

javelins. The cavalry was terrifyingly powerful, if we judge by the panic that the clashing of its weapons caused in the Moroccan ranks during the war against Morocco (June 1609).

What frightened the Moroccans most in this encounter was the noise of the shields pounding against the legs of the horses when they were galloping. The entire Moroccan army, chiefs and soldiers, fled as far as Lake Debi, where the men were thigh-deep in water. But having recognized the cause of their terror, they left the water after having experienced the greatest terror and the most extreme fear.⁵⁰

Foot Soldiers

Foot soldiers were armed mainly with bows and arrows. The infantry included a special élite corps, which was distinguished by the wearing of gold bracelets. Whatever the fortunes of war, the members of this élite corps could not turn their backs on the enemy: which is what happened at the end of the first battle that Djuder, under orders of the Sultan of Morocco, fought against Askia Daud on the left bank of the Niger River. The army of Songhai was defeated because it had no firearms. The whole élite corps allowed itself to be decapitated rather than run away.

There also perished that day a large number of important people among the foot soldiers. When the army was defeated, they threw their shields on the ground and squatted on these sorts of seats, awaiting the arrival of Djuder's troops, who massacred them in this position without any resistance on their part; this because they were not to flee in case of rout. The Moroccan soldiers took the gold bracelets from their arms.⁵¹

The army had a band consisting of drums, trumpets (*kakaki*, cf. *Tarikh el Fettach*, p. 136), and cymbals. When El Hadj revolted, he marched on Kaoga to the sound of such trumpets. "He had put on a breastplate and let the trumpeters, drummers, and so on, march ahead of him."⁵²

The war drum of the Damel of Cayor was called Djung-Djung. It was used to beat out the *bur dakha djap rendi*, a march signifying: "The king follows [the enemy], catches him, kills him."

The auxilliary corps of the Tuareg vassals were composed essentially of camel-drivers; there must also have been an infantry armed with long javelins, marching ahead of the camels and fighting according to the Berber technique, as described by Bakri. The Tuaregs wore puffed trousers, a tunic, a turban, and a litham.

Flotilla

There existed on the Niger an entire flotilla no doubt composed of small boats equipped with outrigging—hence uncapsizable—like those found today on Lake Chad, Lake Victoria, and other large lakes of Central Africa. In case of war, this fleet was used for military purposes; the director of the port of Timbuktu or some other place where the battle took place then played a leading role. At the time of the war against Morocco, he was to hide the boats so Moroccan soldiers could not cross the river.

Mahmud [leader of the Moroccan army] then decided to march against Askia Ishâq. First of all he set about procuring boats, since the director of the port, Mondzo-El-Fa-uld-Zerka, had taken them all with him at the time of his flight toward Binka, when Askia Ishâq had demanded the evacuation of the city of Timbuktu.⁵³

Those were the different corps that made up the African army of Songhai. They lacked one essential weapon, firearms; they did not have the time to acquire any because the very people who might have sold them to them, either manufacturers (Europeans) or intermediaries (Arabs), took advantage of this major weakness to try to conquer Black Africa. The first firearms sold to the Africans exploded in their hands.

Royal Guard

The king was surrounded by a very large body of guards in which the sons of vassal princes served side by side with other members of the nobility.

Within this army, in which a lordly, aristocratic mentality reigned, the role of the griot assumed all its sociological significance. Through his songs, which were living accounts of the history of the country in general and the families whose members he addressed, he helped, he even forced the indecisive, fearful warrior to act bravely, and the brave to act like heroes, to perform miracles. His contribution to victory was very important: his bravery and often temerity were beyond question, for he too was as exposed to danger as the warriors whose exploits he celebrated; even at the height of battle, they needed to hear his exhortations which boosted their morale. The griots, then, were not superfluous beings; their usefulness was obvious: they had a "Homeric" social function to fulfill. The division of labor was thus valid at all levels of society. European conquest dimmed the interest to be found in the character of the griot, but it is impossible to give an historical account of the mentality of precolonial African armies without assessing his part in it. To a certain extent, he even held the fate of the princes in his hands. After having been lectured by his mother, Otsman had given up all idea of revolt and was once again determined to obey his brother who had become Askia Daud; he even loaded some boats with food, to go and do him homage at the head of his troops. But the feelings of pride awakened by the song of his griot as he was setting forth were stronger than his sense of discipline: he no longer deemed it necessary to rub dust on his head as a sign of obeisance to anyone:

But almost immediately, as his griot began to sing, he went into such a fury that he almost burst with rage, and addressed his entourage, crying out, "Unload everything on the boats. Upon my life, the one speaking to you will no longer put any dust on his head for anyone."⁵⁴

Strategy and Tactics

Strategy and tactics were quite different from one country to another; there were different ways of combining the attacks of cavalry and infantry. The use of scouts and encampments with tents was common.

Friday, the eighteenth of the month of Djomada First [April 15, 1588], Balama Mohammed es-Sâdeq camped with his troupes at Konbo-Koraï. After his tent was put up, the Balama went inside and the first person who came to attack them was Mârenfa-El-Hâdj.⁵⁵

The Askia Daud also camped before the walls of Timbuktu. "On his return, Askia Daud passed through Timbuktu and camped in this city in the square behind the mosque."⁵⁶

They carried on long sieges, lasting for years, with consummate technique, in no way less expert than that of Agamemnon before Troy. This was the case in the siege of the city of Djenné by Sonni Ali. The cities were fortified by a system of ramparts, with a variable number of guarded gates. A fortified city was called a *tata*. "Djenné is surrounded by a rampart with eleven gates. Three of them were later sealed, so that only eight remain today."⁵⁷

To conquer a city thus fortified, which never before had been subjugated, if we are to believe the *Tarikh es Sudan*, Sonni Ali laid a siege which lasted seven years and some months. His camp was set up at Zoboro, former site of the city; he left there each day to fight before the walls until evening. These battle scenes took place daily throughout the entire low-water season. When the water rose, surrounding the walls of the city, making it unapproachable, he withdrew with his troops to the place which today bears his name: Nibkatu-Sonni, or Sonni's Hill. While waiting for the water to recede, the troops cultivated the soil to produce their own food. Things continued in this way until, at the end of seven years, Djenné surrendered, chiefly for lack of supplies. During that time, the king had died and his young son had replaced him.

Sonni Ali treated the latter benevolently and married his mother.⁵⁸ After his death, the city of Djenné was to keep his horse's trappings in a kind of museum as relics.

According to Kâti, however, the siege lasted only about six months, with some battles at night. Djenné was blocked, he reports, by four hundred warships. Since Sonni Ali reigned for only twenty-seven years, the duration of the siege indicated by Sâdi does appear excessive. Perhaps the truth lies somewhere between these two extremes (six months and seven years). Further research will enable us to come closer to the historical truth.⁵⁹

The effects of surprise and secret missions were in common use. On August 21, 1563, Askia Daud ordered the fari-mondzo Bokar to go and fight Bani, a rebel chief in Barka land. Bani was very clever and had in the past given much trouble to the central power. The Askia resolved to keep secret the mission with which he had entrusted the fari-mondzo. The most unfavorable time of year for such a maneuver was chosen so as to overcome the vigilance of Bani, who could never have suspected that so many obstacles would be faced in order to reach him. The direction of the march also was unlikely: troops would go up into the mountains, from which they would then pour down, to the great surprise of the enemy who at most might have expected to see them lining up on the usual horizon. The fari's troops were kept completely ignorant of the goal and destination of the operation. Even the Askia's son, who was along on the expedition, was unable to learn the secret known only to the general, the fari-mondzo. Thus, Bani was defeated.⁶⁰

Military demonstrations were also used. Askia Daud, for one, deployed his forces as far as Mossi and Lulami country without engaging in battle or pillaging, for the sole purpose of impressing his neighbors and taking away any desire they might have to venture into the interior of his lands.⁶¹

The *Tarikh el Fettach* also stresses the development of military science in Songhai. Its author underlines the diffi-

culties of the kurmina-fari's expedition against Tenidda (Tengella, Tia-N'Della), king of Futa. Tendirma, the point of departure, was two months' march away; even so, the expedition was victoriously completed with a large army. The defeated enemy was put to death and the troops returned with a great deal of booty (March 8, 1513).⁶²

Although the Cayorians were formidable warriors, their military tactics, until the accession of Lat Dior, seem not to have been so well regulated as in Songhai.

The knights charged in total anarchy, each one whenever he felt like it, after having gotten carefully "plastered" far in the rear; they felt that their noble station was incompatible with the idea of an organized command, especially when it was headed by a slave generalissimo, the *diaraff bunt ker*. The fact was, that they often arranged to let the foot soldiers take the first rounds of fire, the only ones that usually were fatal. The firearms the Cayorians had at the end of the Damel period were loaded with powder, pottery shards, and other small fragments of cast iron. It is easy to imagine that during a battle, the soldiers did not often have time to replace such loads. So, after the first rounds, what followed was nothing but fireworks, causing, at most, slight superficial burns. More than one brave knight chose such a moment to enter the fray, seeking out among the enemy knights a single personal adversary he might defeat; he fired his gun only when in sight of this enemy. He had sworn to do so on the eve of battle at the time of the "Khas": this was a ritual, often held at night, in which all the valiant warriors, plunging their lances repeatedly into a pile of sand they had surrounded, proclaimed their intended exploits for the next day.

It was Lat Dior who probably introduced mobile war into Cayor. Before the technical superiority of Faidherbe's armies, the Damel, who had accepted the teachings of the French school, knew how to adapt to the situation. Instead of putting forward the bulk of his army, he divided it into small corps, posted at strategic points; so it was a war of harass-

ment, a guerrilla war he waged against Faidherbe. His men even dug individual holes in the ground, fully covered, with just one opening through which to aim a weapon: a surprise salvo thus greeted the arrival of the enemy on the scene; this was the tactic called *guedjo* (individual hole). This period of mobile war was called the "Time of the Werwerlo" (whirling). Lat Dior stalked Faidherbe's troops who were stalking his: so people wondered, with a touch of mockery, who was chasing whom.

JUDICIAL ORGANIZATION

In the traditional empire, justice was inseparable from religion. It was a compensatory punishment ritually administered to one who offended against social order.

With Islamization, the situation became more complex: it became more and more secular, although its foundation remained religious, to the extent that the Koran was everywhere adopted as the civil code: Ghana, Mali, Songhai.

However, there had always been throughout history two types of justice: royal justice and the justice of the *cadi*. The *cadi* was the Muslim judge appointed by the king; he handled mainly common-law misdemeanors, disputes between citizens, or between citizens and foreigners. These were the sorts of cases under the jurisdiction of the *cadi* of Ghana or Timbuktu. A tribunal was built for rendering justice. In Ghana, the procedures employed to make the accused confess were quite rudimentary; in cases of murder, or other crimes, or debts, the provost used the ordeal by water: the accused was brought before him rather than the king. A tribunal was built for the rendering of justice. The ordeal by water⁶³ consisted of steeping a piece of special wood in a given quantity of water which the accused was then made to drink: if he vomited this bitter brew, he was innocent. The ordeal by water was only a variant of the ordeal by fire practiced until present times in Black Africa, although prohibited by French law; the most

recent case I know of occurred around 1936: it was at Djurbel, in Senegal, in the Baol. It consisted of heating till it was white hot a thin metal blade, usually a sort of old spike polished in earth, which each of the accused in turn had to lick: the guilty ones were those who had swollen or split tongues the following day; truly a barbarous method, in every way comparable to those employed in the Middle Ages, mainly in the Germanic judicial system. The guilty, of course, sometimes confessed in time; but how many of the innocent must have been victims! The most extraordinary fact about it is that several defendants undeniably underwent this ordeal with success. This can be explained only by a large dose of self-suggestion, due to the mystical religious conviction widespread among the common people, according to which the innocent "could not" be burned. One can imagine the terrible result that might occur when an innocent defendant of skeptical temperament was involved.

