

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of  
Doctorate of Philosophy

## Tûbâ: an African eschatology in Islam

by Eric Ross

Institute of Islamic Studies  
McGill University, Montréal  
March 1996



National Library  
of Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et  
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa (Ontario)  
K1A 0N4

*Your file    Votre référence*

*Our file    Notre référence*

**The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.**

**L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.**

**The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.**

**L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.**

ISBN 0-612-19769-7

**Canada**

## Table of Contents

List of illustrations	v
Abstract	vi
Résumé	vii
Acknowledgments	viii
 Introduction	 1
 Chapter 1. Africa in Islam	 6
Hegel	7
Cheikh Anta Diop	10
An afrocentric narrative of Islamic history	15
1) Noah to Abraham	16
2) Abraham to Muhammad	20
3) Mecca at the time of the Revelation	25
4) Classical period	30
5) Medieval period	32
6) Modern period	35
 Chapter 2. Touba in Senegal	 39
Geography and religious studies	40
Touba as tradition	46
Sources	46
Khadimou Rassouli	50
The mbébé tree	55
The Guy Texe	58
Aïnou Rahmati	59
The pact of exile	61
Le pays mouride	63
Touba as configuration	70
The mandala	70
The mosque	75
mausoleum	75
Lamp Fall	76
The cemetery	79
The prayer-ground	81
maqṣūra	81
qibla façade	82
The straight path	84
Necropolis ?	89
Tree as archetype	94

<b>Chapter 3. Islamic tradition:</b>	
<b>Tûbâ and the sidrat al-muntahâ</b>	<b>99</b>
Tûba	99
Tûbâ and tayyiba in the Qur'ân	100
Quranic trees of Paradise	101
The parable of the two trees	106
Tihtum	108
Tubâ in hadith	109
Clothing of the Blessed	114
Thaub and tauba	116
Rivers of Paradise	117
Islamic gardens	118
Kawthar	119
Tâba, tayba, tib, tîba	121
Tuwâ	122
Umayyad mosques	123
Sidrat al-muntahâ	125
Tûbâ and the sidrat al-muntahâ in the mi'râj	130
Ladder	133
Jacob's ladder	133
Jonah's gourd-tree	135
Khidr of the two oceans	137
The tree of ma'rifa	138
The tree and the tablet	139
Tree of light	149
Shajarat al-kawn	153
 <b>Chapter 4. West African tradition:</b>	
<b>the guy mbind and the pënc</b>	<b>161</b>
Cosmic tree	167
Sacred tree	168
kapok tree	170
fig tree	170
cola tree	173
baobab	174
Tree worship ?	183
Community and cosmos	187
Foundation tree	190
Constitution tree	193
Urban monuments	194
The pënc	196
Tree and mosque	200
The minaret	202
The African Islamic city	210



Chapter 5. Egyptian tradition:	
the sycamore of Hathor and the ished of lunu	215
Eschatological symbols compared	219
Tree of life	229
Sycamore of Hathor	230
Ished of lunu	234
Ished and the sidrat al-muntahà	245
The parable of the two trees	246
Trees of light	247
Gnostic trees of light	249
Sacred topography	251
Tree and cemetery	252
Abedju	253
ladder	254
tet	257
Sethi's shetyt	259
Tree and sanctuary	266
Tree and garden	270
Incense trees of Punt	274
Ethiopian trees of judgment	278
Waset	282
Sycamore of the Virgin	286
An African etymology for Tûbâ ?	291
Conclusion: the power of a name	297
Continuity of an African archetype in Islam	297
A modern Islamic synthesis	302
Tûbâ is a name	303
Touba is a toponym	307
Appendix: Taxonomy of trees mentioned in thesis	309
Bibliography	317

## List of Illustrations

fig. 2.1	Touba in Senegal	51
fig. 2.2	The <i>Pays mouride</i>	67
fig. 2.3	Touba-Mbacké: The Mouride Conurbation	68
fig. 2.4	Touba's Central Wards	72
fig. 2.5	Axonometric View of Touba	73
fig. 2.6	Lamp Fall	77
fig. 2.7	Qibla Wall of Touba Mosque	83
fig. 3.1	Delightful Trees and Pavilions of Paradise	124
fig. 3.2	Inverted Tree of Paradise	152
fig. 4.1	Touba and the <i>Diakhanké</i> Tradition	163
fig. 4.2	Touba and Taïba as Toponyms in Senegambia	164
fig. 4.3	Baobab as National Symbol	178
fig. 4.4	Tree and Minaret	201
fig. 4.5	West African Pyramid Minarets	205
fig. 4.6	Pyramid as Archetype	206
fig. 4.7	West African Palace Façades	207
fig. 4.8	Qibla Wall of Djenné Mosque	209
fig. 5.1	Nile Valley and Adjacent Lands	217
fig. 5.2	Throne and Balance	221
fig. 5.3	Sycamore of Hathor	232
fig. 5.4	Ished of Iunu	236
fig. 5.5	Writing on the Ished	238
fig. 5.6	Tree and Cemetery	252
fig. 5.7	Tet Pillar	258
fig. 5.8	Shetyt Crypt	260
fig. 5.9	Tree and Sanctuary	268
fig. 5.10	Paradise Garden	271
fig. 5.11	Pool of Osiris in Tuat	272
fig. 5.12	Hatshepsut's Expedition to Punt	277
fig. 5.13	Thoth as Baboon	277
fig. 6.1	Continuity of the Tree Archetype within African Religious Tradition	299

## ABSTRACT

The thesis "Ṭubā: an African eschatology in Islam" adopts afrocentric hypotheses for the study of Islam. First, the thesis demonstrates how certain phenomena specific to Islam in Africa, those usually qualified as products of religious syncretism, are on the contrary indicative of the ongoing process of synthesis and enrichment within Islam, and, secondly, that African spiritual tradition continues today as in the past to participate along with others in this constructive process. In order to demonstrate this hypothesis the spiritual significance of the modern Islamic holy city of Touba in Senegal will be analyzed.

Touba is named for the Tree of Paradise (Ṭubā) of Islamic tradition and the holy city has been constructed around the singular arboreal image. The spiritual meaning imparted by Touba, a deliberate creation, is expressed in the topography of the holy city, in its geographic configuration. The thesis adapts the methodologies of spatial analysis, and specifically the semiotic reading of landscape, to the study of a religious phenomenon, i.e., the creation of a holy city.

In order to explain the significance of this holy city for Islamic eschatology, the meanings which three distinct religious traditions (Islam, West Africa, Ancient Egypt) have attached to the image of the cosmic tree are inventoried. The tree as archetype here serves to establish the continuity of African religious thought from pharaonic Egypt to modern Muslim Senegal.

## RÉSUMÉ

La thèse, intitulée "Tūbā: an African eschatology in Islam", applique les hypothèses diopistes à l'étude de l'islam. La thèse démontre d'une part que quelques uns des phénomènes spécifiques à l'islam en Afrique, ceux le plus souvent qualifiés de syncrétisme religieux, sont indicatifs au contraire du processus de synthèse par lequel l'islam continue à se développer et à s'enrichir, et, deuxièmement, comment la tradition religieuse africaine participe au même titre que celles des autres continents à ce processus. Afin de démontrer cette hypothèse, il s'agit d'expliquer la signification spirituelle du sanctuaire islamique moderne de Touba au Sénégal.

Touba est nommée pour l'arbre du paradis (Tūbā) tel qu'il est connu dans la tradition islamique. La ville sainte a été conçue à travers l'image de cet arbre cosmique. Touba étant une création géographique pensée et voulue, le sens spirituel qu'elle exprime est d'abord véhiculé par sa topographie même, par sa configuration spatiale. Les méthodologies de la géographie, c'est à dire l'analyse spatiale et plus spécifiquement la lecture sémiotique des paysages humains, sont adaptées ici à l'étude d'un phénomène religieux, en l'occurrence celle d'une ville sainte.

Afin de comprendre ce que cette ville représente pour l'eschatologie islamique, les significations que trois traditions religieuses distinctes (l'islam, l'Afrique de l'Ouest, et l'Égypte ancienne) ont attaché à l'image de l'arbre cosmique seront inventoriés. L'arbre en tant qu'archétype sert ainsi de fil conducteur pour retracer la continuité de la pensée religieuse africaine depuis l'Égypte pharaonique jusqu'au Sénégal musulman actuel.

Merci d'abord à Serigne Saliou Mbacké,  
Khalîfa-général des Mourides, pour l'accueil et  
les facilités accordés lors de mon séjour  
à Touba.

Je remercie également El-Hadj Serigne Ibrahima More  
Mbacké à Touba-Mosqué, Serigne Mukhtar Diakhaté et  
Serigne Saliou Diakhaté à Darou-Miname ainsi que leur frère  
Fallou Diakhaté de L'I.F.A.N.C.A.D. (Dakar), Cheikh Oumy  
Mbacké Diallo et sa mère Sokhna Amy Mbacké Sagatta à  
Gouye-Mbinde, Sokna Bintou Mbacké Massamba à Parcelles-  
Assainies (Dakar), et spécialement Madame Absa Ba de la  
Pharmacie Serigne Saliou Mbacké à Ndamatou.

Merci aussi à Monsieur Alioune Ndaw, directeur de la Bibliothèque de  
Touba, et à Serigne Matar Sylla, président de l'Association culturelle  
et religieuse islamique mouride à Touba-Mosqué. Thanks also to Mr.

Gary Engleberg of African Consultants International, Dakar.

Je veut remercier mon cousin Patrick Berger à Toulouse pour avoir lu  
le premier, et en anglais, les cinq chapitres de ma thèse. Je remercie  
aussi Mamadou Lamine Sylla. I wish to thank my fellows at the  
Institute of Islamic Studies: Virginie Lamotte, Ania Kazi, Sandy Bain,  
Abdelaziz Ezzelarab, Bruce Fudge and Richard McGregor. Each has  
contributed to research in specific ways. Thanks also to the  
librarians: Salwa Ferahian, Beverly, Steven  
and especially Wayne.

I am ingratiated towards the Black Students Network of McGill  
and the Groupe de recherche et d'initiative pour la libération de  
l'Afrique (GRILA) for having brought renowned scholars  
to Montréal for lectures and conferences.

I want to thank my thesis supervisors: Professor Khadim Mbacké of  
the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar,  
and Professor A. Üner Turgay, Institute of Islamic Studies,  
McGill University.

I am grateful for the financial support of  
the Department of National Defense and of  
the J. W. McConnell Foundation.

## INTRODUCTION

Touba in Senegal is a modern Islamic holy city. These four qualifiers — modern, Islamic, holy and city — describe the phenomenon that is Touba.

Touba is modern because the sanctuary's foundation and construction correspond to the period of colonial rule in Senegal, while its growth as an urban center has occurred since Senegal's accession to independence.

Touba is Islamic because the city's founder, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké (d. 1927), created it in order that it fulfill a specifically Islamic function, that of establishing the Straight Path which leads to favorable Judgment and on to Eternal Recompense in Paradise. This function is administered by the "Mouride brotherhood" that he founded and for which the city serves as metropolis.

Touba is holy because it marks a point of transcendence, a sacred point where our sensible world connects with ultimate Reality, a place where we are informed by the Divine. It is in Touba that Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba lies buried. The city is a place of pilgrimage. People go there to be buried. It is a locus of spiritual desire.

Touba is a city because it concentrates spiritual, social, economic and political functions affecting people in places far beyond it. Indeed, with over 300 000 inhabitants it is now Senegal's second city — after Dakar.

As a modern Islamic holy city, Touba raises a number of questions. Holy cities are sufficiently rare that when one emerges *ex nihilo* under the glare of modern recorded history it affords the opportunity of illuminating similar events lost in darker ages. As a place expressly built to house an Islamic way of life, Touba can serve as case study for the perennial question of what constitutes an Islamic city. As a holy city, Touba can also serve as point of departure for an inquiry into the relationship between the sacred and its locus, between religion and geography. This thesis is original in that it attempts to define "spiritual geography" as a field of study. The pertinence of defining such a field will be

addressed, and the appropriate literature reviewed, in the second chapter of the thesis.

For the purposes of this thesis however, Touba is of interest mainly because this modern Islamic holy city has emerged in Africa. Touba here serves as point of departure for an inquiry into the question of Africa's contribution to Islam. Recent developments in African studies, developments which have been defined as "afrocentric" by the North American academic milieu and as *diopiste* by the Francophone one, will be adapted to the study of Islam. The originality of the thesis lies in its utilization of the afrocentric hypothesis, i.e., premises pertaining to the continuity and the specificity of the African contribution to civilization, for the analysis of an Islamic phenomenon.

**Chapter 1**, "Africa in Islam", will offer a review of the afrocentric literature as it has developed over four decades. It will present the three essential afrocentric premises: **a)** Ancient Egypt was a fundamentally Black African civilization, **b)** Ancient Egypt exerted great influence on subsequent Asian and European civilizations, **c)** Ancient Egypt and modern Black Africa share a common cultural matrix. These premises were first articulated by Cheikh Anta Diop<sup>1</sup> and have since been further developed by African and African-American scholars. It will be argued that the afrocentric perspective offers new avenues for the study of Islam as a universal religion. The emergence of a modern Islamic holy city in Senegal will serve to illustrate the new reading of Islam which the afrocentric perspective allows.

In **Chapter 2**, "Touba in Senegal", the holy city will be described in order to expose the eschatological and cosmological meanings it conveys. Tûbâ is the name of the "Tree of Paradise" in Islamic tradition. It is an immanently eschatological and cosmological symbol. This tree incarnates notions of the Hereafter, of Divine Judgment, and of access to the promised Garden. These spiritual notions are topographically associated to actual trees in

---

<sup>1</sup> DIOP, Ch. A., Nations nègres et culture, 1954.

the holy city of Touba. The tree is thus the primary operative symbol around which Touba has been constructed.

The most important source for discerning the meaning which Touba imparts as a holy city is its spatial configuration, its overall topography and architecture. The geography of the city will therefore be analyzed. To this end it will first be demonstrated how spatial analysis can complement textual analysis and hermeneutics as a valid methodology for the study of religious phenomenon — hence the need to define "spiritual geography" as a field. The geographical methodologies employed here include a semiotic analysis of the urban landscape and the study of toponymy. The names of places are essential to their identities and significations. Consequently, this thesis may be categorized as the etymology of the toponym "Touba".

The meaning which the city is designed to express is also discernible in written sources. These include the *qaṣīdas* (odes) of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké, his hagiography, as well as the historiography of the city. Touba's "iconography" is also of relevance because these representations express certain specific ideas about the city's spiritual function. Certain segments of this chapter, those describing the topography of the sanctuary and including figures 2.4 and 2.5, have previously appeared in an article.<sup>2</sup>

In the three subsequent chapters of the thesis, the specific cosmological and eschatological construct which Touba actualizes in modern Senegal will be explained by reference to the overarching religious traditions to which it is connected: Islam, West Africa, and Ancient Egypt. Some of the scripture, literature, ritual, art, architecture and landscape of these traditions will be canvassed in order to trace the various elements of the "Tree of Paradise" construct prior to their so recent assembly in Touba. The objective of these three chapters is to explain Touba. What does Touba express

---

<sup>2</sup> ROSS, "Touba: a spiritual metropolis in the modern world", 1995. The article relates the foundation and construction of the holy city within the social and economic context of colonial and post-colonial Senegal. The article is itself partially based on a Master's thesis in Geography (UQAM, 1989), entitled "Cités sacrées du Sénégal: essai de géographie spirituelle".



as a holy city and as a toponym; what message do its name and configuration convey? Secondly, what new significance does the modern African holy city of Touba add to the universal Islamic Ṭubā construct.

In **Chapter 3**, "Islamic Tradition", the use of the image of the tree, and especially of the tree called Ṭubā, in Islamic tradition will be surveyed. First of all references to a plurality of celestial/cosmic/eschatological trees in the Qur'ān and ḥadīth will be gathered and categorized according to the notions they convey. Furthermore, Ṭubā as it is described in the mi'rāj narrative and certain theosophical works will be discussed. It will be demonstrated that Ṭubā is a "construct" which has subsumed a number of other arboreal identities and that this name has come to designate the universal "Tree" archetype.

**Chapter 4**, "West African Tradition", will explore the significance of the image of the tree to Senegambian and Sudanic civilizations both before and after the advent of Islam. These traditions will be approached on the one hand through historical chronicles, to the extent that this corpus of oral history has been written down and translated. Other historical sources are literary (in Arabic) dating from the medieval and early modern periods. The large corpus of English and French monographs and studies of African religions, and especially the more recent contributions of African scholars, will also be used. The spatial configuration of African cities as well as religious art and architecture constitute additional sources of data. The reading of this West African tree tradition will be extended so as to connect with other related cultural areas: the Nile valley, the Maghreb, India and even farther afield with the African diaspora of the Americas. Sources will be reviewed in order to extract from them (through analysis of semiotics and semantics) the eschatological and cosmological significance attached to the image of the tree and to determine the relevance of the symbol for urban geography. It will be demonstrated that the tree symbol was important to the spiritual and spatial configuration of West African communities before the introduction of the Islamic Ṭubā construct and that this construct has subsumed

the pre-existing local signification attached to the image of the tree.

**Chapter 5, "Egyptian Tradition",** will determine the cosmological and eschatological significance of the celestial tree in Ancient Egyptian scripture (Pyramid texts, Coffin texts, Book of the Dead). Analysis will consist of a systematic comparison of Egyptian notions of the Hereafter, divine Judgment and access to Heaven in their association with the image of the tree to equivalent notions in the Islamic celestial tree construct — especially its modern manifestation in Touba. Egyptian art and architecture, which is closely linked with its scripture, will also be canvassed for representational and iconographic uses of the tree. The use of the tree in the sacred topography of ancient Egypt will also be analyzed. Finally, some other African sources, qualified here as "post-pharaonic/pre-Islamic": Hermetic and Gnostic texts, Coptic and Ethiopian Christian scriptures, will be similarly reviewed. It will first be demonstrated that essential meanings of the Islamic Ṭubā construct were already conveyed by the image of the tree in Ancient Egypt and, moreover, that some of these ancient meanings are directly discernible in the modern Senegalese city of Touba.

The thesis, qualified above as the etymology of a toponym, can also be qualified as the archeology of the Tree archetype — the Arabic term Ṭubā designating both entities. Beginning with the modern city of Touba, which has been built within living memory, the investigation will uncover successive layers of occupation of the tree-image: the Islamic, the West African and the ancient Egyptian traditions. It is hoped in this way, through the archeology of this image and the geography of its modern actualization, to explain how Islam can be understood within the continuity of religious thought on the African continent and also how Africa has participated along with others in the construction of Islam.

## Chapter 1

### AFRICA IN ISLAM

It has long been a consensus among scholars in the field of Islamic studies that Islam is the religion of great synthesis. The genius of Islam as a universal religion is that it can welcome new beliefs by reformulating them so as to harmonize them with its own overarching system, i.e., expressing them in conformity with a recognizably Islamic vocabulary. Muslims hold Islam to be the first and truest faith; the faith given by God to all of humanity assembled in the loins of Adam (Qur'ân, 7;172) and subsequently renewed by His messengers. The mission of the Prophet Muhammad was to complete the achievement of these previous revelations, to confirm what was true in them and to reject what had been corrupted (Qur'ân, 5;48). The pristine faith of the Madinan period wholly embraced the prophetic legacy of Judaism and Christianity without however confining itself to the older (corrupted) texts. Later, as theological and philosophical problems were being raised and resolved within Islam, the Persian and Greek intellectual traditions were introduced, helping in turn to fashion a host of Islamic sciences. Finally, the Buddhist environment of India and Transoxiana, and with it the whole Sanscritic tradition, are also believed to have participated in the evolution of Islam as a universal system of belief. Islam is certainly greater than these "parts", yet the parts it has received from older traditions have nonetheless been recognized by scholars as significant elements in its construction.

Africa however has not usually been considered as a contributing source — as an active ingredient — in the construction of Islam. In the field of Islamic studies, Africa has been seen in a passive role, as simply receiving Islam. Islam might be "in" Africa but there never seems to be any Africa "in" Islam. There are large French<sup>7</sup> and English<sup>8</sup> corpuses of research on the question of Islam in

---

<sup>7</sup> LE CHATELIER, L'Islam dans l'Afrique Occidentale, 1899; FROELICH, Les Musulmans d'Afrique noire, 1962; CUOQ, Les Musulmans en Afrique, 1975; MONTEIL, L'Islam noir, 1980; MOREAU, Africains Musulmans, 1982.

<sup>8</sup> TRIMINGHAM, Islam in West Africa, 1959; A History of Islam in West Africa, 1962; The Influence of Islam upon Africa, 1968; HISKETT, The Development of Islam in West

Africa, and specifically in West Africa. This established research has up until now been based on the assumption that the two entities, at least initially, were mutually exclusive; that there was a historic encounter between two quite distinct religious traditions. Moreover, while authors might admit the possibility of Semitic (or Judeo-Christian) influence on African religion prior to the arrival of Islam, the possibility that Black Africa might also have influenced Islam (that is to say Islam as a universal faith, not Islam as it is practiced locally), has not been considered.

### Hegel

This absence of Africa from the Islamic "equation" is mainly due to the fact that the continent, until recently, has been excluded from serious discussion of religion generally. According to the Hegelian global division of intellectual labor, religion and spirituality belong to Asia just as philosophy and science belong to Europe. Africa is permitted neither:

Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained — for all purposes of connection with the rest of the World — shut up; it is the Gold-land compressed within itself — the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night... In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence — as for example, God, or Law... This condition is capable of no development or culture, and as we see (Negroes) at this day, such have they always been... (Africa) is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movement in it — that is in its northern part — belongs to the Asiatic or European World.

— G. W. F. Hegel in The Philosophy of History <sup>9</sup>

Hegel's negative characterization of Africa and Africans cannot be attributed to ignorance. There were those in the Europe of Hegel's

---

Africa, 1984; The Course of Islam in Africa, 1994; LEVTZION, Islam in West Africa, 1994.

<sup>9</sup> HEGEL, The Philosophy of History, 1956, pp. 91-99.

day, the Comte de Volney<sup>10</sup> for instance, who well knew of Africa's former rank among civilizations. The African philosopher Anton Wilhelm Amo (native of present-day Ghana) was professing in German universities (Halle, Wittenberg and Jena) a century prior to Hegel's lectures on the state of African unconsciousness.<sup>11</sup> Rather than being due to ignorance, Hegel's denigration of Blacks was lucid and a necessary corollary of Africa's subordination to Europe's global division of economic labor. It is significant that Hegel, later in the lecture cited above, justifies the enslavement of Africans as a means of bringing them out of the a-historical night into the day of self-conscious history. It is essentially Europe's Atlantic slave trade which necessitated the de-historicization of Blacks.

Despite the extreme prejudice on which it was based, the Hegelian compartmentalization of humanity with its negative characterization of Blacks was nonetheless a powerful factor in the institutionalization of knowledge by Western European and North American universities throughout the XIX<sup>th</sup> and early XX<sup>th</sup> centuries. The common understanding was that before the intervention of Asians and Europeans, Africa had lived in an anthropological age. It was a-historical. Accordingly, scientific data extracted from the continent under colonial auspices was classified as anthropological and kept carefully away from departments of philosophy and religious studies. African beliefs were termed "fetishist", "idolatrous", "animist" or "shamanist". Moreover, African mental constructs were "primitive" and "pre-logical".<sup>12</sup> Such a mentality could obviously not contribute to the advancement of civilizations, let alone of Universal Civilization as it was conceived by Europeans.

Many generations of qualified academics have been educated into these institutionalized attitudes towards Africa. Such popular and widely read compilers of universal history as H. G. Wells and Arnold Toynbee (recently re-edited in French) systematically excluded Africa from History. In Toynbee's classification of the "twenty-one" civilizations of Humankind according to skin color,

---

<sup>10</sup> DE VOLNEY, Ruins or Meditations on the Revolutions of Empires , 1835.

<sup>11</sup> OBENGA, La Philosophie africaine de la période pharaonique , 1990. p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> LEVY-BRUHL, La mentalité primitive , 1931.

Blacks are deemed to have made "no contribution to civilization"<sup>13</sup> while the four different categories of Whites: Nordic, Alpine, Mediterranean and Polynesian (! the Japanese thus become honorary Whites) account for all but nine of them. Toynbee achieved these results by classifying ancient Egypt as "White-Alpine-Mediterranean" and then by simply ignoring all other civilization on the continent (Nubia, Abyssinia, Ghana-Mali-Gao, Zimbabwe).

It is in this context of an infantile, a-historical, pre-logical Africa that the study of Islam on the continent has been undertaken. Trimmingham, a recognized expert on Islam in Africa, states:

Islam came to Africa fully developed... We might depict a Negro Africa as offering virtually no response to the mystical Way, either intellectually or emotionally, adopting form without content and spirit.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, there is a persistent tendency in the authoritative literature to view Africa as lying outside normative Islam. Black Africans are "Islamized" rather than Muslims. They have adhered to the "multiplicity of (God's) mystical power" rather than to tawhīd itself. They have exploited whatever space there is in Islam for "divination and magic", for the "veneration of saints", and have not invested in the classical Islamic sciences. Africans seek "immediacy of human intercourse" with the Absolute rather than adherence to the "lofty and fatalistic conceptions of Muslim eschatology".<sup>15</sup> Moreover, while in Asia Islam might constitute a great "synthesis" of previous traditions, in Africa it becomes "syncretist". This accusation of syncretism is also leveled at the faith of African Jews and Christians and has categorized the faith of Africans in the Americas as well. It is as if only the faith of Asians and Europeans could ever be normative. This categorization of African faith clearly stems from Hegel's original notion of the African as "child", as beneath historical consciousness, as incapable of attaining "true" civilization, "God or Law", but only of imitating its baser

---

<sup>13</sup> TOYNBEE, A Study of History, 1934, vol. 1, p. 232.

<sup>14</sup> TRIMMINGHAM, The Sufi Orders in Islam, 1971, p. 219.

<sup>15</sup> LEWIS, I. M., Islam in Tropical Africa, 1966, pp. 58-67.

manifestations, "adopting form without spirit". Though rarely stated in such blatant terms as those of Toynbee or Trimingham, these views continue to color much contemporary Western academic production.

### Cheikh Anta Diop

Since decolonization however the ideological foundation of the Hegelian philosophy of history has been challenged. African scholars, on the continent and in the diaspora, have attacked the theoretical mystifications and ideological motives of the European and North American scientific communities. This challenge was spearheaded by a revolution in Egyptology. In Nations nègres et culture the Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop disputed and refuted the theory of a White Egypt.<sup>16</sup> By returning to ancient sources (Egyptian, Biblical, Greek) and confronting them with the results of modern data (linguistic, anthropological, literary) Diop demonstrated that Egyptian civilization had been fundamentally a Black African one. Moreover he demonstrated that the Ancients: the Greeks, the Jews and Egyptians themselves had always clearly identified Egypt as Black and that this view had prevailed in Europe until Hegel's day. It was mainly due to European colonialism and imperialism in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century that a "whiter" Egypt was fabricated by Western academics. A host of theories based on tendentious interpretations of facts were adopted which aimed at proving that the accomplishments of Ancient Egypt, in the sciences, the arts, state-craft, etc., were attributable to migrants and influences from Asia (deemed to be a whiter continent than Africa). These theories were later incorporated into connected disciplines and fields of study (Classical Studies, Biblical Studies, African Studies). Since the Cairo symposium on "The Peopling of Ancient Egypt" sponsored by UNESCO in 1974 the Black African character of Egyptian civilization has been generally accepted once again in the field of Egyptology.<sup>17</sup> Some long-standing problems in Egyptian history (notably in

---

<sup>16</sup> DIOP, Ch. A., Nations nègres et culture, 1954.

<sup>17</sup> DIOP, Ch. A., "Origin of the Ancient Egyptians", 1990, pp. 15-61.

linguistics and political philosophy) have in this way been resolved and even Diop's former opponents now work from the Diopian premise.<sup>18</sup>

Repercussions from this revolution in Egyptology have also been felt in the other branches of the humanities. African Studies especially can no longer be credibly pursued without reference to the ancient Nilotic origin of Black civilizations generally.<sup>19</sup> That modern African religious and philosophical traditions continue to bear the imprint of their Egyptian antecedents has been demonstrated by Diop and his students.<sup>20</sup>

A similar reappraisal is currently underway in Classical studies. Though its author was by no means the first to present the arguments,<sup>21</sup> Martin Bernal's Black Athena has irrevocably undermined the myth of the "Greek Miracle".<sup>22</sup> Bernal not only reveals the Black Egyptian roots of Greek civilization, of its religion, mythology, philosophy and science, but also the modern academic dishonesty (the prejudice in favor of an "all-Aryan" explanation) which had conspired to conceal them. Like Diop, Bernal explains that these falsifications were rendered necessary by the general climate of racism, anti-Semitism and White supremacy which prevailed in XIX<sup>th</sup> century Europe. It became ideologically inadmissible that Ancient Greece, the cradle of European identity, should owe even a parcel of its success to any Asian or African precedent. Thus, despite the fact that the Ancient Greeks themselves acknowledged their Egyptian teachers, modern Hellenophiles and Classicists maintained that the Greek sciences had been self-generated. The premise of an "all-Aryan" Greece, like that of a "White" Egypt, then

---

<sup>18</sup> VERCOUTTER, L'Égypte et la vallée du Nil, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> JACKSON, Introduction to African Civilisation, 1970; KI-ZERBO, Histoire de l'Afrique noire, 1978.

<sup>20</sup> DIOP, Ch. A., L'unité culturelle de l'Afrique noire, 1959; Antériorité des civilisations nègres, 1967; Civilisation ou barbarie, 1981; OBENGA, L'Afrique dans l'antiquité, 1973; La philosophie africaine de la période pharaonique, 1990; ANSELIN, Samba, 1992.

<sup>21</sup> See JAMES, Stolen Legacy 1954; and BEN-JOCHANNAN, Africa: Mother of Western Civilization, 1988.

<sup>22</sup> BERNAL, Black Athena 1987, vol. 1.



became canonical for connected disciplines: Biblical, Oriental and Islamic Studies.

The questioning of the scientific legitimacy of the Hegelian based constructs, which the Diopian critique demands, must now necessarily extend to those disciplines, including Islamic Studies, which have adopted them. Indeed, Islamic Studies seems ready for such revision. Orientalists have always worked from the premise that Islam assimilated ancient religious and cultural traditions. They have traced Islam's universal appeal to the wealth of previous traditions over which it achieved mastery: Judaism, Christianity, Persia, and Greece. Scholars such as Corbin for instance have successfully demonstrated the continuity of the Persian philosophical and spiritual tradition from Mazdean times to Shī'i ones.<sup>23</sup> No scholar has yet undertaken to discern any similar continuity of African thought in Islam. The reason for this may partly be due to the continent's linguistic discontinuity. Ancient African languages, unlike Iranian ones, did not survive their multiple subjugation; Egyptian (Demotic, Coptic), Nubian (Meroitic) and Punic were eventually replaced by Greek and Latin and later by Arabic. Yet beyond these methodological considerations, some of the same ideological choices which characterized Egyptology and Classical studies have also determined the direction of research in Islamic studies. Scholars have always been willing to consider the influence of Indo-European civilizations upon Islam. This is in keeping with the general atmosphere of Aryanism and anti-Semitism which used to permeate European academic circles, especially in the more conservative disciplines (such as Classical and Religious Studies, Orientalism).<sup>24</sup> Eurocentric perspective has focused on the Mediterranean and the Fertile Crescent where History can more or less be subject to the Indo-European genius. The manifest success of a Semitic universal religion and world civilization thus becomes problematic. Arabia at the time of the Prophet has been viewed as

---

<sup>23</sup> CORBIN, Terre celeste et corps de résurrection, 1960; Histoire de la philosophie islamique, 1986.

<sup>24</sup> These disciplines are qualified here as conservative because they are heavily reliant on ancient texts and/or dead languages.

beyond the historical *ecumene*. Accordingly, the birth of Islam in Arabia becomes a historical aberration whose success needs to be explained. No effort has been spared to attribute this success to Persian and Hellenistic<sup>25</sup> (and thus Indo-European) influences to the exclusion of any other. Hodgson for example explains Islamic civilization entirely by reference to the "Irano-Semitic" tradition of the "Nile-Oxus" zone.<sup>26</sup> This choice of nomenclature, which is an avatar of Spengler's "Magian zone",<sup>27</sup> is a significant example of the eurocentric bias in Islamic Studies. Historically, the Nile has been neither Iranian nor Semitic but wholly African. Yet Hodgson subsumes it into a semi-Aryan Asian geographical construct.

There are grounds for questioning the continued validity of the eurocentric perspective in Islamic Studies. Both Diop and Bernal have rendered an epistemological service to the humanities in general. They have exposed the pattern of ideologically motivated falsification and distortion of facts which were necessary in order to create and sustain an academic Aryanism which effectively denied Blacks not only *their* history but any participation in *our* history, in universal History. In order to include Islam within universal history — where it obviously belongs — research has over-emphasized its Indo-European affinities (both real and imagined) while excluding its African ones absolutely. The new afrocentric premises concerning Africa's place in history can help to correct this unbalanced view. If we are to abandon the eurocentric viewpoint we must be prepared to reexamine the theoretical constructs it has helped build. So long as Judaism, Christianity and Greece were considered in isolation from Egypt, and so long as Ancient Egypt was detached from the history of Black Africa, no significant African contribution to Islam seemed likely. Given the growing body of afrocentric research constituted in the past decade, the question of Africa's contribution to Islam can now be appraised.

---

<sup>25</sup> ROSENTHAL, The Classical Heritage in Islam , 1975.

<sup>26</sup> HODGSON, The Venture of Islam, 1974, vol. 1, pp. 103-145.

<sup>27</sup> SPENGLER, The Decline of the West 1939; see also DJAIT, L'Europe et l'Islam , 1978, p. 93.

Many African and African-American scholars, mostly working outside of White academic circles, have raised the question of Africa's involvement in Islam. The problem has initially been approached by surveying the contributions of individual African Muslims. In African Origin of the Major "Western Religions", Ben-Jochannan claims a fundamental role for Bilâl b. Rabâh in the establishment of the new faith.<sup>28</sup> He cites however as the only source for this claim a five page article on Bilâl by Rogers,<sup>29</sup> which itself is compiled from three late XIX<sup>th</sup> century works.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, though elsewhere in his work Ben-Jochannan shows exhaustive understanding of Ancient Egyptian, Jewish and Christian scriptures, his book betrays a total lack of knowledge of the Qur'ân or of authoritative Islamic sources. An article by Chinyelu likewise does not analyze Islam as a religion.<sup>31</sup> Neither does Chinyelu make use of primary Islamic sources. Rogers' article on Bilâl is again given prominence. Rogers, it should be noted, does not argue the question of Africa in Islam at all but confines himself to presenting Bilâl as a historic figure, as a "great man of color".

Another approach to the question of Africa's influence on Islam has been to argue that the specific history of Islam in Africa has significance for the universal faith. Here again Chinyelu's article is revealing of the shortcomings of such an approach. While lauding the achievements and ingenuity of Moorish civilization (and its significance for Europe), the author fails to explain in what way this is important for Islam, unless we are meant to consider that the adoption and spread of Islam by Africans is in itself a significant contribution.

A more promising approach to the question of Africa in Islam has been developed by Haddad, Mufuta & Mutunda.<sup>32</sup> By analyzing the efflorescence of Arab humanism (in poetry, prose and music) these

---

<sup>28</sup> BEN JOCHANNAN, African Origins of the Major "Western Religions", 1991.

<sup>29</sup> ROGERS, World's Great Men of Color, 1946, vol. 1, pp. 143-147.

<sup>30</sup> MUIR, W., Life of Mohamet, 1894; KOELLE, W., Muhammad, 1889; ALI, Syed Ameer, Life and Teaching of Mohammed 1891.

<sup>31</sup> CHINYELU, "Africans in the Birth and Expansion of Islam", 1992, pp. 360-381.

<sup>32</sup> HADDAD, MUFUTA & MUTUNDA, De la culture négro-arabe, 1989.

authors document a recurring African resonance within early Islamic civilization. Though the object of their investigation is in fact culture, there is nothing in their approach which would preclude its application to the religious sphere as well. Beyond singular individuals and their specific contributions, what needs to be established are the recurrent patterns, that is to say the means and methods by which Islam has absorbed African elements. This approach characterized an all too brief article by Samb<sup>33</sup> and it is unfortunate that this Senegalese scholar was unable to pursue this research due to his untimely death. More recently, Al-Assiouty has presented a study wherein he compares the symbols and rituals of specific Christian and Islamic festivals and points of creed with those of the Osirian mysteries of Ancient Egypt.<sup>34</sup> This author however argues in favor of direct contacts between the ancient Egyptian religion and Palestine and Arabia as the sole means of explaining the continuity.

#### An Afrocentric Narrative of Islamic History

The existing literature presents evidence of a variety of avenues of transmission whereby African concepts and practices could find themselves in Islam. These avenues are categorized below according to six historical contexts which can qualify as an emerging afrocentric narrative of Islamic history. The purpose of this narrative is not to substitute an "all-African" bias in lieu of the Aryan one. Rather it is intended as a convenient manner of presenting, for those not already familiar with them, the main afrocentric arguments and the avenues of inquiry currently being pursued. The narrative here presented does not serve an analytical purpose but simply a didactic one — that of applying the Diopian premises to the study of Islam. Once the hypothesis of an identifiably African contribution to Islam has been presented, the specific question of the African contribution to Islamic eschatology, as manifested in Touba, can be addressed.

---

<sup>33</sup> SAMB, "Contribution de l'Afrique aux religions abrahamiques", 1974, pp. 42-48.

<sup>34</sup> AL-ASSIOUTY, Origines égyptiennes du christianisme et de l'islâm, 1989.

1) Noah to Abraham — Africa is the oldest continuously inhabited part of the earth and the Arabian Peninsula is its closest neighbor. The initial peopling of the Arabian subcontinent, and the emergence of Semitic peoples which is believed to have occurred there, can therefore best be reconstructed by hypothesizing close kinship with African populations across the Red Sea. This demands a critical reexamination of the assumptions which underlie the terms "Hamite" and "Semite" in modern literature and which rest on Biblical notions of ethnicity (the three sons of Noah). It is not proposed here to credit the Biblical narrative with historical accuracy but, since the Bible has in fact exerted an enormous influence on the study of ancient history, an inquiry into the manner in which Biblical data has been interpreted is necessary.

Even a casual reading of the original source, Genesis, argues against the hypothesis of a union of Semite and Hamite into a single historically significant bloc. Sam, Ham and Japhet are the brothers of the post-diluvian world. Nonetheless, each has a distinct career and, of the three, Ham is initially the one farthest advanced in the arts of civilization. At the dawn of Abrahamic tradition, early in the second millennium BCE., the sons of Ham are already masters of civilization. Hamitic civilization includes Egypt (Mizraim), Nubia (Cush), Abyssinia-Yemen (Sheba), Somalia (Put), Palestine (Canaan, Sidon) and Sumeria (Nimrod and his sons in the land of Shinar: Babylon, Erech, Accad, Calneh).<sup>35</sup> That XIX<sup>th</sup> century and modern historians insist on classifying most or all of this civilization as Semitic should not obscure the fundamental fact that according to the primary source of the Abrahamic tradition the civilized world was at first an entirely Hamitic one — and there is certainly no evidence therein of any significant Semitic, let alone Indo-European, accomplishment at that early date. Whether this Biblical conception of early history is accurate or not is irrelevant to the fact that the Ancient Hebrews (or rather those responsible for the narrative as it has come down to us) *perceived* it to be true.

---

<sup>35</sup> "These are the descendants of Ham, according to their clans and languages, by their lands and nations." Book of Genesis, 10:6-20. Biblical citations are from Tanakh, A New Translation, by the Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1985.

The existence of an Afro-Asiatic or Hamito-Semitic linguistic group (containing the following families: Hamitic, Semitic, Cushitic, Berber) is rejected by African scholars such as Diop, Jackson, Obenga and Ben-Jochannan. They argue that the Afro-Asiatic group was first constructed in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century in order to serve as a foil for the Indo-European construct and that it was not the result of research into the structure of these languages themselves. According to Diop the main purpose of the Afro-Asiatic construct was to subsume the Black African (Hamitic) world and its accomplishments into a whiter Asian (Semitic) one.<sup>36</sup> This linguistic theory went hand in hand with a racial theory which postulated a "Brown" or "Mediterranean" race (considered to be "dark" Caucasian) which created the pre-Hellenic civilizations of the Western Asia and North-East Africa and then enigmatically disappeared to make room for "White" Caucasians.<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, these theories deprived Blacks of all participation in ancient history in favor of some other, hypothetical, "Dark White", "Dark Red", "Asian migrants", mysteriously "Hamito-Semitic", or otherwise non-African peoples (who, conveniently, no longer exist).<sup>38</sup>

In the alternative Diopian system, espoused and developed by Obenga, the Afro-Asiatic linguistic construct is entirely discarded. Obenga demonstrates that the language of ancient Egypt was a member of the Black-Egyptian linguistic group (*langues négro-égyptiennes*) — a group which includes the following living families: Cushitic, Nilo-Saharan, and Niger-Kordofanian (according to the Greenberg classification), as well as Ancient Egyptian-Coptic but not Berber or Semitic.<sup>39</sup> The prototype of ancient Egyptian and of the other Black-Egyptian languages must be sought in the Paleolithic Upper Nile-Abyssinia-Great Lakes area,<sup>40</sup> and later in the green expanse of the Neolithic Sahara.<sup>41</sup> The Semitic family might then be

---

<sup>36</sup> DIOP, Ch. A., 1967, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25, 54-67.

<sup>37</sup> RENOLDS-MARNICHE, "The Myth of the Mediterranean Race", 1994, pp. 109-125.

<sup>38</sup> DIOP, Ch. A., 1990, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-32.

<sup>39</sup> OBENGA, 1973, *op. cit.*, pp. 289-331.

<sup>40</sup> FINCH, "Nile Genesis", 1994, pp. 35-54.

<sup>41</sup> KI-ZERBO, 1978, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-59. For an indication of how green the Sahara was c. 12,000-9,000 B.P. see ROGNON, *Biographie d'un désert*, 1989. For a recent *mise au*

categorized as a peripheral development of this much older and greater African stock. Thus there is no common proto-Afro-Asiatic language but rather a relatively late (fifth and fourth millenniums BCE.) Arabian offshoot from the Black-Egyptian linguistic tree. By combining with Asian elements, this offshoot contributed to the creation of the Semitic family. Thereafter, Semitic languages continued to evolve in close proximity to African ones. Akkadian, Aramaic, Hebrew, Syriac, Ge'ez, and Arabic were generated at the margins of a mainly Black world. This is confirmed by differences within the Semitic family itself. Ge'ez, South-Arabic and Akkadian (as opposed to North-Arabic, Hebrew and Aramaic) are distinguished for their morphological proximity to "Hamitic" (African) languages.<sup>42</sup> This can most easily be explained by recalling that the former group arose against a largely Black African background (Sumeria, Cush-Sheba) while the latter developed in a more independently Semitic environment. Though debate about the classification of African languages is by no means resolved,<sup>43</sup> it is unlikely that the Afro-Asiatic (or Hamito-Semitic) construct will ever figure in any new consensus. Certainly it has lost all scientific credibility among African linguists if not among Africanist or Orientalist ones. It would have been impossible for instance to reconstruct the linguistic map of Europe had the initial premise been that of a "Japheto-Semitic" group.

Diop is careful to point out that his theory is not a "race" theory. "Black" first of all describes a pigmentation of the skin and secondly, by extension, defines an ethnic affiliation (i.e., those with black skin) and not a linguistic one.<sup>44</sup> The Egyptians called themselves Remtu Kemit (Black Men) and they called Egypt Kemet (Black). Both terms are derived from kem, "black". This term has

---

point as to the domestication of cattle and the invention of pottery which occurred there at that time see CORNEVIN, *Archéologie africaine*, 1993.

<sup>42</sup> O'LEARY, *Arabia Before Muhammad*, 1927, pp. 15-16.

<sup>43</sup> See DIAGNE, "History and Linguistics, and Theories on the 'Races' and History of Africa", 1989, pp. 89-103; OLDEROGGE, "Migrations and Ethnic and Linguistic Differentiations", 1989, pp. 104-112; GREENBERG, "African Linguistic Classification and the Language Map of Africa", 1989, pp. 113-121.

<sup>44</sup> DIOP, Ch. A., 1967, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

passed into Semitic languages where it conveys the notion of blackness through heat, baking or burning (Heb. kem, hem; Arb. h.m.m., h.m.y.). It is also found in other African languages (Wolof, Mbosi).<sup>45</sup> Either the Hebrew term "Ham" must be accepted with its original etymology; i.e., "burnt", "Black" and thus as an ethnic designation for African, or it must be discarded. The terms "Hamite", "Ethiopian", "Negro" and "Black" are essentially synonymous. They all refer to the same clearly observable objective phenomenon. They are not the product of a theory, racial or otherwise. Attempts at whitening such terms, at divorcing them from the notion of blackness which they convey, are ideologically suspect.

It is significant that classical Arab geographers used the term *aswad*, "Black", in a similar fashion, as an ethnic designation for those with black skin. Witness the following passage from the 11<sup>th</sup>/IX<sup>th</sup> 46 century *littérateur* al-Jāhiz:

Among the Blacks are counted the Negroes, the Ethiopians, the Fezzan, the Berbers, the Copts, the Nubians, the Zaghawa, the Moors, the people of Sind, the Hindus, the Qamar, the Dabila, the Chinese, and those beyond them... and the islands in the sea between China and the land of the Negroes are full of Blacks, like Sarandib, Kalah, Amal, Zabij...<sup>47</sup>

This view of the Black world, which included not only the African continent in its entirety but also the southern portions of Asia and the lands of the Indian Ocean (the IV<sup>th</sup>/X<sup>th</sup> century geographer al-Mas'ūdī also considers the inhabitants of India to be descendants of Ham<sup>48</sup>), largely conforms not only to the Biblical ethnic notion of "Hamite", but also to the ancient Greek understanding of "Ethiopian" (Herodotus). In the truest sense of the word, the entire African continent is "Hamitic" and this term should no longer be used to

---

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* pp. 54-59; OBENGA, 1973, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

<sup>46</sup> When two dates appear in the text, the first is the Islamic chronology (A.H., after the Hijra) while the second is Common or Christian Era (C.E. or A.D.).

<sup>47</sup> AL-JAHIZ, The Book of the Glory of the Black Race 1985, pp. 55-56. Al-Jāhiz was noted among other things as a geographer but his major work in this field, "Kitāb al-amṣār wa 'ajā'ib al-buldān", has mostly been lost.

<sup>48</sup> AL-MAS'UDI, Les prairies d'or et les mines de diamants, vol. 3, 1863 pp. 294-295.



pretext Asian influence. Hamites did not arrive in Africa from a Semitic Asia but more likely the reverse; Semites (or an important contingent of their ancestors) arrived in Asia from Black Africa. This view is the one now presented in at least some of the new general works on Islam.<sup>49</sup>

When Semites as an ethno-linguistic group first appear in the historical record, in the middle of the third millennium BCE., they are pastoral peoples intruding upon more advanced Black cultures — sedentary nations with temples, cities and states. The Semitic Akkadians came to power in lower Iraq and built their civilization on existing Sumerian foundations. The cuneiform script which they adopted was initially developed for the Sumerian language and the gods which they worshipped had previously been Sumerian ones. Even Hammurabi's famous Code has been traced back to Sumerian prototypes.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Canaanite Syria-Palestine first evolved within the orbit of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom and later of its New Kingdom.<sup>51</sup> Semites from the neighboring Arabian steppe: Amorites, Midianites, Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, Hebrews, Arameans, etc. are believed to have progressively infiltrated the area (along with Indo-European elements) during the second millennium BCE.<sup>52</sup> In these cases the religion of the earlier, Black, civilizations must be considered as original. If Black cosmologies and theologies (manifest in rites such as fasting, circumcision, ritual cleanness, dietary prescriptions, use of incense and temple architecture) are later discerned in Semitic religions (in Mesopotamia, Palestine and Yemen for instance) we must once again conclude that they were borrowed from the older religions rather than the product of some general Afro-Asiatic prototype. The Black sources (textual and archeological) predate Semitic ones by at least one millennium.

**2) Abraham to Muhammad** — Though Ham was eventually cursed in Jewish tradition, Judaism nonetheless had a long and intimate relationship with Black civilization. Every one of its leading

---

<sup>49</sup> STEWART, Unfolding Islam, 1994, pp. 1-15.

<sup>50</sup> MOSCATI, Ancient Semitic Civilizations, 1957, pp. 46-51, 57-59, 79-80.

<sup>51</sup> REDFORD, Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient times, 1992.

<sup>52</sup> MOSCATI, 1957, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-111.

patriarchs and prophets sojourned and took a wife in Egypt.<sup>53</sup> The prophet Abraham entered Egypt while seeking refuge from famine (Genesis, 12;10). While there he took as concubine the Egyptian woman Hagar (Genesis, 16;1-15). The first to be circumcised into his new faith was his first-born, Ishmaël, his son by Hagar (Genesis, 17;23). We know that circumcision and clitorrectomy are religious rites indigenous to Africa and that they express a distinctly African conceptualization of the spiritual nature of the gendered individual.<sup>54</sup> The Covenant between Man and God which circumcision symbolizes in Judaism was therefore originally an African one. Ancient Egyptians and other Nile valley peoples practiced circumcision from prehistoric times and Africans of all religious affiliations (including Coptic and Ethiopian Christians) continue to practice it to this day.<sup>55</sup>

Again, according to the Biblical narrative, the Patriarch Joseph found refuge in Egypt and became prime minister in Pharaoh's court. He was married there to Asenath, daughter of Poti-Phera, priest of On (Heliopolis) (Genesis, 41;45). He oversaw the establishment in Egypt of what was then the entire nation of Israel (70 persons) fleeing from famine (Genesis, 46;27). "Four hundred and thirty" years later, led by Moses, the Israelites, now numbering over six hundred thousand, left Egypt (Exodus, 12;37). In the intervening period they must have become a very Egyptianized nation. There are passages in the Qur'ân which indicate that Moses was Black,<sup>56</sup> and he married a Cushite (Numbers, 12;1). Moses' Exodus and the subsequent bringing down of the Jewish law followed upon the Aten-Amon theological crises of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> Egyptian dynasty (XIV<sup>th</sup> century BCE.). This was a critical period in the history of religious thought. Monotheism, for the very first time, was being instituted and disputed in Egyptian

---

<sup>53</sup> BEN-JOCHANNAN, 1991, *op. cit.*

<sup>54</sup> GRIAULE, *Dieu d'eau* 1966, pp. 165-173.

<sup>55</sup> MEINARDUS, *Christian Egypt: Faith and Life*, 1970, pp. 318-341.

<sup>56</sup> "And thrust your hand within your armpit, it will come forth white without hurt: another sign" (20;22). "And he drew forth his hand, and behold, it looked white to those who beheld it." (7;108). For this miracle to make any sense we must assume the Moses' hand was black, or at least not white, before it entered his armpit. The miracle of this "sign" is also referred to in "Exodus" (4;6-7).

temples. Moses had been raised and educated at Pharaoh's court. The guidance he later gave his people was informed not only by Revelation but also by this Egyptian experience. The "Egyptianness" of Moses and his religion has been argued by many, including Freud.<sup>57</sup> Manetho, the III<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. Egyptian historian, believed Moses to have been a priest of the Osirian Mysteries,<sup>58</sup> while the II<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. Jewish author Artapanus assimilated him to the Egyptian Thoth.<sup>59</sup> According to the Christian Gospels, "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7;22).

Thus, according to its own record, Abrahamic monotheism issued from the womb of African religious thought. Judaism was conceived in the antechambers of Egyptian temples and in the halls of its palaces and it first developed at the periphery of its empire (it should be recalled here that previous to its career as Jewish holy city, Jerusalem had been a major administrative center of Egypt's Asian empire).<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, no claim can be made to similar intimate and significant links between Judaism and its Asian neighbors. It can not be said for instance that the captivity in Babylon produced any impact on the Jewish religion equivalent to that of the sojourn in Egypt. Nor is there any record in the entire Abrahamic tradition of a prophet taking an non-Jewish wife other than an African one or finding refuge at a foreign court other than in Africa. There is thus a significant "motherly" pattern of African involvement in early Abrahamic tradition and this pattern persists in its later developments. Ishmaël took a wife in the land of Egypt (Genesis, 21;21). Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh (I Kings, 3;1). Jesus in his infancy took flight to Egypt with his mother Mary and found refuge there (Matthew, 1;13-21). Muhammad too took an Egyptian concubine, Mary the Copt, who bore him a son, Ibrâhîm,<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> FREUD, Moses and Monotheism 1939.

<sup>58</sup> DORESSE, Les livres secrets des gnostiques d'Égypte 1958, p. 111.

<sup>59</sup> FOWDEN, The Egyptian Hermes, 1993, p. 23.

<sup>60</sup> REDFORD, 1992, *op. cit.*, pp. 269-270.

<sup>61</sup> IBN ISHAQ, The Life of Muhammad 1955, p. 653.

while Meccan Muslims found refuge from early persecution at the court of the Negus of Abyssinia.

Ancient Egypt had a major impact on Greek thought from its very inception until its absorption by subsequent traditions. Greek and Latin authors (Herodotus, Diogenes, Diodorus, Strabo, Porphyry, Clement of Alexandria) relate how the earliest Greek thinkers traveled to Egypt in order to study in its temples.<sup>62</sup> Thales of Miletus and Pythagoras for instance studied mathematics in the temples of Heliopolis, Memphis and Thebes, and Pythagoras at least had to undergo circumcision in order to do so. Later, Plato too spent thirteen years as a student in Heliopolis. According to their own record then, the ancient Greeks were literally "initiated" into the sciences by Egyptian priests. When Greek thought (Plato's "Republic", "Phaedrus" and "Timaeus" for instance) is then credited with having influenced Abrahamic theologies, theosophies and philosophies; the Egyptian roots of this thought must not be ignored.

And it is in Alexandria, on Egyptian soil, that Hellenism produced its best fruit, that its sciences, philosophy, medicine, mathematics, geography, etc. flourished. Ptolemaic Alexandria, like 'Abbâsid Baghdâd, stood both at the confluence of all previous intellectual accomplishments and at the fount of a new universal civilization. And just as an ancient Persian substratum has been discerned beneath the intellectual brilliance of Arabic Baghdâd, so too does Pharaonic Egypt support the accomplishments of Hellenistic Alexandria. Not only did Egyptian tradition continue to evolve in the new metropolis but, in its Greek form, it became known throughout the Hellenistic world. The Helleno-Egyptian city maintained this intellectual preeminence until the early Christian period (with the philosophers Plotinus and Porphyry) and it was to have a determining effect on the Judeo-Christian tradition in the millennium preceding the Quranic revelation. It is also of significance that the great intellectual institutions of Pharaonic Egypt continued to function in their Hellenistic form until Byzantine times, that is to say until the very eve of Islamic conquest. Alexandria's Serapeum library was

---

<sup>62</sup> OBENGA, 1973, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-206; JAMES, 1954, *op. cit.*

destroyed by official decree of the Patriarch Theophilus in 391 C.E. and the city's last philosopher, Hypatia, was murdered by a "fundamentalist" Christian mob in 415 C.E.<sup>63</sup> The last functioning Egyptian temple, the temple of Isis at Pilak (on the island of Philæ on the 1<sup>st</sup> cataract), was closed by an edict of the Emperor Justinian in 527 C.E. These three events mark the salient moments of the unhappy relationship between ancient knowledge and the newly institutionalized Christian Church. Yet as unhappy as the relationship may have been, Christian theology nonetheless came to share a number of key doctrines with the older Egyptian one.

There is a persistent triadic nature to the God-head throughout the history of Egyptian theology (the triads Ptah-Sekhet-Nefertem, Khnum-Anukis-Satis, Amon-Mut-Khons). This could shed light on the works of Egyptian theologians during the interminable, "Byzantine", debate about the nature of Christ (Arianism, Monophysitism, Monothelitism). More specifically, the Egyptian doctrine of the Redemption of humanity through the Resurrection (of Osiris) and the related cult of the Madonna and Child (Isis and Horus) and the Immaculate Conception (Isis' "parthenogenesis") are clearly the precursors of Christian beliefs.<sup>64</sup> Easter and Christmas, the major Christian festivals, still bare the imprint of these Osirian roots.<sup>65</sup> Was not the birthday of Horus celebrated on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December?<sup>66</sup>

Africa played a major role in the formative centuries of the Universal Church as an institution. Monasticism emerged in the III<sup>rd</sup> century C.E. as a codification of the ascetic practices of Egyptian Mystics.<sup>67</sup> Thereafter, the institution was adopted and adapted by the Greek and Latin Churches. Monasteries proved to be the strongest institutions of the Coptic, Nubian and Ethiopian Churches during the period of their relative isolation following the advent of Islam. Even

---

<sup>63</sup> LUMPKIN, "Hypatia", 1984, pp. 155-161; "Mathematics and Engineering in the Nile Valley", 1994, pp. 323-340.

<sup>64</sup> BUDGE, The Gods of the Egyptians 1969, vol. 2, pp. 220-221; MCKINNEY-JOHNSON, "Egypt's Isis", 1984, pp. 64-71; REDD, "Black Madonnas of Europe", 1988, pp. 162-187.

<sup>65</sup> AL-ASSIOUTY, 1989, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-200.

<sup>66</sup> SCHWARZ, Égypte: les mystères du Sacré 1986, p. 83.

<sup>67</sup> MEINARDUS, 1970, *op. cit.*

the Beta Israel (the Jews of Ethiopia, or Falashas) adopted monasticism;<sup>68</sup> they being the only Jews in the world to do so. Africa also produced a great many Church Fathers: Athanasius, Clement and Origenes of Alexandria, Felix, Tertullian of Carthage, Saint Augustine of Hippo, Lactantius and Maternus.<sup>69</sup>

Egyptian theologies have also been recognized as the precursors of Hermetism and Gnosticism. In 1904 Budge had already argued that Gnostic cosmology was derived partly from the Osirian Mysteries.<sup>70</sup> Since the discovery of the Coptic library of Nag Hammadi the filiation which leads from the Mysteries of the Pharaonic Thoth, to the Hellenistic Hermes Trismegistus, and on to Christian (and Jewish) Gnosticism has been confirmed.<sup>71</sup> Therefore when Alexandrian philosophy (the "Enneads" of Plotinus), Hermetism and Gnosticism are then found to have influenced Islamic thought, their roots in Pharaonic thought must not be ignored.

3) Mecca at the time of the Revelation — Of greater significance for Islam in these early centuries of the Christian era are developments within Arabia itself. Nowhere are the Black and Semitic worlds more deeply interwoven than in the lands of the Red Sea, on either side of the Bâb al-Mandeb: Abyssinia, the Yemen, and their Cushitic and Arabian peripheries. This is in all likelihood the area where Semitic was first differentiated from the African matrix.<sup>72</sup> The cultural, linguistic and religious affinities between the civilization of ancient Yemen (Saba', Himyar) and that of Abyssinia (Yeha, Daamat, Aksum) have always been acknowledged. Yet whereas Semitic and specifically South-Arabic influence on ancient Ethiopia is relentlessly evoked and painstakingly researched, reciprocal influence is not. The migration of Arabs from Yemen to

---

<sup>68</sup> FRIEDMANN, Les Enfants de la Reine de Saba 1994, p. 54.

<sup>69</sup> BEN-JOCHANNAN, 1991, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-137.

<sup>70</sup> BUDGE, Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection, 1969, vol. 1, pp. 265-268.

<sup>71</sup> DORESSE, 1958, *op. cit.*; MAHÉ, Hermès en Haute-Égypte, 1978; FOWDEN, 1993, *op. cit.*

<sup>72</sup> It must be emphasized that one can be both Black and a Semite without there being any contradiction in terms — "Black" referring to an ethnic category (of black skin) and "Semite" to a linguistic one (of Semitic tongue). There are in fact many Black Semites on either side of the Strait.

Erythrea and Tigre which occurred sometime between 1000 and 400 BCE,<sup>73</sup> as important as it was for subsequent cultural developments, was but one episode in a continuous ebb and flow of people across the strait.

Arab tradition records the active presence of Africans in pre-Islamic Arabia. Many people from surrounding lands, in groups and as individuals, were absorbed and assimilated within it (the *musta'riba* or "arabized" included the half-African Ishmaël and his Egyptian wife). Sobriquets such as "al-aswad" (The Black) and "al-ḥabashiya" (The Abyssinian) abound in Arab genealogies and epics. For example, the name of the last Khuzā'a custodian of the Ka'ba, Hulayl b. Habashīya, suggests that he was the son of an Abyssinian woman.<sup>74</sup> Quṣayy b. Kilāb, who founded Qurayshī power in Mecca, did so by marrying Hulayl's daughter. According to Al-Jāhiz, "Abd al-Muṭṭalib (Muḥammad's grandfather) fathered ten lords, black (al-dalham) as the night and magnificent", while "Abd Allah Ibn 'Abbās (Muhammad's cousin) was blackest in magnificence, and the family of Abū Ṭālib (Muḥammad's uncle) were... black, with black skin".<sup>75</sup> "Mother Africa" was thus an apt characterization of the Black continent's significance for Mecca's Qurayshī elite. The taking of Abyssinian women as wives, concubines and nurses by those who could afford to seems to have been one of the constants of Meccan history down to our own century.<sup>76</sup> Al-Jāhiz also qualifies the legendary sage Luqmān as aswad,<sup>77</sup> while Al-Mas'ūdī describes him as a Nubian.<sup>78</sup> Thus the epitome of wisdom in ancient Arab tradition is acknowledged as African. Likewise, the three greatest early Arab poets (ʿAntara b. Shaddād al-Kalbī, Khafāf b. Nudba al-Sulakhī and Sulayk b. al-Sulaka) were known collectively as the "Crows of the Arabs" because of their Black mothers.<sup>79</sup> Poetry was the only achievement of the pre-Islamic

---

<sup>73</sup> DORESSE, *Ethiopia: Ancient Cities and Temples*, 1959, p. 21.

<sup>74</sup> IBN ISHAQ, 1955, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>75</sup> AL-JAHIZ, 1985, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>76</sup> PETERS, *Mecca*, 1994b, pp. 269-273.

<sup>77</sup> AL-JAHIZ, 1985, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>78</sup> AL-MAS'UDI, 1863, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 110-111.

<sup>79</sup> HADDAD, MUFUTA & MUTUNDA, 1989, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-28.

period which the Arabs would later recall with pride and it is significant that the epitome of this tradition too is once again characterized as partially African.

According to Ibn Hishâm, the founder of the Christian community of Najrân was a Copt from Upper Egypt.<sup>80</sup>

It is Abyssinia, not Yemen, which evolved into a powerful empire — an empire built on a direct filiation with Abrahamic tradition through the story of Makeda, Queen of Sheba (the Bilqîs of Arab tradition).<sup>81</sup> During the period of the Quranic revelation, and in the centuries immediately preceding it, Ethiopia was an important power in Arabian affairs. As of 240 C.E.,<sup>82</sup> or possibly even 195 C.E.,<sup>83</sup> and right up until the time of the birth of the Prophet (in "the year of the elephant"), the Yemen was subject to the sporadic yet persistent overlordship of the Negus of Ethiopia. Ethiopians of many classes, Christians and Jews, lived in the Yemen and Hijâz. Two Quranic sûras: "Al-Fil" and "Quraysh" (sûras 105 and 106 respectively), are directly concerned with Abyssinian involvement in Mecca.<sup>84</sup>

The ancient Ethiopian sanctuary of Yeha (V<sup>th</sup> century BCE.) preserves to this day a ruined cube similar in size (18.60 x 15 x 10 m), though not in orientation, to Mecca's Ka'ba (12 x 12 x 15 m).<sup>85</sup>

The accepted biographies of Muḥammad generally support the argument of a significant Ethiopian role in his immediate environment. These sources<sup>86</sup> are filled with reports of Meccan Ethiopians and Blacks, early converts and early martyrs. Some of them are enumerated here:

---

<sup>80</sup> AL-ASSIOUTY, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>81</sup> ULLENDORF, Ethiopia and the Bible, 1968, pp. 131-145.

<sup>82</sup> ANFRAY, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>83</sup> BRUNSON & RASHIDI, "The Moors in Antiquity", 1992, p. 69.

<sup>84</sup> SHAHID, "Two Qur'ânic Sûras", 1988, pp. 429-435. Shahîd argues that the two sûras become fully meaningful only when read together as a single revelation.

<sup>85</sup> JÄGER, Antiquities of North Ethiopia, 1965, pp. 96-99; ANFRAY, Les anciens Éthiopiens, 1990, pp. 17-33.

<sup>86</sup> Those cited by SAMB, 1974, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-48; TALIB & EL-SAMIR, "The African Diaspora in Asia", 1992, pp. 337-347; CHINYELY, 1992, *loc. cit.*, pp. 360-381; BRUNSON & RASHIDI, 1992, *loc. cit.*, pp. 67-79.



— The infant Muḥammad's wet nurse is identified as the Ethiopian Umm Ayman Baraka. Thus Africa is "mother" of sorts to the Prophet himself.

— Bilāl b. Rabāh, an enslaved Abyssinian, became one the Prophet's closest companions and Islam's first mu'adhdhin (caller to prayer). He would deserve special mention if only because of the important position he holds in Black Muslim consciousness in the U.S.A.

— Zayd b. Hārith, the Prophet's adoptive son and a general, was of African birth.

— The first Muslim recorded to have been martyred for her faith was an Ethiopian slave called Sumayya.

— 'Ammār b. Yāsir, brother of the above mentioned Sumayya, took part in the Abyssinian hijra and later became governor of Kūfa.

— The first Muslim to be killed in battle was "Mihdja — a Black man".

— Al-Miqdād b. 'Amr al-Aswad, known as "Fāris al-Islām", became famous for his military prowess.

Though the etymological foundation of the claim has been challenged, the Abyssinian recruits known as the aḥābīsh constituted an active military segment of Meccan society under Qurayshī hegemony.<sup>87</sup> It has been argued that aḥābīsh is the plural form of uḥbūsh, "ally" and does not refer to Al-Ḥabasha, "Abyssinia".<sup>88</sup> However it is of no small significance, surely, that in Meccan vocabulary a term constructed from the root ḥ.b.sh. should signify "ally" in the first place. Indeed, diplomatic relations between the Prophet and the Negus were always warm and fraternal.<sup>89</sup> Seven years prior to the Hijra to Madīna, some Meccan Muslims migrated to Aksum seeking refuge from persecution. They were well received there. This has been called the "First Hijra".<sup>90</sup> The privileged relationship between early Islam and Abyssinia stands in stark contrast to foreign relations on Islam's Indo-European "front" and it would be reasonable to assume that these peaceful and friendly relations were conducive to the free circulation of ideas. This is

---

<sup>87</sup> LAMMENS, *L'Arabie occidentale avant l'hégire*, 1928, pp. 237-291.

<sup>88</sup> HAMIDULLAH, "Les 'Ahabish' de la Mecque", 1956, pp. 434-437.

<sup>89</sup> IBN ISHAQ, 1955, *op. cit.*, pp. 657-658.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.* pp. 146-155.

significant because Aksum in the VII<sup>th</sup> century was a major Christian metropolis. Biblical scripture was being intensely studied in Abyssinian monasteries.<sup>91</sup> Texts such as "The Book of Enoch", "The Book of Jubilees" and "The Ascension of Isaiah", later proscribed elsewhere in the Christian world, are known today solely because they were considered canonical in the Abyssinian tradition and thus preserved there. Ethiopian loan-words (terms such as *mānbār/minbar*, and *ma'areg/ma'ārij*) are to be found in the Qur'ān and in early Arabic sources<sup>92</sup> and it is reported (by Ibn Sa'd) that Muḥammad spoke Ge'ez.<sup>93</sup>

At the outset of Islamic history therefore, of the three great contending empires in the shadow of which the Meccan system evolved: "Ḥabasha", "Rûm" and "Fars", the first was certainly the one most intimately involved in Hijâzî culture, society and politics. By comparison, Persian or Byzantine involvement in Meccan affairs at this time appears especially meager. Yet despite the above evidence, the question of Ethiopia's significance for Islam, rather than being raised as one should expect, has been systematically ignored by established academic authorities. Hodgson (1974), Rodinson (1961) and Watt (1953, 1956) for instance have cast Muḥammad's Arabia entirely in the Byzantine-Sassanian mold, while studies of the Ghassânids and the Lakhmids abound. Crone, who is otherwise critical of the established paradigm through which the rise of Islam has been cast, nonetheless considers Byzantium and Persia to be the crucial factors — Ethiopia being relegated to the rank of proxy of Byzantium.<sup>94</sup>

Modern Arab historical geographers on the other hand argue in favor of a central position for the Arabian Peninsula within the universal historical *ecumene*; a position which takes into account not just the Mediterranean, the Fertile Crescent and Iran (Byzantium-Sassania) but also the civilizations of the Sahara (Gharamānts), Nile Valley (Egypt, Nobadia, Maquria, Soba, Abyssinia)

---

<sup>91</sup> ULLENDORF, 1968, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-72.

<sup>92</sup> O'SHAUGHNESSY, Eschatological Themes in the Qur'ān 1986.

<sup>93</sup> see the article "Al-Nadjāshî" in the Encyclopædia of Islam.

<sup>94</sup> CRONE, Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam 1987, p. 250.

and Indian Subcontinent (Harappa, Vedic cultures, Maurya Empire) as well as the maritime trade of the Arabian Sea in the millennia preceding the Quranic revelation.<sup>95</sup> This arabocentric view was the central thesis of O'Leary,<sup>96</sup> but was later rejected in favor of a more "Aryan" explanation (exemplified by Hodgson's Nile-Oxus construct).

4) Classical Period (1st-IV<sup>th</sup>/VII<sup>th</sup>-X<sup>th</sup> centuries) — During the first centuries of the Muslim era, Africans participated along with others in the creative process in the factories of the new faith: in the amṣār (Baṣra, Kûfa, Fustât, Qayrawân) and in the capitals (Dimashq, Baghdâd, Qurṭuba). As Bernard Lewis has explained, the participation of Blacks in Arabic civilization during the earlier classical period, though not entirely free of color-prejudice, was accepted and acceptable according to the established views of the day.<sup>97</sup> Though *color* (or more precisely *phenotype*) was perceived as an issue (discussed in literature and dealt with in fiqh), *race*, in the modern European sense of the word, was not. The Qur'ân certainly offered no foothold for racist attitudes equivalent to the Biblical "curse of Ham".<sup>98</sup> Arabs may have been the dominant people but Blacks, through the mawlâ system, had as much opportunity as Syrians, Persians and Turks to join the cosmopolitan Islamic enterprise. Indeed, once again we find the sources filled with references to such individuals, poets, musicians, scholars, mystics, soldiers, governors, etc. The contributions of these Africans of the diaspora — of these African-Arabs — to the construction of the new civilization include the work of Dhû al-Nûn al-Miṣrî in the field of Sufism, of Al-Jâhîz in adab, Abû Mihjân in poetry and Ziryâb in music.<sup>99</sup>

The case of Dhû al-Nûn al-Miṣrî (d. 245/860) is particularly significant for the argument of African continuity in Islam. Dhû al-Nûn, one of the founding figures of Sufism, was born in Akhmîm in

---

<sup>95</sup> Atlas al-wâtan al-'arabi wa al-'âlam , 1991, pp. 110-112.

<sup>96</sup> O'LEARY, 1927, *op. cit.*

<sup>97</sup> LEWIS, B., Race and Color in Islam, 1971.

<sup>98</sup> SAMB, "L'Islam et le racisme", 1982, pp. 98-101.

<sup>99</sup> HADDAD, MUFUTA & MUTUNDA, 1989, *op. cit.*; VAN SERTIMA, Golden Age of the Moor 1992; TALIB & EL-SAMIR, 1992, *loc. cit.*, pp. 337-347.

the Sa'id, the intellectual heart of what was then still very much a profoundly Coptic Egypt, and he was of Nubian origin. These two points are important because we know that Egyptian tradition flourished independently in Nubia until early in the VI<sup>th</sup> century C.E., long after its decline in Egypt-proper (the closing of the temple of Isis in Pilak by the Byzantines in 527 C.E. caused great consternation among Nubian pilgrims), and that this tradition remained relatively easily accessible to speakers of the Nubian and Coptic languages for some time thereafter. Furthermore, we are informed by the VII<sup>th</sup>/XIII<sup>th</sup> century Andalusian theosophist Ibn 'Arabî that Dhû al-Nûn had at least a working knowledge of hieroglyphs as he is reported citing inscriptions from the temple of Hathor in Denderah.<sup>100</sup> Al-Mas'ûdî also confirms that the Egyptian mystic studied in the abandoned temples and read their texts.<sup>101</sup> The point here is that apparent linguistic discontinuity is not in itself an argument against the thesis of continuity of intellectual tradition (Arabic was probably Dhû al-Nûn's third language, after Nubian and "Akhmimic" Coptic). After all, today a good portion of African intellectual activity, both on the continent and in the diaspora, is conducted in English and French yet this in no way negates its "Africanness". Furthermore, just as today one can discern an African resonance in the arts and religions of America (U.S.A., Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, Brazil), so too is this the case in early Arab civilization.

African Christians, so long as they were not aligned with Constantinople, were able to entertain friendly relations with the Islamic state. As we have seen, since the days of the Prophet Muhammad, Christian Ethiopia was regarded as an ally of Islam and its soldiers continued to serve as valuable auxiliaries in early Muslim armies.<sup>102</sup> Likewise, the Caliphate rapidly came to a diplomatic understanding with the Christian Nubian kingdom. The bakt (pact, treaty) of 31/652, which remained in force for six centuries, was unique in the annals of early Islamic conquest in that it legally exempted Nubia from the status of dâr al-ḥarb (abode of

<sup>100</sup> IBN 'ARABÎ, La vie merveilleuse de Dhû-l-Nûn l'Égyptien, 1988, p. 194.

<sup>101</sup> AL-MAS'UDÎ, 1863, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 401-402.

<sup>102</sup> PIPES, "Black Soldiers in Early Muslim Armies", 1980, pp. 87-94.

war). Christian Nubian archers thereafter became allies and auxiliaries of Muslim Egyptian armies.<sup>103</sup> As for the Coptic Church, it continued to thrive during the first Muslim centuries. Copts constituted the bulk of civil administration in Egypt until the arrival of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn,<sup>104</sup> just as Persians dominated early 'Abbāsid administration in Baghdād.

African soldiers made a significant contribution, second only to the Arabs themselves, to the initial military expansion of Islam. The Berber conquest of Spain and France is too well known to warrant repetition here. Less known perhaps is the fact that the Berber Maghreb, as much as the Persian Mashriq, initiated the revolution which toppled the Umayyad regime. Under the banner of Khārijism, Berber forces in Andalusia and Morocco revolted in 122/740. A host of Khārijī states resulted: Barghawāta (125-452/742-1060), Jabal Nafūsa (128-473/745-1080), Sijilmāsa (140-366/757-976), and Tāhert (144-296/761-908).<sup>105</sup> Ibādi republics survive in Wargla and the Mzāb (Algeria) even in our present time. The career of Tarīf b. Zar'ā can best illustrate this Berber encounter with Islam. Converted to Islam towards 86/705 after having initially resisted Islamic conquest, by 93/710 Tarīf was leading the very first Muslim incursion into Visigothic Spain.<sup>106</sup> Later, disillusioned with Umayyad administration of al-Andalus, we find him leading a successful Khārijī insurrection in his native Morocco (125/742).<sup>107</sup> Ironically an Umayyad prince of a Berber mother, 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Mu'āwiya, was the only member of the former dynasty to survive the 'Abbāsid revolution, escaping from Syria to found a new Umayyad State in Andalusia (140-422/756-1031).

5) Medieval Period (IV<sup>th</sup>-IX<sup>th</sup>/X<sup>th</sup>-XV<sup>th</sup> centuries) — Africa constituted an essential and vital landmass for the evolution of Islamic civilization. The Islamic world-system at its apogee constituted a single powerful intellectual civilization. Africa was in

---

<sup>103</sup> ADAMS, Nubia, 1977, pp. 451-453.

<sup>104</sup> KAMIL, Coptic Egypt, 1987, pp. 40-43.

<sup>105</sup> TALBI, "The Independence of the Maghrib", 1992, pp. 130-145.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.* p. 127.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.* p. 140.

no way absent from it. The finest works in Islamic intellectual output, just like its refined manufactured goods, flowed freely through Africa at this time. By means of the medieval world economy, Africa continued as before to be fully integrated into the mainstream of world history and participated in its highest developments. African traders and pilgrims traveled the roads and sea lanes of the Muslim network and they established their houses of business in its commercial capitals — the wakâlât of the Takrûrî in Fustât and Jidda for instance. By the VIII<sup>th</sup>/XIV<sup>th</sup> century Timbuktu's Sankora mosque-university was in the same Sunni "ivy-league" as the Qarawiyîn of Fez and Cairo's Al-Azhar. The court of the mansa (Sultan) of Mali attracted the same caliber of scholars and adventurers as that of the contemporaneous court of the Sultan of Delhi.<sup>108</sup>

Transcontinental and maritime trade, especially in luxury products, were the mainstay of the world economy during the first Muslim millennium.<sup>109</sup> This trade, basically oriented in an East-West direction across Eurasia and its southern seas, was fueled substantially by African gold. Gold, circulating along South-North trade routes from Nubia, Ghana and Monomotapa, and not slaves, was the defining feature of Africa's participation in the Muslim world economy, especially as of the II<sup>nd</sup>/VIII<sup>th</sup> century when this economy adopted gold coinage.<sup>110</sup> Shaban has shown how an understanding of this gold trade and the prestige and power that it gave to those who controlled it are essential to explaining the initial success not only of the Egyptian Tûlûnids (254-294/ 868-905), but also of the Zanj State in Lower Iraq (255-270/869-883).<sup>111</sup> Control of African gold has also been invoked to explain the peculiar destiny of the Fâtimid state,<sup>112</sup> and later of the Mamlûk one.<sup>113</sup> The many accomplishments

---

<sup>108</sup> IBN BATTUTA, Voyages 1982, vol. 3.

<sup>109</sup> CHAUDHURI, Asia Before Europe, 1990.

<sup>110</sup> LOMBARD, L'Islam dans sa première grandeur, 1971, pp. 127-136.

<sup>111</sup> SHABAN, Islamic History, 1971, vol. 2, pp. 100-113. See also TALHAMI, "The Zanj Rebellion Reconsidered", 1977, pp 443-461.

<sup>112</sup> HRBEK, "The Emergence of the Fâtimids", 1992, p. 169.

<sup>113</sup> LEVTZION, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

of Moorish Andalusia,<sup>114</sup> Norman Sicily and the Berber dynasties of the Maghreb, were likewise fueled by Ghanaian gold. This includes the work of such intellectuals as Ibn Rushd, Ibn 'Arabî, Ibn Khaldûn and Al-Idrisî and, perhaps more importantly, the significant contributions of the Al-Azhar, Al-Zaytûna and Al-Qarawiyîn mosques as institutions of higher learning. The preeminent position of Fustât-Cairo in the Medieval world system, both as a cosmopolitan commercial capital and intellectual metropolis, was sustained by the general peace and prosperity of the entire continent. In 724/1324, Mansa Mûsâ, Sultan of Mali, on his way to perform hajj, arrived in Cairo with so much gold (estimated at about fifteen tons)<sup>115</sup> that the precious metal was devalued on the city's currency exchange for at least twelve years thereafter.<sup>116</sup>

Not only did Mali participate fully at the center of the Muslim world, it pioneered a brave new development as well. Mali instituted a policy of Atlantic exploration well over a century before Portugal did. The VIII<sup>th</sup>/XIV<sup>th</sup> century Egyptian chronicler Al-'Umarî reports how Mansa Abû Bakr II (703-712/1303-1312), after an initial trial journey, personally set sail westward across the ocean with two thousand ships.<sup>117</sup> This was a diplomatic mission and it was liberally provided with gold. Though neither the mansa nor his ships ever returned from the expedition, there are indications that trans-Atlantic voyages continued. When Christopher Columbus reached the Caribbean he found Malian gold circulating there under the Mandinga designation "quanin" (ghana, ghanin, English "guinea").<sup>118</sup> Thus, once again a significant chapter of the Medieval (Islamic) world system can be explained by African gold.

Hodgson however makes absolutely no allowance for African gold in his appraisal of medieval economic geography, preferring to

---

<sup>114</sup> VAN SERTIMA, 1992, *op. cit.*

<sup>115</sup> LEVTZION, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

<sup>116</sup> AL-'UMARÎ, Masâlik al-absâr, 1927, p. 79.

<sup>117</sup> AL-'UMARÎ, 1927, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>118</sup> LAWRENCE, "Mandinga Voyages across the Atlantic", 1986, pp. 169-214. See also BRADLEY, Dawn Voyage 1987, and VAN SERTIMA, Ivan, They Came Before Columbus: The African Presence in Ancient America, Random House, New York, 1977.

explain it with Chinese gold instead.<sup>119</sup> Africa is similarly excluded from Abu-Lughod's analysis of the Medieval world system.<sup>120</sup> While there is no doubt that the North-South trade of the China Seas was fueled by its own currency system based on Chinese precious metals, there is every indication that the central and western sectors of the Medieval world economy (that part west of the Straits of Malacca and evidently extending all the way to the Caribbean) was based on African gold. There is no objective reason why African cities such as Walata, Timbuktu and Kilwa should not be accorded a rank in this world system at least equivalent to that of contemporaneous Venice and Genoa. Certainly the gold of Ghana and Monomotapa was more essential to the functioning of the system than the cloth of Flanders. Moreover, despite the cumulating evidence and the significance of the phenomenon for universal history, scholars of "Islam in Africa" have yet to acknowledge Mali's Atlantic policy. Levtzion, though he otherwise considers Al-'Umarī's sources as reliable, is conspicuously silent on this subject.<sup>121</sup> It is difficult to explain the myopia of authors of Medieval economic geography in terms other than the systemic Hegelian legacy of excluding Africa from History. This is especially relevant in the case of Abu-Lughod because this author explicitly takes great pains to free her work from eurocentric models, yet Africa is nothing but a big empty stretch in her world map.

**6) Modern Period** — It is only with the onset of Europe's oceanic hegemony in modern times — the exploitation of the gold and silver of Mexico and Peru, the Atlantic slave trade, the conquest of the Indian Ocean trade — that Africa was confined to the periphery of the world economy and concomitantly marginalized in universal history. The city of Kilwa was destroyed by the Portuguese in 911/1505 and Timbuktu's Sankora university by Moroccans in 1000/1592. Since then the continent has indeed offered a sorry sight for the study of civilization. However, to project Africa's modern predicament backwards to earlier periods is an error. It is significant therefore

---

<sup>119</sup> HODGSON, 1974, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 4.

<sup>120</sup> ABU-LUGHOD, Before European Hegemony 1989.

<sup>121</sup> LEVTZION, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 347.



that the ubiquitous chapters on "Islam in Africa" which characterize so many academic monographs, rarely if ever venture back beyond the X<sup>th</sup>-XI<sup>th</sup>/XV<sup>th</sup>-XVII<sup>th</sup> centuries. Yet, even in modern times, though Africa has been ravaged by internal contradictions exacerbated by the multiple constraints of successive European world orders, African Muslims have continued to make distinguished and noteworthy intellectual contributions.

The West African predisposition towards jihād and mahdīism has often been singled out by researchers. However, of greater significance for modern Islam was the effort at establishing the dawla al-dīniya (the "Theocratic State") which resulted from these movements. During the XII<sup>th</sup>/XVIII<sup>th</sup> and especially the XIII<sup>th</sup>/XIX<sup>th</sup> centuries there was a concerted and sustained attempt on the part of the 'ulamā' to consolidate political power within their hands in order to assure that society as a whole be "rightly guided". Among the most successful of these theocracies were: the imamate of Fouta Bundu (1104-1302/1693-1885),<sup>122</sup> the imamate of Fouta Jallon (1184-1306/1770-1889), the imamate of Fouta Toro (1190-1297/1776-1880), the caliphate of Sokoto (1219-1321/1804-1903),<sup>123</sup> Masina (1227-1279/1812-1862),<sup>124</sup> and Nioro-Segu (1270-1311/1854-1893).<sup>125</sup> Within the broad historical problem of Islam's encounter with the Modern World Order, these theocracies proved for a time to be an adequate response to the destabilizing effects of encroaching European hegemony.<sup>126</sup> The point here is that this effort by the African 'ulamā' to establish working theocracies is original and significant for Universal Islam; that is to say that the study of this movement has shown itself to be of use and relevance to understanding modern Islamic history in general.<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>122</sup> GOMEZ, Pragmatism in the Age of Jihad 1992.

<sup>123</sup> LAST, The Sokoto Caliphate 1967.

<sup>124</sup> BA, L'Empire peul du Macina , 1962.

<sup>125</sup> ROBINSON, La guerre sainte d'al-Haji Umar , 1988. One could add to this list the dawla al-mahdiyya in the Nilotic Sudan (1881-1899), despite the many significant differences in circumstances as compared to events farther West.

<sup>126</sup> HISKETT, 1984, *op. cit.*

<sup>127</sup> LEVTZION & VOLL, Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam , 1987.

Islam has also had a career in the New World and its development here is mainly ancillary to the larger experience of African-Americans. After the gold-ships of Medieval Mali, Islam next crossed the Atlantic in the hulls of slave-ships. The Qur'ân continued to be recited and "Moorish" texts to circulate among African-Americans for generations thereafter.<sup>128</sup> Early attempts at Muslim emancipation led to the founding of Midwestern towns with names like "Morocco" (Indiana), "Mecca" and "Mahomet" (Illinois). These communities were however destroyed at the beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup> century by the eugenics policies enacted by various State governments.<sup>129</sup> More recently, Islam in the United States has been marked by such charismatic spiritual leaders as Noble Drew Ali (1283-1348/1886-1929),<sup>130</sup> Elijah Muhammad (d. 1395/1975)<sup>131</sup> — both from the Midwestern metropolis of Chicago — and Al-Hajji Malik Al-Shabazz (Malcolm X, 1344-1385/1925-1965).<sup>132</sup>

The "islamization" of Africa and the concomitant "africanization" of Islam is an on-going process which continues today, as will be illustrated by the case of Touba in Senegal. This process needs to be studied within the larger framework of the interface between African civilization and Islam.

There is a need to position Africa within the mainstream of Islamic history in order to pass beyond the view of Islam on the continent as parochial (marginal and outside the classical norms when not classified outright as "syncretist" or worse). The present thesis works from the premise that Africa, in its own way, has always been part of Islam, that Africa has invested and continues to invest in Islam and is thus part of the great Islamic "synthesis". By positioning Africa in the mainstream of Islamic history, Islam is also being viewed as part of African history, i.e. as something that

---

<sup>128</sup> AUSTIN, "Islamic Identities in Africans in North America in the Days of Slavery", 1993, pp. 205-219; JUDY, (Dis) Forming the American Canon, 1993.

<sup>129</sup> WILSON, Sacred Drift, 1993, pp. 28-29. See also BEY, I.A.Z., 1991, p. 121.

<sup>130</sup> WILSON, 1993, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-50.

<sup>131</sup> MUHAMMAD, Message to the Blackman in America 1965.

<sup>132</sup> X, The End of White World Supremacy: Four Speeches by Malcolm X, 1971.

Africa has done rather than as something which has been done to Africa.

Africa as agent rather than recipient, this is what the afrocentric perspective attempts to establish. By applying afrocentric concepts to Islamic Studies, phenomena on the continent and in its relations with other continents become dynamic. They acquire historical depth. The afrocentric narrative presented in this chapter is based on facts culled from a variety of sources, some primary and others not. The intent in presenting them all here is to demonstrate the various ways in which Africa is "in" Islam. Each specific point, every fact evoked, deserves to be scrutinized closely as to its origin and modes of interpretation. Research in this direction is currently underway and much remains to be done. Though any specific point in the argument can, and should, be critiqued, the entire body of evidence cannot simply be dismissed. The Hegelian philosophy of history is no longer acceptable and we must now entertain alternative ones.

