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THE THIRTEENTH- AND FOURTEENTH-CENTURY KINGS OF MALI¹

By N. LEVTZION

THE three most important Arabic sources for the Empire of Mali at its height are Ibn Fadl-Allāh al-'Umari, Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa, and Ibn-Khaldūn. These authors all had good opportunities to collect information on this remote empire. Al-'Umari, who wrote in 1342-9, reflects the impression that Mansā Mūsā had left in Cairo during his pilgrimage. In all probability, he had not himself met Mansā Mūsā in person, but he had talked with people who had met the Sudanese emperor.² One of his most important informants was ash-shaykh Abū-sa'īd 'Uthmān ad-Dukkālī, who had lived in Mali for thirty-five years.³ Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa recorded his own tour through Mali from February 1352 to December 1353.⁴ This account by such an experienced traveller is a first-rate historical document. Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa was travelling in a region that was well known to his own countrymen; indeed he met Moroccans all over the Sudan. He was, therefore, inhibited from exaggerating or introducing incredible stories of the sort that often occur in his accounts of remoter countries.

Al-'Umari and Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa describe many interesting aspects of the social, economic, and political life of Mali. Ibn-Khaldūn, as a historian, is interested in Mali's dynamic development. He succeeded in reconstructing a chronicle of the kings of Mali in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. As a preface to this chronicle he gives a precise, summarized description of events in the Sudan prior to the hegemony of Mali: Ghana as the leading power, its destruction by the Almoravids, the rise of Sūsū in its place, and finally the victory of Mali.⁵ Ibn-Khaldūn admits that he deals with the history of the Sudan only incidentally, in connexion with the history of the Almoravids.⁶ Nevertheless it seems that Ibn-Khaldūn had striven to

¹ This article is based on a chapter in an M.A. thesis submitted to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

² These were: Ibn Amīr Hādījib, the host of Mūsā Mansā during his stay in Cairo; al-Mihmandār, the official charged with looking after Mansā Mūsā during his visit to Cairo; Muhannā b. 'Abd al-Bāqī al-'Adjramī, Mansā Mūsā's guide on his way from Cairo to Mecca. (Al-'Umari, *Masālik al-Absār fi Mamālik al-Amṣār (L'Afrique moins L'Égypte)*, traduit et annoté par M. Gaudéfroy-Demombynes (Paris, 1927), 76, 78.) Another informant of al-'Umari was ash-shaykh Abū ar-Ruh 'Isā az-zawāwī (from Zawāwa in Qabiliya, Alger), who met Mansā Mūsā outside the Sudan (ibid. 80-1).

³ Ibid. 58. He was from Dukkāla in Morocco.

⁴ Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa, *Tuḥfat an-Nuṣār fi Gharā'ib al-Amsār wa-'Adjā'ib al-Asfār*, Texte Arabe et Traduction Française par C. Defrémery et B. K. Sanguinetti (Paris, 1922), Tome IV, 377(3-6), 447(8).

⁵ Ibn-Khaldūn, *Kitāb Ta'riḫ ad-Duwal al-Islāmiya bil-Maghrib min Kitāb al-'Ibar*, Texte Arabe, pub. par M. G. De Slane (Alger, 1847), I, 263. id. *Histoire des Berbères et des Dynasties Musulmanes de l'Afrique Septentrionale*, trad. par M. G. De Slane, 2^{ème} édition, 1925-56, II, 109-10.

⁶ Ibid. 261(4)/trans. 105.

collect all information on the Sudan and in particular on Mali, which, of course, was still flourishing in his time.

Ibn-Khaldūn acquired his information on the early kings of Mali from the shaykh 'Uthmān, *faqīh ahl Ghāna*, a Muslim jurist, famed for his erudition and piety, who came to Cairo with his family in 796 A.H. (A.D. 1393/4) while on pilgrimage.⁷ Ibn-Khaldūn twice mentions information given by al-Hadjdj Yūnis, who is called *turdjmān at-Takrūr*, i.e. the interpreter or, probably, the ambassador of Mali in Egypt. In both cases this information is connected with Mansā Mūsā.⁸

Ibn-Khaldūn remarks that for much of what he wrote about the kings of Mali, he relied upon information from the Qādī Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn Wāsūl from Sidjilmāsa, who had settled at Gao (Kawkaw) in the dominion of Mali, where he performed the functions of a *Qādī*, a Muslim judge. Ibn-Khaldūn met him at Hunayn in 776 A.H. (A.D. 1374/5). Ibn-Khaldūn mentions this informant only on one occasion, concerning Mārī-Djāta II, who died in 775 A.H. (A.D. 1373/4), only a year before their meeting at Hunayn.⁹

Another reliable source of information for Ibn-Khaldūn was al-Mu'amar Abū 'Abdallāh ibn Khadīdja al-Kūmī, a missionary of the Ismā'īliya in az-Zāb (region of Biskra). He met Mansā Mūsā in Ghadāmes, when the latter returned from the pilgrimage, and went with him to Mali. He related his experiences with Mansā Mūsā to Ibn-Khaldūn.¹⁰

In 754 A.H. (A.D. 1353), at Biskra, Ibn-Khaldūn met an envoy of the ruler of Takkadā (or Tādmakka), who told him that it was subject to Mali.¹¹

