

The Gonja Kingdom in northern of Ghana and the role of Dioula traders in its appearance between 16th and 17th centuries

مملكة غونجا الإسلامية في شمال غانا و دور التجار الديولا في ظهورها

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الملخص:

إن انتشار الإسلام في منطقة الغابات الإفريقية و أدغالها يعود الفضل فيه إلى التجار المتنقلين المعروفين بالديولا، وهم مسلمون ينحدرون من أصول مندية يقومون بالتوغل في الغابات الاستوائية باحثين عن الذهب والكولا أين يتكون بالشعوب الإفريقية الوثنية المتواجدين في منطقة نهر الفولتا و الأكان مثل البنين، توغو، كوت ديفوار وغينيا، أين أقاموا أسواقا هناك بالقرب من هؤلاء الشعوب، و كونوا جاليات مسلمة تمكنت من اكتساب مكانة ونفوذ بفضل أخلاقهم و أمانتهم، و بالتالي أسلم على أيديهم عدد من زعماء القبائل. لهذا حاولت من خلال هذه الدراسة معالجة نموذج لمملكة إسلامية كان للتجار المسلمين دور في ظهورها و هي مملكة غونجا في شمال غانا الحالية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ديولا ؛ غونجا ؛ تجار مسلمين؛ مندينغ ؛ وثنيين؛ غانا

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Abstract:

The Islam spreading in the African jungle and its forests proceeded at Mobile traders known as the Diola, these Muslim merchants of Manding origins penetrating the tropical forests in search of gold and cola, which enabled them to interact with the peoples Pagan African peoples located in the regions of the Volta River and the Akan, like Benin, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea, where they established markets among those peoples, and they formed Muslim communities whose gained status and influence thanks to their morals and honesty, and a number of leaders of those tribes and states embraced Islam at their hands. That is why I tried, through this study, to treat a model of the Islamic kingdoms that Muslim merchants had a role in its emergence, namely the Gonga Kingdom in the north of present-day Ghana.

Keywords : Ghana ; Gonja ; Muslim traders ; Manding ; Bagans ; Ghna

Introduction:

The spread of Islam in the region of jungles and forests of Africa progressed at a steady pace, aided by the traveling traders known as the Diola ¹. These Muslim traders, originally from Mandé roots, traversed long distances penetrating the tropical forests in search of gold and kola nuts. This enabled them to interact with the pagan African tribes located in the areas of the Volta River, Akan, Benin, Togo, Ivory Coast, and Guinea. They established markets among these peoples, forming Muslim communities that gained respect and influence over time due to their ethics and trustworthiness. Through their interactions, they succeeded in converting some of the leaders of those tribes and chiefdoms to Islam. They also intermarried with the rulers of those tribes and chiefdoms, thereby contributing to the emergence of Islamic chiefdoms and kingdoms in the African forest region, consequently facilitating the Islamization of their societies.

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Therefore, through this study, I attempted to address a model of Islamic kingdoms in which Muslim traders played a role in their emergence. Specifically, I focused on the kingdom of Gonja in present-day northern Ghana. My treatment of the subject revolves around the question: What role did Muslim traders play in the emergence of the Gonja kingdom, and what was their impact on the Islamization of Gonja society?

1.The General Framework in which the Gonja Kingdom Emerged:

The evolution of trans-forest trade through the Diola during the 15th century AD had significant political implications, sometimes leading to military repercussions as well. Ambitious Akan leaders sought to expand their power and develop their authority to exploit more resources, control larger territories, and subjugate more people in the northern fringe of the forest region. Meanwhile, several kingdoms such as Bono² and Banda³ had emerged along the routes where kola nuts and gold were exchanged with the Diola, leading to the uninhabited forests south of these kingdoms transforming into densely populated areas. Over time, these villages, which were mere settlements, became essential pillars of ruling groups, with many of them becoming slaves or clients of the ruling families, their armies, and their commercial institutions. Consequently, most Akan territories were organized in this manner, especially with the increasing commercial activity across those forests, leading to the proliferation of small political entities. However, sometimes these changes were not favorable to the Diola, who had previously used Dioula warriors to protect their caravans and occasionally called upon the armies of Islamic Sudanese kingdoms for assistance. This led to a fierce war between the Dioula and the pagan Kingdom of Banda in the 17th century, resulting in the destruction of the Banda Kingdom and leading

the Diola to establish a trading base in the Bondoukou region.

