

*Origins of Political Relations Between Western Sudanese Kingdoms and
Maghreb Al Aqsa During the 8th-10th/14th-16th Centuries:
The Examples of Mali and Songhai*

**أصول العلاقات السياسية بين ممالك السودان الغربي والمغرب الأقصى
خلال القرون 8-10/14-16: أمثلة من مالي وصونغاوي**

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ملخص:

ان دخول الإسلام الى إفريقيا ما وراء الصحراء (بلاد السودان) يعتبر من الأحداث المهمة في التاريخ الإفريقي منذ القرن الأول هجري السابع ميلادي، فمند وصوله الى شمال إفريقيا وبداية تدرده على ظهراني صنهاجة الصحراء، بدأت المجالات الجنوبية تحمل راية الإسلام خاصة بعدما ارتبط بالتجارة والتي تعد العامل الأساسي والميكانيزم التي تجمع وتسير العلاقات بين الشمال والجنوب، فانطلقنا في بحثنا هذا من تتبع سيورة الإسلام بين المجالات المغاربية والمجالات السودانية لفهم مسألة الدين والسياسة في إفريقيا ما وراء الصحراء، وتبيين التجربة التي خاضها الإسلام في بلاد السودان، فبالرغم من افتقارها لمقومات النجاح في المنطقة الا انها أفرزت عن تجربة فريدة من نوعها أوصلت المنطقة الى الازدهار والرفق، وأصبحت تحسب من ديار الإسلام، فتعززت بذلك العلاقات بين المغاربة والسودانيين في شتى المجالات.

كلمات مفتاحية:

المغرب العربي، الإسلام، التجارة، العلاقات السياسية، السودان الغربي.

Abstract:

The introduction of Islam to Sub-Saharan Africa (Bilad al-Sudan) was a significant milestone in African history from the first century AH/seventh century AD. Following its entry into North Africa and initial interactions with the Saharan Sanhaja tribes, Islam began spreading southward, primarily driven by trade, which served as a key mechanism connecting the north and south. This study explores the spread of Islam through the Maghreb and Western Sudanese regions to understand the relationship between religion and politics in sub-Saharan Africa. Despite the initial lack of favorable conditions, the Islamic experience in Bilad al-Sudan resulted in the region's prosperity and incorporation into the Islamic world. This strengthened the ties between the Maghrebis and Western Sudanese in various areas, initially focused on trade and goods exchange, and marked the beginning of a new era of cultural, social, and political relationships. Maghrebi scholars, jurists, and preachers, with the support of the trade and ruling authorities, played a crucial role in this process. Notably, rulers from both regions preserved the intertwining of religion and politics to maintain diplomatic relations and legitimize their policies.

Keywords: Western Sudan; Maghreb; Islam; Trade; Political Relations.

1. Introduction:

International relations researchers widely regard geographic location as the predominant determinant of the relationships between countries, as these relationships are influenced and shaped by the characteristics of this component. In contrast to all other elements that are subject to change, the geographic component exhibits the distinct attributes of stability and permanence¹. When considering the African Sahara as a geographical fact, many people see it as an arid, infertile, and inhospitable region filled with hazards, and acting as a natural obstacle that divides the northern and southern parts of the continent. Nevertheless, scholars of these places cannot support a viewpoint that contradicts the idea that throughout history, the Sahara was not an uninhabited, barren wilderness devoid of life. Instead, it served as a vital connection between the northern and southern regions, where Maghrebis and Western Sudanese effectively established authority, converting it into a productive environment for cross-domain contact. An analysis of the historical context of West Africa with regard to the interactions between the regions on both sides of the Sahara is essential for understanding the political, economic, and cultural developments of the Maghreb.

Archaeological studies and historical research indicate that all regions of the Maghreb were actively involved in communication with sub-Saharan Africa, with the western region playing a prominent role. These regions had a dynamic and uninterrupted cultural development that spanned from the time of chariots, as portrayed in rock art, to the beginning of modern history. Upon further analysis of their geographical positioning, the expansive arid Saharan desert, which may be seen as a natural obstacle dividing the western region of the Maghreb from the Western Sudanese lands and preventing communication between their residents, does not seem to be as influential. The Sahara played a significant role in facilitating trade, political relations, cultural exchange, and the spread of civilization. Rather than creating divisions, it served as a bridge connecting different regions.

The expansion of Islam in these regions marked the initial and beneficial interactions between the African continent and the outside world in North Africa². Maghrebi traders were essential for enhancing communication and spreading Islamic culture in West Africa, often known as Western Sudan. The dissemination of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa was mostly facilitated through trade. This article focuses primarily on the political relations between the Maghreb and Islamic empires in West Africa. While discussing this topic, one secondary issue that will be addressed is the succession of political entities in Western Sudan under Islam.