With the influx of merchants to Timbuktu and the development of the city's international character, it was eventually found necessary to name another judge, besides the *cadi*, of a clearly more profane character, qualified exclusively to settle disputes between foreigners or between foreigners and locals. One of them temporarily appointed, was Mohammed Baghoyô, a man of Wankoré origin, under Askia El Hadj.⁶⁴

The *cadis'* intellectual level was very high, their sense of duty very acute. One fact concerning the reign of Askia Ishâq proves this. The Askia twice in vain offered the position of *cadi* to the jurist Abu-Hafs Omar, who refused it. Another jurist, Takonni, advised the Askia to threaten Abu-Hafs that he would appoint an ignorant man to the position, in which case, having so obstinately refused this office, Abu-Hafs would be responsible before God for the incompetence of all the judicial acts rendered. Only when reduced to this extreme did he accept and take office on February 1, 1585.⁶⁵

A judge's house and a mosque were inviolable sanctu-

aries. The *cadi* could with impunity admonish the king; to the princes, he was the respected intercessor whose words were heeded. When Saïd Mâra was banished from society by Askia El Hadj, he got as far as the mosque, where he took refuge, implored and obtained the intercession of the *cadi* with the sovereign, and was granted a pardon.

A public crier announced the decisions of the *cadi* or the king when they affected the population at large. Common punishments were incarceration (there were prisons at Kanato, at Kabara near Timbuktu, and elsewhere), confiscation of goods, and *bastinado*, which might accidentally prove fatal. El Hadj's maternal uncle, who had organized a revolt against the Askia in favor of his nephew, died in this manner.

Crimes of *lèse-majesté* and high treason were under the jurisdiction of the king. Thus, Askia El Hadj insisted on himself judging all those who had participated in the conspiracy aimed at toppling him from the throne; the punishments he inflicted on the guilty, as he himself pointed out, were based on the degree of their involvement in the revolt and the rank of their social positions. The same was true under Askia Ishâq II, who condemned the Hombori-koï to be sewn alive into a bull's hide and buried in this way.⁶⁶

With Askia El Hadj, we see how royal justice banned a person from society. Saïd Mara was to be led throughout the city, while a crier announced his outlawry: this meant that anyone could henceforth kill him with impunity, since no law any longer protected his life. It was while he was being turned over to the mob that he took refuge in the mosque, under the protection of the imam.⁶⁷

In Mossi land, the *Nakomsé* (nobles) could be judged only by their peers, so to speak: the Moro Naba alone was qualified to do this.

When the king was on his throne to render justice, in any part of Africa, he was the only one allowed to wear headgear, the symbol of dignity and wisdom. The Pharaoh of Egypt in

the same position was referred to as the *Atef*, although Egyptologists have been unable to find an exact term to translate this word. If *Até* was a revised Egyptian verb, *Atef* would signify in Egyptian "he judges," assuming that this root meant "to judge." It is interesting to note that *Atef* in Wolof means "let one judge." Despite their very great importance, the cadis were dependent on the king. Whereas the *Tarikh es Sudan* gives us to understand that the one of Timbuktu was the most important of all, that all others were subordinate to him and he could remove them, the *Tarik el Fettach* is more categorical: it was Askia Mohammed who appointed all the cadis of his kingdom: "Thus it was that he appointed a cadi at Timbuktu, a cadi in the city of Djenné, and a cadi in each city of his territory which had one, from the Kanta to the Sibiridugu."⁶⁸

The use of notarized documents was widespread. The author of the *Tarikh es Sudan*, for example, was asked to draw up a notarized inventory of the goods belonging to a convict, one Salti, when he went to prison, during the war with Morocco:

Tuesday, when we entered the prison, we found the unfortunate Salti in a pitiful state. I read him the register of the inventory, and as he declared that this was indeed his entire fortune, we attested to it in writing on the register to vouch for its authenticity.⁶⁹

The author was accompanied by another notary.

Ibn Battuta described the spirit of immanent justice in the people and the security which covered foreigners and their goods, two facts worthy of a society already open to international affairs.

Acts of injustice are rare among them; of all the peoples, they are the one least inclined to commit any, and the Sultan (Black king) never pardons anyone who is found guilty of them. Over the whole of the country, there reigns perfect security; one can live and travel there without fear of theft or rapine. They do

not confiscate the goods of white men who die in their country; even though they may be of immense value, they do not touch them. On the contrary, they find trustees for the legacy among white men and leave it in their hands until the rightful beneficiaries come to claim it.⁷⁰

So wrote Battuta in 1352–53, at the time of the Hundred Years War, relating the good he found in the behavior of the Blacks.

In certain holy cities dominated by the clergy, such as Timbuktu, Diaba in Mali, Kundiûro in Diâra, the *cadi* had the right of pardon or punishment (life and death) over the accused. If Kâti is to be believed, the Mansa of Mali could not enter the sacred city of Diaba even if the murderer of his son had taken refuge there, because it was the city of God, where salvation was guaranteed to all fugitives.⁷¹ Such must have been the case of N'Diaré, the holy city of the N'Diayé in Senegal.

Judges must often have been unpopular for quite human reasons; that explains the numerous refusals of appointments related by Kâti and Sâdi.

NOTES

1. Leroi-Gourhan, *op. cit.*, p. 100.
2. Al Bakri, *op. cit.*, "Route de Gahana à Ghiarou," pp. 34–36.
3. *Idem.*, "Description de Ghana et mœurs de ses habitants," pp. 327–328.
4. *Idem.*, "Route du Dera au pays des Noirs," pp. 309–318.
5. Ibn Khaldun, *op. cit.*, p. 112.
6. Al Bakri, *op. cit.*, "Route de Tademekka à Gahdamès," p. 341.
7. Ibn Khaldun, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
8. Delafosse, *Les Noirs de l'Afrique* (Paris: Ed. Payot, 1922), p. 62.
9. Ibn Khaldun, *op. cit.*, pp. 114–115.
10. Ibn Battuta, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
11. *Présence Africaine* magazine, No. XVIII–XIX, Feb.-May 1958, pp. 176–177.
12. Ibn Khaldun, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

13. Sâdi, *T.S.*, ch. XIII, p. 121. 14. *Idem.*, III, 14.
 15. He was the first to assume the title of Dali, which, in African tradition, is the equivalent of Caesar.
 16. Sâdi, *T.S.*, XII, 104. 17. *Idem.*, XVII, 178. 18. *Idem.*, XVI, 164.
 19. *Idem.*, XVII, 174. 20. *Idem.*, V, 24. 21. *Idem.*, XIII, 121.
 22. Ibn Khaldun, *op. cit.*, p. 107. 23. Sâdi, *T.S.*, VII, 40.
 24. *Idem.*, XVI, 164.
 25. Al Bakri, *op. cit.*, "Description de Ghana et moeurs de ses habitants," p. 330.
 26. *Idem.*, p. 330. 27. Ibn Khaldun, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
 28. Could Kaarta derive from Carthago? (See map p. 000.)
 29. Al Bakri, *op. cit.*, p. 334. 30. Sâdi, *T.S.*, XIII, 129-130.
 31. *Idem.*, XVIII, 193. 32. *Idem.*, XXVII, 298. 33. *Idem.*, II, 10-11.
 34. *Idem.*, XVII, 171-172. 35. *Idem.*, XIII, 116-117.
 36. *Idem.*, II, 12. 37. Delafosse, *Haut-Sénégal-Niger*, *op. cit.*
 38. Sâdi, *T.S.*, XIV, 134-135. 39. *Idem.*, XXI, 216.
 40. *Idem.*, VII, 40. 41. *Idem.*, XVIII, 185. 42. *Idem.*, IV, 20.
 43. *Idem.*, V, 25. 44. *Idem.*, XIII, 118. 45. *Idem.*, XVIII, 190-192.
 46. *Idem.*, XIX, 199. 47. *Idem.*, XX, 204. 48. *Idem.*, XXI, 216-217.
 49. This also happened to the Crusaders on the roads of Palestine.
 50. Sâdi, *T.S.*, XXVII, 301-302. 51. *Idem.*, XXI, 219-220.
 52. *Idem.*, XVII, 191. 53. *Idem.*, XXI, 226. 54. *Idem.*, XIV, 136.
 55. *Idem.*, XX, 203. 56. *Idem.*, XVII, 178. 57. *Idem.*, V, 23.
 58. *Idem.*, V, 26-27. 59. Cf. Kâti, *T.F.*, ch. V, pp. 94-100.
 60. Sâdi, *T.S.*, XVII, 175. 61. *Idem.*, XVII, 179. 62. Kâti, *T.F.*, III, 74.
 63. Al Bakri, *op. cit.*, "Route de Ghana à Ghîarou," p. 335-336.
 64. Sâdi, *T.S.*, XVIII, 190. 65. *Idem.*, *loc. cit.* 66. *Idem.*, XX, 205.
 67. *Idem.*, XX, 207-208. 68. Kâti, *T.F.*, VI, 115.
 69. Sâdi, *T.S.*, XXXIII, 360-361. 70. Ibn Battuta, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.
 71. Kâti, *T.F.*, XVI, 314.

Chapter Six

ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

Africa, in the eyes of the specialists, is depicted as a land which prior to colonization was only at the level of a subsistence economy: the individual, virtually crushed by the force of nature, was able to produce only what he absolutely needed to survive. No creation, no activity reflecting a society freed from material constraints might be found there. Exchange relationships were governed by barter. Notions of money, credit, stock market, thrift, or accumulation of wealth by individuals belong to a type of commerce connected with a higher economic organization: they could not have been found at the alleged level of African economy.

Seldom has an opinion been so little founded on fact. This one arose from a preconceived idea of African societies: they had to be specifically primitive, therefore endowed in every respect with systems characteristic of such a condition.

BARTER

Undeniably, at the periphery of the African kingdoms, some backward tribes, such as the Lem-Lem in Southwest Ghana, perhaps on the banks of the present-day Falémé River, had been carrying on barter trade since the Carthaginian period.¹ Herodotus attests to this. That situation remained inflexibly unaltered until the twelfth century, as corroborated by the accounts of Arab travelers, e.g., Ibn Yakut. For these

peoples, in every way comparable to the still-unassimilated barbarians who roamed on the outskirts of the Roman Empire, the notion of merchandise in the modern sense was probably unknown: barter was the foundation of all their commercial activity. After crossing the desert separating Ghana from Upper Senegal, the Arabs reached the banks of the Falémé, unloaded their goods in small bunches (varied products from the Orient), gave a signal, and then retreated; the Africans then came out and in front of each bundle placed the quantity of gold dust they judged it to be worth, then withdrew. The Arabs came back and collected the gold if they found the amounts satisfactory; if not, the cycle was repeated, still without any direct contact. Sociologists and ethnologists agree that commerce conducted under such conditions excludes any awareness of merchandise: the gold in this instance is not even money, but a local product which is traded for goods or other materials not native to the country.

These tribes living in a virtually closed society had much less need for the glittering Oriental baubles to improve their living conditions than did the Carthaginian and Arab traders for the gold they "harvested." One may assume, therefore, from the very fact that they were in a less developed state, that the honesty governing these exchanges came from them; they imposed it, from the start. If they were swindled, they could, without loss to the essentials of their life, suspend relations with any given group of traders so identified.

This was the nature of commerce along the borders of the kingdom. Only by applying it, in a misguided generalization, to all the rest of the continent, could one reach the abovementioned theories.

MODERN-TYPE COMMERCE

In actuality, there was another form of commercial activity, already modern in type, that was much more extensive,

covering all of the kingdoms. It was carried on by the best organized and most dynamic elements of society, by those, in a word, who were already detribalized. There were already entire merchant classes in the empire of Ghana and Songhai. The *Tarikh es Sudan* alludes to their activities in the already-international centers of Timbuktu and Djenné.²

The density of Niger River traffic between these two cities at that period could never be suspected today. Kabara was the true military and commercial port through which all goods were exported from Timbuktu, to Djenné, Mali, and the Upper Niger in general, or Tirekka, Gao, and Tademekka, Kukia and the Dendi country, that is, present-day Upper Dahomey (Benin). According to the *Tarikh el Fettach*, entire groups were devoted to commerce:

If you ask what difference there is between the Malinke and the Uangara, know that the Uangaras and Malinkes share the same origin, but that Malinke is used to designate the warriors, whereas Uangara serves to indicate the merchants who carry on trading from one country to another.³

Bakri likewise informs us that the Nunghamarta were a group of traders who exported gold from Iresni, on the Upper Senegal, to all countries. This city is very close to the gold-bearing stronghold of Ghiaru, previously mentioned.⁴ After the destruction of Carthage by Scipio Africanus Minor, the Roman expedition which pursued the fleeing Carthaginians to discover where they got their gold, reached this point, the source of the Bambuk (the name given by the Romans to the Senegal River).