In the subsequent centuries, the Dioula continued to seize political power for themselves at strategic points along the trade routes passing through the eastern coast of Ivory Coast, where they gained almost complete control over the export of goods from the forests frequented by the Akan and Bono kingdoms. Their power increased towards the north, towards the Dagomba kingdom, where they controlled the salt pans. However, the most significant political attempt made by the Dioula along the trade route south of the city of Jenne was the establishment of a new Dioula kingdom in northern Akan, namely the Gonja Kingdom. The arrival of around 1500 long-distance traders from the Hausa lands of Nigeria made the Diola attempt to combat this development and halt its progress by establishing a large kingdom for themselves in Gonja. This area was crucial for northern traders, especially those coming from Jenne and the Hausa lands, as they had to pass through it to reach the Akan forest lands. Most of the Gonja territories were barren, and its kings lacked the wealth necessary to confront the growing power of the Akan⁴.

2.The History of the Emergence of the Gonja Kingdom:

The emergence of the Gonja Kingdom in present-day northern Ghana dates back to the early 16th century. The Gonja initially began as a human group known initially as the Gua or Kwa, then transformed into the name Ghanjawiiyyu. The Gonja derived their name from a corrupted word from the Hausa language, which is "Kada Goro-Jaa" or alternatively pronounced as "Zani gun dza goro." In both pronunciations, the meaning of this word is "I will go to the land of red kola nuts"⁵. indicating that the founders of the Gonja Kingdom were Dioula traders who penetrated the forest area from Mandé to bring back kola nuts.

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The original designation for this people was Ngbanya, meaning brave men.

The history of the Gonja has been preserved by Muslim Arab scholars who accompanied them to these lands. Based on Arabic manuscripts and oral traditions, the Gonja, descended from Mandé origins, migrated from the land of Manding during the time of the Mali Empire. They passed through the Segu region in southern Mali, then approached the lands inhabited by the Baolé⁶ through Ivory Coast. They also traversed the Sissala region in south-central present-day Burkina Faso.

3. Founding of the Gonja Kingdom:

3.1. The establishment of the Gonja Kingdom:

According to oral traditions, the origin of this kingdom began in the 16th century CE/10th century AH when a group of Mandé knights invaded and settled between the three Volta rivers⁷. These knights, armed with spears, were assisted in their conquest by a Muslim scholar named Al-Mu'allim Fati Morokbiyye. They easily conquered the local inhabitants, who were less advanced and armed with only arrows and bows. Some narratives suggest that the invasion was carried out by the father of Ndurama Jakpa, but most attribute the founding of the kingdom to Ndurama Jakpa himself, who also established its political system, which was semi-federal with subordinate states⁸.

Generally, the Gonja Kingdom was founded southwest of the Mamprusi, Dagomba, and Nanumba kingdoms by Mandé warriors and traders from Mali, led by a man named Wadh Naba or Nabaga, in the second half of the 16th century. The Malian traders were motivated by commerce with the flourishing southern regions between the Black and White Volta rivers. Between 1550 and 1575 CE, Askia Dawud of Songhai decided

to establish a gold reserve due to decreasing gold exports to Mali. He directed his Mandé knights southward towards the Volta River and the Akan lands in present-day northern Ghana, starting from their base in Jenné. These knights, later known as the Gonja, armed with swords and iron spears, engaged in battles with the Akan people, led by Chari Manwura. Some sources claim that Chari Manwura, father of Ndurama Jakpa, led an earlier invasion, and his boat sank at the confluence of the Black and White Volta rivers⁹. He is also credited as being the first king to convert to Islam under the influence of Mandé Muslim scholars¹⁰.

Other accounts suggest that the Malian trader known as Nabaga (meaning "the king") claimed to be a messenger from the Mandingo leader on a mission, possibly a punitive one, to the Begho trading area to investigate the reasons for the decline in gold exports to Mali. However, he disobeyed the Mandingo leader's orders and instead attacked the city of Bona, then crossed the Black Volta River west of Gonja land and established a fortified military base called Yagbum¹¹. With the help of Dyula traders in the Begho area, Nabaga formed an army of Ngbanya knights and locals, defeating the Guan-speaking tribes and subjugating them under Gonja authority¹².