Ibn-Khaldūn travelled much in Egypt and North Africa and thus had ample opportunities to meet people from the Sudan or those who had visited there. He was in Tunis when a deputation from Mali happened to be there to honour the Moroccan Sultan Abu al-Hasan, and witnessed a rebellion of the Arabs of Ifriqiya in 749 A.H. (A.D. 1348).¹² Ibn-Khaldūn resided at the court of the Moroccan sultan in Fes during the years 755-763/4 A.H. (A.D. 1354-61/2). In 762 A.H. (A.D. 1360/1) Fes was visited by an embassy from Mārī-Djāta II.¹³

Ibn-Khaldūn's sources of information have been discussed at this length so as to show that he was well informed on the affairs of Mali, and in particular on the kings of Mali. The remainder of this article is an attempt

⁷ Ibn-Khaldūn, 263(12-14)/trans. 110. See also 264 (2, 14)/trans. 110-11, where, concerning the exact pronunciation of the names of the kings, he twice says 'In that way it was dotted by the shaykh 'Uthmān'. The title *faqīh ahl Ghāna* may be attributed not to the state of Ghana (which probably did not exist any more) but to the area where this state once flourished. (Cf. J. S. Trimmingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa* (Oxford University Press, 1962), 60.)

⁸ Ibn-Khaldūn, 264(19-20), 265(15-17)/trans. 111-13.

⁹ Ibid. 266(17)-267(9)/trans. 114-15.

¹⁰ Ibid. 265(4-18)/trans. 112-13.

¹¹ Ibid. II, 73(7-13)/trans. III, 287-8 on the confusion of Takkadā and Tādmakka, see: H. Lhote, 'Contribution à l'étude des Touaregs Soudanais', *Bulletin de l'I.F.A.N.*, 1955, 359-67.

¹² Ibid. I, 557(4-12)/trans. III, 37-8. See also the article 'Ibn-Khaldūn' in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

¹³ Ibid. II, 459(8-14)/trans. IV, 343.

to reconstruct the chronicle of the kings of Mali, an attempt based mainly on Ibn-Khaldūn. This has been done before, first by Delafosse and then by Charles Monteil.¹⁴ Delafosse fixed exact dates for the reigns of all the kings of Mali. These dates have been adopted by many other writers, although some of them are not based on historical evidence, or at least Delafosse gives no reference for the sources of his information. Monteil undertook a critical revision of this chronicle of Mali, and suggested more accurate dates, although he still retained some dates that cannot be proved, or for which Delafosse provides the sole authority. Nevertheless Monteil's treatise is an invaluable guide to the reading of the sources for Mali history, and for the most part it has been followed in this article. There are, however, some points of divergence, and it is to these that particular attention is drawn. The main reliance has been on Arabic sources; oral traditions have been used only to throw light on disputed points.

The first king of Mali mentioned by Ibn-Khaldūn is Barmandana. He was the first to become a Muslim. He made the pilgrimage, an example followed by his successors.¹⁵ There is no evidence for identifying him with the king of 'Malal' whom al-Bakrī says had been islamized.¹⁶ Ibn-Khaldūn does not give any indication of the date of this king, nor does he state his relation to Mārī-Djāta, the next king he mentions. Mārī-Djāta was the powerful king of Mali who overcame the Sūsū, conquered their land, and wrested power from their hands. Ibn-Khaldūn admits that he has no information concerning the genealogy of this king.¹⁷ Mārī-Djāta is to be identified with Sun-Djāta, the founder of the empire of Mali according to the local oral traditions.¹⁸ It may be remarked that Ibn-Khaldūn is the only Arab writer who mentions Mārī-Djāta,¹⁹ whereas in the oral traditions his shadow is cast over all the other rulers of Mali.

Mārī-Djāta was succeeded by his son Mansā Ulī, who was one of the

¹⁴ M. Delafosse, *Haut-Sénégal-Niger* (Paris, 1912). Charles Monteil, 'Les Empires du Mali', *Bulletin du Comité des Études Historiques et Scientifiques de l'A.O.F.* (1929), 291-447.

¹⁵ Ibn-Khaldūn, 264(1-3)/trans. II, 110-11.

¹⁶ Al-Bakrī, *Al-Masālik wal-Mamālik, K. al-Mughrib fi dhikr bilād Ifriqiya wal-Maghrib*, pub. par M. G. De Slane (Alger, 1911), 178(3-19), and *Description de l'Afrique Septentrionale*, trad. par M. G. De Slane (Alger, 1913), 333 cf. Trimmingham, *op.cit.* 62; This identification was made by Delafosse, *op. cit.* II, 174-5.

¹⁷ Ibn-Khaldūn, 264(3-6); trans. III.

¹⁸ Ibn-Khaldūn (*ibid.*) interprets the name Mārī-Djāta as follows: 'Mārī means in their language Amir, a prince, who is an offspring of a Sultan; Djāta means a lion.' Dj. T. Niane, 'Recherches sur l'empire du Mali au Moyen Age', *Recherches Africaines* (1959), 45, and Delafosse (*op. cit.* 177-8), who finds Ibn-Khaldūn's interpretation satisfactory, suggest interpretations of the name Sun-Djāta, and both admit that Djāta is the proper name.