## Chapter 2 TOUBA IN SENEGAL

*And Wilderness is Paradise now*  
— Omar Fitzgerald

The Islamic holy city of Touba was established in 1304/1887 by a Sufi shaykh named Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké (1270-1346/1853-1927). Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba was the founder of a distinct *ṭarīqa* (Sufi institution), known as *la confrérie mouride*, the "Mouride Brotherhood", or Muridiya.<sup>1</sup> The Mouride *ṭarīqa* today is the single most important religious institution in Senegal. It constitutes a clergy, i.e., a centralized hierarchical religious administration wielding power over population, territory and resources. Touba, where Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba lies buried, is the metropolis of the Mourides. It is very much a modern place. Only a little over a century ago Touba was an empty wilderness. Physical construction of the city began after Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's death in 1346/1927 and its mosque was only completed in 1383/1963. Today, with approximately 300,000 inhabitants, Touba is Senegal's second largest city.<sup>2</sup>

Touba has thus been created within living memory and it constitutes one of the most recent additions to the list of the world's holy cities. Yet notwithstanding its youth, Touba actualizes a definite spiritual project which is as "eternal" as that of any ancient holy site. The purpose of this chapter is to explain the spiritual significance of this place through analysis of its spatial configuration.

---

<sup>1</sup> The most complete studies to date on Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba and the Mourides are: SY, *La confrérie sénégalaise des Mourides*, 1969; and CRUISE O'BRIEN, *The Mourides of Senegal*, 1971. A similar monograph also exists in German (SEESEMANN, Rüdiger, *Ahmadu Bamba und die Entstehung des Muridiya*, Klaus Schwartz Verlag, Berlin, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Touba is not recognized as a city. It is not a "commune" (municipality). It has the *de jure* administrative status of a "communauté rurale autonome". *De facto*, the city is administered directly by the Mouride *ṭarīqa* independently of the State.

### Geography and Religious Studies

Geography has so far contributed remarkably little to the study of religion. Yet the religious experience, experience of the sacred, is immanently geographical. There is a spatial relationship between the sacred and the profane.<sup>3</sup> Hierophany, that is the manifestation of the sacred, constitutes a point of reference whereby the profane world acquires meaning, whereby it becomes oriented. Experience of the sacred entails a transcendence of physical reality in favor of an ultimate Reality which is *more* real than the perceptible one. There are grounds then for considering the religious experience as essentially a spatial one. People need to understand their existence "in the world" and the ensuing constructs are both spiritual and spatial. They involve such fundamental spatial notions and concepts as axis/field, center/periphery, ascension/descent, right/left, threshold, gate, abyss, mound, and sky. Experience of the sacred thus entails conceptualization of space, a conceptualization subject to models and codes. Therefore, just as the economic and political dimensions inherent to life on earth have given rise to distinct fields of study for geographers, so too should the spiritual dimension of space qualify as a field of study.

Geographers however have been reticent to invest in such a field. Perhaps the principal reason for this is psychological. Geographers generally take great pride in the "concreteness" of their discipline. Geography appears to be something one can actually walk through with one's own two feet. Better yet, it appears to be a physical reality one can draw on maps. The apparent materiality of "space" — as opposed to the manifestly abstract notions of "time", "society" or "power" — has convinced many geographers that the object of their discipline is somehow more physical than that of the other social sciences. This has meant that geographers have shown little inclination to take into account the metaphysical dimensions of space. When geographers have contributed to the study of religion, they have been interested exclusively in its material manifestations.

---

<sup>3</sup> ELIADE, The Sacred and the Profane 1959.

For Deffontaines<sup>4</sup> and Sopher,<sup>5</sup> religion is of interest to the geographer only as a social phenomenon, as a system or an organization; both authors study "religions", in the plural, rather than religion as a general human condition. For these authors, the problem is one of distinguishing the role of religion on the landscape. Religious activities (pilgrimage, worship, burial) are discussed in order to explain geographical phenomena (questions of demography, distribution, production, administration). There is however no indication that geography might explain religious phenomena. How for example can pilgrimage, a geographical act, contribute to the formulation of religious beliefs? Similarly, when Deffontaines and Sopher discuss sacred space, they limit themselves to a discussion of the role of sacred places as elements of the *ecumene*. There is no explanation of how sacred space exists as a category, as a "type" of space. Religion becomes a factor for geography only in so far as it is materially manifest, "mappable", while geography seems to have nothing of value to contribute to the study of religion.

Isaac<sup>6</sup> and Fickeler,<sup>7</sup> on the other hand, do make a claim for the usefulness of geographical analysis for religious studies, but once again it is the physical manifestation of religion in the landscape which is objectified. For these authors the landscape is coded. Such features as trees, rocks, mountains and ponds are perceived symbolically as loci of religious experience. Certain directions or alignments impart meaning to human activities and installations. For Fickeler, space is punctuated by sacred "poles" which create "fields of force", while qualities of the landscape (colors, sounds, odors) are understood as signaling hierophany. These conceptualizations are as yet but timid responses to the problem of the "geographicity" of religious experience. It is significant of their limitations that both Isaac and Fickeler believe that the religious coding of space is operative in primitive and traditional societies but that it

---

<sup>4</sup> DEFFONTAINES, Géographie et religions, 1948.

<sup>5</sup> SOPHER, Geography of Religions, 1967.

<sup>6</sup> ISAAC, "Religion, Landscape and Space", 1959, pp. 14-18; "The Act and the Covenant", 1961, pp. 12-17.

<sup>7</sup> FICKELER, "Fundamental questions in the geography of religions", 1962, pp. 94-117.

disappears altogether in modern "rational" ones. Fickeler believes the geography of religion to be pertinent, at best, to the study of historical geography and anthropology.

Perhaps a solution to the problem of "the geography of religion" lies in the new emphasis on semiotics which characterizes urban geography. In The City and the Sign,<sup>8</sup> Gottdiener & Lagopoulos argue that urban form can be understood as primarily a set of signs. By analyzing the signifier, one gains understanding of that which is being signified. Landscapes, urban or otherwise, contain signs and these convey messages. They are "texts". Yet landscape as object of study for geographers is just reemerging after several decades of anathema. In an effort to uphold the scientific legitimacy of their discipline, geographers had in effect banned the study of landscape, i.e., the directly observable dimension of space — space as it is experienced — because perception was deemed too subjective for scientific methodologies. Experience of space had become of relevance only to psychologists of the "mental map" school. It is precisely while seeking a way out of the dead end of the "mental map" approach to social spatial conceptualization that Gottdiener & Lagopoulos have adopted semiotic methodologies. The advantage of this approach over the more timid effort of Fickler is that all elements of a landscape can be signs, even such profane ones as suburban shopping malls. Though these authors are seeking a solution to problems of urban geography, their methodology can just as well lend itself to the field of geography of religion. First of all, the analysis of the religious significance of landscape in order to comprehend human settlement, the problematic advanced by Isaac, is in any case mainly concerned with cities, towns and other sites of similar scale. It is at the scale of direct observation and personal experience that the landscape/text functions. At this scale we are dealing with sensible physical form as signifier. Landscape is manufactured and is thus imbued with significance for humans. There is meaning to man's orientations and alignments, to his vertical and horizontal compositions. Space is ordered. This order is inscribed on

---

<sup>8</sup> GOTTDIENER & LAGOPOULOS, The City and the Sign 1986.

the "face" of the earth. The earth's surface thus becomes a "text" and elements of this *topos* are considered to have been "written" (by us, by Nature, by God?). Topography, the description of the surface of the earth, amounts to "reading" its text in order to reveal its meaning. This semiotic hermeneutics of the landscape may be a highly personal *démarche* but landscape itself is as "objective" an object as any text. Nor is the interpretation of signs in the landscape limited to linguistic expression, to the capacity of words to convey meaning. By considering the surface of the earth as a "canvas" rather than a "book", the textual or linguistic analogy can be extended and the limitations of sign=word can be avoided. Since everything in the sensible world has been created, "formed" rather than "written", the earth becomes a work of "land art".

If the metaphysical dimension of space constitutes a rare preoccupation for geographers its an old one for theologians. Medieval Muslim theosophists and Christian scholastics alike considered the sensible world to be a book, "a book written by the hand of God... All visible things, visibly presented to us by a symbolic instruction, that is, figured, are proposed for the declaring and signifying of things invisible" (Hugh of Saint Victor, in "Didascalicon").<sup>9</sup> The Qur'ân can also be seen as advocating the semiotic interpretation of sensible phenomena; phrases such as "Surely in this are signs for those who discern" (15;75) are recurrent.<sup>10</sup>

Maps are rightly considered by geographers as their most distinctive attribute and map-making is a distinguishing feature of their methodologies. It is therefore significant that semiosis plays an essential role in the making of maps — through the creation and manipulation of cartographic symbols. Cartographic symbols, like hieroglyphs, are ideograms. Their forms tend to con-form to the phenomena they represent so that their signification can be

---

<sup>9</sup> ECO, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* 1986, p. 103.

<sup>10</sup> SCHIMMEL, *Deciphering the Signs of God* 1994.



understood intuitively, without recourse to words. The ideal map therefore would have no legend. Everything represented would be immediately understood solely by means of the formal affinity between its local physical actualization on earth and a corresponding image (cartographic symbol) of the idea which it symbolizes. Signs are known primarily through their forms, and forms are sensible, i.e., they are perceptible to the senses. To the extent that the phenomena being represented on the map have universal value as elements of the *ecumene*, to that extent would their corresponding symbols be archetypal. Thus the semiotic process is essential to the work of representing the surface of the earth.

It is this kind of process which Corbin has qualified as "imaginal". Following precisely on the path of the great theosophists he studied, Corbin argues that there are in fact three manners of knowing.<sup>11</sup> Between the cognitive universe of pure intelligence (accessible through intellect alone) and the perceptible universe of the senses there is an intermediary universe of "immaterial matter", of "archetypal figures", of "idea-images", accessible through the "active imagination". Imagination, like reason, permits knowledge of truth, of ultimate Reality (Haqq). Within the frame of Neoplatonic cosmology, though God can ultimately be neither represented nor described, His qualities and attributes (His Power, His Justice, His Mercy) can be understood as emanations or manifestations on planes of reality accessible to human understanding. To these emanations correspond symbols such as the Throne and the Tablet. These have an objective existence in the imaginal world (the *'alam al-mithal*) and Mystics at least can know them. Symbols are seen by the "eye of the imaginative conscience" and are related to forms. Forms, like those of cartographic symbols, translate or transmute data from the perceptible world, rendering it transparent and thus permitting knowledge of that which is symbolized.<sup>12</sup> One of the major achievements of Corbin's work has been to legitimize this "imaginal" dimension of knowledge and the intuitive faculty which permits it.

---

<sup>11</sup> CORBIN, L'Imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabi, 1958, pp. 5-6.

<sup>12</sup> CORBIN, Face de Dieu, face de l'homme 1983, pp. 36, 92-93, 296-297.

He has repeatedly emphasized the need to take into account the "geography" of Neoplatonism, going so far as to propose the existence of a *géosophie*, i.e., a "spatial gnosis".<sup>13</sup> Corbin has however been too hasty in dismissing the relevance of "positive topography", i.e., the landscape perceptible to the senses, for "geosophic" notions.<sup>14</sup> Forms apprehended by the senses necessarily conform to those comprehended by the active imagination (and by the active intellect). The imaginal and the sensual worlds in-form each other. If the sensible landscape is a "mirror" of the imaginal one, then it is also a "window" unto it.

Building upon Corbin's foundation, some studies of urban form in the Muslim world have opened the way towards a semiotic reading of the religious significance of space and have developed the necessary tools of "geosophic" analysis. Ardalan & Bakhtiar have analyzed such architectonic elements as open/closed, form, light, color, etc. in Iranian cities in order to demonstrate their dependence on the religious concepts which structure the civilization which produced this architecture.<sup>15</sup> These authors demonstrate how the symbolic use of spatial structures in Persian architecture, at the microcosmic scale, intentionally imparts a sense of the fundamental unity (*waḥda*) of the macrocosm. The fact that space is conceptualized according to a fixed "vocabulary" of symbols is significant given that sufism has always used symbols to articulate essential ideas about the cosmos and existence. Such symbols can dominate artistic expression, be it music, dance, architecture, or, as in the case of Toubā, urban planning. Landscapes are the factories as well as the products of cultures. Islamic architecture has long been analyzed as a "product" of Islam; Ardalan & Bakhtiar have shown how it can be exploited for what it reveals about the construction of Islamic concepts.

For the purposes of pursuing this thesis on Toubā, we will define "spiritual geography" as follows: we posit first of all that

---

<sup>13</sup> CORBIN, Terre céleste et corps de résurrection, 1960, p. 38.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>15</sup> ARDALAN & BAKHTIAR, The Sense of Unity: the Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture, 1973.

elements of the perceptible landscape can be "signs", i.e., they can mean something they are not. A house may mean nothing other than "unit of habitation", but it may also mean "unit of production" or "Universe" or "mother". In these latter cases the house is a sign. Secondly, the message of a given sign is relative, or "particular" within its geo-cultural context. Signs exist within an ambient language,<sup>16</sup> just as landscapes belong to specific cultural (economic, political) systems. Two identical signs, two houses, need not communicate an identical message. The language in which they are expressed will determine the appropriate interpretation. Thirdly, signs can be religious, i.e., they can inform us of an ultimate Reality existing beyond the sensible one and which is supposed to "explain" it. Religions, with their codes and laws, their symbols and rites, their metahistories, cosmogonies and cosmologies, constitute the distinct "languages" in which such signs are to be read. A church, a mosque, a stupa, shrine or temple may all be classified as "building intended for worship". They do not however simply on this account signify the same things in their respective landscapes. "Spiritual geography" as a field of study then consists of the analysis of religious signs in so far as they are expressed in a geographic context and in a known language.

### Touba as Tradition

#### Sources

Mouride history is modern. It has unfolded in what is still living memory and, what is more, under the intense scrutiny of a European colonial administration which left complete archival records of it. The emerging Mouride *tarîqa* was of great interest to the French. Beginning with Marty's work in 1913,<sup>17</sup> administrative reports were periodically published as research papers.<sup>18</sup> These sources however reveal virtually nothing about Touba or about the

---

<sup>16</sup> ECO, 1986, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-45.

<sup>17</sup> MARTY, "Les mourides d'Amadou Bamba", 1913, pp. 3-163. This article later appeared in the form of a book, entitled Études sur l'Islam au Sénégal, 1917.

<sup>18</sup> BOURLON, "Mourides et mouridisme 1953", 1962, pp. 53-74.

spiritual motor which propels the Mouride movement. For these we must turn to internal sources.

The most important internal primary sources of the Mouride *ṭariqa* are the written works of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba himself. Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba was a prolific composer of *qaṣīdas* (odes) in Arabic. Along with the holy city of Touba, his written œuvre, his *diwān*, must surely constitute his most important legacy. The *qaṣīdas* circulate massively among the Mouride faithful as they are recited (*samāʿ*) on many occasions. Dumond has analyzed many of these *qaṣīdas* in order to determine Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's mystic thought.<sup>19</sup> Dumond has not however linked this written work to the holy city of Touba. Yet Touba was of prime importance in Ahmadou Bamba's life and his life's work cannot be comprehended without taking it into account. The primacy of the holy city for defining the shaykh and his work is verified by the fact that his single most common sobriquet is the Wolof expression *Serigne Touba* (*Seriñ Tuubaa*), "Shaykh of Touba". The toponym *is* his homonym. It is significant too that Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba defined himself as being "of" Touba; he used the *nisba* "Ṭūbawī".<sup>20</sup> Several of his *qaṣīdas* contain references to the holy site and to his intention in founding a city there. One *qaṣīda* in particular, entitled "*Maṭlab al-fawzayn*" ("In Pursuit of the Two Accomplishments"), was written as an ode of thanks to the Most High for having permitted the foundation of the sanctuary. It reveals much about Touba's temporal mission and will therefore be quoted from often in this chapter.<sup>21</sup> It is significant that this ode — Touba's ode of foundation — is not among those singled out by Dumont for analysis.

The second category of internal sources are the hagiographies of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, of which "*Minan al-bâqī al-qadīm fī sirat al-shaykh al-khadīm*", written by his son Serigne Bassirou Mbacké c.

---

<sup>19</sup> DUMOND, *La pensée religieuse d'Amadou Bamba* 1975.

<sup>20</sup> MBACKÉ, "Les bienfaits de l'Éternel", 1981, p. 91.

<sup>21</sup> "*Maṭlab al-fawzayn*" was translated from the Arabic into French (via Wolof) in Touba by Ibra Fall of Mbacké-Bari ward and Cheikh Oumy Mbacké Diallo of Gouye-Mbinde ward. This draft then served to guide my own translation of the Arabic ode into English.

1355/1936-37, is by far the most important. This voluminous work, the French translation of which has only been partially published,<sup>22</sup> is primarily concerned with the ethical and spiritual qualities of Touba's founder: his unqualified commitment to God, to the Prophet, and to the Sunna. A later hagiography, a short work entitled "Ḥayāt al-shaykh Aḥmad Bamba" by Mamadou Moustafa An (1961), has recently been translated and published in German.<sup>23</sup> Yet a third hagiography, "Irwā' al-nadīm min 'abd ḥubb al-khadīm" by Mamadou Lamine Diop Dagana (1967), has yet to be translated.<sup>24</sup>

Traditions concerning Touba and its founder are fundamentally oral in nature. Though they may not figure in the hagiographies, many of them have found their way into the large body of academic literature concerning the Mourides.<sup>25</sup> The various episodes of Ahmadou Bamba's spiritual career have also found iconographic representation in illustrations, and they feature in popular song. Because they have not been "doctored", these popular traditions are strong expressions of the meaning which Mourides attach to Touba. There is, as we shall see, no contradiction between this popular mythology and the official hagiography.

Though Touba has not entirely escaped the attention of researchers of the Mouride "phenomenon", in their published works the spiritual metropolis has rarely been accorded the prominence it deserves. Neither Dumond nor Cruise O'Brien for example have related the holy city to the spiritual and ideological core of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's legacy. Marty offers a brief description of the incipient sanctuary as it was c. 1913.<sup>26</sup> Forty years later Bourlon describes the city and especially the annual pilgrimage (maḡgal) which had by then been established.<sup>27</sup> This description is repeated and refined by Samb following four years of research (1953-57).<sup>28</sup> Sy has also

---

<sup>22</sup> MBACKÉ, "Les bienfaits de l'Éternel...", 1980, 1981, 1983.

<sup>23</sup> SEESEMAN, 1993, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-179.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>25</sup> DIOP, M. C., "La littérature mouride", 1979, pp. 398-439.

<sup>26</sup> MARTY, 1913, *loc. cit.*, pp. 16-19

<sup>27</sup> BOURLON, 1962, *loc. cit.*, pp. 55-74

<sup>28</sup> SAMB, "Touba et son 'Magal'", 1969, pp. 733-753

devoted several sections of his monograph on the Mourides to Touba and its *māggal*.<sup>29</sup> These sources however date mostly from the period of the sanctuary's construction — before the completion of the mosque (1963). Touba however has only begun to function as a veritable city and to fulfill its role of metropolis in recent decades, precisely since the completion of its mosque.

An internal Mouride publication, the *Guide du Pèlerin*,<sup>30</sup> can also be considered as authentic Mouride historiography. This guide book deals directly with the holy city of Touba and the significance of its various monuments. Because it now exerts such force in Senegal's social, economic and political landscape, Touba has been the object of a number of unpublished theses (in geography, urban studies, public administration, economics).<sup>31</sup> Of course Touba is also often the subject of articles in locally available newspapers<sup>32</sup> and has recently been the subject of a full-page article in *Le Monde diplomatique*.<sup>33</sup>

As useful as all these sources have been, the descriptive section of this present chapter is based on personal field work conducted in 1988 and 1994 and thus constitutes original research. First, a proper topographic plan and an axonometric diagram of the center of the city were drawn. These were based on cadastres (1/2000 and 1/5000) made available through the *Bureau national du recensement* in Dakar (1987) and completed on-site. Then the traditions contained in the textual sources or collected in the field were connected to the appropriate elements of the topography. Where contradictions and lacuna occurred, every attempt was made to resolve them by consulting the competent authorities in Touba. Some of this research has already appeared in an article which relates the

---

<sup>29</sup> SY, 1969, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-111, 219-224, 313-318.

<sup>30</sup> Dahirah des étudiants mourides de l'Université de Dakar, *Guide du pèlerin*, Dakar, 1407 (1985-86).

<sup>31</sup> DIOP, Ah. B., *Croissance et originalité de Touba dans l'armature urbaine sénégalaise*, 1989.

<sup>32</sup> These include Senegal's national daily, *Le Soleil*, and such Mouride publications as *Ndigël*.

<sup>33</sup> BAVA, Sophie & BLEITRACH, Danielle, "Les mourides entre utopie et capitalisme", in *Le Monde diplomatique*, #500, nov. 1995, p. 21.

holy city's foundation as well as its urban development and civic administration.<sup>34</sup> The aim of this present chapter however is to identify the "signs" of Touba's topography (of its "text") and to relate these to each other in order to establish the spiritual meaning imparted by the holy city. To this end the narrative of the city's foundation must first be recounted.

### Khadimou Rassouli

Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's quest for Touba, the events leading to his sanctuary's foundation, his mystic experience once there and his painful separation from that hallowed ground in later life, all constitute a narrative lore for the holy city, a sacred mythology. Reports about Touba center around Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's mystic visions. Both the Angel Gabriel and the Prophet Muḥammad are believed to have served as conduits for his divinely ordained mission. Though not always officially condoned by the *tariqa* authorities, these traditions are nonetheless generally known and widely circulated among Mourides.

There are various versions of the Touba narrative. One version, publicly narrated by Dame Dramé, the *Secrétaire-général* of the *Khalifa-général* of the Mourides on the occasion of the inauguration of Touba Mosque in 1963, and published by Sy in 1969,<sup>35</sup> can be considered as benefiting from official endorsement. Sy also relates another, anonymous, version of the story dated 1948.<sup>36</sup> Here follows a resume of these narratives to which have been added data relative to the foundation of Touba contained in his hagiographies.

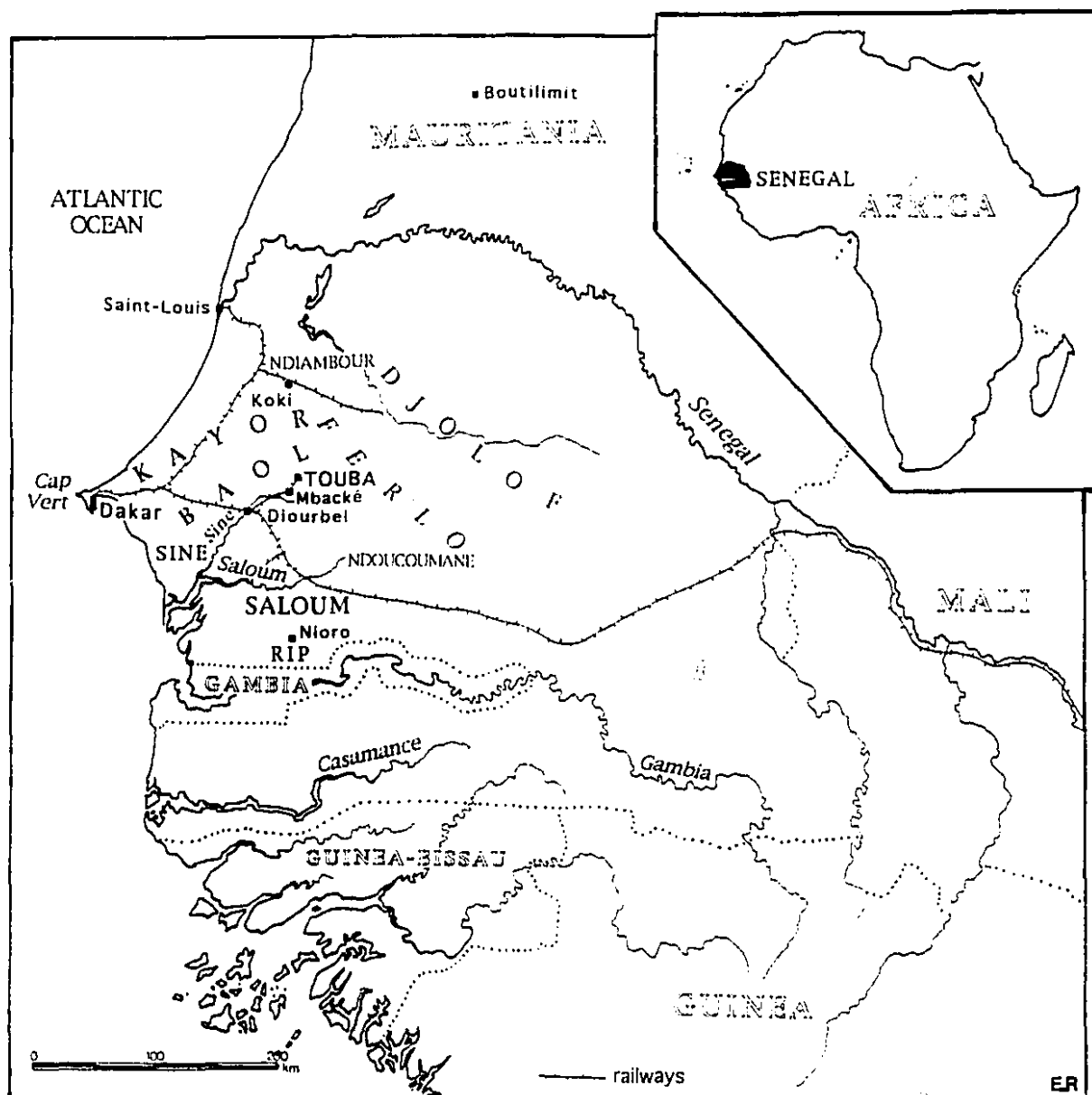
Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba was born in 1270/1853 in the town of Mbacké in the eastern part of the kingdom of Baol (fig. 2.1). Mbacké is only eight kilometers removed from the center of modern Touba. The town was founded in 1210/1796 by Marame Mbacké (d. 1217/1802), Ahmadou Bamba's great-grandfather and a renowned Mālikī jurist (*faqīh*). At the time of its foundation, Mbacké was on the very frontiers of civilization. Eastern Baol was mostly unsettled

<sup>34</sup> ROSS, "Touba: a Spiritual Metropolis in the Modern World", 1995.

<sup>35</sup> SY, 1969, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 314-315.

fig. 2.1 Touba in Senegal





wilderness at the periphery of the economic and political life of Senegambia. Nonetheless Marame, who received the Mbacké land-grant as payment for legal services rendered at court,<sup>37</sup> settled there with his family and students and opened a school. Under his directorship and that of his successors, the school of Mbacké became famous. It was integrated into an intellectual circuit which included other established Islamic academies such as Koki in Ndiambour. Ahmadou Bamba resided in Mbacké until it was destroyed during the jihād of the Tijānī shaykh Maba Diakhou in 1281/1864.<sup>38</sup> The Mbacké family then followed Maba back to his capital, Nioro, where Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's father, Momar Anta Sali reopened the school and became closely involved with the jihād leadership. Following Maba's death on the battlefield (1284/1867) the Mbacké joined the court of Damel Lat Dior in Kayor where there was a further attempt at establishing an Islamic State. Momar Anta Sali became qādi-in-chief of Kayor (1286-1295/1869-1878) but the entire experiment succumbed to colonial conquest in 1300-1304/1882-86. By that time Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba had already distanced himself from his father's politics. Beyond his education as faqih (a family profession), he chose to pursue taṣawwuf. His would be a spiritual career, not a political one.

As a youth in Nioro Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba had already been initiated into the Qādirīya ṭarīqa (of the Sidiya-Bakkaīya branch).<sup>39</sup> Later in Kayor he continued his studies in taṣawwuf and in 1302/1883, after the death of his father, he went to study in Saint-Louis and then at the Sidiya zāwiya in Tindūja, Mauritania. He then returned to the family's original home of Mbacké in 1303/1884 in order to pursue what had become a mystic quest — the quest for Ṭūbā, the "tree of Paradise".

According to tradition, early on, God, through His Archangel Gabriel, designated Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba as the mujaddid (the "renewer") of Islam.<sup>40</sup> To him was assigned the task of renewing the

---

<sup>37</sup> MBACKÉ, 1980, *loc. cit.*, p. 577.

<sup>38</sup> SY, 1969, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>39</sup> MBACKÉ, 1981, *loc. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>40</sup> SY, 1969, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

faith of the people. In order to do so, he was to find a "sacred place" where he was to establish a spiritual metropolis of universal significance, a great religious center. This place would be chosen by God; God would guide him there. Furthermore, this place was to be named Ṭubá, the name of the tree of Paradise. Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's sanctuary was thus to be the tool by which he would lead the people to belief, and the believers to ultimate recompense. That this recompense would consist of access to Paradise could be implied by the very name of the future holy city. God's promise of eternal Bliss for the Righteous became Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's foremost preoccupation. He desired above all else to lead the way to Paradise for all those who would follow him along the Straight Path. This task first found expression in his written compositions. His qasidas include such titles as: "Passages to Paradise", "Opening of Paradise and Closing of Hell" and "Provisioning Youth for the Journey to God's Gardens".<sup>41</sup> Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba also laid great stress on the necessity of unmitigated faith in God and His Word and on unbounded love for His Prophet Muhammad and the Prophet's Sunna. The Prophet was God's greatest gift to mankind for it was through him that the "keys" to Paradise were delivered. Indeed, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba was so devoted to the Prophet that he chose for himself the sobriquet "Khadim al-Rasul" ("Servant of the Messenger") and today it is by this name (Khadimou Rassouli in Wolof) that Mourides prefer to evoke his memory.

Muhammad the Messenger of God had exposed God's plan for all, so that all might know it, so that all might be rewarded in the Hereafter. But many had forgotten or neglected to follow this path called Islam. Now it was the mandate of Ahmadou Bamba, the Servant of the Messenger, to lead people back to the Straight Path. Any murid ("aspirant") who chose to follow Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba along this path would be rewarded in the Hereafter. It is important to note here that, though the shaykh had studied under several masters and considered himself a member of the Qâdiriya, the Shâdhiliya and the

---

<sup>41</sup> DUMOND, 1975, *op. cit.*

Tijāniya,<sup>42</sup> and though his silsila ("chain" of spiritual ascendancy) included Al-Suyûtî, Ibn ʿArabî, Al-Ghazâlî, Al-Jîlî, Junayd and Al-Baṣrî among others,<sup>43</sup> his ultimate spiritual knowledge was derived first of all from the Angel Gabriel and later from the Prophet Muḥammad. He was a "quṭb" (a Pole), who attained maʿrifa (gnosis) through visitations and visions sent from above, and not from any strictly earthly murshid (master).<sup>44</sup>

Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's chosen sobriquet also has a more directly eschatological significance. Though not explicitly stated in the Qurʾân, there is a persistent Islamic tradition of intercession (shafâʿa).<sup>45</sup> The Prophet Muḥammad, according to this tradition, is held to intercede on behalf of his umma at some point in the Judgment process. Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, as the Prophet's servant, is thus posed to lead his murids to Muḥammad's intercession. The holy city which he founded is thus functionally related to the "City of the Prophet", Madinat al-Nabî, locus of Muḥammad's intercession:

*Un jour l'Ange (Gabriel) lui révéla qu'il (Ahmadou Bamba) devait se mettre en route pour chercher "l'endroit sacré" qui deviendrait le lieu de pèlerinage où les mourides, et plus tard le monde entier, viendraient faire pénitence et se sanctifier, où lui-même serait enterré pour que les fidèles puissent trouver à son tombeau les grâces qu'ils allaient demander à Médina sur la tombe de Mouhamed.* <sup>46</sup>

Established Islamic tradition generally supports the notion that Believers who travel the tomb of Muḥammad in the Mosque of the Prophet in Madîna can request his intercession on the Day of Judgment.<sup>47</sup> According to the popular Mouride tradition cited above

<sup>42</sup> MBACKÉ, 1980, *loc. cit.*, p. 589.

<sup>43</sup> DUMONT, 1975, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>44</sup> MBACKÉ, 1980, *loc. cit.*, p. 576, 587.

<sup>45</sup> SMITH & HADDAD, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection, 1981, pp. 80-82.

<sup>46</sup> SY, 1969, *op. cit.*, p. 314: One day, the Angle (Gabriel) revealed to him that he (Ahmadou Bamba) must set out to find the "sacred place" destined to be an object of pilgrimage where Mourides, and later the entire world, will come in penitence, where he himself will be buried so that the faithful might find on his tomb the benefit which they seek on the tomb of Muhammad in Madîna (emphasis added).

<sup>47</sup> AL-GHAZALI, The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife 1989, p. 113.

this request can also be made on the tomb of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba in Touba because he is the Khadim al-Rasûl, the "Servant of the Prophet". There is thus a recurring equation of Touba with Madîna in Mouride traditions:

*Comme Medine pour le Prophète , Touba était aussi choisi par Dieu pour servir de capital religieuse au Mouridisme. Comme le Prophète, Ahmadou Bamba ignorait l'emplacement exact de ce point de contact avec la divinité que fut Touba pour lui, comme fut jadis le Mont Sinai pour Moïse.<sup>48</sup>*

Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba however does not himself use the term "madîna", the most common Arabic term for "city", when referring to Touba in his odes. Rather, he uses a host of other terms: "bayti" (my house), "banîi" (my building), "binâ'îi" (my edifice), "maskanî" (my settlement), and "sakanâti" (my dwellings).

However one chooses to interpret Khadimou Rassouli's spiritual mission, there can be no doubt that he intended it to be actualized by Touba, the earthly reflection of the celestial Tûbâ.

### The mbéh tree

When Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba returned to Mbacké in 1302/1884 Senegal was in the process of being conquered by the French. The old political order had collapsed and a new colonial administration was being erected. Tumult and dislocation were overtaking the heart of the country. Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's retreat into the wilderness of Eastern Baol was in some way a manner of hijra, a migration out of iniquity towards a more righteous existence. More importantly, the shaykh had been assured through dreams and visions that Tûbâ was waiting for him somewhere in the anonymous expanse.<sup>49</sup> Only the wilderness held out hope for renewal. Yet his quest for the promised spot turned out to be a daunting task. The wilderness in question was

---

<sup>48</sup> SY, 1969, *op. cit.*, p. 110: Like Madîna for the Prophet, Touba was also chosen by God to serve as the spiritual capital of Mouridism. Like the Prophet, Ahmadou Bamba did not know the exact point of contact with the Divine which Touba would represent for him, just as Mount Sinai had represented for Moses.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

a wooded steppe, entirely devoid of civilization, of culture, of settled life. In the introduction to "Maṭlab al-fawzayn", it is prosaically referred to as "an uncultivated valley" (wāḍin ghayri dhi zar'in), a Quranic expression (14;37) which has more usually and far more aptly been applied to Mecca. In actuality the land in question was a flat waste known as the Ferlo which extended from Baol to Ndiambour, to Djolof, and to Ndoucoumane. The Ferlo was inhabited, so the story goes, only by ferocious beasts, and it was entirely lacking in any kind of landmark, neither watercourse nor relief. The only distinguishing features of the emptiness were its trees, some of which towered above the landscape. It is these great trees which would catalyze events. In the whole spiritual and physical transformation of wilderness into metropolis which Serigne Touba instigated, the only constants of topography were to be the trees; some of them still stand today, others survive as toponyms, yet others live on solely in the traditions.

For several years Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba roamed the forest expanse, isolating himself for days on end in certain special spots, termed *khalwas* ("spiritual retreats"), where he could devote himself entirely to prayer, sensing all the time in this wilderness the immanence of Ṭubā, finding the roots of the paradisiacal tree surfacing everywhere.<sup>50</sup> Finally, while returning from one of his *khalwas*, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba came across a giant *mbéb* tree (gum-plane, *Sterculia setigera*).<sup>51</sup> This *mbéb* tree was the sign he had been seeking. It marked the chosen spot, the promised spot. Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba was guided to it by the Angel Gabriel. Here at last was Ṭubā. While prostrated before the tree, deep in prayer, a prayer of thanks to God for having made manifest the holy place, Ahmadou Bamba had a vision, or rather a transcendent "illumination". In a great vision of light he saw "the fish which upholds the world".<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> This piece of geo-poetics regarding Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's quest was related to me by sharif Abdou Rahmane Fall, of the Iyakhine Baye-Fall (Thiès) in Parcelles-Assainies, Dakar.

<sup>51</sup> SY, 1969, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, p. 314, According to this late tradition (1948), the event occurred on the 17<sup>th</sup> Safar 1305 (4<sup>th</sup> November 1887); see also SAMB, 1969, *loc. cit.*, p. 743.

The quest for Touba, and its successful culmination, were summarized as follows in the opening verses of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's "Maṭlab al-fawzayn":

Praise be to God, the Munificent, Possessor of graces.  
 He has elevated my preoccupation with injunctions and  
 sanctioned practices.  
 I thank Him for verily He has guided me  
 To a homeland in which He has exiled from me that which  
 would obstruct me.  
 And has brought to me that which has beauty  
 After having polished (me) by removing ugliness,  
 He has drawn me to it through the sciences,  
 And achievements and labor with certainty.  
 Then prayer in peace followed.  
 He has exalted the one who it is my intent to follow.  
 He has exalted the one He wishes me to emulate.  
 In private and in public, he is a model.  
 He is the one who emigrated to Madīna  
 By the command of his Lord. He upheld his religion.  
 He is the instrument to my exalted possessor,  
 Muhammad, the Best of Men, the Intercessor. (verses 1-16)

Several key notions are expressed in this passage. First of all Khadimou Rassouli was guided to Touba by God — through the injunctions and sanctioned practices of the Sunna, through purity and beauty of spirit, through the sciences and through labor. Secondly, he was following the model of the Prophet Muḥammad, the Intercessor, who emigrated to Madīna by the command of his Lord.

Touba thus marks Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's transcendent experience, the place where he connected with the Absolute Eternal (al-Bāqī al-Qadīm). It is a qutb. Essentially, "qutb" designates a transcendent experience, and by extension the moment or place of transcendence — wherever and whenever the other, or ultimate, Reality is felt or approached. It can be manifest in a person or actualized by some event. The qutb is also a cosmic axis, an axis mundi, the qutb al-ʿālam or "pole of the world". The shaykh was himself a qutb in the mystic sense; he experienced transcendence of the physical and spiritual worlds. Touba too is qutb; as a sacred space it links these two realities. It is a point of rupture in space, a

point where the profane world connects with ultimate Reality and therefore acquires meaning. This is the essence of Touba. Touba is a purposeful creation. It was chosen by God. The choice was signaled by a tree. This qutb forever transformed Senegal's landscape.

Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba came to live on the chosen spot. He established himself with his wives and young children directly beneath the mbéb tree. The initial settlement is reported to have consisted of a number of houses arranged around the base of the great tree and enclosed by a wattle fence.<sup>53</sup> This chosen ground, which would later become Touba's great mosque, was thus first of all the founder's homestead, just as had been the case in Madīna at the time of the Prophet Muhammad.

### The Guy Texe

Rustic conditions in the wilderness were responsible for the first noteworthy event to occur in Touba following its foundation, the death of Sokhna Aminata Lo. Sokhna Aminata Lo was Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's first wife. She was the first to give birth in the new sanctuary (to Serigne Bara c. 1305/1888) and, when she died of a snake bite shortly afterwards, she was the first to be buried there. Her "sacrifice" is believed to have consecrated Touba's spiritual foundation.<sup>54</sup>

The lamented woman was buried beneath a great guy tree (baobab, *Adansonia digitata*) a short distance to the East of the homestead. This tree, the second tree of Touba's foundation, is known as the Guy Texe (pronounced "gouï tékhé", غُوِي طَخْ), the "Baobab of Felicity", or "Baobab of Paradise".<sup>55</sup> It stands in the middle of Touba's cemetery to this day and Sokhna Aminata Lo's burial beneath it established Touba as "gate" to Paradise. The Guy Texe, as its name suggests, is an essential element of the Touba tradition. It is widely held in Mouride circles that Khadimou Rassouli promised that those

---

<sup>53</sup> This description was related to me in Touba by Serigne Matar SYLLA, President of the *Association culturelle et religieuse islamique mouride*, in Touba-Mosquée ward.

<sup>54</sup> This tradition of "sacrifice" was related to me in Touba's cemetery by the keeper of the Guy Texe.

<sup>55</sup> SY, 1969, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

buried in Touba would enter Paradise.<sup>56</sup> The Guy Texe incarnates this promise. Burial in the earthly Touba, beneath the Guy Texe, as good as guarantees access to the heavenly Tûbâ.<sup>57</sup> This is an established Mouride belief, a belief shared by those in the uppermost hierarchy of the *ṭarîqa* as well as by the rank and file faithful. Witness the following declaration of the late *Khalîfa-général* of the Mourides:

*Touba restant notre ultime patrimoine — nous devons, quant à nous, souhaiter y passer tout notre séjour terrestre, y terminer notre existence et enfin y ressusciter pour la vie future. Et il est certain que ceux à qui la faveur d'être résident de la ville n'a pas été accordée, nourrissent ardemment l'espoir d'y être ensevelis et d'y ressusciter . -*  
Serigne Abdoul Ahad MBACKÉ<sup>58</sup>

In essence, the earthly Touba and the celestial Tûbâ are connected. Burial in Touba signifies resurrection to Tûbâ. Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's *qutb*, his contact with the Absolute, his point of transcendence, constitutes a permanent fixed link between this world and the next one. The great tree in its cemetery signifies this cosmic link.

### Aïnou Rahmati

That Touba in the early years was an arid waste cannot be overstated. Surface water was entirely lacking and the various wells sunk in the vicinity of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's homestead yielded little. Once again however these harsh conditions were responsible for yet another of God's blessings. One of the attempts at finding water resulted in the manifestation of a beneficent spring; 'Ayn al-Rahma (Aïnou Rahmati in Wolof). This "Well of Mercy"<sup>59</sup> possesses important spiritual powers and Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba dedicated at

<sup>56</sup> CRUISE O'BRIEN, 1971, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

<sup>57</sup> SY, 1969, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

<sup>58</sup> Cited by COULON, "Paroles mourides: Bamba père et fils", 1981, p. 105: "Touba being our supreme heritage - we must hope to live here during our entire earthly sojourn, to finish our days here and to rise here in the Afterlife. And surely those to whom the favor of residence in the city has not been granted, desire above all else to be buried and to resurrect here."

<sup>59</sup> In much of the literature Aïnou-Rahmati is referred to as Zamzam, the name of the sacred well near the Holy Ka'ba in Mecca.



least two odes of thanks for the event. Therein, those who seek refuge in the sanctity of Touba and are repentant of their sins are told that they may purify and enlighten their hearts by drinking of its water:

O my dear Lord Protector who hast installed me in this holy place Tuubaa,  
Shield it against foe and doom,  
Shield it against disease and disaster,  
May it be a place of unwavering devotion...

Thou hast quenched our thirst with this very source of bliss,  
Preserve us o Lord from doom and prejudice,  
O Lord, bestow upon us a life of purity,  
Let the heart of those who drink of this source be as enlightened as the heart of the fortunate ones...<sup>60</sup>

The "fortunate ones", there can be no doubt, are those Righteous who will accede to Paradise. The qasida goes on:

This world here below and the next one belong to Thee o my Protector,  
Thou hast saved me...  
To Thee we belong and as such entertain the strongest hope that the rarest gifts are in store for us...

The waters of Aïnou Rahmati, this well in the wilderness, are a manifestation of the city's "blessings" and this is expressed in "Matlab al-fawzayn":

Preserve my home from debauchery.  
Bestow blessings upon the people by flowing water.  
Make it, Lord, immediate blessings (minan),  
That will occasion deferred blessings. (verses 143-146)

In a very immediate sense, Aïnou Rahmati was a manifest blessing in that it rendered the wilderness inhabitable.

---

<sup>60</sup> These odes are inscribed inside a pavilion within the precincts of Aïnou Rahmati in their original Arabic as well as in French and English translation. The citations above are from the English text as it appears on the monument.

### The Pact of Exile

During the foundation years, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba continued to isolate himself in the surrounding wilderness and these khalwas continued to yield spiritual fruit. Darou-Khoudoss was one such retreat. It was in Darou-Khoudoss, on the spot now marked by a small mosque, that during the month of Ramadân 1311 (1894) Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, then in his fortieth year, was granted direct access to the Prophet.<sup>61</sup> In what became known as the "Pact of Exile", he was assured by the Prophet, in a vision, that his new city had been taken under God's Own protection, that no evil would come to it or to those who would take refuge in it, but that he himself was henceforth to live in exile.<sup>62</sup>

Thus Touba is under God's protection. In qasidas the city is referred to as "al-mahrûsa" (the protected one), "al-ḥimâ" (the sanctuary), and "al-ḥarîm" (the sacred precinct). It is a sanctuary, a refuge from evil. Touba is the means, the tool by which Believers are aligned on the Straight Path. It is a place where the Sunna can be properly observed, a place protected from iniquity and innovation. This is the city's temporal function and it is clearly stated in "Matlab al-fawzayn":

Make my home a home of forgiveness,  
Of sound, acknowledged and sanctioned conduct,  
An abode of sincere devotion, truth and piety,  
An abode of the Sunna and security from innovation.  
Make it indefatigably the home of education,  
A locus of thought and understanding,  
The home of guidance and instruction,  
The home of rectification and comprehension.  
Make it a home exempted from iniquity,  
Through light. Spare it from all those who do wrong.  
Make it indefatigably a place of observance  
Of the Sunna, and not a place of innovation.  
Make it, o Lord, a desired place  
In our world which You own and will obliterate.  
Guard my abode against depravations,

---

<sup>61</sup> MBACKÉ, 1981, *loc. cit.*, p. 102.

<sup>62</sup> Dahirah des étudiants mourides, Guide du pelerin, 1986, p. 3.

Against depravities and temporal futility.  
 Purify it of both infection and plague.  
 Render its drink and food sweet.  
 Make our sanctuary an inviolable place.  
 Its preservation is sufficiently guaranteed.  
 Obtain for it the best part of  
 The six directions and protect it from harm.  
 Protect me from Satan, o Sublime One,  
 And my home and all who have not deviated. (verses 431-454)

If Touba's spiritual mandate is to point the way to Paradise, its temporal mandate is to set an example of the Straight Path. One can again cite the late *Khalifa-général* in this regard:

*Nous autres mourides, nous vivons dans une concession, nos vies sont régies par les enseignements d'Amadou Bamba, par le travail et la prière. Au-delà de cet enclos nous apercevons Satan et toutes ses œuvres. - Serigne Abdoul Ahad MBACKÉ*<sup>63</sup>

Touba's sanctity is divinely ordained and divinely sustained. The *ṭariqa*, for its part, vigilantly protects the sanctuary from the corruption of the profane world. Touba must remain a bright beacon of God's specified will, a bastion of Islam against the satanic temptations and ruses which threaten to overwhelm men. Therefore prohibited in Touba are the consumption of alcohol and tobacco, the making of music, gaming, partying and all other forms of secular entertainment. All life in Touba must turn to God because this was His purpose in guiding Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba to the transcendent spot. Touba is the beacon of the Sunna, and the Prophet's Sunna is the gate to Paradise.

Notwithstanding the hardships of life in the bush, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba attracted crowds of murids and this aroused the suspicions of a colonial administration not yet securely in command of the newly conquered population. The French authorities took note of the "Mouride" phenomenon and on the 18<sup>th</sup> Safar 1313 (21<sup>st</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> "We Mourides live in a compound, our lives are ruled by the teachings of Ahmadou Bamba, by work and by prayer. Beyond this enclosure we see Satan and all his works." Pronounced by the late *Khalifa-général* Serigne Abdoul Ahad Mbacké during the *maggal* of 1973, cited by COULON, 1981, *loc. cit.*, p. 104.

September 1895) deported Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba to an insalubrious penal colony on the island of Mayoumbé in Gabon. So began for Khadimou Rassouli a life of trials and tribulations. After seven years of exile he was allowed to return from Gabon and was joyously welcomed in Touba (16<sup>th</sup> Sha'bân 1320/8<sup>th</sup> November 1902),<sup>64</sup> only to be arrested and deported again a year later (14<sup>th</sup> Rabi' al-awwal 1321/12<sup>th</sup> May 1903)<sup>65</sup> — this time to Boutilimit in Mauritania. In 1325/1907 he was returned to Senegal but was kept under house arrest and never permitted back in Touba. It is only upon his death, which occurred on 19<sup>th</sup> Muḥarram 1346 (19<sup>th</sup> July 1927) while still under house arrest in Diourbel, that Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba at last returned to Touba and was buried there on the chosen spot.

Actual construction of the mosque and the city was permitted to proceed only after Serigne Touba's death. By then the Mouride tariqa had grown into a mass movement of national proportions and the colonial administration had learnt to accommodate it. The administration had hoped to nip the "Mouride" phenomenon at the source by deporting its spiritual leader. Rather than abating however, the growth of the spiritual revivalist movement had accelerated following Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's exile. Exile is therefore a central theme of Mouride history as it marks the moment when the "Pact of Exile" was honored and the shaykh's mission as "renewer of the faith" became manifest in fact. The annual pilgrimage to Touba, which culminates on the 18<sup>th</sup> Šafar, commemorates the departure for exile.<sup>66</sup>

### Le Pays Mouride

Touba lies at the center of a highly hierarchical regional landscape of its own manufacture which has been aptly named *le pays mouride* (fig. 2.2). "Mouride Country" is what has replaced the original wilderness of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's mystic quest. And just like the wilderness it has replaced, Mouride Country is a essential part of what Touba represents.

---

<sup>64</sup> MBACKÉ, 1980, *loc. cit.*, p. 624.

<sup>65</sup> *idid.*, p. 627.

<sup>66</sup> DUMONT, 1975, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

If Touba is a holy city, Mouride Country, which extends for some forty kilometers in all directions around it, is a holy land. We have seen that while he was searching for the chosen spot there is some indication that Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba felt that the entire wilderness constituted some kind of a foretaste of Touba, that he could feel the imminence of its manifestation everywhere. In this sense Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's khalwas were already part of Touba. In the decades following Touba's foundation this "uncultivated valley" all but disappeared to make way for settled Mouride communities. This process of building up a "Mouride Country" constitutes an important part of Touba's tradition. The Mouride holy land figures in Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's odes, where he refers to it as "al-balad" (the country), or as "al-waṭan" (the homeland). Mouride Country is the cultural (and agricultural) heartland of the tariqa. It stands as a testimonial to the heroic, pioneer spirit of the early years of the movement. It is this heartland that nourished the great sanctuary which was erected at its very center.

Long before Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba had founded Touba he had already become a well known religious leader in Senegal. His reputation as sufi shaykh compounded with the established renown of his family to turn him into something of a cult figure for what was then a very distraught nation. In 1302/1884 about five hundred murids are said to have followed him in his hijra to Mbacké. All the while he had been occupied by the search for Tūbā, Mbacké had been inundated with people searching for him. In an attempt to isolate himself from the crowds, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba established himself deeper in the wilderness, first in a khalwa he named Darou-Salam, about a kilometer from Mbacké, and then in Touba itself, seven kilometers further out. Yet ever increasing numbers of his followers were joining him in these retreats. Despite the harsh living conditions the forest waste was becoming crowded. In what can be described as a sustained policy of agricultural colonization, the energies of this growing mass of murids were channeled into settling the land. The first experiment of this policy was the community of Darou-Marnane. Darou-Marnane was one of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's khalwas. It was strategically situated at the

midway point between Mbacké and Touba and the settlement was developed to screen those headed for the new sanctuary. It was hoped to prevent murids from submerging Touba by otherwise occupying them in Darou-Marnane. A school was opened for their instruction and they were put to work as well. Bush was cleared, trees felled, wells dug and crops planted.

The experiment proved a success. During Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's exile his brothers and others among his closest associates led similar forays into the wilderness. Mouride communities were built throughout the arid waste surrounding Touba and by the time of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's death a prosperous Mouride Country had emerged. These new communities provided the *ṭariqa* with a sound economic foundation — the financial returns of peanut cultivation. Peanuts were the backbone of the colonial economy and everywhere Mourides settled they grew them as a cash-crop. The success of the Mouride policy of opening new land to cultivation is what prompted the colonial administration into adopting a more conciliatory attitude towards the Mourides. Henceforth, and for the remainder of the colonial period, the French administration and the sufi *ṭariqa* would partake together in the expansion of the peanut economy and in the benefits which this entailed.

Mouride Country was not just a material success however. Successive generations of murids have lived and worked in these villages, in the shadow of Touba, and thus there has emerged a distinct Mouride culture which is relevant to an understanding of Touba. Mouride communities have traditionally gone by the name of darou (Arabic *dār*, "house", "abode"). A darou is first of all a primary school (a *daara* in Wolof), where young murids are sent to learn the Qur'ān, but it is also an agricultural village, where murids work the fields for the benefit of the darou's shaykh and the *ṭariqa*. Each darou thrives under the spiritual and temporal authority of its founder and his successors. Each is a "chapter" of the *ṭariqa*, with its own local khalifa. Each is a Touba in miniature, with its own mosque on a public square, its mausolea, its pious visits, its history and traditions. Moreover, when viewed at another scale of analysis, all darous serve Touba. They are all under the ultimate authority of the

*Khalifa-général* of the Mourides and each one is attached to the metropolis at the center of the holy land.

Darous thus defined are spiritual foundations. They partake in the essence of Touba. Many of the most important darous, those established by Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba himself, or by his brothers and sons, are called after Divine names:

- Darou-Salam (from al-salâm, "The Peace") founded by Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba in 1884;<sup>67</sup>
- Darou-Marnane (al-manân, "The Benefactor"), 1887;
- Darou-Khoudoss (al-quddûs, "The Most Holy"), 1894;
- Darou-Mousti (al-mu'ti, "The Giver") founded by Mame Tierno Birahim Mbacké, 1912;
- Darou-Rahmane (al-raḥmân, "The Merciful") founded by Serigne Abdoulaye Mbacké, 1940's;
- Darou-Karim (al-karim, "The Munificent");
- Darou-Khafor (al-ghafûr, "The Forgiver");
- Darou-Rahim (al-raḥîm, "The Compassionate");

Still other Mouride establishments, like Touba itself, have been given the names of eschatological symbols mentioned in the Qur'ân:

- Kaossara, (al-kawthar, 108:1) founded by Serigne Assane Fall, 1926;
- Darou-Naïm, (jannât al-na'im, 10:9);
- Djannatoul-Mahwa (jannat al-ma'wâ, 53:15) founded by Serigne Saliou Mbacké, 1987.

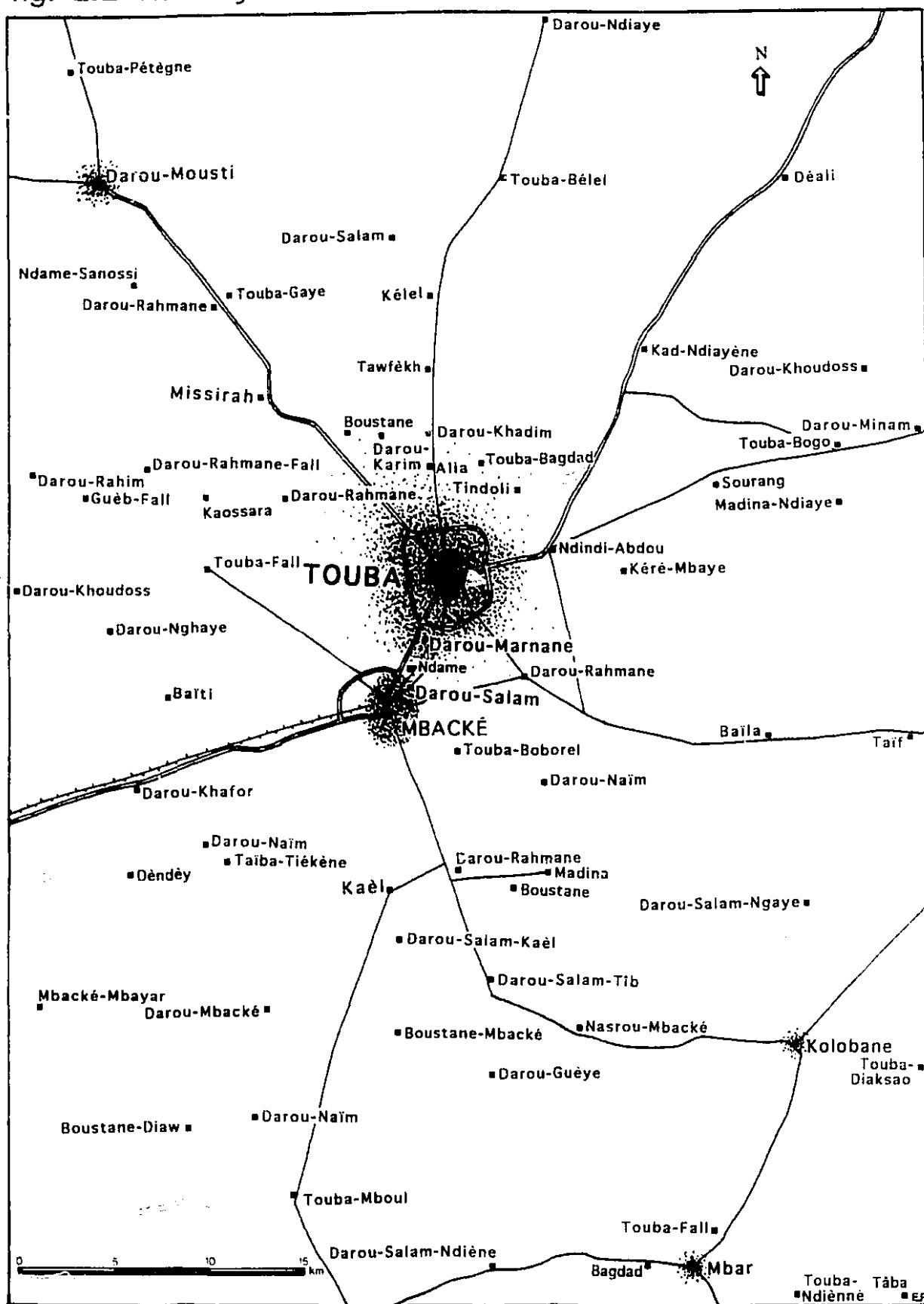
The list of Mouride toponyms also includes: Darou-Minam, Alia, Tawfèkh, Sourah, Boustane, Madina, Taïf, Bagdad, Khaïra, and Missirah. Moreover, most of these toponyms are recurrent. They may designate darous throughout Mouride Country and beyond, wherever Mourides have settled.

Thus the entire Mouride holy land contributes to Touba's theophany. God's presence is evoked throughout, as is His eschatological promise. The wilderness, all of it, is Ṭubâ. It was cleared and settled concomitantly with the building of the great

---

<sup>67</sup> That Darou-Salam was named for al-salâm ("The Peace", one of the Divine names) rather than for dâr al-salâm ("the Abode of Peace", a name of Paradise) was explained to me by al-Hajjî Serigne Ibrahima More Mbacké in Touba-Mosquée ward.

fig. 2.2 The Pays mouride



Sources: Institut Géographique National (Paris), République du Sénégal 1:200 000, ND-28-XXI (Linguère) 1957; ND-28-XV (Kaffrine) 1958; ND-28-XX (Louga) 1981; ND-28-XIV (Thiès) 1981.





Fig. 2.2 commentary : Touba lies at the center of a regional landscape of its own manufacture. In the decades following the holy city's foundation (1887), the surrounding wilderness was cleared to make way for Mouride villages called darous. Construction of Touba was begun in 1928 with funds and labor provided by these darous. The railroad from Diourbel was completed in 1931. However, most transportation (of pilgrims and produce) now uses the road network which converges on Touba.

Fig. 2.3 commentary: Touba is configured as a grid (aligned on the qibla to Mecca) and as a wheel (centered on the Great Mosque). The Mouride sanctuary began to develop as a city following completion of the Mosque in 1963. Sustained demographic growth (30 000 inhabitants in 1976; 134 000 in 1988; estimated 271 000 in 1993) has caused the city to sprawl. Important Mouride darous such as Guédé-Boussou and Darou-Marnane, which were formerly independent villages, became integrated urban neighborhoods. Darous further afield, such as Touba-Bagdad, Ndindi-Abdou and Darou-Rahmane, are currently experiencing similar development.

Mbacké, a local administrative center (*préfecture*), is Touba's "mother" city and second pole of the Mouride conurbation. Mbacké was founded by Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's great grandfather a century prior to the foundation of Touba, and it is from Mbacké that the shaykh set out searching for Tūbā, founding Darou-Salam and Darou-Marnane in the process. Mbacké (39 000 inhabitants in 1988) used to be a much bigger place than Touba. It has now been reduced to satellite status as most of its commercial activity has moved to Touba and only civil administration functions remain.

Beyond these two centers, new residential subdivisions are being created wherever water can be piped in. Touba's radial street plan with its concentric ring roads imparts cohesion and centrality of purpose to the expanding conurbation.

sanctuary. Those shaykhs and murids who opened up this land for settlement fervently believed that they were clearing the way for Touba and, indeed, the sprawling Mouride metropolis continues to absorb these formerly rural darous as it grows (fig. 2.3).

### Touba as Configuration

Touba has become a great city. This is no accident. This is what was intended for it by its founder. From the start the scale of the project was in keeping with the universality of its temporal and spiritual mission. In no way can Touba be described as a village which accidentally grew into a city. Touba was to be a metropolis. Plans were initially drawn up under Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's direct supervision.<sup>68</sup> His intention was to construct the largest mosque ever erected in the land. This mosque was to stand in the middle of a public square at the absolute center of his city, with great avenues converging on it from every direction.

### The Mandala

The sanctuary has in effect been erected according to this plan by Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's sons and successors, the khalifas of the Mourides. The city is laid out as a "concentric grid", a mandala of sorts, a squaring of the circle (fig. 2.3). The mandala figures prominently in the Sufi vocabulary of symbols, where according to Ardalan & Bakhtiar it expresses "unity through multiplicity".<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the mandala, already a complex symbol in itself, is also a sign. It signifies the presence of an archetype; it is an archetype's "imprint" or "signature".

In Touba's case, the mandala configuration actualizes Tūbā. It is the imprint of Tūbā's projection onto earth. The mandala's square component, its grid, is determined by the qibla axis (the direction of Mecca). It represents the warp and woof of Touba's temporal mission, the alignment of the particulars of earthly existence onto the Sunna, onto the Straight Path. The mandala's circular component,

---

<sup>68</sup> SY, 1969, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>69</sup> ARDALAN & BAKHTIAR, 1973, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-31.

represented by radiating arteries and ring roads, marks the holy city as a transcendent place, a *qutb*, a place of communion with ultimate Reality. It imparts unity and centrality of purpose to the grid of life on earth. This urban mandala has furthermore been delimited by a circular boulevard (called the *rocade*) which confines the holy city and defines it. Though the city continues to sprawl out well beyond this boulevard, the *rocade* constitutes an enclosing topographical element. It defines the sacred enclosure, the protected zone (*mahrûsa*) from which "Satan and his works" are excluded. The city does in fact enjoy special legal status within Senegal (Touba has been a *communauté rurale autonome* since 1976<sup>70</sup>) and the *rocade* to some extent circumscribes this distinction on earth.

Both square and the circle are centered on the Mosque. The Mosque marks a cosmic center, a *qutb* or "pole". Indeed Touba is the center of the Mouride universe and, according to Mouride historiography, its centrality has universal significance for humanity. It is believed that the Angel Gabriel promised Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba that the entire world (Blacks and Whites) would one day come to Touba in penitence.<sup>71</sup> Touba's universality has repeatedly been iterated:

*Mouhamadou Bamba appelle à Touba non seulement les Mourides, non seulement les Musulmans, mais tous les fils d'Adam.*<sup>72</sup>

Nothing better expresses Touba's position at the center of the universe than its radial street plan. The city's great avenues converge on its central Mosque. In the opposite direction, these roads extend far beyond the city's precincts, right across Mouride Country and beyond, to everywhere Mourides live. Anywhere Mourides settle is Touba and thus today there is a Touba-Paris, a Touba-Milano, a Touba-New York, etc. Those Mourides who cannot actually live in Touba are thus at the very least "on the road" to Touba.

---

<sup>70</sup> ROSS, 1995, *loc. cit.*, pp. 245-249.

<sup>71</sup> SY, 1969, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

<sup>72</sup> "Mouhamadou Bamba summons to Touba not only Mourides, not only Muslims, but *a // the sons of Adam.*" (emphasis added) DIOP, Ah. B., "Lat Dior et le problème musulman", 1966, p. 538.

fig. 2.4 Touba's Central Wards

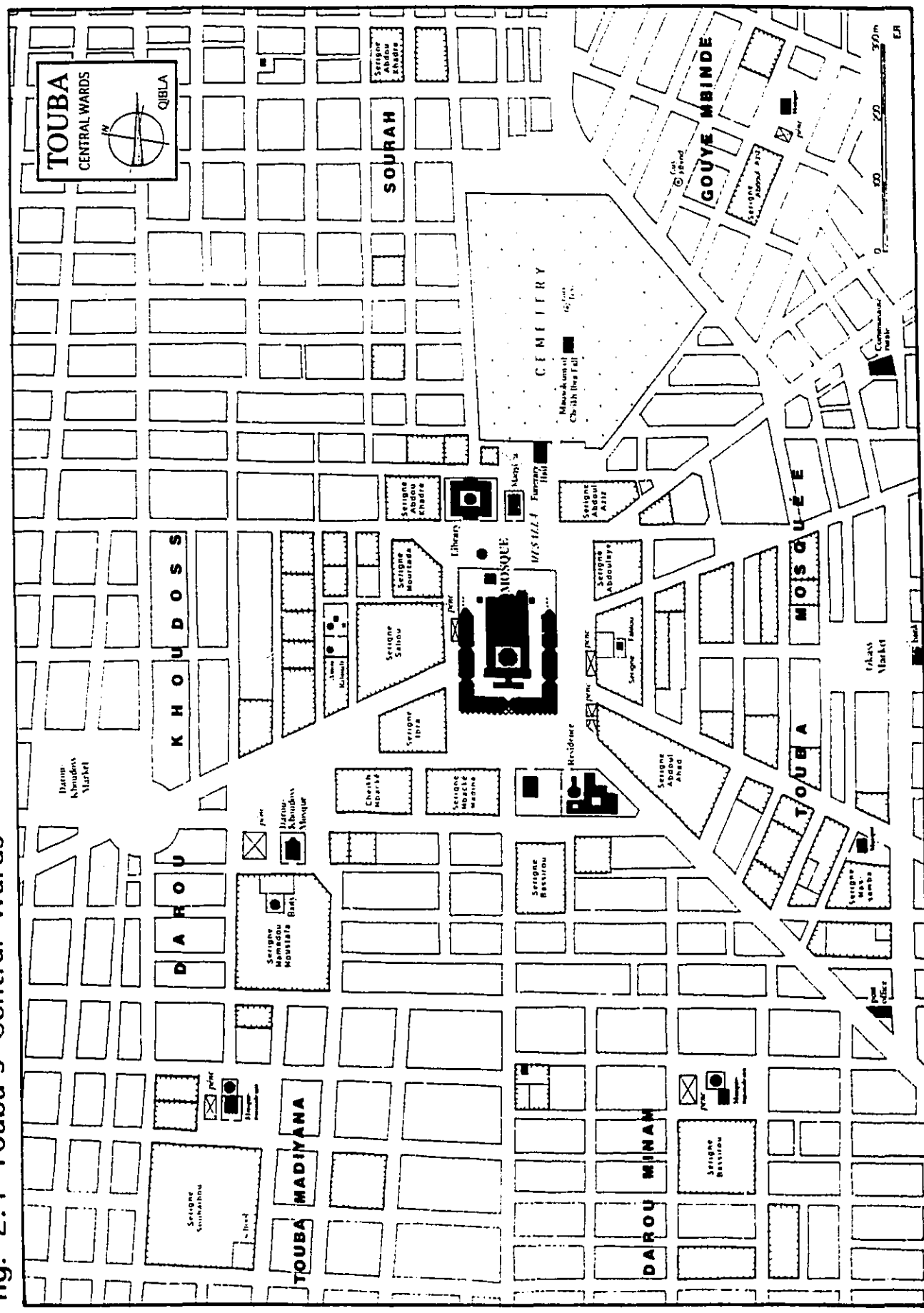
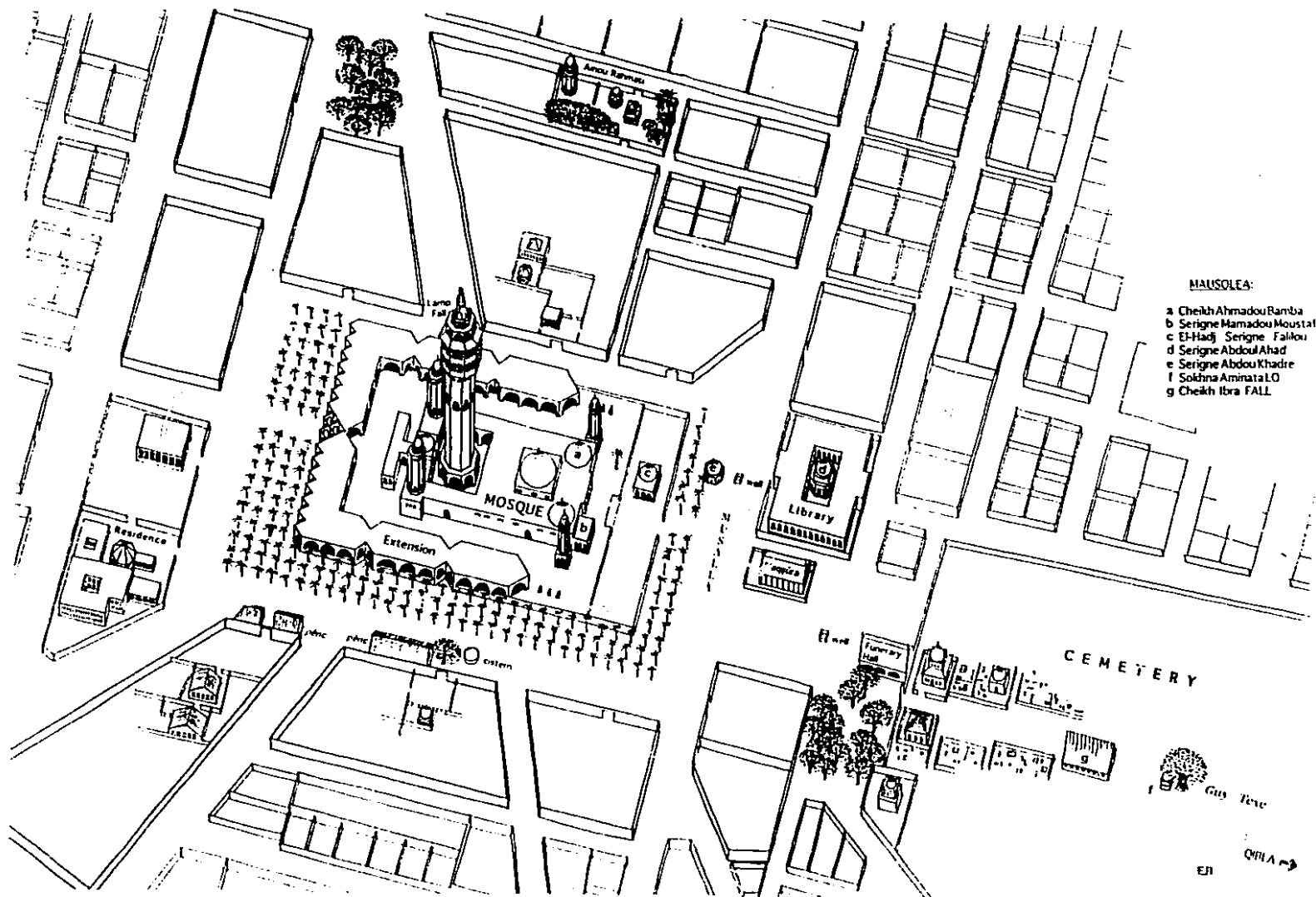


fig. 2.5 Axonometric View of Touba



Source: Bureau National du Recensement (Dakar), Ville de Touba, 1:5000 (1987).  
Verified and updated on-site Oct.-Dec. 1994.

Fig. 2.4 commentary : The Great Mosque commands Touba. It rises from the middle of the central square on which the city's main avenues converge and facing which the *ṭariqa*'s major institutions (library, *maqṣūra*, mausolea, official residences) have been built. The large compounds of the *khalifas* (sons and successors of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba) are of particular importance as these are the locus of *ṭariqa* administration. The cemetery, on the qibla side of the square, is a central element of the holy city.

Residential wards (Darou-Khoudoss, Darou-Minam, Touba-Madiyana, Gouye-Mbinde, Sourah) have been built around this nucleus. Each ward is under the jurisdiction of a distinct Mbacké lineage and each is ordered as a little Touba, with its own central public square, its mosque-mausoleum, its official residence...

Touba-Mosquée, unlike the other wards, is under the direct jurisdiction of the reigning *khalifa*. It contains the city's central market (named for 'Ukâz) and bank, as well as the only elements of civil administration (the post office and the office of the *communauté rurale*) permitted within the autonomous holy city.

Fig. 2.5 commentary : The Mosque's high central dome crowns the *mihrâb* of the prayer hall. The edifice also contains, under its north-east dome, the mausoleum of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké (a). The Mosque has recently been extended by the addition of subsidiary prayer halls along the perimeter of its plinth. The central minaret (Lamp Fall) rises 87 meters above the sanctuary. It dominates Touba's skyline and commands the surrounding landscape.

The Guy Texe, the "Baobab of Felicity", marks the cemetery. It is a major object of pious visit and is surrounded by a veritable necropolis — a dense grid of tombs and mausolea.

The *muṣallâ*, or prayer-ground, occupies the area between the Mosque and the cemetery. It contains the *khalifa*'s *maqṣūra* and the mausolea of former *khalifas*. These too are the object of pious visit. There are numerous wells and cisterns in and around the central square. These testify to the effort required in order to render the holy city inhabitable. The most famous well, Aïnou Rahmati, has been planted as a garden.

The large compounds of the most senior members of the *ṭariqa* face the square.

### The Mosque

The chosen spot at the center of Touba, the spot signaled by the *mbéb* tree, is today marked by the Great Mosque. Featuring five minarets and three green domes, the Mosque rises on a plinth in the middle of a vast public square at the center of the city (fig. 2.5). The Mosque is oriented, as it must be, towards Mecca, towards the Holy Ka'ba, man's first house of worship of God. This is the qibla of Islamic life. Each day Muslims the world over address five canonical prayers in the direction of the Ka'ba. While prayers may be recited in any suitable place, those held collectively, in mosques, and particularly the Friday midday prayer in the Great Mosque, are of far greater value than those recited alone in private. The entire urban plan of Touba is determined by its Mosque, which itself conforms to the qibla. Also, prayer-time in the city is fixed by a sun-dial built within the Mosque's very precincts. Thus it can be said that the Mosque is the point of origin of both space and time. All life in the city, from Friday prayer down to the most mundane activities, turns to Mecca and is set on the Straight Path of Islam — just as Ahmadou Bamba had intended.

Mausoleum The Mosque houses, beneath its North-East dome, the richly adorned and sweetly scented tomb of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba. Thus Touba resembles Madīna to the extent that the tombs of their founders each lie in a mausoleum beneath a dome (*qubba*) to the left of the *mihrāb*. Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's burial chamber is preceded by a hall where his *qasīdas* are perpetually being recited. This antechamber lies directly behind the *mihrāb* of the prayer-hall and one gains access to it from the exterior of the building — without actually entering the Mosque proper (there is however a small door between the prayer-hall and the actual mausoleum). Legally minded Mourides maintain that Khadimou Rassouli's mausoleum is *not* part of the Mosque, that the Mosque is delimited by the interior qibla wall of its prayer-hall and not by the exterior wall of the building. Yet the entire edifice constitutes a single composition. The Mosque and the mausoleum were planned and constructed together as one edifice. Other Mouride communities,



Touba's various wards and suburban neighborhoods as well as darous throughout Mouride Country, are similarly centered on mosque-mausoleum complexes (though much reduced in scale).

Khadimou Rassouli's mausoleum is the single most precious attribute of the holy city and the most tangible expression of its divine sanction. Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba is believed to have attained the summit of gnosis.<sup>73</sup> The person of Ahmadou Bamba, his *being*, is the essence of his enduring legacy. Far more than his actual teachings or writings, it is the heroic or legendary Ahmadou Bamba — the precocious youth, the life-long search for Touba, and the later tribulations with the colonial regime — who lies at the heart of Mouride historiography. Proof of his divine mission, of his closeness to God, was mainly manifest in the enduring effect he had on those around him and this charisma is still what is most remembered about him today. As a result, Muslims from all over, Mourides and non-Mourides alike, arrive in Touba ostensibly to utter prayers by the tomb of Khadimou Rassouli, the "Servant of the Messenger", the "Friend of God".

Lamp Fall Rising 87 meters above Touba is the mosque's central minaret, known popularly as Lamp Fall after Cheikh Ibra Fall, Ahmadou Bamba's most fiercely devoted murid. The name Lamp Fall is derived from the French "*lampe* " and its "illuminative" associations are clear. The monument marks the landscape with Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's mystic vision of light, with his cosmic experience of transcendence, his contact with the Eternal. Lamp Fall is one of the tallest structures in all of Senegal and there can be no doubt that its main function is representational. This distinctive minaret symbolizes Touba and it is a visible concrete manifestation of the paradisiacal tree Tūbā. Its form is immediately recognizable and figures prominently, along with the equally familiar portrait of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, in Mouride iconography (fig. 2.6). The image of Lamp Fall is often represented on tomb stones, in Touba as well as in cemeteries elsewhere and can therefore be qualified as an

---

<sup>73</sup> MBACKÉ, 1981, *loc. cit.*, pp. 47-54.

Fig. 2.6 Lamp Fall



Sources: (left and center) CRUISE O'BRIEN, Donal B., The Mourides of Senegal Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971, pp. 162, 83; (right) HECH, David & SIMONE, Abdou Maliqalim, Invisible Governance, Autonomedia, Brooklyn N. Y., 1994, p. 112.

Touba's great central minaret (87 m), popularly known by the name Lamp Fall (left), has immense symbolic value for Mourides. Representations of Lamp Fall, often in conjunction with, or superimposed upon, the equally well known portrait of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba (center), are ubiquitous. Such images can be found on store fronts and signs, busses, murals, calendars and pamphlets. Lamp Fall is also commonly represented on tomb stones, in Touba's cemetery as well as in cemeteries elsewhere.

eschatological symbol. Lamp Fall indeed stands as a metaphor for Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's entire life's work:

*L'Éternel m'a honoré pour l'éternité, d'un édifice indestructible, qui se dressera jusqu'au Paradis — Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba*<sup>74</sup>

The man and the monument, the images of which are so often superimposed one upon the other, are both manifestations of a single idea. Both signify Touba.

Lamp Fall is both sign and symbol. Not only does it stand as the Tree of Paradise on earth, but, in the interminable flatness of Senegal's countryside, this minaret "marks" the chosen spot in the most unequivocal manner, just as the mbéb tree once did. Lamp Fall is a strong vertical axis, a qutb, which completes the qibla axis of Islam. However, whereas the horizontal qibla axis exists at every point on the surface of the globe,<sup>75</sup> Touba's qutb is specific. This is a chosen point. The vertical and horizontal axes which bisect in the Great Mosque define Touba. Their intersection marks the locus where Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba leads the believer simultaneously to Islam (to the Ka'ba) and to Paradise above (to Tûbâ). It also marks Touba as a center, as *the* center of the Mouride universe. From the top of Lamp Fall, which rises towards Heaven at the focus of the tariqa's global web, Touba summons the entire world into the vortex of its exalted center. All roads lead to Touba. All are summoned here, to Heaven's Gate.

Lamp Fall is a beacon. The call to prayer, amplified from the summit of the great minaret, can be heard throughout the city (which presently extends in radius about five km). By day its silhouette can be seen clearly from fifteen kilometers away while by night the bright blue star at its summit shines out even farther. It dominates the townscape as well as the surrounding country. The soaring dominance of Lamp Fall is a clear indication that Touba was intended as a great city. Mâlikî jurisprudence discourages the proliferation of

---

<sup>74</sup> "The Eternal One has honored me for all eternity with an indestructible edifice which shall rise all the way to Paradise." Cited in *Guide du pèlerin*, 1407 (1986), p. 18.

<sup>75</sup> Except perhaps on the Polynesian island of Mururoa at the antipode of Mecca.

Great Mosques (jāmi', or Friday Mosques) by preventing their construction within ear-shot of each other.<sup>76</sup> Built in an age of loudspeakers, Lamp Fall's effective radius of several kilometers guaranteed that Touba would have no concurrent jāmi'. It must be emphasized that when this minaret was planned and constructed the space it dominated was as yet but a semi-settled wilderness. Decades would pass before a cityscape coalesced around it.

### The Cemetery

Directly on the qibla axis of the mosque is Touba's cemetery. Spiritually, the cemetery is the next most important element in the city's topography after the Mosque. Its location in the very heart of the sanctuary confirms its elevated status for Mourides. In Islamic practice, as in others, a cemetery is usually considered a peripheral function and is shunned from the central activities of urban life. But in Touba the cemetery lies at the center of the city. In one sense the cemetery can be said to have established the city. We have seen how Mouride traditions link burial in the earthly Touba to access to the heavenly one. Touba's function is to be a "gate" to Paradise and its cemetery is the gate — physical burial amounts to passage through it. Burial is the means by which Touba's primary function, its eschatological function, is fulfilled, and the cemetery is for this reason a central urban institution.

More even than the Mosque, the cemetery is a manifestation of the tree called Tūbā. It is in the center of the cemetery that one finds the great baobab known as the Guy Texe, the "Baobab of Felicity", the "Tree of Beatitude", the "Tree of Paradise". Like the mbéb, the Guy Texe stood forsaken amidst the surrounding wilderness until the bereaved Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba singled it out as the locus of burial for his nascent sanctuary. Sokhna Aminata Lo's burial in effect "opened" the gate and consecrated the sanctuary's mission. Since then, the surrounding cemetery has become a veritable "city of the dead" where tombs and mausolea (among them the large mausoleum of Cheikh Ibra Fall and his progeny) celebrate

---

<sup>76</sup> BERQUE, Ulémas, fondateurs, insurgés du Maghreb, 1982, p. 251.

the Day when all will rise, when Khadimou Rassouli will intercede for his murids, when the Lord's recompense will be near at hand. Mourides of every status aspire to burial beneath the Guy Texe. The great tree is regularly and piously visited by the faithful. It is the focus of their eschatological desire. Even Mourides who die far from Touba may have their bodies brought for burial beneath the Guy Texe.

Moreover, the Guy Texe itself fulfills an extraordinary function within the holy city's eschatological construct. Believers who make pious visits to the cemetery actually engrave their names as well as the names of their kin on the bark of the baobab's massive trunk and in this way they are "registered on the list of those who will enter Paradise".<sup>77</sup> Actual registration for Paradise is thus a physical reality in Touba and this singular practice distinguishes the city as a unique holy place. In effect, local Islamic tradition claims that the names as well as the good and evil acts of each individual are inscribed on a leaf of the Tree of Paradise, and that each leaf, when it falls, signals the death of the person whose name is written on it. The leaf containing this information is then preserved for the Day of Judgment.<sup>78</sup>

That Touba is a locus of eschatological registration is also attested in "Maṭlab al-fawzayn":

Let down Your veil as an eternal shelter,  
Upon me along with my kin, o Everlasting.  
Impose the pavilions of Your protection  
Upon my abode and the entirety of those who are registered  
(musjzi) in it.  
Let them all enter into Your hidden concealment. (verses  
421-425)

The righteous life and burial in Touba is tantamount to registration for entrance to Paradise. This registration translates as inscription of names on the Guy Texe in the cemetery and this act in turn relates to the register of names and deeds on the leaves of the celestial tree Tūbā. That this paradisiacal tree called Tūbā with its inscribed leaves is related to Touba's Guy Texe with its inscribed trunk is

<sup>77</sup> SAMB, 1969, *loc. cit.*, p. 743.

<sup>78</sup> SY, 1969, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

central and essential to the holy city's meaning. The notion of registration/inscription in its association with the image of the paradisiacal tree animates the very heart of Touba's signification as a sacred place. It lies at the core of its symbolic value and will determine the direction of research in the three subsequent chapters of this thesis (sidrat al-muntahâ, guy mbind, ished of lunu).

### The Prayer-Ground

Between the Great Mosque and the cemetery is the muṣallâ or prayer-ground. The muṣallâ is used on the main festival days: 'id al-kabîr (or "tabaski" in Wolof), 'id al-fiṭr (or "korite"), mawlid al-nabî ("gàmmu"). The association of the muṣallâ and the cemetery in Touba is not in itself unusual. In the largely Mâlikî Maghreb one finds a similar association. However, once again it is the central location of the muṣallâ which constitutes a significant departure from established Islamic form and which contributes to reinforcing Touba's distinctive spiritual signification.

In Touba the muṣallâ has central functions. It is part of the great central square which surrounds the mosque. It is used for public assembly during Touba's specifically Sufi events, such as the mǎggal (the annual assembly of Mouride faithful which lasts several days, culminating on the 18<sup>th</sup> Šafar), as well as on other, social occasions. All of Touba's major monuments are concentrated here: the Mosque, the cemetery, various important mausolea, the official residences of Touba's successive khalîfas and more.

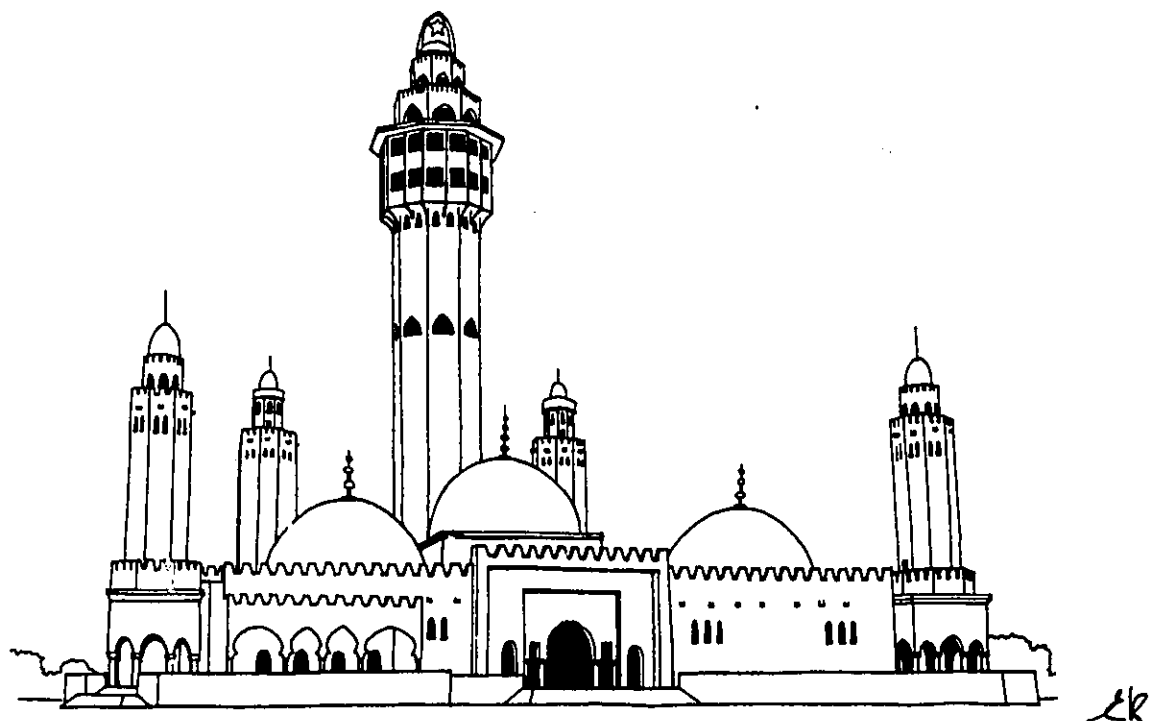
Maqṣûra The muṣallâ harbors the maqṣûra which is where the khalîfa of the Mourides gathers with his entourage to lead the assembled faithful in prayer. The maqṣûra is rarely found in modern Islamic architecture but it was a common enough feature of caliphal Great Mosques until Ottoman times. Historically, the purpose of the maqṣûra has been to protect or otherwise separate the sovereign from his subjects during prayer — hence its disappearance in modern democratic times. The presence of a maqṣûra in Touba is thus significant for what it reveals about temporal authority in the Mouride tariqa. The *khalîfa-général* of the Mourides is in many respects a monarch. He exerts real authority over Mourides through

the *ṭarīqa* administration and he is constantly thronged with supplicants and petitioners. The *maqṣūra* is the place where the khalifa, especially during the annual *māggal* and usually through a designated spokesman, communicates his official sermons and spiritual directives, called *ndigal* in Wolof, which are binding for Mourides. Registration for Paradise is thus a direct function of submission to the khalifa's spiritual authority here on earth. The *maqṣūra*, though a relatively innocuous structure in itself, is the clearest indication yet that Touba has a political dimension. The holy city's "field of force" is not exclusively spiritual. On the contrary, the Mouride *ṭarīqa* is one of Senegal's major social, political and economic institutions. The caliphal authority represented by the *maqṣūra* extends to these fields as well.