The oral traditions that have preserved the early history of this kingdom do not provide specific dates for the period of the rule of the first kings and were content to only give us the duration of their rule, with the exception of the first king, a genius, whose beginning of his rule was determined by some studies between the years 1549 and 1550 AD ¹³, and there are those who go to define it as the year 1554 AD. And between the years 1623 and 1667 AD for the reigns of the early kings but only mention their reign periods. The most important event recorded is the conversion of the ruling family to Islam under King Maawura,

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who ruled from 1580 to 1599 CE. During this period, the capital of the kingdom was the city of Buipe in the central Gonja region, located on one of the main trade routes leading to the forest region. This was followed by a new phase of Gonja history, marked by expansion to the north. These narratives often mention the reign of King Lata¹⁴, who ruled from 1623 to 1667 CE, during which he divided the Gonja Kingdom into provinces and appointed one of his brothers as the head of each. This division weakened the central authority and led to a civil war among his sons immediately after his death in 1667 CE, during the reign of his son, King Lata Sulayman. Although this civil war ended in 1689 CE, it erupted again with greater intensity in 1698 CE¹⁵.

This civil war weakened the authority of the capital ruler of Buipe and made his word unheard. The conflict led to the formation of two warring groups, both of Mandé origin: one led by Manwura and the other led by Lanta di Ngoro, also known as Jakpa. After the latter's victory, he abdicated the throne in favor of his son, Ndurama Jakpa, who is considered the true founder of the Gonja Kingdom¹⁶.

According to a Western manuscript known as the Gonja book, these wars and disturbances occurred in the mid-16th century. During these disturbances, a group of Mandé led by King Landa seized control of the heart of Gonja land. His reign was between 1546 and 1576 CE. He was succeeded by King Wam, who ruled for nineteen years from 1576 to 1595 CE. He was followed by King Chari, who ruled for forty years from 1595 to 1615 CE. He was succeeded by Alhaji Imoru Seidu, who ruled from 1615 to 1634 CE. He was followed by Lanta Limu from 1634 to 1675 CE, who was the father of the legendary founder of the Gonja Kingdom, Ndurama Jakpa. In reality, Lanta Limu abdicated the throne in favor of his son Ndurama Jakpa, who ruled between

1675 and 1697 CE¹⁷.

The new King of Gonja, Ndurama Jakpa, led campaigns to expand the kingdom's territory. He invaded Dagomba and captured the most important center for salt production in Daboya, located in the Dagomba Kingdom. He also defeated several other chiefdoms through his campaigns, establishing several cities and villages, including Salaga, which later became an important trading center and the kingdom's capital.

3.2.The Role of Muslims in the Establishment of the Kingdom:

Local narratives attribute the Gonja people to Mande origins, where it is mentioned that Mandinka traders embraced Islam through "Teacher Muhammad Labairo," who became known in oral traditions as Fati Morukpe. After their victory over the pagan army of "Kaolaw Emirate," a part of the Gonja embraced Islam, while another part remained pagan until today, especially in eastern Gonja, where they continue to adhere to ancient beliefs. Those who converted to Islam were fascinated by the victory achieved by Muslims in Kaolaw over the pagan army. They wanted to pray with the Muslims to achieve more victories that would enable them to establish their own kingdom, gain more wealth, and obtain more social status¹⁸.

Some narratives suggest that the first king to embrace Islam in the Gonja Kingdom was Shari Manuwura, who, after converting, asked the Muslim merchant and scholar Teacher Muhammad Labairo to join his army and invoke Allah for victory, and to open the doors of success for him and remove the obstacles hindering his progress. The leader of the Gonja, Teacher Muhammad, promised to reward him if he succeeded in his conquests, and an agreement was reached between the two parties inside the Gonja camp, concluding with an oath on the

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Quran binding both parties to implement this agreement¹⁹.

Other narratives mention Jakpa as the real conqueror and founder of the kingdom, who carried out these great military actions and organized his kingdom with the help of a Muslim scholar (referred to as Teacher among them) named Fati Morukpe. This narrative illustrates well the pact that bound this Muslim scholar with the Gonja, as the narrative states: "...there was a nobleman named Jakpa who set out from the land of the Mandinka accompanied by his followers to wage war... but they informed him that if he wanted war and did not find any Murabitun scholars to accompany him, it would be impossible for him to wage this war. Therefore, he asked Fati Morukpe to accompany him in his army. Then he took an oath saying: 'By Allah, I will give you a hundred horses, a hundred captives (men, women, and children), a hundred rams, a hundred dresses, and a hundred trousers with their belts. If you are killed in the war, your family and children will take all this after your death, and if I die, my followers will take care of you and your family after my death.' This Murabitun scholar accepted this deal and accompanied Jakpa in his war, where Jakpa fought and won all his battles, and whenever Jakpa conquered a city, one of his grandchildren would be appointed as its leader, while Fati Morukpe would send one of his grandchildren alongside him to be an imam²⁰.

