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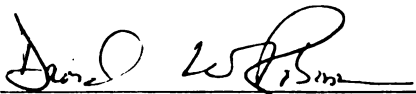
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Cross-Cultural Exchange in Western Africa,
1840s-1930s**

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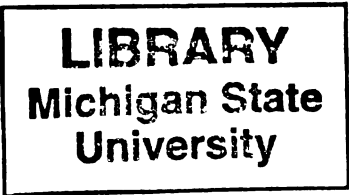
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ON TRANS-SAHARAN TRAILS: TRADING NETWORKS AND CROSS-
CULTURAL EXCHANGE IN WESTERN AFRICA, 1840s-1930s

VOLUME I

by

Ghislaine Lydon

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

ON TRANS-SAHARAN TRAILS: TRADING NETWORKS AND CROSS-CULTURAL EXCHANGE IN WESTERN AFRICA, 1840S-1930S

By

Ghislaine Lydon

This dissertation explores the long-distance trading networks of families who, across three generations, organized camel caravans on trans-Saharan trails. It covers a period of about 100 years, from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, and a large area encompassing Mauritania and the bordering regions of northwestern Mali, southern Morocco and northern Senegal. The spatial and temporal breath allows me to follow the migration patterns of traders between North and West Africa, as they relate to both the pursuit of economic opportunities and interactions with local and colonial states. The study is based on a wide variety of sources ranging from oral histories and colonial archives, to Arabic trading records found in private libraries.

The 'trading diasporas' of two groups, the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā', are examined to reconstruct this history of long-distance trade. Both groups of Berber origin, tended to be commercially successful because they formed tight-knit corporate associations based on trust. Islamic law provided an institutional framework for the purposes of accounting and accountability, with Muslim scholars acting as arbiters in legal disputes. These traders used their multiple skills to maneuver across several states and currency zones, and engage in arbitrage between western African markets. They were professional stranger traders who tapped into local networks to transact in all kinds of merchandise including, slaves, gold and salt. With the coming of colonial rule, these traders took advantage of opportunities in the new economic order. They offered their transportation services to the French colonial administration, opened general-purpose stores, while continuing to organize trans-Saharan caravans across the desert.

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To the People of the Sahara

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the late nineteenth century, Mulay Ḥāshim wuld Mulay Al-Maḥdi's father migrated from Gulmīm, in southern Morocco, to the northern Mauritanian town of Shingīti. He married and settled there, while continuing to organize trans-Saharan caravans across western Africa. Mulay Ḥāshim first accompanied his father on a salt caravan to Nioro at the age of nine. From then onwards, he quickly learned the tricks of the trans-Saharan trade, and in 1932, when he was about eighteen, he accompanied his father to the French colonial port of St. Louis. Mulay Ḥāshim stayed in Senegal and briefly worked for a fellow Tikna trader in a *boutique*. Then he began peddling single cigarettes and candy on the streets of Louga and eventually, he generated enough income to start a small business of his own. In 1989, when he was deported alongside many Mauritanian nationals because of the Mauritania – Senegal conflict, Mulay Ḥāshim had been managing a gas-station and running several wholesale general-stores in Senegal's capital, Dakar. I met him in 1995, during a summer trip financed by the Social Science Research Council. It was the life history of Mulay Ḥāshim, and his family's commercial itinerary, which sparked my interest in the Wād Nūn trade network.

To the countless people of Mauritania, Senegal, Mali and Morocco, who warmly welcomed me into their homes, kindly shared their life histories with me, and gave me access to their family archives, I dedicate this dissertation. It is thanks to their hospitality, their generosity, and their wisdom that I was able to reconstruct the history

detailed in the following pages. The names of many of these people appear in the list at the end of the dissertation. Of course, all the errors contained herein are mine alone.

In Mauritania, I would like to express my special gratitude to the late Zaynabū mint Aḥmad Fāl, and her husband Muḥammad al-Maḥmūd wuld Hammuddy of Atar, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān wuld Muḥammad al-Ḥanshi and the Aḥmad al-Talmūd family of Shingīti, Dadda wuld Īdda of Tishīt, and Dīdi wuld ‘Abd al-Qādar of Tijīkja. In Nouakchott, there are so many people to thank. I am most grateful to Abdel Wedoud wuld Cheikh for his encouragement and his delightful sense of humor. I thank Muḥammad al-Yaḥḍih wuld Tolba for his precious advice and friendship. I would like to thank Muḥammad wuld Muḥammadan and Fātimatu mint ‘Abd al-Wahāb for their tremendous help throughout my stay in Mauritania. I also thank Muḥammad al-Mukhtar wuld Sa‘ad and Lūm, and Deddoud wuld ‘Abdallah and Fātima, for the Mauritanian history lessons and the valuable suggestions. I am most indebted to Muḥammad al-Sāīd wuld Hammuddy for introducing me to the history of the Awlād Bū Sbā’ and giving me access to his incredible library. I am also grateful to the Shaygar and Mulay ‘Aly families. I thank all the staff of the American Embassy in Nouakchott for their generous assistance. Special thanks to Magida and Jon Shadid, and Khaddy mint Muḥammad al-‘Abd and Sid Aḥmad “Dah” Fāl, my friends and extended families.

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for their assistance in Louga. In Mali, I thank Al-Hajj Bakary Diagouraga of Nioro and Chendouk of Timbuktu. In Morocco, I am especially thankful to Aḥmad Fāl b. Majīdri, the Bayruk families and the children of Maḥjūb wuld Jumāni.

Many professors and colleagues have shaped by understanding of African history. I would like to pay tribute to my undergraduate professors, Myron Echenberg and Dan Aronson, who initiated me into the study of Africa. I am privileged to have been trained by David Robinson, my graduate advisor. His dedication to students, his generous guidance, his academic decorum, not to mention his scholarly excellence, are qualities to which I will always aspire. I am also most grateful to have learned historical methods, the art of teaching, and invaluable tips about the academic job market from Lisa Fine. I am thankful to all my friends at the Department of History of Michigan State University for lessons in history and collegiality.

My overseas research trips were made possible thanks to a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship, and a Research Fellowship awarded by the Council for American Overseas Research Centers (Smithsonian Institution). I also thank the College of Arts and Letters at Michigan State University for a dissertation completion fellowship. I am most grateful to the African Studies Center and the History Department for their generous support. I would also like to thank the staff of both these units for their kind help throughout my graduate existence at Michigan State University.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my beloved husband, Michael Boyadjiew for his patience, bountiful encouragement, the long nights of proof-reading, as well as his creative technical support. This dissertation is his accomplishment as much as it is mine.

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NOTE ON LANGUAGE

1. On Arabic Transliteration

Overall, I tend to follow the standard transliteration of Hans Wehr's *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1980 (reprint).

2. On Saharan Specifics

Saharan names, which are genealogical in nature, tend to be rather long. Daughters and sons are given their father's name. For the daughter, her first name is separated from her father's name by the preposition "daughter [of]" written *mint* in the Sahara, unlike the typical *bint* (literally daughter in Arabic) most common in Arabic speaking countries. As for a son, the name is followed by *wuld* meaning "son [of]." In classical Arabic, and in most places in the Arabic-speaking world, the 'son of' is usually "ibn," often abbreviated to a simple "b." Throughout this dissertation I vary between using the "b." and the Saharan "wuld" when writing the names of men.

3. On Translations and Foreign Words in Text

All translations from interviews and texts are mine, except when specified. Foreign words are usually in Ḥasanīya, Arabic, or Wolof and tend to be italicized. Generally, proper nouns are italicized the first time and not in subsequent uses.

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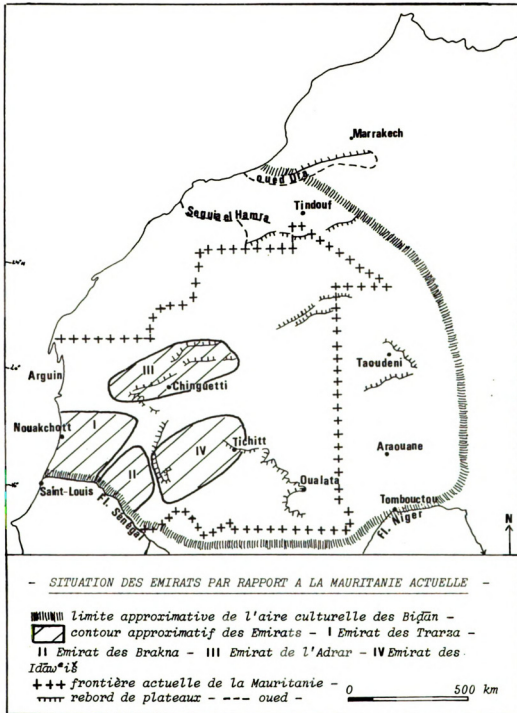
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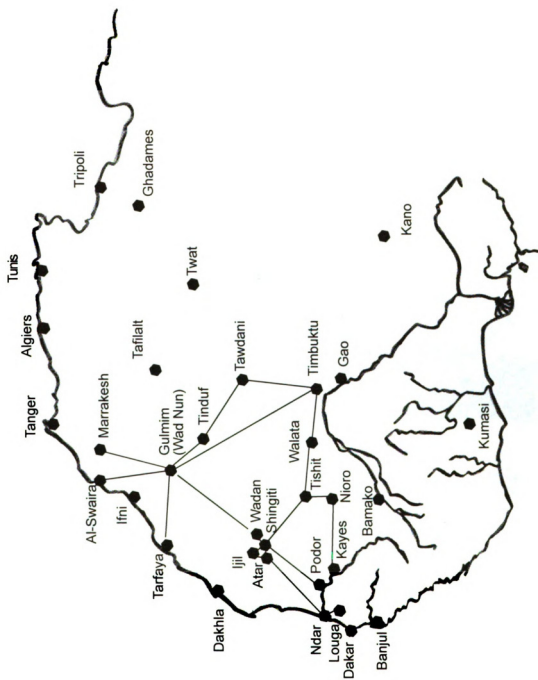
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MAP 1: TRĀB AL-BIḌĀN

Source: Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh, *Eléments d'histoire de la Mauritanie*. CCF: Nouakchott, 1984.

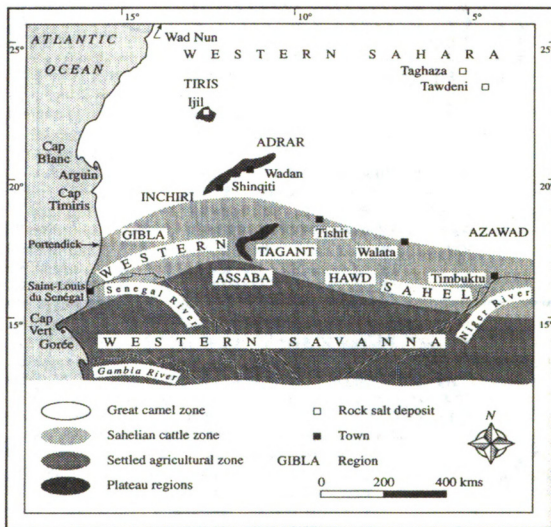


MAP 2: ON TRANS-SAHARAN TRAILS



MAP 3: WESTERN AFRICAN ECOLOGICAL ZONES c. 1850

Source: James, L.A. Webb, Jr. *Desert Frontier: Ecological and Economic Change along the Western Sahel, 1600-1850*. Madison: WUP, 1995, p. 11.



Map 1.2. Approximate location of ecological zones, c. 1850.

Source: Exposition Coloniale Internationale de Paris, "Réseau routier," Commissariat de l'Afrique Occidentale Française, Rocherfort-sur-Mer: Imprimerie A. Thoyon-Thèse, 1931, p.5.



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Long-distance trade across political, economic and cultural spaces has been a common profession around the world and, until recently, one exercised predominantly by men. Whether it involved sailing to far-away lands for a cargo of tropical foods, or organizing a caravan to exchange salt for slaves, such an occupation required a careful combination of capital, international networking, trust, stamina and good fortune. But what were the logistics of long-distance trade operations across foreign lands not ruled by a unified state or common currency? Indeed, how could long-distance trade be successful cross-culturally when basic market conditions such as political stability and security, a lingua franca and international business ethics were lacking? In such unpredictable situations and with all the trade externalities and risks involved, what were the strategies devised by long-distance traders to circumnavigate the dangerous pitfalls? How did such strategies--if at all institutionalized--evolve over time in the face of political and economic permutations? This study seeks to provide answers to these general questions by examining the recent history of trans-Saharan trade. It is illustrated by the life histories of families who, across several generations, operated long-distance trading networks in and across the Saharan regions of western Africa connecting markets, peoples and cultures.

This dissertation explores the organization of networks of long-distance traders who organized camel caravans on trans-Saharan trails. It covers a period of approximately one hundred years, from the 1840s to the 1930s, and a large area encompassing Mauritania and several bordering nations: southern Morocco, northwestern

Mali, and northern Senegal. The spatial breadth is determined by the movement of the traders who exchanged goods and settled in active markets along trade routes. I adopt the *longue-durée* approach necessary to discern macroeconomic trends in western African history. This time depth allows me to follow the migration patterns of families within western Africa and between trading centers as they relate to both the pursuit of economic opportunities and interactions with local and colonial states.

Part I: On Trans-Saharan Trails: Ecological and Historical Setting

The present countries of Mauritania, Mali, Morocco and Senegal, share a common cultural space as well as a common history. Saharan communities, who were essentially nomadic, circulated within the cultural and linguistic borders of the *Trab al-Biḍān* or the “land of the Biḍān” (see Map 1). In this cultural space encompassing the regions of Mauritania, southern Morocco, northern Mali, northern Senegal, Saharan nomads and semi-nomads shared the language of Ḥasanīya (*Znāga* /Arabic language),¹ common traditions (religious, literary, culinary and vestimentary) and socio-political structures (“tribal” law and organization). Throughout the time period covered in this study, the *Trab al-Biḍān* was ethnically very diverse as the flux and influx of peoples of various

¹ *Znāga*, part of the so-called Berber language group, was spoken in southwestern Mauritania, until a few decades ago (only very few elderly people still speak it today). I would like to point out that the word “Berber,” like the term “Moor,” is a European construct. These vague ethno-terms were imposed by Europeans to designate peoples who had their own words to designate themselves. The terms Berber and Moor/Maure therefore have no reality “on the ground” (although in present day Mauritania the Biḍān tend to call themselves “maures” when they speak the French language and likewise in Algeria, and Morocco, the Amazight tend to use the term “Berbère” when discussing their identity in French). Whenever possible

cultures (for example: the North African conquests to the south; the forced migration of enslaved Bambaras to the north; constant migrations of trading communities throughout western Africa) brought with them new words and cultures. By transcending the artificial "Saharan frontier," it is easy to see that the history of the Sahara, just like that of the Atlantic, is marked by continuous flows of peoples, ideas, and goods. Throughout this dissertation, I treat West and North Africa as one region, and the Sahara as sealing that unity rather than dividing it. By "western Africa," I invoke a geographical space that includes the region typically referred to as West Africa as well as the Sahara stretching to its northwestern (south of Morocco, southern Algeria) and north-central edges (Niger and Chad).²

Ecologically, the *Trab al-Biḍān* is a very diverse region from its northern to its southern Sahel (the Arabic for 'coast'). In the mid-1700s, the Mauritanian, Senegambian and southern Sahelian regions experienced a period of drought lasting several decades. This drought is known as "solo" (clearly from the Wolof meaning "problem").³ In the first half of nineteenth century, western Africa experienced a wet period until the 1860s, before going through another period of severe drought in late 1860s, and then again in the 1880s, stretching from the oases of southern Morocco to the Senegal River. The later drought sent the price of millet to record heights. Many perished, while others lost their

I avoid using these terms acknowledging that they are European inventions. There are three Berber languages still spoken today: Tamazight, Tashelhit and Tamashek.

² This definition is similar to George Brooks' use of the term *Landlords and Strangers: Ecology, Society, and Trade in Western Africa, 1000-1630*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993. This new geographical classification is part of an effort to bring the Sahara into African Studies with an aim to re-think the colonial legacy of geographic/ethnographic categories which have divided the continent between "white" or North Africa and "black" or Sub [sic]-Saharan Africa.

³ Sharon Elaine Nicholson, "A Climatic Chronology for Africa: Synthesis of Geological, Historical, and Meteorological Information and Data", University of Wisconsin-Madison, Ph.D. (meteorology), 1976.

livestock.⁴ In an important environmental history of the region, James Webb attempts to move beyond recent classifications of wet and dry climatic periods in the western African history to offer a more useful perspective. He proposes that it is best to think in terms of increasing aridity in the long-term.⁵ Desertification forced shifts in the configuration of human ecology in the western Sahel, with pastoral societies migrating farther and farther south putting pressure on sedentary agricultural communities living north and south of the Senegal River Valley. New relationships between pastoral and agricultural societies were forged with the establishment of a new power structure on the desert frontier. With expanding desertification, exchanges between these two communities intensified, resulting in nomadic domination over settled farming communities through expropriation of agricultural produce (mainly millet) and enslavement into the Saharan traffic (See Map 3: "Western African Ecological Zones").

When one visits present-day Mauritania, it is easy to believe that the great majority of Mauritanian men and women are traders. Many a Mauritanian will tell you that trading is a quintessential trait of what it means to be Mauritanian. Beyond Mauritania's borders, the Mauritanian trading diaspora is far reaching. It extends all over Africa with communities in the Gambia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinée, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Cameroon, Congo, and the Democratic Republic of Congo and even Southern Africa. Until the 1989 border clashes between Senegal and Mauritania, Mauritanian shopkeepers dominated Senegal's retail business. Mauritanians are slowly returning south of the border in small numbers to resume their trading activities or seek

⁴ Paul Marty, "Les Chroniques de Oualata et de Néma", *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 1927, cahiers III et IV.

⁵ James, L.A. Webb, *Desert Frontier: Ecological and Economic Change along the Western Sahel, 1600-1850*. Madison: WUP, 1995, p. 5.

new opportunities. The pioneers in these networks were two long-distance trading groups: the Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā'. When Mauritanian traders are asked how trade began, they invariably reply that "the first to bring *tijāra* [trade--read "international trade"] to the area were the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā'."⁶ These two commercial pioneers, the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā', are the two case studies explored in the dissertation.

The people of Mauritania were among the first West Africans to come into contact with Europeans (the Portuguese in the late 15th century) but one of the last to experience colonization (early 20th century). In the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Saharan communities were comprised of socially stratified communities with diverse linguistic, ethnic and cultural identities. The *Biḍān*, or "Maures/Moors" as they came to be so identified by European observers, shared a mixed Arab and Berber origin and dominated Saharan society since the sixteenth century. The *qabīla* or "tribe", an ensemble of endogamous families often sharing the same eponym, was the basic unit of social, political and economic organization.⁷

⁶ Interview in Nouakchott with Mohamed Saïd w. Hammuddy (02/05/97). This opinion was repeatedly stated in interviews. It is a fact most Mauritaniens seem to agree upon. That the Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' played such an important role in trans-Saharan trade was only recently recognized. See anthropologist Pierre Bonte in "Fortunes Commerciales à Shingŋi (Adrar Mauritanien) au Dix-Neuvième Siècle," *Journal of African History*, 39 (1998), p. 9.

⁷ A note on terminology: The word "tribe," used by Westerners to describe African ethnic groups, clans and social groups, has a negative, pejorative connotation which weighs heavy in the colonial and ethnographic literature. Fully aware of this, I nonetheless use the word tribe throughout this dissertation as a direct translation of the Arabic/Ḥasanīya word *qabīla*, as per my definition in text. For the sake of simplicity, I tend to use the singular of most Arabic words throughout the dissertation.

Generally speaking, the Biḍān were split along vocational lines between the people of the sword, known as *hasāni* (or sometimes pejoratively called ‘*arab*), and the people of the book, referred to as *zwāya* (whom the French called “marabouts”). The *hasāni*, so-named because they were descendents of the Bani-Hassan, the North Africans who invaded the area in the sixteenth century, were ‘warriors.’ The various warrior tribes had an honor code, thrived on military prowess and the bearing of arms. Their sources of livelihood were derived from exacting income (*hurma*) from tributary tribes and tolls or regional customs duties from those who crossed their territory, namely caravan leaders (*ghāfar*).⁸ They also engaged in raiding operations (*ghazzi*) to supplement their income.

The more numerous *zwāya*, or clerical groups, were semi-sedentary by the late eighteenth century. The word *zwāya* is derived from the word “angle” to convey the idea that the *zwāya* retreated to a corner to study and teach the Qur’an, and the fact that they do not defend themselves (i.e. they do not bear arms).⁹ In addition to their role as Muslim scholars and leaders, the *zwāya* were herders and traders. It was they who organized local and interregional camel caravans, participated in the gum trade along the Senegal River bordering northern Senegal, and traded in the gold and cereal rich regions of Mali. However, as Abdel Wedoudould Cheikh warns, and as we shall see with the

⁸ Abdel Wedoudould Cheikh, “Nomadisme, Islam et Pouvoir Politique dans la Société Maure Précoloniale: Essai sur Quelques Aspects du Tribalisme.” Thèse de doctorat, Paris V, René Descartes, 1985, vol. II, p. 369. See chapter 3. Abdel Wedoudould Cheikh has produced the most important scholarship on Mauritania. His dissertation is the best general history of pre-colonial Mauritania to date.

⁹ Shaykh Muḥammad al-Māmī, *Kitāb al-Bādiya*, cited in Abdel Wedoudould Cheikh, “Nomadisme, Islam et Pouvoir Politique” Vol. II, p. 374.

examples of the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā', this social stratification which characterizes Saharan societies was not nearly as rigid as the literature seems to imply.¹⁰ Independent black African communities in Mauritania, namely Hal-Pulaar, Soninké and Wolof, were predominantly farmers who were often subject to seasonal raiding by, or paying tribute to, the Biḍān.

Below the Biḍān, the Hal-Pulaar, the Soninké and the Wolof were the tributaries and servile groups in the social hierarchy prevailing in the region. The tributaries (*znāga* or *laḥma*) were tribes or clans whose rights had been "bought out" by another tribe or clan, or who had submitted themselves to follow a dominant tribe. Tributaries, whether "under the stirrup or under the book," whether tributary to the *'hasāni* or the *zwāya*, were required to pay a yearly tax (*hurma*) as a symbol of their subjugation.¹¹ Just like the *'hasāni*, *zwāya*, *ḥarātīn* and *'abīd*, there was never a specific "ethnicity" attached to the social status of tributary. Other tributaries included the artisans, from blacksmiths to tanners, and griots or musicians and storytellers. Both groups formed a distinct social category who derived their income from "selling" their goods, verses and music to the tribe members to whom they were attached.

¹⁰ Abdel Wedoud ould Cheikh, "Nomadisme, Islam et Pouvoir Politique" Vol. II, chapter 4. See, for instance, Francis de Chassey, *La houe, l'étrier et le livre*, Paris: Anthropos, 1978 and Charles Stewart, "Political Authority and Social Stratification in Mauritania," in *Arabs and Berbers: From Tribe to Nation in North Africa*, Ernest Gellner & Charles Micaud (eds). London: Lexington Books, pp. 375-393. The Awlād Bū Sbā' was a tribal group scholars who also took arms and became warriors. More on this group in chapter four.

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 400-404. This expression is in reference to a proverb cited by the author, p. 403.

In many western African regions, servile groups formed a large segment of society, as well as the labor force. 'Abīd, or so-called "slaves," were people stripped of their identity and their freedom. Whether captured or sold, they had various ethnic backgrounds. The majority of slaves sold into the trans-Saharan trade were Bambara, Wolof, and Soninké. In the course of the nineteenth century, the increased availability of 'inexpensive slave labor' resulted in an increase in the slave trade into and across the Sahara.¹² In the Sahara, slaves were put to work in all areas. They performed all domestic tasks. They were servants, concubines and wet-nurses, agricultural workers in the palm tree oases, pastoral laborers (herders and caretakers), house builders and well diggers, quarry miners and transporters, as well as caravan workers. Sometimes slaves bought their freedom, and/or their masters freed them voluntarily. They then became "freed-slaves" or *ḥarātīn* who often maintained various ties to their former masters.¹³

Historical Background

In the nineteenth century, the western African region had long been connected to international trade systems through commercial relationships established with European merchants on the Atlantic coast. During the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the intensification of the European presence had important consequences on the political economies of Saharan communities and exchange patterns. European merchants competing for southern Saharan trade in slaves and gum arabic prompted a greater

¹² See Ann McDougall, "Salt, Saharans, and the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade: Nineteenth Century Developments", *The Human Commodity: Perspectives on the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade*, London: Frank Cass, 1992, p. 73. (more on this subject in chapters 3, 4, and 5.)

¹³ On freed slaves see McDougall, "A Topsy-Turvy World: Slaves and Freed Slaves in Mauritanian Adrar, 1910-1950." In S. Miers & Richard Roberts, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, Madison, 1980.

French presence in the entrepôt of Saint Louis du Sénégal founded in the seventeenth century, known locally as the town of *Ndar*.¹⁴

With the international movement of abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, gum arabic -- used as a solvent in European textile industries -- became the most important “legitimate trade” good exported from the western African coast. A complex web of credit relationships unfolded with the intensification of commercial activity in *Ndar*. African traders acquired imported merchandise on consignment from African and European merchants, including sugar, tea and the cotton cloth the French called “guinéés.” These commercial agents traveled seasonally along the Senegal River to trade with *Biḍān* gum suppliers. Political authorities on the desert edge, especially the emirs of *Trarza* and *Brakna*, brokered terms of trade between gum suppliers and gum buyers by exacting customs duties in guinée cloth from the French authorities. Both local and long-distance caravans fed into this desert-edge exchange market.¹⁵

On the northern side of the Sahara desert, at the Atlantic port Europeans named *Mogador* but locals knew as *al-Swaīra*, European traders imported merchandise which they exchanged with Saharan and Moroccan traders for gold, leather and hides, cereals and other African goods. The region of *Wād Nūn*, and especially the town of *Gulmīm*, functioned as a Saharan entrepôt where caravaners and merchants exchanged their wares. In the mid-nineteenth century, access to western African products transported to the northwestern desert edge, was often controlled by *Shaykh Bayrūk* and other

¹⁴ Hereafter called as such. Throughout this dissertation I tend to use local rather than colonial names for towns and other geographic entities.

prominent local authorities. In the late 1850s, the establishment of a new trading outpost--Tindūf--at the hands of the Tajakānit, was to play an important role as a relay between North African and western African trading centers, especially at the Timbuktu terminus.

Several key items imported by European merchants from Asia became extremely popular in the late nineteenth century. In the 1850s and 1860s, a remarkable development took place as western Africans adopted the habit of drinking imported green leaf tea. By the beginning of the following century, tea drinking was an established tradition in the Sahara and further south. Blue cotton *guinée* cloth was another imported good that quickly became a necessity when Saharans¹⁶ adopted it as their vestimentary trademark. Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā caravaners were largely responsible for the distribution of this import, as well as other merchandise such as sugar, cloth, and guns. They also brought to western Africa luxury goods like Moroccan teapots and rugs, and Islamic supplies such as books and chaplets.

Throughout the nineteenth century, France, Spain and Britain competed along the Atlantic coast for export opportunities and access to African markets. In this period, commerce thrived in the European dominated port of Ndar and along the Senegal River. At the same time, Europeans actively sought to gain exclusive trading rights with northern Saharan rulers such as Shaykh Bayrūk, the Tikna chief who controlled a significant portion of the trans-Saharan traffic transiting through Wād Nūn from its main

¹⁵ See James Webb, *Desert Frontier*; Raymond Taylor, "Of Disciples and Sultans: Power, Authority and Society in the Nineteenth Century Mauritanian Gebla," Doctoral Dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1996.

¹⁶ I use the word "Saharans" loosely to refer to the people of various ethnicities who lived in and around the western Sahara desert region (Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Senegal).

market of Gulmīm.¹⁷ The Bayrūk family played an important role in trans-Saharan trade until the late nineteenth century. In the early 1840s, Shaykh Bayrūk even contacted the Governor of Senegal directly to discuss his plans to open a trading post at the mouth to the Wād Nūn delta.

In response to a combination of economic, ecological and political factors, certain northern Saharans began migrating into western Africa in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Saharan traders, such as the Tikna, the Awlād Bū Sbā', and others, responded to changes in the political economy by moving to Saharan towns, such as Tishīt, Shingīti, Walāta and Timbuktu. In a second phase, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, another wave of migrants began settling further south, following economic opportunities and the shifting prominence of Saharan markets. By the 1900s, Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' traders were established in the key markets of colonial Senegal and the French Soudan (present-day Mali), and eventually they moved to the towns in the Saharan colony which the French labeled Mauritania. By the 1930s, both groups held a sizeable portion of the market in the French colonial towns of Atar --which became a key the economic capital of Mauritania-- and Rosso, on the Senegal River.

From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, these traders successfully shifted the focus and direction of their trading activities to seek new opportunities in the changing economic, and now colonial, landscape. This dissertation, which is a historical reconstruction of these migration patterns, seeks to assess their direct and indirect causes.

¹⁷ Gulmīm became the main market in the course of Shaykh Bayrūk's life and as a direct result of his policies. Liksābi, but especially Asrīr, were more important in previous times. I will return to this in

Like the trading network of the Jakhanké in seventeenth and eighteenth century West Africa, the Tikna also strived to maintain peaceful relationships with the political establishment in the foreign lands they traversed and settled in.¹⁸ They accommodated to the rules of the majority and did not interfere in local politics in the pre-colonial period.¹⁹ The Awlād Bū Sbā', on the other hand, tended to have many conflicts with local tribes and states in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Although they secured a strong economic position in colonial western Africa, they strove to maintain a certain degree of independence from the structures imposed upon the people of the region.

Western African Trade Networks

Trade in western Africa has historically been organized in networks formed along “tribal” lines. From the ubiquitous Jula traders and the Hausa trade monopoly of kola nuts, to the general-purpose boutiques of the Lebanese, the existence of trading networks has both commercial and cultural ramifications in African history. Traders formed associations with members of their “ethnic” group because reduced transaction costs were made possible through this type of cooperation. As a result, whether long-distance or local, traders formed distinct groups within their host communities based on their status as strangers.

Till this day, the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā', are renowned for being professional traders. Their experiences are comparable to those of other stranger-trader

chapter 3.

¹⁸ The evidence stems from a cross-examination of oral sources and the colonial record (discussed at length in chapters 4, 5, 6 & 7).

groups such as the Jula, Hausa, Jakhanké, Chinese, Lebanese, Jewish and Senegalese Baol-Baol communities in world trade history.²⁰ These two *qabā'il* ("tribal groups") are both originally from the southern Moroccan regions of the Wād Nūn, and the Haouz. Because of their relatively recent arrival in western Africa, and their distinct cultures, they were always regarded as northern Saharans, 'the people of the [northern] Sahel' or the northern desert edge (*ahl al-Sāhil*).²¹ Ironically, French colonials tended to label them as "Moroccans" when in reality neither the Tikna nor the Awlād Bū Sbā' considered themselves as such. The Wād Nūn, the region where they tended to coalesce, was effectively outside the orbit of the Moroccan Kingdom (until the French conquest of the area in 1934).

Both the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' were of *Amazigh*, or so-called Berber origin, and their main language was Berber (Tashelhit). They tended to be literate in Arabic and, because of their commercial interests in and across the *Trāb al-Biḍān*, many traders were speakers of Ḥasanīya, the Saharan lingua franca which is a Berber/Arabic/African language. The Tikna were from the northern Saharan region of Wād Nūn, which is their homeland, yet they also nomadized in the Sūs and the Tīris

¹⁹ Philip Curtin, "Pre-Colonial Trading Networks and Traders: The Diakhanke,," In *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa*. Edited by Claude Meillassoux. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.

²⁰ Philip Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*, Cambridge: CUP, 1984.

²¹ As Mohamed Saïdould Hammady (Interview 6/24/98) who is himself an Awlād Bū Sbā' explains, both the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' were regarded as foreigners from the north (i.e the southern edges of the Maghrib). But reflecting on degrees of "strange-ness", the Awlād Bū Sbā' were considered much less

regions. The Awlād Bū Sbā' were from various regions, depending on the historical period. They tended to congregate in the Haouz (Marrakech), but their ancestors were buried in Wād Nūn, on the outskirts of Gulmīm (See Map 2). In the early 1700s, they settled in greater numbers in the Wād Nūn, Sūs, Tīris and Imrīgli regions when forced to migrate out of Marrakech. Both the Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' were semi-sedentary; they were seasonal nomads and had a long history of urban lifestyles.

Both groups formed large federations of tribes united by a common ancestor or by a sense of belonging to common entity. Because of the numerous tribal branches composing each group, the Tikna, like the Awlād Bū Sbā', tended to identify themselves by their clan (*fahd*) or lineage (*fašīla*). It was only when they were outside of the “homeland” that they came to identify themselves by the general categories of Tikna or Awlād Bū Sbā'.

The Tikna were considered “*hasāni*” or warriors perhaps because of their skills in horsemanship and cavalry or because, in general, they were not *zwāya* (clerics or people of the book). At the same time they were farmers and herders. For their part, the Awlād Bū Sbā' considered themselves to be *zwāya* and even claimed Sharifian descent (as descendents from the Prophet of Islam). But because they also were engaged in professional trading and military activities (including raiding), they were at times

foreign than the Tikna, in the eyes of Mauriticians. I will return to this in point in subsequent chapters, especially chapter 9.

considered by others as “*hasāni*”.²² Therefore, neither the Tikna nor the Awlād Bū Sbā’ fit “neatly” into the Saharan social stratification as they were vocationally versatile and involved in diverse economic activities.

Through pragmatic leaders, or adventurous individuals, both the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā’ made contacts early on with states and chiefdoms in western Africa and often settled within these communities. Unlike many other Muslims, these stranger-traders easily approached non-Muslims, including Christians and Jews. Indeed, the Awlād Bū Sbā’ were one of the first Saharan groups to develop relations with the French in St. Louis in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Tikna also have a long history of relationships with western African nations, as well as with foreigners on the Atlantic coast. Their close ties to the Jewish community, and their attempts to develop trade relations with Europeans, illustrate their open-mindedness and the international dimensions of their business operations. It is because of these similarities and their regional proximity that Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā’ came to cooperate in long-distance trade operations within western Africa in the nineteenth century.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, several trans-Saharan traders of the Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā’ established settlements in western African. Several traders purchased houses and became residents (even if part-time) in Ndar on the Senegalese coast, or in other key markets of the interior, namely Tishīt. In the course of the nineteenth century, there were new waves of migrations from the northern edges of the

²² Because of their eclectic socio-professional identity, the French categorized the Awlād Bū Sbā’ as “marabouts-guerriers.”

western Sahara to towns in western Africa. In time, the Awlād Bū Sbā' would be courted by French colonial officials because of their military and commercial skills. Less united and numerous than the Tikna, they tended to move in and out of the favor of the colonial overlords. By first decades of the twentieth century, a large wave of Awlād Bū Sbā' migration hit the Mauritanian coast and moved into Senegalese peanut basin. Several ambitious and skillful traders accumulated sizeable wealth within the Senegalese economy by hiring out their services and their camels for the transportation of groundnuts. Then, in a second phase, they entered the retail business, purchasing groundnuts for the French export houses in exchange for basic European imports, such as rice and cotton. By the end of the 1930s the ascension of this Awlād Bū Sbā' was so remarkable that they came to be considered, in the eyes of the French, as a "money power."²³

In pre-colonial arrangements, Tikna families living in Shingīti, for instance, had a tribal leader. At the same time, they developed alliances with the local dominant groups, such as the Māsna of Tishīt, and the Laghlāl and the Idaw'ālī in Shingīti. The Awlād Bū Sbā' allied themselves generally with religious authorities such as the Laghlāl of Shingīti, or the Shurfa of Tishīt. The political, and perhaps juridical, position of the stranger communities changed with the establishment of the French administration. In the eyes of

²³ Or "une puissance d'argent" as per Interpreter Lieutenant Martin who produced the most detailed study of the Awlād Bū Sbā' in Mauritania to date. "Une Tribu Marocaine en Mauritanie: Les Oulad Bousba" February 1937. Copy shared by Ahmad Sālam wuld Abdal Wadud. Copies also exist in the CHEAM and CAOM (see the Bibliography for these acronyms).

the French, they were not "strangers" as much as they had been in previous political climate.

The Tikna also seized opportunities offered by the colonial situation. Their patterns of accommodation to colonial rule, however, marked a sharp contrast to this early pacifist behavior. With the backing of the French, they not only interfered, but also assumed brokering positions, in Franco-Biḍān relationships. With the establishment of colonial rule, both stranger-trader groups were able at various levels to broker between the French and Biḍān societies. The French appointed "tribal chiefs" in very much the same style as their British counterparts did in Northern Nigeria. They also chose leaders (shaykh) of 'foreign' groups such as the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' to represent their economic and political interests.

This study follows the migration patterns of traders who financed and/or led caravans, "following the clouds" in search of pastures, commercial opportunities and gain, settling in various towns along trans-Saharan trails.²⁴ Two kinds of caravans supplied Saharan regions in goods and services. The first was the large caravan which usually traveled the longest distances bringing North African and European imported merchandise to western African markets and returning to the northern desert edge with products and slaves. The second type of caravan was smaller more frequent and engaged in local and interregional exchange for subsistence goods. This dissertation follows the historical dynamics of both caravan types, and the traders who organized them, through the waves of political and economic stability and instability which transpired from the

1840s to the 1930s. I will examine how caravans were organized, why large caravans became less common in the late-nineteenth century and the resurgence of the great caravan under French colonial rule.

Part II: Researching on Trans-Saharan Trails: Methods and Sources

The process of writing history, with its stages of subject selection, research and analysis, is a craft that requires determination, patience and a certain element of chance. There are no set rules about how one becomes inspired by a historical topic, gathers the appropriate set of materials which inform it, finds the ideal tools to analyze these sources so as to craft a solid historical reconstruction. And how could there be rules for such a process, or even laws of history, when the possibility of having access to a totally complete source-base for any given episode is a near impossibility? This is why, I would argue, there is a great degree of chance involved in doing historical research. This seems to be true for all aspects of research, from picking a topic and collecting the best available evidence, to finding the most appropriate theoretical conversations. This dissertation was shaped by a remarkable series of chance meetings with informants and texts. At various stages, these encounters guided me towards exceptional sources, influenced my interpretations and ultimately determined the themes of investigation.²⁵ This dissertation

²⁴ The expression to follow the clouds is a common one among the nomadic herders of the *Trab al-Bidān* who are always looking to take their camels and sheep to new grazing grounds which appear in the desert even after a light rain.

²⁵ As Janet Ewald describes in an excellent article, collecting oral data and investigating in archives are not processes than can be considered in separate loci because, ultimately, historical research is the combination of "relationships that exist between the evidence, its environment, and the researcher." In "Foxes in the Field: An Essay on a Historical Methodology," *African Studies Review*, 30, no. 2 (June 1987), p.10. In describing his own research path, Paul Pascon conveys the same idea that he "ran into" his subject through a series of events which had more to do with "chance [*hasard*] and circumstances" than a "rational" approach. *La Maison d'Illigh et l'histoire sociale du Tazerwalt*, Rabat: SMER, 1984, p. 6.

is based on a wide-range of historical sources, from oral data to official and unofficial documentation, collected in twenty months of fieldwork in Mauritania, Senegal, Mali and Morocco.

Oral Data

As Philip Curtin noted some years ago, the profession of historian has changed from "archival animal" to "archival creator," by which he meant that in the process of collecting oral data the historian now produces sources.²⁶ Oral research is a generic term encompassing a multitude of methods, procedures, and applications. Following Curtin's classification, oral sources can be divided into three broad categories: formal traditions, informal traditions, and personal recollections.²⁷ The interviews that I conducted in western Africa (Mauritania, Senegal, Mali and Morocco) often contain a combination of all three types of data. Typical was the interview generating biographical information (personal recollections), family histories and other historical data (informal traditions), and memorized formal texts linked to specific people and events (formal traditions).²⁸

I conducted oral interviews with over 200 informants in the course of my research in western Africa. While I decided not to work with a research assistant, I often was accompanied by a relative of the informant or a student, who offered their generous

²⁶ Philip D. Curtin's terms in "Field Techniques for Collecting and Processing Oral Data," *Journal of African History*, vol. 9, no. 3 (1968), pp. 367-385.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 371. In his esteemed work *Oral Tradition. A Study of Historical Method* (Tervuren, 1961), translated in English by H. M. Wright (Chicago: Aldine, 1965), Jan Vansina establishes an alternate categorization in which he puts emphasis on oral tradition (the others are "eyewitness account" and "rumors") p. 21. In a later revision of this work, Vansina defined oral tradition as: "verbal messages which are reported statements from the past beyond the present generation", *Oral Traditions as History* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1985) p. 27.

²⁸ Curtin recognizes that there could be overlapping of these categories. "one is likely to find informal versions of the same traditions that are also recited formally," "Field Techniques," p. 374.

"brokerage" services with introductions and assistance in communication.²⁹ These interviews varied in style, purpose, length, and informant profiles. In selecting interviewees, I focused mainly on elders of different backgrounds and tribal affiliations, members of established trading families, relatives and descendants of particular traders, acquaintances including neighbors of key families, and professionals in a variety of fields (from retailers to story tellers, religious leaders and diplomats). I selected informants through chance meetings, by following suggestions, and introductions made by previous informants. The interview format depended on the informant's background and their relationship to my general topic. Some of my informants were not always actually "interviewed" in the literal sense of the word. They simply shared historical information through informal conversations and short questions and answers sessions. In other interviews, I came prepared with a formal list of questions. For interviews with religious or other authorities, I sometimes delivered a list of questions a day or two prior to the scheduled meeting, so the interviewee could better prepare to respond to complex questions, such as those dealing with Islamic law. Over half of these sessions were recorded, and of these recorded sessions, many were undertaken in the interviewees' homes often with other family members and friends.³⁰ The questions asked to informants ranged from specific events and periods (example: "Was your father's wedding to Fatima X before the year when the town was attacked by the Rgaībāt, or after?"), to open-ended questions about how life used to be and family history recollections. As much as

²⁹ However, I did work with a number of assistants for transcriptions and translations of some of my oral and written sources. The success of my research trip was made possible through the help, generous welcome and sharing of hundreds of people who lent me a hand. I am forever indebted to everyone who assisted me in all my fieldwork experiences. I would like to thank all these people, the village it took to reconstruct this history, for their kind support.

³⁰ Curtin, "Field Techniques." Following Curtin, I recorded and took notes at the same time.

possible, I tried to let my informants talk freely; at strategic moments I would steer the conversation towards the topic at hand.

This extensive oral research resulted in a large database of uneven quality and usability. Because of time or opportunity constraints, it was not always possible to screen informants prior to setting up interviews. Information quality was often divided along gender lines. Women tended to be the repositories of cultural vignettes and formal traditions, sharing oral texts and anecdotal stories often with great accuracy. They also were the best sources for family history and genealogies. Men tended to pay less attention to detail, but they had a better handle on regional political events. I used both personal memory and conscious omissions, trying to recognize the areas of misremembering and repetitions. I found that informants who were strangers to the area, who had resided in a house, town, market, or region, and/or traveled there for a shorter while, or during a specific time-period, tended to possess clearer and more salient recollections about people, places and events than those who were from the area. Because of their position as strangers in society, these interviewees also described matters locals typically took for granted. These snapshot recollections of a given time and place tended to produce very useful historical data. Minorities and strangers had often sharp memories of the time they migrated to the area, and when they settled down. Moreover, migration narratives figured most prominently in the oral history passed down to the next generation. These recollections, tested against other sources, form the canvas upon which this study was sketched.³¹

³¹ Something must be said about my position as a researcher in Western Africa. My fieldwork was greatly facilitated by my fluency in French and Arabic, as well as my competency in Wolof. My knowledge of Arabic and Ḥasanīya was especially welcomed by peoples in Mauritania, northern Mali, and southern

Private Collections and Other Primary Sources in Arabic

Besides the oral data, this study relies on written materials collected in over 30 private libraries, including private papers, family records, legal documents, and several well-organized and indexed town libraries. The doors of these libraries were opened to me as a result of chance meetings with library owners or their relatives, or the guidance and assistance of several Mauritanian historians to whom I am greatly indebted.³² Like most historians, I came across the bulk of this material by wandering into piles of papers, often with the assistance of either collection owners or their descendants. The majority of these documents, which I photographed, deal with the mid-to-late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. The kinds of documents include correspondence, legal contracts and opinions (or *fatāwā*), and accounting records. Most of the informal records used in this dissertation were chosen for either their content about methods and means of

Morocco (and among Muslim notables in Senegal), where encounters with Westerners and with Westerners, who speak their language, are exceptional. The importance of this in entering the doors of Saharan families and their libraries cannot be overstated. Because Arabic is also the language of Islam, my knowledge of classical Arabic and the Qur'an conveyed a certain standing which often elevated me to the respectable position of a 'scholar' by western African standards. Moreover, because I was a woman--and generally perceived as non-threatening--, I think that I was more easily and quickly absorbed into family networks. What is more, being a foreigner, I had access to both men's and women's circles in a similar way that Tim Cleaveland explains for his work on Mauritania/Mali, "Becoming Walati: A Study of Politics, Kinship, and Social Identity in Pre-Colonial Walata." Doctoral Dissertation, NWU, 1995, and Sophie Carratini in her fieldwork in Morocco, *Les enfants des nuages*, Paris: Seuil, 1993.

³² Abdel Wedoud ould Cheikh made invaluable suggestions throughout my fieldwork. Muḥammad b. Muḥammadan wrote many of my "letters of introduction" which greatly facilitated my research in the Adrar. Deddoud ould Abdallah suggested that I look at materials stored in boxes in the house of the former *qādi* Shaykh Hamuny of Shingīi. I am extremely grateful to him for pointing the way towards what became the richest written material for this dissertation. Muḥammad al-Mukhtar wuld al-Sa'ad shared much of his knowledge about economic history and gave me numerous research tips. Muḥammad Sa'id wuld Hammuddy kindly guided my research in Atar. Muḥammad b. Mawlūd with whom I visited several libraries in Tishit and Tijtkja.

exchange, exchange rates and equivalencies, or for what they reveal about the actual authors of the document and/or the people mentioned therein.

Legal documents also inform on economic order and business ethics in nineteenth century Sahara. I analyze a selection of *fatāwā* or legal opinions, and *nawāzil* (legal cases) or the collection of legal questions posed to particular Islamic jurists. I focused on trade and finance, and trading records (account books, trade correspondence and the like). These documents found in private Saharan libraries bear witness to the intense legal discourse of Saharan notables and scholars of jurisprudence who typically engaged in trade. Scholars deliberated on all economic matters from the legal status of salt and gum arabic as food or currency, to the use, inheritance and sale of slaves. In comparing *fatawā* and business records, I assess the relevance of legal discourse to the conduct of trade. I argue that jurisprudence was central to trading operations in the Sahara, where most relationships were influenced by Islamic precepts.³³

One the most remarkable sources, which I found rather serendipitously on the sandy floor of the Shaykh b. Hammuny library in Shingīti (Mauritania), is an inheritance case. The document is written by several jurists who debated a complicated inheritance proceeding. It provides the best insights into the commercial operations of the Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' network, the Wād Nūn trade network. The main author discusses the complicated sorting of the extensive commercial accounts of several traders who meet their death on trans-Saharan trails, revealing how their commercial operations were made

³³ See chapter 2.

possible through a complex set of relations of credit and debt. The source also shows how social institutions such as trading networks were based on trust between trade partners.

The written evidence presents a number of limitations. Trade records tend to paint a picture of lawfulness that conveys only a partial reality about trans-Saharan exchange. Written sources rarely discuss ‘illegal’ matters, such as trans-Saharan trade in slaves or guns in the colonial period. In a real sense, the written record is often an official record of the formal economy. As such, the record was meant for public consumption, and was written by traders or scribes who wrote “as God has taught him”³⁴ and in “fear of God.” This, of course, does not apply to the trade records such as account books and other very personal, and less legalistic material. Therefore, I would argue that the “informal economy,” operating beyond the purview of Muslim jurists, tribal or regional authorities, and therefore off-the-record, did not necessarily follow the same guidelines set by the Qur’ān. This is not to imply that what was not written was necessarily not lawful but only to suggest that the written record of trading operations is a formal, public and conservative representation and should be used by historians accordingly.

Saharan societies, especially the *zwāya* or clerics, were literate by definition. They, together with professional well-to-do traders, used their literacy skills professionally. It is important to point out, however, that the bulk of written Arabic sources are produced by those who controlled the channels of literacy, scholarship and jurisprudence, i.e. (wealthy) men. Typical of patriarchal societies, women were more or less excluded from acquiring literacy and advanced education, unless they happened to be

the daughters of scholars. Women's voices do appear in the written record, although usually interpreted by the pen of a male cleric or judge.³⁵ Therefore, the inherent bias in these written sources is very much in line with the colonial exclusively male produced sources discussed below.

Paper was a very rare commodity in the region of western Africa. Since it was not produced locally, Muslim western Africa was paper hungry.³⁶ To be sure, paper was an important trade item on trans-Saharan trails from at least the 17th century. Oral sources suggest that paper was originally imported from the Indian peninsula and the Middle East, especially Morocco, Libya and Egypt.³⁷ Timbuktu might have operated as market for paper transiting from northeastern Africa, whereas the port of *al-Swaīra* on the Moroccan coast and Ndar at the mouth of the Senegal river were probably the most important entry points for paper of European origin sold in western Africa. Paper was consumed in the main by scholars, religious leaders and/or traders. That traders would write their business contracts on such paper is extremely significant when considering overall transaction costs and business behavior. For traders and business partners, having a written record was critical to accounting and accountability. As proverb in Ḥasanīya expresses: “*Illī marrg arrāṣ ma yumarrg akkurās*” or ‘what leaves the head does not leave the paper.’ Since paper was not a no-cost factor, keeping a paper supply, especially

³⁴ See Surat of the Cow, *Qur'ān* (II:282).

³⁵ There are exceptional women scholars. See brief discussion in chapter two.

³⁶ Saharans sometimes kept records on tanned antelope skin. It seems from the rarity of these types of records that antelope skin was either the less-preferred recording medium, and/or that it was used in cases of last resort such as in a paper shortage situation. See copy of the entire manuscript copies on skin sheets of the *Nawāzil* of Abdallah b. al-hajj Ibrahim found in the family archives of Hamūd b. al-Shaykh in Tijjka; Also copy at the IMRS. These are very rare and precious manuscripts.

³⁷ Interview in Tishit with Mohammad wuld Aḥamdi (04/21/97; tape 2).

in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was not an easy feat for residents of the Saharan interior. A thorough study of the paper trade is needed. Curiously enough, I did not find any written evidence of paper transactions outside of Timbuktu.³⁸

Not only were many Saharan societies literate, they relied on the Muslim calendar in all matters including trade. Many colonial officials are responsible for propagating the erroneous belief that western Africans had no notion or appreciation of time. In the colonial record, discussed below, there are countless examples of French officials exasperated at the fact that caravaners would sometimes walk the extra hundred miles (an additional 10 days trek) in order to take advantage of better market values. They would conclude that they were inefficient because of the "wasted-time" factor. Against this misguided notion which had lasting negative effects on perceptions about Africa, my data shows how very carefully time was factored into economic and other calculations. This was so much so, that all legal contracts --even the simplest transaction such as a mother giving a goat to her son as a gift--was witnessed and dated.³⁹ Likewise, all legal decisions of Islamic scholars and judges, as well as copies of manuscripts and documents, are generally dated. This facilitates the job of the historian a great deal. Unfortunately, Saharans tend not to date correspondence. This renders the use of certain key letters slightly problematic unless one can identify names and link them to genealogies.⁴⁰

³⁸ In Timbuktu, the Tikna trader Ahmad b. Bu La 'araf was the main supplier of paper and books in the first half of this century. It is interesting to note that an examination of paper usage is very telling about the status of traders and their connections. If a given source is written on the folio's recto and verso for different transactions this might be an indication that either there was paper shortage that particular year or/and that traders had irregular paper supplies.

³⁹ IMRS Manuscript (MS) 40: (no. 7) Attestation that a mother gives her son an adult she-camel (*nāga*) and writes a document, even if it is simply a donation/gift to a family member to protect her son's claim to this property when she dies (1883).

⁴⁰ As in the case of the correspondences of two Tikna brothers discussed in chapter 6.

A word must be said about the Saharan tradition of naming years, yet another illustration of western Africans' sophisticated sense of time and their methods for recording history. The scholars of each region of the "Mauritanian" Sahara have a specific chronological record of events corresponding to dates on the Islamic calendar. Oftentimes, when events transcended the political borders of the regions, they shared the same name for the year given to that particular event. The year 1887 (1304 hijra), for example, is known throughout the region as *'ām al-nujūm* (or the year of the stars, or the meteorite shower). Other times, the same year name corresponds to different calendar years because the same event took place in different regions at different times. So, for instance, the year of French colonial conquest, is known as *ām jawu an-naṣāra*, or the year the "Christians" came. But the French conquest started earlier in the south (h. 1319, A.D.1902), then in the middle of the country (H. 1322; A.D. 1904-5) and much later in the northern region of Adrar (1327 H.; A.D. 1909).⁴¹ All three years have the same name in the three different regions. Another example is *'ām al-kaīt* a Ḥasanīya-Wolof phrase meaning the year of the paper, which corresponds to the year the French imposed paper money in western Africa (1915). The actual date of this event varies according to the region since banknotes were gradually introduced in different markets.

Besides these types of data, I also consulted published and unpublished manuscripts written by Saharan scholars. These include the pilgrimage account (1894-1902) of Muḥammad Yaḥya al-Walātī, the large encyclopedic collection of Mukhtār b.

⁴¹ Some Saharan chronologies are published, (Paul Marty, "Les Chroniques de Oualata et de Néma," *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*), others are available at the Mauritanian Ministry of Economic Planning, Office of Statistics. These were used as guidelines for demographic census purposes, and are not always accurate. Still others were gathered orally.

Ḥamidūn,⁴² Abd al-Wadūd b. Aḥmad Mawlūd b. Intaḥā's historical account of the Adrar, and the classic nineteenth century account by Aḥmad b. al-Amīn As-Shinqīṭī.⁴³

European Archives or the Colonial Record

The third type of historical sources was collected at the national and departmental archives of Mauritania, Mali and Senegal.⁴⁴ I consulted a representative sampling of correspondence at all levels of the French colonial hierarchy (letters, dispatches and telegrams) for information about colonial policy and praxis. This includes correspondence within the colonial administration (between administrators, senior and junior officials, France and the Colonial Governors), as well as what is referred to as *correspondences indigènes* or letters between French and locals (such as the regional Saharan emirs, traders and other African correspondents). In either case, these two sets of correspondence can be termed 'formal' sources. Formal correspondence revealed a myriad of data: dates, events, numbers. They speak to colonial practices at large, as well as the relationship between local rulers and the European powers. As with all data, I sifted and treated these with careful scrutiny. I did not take opinions and interpretations at face value, as the French were not always equipped to fully grasp situations. Besides, on either side of the colonial relationships, there always was much to be gained from misinformation and misrepresentation.

⁴² Two volumes are published. But his unpublished works and archives were consulted at the Institut Mauritanien de Recherches Scientifiques.

⁴³ Aḥmad b. Al-Amīn Al-Shinqīṭī, *Al-wasīṭ fi tarājim udabā' Shinqīṭī*. Cairo: Maktaba al-Khajī, 1911. Refer to the bibliography.

⁴⁴ The Archives Nationales du Sénégal (ANS) are the repository of the colonial records for all the territories in West Africa formerly colonized by France. I also consulted the documentation on Mauritania microfilmed and deposited in the Centre d'Archives d'Outre-mer in Aix-en-Provence (CAOM). These microfilms are in the possession of Sid Ahmed dit "Dah" Fall in Nouakchott.

Other formal sources include weekly, monthly and yearly reports of key regions in all three countries. These were mined for information on specific events, peoples and economic information (from formal statistics to colonial decisions). Colonial statistics are very useful as general indicators of trends, especially since no other such data is readily available. I tend to handle colonial statistics (of the “formal economy”) with care. In encountering, for example, an estimate in 1929 of 40 million Francs for the “global commerce of Mauritania” it is clear that this figure does not take into account commercial transactions which took place beyond the colonial purview.⁴⁵ Besides, it is often impossible to know how colonial officials collected data, or calculated averages.⁴⁶

An added complication for quantities is that each region in Mauritania had its own standards of measurement for liquids and grains (the *mudd*, discussed in chapter two). Standardized equivalencies are never specified in the reports which express prices per kilogram (a measurement not used outside of the colonial economy until the 1950s). In addition, each district administrator (or *commandant de cercle*) had a distinct level of analysis, and so reports offer uneven pictures. These figures, however biased, are nonetheless extremely valuable because they allow general estimations and provide information about the colonial economy. Moreover, there are no other types of statistics available at this point.⁴⁷ These formal sources also reveal the key African players who participated in the colonial economy. As stranger-traders with a unique position in the wider political economy of the Sahara, the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā’ are visible in

⁴⁵ Archives Nationales de la République Islamique de Mauritanie (ANRIM) Q400, “Rapport Economic Annuel, Colonie de la Mauritanie, 1929.

⁴⁶ Other problems have to do with the inconsistency in terms of what factors are reported. For example, some reports only listed riding camels, while others only listed camels to be butchered.

⁴⁷ I intend to address this statistical gap in my future work with a thorough review of the colonial and local sources.

the French colonial record. Their names appear as caravaners, informants, mediators, and rebels. Complimented with oral sources, this colonial information enabled me to make in depth assessments of the position of these groups within the colonial system.

The National Archives of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania (ANRIM) is where I collected the largest body of colonial archival material. This is also where I encountered the most difficult working conditions due to the poor state of the archives. The collections, once well-organized and attended, are now in a critical state and are constantly being depleted by poorly trained or demoralized personnel, as well as unscrupulous visitors. Very often one finds that the original documents have disappeared and carbon copies are the only remaining, making referencing problematic. Other times, whole sections pertaining to one tribe or another are ripped out of the file. The prefect archives, where they still exist, are in an even more lamentable state.⁴⁸

The richest Mauritanian collection is the E series containing documents in the general categories of politics, society and economy. The Q series (especially in the 400s) was especially useful for gleaning economic and commercial data. The personal agendas of General Gouraud, who led the army to conquer the Adrar region in 1909, classified in the military series N, provided valuable insights about local reactions to colonial conquest, the main "collaborators," how Gouraud dealt with them and other groups. It allowed me to follow, step-by-step, the establishment of French colonial rule in the Adrar, a region which became a main political and economic center in colonial Mauritania. I also consulted the B series for information on how the French dealt with the question of slavery in Mauritania in the twentieth century.

⁴⁸ The collections are often raided by paper-hungry scholars who do not read French. I came across several scholars who wrote on colonial registers, the main pages of which had been torn out.

The National Archives of Senegal (ANS) are by far the richest and best-organized archives located in francophone West Africa. I researched the 9G series on Mauritania quite carefully. These are especially useful for the colonial political economy because they contain 'correspondences indigènes.' Other colonial archives include the private papers of key colonial officers who served in West Africa. An especially rich collection is the "Fonds Auguste Terrier" held at the Institut de France (Paris) which includes notes and correspondence related to Mauritania, Mali and Senegal. A two volume collection entitled "Origine de la Mauritanie" is particularly informative about the very beginnings of colonial rule in Mauritania as August Terrier--a French administrator who became director of the Comité de l'Afrique Française--recorded these with his interpretations. It includes several key handwritten documents by Xavier Coppolani, the architect of Mauritania, which helped me understand the early history of this Saharan colony. A visit to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris revealed very interesting data on the early relations between the French on the western African coast and the Tikna ruler of Gulmīm, Shaykh Bayrūk.

Other Sources

Evidence for this historical reconstruction of Saharan exchange is also obtained from published sources such as travelogues and autobiographical accounts. In the nineteenth century, the main interest of Europeans writing these accounts was to impress the geographical societies in their countries. It follows that commerce and exchange generally tend to be a main theme. But descriptions are often rather superficial and thin in detail because of the short duration of travelers' stay in the interior. Moreover, these *gens de passage* usually had a very limited understanding of the people and the social

structures they encountered. This explains the unidirectional nature of this type of source that often lacks depth. Nevertheless, the testimonies of European foreigners remain important sources, especially in the absence of other material. For example, the memoirs of Faidherbe, the ‘founding colonial father’ of Senegal, and those of other nineteenth and twentieth century French colonial officials and ethnographers, who obviously relied on oral data, provide valuable testimonies.

Both Léopold Panet and Bu al-Mughdād offer exceptional perspectives for western African history precisely because of their interesting social positions straddling Senegalese and French cultures. Panet (1820-1859), a Métisse orphan born in Gorée Island, attended French school and became involved in the gum trade along the Senegal River. He met Colonel Raffanel who hired him to join a short expedition into the Kaarta region of Mali. After this successful mission, Panet volunteered to cross the Sahara from Senegal to Morocco (01/1850-07/1850). He became the third “Christian” (disguised as a Muslim) to successfully cross the western Sahara and write about it (after the British Hugh Clapperton, 1821 and the French René Caillé, 1830). He went on an exploratory mission “to determine how to establish overland communications between Algeria and Senegal,” and had lengthy sojourns in towns of Shingīī, and Gulmīm.⁴⁹ His travel journal was published that same year.⁵⁰

Unlike other accounts by Europeans traveling into the unknown African hinterland, Panet had a good grasp of what he experienced and described. He knew

⁴⁹ Panet, *Première exploration du Sahara occidental: relation de voyage du Sénégal au Maroc 1850*. Paris: le Livre Africain, 1968, p. 12 (except from a letter of the Governor of Senegal dated 27 November 1848 CAOM EE 1714).

⁵⁰ *Revue Coloniale*, November (vol. V, no. 2) and December 1850 (vol. V, no.2). Later republished in book form thanks to the initiative of Robert Cornevin (see footnote above).

African languages, including some Ḥasanīya, and was remarkably perceptive. Moreover, he personally interacted with the inhabitants of the interior. Panet joined several small interregional caravans to reach Morocco via the Wād Nūn region. He was escorted most of the way by a Jewish caravaner from Wād Nūn named Judas or Yaouda. His escort promised to lead him to Algeria, once he had delivered his trade goods in Gulmīm, for a fee—an engagement he failed to keep.⁵¹ The first caravan which connected Ndar to Shingīti contained thirty camels and a total of twelve men. Although he spoke Wolof, the lingua franca of Senegal, Panet was accompanied by an interpreter/guide (not identified) for communication in Ḥasanīya.

The Bu al-Mughdād family of Ndar, with their three generations of interpreters, played a key role in brokering relationships between the Biḍān and the French.⁵² Bu al-Mughdād was the son of a Wolof intellectual who was educated in Trarza in a Biḍān Qurʿanic school. He was an exceptionally popular and respected notable who served the French as an interpreter and was their “Saharan eyes, ears and mouth” because of his multi-lingual skills and his connections in the *Trab al-Biḍān*.⁵³ The written records of Bu al-Mughdād and his son Doudou Seck (who was also named Bu al-Mughdād in honor of his father since he replaced him as an interpreter; later he would be assigned to assist the

⁵¹ An agreement was signed between the French Governor of St. Louis, A. Baudin, and Judas, with promise to pay the trader (800 FF) for his escort services once the final Algerian destination was reached.

⁵² See David Robinson’s *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and Colonial Authority in Senegal and Mauritania, ca. 1880-1920*, Athens: Ohio University Press (forthcoming), chapter two.

⁵³ Interview in Ndar with his great grandson of Bu al-Mughdād, Abou Latif Seck (11/5/97).

French in the conquest of Mauritania), but also records left by Doudou's brother Abdalaye Seck who became the *qāḍī* (judge) of the Muslim Tribunal in St. Louis, represent some of the most valuable and untapped sources for Senegalese/Mauritanian history.

The Biḍān composed numerous poems about Bu al-Mughdad.⁵⁴ For instance, a poem describes his home in St. Louis which was never empty as the cracks in the walls attest (created by the crowds that leaned against them). In fact most notable Muslim visitors--especially those from the Trarza region--would stay there when visiting the French capital. In another *gāf*, or praise poem, Bu al-Mughdād is described as a thin man who serves all his food and “eats” with his ears (i.e. he lives on the information which circulated through the mouths of his numerous guests).

Bu al-Mughdād went on pilgrimage via Morocco ten years after Panet (departing in December 1860).⁵⁵ He was fluent in Wolof, Ḥasanīya, Arabic, French, and perhaps Pulaar as well. In the early twentieth century, his son Doudou Bu al-Mughdād wrote an important essay which describes the history of Franco-Saharan relations at the turn of the century.⁵⁶

Numerous European officials stationed in western Africa authored memoirs which describe their time in service. Military officials, who led the conquest of the western African interior, were numerous in this category. The works of exceptional

⁵⁴ The poems referred were shared by Muḥammad Yaḥḍī wuld al-Tolba, Nouakchott (05/97). I would like to thank Muḥammad Yaḥḍī for his kind assistance and great insights during my stay in Mauritania.

⁵⁵ “Voyage par terre entre le Sénégal et le Maroc,” Bou-el-Mogdad, assesseur au cadī de St. Louis, *Revue Maritime et Coloniale*, mai 1861, 1er trimestre, pp. 477-494.

ethnographers such as Albert Leriche, Paul Dubié, and Odette du Puigaudeau are also important accounts for the first half of the twentieth century. Both Leriche and Dubié served long periods as administrators in colonial Mauritania. The first worked on the first French-Ḥasanīya dictionary and published extensively on a range of ethnographic and historical subjects. Du Puigaudeau, the first French woman to cross the Sahara desert (with her girlfriend), produced numerous publications that are especially useful for the cultural history of Mauritania in the 1930s.

A final category of sources used is literary in nature. These are poems, religious sayings and proverbs that inform about cultural norms, morality and exchange values. These types of cultural vignettes encapsulate images and sentiments passed down from generation to generation, and are in danger of extinction in the contemporary situation. Some of these literary texts were collected during fieldwork, while others are published.

This dissertation is concerned with the history of long-distance traders and their trading networks in a predominantly patriarchal Muslim society. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the profession of long distance traders in Saharan economies was predominantly a male occupation. Women rarely appear as active agents in the written historical record of throughout most of the period covered by this study and when they do, it is typically as the daughters or widows of prominent families. The oral record, however, contains a much more balanced recollection of the past, and this is especially true about women's oral history. Several scholars have recently applied gender analysis to the study of a male profession. A recent volume on maritime history provides useful

⁵⁶ ANRIM, E1/3. "Mémoires de Bou el Mogdad jusqu'en 1903."

guidelines to the study of the social history of long-distance traders.⁵⁷ The authors challenge stereotypes by arguing that

maritime history amount [ing] to tales of men, ships, and the sea and that sailors were universally tough, have long enjoyed wide currency. The complementary premise that women and shore side institutions were tangential to maritime experience had been equally tenacious....[yet] gender is a fundamental component of seafaring, as it is of all society...."⁵⁸

The discussion of social construction of 'iron men' and 'wooden maidens' has much relevance to the present examination of caravaners crossing desert frontiers.

This dissertation relies on a wide array of sources which vary in quality from the inherent gender biases of written sources, the problem of the colonial documentation and the originality of Saharan trading records, to the rich evidence contained in oral interviews and oral texts. Trained as a historian to be cautious with any body of evidence, I found it necessary to collect such a mixed bag of sources in order to better grasp the actors and the settings of this historical reconstruction. Written sources by scholars, travelers and colonial officers vary in pen and purpose. Trade records were often written to create tangible legal contractual arrangements and/or to convey market information. Oral sources, in and of themselves, do not always yield unique and useful information. To be sure, few sources stand on their own, and so the wealth of my sources rests in their combined use. In order to fully understand the written record (indigenous and colonial, official and private), it was necessary to consult with elders and local scholars who could inform about people, places and events. This process of investigating source material by measuring one source of information against another, by taking the written word to the elder or by finding, by a stroke of luck, confirmation of his/her oral testimony in the

⁵⁷Margaret Creighton & Lisa Norling, *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, pp. vi-xiii, p. vi.

archives, was central to my methodology. The combination of sources, and the multiple voices that they represent, allow for an original reconstruction of Saharan history using both inside and outside perspectives.

Part III: The Layout of an Argument

This dissertation is a social history of things economic, not an economic history per se.⁵⁹ No attempt was made here to quantify trade or the economic performance of the trading families. This study examines the migration patterns and the operation of trading networks of professional traders and caravaners in Africa's western Saharan region and therefore it is a social history of commercial agents and macro-economic trends. So in examining how members of specific trading networks cooperated to maximize their economic opportunities in the face of significant shifts in the political economy of western Africa, I focus on qualitative rather than quantifiable indicators.

This study covers a period of important political and economic permutations. It examines how the organization, itineraries and loads of camel caravans changed from a time when the Saharan interior was ruled by several nomadic emirates and tribes in the mid-nineteenth century, to that when French, and also the Spanish, administered the Saharan region. In the pre-colonial setting, a certain number of ad hoc rules and Islamic laws regulated exchange and cross-regional relationships. Then, a transitional and rather disruptive period from the late nineteenth century until the first decade of the twentieth century, witnessed the intensified encroachment, political negotiations, military conquest

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. ix.

and eventual establishment of European (French and Spanish) colonial administration and economic order. The study ends in the 1930s, after the Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' had diversified their trading activities and had come to dominate in the retail business of Mauritania, Senegal, northwestern Mali and beyond. By this time, the French finally conquered the last stronghold of resistance on the northern shores of the western Sahara, the Wād Nūn region. This area then became part southern Morocco. This study is guided by Fernand Braudel's emphasis that historians should move away from traditional approach of event reporting and apply the economists' notion of time, or 'conjunctures,' which, when transcended, form the *longue durée* (the long time-span).⁶⁰

In a hundred-year period, from the 1840s to the 1930s, this study covers many shifts in commercial itineraries, markets, and goods in western African history. I examine how the media of exchange commonly used by western Africa traders changed from the *mithqal* gold weight standard, and interface currencies such as cloth and the cowry shell, to be supplanted by colonial currencies by the mid-twentieth century. I argue that the relationships between markets made possible through the intermediary of long-distance traders had lasting effects on the monetary history of the region. Indeed, traders played a key role in modifying monetary practices and monetization (or the use of financial institutions), so much so that countries such as Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, and Senegal today all share a similar numeric system for counting currency. Moreover, foreign currency did not always supplant pre-existing currencies or systems of exchange.

⁵⁹ Although, if I take Douglass North's definition of economic history as the history of institutions and their legal frameworks, then I would have to classify my work in such terms given that I am looking at social institutions which favor economic practice.

⁶⁰ "History and the Social Sciences: The *Longue Durée*", *On History*, Cambridge: CUP, 1980, p. 25-54.

In certain regions, and for certain trades, the media of exchange remained the same while new valuation systems were negotiated and introduced.

More importantly, this study informs about the multiple credit practices, which were a central ingredient to efficient long-distance trade operations. Because of market and political instabilities, traders were constantly redistributing their wealth in the form of loans to fellow trade partners, or deposits entrusted to them. With the establishment of a colonial *pax economica*, credit practices shifted. Moreover, the face of the credit market changed quite significantly with the advent of the “boutique” or general store. Store owners and store managers began extending credit to customers through complicated transactions transforming clientage in new, more visible ways.

With the imposition of a colonial order in the twentieth century, large and medium size traders were now forced to comply with a certain number of innovations in terms of regulations and administrative requirements. By the first decade of the twentieth century, once prominent commercial centers in the interior such as Shingīti and Tishīt lost favor to new towns now under French control and loaded with French imported merchandise. In colonial Mali, the western town of Nioro became an important market where Saharan communities drove their camel caravans to exchange their salt. The French efforts to put an end to the trans-Saharan traffic in slaves changed the entire basis of cross-cultural exchange in the Kaarta region. But even though the cotton cloth currency replaced the slaves, previously exchanged for salt, the trans-Saharan slave trade continued beyond the colonial gaze albeit at a much reduced volume. Aside from several distinct periods of intermissions in market exchange, camel caravans, and through them

the circulation of goods and services, continued to link North, West and Saharan production and trade centers throughout this period.

Traders linked to the colonial economy introduced much of the region to the new currencies. In this process, I argue that the stranger-traders such as the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā', played a key role as commercial agents on the cutting edge of economic permutations. These traders moved between different currency zones, from the highly monetarised markets of Morocco where coins regulated exchange since the medieval period, to the markets of western Africa with their local currencies, measures and exchange systems. They were well equipped to be successful long-distance traders. Not only were they innovators in international financial practices including the use of the money order, they also extend business knowledge to other less commercially inclined Saharans (through employment and training). They were pioneers in opening *boutiques* in towns such as Atar, the new economic capital of colonial Mauritania. Because of their business *savoir-faire* as well as their proximity to the colonial administration, several stranger-traders such as the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' worked as collaborators and intermediaries between the colonial rulers and their "subjects"; a role quite distinct from--although arguably just as prominent as--the religious leaders or the *maraboutic intelligentsia* who guided colonial policy in the early phases of colonial Mauritania. The position of these stranger-traders was similar to that of many other minority groups who came to play important roles as intermediaries between the colonizers and the colonized.⁶¹

⁶¹ See, for example, Herschelle Sullivan Challenor, "Strangers as Colonial Intermediaries: The Dahomeyans in francophone Africa", in *Strangers in African Societies*, William A. Shack & Elliott P. Skinner, eds., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, pp. 67-83.

Dissertation Layout

In the next chapter, I show how Islamic precepts, interpreted by Muslim scholars, regulated pre-colonial exchange in western Africa. Based on legal documentation produced by seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century Saharan jurists, I examine the currencies and systems of equivalencies which facilitated cross-regional and cross-cultural exchange. While Islamic law provided a juridical and institutional framework guiding business ethics and economic behavior, I show how Muslim traders circumvented certain laws, such the Islamic interdict on usury. I argue that Muslim jurists, as arbitrators and mediators, played an obvious role in maintaining an economic order which facilitated exchange.

Chapter three describes markets, itineraries and the organization of caravans in mid-nineteenth century western Africa. Here, I map out the political and economic landscape of trans-Saharan trade, focusing specifically on the western trade routes. I discuss the commercial links between European suppliers of merchandise on the coast, and internal markets, trade goods and caravaners. The second part of the chapter is focused more specifically on the organization of long-distance caravans, distinguishing between the interregional and the international kinds. I end with a discussion of the question of insecurity and the strategies used by traders to circumnavigate danger on trans-Saharan trails.

Chapter four provides a brief history of the two trans-Saharan trader groups examined in this dissertation: the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā'. It is argued that given their cultural, professional and geographical proximity converging in the Wād Nūn

region, both groups became partners who cooperated in the risky business of long-distance trade. This overview prepares for a full discussion of the Wād Nūn trading network in the next chapter. After reviewing the literature on ‘trading diasporas,’ stranger-traders, landlords and cross-cultural brokers in West African history, chapter five focuses on the operation of trading networks between western African markets and northern Saharan caravan termini. Based on a complex inheritance case of four Wād Nūn traders located in the town of Tishīt in the mid-nineteenth century, I describe the inner-workings of long-distance trade networks. I pay particular attention to the vibrant web of credit arrangements between traders operating in a tight and efficient commercial group. In fact, I argue that an essential ingredient to successful long-distance trading was the extensive use of credit from multi-party and multi-regional sources as a strategy to save capital by investing in people.

In chapter six, I describe the political conjunctures characterizing the last two decades of the nineteenth century. I argue that it was during the peaceful reign of Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad that a more sizeable group of Wād Nūn migrants came to settle in the markets of western Africa. Then, in chapter seven, I deal with the French conquest of the Sahara, from the initial victories such as the fall of Timbuktu, to "the creation of Mauritania." I examine the circumstances of the French conquest of Mauritania. I argue that Xavier Coppolani, an Algeria-trained colonial Islamicist, was the singular architect and colonial martyr of Mauritania. I detail how Coppolani's official rationale for the colonization of the Sahara shifted from a *politique musulmane*, to arguing the economic benefits the French would reap from gaining control of trans-Saharan trade routes. In the

last part of the chapter, I examine the roles played by Awlād Bū Sbā' as colonial mounted riflemen, and how the Tikna assisted in the establishment of French rule in the Adrar.

Chapter eight examines the establishment of the colonial infrastructure and the ensuing shifts in commercial itineraries during the colonial period. In the western Sahara, the Spanish simply did not have the strategy or the numbers to expand their presence inland. In fact, colonial rule in the Sahara, whether Spanish or French, did not bring about significant changes in infrastructure. The French dream of a trans-Saharan railway from Morocco to Senegal, and from Algeria to Timbuktu, never materialized. The Sahara desert was overwhelming and the colonial administrations of the Spanish Sahara, Mauritania and northern Mali had little choice but to adapt to local means of transportation, namely the camel. They requisitioned camels from their subjects and formed colonial caravans to supply their various military outposts. In Mauritania, the town of Atar now attracted caravan traffic from Wād Nūn, whereas in Mali the economy of Timbuktu was revitalized with new caravan traffic. While colonial imposition had a damning effect on local economies, some traders took advantage of the situation by expanding their activities. In Senegal, Ndar and later Louga became prime destinations for caravaners from Wād Nūn. They traded goods and sold their camels to local farmers for peanut transportation, a cash crop that came to dominate the Senegalese economy.

It is widely believed that in the late nineteenth century, the European conquests of the African mainland put an end to the trans-Saharan trade relations which had existed for centuries immemorial between North and West Africa. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I argue that while this may be true for the eastern branches of trans-Saharan trade, which connected central Niger to Ghadames and Tripoli, the argument does not

hold for the western routes from western Africa to the Maghrib. The western trans-Saharan trails did not dry up with colonial imposition, quite to the contrary. Traders not only continued linking northern and western African markets, they also took advantage of new economic opportunities to become commercial innovators and expand their trading networks. The trans-Saharan routes connecting Morocco to Mauritania, Senegal, and Mali prevailed throughout the political and economic tides of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In 1930s, the automobile began circulating on trans-Saharan trails, but it would be years before the truck forever replaced the camel caravan.

CHAPTER 2

ISLAM, ECONOMIC ORDER AND BUSINESS ETHICS

“Trading is the true test of man, and it is in the operations of trade that his piety and religious worth become known.” Caliph ‘Umār¹

“Praise to God who is the only one to control the action and the decision, who administers and accomplishes His will, who established the laws for the people that dissuade them from oppression and prejudice by their application, who changed the governors of Islamic laws and of bare promises instead of natural politics and heresies. He has protected them by the guidance of the Sunna against the guidance of conjectural reasoning...and who opened the way towards analogies and personal interpretation on the basis of the Qur’ān and the Hadith so that Muslims are not embarrassed and find solutions to their issues.... “They will not—I swear—be true believers until they ask You to arbitrate in their disputes”(Qur’an IV:65) ”²

That religion provides a framework for the operation of trade has been recognized by many scholars of western Africa.³ Indeed, “[i]t is something of a cliché to point out the symbiotic relationship of Islam and trade.”⁴ Being Muslim often involved the use of the Arabic language and script, belonging to a community of trustworthy believers, and having recourse to Islamic law. The Qur’ān and its commentaries set a *modus operandi*

¹ Cited in E.W. Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the Moors: West African Kingdoms in the Fourteenth Century*, Princeton: Wiener Publishers, 1995 (reprint. 1958), p. 236.

² Appendix 6: Document 1, Inheritance of Wād Nūn traders, 1840s-1850s, Arwīli family documents in Maktaba Shaykh b. Hammuny, Shingŋŋ (discussed in chapter five).

³ See, for instance: Abner Cohen, *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa: A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns*. Berkeley, 1969; Philip Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade*, 2 vols. Madison, 1975; Paul Lovejoy, *Caravans of Kola: The Hausa Kola Trade, 1700-1900*. Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1980; Stephen Baier, *An Economic History of Central Niger*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.

⁴ John Hunwick, “Islamic Financial Institutions: Theoretical Structures and Aspects of their Application in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *Credit, Currencies And Culture: African Financial Institutions In Historical Perspective*. Endres Stiansen and Jane I. Guyer, eds. The Nordic Africa Institute. Research Report 113 (forthcoming 1999), p. 1. I thank John Hunwick for sharing this important article which provided much insight in the final stages of completing the following chapter. See also Abner Cohen, “Cultural Strategies in the Organization of Trading Diasporas,” in *The Development of Indigenous Trade and markets in West Africa*, C. Meillassoux (ed.), p. 277.

for economic behavior. As most Muslim traders are proud to say, the Prophet Muhammad, founder of the religion of Islam and author of the words of the Qur'ān, was himself a trader. For this reason in Mauritania, like in other parts of Muslim western Africa, there is a certain prestige attached to the trading profession.⁵ It is only natural, therefore, that commerce features prominently in Islamic law.⁶ The pervasiveness of Islam in western Africa makes it difficult to understand Saharan exchange outside of its religious framework. That ethics dominate economic behavior points to a feature of Islam that sets it apart from other economic systems.⁷

Enforcement of Islamic precepts is self-managing as all Muslims usually have at least a rudimentary knowledge of the basic principles. In pre-colonial western Africa Muslims could have recourse to judges (*qādi*) and religious authorities who enforced contractual law, mediated in disputes and engaged in problem solving. In seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century Sahara, the role of jurists and Muslim scholars in commercial arbitration and mediation was paramount.⁸ The written record of their legal deliberations offers an exceptional window into the social and economic questions of the day. The first part of this chapter discusses Islamic precepts on economic behavior, both in terms of ethics and commercial law. Then, I examine the writings of several religious authorities, scholars and jurists on business ethics and norms. I survey how the commercial concerns brought to them for legal deliberation changed from the late

⁵ Abdel Wedoud ould Cheikh, "Nomadisme, Islam et Pouvoir Politique" Tome I, p. 62. Many of my informants proudly pointed this out and accordingly, the profession of trader is considered very respectable.

⁶ Hacène Benmansour, *L'économie Musulmane et la Justice Sociale*. Paris: Dialogues Editions, 1995, p. 104.

⁷ Ibid, and Syed Nawab Haider Naqwi *Ethics and Economics: An Islamic Synthesis*. London: The Islamic Foundation, 1981, [also published/distributed in Kano, Nigeria, and Nairobi, Kenya], p. 18.

⁸ Charles Stewart with E.K. Stewart. *Islam and Social Order in Mauritania: A Case Study from the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford, 1973, p. 65 et sq.

seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries, reflecting the shifting political and monetary landscape of Saharan exchange. Most of the evidence for this chapter is gleaned from the *nawāzil* or legal cases of Saharan jurists (*faqīh*). I examine these legal records to assess more specifically Saharan business ethics in terms of valuation, measures and currency use, rules of finance, cross-cultural exchange, and other matters related to economic behavior. I compare judgments and commercial records to argue that trade did not always follow legal guidelines. This review of Saharan jurisprudence and economic order is preliminary. A definitive study awaits a more thorough examination of the legal record.

Islamic Precepts and Economic Behavior

Islamic precepts follow four ethical axioms, according to Syed Nawab Haider Naqwi.⁹ The first is the ethic of *unity* between members of the community of believers or the *umma*; while the second is the concept of *equilibrium* between Muslims with its emphasis on *'adl* or justice for "Allah loveth not transgressors."¹⁰ The obligation of all Muslims to be fair to one another is stressed throughout the Qur'ān. The following precept, reiterated six times in the book of Islam, is clearly linked to the trading profession: "[g]ive just weight and full measure."¹¹ In the surat entitled "The Unjust," this idea is expressed as follows: "Woe to the unjust who, when others measure for them, exact in full, but when they measure or weigh for others, defraud them!"¹² The last two axioms of Islamic ethics are *free will* and *responsibility*, emphasizing respectively the

⁹ Naqwi, *Ethics and Economics: An Islamic Synthesis*. p. 37-69.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 50 (*Qur'an*, 5:87).

¹¹ "*wa iqāmū al-wazn bil-qistī wa la takhasū al-maizān*", Qur'ān 6:152; 11:84; 17:34; 26:180; 55:5; 83:1-2.

individual's right to choose in all matters, and her/his sense of accountability in good and bad deeds. Responsibility implies that "each soul earneth only on [her/] his own account, nor doth any laden bare on another's load."¹³ In other words, one must claim responsibility for one's actions, and it follows that those who do good will reap the rewards thereof, while unethical, unbridled individualism and greed would have negative consequences. In a nutshell, these axioms determine a Muslim's symbiotic connection to others, assuring harmony and avoiding abuse in all matters social, political, and economic.

Islamic ethics on economic behavior must be seen within the framework of Islamic law and its overarching mission of social justice. The concept of social justice, which is at the heart of Islamic ethical behavior, is a Muslim's social obligation to other fellow Muslims. This includes the obligation to redistribute wealth surplus to those in need. As the Qur'an stipulates, "wealth become not a commodity between the rich among you." The idea behind this edict is that wealth should not "beget" wealth only, or that wealth should not be restricted to a wealthy minority. Such a situation of wealth redistribution and sharing is socially equitable in Islam for all individuals should guarantee the well-being of fellow believers and "in their wealth, the beggar and the destitute have due share."¹⁴ The re-distributive policy of Islam is carried out through a number of duties that befall on individual Muslims, although they are in some areas institutionalized. These include the yearly distribution of the annual holy tax to the poor

¹² *Qur'an*, 83:1-2.

¹³ Naqwi, *Ethics and Economics: An Islamic Synthesis*. p. 54

¹⁴ *The Koran with a Parallel Arabic Text*. Translated with notes by N. J. Dawood. Penguin Books: London, 1990, p.111.

or *zakat*, and/or repeated manifestations of charity and generous behavior through alms giving.

The Qur'ān sets clear guidelines for the conduct of lawful trading and financial transactions. That the Prophet himself was a trader, explains why the Qur'ān, the compilation of his sayings and teachings, so carefully describes the lawful way to behave in business and exchange.¹⁵ Many of the tenets prescribing proper conduct in matters of trade and finance are contained in the chapter of the Qur'ān entitled *Surat al-Baqara* (chapter of the cow).¹⁶ The first Islamic precept on rules of finance is the interdict on usury or the prohibition on interest on loans. The discussion of finance in *Surat al-Baqara* begins with the question of usury. As the book explains: “[t]hose [who] live on usury shall rise up before God like men whom Satan has demented by his touches; for *they claim that trading is no different from usury*. But God has permitted trading and made usury unlawful...God has laid His curse on usury and blessed almsgiving with increase.”¹⁷ If by some mishap a Muslim engages in usury and decides to repent and mend her/his ways, s/he can retain the principal of the loan, but no more than the principal, so that s/he will not cause loss or harm to another.¹⁸ In the *Surat al-‘Imrān*, the Qur'ān also warns “Believers, do not live on usury, doubling your wealth many times over. Have fear in God that you may prosper” (3:130).

¹⁵ Hunwick makes the same argument in “Islamic Financial Institutions,” pp. 1-4.

¹⁶ It is tempting to speculate that the reason why the chapter is called “the cow” is because in the Saudi Arabia of Prophet Muhammad’s day, the cow was a key symbol of wealth, the ultimate capital investment as is still the case in many pastoral societies today.

¹⁷ Dawood (ed.), *Koran*, 2:275-276, p. 46 (emphasis mine).

¹⁸ Ibid, 2: 278 (gender emphasis mine).

It is worth noting that usury was also prohibited by the Catholic Church in Europe until the mid-eighteenth century. Moreover, Aristotle considered usury to be “unnatural” because “money was intended to be used in exchange, but not to increase at interest.”¹⁹ As Farhan Ghannadian and John Klein explain, usury is looked down upon and even inadvisable as per the Bible, the New Testament and Talmudic Law.²⁰ The rationale, according to the *sharī‘ā* or Islamic law, was simple although admittedly ambiguous. Unlike in trade where a single purchase is only paid for once, a loan with interest is paid for in multiple payments (i.e. over and above the actual value/principal) and the over-payment of a principal is exploitative.²¹ Yet, there seems to be a fine line between the act of trading (selling a good for a profit margin) and usury (lending/selling capital for a profit margin). This similarity has been debated extensively in Islamic law.²² The real difference between usury and trade, from my own understanding at least, lies in the humane aspects of exchange. If an exchange with interest is unfair by its very nature, if a trader takes advantage of a customer’s misfortune by exacting excessive, abusive and unreasonable interest, then that is usury. Hence, the saying the *riba’* or usury, is the ‘devouring of others wealth.’ Every other transaction, like the payment of monthly rent, the net profit on a bargain, is trade, pure and simple.

To avoid usury or *riba’*, and therefore transact lawfully, a famous hadith, or Prophetic tradition, recommends that:

Gold is to be paid for by gold, silver by silver, wheat by wheat, barley by barley, dates by dates, and salt by salt – like for like, equal for equal, payment being

¹⁹ Farhan Ghannadian & John Klein, “A Note on Interest and Banking in Islam,” *Savings and development*, vol. XV, no. 4, 1991, p. 374, quoting from Aristotle’s *Politics*.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Benmansour, *L’économie musulmane*, pp. 62-63.

²² Ibid., pp. 63-65. For a concise description of Islamic finance and the main issues currently debated by Islamic scholars see <http://www.islamic-finance.com/item5.htm>.

made on the spot. If the species differ, sell as you wish provided that payment is made on the spot.²³

At first hand, the hadith is rather confusing in the sense that it recommends selling kind for kind when the essence and reason for exchange is precisely the opposite: exchange of one good/thing/money for another good which one needs and does not have in one's possession. But in reality, the main gist of the hadith is that exchange must take place with a common denominator, a means of exchange or unit of account. Moreover, in order to be lawful exchange must be simultaneous, an immediate transaction. Selling a good with a delay, was considered usurious simply because that delay was worth something to the seller. What is more, selling an absent good, a good which is not seen by the purchaser, is prohibited.

The verses that follow lay down the guidelines for contractual agreements in matters of credit. These guidelines, which often form the basis of the trading records used throughout this study, are worth stating here in full.

Believers, when you contract a debt for a fixed period, put it in writing. Let a scribe write it down for you with fairness; no scribe should refuse to write as God has taught him. Therefore let him write; and let the debtor dictate, fearing God his Lord and not diminishing the sum he owes. If the debtor be a feeble-minded or ignorant person, or one who cannot dictate, let his guardian dictate for him in fairness. Call in two male witnesses from among you, but if two men cannot be found, then one man and two women whom you judge fit to act as witnesses; so that if either of them commits an error, the other will remember. Witnesses must not refuse to give evidence if called upon to do so. So do not fail to put your debts in writing, be they small or big, together with the date of payment. This is more just in the sight of God; it ensures accuracy in testifying and is the best way to remove all doubt. But if the transaction in hand be a bargain concluded on the spot, it shall be no offence for you if you do not commit it to writing.

See that witnesses are present when you barter with one another, and let no harm be done to either scribe or witness. If you harm them you shall commit a

²³ <http://www.islamic-finance.com/item5.htm>.

transgression. Have fear in God who teaches you; God has knowledge of all things. If you are traveling the road and a scribe cannot be found, then let pledges be taken. If any one of you *entrusts* another (*In āmina ba'adukum ba'adan*) with a pledge, let the trustee restore the pledge to its owner; and let him fear God, his Lord. You shall not withhold testimony. He who withholds it is a transgressor. God has knowledge of all your actions.²⁴

When one does disburse interest free loans it is recommended that the creditor be understanding and therefore lenient with her/his debtor. As the Qur'ān prescribes, “if your debtor is in straits, grant [her/] him a delay until [s/]he can discharge his debt; but if you waive the sum as alms it will be better for you, if you but knew it.”²⁵

The focus of Islamic law on economic behavior, especially in matters of trade and finance, is an indication of the centrality of exchange to human behavior. Because the teachings of the Qur'ān, and other sacred texts, such as its commentaries, the hadith, were crafted to deal with the situations characteristic of their time, and since practices and behavior needed to adjust to the passage of time, Muslim jurists applied themselves to interpreting the law to address current situations. This movement called *ijtihād* (interpretation) is a rational methodology based on fundamental Islamic texts, and aimed at resolving current affairs to find solutions to contemporary questions about lawful behavior.²⁶ Saharan jurists and scholars were quite active in *ijtihād*, and as discussed below, they debated numerous questions regarding behavior, especially in matters of exchange.

²⁴ Dawood (ed.), *Koran*, p. 47. (2:282; 283), emphasis mine.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 46. (2:280).

²⁶ Interview in Nouakchott with Hamdan w. Attah (06/06/97).

Western Africans follow the Maliki doctrine of Islam. The great references of jurisprudence are the works of Shaykh Ibn Mālik (*al-Alfīya*), and his followers Sīdī Khalīl b. Ishāq (especially his *al-Muḥtaṣar*.) and Abu Zaīd al-Qarawānī.²⁷ As Hamdan b. Attah, one of Mauritania's finest contemporary jurists explains, "since the 17th century when we begin having legal records in Mauritania till this day, the most debated and discussed issue in the *fatāwā* is what is known as *qaḍīat al-bay'* [the problem of sales]."²⁸ It is worth noting that sales are defined with great precision in Islamic law. In his glossary of Islamic economics, Muhammad Khan lists no less than sixty three different categories of sales from forward purchases (*bay' al-salam*) to the sale of monetary value for monetary value, or currency exchange, (*bay' a-sarf*).²⁹ Indeed, in western Africa economic affairs were the most contested, or at least debated, in the legal arena. It was the second most deliberated issue by Saharan jurists after their preoccupation with theological or purely sacred matters. However, in Islam, since all behavior is in principle dictated by religious precepts, one cannot dissociate purely religious from practical concerns.

Saharan legal records begin with the *nawāzil* of Muhammad b. al-Mukhtār b. Al-'Amish, (1626/7-1695/6), who is considered the first *faqīh* or Islamic jurist of

²⁷ For a list of other works of jurisprudence found in western African libraries (Mali and Mauritania), see Abdel Wedoud ould Cheikh, "Nomadisme, Islam et Pouvoir Politique" vol. II, pp. 387-395

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Muhammad Akram Khan, *Glossary of Islamic Economics*. London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1990, pp. 13-22.

Mauritania³⁰ He was from Shingīl, and like several important Saharan scholars, including Sīdi Abdallah b. al-Haj Ibrāhīm discussed below, he is from the Idaw'ālī group.³¹ Sīdi Abdallah b. al-Ḥaj Ibrāhīm is considered, alongside Shaykh Muḥammad al-Māmi, Muḥammad b. al-Bāba, and Mukhtār b. Būnā, to be part of a new movement of Saharan scholars who took to reinterpreting the law.³² Shaykh Muḥammad al-Māmī's *Kitāb al-Bādiya* is especially regarded as a landmark legal treatise seeking to apply a more lax interpretation to the Malīki jurisprudence.³³ Nevertheless, the first jurist Al-'Amish was a role model, carefully studied and often emulated, by most Saharan *faqīh*. In many ways, Muḥammad b. Al-'Amish set the tone and the course of Saharan legal discourse.

Sīdi Abdallah b. al-Haj Ibrāhīm (1739/40-1816) was from the region around Tijikja, in the western Tagant. He is still venerated as the most important scholar of his time. As his name indicates, he went on the pilgrimage to Mecca. Along the way, he

³⁰ For other works by al-'Amish besides the *nawazīl* see *Fatḥa al-shukūr fī ma'rifa l'yan ulma' al-Takrūr*, Abi Abdallah al-Tālab Muhammad b. Abi Bubakar al-ṣadīq al-Bartali al-Walāti. Bairut: Dar algharb al-islami, pp. 40, 75, 79, 91, 114-7, 160-1, 171-2, 181, 193.

³¹ For brief biographies of Muhammad b. al-Mukhtar b. al-'Amish and Sidi Abdallah b. al-haj Ibrahim see Aḥmad b. Al-Amīn As-Shinqīl, *Al-wasīl fī tarājim udabā' Shinqīl*. Cairo: Maktaba al-Khajī, 1911, pp. 37-40 and Abdallah b. Youba b. Khalifa "Les aspects économiques et sociaux de l'oued Tijigja: de la fondation du Ksar à l'indépendance (1660-1960)." Doctoral thesis, Université Paris I, 1990-1991, pp. 150-160.

³² Charles & E. Stewart, *Islam and Social Order*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973, p. 69, fn. 1.

³³ For a discussion of Shaykh Muḥammad al-Māmī's reformist approach to Islamic jurisprudence, see Abdel Wedoudould Cheikh, "Nomadisme, Islam et Pouvoir Politique" Vol. III, pp. 799-808. See also Norris, *Shingīl Folk Literature and Song*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 92-101. His *Kitāb al-Bādiya* (The book of the Desert) is an important study of Saharan jurisprudence. I have a copy of the handwritten manuscript which I intend to read when I revise this dissertation for publication.

spent time in Morocco and Egypt.³⁴ He even met the Sultan of Morocco, Sīdi Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallah with whom he enjoyed a famous intellectual exchange. In his *nawāzil*, or the compilation of the legal problems he was asked to solve and deliberated on, Sīdi Abdallah b. al-Ḥaj Ibrāhīm dealt with similar legal questions to al-‘Amish while addressing the socio-economic circumstances of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Based on the *nawāzil* of these two scholars, and a small sample of legal sources by Aḥmad al-Ṣaghīr (1820-1865), Muḥammad Yahya b. al-Tālab ‘Abdallah al-Walāṭī (1843-1912) and Isma‘īl b. Bāba b. al-Shaykh Sidiyya (c.1890s-1970s), I examine Saharan economic order from the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. It is important to note that in western African history, several notable women were active jurists. Unfortunately, I was unable to locate any written evidence of their legal deliberations. In Tishīt, for instance, Faṭīmatu mint Shaykhnā Buyahmad was known for her brilliance in Islamic law. Born in a prominent scholarly family of Tishīt, she began her career by writing *fatāwā* in the name of her father.³⁵

³⁴ Aḥmad b. Al-Amīn As-Shinqīṭī, *Al-wasīl*, p. 38.

³⁵ Interview in Tishīt with Dada b. Idda (04/26/97). Faṭīmatu mint Shaykhnā Bu Aḥmad died in 1957. Another woman from Tishīt, Faṭīmatu mint Zaīni is also remembered for her knowledge of Islamic *fiqh*. For a brief discussion of Muslim women scholars in western Africa, and the need for more research in this area, see Jean Boyd & Beverly Mack, *Collected Works of Nana Asma’u, Daughter of Usman dan Fodiyo (1793-1864)*. East Lansing: MSU Press, 1997, pp. 3-5. Boyd and Mack misspelled the name of Khajijatu

Currencies, Measures, Valuation and Sales³⁶

Written at the dawn of the eighteenth century, Muhammad b. Al-'Amish's *nawāzil* dealt with numerous queries posed by traders concerning Islamic economics in the area of valuation and equivalencies. Al-'Amish tackled this subject in a series of questions carefully reasoned with much erudition and an impressive knowledge of logic, as well as Islamic law. Throughout the nineteenth century, a range of monies regulated exchange in western Africa, including international coins, gold dust, salt bars, cowry shells, manillas, units of livestock, and cotton strips.³⁷ Because of the multiplicity of currencies, and the lack of a unified market system, it is hardly surprising that many concerns of Muslim traders would revolve around issues of exchange, namely questions about currencies, measures, valuation, and sales.

mint al-'aqa, the scholar of the Awlād Daymān. Other famous Muslim women scholars in Mauritania include Aminatū mint Yūsuf of the Idaw Ṭsh and Shara Kūba of the Wolof Fāl.

³⁶ The discussion that follows was very much inspired by the teachings of Hamdan b. Attah, a prominent and extremely open-minded *faqīh* in Mauritania. He was Minister of Islamic Orientation under Mukhtar b. Daddah (Mauritania's first president). Interviews were carried out at his old home in the Cinquième (June 2, 3, & 6 1997) and his new home in Sokojim (June 22, 1998). During these sessions, Hamdan and I read the *Nawāzil* of Muhammad al-Mukhtar b. Al-'Amish, Sidi Abdallah b. al-Haj Ibrahīm, Muhammad Fall b. Mtali, Muhammad Sālim o/ al-Iman, and Maḥnand Bāba b. A'bayd, with particular focus on the segments regarding sales and credit arrangements. This exercise and Hamdan's commentary were invaluable lessons that shaped my understanding of Saharan jurisprudence. Photocopies of the *nawāzil* (which are not yet published) were obtained at the Xeroxing boutique of Muhammad Abd al-Wahāb b. Muhammad Al-Amin, Imam of the 'Abās mosque, and manager of its manuscripts, Nouakchott. Other *fātāwa*, discussed below, were found in several private libraries in Tishit.

³⁷ Ann McDougall is the expert in the history of salt in western African history. See her dissertation, and numerous articles. For a good summary, see for instance: "'Salts of the Western Saharan: Myths, mysteries and historical significance," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. 23, no.2, 1990.

It is quite significant that al-ʿAmish should begin his section entitled *nawāzil al-bayʿ*, or cases of sales, by deliberating on the question of the bar of salt (*adīla al-milh*).³⁸ Salt was extracted in the shape of bars, or slabs, from several Saharan salt mines.³⁹ Since salt was a major means of exchange, the main currency between western Africans in particular, it is only natural that jurists should discuss it at length. As Hamdan b. Attah argues, the manner in which Al-ʿAmish and his successors discussed the salt bar is an indication that “salt held the same place as money does in the mentality of Mauritians of today.”⁴⁰ Salt bars were bought, sold, stored, loaned or “rented,” inherited and consumed, sharing the same monetary functions and more than as silver coins or cowries. Although they tended to have a customary size, salt bars were never carved with precise measurement and therefore were not exactly standardized. The *ʿadīla* (plur. *ʿadaʿil*) is the Ḥasanīya word for salt bar, and it probably stems from the Arabic word *ʿadl* for just, equal, balanced. This might have something to do with the fact that salt bars were “balanced” on each side of the camel’s back. Salt bars from the Ijīl mines, in what came to be known as northern Mauritania, were approximately 30cm wide, 90cm long, and 5cm thick, while weighing around 25-30kg. The salt bar of Tawdanni was whiter, harder and heavier. While approximately the same length, it was slightly thinner and wider.⁴¹ Half an *ʿadīla* was called a *fāṣ* (and was often the payment of the caravan worker, see

³⁸ Ann McDougall’ “A Qadi from Shinqiti and the Question of Salt: The Nawazil of Mohammed bin al Mukhtar bin La’amech (late 17th century).” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Philadelphia (11/13/99).

³⁹ McDougall “The Ijil Salt Industry: Its Role in the Pre-colonial Economy of Western Sudan. PhD. Dissertation, University of Birmingham, UMI, 1980.

⁴⁰ Interview in Nouakchott with Hamdan b. Attah (06/06/97).

chapter three), while the term *gandūz* (plur. *agnādiz*; word of Berber origin) was a bulk measure equal to twenty *'adīla* or salt bars.⁴²

The debate about salt valuation would consume many Saharan jurists in the same way the legal definition of gum arabic would be the subject of numerous deliberations.⁴³ It centered on the measurements and quality of salt. Saharan jurists debated the tenuous qualifications of salt valuation, discussing whether salt should be measured by the quality/origin, and how to establish exchange equivalencies either by quality, weight, by volume (*wazn*, *walla wazn al-kaīli*), or by custom (*'āda*).⁴⁴ Al-*'Amish* admitted that salt measures could not be established with accuracy (*la yakūn dhābitih*) and there was no consensus about size or quality.⁴⁵ Writing at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Sīdi

⁴¹ Curtin gives the dimensions for the Tawdanni bar of 100cm long, 40 cm and 3 cm thick while weighing between 35 and 40 kg. *Economic Change*, p. 224.

⁴² Interview with Dadda b. Idda, Tishit (4/26/97). Capitaine D. Brosset wrote that a *ganduz* (*guendouz*) was 200 salt bars in "La Saline d'Idjil," *Afrique Française: Renseignements Coloniaux*, no. 11 1933, p. 262.

⁴³ Maḥand Bāba wuld 'A-bayd (d. 1860), a jurist from the Trarza region of Mauritania, wrote an important *fatwā* of gum arabic which discussed its quality as food or not food. He established that it was considered food, because it was used in medicine, some dishes and in times of food scarcity. His own student, al-Hārith b. Maḥand b. al-Shuqrāwī, took the opposite view, declaring that gum arabic, which was a major item in western African exchange, could be exchanged for a delay and therefore could be defined as non-food. Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh from the University of Nouakchott is researching this Saharan debate.

⁴⁴ Muhammad b. Almukhtar b. 'Amish, *Nawāzil*, p. 58-60. Manuscript copied from the original copy of al-Khalil Md b. al-Shaykh Md Yehdih b. Abaass al-Maliki by Abd Allah As-Salam b. Yaḥdih b. Abd al-Wadud (1394). Copy owned by Muhammad Abd al-Wahab b. Muhammad Al-Amin, Imam of the 'Abaas mosque, and director of its manuscripts, Nouakchott. Curtin discusses the system of equivalencies in his landmark study of *Economic Change*. See also Jean Ensminger who discusses a similar system of equivalences among the Orma of East Africa. *Making a Market, the Institutional Transformation of an African Society*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, chapter 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 59.

‘Abdallah b. al-Ḥaj Ibrāhīm came up with the same conclusion.⁴⁶ After recounting the legal ponderings of Saharan jurists on the fungibility of salt bars, he concluded:

the bars of salt are fungible (*mithlīya*) because salt is a unit like gold for gold, paper for paper, seed for seed, barley for barley, dates for dates and salt for salt...[Although] salt does not have a legal (*sharʿī*) standard measure, it has a customary standard measure [even though it is not precise].⁴⁷

His explanation was based directly on the rules laid out by Sidi Khalīl. But Sīdi Adballah b. al-Haj Ibrāhīm admitted that the real problem regarding the standard valuation of salt arises when it is used in credit transactions (discussed below).

Scholars also discussed the question of the origin and relative quality of the salt to determine its value.⁴⁸ Just like on the question of bar size, they concluded in the end that the quality of salt could be determined only by tradition, meaning the customary sizing of the bars.⁴⁹ The two largest Saharan salt quarries (*sabkha*) supplying the regions of western African were Ijīl and Tawdanni.⁵⁰ According to historian Aḥmad b. Al-Amīn as-Shinqīti writing in the early 1900s, Ijīl produced the higher quality salt preferred by western Africans above that of Tawdanni.⁵¹ Another mined salt pan, besides Aglīl (mentioned by Al-ʿAmish, but not located) is the one located north of Ndar (Senegal)

⁴⁶ *Nawāzil*, Sidi Abdallah b. al-Haj Ibrāhīm (manuscript without page numbers). He makes constant references to al-ʿAmish’s judgments on similar issues.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* Sidi Abdallah explains the entire debate around salt in a three page discussion.

⁴⁸ *Nawāzil*, al-ʿAmish, *ibid.*, p.59.

⁴⁹ Interview Hamdan b. Attah (Nouackhott 06/06/97). Ann McDougall makes a similar argument in her 1999 ASA paper presentation (see fn 38).

⁵⁰ Mention is made of salt from Aglīl in Al-ʿAmish, p. 59.

⁵¹ Aḥmad b. Al-Amīn As-Shinqīṭī, *Al-wasīl* p. 460. I was able to confirm this through inquiries in Mali, Senegal and Mauritania.

known as N 'terert which means in Znāga (Berber) “the one of salt.”⁵² The salt trade from this quarry, transported along the Senegal River, was such that in the late nineteenth century it impelled the Devès family of St. Louis to attempt to purchase the rights to it from the emir of the Trarza region (see chapter seven).

The question of salt valuation was central to that of sales in western Africa. Al-'Amish deliberated on the general rule in Islam, expressed in abovementioned hadith, which acknowledges the sale of one kind of good for another of the same kind. This particular case had to do with the sale of food for food, as in salt for millet. It concerned the legal definition of salt as food or spice, and the question of whether spices could be categorized as food or condiment. In Islam, exchanging one good for another good of the same kind for a profit (with a delay) is prohibited because it is usurious. So, for example, to sell salt bars for units of millet was lawful only if salt was considered a spice and not a food, which made the transaction of one kind of good (spice) for another type of good (food) lawful. Moreover, to be considered lawful, at least one of the goods exchanged had to be sold in recognizable measures. In this case, salt bars were recognized as units of exchange by tradition and so, most jurists sanctioned such transactions.

Sīdi Abdallah b. al-Ḥaj Ibrāhīm was asked about the sale of a good of an unknown measurement for one of known measurement. For example, selling three *adīla* of salt for six unknown quantities of millet. He ruled that this was not lawful, arguing, in quite mathematical terms, that a known can never be equal to an unknown. Along similar lines, the seventeenth century *faqīh* al-'Amish was asked about the sale of a quantity in a

⁵² Yahya Ould Bara, personal communication (01/09/97)

large container (*thabia*: basket made of cloth) against a quantity in a small container in a situation of necessity when the people have no other recourse; and he ruled that only in situations of need was it lawful to exchange in such a way. He also was asked whether exchanging these goods with non-established measurements or weights was lawful. The example given was the sale of an unspecified quantity of milk for another non-determined quantity (in a *gharfa* or small bowl) of millet. Al-'Amish ruled that the qualitative equivalence (*Al-kaifīa*) does not require quantitative knowledge. In other words, equivalency in quality is more important than equivalency in quantity. In short, equals in quality are equal and therefore exchangeable, whether they are weighed (or otherwise measured) or not.⁵³

It is important to note that in Muslim western Africa, like in many regions of the Muslim world, the main unit for measuring cereal was the *mudd* (plur. *amdad*). The *mudd* was used to measure millet, barley, henna, baobab flour, red peppers, dates, and other dry goods such as gum arabic and imported consumables such as green tea and rice. According to Islamic law it is both a weight and measure, but its exact proportions are regionally determined. The Hanafites established that the *mudd* was equal to two *ratl* equal to 1.032 liters or 815.39 grams.⁵⁴ For other jurists, a *mudd* measured 1-1/3 *ratl* or

⁵³ *Nawāzil*, p. 49. "so as for the sale with an unknown measure (*al-miqiyās al-majhūl*) in the presence of a known measure (*al-miqiyās al-ma'lūm*) it is not allowed to make a verbal deal and explain [the transaction] with the unknown...and according Imam Malik the purchase of food under the condition that it is in a *gedha* (Saharan type wooden bowl) or in *qasa'a* (equivalent word in Classical Arabic) and not with the measure of the people then is prohibited and therefore [so is] the forward purchase (*al-salam*, forward buying) of it."