1. The Kingdoms of Western Sudan and the Spread of Islam:

This section will primarily focus on understanding the spread of Islam in the region and the Western Sudanese people's adoption of the faith, rather than extensively analyzing all the causes that facilitated the dissemination of Islam throughout sub-Saharan Africa. The incorporation of the Islamic faith into Africa is often regarded as one of the most consequential events in its history. The distinguishing factor that set Muslims apart from other groups, as perceived by Africans, was their role as conveyors of a message³ rooted in the Prophet's Hadith, "There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab except through piety and good deeds."⁴ Muslims were introduced to the regions beyond the Sahara starting from the first century AH/7th century CE, as they expanded their explorations towards the south. Ibn Abd al-Hakam, who is acknowledged as the first historian to mention the first military expeditions conducted by Uqba ibn Nafi in the regions of Fezzan, Kavar, and Sus located south of Maghreb Al Aqsa during the period of 46-62 AH/666-682 CE⁵, indirectly refers to this. Nevertheless, Africa initially experienced Islam during the Prophetic mission that occurred before migration. During this time, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) instructed Muslims to spread out over land after facing persecution, torture, and even death from the Qurayshi. When inquired about a destination, he suggested travelling to Abyssinia, where a benevolent monarch reigned without subjecting anyone to oppression⁶.

Starting with the late 1st century AH, the Sanhaja of the Sahara (also known as the hooded ones) started to hear and adopt the Islamic call because of their interactions with Muslim Berbers in the Maghreb region. Sanhaja's adoption of Islam during the third century AH/9th century CE is shown in their renunciation of paganism as a foundational doctrine⁷. The introduction of Islam to the Sanhaja tribes and subsequently to the regions of Western Sudan was facilitated by a combination of various reasons. However, the most influential factor that shaped the spread of this emerging religion was the Saharan commerce. "Trimingham" explained the pivotal correlation between Islam and trade, affirming: "Islam and trade are closely interconnected."⁸ Maghrebi merchants played a crucial and influential role in spreading Islam throughout the region. The trade routes served as the channels through which Islam spread into the core of the Sahara and beyond. The Muslim Maghrebi merchant, when travelling between different trade hubs, engaged with Africans and exerted a significant impact on them through his exemplary behavior, trustworthiness⁹, and adherence to Islamic ethics, thus earning their trust and respect. This earned him a favorable reception from them. Upon his arrival in the city, he

immediately attracted attention due to his regular practice of ablutions, prayers and worship, which were unfamiliar to the inhabitants. In contrast, the business transactions of the Maghrebis were marked by integrity, honesty, avoidance of usury, abstaining from unjust accumulation of fortune, and adherence to proper measurement and weight¹⁰. The pagan buyer cultivated a profound admiration for commercial transactions with the Maghrebi trader, often leading to the pagan African being attracted by Islam and ultimately embracing faith¹¹. Furthermore, trading caravans played a crucial role in the spread of Islam throughout the region. Jurists and academics would typically accompany them, bringing along fresh perspectives on the existing cultural, social, and economic circumstances in different regions of the Islamic world, as well as the progress and growth that have been achieved by these nations under the influence of Islam. These jurists often seek to enlighten individuals about problems related to their religion¹².

By analyzing Islam and Western Sudanic kingdoms, we may utilize existing sources to chronologically track the development of Islam in Western Sudan and evaluate the contributions of merchants, jurists, and preachers in spreading religion in Western Sudan. Nevertheless, these sources frequently fail to provide explicit information about the specific circumstances related to the process of Western Sudanese conversion to Islam, since the authors primarily focused on the end result and disregarded other details¹³. The historical origins of the first Western Sudanic region adopting Islam can be traced back to the early part of the 5th century AH/11th century CE, before the Almoravid campaign. Al-Bakri confirms that the Takrur Kingdom¹⁴, located in the Senegal Basin, has been a Muslim state from the reign of the king "Warjabi bin Rabis" (d. 432 AH/1040-1041 CE). The latter played a role in spreading Islam in the nearby "Silla," and then the people of Silla took on the task of promoting Islam in the pagan territories of the Ghana Kingdom, namely in the city of Qalambu, which is located at a distance of more than a day's travel from Silla¹⁵.

The Kingdom of Ghana¹⁶, located near Takrur, is considered the earliest sophisticated political organization in the Western Sudan region (spanning from the Senegal River in the west to the Niger River in the east) during the mediaeval era. It attained its peak glory and magnificence during the period from the third to the middle of the fifth century AH (ninth to eleventh centuries CE)¹⁷. During Al-Bakri's reign, the monarchy was grappling with pagan traditions¹⁸. During Al-Idrisi's era, significant changes occurred in the religious sphere. He mentioned that the inhabitants of the region were Muslims, and their king, as stated, belonged to the lineage of Salih bin Abdullah bin Al-Hassan bin Al-Hussein bin Ali bin Abi Talib¹⁹.

Based on the previous discussion, we can disprove the commonly held belief that the Islamization of Ghana occurred as a result of the Almoravid conquest in 469 AH/1076 CE. According to Al-Bakri, the Ghanaian King "Basi" (d. 455 AH/1063 CE) was highly praised for his conduct, had a strong sense of justice, and was considered as a guide for Muslims. His nephew assumed power after him and relied on Muslims for administering governance affairs. The inhabitants of Ghana's province of "Yarsni" showed profound respect and acceptance towards Muslims, promoting harmonious coexistence. to the extent that the city of "Yarsni," one of Ghana's provinces, was predominantly Muslim and had 12 mosques²⁰. Based on archaeological findings, the most ancient mosques in Ghana can be traced back to the 3rd century AH/9th century CE²¹. However, the issue at hand, as raised by both Ahmed Al-Shukri and Father Cuoq, is how can we explain the contradictory position of the rulers of Ghana? Although the kings "Basi and Tenkamin" were tolerant towards Muslims by enabling them to hold high positions, permitting the construction of mosques, and supporting jurists, they themselves continued to hold onto pagan beliefs and did not convert to Islam²².