It is worth mentioning that the scholar Fati Morukpe served as the spiritual leader of the kingdom, as he gave the Gonja king the Islamic title "Sumanlla," and he led them in prayer during invasions, praying for their victory. Narratives influenced by Sufism suggest that he would inform his followers whether the battle would be in their favor or if it would go badly, and they would be informed whether they would live or perish in the battle. These Muslims, known as Sakpari, were the ones who

prayed during battles for the salvation of the Gonja people²¹.

Some narratives, transmitted by some Sufis, claim that Sumanlla had become bankrupt at times, so he consulted the Muslim scholar Teacher Ahmad, or Fati Morukpe, about true wealth. The latter told him that despite his royal lineage, he would not become a king in these foreign lands, but his true wealth lies in the lands he would acquire in foreign countries, which would make him and his descendants kings one day. Therefore, Sumanlla was convinced of the prophecy of Teacher Muhammad. Thus, Sumanlla prepared thousands of fighters and followers during the 16th century²².

However, contrary to all this, some studies claim that Jakpa never entered the Ashanti lands, and it was Sulemana who assumed his identity and presented himself as the king of Gonja. This has misled many historians ²³.

It seems that the reason for these differences dates back to the policy implemented by Nadowura Jakpa in 1620 when he invaded the Dagomba lands and other peoples' lands. With the aim of achieving unity in the lands he conquered, he introduced a law prohibiting the subjected peoples from referring to their history before the Gonja conquest or mentioning their history independent of Gonja or praising it. Those who did so were punished by execution. He also prohibited African oral narrators from chanting epics that glorify their own history. He also ended the leaderships of the Emirates existing in the subjected lands and replaced them with leaders from his own family. Moreover, the kings of Gonja after him did not pay much attention to preserving their achievements through oral narration, as all victories were attributed to the first heroic conqueror Jakpa, around whom many legendary narratives were woven. This left a historical vacuum for this period, allowing for various and

conflicting interpretations and narratives²⁴.

3.3. Leader Nadowura Jakpa and His Conquests:

There is almost a consensus in oral narratives that Nadowura Jakpa, son of Lata di Nguro, is the historical founder of the Gonja Kingdom. The oldest version of the epic of this heroic founder, recorded in Arabic annals, dates back to the period between 1867 and 1712 AD. It is mentioned that there was a conflict between two groups of Mandes: Shari Manwura and the leaders of Gonja known as Lata Ngbanya, led by Lata di Nguro Jakpa.

After the hostility between Shari Manwura and Lata di Nguro ceased in 1675 AD, "Lata di Nguro Jakpa" relinquished the throne to his son who took the title Nadowura Jakpa. "Lata di Nguro" had held the position of leader over the Lata Ngbaya region since 1634 AD, serving for 41 years. Nadowura Jakpa is considered the first founder of the Gonja Kingdom according to sources, also bearing the title Sumaila Ndwura. Some sources suggest he was originally a merchant ²⁵.

According to Konga's narratives, Nadowura Jakpa relied on a strong and disciplined army in his conquests. He constantly recited Islamic prayers taught by the Muslim scholar, Teacher Fati Morukpe. He began by invading local peoples who lacked central authority and an army, with his forces comprising elements of Mandinka, including the Wongara and Bambare. They rode horses and wielded spears²⁶.

Upon reaching the first port in the region, Jah Port, Jakpa contacted the teacher Fati Morukpe, establishing a friendship and asking him to accompany him in his conquests to benefit from his prayers for victory. Nadowura Jakpa would appoint one of his sons as governor whenever he conquered a land, and one of Fati Morukpe's sons would serve as his adviser, making

Fati Morukpe's lineage a partner in the royal family and palace of Konga, in all provinces²⁷.

However, the installation of his sons in various provinces did not help in establishing the centralized system he aimed for because the vastness of the territories he conquered did not align with the centralized system he tried to establish. Moreover, there were severe disputes among the princes over slave raids and commercial matters. Thus, despite western Konga, which includes Baoli, Damongo, and central and eastern Gonja, particularly the capital Salaga-Kpembe, regions extending to the east like Kpandai remained semi-autonomous until the colonial era²⁸.

Nadowura Jakpa began his conquests by moving westward from the Dubair region, where his father had established his state. Upon reaching Baoli, he was informed of a pagan priest worshipped by the people, whom he had to defeat in Mankuma, the capital of Gbibi, before he could settle and control the area. He then moved to Mankuma and, after a fierce struggle, defeated the pagan priest, appointing his sister as queen of Mankuma and his nephew as Kakulasewura, a position equivalent to modern-day intelligence chief. His nephew's task was to spy on the pagans and shrine owners and report to Nadowura Jakpa²⁹.