⁵⁴ Khan, *Glossary of Islamic Economics*. p. 95. According to Albert Leriche, the *mudd* is a very ancient measure. In Hebrew to measure is "madad", in Latin it is "modus." The "muid" used to be a measure for cereals in France. See Leriche, "Mesures maures: Note préliminaire," *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'Afrique noire*, Tome XIII, no. 4, octobre 1951, p.1229.

0.687 liters or 543 grams.⁵⁵ Each *mudd* was divided into numbers of *nafga*, and the *mudd* of the Prophet Muhammad (*mudd al-nabi*) was equal to four *nafga*.⁵⁶

In the Sahara, tall bowl-like containers representing one *mudd* were carved out of wood (usually in *comiphora africana* or *balanites aegyptiaca* wood).⁵⁷ Several regions in western Africa had their distinct *mudd*. French colonial administrator and scholar Albert Leriche estimated in kilograms the size of several *mudd* prevailing in colonial Mauritania (Atar: 1kg 400; Shinqīt: 2kg 450; Tagānt: 3kg 500).⁵⁸ Leriche also claims that the *mudd* in the southwestern region of Trarza weighed approximately 3 kilograms. But it must be stated that in western Africa, before the influence of colonial measures, the *mudd* was always measured by volume and *not* by weight. The sizes of the various *mudd* relative to one another give some indication of the proportional wealth of each region.

The largest *mudd* (plur. *amdād*) of all was that of Tishīt (Map 1). With its twelve *nafga*, it was the biggest *mudd*, according to Dada b. Idda (an important notable of Tishīt and owner of Tishīt's largest library), because of the economic importance of this town in its heyday. As he argued, "the bigger the *mudd* the stronger the currency."⁵⁹ I would add that Tishīt's location near the millet and other cereal producing regions of the Sahel might explain its prominence in the cereals market. It is also interesting that although Tishīt was considered part of the Tagānt region, the Tagānt had a different *mudd* which

⁵⁵ Khan, *Glossary of Islamic Economics*. p. 95.

⁵⁶ Interview in Nouakchott with Muhammad al-Hanishi b. Muhammad Saalah (06/25/97).

⁵⁷ Leriche, "Mesures Maures," p. 1228.

⁵⁸ Ibid, pp.1227-1256.

had a different *mudd* which was three times smaller than that of Tishīt.⁶⁰ Trade records show that both size *mudd* were used simultaneously, with the Tagānt *mudd* serving to measure the smaller amounts (see for example a list of *mudd* of millet distributed from a caravan of Tishīt returning from exchanging salt for millet). The *mudd* of Shingīti, in comparison, was one quarter smaller (equal to seven *nafga*), whereas the *mudd* of Wadān (a Saharan city which, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, was in economic decline) was half the size of the *mudd* of Tishit. The *mudd* of Atar, a town which would become the economic capital of colonial Mauritania in the first decades of the twentieth century, was the smallest of all (four *nafga*).

It is worth mentioning that certain regions and groups used multiples of the *mudd* for tax or “annual gift” purposes.⁶¹ Such was the case in the regions bordering Senegal where the *tanitchfāga*, a Berber-Wolof word meaning charge/fee of the marabout, was equal to thirty *mudd* (presumably of the Trarza region) and represented an established amount given to Muslim leaders. Another was the *mudd ḥagg* also used in the southern regions in contractual arrangements (salary) with workers such as well diggers and was the equivalent to two *mudd al-nabi* (or 2 kg). The “moule” of Senegal which Panet

⁵⁹ Interview in Tishit with Dada b. Idda, April 1997 (notebook 5). The *mudd* of Tishit was photographed in Dada’s library. See photographs of the *mudd* of Walata and Shingiti.

⁶⁰ Interview with Muhammadu b. Ahamdi, Tishit, (4/23/97). Ahamdi gave me the following approximate equivalencies for the different *mudd*: Tagant: 4 kg, Tishit: 12 kg, *mudd* Adrar: 4 glasses. I never found out the proportions of the Walata *mudd*.

⁶¹ See Leriche for the following examples, “Mesures Maures,” pp. 1230-1235.

explains is equivalent to two liters and is used to measure millet, is clearly the same mudd.⁶²

In the course of the twentieth century, western African traders and consumers began using the metric measuring systems of the colonial rulers. The kilogram (*kīl*),⁶³ half kilogram (*lībīr*), and the ton (*tūn*), as well as other measurements, such as the barrique or quintal (*barīga*), were used especially to measure peanuts in Senegal.⁶⁴ Some local measures came to be quantified with the new imported containers. Such was the case with the *nafga* which was measured with the small shot glass of 8 centiliters which became the standard tea glass in the twentieth century western Africa. These glasses, imported from France via Marseilles, were not only common tea drinking utensils in Senegal, Mali and Mauritania, but also they became measuring receptacles for small quantities. During the Second World War, a new measure came into existence, the *ga'r al-kās* or the bottom of the glass turned upside down.⁶⁵ At that time, in the early 1940s, the quantity of tea leaves which fit in the small hollow at the bottom of a tea shot glass turned upside down sold for 5 French Francs. In those difficult years of famine and deprivation, tea portions were even sold in smaller quantities such as in bottle caps.⁶⁶ According to one of my informants, after the recession in the late 1940s, the size of the

⁶² Panet, *Première exploration*, p. 159 fn. 1. Where Panet explains that it is a “measure containing the capacity of 2 liters”; in other words a measure of volume.

⁶³ It is worth mentioning that the origin of the word kilogram is Arabic (from *kāla*, *yakīl*, to measure, to weigh).

⁶⁴ Leriche mentioned many other measures which were imported such as the Kar (quart), the wichem (huitième or half a quart). “Mesures Maures,” p. 1232. The year 1911 is remembered as ‘*ām barīga ugīya*’ the year the quintal of peanuts was worth 5 French Francs (See Interview with Maymūna mint Aḥmad Targa Nouakchott, premier, 5/21/97); also mentioned in conversation with Abdel Wedoud ould Cheikh (4/97).

⁶⁵ Leriche, “Mesures Maures,” p. 1235.

naḥḡa in the town of Atar rose from five to six shot glasses.⁶⁷ By the 1950s, as Leriche explains, “For the retail sale of butter, oil, and several other liquid products such as vinegar and bleach, the small tea glass [was] the unit of measure in the shops of the Moors of St. Louis. There are 12 ½ per liter.”⁶⁸

Because of the multiple sizes of the *mudd*, trading between regions involved converting measures between different zones. Although no evidence of legal deliberations on the *mudd* zones was found, it is likely that this matter was brought to the attention of some scholars who might have left a written record. It must be noted that variations in weights and measures were extremely common in other places of the world before the mid-nineteenth century. As Marion Johnson reminds us,

[i]n the 1830s every trading city in Italy had its own standards, and Spain had at least four different standards, though most of Germany and the Baltic were using the Cologne standard. In many countries, England included, different weights were used for gold and for the weighing of other commodities. By this time, the metric weights were replacing the traditional system.⁶⁹

The *raṭl* (*irṭal*), mentioned above, was another common measurement used in trans-Saharan commercial transactions. It was a weight of approximately 445 grams used to measure lightweight goods such as ostrich feathers, a common trade item sold to Europeans in the second half of the nineteenth century. The *qinṭār* (*qanāṭīr*) was a varying weight of 100 *raṭl* or about 45 kilograms.⁷⁰ Another western African measure, which might have varied from one market to the next, is the *mithqāl* of gold or silver. The

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 1235.

⁶⁷ Interview Muhammad al-Hanṣi b. Muhammad Ṣalāḥ (Nouakchott, 6/25/97).

⁶⁸ Leriche, “Measures Maures,” p. 1237.

⁶⁹ Marion Johnson, “The Nineteenth-Century Gold ‘Mithqal’ in West and North Africa,” *Journal of African History*, IX, 4 (1968), pp. 549.

mithqāl (from the Arabic *thiql* plur. *ithqāl* for weight) was the standard measure for weighing gold dust. Compared to the *mudd*, the *mithqāl* varied only slightly in size across a large area including much of West and North Africa and regions of the Middle East. In western Africa, the *mithqāl* was used to measure gold dust and silver (usually in the form of minted coins). It was the only pre-colonial measure, besides the *irṭal*, which corresponded to an actual weight as opposed to a quantity. The *mithqāl al-dhahab*, or gold mithqal, held a fairly standard weight between 4.25 and 4.50 grams with slight variations due to weighing techniques.⁷¹ In nineteenth century western Africa, it was measured with small scales and various seeds or grains (from carub and wheat to pumpkin). The *mithqāl a-fiḍī*, or silver mithqal, was priced between 1/4th and 1/15th of the gold mithqal, but these proportions fluctuated significantly with the market price of gold. In 1850s Tishīt, for example, silver was pegged to the gold standard at an even four-to-one.⁷²

Besides being a weight, it is clear from local trade records, that the *mithqāl* was also a unit of account (we will return to this in chapter five).⁷³ Sīdi Abdallah b. al-Haj

⁷⁰ Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, Arabic-English*. Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1980, pp. 345, 793.

⁷¹ See Panet for an example of the variations in the weighing of gold in Gulmīm, pp. 162-163

⁷² See Appendix 6B and discussed in chapter 5.

⁷³ Several scholars have written about the use of the *mithqāl* in western Africa, the most authoritative is Timothy Garrard. See Johnson, "The Nineteenth-Century Gold 'Mithqal,'" Leriche, "Mesures Maures," p. 1248; Timothy Garrard, *Akan Weights and the Gold Trade* (Longman: London, 1980) and "Myth and Metrology: The Early Trans-Saharan Gold Trade," *Journal of African History*, vol. 23, no. 4 (1982), pp. 443-461, especially pp. 455-459.

Ibrāhīm dealt with the exchange rate between *mithqāl* and *dinār*.⁷⁴ Presumably equivalent to the Roman solidis,⁷⁵ the *dinār* became the basic monetary unit in Islamic law and was “technically” a gold coin weighing one *mithqāl*.⁷⁶ In his answer, Sīdi Abdallah b. al-Haj Ibrāhīm explains that the *dinār* was equivalent to 24 carats (like the *mithqāl*) and that from his understanding of the last legal valuation, it weighed 4.15 grams (although he does not mention how this weight is measured locally).

On the question of valuation, Muhammad b. Al-‘Amish was asked about the *beṣa*. His discussion of this good provides clear evidence that by the late seventeenth century this cotton unit had already become a recognized measure and medium of exchange. He was asked whether the *beṣa* could be considered a “known or an estimated quantity,” to which he answered affirmatively that the *beṣa* was a recognized measure (*al-beṣa al-mithliya*). The *beṣa*, which became an interface currency in western Africa, was a blue cotton cloth measuring 15 by 1.5 meters.⁷⁷ One *beṣa* was divided into two *milḥafa* (or 7.5x1.5 m); the *milḥafa* being the veil/robe typically worn by Saharan women. The word “*beṣa*” most certainly came from the Spanish/Portuguese “*pieza*” for piece, a term which also means coin, such as the famous Spanish “piece of eight.” The French, and possibly the British as well, called this unit of cotton which came to be a common currency of

⁷⁴ *Nawāzil*.

⁷⁵ As per Garrard, “Gold Trade,” p. 450-1.

⁷⁶ Khan, *Glossary*, p. 34.

wholesale exchange, the *guinée*. The term *guinée* is very close to the British “guinea” (a gold coin worth 21 shillings minted between 1663 and 1813) named after the area where the gold to make the coin was first obtained.⁷⁸ The *beṣa* used in wholesale transactions, was divided into thirty arms (*ḡirāʿ*; the measure of which varies across the Muslim world), which measured about half a meter each. Small-size transactions in cloth tended to be expressed in *ḡirāʿ*. There were all kinds of different *beṣa*, including the *beṣa asshigga* which was twice the size (i.e. 30m) as the basic *beṣa* and was also called *al-makhzūma* because it was typically sewn together or “sealed with a ribbon to keep it intact. When we wanted to open it, we cut the ribbon. It was always thirty meters.”⁷⁹

Jane Guyer suggests using the term “interface currencies” instead of stereotypical concepts such as “primitive monies” often employed to describe cowries, manillas, metal rods, and other imports which served as monies.⁸⁰ These are defined as “currencies largely created from the outside, and whose capacities to permeate economic relationships across the borderland were kept limited.” The blue *guinées* or *beṣas* imported by the French and the British from India are an excellent example of an interface currency. They functioned as a medium of exchange, store/unit of value, and

⁷⁷ Richard Roberts, “Guinée Cloth: Linked Transformations in Production within France's Empire.” *Cahiers D'Etudes Africaines*, 32 (1992); Webb, *Desert Frontier*.

⁷⁸ One guinea was originally 20 shilling until the rate was changed in 1717. The fact that this term came into use in French western Africa might be explained by the fact that the British occupied the Senegalese capital twice (see chapter 3).

⁷⁹ Interview in Shingŋi with 'Abdarraahmān wuld Muḥammad al-Ḥanṣhi (02/27/97).

⁸⁰ Jane Guyer, “Introduction: The Currency Interface and Its Dynamics,” *Money Matters: Instability, Values and Social Payments in the Modern History of West African Communities*. J. Guyer (Ed.) Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995, p. 8.

standard for deferred payment and “had all the attributes of modern money.”⁸¹ Like salt bars and cowries, they were subject to slight variations in size, color (hues of indigo blue), quality and origin, factors which clearly affected their valuation.⁸² They also were consumed by western Africans who wore the blue cloth, which is why Europeans often referred to them as “blue men.” Like many other currencies regulating trade in nineteenth and early twentieth century western Africa, *beṣas* were directly tied to definitions of social identification, like in the case of Teke cloth of the lower Congo region.⁸³

The cowry shell currency was especially used in Mali while it circulated at a lower velocity in the regions of Senegal and in the Mauritanian interior.⁸⁴ I came across several documents which describe exchanges in cowries, too few, however, to make any judgment at this point.⁸⁵ From the overwhelming evidence in the written record of Timbuktu, cowries were a major currency there, imported from all directions. Although I did not see many cowries in Tishīt (besides the ones used for fortune telling or *laghzāna*), some elders still remember them being transacted. For instance, a string of 140 cowries

⁸¹ Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, New York, 1973, p. 71.

⁸² Variations include the classic *khunt*, the *chandhura*, the *manqūsa*, the *filatūr*, *beṣa al-nīla* and other types of *beṣas*.

⁸³ Marie-Claude Duprè “Raphia Monies Among the Teke: Their Origin and Control;” see also Sarra Berry, ‘Stable Prices, Unstable Values: Some Thoughts on Monetization and the Meaning of Transactions in West African Economies,’ both in *Money Matters*, Jane Guyer ed.

⁸⁴ See Marion Johnson and Jan Hogendorn, *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade*, CUP, 1986; Ivor Wilks & Phyllis Ferguson “The Cowry Currencies in West Africa.” *Journal of African History*, vol. 2, nos. 1&2.

⁸⁵ Most of the documents I collected expressing transactions in cowries come from Timbuktu where they were a major currency (CEDRAB). I expect a thorough investigation in the archives of Walāta, Tishīt and Timbuktu, and other locations in the northern Niger River, would allow for better understanding of the cowry currency zone. Moreover, trade records from northwestern and northeastern Africa generally, should inform about the Saharan trade in cowry shells. I was especially eager to find evidence of the cowry currency throughout my fieldwork. But from oral evidence and the little documentation I did consult, I am inclined to argue that the currency zone included Mali, south-central and southeastern Mauritania, and the

was called a *ḥabl*, whereas the small unit of 40 cowries was called *khaīthu* (perhaps because they were sewn together).⁸⁶

Three contracts illustrate the use of cowry currency in economies of central and southeastern Mauritania. A sales contract from seventeenth century Tishīt details the sale of a roll of cloth (*infīa*) for 3140 cowries.⁸⁷ A document from Walāta, which most unfortunately, and curiously, is not dated, details the sale of a bull for 23 000 cowries.⁸⁸ Another contract found in Tishīt is a sale of a land (of unknown exact measures but with water access--*arḍ 'ayn*) enclosing seventeen date palm trees for the amount of 40 000 cowries. This sales contract, concluded in 1900 (1318 h) between Yadis b. al-Amīn and Muḥammad b. Sīdi b. al-Haj 'Aly (grandson of an important trader discussed in chapter four), was to be effective as soon as the first had freed the land from pawnship (mortgaged for two *beṣas*).⁸⁹

Among the pastoral and nomadic societies, livestock were often used as a means of exchange. In fact, for many, the cow or the camel were the ultimate symbols of wealth and savings. A very rich vocabulary exists in Ḥasanīya describing with precision the quality of different animals in terms of age, origin, and other important variables. For

eastern regions of Senegal (in other words I would extend the cowry zone as compared to Johnson and Hogendorn's *The Shell Money*, map p.108).

⁸⁶ Conversation in Tishīt with Dāda b. Idda, Tishīt (4/28/97)—notebook 2b; Interview in Tishīt with Baba Ghazzāl (04/25/97).

⁸⁷ Contract Sīd Aḥmad b. Sīdi b. Bubakkar and Muhammad b. Aḥmad al-zaīn alṭāhir (not dated, but approx. beg. 12th c. Hijra – early 18th c). Family archives of Shakhna Buyahmad (Tishīt – photographed 4/97).

⁸⁸ Tālab Aḥmad Library Document no. 1048 (37). Walāta (Photo 04/18/97)

instance, a *dīa* sheep was an adult of medium quality ready to be exchanged for pecuniary transactions, or to pay a fine such as blood-money (*dīa*).⁹⁰ For the purposes of exchange, there were well known animal equivalency equations. For instance, a sheep ready for consumption was equal to two sheep less than a year old, or four young not yet weaned sheep plus one *dīa* sheep or three weaned sheep plus one young sheep with two teeth or two weaned sheep. As Dubié argues, “the different types of animals formed a *real monetary system* which used to allow for the valuation and payment of dowries, exchanges of animals and merchandise, the dividing up of inheritances, the payment of debts and usurious loans.”⁹¹ Others remarked that Africans held in slavery were also exchanged in a similar fashion. In the early twentieth century, for example, a French colonial official claimed that “the slave is the banknote [sic!] of Africa.”⁹²

On the subject of slavery, I found little legal documentation although trade records detailing transactions in slaves are common.⁹³ Aḥmad al-Ṣaghīr (1820-1868), the famous *faqīh* and prolific writer of nineteenth century Tishīt, was asked to rule on a

⁸⁹ Family archives Sharf b. Muhammad al-Sharīf, MS 1 recto-verso, photographed 5/4/97 (Tishīt).

⁹⁰ See Paul Dubié, “la Vie Matérielle des Maures,” *Mélanges Ethnographiques*. Mémoires de l’Institut Français d’Afrique Noire. No. 23, Dakar, 1953, pp. 219-221. For a discussion on blood money in southwestern Sahara, see Raymond Taylors, “Warriors, Tributaries, Blood Money and Political Transformation in Nineteenth-Century Mauritania.” *Journal of African History*, vol. 36, no. 3 (1995), pp. 419-41.

⁹¹ Dubié, “La Vie Matérielle des Maures,” p. 220 (emphasis mine).

⁹² Georges Poulet, in Paul Lovejoy & A. S. Kanya-Forstner eds., *Slavery and its Abolition in French West Africa: The Official Report of G. Poulet, E. Roume, and G. Deherme*. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1994, p. 39. This is the same Frenchman who wrote about Mauritanian society: “Nothing about the Moors’ way of life corresponds to what we [the French] know, what we are used to seeing. Here all is vague, imprecise and flitting...” *Les Maures de l’Afrique occidentale française*. (Paris, 1904), p. 2, quoted in Stewart, *Islam and Social Order*, p. 54.

⁹³ Slavery was a taboo subject with foreigners at precisely the time of my fieldwork than the existence of such documentation. The documentation that I consulted might have been censored by the librarians. I was very careful in discussing the subject of slavery for fear of alerting my hosts and risking losing access altogether.

question pertaining the ownership of an enslaved woman.⁹⁴ A wealthy woman of Tishīt was given as a gift from a relative the property of half a female slave. It was soon discovered that the slave in question was pregnant. The question the woman asked Aḥmad al-Ṣaghīr concerned her share as half owner of the progeny of the female slave. So, the woman posed, if the slave woman gave birth to twins, did she, as the half owner, have the right to one twin, or half of both twins? Unfortunately, I only found the question and not the answer to this *fatwā* in the family archives of Aḥmad Al-Ṣaghīr's family in Tishīt. This case does illustrate quite vividly the extent to which slaves, like animals, were valued as a divisible commodity/currency. However, it is important to note that slaves, like cattle, differed from other forms of currency in that, through reproduction, they bore interest. These examples demonstrate how issues of wealth and ethics were carefully studied and debated in Muslim western Africa.

***Nawāzil al-Qarḍ*, Loan Cases, and the Centrality of Credit**

Long-distance trade was made possible through the availability of credit in a vibrant, flexible and highly personalized financial market (chapter 5). Credit was key to commercial operations as both a means to access capital to engage in trade and a means to accumulate capital by transferring it temporarily to trustworthy partners. Trust between Muslim partners who shared a common religion and a legal framework, and had

⁹⁴ Family archives of Aḥmad al-Ṣaghīr, AS7 recto, photographed 4/28/97 (Tishīt).

access to religious authorities who enforced the law, was the building block of credit operations.

In the *nawāzil* of Muhammad b. al-Mukhtār b. Al-'Amish there is a special section entitled *nawāzil al-qarḍ* or loan cases.⁹⁵ Naturally, Al-'Amish begins his discussion of loan cases with the question of salt loans. He concludes, as explained above, that loans in salt bars should be calculated per unit measured/carved by the custom of the country.⁹⁶ There was no established agreement about the precise dimensions of the salt bar and its volume. Workers carved salt bars out of the quarry into a fairly standard rectangular slab but its accuracy was subject to human workmanship.⁹⁷ This lack of an exact standard made the reimbursement of loans in salt bars quite problematic since bars could never be measured with precision and were therefore subject to contestations. Since there was no consensus about the bar's exact measurements, problems arising from the loaning of bars could never be adequately resolved.

The problem of salt valuation was recognized by Sīdi Abdallah b. al-Haj Ibrahīm who studied salt finance, and in particular, the repayment of loans in salt bars. Precise repayment of the exact amount of bars--if measured in volume or weight instead of in numbers of bars--always could be subject to dispute (*ikhtilāf*). But he admitted that there was no legal way around this problem due to the lack of a precise standard of valuation.⁹⁸ Yet the difficulty of salt valuation was not an impediment to active credit operations.

⁹⁵ *Nawāzil*, p. 60-64.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 60-1.

⁹⁷ McDougall, "The Salt Industry of Ijil."

⁹⁸ *Nawāzil*, Sidi Abdallah b. al-Haj Ibrahīm.

It is clear from Sīdi Abdallah b. al-Haj Ibrāhīm's *nawāzil*, that minor violations of Islamic law were tolerated. In the case of usury, for example, he ruled that whomever takes goods which do not belong to her/him in the form of *riba* (usury), and repents, s/he must return these misappropriated goods to the rightful owner. However, if that is not possible, s/he must distribute them to the poor and the destitute.⁹⁹ The fact that repentance was the proper way to proceed with such cases of usury, would suggest that this breach of Islamic law was actually common. On a problem related to the lack of common currency, Sīdi Abdallah b. al-Haj Ibrāhīm was asked whether it was lawful to pay back a loan in a different medium equivalent in value. For example, 'Aīsha owes Aḥmad one *mudd* of millet and wants to settle her debt but she has rice only. Can she give Aḥmad the equivalent in rice instead of the millet? The Saharan jurist ruled that this type of transaction was also permitted but only in the case of necessity.¹⁰⁰

From reading a representative sample of commercial contracts dealing with loans, it is clear that there were a number of ways that traders could avoid “technical” usury by transacting in multiple currencies. Paul Dubié, a French official who served many years in Mauritania, discusses another strategy used by traders to circumvent conspicuous usury. The *mud'āf*, examined by Dubié in the 1930s and 1940s, was a practice consisting in borrowing in one currency, and reimbursing the loan at a later date in a different

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ *Nawāzil*, Sidi Abdallah b. al-Haj Ibrahim.

currency for double the value (*mud'āf*) of the initial loan.¹⁰¹ Dubié reports that this usurious practice of deferred payment became prevalent in the early 1900s with the increased use of colonial currencies. However, it can be assumed that before the use of French Francs became common, other international as well as local currencies and exchange goods were loaned in such a way.¹⁰² Although it was reported by Dubié and Webb, oral sources were completely mute about the *mud'āf*. This could easily be explained by the fact that such a practice was not considered lawful, and therefore a discussion was best avoided. It is important to be reminded of the verse of the Qur'ān which stipulates that “doubling” one’s capital through lending is usurious.¹⁰³

To explain the *mud'āf*, Dubié gives the example of a trader X who gives trader Y a sum of 100 French Francs to be repaid in three months (or six months, or a year) with cloth worth 200 Francs.¹⁰⁴ Animals were also part of *mud'āf* transactions. For example X gives Y cloth worth 200 Francs against the promise to deliver at a set future date twenty sheep *jedda* (young sheep less than a year old) worth 400 Francs at the time of the contract. The terms of the *mud'āf* were apparently well defined and inflexible. If the

¹⁰¹ Dubié’s “La vie matérielle des Maures,” pp. 216-219. It is important to note that *mud'āf* means to double and not to triple as Dubié claims. James Webb also noted this practice, based essentially on Dubié’s account (*Desert Frontier*, p. 63 and fn 58).

¹⁰² Historian Muhammad al-Mukhtār b. Sa’ad informed me about several legal discussions concerning the *mud'āf* located in the IMRS, including a document by an 18th century Qāḍi of Walāta al-Qasrī, IMRS Doc no. 2138, and ISERI nos. 233-235. Unfortunately, I was unable to consult these documents. But it seems clear that the practice of *mud'āf* was a subject of Saharan legal debates well before the twentieth century.

¹⁰³ “Believers, do not eat usury, doubling [*Idā’fan mudā’fatan*] your wealth many times over. Have fear in God that you may prosper” (3:130). Quoted earlier in discussion of Islamic precepts and economic behavior.

¹⁰⁴ Dubié, “La vie matérielle des Maures,” p. 218. This paragraph is based on Dubié’s discussion of the *mud'āf*.

debtor paid before the term of the contract, s/he could not obtain a reduction in the loan price; at the same time, the creditor could not increase the price of the loan if the debtor was late in paying it back. While most Saharan jurists condemned it, long-distance traders practiced the *mud'āf* openly with colonial currency, *beṣa*, or animals and they considered it to be “relatively honorable.”¹⁰⁵ But apparently public opinion was unfavorable to the *mud'āf*. Dubié discussed the case of a creditor in the Trarza (not identified) who was publicly snubbed in a poetic verse which states: “You castrate money...” (as in castrating animals to fatten them for a higher sales price).¹⁰⁶

Traders circumvented the interdict on usury in a number of other ways. To be sure, few of these ploys are documented since evading the law was best done off the written record. I suspect that the practice of “renting” capital, such as the rental of salt bars, was a disguised form of usury. Although I was unable to find any legal discussion of this type of contractual arrangement, several trading records and oral sources confirm the practice of renting (*al-kira*) salt as well as other goods and currencies. According to Abdarrahmān b. Muhammad al-Hanshi, salt was rented at the rate of one third of its value.¹⁰⁷ For example, if Fatima rented twelve bars to Muṣṭāfa, then she could expect that he would return the rented salt plus four additional bars. It is easy to see that, while called ‘renting’, this practice in effect was an evasion of the Islamic interdict on charging interest on loans. In fact the whole notion of rent, whether it be on salt bars or on property, seems to go against Islamic precepts. As in the fine line between usury and

¹⁰⁵ Dubié, “La vie matérielle des Maures,” p. 219.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

trade, admitted even by the Qur'ān, there is little difference between the practice of renting and that of usury, except one of context and definition.

Another mechanism to circumvent usury was called “sale by the eye” (*bay' al-'ayn* or *bay' al-'ayniyya*) a practice whereby “[t]he debtor sells the creditor an item and immediately repurchases it for a higher sum, payable at a later date.”¹⁰⁸ This strategy was in effect a loan with interest, through the intermediary of a fictitious sale item. That this credit operation was extremely popular in western Africa is clear from oral evidence collected in Senegal where in Wolof the system is called “*bukki*.”¹⁰⁹ In the Wolof culture of Senegal, the *bukki* or hyena has the reputation of an idiot, untrustworthy and tumultuous in character, as the following proverb shows: “one does not entrust a hyena with ones dried meat” (*bukki ken du ko dënki sel*). The *bukki* system was such a common means to obtain credit in Senegal and it came to symbolize the classic relationship between shopkeepers and their impoverished customers.¹¹⁰

The *bukki* credit mechanism disguised interest rates and operated in several ways. For example, a debtor sells a wool carpet at fifty Francs to a trader-banker and then he

¹⁰⁷ Renting contract by Muhammad al-Mukhtār b. 'Amar, Private Archives of 'Abdarrahmān b. Muhammad al-Hanshi. Also Interview with of 'Abdarrahmān b. Muḥammad al-Hanshi (Shingiti, 10/1/97).

¹⁰⁸ Hunwick, “Islamic Financial Institutions”, p. 13. Hunwick provides a full explanation of this credit mechanism. It is interesting to note that the expression “by the eye” bears resonance in many Romance languages today. In French, for instance, the nineteenth century expression “à l’œil” means “on credit” or even “without paying.” The image of the eye might have something to do with the relationship between the two parties involved in the exchange who presumably have “known” each other or “know of” each other for they have seen one another before. In Arabic, the word 'ayn has numerous meanings including eye, evil eye, cash, capital asset, and source (as in fountain).

¹⁰⁹ Cheikh Anta Mbacke Babou (personal communication, 2/27/96, MSU); interview in Louga with Samba Souna Fall (07/04/97).

¹¹⁰ Such “loans” sometimes reach over 100% of the value of the object “sold.” Until 1989, this form of money-lending with draconian conditions tied many Senegalese to Mauritanian shopkeepers in extremely difficult debts traps. The expression “*sul bukki sulli bukki*” meaning whomever buries a *bukki* loan gets buried by a [another] *bukki* loan, conveys the idea that the *bukki* system is a permanent trap. Since the

immediately purchases the wool carpet back from the trader-banker at the rate of eighty Francs that the customer now owes. The trader-banker keeps the carpet as collateral until the debtor eventually pays back the eighty. In another instance, the trader-banker sales a pound of green tea to a debtor at an inflated price of fifty Francs. The debtor then immediately sells the tea back to the trader-banker at the regular retail price of tea which is thirty Francs a pound. The debtor receives the thirty from the trader but still owes the original fifty. Either way, the interest is therefore disguised in the difference between the sale and purchase price. This system was most probably brought to Senegal, and possibly even Mali, via Mauritanian traders who, starting in the 1910s began playing a prominent role in the retail business of Senegal (as discussed in chapter 8). Some aspects of the bukki system are similar to the typical pawnshop transaction, while others are clearly linked to the practice of pawning which was once so widespread in West Africa.¹¹¹

Another financial mechanism was the concept of forward purchases, or *bay' al-salam*. Forward buying is a principle in Islamic economics defined as the “advance payment for goods which are to be delivered later.”¹¹² According to the normal rules, a sale cannot proceed lawfully unless the goods are in existence at the time of the deal. However, exceptions to the rule are allowed provided the goods are defined and the date of delivery is fixed. Moreover, this type of purchase on promise is only lawful if it involves only fungible goods, not gold or silver which are considered to be purely monetary values. This form of future sales is precisely what economists today call

devaluation in 1994 this bukki system has become extremely pervasive in the informal finance markets of Senegal. I thank Marieme Diawara for this last information (MSU 11/29/99).

¹¹¹ Toyin Falola & Paul Lovejoy, *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994.

¹¹² Khan, *Glossary of Islamic Economics*, p. 20.

forward contracts “in which one party agrees to buy something from another at a specified future date for a specified price.”¹¹³

Saharan jurists debated the question of forward purchases. Sīdi Abdallah argued in his *nawāzil*, that to sell goods that are absent (*'a'ib*) was forbidden; in his opinion, it could be done only in case of necessity. Here he differed from his mentor who judged that this practice was not lawful. Indeed, Al-'Amish argued that to purchase food with the promise to pay in bars of salt to be extracted at the next salt harvest was against the *sharī'ā*. In fact he ruled that any sale made with promise to pay at a future date (*mu'āwadatan*), as in this case, was forbidden. Another example was a legal opinion demanded of Aḥmad al-Ṣaghīr by Khadīja mint Sīdi Mawlūd. She wanted to buy a small piece of land in Tishīt with a cultivable area around palm trees (*zrība*). So she hired a man (*wakīl*) to purchase it. When she saw the *zrība* after the purchase, she decided that she did not want it, so she asked Ahmad al-Saghir to judge on whether the purchased could be annulled on the basis that she did not witness it—although she was the buyer. The answer was no because she had legally authorized the purchase even though she did not witness it.¹¹⁴

The reason jurists debated this mechanism was precisely because a forward purchase was in effect deferred payment (i.e. a loan) since the buyer paid at the time the deal was struck and received delivery after a certain delay. There is ample evidence in

¹¹³ *The Economist*, “Future Perfect,” Vol. 353; No. 8147; Nov 27th 1999 p.103. This is the “futures market” which A.G. Hopkins identified, although he lacked the evidence, in his seminal *An Economic History of West Africa*, p. 71.

the trading records consulted, that long-distance traders relied extensively on forward contracts. By selling goods in advance of future caravan expeditions, the salt, date or millet harvests, they could not only guarantee buyers for the products they were going to return with, but they could also finance part of the expedition with the advanced payments. Indeed, it is not unlikely that caravans organized by well-connected traders could be entirely financed on forward contracts.¹¹⁵

Since credit was so central to the organization of long-distance trade, the element of trust was paramount to business. Honoring one's debts was not only a question of preserving one's creditworthiness and access to the market, it also had to do with *reputation*, an aspect discussed in chapter five. A number of proverbs point to the moral responsibility of not defaulting on loans. For instance, the proverb in Arabic "*salf al-wālī*" meaning the free (non-interest bearing) loan of the governor (or local authority) conveys the moral message that one must abidingly honor debts.¹¹⁶ Another proverb in Hasaniya, the lingua franca of the Sahara, attests to the obligation to be scrupulous when contracting loan. It says that a loan established in precise terms yields wealth (*al-salf mahdūd al-mulah mardūd*). Extending and receiving credit was crucial to the operation of long-distance trade in western Africa, where there was no unified state, common

¹¹⁴ Family archives of Shrifna b. Shaykhna b. Buyahmad (SSB) document 8 (photographed 4/28/97).

¹¹⁵ An example of forward purchasing dates to the 1840s when Muhammad b. Mbārak, a successful trader arranged a forward contract of 140 bars of salt deliverable at the next salt extraction season. The price, which is not specified in his inheritance, was obviously specified with his partner at the time of the contract. Document 1, Archives of Shaykh b. Hamunny, Qadi of Shingiti (till the early twentieth century). See chapter 5 for a discussion of Document 1.

¹¹⁶ *Al-Amthāl wa al-hikm al-sh'abiya al-muritāniya*. Musa b. Ibnu, Sid Aḥmad b. Aḥmad Sālam, Sālik b. Muhammad Mustāfa & Muhammad al-Muṣṭāfa b. al-Nadī eds. (Nouakchott: IMRS/IPN (not dated; c. 1997), p. 238-9.

currency or banking institutions. Moreover, giving out loans was a mechanism of capital accumulation.¹¹⁷

Cross-Cultural Exchange and Barter

Traders in western Africa were buyers and sellers who operated in a continuum of interlocking market cycles. Because of the necessities of long-distance trade, they typically had correspondents in commercial centers who acted as cross-cultural brokers, hosts and financial agents.¹¹⁸ They operated within distinct networks, trading associations or companies, often with representatives in every major western African market. This was a common and indeed highly efficient way to organize long-distance trade, but the extensive credit web which linked members of one network often created complicated transactions. Al-'Amish addressed this very subject in a discussion of the legal obligations of trader-debtors who used brokers across regional frontiers. He was asked to arbitrate in the following situation: if someone had a debt in the town of Shinqīti, and the payment was overdue, and while in a different location, he reimbursed the loan (through one of the agents and/or family members of the creditor) was he obligated to wait until his return to the town where the conditions were set to finalize in writing the closing of the deal? Al-'Amish judged that proof of repayment was to be established in writing by all parties involved.¹¹⁹ For obvious reasons, the rules of cross-cultural exchange, briefly

¹¹⁷ This is argument will be developed further in chapter five.

¹¹⁸ Curtin, *Economic Change*, pp. 295-299.

¹¹⁹ Al-'Amish, *Nawāzil*, p. 65.

touched upon above when discussing the debate surrounding the valuation of the salt bar, were a main preoccupation of Saharans who traded long-distances between regions.

The subject of cross-cultural exchange in western Africa was directly addressed in a document discussing trading practices between “black” and “white” Africans. This is an “abridgement of what Al-Shaykh Sīdi al-Mukhtār b. al-Shaykh Sīdi Muhammad [al-Kunti, grandson of the famous scholar and leader of the Qādiriyya Sūfī order who lived in Arawān, north of Timbūktu]¹²⁰ quoted on the issue of the commercial transaction of the blacks (*sha’n bay’a al-Sūdān*).”¹²¹ In this document, the author states that “the commercial transaction of the blacks (*Sūdān*) is just like the commercial transaction of the whites (*Biḍān*).” He goes on to explain that exchanges are not done by force and when there is peace in religion (i.e. Islam), then there can only be agreement and continuance of exchange. Disputes are settled according to the rules of the majority in the region. Moreover, he admits that the rules of the blacks are not bad (*la ba’s biha*) and that problems are resolved amicably and with understanding. To fully comprehend this discussion requires a reading of the original document from where it was extracted. But from the excerpt found, the main gist of it is that fairness in exchange should prevail between Muslims.

Sīdi ‘Abdullah b. al-Hāj Ibrāhīm was asked to judge on another question of cross-cultural exchange. He was asked to answer the following: “is it lawful to sell slaves to

¹²⁰ I am not sure whether this is the father of Sīdi Muhammad, or his father, in which case it is the head of the “Mukhtāriyya” himself. See Stewart, *Islam and Social Order*, pp. 34-6, et sq.

¹²¹ Family archives of Ahmād al-Ṣaghīr, AS1 recto, photographed 4/28/97 (Tishr).

another trader knowing that in turn this trader was going to sell the slave to the *Naṣāra* [people of Nazareth, i.e. Christians/Europeans]?”¹²² His answer was a categorical no. In his opinion, it was forbidden to sell slaves to a trader who engaged in slave trafficking with Europeans. Sīdi ‘Abdallah b. al-Hāj Ibrāhīm gave no reason other than if the trader knows that the other person is going to sell the slaves to a European, then the sale is forbidden. This is a significant indication of the serious questioning which was taking place in late eighteenth-early nineteenth century western Africa regarding cross-cultural trade between traders of different faiths, and presumable entirely different business ethics.

Still on the subject of cross-religious exchange, it is clear that the Jewish population of western Africa suffered tremendous discrimination at the hand of Muslims. For example, in an inheritance document of several prominent traders which details their credit relations mention is made of one of their Jewish creditors named Shalūm. In this document, the following qualification is added after each mention of Shalūm’s name “May God damn his sect!”¹²³ Léopold Panet made similar remarks about the open discrimination and abrasive treatment of Jews by Muslims in the area. The Senegalese adventurer who passed for a Muslim to join a caravan headed to Shingīti remarks in his travelogue how the Jewish trader in the caravan was discriminated against and was constantly nagged and rejected by the other Muslim caravaners “because he was a Jew,

¹²² Sidi Abdallah b. al-Haj Ibrahim, *Nawāzil*.

¹²³ See Appendix 6.

and the degree of degradation and servitude to which Jews are condemned by Arabs is well known.”¹²⁴

Al-'Amish was asked to provide a legal opinion on how trade should be conducted in regions where there was no unified currency or an agreed upon means of exchange. He replied that in such circumstances, both parties should find an intermediate good, the value of which they both agreed upon, and use it as a basis for their purchases and sales. In other words, the parties should innovate an intermediate currency to settle their transactions.

Al-'Amish touched on a central question when discussing how to trade in the absence of a shared currency, a procedure economists are usually quick to call “barter.” The classic definition of barter is the direct exchange of one good or service for another, without the use of money (typically defined in the limited Western sense as coins and bills). In al-'Amish's response to the question, his recommendation was that both trading parties find a common currency, not that they exchange apples for oranges directly. What al-'Amish implied was not necessarily that traders find a third object to operate as an intermediary for the sake of exchange, but that they find a shared unit of account to allow them to value their transaction in this “intermediate good.” This distinction is important, for it sets this type of “barter” transaction within a context of exchange valuation where everything has a price. Despite his narrow definition of what constitutes physical money, Tayeb Chentouf has a similar argument when describing the nineteenth century southern Algerian economy. There, even though coins and bills were rarely

¹²⁴ Panet, p. 45.

exchanged, “the fixing of prices is always monetary; in some cases, monetary deals (with the exact change) were concluded; the last operations caravaners realized are very related to monetary exchange.”¹²⁵

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the judgments of another well respected Saharan scholar, Muhammad Yahya b. al-Tālib Abdallah al-Walātī (1843-1912) bear witness to the increasing European influence in matters of trade and the changing monetary landscape in western Africa. During Al-Walātī’s long pilgrimage (1894-1903), which he recounts in his travelogue, he was asked by some of his hosts to deliberate on several legal issues.¹²⁶ While stopping in the caravan center of Tindūf, a trader of the Tajakānit group asked al-Walāti to rule on whether it was lawful, according to the sharī’ā, to exchange one foreign currency with another.¹²⁷ In this case, could one repay a loan contracted in one type of foreign silver coin (the Spanish Real), with another foreign silver coin (the French Franc). In his response, in which he discussed the diversity of

¹²⁵ Tayeb Chentouf, “Les Monnaies dans le Gourara, le Touat et le Tidikelt dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle.” *Revue de l’Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 33, 1983. “La fixation des prix est toujours monétaire; dans certains cas, il est même procédé à des réglemens monétaires (appoint); les dernières opérations réalisées par les caravanistes appartiennent tout à fait à l’échange monétaire.” p. 81. On this last point, I differ in opinion from Chentouf by arguing that all exchange was “monetary” when organized in an established system of equivalencies.

¹²⁶ Muhammad Yahya b. al-Tālib Abdallah al-Walāti, *Al-Rihla al-ḥijāzīya*. Rabat: African Studies Institute, 1990.

¹²⁷ This *fatwā* on the exchange of coins which covers southern Morocco, western Algerian and northern Malian markets of the Sūs, Tindūf and Arawān, is an extremely important document which was unfortunately left out of the publication of al-Walāti’s *rihla* (see previous footnote). I thank Professor Muhammad al-Mukhtār b. Sa’ad of the Department of History of the University of Nouakchott for alerting me to the existence of this *fatwā* which was the subject of the master’s thesis of one of his students. This thesis is a transcription of the original *fatwā* followed by a short commentary. I rely on this thesis for information contained in the paragraph. Mariam bint A’baydallah, “Fatwā al-Walāti bi Sha’in al-tfaḍīl bayna al-Sakk fi al-Sūs wa Tindūf wa Arawān.” *Maîtrise in history*, University of Nouakchott, 1993-1994, especially pages 12-48.

coins prevalent in the western Africa, between the Morocco and present-day Mali, al-Walātī replied that such a settlement was unlawful because:

the variety of coins in exchange operations and debt settlements constitute an exemption to the Muslim convention and a dissimulation of the Qur'ān and the Sunna. It is the imitation of Christian law...What is taking place between people in operations of exchange of one unit of francisse coin against 2 minus 1/4 Spanish rial [i.e. 1 and 3/4] is usurious interest and is therefore completely forbidden.¹²⁸

Clearly, the French Franc piece of five (which the French called “gourde” and Saharans would eventually name *ugīya* or “ounce” like the Moroccan coin) fetched a higher price in western African markets because of its higher silver content. Silver coins, called *rial*, or sometimes *faḍa al-baīda* (white silver/money) and *faḍa al-gāsia* (hard silver/money), were prized in western Africa because they were smelted down to create jewelry. As discussed in chapter eight, this burgeoning trade in European silver coins continued under colonial rule. Saharan women, in particular, would commission blacksmiths to make thick and heavy bangles called the *khlākhil* which were worn on the ankle. These bangles were especially important to the Saharan bourgeoisie and were used in the force fattening (*liblakh*) of young pubescent girls because it supposedly slowed them down or immobilized them.¹²⁹

It is important to note that Muslims of western African societies were fully aware of the existence of “modern” money in the shape of minted coins independent of the presence of European powers. The proximity to the Moroccan kingdom, a fully

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 36. The Spanish Real was called *rial zabīl* or the real of Queen Isabella of Spain.

¹²⁹ The force feeding and fattening of young girls was still practiced in the early 1990s in the remote villages of the Mauritanian interior, while people in towns and cities connected to outside world, have

monetarized economy, and regular communications between northern and western African regions, meant that many travelers, pilgrims as well as traders, were familiar with the use of coin currencies as they traversed currency zones.¹³⁰ In the mid-nineteenth century, for instance, the chief of the Idaw al-Hāj group who nomadized¹³¹ north and south of the Senegal river, explained to Léopold Panel, that in order to arrive in the Wād Nūn region he needed money to pay various fees along the way. He estimated that:

for 300 pieces of guinée [or *beṣas* equivalent to] (4,500 francs), [he] could arrive in Nun; from there to Morocco, and from Morocco to Algeria, money [l'argent or silver coins] replaced the guinée, and, for this additional itinerary, four or five bags of one thousand francs would not be excessive.¹³²

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a severe economic crisis in Morocco resulted in its loss of autonomy to European powers. The situation was compounded by a serious currency crisis from the 1860s to 1890s, as the Makhzen struggled to maintain the royal Dirham in the face of increasing popularity of the five Franc silver piece.¹³³

Finally, another type of loan was used by long-distance traders: the international/ interregional traveler's check or *sufṭāja* (plur. *safātij*; a word of Persian origin). This type of bill of exchange was discussed by Ismā'īl b. Bāba b. Al-Shaykh Sidiya (c.1890-1970), son of an important leader in colonial Mauritania and a jurist with a keen interest

visibly abandoned this practice. See M. Vincent, "Voyages dans l'Adrar et Retour à St. Louis", p. 60 for a description of the practice in 1860s Adrar.

¹³⁰ 'Umar Afa, *Masalat al-nuqud fi Tarikh al-maghrib fi al-qarn at-tass'ih 'achar*. Rabat: Al-Tabi'a al-ula, 1988.

¹³¹ I take the liberty to use the word "nomadize" (which does not appear in any English dictionary) as a direct transliteration of the French verb *nomadiser* meaning to engage in a nomadic movement.

¹³² Panet, *Première exploration du Saharan occidental*, p. 36. See chapter 1 and 3 for a full discussion of Panet's journey and his invaluable written testimony.

¹³³ Germain Ayache, *Etudes d'Histoire Marocaine*. Rabat: SMER, 1979.

in matters economic.¹³⁴ He defined the *suftāja* as “a written document by the owner of capital to his representative to pay to him loaned capital so as to protect him from the dangers of the road.”¹³⁵ This credit mechanism is best explained by means of an illustration. A trader from Timbuktu (Mali) wants to travel to Gulmīm (southern Morocco), but the road is actually quite insecure. So he approaches a wealthy trader who has connections in Gulmīm with whom he has previously established a relationship of trust. The traveling trader pays the amount of money he intended to travel with, plus a premium or fee, to the wealthy trader in Timbuktu in exchange for a bill redeemable to the wealthy trader’s cousin in Gulmīm. When the traveler arrives in Gulmīm he can take his *suftāja* bill to the cousin who will redeem the loan.

This long-distance exchange mechanism was quite flexible, as a *suftāja* could also be exchanged with another trader who in turn would cash-in the amount. Because wholesale long-distance traders often operated within tight-knit networks, they were often transacting across the Sahara with their fellow partners and literate traders were able to kept careful records of “I-O-Us” and other transactions. By purchasing a *suftāja*, a trader could travel safely without carrying money or goods which were easily targeted by marauders on trans-Saharan trails. For the two wealthy traders providing the service,

¹³⁴ For a discussion of the legal deliberations of Ismā’īl b. Bāba b. al-Shaykh Sidīya see Charles Stewart, “A Comparison of the Exercise of Colonial and Precolonial Justice in Mauritania.” *Nomades et commandants: Administration et sociétés nomades dans l’ancienne A.O.F.* Paris: Karthala, 1993, pp. 82-86.

¹³⁵ Isma’īl b. Bāba, “al-naql al-majmū’a aw laha al-inqāl al-muntāja hal al-suftāja.” Haroun ould Cheikh Sidiyya Library, Boutilimit (Mauritania), copies on microfilm at the Illinois Archives, University of Illinois, 1235-98/12. I wrote a paper based on this source entitled “Istikhdām shik al-siyāhī fi Ifrīqiya al-gharbīa” Middlebury College (08/05/96).

the intermediary trader carrying the *suftāja* allowed them to settle debts (to “wire” money) or otherwise transact, as well as communicate (orally or through additional correspondence) with one another across long-distances. The only one to run any risks in this operation was the *suftāja* carrier who was traveling the long-distance and could lose the bill and/or his life.

The system of bills of exchange was well-established in trans-Saharan exchange, although evidence of these bills, which I suspect were typically destroyed once redeemed, is hard to find. Such financial arrangements between different traders (wholesalers, itinerant and financiers) reduced the risk involved in trading in conditions of political and economic insecurity. From oral investigations in Mauritania and Mali, it appears that the actual word *suftāja* was not very common, although the mechanism of the traveler’s check was.

The issues raised by Saharan scholars and the questions which were posed to them shifted in the course of the nineteenth century, I would argue, following the globalization of international trade along trans-Saharan routes and growing concerns about the influence of European presence upon the conduct of trade. This trend continued into the twentieth century under effective colonial rule, as shall be seen in chapters seven and eight. The subject of cross-cultural exchange in western Africa begs for more questions revealing how western Africans trade across culturally diverse regions. Few sources describe how business ethics were carried out in different cultural settings. A well-known Wolof proverb conveys the message that one should be thankful towards the Biḍān who extend credit: “you did not pay the Biḍān their salt” (*Fayoonār bi*

khodomom), meaning that you are not grateful.¹³⁶ But based on oral evidence from the towns of Nioro, Podor and Louga, and judging from the number of proverbs, which often depict traders in quite negative terms, it is easy to believe that the Islamic ideals of social justice between Muslims, and between Muslims and non-Muslims, were not always applied across cultural or religious frontiers.

Saharan Return Policy, the Wangala and Other Transactions

A common transaction discussed by Saharan jurists was the purchase of defective goods and the return policy of such sales. Sīdi Abdallah b. al-Hāj Ibrāhīm was asked to judge if a person who bought a cow or a camel only to discover that it was sterile had a right to return the purchase on the grounds of *'aib* (defect).¹³⁷ Moreover, he laid down the rules of a return policy of defective goods depending on the identity of the seller. He ruled that the return policy for a defective product was ten years for a good purchased from a stranger trader, and forty years for a good purchased from a local trader.¹³⁸ It is extremely significant that Sīdi Abdullah distinguished between stranger traders and local traders, applying different return policies in each case. Unfortunately, I only came across one such reference in the archives. Yet, there is evidence in western African history to suggest that discrimination through different tariff and duty rates was the norm in certain

¹³⁶ Personal communication by Serigne Mor Mbaye, Dakar, August 1992. In future research, I intend to explore further the topic of boutiques and rural bankers in Senegal.

¹³⁷ *Nawāzil*. It is interesting to note that unlike his mentor Al-'Amish, Sidi Abdallah was asked many questions regarding the sales and purchases of animals. This might reflect the different regions where the two jurists resided. Al-'Amish was in Shingitl, the oasis in the northern desert region of the Adrar where animals were few. Sīdi Abdallah, on the other hand, was in the Tagant (meaning forest in Berber) region north of the Senegal River, where animal husbandry was more prevalent.

western African markets. That strangers had to pay higher taxes is confirmed by evidence from Jenne, Timbuktu and elsewhere.¹³⁹ They were also more likely to be victims of attacks or raids since strangers were easy targets far from their homeland and tribe.¹⁴⁰

Another example of Saharan return policy on defective products which touches on the esoteric is the case brought to Sīdi Abdallah concerning the sale of property. If a house was sold and certain ghost apparitions or another unexplained phenomena were discovered to occur in the house (witnessed according to the law), then the house could be returned to the seller on the basis of *'aīb* (defect).¹⁴¹ A related question, which Sīdi Abdallah b. al-Hāj Ibrāhīm discussed at length, was the sale of “impure” products--a much debated legal matter according to Hamdan b. Attah.¹⁴² If a product such as milk, or honey, or oil (the three common liquid consumables most available in western African markets in early nineteenth century) had been spoilt with a drop of religiously impure material (*najis*) such as blood or urine, could the good still be sold for animal feed. Unlike some jurists, Sīdi Abdullah ruled that it could not be sold for any use whatsoever.

An additional return sales practice was the *iqāla*, which consisted in the sale of a given good with the agreement that the purchased good could eventually be returned. Muḥammad Akram Khan defines this as the “cancellation or revocation of a contract of

¹³⁸ *Nawāzil*, Sīdi Abdallah b. al-Haj Ibrāhīm.

¹³⁹ See Hopkins and Levtzion's *Corpus*, and Charles Monteil, *Monographie de Djenne*. See also the discussion of Jewish traders in chapter six.

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter 6.

¹⁴¹ *Nawāzil*, Sīdi Abdallah b. al-Haj Ibrāhīm.

¹⁴² Interview with Hamdan b. Attah (Nouakchott. 6/3/97).

sale.”¹⁴³ The specifications of this type of revocation are detailed in the texts of Islamic jurisprudence. There is ample evidence that this was a common procedure in Saharan exchange.¹⁴⁴ For example, in 1894 (1312 h), Muḥammad b. Abdallah b. Arwīli (son of the trader discussed in chapter five and six) demanded the *iqāla* for a horse which he purchased from the son of its original owner.¹⁴⁵ The father, and original owner of the horse, received the horse back. Muḥammad accepted the revocation of this sale because “he does not want to go against the *sharīʿā* and [even if he] ate his loss.” Similarly, Sīdi Abdallah b. al-Hāj Ibrāhīm was posed a question at the turn of nineteenth century on lawfulness of purchasing goods knowing that they had been illegally seized (*bilghasb min amwāl al-nās*). He answered that if the buyer was not aware that the goods purchased had been illegally appropriated, then the purchase was lawful.¹⁴⁶

Sīdi Abdallah was asked another question related to the raiding of property, a common occurrence in nineteenth century Sahara. The question was the following: if someone went to the encampment of raiders to recuperate stolen goods, and he was given goods which were not the original goods, could this retrieval be considered legal? He judged that since all the goods held by raiders were illicit, they could be considered

¹⁴³ *Glossary*, p. 64.

¹⁴⁴ Documents from Tishit libraries. Also, Arwīli documents in Archives of Shaykh b. Ḥamunni, Qāḍī of Shingīti.

¹⁴⁵ Arwīli document no. 8 in Archives of Shaykh b. Ḥamunni, Qāḍī of Shingīti.

¹⁴⁶ *Nawāzil*, Sīdi Abdallah b. al-Haj Ibrāhīm.

equal.¹⁴⁷ In the oral traditions of Tishīt, the story is often told of when Aḥmad b. Al-Ṣaghīr, the famous scholar of Tishīt, went to a camp of Awlād Dlīm—reputed active Saharan raiders—to recuperate stolen camels and slaves.¹⁴⁸ Upon arriving to the encampment, Awlād Dlīm chief, Shigh al-Mansūr, said that he would return the stolen goods if Aḥmad could cure his daughter, who was mentally challenged. Aḥmad performed the miracle and later returned with loaded camels, to the joy of the people of Tishīt. Whether the goods he returned with were the original ones, or substitutes, was not specified in the oral tradition.

The *nawāzil* of Al-ʿAmish, Sīdi Abdallah, and other legal records, reveal that Saharan scholars often deliberated on micro-economic matters. For instance, Al-ʿAmish was asked whether it was lawful to sell the hides off an animal which was not dead. He answered that this was not recommended since there was no way in knowing whether the person in charge of skinning the animal might not tear the leather.¹⁴⁹ Another question posed to Al-ʿAmish concerned the legality of selling baby camels without the mother camel, to which he responded affirmatively. Sīdi Abdallah examined whether it was lawful in commercial transactions to shake the *mudd* container filled with grain so as to

¹⁴⁷ *Fatwā* on the ghazzi by Sīdi Abdallah b. al-Haj Ibrāhīm photographed in the private library Bu ʿAsarTya family, Tishīt (4/97).

¹⁴⁸ Tishīt interviews with Mariam mint Limām (4/28/97) and Dada b. Idda (4/26/97).

¹⁴⁹ *Nawāzil*, Al-ʿAmish.

pack down more grain; to which he replied that the *mudd* container had to be filled normally without packing it.¹⁵⁰

On a completely different matter, Muhammad b. Al-'Amish was asked whether the practice of *wangala*, an association led by groups of close female friends and relatives who rotated cooking obligations, was allowed or not. This association operated like a rotating credit fund except that it centered around the cooking of meals.¹⁵¹ Each member of the *wangala* took turns cooking meals for the other members of the group and their families. This social institution allowed women to be relieved of cooking duties for as many days as there were members in the *wangala* minus the day it was their turn to cook. Since the participation in a *wangala* involved exchanging one type of unknown food for other unknown foods, in other words the exchange of meals not necessarily equal in value/composition, the people of Shingīṭi wondered about its legality in the eyes of Islam. Muhammad b. Al-'Amish ruled that because the *wangala* was an association organized between friends, it was quite acceptable.¹⁵²

It is important to point out that the *wangala* has very similar modalities to the rotating credit and savings associations which became so prevalent in twentieth century western African informal finance. To my knowledge, this is the earliest reference in the historical record of a rotating service association, which in the literature about informal

¹⁵⁰ *Nawāzil*, Sidi Abdallah b. al-haj Ibrahim.

¹⁵¹ I participated in a *wangala* with eight other women in Shingīṭi. It lasted nine days during which time we took turns cooking midday feasts. The *wangala* is now considered an old tradition which is hardly ever practiced.

¹⁵² The question of the lawfulness of *wangalas* was also discussed by jurist Muhammad Fall b. Mu'tali. He identified two types of *wangala*: one in which all the participants slaughter an animal during their turn, and the other when all purchased a set of animals (goats, for example) and from that pool of common property

finance is thought to be the antecedent of the so-called “tontine” or “tour” of present-day Mauritania, Mali and Senegal. These associations later came to include all kinds of exchanges involving goods, labor and money.¹⁵³

Islam and Economic Order

From the evidence presented in this chapter, it appears that exchange in Muslim western Africa was highly regulated while carried out in multiple currencies. This economic order was maintained in large part by the use of Islamic law and the reliance on the services of religious authorities. Muslim jurists acted as arbitrators who engaged in the regulation of measures and valuation, as well as contract enforcement. Moreover, the existence of known equivalencies (in animals, for example), multiple “general-purpose” currencies (such the *beṣa* and salt bar), and a highly sophisticated capital market framed in Islamic law, were key factors which facilitated exchange and lowered transaction costs. This is not to say that this unity was not possible in the absence of Islam. In fact, as Hopkins recognized, “most societies had rules which defined various types of loans and laid down regulations for recovering debts. This was true both of Muslim states in the Western Sudan, where the Koranic injunction against usurious loans had little influence on the operation of the commercial money market, and the ‘pagan’ states in the forest zone, as, for example, among the Yoruba kingdoms.”¹⁵⁴

they each slaughtered an animal. Mu’taali ruled that only the second type of Wangala was lawful. Interview with Hamdan b. Attah (6/6/97).

¹⁵³ G. Lydon, “Banking l’Africaine: Prevalence and Popularity of Rotating Credit and Savings Associations”, B.A. Thesis, McGill University.

¹⁵⁴ *An Economic History of West Africa*, p. 71.

Saharan scholars of Islamic jurisprudence tackled numerous questions regarding exchange which inform about prescribed business ethics and norms. Their written legacy provides an invaluable body of sources about economic and social transactions of the day, while demonstrating the sophistication of commercial law in Islam as practiced in precolonial western Africa. The fact that the two most prominent jurists of their time, Muhammad b. Al-'Amish and Sīdi Abdallah b. al-Hāj Ibrāhīm, debated on similar issues related to commercial exchange from late seventeenth century to early nineteenth century, could be explained by their intellectual proximity. It also might be an indication that Saharan economic order did not change substantially in that period, or at least not as significantly as it did at the turn of the century when Muhammad Yaḥya al-Walāṭī was writing a *fatwā* on currency exchange. Jurists, such as al-Walāṭī, witnessed the encroachment of European powers and the infiltration of their currencies into western African markets. Later, Ibrāhīm b. Bāba b. al-Shaykh Sidiyya would discuss the use of the “traveler’s check” which, like the money order and the wiring of money through the colonial telegraph line, became common financial tools of long-distance exchange in the first half of the twentieth century. A thorough investigation of Saharan legal sources would reveal the full range of concerns in the wake of the changing political and economic landscape of the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

From the review of the legal sources presented here, it is clear that Saharan jurists did not always agree with one another’s judgments. According to Hacène Benmansour, disagreement between scholars of Islamic jurisprudence was typical, especially on matters economic because the borders between capital gain, profit and usury are so

ambiguous.¹⁵⁵ That there was a lack of consensus among Saharan scholars was obvious when they dealt with a number of sticky issues on sales and finance. For example, on the question of forward buying, or the purchase of goods with delay in delivery, Al-ʿAmish ruled that it was forbidden to sell or purchase absent products. Sīdi Abdullah b. al-Hāj Ibrāhīm, on the other hand, consented that it was lawful only when carried out in consumables and in the case of necessity.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, as several examples have shown, jurists would often allow technically unlawful transactions for they were willing to overlook the sharīʿā in situations of need, as in the examples of selling unknown quantities for known quantities of food, and reimbursing a loan with a different consumable. Evidence regarding a long-distance legal debate on the inheritance of four Wād Nūn traders presented in chapter five, will show further that, despite the existence of a unified legal framework in Islam, consensus about the application of the law was not a given.

Although scholars in the centers of learning and trade of Shingīti, Tishīt and elsewhere set guidelines of exchange, it is reasonable to ask to what extent Muslims complied to these rules of commercial conduct as prescribed by the local *ʿulamā*. It can be assumed that many scholars, who themselves were engaged in subsistence trade to support their leisure time and scholarly ruminations, as well as their immediate constituents, complied as best they could with the sharīʿā. After all, they were the ones

¹⁵⁵ Benmansour, *L'économie musulmane*, pp. 54-57

¹⁵⁶ *Nawāzil* Muhammad b. al-Mukhtar b. al-ʿAmish, *Nawāzil* Sidi Abdullah b. al-Haj Ibrahim. Sidi Abdullah explains this as food only (*taʿam raʿib*), or the sale of food with absent food.

engaging in legal deliberations about business matters. Yet how law abiding was the average non-scholarly Muslim trader? Examples from this chapter have revealed that in western African exchange, Sīdi Khalīl’s warning against committing “frequent abuses that could lead to a dubious disguise of the loan in the form of a sale or to obtain a usurious advantage” was not always applied to the letter.¹⁵⁷ The existence of such practices such as the *mud’āf*, or the bukki system, even the subterfuge to conceal a loan with interest by calling it “rent,” are clear indications that traders frequently broke the rules. As jurist Hamdan b. Attah explained by means of a proverb, some individuals took the law into their own hands for “the renegade makes his one laws” (*al-murtad faqih nafsu*).¹⁵⁸

The entire credit system, with its myriad mechanisms to bypass the Islamic interdict on usury, was subject to controversy and debate. Yet, I would argue that while Saharan jurists struggled with the lawfulness of transactions in the area of credit and loan disbursement and reimbursement, engaging in technical usury was often inevitable. Indeed, avoiding usury in commercial operations with multiple parties, in multiple currencies, and across long-distances, was a feat in itself. To be sure, transacting in salt bars, or cotton *beṣa*, with their irregular valuation standards made it at times quite impossible to “give fair measure and full weight” in trade. Moreover, the need for credit, the lifeline of caravan commerce, was such that trading according to the book was often unfeasible.

¹⁵⁷ Dubié, “La vie matérielle des Maures,” p. 218.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Hamdan b. Attah, Nouakchott (06/03/97)

When comparing trade records to Islamic law it is clear that literate traders generally used the Qur'ān as a guideline or blueprint in their business operations. Beyond the technicalities, Islamic precepts represented the pillars of social morality in Muslim western Africa. Obviously, this was true of the *zwāya*, or clerical communities, who tended to be semi-sedentary or urban, more than the *'arab*, or nomadic warriors, who, while Muslims, lived by their honor code. Aḥmād al-Amīn, the nineteenth century historian of Shingīṭi was fully aware of the fact that the *zwāya* were suspicious about commercial exchange with *'arab* groups because their goods tended to be stolen or plundered.¹⁵⁹ The role of scholars of Islamic jurisprudence in regulating trade cannot be underestimated. Even though traders sometimes broke the rules, because of need or greed, they benefited from Islamic law and the economic order it provided. Members of the Muslim community had a vested interest in upholding the Islamic ethical axioms of unity, justice, free will and responsibility. Their identities, their “tribal” honor, as well as their economic performance was hinged on their reputation as respectable Muslims.

¹⁵⁹ *Al-Wasīṭ*, p. 532.

CHAPTER 3

MARKETS AND CARAVANS IN MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY WESTERN AFRICA

*Idā ṭal'a al- 'īwa yagūl al-jamāl aīwā!*¹
“When the riwa star rises, the caravaners say ‘let’s go!’”

This chapter examines the markets, itineraries and organization of camel caravans in mid-nineteenth century western Africa, with a focus on the western branches of trans-Saharan trade (c. 1840s-1860s). The first part of the chapter is concerned with the political and economic landscape and main trade goods, whereas the second part discusses the organization of interregional and trans-Saharan camel caravans from the point of view of logistics. I then examine the political economy of raiding in western Africa and the strategies adopted by long-distance traders to navigate in conditions of market insecurity. Based on oral testimonies of caravaners who are retired, or their descendants, I discuss the preparation involved in organizing camel caravans. Other primary sources used in this chapter include trading records from several family archives located in Tishīt and Shingīti, and several histories of Adrār.² I also rely on several eyewitness accounts, especially those of two Senegalese explorers: Léopold Panet, who produced the first informed description of the interior of western Africa and southern Morocco in 1850, and Bu al-Mughdād, the Wolof interpreter who wrote a description of the Sahara in his 1860 pilgrimage account.

¹ Popular saying in Shingīti and Tishīt. Interview in Shingīti with Abdarrahmān b. Muhammad al-Hanshi (9/29/97); Interview in Tishīt with Dada b. Idda (4/18/97).

Markets and Trades in Mid-Nineteenth Century Western Africa

Scholars of West African history generally agree that the trade within and across the Sahara increased significantly in the nineteenth century.³ Several studies argue that the colonization of France's first African colony had the effect of shifting trade away from Algeria and the eastern routes, favoring the western itinerary of trans-Saharan trade from Timbuktu, and other western Saharan markets, to Moroccan centers of exchange.⁴ As Colin Newbury explains, "the immediate effect of military intervention and customs regulations along the southern frontier of Algeria in 1843 was to divert the trade of El Golea and Wargla to the markets of Tafilet and Ghadames in the west and east."⁵ He explains that this shift, which revitalized the far eastern and far western routes, meant that by the mid-nineteenth century "the Sudan trade was firmly in the hands of Moroccans, Tuat, Ghadames, Cha'amba, Omadi and Tuareg principals, agents and carriers, who took

² Abd al-Wadūd b. Aḥmad Mawlūd b. Intaha (Smāssid, Atar), *Tārīkh Adrār*, written in 1353 (1934). Copy shared by his son Jily b. 'Abd al- Wadūd b. Intaha (09/97), Aḥmad b. Al-Amīn As-Shinqīṭī, *Al-Wasīṭ*; Mukhtār b. al-Ḥamidūn, *Ḥayāt muritānīa, II: ḥayāt al-thaqāfiya*, Dar al-Maghribīa, 1994.

³ Baier, *An Economic History of Central Niger*; Austin, "The Mediterranean Islamic Slave Trade Out of Africa: A Tentative Census," and McDougall, "Salt, Saharans and the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade;" CHEAM no. 567: Capitaine Meric, "La Circonscription de Goulimine, le pays de l'Oued Noun", Mars 1941. CHEAM no. 1357 Capitaine Dupas. "Le Commerce Caravanier entre les Confins Algéro-Marocains et l'AOF (Mauritanie et Soudan) à Travers le Saharan Occidental," 1er avril 1938.

⁴ Baier, *An Economic History of Central Niger*; C.W. Newbury, « North African and Western Sudan Trade in the Nineteenth Century : A Re-Evaluation. » *Journal of African History*, VII, 2 (1966), pp. 233-246; Jean-Louis Miège, "Le Commerce Trans-Saharien au XIXe Siècle: Essai de quantification," *Revue de L'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 32, 1981-2; Michel Abitbol, "Le Maroc et le Commerce Transsaharien du XVIIe Siècle au Debut du XIXe Siècle," and Donald C. Holsinger, "Trade Routes of the Algerian Sahara in the Nineteenth Century," *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 30, 1980.

⁵ Newbury, "North Africa," pp. 235.

over goods at the northern and southern entrepôts and disposed of them at either end of the route to a new series of entrepreneurs.”⁶

Few studies have focused on the western branches of trans-Saharan trade, and even fewer still have relied on local as opposed to European sources. Ann McDougall's pioneering research in the Adrar region on the salt industry and slave trade still remains one of the rare exceptions.⁷ By and large, the studies that have examined this area of investigation tend to discuss the Moroccan side of trade based on colonial archives.⁸ Due in large part to the great divide in African studies between “North” and “Sub-Saharan” Africa, the full extent of trans-Saharan trade in western Africa has rarely been appreciated. The lack of communication between areas studies has often led to erroneous assumptions about Africa's place in world history. This is so much so that, for instance, it has been argued that until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the West African interior remained “isolated” from the major currents of world trade and “cut off by the aridity of the Sahara” although all the evidence from the western Sahara points to just the opposite trend.⁹ Scholars of trans-Saharan trade have tended to overlook the significant confluence of European and African trades which took place in and around two key

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ McDougall, “The Ijil Salt Industry: its Role in the Pre-colonial Economy of the Western Sudan,” Doctoral thesis University of Birmingham, 1980. In the past twenty years she has published numerous articles on the trans-Saharan salt and slave trades (see Bibliography).

⁸ Miège, *Le Maroc et l'Europe (1830-1894)*, 3 Tomes, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962; Zahra Tamouh-Akhchichine, “Le Maroc et le Soudan au XIXe siècles (1830-1894): Contribution à l'histoire inter-régionale de l'Afrique.” Doctorat 3ème cycle, Centre de Recherches Africaines, Université de Panthéon, Sorbonne, Paris I, 1984.

⁹ Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade*, p. 15. Along similar lines, Austen hypothesizes that the reason trans-Saharan trade “survived” in the course of the nineteenth century was because it was “protected” from European ocean competition by the “natural barrier” between commercial circuits and North Africa; see “Marginalization, Stagnation and Growth: Trans-Saharan Caravan trade, 1500-1900” in *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350-1750*, James Tracy (Ed.) CUP: 1990, p. 349. Popular books such as Bovill's, *The Golden Trade*, are also responsible for perpetrating the notion that the Sahara created an obstacle to North-South communication. For example, he claims: “the Sahara, one of the world's most formidable barriers to human intercourse,” p. 237.

Atlantic coastal ports: Ndar (St. Louis) in Senegal and al-Swaïra (Mogador) in southern Morocco.¹⁰ The increased commercial activity of international traders, which began before the seventeenth century in these and other ports of lesser importance along the Atlantic coast, had significant ramifications on long-distance trade within and across the Sahara. Analyzing these connections between western African markets and people as they unfolded from the mid-nineteenth century onwards is among the objectives of this dissertation.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the western branch of trans-Saharan trade was very much integrated into the world economy through cross-cultural exchange on the Atlantic coast (see Map 2: “On Trans-Saharan Trails”). The French port of St. Louis (Ndar), founded in 1659, was a most active trading center in the mid-nineteenth century.¹¹ After the French and English abolitions of the Atlantic slave trades in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the bulk of the goods exported out of Ndar were for the most part gum arabic, gold, hides, and ivory. For Europeans, the main export was gum Arabic, which was exchanged in several locations called ‘*escales*’ or ‘*marșas*’ during the gum harvesting season from September-October to May.¹²

Gum arabic was an important commodity in Europe, especially in the wake of the industrial revolution. It was used for pharmaceutical, cosmetics, confectionery purposes,

¹⁰ Baier has recognized the importance of the port of Tripoli in the eastern branch of trans-Saharan trade—the other importance port of entry for European goods into western Africa in *An Economic History of Central Niger*.

¹¹ See Kalala Ngalamulume’s “Economy and Society in a Colonial City: St. Louis (Senegal) from Mid-19th Century to Early 20th Century,” Michigan State University Ph.D Dissertation, 1996.

¹² Webb, “The Trade in Gum Arabic: Prelude to French Conquest in Senegal”, *Journal of African History*, 26 (1985), p.150. Webb relies heavily on statistical estimations compiled by Philip D. Curtin in *Economic Change*. See uses of gum discussed in Webb, “The Trade in Gum Arabic,” p 149; Curtin, *Economic Change*, p. 215-6; For a study of gum arabic see Lt. Gaden, “La gomme en Mauritanie,” *Annales de l’Académie des Sciences Coloniales*, t. IV, 1929.

as well as the bookbinding business. But most importantly, gum was used as a solvent in the European textile and dying industries. Until the mid-nineteenth century, with the rise in gum exports from the region of Kordofan in the British Sudan, the acacia growing regions of western Africa supplied the bulk of gum to Europe.¹³ Because of the need for this product in industrial revolutionizing Europe, France, Britain and Holland fought along the western African coasts what are known as the “gum wars” for primary access to the suppliers of the gum.¹⁴ Consequently, Ndar was occupied twice by the British (1758-1778, 1809-1817).

Gum was harvested in the Trarza and Brakna regions of present-day southwestern Mauritania, and in the Ḥawḍ and Kaarta regions of what would become Mali. The gum trade along the Senegal River with European outfits was more or less regulated by the emirs of both regions who negotiated terms of trade with the French every trading season (from January until June). Gum traders migrated seasonally to the markets along the Senegal River to sell the gum harvest in exchange for cloth, firearms, various metals and iron bars, as well as miscellaneous paraphernalia (anything from glassware, locks and mirrors, to flints, gunpowder and paper). By the mid-nineteenth century, British and other Europeans had cornered a sizeable share of the western African market in cloth, and imported merchandise which was becoming more and more popular such as tea, sugar, guns and gunpowder from their northwestern commercial enclave of al-Swaīra. Gum arabic, harvested in the Sagīa al-Ḥamra and Wād Dra’a regions of the western Sahara, or

¹³ See Webb, *Desert Frontier*, especially chapter five. For an examination of the Kordofan gum exports, see Endre Stiansen. “The gum arabic trade in Kordofan in the mid-nineteenth century.” In *Kordofan Invaded: Peripheral Incorporation and Social Transformation in Islamic Africa*, E. Stiansen & Michael Kevan, eds. Leiden: Brill, 1998, pp.60-85.

transiting from further south (Trarza, Brakna and the region around Timbuktu), was also traded in the port of al-Swaīra.¹⁵

The port of al-Swaīra was founded in 1768 by the Moroccan king Sīdi Muḥammad so that he could better control international trade coming into his kingdom, and collect royal duties.¹⁶ Until the European abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, the export of slaves from the North African ports starting with al-Swaīra was substantial.¹⁷ In the first half of the nineteenth century, British merchants and their Jewish Moroccan trading partners had the largest stake in the import trade at al-Swaīra. Other countries, such as France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Sardinia, Malta, Italy, and Austria were also represented. Cotton cloth and firearms figured at the top of the imports list. Other regular imports included tea and tea sets (pots and cups), sugar, paper, glass beads, fine fabrics, guns, flints, gunpowder, as well as other merchandise. These goods were exchanged for western African slaves (until the abolition of the Atlantic slaves trade), animal hides (the most important Moroccan export in mid-nineteenth century), gum arabic, cereals (mainly wheat) and other foodstuff (almonds, dates), wax, some gold dust and ostrich feathers (a trade item which really gained importance in the second half of the nineteenth century).¹⁸

¹⁴ The best account of this under-researched world trade history event is André Delcourt, *La guerre de la gomme, Dakar*, IFAN, 1952.

¹⁵ Panet. See also Webb, *Desert Frontier*.

¹⁶ Daniel Schroeter, *The Merchants of Essaouira: Urban Society and Imperialism in Southwestern Morocco, 1844-1886*. Cambridge: CUP, 1988; Miège, *Le Maroc et l'Europe*. Prior to the establishment of al-Swaīra, coastal trade had been conducted in Agādīr further south and far from the Sultan's effective political control.

¹⁷ See Austen, "The Mediterranean Islamic Slave Trade."

¹⁸ See AMAE, *Mémoires et Documents*, no. 9, Maroc (1690-1847), pp. 248 et sq. on trade in Mogador. See also Miège, *Le Maroc et l'Europe*, chapter 3, vol. 2, pp. 123-189.

All these European commodities as well as Moroccan goods were imported into western Africa on camel back via the trans-Saharan trade. Often transiting through Gulmīm in the region of Wād Nūn, the merchandise was traded along the way ending in the regions of Azawād and Kaarta (in present-day Mali), as well as the Adrār and the Tagānt (in present-day Mauritania). The importation of tea, introduced by British merchants at the port of al-Swaīra, became progressively more important in the course of the nineteenth century. Data collected by Jean-Louis Miège suggests that between 1830 and 1840 tea imports to Morocco increased from 3500 to 20 000 kilograms.¹⁹ This newly acquired taste for drinking tea which spread along trans-Saharan trails into the western African interior, went hand in hand with the importation of another luxury consumable, refined sugar. In the same ten-year period, the importation of this last item tripled in value.²⁰ In the course of the nineteenth century, cotton cloth became the number one merchandise imported by Europeans into western Africa. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the quantity of British cloth imports at al-Swaīra was higher than French imports of the same item in Ndar and al-Swaīra combined.²¹ That the quality of British cotton cloth was preferred above French cloth was a fact mentioned repeatedly in the French archives.²²

¹⁹ Miège, *Le Maroc et l'Europe*, pp. 73. These numbers are given here to give a sense of the increase in African demand.

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 73-74. This massive importation had the effect of supplanting the agricultural production of sugarcane in southern Morocco. We will return to the question of imported European merchandise and shifts in consumer behavior in the chapter six.

²¹ Cf. Ibid, pp. 74.

²² The superior quality of English cloth explains its popularity throughout the nineteenth century. When the French finally conquered Timbuktu in 1894, they complain that British cloth was more valued and

Moroccan imports were also transported from north to south along the western trans-Saharan trails.²³ Saharan traders imported key luxury items manufactured in Morocco, such as silk and woolen Berber blankets, carpets, prayers rugs, expensive fine cloths and clothing (such as the *haïk*, a wool cloak very much in demand by Muslims in Senegal, and babouches, Moroccan leather slippers which were also very popular among Muslim notables in western Africa), writing paper, manuscripts, and Islamic supplies such as copies of the Qur'an other religious texts, and chaplets. Arabic books and manuscripts from Morocco, especially the market of Marrakech, into western Africa was an extremely significant part of trans-Saharan trade.²⁴ Other kinds of Moroccan consumer products were imported into the western Africa. These include bronze and copper platters, teapots and oil lanterns, amber, local and imported beads, Moroccan and Spanish silver coins (Dirham and Real) and perhaps Berber jewelry,²⁵ handheld weapons such as daggers (*khnāfir*) and sabers, as well as handmade guns and leather bags/pouches for gunpowder (*a'rāb*).

In addition, certain consumables were prized as well, such as spices (for example safran), incense (*libkhūr*), perfumes (*rawayah*), tobacco, henna and cereals (namely barley and wheat). Dates, harvested in the Saharan palm oases, were also an important

present in the markets of the western African interior. Archives Nationales du Mali (ANM), 1D-59. Discussed in chapter 6.

²³ The following list was gathered mainly through interviews in Mauritania and Senegal.

²⁴ See Charles Stewart, "A new Source on the Book market in Morocco in 1830 and Islamic Scholarship in West Africa," *HESPÉRIS*, vol. XI, 1970, pp. 209-246. He discusses a list of books imported from Marrakech by Sidiyya al-Kabīr of Trarza in 1830.

²⁵ I found no written sources to support this but similarities between Berber silver jewelry such as the *khlākhil* (see chapter 2) ankle bracelets of Morocco, and those found in Mali, Mauritania and Senegal,

trade item. Dates reached high prices in western Africa because of their sugar content and long-term preservation qualities. Tar, used to cure various skin diseases of camels, was also imported from Morocco in notable quantities.²⁶ Another strategically important import from northwestern markets was sulfur. It was especially prized in the mid-to-late nineteenth century when sulfur was used to manufacture local gunpowder. Saharan salt purchased in the Saharan salt quarries was, of course, the first and most important trade item exchanged for western African slaves and goods (see chapter two and discussion below).

At the same time, a sizeable trade in horses across the Sahara from the Wād Nūn to the Ganjool, Djolof and Kajoor regions of Senegal, was still active in the 1850s. As Robin Law and James Webb have argued, the horse-for-slave trade between northerners and westerners served to supply the cavalry forces of western African states.²⁷ Because of the climatic conditions, horses had a shorter lifespan in western Africa and so leaders and kings were constantly looking to replenish their supplies. According to Webb, in the 1840s “a trade spur opened up that linked Kajoor with Wad Nun via the Adrar and apparently supplemented the coastal route.”²⁸ In the 1850s, Governor Faidherbe, the architect of colonial Senegal, described a caravan from Wād Nūn trading north of the Senegal River, “which was originally composed of 200 camels and 150 mares, of which

would seem to indicate this trade. See Odette du Puigaudeau, “Arts et Coutumes des Maures (III),” *HESPÉRIS*, vol. XI, 1970, pp. 5-82.

²⁶ Until the French began importing it at the port of Ndar in the late nineteenth century. See interviews and conversations with Muḥammad al-Maḥdi b. Muḥammad al-āmīn b. A'wasi (07/08/98) in Nouakchott, Dāda wuld Idda in Tishit, Aidara, Madike Wade in Ndar.

²⁷ Webb, “The Horse for Slave Trade between the Western Saharan and Senegambia,” *Journal of African History*, vol 34, 2, 1993, pp. 221-246. Also *Desert Frontier*, pp. 68-96; Robin Law, *The Horse in West Africa History*, Oxford; Clarendon, 1980; See also Mamadou Diouf, *Le Kajoor au XIXe siècle*. Paris: Harmattan, 1990.

half had already been sold along the way.”²⁹ At the then average exchange rate of 15 slaves per horse, that caravan was exporting potentially over 1100 slaves into northern African markets. According to Claude Meillassoux’s estimates, horses were being traded for 10 to 20 slaves in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the wars of al-Ḥāj ‘Umar, Samori Ture and the French conquest.³⁰

It must be said that rearing horses in western Africa was not an easy occupation. Horses were so precious, whether they were in the Wād Nūn regions or in the oases and towns of western Africa. In the desert regions milch camels had to be devoted to feeding horses, an expense few could afford. Discussing the horse trade in the early twentieth century, Frédéric De la Chappelle explains that the price of horses in the Saharan interior was so high, sometimes reaching 100 camels per horse, that horses were usually owned by communities rather than by individuals.³¹ Some traders kept written genealogies of certain thoroughbreds; this was especially the case of the Tikna of the Wād Nūn and the emir of Adrar who had recognized lines of thoroughbreds.³²

The finest breeds, the Mamkūs kind, were reared in the Asāba region (present-day southern Mauritania). In this region, the “Shnātar [family] of the Mashdhūf, were reputed horse breeders and they used to say that they could not ride a horse of mixed blood, only

²⁸ Webb, *Desert Frontier*, p. 94.

²⁹ Quoted and translated in Webb, *Desert Frontier*, p. 94 citing Louis Léon César Faidherbe, “Renseignements géographiques sur la partie du Sahara comprise entre l’Oued Noun et le Soudan,” *Nouvelles annales des voyages*, 6e série 5e année (août 1859), pp. 129-156.

³⁰ “Le commerce pré-colonial et l’esclavage à Gubu du Sahel (Mali).” *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa*, C. Meillassoux (Ed.), London: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 187.

³¹ “Histoire du Sahara Occidental,” in *HESPÉRIS: Archives Berbères et Bulletin de l’Institut des Hautes-Études Marocaines*, 1930, Tome XI.

³² Interview in Nouakchott with ‘Abdallah b. Muḥammad Sidiyya (10/16/97).

a thoroughbred.”³³ The “horse trade fell with those who believed in it...those who fought with horses. Because horses were like the Fantome [F15 jet fighter]. The whole spirit died completely with the fast-firing gun.”³⁴ Indeed, in the words of retired geographer-nomad ‘Abdallah b. Muḥammad Sidiyya, the horse in western Africa was used as a military engine. He recalls witnessing as a child the exchange of “a mare that the Tikna gave to a chief who brought it to Butilimīt.”³⁵ To be sure, only the wealthy and the powerful (such as the Saharan emirs and chiefs of the Djolof, the Waalo and Kajoor states) tended to be private owners. Horses were used in combat, but also for rapid deployment to search for wells and pasture, to quickly make herds move (as American Cowboys) and to find fugitives.³⁶

From Faidherbe’s abovementioned remark on the horse for slave trade, and countless other sources, it is clear that the European abolition did not end the slave trade across the Sahara. The town of Gulmīm in the Wād Nūn region remained an important slave trade center (at least until the first half of the twentieth century), if not the most important slave market in northwestern Africa.³⁷ Slaves, purchased or pillaged in western Africa, were tied one behind the other and forced to walk barefoot across the hot sands and rocky terrain of the Saharan regions. Some Africans were sold as domestic servants, herders, laborers or concubines into the Saharan date producing and pastoral economies, and oasis towns. But for the most part, they were destined to be sold on

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ De la Chapelle, “Histoire du Sahara Occidental,” p. 44, fn.1.

³⁷ See, for instance, interview in Likṣābi with Muḥammad b. al-Nājim b. Muḥammad b. al-Naājim (08/01/99).

northwestern African markets. As Théodore Mollien who visited in northern Senegal in 1818 explains,

The abolition of the slave trade was a grand gesture, generous, worthy of an enlightened century, but illusory, until we force the Moors to subscribe to it. Let me explain: the Blacks sell to the Moors the slaves which are forbidden to the Europeans to buy; and the king, who had sufficient revenue to maintain his court by selling two hundred prisoners to the French at 600 francs apiece, at present makes more frequent incursions against his neighbors, and against his own subjects, to double the number of his slaves and to have the same revenue, because the Moors pay only half as much for slaves as the Europeans did.³⁸

The slave trade in and across the Sahara did not end with the European abolition of the slave trade across the Atlantic (1810s) or within their colonies (French Territories 1848). On the contrary, the decline in the international demand for slaves which followed the end of the Atlantic slave trade, scholars argue –just like Mollien did—, resulted in a drop in the price of slaves which provoked a surge in the slave trade across the Sahara and an increase in the consumption of slaves in western African economies.

In his travels in the mid-nineteenth century Saharan interior, Panet was asked repeatedly to explain why Europeans had renounced owning slaves.³⁹ To be sure, this move intrigued many Africans. On one of these occasions, a religious authority admitted that “no one will contradict that their [the Europeans’] abolition of slavery is a great act of the heart and of charity, and who does it profit? To Muslims and other people who do

³⁸ Mollien, *L’Afrique occidentale en 1818*, Paris, 1967, p.75 quoted in Webb, *Desert Frontier*, p. 94.

³⁹ Panet, pp. 101, 159-161, 166. It is important to note that Panet argues in Afrocentric terms that it was Europe who brought slavery to Africa which is why he believed that it was the duty of Europeans to wipe out slavery from the African continent; “Before they braved the oceans to transport themselves in their ships to the African coast, slavery did not exist in this land, or if you will, it existed but in an acceptable form which had nothing of the odious character which it later took on, that is to say that man did not descend from the position where the Creator had elevated him to the point of becoming a common currency or an object of exchange: the traditions of the country prove this beyond a doubt. ” Panet’s argument is perceptive to say the least. He laid his finger on a very delicate subject scholars are grappling with today.

not have the same religion as them, for no Christian is a slave.”⁴⁰ Panet does not reveal what explanations he provided to satisfy the curiosity of Saharans. In fact, he hardly makes mention of the trans-Saharan slave trade in the regions he traversed. This seems peculiar given his professional interest in commerce and the fact that he was traveling in the height of the caravan season. However, he does provide an important eyewitness account of the arrival in Gulmīm in April 1850 of a trans-Saharan caravan from Timbuktu. The caravan of unmentioned size transported 200 enslaved women and men from the Western Sudan. As soon as they were within view, Panet observes, the women of Gulmīm immediately began eyeing them to make their choices.⁴¹ Panet later complained to Shaykh Bayrūk, the chief of Gulmīm (discussed below) about the awful state of the newly arrived slaves and expressed how “outrageous it [was] for humanity to see human beings become a mere “currency,” to which the Tikna chief is said to have agreed while arguing that “we are not guilty, because all we do is follow the traditions of our ancestors.”⁴²

Another important trade item sold to European merchants on the coast was ostrich feathers. Gaining in importance in the 1860s and 1870s, ostrich feathers (*rīsh al-na’am* in Arabic) were especially sought after by European nobility who developed a taste for feathered hats, and the British monarchy which adorned the caps of royal guards with such feathers. This demand led to an increase in ostrich hunting, the season of which began in May. At this time of the year, ostriches suffered from the heat and had less

⁴⁰ Panet, p. 166.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 176.

⁴² Ibid, p.177.

energy to outrun a galloping horse. One of the most active groups in this type of hunting was the *Awlād Bū Sbā'* and their tributaries (*Awlād Tīdrārīn* and *Imrāguen*) living in the coastal regions of the western Sahara where a sizeable ostrich community was once located. In the hot months, ostriches congregated closer to the cool seashore where they became easy targets. Hunters would then round them up and drive them to the water, often drowning them in the process.⁴³ Ostriches were also hunted for their feathers, meat and eggs in the region of Timbuktu and Gao, as well as further southwest in the *Ḥawḍ*.

Many more commodities exported from West to North Africa were destined for the Saharan and Moroccan markets. In the mid-nineteenth century these featured gold dust and the high quality cotton cloth. Cotton cloth was produced in strips (called *Jīf* in *Ḥasanīya* and *iradoora* in Soninké) in the regions of the Malian Sahel from Nioro to Sokolo, and in the region around Gubu. It was an extremely important item for the nomadic pastoralists who made their tents, their main residences, out of this hand-woven cotton.⁴⁴ Some cloths, woven, dyed and embroidered in centers such as Timbuktu and Kano (such as the *mjaybāt* or the *farawil*), were also highly prized by the people of western Sahara and southern Morocco who used them as turbans (*hawuli*).⁴⁵

Other goods included various oils (such as ostrich butter, and shea butter) a whole category of vegetable and animal products used for medicinal and mystical purposes (including leopard fangs and bark), different woods, ivory, yellow amber, animal skins,

⁴³ Vincent, "Voyages dans l'Adrar et Retour à St. Louis" (1860s), p. 58

⁴⁴ Meillassoux, "Le commerce pré-colonial," p. 185.

⁴⁵ Interviews in 'Asrīr with 'Abdāti b. Ḥamdī (3/31/99) and in Liksābi with Ibrahīm b. 'Aly (8/01/99). See also Abitbol, "Le Maroc," p.14, fn 61.

beeswax and foodstuffs such as peanuts, beans, peas, seeds (from pumpkin (*sirkāsh* and *fundi*) to Baobab tree (*tajmaght*)) and a range of spices (especially malaguetta red hot peppers). What is more, Muslim treatises in the form of manuscripts, written by western African scholars in the towns of Tishīt, Shingīti, Timbuktu, Arawān, Wālata, Sokoto, Kano and beyond, were also traded in Moroccan centers of learning.⁴⁶ Wood was especially valued by Saharan nomads because it was a rare commodity (used for tent poles and utensils such as bowls).

It is important to note that European merchandise sold in Ndar and the escales along the Senegal River (especially Podor and Dagāna) also traveled north, transported in caravans across the Sahara and into northern African markets. Indeed, French cotton cloth, white and blue, as well as other miscellaneous items, from mirrors and razors to bottles and paper, made their way north, despite the fact that some of these items were also available in al-Swaīra and other Moroccan ports. But strategic items such as firearms became popular trade goods which could not be obtained easily in Moroccan controlled ports. These were readily available for exchange in Ndar, and so the Spanish traveler Joaquim Gatell in the late 1860s remarked, no doubt exaggerating somewhat:

One hardly meets one inhabitant of the Ouad Noun [Wād Nūn] or a Tikna who is not armed with his double-barrel shotgun. These guns are French, from what I was told, and they come from Ndar of Senegal; they are sold quite dearly in the Wād Nūn.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Abitbol, "Le Maroc," p. 14, fn. 62.

⁴⁷ *Viajes por Maruecos, el Sus, Uad Nun y Tekna*, Memorias de la sociedad geographica de Madrid, 1882. cited in Maurice Barbier's source book *Voyages et Explorations au Sahara Occidental au XIXe siècle*. Paris: l'Harmattan, 1985, p. 178. The Maurel et Prom trading house had an important share of the arms trade in Ndar. See Chapter 6.

As discussed in the next chapter, the Tikna but mainly the Awlād Bū Sbā' acquired the reputation of being the traders of firearms in the western Sahara, and their successes in wars against other tribes were usually attributed to the fact that they were always armed with the best guns, namely the *warwar* or fast-firing rifle.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the market of Gulmīm was the caravan terminus on the northwestern desert edge (southern Morocco) and a “veritable bazaar where one could find everything.”⁴⁸ After a period of political and economic crisis in the mid-1840s, the next three decades of the nineteenth century (1850s-1870s), just starting when Panet was passing through the Wād Nūn region, were prosperous ones. Its position at the crossroads of western trans-Saharan trade routes gave Gulmīm the appellation of “*Bāb al-Ṣaḥra*” or the Door of the Sahara. Although other markets in the Wād Nūn region, such as Liksābi but especially Asrīr, were also commercially important, Gulmīm gained regional prominence in the first half of the nineteenth. Indeed, Gulmīm was a terminus for the western branches of trans-Saharan traffic, where the old *tarīq al-Lamṭī*, the trans-Saharan trail of the Almoravids, and the eastern trails from Timbuktu, converged. For this reason, the ‘Door of the Sahara’ was also one of the most important slave markets south of Morocco. Indeed, the entire Wād Nūn region was known for being the entry point of western Africans taken and sold into the trans-Saharan slave trade.

⁴⁸ Panet, pp. 161-162. This can still be said about Gulmīm today.

Gulmīm's successful development, starting in the late eighteenth century, is usually attributed to the role played by its charismatic leader Shaykh Bayrūk b. 'Abaydallah b. Sālam, of the small yet prosperous Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly clan of the Tikna confederation (discussed in the next chapter). The secret of the commercial success of Gulmīm, according to the oral evidence at least, was due to the presence of a community of Jewish traders who were placed under the protection of Bayrūk and his successors.⁴⁹ Bayrūk, for his part, devised ways to avoid paying royal duties by expanding his international connections to control the western branch of trans-Saharan trade and promote international trade to and from Wād Nūn. He achieved this by sending numerous emissaries all over western Africa and Europe.⁵⁰ Bayrūk was also actively engaged in capturing the crews of capsized European ships on the Atlantic coast, contacting the appropriate consuls in al-Swaīra and bargaining the ransom price for their release.⁵¹ As a result of his interactions with the European community stationed in al-

⁴⁹ Interview with Bashīr b. Bakār b. Muḥammad b. Bayrūk al-Ghazāwi in Gulmīm (7/26/96); Interview with Ahmad Sālak ould Abidine ould Bayruk, Gulmīm (7/22/99). Letter of agreement between the Jewish community of Gulmīm and the sons of Shaykh Bayrūk rabia 2 1281, Archives of Bashir al-Ghazāwi in Gulmīm.

⁵⁰ One of his agents made it to Marseilles (France), another to Manchester (England).

⁵¹ The French would name this practice "white slavery," and, to be sure, it captured the imagination of many adventurers and novel writers. On a ransom venture run sour see the anonymous note: "Correspondance des Anglais avec le chikh Beyrouk de Goulimin au sujet du meurtre de Davidson," *Bulletin de la Societe Geographique*, VII, 1837, pp. 102-112.

Swaīra, Bayruk developed a lasting relationship with the French consul and established a good rapport with the British.⁵²

Between Bayrūk, in the Wād Nūn, and the Kingdom of Morocco, there was much tension and commercial competition. This was due, in large part, to the fact that the bulk of the caravan trade from western Africa transited through the Wād Nūn, evading the control of the Moroccan king. Bayrūk's lifelong dream was to establish an independent port on the Atlantic coast near the Wād Nūn region.⁵³ To achieve this goal, Bayrūk sent an emissary to Governor Bouët in Ndar (Senegal) who agreed to launch a seafaring expedition to the Saharan coast in 1844. The French ship, carrying Bayrūk's emissary, failed to moor on the sandy shoreline and it was determined that establishing a port there would be logistically impossible.⁵⁴ From the archives of the French Foreign Office, it appears that Bughazza, the "minister" of Wād Nūn sent on behalf of Shaykh Bayrūk, then traveled all the way to Paris to discuss Bayrūk's plan. Bayrūk claimed that their trade with France could fill 15 to 20 ships per annum. He sought to negotiate a treaty "which would give France the monopoly of exchanges and ensure the protection and repurchase

⁵² The French consul Delaporte was perhaps the man who encouraged Bayruk to pursue his idea of building a port on the Wād Nūn coast by contacting the French in Senegal. An examination of the British Foreign Office Consular Records would reveal much about the commercial history in northwestern Africa.

⁵³ Interviews in Gulmīm with Bashir b. Bayruk al-Ghazāwi, Ahmad Sālak b. Bayruk; and in Nouakchott with Muḥammad al-Amīn b. Bayruk and Shaykhu b. Bayruk.

⁵⁴ AMAE, Mémoires et Documents, no. 14, Maroc (1844), Affaire du Scheikh de Wadnoun, pp. 66-69. The expedition never managed to moor on the sandy shoreline, and it would be another thirty years before this dream of a direct access to the Atlantic would come true 1870s. Lahbīb b. Bayrūk struck a deal with a British entrepreneur, Donald Mackenzie to construct a port at Tarfaya. This was good while it lasted, but it was only a few years until the Spanish supplanted all other Europeans on the Western Saharan coast (see chapter 6).

of its shipwrecked nationals” on the Atlantic coast.⁵⁵ But nothing came out of these proceedings as the Wād Nūn coast proved to be practically impossible to moor and the Morocco Sultan saw these deals with unfavorable light to say the least.⁵⁶

According to De La Chapelle, it was after these incidents that the Sultan of Morocco struck a deal with Shaykh Bayrūk. He was given a house to trade in al-Swaīra and the right to two-thirds of the export duties on goods arriving from Wād Nūn in exchange for the promise not to engage in further negotiations with foreigners on the coast.⁵⁷ It is interesting that later that same year, the French bombed the ports of al-Swaīra and Tangier to retaliate against the Moroccan kingdom’s sheltering of ‘Abd al-Qādar, the resistance leader who lead a jihād against the French in the Algerian Atlas.⁵⁸

In fact the bombing took place at the very time Bughazza was in Paris. It is tempting to suppose that by bombing Mogador, the French were conveniently harming the commercial interests of their competitors, the British, in preparation for the more significant role they were about to play in the region. To be sure, the French were still considering the idea of building an outpost on the Wād Nūn coast in the late 1850s, and then in the 1870s.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ “Les Teknas du Sud Marocain: Etude géographique, historique et sociologique,” *Bulletin du Comité de l’Afrique française*, 1933, p. 643.

⁵⁶ AMAE, Mémoires et Documents, no. 14, Maroc (1844), Affaire du Scheikh de Wadnoun.

⁵⁷ De la Chapelle, “les Teknas,” p. 642.

⁵⁸ See AMAE, Mémoires et Documents, no. 14, Maroc (1844) where the two events of the French ship exploring the Wād Nūn coast and the Algerian-Moroccan war are discussed together. See Miège, *Le Maroc et l’Europe*, vol. 2, pp. 196-224 for a sense of the Franco-British competition in Moroccan politics.

⁵⁹ “It is clear that it is France’s absolute interest to build establishments on these two points: Oued Noun and Arguin [north of present-day Mauritania, a trading post was once established there by the Portuguese]. So ruinous and useless for France would be the conquest of Morocco, so it would be advantageous to establish oneself on several maritime points where France could absorb all the commerce of the area.”

It must be noted that besides the Wād Nūn, there were numerous other important trade centers in southern Morocco competing for trans-Saharan trade, such as Akka, Tarudant, Tafilalt, and Illigh. The town of Illigh in the Sūs region, controlled by another charismatic, but also religiously prestigious leader Ḥāshim b. ‘Aly family who claimed sharifiyen descent, attracted a sizable portion of trans-Saharan traffic. He and his constituents venerated the saint Sid Aḥmad b. Mūsa for whom they created the commemorative *zawīya* in Tazerwalt near Illigh.⁶⁰ In an excellent study of the *kunnash* or account book of Husayn b. Ḥāshim dating from 1850-1875, Paul Pascon argues that “the Tazerwalt..and Illigh...became by 1850 the principal commercial center for the exchange between Saharan products, those of the Sūs and those [imported] from Europe at the Port of Essaouira [Mogador].”⁶¹ Although I think this claim remains to be tested against a complete examination of the *kunnash* of the Bayrūk family, and those of others involved in trans-Saharan trade, the Illigh commercial house was clearly a prominent market in nineteenth century southern Morocco. Moreover, as we shall see in the next chapter, the Ḥāshim family’s main caravaner correspondent was an Awlād Bū Sbā’ who resided in the western Africa town of Tishīt who also traded with the commercial community of Gulmīm.

Faidherbe, “Renseignements géographiques sur la partie du Sahara comprise entre l’Oued Noun et le Soudan,” *Nouvelles annals des voyages*, 6e serie 5e année (aout 1859), pp. 129-156 cited in Maurice Barbier’s source book *Voyages et Explorations au Sahara Occidental au XIXe siècle*, p. 153.

⁶⁰ Paul Pascon, with A. Arrif, D. Schroeter, M. Tozy & H. Van Der Wusten, *La Maison d’Illigh et l’histoire social du Tazerwalt*. Rabat: SMER, 1984.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 69.

The best description of mid-nineteenth century Wād Nūn was provided by the intrepid Panet. Because of Panet's own professional background as a trader, the detail he provides about trade in Wād Nūn warrants citation *in extenso*.

The luxury that this branch of public prosperity gives to the inhabitants of the country is the most convincing proof of its importance. It is to the progress of commerce, nothing but commerce, that are due the beautiful houses of the town, the soft rugs of Morocco that cover the apartments; a healthy and abundant nutrition in all [social] classes.

Located between Morocco and Soueïra [the port called Mogador by Europeans] where they go for supplies of European merchandise, the traders of Nun in return, buy the gum [gum arabic], goat skins, camel and sheep wool, ostrich feathers from the Saguia and other locations along the coast from the nomadic tribes there. Moreover, they expedite caravans to Timbuktou which return with large quantities of gold, two to three thousand camels loaded with gum, ivory, wax and slaves. The neighboring villages and burghs also supply wax and gum obtained from the Tadjakant, a neighboring Berber tribe. They also collect their share of the gold mines of the Sudan through their relations with the oasis of Adrar and direct expeditions to Tishit or by foreign caravans. Their relations with Tafilalt and Touat are increasing and will soon receive a boost [in reference to the French presence in Algeria]. *Beïrouk [Bayrūk], whose intelligent efforts and conciliatory character ensures that peace prevails around him, is the first to give the example of caravan expeditions to foreigners and in the interior of the continent by procuring the services of several commercial brokers chosen generally from the one hundred to one hundred and fifty El-Harib* [? This must be a mistake since the Arib are enemies of the Tikna] *who migrated to Nun. Let me add that his intelligent correspondence with several indigenous chiefs of the interior attracts to him a crowd of traders.* For an Arab [sic! Read Berber], it was not without admiration that one day I heard him say to a group of his commercial brokers: "One does not wait at home for fortune, one must go find it by taking products of one's country to exchange them for products in a foreign country. In his utmost wisdom, God has designed it so that what can be found in one people is lacking in another to force people to engage in relations which, by uniting them in a common interest, drives away the spirit of war in them forever. If next they were inspired to name a chief among us, it is to give a direction to these relations which otherwise would not have been possible if each nation [people] did not have in its midst an interpreter of its wishes to treat with the other. Indeed, how could two nations get along and how much time would they need if each one of its people were to speak. Now, the first responsibility of this chief is to ensure peace and to revive the work, source of progress and greatness. This is what I do, by applying the revenue which my position generates to send

my caravans everywhere. Wherever I succeed, my subjects follow; wherever I do not succeed, they are warned in time and are spared of fruitless relations.⁶²

Panet, who visited Gulmīm at the height of the caravan season in Winter-Spring of 1850, provided an eyewitness account of the commotion in town. He noted the presence of caravans from Shingīti and Tishīt belonging to the Awlād Bū Sbā'. He also witnessed the departure of a caravan headed for Tishīt which was transporting a group of skilled workers (blacksmiths, and cultivators) destined to work for Shaykh 'Umār Tāl, the Muslim leader living in Segou.⁶³ Given 'Umar Tal's role in slave trafficking, a great deal of his transactions in Wād Nūn were most probably paid in slaves. Slaves were the most valuable (human) commodity on the Gulmīm market and probably the Futa leader's only currency for purchasing weapons and other resources needed to build his Islamic state.⁶⁴ It is noteworthy that Panet was very impressed with the size of the town of Segou, another "rich bazaar", which he had visited with French official Anne Raffanel in the mid 1840s.⁶⁵ It was during his trip to the Malian region of Kaarta that Raffanel commented that he "could not buy even a morsel of salt from a 'Moor' unless he was willing to trade a slave."⁶⁶

⁶² Panet, pp. 155-156. Panet was visibly seduced by Bayruk's charisma and power; a man whose reputation in politics and trade he had been made aware of in Ndar. Panet's reference to the Ahl Harib is intriguing in light of oral evidence which points to the disagreement between Bayrūk and this group. Interview with Ahmad Saalakould Abidineould Bayruk, Gulmīm (7/22/99).

⁶³ See David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, Clarendon Press: 1985.

⁶⁴ Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa*, Cambridge: CUP, 1998, pp. 43-5.

⁶⁵ Panet, p. 182. , I fact, he argued for the establishment of a French outpost there.

⁶⁶ *Nouveau Voyage dans le Pays des Nègres suivi d'études sur la colonie du Senegal et de documents historiques, géographiques et scientifiques*, Paris, 1856, p. 452 cited in Ann McDougall "Salt, Saharans, and the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade."

As discussed in chapter two, salt was indeed the number one resource of the Sahara desert which was traded for the slaves, gold and the other products of the Sudan. The two most important rock salt pans were Ijīl, just north of Shingīṭī, and Tawdanni (400km north of Timbuktu). The brown sandy salt crust called *amersāl* found around the city of Tishīt, used especially for animal feed, was also a non-negligible subsistence trade item. Because of the dearth of salt in western Africa the trade in rock salt was crucial to its inhabitants.⁶⁷ According to Ann McDougall, the expert on the history of Saharan salt, the western African salt mine of Ijīl was accessible and attracted the most caravans in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.⁶⁸ The early nineteenth century scholar Sīdi Abdullah b. al-Ḥāj Ibrāhīm, discussed in the previous chapter, noted, in reference to an earlier period and no doubt with some exaggeration, that:

There once left Shingīṭī a caravan of 32,000 camels loaded with salt, of which 20,000 belonged to the people of Shingīṭī and 12,000 belonged to the people of Tishīt. All these loads were sold in Zāra [not located, but could be Nara].⁶⁹ The people were seized with admiration and wondered which of the two cities was most prosperous.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Curtin, *Economic Change*, pp. 224-5; McDougall, "Banamba and the Salt Trade in the Western Sudan," in D. Henig, Ed. *West African Economic and Social History: Studies in Memory of Marion Johnson*, Madison: UWP, 1990, p. 151.

⁶⁸ McDougall, "The Ijīl Salt Industry," and "Salt, Saharans and the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade."

⁶⁹ See McDougall, "The Search for "Tarra": Toponym and Geography in Exploring History," *History in Africa*, 18 (1991), p. P. 276 fn 38. I came across a children's rhyme which mentions the town or region of Zāra. "*lahmām gambri taht al-hāba yangbuḡ mutrī mutrī zārā*" translated as "the Gambri dove under the stone grabs little millet, little millet from Zāra." In other words the bird eating the little millet supply was crushed under a stone. The elderly woman who shared this with me did not know where Zāra was, but thought it was in the Malian millet bowl where all millet was imported (the towns of Nara, Banamba, Sokolo, Goumbou and later Nioro).