The existence of whole groups devoted to commerce (the ancestors of the present-day Djula and Sarakolle) being confirmed, there remains to be defined the type of exchange they practiced. The characteristics of modern economic activity could already be detected in it: the existence of money, a well-defined tariff system, and cosmopolitan commerce centers throughout each country. In addition to the two previously

mentioned cities, Timbuktu and Djenné, known as far as Asia and Europe, there were Biru, Soo, Ndôb, Pékès,⁵ and so on. In all these centers foreign nationals had their own quarters in which they could live in the utmost security with their goods, while pursuing their business.⁶ For the most part these were Arabs from North Africa, Egypt, and Yemen, and Europeans, especially Spaniards. Some of them were even students in Timbuktu, as will be seen later. Black Africa was hospitable to foreigners. We already know that the king of Djenné wished for there to be more foreigners than natives in his capital, but his last wish—the last of three—was “that God might weary all those who had come only to peddle their wares, so that, bored with staying in this place, they might sell their shoddy goods at bargain prices, to the benefit of the inhabitants.”⁷

CURRENCY

Economic concerns existed on all levels. The sale of goods was strictly regulated: there were fixed market days. The economic officer of the city then levied taxes in the name of the king; they might be paid in either goods or cash, especially in Timbuktu. As earlier observed, an appropriate duty was placed at the border on all goods imported or exported.⁸

The currency used consisted of salt, cowries, or gold in either dust or pieces (of foreign or local mintage). It at first glance might appear astonishing that blocks or pieces of salt of different sizes should constitute a currency. It must be remembered in this regard that certain substances such as salt and copper were as rare in Africa at that time as gold was abundant; indeed in certain regions copper jewelry was more highly prized than that of gold; in ancient times, gold was less expensive than copper in Nubia, that is, the Sudan, of which Khartoum is the present capital. According to Bakri, salt was

worth its weight in gold among the people he calls El Feruin, who were said to be in Northern Senegal in the vicinity of the Lake of Guiers.⁹ The value assigned to any substance is always in terms of its rarity. Thus, cowries which came from the Indian Ocean via Persia, according to Leo Africanus, could serve as currency. It was, therefore, not a matter of backward peoples unable to conceive and produce coins of gold or other metals, for, as we shall see, such coinage was very widespread in Black Africa at the time.

As for gold dust, a conventional quantity of approximately 4.6 grams (probably more often measured than weighed) constituted what was called the *mitkâl* of gold dust; this was the gold standard, in the strictest modern sense of the term, on the basis of which minted coins (whose composition might be adulterated with nonprecious metals), as well as cowries, were exchanged. The *mitkâl*, depending on the rates of exchange, was worth anywhere from 500 to 3,000 cowries, available documents inform us.¹⁰

Obviously, all this was relative to prevailing conditions. A gold-dust standard was used because in this form the metal was more difficult to adulterate.

Identical weights of gold or heavier ones were effectively turned into coins with embossed designs at mints, for commercial exchange purposes, as evidenced by this passage from Idrisi, about gold collection among the Lem-Lem:

When the river returns to its bed, everyone sells his gold. The bulk of it is bought by the inhabitants of Wardjelan [in present-day Libya] and by those from the tip of West Africa, whither this gold is transported to the mints, coined into dinars, and traded commercially for goods. This is how it happens each year. This is the principal product of the land of the Blacks; great and small, they make it their livelihood. In the country of the Uangara there are flourishing cities and renowned fortresses, its inhabitants are wealthy; they possess gold in abundance, and receive the products brought to them from the other remotest portions of the earth. They attire them-

selves in robes and other kinds of raiment; they are altogether black.¹¹

One remark made by Bakri about the Berbers of Tademekka indicates that coins without markings must have been rather rare in Africa. After having described the kind of prostitution customary among them (the women grabbing hold of strangers), he gets around to mention of the sort of money they used: "The dinars they used were of pure gold and were called *sola* [bald] because they bore no imprints."¹²

Thus these documents allow us to be sure of the use in Black Africa of imprinted gold coins, without, however, being able to know whether such imprints were effigies of local emperors or kings, or to know whether there was any generalized imperial currency minted apart from the *mitkâl* standard. The situation must have been comparable to that of the Greco-Latin city-kingdoms after the invention of money by the Lydians in the sixth century B.C.; among other peculiarities, each of these cities had its own system of measures and, as a result, its own urban coinage stamped with the city's coat of arms; there existed no accepted relation of the exchange value of these currencies. According to the *Tarikh el Fettach*, Askia Daud "was the first to build financial depositories and even libraries."¹³

So there existed in West Africa a whole gamut of currencies usable according to the value of the goods purchased. There was even a curious sort of currency in the form of squares of fabric (four spans to each side) manufactured in the textile center of Terenka, on the Upper Senegal, according to Bakri; these squares, called *chigguiya*, were in use at Silla, also on the Senegal, along with other currencies such as salt, copper rings, and *dora*, a cereal.¹⁴

The *Tarikh es Sudan* mentions, in describing the poverty resulting from the Moroccan occupation of Timbuktu, the existence of a "stock exchange" in that city: "The exchange rate fell to 500 cowries . . ."¹⁵

A remark by Ibn Haukal attests to the use of acknowledgment of debts in writing and at the same time gives an idea of the enormous wealth of the country: he saw a text in which an inhabitant of Sijilmasa acknowledged his indebtedness to a citizen of Aoudaghast in the sum of 40,000 dinars. To the author of *The Book of Roads and Kingdoms*, such an occurrence was unique in the trading world of the tenth century. Even in Baghdad, the capital of the Orient, one could find nothing like it.¹⁶ So Africa was distinguished in the world for its legendary wealth which led the Arabs to say: "Against the camel's mange use tar, and against poverty make a trip to the Sudan."

IMPORT-EXPORT

The exported materials were gold, iron, tin, etc. Domestically, commerce in cola nuts, cereals such as *dora*, and millet from which a kind of beer was fermented, was active; the same was true for weaponry: spears, javelins, arrows, bows, etc. As for manufacture, one might mention the glass industry which had made extraordinary strides in Benin. Commerce between East Africa and India and China was no less active in the tenth and eleventh centuries. In that region, contrary to common opinion, the tribal stage was outgrown: the land was united into one great monarchy under the Monomotapa. Metals, gold, tin, copper were exploited largely for his own personal gain, according to well-established procedures. Organization of the work was very advanced. Experts have estimated the quantity of tin mined at Rockpoort as approximately thirty thousand tons. The experts went to the East and the Chinese Far East through the port of Sofala. There was a whole merchant class; its conflicts with the Arab immigrants are described in a book by Burueg Bin Shariya entitled *Of the National Pride of Negroes and Their Disputes with White*

Men. All of these facts concerning East Africa are taken from a study by M. A. Jaspán.¹⁷

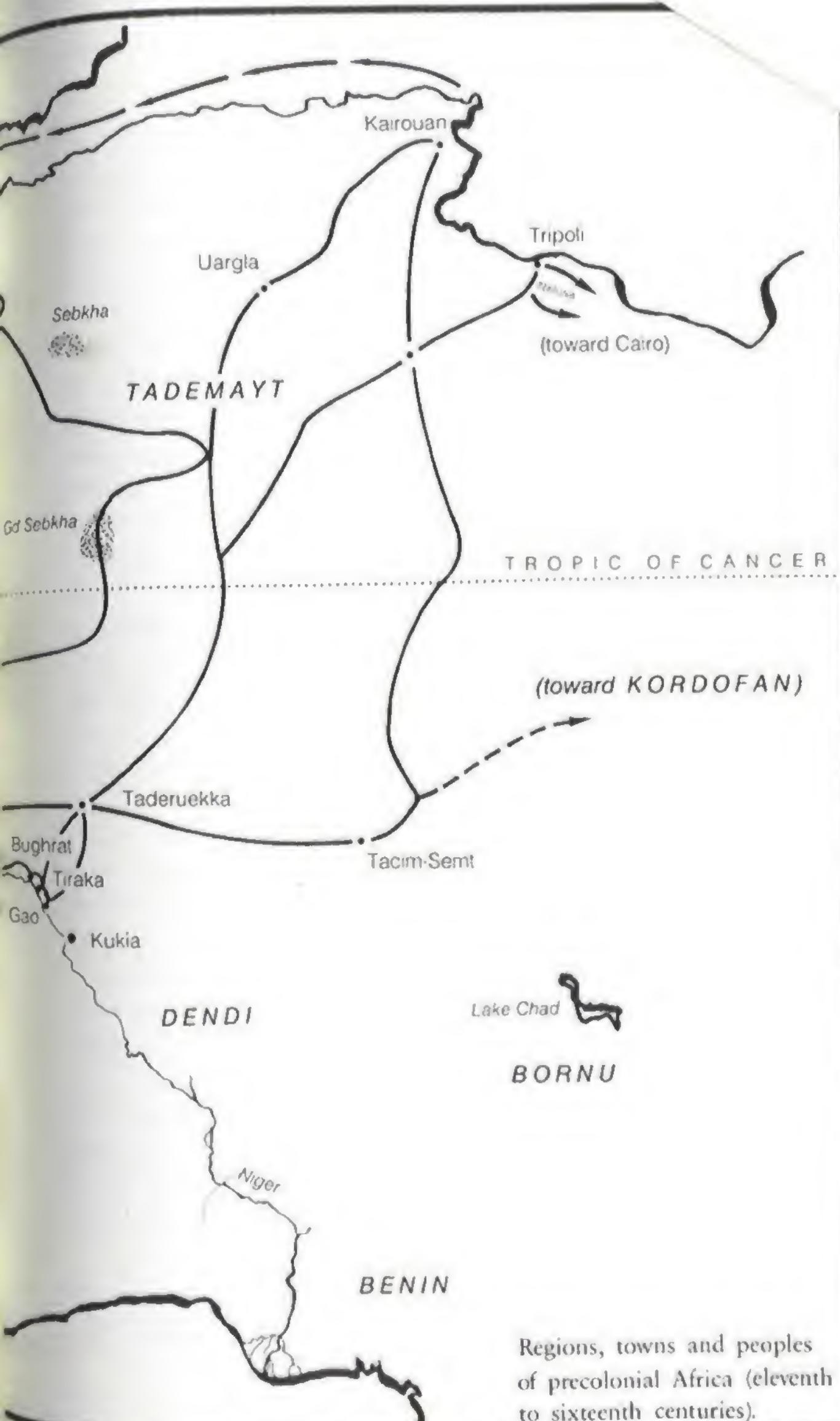
In West Africa, the products imported were wheat, raisins, figs, Saharan salt, cowries, copper, dates, henna, olives, tanned hides, silk, cloth, brocade, Venetian pearls and mirrors, and so on. Tobacco was probably introduced into Muslim West Africa at this time.¹⁸ Other products such as gum, gummiferous mimosa, cucurbitaceae, and euphorbiae added to the trade. Bakri tells of a strange plant that existed at the time: it yielded a kind of fireproof wool that was woven into clothing; it was called *turzi*. But among the Berbers there was a stone possessing the same properties when softened. So we may well conclude that this strange product was asbestos, rather than a plant. The Berbers from the region of Tademakka and the Blacks of Bornu locally mined a kind of agate that was sold as far away as Ghana: in the Sudan it is made, up to the present day, into necklaces and pendants of impressive size. Along the Senegal River, according to Bakri, whips of worldwide reputation were made of hippopotamus hides.¹⁹

MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION, ROADS

The usual method of transportation in the interior of Black Africa was on a donkey, ox, camel, or "mongrel" horse, where there were no navigable waterways. Connection to the Mediterranean and Egypt, across the Sahara, was made by camel caravans. It is important to stress that this commercial initiative was taken by Arabs and not by Africans, who traded only at the domestic markets of Djenné, Timbuktu, Waleta, Aoudaghast, Gao, and so on. It seems that the wealth of the continent always made it unnecessary for its inhabitants to risk the dangers of the high seas or the great international routes for commercial purposes. Likewise, in ancient times, Ethiopians and Egyptians virtually never left their homelands.

Commercial routes between the Mediterranean area and Africa in the eleventh century.





Kairouan

Tripoli

Uargla

Sebka

(toward Cairo)

TADEMAYT

TROPIC OF CANCER

(toward KORDOFAN)

Taderuekka

Tacim-Semt

Bughrat

Tiraka

Gao

Kukia

DENDI

Lake Chad

BORNU

Niger

BENIN

Regions, towns and peoples of precolonial Africa (eleventh to sixteenth centuries).

Egypt possessed all the technical means and material resources to assure her mastery of the seas; but throughout the course of her history she left it to her cousin, Phoenecia. Except for a few solitary navigators, mentioned in tales and legends, not until the Eighteenth Dynasty did she build a fleet on the Red Sea. Egypt was born and remained an essentially continental power. Neither she nor Nubia ever became trading nations.