¹⁹ Except for al-Qalqashandī, who is copying Ibn-Khaldūn. (Al-Qalqashandī, *Subḥ al-A'shā* (Cairo, 1915), v, 293.) Ibn-Baṭṭūta, 419(10)-420(2), relates that the grandfather of one Mudrik ibn Faqqūs had converted to Islam Sāriq-Djāta, the grandfather of Mansā Mūsā. This Sāriq-Djāta should be identified with Mārī-Djāta and Sun-Djāta, although he was not a grandfather of Mansā Mūsā but a brother of his grandfather, as we shall show below. Ibn-Baṭṭūta had not studied the genealogy of the kings of Mali.

most powerful kings of Mali. He went on pilgrimage during the reign of az-Zāhir Baybars, the Mamluk Sultan of Egypt.²⁰ References like this to rulers and events in the Muslim world help to suggest approximate dates for the reigns of the kings of Mali. Baybars ruled in A.D. 1260–77, but we have no indication exactly when during this period Mansā Ulī made his pilgrimage. There is nothing in the texts for or against Delafosse's suggestion that Mansā Ulī reigned in the years A.D. 1255–70.²¹ Ibn-Khaldūn remarks that Mārī-Djāta ruled for twenty-five years, but there is no such indication concerning the length of the reign of Mansā Ulī.

Mansā Ulī was succeeded by his brother Wātī, and after him authority passed to another brother, Khalīfa. This ruler was weak-minded and used to amuse himself by shooting arrows at people, killing them for sport. His subjects rose and killed him.²² A degeneration in the ruling dynasty undermined the authority of the kings; troubles at court followed.

After the deposition of Khalīfa, the throne was given to Abū-Bakr, a grandson of Mārī-Djāta by one of his daughters. 'He was crowned according to the customs of the Berbers, where a man is succeeded by his sister or his sister's son.'²³

We have seen, following Ibn-Khaldūn, that Mārī-Djāta was succeeded by a son, who in his turn was succeeded by two brothers. The accession of Abū-Bakr, grandson of Mārī-Djāta and son of a sister of the last three kings, was by no means the rule, but a divergence from the rule, which Ibn-Khaldūn associated with the Berber custom. After the deposition of Khalīfa, Abū-Bakr was crowned by the officers of the court, probably because they thought him most amenable to their policy. He had a certain right to the throne, but it is uncertain whether he could have reached it in other circumstances. According to the oral traditions (which call him Bata Mande Bory), Abū-Bakr was a son of Sun-Djāta's daughter, but had been adopted by him as his son.²⁴ This adoption might well have strengthened his claim to the throne.

²⁰ Ibn-Khaldūn, 264(6–9)/trans. III.

²¹ Delafosse, op.cit. 184.

²² Ibn-Khaldūn, 264(9–10)/trans. III.

²³ Ibid. 264(10–13)/trans. III. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (388) relates that among the Masūfa, the Berber inhabitants of Walata, the son is attached by genealogy not to his father but to his maternal uncle. A man's heirs are not his sons but the sons of his sister. The same traveller (443) found that the sons of the sister of the Sultan of Takadda, a Berber, lived with him and would succeed him to the throne. Al-Bakrī (175, trans. 328) describes the same custom in Ghana, where the king was succeeded by his sister's son. The ruling dynasty in Ghana, being in contact with the Berbers could, therefore, be Berber-influenced and have adopted a matrilineal succession to the throne (cf. H. Baumann & D. Westermann, *Les peuples et les civilisations de l'Afrique* (Paris, 1948), 392–8). Al-Bakrī's account relates only to the succession to the throne and not to inheritance among the common people. Al-Bakrī himself (179, trans. 334) gives evidence on patrilineal inheritance among the Bakama, the inhabitants of Sāma, a province of Ghana, where the eldest son inherits all the property of his father. R. Mauny (*Tableau Géographique de l'Ouest Africain au Moyen Age* (IFAN, Dakar, 1961), 126) identified the Bakama with the Bambara, thus bringing us nearer to the people of Mali, where the patrilineal pattern probably prevailed.

²⁴ Niane, op. cit. (1959), 39.

After Abū-Bakr, the throne was seized by a freed slave of the royal family, Sākūra, who secured control over the kingdom. (Ash-Shaykh 'Uthmān, *faqīh ahl Ghāna*, gives the local pronunciation of this name as 'Sabkara'.) Sākūra went on pilgrimage during the reign of al-Malik an-Nāṣir Sultan of Egypt, and was killed in Tadjūra on his way home.²⁵

Under his powerful government the possessions of the people of Mali were expanded and they overpowered the neighbouring nations. . . . Their authority became mighty, all the nations of the Sudan stood in awe of them and the merchants from North Africa travelled to their country.²⁶

The laxity of the ruling dynasty in contrast to the power of the officers of the court, among whom the slaves and freed slaves were probably prominent, thus became more emphasized with the usurpation of the throne by Sākūra. It is possible that this freed slave had been involved in the deposition of Khalīfa and the crowning of Abū-Bakr; at last he seized the power from the legitimate heirs. Once again Mali had a powerful king. Ibn-Khaldūn's account gives the impression that during his reign Mali reached a new climax after her first glory under Mārī-Djāta and Mansā Ulī. Sākūra's pilgrimage was probably during the second period of power of al-Malik an-Nāṣir ibn Qalā'ūn in Egypt, i.e. during A.D. 1298-1308.²⁷

After the death of the usurper Sākūra, the throne reverted to the legitimate heirs. The next king was Mansā Qū, who was succeeded by his son Muḥammad.²⁸ In this context Ibn-Khaldūn refers to Mansā Qū as the son of Mārī-Djāta, but later on he refers to the seizing of the throne by a certain Maḥmūd, a descendant of Mansā Qū, the son of Mansā Ulī the son of Mārī-Djāta.²⁹ According to this version, Mansā Qū was a grandson of Mārī-Djāta and not his son. This version may well fit the chronology, as the three sons of Mārī-Djāta (Ulī, Wātī, and Khalīfa), reigned in the third quarter of the thirteenth century, while Mansā Qū ascended the throne only at the beginning of the fourteenth century.³⁰ After the deposition of Khalīfa there was no son of Mārī-Djāta; authority passed to Abū-Bakr, a grandson of Mārī-Djāta, and was later seized by Sākūra the usurper. Consequently, when the throne reverted to the royal family, it was given

²⁵ About the identification of this place see: C. F. Beckingham, 'The Pilgrimage and Death of Sākūra king of Mali', *Bull. S.O.A.S.* (1953), 391-2.