⁷⁰ From *al-aḥīḥatu al-naqlī*, (early 1800s) cited by Abdel Wedoud oud Cheikh, "Nomadisme, Islam et Pouvoir Politique," Vol. I, p. 71. The size of this caravan seems extraordinary. In the mid-nineteen century, the numbers of 23 000 and 12000 were more likely to represent total numbers of camel loads of

The salt from Ijīl was purchased directly at the salt quarry or in the market town of Shingīti. In Ijīl, salt bars were bought from the workers of the Kunta group of Wadān who held the rights to quarry. As Capitaine Brosset explains,

they deliver the bars lined-up on the side of the trench; this is where the caravaners take them and strap them [on to their camels] themselves. The payment is in bars of salt restored in Atar or in Chinguetti. Besides, the caravans bring some provisions, have the duty of bringing wood and water. The rate of payment is 1 bar for every 6 or 7 bars, or 2 bars for 13 bars, 3 bars for 20 bars, 15 bars for 100. Camels carry usually 8 bars; some sometimes carry up to 10 and even 12. These bars weigh 35 to 40 kgs.⁷¹

Caravans would then head south with their bars of salt to trade it for millet and other products (we will discuss the specifics of caravan organizing below). Salt was not extracted all year round, but seasonally during the winter months, coinciding with the caravan season (from October to March). Capitaine Vincent, a Frenchman who led an exploratory expedition to the Adrar accompanied by Bu al-Mughdād in the winter of 1860, estimated that more than 20 000 camel loads of salt were extracted from the Ijīl mine annually.⁷²

As McDougall's scholarship has shown, and indeed the above quotes by Sīdi Abdullah b. al-Ḥāj Ibrāhīm and Raffanel support this, it was for slaves that the bulk of salt bars were exchanged in the mid-nineteenth century. However, I would suggest that the caravans engaged in the slave for salt trade were more likely to be the *akabār* or

salt extracted annually from Ijīl (see below). This quote is often repeated by the inhabitants of Tishit and Shingīti today. Also cited by McDougall in "Salt, Saharans and the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade."

trans-Saharan more than the regional trade expeditions (discussed below). The interregional caravan's main purpose, I argue, was to acquire subsistence products namely millet, and other cereals and food products such as nuts, seeds, spices, as well as cotton cloth, crafts and wood (for tent poles and utensils). These subsistence caravans would nonetheless purchase the occasional slave to meet the labor needs of the desert economy. But, as we shall see in the next chapter, those engaged in the long-distance exportation of slaves to northwestern African markets were often from the Wād Nūn or Sūs region, or had solid contacts with the merchants in those markets.

The town of Shingīti (located in present-day northern Mauritania) was the economic capital of the Adrar region in the 1860s. It then had a population of three to four thousand living in approximately 800 houses (made of stone in the style of oasis towns of the Sahara).⁷³ The town of Atar, to the west of Shingīti, had 500 houses and between one to two thousand residents. The oasis of Awūjift, south of Atar, also had a sizeable population of between 1000 and 1700 inhabitants. The main cultures of the Adrar oasis were wheat, barley, some millet and melons and, of course dates, which constituted the most important export after salt. According to Vincent's information, the total yearly production of millet represented on average 15 000 loads of camels per year (3 million kg per year), 1000 camel loads of barley (total of 200 000 kg), 500 loads of wheat (100 000 kg). Given that the Adrar was a major importer of cereal, especially the millet staple, I doubt that these proportions were exported or even represent the actual

⁷¹ Capitaine D. Brosset "La Saline d'Idjil," *Afrique Française: Renseignements Coloniaux*, no. 11, 1933, p. 264.

⁷² Vincent, p. 58.

annual production of the Adrar. Indeed, the small *zra'ib* or gardens located underneath palm trees were so small and few that it seems inconceivable they produced such quantities. Rather, I suspect these figures represented rough estimates of annual production and/or imports destined for local consumption.

By the first half of the nineteenth century, the city of Tishīt located in the Tagānt region on the southern edge of the Sahara had emerged as one of the most active exchange centers where northern and southern traders met.⁷⁴ As the nineteenth century historian of Shingīṭī, Aḥmad b. Al-Amīn, explained when describing Tishīt, its inhabitants were traders and “it is the closest region to the Sudan.”⁷⁵ Tishīt was founded probably before the twelfth century (536 h or *'am thalwin*)⁷⁶ by the Māsna, and later settled by a group of the Shurfa (sharīfian descent). The Māsna are the people of Soninké origin who founded the town and owned the rights to its supply of *amersal*.⁷⁷

⁷³ Vincent, p. 62.

⁷⁴ McDougall, “The Ijīl Salt Industry;” For an architectural study of the town and its stone houses see D. Jacques-Meunié, *Cités Anciennes de Mauritanie, Provinces du Taganant et du Hodh*. Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1961.

⁷⁵ *Al-Wasīl*, p. 459.

⁷⁶ As the following saying, clearly invented by the Shurfa of Tishīt, expresses: “In the year of thalwin [th-l-wa=536 in the numero-script code of the Sahara equal to year 1141 in the Gregorian calendar] the city of Tishīt was built and the knowledge among the people was plentiful. They were many descendents of Khadījā [wife of the Prophet Muḥammad; i.e. the sharīfians were well-represented] and very few *ḥasāni* [or *'arab* warriors].” Poem shared by Dāda b. Idda of Tishīt and also repeated by Jily b. Abd al-Qadar b. Intaha, *Atār* (9/25/97).

⁷⁷ Interview with Ḥamallah b. Bāba Mine, Chief of the Māsna, Tishīt (4/15/97); Interview with Muhammadu b. Ahamdi, Tishīt (4/30/97); Jacques-Meunié, *Cités Anciennes* pp. 58-8. See also McDougall, “Salts of the Western Sahara,” p. 250-251. The foundation of Tishīt is contested between the Māsna and the Shurfa. It is most likely that the first founded the town and the second moved in later and began building their own stones houses. It is at this point that the Shurfa date the founding of Tishīt (1141 AD, see note above), and so the town must actually be more ancient than that. The same process took place in the town of Walāta (formerly Bīru), founded by the Mande and settled by Berbers camel pastoralists in

Oral traditions explain that when the Awlād Bū Sbā' trader Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm Khalīl first came to Tishīt (circa 1840s), he counted 250 stone houses and not a single one was in ruins.⁷⁸

Another group, which settled in Tishīt in the 1780s according to the Tishīt chronicle, came to assume a significant position in local caravan trading: the Awlād Billa.⁷⁹ Aside from several entries in the chronicle, little is known about this group. They had several conflicts with the Māsna, who would eventually drive them out of Tishīt in 1850.⁸⁰ This is when most Awlād Billa moved 35 kilometers to the east and founded the new town of 'Aqrayjīt.

Sociologist Abdel Wedoudould Cheikh suspects that the Awlād Billa are somehow related to the Tikna of the Wād Nūn region.⁸¹ It is certainly tempting to establish a connection due to the similarity of the name to the Aīt Billa *leff* of the Tikna confederation (see discussion of the Tikna in the next chapter). Unfortunately I only interviewed five members of the Awlād Billa, two of them in their home town of

the 12th and 13th centuries. See Tim Cleaveland, "Becoming Walati: A Study of Politics, Kinship and Social Identity in Pre-Colonial Walata," Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1995, p. 105, and see pp. 201-206 for a brief description of the Māsna based on a French source.

⁷⁸ Interviews with Dāda b. Idda and Aḥmadu b. Aḥamdi. Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm Khalīl, the trader from Wād Nūn who commandeered the international trade of Tishīt from the 1840s to the 1870s is discussed in the following chapters, especially chapter 5 (see trader profile).

⁷⁹ *Ḥāūliyāt Tishīt* or the Tishīt Chronicle, photographed in the family archives of Al-Sharīf b. Buyahmad (4/97), p. 2/29.

⁸⁰ Commandant Frèrejean writes that the Awlād Billa were originally in the Adrar region when the Kunta group drove them out in 1787 from whence they moved into Tishīt. This date is confirmed by the Tishīt chronicle. In "La région des Idouaich" p. 45.

‘Aqrayjīt. Although a Wād Nūn connection was denied, at least one interviewee, whose mother was the granddaughter of the founder of Aghrayjīt, al-Ḥāj ‘Aly, asserted that the Awlād Billa were big time traders with strong links to Morocco.⁸² To be sure, the presence of an underground canal-system, which connects the main well of ‘Aqrayjīt to other wells around the town, indicates a northern influence. Known as “sāgay,” this subterranean hydro-system is found only in the Wād Draa, Saguiat al-Ḥamra and Wād Nūn regions on the northern desert edge.⁸³ It is highly likely that this system was imported from the North by the Awlād Billa and/or by their trading associates. Another indication of a possible connection with the Wād Nūn comes from a similar legend in Gulmīm and Aqrayjīt. It describes a jackal which discovers water by scraping the ground with its paw.⁸⁴ Aqrayjīt remained a relatively small town, and never became an important trade center. Whatever prosperity it yielded began to decline together with Tishīt in the late nineteenth century.

⁸¹ Personal communication, Nouakchott (1997).

⁸² Sharf b. Muḥammad al-Sharḥ (Tishīt, 05/03/97). I received a negative answer to my blunt question “Is there a link between you and the Tikna?” but this might have to do with the way I asked the question.

⁸³ Interview with Al-Sharḥ b. Mbāke, Tishīt (5/2/97). “Aghraiḥīt means empty, like in a dry, empty well. When the Awlad Billa came, they hit the soil only slightly and the water came spurting out. There are 8 wells today. The sāgay is owned by Aḥmad Dayda b. Aḥmad Dayda. This is a system of canalization (*māsraf*) between wells, the sāgay being the central one with an underground tunnel connecting to other wells. When one well is full with rain, it never overflows since it is connected to the other wells. It saves more water.”

⁸⁴ See Jacques-Meunié, *Cités Anciennes*, p. 69 (citing Mauny). See also quote in previous footnote. The jackal is the mascot of the Aḥ Mūsa wa ‘Aly Tikna who often sign their name with the niṣba al-ḡībī (the one of the jackal). See chapter 4.

Wadān, where the clerical tribe of the Kunta was settled, once a prosperous Saharan metropolis in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, was in decline by the beginning of the nineteenth century due to civil strife and environmental factors.⁸⁵ In the city of Timbuktu, commerce was of relative importance in the eighteenth century. But in the middle of the following century, things picked up considerably. This is attributed, in large part, to the import/export activities of two port cities: al-Swaīra, and especially Tripoli. As Panet's description of the arrival of a caravan in Gulmīm attests, the western branch of trans-Saharan trade was active in the mid-nineteenth century. Evidence from trade records in Timbuktu suggests, however, that a sizeable part of the trade from this city went along the eastern branch towards Tripoli, via Ghadames and Murzuk.⁸⁶ As Stephen Baier explains in his excellent study of the nineteenth century economy of Central Niger, "In the 1860s trade from Timbuktu may have accounted for as much as one quarter of the Tripoli totals, but this trade disappeared before 1880, having been diverted either to Mogador or to river and ocean routes pivoting on St. Louis and the lower Senegal."⁸⁷ We shall return to this question in chapter six.

⁸⁵ Vincent, p. 62 based on the testimony of a Jewish trader settled in the town of Atar named Mardochee. It is highly likely that this Mardochee is the same Mardochee/ Murdukhay trader who blazed a trail for Jews in Timbuktu (see chapter 6).

⁸⁶ From my week-long survey of trade records at the CEDRAB in Timbuktu, the bulk of records found until the later nineteenth century were written by traders from Ghadames, Gwat, Murzūk or Tripoli. It was only for the later part of nineteenth century that trade along the western branches of trans-Saharan trails become more significant.

⁸⁷ *An Economic History of Central Niger*, p. 39.

The Organization of Interregional and Trans-Saharan Caravan Trade⁸⁸

In the nineteenth century, two kinds of caravans supplied the regions of western Africa in goods and services along the western routes. The first was the large caravan which usually traveled the longest distances. It transported North African and European imported merchandise to western African markets, and returned to the northern desert edge with various products (of the kind mentioned above) and slaves. This caravan, known as the *akabār* (derived from the Arabic superlative *akbār* meaning largest, biggest), was usually organized once or twice a year in the northern towns of the desert-edge and destined for the markets of the Sudan. It involved a large number of people, capital and camels. The second more common caravan was locally known as *rafa* (plur. *rafa'ig* derived from the Arabic for group of people or company) or sometimes simply *qāfila* (plur. *qaw'āfil* Arabic generic term for caravan or convoy, from the verb 'to return home'). It was smaller in size and usually traveled shorter distances for food, slaves and

⁸⁸ Because the basic organization of camel caravans does not seem to have changed significantly throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, in the sense that there were no technological innovations, this discussion will be set in a nineteenth century 'ethnographic present.' It is based, essentially, on oral evidence gathered in the late twentieth century. I interviewed numerous former caravaners, including Muhammad Hanshi b. Muhammad Sālah (Nouakchott, 06/25/97); Aḥmād b. Jiddū, one of the last caravaners from Shingīṭi; his last trip dates back to the early 1970s. (Shingīṭi 09/29/97 and 03/05/97); Abdarahmān b. Muhammad al-Hanshi (Shingīṭi 02/27/97; 09/29/97; 01/10/97); Bāba Ghazzāl, the oldest caravaner of the Māsna, Tishīṭ (04/14/97; 04/16/97; 04/25/97); Muhammad Lamine o/ Moissa nicknamed al-Mashbuḥ, Tishīṭ (04/16/97; 04/17/97; 05/03/97); Falla mint Būbū, Tishīṭ (5/01/97); Khalīfa b. Bashir, Tishīṭ still active although he is in his seventies. He is known in town as the last caravaner of Tishīṭ (04/30/97); Abderahman b. Jiddu, Tishīṭ (04/19/97) Ahmed b. Kubran (04/19/97); Taha mint al-Khatābi b. Dawūd, Tishīṭ (05/01/97); Muhammad b. Ṭālib and Makhāla b. al'Amish in Tijijkjā (05/06/97) and Bashir b. Muḥammad (05/07/99); Fuṭji b. Aṭāf, in Aṭār (12/10/97; 12/11/97) and in Nouakchott (03/07/98); Ḥabūb b. Aḥmad b. al-Ma'ati and Aḥmad Fāl b. Muḥammad b. Laḥbīb in Asrīr, Morocco (07/30/99) and 'Abaydat b. Ḥamdi (07/31/99); and in Liksābi, Ibrahīm b. 'Aly b. al-Talib (8/1/99) and Muḥammad al-Nājim b. Muḥammad al-Nājim (08/01/99); in Timbuktu interviews with Muḥammad b. Khatrā (4/22/98) and Sidi 'Umar ould Sid Ahmed Sultan (04/22/98).

other supplies in exchange primarily for salt, dates (transported whole or in a paste in leather pouches) and dried meat (*tishdār* in Ḥasanīya; *bukané* in Soninke) which was very prized by people in the south. By the end of the nineteenth century, with the increased traffic towards the Senegal River trading posts and Ndar, there was a term shift and the word *akabār* came to be used for caravans going to these destinations as well as those linking markets on both edges of the Sahara.

The caravans from Shingīti and Tishīt were often organized by the *zwāya* who engaged in regulating exchange and enforcing Islamic law. Stranger traders, such as the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' residing in western African towns, also participated in the organization of interregional caravans, in combination with their trans-Saharan operations. Further east, in the Azawād region of present-day Mali, camel caravans that linked (and still do) the salt mine of Tawdanni to Timbuktu were called *azalaī*.⁸⁹ These were organized by the people of Arawān and Timbūktu on a yearly basis as well.⁹⁰

Both regional and trans-Saharan caravans required careful planning. The preparation involved networking with trading partners to determine who was participating and how many camels and other resources they were contributing. In the mid-nineteenth century, the size of interregional caravans ranged from a few dozen to over a thousand camels, whereas the much larger *akabār* had camels numbering in the

⁸⁹ These caravans are still operating today in northern Mali and eastern Mauritania because of the lack of roads. Interview with Yahya b. al-Kuttām, known as « quthm » in Mopti (04/20/98).

⁹⁰ Interviews in Timbuktu Muḥammad b. Khattra (4/22/98) and Sidi 'Umar b. Sid Ahmad al-Ṣūltan (4/22/98).

thousands.⁹¹ One of the most vivid accounts of an *akabār* was collected by James Riley, an American sailor shipwrecked on the Saharan coast who was taken captive by the Awlād Bū Sbā'.⁹² Sīdi Hamet, an Awlād Bū Sbā' whom Riley interviewed, described his first trip from Wād Nūn to Timbuktu in the early 1800s with his brother. They, and their four camels, joined an large *akabār* "consisted of about three thousand camels and eight hundred men, with goods of almost every kind that are sold Morocco."⁹³ In his second trip to Timbuktu, Sidi Hamet joined a caravan of 4000 camels and close to 1000 men. He tells the chilling story of how the entire caravan was almost entirely swept away under a sandstorm. Only twenty-one men and twelve camels reached Timbuktu alive.⁹⁴

The number of shareholders with stakes in a caravan could range from three to forty for the interregional *rafga*, to the hundreds for the annual trans-Saharan *akabār*. All shareholders needed to agree about final destination and select a representative, or representatives, to "walk" the caravan. The main caravan organizers were not necessarily the actual caravaners. This was more likely to be the case in interregional caravans which were smaller in scale and where the caravan leader was often the chief executive of the enterprise. The element of trust between caravaners was of great importance, as

⁹¹ Guestimates based on interviews, travelogues and caravan lists (for the *rafga* only, I have not yet located a *akabār* caravan list).

⁹² Riley, James. *James Riley, Loss of the American Brib Commerce, wrecked on the western coast of Africa in the month of August 1815 with an account of Tombuctoo...* London: John Murray, 1817. , "Chapter XXV: The author's motives for requesting of, and writing down, his former master's narrative of Travels on the Desert when in Mogadore, together with Sidi Hamet's narrative of a journey across the great Desert to Tombuctoo, and back again to Widnoon, with a caravan" (1815), pp. 159-177.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 160. The figure of 800 men which corresponds to a 3.75 camels/men ratio. There is no way in knowing how Riley interpreted the information of his Awlād Bū Sbā' informant.

⁹⁴ Ibid. pp. 163-165.

can be imagined and as the proverb “the caravan companion does not lie” illustrates (more on the question of *trust* in chapter five).

Each caravan center had its terminology to designate the workers of the caravan trade. For the large trans-Saharan caravans typically leaving Wād Nūn, the caravan leader, chosen from among the shareholders, took on the distinguished title of “Shaykh.”⁹⁵ The vocabulary for Tishīt and Shingīti was similar due, no doubt, to the geographical and professional proximity of the two towns. The only difference was how they designated the caravan leader. In Shingīti, he was called the *mrābuṭ* from the Arabic *rabat* “to bind, tie up, connect” and meaning by extension the leader of the pack.⁹⁶ The inhabitants of Tishīt simply called the leader ‘head of the caravan’ (*raīs al-rafga*). As mentioned above, the *mrābuṭ* could be the main executive director of the caravan expedition, his son or another relative, or a professional guide. To be sure, he needed to be very knowledgeable in regional geography, including topography and hydrology (knowing where the key wells and water sources were located). He also needed to have a good handle on astronomy so as to navigate with the constellations.⁹⁷ As Fuṭjī b. al-Ṭayr, an old caravaner of the Awlād Bū Sbā’, explains,

When it is night, there is a star that rises called *bilhady*. If it was night, I would show it to you, all the stars move except her, *bilhady*, it does not

⁹⁵ Interviews; This is probably the reason Bayrūk, the chief of Gulmīm and the Aṭṭ Mūsa wa ‘Aly was entitled Shaykh.

⁹⁶ The French would later deform this term into marabout with which they identified religious leaders.

⁹⁷ It must be noted that astronomy was one of the favorite subjects of scholars of the Sahara who collected astrology books. The Ḥabuṭ library of Shingīti is filled with such books and colorful 18th and 19th century manuscripts including diagrams of the constellations. See interview with Fuṭjī b. al-Ṭayr regarding astronomy and navigation.

shift...sometimes when I go [on the caravan] over there I put it [*bilhady*, the guiding star] in front of my neck and when I leave, I put it on one or the other of my shoulders, like this [demonstrates where he places himself in relationship to the star]. You can leave without fears with that star over there which does not move, the stars that move when you leave with their help [when you use them to guide yourself] you get lost.⁹⁸

In addition to these skills, the head of a caravan needed to be a smooth negotiator and diplomat to deal with the other caravaners, the caravan stoppers (*qiṭ'a al-ṭarīq*; literally 'road cutters') as well as with the traders and agents in the foreign markets visited. In fact, it is easy to see how information was a key element in long-distance trade organization. Access to information about trails, pastures and wells and the state these were in, the recent locations of sand dunes as well as certain enemy *ḥasāni* tribes, the market conditions in distant towns and the movement of other caravans in the area—all this information and more—was vital to the success of a caravan expedition. Reputation, 'wealth in people,' and long-distance networking promoted access to information, a question we will return to in the chapter five.

For this reason, the head (or heads of large interregional caravans and the large *akabār*) was required to be literate in Arabic and have a good sense of Islamic law, as he was in charge of all the contracts of the caravan and could be called upon to judge if the situation arose.⁹⁹ This could involve knowledge of several languages, but usually, the *mrābuṭ* relied on the services of cross-cultural brokers living in the main market towns who were themselves multilingual and whose job it was to mediate between foreign and local traders. The head of the caravan was paid by the general owner, or collectively by

⁹⁸ Interview with Fuṭṭī b. al-Ṭayr, Atar (10/09/97).

the shareholders of the caravan. If he happened to be the owner of caravan, his revenue was derived from the profits generated by the trip. In caravans originating from Shingīṭi, the *mrābut* was usually paid in transportation share and had a right to load a *taravāt* or long leather bag per camel.¹⁰⁰

The term *aqādīm* (Arab word with a Berber declination) was used in both towns, as well as in Walāta, and possibly Timbuktū, to designate the camel caravan's transportation manager. For salt caravans, the *aqādīm*'s salary typically varied between one salt bar (*'adīla*) and half a salt bar (*fāṣa*) per camel per trip. He would then sell the salt bars in the southern markets on his account, and get a similar weight allocation for the return trip. His responsibilities were many, so much so that in large caravans the *aqādīm* would take along an apprentice or hire an assistant at his own expense called the *shiqād*. The *aqādīm* and his aid prepared the cords made of leather with which to fasten the merchandise bundles (either four *dharf* (medium-sized merchandise bag made of leather), two *mezūd*, 2 *ravid*, with sometimes a *'alīya* on top of the bundles) and salt bars to the camels' back.¹⁰¹ He also prepared the grass cushion pads called *tikārīr* which were placed between the camel's back and the salt slab, fixed bundles and repaired broken bars by strapping them together. Al-Mashbūḥ, who first went on caravan as an apprentice

⁹⁹ Panet, discussed instances when the caravan leader had to arbitrate and pronounce judgments when one of the camels fell sick and loads needed to be shifted around.

¹⁰⁰ The information regarding the wages of caravaners disproves Austen's claim that "there was virtually no wage labor on the caravans" "Marginalization," p. 340; See Du Puigaudéau, *La Route du Sel*, Plon: 1945, for illustrations of caravan gear.

(*shidāq*) when he was first shaved (around twelve years of age) in the early 1930s, explains that if any of the salt bars broke during the trip, then he would not get paid, for “they [the caravan owners] were not kidding!”¹⁰²

Camels could transport between 150 and 200 kilograms of merchandise or between six and eight bars of salt from Ijīl or an average of five bars from Tawdanni. Camels leaving Tishīt with loads of amersāl salt carried on average four to five leather bags (*zgāib*) weighing about 50 kilograms each.¹⁰³ The *aqādīm* loaded the camels in the morning and unloaded them at the end of the caravan day, sometimes with the assistance of the other caravaners. He was also in charge of the meals and was usually the first one up in the morning to light the fire (with flint stones, which were found locally and then in the course of the nineteenth century they became progressively imported by Europeans on the coast) to cook the morning *‘aysh* (millet porridge).

The last caravan worker was the *rai’*, or shepherd, whose job it was to tend to the camels. At the end of the day, he would help unload and take the camels to the well, where he drew the water with a leather bucket. He would then take the camels to graze, if there was grass or shrubs in the vicinity. Like the *aqādīm*, the *rai’* was paid by the *mrābut*, and the salary was determined by the size of the camel caravan. Typically the

¹⁰¹ Interview with Abdarahim b. Muḥammad al-Hanshi, Shingṭi (2/3/97).

¹⁰² Muhammad al-Āmīn b. Muissa nicknamed al-Mashbūh, Tishīt (4/16/97). Of Bambara origin, he was once a ḥartāni of the Awlad Dawūd.

¹⁰³ Interview with Hamallah b. Bāba Mine, Chief of the Māsnā, Tishīt (4/15/97).

rai', like the *aqādīm*, the *shidād* and more rarely the *mrābut*, tended to be men of servile origin, usually “freed-slaves” often working for their former masters for wages.

A word must be said here about the locomotive power of caravans: the camel. Camels, thought to have arrived on the African continent via Egypt in a period between 200 and 300 A.D., became the main means of transportation in northwestern Africa by the seventh or eighth century.¹⁰⁴ As early as the tenth century, camel caravans were connecting the northern and the southern desert-edge communities of western Africa.¹⁰⁵ By the mid-nineteenth century, the levels of aridity had increasingly pushed the Sahelian cattle zone further south, just miles north of the rain-fed cereal producing zones north of the Senegal River.¹⁰⁶ The camel was the ideal vessel for trans-Saharan transportation. As James Webb explains, it

had several advantages over its closest competitors: the camel could survive without water or fresh grazing for 8-10 days, or twice as long as a donkey; the strongest draft animals could carry 200 kilograms of freight, or one-third more than donkeys or the draft ox; fewer men were required to tend camels than donkeys, and thus long-distance transport costs, figured in ton-kilometers, were lower; and the camel could negotiate the hazardous footing of the full sand desert, which no other domesticated desert animal could do...the camel was able to tolerate higher concentrations of salt [in water] than any other domesticated animal. In addition, the camel had a further advantage over other desert herd animals in that the milch camel's lactation was not dependent upon the availability of fresh pasture, as was the lactation of cattle, sheep, and goats. Milch camels normally lactated for 11 months out of 12, and the camel's ability to turn salty water into sweet milk for almost the entire year allowed desert people to exploit lands which otherwise would have remained submarginal.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Richard Bulliet, *The Camel and the Wheel*. Cambridge, 1975.

¹⁰⁵ McDougall, “Salt, Saharans, and the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade”, p.60.

¹⁰⁶ Webb, *Desert Frontier*, p.11. See also Curtin, *Economic Change*, pp. 278-285 for calculations of camel transportation.

¹⁰⁷ *Desert Frontier*, p. 11.

The technology of camel transportation seems to have changed very little across the centuries.¹⁰⁸ But clearly, environmental conditions characterized by a progressive increase of desertification, affected management of camel herds as well as itineraries. It is also important to note that the best camels for transportation were male and castrated (called *azūzal*). In the past five decades, the camel population has decreased dramatically. This is explained by the mass sedentarization in countries such as Mauritania, Mali and Morocco, which drained the interior of its inhabitants. This movement was followed by a considerable drop in the food supply needs of the reduced number of inland inhabitants, and the replacement of the camel caravan with the four-by-four (chapter seven). At the same time, the sex ratio of the camel population shifted with the higher demand now for she-camels, which serve the same purpose as cows supplying milk, baby she-camels and camel meat. This last use, the butchering of camels, is very much a twentieth century phenomenon, as “camels were rarely killed in the past” for regular consumption since they represented a precious working capital.¹⁰⁹ As another informant expressed, “one did not kill camels, it was the last bullet,” meaning that butchering a camel was an act of last resort.¹¹⁰

Besides the southern regions near Senegal, the preferred camel grazing zones in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the Tiris and the northern regions of the Inchīri (Map 3). Located at 1000 feet above sea level, the Tiris was arid most of the year

¹⁰⁸ Bulliet, chapter one.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Aḥmad b. Jiddū, Shingṭi (3/5/97). Camels were slaughtered on grand occasions and for political reasons to pay allegiance or honor the customary obligation to competing groups. Nowadays, in the town of Shingṭi for example, one she-camel is slaughtered per day to meet the needs of approximately 500 residents (outside the summer vacations and the Getna or date festival). See also Frédéric de la Chapelle, “Histoire du Sahara Occidental,” p. 41.

except in the spring and summer, when small amounts of rainfall produced excellent, albeit ephemeral, pastures. The other important advantage was the region's relative autonomy. Unlike the regions of the Adrar, the Tagant or the region of Wād Nūn in the north, the Tiris was a "no-man's land" where no ruler ruled supreme even after the successive colonization of Algeria, the Spanish Sahara, Mali, Mauritania and eventually Morocco. In 1859, Faïdherbe obtained the following information about the region:

So what is the Tiris? It is a region where there is not a village, not a tree, not even a small stream...But from October to May is covered in grazing fields, and all the tribes, from the Oued Noun [Wād Nūn], in the north, to Senegal, in the south, and to Tichit, in the East, that is to say living in a space of 40 000 square miles, head towards the Tiris with their herds of camels and sheep to find grass; the Tiris extends to the sea. During our raining season in Senegal, on the contrary, from June to October, there is no more grass in the Tiris, and tribes all return to their countries, where they can now find grazing fields...It is therefore a name which must appear on the map, because it plays an big role in the life of the people in all this part of the Sahara.¹¹¹

A number of nomadic groups frequently camped in the Tiris all year-round, including the Awlād Bū Sbā', the Awlād Dlīm, the Tikna and the Rgaībāt. It is no coincidence that these groups happened to be the principal camel herders and traders in western Africa. This explains why the main camel markets in western Africa were controlled by the two most commercially inclined of this Saharan groups: the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' (discussed in the next chapter). In the northern Sahel, the town of Gulmīm was the principal camel market from at least the late eighteenth century until today. In the southern sahel, the town of Louga in the Ganjol region of Senegal was the

¹¹⁰ Interview in Nouakchott with 'Abdallah b. Muḥammad Sidiyya (10/16/97).

¹¹¹ Faïdherbe cited in Maurice Barbier's source book *Voyages et Explorations au Sahara Occidental au XIXe siècle*, pp.146-7.

main camel market until recently. In both towns, there used to be a weekly camel fair.¹¹² It must also be noted that, given the high demand of camels in western Africa, certain traders specialized only in the camel trade. The Rgaībāt for instance were professional camel herders and traders, but the Awlād Bū Sbā' and Tikna were also involved in this business. Camel caravans for sale usually traded between Gulmīm and Louga, sometimes to Tindūf and other smaller markets as well. These types of caravans were sometimes called “*yasāwugu al-ībl*” (meaning ‘they market the camels’). As Fātima mint ‘Abd al-Raḥman b Buhay explains, describing the activities of her father, a Tikna,

he would take camels from here [Shingīṭi] and sell them over there [Gulmīm]. That they called *yasāwugu*, in those days they called that *yasāwugu al-ībl*, that’s right meaning they bought camels, they took them from here and they sold them over there.¹¹³

Whether it was a subsistence caravan from the salt mine to the millet bowl, or trans-Saharan one from the southern to the northern desert edge, the movement of large-scale caravan traffic was “weather related” and therefore seasonal. Circulation between regions was year round, of course, but the regular caravan traffic took place in the colder winter months. In the towns of Tishīt and Shingīṭi, the caravaners would wait until the *riwa* star could be seen in the firmament before it was time for the caravan season to

¹¹² In Louga, the camel market has dwindled in importance in the past three decades with the drought and decline in camel transportation due to increased automobile accessibility. The Saturday market in Gulmīm is still open, but the numbers of camels exchanged are nothing compared to what they once used to be.

¹¹³ Group interview with Muḥammad Sa’īd b. Buhay, Khadijatu mint Abdullah wuld ‘Aly, and Fatima mint Abd Rahman b. Buhay in Shingīṭi (3/08/97). The verb *yasāwugu* is derived from the Arabic for market (*sūq*).

begin.¹¹⁴ It was then that the caravaners would start loading their camels with salt and all the months of planning the caravan would spin into action. The caravan season, which usually lasted from October to March, was very much in tune with the agricultural calendar of the sedentary farmers and the gum arabic pickers in the southwestern forest zones. It triggered the harvesting of salt bars in the two main mines Ijīl, north of Shingīṭ and Tawdannī, north of Timbukṭū. The large-scale caravans, which brought together many traders who pooled their resources, were organized either yearly or bi-annually.

Although the profession of camel caravaners—the ones who physically walked the caravan--tended to be a male-dominated occupation (with the exception of the Māsna group of Tishīṭ, which we will turn to shortly), the caravan business was more a family enterprise where responsibilities crossed gender lines. As a Tikna informant Khnātha mint Aḥmayda explains, “the women of Shingīṭ...do not move, it is looked down upon by them [*shayn 'andhum*], their women don’t walk.”¹¹⁵ Although women participated in other ways in the caravan economy, it does not follow that decision-making, and profit sharing, were on a gender-equal basis, or that women had equal access to opportunities. On the contrary, women had fewer choices than men, especially because of the inequalities inherent in the Muslim patriarchal system.

Let us pause here to discuss the role of women in Saharan Muslim societies. Women inherited half the amount of their male counterparts and, for all intents and

¹¹⁴ See proverb at the beginning of this chapter (and fn 1).

¹¹⁵ Khnātha mint Aḥmayda (with her two daughter Fatimatu and Mariam daughter of Muḥammad al-Farha) in *Atar* (10/5/97).

purposes, they were legally half the status of men.¹¹⁶ Moreover, as per the *sharī'ā*, only men chose their women and had the right to divorce them. But, from written contracts dating to the mid-to-late nineteenth century, confirmed by oral evidence, some noble Biḍān women did practice the unusual right to demand that their husbands not have or take a second wife.¹¹⁷ It must be said, however, that noble Saharan women did not have the same status as the typical Muslim woman usually described in the literature.¹¹⁸ A number of authors argue that because of the matrilineal heritage of their Berber ancestry, noble Saharan women enjoyed a certain “freedom” as compared to many Muslim women elsewhere.¹¹⁹ It could be argued that the status of these women might have been also derived from their power to commandeer the domestic slaves of their tents and households. Research on how the increased access to slave labor in nineteenth century Sahara affected gender dynamics would prove or disprove this theory. To be sure, Panet remarked how “liberal” were the women in mid-nineteenth century Shingīṭi.¹²⁰ Ten years later, Capitaine Vincent in his excursion to the Adrar was equally surprised when he saw how the women of the emir seemed to “interfere in the affairs of men.” When he asked a

¹¹⁶ Cf. Chapter two where a verse from the Qur'an states that the testimony of two women equals the testimony of one man; in other words, a women's word is worth half that of a man.

¹¹⁷ Tishīṭ and Shingīṭi archives, interviews in Shingīṭi with Tikbir mint al-Ghulām (9/29/97), Zaynabuh mint Sidi b. Tālīb (1/10/97) and in Tishīṭ with Mariam mint Buya Ahmad (4/27/97), for example. The legal sentence was “lā ṣābiqan wa lā khālīfan” meaning that when marrying the woman, the man was to have to wife prior and no wife after the one he was marrying on that date.

¹¹⁸ See, for instance, Judith Tucker “Women in the Middle East and North Africa: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in *Women in the Middle East and North Africa*, Bloomington: IUP, 1999. It must be noted that much of what Tucker has to say does not apply to my very understudied research area where women are “African” and not “Middle Eastern.” But these categories in themselves are clearly problematic.

¹¹⁹ See Tim Cleaveland, “Becoming Walati,” for a discussion of the status of the ‘noble’ women in Walata, pp. 40-49. Also discussed here in the next chapter.

¹²⁰ Panet.

woman, through an interpreter, why this was so, she replied “the lion kills, but the she-lion kills as well.”¹²¹

Nevertheless, women had few chances of becoming independent caravan entrepreneurs unless they happened to be born “noble” into a commercial or scholarly family as a single or eldest daughter, or if they were widows.¹²² Among the Māsna of Tishīt unlike the Biḍān, however, some women accompanied caravans, alone or with male relatives, and traded on their own accounts.¹²³ It is important to note that like the Jula and the Jakhanké, the Masnā are related to the Soninke who are reputed long-distance traders in Western African history.¹²⁴ To be sure, Māsna women rarely, if ever, serviced the northern routes from Tishīt to the Ijīl salt mines or to the markets farther north. Māsna women, like the exceptional Biḍān woman (widow or single daughter), were also caravan organizers and financiers who rented representatives and caravaners to trade for them. Several Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā’ male traders who came to settle in Tishīt in the course of the nineteenth century married Māsna women and it is easy to imagine the advantages that these types of partnerships represented (See chapters five and six).¹²⁵

¹²¹ Vincent, p. 60.

¹²² See examples of successful widow traders in chapter 6.

¹²³ Interviews in Tishīt with Bāba Ghazzāl (4/24/97), and Falla mint Būbū (05/02/97) (last female caravaner in Tishīt; in her seventies). Like many Masnā, she speaks enough Bamanakan to effectively transact without the intermediary of a cross-cultural broker.

¹²⁴ See Curtin, « The Diakhanké. »

¹²⁵ See case studies of the Awlād Bū Sbā’ and Tikna in the next chapter.

Just like the seafaring expeditions of mercantile vessels, preparing for the camel season or the “time of the camel rein” (*zamān al-āgāda*), took several months, many more than the months spent on the trail. In towns such as Tishīt and Shingīti, the two most important commercial centers in mid-nineteenth century southwestern Sahara, caravans were frequently organized along lines of tribal, family and/or political affiliation. Oftentimes, particular sets of families would pool their resources and form one caravan. To facilitate this operation, they would select or hire an executive director to coordinate and manage the preparation, logistics and accounting. There were clearly tremendous advantages in caravan pooling since larger caravans tended to be safer although much less mobile. Other times, the whole town organized one large caravan. In Tishīt, for instance, the *Shurfa* (who linked their genealogies to the Prophet Muhammad), nominated a town caravan organizer yearly. He was in charge of organization and bookkeeping (not an easy task when accounting for multiple shareholders with multiple loads and wish lists). In the first part of the twentieth century, Hamallah b. Idda, the father of Dadda, was typically selected to direct the annual caravan of Tishīt to the Malian markets such as those of Nara, Banamba, Sokolo, or Nioro.¹²⁶ In such cases, he would hire his young sons, or nephews, to head caravans and usually men of ‘servile’ origin, or *harātīn* for the position of *aqādīm*. As an accountant, the caravan director was responsible for drawing a list of the caravan shareholders and the size of their shares.

¹²⁶ Family Archives of Dadda b. Idda, Tishīt, DI 5.

A good example is a list of participants in an interregional caravan from Tishīt, heading south to exchange salt bars and *amersāl* loads for millet, dating from the mid-nineteenth century (see Appendix 2).¹²⁷ In this caravan list, the caravan director, who identified himself as “the writer” (*al-kātib*), participated in the caravan as shareholder. Apparently he was paid for his services with the extra salt bars added after each load of salt bars was described (ex. “and one salt bar”). This seems to indicate that Muḥammad, the writer/executive director, was paid a total of 14 full bars and 12 half bars or a total of twenty bars or the equivalent of three camel loads. The half or one and a half bars given to him in payment could be fractions deducted from a previous debt. It must be noted that the participants in this caravan are all male, which was not always the case.¹²⁸ Moreover, from the original it is obvious that the document was written in phases, as the caravan was being formed. The total number of camel loads, with both kinds of salt, was 1050; a large size for a mid-nineteenth century interregional caravan.

Men and women in the caravan business shared similar roles to those involved in the organization of mercantile cargo ships which linked markets across the Mediterranean, Atlantic, Indian and other oceans. In many cases, caravaning was a family business, just like many professions around the world in nineteenth century including farming, butchering, and baking. The gender division of labor in caravaning was not unlike nineteenth century Belgian retail businesses where “the whole family takes part in it...the wife keeps the books, the husband sells, and the children deliver to customers’

¹²⁷ Family archives of Aḥmad al-Saghīr, Tishīt AS3 (R/V).

¹²⁸ See list in Appendix 1 which includes female participants.

homes.”¹²⁹ Marriage was key to business strategy, admittedly more for the men who enjoyed alone the right to chose, than for most women (widows excepted). It was often through marital alliances that many caravaners, like shopkeepers, or “ship owners[,] amassed the capital necessary to launch the voyage.”¹³⁰ Regardless of the dowry, the choice of acquiring a woman, or giving one’s daughter’s hand away to a trader, was also a way to gain entrance into a specific trade network. This was particularly true for stranger traders, such as the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā’, who settled in western African market towns along trade routes (discussed in the following chapters).

Aside from being the object of strategic commercial alliances and sources of capital, wives of caravaners and financiers shared business responsibilities in the area of information networking. They gathered information about other traders and their projects through elaborate ‘gossip’ networks. Conceivably, they could participate in disinformation campaigns to reinforce their business positions as well as spread rumors about competitors. On the other hand, wives and daughters made business arrangements with trading partners and/or by placing orders with caravaners on their own accounts, separate from the ‘family business,’ the total profits of which they did not necessarily control. For example, the daughters of Limām were shareholders on the Tishīt caravan and sent their ‘slave’ as a caravan courier.¹³¹

¹²⁹ A. Goody, *Le mouvement coopératif*, Gand, 1896, pp. 14-15. In *The Bourgeoisie in Europe, 1780-1914*, Geoffrey Crossick & Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, London: Routledge, 1995, p. 87. It must be noted, of course, that this portrays the perspective of a late 19th c. Belgian social catholic imbued with the ideals of a “harmonious family business ethic.”

¹³⁰ Lisa Norling, “Ahab’s Wife: Women and the American Whaling Industry, 1820-1870,” pp. 70-91, in *Iron Men*, p. 78.

¹³¹ See returning caravan document cited in chapter two in Appendix 1.

While their men were on the trail, the most notable role of the wives of caravaners was to hold the fort for long periods ranging between three months and six months. Unless a caravaner appointed a representative to oversee his affairs in his absence (as was the case in the inheritance case in chapter five), women then usually assumed all the responsibilities from selling to bookkeeping, purchasing, hiring and firing, and more. This was also remarked among the ‘noble’ long-distance male traders of the Damaragam, where Baier explains that “women of servile origin [were left] in charge of their houses and possessions.”¹³² Similarly, the wives of nineteenth century absentee sailors had “to care for the young, the sick, and the old; to oversee property, manage budgets, maintain households, and integrate the networks of kinship and neighborhood ties through which the larger community survived.”¹³³

In the winter months, caravaners tended to travel from dawn until about one or two in the afternoon (at the time of the afternoon prayer, *ṣalāt al-thahr*). Depending on the moon, and sometimes on the political situation or environmental conditions (sandstorms, or to avoid dehydration for example), they would also travel at night. The *jiba* or the daily distance covered by a loaded caravan was approximately 25 kilometers. Usually a *jiba* was determined by the presence of wells, and so typically, daily overnight/resting stops were planned around wells. However, sometimes there were portions of the trip where a well was not reached for several days at a time. For trans-Saharan itineraries, for instance, crossing the arid region of Tiris involved spending as long as five days without water. Distances between markets were as follows:

¹³² Baier, *An Economic History of Central Niger*, p. 47-8.

¹³³ Norling, “Ahab's Wife,” p. 79.

<u>Some Distances Between Markets in Western Africa</u> (expressed in caravan days and kilometers)			
<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>Days</i>	<i>Distance (km)</i>
Shingīṭi	Ijīl	4-5	85
Shingīṭi	Wād Nūn	30-35	860
Shingīṭi	Tishīt	15-17	430
Shingīṭi	Nioro	30	690
Shingīṭi	Podor	30	700
Shingīṭi	Ndar	25-30	730
Ndar or Louga	Wād Nūn	45-50	1170
Tishīt	Wād Nūn	45-50	1140
Tishīt	Nioro	12-15	345
Tishīt	Tidjikja	6	150
Tishīt	Walāta	7	160
Walāta	Timbuktu	15	380
Timbuktu	Tindūf	35-8	990
Tindūf	Gulmīm	5-6	190
Gulmīm	Al-Swaīra	8-10	240

Organizing camel caravans required a careful combination of capital, international networking, trust, stamina, navigational and linguistic skills as well as a great deal of luck. Indeed, caravanning was a dangerous undertaking. Not least of the risks were the environmental and ecological threats along the way. The

danger of sand storms was always present. Oral traditions from Mauritania tell about fatalities on trans-Saharan trails, and numerous were the caravans buried by the sandy storms of the Sahara, like ships at sea swallowed by unrelenting waves. Fuṭji b. Aṭār, the oldest caravaner interviewed in Mauritania, recounts an incident when half the caravan was swept under a sand dune.¹³⁴ Besides burying caravans alive, storms and constant winds also had the effect of displacing sand dunes which covered and uncovered active

¹³⁴ Interview with Fuṭji b. Aṭār, Aṭār (2/10/97). The remains of the caravan and the skeletons of the deceased were found more than a year later. Close to one hundred years in age, Fuṭji's testimony will be used extensively in chapters 7 and 8.

wells. As geographer/historian 'Abdallah b. Muḥammad Sidiyya, an expert on trans-Saharan trails and terrains, explains with regards to the itineraries of caravaners,

Those people [meaning caravaners] do not go in straight lines. They have animals and so they are obliged to do with temporary wells and especially with the pastures. So those who try to identify fixed trails marked like those of the Romans, they are wrong...It must be known that the itineraries of al-Bakri must be accepted with the understanding that they were related to [the availability] of pastures. Because when one had 300 or 400 camels to feed one had to figure out where they are going to graze every night. And these are not necessarily straight lines, there are always variations...There are also temporary puddles which formed in known regions and so the crossing is done with full knowledge of the facts and so you must not be fixated on itineraries.¹³⁵

So every year, the crossing differed in relationship to the ecological conditions. If there were no rains and therefore no pastures, then crossing of certain areas was impossible some years. The access to information about pastures and puddles was critical to the success of a long-distance trip. Of course, there were known passages which were obligatory for all camel caravans. One example is the famous narrow passageway across the Bani mountains in the Adrar Setūf, called *Arrsān*, which is a *fūm* or mouth in the mountain where camels had to tread delicately in a straight line.¹³⁶

Dying of thirst near a dry empty well was a common fate for caravaners. The chronicles of Tishīt, Walāta and Na'ma have numerous entries of whole caravans perishing of thirst.¹³⁷ It is interesting to note that, in their Saharan crossings, both Panet

¹³⁵ Interview in Nouakchott with 'Abdallah b. Muḥammad Sidiyya (10/16/97). I wish to thank 'Adballah for his precious teaching and for setting me straight!

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ *Hāūliyat Tishīt* or the Tishīt Chronicle, photographed in the family archives of Al-Sharīf b. Buyahmad (4/97) translated into French by Vincent Monteil, "Chroniques de Tichite (Sahara occidental), *Bulletin de l'Institut Francais d'Afrique Noire*, t. I, no. 1, 1939; Paul Marty, "Les Chroniques de Oualata et de Nema." Such was the fate, in the first decade of the twentieth century, of Ḥamā b. Maḥjūb b. al-Jumānī and his recently acquired female slave (*khādim*) who died of thirst by a dried-up well in the Guelta Zammūr

and Bu al-Mughdād were menaced by thirst. In Panet's case, he spent three days and three nights waiting with the rest of the caravan for two caravaners returning with filled *gerbas* (goats skin bottles).¹³⁸ Also in the Tiris region, Bu al-Mughdād and his traveling companions exhausted their water supply faster than expected.¹³⁹ Their thirsty condition was worsened, according to Bu al-Mughdād, by eating excessive amounts of the *tishdār* or dried salted meat, the caravaners' staple. This water shortage created disagreement between the caravaners with some wanting to slaughter a camel to drink the water in its' stomach, others wanting to dump their loads and accelerate the pace to the nearest well, and still others who preferred traveling by night. In the end, this last choice proved to be successful as they rode in the dark and finally reached the well in time. In the early 1900s, Hamūd b. al-Mukhtār al-Nājim, the son of the chief of the Tikna Aīt Laḥsan, also "died of thirst coming from Mauritania with a caravan full of goods and he died in the sun and thirst and we only found his arm, the rest of his body had been eaten by wild animals."¹⁴⁰

As a matter of fact, another eminent danger, granted it receded with desertification and the popularization of gun use, was the attack by wild animals such as lions. Aḥmad b. Al-Amīn As-Shinqīṭī, the nineteenth century historian, spends several

region (northern Adrār) on their way back from Timbuktu. Interview with Aīsha mint Muḥammad b. 'Umar in Asrīr, Morocco (07/30/99) and Ḥabūb b. Aḥmad b. al-Ma'ati and Aḥmad Fāl b. Muḥammad b. Laḥbīb in Asrīr, Morocco (07/30/99).

¹³⁸ Panet, p. 107-9.

¹³⁹ Bu al-Mughdād, "Voyage par terre," pp. 488-489.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Kara Jamī'a mint 'Abaydna b. Barak, Liksābi (08/01/99). Kara Jamī'a was born to two slaves and stolen when she was very young by the Awlād Djarrir, then to the Hāhā before the family of al-Mukhtar b. al-Nājim bought her. She is in her 70s.

pages describing the presence and menace of lions in Shingīti.¹⁴¹ In 1850, Panet also recalls that on their way to Shingīti one of the camels almost fell victim to an enormous lion who had apparently devoured a young ‘slave’ two days prior.¹⁴² Muhammad b. Ṭālib recounts being in a small caravan from Tijīkjā to Tishīt in the late 1950s when they were followed by a lion for several days.¹⁴³ Other beasts such as venomous snakes and reptiles, as well as scorpions and poisonous spiders were common foes. Common too was catching a deadly disease, as was most frequent for all long-distance travelers.¹⁴⁴ Camels could also fall sick or become injured. This could complicate a caravan expedition as choices had to be made in terms of what loads to discard.

Caravans, the subsistence interregional kind, but especially the large *ākabār* coming and going between western and northern Africa, were ambulant fairs, and exchange deals were negotiated in and out of central markets. When the caravans arrived in the vicinity of a town, they would stop before getting into the market to send a scout to check prices, situations, inquire about clients and to eventually announce the arrival of the caravan. As informant and ex-caravaner Mulay ‘Umar wuld Mulay Aḥmad explains, “*yamurrgū legeddam*” meaning the caravaners would enter town, leaving the caravan outside” (see Limān wuld Arwīli’s story in chapter six).¹⁴⁵ This was also a matter of

¹⁴¹ *Al-Wasīl*, pp. 524-526.

¹⁴² Panet, p. 42.

¹⁴³ Interview with Muhammad b. Ṭālib and Makhāla b. al-‘amish in Tijīkjā, Mauritania (05/06/97).

¹⁴⁴ Such was the fate of ‘Abidīn b. Bayrūk who died of sickness in Tīris on his return from a trip to the Adrār in the early part of this past century. Interview with Bashīr b. Bakār b. Muḥammad b. Bayrūk in Gulmīm (07/29/99).

¹⁴⁵ Mulay ‘Umar Wuld Mulay Ahmed and Aishatu mint Mulay ‘Aly (07/30/97)

superstition for it is said that if the people of the town saw the goods on the caravan, they would get spoilt.¹⁴⁶ Oftentimes, the caravan load would be sold before it arrived into town. In some cases, the principal council of a town would reunite to discuss prices and distribution of goods.¹⁴⁷ When the caravan Panet was traveling on finally arrived into Shingīti, in twenty-four hours, the cotton *beṣa* which formed the bulk of caravan loads were all sold.¹⁴⁸

Once in town, caravaners typically relied on the housing, hosting and brokerage services of so-called “landlords,” or *jaajgi* (a word of Soninke origin). Oftentimes, certain Saharan groups developed stable and long-term relationships with known *jaajgis* to whom they would returned year after year. Such was the case for most caravaners coming to trade in Nioro (present-day Mali; see Map 2) who, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, typically lodged in the houses of Musa Djan Traore and Aly Sibi.¹⁴⁹ They acted as “commercial representatives and served as intermediaries between the Biḍān traders and those of Nioro.”¹⁵⁰ When he died, Musa was the eldest man in Nioro, and one of the most reputed and powerful commercial brokers. Landlords and cross-cultural brokers were critical to the operation of long-distance trade, especially for interregional caravaners who did not have representatives in foreign markets. Trans-Saharan traders such as the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā’ tended to have elaborate trading networks with relatives in most of the key western African markets. We will

¹⁴⁶ See also Panet, p. 61.

¹⁴⁷ For a similar phenonemon in the Algerian Sahara see Chentouf, “Les Monnaies dans le Gourara,” p. 81

¹⁴⁸ Panet, p. 65.

¹⁴⁹ Interview in the Nioro market with al-Al-Hāj ‘Aly Bakary Diawuraga, Samba Daffé and Gaye Nimaga (05/12/98); Interview in Nioro with Shaykhna Sibi (05/14/98).

¹⁵⁰ Interview in Nioro with Shaykhna Sibi (05/14/98).

discuss more specifically the essential role of landlords and cross-cultural brokers when we examine the organization of trading networks (chapter five).

Caravan Traffic and the Question of Insecurity

In mid-nineteenth century western Africa, insecurity on trans-Saharan trails was common. Strangers, those unfamiliar with the area, and those with no “protectors” ready to vouch for their safety, were especially at risk. Political and social instability was frequent in this period. When Panet was about to cross the Sahara and was scouting for a sponsor, he was warned by the chief of the Idaw al-Hāj about the dangers involved in this undertaking. Panet reflected, not without some derision, that if he was to believe everything that he was told about the dangers of crossing the Sahara, “one needed to be equipped with a rubber boat to traverse the lakes of blood which crisscross the path and which were produced by the blood spilt in the wars between the Doviche [Idaw ṭsh], the Oulad-Nâcir, the Oulad Deleim and the Kountas.”¹⁵¹ Ten years later, when Bu al-Mughdād was entering the Adrar region on a commercial caravan, the caravaners were informed that there was a major succession war after the sudden death of emir of Adrar. Faced with this situation of instability, they first thought to turn back to Ndar to wait out the political storm rather than running the risk of entering a revolution; in the end they decided to avoid the center of the Adrar and went in the direction of the western Tris region.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Panet, p. 35. It is interesting that he should write about rubber boats in a period when wooden boats were the norm.

¹⁵² Bu al-Mughdād, “Voyage par terre,” p. 484-485.

Raiding by nomadic warrior or *ḥasāni* groups, as well as thieves and other marauders who lurked on trans-Saharan trails behind dunes or near the main wells waiting to hijack or plunder a loaded caravan, were quite common in nineteenth century Sahara. Indeed, raiding was an integral part of the wider political economy of the Sahara. Anthony Toth's description of raiding as an institution in Iraq and Transjordan in the first half of the twentieth century is very pertinent to the situation in western Africa.¹⁵³ Following Louise Sweet, Toth distinguished between two types of raiding: "unilateral raiding" which consisted of attacks on the property of "non-Bedouins" and "reciprocal raiding" or seizing camels from "noble" Bedouin tribes." "In both cases," Toth explains,

certain sets of rules and conventions regulated the activity. For example raids usually were not carried out between two friendly tribes. Instead, a declaration of hostilities had to be in place before raids were permissible. In addition, the prime motive for most raids was to obtain property rather than to inflict injury upon the victims. Finally, groups or individuals could theoretically protect themselves from raids by paying a regular fee of "brotherhood" (*khuwa*) to a member of the tribe controlling one's area...raiding provided a mechanism for the widespread circulation of camels (and thus survival for poor Bedouin) in a variable environment which made camel-herding a boom-or-bust enterprise.¹⁵⁴

The same was true of western Africa, where Saharan nomads frequently raided caravans, encampments, and sometimes entire towns. As Abdel Wedoud ould Cheikh admits, besides the desire for vengeance and honor, the ghazzi was above all, "an economic expedition" which, in certain northern tribes, resembled a veritable "enterprise."¹⁵⁵ The Awlād Dīlīm, the Rgaybāt in the northwestern Sahara, and the

¹⁵³ "Economic Change in the Bedouin Domain: Case Studies in the Era of Before Oil, 1830-1950." Oxford University, Dissertation in History, chapter 2, p.2.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

¹⁵⁵ Abdel Wedoud ould Cheikh, "Nomadisme, Islam et Pouvoir Politique" Vol. II, pp. 370-371. On the honor of the *ḥasāni* see Raymond Taylor, "Of Disciples and Sultans," especially chapter three.

Mashdūf, Berabish, and Awlād al-Nāṣar in the southeastern regions, were reputed professional raiders. The Awlād Dlīm, in fact, operated within a wide section of western Africa from the Senegal and to the Niger Rivers. Some clans among the Awlād Bū Sbā', for different reasons, acquired the reputation of pirates on trans-Saharan trails, as they forays and eventual settlement in western African markets became more definite.

Raiding was often connected to systems of taxation and tribute collection. In western Africa, the four emirates (Trarza, Brakna, Adrar and Tagant/Idaw 'ish), as well as independent warriors groups or *ḥasāni*, tended to collect an annual or seasonal tribute from farmers, fisher people and other sedentary workers living within the political boundaries of their jurisdictions. This tax was known as *ḥurma* and it was collected in exchange for protection from the raids of foreign nomads. The *ghāfar* (meaning 'pardon') was another tax was collected by the *ḥasāni* on the *zwāya* groups, strangers and caravaners crossing their territory. This tax, or rather customs duty, was especially enforced on caravan traffic crossing the Trarza region on its way to Ndar, and in the first decade of the twentieth century, it might have been as much as five francs per camel in addition to one tenth of the loaded merchandise.¹⁵⁶ For trans-Saharan caravans, such as those organized by the Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' long-distance traders, there was a special heftier *ghāfar* known as the *ghāfar al-Shidd* (or the strong pardon). It is said that

¹⁵⁶ Frèrejean, "La région des Idouaich," p. 78.

this customs duty was typically 100 *beṣa* or units of cotton cloth.¹⁵⁷ But it is safe to say that these amounts varied considerably. Another type of protection tax (*mudāra*) could form part of a specific arrangement between *ḥasāni* and *zwāya* groups. For an agreed upon *mudāra* tax, paid annually, a group of *zwāya* could buy the protection of a specific *ḥasāni* tribe.¹⁵⁸ As can be expected, strangers were typically taxed more than locals, and were also easy targets for raiding parties.¹⁵⁹

Various nomadic groups were likely to have representatives, called *liṣān* (“tongue”), scouting the main wells and passageways where long-distance caravans were likely to be traversing.¹⁶⁰ Their task, sometimes performed by young girls or boys, was to inform the toll collectors and others about the movement and size of caravan traffic. For example, at the well of Akjūjt, where all caravans circulating between the Adrar and Ndar made a water stop, a representative of the Awlād Talḥa (or “spy of the desert pillagers”, as Bu al-Mughdād describes him) was in charge of “signaling caravans.”¹⁶¹ Fortunately, for Bu al-Mughdād, they avoided any unpleasant trouble because the caravans knew the representative and bought him off with a small “gift.” Another regular tollbooth was located just north of Ndar, in the most western tip of the Trarza region in a

¹⁵⁷ See interviews with Sīdi b. Daḥī (06/12/98). Martin, ‘Une Tribu, p. 17.

¹⁵⁸ See for example the al-Ḥāj ‘Alī *mudara* list with Awlād Dīm (Sharīf b. Muḥammad Sharīf library in Tishīt; document SMS photographed 4/97).

¹⁵⁹ Frèrejean, “La région des Idouaich,” pp. 77-79. As document 1 dealing with the inheritance case discussed in chapter 4 explains, strangers were more likely to be the target of raiders.

¹⁶⁰ Abdel Wedoud oud Cheikh, “Nomadisme, Islam et Pouvoir Politique” Vol. II, p. 371.

¹⁶¹ Bu al-Mughdād, “Voyage par terre,” p. 485.

village called Ndiago. Here, the emir of Trarza had a permanent representative, an inherited position, to ensure that each loaded caravan heading back north paid the *ghāfar*.

If one's caravan was attacked during the crossing of the Trarza territory, however, one could request a refund, since the agents of the emir had failed to protect the caravan. In this case, it was the emir's responsibility, at least in theory, to find the raiders and return the stolen goods. Indeed, because of the low population density, the fact that regions were interdependent in western Africa, and trade was essential, those who committed crimes or exacted unreasonable claims could be identified and reprimanded when they came to town or were spotted elsewhere.

In effect, groups made one-on-one *mudāra* arrangements with nomadic *ḥasāni* for protection. Another, yet similar, arrangement between groups was the practice of “*dabīḥa*” or ceremonial slaughter. This practice, which seems to have been prevalent in the northern Sahara, and consisted of a group slaughtering a camel for another group in a symbolic gesture of solidarity. For example, in the Wād Nūn region, the Awlād Bū Sbā' slaughtered for the Tikna Azwāfiṭ family of the Ahl Ḥamdāt.¹⁶² This meant that in effect, the Awlād Bū Sbā' promised to symbolically or effectively slaughter a camel to the Ahl Ḥamdāt in exchange for their protection. By doing this, they became akin to the more powerful tribe (*ʿaṣabīya*), which translated into a strong alliance between the two groups (more on the significance of the *dabīḥa* in the next chapter). Also in the Wād Nūn there was a special customary or negotiated protection of strangers living in towns, namely

Gulmīm, called the *al-ʿurfīya al-gazūla*.¹⁶³ The Jewish community of Gulmīm, for example, was protected by the town dwellers under this custom. The Bayrūk family assumed the responsibility of this protection towards the Jewish community.

The question of caravan traffic and insecurity varied according to the size, purpose and identity of the caravaners. To be sure, interregional or subsistence caravans traveling the classic routes, from say Shingīti to Tishīt, could rely, to some extent at least, on regional agreements between tribes to ensure their safety. After all, the population density of the regions of Adrar, Tagant, Azawād, the Hawḍ, were relatively low, and people tended to know, or know of, one another. Information traveled far and fast, and despite the fact that many nomadic warriors were only superficially religious, they did ‘fear God’ and perhaps the Muslim leaders and their constituents who organized caravans.

Stranger-traders traveling on trans-Saharan trails, on the other hand, were perhaps individually more vulnerable. This is why they tended to travel in such large caravan enterprises containing hundreds of men and camels. Although big men located on the northern desert edge, such as Shaykh Bayrūk or Sīdi Hāshim, might have inspired some awe on the part of Saharan nomadic pirates on the prowl, they were not an immediate threat because the distance between them was so great. Beside ‘power through sheer numbers,’ which a large-scale trans-Saharan caravan represented, however, long-distance traders naturally had other defense mechanisms. The bearing of arms of the handheld

¹⁶² Document 1298h (1880A.D.) consulted in the archives of Ahmād Fāl b. al-Mahjūb b. Mujīdrī, Gulmīm.

¹⁶³ Interview with Ahmād Fāl b. al-Mahjūb b. Mujīdrī, Gulmīm. (07/27/99).

kind such as daggers and sabers, were a part of the international caravaners' typical gear as well as a part of his trade wares. The nineteenth century saw the propagation of another type of lethal weapon: firearms. As early as the 1810s, when Sidi Hamet was doing the crossing from Wād Nūn to Timbuktu on an *akābār* with 800 other men, he claimed "the men were all armed with good muskets and scimitars."¹⁶⁴ That Sidi Hamet was an Awlād Bū Sbā' was no coincidence, since this group still to this day hold the reputation of the great arms traders in these regions of western Africa (see Appendix 5 and chapters four and six).¹⁶⁵

Like caravan traffic, raiding was seasonal. Often raids occurred when people migrated to oases in the date harvesting season in the Adrar and Tagant regions known as the *Getna*. This yearly date fair which occurred from late July to early September was the occasion for town-dwellers to abandon their hot stone houses and live under the tent for a few months. This was one of the rare occasions noble women left town. Large groups of people, nomads and sedentary, would congregate around the main palm date oases and eat large amounts of fresh and ripe dates. Families would buy the rights to certain date palm trees from the owners which they would harvest during the duration of the season.¹⁶⁶ Another important element was the socializing aspect of the *Getna* festival where the latest news or gossip from distant towns was disseminated.¹⁶⁷ More importantly, the *Getna* was the occasion for those in debt to make good on their loans. Indeed, creditors often extended loans "up until the *Getna*" and so it was the obligation of

¹⁶⁴ Riley, p. 160.

¹⁶⁵ Very little research has been done on the military history of Africa. The history of the European arms trade which began in earnest in the nineteenth century, and remains a topic of utmost importance in Africa today, has been conveniently ignored by Western scholars.

¹⁶⁶ De la Chapelle, "Histoire du Sahara Occidental," p. 47, fn. 2.

debtors to show-up, settle tabs or possibly arrange extensions, or negotiate new terms or loans.

Other regional fairs took place during the summer months which were also known as the time to reimburse and contract debts.¹⁶⁸ In the Wād Nūn region, for instance, the towns of Gulmīm, Āsrīr and Liksābi had weeklong summer fairs each taking place two weeks from one another known as *amuggar* (*mūssam* in Moroccan Arabic).¹⁶⁹ Each festival commemorated a particular saint. The *amuggar* of Gulmīm commemorated Sīdi al-Ghāzzi, whereas the one of Āsrīr was Sīdi Muḥammad b. 'Amar and Liksābi was the Awlād Bū Sbā' Saint called Sīdi 'Amru 'Amrān. Unlike the other towns, Āsrīr had two *amuggar*, the first and the last of the season (the last was nicknamed *al-ma'īl* or the repeated one) which might be an indication of the commercial importance of this town before the rise of Gulmīm in the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁷⁰ Unlike the *Getna* fairs, the *amuggar* were large markets where all the people in the region came to town to meet one another, exchange credit, information, wares, fresh produce and animals.

¹⁶⁷ For a description of the *Getna* in the 1930s see DuPuigaudeau, *La foire aux dates*, Paris: Plon, 1937.

¹⁶⁸ See, for example, the debt between Al-Ḥusayn b. Aisha mint Buhangar al-Smālili al-Gulmīmī (note the name which is linked to a female ancestor) and Muḥammad b. Abdallah b. Muḥammad Ārāl al-Dhīrbī to be reimbursed at the next *mūsum* of Sīdi Ḥammād b. Mūsa (Tīznīt). 10 Shaybān 1304 (c. 1887).

¹⁶⁹ It is worth mentioning that, according to one informant, the *Amuggar* of Liksābi began in the 18th c. at the suggestion of Mulay Ḥāshim the chief of Tazerwalt (and Illigh). See Interview with Ibrāhīm b. 'Aly b. al-Ṭālib in Liksābi (08/01/98). As a result of an arrangement between the Aṭṭ Laḥsan Tikna and Mulay Ḥāshim the first were to ensure the safety of the southern trade routes and the latter the northern routes.

¹⁷⁰ Interviews in 'Asrīr with Aisha mint Muḥammad al-Amīn (07/30/99), Ḥabūb b. Aḥmad b. al-Mā'īt and Aḥmad Fāl b. Muḥammad b. Laḥbīb (7/30/99) and interview in Liksābi, Ibrāhīm b. 'Aly b. al-Talib (8/1/99) and Muḥammad al-Nājim b. Muḥammad al-Nājim (8/1/99).

The *amuggar*, like the *Getna*, was an important yearly get-together and, because they reunited many people from the Sahara and the Sudan, they were potentially politically dangerous, for not only did traders come to exchange their wares, but creditors came to find their debtors, and men came to find and deal with their enemies. The oral traditions of Wād Nūn express that the day of the *Suq* or market, those entering the market had to deposit their weapons. The market laws on such a day were so strict that even if you spotted your worst enemy in the market, you were not allowed to touch him or speak to him until the end of the market and outside town limits. An exceptional document, dating from the late 1870s, describes in great detail the elaborate laws of the Gulmīm market (*qanūn al-sūq*).¹⁷¹ Besides determining the fees all the market goers had to pay to enter and participate in the market and to settle minor disputes, there was an elaborate fining scale for conflict related to insecurity. For example, the one fined for “stabbing another with as dagger gives 30 mithqal, and if there were four fingers left he gives 50 mithqal and whomever shot [a bullet] and missed gives 50 mithqal...”¹⁷² This agreement was signed by twenty-four members of the Tikna Aīt Mūsa wa ‘Aly, who dominated in Gulmīm. Presumably, the fines were paid to the twenty-four members who divided sums between themselves, or perhaps they spend it on communal expenses such as providing food for visitors.¹⁷³ The inhabitants the Adrar and Tagant regions used the term “Hanatīt” for raiders and highway robbers, and have a saying: "May God get rid of

¹⁷¹ ‘Qanūn al-Sūq Gulmīm,’ family archives of Bashir b. al-Ghazāwi, Gulmīm (photographed 07/99).

¹⁷² Ibid.

the Hanātits and the Shrattits too." (the Shrattit are a *ḥasāni* group also reputed raiders of the Brakna and Tagant regions).¹⁷⁴

All town-dwellers and itinerant traders were susceptible of being raided by warrior groups. This is perhaps the main reason why small shops, general stores, or regular markets, did not exist in nineteenth century western Africa. Traders stored and sold goods out of their homes, and often had secret chambers in the walls and floors, where their merchandise was safely hidden. The town-dwellers of Shingīti even organized an elaborate underground system, the entrance of which was hidden in a well, where people would hide with their possessions when the danger of a raid was eminent.¹⁷⁵

But to be sure, stranger-traders traveled on trans-Saharan trails, and those who took residence in the markets of western Africa were more prone to raiding and pillaging than were locals. This was simply because they were isolated from the rest of their tribe and therefore more vulnerable and less likely to retaliate. That strangers were especially prone to adversities in situations of political and economic uncertainty was clearly stated in an inheritance document of Wād Nūn traders which will be examined in chapter five. It is perhaps no wonder that the four wealthy traders who met their deaths of trans-Saharan trails were all Tikna and therefore “strangers” to Tishīt. Indeed, the main author

¹⁷³ Such a tax levied in Shingīti by the Laghlāl or Idaw ‘ālī chief was intended to cover the expenses of the honorable guests and personalities who visited the town. Interview with Abdarraḥman b. Muḥammad al-Hanshi (Shinqīti, 9/29/97).

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Abdarraḥman b. Muḥammad al-Hanshi (Shinqīti, 9/29/97).

¹⁷⁵ These underground labyrinths still exist today. They are very reminiscent of the bomb shelters in operation in twentieth century Europe.

of the document stated quite clearly that it was precisely because they were not from the area that they were easy targets for hungry raiders:

I gave to the creditors of 'Aly b. Ḥammād their dues and among them some did not swear like the Azargyīn and the Jew to safeguard their property because if they stay together [in one pile...if they are not distributed and separated] their assets are exposed to danger and suffice it that the raiders (*al-mutaghālībīn*) find out about it to attack it there where it is located whether it is the property the people of the North [*ahl al-Sāhil*], or those of the people of Arawān. They covet the assets in the house of strangers [*al-gharīb*] aside from that in the house of the missing [*al-faqīd*]. And this is their custom [*'ādatihum*] which everyone knows about.¹⁷⁶

Engaging in long-distances trade across the regions of western Africa, therefore, required capital, connections in distant markets, and ties to political or religious authorities with a big enough reputation to carry weight. From the evidence of Panet and Bu al-Mughdād, who discuss the countless times their caravan leaders had to pay “gifts” to caravan stoppers, the documents consulted dealing with *ghāfar*, and protection contracts signed between tribes, the accepted means of payment for tributes and tolls in mid-nineteenth century western Africa was the *beṣa* or the cotton currency. The cost of paying for protection and paying tolls at the common passageways on trans-Saharan trails, was not a negligible share of the total transaction costs involved in long-distance trade. As we shall see in the next two chapters, these costs were considerably lowered when traders belonged to a recognizable and reputed trading network.

¹⁷⁶ Document 1, Inheritance of Wād Nūn traders in Tishīt, Arwīli Archives at MSH (see translation in Appendix 6B), p. 10.

CHAPTER 4

THE TIKNA AND THE AWLĀD BŪ SBĀ : A BRIEF HISTORY

Hātha shay'allā al-Tikna wa 'abīdha

(This is something only the Tikna and their slaves [are capable of])

*Idha raīt al-Sbā'ī wa al-lefā'ī Qatl al-Sbā'ī wa khallī al-lefā'ī*¹

(If you see an Awlād Bū Sbā' and a viper, kill the Awlād Bū Sbā' and leave the viper)

As I argued in the first chapter, the Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' were the most prominent groups engaged in the risky business of long-distance trade on the trans-Saharan trails of nineteenth century western Africa.² Both the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' shared cultural and spatial affinities. Their first language was Tashelhit (one of the four Berber or *amazigh* languages). Yet, long-distance traders tended to be multilingual. They also spoke Ḥasanīya (the lingua franca of the Sahara), Moroccan Arabic, and wherever they migrated to, they acquired local languages (Wolof, Pulaar and Sonraī). The Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' were semi-sedentary and their activities were economically diversified. But they both had a reputation as professional and long-

¹ Popular saying about the Awlād Bū Sbā'. The fact that it is so prevalent is an indication of the reputation of the Awlād Bū Sbā' and the general fear they instilled among western Africans. It is very interesting to note that in the late nineteenth century, Governor Faidherbe recorded a slightly different version of this proverb in his history of Senegal. Yet, rather than targeting the Awlād Bū Sbā', his version of the proverb discusses another mysterious/unknown tribe which rhymes with Sbā'ī (the Ouled Far'ī). Perhaps he was misinformed by an Awlād Bū Sbā' who did not care for the poem (it must be said that today most Awlād Bū Sbā' are actually proud that they were so feared in the past). But it is altogether strange that the portrait of the Awlād Bū Sbā' Muḥammad Sālūm carrying his gun is located on the page just opposite the proverb (see Appendix 5). What is also noteworthy is that this portrait seems to be placed there and not commented on in text, as if Faidherbe was conveying the real subjects of proverb by association.

distance traders. Their commercial itineraries tended to converge in the region of Wād Nūn and in the commercial centers of western Africa.

Because of their proximity and, as we are about to see, the fact that they tended to cooperated with one another in trade, I designate the combined long-distance trading networks of the Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' "the Wād Nūn trade network." It must be said, however, that these two groups maintained separate identities, and developed different alliances in their host countries. In reality, they formed two separate and quite distinct "tribal" networks with both parallel and divergent historical itineraries. But for the sake of convenience, and because of their common history in and around the Wād Nūn, I have combined them as one grouping. This choice is also due to the fact that in the minds of western Africans, these two tribal groups are often lumped together. Indeed, in Mauritania today, both the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' are believed to be the first "international traders." They were the first to import what would become the national beverage of Mauritania and Senegal, green tea (imported wholesale by the Europeans from south Asia), as well as other remarkable foreign items such as guns.

² Anthropologist Pierre Bonte recognized this fact in a recent article on the commercial history of Shingŋi. "Fortunes Commerciales à Shingŋi," p. 9.

The Tikna³ Nation

The Tikna form a large tribal confederation in the region of Wād Nūn on the northern edges of the western Sahara, and south of the borders of the Moroccan kingdom. The region of Wād Nūn, or the valley of Nun, with its numerous burgs including Āsrīr, Liksābi and the largest Gulmīm, has a certain reputation in the western Africa as the homeland of the Tikna (See Map 2).⁴ The city of Gulmīm is locally known as the 'Door of the Sahara' (*Bāb as-Ṣaḥrā*) because of its role, since the late-eighteenth century, as a major entry and exit point for long-distance caravans transiting between northern and western African markets and ports. In effect, the Wād Nūn region was an intermediary zone between western African markets and Morocco. Being an important trans-Saharan trade terminus on the most western routes, it was the largest camel market in northwestern Africa from about the late eighteenth century until now. This was a tremendous asset, an integral link to the town's commercial role, since camel caravans were the lifelines of the western African interior. In the twentieth century, with the

³ A note on orthography of the Berber word Tikna: Most French authors spell the word Tekna or sometimes Toukena. Other scholars also refer to the group as the Takna, following Mustāfa Na'īmī. Given that the Arabic rendering, as well as the real pronunciation, is generally either Tikna (تكن) or Tiknah (تكه; the added "h" at the end is meant to facilitate pronunciation but is not part of the original Berber word), I have chosen to transcribe it as Tikna.

⁴ According to some, the name Nūn is derived from "Nul" from the Almoravid town "Nul Lamṭa." The ruins of this historic town are currently located on the outskirts of present-day Āsrīr. Yet there are two general etymological explications in the oral traditions collected in Gulmīm, Āsrīr, and Liksābi. One states that Nun is a fish, or type of eel, called ennun in Tashelḥīṭ. The other, that Nūna was the name of a Portuguese princess who was married to a Shaykh in the area, and so the name was given to the whole region. The same two theories were collected in the 1930s by Capitaine Méric, "La circonscription de Goulimine," p. 29. De la Chapelle has yet other etymological theories but these were not corroborated by other sources. See "Les Teknas" p. 636. See Interview with 'Abd al-Wahāb b. al-Shaygar in Nouakchott (9/12/97) for other theories. It is interesting to note that Nun was the name of the primeval waters which

expansion of colonial cash-crop economy in Senegal, the Gulmīm market became its first supplier of camels. Wād Nūn traders responded to the Senegalese demand for this transportation animal, and they participated in the development of the Louga cattle market in the Jambour region of Senegal in 1910s (see chapter eight). That northern Saharans formed the majority of camel herders and camel owners in the area goes a long way in explaining why they played a dominant role in north-south trade relations.

Although several colonial administrators and other scholars have written about the Tikna, there is no definitive study of this large tribal group to date.⁵ The precise origin

prevailed on earth after the departure of Sun God Rah in Egyptian cosmology. I thank Jason Peirce for this information.

⁵ These are the general references on the Tikna: The French official Alfred Le Chatelier, who launched the *Revue du Monde Musulman* in the early 1900s, wrote *Tribus du Sud-Ouest marocain* (Leroux, 1891) in which he devotes several pages to discussing the Wād Nūn based on secondhand information. In 1910, Chef de Bataillon Claudel in Adrar (Mauritania) wrote a report concerning the Tikna: "Notes sur les Grands Nomades du Nord" Atar, March 31, 1910 in ANRIM E2/17, dossier 4 "Oulad Bou Sba, 1924-1930" (obviously misfiled); Paul Marty, who became the French colonial authority on Muslim Africa, wrote an article in three parts where he discussed three nomadic and semi-nomadic Saharan groups which escaped the authority of the French: "Les Tribus de la Haute Mauritanie: Les Reguibat, les Oulad Delim et les Tekna," *Renseignements Coloniaux: Documents Publiés par le Comité de l'Afrique Française et le Comité du Maroc*. Paris: 1915. In the 1930s, Capitaine De La Chapelle, posted in Morocco, published a short monographical essay on the entitled "Les Tekna du Sud Marocain" *Bulletin du Comité de l'Afrique Française* (1930) pp. 634-645. This study is the main source on the Tikna but is riddled with mistakes often repeated in subsequent publications. In the 1940s, two additional studies of the Tikna were written: Capitaine Méric's "La Circonscription de Goulimine, le Pays de l'Oued Noun," CHEAM no. 567 (1941) and the work of another young administrator in Morocco, Vincent Monteil's *Notes sur les Tekna*, Paris: Institut des Hautes Etudes Marocaines, 1948. Mukhtār b. Ḥamidūn, the eminent historian of Mauritania (see introduction) recorded several genealogies of the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' in his historical encyclopedia of Mauritania which remains unpublished (Mukhtār b. Ḥamidūn Archives, IMRS). More recently, Tikna scholar Muṣṭāfā Na ṯmi published a general study of *al-Ṣahrā' min khilāl bilād tiknah*. Casablanca: Dar Mahjar, 1989 and the translation of a chapter of his dissertation: "The Evolution of the Tekna Confederation caught between Coastal Commerce and Trans-Saharan Trade," in *Tribe and State: Essays in Memory of David Montgomery Hart*, E. G. H. Joffe and C. R. Pennell, Eds. Wisbech: Middle East and North African Studies Press, 1987, pp. 213-238. Finally, Rita Aouad published an article based on her dissertation, which examines the Ben Barka family: "Réseaux marocains en Afrique sub-saharienne: Le Tekna de L'oued Noun; l'exemple de la famille Benbarka, 1880-1930." *Revue Maroc-Europe*. no. 4, 1993.

of the Tikna is unclear, although they sometimes claim a common ancestor.⁶ Many Tikna believe their ancestors filled the ranks of the Almoravid army and led the Islamization of western Africa and Spain. One French ethnologist, who traveled in the Wād Nūn region in the early twentieth century, stated quite plainly: “The Teknas of today are the Almoravids...this is how the companions of Youssef ben Tashfin [Almoravid leader], the Lemtouna with their veiled faces, coming from the depths of the Sahara, that is how they ravaged Morocco and Spain in just a few years...”⁷ The Spanish Colonel J. Asensio also argued that the Tikna are originally the Guezulas who were the contingents of the Almoravids.⁸ Moreover De la Chapelle claims that the Lamta of present-day Wād Nūn are, together with other tribes, descendants of the Almoravids.⁹

The Tikna were a large confederation of over a dozen *qabā'il*. Some of them became partially “arabicized” as a result of several waves of Arab migrations into the northern Saharan regions. As a French administrator, who served a number of years in the area, explains about the Tikna,

the word evokes a unity in race, language, at least an accord. One must not imagine anything of the sort. Nothing is more varied than the confederation of the Teknas....[the region] is bound to the North to the Berber grouping of the Anti-Atlas and extends to the South to the Senegal River. And still, there is in this diversity, in this richness of exchange and contacts, a unity. Unity due to

⁶ According to Mukhtār b. Ḥamidūn, the Tikna claim that they are descendents of the Ja'afar al-Ṭayyar, the sons of Abu Ṭalib, the paternal uncle of the Prophet Muḥammad, but he states there is no proof of such a claim. “*Tiknah*,” Mukhtār b. Ḥamidūn (1897-1987) notes from his unpublished encyclopedia *Ḥayāt muritānīa*, archives located in IMRS. I did not read/hear this claim in any other source.

⁷ Edmond Doutté, *En Tribu: Missions au Maroc*. Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner, 1914, p. 344. He refers to the Tikna pillagers.

⁸ Colonel J. Asensio, “Note Présentée au Congrès au Nom de la Délégation du Gouvernement Espagnol,” in *HESPÉRIS: Archives Berbères et Bulletin de l'Institut des Hautes-Études Marocaines*, 1930, Tome XI, p. 17.

⁹ De la Chapelle, “Histoire du Sahara Occidental,” p. 74.

history as much as geography, unity of customs, unity of resources especially, involving a certain lifestyle.¹⁰

To be sure, the Tikna did not fit easily into social stratification of Saharan tribes between the people of the sword, or *ḥasani* (warriors), and the people of the book, or *zwāya*.

Professionally, the Tikna were divided between nomadic warrior-herders, traders and farmers. In the Wād Nūn region, a very fertile alluvial basin, numerous cereals were cultivated in fields irrigated with elaborate canal and well systems. Access to water, a precious resource, was highly controlled, so much so that farmers cultivating in the same area took turns watering their fields.¹¹ The main crops were cereals (barley, wheat) and tobacco (for export within Africa and to Europe). The Tikna were also herders of sheep (wool, meat and leather were exported northward), goats, horses (exported to the north and south until the drought of the mid-1930s) and camels (a capital resource). But above all occupations, the Tikna were renowned for their far-reaching international trading activities. As Paul Marty, French administrator who in the first decades of the twentieth century wrote the most important studies of Muslim societies in western African explains, the Tikna “are traders in the soul and, like the Kabyles of Algeria who are found as hawkers or shopkeepers in all the towns and along all the major roads of North Africa,

¹⁰ Méric, “La Circonscription de Goulimine.” Méric served as a French district officer (*commandant de cercle*) in Gulmīm for several years in the late 1930s and 1940s. He is still remembered today by elders in Gulmīm for being a curious and dynamic officer. Méric explains that the Tikna confederation “unites all the races of Morocco, the Berber (chleuh [sic!]), the arabized Berber, the pure Arab, and naturally the hartani and the slave; all lifestyles, the sedentary, the semi-nomad, the nomad; all languages, Berber, colloquial Arabic, almost pure Arabic; all nuances in religion,” p. 11.

¹¹ ‘Water turns’ were an important trade item constantly negotiated and renegotiated between farmers and rentiers. See, for instance, the sales contract of a ‘water turn’ between Sīdi ‘Aly b. Abd al-Qādar b. Muḥammad al-ḡībī [the one of the jackal; see below] al-Tiknī and Mbārak b. ‘Abdarrahmān Āsrīrī (from Āsrīr) and Abdallah b. Ibrahim al-Wajuji, Bilqāsim b. Humayd b. Abdallah al-Bujarfawi (Bu Garfa). (Jumāda 1142 h.), Arwīlī documents in MSH.

one finds the Tikna on all the trails of Mauritania, Senegal, and the Sahelian regions of the Sudan [Mali].”¹² By the first decades of the twentieth century, the Tikna trading network was an expansive operation with representatives in the key markets of western Africa, from Shingīt, Tishīt, Timbuktu to St. Louis, Louga, Dakar, Banjul, Conakry and Grand Bassam.¹³ But until the mid-twentieth century, only a small minority within the Tikna confederation was actually engaged in full-time long-distance professional commercial operations, as discussed shortly.

In addition to these professional occupations, several *zwāya* or clerical families lived among, and were assimilated to, the Tikna. They provided their services in Islamic jurisprudence and arbitration. The Rgaībāt, for instance, were reputed to be the *zwāya* of the Tikna.¹⁴ Moreover, a handful of *shurfa* or families claiming sharifian descent (as direct descendents of the Prophet Muḥammad) became attached—usually through marital alliances—to the Tikna and were known as the *shurfa Tikna* (such as the Mulay ‘Aly family, discussed in chapters six and seven). Because of the diversity of their professional occupations, the Tikna were neither warriors nor marabouts, yet the *zwāya* of the Sahara perceived them as *ḥasani*.¹⁵

Although some Tikna claim they all descend from a common ancestor, oral sources failed to identify a single ancestor. Only one written source, Capitaine Méric’s report on

¹² Marty, “Les Tribus de la Haute Mauritanie,” p. 88.

¹³ Ibid and interviews.

¹⁴ On the alliance between the Rgaībāt and the Tikna, see Sophie Carratini, *Les Reguibat*, vol. 1, p. 53 and vol. 2, p. 15.

¹⁵ Marty, “Tribus de la Haute Mauritanie,” p. 85.

Gulmīm, discusses a certain Sīdi 'Athmān, father of al-Ghāzi, Billa and Laḥsan, who was the founding father of the Tikna (see Appendix 3: The Tikna Tree). But even Méric admits that the links between these men, and the diverse backgrounds of the sub-groups which together composed the Tikna, were confusing and unclear.¹⁶

According to oral sources, Tikna is a Tashelḥīt word meaning 'co-wife' as in a polygamous situation. It is tempting to identify the symbol of the two wives with the two branches or *leffs* of the Tikna tribal confederation: the *Aīt al-Jmal* and the *Aīt Billa* (*Aīt* in Berber meaning family or 'the people'). The *leff* system was a classic binary political arrangement among Berber groups which divided peoples of one area into two symmetrical and opposing alliances that together maintained a reciprocal equilibrium.¹⁷ The two *leffs* kept each other in check, and they bounded together to form a united federation of tribes in the face of external threats or for economic pursuits. The *Aīt Billa*, or People with God, regrouped a number of tribes which generally tended to be more nomadic than the tribes under the other *leff*, the *Aīt al-Jmal* or People of the Camel (see Appendix 3). In reality, the boundaries between these two Tikna camps, and even within the Tikna nation as a whole, tended to be fluid and politically mobile. This was so much

¹⁶ Méric, "La Circonscription de Goulimine," pp. 45-6. Regarding the origin of the Tikna, Méric frankly exclaims "We do not understand here...the diversity of tribes all originating from a common ancestor!"

¹⁷ Ernest Gellner also distinguishes between loose and "tight" *leffs*, "Introduction," *Arabs and Berbers*, Gellner & Micaud eds., p. 18. In De la Chapelle's words the *leff* system is "the group of two traditionally opposed alliance systems," *Les Teknas*, p. 34. See also L. Justinard, who argues for the military significance of the *leff* system in "Note sur l'histoire du Sous au XIXe Siecle," in *HESPERIS*, 1926, tome VI, p. 359-360.

¹⁸ Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Barth (ed), Bergen, 1969.

¹⁹ Interview in Nouakchott with Muḥammad al-Amīn b. 'Abdallah b. Bayrūk (05/30/98) "Tikna c'est pas une tribu c'est une population." Interview in Nouakchott with 'Abdallah b. Muḥammad Sidiyya (10/16/97), "les Tikna ce n'est pas une tribu, c'est un groupement tribal."

so, I would argue, that the Tikna, or the ‘Tikna nation’ (as it is sometimes called by the Tikna themselves), formed a political entity rather than a tribal, or even ethnic, one.¹⁸ Indeed, many argued that the Tikna were not a tribe but a “tribal group,” a nation of tribes with diverse origins, historical, ethnic and otherwise. As one informant said, “Tikna is not a tribe, it’s a population.”¹⁹

Because they had a territory, a language, a culture, a political system with a tradition of leadership, I prefer to speak of the Tikna as a nation, rather than a tribal confederation. The Tikna themselves, by birth or assimilation, expressed this feeling of citizenship when they were outside the homeland in letters and contracts by signing their names as the “Tikna citizen” (*al-Tiknī al-muwāṭin*). The Tikna, and others, refer to the Wād Nūn as “*bilād al-Tikna*” (or the land of the Tikna). The French recognized ‘le pays des Tekna’ as an independent nation (as is clear from their correspondences in the 1840s and the maps they drew), for the Tikna remained outside the orbit of the Moroccan Kingdom, in effect, until French conquered the area in 1934.

The boundaries of the Tikna nation were more or less fluid as groups migrated in and out of their protection, sometimes becoming Tikna by association. Vincent Monteil, a French administrator who served in the Wād Nūn area in the 1940s, argues that the Tikna themselves differentiated between the “pure” Tikna or the Tikna by blood (such as the Aīt Mūsa wa ‘Aly, the Aīt Laḥsān and the Azwāfīt), the Tikna by name who came to be associated to the Tikna but are not originally Tikna (such as the majority of Izarguīn), and the de facto Tikna or strangers who, through alliances or relationships of patronage,

became “confused” with the Tikna (such as the Jews of Gulmīm).²⁰ As is typical in matters of ‘identity,’ the contours of ‘Tikna-ness’ changed according to a person’s relationship to the homeland. So, the farther away from Wād Nūn one was, the more one identified oneself as Tikna as opposed to the *leff*, or a tribal group or tribe of origin (more on this in chapter five).

Politically, the Tikna were ruled by several chiefs, shaykhs or leaders, of each tribe. Sometimes one leader represented several Tikna tribes, other times the Shaykh only spoke for his own. The oral traditions talk about the *Aīt al-Arba’īn* or the ‘forty families’ who reunited to confront the enemy or to decide on the rules of the market.²¹ It is unclear who the forty families were, and how they were politically organized. But this political institution, very visible in the oral traditions, must have prevailed at some point in time and remained a powerful force in the memory of the Tikna. Muḥammad b. al-Nājim, one the historical custodians of Liksābi (Wād Nūn), explained that the forty families (*Aīt al-Arba’īn*) would get together and select a committee who would in turn make decisions about rules and regulations of the Wād Nūn towns and markets (such as during the *Amuggar* or yearly fair, for instance). Such decisions included the price of fees for depositing goods in someone else’s house (*sank*) and the *ansāf* or penalties for breaking the rules.²² But, from evidence presented in the previous chapter regarding the

²⁰ Vincent, *Note sur les Tekna*, pp. 10-13.

²¹ Interviews in Gulmīm, Shingī and Nouakchott. No written source discusses this unit. See for instance interview with Ibrāhīm b. ‘Aly b. al-Ṭalib in Liksābi (08/01/99).

²² Interview with Muḥammad b. al-Nājim in Liksābi (08/01/99).

laws of the Gulmīm market in 1876, it seems more likely that each *Amuggar* town had a separate governing committee. In nineteenth century Gulmīm, this was organized by the Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly, and presumably the ruling tribes in the two other major towns of Wād Nūn would determine their laws (the Āzwāfiṭ in Āsrīr and the Aīt Laḥsan in Liksābi). The forty or so families from both the *Aīt al-Jmal* and the *Aīt Billa* might have united as one when the Wād Nūn faced an external threat, both Tikna branches then would come together (an example of this is discussed in chapter six). As eminent Mauritanian historian Mukhtār b. Ḥamidūn (1897-1987) explains, “when they fought likewise they would become like one hand against whomever fought them.”²³

Although oral traditions are unclear about the origin of the Tikna as a whole group, several Tikna tribes keep the memory of their direct ancestors. According to Mukhtār b. Ḥamidūn, the Azwāfiṭ were the most prominent of the tribes of the Tikna Aīt Billa. He recorded the tradition explaining the origin of their name: “their ancestor had a first-rate horse from among the finest of horses and so when he went to a meeting, one of the Tikna meetings, they would say ‘there is the owner of the bucking horse’ (*ṣāḥib al-fars al-safāt*) meaning the horse that bucks people and horses.”²⁴ To have a well-trained horse which, in times of war, could fight the enemy with its hind legs was a major

²³ “*Tiknah*,” Mukhtār b. Ḥamidūn. Notes from his unpublished encyclopedia *Ḥayāt muritanīa*, archives located in IMRS. More research needs to be done on this group to determine the parameters of their political institutions.

²⁴ Ibid. I thank Aḥmad b. Al-Ramḍān for translating the Ḥasanīya word *safāt* or ‘the one who bucks.’ Somewhere along the etymological line, the “s” of *safāt* must have changed to a “z.”

distinction in western Africa. The tribe, thereby, became known as “the buckers” or Azwāfiṭ (singular Zafāt (cf. *safāt*)). From my historical investigations, there is no record of trans-Saharan traders from the Azwāfiṭ until the 1930s when several caravaners turned shopkeepers came to play a more visible role in the commercial histories of Mauritania and Senegal.

Among the Aīt al-Jmal, or Tikna of the camel, the Aīt Mūsa wa ‘Aly played the most prominent role in trade and politics in the nineteenth century. They controlled the Gulmīm market and by extension, a good portion of the trans-Saharan traffic which entered the Wād Nūn region. Indeed, the Aīt Mūsa wa ‘Aly were reputed professional traders, and were the ones most represented in the markets and towns of western Africa. Among the Aīt Ūshin clan of the Aīt Mūsa wa ‘Aly, many recall how their ancestor migrated to Wād Nūn from the town of Twāt (western Algeria) in the late sixteenth century.²⁵

The oral history of the Aīt Ūshin describes a group of mounted men, sometimes referred to as the contingents of the Almoravids (*al-murabiṭūn* who led the Islamization of western Africa). The group was exploring the northern edges of the Sahara when it suddenly ran out of water and began suffering from thirst. The ancestor of Aīt Ūshin (maybe al-Shaykh Muḥammad b. Mas ‘ūd)²⁶ then wandered from the group a ways (some

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. See the Tikna Tree section 4A in the Appendix 3. If Muḥammad b. Mas ‘ūd is the first Aīt Ūshin ancestor, then this event would date back to the seventeenth century only.

say while waiting for a couple of men to return with some water) and sat under a tree. As he was resting, he saw that his horse was scratching the earth at something in the sand, like jackals typically do when they find water. The ancestor drew near and discovered that his horse was pawing at the wet surface of a source of water.²⁷ After he and his horse had quenched their thirst, Muḥammad informed the leader of the group. Later, he was named chief, and a well was dug in that location which became known as *bi'r al-farsiya*, “the well of the horse.” This well is located south of the Wād Nūn region, and according to historian/geographer ‘Abdallah b. Muḥammad Sidiyya, it is at this very well that both trails of the Almoravids, the big and small *Ṭarīq al-Lamṭuni (al-ṣaghīr and al-Kabīr)* meet.²⁸ The ancestor then settled in the area and because of the way his horse had discovered the water, in the manner a jackal, he and his family of the Aīt Mūsa wa ‘Aly were nicknamed in Tashelhīt “Aīt Ūshin” meaning ‘the people of the jackal.’ Later, this was translated into Arabic and so Aīt Ūshin traders sometimes signed their names instead with the *nisba*, or kin epithet, of *al-ḏī'bī* (of the jackal). It must be noted, however, that a similar legend is attributed to the Almoravid leader Abu Bakar b. ‘Umār, and sometimes to ‘Uqba b. al-nāfiq, the first Muslim invader of northwestern Africa.²⁹

²⁷ Group interview with Muḥammad Sa’īd b. Buhay, Khadijatu mint Abdullah wuld ‘Aly, and Fatima mint Abd Rahman b. Buhay in Shingṭi (09/30/97). Interviews in Nouakchott with Khadijatu mint ‘Ābāba (98).

²⁸ Interview in Nouakchott with ‘Abdallah b. Muḥammad Sidiyya (10/16/98).

²⁹ F. De la Chapelle, “Histoire du Sahara Occidental,” p. 56. To be sure, and as De la Chapelle admits, this legend has been assigned to several Saharan heroes and it is difficult to ascertain from which oral tradition it sprung.

In his notes about the Tikna, where he briefly discussed the Aīt Ūshin, Mauritanian historian Mukhtār wuld Ḥamidūn distinguished between the big and the small Aīt Ūshin (*Aīt Ūshin al-kabīr* and *Aīt Ūshin al-ṣaghīr*). Although I did not encounter this distinction elsewhere, it could be that the Mauritanian genealogist was setting apart the Aīt Ūshin in Gulmīm and those living outside of the Wād Nūn homeland in western Africa. Khadijatū mint 'Ābāba, one of my best sources about the Tikna in Mauritania, differentiates between the town Tikna (*Tikna ad-deshra*), the nomadic Tikna (*Tikna al-bādiya*) and the Tikna of the mountains (*Tikna a'ḍahar*).³⁰ But she was the only informant who mentioned these distinctions.

The earliest record of the presence of Tikna south of the Sahara could date as far back as a thousand years to the time of the organization of the Almoravid conquest in the eleventh century. The oral traditions of the Wād Nūn which were carried with migrations of the Tikna diaspora into western Africa, explain that near the towns of Asrīr and Tighmirt, and in the location of Liksābi respectively, lie the ruins of the ancient Almoravid towns of Nūl Lamṭa and Taghaost.³¹ Some Tikna say that a number of their ancestors are buried in Awdaghust (or Tegdaoust), the western African capital of the Almoravids located north of Tamchakett, in present-day Mauritania.

³⁰ Interview in Nouakchott Khadijatou mint Khatari wuld Ababa (5/28/97).

³¹ Currently, European and Moroccan archaeologists are excavating the site. We will know more about these claims when their findings are made public. It could be that the Tikna migrated to the area was much later than this period. A definitive study of this large confederated group is in order. See interviews in Āsrīr with Habūb, in Gulmīm and in Mauritania. For archaeological work on Awdagust see J. Devisse, and

The earliest tangible record of Tikna migration from the northern to the southern edges of the Sahara dates to the early eighteenth century. In the year 1689, the Sultan of Morocco, Mulay Isma'īl, is said to have visited the regions of Adrar and Tagant (present-day Mauritania) passing through the town of Tishīt.³² Little is known of the purpose of this visit, but it seems to have lubricated relations between the Sultan and various religious and political leaders in the Sahara. The interest of the Moroccans in western Africa in this period could be construed as an effort to fight the French commercial incursions along the Senegal River that might have been competing with Moroccan interests on trans-Saharan trails.³³ To be sure, Mulay Isma'īl's sharifian origins and his title of 'Commander of the Faithful' (*Amīr al-mūminīn*) carried tremendous prestige.³⁴

During the reign of 'Alī Shandhūra (1703-1727), the emir of the Trarza region (located north, and--at various historical junctures--south of the Senegal River) faced a war with the neighboring region of Brakna. He decided to seek the help of Mulay Isma'īl and, after a successful mission, he returned from Morocco with the title of "commander of southwestern Sahara." As Abdel Wedoud ould Cheikh admits, by then the Moroccan Sultan's "*politique d'investiture*," or policy of swearing in *ḥasani* chiefs as

D. and R. Robert, *Tegdaoust I*, 1970. De La Chapelle, for his part, extends the history of Wād Nūn all the way back to the Roman Empire of Northern Africa, but with no supporting evidence ("les Teknas", p. 636).

³² Paul Marty, *L'émirat des Trarzas*, Paris: Editions Ernest Leroux, 1919, p. 69. Marty explains, "the successes of Moulay Ismail, the biggest of all the Sultans of Morocco, had spread his name and his power in all of West Africa, from Senegal to the Niger." Marty is a French Islamicist who produced the most important works on Islam in Francophone West Africa. See Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation* (Forthcoming, 2000), Introduction, for a discussion of Marty's scholarship. F. De la Chapelle, "Histoire du Sahara Occidental," p. 81 gives the date 1769 for the Moroccan expedition to Tishit.

³³ Boubacar Barry, *La Sénégambie du XVe au XIXe siècle: Traite négrière, Islam, conquête coloniale*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1988.

³⁴ Abdel Wedoud ould Cheikh, *Eléments d'histoire de la Mauritanie*. CCF: Nouakchott, 1984, p. 79.

representatives or chiefs obeying the king of Morocco, was well-established in southwestern Sahara.³⁵ The Sultan also presented to the Trarza emir a pair of white loose cotton trousers (*sirwāl al-abyaḍ*) as a symbol of his authority to contrast with the dark indigo cloth worn by the majority.

This tradition was carried out by the subsequent emirs of Trarza, and the name Shandhūra (spelled Chandora in French) became a popular white brand of cotton cloth (*beṣa shandūra*).³⁶ More importantly, 'Aly Shadhūra was given a sizeable army of men and cavaliers (some speak of 300 men, others of 500) to assist him in battle against the Brakna.³⁷ As the oral traditions explain, this northern army was composed of Tikna men, a majority from the Tikna Izarguiīn tribe.³⁸ Shaykh Sidiya Bāba, the *zwāya* leader who developed a close relationship with the French (see chapter seven), explained to administrator Paul Marty, that the Moroccan Sultan:

³⁵ Ibid. p. 77.

³⁶ Interviews in Nouakchott with Sid Ahmad dit "Dah" Fall (07/28/95), family group interview with Zaynabūh mint Bubakkar Sira (06/03/98). "Aly Shandura was also given by the the Sultan Mulay Ḥafith a big tabala or drum which is still in the family possession. I wonder whether this emir was not named after the cotton cloth imported by the French, the brand of which might have been something like "Chant d'or." When I asked about this epithet in interviews in the Trarza, the typical answer I got was that the name "was like" a specific type of white cotton *beṣa* (imported by the French) or that a branch of cloth was named after him. I somehow suspect the first version is more credible since the emirs of Trarza were trading with the French directly or indirectly since the establishment of St. Louis in 1659.

³⁷ Marty, *L'émirat du Trarza*, pp. 69-70. For a discussion of 'Aly Shadhūra, see also Boubacar Barry, *Le royaume du Walo: le Sénégal avant la conquête*, éditions Karthala (reprint, 1972), Paris. Also see Leland Barrows, "General Faidherbe, the Maurel and Prom Company, and French Expansion in Senegal," Doctoral Dissertation, UCLA, 1974, pp. 270-333.

³⁸ Interviews with Emir Trarza family in Nouakchott (06/98); Interviews with Tikna, Nouakchott starting with Sid Ahmad dit "Dah" Fall (07/28/95)... Interview with Ibrāhīm b. 'Aly b. al-Ṭālib in Liksābi (08/01/99). Yaḥdhih b. 'Abdallah b. Bayrūk with Khadaīja mint Muḥammad b. Laḥbīb b. Bayrūk in Gulmīm (7/31/99).

...simply gave the order to the Ahel Sidi Youssef [second ancestor of Shaykh Bayrūk or head of the Izarguīn?] ³⁹, Shaykh of the Tikna of Wād Nūn, to help the emir to establish order in the Sahara. It is therefore the shaykhs of the Tikna who furnished the chleuh [read Berber] soldiers to Aly Chandora, and he, in return, promised in his name and in the name of his successors, to pay an annual tribute [to the Tikna]. This tribute had been regularly paid during the two centuries that followed. Alone, the grand distance and the state of instability in the regions separating Glimim [Gulmīm] from the Trarza region [40 days by camel] would occasionally suspend its payment; but it was still paid, in 1904, by the Emir Ahmad Saloum II. In this last instance, it consisted of a beautiful camel which the Tikna delegates came to collect every year. These visits were occasions of celebration and exchange of gifts. ⁴⁰

This recognized tributary relationship between the Wād Nūn and Trarza must have encouraged subsequent migrations of Tikna to the Senegal River in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. ⁴¹ To be sure, Tikna caravans from the Wād Nūn to the Sudan and Senegal were actively trading in this period. What is not clear, however, is exactly when Tikna traders began settling along trans-Saharan trails in the various markets of western Africa such as Timbuktu and Tishit. ⁴² It is highly likely that in the first decades of the 1800s, a small number of Tikna traders traded and/or opened shop in the French port of Ndar. ⁴³ But it is not until the 1840s that the Tikna reemerge in the

³⁹ See the genealogy of Mukhtār b. Ḥamidūn from his unpublished encyclopedia *Ḥayāt muritānīa*, "Tiknah" IMRS.

⁴⁰ Marty, *L'émirat du Trarza*, p. 70-71. This is confirmed by the oral evidence (see previous fn). Confirmed in numerous interviews, see for example Yaḥdhih b. 'Abdallah b. Bayrūk with Khadaṭja mint Muḥammad b. Laḥbīb b. Bayrūk in Gulmīm (7/31/99).

⁴¹ Interview with Sid Ahmad dit "Dah" Fall (07/28/95); Interview with Yaḥdhih b. 'Abdallah b. Bayrūk (with Khadaṭja mint Muḥammad b. Laḥbīb b. Bayrūk) in Gulmīm (7/31/99) who explained that the relationship played itself out as late as the 1940s in an incident in Rosso when the Emir of Trarza interfered on behalf of the Tikna.

⁴² Yet if the link between the Tikna and the Almoravid contingents can be established with hard evidence, then the town of Awdaghost (north of present day Tamshakett), so similar in name to the ancient capital of Wād Nūn Taghaost, could well have been the first Tikna settlement in western Africa. See D. and S. Robert, and J. Devisse, *Tegdaoust I*, Paris, 1970.

⁴³ This is the local word for St. Louis of Senegal. Research in the British Foreign Office around the two periods when the British took over the town of St. Louis (1758-1778, 1809-1817) might yield relevant

historical record of the southwestern Sahara with the arrival in St. Louis of a messenger of the chief of Gulmīm, Shaykh Bayrūk.⁴⁴

Since the late eighteenth century, the Bayruk family, with its long line of leaders of the Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly Aīt Ūshin, played a decisive role in the economic and political organization of the Wād Nūn region.⁴⁵ From the town of Gulmīm, Bayruk's grandfather 'Abaydallah b. Sālam's authority extended over a large section of the Tikna confederation (namely the *Aīt al-Jmal*). But his son, Bayrūk (derived from the name Mbārak), would place the 'land of Wād Nūn' on the world map. To be sure, Bayrūk was an extremely skillful strategist who succeeded in playing off Europeans seeking to grasp trans-Saharan trade goods on the Atlantic coast against the Moroccan Kingdom.⁴⁶ He became famous in England, Spain and France because of his tactic of kidnapping shipwrecked sailors or unscrupulous adventurers who happen to fall in the hands of his agents. Bayrūk would contact the appropriate consuls in the town of al-Swaira (Mogador) and demand ransom in exchange for these prisoners (often referred to, rather strangely, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century European literature as 'white slaves').⁴⁷

information here. It is highly likely that the British who were also active in Mogador and had developed diplomatic relations with the chief of Gulmīm, Shaykh Bayrūk, had contacts with Tikna traders in Ndar/St. Louis.

⁴⁴ This episode was discussed in the previous chapter.

⁴⁵ See the Bayrūk Genealogy in the Tikna tree Appendix 3.

⁴⁶ As De la Chapelle argues, the chief of Wād Nūn Shaykh Bayrūk and the sons who succeeded him played a political "balancing act between European nations and the Sultan in such a way as to maintain their independence: giving in to them only so as to better resist them and inciting one against the other their competitors who constantly threatened to resist them." In "Les Teknas," p. 643.

⁴⁷ For an prime example of this sort of literature see Riley, *Loss of the American Brib*.

Later Bayrūk's successor and son Daḥmān would carry the Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly Tikna torch for a while at least until a destructive and long civil war between both Tikna leffs erupted in the late nineteenth century. This announced the end of the stable commercial reign of the Wād Nūn area (discussed in chapters six and seven). The political authority and commercial power of the Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly Tikna group, which controlled Gulmīm, the "door of the Sahara," explains why it was this group which was most represented among the Tikna trading network in western Africa. Being Tikna or under their protection was, in the words of one my informants, "like having a passport to cross the Sahara."⁴⁸

As stated in the previous chapter, the relationship between the Bayrūk family and the Jewish community of Wād Nūn was very strong. Oral sources in Gulmīm actually maintain that the commercial success of the Bayrūk family, and the Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly as a whole, is due in large part to the presence of Jewish traders who "taught them" the tricks of trade.⁴⁹ Although most informants give credit to Shaykh Bayrūk for having invited Jewish traders to settle in Gulmīm under his protection, it could be that it was his father's idea.⁵⁰ The chief Jewish family of the Gulmīm community was the Shallūm family, the male descendant of whom was still alive in the late 1930s. The charisma and

⁴⁸ Interview with 'Dah' Fāl in Nouakchott (07/28/95).