Although there are inquiries about the factors behind the Ghanaian kings' decision not to adopt Islam and the motivations for some kings to hide their Islamic beliefs, it is certain that Islam gained a significant foothold in Western Sudan and that Kumbi Saleh, the royal capital, was populated by a large number of Muslims. Al-Bakri's report provides evidence of the existence of a mosque in close proximity to the city. However, Allah ultimately led their empire to fall apart, which was later conquered by the Sosso tribes.

Islam in the Mali Empire was considered the most dominant religion in the Kingdom. The tribes that were accountable for founding the empire are commonly referred to as "Manding" or "Mande" in historical studies. These terms have been adopted by historians from experts in anthropological and linguistic research on Africa. Arabic texts employed distinct designations, such as the people of Mali or the people of Takrur, while concurrently labelling them as "Mulam," "Namnam," or "Damdam."²³ In Soninke, a language belonging to the Mande branches, the term "Mande" refers to the royal residence, whereas "Manding" denotes a person's maternal lineage. Generally, the name "Mande" is mostly used to describe a linguistic rather than an ethnic category, denoting a collection of tribes that speak the Mande language. Historians have regarded them as one of the most sophisticated and bright groups in Africa²⁴. The empire's authority encompassed the contemporary territories of the Republic of Mali, eastern Senegal, northern Guinea, the northern

regions of Upper Volta and Dahomey, and the southernmost region of the Republic of Mauritania²⁵. Al-Bakri's book "Al-Masalik" is recognised as the earliest Arabic text that examines the Islam practiced by the rulers of Mali. The text refers to a narrative concerning the embrace of Islam by the first ruler of Mali, whom he referred to as "Al-Muslamani," following a period of severe famine in the nation²⁶. According to Ibn Khaldun, the first ruler of Mali who governed the people was called "Barmandana" and they converted to Islam during the 7th century AH/13th century CE²⁷. The capital of this kingdom was Niani, who derived its name from its reputation as a secure city. King "Sundiata Keita" is credited with building it between the years 633-653 AH/1235-1255 CE. He achieved this by successfully defeating Sosso in the battle of Kirina in 633 AH/1235 CE²⁸.

One of the outcomes of the aggressive strategy carried out by "Sumanguru," the Sosso commander, against the Manding and the subordinate peoples was an increased recognition among the Western Sudanese tribes of the need to come together and form a unified front. This recognition was partly driven by the influence of Islam.. The main narrative of Sundiata Keita, also known as Mari Jata, the renowned hero of Mali, is provided by Ibn Khaldun, although he was unable to authenticate his Sundiata's lineage or reign period²⁹. Sundiata's personality was highly esteemed in oral tradition and is considered a legendary figure credited with setting the basis for African unity and cultural diversity in a large area of the continent³⁰.

The reigns of Mansa Musa (814-850 AH/1412-1447 CE) and his brother Mansa Sulayman (834-895 AH/1431-1490 CE) are regarded as the era during which the Mali Empire achieved its pinnacle of prosperity and glory. The lasting influence of this prosperous period was deeply rooted in the memories of Western Sudanese, as evidenced by Mahmud Ka'ti's account: "We used to hear from the people of our time saying that the sultans of the world were four, excluding the supreme sultan, the sultan of Baghdad, the sultan of Egypt, the sultan of Bornu, and the sultan of Mali."³¹. Under the rule of Mansa Musa, Timbuktu flourished as the main trading hub, attracting a dynamic community of intellectuals, jurists, and literary personalities brought by merchants³². Upon Mansa Musa's death, he left an vast kingdom, and his successors struggled with the arduous task of upholding its colossal size. Mali had a rise in discord and wars, which led to a gradual weakening of the empire starting from the early 9th century AH/15th century CE. The army has experienced a decline in strength and has been divided into smaller, separate groups³³. The emergence of the Songhai Kingdom³⁴ in the second half of the 9th century AH/15th century CE

posed a significant danger to Mali. The Middle Niger is regarded as the original location where the Songhai Empire originated and has had a notable impact on the historical development of northwestern Africa. The Songhai tribes expanded their territory from Dendi, extending down the river's path to Timbuktu and the vast lakes that lie beyond it. Gao, located on the left bank of the Niger River, served as the capital of the Songhai Empire³⁵.