²⁶ Ibn-Khaldūn, 264(13-20)/trans. 111.

²⁷ Al-Malik an-Nāṣir B. Qalā'ūn, reigned three times over Egypt. (i) 693-4 A.H. (A.D. 1293-94); (ii) 698-708 A.H. (A.D. 1298-1308); (iii) 709-41 A.H. (A.D. 1309-40). His first period of reign was ephemeral and could hardly be thought of as 'the days of al-Mālik an-Nāṣir'. During his third period of reign, al-Mālik an-Nāṣir was visited by Mānsā Mūsā. Thus we have to assume that Sākūra's pilgrimage occurred in this second reign.

²⁸ Ibn-Khaldūn, 264(20-21)/trans. 112.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 268(2-4)/trans. 116.

³⁰ Delafosse (*op. cit.* II, 186) suggests that Mansā Qū was very old at his accession and died in the first year of his reign. There is nothing to support this supposition, which might however explain the gap in time between Qū and his brothers.

to Qū the son of Mansā Uli, the only son of Mārī-Djāta, who is said to have been a powerful king.³¹

The descendants of Mārī-Djāta could not any more hold the authority, and after Mansā Muḥammad the son of Mansā Qū, 'the kingship passed from the descendants of Mārī-Djāta to the descendants of his brother Abū-Bakr, and Mansā Mūsā the son of Abū-Bakr ascended the throne'. (*thumma intaqala mulkuhum min wuldi al-sultān Mārī-Djāta ilā wuldi akhihi Abī-Bakr fawaliyā 'alayhim Mansā Mūsā b. Abī-Bakr.*) De Slane translated this passage as follows: 'L'autorité passa des enfants de Mārī-Djāta à un fils de sa sœur nommé Abou-Bekr. Mença Mouça fils et successeur d'Abou-Bekr était. . . .'³²

This translation of De Slane's has deceived all the scholars who deal with this subject.³³ Following it, they maintain that Abū-Bakr was a son of Mārī-Djāta's sister, and hence once again they infer that this was an example of matrilineal succession in the ruling dynasty of Mali. But it is clear from the Arabic text that Abū-Bakr was the brother of Mārī-Djāta.³⁴ This is supported by the oral traditions, which relate that Sundjata had a brother named Bakari or Bogari, the Sudanese variants of the Arab name of Abū-Bakr. This brother was Sundjata's right hand both in exile and in the foundation of the new empire.³⁵

Another fallacy that follows from De Slane's mistranslation is that Abū-Bakr himself reigned in Mali. Thus all the commentators put in their genealogical tables 'Abū-Bakr II'. But the Arabic text makes it clear that Mansā Mūsā was the first ruler of the new branch of the ruling dynasty, and that Abū-Bakr had not been king. Al-'Umarī relates that

³¹ According to the traditions of Kangaba-Niani, Sundjata had only one son—Yerelinkon, identified with the Mansā Uli of Ibn-Khaldūn. The traditions of Dioma give a list of four sons: Yerelinkon (Mansā Uli), Ko Mamadi (Mansā Qū), Bata Mande Bory (Abū-Bakr), and Niani Mamadu (Muḥammad). (Niane, op. cit. (1960), 22.)

Wātī and Khalifa, mentioned by Ibn-Khaldūn, are omitted from the list, probably because of their insignificance. According to our reconstruction of the genealogy based on Ibn-Khaldūn: Qū was a son of Mansā Uli; Abū-Bakr was a son of Mārī-Djāta's daughter; Muḥammad was a son of Qū. Thus we find that out of the four sons of Sundjata mentioned by the traditionalists of Dioma, only Yerelinkon (Uli) was a son of Sundjata, while the others were his grandsons. This Yerelinkon is the only son of Sundjata recorded by the traditions of Kangaba-Niani, and the only powerful king from among the sons of Mārī-Djāta according to Ibn-Khaldūn.

³² Ibn-Khaldūn, 264(21-3)/trans. 112.

³³ Delafosse, op. cit. II, 186; Monteil, op. cit. 391-2; Trimmingham, op. cit. 67. See also the genealogical tables given by these authors.

³⁴ It seems as if the Arabic text which was translated by De Slane had: *ilā waladi ukhihi*. But De Slane himself has edited this text, and he gives no note on any variant. It is obvious that even in the very old MS. used by al-Qalqashandī it was written: *ilā wuldi akhihi* (al-Qalqashandī, v, 294(9-11)).

³⁵ Dj. T. Niane, *Sundjata ou l'épopée mandingue* (Paris, 1960), 17, 56, 147; Monteil, op. cit. 356, 362. Niane ('Recherches' etc. (1959), 39-40) is confronted with a difficulty, as he is convinced that according to the traditionalists, Abū-Bakr was a brother of Sundjata, while according to the French translation of Ibn-Khaldūn he was a son of Sundjata's sister. This brings Niane and others to underestimate Ibn-Khaldūn as a reliable source. In fact, the fault in this case is not with the medieval historian, but with the modern translator.