In light of this temporal authority which resides in Touba, it is significant that the successive Mouride khalifas have been buried on and around the *muṣallâ*, rather than in the cemetery; the mausoleum of Mamadou Moustafa (first khalifa of the Mourides, 1346-1364/1927-1945) is built against the Mosque's qibla wall, those of Falilou (1364-1388/1945-1968) and Abdou Khadre (1409-1410/1989-1990) stand freely along the qibla axis of the Mosque, while the mausoleum of Abdoul Ahad (1388-1409/1968-1989) lies in the inner court of Touba Library which faces the *muṣallâ*. Thus all four mausolea, which have political as well as religious importance, are approached from the *muṣallâ*. Also, as already explained, the mausoleum complex of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, though it lies inside the Mosque edifice, is nonetheless contiguous to and entered from the *muṣallâ*.

Qibla façade The *muṣallâ* with all its mausolea can be understood as forecourt to the cemetery. The main gate of the much frequented cemetery gives off of the *muṣallâ* and it is flanked by a funeral hall where the bodies of the deceased are prepared for burial. Furthermore, because it is the premier public square of the holy city, the *muṣallâ* clearly functions as the forecourt of the Mosque as well. Such a view goes some way in explaining the peculiar morphology of the Mosque's qibla façade. The usual architectural convention of mosques requires their qibla walls to be nearly "blind" to the

Fig. 2.7 Qibla Wall of Touba Mosque



Source: CRUISE O'BRIEN, Donal B., The Mourides of Senegal Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971, p. 162.

The qibla wall of Touba Mosque (shown here shortly after completion in 1963) is its principal façade and is often portrayed in murals, on post cards, etc. The dominant role of Lamp Fall in the configuration of the edifice is clear. The Mosque's qibla wall faces the city's muṣallâ. From the central iwân, at the top of the flight of steps, one gains access to Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's mausoleum (under the dome to the right). Under the arcades to the left is the mausoleum of Serigne Mamadou Moustafa, first khalifa of the Mourides (d. 1945). The mausolea of subsequent khalifas have since been erected in the foreground. This is the most frequented part of the sanctuary.



outside. On the inside, the qibla wall with its mihrāb is always the most lavishly decorated part of the mosque because worshippers face it in prayer. This wall signifies the Ka'ba in Mecca. Its exterior surface however is rarely treated with any special architectural interest and one does not usually enter a mosque from the qibla direction. From the exterior, a mosque's entrance façade and its main representational façade is usually the wall opposite the qibla, as worshippers enter the building from that direction and then head towards the qibla. In Touba the building's qibla wall faces the *muṣallā* and it acts as its principle façade (fig. 2.7). This is confirmed by the fact that pictorial representations of the Mosque, such as on murals and postcards for instance, invariably show the mosque's qibla façade. It is through a large doorway in the center of this façade that one gains access to Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's mausoleum complex and this is the part of the edifice most frequented by visitors. Worshippers wishing to pray in the mosque will however enter the prayer-hall from one of the building's lateral entrances, and *not* from the qibla side.

### The Straight Path

Touba is thus an ensemble of signs. Some of these signs are to be found in the city's founding traditions: the *mbéb* tree, the vision of the cosmic "fish", the "sacrifice" by snake bite, the "pact of exile". Others are associated to Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's personality: his sobriquets (Serigne Touba, Khadimou Rassouli), his iconographic portrait (in conjunction with Lamp Fall). Mostly however, the most important of Touba's signs are topographic: the city's mandala configuration (with its central square, its radiating arteries and *rocade*), the Mosque with its constituent parts (Lamp Fall, the mausoleum, the qibla wall, the Quranic inscriptions they support), the cemetery, the Guy Texe, the *maqṣūra*, Aïnou Rahmati. Yet other signs are discernible in the wider landscape, in the toponyms of Mouride Country for instance. Each one of these signs can refer us to superior bodies of information pertinent to understanding Touba's meaning. In effect the three following chapters of this thesis will decipher the meanings of these various signs. However, what is

immediately clear is that altogether these signs constitute a system. They are not accidentally associated. They compose a text, written in the Islamic "language", a text therefore whose meaning can be known.

Touba's overall configuration is imbued with common meaning and imparts a powerful sense of purpose. The Mosque, the muṣallā and the cemetery together constitute a single integrated space at the heart of the holy city. Though each of the three elements is distinct and well defined, they nonetheless face each other and are interpenetrated by each other's functions to a great extent. The qibla axis of the Straight Path which begins on the chosen spot, the spot indicated by Lamp Fall, in the Mosque next to Bamba's tomb, though ultimately directed through the Ka'ba in Mecca, first passes through the khalifa's maqṣūra and the cemetery with its Guy Texe. The desire for divine grace and eternal bliss finds fulfillment in physical presence — both for the living and for the deceased — in this cosmically aligned chosen place. Furthermore, this composition is associated with the tree image in several important capacities. The Mosque stands on the spot where the mbéb tree once stood and Lamp Fall is its physical avatar. The cemetery lies beneath the shade of the Guy Texe, the earthly manifestation of the heavenly Ṭubā, the tree of eternal Prosperity in the promised Garden on whose leaves are written the names of each mortal individual.

Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba made it his life's work to direct people to the Straight Path which must lead to eternal recompense. Touba, as is stated in "Maṭlab al-fawzayn", is to be the means to this end:

Many treasures lie in this land.

Sustain it and protect it from misery.

Fix in it a straightened community.

Where the five prayers persist, o Wise One. (verses 153-156)

Touba is an actualization of the Straight Path. This is why Touba was chosen. This is why it is protected. Touba must proclaim the triumph of a righteous existence on earth and the promise of eternal recompense in the paradisiacal garden. These are the "two triumphs" (al-fawzayn) in the two abodes:

My home, make it a blessed home.  
 Guide me along an open and ascetic course.  
 I call upon You to make it an abode of piety,  
 Of science and religion, an abode of ascension,  
 A garden on the path of the aspirant,  
 A garden of disclosure for the one who strives,  
 A benefit to all well-guided Muslims,  
 A rebuttal to all recidivist transgressors,  
 Proof for those who are clothed in weakness,  
 Evidence against those who contradict the inevitable,  
 A pursuit of obedience to the Beneficent,  
 A refuge from obedience to the lapidated one,  
 A course to paths of compliance,  
 A forswearing of paths of innovation,  
 A home attracting all the best,  
 A home repelling all harm,  
 An occasion for disclosing the best of what is hidden,  
 An occasion for repelling the most injurious of deficiencies.  
 Be satisfied with it. Make it an earth of subsistence and  
 security,  
 Of compassion and abundance at all time.  
 O Repeller of evils and turbidities.  
 By Mustafâ, repel all evil from this abode.  
 Forgive those who erect its buildings, Exalted One.  
 Forgive those who command them in it as well,  
 And all those who assist them  
 In its construction. Thanks to You, the Most High.  
 Forgive all those who have settled in it. (verses 383-409)

Life in Touba is a life lived on the Straight Path. By living this life, one becomes eligible for eternal recompense, one registers oneself on the list of those who will enter the promised garden.

The holy city was founded in order to fulfill eschatological desire — desire for peace in the grave while awaiting Resurrection on the Day, and ultimately desire for eternal bliss in the promised Garden. In the introduction to "Maṭlab al-fawzayn", Serigne Touba cites Abraham and writes:

"Our Lord, truly I settle a part of my progeny in an uncultivated valley by Your holy house, our Lord, so that they may keep up prayer..." (Qur'ân 14;37) Forgive me and my parents and the Believers on the Day of Resurrection and of

Reckoning. O God, o Lord, verily You have spoken. Your word is the truth and Your promise is sincere.

The conviction that eternal recompense is assured to the Righteous is based on the Qur'ân — God will not break His promise. The Quranic phrase "Verily You will not break the promise" (3;194) is repeated several times in "Matlab al-fawzayn".

Quranic citations pertaining to this promise are further inscribed at the base of Touba's Lamp Fall:

Our Lord! and grant us what You have promised us by Your messengers. Do not confound us on the Day of Resurrection. Verily You will not break the promise . - "Al-'Imrân" (3;194)  
O you who believe, turn to God truly in repentance. Perhaps your Lord may forgive your ills and admit you to gardens with rivers flowing by on the Day when God will not humiliate the Prophet and those who believe with him . Their light shall run on before them and to their right; they shall say: Our Lord! make perfect for us our light, and forgive us , verily You have power over all things. - "Prohibition" (66;8)<sup>79</sup>

Other quranic inscriptions on Lamp Fall call for believers to follow the Straight Path, thus fulfilling the requirements of eligibility for the fulfillment of God's promise:

Our Lord! cause not our hearts to go astray after having guided us aright. Bestow upon us Your mercy. Verily You are the Benevolent. - "Al-'Imrân" (3;8)  
God will raise those of you who believe, and those who have knowledge, in high degrees. God is aware of what you do. - "The Disputant" (58;11)  
O you who believe! be careful of God with the care which is due to Him, and do not die unless you have submitted (to Him). - "Al-'Imrân" (3;102)

Ultimately, this promise consists of a life of Bliss in the eternal Garden in proximity to the Most High:

All things they do are in the scriptures \* All things small or great have been recorded \* Lo! the righteous will dwell

---

<sup>79</sup> I am sincerely grateful to Monsieur Amat Bouso, of the Mosque administration, for his help in tracing the Quranic provenance of Mosque inscriptions.

among gardens and rivers \* In the seat of honor with a most Powerful King. - "The Moon" (54;52-55)

These last Quranic verses, which iterate the promise of eternal bliss for those who will be judged righteous, are emblazoned many dozens of times across Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's catafalque.

Touba fulfills the function of pointing believers along the Straight Path which will permit them the access to Paradise which God has promised. When Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba calls all of humanity to Touba, this is what he is calling us to. He is reminding us of the basic premises of the Islamic eschatological system: a righteous life on earth, a clean record, success in Judgment, access to the Garden. Touba as a city actualizes this system. It is an earthly sanctuary where people can live the righteous life under God's protection. It is also a point of transcendence where the deceased may hope for eternal bliss and peacefully await the Day of Resurrection with the hope that God's Mercy will, in the end, outstrip His Wrath.<sup>80</sup>

It must be stressed that this reading of Touba is nowhere cohesively expounded in Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's written work. The "creative imagination" of this Sufi has exerted itself on the canvas of the landscape, in a work of "land art". It is not the written word but the created landscape which we have read. The written sources of the Touba tradition are cited above in order to confirm the meaning of the city's configuration. It is the configuration which expresses a coherent spiritual construct which otherwise would hardly be decipherable. It must also be stressed that literacy in Arabic was not widespread in Senegal in Ahmadou Bamba's day. He instigated a mass movement in what was still at that time a largely illiterate peasant society and, of his two personal legacies (his *dîwân* and his holy city), the latter is by far the most important. If the meaning of his *qasidas* is accessible to an educated minority, Touba as a physical creation can be experienced and its meaning understood by all.

---

<sup>80</sup> AL-GHAZALI, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

### Necropolis ?

The desire to be buried in select places in order to positively affect destiny in the Hereafter is attested in many different religions. This is a desire as strong as any and there are certain cities that fulfill it — or create it. Such places are "necropolises", not so much because they are "cities of the dead" but because death and burial have developed as essential urban functions.

In the Muslim world, tombs of saintly people: Biblical or Quranic prophets, sharifs, companions of the Prophet, Shī'ī Imāms, Sunni faqīhs, ascetics, mystics, "friends" of God, have often attracted the pious wish for a significant burial. People desire burial in proximity to those who are recognized as righteous. Thus we will find a particular qubba, mazār, marabout, mashhad or imamzadeh at the origin of many great cemeteries. In the case of the Shī'ī sanctuaries, this phenomenon, in so far as it can be defined as specifically Shī'ī, can be related to the Imām's role as mediator and intercessor for men.<sup>81</sup> All the great Shī'ī sanctuaries (Najaf, Karbalá', Kázimain, Sámarrá', Mashhad and Qomm) have grown up around the tombs of the Imāms or of their close relatives. People come from all over for burial in their proximity. In the Sunni world too various saintly people, such as sharifs or Sufis, are often popularly believed to perform similar mediatory functions. In the case that such individuals have been "befriended" by God, it is believed that they might afford some protection to the deceased in the tomb pending the Day of Resurrection and people thus desire burial in their proximity. Moreover, those who are buried and then resurrected in the company of an acknowledged saint just might be favorably placed when all must gather before the Lord for Judgment. Al-Ghazālī, in Iḥyá' 'ulūm al-dīn argues in favor of the extension of eschatological intercession from the Prophets and Messengers to the ranks of the Saintly, the Righteous and the Mystic.<sup>82</sup> As the object of eschatological desire their tombs have significance and, like Shī'ī mashhads, they have sometimes been powerful elements of the

---

<sup>81</sup> MOMEN, An Introduction to Shī'ī Islam , 1985, p. 116.

<sup>82</sup> AL-GHAZALI, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

landscape. One can only begin to enumerate the cities whose saintly tombs have assured them of international renown in the Muslim world: Konya, Mahan, Tantâ, Fâs.

At first glance Touba might be seen as a shrine of this type which "got lucky", i.e., as a very successful saint's tomb. However, this conclusion could only be drawn if one ignored first of all Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's mystic quest for the chosen place and secondly the clearly stated cosmological significance of the city. The venerable or venerated cemeteries described above owe their attractive power to the saintly people they entomb. These saints are believed to perform certain otherworldly functions (akin to intercession in one form or another) and this creates the desire for burial in their proximity. We have seen that the idea of intercession on the tomb of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba is implied by its association with the Prophet Muhammad's tomb in Madina. However, Touba is not sacred because the shaykh is buried there. Quite the contrary. It is Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba who desired burial in Touba because it is sacred in its own right. God selected this spot and Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba had to search for it. God ordained that he be buried there. People may come from all over to pray by his tomb but they have been led there purposefully. Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba had a clear objective in creating Touba, to show people the way to Paradise, to lead them to a favorable judgment. Burial in Touba is the means to this end. Those who desire burial beneath the Guy Texe are obviously comforted by proximity to Khadimou Rassouli's tomb but they are responding to a more fundamental call. Mere physical burial in Touba is in itself entirely meaningless. To be successfully buried in Touba one must accept that which Touba represents, one must understand Touba as a complete construct, as a "system of the world", as Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba understood it.

According to Eliade, religious systems distinguish sacred places from homogeneous profane space in the following manner:

- (a) a sacred place constitutes a break in the homogeneity of space; (b) this break is symbolized by an opening by which passage from one cosmic region to another is made possible (from heaven to earth and vice versa; from earth to the

underworld); (c) communication with heaven is expressed by one or another of certain images, all of which refer to the *axis mundi*, pillar (cf. the *universalis columna*), ladder (cf. Jacob's ladder), mountain, tree, vine, etc.; (d) around this cosmic axis lies the world (=our world), hence the axis is located "in the middle", at the "navel of the earth"; it is the Center of the World.<sup>83</sup>

Touba constitutes just such a complete "system of the world" and herein lies its spiritual force as a holy place. There are numerous cities around the world which are considered holy or sacred. Many of them, like those mentioned above, owe their sacred status to the activities or sepulchers of individual saintly people. A few of them however can qualify as "systems of the world". These places are manifestations of cosmic order. In accordance with Eliade's definition, they reflect here on our temporal earth the overarching structure of the universe and of human destinies within it. Touba is a member of this small category of places, a category which includes some of the most ancient and sacred cities on earth:

Banaras In Hindu tradition Banaras is pre-eternal. It existed before creation and indeed it still exists outside of creation, outside of time itself.<sup>84</sup> Banaras transcends the universe. It is Shiva's shaft piercing the three worlds. It has neither bottom nor top. Banaras is thus the ultimate cosmic fulcrum. It is also the metropolis of death. People come from all over to die in Banaras because this will release them from the nearly infinite cycle of rebirth. Life and death are transcended in Banaras. Precisely because it is a cosmic fulcrum, the city is an existential threshold. Death and cremation in Banaras constitute moksha, "liberation", passage to a qualitatively entirely different state of being. Cremation grounds, which otherwise are considered the most vile of places and banished to the outskirts of cities, occupy the privileged sacred center of Banaras. They take the form of ghats commanding the embankment of the holy Ganges. These ghats are thronged by both the living and the dead and are the locus of the most intense religious exaltation.

---

<sup>83</sup> ELIADE, The Sacred and the Profane 1959, p. 37.

<sup>84</sup> ECK, Banaras, 1982.



Jerusalem In Abrahamic tradition Jerusalem is the center of creation. It is also transcendent. Jerusalem was the first dry place to emerge when land was separated from water and it was the navel around which all other land coalesced.<sup>85</sup> The foundation stone on Mount Moria comes from the divine Throne and it contains the divine Name. Directly above the earthly city is a Celestial Jerusalem. As a cosmic fulcrum, Jerusalem serves also an eschatological function. At the end of time, Jerusalem will be the locus of Divine Judgment. On the Day of Resurrection the deceased shall rise and gather beneath its walls. Here God from His Throne will preside over Judgment. Here the trumpet will blast. Here will be the scales of justice, the bridge over hell and the entrance to heaven. Thus it is precisely beneath Jerusalem's walls, in the Valley of Jehoshaphat and on the Mount of Olives, that some of the most exalted Jewish, Christian and Muslim cemeteries can be found. People desire burial here so that they may be favorably placed on that Day.

Mecca and Madīna In Islamic tradition Mecca has become associated with many of the cosmological attributes of Jerusalem, though not with its eschatological ones. The Ka'ba with its Black stone is especially associated with the Dome of the Rock. The Ka'ba is quite obviously and absolutely the center of the world. It is also an axis mundi which transcends creation. Adam constructed the first Ka'ba, an earthly representation of the Celestial Ka'ba around which the angels worship. Later, Abraham and Ismā'īl built a new Ka'ba on the site of Adam's edifice, as this had been withdrawn to save it from the deluge. The Ka'ba and Mecca play no role however in Islamic eschatology. Such a role is yet reserved for Jerusalem. Mecca's cemetery, al-Ma'lā, though it contains the tombs of many revered or saintly people, is not attributed any superior cosmological or eschatological significance. The cemetery of Madīna, al-Baqī'a, is more famous as a place of pious visit. Indeed, many are those who have ardently desired burial in Madīna. This desire is motivated mostly by proximity to the tomb of the Prophet (and by desire for his eventual intercession during Judgment). Furthermore, an established

---

<sup>85</sup> VILNAY, Legends of Jerusalem 1973.


tradition maintains that one part of the Mosque of the Prophet in Madina, formerly known as "al-Rawda", is actually connected to the paradisiacal Abode.<sup>86</sup> Neither Mecca nor Madina however are considered as eschatological fulcrums in their own right. Despite Mecca's cosmological attributes, Islamic tradition has maintained the older traditions concerning Jerusalem's role on the Day of Resurrection. The *mi'raj* (cosmic ascension) of the Prophet Muhammad, which occurred before the *hijra* and the subsequent changing of the *qibla*, is significant in this regard. Muhammad first traveled by night from Mecca to Jerusalem, whence he was able to ascend the *axis mundi*.

Touba, like Banaras and Jerusalem, is a cosmic fulcrum of eschatological significance. The holy city actualizes the Islamic concept of the relation between humanity and the Creator (the Straight Path). Since this relationship is immanently eschatological, meaning that it is linked to a clear concept of the afterlife (Divine Judgment), Touba also has specific eschatological functions, just as Banaras and Jerusalem do. It is a classic example of a "system of the world" as defined by Eliade. In both its recorded tradition and in its spatial configuration, it conforms to Eliade's model. Touba is an *axis mundi*, a *qutb*. It is an opening, a point of passage, between our world and eternal Bliss. In spatial terms, as transcendent point of contact between different realities, as squaring of the circle, Touba lies at the absolute center of the Mouride universe. Touba rises at the center of this universe and it has expressed its claim to universality both within the vocabulary of Islam as well as in the radial highway-network which actualizes its social, political and economic "field of force". Moreover, Touba's "system of the world" is completely articulated around the single image of the tree.

---

<sup>86</sup> The *ḥadīth* in question runs as follows: "Between my house and my minbar is a garden (*rawḍa*) of the gardens of paradise." GLASSÉ, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* 1989, p. 331. This *rawḍa*, like the "Orchard of Fāṭima", does not seem to have survived the recent Wahhabi extensions of the Mosque of the Prophet. This *ḥadīth* has also served to bolster the metaphysical claims of the Island of Rawda in the Nile facing Cairo.

### Tree as Archetype

The tree is a recurrent religious symbol. It can be found in the mythologies, religions and traditions of all continents since the most ancient times. The use of the image of the tree to express notions of the sacred is attested not only in the scriptures and literatures of the world but in its art as well. The world-wide ubiquity of the tree symbol was first inventoried by Philpot<sup>87</sup> and it has since been analyzed by Wensinck,<sup>88</sup> James,<sup>89</sup> Cook<sup>90</sup> and Brosse<sup>91</sup> among others. The universality of the tree as a symbol is verified by the fact that the image of the tree can be automatically evoked in the mind of almost every single human being at the mere mention of the word "tree". Moreover this image will have very nearly the same form throughout, i.e., roots in the ground, a vertical trunk, and branches in the sky. The Egyptian glyph for tree (  ) aptly attests to the immediacy of this form. This glyph "says" tree without recourse to a phoneme, without the support of a word. The strength of this relationship between actual form (known to the senses), word (intelligible) and image (understood intuitively) explains the power of the tree symbol as an archetype.

The tree, whether image or word, is thus a "natural" sign. Trees are perceptible elements of the landscape. They are known by their distinctive form, for which there is both a word and an image in possibly every single language and culture. The meaning which the tree symbol conveys, though it can and does vary from one tradition to another, revolves nonetheless around its essential physical property, i.e., the fact that it rises from earth to sky. In cosmologies, the tree stands at the center of the universe; it also transcends it as an axis, linking this earth to that which is above and below it (earth, water, air, sky). The tree creates an immanently geographical three-dimensional space within which all other related arboreal constructs have evolved. It is the transcendent axis mundi

---

<sup>87</sup> PHILPOT, The Sacred Tree or the Tree in Religion and Myth, 1897.

<sup>88</sup> WENSINCK, Tree and Bird as Cosmological Symbols in Western Asia, 1921.

<sup>89</sup> JAMES, The Tree of Life: An Archeological Study 1966.

<sup>90</sup> COOK, The Tree of Life: Image for the Cosmos 1992.

<sup>91</sup> BROSSE, Mythologie des arbres, 1989.

function especially which attracts many interrelated meanings. As cosmic link the tree functions as channel to heaven, thus we find it associated with illumination, divine knowledge and ascension to gnosis. The tree signifies life generally but especially notions of birth, re-birth or resurrection after death. Because of its fruit and sap, it also represents the motherly notion of sustenance. The shade of its foliage connotes the equally motherly notion of protection. As living yet inanimate beings, trees also act as mediums to the spirit world. They are abodes of spirits, even of departed human spirits. For all these reasons the tree can attract spiritual and eschatological desire, such as hope for a blissful afterlife in Paradise and/or communion with the Absolute. The tree thus conveys some fundamental sacred meanings. Its form imparts religious messages by signifying such notions as ascension, transcendence, illumination, fertility, immortality, and knowledge. These notions are common to all religious experience and this inclines us to include the tree among that small number of symbols which can genuinely be classified as universal archetypes.

If the tree-image is effectively operative at the level of abstractions, as a cosmological, cosmogonic or eschatological symbol, this is largely because the image is derived from actual trees. Brosse argues that the tree is not foremost a Platonic form. Trees are part of the living reality of human existence and the "blessings" which they might be seen as bringing to people who are in daily contact with them are duly noted and appreciated. The success of the image of the tree as a construct is due to the many excellent attributes of actual living trees: their fruits, their shade, their verticality, their age, the life that comes back to them each year. Such attributes are sensory, i.e., they are known through the senses ("first experience") before being idealized as metaphors.<sup>92</sup> When a tree then is used metaphorically in a sacred text, or evoked in pious poetry or oral tradition, or encountered in living practice, as a symbol of eternal felicity, cosmic transcendence, mystic gnosis, divine judgment, etc., its precise genus and species is an important

---

<sup>92</sup> ECO, 1986, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

part of its symbolic value. In effect, each dendrological species has its own properties and attributes and not all species are equally endowed. Certain trees have more "meaning" than others. Thus when one comes across metaphoric trees taxonomically identified as *Ziziphus lotus* or *Ficus sycomorus*, it is important that some reflection be given to their distinctive biological attributes.

Because natural language and scientific taxonomy do not coincide,<sup>93</sup> dendrology raises problems for social studies. The names of trees vary widely over space and time. The present Linnaean classification (based on Latin terms and the latinization of proper names) is a relatively recent creation which is by no means completed.<sup>94</sup> Latinization raises problems especially for the classification of the great masses of dendrological data collected from the equatorial, tropical and sub-tropical zones of the planet — where species have no parallel in the Mediterranean or European experience. Nuances and distinctions expressed in the local languages have not usually been the basis of the scientific terminology. Yet trees have always been known by "vernacular" terms and they continue to be identified as such today by the vast majority of people even in the West where the present scientific taxonomy was born. For instance, trees commonly identified simply as "fig" trees in various languages across the world are distinguished by botanists into a large number of distinct species. Conversely, local vernaculars may distinguish between various kinds of cola tree which have not been distinguished (yet) by botanists. Vernacular distinctions may not even derive from botanical specificities. Acacias growing in the desert may appear quite different from genetically similar acacias in more watered locations and therefore go by a different name. To this geographical consideration is added a historical one. The further removed one becomes from Greek and Latin textual traditions (from the works of Theophrastus, c. 300 BCE. and Pliny, c. 60 C.E.), the more difficult it becomes to determine the species of trees mentioned in ancient sources. In other words,

---

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>94</sup> Begun by Linnaeus (1707-1778), modern botanical taxonomy has continually been modified and refined well into our present century.

identical terms in modern and ancient vernaculars do not necessarily refer to the same species. The correct identification of the incense and spices of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade (those mentioned in Biblical, Classical and Medieval texts) for instance has been a perennial problem for historians as different identifications have lead to vastly different historical interpretations.<sup>95</sup>

Secondly, "liturgical" terms may simultaneously have currency along with vernacular ones or replace them altogether. Thus different trees may be known by the same name. In the field, the Biblical "balsam" might be applied to several unrelated species for the simple reason that the scriptural term has spiritual connotations. Also, because trees are living organisms, it is not always a simple matter to distinguish absolutely between them. How different really is the *Ziziphus lotus* from the *Ziziphus spina christi*, or the *Acacia seyal* from the *Acacia senegalensis* and the *Acacia nilotica* ? More importantly, if these species are not differentiated in the vernaculars can we say that they really differ from each other? For the purposes of this thesis, the vernacular or liturgical identification must carry more weight than the modern scientific taxonomy.

In an appendix of the thesis all the arboreal species identified by vernacular and liturgical terms have been listed according to the Linnaean taxonomic classification.

The universal function of the tree as metaphor and its signification as an archetype were constructed by those authors cited above through analysis of mainly Indo-European and neighboring mythologies. Brosse first evokes Germanic, Scandinavian and Celtic mythologies. To these are added those of ancient Greece, the religious traditions of India (pre-Vedic, Vedic, Buddhist) and of the Turko-Mongols. Both James and Cook have also relied nearly entirely on Indo-European traditions (though they are able to include some data from Siberia, Aboriginal Australia and the Sioux of the Dakotas). Wensinck too has shown how the tree-image is a symbol

---

<sup>95</sup> GROOM, Frankincense and Myrrh: a Study of the Arabian Incense Trade, 1981; CRONE, Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam 1987.

common to the ancient Semitic traditions of western Asia.<sup>96</sup> In their construction of the universal, all these authors with the exception of Philpot have thoroughly neglected African sources (ancient and modern). This oversight is unwarranted. The tree symbol fulfills the very same functions in African mythologies and religions as it does elsewhere. This has been demonstrated by Pâques,<sup>97</sup> and will be properly demonstrated in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

What has already been made clear in this chapter is that the tree has played a determining role in the emergence of the modern Islamic holy city of Touba in Senegal. Touba's entire cosmological/eschatological construct builds upon the image of the tree and it partakes in all the arboreal functions: centrality, transcendence, foundation, sustenance, ascension, enlightenment, resurrection, judgment, eternity, etc., categorized as universal by authors of the subject. Of all of Touba's constituent signs (whether expressed in tradition or topography), those associated to the tree image are by far the most powerful vectors of its message. Touba was named for the tree of Paradise and this metaphorical tree *Tûbâ* is even actualized in the holy city's cemetery by the baobab called Guy Texe. The Guy Texe is a medium. It supports actual transcription of eschatological desire, of hope for resurrection and favorable judgment. Moreover, the holy city was founded beneath a mbéb tree. The avatar of this "tree of foundation", the minaret called Lamp Fall, continues to dominate the Mouride universe. It incarnates Touba's transcendent quality, indelibly marking the landscape with Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's mystic vision of the cosmic fish and his ascension to gnosis. The Touba construct, as it has been described in this chapter, is thus completely identified with the single image of the tree, and of one specific archetypal tree in particular, the one called *Tûbâ* in Islamic tradition.

---

<sup>96</sup> WENSINCK, 1921, *op. cit.*

<sup>97</sup> PAQUES, L'arbre cosmique dans la pensée populaire et dans la vie quotidienne du nord-ouest africain, 1964.

### Chapter 3

#### ISLAMIC TRADITION

##### Tûbâ and the sidrat al-muntahâ

In the monotheist religions of the Abrahamic tradition the tree has come to represent singular moments in the sacred relationship between humanity and God. From the Creation of the Universe, to the Fall from Grace, to the missions of God's messengers and on to the finality of the Day of Judgment, each *temps majeur* has found some symbolic expression in the tree. Tûbâ, the Islamic tree of Paradise, the tree for which the Senegalese holy city is named, is but one among these arboreal prototypes.

The tree called Tûbâ is a symbol. Islamic notions of death and Resurrection, Divine Judgment, access to Paradise and eternal bliss in the promised Garden are "fixed" to this symbol by scriptural and literary references to distinct celestial and paradisiacal trees. In the Qur'ân and in hadith, as in older scriptures (Torah, Book of Prophets), and in associated pious and devotional works (the mi'râj narrative, Sufi poetry and theosophical treatises) numerous metaphorical trees are evoked. These disparate elements have come to be subsumed under the name Tûbâ. Tûbâ thus designates an archetypal celestial Tree, an archetype which encompasses not only the Tree of Paradise but several other arboreal symbols as well. This celestial Tûbâ, which exists objectively in the imaginal plane of reality, is "reflected" on earth as the physical city of Touba.

This chapter will identify the different components of the Islamic Tûbâ construct and then will attempt to determine the manner and order in which they have been assembled to form the spiritual foundation of the modern Senegalese holy city.

##### Tûbâ

According to Lane's Lexicon the Arabic root ṭ.y.h. (طيب) conveys the general notion of *goodness, pleasantness, geniality and health*.<sup>1</sup> The form ṭûbâ (طوبى) is the feminine of the root's elative and means *best, sweetest, most agreeable*. Used as a noun, ṭûbâ carries a

<sup>1</sup> LANE, Arabic-English Lexicon, 1867, vol. 1, pp. 1900-1902.



variety of related meanings: *ultimate excellence, good final condition, eternal life, good fortune, God's blessing, happiness, felicity*, and as an exclamation it constitutes *a call for blessing*.

#### Tūbā and tayyibā in the Qur'ān

The one and only appearance of tūbā in the Qur'ān is as a noun and it expresses the promise of bliss in Paradise for righteous believers:

Those who believe and do the right, for them is bliss (tūbā lahum), and an excellent resting place. - "Thunder" (13;29)<sup>2</sup>

Thus the prime meaning of tūbā, the meaning expressed in the Qur'ān, is God's promise of bliss for the righteous. This as we have seen in Chapter 2 is essential to Touba's meaning as a holy city. That tūbā lahum in the Quranic context is indeed a reference to eternal bliss, to the felicity of Paradise, is supported by other similar Quranic expressions:

... For them is the recompense of the abode (lahum 'uqbā al-dār). - "Thunder" (13;22)

For them is an abode of peace (lahum dār al-salām) with their Lord... - "The Cattle" (6;127)

Though the eternal bliss identified as tūbā in the sūra "Thunder" is not associated with the tree-image, other forms of this root are. Some Quranic trees are qualified as "tayyiba", or "goodly". Tayyiba (طَيِّبَة), the feminine adjectival form of the root t.y.b., signifies *beautiful, delightful, sweet of fragrance and pleasurable to the senses* generally. On several occasions tayyiba is used to describe Paradise and its creatures. In the sūras "Repentance" and "Formations", the tayyiba (delightful) abodes in which to dwell are those of the Garden of Eden and are recompense for believers whose sins have been forgiven:

---

<sup>2</sup> Quranic citations are compiled from the translations of SAKHIR, M. H., Holy Qur'ān, Tahrike Tarsile Qur'ān, inc., New York, 1985; ALI, Ahmed, Al-Qur'ān: a Contemporary Translation, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N. J., 1984. Terms indicated in bold and/or underlined especially are my own choice of translation.

God has promised men and women who believe gardens with streams of running water where they will abide for ever, and delightful dwellings (masâkin tayyiba) in the Garden of Eden, and the Blessings of God above all. That will be happiness supreme. - "Repentance" (9;72)

He will forgive you your sins and admit you to gardens with rivers flowing by, and delightful dwellings (masâkin tayyiba) in the garden of Eden. This will be great fulfillment. - "Formations" (61;12)

These delightful abodes in the Garden are not explicitly associated with trees yet the very idea of "garden" can be said to contain within it, by implication, the image of trees.

#### Quranic Trees of Paradise

In effect, it is revealed in the Qur'ân that the gardens of Paradise do indeed contain many excellent trees:

As for those of the right hand, how happy those of the right hand \* Amid thornless lote (sidr makhdûd) \* And arrayed acacia (ṭalh mandûd) \* Outstretched shadows (zill mamdûd) \* Gushing water \* And fruits numberless \* Unending, unforbidden \* And raised couches. - "The Inevitable" (56;27-34)

These Quranic trees of Paradise are remarkable for their shade, their fruit and their gushing waters. Yet they are not "Platonic" trees. They are not generic abstractions of the tree form. Rather, lote-trees and acacias are earthly species and the contexts by which they are known to mortal humans can inform us of their paradisiacal significance.

The sidr (translated as lote tree) is known by botanists as either the *Ziziphus lotus* or the *Ziziphus spina christi* of the *Rhamnaceæ* order. *Ziziphus* thrive in hot arid regions, in the deserts and desert margins of Africa and Arabia, and they are usually thorny.<sup>3</sup> The branches of the *Ziziphus spina christi*, or Christ's-Thorn,

---

<sup>3</sup> TÄCKHOLM, Student's Flora of Egypt 1956, p. 236; HUTCHINSON & DALZIEL, Flora of West Tropical Africa, 1927, p. 470.

are held to have crowned the head of the Christian Messiah as he hung nailed from the Cross. The Quranic verse cited above however promises that the lote trees of Paradise shall be thornless (*sidr makhdūd*). Some cultivated varieties of the *Ziziphus* are indeed thornless. The Qur'ān also makes mention of a singular celestial *Ziziphus*, the *sidrat al-muntahā* (53;14), which will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

The *Ziziphus lotus* has had sacred associations since ancient Egyptian times (see Chapter 5), when it was an attribute of the god Horus and grew in his temples.<sup>4</sup> The species is closely related to the *Ziziphus jujuba* (jujube tree) and produces fleshy red or purple fruit, called lotus-fruit or jujubes (see Appendix). Ex-voto of these jujubes have been found in Egyptian tombs — where presumably they were offered as food for the dead.<sup>5</sup> In his "Natural History", Pliny calls these fruit "Egyptian plums".<sup>6</sup> Because of its characteristic lotus-fruit, the *Ziziphus lotus* also evokes several other lotus-bearing plants; among them the Egyptian lotus (*Nymphaea lotus*: the sacred water lily of Upper Egypt) and the sacred lotus (*Nelumbium nelumbo*) of Hindu and subsequent Indian religions. In the Odyssey, the mind-altering lotus consumed by the *Lotophagi* is reputed to be the fruit of the Libyan lotus (Nettle-tree or *Celtis australis* of the *Ulmaceae* family) described by Herodotus.<sup>7</sup> Such trees grace the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem to this day.<sup>8</sup> There is also a genus *Lotus* (*L. Jacobaeus*, *L. Arabicus*, *L. Jolyi*) in the *Leguminosae-papilionaceae* family.<sup>9</sup> These African trees produce edible bean-pods. The importance of the fruit and flowers of these various morphologically similar yet genetically unrelated lotus-plants is also attested in the religious art and architecture of many ancient traditions. These jujubes, these figs and plums and beans, are to be the nourishment for the blessed, however ethereally or corporeally

---

<sup>4</sup> BUDGE, *The Gods of the Egyptians* 1969, vol. 1, p. 468, 499.

<sup>5</sup> VERCOUTTER, *L'Égypte et la vallée du Nil*, 1992, vol. 1, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> WILKINSON, *The Ancient Egyptians* 1994, vol. 2, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> HERODOTUS, *The Histories*, 1954, p. 330

<sup>8</sup> VILNAY, *Legends of Jerusalem* 1973, p. 50.

<sup>9</sup> HUTCHINSON & DALZIEL, 1927, *op. cit.*, p. 399.

such nourishment is defined. Many gardens and courtyards in Touba today are graced with lote trees (called *siddéem* or, more commonly, *déem* in Wolof). In season their fruit are a favorite with children.

Along with lote trees, arrayed acacias (*ṭalḥ mandūd*) grace the Quranic Gardens of Paradise. Some commentators (Tabarī) have preferred to define the *ṭalḥ* as a banana tree, and that is how it is translated in some European languages.<sup>10</sup> Yet the consensus, based on the primary and most common meaning of *ṭalḥ*, is that the Garden is planted with acacias. Like the *Ziziphus*, the *Acacia*, of the *Leguminosæ-mimoseæ* order, is a tropical tree. *Acacia* thrive in the very hottest and driest regions of the world. Also like the *Ziziphus*, *Acacia* are generally characterized by their protective thorns. Many species of acacias, particularly the *Acacia seyal* (commonly called the Tahl Gum) and *Acacia senegalensis*, produce gum arabic. It is these gum-producing acacias which habitually go by the Arabic designation *ṭalḥ*.<sup>11</sup> Acacias are renowned for their resistance to drought; in fact they constitute about the only trees and shrubs found in most Old World deserts. They are also distinctive as great shade-trees on African savannas (the *Acacia woodii* for instance). Indeed, it is their ample shade, their dark green foliage, their fragrant flowers, which best evoke the pleasures of Paradise in the Qur'ān. If the paradisiacal *sidr* will nourish the righteous, the *ṭalḥ* will give them shelter. Though far less significant to the general history of religions than the lote-tree, acacias were nonetheless sacred to Seth in Ancient Egypt and grew in his temples (see Chapter 5).

The original urban plan for Touba called for "arrayed" acacias. During the caliphate of Serigne Mamadou Moustafa rows of acacias were indeed planted around the Mosque on the city's central square. Under Serigne Falilou, the acacias were cut down and replaced by rows of *ndimb* (*Cordyla pinnata* of the *Cesalpiniacæ* family), a common shade tree in Senegal considered to be less "dirty" (acacias continually shed leaves and thorns). Under Serigne Abdoul Ahad the

---

<sup>10</sup> MIQUEL, *L'Événement*, 1992, pp. 174-177.

<sup>11</sup> TÄCKHOLM, 1956, *op. cit.*, p. 626.

ndimb too were cut down and Serigne Saliou has now replanted Touba's central square with row upon row of palm tree.<sup>12</sup>

Paradisiacal date palms and other fruit-trees figure prominently in the Qur'ân:

He who is given his ledger in his right hand will say: "Here, read my book \* Surely I knew that I would meet my account" \* So he shall have an agreeable life \* In a lofty garden \* With fruits hanging low within reach (qutûfuhâ dâniya) \* "Eat and drink to your fill as reward for deeds you have done in days of yore." - "The Sure Reality" (69;19-24)

And for him who fears to stand before his Lord are two gardens \* Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? \* Full of overhanging boughs (dhawâtâ afnân) \* Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? \* Through them two springs flowing \* Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? \* In them are every fruit in pairs (fâkiha zawjân) \* Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? \* Reclining upon couches lined with silk brocade, the fruits (janâ) of both gardens near to hand \* Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny?...

And besides these are two gardens \* Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? \* Of darkest green (mudhâmmatân) \* Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? \* With two springs gushing forth \* Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? \* In both are fruits (fâkiha) and dates (nakhl) and pomegranates (rummân) \* Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? - "The Beneficent" (55;46-55, 62-69)

The date-palm (*Phoenix dactylifera* of the *Palmæ* family) is a well known member of the desert flora. For people living in the desiccated parts of Western Asia and Africa date-palms have long constituted, along with the dromedary, the surest source of sustenance and wealth.

---

<sup>12</sup> The tradition concerning the succession of trees on the central square was narrated to me by Serigne Matar SYLLA of Touba-Mosquée ward.

The general religious history of the date-palm in ancient traditions has been well documented by both Wensinck<sup>13</sup> and James<sup>14</sup> and only the salient points need be repeated here. The date-palm has in the past been associated with life and fertility generally and particularly with notions of divine Motherhood (the goddess Ishtar) and birthing. It is in light of this that the Islamic date-palm tradition can best be understood. In the Qur'ân, the palm tree is associated with Mother Mary giving birth to Jesus:

The birth pangs led her to the trunk of a date-palm (al-nakhla). Would that I had died before this," she said, "and become a thing forgotten, unremembered" \* Then called out to her from below: "Grieve not; your Lord has made a stream gush forth beneath you \* Shake the trunk of the date-palm, and it will drop ripe dates for you \* Eat and drink, and be at peace. If you see any man, tell him: 'Verily I have vowed a fast to The Beneficent and cannot speak to any one this day.'" - "Maryam" (19;23-26)

Thus the date-palm, with water gushing forth from its base, nourishes with its fruit the exhausted mother, just as the trees in the promised Garden will sustain the Blessed. This "Palm of Mary" is important also for Coptic tradition (Chapter 5).

Of more immediate interest is a local tradition from Touba in Senegal which would seem obscure if it were not for the prestigious Quranic precedent. On the qibla axis of Touba mosque, right on the plinth adjacent to Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's mausoleum, grows a date-palm. This tree marks the spot where the first birth in Touba took place. During the foundation years Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba had settled with his family on the holy site beneath the mbéb tree. He had houses built for himself and his wives. It was in her house that Sokhna Aminata Lo, Ahmadou Bamba's first wife, whose death would sanctify the new city and open its cemetery (Guy Texe), gave birth to a son, Bara. Shortly afterwards it was discovered that a ngigis tree (a *Piliostigma reticulatum* of the *Cesalpiniacæ* family) was growing in her house, beneath the bed where the birthing had occurred. The

---

<sup>13</sup> WENSINCK, Tree and Bird as Cosmological Symbols in Western Asia, 1921.

<sup>14</sup> JAMES, The Tree of Life 1966.

ngigis was later cut down to permit construction of the mosque but a date palm miraculously grew up to mark the spot once again.<sup>15</sup> Thus the locus of the first birth in Touba, like that of its first burial, is marked to this day by a tree. Moreover, in the case of Bara's palm tree, the association is clearly Quranic.

### The Parable of the Two Trees

Thornless lote-trees, arrayed acacias, palm-trees and pomegranates, their fruit, their shade, their gushing waters, these are the essential arboreal creatures of the Garden promised by God for the "companions of the right"; yet they have no proper names. The connection between the image of paradisiacal trees and the term *ṭubā* must be sought elsewhere, in the Quranic recension of the parable of the two trees:

And those who believed and did good works will be admitted to gardens beneath which are eternal rivers, therein abiding by permission of their Lord, their greeting therein: Peace! \* Do you not see how God compares a goodly word (*kalima tayyiba*) with a goodly tree (*kashajara tayyiba*) whose roots are firm (*aşluhâ thâbit*) and branches in the sky (*far'uhâ fi al-samâ'*) \* Which yields, by the leave of its Lord, its fruits (*ukulahâ*) in all seasons \* God presents words of wisdom to men that they might reflect \* An evil act is like an evil tree (*kashajara khabitha*) torn out of the earth with no firmness. -"Abraham" (14;23-26)

Though the "goodly tree" is used here metaphorically and is not identified as a "tree of Paradise", it is nonetheless a fruit-tree and is cited in the context of admittance to eternal gardens and rivers. Moreover, its branches are in "the sky", and thus also in "heaven" (*al-samâ'*). It is significant also that this metaphorical "goodly tree" (*shajara tayyiba*) is mentioned in opposition to an "evil tree" (*shajara khabitha*). Such an evil tree does exist in the Qur'ân. It is the infernal tree called *Zaqqûm*, the accursed tree "which grows at the bottom of Hell" (37;62).

---

<sup>15</sup> This tradition was narrated to me in Touba by Cheikh Oumy MBACKÉ DIALLO of Gouye-Mbinde ward; a grandson of Serigne Bara.

The tree Zaqqûm, an undeniably eschatological symbol, incarnates all the torments of eternal punishment as its bitter fruit and scalding waters shall torture the damned. In the mi'raj narrative as well as in sufi works the infernal tree Zaqqûm is systematically cited in opposition to the paradisiacal Tûbâ. In a hadith cited by Bayhaqî in "Shu'ab al-îmân" (Branches of Faith), the parable of the two trees is cited in just such an eschatological context:

Bilal b. Rabah reported Allah's Messenger as saying, "Liberality is a tree in paradise of which he who is liberal will seize a branch, and the branch will not leave him till it brings him to paradise. And niggardliness is a tree in hell of which he who is niggardly will seize a branch and the branch will not leave him till it brings him into hell."<sup>16</sup>

Though called "Liberality" and "Niggardliness", these may well be alternate names for Tûbâ and Zaqqûm respectively.

The parable of the two trees is found in the Biblical Psalms of David:

Happy is the man who has not followed the counsel of the wicked, or taken the path of sinners, or joined the company of the insolent;

Rather, the teaching of the Lord is his delight, and he studies that teaching day and night.

He is like a tree planted beside streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose foliage never fades, and whatever it produces thrives.

Not so the wicked; rather, they are like chaff that wind blows away.

Therefore the wicked will not survive judgment, nor will sinners, in the assembly of the righteous. - "Psalms" (1;1-5)

As symbols of human conduct (good and evil), these trees are associated with the notion of Divine Judgment and of ultimate destiny either in Gardens or in the Inferno. The parable was a feature of Manichean cosmology and is attested in several of the Coptic Gnostic texts as the opposition between the "tree of life" and the

---

<sup>16</sup> QAZI, Bilal in Hadith, 1976, p. 11.



"tree of death".<sup>17</sup> It also makes an appearance in the Christian Gospels:

For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. - "Luke" (6;43)

Ultimately, the parable of the two trees in its Quranic form can be traced back to the "Instructions of Amenemope", an Ancient Egyptian text (Chapter 5).

In Islamic tradition the "goodly" (tayyiba) tree in the parable is etymologically linked to the paradisiacal tree called Tûbâ. This shared etymology verifies the idea that a righteous existence on earth, represented by the goodly tree, leads to eternal bliss in the shade of Tûbâ. However, though the accursed Zaqqûm is mentioned by name on several occasions in the Qur'ân (37;62, 44;43, 56;52), and is referred to on another (17;60), there is no mention therein of any equivalent blessed tree in Paradise called Tûbâ. Moreover, despite the opportunities provided by Quranic references, the Touba tradition of Senegal has absolutely no use for the infernal tree Zaqqûm. When Touba seeks a symbol from the cosmic depths it finds Jonah's fish (as will be demonstrated later in this chapter).

### Tibtum

Tibtum (طبتم), a verbal (perfect) form of the root t.y.b., occurs in the Qur'ân in connection with the Righteous entering Paradise:

Those who were mindful of their duty to their Lord will be driven in groups to the Garden, till they reach it and its gates (abwâbuhâ) are opened, and its keepers (khazanatuhâ) say to them: "Peace be on you; you are the Goodly (tibtum). So enter here to live for ever." - "The Small Groups" (39;73)

In this case, the use of the root t.y.b. in association with the "gates" of Paradise is of some importance to our discussion of Tûbâ as this notion is strongly expressed in the traditions and the spatial configuration of the Senegalese sanctuary. Touba is essentially a "gate" to Paradise. If "tûbâ lahum!" is a promise, "tibtum!" is a

---

<sup>17</sup> DORESSES, Les livres secrets des gnostiques d'Égypte 1958, pp. 234-235.

greeting, a welcome for the Righteous uttered by the keepers of the paradisiacal gates. *ṭibtum* is here used in the context of God's promise of recompense. The sūra "The Small Groups" continues:

They will say (upon passing through the gates of the Garden): "All praise be to God who has fulfilled His promise (*wa'dahu*) made to us, and bequeathed to us this land for dwelling in the garden wheresoever we like." How excellent the recompense (*ajr*) for those who act! - "The Small Groups" (39;74)

God is merciful and compassionate. It is believed that He will not deny the Righteous and the repentant that which He has promised in the revelation. This, as we have seen in Chapter 2, is an important part of Toubā's message. God's promise of recompense is repeatedly cited on Toubā's Lamp Fall. In the sūra "The Small Groups" this promise is associated to the image of the paradisiacal gates, and to the term *ṭibtum*. It is also of some significance perhaps that this particular passage from the Qur'ān has traditionally been used to adorn funerary architecture, tombs and mausolea, notably in Syria and Egypt.<sup>18</sup>

We can discern a significant pattern in the Quranic uses of the root *ṭ.y.b.* (*ṭūbā*, *ṭayyiba*, *ṭibtum*). These related words appear in eschatological context; or more precisely in the context of access to eternal recompense. They also conjure up the delights of the promised Garden and at least some of these delights are specifically manifest in its trees. Yet the singular "Tree of Paradise", the great tree called *Ṭūbā*, is not in itself a Quranic notion.

#### Ṭūbā in Ḥadīth

The notion that there exists a clearly identifiable "Great Tree" in Paradise is first expressed as such in ḥadīth, the corpus of verifiable reports relating the sayings and works of the prophet Muḥammad. In his "Ṣaḥīḥ", Al-Bukhārī cites a ḥadīth about a specific Tree of Paradise whose main attribute is its immense shadow:

---

<sup>18</sup> DODD & KHAIRALLAH, The Image of the Word: a Study of Quranic Verses in Islamic Architecture, 1981, vol. 2, pp. 108-109.

*Anas-ben-Mâlik a raconté: "Le Prophète a dit: "Il y a dans le paradis un arbre ; un cavalier marcherait cent ans sans sortir de son ombre." D'après Abou-Horaïra, le Prophète a dit: "Il y a dans le paradis un arbre à l'ombre duquel un cavalier pourrait cheminer cent année; récitez donc si vous voulez: "Et des ombrages largement étendus..." (sourate LVI, verset 29); certes l'espace en paradis qu'occuperait une branche de l'un de vos arcs vaut mieux que tout ce sur quoi le soleil se lève ou se couche." <sup>19</sup>*

The sûra invoked by Al-Bukhârî in this ḥadith is "The Inevitable" (56;30), already quoted above for its description of excellent trees with "shadows outstretched". "The Inevitable" is one of the more eschatological sûras of the Qur'ân. It contains vivid descriptions of both the pleasures of Paradise (thornless lote-trees and arrayed acacias) and the terrors of Hell (replete with mention of the accursed tree Zaqqûm).

In the "Musnad" of Ibn Ḥanbal, the tree a hundred years wide is clearly named Tûbâ by the Prophet Muḥammad and the word is used as an invocation for prosperity; a call for God's blessing.

*Un homme dit à l'Envoyé d'Allâh - sur lui la Grâce et la Paix -: "Oh Envoyé d'Allâh! Prospérité (tûbâ) à celui qui t'a vu et à celui qui t'a été fidèle!" Le Prophète répondit: "Prospérité à celui qui m'a vu et qui m'a été fidèle, puis prospérité et encore prospérité et toujours prospérité à qui m'a été fidèle sans m'avoir vu." Un homme lui demanda: "Et qu'est-ce que tûbâ?" Il répondit: "Un arbre dans le Jardin (paradisique). Le laps de temps pour le franchir est de cent ans. Il constitue les vêtements des gens du Jardin paradisique, qui apparaissent de l'orifice de ses fruits." <sup>20</sup>*

---

<sup>19</sup> AI-BUKHARI, *Les traditions islamiques*, 1906, vol. 2, pp. 441-442: Anas-ben-Mâlik said "The Prophet said "There is a Tree in Paradise; a horseman could go one hundred years without leaving its shade." According to Abu-Hurayra, the Prophet said "There is a tree in Paradise in who's shade a horseman could travel a hundred years; recite the if you like: "And shadows outstretched..." (sura 56, verse 29); verily the space in Paradise occupied by a single branch of one of your bows is more valuable than all over which the sun rises and sets.

<sup>20</sup> Cited from IBN HANBAL, *Al-Musnad*, (III, 71) by GLOTON, *L'Arbre du Monde d'Ibn Arabî*, 1982, p. 130: A man said to the Messenger of Allâh - peace be upon him -: "Oh Messenger of Allâh! Prosperity (tûbâ) for he who has seen you and who is faithful to you!" The Prophet answered: "Prosperity to he who has seen me and who has been faithful to me, and prosperity and again prosperity and more prosperity to he who has been

In these two "sound" reports, for the first time, we can clearly discern the image of a great tree in Paradise called *Tûbâ*, a tree characterized by astronomic dimensions (one hundred year span) and fantastic attributes (extraordinary fruit). This description of *Tûbâ* as a fantastic tree is confirmed by other *ḥadīths*:

Ka'b, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "I asked the Messenger of Allah about the trees of the Garden and he, peace be upon him, said: 'Their branches do not dry up nor do their leaves fall and their fruits do not vanish. The most numerous of the trees in the Garden is the tree of Tuba. Its root is of pearl, its middle of ruby, its branches of chrysolite, and its leaves of silk brocade. On it are seventy thousand branches, and the branches are connected to a leg of the Throne. The nearest of its branches are in the nearest heaven. There is not a room nor a dome nor a tree in the Garden that doesn't have a branch of the tree of Tuba shading it. On it are fruits whose rareness is desired in this world, and which are not in this world. Its roots are in heaven, and its light reaches every corner.'<sup>21</sup>

In this *ḥadīth*, *Tûbâ* seems to symbolize the Garden in its entirety with all of its delights. Its cosmic dimension is amplified to the point where it becomes an all-embracing symbol for eternal recompense. It grows beneath the Throne and its roots are in heaven (*al-samâ'*). Thus not only is *Tûbâ* a paradisiacal tree, it is also celestial and cosmic.

The *ḥadīths* upon which the *Tûbâ* image is built, those of Abû Huraira and of Ka'b cited above, are cited by Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba himself in a treatise entitled "*Silk al-jawâhir fî akhbâr al-sarâ'ir*"<sup>22</sup>:

---

faithful to me without having seen me." A man asked him "What is *tûbâ*?" He replied: "A tree in the Garden (of Paradise). It is one hundred years wide. From the orifices of its fruit the people of the paradisiacal Garden will be provided with clothes.

<sup>21</sup> AL-QADI, *The Islamic Book of the Dead* 1977, p. 129.

<sup>22</sup> MBACKÉ, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, *Silk al-jawâhir fî akhbâr al-sarâ'ir*, Published by Maktaba al-Khadîm al-Rasûl, Touba, 1397 (1977), pp. 82-83. Translated in Touba with the assistance of Cheikh Saliou Diop and Cheikh Oumy Mbacké Diallo of Gouye-Mbinde ward.

Abû Huraira (may God be pleased with him) relates: "In the Garden is a tree. A horseman can travel in its shade a hundred years without traversing it."

And the report of Ka'b:

Ka'ab the rabbi (may God be pleased with him) asked the Messenger of God (peace and salvation be upon him) about the trees of the Garden. He replied: "Their boughs do not dry up or fall and neither do their leaves. Their fruits are imperishable (forever ripe). The greatest of the trees of Paradise is the tree *tûbâ*. Its roots are of pure gold (or pearls? *durra*), its branches of chrysolite and its leaves silk brocade. There is not in the Garden a parcel or a dome in its (proper) place which is not in the shade of a branch (of it). All over it grow fruits which living souls crave and which delight the eyes. In this respect the sun in this world is similar to it for its roots are in heaven and its light irradiates all the places on earth."

Furthermore, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba cites two *ḥadīths* attributed to 'Alī:

'Alī (may God be pleased with him) confirmed in one of the reports: "The trees of the Paradise are of silver, or rather some of them have leaves of silver and others have leaves of gold. The trees of this world are rooted in the earth with their branches in the sky because they are perishable. But this is not (the case) for the trees of Paradise. Their roots are in the air and their gourds (*far'u*) are on earth just as is it is said (in the *Qur'ân*, 69;23): "Its fruits within reach (*quṭūfuhâ dāniya*)." Its fruits are near. The dust of its earth is of musk, ambergris and camphor. Its streams are of water, milk, honey and wine. When the wind blows the leaves knock each other and a sound similar to a beautiful voice can be heard."

Another report from 'Alī (may God bestow honor upon him) says: "The Messenger of God (peace and salvation be upon him) said: In the Garden is a tree. Shade emerges from its top and from its bottom comes a winged horse, saddled and harnessed with pearls and hyacinth. It does not drop dung or urinate. Friends of God mount it and it takes them flying through Paradise. Those beneath them say: O Lord! how can Your servants reach such high favor as theirs? To which God

Most High says: Verily you are doubting while they perform prayers. You are eating whereas they fast. They are strugglers (on the path) while you are sitting. They spend their wealth whereas you are stingy."

Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba concludes his chapter on the trees of Paradise by citing the same Quranic verse (56;30-34) as Al-Bukhârî:

The Most High has said: "And shadows outstretched, And water gushing, And fruits in abundance, Neither out of reach nor forbidden, And raised couches."

For Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba then, Tûbâ, as defined in hadith, is the essential tree of Paradise. It has cosmic dimensions (shade over one hundred years wide) and fantastic properties (boughs and leaves, fruit, roots, earth, streams) which are evoked in the Qur'ân (56;30-34).

Tûbâ is also the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. Ibn 'Arabî, in the third volume of his major work "Al-Futûḥât al-Makkiya" (The Meccan Illuminations ), paraphrases the following hadith about the great tree:

*Le Vrai planta l'Arbre Tûbâ de Sa Main dans le Jardin paradisiaque du Séjour immortel appelé Eden ('adn) et l'étendit à tel point que ses branches atteignirent le faite de l'enceinte du Paradis d'Eden. Il en fit un lieu d'ombrage pour tous les autres Paradis.*<sup>23</sup>

According to this hadith, Tûbâ grows in Eden, which is mentioned in the Qur'ân as one of the gardens of Paradise — a garden characterized by "delightful dwellings" (masâkin tayyiba) — and its shade extends over all the others. Tûbâ, because it grows in Eden, is therefore associated with the Biblical Tree of Life, bestower of immortality. In the Christian Testament too the Tree of Life in the cosmogonic Garden of Eden has been transplanted in the eschatological Paradise:

In the midst of the street of it (the Celestial Jerusalem), and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life ,

<sup>23</sup> Cited by GLOTON, 1982, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-131. The Real, with His Own Hand, planted the Tree Tûbâ in the paradisiacal Garden of eternity called Eden ( 'adn) and spread it out so that its branches reached the top of the wall which encloses the Paradise of Eden. He made it the shady locus of all the other Paradises.

which bare twelve manner of fruit, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for healing of nations. - "Book of Revelations" (22;2)<sup>24</sup>

The essential attribute of this Eden/Paradise tree is its fruit. It is the fruit which bestows immortality. Immortality, which was denied us at the beginning of the world, now awaits us at its end.

### Clothing of the Blessed

The marvelous fruits of the paradisiacal tree provide not only sustenance for the righteous but their clothing as well. A ḥadīth of Ibn Hanbal, quoted above, has already evoked this textile attribute: *"Il (l'arbre Tūbā) constitue les vêtements des gens du Jardin paradisiaque, qui apparaissent de l'orifice de ses fruits."* Ibn Hanbal mentions this textile attribute on another occasion:

*L'Envoyé d'Allāh — sur lui la Grâce et la Paix — était en train de prêcher. Entra un homme — ou bien un homme se leva dans l'assistance — qui dit: "O Envoyé d'Allāh! il me vint un doute. L'habit des hôtes du Paradis est-il créé tout fait ou bien est-il d'un tissage sans cesse renouvelé?" Les gens présents se mirent à rire à ces paroles. Or, l'Envoyé d'Allāh les désapprouva et dit: "Riez-vous du fait qu'un ignorant comme lui, et il désigna l'homme qui avait questionné, demande à un savant? Non pas! mais les fruits du Jardin paradisiaque traversent ces vêtements et les habitants en obtiennent une science qu'ils ne connaissaient pas auparavant."<sup>25</sup>*

The notion that the clothes of the blessed in Paradise will issue from the fruits of its trees, or from their flowers, is repeated also by Ibn 'Arabī in his "Futūḥāt":

---

<sup>24</sup> Citations of the New Testament are from The Holy Bible, King James Version .

<sup>25</sup> Cited from IBN HANBAL, Al-Musnad, II, 203 and 225 by GLOTON, 1982, *op. cit.*, p. 131: The Messenger of God — Peace be upon him — was preaching on day when a man came in , or he rose from the audience, and said: "O Messenger of God! I have a doubt. Are the costumes of the guests of Paradise created whole or must they be woven continuously?" Those present began to laugh but the Messenger of God disproved of them and, pointing to the man who had asked the question, said: "Do you laugh because an ignorant man asks one who knows? The fruits of the Garden of Paradise pierce through their clothes and the inhabitants obtain knowledge they had no knowledge of beforehand."

Aucun fruit (de l'arbre Tûbâ) ne s'y trouve sans que de son enveloppe n'apparaissent les ornements et les manteaux dont sont revêtus les hôtes du Paradis pour en constituer la parure et en augmenter la beauté et la splendeur que comporte en l'espèce l'enveloppe des fleurs (akmâm) des arbres implantés dans les Jardins paradisiaques...

Certes, le vêtement des hôtes du Paradis n'est pas de même nature que le tissu que l'on tisse. Plus même, les fruits du Paradis traversent ce vêtement comme les enveloppes des fleurs laissent apparaître les roses (warad) ou les anémones (shaqâ'iq al-nu'mân)...

Il (Le Vrai) orna (l'arbre Tûbâ) des fruits de la parure d'investiture (ḥaḷy) et des manteaux d'apparat (ḥulaḷ) qui constituent l'ornement de celui qui s'en revêt.<sup>26</sup>

Ibn 'Arabî is clearly using a specialized botanical vocabulary (warad, rose "blossoms" or "buds"; akmâm, "calyx" or "perianth", the leafy outer envelope of flowers) to explain (not too successfully in these translations) the relationship between the fruit of the tree Tûbâ and the fabulous vestments they produce.

As highly metaphorical as the above passages appear, they nonetheless evoke notions of textiles and weaving which are distinctive of a specific genus of trees: the *Ceiba pentandra* of the *Malvaceae-bombacaceae* family. The common characteristic of the *Malvaceae* family generally is the flossy substance in which it surrounds its seeds — the *Malvaceae Gossypium* for instance is known world-wide as the cotton-shrub from which cotton fiber is obtained. The *Ceiba pentandra*, which goes by many names: *Eriodendron orientale*, Kapok-tree, Silk-cotton, grows in the tropical latitudes of America, Africa and Asia. It produces cucumber-shaped pods filled

---

<sup>26</sup> Cited by GLOTON 1982, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-131: Not a fruit (of the tree Tuba) may be found there which does not produce from its envelope the ornaments and mantels that clothe the guests in Paradise which constitute the costume and increase the beauty and splendor that characterize the envelope of the flowers (akmâm) of the trees planted in the paradisiacal Gardens... Verily, the clothes of the guests of Paradise are not of the same nature as the cloth one weaves. Moreover, the fruits of Paradise pierce these clothes just as the envelopes of flowers allow blossoms (warad) or anemones (shaqâ'iq al-nu'mân) to appear...

The Real decked the tree Tûbâ with the fruits of the jewels of investiture (ḥaḷy) and with vestments of apparel (ḥulaḷ) which are the finery of those who wear them.



with silky floss called kapok.<sup>27</sup> Though today kapok-fiber has only industrial textile-related uses (as stuffing), at one time it was used for weaving cloth (in Senegambia for instance, as we shall see in Chapter 4). In any case the idea that fibers from the fruit of paradisiacal trees will clothe the Blessed recurs too often in ḥadīth for it to be dismissed as an accidental association.

#### Thaub and Tauha

There may even be an etymological link between these earthly trees of the *Malvaceae-bombacaceae* order and the paradisiacal Ṭubā. "Ceiba" is originally a Spanish word and is pronounced *thāiba*. In Arabic the word *thaub* (ثوب) designates garment, dress, cloth, material, garb, and in the plural (*thiyāb*, ثياب) means clothes, clothing, apparel. What is more, the noun *thawāb* (ثواب) designates recompense or merit (for good works) through the bestowal of a robe or mantle, and thus can evoke the Afterlife. There is at least the possibility that the Spanish term "ceiba" is derived from this Arabic term. In any case, in Islamic sources this etymology has not gone unnoticed. In *La confrérie sénégalaise des Mourides*, Sy cites three different yet phonetically related Arabic roots in order to define the toponym Touba: a) from *t.w.b.*, an act of returning to God through penitence, contrition; b) from *t.y.b.*, a surname for Madina, bliss, felicity; c) from *th.w.b.*, a throng, a crowd of people.<sup>28</sup> The root *t.y.b.* is cited by Sy only as a surname for Madina (see *tayba* below) — to the exclusion of all its other meanings and uses — while it is not at all clear how *th.w.b.*, which conveys basically the same notions of "return" as *t.w.b.*, has come to designate a throng. Its connection to clothing and to recompense cannot however be discounted as these are linked to the image of the paradisiacal tree in ḥadīth.

Confusion between the three roots is common. In some sources, as in the following Turkish tradition, the tree Ṭubā is called Tauba (توبة), the Tree of Repentance:

---

<sup>27</sup> HUTCHINSON & DALZIEL, 1927, *op. cit.*, p. 259; STEENTOFT, *Flowering Plants in West Africa*, 1988, p. 115.

<sup>28</sup> SY, *La confrérie sénégalaise des mourides*, 1969, p. 313.

There is also the Tauba, that is the Tree of Remorse, whose fruits are food for every true believer in Paradise as often as he wishes. Its branches and rich foliage are so large that they provide pleasant shade for all the inhabitants of Paradise, sheltering them from the dazzling light that shines down from the Holy Throne above them.<sup>29</sup>

Repentance (tawba) is the first station along the Mystic path to gnosis.<sup>30</sup>

### Rivers of Paradise

Many Quranic passages evoke Paradise as a lush garden by emphasizing its flowing waters:

Those who believed and did the right, will be admitted to gardens beneath which are eternal rivers (al-anhâr khâlidin), where they will abide by the leave of their Lord, with 'Peace' as their salutation. - "Abraham" (14;23)

The semblance of Paradise promised the pious and devout with streams of water that will not go rank, and rivers of milk whose taste will not undergo a change, and rivers of wine delectable to drinkers, and streams of purified honey, and fruits of every kind in them, and forgiveness of their Lord. Are these like those who will live forever in the Fire and be given boiling water to drink which will cut their intestines to shreds? - "Muhammad" (47;15)

Some ḥadīths report these celestial rivers as corresponding to four earthly rivers: the Nile, the Euphrates, the Tigris and the Amu Darya.<sup>31</sup> For its part the Torah names the four rivers of Eden:

A river issues from Eden to water the garden, and it then divides and becomes four branches. The name of the first is Pishon, the one that winds through the whole land of Havilah, where gold is... The name of the second is Gihon, the one that winds through the whole land of Cush. The name of the third is Tigris, the one that flows East of Asshur. And

<sup>29</sup> KNAPPERT, *Islamic Legends*, 1985, p. 30.

<sup>30</sup> MBACKÉ, "Les bienfaits de l'Éternel", 1980, p. 561.

<sup>31</sup> KNAPPERT, 1985, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

the fourth is the Euphrates. (or, according to the King James Version, the Pi'son, Gi'hon, Hid'dekel and Euphra'tes). - "Genesis" (2;10-14)

The four rivers of Paradise are commonly linked to the idea of the Tree of Paradise through the Quranic reference to "gushing waters" beneath outstretched shadows (sūra 56;31). In the mi'rāj, these heavenly rivers might issue from the "dome" of a tree,<sup>32</sup> but more usually they gush forth from its roots.

Islamic gardens These Quranic references to the configuration of paradisiacal gardens and their flowing rivers have had a determining effect on earthly manifestations of eschatological desire, mainly in the ideal "Islamic garden". Islamic gardens emerged as a architectural genre in the early 'Abbâsid period (the Khuld palace in Baghdâd, constructed in 156/773) and were largely modeled in accordance with Ancient Persian tradition. These gardens were intended as representations of Paradise and they endeavored to actualize many of the Quranic verses and ḥadīths cited in this chapter. They were laid out squarely according to the cardinal points, with four (or multiples of four) rivers flowing from their centers down towards their extremities. They were further graced with delightful basins, fountains, pavilions and especially alignments of various species of trees. The Islamic garden tradition has been an effective model from Andalusia and Morocco to India. It has had a powerful affect on palace construction and on occasion it has been influential in urban design as well. The city of Hyderabad in the Deccan (founded in 1000/1591), for instance, was intended as a "replica of Paradise on earth" and, though a city, it was configured according to the Islamic garden model.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, Sufi urban experience has made common use of the image of the paradisiacal garden, as in the Chishtiya center of Khuldabad (founded in 727/1327), also in the Deccan.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> AL-QADI, 1977, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>33</sup> PIEPER, "Hyderabad: a Qur'ānic Paradise in Architectural Metaphors", 1983, pp. 46-51.

<sup>34</sup> ERNST, Eternal Garden, 1992.

One could have expected the urban plan of Touba to be similarly based on the established Islamic model. A Sufi shaykh endeavoring to point the way to Paradise by means of a work of "land art" could well have developed the garden theme. This has not been the case. Touba does not partake in the Islamic garden tradition. Touba was not intended as a replica of Paradise. If anything, Touba is an actualization of the Straight Path. Like the Straight Path, it leads to the gate of Paradise. The Garden of Bliss lies beyond and is not to be had on this side. Consequently, the holy city conforms to an entirely different spatial model. Its configuration corresponds to the West African urban tradition of the central public square (pénc), as will be demonstrated in Chapter 4.

In Touba, the only hint of the Islamic garden model involves Lamp Fall. Directly beneath Lamp Fall, you will find the "gushing waters" of a large basin. This is not an ablution basin and it is forbidden to perform ablution there (facilities are provided elsewhere in the Mosque). Rather, the waters beneath Lamp Fall are for drinking only and visitors to the mosque invariably pause there for refreshment.

Kawthar For Touba, the paradisiacal waters mentioned in the Qur'ân have been subsumed into a rather different eschatological symbol, that of the basin called Kawthar. The word kawthar appears once in the Qur'ân:

Surely We have given you abundance (al-kawthar) \* So pray unto your Lord and sacrifice \* Surely your enemy will be the one without posterity. - "Kawthar" (108;1-3)

It is traditionally accepted that kawthar here refers to a fountain or basin (hawd). In Muslim's "Ṣaḥīḥ", the circumstances in which the sūra "Kawthar" was revealed and the significance of the term are reported by Anas:

*Le Prophet (BSDL)... dit "Savez-vous ce que c'est al-kawthar ?", on répondit: "Dieu et Son Messager le savent". Il dit: "C'est un fleuve du Paradis que Dieu m'a promis, il contient*

*beaucoup de richesse, c'est un bassin où ira ma communauté le jour de la Résurrection."*<sup>35</sup>

Thus Kawthar is the Prophet's own paradisiacal river and it is associated to the notion of recompense on the Day of Resurrection. This association is confirmed by other ḥadīths. According once again to Anas (cited by Al-Bukhārī, Muslim and Ibn Hanbal):

*L'Envoyé de Dieu (BSDL) a dit: "Alors que je marchais dans le Paradis (lors du mi'rāj), je découvris une rivière dont les bords sont des coupoles faites de joyaux, j'ai demandé: "Qu'est-ce O Gabriel?" Il répondit: "C'est al-Kawthar que ton Seigneur t'a donné". L'ange a frappé dans ses mains et voilà que sa terre fut faite de musc exhaltant une odeur forte."*<sup>36</sup>

And according to 'Abd Allah b. 'Umar (cited by Tirmidhī):

*L'Envoyé de Dieu (BSDL) a dit: "al-Kawthar est une rivière du Paradis dont les rives sont en or, son lit est de perles et de pierres précieuses, sa terre est meilleure que le musc, son eau plus douce que le miel et plus blanche que la neige."*<sup>37</sup>

According to Smith & Haddad,<sup>38</sup> in traditional Muslim understanding Kawthar represents purification of the blessed before entrance to Paradise. Along with the "balance" and the "bridge", this "basin" is part of the judgment process and has come to symbolize Muhammad's intercession. All but the "most sinful" members of his umma will be saved from hell-fire by the Prophet's intercession in their favor before the magnanimity of the Merciful. How this

---

<sup>35</sup> Cited in HAJA, La mort et le Jugement Dernier selon les enseignements de l'Islam, 1991, p. 128: The Prophet (PSUH) said... "Do you know what al-kawthar is?", we replied: "God and His Messenger know. He said: "It is a river of Paradise which God has given me. It contains much wealth. It is basin where those of my community will go on the Day of Resurrection".

<sup>36</sup> Cited in HAJA, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 128: The Messenger of God (PSUH) said: "While I was walking through Paradise (during the mi'rāj), I came across a river the banks of which are of jeweled domes. I asked: "What is this O Gabriel?" He replied: "This is al-Kawthar which your Lord has given you". He then clapped his hands and its earth became musk exuding strong fragrance.

<sup>37</sup> Cited in HAJA, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 129: The Messenger of God (PSUH) said: "al-Kawthar is a river of Paradise whose banks are of gold, its bed of pearls and precious stones, its earth is better than musk, its water is sweeter than honey and whiter than snow."

<sup>38</sup> SMITH & HADDAD, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection, 1981, pp. 80-82.

intercession has come to be associated with the image of the basin, and how this basin became identified with the Quranic Kawthar is not immediately clear. Nonetheless, Kawthar, more than any other symbol, is linked to Muḥammad's eschatological role as intercessor. It is his basin, where his umma will congregate, where he will intercede in their favor, where their earthly infractions and misdemeanors will be washed away, so that they may enter the Garden absolutely pure.

Kawthar (Kaossara) is a Mouride toponym. A darou of that name was founded in 1345-46/1926 some 13 kilometers West of Touba (in circumstances we will discuss in Chapter 4) and Touba's Palène ward is also otherwise known by the name Kaossara.<sup>39</sup>

#### Tāba, Tayba, Tib, Tiba

The form *tāba* (طابة) appears in Al-Bukhārī's "Ṣaḥīḥ", where it is used by the Prophet Muḥammad to describe Madīna:

Narrated Abū Ḥumaid: We came with the Prophet from Tabūk, and when we reached near Medīna, the Prophet said, "This is Tābah." (XXX, 3).<sup>40</sup>

Though the form appears to be adjectival (feminine), *tāba* is used in this particular ḥadīth as an indefinite noun, without an article, and it could be understood as the Prophet's own surname for his city: (هذه طابة) "This is Prosperity!" or "Here is Felicity!" keeping in mind the eschatological connotations of the root *t.y.b.* discussed above.

Medieval geographers frequently used "Tayba" (طيبة), "sweetly scented" or "fragrant", as an honorific and devotional surname for Madīna.<sup>41</sup> According to the III<sup>rd</sup>/IX<sup>th</sup> century geographer Ibn Abi Ya'qubī this name, bestowed on Madīna by the Messenger of God, means "perfumed",<sup>42</sup> and though he does not cite the source of this

<sup>39</sup> Both Kaossara ward and Kaossara village were founded by the same Mouride shaykh, Chérif Assane Fall (1323-1400/1905-1980), son of Cheikh Ibra Fall.

<sup>40</sup> AL-BUKHARI, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1977, vol. 3, p. 55.

<sup>41</sup> IBN JUBAYR, *Voyages* 1943, vol. 2, p. 190.

<sup>42</sup> IBN ABI YA'QUBI, *Les pays* 1937, p. 147.

information, it can probably be traced to tāba in the ḥadith cited above by Al-Bukhārī.

The noun *tib* (طيب) does in fact mean "perfume". It should be understood as signifying "sweet", though rather than referring to taste, it is the sense of smell which is being evoked. The perfume in question in "Ṭayba" might be the sacred aura of the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad, which is indeed sweetly perfumed. In Touba also, incense is kept continually burning by the tomb of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba. It should be recalled here that according to a strong local tradition Touba's founder intended the city to be an adjunct of Madīna.<sup>43</sup> In any case he could not have been ignorant of the pious surname of Islam's second holy city. According to Kazimirski, *tiba* (طيبة) is also a surname for the sacred well Zamzam in the Ḥaram of Mecca.<sup>44</sup> Touba's Ainou Rahmati is often associated with Zamzam in local oral tradition. It must also be noted that Thebes, the greatest of ancient Egypt's holy cities, is called *Tiba* (طيبة) in Arabic and that toponyms such as Tayba, Taiba and Touba abound throughout modern Muslim Africa (in the Nilotic Sudan as well as the Western Sudan) as will be discussed in Chapter 4. Moreover, the forms *Tāba* (Tāba) and *Tib* (Darou-Salam-Tib) both occur as toponyms in Mouride Country.

### Tuwā

The sacred valley called *Ṭuwā* (طوى) in the Qur'ān provides us with yet another intriguing piece of etymological and toponymic evidence for the term *tūbā*. The valley of *Ṭuwā* is the locus of the initial Mosaic revelation:

When (Mūsā) saw the fire, he said to his family: Stop, for surely I see a fire, haply I may bring to you therefrom a live coal or a guidance at the fire \* So when he came to it, a voice was uttered: O Mūsā \* Surely I am your Lord, therefore put off your shoes; surely you are in the sacred valley Tuwā (al-wādi al-mutaqaddas ṭuwā) \* And I have chosen you, so listen to what is revealed... - "Ṭa Ha" (20;10-13)

<sup>43</sup> SY, 1969, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

<sup>44</sup> KAZIMIRSKI, Dictionnaire arabe-français, 1960, vol. 2, p. 127.

This revelation occurred while Moses is in Midian, hiding from pharaonic justice. The valley is qualified by God Himself as being hallowed ground.<sup>45</sup> It marks the beginning of a prophetic career which would culminate on Mount Sinai. Though the etymological relation with *ṭubā* appears at first tenuous, the toponymic relation is expressed in the city of Touba. One of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's sons, Serigne Souhaïbou (Shu'ayb, the Quranic equivalent of the Biblical Jethro, Moses' father-in-law), named his ward Touba-Madyana, after the Quranic passage: "And to Madyan (We sent) their brother Shu'ayb..." (7;85). In the Qur'ân, Shu'ayb is a prophet sent by God to the Madyanites. Moses, who marries his daughter, is first addressed by God in the hallowed valley of *Tuwā* in Madyan. Serigne Souhaïbou was clearly referring to the Quranic precedent when he named his ward Touba-Madyana.

#### Umayyad Mosques

It would appear that the image of celestial trees was already popular in the very earliest period of Islamic art — before iconophobia triumphed so absolutely. Mosaics representing such trees were major decorative elements in the great Umayyad mosques: the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (completed in 72/691), the Great Mosque of Damascus (completed in 87/706), and Al-Walid b. 'Abd al-Mâlik's enlargement of the Mosque of the Prophet in Madîna (88/707). These mosaics were created with great precision and they invariably represented specific fruit-bearing species: date palms alternating with leafy shade-trees.<sup>46</sup> These Umayyad forests of paradisiacal trees interspersed with delightful mansions can still be discerned on the walls of the great mosque of Damascus (fig. 3.1).<sup>47</sup> The mosaics in Madîna, long disappeared, have left traces in literary sources:

They (the mosaics in the Mosque of the Prophet) are comprised of representations of trees, all different looking

---

<sup>45</sup> This sacredness is also referred to in "Exodus" 3;5.

<sup>46</sup> ETTINGHAUSEN & GRABAR, *The Art and Architecture of Islam*, 1987, pp. 26-45.

<sup>47</sup> DODD & KHAIRALLAH, 1981, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 28-29.



**Fig. 3.1 Images of the Delightful Trees and Pavilions of Paradise in Umayyad Mosques**



Sources: (top) SOURDEL-THOMINE, Janine & SPULER, Bertold, *Die Kunst des Islam*, Propyläen Verlag, Berlin, 1973, pl. 23; (right) ETTINGHAUSEN, Richard & GRABAR, Oleg, *The Art and Architecture of Islam 650-1250*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth Middlesex, 1987, p. 42.

Artists responsible for these mosaic depictions of paradisiacal gardens (on the interior walls of the Great Mosque of Damascus) relied on Quranic descriptions and reports transmitted from the Prophet Muḥammad. Great leafy fruit-bearing trees rise above flowing rivers.



and with their branches weighed down with fruit. The entire prayer-hall is decorated in this fashion... Some of those who produced the mosaics said: "We have reproduced here the images we have found of the trees and villas of Paradise." When the artist finished the finely done great mosaic tree in the composition, Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz gave him a bonus of thirty dirhams.<sup>48</sup>

There is no doubt that this graphic representation conformed to Quranic and traditional references to celestial trees, and to one "great" tree in particular. That they graced the walls of the most important mosques of the realm in the very first century of Islamic expression argues in favor of the Islamic "legitimacy" of the Tree of Paradise construct.

Toponymic use of *ṭūbā* is also attested as early as the Umayyad period, where one of the palaces of Al-Walid b. Yazid (ruled 126-127/743-744) was called *Qaṣr al-Ṭūba*,<sup>49</sup> while in Iraq, just outside Basra, there is a town called *Al-Ṭūba* (الطوبى).

#### Sidrat al-Muntahā

By far the single most important Quranic reference for the entire *Ṭūbā* construct, the reference to the *sidrat al-muntahā*, has nothing to do with Paradise. Nor is it associated in any way with the root *ṭ.y.b*:

He (the Prophet Muhammad) saw Him (The Supreme Power : *Shadid al-Quwā*) indeed another time \* By the Lote-tree of the extremity (*sidrat al-muntahā*) \* Close to which is the Garden of Refuge (*jannat al-ma'wā*) \* When the Lote-tree was covered over with what it was covered over \* Neither did sight falter nor exceed the bounds \* Indeed he saw some of the greatest signs of His Lord. - "The Star" (53;13-18)

The *sidrat al-muntahā* referred to here is not a tree of Paradise. It stands "close to" (ind) the Garden of Refuge but not in it. It is not cited in the context of gushing streams or delightful abodes. Nor is it associated with the notion of recompense for the Righteous. In no

<sup>48</sup> PETERS, *A Reader on Classical Islam*, 1994a, pp. 301-302.

<sup>49</sup> MIQUEL, *L'Islam et sa civilisation*, 1977, p. 412.

way does this particular tree conform to the usual Quranic evocation of Paradise or of its trees.

The reference to the *sidrat al-muntahā* in "The Star" is usually understood as referring to the Prophet Muhammad's *mi'raj*: his cosmic ascension, in the company of the Archangel Gabriel, into God's presence following his night journey (known as the *isrā'*) from Mecca to Jerusalem:

Glory to Him who took by night (*asrā'*) His votary to a wide and open land from the sacred mosque to the distant mosque whose precincts We have blessed, that We may show him some of Our signs; surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing. - "Al-Isrā'" (17;1)

In the Qur'ān, the "lote tree of the extremity" is a cosmic tree, not a paradisiacal one. It stands at the uppermost limit of the cosmos. It symbolizes Muhammad's direct contact with the "Supreme Power" (*Shadīd al-Quwā*) and confirms his qualification as His messenger to those who would doubt it. The *sūra* "The Star" states that Muhammad "saw" the Most High by this lote-tree and that he was shown some of His "signs". This is confirmed by the first verse of *sūra* "Al-Isrā'" cited above. The correct manner of interpreting Muhammad's ascension (through vision, in spirit, in body?) and his "seeing" of the Lord (with his eyes, with his heart?) has been the object of much debate among Muslims down to the present time.<sup>50</sup> Whatever the interpretation, the Quranic *sidra* is understood as a point of contact between this world and ultimate Reality; a kind of hinge or fulcrum for the Universe.

The *sidra*'s role of cosmic fulcrum is confirmed in many *ḥadīths*. According to Mas'ūd (cited by Muslim):

(Gabriel) took me up as far as the Lote-tree, beyond which none may pass, which is in the sixth heaven. Anything which comes up from earth stops there and is taken from there, and anything which comes down from the region beyond stops there.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> AZAD, "Isra' and Mi'raj", 1983, pp. 63-80.

<sup>51</sup> Cited by HAJJAJ, The Isrā' and the Mi'raj, 1989, p. 38.

According to Al-Nawawî:

It is called the Lote-tree beyond which none may pass because the knowledge of the angels stops there: no-one has gone beyond it except the Prophet (S).<sup>52</sup>

According to Anas b. Mâlik, cited by Sharîk b. 'Abd Allâh:

Then Gabriel took him higher, to regions which are unknown to all except Allah, until they reached the Lote-tree, beyond which none may pass. Then Allah the Almighty drew near, until He was very close indeed, and revealed the commandment: "Fifty prayers, day and night, are prescribed for your Ummah."<sup>53</sup>

The *sidrat al-muntahâ* is the threshold between the Creator and His creation. This is the place where the realm accessible to the understanding of creatures ends and where God's own inscrutable realm begins. Even Gabriel is unable to proceed beyond this extremity. Only the Prophet Muhammad; i.e., the most perfect of creatures, passes beyond the lote-tree into God's presence. Conversely, everything which comes down from God, including revelation, is received at this tree.

Though the Quranic *sidrat al-muntahâ* is not a tree of Paradise, its use and evolution within Islamic literature, and particularly in sufi and theosophical works, has led to its association to *Tûba* the Tree of Paradise and eventually to its absorption into the *Tûba* construct. There are several levels at which the assimilation of the *sidra* and *Tûba* can be apprehended. First of all, in *sûra* "The Inevitable" (56;28) it is clearly stated that "thornless lote" are among the trees in the promised Garden and the "Lote tree of the Extremity" might therefore be construed as one of them.<sup>54</sup> *Tûba* it should be recalled is a feminine noun and the Lote tree of the Extremity is clearly feminine (*sidra*) rather than masculine (as in the *sidr makhḍûd*). Secondly, in some *hadîths* there is considerable confusion between the *sidrat al-muntahâ* and the tree called *Tûba*: In

---

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>54</sup> AL-GHAZALI, *The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife* 1989, p. 240.

the following report (cited by Tirmidhî) for example, the tree with the shade "one hundred years wide", identified in Al-Bukhârî's "Ṣaḥîḥ" as Ṭubâ the tree of Paradise, is reported to be none other than the Quranic sidrat al-muntahâ:

Azma'a-bn-Abi Bakr reported: I heard the Apostle of Allah being reminded of the "farthest lot-tree". He said: The rider will travel in the shade of its branches for one hundred years...<sup>55</sup>

The cosmic dimension (one hundred years) of the sidrat al-muntahâ is identical to that of the tree called Ṭubâ and it is as if the same celestial tree were being referred to.

Furthermore, some of the other attributes (extraordinary fruit, sweet fragrance, gushing rivers) which characterize reports about Ṭubâ and the trees of Paradise are also encountered in reports about the sidrat al-muntahâ:

Ibn Dahyah said: "The Lote-tree alone was chosen, because it has three attributes: extensive shade, delicious food and beautiful scent. These attributes symbolize faith, which combines speech, actions and intentions. The shade represents action, the food represents intention and the scent represents speech."<sup>56</sup>

According to both Ibn Ḥazm and Anas b. Mâlik:

Then Gabriel took me up as far as the Lote-tree, beyond which none may pass; it was veiled in colours indescribable. Then I was granted admission to Paradise, where I saw nets made of pearls, and its earth was of musk.<sup>57</sup>

According to Mâlik b. Sa'sa'ah:

Then I was taken up to the Lote-tree beyond which none may pass. There were four rivers, two hidden and two visible. I asked, "What is this, O Gabriel?" He said, "The two hidden rivers are rivers in Paradise. The two visible rivers are the Nile and the Euphrates."