Ismail Al-Arabi asserts that by excluding certain legendary narrative, we may discern from the historical record that King Dia Kossoi (Dia Kosoi 15) is recognised as the first ruler of the Songhai empire, who established the city of Gao as the kingdom's capital. The Dia Dynasty is acknowledged as the first royal lineage in Gao that converted to the Islamic faith. During the middle of the 7th century AH/13th century CE, Islam began to spread extensively throughout the kingdom as a result of the Almoravids' influence in the desert and the arrival of merchants in the region³⁶. In 400 AH/1010 CE, King Kosi, after embracing Islam, founded the first capital of the kingdom, and from then on, it became conventional for the ruler of the Songhai tribes to adhere to Islamic faith. Gao, the capital, emerged as a significant commercial hub in the region³⁷. Ali Sini, often known as Ali the Great, assumed the throne between the years 868-898 AH/1464-1493 CE. The sultan of the Malian Manding (Mandinka) solicited him support when he was unable to restoring order in Timbuktu against the Tuareg³⁸. Al-Saadi provided a description of him, saying: "As for the greatest tyrant, the immoral Sini Ali, he had great strength and a huge body. He was an oppressive, corrupt, transgressive, domineering, and bloodthirsty person who killed more people than can be counted by anyone except Allah Almighty. He persecuted scholars and righteous people through killing, humiliation, and degradation." He remained in the kingdom for approximately 28 years and actively participated in victories and territorial expansions³⁹.

After the death of Sini Ali, the reign of the royal Songhai dynasty, which had ruled the kingdom for almost eight centuries⁴⁰, came to a close, and the "Askia" dynasty⁴¹, led by the Soninke people⁴², assumed power. The consensus in the literature is that the peak of Islamic Songhai's territorial expansion occurred under the rule of Askia Muhammad the Great⁴³ during the Askia period. After abandoning the throne to his son Musa in 999 AH/1591 CE, the Kingdom's foundations began to crumble. The following monarchs were distinguished by their cruelty, greed, and immorality, leading them to engage in fratricide or pursue aspirations and passions. The prevailing turmoil within the Songhai Kingdom compelled the Sultan of Maghreb, Ahmad al-Mansur, to intervene and ultimately dismantle the Kingdom⁴⁴.

2. Political Relations between the Kingdoms of Western Sudan and the Far Maghreb

An analysis of the political history of both Western Sudan and Maghreb Al-Aqsa shows notable political changes in the region, particularly following Ghana's liberation from Almoravid governance⁴⁵. The Ghanaians took advantage of the internal warfare between the tribes who established the Almoravid state (Jadala and Lamtuna) after the assassination of Prince Abu Bakr ibn Umar and Yusuf ibn Tashfin's withdrawal from Saharan and Western Sudanese politics in the late 11th century CE. They declared independence from the Almoravids, with the sole vestiges of political ties between Maghreb and Western Sudan, as a handful of letters exchanged by Yusuf ibn Tashfin and the Ghanaian King regarding the supply of slaves. There was no other communication similar to this. during the Almoravid period, from the reign of Ali ibn Yusuf ibn Tashfin to the complete loss of control over Ghana. This period marked the first and most important political involvement of the Maghrebi components in Western Sudan's history⁴⁶.

The departure of the Almoravids created a political void in the region, which caused the Sosso Soninke tribes, who were under the control of Ghana, to quickly declare their independence in the late 5th/11th century. Under the leadership of "Sumanguru," they launched their expansion by capturing Ghana in 600 AH/1203 CE⁴⁷. First, the relationship between the Sosso tribes and the Maghreb was friendly, as confirmed by the mission sent by Aflah ibn Abd al-Wahhab to the Sosso monarch, carrying notes praising his victories. These communications were received with great hospitality and respect⁴⁸. Nevertheless, the relationship between the northern and southern regions quickly worsened as a result of the harsh policies and aggressive actions of the Sosso ruler towards the people of Western Sudan, notably the Muslim tribes⁴⁹. In an exceptional incident in the historical interactions between the northern and southern regions, Governor Abu al-Rabi' Sulaiman of Sijilmasa addressed a strongly worded letter to the pagan monarch of Western Sudan, expressing his disapproval and denunciation of the unfair and aggressive policies imposed on Maghrebi merchants⁵⁰.

Following the decline of the Almoravids, the relationship between the Maghreb and Western Sudan was predominantly marked by peaceful and cooperative interactions. The common religious beliefs held by the people of North Africa and Muslims of Western Sudan facilitated deeper connections that went beyond simple trade of products and goods. The Maghrebi sultans established

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diplomatic connections in 736 AH/1336 CE under the leadership of Mansa Musa, the Mali Monarch. During the Marinid reign, he dispatched a distinct mission to Fez to congratulate Sultan Abu al-Hasan on his triumph over Banu Abd al-Wad at Tlemcen in 735 AH/1335 CE⁵¹. According to Al-Nasiri, the Sultan received the delegation with great warmth and showed great respect. While the Malian delegation was in Maghreb, they received news of the death of Mansa Musa. Consequently, the sultan dispatched a delegation bearing gifts, led by Abu Talib bin Muhammad bin Abi Madin, to King Mansa Sulayman (d. 760 AH/1360 CE) as a token of condolence following the death of his brother. Furthermore, he instructed the Maqil Arabs of the desert to accompany them during their journey to and from their destination. The delegation was received with great warmth by Mali⁵².