His armies then invaded the Vagalla people in the area, then moved through the Sakpa region in eastern Gonja. In Sakpa, he met with elders from Bel, Mandari, and Gbenfu, who pledged allegiance to him and joined him. He changed the name of the Bel region to Boolé, meaning submission in the Gonja language. After consolidating power, he appointed a leader to govern the entire region and continued north until he reached the Wala lands, defeating them and choosing the city of Nyaga as the

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capital of the occupied territories, renaming it Gbinipowura-pe. He then divided those lands among his sons.

Next, Jakpa focused on the Tampruma people on the western banks of the White Volta, who were subjects of the Dagomba kings. He waged war against the Dagomba, pushing them from the west to the east until a fierce battle ensued where both sides lost many soldiers. Ultimately, the Dagomba were defeated, and their king, Na Dariziogo, was killed. Several cities, including Gbirimani, were subjugated, and Nadowura Jakpa appointed his daughter to govern the Daboya region, also known as Burugu, as Burugu-Wurche, meaning queen of Burugu, leaving a small military guard under her command³⁰.

The Daboya region (or Burugu) held significant strategic importance for both the Ngbanis (Gonja) and the Dagombas. It served as the gateway to the western corridor of the Tamplumas lands³¹, known for their military prowess. This importance led the Dagombas to continue frequent military harassment in the Daboya region and neighboring villages. Consequently, Nadowura Jakpa displaced Wasipewura, the king of Tamplumas, from the Wasipe region within the Daboya area to secure control over salt production sources. During this time, Jakpa invaded the Banda people after significant resistance and then advanced into the Bamboi region, which surrendered without resistance and offered him 30 barrels of gunpowder.

Jakpa attempted to fight the Ashanti, but his army was exhausted due to fatigue from his numerous wars throughout Gonja. He did not consider fighting the Ashanti, and during a battle between them near the White Volta, he suffered a severe injury. Before dying, he ordered his body to be buried near his sister's grave, Makuma. Upon reaching Abramase, his illness worsened, and he died in the Trekpa region. Jakpa's followers

continued their journey to Gbuipe, where he was buried in central Gonja.

4. Political and Social Organization of the Gonja Kingdom:

4.1. Political Organization:

The political system in Gonja comprises three levels. At the top of the hierarchy is the leader, known as Yagbumwura, who resides in the capital as long as he is the leader of the province. His authority derives from state legislation and accompanying religious rituals. His wealth comes from the tribe, slave labor, and the levies and taxes imposed on commercial transactions.

The second level consists of the leaders of the twenty Emirates, representing the provinces and clans comprising the Gonja Kingdom. They are responsible for ensuring justice, harmony, and peace in the Emirates they govern, protecting the kingdom. They also appoint village chiefs, who represent the lowest level in the state's hierarchical structure. These officials are surrounded by advisers, religious and pagan leaders, Muslim religious scholars, and military commanders.

Overall, Gonja's political system is based on the dominance of the dynasty of the historical founder of the kingdom, Ndwura Jakpa. This dynasty governs the Gonja Emirates and is exclusively represented by the Gbania family, directly descended from the founder's lineage. Another lineage called Agnat, also descended from the founder Jakpa, holds positions as village chiefs. The Emirate leaders choose the king's successor from among five candidates upon his death³².

4.2. Political Authority of the Gonja King and His Privileges:

The Gonja king commands great respect in Gonja traditions. The leader had the right to request anyone to live in any village

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or city he governed. The leader's relatives and children were respected even if they were young children. The leader enjoyed exceptional privileges from the government, benefiting even from levies imposed by the government on lands and imposing tribute on settlers living on their lands. The people were unable to refuse these requests and made great efforts to gain the leader's favor.

There was a list of privileges that the leader enjoyed from the kingdom's inhabitants, including:

- 1.Assisting the king in serving his land when requested.
- 2.Participating in the harvest of the king's lands, assisting the leader in providing food for his guests during celebrations, as well as financially assisting him to purchase necessary gifts for his guests such as sheep or cattle.
- 3.Presenting to the king all large game caught on his lands, such as buffaloes and elephants³³.