---

<sup>55</sup> AL-TABRIZI, *Mishkât-ul-Maṣâbîḥ*, 1963, vol. 4, p. 170.

<sup>56</sup> Cited by HAJJAJ, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11.

...Its fruits were like pitchers of Hajar and its leaves were like the ears of elephants...<sup>58</sup>

The heavenly "rivers" beneath the sidra especially are important as these rivers of Eden have been linked to notions of paradisiacal trees. And if Tûbâ is often identified as the biblical "Tree of Life" growing in the garden of Eden, so too is this the case with the sidra. In East African Islamic tradition for example, the sidrat al-muntahâ is identified as the "Tree of Life" (shajarat al-ḥayâh) and it figures prominently by that name in the Swahili mi'râj narrative.<sup>59</sup>

Finally, the geosophic contexts within which these two trees are defined are also similar. Tûbâ is described as growing in the "center" of the Garden. In the Islamic conception of Paradise there are seven or eight concentric gardens<sup>60</sup> with the highest and greatest one (called either 'Adn or Firdaws) being the central one directly beneath the Throne, the one in the middle of which Tûbâ grows and from which the paradisiacal rivers descend.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Medieval Islamic cosmology conceives of seven concentric heavens, the outermost one being the highest and greatest one. The sidrat al-muntahâ is by definition "at the limit" of this seventh heaven. By subsuming the sidra within the Tûbâ construct this absolute extremity finds itself at the absolute center. The apparent contradiction, as with the "squaring of the circle", can be resolved by bearing in mind the fundamentally tri-dimensional nature of the Tûbâ construct. The absolute center of horizontal Paradise (Tûbâ) is also the extreme uppermost limit of the vertical heavens (sidrat al-muntahâ). The tree, because of its verticality, is an apt symbol for the construct.

The assimilation of the sidra into Tûbâ is expressed in Touba's topography. First of all, Lamp Fall, Touba's premier symbol, is not surmounted by a crescent as is usual in West Africa but by a star — a

---

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

<sup>59</sup> KNAPPERT, *Swahili Islamic Poetry*, 1971, vol. 3, p. 261.

<sup>60</sup> The number and name of the gardens vary from one source to another. Among the more common ones, those mentioned in the Qur'ân, are: 'Adn, Firdaws, Dâr al-salâm, Dâr al-muqâma, Dâr al-ḥayawân, Jannat al-ma'wâ, Jannat al-khuld, Jannat al-na'fm. See article "Djanna" in *Encyclopædia of Islam*.

<sup>61</sup> SMITH & HADDAD, 1981, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88.

large bleu neon star — the star of sūra "The Star", wherein figures the sidrat al-muntahâ. Secondly, in 1987 Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's son Serigne Saliou, currently fifth Khalîfa of the Mourides, founded a new ward called Djannatoul-Mahwa. Djannatoul-Mahwa is named for the Quranic jannat al-ma'wâ (the "Garden of Refuge") which is mentioned in "The Star" as being "close to" the sidrat al-muntahâ. Djannatoul-Mahwa is indeed close to Touba. The new ward lies just beyond the circular boulevard which serves as something of a physical boundary or enclosure for the holy city.

#### Tûbâ and the Sidrat al-Muntahâ in the Mi'râj

In the mi'râj narrative, there are further similarities between the Quranic sidra and the tree called Tûbâ. The narrative of the mi'râj is a legendary, fantastic and marvelous epic which recounts in vivid detail the Prophet Muḥammad's cosmic ascension along the axis mundi into God's presence. After having been "shown" some of God's "signs", he is taken on a tour of Paradise and Hell. There are in fact many "sound" ḥadīths which describe elements of this journey yet it is significant that not one verifiable report can be found which mentions Muḥammad's actual encounter with the tree named Tûbâ. The mi'râj narrative however is not primarily concerned with presenting "canonical" data. Rather, it must be seen as endeavoring to present a coherent cosmology within a narrative — incorporating the legitimate sources where possible, yet not limiting itself to them.<sup>62</sup>

Trees are important features of the cosmology revealed to Muhammad during his ascension. In the mi'râj narrative Tûbâ is a marvelous tree which grows in the middle Paradise:

*Il a un tronc si gros qu'un homme, monté sur le cheval le meilleur, le plus rapide, et qui ne cesserait de galoper, ne pourrait en faire le tour en cent ans. Il cheminerait autant de temps avant d'en franchir l'ombrage. La terre où il est planté est faite de musc et d'ambre. Elle est plus blanche que la plus blanche des neiges, et sent si bon que nul ne*

---

<sup>62</sup> BENCHEIKH, Le Voyage Nocturne de Mahomet 1988.

*pourrait dire. Mais, comme le parfum du musc et de l'ambre est trop fort, il y est mêlé du camphre pour le tempérer... Le tronc de cet arbre est de rubis, et ses branches d'émeraude. Ses feuilles, faites de velours, ont la forme d'oreilles. Elles sont si larges qu'une seule pourrait ombrager notre pays. Ses fleurs sont d'or le plus beau qu'on pourrait décrire. Les fruits sont en form de perles et si grands qu'un seul d'entre eux donnerait à manger à cent hommes pendant une année. Ils sont plus blancs que la neige et plus limpides que le cristal. Leur goût est celui du miel mêlé de gingembre. Tout à l'entour, l'herbe est semblable à celle des prés. Elle est de safran vert qui sent merveilleusement bon. Elle est aussi fraîche que si elle venait de naître... Du pied de cet arbre, jaillissent des sources de vin qui sont celles de fleuves qui coulent en paradis... Je demandai alors à Gabriel de me dire ce qu'était cet arbre. "C'est l'arbre de félicité (*ṭūbā*), me dit-il, que Dieu a cité dans le Coran: 'Ton peuple séjournera sous son feuillage le jour du Jugement et c'est une chose considérable.'" 63*

Equally marvelous is the *sidrat al-muntahā* which marks the end of the seventh, uppermost, heaven:

*Sa beauté surpasse celle de toute chose hormis celle de Dieu et celle de ses anges. Son tronc est d'or rouge, ses branches maîtresses sont taillées dans une unique perle merveilleusement blanche, ses rameaux sont de corail, d'or natif et d'argent. Chaque branche porte soixante-dix mille feuilles séparées l'une de l'autre par un espace de quarante ans de marche. Elles sont d'émeraude et pareilles en beauté*

---

63 BENCHEIKH, 1988, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-105: Its trunk is so great that a man, riding the best and most rapid of horses at a continuous gallop for a century, would be unable to circumvent it. He could ride a century again without leaving its shade. The earth in which it is planted is of musk and amber. It is whiter than the whitest snow, and is indescribably fragrant. The scent of musk and amber is indeed so strong that it is tempered with camphor... The trunk of this tree is of ruby and its branches of emerald. Its velvet leaves are shaped like ears. They are so large that a single one could shade our whole country. Its flowers are of the finest gold describable. Its fruits are shaped like pearls and are so large that a single one could feed one hundred men for a year. They are whiter than snow and purer than crystal. They taste of honey and ginger. All around it the grass is like a prairie, of extraordinarily fragrant green saffron, as fresh as fresh shoots... At the foot of this tree gush sources of wine which are those of the rivers which flow in Paradise... I asked Gabriel to tell what this tree was. "It is the tree of felicity (*ṭūbā*), he explained, cited by God in the Qur'ān: 'Your people will congregate beneath its foliage on the Day of Judgment and that is a good thing.'"



*à la queue d'un paon. Une seule d'entre elles peut ombrager l'univers. La lumière du Trône inonde cet arbre et nul ne peut le fixer du regard. C'est le jujubier extrême (Sidrat al-mountahâ). Tout ce qui monte de la terre ou descend des cieux y aboutit. C'est à lui que s'arrête la connaissance des anges et aucun d'eux ne le franchit. Gabriel me dit qu'ici parviendraient tous ceux de mon peuple qui suivent ma voie. De cet arbre, jaillissent des sources d'une eau limpide, d'un lait au goût inaltérable, d'un vin suave et d'un miel délicieux.<sup>64</sup>*

Both these descriptions incorporate Quranic citations and "sound" ḥadith reports. The sidra is essentially a cosmic threshold. Light from the Throne descends on it. Thus the "shade" of the sidra extends over all of Creation and defines it, distinguishing it from the overwhelming and infinite brilliance of the Divine Light. Sources and rivers spring from it. As for the tree Ṭubâ, it is the immense shade tree of Paradise. It is imbibed in marvelously fragrant substances. These two arboreal manifestations, distinct as they are, share many of the same attributes: the opulence of their material composition (trunks of ruby, branches of emerald, fruits of pearl), the cosmic scale of their deployment (centuries, hundreds of men, entire countries), the substances which gush forth from their roots (celestial rivers and springs of wine). More even than the graphic similarities, the eschatological functions of the two trees are similar: "*Gabriel me dit qu'ici parviendraient tous ceux de mon peuple qui suivent ma voie.*" (sidra), and "*Ton peuple séjournera sous son feuillage le jour du Jugement et c'est une chose considérable.*" (Ṭubâ). Those of Muḥammad's umma "reach" the sidra while the foliage of

---

<sup>64</sup> BENCHEIKH, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 52: Its beauty surpasses that of anything else other than God and His angels. Its trunk is of red gold, its limbs are sculpted from a single marvelously white pearl, its branches are of coral, natural gold and silver. On every branch grow seventy thousand leaves separated one from the other by a space of forty years (walking). They are of emerald and are equal in beauty to the peacock's tail. A single one of them can shade the whole universe. The light from the Throne floods this tree so that none may set eyes on it. It is the jujube-tree of the extremity (sidrat al-mountahâ). Everything that rises from the earth or descends from the heavens reaches it. It is where the knowledge of the angels ceases and none of them may proceed beyond it. Gabriel told me that all those among my people who follow my path will attain it. From this tree gush sources of clear water, milk which will not sour, sweet wine and delicious honey.

Ṭubā is the locus of the Day of Resurrection. The mi'rāj narrative, by presenting and popularizing a cohesive cosmology, may well have played an important role in the process of amalgamating these two trees into a single construct.

### Ladder

Mi'rāj (from 'araja, to ascend) means "ladder" or "stairs". The ladder in question is manifestly a cosmological symbol and this is confirmed by Quranic usage of the term:

An inquirer asked for the affliction that is to come \* Upon the infidels — which none will be able to repel \* From God, the Lord of the Ladder (dhī al-ma'ārij) \* To whom the angels and the soul take a day to ascend, whose length is fifty thousand years. - "The Steps" (70;1-4)

This cosmic ladder, attributed to Jacob in the Torah ("Genesis" 28;10-19), was known to Arabs in Muhammad's day by its Ethiopic name, ma'āreg (mentioned in the Ethiopic text of the "Book of Jubilees").<sup>65</sup>

In Islamic tradition it is generally supposed that Muhammad physically ascended the cosmic ladder. At least one ḥadīth concerning the mi'rāj associates this ladder to a cosmic tree:

Al-Bazzār and Sa'id ibn Mansūr (narrate), through Abū 'Imam al-Jūnī, from Anas, (that) the Prophet (S) said: "Whilst I was sitting, Gabriel came to me and tapped me on the back. We got up and went to a tree in which were what looked like two birds' nests. I sat in one and Gabriel sat in the other, and the tree rose up until it filled the sky... A gate in heaven was opened for me, and I saw the greatest light. It was covered with a curtain made of pearls and sapphires."<sup>66</sup>

Jacob's Ladder As representations of the axis mundi, the ladder and the tree are closely related. Both are symbols of cosmic transcendence, of quṭb. In the "Book of Jubilees" (or "Little Genesis"), as it has come down to us in its Ethiopic version, Jacob's

---

<sup>65</sup> See the article "mi'rāj" in the Encyclopædia of Islam.

<sup>66</sup> Cited by HAJJAJ, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

vision of the ladder occurs beneath an oak tree.<sup>67</sup> Jacob, it should be recalled, did not ascend the ladder. He merely saw it in a vision. Nonetheless, Jacob's vision, his *qutb*, like that of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, led him to found a city — the holy city of Bethel, the "House of God" ("Genesis" 28;10-19). In both Bethel and Touba, cosmic transcendence was initially revealed through a dream or a vision and both cities therefore claim to constitute "gateways to heaven". Thus the transcendent vision, the tree and the holy city are linked. Furthermore, upon founding the holy city of Bethel, Jacob and his family dispose of all their "alien gods" and jewelry by burying them beneath a terebinth (turpentine tree, *Pistacia terebinthus*) near Sheshem ("Genesis" 35;1-4).

The terebinth of Sheshem appears earlier in the Torah, and it too signifies a *qutb*. When Abram (Abraham) arrives in Canaan, his first halt is in Sheshem "at the terebinth of Moreh" ("Genesis" 12;6). The Lord then appears to him and assigns the land to his descendants. Later Abram goes to dwell "at the terebinths of Mamre" in Hebron ("Genesis" 13;18) where he builds an altar. Both of these Abrahamic arboreal manifestations mark the initial loci of great pre-Davidic sanctuaries. They mark the very first holy places of the Abrahamic tradition. At the time of the Judges, Sheshem became a "sacred precinct of the Lord" ("Joshua" 24;26). It contained the tomb of the patriarch Joseph and an oak beneath which Joshua erected a stone altar. In "Judges" (9;37) this tree is called "Allon-meonenim" (Oak of the Soothsayers). Hebron too became a holy city known for the tombs of the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) and their wives (Sarah, Rebecca, Leah). Flavius Josephus reports that in his day (1<sup>st</sup> century C.E.) Abraham's terebinth in Hebron, "which has continued ever since the creation of the world", was still flourishing.<sup>68</sup> Jacob's Bethel, for its part, was to become the main sanctuary of the kingdom of Israel. It too contained a stone altar and a sacred oak, called "Allon-

---

<sup>67</sup> CHARLES, The Book of Jubilees or the Little Genesis, 1917, p. 146.

<sup>68</sup> JOSEPHUS, The Wars of the Jews book 4, ch. 9;2 (p. 607). This author also reports that Abraham resided near Hebron beside an oak called "Ogyges". Antiquities of the Jews book 1, ch. 10;4 (p. 37). See also SÉGAL, Abraham: enquête sur un patriarche, 1995, pp. 44-49.

bacuth" (Oak of Weeping), beneath which Jacob had buried Deborah, Rebecca's nurse ("Genesis" 35;8). This oak might well be the oak of Jacob's initial transcendent vision (according to the Ethiopic "Book of Jubilees").<sup>69</sup> Thus in the Torah there is a significant pattern whereby trees (terebinths and oaks), as manifestations of the axis mundi, signal theophany and mark the foundation of holy cities (Sheshem, Hebron, Bethel). The interrelation of these two arboreal species in the Biblical texts may in fact arise from confusion during the translation of the Hebrew terms into Greek.<sup>70</sup> The terebinth (Heb. **אלה**, elah) is a sub-tropical species unknown to Europe and it may have been translated as "oak" (Heb. **אלון**, allon), or simply as "tree" (**אילן**, ilan).

Jonah's Gourd Tree As with Jacob's Ladder, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's transcendent experience takes the form of a vision. Contrary to Jacob however, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba experiences a vision of the depths. Rather than reaching upward, his mystic experience takes him down to the cosmic fish at the bottom of the world. "The fish that upholds the world" in Ahmadou Bamba's illumination is Nûn, the fish of Sheol mentioned in the Bible, the abyssal fish who swallowed Jonah (Yûnus) and took him down "to the base of the mountains":

I sank to the base of the mountains; the bars of the earth  
closed upon me for ever. Yet You brought my life up from the  
pit, O Lord my God! - "Jonah" (2;7)

By invoking Jonah's fish, Touba's quṭb likewise spans all of creation, from the sidra beneath the lofty Throne to the abyssal fish called Nûn. And just as with Jonah, its "sign" is a tree.

In the Biblical narrative, after fulfilling his mission to Niniveh, the despondent Jonah retires to the desert where God causes a tree to grow over him in order to give him shade ("Jonah" 4;6). This tree is a sign. God causes it to grow over Jonah in order to demonstrate the necessity of His mercy. In Hebrew the tree is called

---

<sup>69</sup> Also in "Genesis" (21;33), while residing in Beer-Sheba, Abraham planted a tamarisk "and invoked there the name of the Lord".

<sup>70</sup> MEISTERMANN, Nouveau guide de Terre Sainte 1907, p. 248.

"kikayon" (כִּיקַיֹּן). Modern translations refer to it as a "ricinus plant", i.e., an oil-producing plant, but it has traditionally been understood as a "gourd-tree". In the Qur'ân, this gourd-tree (shajara min yaqtin) grows over Jonah immediately upon his being freed from the belly of the fish and cast ashore:

Verily Jonah is one of the apostles \* When he fled on the laden ship \* And lots were cast he was rejected \* Then he was swallowed by a fish (al-hût) as he was worthy of blame \* Had he not been one of those who struggled hard \* He would have stayed in its belly till the day the dead are raised \* So We cast him, sick, on a barren shore \* And We made a gourd tree (shajara min yaqtin) grow over him.  
- "Who Stand Arrayed in Rows" (37;139-146)

The Arabic root q.t.n. has many botanical associations important to our discussion: qutn, cotton; qutniya, legumes (peas, beans, lentils); qutâniya; corn, maize; and yaqtin, gourd, squash — the form in which it is used here. The two relevant ideas are "cotton", which has been referred to earlier (fine cloth produced by the fruits of the celestial Tûbâ), and "leguminous" fruit (gourd or pod). If we accept the translation of the Biblical kikayon as "ricinus tree" another important notion, that of "oil-production", is added to notions of "cotton" and "gourd-fruit". As we shall see in Chapter 4, several tropical species of the *Malvaceæ* family (the baobab, the kapok tree) actually combine these three attributes.

According to Jewish commentators, Jonah is the boy resuscitated by Elijah in "I Kings" (17;17-24).<sup>71</sup> They relate his descent into the abyss in the belly of the fish to his boyhood post-mortem adventure. For the Ancient Jews, Sheol, the abode of the dead, lay below the earth. It was chthonic. Sheol and the cosmic ocean beneath the mountains are thus geographically equivalent.<sup>72</sup> Jonah's three day journey in the fish amounts to a *néantisation*, an annihilation of his being (equivalent to the sufi concept of fanâ'). "Going down" to the depths (Heb. verb yarad), into the *néant* of non-

<sup>71</sup> REICHELBERG, *L'Aventure prophétique; Jonas, menteur de Vérité*, 1995, p. 86.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, p. 126.

being, in order to encounter the Divine was a feature of Jewish Merkaba mysticism<sup>73</sup> and later of Kabbalah.<sup>74</sup>

Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's transcendent experience is however unique in the annals of Islam. There is no record therein of mystic fanâ' as "descent", or of descent as a means of achieving 'irfân (gnosis). Nonetheless, in the Qur'ân (21;87) Jonah is called Dhû al-Nûn (the one whose attribute is the "fish") and this sobriquet was adopted by one of the earliest Sufis, i.e., Dhû al-Nûn al-Misrî. In Chapter 5 it will be demonstrated how these abyssal and chthonic notions, and their association to the term "Nûn", can be derived from the "Nun" of ancient Egyptian cosmogony.

Khidr of the Two Oceans Jonah, like the always enigmatic Khidr, occupies a special place in the sufi *Weltanschauung* and this may very well have something to do with his unique eschatological/cosmic/cosmogonic journey and its parallels for the mystic quest for gnosis. The parallel between Jonah and Khidr (usually assimilated to the Biblical Elijah) is supported by the fact that in sûra "The Cave" (18;60-82) Khidr too is associated with a fish and the ocean. Khidr is not mentioned by name in this sûra. Rather he is referred to as "one of Our slaves". Like Jonah however, this anonymous Quranic figure is a cosmic voyager "informed" by God. Moses meets up with him at the confluence of two oceans and then accompanies him on a mystic journey. That Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's journey has been perceived in terms of that of Khidr is attested by the fact that his son and hagiographer, Serigne Bassirou, refers to him as the multaqa al-buḥûr ("The Confluence of Oceans")<sup>75</sup> and it is also expressed on Touba's foremost cosmic symbol, Lamp Fall, which carries on its surface a citation of the Quranic precedent:

Then they found one of Our slaves, to whom We had been merciful, and had taught him from Our knowledge. - "The Cave" (18;65)

---

<sup>73</sup> STROUMSA, "Mystical Descents", 1995, pp. 137-154.

<sup>74</sup> SCHOLEM, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, 1995, p. 25.

<sup>75</sup> MBACKÉ, 1980, *loc. cit.*, p. 589.

Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's cosmic vision of the fish/ocean in association with the tree can thus be seen as mystic use being made of established Islamic symbols.

### The Tree of Ma'rifa

Sufism, as an instituted kind of mysticism,<sup>76</sup> has done much to disseminate or popularize powerful symbols such as these. Along with the mi'rāj narrative, sufi literature contributed to the coalescence of the Ṭubā construct. In early sufi thought, the image of the tree signified cosmic consciousness generally. One of the earliest Sufis, Abū Yazīd Bistāmī (d. 260/874), wrote of the "Tree of Oneness" (shajarat al-tawḥīd) in the "field of Eternity",<sup>77</sup> while Abū al-Husayn al-Nūrī wrote of the "Tree of Gnosis" (ma'rifa).<sup>78</sup> A later Bektashī poet wrote: "This universe is a tree — man became its fruit".<sup>79</sup> Quranic references to the trees of Paradise and reports about Ṭubā and the sidrat al-muntahā in particular fueled this mystic literature and helped determine the symbolic uses of the tree. As the uttermost limit of the Universe, the sidrat al-muntahā especially became something of a spiritual destination for Sufis. In the original Quranic verse (53;14), this tree is clearly associated with Muḥammad "seeing" the Most High. Sufi experience generally strives to achieve ultimate union with the God — a spiritual mi'rāj for the initiated known as fanā' ("annihilation" of self). The Lote tree of the extremity was understood as the ultimate station in this spiritual ascension:

On the holy boughs of the Sidra,  
High up in the heavenly fields,  
Beyond terrestrial desire,  
My soul-bird a warm nest has built. - Hafiz<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> The term "instituted" is used here to designate mysticism as it as evolved since Al-Ghazālī, i.e., mysticism as it is strictly circumscribed within the Islamic "language". This sufism has in fact taken the form of "institutions", i.e., ṭariqas.

<sup>77</sup> SCHIMMEL, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, 1975, p. 49.

<sup>78</sup> SCHIMMEL, Deciphering the Signs of God 1994, p. 17.

<sup>79</sup> SCHIMMEL, 1975, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>80</sup> Cited by COOK, The Tree of Life, 1992, p. 28.

According to Ibn 'Arabî, the Mystic Dhû al-Nûn al-Misrî called this tree Tûbâ and cites it for its "proximity" to the Most High:

*Les hommes obéissants ont gagné d'être à l'ombre de Tûbâ  
et d'être à proximité de leur Seigneur le Très-haut.*<sup>81</sup>

Right from Sufism's earliest expression therefore, one can find the image of the tree at the heart of the mystic's deepest preoccupations: personal experience of Oneness of God and proximity to Him. Moreover this mystic construct is clearly labeled sidra and Tûbâ and therefore built up from the Qur'ân and authentic traditions.

### The Tree and the Tablet

In the mi'râj narrative the gate to the first heaven is associated with yet another tree. This is the tree of 'Izrâ'il, the Angel of Death, at the "Gate of heaven".<sup>82</sup> It stands to the left of 'Izrâ'il; to his right there is the "Preserved Tablet" (al-lawh al-mahfûz) where the destiny of men is believed to be recorded. Given this context 'Izrâ'il's celestial tree too must be understood primarily as an eschatological symbol; death is administered through the tablet and the tree. The tablet and the tree are 'Izrâ'il's tools and they stand together.

Sûra "The Small Groups" (39;73), as we have seen, presents us with the notion of paradisiacal "gates" and their "keepers" (whose greeting is tibtum). This notion is further developed in ḥadiths related to this sûra, and the heavenly gates and keepers can be associated to a tree:

'Asim ibn Damra related that 'Alî (may God ennoble his face) once made mention of Hell, stressing its enormity in a way I do not now recall, and then said, "*And those that had feared their Lord shall be driven to Heaven in troops* (sûra 39;73) until they reach one of its Gates , where they shall find a tree from the foot of which two springs gush forth. They repair to one of them, as they have been

---

<sup>81</sup> Cited by IBN 'ARABÎ, *La vie merveilleuse de Dhû-l-Nûn l'Égyptien* , 1988, p. 284: "Obedient men have earned their presence in the shade of Tûbâ and proximity to their Lord the Most High."

<sup>82</sup> BENCHEIKH, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 28.



instructed, and drink. Thereby all the grief and hurt which lay in their bellies is removed. Then they make their way to the other where they purify themselves, whereupon the *expression of delight* (sûra 83;24) steals over their faces. From this time on their hair never changes, and their heads never become dishevelled; it is though they had been anointed with oil. Then they come to Heaven, to be told '*Peace be upon you; good you were (tibtum), so enter it for evermore.*' (sûra 39;73)"<sup>83</sup>

In the geosophy of this construct, the celestial tree, with rivers gushing from its root, is neither Tûbâ nor the sidrat al-muntahâ. It stands at the gate. It signifies access, and is related to some of the purificatory functions of the aquatic Kawthar symbol.

According to Islamic convention, the Angel at Heaven's Gate is usually considered to be Ridwân. His substitution here by 'Izrâ'il, the Angel of Death, emphasizes the relationship between Tree and human mortality. There are in effect recurrent references which associate the falling leaves of 'Izrâ'il's tree with individual mortality:

All is recorded in the heavenly register, and 'Izrâ'il only knows the time for taking a soul when God gives him a clear and specific sign. The angel who is responsible for recording the deeds of the individuals informs the angel of death of the proper moment... When exactly forty days of a person's life are left, say many reports, a leaf on which is written the name of the soul who is to die falls from the tree located beneath the Throne of God. By that sign 'Izrâ'il knows that the time of death has come.<sup>84</sup>

The tree beneath the Throne is our now familiar Tûbâ/sidrat al-muntahâ. In the above description it is related to 'Izrâ'il. It becomes, by association 'Izrâ'il's Tree and represents divine monitoring of human existence.

We find this arboreal attribute of celestial transcription to have become subsumed into modern definitions of the Quranic sidra al-muntahâ, as the following passages illustrate:

<sup>83</sup> Cited by AL-GHAZALI, 1989, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-236.

<sup>84</sup> SMITH & HADDAD, 1981, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

Each of its leaves has a name written on it. As long as the leaf lives, the bearer of that name lives; as soon as it falls, that person dies.<sup>85</sup>

*Sur chaque feuille de cet arbre... est inscrit le nom d'un être humain, homme ou femme. Lorsque cet être arrive au terme de sa vie, la feuille qui porte son nom jaunit et tombe.*<sup>86</sup>

In these modern definitions of the sidra, the celestial tree becomes the central "data bank" of humanity, a cosmic computer of sorts. The monitoring of human existence takes the form of the inscription of the names of individual mortals on its leaves. The life and death of individual leaves represents that of human mortals. We can recognize here the essence of Touba's Guy Texe tradition, where individuals inscribe their names on the tree in order to be "registered" for Paradise. The "administrative" attribute of the celestial tree is important for the specifically Senegalese Tûbâ construct.

However, none of the authors quoted above cite any authenticated source for this foliar tradition. Though Smith & Haddad do mention an anonymous "Kitâb ahwâl al-qiyâma" and refer us cryptically to "some reports", not a single ḥadīth has in fact been evoked nor any human authority cited. The notion that its leaves represent human destinies is not found in any of the ḥadīths concerning the sidra, or Tûbâ for that matter. Indeed I was assured in Touba by Serigne Modou Mahmoudine Niang, Arabic secretary to the late Khalifa Abdoul Ahad, that no such ḥadīth existed and that the "tradition" of human destiny being recorded on the leaves of the cosmic sidra cannot be attributed to the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>87</sup> This specific foliar attribute of the sidra therefore must possess some source other than authentic Islamic tradition.

There are many indications that the sidrat al-muntahâ's foliar tradition is at home in Egypt. The image of individual destinies being symbolized as leaves falling from the celestial tree have been

---

<sup>85</sup> RIPPIN & KNAPPERT, Textual Sources for the Study of Islam, 1990, p. 198.

<sup>86</sup> BENCHEIKH, 1988, *op. cit.*, pp. 28, 31: On each leaf of this tree... there is inscribed the name of a human being, a man or a woman. When the term of life of this person reaches its end, the leaf bearing his name yellows and falls.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Serigne Modou Mahmoudine Niang, Touba-Mosquée ward, Touba.

evoked during observances of laylat al-barâ'a (the Night of Forgiveness), the night of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Sha'bân. According to the Wehr dictionary, destinies for the coming year are believed to be fixed on that night; the celestial tree shakes, causing the leaves of those who will die to fall.<sup>88</sup> This unspecified "popular belief", though expressed in general terms, is specific to Egypt. The laylat al-barâ'a has long been an important festival in Egypt. In his "rihla", Ibn Battûta mentions this nocturnal ceremony while describing Cairo's Qarâfa cemetery and, in a recent re-edition of the French translation of this work, the editor cites the very same arboreal tradition as Wehr.<sup>89</sup> Though the Wehr dictionary does not cite the source of this information, it can be traced to Lane's Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, first published in 1860. Lane describes the laylat al-barâ'a but distinguishes it from the religious observances in the Qarâfa cemetery (the mawlid of Imâm al-Shâfi'i held in his mausoleum on the first or second Wednesday of Sha'bân). According to Lane:

"The Night of the Middle of Shaabân", or "Leylet en-Nusf min Shaabân", which is the night of the fifteenth (that is *preceding* the fifteenth day) of the month, is held in great reverence by the Muslims, as the period when the fate of every living man is confirmed for the ensuing year. The Sidr (or lote-tree) of Paradise, which is more commonly called Shegeret el-Muntahâ (or the Tree of the Extremity) probably for several reasons, but chiefly (as is generally supposed) because it is said to be at the extremity, or on the most elevated spot, in Paradise, is believed to have as many leaves as there are living human beings in the world; and the leaves are said to be inscribed with the names of all those beings; each leaf bearing the name of one person, and those of his father and mother. The tree, we are taught, is shaken on the night above mentioned, a little after sunset; and when a person is destined to die in the ensuing year, his leaf, upon which his name is written, falls on this occasion: if he is to die soon, his leaf is almost wholly withered, a little portion only remaining green: if he be to die later in

<sup>88</sup> WEHR, Arabic-English Dictionary, 1976, p. 887.

<sup>89</sup> IBN BATTUTA, Voyages 1982, vol. 1, p. 126.

the year, a larger portion remains green: according to the time he has yet to live, so is the proportion of the part of the leaf yet green.<sup>90</sup>

The tradition whereby individual destinies for the coming year are set on the laylat al-barâ'a is supported by at least one ḥadīth (cited by Al-Ghazālī in his "Iḥyā'"):

Said 'Atā' ibn Yasār, "On the middle night of Sha'bān the Angel of Death receives a scroll and is told 'This year you are to take the people whose names are recorded on this scroll.' A man may sow crops, marry women and raise up buildings, while his name is upon that scroll and he knows it not."<sup>91</sup>

Here the laylat al-barâ'a is associated with 'Izrâ'īl and a "register", or "scroll", of names.

'Izrâ'īl's scroll of names (the names of those about to die) is but one among several celestial registers. Such registers are mentioned on several occasions in the Qur'ān, and always in the context of Divine Judgment. Registers (ṣuḥuf) are mentioned in conjunction with the "rolling up" of the heavens on the Day of Resurrection in sūra "The Rolling Up" (81;10). This ledger or "scroll" (al-sijill) is again used as a metaphor for the "rolling up" (tawâ) of the heavens in "the Prophets" (21;104). Sūra "The Defrauders" mentions two celestial ledgers: the record of the wicked in Sijjīn (83;7) and the record of the Righteous in 'Ilīyīn (83;18). These ledgers represent the records, the particulars, of human existence. Their relationship to the Day of Reckoning is verified by other Quranic passages:

Round each man's neck We have hung his chronicle (al zamnāhu ṭā'irah), and on the Day of Resurrection will present it as a book found open \* Read your book (kitābaka); this day you are sufficient to take your own reckoning (ḥasib). - "Al-Isrā'" (17;13-14)

<sup>90</sup> LANE, Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians 1908, pp. 476-477.

<sup>91</sup> Cited by AL-GHAZALI, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

All things they do are in the scriptures (al-zubur) \* All things small or great have been recorded (mustatar) \* Lo! the righteous will dwell among gardens and rivers \* In the seat of honor with a most Powerful King. - "The Moon" (54;52-55)

It will be recalled that this last verse, which associates inscription and record-keeping with access to Paradise, is inscribed many times on Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's catafalque.

In Bencheikh's compilation of the mi'rāj narrative, 'Izrā'il's ledger is identified as the Preserved Tablet. The Preserved Tablet (lawḥ mahfūz) is the ultimate, archetypal, celestial record. It appears in the Qur'ān (85;22) as a synonym for the Qur'ān itself and is generally interpreted as the cosmic locus where the uncreated Qur'ān exists, where the Word of God is actually written. Just as the various celestial trees of the Qur'ān and ḥadīth have been subsumed into the singular sidrat al-muntahā/Ṭūbā, so too have the various celestial registers, scrolls and chronicles mentioned above been assimilated to the Preserved Tablet. The Lawḥ al-Mahfūz, the register of God's Word, thus also becomes the record of His knowledge of particulars — the particular words and acts of each mortal and the monitoring of each life and death.

It is the Islamic traditions of Africa especially which have associated the archetypal celestial Book (Lawḥ Mahfūz) to the celestial Tree (Ṭūba/sidrat al-muntahā). In Lane's description of the laylat al-barā'a the celestial register of 'Izrā'il is indeed attached to the image of a celestial sidrat al-muntahā. This association is specific to Egypt. The term "Muslims" is used in Lane's definition in order to distinguish Egyptian Muslims from Egyptian Copts and Jews, and not to designate Islamic tradition generally. Lane cites neither textual source nor human informant and he relates the tradition as he would any number of other local Egyptian "manners and customs". Nonetheless Lane's description of the sidrat al-muntahā according to this local Egyptian tradition of the laylat al-barā'a has found its way into general works, and usually without the original source being cited. It is possible that Wehr, Rippin & Knappert,<sup>92</sup> Smith &

<sup>92</sup> RIPPIN & KNAPPERT, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

Haddad<sup>93</sup> and Bencheikh<sup>94</sup> were all relying on Lane, or Lane derivatives, when they put together definitions of the sidra. Elsewhere, Knappert also mentions the foliar attribute of the sidra in the context once again of a popular (anonymous and unauthenticated) Muslim cosmogony from Egypt:

God first created Paradise, i.e., the seven layers of Heaven, with the cosmic tree *sidrat al-muntahâ* whose roots feed the four great rivers of the then known world (Nile, Euphrates, Tigris and Oxus) and whose leaves have the names of all living people written on them, you and I each have our own leaf and when it falls we die... Each time a leaf falls from the Tree of Life in heaven, the Angel of Death flies up to read the name on it, then flies down to Earth to find the owner of that name.<sup>95</sup>

It should be noted that in this Egyptian tradition, as in the one cited by Lane, the *sidrat al-muntahâ* is clearly referred to as a tree "of Paradise".

According to the Tûbâ tradition of Senegal, as we have seen in Chapter 2, inscription on leaves is a fundamental attribute of the paradisiacal tree Tûbâ:

*Touba désigne encore un arbre du Paradis sur les feuilles duquel sont inscrites pour chaque humain ses bonnes et ses mauvaises actions . Et chaque feuille, en tombant, provoque inexorablement la mort d'un individu, celui qui y a ses actions notées. Elle est alors conservée pour le jugement dernier .*<sup>96</sup>

Thus the popular Muslim traditions of Egypt and Senegal are nearly identical. In Senegalese tradition not only are the names of individuals inscribed on the leaves, but their specific acts as well. This "record" is then preserved for the Day of Judgment. Emphasis here is not on life and death (or the duration of earthly existence, as

<sup>93</sup> SMITH & HADDAD, 1981, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>94</sup> BENCHEIKH, 1988, *op. cit.*, p. 28, 31.

<sup>95</sup> KNAPPERT, 1985, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-26.

<sup>96</sup> SY, 1969, *op. cit.*, p 314: Touba designates a tree of Paradise on whose leaves are inscribed for each human being his good and his evil actions. And each leaf, upon falling, provokes inexorably the death of an individual, the one who has his actions written on it. The leaf is then preserved for the last judgment.

represented by 'Izrâ'il in Egypt) but rather on life and the afterlife — on judgment and access to eternal bliss. In Senegal, 'Izrâ'il's mortuary ledger, where each individual's name and mortality is recorded, is assimilated to that other celestial record, the register of the good and evil acts of individuals. Senegal's Ṭubâ functions very much as the Tablet.

The association of the two scriptural symbols is also a feature of the Egyptian *laylat al-barâ'a*. According to Lane, the *du'â*, or "supplication" to God, recited "a little after sunset", while the celestial tree shakes, runs as follows:

O God, O thou Gracious, and who art not an object of grace, O thou Lord of Dignity and Honour, and of Beneficence and Favour, there is no deity but Thou, the Support of those who seek to Thee for refuge, and the Helper of those who have recourse to Thee for help, and the Trust of those who fear. O God, if Thou have recorded me in Thy abode, upon the Preserved Tablet, miserable, or unfortunate, or scanted in my sustenance, cancel, O God, of Thy goodness, my misery, and misfortune, and scanty allowance of sustenance, and confirm me in Thy abode, upon the Preserved Tablet, as happy, and provide for and direct to good: for Thou hast said (and Thy saying is true) in Thy Book revealed by the tongue of Thy commissioned Prophet, "God will cancel what He pleaseth, and confirm; and with Him is the Original of the Book" (13;39). O my God, by the very great revelation (which is made) on the night of the middle of the month of Shaabân the honoured, "in which every determined decree is dispensed" (44;4), and confirmed, remove from me whatever affliction I know, and what I know not, and what Thou best knowest; for Thou art the Most Mighty, the most Bountiful. And Bless, O God, our lord Muhammad, the Illiterate Prophet, and his Family and Companions, and save them.<sup>97</sup>

Here the Believer supplicates God to be magnanimous in what He records on the Preserved Tablet, in His celestial Book of human destiny because He cancels and confirms, decrees and dispenses at will.

---

<sup>97</sup> LANE, 1908, *op. cit.*, pp. 477-478.

The Preserved Tablet thus defined (i.e., as a register of particulars) is associated to the *sidrat al-muntahâ*. The idea that this celestial Book might be located at the *sidrat al-muntahâ* is certainly compatible with the *sidra*'s role as cosmic fulcrum, as hinge between God and creation. The association of the celestial Tree and Book is also strengthened through the common attribute of leaf/sheet. In effect the Arabic term *waraq*, as with the French *feuille*, designates both the leaf of a tree and a sheet of paper (etymologically the arboreal leaf surely pre-dates the designation of paper).

Yet, though the leaf/sheet as simile for the life and record of each individual may not be authenticated by sound Islamic tradition, it nonetheless can be traced to the Qur'ân:

He has the keys of the Unknown. No one but He has knowledge; He knows what is on land and in the sea. Not a leaf falls without His knowledge (mâ tasquṭ min waraqa illâ ya'lamuhâ), nor a grain in the darkest part of the earth, nor anything green or seared that is not in a clear record (fî kitâb mubin). - "The Cattle" (6;59)

In this verse the falling of the leaf has been understood as an indication of God's Omniscience, i.e., His knowledge of each individual event, occurrence and accident. That the leaves in question are falling from a tree can be deduced from common sense. That this tree might be the celestial tree called *Tûbâ*, the Quranic cosmic *sidra*, is not a forgone conclusion but the compatibility of this notion with the existing celestial tree image could certainly make such an association possible. It is of relevance then that in this Quranic verse the falling of the leaf is recorded "in a clear record", which itself evokes the Book, the Ledger. The Tree and the Book, archetypes both of them, are linked through the common attribute of leaf/sheet. The leaf/sheet supports written knowledge, and specifically knowledge of particulars. It does this at the threshold of the Universe.

Foliar notions of individual destiny, the transcription of names and deeds in view of Divine judgment, seem to constitute a specifically African development of the Islamic image of the



celestial tree. We find it expressed in the Egyptian laylat al-barâ'a and in Senegalese Touba. The following extract from Pular (West African) verse is characteristic of this African emphasis on the recording of human destinies:

*Au Jujubier de la Limite on te montre ce qu'est cet arbre,  
à l'ombre duquel les martyrs sont assis.  
On te montre la Table Gardée,  
— voyageur des cieux, tu es venu voir les choses de Dieu.  
Y est écrite la destinée des hommes dans le monde.  
Celui qui suit ta Sunna sera sauvé de l'Abîme.  
Devant toi sont de multiples merveilles.  
Le Trône et le Dais ont été construits pour toi.  
Plein et beau le Lac Kawthar t'est montré.  
Les coupes à boires y sont au nombre des étoiles.  
Des dattiers, arbres du Lieu du Bonheur l'entourent.  
Ahmed, l'Unique y est amené et voit le lac.  
Les mystères des Paradis te sont montrés.  
Tu reçois l'éclat des lumières célestes.<sup>98</sup>*

In this short segment relating the mi'rāj, the Quranic sidra is closely associated with the full panoply of cosmological and eschatological symbols: the heavens, the Divine Throne and Pedestal, stellar illumination, the signs of God, martyrs, salvation from the Abyss, the Pool of Kawthar, trees of the Abode of Bliss, the Gardens. The sidra is the crux of the system and its first association is to the Preserved Tablet: "The destiny of men in the world is written on it".

In the Touba tradition there can be no doubt that the celestial Tūbā is the "tree of destiny", that the particulars of individuals (represented by their names and deeds) are recorded or registered and that, by this means, their destinies in the Hereafter are determined. This tree/book association seems to be a theme peculiar

---

<sup>98</sup> HAAFKENS, *Chants musulmans en peul*, 1983, p. 353: At the Lote tree of the Extremity you are shown this tree, in the shade of which the martyrs sit. You are shown the Preserved Tablet, — celestial traveler, you have come to see the Divine Attributes. On it is written the destiny of men in the world. Those who follow your sunna will be saved from the Abyss. Before are numerous marvels. The Throne and the Pedestal were built before you. Lake Kawthar, full and beautiful, is shown to you. The drinking cups are as numerous as the stars. Date-palms, the trees of the Abode of Bliss, surround it. Ahmad, the Singular, is brought to see the lake. You are shown the mysteries of Paradise. You receive the brilliance of the celestial light.

to local Islamic traditions throughout Africa and in Chapter 5 it will be traced back to an important Ancient Egyptian antecedent — the cosmic ished tree of Heliopolis.

### The Tree of Light

Divine knowledge, expressed as a Book: as the *Lawḥ al-Mahfūz* (85;22), or the *Umm al-Kitāb* (13;39), is also evoked by the idea of Light (*nūr*), of "illumination", and thus the Tree of Knowledge becomes a Tree of Light. The association of the tree with the notion of Divine Light is based primarily on verse 35 of *sūra "The Light"*:

God is the light of the heavens and the earth. The semblance of His light is that of a niche in which is a lamp, the flame within a glass, the glass a glittering star as it were, lit with the oil of a blessed olive tree (*shajara mubarakā zaytūna*), neither of the East nor the West, whose oil appears to light up even though fire touches it not, light upon light. God guides to His light whom He will. So does God advance precepts of wisdom for men, for God has knowledge of all things. - "The Light" (24;35)

This Quranic verse, which has been a favored subject of mystic and theosophic speculation, participates along with other arboreal types in the construction of the tree archetype.

For Al-Ghazālī the niche, the glass, the lamp, the tree and the oil of *sūra "The Light"* signify five different faculties through which Divine Light can be accessed, mainly the senses, the imagination, the intellect, cogitation (or reflection, meditation) and prophecy respectively.<sup>99</sup> The tree is symbolic of the cogitative faculty because of the fruits it bears — fruits which permit renewal and continuity of knowledge of Light. The olive tree is especially significant then because its fruit actually produces the (prophetic) oil which lights the (intellectual) lamp through the cogitative faculty, thus partaking in three of the five planes of Divine Illumination. By applying this exegesis, the "tree" of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's meditation taps the Muhammadan "oil" and the "lamp" is lit. It is following his mystic vision that Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba was

---

<sup>99</sup> AL-GHAZALI, Le Tabernacle des Lumières, 1981, pp. 79-81.

informed directly by the Prophet Muḥammad, and Lamp Fall continues to light the Mouride universe from the center of Touba.

The blessed olive tree is referred to elsewhere in the Qur'ân and evokes God's Messengers:

A tree that grows from Mount Sinai yields oil (duhn) and condiment (ṣibgh) for those who eat. - "The Believers" (23;20)

I call to witness the fig and the olive \* And Mount Sinai \*  
And this land secure (al-balad al-amîn). - "The Fig" (95;1-3)

Mount Sinai is the locus of Mosaic prophecy. In these verses it is called to witness along with trees. In "The Believers" this tree is defined as ricinus so it could well be an olive tree. It produces "oil" (duhn) and "condiment" (ṣibgh) — both terms connoting "anointment". In sûra "The Fig", Mount Sinai is associated to the fig and the olive. These appear here to be references to fruit but by inference we can assume also that they refer to the fruit trees as well. The olive is evocative of Noah's prophetic mission, a mission which is also associated with a mount, i.e., Mount Ararat. The olive is also evocative of the Mount of Olives and Jesus' mission. The fig on the other hand evokes Adam and the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. The secure land is generally believed to refer to the Meccan ḥaram, where Mount Hirâ' (Jabal al-Nûr, the "Mount of Light") was the locus of Muḥammad's first Quranic revelation and where Mount 'Arafât marks the close of that revelation (as well as Abraham's "sacrifice" trial).

However, beyond these specific manifestations, both Tree and Mount can be understood as archetypal. According to the geosophy of Medieval theosophists a cosmic mountain called Qâf stands at the threshold of the universe and, like the sidrat al-muntahâ, it is the locus of revelation. All of the various earthly mountains which figure in the careers of God's Messengers, those cited in the verses above, are but particular reflections of this universal Qâf. Mount

Sinai especially has been associated to the cosmic Qāf<sup>100</sup> (and the Touba tradition of Senegal associates the holy city with Mount Sinai<sup>101</sup>). When Tree and Mount stand together as archetypes, as in the above verses, they configure Divine Light entering creation. In this construct there can be no question of reciprocity. The knowledge represented by "Light" is Eternal Truth which God imparts "down" to creation. It is not knowledge of the particulars "rising" to be recorded.

The illuminative attribute of the Tree of Knowledge/Light finds further expression in the image of the "inverted tree". It represents Divine Light irradiating from the Throne downwards towards creation. This description of the great celestial tree "growing from its high place in the Universe downwards to the lowest heaven"<sup>102</sup> recurs sporadically in Islamic sources (fig. 3.2). The "Tree of Knowledge" is rooted in Divine Omniscience ("its roots are in heaven")<sup>103</sup> and it reaches down to humanity. In the Kabbalist Book of Zohar (c. 1280) the Sefirothic Tree "extends from above downwards, and is the sun which illuminates all".<sup>104</sup> It is the "Tree of God" where God's power is manifest as ten "branches" but whose "root" is unknown and unknowable.<sup>105</sup> The image of this "inverted" world-tree, whose root is in God, operates within the Neoplatonic "emanationist" cosmology and had previously featured in Gnostic cosmology.<sup>106</sup>

Some Muslim sources describe Tūba as precisely such an inverted tree:

The trees of this world have their roots in the earth and their branches in the air because it is the abode of vanishing. The trees of the Garden are not like that. Their roots are in the air and their boughs in the earth, as Allah-

---

<sup>100</sup> GLOTON, 1982, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>101</sup> SY, 1969, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

<sup>102</sup> WENSINK, 1921, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>103</sup> AL-QADI, 1977, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>104</sup> COOK, 1992, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>105</sup> SCHOLEM, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

<sup>106</sup> RUDOLPH, Gnosis, 1987, p. 64



Fig. 3.2 Inverted Tree of Paradise

Source: MOYNIHAN, Elizabeth, *Paradise as a Garden*, George Braziller, New York, 1979, p. 43.

The image of the "inverted" Tree of Paradise (as in this illustration of Tuba from an XVIII<sup>th</sup> century prayer book) is based primarily on the Quranic passage; "its fruit within reach" (69;23). The inverted tree is especially apt as a symbol of knowledge. The roots of the Tree of Knowledge are in the highest heaven (with God) and it grows down towards earth so that men may gather its fruit. This process whereby knowledge emanates from God above and irradiates downwards is paralleled by the metaphor of Divine Light, hence the notion of Tree of Light.

ta'ala said: *its clusters nigh to gather*, (quṭūfuhā dāniya: its fruits within reach, 69:23).<sup>107</sup>

For Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba also, Ṭūbā is the Tree of Light; "The sun in this world is similar to (Ṭūbā) for its roots are in heaven and its light irradiates all the places on earth". He supports the inverted tree construct, symbol of illumination, by two now familiar Quranic verses; "its fruits within reach" (quṭūfuhā dāniya, 69:23), and "as a goodly tree whose roots are firm and branches in heaven" (aṣluhā thābit wa far'uhā fi al-samā', 14:24).

### Shajarat al-Kawn

The close association of the celestial Book, the archetypal Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz, and the Tree of Light, the celestial Tree called Ṭūbā is full of significance. Both are Divine Emanations and both represent God's Knowledge. However, while the Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz is God's written Word and is accessed through the faculty of intellect, Ṭūbā is His Light and is accessible through imagination. Their close association one to the other in the geosophy of sufism confirms that they ultimately reveal One Truth. Messengers, and especially Muḥammad their Seal, are supremely endowed in both faculties and thus have accessed Al-Haqq through both Book and Tree.

Following Al-Ghazālī's "Mishkāt al-anwār", theosophists employed the image of the Inverted Tree, the Tree of Light, for exactly this epistemological purpose. Three nearly contemporaneous Iberian intellectuals: Ibn 'Arabī (Shajarat al-kawn c. 1234),<sup>108</sup> Moses of Léon (The Book of Zohar c. 1280), and Ramón Llull (Arbor Scientiae c. 1295) used the image of the tree in order to explain the structure of knowledge. They had been preceded in their efforts by another Andalusian, Abū 'Uthmān Sa'īd b. Fathūn (early XI<sup>th</sup> century), author of an introduction to the philosophical sciences entitled Tree of Wisdom (Shajarat al-ḥikma).<sup>109</sup> Shahrastūrī, an Iranian theosophist, likewise produced c.1282 an encyclopedia entitled Treatise of the

<sup>107</sup> AL-QADI, 1977, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>108</sup> GLOTON, 1982, *op. cit.*; JEFFERY, "Ibn Al-'Arabī's Shajarat al-Kawn", 1959 and 1960.

<sup>109</sup> FAKHRY, A History of Islamic Philosophy, 1983, p. 258.

Divine Tree and of Theosophic Secrets (Rasā'il al-shajara al-ilāhiya wa al-asrār al-rabbāniya).<sup>110</sup> According to the system expounded by these thinkers, all knowledge originates in God. The notion of the inverted tree discussed above, because it reaches down to us, expressed this Divine origin, while earthly trees, which reach up from earth to Heaven, are appropriate symbols of the process through which we access knowledge.<sup>111</sup>

For the Persian philosopher Shihâb al-Dîn Suhrawardî (Shaykh al-Ishrâq, 549-587/1154-1191), Tûbâ is essentially a tree of knowledge in the sense of "illumination".<sup>112</sup> It symbolizes Divine Light as it illuminates the created universe. Tûbâ is by extension a typification of spiritual enlightenment, of "Eastern Illumination" (ishrâq). All that a person can hope for in this world is to be illuminated by it, to capture and reflect its light like the Moon in relation to the Sun. We have already seen how one of the ḥadīths paraphrased by Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba equates Tûbâ with the sun and its illumination of the world.

Suhrawardî's Tûbâ is also associated with the legendary Simorgh-bird of ancient Persian tradition:

*Sîmorgh a son nid au sommet de l'arbre Tûbâ. A l'aurore elle sort de son nid et déploie ses ailes sur la Terre.*<sup>113</sup>

The Simorgh symbolizes gnosis, i.e., a spiritual or intuitive kind of knowledge as opposed to the "bookish" knowledge symbolized by the Tablet.

For Ibn 'Arabî (al-Shaykh al-Akbar; d.638/1240), Tûbâ is a ramification of the World Tree, the shajarat al-kawn or tree of

<sup>110</sup> CORBIN, Histoire de la philosophie islamique, 1986, pp. 303, 449.

<sup>111</sup> The use of the tree form as a tool for organizing thought, first developed by Porphyry in Isagoge has consolidated its significance as a symbol of knowledge. The tree form continues to operate as a powerful "natural" model for intellectual constructs: such as taxonomies, genealogies, linguistic trees and flow charts. ECO, Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language 1986.

<sup>112</sup> SUHRAWARDI, "Le récit de l'Archange empourpré", 1976, pp. 197-220.

<sup>113</sup> SUHRAWARDI, 1976, *loc. cit.*, p. 207: Sîmorgh has her nest at the summit of the tree Tûbâ. At day-break she leaves her nest and spreads her wings over the Earth.

existence. His treatise of that name<sup>114</sup> begins with a suitably Quranic genesis. In the beginning is God's word. And that word is the verb "be" (kun) in the imperative (Qur'ân 2;117). All of existence, all that is in being (kawn), grows from this imperative command. Kun is the seed from which springs the World Tree. The shajarat al-kawn is truly a quṭb al-ʿālam; a "pole of the world", an axis mundi. It encompasses the entire universe from Tûbâ in Paradise right down to Zaqqûm in Hell:

*Si tu fixais avec le regard de ta vue intuitive, tu pourrais voir les rameaux de l'arbre Tûbâ suspendus à ceux de l'arbre Az-Zaqqûm...*<sup>115</sup>

*Le Jardin paradisiaque est la demeure où évoluent les Compagnons de la Droite sur le versant de la montagne prospère en rapport avec l'Arbre béni et parfumé agréablement (shajarah tayyibah, 14;24). Le Feu infernal est la demeure d'évolution des Compagnons de la Gauche en relation avec l'arbre maudit dans la Récitation coranique (al-shajarat al-ma'ûna, 17;60).*<sup>116</sup>

Here again we find the parable of the two trees. Tûbâ, the "goodly tree" of sûra "Abraham" (14;24) is assimilated to "a blessed olive-tree" (24;35), the prophetic "tree of light" on Mount Sinai (23;20, 95;1-2), whereas the opposing "evil tree" is designated as the "cursed tree", the infernal Zaqqûm (17;60). Yet, in this case, they are opposite manifestations of a single phenomenon, of one World-tree, the all-transcendent tree of being. At the specified threshold along

<sup>114</sup> A recent doctoral thesis has questioned Ibn 'Arabi's authorship of "Shajarat al-kawn"; Shams ALIBHAI, "Shajarat al-Kawn attributed to Ibn 'Arabi: an analytical study" (Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1990). Whatever the case, this text was known and circulated under Ibn 'Arabi's name, under his "authority" or "mantel".

<sup>115</sup> GLOTON, 1982, *op. cit.*, p. 60. See also JEFFERY, 1959, *loc. cit.*, p. 72: Thus it is that were you to gaze with the intense gaze of your sight, you would see the shoots of the tree Tûbâ clinging to the shoots of the tree az-Zaqqûm...

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*, p. 59. See also JEFFERY, 1959, *loc. cit.*, p. 71: "Paradise is a dwelling for the Companions of the Right Hand, beside the mountain to the right of the blessed good tree, whereas Hell is the dwelling for the Companions of the Left Hand, by the tree that is accursed in the Qur'ân."



its axis, at the extremity of the seventh heaven, there is the sidrat al-muntahâ, fulcrum of the entire system.

Ibn 'Arabi's sidrat al-muntahâ is the tree of knowledge, of ultimate knowledge, of knowledge of Good and Evil. The entire Judgment system: Good/Evil, Right/Left, Ṭubâ/Zaqqûm, hinges on the sidra. What is evoked here is the image of yet another eschatological symbol, the "Balance", with the sidra in the characteristic position of fulcrum. The sidrat al-muntahâ functions specifically as the place of transcription where God's omniscience is manifest. The author presents for us the sidra, the cosmic fulcrum, as locus of transmission and transcription - as Tablet (Lawh) and Pen (Qalam) - where the principles of the divine realm are inscribed for the benefit of those in the realm of creation:

Then meets there (at the sidrat al-muntahâ) a copy of the book of the *mu/k* which is the Preserved Tablet. No matter what takes place in this tree (of the Universe), be it removing or retaining, be it decrease or increase, it does not pass beyond that (Sidra) tree... Nothing of the fruit of this tree (of the Universe) is raised up, however lowly or however magnificent, small or great, courtly or humble, little or much, but the sealing thereof is in the book, and nothing is cast away, whether big or little, without having been counted therein.<sup>117</sup>

This passage evokes several Quranic verses: "Not a leaf falls without His knowledge" (6;59), "All things small or great have been recorded" (54;53), "In a Preserved Tablet" (85;22). It may also have been inspired by the following verse:

...To Him do ascend good words (al-kalim al-ṭayyib)... -  
"The Originator" (35;10)

---

<sup>117</sup> JEFFERY, 1959, *loc. cit.*, p. 70. See also GLOTON, 1982, *op. cit.*, p. 59: *C'est là qu'un tel être trouve une transcription de l'Écrit du Royaume divin, écrit qui est la Table gardée. Ce qui survient dans cet Arbre universel en fait d'effacement ou d'affermissement, de diminution ou d'accroissement ne peut dépasser ce Lotus de la Limite... Aucun des fruits de cet Arbre (universel) ne s'élève, qu'il soit vil ou superbe, petit ou grand, majestueux ou insignifiant, qu'on le trouve en petite ou grande quantité, sans qu'il n'ait été consigné dans un écrit.*

Here we find the root ṭ.y.b. associated with the notion of cosmic ascension. Leaves fall, words ascend, and through it all the sidra fulfills its crucial role as fulcrum and record-keeper. One can also relate the goodly words mentioned here with those of the parable of the two trees and with the "record of the Righteous" (kitāb al-abrār) in the celestial 'illiyyin (83;18). Ibn 'Arabī's sidrat al-muntahā is a Tree of Omniscience. On the one hand it keeps record of God's "plan" (the Preserved Tablet) and on the other it monitors the existence of each of His creatures. All knowledge, universal and particular, and all "fruits", good and evil, are recorded in the Book.

However, of the various manifestation of the World Tree, it is Ṭūbā and not the sidra which is exalted in Ibn 'Arabī's thought. The preeminence of Ṭūbā is explained in his major work "Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiya". Paraphrasing a ḥadīth, the Mystic from Murcia stresses the spiritual relationship between the tree Ṭūbā and humanity. In effect Ṭūbā, like Adam, has been fashioned by God's Own Hand and for this reason is inhabited by a spirit kindred to that which inhabits humanity:

*Sache que l'Arbre Ṭūbā est aux autres arbres du Paradis comme Adam par rapport à ses descendants qui furent engendrés à partir de lui... Allāh planta l'Arbre Ṭūbā de Sa propre Main, le façonna harmonieusement et insuffla en lui de Son Esprit... Le Vrai se chargea de planter l'Arbre Ṭūbā de Sa propre Main et y insuffla l'Esprit. Ne sommes nous pas la Terre de cet Arbre?*<sup>118</sup>

Al-Ghazālī cites a similar ḥadīth:

Said Ka'b, "God (Exalted is He!) created Adam with His hand, wrote the Torah with His hand, and then planted Heaven with His hand, saying to it, 'Speak!' And it declared, 'The faithful have triumphed'."<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>118</sup> Cited by GLOTON, 1982, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-131: Know that the Tree Ṭūbā is to other trees of Paradise as Adam is to his descendants who were born of him... Allāh planted the Tree Ṭūbā with His own Hand, fashioned it harmoniously and breathed into it His Spirit... The Real attended to the planting of the Tree Ṭūbā with His own hand and breathed Spirit into it... Are we not the Earth of this Tree?

<sup>119</sup> AL-GHAZALI, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

The parable of the two trees ("Abraham" 14;23-26) can be understood as contributing to reinforce this spiritual relationship between humanity and the paradisiacal tree. The "goodly word" (our mortal existence) is related to the "goodly tree" (shajara ṭayyiba), the Tree of Eternity, the Tree of Paradise called Ṭubā.

The claim of spiritual kinship between the cosmic/celestial/ paradisiacal tree Ṭubā and humanity is also supported by a ḥadīth concerning the palm tree and the very first prophet, Adam. According to Abū Ya'lā and Abū Nu'aym as cited by Suyūṭī in "Al-Jāmi' al-saghir", the prophet Muḥammad said:

*Honorez votre tante le palmier (nom féminin en arabe) car il a été créé du surplus de l'argile dont a été constitué votre père Adam. Parmi les arbres, aucun n'est plus honoré d'Allāh que celui sous lequel Marie fille d'Imrān a enfanté Jésus. Nourissez vos femmes qui viennent d'accoucher de dattes fraîches et, si on n'en trouve point, de dattes sèches.* <sup>120</sup>

There is thus established here a cosmogonic, ontological, association between Humanity and a species of tree (the palm) considered to be its paternal aunt (both "palm tree", nakhla, and "tree", shajara, are feminine terms in Arabic). Furthermore, it is advised that the cosmogonic link should be reenacted at birth and this is clearly based on Mother Mary's birthing of Jesus beneath the palm tree (19;23). Ibn 'Arabī's paradisiacal Ṭubā is this very same primordial palm tree — humanity's aunt (Ṭubā and sidra are also feminine terms), provider of nourishment and water. Ṭubā was thus fashioned from the same clay as the primordial man and infused with the same spirit. It can be argued therefore that the final destiny of each and every person is to accede to Ṭubā since there exists a spiritual predisposition to do so. When the Senegalese author Ah. B. Diop writes that "Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba has called to Touba not only Mourides, not only Muslims, but all the sons of Adam",<sup>121</sup> this

<sup>120</sup> Cited by GLOTON, 1982, *op. cit.*, p. 132: Honor your aunt the Palm-tree for she was created from a surplus of the clay from which your father Adam was constituted. Among trees, none is more favored by God than the one beneath which Mary daughter of Imrān gave birth to Jesus. After they give birth, feed your wives fresh dates or, if none can be found, dry dates.

<sup>121</sup> DIOP, Ah. B., "Lat Dior et le problème musulman", 1966, p. 538.

pretension to universality is not ungrounded. At least since Ibn 'Arabî's illuminations Tûbâ has represented this universal spiritual aspiration.

Touba must be understood at this universal level. All the sons of Adam have an ontological and spiritual destination in Tûbâ. This destination is both ontological and spiritual because the spirit which animates humanity is essentially the same as the spirit of Tûbâ. Both emanate from God. Both were fashioned from the same clay with "His Own Hand" and then infused with the same divine Spirit. Furthermore, if we accept the tradition of the celestial tree as locus of transcription, as Lawḥ al-Maḥfûz, then Tûbâ and humankind are in a continuous relationship from Creation to the Day of Judgment. The only qualification for our ultimately conjoining with Tûbâ for Eternity is our adherence to the Straight Path (the Plan as written in the Book) and a favorable Judgment (a legal procedure for which evidence is continuously being gathered and recorded on its leaves). The records and registers of our acts and words are all that really separate us from Tûbâ, from our ontological destination. When Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba calls all of humanity to Touba, he does this in order to remind us all that our acts and words are recorded, that we shall in the end be judged according to this record and that the Merciful has promised the meritorious eternal bliss in His proximity. One can only hope that He will keep His promise, that He is magnanimous in what He records on His Ledger, and that in the end His Mercy will outstrip His wrath.

The Tûbâ construct, as it has been defined in this chapter, has been actualized in spectacular form in the holy city of Touba as it has been described in the previous chapter. The potential of the symbol may have been universal but its actualization has been quite particular. Nowhere else in the Muslim world has such emphasis been put on Tûbâ as all-encompassing symbol of our destiny in the universe. Nowhere else has Tûbâ become such a complete and all-embracing construct. And nowhere else has an entire holy city been developed around this particular construct. Tûbâ has existed as an eschatological symbol with universal potential since at least the epoch of the great theosophists, Suhrawardî and Ibn 'Arabî. Sufi

circles were using the symbol far earlier. But notwithstanding this potential Ṭubā did not develop as an important symbol in the Islamic heartland, in the historic and geographic centers of the Muslim world. Ṭubā can occasionally figure in the works of 'Aṭṭar, Rûmî and Ḥafiz for instance but these mystics do not invest it with any greater significance than that of the many other imaginal symbols they manipulate. Al-Ghazâlî, in his comprehensive treatise on eschatology (tome 40 of the "Iḥyâ"), does not even mention Ṭubā. So innocuous is Ṭubā in "classical" Islamic literature that the term is not inventoried in specialized dictionaries and lexicons. Nor is it in Persia or Mughal India, despite their exquisite representations of paradisiacal gardens, that Ṭubā has been constructed. Rather, Ṭubā has arisen in Senegal, at what has always been considered the African periphery of the Muslim world. It is the African understanding of the universal tree-image which has permitted the actualization of the Islamic arboreal construct.

## Chapter 4

### WEST AFRICAN TRADITION

#### the guy mbind and the pënc

In West Africa the Islamic concept of the Tree of Paradise, the archetype named Tûbâ, has been developed with particular intensity. The process, which has recently led to the creation of a great spiritual metropolis in Senegal, may have been initiated as early as the VIII<sup>th</sup>/XIV<sup>th</sup> century in the city of Diakha, in the Empire of Mali. In terms of its cultural achievements Mali was the epitome of West African civilization. It was in every respect a great empire and maintained diplomatic relations and prosperous trade with the rest of the Islamic world. These links permitted Islamic scholarship to flourish, as is attested by the international renown of Timbuktu's Sankora mosque-university. Diakha (the Zâgha of Arabic sources, modern Diaba, Diafarabé or simply Dia), 350 km up the Niger from Timbuktu, was an established center of Islamic learning at the time of Ibn Battûta's visit in 753/1352.<sup>1</sup> For centuries thereafter, scholars trained in the tradition of Diakha traveled widely across the subcontinent, as far west as the Gambia River and east to Lake Chad, and were collectively identified as the *Diakhanké* or *Jakhanké*.<sup>2</sup>

The greatest attribute of these itinerant scholars was their literacy in Arabic. Because of their skills in all the arts of the pen, they are referred to as "clerics" in modern literature. They taught the Qur'ân and its exegesis (tafsîr) as well as 'ilm al-kalâm and, wherever they established their schools, they led literary circles. *Diakhanké* scholarship may even have contributed to the education of Muslims in the African diaspora of the United States. In the XII<sup>th</sup>/XVIII<sup>th</sup> century, a number of *Diakhanké* clerics were enslaved and shipped to the New World where it appears that they managed to covertly pursue their academic activities, and where *Diakhanké* textbooks (books of Mâlikî fiqh) have survived.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> IBN BATTUTA, *Voyages* 1982, vol. 3, p. 409.

<sup>2</sup> SANNEH, "The Origins of Clericalism in West Africa", 1976, pp. 49-72; *The Jakhanké Muslim Clerics: a Religious and Historical Study of Islam in Senegambia*, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> JUDY, *(Dis)Forming the American Canon*, 1993, pp. 205-209.

One *Diakhanké* cleric, Al-Hajj Karamokho Salimu Gassama (known as Karamokho Bâ, c. 1143-1240/1730-1824), established what was to become a very successful school, called Ṭūbā, in Fouta-Djallon (present-day Guinea).<sup>4</sup> Thereafter, chiefly due to similar efforts by other peripatetic *Diakhanké* clerics, a number of other communities named Ṭūbā (later transliterated as "Touba" on French maps) were founded. For example, towards 1292/1875 a *Diakhanké* by the name of Youssoufou Fadiga founded a town called Ṭūbā in present-day Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>5</sup> Other towns of that name exist in Mali, Guinea and especially in Senegal (fig. 4.1). Still other West African communities are called by the related name Ṭayba (the pious surname of Madīna): Taïba-Niassène, Taïba-Ndiaye. (fig. 4.2) Invariably these communities too were founded by Muslim scholars (though not necessarily of the *Diakhanké* school). The Senegalese city of Touba was established in 1304/1887 by Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké. Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba was not himself a *Diakhanké*, but the *Diakhanké* had been active in Senegambia under the local name *Diakhaté* and included one of Ahmadou Bamba's teachers, Khali Madiakhaté Kala — whose descendants still constitute one of the great Mouride families.<sup>6</sup>

There is as yet no evidence of the role Ṭūbā may have had as an eschatological construct or didactic tool in the instruction disseminated by the *Diakhanké*. Those of their chronicles which have been translated and published make no reference to it. However, since so few of West Africa's libraries survived the political collapse and social rupture of the second half of the XIII<sup>th</sup>/XIX<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>7</sup> it can not be excluded that the Tree of Paradise current in works of theosophy, and in those of Ibn 'Arabī in particular, was an object of speculation for the *Diakhanké*. The fact remains that as of the

---

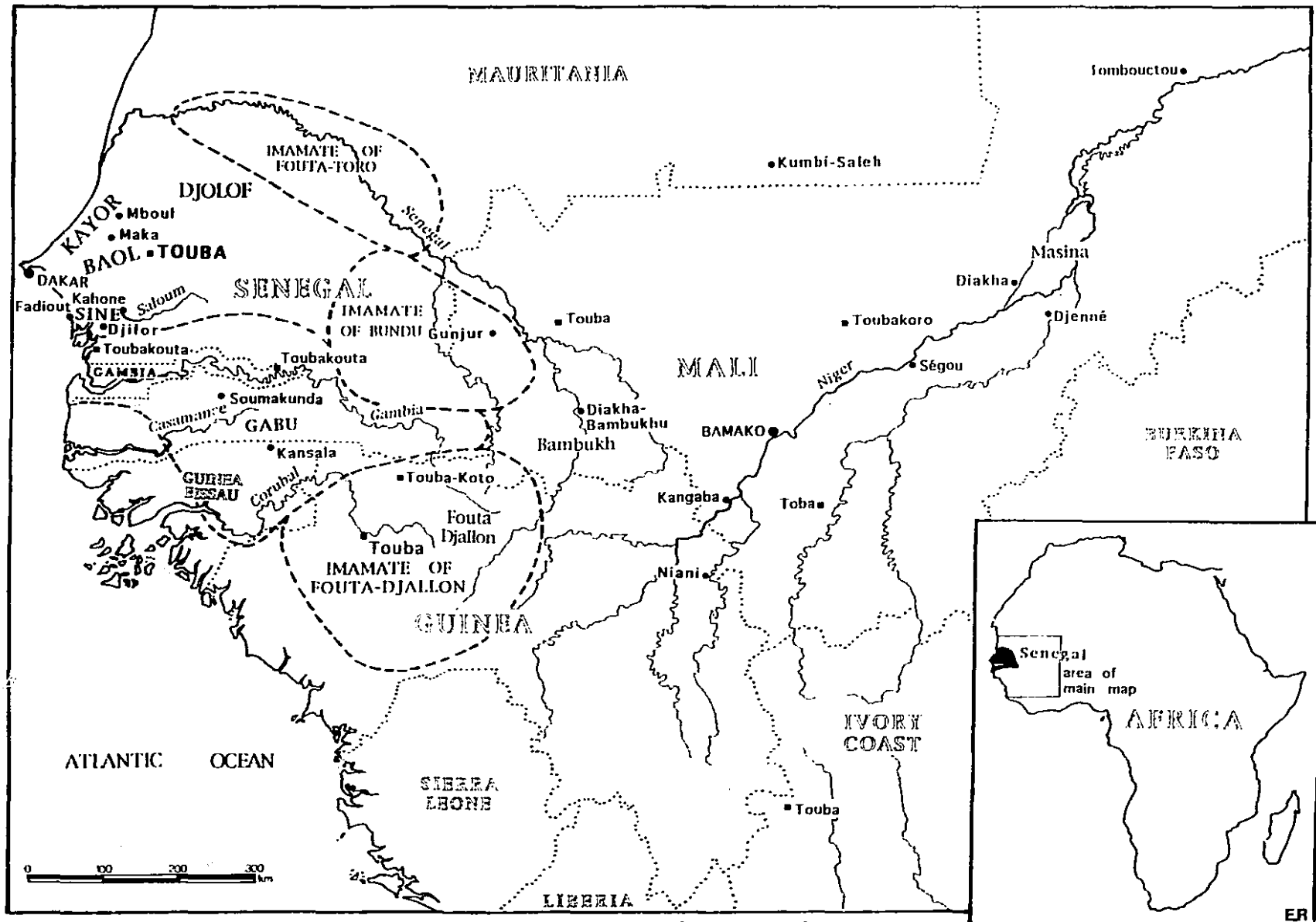
<sup>4</sup> QUIMBY, "History as Identity: the Jaaxanke and the founding of Tuuba", 1975, pp. 604-618.

<sup>5</sup> MARTY, *Études sur l'Islam en Côte d'Ivoire*, 1922, p. 139.

<sup>6</sup> Khali Madiakhaté Kala (d. 1902) and Momar Anta Sali Mbacké, Ahmadou Bamba's father, had both been qādī of Kajor under Damei Lat Dior. The present Khalifa of the Mourides, Serigne Saliou Mbacké, is Diakhaté through maternal filiation.

<sup>7</sup> SENE, "Notes sur les bibliothèques musulmanes en Afrique de l'Ouest", 1984, pp. 30-34.

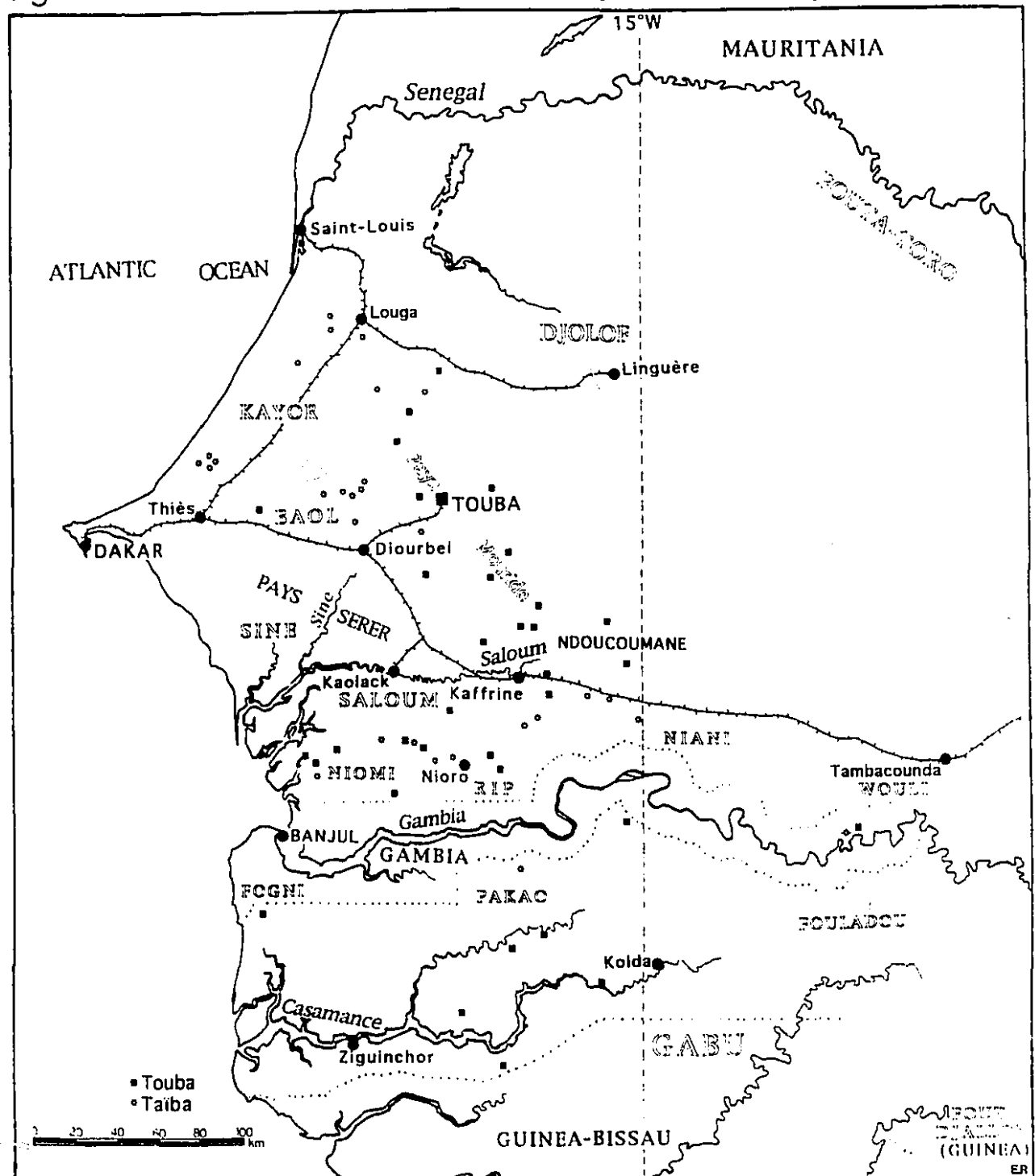
fig. 4.1 Touba and the *Diakhanké* Tradition



Source: SANNEH, Lamin, *The Jakhanke Muslim Clerics*, University Press of America, New York, 1989.



fig. 4.2 Touba and Taïba as Toponyms in Senegambia



Sources: Institut Géographique National (Paris), République du Sénégal 1:200 000, ND-28-XIII (Dakar) 1957; NE-28-II (Saint-Louis) 1957; NE-28-III (Dagana) 1957; ND-28-XXI (Linguère) 1957; ND-28-XV (Kaffrine) 1958; ND-28-XX (Louga) 1981; ND-28-XIV (Thiès) 1981; ND-28-VIII (Sokone) 1958; ND-28-IX (Nioro) 1959; ND-28-II (Ziguinchor) 1959; ND-28-III (Sédhiou) 1959.

Fig. 4.1 commentary : The town of Diakha in Masina was a center of Islamic scholarship in XIV<sup>th</sup> century. Following the decline of the Empire of Mali (XV<sup>th</sup> century) and the destruction of the university of Timbuktu (1591), clerics from Diakha established schools throughout West Africa. In the XVII<sup>th</sup> century Diakha-Bambukhu was the foremost center of *Diakhanké* scholarship. During the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century this rank was held by the *Diakhanké* holy city of Gunjur in the imamate of Bundu. When Bundu declined, *Diakhanké* communities were established in the imamate of Fouta-Djallon, first in Touba-Koto (Old Touba) c. 1803, and then in a new city of Touba (c. 1814). Touba in Fouta-Djallon achieved great renown. Similar schools were thereafter established throughout the Mandinga (Wangara) world: in the Ivory Coast, in the Empire of Gabu (Guinea-Bissau, Casamance, Gambia).

Other places mentioned in chapter 4 also figure on map.

Fig. 4.2 commentary : "Touba" is a recurrent toponym in Senegal. Following Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's founding of Touba in 1887 many other Mouride communities received this name (Touba-Mérina, Touba-Mbela, Touba-Mboul, etc.). This accounts for the frequent occurrences of the toponym throughout Mouride Country and its extension in Eastern Saloum (Ndoucoumane). The toponym is completely absent from the old Wolof heartland of Kayor and Baol except where it is clearly associated with Mouride activities (such as Touba-Toul). "Touba" is also recurrent south of the Saloum river. In these cases "Touba" is not entirely dependent on the Mouride phenomenon. Though some Mouride colonization has occurred (Touba-Fall in Rip, Touba-Keur-Cheikh in southern Saloum), many occurrences of "Touba" (Touba-Morikounda, Toubakouta) are clearly of Mandinga (and most probably *Diakhanké*) origin. The fact that some communities are called "Touba-Mouride" indicates that other Toubas are not Mouride. It should be noted that these lands (Fogni, Niomi, Rip, Niani, Pakao) were formerly part of the Empire of Gabu where the *Diakhanké* of Touba in Fouta-Djallon had been active in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century.

"Taïba" is also a recurrent toponym. Contrary to "Touba", "Taïba" is very common in the Wolof heartland of Kayor and Baol (Taïba-Ndiouga, Taïba-Babou, Taïba-Moutoufa, Taïba-Dakhar, Taïba-Bep...) and relatively rare in Mouride Country. It is therefore not a Mouride toponym though other Senegalese *tarīqas* (the Tijāniya) use it (Taïba-Niassène). Its frequent occurrence in the lands of the former Empire of Gabu (Taïbatou in Wouli) and its complete absence from Djolof and Fouta-Toro indicates that, like "Touba", it was propagated

in Senegambia by Mandinga clerics rather than Toucouleur ones. Both toponyms are also entirely absent from the Serer heartland of the lower Sine and Saloum rivers which even today remains largely non-Muslim.

Though the maps (1:200 000 scale) available for this toponymic inventory were limited to the area of Senegal West of 15°W., there is good reason to believe that both "Touba" and "Taïba" are equally common in provinces of the former Gabu Empire lying East of 15°W. (Niani, Wouli, Fouladou, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau...), where maps of an equivalent scale were unobtainable.

beginning of the XIII<sup>th</sup>/XIX<sup>th</sup> century Tūbā became the standard toponym of *Diakhanké* communities and was thus associated with the highest level of scholarship then available.<sup>8</sup>

What is known is that the tree, as a cosmic symbol, was omnipresent in West African religious thought and practice prior to the proselytism of the *Diakhanké*. There is every indication that the *Diakhanké* were tapping into a rich cultic vein when they propagated the Islamic paradisiacal tree construct under the toponym Tūbā.

### Cosmic Tree

In African religious thought the image of the tree figures prominently as a cosmic symbol. In an important study of the subject, Viviana Pâques demonstrated how the image of the cosmic tree has permeated every facet of West and North African culture and belief.<sup>9</sup> Following in the wake of Griaule's *Dieu d'eau*,<sup>10</sup> Pâques analyzes the use which is made of the tree image as symbol for a cosmogonic construct which finds expression in a number of existential rituals, mostly sacrifice and circumcision. Very succinctly, this African cosmogony tells how Creation emerged from primordial chaotic waters following an initial sacrifice. It is further articulated through an ensemble of myths which make use of a number of common symbols: the cosmic mountain and tree, specific stars and constellations, the primordial egg, the sacrificial ram and snake. Within this system, the image of the tree is used to express beliefs about the structure of the universe and the life therein. It is thus very much a cosmic symbol of the same scale of significance as the universal tree-image presented by James,<sup>11</sup> Brosse<sup>12</sup> and Cook.<sup>13</sup> Pâques documents the similarity of this cosmogonic and cosmological tree-construct from the banks of the Niger river to the

---

<sup>8</sup> intriguingly, Touba in Fouta-Djallon was founded and named after a dream of Karamokho Bâ's wife, but no further details are provided in the sources.

<sup>9</sup> PAQUES, *L'arbre cosmique dans la pensée populaire et dans la vie quotidienne du nord ouest africain*, 1964.

<sup>10</sup> GRIAULE, *Dieu d'eau*, 1966.

<sup>11</sup> JAMES, *The Tree of Life: an Archeological Study*, 1966.

<sup>12</sup> BROSSE, *Mythologie des arbres*, 1989.

<sup>13</sup> COOK, *The Tree of Life: Image for the Cosmos* 1992.

Muslim metropolises of the Maghreb, and she argues in favor of its Saharan origin. In effect, according to Pâques, the system was created in such a way as to incorporate specific climatic and astronomical phenomena which are only found in conjunction in the Sahara or further south in the Sûdân, and it dates from a Neolithic context of incipient agriculture. Pâques is of the opinion that this cosmogony later made a lasting impression on Hellenic thought (via Alexandria?) and that it found its way into Islamic conceptions as well. That this cosmogony is indeed indigenous to Africa is indicated by the fact that it is still found intact in its most coherent form among those Sudanic peoples most resistant to Islam (the Dogon for instance), and that it survives in increasingly hidden and distorted forms as Islam grows (among Berbers and Maghrebi Blacks).<sup>14</sup> This African cosmogony, and especially the semiotics of certain symbols, colors and numbers, has since been studied by other authors<sup>15</sup> who have linked it to ancient Egyptian religious concepts (to which we shall return in Chapter 5). What is important to note here is that in Black Africa the cosmic tree was an operative symbol long before the introduction of the Islamic *ṭubā* construct.

### Sacred Tree

In Africa, certain categories or species of tree are regarded in one way or another as sacred. Generally, these sacred trees can be understood as conduits to God and the Hereafter; that is, they are "points of contact" with the metaphysical world, points of transcendence where the heavenly and earthly spheres touch. If trees can be symbols of cosmic connection, they can also be its agents. Like sacred cows in India, the products and by-products of sacred trees (their fruit, sap, leaves, bark, branches, roots) play significant roles in religious rites.<sup>16</sup> Trees may be "inhabited" by spirit-beings (often called by the Arabic term *jinn* even by non-Muslim Africans). These *jinn* are active in this world and appropriate measures are

---

<sup>14</sup> PAQUES, 1964, *op. cit.*, pp. 675-676.

<sup>15</sup> LAM, "Quelques similitudes culturelles entre l'Afrique du Nord et l'Afrique de l'Ouest", 1982, pp. 90-95; ANSELIN, Samba, 1992.

<sup>16</sup> ROUCH, La religion et la magie songhay, 1960, pp. 165-167.

taken to assure their continued good will. In Mali jinn were generically known as dialan, the name of the primordial tree which they originally inhabited.<sup>17</sup> Sacred trees can be the locus of restricted religious ceremonies, such as group circumcision, initiations or masquerades for instance, while others are believed to possess universal cosmological and eschatological attributes and are objects of very public festivals and pilgrimage. Other trees, or groves of trees, mark cemeteries.<sup>18</sup> Such cemeteries contain tree-altars and are the locus of funeral rites and other religious ceremonies.

Wherever they stand, sacred trees are altars where people connect with ultimate Reality. Individual trees, singled out as sacred, may constitute the focus of worship in African temples such as those of the Akamba and Gikuyu for instance; "these trees may not be cut down and the shrines are regarded as a sanctuary for animals and humans alike, so that none may be killed there".<sup>19</sup> Many African genera of trees fulfill such religious functions. Such is the case for example with the muhacha (*Parinari curatelfolia*) of Zimbabwe<sup>20</sup> and the iroko (*Chlorophora excelsa*) and related species in West Africa. In Dahomey the iroko has its own priesthood, its shrines and temples.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, the extremely rare ighi-nla tree, a great relative of the iroko, is revered by the Yoruba wherever it is found.<sup>22</sup> There is perhaps a typical case in the Namibian "tree of life" (omumborombonga known in botany as *Combretum pimigenium*). People are believed to have originated from this mythic tree which grows in the netherworld. This tree is also found on earth and people who come across one greet it with respect as it is the symbol of life and continuity in the Hereafter.<sup>23</sup> In Batammaliba cosmology the sky is conceived of as a great tree (a baobab) which initiates can climb

---

<sup>17</sup> NIANE, Histoire des Mandingues de l'Ouest, 1989, p. 103.

<sup>18</sup> BLIER, The Anatomy of Architecture 1987, p. 12, 76.

<sup>19</sup> MBITI, African Religions and Philosophy, 1990, p. 72.

<sup>20</sup> ISAAC, "The Act and the Covenant", 1961, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> PARRINDER, West African Psychology, 1951, p. 153.

<sup>22</sup> BERTHO, "Ighi-nla, le grand arbre", 1947, p. 24.

<sup>23</sup> MBITI, Introduction to African Religion, 1975, p. 148.

as they would a ladder.<sup>24</sup> Sometimes, like in the Biblical Tree of Life, the fruit of the African tree of Life are "forbidden" to specific categories of persons, such as uncircumcised youth or women, for whom the fruit of the sacred taba tree (*Cola cordifolia*) of Pakisse were forbidden.<sup>25</sup> In Djilor, the fruit of a sacred royal baobab was forbidden to members of the reigning lineage.<sup>26</sup>

Kapok Tree Kapok trees (*fromager* in French, *béntéñe* in Wolof) especially have religious significance. The Serer of Senegal used kapok trees to address themselves to heaven. The trees represented the source of life and continuity of life after death. They signified God's magnanimity. Invariably, Serer villages and towns were dominated by great kapok trees. In Diourbel an ancient *béntéñe* was the site of a great festival.<sup>27</sup> Kapok trees (*Ceiba pentandra*, also called *Eriodendron orientale*, of the *Malvaceae-bombacaceae* family), as explained in the previous chapter, are distinguished by the silky floss produced as fruit. We have seen how the image of these trees producing the clothes of the Blessed in the hereafter has been expressed in hadith and speculative works. In Senegambia, kapok fibers have long been used for the manufacture of cloth. A multi-purpose oil is extracted from the seeds of the Kapok fruit and both seeds and leaves have medicinal uses. Also, for Serer communities the kapok tree was both a cosmic link with the Most High and an eschatological link with the departed. This function may partly be due to the fact that the *Ceiba pentandra* is the tallest tree in the West African flora — heights of 40 m. are not uncommon in the mixed forest-savanna belt.<sup>28</sup> The tree's function as cosmic link is also attested in African traditions of the diaspora. In the Caribbean, the related Silk-cotton tree (*Eriodendron anfractuosum*) was revered by Africans and referred to as the "God-tree".