During the reign of Sultan Mansa Sulayman, the Western Sudan region was visited by the Maghrebi traveller Ibn Battuta. He arrived in Mali in 754 AH/1353 CE as an ambassador of the Marinid Sultan Abu Inan (610/759 AH-1213/1358 CE). Ibn Battuta reports that he was unable to meet the Sultan initially because of his illness. Later on, he encountered him, saying: "....a meal was prepared in honor of our master Abu al-Hasan, may God be pleased with him. The princes, scholars, judges, and preachers were invited, and I attended with them. They brought the Qurans, completed the recitation, and prayed for our master Abu al-Hasan, may God have mercy on him, and for Mansa Sulayman. After the prayers, I approached and greeted Mansa Sulayman. He responded in their language, and they told me the Sultan said, 'Thank God.' I replied, 'Praise be to God and thanks in all circumstances.'" During his stay, the king treated Ibn Battuta generously, providing him with accommodation and covering his expenses as he frequently visited and sat with the judge and preacher. When Ibn Battuta departed, the king gave him 100 gold dinars⁵³.

The tradition of sending delegations and gifts amongst the sultans remained in maintaining strong connections of kindness and regard. After the Maghrebi delegation arrived in Mali, a diplomatic expedition from Mali, with presents and accompanied by nobles, was sent to the Sultan of Fez. Nevertheless, this expedition only managed to reach the outermost frontier at Walata and was stopped due to internal disputes regarding succession after the demise of Mansa Sulayman, who had governed for a period of twenty-four years. As a result, they did not reach the Marinid capital⁵⁴.

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Once Sultan Mari Jata secured control of the region following the nine-year reign of Mansa Ibn Mansa Sulayman, he continued to nurture friendly relationships. Upon hearing about the gift that had been stopped in Walata, he commanded its delivery to the Maghrebi King Sultan Abu Salim Ibn Sultan Abu al-Hasan in 762 AH/1361 CE. Included in the gifts was a giraffe, an exotic animal in Maghreb countries that fascinated the people of Fes. Ibn Khaldun relates that the day of the delegation's arrival was notable, with the Sultan receiving them in the Tower of Gold (Majlis al-Ard). The people were captivated by the giraffe, and poets composed verses of praise and congratulations describing the occasion. The delegation stayed with the sultan, apologized for the delay in delivering the gifts, and reaffirmed their message of goodwill and friendship⁵⁵.

Since the campaign of Abu Bakr al-Lamtuni against Ghana, Maghrebi sultans (before the 10th century AH/16th century CE) have not undertaken any military attempts to conquer Western Sudan. Instead, they focused on establishing trade and diplomatic relations with the kings. They were satisfied with the profits from the caravan trade, which brought gold and other goods. The Maghrebis likely avoided invading the region due to the challenges that would arise from incorporating such vast and diverse areas, with their many people, cultures, and sects, into their already strong and stable empires⁵⁶.

With the rise of the Saadians, who sought to exploit the wealth of southern Sahara, particularly the salt mines in Taghaza⁵⁷, they established new political relations with the kings of Western Sudan⁵⁸. The ambitions of the Maghrebi sultans in Western Sudan began in the late first half of the 16th century. In 1526, Sultan Ahmad al-Araj of the Saadian dynasty requested that Askiya Ishaq I (1539-1549) cede the Taghaza salt mines⁵⁹. Al-Saadi reports Ishaq's firm refusal: "The Ahmed who has been heard is not actually him, and the Ishaq who heard is not me either."⁶⁰ To demonstrate his determination, Ishaq dispatched a military campaign of the Tuareg cavalry into southern Maghrebi territories, where they ravaged the village of al-Dhara, a part of al-Araj's domain. The objective was solely to display strength, with strict orders to not kill anyone⁶¹.

After Muhammad al-Sheikh came to power, he sent a request in 1544 to Askiya Ishaq to cede the Taghaza salt mines. Ishaq refused for the second time. Shortly before Muhammad al-Sheikh's assassination in 1557, he sent a military campaign of approximately 1,800 cavalymen to the famous Ajel salt flats used by the Western Sudanese. The military forces progressed towards Taghaza and eradicated Western Sudanese control there⁶². Al-Fishtali writes, "The Imam, may

God be pleased with him, attacked Taghaza, seizing it from Ishaq and annexing it to Maghreb, He then appointed his own soldiers to govern it." ⁶³. Consequently, the ruler of Taghaza, Muhammad Ikoma, who was responsible for collecting taxes, was assassinated by a man named al-Zubaytari from Tafilalt following the orders of the Maghrebi Sultan. Tuareg salt carriers were also killed. The survivors sought permission from Askiya Dawud to abandon the Taghaza mines and exploit other mines. Askiya was forced to agree in 969 AH/1562 CE, choosing a new site called Taghaza al-Ghazlan, located between Taghaza and Taoudeni⁶⁴.

However, the Western Sudanese refused to participate in the trade of Taghaza salt and the caravans that transported it. This forced the Maghrebi sultan to give up some of the tax income to the Askiya in return to allow the salt to be sold, the Western sudanese sultan would send an emissary to collect his portion of the income without getting involved in the administration of the territory or the activities of the mine⁶⁵.