⁴⁹ Interviews in Gulmīm: Aḥmad Sālam b. Bayrūk (07/18/99), 'Aly Sālam b. Daḥmān b. 'Abidīn b. Bayrūk (07/29/99), Bashir b. Muḥammad al-Ghazwi (07/21/99) and some in Nouakchott. In fact, I was often told that the Tikna were "like the Jews of the Sahara."

political vision of Bayrūk, and to some extent his succeeding son Daḥman, cannot be overstated. His relationships with western Africans and Europeans, his strong cavalry and commercial genius (described by Panet in the previous chapter) made him a significant authority who promoted and controlled trans-Saharan trade in and around his Wād Nūn fief.⁵¹ Indeed, during his 34 year rule of Gulmīm, he excelled in political negotiations and, according to La Chapelle's information, "all the nomadic tribes came to make sacrifices [*dabīḥa*] to him."⁵²

The practice of *dabīḥa* was the symbolic slaughtering of an animal, typically a camel, to a dominant group as a gesture of subservience and tribal *entente*. It established mutual obligation between two groups. In accepting the *dabīḥa*, the dominant group agreed to "protect" those executing the gesture, who in turn promised to respect and honor good relations towards the dominant group and their allies. Each tribal group within the Tikna negotiated their own alliances with non-Tikna groups, and these rights of respect and obligation were indeed transferable within the large Tikna confederation. For instance, in the days of Shaykh Bayrūk's reign, he transferred many of his *dabīḥa* alliances to the Aīt Laḥsan tribe of the Aīt al-Jmal Tikna, in an attempt to keep this Tikna

⁵⁰ See Méric, "La Circonscription de Goulimine," p. 58 and Interview with Aḥmad Sālam b. Bayrūk in Gulmīm (07/18/99).

⁵¹ Some contest that he had control over the whole of the Wād Nūn. For example, Muṣṭāfa Nā'īmī argues that Bayrūk's authority extended only over the town of Gulmīm (personnal communication over the telephone (07/31/99). While I think this is true so some extent, since each Tikna tribe had a representative and later in the 1880s, a qa'id (such as al-Ma'ī of the Azwaft and Mukhtār b. al-Nājīm of the Aīt Laḥsan), the evidence seems to indicate that Bayrūk managed to be in charge over the other Tikna groups of the Wād Nūn region, and he had the military and financial power to maintain his authority.

⁵² La Chapelle, "Les Teknas," p. 635.

tribe in check.⁵³ Of course, these tribal agreements could be broken, if, for instance, a conflict occurred between the two groups. All the nomads and camel herders, who nomadized along trans-Saharan trails and typically came to the Wād Nūn markets for supplies, had a vested interest in maintaining good relations with the Tikna.

The most important Saharan groups, such as the Tajakānt (who controlled the caravan stop of Tindūf), the Rgaībāt (especially the Fuqra, Awlād Dawūd, Swu'ād, and Awlād al-Shaykh branches), the Awlād Barikallah and Awlād Dlīm of the western Saharan coast, all had alliances with the Tikna nation, and especially the overlords of the Gulmīm, the Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly. As we are about to see, the other prevailing group, the Awlād Bū Sbā', also entertained privileged relations with the Tikna, whom they considered "brothers."

Apart from their alliances with Saharan nomads, and their privileged position with the Trarza emirate who controlled access to the Senegal River trade, the Bayrūk family also forged political agreements, as well as marriage alliances, with the emirs of the Adrar, Brakna and Tagant regions.⁵⁴ Moreover, their political relations extended to the Futa Toro and Kaarta regions where, in the mid to late nineteenth century, they entertained close ties with Shaykh 'Umar Tāl and later with resistance leader Samory

⁵³ La Chapelle, "Les Teknas," p. 635. This gesture might have been related to the fact that the Aīt Laḥsan were developing strong relationships with the Sīdī al-Ḥāshim trade group of Tazerwalt/Iligh. For this last insight, see interview with Ibrāhīm b. al-Tālib 'Aly in Liksābi (08/01/99).

⁵⁴ Discussed in chapter 6.

Turé.⁵⁵ It was Bayruk and his family's vision who promoted the settlement of Tikna in various western African ports and markets to create a tight-knit Tikna trade network. Bayrūk sent representatives all over western Africa, and whomever double-crossed an Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly or attacked a Tikna caravan was simply denied access to the Gulmīm market, and thereby to camels and other key trade items under his control.

With these political alliances and agreements in place, Shaykh Bayrūk was able to correspond with all the important markets in western Africa. As per his philosophy about trade, collected by Panet and quoted in the previous chapter, he sent his commercial emissaries, or trade representatives, to engage in the honorable and necessary occupation of cross-cultural exchange. By the time of his death in 1859, a sizeable number of Tikna traders, most from the Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly, the Bayrūk branch, had taken residence in commercial centers such as Timbuktu, Tishīt, and Walāta. These commercial agents, who married locally and learned the languages and customs of the people among whom they lived and worked, acted as cross-cultural brokers to seasonal caravaners from their homeland, be they Tikna, Awlād Bū Sbā' or others, coming to trade in their adopted town. An inheritance case, discussed in the following chapter, depicts the Wād Nūn diaspora in the town of Tishīt in the mid-nineteenth century. By the late nineteenth century, when Daḥmān b. Bayrūk succeeded to his father, a new and perhaps more important wave of Tikna migrations into western Africa was to take place. This coincided with the peaceful reign of an exception emir in the Adrar region (chapter six).

⁵⁵ See Panet's account in previous chapter and interviews in Tishīt, Shingīti and Nouakchott.

It is important to note that the Wād Nūn, like the regions of the Sūs and Sagiya al-Ḥamra, remained independent from their big northern neighbor the Morocco kingdom. They were autonomous and ruled by great leaders such as Bayrūk in Wād Nūn and Sidi Ḥāshim in Illigh. These two leaders cooperated with one another to the point that Sidi Ḥāshim apparently gave one of his daughters in marriage to Bayrūk.⁵⁶ Like many African chiefs, Bayrūk and his sons who succeeded him (especially Daḥman and more recently his great nephew Daḥman b. Abidine b. Bayruk), practiced polygamy on a massive scale. Typically, the Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly chiefs had four “official” wives, usually one from the Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly, the others strategically chosen from political allies, and had countless concubines from among the women and children taken into slavery and brought along trans-Saharan trails into the Gulmīm market. These chiefs also practiced serial polygamy, meaning that they married and divorced for reasons internal and external to the marriages themselves, in an attempt to keep the maximum of four wives as prescribed by Islam.⁵⁷ By the beginning of the twentieth century, other Tikna groups such as the Aīt Laḥsan, but especially the Azwāfīt, who had a particularly strong alliance with the Awlād Bū Sbā', assumed a more important commercial role.

⁵⁶ De la Chapelle, “Les Teknas,” p. 640.

⁵⁷ On the subject of marriage, concubinage and polygamy on trans-Saharan trails see chapter 6.

The Awlād Bū Sbā' or 'Sons of the Father Lion'

To date, the history of the intriguing Awlād Bū Sbā', or the 'sons of the father lion,' remains to be written. There are several genealogical works by Awlād Bū Sbā' scholars, a few colonial reports on this group, and references to them strewn in other primary sources.⁵⁸ But because a great number of Awlād Bū Sbā' were literate in Arabic with a long tradition of Islamic scholarship, their oral traditions tend to be more detailed. They were both nomads and urban dwellers. They were simultaneously celebrated Muslim scholars (ex. Muḥammad al-Ḥasān b. Sīdī 'Abdallāh who taught the Ahl Sidīya in Boutilimit) as well as professional raiders and armed robbers (Muḥammad Sālam b. Bu'ānga who was a famous arms dealer and raider in Mauritania during the colonial conquest; see chapter seven and Appendix 10). They too cannot be classified as either

⁵⁸ Général Faidherbe, *Le Sénégal – La France dans l'Afrique Occidentale*, Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1889, p. 41. Sīdī 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Ma'ī, *Al-Difā' wa qīṭa' al-nazā' al-shurfa' Abnā' Abī al-Sibā'*. Marrakech: 1986 (first written in 1935). The author was born in Tīris (1310-1390 h; c. 1900-1970s). He studied with his father and later opened his school in the Ḥawūz Marrakech region. This book and the following are praises about Awlād Bū Sbā' tribe and a defense of their Sharifian origin (descendants of the Prophet) Mulay Aḥmad b. Mulay al-Māmūn al-Sbā'ī, *Al-Ābdā' wa al-Ātbā' fī tazkīya sharf Abnā' Abī al-Sbā'*. Dār al-Bayda (Casablanca): Imprimerie ITOS (n.d.). Mukhtār b. Ḥamidūn wrote a few pages on the Awlād Bū Sbā' genealogy in his unpublished manuscript *Ḥayāt Muritāniya*, Archives of IMRS. I also obtained additional written genealogical material from Aḥmad Sālam b. 'Abd al-Wadūd in Nouakchott and Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Sālam b. al-Hassni b. Lebuḥ in Gulmīm. Because of their long-term interest in coopting the Awlād Bū Sbā', the French wrote several reports on this group. See Chef de Bataillon Claudel, "Notes sur les Grands Nomades du Nord" Atar, March 31, 1910 in ANRIM E2/17, dossier 4 "Oulad Bou Sba, 1924-1930 (obviously misfiled); Interprète-Lieutenant Martin, "Une Tribu Marocaine en Mauritanie: Les Oulad Bousba" Février 1937 copie shared by Aḥmad Sālam b. 'Abd al-Wadūd (a copie of this important report was not found in the Mauritanian archives). See also Martin's notes in ANRIM E2/17 file "Notes de Martin." Capitaine Bonafos also wrote a report on the Awlād Bū Sbā' in 1929 in response to several wars between them and other groups, namely the Awlād Dīm, briefly touched upon in chapter seven. The two most important files in the Mauritanian archives on the Awlād Bū Sbā' are E2/17 and E2/80. See also Marty, *L'Emirat du Trarza*, pp. 204-216.

ḥasani or *zwāya*, because, as many argue, they were both warriors and scholars at the same time.⁵⁹

The best French study of the *Awlād Bū Sbāʾ* of Mauritania and Senegal was written in the 1930s by a French Lieutenant-interpreter Martin who served in *Akjūjt*, the town north of *Ndar* which would become the *Awlād Bū Sbāʾ* capital in Mauritania. The aim of this study entitled “A Moroccan tribe in Mauritania: The Oulad BouSba” was clearly to examine the ways in which the French could convert the *Awlād Bū Sbāʾ* into a “maghzan tribe [or government tribe, the *maghzan* being the state apparatus]⁶⁰ ...[or] an “associate” [group] which could set an example for other tribes of purely Moorish [sic!] origin and naturally undisciplined [!].”⁶¹ As seen in chapters seven, the French would have tremendous difficulty in coopting or controlling the political and economic actions of the *Awlād Bū Sbāʾ*.

The history of the *Awlād Bū Sbāʾ* is one of many migrations and, unlike the *Tikna*, they never had a permanent “homeland.” ‘Abd al-Wahāb b. al-Shaygar, one of my best informants for *Awlād Bū Sbāʾ* history, recounts the story of their ancestor:

At the end of the second Idrissite dynasty [of Morocco] there was a revolution led by a Sultan Musadna b. ‘Āfiya al-Meknesi when he chased the Idrissite...he wanted to bring the Berber people back to their former animist religion and wanted nothing more to do with Islam and in order to get rid of Islam he decided to exterminate the *Shurfa*, the people who claim to be the descendants of the

⁵⁹ See interview with ‘Abdallah b. Muḥammad Sidiyya in Nouakchott (06/2/598). The French also called the *Awlād Bū Sbāʾ* “marabouts guerriers.”

⁶⁰ We will return to the French policies towards the *Awlād Bū Sbāʾ* in chapters 7 and 8.

⁶¹ Martin, p. 1.

Prophet. He massacred many people and the people started to even deny that they were Shurfa. Among those families chased away [there was] a family [that] settled in Tilimsān, in Algeria, a man from this family called 'Āmar al-Ḥamal had heard that the Almoravids had re-established the situation in Morocco [and] he left Tilimsān to settle among the tribe of the Idaw Ba'aqil in the Sūs region, that is the mountain between Marrakech and Wād Nūn. He settled there. He was a learned man who taught Islamic law and the Arabic language, and the people respected him very much. Why he was called Bū Sbā' we have nothing real [concrete] regarding this. He was just called Bū Sbā' (father lion). *He had two sons 'Amar and 'Amrān. These two sons later left to Wād Nūn to fight the Portuguese who were manifesting themselves already in the fifteenth century on the coast...[they fought a jihād against the infidels] and they [both] died in the Wād Nūn next to Gulmīm in the town called Liksābi. Their two tombs are well-known and are venerated there till this day.*⁶²

The Awlād Bū Sbā' ancestor 'Amrān is venerated as a saint and commemorated at the yearly summer festival or *Amuggar* of Liksābi. 'Abd al-Wahāb b. al-Shaygar's oral account of the early history of the Awlād Bū Sbā' is generally corroborated by oral tradition written by genealogist 'Abdallah b. 'Abd al-Ma'ī. He claims that the Awlād Bū Sbā' ancestor married a woman of the Berābīsh group:

Bū Sbā' left the city of Fez [north-eastern Morocco] for Tilimsān [northeastern Algeria]. Then to the extreme southern part of the Sūs [western Sahara] where he built his spiritual retreat in a place called the source of the lion (*tizik al-sbā'*) which is in the region of Amarbīt [between Wād Nūn and Sagiāt al-Ḥamra] ... and the Berābīsh [see below] offered him one of their woman. So he asked the

⁶² Interview in Nouakchott (09/16/97), emphasis mine. 'Abd al-Wahāb b. al-Shaygar did not subscribe to any of the following theories about the origin of the name "father lion" which he associated more to myth than 'authentic history.' I feel very fortunate to have had the privilege to get to know 'Abd al-Wahāb and I will always treasure the afternoons spent in his company discussing history. His passing at age 75 in February 1998 was a great loss in Mauritania and countless poems were written in his honor on this sad occasion. See interview in Nouakchott with Aḥmad Sālam b. 'Abd al-Wadūd (06/28/98) for another similar version of this early history in poem (by 'Abdallah b. Main b. Muḥand Bāba).

permission of his Shaykh the Father of 'Amrān al-Jarrārī from the Awlād Jarrār a 'Arab tribe [*qabīla 'arabiya*] and so he permitted him and so he married her and from her were born: 'Amar and 'Amrān and their brothers and so the Awlād Bū Sbā' tribe [*qabīla al-Sbā'īa*] has two branches the sons of 'Amar and the sons of 'Amrān and so some of them reside in the Ḥaūz Marrakech next the foot of the Daran Mountain in a place called Būjumādah, and in another location called Taghsarīt and some of them reside in the Shingīṭi Sahara [meaning the Tīris and Adrār regions]. And the two sides are not separate from one another. And everyone from both branches knows his kinship [*rahmihi*] and his relatives and whomever was not comfortable [*lam yaṭaib*] in this location from this side he nomadized [*raḥala*] to the Sahara and whomever was not comfortable in the Sahara came to this country.⁶³

The most common version of the oral tradition explaining the origin of the sobriquet 'father lion' says that the Awlād Bū Sbā' ancestor was sitting on a mountain herding sheep when some (Berābīsh) raiders came and demanded his herd. At that point, the ancestor is said to have called upon a group of lions to scare the raiders away, saving both him and his herd. From that moment onwards, he was nicknamed the father lion, Bū Sbā', and venerated for this miraculous action.⁶⁴ According to 'Abdallah b. 'Abd al-Ma'ī account, which is confirmed by oral sources, there is a clear tribal link between the

⁶³ Sīdi 'Abdallah b. 'Abd al-Ma'ī, *Al-Difā' wa qīṭa' al-nazā' al-shurfa' Abnā' Abī al-Sibā'*. Marrakech: 1986 (first written in 1935), p. 16-17. *Tizik* is translated as the place where waters reunite; a fertile area near the town of Aṭār (Ādrār, Mauritania), Catherine Taine-Cheikh, *Dictionnaire Hassāniyya Français*, vol. 2, p. 204.

⁶⁴ Interviews in Nouakchott with Aḥmad Sālam b. 'Abd al-Wadūd (06/28/98); Sīdi b. Dahi (06/98). Other interpretations of the name include variations of the word Sbā' could seven (*saba'a*), and so Awlād Bū Sbā' means the father of the seven and is linked to a battle seven Awlād Bū Sbā' led against the Portuguese (see below). Yet another version/play on words links includes the word to sell *ba'a* and so the tale explains the name is derived from a Awlād Bū Sbā' named bus who was always found selling (This last version is the least convincing!). Oral evidence and also repeated in Marty, *L'émirat du Trarza*, p. 212; also recopied in Martin, p. 9.

Awlād Bū Sbā' and the Berābīsh, a Saharan group whose nomadizing regions including the Tīris, the eastern Adrār, and especially the Azawād region north of Timbuktu.⁶⁵ The mother of 'Āmar, 'Amrān, and their three sisters Ruqaiya, 'Āīshā and Mas'ūda, were Berabīsh. Bū Sbā' is said to have had a second wife from the Smālīl group who produced a third son Muḥammad al-Nūmar (although this last son had very few descendents none of whom are ever taken into account).⁶⁶ Next to the tomb of Sid Aḥmad al-'Arūsī, an important religious leader and founder of the Arūsī tribe, are buried "the seven Awlād Bū Sbā." These seven men were the ancestors of the Awlād Bū Sbā' who "lived in the Sagiāt al-Ḥamra. They engaged in a Holy War against the invading Portuguese and were killed by a Portuguese chief named Soumīda. Thanks to their efforts, the Christians were chased out of the country."⁶⁷

The Awlād Bū Sbā' claim to be descendents of Prophet Muḥammad and link their genealogies to Fāṭima al-Zahra', Muḥammad's only child (see Appendix 4 the Awlād Bū Sbā' Genealogy, example of the Al-Hāj Aḥmad branch). They even brand their camels with the insignia *makka* (مكة) for Mecca. This Sharifian claim was made more "legitimate" by the written sanction of Shaykh Sa'ad Būh b. Muḥammad al-Fāḍal, the

⁶⁵ Interviews with Muḥammad Sa'īd b. Ḥammūny in Nouakchott (97), 'Abd al-Wahāb b. Al-Shaygar in Nouakchott (97), etc.

⁶⁶ Interview in Nouakchott with Aḥmad Sālam b. 'Abd al-Wadūd (06/28/98).

Muslim leader who served the French in their effort to colonize Mauritania. This “marabout” also happens to be the brother of the main resistor and proto-hero to French colonial rule, Mā’ al-‘Aynayn b. Muḥammad al-Fāḍal. In the 1910s, a war was waged between the Awlād Bū Sbā’ and the Awlād al-Lab north of the Trarza region of colonial Mauritania, during which Shaykh Sa’ad Būh it is said have blessed the second group. As a result of this action, Fāṭima al-Zahra appeared to Sa’ad Būh in a dream. She was covered in blood for her breasts had been cut off, and she carried forth the following message: “How dare you go against the Awlād Bū Sbā’ who are my children and my blood?”⁶⁸ It was apparently as a result of this dream that Shaykh Sa’ad Būh wrote his praise poem where he exalts the sharifian origins of the Awlād Bū Sbā’.⁶⁹

Some Saharans, however, categorize the sharifian claim of the Awlād Bū Sbā’ as “heresy.” Several argue that the Awlād Bū Sbā’ could not possibly be *shurafa* because they carried guns and behaved like warriors. As discussed in chapter six and seven, they were so feared at one point that in a proverb composed probably about that time warns that an Awlād Bū Sbā’ were to be more feared than a viper (See proverb quoted at the

⁶⁷ De la Chapelle, “Histoire du Sahara Occidental,” p. 75 quoting the oral testimony of an Awlād Bū Sbā’ of Mauritania named Mulay Ahmad ould La’waysi. (fn. 2).

⁶⁸ Interview with Kity mint Shaygar in Nouakchott (6/18/98); See also interview with Aḥmad Sālam b. ‘Abd al-Wadūd in Nouakchott (6/26/98).

⁶⁹ IMRS, no. 2762, copy shared by Aḥmad Sālam b. ‘Abd al-Wadūd; also partially reproduced in Mulay Aḥmad b. Mulay al-Māmūn al-Sbā’i, *Al-Ābdā’ wa al-Āibā’ fī tazkīya sharf Abnā’ Abī al-Sbā’*. Dār al-Bayda (Casablanca): Imprimerie ITOS (n.d.), pp. 129-130. According to Muḥammad Sa’īd b. Hammuny, the reason Shaykh Sa’ad Buh embraced the cause of the Awlād Bū Sbā’ at the time was simply to support

beginning of the chapter). In fact, the very brother of Shaykh Saad Buh, Shaykh Mā' al-'Aynayn b. Muḥammad al-Fāḍal (discussed in chapter seven) is said to have argued that these claims were unfounded.⁷⁰ Shaykh Ṭālib Khyār, the son of Mā' al-'Aynayn, accompanied his father to Fez for an audience with the Morocco King 'Abd al-'Azīz, recounted the following story. When they visited the tomb of Mulay Īdrīs, they deliberated with two scholars on the origin of the Awlād Bū Sbā'. It was mentioned that in order to be accredited, a genealogy had to be approved by Fez scholars (in other words the sharifian origins of the Awlād Bū Sbā' had not been endorsed). According to their view, reproduced and interpreted by Colonel Martin who interviewed Ṭālib Khyar,

the Awlād Bū Sbā' form a small tribe which settled in Fez during the rule of the Lamtūna. When they arrived in this town, they first mixed with the Sanhāja. Yūsuf b. Tashfīn [the Almoravid leader] who commanded the Sultan's army entrusted to a Awlād Bū Sbā' the command of the Sanhāja which included several Jews recently converted to Islam. One day this Awlād Bū Sbā' passed away leaving two young boys and numerous girls. The Sultan decreed that the name Awlād Bū Sbā' would be given to the group of the Sanhāja, the Berbers and the converted Jews commanded by the deceased. His two sons and the girls then blended into the mass which constituted, by order of the Sultan, the Awlād Bū Sbā' tribe.⁷¹

them in their fight against the Ahl Sidiyya family (discussed in chapter 6) and Shaikh Sidiyya Bāba in particular who was favored above him by the French. Interview in Nouakchott (06/26/98).

⁷⁰ Martin, pp. 6-10. Martin was convinced by his informants, namely the son of Mā' al-'Aynayn, that the Awlād Bū Sbā' were not descendants of the prophet. He argues that the Awlād Bū Sbā' used there "supposed claim" as an excuse so as to avoid providing men to feed the colonial army (see discussion in chapter 7).

⁷¹ Ibid, pp. 7-8.

To be sure, this version of their history has been strongly contested by the Awlād Bū Sbā', and is easily dismissed. But it is altogether ironic that the two sons of Muḥammad al-Fāḍal, the celebrated Mauritanian scholar of the Hawd, both had such divergent opinions about the origin of Awlād Bū Sbā'.⁷² According to Martin, when Mā' al-'Aynayn read the treatise written by his brother Saad Būh, he exclaimed: "everything he says is wrong...even if the Awlād Bū Sbā' are really descendants of the Prophet, to give them the title of "shurfa" would be a heresy for they have not followed the way of God."⁷³ On another note, the connection of the Awlād Bū Sbā' to the Almoravids is interesting in light of the Tikna's claim to be related to this historical Islamic movement.⁷⁴

The Awlād Bū Sbā' tribe has numerous family branches stemming from the ancestors 'Amar and 'Amrān. The sons of 'Amar tended to remain in the Saharan regions while the sons of 'Amrān headed towards the region of Marrakech. There they engaged in trade, but they also opened numerous *madrasa* or schools of Islamic learning which gained repute.⁷⁵ The descendants of 'Amar are those who, as mentioned above, waged a holy war against the Portuguese infidels on the Atlantic coast in the region of

⁷² For a history of his son Shaykh Saad Buh see Boubrik, Rahal. "Sainteté Et Espace En Mauritanie: Le Cas De Shaykh Sa'd Buh", *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara*, no. 10, 1996, 155-166.

⁷³ Martin, p. 5.

⁷⁴ Martin, p. 9-10. There might be a link to the Karidenna family among the Awlād Bū Sbā'. See Norris, *Saharan Myth and Saga*, p. 108 et sq.

⁷⁵ See interview with Aḥmad Sālam b. 'Abd al-Wadūd in Nouakchott (07/03/99).

Sagiya al-Ḥamra along side the Awlād 'Arūssiīn.⁷⁶ The Awlād Bū Sbā' who participated in this event (the date of which is unclear) are called the seven sons of the father lion (*Awlād Bū Sbā' al-Saba'a*) and they include Muḥammad al-Baggār, his son Muḥammad al-Mukhtār and the brother of Muḥammad al-Baggār called Ibrāhīm al-Bu'ānga, the other brothers called 'Isa 'Abd al-Mūlā and 'Isa 'Abbās and two other brothers from the same family of the Awlād al-Baggār.⁷⁷

After that period, many Awlād Bū Sbā' of the Awlād 'Āmar migrated to the region of Haūz Marrakech. But in the late eighteenth century (1197 hijra; 1782-1783 A.D.), the Moroccan Sultan Sīdi Muḥammad b. 'Abdallah ordered the people of Marrakech to drive out the Awlād Bū Sbā'. The reason for the expulsion is because a great number of Awlād Bū Sbā' were pillaging the market. By then, they had forged a reputation as expert robbers. The royal chronicler Aḥmad al-Nāṣiri al-Slāwi, in his *Kitāb al-Istiḡsa*, reports:

A revolt took place in Morocco...many troublemakers spread sedition among certain tribes who resumed their old habits. Among these tribes was the Awlād Bū Sbā' in the region of Marrakech. For a long time these people committed the most despicable crimes. Always revolting, they attacked their neighbors and came to pillage their land and even their homes. And so in the year 1197 [1783-4 AD] the Sultan send an expedition against them. They were combated and when a number of them had been killed and their goods had been pillaged, they were pushed out towards the Sūs. The Sultan arrested a great number of their notables, and threw them in prison in Meknes where they remained until their

⁷⁶ Presumably, this would have occurred in the 1400s or 1500s. Interviews in Nouakchott with Abd al-Wahāb b. al-Shaygar (09/16/97); See also interview with Aḥmad Salam b. 'Abd al-Wadūd in Nouakchott (6/26/98), and Interview with Sīdi d. Dāhi. (06/98).

⁷⁷ Interview 'Abd al-Wahāb b. al-Shaygar in Nouakchott (09/16/97).

deaths. He ordered that the inhabitants of the Sūs to chase the last survivors of this tribe towards the southern regions, *their native lands*.⁷⁸

It is said that after this event, chains were suspended across the top of the entrance doors of the city of Marrakech to force riders of camels and horses to descend from their saddles in order to exit the town.⁷⁹ Robbers were then forced to dismount their rides, which deterred them from performing hit-and-runs. Their expulsion from the region of Marrakech provoked a second migration towards the Saharan regions and into the Wād Nūn. There is where their ancestors were buried and the Awlād Bū Sbā' had already developed a relationship with the Tikna.

Even though, in all their years of wandering, the Awlād Bū Sbā' never had a home base, they do claim territorial rights on the western African coast. One of the earliest such records in the oral traditions of the Awlād Bū Sbā', is their claim to the stretch from Imrīgli (on the western Saharan coast) to a place just north of Ndar in Senegal known as *nakhā'ila jīwuā*. (the small palm trees of Jiwa) near the caravan passageway of Ndiago. The Awlād Bū Sbā' say that they received the right to the Atlantic coast as a truce between them and the Awlād Tidrārīn. It is said that the deal was sealed by a *zwāya* of the Idaw al-Ḥāj named Tiyyūr al-Janna in the year 1004 hijra corresponding to the year 1596 in the Gregorian calendar.⁸⁰ This ownership included the

⁷⁸ Quoted in Martin, pp. 12-13.

⁷⁹ See Martin, pp. 12-13. This is so they could not engage easily in hit and runs.

⁸⁰ See, for example, Interview in Nouakchott with Ahmad Sālam wuld Abd al-Wadūd, (06/26/99), Sīdi d. Dāhi. (06/98). The Awlād Tidrārīn had killed a Awlād Bū Sbā' and as a result the latter group swore to exterminate the former. This is a well-established fact in the oral traditions of the Awlād Bū Sbā' and some

mysterious island of Tidra (believed to be the possible location of the famous Rabat of the Almoravids).⁸¹ Some say that Tidra was a perfect retreat for Awlād Bū Sbā' because it was only accessible at low tide and it had a source of freshwater. Traders, with their loaded camels and/or herds of horses, would seek refuge there and they might have had a permanent settlement inhabited by them and/or their tributaries.

Subsequently, probably after their expulsion from Morocco in the late eighteenth century, several Awlād Bū Sbā' families came to settle on the coast above what became the colony of Senegal. This area which would become the southwestern corner of the colony of Mauritania in the early twentieth century (regions of Trarza and Inshīri).⁸² Two Awlād Bū Sbā' families, the Ahl Mīnaḥnā (from the Ahl 'Abaydāt branch) and the Ahl Budda (from the Dumūisāt branch) settled along the coast just North of Senegal

claim to have a copy of the *fatwā* written by Tiwūr al-Janna (the ancestor of a well-known jurist Ahmad wuld Tiyur al-Jenna), but I never saw a copy myself. According to several Awlād Bū Sbā', Governor Faïdherbe was shown a copy of this contract in the mid-nineteenth century; See Marty, *L'émirat du Trarza*, pp. 205-6.

⁸¹ Abdel Wedoud ould Cheikh, personal communications (1997; 1998). Abdel Wedoud ould Cheikh, Robert Vernet, Denise Robert and other scholars visited the island of Tidra in 1998. The people living there, including an old woman, claim to be of the Awlād Bū Sbā'. See also interview with Muḥammad Sa'īd b. Hammuny in Nouakchott (07/06/98) who explains, "the Awlād Bū Sbā' consider that Tidra is their roots, we go there and return to our sources because that is where our ancestors the Almoravids were. Tidra is the place of the Awlād Bū Sbā' where they [used to] spend their winters."

⁸² Historian and geographer Abdallahi b. Muḥammad Sidiyya argues that these first Awlād Bū Sbā' settlements in Trarza region date from the 1780s when the King Sīdi Muḥammad ordered that the Awlād Bū Sbā' be sacked. It is interesting to note that this Moroccan king was the first foreign official to recognize the US independence in 1776. Interview with Abdallah b. Muḥammad Sidiyya in Nouakchott (06/25/98). Also interviews with the Ahl Minahna: Mukhtār b. 'Abd al-Wahāb in Nouakchott (06/13/98), and the chief of Ahl Budda of Iwīk: Ahmadu Bamba b. Budda met in Iwīk and interviewed in Nouakchott (07/04/98). According to historian Aḥmad Sālam b. 'Abd al-Wadūd (interview 06/26/98) the first Awlād Bū Sbā' to be buried in Senegal was a man called Bubakar. If historian Muḥammad al-Mukhtār b. Sa'ad's hunch that the emir of 'Aly Shandura (1700-1723) first appointed a certain Bu 'aly b. Bubakar, is correct,

in the region of Arguin. Their main settlement was opposite the Island of Tidra around the well of Īwīg. Through means that are yet unclear, they came to dominate the fisher people of the coast called the Imrāgan. It is highly likely that they bought the *hurma* rights (and the *taghada* which was equivalent to one fish per day per man) of this group from the emir of Trarza at some point in time.⁸³ The Imrāgan were professional fisher people who had the unusual skill of domesticating dolphins to help them round up schools of fish and drive them to the shore where they could be easily caught.⁸⁴ The Awlād Bū Sbā' of the Ahl Mīnāḥna began residing in the village of Ndiago, the caravan passageway just fifteen kilometers to the North of Ndar.

Because of their settlements just north of Senegal, these groups were most probably among the first Awlād Bū Sbā' to enter into contact with the French stationed there.⁸⁵ To be sure, in the course of the nineteenth century, the Awlād Bū Sbā' played a very important role in the Trarza and Senegal River region, as Governor Faidherbe was

then he could be the son of the above mentioned Awlād Bū Sbā'. This would bring the date of first arrivals much earlier.

⁸³ See P. Mercier, G. Balandier, "Emancipation par Rachat des Pecheurs Imragen (Mauritanie)" in *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, no. 33, 1947, p. 22. I thank Muḥammad al-Mukhtarould Al-Sa'ad for this reference. The Awlād Bū Sbā' continued this tactic in 1930s when a final migration wave of Awlād Bū Sbā' came to Mauritania and began buying the rights over other tributaries from several tribes in the Trarza region in an attempts to increase their "followers." See chapter 7.

⁸⁴ The Imrāgan, still tributaries of the Ahl Budda today, practice this fishing tradition less and less nowadays. They mainly fish sting rays and shark for the Japanese market. Interview with Adballah b. Muḥammad Sidiyya in Nouakchott (06/25/98) and with Ahmadu Bamba b. Budda in Nouakchott (07/04/98; check tape).

⁸⁵ According to Adballah b. Muḥammad Sidiyya, the Awlād Bū Sbā' were also key intermediaries between the German Bradenburgers who were trading in Arguin and the local population in the 17th century (see interview listed above).

one of the first to note in the mid-nineteenth century.⁸⁶ Although too little is known about these first Awlād Bū Sbā' settlers, they did entertain good relationships with the groups living in the Trarza region and especially with the emiral group. By at least the late eighteenth century, the emir of Trarza entrusted a man of the Awlād Bū Sbā' to act as his 'prime minister' (*wazīr*) thereby assuming a key position as a mediator between the emir and foreigners brokering his relations, especially the Europeans in Ndar and along the Atlantic coast.⁸⁷ At least by the reign of Emir 'Aly al-Kūri (who died in 1786), his minister was an Awlād Bū Sbā' named 'Abd al-Wahāb al-Sbā'ī. Later, during the reign of the emir 'Amār al-Mukhtār (1800-1819), his grandson, Mukhtār b. Sīdī d. 'Abd al-Wahāb, was the emir's *wazīr*. This tradition continued into the twentieth century with Akhaīrhum, who had a very close relationship with the French and was involved in schemes of all kinds with the traders of St. Louis. Akhaīrhum brokered all the political negotiations, treaties and truces, between the emir of Trarza and the people of St. Louis, official and commercial agents. He spend much time in Ndar and had a reputation of being a bold opportunist. Perhaps this is why Akhaīrhum was the last Trarza minister of this line of Awlād Bū Sbā'.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Faidherbe, in *Moniteur du Sénégal*, cited in Marty, *L'émirat du Trarza*, pp. 205-6.

⁸⁷ I thank historian Muḥammad Mukhtār b. al-Sa'ad of the University of Nouakchott for the following information about the ministers of the Trarza emir. Meeting in Nouakchott (06/09/98).

⁸⁸ See, for example, the Franco-Trarza treaty of 1903 brokered by Akhaīrhum and Xavier Coppolani in Marty, *L'émirat du Trarza*, p. pp. 466-467.

In the early 1850s, the emir of Trarza Muḥammad al-Ḥabīb appointed the chief of the Ahl Mīnāḥna, Muḥammad b. 'Umar, as representative of the Awlād Bū Sbā' living in the Trarza.⁸⁹ Muḥammad al-Ḥabīb was the emir who married princess Jimbut of the Waalo kingdom, and fought the French contingents of Governor Faidherbe to maintain the borders of the Trarza south of the Senegal river.⁹⁰ Besides being in charge of the Awlād Bū Sbā' in the region, Muḥammad b. 'Umar was also responsible for ensuring that survivors of shipwrecks on the Atlantic coast were brought to the emir (who could negotiate a ransom with the French, the same activity the Bayrūk family engaged in further north).⁹¹ The *entente* between the Awlād Bū Sbā' and Trarza emirate was so strong, according to trader/historian Aḥmad Sālam b. 'Adb al-Wadūd, that

Muḥammad al-Ḥabīb declared that any person of the Awlād Bū Sbā' who came to Trarza was entitled to a *guerba* (goat skin water bottle) and a *khzāma* (a camel noise ring) which is to say a camel for transportation if he needed it.⁹²

As we will see in chapter eight, when discussing their last wave of migrations into Mauritania and Senegal in the 1930s, the Awlād Bū Sbā' would take this generous invitation to the Trarza region quite seriously.

⁸⁹ Faidherbe, *Moniteur du Sénégal*, (1959) quoted in Marty, *L'émirat du Trarza*, p. 205. Interview with the Ahl Mīnāḥna in Nouakchott Mukhtār b. 'Abd al-Wahāb (06/13/98). This appointment may have been hereditary and perhaps dates to an earlier period.

⁹⁰ See Boubacar Barry, *Le Royaume du Waalo: Le Sénégal avant la conquête*. Paris: Karthala, 1985, pp.256-261.

⁹¹ Interview with the Ahl Mīnāḥna Mukhtār b. 'Abd al-Wahāb (06/13/98) in Nouakchott.

⁹² Interview in Nouakchott (07/03/99). Aḥmad Sālam b. 'Abd al-Wadūd is a trader, third generation Awlād Bū Sbā' born in Senegal, who is compiling material to write a history of the Awlād Bū Sbā'. I benefited tremendously from his insights and the information he shared with me.

In 1851, Muḥammad b. ʿUmar made the mistake of bypassing the emir's authority by taking shipwrecked people directly to the French in Ndar, and for that he was assassinated by another Awlād Bū Sbā' (quite possibly of the Ahl Budda). Consequently, the young son of Muḥammad b. ʿUmar, Muḥammad Sālam, avenged his father and fled to Ndar (see portrait of Muḥammad Sālam with his *warwar* (rifle) in Appendix 5). It is perhaps at this moment that the Ahl Mīnāḥna left Arguin and settled in Ndiago and in Guet Ndar (the most western island of Ndar). The French reeled in Muḥammad Sālam and enrolled him in the missionary school, while his elder brother, who had traveled to England (probably in the 1810s when the British were in St. Louis) where he had learned English, returned to the Trarza region.⁹³ Unfortunately, that is all that is known about these Awlād Bū Sbā' families who were the first to settle in what would become southern Mauritania and Senegal.

Subsequent migrations of Awlād Bū Sbā' into western Africa date to the beginning of the nineteenth century when Mulay Aḥmad al-Shaygar, of the Awlad al-Baggar (or sons of the cow) branch, settled in the town of Wadān. As his great great grandson explains, he engaged in long-distance trade there between the Wād Nūn and Timbuktu while at the same time following the teachings of the Sharif Mulay Ibrāhīm b.

⁹³ Faidherbe, *Moniteur du Sénégal*, (1959) quoted in Marty, *L'émirat du Trarza*, p. 205.

Mulay al-Bukhāry.⁹⁴ He developed a rapport with his spiritual tutor so well that he married his daughter Dummāha. But at some point, Mulay Aḥmad had a serious theological disagreement with Mulay Ibrāhīm which caused him to leave Wadān for Timbuktu. There, he married into the Berābīsh tribe with 'Aīshatu mint al-Ṭalib Mūsa (with this union, this Berābīsh family apparently “transferred” to the Awlād Bū Sbā’).⁹⁵ After a while, and after having refined his theological thesis with supporting material gathered in Timbuktu, Mulay Aḥmad al-Shaygar decided to return to Wadān with his second wife. After presenting his religious argument to Mulay Ibrāhīm, his father-in-law admitted that he was wrong, and then he told his daughter, Dummāha, the first wife of Mulay Ahmad, to ‘join her tent’ (see discussion of the practice of long-distance polygamy in chapter five).

A few years later, Mulay Aḥmad al-Shaygar returned to Morocco where he took an active part in a “*jihād* against the Portuguese at the port of al-Swuīra.”⁹⁶ Because of his military exploits, Mulay Aḥmad was subsequently named qa’id of the Awlād Bū Sbā’

⁹⁴ Interview with ‘Abd al-Wahāb b. al-Shaygar in Nouakchott (9/12/97). The rest of the story of Mulay Aḥmad is based on this interview, also some information was obtained/confirmed by Muḥammad al-Maḥdi b. Muḥammad al-Amīn b. A ‘uaysī interviewed in Nouakchott (07/08/98) and others.

⁹⁵ Interview with ‘Abd al-Wahāb b. al-Shaygar in Nouakchott (9/12/97). It is important to note that this type of tribal allegiance transfers were common in among western Saharans. There are even cases where the descendants of such a union decide to take the family name of the mother instead of the father to mark the reverse switch. See for instance MSH document no. 9 which is a debt settlement between al-Ḥusaīn b. ‘Aīsha mint Bu ‘ānga al-smālīlī (from the Smālīl tribe, although the name is similar to a Awlād Bū Sbā’) al-Gulmīnī (from Gulmīm) and Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallah b. Muḥammad al-Ārāl al-qībtī (of the jackal, Att Ūshin).

tribe by the Sultan 'Abdarrahmān. But he later renounced this position and once again returned to the Sahara. He took residence at some point in the Wād Nūn, in a small village near Gulmīm, where he married a Tikna woman from the Aīt Laḥsān and began purchasing real estate.⁹⁷ Eventually, Mulay Aḥmad led the famous war of the Awlād Bū Sbā' against the Kunta (1281-1283 h.; 1860-1862 A.D.). Known as "the day of Turīn" where the main battle took place, the Kunta chief Sīdī al-Mukhtār and his son were killed in this historical event.⁹⁸ After this episode, Mulay Aḥmad settled in the Wād Nūn near Gulmīm where he purchase land (which still remains in the family) and where he ended his days sometime in the late nineteenth century.

This first major Awlād Bū Sbā' - Kunta battle signaled the beginning of a forty year period when "the Awlād Bū Sbā' abandoned all studies and religious learning; they engaged in war; they started with the Kunta and attacked most groups in the Sahara."⁹⁹ As early twentieth century historian Aḥmad b. Al-Amīn As-Shinqīṭī explained, after the battle in Turīn (which is the name of a well, like most known locations in the Sahara), "the Awlād Bū Sbā' started to raid everyone (*ṣāra al-Awlād abī Sibā' yughazzū 'ala*

⁹⁶ Ibid. I am not sure which war he was referring to here.

⁹⁷ Interview with 'Abd al-Wahāb b. al-Shaygar in Nouakchott (9/12/97). The Shaygar family still owns houses in and around Gulmīm today.

⁹⁸ See interviews in Nouakchott with 'Abd al-Wahāb b. al-Shaygar (07/22/97), Aḥmad Sālam b. 'Abd al-Wadūd (07/03/98) and others who detail the famous battle. See also Marty, *L'émirat du Trarza*, p. 206. On this war see Aḥmad b. Al-Amīn As-Shinqīṭī, *Al-Wasīl*, pp.509-510. It is tempting to suspect that this major war was somehow caused by tensions due to economic competition (See Chapter 6).

jamī' al-nās), there was no difference whether they were their enemy or not and whomever did not give them their wealth (*mālhu*) they would kill him..."¹⁰⁰ From the 1860s to the 1930s, the Awlād Bū Sbā' would engage many western Africans in wars which they tended to win (these military events will be briefly touched upon in chapter six).¹⁰¹

The case of Mulay Aḥmad al-Shaygar is well remembered, as he was once the qā'id of the all the Awlād Bū Sbā' under the authority of the Sultan of Morocco. When he traveled and settled in Wadān and Timbuktu in the 1840s, it can be assumed that at the time there were other Awlād Bū Sbā' scholars and traders residing in the markets and towns of western Africa. Oral and written evidence makes clear that one of their main trade goods was Arabic books and manuscripts (See next chapter). There are countless examples of distinguished Muslim scholars from the Awlād Bū Sbā' who, in the first half of the nineteenth century, settled oftentimes independently in markets which were also centers of Islamic learning such as Wadān, Timbuktu, Arawān, Walāta, Tishīt, and Shingīti. In fact, in this last town, it is well known that it was an Awlād Bū Sbā' who

⁹⁹ Interview in Nouakchott with Aḥmad Sālam b. 'Abd al-Wadūd (07/03/98).

¹⁰⁰ Aḥmad b. Al-Amīn As-Shinqīṭī, *Al-Wasīl*, p. 509.

¹⁰¹ The only battles they did not win were against the Rgaṭbāt ("the day of Lumdun" 1321h; 1900AD and "the day of Fūsht" 1324h; 1902AD) and the reasons they lost, according to Awlād Bū Sbā' historian Aḥmad Sālam b. 'Abd al-Wadūd were for environmental reasons: in Lundum the mountain got in the way and in Fusht, the well was dry. Interview in Nouakchott (07/03/98).

helped build the second part of the mosque.¹⁰² Ibrāhīm b. al-Khalīfa organized the laborious transportation by camel of the mosque stones which were quarried at the Jdīda mountain, forty kilometers northwest of Shingīti.¹⁰³ It is important to note that Shingīti, in the Adrar region, gained its reputation in the Muslim world because of the high number of its eminent scholars. These scholars often organized a pilgrimage caravan and it is said that they impressed their fellow scholars in Mecca and Medina with their erudition. For this reason, Shingīti was called “the Seventh City of Islam.” In fact, the region in and around the Adrar came to be known by outsiders as *bilād Shingīti* or the land of Shingīti. The name Shingīti derives its name from the Berber word meaning ‘the source where the horses drink.’¹⁰⁴

Partners in Trade: The Wād Nūn Network

When reflecting upon the history of these two Saharan groups, there are a number of parallels which can be drawn. First, the ancient history of the people of the Awlad Bu Sba’, like the Tiknas, seems to be somehow tied to that of the Almoravids. The historical coincidences expressed in several pieces of scattered sources presented here might simply reflect the popularity of the Almoravid movement in the memories of the Tikna, Awlād Bū Sbā’ and others. Archaeological research in the Wād Nūn (Taghaost, Nūl Lamta) and

¹⁰² Interview in Nouakchott with Fatimatu mint Sīdi Muḥammad with Salka mint Bābatah (06/25/98).

¹⁰³ Interview in Shingīti with ‘Abdarrahman b. Muḥammad al-Ḥanshi (09/29/97) he states this happened in the year 1150 (18thc.); Interview in Nouakchott with Aḥmad Sālam b. ‘Abd al-Wadūd (07/03/98).

¹⁰⁴ Aḥmad b. Al-Amīn As-Shinqīti, *Al-Wasīl*, p. 422.

the Mauritanian Tagant (Awdaghust) would uncover more about the identities of the original Almoravids and prove or dispel such the tribal.

Secondly, both the Awlād Bū Sbā' and Tikna groups converged in and around the region of the Wād Nūn. The Awlād Bū Sbā' ancestors were buried in Liksābi, barely ten kilometers northwest of Gulmīm. That the Awlād Bū Sbā' ancestor is worshiped as a saint during the summer market festival of the Liksābi *Amuggar* is in itself a significant symbol of a strong Tikna/Awlād Bū Sbā' partnership. Liksābi is the stronghold of the Aīt Laḥsan Tikna who are the first allies of the Awlād Bū Sbā'. This alliance would prove tremendously significant to the Awlād Bū Sbā' in the first decades of the twentieth century when a sizable group of Awlād Bū Sbā' moved to join others in Liksābi, as discussed in chapter eight. To be sure, the community of Awlād Bū Sbā' traders in Gulmīm itself was sizeable in the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁵ The Tikna/Awlād Bū Sbā' alliance is established by oral traditions. It is also confirmed by the fact that in the history of the Awlād Bū Sbā', they never raised arms against the Tikna, whom they considered their protectors. This is a very significant fact when one knows that the Awlād Bū Sbā' engaged in wars against almost every Saharan tribe in western Africa, as will be related in chapter six.

Thirdly, for various reasons, some that can be explained politically, others which are individually determined, the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' started a tradition of

southern migration into the markets and centers of learning of western Africa. From the historical evidence of both groups, the beginnings of their diasporic presence in the regions along the western African Atlantic coast and into northern Senegal, coincides sometime in the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁶ For the Tikna, it is the arrival of an Izarguyin Tikna army sent to assist 'Aly Shandura, the emir of Trarza, in his territorial war with the Brakna. For the Awlād Bū Sbā', it is the southern flight coinciding with the treaty with the Awlād Tidrārin which supposedly gave them coastal rights from Imrīglī, in the western Sahara, all the way south, just miles from the Senegalese port of Ndar.

In the nineteenth century, the migrations of individual traders and scholars from the northern to the southern edges of the Sahara would accelerate, regulated by political or economic circumstances (the Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly Tikna sent as caravaners and trade representatives connected to the Bayrūk family), or simply motivated by personal reasons (the case of Awlād Bū Sbā' Mulay Aḥmad b. al-Shaygar who sought learning, and traded in Wadān and Timbuktu). Tikna traders had representatives in all the important trading towns on trans-Saharan trails by the mid-nineteenth century. The efficient organization of their trading network was facilitated by the political actions and economic foresight and planning of Tikna leaders such as the Bayrūk clan. Undoubtedly, the most significant factor explaining the rise of the Tikna as trans-Saharan traders *par excellence*, is the role played by the Bayrūk family. This family rose to a position of political

¹⁰⁵ Interviews in Gulmīm, Liksābi, 'Asrir and Marrakech, as well as Nouakchott.

prominence of great proportions and transformed the town of Gulmīm into the caravan terminus, the ‘door of the Sahara’ that it became. By maintaining tribal concord ritualized in the practice of *ḡbīḥa* and political/tribal alliances symbolized in multiple marriage arrangements, the Bayrūk leaders assumed a certain power and prestige which would outlast the nineteenth century.

Unlike their Tikna counterparts, the Awlād Bū Sbā’ were historically more nomadic in the sense that they did not have a homeland, at least not after the late eighteenth century when they were expelled out of Marrakech. This, and other events, contributed to their tribal dispersal and, besides Mulay Aḥmad al-Shaygar who briefly became qaīd for the Moroccan Sultan, the Awlād Bū Sbā’ had no political tradition of leadership, and often lacked institutional cohesiveness as a group. Their southern migrations were less “organized” than those of their Tikna Aīt Mūsa wa ‘Aly counterparts. However, because of their sharifian descent, and because of their scholarly tradition, the Awlād Bū Sbā’ carried with them tremendous religious distinction and an ascribed reputation which indubitably promoted them to high social ranks wherever they wandered. In Shingīṭi, Ibrāhīm al-Khalīfa helped reconstruct the mosque. In Timbuktu and Wadān, Mulay Aḥmad engaged in theological debates. Throughout western Africa, the Awlād Bū Sbā’ became teachers of Islam in all the main towns where they came to

¹⁰⁶ I borrow the term ‘diasporic’ from James Clifford in his contribution to diaspora studies, which will be discussed in the concluding chapter, and which is entitled *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

settle (this is the case of Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl discussed in the next chapter). Their scholarly prestige was converted into economic capital when they engaged in trade, and the trade in books from Marrakech to western Africa would become their specialty. Indeed, the reputation of the Awlād Bū Sbā' as scholars and traders provided the symbolic capital necessary to propel them into a class of protected stranger-traders on trans-Saharan trails.

The Wād Nūn trading network, the subject of the next chapter, was comprised of two groups who maintained relationships of solidarity across "tribal" lines. They identified with one another because they came from the same region, and they had strong alliances based on manifest demonstrations of political and tribal allegiances (*'asābiya*) and inter-tribal marriages. Since they identified with one another as stranger-traders in western Africa, they tended to cooperate as *ansāh* in trade and otherwise. This is why I argue that they formed a trading diaspora based on, not so much a shared "ethnicity," but a shared "tradition." Yet, in the long-run, as we will see, both groups were not equally effective in securing commercial success across the generations. Moreover, as shown in chapter eight, the cooperation as a network in western Africa between the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' came to end in the first decades of colonial rule as both groups adopted separate strategies of negotiation and accommodation within the new power structure. This tribal alliance was forever broken when, in the 1930s, tension between the two groups which resulted in a physical confrontation in the market of Atar, broke whatever bonds of solidarity had existed in the past.

CHAPTER 5

TRADING NETWORKS: THE WĀD NŪN EXAMPLE

Throughout the history of economics, the stranger everywhere appears as the trader, or the trader as the stranger.¹

Every son "had his own town, and did [trade] there."²

In chapter two, we saw how many Muslim traders used Islamic law as a guideline, a legal framework mutually enforced by other Muslim traders and scholars. The *sharīʿa*, although it was not always followed to the letter, especially in the credit market, was the basis of most written exchanges. The Arabic script was used for accounting (keeping trading records) and accountability (contractual enforcement). In chapter three, we briefly laid out the wider economic landscape of western Africa in the mid-nineteenth century and examined the logistics of camel caravan organizing. It was argued that cooperation between caravans and trading partners was an important ingredient to the successful operation of long-distance trade. Cross-cultural trade required knowledge of the terrain, of foreign markets and connections to commercial agents located in the host markets that could act as a cross-cultural brokers.

This chapter examines the organization of trading networks based on the example of Wād Nūn. After addressing certain theoretical considerations about the study of trading networks (or so-called "trading diasporas"), I argue along with authors such as

¹ George Simmel, "The Stranger" in *The Sociology of George Simmel* translated by Kurt Wolff (Glencoe, Illinois, 1950) pp. 403-405 cited in L.A. Fallers, *Immigrants and Associations*, edited by L A Fallers, The Hague: Mouton, 1967 (my emphasis).

² Interview in Atar with Khnātha mint Aḥmayda and her two daughters Fatimatu and Mariam daughters of her and Muḥammad al-Farha (10/5/97).

Abner Cohen, that successful trade operations across long distances were made possible through such social institutions. The organization of trade through tight-knit communities of traders engaged in cooperative arrangements of solidarity had the effect of reducing transaction costs. Two tribal groups played a significant role in nineteenth century western trans-Saharan trade: the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā'. Based on the historical overview presented in the previous chapter, I show that these two groups succeeded in trade because of how they organized themselves in networks to facilitate their long-distance trading operations.

The second part of the chapter focuses on a lengthy document written in the 1850s by Saharan jurists. It depicts the complex inheritance case of several Wād Nūn traders and offers a unique snapshot into the inner workings of trans-Saharan trade operations in mid-nineteenth century western Africa. I pay close attention to financial operations to provide a sense of how these types of commercial enterprises were realized across long-distances. Following my remarks about long-distance trade in chapter two, I demonstrate that credit was central and discuss how extending credit was a strategy of capital accumulation and personal wealth in a situation of market uncertainty.

Stranger-Traders and 'Trading Diasporas:' Some Theoretical Considerations

Long-distance trade in Africa has long been a popular subject of historical investigation. Several historians have written about how discrete communities of traders, linked by "ethnic" or "tribal" affiliation, formed trading networks between markets and

across long-distances.³ This choice of topic is hardly surprising since in the history of the Africa, there are so many examples of the presence of so-called ‘trading diasporas’ in the main markets and towns of the continent. Western Africa is a particularly fertile region for the study of long-distance trade networks. The case of the ubiquitous Jula, who traveled along all the major trade routes of western Africa, settling in the main markets from Bonduku to Timbuktu, have been studied by numerous historians from Philip Curtin to B. Marie Perinbam.⁴ Other examples include the Hausa traders who, like the Jula, operated an extensive trade network all over western Africa and beyond. Abner Cohen’s seminal study of the Hausa cattle traders in Ibadan, Paul Lovejoy’s research on the Hausa Kola traders, and the Hausa of Maradi studied by Emmanuelle Grégoire, all bear witness to the Hausa itinerant entrepreneurship.⁵ Still other case studies include the Jakhanke of Senegambia, the Soninke of Sudanic Sahel and, most recently, the Fula in Sierra Leone examined by Alusine Jalloh and the small yet significant Duala middlemen of Cameroon studied by Ralph Austen and Jonathan Derrick.⁶ In addition to Africa’s “ethnic”

³ See Abner Cohen, “Cultural Strategies in the Organization of Trading Diasporas,” in *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa*, C. Meillassoux (ed.); Curtin, *Economic Change*; Lovejoy, *Caravans of Kola: The Hausa Kola Trade, 1700-1900*. Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1980; Edward Alpers, “Trade, State, and Society Among the Yao in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of African History*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1969, pp. 405-420; and Jean-Loup Amselle, “Parenté et Commerce chez les Kooroko.” In *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa*, C. Meillassoux (Ed.), London: Oxford University Press, 1971.

⁴ Curtin, *Economic Change*, Chapter two; Marie Perinbam, “The Julas in Western Sudanese History: Long-Distance Traders and Developers of Resources,” *West African Cultural Dynamics: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives*, B. K. Swartz and R. Dumet (eds). The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1980, pp. 455-475.

⁵ Cohen, *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa: A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns*. Berkeley, 1969; Lovejoy, *Caravans of Kola*; Emmanuelle Grégoire, *Les Alhazai du Maradi (Niger): histoire d’un groupe de riches marchands sahéliens*. Paris: Editions L’ORSTOM, 1986.

⁶ Curtin, *Economic Change*, Chapter two on the Jakhanke, Soninke and others; Curtin “The Diakhanké,” Alusine Jalloh, *African Entrepreneurship: Muslim Fula Merchants in Sierra Leone*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999.; Austen and Derrick, *Middlemen of the Cameroons Rivers: The Duala and their Hinterland c. 1600-c. 1960*, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

diasporas, scholars have also studied international diasporas such as the Lebanese networks in West Africa and the Indian shop-keepers in East Africa.⁷

Trading Diasporas

To explain the operation of long-distance trading networks, many of these authors have relied on the concept of 'trading diasporas,' originally developed by anthropologist Abner Cohen in a landmark article.⁸ The 'trading diaspora' model provides a useful sociological framework for analyzing the organization of trade. It explains how ethnic associations overcome basic organizational issues in trade, such as obtaining credit and business information, maintaining cultural distinctiveness, and operating within a political and religious establishment. Trust between partners and communication of information--two key factors in successful long distance trade--"are far easier between people who share values, language, legal system, kinship ties, and other sources of solidarity."⁹

Cohen's theoretical contribution is based on a careful study of the *sabo* or "tribal neighborhood" of the Hausa in the town of Ibadan. He explained that 'trading diasporas' worked precisely because their membership was based on a shared "ethnicity," or "members from communities of the same ethnic group." It is widely accepted that so-called 'trading diasporas' are as old as trade itself and functioned as basic commercial institutions the world over. As Curtin, explains in an original approach to cross-cultural trade in world history, "communities of merchants living among aliens in associated

⁷ Henry Bierwirth, "Like Fish in the Sea: The Lebanese Diaspora in Côte d'Ivoire, ca. 1925-1990," Doctoral Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1994.

⁸ "Cultural Strategies," p. 277.

⁹ Curtin, *Economic Change*, p. 60; Cohen, "Cultural Strategies," pp. 273-4.

networks are to be found on every continent and back through time to the very beginning of urban life."¹⁰ Curtin effectively applied the term 'trading diaspora' to analyses of world history, including Senegambian history, to explain these tight-knit communities of European and African merchants.¹¹ He gave currency to the term 'trading diaspora' without however providing a theoretical discussion or a proper definition.

Until the 1990s, few economists expressed an interest in examining the social institutions which governed trading operations. The recent work of Janet Landa takes a bold look at the discipline from the perspective of 'new institutional economics.' Landa is one of the rare economists to acknowledge the relevance of 'ethnic trading networks' to economic analysis. She argues that a shared identity is critical for traders operating in an environment of contract uncertainty; "hence the importance of *trust* embedded in the *particularistic* exchange relations such as *kinship* or *ethnicity* in protecting contracts."¹² This was precisely what Cohen argued in his research, although Landa does not seem to be aware of this.¹³ She adds that *identity* matters for traders operating in an environment characterized by contract uncertainty and that their cooperative behavior promotes a tight-knit *corporate culture* which provides the social capital and the institutional framework for efficient exchange.

Jean Emswiler, another scholar trained in new institutional economics, has made an excellent contribution to economic history with her study of the Orma long-

¹⁰ Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade*, p. 3.,

¹¹ See Curtin's *Economic Change*; and *Cross-Cultural Trade*.

¹² Janet Tai Landa, *Trust, Ethnicity and Identity: Beyond the new institutional economics of ethnic networks, contract law and gift-exchange*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994, p. 4.

¹³ Indeed, it is altogether rather strange that Landa does not seem to be familiar with Cohen's groundbreaking research in the area of trading diasporas. This might be related to the problem of cross-disciplinary communication which she alludes to in chapters 1-2. She does, however, make passing reference to Curtin's *Cross-Cultural Trade*.

distance traders of northern Kenya ¹⁴ Marrying anthropology and economics, she argues that ideology, including notions of social justice and ‘fair play,’ is critical to explaining economic choices and performance.¹⁵ Based on the work of Douglass North, she explains that social institutions are held together by a combination of *formal rules*, *informal constraints* and *enforcement*.¹⁶ This applies well to the organization of trading networks which are backed by the formal rules of Islam, the informal constraints of accepted business ethics, and mutual enforcement by fellow Muslims and their jurists. Belonging to a trading network, an established organization focused on the pursuit of commercial gain, with members who trusted and communicated with one another, was a strategy for efficient cross-cultural exchange. Most importantly, such an institution reduced traders’ transaction costs, which were typically prohibitive in areas not ruled or managed by a single governing body enforcing a rule of law. Transaction costs are the costs of trading incurred to “gather information, negotiate, monitor, and enforce property rights and contracts.”¹⁷ Participating in a trading network where members shared precious information (on markets, cultures, politics, ecology), professional solidarity and a common business ethics, was the most efficacious way to organize long-distance trade on trans-Saharan trails.

¹⁴ *Making a Market: The Institutional Transformation of an African Society*. Cambridge University Press, 1992. I would like to thank Steven Heydemann for pointing me towards this important work.

¹⁵ Ibid, *Making a Market*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 5-6. Based on North’s *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge University Press, 1990.

¹⁷ Douglass North, *Institutions* quoted in Einsminger, *Making a Market*, p. 18.

Landlords, Cross-Cultural Brokers and Stranger-Traders

Traders who participated in such networks, playing the comparative advantages of distant markets, were strangers in foreign lands by the very nature of their profession. The work of sociologist George Simmel on the position and role of strangers in society is particularly relevant to this study. His definition, based on the Western European experience, holds some significance in the western African context.

Throughout the history of economics, *the stranger everywhere appears as the trader, or the trader as stranger*. As long as the economy is essentially self-sufficient, or products are exchanged within a spatially narrow group, it needs no middleman: a trader is only required for products that originate outside the group. Insofar as members do not leave the circle to buy these necessities-in which case *they* are the stranger merchants in that outside territory-the trader *must* be a stranger...¹⁸

The recognition of the stranger-trader phenomenon is extremely significant when investigating African history.¹⁹ It explains a great deal of African commercial history, and not just the interactions between European and African merchants on the coast. But, as Curtin acknowledges in the quote above, the position of stranger-traders in African communities goes back to the history of urbanity.

In a pioneering article published in the early 1960s, V. R. Dorjahn and Christopher Fyfe examined the relationships between landlords and strangers in Sierra Leone, drawing attention to the prevailing social structures accommodating incoming strangers. One of the most significant observations they made was that the “landlord

¹⁸ V. R. Dorjahn and Christopher Fyfe, “Landlord and Stranger: Change in Tenancy Relations in Sierra Leone.” *Journal of African History*, III, 3 (1962), pp. 391-397.

¹⁹ A signpost edited volume on the subject of stranger is: William A. Shack & Elliott P. Skinner, *Strangers in African Societies*, eds., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979.

took full responsibility for his stranger.”²⁰ Based on evidence drawn from European sources, these authors identified how the responsibilities of landlords extended into the credit market, as they were guarantors of their stranger-trader clients. Even though Dorjahn and Fyfe did not provide a theoretical framework for the study of landlords and strangers, and theirs was a brief contribution, they touched upon an important aspect of the history of credit in Africa. Based on this article and the work of Cohen, Polly Hill analyzed “landlords and brokers” in Kumasi (Ghana).²¹ She provides a useful definition of terminology related to the multifarious occupations of the long-distance trader. She defined the landlord as:

a settled stranger, who makes it his business to accommodate long-distance stranger-traders and to assist them in selling and usually in storing their goods. If a landlord operates in a market-- which he does not necessarily do, for (as will be seen) many landlords' houses resemble small wholesale markets--then he is also a *dillali* (or broker) a Hausa word of Arabic origin signifying a formally recognized intermediary between buyer and seller.²²

Whether they were called *mai gida* (Hausa), *jaatigi* (Soninké), or *jaajgi* (Ḥasanīya), landlords were “the pillars supporting the market structure.”²³ As George Brooks explains in his remarkable history of western African trade until the seventeenth century, one of the principle aspects of landlord-stranger reciprocities was hospitality.²⁴ As we will see in

²⁰ V. R. Dorjahn and Christopher Fyfe, “Landlord and Stranger: Change in Tenancy Relations in Sierra Leone.” *Journal of African History*, III, 3 (1962), pp. 391-397.

²¹ Polly Hill, “Landlord and Brokers : A West African Trading System (With a Note on Kumasi Butchers,” *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, vol. 7, no. 23.

²² Ibid., p. 350.

²³ Ibid., 355.; Meillassoux, “Le commerce pré-colonial et l’esclavage,” Jean-Louis Boutellier, “La cité marchande de Bouna dans l’ensemble économique Ouest-Africain pré-colonial.” In *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa*. Edited by C. Meillassoux. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 244; Interviews, for example, in Shingŋi with Abdarahmān wuld Muhammad al-Ḥanshi (09/29/97).

²⁴ George E. Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers: Ecology, Society, and Trade in Western Africa, 1000-1630*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993, pp. 28-29.

the next section when examining the contours of the Wād Nūn network, the roles, occupations and responsibilities of landlords ranged from cross-cultural broker to banker.

Politically, stranger-traders tended to hold liminal positions in their host societies, typically living on the periphery of local authorities and the local communities at large. Again, George Simmel's discussion of the position of strangers is relevant to the case studies examined in this dissertation.

He is not radically committed to the unique ingredients and peculiar tendencies of the group [meaning the local community], and therefore approaches them with the specific attitude of "objectivity" But objectivity does not simply imply passivity and detachment; it is a particular structure composed of distance and nearness, indifference and involvement...The freedom, however, which allows the stranger to experience even his close relationships as though from a birds-eye view, contains many dangerous possibilities. In uprising of all sorts, the party attacked has claimed, from the beginning of things, that provocation had come from the outside, from emissaries and instigators.²⁵

As L.A. Faller explains, stranger-traders belong to "a culturally alien community resulting from migration in pursuit of economic opportunity."²⁶ Because of their social positions as strangers, they are "betwixt and between" the different power structures in the host community. In a volume on strangers in African societies, William Shack adds that "[t]hrough their involvement in sundry social, economic and quasi-political activities, *strangers symbolically mediate between society and state*."²⁷ From material examined in the previous chapter on the role of the Awlād Bū Sbā' as the foreign ministers of the emir of Trarza, and as will become clear in chapters seven and eight when we discuss the roles played by the Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' during the

²⁵ See footnote 1.

²⁶ L. A. Faller, "Introduction," *Immigrants and Associations*, p. 9.

²⁷ "Introduction," *Strangers in African Societies*, William A. Shack & Elliott P. Skinner, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, p. 4 (my emphasis).

establishment of colonial rule in the area, both Saharan groups fit these descriptions of stranger-traders.

The Organization of a Trading Network:²⁸ The Wād Nūn Example

The examples of the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā', the two Saharan tribal nations examined in the previous chapter, fit the conceptual framework and theoretical considerations examined above. The Wād Nūn trading network was comprised of two tribal groups who maintained relationships of solidarity because they identified with one another coming from the same regional area. They developed partnerships based on manifest demonstrations of political and tribal allegiances and most importantly on a shared sense of solidarity ('*asābiya*). That Islam acted as a 'symbolic blueprint' for the organization of the network, and maintenance of a collective economic order, is clear from materials presented in chapter two.²⁹ Because members of this trading network were all Muslim and shared Islamic norms and behaviors, as well as moral responsibility, a business ethic, a common identity and mutual solidarity.³⁰

²⁸ I chose to substitute the word 'network' for 'diaspora' because the word network conveys a complex system of interconnected branches. Although admittedly 'diaspora' conveys the idea of an "ethnic group in dispersal," I do not think it conveys the idea of a system of linked entities like the word 'network' does. See Cohen, "Cultural Strategies," p. 267 fn 1 for his justification of the word 'diaspora,' which, for other reasons, was criticized by others.

²⁹ The idea of Islam functioned as a 'symbolic blueprint' is Abner Cohen's, "Cultural Strategies," p. 276.

³⁰ Curtin, *Economic Change*, p. 66.

The Beginnings of a Trading Network: First Settlements of Trans-Saharan Migrants

As discussed in chapter four, the first Awlād Bū Sbā' and Tikna settlers in western Africa migrated for a host of reasons. Some came because of persecution and a treaty (Awlād Bū Sbā' were chased out of Marrakech and they signed an agreement with the Awlād Tidrārīn which gave them territorial rights to the Atlantic coast all the way to Senegal). Others migrated for military reasons (some Tikna migrated as soldiers to assist the Emir of Trarza in his war against the Brakna). Both these events took place in the eighteenth century, but the very beginnings of the Wād Nūn trading network remain nebulous at this point. Few scholars of Islam have discussed the presence of "North African" traders in the main cities of western Africa.³¹ Moreover, I would argue that the generic blanket-term "North Africans" or "Arabs" has tended to obscure the identities and origins of the very diverse set of nations represented on trans-Saharan trade routes. Consequently little is known to date about the identities of these early pioneers and missionaries who combined trading and scholarly activities. Based on a collection of the biographies of several generations of traders who traveled along trans-Saharan trails, and migrated to western Africa, I have reconstructed the beginnings of the Wād Nūn network.

Oral sources explain that the first pioneers on trans-Saharan trails were caravaners who had participated in several *akabār* before they decided to settle down in a caravan terminus such as Timbuktu, Walāta, Wadān, Shingīti or Tishīt. These Wād Nūn traders

³¹ Brenner, "North Africans;" Newbury, "North African;" Diadié Haidara, *Les Juifs du Tombouctou*, Bamako: Editions Donniya, 1999 (I thank Nehemia Levtzion for sharing a copy of this recent publication via R. Seán O'Fahey).

had knowledge of markets and/or had contacts with traders and landlords working there. This first generation of traders either married local women or otherwise purchased enslaved women who were forced to become concubines (marriage patterns are discussed in the next section). Some long-distance traders might have also migrated across the Sahara with their wives and families. Although I did not encounter examples of this in oral sources for the Tikna (except the case of the Muḥammad al-Farha who came to Shingīti with his mother and sister in the early 1910s), there is ample evidence that this was the case among many of the Awlād Bū Sbā'. Their wives and sometimes daughters would become business partners in the ways described in chapter three.

Generally speaking, Wād Nūn stranger-traders were expert social navigators, and tended to possess fine skills in cross-cultural communication. As Curtin explains, “the trader of the diaspora mediated by gaining a specialized knowledge of other cultures along the trade route.”³² Because of their contacts, the information they brought with them about far-away markets, as well as exotic goods they sold (foreign wares and religious paraphernalia), the Awlād Bū Sbā' and the Tikna stranger-traders were likely to be well received in their host communities. Moreover, it cannot be overstated that the western African sense of hospitality to strangers is almost an institutionalized form of reciprocity, as Brooks explains.³³

The first generation of pioneers on trans-Saharan trails who took residence in western African markets negotiated the purchase or rental arrangement of a given

³² Curtin, *Economic Change*, p. 60.

³³ Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers*, pp. 38-9.

property. Typically, the Wād Nūn traders chose to live either near the main mosque in town and/or in the vicinity of the market. Generally speaking, first and second generation traders would invest most of their profits in real estate back in the homeland (Wād Nūn). It was only in the twentieth century, with the imposition of colonial rule, that Wād Nūn traders began investing more earnestly in western Africa (houses, palm trees).

Thanks to their skills in acquiring the main language spoken in the host community (Wolof, Sonrai, Pulaar, Soninké), and their knowledge of Ḥasanīya, the Saharan lingua franca, these first Berber-speaking settlers could easily continue operating long-distance caravans, linking their adoptive commercial center to that of the homeland. A settled Wād Nūn trader would act as a vector for other caravaners belonging to his network who benefited from his services as landlord, cross-cultural broker and banker (see next section). Although he took residence (or a second residence, if already married in the homeland), he would continue organizing caravans, either walking himself or sending representatives (*wukalā*). At least once a year, he would send a loaded caravan to the Wād Nūn to his trading partner, relative and/or associate living there. Through their operations and trading agents, they connected markets across long distances. Whole families would settle strategically between markets communicating with one another through correspondence and couriers.

Since stranger-traders lacked social ties and access to human resources in the host countries where they settled, they had to find ways to either hire or acquire reliable workers. In the Wād Nūn case, long-distance traders were active slave traders. They

often purchased slaves to fulfill their own labor needs, as well as for resale in the Wād Nūn markets. For these reasons, established Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' families living in western Africa might have owned more slaves than the average Saharan oasis dweller. Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' relied on slave labor for practically every task: from domestic work, herding camels, leading caravans, loading and unloading cargoes, as well as other jobs on caravan trails such as cooking and keeping guard. Slave women also were used as concubines, mothers and wet nurses. Wād Nūn traders employed their most reliable slaves, or freed slaves, as caravan managers and couriers sending them off with loaded caravans to Wād Nūn associates in northern or southern markets.

The next generation, born in the diaspora, was brought up with a distinct identity as strangers with multi-lingual skills and a sense of the wider regional and economic landscape. The sons would in turn follow in their fathers' professional footsteps. Often, elder sons worked directly for their fathers. Young boys, from age ten onwards, were typically socialized to go on caravan with their fathers to learn the itineraries and the tricks of the trade. Sons tended to be caravaner apprentices at an early age, preparing for a long-distance trading career. Eventually, they would become the family's main caravaner, replacing their fathers who had retired to more sedentary lifestyles. Oftentimes, when the first or second generation Wād Nūn trader decided to retire, letting his sons take over the business, he would return to Wād Nūn where he had invested most of his wealth. From then onwards, the senior member of the network would become a financier of caravans, sending his sons and representatives on the trail, while arranging

business deals in town. Although women rarely walked the trail, wives of caravaners would manage the business, taking over the reigns when their husbands were on the trail (see chapter three). Exceptional widows and exceptional daughters would perform full-time as long-distance financiers, as shown in the next chapter.

The second generation of migrant traders reproduced the network by continuing the vocation of their fathers. Younger sons could then move on to settle in another market along trans-Saharan trails, following the economic opportunities there and acting, in-turn, as a local representatives of the network. As Khnātha mint Aḥmayda, a third generation Tikna in the Adrar, explains “every son “had his own town, and did [trade] there.”³⁴

In an effort to preserve their cultural distinctiveness, a major source of the commercial success of stranger-traders, the second generation strove to marry within the tribal group. In the case of the Tikna of Shingīṭi, for which I have the most data, the first Tiknas to settle arrived in a small group. Many of the second generation Tiknas, therefore, married the daughters of the first generation traders. From then onwards, the network members could reproduce their cultural identities while, at the same time, marrying second or third wives in and out of town, as well as taking on concubines. The Awlād Bū Sbā’, who migrated earlier to Wadān and Shingīṭi, tended to live in close vicinity of one another. But it was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when they settled in large numbers in the burgeoning town of Atar, that the Awlād Bū Sbā’ formed a sizeable stranger-trader community (see the next chapter for specifics on the move south).

Landlords, Bankers and Cross-Cultural Brokers

As a member of a trading network settled in a major market on trans-Saharan trails, the Wād Nūn trader assumed a diverse set of professional occupations. As a caravaner, he pursued long-distance trade, using his new home as a base. He also acted as regional representative for his trading partners living in other areas, forwarding market information, as well as goods (see example of brothers corresponding between Shingīṭi and Timbuktu in the next chapter). When caravaners of the Wād Nūn trade network came to town, he lodged them, providing all the services of a host, and more. If needed, he could act as a cross-cultural broker assuming the position of an intermediary between buyers and sellers, and between the stranger-trader and the local community.

Hosts, and their household members, were compensated for the expenses incurred in hosting visiting caravaners, who stayed anywhere from several days to several months. They received multifarious tips as facilitators of cross-cultural exchange. Caravaners brought with them the precious news from abroad. Promoting visiting traders increased the hosts' access to information, and it could strengthen their local reputation as a provider and commercial catalyst. Moreover, the relationships traders of a network entertained with one another reinforced their sense of mutual trust, solidarity and shared obligations which formed the bedrock of their commercial institution. It must be noted that Wād Nūn traders in particular tended to act as hosts to their own tribal partners, as well as traders from the Wād Nūn region, and long-distance stranger-traders not

³⁴ Interview in Atar with Khnātha mint Aḥmayda and her two daughters Fatimatu and Mariam daughters of her and Muḥammad al-Farha (10/5/97).

necessarily linked directly to their discrete trading network. The level of services they provided to their hosts was related to their social proximity and mutual trust.

As landlord and cross-cultural broker, stranger-traders also took on the great responsibility of being the “legal guardian” of their hosts. This responsibility included: providing local market information through their local connections; arranging for the caring of hosts’ camels, as well as the provision of “fresh” camels in exchange for tired herds; negotiating terms of trade and securing local trade licensing such as the political fees imposed by local authorities or known warrior groups (*ghāfar* and *mudarāt*); acting as a guarantor vouching for them in matters of finance (which meant that landlords paid the debts of their hosts in the eventuality of default); and providing safe-deposit and storage facilities.

Landlords encouraged young tribal members to join the trade network by extending them loans to begin trading. In the histories of the Awlād Bū Sbā’ and the Tikna living in western Africa, there are countless stories of how one landlord-trader provided the cash which allowed a young trader to succeed and rise to become a prominent member of the network. That both groups practiced an obligation to financially assist their relatives was a central part of the opportunities and securities offered by participation in these social institutions. As Lieutenant-interpreter Martin argued in his excellent study of the Awlād Bū Sbā’ presence in Mauritania, the Awlād Bū Sbā’ were the “bankers of the steppe.”³⁵ They were constantly extending loans to men as start-up capital, or giving the younger generations opportunities to trade.

³⁵ Martin, p. 16.

Hence, in more ways than one, landlord-brokers acted as guarantors and local bankers to the members of their network. The central question of storage was recognized by Hill, based on her research among the cattle traders in Kumasi. She goes so far as to say that “considering how slowly long-distance traders are apt to sell their goods, storage is their main problem and the facilities provided by many landlords are effectively extra-market, especially if the produce is bulky.”³⁶ Since long-distance traders entrusted their landlords with their commercial cargoes, it would have to be said that this might have constituted the landlords’ largest liability, as the case examined below illustrates. They were in effect acting like bankers, receiving deposits to which they were legally bonded. At the same time, they extended multifarious loans to trading partners, which clearly was a balancing act of capital management. As will be seen in the inheritance case discussed below, having a house stacked with merchandise was the easiest way to become the target of burglars or nomadic raiders. In times of insecurity, deposits had to be constantly shifted between houses and secret locations to avoid visible, and therefore risky, capital accumulation (often salt bars were buried in the sand in hidden spots known only to the owner). Some houses had secret underground vaults and tunnels to store merchandise.³⁷

Landlord-brokers also arranged for local “notarized” writers and jurists who produced and enforced contracts. In matters of jurisprudence, the Tikna relied on groups of scholars who came to be associated with the confederation. Among them was the Lamti group, said to be descendant of the famous Lamta who were among the earliest converts to Islam (see previous chapter). One acted as jurist in the inheritance dispute

³⁶ Hill, “Landlords and Bankers,” pp. 354-5.

³⁷ See Appendix 6B.

discussed below.³⁸ The Awlād Bū Sbā', on the other hand, tended to be trader-scholars who often had high levels of education, and an active understanding of Islamic law.

In the mid-nineteenth century, when Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' took up residence in the active commercial center of Tishīt, they obviously relied on the landlord-brokerage services of the Māsna. The Māsna operated extensive Soninké based networks to the cereal, gold and slave producing regions further south. They owned the rights to the Tishīt salt deposits of *amersāl*, and they were the main organizers of salt caravans to the markets of the Sahel. Several scholars have examined the Soninké trading network in western Africa and beyond.³⁹ Marrying into the Māsna network, a strategy taken by several pioneer members of the Wād Nūn diaspora (see below), was clearly the most effective way to benefit from two networks. There is no doubt that the partnering of the two stranger-trader groups with the Māsna was a large measure of their commercial success. In the late nineteenth century, when Tishīt lost its commercial importance to burgeoning markets further south, such as the town of Nioro, Wād Nūn - Māsna partnerships endured. In the markets located in the Soninké regions of the southern Sahel, when trading networks had no representative in town, they would rely on the

³⁸ Méric, explains that the two clerical families of Ahl Abd al-Usa and the Ahl Bushbūk are reputed to be direct descendant of the Lamṭa. "La Circonscription de Goulimine," p. 25. Also see H. T. Norris' *The Arab Conquest of the Western Sahara*, Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1986.

³⁹ Curtin, "Djakhanké;" and Meillassoux, "Le commerce pré-colonial;" François Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants: Soninké Labor Diasporas, 1848-1960*. Athens: Ohio Press University, 1997.

landlord-broker services of established *jaajgis*. From oral evidence, it seems clear that these *jaajgis* were either Māsna, related to the Māsna, or otherwise connected to Tishīt.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the town of Nioro gained economic prominence over Tishīt. Nioro is said to have been founded in the thirteenth century, at the time of the reign of Sundiata Keita, by a runaway Hal-Pulaar slave previously belonging to the Diawande named Beirdari Tambura.⁴⁰ Another remarkable event in the history of this town is that the leader of the nineteenth century *jihād*, Shaykh Umar Tāl, once established his headquarters in Nioro. He built the first mosque there with assistance from the people of Tishīt.⁴¹ By the time the French conquered Nioro in 1891, there were several *jaajgis* in town whose main clients were the *akabār* and the *rafgas* caravaners who sold salt, dates and foreign merchandise in exchange for subsistence supplies (millet, beans, peanuts), cotton strips (to produce tents), and slaves. Alay Sibi came from Tishīt with his two wives and became the chief contact for the Biḍān in Nioro. As his grandson explains,

he came here [to Nioro] with animals to sell dates, dried meat (bukané), salt. He was originally from a chief family of the Laghlāl [? The Laghlāl were not in Tishīt]. When the French conquered the area under Archinard...he named Alay Sibi chief of the Biḍān [in Nioro].⁴²

⁴⁰ Interview in Nioro with al-Hajj Bakary Diaworaga (05/14/98).

⁴¹ Ibid. Bakary's great grandfather was one of the Shaykh's right arms.

⁴² Interview in Nioro with Cheikhna Sibi "Gipact" (05/14/98)

In addition to his occupation as landlord-broker, he would also go on caravan to Shingīṭi, Walāta, Tishīt and his son continued his profession as *jaajgi*. That the family claims to have been part of the Laghlāl could mean that they were once enslaved to them, before Alay landed in Tishīt and then settled in Nioro. It must be noted that the Laghlāl of Shingīṭi were important camel owners in the Adrar and the Hawd. Consequently, they organized a large portion of the interregional subsistence caravans carrying salt bars down from Ijīl.

In the later period, another *jaajgi* came to play an important role as landlord-broker of the caravaners called Musa Djan Traore, a *harātīn* of Bamana origin. He was multilingual and owned several large houses in Nioro. When he died in the 1950s, Musa was the oldest man in Nioro at the time. He was the most popular *jaajgi* of the caravaners coming from the north. As Gaye Nimaga, an elder of Nioro, explains,

the caravaners unloaded their salt on the [main market] square and the dates at Musa's; the caravaners etc. slept at Musa's and the others [for example the *aqādim*] slept near the merchandise [i.e the salt bars].⁴³

Oral sources from Shingīṭi confirm that the main *jaajgi* of the salt for millet caravaners was a *hartāni* of the Tikna living in Shingīṭi.⁴⁴ Although I was unable to confirm this

⁴³ Group interview in Nioro with al-Hajj Bakary Diagouraga, Samba Daffé and Gaye Nimaga (05/12/98).

⁴⁴ Interviews in Shingīṭi with 'Abdarrahmān b. Muḥammad al-Ḥanṣhi (09/29/97) "There was a haratin of the Tikna (Shingiti) who welcomed all the caravans. He was "Jejgui" (meaning hospitality). He had a son called Ibrahim in Nioro;" Interview with Aḥmad wuld Jiddu, the last great caravaner of Shingīṭi (09/29/97). See also Bonte's Laghlāl informant "A Nioro nous sommes reçus par un ancien *hartāni* des Tekna, originaire de Shingīṭi qui reçoit tous les gens de cette ville. Il sert aussi d'intermédiaire et stock le mil." In "Fortunes Commerciales," pp. 5-6.

from Nioro sources, it seems likely that Musa was the Tikna *hartāni* in question.⁴⁵ That the Tikna had a recognized landlord-broker in Nioro is extremely significant in light of the discussion of the Wād Nūn network. By the beginning of the twentieth century, long-distance traders, of the Awlād Bū Sbā' and the Tikna, settled permanently in this commercial town (see next chapter).

Reproduction of a Trading Diaspora: Concubines and Long-Distance Polygamy

For male traders traveling on caravans between the markets of western Africa, the choice of marital partners was, for all intents and purposes, strategic. When the first stranger-traders from the Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' settled in the foreign towns of Timbuktu, Shingīī, Wadān, Walāta or Tishīt, they had several choices of marriage partners. As explained above, a trader could either marry locally or purchase female slaves. The first Wād Nūn settlers tended to purchase slaves who worked and reproduced the trade network. Slaves were put to work as caravan workers, domestic servants and concubines, mothers and wet nurses. As discussed in the next chapter, even traders who married free wives tended to marry or simply hold enslaved concubines as well. In fact bridewealth payments for free women typically included the price of a slave. It would be interesting to compare bridewealth prices and the price of female slaves to get a sense of the relative financial advantage in marrying freed versus enslaved women. But to be

⁴⁵ Brief meeting with 'Mouy Traore (05/13/98) the daughter and only living descendent of Musa. She was very weak when I met her in the huge house which was once a landlord's compound.

sure, there were tremendous advantages in marrying the women of their host communities.

To marry a local woman from a politically, religiously or commercially prominent family was an option, or one could say opportunity, which would be hard to come by for stranger-traders. This was the case of Mulay Aḥmad b. Shaygar who in Wadān married Damāha mint Mulay Ibrahīm, the daughter of his spiritual mentor. For the Awlād Bū Sbā', with their claim to Sharifian descent and their tendency to be highly educated, finding a wife among the local Shurfa, or other *zwāya* families living in the oases of the Sahara, would have been easier. Their prestige and reputation attracted local personalities who often found a comparative advantage in allying with the incoming stranger-trader. Awlād Bū Sbā' traders, with their ascribed social prestige, developed strong ties with local scholars and traders. Moreover, because they were engaged in the book trade from Morocco and Saharan scholars were avid readers, Awlād Bū Sbā' were often considered hosts of mark in their local community. This would explain why the Awlād Bū Sbā' allied closely with the Laghlāl group who tended to hold a monopoly on religious authority in nineteenth century Shingīti. The daughter of Mulay Aḥmad al-Shaygar, for instance, married the nineteenth century qāḍī of Shingīti. These alliances in marriage explain why, by the end of the nineteenth century, the Awlād Bū Sbā' community of

Shingīṭi was so intertwined with the Laghlāl, they no longer were considered a separate group in colonial censuses.⁴⁶

For many, especially the Tikna, these types of local marriage arrangements seem to have been less forthcoming. This is not to say that the Tikna never married local women. On the contrary, many cases prove that they did. In Shingīṭi, when this occurred, Tiknas tended to marry women from the Idaw'ālī group. In Tishīt, as the evidence from the inheritance case discussed below shows, both the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' men married Māsna women. To be sure, the Masnā operated an elaborate and highly successful trading network with representatives in key markets of the western Sudan--connections which undoubtedly promoted the entrepreneurial activities of stranger-traders such as the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā'. In Timbuktu, some Tikna men married women of the ruling group, the Sonrai. This was the case of the 'Abd al-Waḥāb b. Ambayrikāt family (discussed briefly in the chapter eight).

Successful men--who were constantly on the road, traveling long-distances for months on end between markets and across regional and cultural divides, beating the odds and boldly seeking fortune--tended to have a wife in every trading center. Like the often exaggerated tales of the sailors at sea who had a woman in every port, both the

⁴⁶ This is clear from the colonial record of Shingīṭi where the Awlād Bū Sbā' were not classified in a separate census category, like the Tikna were. This was not the case in colonial Atar where the Awlād Bū Sbā', like the Tikna, had a chief representative within the colonial system of governance and indirect rule (more on this in chapters seven and eight).

Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' had a tendency to practice long-distance polygamy. As

Aīshātu mint Mulay 'Aly explains,

You see the people who were traders, they would go to all the places, they would load the trade on their camels...if trade was not good here, then they would go to Rosso [leGwārib], if trade was no good there then they would go elsewhere..or, they would choose to sit [to stay there] four or five months. Because of the religion of Islam...they would prefer to take a wife and marry her because of the religion of Islam. If someone decided to marry there, he would sit, and if he is married there he would have a child and then he might get up and go trade in another place. He could return the next year if the trade was good; if it was not good he would not return, you see?"

In the previous chapter, we saw the example of the Awlād Bū Sbā' Mulay Aḥmad b.

Shaygar who married a second wife in Timbuktu, while his first wife remained alone in

Wadān. The stories I collected, which admittedly are biased towards successful men, are

typically tales of polygamous patriarchs. As will be clear from the case examined below,

practicing long-distance polygamy on trans-Saharan trails could prove extremely

complicated when it was time to sort out the inheritances of polygamous itinerant traders.

The marital patterns of the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' stand in sharp contrast

to those of the peoples of the western African Sahara. Indeed, as explained in chapter

three, the elite women of Saharan oases typically demanded that their husbands-to-be

sign a notarized pre-nuptial agreement to protect them against polygamy. The contract

stated that the husband is currently not married and he they will not seek to marry a

second wife after the present marriage is performed (*lā ṣabiḡan wa lā lāḡikan*). If

husbands failed to live up to this commitment, the document gave women legal grounds

to seek an immediate divorce. This practice, which clearly gave Saharan woman some

measure of authority within the institution of marriage, was not shared by Tikna or Awlād Bū Sbā' women. In fact, polygamy was very common among the Wād Nūn traders, as it was prevalent in the Senegalese and Malian societies where they often took residence. Moreover, in the Tikna tradition, the origins of which are not yet clear, women were required without a doubt to be more subservient to men than were their Saharan counterparts, a topic we will turn to shortly.

Maintaining and Reproducing Cultural Distinctiveness

Typical of stranger-traders the world over, the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' tended to live in close proximity to one another, forming their own quarter (or 'ghetto') in the towns where they settled. This is very similar to the *sabos* of the Hausa migrants in western Africa, as well as the *zongos* of the Yoruba, and so on. In Shingīṭī, the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' lived in same area, not far from the mosque, the prime real estate in town. By the 1920s, with market shifts and the development of Atar as the commercial center of the Adrar region, both groups built residences in the old part of town, with the exception of Yazīd wuld Mulay 'Aly who built next to the French headquarters. By the 1930s, the Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā', who dominated the economic scene there, built new houses all around the new market square. In Timbuktu, the traders of Wād Nūn were called the "Wād Nūn Koī" or the "Gulmīm Koī," koī meaning owner in Sonrai.⁴⁷ They tended to live in the center of town in close proximity to one another and right next

to the main Timbuktu market. The same can be said of all the towns they moved to in Senegal, such as Louga, Kaolack and Ndar.

As a community of stranger-traders, the Tikna, unlike the *Awlād Bū Sbā'*, tended to remain more reclusive and separate from the general community. This phenomenon of social seclusion was a fact repeatedly described by Tikna and non-Tikna informants. To be sure, the Tikna had very different traditions from the other western Africans among whom they lived. The most remarkable of these was their practice of female seclusion. Tikna women--especially single women and young wives-- were not to be seen by men other than those of the immediate family. Whether it was in late nineteenth century Shingīti, or in mid-twentieth century Dakar (Senegal), Tikna women were forbidden from leaving the house unveiled and unaccompanied. When guests came to the house, the Tikna women were generally secluded into a section of the compound, or sometimes confined to a small room. For example, the 'Amāra family in Shingīti (discussed in the next chapter) had a special room where women were locked-up so as not to be seen by male guests.⁴⁸ This room is still standing, although much of the rest of the 'Amara compound is in ruins. The walls of the small room, which has only narrow slits for light, are filled with graffiti and the names of the women who once were locked between them. As one informant put it, speaking of the separation of men and women in Tikna homes, "all their houses are forbidden, one side was for the women, the other side was for the men...in Shingīti, in Atar, all the Tikna, no one enters their houses, no ones enters except

⁴⁷ Interview in Bamako with al-Ghāly b. 'Abd al-Wahāb (05/6/98).

⁴⁸ Interview in Shingīti with Dhahabiya mint 'Amāra (09/97).

them.”⁴⁹ The same was true of the Tikna houses in Senegal, Mali and in the Tikna homeland, the Wād Nūn region of present-day southern Morocco.⁵⁰

The seclusion of Tikna women, explained by the Tikna themselves as a holy and respectable practice, can be compared to that of Hausa women in northern Nigeria where wife seclusion or *kulle*, meaning ‘locked,’ (often referred to as *purdah* by British from their colonial experiences in India) was practiced extensively among the upper echelons of society. Like the urban Hausa wives in seclusion, the Tikna relied extensively on the messenger services of children and slaves. They did not, however, develop a “honeycomb” economy of the kind described by Hill.⁵¹ In fact, generally speaking, Tikna women were very much forbidden from engaging in trade or professional activities of any kind, including seeking education and/or Islamic learning. Tikna women did, however, trade beads and jewelry with one another.⁵² It is easy to see that the strict tradition of seclusion was also a strategy for men to control Tikna women. Without a doubt, Tikna women were in high demand outside of the Wād Nūn where Tikna families strived to reproduce their cultural distinctiveness and the Tikna tradition. It was in the

⁴⁹ Interview in Atar with Khnātha mint Aḥmayda (with her two daughter Fatimatu and Mariam daughter of Muḥammad al-Farha) (10/5/97).

⁵⁰ Interview in Nouakchott with Maimūna mint Aḥmad Targa (5/21/97) who was born and raised in Senegal. She left, like all the Tikna, Awlād Bū Sbā’, and *Bidān* during the 1989 crisis between Senegal and Mauritania. Interviews in Timbuktu with Aisha mint Badi wuld Bachir (4/25/98), and Khanātha mint ‘Abd al-Qādar (04/26/98) with Mariam Mint Yahya b.Barka.

⁵¹ Hill, “Hidden Trade in Hausaland,” *Man*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1969, pp. 392-409; « Two Types of West African House Trade, » *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa*, C. Meillassoux (Ed.), London: Oxford University Press, 1971.

⁵² Interview in Atar with Khnātha mint Aḥmayda (with her two daughter Fatimatu and Mariam daughter of Muḥammad al-Farha) (10/5/97). Also see Gisèle Simard, *Petites Commerçantes de Mauritanie: Voiles, Perles et Hénné*. Karthala, 1996.

best interests of a Tikna father to limit access to his women, especially his daughters who could eventually serve as pawns in political or economic alliances.

Another cultural trait of the Tikna in the diaspora was their cooking traditions and the innovations they brought with them. Tikna cooking was particularly remarkable among Saharans who had very limited gastronomical variety (millet porridge; camel, goat and game meat; dates and milk). Tikna women distinguished themselves by their elaborate meals and the tradition of the couscous which they imported to western Africa. They also brought the tradition of the Moroccan *tājīn*, or stir-fry, which people “had never heard of before.”⁵³ What is more, the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā’ brought the tradition of drinking tea into western Africa, not a small feat when considering that tea is now a national past time in Senegal, Mauritania and many parts of Mali today. Both groups imported ‘gunpowder green tea’ (so called because the leaves were rolled into little balls) and tea drinking utensils made in Morocco which were subsequently reproduced by the *ma’alim* or blacksmiths in western Africa.

Because of their reputation as international traders, their knowledge of foreign markets, their exotic imports, and their know-how in matters of commerce, the Tikna tended to view themselves as culturally or otherwise superior to the people among whom they lived. As Khnātha mint Aḥmayda contended,

our customs were such that we were respected by all and we were considered superior to the people of Shingīṭi. The Tikna were always superior [*akbār*].

⁵³ Ibid. Also see other interviews such as Maimūna mint Aḥmad Targa in Nouakchott (05/21/97; 05/24/97). Now the word *tājīn* has been adopted by the Biḍān to signify “snack” rather than the original cooked meal that it is in southern Morocco.

Among the people of Shingīī, if someone did not say something to a Tikna, he did not have anything.⁵⁴

That is to say that the Tikna were those who brought goods from afar, especially the very prized luxury goods from Morocco: books, cloths, jewelry, carpets, prayer rugs, woolen Berber blankets, brass and silver platters and other utensils, as well as perfumes, incense and amber (see chapter 3). Thus, people had a vested interest in pursuing good relations with the Tikna community for access to luxury goods and imports.

The Wād Nūn trading network was created out of a need for an organizational framework to reduce the high transaction costs incurred in long-distance trade. Islam provided the rules, which kept the institutional framework in place, and mutual trust between members provided the elusive yet real congealing element which held members together. Compliance with the general rules of Islam, and reliance on a common business ethic, were self-enforcing behaviors between traders. When problems arose, legal experts could be called upon to arbitrate. For stranger-traders residing in markets located outside of their regional homeland, cooperation and solidarity with fellow stranger-traders within social institutions such as these ‘networks’ was essential to their long-distance trading operations.

Finally, a note must be said about the “identities” of these long-distance traders who practiced long-distance polygamy in multi-ethnic settings on trans-Saharan trails. Because they tended to marry western African women, whether free or enslaved, one would be hard pressed to talk about the specific ‘ethnicities’ of the Tikna like the Awlād

⁵⁴ Interview in Atar with Khnātha mint Aḥmayda (with her two daughter Fatimatu and Mariam daughter of Muḥammad al-Farha) (10/5/97).

Bū Sbā'. Because of the fluidity of the "ethnic boundaries" of long-distance traders, I find it generally problematic to talk about their discrete "ethnicities." The same can be said of many western Africans today. It is perhaps more appropriate to examine "tribal identities," or better still, national identities, and how these changed over time. This topic clearly goes beyond the focus of this dissertation, but let it be stated that stranger-traders living in host communities had a tendency to create and recreate across the generations a sense of an "imagined tribal/national community." In his work on the Hausa sabo of Ibadan, Cohen spoke about the process of "retribalization" which occurred among Hausa communities living outside of the Hausa homeland.⁵⁵ For the Tikna, who also had a physical homeland and a strong sense of national pride, the boundaries of this "imagined identity" were perhaps stronger, if only more pronounced, than the Awlād Bū Sbā'. The example of wife seclusion (now out of fashion in the Wād Nūn region, but still practiced in current day Mauritania) is but one example.⁵⁶ Both the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' were a mixed pot of ethnic origins, like many long-distance traders in world history. To varying degrees, they reproduced distinct cultural identities, while embracing their ethnic, lingual, and cultural diversity.

⁵⁵ *Custom and Politics*.

⁵⁶ In future revisions of this manuscript, I intend to develop this area of inquiry further since my data lends itself so well to a study of the shifting parameters of national/tribal identities across generations of long-distance trading families.

A Case Study: A Complex Inheritance of Wād Nūn Traders

The earliest and best written source I came across, which depicts the Wād Nūn trading network in action, dates back to events which occurred in the late 1840s and early 1850s. The document in question was found, almost miraculously, in the archives of the Shaykh b. Hammuny, who served as the qāḍi of Shingīti (circa 1870-1900).⁵⁷ It is important to note that the family of Shaykh b. Hammuny, from the Laghlāl tribe, had very close ties to Wād Nūn traders. In fact, Shaykh b. Hammuny's mother was a "mint Shaygar" of the family of Mulay Aḥmad b. al-Shaygar (Awlād Bū Sbā' of the Awlād al-Baggar) discussed in the previous chapter.⁵⁸ There was a tradition among western African Muslim communities to deposit the legal documents of the deceased with the local qāḍi for safekeeping. Typically, this happened when all the male descendants had passed away so that the qāḍi would deal with postmortem legal matters. This is what the female descendents of the Arwīli family living in Shingīti, two generations after his death, must have done (see the Arwīli genealogy Appendix 3).

The document in question deals with a complex inheritance case of the Wād Nūn long-distance trade network. The key characters mentioned within are, for the most part,

⁵⁷ I literally stumbled upon this document which was folded into a small pile and buried under the sandy floor of the library of Shaykh b. Hammuny, the qāḍi of Shingīti. Shaykh was succeeded as qāḍi by his son Menna who probably accepted the deposit of the Arwīli family documents at the death of Limān wuld Arwīli.

⁵⁸ Interview in Nouakchott with Fatimatu mint Sīdi Muḥammad (06/25/98).

from the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā'. Indeed, this inheritance case demonstrates the solidarity prevailing between both groups who took residence in Tishīt, hundreds of miles south of their homeland or regional base.

The Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' families mentioned in this document may or may not represent the earliest groups to settle in Tishīt. To be sure, the people of Tishīt had a long lasting relationship with the Wād Nūn traders who supplied all kinds of Maghribi goods from foodstuffs, primary materials, utensils, woolen blankets, rugs and fine cloths, to Islamic supplies such as prayer rugs, chaplets and especially books. From the names mentioned in the document, I was able to trace the descendants of eight of the families who are currently living in Mauritania, Mali and Senegal, or one hundred and fifty years later. More than any other source, this inheritance case provides invaluable information about the complicated relationships of trade and finance which bounded a group of traders together. It touches on several themes central to this dissertation: the financial operations of traders within a network, the centrality of the use of credit to long-distance exchange, the shifting use of currencies and their valuations, the high risks involved in long-distance trade in mid-nineteenth century western Africa, and the importance of Islamic law in regulating socioeconomic relationships, together with the role of religious leaders in this process.

This remarkable source is written on the recto and verso of a large parchment (60x45 cm with several holes on the folded corners due to the wear and tear of the paper).⁵⁹ It contains a total of approximately 9000 words by the pen of several Saharan

⁵⁹ See overview photo in Appendix 6A.

jurists who commented on the original letter written by Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Saghīr b. Ambūja, a Muslim scholar of Tishīt. This document, which discusses the inheritance proceedings of four Wād Nūn traders, obviously circulated between several people. The document I found was in fact a certified copy of the original signed by Muḥammad b. Abdarraḥman b. Muḥammad al-Lamṭī of Gulmīm, son of the third *faqīh* who comments on this long-distance inheritance affair (see original and translation in Appendices 6A & 6B).

Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Saghīr of Tishīt, addressed his declaration to:

the community guarded by the watchfulness of Allah, the Almighty –who protects it with His grace— that is the community of Ajlīmīm [Gulmīm] and in particular Aḥmadna and his brothers Arwīlī, the Awlād Hmaīda al-Aḥsān, al-Hāj Muḥammad b. al-Hāj Aḥmayda, al-Yatīm b. al-Qāsim and Sīdī Abdarraḥman and the others whom we have not named not by scorn but because of lack of space and ignorance of their names.⁶⁰

The purpose of the correspondence, as the author explains after transmitting the appropriate Muslim salutations, was

to inform [them] about the outcome of the inheritance of [their] brothers having graced the goodness of God, I cite *Muḥammad b. Mbārak* nicknamed “*Baghlīl*,” *Al-Hāj ‘Aly b. Sa’īd*, *‘Aly b. Hammād* and *‘Aly Fāl [b. Arwīlī]*-- May God grant His grace to all and welcome them in Paradise.⁶¹

Muḥammad al-Ṣaghīr then proceeds to deal with the inheritance of each of these traders in turn. The four traders in question were originally from the town of Gulmīm, and at

⁶⁰ Document 1, Inheritance of Wād Nūn traders in Tishīt, Arwīlī Archives at MSH (see translation in Appendix 6B).

⁶¹ Ibid.

least three were from the Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly tribe of the Tikna nation. They all had taken residence in the town of Tishīt, where they cooperated in trade with other traders, including traders of the Awlād Bū Sbā', namely the renowned trader Shaykh b. Ibrahim al-Khalīl (see family profile below and Appendix 8). What unfolds is a complex web of credit and debt relationships between these four traders who were clearly partners in a trading network, their wives and about fifty-five other traders. Because of the prominence of all four of these traders and the size of their multiple credit relations, the inheritance proceedings became the subject of a long-distance juridical dispute.

The Setting

Let us pause here to discuss the geo-historical context in which the document was written, and the case of these four stranger-traders who met their death in or around the town of Tishīt. Based on the chronicle of the city of Tishīt, beginning with the year 1200 hijra (1785-6), it is possible to recount the main events of the 1840s leading to the incidents which concern this inheritance case.

Since the late 1830s, the main group of Tishīt, the Māsna, engaged in battles with the Awlad Billa.⁶² As discussed in chapter three, the Māsna owned the rights of the amersāl salt pans of Tishīt and were powerful players in interregional trade. This disruptive conflict was followed by another event which surely affected caravan traffic in

⁶² *Hāūliyāt Tishīt* or the Tishīt Chronicle, photographed in the family archives of Al-Sharīf b. Buyahmad (4/97), p. 3/29. The first war recorded war between the Māsna and Awlād Billa was in 1253 (1837-38).

and out of the area: the civil war between the Tajakānit group in 1257 (1841-42) which led to the abandonment of their town south west of Tishīt and the dispersal of the group in the Hawḍ regions and the Tīris (eventually a group of Tajakānit would create the new town of Tindūf strategically located at on the trans-Saharan trail between Gulmīm and Timbuktu, which would become an important trade stop in the late nineteenth century until it was destroyed by the Rgaībāt).

The wars between the Māsna and Awlād Billa, the causes of which go unrecorded, lasted until a final confrontation drove the Awlād Billa out of Tishīt. In the year 1849-50 (1266 hijra) they began building their own town some 30 kilometers to the east of Tishīt which they named 'Aqrayjīt. That same year, 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīli (discussed below) left on a *rafga* or interregional camel caravan from which he would never return alive. The entry of the Tishīt chronicle for the year 1266 (1849-50) is as follows:

took place the Friday of Ramadan during which 'Aly b. Attayah [mentioned in document 1. As one of the creditors of 'Aly b. Ḥammād] died and whomever was with him [too] and in that eleventh month of the Muslim year [*du al-qa'da*] conflicts and degradation occurred between the people of Tishīt and the Al-Ḥajāj and the Ādaḥāḥan [two branches of the Awlād Billa] and the Al-Ḥajāj and the Ādaḥāḥan attacked on the following day of the Immolation and their attack continued until the seventeenth of *du al-hija* [the last month of the Islamic calendar].⁶³

⁶³ *Ḥaūliyāt Tishīt* or the Tishīt Chronicle, photographed in the family archives of Al-Shartf b. Buyahmad (4/97), p. 4.

The following year, a large raid of the Azāwād region (Timbuktu, Arāwān, Gao) caused the death of about fifty people and seventy horses.⁶⁴ All of these political events, some motivated by economic prerogatives, no doubt, had the effect of creating a heightened climate of caravan insecurity and general political and economic instability. It was probably a good time for risky long-distance traders to buy and sell since instability creates shortages resulting in increased opportunities for the commercial class.

Since this document deals essentially with wealth and credit operations, a note on exchange in the mid-nineteenth century is in order. Generally, sums tend to be expressed in either gold or silver mithqals (see chapter two for a discussion of this bimetal standard). This differs from the *kunnāsh* of the Illigh examined by Pascon where he assumes that amounts are expressed in silver mithqal only, since gold was less prevalent and silver abounded in the northern Sahara and southern Morocco. In the case study, it seems that the mithqal in question is of gold. When the mithqal is of silver it is usually specified (*mithqāl al-faḍī*) and the gold exchange is often mentioned alongside it. From exchanges expressed in this document it appears that in the 1850s the standard exchange rate between silver and gold was an even four to one. For example, a debt owed by ‘Aly b. Ḥammād to Jewish creditors of 464 silver mithqal was worth 116 gold mithqal, and ‘Aly Fāl was owed by this same trader 160 silver mithqal equal to 40 gold mithqal.⁶⁵

As described in chapter two, during in the nineteenth century both silver and gold were used as means of exchange, units of account (equivalency or valuation) and stores

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

of wealth. Both were also highly desirable commodities sold all over western and northern Africa to be melted into objects such as women's jewelry. Illustrating the valuation of large scale transactions of the day, the mithqal had multiple functions from unit of account to bullion, although admittedly, it is difficult to say with precision when actual amounts mentioned in text referred to physical liquidity. In this source (like in many trade records of the day) several stamped coins are used although I was unable to identify their foreign origin (they most likely are French silver gourdes of 5 FF). This is an indication that French coins were filtering into exchanges, and as currencies with intrinsic value since, like gold, they were melted down for other uses. Besides metals, a range of other currencies regulated exchange in mid-nineteenth century. These include the salt bar (see chapter two) and units (or beṣa) of cotton cloth. The *akḥal*, or the blackest *beṣa*, figures prominently since it formed a common exchange good. Other beṣas were also current of the time, but in this document it is often mentioned since a caravan of *al-akhāl* came into town after one of the Tikna traders had passed away.

The Story

In this context, four long-distance traders named Muḥammad b. Mbārak, al-Ḥāj 'Aly, 'Aly b. Ḥammād and 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīli met their death. The first to perish was Muḥammad b. Mbārak, whose nickname was "Baghlīl" ('the little mule'). He died while on a caravan, and might have perished at the hands of caravan raiders (*al-*

mutaghālibīn).⁶⁶ This fatal incident occurred in or around 1849.⁶⁷ He left behind a wife in Tishīt named Aghzīma, as well as many debts and some unspecified quantity of cloth (*khunt*: *beṣa* cotton purchased from the French, directly or through various intermediaries trading in Senegal). Baghlīl's business was embedded in a web of commercial credit and debt obligations to his multiple and multi-local trade partners, including the three other deceased men. Therefore, as can be imagined, figuring out his inheritance--like that of his three other partners--was a complicated affair (Appendix 7 which represents but a fraction of the credit relations mentioned in the document). Upon the death of Baghlīl, al-Hāj 'Aly, his Tikna colleague to whom he owed a debt of 140 gold mithqal, assumed responsibility of the inheritance. It unfolded that aside from his sizeable debt to al-Hāj 'Aly, Baghlīl was owed a number of sums. These included credit he had extended to the two other traders who would soon perish as well: 'Aly Fāl (45 gold mithqal) and 'Aly b. Hammād (who owed him 137 gold mithqal).