4.3.Capital of Gonja:

There is a recently discovered Arabic document that narrates the history of Salaga, the capital of the Gonja Kingdom, as well as the invasions of King Sumaila Ndewura Jakpa Lanta, who is a descendant of the founding Jakpa. This document, written during the 19th century, was compiled from several oral narratives, providing vast information about the life of the Gonja people, including details about the capital Salaga. During Gonja's peak, Salaga was a strong and prosperous city situated at the crossroads of East-West and North-South trade routes. Its relations with the Hausa lands became strong, engaging in trade of goods such as kola nuts from forest areas, salt, leather, fabrics, weapons, and Islamic books. Salaga became a global capital, attracting nationals from Bornu, Yoruba, and Noup

(Noupi) in present-day Nigeria, as well as Mossi from Wagadugu, in addition to Akan from the current Ghanaian kingdoms.

5. Islamic Aspects in the Political System of Gonja:

In the Gonja Kingdom, the king must be a male descendant of the great conqueror of those lands, Sumaila Ndewura Jakpa. During the wars that Jakpa waged in those territories, he enlisted the help of some Muslim scholars. Therefore, Muslim scholars (Limami) became associated with the main classes of the governance system in the Gonja Kingdom. The scholars trace themselves back to the man who converted Jakpa, Sumaila Jokpa, also known as Fati Morukpi, also known as Muhammad Labayro, meaning Muhammad the White. During major Islamic-themed celebrations, both state leaders and Muslims had special roles assigned to them, and their participation in preparations was essential for the success of these celebrations. The ruling authority in Gonja believed that the prosperity of its people and kingdom depended primarily on these rituals performed by Muslims ³⁴.

In contrast to Muslims in the Dafina region of the Volta River, the Mandi in Gonja did not attempt to establish their authority by founding an Islamic state or declaring jihad to expand their borders. This approach seems to be prevalent in the spread of Islam in the Central Volta region, which includes territories like Wa, Mamprussi, and Dagomba³⁵.

Muslims in the Central Volta region in general, and Gonja in particular, integrated into the social and political system while maintaining their identity within these communities. Although they strived to adhere to Islamic rules in their personal conduct as much as possible, they were able to present Islam and advocate for it moderately and non-radically to tribal and state

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leaders. In this way, they built smooth communication with leaders, gaining their sympathy towards Islam and paving the way for its adoption, thereby increasing their influence among these populations³⁶.

The Muslim community in Gonja was known as Karamo and represented a second state within the state, comprising many inhabitants of Mandi origins. The most important group of Muslims were the Sakpar, the only Muslims entitled to hold the position of teacher (Mualim) within Gonja's hierarchy. This right was based on their lineage to the teacher Fati Morukpi, who aided Jakpa in his conquests at the inception of the kingdom. The third group was the Nyamase, non-Muslims, some of whom were the indigenous people who inhabited the region before the Mandi invasion, while others came afterward.

In the town of Bole, which is under the rule of the Aunga Kingdom, Muslims are considered either Sakpar or Dabo, both of whom are Mande. They are both exempt from taxes due to their illustrious history of assisting the leader Jakpa. There are other groups of Muslims residing in Mbontisuwa, known as the Muslims of the Akan region, who descend from a Mandi lineage, as well as Muslim merchant families from Mandi or Hausa who settled in Bole after its conquest. They were considered outsiders and therefore paid levies to Gonja leaders, while Sakpar representatives exclusively represented all Muslim communities and served as advisors to the leaders of Bole. The Nso-Owura, meaning Muslim leaders, represented all Muslims in the royal palace and served as leaders of the Islamic mission in Bole³⁷.

6.Social System in Gonja:

6.1.The class division of Gongja society:

Social stratification characterizes Gonja society, where at the

bottom of the social ladder are slaves and foreigners who came to Gonja due to trade or wars. In the middle, there are farmers, usually composed of subjugated peoples. The noble class consists of descendants of the leader who opened those lands, residing in their own communities, participating in trade, and exerting authority over both local and central power. They also lead the Islamic community in the kingdom. However, this stratification did not prevent the formation of alliances³⁸.

This social division is reflected in the system of land ownership, where properties are distributed into three main categories: royal properties, Muslim properties, and commoner properties, which include properties of additional groups like slaves and foreigners. Over time, the three primary classes did not differ much from others because all village men are considered primarily farmers regardless of their original occupation. However, before the year 1900, the differences were significant. Leaders and village chiefs were more involved in governance and education, while Muslims were more engaged in trade. Meanwhile, commoners, along with warriors known as Mbong and sorcerers, primarily served the land³⁹.

The commoners, also known as villagers, are the locals who inhabited the land before the establishment of the Gonja Kingdom, as they claim. They speak local languages and dialects, worship local idols and shrines, practice local customs, and usually marry within their own social strata. Social status for them is linked to tribal ties⁴⁰.