When Ahmad al-Mansur al-Sharif ascended to power in 983 AH/1578 CE, Askiya Ishaq was still alive but was soon succeeded by Askiya Dawud. The Maghreb had reached the height of their power following their victory in the Battle of Ksar el-Kebir⁶⁶, leading to a period of internal and external stability. Ahmad al-Mansur began implementing an expansionist policy, focusing on strategic locations in the Maghrebi Sahara, famous for its oases, mineral resources, and its significance in facilitating transportation. These bases were intended to serve as launching points for further expansion, initially into neighboring areas, and then into Western Sudan⁶⁷.

Ahmad al-Mansur sought to achieve Maghreb's objectives in Western Sudan through peaceful means. In 1581, he sent a gift worth ten thousand ounces of gold (or ten thousand gold pieces⁶⁸, according to some accounts) to Askiya Dawud (1549-1582), requesting him to cede the salt mines for one year⁶⁹. The Maghrebi sultan was impressed by Askiya's generosity and hospitality, which promoted goodwill and friendship between them. When news of Askiya Dawud's death reached Ahmad al-Mansur, he mourned and received condolences from high officials⁷⁰. It appears that Askiya Dawud was aware of the Maghrebi goals and his army's inability to combat them, so he readily accepted al-Mansur's proposal and leased the Taghaza salt mines for one year. These two rulers maintained a cordial relationship throughout Dawud's reign⁷¹. Ahmad al-Mansur also received a fatwa from his scholars, written by the Imam and Grand Mufti of Marrakesh, Abu Malik Abdul Wahid bin Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sijilmasi, stating that control of mineral resources belongs solely to the Imam, and no one may exploit them without the sultan's permission or his deputy's authorization⁷².

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After Askiya al-Hajj assumed power, it became apparent that the Maghrebis had ambitions in the region⁷³. Sultan Ahmad al-Sharif al-Hashemi (al-Mansur) sent his envoy to Askiya al-Hajj with wonderful gifts. According to al-Saadi, the true purpose of this mission was "to gather information about the state of the Tekrur lands, as he intended to send his envoy to Gao." Askiya al-Hajj received the envoy with honor and, upon his return, sent back gifts many times greater, including servants, valuable felines, and eighty eunuchs⁷⁴.

Subsequently, Al-Mansur decided to intervene with force. Initially, he dispatched an expedition of 20,000 men to Wadan in what is now northeastern Mauritania, with orders to advance south, seize all territories along the Senegal River and beyond, and continue to Timbuktu. However, the expedition failed due to hunger and thirst, and the survivors returned to Maghreb without achieving any of the sultan's objectives⁷⁵. Meanwhile, al-Mansur sent Mansur bin al-Filali, an experienced Arab well-versed in the ways of the desert, to Gao. His mission was to exploit the internal divisions among the ruling factions to facilitate a military attack on Western Sudan. Mansur bin al-Filali spent three years there, cultivating their trust under the guise of a trader while demonstrating loyalty and piety⁷⁶.

In response to the previous defeat in Wadan, al-Mansur launched a second expedition in 994 AH/1586 CE to conquer Taghaza and capture its residents. The campaign comprised approximately 200 cavalymen. Nevertheless, locals were informed in advance of the mission, which prompted them to escape. Some individuals sought safety in Hamadiya, whereas others escaped to Tuat, thereby preventing the Maghrebis from seizing the opportunity to pillage. Upon arrival, Maghrebis discovered that the site was deserted, except for a small number of individuals. Consequently, they decided to retreat from the area, thereby enabling regular activities to continue⁷⁷. Al-Saadi states that in 994 AH/1585 CE, the Askiyas ended their presence in Taghaza. He wrote, "Their notables went to the Askiya and informed him of the situation. He agreed to prevent the salt caravans from going there. In Shawwal of the same year, it was decreed that no one should go to Taghaza and anyone who would face the confiscation of their property. Thus, they endured the adversity of salt deprivation"⁷⁸

The Askiya's stance was viewed as a negative response, reflecting his sense of weakness against the Maghrebi forces armed with cannons and gunpowder. He resorted to boycotting and avoiding dealings with the Maghrebis. This stance angered many Western Sudanese, leading to a revolution in Dhul-Hijjah 994 AH/1586 CE that deposed Askiya Hajj Muhammad (Muhammad III). Subsequently,

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the country fell into a state of internal turmoil. Askiya Muhammad, the brother of the overthrown leader, took control in 995 AH/1587 CE, but he died within the year and was succeeded by his brother, Askiya Ishaq II, who was inaugurated on Sunday, 3 Jumada al-Awwal 996 AH/April 10, 1588 CE⁷⁹. the nation fell into a state of internal turmoil

In 997 AH/1589 CE, according to Boufil, a messenger from Marrakech arrived at al-Mansur's palace bearing a letter. The letter was written by Uld Kirinfil, an African black man from Western Sudan who had been exiled to Taghaza by Askiya Ishaq II⁸⁰. From there, he fled to Marrakech. Disappointed not to find Sultan al-Mansur, who was in Fes at the time, he wrote the letter claiming to be the brother of Askiya Ishaq II and alleging that his brother had usurped the throne. He sought support from al-Mansur⁸¹. Al-Fishtali further clarifies this by mentioning the arrival of the Western Sudanese prince Ali bin Dawud in Marrakech in Jumada al-Awwal 997 AH/April 1589 CE, referring to the brother of Askiya Ishaq⁸². Ahmad al-Mansur seized this opportunity, which he had planned and waited for over three years, to gather information on the state of Western sudan, which was suffering from internal disintegration and division, in order to exploit the mines and expand southward.