One might suppose that, during the precolonial period, West Africa was not technologically capable of taking to sea, and attempt to explain in this way the absence of African maritime commerce created by local initiative. Some documents which we will quote below prove that this point of view is not acceptable. Even if it were, there was nothing in any case to prevent the peoples of the African empires from establishing camel caravans, as the Arabs did, and transporting their wares to the shores of the Mediterranean. All the technological conditions required for the Africans to develop caravans and become international traders by crossing the Sahara were at hand. But they never did so, because economic abundance and their own social structure obviated this necessity. So the dromedary has remained to this day in the use of Arab traders alone; it is the ideal animal for crossing the desert. This is why: not only can it endure thirst, but it is able to store in its body hundreds of liters of water which if need be can be restored to a more or less drinkable condition by slaughtering the beast. In this way, camel-drivers have with them a ready supply of meat and water.

According to Ibn Battuta, the roads in the interior of Africa were absolutely safe: "Having decided to visit the latter city [Mali], I hired but one Messufite to serve as my guide since there is no need to travel by caravan, for the roads are that secure."²⁰

From the documents left by Bakri, we can describe the network of routes that connected Black Africa with the Medi-

terranean and the Orient, its complexities, and the traveling conditions of the caravans. Along most of the routes there were few wells of drinking water: it took several days' travel to reach one. One can see on the map that two principal routes connected the South Sahara with Black Africa: one of them went from Wadi Draa to Aoudaghast; the other started out from Sijilmasa and went to Tamedelt and Uanu, which was a crossroads for all the routes leading to Black Africa. It took fifty-one days from Sijilmasa to Aoudaghast. The wells along them were, for the former, Tezamet, Bîr el Djemmalîn, and Nalili; and for the latter, Camel-drivers' Well or Bîr el Djemmelîn . . . The trip took two weeks from Aoudaghast to the imperial capital of Ghana; from Ghana to Silla, along the Upper Senegal, the caravans took twenty days; from Ghana to Gao, two weeks; from Ghana to Augham, probably five days; from there to Ras Elma, four days; from this center to Tiraka, on the Niger, six days; from Gao to Tademekka, nine days were required; from there to Ghadamès across the desert, forty days; from this crossroads to Tripoli, eleven days; and, finally, from Ghadamès one went to Kairouan.²¹

ECONOMIC WEALTH

From the economic point of view, Africa is characterized by abundance. Travelers of the precolonial era encountered no poverty there; according to the *Tarikh el Fettach*, the emperor of Ghana, seated upon a "platform of red gold," daily treated the people of his capital to ten thousand meals.²² Such material comfort resulted in an increase in demographic density scarcely imaginable today: in the region of Djenné alone there were 7,077 villages.

The following fact is enough to give us an idea of the proximity of these villages one to another. If the sultan, for example, wishes to summon a person inhabiting a village situ-

ated in the neighborhood of Lake Debo, his chosen messenger betakes himself to one of the gateways of the ramparts and, from there, cries out the message he has been charged to convey. The people, from village to village, repeat this call and the message immediately reaches the intended party who goes to the convocation sent to him. No need for further demonstration to show how densely this territory is populated.²³

Under the Askia El Hadj a census taken by a group of students which lasted three days established that Gao consisted of 7,626 blocks of houses of solid construction (clay?), not counting straw huts.²⁴

It has been estimated that the slave trade swallowed up one hundred to three hundred million individuals, dead or shipped to America. So, had it not been for slavery, the total figure of Black population on the continent would probably have been four times what it now is: it would have been in the vicinity of four hundred million. The *Tarikh es Sudan* stresses how exceptional poverty was in Black Africa when describing that caused by the Moroccan occupation of Timbuktu:

The high cost of food in Timbuktu was excessive; a great number of people died of hunger and the famine was such that people ate the corpses of draft animals and of human beings. The exchange rate fell to 500 cowries. Then the plague came in turn to decimate the population and killed many that the famine had spared. This high cost of food, which lasted two years, ruined the inhabitants, who were reduced to selling their furniture and utensils. All the elders were unanimous in saying that they had never seen such a calamity and that not one of the elders before them had ever told them of anything like it.²⁵

COMPARISON OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURES IN AFRICA AND EUROPE

The time has now come to examine the passage from feudal production to capitalist production in Europe, to see

whether such a development, such a transformation occurred in the African economy of the corresponding period. And if not, why not?

Karl Marx showed in *Das Kapital* that the feudal organization in the countryside and the corporations in the cities for a long time kept the money-capital, resulting from usury and commerce in the Middle Ages, from being transformed into industrial capital. The upheaval which was to give birth to modern capitalism, according to the same author, began at the end of the fifteenth century and developed with increasing intensity during the sixteenth, especially in England. Royalty and parliament went to war against the feudal lords to try to win back central authority. In increasingly difficult circumstances, the lords successively got rid of everything superfluous in their lives; that meant liquidation of the "lordly entourages," and the abandonment of pomp in court life. Then came the first exodus of country folk to the cities. Overnight, there was thus created a proletariat without either hearth or home, whose numbers would go on increasing even more for other reasons. Against the violent repression of king and parliament, the lords reacted by progressively confiscating the lands of all the peasants who were tilling the soil under "feudal tenure": serfdom was no more. Those formerly bound to the soil were now independent peasants, at most paying some fixed tribute to the lord. Then these peasants in turn were driven into the cities. The movement of expropriation spread to the ecclesiastical communal domains by a system of "enclosure," which consisted purely and simply of annexing the lands adjoining the lord's domain by putting a fence around them. The lords had in fact found that, due to the prodigious development of the manufacture of woolens in Flanders, it was henceforth more profitable to turn all the arable lands into pastures for raising wool-bearing sheep.

Later, some domains of the Scottish highlands would be turned into hunting forests, for profit. "Of cities and townes

. . . pulled downe for sheepe-walks, and no more but the lordships now standing in them . . . I could saie somewhat."²⁶

Conditions suitable for the birth of capitalism had been created. For this system to appear, as Marx says, there must be a separation between work and working conditions, making a true class of wage-earners, in the modern sense of the term. Before expropriation, the peasant family tilling the soil at the same time carried on a whole range of artisanal activities, constituting cottage industry: they wove their clothes from the flax they harvested, and manufactured most of the things they needed. In becoming a wage-earner, the peasant no longer had anything but the strength of his labor to sell to urban manufacturers or country farmers: he could no longer produce at home the things he needed for domestic use, but had to buy them as manufactured products on the home market which the capitalist circuit had established between countryside and city.

A man who, to begin with, inherited or could borrow enough money, might go the country and sublet from the lord a part of his land: he became a farmer to whom the land was "leased." His capital was all he had to work with. In a second phase, he might hire hands to work his land: he became the rural capitalist supplying raw materials to feed the industries of the cities. From him, the manufacturer would get the flax for his weaving; the one and the other found it to their interest to pay the lowest possible wages for the greatest amount of work: no matter that working conditions might be inhumane, that workers might become "alienated." This form of economic activity would constantly be dominated by the goal of profit and superprofit. It would not take long for the importance of manpower to be minimized by the introduction of the machine. The capitalist system thus appears better suited to the development of applied science than had been the one based on domestic economy which it had just destroyed. The use of machinery was limited and unnecessary in the latter, because there was no concern with profit and productivity in

the capitalistic sense of the term. So it would seem to be more judicious to explain the development of mechanization by the needs of capitalist production, rather than to justify the system as being a consequence of the use of machinery. The needs of the new home market thus created, with its peculiar structure, and those of the world market, resulting from the great voyages of discovery, would constantly stimulate the economic activity of the European countries: the modern type of trading country had thus been created, the very type whose wealth excludes that of the people.

Of course, the newly created proletariat was not entirely and automatically absorbed by industry; but it was subject to the law of supply and demand. The unemployment which resulted turned a great many individuals into vagabonds, thieves, or vagrants, as they were called. This ever-increasing flood of unemployed hands finally frightened the masters of industry, although they had at first seen it as a happy divine intervention intended to make the economy prosper. The parliaments of the different European countries soon began to consider it the germ of future revolutionary troubles. There was, as yet, no experience of modern revolutions: it had not yet been sufficiently realized that in order to be revolutionary, it was not enough to be numerous and malcontented, but that organization and education were required. So a panic, as widespread as it was unadmitted, took hold of the parliamentary legislators and led them to pass laws so terrible, so coercive that it is hard for us to imagine them today. In 1530, in England, under the reign of Henry VIII, a vagrant picked up for the second time was whipped and had half an ear cut off; taken for a third time, he was "to be executed as a hardened criminal and enemy of the common weal."²⁷ Seventy-two thousand vagrants were thus executed during that reign. In the time of Edward VI (1547), "if anyone refuses to work, he shall be condemned as a slave to the person who denounced him as an idler."²⁸ The owner of such a slave might whip him, chain him, and brand him on cheek and forehead with a letter S (for

Slave), if he disappeared for two weeks. If he ran away a third time he was executed.

The master can sell him, bequeath him, let him out on hire as a slave, just as any other personal chattel or cattle. If the slaves attempt anything against the masters, they are also to be executed. Justices of the peace, on information, are to hunt the rascals down.²⁹

An idler caught on the highway was branded on the chest with a *V* (for Vagrant) and returned to his native city, whose slave he became, doing municipal work without pay, held in irons. If he gave the name of a false city, he was nonetheless made its slave, marked with an *S*. Inhabitants of the said city were allowed to take possession of his offspring, present and future, and keep them as apprentices until the age of twenty-four for boys and twenty for girls. If the latter tried prematurely to take their freedom, they automatically became the slaves of their employers, who whipped and chained them. They had the right to weld on the neck, arm, or leg of the slave an iron ring, as a distinctive mark to keep him from escaping. Slaves of towns or parishes subsisted into the nineteenth century, under the name of roundsmen, as Marx points out.

The same laws remained in force under the reign of Elizabeth (1572). An eighteen-year-old vagrant, arrested for the second time, was to be executed "unless some one will take them into service for two years . . ." Under the reign of Queen Bess "rogues were trussed up apace, and in one year commonly . . . three or four hundred were . . . devoured and eaten up by the gallows."³⁰ The situation was exactly the same under James I: idlers were branded with the letter *R* (for Rogue) on their left shoulders. Only in 1715 was this legislation abolished in England. Similar laws existed in France. Until the beginning of the reign of Louis XVI,

every man in good health from 16 to 60 years of age, if without means of subsistence but not practising a trade, is to be sent to the galleys. Of the same nature are the statute of Charles V for the Netherlands (October, 1537), the first edict of the States

and Towns of Holland (March 10, 1614), the "Plakaat" of the United Provinces (June 26, 1649), etc.³¹

Because of all these European-originated deportations, it can be asserted without exaggeration that present-day America is populated in part by citizens of slave (or indentured) origin, whether they be white or black.

To conclude, we must recall the terrible conditions under which child labor was exploited, the one-sided legislation on wages that was constantly intended to favor the employer.

Thus the capitalistic ownership of the social means of production by the few was the negation and superseding of the "dwarf property" of the earlier domestic economy. According to Marx, in the latter, because of the excessive spreading of the means of production among an infinite number of individuals, there was no possibility of cooperation in production on any large scale, nor of the

. . . division of labour within each separate process of production, the control over, and the productive application of the forces of Nature by society, and the free development of the social productive forces. It is compatible only with a system of production, and a society, moving within narrow or more or less primitive bounds. To perpetuate it would be, as Pecqueur rightly says, "to decree universal mediocrity."³²

The accidents of European history which led to the systematic expropriation of the peasants are not general laws. But without this phenomenon of expropriation, capitalism would not have come to be. One would therefore like to know the immutable sociological laws which explain the necessary passage from the stage of domestic economy to capitalism, in all societies; to know why India, China remained for millennia in relative stagnation, despite the terrible poverty which existed in those countries; why the industrious population of Japan, with its great density which necessitated microcultivation, did not undergo an identical evolution; why the politico-social balance of Africa was broken only at contact with an external influence. To what degree does the ideological superstructure

constitute, for some social structures, an iron collar equivalent to an immense weight holding down the society for some unpredictable period, thus outweighing for a long time such material factors as poverty?