In processing the inheritance, Al-Hāj 'Aly, who was Baghlīl's creditor for 140 mithqal, was going to recover his debt with some cloth that Baghlīl had left behind. It was decided (probably in consultation with the other traders concerned by the inheritance) that the cloth would be exchanged at the rate of 4 mithqal per *milḥafa* (one

⁶⁶ See Appendix 6B p. 1. Unfortunately nothing more is known about the death of "Baghlīl" since he was the subject of a previous correspondence between Muḥammad al-Ṣaghīr and the people of Gulmīm.

beṣa equals two *milḥafa* or 7.5x1.5 m). But after inspecting the *beṣas*, al-Ḥāj 'Aly decided that the quality was “unsatisfactory and so he refused to take them.”⁶⁸ Another trader named Muḥammad b. Aḥmayda [probably the older half brother of Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmayda, a Tikna also mentioned in this document and discussed in the next chapter], who obviously was a close partner of Baghlīl, decided to accept the cloth at the specified rate “saying that it was not good for one to have debts underneath him” or, in other words, that to take debts to the grave was unacceptable.⁶⁹ So he purchased 140 mithqal worth of cloth that was remitted to al-Ḥāj 'Aly in lieu of his debt to Baghlīl. This gesture of solidarity towards a deceased Tikna partner was very much in the spirit of the mutual obligations that ideally characterized the relationships between members of one trading network.

Shortly after Baghlīl, al-Ḥāj 'Aly passed away on the trail in a town called Aniassan [which might be Niacene in Senegal]. 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīli, fellow Tikna and trade partner also living in Tishīt, related to a most prominent Bayrūk family of Gulmīm, in turn took responsibility of al-Ḥāj 'Aly's inheritance. By extension, 'Aly Fāl also assumed the task of sorting out Baghlīl's pending inheritance since it fell under al-Ḥāj 'Aly's responsibilities. In al-Ḥāj 'Aly's papers, 'Aly Fāl discovered that he had entrusted

⁶⁷ I state this approximate date considering that 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīli was the last to die in 1849-1850, and given all the operations which took place between his death and that of Baghlīl.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

a large sum to another Tikna living in Aniassan named Sīdi Mas'ūd al-Yaggūtī from the Yaggūt branch (see Appendix 3). To recuperate al-Ḥāj 'Aly's goods, 'Aly Fāl sent a representative (*wakīl*) to al-Yagguti. From him he received "107 silver mithqal [coins inscribed] with the letter S and 90 silver mithqal [coins inscribed] with the letter T."⁷⁰ This cash seems to have been the extent of al-Ḥāj 'Aly's liquid assets. When creditors of al-Ḥāj 'Aly came to town to claim their debts, such as 'Abd al-'Azīz b. al-Rgaībī (from the Rgaībāt) who was owed in *akhāl*, 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīli paid them their dues.

Between the lines of this complex document, it appears that al-Ḥāj 'Aly left behind a wife in Tishīt. Her name is not revealed although she is referred to as "al-Masniya," which is to say that she was Māsna.⁷¹ This is extremely significant in light of what was said above regarding the convergence of the Māsna and Wād Nūn trade networks. It is easy to see how such a marriage alliance could have served al-Ḥāj 'Aly's business transactions well. Clearly, al-Māsniya could also benefit from access to her husband's commercial operations. There was no mention of any children originating from this union. So, of the 197 silver mithqal which had been recovered of her husband's assets, al-Māsniya received only 11 or about 5.5%. The author of the text indicates that there was some reluctance on the part of 'Aly Fāl to hand over this money to al-Māsniya.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 1. Muḥammad b. Aḥmayda may possibly be a relative of Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmayda discussed in the next chapter. But, I acknowledge that Aḥmayda is a common name among the Awlād Bū Sbā' as well.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

In fact it seems that this disagreement created a grave dispute “which caused definite damage,” and had to be settled with the intervention of the Tishīt jurist and author of the letter.⁷² In any event, this amount seems small considering the overall wealth of al-Ḥāj ‘Aly.

As it turns out, al-Māsniya had to share her husband’s inheritance with the other members of her husband’s extended family. As a matter of fact, typical of long-distance caravaners, al-Ḥāj ‘Aly also had a second wife in his hometown of Gulmīm (Wād Nūn). Shortly after hearing the news about his father’s death, his son Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥāj ‘Aly from the second wife (who was probably his first wife in chronological order) traveled from Gulmīm to Tishīt. He arrived carrying a document representing “the legal deal of the inheritors of his father and the exclusive list.”⁷³

‘Aly b. Ḥammād was the next of the Tikna traders to die just months after al-Ḥāj ‘Aly in 1849. Because of his reputation, or perhaps because he was probably the only Tikna left in town at that point, ‘Aly Fāl had to take responsibility for this inheritance case as well. This was indeed a very complicated case when considering that Aly b. Hammad, like the deceased trader al-Ḥāj ‘Aly, had a wife in Tishīt and another in Gulmīm. So ‘Aly Fāl was left with the tremendous task of sorting out for the deceased

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 6.

Tiknas who-owed-what-to-whom. Here it must be said that such a process could literally take years, because of the itinerant life-styles of caravaners.

At the time of his death, 'Aly b. Ḥammād had

left a number of camels and merchandise or some ten loads of food and a number [of loads] of *al-akhāl* [black cloth] which exceed 200 *milḥāfa* [veils; see above] and 20 or so woolen blankets. And his death coincided with the arrival of his assets (*mālihi*) and the arrival of the caravans and there were many raiders [*mutaghālibīn*] that we feared for the assets [of the deceased] because of them. However they [the raiders] talked about it and some of them were diverted [talked out of raiding the property] from it with "necessities" [everyday objects which were given to them to appease them]. He ['Aly b. Ḥammād] left many debts...⁷⁴

As stated, 'Aly b. Ḥammād's death occurred shortly before the arrival of his caravan transporting *al-akhāl* or the very dark blue, almost black, cotton cloth which tended to be imported from southeast Asia via European wholesalers stationed on the Atlantic coast.

From the enumeration of 'Aly b. Ḥammād creditors who had placed orders of *al-akhāl* it is possible to give a rough estimate of the size of his trading operations. The fact that he owed to so many creditors, many of whom had stakes in, or had placed orders on, his last caravan, is an indication of the size of his wealth and creditworthiness, not his indebtedness.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 2.

'Aly b. Ḥammād's Creditors (in gold mithqal unless specified)⁷⁵

Baghlīl	137
Aghzīma (wife of Baghlīl)	4
First wife of 'Aly b. Ḥammād and their daughter	30 bars and some gold (=inheritance?)
Shepherd (al-rāi') of the caravan	Wage (in salt no doubt)
Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al Khalīl	3
Bāba b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl	? (cashed-in in <i>akḥāl</i>)
Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Al-Dimuīsī [Awlād Bū Sbā']	10
Muḥammad b. Baddah	8
'Aly b. Ibrāhīm b. Limayif	12
Shalum (Jewish trader)	36
Several Jewish traders	116
'Aly b. Attāyah (repaid in camels)	300 bars of salt ⁷⁶ + 75 salt bars (or mithqal?)
Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ahmarmar	4
Aḥmayda b. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm	11 + price of 5 blankets
'Aly b. Ḥmayda	450 silver mithqal (112.5)
Aḥmad al-Qaḍrūr al-Majāṭi	Price of one blanket
Ambārak b. Aḥmād al-Znāgi	4
? Creditor x	55 ½
Azargyīn (wages and debt?)	27+40
Total amount obtained for the sale of the akḥāl caravan	602 ½

⁷⁵ Ibid, pp. 3-4.

⁷⁶ On the 300 salt bars, 150 were for 'Aly b. Ḥammād and the other 150 he acted as guarantor for a third party, which made him liable and responsible for the debt. As stated in the document, the *shart'a* stipulate that the debt is due immediately following the death of the guarantor (Ibid, p. 3).

A word must be said about the Jewish creditors mentioned in this text. Although it is not clearly stated, at least one of the Jewish creditors of 'Aly b. Ḥammād, the man named Shalūm, resided in Gulmīm (Wād Nūn). Indeed, from oral evidence collected in Gulmīm, which is corroborated in Panet's mid-nineteenth century account, the Shalūm's family was the most prominent Jewish family in town. To be sure, in the mid-nineteenth century, Jewish traders were established in key towns along trans-Saharan trails, from al-Swuīra, Illigh and Gulmīm, to Atār (one Jewish trader was residing there in 1860; this town did not become an important market until the twentieth century) and Timbuktu (after 1860 and Murdukhaī's fight for the right of Jews to trade there).⁷⁷ Shalūm, who loaned 36 mithqal to 'Aly b. Ḥammād (see above table), is said to be one of the first Jews to settle in the town of Gulmīm, at the invitation of Bayrūk.⁷⁸ Jewish traders were big time financiers of long distance trade operations. The fact that 'Aly b. Ḥammād's debts to the Jewish traders were settled by Bāba b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl, the Awlād Bū Sbā' whose brother lived in Tishīt, is an indication of the proximity of the Tikna, the Awlād Bū Sbā' and the Jewish community of traders living in northern Saharan regions.

⁷⁷ See Chapter 6 for a discussion of Jewish traders in Timbuktu. It is important to note that in the western African region examined in this dissertation, Jewish traders were settled in the towns of Timbuktu, Wadān and Atār. According to the people of Wadān, the few Jewish families who resided there in the 18th and early 19th centuries had converted to Islam. Their records are being organized and will prove to be an extremely rich source for the economic history of the region. See Raymond Mauny, "Les Juifs du Sahara," *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, no. xix 1949; and also Diadié Haidara, *Les Juifs du Tombouctou*.

⁷⁸ Interviews in Gulmīm and Méric, "La circonscription de Goulimine."

In addition to creditors, 'Aly b. Ḥammād also had numerous debtors. And so shortly after his death many of these traders “rose” to settle their debts. For instance, the Awlād Bū Sbā' trader Muḥammad b. Ibrahīm b. Sīd Aḥmad Lazgham al-Baggārī (from the Awlād al-Baggār; living in Shingīṭi at the time) presented himself to the jurist of Tishīt (and 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīli?) with a credit contract stating that he owed six mithqal to the deceased. The fact that upon traveling to Tishīt this Awlād Bū Sbā' trader made due on the debts he had contracted with the Tikna is an indication of the honesty and good faith prevailing between Wād Nūn traders. It is important to note that after Muḥammad received his dues in merchandise, his name was erased (scratched) from the written credit contract in front of the jurist Muḥammad al-Ṣaghīr.⁷⁹ This, as discussed in the introduction (Part II), was the routine method of canceling debts and settling trade records.

'Aly b. Ḥammād's long-distance 'calico caravan' of *akḥāl* also included extra cloth which was not “ordered” by his clients. In dealing with this merchandise, 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīli sold the remainder 90 *milḥafa* at the going rate of one and two-thirds mithqal per *milḥafa* (much lower than Baghlīl's cloth debt paid by Muḥammad b. Aḥmayda mentioned above), which was forward purchased since

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

he sold the *akhāl* for salt until the extraction season [*bai' al-milḥ ila zaman al-ḥush*] and with it too he did not buy with the gold until the arrival of the interregional caravans [*majī' al-rafā'ig*].⁸⁰

Since 'Aly b. Ḥammād's death coincided with the height of the caravan season, he also had interregional caravan business operations, those collecting salt (from Ijl) and selling it in southern markets. Again, 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīli managed 'Aly b. Ḥammād's active estate, but at some point in time, there was disagreement over the ownership of a number of salt bars. It was then revealed that 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīli was renting 'Aly b. Ḥammād's salt to others.⁸¹ This, combined with the fact that he eventually left on caravan with funds belonging to both al-Ḥāj 'Aly and Baghlīl's inheritors, is an indication that 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīli might have taken certain trading liberties with the estate of his deceased Tikna trade partners (or was he simply redistributing the wealth so as to better "save" it?).⁸²

As stated in the Tishīt chronicle, and as the quotes above and below illustrate so vividly, insecurity was particularly high at that juncture in Tishīt's history. Since news traveled fast on the desert edge, various nomadic raiders [*al-mutaghālibīn*] found out about 'Aly b. Ḥammād's death and the return of his caravan and so they came to town to seize his goods. As mentioned in chapter three, stranger-traders such as the Tikna and

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

⁸¹ Ibid. Sometimes equivalent to loaning money with interest (see chapter two).

⁸² Indeed, judging from the tone of the document and innuendos it is clear that 'Aly Fāl caused a great deal of disturbance and there was much tension surrounding the inheritance proceedings.

the Awlād Bū Sbā' were particularly prone to being attacked. This eminent danger is clearly evoked by the Tishīt jurist who explains that:

...their assets are exposed to danger and suffice it that the raiders [*al-mutaghālibīn*] find out about it to attack it there where it is located whether it is the property the people of the northern Sahel [*ahl al-Sāhil*, meaning the Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā'], or those of the people of Arawān [people of the town of Arawān, north of Timbuktu]. *They covet the assets in the house of strangers [al-gharīb] aside from that in the house of the missing [al-faqīd]. And this is their custom [ʿādatihum] which everyone knows about.* And it is known by those who were present that they entered the home and requested the assets of 'Aly b. Ḥammād and that they did not spare Shaykh [b. Ibrāhīm Khalīl; Awlād Bū Sbā' trader discussed below] and 'Aly Fāl to the point that they encircled them and so that they would reveal to them if they had the assets. Such a case cannot be considered within the jurisdiction of sharī'ā [meaning the stranger-traders were obliged to lie under these circumstances]. They both [Shaykh and 'Aly Fāl] told them what was left of the assets was taken by his creditors [of 'Aly b. Ḥammād] and there was nothing left.⁸³

That the raiders came to town and demanded, quite coercively it would seem, that 'Aly Fāl and Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl hand over 'Aly b. Ḥammād's goods is an clear indication of the vulnerability of the Awlād Bū Sbā' and Tikna traders living in western African markets.

Shortly after these events, 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīli organized a caravan to "the Sudan" using the funds which belonged to the inheritors of Baghlīl and al-Ḥāj 'Aly; namely 45 gold mithqal and 186 silver mithqal (which at the gold-silver exchange of the day were equal to 46.5 mithqal; representing 197 minus the 11 given to al-Māsniya). Before

leaving, 'Aly Fāl entrusted a fellow stranger-trader with his family and his entire estate.

Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl of the Awlād Bū Sbā' group--another man from the Wād

Nūn network--was thus given the legal authority (or power of attorney) to represent 'Aly

Fāl and his business interests whilst he was on caravan mission. As the author of the

letter to Gulmīm, the jurist Muḥammad al-Ṣaghīr explains, 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīlī :

left *Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl* as an representative [*wakīl*] of his possessions and his dependents [*'iyālihi*] and as administrator of his possessions after his death and he informed him about all his [business] affairs and entrusted him exclusively the administration of his assets and the possessions entrusted to him while alive and after his death and the place where he kept his documents [*'ugūd*] and he commissioned him with the supervision. However he did not leave any of his possessions in his hands, to our knowledge, but he informed him about the locations of his affairs in the city with whom he deposited them and what he left in his house.⁸⁴

Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl proceeded to manage 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīlī's estate, dealing

with 'Aly b. Ḥammād's inheritance proceedings and providing for his family in his

absence. But as soon as he heard about his partner's death, he tried to wriggle out of his

obligation as legal guardian. For dealing with 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīlī's inheritance and

postmortem affairs now included managing the inheritances of all four Tikna traders; a

risky task given the presence of raiders and the fact that 'Aly Fāl was from the most

prominent family of Gulmīm. Such an endeavor could literally take years given the

itinerant lifestyles of traders.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 10 (emphasis mine).

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl then approached certain personalities of Tishīt (three men who might have been members of the trading network) to attempt to be relieved of the obligation to manage his partner's affairs. He probably argued that times were extremely insecure, ransacking by nomadic warriors was frequent, as a stranger-trader in town he feared for his own safety, that of his family and he feared for the goods of the deceased. But they replied "that this was impossible because what is expected of him after his death is greater than what is expected of him during his living." Moreover, they argued that Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl could not "disappoint" his partner now for "he [was] the best positioned to take care of the matter of his inheritance...because of his firmness and his precision and *his trustworthiness*."⁸⁵ The men convinced Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl that it was his duty to make due on his promise to 'Aly Fāl, and that his obligations towards him were greater now that he was dead. So in the end, Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl undertook the task with the assistance of Muḥammad al-Saghīr, the author of the letter which disclosed all this information. Between the time of the first death and the completion of the letter, close to four years went by.

In the process of sorting out the inheritances, several of the sons of the four Tikna traders traveled to Tishīt to recover their respective fathers' wealth. In 1851, the sons of 'Aly b. Ḥammād ('Abdallah), and of al-Ḥāj 'Aly (Ibrāhīm) arrived to claim the inheritances for their families. The first also carried with him "a contract of the inheritors of 'Abdallah b. Arwīlī" and another contract giving him the right to appropriate the

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

inheritance due to 'Abdallah b. Arwīli.⁸⁶ Eventually, 'Abdallah b. Arwīli, who was the brother of 'Aly Fāl, came in person to Tishīt. There was some disagreement about what the above-mentioned Tikna sons were given and what was due to the Arwīli family. In the process of claiming his rights, 'Abdallah b. Arwīli apparently took more than his share and certain debts owed by his brother 'Aly Fāl were not settled; namely 186 (197-11) gold mithqal due to the inheritors of al-Ḥāj 'Aly. This is why towards the end of the letter to Gulmīm, the Tishīt jurists requests that 'Abdallah b. Arwīli return quickly to settle these debts in order “to free the dead of their obligations to which they are indebted.”⁸⁷

When the letter arrived at its destination in the town of Gulmīm, a local jurist there reviewed it and declared that the inheritances were improperly processed. Clearly representing the interests of the inheritors of 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīli, the jurist denied they owed funds to the inheritors of Baghlil and al-Ḥāj 'Aly. Moreover, in his reply to Muhammad al-Saghir in Tishīt he questioned, in no uncertain terms, his credentials as a man of law.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 7.

⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 10.

The Legal Dispute

The next section of parchment is the judgment of ‘Abdalāzīz b. Shaykh al-Māmi, who might well be the son of Saharan jurist Shaykh Muḥammad b. al-Māmi.⁸⁸ To be sure, he was an Islamic jurist in his own right as demonstrated by his long refutation of Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ṣaghīr al-Tishīrī’s handling of the inheritance.⁸⁹ ‘Abdalāzīz’ commentary was requested by ‘Abdallah b. Arwīli who was backed by the chief of Gulmīm, none other than his great uncle Shaykh Bayrūk (see Appendix 3). ‘Abdallah b. Arwīli asked him to deliberate on the legal question (*nazīla*) concerning the inheritance of his brother, ‘Aly Fāl, and that of al-Ḥāj ‘Aly, whose representative was Ambayrikāt b. Al-Ḥāj Muḥammad al-Rakūk (the grandfather of a trader who later settled in Timbuktu, discussed in chapter six).

The main controversial issue was the outstanding debt of 186 mithqal owed by ‘Aly Fāl to the inheritors of al-Ḥāj ‘Aly. This sum, which was part of al-Ḥāj ‘Aly’s inheritance, was mentioned in Muḥammad al-Tishīrī’s letter and was apparently in the

⁸⁸ Shaykh Muḥammad al-Māmi, a Saharan scholar and jurist who wrote prolifically in the first half of the nineteenth century (he died in 1865). Shaykh al-Māmi wrote many treatises on Islamic law including a text on the *Mukhtāsar* of Khalīl and a poem on the basic principles of jurisprudence. This nomadic scholar family lived between Tiris and Trarza. See Norris, *Shingīti Folk Literature and Song*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 92-101.

⁸⁹ Abdalāzīz b. Shaykh al-Māmi relies extensively on the works of Shaykh Mālik—initiator of the Mālikī branch of Islamic law, Shaykh Sīdī Khalīl, the reference in western African jurisprudence, Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Dasūqī and al-Dardīnī, amongst others.

possession of 'Aly Fāl when he departed Tishīt on his fatal mission.⁹⁰ After reviewing the document written by Muḥammad al-Tishīt, 'Abdalāzīz b. Shaykh al-Māmi accused him of improper legal procedure. Relying on several texts of jurisprudence, he contended that Muḥammad al-Tishīt did not draw up a list of the rightful inheritors, he failed to consult the right number of witnesses to confirm debts and credits, he abused his position by managing directly traders' estates, and in the process he mismanaged funds. What is more, 'Abdalāzīz b. Shaykh al-Māmi warns against the judgments of men who are religious charlatans and who elevate themselves to the rank of qāḍī while making false judgments. So in response to 'Abdallah b. Arwīli's query, he pronounced that Muḥammad al-Tishīt's statement on the inheritances was not valid because it was not lawfully executed. Therefore, the document could not be used against the claims of the inheritors of al-Ḥāj 'Aly.

'Abdarrahmān b. Muḥammad al-Lamṭī provided the second commentary on this inheritance matter.⁹¹ From the Ahl al-Lamṭī branch of the Tikna confederation, this family descended from a long line of jurists (perhaps direct descendants of the Almoravids). Muḥammad al-Lamṭī and his sons played an important role in jurisprudence in Āsrīr (ten kilometers to the southwest of Gulmīm), and Gulmīm which became their

⁹⁰ See Document 1 page 2 line 10 in Appendix 6B.

⁹¹ It is important to note that his son, Muḥammad, was the copier of the original document written by Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ṣaghīr. He must have been a young apprentice at the time, and was to replace

adoptive town.⁹² In a brief statement, ‘Abdarrahman b. Muḥammad al-Lamṭī discusses Muḥammad al-Tishīṭī’s letter and ‘Abdalāzīz b. Shaykh al-Māmi’s judgment. He defends the author of the Tishīṭ letter against the claims of ‘Abdalāzīz b. Shaykh al-Māmi by stating that the first jurist never once pretended to be pronouncing a legal judgment in his discussion of the inheritance of the four Wād Nūn traders. He argues that Muḥammad al-Tishīṭī was merely explaining the procedures that were followed to settle these complex inheritances; he was trying to figure out who owed what to whom based on the available information at the time. Al-Lamṭī did agree with the other faqih, however, that Muḥammad al-Tishīṭī’s dubious role as a disburser of a large portion of the inheritances needed further clarification. He also acknowledged the situation of insecurity described by al-Tishīṭī linked to the presence of raiders [*mutaghālibīn*] which complicated further the inheritance procedures.

The final commentator, ‘Umaīs b. Ṭaīfūr b. al-Samkī residing in Tīznit (just north of Gulmīm), reinforces the comments of the previous *faqih* (‘Abdarrahman b. Muḥammad al-Lamṭī) while refuting his personal attack on Muḥammad al-Tishīṭī. He argues that nowhere did the scholar of Tishīṭ issue a *fatwā* on this particular matter, and

his father in his role as religious arbiter at the end of the nineteenth century. See for example, document 9 Arwili archives in MSH.

⁹² The descendants of Muḥammad al-Lamṭī probably moved from Āsrīr to settled in Gulmīm in the first half of the 19th century. Because of their important role in jurisprudence in the Wād Nūn region, the archives of the Lamṭī family, which are not yet been explored by historians, are potentially a rich source for

therefore the statement was not legally binding. He maintains that the author was simply trying to sort of the inheritances in a situation of peril and fear due to the presence of the raiders. Moreover, he adds that the Tishīt scholar never claimed any part of any inheritance for himself.

The Significance

This “legal dispute” between Saharan jurists is significant when examining the political economy of nineteenth century western Africa. First, it shows how connected to one another were the members of the Muslim establishment of jurisprudence between the southern and northern shores of the Sahara desert. As shown in chapter two, Islamic law was enforced by Muslim authorities and debated between them. Religious jurors, alongside or in place of political leaders, regulated and ensured the application of the law across long-distances.

Secondly, on their own admission, religious authorities played an active governing role in their respective communities. As the words of Abdalāzīz b. Shaykh al-Māmī so plainly express,

...[A] qāḍī decrees based on this [the Holy texts] with his brothers, and his orphans because he is charged with this [responsibility] to write the quarrels, the disputes and the discord between parents. Because *he is the governor of this location de facto and de jure* he must base his [argument] on these judgments for the orphans and his brothers on what is best known and followed by the people. And *the governors are entrusted only to reprimand the oppressors*, to bring to heel the evildoers and the corrupt [*ahl al-shar wa al-mufāsada*], to defend the people and their property and

the history of the region and its international connections. Muṣṭafā Nā 'īmī personal communication by telephone by (7/30/99).

reject lies and bad deeds. We pray Allah to guide us and to guide him by his sanctity of the Prophet and His honorable companions.

Since no established political apparatus existed aside from the nomadic emirates of the *ḥasāni*, who collected occasional tribute and monitored traffic, the most prominent scholar-jurist could be regarded as a *de facto* governor of that locality. One could go as far as to argue that each town was therefore like a mini-Islamic state under the rule of a “khalīfa” who judged the affairs of the people, although unlike the emirs he had no standing army and therefore he did not physically defend the community. The responsibilities of these religious authorities were therefore paramount. Because the application and interpretation of Islamic law was always debated, even across large expanses of land, other religious authorities could converse with one another on their respective rulings and, judging from the data presented here, this is what occurred.

Thirdly, this legal case demonstrates the interdependency of the activities of traders and scholars. The traders needed a leader to act as a moral authority and to arbitrate in cases of disputes, disagreements, or simply civil matters such as inheritance or divorce cases. The scholars, in turn, derived recognition and prestige (symbolic capital to use Pierre Bourdieu’s terminology), nurturing and at times uplifting the reputation of their hometowns and their people.⁹³ By extension, their intellectual performance and public demonstrations of wisdom were self-reinforcing for the town dwellers as well. Of course, scholars derived revenue from their services of arbitration, and from blessings, charms and legal documents they were asked to write. They, and/or family members,

⁹³ “Structures, Habitus, Power: basis for a Theory of Symbolic Power,” in Dirks, Nicolas, Geoff Ely & Sherry Ortner (eds.). *Culture, Power and History: A Reader of Contemporary Social Theory*. Princeton University Press, 1994. Abdel Wedoudould

were naturally involved in interregional subsistence trade. Like lawyers watching over the best interests of their clients, they strove to earn credit for their issuances of jurisprudence. They were ready to fight with their pens to secure the rights of their constituents and this inheritance is a case in point.

Concluding Remarks

Inheritance cases, such as this one, offer a unique window into human relationships. What makes this one a particularly insightful source is the fact that it involves so many people: male traders, their wives and families, and jurists. Since the deceased traders themselves were involved in large-scale and multiple trade operations, with one another as well as with other traders within the network (and some outside of the immediate partnership), they clearly were high profile cases. Their inheritance was so coveted that it became controversial and therefore debatable. Indeed, because the inheritance procedure was considered by at least three different Muslim jurists who stated their opinions, the source represents a multi-layered multi-vocal document. It is precisely because this inheritance case was so divisive that it is such an exceptional historical source.

For the most part, the members of trading operations, their relatives and some of their clients belonged to the two large tribal groups of Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā. Other traders/clients mentioned in this source are from the Rgaḇbāt, a northern Saharan nomadic tribe closely allied to both the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' (discussed in chapter four &

Cheikh uses the term "charismatic capital," "Nomadisme," chapter nine.

six). The two Saharan groups forming the Wād Nūn network were leading players in trans-Saharan trade between northern and southern markets. These stranger-traders bonded in a spirit of solidarity and mutual cooperation. Whether they were Tikna or Awlād Bū Sbā', they belonged to a network, frequented the same distant markets, watched over each others' interests, paying one another's debts and caring for one another's families.

The four stranger-traders who met their death on trans-Saharan trails, Baghlīl, Al-Ḥāj 'Aly b. Sa'īd, 'Aly b. Ḥammād and 'Aly Fāl relied, and indeed depended on each other and upon a host of other trading partners. All four acted as landlord-bankers extending credit and accepting deposits. They were all indebted to one another at the time of their deaths. When one died, all his creditors and debtors came forward to settle accounts. As this case reveals, "the creditors rose to collect their dues" upon hearing about a trader's death. If creditors, and dependable debtors, waited too long to collect or settle their dues, it might be too late, the deceased's house might be already sold and retrieving one's funds would become almost impossible once the inheritance was proceeded.

Extensive and multiform credit was indeed central to the successful operation of their business ventures. That stranger-traders were merchants, landlords, brokers and bankers simultaneously is also highlighted throughout the inheritance document. Traders were "entrusted" with the goods of others, as if receiving bank deposits or holdings redeemable at a future date. Since landlord-brokers lived in solid houses, almost like bank vaults to the average itinerant, nomadic trader, placing goods on deposit in his or

her house was relatively safe compared to the alternative. As Hill recognized over thirty years ago in her study of the Kumasi cattle market, the question of storage for long-distance traders was critical.⁹⁴ When visiting Timbuktu in the 1890s, European explorer Felix Dubois noticed that “[t]he city is merely a temporary depot...a town of warehouses and docks.”⁹⁵ The task of storing merchandise was a major activity of landlord-bankers and it was an essential service for long-distance traders, yet it was a dangerous occupation. This was especially true when raiders were in the vicinity as in the case of mid-nineteenth century Tishīt. Accumulated capital needed to be “dispersed” in various houses and thereby “hidden” from threatening nomadic pirates descending upon the town.⁹⁶ As countless *fatāwā*, or legal opinions written in the nineteenth century in Timbuktu, Walāta, Tishīt, Shingīti and beyond attest, the modalities of the practice of depositing merchandise with traders (*waḍī‘ā*) were actively debated among jurists.⁹⁷

The hoarding of goods, the physical and visible accumulation of wealth, was the surest way to be targeted by raiders. And so stranger-traders, who were more prone to such attacks, had to play a careful act of juggling merchandise between people. Extending it on credit was perhaps the safest way to store that wealth. Besides, money was wasted if it remained idle, it needed to circulate and lubricate the relationships of exchange. This is why traders in a network were all indebted to one another, while at the same time they were constantly offering new credit lines to trustworthy partners.

⁹⁴ "Landlord and Brokers," p. 355-6.

⁹⁵ *Tombouctou la Mystérieuse*, Paris: Flammarion, 1897, p. 284-5.

⁹⁶ A very common practice was to bury merchandise in the sand in special locations.

Long-distance trade was made possible through the availability of credit in a vibrant, flexible and highly personalized financial market. Credit was key to commercial operations as both a means to access capital to engage in trade and a means to accumulate capital by transferring it temporarily to trustworthy partners. Muslim partners shared a common legal framework, had access to religious authorities who enforced the law and trusted one another. Indeed *trust* was the building block of all these trading operations. That the brother of Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl, named Bāba, who was located in Gulmīm, settled ‘Aly b. Ḥammād’s debts toward Jewish creditors in that town is a great example of how the Wād Nūn long-distance trade network operated.⁹⁷ One is reminded of the traveler’s check mechanism (*suftāja*) described in chapter two which facilitated the virtual movement of capital between markets, from one end of trans-Saharan trail to the other. A similar exchange took place here when Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl wrote to his brother Bāba asking him to settle the debts of their fellow trade partner in Gulmīm on his behalf. This shows both the financial mechanisms used while highlighting the element of trust needed for the good functioning of such long-distance operations.

Despite the fact that they operated in a cooperative institution, the Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā’ also relied on services provided by other trade networks such as the Māsna and the Jewish community of the Wād Nūn. The convergence of commercial

⁹⁷ Such a fatwā was written at the turn of the century by Muḥammad Yahya al-Walāti on the question of depositing goods without permission of the owner of the house. See documents at IMRS, HOCS, CEDRAB, and in the Tālib Bubakkar Library of Walāta.

⁹⁸ Appendix 6B, p. 3.

operations, forged through marital alliances (with the Māsna) or economic arrangements (with the Jewish community of Gulmīm protected by the Bayrūk family), is extremely significant for it is an indication that trading networks were not as hermetic as they are sometimes depicted in the literature. For cross-cultural exchange to be efficient on long-distance routes, ties with local communities were key, allowing for the operation of an entire web of interlocking and efficient trade networks.

It must have been quite a blow to see four wealthy Tikna traders meet their deaths in such a short period of time. From oral evidence gathered in Tishīt, no Tikna family settled in the town after this. That these events coincided with the first major war between the Māsna and the Awlād Billa, which provoked the latter to leave Tishīt and create the new town of ‘Aqrayjīt, might not be coincidental.⁹⁹ Only the Awlād Bū Sbā’ families, such as that of Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl, remained there permanently. But eventually, when Tishīt stopped being a prosperous market, his descendents moved south to Nioro in the Sahel. Tikna traders did, however, continue trading there since Tishīt was such an important market at the time. The ‘Abāba and the Aḥmayda families based out of Shingīṭi (discussed in the next chapter) kept close ties with Tishīt, resulting in several marital/commercial alliances. But the only Tikna born in Tishīt after that was a daughter

⁹⁹ See chapter three for a discussion of ‘Aqrayjīt and the possibility of a connection between the Tikna and the Awlād Billa. These possible historical sequences must be investigated further, as more scholars venture into the desert to investigate the history of these communities. I intend to examine the history of the Māsna in future scholarship.

of Muḥammad b. al-Jāmi', an Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly Tikna trader from Lebyār, near Gulmīm, who took a temporary wife there. His daughter 'Aīsha mint al-Jāma' later married a Tikna trader Aḥmayda b. Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmayda and she followed him to Shingīti.¹⁰⁰ When juxtaposing the oral data and the written record, it appears that the group which is remembered today as being the first Tikna group to settle in the region, is actually part of the second recorded generation Wād Nūn migrations. The wave of Tikna migrants which remains in the living memory of their descendants in present-day Mauritania, came in the period of the 1870s and 1880s which we will now turn to in the following chapter.

¹⁰⁰ His father is mentioned in Document 1. Interview in Atar with Khnātha mint Aḥmayda (daughter of Aīsha mint al-Jama'a and b. Aḥmayda) with her two daughter Fatimatu and Mariam daughter of Muḥammad al-Farha) (10/5/97).

Awlād Bū Sbā' Trader Profile: Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl¹

According to the oral traditions of Tishīt, Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl was the most successful international trader of his time. Not only is he remembered as a great trader who had extensive commercial and social relationships with the people of Tishit and beyond, he is also venerated as a fine Muslim scholar. A short poem states that the year Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl arrived in Tishīt, the town counted 250 houses and not a single one of those houses was in ruins.¹ That the era of Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl is associated with a prosperous time when Tishīt was a bustling town with prime real estate, is evidence that Tishīt was in its heyday in the mid-nineteenth century.

Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl might not have been the first Awlād Bū Sbā' to settle in Tishīt. Judging from a letter addressed to him in the mid-nineteenth century which salutes both the members of his tribal branch, the Awlād 'Amrān, and those of Awlād al-Baggar, there were other Awlād Bū Sbā' families living in the area at the time.² To be sure, Shaykh's brothers Bāba and 'Umār, whose names appear in the inheritance document, probably also frequented Tishīt (See Appendix 8). It must be noted that the

¹ Interviews in Tishīt with Dāda b. Idda (04/97) and Muḥammad b. Aḥamdi (04/97). For specifics about the Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl family see Appendix 8.

² Family Archives of Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl in Tishīt, Document no. 2 Letter to Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl from the emir of Tagant Bākar b. Aswaīd Aḥmad (photographed 04/97).

descendents of Shaykh, interviewed in Mali and Mauritania, did not record the existence of these two brothers (which means that they left no progeny there). Other Awlād Bū Sbā' traders in Tishīt, whose names were mentioned in the inheritance case, include Muḥammad Ibrāhīm b. al-Damuīsi who was indebted towards 'Aly b. Hammād (see above and Appendix 7) and Sīdī Muḥammad b. Lazgham, who was one of the first Awlād Bū Sbā' to settle in Atar at the end of the nineteenth century. The maternal grandfather of Fālla mint Samba Djaye, who I interviewed in Tishīt, is also mentioned in this inheritance document. He was an Awlād Bū Sbā' named Mukhtār b. Muḥammad Fāl.³ In the mid-nineteenth century, it is possible that several Awlād Bū Sbā' resided in Tishīt. But, most likely, that the majority mentioned in the inheritance document were temporary traders who relied on Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl, and the four Tikna traders, as their landlord and cross-cultural broker.

From oral evidence, we know that Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl married in the Wād Nūn region where his first son Sid Aḥmad was born. As the unraveling of the inheritance revealed, Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl had intimate relations of trust and solidarity with the Tikna long-distance traders who perished on trans-Saharan trails. 'Aly

³ Interview with Fālla mint Samba Djaye, Tishīt (04/22/97).

Fāl entrusted him with his entire estate, and the legal guardianship of his family. The cooperation between these traders was a part of the trade network's *modus operandi*.

Oral evidence reveals precious information about the woman who became Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl's wife in Tishīt, Fātīma Seri mint Niāba (See Appendix 8). According to Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl's great-grandson (Nioro, Mali) and his great-great grandson ('Ayūn al-'Atrūs, Mauritania),⁴ Fātīma, who was Māsna, was a *ṭāliba*, or student of Islam, and had a great reputation of piety. She was also a chief member of the business community of Tishīt. Fātīma was a very prosperous businesswoman who had many caravan workers (*'umāl al-murāḥil*), slaves and *ḥarātin*. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Niāba family members were among the first traders to settle in what became the market of Nioro (discussed in the next chapter).

Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl had a great reputation in Tishīt. Oral sources explain that he provided for all the families in town, for he was generous in the way of God (*nāfiq fi sabīl Allah*). His descendent tells the following story, relayed to him by an elder woman of the family:

[Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl] was going to the Ḥāj. He was going to see Mecca. But the people of Tishīt told him not to go, for if he left they were going to perish because he was the one who gave to them food and drink...So he went to the qāḍi, he and the people of Tishīt, he went and they went with him. He explained the problem to the qāḍi and the qāḍi said "your father went on the Ḥāj

⁴ Interview in Nioro with Muḥammadu b. Sid Aḥmad b. Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl (05/16/98); Interview in 'Ayūn al-'Atrūs with Mulay Ibrāhīm b. Sid Aḥmad "Dāda" b. Muḥammadu b. Sid Aḥmad b. al-Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl (05/18/98).

and he did not move,” an expression [meaning] you must stay because these people need you and that is your Ḥāj; your Ḥāj is in your place [*fi biladak*].” So he stayed rather than going on pilgrimage.⁵

Stories about the generosity and piety of this Awlād Bū Sbā’ trader depict a man with immense charisma and symbolic capital. It is no wonder that such a man would also be remembered as the richest man in town.

Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl’s reputation as an outstanding Sharifian scholar and trader was inherited by his descendants. A similar story is told of his grandson, Muḥammadu b. Sīd Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl born in Nioro, who became a big trader in early twentieth century Bamako (see genealogy below). A poor woman sent a letter to Muḥammadu via a cattle trader. The letter explained that her family was poor and that she needed two bags of millet, some clothes and 30 or 50 Francs to pay the colonial taxes. The cattle trader took the letter to Muḥammadu who told him to come and see him before returning to the village. When he had sold all his cattle, the trader started on his return trip forgetting his promise. But several miles out of Bamako, he remembered so he returned to Muḥammadu who had not forgotten the woman’s letter. He entrusted the trader with exactly what the woman had requested (two bags of millet, cloths and 30 or 50 Francs).⁶ The hagiographical representation of the Muslim sharifian trader was very much a part of the symbolic capital of traders who banked on their reputation.

⁵ Interview in ‘Ayūn al- ‘Atrūs with Mulay Ibrāhīm b. Sīd Aḥmad “Dāda” b. Muḥammadu b. Sīd Aḥmad b. al-Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl (05/18/98). He was told this by an elder of the Awlād Bū Sbā’ who died in the 1970s Tutu mint Da’mash.

⁶ Interview in ‘Ayūn al- ‘Atrūs with Mulay Ibrāhīm b. Sīd Aḥmad “Dāda” b. Muḥammadu b. Sīd Aḥmad b. al-Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl (05/19/98).

Judging from what is left of the family records of the Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl, his most active trading period extended from the 1850s until the early 1880s. His family records consist of a few commercial letters and business contracts, legal judgments and a few manuscripts. These books include early printed books of classic works of jurisprudence such as a book on how to write business contracts. From what is left of the collection of correspondences, it is clear that Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl enjoyed good relationships of trade and scholarship with some of the most influential personalities in western Africa at the time. A letter addressed to him by Sid Aḥmad al-Kabīr, the eldest son of Shaykh Ūmār Tāl, begins thus: “my love [*ḥabībī* here connoting friendship] and the love of my father and the one who loves Muslims, al-Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl al-Sbā’ī.” This introduction shows that this Awlād Bū Sbā’ had a close relationship with the family of Ūmār Tāl, the Fulani *jihād* leader of the nineteenth century.⁷ Another letter, found in the family archives, was from Bakār b. al-Swayd Aḥmad, the emir of the Tagant region.

Thanks to Paul Pascon’s careful study of the nineteenth century account book of Sharif Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥāshim in Iligh, we know a little more about Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl’s commercial activities.⁸ Indeed, according to Pascon, Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-

⁷ Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl (SIK) family archives in Tishit document 1. The letter asks for Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl’s help in recuperating his slaves taken by the Awlād Mbārak. For the history of this religious leader, see Robinson, *Holy War*.

⁸ Paul Pascon, “Le commerce de la maison d’Iligh d’après le registre comptable de Husayn b. Hachem du Tazerwalt, 1850-1875,” in *La Maison d’Iligh et l’histoire sociale du Tazerwalt*, Pascon, A. Arrif, D. Schroeter, M. Tozy & H. Van Der Wusten, eds. Rabat: SMER, 1984, pp. 70, 72, 74 and 83.

Khalīl was the most important of the three trans-Saharan trade agents of the Illigh trading house. Alone, Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl's business represented no less than 80% of all the trans-Saharan trade of that commercial house between 1850 and 1875, representing a total of about 20 transactions.⁹ Pascon translated two records from the Illigh account book detailing transactions between Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl and Husayn b. al-Hāshim. One is the description of an outgoing caravan prepared by the al-Sharīf Husāyn b. Hāshim for his client/partner Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl in Tishīt dated October 1861. The merchandise that Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl delivered to Husāyn b. Hāshim, and that which was loaded in exchange, described in this document, are expressed in the following table.

⁹ Ibid, p. 70, 83. See chapters 3 and 4 for mention of Illigh and the relationship with Gulmīm.

<i>Sharīf Ḥusayn b. Ḥāshim purchases for Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl (in silver mithqal)¹⁰</i>		
16 Camels	731	
50 bags or sacs	91.1	
Saddle packs and ropes	4.2	
Renting of sacs	31.2	Total= 857.5
<i>Sharīf gives to the caravaners:</i>		
Muḥammad b. 'Abdarrahmān	500	
Wuld al-Ṣaddīq	500	
Al-Ḥāj Muḥammad al-Maddahi	400	Total for the 3= 1400
<i>Sharīf loads the following on the caravan:</i>		
160 <i>beṣa</i> of <i>khunt</i>	2040	
50 <i>beṣa</i> of cloth	105	
2 <i>beṣa</i> of <i>farawal</i>	7	
1 load of sulfur	172	
50 pounds of flowers	23.8	
Needles and thread	51.7	
20 pieces of red cloth	49.6	
60 pounds of <i>tusarghint</i>	28	
Resin (amber?)	235	
57 addtl. <i>beṣa</i> of <i>khunt</i>	641.2	3353.3
Payment of the Zakat	167.5	167.5
Total:		5778.3 (equiv. 300 000FF 1979)

¹⁰ The following table is based on Pascon documents 121.1 and 122.1, "Le commerce," p. 72, 24. According to Pascon, only silver bullion weighed in mithqal was in effective in the nineteenth century monetary history of Morocco. As Document 1 shows, both silver and gold were used in transactions in Tishit. The *khunt* is the dark blue cotton cloth imported by Europeans and sold at al-Swuīra. The *farawal* was a thick cotton cloth, usually made in western Africa (from northern Nigeria to Timbuktu). The *tusarghini* is the root of a plant, perhaps used for medicinal purposes.

The other record is an incoming caravan sent by Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl via his caravaner Bubakar al-Sbā'ī (of the Awlād Bū Sbā') in September 1863. It details what was sent, how al-Sharīf Husāyn b. Hāshim expedited the caravan loads, and the purchases sent on a return caravan to Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl in Tishīt.

Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl's goods	Price paid by the Sharīf (in silver)
28 Raṭāl of ostrich feathers	700 mithqal
90 Raṭāl of Ivory	360 mithqal and 250 mithqal (from 2 sales)
Total:	1310 mithqal
Purchases for Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl	
2 misc. items and rope	43 ugiya
60 <i>beṣa</i> of <i>khunt</i>	810 mithqal
40 American tarfan (?)	248 mithqal
3 she-camels	150 mithqal and 5 ugiya
2 Raṭāl of silk in a skein	27 mithqal
Zakat (Muslim tax):	64 mithqal and 8 ugiya (= 5%)
The total sum was used for the purchases and given to the caravaner to be transported to Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl in Tishīt. ¹¹	

Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl's profile is that of a very successful stranger-trader. He used his tribal connections directly in his long-distance caravan operations by employing Awlād Bū Sbā'ī caravaners to walk his caravans (example of his caravaner Bubakar al-Sbā'ī). He was the principal trans-Saharan trade partner of al-Sharīf Husayn b. Hāshim of the Sūs, a trading house with a close alliance to the Bayrūk family. More importantly, Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl took advantage of his wife Fātīma Seri mint

¹¹ This graph is based on document 87.1, Pascon, "Le commerce," p. 72

Niāba's connections, and the access she provided to the Māsnā network with its trade relations all over the Kaarta, Goumbou and Sokolo regions of (present-day) Mali. It was probably thanks to Fātima's network that Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl developed such extensive trading partnerships in western Africa.

The sons of Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl would continue in the professional line of their father, eventually moving south of Tishīt to Nioro with the shifts in markets which occurred in the late nineteenth century. This move south, discussed in the next chapter, was initiated by Sid Aḥmad, his eldest son, who was in fact born in the Wād Nūn and who arrived in Tishīt at some point in time. It is very likely that Sid Aḥmad joined his father's house in Tishīt after Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl passed away, to deal with his inheritance.

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ON TRANS-SAHARAN TRAILS: TRADING NETWORKS AND CROSS-
CULTURAL EXCHANGE IN WESTERN AFRICA, 1840s-1930s

VOLUME II

by

Ghislaine Lydon

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CHAPTER 6

TRADING ACROSS A SEA OF PIRATES IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY: THE MOVE SOUTH

*The sugar cone in its blue robe, carried on the backs of camels
There is no pleasure if it is lacking. The snowy sugar, how beautiful it is
The tea of London has beauty and goodness. The tea jar is the minaret on the mosque
The kettle is the mu'azzin of course, just along side. And the teapot is the imam.
That too is obvious. The glasses are the rows of Muslims in prayer.
And the tea tray is the praying-ground (msāla). As for the tea, make no mistake.
The Christian, he who knows well that you are the enemies,
He strikes you with his cannons loaded with charges of tea.
He tricks you with his scales. The enemy strikes you in the stomach.
The Christian strikes. He aims well. He brings the sugar cone.
If it were good for you, he would not bring anything.¹*

The late nineteenth century was marked by a period of relative peace followed by a decade of political and social turmoil leading into the advent of colonial rule in western Africa. While I am concerned with the itineraries of long-distance traders, patterns of migration and commerce, these were inextricably linked to the political climate of the *Trab al-Biḍān*. As will become clear in relating key political events of late nineteenth century western Africa, the Awlād Bū Sbā' and the Tikna were, to varying degrees, embroiled in them. Alliances between the emirs of the Adrar, the Tagant, the Trarza, and the Wād Nūn regions where key trading centers such as Shingīti, Tishīt, Ndar and Gulmīm were located, tempered the migration patterns of trans-Saharan traders. It was during the reign of Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad, nicknamed 'emir of peace,' that a more

¹ Poem recorded before the 1920s composed by the Ait Ba'amrān in the Sūs region of what is now southern Morocco. Colonel Justinard, "Les Ait Ba'amrane," *Villes et tribus du Maroc*, XVII, pp. 63-6,

sizeable group of Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' families came to settle in the towns of Shingīti, Walāta, Timbuktu and Ndar. Unlike the Tikna, who often acted through their leaders, namely the chief of Gulmīm (Wād Nūn), the Awlād Bū Sbā' participated, sometimes quite belligerently, in the political affairs of the Adrar, Trarza and the Azawād regions in particular, despite their status as strangers.

The first part of this chapter reviews the political economy of western Africa in the second half of the nineteenth century, highlighting events in the market center of Timbuktu and the reign of Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad of Adrar emirate. In the second part, I examine the southern migrations of several Saharan long-distance traders who settled in western African towns in the late nineteenth century in a period of relative political stability. In this era of prosperity new products, often of European origin or control, such as tea and guns, filtered into markets. These new imports had tremendous cultural and political repercussions. I argue that the end of a peaceful reign provoked an increase in pirating activities on trans-Saharan trails. The end of the century, the state of insecurity pushed many trans-Saharan traders to migrate further south and begin a process of economic diversification within the new colonial power structure.

The main sources for this chapter include oral evidence (recollections and oral history), documents from the French archives (correspondence with African leaders and chiefs, and reports), and local written sources. I rely in particular on several historical accounts of the Adrar produced by local historians of the late nineteenth and early

cited in John Waterbury, *North for the Trade: The Life and Times of a Berber Merchant*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972, pp. 79-80.

twentieth centuries such as the contemporaneous and eye-witness accounts by Berabīsh historian Muḥammad Sālam wuld Laḥbīb and ‘Abd al-Wadūd wuld Intāha. I also glean insights from the historical accounts produced by a scholar-interpreter who served in the colonial administration, Mahmadou Ahmadou Ba.

Although there is no study to date on Mahmadou Ba and his significant contribution to Mauritanian history—and indeed it is important to produce one—a few remarks can be made about this scholar. Ba was a Hal-Pulaar trained in the colonial educational system to be a translator-interpreter for the French. His time in service overlapped with that of Bu al-Mughdād II (Doudou Seck) discussed in chapter seven. He is most remembered for his long service in Atar as a colonial interpreter (*amallāz*) of French, Pulaar, Ḥasanīya and Wolof, the capital of the Adrar region of what would become northern Mauritania.

Not only was Ba a fine linguist, he was also a keen historian and an exceptional writer. Based mainly on oral traditions, he wrote prolifically on the history of the Adrar, its people and politics. Combined, his articles which appeared in the *Bulletin du Comité de l'Afrique Française et le Comité du Maroc*, as well as in other colonial scholarly journals such as the *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, are original contributions to Mauritanian history.² The bulk of his scholarship was published in around the 1930s. Oral sources explain that

² Some of Mahmadou Ahmadou Ba's publications include: "L'Adrar dans l'Anarchie," and "Chronologie de l'Adrar," *Renseignements Coloniaux* (former BCAFCM) no. 2, Février 1933; "Une Grande Figure de l'Adrar : L'Emir Ahmed ould M'Hamed, 1871-1891," *Renseignements Coloniaux*, no. 10, Octobre 1929; "Un Emir de la Guerre en Adrar: Ahmed Ould Sid Ahmed," *Renseignements Coloniaux*, no. 10, 1930; "Contribution à l'Histoire des Reguibat," *Renseignements Coloniaux*, no. 12, Décembre 1933 and no. 4 Avril 1934, also published in BCEHS, t. XVI, no. 3, Juillet-Septembre 1933.

Ba was quite popular among the residents of Atar. He was a frequent visitor to the home of Hammuddy, the big trader of the Awlād Bū Sbā' who came to dominate Atar's commercial scene in the 1930s (discussed in chapter eight).³ It was in Hammuddy's house, located in front of Atar's main market, that all the personalities of the Adrar, including the Emir, would congregate and discuss regional affairs, past and present.⁴ During these sessions, to which he was privy, Ba collected the oral traditions and data which he used to recreate the political history of the Adrar.

Trans-Saharan Trade in Timbuktu

By the mid-nineteenth century, at about the time of the sudden deaths of the four Tiknas discussed in the previous chapter, a sizeable community of stranger traders resided in the market town of Timbuktu. It is tempting to surmise that the fate of Tikna traders might have prompted a transfer of economic loyalties of many Tikna trans-Saharan traders to markets further south, and perhaps a reinforcement of their presence in the city of Timbuktu. Future works on the very understudied socioeconomic history of Timbuktu, and the Azawād region of Mali generally, would reveal the macro-economic trends of nineteenth century trans-Saharan trade, filling the large gaps of the present dissertation. To be sure, Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' traders, as well as other Saharans, were important players in trans-Saharan trade between southern and northern

³ For a mini-biography of Hammuddy see Ann E. McDougall's "A Topsy-Turvy World: Slaves and Freed Slaves in Mauritanian Adrar, 1910-1950." In S. Miers & Richard Roberts, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, Madison, 1980.

⁴ Muḥammad Saīd b. Ḥammuddy (07/06/98). I thank Saīd for this information and for sharing a photo of Mahmadou Ahmadou Ba.

western African markets at this time. As seen in chapter three, with the testimony of the Awlād Bū Sbā' interviewed by John Riley and in Léopold Panet's account, caravan traffic from Wād Nūn to Timbuktu was substantial in the first half of the nineteenth century. The classic travelogues by daring European explorers, such as Henrich Barth, Oscar Lenz, Felix Dubois, while rich in market information, hardly give tangible estimates on the overall trade volume. But it is clear that regular caravan traffic prevailed throughout the nineteenth century, with some intermittences linked to the political landscape.⁵

In the late 1850s, the foundation of a new town and market midway between Timbuktu and the Wād Nūn had important consequences on the conduct of trans-Saharan trade. Tindūf (Berber for the well of "doof") was founded in the 1852 by a group of Tajakānit trader-scholars. This Saharan *zwāya* group, originally from the Hawḍ region (town of Tinīgi), split in two groups at the outset of a civil war.⁶ Although little is yet known about the history of Tindūf, or the history of the town's founders, it is clear that it became a major caravan center between Gulmīm and Timbuktu (Tindūf is located in present-day Algeria; it is the "capital-in-exile" of the Polisario run Government of

⁵ See discussion below. For estimates based on European sources see Ralph Austen, "The Transsaharan Trade: A Tentative Census," *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, J. Hogendorn & H. Gemery (eds). NY: Academic Press, 1979.

⁶ I have very little information on this group. I interviewed only one Tajakānit trader in Timbuktu, a scholar in his own right, who provided invaluable historical data which I was not able to check against other sources. Therefore I use this oral data advisedly. Interview in Timbuktu with Muḥammad wuld Khattra (04/22/98). Apparently, civil war broke out when a man hit a woman and knocked her teeth out.

Western Sahara). The new commercial center of Tindūf was strategically located just north the salt pan of Tawdanni, which supplied Timbuktu with salt bars. From then onwards, the Tajakānit began assuming an active role as caravaners, couriers and desert transporters for hire on the Tindūf-Timbuktu route.

When a Moroccan Jew first halted in Tindūf on his way to Timbuktu in 1858, he reported that there were already about one hundred newly built houses.⁷ About thirty years later, the town had become an important market, according to the eye-witness account of three Idaw'ālī pilgrims from Shingīti who were traveling to Mecca via Algeria, collected by French geographer A. Coyne in Algiers.⁸

Trade between Tindouf and the Sudan is considerable. Caravans leave this town for Timbuktu or for Arawan carrying cotton cloths, cloth sheets, gunpowder, weapons manufactured in Europe, glassware, sugar, paper, lead, tar, etc., etc. They complete their loads at the *sabkha* (salt pan) of Tawdanni, with rock salt, the value of which...is considerable in the Sudan. They bring back slaves, cotton cloth of the county, Negroes [sic!], ostrich feathers, gold, either in bars or in dust, ivory, rice, etc.⁹

The role of Tindūf, and the Tajakānit who controlled traffic to and from the town, was so important that they and the Tikna became strong allies, through intermarriage and trade partnerships. According to Muḥammad al-Khattāri, retired caravaner whose family

The entire Tajakānit tribe left Tinīgi; one branch moved west to Gueru and other locations, the other, more scholarly branch went north and founded Tindūf.

⁷ Mardochée, Aby Serour. "Premier établissement des Juifs à Tombouctou," trans. Auguste Beaumier, *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*, Avril-Mai, 1870, p. 16.

⁸ A. Coyne. *Journal de Route des Adrariens Etude Géographique sur L'Adrar et une partie du Sahara Occidental*, Alger, 1889, pp. 25-28. This is a very important source for Saharan history at the end of nineteenth century.

⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

always served the Tinduf-Timbuktu route (with frequent trips to Gulmīm to sell and purchase camels, trade items and supplies), the “Tikna cannot cross the Sahara without the Tajakānit.”¹⁰

It must be noted that before the arrival of the Tajakānit on the trans-Saharan caravan scene, the prestigious Kunta tribe, with the assistance of the nomadic Berabīsh and the Twāreg, had an uncontested stronghold on the traffic between Tawdanni and Timbuktu.¹¹ The Kunta network seems to have extended all the way to Sokoto in Northern Nigeria.¹² In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Kunta group was centered in the town of Arawān, several camel-days north of Timbuktu. The large tribal group was governed by the religiously prestigious family of Sīdi al-Mukhtār b. Sīdi Muḥammad al-Kunti who held a virtual monopoly over the sufi order of the Qadiriyya. Because of their ‘charismatic capital,’ the Kunta had numerous *talamiḍ*, or students of Islam, who participated in providing wealth and a strong power base. Because of their religious following, the location of their town of Arawān between Timbuktu and Tawdanni, their relationships with nomadic groups (especially the Berabish), and not to mention their strong position as “overseers” of the other rock salt pan (Ijīl), the Kunta

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See Paul Marty, *L'Islam et les Tribus du Soudan*, Paris: 1917, for a discussion of the Kunta religious network and their prominent role in the trade to and from Azawād. Abdel Wedoud ould Cheikh is working on a study of the Kunta and translations of several important histories produced by these scholars in the 19th century.

oversaw much of the salt trade to and from Timbuktu (see Map 2). As J. Genevrière, a colonial administrator in Timbuktu explained, “[j]ust like the Awlād Bū Sbā’ of the western Sahara whose commercial activity extended from southern Morocco to Portuguese Guinea, the Kunta is born a trader.”¹³ More specifically, just like their Awlād Bū Sbā’ counterparts, the Kunta banked on their religious capital to prosper in trade. This prosperity and eminent position on the Timbuktu side of trans-Saharan trade would be seriously curtailed after the 1860s when the Awlād Bū Sbā’ and Kunta became engaged in a war from which the latter would never fully recover (discussed in the next section).

In the mid-nineteenth century, explorer Heinrich Barth estimated that the population of Timbuktu ranged between 13,000 and 23,000 people.¹⁴ According to Ismaël Diadié Haïdara’s reckoning, the northern African community residing in Timbuktu then equaled exactly 648, or about 3.25% of the total population.¹⁵ The reign of Aḥmadu, the emir of Macina, in the first half of the nineteenth century brought forth a new commercial era during which the position of stranger-traders in Timbuktu gained prominence and numbers. It was also in this period that a Jewish trader, Murdukhay Aby

¹² Genevrière, J. “Les Kountas et leurs activités commerciales,” mémoire du CHEAM, no. 1240 (1944), p. 46.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Barth, Heinrich. *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*. London: Ward, Lock and Co. 1890.

¹⁵ Haïdara, *Les Juifs*, p. 21. Because the category of “northern African” is so nebulous, it is difficult to gauge who is included. Unfortunately, Haïdara does not cite his source for this figure. In fact, this is a problem throughout the book. Although he must be commended for making material from the CEDRAB available for researchers, there are numerous problems with this publication. His introduction contains a number of historical inaccuracies. Moreover, the book suffers from poor editorship. It is hoped that more

Sarur, blazed a trail in the establishment of Maghribi Jewish traders in Timbuktu after struggling with Tikna and other traders who wanted their exclusion from the market.¹⁶

The struggles of the Jewish traders in securing a position on the Timbuktu market are worth discussing here since they inform on the commercial and social history of nineteenth century Timbuktu.¹⁷ Muslim-Jewish relations as they were negotiated in Timbuktu are telling with regards to cross-cultural exchange and competition in an international market. As we saw in chapters two and three, Jews were generally treated with scorn by Muslim traders. Because of their religion, Jews remained apart from the rest of the predominantly Muslim community of Timbuktu, as they did in most host societies around the Muslim world. They were classified as *dhimmi* or ‘protected non-Muslims’ and they tended to live segregated in ghettos.

When Murdukhay arrived in 1859, after a long and treacherous journey, he was not welcomed on the Timbuktu market place. In fact, he was assaulted by established traders such as the Tikna and the Tajakānit who ganged-up and chained him. Fortunately, he managed to escape his assailants.¹⁸ It is important to mention that Murdukhay was not a Jew of the Wād Nūn, but of the Tafilālt region. This explains the antagonism of the Tikna traders in Timbuktu who normally would have been obligated to protect the Jews residing in their Wād Nūn homeland. Accompanied by a member of the

work on the history of Timbuktu—a notorious city which has attracted so few scholars and awaits a historical reconstruction—will be produced based on the numerous and rich commercial sources of the city.

¹⁶ Since the edict of Askia Muhammad, counseled by Al-Maghīli, Jews had been banned from entering Timbuktu. See John Hunwick, *“Shari’a in Songhay: The Replies of al-Maghīli to the Questions of Askia al-Hajj Muhammad.”* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 32-42.

¹⁷ The information contained in this paragraph is based on Hāidara, *Les Juifs de Tombouctou*, pp. 36-38. This book is essentially composed of rough French translations of Arabic and Jewish sources, with a lengthy introduction. A serious study of Saharan Jews is needed.

prestigious Sīdi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti family, Murdukhay then traveled to the Macina capital Hamdullahi to meet with Aḥmadu, the emir of Macina who ruled over the region.

Murdukhay apparently declared to him the following:

Those merchants, with their hate against us [the Jews] take care of themselves only and do not care about your country; if instead of listening to them, you admit in your land Jews and Christians, you would see all the advantages they would bring to you, and you would soon realize that the words of these merchants are only scornful and go against your own interests.¹⁹

According to Murdukhay, Aḥmadu thereby agreed to grant Jews the status of a *dhimmi* in Timbuktu, just like in Gulmīm and other Saharan towns with sizeable Jewish communities. Jews could now trade and reside in Timbuktu in exchange for an annual tax (*jizya*) equal to one camel load of sulfur imported from Morocco.²⁰ As for stranger-traders doing business in Timbuktu, whether Jew or Muslim (such as the Tikna who formed a sizeable community in the mid-to-late nineteenth century Timbuktu), they had to pay a fee for the right to trade in the city limits called the *'ushur* or one-tenth (dime).

Admittedly this incident is poorly researched, and we are relying on one source only (Murdukhay's account). Moreover it is questionable to what extent Aḥmadu actually

¹⁸ Mardochée.

¹⁹ Document 5; Letter by Mardochée (Murdukhay) Aby Serour to M. Auguste Baumier, French Consul in Mogador. 14 September 1869 (Published in the *Société de Géographie de France*), cited in Haidara, *Les Juifs*, p. 78.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 52. As seen in chapter three, sulfur was used as a key ingredient for the manufacture of gunpowder.

controlled Timbuktu at the time. To be sure, after Shaykh ‘Umar Tāl invaded the town for several months in 1862, Timbuktu remained autonomous from Macina.²¹

In 1863, after securing his position, Murdukhay invited a number of southern Moroccan Jewish partners—members of his trading network—to settle in Timbuktu. But a number of mishaps dissuaded these traders from staying very long. Murdukhay’s brother was completely pillaged by pirates on the trails when he was returning to Morocco with a full caravan, and he was in fact lucky to live to tell his tale. Heading south in 1864 in a caravan loaded with goods he had purchased in Europe, Murdukhay was pillaged by an armed group of Rgaībāt, and Tikna (Ait Laḥsān and Yaggūt). Murdukhay survived the attack and arrived safely although penniless in Timbuktu.

Eventually, Murdukhay was given a loan in gold with which he purchased ostrich feathers to send to his trading partner in al-Swaīra. One again, however, “that expedition was taken from [him] as well by pillagers belonging to the Rgaybat and the Oulad Bou Sebah (of the Awlād al-Baggar sub-group).”²² Murdukhay later recognized three of his Awlād Bū Sbā’ pillagers in the Timbuktu market. Thanks to his connection with the Sīdi Mukhtar al-Kunti family, he arranged for them to be imprisoned. He then ransomed them to the rest of the Awlād Bū Sbā’ tribe in return for the stolen ostrich feather loads. The Awlād Bū Sbā’ prisoners protested and claimed innocence on the grounds “that they were Shurfa descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad. This is why, no doubt, they thought they

²¹ See Chapter 8, Robinson, *Holy War*. I thank Robinson for pointing this out to me.

²² Haidara, *Les Juifs*, p. 80.

had a right to eat the goods of the poor.”²³ Apparently, it turned into a diplomatic incident when Shaykh al-Bakkay, head of the Kunta family, decided to write to the Sultan of Morocco to complain about the acts of his former constituents, the Awlād Bū Sbā’ and the Rgaībāt.²⁴ That these two Saharan groups were raiding in the Azawād regions of Timbuktu could be an indication that they were moving further south for access to resources, a subject we will return to below.

There could be a simple reason why a Kunta would take sides with a Jewish stranger-trader against the Awlād Bū Sbā’. Just years prior to this event, at the final onslaught of a protracted and bitter war between the two prestigious scholar-trader groups, the Awlād Bū Sbā’ killed the Kunta great leader Shaikh Aḥmad b. Sīdī Muḥammad al-Kunti.²⁵ The exact causes of this historic war are unclear but according to early twentieth century Berābīsh historian Muḥammad Sālim wuld Laḥbīb wuld Lḥusayn wuld ‘Abd al-Ḥay, it all started when Shaikh Aḥmad al-Kunti decided one day to “rule over all the tribes in order to reestablish security in the region.”²⁶ This event, which took place in the late 1850s, could explain why the situation of insecurity around Tishīt, described in the previous chapter, was exceptionally violent. Allied with some members of the Rgaībāt, the Awlād Bū Sbā seized all the goods of the Kunta encampments. They

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. All this information comes from one source and so I use it advisedly. Murdukhay’s account, although fascinating, is not necessarily a reliable source on mid-nineteenth century Timbuktu.

²⁵ Interviews in Nouakchott with Abd al-Wahab (“Baba”) wuld Shaygar (07/22/97); Muḥammad Said wuld Hammuny (7/20/97); Aḥmad Sālam b. ‘Abd al-Wadūd (06/26/98).

issued a severe blow to a large group of Saharans with such a domineering economic and political role in the western African regions of current day northwestern Mali (in Timbuktu in particular) and Mauritania. Because of the similar professional profiles of both the Awlād Bū Sbā' and the Kunta, it is tempting to suggest that economic competition on trans-Saharan trails might have been an underlying factor in this historic war. In the years that followed, the Awlād Bū Sbā', armed with some of the latest firearms, would continue their forays into the Adrar and Azawād regions, a subject we will turn to shortly.

According to the conclusions drawn by Capitaine Dupas, stationed in the western Saharan regions of colonial Algeria (*confins algéro-marocains*) in the 1930s who wrote on the history of the western branch of trans-Saharan trade, "This commerce was prosperous during the nineteenth century, notably in 1860, at which date it reached its apogee."²⁷ Dupas provides no evidence supporting this particular date. But in light of the events related above, I would suggest that a peak was reached some years later in the 1870s.²⁸ This point is also made by historian Jean-Louis Miège who bases his propos on an examination of European commercial records to and from northern Africa, namely Morocco.²⁹ Relying on Miège's data, Newbury implies that the newly established Jewish

²⁶ Na'imi, (ed. & trans.), *Les Principales Préoccupations*, p. 133. In his chronology of the Adrar, Ba claims that the Kunta leader had in fact proclaimed himself "mahdi." "Chronologie," p. 36.

²⁷ Capitaine Dupas, "Le Commerce Trans-Saharien entre le Sud du maroc et le Sahara Occidental et la Mauritania" *La France Méditerranéenne et l'Afrique : Bulletin d'Études Économiques et Sociales*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1938, p. 76.

²⁸ Dupas is clearly unaware of the history of the Saharan political economy of the mid-nineteenth century. In any event, this author does not explain how he came up with such a date, or provide quantitative date to proof his point.

²⁹ Miège, *Le Maroc et l'Europe*, p. 92.

traders in Timbuktu “were probably instrumental in reviving trade with the north.”³⁰ Although this might be true, it seems more likely that trans-Saharan trade reached a climax perhaps a decade later in the 1870s as a result of a more peaceful era in western African politics.

The Peaceful Reign of Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad, 1871-1891

For the people of the Adrar region of western Africa, the period from the 1850s to the early 1870s was one of great political instability and economic uncertainty. In the chronological record of the Adrar, the decade from 1861 to 1871, between the death by illness of Aḥmad wuld Aṭda and the swearing in of the new emir of Adrar Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad, was particularly tumultuous politically. In fact, during this decade the emirate of Adrar—formed by the warrior group of sons’ of Yahya b. ‘Uthmān, with a motley crew of camel-mounted armed forces including the Awlād Ghaylan and the Jaafra—had no ruler.³¹ According to Ba, the early 1860s is remembered in the Adrar oral chronology as a time when

confusion was then to the extreme: there was no more security, no more liberty;³² the transactions ceased, livestock raising collapsed, cultivations and plantations [of date palm trees] were more or less abandoned, and extreme

³⁰ Newbury, “North African,” p. 241.

³¹ Pierre Bonte has written extensively on the Adrar, from a historical anthropology perspective. For a study of the formation of the Adrar emirate, see for instance his “La constitution de l’émirat de l’Adrar: Essai sur les formations politiques tribales.” *The Maghreb Review*, vol. 22, 1-2, 1997: 40-54. For an excellent study of political succession in the emirate, see his “Tribus, factions et état. Les conflits de succession dans l’émirat de l’Adrar.” *Cahiers d’Etudes Africaines*. XXII, 1982, 489-519.

³² The choice of both these words “security” and “liberty” must be understood within the colonial framework. The French who prided themselves on establishing security and freedom of mobility through conquest, or what they called “pacification.” In other words, Ba was using the vocabulary his colonial audience would understand best.

poverty became severe in all of the Adrar. This dark period is known as the “the period of decadence of the Ahl ‘Uthmān.”³³

The Adrar region was key to long-distance traders traveling along western trans-Saharan trails; “[a]t about equidistance between the Wad Nun and St. Louis [Ndar], between Walata and the Atlantic Coast, the Mauritanian Adrar was once the hyphen between the countries which for a long time were the principal outlets of the western Saharan commerce .”³⁴ As historian Abd al-Wadūd wuld Aḥmād Mawlūd (1870s-1940) wrote in his chronicle of the Adrar,

the situation of *ṣība* [generalized insecurity] prevailed until 1289 [hijra or 1871-1872 A.D.] up until the emirat of Aḥmād wuld Mḥāmad wuld ‘Abdy and he was just and he shared with Bakār wuld Swayd Aḥmād [Emir of Tagant] and ‘Aly wuld Muḥammad Laḥbīb [Emir of Trarza] and Muḥammad Maḥmūd wuld Laḥaymīt [Emir of Brakna] and Daḥmān wuld Bayrūk [chief of the Tikna, Ayt Mūsā wa ‘Aly, leader of Gulmīm in Wād Nūn], Mulāy Al-Ḥasān [Sultan of Morocco] and ‘Abd al-Majīf [?], and this is the same period as al-Khadawiyīn in Egypt and *this period is well-known for the peace and general prosperity. And after this period [after the death of Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad] the injustice increased and the killing (qatl) and the blood spilt, until the coming of the Nasāra.*³⁵

It is interesting to reflect upon the order of importance of political leaders mentioned by this historian. First he cites Bakār wuld Swayd Aḥmad, the emir of the Idaw‘īsh of the Tagant region who was the maternal uncle of the Adrar emir Aḥmad wuld

³³ Ba, “Une Grande Figure de l’Adrar,” p. 544.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 543.

³⁵ *Tārīkh Adrār*, Abd al-Wadūd wuld Aḥmād Mawlūd wuld Intāha (Smāssid, Atar) written in 1353 (1934). Copy shared by his son Jily wuld ‘Abd al Qaḍar o/ Intaha (Sept 1997), p. 10-11 (emphasis mine; translation mine with the assistance of Ismaīl wuld Gabī, graduate student at the University of Nouakchott).

mad, and who later waged war against the people of the Adrar in the 1890s after
pew was assassinated. Then the author lists the emirs of Trarza and Brakna,
mentioning the leader of the Tikna, Daḥmān wuld Bayrūk, and the Sultan of
co. It is significant that historian 'Abd al-Wadūd would include these two northern
s in the political landscape of the Adrar. First, the allusion to the chief of the Tikna
ndication of the importance of Gulmīm to the northern communication channels of
lar. Since Gulmīm was the caravan terminus on the northern edge of the desert, it
most the necessary destination for Adrar northward bound traffic. The mention of
Hasān is evidence that the Sultan of Morocco figured prominently into the
al equation as well.

Throughout the nineteenth century in the western Sahara, the chiefs of Adrar and
Nūn played a determining role in regulating and controlling caravan traffic to and
their respective regions.³⁶ When Emir Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad came to power, he
successfully controlled his people through military might, organized justice and political
ation. His policies had positive consequences on the economic development of the
Till this day, in local Mauritanian oral traditions, this Emir of Adrar is fondly
bered as *amīr al-ʿāfiya*, or the leader of peace.³⁷ It is interesting to note that the

of Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad is fondly remembered in the oral traditions of the Adrar

a Chappelle, "Histoire du Sahara Occidental," p. 47 and fn 4: "Before our occupation, most of the
tribes, such as the Regeibat, paid fees to the emirs of the Adrar and the Tikna chiefs of the Oued

region very much in the way Tanimu (1854-1884) is depicted as a power military leader during whose reign trans-Saharan trade prospered in the region of Damagaram in central Niger.³⁸ Like Sarki Tanimu, the emir of Adrar gained respect through his military might because his “military success ensured peace and security.”³⁹

The best written source on the life and times of this great emir of the Adrar is an article by Ba.⁴⁰ Although his is a political history of a great man, Ba does disclose useful information about economic affairs during the emir’s twenty-year reign. Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad entertained an excellent rapport with his mentor and maternal uncle the illustrious emir of Tagant, the Idaw’ish Bakār wuld Swayd Aḥmad. In turn, Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad would marry Bakār’s daughter. Unlike most of his predecessors, he was pious and he “showed a great consideration for religious personalities and especially for Shaikh Muḥammad Fāḍal wuld Abaydi [father of two of the most influential marabouts during French colonial rule, discussed in the next chapter], whom he never ceased to support against his rivals.”⁴¹ In fact, alongside religious leaders, he also was constantly surrounded by a group of advisor-scholars of Islamic law who formed his *mahkama* or court of justice.⁴²

Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad’s rule was so exceptional that he forbade the warriors under his command from constantly raiding defenseless people, and punished severely those

³⁷ See, for instance, Interview with Abdarahmān wuld Muḥammad al-Ḥanṣhi (09/19/97).

³⁸ Baier, *Economic History of Central Niger*, p. 44.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 45.

⁴⁰ Ba, “Une Grande Figure de l’Adrar.” The rest of the paragraph is based on Ba’s information.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 545. By ‘rivals’, no doubt Ba is referring here to the Kunta clan.

who engaged in arbitrary violence, including his own cousin Aḥmad wuld Sid Aḥmad (his successor) who he expelled from the Adrar.⁴³ To regulate abusive raiding, the emir Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad proclaimed the following edict complete with fines for breaking the rules:

any sheep slaughtered without right would be reimbursed four times its value, any mount [horse or camel] belonging to another would bring about the payment of an indemnity four times equal to the normal price of rental for the distance traveled, and all atrocities would lead to reparations four times superior to the damage caused; all of this not including the legal punishments the judgment of which was reserved to his *maḥkama*. Repeated from mouth to mouth, these wise dispositions rapidly toured the Adrar, alarming some, reassuring others, bestowing upon all the impression that a new era was beginning.⁴⁴

During his reign, Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad developed extensive and strong alliances with neighboring polities. In 1880, the Sultan of Morocco, Ḥasān I, sent a delegation to him bearing “magnificent gifts and a letter in which the Commander of the Faithful [Ḥasān I] confirmed Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad in his duties and congratulated him for the way in which he administered the Adrar.”⁴⁵ This swearing-in of Saharan emirs by the Sultan of Morocco was a common, although by no means systematic, practice (see example of the emir of Trarza ‘Aly Shandūra in chapter four). The emir of Adrar also developed an amicable relationship with the Trarza leader ‘Aly wuld Muḥammad al-Ḥabṭb at the outset of an historic meeting in 1884. After several decades of wars and hostility between the rulers of the Trarza and the Adrar regions, they both reached an

⁴² Ibid, p. 546.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

entente based on a shared concern for regional security and prosperity. Of all the emirates of the *Trab al-Biḍān*, the Trarza had a ancient relationship with the French establishment in Ndar, centered on political discussions around the gum trade.⁴⁶ It is ironic that the two emirs met at an *Awlād Bū Sbā'* encampment in *Tīris*, the camel-grazing region north of Adrar. Indeed, as will be discussed shortly, the *Awlād Bū Sbā'* would soon become a menace to both the people of the Adrar and the Trarza in the last decade of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. Two years after the Adrar-Trarza meeting, the emir of Trarza was assassinated, which quickly put an end to the good relations between the two emirates.

The same year of this historic encounter between the two emirs in 1884, Spanish men began infiltrating further inland and south from the Atlantic coast. They settled permanently in the small peninsular tip of *Dākhla*, forming a port they would name *Villa Cisneros* (Map 2). Eventually they built a fort there, establishing relationships of trade and politics with the *Tikna* in *Wād Nūn*, the nomadic tribes of the *Rgaṛbāt*, and especially the coastal *Awlād Dlīm*. Two years later, a Spanish mission under the direction of Captain Cervera y Baviera met with the Emir of Adrar, *Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad*, just north of *Ijīl*. During this remarkable event, signaling the first time an emir of Adrar ever entered into contact with a European official, both parties exchanged "polite talk and

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 550.

⁴⁶ See Webb, *Desert Frontier*, and Gnokane, Adama. "La politique française sur la rive droite du Senegal: Le pays Maure (1817-1903). Thèse du Doctorat Troisième Cycle, Université de Paris I, 1986-7.

political gifts.” The outcome of this desert encounter was the emir’s agreement to sign a treaty of amicable relations with the Spanish.⁴⁷

At about the same time, the emir of Adrar signed a treaty with the leader of the Aīt Mūsa wa ‘Aly in the Wād Nūn, Daḥmān b. Bayrūk.⁴⁸ By then, the leader of Gulmīm had been appointed qā’id, or royal representative, by the Sultan of Morocco, inaugurating a formal albeit ephemeral relationship between the people of Wād Nūn and the Moroccan kingdom. The Sultan visited Gulmīm in person on this occasion in 1886.⁴⁹ As will be discussed shortly, these agreements provoked the flow of a new wave of traders from Wād Nūn (southern Morocco) to the oases of the Adrar and the Tagant where they expanded trading operations.

To secure the smooth operation of their long-distance commercial ventures, the Tikna, and the Aīt Mūsa wa ‘Aly in particular under Shaikh Bayruk and his successor and son Daḥmān, had a vested interest in creating tangible ties with emirs and formal agreements on customs’ duties (such as the *ghāfar* discussed in chapter three). One of the most common diplomatic tools was the political “gift” of women, especially

⁴⁷ AMAE, *Mémoire et Documents - Afrique, Sénégal et Dépendances* 18, 1890 - 1891, Tome 123. The French only found out about this secretive meeting six years after the event.

⁴⁸ See for example, interviews with Mohamed al-Amīn wuld Abdallah wuld Bayruk (06/05/98) and Bashir b. Muḥammad al-Ghazwi (07/21/98). I have never seen a copy of this treaty, although I have heard/seen references to it.

⁴⁹ Mustafā Na’īmī, “The Evolution of the Tekna Confederation caught between Coastal Commerce and Trans-Saharan Trade,” in *Tribe and State: Essays in Memory of David Montgomery Hart*, E. G. H. Joffe and C. R. Pennell, Eds. Wiesbaden: Middle East and North African Studies Press, 1987, pp. 213-238.

daughters, who were forcibly married-off to political allies and faraway rulers.⁵⁰ Daḥmān b. Bayrūk, following in the steps of his father, became a politically oriented serial polygamist, marrying and divorcing the daughters of relatives and important leaders while always keeping four official wives. Like the emir of Adrar, Daḥmān married a daughter of Bakār wuld Swayd Aḥmad, the powerful emir of the Tagant region who controlled access to markets such as Tishīt, as well as the ones located on his territory along the Senegal river. This type of diplomacy through the exchange of women has existed the world over since time immemorial. It is worth mentioning that the earliest examples of such diplomatic tactics between the western and northern Africa was the case of the daughter of the emir of Brakna, north of the Senegal River, who was given as wife to the Sultan of Morocco Mulay Ismaʿīl in the eighteenth century.⁵¹

The treaties and relationships negotiated between the Trarza and the Tikna guaranteed a certain security to regional commercial circulation. With the laws regulating internal affairs of the Adrar set in place, it so followed that the emir of peace's policies gave "a great boost to the prosperity of the country."⁵² This economic growth was also favored by several good years of bountiful rainfall. The most notable of these were 1885 (1303 hijri) *'ām aruwādīn* meaning 'the year of the continual and abundant rainfall,' 1888 (1306 hijri) *'ām anshāl*, or when the green pastures came, and two years

⁵⁰ Anthropologist Pierre Bonte has written extensively on marriage and politics in Mauritania. See, for instance, "Donneurs de femmes et preneurs d'hommes? Les Awlad Qaylan tribu de l'Adrar mauritanien," *L'Homme*, vol. 27, 102, pp. 54-79.

later, 1890, known as ‘the year of the great rain.’⁵³ In this period, the zones of date palm cultivation expanded considerably around the northern Adrar region as did the extension of small-scale oasis cereal farming under and around date trees. Moreover, “the herding of cows in the south and that of goats, sheep and camels in the whole of Adrar saw unprecedented development.”⁵⁴ The salt trade also reached a peak in this period, according to Ba’s information. Salt mining in Ijīl reached an extraction maximum between the years 1875-1891.⁵⁵ Millions of camels loaded with slabs of salt left Shingīti for southern markets, and the revenues of the Adrar emirate were so plentiful that it is said caravaners paid often more than their share in caravan tolls.⁵⁶ As Ba explains, trans-Saharan traders, of which the Awlād Bū Sbā’ and the Aīt Mūsa wa ‘Aly (Tikna) were chiefly represented, came in numerous caravans to the Adrar,

bringing their beautiful carpets, the loose haiks [Moroccan style woolen shawls] and other articles of southern Morocco, the cereals of Imirigli, the horses of the Sahel [read northern Sahel—the northern desert shore], sugar and the cloths from Senegal. They appreciated so much the freedom and the protection which they enjoyed that they paid without difficulty the “ghafar shadd” or the import tax.⁵⁷

According to Ba’s informants, long-distance traders paid a combination of the following import duties: one carpet per camel load, one haik per camel load, a *beṣa* per

⁵¹ See Abdel Wedoud oul Cheikh, “Nomadisme,” and De la Chapelle, “Histoire du Saharan Occidental,” p. 77, fn.4.

⁵² Ba, “Une Grande Figure de l’Adrar,” p.552.

⁵³ Ba, “Chronologie de l’Adrar,” p, 36-7 and “Calendrier historique Adrat et Tiris Zemour,” Ministère du Planning et des Statistiques,” Gouvernement de la République Islamique de Mauritanie.

⁵⁴ Ba, “Une Grande Figure de l’Adrar,” p. 551.

⁵⁵ Ibid. Given the absence of statistics and quantitative studies, this estimation must be taken advisedly. The oral evidence is however unequivocal about the prosperity in this period.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 552.

load of one hundred *beṣa*; two sugar cones for every hundred; one horse out of ten; twenty-five kilos (presumably the measure used then, in the pre-colonial period, was not the kilogram but the *mudd*) per camel load of cereal; twenty kilos of tobacco per camel load; one skin bag (*guerba*) of tar per camel load, and so forth.⁵⁸

All this prosperity through amicable trade relations does not mean that the emir of Adrar never had to confront domestic problems. On the contrary, as Ba reports, he met with the opposition of many unhappy warriors who disagreed with his conciliatory policies. More than once, during his twenty-year reign, Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad face mini-coups and attacks.⁵⁹ Indeed, it was at the hands of a disgruntled family member, the cousin he had expelled, that this political era came to a dramatic end. Nevertheless, it was Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad's reign of peace and security that a sizeable number of Wād Nūn traders of the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' moved south and came to settle in towns on trans-Saharan trails, starting in Shingīṭi and moving further south.

Southern Migration of the Wād Nūn Trade Network

The Awlād Bū Sbā' on the Prowl

In the late nineteenth century, the Awlād Dlīm, the Rgaībāt, the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā were considered the most powerful of the nomadic tribes circulating between Morocco and the Sahel regions of western Africa. With the exception of the

⁵⁸ Ibid, fn 2.

Tikna, they all engaged in a series of tribal wars in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The most serious and violent of these wars took place between the Rgaïbāt, the Awlād Bū Sbā and the Kunta tribes. In fact, a popular saying encapsulates the mutual hostility of these three groups, "to hate one another as a Rgaïbi and a Sbaï, or as a Rgaïbi and a Kunti."⁶⁰

The war between the Awlād Bū Sbā' and the Kunta, which erupted in the early 1860s, the real causes of which remain to be investigated, ushered in a troubled period. The Awlād Bū Sbā' would fight against all the major tribes in the Adrār, the Tagant and even the Trarza. Their war against the Kunta would continue into the first decade of the twentieth century (as discussed in the next chapter). During this period, the Awlād Bū Sbā' earned a reputation as offensive pirates and prowling pillagers. Because of their technological superiority achieved through their position as the main arms dealers in the area, the Awlād Bū Sbā' tended to succeed in all the confrontations they faced or provoked. It is difficult to generalize about these events. To be sure, the Awlād Bū Sbā' were not united in these belligerent moves. In fact, they were often divided, and loyal to leaders of their immediate tribal branches. The Awlād Bū Sbā,' or 'sons of the father lion,' formed a motley confederation lacking unity, leadership and a homeland. Some clans were more nomadic than others; some engaged in more militarily expeditions and

⁵⁹ See Ba, "Une Grande Figure de l'Adrar."

⁶⁰ Paul Marty, "Les Tribus de la Haute Mauritanie: Les Regueibat," *Bulletin du Comité de l'Afrique Française*, 1915, p.121.

piracy than others; some families were more scholarly than others; and some were most economically successful than others. But all the Awlād Bū Sbā' tended to be commercially inclined, or as one informant put it, "we are all traders."⁶¹

From the 1860s to the 1900s, excluding the 1870s-1880s period of relative peaceful prosperity, a number of Awlād Bū Sbā' families settled in the Adrar and further south. These Awlād Bū Sbā' joined others who had moved earlier such as the heroic Aḥmad wuld Al-Shaygar in Wadān, and the pious Ibrāhīm wuld al-Khalīfa in Shingīṭi (both discussed in chapter three). Other early Awlād Bū Sbā' residents in Shingīṭi included the Ahl A'uaīsi, the Ahl BuṢabūr, the Ahl Maslūhi and the Ahl Lazgham. To be sure, the Lazgham family, of the Awlād Bū Sbā' Awlad al-Baggār (sons of the cow) branch, were among the earliest Awlād Bū Sbā' in the Adrar.⁶² In the late 1870s or early 1880s, the Ahl Lazgham, the Ahl Bukhāry, Mulāy Ibrāhīm and the Gharrābi families were among the first to settle in Atār (some moving from Shingīṭi). At that time, Atar was a small oasis where the Adrar emirate tended to reside when it was not in *maḥalla* or 'on tour' (being a nomadic state, the emir tended to live under the tent moving from place to place collecting tribute and holding court). What is more, these families and possibly

⁶¹ Interview in Nouakchott Group Interview with Mulay Idrīs b. al-Bukhāry, Sīdi b. Isma'īl b. Abd al-Qudūs, Ḥamūdy b. 'Uthmān b. Aḥmad Sālik and Ḥamad al-Āmīn b. Aḥmad Sālak (06/29/98).

⁶² A family member, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Sīd Aḥmad Lazgham al-Baggāri, is mentioned in the Inheritance Document I, Appendix 6B.

others, purchased palm trees around Atar at this time, signaling a long-term investment and their desire to establish permanent residency.

There is no doubt that in developing relationships with the people of the Adrar and beyond, the Awlād Bū Sbā' "cashed-in" on their prestigious Sharifian origins. It bestowed upon them the very kind of reputation, or 'symbolic capital,' that many authors have identified as being a prerequisite to capital accumulation in nineteenth century western and northern Africa.⁶³ But their pirating activities at the end of the nineteenth century gave the Awlād Bū Sbā' such a different, almost contradictory, reputation that it was said that if one met a viper and a Awlād Bū Sbā', it was better to kill the Awlād Bū Sbā' for he was more dangerous than the viper.⁶⁴ For this reason, religious leaders such as Shaykh Mā' al-'Aynayn (which will be discussed briefly in the next chapter), claimed that even if the Awlād Bū Sbā' were really descendents of the Prophet, they no longer deserved to be because their violent conduct went against the way of Islam.⁶⁵

The history of the active military expeditions of Awlād Bū Sbā' in the last decades of the nineteenth century must not prevent the active commercial involvement of many Awlād Bū Sbā' in western African markets. In fact, I would suggest that the two activities converged quite successfully in the gun trade. The Awlād Bū Sbā' maintained

⁶³ Pascon, *La maison d'Illigh*. For a discussion of 'symbolic capital' see Pierre Boudieu, "Structures, Habitus, Power: basis for a Theory of Symbolic Power," in Dirks, Nicolas, Geoff Ely & Sherry Ortner (eds.). *Culture, Power and History: A Reader of Contemporary Social Theory*. Princeton University Press, 1994. See also Stewart & Stewart, *Islam and Social Order*.

⁶⁴ See proverb and discussion in chapter four.

⁶⁵ See discussion of Mā' al-'Aynayn's take on the Awlād Bū Sbā' in chapter four.

strong ties to Ndar and were becoming more present on the commercial scene of the Senegalese economy, a discussion we will turn to below.

Tikna Traders in Shingīfi, Timbuktu and Walāta

Alongside the Awlād Bū Sbā', a second wave of Tikna migrants came to settle along trans-Saharan trails in the second half of the nineteenth century. From genealogical calculations and oral data, it is clear that the largest settlements of Tikna traders coincided with the reign of Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad. My data on the family histories of these groups is more complete than for the Awlād Bū Sbā' in this period. This southern migration can be linked to good relations which prevailed between the Adrar and the Wād Nūn regions, symbolized by the signature of an agreement between the emir of Adrar and the chief of Gulmīm, Daḥman wuld Bayruk. The southern migrations might also have been provoked by an ecological factor: the severe drought in the last decades of the nineteenth century which afflicted the regions on the northern edge of the western Saharan, including the Wād Nūn.⁶⁶

The pioneers of this second wave of Tikna migrations, if one can call it that, were two remarkable traders named Ibrāhīm wuld Aḥmayda and Mḥaymad wuld 'Ābāba.⁶⁷

According to all the oral sources consulted, both Ibrāhīm and Mḥaymad came roughly at

⁶⁶ Miège, *Le Maroc et l'Europe*, vol. III.

the same time.⁶⁸ These traders are believed to have been the first to initiate the emir of Adrar, Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad, to the custom of drinking tea (discussed in the next section).

Mḥaymad wuld ‘Ābāba (b. al-Hāj Bil‘īd) rose to become one of the most prosperous traders in Shingīti with connections to Tishit, Walāta, Timbuktu and beyond. He was from the prominent Aīt Mūsa wa ‘Aly family of al-Hāj Bil‘īd, and his cousin, Bāshir, was a big trader in Timbuktu at the same time. According to his great granddaughter, there was a specific reason why he came to reside in Shingīti. Mḥaymad wuld ‘Ābāba decided to leave town after Gulmīm was attacked by raiders who ransacked his house and killed his cousin. His great, great grandson explains that, at the time, Mḥaymad wuld ‘Ābāba, “was eighteen years old and borrowed money from a prominent trader [in Gulmīm] to trade South. There he sold ostrich feathers...but went all the way to Dakar, where he got more for his load.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Interview in Shingīti with Ruqya mint Muḥammad Lamin o/ ‘Ababa (09/29/97); Interview in Atar with Khnātha mint Aḥmayda (with her two daughter Fatimatu and Mariam daughter of Muḥammad al-Farha) (10/5/97).

⁶⁸ See, for example, interview with Khnātha mint Aḥmayda in Atar (with her two daughter Fatimatu and Mariam daughter of Muḥammad al-Farha) (10/5/97). She is the great granddaughter of Ibrahim. That Ibrahim was the first Tikna to settle in Shingīti was confirmed by others. See, for example, interviews with Muḥammad al-Amīn wuld Swaylim in Nouakchott (6/18/97), Muhammad Lamine wuld ‘Ābāba in Shingīti (2/27/97); Interview in Nouakchott with Muḥammad al-Āmīn b. al-Swaylim (6/18/97) maintains that Ibrāhīm wuld Aḥmayda was the first Tikna to settle in Shingīti.

⁶⁹ Interview in Shingīti with Muḥammad al-Amīn b. ‘Ābāba (2/27/97). I wish to thank Muḥammad al-Amīn for his enthusiastic support of my research and for the all-nighter lesson of Tikna history!

As the story goes, Mḥaymad was the youngest on the caravan he joined from Gulmīm to Ndar. Somewhere on route, he purchased ostrich feathers and when he arrived, the price of feathers was very low on the Ndar market. His fellow caravaners had laughed at him along the way arguing that the demand for ostrich feathers was down. Rather than despair and sell at a loss, Mḥaymad decided to head further south to Dakar, then a small trading port (it became the largest city and capital of Senegal in the twentieth century). There, he received such a great price for his feathers that it quickly propelled him into the career of a successful long-distance caravaner. After a few successful caravan expeditions, he built a house in Shingīṭi with a large inner court where camel caravans came in directly to load and unload. ‘Ābāba had numerous concubines, but “officially” he married only one wife, a Tikna named Mariam mint Muḥammad b. Aḥmayda, the cousin of Ibrāhīm, whose profile we will turn to shortly.

Mariam mint Aḥmayda had the exceptional reputation of a business woman in her own right. Although she bore seven of Mḥaymad wuld ‘Ābāba’s children, she was widowed early (Mḥaymad died at fairly young age from a sudden illness on his way back from trading in Ndar). Because of her social position as a widow, she took over the management of her deceased husband’s business.⁷⁰ Moreover, she also played an active

⁷⁰ Khnātha mint Aḥmayda (with her two daughter Fatimatu and Mariam daughter of Muḥammad al-Farha) in *Atar* (10/5/97).

role in dealing with her father's inheritance.⁷¹ In a letter found in the Tishīt archives, Mariam mint Aḥmayda requested that Hammallah wuld Idda, a trader in Tishīt, reimburse a loan extended to him by her father.⁷² As is typical with correspondence, this document was not dated. But comparing it to the period when Hammallah, the father of Dādda wuld Iddā, was alive, the letter would date to the turn of the twentieth century.

Mariam's cousin, Ibrāhīm wuld Aḥmayda, was born in a trading family belonging to the trans-Saharan trade tradition. The Tikna trader mentioned in the inheritance case discussed in chapter five, Muḥammad b. Aḥmayda, who had credit relations with Baghlīl and al-Ḥāj 'Aly, could well have been Ibrāhīm's half brother who was buried in Shingīṭi.⁷³ Little is known about Ibrāhīm, except that he was a respected trader of Shingīṭi, whose reputation was well established in all the major markets of this region of western Africa. Like many Wād Nūn traders, Ibrāhīm wuld Aḥmayda practiced polygamy on trans-Saharan trails with a family in Gulmīm and a second one in Shingīṭi. In Shingīṭi he married a Tikna woman named Zaḥra mint Muḥammad Sālak wuld Aḥmayāda.⁷⁴ He had several children in Gulmīm and in Shingīṭi. Several became traders

⁷¹ Evidence of her active involvement in her father's affairs was found in the private papers of the Idda family in Tishīt.

⁷² Maktaba Dadda b. Īda (DI) in Tishīt, document 22 (photographed 4/27/97)

⁷³ Khnātha mint Aḥmayda (with her two daughter Fatimatu and Mariam daughter of Muḥammad al-Farha) in Atar (10/5/97). See Appendix 6B.

⁷⁴ She was the daughter of a Tikna trader who settled in Shingīṭi, after the arrival of Ibrāhīm.

like him, including two of his sons who resided in the town of Walāta (halfway between Tishīt and Timbuktu).

After Ibrāhīm died, his widow Zahra mint Muḥammad Sālak wuld Aḥmayāda married a second time to another prominent Tikna trader in town, Limān wuld Arwīli. As we saw in the previous chapter, Arwīli's son named 'Aly Fāl was established in Tishīt and he organized caravans to and from there in partnership with fellow Wād Nūn traders. The next Arwīli to travel to the area was 'Abdallah wuld Arwīli who came to Tishīt in 1852 to pocket his brother's inheritance. But there is every indication to suggest that their father, Arwīli, was also a caravaner, and at some point he must have traveled from Gulmīm to Ndar. According to one oral source, Arwīli's son Limām was born to a woman from the Awlād Damān, the emiral tribe of Trarza sometime in the mid-nineteenth century.

It is important to be reminded of the special alliance between the Trarza emirate and the Tikna established in the eighteenth century (see chapter four). Typical of the lifestyles of caravaners on the road, Limām's mother was probably "given" to Arwīli.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Limām's father could also be either 'Aly Fāl, 'Abdallah or another son of Arwīli. But this seems unlikely given that Limām did not bear their name, but was named directly son of Arwīli. After all, 'Aly Fāl did leave three sons in Tishīt at the time of his death. The dating would coincide well, given that Limām died an old man in his 80s in the approximately 1920. The few oral sources I collected contend, however, that he was the direct son of Arwīli, which means he was a brother of the two sons mentioned in Document 1 (Appendix 6A). Refer back to chapter five and Aishatu mint Mulay 'Aly's description of how caravaners arrange temporary marriages.

This woman had one son from Arwīli, and sons from several other unions with prestigious men, including Mulay Aḥmad wuld Mulay al-Bukhāry, a Shurfa of the Tagant region. Very little is remembered about Limām’s mother other than the fact that she was from the ruling Trarza tribe. She moved to the Tagant to the town of ‘Aqrayjīt, next to Tishīt, where she raised her sons.

In time, Limām became a caravaner in the family tradition. Eventually, he traveled east to the next big town, Walāta. There he married Sāviya mint Mulay ‘Aly, daughter of an important Tikna trader (she is the half-sister of Yazīd, discussed in the next two chapters). Together they had a daughter, but they soon divorced and Limām then moved to Shingīti in the 1880s where he settled permanently. It was at this point that he married Zaḥra mint Muḥammad Sālak wuld Aḥmayāda, the widow of Ibrāhīm wuld Aḥmayda mentioned above. Limām later purchased a Bambara concubine named Twaytu mint Shūba, mother of one of his daughters. He also married a second official wife from the Nmādi tribe.

By the time he “became a man” (*‘ād rājul*), Limām b. Arwīli developed the reputation of a notable among the Tikna of Shingīti.⁷⁶ He was a scholar of Islamic law,

⁷⁶ Interview in Nouakchott with Mulay ‘Umar wuld Mulay Ahmed and Aishatu mint Moulay ‘Aly (7/30/97).

and provided advice and mediation services to the Wād Nūn community of Shingīṭī which, by the late nineteenth century, was suddenly quite sizeable. As a relative explains, Limām wuld Arwīli was a “scholar and one in the right path of God...and his fellow Tikna paid tribute to him” (*‘ālim wa rashīd...awlād ‘amhu taqtū’ ‘alayhi*).⁷⁷ This was an unusual vocation for a Tikna, and could be explained by the fact that Limām wuld Arwīli was raised in a Shurfa family. Many Tikna would lodge in his home because of his reputation and perhaps because he had in-depth knowledge of the markets in this region of western Africa. Like the majority of Tiknas in the diaspora at this time, Limām’s main business was to purchase gold and slaves and sell these in Gulmīm.⁷⁸ Indirectly, he was engaged in the interregional salt trade since, like all long-distance traders in the area, he had to purchase salt bars to do business in the southern Sahelian markets. Mulay ‘Umār wuld Mulay Aḥmād, an elder who grew up in Shingīṭī and was the grandson of Twaytu mint Shūba from a later union, recounts the following story of the day Limām arrived on caravan to Walāta and announced that Mulay ‘Aly, his former father-in-law (discussed below), had died:

[when caravaners arrived] they knew someone there living in town. You know the ancestors⁷⁹ would go forward [*yamurrḡū legeddam*; meaning the caravaners would arrive first, leaving the caravan a ways out of town], they drink tea in the

⁷⁷ Interview in Nouakchott with Mulay ‘Umar wuld Mulay Ahmed and Aishatu mint Moulay ‘Aly (7/30/97).

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ *Al-nās al-awula*, meaning the people who came first, the ancestors. This is a Ḥasanīya expression to refer to the people in the old days.

morning and they go forward.⁸⁰ One day they came to town to see what they could buy and sell, and the people recognized Limān wuld Arwīli [a former resident of Walāta]. They asked him “What’s new in Shingīṭi”...He told them “Nothing but good [*mā tāri kun al-khair*]...Mulay ‘Aly is no longer alive [*mātla sālīm*].

Limām was bearing a letter from the son of Mulay ‘Aly, Yazīd who had traveled from Gulmīm to Shingīṭi to collect his father’s inheritance and draw-in his credit lines. Because of Limām’s connections in Walāta, he was able to collect his ex-brother-in-law’s inheritance, and by this symbolic gesture, he and Yazīd developed a very special bond.

A word must be said here about the Tikna presence in Walāta, a caravan stop which is halfway between Timbuktu and Tishīt.⁸¹ One of the earliest Tikna traders to trade in Walāta was from the Ambayrikāt family.⁸² Ambayrikāt’s son, Bashīr, later moved to Timbuktu where, in 1910, his son ‘Abd al-Wahāb was born. In the late nineteenth century, four prominent families were represented in Walāta: Mulay ‘Aly (who moved there in the 1870s had his daughter Sāvia and then retired in Shingīṭi; his sons born in Gulmīm, especially Yazīd, would continue the business out of Shingīṭi); the

⁸⁰ Aīshatu explains in the background that the people would enter town alone, ahead of the caravan to check the market and assess their commercial returns. Interview in Nouakchott with Mulay ‘Umar Wuld Mulay Ahmed and Aīshatu mint Mulay ‘Aly (7/30/97).

⁸¹ I went to Walāta twice and spent a total of three days there, just enough time to set up two interviews and pay two visits to the Library of Muḥammad Maḥmūd b. al-Shaykh Bubakar. See Cleaveland’s “Becoming Walāti,” for a history of this important center of learning and trade.

⁸² Ambayrikāt b. al-Ḥāj Muḥammad who is mentioned in Appendix 6B p. 11. Interviews in Timbuktu with ‘Aīsha mint Badi (4/25/98) and Mulay Baha (4/25/98).

Aḥmayda and the ‘Abābā families (represented by the sons of the first traders who settled in Shingīṭi). A cousin of the ‘Abābā family, Bashīr b. al-Hāj Bil‘īd, was also resided in Walāta before moving permanently to Timbuktu. There, he became a prominent landlord-broker for the Tikna, organizing caravans to and from Gulmīm and extending credit to Tikna partners. It was thanks to his help, that his nephew, Muḥammad b. Barka, later became one of the most prosperous Tikna traders in that town.

The itinerary of Muḥammad b. Barka was characteristic of most of the Wād Nūn traders who made their fortunes on trans-Saharan trails. Sometime in the 1880s, Muḥammad fled Gulmīm after an unintended homicide and came to join his uncle, Bashīr b. al-Hāj Bil‘īd working out of Timbuktu. His uncle extended him a loan and sent him off to Ndar, where he had some Tikna connections. He began trading between Ndar, Kayes (a trading post on the Senegal River), Walāta and Timbuktu. Eventually, he purchased a slave with whom he had a son, ‘Abd al-Qādar, born in Ndar in 1892.⁸³ At some point he traveled to Segou (in present-day Mali) where he had another son (Yaḥḍih).

Muḥammad b. Barka’s two brothers also migrated to western African markets, one settling in Walāta and the other in Timbuktu. Soon after the French conquered the city in 1894 (discussed in the next chapter), Muḥammad decided to reside permanently in

⁸³ Interview in Timbuktu with ‘Abās b. ‘Abd al-Qādar b. Muḥammad b. Barka (04/21/98); with Mulay Baha (04/5/98). Nothing is known of this enslaved woman other than the fact that she was “Kankossa”?

Timbuktu. From then onwards, he had several concubines and other sons were born. At the same time, he married a daughter of the Bayrūk family in Gulmīm, ‘Aishatu mint ‘Abidīn b. Bayrūk. He eventually built a large house in Gulmīm where he retired “a very generous man...[who] always gave money to everyone.”⁸⁴ His sons continued the family business between Gulmīm and Timbuktu, and in the first decades of the twentieth century one of his sons opened shop in Bamako (his grandson ‘Abbās was mayor of Timbuktu for close to twenty years from 1978-1987).⁸⁵

The history of the southern migration of the “Buhay” family follows the same patterns of other Tikna families in this period. Muḥammad b. Salam, Ibrāhīm b. Salam and “Buhāy” b. Salam came from Gulmīm in the late 1870s or early 1880s and settled in several markets on trans-Saharan trails. Muḥammad settled in Timbuktu, Ibrāhīm in Shingīṭi, and Buhay, the youngest, lived between the two places connecting Shingīṭi to Timbuktu as the main family caravaner.⁸⁶ As Tiknas belonging to the Wād Nūn network, these three brothers operated a tight-knit family business, while at the same time relying on the Wād Nūn traders in other markets in Gulmīm, Ndar and the *marṣas* along the Senegal River. They dispatched loaded caravans to one another according to what was in

⁸⁴ Interview in Gulmīm with Aisha mint Aḥmad ould Bachir ould Al Hajj Bul'id (7/26/99).

⁸⁵ For more information on the Barka family, especially for the twentieth century, see Aouad, “Réseaux marocains en Afrique sub-saharienne.

⁸⁶ Letters photographed from Muḥammad Sa‘īd b. Buhāy’s family records in Shingīṭi (03/97).

season, traveling to Gulmīm ever so often, and meeting every couple of years.⁸⁷

Moreover, they communicated via correspondence delivered by Buhay, or other caravaners, couriers, and nomads. Several of the letters sent by Muḥammad to his younger brother Ibrāhīm have been preserved by Buhāy's descendents.⁸⁸

As mentioned in the introduction, Saharan letters generally are not dated. It is possible, however, to guess the chronology of these sources if one knows the genealogies and live-histories of the traders mentioned within. Through correspondence, the brothers exchanged all kind of information, as the following letter illustrates.

Praise be to God and prayer to Muḥammad and those with him, and so: Peace from Muḥammad b. Sālam to his brother Ibrāhīm to whom I am obligated you and Muḥammad al-‘Abd [Tikna trader who later moves to Timbuktu and eventually his sons settled in Louga, Senegal]. After my salutations to him also I inform you oh! Ibrāhīm that I paid to al-Bashīr b. ‘Abaydallah his camel with 166 mithqal from the debts of Sīdi Muḥammad al-‘Arāb because he took something from them [the debts] from ‘Alāl b. Āb Idrīs and he added to him [he increased] from his own [account] because ‘Alāl did not settle all of his debts and he traveled to [gap!]. If he returns from his trip he wants to settle [gap] God willing and praise God, and he is fine [*la bās bihi*] and he sold all of his merchandise in ostrich feathers and the totality of feathers he purchased is 77 *raṭl*⁸⁹ of *ḍalīm* [male feathers] and 17 *raṭl* of *Tajkajkat* [the best quality, large feathers from the female ostrich] and I sold to him 21 *beṣa* of *mamqūsa* [woven and dyed in indigo] and one *beṣa* of the *matkhīmar* [?] and I inform you that the kind of *mamqūsa* and the kind of *filātur* [cotton imported by the French, white] are close in value here [meaning both are about the same price in Timbuktu] in

⁸⁷ Group interview with Muḥammad Sa‘īd b. Buhāy, Khadijatu mint Abdullah wuld ‘Aly, and Fatima mint Abd Rahman b. Buhāy in Shingīti (2/25/97; 03/02/97).

⁸⁸ Group interview with Muḥammad Sa‘īd b. Buhay, Khadijatu mint Abdullah wuld ‘Aly, and Fatima mint Abd Rahman b. Buhay in Shingīti (3/08/97)

⁸⁹ See chapter two p. 22. The official weight of an *raṭl* is about 445 grams. The *qintār* mentioned further is equal to 100 *raṭl*.

other words the preference between the two is small [meaning that the demand for both is about equal]. As for the holdup of Buhāy in Timbuktu [gap] on account that he is waiting for al-Nājim b. Ambayrikāt [son of Tikna from Walāta] and nothing else [? Gap] because al-Nājim forbade him from leaving [on him] until al-Nājim sells his merchandise and they are coming together in the same caravan [*mutarāfiqīn*] and also I inform you that I dispatched to you 6 mithqal except [minus] 2 carats with Muḥammad Sālam b. ‘Aly al-Najār, have you received them or no? And I inform you that Ibrāhīm b. Swaylim [discussed in chapter seven] is well except that it came to our ears that he took the credit from Khummu and that he requests it for four *qantār* [180 kilograms] of feathers ...[What is more] it came to us after seeing Ibrahim Swaylim that every day he spends uselessly (he squanders) one *beṣa* or more in his ? he and his family.⁹⁰

All kinds of information was exchanged between these two brothers. Muḥammad informed Ibrāhīm about the price of cloth in Timbuktu. He appraised him on various credit operations (the case of Ibrāhīm b. al-Swaylim who seemed deeply in debt) and the fact that their brother Buhāy was still held-up in Timbuktu because he was waiting for another trader, al-Nājim b. Ambayrikāt. Both were planning to travel from Timbuktu to Shingīti together on the same caravan. Al-Nājim was the brother of Bashīr the prominent Tikna trader in Timbuktu mentioned earlier. Both these brothers were cousins of Muḥammad b. Barka, the Tikna caravaner discussed above who started in Ndar before settling permanently in Timbuktu.

