

To Article XVIII (1996a: “Chute des Sissé”)

The study proposes a re-evaluation of Songhay history on the basis of a greater geographical proximity between ancient Ghana and the Gao state. For various reasons the Zāghē are now seen to be Soninke and not Berber by origin. The article tries to show that the Zāghē are identical with the Zā of the *Tā'rikhs* and that they correspond to Sisse refugee kings from Ghana. It considers the Zā to be a homogenous ruling house which first ruled in Ghana, then experienced a palace revolt with a Muslim branch coming to power, and finally were expelled from Ghana by non-Sisse Muslims. This reconstruction makes it possible to conceive the Zāghē as refugee Zā from Ghana who established themselves under the umbrella of local Massūfa on the site of Gao-Saney. It further makes it possible to identify the ancestors of the Zarma from Tendirma as Sisse having originated from Ghana. The idea of a timeless Mande substratum on the eastern Niger bend is now replaced by the conception of a dynastic link between the Sisse from Ghana and the Zāghē from Gao by way of the Zā.

Misconceptions concern the matrimonial policy of the Zāghē with respect to the local vassal dynasty of the Qanda and the eastern origin of the Songhay (1996a: 157, 164). Having been former suzerains of the Qanda, the Zā did not need to practice a matrimonial policy with respect to the local kings. The epi-

Ancient Kingdoms of West Africa

graphic evidence rather suggests that the *malika* ("queen") of Gao-Saney was not the wife but the legal counterpart of the king, or rather a former high priestess reduced to the status of constitutional supervisor.⁴⁰ As such her office resembled that of the Magira of Bornu and the Magajiya of the Hausa states (see below XIX).