Modern capitalism, wherever it may be found, is a European export and not the result of natural local evolution. We may therefore regret that there is no precise answer to these questions to be found in *Das Kapital*. The latter indicates only that when this industrial regime of small independent producers reaches a certain stage of development,

it brings forth the material agencies for its own dissolution. From that moment new forces and new passions spring up in the bosom of society . . . It must be annihilated; it is annihilated. Its annihilation, the transformation of the individualised and scattered means of production into socially concentrated ones, of the pigmy property of the many into the huge property of the few . . . this fearful and painful expropriation of the mass of the people forms the prelude to the history of capital.³³

No writer until this date has ever attempted to evaluate correctly the "stage" after which the material agencies of dissolution are engendered so that the necessary historical transformation can take place. Domestic industry is the thesis, capitalism is the antithesis, but the dialectical link, the path inexorably leading from the one to the other, has not been recognized and described in satisfactory fashion for all societies. At any rate, it goes without saying, some societies today can be spared the capitalist phase.

Precolonial Africa, was, then, at the stage of "pigmy property." The peasant family wove its own clothing; Bakri tells us that each house had its own spinner. Obviously, the division of labor reflected by the caste system did not allow the manufacture of everything that was needed: all one could do was work in the craft allowed for his caste. For everything else, they had to turn to the open market, sometimes by barter, but in general by actual purchase for money. This system which

precluded competition with others in their professions constituted a true monopoly: each caste monopolized an economic activity, sanctified by tradition. The same frame of mind was to be found in the European corporations or guilds of the Middle Ages. However, it seems that they had not gone so far as to form professional associations for the defense of group interests: the living tradition was amply sufficient to guarantee that. Therefore, no separation between domestic industry and agriculture, a separation prerequisite for the appearance of capitalism.

We have seen that the term "property" implied different realities from Europe to Africa, where appropriation of the land was concerned. In Africa, it would be more precise to speak of use of the land, even in the so-called royal domains. The accent was placed rather upon the "human domain" of the king working these lands; enumeration of the different families of captives was what expressed the wealth of a personage. The African king, however powerful, was easily persuaded that the soil did not belong to him; this is especially applicable to emigrant kings: they easily accepted the sacred authority of the original occupants, even if the latter were presently without any material power. This explains the deference of the powerful king of the Mâcina to one of the local princes of the Mima region, the Tukifiri-sôma.

Before him, the king of the Mâcina had to remain standing, cover himself with dust while swearing fidelity to him, and remove his boubou to drape himself in it; . . . The title of this prince has survived to this day, but the one who now bears it has fallen from power and can only walk, having no steed; his authority has vanished, but his title remains . . . The king of the Mâcina still goes to visit this personage, asserting that this brings him good luck; he consults him and asks him to pray for him; he dismounts to salute him and visits him at the place where his ruined capital used to be.³⁴

This singular personage so described is the former sovereign, still the master of the soil, in the ritual sense of that

term; he is the one who allots lands to newcomers, without first consulting the king. He has received the land in trust; he never sells it—he would not dare to do so for religious reasons—he allots only the use of it. The sale of land, properly speaking, seems to have been unknown in traditional pre-colonial Africa. To grasp the historical peculiarities of the country, one would have to imagine a victorious Julius Caesar showing similar deference to Vercingetorix, the vanquished autochthonous prince, the original occupant of the land. We might go even further and observe that, in truth, the problem of land ownership appears never to have existed in Africa. Instead of land having constituted a wealth beyond the reach of certain social categories, it was within everyone's grasp, with no need to forfeit one's freedom, like the serf bound to the soil, in order to make use of it, to "possess" it. The slave had his own patch of ground; the stranger who just this morning came to the village would also get his. Expropriation of the sort seen in sixteenth-century Europe was unthinkable in the history of precolonial Africa. Perhaps, it was the vast expanse of arable lands that shielded Africa from this social problem. So Africa never had the rural capitalist who was the farm-owner acting as intermediary between the true owner of the soil and the expropriated agricultural wage-earner.

NAVETANISM

The category of peasants called *navetânes* in Wolof do not constitute a class: its members do not know one another, are not bound by any traditional group solidarity; they are mobile because, in the main, they are young bachelors who go away to look for work so as to accumulate a dowry with which they can return to marry in their villages and settle down permanently. Navetanism is thus a transitional stage in the life of a young man: he goes away with the permanent intention of one day returning home. He is no man's slave, no contract

could permanently bind him to the land of any lord. The root of the word in Wolof means, literally, "to spend the winter," i.e., the "rainy season"; contracts automatically end with that season and are renewable only by agreement.

Drought and progressive exhaustion of the soil are the principal reasons impelling young men of a particular village to spend the rainy season in a region with more water, not yet exhausted by cultivation, in a word, better endowed by nature. Since the desert is creeping into Black Africa from north to south above the Equator, these peregrinations follow the same direction. It was drought which brought about the dispersion of the inhabitants of the former capital of Ghana and the entire region of the Ouagadou. It also caused the successive retreats on the left bank of the Senegal River. Many of the people of the Djambur and Cayor regions, today half desert, withdrew toward the Baol, while the inhabitants of that area, especially the peasants, went off in the direction of Sine Salum, the British Gambia, and Casamance, all regions located farther south and decidedly more humid. Only the powerful attraction of Dakar's economic pole was able to swing this tide westward, insofar as Senegal is concerned. The peasants who thus escaped the hard and monotonous seasonal rhythm of local economic life, ended up by settling in the suburbs of that city, although that was not their original intention: they had come with the idea of returning home as usual. Once settled there, under the changed living conditions, they gradually lost their peasant attitudes as they found work at the docks or in various urban industries, and this finally made them aware of the fact that they were workers. Thus, a phenomenon of growing proletarianization.

THE TAALIBÉ

The set of mind of the *taalibé* (the believer) in the Murid, Tidjane, and other communities carried no seed of social

upheaval, for the believer was not bound to the marabout against his will. He had voluntarily submitted himself so as to enter Paradise in which he believed; he could at any time break the spiritual bond tying him to the marabout. This relatively rare act of disaffiliation was called, in Wolof, *vudet*. The body of such believers were grouped in the community (*Dara*), in which all the means of production were concentrated. The believer shunned possessions. He felt that his own power to work (apparently the only thing left to him) did not belong to him: it was in the service of the marabout with whom he had made a metaphysical contract assuring him a place in Paradise after death. Thus, even the precolonial marabout system could not lead to social revolutions, because the believer was unaware that he was expropriated and exploited.

SLAVE MANPOWER: CONCENTRATION

The end of the Middle Ages and the whole of the Renaissance in Europe were characterized by a degree of slavery as intense as and more detestable than what Africa had known. This will become clearer by what is to follow. It is customary to consider slavery as a specifically African phenomenon, but we have just seen that until the end of the aforementioned period white men were in the habit of reducing their own fellows to slavery. The serf of the Middle Ages was as totally in thrall as the African slave (Fustel de Coulanges referred to him as the rustic slave). So, this institution was characteristic of all mankind, regardless of color. It is erroneous to believe that European slavery, especially in modern times, was but an exceptional and fragmentary social phenomenon. After its contact with Africa, sixteenth-century Europe progressively lost the custom of internal slavery and, taking advantage of its superiority in arms, substituted Black slavery. After the contact with Europe, the lot of Africa's slaves suddenly got worse,

since it then became possible for them to be sold to persons who would export them, with the whole chain of well-known evils entailed in these forced crossings.

Slavery is certainly the great chink in African social organization; but the documents available prove that the African slaves who were not deported in general enjoyed living conditions incomparably superior to those of white slaves in Europe. Slaves of the kings of Mali and the Askias of Gao enjoyed complete liberty of movement. Thus, an ordinary slave of the Askia Daud, a native of Kanta, was able to carry out a pilgrimage to Mecca without his master's knowledge; on his return, instead of listening to the hypocritical words of his *uandu* (herald), who tried to incite him against the slave, the king pardoned him along with a hundred members of his tribe.³⁵ The Diam-Uali, Diam-Téné, and Sorobanna tribes, while being slaves of the Askia, occupied a whole territory whose soil they cultivated for their own account, giving only a predetermined share of their crops to the sovereign. When the latter made a present of them to an erudite Muslim named Mohammed Tulé, they remained on their lands unhindered: their life in no way changed and their new master, according to tradition, merely went on getting the same share of the crops from them.³⁶

When Askia Mohammed defeated Sonni Baro Dau, the son of Sonni Ali, he took over some twenty-four slave tribes that belonged to him. The *Tarikh el Fettach* gives details about the social life of these tribes and, in particular, the system of shares which was applicable to them. Before belonging to the Songhai, they too had first been the property of the king of Mali; starting only with Sonni Mâdogo did they change imperial masters. The first three tribes were of Bambara origin and had most likely not yet been converted to Islam, if Kâti is to be believed; in other words, the slave might be of a religion other than that of his master. The king of Mali selected his domestic servants from among them. When one of

the men wished to marry, the king would furnish a dowry of forty thousand cowries

to the parents-in-law of the groom, so as to prevent the wife or children from claiming their freedom, and in order to make sure that they and their progeny would always remain the property of the *Malli-koi* . . . In the days of the *Malli-kois*, and ever since these tribes first belonged to them, they had been obligated to pay an annual tribute of forty cubits [of cultivated land] per couple, man and wife; thus it was until the time these tribes were handed over to the *chîs*.³⁷

With these crops the king fed his army; if they were insufficient or of poor quality, a new compensatory tax was levied upon the tribes for having been responsible for bad agricultural management. Under Askia Mohammed, however, the shares taken became more reasonable, more humane; they were collected in the following manner: a graduated tax, in kind, was levied on each couple at harvest time. After having appraised the holdings of each family, the king's tax-collector would take ten measures of flour from any who could supply only that much, twenty from those who could supply no more, and thirty from all others, even if they were capable of providing a thousand. This limit, indeed, was never to be exceeded, however much individual wealth the slave might have. A dark shadow clouds this almost too beautiful picture: the Askia bartered some of the tribe's children for horses.

The fourth tribe, the Tyindiketas, were dispersed from Gao as far as Sibiridugu. No one tried to stop the peregrinations of these people; when the Askia met one of them along his way, at a strongpoint or in a village, he could tell only by the individual's ethnic name that he was one of his slaves. He might then do with him whatever he wished. From the period of Mali until that of Gao, the only kind of tax imposed on this tribe was to supply the feed necessary for the king's horses; the hostlers were furnished by it as well, and the adults built the boats needed to transport the hay, at least during the reign

of the Askias. The tax thus assumed an increasingly functional character: one's occupation or economic status was the basis for the tax imposed on him.

The Zendji (the fifth tribe, extending from Kanta to Sibiridugu), who lived by fishing, paid their tax in dried fish when the water was low: it ranged from one to ten parcels of dried fish, according to the means. The ten-packet maximum was never to be exceeded. This tribe also supplied the boats and crews needed for certain types of transportation. The sixth tribe, the Arbis, were exempt from the levy since, under the Askias, it was from them that all the domestic servants and confidential special emissaries came. The women served the king's wives, while the youth escorted the king on his peaceable or warring outings. The seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh tribes were blacksmiths of foreign extraction. Their male ancestor had been the blacksmith slave of a Christian master living somewhere on an island in the Atlantic: one of the Canaries or Cape Verde Islands? We do not know. At any rate, this slave was said to have escaped and taken refuge in Kukiya, under the reign of Sonni Mohammed Fari. We have noted that, in general, men of the castes could not be taken as slaves. If that rule was broken, it was perhaps because the individual in question was of foreign extraction. He had come into the country already a slave. However that may be, his descendants, instead of being concentrated in one place, were dispersed so as to avoid any coalition among them. Kâti observes that these aliens followed filiation through the paternal line, contrary to African customs. The taxes imposed from time immemorial on these five tribes amounted to "one hundred spears and one hundred arrows per family each year."

The twelfth tribe occupied the territory between Gao and Fâni.

According to Kâti, the Askia Daud had plantations throughout the land, from the Erei, the Dendi, the Kulane, etc. He estimates the total annual crop at four thousand sacks

of grain, which by present-day calculations does not seem a great deal. The work on these plantations was carefully organized, and done by slaves. Each plantation was managed by a *fanfa*, who might have under him one hundred, sixty, fifty, forty, or twenty slaves; the name means both slave-master and ship's master.