⁹⁰ Letter no. 1, photographed from Muḥammad Sa‘īd b. Buhāy’s family records in Shingīti (03/97).

In a second letter, Muḥammad b. Buhay wrote to his brother Ibrāhīm relaying similar market information. This excerpt discusses the current Timbuktu market prices in cloth, gold, slaves, ostrich feathers and the mudd of millet,

...and the exchange rate between the *beṣa* and gold is one-and-a-half mithqal, and between [the *beṣa*] and silver three [mithqal] and the price of the female slave in Timbuktu is between ten and thirteen *beṣa* and the feathers [ostrich] seven *beṣa* and the reason for it being seven *beṣa* is because it was bought with seven and it was five *beṣa* before and the *beṣa* from the rough cotton [*al-za'a*] is eight *mudd* of the *mudd* of Walāta.⁹¹

This same letter, written circa 1885, also contains a request for imports from northwestern Africa. Muḥammad places an order with his brother for “some good *shegga* [tough cotton imported from European sources] and white silk and silk of different colors and two *beṣa* of the red kind and some paper and two ‘sulfurs’ [*kabaraīt*] and leather shoes [*angangīr*; Moroccan leather slippers called ‘babouches’ in French].” These goods were imported through Wād Nūn, where they transited from markets further north such as the port of al-Swuīra and the city of Marrakech.

Besides basic market information, these Tikna traders also conveyed other types of news. For example, they included information about current caravan traffic and political events, from reported raiding activities on trans-Saharan trails by nomads, to activities against the French. For example, Muḥammad b. Buhay wrote:

⁹¹ Letter no. 2, photographed from Muḥammad Sa'īd b. Buhāy's family records in Shingṇi (03/97).

It came to our ears that the son of al-Ḥāj ‘Umar [Aḥmad al-Kabīr] had the audacity to confront the *Naṣāra* [the French] with many armies and that anyone who is with them, the *Naṣāra* that is, from the people of Fūta he will act treacherously towards them, and if the *khunt* [cloth] does not arrive in their direction, then he will be here requesting [it].⁹²

Political events, as always, dictated terms of trade and the wars of resistance to French colonial rule which were waged by Shaykhu Aḥmad al-Kabīr, Samori Turé, Mā’ al-‘Aynayn, and others, provided both opportunities for trade as well as an impediment to traffic. As the French pushed further inland in the late 1880s and early 1890s, more and more Wād Nūn traders were moving even further south, developing ties with French trading houses in Ndar and placing themselves strategically in French protected posts along the Senegal River.

Wād Nūn Traders in the Markets of Senegal and the Western Sudan

As seen in chapter four, the Tikna nation enjoyed a privileged relationship with the Trarza emirate since the eighteenth century. Tikna caravans which obligatorily crossed Trarza territory to trade in Senegal paid regularly to the emir, or his people, the annual *ghāfar* of 100 *beṣa* (or “pieces de guinéés” as the French called them). Conversely, the emir of Trarza sometimes borrowed money from Tikna traders. The amicable relations between the two nations endured in the late nineteenth century. This is clear from documentation found in the “correspondence indigènes” files of the French

⁹² Letter no. 2, photographed from Muḥammad Sa‘īd b. Buhāy’s family records in Shingŋi (03/97).

colonial archives depicting the credit operations that existed between Trarzas, Tiknas, and the trading community of Ndar. In 1878, the emir of Trarza took a loan of 106 *beṣa* (“guinéés”) from a Tikna caravan.⁹³ As with all such credit operations, the transaction was expressed in writing.

The purpose of this document is for all to recognize that Ely [emir of Trarza] owes to the Touknas [Tikna] 106 pieces of guinée that he will repay to them when he receives the payment of the dues that they owe him to enter in the land of the Trarzas. He has satisfied the Tikna chiefs [of the *akabār* caravan] Ibba and ould Embark [Muḥammad b. Barka?]. He will pay to whomever presents to him this paper what is due to him of the 106 pieces of guinée. Without this paper, he will pay nothing.⁹⁴

A year later, the debt was repaid “to the chief of the Tikna” by the French colonial government in St. Louis through the intermediary of a French trader located in Ndar named Gaspard Devès. What happened is that the trade representative of Devès located in Dagana, a trading post along the Senegal River, received the debt owed by the emir. In turn, Devès forwarded that same amount to the French in Ndar who then reimbursed the Tikna traders. As will be discussed briefly in the next chapter, the Devès family was deeply involved in Saharan trade and politics.

As we saw in chapter three, the Tikna had established a presence in the town of Ndar at least by the 1840s. It was then that Bayrūk had sent his ‘foreign minister’ to Ndar to negotiate with the French the establishment of a port near Gulmīm (see chapter three). Evidence strongly suggests that the Tikna community in St. Louis grew

⁹³ ANS, 9G2, Document 207: Lettre Cercle de Dagana et du Oualo à Gouverneur Sénégal (12 mars 1878). Translation; the original is missing.

⁹⁴ ANS, 9G2, Document 208, Reconnaissance d’Ely.

exponentially in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century. Muḥammad b. Barka, the trader discussed above, who might have been one of the two who extended the abovementioned loan to the emir, may have even acted as a political representative of the Ndar community of Tikna stranger-traders (the “chief of the Tikna” mentioned in the document).⁹⁵

In the late nineteenth century, several Tikna moved into the markets of the Western Sudan. By the late 1880s, the town of Nioro had come to replace Tishīt as the most active commercial center in the region. The descendents of the prestigious trader Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl, member of the Wād Nūn network involved in the inheritance of the four Tikna traders of Tishīt, migrated south to Nioro (Appendix 8). According to oral sources, Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl’s eldest son, Sid Aḥmad, was the first to settle there at the invitation of another Awlād Bū Sbā’ residing in the French colonial city of Ndar.⁹⁶ This prosperous Awlād Bū Sbā’, who had opened shop in Nioro several years prior, offered his house to Sid Aḥmad. So Sid Aḥmad moved permanently to Nioro, shifting his network southward and he soon sent for his brother Muḥammad to join him.

⁹⁵ There are no Tiknas currently living in Ndar.

⁹⁶ Interview in Ayūn al-Atrūs with Mulay Ibrāhīm b. Sid Aḥmad « Dāda » b. Muḥammad b. Sid Aḥmad b. al-Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl (05/19/98). For a history of the Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl family, refer to Trader Profile in Chapter 5 and Appendix 8.

Soon all the family trade connections were transferred from Tishīt to Nioro. This town had become the most important salt, slave and cattle market of Sahelian region from the late nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century. When the French conquered the town in 1891, Wolof and Ndar traders opened branches of their stores in Nioro. At the same time, several Tikna traders took residence in Nioro. It was mentioned in the previous chapter that the Tikna had a permanent landlord in that market in the late nineteenth century named Mūsa Djaye Traore. Soon, other Tikna shifted their networks to include Nioro. Such traders included al-Kūri b. al-Bashīr who also entertained a second (or perhaps third) family in Shingīti and was related to the Bayrūk clan.⁹⁷

The Awlād Bū Sbā', like the Tikna, had a long history of relationships and residence in the French port of Ndar. By at least the mid-nineteenth century, Awlād Bū Sbā' traders were settled there, starting with the Ahl Minahna, the group nomadizing northwest of the Senegal River who operated as intermediaries between the emir of Trarza and the French. As discussed in chapter four, the Awlād Bū Sbā' had had a long relationship with the commercial and political establishment in Ndar and in the Trarza region. By the 1870s, several Awlād Bū Sbā' traded out of Ndar where they performed as brokers between the French, Ndar trading houses and the Wād Nūn diaspora. Other Awlād Bū Sbā' belonging to the trade network were settled along the various *marsas*

⁹⁷ ANM, 4D-101 1895-1920 Successions de Nioro.

along the Senegal River. They traded and brokered between long-distance caravaners and the Ndar *traitants* exchanging European merchandise for gum arabic, leather, millet and other local products.

In 1878, the emir of Trarza ‘Aly b. Muḥammad Laḥbīb wrote to the Governor of Senegal informing him about the death of one of these Awlād Bū Sbā’ traders living near the *marṣa* of Bakel.⁹⁸ The relatives of this trader living in Ndar demanded their share of the inheritance of this Awlād Bū Sbā’ “who was very rich,” and the emir requested that the governor assist in recovering their dues.

Another interesting trading itinerary and southern migration is the case of ‘Aly b. ‘Amāra. He was a successful long-distance trader from the Smālīl group of Wād Nūn who had a strong affiliation to the Tikna, the tribe of his mother.⁹⁹ It is said that when he arrived in Shingīti to settle down in the 1880s, he made such an impression on Sīdī Muḥammad b. al-Ḥabuṭ, the main scholar of the town, that he was given a house. From there he organized caravans to Tishīt, Timbuktu, Nioro and other Sahelian markets. Numerous stories are preserved in the oral family history of ‘Aly b. ‘Amāra’s adventures across the Sahara. One remarkable event took place when ‘Aly b. ‘Amāra

was on his way back from Timbuktu on a *rafga* [interregional caravan going from the Sahara southwards to the Sahel] when he and his companions were surrounded by a gang of caravan raiders from the Rgaībāt, you know the

⁹⁸ ANS, Série 9G2 Correspondences Indigènes, Document 184: Lettre de l’emir du Trarza au Gouverneur (6 Septembre 1878).

⁹⁹ He would sign his name “‘Aly wuld ‘Amāra of the Smalil in name, of the Tikna in house and in origin.

Rgaïbāt, you know what they do [indeed the Rgaïbāt--a nomadic tribe of the Western Saharan-- are notorious pillagers and caravan raiders]. The leader proceeded to ask each man which tribe they were from...‘Aly said Smalīl [although he associated to the Tikna, the tribe of his mother], then he said [his family name] ‘Amāra, and the Rgaybāt was so impressed that he was an ‘Amara that he spared his merchandise...But after they had finished sorting out ‘Amāra's merchandise from the rest, only 15 % was left, in the end the whole caravan was spared. Since then, the Smalīl always identified themselves as ‘Amāra. He married into all tribes.¹⁰⁰

‘Aly b. ‘Amāra had numerous children mainly with enslaved women who became his concubines. When, in the early twentieth century, the French conquest of the Adrar was eminent, he decided to moved to the town of Banamba (present-day Mali) where he married a saintly woman, retired and eventually passed away.

Acquiring New Tastes: Green Tea and Guns

Green tea leaves, sugar and the tea drinking habit were imported into western Africa through European agency. Naturally, the British were largely responsible for this trend. A Berber poem, collected in early twentieth century southern Morocco, illustrates this point: “the tea of London has beauty and goodness.”¹⁰¹ Just as tea was a luxury good in England until the 1800s when it had become cheap and accessible, so was it a drink of the wealthy in the Sahara until the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁰² The tone of the poem becomes progressively cynical about tea, perceiving it as a product of colonial supremacy and oppression (“The Christian, he who knows well that you are the enemies,

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Muḥammad Wuld Ibrahim o/ Amara March 11, 1997.

¹⁰¹ Waterbury, *North for the Trade*, p. 79.

¹⁰² James Walvin, “A Taste of Empire, 1600-1800; Tea, Sugar and Tobacco Trade and Britain,” *History Today*, 47: 11-16, Jan '97.

he strikes you with his cannons loaded with charges of tea. He tricks you with his scales. The enemy strikes you in the stomach”). In light of the poet’s metaphor of ‘the canon loaded with charges of tea’, it is interesting to note that the most popular brand of Chinese green tea imported into western Africa was called “gunpowder.”

From their commercial stronghold in the northwestern port of al-Swaīra, the British, who often partnered with Maghribi Jewish traders, were actively engaged in the import-export business.¹⁰³ They imported all kinds of tea, but especially high quantities of low quality “gunpowder” tea that was transported to the markets of the western African hinterland. Sugar, imported alongside the tea tins, also became a popular trade good in the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sugar was sold in cones (*galūb* or ‘hearts’) of various sizes ranging from 500 grams to five kilos. On the British side, the rapid increase of tea imports was directly connected to the increase in sugar plantation production from the Americas. Little is known about tea and sugar importations into Africa—a trade which closed the Atlantic trade triangle—and how the sweet tea tradition was adopted and adapted to western African culinary traditions. To be sure, by the late nineteenth century, western Africans living in and around the western Sahara, “had become accustomed to acquiring and enjoying imported British goods. Those goods were, by and large, part of that remarkably complex economic exchange which in turn sustained the British appetite for imported pleasures of their own.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ For a discussion of the commercial scene in nineteenth century al-Swuīra see Schroeder. *The Merchants of Essaouira*.

¹⁰⁴ Walvin, “A Taste of Empire.” Walvin argues this for the late 18th c. which might be true for northwestern Africa, but it would take another hundred years for British goods to “swamp” western African markets as planned.

Oral sources in Mauritania confirm that the first traders to convert western Africans of this region to the tea drinking habit were the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā'. Both stranger-trader groups still wrangle over this claim to fame. But whatever the verdict may be, there is no doubt that both groups were active tea and sugar traders, and cross-cultural innovators in this regard. According to one source, the Awlād Bū Sbā' were the first to bring tea to Shingīti, but the Tikna were the ones to spread the daily tea drinking ritual among the Biḍān.¹⁰⁵ In his travelogue, Léopold Panet first mentions drinking tea with the Jewish Moroccan trader whom he joined in a caravan.¹⁰⁶ In Shingīti, he enjoyed a nice cup-of-tea with an Awlād Bū Sbā' trader residing in Shingīti named 'Abd al-Sālam. During this occasion, Panet remarked the imported objects in this stranger-trader's home. These included "a wooden coffer, a silver platter on which there were teacups and mismatched saucers; one could notice other objects, including some with labels, from the balm jar of perfume to the pot of ointment from the druggist; in the middle was shining a silver teapot."¹⁰⁷ It would seem that the Awlād Bū Sbā' were the main international traders of Shingīti at that time, and most likely the first to import tea to town, albeit for personal consumption. In the oral histories of the Awlād Bū Sbā', two traders are said to have been the first to bring tea to Adrar: Salih wuld Jilāli and Mulay

¹⁰⁵ Interview in Shingīti with Abdarraḥmān wuld Muhammad al-Ḥanṣhi (2/29/97).

¹⁰⁶ Panet, p. 45.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 67.

Aḥmad b. Shaygar.¹⁰⁸ Nothing, however, is remembered about how these two Awlād Bū Sbā ' brought the tea or when.

Other, mainly Tikna, oral sources maintain that it was during the peaceful reign of Aḥmad b. Mḥammad that an emir first acquired the habit of drinking tea through Tikna traders. As Khnātha mint Aḥmayda explains,

when they [the Tikna] came, they bought sugar and tea. In those times the people did not know it, they did not know anything. Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad wuld Aḥmad 'Aida that time he came here [meaning Shingīṭi] he came and he saluted them and when they had saluted him, they made tea for him. He really enjoyed it like nothing else. The next day, [the emir] send an envoy to them [to Ibrāhīm wuld Aḥmayda and Mhaymad wuld 'Abābā] asking for more tea. The envoy brought with him a wooden bowl (*gdeḥa*) and said to them "this *gdeḥa* fill it with that medicine which you served yesterday." They [the Tikna] realized that they [the people of the emir] would never be able to make tea with that [because they lacked the utensils and know how] and so they sent with him the *tāblā* [small round metal, often brass, platter or small table on which the tea is prepared and served], the glasses, the *maghrij* [tea kettle] and someone to show them how to make the tea. They told them that they could not make tea in those wooden bowls!¹⁰⁹

The emir of Adrar's first taste of tea, an event which took place in the 1870s or early 1880s, was a significant chapter in the history of what would become Mauritania. But to be sure, it was not until the first two decades of the twentieth century that drinking

¹⁰⁸ Interview in Nouakchott with Fift mint Fuṭṭi (06/30/98); Interview in Marrakech with al-Bāqir b. Mulay 'Aly (02/08/98).

¹⁰⁹ Interview in Atar with Khnatha mint Aḥmayda (with her two daughter Fatimatu and Mariam daughter of Muḥammad al-Farha) (10/5/97). For other versions of the same oral tradition see: Interview in Nouakchott with Mulay Umar Wuld Moulay Ahmed and Aishatou mint Moulay Ely (7/30/97) who adds that the Tikna told the emir that "you don't drink tea in the *gdeḥan* [plural of *gdeḥa*] like milk!"; Interview in Shingīṭi with Abdarraḥmān wuld Muhammad al-Ḥanṣhi (2/29/97) who confirms that Mhaymad wuld 'Abābā was involved in the emir of Adrar's first taste of tea.

shot glasses of sweet tea became a popular pastime for the majority of western Africans. Shingīti elder ‘Abdarrahmān b. Muḥammad al-Ḥanshi recalls that when he was a child, back in the 1920s, drinking tea was a luxury activity reserved for only four or five households in town.¹¹⁰ A select group of rich traders and prominent scholars of Shingīti would take turns preparing tea for one another in the evening; a special tea time they used to call “*al-dhābī*” meaning ‘the golden one.’¹¹¹ In times of scarcity, those few preparing tea used to try to make as little noise as possible when breaking the sugar cone into usable pieces so as not to attract attention. Those who, as the sound of the hammering of a sugar cone, showed up to enjoy a glass of tea at their neighbor’s expense, were called *sakāk* (from the word ‘to break sugar’). As tea became a part of daily consumption in western Africa, many poets and scholars devoted verses and treatises to the subject.¹¹² It became such an addictive consumable that scholars began debating whether drinking tea was a lawful activity from the Islamic point of view.¹¹³

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Europeans also began acquiring new tastes. One of the most significant international market shifts in western African history, besides the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, was the significant drop in the European demand for gum arabic from western Africa. After a mid-century boom in the gum

¹¹⁰ Interview in Shingīti with ‘Abdarrahmān wuld Muhammad al-Ḥanshi (2/29/97).

¹¹¹ Ibid. ‘Abdarrahmān did not know the reason the evening tea was once called the golden one. Perhaps it had something to do with the fact that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, tea was as rare or as valued as gold.

¹¹² See for instance the book of tea by the famous scholar of Shingīti, Sidi Muḥammad wuld Habbū containing regulations on how tea should be prepared and drunk and the various legal opinions or *fatāwā* written on the subject by local ‘ulāma (MH).

exports from the Senegal River markets, gum prices began dropping steadily, along with exports. This is due in large part to the increase in gum exports after 1849 from the Kordofan region of the British Sudan, and it was to a lesser extent linked to the discovery of a synthetic substitute in the 1870s.¹¹⁴ At the same time, the cultivation for export of a new cash crop, peanuts, replaced gum exports, changing immeasurably the face of the Senegalese economy. It is worth noting that as peanut production increased, the nuts came to figure more regularly on the camel loads of both interregional and long-distance caravans.

From the 1860s onwards, ostrich feathers suddenly became a more valuable trade item with Europeans. These large, graceful feathers were traded with Europeans who used them as fancy plumes, or ink pens, as well as decorations on ladies' hats. But in the mid-nineteenth century, the British developed a new use for the feathers, which came to adorn the ceremonial hats of the Royal Guard. Consequently, there was a dramatic increase in the demand for this product, as discussed in chapter three. According to Miège's estimates, which are based on European trade records from Moroccan ports, namely al-Swaïra (Mogador), ostrich feather exports reached a peak between 1863 and 1871.¹¹⁵ At some point, Miège argues, ostrich feather loads accounted for half of all the trade coming from western Africa.¹¹⁶ This trade item was also exchanged in other North African ports such as Tripoli and Alexandria. By the 1880s, South African feathers from

¹¹³ Mauritanian and Moroccan scholars wrote profusely on the virtues and the sinfulness of the tea drinking habit.

¹¹⁴ See discussion of gum arabic in Chapter three.

¹¹⁵ Miège, "Le Commerce Trans-Saharien au XIXe siècle," p. 100.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 102.

farm-raised ostriches successfully competed on the international market. By then, the ostrich population in western Africa had been disseminated through the barrel of the gun.

Faced with the expansion of European imports entering western African via the trans-Saharan trade, itinerant traders became increasingly involved in distributing these goods (mainly Asia imported cotton fabrics, sugar, tea, utensils) playing the comparative advantage of key ports (Ndar, Al-Swaīra, Banjul). Cotton cloth imported cheaply from South Asia was perhaps the most represented imported good on caravans going north and south. It was the basis of clothing of western African men and women. In fact, with more and more Africans converting to Islam in the second half of the nineteenth century, wearing cloaks, long loose pants, “boubous,” headscarves, turbans, and drapes were increasingly popular among Muslims. The demand for imported cotton cloth industrially woven by Europeans became a substitute for locally produced cotton. The guinée cloth was the most important consumer good in the second half of the nineteenth century. The same can be said about the demand for Moroccan luxury items, such as the embroidered haiks, babouche slippers and all kinds of Islamic supplies (Qurans, chaplets, prayers rugs) which were in high demand by the late nineteenth century in Senegal and the western Sudan.

British commerce on the north African Atlantic coast cornered a considerable size of the import market. The case of Donald Mackenzie, the English trader who entered into relations with the Bayrūk sons (Muḥammad, and the later Laḥbīb) in the early 1870s, is particularly remarkable. After strengthening his contacts in the western Sahara, Mackenzie returned to Britain to produce a project proposal to “flood the Sahara” with

British merchandise.¹¹⁷ In his report, Mackenzie estimated that the volume of the trade coming from western African markets to Morocco was equal to four million British Sterling Pounds in 1871.¹¹⁸ According to the much lower calculations of the French Consul in Mogador (al-Swaïra), “in 1874 or 1875 the total value of Sudan products exported to the northern ports amounted to nearly 13 million francs (511,980 British pounds), two-thirds of which still went through the markets of Tunis and Morocco.”¹¹⁹ Mackenzie quickly formed the North West African Company, and returned to the coast where he established a trading post in Tarfaya (Cap Juby) just west of the Wād Nūn region. At the same time, he opened company stores in Las Palmas and Great Canary on the Canary Islands. By then, the Spanish Islands formed a major trading hub for European-African exchange.¹²⁰ But his plan to flood the Sahara never materialized, and his trading post on the western edges of the Wād Nūn was eventually abandoned along with Mackenzie’s grand scheme.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, firearms and ammunition were among the most coveted trade items in western Sahara. The history of the gun trade, with its disastrous consequences in human suffering and violence, is one of the most neglected subjects in African history. Because of their access to European maritime markets on the

¹¹⁷ He would later publish a book on the subject. See Donald A. Mackenzie. *The Flooding of The Sahara: An Account of The Proposed Plan For Opening Central Africa to Commerce and Civilization from the North-West Coast, with a Description Of Soudan and Western Sahara, and Notes of Ancient Manuscripts*. London: S. Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1877.

¹¹⁸ A. Adu Boahen, *Britain, the Sahara and the Western Sudan* (Oxford, 1964), p. 131.

¹¹⁹ Newbury, “North African,” p. 240, fn 28.

¹²⁰ Camille Douls, “Cinq mois chez les maures nomads du Sahara Occidental.” *Tour du Monde*, Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1888, premier semestre, p. 178. All the main European powers had trading houses in the Spanish Canary Islands. Lancas and other boats linked the continent to the island and active trading

Atlantic coast, namely the ports of al-Swuīra and Ndar, the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' were among the first and biggest arms dealers on trans-Saharan trails between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As testified by the Spanish adventurer who traveled to the Wād Nūn in the 1860s cited in chapter three, the Tikna were typically armed with guns purchased in Ndar. One of De la Chapelle's informants explains, "we consider it a dishonor not to purchase a firearm when one is able."¹²¹ This conversation took place in the 1920s by which time guns had been a tradition for over a century.¹²² By the end of the nineteenth century, the ceremonial *barudiya* or gunpowder party (from *barud* meaning gunpowder; the French termed this tradition *fantasia*), was an old custom in the Wād Nūn, as well as in the Adrar emirate further south. This was a traditional performance for celebrations whereby horse riders would dress up in gear, re-enact war scenes and fire shots in the air.

As a result of the active trans-Saharan arms trade, western Africa underwent what Joseph Smaldone described as a "revolution in warfare."¹²³ What Smaldone argues for the eastern branches of trans-Saharan trade also holds true for the western side, namely that the importation of firearms via the northern routes became extremely important at the end of the nineteenth century as "munitions became for the first time important items in

activity took place on the coasts of the Sahara desert. More information is needed about this important commercial hub.

¹²¹ De la Chappelle, "Les Teknas," p. 794.

¹²² Refer back to the example cited in chapter three of Sidi Hamet's caravan in the 1810s where caravaners were armed with muskets.

¹²³ Joseph P. Smaldone, "The Firearms trade in Central Sudan." In *Aspects of West African Islam*, Daniel F. McCall & Nromal R. Bennett, eds. Boston: Boston University Papers on Africa, 1971.

the Saharan trade."¹²⁴ A strong gun-bearing culture developed in and around the Saharan regions of western Africa; a culture which was more pervasive and enduring than that of the western Sudanic regions of Futa Jallon and southwestern Mali. When the French conquest was drawing nearer at the turn of the century, acquiring guns became most every Saharan family's objective. The fact that the Biḍān had direct access to firearms and ammunition, through trading relations with stranger-traders such as the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā', explains in part why they successfully resisted French conquest for so long.¹²⁵

Although the Tikna were actively engaged in trading guns, it was their fellow Saharans, the Awlād Bū Sbā', who were the most reputed arms dealers in the region of western Africa covered in this dissertation. As the illustration of Muḥammad Sālem b. 'Umār in Governor Faidherbe's late nineteenth century colonial history of Senegal clearly conveys, the Awlād Bū Sbā' traders were professional users and traders of firearms (See Appendix 5: Illustration of an Awlād Bū Sbā' with a rifle). This fact is amply confirmed in the oral sources of Mauritania where Awlād Bū Sbā' still carry the reputation as gun dealers. One of the earliest and most popular firearms in the late nineteenth century was the 1874 single shotgun locally known as the *warwar*. Then and

¹²⁴ Ibid. p. 160. Although Smaldone argues that most of these arms traveled along the Cyrenaica-Wadai route of north-central West Africa, he recognizes that munitions were also imported from Morocco and Tunisia which Europeans had little control over (p. 158).

¹²⁵ The last pockets of resistance to French colonial rule in colonial Mauritania and colonial southern Morocco were not quelled until the 1930s, see chapter eight.

until this day, the Awlād Bū Sbā' became associated in the imagination of Mauritians as the bearers of the fast-firing rifle (*rumbiyāt*, or *fusil à tir-rapide*).

Ironically, it was through French sources that western Africans first began acquiring firearms from the early nineteenth century onwards. The Bordelais trading company Maurel & Prom, one of the oldest such import-export houses established in Ndar, “had become the largest and most powerful” by the mid-nineteenth century.¹²⁶ Although the historian of the Maurel & Prom Company, Leland Barrows, does not mention the active participation of this French trading company in the gun trade, oral sources suggest that this was the case.¹²⁷ When Camille Douls, the intrepid French adventurer, crossed the northern Sahara in 1887 disguised as a desert trader (and was seriously tortured by the Awlād Dīm in the process), most every group he met carried guns “coming from Senegal.”¹²⁸

Eventually Awlād Bū Sbā' began acquiring the *rumbiyat* or four-shot rifle 1887 model. At this point, trans-Saharan traders shifted their trading itineraries further north to acquire newer models from other Europeans on the northern coast of the Atlantic. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, these European gun importers included the Spanish who had geo-political reasons for arming Saharans who could better fight the French encroachment further south. Then came German arms dealers who, often in collaboration with Spanish traders, circulated in and out of the active trading ports of the Canary

¹²⁶ Leland Barrows, “General Faïdberbe, the Maurel and Prom Company and French Expansion in Senegal,” Doctoral Dissertation, UCLA 1974, p. 116.

¹²⁷ Interviews with Awlād Bū Sbā'.

¹²⁸ Douls, p. 211.

Islands. There is clear evidence that the Germans were the main gun suppliers to Mā' al-
'Aynayn, the charismatic leader of a holy war against the French (discussed briefly in
chapter seven). But apparently, French merchants continued supplying guns and
ammunition in the late nineteenth century, beyond the purview of the colonial
administration of Senegal. The Awlād Bū Sbā' were their biggest clients. The most
famous of these traders in historical memory is an Awlād Bū Sbā' named Muḥammad
Sālam b. 'Abdarraḥmān b. Bu'āngar (see chapter eight).¹²⁹ It is said that Bu'ānga would
smuggle guns out of St. Louis through the anal orifices of camels, and then sell them in
the regions of Trarza and beyond.¹³⁰ His reputation as the greatest firearms trader of
what became Mauritania still lives on in the oral traditions and several poems have been
penned in his honor.

During the course of the nineteenth century, as mentioned throughout this
dissertation, the slave trade across the Sahara increased significantly. A combination of
factors explains this trend, including the end of the Atlantic slave trade, the general drop
in slave prices, the creeping European control of African commerce, the rise of
international trade, and political and social mobilizations through Islamic and resistance
movements. Although the eastern branches of trans-Saharan slave trafficking were
perhaps predominant, the western Saharan trade routes linking western African markets
to Morocco were also significant. This is clear from both the oral and written records of

¹²⁹ Na 'Imi, Muṣṭāfa (ed. & trans.), *Les Principales Préoccupations des Rgaybat*, p. 126. See Appendix 9
for a letter concerning Bu'ānga.

Mauritania, Mali, Senegal and southern Morocco. According to the European consular and commercial records studied by Miège, the slave trade from western Africa into Morocco continued at least until the late 1880s.¹³¹ From McDougall's research, which is confirmed by my data, slaves whether snatched or purchased from the western Sudan, were still reaching the northwestern market of Gulmīm in the 1960s. The effect of colonial rule, and the European attempts to curtail the slave trade, had a significant impact on the volume of children, women and men being sold off into slavery and exported northward bound on trans-Saharan trails.

In this period, the importance of markets shifted more dramatically towards the escales or trading outposts along the Senegal River. Already, in the mid-nineteenth century, at the beginning of this study, there was a shift in caravan traffic towards Ndar and the Senegal River from where caravaners directed their commerce further south.¹³² Trading patterns along the Senegal River had been well established since before the nineteenth century, with slaves and gum arabic being the key trade goods.¹³³ French trading companies hitherto located in Ndar exclusively, began opening branches in towns such as Podor (known to Ḥasanīya speakers as *Duera* meaning little house) and Dagana to Ndar. These permanent establishments of import-export houses exchanged gum arabic, dates, millet, other cereals, leathers, salt and some gold for European and Asian-

¹³⁰ Interview with Katī mint al-Shaygar (06/18/98). I heard this story from one source only, but she is a member of the family.

¹³¹ *Le Maroc et l'Europe*, (III, 361, n). See also Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.

¹³² Panet, p. 64. Who notes that the relationship between Shingṭi and Tishṭ and St. Louis of Senegal was very recent. Before, all imports came via the Wād Nūn from the North.

manufactured goods, mainly cotton indigo-dyed *beṣa* or “guinéés.” A host of other goods, often listed in the French sources as “pacotilles” (third-rate merchandise) were also exchanged including paper, flints and poor quality firearms, receptacles, locks, mirrors, others types of imported cloth, blankets, coffers, matches and other miscellanies. Traveling on camelback to the markets of the interior, these trade items were regularly available until commercial traffic was disrupted in the late nineteenth century.

Zamān al-Ṣība: The End of a Peaceful Era

The death of Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad, and accession of his successor and nephew Aḥmad wuld Muḥammad wuld 'Aīda, marked a dramatic shift in the political climate of the region.¹³⁴ Given the geo-political weight of the Adrar for the entire western Saharan zone--as the necessary passageway of trans-Saharan traffic and caravans heading south to the Senegal River and the Malian regions-- this event had a significant impact on the conduct of long-distance trade. In fact the new emir was so very unpopular due to his bluntness and ruthless greed, that the year 1307 (1890 A.D.) after he came to power is known in the oral chronology of the people of the Adrar as *'ām ighadrat Aḥmād wuld M'ḥammad*, or the year of the betrayals to Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad. This year was so labeled because the successor to the emir of the peace betrayed his uncle's pacific policy of negotiation and conciliation so appreciated by the people of the Adrar and beyond.

¹³³ See Curtin, *Economic Change*; James Searing, *West Africa Slavery and Atlantic Commerce: The Senegal River Valley, 1700-1860*, CUP: 1993; Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers*; Webb, *Desert Frontier*; and Taylor, “Of Disciples and Sultans.”

Trouble in the Emirates

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, the land between Senegal and Morocco was the theatre of numerous wars between the regional emirates of Adrar, Tagant, Trarza and Brakna, as well as internal rivalries between *qabā'il* within and across regions. These rivalries, raids and patrimonial feuds had damaging effects on regional communications, and were especially detrimental to the flow of trade. This general instability sometimes referred to by local historians as *zamān aṣība*, or 'the time of chaos,' was concomitant with the intensification of European infiltration into the West African hinterland.¹³⁵

Conflict immediately erupted between the new emir of Adrar, Aḥmad wuld Sid Aḥmad wuld 'Aīda, and Bākār wuld Swayd Aḥmad, the emir of Tagant. In 1893, Bakār sent a large *haraka*, or camel cavalry, to attack the people of north, probably to avenge the death of his nephew, the former emir. In the course of the attack, Bakār's forces fell upon the town of Shingīṭi. As it often occurred during civil unrest, the stranger-traders in town were persecuted in the process. Consequently, the house of the wealthiest Tikna in Shingīṭi at the time, 'Abdallah, the eldest son of Mhāymad wuld 'Abābā, was seriously ransacked. The plundering against the Tikna community was so devastating, that the leader of Gulmīm, Dāhmān wuld Bayrūk who was immediately informed of the attack,

¹³⁴ See Bonte, "Tribus, factions et état."

¹³⁵ See *Tārīkh Adrār*, Abd al-Wadūd wuld Aḥmad Mawlūd wuld Intāha, for instance.

sent a group of armed men in retaliation.¹³⁶ As we will see in the next chapter, a similar incident occurred in 1908, when Shingīṭi was pillaged by the Rgaībāt who targeted the home of another Tikna trader Yazīd wuld Mulay ‘Aly. In so doing, they ransacked the houses of the most prosperous traders in the town, namely the Tikna from whom they stole approximately 500 guinées. These ruinous attacks on the Wād Nūn stranger-traders were among the chief reasons why numerous Tikna would side with the French in the conquest of the Adrar (discussed in the next chapter).

Between the years 1891-1892, the chronicles of Walāta and Na'ma list twenty-four tribal wars and an equal number of *ghazzi* or pillaging raids for the Hawḍ and Tagant regions alone.¹³⁷ The occurrence of such raids was distinctly higher than in previous years. It must be linked to the dramatic assassination of Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad and the end of his peaceful reign. The increased competition over resources, availability of firearms and ensuing violence, are symptomatic of rising levels of what the French would term "insecurity;" a situation they underscored to justify their 'pacification' mission. It is important to be reminded that banditry was the *modus operandi* of certain Saharan tribes,¹³⁸ namely the *hasāni*, who essentially lived on the spoils of pillage, extortion of random tolls, fees for protection and the forced collection of tribute. The experience of

¹³⁶ Interviews in Nouakchott with Khadijatou mint Khatari wuld ‘Abāba (5/28/97, 05/21/98); Mohamed al-Amīn wuld Abdallah wuld Bayruk (06/05/98); Interviews in Gulmīm with Bedda; with Bachir ould Ahmad Saalak ould Dahman (7/25/99). Although this is an important historical event, I was unable to obtain many details of what ensued when Dahmān sent his men. It could well be that it was as a result of this conflict that he was offered Bakār’s daughter (see discussion above).

¹³⁷ Marty, "Les Chroniques de Oualata et de Néma," pp. 385-7.

the Idaw'aly pilgrims from Shingīti, recorded in the *Journal de Route des Adrariens*, is a good indication of the dangers involved in traveling across the Sahara in these troubled times.¹³⁹

In the year 1896, many wars erupted in the Adrar according to chronicler 'Abd al-Wadūd b. Aḥmad Mawlūd.¹⁴⁰ These were between the people of the emirate, the Smācide *zwāya* tribe who dominated the town of Atār, and others. In 1897, the Awlād Bū Sbā' became involved in the internal politics of the emirate when a feud erupted between Aḥmad wuld Sid Aḥmad 'Aīda and his paternal cousins. The emir sought refuge in the house of Mulay Ibrāhīm b. Al-Bukhāry, an Awlād Bū Sbā' trader who had recently settled in Atar. Eventually, the unpopular emir sought the support of other 'people of the northern Sahel' besides the Awlād Bū Sbā', such as the Rgaībāt and the Awlād Dlīm. The irony of this, as the chronicler of Adrar Abd al-Wadūd b. Aḥmad Mawlūd b. Intaha explains, is that the northern nomads were traditional enemies of the emirate of Adrar. Intaha used a proverb to illustrate this dangerous situation: "If he raises goats in a land full of lions, when he sleeps the lions will raise the goats in his place."¹⁴¹ These verses were clearly referring to 'sons of the father lion,' the Awlād Bū Sbā'. For indeed, shortly after this episode, a large group of armed Awlād Bū Sbā', returning from having fought a

¹³⁸ A reminder that I use the term tribe as a translation of the word *qabīla* (plur. *qaba'il*).

¹³⁹ Coyne.

¹⁴⁰ Abd al-Wadūd b. Aḥmad Mawlūd b. Intaha, *Tārīkh Adrār*, p. 67.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 69.

war in the Inshīri region (see Map 3), fell back on the *maḥalla* of the emir of Adrar. By the end of this combat, which took place in the early months of 1898, the emir Aḥmad b. Mukhtār b. ‘Aīda had been killed at the hands of the Awlād Bū Sbā’. The following year, the Awlād Bū Sbā’ continued their attacks, taking on the Awlād Dlīm and the ‘Arūssiyīn (their old allies) before agreeing to a truce in 1899. They then engaged in a second war with the Kunta, and a tremendous war with the Rgaībāt where they were finally defeated and lost over one hundred men.

In the last years of the 1890s and the first of the 1900s, the Adrar was devastated. Numerous wars were waged between the Rgaībāt, the Awlād Ghaylān, the emiral group and other tribes in the area. There were so many *ghazzi*, or raiding attacks, that the people of Adrar called these years “*Ghazzi ghawātha*” or ‘the heavy rain of raids.’ There was tremendous scarcity compounded by a dry spell which wiped out many herds of camel. According to the chronicler of Adrar,

That year [1899] Muḥammad Sīdina wuld Barrū [who was qāḍī of Atar] said that the *beṣa* is red in the town and it is purchased with the dates of the destitute [poor quality dates] and the date pits [usually eaten by] of the slaves and they fight with the goats to eat the pits and they say too that the *nifga* [one fourth of a mudd of Atar] was worth ten times more than in previous years...and that year numerous camels met their death because of the scarcity [*al-shidda*] and the scabies [*al-garru*: skin disease affecting camels which is cured by spreading tar on the wounds] and that is the reason for the displacement of camels [to the Tiris]. This situation of scarcity continued and the Rgaībāt, great camel herders and nomads, redoubled their raids on the town dwellers of the Adrar. There had never been so many guns in the area, recalls ‘Abd al-Wadūd.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Ibid, p. 74.

Trouble in the Wād Nūn

In the late 1880s, the chief of Gulmīm, Daḥmān b. Bayrūk, died and with him a long period of political stability and prosperity in the Wād Nūn. The end of his reign also announced a series feudal wars of succession which lasted into the twentieth century. The son who succeeded him, ‘Aly Fāl b. Daḥmān, was brutally murdered in broad daylight in the central Gulmīm market by three of his paternal cousins.¹⁴³ Eventually, after the short reign of another son, it was ‘Abidīn b. Daḥman b. Bayrūk who succeeded in holding on to the reins of power in Gulmīm as leader of the Aīt Mūsa wa ‘Aly Tikna. ‘Abidīn would travel to Shingīti in the early twentieth century, but he perished on his return trip after contracting a lethal illness. His son, Daḥmān the second, was the next in line, and his rule would outlast the period of the French conquest of northern Adrar, Morocco and, eventually, the Wād Nūn region.

In the 1893, the same year that the emirs of Adrar and Tagant were at war, a war broke out between the Rgaībāt and the Awlād Dlīm because of a homicide. Both warring factions involved the Tikna in what became a very disruptive conflict. The Awlād Dlīm were Saharans who nomadized mainly in the coastal regions of the western Sahara. They

¹⁴³ Interviews in Nouakchott with Mohamed al-Amīn wuld Abdallah wuld Bayruk (06/05/98); Mohamed Lamine wuld Mbarak wuld Bayruk (07/19/97). See also Appendix 3 for the complete list Bayruk’s successors.

became one of the tribes to develop close relations with the Spanish Saharan administration.

At the outbreak of this war, the Rgaïbāt called upon their traditional protectors the Aït Billa leff of the Tikna. In search of military backing, the Awlād Dlīm performed the *dhbiḥa* to ‘Abidīn b. Bayrūk (then head of Gulmīm) by slaughtering a she-camel. They thereby acquired the protection of the Tikna Aït al-Jmal leff. This event would eventually precipitate the Tikna into a civil war between the two leffs. As historian Muḥammad Sālim wuld Laḥbīb, who witnessed the war, recounted,

the people of Wād Nūn were divided...the war was long, everyone was confused. The clashes were incessant, the roads were cut [blocked]...the battle raged on for a while, then calm returned...But when the people had dispersed, the hostilities began once again. The Rgaïbāt had left to the Zammūr [east of Tiris], the Awlād Dlīm and the people of the Aït al-Jmal attacked villages of the Aït Billa, seized their livestock and committed pillages in the whole region. The Aït Billa then called for the assistance of the Rgaïbāt who, filled with hatred, immediately returned to the Wād Nūn, calling upon the Aït al-‘Arb’aīn [‘the forty families,’ supra-political alliance discussed in chapter four] who, night and day, held watch. As soon as they rejoined the Aït Billa, the war began as before.¹⁴⁴

After years of conflict, from 1893 until 1896, and the intervention of a leader of another group, the Aït Ba‘Amrān, all three groups finally resolved to end the war and go in peace. Nevertheless, the tension between the two Tikna leffs would never recede. In the course of the *ṣība* (which the French typically translated as “anarchy”) which

¹⁴⁴ In Na‘tmi, *Les Principales Préoccupations*, p. 129.

prevailed in the first decade of the twentieth century, the divisions within the Tikna nation might have facilitated French conquering efforts to some extent. As a result of this war, many more Tikna headed south, typically seeking refuge among the large community of Tikna of Shingīti, and often moving further south into Senegal and Mali.

Trouble in Timbuktu

That the European conquest was imminent became obvious to several Saharans when a French officier, Caron, led a war vessel from the Senegal River to the Niger, mooring on the outskirts of Timbuktu in 1887. He was accompanied by Abd al-Qādar, the son of a Timbuktu trader, who offered his services to broker relationships between the French and his home town.¹⁴⁵ In his account, Caron explains that a number of traders in Timbuktu were spreading rumors about the French intention to conquer their town. The main town crier was none other than Ibrāhīm wuld Swaylim, mentioned in the Buhay letter cited above as the trader who seemed deeply in debt at the time. As Caron wrote:

Ibrahim Ould Soualin, of the Tikina tribe, from the land of the Oued Noun, ten days from the Teneriff, chased out of Medine [trade post along the Senegal River] in 1885, is said to have declared that we were coming to establish an outpost and he is said to have backed this rumor by the word of a French trader in St.Louis [Ndar]! In an assembly of notables, he contended that we had on board bricks and cement, and he swore that if we disembarked, the first bullet would be for Abd el Kader. All the Moor traders have mobilized the Twareg against us and they even gave them presents. Moreover, the Moors proposed to the Twaregs, in case that they get seized, to declare that the inhabitants of Timbuktu are all subjects of the Moroccan King.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ See Kanya-Forstner, *The Conquest of the Western Sudan*. Cambridge University Press, 1969.

¹⁴⁶ Caron (lt de vaisseau), E.. *De St.Louis au port de Tombouctou voyage d'une canonnière française suivi d'un vocabulaire songhai*. Paris, Augustin Challame, éditeur librairie coloniale 1891, p. 250. Just like the people of Timbuktu, so had Aḥmad al-Kabīr, the son of 'Umār Tāl who said, rather unsuccessfully to

Caron reached the shores of Timbuktu, but he was not allowed to disembark his vessel. His expedition nevertheless sent alarm waves throughout the region. It is extremely significant that Ibrāhīm b. Swaylim had been informed about France's intention to conquer the region by a French trader in Ndar. In all likelihood, his contact in Ndar was either from, or related to, the Devès family who, as we will see in the next chapter, seriously opposed the conquest of the Sahara on the grounds that it would threaten their commercial interests.

Around the time of Caron's expedition, Haïdara recounted a confrontation between Tikna and Jewish traders in the Timbuktu market.¹⁴⁷ The nasty dispute, reminiscent of the tribulations Murdukhay Aby Sarur had faced some thirty years early, was over the payment of a *sufiāja*, or money order. One of the most prominent Jewish traders in late nineteenth century Timbuktu, Eliahu b. al-Hazzan Ya'qūb, presented himself one day to several Tikna traders to cash-in a money order issued by one of their southern Morocco trading partners, a certain 'Sharīf'.¹⁴⁸ All but one of the Tikna agreed to endorse the *sufiājā* for the amount of merchandise owed. Maḥmūd b. Bulḥait refused to pay his share arguing that he owed nothing to the Sharīf. But the letter carried by Eliahu, authenticated locally as the Sharīf's handwriting, clearly stated that Maḥmūd

continue his father's *jihād*, written to the Moroccan Sultan in a desperate plea for support against the French conquest. See Letter 19B in J. Hanson & D. Robinson, *After the Jihad*, MSU: 1991, pp. 392-399.

¹⁴⁷ Discussed by Haïdara, *Les Juifs*, pp. 36-38. Once again, the author does not cite his sources.

¹⁴⁸ See chapter two for a discussion of this long-distance financial mechanism.

owed him certain goods “including 53 ivory tusks, 14 of which were of large dimensions and the rest of medium size, 63 *riḥl* (light weight) of ostrich feathers *al-zalim*, 4 of ostrich feathers *tayarāt*, 5 of ostrich feathers *al-bayda*. He also owed 51 salt bars.”¹⁴⁹

Only after serious legal deliberation and the pressure of witnesses, did Maḥmūd finally admit to owing the merchandise. But he claimed he was incapable of making due since he owed merchandise to his trading partners in Morocco. After pronouncing these words, Maḥmūd was seized by the authorities of Timbuktu at which point the entire Tikna community rose up in arms to demand their partner’s discharge. They also requested that the affair be judged by another qāḍi, more friendly towards the Tikna community, named Zubayr b. La’mish. Moreover, they agreed to pay the merchandise owed by Maḥmūd, but they never made due on this offer. According to Haḍdara’s reading, “it is obvious that the Tikna traders had bought off the emir of the town and the Qadi Zubayr.”¹⁵⁰

A series of disputes ensued involving several Muslim jurists of Timbuktu. Eliahu had to fight the Tikna community for his bond, and so the Tikna seized him and chained and locked him in his own house! According to Haḍdara’s information, which should be checked against other tangible sources, this outrageous act “became known throughout the town of Timbuktu and several incensed residents decried: ‘He who cheats

¹⁴⁹ Haḍdara, *Les Juifs*, p. 36.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 37.

a *Dhimmi* [a protected non-Muslim] without meeting any resistance on his part will feel Paradise only from afar!''¹⁵¹

The tensions in the city of Timbuktu, which weakened the unity of the town-dwellers, must have added to the general sense of confusion that prevailed as the French conquest drew nearer. In late 1891, the French seized a caravan organized by the residents of Walāta and Tishīt and forced it to proceed to the town of Nioro where they were taxed five percent of the total value of the caravan.¹⁵² This was the beginning of the French conquest of the 'French Soudan' that was to culminate in the occupation of Timbuktu in early 1894. That same year, the Sultan of Morocco, Mulay Ḥāfiḍ, died and a new era of political instability in Morocco and western Sahara unfolded.

The European pressures to control African markets, soon to translate into de facto colonization, forever destabilized local political economies. Resistance movements and piracy on the trans-Saharan trails were rampant by the first decade of 20th c. when the French were actively engaged in the 'pacification' of the land they branded as 'Mauritania.' Normal trading patterns were further disrupted with the intensification of activities of Saharans hijacking commercial caravans. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the situation pushed a number of Tikna traders to side with the French in the conquests of Mauritania, and to some extent, Morocco, so as secure both their commercial operations and political positions vis-à-vis the new rulers.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 38.

¹⁵² Marty, "Les Chroniques de Oualata et de Néma."

CHAPTER 7

FROM THE TIME OF ŠIBA TO THE COMING OF THE NAŠĀRA¹ OR THE ORIGIN OF MAURITANIA, 1890s-1910s

...And after this period [after the death of Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad] the injustice increased, and the killing (qaṭl) and the bloodshed until the coming of the Našāra.²

In the aftermath of the scramble for Africa in the late-nineteenth century, a large expanse of land still remained uncontrolled by European powers: the Sahara desert. Many French officials began dreaming of ways to conquer the seemingly unconquerable. Few French expeditions had ventured into the depths of the Sahara and survived. The tragic massacre of General Flatters and his Algerian mission in 1881 had indelibly scarred the French imperial ego, and the Sahara was since branded as an impenetrable land of ‘ferocious nomads.’ In the early 1890s, however, a handful of French officials, engineers and Saint-Simoniens pushed the idea that a trans-Saharan railway could become the Trojan horse of French conquest. Although this engineer’s dream never materialized, it did mobilize thinking about conquering the Sahara, especially in Algeria, where effective French colonial control stopped at the edges of the desert. It is therefore hardly surprising that the idea of creating the Saharan colony of Mauritania would come from an Algerianist.

¹ ‘The time the Christians came’ (or *waqt illi ja’wū an-Našāra*). This is a typical expression in the Sahara to signify the European conquest. In this case, the French conquest of what became “Mauritania.” See for instance, interview with Muhammad w. Ahamdi, Tishit (4/27/99).

² *Tārīkh Aḍrār*, Abd al-Wadūd wuld Aḥmād Mawlūd wuld Intāha, p. 10-11 (emphasis mine; translation mine with assistance of Ismaʿīl wuld Gabī, maitrise student at University of Nouakchott).

This chapter explores the establishment of colonial rule in the Saharan zones of the French Sudan (present-day Mali), and the land that was branded 'Mauritania.' I examine the motivations of the French in conquering Timbuktu and later the 'Land of the Moors.' I demonstrate the importance of trans-Saharan trade in this process. I pay close attention to the decisive role of Xavier Coppolani, the architect of the conquest of Mauritania, and examine the economic motivations behind 'the origin of Mauritania.'³ Most sources for this chapter are from the colonial archives, namely the documentation produced by Coppolani and his contemporaries and the *correspondences indigènes* or letters exchanged between the French and their West African correspondents.

French Negotiations with 'le Pays des Maures'

As explained in the previous chapter, the Adrar was a central region of political and economic activity. By the early 1890s, the French were aware of this as expressed in the following report which landed on the desk of the Minister of Foreign Affairs:

..The Adrar is one of the keys to the Sahara; it is the junction point between numerous caravans; its importance is growing since the French-British treaty determined our influence in this part of the continent. A mission...could serve as a basis for negotiations that will be complete with the delimitation of Spain [our respective territories]. From the commercial point of view, the Adrar is leaning towards a closer relationship with us. The caravans are arriving more frequently in St. Louis. A trip would tighten these links and the day that the road from the

³ The term 'l'origine de la Mauritanie' is the title of a brief note on the history of Mauritania written by Ernest Roume, former Governor-General of French West Africa (Afrique Occidentale Française) in 29 May 1905 just days after the assassination of Xavier Coppolani at the hands of a Saharan resistance fighter. *L'origine de la Mauritanie* is also the title given to the two volumes of the Auguste Terrier papers deposited in the archives of the Institut de France in Paris (consulted in 03/99). The phrase 'the origin of Mauritania' is borrowed here because it conveys a sense of the artificiality of the colonial construction of Mauritania.

Adrar to Senegal is regularly open, the one from southern Algeria and Morocco to Senegal will also be open half-way at the same.⁴

This report submitted in May 1891, was based on scanty information that the French had on the Adrar at the time. Its aim was to prepare for the 1891 French mission to the Adrar led by Fabert which was to lead to the first treaty between the French and the Emir of Adrar (discussed in previous chapter).

Until the end of the nineteenth century, French missions into the Saharan interior, led by explorers, scientists or colonial officials, were very rare. Since Panet, Lt. Vincent, Mage and Bu al-Mughdād, who wrote about their missions in the western Sahara in the mid-nineteenth century, and a few accounts by explorer/adventurers such as Camille Douls and Paul Soleillet in the 1880s, the French knowledge of the area in the 1890s was still very limited.⁵ These rare sources of information about the Saharan hinterland, although important, were clearly scanty, and the best account, Panet's travelogue, was now dated.

Nevertheless, the French clearly recognized that the Adrar, flanked by Senegal and Morocco, was strategically located between Wad Nūn and Senegal. Moreover, trade from the north to the southern Senegal River *marṣas* (trading posts) had gained momentum in the second half of the nineteenth century. In order to secure trade routes

⁴ AMAE, Mémoires et Documents: Afrique, Sénégal et Dependances, 18, tome 123, Mission politique et commerciale dans l'Adrar (Soudan Français), 21 mai 1891, p. 204.

⁵ Jules Gros (ed.). *Les voyages et découvertes de Paul Soleillet dans le Sahara et dans le Sudan...* Paris: M. Dreyfous, 1881. This is the edited travelogue of one of the first French explorers of the Mauritanian Sahara. He got in trouble with some tribes in southern Mauritania at one point and Shaykh Sa'd Būh bailed him out; Douls.

and ensure a steady commercial flow across the Adrar, the French sought to engage in negotiations with Aḥmad wuld Sid Aḥmad 'Aīda, the one who came to power after assassinating his cousin, the emir of peace. So they dispatched an official mission led by Léon Fabert accompanied by the French's chief interpreter Doudou Seck (the son of the aforementioned Bu al-Mughdād; hereafter referred to as Bu al-Mughdād II) to establish an alliance between the Governor of Senegal, Henri de Lamothe, and the Emir of Adrar, Aḥmad wuld Sid Aḥmad 'Aīda.⁶ Nevertheless, the mission failed in its stated goal when the emir of Adrar refused to grant audience to Fabert. This failure to correspond with the people of the Adrar would be the first in a long series of attempts that would last eighteen years, until the conquest of the Adrar was finally completed at the end of 1909.

In a second mission, the following year, the Governor of St. Louis sent Bu al-Mughdād II, this time alone, to broker a new agreement between the French and the Adrar emirate.⁷ When Bu al-Mughdād II asked the emir why the French had been so badly received the previous year, he responded: "we are Muslim, we do not like the Christians especially when they come to our land with the aim that they feign and we so clearly foresee [i.e. conquest]."⁸ During several meetings with Bu al-Mughdād during his stay in the oasis of Atar, the Emir explained that none of his ancestors developed any relationships with the French. However, he recognized that the "marabouts" (or *zwaya*)

⁶ ANRIM, E1/3, "Mémoires de Bou el Mogdad jusqu'en 1903." See also Léon Fabert "Voyage dans le Pays des Trarzas et dans le Sahara Occidental", 1892 (Bibliothèque de l'Evêché de Nouakchott).

⁷ ANRIM E1/3, "Mémoires de Bu al-Mughdād." He departed on a small six camel caravan in June 1892.

⁸ Ibid, p. 9.

had trade relations with the Christians; exchanges, which he believed were advantageous to both Muslims and Christians.⁹

Nevertheless, Bu al-Mughdād II's visit was perceived with much suspicion. It is said that there was a Shaikh who had pronounced a prophecy that a black man would come to them with a message of friendship from the French, but that this man was but a spy to be feared. Bu al-Mughdād also got wind of a rumor that the gunpowder he had presented to the emir, as a 'political gift,' would eventually explode in their hands.¹⁰ But these rumors did not scare the emir. By the time he returned to Ndar after a few months of peaceful negotiations, the emir had agreed to sign the treaty (August 1892). The main gist of the agreement was stated in the first clause: "France and the Adrar pledge to live reciprocally on the most sincere friendly terms and to promote, as much as possible, trade between the two countries."¹¹ That agreement respected the autonomy of the Adrar while specifying that the French would intervene in the affairs of the Adrarian state only to protect the state from its enemies. For the French, the treaty secured them a relationship which the Adrar emir who had been courted in 1886 by the Spanish delegation (see previous chapter). As for the emir, this agreement had a financial payoff; the French committed to the payment of an annual tribute of 500 guinéés. In October 1899, this amount was increased to 800 guinéés with the coming of the new emir

⁹ Ibid, p. 10

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Gnokane "La Politique Française." The author asserts that the Fabert mission was immediately successful and that emir gave his verbal agreement to this agreement which was turned into an official treaty a year later p. 276. In fact Fabert did not receive a verbal agreement according to Bu al-Mughdād II's memoirs.

al-Mukhtār wuld Aḥmad wuld ‘Aīda (who succeeded the emir killed by the Awlād Bū Sbā’; see chapter six).

At the same time that the French were courting the rulers of the Adrar, they were interfering in the affairs of the emir of Trarza. In the fall of 1891 a political crisis took over the Trarza state. A political struggle broke out between the emir ‘Amar Sālam who had been the emir since 1886, and Aḥmad Sālam, the son of the latest emir, ‘Aly and grandson of Jimbot, the Senegalese princess of Waalo, and nephew of the existing emir.¹² With French backing, Aḥmad Sālam defeated the emir and, in October 1891, he signed a treaty similar to the one signed by the emir of Adrar.¹³ It must be noted that the Trarza, more than any other Biḍān polity, had the longest and closest relationship to the French in Ndar, and the preceding emirs had made numerous agreements prior to this one.

The next French mission into Biḍān territory would take place in 1894 and again, Bu al-Mughdād II, France’s ‘eyes, ears and mouth’ in the land of the ‘Maures,’ led the expedition. Bu al-Mughdād II skillfully managed to convince the two principal chiefs of the Chrattit tribe (a very important tribe of the Tagant which was oftentimes quite belligerent and impeded French commercial enterprises along the Senegal River) to sign

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Gnokane, “la Politique Française,” p. 236. The Emir had taken payment for a political favor which he never executed to lead an expedition against the Emir of Brakna, Bakar wuld Swaīd Aḥmad.

a similar treaty to the two mentioned above.¹⁴ This agreement was slightly more audacious on the part of the French, for it included a clause stipulating that the emir of Tagant committed to supplying the French with camels for transportation in exchange for a daily fee per camel and per rider. The agreement contained the classic annual tribute paid by the French of 600 guinéés. Moreover, like all the other treaties, it guaranteed Biḍān territorial integrity and full independence vis-à-vis the French.

In his report summarizing the 1894 mission, Bu al-Mughdād II described the relations between the people of Tagant, who were not very commercially inclined, and long-distance traders. He explained how they relied on stranger-traders for merchandise, usually exchanging it with horses, sheep, millet and slaves, which they typically raided for in the sedentary villages of the Sudan and Senegal. Here he emphasized the role played by the Tajākant and Awlād Bū Sbā tribes in the Tagant region and beyond.¹⁵ The first controlled the gum trade in the Tagant region, and the latter were renowned for their long-distance trading connections of international proportions.¹⁶

From the record of the treaties the French negotiated with the chiefs of the land of the Biḍān, it is clear that Bu al-Mughdād II's role as political broker in this process was key. Son of Bu al-Mughdād I, who was the chief interpreter and political advisor to the French governors of Senegal in the second half of the nineteenth century, Bu al-Mughdād

¹⁴ Mohamedouould Mohameden, "Les tentatives de pénétration française dans le pays maure à travers le rapport de mission Bou El Mogdad en 1894 au Tagant" *Maṣādir: Cahier de sources de l'histoire de la Mauritanie*, Cahier no.1, 1994, pp. 79-99.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 96.

II would continue this mission, which eventually lead to the full-fledged conquest of the western Sahara. The influence and knowledge of this Wolof family, and their position as intermediaries between the French and the Bidān and agents of the French imperial pursuit, cannot be underestimated.

Conquering the Market of Timbuktu: A French Setback

The French conquest of Timbuktu, an important episode in the history of western Africa, remains to be written.¹⁷ Like in most conquests, the main incentive for the French move on Timbuktu was one inspired by economic prerogatives. By the late nineteenth century, Europeans had long held in fascination the city of Timbuktu where it was believed that camel-loads of gold were actively traded. By the 1880s, the French had been settled in their first African colony, Algeria for over half a century and they understood that the main merchandise arriving into the transit market of Timbuktu was European in origin. From their bases furthest south in Twāt, the French realized that British merchants, importing via Tripoli to the East, and Morocco to the West, were the main suppliers of European merchandise to western Africa via the trans-Saharan trade routes.

¹⁶ Ibid. "...Les Oulad Bou Seba de l'Adrar qui font le commerce jusqu'à St. Louis, Oualata et Mogador, apportent aussi du tabac de l'Ouad Noun et de la guinée aux Maures Chrattit."

¹⁷ Although Kanya-Forstner covered some of the main military events in his seminal *The Conquest of Western Sudan*.

Indeed, as French explorer Gaston Donnet remarked in the early 1890s, the British imperial “threat” in the Sahara was ominous.¹⁸ For decades, the Biḍān had preferred the cotton cloth imported from the north to that of the French exchanged along the Senegal River. Even the emir of Tagant, writing to the French officer in Bakel, complained that the quality of the French guinée was inferior, and that he relied on trans-Saharan traders to bring him good quality cloth from Wād Nūn, via Tishīt or Walāta.¹⁹ The British, propelled by the entrepreneurial activities of Mackenzie (discussed in the previous chapter) had made plans with the Sultan of Morocco to acquire rights to a trading port in front of Wād Nūn, the port of Tarfaya (Cap Juby).²⁰ The Bayrūk clan who controlled local trade to and from Tarfaya had finally realized the dream of their prominent ancestor to build a port on the Wād Nūn coast. It is worth mentioning that Daḥmān and Laḥbīb, both sons of Bayrūk, had written to Bu al-Mughdād in the 1870s to reiterate their request for French support in building a port.²¹ The British cornered a large part of the international trade traveling into the western African hinterland. The Spanish presence on the coast, however, did not threaten French interests to the same extent.

When the French finally pushed northwards in October 1894 and succeeded in entering Timbuktu, their disappointment was tremendous. They expected to find a grand

¹⁸ Gaston Donnet. *Une Mission au Sahara Occidental du Sénégal au Tiris*. (Chargé de mission du Ministère des Colonies). Paris: Augustin Challamel, Ed. 1896 Ibid., pp. 56-7.

¹⁹ ANS 9G5, Documents 57 & 56. Late 1880s.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 2, fn 1. Recently a dispatch of British sources announced that the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Sultan had received 145 000 Dollars of the 50 000 Pounds Sterling to pay for the purchase of Cap Juby.

²¹ ANM 1D – 147 Lettre d’el Habib et Dahman fils de Beirouk à Bou el Mogdad, traduit par Paul Marty. 4 Décembre 1872. Also located in Marty, *l’Emirat des Trarzas*.

city with an organized market and numerous stores. Instead, they found a rather small town and no visible sign of economic activity. The French would soon realize that their control of the Timbuktu market did not put an end to the importation of British manufactured cotton cloth, the most common trade item on trans-Saharan trails at that time. As the French district commissioner (*commandant de cercle*) of Timbuktu explains in a report on the commercial activity of Timbuktu,

The market of Timbuktu in its present state can absorb annually, without plethora, 50 000 blue *pièces de guinée*; Timbuktu, in effect, even though it is very rundown, is still a big entrepôt for nomads who use almost exclusively the blue *guinée* for the creation of their cloths...the most common trade route for the importation of *guinées*, cloths and [other] objects of European provenance is the route from Mogador (the Souera [al-Swaïra] of the natives), Tindouf and Tombouctou. This route is a bit longer than the one from St. Louis to Tombouctou, but it presents for the importers, almost all Moroccan merchants, considerable advantages.²²

The French presence in Timbuktu had the immediate effect of antagonizing many tribes and increasing insecurity of trans-Saharan trade. On the Sahelian and Senegalese sides, however, a new commercial era had begun. The French establishment of an outpost in the Medine and Kayes, had changed the face of trade in the interior quite significantly. The Wolof, Pulār and Soninké traders, called *traitants*, took advantage of these new commercial inroads. They traded on their account or for merchants headquartered in Ndar, or in French ports such as Bordeaux and Marseilles. These traders from Ndar seized opportunities offered by colonial conquest. In June 1896, they expressed their satisfaction in a letter to the Governor of the newly established colony of the French Soudan (present-day Mali) in the following terms:

Since you have been the head of the colony...you have only favored trade by giving it new outlets, by maintaining the security of roads, and by giving protection to the caravans coming from Timbuktu.²³

That the French provided armed “protection” of camel caravans moving to and from Timbuktu, heading towards the Senegal River, was a not an innovation in colonial practice; it was simply an extension of French military presence in the trading posts along the river which had endured since the mid-nineteenth century.

Several years later, Félix Dubois, visiting the city of Timbuktu, provided an assessment of the Timbuktu market. He made the French aware, perhaps for the first time, that the commercial activity of Timbuktu was naturally “hidden” in the houses of traders. He described its numerous warehouses and elaborate long-distance trading networks.²⁴ By the end of the century, the economic landscape of Timbuktu and the Azawād region generally had significantly deteriorated. In a report on the situation to the governor of the French Soudan, with its capital in Kayes, the administrator of Timbuktu wrote in September 1899:

The commercial movement which was the unique *raison d'être* of the town of Timbuktu has experienced an almost total halt during the passed month due to the state of hostilities we face with the Berabish. The salt and the grains, which form the bulk of this movement, have doubled in price in one month.²⁵

To be sure, the Tikna who were numerous in Timbuktu were actively engaged in seizing new opportunities presented by the strengthening of the French presence inland, and the

²² ANS Q49, Document 24. Le Capitaine Ronget, Commandant de Cercle de Tombouctou à Monsieur le Colonel Lieutenant Gouverneur du Soudan Français à Kayes (15 Mars 1896).

²³ ANS, Q49, Document 33. Lettre des commerçants de Medine à M. le Lieutenant Gouverneur du Soudan Français à Kayes, Médine le 21 juin 1896.

²⁴ Dubois, *Tombouctou la Mystérieuse*, p. 126 et sq. See his quote in the previous chapter.

river trade that reached Timbuktu, Bamako, Mopti, Nioro and other markets of the French Soudan. At the same time, commerce was also diverted into the markets of the Sahara which the French did not control. A young Corsican, trained in Algeria, would lead the way towards the last phase of the French conquest of the western African land.

Coppolani in the French Soudan: A First Encounter with the *Ṭrāb al-Biḍān*

Since the achievements of Léon Faidherbe in mid-nineteenth century, the French Governors of Senegal had been generally reluctant to *conquer* the territory north of the Senegal River. The French policy vis-à-vis the Biḍān nomadizing on the right bank of the Senegal River had since then remained at least conciliatory, and sometimes even deferential. Since the treaties signed in the first half of the nineteenth century with the emirs of the regions of Trarza and the Brakna (see Map 1), the French position remained relatively unchanged until the coming of Xavier Coppolani.²⁶

Xavier Coppolani's Politique Musulmane

Coppolani was a Corsican who migrated to Algeria to attend school. Like many officers trained in the colonial circles of Algiers, he would end up serving in the regions

²⁵ ANM 1-E78 - Rapport de Administrateur Vidal, Commandant en Chef à Tombouctou à M. le Colonel Lt. Gouverneur à Kayes (Sept 1899).

²⁶ For an assessment of Coppolani's character, and comparison to those of the architects of colonial Senegal (Faidherbe) and colonial French Soudan (Archinard), see David Robinson, "'French Africans': Faidherbe, Archinard and Coppolani, the 'Creators' of Senegal, Soudan and Mauritania." In *Personality and Political Culture in Modern Africa (Studies Presented to Professor Harold Marcus)*. Boston University: 1998.

of western Africa.²⁷ Coppolani soon developed a keen interest in Islamic practice in Algeria, paying particular attention to Muslim brotherhoods or Sufi orders. Coppolani's coming of age in the colonial administration clearly followed a new trend in the French interest in Islam.²⁸ According to Philip Lucas and Jean-Claude Vatin, "islamologie" became a popular object of inquiry among the French in Algeria in what they identified as North Africa's transitional period from approximately the 1870s to the 1890s.²⁹ By 1893, the new Governor of Algeria, Cambon, had received the writing of a *fatwā* from scholars of Mecca stating that "Muslims could accept French domination as long as the religion of the Prophet was respected."³⁰ This was clearly a major feat in French colonial policy and an approach which would be reproduced in their other "Muslim" colonies including those of western Africa.

Very quickly, Coppolani conceptualized an approach to French colonial Muslim policy in a publication on "Muslim brotherhoods."³¹ He brought to light his theories about the administration of Muslim societies in the Sahara or what he called France's *politique musulmane*. The overarching principal of Coppolani's Muslim policy was that religious leaders should be coopted by the colonial state. Through the intermediary of Muslim leaders, such as the heads of powerful Sufi orders, the French could rule and gain

²⁷ A few administrators, including his close friend Robert Arnaud and François-Marie Colombani who served by Coppolani's side in the conquest of Mauritania, wrote biographies of Coppolani, but Céline Frébourg's research, based on extensive archival and oral research is the best scholarly work to date on this unusual colonial officer (see next footnote).

²⁸ Cécile Frébourg, "Le Corse en Mauritanie. Xavier Coppolani (1866-1905). L'Islam au service de la France", Mémoire de maîtrise d'histoire, Paris VII, sept. 1990 (from the notes shared by David Robinson which I thank him for sharing with me).

²⁹ *L'Algérie des anthropologues*, Paris: Maspero, 1975, p. 23

³⁰ "les musulmans pouvaient accepter la domination française sous la condition que celle-ci respecte la religion du Prophète." Ibid.

widespread allegiance. As the constituencies of Sufi orders such as the Tijaniya and the Qadiriya, extended far beyond the nebulous borders of Algeria, Coppolani's vision of France's Muslim policy was also far-reaching: "We could follow a similar program, in a much limited range, with our Algerian tijanis which we would send to the pagan countries to fight the propaganda of their dissident "brothers" of Morocco and the French Soudan."³²

Coppolani in the French Soudan

Immediately after its publication, Coppolani strove for widespread support and application of his *politique musulmane*. He wrote directly to the French Foreign Office, requesting permission to study Sufi orders in other colonies (April or May 1898).³³ At first, his request was denied. But eventually, Coppolani managed to hold the interest of the Governor-General of the French Soudan, Lieutenant Trentinian. Coppolani's ideas about the administration of Muslim societies were appreciated by the Governor-General who believed that in the northern regions of the French Soudan, there was definitely a need for ethnographic studies of the Biḍān and the Tuareg. Indeed, in the course of the late 1890s the French Soudan was undergoing a difficult transition from military to civilian rule. As explained above, the French had been tremendously disappointed to realize that they conquered in Timbuktu a seemingly depressed market. In fact, as A. S.

³¹ A. Depont & X. Coppolani, *Les Confréries religieuses musulmanes*, Alger: Jourdan, 1897.

³² Ibid, p. 288.

³³ Frébourg, "Coppolani Revisité" p. 622, fn.22. Désirè-Vuillemin, *Contribution à l'histoire de la Mauritanie*, p. 94. For Frébourg he wrote in April, whereas Vuillemin writes that this happened in May. Given that the first author is Coppolani's biographer, I would lean towards her dates.

Kanya-Forstner explains, the colony's economic *raison d'être* was seriously being questioned at the time. The military campaigns in the western African interior had drained too many resources and the colony's economic viability was put in doubt.³⁴ Moreover, the French were having trouble administering the nomadic groups of the French Soudan and preventing their numerous surprise attacks. They lacked the guidance and the knowledge about the Biḍān and the Tuareg populations necessary to establish an effective administration of the nomads in the area.

With his knowledge of Algeria, Muslim civil society and Arabic, Coppolani appeared to be the most suitable candidate for leading such a mission in the recently conquered areas of the French Soudan. The Ministry of Colonies, in agreement with the Governor-Generals of the French Soudan and Algeria, assigned Coppolani to study Sufi orders and their relationship with the French administration in the western Sudan (region of present-day Mali), the extreme southern regions of Morocco, and the southwest regions of Algeria. In Coppolani's own words, the aim of this mission was to strengthen France's "authority in the conquered regions, to extend our domination into regions which are currently out of our control, promote our influence in the hinterland, and especially, to favor our penetration of the Sahara."³⁵ It was during this expedition, which lasted for seven months (from December 1898 to July 1899), that Coppolani came to appreciate the geographical extent of the *Trāb-al-Biḍān*. I argue that this episode in Coppolani's

³⁴ A.S. Kanya-Forstner, *The Conquest of the Western Sudan*, CUP, 1969, p. 254-262.

³⁵ "L'organisation politique et administrative des Pays Maures et l'unification de notre empire du Nord-Ouest Africain", p. 6 in "L'origine de la Mauritanie.", manuscript 5942, Fonds A. Terrier, Institut de France, Paris (hereafter "l'origine de la Mauritanie.")

itinerary, which is generally overlooked by historians of colonial Mauritania and Mali, changed his approach to the administration of Muslim communities.

Coppolani's mission to the French Soudan was a success. Accompanied by his friend and fellow Algerianist Robert Arnaud, this trip took him from Senegal to Sahelian and northern regions of the French Soudan. He focused essentially on the Biḍān communities of the Azawād and the Ḥawḍ (See Map 3). He observed how several Biḍān groups had surrendered to the authority of the government of the French Soudan. They paid taxes in the form of tolls in percentages of camel loads at colonial checkpoints. At the same time, a large number of Saharan nomads were holding on to their independence and some were causing a great deal of havoc attacking and plundering villages and caravans.

As the French conquest of the western African hinterland grew eminent, the incidence of social unrest between nomads and settled dwellers increased significantly, and traveling along trans-Saharan trails was fraught with added danger. The French established posts in several towns where Saharan traders usually traveled to exchange their salt and dates for cereals, and other commodities including slaves. The colonial administration set-up a new tax system and established mobility regulations. Traffic blockades would deter caravaners from organizing camels or travelling the normal routes. Colonial controls had the effect of limiting exchange, increasing competition over dwindling resources and, with it, the incidence of piracy, political instability and levels of insecurity. Through the contraband arms-trade from Morocco, The Gambia, as well as other European outposts along the Atlantic coast, the availability of guns contributed to

destabilize local trade patterns and the overall Saharan political economy. With more guns, it became easier to ransack villages and hijack camel caravans returning from southern or northern markets.

Coppolani's approach to Muslim leaders in West Africa was extremely successful. In the Azawād region he convinced the residents of the town of Arawān, the sister-city of Timbuktu, to sign a treaty of surrender to French rule. During his trip to the Sahelian region, he befriended some of the most influential *zwāya* of the Ḥawḍ who helped him in negotiations with the chiefs of several 'hostile' tribes. His policy of co-opting Muslim leaders was working. Even the relatives of Shaykh Mā' al-'Aynayn (strongest Saharan resistance leader to French conquest of the Sahara; discussed below), namely his brother Turāḍ, and Muslim leaders Shaykh Sīdi Lamīn, Shaykh Sīdi wuld Shaykh wuld Sidi wuld Hannun and Sidāti, all assisted Coppolani.³⁶ Thanks to the backing of these Biḍān Muslim leaders, Coppolani received the submissions of other tribes such as the Awlad Alūsh, the Mashḍūf, the Awlād Al-Nāsar and the Aulimdan, who were reputed to be "professional raiders." Moreover, notables from Walāta and Tishīt, as well as N'ama, came to Goumbou, Sokolo and Nioro to meet Coppolani asking for the protection of the

³⁶ "Note de Colombani" p. 43 in "L'origine de la Mauritanie", manuscript 5942, Fonds A. Terrier, Institut de France, Paris. I have not identified Sidati; Sidi wuld Sidi wuld Hannun, is the chief of al'Alūsh according to Marty, "Chronique de Oualata" p. 388.

French.³⁷ These included members of the Laghlāl, one of the largest *zwāya* groups of the Sahara, and very active commercially. In fact, Coppolani seems to have spent a great deal of time talking with traders, including members of Wād Nūn network. As argued below, the discussions he entertained with the local trading communities of the French Soudan, and possibly Senegal, influenced Coppolani's thinking about how to undertake the conquest of the Sahara.

That several religious leaders of the Ḥawḍ region would seek the protection of the French and voluntarily surrender to their authority is altogether quite extraordinary. But the reason for this move, from the colonial record at least, is simple. As explained above the presence of Europeans intensified during the last decades of the nineteenth century causing additional stress on local economies and societies as they moved from their coastal settlements into the African hinterland. At the same time, the political instability in western Africa was prevalent, as scene in the previous chapter. During the *zamān as-sība*, the situation of "anarchy" could explain why the *zwāya*, a majority of whom were engaged in commercial operations and intra-regional exchange, sought the protection of the French at this particular juncture. As Coppolani later would argue when making his appeals to the Ministry of Colonies for the establishment of a Saharan protectorate, insecurity along trans-Saharan caravan routes threatened the very existence of Saharan groups who depended on the agricultural regions of the French Soudan for subsistence

³⁷ Rapport succinct à M. le Ministre des Colonies sur l'organisation administrative et l'occupation pacifique de la 'Mauritanie'. P.30 (verso) in "L'origine de la Mauritanie", manuscript 5942, Fonds A. Terrier, Institut de France, Paris.

exchange. It also was clearly in the best interest of the French to "pacify" the hinterland so as to "restore" peaceful exchange with the aim of placing French trading agents to secure their own colonial viability.

The French had taken over the town of Nioro in 1891. They had endeavored to expand its commercial role by promoting the establishment of French commercial houses to encourage caravan traffic. In Timbuktu, a similar pattern of French settlement took place after 1894. These trading houses controlled imports from Ndar and exports of commodities from the interior (gum arabic, hides, millet, salt). However, the French were competing against local traders in Timbuktu, Gao, and other Malian towns who had been supplying European merchandises bought in either the ports of Bathurst (Gambia), St. Louis (Senegal) or Mogador (southern Morocco). Trade there could potentially generate large profits.³⁸

There is no doubt that Coppolani's friendly demeanor towards the Biḍān, his profound knowledge of Islam, and his fluency in Arabic, won him popularity.³⁹ As his friend Arnaud would later reveal,

In one hour of conversation, he made the Moors [i.e. the Biḍān] most hostile to us make a complete turn-around. This is why he has an extraordinary reputation in the region. I saw men who traveled miles to bring a sheep, fattened to his intention, which they transported by camelback so the meat would be better. I

³⁸ In 1897, Capitaine Lartigue stationed in Nioro, evaluated the situation in the following terms: "The trade of the Moors in the Soudan can be gauged in the ten millions, since in the region of the Sahel alone, which includes the districts of Nioro, Goumbou and Sokolo, customs duties were in the order of 400 000 francs in 1895 alone, which is the equivalent of 4 000 000 francs merchandises (since customs are equal to 1/10 of the camel load)." ANM, 1G-224, "Notice sur les Maures du Soudan et du Sénégal."

³⁹ Frébourg (chapter 2 part 2 from Robinson's notes). Coppolani mentions that the news of his mission spread in the Sahara all the way to the Wadi Drā in southern Morocco; See also Copie Lettre no. 835, Lt. Gouverneur du Soudan Français à Coppolani, "L'organisation politique et administrative des Pays Maures et l'Unification de notre empire du Nord-Ouest Africain", 1900, in "L'origine de la Mauritanie," p.29.

saw marabouts [religious leaders] lead whole herds of cows to him so that he was never in need of milk.⁴⁰

Perhaps this was the first time that a *Naṣrānī* who approached the *Biḍān* could effectively speak their language, relate to their needs and converse on their favorite topic: religion.⁴¹ Coppolani was obviously very impressed with the favorable welcome he had received by the *zwāya* tribes of the Ḥawḍ. He was particularly sensitive to their appeal for French protection against the raids of the *ḥasānī*. Later, Coppolani explained in a report, perhaps with some degree of exaggeration, "[f]rom all sides, a movement in favor of the establishment of a French protectorate through peaceful domination was felt."⁴²

It was during his experience in the French Soudan that Coppolani envisioned the creation of a new colony, which would include the Saharan desert between Morocco and Senegal, part of northern French Soudan and southwestern Algeria. This large territory represented the natural boundaries (linguistic and cultural) of the *Trāb-al-Biḍān*, the "Land of the Moors." Upon completion of his report on his mission in the French Soudan, Coppolani returned to Paris in 1899 where he endeavored to turn his tested theories about French Muslim policy into further action. Judging from the contents of a

⁴⁰ *Xavier Coppolani: secrétaire général des colonies, commissaire du gouvernement général en Mauritanie 2 février 1866 - 12 mai 1905*, Jean François Maurel, Territoire de la Mauritanie, Gouvernement Général de l'A.O.F. no. 1148, St. Louis 1955. Bibliothèque de l'Evêché de Nouakchott, 1966. I XAV.

⁴¹ Interview with Haibatna o/ Muhammad Abdallahi o/ Muhammad Ghulam (Nouakchott, 6/24/97), for example. Incidentally, the memory of Coppolani, the man who befriended the *Biḍān*, still lives on in Mauritania today as testified by the poetry lines in Hassaniya devoted to him.

⁴² Coppolani, "L'organisation politique et administrative des Pays Maures et l'Unification de notre empire du Nord-Ouest Africain", 1900, in "L'origine de la Mauritanie," p. 30

letter the Governor-General of the French Soudan, the results of Coppolani's mission to the Soudan were well received.⁴³

Coppolani made a number of administrative recommendations, some of which were immediately followed by the Governor-General of the Soudan. For instance, personnel not qualified to deal with "native affairs" were replaced with administrators trained in Algeria who could better serve the French in northern Soudan. Because Coppolani had worked very closely with local religious authorities, he was able to share his intimate knowledge of the nomadic populations of the region, their life-styles, their itineraries, the location of their wells and camps. To be sure, Coppolani had uncovered what was essentially uncharted territory. Very few in-depth studies of the area had been produced at that point.⁴⁴ As we saw, remarkably few French explorers had ventured into the desert and survived to describe what they saw since Panet, and the monographs and studies produced by French officials in the 1890s were based on a superficial understanding of what they described.⁴⁵

Coppolani's first experiment in applying his theories about Muslim policy in a Saharan setting was a success. The most tangible results of his mission to the French Soudan had been the submission (albeit temporary for some) of a number of tribes

⁴³ Copie Lettre no. 835, Lt. Gouverneur du Soudan Français à Coppolani, Kayes, 24 mars 1899 p. 28, in "L'origine de la Mauritanie."

⁴⁴ I am not aware of any research undertaken by a European fluent in the Arabic language until Coppolani. This is why Coppolani's reports and analyses of Biḍān economy and society are so important a source for historians of the Sahara today.

⁴⁵ In the ANS (where the Afrique Occidentale Française archives are preserved) and in the ANM, I consulted a large number of French reports written in the 1890s on the areas newly conquered by the French. These works are often shallow analyses or simple descriptions of situations that the authors only barely grasped. As the Governor-General of the French Soudan was the first to admit, the officers employed in the Azawāḍ

through the mediation of prominent shaykhs or religious authorities. Moreover, he had received the solicitation of French protection by a number of *zwāya* tribes. Propelled by these accomplishments, Coppolani pushed forward his plan to create a colony encompassing all the territory of the Biḍān tribes of the Sahara; a vision that would soon become a passionate battle. What was Coppolani's overarching argument in defending his project for a French pacification of the "Land of the Moors"? What was his stated rationale? These questions find their answers in the reports Coppolani presented to the Minister of Colonies in late 1899.

The Origin of Mauritania: A False Start

Although Coppolani had proven that Muslim leaders could be coopted and through them, France could extend its domination, this was not a strong enough motivation for the French Ministry of Colonies to approve the conquest of a new Saharan colony. Coppolani had to find a sound justification for his project elsewhere, and his argument here would be directly related to trade. In order to attract the attention of decision-makers in the French capital, he drew their attention to what seemed to be an 'anomaly' in Franco-African relations. Indeed, he questioned the very essence of Franco-Biḍān relationships that had prevailed for over half a century since the time of Governor Faidherbe. As François-Marie Colombani, a French officer who served in Mauritania under the orders of Coppolani, explains:

and the Sahel were ill-equipped to comprehend, let alone administer the Saharan populations under their

The Moors of the Hawd and Azawad regions with whom we came into contact during the conquest of the Soudan paid tribute to us while, at the same time, we paid tribute to the populations of the same race, of the same customs, living on the right bank of the Lower-Senegal. There was a strange anomaly here and the fact that we had to bear the incursions of the Moors and to pay them tribute in no way increased our prestige whether in [what would become] Mauritania, or in the organized territories of the left bank.⁴⁶

These relations consisted of the French paying taxes (locally called "coutumes" or "Amkubal") to the emirs of Brakna, Trarza, the Idaw'ish, and since 1891 to the Adrar, for the right to trade with their constituents.⁴⁷ Coppolani judged that this situation was disadvantageous to French commerce, and indeed humiliating to French authority. Moreover, the taxes paid by the French buttressed the authority of local Biḍān rulers who essentially brokered trade relations along the Senegal River.⁴⁸

In Paris, Coppolani approached the Minister of Colonies to discuss his ideas about the organization of the Saharan Biḍān and Tuareg. In a report addressed to the Ministry, Coppolani first coined the name of the future colony, "Mauritania."⁴⁹ The Minister responded so favorably to Coppolani's master plan that in a rather unusual move, he immediately gave his official approval by signing a decree on December 27th 1899, constituting the Protectorate of 'Mauritanie Occidentale.' Coppolani set to work at once, submitting a second report to the Minister of Colonies, which described his plan for the

control.

⁴⁶ Note de Colombani, in "L'origine de la Mauritanie," p. 45. N.B. rive droite and rive gauche are the northern and southern banks of the Senegal River which the French perceived almost as a racial divide between black and white/Arab Africa.

⁴⁷ See chapter four.

⁴⁸ See chapter two of Raymond Taylor's "Of Disciples and Sultans," for a detailed examination of the Franco-Moor trade relations along the Senegal River. Also see the works of Adama Gnokane, "La politique française."

“peaceful” conquest of Mauritania (*occupation pacifique*) and how he foresaw the administrative organization of this new territory. But although the origin of Mauritania can therefore be dated to the signing of the 1899 decree, it would be a few years before Coppolani could spring his colonial plan into action.

Coppolani's first report was a detailed exposé of the geography of the Sahara, the history of Franco-Biḍān relations, the results of his findings in the French Soudan and the role of religious authorities in the Sahara. He placed great emphasis on the charismatic personality of Shaykh Mā' al-‘Aynayn, the powerful religious leader residing in Smāra, in the region of Saqyāt al-Ḥamrā (southern Morocco), whom he perceived as the moral guide of a majority of Saharans.⁵⁰ He determined that control of the northern region of the Adrar to the south of the Saqyāt al-Ḥamrā, home of many Saharan oases and a strong emir, was critical. The people of the Adrar were strategically located to play the comparative advantage of both markets on either side of the Sahara. What is more, the emir of Adrar was a loyal follower of Shaykh Mā' al-‘Aynayn, and by the late nineteenth century, this powerful marabout had already marked himself as a resistance leader to European conquest. Because of the position and disposition of the people of the Adrar, Coppolani therefore saw this region as the key to a successful conquest of the *Trāb al-Biḍān*.

⁴⁹ Rapport succinct à M. le Ministre des Colonies sur l'organisation administrative et l'occupation pacifique de la 'Mauritanie'. P.2 in "L'origine de la Mauritanie."

⁵⁰ Otton Loyewski, "Coppolani et la Mauritanie," *Revue Histoire des Colonies*, vol.26, no.2, 1938, p. 12.

Logistically, conquering the Sahara represented a monumental task. The French were quite ignorant about the Saharan interior, but they knew enough to determine that in the desert there was very little in the way of natural resources to be exploited besides salt and a few dates. For Coppolani, this was no obstacle, as he came to realize that the real economic incentive for the French to form this new colony was commercial. He soon began arguing that, in the words of his colleague Otton Loyewski, "the policy to follow is the route followed by the different caravans that cross the Sahara."⁵¹ Coppolani began playing on the popular European perception about the great riches of trans-Saharan trade to argue that France's motivation to conquer the Sahara was to control the trade routes. His concrete plan was to establish French military posts in all the major markets of the Sahara where the colonial administration could effectively levy custom duties and control Saharan caravan traffic, the lifeline of Saharan communities.

In a second report, Coppolani elaborated on his plan of action.⁵² He determined the specific geographical dimensions of the future Saharan colony, which would spread from Ndar to the Cap Juby (Tarfaya) from the Atlantic to the eastern regions and the principal centers of Arawan, Tawdani, Walāta, Tishīt, Wadān and Shingīṭī, and Tindūf (Map 1).⁵³ Coppolani's strongest argument was that: "By its location and its composition, *Mauritania is the indispensable hyphen between the French possessions in northern*

⁵¹ Loyewski, "Coppolani" p. 12.

⁵² Rapport succinct à M. le Ministre des Colonies sur l'organisation administrative et l'occupation pacifique de la 'Mauritanie', in "L'origine de la Mauritanie." It is important to note Coppolani's use of local terminology in this rapport. I believe he is among the first French administrators to call the Biḍān by their own terms by employing the word "Baïdan" as opposed to the vague word 'Maure' which had been used only by Europeans for centuries to designate a variety of people including the Biḍān. It is a pity, however, that Coppolani did not chose the local name for the new colony (*Trāb-al-Biḍān*).

Africa and those of equatorial Africa. I have the firm hope that it will become the safeguard of our interests in the Moroccan empire."⁵⁴

In his address to the Minister of Colonies, Coppolani argued that France could not conquer the Sahara by force or without political negotiation. Such a mistake had been made a few years earlier when the French tried to aggressively occupy Twāt.⁵⁵ In line with his *politique musulmane*, he highlighted the role that Sufi leaders could play when coopted into serving the French cause. In doing so, Coppolani refers to Shaykh Bayruk [sic!; it was his son Daḥmān who ruled at that point] as "one of the most venerated chefs of the Tijaniyya."⁵⁶ He also reiterated the commanding role of Shaykh Mā' al-'Aynayn, who counted the Sultan of Morocco as one of his disciples. To bypass the authority of these powerful religious leaders would be, in Coppolani's view, a mistake because "without their assistance, it is the Jihad [holy war]...it is a march into the unknown, a permanent state of hostilities with the Saharan and Moroccan populations."⁵⁷

An examination of Coppolani's colonial program reveals remarkable stylistic similarities to Lord Lugard's organizational ideas about British rule in Northern Nigeria,

⁵³ Ibid., p. 1.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.2-3.

⁵⁵ The conquest of Twāt, a Moroccan commercial center, not far from the then Algerian border, became an extremely expensive enterprise for the French, both militarily and politically. See Miège, *Le Maroc et l'Europe*, pp. 249-255.

⁵⁶ Obviously, he was referring to Bayruk's son who then ruled in his name, Dahman w. Bayruk. But this mistake could be taken to signify the important reputation that this Wad Nun still conveyed at the turn of the nineteenth century. Moreover, Shaykh Bayruk was not a Tijani discipline, let alone a certified Tijani Shaykh, although he might have had ties to the Nasiriyya sufi order. It is puzzling that Coppolani should refer to him in such terms.

⁵⁷ L'organisation politique et administrative des Pays Maures et l'unification de notre empire Nord-Ouest Africain. P.15 (verso) in "L'origine de la Mauritanie."

published a few years later.⁵⁸ Admittedly, Coppolani was inspired by what he saw as the successful Muslim policy of the British in India, which the Russians themselves imitated in their possession of Asia.⁵⁹ He argued that France would be well advised to follow these examples.

A comparison between the conquest of Mauritania and that of the British in Northern Nigeria is, in this regard, extremely compelling for it refutes the classic dichotomy of British (Indirect) and French (Direct) colonial rules.⁶⁰ The French in Mauritania, like their British counterparts, were to rule through the intermediary of local "natural" chiefs. In the case of Northern Nigeria, these would be the emirs. In the Mauritania both temporal (emirs) and spiritual (marabouts) leaders would rule in the name of the French. Coppolani's plan for the administrative organization of Mauritania was the following:

We must draw towards us the chiefs of different tribes, make them the intermediaries between us and their subjects, in such a way as to invest them with our power and our rules. Namely, they will be responsible for collecting the taxes sanctioned by the Coran as soon as we can establish these...Instead of receiving tribute from them as a sign of their assistance and loyalty, which places the Government of Senegal in the position of a tributary state of Moor chiefs, they will keep a percentage of the collected taxes, which we will determine. They will become, in a way, our immediate agents, aghas and quids, or simply shuyukh [plur. of shaykh] in charge of executing our orders and ensuring that their constituents respect our regulations...to administer through

⁵⁸ See for instance Peter Kazenga Tibenderana, "The Role of the British Administration in the appointment of the Emirs of Northern Nigeria, 1903-1930." *Journal of African History*. Vol 28, 1987. The Hausa states of Northern Nigeria were conquered by Lugard in 1903.

⁵⁹ Rapport succinct à M. le Ministre des Colonies sur l'organisation administrative et l'occupation pacifique de la 'Mauritanie'. P.2 in "L'origine de la Mauritanie." It is important to note that it was also in India that Lord Lugard found the inspiration for his 'dual mandate' or the lay-out of the British system of indirect rule. The fact that Coppolani's writings predates Lugard's famous treatise on indirect rule warrants a reconsideration of the history of colonial rule in Africa; a subject I intend to address in the future.

⁶⁰ For a new interpretation of indirect versus direct colonial rules in Africa see Berman and Lonsdale *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa*. London: James Currey Ltd., 1992. It seems to me that the case of Mauritania is the perfect example for their argument that the British and French approaches to colonial rule were not nearly as distinct as they have been portrayed in the literature.

the intermediary of local chiefs, is the only way to obtain immediate results, simply and cheaply.⁶¹

Coppolani believed, naively, that through political action and the persuasion of France's magnanimity, Saharan groups could easily be turned into peaceful taxpayers. This tactic had been used, to some degree of success at least, in the French Soudan, where several Biḍān chiefs and their followings had been peacefully coerced into paying taxes in sheep, camels and guinéés. Moreover, he emphasized the cultural, linguistic and religious links between nomads of western Algeria and those of western Africa. At the end of his report, Coppolani suggested to the Minister that he be appointed '*Résident de la Mauritanie*,' and requested the permission to return to Senegal to study the logistics of his colonial project.

From the onset, Coppolani's plan to create a new colony met with the resistance of the Governor-General of French West Africa, Chaudié, and his successor Bellay. Both officials were steadfast against making any modifications to the Franco-Biḍān relations that had prevailed for over a century between Ndar and the Biḍān north of the Senegal River. In his response to the December 1899 decree, issued by the Minister of Colonies, that inaugurated the Mauritanian Protectorate, Chaudié explained the reasons why he believed such a project was not realistic. He argued that Franco-Biḍān relations in and above the Senegalese colony were far more complex than Coppolani's representation

⁶¹ Rapport succinct a M. le Ministre des Colonies sur l'organisation administrative et l'occupation pacifique de la 'Mauritanie'. P.2 in "L'origine de la Mauritanie," p. 3 (recto and verso).

admitted.⁶² In his opinion, the French had found a perfect equilibrium in their commercial and political relations with the Biḍān. This was especially true, according to Chaudié, since 1892 when the emir of Adrar had signed a similar treaty to the ones the French had negotiated in the 1850s with the emirs of Trarza, Brakna and the Idaw'ish. He emphasized that these treaties were respected and safeguarded France's peaceful trading relations with the Biḍān. The Governor-General assured the Minister of Colonies that the French had well-established contacts with the Saharan rulers all the way to the Wad Nūn region of southern Morocco.⁶³ Moreover, the French had two important allies in Shaykh Sa'd Buh and Shaikh Sidiyya Bāba, two marabouts who had proven their loyalty to the French and assisted them in their relationships with the Biḍān.⁶⁴ Moreover, he insisted, putting in place an entire structure to collect customs fees and channel caravans to French posts would be extremely cost prohibitive and the AOF⁶⁵ budget could never sustain this.

⁶² ANS, 9G14, Document 36. Governor-General AOF à Ministre des Colonies, January 1900 (day does not appear on copy).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ For a discussion of the role of Sa'd Buh see Boubrik, Rahal. "Sainteté Et Espace En Mauritanie: Le Cas De Shaykh Sa'd Buh", *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara*, no. 10, 1996, 156 and David Robinson, "An Emerging Pattern of Cooperation between Colonial Authorities and Muslims Societies in Mauritania and Senegal." In D. Robinson & J.-L. Triaud (eds.), *Le Temps des Marabouts*. Paris: Karthala, 1997; and *Paths to Accommodation: Muslim Societies and Colonial Authority in Senegal and Mauritania, ca. 1880-1920*, Athens: Ohio University Press (forthcoming). For the definitive history of the Shaykh Sidiyya family see Charles Stewart, with E.K. Stewart. *Islam and Social Order in Mauritania: A Case Study from the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford University Press: 1973.

⁶⁵ Afrique Occidentale Française: French West African Colonies, a political regional entity, established in 1895, regrouping all of France's western African colonies.

He ended his reply by stating that it would be premature to execute "hasty measures which might compromise the situation and which in my view present no advantages."⁶⁶

The negative opinion of the Governor-General of AOF reflected that of the community of traders in Ndar. Several owners of trading houses, mainly the French Bordeaux interests and the Creole merchants, strongly opposed the French conquest of the northern bank because it threatened to destabilize their relationships with their main Biḍān trading partners. They probably believed that conquest would open the door to competition and threaten their economic position. The Devès family, originally from Bordeaux, who possessed one of the most successful trading houses in Ndar, established since the 1820s, was particularly opposed to French moves to conquer the Sahara.⁶⁷ Indeed, the Devès brothers had very close ties to the emirate of Trarza. They had even obtained from the Emir himself rights on the salt mine of N'Terert (located to the north of St. Louis, salt was an important trade item along the Senegal River) and the island of Arguin, in the Atlantic Ocean. The Devès sons were most probably the Ndar traders who informed Tiknas such as Ibrāhīm b. Swaylim about the French official plans to conquer Timbuktu (discussed in chapter six). François Manchuelle, who researched the history of the Devès family and their role in Senegalese politics, argued that the Devès sons played a critical role in the general council of Senegalese elected officials in the Ndar in

⁶⁶ "des mesures trop hâtives qui pourraient compromettre la situation et dont je n'entrevois pas les avantages." ANS, 9G14, Document 36. Governor-General AOF à Ministre des Colonies, 01/00.

⁶⁷ ANS, 1Z-6 Affaires Famille Devès, 1893-1910.

the 1880s and 1890s.⁶⁸ It was at during this time that the French administration sought to curtail the political powers of this electoral body of St. Louis in decisions about conquest and regional policy.

Coppolani found another opponent to his plan in the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, M. Delcassé. The minister refused to occupy a region where there existed some dispute over territorial boundaries, by which he meant the Spanish and French jurisdictions in the Western Sahara.⁶⁹ Besides, there was a lot of resistance to Coppolani himself. After all, he was not a military leader but rather a simple third level administrator turned "islamologue" who sought to become a man of action and leader of conquest.

The Origin of Mauritania: A Second Chance

Faced with such strong opposition, Coppolani's colonial project appeared to be doomed. In Ndar, the hostility towards interfering in Saharan affairs was redoubled after the dramatic failure of an exploratory mission to Adrar in March 1900. This expedition to study the Ijīl salt deposits in northern Adrar was led by French scientist M. Blanchet. He was accompanied by the principal interpreter for the French, Bu al-Mughdād II, and several French officers and tirailleurs sénégalais (colonial riflemen). The expedition ran amok when the new emir of Adrar, al-Mukhtār wuld Aḥmad ‘Aīda, captured the entire

⁶⁸ Manchuelle, "Métis et colons: la famille Devès et l'émergence politique des Africains au Sénégal, 1881-1897." *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 24, 4, 1984, pp. 477-504.

⁶⁹ ANRIM E1/9 Ministère des Affaires Etrangères à Ministre des Colonies, Paris, 8 mars 1900, cited by Adame Gnokane p. 257, fn 17 Gnokane "La Politique Française."

mission. Blanchet, his close advisors, and Bu al-Mughdad II, were buried to the neck in the sand and would have perished in this way if the marabout, collaborator of the French Shaykh Sa'd Bu, had not intervened and negotiated their liberation with the emir.⁷⁰

The 'Mission Blanchet' was a serious setback. Had it not been for Coppolani's determination, his passionate commitment, and, most importantly, his extremely skillful maneuvering between various ministries in Paris, the project to conquer the Sahara would have been abandoned altogether. Fortunately, he received the backing of both the Governor of the French Soudan and the Governor-General of Algeria, who had supported his initiatives from the onset. After a decisive meeting in June 1901 with the President of the French Council and Minister of Interior M. Waldeck-Rousseau, Coppolani was able to turn the tables. After hearing Coppolani's pitch, the minister decided to call an inter-ministerial commission composed of members of the three ministries of the Colonies, the Interior, and Foreign Affairs, to study Coppolani's propositions. After much deliberation, this commission decided to give the young Corsican a chance to prove his theories and convince the commission about the viability of a Saharan conquest. It is tempting to surmise that this positive decision might not have been reached had the governorship of French West Africa not changed hands from Bellay to Ernest Roume, a man who obviously favored Coppolani's ideas.⁷¹

⁷⁰ See Ba, "L'Adrar dans l'Anarchie," p. 26.

⁷¹ The aim of the triple ministerial commission was to "examine the situation relative to French position in western Algeria, determine territorial limits, study the relations and means of communication, and determine a plan of reconnaissance and organization of the regions under France's control." Emphasis in original text. Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer à Aix-en-Provence (CAOM), Mauritanie IV-I. X. Coppolani, Rapport présenté à la commission interministérielle du Nord-ouest africain, 14 octobre 1901, p. 1 (hereafter CAOM, Mauritanie IV-I. X. Coppolani, Rapport 1901)

Coppolani presented his comprehensive report to the inter-ministerial commission in October 1901.⁷² In an impressive *tour de force*, he resolved to persuade all three ministries, and everyone else in Paris, of the worthiness of his colonial cause. The report argued that a Saharan colony would serve a triple role: 1. To ensure the security and commercial development of Algeria and Senegal; 2. To unify the French African empire; 3. To serve the economic and political interests of the French in Morocco.

Coppolani put more emphasis than ever before on the economic competition of European merchants along the Atlantic coast of southern Morocco. He called attention to the rumor that the British were toying with the idea of building a railway from their temporary port of Cap Juby, in Southern Morocco, to Timbuktu.⁷³ This was sure to catch the attention of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which was well aware that the British were responsible for a large portion of the European imports to Morocco, especially at the port of Mogador (al-Swaīra).⁷⁴ Coppolani also repeated a rumor that the Germans were seeking to build an inland fort near the town of Smāra, Mā' al-'Aynayn's main headquarters. By that time it was not a secret that German traders were the main suppliers of firearms to Saharan resistance leaders.⁷⁵ Then Coppolani went on to explain that the areas of Algeria, Morocco, French Soudan, and the land between Senegal and Morocco (excepting the Spanish Sahara, the borders of which had been determined in the treaty of

⁷² CAOM, Mauritanie IV-I. X. Coppolani, Rapport 1901. The report was written by Coppolani but signed and presented to the commission by M. Binger, the Director of the Ministry of Colonies.

⁷³ The British had recently signed a treaty with the Sultan of Morocco to establish this commercial port.

⁷⁴ CAOM, Mauritanie IV-I. X. Coppolani, Rapport 1901, p. 33.

⁷⁵ This was actually true and the Germans were actively pursuing this plan as late as the 1940s (ANRIM E2/221). The relations between the Germans and the Ma al-'Aynayn family were extremely close and

June 1900) were culturally and linguistically unified, and that the same tribes nomadized across the entire region (the *Trāb al-Biḍān*). This was probably the first time that French officials had been made aware of this Biḍān space, which encompassed such a large section of western Africa.

Along the lines of his earlier report to the Minister of Colonies, Coppolani recognized that religious leaders wielded considerable authority. But then he switched focus altogether to examine the potential role of traders and trans-Saharan trade. He describes in careful detail the eastern arteries of trans-Saharan trade, identifying two main commercial itineraries. The first connected northern Atlantic ports to the extreme southern tip of Algeria, passing through southern Morocco and the northern edge of the Sahara (Map 2). The second major artery went from Ndar to Timbuktu, where French merchants were the main suppliers. He explained how market towns such as Tishīt, Wadān, Shingiti, Atar and Arawān, Walāta functioned as desert entrepôts along both major trans-Saharan trails.⁷⁶

After describing the trade routes, Coppolani examined the types of trade goods most common in Saharan exchange. First he noted the products of European origin that circulated in northern and western African markets (*guinéés*, firearms, paper, candles, sugar and tea).⁷⁷ Then he listed the commodities of Moroccan origin most represented in

require more research. I suspect that Germans were the main suppliers of munitions to the resistance movement against the French.

⁷⁶ CAOM, Mauritanie IV-I. X. Coppolani, Rapport 1901, p. 23.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 24.

trans-Saharan trade, noting that these were imported by the Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā'.⁷⁸

These were mainly luxury goods such as carpets, fine clothes, utensils (teapots and tea serving tables), as well as books and paper. As for the commodities exported to the North from western Africa, and eventually Europe, these included millet, rice, kola nuts, honey, incense, leathers, ivory and some gold, as well as virgin wool, wax, gum arabic, dates, salt, ostrich feathers, sheep, and livestock.

In this report, Coppolani underscored that the Tikna and the Awlād Bu Sbā were the long-distance traders supplying and distributing these goods to the two shores of the Sahara. This is a clear indication that Coppolani either entertained conversations with Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' traders, and/or that he had studied the commercial scene during his trips to Senegal and the French Soudan. His awareness of the prominence of these two groups elucidates why they were about to play a critical role in the effective occupation of the Mauritania alongside the French, a topic we will turn to below.

Compiling comprehensive statistics on the real volume of this trade was next to impossible. However, Coppolani provided estimates based on data gathered from the commercial reports of French representatives in Mogador, Senegal and the western Sudan. He estimated that the total volume of trans-Saharan trade in 1899 was equal to 20 million French Francs. What is more, based on the information he had extracted from

⁷⁸ "Matières premières de provenance marocaine tels que laines brutes, viandes séchées, graines, burnous de laine blanche, manteaux noirs, caftans, haik [khaïk] tissu blanc brillant, soie épaisse? portée par les femmes comme châle...marchent en dandinant...importés par Tekna et Oulad Bou Sba pour les femmes du nord, poèmes de ghazal...bourgeoisie), couvertures, ceintures, cordelières rouges, sandales, tapis courroies pour chevaux, parfumerie, ambre du Tafilelt, huile d'olive, goudron végétal, ustensiles de cuisine de Taroudant, quelques juments, etc." CAOM, Mauritanie IV-I. X. Coppolani, Rapport 1901, p. 24.

“Moroccan” traders in the French Soudan in 1899, he assessed the trade of Moroccan products into western African markets at an annual 5 409 000 francs. Coppolani underscored that the bulk of imported European merchandise arriving in western African markets was of British and German origin.⁷⁹ In playing-up this European competition card, Coppolani goes as far as to project that with a firmer control of the Sahara regions between Morocco and Senegal:

Our trading posts of Senegal (unlike others on the Atlantic coast between Wadi Draa and St. Louis) will easily supplant the foreign markets of the Sous and Mogador and will come to dominate the trade traffic of several million francs that currently is out of our grasp.⁸⁰

In contrast to his earlier theories about "pacification" through cooptation of religious leaders, Coppolani's final report put the accent on economic advantage and trade. This shift in approach is indeed quite remarkable. Moving away from his original *politique musulmane* that saw the cooptation of marabouts and other religious leaders as the sole agents of a peaceful colonial conquest, Coppolani switched the onus from the *Shaykh* (religious leader) to the *Tājir* (trader; plur. *Tijār*), while at the same recognizing the connections between the two professions, as is clear from the following passage:

The confederations of Tidjars (traders) put their merchandise under the protection of religious chiefs. A recommendation, a good word from Shaykh Ma al-Ainain, Saad Buh, Shaykh al-Kabir, of a Kunta marabout or any other, is a passport that everyone respects. But to obtain it, one must either pay for it or at least acknowledge the rendered favor and the poor trader becomes in a way the tributary of both temporal and spiritual chiefs. This is why he ceaselessly requests the safety that he lacks, and it is our

⁷⁹ CAOM, Mauritanie IV-I. X. Coppolani, Rapport 1901, p. 27.