Fig Tree Fruit-bearing trees, and especially the various species of fig-trees (*Ficus*), are the objects of special attention in African

---

<sup>24</sup> BLIER, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>25</sup> NIANE, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>26</sup> SARR, "Histoire du Sine-Saloum", 1986-87, p. 231.

<sup>27</sup> MARONE, "Le tidjanisme au Sénégal", 1970, p. 155.

<sup>28</sup> DALZIEL, *The Useful Plants of West Tropical Africa*, 1937, p. 119.

religions. The genus *Ficus* is part of the *Moraceae* family, an order distinctive for its milky latex-sap. The *Moraceae* are tropical trees and shrubs and they grow throughout Africa as well as other tropical and subtropical zones of the world. Because of their distinctive milky sap and fleshy fruit, this family is held in many religious traditions to have "motherly" attributes, as a provider of nourishment. Certain species of *Ficus* especially: such as the *Ficus religiosa* (Pipal or Bo-tree, the Asvattha of Hindus and the Bhodi-tree of Buddha's Enlightenment) and the *Ficus benghalensis* (Banyan Fig), are of special interest to the study of Indic religions as they have been singled out since pre-Vedic times as possessing sacred properties. Similarly, the *Ficus sycomorus* (sycamore or pharaoh's fig) was sacred to the ancient Egyptians (as will be demonstrated in Chapter 5). The Biblical tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden is generally figured to be some kind of fig tree; Adam and Eve use fig leaves to cover their nakedness after eating of its fruit ("Genesis" 3;7). In Kenyan tradition the first man, Gikuyu, was commanded from the top of Mount Kenya to worship the Supreme Being, Ngai, in a sacred grove of fig-trees called mikoyo.<sup>29</sup> In Zaire, the nsanda (*Ficus dusenii*) is also considered to possess cosmic connections — it is a "ladder" to the sky — and it is the patron of child-birth.<sup>30</sup> The nsanda is therefore a "tree of life". There is also a species of fig-tree (*Ficus sycomorus capensis*) called "Toothstick of Paradise", soto àjjana in Wolof (from Arb. al-janna). Rather than growing from its branches, its figs grow out in bunches from the bark of its trunk and limbs.<sup>31</sup> Its name can leave no doubt as to its eschatological association. The mikoyo of Kenya is likewise associated with life because it is the scene of God's bestowal of progeny onto mankind. Beneath this fig-tree Gikuyu presented God with burnt offerings from a sacrificial lamb and in return received husbands for his seven daughters.<sup>32</sup> The West African iroko (*Chlorophora excelsa*) is a

---

<sup>29</sup> KENYATTA, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 1938, p. 227.

<sup>30</sup> THOMPSON, *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas* 1993, p. 69.

<sup>31</sup> GARNIER, "L'arbre du Paradis", 1948, p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> KENYATTA, 1938, *op. cit.*, p. 7.



relative of the *Ficus* species and is likewise associated with the same attributes: birth and nourishment.

The association of Fig-tree and birth is also a feature of Africa's Islamic traditions, as the case of Abû Jummayza illustrates. Muḥammad al-Zayn Abû Jummayza was a charismatic teacher in Dâr Fûr who, in 1305/1888, led an unsuccessful revolt against the Mahdist regime. Many of his followers believed at the time that he had emerged out of a jummayza (*Ficus sycomorus*), hence his name.<sup>33</sup>

The life-bearing cosmogonic and eschatological attributes of African Fig-trees also live on in the diaspora. African-Brazilians for instance have bestowed them on the *gameleira branca* (*Ficus doliaria martius*).<sup>34</sup>

The African "tree of life", be it a fig tree or otherwise, is fundamentally eschatological. It constitutes a medium between the living and the deceased, and with the spirit world generally. It is regularly associated with burial. Zaire's nsanda for instance is planted on important graves, where presumably its "ladder" will be of use for the deceased. Trees over graves might be adorned with various vessels: plates, gourds, and bottles.<sup>35</sup> According to Thompson these vessels operate as representations of departed souls. Even when not associated with actual burial sites, such "gourd trees" (in effect "manufactured" fruit trees) will act as loci for the beneficent and protective power of departed spirits. Among African Americans too, the "bottle tree" is a recurrent theme of "yard shows", where it embodies similar notions of communion with the spirit world.<sup>36</sup> African Americans have also been known to mark certain graves with evergreens (representing eternal life).<sup>37</sup> The cypress tree, also an evergreen, has traditionally marked cemeteries throughout the Persian and Mediterranean world. Even in an Islamic context the association of burial and great tree is by no means rare in Africa. In Timbuktu for instance, the cemetery of the Gingereber Mosque is

---

<sup>33</sup> VOLL, "Abu Jummayza: the Mahdi's Musaylima?", 1988, p. 99.

<sup>34</sup> THOMPSON, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 84-88.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p. 72, 78.

dominated by a tree known simply as Turinyan ("great tree").<sup>38</sup> In Touba, as we have seen, the tree/cemetery association is integral to the spiritual and morphological identity of the holy city.

Cola Tree The cola tree (*Cola cordifolia*, *taba* in Mandinga and Wolof) was important to Mandinga tradition generally. Cola nuts were believed to foster immortality and the Mandé of Guinea associated the cola tree with burial.<sup>39</sup> In Yoruba tradition the cola nut symbolized health, age, and could be sent as a message of prosperity or peace.<sup>40</sup> There was a sacred *taba* tree in Pakisse whose nuts were forbidden to uncircumcised youth and women because they bestowed invulnerability.<sup>41</sup> There may also have been such a cola tree in Bornu.<sup>42</sup> The Mandinga capital of Kansala was built around a tree called *tabadjou*, very possibly a cola tree (*taba* in both Mandinga and Wolof).

The cola nut is a stimulant. Before the introduction of tea and coffee into West Africa, cola was the only stimulant available and international trade in cola nuts has been one of the constants (along with gold and salt) of West African economic geography. Even today use of cola remains popular and its association with immortality survives in local Islamic tradition.<sup>43</sup> In Touba, where prohibition of alcohol and tobacco is strictly enforced, citizens can and do enjoy cola nuts, along with coffee and tea.<sup>44</sup>

The *mbéb* (gum-plane, *Sterculia setigera*, formerly *Sterculia tomentosa*, of the *Sterculiaceæ* order), the tree beneath which Touba was founded, is an extremely rare relative of the cola tree. Along with the cola and the kapok, the *mbéb* constitutes one of the tallest

---

<sup>38</sup> PAQUES, 1964, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

<sup>39</sup> DALZIEL, 1937, *op. cit.*, p. 102; DEFONTAINES, *Géographie et religions*, 1948, p. 204.

<sup>40</sup> OBENGA, *L'Afrique dans l'antiquité*, 1973, p. 369.

<sup>41</sup> NIANE, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>42</sup> DALZIEL, 1937, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

<sup>43</sup> DEFONTAINES, 1948, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

<sup>44</sup> A distinctive coffee concoction known as *Café-Touba* is served during Mouride *samâ'* recitals and has recently gained favor as a social drink in Senegal generally. *Café-Touba* is exported to Mouride communities abroad.

trees (40 m.) of the West African flora.<sup>45</sup> Could there be an etymological link between the taba and Touba? Wolof is a relatively modern language. Historically, Mandinga and Pular have been the principal languages of Islamic West Africa. Mandinga was the language of *Diakhanké* scholarship and it is the *Diakhanké* who popularized Touba as a toponym. According to Marty (who did not seem to be aware that *ṭūbā* is an Arabic term designating the Tree of Paradise), the *Diakhanké* town of Touba in Côte d'Ivoire was said to signify "great forest".<sup>46</sup> There is also a completely different arboreal species altogether which goes by the Wolof name tuba (tabanani in Serer); this is the *Jatropha curcas* of the *Euphorbiaceæ* order, otherwise known as the fig-nut. This tuba is a shrub whose nut is both ricinus and toxic (the oil has traditionally been used for lamps and soap).<sup>47</sup> The mbéb on the other hand is of use mostly for its bark (fiber for cords), its gum and its edible leaves.<sup>48</sup>

Touba's mbéb is of further significance in the Islamic context because of its physical resemblance to the plane tree of more northern latitudes. Persian tradition long ago had associated the plane tree (Persian *chinâr*, Arabic *dulb*, the *Platanus orientalis* of the *Platanaceæ* family) to the paradisiacal *Ṭūbā*.<sup>49</sup> Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba thus founded Touba under a tropical manifestation of the *chinâr*.

Baobab However, the species which dominates Touba's tradition is not the mbéb of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's mystic vision, but the guy which crowns its cemetery. The guy (baobab, *Adonsonia digitata*), like the kapok tree, is of the *Malvaceæ-bombacaceæ* order and it is the single most important West African species in terms of its religious significance.

The baobab is in every respect an extraordinary tree; so extraordinary in fact that it has never failed to strike the

---

<sup>45</sup> STEENTOFT, *Flowering Plants in West Africa*, 1988, p.112,

<sup>46</sup> MARTY, 1922, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>47</sup> DALZIEL, 1937, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>49</sup> HANAWAY, "Paradise on Earth", 1976, p. 46.

imagination of strangers who come across it for the first time. After traveling through Mali Ibn Battûta offered the following description:

*Tout le long du chemin nous trouvâmes de gros arbres séculaires. Un seul suffit pour donner de l'ombre à toute une caravane. Il y en a qui n'ont ni branches ni feuilles, et, malgré cela, leur tronc ombrage un homme à merveille. Quelques-uns de ces arbres ont souffert une carie à l'intérieur, par suite de laquelle l'eau de pluie s'est amassée dans leur creux, et a formé comme un puits, dont l'eau est bue par les passants. Dans d'autres, la cavité est occupée par des abeilles et du miel; les hommes recueillent alors ce dernier. Une fois je passai devant un de ces arbres cariés, et je vis dans son intérieur un tisserant; il avait dressé là son métier, et il tissait: j'en fus bien surpris.<sup>50</sup>*

The most distinctive characteristic of the baobab is its enormous girth. The massive trunks can reach up to 9 m in diameter and circumferences of over 25 m have been measured.<sup>51</sup> These dimensions, thought not of a scale equivalent to those of the celestial trees described in ḥadīth, nonetheless make the baobab one of the largest trees on earth. This massive trunk is all the more impressive as the tree itself is quite stout (not exceeding 20-25 m) and possesses relatively few limbs and branches. What is more, for most of the year (during the nine-month dry season) the tree is entirely devoid of foliage so that the baobab does indeed appear to be planted in the earth upside down, an inverted tree with its bare "roots" firmly in the sky ("a goodly [ṭayyiba] tree whose roots are firm and branches in the sky", Qur'ān 14:24).

The second distinctive feature of the baobab is its great longevity — well over one thousand years by radio-carbon dating.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> IBN BATTUTA, 1982, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 405: All along the way we found great ancient trees. The shade of one of them alone is sufficient to cover an entire caravan. Even should they possess neither branches nor leaves, the shadow of their trunks will shade a person marvelously. Some of these trees are hollow and rain water has collected within them to the extent that they form wells, the water of which is drunk by passers-by. The hollows of others are filled with bee's honey which is also collected. Once, I passed in front of one of these trees and saw in it a weaver; he had installed his loom in its hollow and was working it. I was quite surprised.

<sup>51</sup> ADAM, "Le baobab", 1962, p. 35.

<sup>52</sup> HORA, The Oxford Encyclopedia of Trees 1986, p. 267.

There is even reason to believe that the baobab may be as longevous as California's giant sequoia (four or five millennia) but, as old baobabs are invariably hollow (the most ancient growth at the center having disintegrated to create a cavity), this is impossible to verify through radio-carbon dating or by reading of growth rings.<sup>53</sup>

The third distinctive characteristic of baobabs, one related to the first two, is their large inner cavities. The cavities within the trunks of these great trees often attain the dimensions of veritable rooms. As Ibn Battûta observed, such space can be put to use, as a weaver's workshop for instance (the fibers extracted from Baobab bark have traditionally been used in local textile and rope manufacture). In modern Senegal, conveniently situated road-side baobabs are still commonly used as boutiques. In Ndienné, one of Touba's residential neighborhoods, there is a great baobab known as Guy Siyaare, "Baobab of pious visit" (from Arabic ziyâra). Its large inner cavity is configured like a mosque, including a properly aligned mihrâb. It is popularly believed that Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba used to pray in this tree during his ascetic retreats in the wilderness. Hollow trunks of old baobabs, as Ibn Battûta also noted so judiciously, make ready reservoirs for rain-water. In the arid conditions of the West African savanna this is a quality well appreciated by wildlife and passers-by alike. As an abode for bees, the cavities of baobabs are a source of honey as well as water. One is reminded here of the sweet rivers gushing forth beneath the great paradisiacal tree of Islamic tradition.

The fourth distinctive feature of the baobab is its fruit: large hard round or oblong gourds. Indeed, the baobab was once called Calabash-tree (from Arabic qar'a yâbisa, "dry gourd") because, like the other Calabash (*Crescentia cujete*, an American genus), its gourds are commonly used as vessels (water gourds, plates and bowls). Baobab-gourds are conspicuous because they remain on the tree long after the foliage is gone. The pulp and seeds inside these fruit are edible and, like baobab-leaves, they are standard ingredients in traditional Senegambian cuisine (dried baobab-pulp was being

---

<sup>53</sup> ADAM, 1962, *loc. cit.*, p. 35.

exported as far as Egypt in the X<sup>th</sup>/XV<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>54</sup> Moreover, cooking-oil is extracted from the seeds. It seems that the oil of the baobab-gourd was consumed exclusively on religious festivals,<sup>55</sup> while the spherical gourd was itself considered a symbol of the earth.<sup>56</sup> All this: shade, fibers, gourds and oil, makes Ahmadou Bamba's baobab quite compatible with Jonah's ricinus gourd-tree. Given its distinctive attributes: immense shade, rain water, conspicuous gourd-fruit, the baobab is also a remarkably "Quranic" tree ("shadows outstretched, gushing water, and fruits numberless", 56;30-32).

Due to girth and longevity, baobabs are important elements of the West African landscape. Remarkable longevity especially has elevated baobabs to the rank of veritable landmarks. The physical presence of the most venerable of these trees defies human notions of time. One gets the feeling that they have solemnly stood where they stand since the beginning of time, and indeed they have. The most remarkable among them have proper names, as do streams and hills, and their toponyms appear on maps. They are in fact so remarkable as physical features that they possess their very own cartographic symbol (🌳). Their names also appear regularly in West African oral annals as the sites of famous battles for instance.<sup>57</sup> In some cases there is record of important institutions or whole communities being established around a specific baobab and adopting its name as their own. Sandaga market in downtown Dakar for example, retains the name of the great tree which still stood there at the beginning of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>58</sup> Throughout recorded history therefore baobabs have been singled out for special consideration and

---

<sup>54</sup> MAUNY, "L'origine du mot baobab", 1951, p. 57.

<sup>55</sup> DALZIEL, 1937, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>56</sup> BLIER, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>57</sup> FALL, "Recueil sur la vie des damal", 1974, p. 114, 116: Towards the year 1700, Prince Mathioro Fall of Baol and Prince Latmoussou Diélèn of Sine engaged each other in battle at the tree called "Mafam". Twenty years later another battle, between King Maïssa Teindé Wedj of Kayor and his nephew King Makodou Koumba Diaring of Baol, was engaged at the tree called "Sangay".

<sup>58</sup> DELCOURT, Naissance et croissance de Dakar n.d., p. 19.

the species maintains status as a national emblem of modern Senegal, figuring on official stamps (fig. 4.3).

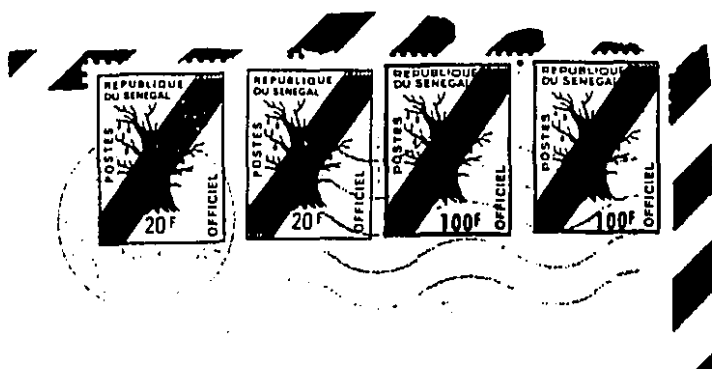


Fig. 4.3 The Baobab as National Symbol

The baobab figures on Senegal's official stamps. Note the gourd fruit hanging from the bare limbs.

Given its extraordinary qualities, it is understandable that the baobab has long had special religious significance in Senegambia. Like the other arboreal species discussed above (fig trees, kapok trees, iroko, cola trees), the baobab is a "point of contact" with ultimate Reality. However, the baobab is distinguished from the other species by the specific manner in which it fulfills this role, through the significant practices of inscription and burial.

Inscription In ante-Islamic times some of Senegal's most venerable baobabs were inscribed all-over with ancient glyphic writing. Such trees are known generically in Wolof as *guy mbind* (tree of writing) and they can still be seen today. In the city of Diourbel, one *guy mbind* in particular was the object of an ongoing controversy between Ch. A. Diop and R. Mauny. Diop, relying on childhood memory, first discusses this tree in Nations nègres et culture :

*A Diourbel... dans le quartier de Ndounka... on trouve un baobab couvert de hiéroglyphes, depuis le tronc jusqu'aux branches. Autant que je m'en souviene, ils étaient composés de signes de mains, de pattes d'animaux — qui n'étaient plus les mêmes que ceux d'Égypte: pattes de dromadaire — de signes de pieds, et autres signes d'objets... Il eût été important de relever ces empreintes et de les étudier. Au temps où je les voyais, je n'avais ni l'âge, ni la formation nécessaire pour m'y intéresser. On pourrait avoir une idée de l'époque — ancienne ou récente — à laquelle ces signes ont*

été gravés sur l'écorce de ces arbres, en analysant l'épaisseur de l'écorce, la nature des signes, des objets représentés, le déplacement de ces signes le long du tronc et des branches par suite de croissance de l'écorce. Il faut dire que de tels arbres sont considérés comme sacrés et qu'on enlève rarement leur écorce pour faire des cordes. Il faut dire aussi qu'ils sont loin d'être rares dans le pays.<sup>59</sup>

In 1960, Gard & Mauny inspected this baobab and wrote:

*On nous montra aussi le baobab dit Gouy Kodiouf à Diourbel quartier Ndounka, dont M. Cheikh Anta Diop parle... Ce baobab de belle taille (16 m environ de circonférence) porte des graffiti comme tous les baobabs: les seuls qui attirent l'attention sont une série de stries parallèles à la base et, sur une branche à hauteur, quelques dessins profondément gravés dans l'écorce, dont l'un semble représenter un pied chaussé.<sup>60</sup>*

To which Diop replied:

*Je suis retourné au pied de ce baobab l'année dernière. J'étais complètement déçu parce que je reconnaissais à peine les signes que j'identifiais avec facilité dans mon enfance, l'écorce du baobab s'étant développée depuis. Un petit garçon et une jeune fille sont passés et m'ont tiré d'embarras; ils m'ont aidé à retrouver les signes qui, en fait, sont des rébus, des idéogrammes: une bouilloire, un sabre, une peau de bouc, une patte de chameau, un chapelet effacés*

---

<sup>59</sup> DIOP, Ch. A., *Nations nègres et culture*, 1954, vol. 2, p. 352: In Diourbel... in Ndounka Ward... can be found a baobab covered in hieroglyphs from its trunk up to its branches. As far as I can recall these consisted of signs of hands, of feet of animals — no longer the same ones as those of Egypt: dromedary feet — signs of feet and of other objects... It would have been important to copy and study these imprints. At the time I was neither old enough nor competent enough to undertake such a study. One could get an idea of the age — ancient or recent — of these imprints by analyzing the thickness of the bark, the nature of the signs, the objects represented, the shift of the signs along the trunk and branches as the tree grew. It should be noted that such trees are considered sacred and that their bark is rarely employed in making rope. It should also be noted that they are not uncommon in the country.

<sup>60</sup> GARD & MAUNY, "Découverte de tumulus dans la région de Diourbel", 1961, p.11: We were shown the baobab called Gouy Kodiouf in Ndounka ward of Diourbel, the one which Cheikh Anta Diop mentioned... This is a baobab of respectable size (16 m in circumference). Like all baobabs it has graffiti. The only marks worthy of attention are a series of parallel strokes at its base and, on the bark of a high branch, a number of deeply incised drawings, one of which seems to depict the imprint of a shoe.



*aujourd'hui, etc., matérialisant le séjour d'un grand chef religieux d'autant que l'on identifie volontiers au Prophète. Si R. Mauny retourne un jour sur les lieux, il aura toutes les facilités pour se faire expliquer comme moi la signification de ces signes qui n'est pas encore perdue.*<sup>61</sup>

That such a tree as the Guy Kojuf of Diourbel should be the object of scientific polemic is itself an indication of the importance of baobabs as archeological artifacts. The glyphs which Diop describes must certainly date from a period prior to the introduction of Arabic writing into Senegambia. The fact that local tradition still associates them with a holy figure, now assimilated to the Prophet Muhammad, further supports the argument that these trees were the locus of spiritual communion. They were conduits. The act of writing on them was a sacred one, a means of communicating with a superior force. It must be noted here that contrary to widely held but entirely unfounded opinion, Black Africa was not bereft of its own systems of writing. Obenga has analyzed five different West African scripts (Nsibidi, Mende, Toma, Vai, Mum) and concludes that they share a common parentage with the most ancient (pre and early-dynastic) Egyptian pictograms before the latter evolved in historic times.<sup>62</sup> The rebuses on the Guy Kojuf must belong to a similar type of script.

Also, as Diop mentioned, such "glyphic" trees are not uncommon. Certain gigantic baobabs, which now stand isolated, alone and forsaken, still carry the marks of ancient devotion. I personally came across such a lonely guy mbind near Fadial (Mbissel), its massive trunk towering above the lush delta of the Saloum. Moreover, as the case of Touba indicates, guy mbind are very much a part of the modern spiritual landscape. The Guy Texe in Touba's cemetery is covered with names, written in both Arabic and Latin scripts. In

---

<sup>61</sup> DIOP, Ch. A., *Antériorité des civilisations nègres*, 1967, p. 246: Last year I returned to the foot of this baobab. I was entirely disappointed because I could hardly recognize the signs I had easily identified as a child. The baobab had grown. A little boy and a young girl who happened to be passing by helped me out. They led me to the markings, which are in fact rebuses, ideograms depicting: a kettle, a saber, a ram's skin, the paw of a camel, a rosary now obliterated, etc., symbolizing the sojourn of a great religious figure — readily identified with the Prophet. If R. Mauny would return there some day, he could easily have the meanings of these signs explained to him as they were explained to me for they are not yet lost.

<sup>62</sup> OBENGA, 1973, *op. cit.*, pp. 355-443.

Touba there was until recently a second guy mbind, in the ward of that name, not far from the cemetery. People used to visit it and inscribe their names on it — occasionally driving into its trunk nails or wooden pegs with names attached. In 1983 the guy mbind of Gouye-Mbinde ward succumbed under the weight of popular devotion and collapsed.<sup>63</sup> Yet a third guy mbind still stands tall on the central square of Touba's Darou-Marnane ward. It is covered with inscriptions and is piously visited, approached bare-foot and reverentially kissed.

In these modern, Muslim, cases there can be no doubt as to the meaning of the arboreal inscriptions. The guy mbind is a register of those who desire entrance to Paradise.<sup>64</sup> It is a list of names. Such a mediating function clearly approaches the "transcriptural" attributes (lawḥ and qalam) of the Islamic sidrat al-muntahâ, and can be related to the ished of Heliopolis in Ancient Egypt (Chapter 5). Knowledge — sacred knowledge — is written on the celestial Tree while its manifestation on Earth becomes the medium for registering the particulars of human existence. One could perhaps be permitted to hypothesize that the ideograms and rebuses on the Diourbel's Guy Kojuf might similarly be names (totemic in form ?) inscribed in pre-Arabic writing, and that this tree might have an eschatological signification similar to that of Touba's Guy Texe given the baobab's equally ancient association with burial.

Burial In effect, many Senegambian cemeteries are overshadowed by great baobabs. To a certain extent this might be an accidental association, or rather an involuntary one, as baobabs may grow up from seeds present within the stomachs of those buried.<sup>65</sup> However, whatever the origin of the association, baobabs and cemeteries have been inextricably linked since the most ancient times. Serer cemeteries especially have the aspect of veritable baobab forests. Muslim and Christian cemeteries are equally marked

---

<sup>63</sup> The story of this guy mbind was related to me by Cheikh Oumy Mbacké Diallo of Gouye-Mbinde ward.

<sup>64</sup> SAMB, "Touba et son 'Magal'", 1969, p. 743.

<sup>65</sup> This botanical explanation was provided by M. Bocoum, Département de la pré-histoire, IFANCAD, Dakar.

by such trees. Moreover, cemeteries which have been abandoned for centuries can still be discerned in the landscape by observing the configuration of baobabs. Several examples cited below will serve to illustrate this relationship.

- The famous Catholic cemetery of Fadiout is dominated by baobabs. Fadiout lies in the maritime delta of the Saloum river, an area characterized by innumerable seashell mindens, the remains of fishing villages dating back to the VII<sup>th</sup> century C.E. As baobabs thrive in calcareous soil these mindens are invariably crowned by one or several baobab trees.<sup>66</sup> The ancient Serer port of Fadiout is built on just such a minden and the center of town is dominated by an enormous baobab. Its cemetery, on a separate island minden some one hundred meters across the still waters, is crowned by as many as a dozen great baobabs in the midst of which a tall iron crucifix has been erected.

- In Djilor (also in the Saloum Delta), Samba Sarr (d. 685/1286), the founder of the Serer kingdom of Sine, was buried next to the mosque which he had erected in Ngaraf ward. He is believed to have predicted that a tree would grow over his tomb, the fruits of which should be forbidden to his descendants. The mosque of Ngaraf has long since disappeared but a great baobab still marks Samba Sarr's tomb and his testament is still respected today by members of the former royal lineage.<sup>67</sup>

- In the 1930's the Catholic cathedral in down-town Dakar was constructed in what had formerly been the Muslim cemetery of pre-colonial Ndakarou (capital of the theocratic State of the same name). The great baobabs which formerly had overshadowed the burial-ground still rise above the cathedral garden to this day.

- A single great baobab (sito in Mandinga) in the village of Soumboundou (in Pakao) marks the grave of the Muslim village's saintly founder.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> ADAM, 1962, *loc. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>67</sup> SARR, 1986-87, *loc. cit.*, p. 231.

<sup>68</sup> SCHAFFER, Mandinko: the Ethnography of a West African Holy Land 1980, p. 69.

Historically, certain great baobabs of Senegal have been used as actual sepulchers, particularly for *griots*, or "oral traditionalists" (gèwél in Wolof). *Griots* constituted a caste both feared and revered for the power and magic which it could command (the power of the Word). As a consequence, *griots* were never permitted burial in soil lest they render it sterile. When the morphology was right, if the cavity at its core was accessible through a suitably narrow aperture, an ancient baobab would be used as a burial chamber, as mausoleum. Near Dakar one such baobab, named Bok, (boki=baobab in Pular) was discovered to contain the remains of no less than thirty individuals.<sup>69</sup> Other trees of this type, known generically as guy gèwél (Baobab of Griots), have been recensé elsewhere. Livingston apparently reports a similar tradition from East Africa.<sup>70</sup>

Traditional, Muslim or Christian, West African cemeteries have always been marked by baobabs. In Touba, this association of baobab and burial is a fundamental one. The Guy Texe dominates the cemetery. The cemetery of Darou-Salam, founded by Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba in 1301/1884, is likewise dominated by a great baobab. Moreover, Touba's Guy Texe combines the baobab-burial tradition with the baobab-writing tradition. The guy mbind and guy gèwél are "types", that is they are a recurrent phenomenon, but the Guy Texe is unique. No other single tree has united both arboreal types into a single cohesive tradition. Touba's Guy Texe thus constitutes a modern development of ancient West African traditions.

### Tree-Worship?

It should be clear from the above discussion of the spiritual significance of trees in Africa that we are not dealing with "tree worship". Africans do not worship trees. Rather, the trees discussed above are "altars". They are the foci and the loci of worship. It is *through* them that Africans commune with Reality beyond, however it may be conceived. Sacredness is manifest through the tree at a symbolic level. Moreover, the use of actual trees as altars is in no

---

<sup>69</sup> MAUNY, "Baobabs - cimetières à griots", 1955, p. 73.

<sup>70</sup> DALZIEL, 1937, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

way confined to Africa. Philpot, James, Cook and Brosse have compiled examples of arboreal rituals from around the world.<sup>71</sup> This too is part of the universality of the tree archetype.

In the Muslim world, both past and present, we can find many references to actual trees serving as vehicles for metaphysical relations. In the Jordanian village of Badhan, for example, there is an extraordinary tree called Al-Sidra. The umbrella of Badhan's lote tree is enormously wide. It stands at the entrance to the village and its shade constitutes a gathering place. No one is allowed to harm the tree and candles and incense are burnt beneath it.<sup>72</sup> Among the many other trees categorized as wali by Jordanian villagers there is a great oak near Tibneh. This sacred oak stands on the summit of a ridge on the village's qibla axis. It is believed to possess spiritual powers.<sup>73</sup> We have already seen the role played by terebinths and oaks in the initial configuration of the first Jewish sanctuaries (Sheshem, Hebron, Bethel).

Sir Richard Burton, writing about 1850, describes the numerous sacred trees in Sind called after 'Abd al-Qâdir al-Jîlânî:

Each had a pole and a flag hung upon it to fulfill some vow made in adversity or sickness. Sweetmeats were distributed to the poor in honor of the saint, and the fruit and leaves of the trees were not allowed to be touched even by cattle.<sup>74</sup>

In the Maghreb, venerable trees (usually olive trees but also terebinths, oaks, acacias and occasionally fig and lote trees), or entire groves of them, are often found in cemeteries and at the tombs of saints. Such trees and groves have proper names. They possess their own "traditions" and are the loci of pilgrimages by Muslims and Jews alike.<sup>75</sup> The tombs of many Egyptian holy men are likewise surmounted by trees, palm trees or sycamores, or are surrounded by

---

<sup>71</sup> PHILPOT, The Sacred Tree 1897; JAMES, 1966, *op. cit.*; COOK, 1992, *op. cit.*; BROSSE, 1989, *op. cit.*

<sup>72</sup> KHAMMASH, Notes on Village Architecture in Jordan, 1986, pp. 14-15.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>74</sup> Cited by SCHIMMEL, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, 1975, p. 248.

<sup>75</sup> DERMENGHEM, Le culte des saints dans l'Islam maghrébin, 1954, pp. 136-141.

sacred groves.<sup>76</sup> In these cases the trees embody or actualize a number of sacred relations, especially that of the mediation or intercession of prophets or saints. They are conduits to the departed saint or to the spirit world. Very often they have some association to burial. No one must profane such trees, i.e., by using them for fire wood or as fodder. On the contrary, they are honored, cared for and treated with respect. They are protected from harm. They constitute sanctuaries.

Specific trees were singled out for special veneration in ancient Arabia as well. There was a sacred acacia at Nakhla which was identified with al-'Uzzâ, and a tree called Dhât Anwât, "tree of hanging things", was piously visited by Meccans in the Jahiliya period.<sup>77</sup> Pilgrims would hang weapons, garments and other items from the limbs of this tree.<sup>78</sup> According to Ibn Ishaq, the Haram of Mecca itself was originally a sacred grove until Quṣayy had the trees around the Ka'ba cut down and allotted urban quarters in their stead.<sup>79</sup> Likewise, the sanctuaries of ancient Ethiopia often consisted of a simple enclosure containing trees.<sup>80</sup> As the Christian faith progressed churches were built within these enclosed groves. The XII<sup>th</sup> century Emperor Lalibela had the sacred tree on the holy mountain of Amba Geshena replaced by a church.<sup>81</sup> Before entering the holy city of Aksum, Christian pilgrims would stop under a great sycamore, remove their profane clothing, and don a ritually pure garment. This great sycamore still lives today as a new offshoot has continuously been planted as the parent tree ages and dies.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, Ethiopian churches continue to rise in the midst of groves which serve as cemeteries.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> BLACKMAN, "Sacred Trees in Modern Egypt", 1925, p. 57.

<sup>77</sup> O'LEARY, Arabia Before Muhammad, 1927, p. 195-196.

<sup>78</sup> PHILPOT, 1897, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>79</sup> IBN ISHAQ, The Life of Muhammad 1955, p. 53.

<sup>80</sup> DORESSE, Ethiopia: Ancient Cities and Temples, 1959, p. 22.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>83</sup> DEFONTAINES, 1948, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

African tree-related practices are therefore no more primitive for being African. When one worships beneath a tree, one does not worship the tree anymore than one worships a temple when one prays in one. Moreover, if God inhabits a tree, He does so only in as much as He inhabits a temple or altar. Both are religious monuments. At the highest levels of spiritual signification the symbolism of the tree in African religions is even relatively close to that of the Abrahamic prophetic tradition. In both cases the arboreal attribute of transcendence seems to derived from the vertical thrust of the tree; hence the image of the "ladder" to the sky (Zaire's nsanda, the Batammaliba's baobab), as well as from its motherly "life" attributes: longevity, fruit-bearing, shade, annual rebirth. As in the Abrahamic traditions, African trees often express notions of life and death, Paradise and Creation. There are however several elements of West African tree traditions which stand out as immediately relevant to the emergence of Touba in Senegal. The tree is used not only as an imaginal symbol but as an active religious agent: as temple, altar, scripture and sepulcher. There can be little doubt that the success of the Islamic Ṭubā construct in West Africa had much to do with this immanent position of the tree, and especially of the baobab, in traditional religious thought, a position which included such specific characteristics as burial and sacred inscription . It is significant that of all the different trees, great and small, which used to inhabit the original wilderness, only Touba's baobabs have survived (the Guy Texe, the various guy mbinds, the guy siyaare as well as many others that can be observed in and around the city).

However, "tree worship", if we mean by that reverence for actual living trees, constitutes only a minute part of the West African arboreal tradition. At the village level "tree worship" was no more prevalent there than elsewhere, in the Maghreb or in Jordan or Pakistan for example. Furthermore, in the case of Touba there is no indication that the Guy Texe, or the great mbéb tree for that matter, were ever revered for themselves. On the contrary, these trees stood alone and ignored in the wilderness and Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba had to search for the chosen spot. They were anonymous. Touba is not some village tree which, through the accident of historical evolution, rose

to the ranks of great sanctuary. Rather, the city of Touba was a willful creation and was intended as a physical expression of a previously elaborated theosophy. In Touba the tree is most powerful as a symbol, as a "spiritual ideogram",<sup>84</sup> and it is at the symbolic level that the West African arboreal tradition contributes most to the emergence of modern Touba.

### Community and Cosmos

We have seen how the tree is a universally admitted and well established symbol of the sacred relationship between Man and God. In African tradition however, the tree is also a powerful symbol of the equally sacred relationships between the individual and his community and between the community and God.

In African religious thought generally, there is a triangular relationship between the individual, the community and God.<sup>85</sup> Cosmic order, ultimate Reality, demands that human affairs be managed according to specific ethical and ritual precepts. Every individual is responsible for the maintenance of these sacred social precepts so that the community as a whole may continue to be in favorable standing with the Cosmos. This world view is not fundamentally different from the Islamic concept of the Straight Path. There is an order, a plan, a code, for the conduct of its internal affairs which the community, the *umma*, is required to adhere to. The social, political and economic activities of the community are just as subject to this order as its religious ones. A community that lives according to the "code" is a prosperous community. In Egypt, Pharaoh was a divine king mainly because the prosperity of humanity depended on his continued ritual purity and his scrupulous observance of ethical propriety. Failing this the order of the Universe would be defiled, with disastrous results here on earth. The Egyptian cult of the pharaoh was thus essentially a cult intended to please the gods. Divine kingship, as it came to be constituted throughout Africa, was likewise an expression of the sacred harmony within the community

---

<sup>84</sup> THOMPSON, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>85</sup> MBITI, 1975, *op. cit.*, p. 13.



and its purpose was to maintain collective good standing in the Cosmos. This goes some way in explaining why "tyranny" or despotism of the type so common in the ancient Fertile Crescent and Greece was unknown in Egypt — despite the Pharaoh's supposed "absolute" power — until late dynastic times. Likewise, until relatively modern times, tyranny, such as existed in Renaissance Italy for instance, was unknown in African polities. The African "spiritual" constitution, as opposed to a merely political one, would not sustain unethical, illegitimate or arbitrary exercise of power.<sup>86</sup>

Before European colonial rule, every West African community, every village, town and neighborhood, was something of a polis; an individual political entity unto itself regardless of its incorporation into any larger political structures. Each polity self-consciously partook in the maintenance of cosmic order, of balance and harmony between the physical and metaphysical worlds. Responsibility for maintaining prosperity and for avoiding evil was incumbent upon every member of a group, upon every group in society. In effect, each community strove to establish and maintain proper relations with the metaphysical world in order to assure prosperity in this one. Every community was at the center of Creation and every one of its members had a responsibility on this cosmic plane.

Control over its spatial configuration was one means by which a community could assure good order in the Cosmos. Space, as we have seen, is not neutral. It expresses "hidden" reality because the perceptual world is considered to be a "shadow" or "mirror" of ultimate Reality. African communities were configured according to what were believed to be divinely ordained precepts, according to the cardinal and cosmic alignments indicated by the ultimate Reality of being. The urban plans of large cities such as Timbuktu, though they may have seemed arbitrary and "organic" to the casual observer, were nonetheless understood by those who lived in them to be ritually and cosmically aligned.<sup>87</sup> If cosmic alignments were sometimes concealed, they could also be manifest. The first European observers

---

<sup>86</sup> SYLLA, "Le sacré dans les philosophies africaines", 1979, pp. 105-107.

<sup>87</sup> PAQUES, 1964, *op. cit.*, pp. 240-241.

to visit Benin described the city as a grid organized along the cardinal points. These XVII<sup>th</sup> century C.E. observers found the neatness of Benin's urban plan to be superior to the Dutch and French cities they knew back home.<sup>88</sup> Two main avenues, 120 feet wide, paved and tree-lined, led from the city gates to the center where they crossed at right angles. Smaller streets intersected these avenues.

Spatial configuration could often have explicit cosmological significance. In keeping with their principle of cosmic twinning, the Dogon for example build all their villages in pairs called "Heaven" and "Earth". More complex cosmologies call for more complex configurations. Akan cities were invariably divided into seven distinct wards corresponding to the seven heavenly spheres. Moreover, each ward was under the jurisdiction of a distinct matrilineal clan.<sup>89</sup> Here, in a society where power is defined through matrilineal filiation, we have a clearly expressed correlation between cosmic order, political organization, and spatial configuration. Likewise, the lay of Hausa cities corresponds to a definite cosmology:

The critical points of the Hausa spatial schema are on a boundary defined by the cardinal points, axes which run east-west, north-south, north-west - south-east and north-east - south-west. At the center point, where these axes meet, is a vertical axis linking heaven and earth at that space. This geometrical schema and its variations stem from a view of man and his relationship to the cosmos.<sup>90</sup>

Every community thus configured is in effect aligned along the axis mundi. Every place is the center of the Universe. Every community has a center and every community *is* a center. There is a multiplicity of centers yet no particular center need contradict the legitimacy of any other.

---

<sup>88</sup> KI-ZERBO, Histoire de l'Afrique Noire, 1978, pp. 162-164.

<sup>89</sup> ISAAC, "Religion, Landscape and Space", 1959, p. 16.

<sup>90</sup> MOUGHTIN, Hausa Architecture, 1985, p. 34.

The cosmic axis at the center is often marked by a suitable symbol, a permanent wooden mast, or a stone or clay pillar.<sup>91</sup> For example, the ancient Yoruba city of Ife, like Jerusalem, is believed to be both the first place created and the center of creation.<sup>92</sup> This belief is actualized by a monolith which graces one of the holy city's central squares. This monument, known as Opa Oranyan, is an eighteen-foot high granite column studded with alignments of 123 iron nails. It is said to mark the grave of Oranyan, founder of the Oyo State.<sup>93</sup> More usually in West Africa however, a tree (as transcendent symbol) would mark the axis mundi. This has a direct bearing on the spatial configuration of the holy city of Touba and distinguishes it within the wider Islamic tradition, as will be now demonstrated.

In Africa, sacred trees played an important role in the construction and maintenance of collective spiritual identities; they were the "souls" of the polity. They were *genii loci*.<sup>94</sup> They incarnated the vertical axis linking heaven and earth — God's plan with its human actualization. They were elements of existential space because they testified to "hidden" order in the Universe. They imparted meaning to life on earth, and not just spiritual meaning but political and social meaning as well. They represented the community as a whole; its unity, its identity. They were central to the configuration of communities. They actualized notions of foundation/creation, duration/continuity and harmony/order (both cosmic and temporal). As an actualization, a sign of hidden (cosmic) order, the tree was essential to the manner in which a community arranged its immediate landscape. Great trees became important institutions of public life and as such dominated the landscape.

### Foundation Tree

The tree as *genius loci* represents first of all the notion of foundation. The emergence of a new city was often the topographic manifestation of the creation of a new polity. Thus one can trace a

---

<sup>91</sup> THOMPSON, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>92</sup> OJO, Yoruba Culture: a Geographical Analysis, 1966, p. 123.

<sup>93</sup> SMITH, Kingdoms of the Yoruba 1988, p. 21.

<sup>94</sup> PARRINDER, 1951, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

"genealogy" of cities over a millennium of West African history.<sup>95</sup> With regularity, one finds in African annals kingdoms and their capitals being founded beneath trees. Such was the linke tree (*Afzelia africana*) which grew in a sacred grove in the holy city of Kangaba (Mali). This tree marked the great assembly which had witnessed the foundation of the world.<sup>96</sup> Each Batammaliba community maintains a baobab tree believed to have sprung up from a seed produced by the primordial Tree in the sky.<sup>97</sup> Mboul, the first capital of Kayor, was founded early in the IX<sup>th</sup>/XV<sup>th</sup> century beneath a tree chosen through divination. A talisman was attached to a pigeon and it was set loose. The first tree on which it would alight was to be designated as the communal tree in the center of the public square of the intended capital. The bird landed on a tree named Mboul, situated in the corn field of a certain Ndasmi Lo. The new city was called Mboul after the tree.<sup>98</sup> A more recent foundation is that of Segou, capital of the Bambara kingdom of the same name. Early in the XII<sup>th</sup>/XVIII<sup>th</sup> century the city of Segou was founded when the king came to live beneath a great karité tree (*Butyrospermum parkii*) on the banks of the Niger.<sup>99</sup> Other Bambara polities were similarly founded. Typically, a tree would be chosen through divination. Warriors would hang their weapons from its branches, artisans would hang their tools, and farmers their implements. Sacrifices would be made.<sup>100</sup> The hanging of tools and implements from branches had the effect of "manufacturing" a fruit tree, fruit which clearly represent a community's means of sustenance (witness also the tree called Dhāt Anwāt in ancient Arabia).

When no tree existed at the location desired for a new community one could simply be planted for the occasion. When a new ward of a city or town was allotted, a tree would be planted there,

---

<sup>95</sup> SINOU & OLOUDÉ, *Porto-Novo*, 1988, p. 23.

<sup>96</sup> PRUSSIN, *Hatumere: Islamic Design in West Africa*, 1986, p. 117.

<sup>97</sup> BLIER, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>98</sup> FALL, 1974, *loc. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>99</sup> KI-ZERBO, 1978, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

<sup>100</sup> PARRINDER, 1951, *op. cit.*, p. 152; GUIDONI, *Primitive Architecture*, 1987, pp. 161-163.

and this would be regarded as the spiritual abode for the new community. Conversely, upon the conquest of a community, its trees, the incarnations of collective identity, were most often felled by the victor, only to be replanted again upon a return to independence. Such was the case when Abomey, capital of Dahomey, was briefly occupied by the troops of Oyo during the 1730's.<sup>101</sup>

We can recognize in these traditions parallels with modern Touba. When Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba settled beneath the mbeb tree with his family, he was founding his city in accordance with an established model. Not only Touba, but many other Mouride communities also conform to the "foundation tree" system. Missirah was founded in 1913 by Serigne Mame More Diarra, one of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's brothers, on the site indicated by a baobab called Ndeglu. The founder spent a month in prayer and Quranic recitation beneath the tree before the first house was built.<sup>102</sup> Kaossara, named for the Quranic Kawthar (the "Pool of the Prophet" mentioned in hadith), was founded in 1926 beneath a baobab that distinguished itself by the reservoir of fresh water it contained within its trunk.<sup>103</sup> Here the African foundation tree, a baobab, is associated with a Quranic eschatological symbol through the common element of a basin of water.

Along with the tree, sacrifice plays a major role in West African foundation myths. Such is the legendary foundation of Bagirmi (Chad); in the company of his companions, the first king sacrificed an ox beneath a mbaya tree (a species of fig tree). The tree then divided itself into six radial parts.<sup>104</sup> Likewise, the foundation ritual of every new Rwandan capital would terminate with the planting of a fig tree over the buried remains of a sacrificial cow.<sup>105</sup> The founding myth of Timbuktu relates the story of the sacrifice of the woman Buctu beneath the tree called Garboyña, and the subsequent emergence of the city from the surrounding waters.

---

<sup>101</sup> PARRINDER, 1951, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>102</sup> COPANS, Les marabouts de l'arachide 1980, p. 91.

<sup>103</sup> COPANS, Maintenance sociale et changements économiques au Sénégal 1972, p. 140.

<sup>104</sup> GUIDONI, 1987, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-171.

<sup>105</sup> COQUERY-VIDROVITCH, Histoire des villes d'Afrique noire, 1993, p. 87.

This tree no longer exists but Buctu's tomb, next to the Sidi Yayah mosque, survives. Each year during the Laylat al-qadr (the "Night of Power", the 27<sup>th</sup> of Ramadân, the Night during which the Holy Qur'ân descended to earth) the men of Timbuktu gather by the tomb and recite prayers.<sup>106</sup> Thus does Timbuktu's genius loci survive as a cosmic link within an Islamic context. The parallels between Timbuktu's legendary foundation (through the sacrifice of a woman and its association to a tree/tomb) and Touba's foundation (Sokhna Aminata Lo's death and burial beneath the Guy Texe) becomes even more significant given that Timbuktu's legendary foundation occurred in the obscure past, no later than the VI<sup>th</sup>/XII<sup>th</sup> century, while Touba's foundation occurred in 1304/1887. Despite its modernity, Touba's foundation as an Islamic polity, and the specific role played by the tree, is thus grounded in West Africa's most ancient traditions.

### Constitution Tree

Given its politically and socially charged presence in the collective conscience, it is easily understandable that the sacred tree also played a role in the institution at the very summit of West African political organization, the monarchy. The institution of the monarchy was pivotal to social relations as well as to the relationship between the community and God. As in ancient Egypt, African kings were sacred (or rather the institution of the monarchy was sacred; individual kings could be, and were, legally impeached without breaching cosmic order).<sup>107</sup> Their ritual purity and scrupulous observance of ethical and legal propriety were essential for maintaining balance and harmony between the physical and metaphysical worlds. As central embodiment of sacred relationships, the institution of the monarchy was the defining factor of the polity. Crowned kings had to be the most cosmically aligned of beings, hence their association with cosmic trees. They were crowned beneath them, they held court beneath them and very often they were buried beneath them. "Constitution" trees were destinations along the routes

---

<sup>106</sup> PAQUES, 1964, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

<sup>107</sup> SYLLA, 1979, *loc. cit.*, p. 106.

of coronation processions, they were circumambulated, they were physically ascended by newly crowned monarchs. Kings of the Asante, upon enthronement, would take oaths beneath them. They would swear before the assembled people to rule them wisely and protect them. The spirits of these very political trees would act as moral witnesses.<sup>108</sup> Such trees embodied the kingdom's constitution. They could also symbolize justice, as in the great tree in Ouagadougou beneath which the Mogho-Naba rendered justice,<sup>109</sup> or the one in Niani beneath which Ibn Battûta observed the Mansa of Mali holding court. Constitution trees were also the object of political pilgrimage. The Guy Njulli (Baobab of Circumcision) of Kahone for instance was visited each year by representatives of all of the provinces of the kingdom of Saloum. They arrived in the capital ostensibly to renew homage to the king beneath the great tree, but the ceremony was also the occasion for very popular public festivities which lasted for days.<sup>110</sup> Such political pilgrimages were called *gammu* in Wolof, a word used today to describe large religious gatherings (equivalent to the Arabic *ziyâra*) in Senegal's Islamic sanctuaries.

Once again it is important to stress that these civic trees were not "worshipped". They were simply treated with all the respect and public reverence that the modern secular age accords to symbols such as constitutions, flags and tombs of unknown soldiers.

### Urban Monuments

As central symbols of the community, West Africa's sacred trees were urban monuments. Such trees incarnated notions of civic identity and legitimate government. They were civic monuments. Not only did they symbolize the unity of the polity and the good order of its inner social relations, they stood as the recognized locus of the community's political activities. City form, the spatial organization of urban society, was manifest in its trees; the urban fabric was woven around monumental trees.

---

<sup>108</sup> THOMPSON, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>109</sup> KI-ZERBO, 1978, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

<sup>110</sup> DIOUF, "Le gamou de Kahone", 1989, pp. 12-13.

Great political capitals, even more than ordinary settlements, were expected to conform to cosmic order. Royal compounds invariably included sacred groves where religious rights were enacted and where kings would be buried in mausolea. The V<sup>th</sup>/XI<sup>th</sup> century Andalusian geographer Al-Bakrî describes such a grove, called al-Ghâba in the capital of Ghana (modern Kumbi Saleh).<sup>111</sup> Likewise, according to XV<sup>th</sup> century C.E. Portuguese accounts, a grove to the north of the royal compound served as sepulcher for the kings of Kongo (modern Angola).<sup>112</sup> Everywhere African royal palaces have survived, such as in Porto Novo<sup>113</sup> or in the Yoruba city-states, sacred groves remain essential elements of their configuration. Yoruba palace compounds (called Afin) were vast and contained at the rear of their precincts a sacred grove where secret religious rites (sacrifices, circumcisions, masquerades) were performed in temples and where kings were buried in mausolea. The front of the palace on the other hand was public. There were normally two or more courtyards and these served as fora for the city. Surrounding this complex in turn were the compounds of the other leading men of State.<sup>114</sup> The royal palace and the public square were usually associated together as focus of urban space. These squares were the centers of civic life. Typically, the palace would occupy one side (the west side) of the square while the compounds of other state officials would form a ring around it. These squares served as fora (for political gatherings and symbolic representations of power), agoras (for social gatherings), and market places. These functions were "sacred" in so far as all the inner workings of a community were supposed to conform to sacred precepts. The remainder of the city would be organized into wards surrounding this central political nucleus.

Public squares were often dominated by one or several great trees. In Gondar, the XVII<sup>th</sup> century capital of Ethiopia, the imperial palaces occupied sprawling compounds to the north of the city's

---

<sup>111</sup> AL-BAKRI, Description de l'Afrique septentrionale, 1911-13.

<sup>112</sup> KI-ZERBO, 1978, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

<sup>113</sup> SINOU & OLOUDÉ, 1988, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-58.

<sup>114</sup> OJO, 1966, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-137.



central square, while the square itself is dominated to this day by a great tree.<sup>115</sup> In Mbanza Kongo, XV<sup>th</sup> century C.E. capital of Kongo, the royal compound fronted a public square called Mbazi. The Mbazi was dominated by a great fig tree beneath which the monarch received Portuguese embassies, in full view of the citizens.<sup>116</sup> In modern Touba also we find that the large central square which surrounds the mosque is itself surrounded by the official residences of the various khalifas. This configuration is called the pënc and is directly derived from African political tradition.

### The Pënc

The Wolof term pënc designates the "palaver tree", the "parliamentary" tree, the "constitution" tree, the tree as town-hall. People congregate beneath the pënc, where matters of public concern are discussed and disputes settled. By extension, the term pënc also designates the public square of a community, where such a tree is likely to be found, a town-hall on a town square. In both definitions the meaning is clearly political but it is obvious that the tree predates the square. It is easy to understand, for instance, how the tree of foundation, which represents the community's identity, could become a constitutional tree, a palaver tree where the community gathers to settle matters of public concern in accordance with the overarching spiritual constitution. The palaver tree in the middle of the public square is typical of African communities — a manifestation of the continent's idyllic democracy, both real and imagined.

The pënc, a monumental tree in the center of a public square, bounded by the royal palace, is characteristic of pre-colonial West African capitals and might be said to constitute a fixed model. Witness Kansala (established in the VII<sup>th</sup>/XIII<sup>th</sup> century), the capital of Gabu. To the east of the royal palace was a public square and a tree with dense foliage. This tree was a tabadjou, possibly a cola tree (taba in Mandinga). It was on this central square, beneath the great

---

<sup>115</sup> JÄGER, Antiquities of North Ethiopia, 1965, pp.38-45.

<sup>116</sup> KI-ZERBO, 1978, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

tabadjou, that young princes would congregate with their retinue for drinking parties and amusement.<sup>117</sup> Witness also the city of Soumacounda, a provincial capital of the Gabu Empire. In the middle of this city too was a public square shaded by a great kapok tree. It was beneath this tree that the provincial court would assemble in case of conflict. It was here that disputes were settled after much palaver and much drinking of palm wine and millet beer.<sup>118</sup> Likewise in Niani, the imperial capital of Mali, the public affairs of State were performed beneath the shade of a great kapok tree which stood in the city's central square.<sup>119</sup> According to Ibn Battûta, the Mansa sat enthroned upon a dais set up directly beneath the tree.<sup>120</sup> The traveler from Tangiers designates this arrangement with the term "penpi". One is tempted to see here an etymological forerunner of the Wolof term *pënc*, which has been variously transcribed as *pinc*, *pentch*, *pinthie*, *pinthiou* and *mpentye*. Today, the *Khalîfa-général* of the Mourides presides over official religious ceremonies on Touba's *pënc* from the shade of his *maqşûra*.

West African capitals, centered on the *pënc*, were generally well ordered urban creations. They were the necessary "sets" where State functions and court life could be properly enacted — in keeping with the royal obligation to maintain cosmic order. Public ceremony was essential to the exercise of political power. Ritual, properly enacted, sustained legitimacy. In Djilor, from the VII<sup>th</sup>/XIII<sup>th</sup> century until the last king of Sine was enthroned in 1924, the royal *pënc* was ritually circumambulated seven times at each coronation ceremony.<sup>121</sup> Witness also the city called Maka. Maka was established early in XII<sup>th</sup>/XVIII<sup>th</sup> century to serve as the capital of a united kingdom of Kayor and Baol. It was founded on the border between the two States. It was an administrative capital, no peasants were allowed to live there, only nobles and their retinues. Indeed those provincial officials and nobles who were unable to reside in Maka

---

<sup>117</sup> NIANE, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>120</sup> IBN BATTUTA, 1982, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 416.

<sup>121</sup> SARR, 1986-86, *loc. cit.*, p. 231.

were obliged to mandate proxies to represent them at court. In Maka, the palace and square lay at the center of an urban grid aligned according to the cardinal points. Its streets were straight and wide enough to permit parades and reviews of cavalry. They were kept lit at night with great oil lamps.<sup>122</sup> The pénc tradition retains all of its political and social potency to this day. In Dodoma, the brand new national capital of Tanzania, the city is centered on a monumental abstract metallic acacia tree constructed in the middle of Ujamaa Square (from Arb. jama'a, to gather together; "community").<sup>123</sup>

Just as they could be purposefully created, arboreal civic institutions and monuments could be abandoned. In fact, West Africa's longevous trees regularly survive the more fleeting rise and fall of its cities and states. Many ancient monumental trees, baobabs and kapok-trees but also acacias and tamarinds, still stand today. If groups of baobabs often mark the sites of ancient cemeteries, great kapok trees and solitary giant baobabs are often the last remaining traces of forgotten cities.<sup>124</sup> In Kansala (established seven centuries ago), one can still visit the tabadjou, while in Kahone, the ancient capital of Saloum, the great baobab called Guy Njulli is now classified and protected as a "National Monument".<sup>125</sup> The tree named Mboul, already a mature tree at the city's foundation in the IX<sup>th</sup>/XV<sup>th</sup> century, continued to stand in the middle of the pénc of Kayor's capital for several centuries thereafter and might well be standing there still (though Mboul is now a tiny village). Niani, the former capital of the Empire of Mali, has shifted its location four times since the fall of that Empire at the close of the IX<sup>th</sup>/XV<sup>th</sup> century. Each successive site is still marked by a great baobab.<sup>126</sup>

The cosmically aligned tree at the center of the city, of the community, is a trait which Africa also shares with the adjacent

---

<sup>122</sup> FALL, 1974, *loc. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>123</sup> VALE, Architecture, Power and National Identity, 1992, p. 152. It is unfortunate that the Tanzanian plan did not take the tree concept to its ultimate resolution and plant a living acacia tree in the middle of Ujamaa Square, even if this would have meant waiting a generation or two for the tree to reach maturity.

<sup>124</sup> NIANE, Soundjata ou l'épopée mandingue 1960, p. 149.

<sup>125</sup> DIOUF, 1989, *loc. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>126</sup> HERVÉ, "Niani: ex-capitale de l'empire manding", 1959, p. 53.

civilizations of the Indian Ocean; in Madagascar for instance, the religiosity of every village is manifest in a sacred tree surrounded by a palisade.<sup>127</sup> It is this tree that gives its name to the village. In ancient India too, a banyan or pipal tree, the "Tree of Vishnu" would be planted at the intersection of the main north-south and east-west streets.<sup>128</sup> It marked a cosmic axis. In the African diaspora also, the tree continued to incarnate collective identity and political legitimacy. In the six Maroon republics of Surinam, established in the hills in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century following a successful revolution by plantation slaves of the coast, a kankantii, or silk-cotton tree (*Eriodendron anfractuosum*, a relative of the kapok tree), was planted in each community and today several of them still tower over at least one of the Maroon capitals, Dii Tabiki.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, all the Maroon capitals (Asindoopo, Puketi) possessed peri-urban sacred groves and in some of these sanctuaries the axis mundi has been actualized in the form of "ladder altars".<sup>130</sup> Thus the full panoply of cosmological meanings expressed by the West African tree construct has been redeveloped in Surinam, where during the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century as much as 49% of the African population was arriving from the "Slave Coast" (modern Ghana).

Thus the pénc (or its equivalent such as the Mbazi of Angolan tradition) has been the central feature of Africa's capitals and one of the necessary principles of its urban planning. There can be no doubt that this pénc designates a distinctly African arboreal archetype. As an archetype, the pénc articulates the sacred triangular relationship between the individual, God and the community to the image of the tree. The metallic acacia in the middle of Dodoma's Ujamaa Square and Touba's Lamp Fall towering above its pénc can both be seen as modern expressions of this ancient spatial association; the former in the political realm and the latter in the spiritual one. New social and religious systems (the Nation-State in Dodoma, Islam in Touba) have

---

<sup>127</sup> DEFONTAINES, 1948, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>128</sup> ISAAC, 1959, *loc. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>129</sup> THOMPSON, 1993, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-123.

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 134-138.

appropriated the African archetype and successfully used it to express their own messages.

### Tree and Mosque

The legacy of West Africa's civic trees resounds throughout its Islamic urban traditions to this day. In time, Islam came to be the dominant religion in most of West Africa. Rulers and ruled alike abandoned older religious practices and sought legitimacy in new Islamic symbols. Sacred trees, especially if they were associated with the monarchy and political constitutions — the ones which stood in the center of the public squares of capitals, or in royal compounds — were often felled and replaced by mosques. Witness the Hausa city of Kano late in the X<sup>th</sup>/XV<sup>th</sup> century when a peripatetic *Diakhanké* scholar came to town. The visiting scholar convinced the monarch to have the sacred tamarind tree, which had stood behind the palace, cut down and a mosque constructed in its place.<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, tradition relates that the mosque of Kano's Madabo ward similarly marks the spot where a sacred tree once grew.<sup>132</sup> In Timbuktu also the Sankora Mosque (famous for its university until its destruction in 1000/1592) was erected c. 700/1300 on the site of a great tree.<sup>133</sup>

Mosques are by definition places of assembly for prayer (*masjid* from *sajada*, a place of prostration for worship; *jāmi'* from *jama'a*, to gather or assemble together). Prayer being the single most conspicuous practice of the Believer, the mosque was, ever since the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, the essential locus of the *umma* and its primary topographic expression. Originally, during the earliest period of Islamic history, the mosque was also the absolute center (in sociological as well as geographical terms) of any Islamic community. It served for "palaver", for public debate and the settling of disputes, and harbored in its midst the *umma*'s treasury. Many other social functions which eventually became separate institutions on their own (such as courts of law and colleges) were once

---

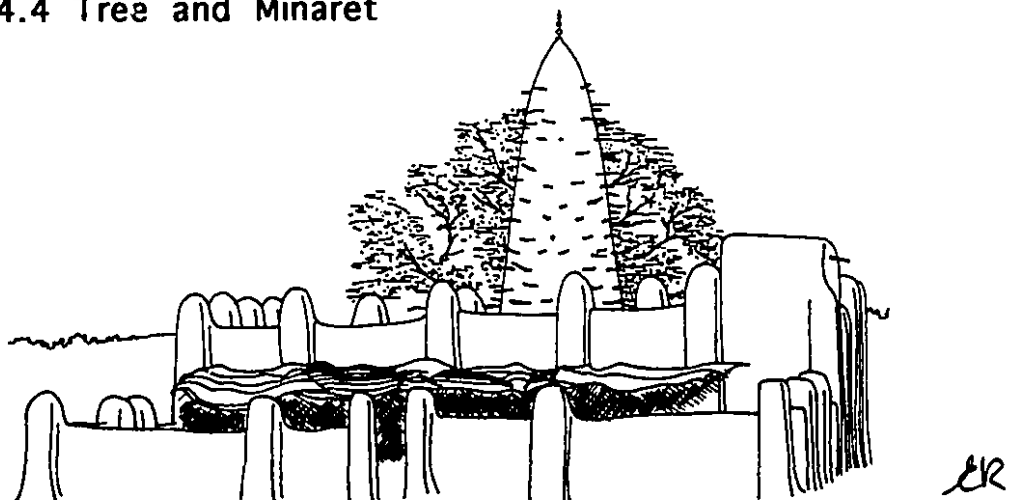
<sup>131</sup> SANNEH, *The Jakhanke Muslim Clerics*, 1989, p. 34.

<sup>132</sup> PADEN, *Religion and Political Culture in Kano*, 1973, p. 48.

<sup>133</sup> DOMIAN, *Architecture soudanaise: vitalité d'une tradition urbaine et monumentale*, 1989, p. 72.

conducted in mosques. In West African cities the mosque likewise assumed a central position in the Islamic community, occupying the center of human relations. As elsewhere, it was the symbol of the community's unity, of its identity and of its alignment with universal order (the Ka'ba and Islam).

Fig. 4.4 Tree and Minaret



Source: DOMIAN, Sergio, *Architecture soudanaise*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1989, p. 90. The skyline of this town in Dori (Burkina Faso) is characterized by a great tree and its mosque's single minaret. The minaret marks the mosque's mihrāb. The great tree behind it rises from the center of the town square (on the mosque's qibla axis). Note the minaret's characteristic protruding branches.

However, when the mosque (already charged with its own distinct representational significance) came to replace the tree as the primary institution of communities, it took on the tree's representational functions as well, standing literally in place of the tree in collective consciousness. The West African mosque, and especially its minaret, inherited many specific significations (foundation, constitution) formerly expressed by the ante-Islamic cosmic tree. Mosques replaced trees as the defining monuments of cities. The sky-lines of modern West African communities are now dominated by towering minarets which rise from their central mosques. In some towns the minaret and the great tree continue to

share the vertical space (fig. 4.4). In Timbuktu, several such minarets rise above the great city. More often however the urban landscape culminates in one single tapered minaret, such as the famous minarets of the Ibâdi republics of the Mzâb (Algeria), or that of Agadès (Niger), just as it formerly culminated in a single great tree. The minaret replaced the tree as physical incarnation of the axis mundi, symbolizing the vertical alignment of the community.

### The Minaret

Proper alignment of a mosque is always a determining factor of its configuration as improper alignment of prayer will nullify it. However, Islamic alignment (towards the Ka'ba) concerns the horizontal dimension alone, leaving the mosque's vertical dimension free from any obligatory configuration. Each part of the world has evolved its own traditions and preferences as to the architectural treatment of the mosque's vertical dimension, through the use of domes, minarets and great portals, alone or in combination. West African mosques have long been strongly characterized by the use of a single great minaret and this finds obvious fulfillment in Touba's Lamp Fall.

Historically, West African mosques were relatively low structures. The dome is a new architectural element which has only appeared in the XX<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>134</sup> Previously, the only clearly expressive architectural element was the minaret and indeed we find that this element has been fashioned in a manner which effectively exploits to the utmost its vertical transcendent qualities. Furthermore, in their physical morphology, West African minarets were enhanced with arboreal elements. They were given the distinctive profile of trees through the use of protruding sticks and poles. Contrary to appearances, these elements serve no structural function. The great adobe towers would stand without them. Some authors have argued that the protruding poles are necessary for the annual maintenance of minarets, constituting a kind of permanent

---

<sup>134</sup> The Mosque of Diourbel (constructed 1335-1338/1916-1918) is Senegal's earliest domed mosque. It was built under Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's direct supervision according to the "Ottoman" model at a time when France and Turkey were at war.

scaffolding.<sup>135</sup> While the scaffolding argument has some truth to it — ladders can be and are just as easily used for upkeep — it can not explain the phenomenon entirely. The twigs, sticks and poles are primarily symbolic elements. They give minarets distinctly arboreal attributes, visually evoking the idea of a tree with branches (fig. 4.4).

Local traditions support this minaret/tree association. It was claimed, for instance, that the proper upkeep of the minaret of Timbuktu's Dinguerebe Mosque affected the prosperity of the entire city.<sup>136</sup> The Dinguerebe minaret, like that of Timbuktu's Sankora mosque (erected on the site of a tree), was until recently the object of circumambulation, especially by women, during mawlid al-nabi observances.<sup>137</sup> Minarets, like trees, might also mark the sites of tombs. The minaret of Timbuktu's Sidi Yahya Mosque for instance, is said to contain the tomb of the mosque's founder,<sup>138</sup> while that of Gao is purported to mark the tomb of Askia Muhammad (d. 945/1538).

Touba's great minaret can only be properly understood within this tradition. As symbol of cosmic transcendence, Lamp Fall develops spatial relationships first manifest in West Africa's cosmically aligned trees, promoting the centrality and legitimacy of the community in absolute terms. Lamp Fall is a personification of Touba's axis mundi. Like the traditional pénc, Lamp Fall towers above Touba's public square. Moreover, Lamp Fall stands in lieu of Touba's foundation tree. Though Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's mbéb was not a sacred tree in its physical form, it nonetheless marked holy ground until Lamp Fall replaced it. It is here that he lived and it is here that he was buried. As we have seen, many other Mouride communities (Missirah, Kaossara, Darou-Marnane) were similarly first marked by singular trees (in these cases baobabs). Though today mosques have usually replaced the trees, as in Touba, some Mouride communities continue to thrive beneath the foliage. This is especially the case when no mosque has yet been built, or when a temporary mosque of

---

<sup>135</sup> BOURGEOIS & PELOS, Spectacular Vernacular: the Adobe Tradition, 1989.

<sup>136</sup> AL-SA'DI, Tarikh as-Soudan, 1964, p. 100.

<sup>137</sup> PAQUES, 1964, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*, p. 258.



planks and corrugated sheet-metal is used pending the construction of a permanent structure. In the city of Mbacké, two great kapok trees with characteristic buttress-trunks, cast their shadow over the public square of Gawane ward. The smaller of the two trees used to shelter the local market until a new market place was built elsewhere. The larger kapok tree however continues to tower over Gawane's tiny make-shift mosque. Elsewhere, in Touba's Keur-Niang ward, the mosque-mausoleum complex of Serigne Ahmadou Fadiama Niang shares the public space with two corpulent baobabs and a towering cola tree.

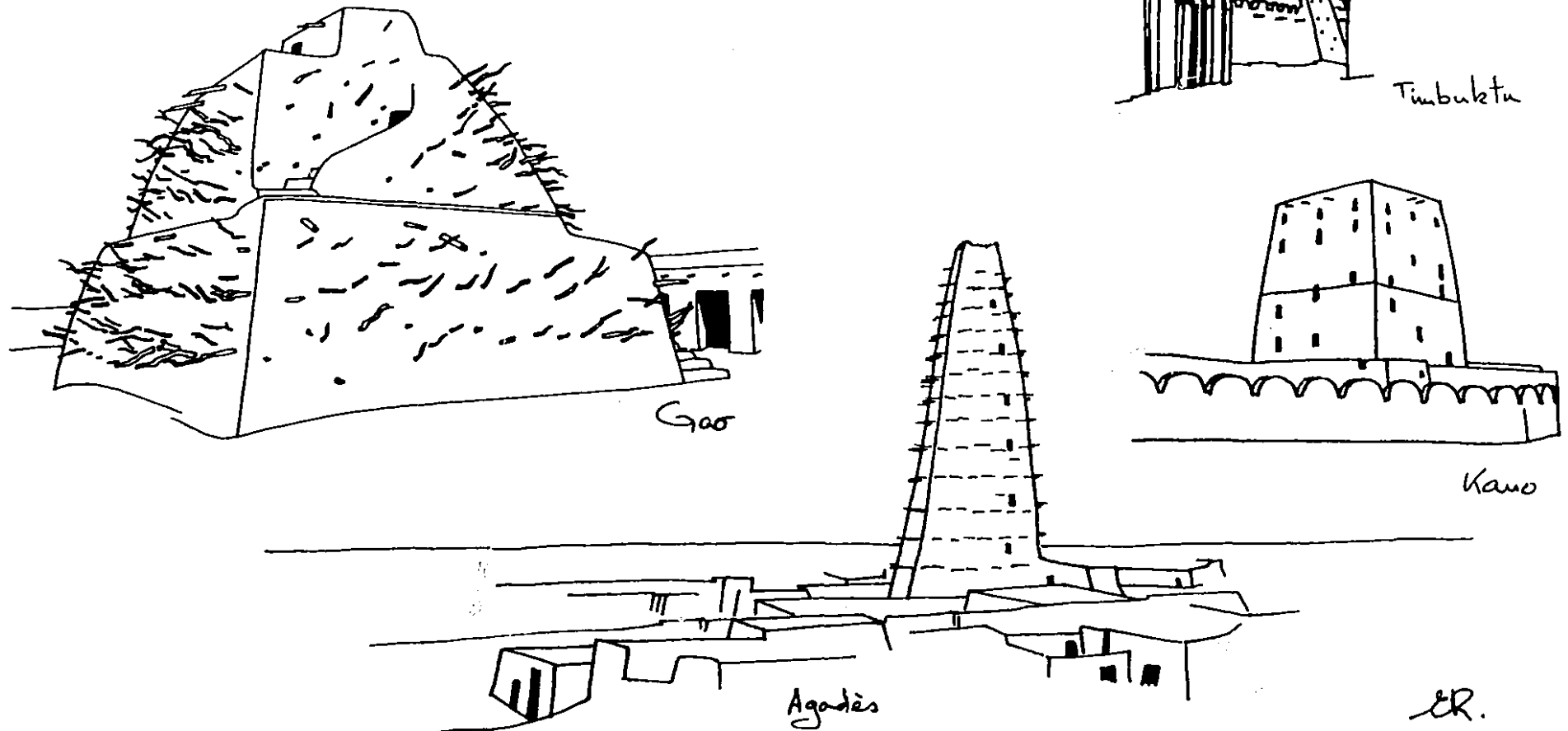
Traditional West African minarets are renowned for their peculiar tapered silhouettes which give them a distinctive "pyramidal" form (fig. 4.5). The massive minarets of Gao and Kano have often been compared to pyramids and that of Gao (purported to contain the tomb of an Askia) has "steps" like the Step Pyramid of Saqqara in Egypt. Pyramids — cubic, conical, tapered, truncated or stepped — have always been widely used in African shrines and sanctuaries (fig. 4.6). In their smallest format, they are conical altars within temples and are reminiscent of the linga of Hindu (Shivite) tradition. In Mandinga, these clay pillar altars are called "lo"; a word which connotes "vertical position, that which is vertical, knowledge, to know...".<sup>139</sup> As symbols of ascension and mediums to gnosis, pyramid altars assumed dominant architectural form as sacred towers in the inner confines of West African royal sanctuaries, such as the cubic one named Gudu in Gulfeil (Chad).<sup>140</sup> Further afield, the conical tower raised in Great Zimbabwe had truly monumental proportions (today, in its ruined state it still stands over 9 meters in height). Surely these pyramidal forms discernible in monurnents right across the continent hark back to the ancient pyramids erected on the banks of the Nile. The Empire of Meroë, it should be recalled, continued to erect pyramids until the IV<sup>th</sup> century C.E. The pyramidal form constitutes a specifically African archetype. Whatever its actual physical configuration or metaphorical

---

<sup>139</sup> THOMPSON, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>140</sup> GUIDONI, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

Fig. 4.5 West African Pyramid Minarets



Sources: DOMIAN, Sergio, *Architecture soudanaise*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1989, p. 73 (Timbuktu), p. 77 (Gao), p. 81 (Agadès); ROBINSON, Francis, *Atlas of the Islamic World since 1500*, Equinox, Oxford, 1982, p. 108 (Kano).

These are among West Africa's most famous minarets. Constructed of adobe (sun-baked mud brick), their pyramidal form varies (tapered, truncated, stepped). The protruding poles and branches are esthetic and symbolic — not structural — elements of their composition. Kano minaret, built on the site of a sacred tree in the XV<sup>th</sup> century, was demolished in 1937-38. Gao minaret stands in the middle of the mosque's courtyard and is reputed to contain the tomb of Askia Muḥammad (d. 1538).

Fig. 4.6 Pyramid as Archetype

SYSTÈME DU MONDE

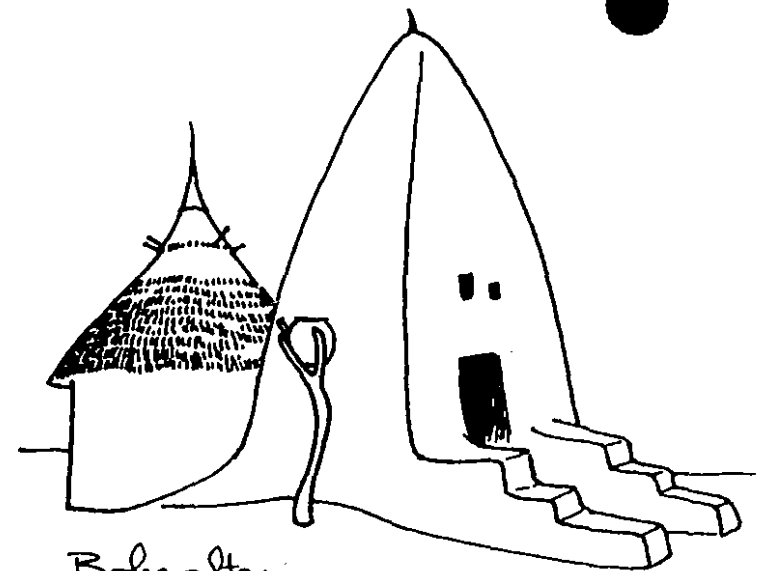
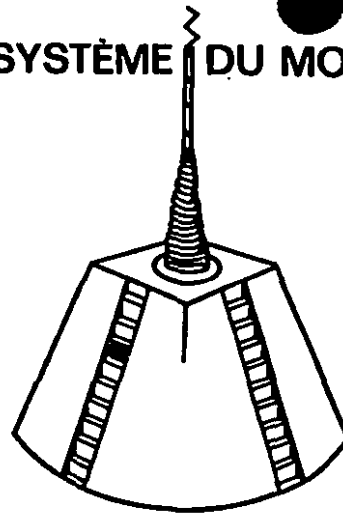
*Dogon archetype*

E

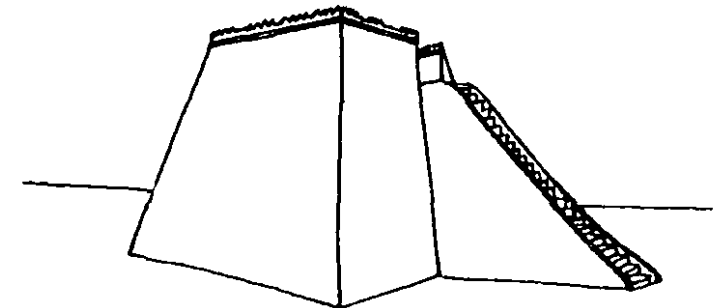
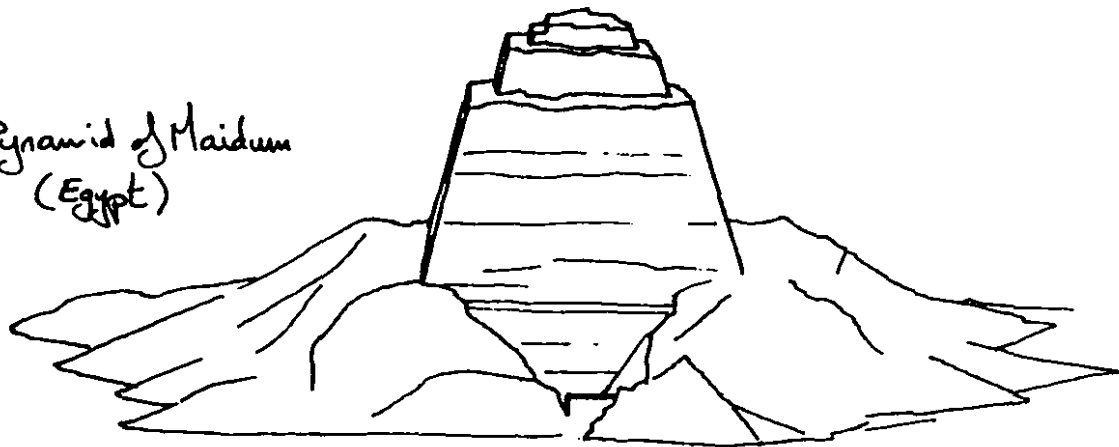
S

N

O



*Pyramid of Maidum  
(Egypt)*



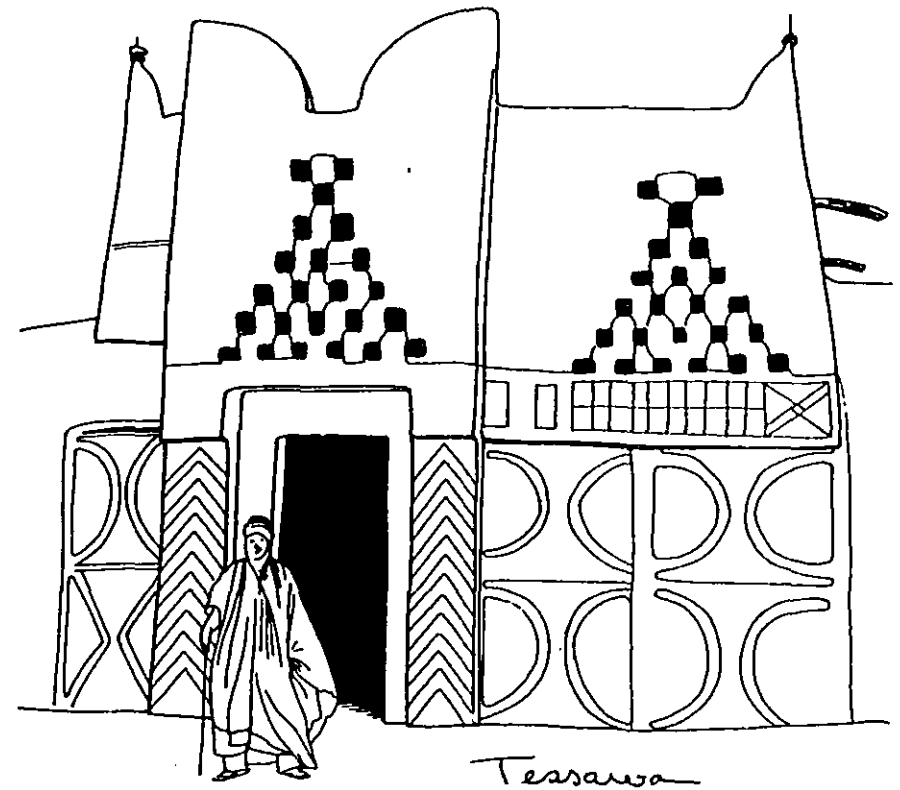
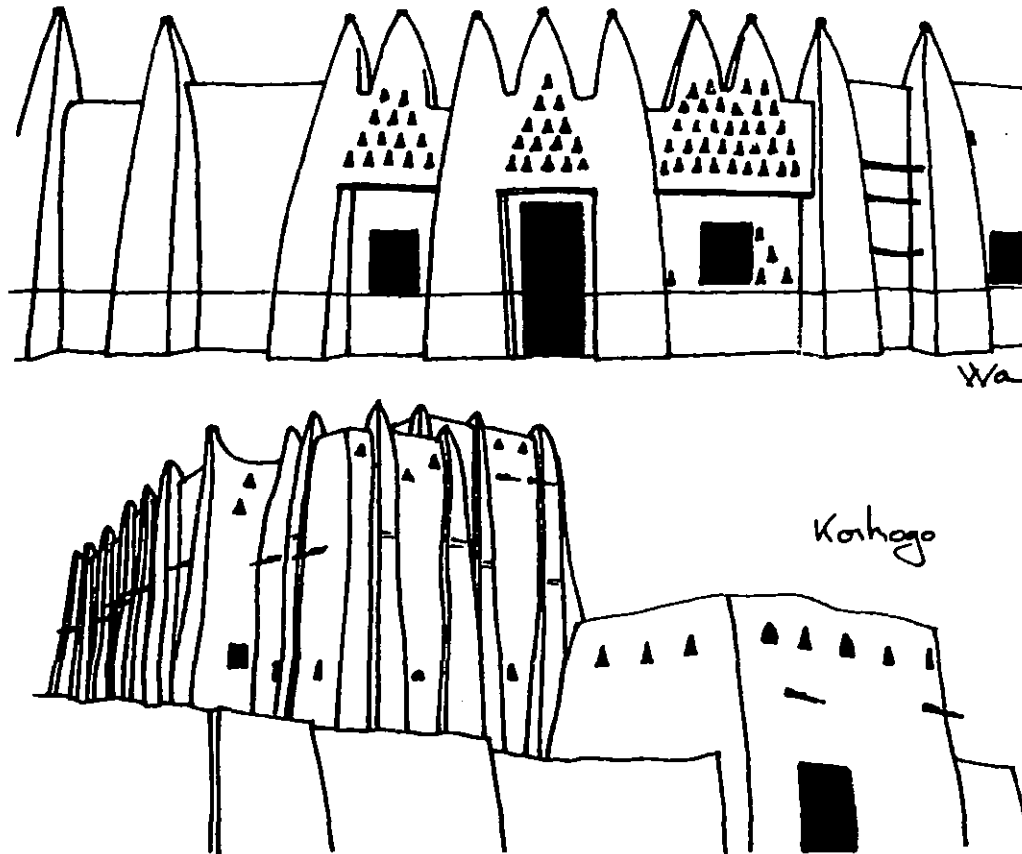
*Gudu tower (Gulfail)*

Sources: GUIDONI, Enrico, *Primitive Architecture*, Rizzoli, New York, 1975, p. 165 (Gulfail), p. 176 (Bobo); GRIAULE, Marcel, *Dieu d'eau* Fayard, Paris, 1966, p. 38 (Dogon); BAINES, John & MALEK, Jaromir, *Atlas of Ancient Egypt* Equinox, Oxford, 1980, p. 132 (Maidum).

Like traditional West African minarets, the Bobo altar (Burkina Faso) and the Gudu tower in the royal sanctuary of Gulfail (Chad) share a common pyramid form. Griaule has demonstrated how this form corresponds to an archetype — a "system of the world" — variously described as a cosmic/primordial granary or termite hill. Variations on this form can be found in sacred architecture throughout Black Africa and can be linked to the great pyramids of Ancient Egypt. These too varied in form (stepped, bent, "true"). However, whatever their outer form, within each pyramid there lies a core structure (revealed in the collapsed pyramid of Maidum) which corresponds to the archetype discussed by Griaule.

*ER.*

Fig. 4.7 West African Palace Façades



Sources: DOMIAN, Sergio, *Architecture soudanaise*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1989, p. 23 (Korhogo), p. 126 (Wa); GUIDONI, Enrico, *Primitive Architecture*, Rizzoli, New York, 1975, p. 166 (Tessawa).

Variations on the pyramid form characterize the entrance façades of West African royal compounds. These façades invariably face the central public squares of the communities they rule. Like the pylons of Ancient Egyptian temples, they constitute existential thresholds distinguishing sacred from profane space. These entrances serve as the principal representational façades for the spiritual/political authority housed within. The meaning of the abstract forms and figures in relief or paint with which they are decorated is understood by those initiated to the symbolic language.

ER.

designation (cosmic granary, primordial termite hill), it tends to conform to an "imaginal" model — an ideal form which embodies a certain understanding of the structure of the universe, a "system of the world". Griaule has reconstructed this archetype from Dogon cosmogony,<sup>141</sup> and one can discern it in the inner structure of Egyptian pyramids. The earliest West African minarets too conformed to the system.

The pyramid theme permeates West African royal architecture as well. Palaces were usually built on the west side of central squares and they tended to present broad monumental façades, such as those of Korhogo, Kong (Côte d'Ivoire), Wa (Ghana),<sup>142</sup> or Tessawa (Niger) (fig. 4.7).<sup>143</sup> These painted façades were composed of massive vertical and pyramidal sculptural elements and they were intended as major representational monuments. Such façades must be understood as the expressive "faces" of their communities. Like the pylons of ancient Egyptian temples, they were functional gates; thresholds between profane and sacred space which configured on their surfaces all of the cosmogonic and cosmological symbols significant of the political authority and spiritual legitimacy which resided within the precincts. These façades can thus be "read". Cheikh Anta Diop has already described the similarities of morphological conception that this West African architecture shares with the "palace façade" tradition of ancient Egypt.<sup>144</sup> The analogy can be carried further to the role these façades play in urban form, to their significance for existential space. In West African capitals the lay public was forbidden contact with life within the sacred royal precincts while the monarch rarely left his compound except for precisely prescribed rituals (on such excursions he was usually veiled from public view and forbidden to come into physical contact with the profane ground). The monumental façade, towering above the city's central square, had therefore to articulate the communion between the community and its king, between the surrounding profane cityscape and the

---

<sup>141</sup> GRIAULE, 1966, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>142</sup> DOMIAN, 1989, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 118, 126.