The plantation of Abdâ, in the Dendi territory, employed two hundred slaves with four *fanfas*, all under another head named, Missakulallah; it yielded one thousand *sunus* of rice: *sunus* were leather sacks holding about 250 liters. Seed and sacks were supplied by the Askia. Ten boats were used to transport the cereals. At harvest time, the agent sent to collect it brought from the Askia to the head *fanfa*, according to custom, one whole block of salt, a thousand kola nuts, and a black boubou and a black loincloth for his wife. The personal wealth of this head *fanfa*, who was nonetheless a slave, could easily exceed in cereals alone a thousand *sunus*. His situation was thus in no way comparable to that of a member of the plebs of antiquity or a serf of the Middle Ages bound to the soil.

Such agricultural wealth was stored in clay granaries used for purposes of silage. It sometimes happened that such a plantation, with all those working on it, was given as a present to a Sherif, a scholar, or any other friend of the king. This is how the plantation of Djangadja was given to the alfa Kati, a native scholar: the crops then went to a new master, but the social situation of the workers remained unchanged.

One institution of Askia Daud's seems to indicate that the soldiers must have been mostly of slave origin:

It was he who inaugurated the system under which the king was heir to all his soldiers' goods, because, he said, they were his slaves; before that, it had not been so, and the king inherited only the soldier's horse, shield, and javelins, nothing else. As for the custom the kings had of taking the daughters of their soldiers and using them for their own pleasure, it was a deplorable custom which existed before his reign.³⁸

A freed slave was entitled to a deed of manumission drawn up in proper legal form. This was the case of an old woman who was part of the legacy of the *diango* Mussa Sagansâro, who, according to Kâti, was freed by Askia Daud.³⁹

The facts mentioned in this chapter constitute additional information on the organization of civil administration and labor; one can see in general how taxes must have been levied. The social condition of the slaves has been clearly shown: their treatment was not inhumane, for the period, as long as they remained within the area; they were, more and more, sort of "subjects" of the king. Their misfortune lay in the awful and hateful fact that they might at any moment be sold. From that viewpoint, their situation was identical with that of the white European slave of the same period. Beyond that, they were better off, as we have just shown.

RETRIBALIZATION

We can see at work here the characteristically African phenomenon of apparent retribalization. Kâti tells us the ethnic family names of the first slaves who were the originators of the twenty-four tribes belonging to the emperors of Mali and Gao; they were ordinary individuals whom the sovereign allowed to found a house which would proliferate in geometric progression through the generations. These large families, which numbered thousands of members after a short while, had all the external appearances of a clan or tribe, as to number, identity of name, and collateral relationships. Yet they totally lacked the social structure and organization of the clan. Their members were merely a juxtaposition of individuals integrated into an already highly developed monarchic society who were at most only conscious of their degree of kinship through the ethnic names appearing in the census.

PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION

We now have a general idea of the productive forces, the means of production, accumulation, and disposal, and whom they belonged to. There was not, on the one hand, a social minority possessing these means and accumulating them in a few shops and, on the other hand, a mass of expropriated persons forced to sell their labor power to this minority in order to live. According to the later analyses of Marx and Engels, Africa was thus at the stage of "natural economy," characterized by the production of only what is barely necessary for existence. Such an economy is an obstacle to the appearance of capitalism. However, on examining things more closely, we see that it was not exactly that way; in the marketplaces of Timbuktu, Djenné, and elsewhere, there were people producing with the sole purpose of resale; and, as Rosa Luxembourgh points out, this is the main condition for the appearance of capitalism. Nevertheless, if one considers the duration of this period of "natural economy" in Africa, one must realize that the process of "primitive accumulation," that is, the separation of labor and the conditions of labor, took place there at the slow pace of a secondary chemical reaction thoroughly negligible when compared to the principal reaction. It seems that it was the African collectivism described in the preceding chapter, the moral and material security it assured every individual, which made useless, if not superfluous, the accumulation of excessive wealth; even the riches of the king do not seem huge by modern standards. Hoarding, usury, and all forms of excessive concentration of individual wealth are only the reflection of social anxiety, uncertainty about tomorrow, a sort of shield for oneself and one's kin against a cruel fate. It is in an individualistic society that we see the great growth of such a phenomenon: this was true of the West throughout its history. Indo-Aryan individualism, dating from earliest antiquity, and the feeling of social insecurity

ity inherent in it, developed the spirit of struggle for life more than anywhere else. When the history of societies is written, it will be seen that, from the Aegean period to our own day, that of the Europeans was the hardest, roughest, least clement for the individual who was forced, condemned to a constant struggle, lest he disappear. Of course, the struggle for life is a law of nature, but it applies there more than anywhere else. Without any margin of safety, one whose means give out sinks before the indifferent eyes of others. This social coldness extends far beyond the period of modern capitalism to cover the history of Europe from the time of Athens until today. No politico-social education has so far radically changed the Occidental mind in this respect. The technical and intellectual progress due to constant and necessary busyness, the energy with which one must imperturbably amass ever more wealth, the peculiar forms that these activities assume and their repercussion upon the social order, the development of mercantilism—all these seem to flow, in large part, from one same initial principle. Even a certain love of risk results from this necessity: in order to escape from slavery in Europe, as we have seen, one had to have a remunerative means of support; the same social reason accounted for the search for an inheritance or credit so as to set up as a farmer-employer in the country or commission a ship and try one's luck on the high seas. The rise and development of maritime commerce remained, for a very long time, a private business, before being taken over by the various European countries.

From Homer's day to our own, through Athens, Rome, and the Middle Ages, it would be difficult to find a period with a properly "natural" economy. The mercantilism inherited from the Cretans and Phoenicians has gone on and grown stronger, except for a few moments of decline. Two factors appear to have stimulated commerce: the small size and, especially, the comparative poverty of the mother country, on one hand, and on the other, a certain numerical weakness of

the population which eliminated all hope of achieving fortune by force of arms, by the conquest of other countries. Commercial activity often seems the form of economic adaptation of minorities. Such was the case with the Phoenicians, beside the powerful Egyptian nation; such was also the case for Genoa and Venice until the destruction of Constantinople by Mohammed II; and the Lebano-Syrians and Israelites in our times; such would seem to have been the case for certain Black African groups, such as the Djula, among others. The commercial activity of Athens must have been stimulated by the geographic context and the poverty of Greece. Numerous and powerful peoples living in underendowed regions, such as the Germanic, throughout history have been conquerors. In modern times, with such universal and pacifistic minds as Goethe, the Germanic drive from north to south took on a literary turn: "*Kennst du das Land wo die Zitronen bluehn?*" (Do you know the land where the lemon-trees bloom?)⁴⁰ To the extent that African collectivism and European individualism grow out of the material conditions of existence, the preceding considerations are founded upon an objective basis.

NOTES

1. See position of Kaarta on map, pp. 138-139.
2. Sâdi, *T.S.*, XXXV, 387.
5. The last two of these were in Senegal (Cayor).
6. See quotations from Ibn Battuta.
7. Sâdi, *T.S.*, V, 24.
8. See p. 85 above.
9. Al Bakri, *op. cit.*
10. Kâti, *T.F.*, XVI, 319, and Sâdi, *T.S.*, XXXI, 338.
11. *Idrissi géographe, op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 18.
12. Al Bakri, *op. cit.*, p. 340.
13. Kâti, *T.F.*, XI, 177.
14. Al Bakri, *op. cit.*, pp. 324-326.
15. Sâdi, *T.S.*, XXXI, 338.
16. Ibn Haukal, *Of Roads and Kingdoms*.
17. M.A. Jaspán, "Negro Culture in Southern Africa Before European Conquest," *Science and Society*, vol. XIX, no. 3, Summer 1955, pp. 193-218, translated by Thomas Diop as "La Culture Noire en Afrique du Sud avant la conquête européenne," *Présence Africaine*, no. XVIII-XIX, February-May 1958, pp. 143-165.

18. Kâti, *T.F.*, XVI, 320. 19. Al Bakri, *op. cit.*, pp. 324-327.
 20. Ibn Battuta, *op. cit.*, p. 14. 21. See map, p.
 22. Kâti, *T.F.*, IV, 77. 23. Sâdi, *T.S.*, V, 24-25. 24. Kâti, *T.F.*,
 XIV, 262.
 25. Sâdi, *T.S.*, XXXI, 338.
 26. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by Samuel
 Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. by Frederick Engels, reviewed and
 amplified according to the Fourth German Edition by Ernest Unter-
 mann (Chicago: Kerr, 1915), Vol. I, Part VIII, ch. XXVIII, p. 790,
 quoting William Harrison's "Description of England, prefixed to Hol-
 inshed's Chronicle" (1577).
 27. *Idem.*, p. 806. 28. *Ibid.* 29. *Idem.*, pp. 806-807.
 30. *Ibid.*, fn. p. 808, quoting *Styne's Annals of the Reformation and*
Establishment of Religion, and other Various Occurrences in the
Church of England during Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign, Second
 ed., 1725, vol. 2.
 31. Marx, *op. cit.*, p. 808. 32. *Idem.*, XXXII, 835. 33. *Idem.*, *loc.*
cit.
 34. Kâti, *T.F.*, V, 81. 35. *Idem.*, XI, 204-207. 36. *Idem.*, I, 52-
 53.
 37. *Idem.*, V, 108. 38. *Idem.*, XI, 211. 39. *Idem.*, XI, 192-193.
 40. Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, III, 1.

Chapter Seven

IDEOLOGICAL SUPERSTRUCTURE: ISLAM IN BLACK AFRICA

Analysis of the conditions in which Islam succeeded in Africa will lead us to see the part it also played in civilizing the country.

Only during the Almoravide movement of the first half of the eleventh century did some white people, Berbers, attempt to impose Islam on Black Africa by force of arms. Yahia ben Ibrahim, head of the Lemtuna and Djoddala tribes, which respectively occupy the regions of Mauritanian Tagant and Adrar, was the originator of that movement. On his return from Mecca, around 1035, he brought a preacher, Abdallah ben Yasin, to convert the members of the tribes under his jurisdiction. The first result was total failure. The preacher was on the point of leaving, when Yahia succeeded in convincing him it was a good idea for the two of them to take a retreat in a fortified monastery, on an island at the mouth of the Senegal River, and lead an ascetic life, which through their example might attract some disciples. This was the beginning of the Marabout movement in West Africa ("marabout," from the Arabic *el Morabbatin*, meaning "living in a monastery"): "Almoravide" in turn derives, by alteration, from *el Morabbatin*. According to Ibn Khaldun, when the number of disciples had reached one thousand, Yassin said to them:

A thousand men cannot easily be beaten; therefore must we now work at remaining steadfast in holding to the truth and forcing, if need be, everyone to recognize it. Let us leave this place and fulfill the task imposed upon us.¹

PEACEFUL PENETRATION

The Almoravides besieged Aoudaghost and Ghana. This was the only time white troops attempted to impose Islam through violence.

One of Yasin's disciples, King Uardiabi, converted part of the Tukulor on the Senegal River: they became zealous allies of the Arabo-Berbers in the holy wars, from the eleventh century on.

The Almoravide thrust pushed northward across the desert, through Sijilmasa and the Maghreb, to reach part of Spain. It did not spread, in West Africa, to the east and south: conversion of these regions was to be the work of autochthonous marabouts.

The primary reason for the success of Islam in Black Africa, with one exception, consequently stems from the fact that it was propagated peacefully at first by solitary Arabo-Berber travelers to certain Black kings and notables, who then spread it about them to those under their jurisdiction. This was the case, according to Bakri, with the king of Mali, whom he calls El Mussulmani, and who must have been none other than the Mandingo king Baramendana Keita (1050) of whom Khaldun speaks. A Mohammedan traveler abided for a long time with him when drought swept the land; legend has it that he caused it to rain by his prayers. The king, who took this to be a miracle, then converted to the new religion. What is to be emphasized here is the peaceful nature of this conversion, regardless of the legend surrounding it.

THE ROLE OF AUTOCHTHONOUS CHIEFS

The second period of Islamization was marked by the conversion of the people, whether through automatic imitation of their chiefs, or through some violent action of these chiefs, sometimes going beyond their borders and becoming

veritable holy wars: all such holy wars were conducted by Black chiefs. The king of the town of Silla, in the eleventh century, was already waging holy war against the inhabitants of Kalenfu,² as had Askia Mohammed against the Mossi emperor Naséré, Amadu Sheiku against the Damel of Cayor, and Lat Dior Diop against Koki in 1875.

Ousman Dan Fodio (1801), El Hadj-Omar (1850), and Ahmadu Ahmadu (1884) were the great religious conquerors of the Sudan in the nineteenth century.