⁸⁰ "Nos comptoirs du Sénégal (à défaut d'autres sur la Côte Atlantique entre l'Oued Drâa et Saint-Louis) pourront aisément supplanter les marchés étrangers du Sous et de Mogador et se rendre maîtres d'un trafic de plusieurs millions qui actuellement nous échappe. " Ibid. p. 27.

duty to provide it...*Allied to the religious, the Tidjar is the best element of peaceful penetration.* He is intelligent and an expert in business. With his position, his skills, his spirit of assimilation, *he is the obligatory intermediary between the Moors and us, the natural link of commercial transactions between northern and western Africa. It would be a grave mistake not to encourage and guide him.*⁸¹

It is very likely that when conceptualizing about the central role traders could play as agents of French colonialism, Coppolani had the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' in mind. As explained below, he recommended that the Awlād Bū Sbā' be armed and participate in the conquest; he also developed close ties with the two most prominent Tikna traders of Shingīṭī who became his informants. It was by stressing the potential economic benefit the French could reap from controlling Saharan trade routes, that Coppolani finally succeeded in persuading the three ministries of the validity of his colonial plan. Clearly, an economic argument, to which was added a sense of tense competition between European powers in Morocco, was a most compelling excuse to conquer the Sahara. If there was going to be any French involvement and military investment in this region, it needed to be justified by at least the semblance of an economic rationale. On 4 June 1902, Coppolani was named secretary general of the civil territory of Mauritania, a colony much reduced in size from Coppolani's original colonial map.⁸² The real conquest would begin in earnest later that year.

As it turns out, both Muslim authorities and prominent trans-Saharan traders became active collaborators in Coppolani's conquest of Mauritania as it unfolded from

⁸¹ CAOM, Mauritanie IV-I. X. Coppolani, Rapport 1901, p. 28 (Emphasis mine).

the late 1902 onwards. In the early months of 1903, Shaykh Bāba wuld Sidīya, the principal marabout collaborator of the French, wrote a *fatwā* defending the French conquest of the *Trāb al-Biḍān* on the grounds that submission to an infidel ruler was acceptable given the general situation of *sība* in the area.⁸³ Later that year, Coppolani wrote to Yazīd wuld Mulāy 'Aly, a Tikna who became the most prosperous trader in colonial Mauritania, asking him to provide confidential information about the resistance movement in the Adrar.⁸⁴

The Problem of the Awlād Bū Sbā'

The colonial conquest of Mauritania began in earnest in the spring of 1903 with the guiding support of Shaykh Bāba wuld Sidīya and Shaykh Sa'ad Buh.⁸⁵ In their push northward, the French colonial troops and their Senegalese riflemen (barely initiated to riding camels and navigating between active wells across shifting sand dunes) created much tension north of the Senegal River. Added to the political instability in the Adrar region, the caravan traffic across the Sahara came to a grinding halt in the first decade of the twentieth century. As Ba explains, "the state of insecurity diverted the caravans in

⁸² The borders of Mauritania as they were drawn then are basically those of the country today; they represent a portion, albeit the largest unified piece, of the *Biḍān* space.

⁸³ Marty, *L'Emirat du Trarza*.

⁸⁴ Letter found in the personal archives of Muḥammad Lamine o/ Abdallah o/ Bayrūk, Nouakchott (Mauritania). Yazīd wuld Mulāy 'Aly is one of the most important "personnages" in my dissertation (discussed in the next section).

the land and suspended the commercial movement with the north as well as with the region of Tishīt and Walāta.”⁸⁶

From the very beginnings of the conquest, the Awlād Bū Sbā’ came to assume an important intermediary position brokering, and at times breaking, relations between the French and the Biḍān communities north of the Senegal River. It is important to recall that the founder of the Senegalese colony, Governor Faidherbe, had recognized the Awlād Bū Sbā’ in his nineteenth century mémoires (see chapter four). He might have written a report on this group, the first group of “Maures” to submit to French overrule in the mid-nineteenth century.⁸⁷ Faidherbe wrote that the Awlād Bū Sbā’ were France’s first “allies” in 1854, in his war against the emir of Trarza, Muḥammad Laḥbīb.⁸⁸ In more ways than one, as David Robinson explains, Coppolani and Faidherbe would follow similar itineraries as founders of colonies.⁸⁹

As we saw in the previous chapter, the last decade of the nineteenth century was particularly tumultuous for the Awlād Bū Sbā’. From their protracted wars against the Kunta, to their defeat at the hands of the Rgaībāt, and their assassination of the emir of the Adrar in 1899, their reputation as warriors was well established by the early twentieth

⁸⁵ See Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation*.

⁸⁶ Ba, “L’Adrar dans Anarchie,” p. 29.

⁸⁷ Although I have to find concrete evidence of the dating of this event, and the relevant documents in the French colonial record, it is a fact undisputed by a number of insinuations in sources written by Coppolani, Frèrejean (see below). It is clearly stated in a letter addressed by the Awlād Bū Sbā’ to Coppolani in 1905 (also discussed below).

⁸⁸ Martin, “Une tribu,” p. 26.

century. Between 1900 and 1906, they continued to engage in warfare and hostilities with the local population. In 1900, the Awlād Bū Sbā' and the Kunta nomadizing in the northern Adrar engaged in a number of skirmishes. According to Ba (who might have been biased in favor of the Awlād Bū Sbā', his hosts in Atar), it was the Kunta who were the most stubborn adversaries, refusing to settle for peace.⁹⁰ During one of these clashes, the Kunta lost thirty men, several hundred camels and many slaves to the Awlād Bū Sbā'. The Kunta retaliated by assassinating a defenseless and well renowned Awlād Bū Sbā' scholar; an act which apparently infuriated many Adrar residents.⁹¹ In 1902 a major war erupted between them and their old allies the Rgaībāt. The war was initially fought through their respective bards (*Iggāun*) who composed poems condemning the opposite group.⁹² The Awlād Bū Sbā' were severely defeated by the Rgaībāt in the battle at Fūsht, losing close to one hundred men, and stopping at least temporarily the Awlād Bū Sbā' rampage. In a last assault that took place in 1905, a group of Awlād Bū Sbā' was pushed out of the Adrār and sought refuge in Smāra, in the encampment of Mā' al-'Aynayn.⁹³ Other Awlād Bū Sbā' men headed south, seeking shelter in the French colonial capital of Ndar.

⁸⁹ Robinson, "'French Africans.'"

⁹⁰ Ba, "L'Adrar dans l'Anarchie."

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Muḥammad Sālim wuld Laḥbīb, in Na'Imi, *Les Principales Préoccupations*, p. 125-126.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 125.

In the 1902, the French colonial administration intervened in a dispute between the emir of Trarza, and his cousin Aḥmad Sālūm. Coppolani interfered directly in this political struggle by deposing the first and installing the latter, more favorable to the French plan of conquest. It is very likely that Akhaīrhum, the Awlād Bū Sbā' minister of foreign affairs of the emir of Trarza who was practically living in Ndar, was instrumental in this entire political machination. In any event, it was at this time that Coppolani recommended to his second-in-command, Capitaine Louis Frèrejean, that the military should begin co-opting a group of Awlād Bū Sbā' to participate in the conquest. Perhaps because of their position as strangers in the area, and their reputation as troublemakers, the French saw tremendous advantages in having the Awlād Bū Sbā' on their side, instilling fear in the local population. Armed with the latest weapons by the French, they could assist in "convincing" the Biḍān communities of lower Mauritania to acquiesce to French domination.

When Commandant Frèrejean joined the Coppolani team at the end of 1902, he spent the first six months in Ndar learning Ḥasanīya and reading the archives.⁹⁴ Frèrejean had previously been part of the military troops which conquered Nioro (1891) and Timbuktu (1894).⁹⁵ While training in Ndar, Frèrejean became familiar with the community of Awlād Bū Sbā' traders living in town. Judging from his memoirs, it seems

⁹⁴ Cmdt. Frèrejean, *Mauritanie 1903-1911: Mémoires de Randonnées et de Guerre au Pays des Beidanes*, Paris: Karthala, 1995, p. 13.

⁹⁵ See his memoirs *Objectif Tombouctou*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996.

that he developed a particularly close relationship with Akhaīrhum, who died of old age the following year.⁹⁶ By the time the Awlād Bū Sbā' were being courted by the French, they were weakened by countless wars and in serious need of resources. The French invitation was obviously attractive, but the Awlād Bū Sbā' refused, however, to enlist as "goumiers," or the camel-mounted soldiers in the French colonial army. They argued, apparently, that the "Shurfas could not serve infidels against Muslims."⁹⁷

After winning over the emirs of Trarza, Brakna and the Tagant, Coppolani led the conquest of the southwestern Sahara. With mounted camel corps, trained in the outskirts of Ndar and composed mainly of Wolof and Hal-Pulār soldiers, he blazed a trail, negotiating submissions with each tribe along the way. Coppolani's co-architect in sketching the colonial conquest canvas, and convincing the Biḍān of the validity of the plan, was *zwāya* Shaykh Bāba wuld Sidiya mentioned above.⁹⁸ The other important "marabout," with a long-term relationship of collaboration with the French, was Shaykh Sa'ad Buh. A religious leader with an growing following in Senegal, Shaykh Sa'ad Buh was constantly visiting Ndar and nomadized between the northern Trarza and Inshīri

⁹⁶ Ibid. The two photographic reproductions in the book are both of Akhaīrhum

⁹⁷ Martin, p. 9. Martin's tone is clearly sarcastic as the Awlād Bū Sbā' were armed and did use their guns primarily against Muslims. The term goumier was a generic term for colonial riflemen mounted on camels. It was coined in Algeria and exported southward. The term is derived from the Arabic "*qāma*" meaning to get up, stand, and fight in the imperative (*qaūm*).

⁹⁸ See Robinson, "French Africans."

regions (see Map 3).⁹⁹ It was he who, in the early twentieth century, wrote a *fatwā* defending the Sharifian claims of the Awlād Bū Sbā', at the outset of their war with the Awlād al-Lab (see chapter four). However, Shaykh Bāba wuld Sidīya was perhaps the most respected of the two. He was from the learned Awlād Ibīri group, and his father was also a venerated Muslim scholar.

In the course of 1904, Coppolani and his troops defeated the Idaw'īsh of Tagant who had turned against them and joined the resistance movement. This conquest of the Tagant was quite a violent affair, and was far removed from the scenario of a "peaceful colonial penetration" Coppolani had originally claimed it would be. In the course of the military operations, the old emir of the Tagant, Bakār wuld Swaīd Aḥmad (who was by then a centenarian) was killed at the hands of Commandant Frèrejean. It is easy to see how the disappearance of a powerful political leader who had ruled between the Tagant and, indirectly, the Adrar for over half a century, may have been a traumatic event for the people of the *Trāb al-Biḍān*.¹⁰⁰ As historian Maḥjūb w. Al-Baya explains, "no national personality had the power and the prestige that Bakar had, except Mā' al-'Aynayn."¹⁰¹

During these combats, many people, fighters, women, children and elders, met their death, and the massacre sent panic waves back to Ndar. Shortly after, Coppolani

⁹⁹ See Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation*, and Rahal Boubrik, "Sainteté."

¹⁰⁰ See Mariella Villasante-de Beauvais, *Parenté et Politique en Mauritanie*, Paris: l'Harmattan, 1998, pp. 63-78 for several oral testimonies of the conquest of the Tagant.

established the French headquarters in the oasis town of Tidjikja. Later, commander Frèrejean founded a military outpost at the well of Nouakchott (which would become the location of the future capital of independent Mauritania).

In the course of all this military action, a group of Awlād Bū Sbā' was armed with performing guns supplied by the new Protectorate of Mauritania. Among these men was Muḥammad Sālam b. 'Abdarraḥmān b. Bu'ānga (discussed in the previous chapter). In the process of serving the French cause, Bu'ānga engaged in smuggling guns from the colonial capital to the people who were preparing armed resistance under the guidance of Mā' al-'Aynayn. Thanks to Bu'ānga, who supplied the most performing of weapons, the fast-firing rifle, the Awlād Bū Sbā' regained their military strength. Consequently, as the following verses from a popular poem express, the Awlād Bū Sbā were "militarily superior to all the inhabitants of the region, they sent out their armed bands on the whole population. The people grew fearful, even those who had guns in their possession. The Awlād Bū Sbā' fought everyone and dominated."¹⁰²

Coppolani's involvement of the Awlād Bū Sbā' in the conquest of Mauritania was bound to backfire, so to speak, as these clerics turned warriors ("marabouts-guerriers") were to turn their guns on their political enemies in the process. This is exactly what

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Muḥammad Maoloud, "Le Pays de Chinguetti (Mauritanie) de 1899 à 1912: Aperçu Général sur la Résistance à la Conquête Coloniale." Mémoire de Maîtrise, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, 1983-1984.

¹⁰² Muḥammad Sālim wuld Laḥbīb, in Na'īmi, *Les Principales Préoccupations*, p. 126.

unfolded in 1904; an embarrassing incident in the history of the French colonial conquest. From the time the Awlād Bū Sbā' had defeated the Kunta in 1863, this powerful Saharan tribe had remained their archenemy. With the changing imperial power structure in the early 1900s, ancient rivalries continued to be played out in a new setting.

While Frèrejean was founding the outpost of Nouakchott, he was approached by “his” Awlād Bū Sbā' troops. They had just been attacked by the Awlād Ibīri, the tribe of Shaykh Bāba wuld Sidīya.¹⁰³ They asked for permission to retaliate against the attack. It is important to mention that these hostilities were very connected to the Awlād Bū Sbā'-Kunta rivalry. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Kunta were the leaders of the Qadiriya sufi order in western Africa. The Kunta had educated Shaykh Bāba wuld Sidīya's father, and initiated him into the Qadiriya order.¹⁰⁴ Any assault on the Kunta was, by extension, an affront to the Awlād Ibīri, the tribal group of the Sidīya family living in southern Trarza.

In response to their request, Frèrejean gave the Awlād Bū Sbā' the green light to attack an encampment of Awlād Ibīri where they proceeded to kill several men. This was a major *faux pas* against the very group who formed the *maraboutic intelligentsia* backing Coppolani's colonial scheme, with Shaykh Bāba wuld Sidīya at its head. The Awlād Bū Sbā' then proceeded to move into the Brakna region, then at war with the

¹⁰³ See Martin, pp. 26-29; and Frèrejean, *Mauritanie*.

French conquerors, requesting from the people hospitality and booty along the way. Upon their return, the Awlād Bū Sbā' were met by Coppolani's forces who, to save face in front of the Shaykh Bāba wuld Sidīya clan, were ordered to attack them.¹⁰⁵ This retaliation took place in the encampment of Shaykh Bāba wuld Sidīya's family, a traditional sanctuary for the learned and their tributaries. In the rebound, several of the Shaykh Bāba wuld Sidīya men were accidentally killed. This was a most embarrassing moment for Coppolani, since ultimately he was responsible for the misconduct of the officers and the Awlād Bū Sbā' under his command. He was walking a fine line between the Shaykh Bāba wuld Sidīya clan and the Awlād Bū Sbā'.

In July of 1904, in a moment coinciding with Coppolani's temporary return to Paris, the Awlād Bū Sbā' proceeded with their pillaging activities. They traveled quickly all over the southwestern Saharan regions from the Trarza to the Hawḍ targeting the Kunta encampments. Consequently, "all acts of pillaging were attributed to them."¹⁰⁶ Six months later the Awlād Ibīri, equipped with fast-firing rifles supplied by the French *résident* (district commissioner) of western Trarza, decided to seek vengeance on the Awlād Bū Sbā' pirates. A large group of about two hundred armed men from the Awlād Ibīri, taking arms for the first time, fell full force upon an Awlād Bū Sbā' encampment in

¹⁰⁴ Stewart, *Islam and Social Order*.

¹⁰⁵ Martin, p. 27.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

northern Trarza. They found a much larger group than anticipated composed of about 260 Awlād Bū Sbā' and their allies the Awlād Dīm and the Rgaībāt, who happened to be visiting that day. The attack turned into a bloody defeat for the Awlād Ibīri.¹⁰⁷ As a council of Awlād Bū Sbā' later explained,

We were leaving our encampment to go in the direction of Akenayatur when we arrived at Mugnayna, the army of Oulades Abeyayery [Awlād Ibīri] accompanied by 70 people subjects of the Adrar fell upon our encampment where there were 265 men. We fought for four hours. We vanquished them with the grace of God; they killed eleven of our men, including six Oulades Bouseba and five of our allies. We killed 185 of their men and we seized 200 rifles.¹⁰⁸

This large-scale massacre, which occurred in early 1905, was the last of a long series of Awlād Bū Sbā' - Kunta clashes carried out over a period of fifty years. In order to secure their favorable position vis-à-vis the French authority in the aftermath of this carnage, a council (*jama'a*) of Awlād Bū Sbā' wrote directly to the then Governor of Senegal, Ernest Roume, in February 1905. That the Awlād Bū Sbā' chose to address the Governor of AOF directly, and not Coppolani, the de facto governor of the Protectorate of Mauritania, is an indication of the skillful maneuvering of this stranger-trader group. The Awlād Bū Sbā' obviously had an understanding of the hierarchy of the colonial administration. The rather lengthy message began as follows:

The aim of this letter is to remind you that it was us who were the first to enter into contact with the French governor-generals. You do not ignore that we are

¹⁰⁷ Martin, p. 25.

¹⁰⁸ ANS 9G22, Document 6, p. 4.

the first Biḍāni who sought your protection on the basis of an alliance...we have so far held to our promises and we are disposed to make war to our own enemies as well as those of the French, such as the people of the Adrar, the Awlād al-Lab, and the Awlād Dlīm...We had suffered with patience all fatigues and sufferance. All the tribes hate us, the *zwāya* as well as the notables since Mr. Coppolani has penetrated the *Trāb al-Biḍān*.¹⁰⁹

The tone of this letter is perceptibly defensive, almost as if the Awlād Bū Sbā' blamed the conquest for their plight. The letter, signed by "Labibe Samany," whom I have not identified, further explained that Coppolani was misinformed by the enemies of Awlād Bū Sbā', namely the Kunta and the Awlād Ibīri. He insisted that the Awlād Bū Sbā' were dedicated to the French cause, and given a chance they would remain resourceful allies. The author goes as far as appealing for the continued relationship with the French in the following terms "we need the assistance of the French and we are your devoted auxiliaries."¹¹⁰ Besides political action, the Awlād Bū Sbā' promised to support the French conquest and quell resistance.

The most remarkable aspect of this letter is that it sheds light on Coppolani's argument, stated above, about the role of trader as "the best element of peaceful penetration." Labibe Samany divulged information about how the Awlād Bū Sbā' were being directed to become commercial colonial agents. He mentioned that the Awlād Bū Sbā' were asked to settle and start expanding their trade networks in the regions then

¹⁰⁹ ANS 9G22, Document 6. (1322 hijra), February 1905. Letter signed by Labibe Samany and translated by Souleyman Diop in Dakar (the original is lost).

under effective French military control, namely the Trarza. The French apparently asked a number of Awlād Bū Sbā' to set-up shop in a location called "Akenayatur." This transliterated name is most certainly a location in the Trarza near the Akneya well, where the French outpost of Mederdra was founded. At the time of the conquest, Mederdra became the site where Awlād Bū Sbā' traders opened the first *boutiques* in this region of western Sahara.¹¹¹ As per the letter, the Awlād Bū Sbā' had received orders to settle there and

do trade with the French, to receive favorably their subjects who could come to this region and to provide them with all that they demanded [in terms of trade goods]. We responded to him [presumably Coppolani] affirmatively and we sent an envoi to the Oulades Bouseba [Awlād Bū Sbā'] who are in Vadenoune [Wād Nūn] to recommend to them to come trade with the French when they have horses or any other animal; the principal traders since are sending us horses.¹¹²

That the Awlād Bū Sbā' were to be the peaceful agents of colonial penetration through commercial infiltration seems clear from this and other sources discussed below. Moreover, this episode marked the very beginning of a new form of trading activity for the Wād Nūn caravaners; that of holding shop. As explained in chapter three, shops were unheard of in the area prior to the twentieth century simply because it was dangerous to advertise wealth. Most exchange transactions took place in peoples' homes, or under a tent. We will return to the advent of the boutique in chapter eight.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

¹¹¹ Interviews in Mederdra with Fatima mint al-Ḥasān (08/05/95), and Mohamed Jules (08/02/95).

¹¹² ANS 9G22, Document 6, p. 4.

The mention of the horse trade from the Wād Nūn to Ndar, which the Awlād Bū Sbā' specialized in, is important in light of the evidence that this trade continued into the twentieth century on new terms. Oral sources reveal that, by the turn of the century, several Awlād Bū Sbā' traders revolutionized their approach to trans-Saharan trade by using European maritime transportation. Embarking on ships moored in Agadir, al-Swaīra, Tarfaya, and other ports on the northern Atlantic coast, several Awlād Bū Sbā' long-distance traders continued the still very lucrative horse trade by boat.¹¹³ To be sure, the Awlād Bū Sbā' and the Tikna began taking advantage of the regular ship transportation from the northwestern Atlantic coast to Ndar probably as early as the 1890s. This commercial revolution, marking the transformation of several caravaners into commercial sailors, occurred in a period of insecurity on trans-Saharan trade and the related increase in European presence in the area. For Wād Nūn stranger-traders who had a long history of interactions with Europeans and occasional overseas experiences (See chapter four for the examples of the Awlād Bū Sbā' Muḥammad wuld 'Umar's brother who traveled to England, and Bayrūk's envoy in Paris), it is hardly surprising that they would become pioneers in this regard (more on this subject in the next chapter).

The Awlād Bū Sbā' letter to Governor Roume then expressed the indignation of the Awlād Bū Sbā' with regards to the surprise attack of the armed Awlād Ibīri. It

¹¹³ Interview in 'Asrīr with Ḥabūb (07/30/99).

conveyed a general concern that this attack had been endorsed by the French authorities. The letter ended with a threat that if the French continued to support their enemies, the Awlād Bū Sbā' would be obliged to flee to the north. They thereby insinuated that, if pushed to do so, they would switch sides and join the resistance movement.

Whatever the French response to the Awlād Bū Sbā' plea, it is clear that the Awlād Bū Sbā' remained on the good terms of the French throughout most of the colonial period. Yet for the French, the main problem in dealing with the Awlād Bū Sbā' was the fact they were a divided group who admittedly lacked leadership and a proper political structure. This seems to have been a problem for the Awlād Bū Sbā' as a whole, as well as for the imperial power trying to co-opt them. The above mentioned letter clearly stated that the Awlād Bū Sbā' lacked internal coalition.¹¹⁴ The French would continue courting them, realizing also that having the Awlād Bū Sbā' on their wrong side would be a political mistake. Nevertheless, it took another five years before the French could effectively occupy the most important region of Mauritania, the impenetrable Adrar.

The Conquest of the Adrar and the Role of the Tikna

In this initial period of colonial conquest, a number of Tikna traders who organized caravans to and from Ndar also became colonial agents for Coppolani. As in the case of the *Awlād Bū Sbā'*, the Franco-Tikna relationship can be explained by the familiarity of this stranger-trader with Ndar, and the colonial order located there. Moreover, the Tikna had entered into direct negotiations with the French since the 1840s, when Bayrūk had approached the Governor in Senegal in view of building an independent *Wād Nūn* port on the Atlantic coast (see chapter three). The colonial record shows that the most prominent Tikna trader of *Shingīṭi* at the time, 'Abdallah wuld 'Abābā, son of *Mḥaymad wuld 'Abābā* discussed in the previous chapter, was involved in the early phases of the colonial conquest. First he began selling camels to the French military. From *Shingīṭi*, in the Adrar region, he drove several herds of camels to Coppolani in *Tijīkjā*.¹¹⁵ At the same time, 'Abdallah wuld 'Abābā began renting his services as a transporter for the French administration bringing supplies from Ndar to the French outposts in southwestern Sahara, including *Tijīkjā*. In the next chapter, we will return to the subject of colonial caravans, and how this occupation propelled a number of Tikna traders into the colonial economy. In August 1908, as the conquest of the Adrar

¹¹⁴ Ibid. The letter by the *Awlād Bū Sbā'* stated the fact that they lacked unity and a proper governing body quite forthrightly.

¹¹⁵ ANS, 9G 12.

was becoming eminent, ‘Abdallah wuld ‘Abābā’s camels were requisitioned by the French near Tijikjā in the Tagant for the transportation of the French artillery. This information quickly made its way to Shingīī, and as a result, his house was pillaged, and could not return to it until the French occupied the Adrar five months later.¹¹⁶ ‘Abdallah wuld ‘Abābā was not the only Tikna to suffer the consequences of collaboration with the *naṣāra*.

Yazīd wuld Mulay ‘Aly was another caravaner who, very early on, assumed the rather precarious role of a colonial agent. The case of Yazīd wuld Mulay ‘Aly is worth examining here in full, since this stranger-trader came to assume such a central role in the commercial development of colonial Mauritania. In the previous chapter, we mentioned Mulay ‘Aly, Yazīd’s father, who was part of the second wave of Tikna traders to settle on trans-Saharan trails in the second half of the nineteenth century. Mulay ‘Aly’s family was originally from Tafilālt but they moved to Gulmīm where he was born to a Tikna mother.¹¹⁷ Through marriage, assimilation and location, the Mulay ‘Aly family became Tikna by alliance and association. Because they claimed Sharifian descent, this family came to be considered as Sharifs of the Tikna (*shurfa al-Tikna*). Mulay ‘Aly in turn

¹¹⁶ ANRIM, E2/82. Renseignements sur les Tribus, Tribu des Tikna.

¹¹⁷ The biographical information was derived from interviews with numerous members of the family, descendents of the sons of Mulay ‘Aly who live in Mauritania.

married a Tikna Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly woman in Gulmīm with whom he had several children while living the life of a trans-Saharan caravaner. Like most Wād Nūn traders, he focused on the trade in luxury goods, namely gold and slaves.¹¹⁸ For a while, he took up residence in Walāta, where he married and had a daughter (Sāvīa). Later, he moved to Shingīti where he eventually passed away.

After his death, Mulay 'Aly's oldest son Yazīd, living in Gulmīm, came on caravan to Shingīti to collect the inheritance of his father. He was welcomed there by the Tikna community, and through their connections, he was able to recuperate his father's wealth (see chapter six for a discussion of the role of Limām wuld Arwīli in this process). Rather than return to Gulmīm, Yazīd decided to stay to trade, no doubt using his father's trade connections and the inheritance as start-up capital. Based out of Shingīti, he organized trans-Saharan and interregional caravans of the kind that I described in chapter three. His most frequent routes where:

¹¹⁸ Interview in Nouakchott with Mulay 'Umar Wuld Mulay Ahmed and Aishatu mint Mulay 'Aly (7/30/97)

Shingīṭi - Gulmīm: He sold slaves and some gold, exchanged camels, and purchased Moroccan luxury goods (carpets, tea pots, glasses, and metal platters, as well as books and religious paraphernalia).

Shingīṭi - Nioro: He sold salt, some dates and Moroccan wares for millet, other foodstuffs and slaves.

Shingīṭi - Ndar, or alternatively Shingīṭi –Podor: He sold mainly Morocco goods (mainly expensive Morocco cloths (haiks, babouches, bonnets) and Muslim supplies (books and chaplets). He also sold camels, horses, sheep and perhaps other livestock. In exchange, he purchased all kinds of European goods (cloth, foodstuffs, oils and tar, and consumer goods) and African goods (foodstuff).

Very soon, Yazīd's caravaning enterprise prospered and so he invited his two brothers to come from Gulmīm and join him. He married Fāṭima mint al-Swaylim, daughter of Ibrāhīm wuld Swaylīm, the Tikna trader mentioned in the previous chapter who traded between Ndar and Timbuktu. Together they soon had several children. Family traditions relate the story of Yazīd's success, his natural flare for trade:

Once on route to Nioro with his salt caravan, he met a caravan returning from Nioro. The caravaners explained to him that there was a big cloud over Nioro, and it was pouring rain. As a result, these traders had lost their entire load of salt. And so they warned Yazīd that if he wanted to save his salt, he should turn around. Yazīd thanked them for the information, and decided to take a huge risk. He proceeded on course. By the time he was entering Nioro, the clouds had already dissipated and the demand for salt was so high that he obtained the best price for his salt.¹¹⁹

While trading in Ndar, the French colonial capital, Yazīd made connections with European traders. Eventually, when the conquest of what would become Mauritania was

eminent in the early 1900s, he was able to use the information he obtained in this town effectively. To secure a position within the new power structure, Yazīd soon entered into conversation with the French, exchanging information and preempting the economic consequences of colonial conquest.

A letter, found by chance in the personal archives of Muḥammad Lamine wuld ‘Abdallah wuld Bayrūk, provides precious insights into Yazīd’s relationship with Coppolani, the architect of colonial Mauritania.¹²⁰ The letter was written by the latter who addressed it to "his friend Yezid." I found no evidence in Coppolani's works as to when he actually met Yazīd wuld Mulāy ‘Aly, nor how they came to develop this "friendship."¹²¹ To be sure, the part played by this Tikna trader during the decade leading to the French 'pacification' of the Adrar region, which we will return to below, cannot be underestimated. Writing sometime in mid-1904, Coppolani informed Yazīd wuld Mulāy ‘Aly that the Idaw‘īsh tribe had submitted to the French authorities, and that he had now set-up camp in Tijīkja, an oasis town in the Tagant region (200 km to the west of Tishīt). The purpose of Coppolani's letter was to ask Yazīd wuld Mulāy ‘Aly about the political

¹¹⁹ Interview in Nouakchott with Mulay Ghaly wuld Yazid wuld Mulay ‘Aly (07/24/97). This story was repeated by several oral informants.

¹²⁰ Copy of Coppolani’s letter to Yazīd not dated but signed by the interpreter P. T. L. Family records of Muḥammad Lamine wuld ‘Abdallah wuld Bayrūk (Nouakchott).

¹²¹ Although I had access to the documents of the Yazīd wuld Mulāy ‘Aly in the possession of three of his grand children, I was unable to find any further evidence indicating the relationship between the two.

climate in the Adrar and the disposition of the people with regards to the French occupation, as the following excerpt conveys:

We are in the best of positions for the people of Adrar. Tell this to all the traders. Write to me a letter that you can dispatch with one of your trustworthy men where you inform me exactly what is the situation in Adrar and the disposition towards us [the French] of the people there.

At about the same period, as he prepared the assault of the Adrar from the town of Tidjīkjā, Coppolani also got word that the people of Adrar and dissident groups of the Trarza region were allying themselves to the Awlād Bū Sba with the intent to stop the French incursion.¹²² Moreover, he received a letter from the Emir of Adrār that warned the French that their land was under the protection of the Sultan of Morocco and that he would remain at peace with the French as long as the French were at peace with the Sultan.¹²³

Shortly after, in the spring of 1905, Coppolani's fort in Tijikja was attacked at night. The "friend of the Biḍān" was assassinated by a certain Sidi Saghīr wuld Mulay Zayn. All kinds of theories and stories are told about the circumstances surrounding Coppolani's sudden death. To be sure, it was the beginning of a series of confrontations organized by the people of the Adrar with support from Moroccan allies.

The dramatic death of colonial Mauritania's martyr sent shock waves to Ndar and Paris, putting the entire conquest temporarily on hold. At the same time, the resistance

¹²² Gillier, *La Pénétration en Mauritanie*. Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 192, p. 130.

¹²³ Gillier, 1926. p. 130.

under Mā' al-'Aynayn gained momentum. Mā' al-'Aynayn, accompanied by several hundred men, including people of the Adrar led by the emir, Awlād Bū Sbā', Tikna, Rgaībāt and all of the Muslim leader's *talamīdh* (students), marched north to the Morocco capital of Fez to meet with the Sultan 'Abdal'azīz. As a result of this massive rally, the Moroccan Sultan sent his uncle Mulay Idrīs in 1906 as an emissary to the Adrar, and later to the Tagant, to announce Morocco's support to the cause of resistance, the promise to supply guns, and a general call to the peoples of the Sahara to take arms against the French conquest. As Ba explains, this calling spread like wildfire "from the ocean to Timbuktu all people talked about the next combat that was to liberate the Muslims from the yoke of the infidels."¹²⁴

As Colonel Modat recalls in his history of the conquest of Mauritania, "The situation had become intolerable. There was only one cure: to occupy the Adrar, from where the enemy came...The Adrar had become the armed stronghold of the pillagers."¹²⁵ It would last until Colonel Gouraud, a young man with just as much determination as Coppolani, took over the reigns of the colonial plan in this western Saharan region. In December of 1908, he led the French military decisively into the Adrār.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Ba, "L'Adrar dans l'Anarchie," p. 32.

¹²⁵ Colonial Modat, "Portugais, Arabes et Français dans l'Adrar Mauritanien," *Bulletin du Comité d'Études Scientifiques, Afrique Occidentale Française*. Vol. 5, no. 4 (1922), p. 567.

¹²⁶ To recount the military episodes leading to the final conquest of the Adrar would detract from the focus of the dissertation on the commercial history. See Muḥammad ould Maouloud, "le Pays de Chinguetti."

Yazīd wuld Mulāy 'Aly's involvement with French leaders of colonial Mauritania outlasted the dramatic assassination of Coppolani. Indeed, this relationship, like that of other Tikna traders who supplied the administration, was probably instrumental in the conquest of Adrar. Since prime information circulated very quickly in the area, Yazīd soon paid the price of his collaborative relations with the French, shortly after the French occupation of the lower Adrar. Several weeks after the French had set-up camp in Atar, a small town about 90 kilometers to the southwest of Shingīṭī, and were beginning to receive the submissions of various tribes in the area, Yazīd's house was ransacked by *ḥasāni* raiders. After the incident, he dispatched a letter to the "Colonel Emir of the Biḍān who commands the affairs of the Adrar [i.e. Gouraud] and who is currently in Atar," while hiding in his house fearing for his life and that of his family. By an incredible stroke of good fortune, I came across a copy of this document in the personal archives of the Mulāy 'Aly family. The letter is a seeming plea for the French to expedite the conquest of Shingīṭī.¹²⁷ Yazīd described the dire straits he was in:

I am enclosed in a dark house to save my life against the Awlād Ghaylān [*ḥasani* of the Adrar emirate] and others pillagers [*al-luṣūṣ*] who want to kill me. The Awlād Ghaylān ransacked all that was in my house and they even burned it

See also ANRIM Série Militaire, N92 & N93 for the journals of Gouraud who explains the conquest step by step. He also published his memoirs (see bibliography).

¹²⁷ From Yazīd wuld Mulāy 'Aly to the Colonel Emir of the land of the Biḍān received by the French on 02/02/09. Personal Archives, Muḥammad Lamine b. Muḥammad Lamine b. Sidi b. Mulāy 'Aly, Nouakchott. This letter is a xerox of an original. It was received by the French on 02/02/09 and translated by Bu al-Mughdād II 02/03/09.

and removed from my wife [Fāṭima mint al-Swaylim] and my daughters the jewelry that they wore.¹²⁸

The aim of the letter was two fold. First, Yazīd conveyed a very significant message of support on behalf of ‘Abidīn wuld Bayrūk, the chief of Gulmīm and leader of the Aīt Mūsa wa ‘Aly Tikna. The chief, then visiting in Shingīṭi, was offering a Wād Nūn style tent to the French as a gesture of friendship. The tent could be collected in the house of a Tikna trader residing in Atar named Mbārak wuld Bashīr. Along with the gift, ‘Abidīn wished to meet Gouraud. He expressed his desire to become his “sincere and devoted brother,” his support for the conquest, and his condemnation of the activities of both Mā’ al-‘Aynayn and the Adrar emirate. Secondly, Yazīd sought reparation for the French raid near Shingīṭi during which time he, and two other Tikna partners had incurred losses. The French military were responsible for the loss of a female slave, a blanket and three large herds representing a total of about 300 sheep. He also wanted to be reimbursed for two camels taken in Tijīkja which the colonial administration had not paid for or returned.

The message from the Wād Nūn Tikna chief, conveyed by Yazīd in his letter, is clear evidence of the Tikna Aīt Mūsa wa ‘Aly’s open support of the colonial conquest. At the same time, it must be said that the Tikna were very much divided on the issue, and

¹²⁸ Ibid.

just like the *Awlād Bū Sbā'*, there were Tiknas on both sides of the colonial divide. As explained in the previous chapters, the Tikna were engaged in civil war by the late nineteenth century, a war which opposed the two leffs of the tribal nation. The death of *Daḥmān b. Bayrūk*, several years prior, had unleashed an internal succession war within the *Bayrūk* clan, and 'Abidīn's presence in *Shingīṭi* seems to have been linked directly to this leadership crisis. The *Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly*, belonging to the *Aīt al-Jmal* leff, were the clan of Tikna most represented on trans-Saharan trails, and consequently, they became the most favorable to colonial rule. What is more, *Yazīd* stated in the letter that 'Abidīn was "not doing trade at the moment" and was eager to negotiate deals with the French. Tikna traders, therefore, were willing to secure their own commercial viability and were open to the new structure of colonial domination in which they sought to negotiate a commercial space. *Yazīd*'s request to be reimbursed by the colonial administration for expenses incurred during the conquest is a clear indication of his continued involvement in the conquest of the Adrar, an involvement which dated to the time of Coppolani.

As stated in the military journal kept by Colonel Gouraud, *Yazīd*'s letter was delivered directly to him on February 3, 1909 by a delegation of four Tiknas from *Shingīṭi* headed by *Limām wuld Arwīli* (See Appendix 3 and chapter six), and the abovementioned *Mbārak wuld Bashīr* who resided in *Atar*.¹²⁹ He received the delegation and after they discussed the grave situation in *Shingīṭi*, Gouraud gave an open invitation

to Yazīd, and all the Tikna of Shingīṭi, to move to Atar where the French colonial headquarters of the Adrar was to be located, and set-up shop there. In the words of Gouraud,

the Tikna should open trading houses in Atar to earn money *as intermediaries between the French who only have money, and the natives who only want guinée*. At the same time, it would be possible for them to take advantage of [the French] escorted convois to bring from the south, in all security, guinée, tea, tobacco, for which there is a great need in the market. *The Tekna, who have known how to transport their business from the Ouad Noun to Chingueti, are the only ones in the country with the commercial experience to undertake such a task.*¹³⁰

The meeting, the minutes of which were carefully recorded by Gouraud, became a veritable exchange. Mbārak wuld Bashīr, who was the only Tikna residing in Atar at the time, asked if he could build a store of stone or thatch in the Qsār, the old part of town, to which Gouraud responded affirmatively. Limām wuld Arwīli, for his part, did most of the talking explaining that “the Tikna traders who are in St. Louis [Ndar] are waiting only for peace to come [to the Adrar].” He explained that his own caravan had been pillaged recently. Moreover, Limām reiterated ‘Abidīn wuld Bayrūk’s desire to enter into formal negotiations with the French. He said “the Mā’ al-‘Aynayn [group had] diminished the power of the Tikna who had always been independent of Morocco.”¹³¹ Gouraud, however, was apparently aware of the war of succession in the Bayrūk clan, and he told

¹²⁹ ANRIM, Série Militaire N92, Cahiers de la Colonne de l’Adrar, no. 4.

¹³⁰ Ibid. Emphasis mine.

¹³¹ Ibid.

Limām that the French were ready to establish peace, that they would provide unconditional support to traders, but that they were not prepared to get embroiled in political games that would “prolong the era of pillaging.”¹³² As a result of the French open invitation to the Tikna traders, Yazīd and his partners in Shingīti would eventually move to Atar, the town which would soon become the commercial capital of colonial Mauritania. The political capital of the new Saharan colony would remain in Ndar, alongside the governorship of Senegal.

The period from the time of *ṣība* (the turbulent years leading to end of the nineteenth century) to the coming of the *Naṣārā* (or Christian colonial rulers) in the first decade of the twentieth century, was one of great social, political and economic upheaval. For at least twenty years, from 1891, or the end of the peaceful reign of the emir of Adrar, to 1909, when the French penetrated the Adrar, trans-Saharan and interregional trade was severely curtailed, apparently coming to a total halt on certain routes for certain years. After the emir of Tagant, Bakār wuld Swayd Aḥmad was killed by the troops of Frèrejean, and shortly after, Coppolani was shot dead in his fort at Tijīkja, the peaceful pacification turned into a full-fledge “guerilla-type” Saharan war. It was fought between, on the one hand, a well-armed resistance movement turned *jihād* against the infidel invasion, and on the other, a relatively small colonial military corps who lacked

¹³² Ibid. “Il n’est pas venu pour détruire le pays mais pour y restaurer l’ordre. Notre protection est acquise

familiarity with the terrain and the art of camel-riding. The latter, nevertheless, would overcome the resistance thanks to their technological superiority, the support of several prominent Muslim leaders in the Trarza, and also their strong alliance with stranger-traders such as the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā'. Certain groups from among these two Wād Nūn tribal nations played key roles in the military and as informants of the colonial administration. In the process of assisting the French conquest, both 'Abdallah wuld 'Abābā and Yazīd wuld Mulay 'Aly suffered the wrath of people of Shingīti who strongly opposed this collaboration. At the same time, their tribal nations were very divided on the colonial issue, and many Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' joined the ranks of Mā' al-'Aynayn in resisting colonial overrule. The conquest of the Adrar region in the first decade of the twentieth century was a prelude to the French move to colonize Morocco in 1912.

Because of their historic exposure to cross-cultural exchange and international relations, and their expansive trade networks covering the main markets of this region of western Africa, the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' got involved early on in the initial stages of the colonial conquest of the Sahara. Through their relationships in and around the town of Ndar, the colonial capital, both groups were "courted" by the French administration, starting with Coppolani, to become agents of a peaceful commercial pacification. The Awlād Bū Sbā' were invited to establish commercial operations in

aux commerçants. Cependant certaines gens ont intérêt à prolonger l'ère des pillages..."

Mederdra, in the Trarza region in 1904. Similarly, the Tikna were asked to move to Atar and become economic “intermediaries” between the French commercial houses in Ndar and the people of the Adrar who were not commercially inclined. Coppolani’s plan to administer Muslim communities in the region through the *tājir* (trader) as the “obligatory intermediary between the Moors and [the French]” was therefore fully realized. As we are about to see in the next chapter, the commercial role of the Wād Nūn stranger-traders located in Mauritania, Senegal and Mali would strengthen and expand as they took advantage of their positions within the new colonial economic order.

CHAPTER 8

FROM WĀD NŪN TO LOUGA: SHIFTS IN COMMERCIAL ITINERARIES IN THE COLONIAL ECONOMY (1900s-30s)

Bugūl Wurūs - Bugūl Khālīs
Faléwulu nak ak dom
Gilem makup sefeum
Lu diokh Naru Ganār

He does not want gold – He does not want money
He does not care about cow or child
It's for a camel with its load
That he gives to the Biḍān of Ganār¹

The conquest of the western African regions, in and around the Sahara, transformed the nature of long-distance trade and economic activities for all. The colonization of Mauritania, which was completed with the occupation of the Adrar region in 1908-1909, had tremendous regional ramifications since, as the French had properly identified, this area was the “natural hyphen” between western Africa and northwestern markets. For many long-distance traders on trans-Saharan trails, the establishment of French colonial rule changed the very nature of their activities as they connected to the regional colonial economies. But for other caravaners, their trading and transportation operations prevailed very much in the same way as they had in past period of peaceful exchange (1870s-1891). The only marked difference was that customs duties were now paid to the *Naṣārā* who sought to control the movement of caravans.

This chapter examines the establishment of the French colonial economy in the *Trāb al-Biḍān* during the first decades of the twentieth century until the last wave of migrations of Wād Nūn traders in the 1930s. In the first section, I discuss how the French converted to the “camelback economy,” or the *économie à dos de chameau*. I

¹ Wolof proverb. Shared by Serigne Mor Mbaye, Dakar (07/95).

show how they transformed the Saharan space by imposing a bureaucratic infrastructure regulating mobility and finances. I examine the development of Atar as a commercial hub in the first decades of the twentieth century with the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' dominating the market place. In the second part, I show how the traders in the Adrar and in the Azawād regions seized opportunities to leave Atar and Timbuktu and move into the dynamic peanut-driven Senegalese economy from the 1910s to the 1930s. The development of the *marbaṭ*, or livestock market, of Louga linked directly to the camel market of Gulmīm by the Wād Nūn trade network, saw a tremendous expansion in this period. Commercial migrations were linked to the dying out and burgeoning of markets, high competition, added to the high demand for livestock. The last part of the chapter focuses on the migrations of Wād Nūn traders in the 1930s when the French finally burst the 'door of the Sahara,' conquering the last pockets of resistance in the Wād Nūn region and establishing an administrative unit in Gulmīm.

The Colonial Economy: Camel Requisitions and Colonial Caravans (*Cobas*)

Colonial Taxation System and Commercial Infrastructure

As soon as the colonial conquest of the *Ṭrāb al-Biḍān* began in earnest in the early 1900s, the French, under Xavier Coppolani's leadership, immediately set in place the infrastructure of a system of colonial domination. Some commercial regulations passed in the nineteenth century were left in place with the establishment of colonial rule in Mauritania. The principle, developed in the mid-nineteenth century by Governor

Faidherbe, of “respect for local customs” so as not to antagonize the “allies of the French” was firmly upheld in the twentieth century.² In fact, when declaring their official submission to French rule, many heads of tribal groups were primarily concerned that the French would interfere with their religious practice and second, that they would take away their slaves.³ In order to ensure the loyalty of their subjects, the French turned a blind eye to the practice of slavery and some instances of local transactions in slaves.⁴ At the same time, the colonial fiscal system implemented in the early years of colonial rule was segregated, and according to Oumar Mouta Ba, the purpose varied according to the targeted group.⁵ For the *hasani* warrior groups, who in the pre-colonial era exacted tribute from the local population, the payment of colonial taxes was a sign of their subjugation to the colonial power. For the sedentary population, the *zwāya* and the tributaries, the payment of taxes to the French ensured their protection under the new colonial order.

The colonial fiscal system divided the population into two “racial” groups. Sedentary farmers and herders, associated with “black” populations, were subject to the same head-tax system prevalent in Senegal. The Biḍān or “Moors,” for their part, paid “Islamic-type” taxes: the *zakkat* (Muslim charity tax) and the ‘*ushur* (achour in French) or tithe. It is paradoxical that the infidel rulers would collect the *zakkat* and named the

² For a discussion of Faidherbe’s policy see Robinson, *Chiefs and Clerics*, p. 113.

³ ANRIM N92. See Cahiers de la Colonne de l’Adrar written by Colonel Gouraud.

⁴ McDougall, “A Topsy-Turvy World.” See also Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*.

⁵ Oumar Ba Mouta, “La Fiscalité coloniale et ses répercussions sur la Société Mauritanienne, 1900-1945”. Mémoire de Maîtrise, Dept. D’Histoire, Université de Nouakchott, 1989-1990,” p. 3-4.

colonial treasurer *baī al-mal*, the Islamic financial term.⁶ Until 1935, the rate of zakkat was fixed at 1/40 of the value of livestock.⁷ After that year, the zakkat rate varied according to total ownership of animals. As for the *'ushur*, it was equal to ten percent of the total agricultural yield. This tax was collected from the chiefs (*shaykh*) of each tribe in the locality where they were registered. According to Francis de Chassey, the French imposed this dual taxation system because of the difficulty involved in collecting a regular head-tax on the Biḍān, the majority of whom were nomadic or semi-nomadic.⁸ It was easier for the colonial administration to count and tax their herds, rather than their "households." At the same time, however, the French were governed by their ethnographic notions of "black" and "white" Africa and their artificial, and indeed erroneous, ideas about a "racial-divide" in Mauritania society.⁹

In 1906, with the stepping up of resistance movements in the Sahara and the ensuing rise in violence, the General Commissioner of Mauritania implemented a stricter control of commercial activity. In order to "prevent the enemies from replenishing their supplies in gunpowder and millet," he ordered that the sale of these two essentials in the trading posts along the Senegal River and St. Louis be restricted to those carrying an authorization.¹⁰ Moreover, he recommended that the same measure be taken in the French Soudan vis-à-vis the people of the Sahel. In effect, the French began issuing special trade permits for the exchange of targeted products, like ration tickets redeemable in European company stores. Gunpowder and millet were the primary goods fueling the

⁶ For a good examination of the colonial fiscal system, see Oumar Ba Mouta, "La Fiscalité coloniale."

⁷ Ibid, p. 41.

⁸ *La houe, l'étrier et le livre*, Paris: Anthropos, 1978, p. 70.

ranks of the resistance to the French conquest in the Tagant, the Hawd regions and the Adrar. Consequently, French officers were instructed to stop all grain caravans coming from the Sahel to the Adrar and to confiscate such camel loads, whether the caravans belonged to so-called “dissident tribes” or to those who had previously declared their submission to the French.¹¹ This system of commercial policing was to prevail after the completion of the effective military occupation.

The camel was at the top of the list of the colonial administration’s most basic needs in Mauritania. Indeed, in order to conquer the Sahara, it was imperative that the French organize a mounted camel corps and have access to a large and replenishing supply of male camel herds, the riding and transporting kind.¹² In order to obtain the necessary camels, the French engaged in so-called “requisitions” by which they basically “confiscated” the camels of traders and camel herders to serve the colonial mission. This is what happened to ‘Abdallah wuld ‘Abāba, whose camels were requisitioned in the summer of 1908 for the transportation of the colonial artillery. Hundreds of camels were requisitioned in this manner, either forcefully purchased, or acquired as a form of taxation.

The Tikna and other entrepreneurial Saharan traders also serviced the colonial economy by renting their camels to the administration. A British trader in Podor complained about the practice of renting and requisitioning on the basis that it

⁹ See Robinson, “Ethnography and Customary Law in Senegal”, *Cahiers d’Etudes Africaines*, vol. 126, XXXII-2, 1992, pp. 221-237.

¹⁰ ANRIM E1/6 – Gouverneur Mauritanie à Gouverneur-Général du Sénégal, 13 Novembre 1906.

¹¹ ANRIM E1/5. Letter no. 254 Gouverneur Haut-Sénégal-Niger à Gouverneur Mauritanie 8 Décembre 1908.

¹² See chapter three for a discussion of the camel.

antagonized the “Moors.”¹³ This eloquent and rather audacious man traded along the Senegal River, and was a friend of Oldani, owner of a successful Italian trading house with large commercial interests in the *marša* of Podor. He recommended that the French colonial administration in Mauritania “simply purchase the animals, which would pay for themselves in a few trips and could always be sold again, rather than expropriating and/or paying ridiculous sums to locals to rent their ‘beasts of burden.’”¹⁴ Nevertheless, the camel service became a profession for enterprising caravaners who could rent half of their camel loads to the administration, while keeping the other half for themselves and benefiting from the “protection” of the French. This became a very lucrative business for those caravaners who were willing to risk their reputation by “collaborating” with the *Naṣārā* for the sake of monetary gain and to establish a safe position within the new power structure.

Pass Laws and The Movement of Caravans

In order to control commercial traffic, the French set in place a simple system of customs duties collection in each main market place, and established outposts at major caravan passageways and intersections, in accordance with Coppolani’s master plan (see chapter seven). For this purpose, they created outposts such as the one in Akjūjt, in the Inshīri region, to control and tax caravans circulating between the Adrar and Trarza. The main tax they charged was called the *oussourou*, a levy on the value of camel loads or other commercial merchandise. This import/export tax was comparable to the *ghāfar*

¹³ ANS 9G23 - Letter by Alfred Isaacs, British trader in Podor, to Governor-General Roume, 06/03/06.

duties exacted by the emirs on caravans crossing their zones of influence in the pre-colonial period. The special tax targeted itinerant traders traveling to another colony for business. It was first applied to the populations of the western Sudan and then adopted in the new colony of Mauritania. Captain Louis Frèrejean defined the *oussourou* in a report discussing colonial fiscal matters as a “duty paid in Senegal, generally, by all strangers crossing the country. The payment is made, by those of the South, when they enter [the colony], and for those from the North, at the exit. The rate is 5 francs per camel, and one-tenth of the merchandise.”¹⁵

Added to these taxes, the French put in place a system of pass laws and trading permits to control the movement of the nomadic Saharan population and itinerant traders. The colonial administration required that traders seeking to leave town on caravan apply for a permit to travel, known as the *laissez-passer* (see Appendix 9 for the example of Muḥammad Fāl b. Limām b. Arwīli’s caravan circulation permit, 1934). The appointed chief of each tribe was responsible for submitting requests for *laissez-passers*. The pass form listed the name of the head of the caravan, the number of camels and people traveling, as well as the destination and purpose of the trip. Those who were caught traveling without a permit were fined heavily, or their loads/camels were confiscated.

The colonial domination of mobility in Mauritania was so intense that the migration of traders was extremely controlled. For example, in 1916 Muḥammad Sālam wuld ‘Abdarraḥmān wuld Bu’ānga, the famous Awlād Bū Sbā’ arms dealer, wanted to

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Frèrejean, “La région des Idouaich,” p. 78.

travel to Ndar to cash-in some debts and trade there.¹⁶ He “request[ed] to be authorized to go to St. Louis [Ndar] to settle there and do trade” (Appendix 10).¹⁷ As the letter of the French district commissioner to the Mauritania colonial government stated, Bu‘ānga had been repeatedly denied authorization to go to Ndar. The reason for this repeated denial was due to Bu‘ānga’s participation in the resistance movement. As expressed by the district commissioner:

I would have gladly granted his request especially in light of the services he rendered to the colonial army in western Mauritania during the conquest, but I learned that he had been strongly suspected of supplying the dissident populations with [model/year] 1886 rifles stolen from the colonial riflemen or sold by them about ten years ago in St. Louis when he was a trader there.¹⁸

Colonial policies on circulation were adopted to regulate the movement of people, but also to control the camel supply in the Saharan regions the French were seeking to occupy. At the same time, the French district commander of each major market town reported on the “movement of caravans.” He recorded the arrivals and departures of caravans, noting the number of camels used, the purpose, and the destination of the caravan. Unfortunately, many of these records of caravan traffic during the colonial period, which remained in the prefectures of each locale, have been lost or destroyed. An example from two reports from Shingīti in 1911, about a year after the French had established a colonial outpost in the town, gives some indication of the size and movement of caravans during the summer, low caravan season (see tables in Appendix 11). The average size of these caravans, all interregional *rafga* or subsistence caravans,

¹⁶ See chapters six and seven.

¹⁷ ANRIM E1/33/1 – Commandant de Cercle de l’Adrar au Commissaire du Gouvernement Général en Mauritanie, 19 Août 1916 (see original in Appendix 10).

¹⁸ Ibid.

was very small, between nine and fifteen camels. Most were circulating between the Ijīl salt mine (where they cashed in bars of salt), the millet markets in the Western Sudan and the trade posts along the Senegal River.

The *droit de pacage*, or the 'right to graze' (often confused with the more likely term 'droit de passage' or right to pass) was a fee collected by the French authorities on caravaners who came to the colonial capital in Ndar or to other outposts along the banks of the Senegal River, to allow their camels to graze in the area. All herders crossing the river into Senegal for the purpose of grazing had to pay this tax. Originally passed in the 1870s, this ruling was finally re-examined in 1912 by the Mauritanian colonial government.¹⁹ The administration requested that caravaners providing official transportation services be exempted from paying this grazing tax. This decision was part of an official attempt to encourage the caravan traffic to the colonial capital that had died down considerably since the beginning of the occupation of Mauritania. Indeed, there was much concern about the slowing down of trade as expressed in letters from the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce, and the Governors of both Mauritania and Senegal.

At that time, the mayor of St. Louis, who was also head of the municipal council, was none other than Justin Devès; from the Creole merchant family, who had strong commercial interests in the Trarza and had always vehemently opposed the colonial project north of the Senegal River. Eager to limit official caravan traffic to Ndar so as to secure his private business operations with the Biḍān, Devès argued that only the camels transporting French provisions for the account of the colonial government could be exempt. All other camels loaded with goods for private or commercial use had to pay the

grazing tax. In response to the question about promoting trade to Ndar, Devès argued that the causes behind the reduction in caravan movement to the colonial capital were numerous. The grazing tax, he contended, was never a major disincentive for traders to come to St. Louis. Rather, he argued there was a general commercial "crisis" in both Mauritania and Senegal directly related to the conquest.²⁰

Years later, in 1924, a new law was implemented to face the increasing incidence of grazing by camels and other livestock south of the Senegal river. The French also felt the need to control the numerous crossings of camels used for transportation in the peanut basin (discussed in the next section). The new legislation stated that "animals used for transportation of merchandise (camels, oxen, donkeys) or for butchery (oxen, sheep and goats) are subject to a tax in addition to the zekkat rate."²¹ This additional duty (later abolished when cars began replacing animals in the transportation of merchandise) was aimed at monitoring the ever-growing traffic of livestock moving from Mauritania and western Mali to Senegal for the transportation of groundnuts and for butchery. Once the tax had been paid, the owner of the animal was given a quittance to be shown at the next colonial control. Animals transporting material for the colonial administration were now exempt from taxation.²²

Shifting Currencies in the Colonial Period

At first, most fiscal payments were regulated in kind, whether in grain, salt bars, cowry shells, or *beşas*. French specie became more and more frequently used after the

¹⁹ ANRIM, E1/3 Moutet à Maire de St. Louis (Devès) no. 39D, 21 Mai 1912.

²⁰ ANRIM - E1/7a3.

²¹ Mouta Ba, p. 52 citing ANRIM D21 "Capitation, Zekkat et Achour 1905-1932."

²² Ibid.

1920s when the French began requesting cash for tax payment. Foreign coins also circulated in the French controlled western African territories. The Spanish Real and Moroccan Dirham, as well as the Marie-Therese Thaller silver coins, were imported via trans-Saharan trade. Although they functioned more like commodity currencies rather than legal tender, these coins circulated in many regions of western Africa, alongside cowry shells and other currencies and valuations. Moreover, because of the proximity to British colonies such as Gambia, colonial pounds, shillings and pennies also filtered into exchange transactions of long-distance traders.

Since the early nineteenth century, the French had been importing French specie into the Senegalese colony, mainly for the purpose of paying colonial staff and the military. Eventually, several monetary reforms in 1826, 1853 and the later in 1895, were implemented, whereby French colonial coins, specifically designed for the colonies in brass, nickel as well as aluminum, were imported for the sake of facilitating exchange. The most popular coin, however, was the silver five franc piece (known as the *gourde*) imported at the port of Ndar and which made its way inland, changing hands several times before meeting its last purchaser who would melt the coin for final use.

By the 1910s, the trade in coins from Morocco into western Africa became a lucrative business for long-distance traders. Because the Moroccan currency was so devalued due to the massive inflation of the late nineteenth century linked to the political instability of the country, the intrinsic value of the Morocco Dirham became higher than its purchasing power.²³ This led to a drain southwards of the currency into western Africa where the demand for silver, for the manufacture of jewelry and other consumer

²³ See Umar Afa, *Masalāt al-nuqūd fī Tarīkh al-maghrib fī al-qarn at-tāsi' 'ashar*. Rabat: Al-Tabi'a al-*ula*, 1988.

items, was always high. As a young teenager in the late 1920s, Fuḡī b. Aṭāīr (discussed below) began joining money caravans purchasing coins in Wād Nūn, the Sūs and the Hawz Marrakech regions, and transporting them to Mauritania and Senegal. As he recalls those times long past, the clanging sound of the bags of coins on the backs of the camels still rings in his ears.²⁴

By the late nineteenth century, when the French were actively engaged in Morocco's money matters, extending loans to the king and minting Morocco specie, the Dirham, like the Spanish Real, was standardized along the same diameters and weight as the five franc silver gourde. Although the French coin had the largest silver content, all three coins had stars around the edges and they all three represented units of five. Because they were exchanged as one unit in western Africa, they came to be associated with a single unit. In Wolof, the coin was called *Derem* and in Bamanakan it was *Dorome* (both words evidently derived from the Moroccan 'Dirham'). In the Sahara, the five franc piece became known as the *ūgīya* (ounce) and one franc was called "a fifth" (*khums*). I suspect that this explains why the counting system for money in Mali, Senegal and Mauritania (at least until the 1970s) was on a quintal system, everything divided and multiplied by five.

After the First World War, the French tried to drain the colonies of whatever silver coins were left in circulation, perhaps because of the need for bullion. They replaced denominations of five francs and higher with paper banknotes. This monetary reform occurred in 1914, but it took several years for banknotes to reach most western African

²⁴ Interview in Atar with Fuḡī b. al-Tayr (10/03/97).

markets. Banknotes made their way into Mauritania in 1919 and 1920, which is why these years are known in several regions as *‘ām al-kaīt*, an Ḥasanīya/Wolof expression meaning ‘the year of the paper.’ As retired caravaner ‘Abdarrahman b. Jiddu in Tishīt recalls:

The money which was current was only the hard money (*al-faḍa al-gāsia*), the white money (*al-faḍa al-bayḍa*) with which women make the *khlākhil* and they put them here (showing his ankle) and the *dbalīs* that they wear on their wrists. That which in those times was active, when France came, came out with the banknotes (*al-ṭāqa*) and those were the ones that became the money of exchange.²⁵

Caravaners, long-distance traders and commercial innovators were among the first to introduce the colonial moneys into their respective regions and into the distant markets they frequented.

The Cobas or Colonial Caravans

As explained earlier, the French colonial administration of the Saharan colonies of Mauritania and northern Mali had to adapt to the local means of transportation. Trucking through the Sahara desert, an area which had never been properly mapped-out till then, was a near impossibility. For a period lasting over half a century, numerous French men dreamed of a trans-Saharan railway. Countless books, projects, conferences, meeting and articles were produced by many French engineers and colonial technicians. They strove for serious consideration on the part of the Ministry of Colonies for the creation of a trans-Saharan train service from Algiers to Timbuktu, or alternatively from Casablanca to

²⁵ Interview in Tishīt with ‘Abdarrahman b. Jiddu (4/19/97).

Dakar.²⁶ In the 1919, a French general in Morocco advocated the creation of a “Transmauritanien” which was endorsed by the Governor-General of Morocco, Maréchal Lyautey. The Transmauritanian train would leave from al-Swaïra (Mogador), head to Gulmīm then Smāra, Atar, Kaedi (on the Senegal River) and then straight to Dakar.²⁷ Even though Morocco’s highest colonial authority recommended it, this project, like hundreds of others, never saw fruition.

In all its Saharan colonies, the French colonial administration converted to organizing camel caravans, just like everybody else. There were two types of colonial caravans serving the French civil and military outposts in their Saharan colony of Mauritania.²⁸ The military convoys (*convois escortés*) which transported military and civilian personnel, and materials (arms, munitions and money) between the outposts and the capital of Mauritania located in Ndar.²⁹ These convoys were escorted by armed mounted and foot soldiers. The other kind was the “free convoys” (*convois libres*) or caravans organized by independent caravaners and commercial entrepreneurs, who rented their transportation services to the administration. They transported supplies from Ndar and the Senegal River outposts such as Podor and Dagana to the colonial outposts of the interior. These *convois libres*, which the local population called the *cobas*, sometimes

²⁶ See for example Le Général Philebert, & Georges Rolland, *La France en Afrique et le Transsaharien*. Paris: Librairie Algérienne et Coloniale, 1890. Philibert and another engineer Bissual spent many years of their lives trying to push this idea. After independence, the Mauritanian government with mainly French funding, created one of the longest trains in the world from the steel mines in Zourate, near Ijtl salt mountain, to the Atlantic coast. The main problem is the shifting sand dunes, and during the war in the Western Sahara in the 1970s, the train-tracks were constantly blasted by the Saharan free army.

²⁷ Jean Donon, “Le Transmauritanien: une solution de la question des chemins de fer transsahariens.” *Renseignements Coloniaux*, 1922, Novembre, pp. 17-21.

²⁸ Based on the General Instructions of Convois of 1924. ANRIM E2/56 – “Instructions concernant les Convois,” Troupes du Groupe de l’AOF, Subdivision Militaire de Mauritanie, no. 37. St. Louis 20 Février 1924.

benefited from the armed escort of colonial riflemen who “protected” the expedition. As elder Muḥammad wuld Ḥanūn recalls, “the *cobas* were the *rafga* [interregional caravans] protected by the *Naṣāra*, no one touched them.”³⁰ They transported all kinds of materials and equipment, to the exclusion of weaponry, munitions and money.

Atar: Commercial Capital of Colonial Mauritania

In early 1909, the French, under the leadership of General Gouraud, successfully conquered the Adrar region, and established their base in Atar, just 40 miles to the west of Shingīṭi. They then invited Tikna traders such as Yazīd wuld Mulay ‘Aly to set-up shop in Atar to mediate commercially and otherwise between the French and their colonial subjects. Eventually Yazīd accepted the generous offer and moved to Atar, marrying a second wife there. ‘Aishata Būna was the daughter of the prominent *zwāya* tribe in Atar, the Smācīd. In no time at all, Yazīd became the most successful trader in town. He continued sending caravans to Nioro, Ndar and Gulmīm (see previous chapter for his regular caravan routes), but he now branched out into the colonial economy. He rented camels to the French military, providing transportation services to the administration. He quickly became the main operator of *cobas* for the French, and was probably in charge of recommending other caravan leaders to the French for their transportation needs.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

³⁰ Interview in Gulmīm with Muḥammad wuld Hanun (7/27/99).

At the time, Atar was a small town, located on a flat rocky plateau. The town center was the *qsār*, a small fortified cluster of houses surrounded by a several date palm oases. When Yazīd moved to Atar, shortly after Gouraud's official invitation to the Tikna, he built his house right next to the recently built governorship and colonial administration buildings. It is easy to imagine why he would make such a move, given the fact that, as a stranger-trader working with the French he was socially vulnerable. It is important to recall the discussion about the risky position of stranger-traders discussed in chapters three and five. Yazīd's house in Shingīṭ had been attacked by the emir's men shortly after France's occupation of Atar. In Atar, Yazīd's compound, enlarged several times over the years, soon became the place where most caravans of the town came to unload their cargoes.

In the colonial era, just as it had been the case in the pre-colonial period, reputation was an extremely important ingredient to a successful commercial career. Despite Yazīd's ambiguous position as a stranger-trader and a "intermediary" with the French, he overcame the contradictions by cultivating a remarkable reputation. He was a man *dhū māl* (with money) who extended credit daily to countless traders. Most of all, he was generous and was always redistributing his wealth. It is told that Yazid was extremely pious and *nāfiq fī sabīl Allah*, meaning that he was generous in the way of God. It is interesting to point out that the word *nafaqa* in Arabic meaning 'charitable gift, handout,' also means 'expenditure.' The associated word *nafāq* means 'good business.' And so, by association, to be generous in the way of God is also a smart way

to spend and be entrepreneurial by cultivating clients and increasing social and economic dependency.

Countless stories are told about Yazid's generosity and his piety. It is said that his household served meals daily to feed the poor, the travelers and others in need. Many tell the story of when Yazīd decided to serve food in the dark.³¹

One day, as the people were eating from the platters of food in the main courtyard of his house, a man noticed the bracelet of a woman eating by his side. She was wearing a *milhafa* which covered her head, but he recognized her bracelet and knew she was from a well-to-do family. He immediately created a scandal, arguing that she had no right to be eating Yazīd's food, the food of the poor. Yazīd overheard the dispute and immediately ordered that the oil lamps which lit the courtyard be extinguished, declaring that everyone is welcomed to eat in his house and no one should be discriminated against. From that day onwards, the meals were always served in the dark so that all who came could eat in peace.

Because of his commercial prominence, and his "prestigious" social background as a *Shurfa Tikna*, Yazīd was elected to represent the Tikna of Atār. It must be noted that by the time the French occupied Shingīṭi in 1910, they counted a total of one hundred and twenty eight Tiknas including their dependents. Of the twenty-one "heads of household" listed, ten were women.³² This is hardly surprising given the itinerant lifestyles of long-distance caravaners and the role of women in caravan market towns.³³ At that time, the head of the Tikna community of Shingīṭi was 'Abdallah wuld 'Abāba, who later was

³¹ Based on numerous interviews with people in and out of the family (Nouakchott and Atar). This is such a well-known story, that some other families have "appropriated" the tale to embellish the past of their ancestors (ex. interview with Muḥammad Lamine wuld Ababa who told me the exact story about his great-grand father).

³² ANRIM – E2/82, Impôts, Recensement 1910-1912.

³³ See discussion in chapter three.

replaced by Sidī wuld Buhay (both second generation from the second wave of Tikna migrations discussed in chapter six). When Yazīd moved to Atar, he became the chief of the Tikna of that town. But as soon as ‘Abdallah wuld Laḥbīb wuld Bayrūk settled in Atar in 1918, Yazīd conferred to him the responsibility of head of the Tikna community there.³⁴

‘Abdallah was the son of Laḥbīb wuld Bayrūk who had spend many years trading on the Atlantic coast in the small port of Tarfaya. When he arrived in Atar, ‘Abdallah was quite destitute and had only his reputation as a member of the prestigious Bayrūk family to go by. Because of this prestige, and his relationship with the French who recognized his “nobility,” ‘Abdallah soon became a relatively prosperous trader in Atar. He first married Umkalthum, the daughter of one of the first Wād Nūn traders to settle in town, the Awlād Bū Sbā’ named ‘Abdallah wuld Lazgham (see chapter six). He also married a second Tikna wife, the daughter of Limām wuld Arwīli, Tūtu. Eventually, this personality married a great number of women and purchased many enslaved women who became his concubines and the mothers of his numerous children. He had a very close relationship with the colonial administration who essentially paid him a salary for his services as an informant. For this reason, he was awarded numerous medals.³⁵

³⁴ Interviews with Mulay Aly and Bayruk families.

³⁵ Interview in Nouakchott with Muḥammad al-Amīn Ould Mbarak ould Bayruk (07/21/97).

By the 1920s, another trader rose in the firmament of the Atar market: Hammuddy wuld Mahmūd.³⁶ Hammuddy was born in Shingiti in 1899 to an Awlād Bū Sbā' slave mother and a freed father (*hartāni*) attached to the family of Yazīd wuld Mulay 'Aly. Hammuddy first began trading in Mederdra, where there were several Awlād Bū Sbā' shop owners. He was hired by a successful *hartāni* from the Adrar named Bilāl wuld Jūli. He quickly ran a large debt, and so he went to Atar where he borrowed from Awlād Bū Sbā' traders to cover his debt and start a new line of business. Hammuddy then began leading small caravans from Atar to Ndar and Louga to sell camels and animal hides in exchange for merchandise, namely cotton cloth.³⁷ At some point, Hammuddy received a loan from Yazīd to purchase cattle and sheep. He then turned around and sold the meat to the French military in Atar. Very soon, Hammuddy was one of the most successful entrepreneurs in Atar, monopolizing the butchery business and organizing long-distance and interregional caravans.

Yazīd died in 1932, in his late 50s or early 60s. And as can be imagined, his inheritance was a pretty complicated affair. In fact, it was so complicated that it is still being debated today between the children of Yazid's first wife, Fātima mint Swaylim (who was in Shingīti) and those of the second wife 'Aishatu Būna (who had died earlier in the town of Atar). After Yazīd, Hammuddy became the trader of Atar. He extended

³⁶ McDougall examined the commercial itinerary of Hammuddy in "A Topsy-Turvy World," especially pp. 379-382.

³⁷ Interview in Nouakchott with Muḥammad Sa'Id wuld Hammuddy (2/5/97).

loans to every trustworthy acquaintance, provided start-up capital to countless traders in the Adrar and in Senegal, cultivated a large clientele that included the French colonial administration. By the mid-1930s, he owned about 300 camels, and most certainly replaced Yazīd as the leading *cobas* organizer in Atar.³⁸ As McDougall explains,

Hammuddy

became the undisputed chief “host” and creditor in Atar. He invested in animals, hired herders, and opened boutiques. He developed long-distance commerce from Morocco to Senegal and hired drivers and agents to handle it. He used credit from his Tikna patron, Yezid [before 1932] and from the French to extend credit to others. He also invested money loaned him by Yezid, returning the original capital and sharing equally in the profits. As his wealth multiplied, his reputation grew and his sources of credit expanded. He was able to extend limitless generosity—money, food, animals, clothing, whatever was needed...Hammody died in 1961, leaving some 200 slaves and a large portion of Atar’s rich date-palm groves.³⁹

Sometime in the 1930s, Hammuddy was appointed Shaykh of the Awlād Bū Sbā’ community of Atar. Prior to him, the Awlād Bū Sbā’ had had no officially recognized leader, unlike the Tikna who were headed by ‘Abdallah wuld Bayrūk. For reasons that remain obscure, there was a major disagreement between the Yazīd family and the Tiknas of Atar. So when Hammuddy became chief of the Awlād Bū Sbā’, Yazīd’s family asked to join the Awlād Bū Sbā’ roster. This event, which took place in 1937, caused a major fight to erupt in the market place in Atar between certain Awlād Bū Sbā’ and several

³⁸ McDougall, “Topsy-Turvy World,” p. 381.

³⁹ Ibid, pp. 381-2.

Tikna under the leadership of ‘Abdallah wuld Bayrūk.⁴⁰ To be sure, this major clash of the Wād Nūn trading community in Atar created a major schism between the Awlād Bū Sbā’ and the Tikna. At about the same time, a confrontation between Awlād Bū Sbā’ and Tikna traders took place in the market of Louga. Although the details of these two momentous incidents which split the Wād Nūn diaspora are not easily divulged, it is tempting to speculate that economic competition had some part in the matter.

From Wād Nūn to Louga: Camel Transport in Senegal’s Peanut Basin

The development of Senegal’s groundnut cash-crop economy, set in motion in the 1840s, was in full swing by the turn of the century. In ten years, from 1900 to 1909, peanut exports from Senegal doubled from 100 000 to 200 000 kilograms.⁴¹ The main regions of peanut cultivation were located south of the Senegal River in the Gandiolais, Jambour, Cajor, Baol and Sine-Saloum regions. By the 1890s, the French had built a railway line connecting the main junction points for peanut cultivation to the ports of St. Louis and Dakar. The railway facilitated the transportation of the bulk cash crop. To carry their crop from the field to the train station, Senegalese farmers became increasingly dependent on the services provided by Biḍān camel owners. Caravaners

⁴⁰ This event is well known to the people of Atar, but it is still a highly sensitive political issue. I was unable to get all the details surrounding the incident in the market place. A major Tikna-Awlād Bū Sbā’ clash also occurred at about the same time in Louga. This event is also hushed in the oral sources, neither side wanting to point fingers or stir the past for fear of the consequences.

⁴¹ Félix Brigaud, *Études Sénégalaises no. 9: Connaissance du Sénégal, no. 6: Le Sénégal Economique*. St. Louis: CRDS,, 1967, p. 41.

would migrate seasonally to the peanut basin to hire their transportation services to the farmers, and/or to sell to them their camels.

Louga in the Jambour region, founded sometime in the fifteenth century, became a major trade center by the late nineteenth century. Because of its location, and the establishment of a train-station there in 1887, Louga expanded quite rapidly in the first decades of the twentieth century.⁴² A primary historical event in the history of Louga, Moustapha Sar explains, was the creation of the *marbat*, or cattle market, in 1905.⁴³ According to the oral traditions of Louga, the *marbat* was originally started by a Biḍān who came with his herd. When he was about to leave and he was asked where his herd was, he answered “*mā rabatā*” meaning that he did not tie it up. In other words, he did not even have time to tie up his herd before it was sold.⁴⁴

Louga quickly became a prime location for stranger-traders such the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā'. In 1906-7, two brothers from Wād Nūn came to settle permanently in Louga: 'Abd al-Jalīl and Mulay wuld Khūna. They were probably among the first Awlād Bū Sbā' in town.⁴⁵ As the story goes, 'Abd al-Jalīl wuld Khūna bought illegally some “red sugar” (meaning brown sugar) from the slaves of a Tikna chief (of the Aīt Laḥsān fraction) in the Wād Nūn town of Liksābi. The slaves were probably selling their

⁴² Moustapha Sar, *Louga et sa région (Sénégal)*. IFAN, Dakar, 1973. Sar's is the only historical examination of this important town.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 52. For a discussion of the Marbat in the 1940s see Robin, J. “Le Marbat: Marché au Bétail de Louga,” *Africa*, 1945.

⁴⁴ Interviews in Louga with Youssou Mbargan Mbaye, 07/02/97 (Griot), Seybu Niang (07/04/97) and Samba Souna Fall (07/04/97) (Notebook SN1). The word *marbat* is derived from the Arabic for fastened, tied.

⁴⁵ Interview in Louga with 'Abd al-Fatāḥ wuld 'Abd al-Jalīl (07/06/97).

rations to generate income. The Tikna chief warned ‘Abd al-Jalīl not to buy the sugar anymore, but he continued to do so. The third time he was caught, the Tikna chief asked him to leave the Wād Nūn. So he came to Senegal and settled in Louga shortly after the official creation of the *marbat*. His brother joined him, and together they organized caravans between Louga and the Wād Nūn. They bought a large compound with a boutique attached to it near the Louga *marbat*.

By the 1930s, all the European and Lebanese trading houses located in Senegal had a store in Louga. It became a multi-ethnic market town where Wolof, Hal-Pulār, Soninké, Biḍān, Berber, Moroccan, Lebanese and European traders all interacted with one another exchanging cattle, sheep, horses, camels, peanuts, imported foodstuffs and merchandise. Various stranger-trader groups lived in the different quarters of the town. The most prominent traders operated as landlord-brokers and had their networks of clients. Doudou Fall remembers when he first came to Louga in 1931, in the height of the trading season: “there were so many people that one could not even circulate in the main street (“Rue du Commerce”).”⁴⁶

In the early 1930s, a large wave of destitute Awlād Bū Sbā’ migrants came from the Wād Nūn region, many traveling by boat, to Mauritania and Senegal. In the course of their battles and pointed defeats, the Awlād Bū Sbā’ took shelter in the colonial capital of Senegal, the port of Ndar. As Martin explains,

⁴⁶ Interview in Louga with Doudou Fall (07/04/97).

St. Louis was progressively invaded by veritable beggars Awlād Bū Sbā' who quickly converted themselves into small traders. After this first step, the markets of Louga, Kebemer, Gueoul, to cite only the principal ones, had colonies of Awlād Bū Sbā' who rapidly took the first position in the local native trade. Dakar, the Casamance (southern Senegal), the Gold Coast, became markets almost entirely reserved to this tribe. Untiring travelers, with a truly surprising capacity for adaptation to European methods, crafty and eloquent traders, subtle and arrogant according to the circumstances, they were to become "a money power" [*ils devaient devenir "une puissance d'argent"*] in the western Sahara, where the nomadic tribes are still so miserable.⁴⁷

Assisted financially and otherwise by members of the Awlād Bū Sbā' nation already established in the region, the Awlād Bū Sbā' very quickly and effectively seized opportunities in the burgeoning Senegalese economy. They typically engaged in the peanut market as transporters and livestock traders. Eventually they moved into the retail business as shopkeepers in the rural villages located in the peanut basin such as Mekhe, Kebemer, Mpal, Coki, Fatick and so on.

The Buhay Network

As mentioned in chapter six, Buhay's sons began migrating into the Senegal economy towards the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the 1910s, after training in the *akabār* as caravaner apprentice to his father, serving the Shingīṭi-Gulmīm and Shingīṭi-Timbuktu routes, 'Abdarrahmān b. Buhay landed in Louga. He arrived with a start-up capital in camels and connected to the Tikna community already established there.⁴⁸ He later opened a boutique and began selling *marsandīs* (European

⁴⁷ Martin, "Une tribu," p. 18.

⁴⁸ Group interview with Muḥammad Sa'īd b. Buhay, Khadijatu mint Abdullah wuld 'Aly, and Fatima mint Abd Rahman b. Buhay in Shingīṭi (3/08/97).

imported merchandise), as well as camels. Once a year, he organized an *akabār* from Louga to Gulmīm to purchase Morocco products and camels.

Like most migrant traders and boutique owners in Senegal, he migrated seasonally back to Shingītī, which had become the Tikna “hometown” in Mauritania. This typically occurred in the low trading season that coincided with the rainy season and the Getna date festival in Adrar. In fact, the months of August and September were the usual months when Saharan retailers of Senegal came back home to visit their families and rest on sand dunes while catching up on the town news and eating freshly picked dates. Soon, ‘Abdarrahmān’s younger brothers Muḥammad Sālam and Shaikh joined him, one settling in Louga, the other in Dagana, an active trading station along the Senegal River. During the rainy season, ‘Abdarrahmān would relay with his brothers so that his shop in Louga was always open. They purchased the merchandise in Ndar from European, Lebanese and Moroccan (Fez) trading houses. Eventually, imported merchandise could be delivered directly from Dakar, a port city that became the economic hub and later the capital of Senegal. His widow, an elder in Shingītī, describes the Buhay network, as well as the activities of her own Tikna father:

Our grandfather [the cousin of the sons of Buhay] ‘Abdullah wuld ‘Aly also traded over there. They traded in Louga, Dagana and Ndar. All died but they were big traders... and they became wealthy, their wealth was plentiful over there. They contacted many people and they made a lot of wealth, they took money from the Ahl Fez [Moroccan traders from Fez] over there, and they had relations with them and they all paid [the debts] and they all helped one another. All of them bought the trade [goods], they would bring it over here to their home [waṭān^{him}] Shingītī. The whole time, he [‘Abdarrahmān] would spend the whole year there, on that land that was his over there. And when the summer came, the Getna, he would get up and come to visit his family by camel, on an

akabār and he stayed for the Getna, and when the Getna was over, he would return to Louga, and to Dagana. Everything they carried/loaded on their camels, they carried dates, all kinds of trade, the *tassuḥfra*, they carry everything....He [her husband ‘Abdarrahmān wuld Buhay] opened a store in Louga and in Indiarir [small town in the Gandiole region of Senegal]...all the traders went to Louga....in those days there were no towns. Every one went to Ndar or Louga.⁴⁹

The other brother who also resided in Louga, Shaykh wuld Buhay, married a Tikna wife from the Arwīli family, Zaynabu mint Limām wuld Arwīli in Shingīti. They had no children and she died giving birth. In Louga, he had a second wife from “Ahl al-Guebla,” probably a Wolof woman. He also became the chief of the Tikna community of Shingīti.

One Last Conquest: the French Burst the 'Door of the Sahara' (1934)

As mentioned above, the conquest of the Adrar did not put an end to the raiding and acts of resistance to the French presence in the Sahara. Raids of caravans remained a frequent occurrence, which is why official caravans required armed escorts. The sons of Mā’ al-‘Aynayn (he died the year the French occupied Morocco in 1912) continued the resistance movement against the French. In 1913, a small military detachment under the leadership of colonel Moutet paid a surprise attack on the town of Smāra, the Mā’ al-‘Aynayn family and resistance movement headquarters in the western Sahara. They

⁴⁹ Group interview with Muḥammad Sa’īd b. Buhay, Khadijatu mint Abdullah wuld ‘Aly, and Fatima mint Abd Rahman b. Buhay in Shingīti (3/08/97).

succeeded in annihilating the town, but Mā' al-'Aynayn's sons, namely Haība and Marabī Rabhu, continued the struggle on a smaller scale, this time no longer benefiting from the support of the Moroccan King, who was now under French control. They did have some relations, at least, with the Spanish colonial administration isolated in the ports of Villa Cisneros (Dakhla) and Ifni. Located in the town of Tiznit, they organized small targeted attacks on mobile French units, raiding the *cobas* in the Ḥawd, Tagant and Azawād regions, and sometimes in the Adrar. This lasted until the end of 1933, when the French finally cracked-down on the regions on the northern edges of the Sahara.

An elder in the town of 'Asrīr, several miles south of Gulmīm, recalls the French invasion in the winter of 1934: "when the French came, the Aīt Ba 'Amrān and the Aīt Ibrāhīm [Berber tribes] collaborated with the French. They dropped bombs and we saw their airplanes for the first time."⁵⁰ As John Waterbury's informant explains, the resistance in the Wād Nūn and Sūs regions against the French invasion was extremely well organized. The Berber communities relied on their political structures, such as the council of tribes, to organize armies against the French. In late 1933 and early 1934, the French were attacking these regions on the northern edges of the Sahara from all sides. Eventually,

On February 23 [1934] the French began to machinegun our positions and drop bombs. They did not do any damage, and no one worried about them. Then the French dropped tracts all over the mountains, containing a message from the Sultan asking us to give up in the name of Islam and the Alawite [family of the

⁵⁰ Interview in 'Asrīr with Ḥabūb b. Aḥmad b. al-Ma'attī with Aḥmad Fāl b. Laḥbīb and Muḥammad b. Maḥjūb b. al-Jumāni (07/30/99).

Morocco King] throne. I remember that everyone ignored them and began to say that he was just the Sultan of the French...Everything changed when the French took over, but they did bring security.⁵¹

A week later, the French entered Gulmīm and created a military outpost there. The following year, they established the *circonscription de Goulimine* that encompassed the Wād Nūn region. According to Captain Méric, who served many years in the Wād Nūn region, “the primary mission of the district of Goulimine [was] the control of the confederation of the Tikna.”⁵² One month later, in April 1934, the first trans-Saharan car crossing was accomplished (from Tiznit, 50 km north of Gulmīm, to Dakar).

Months after the effective occupation of the Wād Nūn region, the French colonial administration noted an obvious increase in trans-Saharan trade. In the summer of 1935, the commercial report of Timbuktu remarked:

Since a year, as a result of the success of our troops in Morocco, the population of the Tadjakant [Tajakānat; see chapter six] of Tombouctou has resumed its commercial relations with Tindouf. The caravans heading north for the azalai are more and more important...this caravan activity beginning to unfold would be part of an economic renaissance.⁵³

Apparently, a number of Tajakānat traders moved from Tindūf to Timbuktu that year.

Such was the case of Muḥammad wuld Khattra who explains the type of long-distance trade he engaged in then: “I came to Timbuktu in 1935...Traders brought [to northern markets] incense, gum arabic, gold, ivory, ostrich feathers, textiles, wooden bowls

⁵¹ Waterbury. *North for the Trade*, p. 56-57. From his interview with al-Hajj Ibrahim.

⁵² Méric, Capitaine. “La Circonscription de Goulimine, le Pays de l’Oued Noun,” mémoire du CHEAM (1941), p. 10.

⁵³ ANRIM E2/56 – Commandant de Cercle de l’Adrar à M. le Gouverneur de la Mauritanie, 30 Sept. 1935.

(*gedah*), slaves and leather boxes sold in Algeria [via Tindūf, located in western Algeria].

And we brought [to Timbuktu] cloth and weapons.”⁵⁴

According to a study about the Kunta traders of the Azawād, the yearly salt caravan (*azalaī*) from Timbuktu to Tawdanni did not exceed a size of 300 camels in the period from 1917 to 1933.⁵⁵ In the winter of 1936-1937, however, the size of the *azalaī* caravan rose to 1000 camels. The rebirth of the large camel caravan in the 1930s was due in large part to the “security” offered by the infrastructure of the colonial economy. The *azalaī* was now controlled by the colonial officials, who sent escorts to ensure the safeguard of the salt caravan.

New Wave of Southern Migrations

The outpost of Akjūjt, founded in the Inshīri region during the first phase of colonial conquest, developed into a nucleus town for the Awlād Bū Sbā’ in the 1910s and 1920s. Aḥmad Samba, nicknamed “Tarnīsh,” or little bird, because of his agility in combat, was instrumental in transforming the outpost of Akjūjt into a “veritable caravanserai” of the Awlād Bū Sbā’. By the late 1930s, the main square of Akjūjt, where

⁵⁴ Interview in Timbuktu Muḥammad wuld Khattra (04/22/98).

⁵⁵ Genevière, “Les Kountas,” p. 56.

the market was located, was dominated by Awlād Bu Sbā's traders.⁵⁶ Tarnīsh had developed a reputation as a great warrior during the war that pitted the Awlād Bū Sbā' against the Rgaībāt in the early 1900s. He then had sought refuge with the Mā' al-'Aynayn group. In 1926, the Mauritania colonial administration invited Tarnīsh in view of turning him into an "excellent collaborator" for the French in the Trarza region.⁵⁷ He came to Mauritania with an entourage of Wād Nūn Awlād Bū Sbā' who were eager to find commercial opportunities in the economies of Mauritania and Senegal. By the end of the 1930s, this group of Awlād Bū Sbā' was hit hard by the global economic crisis, like most everyone in western Africa. Tarnīsh managed to overcome the hardships thanks to his colonial salary. He settled permanently in Akjūjt, where he built most of the boutiques, renting or selling them to members of his Awlād Bū Sbā' network.

By the 1930s, the Biḍān population living, if temporarily, in Senegal was quite substantial. According to a study undertaken by Paul Dubié, who served many years as an administrator in Mauritania, the great majority of Biḍān living in Senegal in the 1930s and 1940s were freed slaves (*ḥarātīn*). Accordingly, there were 3218 Biḍān and 8298 Ḥarātīn in Senegal in 1936.⁵⁸ Although Dubié does not remark upon this fact, it could be

⁵⁶ Group interview in Nouakchott with Mulay Idrīs b. al-Bukhārī, Sīdi b. Isma'īl b. Abd al-Qudūs, Ḥamūdy b. 'Uthmān b. Aḥmad Sālik and Ḥamad al-Āmīn b. Aḥmad Sālak (06/29/98). See also Martin, "Une Tribu," p. 72.

⁵⁷ Martin, "Une tribu," p. 92.

⁵⁸ "La Vie Matérielle des Maures," *Mélanges Ethnographiques*. Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire. No. 23, Dakar, 1953, p. 242.

assumed that the abolition of slavery in the territories under French colonial rule, which was enforced more in Senegal than in Mauritania, prompted many slaves and former slaves to opt for living in Senegal. Often not by choice, they remained connected to their former masters.

The commercial itinerary of Sa'ad Buh wuld Limām wuld La'abayd best exemplifies the geographic and professional range of Wād Nūn traders in the colonial economies of early twentieth century western Africa.⁵⁹ Sa'ad Buh, an Awlād Bū Sbā' of the Awlād al-Baggar branch, left Timbuktu at the age of fourteen to join a relative residing in the town of Fatick in the Senegalese peanut basin. He then moved on to Ghana where he began selling bread alongside other Ghanean traders. Eventually, he saved enough shillings to rent a boutique in order to sell larger quantities of bread. When wrestling matches started to take place regularly in front of his boutique, he prospered quickly, selling a pound sterling worth of bread per day. Soon, he stocked his boutique with all kinds of merchandise, mainly cotton cloth, which he sold off in no time.

Hearing that business was good in the interior of the country, Sa'ad Buh embarked on a ship to Mekati. There, he met a 'Moroccan' trader (probably from Fez) who extended a loan of 30 pounds to Limām. Within three months, he had reimbursed his loan and tripled his investment. With these returns, he set-up shop on his own account. A day came when he noticed a Saharan caravan coming to town. Sa'ad Buh invited the caravaner to lodge in his home. As was the custom for *jaajgis*, or landlords,

⁵⁹ Based on the Martin, pp. 75-78. He interviewed Limām and wrote an extremely insightful a mini-biography.

the caravaner entrusted Sa'ad Buh with his funds while he was in town. Sa'ad Buh asked his guest if he could invest the funds during the duration of his stay, to which the caravaner consented. With the funds, totaling 25.000 francs (250 new francs, about \$45.00 current dollars, to give an rough approximation), he purchased a large amount of cotton guinée from the well-known French trading house Maurel & Prom, who had a branch in town. By another stroke of luck the price of cotton suddenly increased 110 percent. With the bundle he made on this cotton, Sa'ad Buh paid his debt, and headed back to Dakar.

In 1920, he moved to Louga, where his brother from southern Morocco joined him. There, Sa'ad Buh became the most prosperous Awlād Bū Sbā' trader in town, extending loans to fellow Awlād Bū Sbā' traders and organizing caravans to and from Louga and Wād Nūn. His long-distance trade with Morocco increased after the French occupied the Wād Nūn region. Thanks to his loans, several noteworthy Awlād Bū Sbā' traders funded their caravans, including Fuṭgi b. al-Ṭayr. Sa'ad Buh built a large house in Louga in 1927, and by that time he had opened ten other boutiques in Senegal which were run by members of the tribe. In the 1930s, when Captain Martin interviewed him, Sa'ad Buh was about to go on a caravan to Morocco carrying a bill of exchange worth 300.000 francs.

Like many of his entrepreneurial Wād Nūn contemporaries, Sa'ad Buh wuld Limām succeeded in promoting his multiple skills to prosper in the colonial economies of western Africa. He purchased and sold merchandise imported by European trading

houses, he organized international caravans to Morocco, he used the new financial infrastructure to transfer money across long distances, and he invested his money in his fellow Awlād Bū Sbā'. On the eve of the Second World War, Wād Nūn and Biḍān traders were well on their way to controlling a large corner of colonial Senegal's retail market.

From the Camel to the Camion

From the mid 1930s onwards, the automobile made its entrance in Senegalese countryside and it rather quickly chipped away at the camel-train sector so active in the peanut basin. However, no roads were built to service automobile access to the towns in Mauritania and northern Mali. As shown in a colonial roadmap published in 1931, the Saharan zones remained essentially cut-off from the Sahelian regions because of the lack of roads (See Map 4). As early as 1931, attempts were made to provide automobile service from Rosso to Atar.⁶⁰ But it was not until the mid-to-late 1930s that the French colonial transport company *Lacombes & Frères* established regular truck service, charging freight by the weight, between Ndar, Rosso, Akjūjt and Atar.⁶¹ After the Second World War, the *Compagnie Marocaine de Transport* (C.T.M.), a Franco-Moroccan truck company, began connecting on a regular basis the regions of the northern desert edge, such as Wād Nūn and southern Morocco, to Fort Gouraud, north of Atar. In 1935, a decree was promulgated to regulate "the use of the trails [*pistes*] situated in the

⁶⁰ ANRIM – E2/56 "Service Automomobile Rosso-Atar," Colonie de Mauritanie, Travaux Publics, 11 Juillet 1931.

⁶¹ ANRIM – E2/56 Lettre de Lacombe & Frères (Thiès) à Lt-Gouverneur de Mauritanie (20 Novembre 1934).

Saharan territories of AOF.”⁶² From then onwards, it was possible to travel on wheels from Dakar to Casablanca. Caravans transporting merchandise endured, however, well into the 1960s. Moreover, the “*yasāwugu*” type caravan expeditions targeting the purchase and sale of camels between Gulmīm and Louga also prevailed until 1975, when the Saharan war erupted.⁶³

In Senegal, however, it would be at least two decades before camel transportation was completely replaced by the motorized vehicle.⁶⁴ A report on the use of the camel in northern Mauritania written in 1939 bears witness to the continuation of trans-Saharan trade traffic from Gulmīm to Louga. It explains that a handful of Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā’ long-distance traders, with a few Rgaībāt from the Tahalat branch, engaged in trans-Saharan trade between southern markets such as Louga, and southern Morocco, and especially Gulmīm.⁶⁵ The price of camels at this period was still cheaper in Gulmīm than in Louga, and worth the trip. It must be noted, however, that the *camion*, or truck, never fully replaced the camel caravan since so many Saharan towns remained accessible only by camelback, or sometimes by plane (this was the case of Tishīt which is still supplied by caravans coming from the south).

Such was the landscape of the colonial economy which influenced the commercial itineraries of the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā’. Both Wād Nūn stranger-

⁶² ANRIM – E2/56, 2225 TP Arrêté complétant l’arrêté no. 829 TP 13 Avril 1935.

⁶³ See chapter three for description of this type of business.

⁶⁴ Already by the 1940s, the camel population in Senegal had dropped considerably. But the need for the purpose of cash-crop transportation as well as for military transports was still high, especially during the Second World War, when there were fuel shortages. ANRIM E2/56 “Enquête sur les transports camelins,” 1942.

trader groups were involved in the stages of colonization as colonial vigilantes and commercial agents of imperial interests, as argued in the previous chapter. With the development of the colonial economies of Mauritania, Senegal, and Mali, many members of these two tribal nations were in the best of positions to take advantage of new commercial opportunities. From the 1900s to the 1930s, the commercial itineraries of Wād Nūn traders shifted to their advantage. The Wād Nūn entrepreneurial spirit was combined with traders' pioneering innovations in financial operations in the context of a new infrastructure. While they became innovators opening *boutiques*, or all-purpose stores, in the colonial economic space, they also remained caravaners connecting western to northern markets, and migrating seasonally to the north to spend time under the tent during the rainy season and the *Getna* date festival. Indeed, trans-Saharan trade did not end with the imposition of colonial rule, as camels remained an indispensable means of transportation in Mauritania, northern Mali and, for at least the first four decades of the twentieth century, in the peanut basin of northern Senegal.

⁶⁵ ANRIM – E2/56 “Utilisation commerciale du chameau dans la haute Mauritanie” p. 3 (anonymous).

CHAPTER 9

ON TRANS-SAHARAN TRAILS: CONCLUSION

This dissertation has sought to understand how long-distance traders organized to overcome the challenges involved in trading across regional economies not ruled by a unified political and economic system. In pre-colonial western Africa, there were few, if any, institutions for finance and trade upon which long-distance traders could rely to facilitate their commercial operations. From at least the 1840s until the 1930s, trading networks on trans-Saharan trails promoted efficient cross-cultural exchange. The operation of such trading networks, as the Wād Nūn case study shows, was made possible through the existence of tight-knit associations of traders who trusted one another, and relied on Islamic law as an institutional framework. Based on the family histories of several generations of the Wād Nūn traders and the reconstruction of their migration patterns, the following conclusions can be drawn about the changing trade environment, the organization of trading networks, and the study of stranger-traders in African history.

The time-period examined in this dissertation was marked by political, economic and social tides, which had a direct impact on the conduct of long-distance trade across the *Trāb al-Biḍān* region of western Africa. The period from the 1840s to the 1860s was marked by relative insecurity in this region. It was during this time that stranger-traders, such the Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā' who formed the Wād Nūn network, were especially prone to raiding activities. The example of the four Tikna traders who met their deaths

on trans-Saharan trails in a relatively short time span, is a case in point. In the early 1860s, the Kunta shaykh nomadizing in the Azawād, attempted to put an end to the devastating activities of raiders by seeking to control the region. It was at this moment that a group of Moroccan Jewish traders, led by Murdukhay Aby Sarur, settled in the market of Timbuktu. But the Awlād Bū Sbā' - Kunta war of 1863, promoted a new era of political instability which came to an end in the course of the twenty-year reign of the emir of Adrar, Aḥmad wuld Mḥammad.

During these years of peace and prosperity, from the 1870s until the early 1890s, a second wave of Wād Nūn traders moved south settling in, and trading between, the markets of western Africa. The following twenty years, from the 1890s until 1910, at which point the French colonial military had effectively conquered the Adrar region of Mauritania, was a period local historians call 'the time of chaos' (*ṣīḥa*). It was marked by political instability, the intensification of colonial conquests, the subsequent rise in the gun trade, and the related organization of resistance movements. All these trends had the effect of halting regular patterns of camel caravan traffic. From 1910 onwards, another wave of southern migration into the colonial economies of Senegal and Mali unfolded. The Wād Nūn traders, with their established tradition of international trade, were best positioned to take advantage of economic opportunities in the new colonial setting.

Throughout the hundred-year period covered in the dissertation, western African markets and commercial itineraries shifted as a result of both internal and external economic trends. On the internal side, this period saw the rise in the trans-Saharan slave trade linked to the salt trade; the shifts in prominence of markets accompanied by a

tendency for Saharan commercial interests to move southward; and a steady increase in the importation of Moroccan luxury goods, related to both the patterns of islamization in western Africa, and the adoption of guns as well as tea.

At the same time, external factors affected trading patterns. This period saw the end of the Atlantic slave trade; the rise and gradual fall of the gum and ostrich feather trades; the increasing importation of European merchandise, and eventually foodstuffs, at the ports of Ndar and al-Swaīra; the gradual establishment of European trading houses in the main markets of the western African hinterland; and the policing and taxation of long-distance traders by the colonial administration. In this period, the nature of colonial exploitation evolved, from the sole extraction of primary resources to an emphasis on African markets for channeling imports. Indeed, sometime in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the French, along with other European powers, shifted their trade policies to transform their colonies into cash-crop economies with markets for cheap European merchandise. While these gradual changes were occurring, interregional and international trade patterns endured. Caravans trading between the Wād Nūn and western African markets continued to distribute subsistence and luxury goods throughout the region.

Saharans, living in oases and in towns along the desert edge, had very little in the way of resources besides salt, domestic animals and a few dates. Their relative proximity to almost limitless sources of rock salt, in the mountains of Ijīl and in Tawdanni, was a blessing to traders who could transport the salt bars to the cereal-producing regions of the south in exchange for millet and other essentials. Indeed, for the caravaners organizing the *rafga*, or subsistence-type interregional caravan, the salt trade was a basic need, a survival mechanism. For the people of the Sahel, and beyond, access to salt was also a

question of necessity. The regions of the interior were notoriously salt deficient, and this mineral deficiency made people of the Sahel dependent on the salt trade as well.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the trade in slaves, imported into the Saharan oases and towards the slave markets of the northern desert edge, increased significantly due to a number of factors which are still confounding scholars of western African history. While it was not highlighted in the dissertation, it must be said the trans-Saharan slave trade was a major occupation of the traders of the Wād Nūn network. From the late eighteenth century until at least the mid-twentieth century, Gulmīm remained an active transit slave market for Morocco. Although at this stage in our research it is not possible to say much about the actual volume of the slave trade, nor about the quantitative progression of trans-Saharan trade generally, evidence shows that children and women continued to be enslaved and exchanged on trans-Saharan trails well into the mid-twentieth century. This conclusion is drawn from cases encountered in northern Mauritania and southern Morocco of mainly women who were abducted as children and sold into slavery in Gulmīm. In subsequent research, I intend to focus more closely on the trans-Saharan slave trade in terms of cross-cultural exchange and the legal implications of trading in the human commodity.

The profession of caravaner was predominantly a male occupation. But the business of organizing camel caravans was not exclusively male. Indeed, as argued in chapter three, women played an active and critical role as daughters, wives and widows of caravaners and caravan financiers. Moreover, when the caravan was being organized, they placed their orders and negotiated their terms (spices, perfume and incense, special cloths, foods, gold or silver for the next pair of earrings, and other luxury or exotic

goods). Just like in the case of families engaged in the international maritime trade, with sailors and merchants periodically sailing to distant markets, Saharan women managed affairs when their men were off on the trail for months on end. They sold goods, they paid employees, they settled debts and extended credit, in short they took over the business.

Jurisprudence was central to trading operations in western Africa, where many relationships were governed by Islamic precepts, as argued in chapter two. Commercial Islamic law, as it was interpreted, debated and enforced, allowed for the existence of an economic order. In the *Trāḥ al-Biḍān*, the Saharan cultural space examined in this dissertation, this economic order was self-enforced by Muslims whose commercial success was directly related to their reputation, and their creditworthiness. Muslim jurists, as arbitrators and mediators, played an obviously critical role in maintaining this economic order which facilitated exchange.

To enforce contractual agreements, and arbitrate in commercial disputes, traders relied on the services of a select group of legal experts. These scholars were versed in Islamic law, and often were themselves engaged in commercial activities with stakes, shares, or camel loads in seasonal caravans. To be sure, in western African exchange in the nineteenth century, there was a clear complicity between the operation of commerce and the role of religious authorities, between traders and clerics. However, while Islamic law provided a juridical and institutional framework guiding business ethics and economic behavior, however, Muslim traders tended to circumvent certain legal edicts. This was the case with the interdict on usury which, if strictly applied, would have made long-distance trade unprofitable. In the colonial period, with the imposition of colonial

justice system, the reliance of long-distance traders on the services of Muslim scholars lessened as their governing services was curtailed within the new power structure.¹

Long-distance trade was made possible through the availability of credit in a highly personalized financial market. Credit was key to long-distance commercial operations as both a means to access capital to engage in trade, and a means to accumulate capital by transferring it temporarily to trustworthy partners. Trust between Muslim partners, who shared strong ties of solidarity and family, was the building block of all these credit operations. Access to credit, for financing interregional and the trans-Saharan caravans, was facilitated by the existence of trading networks. Businessmen, and their wives, widows and other family members, depended on one another, and upon their fellow business partners, to overcome the tremendous obstacles in conducting trade across long-distances.

Stranger-traders, such as the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' who formed the Wād Nūn network, were well placed to play the comparative advantage of trade between and across the two shores of the Sahara desert. With their knowledge and experience in the interior and on the Atlantic coast, and their understanding of political entities and regional situations, they were successful actors in international trade. But in order to circumnavigate the pitfalls of organizing long-distance trade across political, economic and cultural spaces, traders had to develop social strategies to protect their interests while trading abroad. The role of the Bayrūk family, which controlled access to and from the

¹ The question of the impact of colonial rule on local systems of jurisprudence is an area of investigation for which I have very little information at this stage of my research.

trans-Saharan trade terminus of Gulmīm, the ‘door of the Sahara,’ was key in ensuring some level of political protection for the Tikna and their allies.

In contrast to the portrayal of trading networks as closed associations of stranger-traders, cut off from the host societies in which they live in, this dissertation has shown that, as least in the Wād Nūn case, stranger-traders developed ties with local communities. Through marriage arrangements with the Māsna of Tishīt, traders of the Wād Nūn network tapped into the Māsna trade system, linking the commercial operations of both long-distance networks. In the Wād Nūn, they cooperated with the community of Jewish stranger-traders. Both the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā’ relied on local groups as allies, customers, suppliers of camels, salt, dates and real estate, and sometimes colleagues on caravan expeditions. Similarly, in other towns of western Africa, stranger-traders developed relationships with local groups. In Senegal, they hired and relied upon Wolof workers, they made arrangements with Lebanese and French wholesalers, and they sometimes traded with the Moroccan minority from Fez settled in the main markets since the late nineteenth century. In Nioro, a market that gained importance in the early twentieth century, they cooperated in business with the Hal-Pulaar and the Soninké. Similarly, in Timbuktu, Wād Nūn stranger-traders dealt with the Ahl Kunta, the Berabich and the Tuarag on the one hand, and the Sonrai and Hal-Pulaar on the other.

In the new power structure imposed by colonial rule, stranger-traders such as the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā’ became key informants and economic agents to the French administration. They guided officials by supplying selective information, while at the

same time furthering their interests and maximizing opportunities to expand their commercial ventures. Their successful maneuvering with the French preceded, and indeed assisted, the establishment of colonial rule in Mauritania. The position of these stranger-traders was akin to that of many other minority groups who came to play important roles as intermediaries between the colonial administration and the colonized peoples in African history. A comparable, yet quite separate, example is the case of the Lebanese communities in western Africa who came to dominate the large retail businesses in Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire.

As explained in chapters three, four and five, the Tikna and the Awlād Bū Sbā' stranger-traders were socially at risk in their host communities, especially in periods of political unrest. Their decision to live in close proximity to one another was both a survival and a defense strategy. At the same time, the fact that strangers congregated, oftentimes near the main market place and mosque, made them easy targets in times of social, political and/or economic instability. This is exactly what happened in Tishīt in the 1850s. It would happen again in 1957, in the towns of Atar and Rosso, after the Moroccan independence and a new wave of resistance to colonial rule pushed many to ransack the stores of several prominent Tikna traders. This attack was encouraged by the French, who had decided to turn against their old Tikna allies, now viewed as "Moroccans," and to send them back to the Wād Nūn. The targeting of stranger-traders is a common phenomenon deserving the attention of scholars of world history and politics.

The Sahara was an active space within and across which exchanges in peoples, ideas, foods and things took place from the pre-colonial to the colonial periods. The *Trāb al-Biḍān* remained connected through relationships of long-distance trade despite the colonial imposition of arbitrary territorial divisions in the twentieth century. This historical reconstruction of the commercial itineraries of traders was made possible by traveling on trans-Saharan trails in the countries of Mali, Mauritania, Morocco and Senegal. In treating this area of western and northwestern Africa as one united by the Sahara desert, this dissertation tries to transcend the continental divide that has traditionally characterized the study of Africa. It is hoped that our understanding of migration patterns and cross-cultural exchange in western Africa will be greatly improved when more scholars tackle history trans-nationally by following the trails of their historical subjects.

GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY

Aīt: Berber for 'tribe,' 'family' as in Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly (prominent Tikna clan).

Akabār (akwābīr): trans-Saharan caravan or international caravan, linking the northern to western Africa, typically organized by members of the Wād Nūn network (Tikna and Awlād Bū Sbā).

Akhāl : (meaning blackest in Arabic). Black, or very dark blue cotton cloth manufactured in southeast Asia and imported by Europeans stationed on the ports of the Atlantic coast. See also *khunt*.

Amersāl: Salty earth crust sold in leather bags to herders as animal feed. Most important amersāl deposits are in and around Tishīt.

'Arab: Warrior nomads of the Sahara. Also referred to as Ḥasāni.

Awlad 'Alūsh, Majdhūf..: qabail (so-called "tribes") of the Ḥawḍ region.

Azawād: Region of present-day northern Mali which includes Timbuktu, Gao, Arawān and Tawdanni.

Beṣa: Unit of cotton which came to be a common currency of wholesale exchange in western Africa from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century. Also referred in the French literature as (*piece de*) *guinée*.

Biḍāni (Biḍān): Inhabitants of the Sahara of mixed Arab, Berber and African origins, united by the common use of Ḥasanīya, the Arabic colloquial language of the Sahara spoken in southern Morocco, Western Sahara, Western Algeria, Northern Mali, Mauritania and Senegal.

Blād Shingīṭi: The country of Shingīṭi (spelled Chinguetti in French documents). This is the name historically given to the region of Adrar and its vicinity. Since the Middle-Ages, the reputation of the scholars of Blād Shingīṭi was well-established in the Muslim world as many erudite scholars of Shingīṭi impressed their peers while on pilgrimage in Mecca.