In 998 AH/1589 CE, Sultan Ahmad al-Mansur made a final attempt to persuade Askiya Ishaq II to abandon ownership of the Taghaza salt mines. He argued that he was more entitled to them because he had protected them from Christian infidels. Al-Mansur sent his request with an emissary to Gao⁸³. Askiya Ishaq's dismissive response included only "a broom and iron sandals," symbolizing his refusal. Karim explained that this response implied that Ishaq would use these items after defeating al-Mansur⁸⁴. According to al-Nasiri, the delayed response from Ishaq led al-Mansur to perceive that he was being disregarded, which incited his fury and motivated him to prepare an assault on the Western sudan⁸⁵. Nevertheless, al-Saadi attributes the delay to the inclement weather conditions encountered by the delegation, asserting that: "Snow fell along the way, nearly killing them, and many people lost their hands and feet. They returned in a severe condition."⁸⁶

However, it seems that the Askiya did not realize the gravity of his response and dismissed the possibility that the Saadians would escalate the situation into a war against Songhai. He was not fully aware of al-Mansur's intentions or threats to the stability of his kingdom⁸⁷. Al-Mansur had already gathered extensive information about the region by sending an envoy to assess its conditions, as we previously mentioned, and had received detailed reports on its strengths and weaknesses before launching his military campaign⁸⁸.

Recognizing the golden opportunity to attack, al-Mansur meticulously planned the campaign with the intention of invasion, as al-Saadi noted. After Askiya's response, he decided to proceed with an expedition⁸⁹. On the 1st of Muharram 999 AH/October 29, 1590 CE, he sent a large military group consisting of three thousand individuals, which included archers, cavalry, infantry, artisans, and physicians, to engage them in battle⁹⁰. He appointed Judar Pasha as the leader, supported by ten commanders, including Mustafa the Turk and Commander Mustafa bin Askar.

Al-Mansur personally supervised the preparations for the campaign, ensuring all necessary means and equipment were obtained. He also sought the support of Western Sudanese scholars, particularly the judge of Timbuktu, Umar bin Mahmoud bin Umar. In 1590, he wrote to the judge, inviting him to submit to his authority and urging him to call upon the Western Sudanese to recognize his leadership. Al-Mansur praised the judge's esteemed position in Western Sudan and emphasized that he understood the judge's needs better than Askiya Ishaq. He informed the judge about the imminent arrival of the Maghrebi forces and assured him that any soldiers trusted by the judge would be protected, demonstrating their high regard⁹¹. Following this, he launched the renowned campaign under the command of Judar Pasha, with specific instructions to capture Gao and Timbuktu, the key centers of the Songhai Empire, and annex their territories to Maghreb.

3. CONCLUSION:

The Islamic experience in Western Sudan, influenced by Maghrebi factors, played a crucial role in the region's development from the 5th century AH/11th century AD. Despite these challenges, Islam has established a strong presence, leading to a scientific, intellectual, and architectural renaissance driven by trade and the influence of scholars. Political relations between Western Sudanese rulers and Maghrebi sultans were complex, varying from diplomacy fostered by a shared religion to confrontation driven by resource competition. The Saadian dynasty's exploitation of Sub-Saharan Africa's resources and its military campaign against the Songhai Kingdom highlighted the weak nationalistic sentiment among the Western Sudanese, who accepted external rule, similar to their previous acceptance of the Almoravids and Berbers. This acceptance suggests a lack of strong national motivation to resist or accept foreign control, which underlines the complex historical interaction between cooperation and exploitation.

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- ¹² Al-Fituri, op. cit., p. 105.
- ¹³ Ahmad al-Shukri, op. cit., p. 110.
- ¹⁴ Al-Takrur, also known as Takrur, is a term that, According to the dictionary Al-Muhit, "Takrur" refers to a barrier. In the colloquial language of Mauritians, it signifies an obstruction that prevents salt cargo from chafing against a camel's back. This term is also known as "Takareer" in its plural form, which means barriers or hindrances. Specialists in the Sanhaja dialect of Mauritania explain that "Takrur" originates from "Takurrart," meaning the prince's seat. This is comparable to its meaning in the (Kwanish) language of the Canary Islands' inhabitants, where "Takrur" denotes the king's place, typically represented by a circular stone formation. See: Footnote No. 2 in Mahmoud Kati: Tarikh al-Fattash, edited by Hama Allah Walad al-Salim, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1st edition, Beirut, Lebanon, 2012, p.57.
- ¹⁵ Al-Bakri (n.d.), The Description of Africa and the Maghreb, Dar al-Kitab al-Islami, Cairo. Egypte, p. 172.
- ¹⁶ The first mention to Ghana in Arabic texts may be traced back to the second half of the second century AH/8th century CE, as documented by the astronomer Al-Fazari and referenced by Al-Masudi in his work "Muruj al-Dhahab". Following the initial Arabic references, further mentions of Ghana were limited in substance, and the country remained relatively unknown until Al-Bakri meticulously documented its trade routes and political