Ibn-Amīr Ḥādījib, his informant, asked Mansā Mūsā how he had reached the throne. Mansā Mūsā told him that he was from a dynasty where the authority is transmitted by inheritance, and recounted the adventures of 'the king who ruled before me'. He did not say 'my father'.³⁶ This evidence strengthens the claim that Mansā Mūsā did not succeed his father.

There is still one difficulty in the assumption that Mansā Mūsā was a son of Abū-Bakr, the brother of Mārī-Djāta. Mansā Mūsā and his brother, Mansā Sulaymān, could not be of the second generation after Mārī-Djāta, as they ruled one hundred years and more after him. This difficulty is to be solved by suggesting that Mansā Mūsā was a grandson of Abū-Bakr and not his son.³⁷ This suggestion is supported again by evidence from an oral tradition which says that Abū-Bakr had a son—Faga Laye—who was the father of Mansā Mūsā.³⁸ The son of Abū-Bakr had no significance in the history of Mali, and Mansā Mūsā is affiliated to his grandfather who took part in the foundation of the empire, and serves as a link with the main lineage of the ruling dynasty.

The reign of Mansā Mūsā is the golden age of Mali. He is the favourite of all Muslim writers, both Oriental and Sudanese, in contrast to Sundjata, who is the god-hero of the pagan traditions. We shall have to return to Mansā Mūsā when we discuss various aspects of the Mali empire.

Mansā Mūsā was succeeded by his son Mansā Maghā, and 'Maghā means in their language Muḥammad'.³⁹ Al-'Umarī relates that Mansā Mūsā appointed his son Muḥammad as his deputy during his pilgrimage. He returned home intending to abdicate in his son's favour and to go back to Mecca, to live the rest of his life near the shrine, but he died before he could carry out this intention.⁴⁰ Mansā Mūsā himself, according to his own story, had been appointed as deputy of the former king, and later became the king.⁴¹ Nomination by a king of his successor, who might serve in the meantime as his deputy, was probably legitimate in the ruling dynasty. By appointing his son, Maghā-Muḥammad, as his deputy and later as his successor, Mansā Mūsā deprived his brother Sulaymān of his right to the throne as the eldest male in the family. Mansā Sulaymān did not give up, and succeeded in ascending the throne after Mansā Maghā, who died in the fourth year of his reign.⁴² The short reign of Mansā Maghā raises the suspicion that he was deposed by his uncle, Sulaymān,

³⁶ al-'Umarī, 74; The former ruler had left the country for an expedition to discover the limits of the ocean. He appointed Mūsā as his deputy during his absence. The king did not come back, and Mūsā remained the ruler.

³⁷ It is possible to understand the Arabic word 'ibn' as denoting not only a son but also a grandson. Thus, 'Mūsā ibn Abū-Bakr' could mean also: Mūsā the grandson of Abū-Bakr. Similarly 'Mansā Qū ibn Mārī-Djāta' could also mean Mansā Qū grandson of Mārī-Djāta (cf. supra.).

³⁸ Niane, op. cit. (1959), 40.

³⁹ Ibn-Khaldūn, 266(7-8)/trans. 114.

⁴⁰ al-'Umarī, 73.

⁴¹ Ibid. 74, see above, n. 36.

⁴² Ibn-Khaldūn, 266(9)/trans. 114.

who had claimed the throne.⁴³ These events brought out a rupture in the ruling dynasty.

Mansā Sulaymān was a powerful ruler. He extended the territories of the empire by conquest, and endeavoured to establish Islam in his dominions.⁴⁴ Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa met this king, and describes his parsimony in contrast to the generosity of his brother Mansā Mūsā.⁴⁵

Mansā Sulaymān was a powerful ruler, but even during his reign there were ferments and plots at the court. Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa himself witnessed a very interesting episode that may throw light on the relations inside the ruling dynasty:

It happened during my sojourn in Malī that the Sultan was angry with his chief wife, the daughter of his paternal uncle, named Qāsā. The meaning of 'Qāsā' in their language is 'Queen'.⁴⁶ She is his partner in the kingship, according to the custom of the Sudanese, and her name is mentioned together with his name from above the pulpit. He imprisoned her with one of the Chiefs, and raised in her place another wife, Bandjū, who was not from among the daughters of the kings. . . . The Chiefs talked much about her [about Qāsā], hence the Sultan assembled them in the audience chamber and Dughā [the linguist] said on his behalf: 'You talked a lot about Qāsā, but know that she had committed a capital crime'. Then a female slave of Qāsā was brought in with chains on her hands and legs. She was told to say what she knew. She told that Qāsā had sent her to Djātal [or Djāta according to some MSS.], a son of the paternal uncle of the Sultan, who sought refuge from him at Kanburni. She invited him to overthrow the Sultan, informing him that she herself and all the armies were ready to accept him as a ruler. When the Chiefs heard this, they said: 'verily, this is a capital crime and she deserves to be executed'.⁴⁷

Mansā Sulaymān succeeded in preventing the *coup d'état* which had been planned against him in 1352 or 1353, but seven years later, after his death, there was a civil war in Malī, a struggle for the throne. It was a struggle between the house of Mansā Mūsā and the house of his brother Mansā Sulaymān. Mansā Sulaymān was succeeded by his son Qāsā,⁴⁸ who ruled only for nine months over a troubled state. At last he was overcome and killed by Māri-Djāṭa (or Mansā Djāṭa), the son of Mansā Maghā, son of Mansā Mūsā, who seized power.⁴⁹

This Māri-Djāṭa (or Mansā Djāṭa) should be identified with the Djāṭal (or Djāṭa) mentioned by Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa.⁵⁰ He was the son of Mansā Maghā

⁴³ Following Monteil, op. cit. 414-16.