Bu al-Mughdād I and II: Wolof family of Ndar (St. Louis) who specialized in interpretation and translation. Bu al-Mughdād I was the interpreter of General Faidherbe,

and his son Bu al-Mughdād II replaced him as the primary interpreter and thereby mediator between the French and the Biḍān. He would serve Coppolani in the occupation of Mauritania.

dhibiḥa: Ritual slaughtering (usually of a camel) performed by one group for another as a gesture of submission, alliance, or/and to seek protection.

faqih (fuqahā): Islamic jurist

fatwā (fatāwa): legal opinion in Islamic jurisprudence

Filatūr: Type of guinée cloth (petite filature) imported by the French which was of higher quality than the rest of the cotton cloth for it was of a finer weave.

Ghāfar: Sort of customs duty imposed on caravaners by local emirs who crossed their territories. International traders such as the Awlād Bū Sbā' and Tikna paid a special, heavier, duty called the strong ghāfar or *ghāfar al-shidd*.

Getna: Date festival during the later summer in Adrar and Tagant.

Gerba: goatskin water container.

Hartāni (ḥarātīn): freed slave generally assimilated to *Biḍān* culture.

Ḥasāni: See 'arab.

Hasanīya: the colloquial Arabic spoken in the *Trab al-Biḍān* (mixture of Arabic, Berber and other African languages).

Ḥawd: region in South-eastern Mauritania.

Jaajgi: Landlord-broker in Soninke; the equivalent of the *mai gida* in Hausa.

Khunt: Word of uncertain origin (Berber/Soninke?) used to designate the cotton cloth made in southeast Asia and purchased from Europeans.

Kunnāsh (Kanannīsh): Trade records, usually a pack of contracts, debt/credits documents bounded together in a leather folder or a register.

Leff: political/ tribal division of complimentary opposites typical of Berber groups (ex. Tikna are divided into two leffs: the Aīt al-Jmal and th Aīt Billa).

Mā' al- 'Aynayn: leader of resistance to French conquest.

Maḥalla: the nomadic emirate or state of Saharan rulers usually composed of mounted armed horsemen and camels carrying members of the ruling group (women, children, retinue), tents, supplies and equipment. The *maḥalla* traveled from one end of the territory to the other holding court and collecting tribute along the way.

Marabout: French rendering of the Arabic Murabit used to designate Muslim religious leaders in Africa (see *zwāya*).

Marṣa: Market along the Atlantic Coast or the Senegal River where caravans met Europeans traders.

Mudarāt: Seasonal tribute exacted by *ḥasani* from *zwāya*.

Mudd (amdād): Measure for dry goods (especially cereal) with sizes varying by region.

Na'ma: town in eastern Mauritania, south of Walāta

Naṣrāni (Naṣāra): Christian, European especially French (for Saharans, I am *Naṣrāniya*). This epithet stems from the word Nasareth, the town where the Prophet Jesus was born.

Ndar: Name of the town the French called St. Louis du Sénégal.

Nomadize: to live a nomadic life-style, moving from one place to another following the clouds and green pastures to feed one's camels etc. This is my translation of the French verb *nomadiser* and the Arabic verb *raḥala* which to date has no equivalent in the English language.

Qādi (qu'āda'): Judge of Islamic law

Qā'id (qādāt): leader, commander. Here, the title given to official who ruled certain regions of the Moroccan kingdom by royal appointment (ex. *Qā'id Dahmān b. Bayrūk*)

Qāfila (plur. *qawāfil*): Arabic for caravan or convoy.

Rafga (rafa'ig): interregional or 'subsistence' caravans typically trading salt for millet.

Saad Buh (important shaykh brother of Mā' al-'Aynayn and collaborator with the French)

Saqyāt al-ḥamrā: river/region in southwestern Morocco.

Shigg (shgūg): ½ camel load

Shingīī: Town in northern Mauritania, spelled Chinguetti in the French literature.

Shurfa: (sing. Sharīf; adv. Sharifian) linked through genealogy to the family of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Sidiyya Bāba (Important shaykh in colonial Mauritania).

Smāra: town in *Saqyāt al-ḥamrā*; founded by Mā' al-'Aynayn.

al-Swaīra (pronounced Esawira): Port city on the Atlantic coast of Morocco which Europeans used to call Mogador.

Talamith: students of a Muslim scholar or leader.

Tindūf: Caravan town in Algeria founded by the Tajakānt in 1852; important market in 1880-1940s.

Tishīt: Town in the middle of Mauritania. Important trade center in 18th and 19th centuries.

Tishdār: dried salted meat, staple of caravaners.

Trāb-al-Biḍān: The land of the Biḍān which encompasses the regions of Southern Morocco, Western Algeria, Northern and parts of western Mali, the land branded as Mauritania and parts of northern Senegal. Homogeneous through the shared features of a common culture and a common language (see *Biḍān*).

Zakāt: Islamic tax paid after Ramadhan.

Znāga: Tributaries of the 'arab or the *zwāya*. Sometimes also called *lahām*.

Zwāya: The clerical classes in the Sahara. They formed the majority of the population and were the custodians of Islamic teaching and law. Most Saharan caravaners were *zwāya*. The French called the *zwāya* "marabouts."

Wād Nūn: Tikna homeland on the northern edge of the western Sahara (now a part of southern Morocco).

Wadān (town near Shingīṭī): important caravan center till early 19th c.

Wakīl (*wukalā*'): Authorized representative, trade agent.

Walāta: town in eastern Mauritania, intellectual sister-city of Timbuktu.

Wangala: traditional rotating cooking association (rare nowadays).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Tishīt Caravan with Millet loads measured in the mudds **of both Tishīt and Tagant**

Description: Except from caravan list by Muhammad b. Bubākar b. Ashrīf Ahmad (c. 1850s).

Source: Archives of Maktaba Fāḍal al-Sharīf (FS) in Tishīt; Document FS4 photographed 4/24/97.

“For Sīdi Muhammad b. Dal 16 mudd of the mudd Tishīt and two mudd of the mudd Tagānt on [(the backs of] 25 *ba’īr* [young male camels] one for the Idda family and two for the daughters of al-Imām to the slave of the daughters of al-Imām three mudd of the Tishīt mudd and and two and a half mudd of the Tagānt mudd and to the family Idda one mudd Tishīt and one mudd Tagānt and to Ambuya 6 mudd of the mudd Tishīt from 5 *ba’īr* and to me one mudd Tishīt and one mudd Tagānt and to al-Mukhtār Ashrīf 5 mudd of the mudd Tishīt at one sixth [?] and to Hama Allah ten mudd of the mudd Tishīt and one mudd Tagānt for a total of 28 mudd of the mudd Tishīt and two mudd of the mudd Tagānt and Sīdi Muhammad agreed/fixed (*thabata*) [the deal for] eight salt bars and one mudd Tagānt and he gave these from the total cost of the bar he bought from us....”

APPENDIX 2

Salt Caravan Leaving Tishīt for Southern Markets **(Loads in Salt Bars (*'adīla*) and Amersāl Salt)**

Description: Salt Caravan written by a notable of Tishīt

Source: Family archives of Aḥmad al-Saghīr, Tishīt; Document AS3 (R/V)
photographed 4/26/97.

[beginning cut-off ... Ambārika?] so the honored Sīdi al-Mukhtār b. al-shi' has 53 camel loads (*ḥaml*) [of salt bars] and one salt bar (*'adīla*) and three of amersāl, and al-Mūda six loads and one salt bar and Bubakar al-Mu'alam ten loads and one salt bar and one load of amersāl, and Anbarīk one load and one salt bar and ½ camel load (*shigg*) of amersāl, and Aḥmad b. 'Uthmān 11 loads and one salt bar and one load and a half of amersāl and Sīdi b. 'Uthmān 11 loads minus ½ salt bar (*fāṣa*) and Muḥammad b. al-Tālib Aḥmad 30 loads minus ½ salt bar and five [loads] of amersāl and 'Alyū 18 loads [of salt bars] and one load of amersāl and b. al-Ṭālib 'Aly 9 loads minus ½ salt bar and al-ḥāj Muḥammad 21 loads [of salt bars] and the writer [caravan director] has 26 loads [of salt bars] and two loads of amersāl and 'Aḥbakar b. al-hak [? sp.] al-Mukhtār has 29 loads and one salt bar and Muhammad b. 'Umar has five loads and a half a load of amersāl and Khayr b. 'Abayd has 142 loads [i.e. 140 loads and 2 loads and] and one salt bar and 12 loads of amersāl and Muhammad b. Bubakar has 4 loads and one salt bar and al-Mukhtār b. al-Gazzāl has 4 loads and 'Aly b. Bubakar has 16 loads [14 and 2 also] and six loads and a half of amersāl and Muḥammad b. 'Uthmān three loads and two loads of amersāl and the shepherd (*al-rā'*) two loads of amersāl and Abakar one load of amersāl and Sīd Aḥmad b. 'Aly one load [of salt bars or amersāl?] and Muḥammad b. 'Aly has 40 loads [? minus ½ salt bar] and 16 loads of amersāl and his brother 'Umar has 60 loads [of salt bars] and three and a half loads of amersāl and their brother Aḥmad 6 loads and four loads of amersāl and Aḥmad b. 'Ālim 25 loads and one salt bar and one and a half loads of amersāl and Jid [?] one load and one load of amersāl and Aḥmad bū Ghabūr has 46 loads [of salt bars] and four and one half of amersāl and al-Ṭālib Aḥmad has 24 loads and one salt bar and one load of amersāl and 'umar [?] between al-ḥāj al-Ṭib two loads [of salt bars or amersāl?] as well.

Verso

And a load for b. Sa'īd Naqli [the caravan of ?]

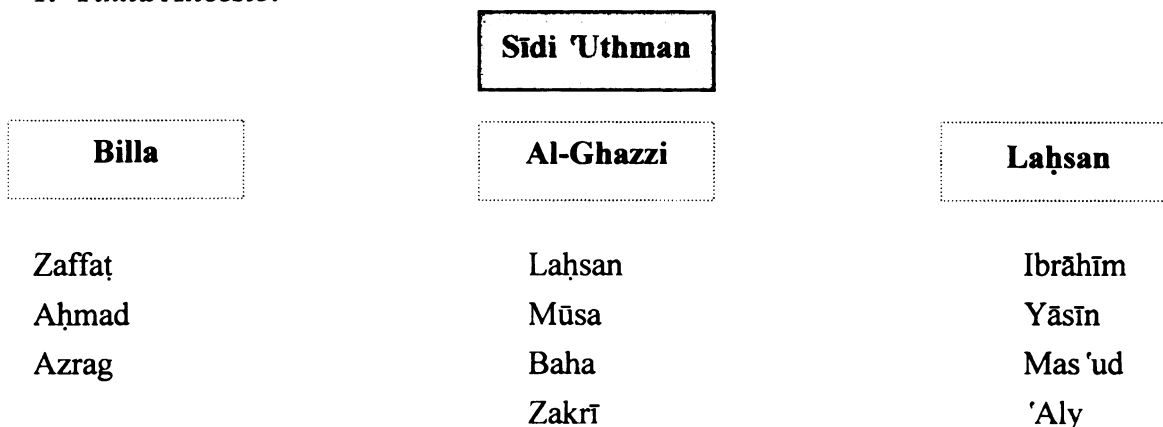
And b. Aḥmad b. al-Ḥāj Sīdī has 32 minus $\frac{1}{2}$ a salt bar and 5 loads of amersāl and 'Abdaraḥman has 4 loads minus half a salt bar and 5 loads also and a bar and a half and Sīdī b. Muḥammad has 17 loads and half a salt bar for Ṣadīq and Muḥammad b.

Ḥamallah [?] has 19 loads and half a salt bar and Aḥmad b. Bubakar has 5 loads and a load and a half of amersāl and the sons Bū Ghabūr 26 loads and one salt bar and 4 loads of amersāl and al-Mukhtār b. Muḥammad has 37 loads and one salt bar and 4 loads of amersāl, and Aḥmad his son 14 loads and a load and a half of amersāl, and Mawlūd 20 minus half a salt bar and three loads of amersāl and Muḥammad b. An Bakar has 45 loads and a salt bar and 13 loads of amersāl and Ḥamāḍ al-Ṭālib Muḥammad has 33 loads and 4 loads of amersāl and al-Ja'īd b. Ṣirt 14 loads minus half a bar and two loads of amersāl and Hamāḍ four loads also and al-Mukhtār b. Muḥammad b. Ḥamar has 6 loads and one salt bar and a bar [repeated] for the writer and Sīdī 'Alūsh has 27 and half a salt bar [loads of salt bars] and 7 [loads of] amersāl and Ibrahim has 14 [loads of salt bars] and 5 [loads of] amersāl and b. al-Sharīf has 2 loads [of salt bars] and 2 loads and a half of amersāl. Muḥammad ['am b?] on the paper with 930 and 120 amersāl.

APPENDIX 3

THE TIKNA TREE

1. *Tikna Ancestor*¹



2. *Tikna Nation*²

The Tikna nation is divided into two confederate branches: the Aīt al-Jmal, or the Tikna 'of the camel' and the Aīt Billa, Tikna 'by God.' Each branch is in turn peopled by several clans (the ones numbered are dealt in section 3):



¹ Based on Méric, Capitaine. "La Circonscription de Goulimine, le Pays de l'Oued Noun," mémoire du Centre de Hautes Études Administratives Musulmanes (CHEAM), 1941, p. 45.

² Based on interviews in Mauritania, Mali and Morocco, and the works of : Mukhtār al-Hamidūn, "al-Tiknah," *Hayāt Muritāniya*, Institut Mauritanien de Recherches Scientifiques (IMRS); F. De La Chapelle. "Les Tekna du Sud Marocain: Etude géographique, historique et sociologique," *Bulletin du Comité de l'Afrique française*, 1933; Paul Marty. "Les tribus de la Haute Mauritanie: Étude sur les Ould Delim, les Regueibat et les Tekna," *Bulletin du Comité de l'Afrique française--Renseignements coloniaux*, No. 5, 1915; Vincent Monteil. *Note sur les Tekna (Institut des Hautes Etudes Marocaines)*. Paris: Editions La Rose, 1948.

4. Yaggūt

Aīt Sa 'ad

Zikāra

Aīt Ḥusayn

Āruwāmīsh

Aīt Ibrāhīm

Awlād Bu 'ashra

Aīt Aḥammād

Aīt Abūhim

Aīt Yāsīn

3. Most Prominent Tikna Groups in Western Africa (based on my survey)

1. Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly

This group of sedentary Tikna, numbering 450 families in Gulmīm (circa 1914), was by far the most represented in trans-Saharan trade.³ They were the earliest and most numerous settlers in western African towns. The Bayrūk family was the most visible politically.

Aīt Ūshin or “the people of the jackal” (ex. *Bayrūk* family in Atār mainly, the *Arwīli* family in Tishīt and Shingīṭi, *Laḥmayda* family in Shingīṭi with links to Tishīt, *al-Ḥāj Bil 'īd* (*Barka*) and *Bu la 'raf* families in Walāta, Shingīṭi and Timbuktu).⁴ See 4A and 4B below.

Ihrān very closely related to the Aīt Ūshin (ex. *'Ābābā* family in Shingīṭi who are cousins of the *al-Ḥāj Bil 'īd* family of Timbuktu and Wālata)

Khmuīs (ex. *'Aly b. Muḥammad* and *Buhaī* families in Shingīṭi and Timbuktu)

Aīt 'Aly Laḥsan

2. Aīt Laḥsan

Numbering 870 families (circa 1914), their chief then was al-Mukhtār b. 'Umar b. al-Nājim and their main town in Wād Nūn was Liksābi. At the same time many lived in Gulmīm. They were sedentary, although like many sedentary Tikna they tended to spend the hot summer months under a nearby tent. They spoke mainly Tashilhīt but many were bilingual. The Aīt Laḥsan were sub-divided into two main branches:

³ These demographic estimations are from Marty “Les tribus de la Haute Mauritanie.”

⁴ Hamidūn distinguishes between Aīt Ūshan lakbīr (the big jackal) and Aīt Ūshan al-Saghīr (the small jackal). I found this distinction in no other source. When listing families in both categories, he repeats several families in both. A definitive study of the Tikna is in order. “Al-Tiknah,” *Hayāt Muritāniya*, p. 2.

Limmūlsāt (Aīt bu Gazzātin, Idūdū Abdallah, Aīt Laḥia)

Injūrin (Ahl Ḥommid, Ruīniyat, Aīt abd al-qadar)

(ex. The *Muḥammad b. Sālam b. 'Umār b. Dāūd* family in Kaolack; *Muḥammad al-'Abd b. Mas 'ūd* in Dakar; the *Kaīna* family in Louga)

3. Izzargyīn

They numbered 350 families (circa 1914). Mainly nomadic, the Izzargyīn have no Ksār or town and were often hired as caravaners. They are divided into seven sub-groups:

Awlād Mbārak, Amtūkah, Aīt Asbīt, Mijjāt, Gandūr, Giruḥ and Lamyār

(ex. Izzargyīn caravaner mentioned in Appendices 6A & 6B)

4. Yaggūt

Numbering 385 families (circa 1914), they spoke mainly Arabic by the beginning of this century. They were more nomadic than sedentary and were not attached to a particular town.

Aīt Āyūb, Abaydāt, Aīt Būr, Aīt Ḥammu, Aīt Sa 'īd, Amzawīj, Aīt Ṭālib

(ex. Sīdi Mas 'ūd al-Yaggūti mentioned in Appendix 6A & 6B)

5. Azwāfīt

About 560 families (circa 1914). The Azwāfīt lived in the town of Āsrīr, which used to be the economic capital of the area before the eighteenth century and the rise of Gulmīm, and in neighboring Tighmirt. The ruins of Nūl Lamṭa, the Almoravid town, are located next to Āsrīr. The family of scholars the Ahl Lamṭa are attached to the the Azwāfīt, but live in both 'Asrīr and Gulmīm. The Azwāfīt began settling in western African at a much later period, starting in earnest in the mid-twentieth century. The only exception was Muḥammad Laḥmād (I am not sure which sub-group he belonged to) who settled in Shingīṭī at the turn of the twentieth century while still maintaining primary residence in Āsrīr.

Aīt Aḥammād wa 'Aly(ex. *Jummāni* first in Timbuktu then in Atar and later Dakar), **Āl-Ḥa'īn, Aīt al-Khanūs, Aīt Muḥammady, Awlād Āblḥūlāt, Lamḥāfīdh (Ahl Lamṭa?)**

4. *Incomplete Genealogies of Tikna Families*

A. Tentative Genealogy of Bayrūk Family (Gulmīm and Atar)⁵

(Tikna Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly, Aīt Ūshin)

1. First ancestor: Sulayman b. 'Aly (late 10th c. hijra = Late 16th)
2. Second ancestor: Yūsuf b. 'Abdallah (late 16th c. - early 17th c. C.E.)
3. Third ancestor: Shaykh Muḥammad b. Mas'ūd (Ūshin)
4. Fourth ancestor: al-Ḥusayn b. al-Shaykh Muḥammad
5. Fifth ancestor: Shaykh 'Adb al-Qādar b. al-Ḥusayn
6. Sixth ancestor: Sālam b. 'Abd al-Qādar (became more active in trans-Saharan trade)
7. Seventh ancestor: 'Abaydallah b. Sālam (ruled the Aīt al-Jmal in the 18th c. and he was the first to travel to Western Africa)
8. Eighth ancestor Ḥamad b. 'Abaydallah (ruled for a short period)
9. Ninth ancestor (brother of 8) Ibrāhīm b. 'Abaydallah (ruled the Aīt al-Jmal in the days of the Moroccan King Abdarraḥmān (beginning 19th c.). He developed relations with Shingīti. He died in 1824-5 (1241 hijri).
10. **Bayrūk b. 'Abaydallah** (brother of 8 & 9). The name Bayrūk is a diminutive of Mbārak. He was a popular ruler, more so than his predecessors, because he maintained peace for 34 years. The only exception is that during his time a war broke out between the Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly and the Āzwāfiṭ of the Aīt Billa because the later stole the horses of a trader of the first Tikna group (of Bayrūk's clan). The Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly triumphed over the Azwāfiṭ and managed to put a temporary end to the activities of pillagers in the area. Bayrūk died in 1275 (1859) leaving 14 sons.
11. Eleventh ancestor: Muḥammad b. Bayrūk. He was very pious and tried to get his family to "return to God." His house always served couscous for all to come and eat in the way of God. He was also a prominent trader and in 1290 he left to Tarfaya, on the Atlantic coast west of Wād Nūn where he opened a trading post. He was joined by his brother Laḥbīb who took over the business until the arrival of the Spanish. Eventually, Laḥbīb was placed under house arrest by the King of Morocco for having bypassed his authority.
12. Twelfth ancestor: Daḥmān b. Bayrūk (brother of 11). He became the first Tikna Qaīd representing the Moroccan King in 1887. He was as strong-minded as his father, and was renown for his military prowess and his large army.

⁵ Based on Ḥamidūn's genealogy and oral date from Tikna informants in Mauritania and Morocco.

13. 'Aly Fāl b. Daḥmān; had a short-lived rule. He was killed in a fraternal conspiracy.
14. Aḥmad Sālam b. Daḥmān also had a short reign.
15. 'Abidīn b. Daḥman. He took an active part in contacting the French before and after the conquest of Northern Mauritania. He died of illness on a Saharan trail. Through the intermediary of a Tikna trader in Shingīt named Yāzīd wuld Mulay 'Aly, 'Abidīn presented a Wād Nūn tent as a gift to the French in early 1909 (see chapter 7).
16. **Daḥmān b. 'Abidīn** (or Daḥmān the second) became Qaīd and continued serving as such after under French colonial rule from 1934 onwards. He died in the mid-1960s with a progeny of over 40 children.

B. Tentative Genealogy of Arwīli Family (Tishīt, Shingīt and Gulmīm):⁶

(Tikna Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly, Aīt Ūshin)

Generation no. 1:

Muḥammad al-'Abd (brother of Abaydallah b. Sālam, paternal uncle of Bayrūk)

Who had several sons including:

Generation no. 2:

1. **Muḥammad Arāl'** who had several sons including:

1a. 'Aly Fāl

1b. 'Abdallah

2. **'Aly Sa'ad**. He had a son called Aghrīb who in turn had a daughter called Munnina

3. **Muḥammad "Arwīli"** (maybe the small "Arāl"?). He who had:

3a. Abdallah b. Arwīli (father of 'Abd al-Karīm)

3b. 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīli (died on the trail in early 1850—one of the inheritors in the document in Appendices 6A & 6B)

3c. Muḥammad b. Arwīli

Generation no. 3:

1. Limām [son of 'Aly Fāl ? or Abdallah?] Arwīli. I am not sure whether he is the son of 'Aly Fāl's three sons born in Tishīt, or the son of 'Abdallah who came to collect 'Aly Fāl's inheritance in Tishīt in 1852. According to one source,

⁶ Based in part on interviews with Khnātha mint Aḥmayda (and her two daughters Fatimatu and Mariam; daughters of Muḥammad al-Farha) in Atar (10/5/97) and Mulay 'Umar Wuld Mulay Ahmed and 'Aishatu mint Mulay 'Aly (7/30/97).

Limām's mother was from the Awlād Damān, the emiral family of the Trarza region.⁷ Limān and his half brothers grew up in the town of 'Aqrayjīt. Later he went to trade in Walāta where he married Sāviya mint Mulay 'Aly, a Tikna and sister of Yazīd, with whom he had a daughter. They divorced and then Limām moved to Shingīti where he stayed permanently. There he later married another Tikna woman called Zahra mint Muḥammad Sālik wuld Ḥumayād (she was the widow of Ibrāhīm wuld Aḥmayda). He also had a Bambara concubine called Twaytu mint Shūba and a second official wife from the Nmādi tribe. Towards the end of his life, Limām traveled to Gulmīm where he is buried. His son Muḥammad Fāl continued trading between Wād Nūn and colonial Mauritania and Senegal.

2. 'Abd al-Karīm b. Abdallah b. Arwīli (Gulmīm)

Generation no. 4:

In Walāta, Limām b. Arwīli had one daughter with Sāviya mint Mulay 'Aly.

1a. 'Azzy mint Limām b. Arwīli.

In Shingīti Limām had several children with Zahra and Twaytu.

1b1: Muḥammad Fāl b. Limām b. Arwīli. He was requested to move to Gulmīm by the family who had no more male descendents and needed a male to take possession of the houses there. He died on a camel caravan near Gulmīm. His children born in Shingīti and Gulmīm are two sons (Limām and another who died recently in Gulmīm named Sīdi Muḥammad). He also has two daughter Zaynabu and Salambuha.

1b2: Mulay 'Umar b. Limām b. Arwīli (died in Wād Nūn. He had not kids)

1b3: Lalla mint Limām b. Arwīli

1b4: Mariam mint Limām b. Arwīli

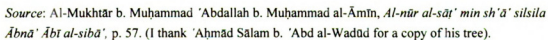
1b5: Khwaydija mint Limām b. Arwīli (her mother was Twaytu mint Shūba)

1b6: Zaynabu mint Limām b. Arwīli

⁷ Interview with Mulay 'Umar b. Mulay Aḥmad and 'Aishatu mint Mulay 'Aly in Nouakchott (7/30/97). This interview is my best source on the Limām b. Arwīli. Mulay 'Umar's mother was Twaytu mint Shūba, a Bambara who was Limām's concubine and became Mulay Aḥmad's wife whe Limām left to Gulmīm. Twaytu's mother who was from Nioro was called Shūba.

THE AWLĀD BŪ SBĀ' GENEALOGY

(Example of the al-Hāj Aḥmad branch)



APPENDIX 5

Illustration of an Awlād Bū Sbā' with a Rifle (warwar)



D'après une photographie.

« Mohammed-Saloum des Ouled-Bou-Sba, d'Arguin, réfugié à Saint-Louis après avoir tué d'un coup de fusil, par vendetta, son parent, chef de la tribu. »

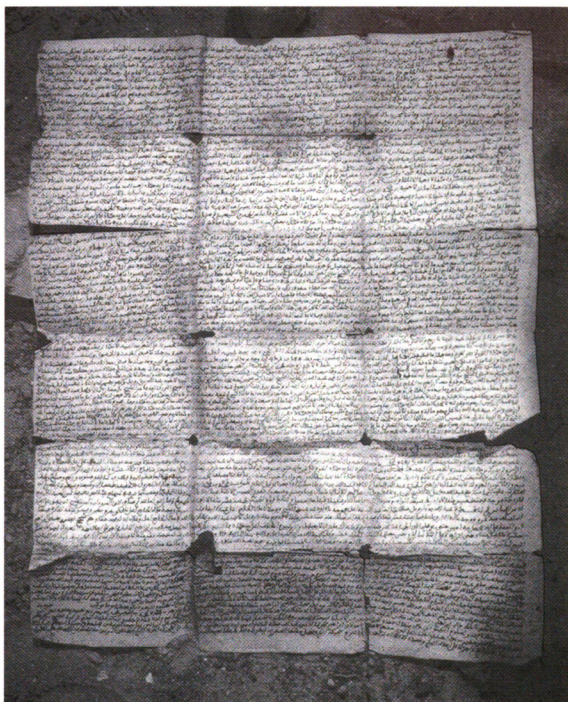
Source: Léon Faidherbe, *Le Sénégal – La France dans l'Afrique Occidentale*, Paris: Librairie Hachette (1889:41).

APPENDIX 6A

Document 1: Wād Nūn Traders Inheritance in Tishit (1268-1269 H.; 1852-1853 A.D.)

Arwli Family Documents in the Shaykh b. Ḥammūny Library in Shingīṭi

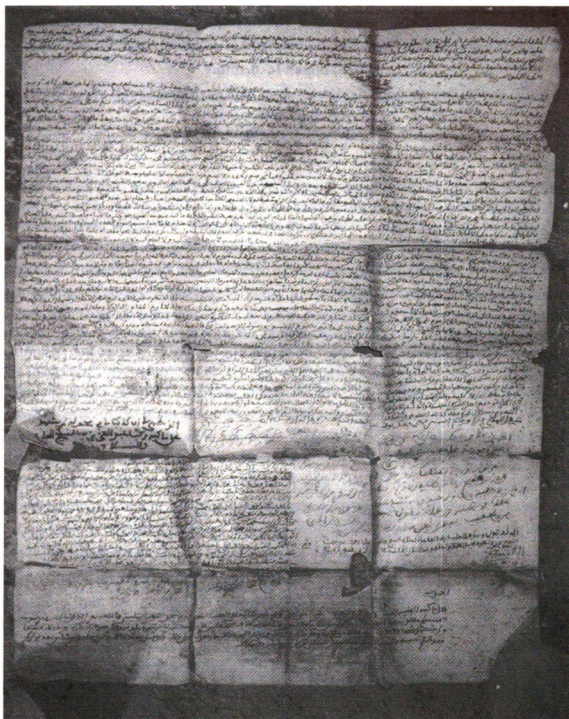
(This is an overview photograph. I shot 12 close-ups to work with the document)



APPENDIX 6A (Verso)

Document 1: Wād Nūn Traders Inheritance in Tishīt (1268-1269 H.; 1852-1853 A.D.)

Arwīlī Family Documents in the Shaykh b. Ḥammūny Library in Shingītī



APPENDIX 6B

Document 1: Wād Nūn Traders Inheritance in Tishīt (1268-1269 H.; 1852-1853 A.D.)

Letter written by Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ṣaghīr b. Anbūja (Tishīt), with a legal critique addressed by 'Abdal'azīz b. al-Shaykh al-Māmī (Gulmīm ?) and comments by 'Abdarrahman b. Muḥammad al-Lamṭī (Gulmīm) and 'Umaīs b. Ṭāīfūr b. al-Samkī (Tiznit)

Arwīli Family Documents deposited in the Shaykh b. Hammuny Library (Shingīti)

(Photographed October 1997)

Preliminary Translation¹

Part I:

Praise to God only him. And so this is an authentic copy of an authentic original the text of which, after the praises to God and the prayer and the salute to the Prophet, says: From the writer to the community guarded by the watchfulness of Allah, the Almighty – who protects it with His grace —that is the community of Ajlīmīm [Gulmīm] and in particular Aḥmadna and his brothers Arwīli, the Awlād Hmaīda al-Aḥsān, al-Hāj Muḥammad b. al-Hāj Aḥmayda, al-Yatīm b. al-Qāsim and Sīdi Abdarrahman and the others whom we have not named not by scorn but because of lack of space and ignorance of their names, I transmit to you the perfect salute of God, His total clemency, and unlimited grace and His kind baraka. And so this is to inform [you] about the outcome of the inheritance of our brothers having graced the goodness of God, I cite **Muhammad b. Mbārak called “Baghlīl”, Al-Hāj 'Aly b. Sa'īd, 'Aly b. Ḥammād and 'Aly Fāl [b. Arwīli]**-- May Allah grant His grace to all and welcome them in Paradise. Concerning **Muhammad**, we have written to you about what happened to his bequest (heritage) what the raiders [*al-mutaghālibīn*] took of his assets the days of his death, may God have his soul, he left credits with guarantees [*bi-al-dimam*] and a part of his *khunt* [cotton cloth] the remainder [of which] was handed over in the presence of al-Hāj 'Aly (God bless him) for the debt of 140 mithqal taken on credit from al-Hāj 'Aly of which 45 gold mithqal were demanded in payment by 'Aly Fāl (God bless him on high) after the death of al-Hāj 'Aly (God bless him on high) and he took its worth and food. And Al-Hāj 'Aly demanded from his [Baghlīl's?] debts which are guaranteed 50 mithqal and the creditor of the 140 *beṣa* paid to al-Hāj 'Aly for 4 mithqal [at the rate of 4 mithqal per *milḥafa*, cotton wrap-around veiled gown worn by women measuring 7.5 by 1.5 meters in size]. He found them unsatisfactory and so he refused to take them. **Muhammad b. Ḥmayda** took them [140] saying that it was no good for one to have debts underneath him [i.e.

¹ Emphasis mine. Transliterated with the help of two IMRS employees, and translated with Mukhtār b. Muḥammadan.

when one is dead] and he [Baghlīl] left 137 mithqal which were in the debt of [i.e. owed to him by] 'Aly b. Ḥammād (May God bless his soul). Al-Ḥāj 'Aly died without receiving it [the loan of Baghlīl] and 'Aly b. Ḥammād remained in his debt (God bless his soul) until 'Aly Fāl took the value of it from his [al-Ḥāj 'Aly's] inheritance in the *akhāl* [black cotton imported from Europe via al-Swuīra] as we will see.

As for **al-Ḥāj 'Aly** he died (God bless his soul) in ? [Aniassan?] and his property was lost and we were informed that **Sīdi Mas'ūd al-Yaggūti** has a portion of it in his possession [meaning that the former deposited or loaned goods with the latter]. 'Aly Fāl (May God bless his soul) sent someone [*wakīl*] to him [al-Yagūti] and his ['Aly Fāl's] representative paid to him in our presence 107 [?silver coins marked with the letter S - *bitaqdīm al-sīn*] and 90 [?silver coins marked with the letter T - *bitaqdīm al-ta*] of mithqal and silver. And 'Aly Fāl (May God bless his soul) settled the *akhāl* (cloth) from '**Abd al-'azīz al-Rgaybī** a debt that al-Ḥāj 'Aly owed him from other assets which he discovered and of which I do not recall the details nor in which hands it fell but it is not part of the numbers of the cash [*al-'ayn*] above mentioned which was proved by his testimony the day he departed from us on his trip from which he never returned that he had in his possession [*bi-yadihi*] 186 mithqal belonging to al-Ḥāj 'Aly and that he paid to the wife of al-Ḥāj 'Aly **al-Māsniya** [from the Māsnā of Tishīt] 11 mithqal which were deducted from the amount taken before [initially--subtracted from the original silver mithqal retrieved from al-Yaggūti] and we know that he paid the 11 mithqal to the wife under our advice after he consulted with us to divide what was the settlement of dispute the manifestation and the propagation of the corrupt deeds which caused definite damage and he also testified the day of his [departure] trip that the value of 45 taken from what he took from creditor Baghlīl [was] in his debt.

And as for '**Ali b. Ḥammād** (May God bless his soul) he left a number of camels and merchandise or some 10 loads of food and a number [of loads] of *al-akhāl* [black cloth] which exceed 200 *milhāfa* [veils; see above] and 20 or so woolen blankets. And his death coincided with the arrival of his assets (maalihi) and the arrival of the caravans and there were many raiders [or subjugators; *mutaghālibīn*] that we feared for the assets [of the deceased] because of them. However they [the raiders] talked about it and some of them were diverted [talked out of raiding the property] from it with "necessities" [everyday objects which were given to them]. He ['Aly b. Ḥammād] left many debts the details of which will be given. So 'Aly Fāl (May God bless his soul) left____ and **Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl** rose and proceeded to hide the assets and to unite all [the goods] to disperse them completely. 'Aly Fāl (May God bless his soul) spoke to '**Aly b. Attāyah**²

² It could that this is the same 'Aly b. Attayah who raided together with the Ahl Ra'yān the Awlad al-Malāt in 1264 (1847-48) mentioned in the Tishīt Chronicle, p. 4. *Hāūliyāt*

who is one of the creditors of 'Aly b. Hammād, to pay to him the camels for some of his rights and he paid them to him give him in *beṣa* [unit of cotton cloth 30 by 1.5 meters] _____ And a portion was left which was paid in salt and he held back [kept away] from the creditors of the *al-akhāl* (cloth) until the 'arab (Arabs or Hassan raiders) had turned back to their families and when they left the creditors rose to prove their rights _____ 'Aly Fāl confronted them and 'Aly b. **Attāyah** (May God bless him) proved [that he was owed] 300 salt bars of which half was in the debt of the deceased ['Aly b. Hammād] (May God bless his soul) and [the other] half was guaranteed by his debts to another person _____ The venerated sharī'ā ordains the immediate settlement [to expedite] of that which is guaranteed: Al-Khalīl says: "The debt is immediately payable with the death of the guarantor." 'Aly Fāl requested from 'Aly b. Attāyah (May God bless both of them) that he strive for the guaranteed [debt] and he accepted to leave him in debt 100 of what he owes and he paid to him the value of 250 [?] bars of salt for the most part in camels which are feared for [in peril because of raiders] and in food located in a well known place. And it was established that he ['Aly b. Hammād] is a debtor to **several Jews** for 464 silver mithqal worth [*ṣarafatiha*= its exchange rate at] 116 gold mithqal. **Bāba b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl** [brother of Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl who is located in Gulmīm] proved the deed [*tawkīl*: contract/proxy] of this [these?] Jew and he paid to/for him what was due to the Jew in black *mal'āfa* for two gold mithqal minus 1/3 [per *mal'āfa*] and likewise for all those who took something [some quantity] of the *al-akhāl* and he himself took the *mal'āfa* at one mithqal and two thirds. 'Aly b. **Ibrāhīm b. Limayif** proved for himself 12 mithqal for his envoy **the Jew Shalum** (May God curse his sect) 36 silver mithqal exchanged for [*ṣarafatihi*] 9 gold mithqal and 'Aly Fāl paid him his due and that of his envoy in the black cloth [*al-akhāl*]. Then **Muḥammad b. Baddah** proved 8 gold mithqal that I paid to him [or were paid to him?] and Al-ṣālḥ [?] and Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmaydī 7 gold mithqal and I paid it to him in *al-akhāl* and **Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ahmarmar** proved 4 gold mithqal which I paid to him in *al-akhāl*. **Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Al-Dimuṣī** [Awlād Bū Sbā' from al-Dimuṣāt branch] known as "al-Kāḥal" [meaning 'the black one'] proved 10 gold mithqal two of which he redeemed by oath and he was given the value of the assets which he had in his possession belonging to 'Aly b. Hammād. And it was proven for **Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al Khalīl** three gold mithqal of which I do not know whether he got them paid with something and the other people cited collected their dues. And 'Aly Fāl did not pay anything until after he received the proof with us [until we authorized him] and after our

Tishīt or the *Tishīt Chronicle*, photographed in the family archives of Al-Sharīf b. Buyahmad (4/97).

order for the payment. The same goes for what he collected for himself and for others as we shall see shortly. And so he [is] by our order and he proved to 'Aly Fāl for/by himself 27 gold mithqal minus one third it was proven for the fee of the **Azargyīn** and his envoy 'Aly Fāl (May God Bless his soul) 160 silver mithqal exchanged at 40 gold mithqal and he found in the contracts (*'uqūd*) of 'Aly b. Ḥammād (May God bless his soul) a written document in which he declares with witnesses in several of his trips that he has 45 gold mithqal entrusted [*āmāna*] to **Aḥmayda b. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm** price of five blankets/garments [*āksīa*] and 11 mithqal to **Aḥmad al-Qaḍrūr al-Majāṭi** the price of one blanket [*kisā'*] entrusted [to him] and four mithqāl to **Azghīma**, the wife of Muḥammad b. Ambārak [Baghlīl] and four mithqal to **Ambārak b. Aḥmād al-Znāgi**. It has already been stated that he owed 137 gold mithqal to Muḥammad b. Ambārak [Baghlīl], the total of what was stated for 'Aly Fāl for Muḥammad b. Ambārak [Baghlīl] 268 minus 1/3 and 'Aly Fāl collected its value in *al-akhāl* for the price of one mithqal and 1/3 per *malḥafa* and a very small quantity of *al-akhāl* remains in his possession (May God bless him) the majority of which is in *al-ḥirma* [kind of cloth] which he paid to **the wife** [and now widow] of **'Aly b. Ḥammād** who died on her a small quantity of gold which was sent with her husband (May God bless his soul) and the 75 salt bars remained which **'Aly Attāyah** did not go for [*lam Yataḥawal*—did not want the transfer to him] and remained untouched [not discharged] till this day [?] and the price in salt of what was loaned in camels and he collected the total sum in **the extraction season** [*zamn al-ḥūsh*] except for 13 [bars] and ½ [*fāṣa*] of the 75 and we will cite the names of those who collected it. **The first wife of 'Aly b. Ḥammād and mother of his daughter** proved 30 bars for her that he paid to her mainly in salt and a portion in cloths (*āthwāban*). **The shepherd** of the camels of 'Aly b. Ḥammād and another who transported for him some of his affairs presented themselves and he paid to each one his due. Another claimed mithqal which 'Aly b. Ḥammād owed him and he paid him their value. 'Aly b. Attāyah presented himself and said that the camels which he was paid suffer from sickness and defects and so he paid him the equivalent -----GAP-----that which was not taken by a creditor/debtor and he recommended that he keep it until it was proven that it belongs to the creditors/debtors and ----then he found a debt and he gave it to its owner for 55 mithqal and a half and we know nothing more which passed through this hands of the assets of 'Aly b. Ḥammād. But one day **Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Sīd Aḥmad Lazgham al-Bagāri** [Awlād Bū Sbā'] presented himself with a written document stating that he owes 6 mithqāl to 'Aly b. Ḥammād and he claims that he paid a part [of this debt] and in the end he took what he accepted as a debt in merchandise, **then they presented themselves [before us] and scratched his name from the document in our presence.** As for what remained of the *al-akhāl* in the possession, that is to say what he collected from others, he returned some immediately after reception [i.e he sold the rest at] 60 for

100 mithqal, then 30 for 50 mithqal of which 25 were lost and **he sold the akhāl for salt until at the extraction season** [*bai' al-milḥ ila zaman al-ḥush*] **and with it too he did not buy with the gold until the arrival of the caravans** [*majī' al-raḥāq*] he collected most of the salt and we do not know about anything raided from him and we know that he (May God bless his soul) **collected a lot** [*kathīran*] **of salt in the extraction season and he rented it for that to** [**be sold in**] **the Sudan and the total can be found in his contracts** [*'uqūd*]. May God bless his soul. However, there are no details regarding what belongs to him and what belongs to the others but **Bujuma'a b. Ahmad b. Ibrāhīm** presented to us last month of ṣafar a document written in a known handwriting containing [the information that] 'Aly Fāl rented his salt with his own salt for the Sudan 130 bars [i.e. 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīli rented 'Aly b. Ḥammād's salt as his own]. And this is what befell (what occurred) between us and **Bujuma'a** and what will come God willing.

Then when 'Aly Fāl (God bless him) decided to head towards the Sudan during the month of the Birth of the Prophet, in the year sixty six [1266 h. or mid-1850] he witnessed [testified] to 186 which he has for al-Ḥāj 'Aly and 45 for Muḥammad Ambārak and he left **Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl** as an envoy [representative - *wakīl*] of his possessions and his dependents [*'lyālihi*] and as administrator of his possessions after his death and he informed him about all his [business] affaires and entrusted him exclusively the administration of his assets and the possessions entrusted to him while alive and after his death and the place where he kept his documents [*'ugūd*] and he commissioned him with the supervision however he did not leave any of his possessions in his hands, to our knowledge, but he informed him about the locations of his affairs in the city with whom he deposited them and what he left in his house. So he took care of his family and he collected in his absence some of his *khunt* [cotton cloth imported by Europeans in Senegal] which came after him [after he had left] from the direction of the Gārib (boat on the Senegal River) and **he forward sold them for 205 salt bars** [deliverable in the future] (*ila ājali*). And he did not cease taking care of his affairs, providing for his family and to do what he ordered him to do and he sent for him debts under his rights and sent what he was ordered to send to his family which was 50 mithqal which he wrote for him to send to his family and he sent this until we found out about his death (God bless him) during the month of *ḍu al-qa'ada* the year of his journey and he died during the month of Ramadan. He [Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl] wanted then to withdraw from the obligation of trustee [legal guardian] and we replied to him that this was impossible because what is expected of him after his death is greater than what is expected of him during his living condition and the word of the group present was accepted such as **Sīdi al-Nāfiḥ** (God bless him) and **Abd al-Qudūs** (May God protect him) and other besides these two and **Sālam b. Aḥmād Asālam** 'Aly agreed that he is the best positioned to take care of the matter of his inheritance (May God bless him) because of his firmness and his precision and his trustworthiness. Moreover we found no other who would accept [this task] because of the difficulty of the situation and the great

number (*kathāra*) of thieves and all are busy with their own affairs seeking refuge with an underground floor [or tunnel/ cellar-*naqb al-dur*--where to hide his assets] and the safety to preserve himself only and he did not give up until he agreed and he learned that it is not in his power but that of God to refuse it [*maalihi*] and we ordered him to provide for the family of the deceased and to assess what he has spent so as to deduct it from the accounting and we ordered him to pay the debts and to take care of the -----GAP-----and to liquidate his assets here [in Tishīt] and to pay obligations—everything he is aware of and all that is needed for the management [of his estate] and he cleared what was in the Sudan and it arrived with the grace of God after [sending] three envoys an accident befell upon them and they did not return with it [the assets held up in the Sudan] except for the third and he was safe only after having obtained a written guarantee to him and al-Shaykh [b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl] took what was brought, that is **700 bars of salt of advanced payments** [*salfan*] to partake/share in it [liyasstahim bihi]. And in this way he put his efforts into recovering [all the deceased's wealth] after having being threatened with loss and he did not give a single carat to the one who brought it to him but someone else came to see him claiming that it was he who sold the salt in the Sudan for the gold until he obtained the quantity which we received, that is 500 and he enticed [?]
---GAP---that he was dead (May God bless him while his salt) was suspended/held-up [*maūqūf*] ---gap --- [?] it was cashed in (*naḍaḍ*) after his death in gold and he [this man claimer] continued claiming the remuneration for the sale of the salt until---gap---bars of salt---and he confirmed this and paid to the owner of the house [where he?] was residing there---gap--for the rent and his family he left five bars of salt which he deserved ---gap---He took the merchandise except for a few and he compromised [invested?] some of them and reimbursed the debts which he was able to recuperate. **He sold to the wife [of 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīlī] a male slave of the deceased for 34 salt bars which she still owes until the settlement of the account and he guaranteed the provision of his family, that is his two blessed sons and his slave girl/maid [āma] and as for his wife her provision is accounted for on the (male) baby since she is breastfeeding him and she had the double ration of her two sons.** We will discuss everything that they both [?] get.

Among the credits [of 'Aly Fāl b. Arwīlī] there is the 100 of which the capital is the *akhāl* and 100 derived from the *khunt* which arrived after the departure of 'Aly Fāl and which he received himself. Amongst what he received, there is the 55 and ½ exchanged for the salt---'Aly b. Hammād who did not become a debtor, amongst what he took there is 10 mithqal which became property of 'Aly Fāl from what **b. al-Mabrūk** forgot in his settling of his debts according to what was found in his assets. The other portion remained and I believe the amount is 12. Amongst what he took there are **two rings that weighed more than 40 mithqal**. 'Aly Fāl (May God bless him) had in his possession **30 mithqal for the brother of his wife Muḥammad b. Ṭālib Ibrahīm which came from the price of a male slave for his father and whom he sold after his death for the salt which he fructified until he obtained 30 mithqal**. He wanted to purchase them with the salt but we did not find it in someone's house as a debt. The sharī'ā stipulated that they

should be taken from his inheritance and we heard him several times say that he provided for the brother of his wife only with his own assets for the love of God and that he does not retrieve anything from the wealth of the one who he is managing for him until he reaches majority.

Everything that Shaykh took remained with him while he waits for someone from his family comes to see him. Until **'Abdallah b. 'Aly. Shaykh** came to see him during the past month of ṣafar with two documents one containing a contract of the inheritors of **'Abdallah b. Arwīlī** and their delegation for him and the second containing a contract of the said 'Abdallah to **'Abdallah b. 'Aly** and **Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥāj 'Aly** [son of al-Ḥāj 'Aly] came with him asking for the assets of his father and he carried with him a document containing the legal deal of the inheritors of his father and their exclusive list. I verified the document with the secretary [the writer] and he accompanied Shaykh to the secretary who ordered to Shaykh to send the assets and to do the account of the family including what he ate and dressed and to bring the rest of the cloths and the remainder of what he has of cloth and to divide what was 'Aly Fāl (May God bless him) owed and what the sharī'ā stipulates to take from the inheritance the assets which were entrusted to him which were not specified [in writing] among the property of the debtors of 'Aly Fāl and composed of the things which were entrusted to him.

So were separated for al-Ḥāj 'Aly 186 of which 50 were separated for Baghlīl the 45 which he had with [belonging to 'Aly Fāl]. We took also 137 which 'Aly Fāl owed him May God bless his soul . So the total owned by Baghlīl is 232. We separated 40 for a member of the **Azargyīn** tribe and we took for those who had entrusted [their assets] to 'Aly b. Ḥammād 64 and we took for **b. Ṭālib Ibrāhīm** 30 and for **Bujūma'a** 45. We have already seen that among what was taken there was $55 \frac{1}{2}$ of the assets of 'Aly b. Ḥammād which were not disbursed to a creditor and the remainder of 'Aly's debt was taken by his son Ibrahim who left it in the hands of 'Abdallah b. 'Aly and it amounts to 136 of which **he gave 2 mithqal and $\frac{2}{3}$ to the one who wrote the document** and he left the remainder with 'Abdallah b. 'Aly ----gap----**602 mithqal and $\frac{1}{2}$ minus what was obtained for the Akḥāl** and the 25 which we mentioned were lost of the 50 the capital of the 30 milḥafa----gap----and it is known that the capital in *akhal* is 137 for **Baghlīl**, 40 for the **Azarguīn** and 64 for **those who entrusted** [assets] to 'Aly b. Ḥammād---It was reduced to 241 and if you are careful you may notice that the reduction was of 1 mithqal out of 10 and one mithqal minus 2 carat was left to add [distribute?] from the total. The assets of 'Aly Fāl are exempt from this reduction but the capital which was lost from this reduction was surely (certainly) part of the assets which were entrusted and the same goes for the assets of al-Ḥāj 'Aly and which were debts as well as the assets of Bujuma'a the origin of which—gap—The same applied to the remainder after the debtors of the assets

of 'Aly b. Ḥammād because its origin is salt and likewise for the 30 which belong to b. Ṭālib Ibrāhīm. All are not concerned by this reduction and it befell_____

Until al-Shaykh agreed with him after discussion that he obtained 72 mithqal. He took the 45 put aside and he added to it 15 which he owed by leaving 12 in debt and of which he charged **Sālam b. Ḥamād Sālam** and Sālām owes 70 mithqal to Ḥmayada who [in turn] owes 16 to 'Aly Fāl and we estimated that Bujuma'a owes 6 mithqal to 'Aly Fāl and the inheritors compensated by paying him 6. Bujuma'a proved that of the inheritance of Baghlīl 13 mithqal and 1/3 . He swore and we paid them to him on the account of Baghlīl's assets and namely on the 311 mentioned. Then **Muḥammad Fāl b. Sīdi Buya of the Awlād Bū Sbā'** [great grandfather of Falla Samba Djaye, interviewed in Tishīt] came with a written deed from 'Aly b. Ḥmayda and which contains that it has been proven for him with **Sīdi Abdaraḥman** [among those living in Gulmīm to whom the letter is addressed] 450 silver mithqal with supporting proof which 'Aly b. Ḥammād owes. The document was authenticated and he found of his assets only the 55 and ½ which were given to him and we gave him access to the documents of 'Aly b. Ḥammad to see his creditor/debtors and recover by his deed his dues. He took with a creditor 4 mithqal and he took 7 mithqal for 13 [?] and the remainder which we said was left for 'Aly ? b. Ḥammād of the 75 aforementioned and he found some of the assets of 'Aly b. Ḥammād----gap----he took them at one mithqal and 1/4 . And he noticed **5 mudd of millet which were taken on credit for 5/7 of a mithqal**. It is the total of what he took today, or a total of 68 and ¼ and 1/7 and half of 1/7 and the 30 set aside for b. Ṭālib Ibrahim were handed over (delivered) to 'Abdallah b. 'Aly. Then when '**Abdallah b. Arwīli** came I handed it over and I paid to the envoy [*wakīl*] of the manager of the affairs of **Sīdi Muammad b. Muḥammad Ar-Radhi** and from what was loaned [advanced – *salafa*] and he learned that of all that precedes, what was set aside in reality is in fact **577 and ½**. Then he must settle the accounts with '**Abdallah b. Shaykh al-Mukhtār authorized by Arwīli** and they obtained for them 300 mithqal in cash and 76 [?silver coins stamped with the letter s? *bitaqdīm al-sīn*] minus 1/3 in cash also so a brother [?fākh] ? and he vanished on [his obligations] and he calculated what he spent in ? [*mahām*] of their family in addition to the price of the male slave who was sold to the wife and so he found a price of 50 mithqal and he obtained 7 of cloth and a provision bag [*mzjūd*] of *zāra* [little millet] he drove and the living expenses and some amount of honey and some books and the all this totaled 15 mithqal which everyone paid to him and it arrived under his safekeeping then he traveled to the Sudan and Shaykh ordered him to provide for the family in clothes then when 'Abdallah b. Arwīli arrived he asked about what 'Abdallah b. Aly took and we showed him his deposits [?āūda'ihī] with Shaykh and we showed him the possession [property or assets: *māl*] of al-Ḥāj 'Aly with him [Shaykh] as well and so he took out all of it and he found that of the assets of al-Ḥāj 'Aly

and a small gharū [*gharū ṣaghīr* ?] was missing and in it there was a reminder document [which mentioned] in it that he borrowed from him [Shaykh?] a *gharū* and he found that of the **assets of the Arwīli family** 16 mithqal were missing he had in his hands a document that he borrowed from him [?] 16 mithqal and so he paid him the assets of Arwīli to his son and ‘Abdallah spoke about the assets of al-Hāj ‘Aly and he said that he has dues/rights and that they were stingy [*shaḥaḥ nafshu*] by the appropriation of Ibrāhīm [? I.e. he did not accept that Ibrāhīm collect [his share] for him?] and they agreed to place the assets with someone trustworthy [*biyad āmin*] until they can be remitted to the protected [by God – *al-maḥrūsa*] community of Ajlīmīm [Gulmīm].

The same goes for what was set aside for Baghlīl and the Azargyīn and the deposits [*āmānāt*] of ‘Aly b. Ḥammād. And we have all judged useful to give a commission to **Bāba b. Ibrahim al-Khalīl** to send what was put aside for them with 10 mithqal and this is on top of the 300 and it stayed with it--?---the 11 and **‘Abdallah asked for the advantage [*mazīya*] of his brother ‘Aly Fāl on this property for his management ---?--** - it was estimated at 15 mithqal whereas his dues are greater than that but ‘Abdallah left the discussion today because of the prejudices which represents the recovery of his dues so he remained silent---and I paid to the one who wrote 5 mithqal and he paid to ‘Abdallah what he estimated---what he took from him between the secretary and ‘Abdallah and the remuneration of Bāba was 30 mithqal and half of it -----[big gap due to a large chunk of the document which is missing and affects the sentences before and after this section (see original photo)]-----We have detailed it in detail to the maximum [that we could] and who took from it/him something and we calculated for every mithqal ---75[?] mithqal of the property of Baghlīl---big gap---Regarding what ‘Abdallah b. Arwīli took from us we say that his envoy Abdallah b. ‘Aly took 376 minus 1/3 and he himself took 22 and the half of 15 according to his estimates for the advantage [*mazīya*] of his brother and 7 ½ of the property----which was put aside in the pack by mistake. And to must clarify this situation from this writing [from what is written] because we did not realize this [the error] until the journey of ‘Abdallah and we clarified the purpose of the writing we examined with utmost accuracy [*daqāqnā*] the purpose meticulously and ‘Abdallah took the day of his departure, or the day before, the value of 8 mithqal and --- provision bag [*mazūd*] of *zāra*. And it includes [or added to *taḍamma*] the 50 calculated in value [*māsūba qīmatan*] in the affair of the family and with it the slave subservient to the wife for 17 mithqal and it includes also the value of the 10 which ‘Abdallah b. ‘Aly obtained [valued] between cloth [*qumāsh*: thick cotton cloth] and clothes [*al-libās*]. But after the departure of ‘Abdallah b. ‘Aly we gave 2 mithqal as a tribute [*mudārat*] to which the property of other contributed [only] partially.

‘Abdallah b. Arwīli paid 3 mithqal and ½ as tribute [*al-mudāra*] and [the cost] which was shared by all. May the reader of this document know that the day that ‘Abdallah b. ‘Aly -----**the daughter of Ṭālib b. Ibrahim for the slave with the 17 which remained**

with her----and $\frac{1}{4}$ and the half of $\frac{1}{8}$. The rest was demanded by her with ‘Abdallah b. ‘Aly who did not give her anything and now that the foods have been delivered to you, listen to her [?]. If this means much or little, to you and ‘Abdallah b. Arwīli told us that he took what was yours of the *al-akḥāl* [black cloth] of the *Awlād Bū Sbā* ‘owed you and he took the value of 50 mithqal and ‘Abdallah took among the debts of the sugar and *al-akḥāl* [or *kaḥl*] 13. So the document of the rights [dues--*taḥrīr al-ḥuqūq*] from here are identified to you. This is all that that we could do in the verification of what was in the possession of your brother and your cousin ‘Aly Fāl May God bless his soul.

Yes, we found in ----**Muḥammad b. Ambārak** of his own writing (May God bless his soul), that he had in the deposits 13 mithqal----and $\frac{1}{3}$ [?]the price of a red blanket for **Bujuma’a b. Ahmad Ibrahim** and he [this last one] was paid his due as we wrote above and 13 mithqal and $\frac{1}{3}$, price of a red blanket and 2 salt bars with gold for **Muḥammad b. ‘Amar** and 7 mithqal— $\frac{1}{3}$ and 3 bars of slat for **‘Umar b. al-Shaykh Ibrahim** and one mithqal for **Agida mint Ṭālib**-----and bars of salt for the **Jew Shalum** and 2 salt bars—value of---**Abdu b. Manṣūr** and we have a written document from **Mulay Ibrahim** (May God bless his soul), a document containing that he proved that he [Baghlīl] (May God bless his soul) owed 304 mithqal and 6 ounces [āūaq, coins?] to **Yarāh b. al-Hāj Rakūk** and 40 mithqal to **Muḥammad b. Lafqih Muḥammad al-Samsāri** and to **‘Abayd b. Aḥmad Aḥrāti** [?] and 7 silver mithqal, 100 mithqal to the **Jew Shalum** and 97 to the treasurer **Mas’ūd b. Laftāli**. In the document it is stated that he stated for them their rights after—his right was proved with us (‘and nā) and the legal representation of the **al-hāj Rakūk** family for **Shaykh Ibrahim al-Khalīl** was proved and he decided to tale [? Check] their dues on the assets of Baghlīl on the basis of the establishment of their rights to the assets---of **Mulay Ibrahim** but when ‘Abdallah claim his rights on the assets he pretended that the debts of Baghlīl are numerous, Shaykh abstained and we all assumed that they must remain together [the assets] and we expressed the wish that the property get to us fast. And so we hired someone to bring these to you and fast and can withstand the difficulties of the journey in order that this encourages (incites) ‘Abdallah b. Arwīli to return quickly to see is to **free the dead of their rights (dues) of which they are indebted** and know-----

Addendum [*Ḥlāq*] in the verso that the *sharī‘ā* goes in the direction of the preservation of the interest and to prevention of prejudice. Hence I gave to the creditors of ‘Aly b. Ḥammād their dues and among them some did not swear like the Azargyīn and the Jew to safeguard their property because if they stay together [in one pile...if they are not distributed and separated] their assets are exposed to danger and suffice it that the raiders (*al-mutaghālibīn*) find out about it to attack it there where it is located whether it is the property the people of the North [*ahl al-*

Sāhil], or those of the people of Arawān. They covet the assets in the house of strangers [*al-gharīb*] aside from that in the house of the missing [*al-faqīd*]. And this is their custom [*'ādatihum*] which everyone knows about. And it is known by those who were present that they entered the home and requested the assets of 'Aly b. Ḥammād and that they did not spare Shaykh [b. Ibrāhīm Khalīl] and 'Aly Fāl to the point that they encircled them and so that they would reveal to them if they had the assets. Such a case cannot be considered within the jurisdiction of sharī'ā. They both [Shaykh and 'Aly Fāl] told them what was left of the assets was taken by his creditors [of 'Aly b. Ḥammād] and there was nothing left. This was written by the one who salutes you in the month of Rayali 1268 [April 1852] the poor one who needs his God, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Al-Ṣaghīr b. Ambūja known as al-Tishīṭī May God accord him his grace. And he wrote [copied] this from the original after a great attention and suspicion of error and the comparison with the original letter by letter without addition or subtraction the 19 Du al Hijja al-Harām 1269 [05/28/1853], the slave of Allah and the poorest of his slaves and who wishes for the Pardon and the Grace of God, Muḥammad b. Abd Arraḥmān b. Muḥammad al-Lamṭī originally from Āsrīr living in Ajlīmīm [Gulmīm] where he resides and was born and where he has his solidarity [*'aṣāba*] may God preserve and protect him Aman. (signature/seal)

Part II

Praise be to God Only. 'Abdallah b. Arwīli questioned me on a legal question (Nāzila) which took place in the city of Tishīt where there occurred a dispute and the quarrel [legal--*khaṣām*] between him the one in charge of procedure of all the inheritors of his brother 'Aly Fāl after the establishment of the delegation from the adults [*balagha*] among them and the presentation of guardianship of the minors [*al-ṣaghār*] as required [by the shari'a] and between his opposing party [adversary - *khaṣm*] **Ambayrikāt b. al-Ḥāj Muḥammad al-Rakūk both of the sons of Mūsa wa 'Aly** [Aīt Mūsa wa 'Aly] in Ajlīmīm [Gulmīm] who is in charge of procedure of all the inheritors of al-Ḥāj 'Aly b. Sa'īd the second claims that the first has a quantity of 186 gold mithqal balance of the village [by weight of the village, i.e Tishīt] the inheritance of his envoys [*mūakilīn*] for which he is the spokesperson of the inheritors of al-Ḥāj 'Aly aforementioned. So the abovementioned "Abdallah [b. Arwīli] replied to him that this claim was unfounded and that the reality [the truth] differs from what he said and that all that what sent to **Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl al-Sbā'ī** [from Awlād Bū Sbā'] **al-'Amrāni** [from the 'Amran branch] with the authorization of Sīdī b. Muḥammad Al-Ṣaghīr b. Ambūja of Tishīt who claims that he is Qādī [Muslim judge] of his community Tishīt with his brother Bāba b.

Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl to make it arrive [*balagha*] to al-Shaykh Ambārak b. ‘Abdallah in Wād Nūn [Shaykh Bayrūk] is in his trustworthy hands by God and his Prophet until they partition according to the magnanimous sharī‘a and gives everyone who has the right to his due their share because he is their scholar [learned- ‘*ālim lahum*] and their shaykh and their senior and their administrator [or leader *muqaddamhum*] and their trusted representative [*āmīnauhum*] and the one posing the question the aforementioned ‘Abdallah claims that all this is threefold the quantity from the inheritance of his brother the deceased ‘Aly Fāl and that all his inheritance was taken on credit [*‘amarat bihā qimma al-Shaykh*] by Shaykh abovementioned who acknowledges that he entered in possession what his relative of the possessions (māl) of the deceased ‘Aly Fāl and promised until the end [expression: *wa’datan wa nihāyatan*] what [was held by] his associates [*aqrān*] entered in his possession and recognized what is written on the verso [*bimaqbūl al-marqūm*] written by the aforementioned Sīdi Muḥammad b. al-Ṣaghīr after having transmitted in his writing [by his pen] in there in another location the quantity of gold which entered into their [dual: Muḥammad b. al-Ṣaghīr and Al-Shaykh?] possession for safekeeping [*āmānihima* entrusted as a deposit] and to provide for his family...Based on the texts... Praise to God who is the only one to possess the action and the decision, who deals with and accomplishes His will, who established the laws for the people which dissuades them from oppression and prejudice by the application of His laws, who changed the governors of Islamic laws and of naked promises instead of natural politics and heresies and He has protected them by the guidance of the Sunna against the guidance of reasoning in present situations. May he be greatly and supremely exalted and his unlimited prayers and his infinite salute on the supreme guide and the Holy Prophet who he sent to guide on the right path and the just religion to dominate all the religions and who transmitted from Allah a science which constituted a miracle for the people and who transmitted the message clearly and peremptorily. Who did not explain or detail in showing the road to follow and all virtue worthy of praises and Allah called him back to him only after having perfected and lightened up the religion and he left his nation on a luminous path. Moreover, he opened the way towards analogies and personal interpretation on the basis of the Qur’ān and the Hadīth so that Muslims are not embarrassed and find solutions to their issues. Therefore it is our obligation to follow his sunna after his death; just like we must follow him in his living: “No! By the Lord! They will not—I swear—be true believers until they ask You to arbitrate in their disputes and that they will not have fell anguish for what you have decided, and that they submit [to your sentence] completely” [Qur’ān IV:65] After the introduction, the one who wrote that God accord him his pardon saw in the copy of the stamped/sealed letters on the verso the text of which was produced by a copier the name of whom is signed after the date of the original of which he made a copy “the poor who needs his God, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Al-Ṣaghīr b. Ambūja known as the al-Tishīṭī which he claim to be the Qāḍī and who is responsible for all the laws of God in that city by arrogance and pretense without respecting precedence as one should from the religious [*sharī‘ī*] point of view.

Our Shaykh [Sīdi al-Khalīl] in the *al-burd al-muwasha* : “We complain to God of certain people who set themselves up as *qāḍīs* and *muftīs* [official expounder of Islamic law, who delivers *fatawa*] before knowing their personal obligations which they owe.” Moreover, their judgment is pure ignorance and whomever studies it carefully and found that it was unfounded and that it is not a legal advice (*fatwā*) which conforms to the texts which explain the laws and the truth. But it is a letter, an introduction, a declaration emanating from a legally capable adult and his declaration states that he deposited the inheritance of deceased ‘Aly Fāl and al-Ḥāj ‘Aly and they produced a letter written for him and certain parties claiming that his testimony for certain individuals among them is valid for them and constitutes a judgment which applies acquired rights for certain individuals to the detriment of others by his writing only for them and they claim that his testimony need not the guarantee of others. And after examination of the testimony and the judgment, we found that it was empty from the point of view of the structure and flat from the point of view of the meaning, without value and if this is indeed a judgment its effect is nil and we issued a *fatwā* on what is contained in his testimony from the point of view of the preemptive texts contained in the Qur’ān, the hadith and the consensus of the umma [*al-Ijtimā*] Following the *Manba’ al-n ūrī wa al-hadī* who explains the saying of Khalīl: “or if he testifies for himself in sympathy for with what has preceded him and not when he is far like the nomad from the sedentary [*kabadawī lkhadarī*] and look at the *al-ḥiṭāb* on this subject and add “and when it [his testimony] brings him a benefit as if he witnesses for his creditor on assets so as to have them and we must refuse and destroy his judgment in accordance with what Khalīl says: “Is void a judgment of an oppressor, of an ignorant, etc.” In the *al-Mi’yār* on the responses concerning justice [*al-qadā*] Malīk said in *al-Mudūwana* “the total ----the plan of justice in our time without charging he who must be charged to direct a community of Muslims nor a great Īmām nor his assistant and his region [*wilāya*] is null and void and rejected with nil effect in the sharī‘ā. *Al-Tawḍī*’ says that he should be opposed.” Any arbiter cannot judge of the ten exclusive questions which Khalīl mentioned by saying: “Only judge those of their reason and the testament....and the assets of the absent the qāḍī and not arbiters.” In the *Tuhfa al-Hikām* one reads: “the reason and its contrary, the testaments, the absent and the assets of orphans are answerable to the Qāḍīs just like the tutorship and not to the arbiters.” Look at *Al-Ītaqān* b. al-Nādhim and *al-Miyār* one reads: “if an arbiter judges on it, his judgment is null and void without effect.” Īyāḍ responded in *al-Miyār* that the sale of the said arbiter must be rejected from all the inheritance of the dead, orphans and the absent,” and he responded that the arbiter guarantees all that he disposes of and all that he took or received of the assets of the orphans and if he give it [assets] to he who has not right to it from the point of view of the sharī‘ā, he is guarantor [liable] because he abuses and if he is really a qāḍī fulfilling the conditions of the occupation of qāḍī, he places nothing of the property of orphans in his hands only with the reunion of the required conditions that is the establishment of the dead, the definition of the inheritors and the peremptory

testimony of the two different witnesses worthy of faith [or just *'adilīn*] to read what he wrote and who are outside his guaranty [ḍimma]. “When you release their assets, to them take witnesses in their presence. But all-sufficient is God in taking account” [Qur’ān IV: 6] “And get two witnesses from among your men and if there are not two men, the a man and two women” [Qur’ān II: 282]

If an arbiter who pretend to be a qāḍī hands over a part of what he admits having taken of the property of orphans without religious reason, he has the guaranty for he took possession according to his declaration of collection and abuse and likewise for what he distributed if he allowed to pay to creditors [of the deceased] without fulfilling the established required conditions and to take [the assets] after release to give them to whomever had a right among the tutors, curator and envoys with established proof for what each creditor who pretends to be a creditor of the deceased by trade, loan or other means among the things of which must be repaid and he must not give him anything from the property of the inheritance of the deceased until he has a proof which is typically either the testimony of two trustworthy witnesses or a sermon, or justice with the testimony of one trustworthy witness and a sermon which supports it or the sermon of justice. He must guaranty it for he has neglected [the proper procedure] and abused [his position].

So, when the clouds have dissipated and things become a little clearer, and when the truth comes and the error has disappeared and truth has burst out for all there is nothing left but the return to the truth which is an obligation and with it we have answered the one who posed the question, ‘Abdallah b. Arwīlī: “After careful examination of the seal copy on the verso and the verification of the compliance of the copy of the original and the authentication of the hand-writing. All that Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Al-Ṣaghīr b. Ambūja of Tishīt and his envoy, the one who is the guarantor [trustee - *āmīn*] of ‘Aly Fāl wrote about what passed between their hands of his property and his inheritance according to his declaration---Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl of the Awlād Bū Sbā’ is not a valid testimony for the opposing party against him and this is not a judgment which binds him because a judgment is an obligation and this is in fact a [mere] declaration where the said Sidi Muḥammad states how he disposed of the inheritance of his “brother” ‘Aly Fāl and the said Shaykh claims that he is a witness of what was handed out of the inheritance of his “brother” and his inheritor ‘Aly Fāl and this is not a testimony and all that -----the two men passed between their hands and of which they disposed of the assets of the said deceased, they disposed of by abuse because he [sic] give it to one who has no right from the point of view of the sharī‘ā and their testimony on his deposition without the sharī‘ā is null and void because they assisted in the matter----it is not a testimony but a declaration and they are both legally capable [*mukalifīn*] adults, nothing prohibits his declaration. See *al-Ḥiṭāb* on the subject and Malīk says in *al-‘atabīa* that the writing of a person as an acknowledgement that is considered and which represents a testimony equal to two trustworthy and endorsed witnesses and that all the depositors are really and legally responsible for the conservation and those among them who gives the depositor of

the inheritance of a deceased to another depositor without authorization of the legal adults among the inheritors, without the authorization of the legally capable among them and without the authorization of the known qāḍī meeting the conditions and who is the envoy of the non-legally capable [i.e. minors], he guarantees it therefore and consequently Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl must guarantee the inheritance of the deceased for having taken it with the permission of the deceased because he send it with his brother to someone else [?] without the authorization of he who has the right. Therefore, Khalīl said: “or else when he entrusts another without his authorization.” And we confirms with our Shaykh and our example and our scholar [religious authority ‘*ālimnā*’] Shaykh Ambārak [Bayrūk] to reunite those who possess the knowledge on this particular case to guide themselves with the relevant texts in the Qur’ān and the Hadith and the *Ijtimā’* that they write to him a legal opinion [*fatwā*] based on what is best known [*al-mashhūr*] and they present it to an eminent erudite who does no personal interest and need the exchange of a bribe from anyone in order for him to write an answer based on the peremptory texts on what is best known and approved by the people [*al-jumhūr*] so that a qāḍī decrees based on this with his brothers, and his orphans because he is charged with this to write the quarrels, the disputes and the discord between parents. Because he is the governor of this location de facto and de jure he must base himself on these judgments for the orphans and his brothers on what is best known and followed by the people. And the governors are entrusted only to reprimand the oppressors, to bring to heel the evildoers and the corrupt [*ahl al-shar wa al-mufasada*], to defend the people and their property and reject lies and bad deeds. We pray Allah to guide us and to guide him by his sanctity of the Prophet and his honorable companions. This is what is contained in the texts and he who says otherwise will be denied by the texts and only the despicable [*arḡāl*] believe him, [for it is] written in guise of preach and as an answer to him [the despicable] who recognized the powerlessness and the negligence, who recognized weak intelligence and [cheap] merchandise [*al-baḍā’a*] in matters of science, the prisoner of his sins and the hostage of his bad acts Abdarraḥman b. ‘Umar Tar, and I reckon that the one who copied this letter does not testify of what he has written. Written by Abdal’azīz b. Shaykh al-Māmī and peace [*wa al-salām*]

Praise God the only one...the one who has written and examined the above legal opinion (*fatwā*) and found it well written from the point of view of structure and fair content, b. Ṭūn.

Part III

Praise God who orders to show the truth and to follow it and to refute and reject the lie and Peace and Salutation to the Prophet Muḥammad, his and those who follow him on the right path until the last judgment day. The poor one who writes this questions the one who judged the letters which he sent and the facts which he establishes on the inheritances of which he accepted a portion and the requester did not swear who guarantees for he has judged without a sermon, a portion was not verified, another

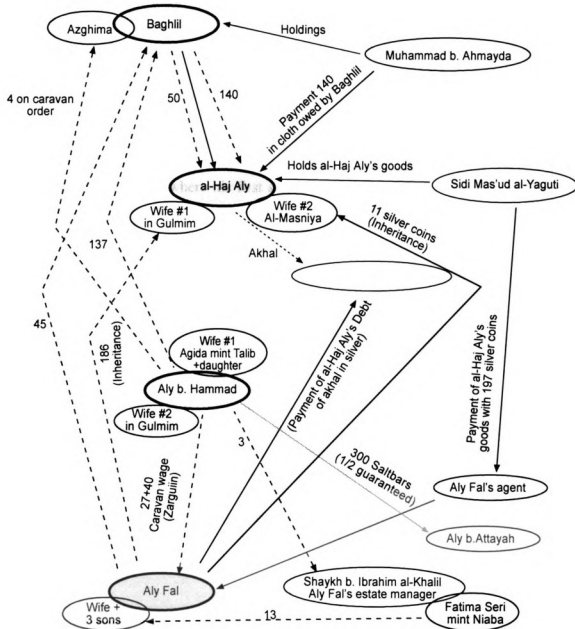
portion was not compared to the original of which it is a copy. A portion came into his possession and he did not inform that he judged [on it]. A portion is a testimony and the one who judged did he judge as a witness? For it is known that Khalīl said: “ His testimony is not accepted after he has judged with it.” For al-Dardīnī, the circumstance does not play a role here because his testimony occurs before the declining to testify because it is a testimony on his own action. As for the accomplishment that is to say his word, the fact that he says what he has judged and the written proofs [on what he judged] that he had with or without guarantee, if all is in his jurisdiction, because if it is not in his jurisdiction he has the right, or with two witnesses which he has testify on his judgment and who testifies with the second about what occurred at the first, he must execute it and all must be in his jurisdiction. And what he said absolutely [*mṭlaqan*] means that the right must be established by two witnesses or by four witnesses [?] or by one witness and one sermon. See al-Dardīnī on this point. The eminent Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Dasūqī in his refutation-----before the judgment one must stick to it and not start again. And one adopts what was recommended for the two even if it passes over what was sent in writing. Al-Ṭawdi on this matter of *al-‘āsimī*: “Then the order [is] to the one who has written if asked: obligatory for the judge or else it is not engaging.” For *al-Māzīri* the judge write if he judges on what he has judged and all the arguments with evidence or refusal to disclaim and the cause of his judgment to be a judgment against the loser if he appeals and writes what the present has judged against an absentee who is the qāḍī ...or else he appeals. His saying if it is in his jurisdiction is excluded because the judges are not of this kind nor of this generation and if what he wrote is not a conclusion nor a judgment or a testimony and therefore the motive if the judgment exists ...What needs to be established is whether the depositor did that which requires an obligation to guarantee or testify on his own act, and consequently his testimony become null and what is known for what is needed with a witness is an excuse for the one against whom he is judging. God and the Muslims-----he notifies therefore that the raiders [*al-‘arab*] are at the door [of the city] and the imam is underneath the tree [proverb meaning that there is no security] and in front of the test one reverses the bitterness or one tumbles [i.e. no one is expected to do the impossible].

Part IV

Praise to God, all that the jurist [*faqih*] wrote, Abdarraḥman b. Muḥammad al-Lamṭī above is fair except his attack against the jurist Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ṣaghīr al-Tishīṭī, I abstain myself here because all that he wrote in this document copied on the verso is an information and not a judgment nor a legal opinion [*fatwā*] and if a word, **he fears the subjugators [*al-mutaghalibīn*; referred to as the arab above] for the possessions of the owners because of their great number in their region** and he cites several inheritors, sometimes with confidence, other times with doubt and he did not testify about anything, and did not claim anything for himself above the judgment and that the depositor [Shaykh b, Ibrāhīm Khalīl] consulted him and he counseled him on part of what he did and all those who claim it is a judgment and that it engages anyone to do or not do anything is abusing. Written by Ḥumaīs b. Ṭāīfūr b. al-Samkī residing in Tīznit may God protect him.

APPENDIX 7

WAD NUN TRADE NETWORK 1850s INHERITANCE CASE (TISHIT)



APPENDIX 8

THE SHAYKH B. IBRĀHĪM AL-KHALĪL FAMILY¹

Approximate Genealogy: Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl b. Muḥammad b. Sīd Aḥmad b. al-Ṭālib Muḥammad b. Sīd Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallah b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Raḥal b. Makhdūf b. Sa’īd b. ‘Amrān b. ‘Āmar b. al-ḥarz [? Al-Ḥāmal?] b. Ibrāhīm b. Yūsuf b. Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Karīm b. Muḥammad Idrīs b. Idrīs b. al-Ḥassan b. al-ra’īs [? Al-mashni?] b. al-Ḥasan al-Sabṭ b. ‘Aly.²

Origin: Awlād Bū Sbā’ from Awlād ‘Amrān branch. Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl (c. 1810-1890) came from the town known as “Fathāl” (location unknown). He had a family in Wād Nūn which is where his first son Sid Aḥmad was born. Perhaps he had a third family in Illigh (Sūs) which is where he had important business ties.³

Residency:

First generation: Tishīt (main residence since the c.1840s), Wād Nūn and possibly Illigh

Second generation: Tishīt and Nioro (late nineteenth century)

Third generation: Nioro and Bamako (early twentieth century)

Fourth generation: Nioro and Bamako (Mali); ‘Ayūn al-‘Atrūs, Timbedra, Galb al-Jmal and encampments in the Ḥawḍ (Mauritania).

Occupation: Long-distance trade between the Sūs and Wād Nūn in the northern Saharan edge and Shingītī, Tishīt and the markets of Mali (Sokolo, Banamba, Nioro, Nara, Gumbu). Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl sold Moroccan luxury goods (from as carpets, copper, to brass wares such as teapots, plates and trays. Most importantly, he imported books from Morocco and beyond. In Tishīt, he relied on his wife’s connections to trade in Malian markets. He owned a large house (in ruins today) and he owned a good number of date palm trees (which still remain in the family).

¹ Based on Interviews with Interview in Nioro with Muḥammadu b. Sid Aḥmad b. Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl (05/16/98); Interview in ‘Ayūn al-‘Atrūs with Mulay Ibrāhīm b. Sid Aḥmad “Dāda” b. Muḥammadu b. Sid Aḥmad b. al-Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl (05/18/98; 05/19/98).

² Shared by Bukra b. Muhammad Sham in Tishīt (04/29/97). Bukra is the the only one of the family left in Tishīt. He used to be a harratīn of the Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl family, and the family documents are in his care. N.B. This genealogy is obviously incomplete (cf Appendix 4: The Awlād Bū Sbā’ Genealogy (Example of the al-Ḥāj Aḥmad).

³ See Pascon, *La Maison d’Illigh*.

Reputation: He was strong-headed and charismatic. He operated within a large international network and had connections with important western African personalities, including Shaykh Umar Tāl and his son Shaykhu Aḥmadu. I suspect he was tijāni and had a flourishing trade in sufi literature. His sons were very close to Shaikh Hammallah, the leader of a popular sufi order in western Africa (based out of Tishīt and Nioro). He provided charity to the families in Tishīt. He was generous in the way of God (*nāfiqan fi sabīl Allah*). His Sharifian origins must have served him in creating his niche in Tishīt.

Family History: Of all his children from Wād Nūn, his son Sid Aḥmad was the only one who came to settle in Tishīt. None returned or migrated to Morocco after that (unless Yubba and Muḥammad al-Amīn who disappeared from the historical record headed that way). After Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl passed away, the ties with Morocco seem to have ended. The family focused mainly on interregional trade and brokering for international traders. Later, they moved into the colonial economy. They did not seem to have developed ties to the northern branch of the family, although there is a record of letters exchanged with relatives up north.

Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl is buried in Tishīt. All his descendents eventually left Tishīt, most moving to Nioro and later Bamako in Mali (N.B. Before 1943, the Ḥawd regions of Mauritania were part of Mali and so the whole region south of Tishīt to Nioro, including Walāta and Na'ma, were part of the French Soudan).

Marriages and Children: Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl had a wife in the Wād Nūn where his first son was born (Sid Aḥmad). Perhaps he had other wives in other ports. But in Tishīt, he married a Māsna woman of great repute named *Fāṭima Seri mint Niāba*. She was a ṭālība or student of Islam (the Niaba family is currently living in Nioro). Fāṭima was a very prosperous businesswoman who had many caravan workers and ḥarrātin. Together they had six sons and several daughters.

1. *Sid Aḥmad b. al-Shaykh:* He is the eldest son of Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl who was born in Wād Nūn. He came to Tishīt and later he was the first to settled in Nioro. It is said that Sid Aḥmad left Tishīt on a salt caravan and when he arrived in Nioro, he met another Awlād Bū Sbā' named Sīdi Mbārak. He was a wealthy trader from Ndar (St. Louis) and in Nioro for business. Sīdi Mbārak told Sid Aḥmad: "my cousin, stay with me here" (i.e. work for me) and he gave him a large house (which the family still owns in Nioro today). There he married a Bamana woman named *Barakatu*. She was very pious and extremely generous towards the poor and orphans.

Sid Aḥmad, and his brothers 'Abd al-Wadūd and Ibrāhīm who joined him, all traded in Nioro. They engaged in interregional trade. When Sid Aḥmad died, he left had houses in Tishīt and Nioro and palm trees in Tishīt. But he died relatively young of an illness and

left no tangible fortune. At the time, his sons were very young and it was his wife Barakatu who began trading and became a businesswoman. In fact it was she who initiated her sons to trade. Sid Ahmad's brother Ibrāhīm apparently took Barakatu as his "wife."

1a. Muḥammadu b. Sid Aḥmad: He was the first to move to Bamako. He married an Awlād Bū Sbā' named Mariam mint Mulay Idriss b. Sid 'Aly b. al-Gharrabi. Together they had Bāba, Sid Aḥmad "Dāda" (who married the niece of his mother Fatimatu mint Mulay Idriss who had Mulay Ibrāhīm, my informant), Shaykhna, Khuria, Hassniya, and Sharifna. Muḥammadu was a close disciple of Shaykh Hammallah. He followed him everywhere and when ever Shaykh Hammallah was traveling, or when the French colonial administration took him (to Bamako, Kayes, then in Ndar and later imprisoned him in Mederdra), Muḥammad was always by his side. When Hammallah was in imprisoned in Mederdra, Muḥammadu stayed with the Awlād Bū Sbā' traders there at the time. Then, when Hammallah was taken to France, Muḥammadu moved back to Bamako. At the time when he first moved to Bamako (c. 1910s), it was a very small town. He was a very successful trader and managed to purchase much land in Bamako. He lived in a big compound there and continued the teachings of Shaykh Hammallah (and indeed he capitalized his connection to Hammallah by collecting hadiyas, as he in turn was view as a semi-saint) and he taught the Qur'an (his descendants still live in the compound in Bamako today). In fact, when Shaykh Hammallah came to Bamako in the 1920s (?) he stayed in Muḥammadu's house where he performed a miracle (he turned the water in the compound well from salty to sweet).

Muḥammadu was one of the very first to own a car in Bamako, and he drove it himself. Muḥammadu acted as the chief of the Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl family, and he took care of all the members' need. The family of Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl developed close ties with the Awlād Bū Sbā' in the area, especially the families living in the Ḥawḍ region. The Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl family was especially close to the family of a reputed scholar-trader named Muḥammad Sālam b. Da'amish from the same tribal branch of the Awlād Bū Sbā' (Awlad 'Amrān). When they first met, it was in Bamako. They realized then that they were related (same branch). Subsequently, Muḥammadu started the tradition of sending all his children to the Ḥawḍ (near 'Ayūn al-'Atrūs, Timbedra) to the family of Muḥammad Sālam so that they could learn Arabic and the Quran.

1b. Sharīf Aḥmad b. Sid Aḥmad, whose nickname was "La Allah Ila Allah": He was a close disciple of Shaykh Hammallah. He was extremely pious and spend most of the day in prayer. He married a Pulaar women called Nāna and together they had 4 girls and 8 sons all in Nioro. He also was a trader and worked in the same network with his brother.

Muḥammadu, who was in Bamako, would send him money and Sharīf Aḥmad would purchase cattle.

1c. *Ibrāhīm b. Sid Aḥmad* came to Bamako with his brother Muḥammadu.

1d. *Sharaīfa bint Sid Aḥmad* his only daughter who married Shaikh Hammallah (she had no kids).

2. *ʿAbd al-Wadūd b. al-Shaykh*: He also left Tishīt for Nioro where he lived and traded with his brother Sid Aḥmad.
3. *Ibrāhīm b. al-Shaykh*: He also followed his brother Sid Aḥmad and lived with him in the same house in Nioro (he had a daughter called Mdeya who married her uncle 1a). He also had Khadaija who married her direct cousin. He died in Nioro.
4. *Bāba b. al-Shaykh*: He stayed in Tishīt. He became a *muqqadam* of the order of Shaikh Hammallah. He only had one son also named Bāba who in turn moved to Nioro and married his cousin, the daughter of Muḥammadu (1a) called Hassniya.
5. *Mulāy Aḥmad b. al-Shaykh*: Died in Galb al-Jmal, near Walāta, which is the place where Shaykh Hammallah resided. His son, Bāba, was a serious adept of the Hamawiyya and he followed Shaikh Hammallah.
6. *Yubba b. al-Shaykh*: (left the region)
7. *Muḥammad al-Amīn b. al-Shaykh*: (remained in Tishīt until he left the region probably in the year 1330, based on a sales contract found in the family archives when he sales his share of a slave to his mother)⁴

⁴ Shaykh b. Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl family archives in Tishīt, document 6 (photographed 4/97)

APPENDIX 9

Caravan Circulation Permit 1934

Issued by the French colonial administration to Muḥammad Fāl b. Limām b. Arwīlī to travel from Shingīṭi to Tāmshakkat with three other men and four camels. The purpose of this small caravan was to purchase sheep.
(N.B. This reproduction is slightly larger than the original)

COLONIE DE LA MAURITANIE

Laissez-Passer N° 212

Nom: *Muḥammad Fāl b. Arwīlī*

Titre: *Chef*

Destination: *Tamshakkat*

Accompagné de: *3 hommes.*

M. Mohamed

But du voyage: *Achat de moutons*

Présenté par son chef.

Délai: *trois mois.*

Chinguetti 5 *Septembre* 1934.

P. le Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Mauritanie.

P. O. *le Résident*

Winy

N. 3001 341! Map to California 1911 Jan. 10 - 1912

Source: ANRIM E1/33/1/3

St. Louis

BUREAU

Il vient de me déclarer nettement qu'il venoit à retourner auprès des dissidents et qu'il demande à rester sous l'administration française qu'il connaît de longue date et qu'il serait désireux de pouvoir aller à St. Louis. J'aurais bien volontiers accédé

APPENDIX 10

(Page Two)

à son désir en raison surtout des services qu'il
a rendus aux Colomnes qui ont opéré dans l'
Ouest de la Louisiane au moment de la
Conquête, mais j'ai appris qu'il avait été forte-
ment soupçonné d'avoir dirigé sur les populations
dividentes les fusils 1876 volés aux Français
ou rendus par eux il y a une dizaine d'années
à St. Louis alors qu'il y était installé comme
Commerçant.

J'ai cru, dans ces conditions, ^{devoir} soumettre sa
demande à votre haute sanction.



APPENDIX 11

Movement of Caravans in Shingiti (1911) (04/11-06/11)¹

DEPARTURES

Number of Caravans	Number of Camels	Destination
11	153	Ijil Salt Mine
8	517	South (Nioro) to Sell Salt
34	496	Podor, Boghé, Mudjeria to Buy millet
7	56	Podor, St. Louis to Buy Sugar, Guinée, etc.

ARRIVALS

Number of Caravans	Number of Camels	Origin & Goods
4	92	Ijil Salt Mine (Salt)
25	198	South (Millet)
/	6	South (Rice)
/	8	South (Guinée)
/	9	5000 Kola Nuts

(07/11-09/11)²

DEPARTURES

Number of Caravans	Number of Camels	Destination
3	48	Ijil Salt Mine
12	142	South to Sell Salt
2	12	South to buy guinée and sugar
3	13	South to Sell Dates

ARRIVALS

Number of Caravans	Number of Camels	Origin & Goods
4	51	Ijil Salt Mine (Salt)
21	101	South (Sucre)
/	18	South (Guinée)
/	12	South (Rice)
1	16	/

¹ Préfecture de Shingiti (Archives), Rapport sur la situation politique, administrative et militaire (2eme trimestre, 1911). I could not find the report for the first trimester which would have been the height of the caravan season.

² Ibid. Rapport sur la situation politique, administrative et militaire (3eme trimestre, 1911). That year the camel "zekat" was 45 camels (31 she-camels, 7 male). Because of the Guetna, the movement of caravans is lower than the preceding trimester.

LIST OF INFORMANTS

LIST OF INFORMANTS

1. Mauritania

'Aqrayjīt

Aḥmad wuld Dayda and Mariam Mint Dada (5/02/97)

Atar

Fuṭṭī b. al-Ṭayr (10/02/97 and 10/03/97) and in Nouakchott (07/03/98)

Budy wuld Bardās (10/04/97)

Khnātha mint Aḥmayda, with her two daughter Fatimatu and Mariam; their father was Muḥammad al-Farha (10/05/97)

Maḥmūd wuld al-Jīd (10/05/97)

Fātimatu mint Mbārak b. Bayruk (09/26/97)

Sid Ahmad wuld 'Aīda wuld 'Abdal Wadūd wuld Ṭaya (09/23/97)

Abd al-Salām b. Bayruk (09/22/97)

Jīlli wuld Intāha in Touizekt (09/25/97)

Ahmad Sālik wuld Farwi in Atar (09/24/97)

Sīdi Muḥammad wuld Daydi wuld al-'Arabi wuld Mulay 'Aly (10/20/97)

'Ayūn al-'Ātrūs

Sidāti wuld Bābah (01/19/97) and then in (07/05/98) in Nouakchott

Mulay Ibrāhīm b. Sid Aḥmad « Dāda » b. Muḥammadu b. Sid Aḥmad b. al-Shaykh b.

Ibrahīm al-Khalīl (05/18/98; 05/19/98)

Mederdhra

Faṭimā mint al-Ḥasān (08/05/95)

Faṭimā mint Hurma (08/02/95)

Mohamed Jules (08/02/95)

Nouakchott

Mulay Hāshim wuld Mulay al-Mahdi with Muḥammad al-Amīm wuld Barrū (07/07/95; 07/23/95; 05/25/97)

Shaykh Yāqūb b. al-Shaykh Sidiyya Bāba (03/12/97)

Maimūna mint Aḥmad Targa (05/21/97; 05/24/97 (2 tapes): 06/31/98)

Fatimatou mint al-Nājim known as "Djibi" (05/23/97)

Khadijatou mint Aḥmayda (5/22/97)

Andallah wuld Abdalqadir wuld 'Ābābā (5/28/97 with Lālla mint Hasana; 07/22/97; 08/3/97)
 Khadijatou mint Khatari wuld 'Ābābā (5/28/97; 05/21/98; 05/29/98; 06/08/98)
 Hamdan wuld Tah with Mukhtar wuld Muhammadu (06/02/97; 06/03/97; 06/06/98)
 Mbeirika mint Bāba and Mahjūba mint Sid Ahmad Zargan with Aminatu mint al-Hajj Sidi (06/17/97, 2 tapes)
 Muhammad Lamine wuld Sāliḥ (06/17/97)
 Mahjūb wuld Jummani (05/18/96, video; 06/19/97; 07/18/97; 6/12/98)
 Bamba wuld Yazīd (06/18/97)
 Khady mint Muḥammad al-Abd (personal communications 1997, 1998)
 Muḥammad al-Āmīn b. al-Swaylim (06/18/97)
 Mulay Hashim Junior (06/23/97)
 Dr. Ibrahim Moussa (Amb Maroc en Mauritanie) (06/27/97)
 Muḥammad al-Ḥanshi wuld Muḥammad Saliḥ (06/25/97)
 Muhammad al-Amīn wuld Abdallah wuld Bayruk (06/05/98)
 Muhammad al-Amīn wuld Mbārak wuld Bayruk 07/19/97 (with Shaykhu wuld Bayruk)
 Muḥammad Saīd b. Ḥammuddy (7/20/97; 06/24/98; 06/26/98; 07/06/98)
 Mulay Ghaly wuld Yazīd wuld Mulay 'Aly (07/24/97)
 Abd al-Wahab ("Baba") wuld Shaygar (09/12/97; 07/18/97; 07/22/97)
 Mulay 'Umar Wuld Mulay Ahmed and 'Aishatu mint Mulay 'Aly (7/30/97)
 Boida Mint Dendra, 08/03/97 (07/02/98)
 Dadah wuld Dendra 07/26/97
 Lemrabutt wuld Barru (08/05/97)
 Muḥammad Mawlūd wuld La'abayd (08/4/97)
 Zaynabu mint al-Kunti b. al-Gamāni (06/28/98)
 Group Interview with Mulay Idrīs b. al-Bukhāry, Sīdi b. Isma'īl b. Abd al-Qudūs, Ḥamūdy b. 'Uthmān b. Aḥmad Sālik and Ḥamad al-Āmīn b. Aḥmad Sālak (06/29/98)
 Fīfī mint Fuīgi b. al-Ṭaīr (06/30/98)
 Muḥammad al-Amīn b. 'Abdallah b. Bayrūk (05/30/98; 06/01/98)
 Tūtu mint al-Shaykh (07/01/98)
 Khady mint Kayna (07/02/98)
 Khady mint Ibrāhīm b. Awubilla (07/02/98)
 Taqia b. Muḥammad al-Āmīn b. 'Abdallah b. Awubilla (07/02/98; 07/05/98)
 Mariam mint Sīdi Muḥammad b. al-Ḥabuṭ (03/28/98)
 Muḥammad Yaḍih b. Braydalayl (3/31/98)
 Sīdi b. Dahī (06/12/98; 06/26/98)
 Abdallah b. Muḥammad Sidiyya (10/16/98; 06/25/98)

Aḥmad Sālam b. 'Abd al-Wadūd (06/26/98; 07/03/98)
 Jimbut mint Muḥammad b. Al-Sha' (06/26/98)
 Katī mint al-Shaygar (06/18/98)
 Mulay Idrīs b. Zargān (06/21/98)
 Aḥmad Sālam b. 'Aly b. Sālam (06/21/98; 07/03/98)
 Aḥmad b. Taūmi (06/14/98; 06/21/98)
 Fāṭimatū mint Hamzata (06/12/98)
 Lamīna mint al-Yazīd b. Mulay 'Aly (06/04/98)
 Muḥammad al-Amīn b. Mulay Ghāly (06/02/98; 06/04/98)
 Nayta mint 'Abdā'im and Mulay Ibrāhīm b. Mulay Ibrāhīm (06/19/98)
 Zaynabūh mint Bubakkar Sira (06/03/98)
 Lalla mint Sīdi b. Mulay 'Aly (07/05/98)
 Muḥammad al-Amīn b. Sālah b. al-Gharābi (07/05/98)
 Muḥammad al-Maḥdi b. Muḥammad al-āmīn b. A'waīsi (07/08/98)
 Mukhtār b. 'Abd al-Wahāb (06/13/98)
 Adballah b. Muḥammad Sidiyya in Nouakchott (06/25/98)
 Ahmadu Bamba b. Budda (07/04/98).
 Fatimatu mint Sīdi Muḥammad with Salka mint Bābatah (06/25/98)

Rosso (Mauritania)

Muḥammad 'Abdallah wuld Quṭūb (07/30/97)
 Ibrāhīm wuld Ḥamdinū (07/30/97)
 Al-Ḥāj Dama Sy (07/30/97)
 Bāba wuld Mukhtār (08/01/97; visit of Library)
 Muḥammad Shaikh wuld 'Amāra (08/02/97)
 Kenza Bughalib and AbdSalām Bughalib (07/31/97)

Shingīti

Abdarahmān wuld Muhammad al-Ḥanshi (02/27/97; 02/29/97; 09/29/97; 10/01/97)
 Muhammad Lamine wuld 'Ābābā (02/27/97)
 Sidi Muhammad wuld madi wuld Moulay Mahdi (03/02/97; 03/03/97)
 Group interview with Muḥammad Sa'īd b. Buhay, Khadijatu mint Abdullah wuld 'Aly,
 and Fatima mint Abd Rahman b. Buhay in Shingīti (02/25/97; 03/02/97; 3/08/97;
 09/27/97)
 Laghnād mint Ahmad Khalīfa and Al-Wālī wuld Luda'a (03/08/97)
 Tikbir mint al-Ghūlām b. al-Ḥabbut (03/08/97, 98)
 Ruqaya mint Taqla wuld 'Ābābā (10/03/97)

Khnaṯha mint ʿĀmāra and Ghalāna mint ʿĀmāra (10/02/97)
Muḥammad b. al-Ghulām (10/03/97)

Tamshakātt

Shaykhna wuld Shaykh wuld Muḥammad al-Nāmuḥ (05/21/98)
Maḥmūd wuld Mbārak (05/21/98)
Zayna mint Mulay Ibrāhim (04/23/98; 04/24/98)
Sīd Ahmad Fāl wuld Muḥammad wuld al-Khyar (05/24/98)
Layla mint Ibrāhim (05/24/98)
Abdawa wuld ʿAbābā (05/21/98; 05/22/98; 04/24/98)
Aḥmad wuld Ḥākī (04/21/98; 04/24/98)

Tidjikja

Muhammad wuld Taleb and Makhala wuld Laamish (05/06/97)
Didi wuld Abdalqader (05/06/97; 05/07/97; 05/08/97, 3 tapes)
Ahl Yubba with Hurma wuld Yubaa and Ziri mint Yubaa (05/08/97)
Muhammad Abdalla wuld Sidi wuld ʿAbda (05/09/97)
Al-Ḥaj Albashir (05/10/97)
Khadijatu mint Khūna (05/10/97)

Tishīt

Dāda wuld Idda (personal communications 04/97)
Hamallah wuld Bāba Mīn, Shaikh Māsna (04/15/97)
Muhammad al-Amīn wuld Muissa « al-Mashbouh» (04/16/97, 05/03/97)
Baba Ghazzāl (04/16/97; 04/25/97)
Abdarrahmān wuld Jiddu (04/19/97)
Ahmad wuld Kubran (04/19/97)
Ahmad wuld Asharīf Almukhtar wuld Mbacké 04/26/97 with Sharīf wuld Shaykhna
Sīdi Muhammad wuld Bāba wuld Khattri and Billa wuld al-Sharīf Aḥmād wuld Ābba
(4/27/97)
ʿAbdallahi wuld Sīdi wuld ʿUmar (4/27/97; on side B of wuld Aḥamdi tape)
Muhammadu wuld Aḥamdi (4/14/97; 4/16/97; 4/30/97 with Muḥammad wuld Mawlud)
Falla mint Būbū (05/01/97)
Taha mint al-Khatābi b. Dawud (05/01/97)
Falla mint Samba Djaye (05/03/97)
Māsna group interview: Hamallah wuld Mine, Bāba Ghazzāl, Aḥmādu wuld Kubrān
(05/02/97)
Bukra b. Muhammad Sham (04/29/97)

Walāta

Batti wuld Bāba wuld Mbuya (04/11/98)

Utu mint Muḥammad Sālāḥ wuld Bashīr wuld Mbārak wuld Laʿabayd (04/12/98)

II. Senegal

Ndar (St. Louis)

Ngor Sene (personal communications)

Amadou Aidara (personal communications)

Souadou Seck, with Hilary Jones and David Robinson (06/30/97)

Doudou Gueye (10/20/97; 11/03/97; 11/06/97)

Cheikh Diop (11/01/97)

Madike Wade (10/31/97; 11/01/97)

Maky Kane (10/21/97)

Barrada (10/23/97)

Hammoud (10/23/97)

Amadou Sow (11/03/97)

Fatima Diop (1995, 97)

Abou Latif Seck, Bu al-Mughdād (11/5/97)

Louga

Youssou Mbargan Mbaye, Griot (07/02/97)

Samba Souna Fall (07/04/97)

Seybou Niang (07/04/97; 07/05/97; 07/07/97)

Momar Gaye Diop (Talla) and Malick Diop (07/05/97)

Sidy Diop (07/05/97)

Imam Mujib Diop, Grande Mosquée (07/06/97)

Saliou Ndiaye (07/06/97)

Mbarik Fall, chef quartier Palleen, Fall family (07/08/97)

Khatary Fall (07/08/97)

Al-Hajj Abdoukane Diop, (07/08/97; 2 tapes)

ʿAbd al-Fatāḥ wuld ʿAbd al-Jalīl (07/06/97)

Doudou Fall (07/04/97).

Podor

Maodou Diop (10/29/97)

Jambaru Niane (10/29/97)

Doudou Sow (10/30/97)

Demba Sy (10/30/97)

Jo Negri (10/30/97)

Rosso (Senegal)

Birame Diop, chef de quartier and Awa Mbodj (07/09/97).

III. Mali

Bamako :

Taïb b. Barka (05/06/98)

Al-Ghāly b. ‘Abd al-Wahāb (05/06/98)

Aisha mint al-Kuttam (05/03/98)

Dogon:

Dogolou chief of Terely (04/18/98)

Chief of Banani (04/18/98)

Mopti:

Yahya b. al-Kuttām, known as « quthm » (04/20/98)

Leila Mukarzel, Lebanese 3rd generation (04/20/98)

Nioro

Al-Hajj Bakary Diagouraga (05/12/98; 05/13/98)

Group interview with al-Hajj Bakary Diagouraga, Samba Daffé and Gaye Nimaga (05/12/98)

‘Amuy Traoré (daughter of Musa Jān Traoré) (05/13/98)

Shaykhna Sībi (05/14/98)

Saydna ‘Umar Dicko (son of ‘Aly b. Muhammad Mālik) (05/14/98)

Hamet Diarra (05/15/98)

Al-Shaykh Muḥammad b. al-Shaykh Hamallah (05/15/98)

Shaykh b. Nāni (on Shaykh b. Ibrahim al-Khalīl) (05/16/98)

Muḥammad b. Sharīf Aḥmad “Sufī” b. Sid Aḥmad b. Shaykh b. Ibrāhim al-Khalīl (05/16/98)

Shaykh Nīāba Haidara (Chef de Quartier de Tishit in Nioro; interview translated from Bambara by his great grandson) (05/15/98; 05/16/98)

Samba Fāl b. Sanaiba (05/15/98)

Timbuktu:

Muḥammad al-Amin wuld al-Nājim “Chendouk” (personal communications)

Abbas b. Barka (04/21/97; 4/22/97)

Sidi Amar wuld Sid Ahmed wuld Sultan, Qadi of Arawān (4/22/98)

Muḥammad wuld Khattra (4/22/98)

Muḥammad Yahya wuld Ahmed Bulaaraf and Taib wuld ‘Aly Saadi (04/23/98; 4/27/98)

Ahmaydi wuld Muḥammad al-‘Arabi (04/28/98, brief conversation)

Harbar Sabane, Maire de Timbuktu (04/23/98)

Mulay Bāhah wuld Mulay ‘Abdallah wuld Mulay Ahmad (04/24/98; 04/25/98)
 ‘Aisha mint Badi wuld Bashīr and daughter Neina mint Ahmad wuld Adbalwahāb wuld
 Sid Ahmed with Chendouk (04/25/98)
 Al-Ḥaj Salam “Chenna,” instituteur secondaire and historien (04/26/98)
 Nana Aisha al-Hakoum (04/26/98)
 Khanātha mint ‘Abd al-Qādar & Mariam Mint Yahya b. ‘Abd al-Qādar Barka (04/26/98)
 Aḥmad Mawlūd wuld Hilal with Chedouk (04/26/98; 04/27/98)
 Aisha Yahya mint Barka (04/26/98)

IV. Morocco

Gulmīm

Ḥumayd al-Kūri b. Baba Aḥmad b. al-Qa’id Mukhtār al-Nājim (7/31/99)
 Yaḥdhih b. ‘Abdallah b. Bayrūk & Khadaīja mint Md. b. Laḥbīb b. Bayrūk (7/31/99)
 ‘Aly Sālam b. Daḥmān b. ‘Abidīn b. Bayrūk (07/29/99)
 Bashir b. Muḥammad al-Ghazwi (07/21/98; 07/29/99)
 Yehdhih o/ mahjoub o. Ibrahim o/ Lahmeyna o/ Md Ibrahim o/ Archichin (7/27/99)
 Alia mint Bayruk (7/24/99)
 Aisha mint ahmad ould Bachir ould Al Hajj Bul'id (26/7/99)
 Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Sālam b. al-Hassni b. Lebuh (07/28/99)
 Bachir ould Ahmad Saalak ould Dahman (7/25/99)
 Muḥammad wuld Hanun wuld Salām wuld Masaīry (7/27/99)

Āsrīr

‘Aisha mint Muḥammad al-Amīn b. ‘Umar (07/30/99)
 Ḥabūb b. Aḥmad b. al-Ma’atī with Aḥmad Fāl b. Laḥbīb and
 Muḥammad b. Maḥjūb b. al-Jumāni (07/30/99)
 ‘Azīza mint ‘Abd al-Mūlā (07/30/99)
 Abdātī b. Ḥamdy (07/31/99)

Liksābi (08/01/99):

Kāra Jmi ‘ya mint ‘Abayda b. Bārak
 Ibrāhīm b. ‘Aly b. al-Ṭālib
 Muḥammad b. al-Nājim b. Muḥammad b. al-Nājim
 Muḥammad b. ‘Umar b. Laḥbīb b. al-Nājim b. Ḥamayd

Marrakech

al-Bāqīr b. Mulay ‘Aly (08/02/98)

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AMAE - Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris
ANRIM - Archives Nationales de la République Islamique de Mauritanie, Nouakchott
ANS - Archives Nationales du Sénégal, Dakar
CAOM - Centre d'Archives d'Outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence
GNA - Gambian National Archives

Prefecture (District) Archives

Atar, Shingīṭi, Tishīt, Rosso (Mauritania)
Nioro (Mali)
Louga, St. Louis, Podor (Senegal)

Documentation Centers & Libraries

CEDRAB – Centre d'Etudes et de Documentation et de Recherches Ahmed Baba, Timbuktu (Mali)
CCF – Centre Culturel Français (Documents sur la Mauritanie), Nouakchott (Mauritania)
CHEAM – Centre de Hautes Etudes d'Administration Musulmane (Paris)
CRDS – Centre de Recherches et de Documentation du Sénégal, St. Louis (Senegal)
EN - Bibliothèque de L'Evêché de Nouakchott (Mauritania)
IFAN – Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire, Dakar (Senegal)
IMRS - Institut Mauritanien de Recherches Scientifiques, Nouakchott (Mauritania)
HCSL - Haroun ould Cheikh Sidiyya Library, Boutilimit (Mauritania) copies on microfilm at the Illinois Archives, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
MMSH – Maktaba (Library) of Muḥammad Sa'īd b. Hammany, Nouakchott (Mauritania)
MH – Maktaba Ḥabbut, Shingīṭi (Mauritania)
MSH – Maktaba Shaykh b. Hammuny, Shingīṭi (Mauritania)

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Atar : Aḥmad wuld Barru (Legal documents from his father who was qādi)
Daydi wuld al-'Arabi wuld Mulay 'Aly (trade records of his father)

Nouakchott :

Mulay Ghāli wuld Yazīd wuld Mulay 'Aly (trade and legal records of his grandfather Yazīd in Atar)
Muhammad al-Amīn wuld Sīdi wuld Mulay 'Aly (misc. Shingīṭi, Atar on his grandfather)

Muḥammad al-Amīn wuld ‘Abdallah wuld Bayrūk (Atar)
Ahmad Sālam wuld Abdal Wadūd (History of Awlād Bū Sbā’)
Muḥammad wuld al-Amīn (Atar)

Shingīṭi

Ahl Ḥabbut (trade records, Laghlāl)
Ahl Hammuny (Wād Nūn trade records, Arwīli family)
‘Abdarrahmān wuld Muhammad al-Ḥanshi (family trade records)

Tamshakatt

Al-Namūh family

Tijikja

Maktaba Hamūd wuld Al-Shaikh
Muhammad Abdalla wuld Sidi wuld ‘Abda
Muḥammad Maḥmūd wuld Laḥbīb wuld al-Hāj

Tishīt Muhammadu wuld Aḥamdi

Sharīf wuld Muḥammad Al-Sharīf
Al-Qāḍī Bu ‘Asarīya
Fāḍal al-Sharīf
Aḥmād wuld Zayn
Sharīf Shaykhna Bū Aḥmād
Al-Sharīf wuld Zayn
Ahl Bāba
Aḥmād al-Ṣaghīr
Sharīfna wuld Shaykhna
Shaykh wuld Ibrāhīm wuld al-Khalīl
Dadda wuld Idda

2. Mali

Timbuktu

Muḥammad Maḥmūd wuld Al-Shaykh (“Bāba”)
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3. Morocco

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