divisions in 460 AH/1067 CE. Al-Bakri highlighted that the term "Ghana" denoted both the capital city of the kingdom and a title for the king, although the actual name of the country was "Aukar." Niane proposes that in the Manding language, the name "Ghana" denotes "an individual possessing great physical strength and exceptional capabilities." See: Ahmad al-Shukri, op. cit., footnote no. 11 p. 135.

¹⁷ Al-Hadi Mabrouk Al-Dali (1999), *The Political and Economic History of Sub-Saharan Africa*, The Egyptian Lebanese House, 1st edition, Cairo, Egypt, p. 21.

¹⁸ Al-Bakri, op. cit., p. 172.

¹⁹ Al-Idrisi (n.d.), *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq fi Ikhtiraq al-Afaq*, Library of Religious Culture, Vol.1, Egypt, p.23.

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²⁹ Ahmad al-Shukri, op. cit., pp. 214-215.

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³² Ismail Al-Arabi (1983), *The Great Sahara and Its Shores*, National Book Foundation. p. 305.

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³⁴ Songhai: This ethnic group once resided in the Niger region along the boundaries of the tropical forest during ancient times. Their migration northwards began along the Niger River and by the 1st century AH/7th century CE, their towns expanded to cover a distance of approximately 150 kilometres along the Niger River. They participated in fishing and cultivated millet, and later spread between the Republic of Niger and Mali, particularly in the surrounding area of the Gao region. See: Abdelkader Zabadia, op. cit., footnote no. 01, p. 25.

³⁵ Ismail Al-Arabi, op. cit., pp. 317-320.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 321.

³⁷ John Joseph (1984), *Islam in the Kingdoms and Empires of Black Africa*, translated by Mukhtar al-Sufi, Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyya, 1st edition. pp. 81-82.

³⁸ Referred to as the "veiled ones" by the Arabs, this group resides in the desert, covering the area from the Touat region to Timbuktu and from Fezzan to Zinder. The Tuareg are comprised of multiple tribes that communicate in a unified language known as Tamazight (TEMAGIGH) and are organised into different segments. See: John Donnie Fage, *History of West Africa*, translated by Youssef Nasr, Dar al-Maaref, Cairo, 1st edition, 1982, p. 82.

³⁹ Al-Saadi (1981), *Tarikh al-Sudan*, edited by Houdas, American Eastern Press, Paris, France, pp. 4, 64.

⁴⁰ Ismail Al-Arabi, op. cit., p. 323.

⁴¹ The title of Askiya, or Askiyas in plural, was given to the Kings of Songhai after to the ascension of Muhammad the Great to the throne. The daughters of Sunni have stated that in their language, it signifies that he will not be king. According to Al-Saadi, Muhammad personally claimed this title for himself. Shalabi has an alternative explanation, asserting that "Askiya" signifies "angry and victorious," a title that Muhammad selected to symbolise his triumph over all adversaries. See: Al-Saadi, op. cit., p. 72.

⁴² The Soninke are a subdivision of the Manding ethnic group, which is renowned as one of the most populous and geographically extensive tribes in West Africa. The Soninke people are regarded as the fundamental and essential component of the population of the Kingdom of Ghana. See: Muhammad Fadel Ali Bari and Ismail Ibrahim Kureidah: *Muslims in West Africa: History and Civilization*, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1st edition, 2007, p. 115.

⁴³ Muhammad Abu Bakr, also known as Muhammad al-Turi, was from the Soninke tribe and settled near the middle Niger, integrating into the Songhai tribe after his family relocated from southern Mauritania during the decline of the Kingdom of Ghana in the 11th century CE. Askiya Muhammad's lineage is traced to Futa Toro on his father's side and the Songhai clan on his mother's side, with his mother claiming descent from Jabir ibn Abdullah al-Ansari. The Askiya dynasty, rooted in the Sanhaja clan, was influential in Sudan. Askiya Muhammad was influenced by his religious and academic family background, driving him to establish a state based on Islamic law.

⁴⁴ Mohamed Ali Bari et Al., previously cited, p. 121.

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⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 51.

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- ⁵⁹ Yahya Bouaziz, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 94.
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- ⁶¹ Zabadia, *The Arab Civilization and European Influence*, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
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⁷⁷ Al-Saadi, op. cit., p. 120.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Karim , op. cit., p. 153.

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⁸¹ Bouffel, op. cit., p. 277.

⁸² Al-Fishtali, op. cit., pp. 121-122.

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⁸⁴ Karim , op. cit., p. 155.

⁸⁵ Al-Nasiri, op. cit., Vol. 5, p. 112.

⁸⁶ Al-Saadi, op. cit., pp. 137-138.

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⁸⁸ Al-Fishtali, op. cit., pp. 119/120.

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