⁴⁴ al-'Umarī, 53.

⁴⁵ Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa, iv, 299(11), 400(9)-401(6), 419(6-8).

⁴⁶ This is also the meaning of the word in modern Mandinke (Mauny, op. cit. 449, quoting Delafosse).

⁴⁷ Ibid. 417-19.

⁴⁸ According to other MSS., his name was Qanbā or Fanbā, and according to al-Qalqashandī (v, 297), Qantabā.

⁴⁹ Ibn-Khaldūn, 266(10-11)/trans. 114; ibid. II, 459(7-8), trans. IV, 343.

⁵⁰ According to Ibn-Khaldūn, he was a grandson of Sulaymān's brother, while Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa referred to him as his paternal cousin. The Arabic word 'Ibn 'amm', that means 'paternal cousin', may also denote any close relative in the patrilinear lineage. See above, n. 19, another fallacy of Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa concerning the genealogy of the ruling dynasty.

who had probably been deposed and executed by Sulaymān. Mārī-Djāta fled from the capital to hide in a neighbouring country, waiting for an opportunity to avenge the death of his father and to restore the throne to the house of Mansā Mūsā. Qāsā, the rebellious wife of Sulaymān, is said to be also a paternal cousin of Sulaymān and a daughter of a king. Thus she might also be a descendant of Mansā Mūsā, or even a sister of Mārī-Djāta, with whom she conspired against her husband.⁵¹

After Mārī-Djāta had seized power he was informed that, during the civil war, a deputation which had been sent by Mansā Sulaymān to the Sultan of Fes had been staying in Walāta. Mārī-Djāta ordered the deputation to proceed on its way, and it arrived at Fes in *Ṣafar* 762 (December 1360 or January 1361).⁵² Qāsā, the son of Sulaymān, reigned for nine months, the period of the civil war. Thus we can assume that Mansā Sulaymān died at the beginning of 1360. Sulaymān reigned for twenty-four years, i.e. 1336–60. Mansā Maghā died four years after his accession to the throne, hence his reign may be established as 1332–6. Mansā Mūsā ruled twenty-five years, i.e. 1307–32.⁵³

According to this calculation, which is based on data supplied by Ibn-Khaldūn, Mansā Mūsā died approximately in 1332.⁵⁴ There is further evidence that Mansā Mūsā died not long after his return from the pilgrimage that he had performed in 1324–5. Al-'Umarī records that Mansā Mūsā could not carry out his plan to abdicate in favour of his son and to return to Mecca for the remainder of his life, as he shortly met his end.⁵⁵ Ibn-Khaldūn relates that Mansā Mūsā died before he could repay the money that he had borrowed in Egypt.⁵⁶

Nevertheless 1332 cannot be fixed definitely as the date of Mansā Mūsā's death. Ibn-Khaldūn says:

After Abu al-Ḥasan, the Sultan of Fes, had overcome his adversaries, the Banu 'Abd al-Wād, conquered Tlemcen and secured mastery over all the kingdoms of

⁵¹ Was there endogamy in the ruling clan of Mali? It is possible that Ibn-Battūṭa was influenced by customs of the wider Muslim world.

The situation might be still more complicated if one assumes that Qāsā, the queen, was the mother of Qāsā, the son and successor of Sulaymān. (See Monteil, op. cit. 429.) This assumption is based on the common custom of placing the name of the mother before the son's name. Hence, Mansā Mūsā is called Kanku Mūsā after his mother, Kanku (see Mahmud Kati, *Ta'riḫ al-Fattāsh*, Texte Arabe et Traduction Française par O. Houdas & M. Delafosse (Paris, 1913), texte 32–3; trad. 56). On the name Sundjata see: Niane, 'Recherches' (1959), 45.

There are at least three arguments against this assumption: First, Qāsā was the title of the queen and not her proper name. Second, if Qāsā was the name of the mother, then the proper name of the son was omitted, while generally it remains together with the mother's name. Third, there are in the MSS. other versions of the name Qāsā (see above, n. 48). These versions, which are more close, rule out this assumption.

⁵² Ibn-Khaldūn, II, 459(4–12)/trans. IV, 343.

⁵³ On the lengths of reign see *ibid.* I, 266(7–11)/trans. 114.

⁵⁴ A slight mistake might occur in this calculation, since Ibn-Khaldūn is using Muslim years, which are 10–11 days shorter than Christian years.

⁵⁵ al-'Umarī, 73.

⁵⁶ *Ta'riḫ Ibn-Khaldūn* (Beirut, 1958–9), V, 932. According to other sources the debts were paid off: see Ibn-Battūṭa, 431(4)–432(6), al-'Umarī, 75; al-Qalqashandī, V, 296(9–11).

the Middle Maghrib, this news spread to the uttermost parts of the earth. Mansā Mūsā aspired to address him and sent a deputation to congratulate him on his victory over his enemies.⁵⁷

Tlemcen was conquered by Abu al-Hasan on 27 Ramadān 737 (1 May 1337).⁵⁸ Hence Mansā Mūsā was still the ruler of Mali in 1337, when news of the conquest of Tlemcen reached Mali. He probably died soon after he had sent the deputation, as the embassy sent by Abu al-Hasan in return was addressed to Mansā Sulaymān.⁵⁹