Between 1550 and 1575, Askiya Dawud Sultan Sanga attempted to establish a gold reservoir from the south while the Akan began selling gold to the Portuguese and Europeans along the Atlantic coast. Askiya Dawud attempted to distribute his forces of Mandinka horsemen by sending them south to the

Volta River and present-day Ghana from the city of Jenné. These Muslim Mandinka horsemen would later become the ancestors of dominant Muslim communities in Gonja.

6.2. The Imams Class in Gonja:

The southern branch of the Diakhanté dynasty⁴¹ migrated from their tribes in Dia and Jenné, in the upper reaches of the Bani River – a tributary of the Niger River – and established lineages and clans in various trading centers along most of the southern trade routes adjacent to the Sassandra-Bandama-Comoé river basins and the Volta River, at the northern borders of the Akan. Some of the Imams of these lineages settled alongside the Gonja in the Volta River basin. According to the social system prevalent in the desert and coastal regions, the union of the warrior class (Imams) and the warrior class controls and dominates the other classes of artisans, farmers, slaves, and freed slaves. There was a union between a noble lineage of warriors called Tun tigi and the class of Imams called Mori, and they came to rule the rest of the local people. However, sometimes local leaders retained their status by embracing Islam⁴².

Gonja continued to owe its victories against the conquered peoples to the Imams class. The leaders of Gonja attributed their status and strength to the Muslim Imams, considering them the reason for their power. The Muslim Imams introduced many Islamic customs into Gonja society, including celebrating the Prophet's birthday known as Damba, which became a national holiday for the kingdom⁴³.

However, Muslim Imams did not intervene in conflicts between tribes or in repelling external threats because their mission was peaceful, not military. Their connection was always with the Gonja monarchy, accompanying them, but they

had no political ambitions and were not classified within the royal lineage competing for power. They contented themselves with the role of advisors and reformers working to calm situations, acting as judges to assist in resolving social disputes between factions and establishing order in mosques. Muslim Imams in Gonja also participated in organizing the process of selecting and installing a new ruler for Gonja⁴⁴.

Conclusion:

From this study, we deduce that the Manding traders, known as Diola, played a quiet and smooth role in spreading Islam in the Volta River region and Ghana. Their influence in the region gradually took on a character that extended over many generations that settled in those distant lands near pagan communities. Their ethics and trustworthiness were a sensitive factor in their closeness to the leaders of those tribes who found in their Islamic religion an assisting factor in their superiority over their enemies from the pagan tribes. The Muslim merchant Fati Morokbi was a model for these Dioula who were able to make Islam a means to establish an Islamic kingdom in the African jungles. They also succeeded in instilling Islamic principles and appearances in the Kingdom of Gonja, whose people were previously pagan.

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- 1 About diola traders see more in my studie under the title «لديولا نور الدين» شعباني نور الدين، في دورهم في نشر الإسلام في منطقة الغابات الإفريقية"، مجلة الحكمة للدراسات التاريخية، المجلد الثاني، عدد3، جانفي 2014م، ص ص 8-28 .«

2 **Bono:** It is one of the countries founded by the Akan people in West Africa between the 15th and 18th centuries AD. It was found between the forest region

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of Guinea and the savannah region of western Sudan in the region that is now known as Brong-Ahafo in the current Republic of Ghana.

3 Banda: It is a city located in the northwest of the Bono region, Ghana. Thanks to its geography, it provided refuge to many groups seeking refuge from all over West Africa during the era of the slave trade. The original name of the settlement (Serminakuu) meant clusters of "weeds". This name was changed to Banda, a corruption of the word "Wanda" meaning "they did not sleep"

4 The wider influence of the sudanic Kingdoms, in :

<https://www.britannica.com/place/western-Africa/The-wider-influence-of-the-Sudanic-kingdom>

consulted on : 28-11-2020

5 [Alhassan Ahmed](#), **Ndewura Jakpa** "Stabbed-In-The-Back", in : <https://www.modernghana.com/news/909741/ndewura-jakpa-stabbed-in-the-back.html>, publié le : 17.01.2019 , consulté le : 29.11.2020.

6 The Baoli are a people inhabiting Côte d'Ivoire. Most of them live in the center of the country near the city of Bouaké and Yamoussoukro. The Baoli were part of the Akan people, originally from Ghana (formerly the Gold Coast), who settled in Côte d'Ivoire in the 18th century AD.

7 The Volta River, located in West Africa, includes three tributaries: the White Volta, the Black Volta, and the Red Volta.