With the Sultan of Djenné, Konboro, we witness the phenomenon of automatic imitation of the sovereign by the people; they adopted the faith of Islam immediately following the conversion of the king. The *Tarikh es Sudan* places this event in the sixth century of the Hegira (twelfth century).³ Sâdi fails to mention the name of the Muslim scholar who must have exerted a religious influence on the king of Djenné: but the fact seems undeniable; when he decided to change his religion, he summoned all the Ulemas living in the country, and renounced the traditional faith in their presence. This instance substantiates the ideas already expressed. These Ulemas, these solitary marabouts, not only were unable to undertake any military action to convert their sovereigns, but absolutely needed their protection and the good will of politico-social circles, to live safely in the land during the transitional period before the conversion of the king.

Such royal conversions were, moreover, taken amiss by the people and all of the sovereign's prestige was needed for them to be accepted. It occasionally happened that a converted king concealed his new religious convictions from his people as long as possible. This was the case with Kan-Mer, the son of Bessi, who ruled the town of Aluken, near Gao, in Bakri's day.⁴

The special character of conversions effected by national chiefs is that the latter, however ruthless their methods, could never have been considered, in the eyes of the people, as

foreign oppressors or as being in league with such. Impossible as it was for the people to see El Hadj-Omar and the others as agents of a colonizing power, just so inevitably did the missionaries see them in this light.

METAPHYSICAL REASONS

A third cause for the success of Islam in Africa seems to reside in a certain metaphysical relationship between African beliefs and the "Muslim tradition." In the latter there is to be found an invisible world, a doppelganger of the visible one; it is indeed an exact replica of it, but the initiate alone can see it. Askia Mohammed, in carrying out his pilgrimage to Mecca, having come back by way of Egypt, pitched camp not far from Cairo for the night. He was accompanied at that time, among other scholars, by one Salih Diawara; the latter was able to "see" and shake hands with the Muslim genie, Chamharuch. According to the "Islamic tradition" related to Kâti, this was a beneficent genie whose followers were like marabouts and made pilgrimages like them. Around him, there were some freed genies, for in that spirit world there are also slaves, some good and some evil. The malevolent, pagan genies, just like their counterparts in our visible world, go to Hell when they die: they spend their time in tormenting us.⁵ In 1928, following the death of Amadu Bamba, originator of the Mohammedan sect of the Murides, a great wind swept the region of his capital, Djurdel, for an entire day. It was blowing toward the sea, and it was spontaneously concluded that this was the genie who had accompanied the holy man during his exile in Gabon, now returning to the ocean. Everyone was convinced that, during his life, this genie never left his side, acting in a way as his rampart against all evil. This metaphysical being is not to be confused with a guardian angel.

It goes without saying that this conception of a dual

world is to be found, in various forms, in the beliefs of Africans to such a point they they feel completely comfortable in Islam. Some of them do not even feel they have changed their metaphysical horizon. That is what led Dan Fodio to criticize severely all those who, though calling themselves Muslims, continue such practices as libations, offerings, divination, the Kabbala, etc., and even write verses from the Koran in the blood of sacrificial animals.⁶ Dan Fodio's text, although rather recent (nineteenth century), reflects a tendency already imperative in the days of the Askias (fifteenth-seventeenth centuries). African religions, more or less forgotten, were in the process of atrophying and being emptied of their spiritual content, their former deep metaphysics. The jumble of empty forms they had left behind could not compete with Islam on the moral or rational level. And it was on that latter level of rationality that the victory of Islam was most striking. That was the fourth cause of its success.

The imperative need for rationality reflected in the writings of Dan Fodio was henceforth better satisfied by Islam than by the dying traditional faiths. Nevertheless, it must be noted that, in the domain of artistic creativity, the Islamized African underwent, for a long time, a throttling, a kind of cultural impoverishment. During the initial years of Mohammedanism strict formalism was needed, so as to check any return to idolatry through the devices of artistic representation. It will be recalled under what conditions Islam triumphed over Sabaism. Therefore, it was necessary to proscribe for centuries any representation in animal form, and even more so, in human form. The notion of God, especially, was one which might not be concretized by means of art. Exegetes of Islam may realize today that this phase of fears is considered historically outgrown within the framework of the evolution of Muslim consciousness. It is unthinkable that the renaissance of sculptural and pictorial art (featuring the human form) might entail an offensive return to idolatry in any Muslim country.

POWER OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

What was the strength of religious belief in precolonial Islamic Africa, its political and social role, the imprint it left?

In the Sudan, the reign of Askia Mohammed was a watershed. Before him it seems, to a certain degree at least, the Islamism of the emperors of Gao was rather fragile: with the last two of these, if we are to believe Kâti, there was undisguised hostility. Askia Mohammed was only the lieutenant of Sonni Ali, whose faith was very lukewarm; his son, Bâro, who replaced him, refused to embrace Islam. Mohammed became a dissident and insistently urged Bâro to convert. Following negotiations which lasted fifty-two days, and were conducted in large part by the scholar Sâlih Diawara, already allied with the future Askia, the two went into battle. Bâro stood firm: there was no question of his embracing Islam; in this, he went farther than his father who had apparently been converted. The battle ended with his defeat. Kâti considers that God thus assured the Askia's victory over the infidel, which is quite reminiscent of the episode mentioned in *La Chanson de Roland*: Charlemagne, the Christian emperor, emerged victorious over the "Saracens" at Roncesvalles because the swords of his men, especially that of Roland, were guided by the Angel Gabriel. From the Christian viewpoint, this was a victory of Light over Darkness.⁷

Islam was, and remains in large part, a living religion in Black Africa, in contrast to the Christianity of the West, which tends to become among Europeans a mere religious custom. The Askias included the Ulemas in all their imperial decisions:

After Sâlih Diawara had informed the Askia of what he witnessed at his interview with *chi* Bâro, the prince called together his council, made up of the Ulemas, the notables, and the chiefs of his army, and consulted them as to the course of action he should pursue.⁸

Islam practically ran the government under Askia Mohammed. Cadi Mahmud did not hesitate to dismiss the envoys of the Askia and purely and simply refuse to obey his orders. Not only did this do him no harm, but he was able to address the Askia as follows (using the familiar "thou" form):

Have you forgotten, or do you pretend to have forgotten, the day you came to see me at my home, and you seized my foot and my clothing, saying: "I have come to place myself under your protection and entrust to you my person, so that you may save me from the flames of Hell; help me and hold me by the hand so that I may not fall into Hell; I entrust myself to you"? That is the reason why I dismissed your envoys and disobeyed your orders.⁹

This action by which one entrusts his metaphysical lot, his fate in the hereafter, to a living saint, is characteristic of the marabout phase of Islam in West Africa. The marabouts are the living intermediaries between laymen and the Prophet, who is in direct communication with God. After death, the marabouts raise their disciples up to Paradise, carrying them on their shoulders past Purgatory (in Wolof: *djegi jirat*). It is while the saint is asleep that his soul, his double, leaves his body to go and carry out such missions of rescue. One can see the reason why even a king, like Askia Mohammed, would feel it imperative to entrust himself to such a savior. So, in Black Africa to this very day, despite the formal doctrines of the Koran, there are no believers who dedicate themselves only to God and his Prophet; a third personage, the one known as his marabout, is needed by all laymen, from the masses up to the sovereign.

The power of Islam was such that it might have eliminated or attenuated slavery in the Middle Ages if it had decreed that the enslavement of one man by another was a mortal sin. But the Koran's point of view on this question is shaded. One may have a slave under the following conditions: to begin with, if he is a prisoner of a holy war—but then he must be educated,

cared for, and converted; but, on the other hand, it is forbidden to take as a slave a Muslim as well educated as oneself; so a slave must be freed as soon as he reaches the intellectual level of his master.

Be that as it may, during the period under consideration, it is quite clear that it was the fear of Hell which kept the faithful within the moral discipline of religion.

MYSTICAL UNDERPINNING OF NATIONALISM

Islam has often been the mystical underpinning of African nationalism. This explains the fantastic epics of the Mahdi (1881), the national hero and liberator of the former Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Rabah (1878), and the conquering Tukulors of the Senegal River and western Sudan. The wars of the Mahdi, with their unusual character, deserve a little more attention. The Mahdi, according to Muslim tradition, is the Messiah, the Saviour who, before the end of the world, will bring the entire earth to Islam. Proclaiming himself such, one Mohammed-Ahmed, a Sudanese by origin, galvanized his men, and succeeded in defeating Rashid-Bey, the governor of Fashoda. In 1882, he defeated an Egyptian column and occupied all the Kordofan: he completely massacred an army of ten thousand men commanded by Hicks Pasha. In 1883, Slatin Pasha, the British governor of Darfur, and Lupton-Bey (the British governor of Bahr-el-Ghazal, who affected Arab aliases as did the former) were also beaten by him. They capitulated in 1884. He conquered the Berber country as well as the Sennar. On January 26, 1885, he entered the citadel of Khartoum and there slew Gordon Pasha (Chinese Gordon). Eight-tenths of the Sudanese territory had been reconquered from the Anglo-Egyptian coalition opposing the Sudanese Blacks, when he died.¹⁰ His victory was the more valiant in that the victorious Sudanese had only bows and arrows while

the Anglo-Egyptians were equipped with the most modern firearms available. The West was stupefied by the event, which brought a shout of admiration from Friedrich Engels.

The victory of Amadu Sheiku over Lat Dior, cited earlier, was due to just such causes: the Damel of Cayor owed his salvation to the help of General Faidherbe whom he was able to get as an ally in this circumstance. The Tukulors, accompanied by women, fought while singing hymns that had a profound effect on both the soldiers and their enemies, according to accounts I received from my maternal grandmother: the Tukulors were fanaticized, the Cayorians terrified. The secular pseudo-nationalism of the latter, their mundane *tieddo* spirit, very quickly fell before the unshakable faith of the Tukulors, who, of course, were convinced they would go directly to Paradise when they died on the battlefield of this holy war. African nationalism among them had found an efficacious mystical underpinning.

The difference between the extraordinary epic of Samory and that of the Mahdi consists in the fact that Samory, although a Muslim, acted without any mystical underpinning to his nationalism, as if he had weighed the consequences of it. He was able to crystallize the national resistance of almost all the territories of West Africa on a strictly secular basis without the assistance of any belief, idea, or foreign power to galvanize his troops. He did not wage holy wars as had Askia Mohammed or the religious leaders of the nineteenth century. He waged a national resistance of the very best "Vercingetorix type."

In his childhood, Samory lived in the circumstances of the masses as an African chieftain rarely had. This was what the originality of his political action and his glory were perhaps due to.

Although of lesser magnitude, the resistance of Behanzin, the last king of Dahomey (end of the nineteenth century), and that of Lat Dior (Senegal) were of the same type. As for Chaka,

the Zulu chief, it will be necessary to make further studies to ascertain whether the English succeeded in channeling his "turbulence" inward, toward the other African clans and tribes, or whether he was consciously making ready so that, when the time came, he might deal them a decisive blow.

The fact was that due to the *modus vivendi* which was always respected, Chaka never waged war against the English in South Africa. On the other hand, the military and social organization with which he endowed his army and his people was the most technical and efficient of all those in Black Africa in modern times. It contributed mightily to the rapid and systematic fusion of the Zulu clans and tribes and the birth of the present-day nationalities in South Africa.

Chaka's internal conquests were as rapid as they were extraordinarily farreaching. It is for all these reasons that he is sometimes referred to as the Napoleon of Black Africa or at least of South Africa.

Chaka never followed European examples.

RENUNCIATION OF THE PRE-ISLAMIC PAST

Islam, in contrast to (present-day) Christianity, takes no account of the traditional past. The Christian West of today proudly recognizes its classical, pagan heritage, and does its utmost to preserve the works of that period. One discovers nothing of the sort in Islamized countries. The equivalent of the Western pagan past must be hushed up, renounced, permanently forgotten. A museum in Mecca filled with relics from the Sabaean period would be pure idolatry, an unthinkable initiative from the Muslim viewpoint. Reasons such as these explain why today the Blacks of Khartoum have a sense of shame at acknowledging their relationship to the ancient past of Meroë. The ruins from that period, the eighty-four pyramids still standing in the ancient capital, the temple of

Semna, Meroitic writing, the remains of the astronomical observatories, the vestiges of the metal industry which made the Sudan the Birmingham of antiquity, all this is of no interest because it is tainted with a pagan tradition no good Muslim would think of recalling. How could they, in all decency, hark back to these people who knew nothing of the Koran, and who did not pray as we now do, to a time before religious wisdom?