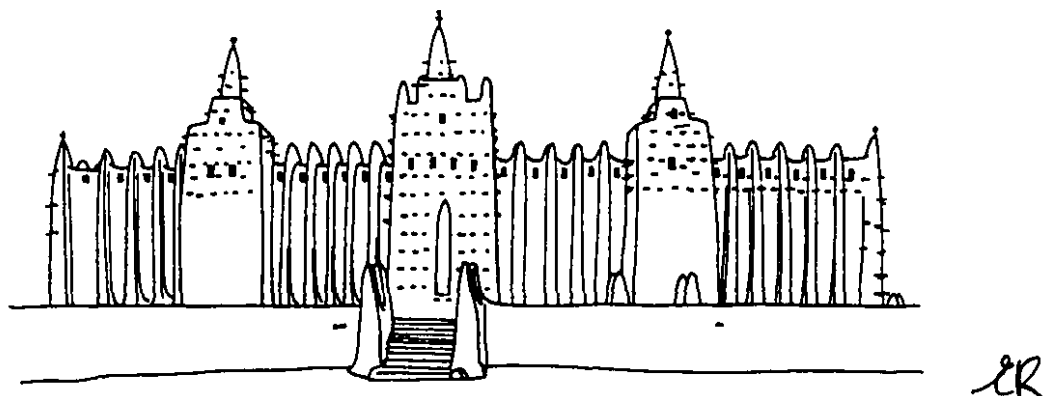
<sup>143</sup> GUIDONI, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

<sup>144</sup> DIOP, Ch. A., Civilisation ou barbarie, 1981, pp. 130-138.

mysteries within the sacred precinct. Such communion was expressed through the façade's architectural and sculptural configuration. Like the pyramidal pylons of Nile temples, West African palace façades marked existential thresholds. They were both physical and metaphysical "gates" (ancient Thebes was known as the city of a thousand such gates) and they towered over the roof-lines of their communities.

The West African mosque inherited much of the palace façade tradition and this helps to explain the prominent role played by the exterior of Touba's qibla wall. The famous mosque of Djenné offers a spectacular illustration of how the mosque's monumental qibla wall, on the west side of the central square, has assumed the representational functions previously fulfilled by palace façades (fig. 4.8). Similar monumentality is discernible in the qibla walls of Mopti and Timbuktu's three Great Mosques. In Touba, as we have seen, the Great Mosque's qibla wall constitutes its main façade. It rises above the *muṣallâ* which is also the city's *penc*, its central square. Unusual by Islamic standards, the qibla wall of Touba's mosque conforms to an African articulation of public space.

Fig. 4.8 Qibla Wall of Djenné Mosque



Source: DOMIAN, Sergio, *Architecture soudanaise*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1989, p. 41. Djenné's Great Mosque and *muṣallâ* share a common plinth (reached by steps in foreground) dominating the city's public square. The Mosque's central minaret marks its *mihrâb*. The *muṣallâ*, on the Mosque's qibla axis, contains the mausolea of local holy men. Compare with Touba's qibla façade (fig. 2.7).

### The African Islamic City

The West African urban model, with its emphasis on significant trees on public squares, was adapted for Islamic use. Where entirely new Muslim communities have been established they have tended to conform to the established, "tree-centric", urban model. The mosque of any new town is erected in the middle of a public square where formerly an monumental tree would have stood. The various wards of the town are then built around it and they recognize in it their common good, a symbol of their unity and common identity.

This Islamic urban form, like so much else in West African Islamic tradition, may be the work of *Diakhanké* scholarship. The *Diakhanké* were the first West Africans to deliberately found Islamic communities — communities purposefully directed on the Straight Path. These communities were precisely ordered. Witness for instance Diakha-Bambuku, a sanctuary founded by the *Diakhanké* Al-Hâjj Sâlim Suware in the VII<sup>th</sup>/XIII<sup>th</sup> century. At the center of the new city was a mosque. Around it four residential wards were laid out. The wards were under the jurisdiction of specific lineages.<sup>145</sup> The famous *Diakhanké* city of Touba (Fouta-Djallon), established c. 1237/1822 by Al-Hâjj Karamokho Bâ, also reveals the importance of the mosque for the constitution of the community of believers. Like Diakha-Bambukhu before it, Touba was organized in four wards (cardinal points) centered on the mosque.<sup>146</sup> The mosque, in the middle of the central square, was intended as the symbol of the unity of the umma and it was the locus of the city's government, the "council of elders",<sup>147</sup> a role formerly fulfilled by the "palaver tree". As in Mouride Touba, the successive khalifas of the *Diakhanké* Touba were similarly buried in mausolea beside the mosque on the town's central square.

The Mouride tariqa has generalized this particular model of urban planning to all new communities under its authority. We have already discussed the principles which underlie Touba's configuration, its central square and its various components. The

<sup>145</sup> SANNEH, 1989, *op. cit.*, pp. 21, 37-38.

<sup>146</sup> QUIMBY, 1975, *loc. cit.*, p. 615.

<sup>147</sup> SANNEH, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 103, 105.

sprawling city which surrounds the square is composed of a number of distinct wards and residential neighborhoods likewise defined by their own central public squares (figs. 2.3, 2.4). On these squares too, all the significant and representational elements of the subordinate communities are concentrated: the mosque (i.e., a local mosque for daily prayer, *jakka* in Wolof, as opposed to Friday Mosque, or *jumaa*), mausoleum of founder, residence of *shaykh*, *pénc*, public assembly, etc. Moreover, these public squares are identified by trees, either actual living specimens, through metaphor or by historical or toponymic evolution. Even the smallest Mouride community, every last *darou*, is similarly ordered around its shady central *pénc* with its mosque. The mosque faces Mecca; the community revolves around the mosque. Streets are wide and straight. They cross at right angles.<sup>148</sup> No community is considered so insignificant as to be unworthy of such proper configuration. Indeed modern visitors, just as those who witnessed Benin in the XVII<sup>th</sup> century, have never failed to be struck by the geometric neatness of Mouride urban planning. The town of Darou-Rahmane for instance is *"neat and pleasing. Houses are arranged around a shady pénc covered with clean sand. The serin of the town lives in a large compound on the west side of the square. In its center is a small mosque."*<sup>149</sup> Moreover, such order in town planning is by no means restricted to Mouride circles alone. Communities established by Senegal's Tijâniya *ṭariqa*, villages like Tabakali, are similarly organized.<sup>150</sup>

In these very modern examples, it is important to note that the ancient tree-centric spatial structure is preserved with its meaning intact. This is confirmed by the semantic evolution of the Wolof

---

<sup>148</sup> COPANS, 1980, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71: "The arrangement of compounds, or concessions — *keur* in Wolof — is one of the peculiar characteristics of Mouride villages when compared to the traditional village of Kayor. The basic principle is that of a large rectangular public square, *mpentye*, around which are arranged the various compounds. The *keur* of the marabou is always on the West side of the square, facing East... Thus, for Mourides, the geometric organization of space prevails, because, generally speaking, each *keur* is clearly defined. All streets meet at right angles... Mouride villages "look good" and we were often touched by the charm of a well ordered *mpentye*, shaded by one or two trees. The center of this square is usually occupied by the mosque." - translation is my own.

<sup>149</sup> COPANS, 1972, *op. cit.*, vol. 1.

<sup>150</sup> DUBOIS, "Les Serer et la question des Terres Neuves au Sénégal", 1975, p. 103.



language. Mouride communities are ordered around a central square, identified as the *pénc* — a term which formerly designated the palaver tree. This shift in vocabulary is an important indication of continuity in meaning as we pass from one system and institution to another. There is yet another definition of *pénc* in the modern Wolof language. The term designates the shelters which stand next to mosques on public squares. These shelters are hangar-type in construction, they open widely onto the surrounding square and could be translated as "loggia". The main purpose of the modern *pénc*, like its arboreal prototype, is to provide a clean shady place where the old pious men of a given community can gather in public. The *pénc* remains therefore very much a political space. In Touba, each of the reigning khalifas has possessed a *pénc* in front of his compound, facing the mosque. In ordinary times the *pénc* serves as forecourt to the residence before which it stands. During religious events, such as the annual *māggal* and the various *ziyāra* and *ʿid* festivals when Touba is thronged with pilgrims, the shady *pénc* shelters much prayer and Quranic recitation. Such *pénc* are not limited to Touba's central square, nor to Mouride communities for that matter. The *pénc* beside the mosque is a fixture on the public square of any number of sufi communities throughout Senegal. In the small Layène sanctuaries of Yoff and Cambérène (in the suburbs of Dakar), the *pénc* occupies the entire public square in front of the mosque and thus "cohabits" along with the mosque at the center of the community. The Qādirīya city of Ndiassane possesses a gigantic concrete *pénc* which, ever since its erection in the 1920's, shelters hundreds of pilgrims each year during the *gāmmu*.<sup>151</sup> As we have seen, the *gāmmu* was originally a political practice associated with royal trees on the *pénc* of Senegambian capitals. The term *gāmmu* now applies to organized pious "visits" (Arb. *ziyāra*) to Islamic sanctuaries as well as to such pious occasions as the festival of the nativity of the Prophet Muhammad (*mawlid al-nabī*), or the commemoration of his "naming"

---

<sup>151</sup> DIOUF, "Portrait de famille: évolution du khalifat", 1988, p. 8.

(*ʿaqiqa*).<sup>152</sup> Thus the terminology associated with ancient institutions and practices has been adopted for the new Islamic ones. What is more, the Wolof term *péncum Yalla* (the "Pénc of God") designates the Day of Judgment, when people shall congregate before their Lord (in the shade of that great pénc in the middle of the sky?). Emphasis here seems to be on the place of Judgment rather than on its time. Al-Ghazâlî too, it should be noted, spoke of "the courtyard of the Resurrection" and "the courtyard of Judgment Day"<sup>153</sup> thereby associating the Day to a distinct element of urban form, a cosmic place rather than an eschatological moment.

Touba's configuration is thus a modern development of ancient West African urban principles. The holy city has employed these principles in order to actualize an Islamic construct of universal significance. The catalyst of this synthesis has been the tree, the tree as an actual living phenomenon, as a symbol and an institution, as an image and an archetype. Originally, Touba was a lonely wilderness, marked only by its trees. Through Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba this wilderness became the home of an Islamic eschatological desire called *Ṭubā* and was transformed into a great spiritual metropolis. One could have expected that the actualization of this Islamic construct would have conformed to the acknowledged model of the "Islamic garden". The wilderness could have been reconfigured as a system of gardens in keeping with Quranic descriptions — as was the case with gardens elsewhere in the Muslim world. The tree as dominant element of the landscape would certainly have lent itself to such a development. This has not been the case. The holy city has been configured as a great urban complex and the basic unit of its organization is not the garden but the public square. The Islamic construct of *Ṭubā* has in effect been actualized by trees, but this actualization has adopted the West African urban model (the *pénc*) rather than the Islamic garden model. The African model itself

---

<sup>152</sup> An important *gammu* is organized by the Tijāniya *ṭariqa* in Tivaouane to commemorate the *mawlid al-nabî* (on the night of 12<sup>th</sup> Rabi' al-awwal). A week later (on the night of the 19<sup>th</sup>) the Qādiriya *ṭariqa* holds a *gammu* in Ndiassane in commemoration of the Prophet's *ʿaqiqa*.

<sup>153</sup> PETERS, *A Reader on Classical Islam*, 1994a, p. 296.

constitutes a distinct cosmological and spiritual construct — that of a properly aligned community, a rightly-guided community — and it has expressed it through the Tree archetype. The pénc is thus an African archetype equivalent in signification to the Islamic Straight Path. The very fact that this "type" possessed a name — that there is a specific term which designated and identified it — attests to its existence. The term pénc, it is important to note, does not designate a species of tree. It is not part of the African taxonomic lexicon. Rather, the term designates a system (social, political, spiritual) topographically expressed as "tree"; it designates an arboreal archetype. An imaginal cosmic tree called "pénc" was thus a potent construct in West African spirituality before the arrival of the Islamic Ṭubā, and the pénc had already exerted a determining effect on the configuration of places. Yet in no way was the signification of this African pénc in fundamental conflict with Islam. The holy city of Touba was configured as the Islamic Straight Path by using the African model of the properly configured community — the pénc. This surely constitutes a distinctly African contribution to the realization of an Islamic ideal. Ṭubā may be a legitimately Islamic construct of universal significance, but only specific West African arboreal practices (burial, transcription, foundation, constitution), and especially those involving urban principles (monuments and public space), can explain Touba's configuration and the meaning it imparts to the universal Islamic construct.

Is this to say then that Touba is yet another example of the syncretism of African Islam? If we were to stop our research here indeed this might seem the proper conclusion. Two quite distinct religious traditions can be seen as having combined to produce an entirely new phenomenon. The first chapter of this thesis has however rejected the "syncretist" premise. The African and Islamic traditions are not to be considered as entirely distinct. They share some common antecedents, notably in ancient Egypt. The various arboreal metaphors so recently assembled in Touba were already being formulated before the development of either the Islamic or West African traditions.

## Chapter 5

### EGYPTIAN TRADITION

#### the sycamore of Hathor and the ished of Iunu

#### Some preliminary remarks

Belief in an Afterlife is attested in Egypt well before the pharaonic period. This belief was instrumental to the way in which the dead were buried, as proper burial in this world was believed to affect destinies in the next one. Funeral monuments, furnishings and inscriptions continued thereafter to constitute essential expressions of Egyptian culture and the main and most consistent source of our knowledge of its religion.

Egyptian scripture, as it is known to us, is a compilation of hymns and supplications which in one form or another were buried with the dead over the course of three millennia. If the Qur'ân is the word of God addressed to humanity, Egyptian scripture on the contrary is the word of man addressed to God. People address the Divine according to ancient formulae, called "spells", first articulated in pre-dynastic times. Though not "revealed" in accordance with the Abrahamic prophetic model, this scripture was nonetheless "divine" and the hieroglyphs in which it was composed were known to Egyptians under the designation *medu neter* ("divine words").<sup>1</sup> Words had power. Divine words contained divine power. This power, or "energy", was "inherent in the actual written or engraved letters"<sup>2</sup> — in the script itself — and priest could access it. Names especially, names of people, gods, objects and *places*, in their hieroglyphic form were believed to contain a parcel of the very existence of that which they designated. The mortuary texts which constitute Egyptian scripture contained all the words and names which had to be uttered by the deceased as they journeyed towards eternal existence in the Hereafter. Ordinary citizens of Egypt could not usually read the hieroglyphs in which their scripture was composed (the cursive hieratic and then the phonetic demotic scripts

---

<sup>1</sup> BRISSON & OUELETTE, Le guide spirituel de l'Égypte, 1995, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> FOWDEN, The Egyptian Hermes, 1993, pp. 63-64.

were used for profane purposes). It was important however that they be able to access the appropriate words during their post-mortem journey, hence the profusion of tomb texts.

Egypt's sacred texts, unlike the books of the Bible, do not constitute narratives. Rather, somewhat like the Qur'ân, they express a large number of specific cosmogonic, cosmological and eschatological notions through a highly symbolic, "imaginal", vocabulary. Also, just as in the Qur'ân, Egyptian scripture evokes a number of "cosmic beings" (literary equivalents of prophets and angels), who are otherwise known through a parallel corpus of myths. These myths, oral in origin like the Biblical narratives, are necessary for the interpretation the sacred texts but they were not considered sacred in their own right. They constituted "scenes" in plays, called "mysteries", enacted within temples during religious festivals. There was never any single "canonical" version of a particular myth. Every temple and city remained faithful to its own specific "role" in the play.

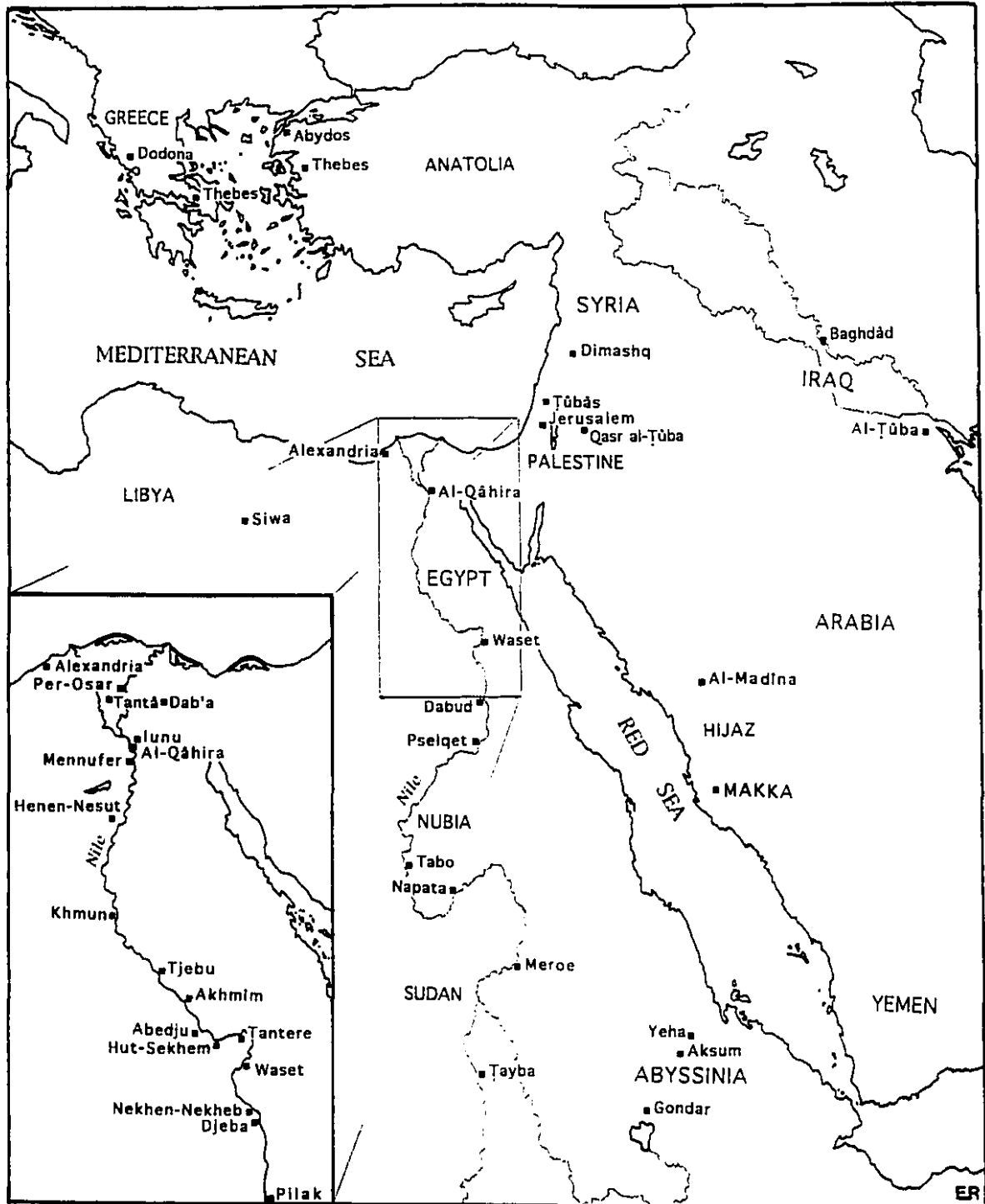
Egyptian scripture was subject to several distinct schools of interpretation over time. The oldest school centered on the Osiris myth of the pre-dynastic city of Abedju (Greek Abydos) and the Horus myth of Nekhen and Nekheb (Greek Hierakonopolis and Eileithiaspolis).<sup>3</sup> With the establishment of the Old Kingdom (end of IV<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE.) these myths were subject first to the royal cult in the temple of Ptah in Mennufer (Memphis) and later to the theologies of the priesthood of Râ in Iunu (Heliopolis) and of Thoth in Khmun (Hermopolis) (fig. 5.1). The highly institutionalized creed which resulted is known from the "Pyramid Texts" (VI<sup>th</sup> dynasty, XXIV<sup>th</sup> century BCE.).<sup>4</sup> During the First Intermediate Period these texts were reinterpreted by the royal priesthood in Henen-Nesut (Herakleopolis). Finally, during the XI<sup>th</sup> dynasty (XXII<sup>nd</sup> century BCE.), the theology of Iunu was reformulated by the priesthood of Amon in

---

<sup>3</sup> Ancient Egyptian toponyms are used in preference to the Greek ones, i.e., "Iunu" instead of "Heliopolis".

<sup>4</sup> Citations from the "Pyramid Texts" are from BUDGE, Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection, 1973, vol. 2, pp. 307-363; and GOYON, Rites funéraires de l'Ancienne Égypte 1972.

fig. 5.1 The Nile Valley and Adjacent Lands



Waset (Thebes), and it is mostly this last form (known as the "Coffin Texts"), replete with illustrations of every aspect of the eschatological process (Journey of the dead, Divine Judgment, life of Bliss) which has been preserved in the New Kingdom "Book of the Dead" (in reality entitled "Book of Going Forth by Day", XVI<sup>th</sup>-XII<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.).<sup>5</sup> Other New Kingdom scripture includes the "Book of Tuat", the "Book of Gates",<sup>6</sup> and the "Book of Breathings".<sup>7</sup> Despite these many modifications introduced by successive clergies, Egyptians generally adhered to the original Osirian roots and it is no accident that the Osirian myth was the one chosen for further elaboration by the Greek Ptolemies (III<sup>rd</sup> century BCE.) when they sought religious legitimacy. Finally, in its Ptolemaic form, the Osiris-Isis cult (along with other "oriental" religions) gained wide popularity throughout the Roman Empire in the three centuries prior to its Christianization.

The figure of Osiris is central to Egyptian eschatology. The Osirian myth presents a coherent system for conceiving of immortality in the Hereafter. Various recensions were known to the Greek and Latin authors (Plutarch especially) but the original story, like other "mysteries", was theatrical in nature. The Osirian Mystery varied somewhat according to the theological preferences of the different cities in which it was performed. Here follows a succinct version of the narrative according to Budge.<sup>8</sup> In the golden age at the beginning of time Osiris and Isis live as a divine sovereigns on earth. They are masters of art, culture and civilization. Osiris however is murdered by Seth. In one version, Seth dismembers Osiris and scatters his parts across the land. Isis searches for Osiris' limbs and finds all but one, his phallus. She reassembles him and, through some "parthenogenetic" process, she conceives their son Horus. According to another version Seth first locks Osiris in a box. The box then floats down the Nile (or all the way to the Phoenician port of Byblos

---

<sup>5</sup> Citations from the "Book of the Dead" are from ALLEN, The Book of the Dead or Going Forth by Day, 1974; and BUDGE, The Egyptian Book of the Dead 1967.

<sup>6</sup> BUDGE, The Egyptian Heaven and Hell 1975.

<sup>7</sup> GOYON, 1972, *op. cit.*.

<sup>8</sup> BUDGE, 1973, *op. cit.*.

according to Plutarch) and is beached among the papyrus. An "erica" tree then grows over it. Isis searches for him and frees his body from the box in the tree. Whatever the variant, Osiris is resurrected to life following Isis' intervention and he ascends to Tuat (the world beyond) where he becomes king and judge of the dead. Horus later avenges his father's murder by bringing Seth before a tribunal of gods. Thereafter Horus is acknowledged as heir to Osiris on earth. He becomes the Primordial Pharaoh, the necessary cosmically aligned being.

### Eschatological, Cosmological and Cosmogonic Symbols Compared

Diop has brought attention to the fact that the ancient Egyptian conception of the Afterlife already foreshadowed in all essential points the later Abrahamic and particularly Islamic eschatologies: immortality of the individual soul , divine judgment according to record on earth , ultimate destiny in either Paradise or Hell .<sup>9</sup> This eschatology had been consolidated as a coherent and cohesive doctrine by, at the very latest, the Middle Kingdom "Coffin Texts" (end of the III<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE.), but was only acquired progressively, and very much later (between the VIII<sup>th</sup> century BCE. and the II<sup>nd</sup> century C.E.), in Jewish and Christian doctrine.<sup>10</sup> To attempt then to derive Abrahamic eschatology from Greece, as has been proposed by Charles,<sup>11</sup> is to ignore the fact that both the Greek philosophers and the Hebrew prophets had intimate experience of the already anciently established Egyptian eschatology. Osirian eschatology (personal immortality, divine judgment, retribution according to record, eternal life of bliss for the righteous) was an operative system 1500 years before Plato's "Phaedrus" and nearly 1000 years prior to the Biblical "Exodus". This system was an *a priori*, a "given" without which the entire corpus of Egyptian scripture would have been meaningless.

---

<sup>9</sup> DIOP, Ch. A., Civilisation ou barbarie , 1981, pp. 416-419.

<sup>10</sup> CHARLES, A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life in Israel, in Judaism, and in Christianity , 1899.

<sup>11</sup> *idem*.



The eschatological system described above is an essential message of the Qur'ân. Al-Assiouty has demonstrated how the symbols around which this Osirian eschatology is articulated (Ledge, Throne, Balance, Bridge, Pool, Gate) are closely paralleled by identical Quranic notions.<sup>12</sup> It is important to explain this "systematic" parallel between the pharaonic symbols and the Islamic ones before addressing the question of the significance of the Ancient Egyptian arboreal archetype for Tûbâ.

Day of Reckoning In the Egyptian system judgment was individual and immediate. There was no eschaton, or "end-of-the-world/end-of-time" syndrome. Immediately upon death each person was judged by Osiris and either acceded to Paradise (an eternity of bliss) or was destroyed (deprived of immortality). Osiris, as well as being Judge, was associated in Egyptian tradition with record-keeping, with the compiling of information in view of the "day of reckoning" - ḥsb, "reckoning", "taking account", "computing" (Spell 125 S1). In the Qur'ân this notion is identically expressed as yaum al-ḥisâb, "the day of reckoning" (38;53).

Ledge of Deeds Thoth, the divine scribe, was believed to keep a written record of every individual in the form of a "register of the years" of their life. This register, translated as "palette" (Spell 94), can be compared to the Quranic "Tablet" (Lawḥ). On it were written the words and the deeds of mortals.<sup>13</sup> This palette was then used during judgment on the Day of Reckoning. There are clear similarities here with the Quranic "chronicle" or "ledger of deeds":

Every man's chronicle (al-zamnâhu) We have hung round his neck, and We will bring forth to him on the resurrection day a book which he will find wide open \* Read your book; your own self is sufficient as a reckoner (ḥasiban) against you this day. "Al-Isrâ" (17;13-14)

Throne and Balance Osiris presides over judgment from his "throne" (he is addressed as "lord of the throne of the sky" in Spell Pleyte 169 S1) and the act is performed with a "balance" (Spell 185c S1). Both

<sup>12</sup> AL-ASSIOUTY, Origines égyptiennes du christianisme et de l'islâm, 1989.

<sup>13</sup> BUDGE, 1973, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 99, 112.

Fig. 5.2 Throne and Balance



Scene of judgment in the hall of the Two Truths.

Source: WILKINSON, Sir John Garner, The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians John Murray Publishers, New York, 1878, vol. 3, p. 469.

Osiris, from his throne (upon the water), presides over judgment of the soul of the deceased. The soul (represented by the heart) is weighed on the balance against Maat (represented by the miniature female figure with ostrich feather headdress). The medium may be theatrical rather than prosaic but there is much in this scene which is in agreement with Quranic descriptions of the Day of Reckoning. Note the ibis-headed Thoth, with pen and tablet, recording the result of judgment.

these symbols are clearly represented in tomb illustrations (fig. 5.2) and both are explicitly mentioned in the context of "reckoning" in the Qur'ân:

It is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His Throne (ʿarsh) is upon the waters, that He might try you (li-yabluwakum), which of you is best in conduct... - "Hûd" (11;7)

We shall fix the scales of justice (mawâzin al-qist) on the Day of Resurrection, so that none will be wronged in the least; and even if it were equal to a mustard seed in weight We shall take it into account. We are sufficient for computation (hâsibin). - "The Prophets" (21;47)

Straight Path Osiris on his Throne judges people according to the record of their acts and words in life. This record (represented by the human heart, home of the mind) is weighed on the Balance against the universal ethical code called Maat (primary meaning "straight", but also "truth", "right", "rule").<sup>14</sup> Maat is paralleled in the Islamic tradition by the "Straight Path" as set down by God's revealed law. This parallel can best be demonstrated by referring to one specific Egyptian text, Spell 125 of the "Book of the Dead". Spell 125 is important for it contains the list of "42 negative confessions" which the deceased, on the Day of Reckoning, will have to recite with conviction. The deceased must solemnly swear that he or she has not committed a number of specified "wrongs": "I have not despised God", "I have not killed", "I have not fornicated", "I have not stolen"...<sup>15</sup> For Egyptians, Maat was Divine Law. It dictated the proper manner in which human relations on earth must be conducted so that people might accede to life in the Hereafter.

Pool Judgment of the deceased is conducted in a Judgment Hall (called the Hall of the Double Maat — Right and Truth). Besides the throne and the balance, this Hall contains a pool, the "Pool of the Two Truths" (Spell 1 S6) and this is paralleled in Islam by Kawthar (Qur'ân 108;1-3), the "Basin of Abundance", the Basin of Muḥammad,

<sup>14</sup> KARENGA, "Towards a Sociology of Maatian Ethics", 1989, pp. 352-395.

<sup>15</sup> BUDGE, 1967, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-203, 345-353.

locus of his intercession. The pool in the Osirian Judgment Hall is an abyss where, following the weighing of their hearts, the minor transgressions of those judged to be righteous are destroyed, so that the Blessed may pass through the gates of Paradise in a state of complete purity.<sup>16</sup> Likewise in Islamic tradition, the transgressions of all but the "most sinful" of Muslims will be absolved in Kawthar before the Blessed enter Paradise.<sup>17</sup>

Abode of Peace Just as in the Qur'ân, following Osirian Judgment the deceased are sorted into two classes; those to the right of Osiris will enter Sekhet Hetep (the Field of Peace) or Sekhet Ârû (the Field of Reeds), the Quranic Dâr al-Salâm (6;127), through cool refreshing water. Sekhet Hetep was a lush well-tended garden by the banks of the celestial Nile where the beatified deceased each receive an allotment of land where various grains and fruit of an ethereal type would be harvested for their sustenance by celestial servants, counterparts to the paradisiacal wildân mukhalladûn and hûr promised the Righteous in the Qur'ân (56;17-22).

Gates and Keepers The Egyptian Paradise was divided into seven distinct areas, called Ârit. Each Ârit was entered through a "gate" attended by three "keepers". These gatekeepers had to be addressed by those who aspired to "become" Osiris (Spell 147). Other spells (Spell 145) enumerate fourteen or twenty-one gates, which are of course multiples of seven. The geography of this early Egyptian Paradise resembles in some ways that of the later Islamic one. The Islamic Paradise, though not explicitly described as such in the Qur'ân, is likewise supposed to be composed of seven or eight distinct gardens.<sup>18</sup> What is attested by the Qur'ân (13;23-24, 39;73-74) is that the promised Garden is entered through "gates" whose "keepers" will greet the postulants to Glory.

Bridge As for those to the left of Osiris, they will enter hell through "waters of fire",<sup>19</sup> the Quranic 'ayn âniya (88;5). This hell is

<sup>16</sup> BUDGE, 1973, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 346-347.


<sup>17</sup> SMITH & HADDAD, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection, 1981, pp. 80-83.

<sup>18</sup> SMITH & HADDAD, 1981, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>19</sup> BUDGE, 1975, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-119.

constituted by a number of fiery pits where the damned are consumed in flames. In effect the damned fall into the infernal pits from a narrow "bridge" (represented by a snake).<sup>20</sup> We recognize here a precursor of the Quranic "bridge over hell" (*ṣirāt al-jahim*, 37;23). Some Quranic commentators have argued that this bridge, reported to be as thin as a hair and as sharp as a sword, is also referred to as *al-ṣirāt* in *sūra "Yâ Sîn"* (36;66).

The Osirian eschatological system fits into an overarching Egyptian cosmology, certain elements of which can also be related to equivalent Islamic notions. Egyptian cosmology is known to us from the "Book of *Tuat*" and the "Book of Gates".<sup>21</sup> These texts, inscriptions of which survive from the Middle Kingdom and the New Kingdom, describe in narrative form the structure of the Cosmos.

Twelve Heavenly Abodes *Tuat* (the Netherworld) does not lie "beneath" the earth as the English term implies, but rather in the sky. It is manifest as the realm of the "fixed" stars (the star in its hieroglyph, , is unequivocal on this point). *Tuat* is a circular stellar "valley", subdivided into twelve "hours" corresponding to the twelve zodiacal abodes, the twelve hours of the night, and inhabited by innumerable cosmic beings: decans, demons, and angels. A cosmic "river" runs through it and every night *Râ* traverses each abode in turn on his celestial ship.

Qâf The inhabited Earth is surrounded by a cosmic mountain, similar to the *Qâf* of Islamic cosmology. This circular mountain has two "gates", one in the East called *Bakhau* through which the rising sun enters the world each morning, and one to the West called *Restau* through which it departs each evening and which the deceased too must use in order to depart this world and enter *Tuat*. Thus the Egyptian *Tuat* was entered through the West (*amenti*) — that is the "right" for the south-oriented Egyptians — and the Righteous were referred to as "Westerners" (*amentiû*). Osiris was the first to pass through this western gate and open the way to eternal life for mortal

---

<sup>20</sup> DIOP, "L'Antiquité africaine par l'image, 1975, p. 34.

<sup>21</sup> BUDGE, 1975, *op. cit.*

humans. In effect, Osiris' oldest sobriquet was Khentamentiu, "King of the Westerners". Mortals, upon their deaths, would join Osiris in Tuat to be judged according to the record of their lives on earth. They would then be expedited either to Paradise or to Hell. Osirian Judgment was variously believed to occur in the second, third or sixth "hour". Other "hours" served as loci where the damned were consumed in infernal pits, or else constituted the fertile fields of Paradise where the blessed lived on eternally.

Lord of the Two Horns Among his many sobriquets in the "Book of the Dead" (Spell 165) Amon is addressed as "Lord of the Two Horns" because of his representation as a ram. In his Mysteries, Osiris too was referred to as "Possessor of the Two Horns", in this case because of his association with the ram-headed Amon.<sup>22</sup> Thus the Quranic expression "Dhū al-Qarnain" can found in ancient Egyptian scripture. In Islamic tradition it is usually accepted that Dhū al-Qarnain is to be equated with Alexander of Macedonia.<sup>23</sup> Other commentators have related Dhū al-Qarnain to Cyrus of Persia.<sup>24</sup> Yet, like Osiris, the Quranic Dhū al-Qarnain is primarily a cosmic being, not a world conqueror. He administers divine Justice somewhere in the westernmost part of the heavens, the setting place of the sun, equivalent to the Egyptian Amenti:

And they will ask you about Dhī al-Qarnain , say: I will recite to you an account of him \* Surely We established him in the land and granted him means of access to every thing \* So he followed a course \* Until, when he reached the setting-place of the sun , he found it setting in a muddy spring, and found by it a people. We said: O Dhā al-Qarnain! either punish them or show them kindness \* He said: As to him who is unjust, we will chastise him, then shall he be returned to his Lord, who will inflict on him terrible punishment \* And as for him who believes and does good, he shall have goodly reward, and We will speak to him an easy word of Our command. - "The Cave" (18;83-88)

<sup>22</sup> LALOUETTE, Textes sacrés et textes profane de l'ancienne Égypte 1987, vol. 2, p. 117, 285.

<sup>23</sup> YUSUF ALI, The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'ân, 1934, vol. 1, pp. 760-765.

<sup>24</sup> ALI, Al-Qur'ân, 1984, p. 259.

Alexander, it should be remembered, adopted the two horns of the ram-headed Amon while in Egypt (at the oracle of Amon in Siwa oasis) and it is to the Oasis of Amon that he commanded that his body be returned for burial.<sup>25</sup> Herodotus points out that the image of Amon in Siwa had a "ram's face".<sup>26</sup> The Macedonian conqueror was thus adopting a recognized Egyptian symbol of the Divine when he attempted to claim divine status for himself, and there is no doubt that upon his death he expected to be united with Amon, "Lord of the Two Horns". The image of the ram as reflection of the Divine remains widespread in Saharan and Sudanic Africa.<sup>27</sup> In Meroitic temples too Amon was worshipped in his ram-headed form.

In turn, the Egyptian cosmology fits into an overarching cosmogony. This cosmogony, variously attested to in Egyptian traditions, conceives of the world as a "Mound" or "Egg" emerging from a primordial matrix called Nun.<sup>28</sup> The Universe can thus be defined as conscious ordered matter as opposed to the chaotic matter (matter without form) from which it emerged.

Creation According to the Heliopolitan theology (the theology developed by the priests of Râ in Iunu) Atum is the personification of the ontological "moment". He is the Mound emerging from Nun. He is the self-generated Being at the origin of the Universe, the first conscious existence (through his will to Be), the first cause to coalesce out of eternal no-thing. Atum represents creation in so far as creation distinguishes the Universe from the un-creation of Nun. He is the One; all subsequent existence is but fractions of him. Atum first produces Shu (air) and Tefnut (humidity), then Geb (earth) and Nut (sky). These four in turn produce Seth, Nephthys, and especially Osiris and Isis from whom sexual existence descends. Râ, Ptah, Amon, Thoth, Hathor and other gods are personifications of various aspects of this One Ennead. They represent specific manners of

---

<sup>25</sup> FAKHRY, Siwa Oasis, 1973.


<sup>26</sup> HERODOTUS, The Histories, 1954, p. 332.

<sup>27</sup> LAM, "Quelques similitudes culturelles entre l'Afrique du Nord et l'Afrique de l'Ouest", 1982.

<sup>28</sup> OBENGA, La philosophie africaine de la période pharaonique, 1990, pp. 27-51.

creating, sustaining and providing for the Universe, of protecting the cosmic Mound from Chaos which surrounds it and continues to threatened it.

While the priests of Iunu (Heliopolis) developed this Ennead, the priests of Khmun (Hermopolis) were expounding a cosmogonic Ogdoad consisting of four principles, each constituted by a positive and a negative (male and female) element: Nun (chaotic matter) and its opposite Nunet, Heh (space/time) and Hehet, Kek (darkness) and Keket, and Amon (the hidden Divine, or initial rational principle) and Amonet. This Ogdoad was responsible for creating, animating and sustaining the cosmic Egg by means of its thought (ib, "heart") and word (nes, "tongue").<sup>29</sup>

Tawhid In Egyptian mathematics (well before Pythagoras), numbers arise from the fractioning of "1", and not from its multiplication.<sup>30</sup> Only the non-existent Nun is truly one and undifferentiated. The existent is dual with regard to Nun and multiple by its manifestations. We can discern here a tawhid of sorts. This Egyptian theology of Oneness was important to the subsequent development of monotheist philosophies. It transpires in the works of Plotinus and in those of the Hermetists and Gnostics and it is especially developed in Ismā'īlī tawhid.<sup>31</sup> The Ogdoad of Khmun (khmun, , actually designates the number eight), though it differed from the Ennead of Iunu, was not erected in opposition to it as has been suggested.<sup>32</sup> Both cosmogonies, and others as well, were considered "true". They all expressed fundamental religious truth and apparent contradictions between them arose from the differences of perspective or of level of understanding — "the Ogdoad reveals the Ennead" according to Hermetists.<sup>33</sup> In the entire 3000 year history of Egyptian theology, with the single noteworthy exception of Akhenaten's short-lived monotheist miḥna (1379-1362 BCE.),<sup>34</sup> there

<sup>29</sup> LALOUETTE, 1987, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 35-38; OBENGA, 1990, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-51.

<sup>30</sup> BRISSON & OUELETTE, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>31</sup> CORBIN, Histoire de la philosophie islamique, 1986, pp. 122-124.

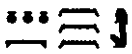


<sup>32</sup> VANDIER, La religion égyptienne, 1949.

<sup>33</sup> FOWDEN, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>34</sup> REDFORD, Akhenaten: the Heretic King 1984.



is no indication of any political or social conflict or controversy arising from these supposedly competing systems. No single theology, no single city, claimed to possess the whole entire truth. Rather, each developed a particular perspective, a way of comprehending ultimate Reality, much as today the "particle" and the "wave" models, far from being contradictory, both contribute to explaining the physical properties of light.<sup>35</sup>

Nûn The primordial Nun of Egypt has passed into the Islamic notion of Nûn.<sup>36</sup> In Islamic cosmology Nûn is the name of the "fish" that upholds the world. It has been expressed as the Biblical fish of Sheol who swallows Jonah and takes him to the "bottoms of the mountains" ("Jonah" 2;6). It is not immediately clear how the term Nûn, and the singular letter "n" which expresses it, came to be identified with this cosmic fish, first in Jewish tradition (נ) and then in the Islamic one (ن). There is no doubt however that the ancient Egyptian Nun  was cryptographically linked to the hieroglyphic letter "n" (  ), its defining characteristic being "water" or "ocean" (  ). The Egyptian Nun is both cosmic (surrounding creation) and cosmogonic (preceding creation). In effect, un-creation continues to exist beyond creation; Nun surrounds the Universe and confines it. It even penetrates the Universe through the common liquid element of water. Following dismemberment, the phallus of Osiris, swallowed by a fish, disappears for ever into the Nun. The Abrahamic Nûn is abyssal. It lies "below" the world and supports it. As an aquatic state, Nûn may also be related to the cosmological image of "water" upon which is the Divine Throne (Qur'ân 11;7)<sup>37</sup> and to the "World Ocean" which Classical and Medieval geographers believed surrounded the inhabited earth (Europe, Asia, Africa) and defined it. Jonah (called Dhû al-Nûn in the Qur'ân, 21;87) and the chosen sobriquet of the Egyptian Sufi (Dhû al-Nûn al-Miṣrî) may be seen as perpetuating the ancient cosmogony (the formless matter of un-creation) within the confines of the later Abrahamic cosmology. It is a vision of this

<sup>35</sup> HORNUNG, Les dieux de l'Égypte 1992, pp. 216-222.

<sup>36</sup> REDFORD, Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times, 1992, p. 396.

<sup>37</sup> AL-ASSIOUTY, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

Nûn which Ahmadou Bamba experiences during his moment of transcendence and to which we will return in the second part of this chapter.

The Osirian eschatology is thus articulated around certain specific symbols which also characterize the Islamic one. Some of these symbols (Throne, Balance, Pool, Bridge, Gate, Abyss) are archetypes, or "fixed" entities (Ibn 'Arabi's *a'yân thâbita*).<sup>38</sup> They express complex or abstract notions as clearly identifiable images. These archetypes, and the notions "fixed" to them (power, justice, purification), have therefore existed unaltered in the Imaginal world for five millennia. They constitute a complete system in both Ancient Egyptian scripture and in the Qur'ân. Because there is no possibility that such a strict parallel is accidental or fortuitous we must conclude that the Qur'ân confirms the validity of the older system, that it attests to the reality of these archetypes.

### Tree of Life

Just as the archetypes discussed above are readily identifiable in both the Osirian and the Islamic eschatologies, so too is this the case with the Tree. The first half of this chapter will present the pharaonic arboreal archetype as it can be known through textual sources. The second half will add to this understanding by analyzing Ancient Egypt's sacred topography.

For the Ancient Egyptians the image of the tree, the Tree as archetype, is associated with notions of "Life" generally. As early as the Old Kingdom "Pyramid Texts" (XXIV<sup>th</sup> century BCE.) the Tree of Life figures as the abode of the gods, the abode of Eternity, the ultimate destiny desired by mortals on earth:

...These (Great Ones) of the imperishable stars give unto Pepi the tree of life whereon they themselves do live, so that he also may live thereon. (Pyramid Text, #420)<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> FAKHRY, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 1983, p. 252.

<sup>39</sup> BUDGE, 1973, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 327.

This is the oldest scriptural reference anywhere to the Tree of Life. The tree symbolizes continuity between life on earth and eternal life in T̄uat. It is a celestial image, being "of the imperishable stars". It assures continuity between Earth and Heaven and also communion between humanity and the Divine. The resurrected Osiris, King of Dead, is called "Tree of Life" in the Mysteries,<sup>40</sup> just as later Coptic tradition (the Teachings of Silvanus) refers to Jesus as the "Tree of Life".<sup>41</sup> The Tree of Life is also maternal. Gods are born beneath it and they are suckled from its sap. Nut bears Osiris beneath the kesbet tree (species unidentified) while the latter's son Horus is recorded as having been born beneath an acacia (Pyramid Text #436).<sup>42</sup> Râ, especially, comes forth into the world beneath Hathor's sycamore.<sup>43</sup> Râ (later Amon-Râ), could also be cited as the creator of the Tree of Life.<sup>44</sup>

The various functions and attributes of the Egyptian "Tree of Life" find further expression in a number of distinct celestial trees.

#### Sycamore of Hathor

The Egyptian Paradise is graced by a Great Sycamore. The Righteous who accede to Heaven are nourished with the fine celestial fruit of an ethereal or luminous nature ("of light")<sup>45</sup> supplied by this tree, provider of eternal life. This sycamore is an attribute of Nut, personification of the sky. The Egyptian Paradise is thus a celestial place and not a chthonic one, not an abyss as is the case with the early Jewish Sheol or the Greek Hades. At no time in its history is the Egyptian Paradise ever located "below" the earth. From the outset it is in the sky, in Heaven.

The celestial sycamore is mentioned in the "Pyramid Texts":

---

<sup>40</sup> LALOUETTE, 1987, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 82.

<sup>41</sup> LICHTHEIM, Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature in the International Context, 1983, p. 192.

<sup>42</sup> LURKER, The Gods and Symbols of the Ancient Egyptians 1974, p. 24.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>44</sup> REDFORD, 1992, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

<sup>45</sup> BUDGE, The Gods of the Egyptians 1969, vol. 2, p. 62.

Homage to thee, O Sycamore , companion of the God, whereunder stand the gods of Nut! Flame blazeth about it, fire burneth inside it, Maat extinguishes it... (Pyramid Text, #669).<sup>46</sup>

Thereafter it is the subject of many hymns:

O thou sycamore of Nut , mayest thou give me water and breath that is in thee... (The Book of the Dead, Spell 59:S).<sup>47</sup>

"Where art thou permitted to eat?" say they, the gods, to me. I eat under this sycamore of Hathor my mistress... I live on bread of white wheat, and my beer is of red barley... (The Book of the Dead, Spell 52:S2).

As we have seen in chapter 4, the sycamore (Egyptian nehet or neha, *Ficus sycomorus*, commonly called pharaoh's fig), like its more famous cousin the *Ficus carica* (or common fig tree, of Syrian origin), is renowned for its shade, its milky sap and its fleshy fig-fruit, all signifying the "motherly" attributes of sustenance and protection . Contrary to its Syrian counterpart however, the figs of the *Ficus sycomorus* emerge in bunches directly from the bark of its trunk and limbs rather than at the extremity of its branches.<sup>48</sup> This peculiarity has not escaped the notice of visitors such as Leo Africanus<sup>49</sup> and it renders the Egyptian sycamore immediately recognizable in illustrations. The sycamore is believed to have originated in the Yemen-Abyssinia area and we have also met up with a sub-species of the pharaoh's fig (*Ficus sycomorus capensis*) in West Africa, the Wolof soto ajjana or "toothstick of Paradise".<sup>50</sup>

The paradisiacal sycamore of the Egyptians is inhabited by Hathor, the universal "cosmic mother of the world" who conceives, creates and sustains human life.<sup>51</sup> Hathor was known as "Lady of the Sycamore".<sup>52</sup> From her celestial tree she would provide the deceased

<sup>46</sup> BUDGE, 1973, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 344.

<sup>47</sup> All citations from the Book of the Dead are according to ALLAN, 1974, *op. cit.*, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>48</sup> MONTASIR & HASSIB, Illustrated Manual Flora of Egypt , 1956, p. 38.

<sup>49</sup> AFRICANUS, Description de l'Afrique , 1956, p. 577.

<sup>50</sup> GARNIER, "L'arbre du Paradis", 1948, p. 17.

<sup>51</sup> BUDGE, 1969, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 431.

<sup>52</sup> BUHL, "The Goddesses of the Egyptian Tree Cult", 1947, p. 86.

with the "water and breath" of eternal sustenance (fig. 5.3). The soul of Osiris, upon being resurrected and ascending to Heaven, was "rejuvenated among her branches" as his "sarcophagus became green".<sup>53</sup> During certain Osirian festivals, specially made statues of the god containing grain would be entombed within sycamores, or else buried at their roots, and would be allowed to germinate there.<sup>54</sup> Throughout Egypt, Osirian temples, which were believed to be the tombs of his dismembered parts, invariably contained sycamore groves.



**Fig. 5.3 Sycamore of Hathor**

Source: COOK, Roger, *The Tree of Life*, Thames & Hudson, New York, 1974, p. 107.

Hathor, from her sycamore, bestows eternal sustenance (food and drink) on those who have attained blissful immortality. Bunches of figs grow from the paradisiacal tree's limbs. Note the lively pool (stocked with fish, fowl, and lotus) at its root.

<sup>53</sup> LURKER, 1974, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>54</sup> VANDIER, 1949, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

Hymns addressed to Hathor in her Tree expressed the desire of the Righteous for sustenance in the hereafter. Illustrations of the "Book of the Dead" show the goddesses Nut and Hathor residing within the branches of the paradisiacal sycamore, bestowing bread and water onto the deceased below while water gushes forth from its roots.<sup>55</sup> In representations of Paradise on the walls of New Kingdom tombs, alignments of sycamores and palm trees appear one after the other, while basins of water lap at their feet.<sup>56</sup> There can be no doubt then that, like Tûbâ in Islamic tradition, the sycamore of Hathor was an appealing symbol of prosperity in the celestial Afterlife and that it expressed popular eschatological desire. On stone monuments there are representations of peasants paying their devotions to "Our Lady of the Sycamore",<sup>57</sup> and the image of Hathor in her sycamore remained a recurrent feature of tomb illustration well into the Roman period.<sup>58</sup> Living manifestations of Hathor's sycamore were worshipped in various sanctuaries.

Hathor is figured as an inhabitant of a palm tree. Hathor, responsible for the milk and figs of the sycamore of Paradise, is also responsible for the "bread" of the paradisiacal date palms. She is "Lady of the Doum-Palms":

I thrive as I eat (bread) beneath the foliage of the doum-palm of Hathor my Mistress... (Book of the Dead, Spell 82c)

The doum-palm (Egyptian ima or mama, *Hyphæne thebaica*), native to the Upper Nile, like the sycamore, was a tree of Paradise for Egyptians. Both trees signified motherly nourishment in Heaven. Pharaohs had themselves represented suckling their sap in infancy,<sup>59</sup> just as the gods had been suckled by the cosmic Tree of Life. We can recognize here aspects of the Islamic palm tree/paternal aunt metaphor.

---

<sup>55</sup> BUDGE, 1973, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 259-260.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 130.

<sup>57</sup> WIEDEMANN, *Religion of the Ancient Egyptians*, 1897, p. 158.

<sup>58</sup> COOK, *The Tree of Life*, 1992, fig. 10.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, figs. 11-12.

The doum-palm however not only represented sustenance but it signified permanence, eternity, as its Arabic-derived English name still testifies to (dawm, "eternity" in Arabic). The doum-palm leaf specifically was an attribute of Heh (personification of time) and it signified "year"; this leaf can be seen represented in conjunction with such numerals as 100,000.<sup>60</sup>

#### Ished of lunu

Foremost among celestial trees in Ancient Egypt was the ished. The Egyptian ished is habitually identified as the "persea" tree (*Persea gratissima* of the *Lauraceæ* family). The persea is a tropical fruit-bearing tree known commonly as the avocado or alligator-pear. This tree however is native to America. The dendrological confusion between the ancient ished and the modern persea has arisen from the Latin translation of the original Egyptian term.<sup>61</sup> Whatever persea may have designated for Pliny, there is no possibility that Ancient Egyptians knew the avocado. Wilkinson identifies the ancient Latin term "persea" with the modern *Balanites ægyptiaca* (of the *Simarubaceæ* order).<sup>62</sup> This is a small thorny desert tree (Arb. hijlij) which bears acorn-type nuts (called lâlawn in Arabic). The *Cordia sebestena* (*Boraginaceæ* family), of which there are several varieties: the *C. myxa*, *C. gharaf* and the *C. latifolia* (col. Egyptian gharaf, mukhait, gimbil)<sup>63</sup> has also been proposed as a likely identification of the ished.<sup>64</sup> These small trees also bear edible sweet-tasting nuts which are valued for medicinal purposes (a medicament known as "sabistan").<sup>65</sup> These nuts are also used in confectionery of sweets. According to Pliny, Egyptians made "wine" from the nuts of the persea,<sup>66</sup> and this might support its identification as the *Cordia sebestena*. The bark is exploited for its gum and fibers (for cordage).

---

<sup>60</sup> LURKER, 1974, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>61</sup> BROSSE, *Mythologie des arbres*, 1989, p. 339.

<sup>62</sup> WILKINSON, *The Ancient Egyptians: their Life and Customs* 1994, vol. 2, p. 28.

<sup>63</sup> MUSCHLER, *A Manual Flora of Egypt*, 1912, p. 780-782

<sup>64</sup> BROSSE, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

<sup>65</sup> DALZIEL, *Useful Plants of West Tropical Africa*, 1937, p. 425.

<sup>66</sup> WILKINSON, 1994, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 27.

Also, *Cordia* wood is scented and was apparently used by Ancient Egyptians both as an incense and for the manufacture of sarcophagi.<sup>67</sup> The species is cultivated in West Africa (Wolof mbey or mbey-gilli). Another possible identification for the ished is the *Mimusops schimperi* of the *Sapotaceæ* family. The *Mimusops schimperi* is noted for its distinctive "monkey-face" flowers and was originally native to Nubia. It was nonetheless cultivated in Upper Egypt as of pre-dynastic times. The tree produces a fleshy red fruit whose seeds are ricinus. Ex-voto of these fruit have been found in the step pyramid of Djoser (c. 2649 BCE.) and this fact may have led to its identification as the ished.<sup>68</sup> The tree is also noted as a shade tree.<sup>69</sup> Illustrations of the ished in tombs depict a small tree with nuts or possibly berries, but certainly not pears or avocados. Pending a definitive botanical identification for the ancient ished, it is preferable to continue to refer to it by its Egyptian name rather than to attempt a translation.

The ished is primarily a cosmic symbol. It is foremost the locus of the victory of Râ (the sun) over the dark forces of night. An important passage of the "Book of the Dead" refers to this cosmic battle at the ished:

I am this Cat beside whom the ished-tree was split in lunu, on this night wherein the enemies of the Lord of the Universe were annihilated... (The Book of the Dead, Spell 17aS15).

The "Cat" here is Râ. Illustrations which accompany Spell 17 show him beneath the ished of lunu piercing the evil Âpep serpent, personification of darkness, with a knife (fig. 5.4).<sup>70</sup> This archetypal struggle (St. George slaying the dragon), which lasts all night, every night, is resolved at daybreak each morning when the red glow on the eastern horizon confirms that the Âpep serpent is indeed being consumed by punitive flames and that the sun will shortly rise to

<sup>67</sup> DALZIEL, 1937, *op. cit.*, p. 425.

<sup>68</sup> VERCOUTTER, *L'Égypte et la vallée du Nil*, 1992, vol.1, p. 46.

<sup>69</sup> HUTCHINSON & DALZIEL, *Flora of West Tropical Africa*, 1936, vol. 2, p. 14.

<sup>70</sup> BUDGE, *Egyptian Ideas of the Future Life*, 1959, p. 85.



illuminate the world once again. This act is represented as the "splitting" of the ished and it marks the continuous triumph of Rá's light, the daily victory of Right and Truth over evil, of Light over darkness, of ordered creation over the chaos of Nun.<sup>71</sup>



Fig. 5.4 Ished of lunu

Source: COOK, Roger, *The Tree of Life*, Thames & Hudson, New York, 1974, p. 115.


The cosmic Ished of lunu, described in Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead*, was the object of much speculation and elaboration. The celestial tree figures in the epic and ever victorious struggle of light over darkness, as depicted in this New Kingdom tomb illustration. Despite the careful rendering of the tree's trunk and fruit in illustrations such as this one, the ished has yet to be properly identified.

This cosmic act, marked by the ished, occurs in lunu, the Abode of the Sun, the Biblical "On" or "Beth-Shemesh", "Heliopolis" to the Greeks. lunu first rose to prominence during the Old Kingdom as the prime sanctuary for the cult of Rá. It was the home of the "Heliopolitan" theology, the Ennead discussed earlier in this chapter. This theology, elaborated at the beginning of the III<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE., was the first theology ever to be consecrated in writing and it was to exert enormous influence on subsequent religious thought, both within Egypt and abroad.<sup>72</sup> "lun" means "pole" or "pillar"<sup>73</sup> and it clearly represented a *qutb*, a cosmic link between Earth and the

<sup>71</sup> LALOUETTE, 1987, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 69.

<sup>72</sup> According to Genesis (41;44), Joseph was married to the daughter of Poti-phera, High Priest of On. According to Strabo, it is in the temples of Heliopolis that Greek students (Plato, Pythagoras, Archimedes, Eudoxes...) were first initiated into the sciences.

<sup>73</sup> DEFONTAINES, *Géographie et religion*, 1948, p. 145.

realm of the Divine in Tuat, as the pillar in the hieroglyphic form of the toponym (  ) demonstrates. This cosmic link was assured by a number of related symbols, foremost of which was the benben, or "obelisk". The name benben derives from the term wbn, "to shine", "to rise". The benben of lunu marked the initial rising of the sun above the cosmic Mound. At the core of the lunu's configuration as a holy city was the Hut-Benben, the "Sanctuary of the Obelisk". This sanctuary was most probably created around a predynastic sacred stone and it was around this omphalos that the cult of Râ was first organized.<sup>74</sup> Like Jacob's stone in Bethel, the benben of lunu signaled the pole, the axis to Divine Light. And it is in the Hut-Benben that an ished, a living manifestation of Râ's cosmic ished, actually grew.

Many New Kingdom tomb texts evoke the ished of lunu as a manifestation of Râ's blessings, of his light:

*Tu prends le frais sous le feuillage du ished vénérable à lunu, tu t'éveilles chaque jour et tu vois les rayons du soleil.* (First Book of Breathings)<sup>75</sup>

The ished here is synonymous with the sun itself. Light, Divine Light, emanates from the ished.

*Que mon cœur ne me soit pas ravi par les Combattants dans lunu! Je suis celui devant qui Atoum énonce les annales sous l'auguste ished à lunu, annales que rédige Thoth lui-même. La lumière entre dans mes yeux pour que je puisse me déplacer pendant la nuit, pendant le jour, afin de voir ses rayons chaque jour!* (Second Book of Breathings)<sup>76</sup>

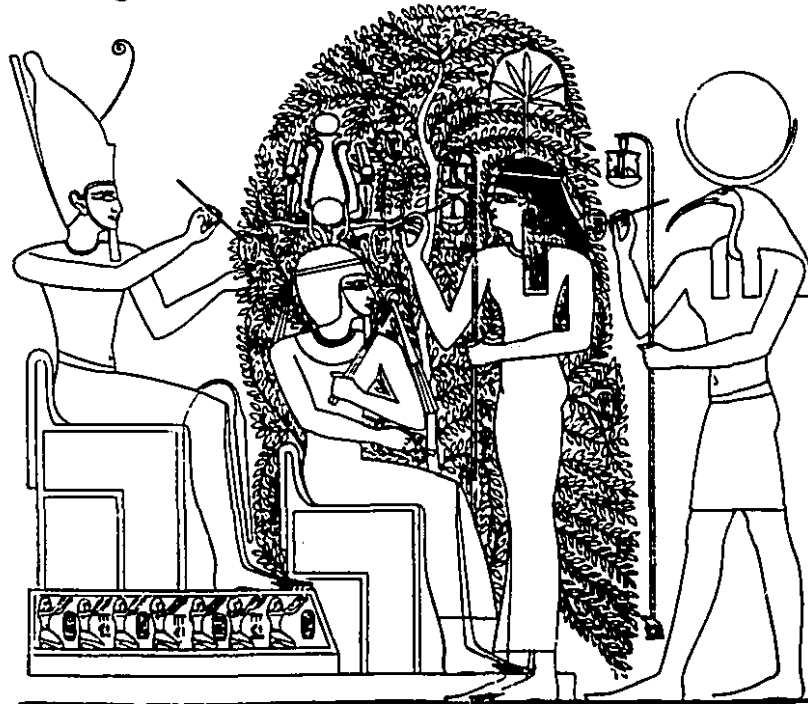
In this second passage, a passage clearly relating to Spell 17 of the "Book of the Dead", the ished is described in relation to Atum's "annals". The cosmic Tree of Light was thus also the tree on which the register of Creation was kept. Atum announced, or pronounced,

<sup>74</sup> KEMP, *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization* 1989, p. 87.

<sup>75</sup> GOYON, 1972, *op. cit.*, p. 219: You take in the breeze beneath the foliage of the venerable ished in lunu, you wake each day to see the rays of the sun.

<sup>76</sup> GOYON, 1972, *op. cit.*, p. 255: May my heart not be ravished by the Combatants in lunu! I am the one before whom Atum announces the annals beneath the august ished in lunu, annals written by Thoth himself. Light enters my eyes so that I may move during the night, during the day, that I may see his rays each day!

Fig. 5.5 Writing on the Ished



Source: ERMAN, Adolf, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, Dover Publications, New York, 1971, p. 347; LALOUETTE, Claire, *L'Empire des Ramsès*, Flammarion, Paris, 1995b, p. 347.

In this relief from the mortuary temple of Ramses II (Ramesseum) in Waset, Ramses IV (seated on the lower throne with the Atef crown) is having his name, his years, and his jubilees recorded on the leaves (or fruit ?) of the Ished. The gods occupied with the inscription are Amon (seated on the upper throne) Thoth (with ibis-head and moon-disc) and Seshat (with palm tree headdress). Similar reliefs had previously been commissioned by Thutmose I, Thutmose III, and Sethi I in the great temple of Amon (modern Karnak).

"names" which Thoth, the scribe, would write.<sup>77</sup> The act of naming was essential to the act of creating. The word, the verb, pronounced and written, brought forth into existence that which was named. Atum would announce "annals" beneath the ished of lunu and Thoth would write them.

Individuals were created through this verbal process. They were emanations from the One (Atum). In order to come into existence, they had to be identified by name. The ran (name) of an individual was as an essential a part of his being as his khet (body), his há ( $\approx$  soul), his kâ ( $\approx$  spirit), or his ib (heart). As illustrations of the ished show,<sup>78</sup> the names of individuals were written on the leaves, in the "foliage", of the ished. The leaves represented the existence of individuals. It was not uncommon for pharaohs of the New Kingdom to depict themselves having their "names and years" recorded in this manner. Thutmoses III (1482-1450 BCE.) had it done for him by the gods Atum and Hathor while Amon presided over the operation.<sup>79</sup> More commonly, Thoth and Seshat would perform this service, as in the illustration of Sethi I (1318-1278 BCE.) in the great temple of Amon in Waset (Thebes)<sup>80</sup> or that of Ramses IV (1162-1156 BCE.) in the Ramesseum (fig. 5.5).<sup>81</sup> On this specific representation, the declarations of various gods are recorded:

Atum - *J'inscris pour toi ton nom sur l'arbre sacré tant que le ciel sera stable sur ses quatre piliers, en même temps que les jubilés de Tatenen et la durée de vie de Ré dans la Région supérieure, pour le temps infini.*

Amon - *Je suis ton père auguste, le seigneur des dieux, qui t'aime plus qu'aucun autre roi. Je te donne le temps éternel, comme roi du Double Pays.*

Ptah - *Je te donne de multiples et gradioses jubilés, et le temps infini dans la vaillance et la force, les victoires du fils de Nout (Seth), la royauté d'Horus dans la ville de Pe, la terre entière étant sous tes sandales...*

<sup>77</sup> ERMAN, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, 1971, p. 348.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, p. 347.

<sup>79</sup> DIOP, Ch. A., 1981, *op. cit.*, p. 419.

<sup>80</sup> ERMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

<sup>81</sup> *idem.*

Thoth - *J'inscris pour toi des années par millions et des jubilés. Je te donne le temps infini en tant que roi, les pays étant sous tes sandales, le Grand Cercle et le Grand Circuit étant dans ton poing, chargés de leurs tributs...*

Seshat - *J'écris à ton intention les jubilés de Rê, des années éternelles et infinies en tant que roi, une durée de vie semblable à celle d'Atoum, des victoires et la puissance d'Horus et de Seth autant que prospérera le ciel.*<sup>82</sup>

Here, unequivocally, the image of a cosmic tree is associated with the act of inscription of particulars. The act of writing (always referred to in the present tense) guarantees the perpetuation ("infinite time" and "eternal years") of that which is being created (victory, power, reign). The fact that Ramses IV only reigned for six years is irrelevant to the eternal and infinite nature of his rule as inscribed on the ished by the gods. In effect, each of the five gods cited above bestows some form of eternity or infinity upon the pharaoh. And in each case this bestowal is actualized through inscription on the cosmic Tree of Life.

That such inscription could also serve a more general eschatological purpose, i.e., the purpose of guaranteeing eternity of life after death, is implied by the important role accorded Thoth in Osirian Judgment. Thoth is the omniscient god, the god of gnosis and writing, "Scribe of the Gods", "Lord of Books" and "Lord of Time" — he would later be assimilated to the Greek Hermes (in New Kingdom texts Thoth could be called "Twice Great" and "Thrice Great")<sup>83</sup> and to the Biblical Enoch (and thereafter to the Quranic Idris as well).

---

<sup>82</sup> LALOUETTE, *L'Empire des Ramsès*, 1995b, p. 347: Atum - "I write your name for you on the sacred tree so long as the sky is secure on its four pillars, along with the jubilees of Tatenen and the life-span of Râ in the Upper Region, for all infinity." Amon - "I am your august father, Lord of the gods, who loves you more than any other king. I give you eternity as king of the Two Lands." Ptah - "I give you numerous and grand jubilees, and valor and strength for infinity, the victories of the son of Nut (Seth), the kingdom of Horus in the city of Pe, placing the whole earth beneath your sandals..." Thoth - "I write years by the millions and jubilees for you. I give you an eternity as king, all lands being beneath your sandals, the Great Circle and the Great Circuit, and all their tribute, being in your fist..." Seshat - "I write the jubilees of Râ for your benefit, eternal and infinite years of kingship, a life-span like that of Atum, the victories and power of Horus and Seth so long as the sky shall prosper."

<sup>83</sup> BUDGE, 1969, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 401.

Thoth is the Moon who reflects the light of Râ.<sup>84</sup> He partakes in Divine Knowledge, knowledge of the structure of the universe. He is responsible for transcribing this otherwise indecipherable knowledge. It was he who invented hieroglyphs and he is reported to have written Egypt's sacred books with the writing of "his own fingers".<sup>85</sup> It is in his metropolis of Khmun that the Ogdoad was first developed. More than any other god, Thoth commands the power of the Word.

- Thoth records names and years in the Osirian Ledger . Thoth keeps the registers of Osiris by recording the "names" and "years" of those on earth.<sup>86</sup> The fact that both Thoth, and Seshat too, also record pharaonic "years" and "jubilees" on the leaves of the *ished* argues in favor of the association of this cosmic Tree with Osiris' celestial Ledger. Being under the authority of Thoth, the omniscient god of writing, and of his female counterpart Seshat, "Lady of writing and Ruler of Books", the *ished* is without a doubt a Tree of Knowledge. It symbolizes the ultimate form of knowledge, knowledge of "particulars". The Tree *is* the Ledger.

- Thoth records Judgment in the Hall of Maat . In the tribunal presided over by Osiris, it is Thoth who records the results of the weighing of the heart. He is depicted beside the Balance recording the outcome with pen and tablet (fig. 5.2). We can recognize here the *qalam* and *lawh* of Islamic tradition. Here again Thoth is recording particulars, the results of individual judgments.

The image of Thoth keeping records on celestial ledgers is especially significant given the well-known bureaucratic "frame of mind" of Ancient Egyptians. Scribes especially were devoted to the constant careful tabulation of particulars in order to chronicle the regular unfolding of the Universe. Thus Thoth, the cosmic scribe, is involved directly in the monitoring of human destiny from birth through to Judgment; on the leaves of the *ished* he writes the names uttered by *Atum* and thus records the coming into existence of each new creature, as well as the years and jubilees of pharaohs; on the

<sup>84</sup> FOWDEN, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>85</sup> ERMAN, 1971, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

<sup>86</sup> BUDGE, 1975, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

Ledger of Osiris he records the years of each individual; at the Balance he records the results of each individual's judgment. Though the image of the tree is explicitly used to signify only the first and second of these four transcripts, we must bear in mind the fact that the cosmic lunu, as well as being the locus of the ished, was also the locus of the Osirian Hall of Judgment:

*O Thoth, tourne ton visage vers moi, et proclame-moi victorieux sur mes ennemis comme tu as proclamé Osiris victorieux devant le grand tribunal qui est à lunu en cette nuit du combat pour abattre ce Rebelle, en ce jour d'anéantir les ennemis du Maître de l'Univers. (Second Book of Breathings)<sup>87</sup>*

By spatial association, the cosmic ished (locus of the triumph of righteousness over darkness), because it grows in lunu (locus of Osirian judgment), becomes the ished of the Judgment Hall, the triumph of life over death. The cosmic Tree of Light (spell 17) thus also marks an eschatological threshold. It is the Tree of Life in the sense of immortality.

The image of the leaf here becomes particularly significant for the construct. As was explained in Chapter 3, leaves may evoke both the foliage of a tree and pages of a book.<sup>88</sup> Thus the leaves of the ished of lunu could easily be associated to the image of pages in the Osirian Ledger of years and jubilees. One Hermetist papyrus, written in demotic, records the magical use of ished leaves. Initiates would prepare for mystic transcendence by writing an eight-letter name on an ished leaf with a specially fabricated ink-concoction which they would then lick.<sup>89</sup> The flowers of the ished were also highly considered and were called "flowers of life", on par with the flowers of the aquatic lotus.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> GOYON, 1972, *op. cit.*, pp. 248-249: O Thoth, turn your face towards me, proclaim me victorious over my enemies as you proclaimed Osiris victorious in the great tribunal which is in lunu, on that night of battle against the rebel, on that day of annihilating the enemies of the Master of the Universe.

<sup>88</sup> The term "paper" comes from "papyrus", an aquatic reed, just as the Arabic "qalam" (pen) comes from the aquatic reed "calamus".

<sup>89</sup> HIMMELFARB, "The Practice of Ascent in the Ancient Mediterranean World", 1995, p. 125.

<sup>90</sup> BUHL, 1947, *loc. cit.*, p. 89.

Moreover, the ished of lunu is home to the Bennû bird (a close equivalent to the Simorgh of Ancient Persian tradition). The term "bennû" is derived from the same root as "benben". The two symbols, stone and bird, were regularly depicted together<sup>91</sup> and expressed the notion of spiritual ascension towards the light, the Divine Source. The Bennû, like the ished, was associated with the sun (Râ) and specifically with its daily rising in the form of Venus, the Morning Star, his triumph over darkness:<sup>92</sup>

I have entered as a falcon; I have gone forth as a Bennû.  
Morning Star, make way for me, that I may enter in peace  
into the beautiful west. I belong to the pool of Osiris. Make  
way for me, that I may enter and adore Osiris lord of life.  
(Book of the Dead, Spell 122b)

That Râ's triumph at the ished was interpreted as the personal triumph of mortals over death is indicated by the function of the Bennû within the Osirian eschatological symbolism. The Bennû (represented by a heron) was a soul-bird. It symbolized the immortal soul (bâ) in its purified state — the potential of every individual to "become" Osiris, to join the "light" of Râ. Osiris, whenever referred to in texts as "Lord of Eternity", was always depicted with the Bennû bird as an attribute.<sup>93</sup> In the above spell the Bennû belongs to the "pool" of Osiris; it is the purified sinless soul. This was expressed in many hymns and prayers:

I am the Bennu,  
the Ba of Râ,  
the guide of the blessed to the Tuat...  
(Book of the Dead, Spell 29B)

I am the Son and Heir of Râ;  
I am the mysterious Bennu.  
I am one who enters when he sets into the Tuat and comes  
forth when he sets from Nut.  
I am lord of thrones in the sky,  
who crosses the nether sky in the train of Râ.

<sup>91</sup> LURKER, 1974, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>92</sup> WEIDEMANN, 1897, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>93</sup> BUDGE, 1973, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 60.



(Book of the Dead, Spell 180,S10)

We find here the image of the soul-bird being used to express the notion of ultimate spiritual destination, ultimate communion with the Divine in the Hereafter. Like Suhrawardī's Simorgh at the summit of Ṭubā and the "soul-bird" of Hafiz at the summit of the sidra, the Bennū is depicted in illustrations at the summit of the cosmic ished (fig. 5.9). The hope for eternal bliss in the Hereafter was represented as the soul migrating to the summit of the tree, the cosmic Tree, the ished of lunu.

The functions of the ished encompass the entire personal trajectory, from creation to ultimate spiritual communion. The ished of lunu is the Tree of Life in that it is associated to individual existences through names and years. That the leaves of the ished represented individual humans at the moment of their creation, through the inscription of their "names" by Thoth, is attested by the Second Book of Breathings. That these same leaves also represented the register of their "years" (of their words and deeds during their earthly existence) can be implied from the constant reference to Thoth's monitoring of "names and years" in Osiris' Ledger and by New Kingdom representations of pharaohs having these particulars registered on the foliage of the ished. That the ished again could represent the access of individuals to the Hereafter following success in Judgment can only be conjectured through the role of Thoth as scribe in the judgment scene and by the fact that the ished grows in the cosmic lunu, wherein also is the Osirian Hall of Judgment. The idea is nonetheless compatible with the role of the ished as ultimate spiritual destination, as the tree of the Bennū.

The ished is thus Tree of Light, Tree of Knowledge, Tree of Judgment, and Tree of Life. This cosmic Tree links the earthly abode of mortals to the stellar abode of the gods wherein lies the celestial Paradise and the promise of immortality. It is perhaps for this reason that the cosmic ished of lunu and the paradisiacal sycamore of Hathor were often confounded in Egyptian tradition. The paradisiacal sycamore, rather than the ished, might constitute the

desired destination of the *bâ*,<sup>94</sup> being represented with two or several *Bennû* birds at its foot,<sup>95</sup> as could the erica tree, Osiris' soul being depicted at its summit.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, in Spells 59 and 68 of the "Book of the Dead", the paradisiacal sycamores and doum-palms of Hathor are cited in the context of Thoth's record-keeping. Conversely, the *ished* was sometimes evoked as a tree of Paradise, a tree beneath which one could "eat of Osiris' pure offerings and drink water and milk and live on forever" (Cairo papyrus #58019).<sup>97</sup> In these contexts, it was an attribute of Osiris rather than of *Râ*. We are reminded here of the similar confusion in Islamic tradition between the cosmic *sidrat al-muntahâ* and *Tûbâ*, the Tree of Paradise — a confusion by which *Tûbâ* eventually subsumed the *sidra* entirely.

#### Ished and the *sidrat al-muntahâ*

The *ished* as just defined is clearly the precursor of all those specifically African traditions concerning *Tûbâ* and the *sidrat al-muntahâ* discussed in Chapter 3. These traditions, whose origin has not been accounted for until now, link the destiny of mortals (Judgment) to a celestial tree through the act of inscription and specifically represent individual mortals as its leaves. The local Egyptian tradition concerning the *laylat al-barâ'a*, reported by Lane, associates the life and death of individuals, represented by their "names", to the wilting and falling of the leaves of the cosmic/paradisiacal *sidrat al-muntahâ*.<sup>98</sup> The Senegalese tradition, reported by Sy, associates the leaves of the paradisiacal *Tûbâ* with the record of the meritorious and sinful acts of individuals in view of the Day of Judgment.<sup>99</sup> These foliar/inscription traditions have no firm foundation in the *Qur'ân* or in *hadîth*. They are thus qualified as "popular", i.e., of unknown and anonymous origin. The above

<sup>94</sup> GOYON, 1972, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>95</sup> LURKER, 1974, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>96</sup> BUDGE, 1973, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 4-5, 19.

<sup>97</sup> GOYON, 1972, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

<sup>98</sup> LANE, Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians 1908, pp. 476-478.

<sup>99</sup> SY, La confrérie sénégalaise des mourides, 1969, p. 314.

description of the ancient ished however can leave no doubt as to the Egyptian origin of this Islamic foliar/inscription construct in its association with the sidra.

The ancient ished, like the sidrat al-muntahâ, marks a cosmic threshold. As an attribute of Râ it distinguished Light from darkness. As an attribute of Atum it distinguished conscious named existence from anonymous matter. As an attribute of Osiris it distinguished mortal earthly existence from bliss in the company of the immortal gods. As an attribute of Thoth especially it distinguished written knowledge from indecipherable (to humans) Divine knowledge (Light). The sidrat al-muntahâ too is a cosmic Tree. It stands at the threshold between the Creator and creation, where His knowledge becomes accessible to humans, through prophecy and inscription. Budge, writing in 1911, was convinced that the Egyptian ished was the precursor of the Islamic lote tree.<sup>100</sup> Diop, for his part, is yet more specific when he claims: "*On sait que cet arbre sacré qui pousse au paradis (l'ished) joue un rôle capital dans la mythologie musulmane sénégalaise.*"<sup>101</sup>

### The Parable of the Two Trees

One Islamic tree construct which can unequivocally be traced back to ancient Egypt is the parable of the two trees. In effect, this parable was first expressed in the Egyptian corpus of "wisdom literature". These didactic texts, dating from the New Kingdom, took the form of "instructions". They were pedagogical; they were meant to be memorized and recited "in class" as part of the moral instruction of pupils. In form and content they bear considerable resemblance to some of the later Biblical "Psalms" and "Proverbs".<sup>102</sup>

In the fourth chapter of the "Instruction of Amenemope" two trees are evoked as metaphors for improper vs. proper human conduct:

---

<sup>100</sup> BUDGE, 1973, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 260.

<sup>101</sup> DIOP, Ch. A., 1981, *op. cit.*, p. 419: We know that this sacred tree which grows in Paradise (the ished) plays a major role in the Muslim mythology of Senegal.

<sup>102</sup> BEN-JOCHANNAN, African Origins of Major "Western Religions" , 1991, pp. 164-165.

As for the heated (hot-mouthed) man in the temple,  
 He is like a tree growing indoors ;  
 A moment lasts its growth of shoots,  
 Its end comes about in the woodshed;  
 It is floated far from its place,  
The flame is its burial shroud .  
 The truly silent (man), who keeps apart,  
 He is like a tree grown in a meadow ;  
 It greens, it doubles its yield ,  
 It stands in front of its Lord,  
 Its fruit is sweet, its shade delightful,  
Its end comes in a garden . (Instruction of Amenemope,  
 Chapter 4)<sup>103</sup>

One can easily recognize here the good tree and the evil tree as found in the Psalms of David ("Psalms" 1;1-5) and in the Qur'ân (14;23-26) already discussed in Chapter 3. In all three cases the Righteous are signified by a good tree whose ultimate destination is in a garden, in *the Garden* — with abundant green foliage, shade, yielding sweet fruit. The wicked, on the other hand, are signified by a different kind of tree altogether — wood for the chopping-block, chaff for the wind, drift wood, whose ultimate destination is to be consumed by flames. In sūra "Abraham" the evil tree has no firmness, while the goodly (tayyiba) tree yields fruit before its Lord, exactly as in the "Instruction of Amenemope". In both the Egyptian and the Islamic parable the tree represents continuity between our life on earth (virtuous or sinful) and our destiny in the Hereafter.

### Trees of Light

The *ished*, as seen earlier in this chapter, is foremost a Tree of Light. It is "of *lunu*", the cosmic abode of Râ. It represents the sun which illuminates the world. It is the cosmic threshold, the locus of transformation of Divine Light into accessible knowledge, through Thoth (the Moon) and his hieroglyphs.

In ancient Egypt, this notion of cosmic threshold was also manifest in other celestial trees — mainly in the two turquoise

<sup>103</sup> LICHTHEIM, Ancient Egyptian Literature, 1976, vol. 2, pp. 150-151.

sycamores believed to grow at the eastern gate of Heaven. If Restau at the western extremity of the cosmos was the gate to the Afterlife, Bakhau at its eastern extremity was the gate through which knowledge entered our world. A sycamore of turquoise grew on each side of it. These twin sycamores were established cosmic symbols as early as the Old Kingdom:

This Pepi hath grasped the two Sycamore Trees which are in the midst of that side of the sky, he saileth on, and they place him in that eastern side of heaven. (Pyramid text #643)<sup>104</sup>

I know these twin sycamores of turquoise from between which Re ascends, which sprout at Shu's sowing at each eastern gate whence Re ascends. (The Book of the Dead, Spell 109; aSI)

Bakhau was the cosmic gate through which Râ would appear each morning and illuminate the world. All knowledge of the supra-stellar abode of the gods was imparted to earth by the sun. Many departed the world through Restau in the West but only the sun returned from Tuat through the eastern gate. It should be recalled that, according to spell 17, Râ would split the ished after defeating the Âpep servant. Thus the heavens would be split open at dawn. The vertical axis of lunu is thus equated with the horizontal Eastern Gate to Tuat. Both are associated with the sun (zenith and rising) and both are marked by trees. Divine Light, whether emanating from the celestial East or descending from the celestial zenith, enters the world at the cosmic Tree. The twin sycamores of Bakhau are "trees of light". On some monuments, these sycamores were actually represented as "two isheds on the tops of two mountains flanking the rising sun",<sup>105</sup> thus reinforcing their association to the cosmic Tree of lunu.

Whatever the case, these trees mark thresholds where Divine Light enters creation and "illuminates" it. Light is the radiating "energy" which in-forms creation. In effect, light creates every form

<sup>104</sup> BUDGE, 1973, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 339.

<sup>105</sup> LURKER, 1974, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

and all forms reflect light.<sup>106</sup> Forms can only be known through light, otherwise all would be formless darkness. As all light is originally Divine Light, eastern illumination represents its purist Source. There are clear similarities here with Suhrawardī's concept of *ishrāq*, "radiation" or "(eastern) illumination", as represented by *Ṭubā* (typification of the sun) at the summit of *Qāf*. For Ancient Egyptians too light transcended the Universe. Like the blessed olive tree on Mount Sinai (which is East of Egypt), the twin sycamores of *Bakhau* crowned the summit of cosmic mountains.

### Gnostic Trees of Light

Trees of Light feature prominently in post-pharaonic Gnostic texts as well. Gnostic doctrines grew up at the confluence of the Hellenistic, Hermetist, Judaic, Persian, and early Christian philosophical traditions. They also, it is now evident, assimilated ancient Egyptian gnosis as well.<sup>107</sup> Gnosticism found fertile ground in Egypt, especially in Upper Egypt (the Thebaid), during the early centuries of the Christian era and most of the surviving Gnostic texts are in the Coptic language. The central premise of Gnosticism — and the structure which permitted it to assimilate so many disparate traditions — is that knowledge of ultimate Reality has been imparted to certain chosen people, i.e., prophets, by means of their physical ascension through the heavenly spheres. Among those who have thus ascended to gnosis one finds Adam, Seth (the Biblical Seth, not the Osirian one), Enoch (Thoth/Hermes), Abraham, Jacob, Isaia, Ezekiel, Jesus and Paul. Gnostic texts are part of "ascension" literature, a genre which can be said to have originated with such Egyptian texts as the "Book of *Ṭuat*" and the "Book of Gates" and to have culminated in the Islamic *mi'rāj* narrative.<sup>108</sup> Like the *mi'rāj* narrative, they are cosmological as well as mystic.

According to Gnostic cosmology the world beyond the celestial spheres, like *Ṭuat*, consists of twelve abodes identified by the Greek term "aeon", a term designating both space and time. The five last (or

<sup>106</sup> OBENGA, 1990, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-95.

<sup>107</sup> DORESSE, Les livres secrets des gnostiques d'Égypte 1958.

<sup>108</sup> HALPERIN, "Hekhalot and *Mi'rāj*", 1995.

highest) eons of the cosmos are each signified by a "tree of the treasure of light".<sup>109</sup> These trees are a feature of Gnostic cosmology generally and appear in many of its texts: "Pistis Sophia", "The Book of the Great Treatise according to the Mystery", "The Bruce Codex", and "The Gospel according to Mary".<sup>110</sup> The five "trees of the treasure of light" clearly refer to various levels of illumination. Knowledge of the Divine is revealed through them to the sub-stellar universe just as the ished of lunu and the sycamores of Bakhau stood at the thresholds of Râ's Light.

In the Qur'ân too, the sidrat al-muntahâ appears in sûra "The Star". It is the star which is called to witness the accession/ascension to gnosis of the Prophet. The locus of this communion is the lote tree at the furthest extremity of the eons, the Tree of Light at the threshold of the Universe.

That ascension to gnosis could be mystic rather than prophetic was acknowledged in Hermetism, and Gnosticism inherited this premise specifically from the Hermetist literature which had immediately preceded it. Emanations from the ultimate Source of knowledge descend, like light, through the celestial spheres. Mystics can access this knowledge by attaining ever higher "states" of consciousness. Successive levels of spiritual enlightenment provide different successive levels of truth about the Absolute.<sup>111</sup> This geosophy subsequently became central to sufism. It is significant therefore that it is the Egyptian Sufi Dhû al-Nûn al-Miṣrî who is credited with having introduced into sufism the notion of successive mystic "states" (aḥwâl) and "stations" (maqâmât). Contemporary sources (III<sup>th</sup>/IX<sup>th</sup> century) attest to the fact that at first Dhû al-Nûn was condemned by the Egyptian 'ulamâ' for teaching "a science unknown to predecessors (in Islam)". In the end however he was brought before the Caliph Al-Mutawakkil in Baghdâd and vindicated of the charge against him.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, according to Corbin, Suhrawardî credits Dhû al-Nûn with having transmitted "Greek

<sup>109</sup> MEAD, *Pistis Sophia: a Gnostic Gospel*, 1896, pp. 191-192.

<sup>110</sup> DORESSE, 1958, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-102.

<sup>111</sup> FOWDEN, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

<sup>112</sup> DELADRIERE, *La vie merveilleuse de Dhû-l-Nûn l'Égyptien*, 1988, p. 13.

wisdom" to Islamic theosophy and particularly with having introduced Hermetist terminology into sufism.<sup>113</sup> Yet there is no evidence that Dhû al-Nûn al-Miṣrî knew Greek or studied Greek texts. What we do know from his hagiographies is that the Nubian Mystic from Akhmîm had direct knowledge of Ancient Egyptian temple texts and it would be logical to suppose that the terms and notions he is credited with having introduced to Islam find their origin in these. Moreover it is known that many Hermetist and Gnostic texts were produced and circulated in the Coptic language (one such text in particular, entitled "Apocalypse of Peter", was actually found in Akhmîm<sup>114</sup>). Upper Egypt and Nubia have always constituted the refuge of tradition when new forces have occupied Egypt. They were the refuge of Pharaonic civilization against Hellenism, then of Hellenic mysticism against the Church, and then of Christianity against conversion to Islam. The Hermetic and Gnostic texts in Coptic, unearthed in Nag-Hammadi, attest to the vigor of these initiatic movements in the Thebaïd. In the mystic micro-climate of Upper Egypt the ancient "way" of Thoth, the way up through words to the original Source of knowledge (Divine Light), may have found its way into the sufi path to ma'rifa.

### Sacred Topography

The Egyptian Tree archetype, expressed as the Tree of Life, and its various celestial manifestations (the sycamore and doum-palm of Hathor, the ished of lunu, the twin turquoise sycamores of Bakhaui), found further expression in the realm of religious topography, in the configuration of sacred space. Trees, in the form of living specimens, iconographic representations, textual references and symbolic incarnations, fulfilled various spiritual/topographical functions. In the second part of this chapter Egypt's sacred topography will be analyzed in order to extend our understanding of the ancient arboreal archetype and its legacy for Islam.

---

<sup>113</sup> CORBIN, 1986, *op. cit.*, p. 185, 300.

<sup>114</sup> STROUMSA, "Mystical descents", 1995, p. 144.



### Tree and Cemetery

Since pre-dynastic times, Egyptian cemeteries were marked by trees. The roots of tamarisks and acacias have been uncovered in Badarian cemeteries (V<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE.).<sup>115</sup> The image of the doum-palm figures on pottery found in pre-dynastic graves<sup>116</sup> and ex-voto dates, figs and pomegranates,<sup>117</sup> fashioned of precious stones and metals, are a recurrent feature of the earliest royal tombs.<sup>118</sup> Archeology has established that both sycamores and doum-palms, earthly manifestations of the great celestial trees the Righteous aspired to, graced Egyptian cemeteries in pharaonic times (fig. 5.6).<sup>119</sup>

Fig. 5.6 Tree and Cemetery



TOMBS IN THE NECROPOLIS, FROM A STELE AT GIZAH.

Source: ERMAN, Adolf, Life in Ancient Egypt, Dover Publications, New York, 1971, p. 130.

Trees are important elements in this representation of a cemetery. The species represented are most probably a sycamore (sheltering the lamenting woman) and date-palms (flanking the offering table).