8 [Esther N. Goody](#), Contexts of Kinship an Essay in the Family Sociology of the Gonja of Northern Ghana, Cambridge University Press, 2005,p7

9 Ibidem.

10 [J A Braimah](#); [H H Tomlinson](#) and [Osafroadu Amankwatia](#), History and traditions of the Gonja, Calgary : University of Calgary Press, ©1997.in : <https://molenationalpark.org/the-gonjas.php>

11 It will become later the capital of Konja

12 [Elias Yussif](#) , The facet of black culture, Trafford Publishing, Canada, 2013, P6

13 MAHAMA HARUNA, WERE GONJAS REALLY DEFEATED BY DAGOMBAS IN : [HTTPS://SAVANNAHNEWSONLINE.COM/2017/12/26/WERE-GONJAS-REALY-DEFEATED-BY-DAGOMBA/](https://savannahnewsonline.com/2017/12/26/were-gonjas-really-defeated-by-dagomba/) CONSULTED ON 26 /12/ 2017.

14 These novels talk about Lata as the name of one of the kings of Gunja, but we think that it is just a title and that it is like a leader, or a king, because after him we will see other kings whose name begins with the title Lata.

15 Mahaa Huruna, Op.Cit.

16 Talouna fondation, History of the Gonja people of Ghana, in : <https://sulemanafusheini18.wixsite.com/tolanafoundation>

17 JACK GOODY, THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORIES OF THE GOLD COAST, WEST OF THE WHITE VOLTA, COLONIAL OFFICE, GREAT BRITAIN, 1954, p54.

18 J A Braimah , H H Tomlinson and Osafoadu Amankwatia, History and traditions of the Gonja, Calgary : University of Calgary Press, ©1997.in : <https://molenationalpark.org/the-gonjas.php>

19 Ibid.

20 Jean-Louis Boutillier, Bouna, royaume de la savane ivoirienne, Karthala Editions, Paris, 1993, PP76-77

21 John Dramani Mahama, My First Coup D'etat, (Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa), Bloom sbury, editions, London, 2012, p89.

22 J. A. Braimah, H. H. Tomlinson, Osafoadu Amankwatia, Op.Cit, P35.

23 Ibid.

24 Goody Jack. The Impact of Islamic Writing on the Oral Cultures of West Africa.. In: *Cahiers d'études africaines*, vol. 11, n°43, 1971. p. P464

25 J. A. Braimah, H. H. Tomlinson, Osafoadu Amankwatia, Op.Cit, P35.

26 A. K. Awedoba, An Ethnographic Study of Northern Ghanaian Conflicts, Sub-saharan Publishers, Accra Ghana, 2009, P138

27 J. A. Braimah, H. H. Tomlinson, Osafoadu Amankwatia, Op.Cit

28 J. A. Braimah, H. H. Tomlinson, Osafoadu Amankwatia, Op.Cit

29 Ibid.

30 J. A. Braimah, H. H. Tomlinson, Osafoadu Amankwatia, Op.Cit

31 Tampulmas: They are a tribe and they speak their traditional Tambulum dialect, which belongs to the Gour language group. The Tampulmas are considered an ethnic group living north of Konga, and they are also among the minorities living in Kongas. Oral narratives say that the Tampulmas and the other three tribes were once One ethnic group. She comes from the same parents who fought over sharing a dog's head, which led to its division.

32 Tardits Claude. Conférence de M. Claude Tardits, Op.Cit

33 A. K. Awedoba, Op.Cit, P152.

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34. Jack Goody, Succession to High Office, Cambridge university press, London, 1966, p143.

35 René A. Bravmann, Islam and Tribal Art in West Africa, cambridge university pressn, London, 1980, p7.

36 René A. Bravmann, Op.Cit, p54.

37 Ibid.

38 Tardits Claude. Conférence de M. Claude Tardits, Op.Cit

39 Ibid.

40 Goody Jack. The Impact of Islamic Writing on the Oral Cultures of West Africa.. In: *Cahiers d'études africaines*, vol. 11, n°43, 1971. p. P462

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41 The Diakhenti: They are an ethnic group that settled in Senegal, Guinea, and Mali. They belong to the Manding or Mendinka group. The Diakhenti are distinguished by their extensive knowledge of Islamic sciences, and their dedication to the Islamic call, and this is what made them gain the respect of all African ethnicities.

42 Andreas Walter Massing, « Imams of Gonja », *Cahiers d'études africaines* [Online], 205 | 2012, Online since 03 April 2014, connection on 01 May 2019. URL :

<http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafriaines/16965> ;

DOI : 10.4000/etudesafriaines.16965

43 Levtzion Nehemia, Godneff Nina. **Commerce et islam** Op.cit

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