“SHERIFISM”

One might term as “Sherifism” the irresistible impulse on the part of most Muslim chiefs of Black Africa to link themselves, by whatever sort of acrobatics, to the family tree of Mahomet. One of my uncles, Mahtar Lô, maintained until his dying day that twenty ancestors, whose names he would quote, linked him to the Prophet; anyone who disagreed with him was a heretic. This tendency spread throughout Africa after the introduction of Islam in the eighth century. All the royal families, without distinction, after Islamization invented Sherifian origins for themselves, often retroactively adjusting local history. This was the case of the royal branch of the Dias of Kukia, the former capital of Songhai, before Gao, until the eleventh century. An oral post-Islamic etymology has it that *Dia* derives from *Dja Men el Yemen* (“he came from Yemen”). It seems there were two brothers, natives of Southern Arabia, who arrived in that region in “the most piteous state,” barely able to conceal their nakedness under “bits of animal hide.” Whenever they were asked where they came from, one of them would answer in Arabic with the aforementioned expression. Henceforth, that was the name of the elder of the two. After he defeated the fish known as Demon of the River, which was king of the region and periodically emerged from the water to dictate its laws, he supplanted it at the head of the nation and founded the Dia dynasty.

Such legends have proliferated in Black Africa since Islam came in and have contributed to altering the authentic history of the continent.¹¹ We find variants of them for the genesis of the first dynasties of Ghana, Bornu, Wadai, all of the Kordofan, and so on. On the other hand, a migration starting from the Nile Valley seems beyond doubt to the extent that, even today, it can be substantiated by the ethnic names of the various clans.¹² This migration, however, is mentioned nowhere except in pre-Islamic legends that gradually grow vaguer and vaguer, according to which, as noted by Delafosse, the Blacks of West Africa relate their ancestors came from the east, from around the "Great Water." We will see that very probably this "Great Water" is the Nile rather than the Indian Ocean.

Consciousness of the continuity of the people's historical past has been progressively weakened by religious influences. Even within our own families, we know that our parents prefer to forget systematically and keep their children unaware of a certain "pagan" past, which it has become indiscreet to mention, except for a few nostalgic reminiscences. In the search for ancestors as far away as Yemen, they might have been better off to stop at the Nile Basin, but this happens less and less often because, beginning with the seventh century, the history of that region appeared as if polluted by the image of the Pharaoh, the Biblical curse on whom is perpetuated in Islam.

However that may be, Mohammedan Black Africa in the Middle Ages was no less original than Christian Europe at the close of antiquity. Both continents were invaded in the same way by alien monotheistic religions which ended up being at the foundation of the entire sociopolitical organization, ruling philosophical thought, and carrying forward intellectual and moral values during this whole period.

A hierarchy as powerful, old, and permanent as that of the Christian Church is nonexistent in Islam; it is the replica, on the religious level, of the old Roman administrative organi-

zation. Immediately after the wars of the times of the first caliphates, there was coexistence and reciprocal tolerance among the different sects. None prevailed sufficiently to be able to anathematize the others and consider them schismatic, so as to erect a durable hierarchy upon its own concepts and its own interpretation of the religious texts. This situation gave rise in Black Africa to the possibility of a multiplicity of sects. Thus, alongside the old Tidjane sect, native to North Africa and propagated by El Hadj Malick Sy in Senegal, there appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century, the new Muride sect created by Amadu Bamba. The French authorities very quickly interpreted this as the integrating of Islam into local nationalism. Instead of expressly recommending a pilgrimage to Mecca, considering the material obligations one would have to fulfill vis-à-vis his family so as to be in a position to make such a journey, Muridism created shrines on the local level: Djurbel, the residence of Amadu Bamba, with its mosque, was the substitute for Mecca during the marabout's life. After his death, it was shifted to Touba, where he is buried. Thus, from 1900 to 1935, no Muride made a pilgrimage to Mecca; the idea of making one occurred to no one, not even the creator of the sect. Cheikh Anta, the most independent of all the young brothers of Amadu Bamba, thought of making it only after Amadu Bamba's death.

To recapitulate, then, in the Middle Ages the religious superstructure played an equally important role in Europe and in Africa. Christianity gave the West politico-administrative organization, and ensured the continuity of historical consciousness. Islam, in Black Africa, merely superimposed itself on the politico-administrative organization: even when, in consequence of the cosmopolitanism of the period, a foreigner (Arab or otherwise) was invested with a position by the sovereign, he bore the indigenous title. The sense of an ancient past was weakening but the Arab chroniclers noted the events of African history with praiseworthy objectivity: their writ-

ings today constitute a precious source of documentation. In Europe, as in Islamized Black Africa, the notion of the seven arts, that is, the trivium and the quadrivium, was carried forward, as we shall see in the following chapter.

NOTES

1. Ibn Khaldun, *op. cit.*, II, p. 69.
2. Al Bakri, *op. cit.*, pp. 324-333.
3. Sâdi, *T.S.*, ch. V, p. 23.
4. Al Bakri, *op. cit.*, p. 334.
5. Kâti, *T.F.*, ch. VI, pp. 123-126.
6. Cheikh Otmane Dan Fodio, *Nour-el-Eulbab* (Algiers, 1898), p. 7 (quoted in Leroi-Gourhan and Poirier, *Ethnologie de l'Union française*, p. 359).
7. Kâti, *T.F.*, ch. V, pp. 104-106.
8. *Idem.*, ch. V, p. 104.
9. *Idem.*, ch. VI, p. 117.
10. Delafosse, *op. cit.*, p. 113.
11. Sâdi, *T.S.*, ch. I, pp. 4-8.
12. Cf. Chapter X below.

Chapter Eight

INTELLECTUAL LEVEL: TEACHING AND EDUCATION

THE UNIVERSITY

As in the Western Middle Ages, teaching was in the hands of the clergy which, in the case of West Africa, was Moham-
medan. Documents now at our disposal permit us to describe
in detail the intellectual life of the university, particularly that
of Sankoré, in Timbuktu. The student body was made up of
all those who, regardless of age, were possessed of an insatia-
ble thirst for knowledge. Today, it is difficult for us to picture
the extent of this need among Africans of that period. The
mosque was at one and the same time also the place of
learning, the university. It was not an official building, but the
religious undertaking of a devout *cadi*, apparently helped, in
the beginning at least, by the people. Thus, *Cadi El Aquib*
restored the mosque built by Mohammed Naddi, the work
being finished between July 16 and August 14, 1569. The
Great Mosque of Timbuktu long remained unfinished, until
the Askia Daud, passing through the town, undertook to
assist the *cadi*, saying to him: "What remains to be done, I
shall take upon myself; it will be my share in this pious
endeavor."¹

The schedule of courses lasted all day, interrupted only at
the times of prayers. Some scholars even taught for part of the
night. Immediately following prayers, the students gathered
around the professor, who imparted his teaching, commented

upon the texts, and discussed them with the students. These professors were not officially paid: they taught for the love of teaching; in return, they enjoyed immense respect and gratitude from their pupils (learning the Koran) and their more advanced students who, after mastering the Koran, went on to the various branches of Higher Education. On Wednesday, the day off from school, pupils and students each brought him some honorarium, for him to live on. According to Kâti, in Timbuktu, there were 150 to 180 Koran schools, and a professor such as one Ali Takaria each Wednesday received approximately 1725 cowries; each of his students brought him from five to ten cowries.² The pupils of the Koran were also obliged to bring the wood for the fire around which the class met in the evening and at dawn.

TEACHING METHOD

The current teaching method was scholastic. The discussions carried on in those days about the texts might appear to us today as useless quibbling; such was not the case. The grammar method then in use, which consisted in making clear the grammatical significance of the text, was so revolutionary that for a long time it was considered suspect in Europe. The attempt to grasp the exact sense of a text and to stick to it, whether one realized it or not, meant ridding it of its mystical, revealed aspect, and reducing it to the dimensions of a profane vocabulary. Therefore, for a long time, many exegetists avoided applying such a method to the Bible. In Africa, the language of Higher Education was Arabic, as was Latin for Europe of the same period. The Koran was the equivalent of the Bible; it was the principal text to be studied, the one from which all others derived. It contained the sum of all that existed: past, present, future, the whole Universe. It was thus necessarily laconic and dense; so short a text to cover

so many things. The commentary, the learned explanation was thus imperative in the very first place. The place given to explication of the Koran within the educational programs is thus easily understood.

THE PROGRAM

But what actually was the program? Recollection of the Seven Arts never altogether vanished in Europe, but it was the Arabs who introduced the Aristotelian texts to it, well before the Crusaders' contact with Byzantium. They introduced the same texts into Black Africa in the same period. The trivium, i.e., the study of grammar, Aristotelian logic (formal logic, grammatical logic), and rhetoric, was on the list of subjects taught, as shown in the *Tarikh es Sudan*. Chapter X of that work gives the biographies of seventeen scholars of Timbuktu, indicating all the subjects they had mastered. Almost all of them were dialecticians, rhetoricians, jurists, etc., who, in addition, had written works mentioned by title but for the most part not yet recovered. One of them, the famous Ahned Baba, is said to have left more than seven hundred works. Each one of them had an immense library, also lost to us today. The intellectual tradition was already well established at the time of Sâdi (sixteenth century). About Mohammed Ben Mahmud, he writes: "He made a commentary of El Moghili's poem in Redjez on logic. My father studied rhetoric and logic under him. He died in the month of Safar in 973 [September 1565]."³

Sâdi himself studied all these subjects, and commented on several texts; he was the pupil of an inhabitant of Timbuktu, a scholar of Uankori origin, by the name of Mohammed Ben Mahmud Ben Abu Bekr.

In a word, he was my professor, my master, and no one was more useful to me, whether directly or through his writings . . .

He awarded me graduate diplomas written in his own hand, covering the subjects he had taught according to his own or someone else's methods. I sent him a certain number of my works; he wrote on them annotations quite flattering to me; he even reproduced the results of some of my research and I heard him quote some of them in his lectures, thus displaying his impartiality, his modesty, and his respect for the truth in all circumstances. He was with us at the time of our misfortune.⁴

AWARDING OF DIPLOMAS

That text informs us of the existence of diplomas, the manner in which they were awarded (the same as that of Europe of the period), their individual character. A diploma was for a long time nothing more than a certificate of conscientiously completed study. We can see here an aspect of the intellectual practices, with the mention of the works used as documentation, the existence of research activity. Thinking, thus, was a conscious activity; as such, it was becoming scientific.

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

In the Middle Ages, four centuries before Lévy-Bruhl wrote his *Primitive Mentality*, Muslim Black Africa was already commenting upon Aristotle's "formal logic" and practicing dialectics. Sâdi mentions by name the dialectician El-Qalqachandi.⁵ Students came from all directions, all regions: "At this time, the city was full of Sudanese students, Westerners, in ardent pursuit of science and virtue."⁶

The quadrivium had also been introduced into Black Africa by the same means at the same time. It did not develop there as well as the trivium. The four disciplines constituting it (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music) belong to the do-

main of science, of knowledge, which Muslims were led to neglect through a certain interpretation of the Koranic text. Since the latter covers everything, including the future, true science consisted in plumbing its depths; religion was the center of everything; all knowledge was merely secondary for the mind, whatever its practical value; such considerations held true for the entire Muslim world, Asian as well as African. In the seventh century, the Arabs, having inherited the learning of antiquity, were more advanced than the West in the exact sciences, which they, in large part, introduced into Europe. But whereas the West developed these sciences, the Arabo-African world merely remained where it was and even retrogressed in some areas. Islam made systematic development of the quadrivium superfluous: the "race" of Arab mathematicians, isolated researchers, progressively disappeared instead of fanning out. Europeans, on the other hand, were *ahlul kitâb*, "those who believe in books, those of the books," those who believe that solutions to all profane problems are to be found in nature and systematically devote themselves to this relatively vain pursuit.

This situation has continued to our own day. My previously mentioned uncle boasted of being one of the few to have some knowledge of astronomy, to be interested in this realm of knowledge, considered vain because not leading directly to God. Yet, a certain kind of scholasticism sees everything deriving from the Divine Unity and should thus have led to the justification and revalorization of science. In the Muride community, the school at Guédé, a village in the Baol, under professor M'Backé Busso taught mathematics, applied mechanics, some aspects of thermodynamics (steam engines), and especially the precise measurement of time, whatever the condition of the sky, this last activity being connected with the need to pray exactly on time. This school, in the 1930s, was well on the way to launching scientific research of the same quality as that which existed during the Renaissance, based