<sup>115</sup> JAMES, 1966, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

<sup>116</sup> LURKER, 1974, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>117</sup> The pomegranate (*Punica granatum* of the *Punicaceae* family) is a tree of eschatological significance. Pomegranates (Egp. remen) are mentioned growing in Egyptian gardens and they occur in its sacred texts. Following the Biblical exodus, the Israelites must have been nostalgic for these fruit (called rimmon in Hebrew), for they planted similar orchards in their Promised Land; King Solomon himself possessed one such orchard. Carthaginians, renowned as arboriculturists, were famous for their pomegranates and the Romans called it the "apple of Carthage" (*malum punicum* from which the *Punicaceae* family gets its name). The eschatological importance of fruit in Carthage, as in Egypt, is attested by the fact that ex-voto of pomegranates, as well as of figs, grapes, plums and almonds, fashioned in glass, stone, clay or ivory, have been discovered in Punic tombs and images of these fruit-trees appear on funerary stela (FANTAR, Carthage 1993, pp. 272-273). Later Europeans named the pomegranate for Moorish Granada (in some respects Moorish civilization was a successor to the Punic one). Arabic, for its part, has retained the ancient Egyptian term (Arb. rummān) and pomegranates feature among the fruit of Paradise in the Qur'ān (55;68).

<sup>118</sup> BUDGE, 1973, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 39-40; VERCOUTTER, 1992, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 45-46.

<sup>119</sup> JAMES, 1966, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

Cemeteries, as is well known, were vital elements of Egypt's spiritual landscape. They were considered to be the veritable gates to the Hereafter and were the locus of all those rites and services connected to the eschatological process. Several cemeteries developed into full-fledged necropolises, i.e., cities whose main function was to cater to death. The necropolis of Mennufer (Greek "Memphis") is famous for its sprawling pyramid sanctuaries (Dahshûr, Saqqâra, Abû Sir, Gîza, Abû Rawash). These cemeteries, founded in the Old Kingdom, were considered to be co-identical with Restau, the western gate of the Cosmos. The association between cemeteries and the notion of Restau can best be analyzed in Abedju, the original home of Osirian eschatology.

Abedju Abedju is certainly Egypt's oldest holy city. Abedju was used as a cemetery without interruption from the Naqada I period (Amratian period, c. 4000-3500 BCE.) until Egypt's conversion to Christianity (whereafter monasteries were built among the ruins). Egypt's first two dynasties (c. 3200-2900 BCE.) originated from the city of Tjeny (the "Thinis" of the Greeks) of which Abedju was the cemetery, and pharaohs continued to be buried in Abedju long after the capital had moved north. Abedju remained Egypt's premier pilgrimage center — even for dynastic Egyptians four thousand years ago it was revered as a most ancient sanctuary. Upper Egypt's Eighth Nome, wherein lay Abedju and Tjeny, was called Ta-Wer ("Most-ancient Land").<sup>120</sup>

Abedju is where the head of Osiris was believed to have been buried following his dismemberment. It is where Osiris was reconstituted by Isis, where he was resurrected to life ("brought forth by day") and where he departed for Amenti. Abedju was thus the gate to his "western" kingdom, the gate to heaven. Before he even possessed a proper name, Osiris was known in Abedju by the sobriquet Khentamentiu, "King of the Westerners".

The oldest necropolis of Abedju was called Pega (from *pog'a*, "to split", Copt. *pok'e*) and, like the cemetery of Mennufer, Pega was assimilated to the cosmic Restau, the western gate to Tuat, the

---

<sup>120</sup> LURKER, 1974, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

place where the horizon split.<sup>121</sup> Earthly burial in Abedju's Pega cemetery was believed to facilitate successful judgment and to guarantee access to Heaven. Those buried there came under Osiris' protection. Those who could not be buried there strove at least to erect a stela or cenotaph in the cemetery. The holy city of Abedju which developed around Pega was thus a cosmic/eschatological gate. Burial there amounted to passage through the gate into Paradise:

*Si tu marches, Horus marchera; si tu parles, Seth parlera; va au lac, voyage à contre-courant jusqu'au nome de Tjeny, et traverse Abedju. La porte céleste de l'horizon est ouverte, et les neterou se réjouissent de te rencontrer; ils t'amènent au ciel avec ton ba, toi qui a été doté par eux d'un ba.* (Pyramid Texts, #798-799)<sup>122</sup>

At the heart of Abedju's Pega was what was considered to be the original tomb of Osiris. This small tomb, tiny by later standards, is believed to have been built during the 1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty (3200 BCE.) over a reliquary containing Osiris' head (one is reminded here of the shrine of the head of Husayn in Cairo). It was beside this tomb, called Areq-Hebū, that Egyptians desired to be buried and it was to it that they came on pilgrimage.<sup>123</sup> Areq-Hebū contained a sacred cistern. This cistern was the earthly physical manifestation of the Osirian pool in the Hall of Judgment.<sup>124</sup> Osiris' sepulcher also contained a "stairway" of fourteen steps.<sup>125</sup> This stairway, like the cistern, was an eschatological symbol; it represented the ladder to heaven.

Ladder Osirian ascension was expressed through the image of the Ladder. In the "Pyramid Texts" Râ is called "Lord of the Ladder".<sup>126</sup> Thus do we find yet another Quranic term, Dhū al-Ma'ārij

<sup>121</sup> BUDGE, 1973, *op. cit.*, vol. 2. pp. 155-157.

<sup>122</sup> BRISSON & OUELLET, 1985, *op. cit.*, p. 56: If you walk, Horus walks; if you talk, Seth talks; go to the lake, travel up-stream until you reach the Thinite Nome, then cross Abydos. The celestial gate of the horizon is open, and the neteru rejoice at your arrival; they take you to the sky with your ba, you on whom they have bestowed a ba.

<sup>123</sup> BREASTED, Development of religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt 1912, p. 285.

<sup>124</sup> BUDGE, 1973, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 12-13.

<sup>125</sup> *idem.*

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 77.

(70:3), a term known to be of Ge'ez origin, similarly expressed in ancient Egypt. Râ's Ladder is both cosmological and eschatological as it represents simultaneously "contact" with God (ascension to His Light), and access to Tuat (ascension of the bâ to Tuat). This Ladder was often represented as the sun's rays.<sup>127</sup> Knowledge descended to Earth in the form of light, but it could also be accessed by ascending these rays. Râ's ladder is mentioned frequently in the "Book of the Dead" and always as a symbol of Osirian ascension:

Osiris ascends on this ladder which his Father Râ made for him, and Horus and Seth grasp his hand. (Book of the Dead, Spell 153 A-S7)

There is mourning for thee when thou ascendest to the sky. Knotted for thee is a ladder to the side of Râ... (Book of the Dead, Spell 169c)

Models of the "ladder to heaven", constructed of knotted ropes between two poles, figured in funerary furniture.<sup>128</sup>

Pilgrims to Abedju, for their part, would piously visit the Osirian tomb, ascend the fourteen steps therein, and leave votive offerings, stelæ on which would be written their names or those of loved ones.<sup>129</sup> Those stelæ that have been discovered are eloquent as to the objective of the pilgrimage:

I fixed my name at the place where is the god Osiris, First of the Westerners, Lord of Eternity, Ruler of the West, the place to which all that is flees, for the sake of the benefit therein, in the midst of the followers of the Lord of Life, That I might eat his loaf and "ascend by day"; that my soul might enjoy the ceremonies of people kind in heart toward my tomb and in hand toward my stela...

I have made this tomb at the stairway of the Great God, in order that I might be among his followers, while the soldiers who follow his majesty give to my ka of his bread and his provisions.<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>127</sup> LURKER, 1974, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

<sup>128</sup> BUDGE, 1973, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 167.

<sup>129</sup> YOYOTTE, "Les pèlerinages dans l'Égypte ancienne", 1960, p. 37.

<sup>130</sup> BREASTED, 1912, *op. cit.*, pp. 285-286.

*Je me suis fait ce monument funéraire qui est glorifié et rendu efficace, sa place étant auprès de l'Éscalier du grand dieu, maître de vie, seigneur d'Abydos, sur le territoire Possesseur-des-Offrandes, sur le territoire Possesseur-des-Aliments. J'ai respiré des fumigations de résine qui monte devant moi et qui me comblent de divine rosée.*<sup>131</sup>

People came to Abedju's cosmic stairway so that they might ascend to the future life. It is important to note that the stelæ which they left behind contained, at the very least, the name of the pilgrim as well as the names of other family members. The ran (name), especially in hieroglyphic script, actualized the person. It contained a parcel of the very essence of the person. The name inscribed on the votive offering assured that the person thus actualized would remain in close proximity to the divine presence residing in the holy place.<sup>132</sup>

Such actualization could take corporeal form as well. Mausolea and tombs of every size crowded around the ancient Osirian sepulcher. Sometimes the bodies of the deceased were brought to Pega from elsewhere for burial. Sometimes these bodies were themselves only on pilgrimage and, after having partaken in the sanctity of the place, were returned for burial whence they had come. This type of post-mortal pilgrimage continues to occur in modern Egypt. Bodies are brought to the mausoleum of Shaykh Ahmad al-Badawî in Tantâ for final blessing before departing again for burial.<sup>133</sup>

By the XII<sup>th</sup> Dynasty a large temple of Osiris had been erected in Abedju (on the site of a much older shrine) and it was further endowed and enlarged by successive dynasties.<sup>134</sup> This temple is where the Osirian Mystery was ritually enacted. This "passion play"

---

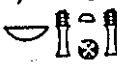
<sup>131</sup> YOYOTTE, 1960, *op. cit.*, p. 36: I have made myself this funerary monument which is glorified and rendered efficient. Its place is next to the stairs of the great god, lord of life, lord of Abedju, in the land of the Possessor-of-Offerings, in the land of the Possessor-of-Food. I have inhaled the smoke from the resin which rises before me and fills me with divine dew.


<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>133</sup> BUDGE, 1973, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 3.

<sup>134</sup> KEMP, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

too was a major attraction for pilgrims. The religious festival (khoiak festival) took place annually in November-December. In the course of the festival, which lasted several weeks, a tet pillar would be raised and Osirian resurrection would be symbolically reenacted.

Tet The tet (or djed pillar) is a cosmic symbol specific to Osirian eschatology. It symbolizes his resurrection from death and his ascension to Tuat.<sup>135</sup> The form of the tet is said to evoke either Osiris's phallus (the only member not reassembled after his dismemberment), his lower spine (the corporeal home of the spirit?) or the figure of the trunk of a dismembered tree and especially of a palm-less palm tree. It is generally accepted then that the tet is a symbol of the Tree of Life. Whatever the case, the vertical nature of the enigmatic symbol is its defining feature. Osiris was said to reside in Tattu, a celestial "house of tet" in Tuat,<sup>136</sup> and the Delta city of Tattu , Per-Osar, Busiris, represented this abode on earth. Illustrations of Spell 17 of the "Book of the Dead" (Râ piercing the serpent) readily identify this celestial house, represented by twin tet pillars, with the cosmic lunu and its ished (fig. 5.7).<sup>137</sup>

As a hieroglyph () tet conveyed the notion of duration and stability,<sup>138</sup> thus serving to transcend human notions of space and time. As an actual pillar, the tet was carried in procession and literally "raised" in temples on certain occasions (for example when the Nile flooded each year). It symbolized renewal, rejuvenation, rebirth and resurrection.<sup>139</sup> By New Kingdom times we find the tet increasingly associated with funerals, appearing on sarcophagi and funerary jewelry.<sup>140</sup> Funerals and all their monuments were intended as statements "about the victory of the vertical as the manifestation of eternal life"<sup>141</sup> and images and models of the tet were prominent.

The ritual raising of a mast to symbolize fertility and the renewal of life (as in the "May Pole" of European tradition or the

<sup>135</sup> JAMES, 1966, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>136</sup> BUDGE, 1975, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

<sup>137</sup> BUDGE, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

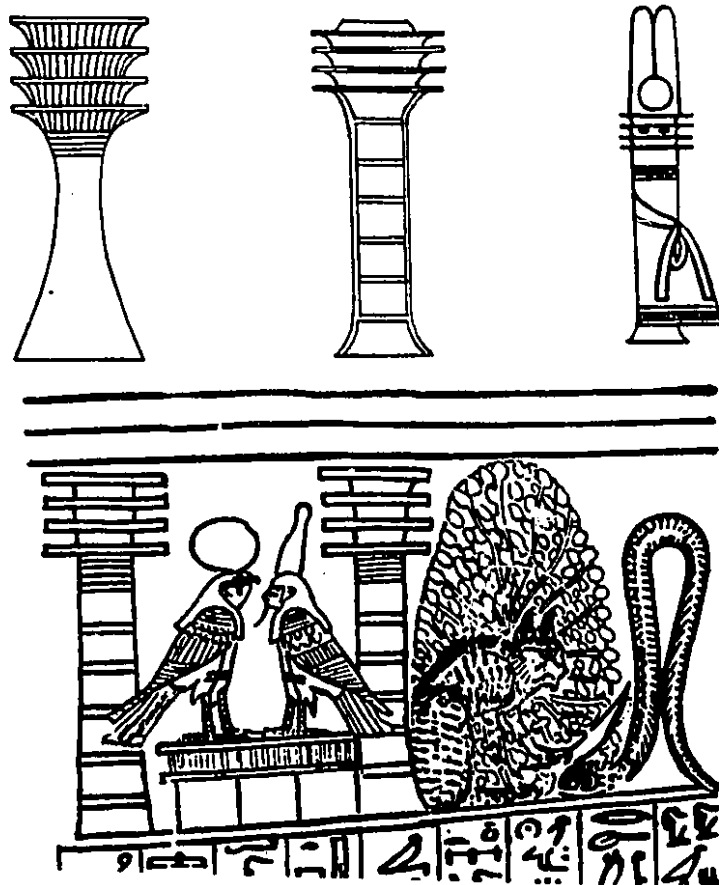
<sup>138</sup> COOK, 1992, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>139</sup> JAMES, 1966, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>140</sup> LURKER, 1974, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>141</sup> RUNDEL CLARK, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, 1978, p. 238.

Fig. 5.7 Tet Pillar



Sources: (top) RUNDEL-CLARK, R. T., *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, Thames & Hudson, New York, 1978, p. 235; (bottom) BUDGE, Ernst A. Wallis, *Egyptian Ideas of the Future Life*, University Books, New York, 1959, p. 85.

Variations on the form of the tet pillar (or djed column). The second example (top center) is the most common form and corresponds most closely to the hieroglyphic symbol for the tet. Compare with the form of Lamp Fall (fig. 2.6). The tet possessed a cosmic significance (as pillar of the sky) and could be associated to the Ished of lunu, as in the tomb illustration (bottom).

cosmic poles African religious festivals<sup>142</sup>) is attested in the local sanctuaries and sufi shrines of modern Muslim Egypt. It bears some resemblance (procession, offerings, sacrifice, circumambulation) to the *tet* of ancient Egypt. At the Badawīya shrine in Tantâ, the soul of Shaykh Ahmad al-Badawī is said to inhabit a *şari* (mast). The *şari* is "planted" annually during a festival.<sup>143</sup> In Tunisia also, certain sufi festivals are characterized by great masts. They are said to represent the saint's "tree". They are paraded in procession, they are planted and then circumambulated.<sup>144</sup> In the case of the Badawīya tariqa of Egypt, the use of the *şari* is particularly revealing. The Badawīya is noted for the ancient Egyptian customs it maintains. Its festivals are held according to the Coptic solar calendar and are therefore connected to the Nilotic cycle.<sup>145</sup>

In the case of Touba in Senegal, Lamp Fall shares a strong morphological similarity with the Egyptian *tet* — a massive vertical shaft flowering or "budding" at the summit. If the traditional pyramidal minarets of West Africa and the ancient pyramids of the Nile conform to a common archetype, could Lamp Fall and the *tet* also conform to some common pillar archetype? Like the *tet*, Lamp Fall is prominently portrayed on funerary monuments in Touba's cemetery as well as on Mouride tombs elsewhere. It too signifies resurrection (for the Day of Judgment) and ascension to Paradise and it too is closely associated to the image of the tree. Furthermore, Abedju and Touba have a similar "geo-sophic" meaning. Both are "gates" to the Hereafter. Burial in these earthly cities amounts to resurrection. In both cases this cosmic/eschatological transcendence is signified by a suitably vertical symbol (*tet*, Lamp Fall) which is itself assimilated to the image of the Tree.

Sethi's Shetyt As a holy city, Abedju was also renowned for its shetyt. The shetyt, otherwise mistakenly known by the Greek name "Osireion", was a physical representation of cosmogony. Begun under Sethi I (1318-1278 BCE.) and completed under Ramses II (1278-1217

<sup>142</sup> BLIER, *The Anatomy of Architecture* 1987, p. 59, 103.

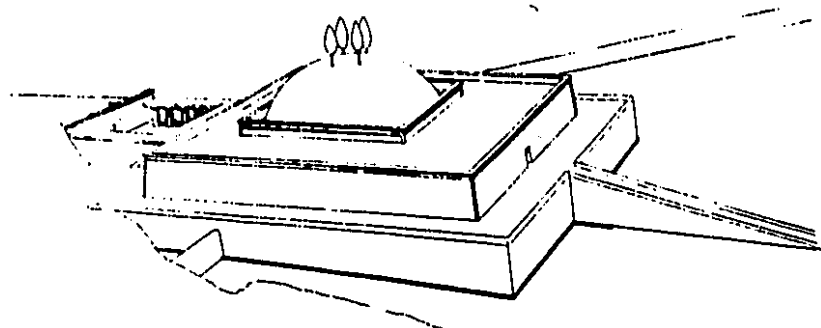
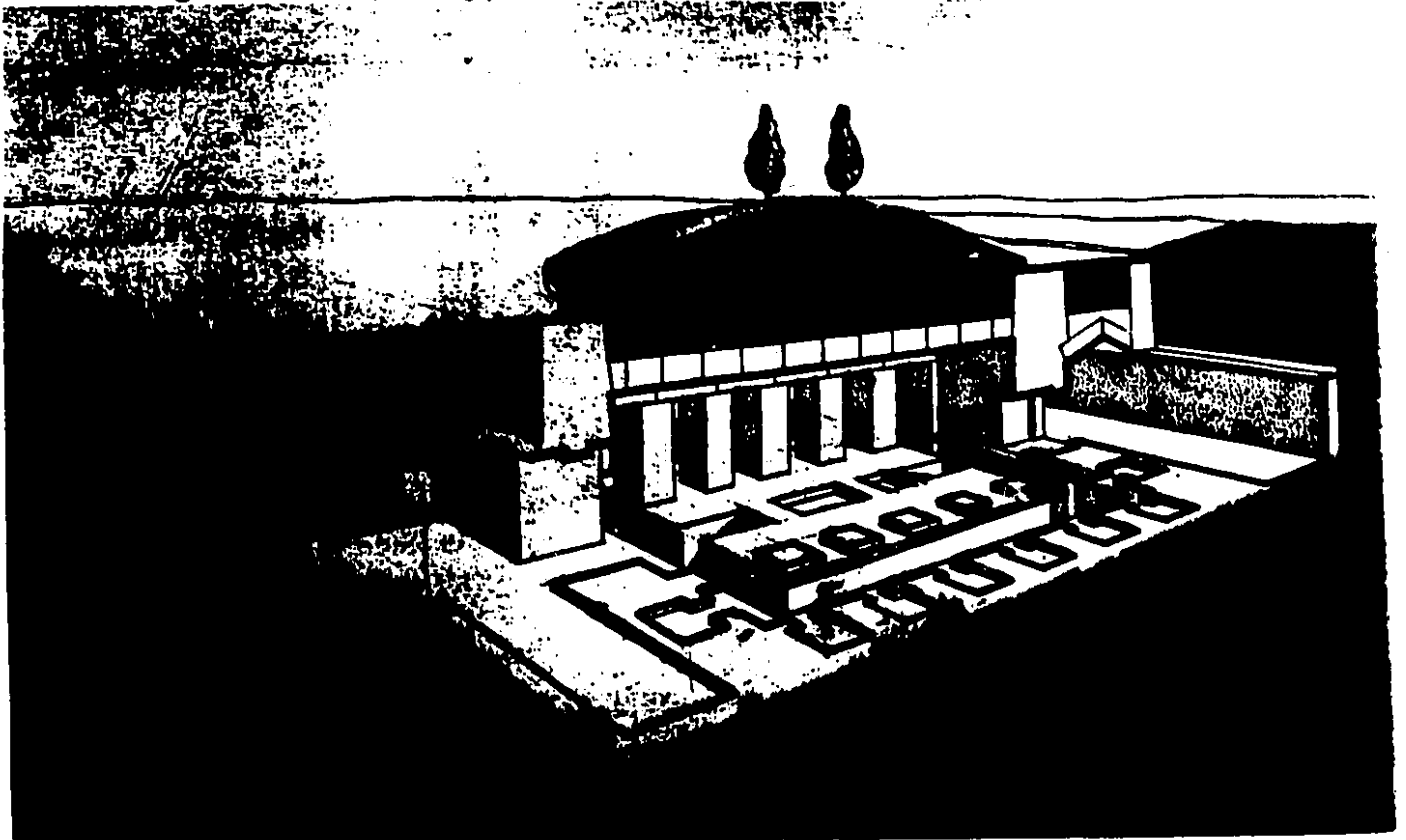
<sup>143</sup> DERMENGHEM, *Le culte des saints dans l'Islam maghrébin*, 1954, p. 136.

<sup>144</sup> *idem*.

<sup>145</sup> LANE, 1908, *op. cit.*, p. 246.



Fig. 5.8 Shetyt Crypt



**Sources:** (top) AUFRERE, Sydney, GOLVIN, Jean-Claude & GOYON, Jean-Claude, *L'Égypte restituée*, Éditions Errance, Paris, 1991, p. 44; (bottom) KEMP, Barry J., *Ancient Egypt*, Routledge, New York, 1989, p. 104.

The shetyt crypt (Osireion) of Sethi I's New Kingdom cenotaph complex in Abedju (top) was intended as a physical representation of Egyptian cosmogony. The subterranean chamber contained a pool surrounding an island. It was entombed within a mound on which trees were aligned. The complex was therefore also a representation of cosmology as both mound and tree were considered cosmic axes. Architectural complexes of this type are known from Middle Kingdom literary sources, as in this hypothetical reconstruction of the mortuary complex of Mentuhetep II (bottom).

BCE.), the shetyt was a representation of Egyptian cosmogony (and not an Osirian sepulcher). It was an underground crypt where the primordial Mound of creation was configured emerging from the watery matrix of Nun. The subterranean basin was fed by Nile water by means of a canal. In its center rose an island on which grain was planted. The crypt thus constituted was entombed within a mound on which trees were arrayed. Representations of the shetyt invariably indicate four trees growing over a mound containing the aquatic crypt (fig. 5.8).<sup>146</sup> It is believed from this and other documentary evidence that these trees were *isheds*.<sup>147</sup>

Similar crypt-mounds crowned by trees are known from archeological and literary sources. Mentuhetep II (2060-2009 BCE.) may have surmounted his mortuary temple in Waset (Thebes) with a mound planted with trees.<sup>148</sup> He may also have similarly surmounted with trees the twin mound-temples of Montu in Madu (Medamud, near Waset).<sup>149</sup> The very first true shetyt (mound and crypt) on record was built in Abedju by Senusret III (1878-1843 BCE.).<sup>150</sup> However it is Sethi's New Kingdom shetyt which has survived and which is recognized as "archetypal". It is on the walls of this shetyt that the "Book of Gates" describing the structure of Tuat was inscribed.

Sethi's shetyt was one of Abedju's major monuments and it attracted pilgrims, some of whom have left votive hymns of their experience:

*(Anubis) — le dieu sur sa Montagne —  
n'écarta (sic) point ton bras.  
et tu gravis les terres saintes.  
Tu entres dans les sanctuaires;  
dans les chapelles, tu déambules.  
Ta route, ensuite, tu (la) poursuis vers Rostaou...  
dans Ta-djeser (terre des morts).  
Tu entres dans la Terre;*

<sup>146</sup> AUFRERE, GOLVIN & GOYON, *L'Égypte restituée* 1991, p. 44.

<sup>147</sup> VANDIER, 1944, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>148</sup> KEMP, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

<sup>149</sup> VANDIER, 1949, *op. cit.*, p. 58; AUFRERE, GOLVIN & GOYON, 1991, *op. cit.*, pp.

146-147; KEMP, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>150</sup> AUFRERE, GOLVIN & GOYON, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

Geb,  
 il s'entrouve pour toi!  
 Tu parviens dans le Hall souterrain,  
 sous les arbres (sacrés).  
 Près du dieu (Osiris), te (voici) arrivé...  
 Tes chairs sont purifiées  
 dans le bassin (sacré)  
 de Heket (la Grenouille).  
 Pour toi s'ouvrent les portes de  
 l'Horizon de l'Autre Monde.  
Dans la paix, dans la paix , tu atteints  
 le saint Lieu d'Osiris! (Leyden Papyrus #32)<sup>151</sup>

This hymn describes spiritual descent as a means of reaching God. The pilgrimage to Abedju entailed a voyage down into the earth (Geb) for purification in the basin of Heket (the "frog"), beneath the sacred isheds, so that the gates of Restau might open. The cosmic gates are thus reached at the root of space and time, at their origin in the waters beneath the World-Mound.

The shetyt unites three symbols (tree, mound, abyss/basin) in a construct which is at once cosmic, cosmogonic and eschatological and which possesses enormous mystic potential. The objective is to attain the non-definable Reality, the Absolute, Infinite and Eternal which is beyond all defining thresholds, beyond space and time. This journey is represented by the frog Heket. The frog personifies the four female elements of the Ogdoad of Khmun (Nunet, Hehet, Keket, Amonet). The ambiguous aquatic/terrestrial nature of this amphibian determines its role as intermediary between creation and the primordial ocean of Nun.<sup>152</sup> Pilgrims to Abedju's shetyt would purify themselves like Heket, at the outer limit, at the threshold between being and no-thing.

---

<sup>151</sup> BRISSON & OUELLET, 1995, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62: (Anubis) — God on his mountain — do not withdraw your arm. You ascend the holy lands. You enter the sanctuaries; in the chapels you wander. Then you follow your road to Restau in Ta-Djeser (land of the dead). You enter the earth. Geb parts for you. You descend to the subterranean Hall, beneath the trees. Near God you have arrived... Your flesh has been purified in the basin of Heket. For you are open the gates of the horizon of the Otherworld. In peace, in peace you reach Osiris' holy place.

<sup>152</sup> LALOUETTE, 1987, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 36.

For Egyptians the realm of the gods, Tuat, lay within the cosmic Egg — at its outer limit perhaps but nonetheless within the space-time continuum of the created Universe. Ultimate Reality (in the sense of Absolute Eternity) lay outside the Cosmos altogether, in the chaotic Nun beyond the defining thresholds. Ultimate Reality therefore was *not* Divine; it resided in Nun, the undifferentiated and "non-personifiable" no-thing.<sup>153</sup> The Egyptian Nun, regarded as an aquatic state (or non-state), was actualized by pools. Just as Light symbolized the universal principle of "informing energy" (ultimately derived from the sun), the pool symbolized the principle of "eternity" (which ultimately resides in Nun). Major temple precincts included sacred pools. Specially constructed underground crypts at water level, like Abedju's shetyt, were the scenes of enactments of the Egyptian cosmogony — the primeval Mound emerging from the primordial chaotic waters of Nun.<sup>154</sup> This configuration seems to have had particular significance for the pharaohs of the XXV<sup>th</sup> (Ethiopian, Nubian or Meroitic) Dynasty. It was Taharqa (688-664 BCE.) who constructed the crypt beside the sacred lake in the temple of Amon in Waset. However, the most famous temple lake was the "Pool of Râ" in Iunu. In 730 BCE., the Ethiopian Pharaoh Piankhi, arriving in the holy city after having reunited Egypt, is recorded as having washed his face in this Pool of Râ, thus legitimizing his rule.<sup>155</sup> The site is still called by the Arabic toponym 'Ain al-Shams (Spring of the Sun) today. Herodotus reports another "Spring of the Sun" at the oracle of Amon in Siwa.<sup>156</sup> One can recognize in the expression "Pool of Râ" the conjoining of the illuminative (Light) and the aquatic (Nun) principles into a single cosmological construct.

How can the configuration of the Egyptian Nun, represented by the shetyt of Abedju and the Pool of Râ in Iunu, be related to the Islamic notion of Nûn and especially its occurrence in Touba's foundation myth? We have seen that Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's transcendent experience beneath the Tree leads him "down" to Nûn

---

<sup>153</sup> HORNUNG, 1992, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-146, 156-168.

<sup>154</sup> AUFRERE, GOLVIN & GOYON, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>155</sup> WIEDEMANN, 1897, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>156</sup> HERODOTUS, 1954, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

rather than "up" as one could have expected. It is upon descending to Nūn that the Senegalese Mystic connects with the Eternal and establishes Tūbā on earth. For Muslims God is Eternal, Enduring and Everlasting (Al-Šamad, Al-Qadim, Al-Bāqī). He is Al-Ḥaqq (Ultimate Truth or Realness); truly beyond all form and matter. God has attributes by which we may know Him (He is Living, Knowing, Powerful, etc.), but His ultimate Reality is beyond such definitions. Nūn might be seen then as symbolizing one of these attributes. Given its acknowledged "aquatic" state, and in so much as it can be related to the Egyptian antecedent, perhaps Nūn is to be understood as an expression of God's "Life" (Ḥayāh), just as Light (Nūr) represents His Knowledge. Nūr and Nūn thus could mark opposite directions ("up" and "down") towards the same source, while the celestial Throne and the abyssal Fish would mark different parts of the threshold between the definable reality we can know and the Ultimate One we can not, different parts of the universe's "shell".

Is this what the Nūn of Touba's foundation actually represents? The image of the tree is certainly a natural vehicle for the conjoining of Nūr and Ḥayāh. Both the "Tree of Knowledge" and the "Tree of Life" are solidly established as symbols. Conjoined as a single entity, the resulting singular "Cosmic Tree" would thrive beneath the Light of Knowledge emanating from the Throne above just as it would drink deeply from the Water of Life flowing below. God, ultimate Source of both Knowledge and Life, would thus nourish the Tree from both extremities simultaneously. Significantly in this regard, West African cosmologies have in fact developed such a Light/Fish construct. For the Batammaliba, the female dimension of the universal life force is symbolized by the "mud-fish" (a fish which hibernates in the muddy riverbed during the dry season and thus has an ambiguous aquatic/terrestrial nature), the male dimension being manifest as sun/light. Both extremities, the abyssal and the celestial, ultimately lead to God.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, this cosmology has been configured in sanctuaries composed of baobabs

---

<sup>157</sup> BLIER, 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

growing over pools.<sup>158</sup> In this case the Tree clearly has the central position between Light and Fish. Touba's Aïnou Rahmati (ʿAyn al-Rahma), because it is etymologically similar to the Egyptian Pool of Râ/ʿAyn al-Shams, might be considered as an actualization of this luminous/aquatic conjunction. To the extent that God's Mercy (al-rahma) might also be defined as an essential attribute (and it certainly is the foundation of His Promise to the righteous), Touba's well (ʿayn) taps into it. Tûbâ, as we know from Suhrawardî, has been equated with the "sun", with Divine Illumination, through the image of the Tree of Light. Lamp Fall, which actualized illumination (this principle of Nûr), shelters a drinking fountain at its base.

If the Senegalese holy city is indeed built on the cosmological model just proposed, and there is nothing in this model incompatible with accepted Islamic notions, then it truly does represent an actualization of the Shajarat al-kawn of mystic speculation. Tûbâ may link the Mound of creation to Divine Light, but Nûn continues as ever to flow beneath it. Life in effect gushes forth from beyond the very bottom of matter. Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's tapping of the Nûn, his mystic descent into *néant*, though it is apparently quite rare in Islamic tradition, is not unknown to Jewish Kabbalah.<sup>159</sup> The notion of God as "no-thing" and as "abyss" is also characteristic of Ismâʿîlî tawhîd.<sup>160</sup> Mystic descent ("katabasis" in Greek) was a feature of Gnostic texts (including the "Apocalypse of Peter", unearthed in Akhmîm) and it too was expressed through the symbol of the frog.<sup>161</sup> The abyssal frog was also featured in the Hermetic literature of Upper Egypt.<sup>162</sup>

As for Dhû al-Nûn al-Miṣrî, whose enigmatic sobriquet has not yet been explained, we have seen under what circumstances he introduced the notion of mystic "states" and "stations" to sufism. That some of these states might have implied descent rather than ascension is nowhere attested, but it might be surmised by the very

---

<sup>158</sup> *ibid.*, p. 51, 75.

<sup>159</sup> SCHOLEM, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 1995, pp. 217-221.

<sup>160</sup> CORBIN, 1986, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

<sup>161</sup> STROUMSA, 1995, *loc. cit.*, p. 144.

<sup>162</sup> MAHÉ, *Hermès en Haute-Égypte*, 1978.

name he chose for himself. Jonah experiences an abyssal, and for all intents and purposes mystic, journey to the Source in the belly of a fish. This event is central to any definition of "Nûn".<sup>163</sup> Whatever the case, the identification of a) Dhû al-Nûn al-Miṣrî with b) the Quranic Jonah, and thus his association with c) the abyssal Nûn through d) the figure of the fish/frog, e) the ocean, and f) the letter "n", cannot be fortuitous. Rûmî had this to say about the issue:

I saw a Jonah sitting at the shore of the ocean of love.  
I said to him: "How are you?"  
He answered in his own way and said: "In the ocean I was  
food for a fish, then I became curved like the letter nûn,  
until I became Dhû'n-Nûn (al-Miṣrî) himself."<sup>164</sup>

### Tree and Sanctuary

All Egyptian temples were considered to rise from the primordial Mound and to be aligned along the cosmic axis. They were cosmogonic and theophanic. They actualized creation and God's first manifestation. Every place was configured as the center and origin of creation. By their very alignment they assured that the ordered Cosmos remained distinct from chaotic Nun and that the Divine remained present among men.

Trees featured in the configuration of many of these sanctuaries:

- Iunu possessed many sacred trees and groves (olives, acacias, sycamores, isheds). As we have seen, a living manifestation of the celestial ished, an actual ished tree, grew within the Hut-Benben and was thus directly associated to the cosmic obelisk and the Bennû bird at the very center of the Sun cult.<sup>165</sup> Also in Iunu was a Hut-Shent, or "Sanctuary of the Acacia (*Acacia nilotica*)",<sup>166</sup> and the olive tree named Baqet, (sacred to Horus) whose fruits were believed to

<sup>163</sup> The Biblical Joshua is named "Joshua son of Nun" ("Numbers" 13:8-16).

<sup>164</sup> Cited by SCHIMMEL, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, 1975, p. 416; Jonah is here describing himself in the process of "becoming" the Egyptian Mystic.

<sup>165</sup> LURKER, 1974, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>166</sup> GOYON, 1972, *op. cit.*, p. 263, 293.

nourish the deceased in Paradise.<sup>167</sup> The Hut-Shent, which lay to the north of the Temple of Râ, was built over the "High Sand" (a cosmic mound). It was the acacia of Saosis (the female dimension of Atum), beneath which her children Shu and Tefnut had been born. It was believed that "life and death" were "contained" in the remarkable acacia which grew there.<sup>168</sup>

- The twin mounds of the temple of Montu in Madu rose amidst a grove enclosed by a wall.<sup>169</sup>

- To the north of the temple of Ptah in Mennufer there was a Sanctuary of the Lady of the Sycamore (Hathor) which contained a grove of her trees, while in the neighborhood of the Giza pyramids, the metaphorical Restau, Hathor was also venerated at an ancient sycamore.<sup>170</sup>

- In Tattu (or Per-Osar, the "House of Osiris", Busiris to the Greeks, modern Abû Sir) there were sacred groves of sycamores, acacias and isheds.<sup>171</sup> Two sycamores are known from textual sources to have flanked the gate to the Osirian temple there.<sup>172</sup> Per-Osar, in the Delta, arose where the box containing Osiris' murdered body had come to rest and where a tree had grown over it. This tree has variously been identified as an erica tree, a cedar, an "abaton", a tamarisk, a willow or an ished (fig. 5.9).<sup>173</sup> It is an arboreal symbol specific to the Osirian narrative and it represents his resurrection.

- In Per-Soped (modern Saft al-Hanna), in the Temple of Soped, there was a Hut-Nebes, or "Sanctuary of the Lote tree".<sup>174</sup>

---

<sup>167</sup> BUDGE, 1969, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 62.

<sup>168</sup> BUHL, 1947, *loc. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>169</sup> KEMP, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>170</sup> BLEEKER, Hathor and Thoth: Two Key Figures of the Ancient Egyptian Religion 1973, p. 37.

<sup>171</sup> BUDGE, 1973, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 37.

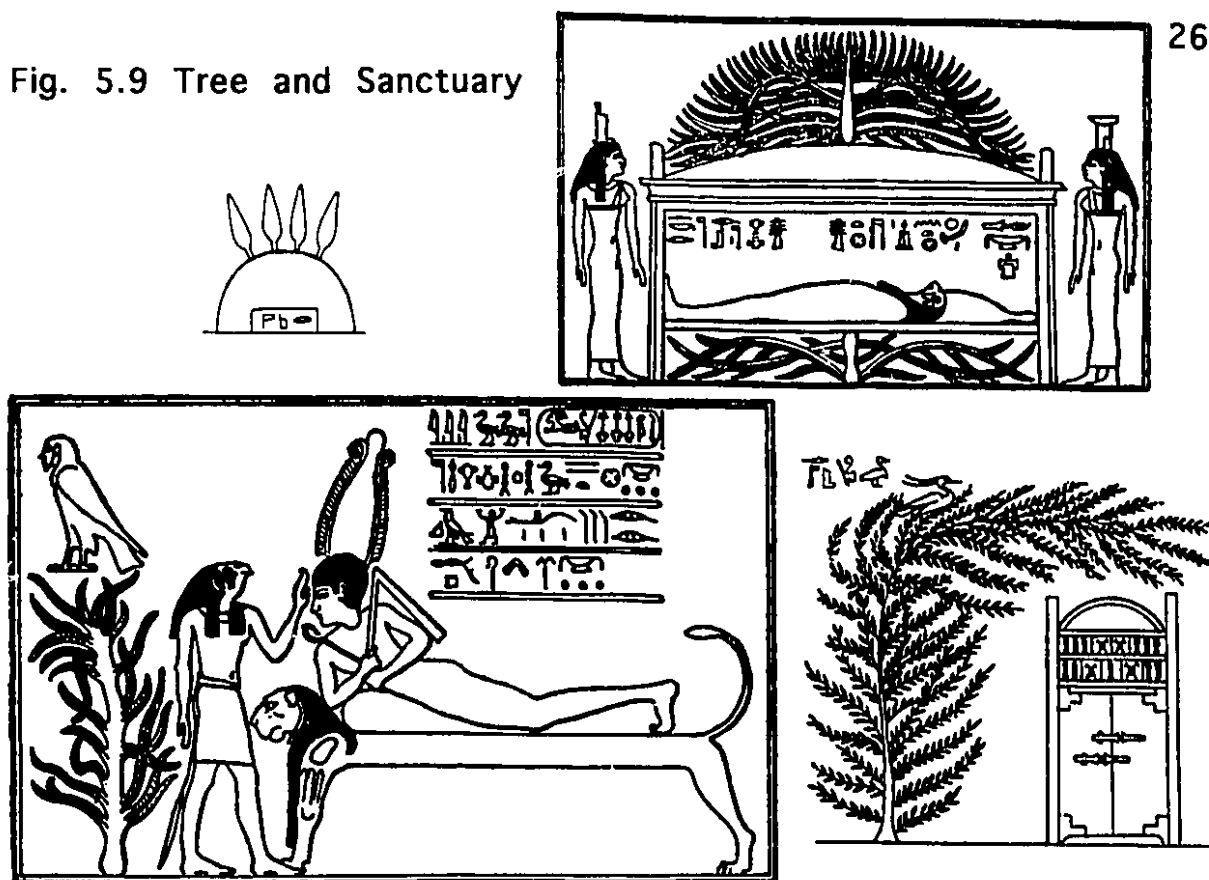
<sup>172</sup> YOYOTTE, 1960, *loc. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>173</sup> BUDGE, 1969, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 345, vol. 2, p. 40, 136; BUHL, 1947, *loc. cit.*, p. 90. It is Plutarch who identifies this tree as an "erica". He also affirms that it grew up in Byblos, which is a departure from Egyptian sources (see VANDIER, 1949, *op. cit.*, p. 52). The Ericaceae is a family of tropical berry-producing shrubs. One species is known to Egypt (Ericaceae arbutus, an evergreen) and several to West Africa (Ericaceae agauria, E. philippia, E. blaeria).

<sup>174</sup> GOYON, 1972, *op. cit.*, p. 82.



Fig. 5.9 Tree and Sanctuary



Sources: (top left) AUFRERE, Sydney, GOLVIN, Jean-Claude & GOYON, Jean-Claude, *L'Égypte restituée* Éditions Errance, Paris, 1991, p. 44; (top right) COOK, Roger, *The Tree of Life*, Thames & Hudson, New York, 1974, p. 107; (bottom left) BUDGE, Ernst A. Wallis, *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, Dover Publications, New York, 1973, vol. 2, p. 40; (bottom right) ERMAN, Adolf, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, Dover Publications, New York, 1971, p. 272.

The enigmatic "erica" tree plays a singular role in the narrative of the Osirian resurrection. It grows over the coffin which contains Osiris' murdered body (bottom left). It also constitutes the ultimate destination of his *bâ* (his soul here represented as a hawk, top). The graphic representation of this tree or shrub (with its rubbery tongue-like leaves) clearly distinguishes it from the more common tree forms. Osirian sanctuaries, which were believed to be the tombs of his scattered limbs, always contained sacred trees and groves of various species. The representation of one such sanctuary (bottom right) depicts Osiris' Bennu bird (a heron) nesting in a tree which shelters his coffin-shrine. The tree here resembles a slender willow. The dendrological identity of the Osirian "erica" tree has yet to be satisfactorily determined. The symbolic representation of another Osirian tomb (top) shows it as a subterranean chamber surmounted by a mound on which four trees are growing. There are clear similarities with Abedju's shetyt crypt (fig. 5.8) and other cosmic mound sanctuaries.

- In the Nubian town of Pselqet (Al-Dakka) there was also a Hut-Nebes consecrated by the Meroïtic king Arkamon. Thoth is depicted as a baboon beneath this venerated lote tree.<sup>175</sup>

- An acacia (shent) and a lote tree (nebes) grew within the precincts of the Horus Temple in Hut-Sekhem (the "Sanctuary of the Sistrum" or "Scepter", Diospolis Parva of the Greeks, modern Hiw).<sup>176</sup> Also in Hut-Sekhem was a grove called Shenesit, "Acacias of Seth".<sup>177</sup> Later, towards 320 C.E., this grove served as ascetic retreat to the young Saint Pachom.<sup>178</sup> It was here that he organized the first monastic order in Christendom. Several Coptic monasteries were built in Shenesit and it became known by the Greek name Khenoboskion. Khenoboskion was also an important Gnostic center and has bequeathed to us the Nag Hammadi Library.

Thus we can find the lote trees (Egp. nebes, *Zizyphus lotus*) and acacias (Egp. shent, Arb. sant) of the Qur'ân (56;27-34) already associated to each other in the form of actual trees in Egyptian temples. The story of Horus (lote tree) and his uncle Seth (the acacia, sacred to Seth, was also considered to be the birth-tree of Horus) was part of the Osirian narrative. Their arboreal manifestations in the holy city of Hut-Sekhem were quite probably intended as a representation of the judgment process. It is certainly of no small interest then that both the lote tree and the acacia (which are characteristically tropical species thriving in desiccated regions) were already associated to each other in pre-history. It is known from traces of their pollen that these species shaded the very earliest agricultural communities of the Neolithic Sahara (c. 6600 B.P.).<sup>179</sup> The lote tree was cited among the trees of Paradise already in the Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts (#808).<sup>180</sup> Ex-voto of lote jujubes have been found in Egyptian tombs.<sup>181</sup> Lists compiled in Ptolemaic times record that the shent was worshipped in 24 nomes and the

<sup>175</sup> BUHL, 1947, *loc. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>176</sup> BUDGE, 1969, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 468, 499.

<sup>177</sup> DORESSE, 1958, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>178</sup> *idem.*

<sup>179</sup> MIDANT-REYNES, *Préhistoire de l'Égypte*, 1992, p. 144.

<sup>180</sup> BUHL, 1947, *loc. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>181</sup> VERCOUTTER, 1992, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 45.

nebes in 17,<sup>182</sup> and in Lane's day (c. 1834 C.E.) Horus' lote tree was still associated with burial in Egypt as its leaves were used to wash the dead and its branches were carried in procession during funerals.<sup>183</sup>

- In the Horus Temple of Djeba (modern Edfu) there was a venerated ished.<sup>184</sup>

- In the necropolis of Waset (Thebes), within the precincts of the "primordial mound" temple of Djêmé, there was a grove of isheds.<sup>185</sup> The forecourt of the Middle Kingdom mortuary temple of Mentuhetep II (c. 2000 BCE.), also in Waset, contained groves of arrayed tamarisk and sycamores.<sup>186</sup> Five hundred years later and only a hundred meters away, the approaches to Hatchepsut's mortuary temple were likewise planted with arrayed trees.<sup>187</sup>

- As to the multitude of private mausolea and tombs in Abedju, it is known from the traces they have left that two trees (one should like to know which species) were invariably planted in their forecourts, one on each side of the central passage.<sup>188</sup>

### Tree and Garden

Egyptian temples were surrounded by precisely arranged gardens. These gardens, like Islamic gardens, were intended as earthly representations of Paradise. The Egyptian Paradise-garden basically consisted of rows of aligned trees (most often sycamores alternating with doum-palms) surrounding a square or rectangular basin.<sup>189</sup> This unit could be repeated and variously arranged in vaster compositions (fig. 5.10). The rectangular pool was the central feature of the temple garden. It was used for priestly ablutions and

<sup>182</sup> WIEDMANN, 1897, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

<sup>183</sup> LANE, 1908, *op. cit.*, pp. 518, 524.

<sup>184</sup> GOYON, 1972, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>185</sup> AUFRERE, GOLVIN & GOYON, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

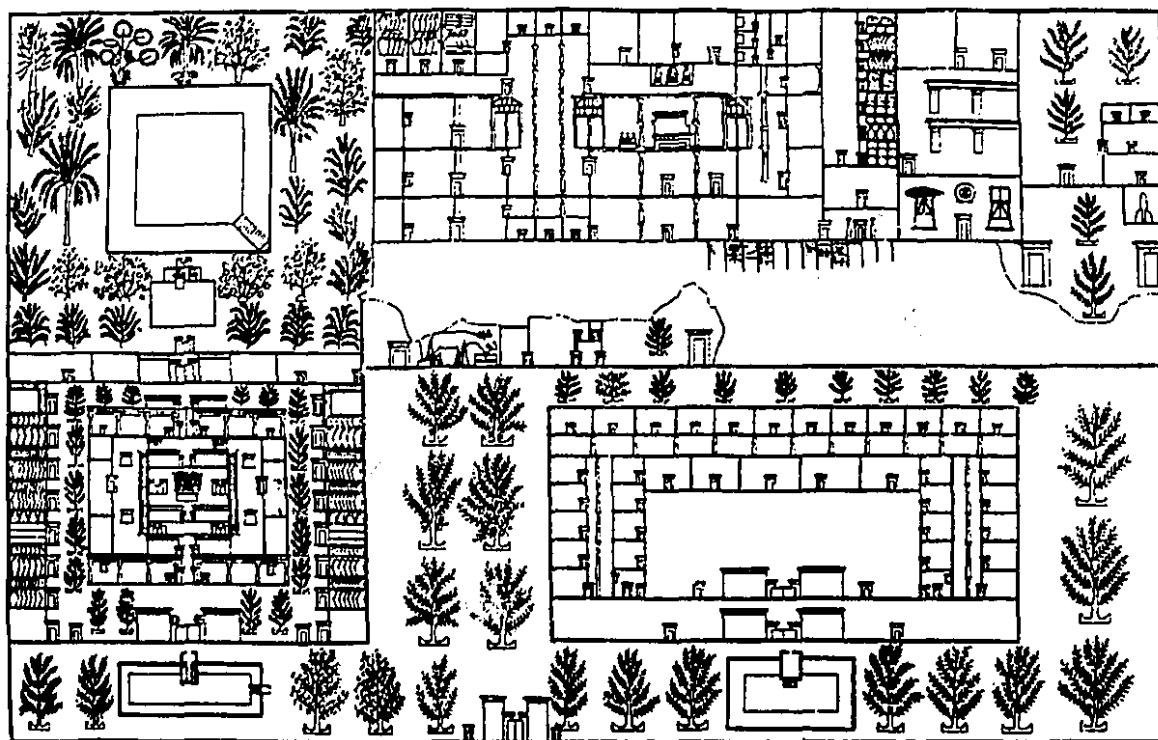
<sup>186</sup> BAINES & MALEK, Atlas of Ancient Egypt 1980, p. 96; LALOUETTE, Thèbes ou la naissance d'un empire, 1995a, pp. 58-59.

<sup>187</sup> AUFRERE, GOLVIN & GOYON, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

<sup>188</sup> *ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>189</sup> WILKINSON, The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians 1878, vol. 1, p. 379; ERMAN, 1971, *op. cit.*, p. 286; ERMAN & RANKE, La civilisation égyptienne, 1985, p. 235.

Fig. 5.10 Paradise Garden



THE ADJOINING BUILDINGS OF THE TEMPLE OF THE SUN-DISK  
(From the tomb of Meryrè, at Tell el Amarna. L. D., III. 95.)

Sources: (top) ERMAN, Adolf, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, Dover Publications, New York, 1971, p. 286; (bottom) WILKINSON, Sir John Garner, *The Ancient Egyptians* Senate, London, 1994, vol. 1, p. 38.

The central element of the Egyptian garden was a square or rectangular pool. The pools of many temple gardens (top) have survived in archeological sites (Karnak, Dendera). The private garden (bottom) contains four pools and numerous pavilions disposed symmetrically amidst the rows of different species of trees.

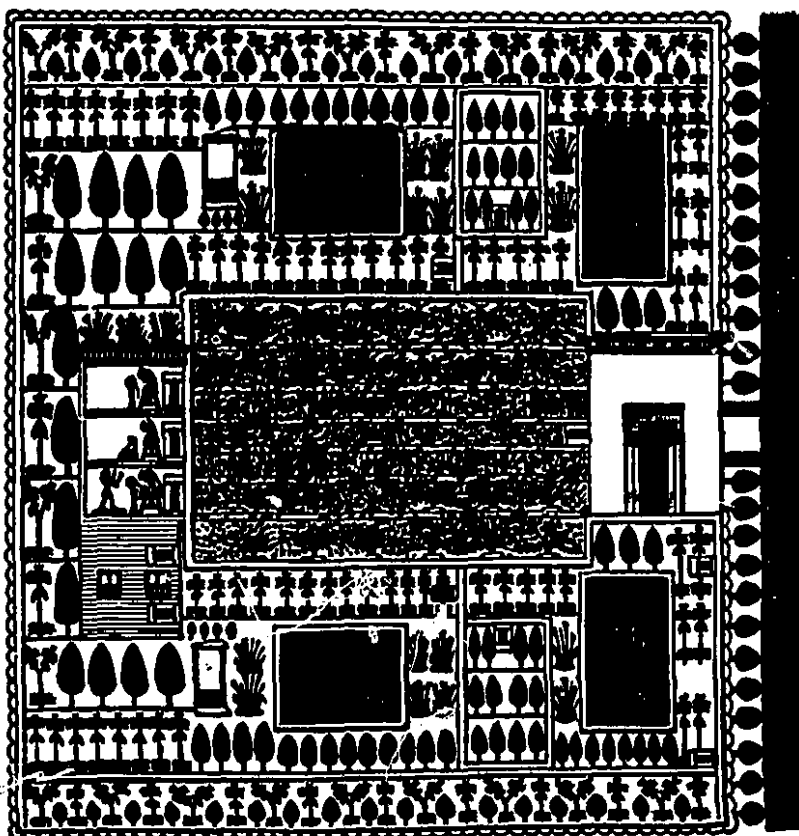


Fig. 5.11 Pool of Osiris in Tuat

OSIRIS KHENTI AMENTI, THE GREAT GOD, THE LORD OF ETERNITY, GOVERNOR OF THE GREAT LAND, SEATED ON HIS THRONE IN THE OTHER WORLD RECEIVING THE ADORATIONS OF THE SCRIBE NEKHT AND HIS WIFE.



Source: BUDGE, Ernst A. Wallis, Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection, Dover Publications, New York, 1973, frontispiece, vol. 1.

In this illustration from the Book of the Dead, the configuration of the kingdom of Osiris in Tuat corresponds closely to that of the typical Egyptian garden (fig. 5.10). The rectangular pool at center is surrounded by alignments of alternating species of trees (possibly sycamores and date-palms). One of these in particular (a leafy fruit-tree at the pool's upper left corner) clearly surpasses the others and might well be a reference to the Ished. Note also at right the paradisiacal abode with a date-palm and a leafy fruit-tree growing before its entrance.

was stocked with sacred animals: the lates-fish of Khnum, the geese of Amon, the crocodiles of Sobek, and were planted with aquatic lotus and papyrus. It also served as reservoirs for the irrigation of temple gardens. The pool could also be a representation of the Osirian pool of purification (fig. 5.11) or of the primordial Nun (in which case a crypt would be constructed on the embankment).

Gardens were not the sole prerogative of temples. Royal palaces and wealthy citizens possessed their own little paradises, enclosed by high walls. As early as the III<sup>rd</sup> dynasty (c. 2700 BCE.) "good trees", among them sycamores and grape-vines, are listed as growing in the Pharaoh's garden.<sup>190</sup> Very precise lists of the composition of later gardens have been found; one in particular, the private garden of Ineni, chief architect at the time of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> dynasty (c. 1500 BCE.), list the following specimens among its five hundred trees: 170 date-palms, 120 doum-palms, 73 sycamores, 31 lisheds, 12 grape-vines, 10 tamarisks, 9 willows, 5 fig-trees, 5 pomegranates.<sup>191</sup> This list, which accompanies a map of the garden (fig. 5.10), ends with the expressed wish of the garden's owner that in the Afterlife he might "sit on the boughs of the trees that he had planted, and enjoy the cool air in the shade of his sycamore".<sup>192</sup> The tree growing over the pool was the most common representation of Paradise in New Kingdom tombs (fig. 5.3).<sup>193</sup>

The garden of the temple of Amon in Waset became something of a botanical and zoological park during the heyday of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Hatshepsut had vowed to turn the great temple into an "incense land". Her expedition to the "God Land" of Punt was undertaken in order to fulfill this vow and it returned with the required incense trees and baboons. Her nephew and successor Thutmoses III (1482-1450 BCE.) had the temple garden stocked with rare plants and birds brought back from the conquered provinces of

---

<sup>190</sup> ERMAN & RANKE, 1985, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

<sup>191</sup> WILKINSON, 1878, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 378; ERMAN & RANKE, 1985, *op. cit.*, p. 240; LALOUE, 1995a, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-184.

<sup>192</sup> ERMAN, 1971, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>193</sup> BUHL, 1947, *loc. cit.*, pp. 90-92.

Syria.<sup>194</sup> Many of these species have been identified through their mural representations.

Incense Trees of Punt For Egyptians, fragrances (incense, myrrh, lotus blossom) represented death — they were the emanations of those who were in a state of blessed purity:

*La mort est devant moi aujourd'hui,  
Comme l'odeur de la myrrhe (ḥt,yw),  
Comme le fait de s'asseoir sous la voile, un jour de vent.  
La mort est devant moi aujourd'hui,  
Comme l'odeur du lotus (ss),  
Comme le fait de s'asseoir sur la rive de l'ivresse. (XII<sup>th</sup>  
dynasty papyrus)<sup>195</sup>*

Moreover, burning incense constituted something of a "ladder" to heaven as the soul of the deceased ascended along with the fumigation:

The mother of Pepi is Nut. The father of Pepi is Shu. The mother of Pepi is Tefnut. They raise Pepi to heaven on the flame of the incense. Purified is Pepi, living is Pepi; moreover, he maketh his seat to be Osiris. (Pyramid Text #955)<sup>196</sup>

Incense, obtained from the gums and resins of various trees and shrubs, along with fragrant leaves, woods and barks, were important to Egyptian funerary rites. Balms and unguents were used to purify the deceased so that their souls might accede to the Hereafter. They were used for "embalming" the dead. In Islam too perfumes: incense, myrrh, lotus and camphor water, are recommended for the preparation of the dead for burial.<sup>197</sup> Frankincense and myrrh were especially necessary to the proper enactment of ancient religious rites, first in Egyptian temples, and later in temples and churches throughout the Near East and

<sup>194</sup> AUFRERE, GOLVIN & GOYON, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>195</sup> OBENGA, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 190: Death is before me today, Like the smell of myrrh, Like the act of sitting beneath the veil on a windy day, Death is before me today, Like the smell of lotus Like the act of sitting on the shore of intoxication.

<sup>196</sup> BUDGE, 1973, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 360.

<sup>197</sup> HAJA, La mort et le Jugement Dernier selon les enseignements de l'Islam, 1991, pp. 25-39.

Mediterranean well into Christian times. It can be noted that the Biblical terebinth tree is an incense tree. The terebinth produces an odorous balm used in Egypt as of the most ancient times.<sup>198</sup> Incense was essential for the conduct of funerary rites. Gifts and offerings of it to mortuary temples were common. The wished, if we accept its identification as the *Cordia sebestena*, has a scented wood which can be burnt like sandalwood and which was used in the manufacture of sarcophagi.<sup>199</sup>

Fragrance was also a sign of hierophany. Sweet scent was the principal manner in which the Divine would manifest itself on earth. Egyptian theophany was olfactory rather than visionary. People could "smell" (equivalent to the French verb *sentir*) divine presence rather than see or hear it. The Egyptian term for incense, *seneter*, is cryptographically linked to the term for God, *neter*.<sup>200</sup> In order to signal Divine presence on earth, Egyptian temples were kept perpetually inhabited by "the aroma of Punt".

The incense land of Punt (Ethiopia and Somalia, the Biblical Put) was "God Land" for Egyptians. The Egyptians were "South" oriented.<sup>201</sup> The south, from which the Nile descended, was "up"; it represented the spiritual "source". The abode of the gods was in the fragrant south, in Punt, the ancestral land of Nilotic civilization whence incense was imported. One of the constants of Egyptian foreign policy was the maintenance of the incense-routes to Punt. The most easily obtainable frankincense was from the *Boswellia papyrifera* (*Burseraceæ* family) which grows throughout the arid tropical zone from Eritrea to the Nilotic Sudan, the East African Rift and Chad.<sup>202</sup> This incense was traded over land and down-river from earliest times.<sup>203</sup> Higher quality incense however was obtained from the myrrh of the *Commiphora myrrha* and *Commiphora abyssinica*

<sup>198</sup> VERCOUTTER, 1992, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 46.

<sup>199</sup> DALZIEL, 1937, *op. cit.*, p. 425. As a member of the Laurel family (a family which includes laurel, camphor, cassia and cinnamon among other fragrant species), the *Persea gratissima* may also possess fragrant leaves and bark.

<sup>200</sup> BRISSON & OUELETTE, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>201</sup> Classical Arab world maps were also South oriented, the South being at the top.

<sup>202</sup> GROOM, *Frankincense and Myrrh*, 1981, pp. 102-103.

<sup>203</sup> *ibid.*, p. 27.



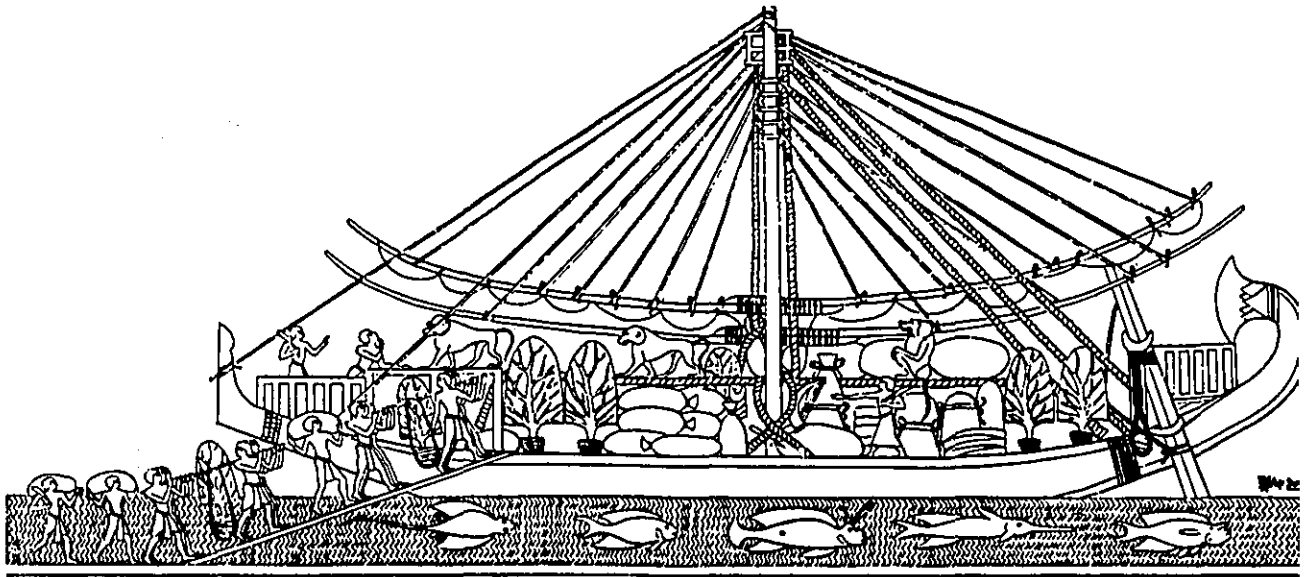
and especially the frankincense of the *Boswellia thurifera*. These species (all of the *Burseraceae* family) are confined to the lands of the Gulf of Aden (Yemen, Hadramawt, Dhufâr, Somalia, Socotra). Though it is possible that these gums and resins reached Egypt overland, commerce on the Red Sea was the most effective means of obtaining them. The first recorded maritime expeditions were undertaken under the Old Kingdom pharaohs Sahure (c. 2485 BCE.), Djedkare (c. 2400 BCE.) and Pepi II (c. 2200 BCE.). "The fleet (of Sahure) returned... with 80,000 measures of myrrh, 6,000 units of electrum, 2,600 units of wood and 23,020 measures of unguent."<sup>204</sup> During the Middle Kingdom, it is recorded that pharaohs Mentuhetep III (2009-1998 BCE.), Mentuhetep IV (1998-1991 BCE.), Amenemhet II (1929-1895 BCE.), and Senusret II (1895-1878 BCE.) also sponsored Punt expeditions. Similar expeditions were regularly undertaken in New Kingdom times by Hatshepsut (1503-1482 BCE.), Thutmose III (1482-1450 BCE.), Sethi I (1318-1278 BCE.), Ramses III (1193-1162 BCE.) and Ramses IV (1162-1156 BCE.).<sup>205</sup> Hatshepsut especially wanted to recreate "God Land" inside the Egyptian capital, the "God City" of Waset (Thebes). She records having imported thirty-one young incense trees from Punt in order to grace Amon's temples there.<sup>206</sup> Her expedition is depicted on the walls of her mortuary temple at Dayr al-Bahrî. Therein figures a representation of an unquestionably African "Queen of Punt" — the earliest reference anywhere to a queen in the land which later became known as Sheba. Also, Egyptian ships are represented being laden with small trees and numerous baboons (fig. 5.12). These trees and simians were associated to each other within the Egyptian eschatological construct. Both the baboon and the ished were sacred to Thoth. Thoth is often seen accompanied by a baboon, especially when he is depicted recording the results of the weighing of hearts (fig. 5.13). Curiously, the ished and the baboon are also connected biologically if we accept the identification of the ished as the *Cordia sebestena*.

<sup>204</sup> RASHIDI, "Royal Ships of the Pharaohs", 1994, p. 274.

<sup>205</sup> RASHIDI, 1994, *loc. cit.*, pp. 85-87; DORESSE, Ethiopia: Ancient Cities and Temples, 1959, pp. 17-18.

<sup>206</sup> ERMAN, 1971, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-195.

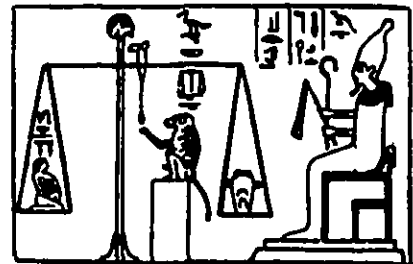
Fig. 5.12 Hatshepsut's Expedition to Punt



Source: ERMAN, Adolf, Life in Ancient Egypt, Dover Publications, New York, 1971, p. 513.

Of all the expeditions to Punt, that of Hatshepsut is the most famous as she used the narrative to decorate her mortuary temple (Dayr al-Bahri) in Waset. In this scene an Egyptian ship is being laden with valuable items destined for the great temple of Amon. Among the goods depicted are seven trees (incense trees of one species or another) and three baboons.

Fig. 5.13 Thoth as Baboon



Sources: (left) ERMAN, Adolf, Life in Ancient Egypt, Dover Publications, New York, 1971, p. 329; (right) BUDGE, Ernst A. Wallis, The Egyptian Heaven and Hell Open Court, La Salle Illinois, 1975, p. 159.

The baboon was an animal sacred to Thoth. It is represented here overseeing the weighing in the judgment scene.

The *Cordia* figure among those species which germinate from baboon droppings.<sup>207</sup> The *Mimusops*, on the other hand, is characterized by its peculiar "monkey-face" flowers — flowers which in effect resemble the faces of simians. The lote tree (nebes) could also be associated to Thoth's baboon, as in the temple of Pselqet (Nubia). The baboon of course is not native to Egypt. It thrives in dry or wooded savannas characteristic of Tropical Africa. The fact that the Egyptians held the baboon in such great esteem, and that it was integrated (along with the equally tropical ibis) to a major cult (Thoth), argues once again in favor of the deep African roots of pharaonic civilization. Actual living specimens of Thoth's sacred ishedds along with his baboons, imported from deepest Africa, from fragrant God Land, thrived together in the gardens of New Kingdom temples.

Ethiopian Trees of Judgment Significantly, the fragrant trees of Punt are prominent in Christian Ethiopian tradition. Cosmic and paradisiacal trees are associated with Divine Judgment in the Ethiopian "Book of Enoch". The "Book of Enoch" is a Biblical text which, though not included in the "Book of Prophets" as it has come to be known in the rest of the world, was nonetheless accepted as canonical by the Ethiopian Church in the IV<sup>th</sup> century C.E. and has therefore come down to us in Ge'ez. The text, which dates from the I<sup>nd</sup> century BCE.,<sup>208</sup> relates the cosmic ascension of the prophet Enoch (an avatar of Thoth-Hermes) in the company of angels, and it is thus part of "ascension" literature. The "Book of Enoch", though it was dropped from the Jewish canon, was nonetheless important for the subsequent development of Jewish Merkabah Mysticism, with its emphasis on the ascensions of Isaia ("Isaia" 6;1-13) and Ezekiel ("Ezekiel" 31;1-18), and their descriptions of celestial "Palaces".<sup>209</sup> In the Qur'ân too, Idrîs (Enoch) is "a truthful man, a prophet, and We raised him to a high place" (19;56-57). Though Enoch does not meet with the Supreme Power, in his cosmic ascension he too, like Muhammad, travels through many different abodes. These abodes

<sup>207</sup> STEENTOFT, Flowering Plants of West Africa , 1988, p. 11.

<sup>208</sup> CHARLES, 1899, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>209</sup> SCHOLEM, 1995, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-45.

contain various eschatological elements and symbols scattered throughout: places of judgment, places for the blessed, places for the damned, the Divine Throne, the Tree of Life.

According to the Ethiopian recension, in the course of his ascension, Enoch encounters the following "Tree of Judgment":

And (there was) a seventh mountain in the middle of these, and in their height they were all like the seat of a throne, and fragrant trees surround it.

And there was among them a tree such as I had never smelt, and none of them nor any others were like it; it smells more fragrant than any fragrance, and its leaves and its flowers and its wood never wither; its fruit (is) good, and its fruit (is) like the bunches of dates on a palm.

And then I said: "Behold, this beautiful tree! Beautiful to look at and pleasant (are) its leaves, and its fruit very delightful in appearance."

And then Michael, one of the holy and honoured angels who was with me and (was) in charge of them, answered me.

And said to me: "Enoch why do you ask me about the fragrance of this tree, and (why) do you inquire to learn?"

Then I, Enoch, answered him, saying: "I wish to learn about everything, but especially about this tree."

And he answered me, saying: "This high mountain which you saw, whose summit is like the throne of the Lord, is the throne where the Holy and Great One, the Lord of Glory, the Eternal King, will sit when he comes down to visit the earth for good.

And this beautiful fragrant tree — and no (creature of) flesh has authority to touch it until the great judgement when he will take vengeance on all and will bring (everything) to a consummation for ever — this will be given to the righteous and humble.

From its fruit life will be given to the chosen; towards the north it will be planted, in a holy place, by the house of the Lord, the Eternal king. Then they will rejoice with joy and be glad in the holy (place); they will each draw the fragrance of it into their bones, and they will live a long life on earth , as your fathers lived, and in their days sorrow

and pain and toil and punishment will not touch them." (the Book of Enoch, 24;3-25;6)<sup>210</sup>

Here we have a cosmic tree clearly identified with judgment — as *locus* of Judgment. The Lord from His throne will judge all at the end of time. Those judged righteous will be given life from its fruit (which grow like bunches of dates) and they will then live on eternally beneath it in a holy place. Its leaves, flowers and wood never wither. Clearly, this Ethiopian tree resembles Tuba and the sidrat al-muntahâ as described in the mi'raj. Moreover, Enoch's tree is most characterized by its fragrance; "they will each draw the fragrance of it into their bones, and they will live a long life on earth..." It is the fragrance of Enoch's tree which has eschatological connections. Fragrance (ṭib, ṭayba), as we have seen, characterizes the Islamic Tûbâ.

Enoch continues his cosmic journey and describes many other fragrant trees:

And I went to another place (away) from the wilderness; I came near to the east of this mountain.

And there I saw trees of judgement , especially vessels of the fragrance of incense and myrrh, and these trees are not alike.

And above it, above these, above the mountains of the east, and not far away, I saw another place, valleys of water like that which does not fail.

And I saw a beautiful tree and its fragrance (was) like mastic .

And by the banks of these valleys I saw fragrant cinnamon . And beyond those (valleys) I came near towards the east.

And I saw another mountain on which there were trees, and there flowed out water, and there flowed out from it as it were a nectar whose name is styrax and galbanum .

And beyond this mountain I saw another mountain, and on it (there were) aloe trees , and those trees (were) full of (a fruit) which (is) like an almond and (is) hard.

And when they take this fruit, it is better than any fragrance. (the Book of Enoch, 29;1-31;3)<sup>211</sup>

<sup>210</sup> KNIBB, The Ethiopic Book of Enoch 1978, pp. 113-114.

<sup>211</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 117-120.

Again we find cosmic "trees of judgment" very precisely characterized by fragrances: incense, myrrh, mastic, cinnamon, aloe, almond, and bearing nut-like fruit

In the Ethiopian "Book of Enoch" the celestial tree of judgment is also equated with the Biblical Tree of Knowledge and it is again defined by fragrance:

And I came to the garden of righteousness, and I saw beyond those trees many large trees growing there, sweet-smelling, large, very beautiful and glorious, and the tree of wisdom from which they eat and know great wisdom

And it is like the carob tree, and its fruit (is) like the bunches of grapes on a vine, very beautiful, and the smell of this tree spreads and penetrates afar.

And I said: "This tree (is) beautiful! How beautiful and pleasing (is) its appearance!"

And the holy angel Raphael, who was with me, answered me and said to me: "This is the tree of wisdom from which your old father and your aged mother, who were before you, ate and learnt wisdom; and their eyes were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they were driven from the garden." (the Book of Enoch, 32;3-6)<sup>212</sup>

Fabulous trees are a common feature of "ascension" literature generally: Seth's vision of the trees of Paradise in the apocryphal "Apocalypse of Moses", "Life of Adam and Eve", and "Gospel of Nicomedia", or Isaia's vision of the Prophetic Tree in the "Ascension of Isaia".<sup>213</sup> What distinguishes Enoch's trees in this Ethiopic text is their fragrance. Fragrance is an essential part of the Islamic *Tûbâ* tradition; *tib* designates "perfume" while in the *mi'raj* the *sidrat al-muntahâ* and the tree *Tûbâ* are both characterized by specific fragrances, fragrances such as those of the Trees of Judgment in the Ethiopian "Book of Enoch". The forests of fragrant trees of the Egyptian God Land (Punt) are thus reproduced in that very same land (Ethiopia) in an Abrahamic cosmological construct. In other recensions of the "Book of Enoch" (the Slavonic one for instance)

---

<sup>212</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>213</sup> BROSSE, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 311, 317.

there is no similar emphasis on cosmic trees nor their olfactory attributes.

Waset Of all Egypt's holy cities, it is Waset (Greek Thebes) which offers the most complete topographical expression of its spiritual constructs. Second only to Abedju as a necropolis and to Iunu as clerical metropolis was Waset (meaning "scepter"). What Waset lacked in antiquity and Osirian legitimacy it made up for in sheer size. The Temple of Amon (37 hectares) remains to this day the single largest religious complex ever erected (The Meccan haram, when its present enlargement is completed, will occupy 21 hectares). It is this very temple which Hatshepsut turned into a fragrant God Land by importing Ethiopian incense trees and baboons, and it is on the walls of its pylons that one repeatedly finds representations of the *ished* of Iunu.<sup>214</sup>

Contrary to Abedju, which predates the monarchy and the State, Waset was the locus of the ritualization of the Pharaoh. It became an important city when the XI<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, native to Waset, reunited the country and inaugurated Egypt's Middle Kingdom (c. 2150 BCE.). Amon, Waset's local god, was then assimilated to Râ, the universally recognized God-head previously instituted by Iunu. The temple of Amon became the locus of the new regime's spiritual legitimacy and would remain so for the better part of the next two millennia, even when the political capital was established elsewhere. Thus when we find pharaohs using the walls of Amon's abode in Waset to depict their desire for prosperity, by having their names, years and jubilees inscribed on the leaves of the *ished*, we are in the presence of important religious expressions at the very heart of official preoccupations.

It was during the New Kingdom that Waset became a sprawling metropolis of monumental temples linked by great sphinx-lined avenues.<sup>215</sup> Beginning in the reign of Thutmose I (1526-1512 BCE.), the old city was progressively demolished to make way for the gigantic enlargements of the temples of Amon, Mut, Khonsu and

---

<sup>214</sup> DIOP, Ch. A., 1981, *op. cit.*, p. 419.

<sup>215</sup> KEMP, 1989, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-217.

Muntu — much as in recent decades the ancient urban cores of Mecca and Madina have been cleared to permit vastly enlarged Harams. It was also Thutmoses I who first had the register of his years and sed festivals inscribed on a representation of the ished (on the fourth pylon of the temple of Amon).<sup>216</sup> Waset was transformed into a grand "set" for imperially sponsored public ritual processions and festivals (shemu and opet festivals) of lavish proportions which could last for weeks. During these festivals the statues of gods would be removed from their naos, in the innermost sanctums of the temples where they habitually resided, to be paraded through the metropolis in ritual barks from one shrine to another. Added to these specifically religious occasions were royal coronation festivals and jubilees (sed festivals) which demanded years of investment. Not only temple complexes but ceremonial festival halls, palaces, gardens, canals and gigantic artificial basins were created. A greater part of the wealth of imperial Egypt was thus concentrated in the religious institutions of its spiritual capital. The power and wealth of Waset's clerical institutions (at one point the Temple of Amon counted the revenues 56 Canaanite towns among its resources)<sup>217</sup> became hegemonic when the New Kingdom weakened. Waset evolved into a theocratic state. Beginning in the XXI<sup>st</sup> Dynasty (1069-945 BCE.), the priesthood of Amon took direct control of pharaonic administration. Later, while the XXII<sup>nd</sup> and XXIII<sup>rd</sup> Dynasties were ruling the Delta (945-725 BCE.), Upper Egypt was ruled directly by the clergy of Amon, under the authority of High Priests in Waset. Finally, under the Ethiopian (XXV<sup>th</sup>) Dynasty and right up until the Persian conquest (in 525 BCE.), a dynasty of High Priestesses (Divine Adoratrices of Amon) exerted sovereign political authority over Upper Egypt.<sup>218</sup> Waset's southern temple of Amon, in modern Al-Uqsar (Luxor), continued to have something of a spiritual career even after the demise of Egyptian religion. It was first transformed by a Roman legion into a temple for the imperial cult. Later, no less than three Coptic churches were built within its precincts. Finally, one of the

---

<sup>216</sup> LALOUETTE, 1995a, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

<sup>217</sup> REDFORD, 1992, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

<sup>218</sup> BAINES & MALEK, 1980, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-51.



disaffected churches became the Mosque of Abû al-Hajjâj Yûsuf (d. 676/1244). Despite the best efforts of Egyptologists to have it removed, this sufi shrine remains Upper Egypt's most popular places of pilgrimage.<sup>219</sup> Rituals connected with this mosque, the procession of the saint's bark through the streets of the town for instance, resemble those of ancient Waset.<sup>220</sup>

Waset was the object of theological as well as institutional investment. It was the "Eye of Râ" and the "Abode of Maat". It was "the island emerging in Nun which first came into being when all other places were in obscurity". According to a XIX<sup>th</sup> Dynasty papyrus, it was the first piece of creation, "water and land began to exist there", and, like Mecca, it was believed to be the mother of cities, "all cities are called cities after her name".<sup>221</sup> Like Madîna, Waset was often simply referred to as Niut, "The City" (the Biblical No or No-Amon, Ptolemaic "Diospolis" or "God City").<sup>222</sup>

Like Abedju, Waset was an eschatological threshold, a gate to a better existence:

Happy is he who comes to die at Waset,  
The abode of Maat, the place of Silence,  
Evil-doers come not here into the places of Maat,  
Happiness to him who comes to die here!  
He will be a divine soul!<sup>223</sup>

Burial in Waset would permit one's soul to accede to divinity. Waset's sprawling western necropoli: the Valley of the Kings, the Valley of the Queens, the mortuary temples of Dayr al-Bahrî, the Ramesseum, Madîna Habu, are well known as archeological sites. To Egyptians these necropoli were designated by the toponym Hapunebes. Hapunebes, like Abedju's Pega and Mennufer's Restau,

---

<sup>219</sup> TRIMINGHAM, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 1971, p. 47.

<sup>220</sup> LEGRAIN, *Louqsor sans les pharaons* 1914, pp. 83-91. In effect, Abû al-Hajjâj possesses a "bark" which is housed in his mosque. Once a year, on the 14<sup>th</sup> Sha' bân (the day before the "Night of mid-Sha' bân", which, as we have seen, is the night when the sidrat al-muntahâ is believed to shake), this bark leaves the mosque and "navigates" counter-clockwise around Luxor.

<sup>221</sup> HILLIARD III, "Waset, the Eye of Ra and the Abode of Maat", 1989, p. 211.

<sup>222</sup> *ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>223</sup> *ibid.*, p. 211.

was construed as "gate" to Tuat.<sup>224</sup> It was the preferred burial ground of Egypt's Middle Kingdom and New Kingdom royalty even after the political capital was moved down river.

As with Abedju's shetyt, the Theban necropolis harbored an actualization of Egyptian cosmogony. The temple of Djêmé (Tjamet or modern Madīna Habu), begun under Amenhotep I (1546-1526 BCE.) and subsequently enlarged,<sup>225</sup> was a subterranean crypt qualified as "The Genuine Mound of the West".<sup>226</sup> Djêmé represented the claim of Hapunebes to be at the origin of creation, to be the primeval mound, locus of Amon-Râ's first manifestation. It is around this temple that the pharaonic jubilee festivals were organized. These festivals used many of the same symbols and rituals as the Osirian Mysteries but associated them closely to the royal cult. For example, during the sed festival, or jubilee, the Pharaoh would enter the "primeval mound" of Djêmé in order to have his mandate renewed.<sup>227</sup> Sed festivals also included the ritual raising of tet pillars, here representing no so much the Osirian resurrection as the Pharaoh's return to youthful vigor, his rejuvenation within the primeval hill beneath the ished trees.<sup>228</sup> Djêmé was the site chosen for the gigantic mortuary complexes of both Ramses II (1278-1217 BCE.) and Ramses III (1193-1162 BCE.). Indeed that of Ramses III actually incorporated the original mound-temple of Djêmé. It is on the inner wall of the first pylon of the mortuary temple of Ramses II, known by the Greek name "Ramesseum", that one finds yet another representation of the ished of Iunu.<sup>229</sup> Ramses IV (1162-1156 BCE) is depicted in the company of the gods having his years and jubilees marked on its leaves (fig. 5.5). The Djêmé complex of Ramses III also contained a sacred grove of isheds. It is in Djêmé that the Divine Adoratrices of Amon chose to be buried, and, later, it is in Djêmé,

---

<sup>224</sup> BUDGE, 1975, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

<sup>225</sup> LALOUETTE, 1995a, *op. cit.*, p. 194, 369.

<sup>226</sup> KEMP, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

<sup>227</sup> AUFRERE, GOLVIN & GOYON, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>228</sup> KEMP, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

<sup>229</sup> AUFRERE, GOLVIN & GOYON, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

and not in Luxor, that the Coptic Cathedral of Saint Athanasius was built.<sup>230</sup>

### The Sycamore of the Virgin

Ancient Egyptian arboreal constructs, and the ideas they express, have survived in Coptic tradition and continue to mark Egypt's spiritual landscape today. Many Christian traditions: the "Infancy Gospel of Saint Thomas", the "Armenian Infancy Gospel", the "Apocryphal Gospel of the Pseudo-Matthew", the "Coptic Synaxarium", the "Ethiopic Synaxarium", relate to the sojourn in Egypt of the Holy Family during their flight from Herod's persecution.<sup>231</sup> A number of significant trees mark this journey.

While in Egypt, the Holy Family travel as far as Al-Ashmunain, the ancient Khmun, the City of Thoth ("Hermopolis Magma" to the Greeks), home of the Egyptian Ogdoad. Here the Christchild encounters an ished (identified in a Byzantine source as a "persea") which He blesses in order that it signal for all eternity His entrance, as Word incarnate, into this ancient city of Divine Knowledge.<sup>232</sup> A later tradition records (in Arabic) that this tree, which grew outside the church of Al-Ashmunain, bore "sabistan" fruit and can thus be clearly identified as a *Cordia sebestena*.<sup>233</sup> This was the shajarat al-muqanta ("Tree of Obedience" ?) which had bowed down to acknowledge Jesus and which thereafter became invulnerable to human hand.

Of greater significance is the Virgin's encounter with the palm tree. During her flight, Mother Mary is nourished by the fruit of a date-palm while water miraculously gushes forth from its root to quench her Child's thirst. We recognize in this Coptic tradition a close parallel to the Quranic passage (19;23-26) discussed in Chapter 3. Various Egyptian sanctuaries claimed to possess this "Palm of the Virgin": Giza, Ahnasya al-Madīna (ancient Henen-Nesut, "Herakleopolis Magma" to the Greeks), and especially Matariya

---

<sup>230</sup> MEINARDUS, Christian Egypt: Ancient and Modern, 1977, p. 427.

<sup>231</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 606-649.

<sup>232</sup> *ibid.*, p. 635.

<sup>233</sup> *idem*.

(ancient Iunu). Following the Arab conquest of Egypt, Muslims readily identified these "Virgin's Trees" with the Quranic reference. The IX<sup>th</sup>/XV<sup>th</sup> century Egyptian historian Maqrizī for instance identified sura Maryam with the "Virgin's Palm" of Ahnasya al-Madīna and reported that the tree could still be seen at the end of the Umayyad period.<sup>234</sup>

Of all the arboreal manifestations within the flight narrative, it is the Virgin's Tree of Matariya which stands out. Matariya, which occupies part of the ancient site of Iunu, is an important Coptic sanctuary. Here the Holy Family stopped to rest in a garden. Here was Mary nourished with the dates of a doum-palm. Here did water miraculously spring forth from its base. Here she washed the clothes of her Child in the pool following which blessed balsam shrubs grow up.<sup>235</sup> The garden, its trees and its pool have been revered ever since and many pilgrims, Christian and Muslim, have left accounts of it. The European pilgrims Marino Sanuto (1321) and John Poloner (1421) record their visits to the "Virgin's Palm" at Matariya, while Maqrizī noted Christ's balsam shrub which still grew there in his day.<sup>236</sup> According to his account, this singular balsam would flourish nowhere else in the world. Its balm was used for Christian baptisms while the water of the garden's pool was sacred and medicinal; pilgrims would bathe in it. The Dominican friar Felix Fabri (1480), relying on the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, believed the holy balsam of Matariya to be a descendant of a tree offered to Solomon by the Queen of Sheba.<sup>237</sup> The balsam is a common designation for incense trees and these Medieval sources are perhaps using the term "balsam" in the generic sense for "incense". The singular balsam of Matariya could thus conceivably be

---

<sup>234</sup> *ibid.*, p. 626, 628.

<sup>235</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 333-334, 622-626.

<sup>236</sup> WIEDEMANN, 1897, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>237</sup> MEINARDUS, 1977, *op. cit.*, p. 602, 625. Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, book VIII, chap. VI;6) claims that the Queen of Sheba offered a "root" of balsam as a gift to Solomon, and that this tree still thrived in his day. Elsewhere (*Antiquities...*, book XV, chap. IV;2) the same author mentions the famous balsam groves of Jericho in the context of Cleopatra's journey through Palestine. Felix Fabri may well have been embroidering on the theme of the balsam and the travels of a fabulous African queen.

the descendant of some exotic frankincense or myrrh tree imported from Punt in pharaonic times. Fabri also mentions an immense sycamore at the garden's gate which was characterized by its hollow trunk.<sup>238</sup> The Holy Family is reported by local pious tradition to have found refuge within this arboreal "room" and Maqrizî notes that the hollow sycamore was used as a chapel.

Later sources concerning Matariya no longer make any mention of either doum-palm or balsam but the sycamore has remained. Offshoots of this Sycamore of the Virgin have continually been planted to replace the aging parent tree, as is the case with those other famous fig trees, the sacred pipal of Bodh Gaya in India<sup>239</sup> and its off-shot in Anurâdhapura (Sri Lanka). In Ethiopia too there is a sycamore with a similar "genealogy". It delimits the haram of the Christian holy city of Aksum.<sup>240</sup> Also in Aksum is a "great tree" beneath which Makeda, Queen of Sheba, prior to her journey to Jerusalem, is believed to have slain the evil serpent who had kept her people in subjugation.<sup>241</sup> The Virgin's Sycamore in Matariya, the one described by Maqrizî with the chapel in its trunk, was replaced by a young shoot in 1672. This tree in turn succumbed in 1906 and the present Sycamore of the Virgin was planted in its stead.<sup>242</sup> The "Virgin's Tree" and sacred pool in the garden of Matariya are still the object of pilgrimage today. Matariya is but 3 km from 'Ayn al-Shams (the "Spring of the Sun"). Both modern localities occupy parts of the site of the ancient holy city of Iunu — birthplace of the Ished construct and of the Ennead. In pharaonic times, as we have seen, Iunu is known to have contained several tree-sanctuaries as well as a "Pool of Râ".

Thus the full panoply of Ancient Egypt's sacred trees, in association with pools, survives in Coptic tradition. The ancient popular devotion to "Our Lady of the Sycamore", originally a

---

<sup>238</sup> MEINARDUS, 1977, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

<sup>239</sup> BROSE, 1989, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>240</sup> DORESSE, 1959, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>241</sup> JÄGER, *Antiquities of North Ethiopia*, 1965, p. 84. There are clear echoes here of Egypt's Ished, where Râ slays the Âpep serpent.

<sup>242</sup> MEINARDUS, 1977, *op. cit.*, p. 626.

reference to the motherly Hathor and an eternal life of bliss, is especially alive and well in Iunu/Heliopolis/Ayn Shams/Matariya with its Sycamore of the Virgin. Continuity of sanctity is common in Egypt as elsewhere in the Old World. Religions may succeed each other but certain holy places seem eternally fixed. This is a well known phenomenon in the geography of religion. However, what is most significant in the case of the Virgin's Tree of Matriya is the continuity in the *manner* of worship. The present "Lady of the Sycamore", with divinely anointed water gushing at her feet, is just possibly the latest in a continuous "chain" of sacred trees (ished, doum-palm, balsam, sycamore) spanning the entire period, back forty-five centuries to the first sacred ished in the Hut-Benben of Iunu.