We incline to adopt 1337 as the date for Mansā Mūsā's death. It was certainly he who took the initiative in developing close relations with the Merinid Sultans of Fes, and it was only after the conquest of Tlemcen that Abu al-Hasan became the undisputed master of the Maghrib. The date of the arrival of the deputation sent by Mārī-Djāta II, *Ṣafar* 762 (January–December 1360–1), should also be accepted as accurate, as Ibn-Khaldūn was then staying at the court of Fes.⁶⁰ One may only suggest shortening the reigns of Mansā Maghā and Mansā Sulaymān, so that they will fit the period between the death of Mansā Mūsā (1337) and the accession to the throne of Mārī-Djāta (1360). Thus they reigned together for twenty-three years, while according to Ibn-Khaldūn's account, their reigns amounted to twenty-eight years; four years for Mansā Maghā and twenty-four years for Mansā Sulaymān.⁶¹ It is better to overlook the allusions to the death of Mansā Mūsā shortly after his return from the pilgrimage. We should cling to information connected with events in the Maghrib, as we may expect Ibn-Khaldūn to be better informed on these.

Ibn-Khaldūn records events in Mali during thirty years (1360–90), presenting a picture of a troubled state. He had first-hand information concerning these events, which occurred in his own time. His informants were present in Mali during this period.⁶² The following is a somewhat shortened paraphrase of the last part of the chronicle of Mali given by Ibn-Khaldūn:

Mārī-Djāta, the son of Mansā Maghā, the son of Mansā Mūsā, reigned for fourteen years. He was a bad ruler who oppressed the people, depleted the treasury and nearly pulled down the structure of the government. Finally he was attacked by sleeping sickness and died within two years of its onset, in 755 A.H. (137/34). After him they gave the throne to his son Mūsā. He followed the path of justice and departed from the way of his father. His chief minister [*wazīr*],

⁵⁷ Ibn-Khaldūn, II, 394(7–10)/trans. IV, 243.

⁵⁸ Ibid. II, 161(8–10)/trans. III, 411.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 395(1), 'He sent them to the King of Mali, Mansā Sulaymān the son of Mansā Mūsā, as his father had died before the return of his deputation.' Mansā Sulaymān is here called the son of Mansā Mūsā probably by mistake, as Mūsā was first succeeded by his son, while the deputation arrived in Mali already in the reign of Mansā Sulaymān.

⁶⁰ Cf. 'Ibn-Khaldūn', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, II.

⁶¹ This was first suggested by Monteil, op. cit. 321–2. M. Delafosse (op. cit. 190) gives 1332 as the date of Mansā Mūsā's death, but he wrongly connects it with the deputation to Fes, as he did not consider the date of the conquest of Tlemcen.

⁶² See above, 2–3.

Mārī-Djāta,⁶³ assumed the reins of government and kept Mūsā, the Sultan, secluded. Mārī-Djāta mobilized armies and subdued the countries that laid to the east of their lands. Mansā Mūsā [the second] died in 789 A.H. (1387). He was succeeded by his brother Mansā Maghā [the second] who was killed about a year later, when the throne was seized by Šandaki, the husband of the mother of Mūsā; 'šandaki' means 'wazir'.⁶⁴ After some months he was assaulted by a man from the house of Mārī-Djāta. Then a man named Maḥmud, came out from the lands of the pagans beyond Malī, and pretended to be the issue of Mansā Qū, the son of Mansā Uli the son of Mārī-Djāta the Great. He got the mastery and became their king in 792 (1390) with the title Mansā Maghā [the third].⁶⁵

Mārī-Djāta II succeeded in restoring the house of Mansā Mūsā to the throne, but he was a despot and ruined the state. Mūsā, his son, had good intentions, but he was weak and took no part in the government, which was exclusively held by his chief minister. The latter did not depose the sultan, who remained the nominal ruler for fourteen years, until his death. As the real ruler, Mārī-Djāta, the *wazir*, succeeded in restoring the empire from its deterioration during the civil war and the irresponsible reign of Mārī-Djāta II. Once again, as with the earlier case of Sākūra the usurper, we find that when weak kings put in danger the existence of the empire, a court official came forward, either by seizing the throne for himself or by making the sultan his puppet, and succeeded in recovering the resources of the empire.

Mansā Maghā II reigned only for a year and was probably also, like his brother Mūsā, a toy in the hands of the officers of the court. This time the legitimate king was deposed, and the throne was usurped by another *wazir*, who probably tried to make himself eligible for the kingship by marrying the widow of Mārī-Djāta II, Mūsā's mother. He did not stay long on the throne, and was avenged by a descendant of Mārī-Djāta.

In this ferment the throne was claimed and seized by a descendant of the old branch of the ruling dynasty, the house of Mārī-Djāta the Great. The wheel had come full circle: at the end of Ibn-Khaldūn's chronicle, the kingship had reverted to a descendant of Mārī-Djāta who had been the starting-point for the chronicle. About four generations or eighty years earlier, after the descendants of Mārī-Djāta had displayed laxity and impotence, the throne passed to the descendants of Abū-Bakr, Mārī-Djāta's brother. The first generation of this new ruling branch, Mansā

⁶³ Ibn-Khaldūn interprets this name saying that 'Mārī' means 'wazir'. Early in the same chapter he interpreted the title 'Mārī' as denoting 'prince' (see above, n. 18). This shows that interpretations of Sudanese names and titles by Ibn-Khaldūn are very flexible, although some of them are satisfactory. It is possible, however, that this Mārī-Djāta was a member of the ruling dynasty, as this name was probably common in the family.

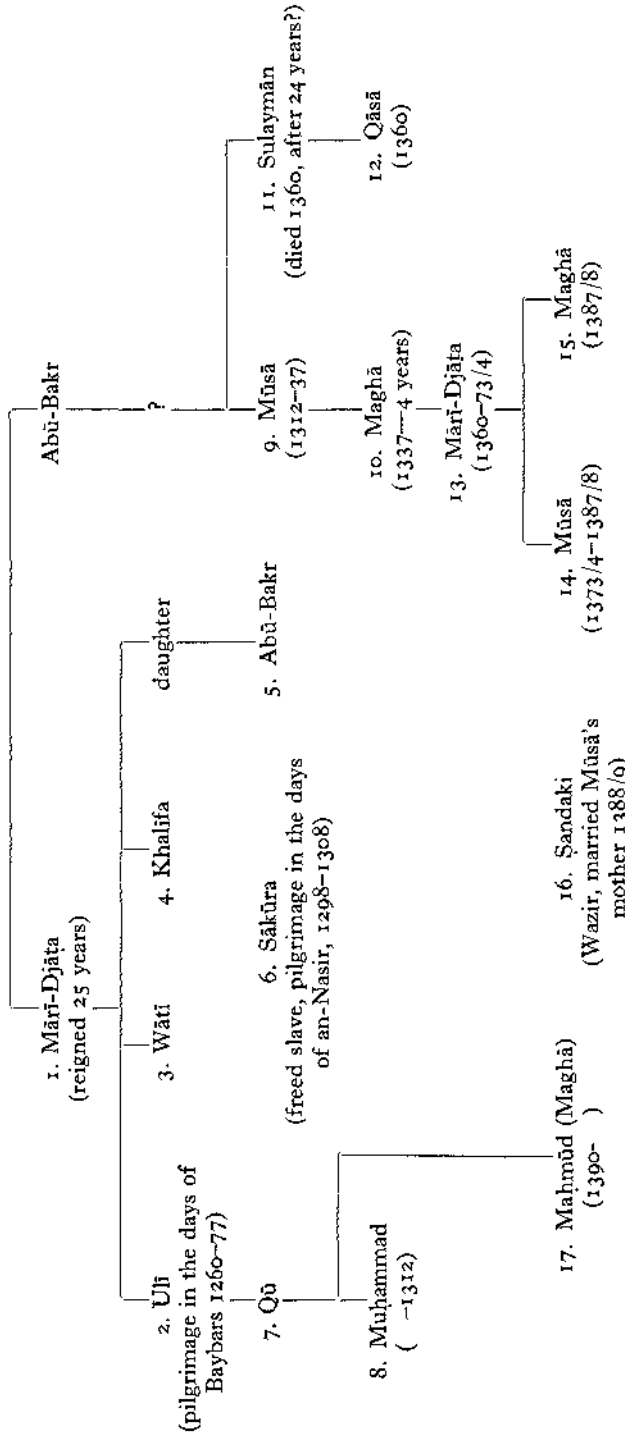
⁶⁴ Mauny (op. cit. 450), quoting Delafosse, explains that 'santigui' is the official who is in charge of the royal expenditure (*tigui* = chief, *sa* = purchasing). Monteil (op. cit. 432) suggests that it was the '*dyon-sandigui*', the chief of the slaves. This interpretation confirms his analysis of the government of Mali, where he assigns an important role to slaves.

⁶⁵ Ibn-Khaldūn, I, 266(11)-268(4)/trans. II, 115-116.

Mūsā and his brother Mansā Sulaymān, brought the empire to its peak. But the succeeding generations showed again that there was a process of degeneration in the ruling dynasty. There was a need for regeneration by transferring the authority from one branch of the dynasty to the other. Within the ruling dynasty the succession to the throne was assured to the descendants of those rulers who are recorded to have been powerful kings, like Mansā Uli and Mansā Mūsā.

In spite of periods of laxity and sporadic cases of usurpation, the throne remained with the same dynasty till the end of the period under survey and, indeed, until the final liquidation of the empire.

THE GENEALOGY OF THE KINGS OF MALI BASED ON THE CHRONICLE OF IBN-KHALDŪN



Notes : 1. All the dates written above are based on Ibn-Khaldūn's text. The following are the dates given by Ch. Monteil:

- 1. Māri-Djāta 1330-55
- 2. Ūlī 1255-70
- 3. Wātī 1270-4
- 4. Khalifa 1274-5
- 5. Abū-Bakr 1273-85
- 6. Sākūra 1285-1300
- 7. Qū 1300-05
- 8. Muḥammad 1305-10
- 9. Abū-Bakr 1310-12
- 10. Mūsā 1312-37
- 11. Maghā 1337-41
- 12. Sulaymān 1341-60
- 13. Qāsā 1360
- 14. Māri-Djāta 1360-74
- 15. Mūsā 1374-87
- 16. Maghā 1387-8
- 17. Sandaki 1388-90
- 18. Maḥmūd 1390-

2. The table drawn above differs from the genealogical tables suggested by M. Delafosse, Ch. Monteil and others, in two points:

- (i) According to them, Qū (7th king) was a son of Māri-Djāta and not his grandson through Ūlī.
- (ii) According to them, Abū-Bakr was the 10th king and he was a son of Māri-Djāta's sister. In fact he was a brother of Māri-Djāta and never reigned. The son of Abū-Bakr (and Mūsā's father) is called (according to oral traditions) Faga Laye.