Christ's ished in Al-Ashmunain (though it no longer exists) has been noted, as have the Virgin's doum-palms in Giza and Ahnasya al-Madina. In the Delta town of Bilbais, until it was cut down in 1850, there was also a well-known "Tree of the Virgin". It was surrounded by a much frequented Muslim cemetery containing the tombs of saintly persons.<sup>243</sup> In Palestine too, near Bethlehem, there grew until 1645 a "Terebinth of the Virgin" near a "Well of Mary",<sup>244</sup> while a tree near Hebron, known as the "Oak of the Sabbath" was likewise associated with the Holy Family's flight to Egypt.<sup>245</sup> An early Christian pilgrim to Hebron, the anonymous Pilgrim of Bordeaux (333 C.E.), describes there the "Well and Terebinth of Abraham".<sup>246</sup> Flavius Josephus reports that Abraham's terebinth in Hebron "has continued ever since the creation of the world".<sup>247</sup> In Ascalon too, Medieval

---

<sup>243</sup> *ibid.*, p. 620. In modern Muslim Egypt many trees or groves are said to mark the graves of saintly people — having sprung up from their corpses or their blood. Sometimes a tree may be the only material manifestation of the departed saint; the spirit (ruh) of Shaykh Sabre, for instance, is believed to occasionally visit his "tree" at Manyal. The motherly attribute of the doum-palm also continues to characterize pious practice in Muslim Egypt. Women who desire children will visit the doum-palm which grows over the grave of a "Shaykh Sayyid" in 'Azba Mismâr (near Minya) and eat its dates (BLACKMAN, "Sacred Trees in Modern Egypt", 1925).

<sup>244</sup> MEISTERMANN, Nouveau guide de Terre Sainte 1907, p. 207.

<sup>245</sup> *ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>246</sup> *ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>247</sup> JOSEPHUS, Wars of the Jews, book IV, chapter IX;7, in The Works of Josephus n.d., p. 607.

visitors report a sanctuary containing a sycamore<sup>248</sup> and a well<sup>249</sup> associated with the prophet Abraham. Ascalon was renowned for its gardens in antiquity and it had first distinguished itself as a major center of imperial Egyptian administration.

The Virgin's Sycamore in Matariya however is even more directly significant than these other similar phenomena for our discussion of the ished/Tūba continuum. Lane-Poole, who visited Matariya prior to the most recent arboreal reincarnation, observed that the trunk of the aged sycamore of the Virgin, the one planted in 1672, was "hacked with numberless names".<sup>250</sup> There could be no clearer parallel to Touba's Guy Texe than this Coptic Tree of the Virgin. We find a sacred tree fulfilling spiritual functions through the act of inscription, and this can be directly traced back to the ished of lunu. We have seen how pharaohs would have themselves represented having their years and jubilees actually inscribed on the leaves of the ished, a manifestation of the Tree of Life, and thus assure for themselves prosperity now and in the Hereafter.<sup>251</sup> A century ago Lane-Poole reported that the trunk of the sycamore of the Virgin in Matariya (the topographical successor to lunu) was "hacked with numberless names",<sup>252</sup> and one would like to know if this is still the case today. On Touba's Guy Texe and on other guy mbind throughout modern Muslim Senegal, devout Believers will actually inscribe their names and those of their loved ones on the bark of sacred trees, manifestations of the Tree of Paradise, and thus "register themselves on the list of those who will enter Paradise".<sup>253</sup>

The significance of the act of inscription can not be overstated. A representation of the ished on a temple wall is purposefully ideographic. Not only does it express the idea of ished of lunu, it attempts to actualize it. By physically inscribing one's

---

<sup>248</sup> AL-MUQADDASI, *La meilleure répartition...*, 1963, p. 112.

<sup>249</sup> IBN BATTUTA, *Voyages* 1982, vol. 1, p. 165.

<sup>250</sup> LANE-POOLE, *Cairo*, 1898, pp. 212-215.

<sup>251</sup> ERMAN, 1971, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

<sup>252</sup> LANE-POOLE, 1898, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-215.

<sup>253</sup> SAMB, "Touba et son 'Magal'", 1969, p. 743.

name on its leaves, one reaches beyond the signifier to the signified itself. In glyphic writing, sign and signifier are nearly identical. The inscribed name *actualizes* the person on the *actualized* ished. In the process of inscription one transcends the dichotomy of the earthly and celestial realms. By acting personally on the earthly sign, one is acting on the celestial signified. The guy nbind phenomenon of Senegambia, like the names inscribed on the trunk of the Sycamore of the Virgin observed in Matariya, takes this act of transcendence one step further. The distinction between sign, signifier and signified is even more completely effaced. We are no longer dealing with a two dimensional representation but with a topographic, completely spatial, three dimensional, living reflection the celestial Tree. Thus one writes directly on a physical manifestation of the celestial tree. Transcendence of the different planes of reality is complete.

#### An African Etymology for Tūbā ?

There is some indication that the Arabic term *ṭūbā* has an African origin, or at least significant African antecedents as a toponym. Lane indicates that according to Saʿīd b. Jubayr *ṭūbā* signified "Paradise" in the Abyssinian language.<sup>254</sup> Likewise, the form *ṭibā*, meaning "fragrant", is reportedly of Abyssinian origin. The Arabic root *t.y.b.*, as we have seen in Chapter 3, connotes notions of "sweetness of fragrance". *Tib* (طيب) means "perfume" and the paradisiacal *Tūbā* (طوبى) has strong olfactory characteristics. *Tayiba* (طيبة), a pious surname for Madīna, also means "perfumed", "fragrant". However, a perusal of Geʿez and Amharic dictionaries has not confirmed an Abyssinian origin for these terms.<sup>255</sup> Neither *ṭūbā* nor *ṭibā*, nor any related forms, are listed with the meanings suggested above.

*Tiba* (طيبة) is of course the ancient Waset, (the Greek Θεβα, from which Thebes and طيبة are both derived). The early Greeks are

<sup>254</sup> LANE, Arabic-English Lexicon , 1867, vol. 1, p. 1901.

<sup>255</sup> LESLAU, Wolf, Comparative Dictionary of Geʿez, 1991; ZEKARIA, A., Dictionary Amharic-English English-Amharic , 1991.



believed to have derived this (as it turns out mistaken) toponym, via the Canaanite *tēbāh* ("ark", "chest"), from the Egyptian cluster *ḏb't*, *ḏbt*, *ḏb'* and *tḥ'* ("ark", "box", "coffin", "shrine").<sup>256</sup>

The Hebrew term *tebah* (תֵּבָה) occurs on two occasions in the Torah. First, in "Genesis" (6;14) Noah is ordered to construct a *tebah*, an "ark", of some kind of enigmatic "gopher-wood" to be caulked with pitch. Then, in "Exodus" (2;3-5) the infant Moses is sent down the Nile in a *tebah*. Like Noah's ship, Moses' wicker "ark" is caulked with bitumen and pitch. Perhaps then the term *tebah* in these cases designates a vessel constructed of reeds or rushes and pitch. According to local Egyptian tradition (reported by Maqrizī) Moses' *tebah* was preserved in the "Mosque of Ṭūbā" in Gīza.<sup>257</sup> Thus a Pharaonic etymology of sorts for the Arabic term *ṭūbā* (via the Hebrew *tebah*) is acknowledged in Egypt. In European languages the word "ark" has other Biblical connotations, as the translation of the Hebrew term *āron*, "coffer". When God commands the Israelites through Moses to build Him a sanctuary ("Exodus" 25;8-22), its essential element is to be a precisely constructed "Ark of the Covenant" which is to contain His revealed law. This ark is to be made of acacia-wood overlaid with gold. In this case the ark definitely constitutes a chest or coffer. Acacia-wood was also the ritual wood of such Egyptian temple furnishings as processional barks. In Solomon's temple the "Ark of the Covenant" was preserved within a shrine in the Holy of Holies ("I Kings" 6;19). In the configuration of modern Sephardi synagogues, the term *tebah* now applies to the "reading desk" where scripture is recited, rather than to the *heikhal*, or *āron ha-kodesh* (the cabinet where scripture is actually kept).<sup>258</sup> In modern Ethiopia the Amharic term *tabot* (Ge'ez, *tābot*) likewise designates the alter of a church. The Ethiopian *tabot*, like the Biblical prototype, is constructed of wood overlaid with gold.<sup>259</sup> Indeed, the Chapel of the *Tabot*, in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Zion, remains the principal object of veneration in the holy city of

<sup>256</sup> BERNAL, *Black Athena* 1987, vol. 1, p. 51, vol. 2, p. 475.

<sup>257</sup> MEINARDUS, 1977, *op. cit.*, p. 627.

<sup>258</sup> DE LANGE, *Atlas of the Jewish World*, 1984, pp. 108-109.

<sup>259</sup> DORESSE, 1959, *op. cit.*, pp. 145, 158, 221.

Aksum. Tradition maintains that this tabot contains the original Biblical Ark of the Covenant.<sup>260</sup> Thus the Amharic tabot designates both the Hebrew terms *tebah* and *àron*. The single Arabic term *tābūt* (تابوت) likewise designates "sarcophagus", "coffin", "box", "chest", "ark".

It is clear that Semitic languages (Canaanite, Hebrew, Ge'ez, Arabic) acquired this term from Egypt. The Egyptian terms *ḏb't* and *dbt* both designated "box", "chest", "coffin", "shrine", while the related word *ḏb'* designated "wicker float", "ark of bulrushes". In the Book of the Dead *ḏb't* is most commonly used for "coffin"<sup>261</sup> but it can also signify "shrine" as in the "shrine of the Presider over the West".<sup>262</sup> This particular coffin-shrine was none other than the box in which Osiris, like Moses, had floated down the Nile and over which a tree had grown. Several traditions testify that this ark was made of sycamore wood.<sup>263</sup> In demotic, the terms *ḏb't* and *dbt* were pronounced *tebyt* and *tybt* respectively, while in Coptic they were combined under the common designation of *ταβε*.<sup>264</sup> We can easily recognize here the toponym *Ta'iba*, so common in West Africa. There were in fact many Egyptian cities whose names derived from the *ḏb't*-*dbt* cluster. *Deb'a*, *Djeba*, or *Teb* (written *Ταβο* or *Θαβο* in Coptic, the Ptolemaic Apollinopolis Magma, modern Edfu), the capital of Upper Egypt's Second Nome, was especially sacred to Horus, son of Isis and Osiris, and *Tebu* is mentioned in the Book of the Dead as the home of "the Boy in the City and the Youth in the Country".<sup>265</sup> *Tjebu*, *Tjebu-Wadji*, *Tabu* or *Djew-Qa* (Antæopolis to the Greeks, modern Qaw al-Kabîr) was capital of the tenth Upper Egyptian nome. Another city with a related name was *Djebu* (*Tattu*, *Per-Osar*, *Busiris*, modern Abû Sir) in Lower Egypt where Osiris' "coffin" had washed ashore.<sup>266</sup> There was a town called *Dabud* (*Tebot*) in Lower Nubia and one called

<sup>260</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 33, 103, 180, 205-207; ULLENDORF, *Ethiopia and the Bible*, 1968, pp. 82-87.

<sup>261</sup> Spells 15B2 var. S 3; 136B a S 1; 161 S 2; 185L S 1.

<sup>262</sup> Spell Pleyte 174 T.

<sup>263</sup> BUDGE, 1973, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 24.

<sup>264</sup> CERNY, *Coptic Etymological Dictionary*, 1976, pp. 180-183.

<sup>265</sup> Spell 85b.

<sup>266</sup> SCHWARZ, 1986, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

Tabo (on the site of ancient Kerma) in Upper Nubia. The Palestinian town of Ṭūbās (طوباس, ancient Thebez) near Nâblus, is likewise commonly translated as "Thebes". Bernal suggests that the toponym ḏb' may also have been used by the Hyksos for their Delta capital (Avaris, modern Tel al-Dib'a).<sup>267</sup> The Hyksos were a dynasty of Asian origin who exerted sovereign political authority over most of Egypt in the XVII<sup>th</sup>-XVI<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. The Ancient Greeks may have adopted this toponym as a generic term for "Egyptian capital" at that time, hence the confusion when Waset resumed its role as capital during the New Kingdom. After Alexander's conquest the mistaken toponym was however corrected and Waset, the "City of Amon", became known as Diospolis Magma or "Great God-City"). Notwithstanding the mistaken toponymy, it is the Egyptian Thebes (Waset) for which two Greek cities were named: Thebes in Boetia and Thebes in Mysia (Anatolia), just as there was also a Greek "Abydos" in Phrygia. Waset is further considered to be the "mother" of the oracles of Amon in Siwa (Libyan Desert) and of Zeus in Dodona (Greece). According to traditions reported by Herodotus, two priestesses (signified by black doves) from the Egyptian Thebes were responsible for this diffusion. One of the doves landed on an oak tree in Dodona and commanded that an oracle of Zeus (Amon) be built there.<sup>268</sup> Acorns sent from Zeus' oak in Dodona (Pelasgia), the oldest oracle in Greece, were later to initiate oak sanctuaries elsewhere in the Greek world (Phliontæ, Eginæ).<sup>269</sup>

The Egyptian terms ṭb' and ḏb' both designated "seal", small clay markers bearing imprinted words. Seals were deposited in tombs. They contained magic names and were to be left by the dead with specified gatekeepers along their way through Ṭuat. Such seals are also mentioned in magical Hermetist texts.<sup>270</sup> The terms ṭb' and ḏb' have given the terms τωωβε and τεβι to the Coptic language. The noun τεβι means "obol", or small coin. The verb τωωβε has

<sup>267</sup> BERNAL, 1987, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 51.

<sup>268</sup> HERODOTUS, 1954, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-152.

<sup>269</sup> BROSSE, 1989, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-88.

<sup>270</sup> HIMMELFARB, 1995, *loc. cit.*, p. 127.

several related meanings: "to seal", "replace", "repay", "requite", "compensate", "punish".

The Coptic homonym τωβε means "brick" and is derived from dbt, via teb in demotic. The word has passed into Arabic as ṭub (طوب) from which European languages have derived "adobe", which designates sun-baked as opposed to fired bricks. The homonymy between the Ancient Egyptian db' ("ark") and dbt ("brick"), and the Arabic ṭubā-ṭub via the Coptic τωβε, may signify a deeper relationship. The Ancient Egyptian term dbt designated "brick" but also the "corner stones" of temples. These stone coffers were buried at specified corners of sanctuaries at the moment of their foundation and they contained specific symbolic objects and glyphs that can aptly be termed "masonic".<sup>271</sup> Thus the dbt "brick" can be considered as a db' "ark, box, coffin, shrine". The Ge'ez term ṭab'ot, "brick", is clearly derived from the Egyptian db', "ark", rather than from dbt, "brick". Ancient Egyptian teb also designated the "fig" of the sycamore tree<sup>272</sup> and might be linked to the term ṭb', "seal", "obol", as in pre-dynastic times ex voto figs (manufactured of clay or stone) are known to have been left in tombs along with the seals mentioned above.

The fifth month (January-February) of the ancient Egyptian calendar was called tybi. It was on the 1<sup>st</sup> of tybi that the Osirian Mysteries would culminate. In demotic, tybi became ṭobe and then τωβε in Coptic and this has now been transcribed as ṭubā (طوبى) in Arabic. Τωβε is the fifth month of the Coptic year. It is thought to derive from t'-bt ("the offering"). It is on the 11<sup>th</sup> of τωβε that Copts celebrate the Baptism of Christ and that the Badawīya ṭariqa celebrates the mawlid of Shaykh Ahmad al-Badawī in Ṭanṭā.<sup>273</sup> Furthermore, the Arabic term ṭubā is used in modern Coptic liturgy to designate "blessed" or "beatified", and is a title of honor for the Patriarch.<sup>274</sup> It also signifies the "blessedness" or the state of "beatitude" of those who accede to eternal Bliss. In this case, rather

<sup>271</sup> BRISSON & OUELETTE, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>272</sup> WILKINSON, 1878, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 378, 404.

<sup>273</sup> LANE, Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians 1908, pp. 246, 546.

<sup>274</sup> WEHR, Arabic-English Dictionary, 1976, p. 578.

than being the "Month of Offering", Ṭūbā may be the "Month of Blessedness". Furthermore, the same demotic term ṭobe mentioned above signified "foliage", though it was derived from Ancient Egyptian ḏb'w. The Coptic term for "foliage" is τΟΟΒΕΥ. Again, this homonymy may not be fortuitous. The word ḏb'w appears once in the Book of the Dead (spell 145c XIX<sup>th</sup> dynasty), where it designates some type of wood of ritual significance (this ḏb'w-wood is mentioned in conjunction with ritually pure water, balm and linen).<sup>275</sup> This spell, like so many others, was to be recited to a gatekeeper upon reaching the "House of Osiris". It ends with the utterance of the "name of him who brightens the tree that is at your doorway".

What can be concluded after this brief etymological review? First, there is no evidence that the term "ṭūbā" existed with anything approaching its present definition (as a designation for the Tree of Paradise) prior to its appearance in ḥadīth. We must consider the term "ṭūbā" as an Arabic one and not as a term borrowed from Coptic, Ge'ez or Amharic. Secondly, the term "ṭūbā" exists in Coptic, where its modern usage (as designating a state of bliss or blessedness) bears some relation to its appearance in the Qur'ān (ṭūbā lahum). Thirdly, the most ancient meaning of the Coptic "ṭūbā" (as the designation of the 5<sup>th</sup> month of the calendar) refers us back to a nebula of interrelated demotic and hieroglyphic terms which, beyond its interest for understanding the Biblical term "tebah", is of interest mostly for the group of ancient toponyms derived from the cluster. The meanings of these Egyptian terms however have very little bearing if at all on the Islamic Ṭūbā construct.

---

<sup>275</sup> Spell 145c, XIX<sup>th</sup> dynasty.

## Conclusion

### THE POWER OF A NAME

In Latcho Drom (France, 1993), director Tony Gatlif relates the journey of the Roms (Gypsies, Gitans, Bohemians, Halabs, Lohars). The film traces their itinerary from a night vigil beneath a sacred tree in the Thar Desert, to a qubba in a grove by the Nile, and on to the pilgrimage to the Black Madonna of Les-Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in the Camargue. This trajectory transcends borders, physiognomies, tongues, creeds, even archetypes. Yet its continuity is clearly manifest through music.

This thesis too has traced continuity — continuity of the Tree archetype within African civilization.

#### Continuity of an African Archetype in Islam

The holy city of Touba serves a spiritual purpose, that of reaffirming the validity of the Straight Path. God has promised those who adhere to the Straight Path an eternal life of bliss in Paradise. At the end of time He will judge individuals according to the record of their words and works in life. Each individual must therefore strive to insure that this record is a favorable one. Touba represents both the process of being on the Straight Path and its ultimate fulfillment, access to the Promised Garden. Touba is configured as the Straight Path. It was created in order to call people to faith, so that, as Adam's children, we might live according to the primordial covenant, so that we might accede to eternal Bliss as promised. Touba expresses this through the single image of the tree.

- Touba is named for the Tree of Paradise, which represents eternal bliss , but it also incorporates two other arboreal constructs: the sidrat al-muntahâ and the Tree of 'Izrâ'il.
- The sidrat al-muntahâ is the cosmic Tree of Knowledge, the fulcrum where Divine words and Divine will are communicated to creation and where the particulars of existence are recorded.
- The Tree of 'Izrâ'il is the tree of life and death, where death is monitored . These last two trees fulfill their functions through the

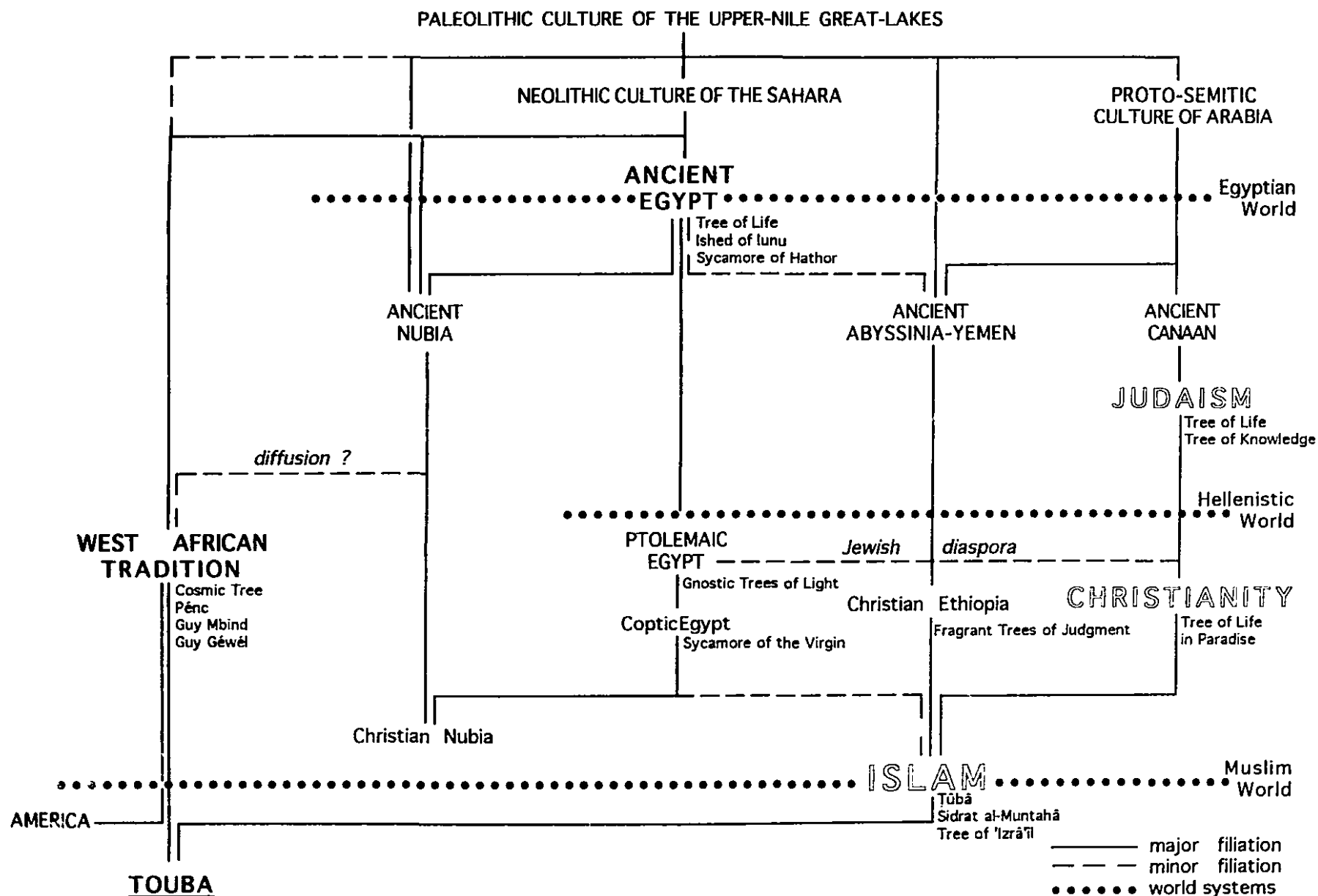
act of inscription . The writing (be it the Eternal Word or the particular record of the words and acts of individuals) is on the tree. Functionally, the celestial Tree comes very near to assimilating the celestial Tablet. This assimilation is actualized in Touba by the Guy Texe, the tree on which the pious write their names, where they register themselves. The Ṭūbā construct thus defined synthesizes the various imaginal trees of Islamic tradition. In Touba these trees grow as one. There is one Tree in the imaginal world and its name is Ṭūbā. It is reflected on earth as the city of Touba. Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's mystic experience established this relationship. It marked the moment when the imaginal Ṭūbā was projected on earth. This phenomenon is unique. The Islamic Ṭūbā construct may be universal, its manifestation as Touba is singular.

It is because Touba has risen in Senegal that the question of the continuity of African thought in Islam has been raised. The search for Touba's spiritual roots was intentionally directed towards the Nile. It is not by chance that Ancient Egyptian, Coptic and Ethiopian texts were scrutinized. Though Touba is a modern Islamic phenomenon, there are sound theoretical reasons why one should expect to find significant antecedents for it in ancient African traditions. Since the work of Cheikh Anta Diop, the continuity of African civilization is not simply a hypothesis but a working model and the measure of any model must be the fruits which it continues to bear. By adopting the afrocentric perspective, this thesis has demonstrated how Touba, which might have been dismissed as a peripheral, parochial or syncretic phenomenon (and therefore of little relevance to Islam as a universal faith), possesses on the contrary depth and breadth in the Imaginal universe and informs us about Ṭūbā.

Egyptian religion is the first on record to refer textually (i.e., in its scripture) to a specific tree archetype — the "Tree of Life". The Tree of Life has two essential manifestations.

- Paradise is graced by a great sycamore attributed to Hathor. The sycamore of Hathor is the tree of eternal sustenance in the Afterlife.

Fig. 6.1 Continuity of the Tree Archetype within African Religious Tradition





- The cosmic axis of lunu is marked by an ished tree, the tree of Divine Light. The "names and years" of every human being are registered on the leaves of the ished of lunu.

It is this similarity between the ancient Egyptian ished and modern Senegalese Tûbâ which raises the problem of continuity of the Tree archetype. Egypt's ished construct is last seen fully operative during the reign of Ramses IV (d. 1156 BCE.). Touba was founded in 1887 C.E., three thousand years later. Either the similarity of the two constructs is accidental and fortuitous, or we must seek to explain this continuity.

Here follows, in conclusion to the thesis, a reconstruction of the trajectory of the Tree archetype from ancient lunu to modern Touba (fig. 6.1).

First, Egypt at its apogee, that is before the Assyrian, Persian and Hellenic periods, was the top-ranking civilization in terms of intellectual and cultural production. Throughout the second millennium BCE., Canaan, Abyssinia-Yemen and Nubia lay within the Egyptian world system. Each of these three areas may have perpetuated Egyptian ideas connected to the ished construct and subsequently transmitted them to the Islamic tradition.

- The Tree of Life had a distinct career in Abrahamic tradition, first in the Fall of Adam and then in the Resurrection of Christ. In the Christian Gospels the Tree of Life in cosmogonic Eden has been transplanted to the eschatological Jerusalem. Desire for immortality has been transformed into a promise of eternal bliss in the Hereafter. There are grounds for considering the paradisiacal fig tree of the Bible as an avatar of the sycamore of Hathor.

- In the Ethiopic "Book of Enoch", Trees of Judgment occur repeatedly. The distinctive attribute of the Ethiopian Trees of Judgment is their fragrance. Fragrant Ethiopian trees were important elements in the configuration of Egyptian temples and fragrance is a distinctive attribute of the Islamic Tûbâ. In view of the intimate relations between Abyssinia and Mecca during the time of Quranic revelation, the parallel between the Ethiopian and Islamic traditions (especially through the genre of "ascension literature") cannot be fortuitous. There are grounds for considering the arboreal

manifestations of the Islamic *mi'rāj* narrative to be a development of those found in Christian Ethiopic sources.

- Whatever life the Egyptian *ished* may have had in Ancient Nubia will remain unknown so long as the Meroitic script has not been deciphered. What is known is that the temples of Amon in Meroe functioned effectively until the IV<sup>th</sup> century C.E. and that thereafter Nubian Christianity was affiliated to the Coptic Church. Likewise, the embryonic state of archeology in the heart of Africa must preclude for the moment any attempt at reconstructing possible diffusion from Pharaonic Egypt and Meroitic Nubia southward and westward to the rest of Black Africa.

Second, the *ished* may have continued to evolve in post-pharaonic Egypt.

- Cosmic Trees of Light were a feature of Gnostic cosmology.
- In Coptic tradition many trees have been associated with Christ and His Mother. The Coptic tradition of Mary and the doum-palm (through its dates and gushing water) is similar to that expressed in the Qur'ân. The Virgin's Tree of Matariya (a sycamore) is locus for the inscription of names. Matariya is the original home of the *ished* construct (*lunu*) and there are grounds for considering its present Coptic tree as an avatar of the ancient "Lady of the Sycamore".

Third, there is evidence that the Egyptian *ished* has always been lurking at the periphery of the Islamic arboreal archetype.

- The tree as metaphor for human destinies is identically expressed in the ancient Egyptian and Quranic recensions of the "parable of the two trees".

- Islamic cosmology and eschatology are linked by the *sidrat al-muntahâ*. Because this cosmic fulcrum distinguishes the realm of the Creator from that of creation, it can also be understood as distinguishing creation from post-creation, i.e., as the threshold of the Hereafter.

- In the *mi'rāj* narrative we find a cosmic tree associated with 'Izrâ'il, the angel of death. The tree at the eschatological threshold is associated to his register of names.

- In Africa we find references to the cosmic tree as locus of inscription of particulars in at least two local Islamic traditions:

Egypt and Senegal. In the pious tradition of Muslim Egypt (the *laylat al-barā'a*) human destinies are recorded on the Tablet and the term of each life is signaled by a leaf of the *sidrat al-muntahā*. Local Senegalese tradition, actualized in the Guy Texe, clearly associates the image of the tree to the notion Divine Judgment by means of the inscription of names and works on the leaves of *Tūbā*.

Finally, there is also some evidence that the ancient ished tradition is shared by later African eschatologies independently of Islam.

- The symbol of the tree is well established in the religious vocabulary of Africa, and of West Africa in particular, where it expressed cosmogonic notions, i.e., creation, foundation, cosmological ideas of communion with ultimate Reality, and the eschatological notion of link with the deceased. Sacred baobabs especially were used for specific eschatological rites such as inscription (*guy mbind*) and burial (*guy géwél*).

- Mostly though, trees were determining elements of the landscape, actualizing triangular cosmogonic and cosmological systems (God, community, individual). This arboreal construct was designated by the term *pénc*. The *pénc* represented collective identity by topographically actualizing institutions such as the monarchy, parliament and the constitution as trees.

By whatever channels, the ancient Egyptian ished has in fact reemerged in modern Touba. The city has united the West African *guy mbind* tradition to those other parcels of the ished construct which had previously entered into the Islamic *Tūbā* construct by other channels ("ascension" literature, Hermetist and Gnostic cosmologies, local Egyptian traditions). The rise of Touba on the face of the earth marks the reunification of the dismembered Egyptian construct. In other words, because of modern Senegalese Touba, the Ancient Egyptian ished now exists whole again within the universal Islamic *Tūbā*.

### A Modern Islamic Synthesis

Touba represents far more than the simple resurrection of an ancient arboreal construct. It signals a decisive stage in the

evolution of the Tree archetype within Islam. The image of the tree occurs in two important capacities within Islamic cosmology and eschatology.

- The configuration of Islamic Paradise is dominated by a great tree called Ṭubā. Ṭubā signifies eternal bliss . Its fruits, its gushing waters and its shade will nourish and protect the Blessed. Ṭubā *signifies* the Promised Garden.
- The sidrat al-muntahā is the culmination of the created universe; it is its ultimate summit, beyond which lies the non-geography of the Absolute. This sidra is a cosmic threshold . All knowledge from God descends to it while the human quest for knowledge must lead up to it.

These two arboreal metaphors are constructed from a number of Quranic references and ḥadīth reports. The articulation of the two symbols as one construct is first evident in the mi'rāj narrative. This narrative elaborated and popularized a geographically coherent cosmology and eschatology. The sidrat al-muntahā and Ṭubā figure in the mi'rāj — where they are described in remarkably similar terms — and yet a third tree appears: the tree of destiny , the tree of 'Izrā'īl at the heavenly gate. This tree (or more specifically its leaves) monitors the life and death of individuals and it is associated with the heavenly Tablet, Scroll, Book, Record or Register.

#### Ṭubā is a name

It is Ṭubā the Tree of Paradise which has become the dominant entity of the Islamic Tree archetype. Initially Ṭubā was only one among several entities associated to the image of the tree. The sidrat al-muntahā, if not the ill-defined tree of 'Izrā'īl, was a serious contender for first place. The sidrat al-muntahā after all is explicitly mentioned as such in the Holy Book, while Ṭubā as Tree of Paradise is not, and its cosmological and mystical potential surpass that of the Tree of Paradise. In the end though it is not the "Lote tree of the extremity" which emerges as the dominant imaginal tree of the Islamic system but Ṭubā. Ṭubā has achieved preeminence over the other arboreal prototypes because it has a name; it is a proper noun.

Ṭubā is not a taxonomic term. It does not designate any species of tree. It is a proper name and designates the archetypical tree of the imaginal world. It is Ṭubā which crystallizes the eschatological desire, not the sidra. Ṭubā! is a blessing. Ṭubā lahum! is a promise — God's promise of eternal recompense for the righteous. Ṭibtum! is a greeting — the paradisiacal gatekeepers greeting the Righteous. Ṭubā is the name which manages to serve as catalyst for all the disparate notions attendant to the celestial tree image dispersed through the Islamic sources. As we have related in Chapter 3, the feminine noun ṭubā is variously translated as "good", "good fortune", "a good final, or ultimate, state or condition", "a blessing", "God's blessing", "blessedness", "eternal or pleasant life", "beatitude" (Lane, Steingass, Wehr) as well as "*félicité*" in French (Kazimirski). However, none of these terms and expressions in European languages manages, alone, to convey ṭubā's full range of signification, nor to capture the desire and hope which the word provokes. And how could these translations take into account the use of Ṭubā — along with the related form Ṭayba — as a toponym, as a name. It is hard to imagine, for example, any of the proposed translations embodying spiritual desire sufficiently to constitute the foundation of a holy city.

Perhaps the closest equivalent term to ṭubā in the English language is "Glory". "Glory" conveys a host of eschatologically related meanings: "worshipful praise or honor", "thanksgiving", "splendor and beatific happiness (of heaven)", "state of great gratification or exaltation", "height of prosperity", "eternity". In the language of African Americans particularly, Glory is a place one goes to, as exemplified by such expressions as "bound for Glory" and "gone to Glory". "Glory" is both object and locus of eschatological desire. Its feminine, "Gloria", is a proper name and has potential as a toponym (Gloria is in fact a recurrent toponym in Brazil).

The Wolof language has a precisely equivalent term for ṭubā; "texe" (pronounced "tékhé"). Texe is translated generally as "*prospérité*" in the eschatological acceptance of the word.<sup>1</sup> The

---

<sup>1</sup> FAL, SANTOS & DONEUX, *Dictionnaire wolof-français*, 1990, p. 222.

Wolof term nonetheless conveys the notion of access to eternal prosperity and is thus a neat equivalent to the Arabic *tūbā*. This is confirmed by the use of the term in the expression *Guy Texe*.<sup>2</sup>

In the end it is *Tūbā*, because it is a name, which has come to dominate the Tree archetype. Names have power. Named entities have more power than unnamed ones; they exist to an extent that unnamed ones can not. They concentrate and focus the semiotic process.<sup>3</sup> The distinction between nouns as a genus and those nouns qualified as "proper" nouns, as "names", is neither uniform nor absolute but it always marks a meaningful threshold in the word/sign equation. When Adam learns the names of the elements of the landscape he is in fact learning nouns, the names of species and not of individuals (he nonetheless does acquire power over them). In Ancient Egypt the act of naming, of designating the individual, was considered equivalent to creating it/him. It marked "individualization". Cryptographically the capital letter can be the "sign" of properness in nouns. Thus in German all nouns are configured as "proper" while in Arabic no noun is thus configured. Obviously, despite the absence of a cryptographic sign, Arabic nouns can be "names", that is they can identify individual specimens. The "*tūbā*" in the Quranic phrase "*tūbā lahum*" designates a state of bliss but it is not a proper name. In *ḥadīth* however, "*tūbā*" may mean "blessing" or "prosperity" but it further designates "a tree in the Garden whose shade is..." This identifiable tree has a name and this proper name is "*Tūbā*". The archetype now named *Tūbā* can be said to exist to an extent that the previously unnamed entity did not. For instance, God's eternal Word was at first a "*lawḥ mahfūz*". Its archetypal existence, its existence in the imaginal world, was defined but who could recite it? It is when the *Lawḥ al-Mahfūz* descended to earth under the designation "*al-Qur'ān*" that it acquired power. The uncreated *Qur'ān* can now be known because it exists in the sensual world as a physical book. Between its earthly

---

<sup>2</sup> Arabic "*tūbā*" and Wolof "*texe*" were defined for me in Touba by Serigne Modou Mahmoudine Niang, Arabic secretary to the late Khalifa Abdoul Ahad, Touba-Mosquée ward.

<sup>3</sup> ECO, Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language 1986, p. 153.

manifestation as book and its eternal reality in God there is no dissolution of continuity. Both dimensions of its existence are designated by its singular name. Ṭubā has undergone a similar semiotic process.

When the name Ṭubā was attached to the Tree archetype, the resulting named entity overpowered the anonymous ones which exist next to it. The *sidrat al-muntahā* is defined but it is not named. Ṭubā, as well as being the name of the Tree of Paradise, became the "name" of the *sidrat al-muntahā* and in this way came to signify all that the cosmic *sidra* had. The Tree of Paradise is *also* the cosmic Tree of Knowledge, the Tree of Light at the threshold of the Universe. Both symbols cohabit a common archetype named Ṭubā. Moreover Ṭubā achieved similar preeminence over other arboreal entities. Ṭubā has in effect assimilated all the other archetypal trees encountered in Islamic tradition, and indeed in those other traditions which Islam has replaced, anonymous entities such as the "Sycamore of Hathor" and the "Ished of lunu". In the process it has acquired their significations.

The tree, as we have seen, is a universal archetype. Many traditions have known a "Tree of Paradise". For Ancient Egyptians it was the sycamore of Hathor. In the Egyptian case however the Tree of Paradise, though it existed as an image, remained anonymous. Like the *sidrat al-muntahā* it had no proper name. It was the "Tree of...", the "Sycamore of...". It was defined but it had no proper identity. Islamic tradition has given the Tree of Paradise a name, Ṭubā, and this name can be said to apply to the Ancient Egyptian sycamore of Hathor as well. There is one archetypal Tree of Paradise and it is called Ṭubā. Likewise the ancient Egyptian *ished* existed as an archetype and was identified as the "ished of lunu", the cosmic tree of inscription, the Tree of Knowledge, the Tree of Light. It is through the local traditions specific to Touba in Senegal (inscription on the Guy Texe in view of Divine judgment) that the ancient *ished* construct has been fully integrated into the Islamic Ṭubā construct. Because the earthly Touba and the celestial Ṭubā are co-identical — they share the same name — the attributes of the modern holy city have been assimilated to the overarching eternal archetype.

### Touba is a Toponym

Tûbâ has been written on the "open book" of the earth. It is printed on earth and appears as "Touba" on maps. The Tûbâ construct began to "descend to earth" through the fieldwork of the *Diakhanké* scholars. The *Diakhanké* adopted the name of the Tree of Paradise as an identifying label, as a toponym. *Diakhanké* religious missions then propagated Tûbâ throughout West Africa. The seeds of the celestial tree, of the archetype, were thus "sown". Nonetheless, it took nothing less than a mystic vision beneath an actual, very real tree to definitively anchor this archetype to earth. It was Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké, as qutb, who caused the imaginal Tûbâ to be definitively projected onto earth, to be "printed" onto a land that had been prepared by the *Diakhanké* to receive it.

A toponym is a special kind of name. It marks the transformation of space into place. By designating a place it individualizes it. The place thus named partakes in the essence of that which its name designates. In other words, the toponym informs the name. The toponym, being a "reflection" of the name, is also a "window" onto it. Touba tells us of Tûbâ. Touba's configuration expresses the fundamental Islamic ideal of the Straight Path. The Straight Path however had never previously been assimilated to the Islamic Tree archetype known as Tûbâ. It is through its configuration that the earthly manifestation imparts this new meaning to the archetype.

In West Africa the pënc existed as a named archetype. "Pënc", like "tûbâ", is not a taxonomic term. The pënc designated the properly aligned community and it expressed this ideal through a specific spatial configuration. Because Touba, as a created place, conforms to this configuration, the Islamic archetype named Tûbâ has assimilated that which the pënc used to symbolize, i.e., the properly aligned community which in the vocabulary of Islam goes by the designation al-ṣirât al-mustaqim (the Straight Path). The pënc, like the ished, thus lives on within Tûbâ. The Islamic Tree of Paradise construct has been actualized according to an African



model and in this way the fundamental Islamic notion of the Straight Path has been enriched.

The imaginal طوبى has been projected on earth as the city of طوبى. Between the modern Islamic holy city and the celestial Tree in the middle of the imaginal world there is no dissolution of continuity. The co-identity of the two is utter and complete. It is as a toponym especially that Touba broadcasts Ṭūbā. Touba is listed in the Manhattan phone-book. Beneath those tiny black characters on the newsprint lurks all that Ṭūbā signifies. All those trees which grace the gardens of the imaginal universe: the sidrat al-muntahā, the penc, and the ished, can now be accessed through Touba, through the single name, the singular place. Touba *is* the Tree of Paradise. One can go there. One can write on it.

## **APPENDIX**

### **Taxonomy of Trees Mentioned in Thesis**

FAMILY	GENUS	SPECIES	COMMON NAMES
Rhamnaceæ	Ziziphus	lotus	lote tree sidr or sidra (Arabic) nebes (Egyptian)
		jujuba	jujube tree 'unnâb (Arabic)
		spina christ	Christ's thorn nabq (Arabic)
		mauritiana	siddéem: or déem (Wolof)
		abyssinica	
Nymphaeaceæ	Nymphaea	lotus	Egyptian lotus zeshen (Egyptian)
	Nelumbium	nelumbo	Indian lotus
Ulmaceæ	Celtis	australis	nettle tree Lybian lotus
Embenaceæ	Diospyros	lotus	date plum

FAMILY	GENUS	SPECIES	COMMON NAMES
Leguminosæ- mimoseæ	Acacia	seyal or gummifera	tahi gum ṭalh (Arabic) suurur (Wolof)
		nilotica or arabica	babul thorn or Egyptian thorn sanṭ (Arabic) shent (Egyptian)
		senegalensis	gum arabic dākkande (Wolof)
		albida	kādd (Wolof)
		radiana	séng (Wolof)
Leguminosæ- cæsalpinieæ	Tamarindus	indica	Indian date tamr al-hindi (Arabic) daqaar (Wolof)
	Piliostigma	reticulatum	ngigis (Wolof)
	Cordyla	pinnata	dimb (wolof)
Leguminosæ- papilionaceæ	Lotus	tetragonolobus	
		jacobaeus	
		arabicus	
		jolyi	
		coriniculatus	

FAMILY	GENUS	SPECIES	COMMON NAMES
Palmæ or Palmaceæ	Phoenix	dactylifera	date-palm nakhla (Arabic)
		sylvestris	sugar-palm
	Hyphæne	thebaica	doum-palm dawm (Arabic) ima or mama (Egyptian)
Punicaceæ	Punica	granatum	pomegranate malum punicum (Latin) remen (Egyptian) rimmon (Hebrew) rummân (Arabic)

FAMILY	GENUS	SPECIES	COMMON NAMES
Moraceæ	Ficus	sycomorus	sycamore jummayz, jummayza (Arabic) nehet, neha (Egyptian) -pharaoh's fig, soto ajjana (Wolof) -doob (Wolof) -looro (Wolof)
		-capensis	
		-vogeliana	
		-iteophylla	
		-senegalensis	
		carica	fig tree tin (Arabic)
		religiosa	bo tree, peepal, asvattha (Sanskrit) bhodi tree
		benghalensis	banyan
		dusenii	nsanda (Zaire)
		doliara martius	gamaleira branca (Brazil)
	Chlorophora	excelsa	iroko lghi-nla (Yoruba)
		regia	
	Antiaris	africana	

FAMILY	GENUS	SPECIES	COMMON NAMES
Malvaceæ- bombacaceæ	Adansonia	digitata	baobab, calabash tree guy (Wolof) sito (Mandinga) boki (Pular)
	Ceiba or Eriodendron	pentandra orientale	kapok tree fromager (French) bénténe (Wolof) quṭn al-kādhīb (Arabic)
	Eriodendron	anfractuosum	silk cotton "God tree" (Carribean) kankantii (Surinam)
	bombax		
Malvaceæ	Gossypium		cotton
Sterculiacæ	Sterculia	setigera or tomentosa	gum plane mbéb (Wolof)
	Cola	cordifolia	cola tree taba (Wolof, Mandinga)
Combretaceæ	Combretum	pimigenium	omumborombonga (Namibia)
		aculeatum	sawat (Wolof)
		glutinosum	rat (Wolof)
Euphorbiaceæ	Jatropha	curcas	fig nut, pourguère (French) tuba (Wolof) tabanani (Serer)
Platanaceæ	Platanus	orientalis	plane-tree, platane (French) dulb (Arabic) chinâr (Persian)
?	Crescentia	cujete	calabash-tree qar'a yābisa (Arabic)
?	Parinari	curatelfolia	muhacha (Zimbabwe)

FAMILY	GENUS	SPECIES	COMMON NAMES
Boraginaceæ	Cordia	myxa or sebestena	? ished (Egyptian) mukhayt or linderab (Arabic) mbey or mbey-gilli (Wolof)
		latifolia	
		gharaf	gharaf or gimbil (Arabic)
Sapotaceæ	Mimusops	schimperi	? ished (Egyptian)
Simarubaceæ	Balanites	ægyptiaca	? ished (Egyptian) hijli (Arabic)
Lauraceæ	Persea	gratissima	persea tree alligator pear avocado ? ished (Egyptian)
Ericaceæ	Arbutus Agauria Philippia Blaeria	unedo salicifolia mannii mannii	<div> <div></div> <div>? Osiris' "erica" tree also identified as cedar, tamarisk, abaton, willow or Ished</div> </div>



FAMILY	GENUS	SPECIES	COMMON NAMES
Burseraceæ	Boswellia	thurifera	frankincense
		sacra	frankincense
		papyrifera	frankincense seneter (Egyptian)
	Cammiphora or Balsamodendron	myrrha	myrrh entiu (Egyptian)
		abyssinica	myrrh murr al-hijazi (Arabic)
		gileadena	Balsam of Mecca or Balm of Gilead
Lauraceæ	Cinnamomum	camphora	camphor kāfūr (Arabic)
		zeylanicum	cinnamon qirfa (Arabic)
	Laurus	nobilis	laurel
	Persea	gratissima	persea tree alligator pear avocado ? ished (Egyptian)
		indica	Indian laurel
Anacardiaceæ	Pistacia	terebinthus	terebinth turpentine tree elah (Hebrew) buṭn (Arabic)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ABU-LUGHOD, Janet, Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989.
- ADAM, J. G., "Le baobab", in *Notes africaines*, #94, 1962, pp 33-44.
- ADAMS, William Y., Nubia: Corridor to Africa, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1977.
- AFRICANUS, Leo, Description de l'Afrique, Librairie Adrien-Maisonneuve, Paris, 1956, translated by A. ÉPAULARD.
- ALI, Ahmed, Al-Qur 'ân: a Contemporary Translation, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N. J., 1984.
- ALLEN, Thomas George, The Book of the Dead or Going Forth by Day: Ideas of the Ancient Egyptians Concerning the Hereafter as Expressed in Their Own Terms, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1974.
- ANFRAY, Francis, Les anciens Éthiopiens, Armand Colin, Paris, 1990.
- ANSELIN, Alain, Samba, Éditions de l'UNIRAG, Guadeloupe, 1992.
- ARDALAN, Nader & BAKHTIAR, Laleh, The Sense of Unity: the Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1973.
- AL-ASSIOUTY, Sarwat Anis, Origines égyptiennes du Christianisme et de l'Islâm, Letouzey & Ané, Paris, 1989.
- Atlas al-waṭan al-'arabī wa al-'ālam, Geoprojects, Bairūt, 1991.
- AUFRERE, Sydney, GOLVIN, Jean-Claude, & GOYON, Jean Claude, L'Égypte restituée: sites et temples de haute Égypte (1650 av J.-C. - 300 ap J.C.), Éditions Errance, Paris, 1991.
- AUSTIN, Allan, "Islamic Identities in Africans in North America in the Days of Slavery", in *Islam et sociétés au sud du Sahara*, #7, 1993, pp. 205-219.
- AZAD, Ghulam Murtaza "Isra' and Mi'raj: the Night Journey and Ascension of Allah's Apostle Muhammad (S.A.W.S.)", in *Islamic Studies*, Vol. XXII, #2, 1983, pp. 63-80.
- BA, Amadou Hampaté, L'Empire peul du Macina, Mouton & co., Paris, 1962.
- BAINES, John & MALEK, Jaromir, Atlas of Ancient Egypt, Equinox, Oxford, 1980.
- AL-BAKRI, Abû 'Ubayd, Description de l'Afrique septentrionale (Kitāb al-mughrib fī dhikr bilād ifriqiya wa al-mughrib), Librairie Adrien-Maisonneuve, Paris, 1911-13, translated by Mac Guckin DE SLANE.
- BENCHEIKH, Jamel Eddine, Le Voyage Nocturne de Mahomet, Éditions de l'Imprimerie National, Paris, 1988.

- BEN-JOCHANNAN, Yosef A. A., Africa: Mother of Western Civilization , Black Classic Press, Baltimore, 1988 (first published 1971).
- African Origins of the Major "Western Religions" , Black Classic Press, Baltimore, 1991 (first published 1970).
- BERNAL, Martin, Black Athena: the Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization: vol. 1 The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1987.
- BERQUE, Jacques, Ulémas, fondateurs, insurgés du Maghreb , Sindbad, Paris, 1982
- BERTHO, J., "Ighi-nla, le grand arbre", in *Notes africaines*, #34, 1947, p. 24.
- BEY, Hakim, T.A.Z., Autonomedia, Brooklyn N.Y., 1991.
- BLACKMAN, Winifred S., "Sacred Trees in Modern Egypt", in *The Journal of Egyptian Archeology*, #11, 1925, pp 56-57.
- BLEEKER, C. J., Hathor and Thoth: Two Key Figures of the Ancient Egyptian Religion , E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1973.
- BLIER, Suzanne Preston, The Anatomy of Architecture: Ontology and Metaphore in Batammaliba Architectural Expression , University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994.
- BOURGEOIS, Jean-Louis & PELOS, Carolee, Spectacular Vernacular: the adobe tradition , Aperture, New York, 1989.
- BOURLON, A., "Mourides et mouridisme 1953", in Notes et études sur l'Islam en Afrique noire , J. Peyronnet & Co., Paris, 1962, pp. 53-74.
- BRADLEY, Michael, Dawn Voyage: The Black African discovery of America , Summerhill Press, Toronto, 1987.
- BREASTED, James Henry, Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt , University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1912.
- BRISSON, Nicole & OUELLET, Brigitte, Le guide spirituel de l'Égypte: voyage au cœur du sacré , Éditions du Rocher, Monaco, 1995.
- BROSSE, Jacques, Mythologie des arbres , Plon, Paris, 1989.
- BRUNSON, James E. & RASHIDI, Runoko, "The Moors in Antiquity", in *Journal of African Civilizations*, vol. 11, 1991, pp. 27-84.
- BUDGE, Ernst. A. Wallis, Egyptian Ideas of the Future Life , University Books, New York, 1959 (first published 1899).
- The Egyptian Book of the Dead: the Papyrus of Ani , Dover Publications, New York, 1967 (first published 1895).
  - The Gods of the Egyptians: Studies in Egyptian Mythology , Dover Publications, New York, 1969 (first published 1904), 2 vols.
  - Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection , Dover Publications, New York, 1973 (first published 1911), 2 vols.

- The Egyptian Heaven and Hell , Open Court, La Salle Illinois, 1975 (first published 1905).
  - Egyptian Ideas of the Afterlife , Dover Publications, New York, 1995 (first published 1905).
- BUHL, Marie Louise, "The Goddesses of the Egyptian Tree Cult", in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 6, 1947, pp. 8-97.
- AL-BUKHARI, Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, Les traditions islamiques (Sahīh), Maisonneuve, Paris, 1906, translated by O. HOUDAS & W. MARÇAIS.
- Sahīh, Kazi Publications, Chicago, 1977, translated by Muḥammad Muḥshin KHAN.
- CERNY, Jaroslav, Coptic Etymological Dictionary , Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976.
- CHARLES, R. H., A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life in Isreal, in Judaism, and in Christianity , Adam and Charles Black, London, 1899.
- The Book of Jubilees or the Little Genesis , Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 1917.
- CHAUDHURI, K. N., Asia Before Europe: economy and civilization of the Indian Ocean from the rise of Islam to 1750 , Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990.
- CHINYELU, Mamadou, "Africans in the Birth and Expansion of Islam", in *Journal of African Civilizations*, vol. 11 1991, pp. 360-381.
- COOK, Roger, The Tree of Life: Image for the Cosmos , Thames and Hudson, London, 1992.
- COPANS, Jean, Maintenance sociale et changements économiques au Sénégal , O.R.S.T.O.M., Paris, 1972.
- Les marabouts de l'arachide , Le sycomore, Paris, 1980.
- COQUERY-VIDROVITCH, Catherine, Histoire des villes d'Afrique noire: des origines à la colonisation , Albin Michel, Paris, 1993.
- CORBIN, Henry, L'imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī , Flammarion, Paris, 1958.
- Terre céleste et corps de résurrection: de l'Iran mazdéen à l'Iran shī'ite , Buchet/Chastel, Corrêa, 1960.
  - Face de Dieu, face de l'homme: herméneutique et soufisme , Flammarion, Paris, 1983.
  - Histoire de la philosophie islamique , Gallimard, Paris, 1986.
- CORNEVIN, Marianne, Archéologie africaine , Maisonneuve & Larose, Paris, 1993.
- COULON, Christian, "Paroles mourides: Bamba, père et fils", in *Politique africaine*, #4, 1981, pp. 101-110.
- CRONE, Patricia, Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam , Princeton University Press, Princeton, N. J., 1987.

- CRUISE O'BRIEN, Donal B., The Mourides of Senegal: the Political and Economic Organization of an Islamic Brotherhood , Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971.
- CUOQ, Joseph M., Les Musulmans en Afrique , Éditions Maisonneuve & Larose, Paris, 1975.
- Dahirah des étudiants mourides de l'Université de Dakar, Guide du pèlerin à l'occasion du grand-magal de Touba , Dakar, 1407 (1985-86).
- DALZIEL, J. M., The Useful Plants of West Tropical Africa , Crown Agents for the Colonies, London, 1937.
- DEFFONTAINES, Pierre, Géographie et religion , Gallimar, Paris, 1948.
- DELADRIERE, Roger, La vie merveilleuse de Dhû-l-Nûn l'Égyptien (traduction de Al-kawkab al-durri fi manâqib dhi al-nûn al-misrid'Ibn 'Arabî), Sindbad, Paris, 1988.
- DE LANGE, Nicholas, Atlas of the Jewish World , Equinox Books, Oxford, 1984.
- DELCOURT, Jean, Naissance et croissance de Dakar , Éditions clairafrrique, Dakar, n.d.
- DERMENGHEM, Émile, Le culte des saints dans l'Islam maghrébin , Gallimar, Paris, 1954.
- DE VOLNEY, Comte Constantin-François de Chassebœuf, Ruins or Meditations on the Revolutions of Empires , Charles Gaylord Publishers, Boston, 1835 (first published 1791), translated from the French by the author.
- DIAGNE, P., "History and Linguistics, and Theories on the 'Races' and History of Africa" in General History of Africa , UNESCO, 1989, abridged edition, vol. 1, pp. 89-103.
- DIOP, Ahmadou Bamba, "Lat Dior et le problème musulman", in Bulletin de l'IFAN, vol. 28, série B, #1-2, 1966, pp. 493-539.
- DIOP, Ahmadou Bamba, "Croissance et originalité de Touba dans l'armature urbaine sénégalaise", Mémoire de fin d'études, École normale d'économie appliquée, Dakar, 1989.
- DIOP, Cheikh Anta, Nations nègres et culture: de l'antiquité nègre égyptienne aux problèmes culturels de l'Afrique Noire d'aujourd'hui , Présence africaine, Paris, 1954.
- L'unité culturelle de l'Afrique Noire: domaines du patriarcat et du matriarcat dans l'Antiquité classique , Présence africaine, Paris, 1959.
  - L'Afrique Noire précoloniale: étude comparée des systèmes politique et sociaux de l'Europe et de l'Afrique Noire. de l'Antiquité à la formation des États modernes , Présence africaine, Paris, 1960.

- Antériorité des civilisations nègres: mythe ou vérité historique? , Présence africaine, Paris, 1967.
  - "L'Antiquité africaine par l'image", in *Notes africaines*, #145-146, 1975, pp. 1-66.
  - Civilisation ou barbarie: anthropologie sans complaisance , Présence africaine, Paris, 1981.
  - "Origin of the Ancient Egyptians", in General History of Africa , UNESCO, 1990, abridged edition, vol. 2, pp. 15-61.
- DIOP, Momar Coumba, "La littérature mouride: essai d'analyse thématique", in *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, vol. 41, série B, #2, 1979, pp. 398-439.
- DIOUF, Badara, "Le gamou de Kahone: mythe ou réalité", in *Le Soleil*, 11.08.89, pp. 12-13.
- DIOUF, J. M., "Portrait de Famille: évolution du khalifat", in *Le Soleil*, 4.11.1988, p. 8.
- DJAÏT, Hichem, L'Europe et l'Islam , Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1978.
- DODD, Erika Cruikshank & KHAIRALLAH, Shereen, The Image of the Word: A Study of Quranic Verses in Islamic Architecture , American University of Beirut, Beirut, 1981, 2 vols.
- DOMIAN, Sergio, Architecture soudanaise: vitalité d'une tradition urbaine et monumentale , L'Harmattan, Paris, 1989.
- DORESSE, Jean, Les livres secrets des gnostiques d'Egypte , Plon, Paris, 1958.
- Ethiopia: Ancient Cities and Temples , Frederick Ungar Publishers, New York, 1959, translated by Elsa COULT.
- DUBOIS, J.-P., "Les Serer et la question des Terres Neuves au Sénégal", in *Cahiers de l'ORSTOM*, série Sciences humaines, vol. 12, #1, 1975, pp. 81-120.
- DUMONT, Fernand, La pensée religieuse d'Amadou Bamba , Nouvelles éditions africaines, Dakar, 1975.
- ECK, Diana L., Banaras: City of Light , Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1982.
- ECO, Umberto  
Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language , Indiana University Press, Bloomington Ind., 1986.
- EICKELMAN, Dale F. & PISCATORI, James, Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination , University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990.
- ELIADE, Mircea, The Sacred and the Profane: the Nature of Religion , Harcourt Brace & Co., New York, 1959, translated by Willard R. TRASK.
- La nostalgie des origines: méthodologie et histoire des religions , Gallimard, Paris, 1971.

- ERMAN, Adolf, Life in Ancient Egypt , Dover Publications, New York, 1971 (first published 1894), translated by H. M. TIRARD.
- ERMAN, Adolf & RANKE, H., La civilisation égyptienne , Payot, Paris, 1985, traduit par Charles MATHIEN.
- ERNST, Carl W., Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center , State University of New York Press, Albany, 1992.
- ETTINGHAUSEN, Richard & GRABAR, Oleg, The Art and Architecture of Islam 650-1250 , Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1987.
- FAKHRY, Ahmed, Siwa Oasis , American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 1973.
- FAKHRY, Majid, A History of Islamic Philosophy , Columbia University Press, New York, second edition 1983.
- FAL, Arame, SANTOS, Rosine & DONEUX, Léonce, Dictionnaire wolof-français , Karthala, Paris, 1990.
- FALL, Tanor Latsoukabé, "Recueil sur la vie des damel", in *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, vol. 36, série B, #1, 1974, pp. 93-146.
- FANTAR, M'hamed Hassine, Carthage: approche d'une civilisation , Les éditions de la Méditerranée, Tunis, 1993, 2 vols.
- FICKELER, Paul, "Fundamental questions in the geography of religions", in Readings in Cultural Geography , University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1962, pp. 94-117.
- FINCH, Charles S. III, "Nile Genesis: Continuity of Culture from the Great Lakes to the Delta", in *Journal of African Civilizations*, vol. 12, 1994, pp. 35-54.
- FOWDEN, Garth, The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind , Princeton University Press, Princeton N. J., 1993.
- FREUD, Sigmund, Moses and Monotheism , Random House, New York, 1939.
- FRIEDMANN, Daniel, Les Enfants de la Reine de Saba: les Juifs d'Éthiopie (Falachas). histoire, exode, intégration , Éditions Métailié, Paris, 1994.
- FROBENIUS, Léo, La civilisation africaine , Gallimard, Paris, 1952 (first published 1933), translated by H. BACK & D. ERMONT.
- FROELICH, J. C., Les Musulmans d'Afrique noire , Éditions de l'orante, Paris, 1962.
- GARD, J. & MAUNY, Raymond, "Découverte de tumulus dans la région de Diourbel", in *Notes africaines*, #89, 1961, pp. 10-11.
- GARNIER, B., "L'arbre du Paradis", in *Notes africaines*, #39, 1948, p 17.

- AL-GHAZALI, Abû Hâmid Muhammad, Le Tabernacle des Lumières (Mishkât al-anwâr ), Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1981, translated by Roger DELADRIERE.
- The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife (Kitâb dhikr al - mawt wa-mâ ba'dahu ), The Islamic Texts Society, Cambridge, 1989, translated by T. J. WINTER.
- GLASSÉ, Cyril, The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam , Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1991.
- GLOTON, Maurice, L'Arbre du Monde (Shajarat al-kawn d'Ibn 'Arabî), Les deux océans, Paris, 1982.
- GOMEZ, Michael A., Pragmatism in the Age of Jihad: The Precolonial State of Bundu , Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992.
- GOTTDIENER, M. & LAGOPOULOS, Alexandros Ph., The City and the Sign: an introduction to urban semiotics , Columbia University Press, New York, 1986.
- GOYON, Jean-Claude, Rituels funéraires de l'Ancienne Égypte , Éditions du cerf, Paris, 1972.
- GREENBERG, J. H., "African Linguistic Classification and the Language Map of Africa", in General History of Africa , UNESCO, 1989, abridged edition, vol. 1, pp. 113-121.
- GRIAULE, Marcel, Dieu d'eau, Fayard, Paris, 1966 (first published 1948).
- GROOM, Nigel, Frankincense and Myrrh: A Study of the Arabian Incense Trade, Longman, London, 1981.
- HAAFKENS, J., Chants musulmans en peul , E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1983.
- HADDAD, Adnan & MUFUTA, Kabernba & MUTUNDA, Mwembo, De la culture négro-arabe ou "Titres de gloire des Noirs sur les Blancs" , Société d'édition d'enseignement supérieur, Paris, 1989.
- HAJA, Fdai, La mort et le Jugement Dernier selon les enseignements de l'Islam , Arayhane éditions, Paris, 1991, translated by Mohamed CHAABAOU.
- HAIJAJ, 'Abd Allah, The Isra' and Mi'raj: the Prophet's Night-Journey and Ascent into Heaven (Al-fath al-bârî ), Dar Al Taqwa Ltd., London, 1989, translated by Hudâ KHATTAB.
- HALPERIN, David J., "Hekhalot and Mi'raj: Observations on the Heavenly Journey in Judaism and Islam", in Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys , State University of New York Press, Albany, 1995, pp. 269-284, edited by John J. COLLINS & Michael FISHBANE.
- HAMIDULLAH, Muhammad, "Les 'Ahabish' de la Mecque", in Studia orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi della Vida , Rome, 1956, vol. 1, pp. 434-437.



- HANAWAY, William L. Jr., "Paradise on Earth: the terrestrial garden in Persian literature", in The Islamic Garden , Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., 1976, pp. 41-67.
- HECHT, David & SIMON, Maliqalim, Invisible Governance: the Art of African Micropolitics , Autonomedia, Brooklyn N. Y., 1994.
- HEGEL, Georg Wilhem Friedrich, The Philosophy of history , Dover Publications, New York, 1956, translated by J. SIBREE.
- HERODOTUS, The Histories , Penguin Books, New York, 1954, translated by Aubrey de SÉLINCOURT, revised by A. R. BURN.
- HERVÉ, H., "Niani: ex-capitale de l'empire manding", in *Notes africaines*, #82, 1959, pp. 51-55.
- HILLIARD III, Asa G., "Waset, the eye of Ra and the abode of Maat: the pinnacle of Black leadership in the Ancient World", in *Journal of African Civilizations*, vol. 10, 1989, pp. 211-238.
- HIMMELFARB, Martha, "The Practice of Ascent in the Ancient Mediterranean World", in Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys , State University of New York Press, Albany, 1995, pp. 121-137, edited by John J. COLLINS & Michael FISHBANE.
- HISKETT, Mervyn, The Development of Islam in West Africa , Longman, London, 1984.
- The Course of Islam in Africa , Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1994.
- HODGSON, Marshall G. S., The Venture of Islam , University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1974, 3 vols.
- Holy Bible: Authorized (King James) Version , The Gideons International, Toronto, n.d.
- HORA, Bayard, The Oxford Encyclopedia of Trees of the World , Equinox, Oxford, 1981.
- HORNUNG, Erik, Les Dieux de l'Égypte: l'Un et le Multiple , Flammarion, Paris, 1992, translated by Paul COUTURIAU.
- HRBEK, I., "The Emergence of the Fâtimids", in General History of Africa , UNESCO, 1992, abridged edition, vol. 3, pp. 163-175.
- HUTCHINSON, J. & DALZIEL, J. M., Flora of West Tropical Africa , Whitefriars Press, London, 1927-1936.
- IBN ABU YA'QUBI, Abû al-'Abbâs Aḥmad, Les pays (Kitâb al-buldân) , Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Le Caire, 1937, translated by Gaston WIET.
- IBN 'ARABI, Abû Bakr Muḥammad Muḥyî al-Dîn, "Ibn Al-'Arabî's Shajarat al-Kawn", in *Studia Islamica*, #10, 1959, pp. 43-77; #11, 1960, pp. 113-160, translated by Arthur JEFFERY.
- L'arbre du monde (Shajarat al-kawn) , Les deux océans, Paris, 1982, translated by Maurice GLOTON.

- Les illuminations de La Mecque (*Al-futūḥāt al-makkiyya*), Sindbad, Paris, 1988, translated by Michel CHODKIEWICZ et al.
  - La vie merveilleuse de Dhû-l-Nûn l'Égyptien (*Al-kawkah al-durri fi manâqib dhî al-nûn al-miṣri*), Sindbad, Paris, 1988, translated by Roger DELADRIERE.
- IBN BATTUTA, Abû 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad, Voyages (*Tuḥfat al-nuẓẓār fi gharâ'ib al-amsār wa 'ajā'ib al-asfār*), François Maspero, Paris, 1982, translated by C. DEFREMERY & B. R. SANGUINETTI in 1858, new annotations by Stéphane YERASIMOS.
- IBN ISHAQ, Muḥammad, The Life of Muḥammad (*Sirāt Rasūl Allāh*), Oxford University Press, Lahore, 1955, translated by A. GUILLAUME.
- IBN JUBAYR, Voyages (*Riḥlah*), Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1943, translated by Maurice GAUDEFROY-DEMOMBYNES.
- ISAAC, Erich, "Religion, Landscape and Space", in *Landscape*, vol. 9, #2, 1959, pp. 14-18.
- "The Act and the Covenant", in *Landscape*, vol. 11, #2, 1961, pp. 12-17.
- JACKSON, John G., Introduction to African Civilization, Citadel Press, New York, 1970.
- JÄGER, Otto A., Antiquities of North Ethiopia: A Guide, Brockhaus Komm., Stuttgart, 1965.
- AL-JAHIZ, Abû 'Uthmān 'Amr b. Bahr, The Book of the Glory of the Black Race (*Kitāb fakhr al-sūdān 'ala al-bidān*), France Preston, New York, 1985, translated by Vincent J. CORNELL.
- JAMES, E. O., The Tree of Life: an Archeological Study, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1966.
- JAMES, George G. M., Stolen Legacy: Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy, Africa World Press, Trenton N. J., 1954.
- JEFFERY, Arthur, "Ibn Al-'Arabī's Shajarat al-Kawn", in *Studia Islamica*, #10, 1959, pp. 43-77; #11, 1960, pp. 113-160.
- JOSEPHUS, Flavius, The Works (Antiquities of the Jews, Wars of the Jews), George Routledge & Sons, London, n.d., translated by William WHISTON.
- JUDY, Ronald A. T., (Dis)Forming the American Canon: African-Arabic Slave Narratives and the Vernacular, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993.
- KAMIL, Jill, Coptic Egypt: History and Guide, The American University in Cairo, Cairo, 1987.
- KARENGA, Maulana, "Towards a Sociology of Maatian Ethics: Literature and Context", in *Journal of African Civilizations*, vol. 10, 1989, pp. 352-395.

- AL-KATI, Maḥmūd bn al-Hājj al-Mutawakkil al-Timbuktī, Tarikh el-Fettach (Tārikh al-fattāsh), Adrien-Maisonneuve, Paris, 1964, traduit par O. HOUDAS & Maurice DELAFOSSE.
- KAZIMIRSKI, Dictionnaire arabe-français, 1960.
- KEMP, Barry, Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization, Routledge, New York, 1989.
- KENYATTA, Jomo, Facing Mount Kenya, London, 1938.
- KHAMMASH, Ammar, Notes on Village Architecture in Jordan, University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette, 1986.
- KI-ZERBO, Joseph, Histoire de l'Afrique Noire, Librairie A. Hatier, Paris, 1978.
- KNAPPERT, Jan, Swahili Islamic Poetry, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1971, 3 vols.
- Islamic Legends: vol. 1, Histories of the Heroes, Saints and Prophets of Islam, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1985.
- KNIBB, Michael A., The Ethiopic Book of Enoch, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978.
- LALOUETTE, Claire, Textes sacrés et textes profanes de l'ancienne Égypte: traductions et commentaires, Gallimar, Paris, 1984 et 1987, 2 vols.
- Thèbes ou la naissance d'un empire, Flammarion, Paris, 1995 (a).
  - L'Empire des Ramsès, Flammarion, Paris, 1995 (b).
- LAM, Aboubacry Moussa, "Quelques similitudes culturelles entre l'Afrique du Nord et l'Afrique de l'Ouest", in *Notes africaines*, #176, 1982, pp. 90-95.
- LAMMENS, H., L'Arabie occidentale avant l'hégire, Imprimerie Catholique de Beyrouth, 1928.
- LANE, Edward W., Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, E. P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1908.
- Arabic-English Lexicon, 1867.
- LANE-POOLE, Stanley, Cairo, J. S. Virtue & Co., London, 1898.
- LAST, Murray, The Sokoto Caliphate, Longman's, Green & Co., London, 1967.
- LAWRENCE, Harold (WANGARA, Kofi), "Mandinga Voyages across the Atlantic", in *Journal of African Civilizations*, vol. 8, #2, 1986, pp. 169-214.
- LE CHATELIER, A., L'Islam dans l'Afrique Occidentale, G. Steinheil, Paris, 1899.
- LEGRAIN, Georges, Louqsor sans les pharaons, Vromont & co., Bruxelles, 1914.
- LESLAU, Wolf, Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1991.

- LEV TZION, Nehemia, Islam in West Africa: Religion, Society and Politics to 1800 , Variorum, Brookfield Vermont, 1994.
- LEV TZION, Nehemia & VOLL, John O., Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam , Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1987.
- LEVY-BRUHL, Lucien, La mentalité primitive , Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1931.
- LEWIS, Bernard, Race and Color in Islam , Harper & Row, New York, 1971.
- LEWIS, I. M., Islam in Tropical Africa , Indiana University Press, Bloomington Indiana, 1966.
- LICHTHEIM, Miriam, Ancient Egyptian Literature, vol. 2: The New Kingdom, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1976.
- Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature in the International Context , Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1983.
- LOMBARD, Maurice, L'Islam dans sa première grandeur , Flammarion, Paris, 1971.
- LUMPKIN, Beatrice, "Hypatia and Women's Rights in Ancient Egypt", in *Journal of African Civilizations*, vol. 6, #1, 1984, pp. 155-161.
- "Mathematics and Engineering in the Nile Valley", in *Journal of African Civilizations*, vol. 12, 1994, pp. 323-340.
- LURKER, Manfred, The Gods and Symbols of the Ancient Egyptians: An Illustrated Dictionary , Thames & Hudson, New York, 1974.
- MAHÉ, Jean-Pierre, Hermès en Haute-Égypte , Presses de l'Université Laval, Québec, 1978.
- MARONE, Ibrahima, "Le tidjanisme au Sénégal", in *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, vol. 32, série B, #1, 1970, pp. 136-215.
- MARTY, Paul, "Les mourides d'Amadou Bamba", in *Revue du monde musulman*, vol. 25, 1913, pp. 3-163.
- Études sur l'Islam au Sénégal , Éditions Ernest Leroux, Paris, 1917.
  - Études sur l'Islam en Côte d'Ivoire , Éditions Ernest Leroux, Paris, 1922.
- AL-MAS'UDI, 'Abd al-Hasan 'Alī b. al-Husayn b. 'Alī, Les prairies d'or et les mines de diamants (*Kitāb murūj al-dhahab wa ma'ādin al-juhūr* ), Imprimerie impériale, Paris, 1861 et suite, 6 vols., translated by BARBIER DE MEYNARD, C. & PAVET DE COURTEILLE.
- MAUNY, Raymond, "L'origine du mot baobab", in *Notes africaines*, #50, 1951, pp. 57-58.
- "Baobabs - cimetières à griots", in *Notes africaines*, #67, 1955, pp. 72-76.
- MBACKÉ, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, "Maṭlab al-fawzayn", Imprimerie Serigne Issa Niang, Pikine, n.d.

- "Silk al-jawāhir fi akhbār al-sarā'ir", Publications de la Bibliothèque Khadīm al-Rasūl, Touba, 1397 (1977).
- MBACKÉ, Sérigne Bachir, "Les bienfaits de l'Éternel ou la biographie de Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké", in *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, série B, vol. 42, #3, 1980, pp. 554-631; vol. 43, #1-2, 1981, pp. 47-108; vol. 45, #1-2, 1983, pp. 117-196, translated by Khadim MBACKÉ.
- MBITI, John S., Introduction to African Religion , Heinemann, Oxford, 1975.
- African Religions and Philosophy , Heinemann, Oxford, 1990.
- McKENNEY-JOHNSON, Eloise, "Egypt's Isis: The Original Black Madonna", in *Journal of African Civilizations*, vol. 6, #1, 1984, pp. 64-71.
- MEAD, G. R. S., Pistis Sophia: A Gnostic Gospel , Theosophical Publishing Society, London, 1896.
- MEINARDUS, Otto F. A., Christian Egypt: Faith and Life , American University of Cairo Press, Cairo, 1970.
- Christian Egypt: Ancient and Modern , American University of Cairo Press, Cairo, 1977.
- MEISTERMANN, P. Barnabé, Nouveau guide de Terre Sainte , Alphonse Picart & fils, Paris, 1907.
- MIDANT-REYNES, Béatrix, Préhistoire de l'Égypte: des premiers hommes aux premiers pharaons , Armand Colin, Paris, 1992.
- MIQUEL, André, L'Islam et sa civilisation , Armand Colin, Paris, 1977.
- L'Événement: le Coran sourate LVI , Éditions Odile Jacob, Paris, 1992.
- MOMEN, Moojan, An Introduction to Shī 'ī Islam , Yale University Press, New Haven, 1985.
- MONTASIR, A. H. & HASSIB, M., Illustrated Manual Flora of Egypt , Imprimerie Misr, Cairo, 1956.
- MONTEIL, Vincent, L'Islam noir: une religion à la conquête de l'Afrique , Éditions du Seuil, Paris, troisième édition 1980.
- MOREAU, René Luc, Africains Musulmans , Présence africaine - INADES éditions, Paris - Abidjan, 1982.
- MOSCATI, Sabatino, Ancient Semitic Civilizations , Elek Books, London, 1957.
- MOUGHTIN, J. C., Hausa Architecture , Ethnographica, London, 1985.
- Mouvement islamique des Mourides d'Europe, "Histoire de la mosquée de Touba", in *Ndigël*, #15, 1985, pp. 10-12.
- MOYNIHAN, Elizabeth, Paradise as Garden , George Braziller, New York, 1979.
- MUHAMMAD, Elijah, Message to the Blackman in America , Muhammad Mosque of Islam, Chicago, 1965.

- AL-MUQADDASI, Abû 'Abd Allâh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, La meilleure répartition pour la connaissance des provinces (Aḥsan al-taqâsim fi ma'rifat al-aqâlim), Institut Français de Damas, Damas, 1963, translated by André MIQUEL.
- MUSCHLER, Reno, A Manual Flora of Egypt, R. Friedlaender & Sohn, Berlin, 1912.
- NIANE, Djibril Tamsir, Soundjata ou l'épopée mandingue, Présence africaine, Paris, 1960.
- Histoire des Mandingues de l'Ouest, Karthala, Paris, 1989.
- OBENGA, Théophile, L'Afrique dans l'antiquité, Présence africaine, Paris, 1973.
- La philosophie africaine de la période pharaonique: 2780-330 avant notre ère, L'harmattan, Paris, 1990.
- OJO, G. J. Afolabi, Yoruba Culture: A Geographical Analysis, University of London Press, London, 1966.
- OLDEROGGE, D. A., "Migrations and Ethnic and Linguistic Differentiations", in General History of Africa, UNESCO, 1989, abridged edition, vol. 1, pp. 104-112.
- O'LEARY, De Lacy, Arabia Before Muhammad, Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., London, 1927.
- O'SHAUGHNESSY, Thomas J., Eschatological Themes in the Qur'ân, Ateneo University Press, Manila University, Manila, 1986.
- PADEN, John N., Religion and Political Culture in Kano, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1973.
- PAQUES, Viviana, L'arbre cosmique dans la pensée populaire et dans la vie quotidienne du nord-ouest africain, Institut d'ethnologie, Paris, 1964.
- PARRINDER, G., West African Psychology, Lutterworth Press, London, 1951.
- PETERS, F. E., A Reader on Classical Islam, Princeton University Press, Princeton N. J., 1994 (a).
- Mecca: A Literary History of the Muslim Holy Land, Princeton University Press, Princeton N. J., 1994 (b).
- PHILPOT, J. H., The Sacred Tree or the Tree in Religion and Myth, Macmillan & Co., New York, 1897.
- PIEPER, Jan, "Hyderabad: A Qur'ânic Paradise in Architectural Metaphors", in *Environmental Design*, #0, n.d., pp. 46-51.
- PIPES, Daniel, "Black Soldiers in Early Muslim Armies", in *The International Journal of African Studies*, vol. 13, #1, 1980, pp. 87-94.
- PRUSSIN, Labelle, Hatumere: Islamic Design in West Africa, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986.

- AL-QADI, Imam 'Abd ar-Rahîm bn Ahmad, Islamic Book of the Dead , Diwan Press, San Francisco, 1977.
- QAZI, M. A., Bilal in Hadith , Printex, Lahore, 1976, revised by Muhammad Muḥshin KHAN.
- QUIMBY, Lucy G., "History as Identity: the Jaaxanke and the Founding of Tuuba", in *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, vol. 37, série B, #3, 1975, pp. 604-618.
- RASHIDI, Runoko, "Black Land of Antiquity: A Brief Historical Outline of Dynastic Kmt"; "Royal Ships of the Pharaohs", in *Journal of African Civilizations*, vol. 12, 1994, pp. 81-104; 274-277.
- REDD, Danita, "Black Madonnas of Europe: Diffusion of the African Isis", in *Journal of African Civilizations*, vol. 6, #1, 1984, pp. 162-187.
- REDFORD, Donald B., Akhenaten: The Heretic King , Princeton University Press, Princeton N. J., 1984.
- Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times , Princeton University Press, Princeton N. J., 1992.
- REICHELBERG, Ruth, L'Aventure prophétique: Jonas, menteur de Vérité , Albin Michel, Paris, 1995.
- REYNOLDS-MARNICHE, Dana, "The Myth of the Mediterranean Race", in *Journal of African Civilizations*, vol. 12, 1994, pp. 109-125.
- RIPPIN, Andrew & KNAPPERT, Jan, Textual Sources for the Study of Islam , University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990.
- ROBINSON, David, La guerre sainte d'al-Hajj Umar: le Soudan occidental au milieu du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle , Karthala, Paris, 1988.
- RODINSON, Maxime, Mahomet, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1961.
- ROGERS, J. A., World's Great Men of Color , Macmillan, New York, 1946.
- ROGNON, Pierre, Biographie d'un désert , Plon, Paris, 1989.
- ROSENTHAL, Franz, The Classical Heritage in Islam , Routledge, London, 1975, translated by Emile & Jenny MARMORSTEIN.
- ROSS, Eric, "Touba: a Spiritual Metropolis in the Modern World", in *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue canadienne d'études africaines*, vol. 29, #2, 1995, pp. 222-259.
- ROUCH, Jean, La religion et la magie songhay , Presses universitaires de France, Paris, 1960.
- RUDOLPH, Kurt, Gnosis: the Nature and History of Gnosticism , Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1987, translated by Robert McLACHLAN WILSON et al.
- RUNDEL CLARK, R. T., Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt , Thames & Hudson, New York, 1978.
- AL-SA'DI, 'Abd al-Rahmân bn 'Abd Allâh bn 'Imrân bn 'Amîr, Tarikh es-Soudan (Târikh al-sūdân) , Librairie Adrien-Maisonneuve, Paris, 1964, translated by O. HOUDAS.

- SAMB, Amar, "Touba et son 'Magal'", in *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, vol. 31, série B, #3, 1969, pp. 733-753.
- "Contribution de l'Afrique aux religions abrahamiques", in *Notes africaines*, #142, 1974, pp. 42-48.
  - "L'Islam et le racisme", in *Notes africaines*, #176, 1982, pp. 98-101.
- SANNEH, Lamin, "The Origins of Clericalism in West African Islam", in *Journal of African History*, vol. 17, #1, 1976, pp. 49-72.
- "Futa Jallon and the Jakhanke Clerical Tradition", in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 12, 1981, #1, pp. 38-64; #2, pp. 105-126.
  - The Jakhanke Muslim Clerics: a Religious and Historical Study of Islam in Senegambia, University Press of America, New York, 1989.
- SARR, Alioune, "Histoire du Sine-Saloum (Sénégal)", in *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, vol. 46, série B, #3-4, 1986-1987, pp. 211-283.
- SCHAFER, Matt, Mandinko: the Ethnography of a West African Holy Land, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1980.
- SCHIMMEL, Annemarie, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1975.
- Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1994.
- SCHOLEM, Gershom, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, Schocken Books, New York, 1995 (first published 1946).
- SCHWARTZ, Fernand, Égypte: les mystères du Sacré, Éditions du félin, Paris, 1986.
- SÉGAL, Abraham, Abraham: enquête sur un patriarche, Plon, Paris, 1995.
- SENE, Henri, "Note sur les bibliothèques musulmanes en Afrique de l'Ouest", in *Notes africaines*, #182, 1984, pp. 30-34.
- SHABAN, M. A., Islamic History (600-1055): a New Interpretation, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1971, 2 vols.
- SHAHID, Irfan, "Two Qur'anic Sûras: *al-Fîl* and *Quraysh*", in Byzantium and the Semitic Orient before the Rise of Islam, Variorum Reprints, London, 1988, pp. 429-436.
- SHAKIR, M. H., Holy Qur'ân, Tahrike Tarsile Qur'ân Inc., Elmhurst N. Y., 1985.
- SINOUE, Alain & OLOUÉ, Bachir, Porto-Novo: ville d'Afrique Noire, Parenthèses/Orstom, Marseilles, 1988.
- SMITH, Jane Idleman & HADDAD, Yvonne Yazbeck, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1981.



- SMITH, Robert S., Kingdoms of the Yoruba , University of Wisconsin Press, Madison Wis., 1988.
- SOPHER, David E., Geography of Religions , Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs N. J., 1967.
- SPENGLER, Oswald, The Decline of the West , Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1939 (first published 1926), translated by Charles Francis ATKINSON.
- STEENTOFT, Margaret, Flowering Plants in West Africa , Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988.
- STEINGASS, Arab-English Dictionary , 1972.
- STEWART, P. J., Unfolding Islam , Ithaca Press, Reading U.K., 1994.
- STROUMSA, Guy G., "Mystical Descents", in Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys , State University of New York Press, Albany, 1995, pp. 137-154, edited by John J. COLLINS & Michael FISHBANE.
- SUHRWARDI, Shihâbuddîn Yahyâ, "Le récit de l'Archange empourpré ('Aql-e Sorkh)", in L'Archange empourpré , Fayard, Paris, 1976, pp. 195-220, translated by Henry CORBIN.
- SY, Cheikh Tidiane, La confrérie sénégalaise des mourides: un essai sur l'Islam au Sénégal , Présence africaine, Paris, 1969.
- SYLLA, Assane, "Le sacré dans les philosophies africaines", in *Notes africaines*, #164, 1979, pp. 102-107.
- AL-TABRIZI, Khâtib, Mishkât-ul-Maṣābīh , Islam Mission Library, Dacca, 1963, translated by Al-Hajj Maulana Fazlul KARIM.
- TÄCKHOLM, Vivi, Student's Flora of Egypt , Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, Cairo, 1956.
- TALBI, M., "The Independence of the Maghrib", in General History of Africa , UNESCO, 1992, abridged edition, vol. 3, pp. 130-145.
- TALHAMI, Ghada Hashem, "The Zanj Rebellion Reconsidered" in *The International Journal of African Studies*, vol. 10, #3, 1977, pp. 443-461.
- TALIB, Y. A. & EL-SAMIR, F., "The African Diaspora in Asia", in General History of Africa , UNESCO, 1992, abridged edition, vol. 3, pp. 337-347.
- Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text , Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1985.
- THIAM, Médoune D., La mosquée de Touba: 1926-1963 , ?, Dakar, 1963.
- THOMPSON, Robert Farris, Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas , Prestel-Verlag, München, 1993.
- TOYNBEE, Arnold, A Study of History , Oxford University Press, London, 1934.

- TRIMINGHAM, John Spencer, Islam in West Africa , Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1959.
- A History of Islam in West Africa , Glasgow University Press, Glasgow, 1962.
  - The Influence of Islam upon Africa , Praeger, New York, 1968.
  - The Sufi Orders in Islam , Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971.
- ULLENDORF, Edward, Ethiopia and the Bible , Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1968.
- AL-'UMARI, Ibn Fadl Allâh, Masâlik al-absâr fi mamâlik al-amṣâr (Itinéraire de discernement dans le gouvernement des metropoles ). Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1927, translated by Maurice GAUDEFROY-DEMOMBYNES.
- VALE, Lawrence J., Architecture, Power, and National Identity , Yale University Press, New Haven, 1992.
- VANDIER, Jacques, La Religion égyptienne , Presses universitaires de France, Paris, 1949.
- VAN SERTIMA, Ivan, Golden Age of the Moor , Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick N.J., 1992.
- VERCOUTTER, Jean, L'Egypte et la vallée du Nil: tome 1, des origines à la fin de l'Ancien Empire, 12000-2000 av. J.-C. , Presses universitaires de France, Paris, 1992.
- VILNAY, Zev, Legends of Jerusalem , Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1973.
- VOLL, John O., "Abu Jummayza: The Mahdi's Musaylima?", in Islam, Politics and Social Movements , Edited by Edmund BURKE III & Ira M. LAPIDUS. University of California, Berkeley, 1988, pp. 97-111.
- WATT, William Montgomery, Muhammad at Mecca , Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1953.
- Muhammad at Madina , Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1956.
- WEHR, Hans, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic , Spoken Languages Services, Ithaca N. Y., 1976, edited by J. Milton COWAN.
- WENSINCK, Arent Jan, Tree and Bird as Cosmological Symbols in Western Asia , Johannes Müller, Amsterdam, 1921.
- WIEDEMANN, Alfred, Religion of the Ancient Egyptians , G. P. Putnam's & Sons, New York, 1897.
- WILKINSON, Sir J. Garner, The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians , John Murray Publishers, New York, 1878 (first published 1836), 3 vols.
- The Ancient Egyptians: their Life and Customs , Senate, London, 1994 (first published 1853), 2 vols.

- WILSON, Peter Lamborn, Sacred Drift: Essays on the Margins of Islam ,  
City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1993.
- X, Malcolm (AL-SHABAZZ, Al-Hajji Malik), The End of White  
Supremacy: Four Speeches by Malcolm X , Merlin House, New  
York, 1971, edited by Benjamin GOODMAN.
- YOYOTTE, Jean, "Les Pèlerinages dans l'Égypte Ancienne", in Les  
Pèlerinages , Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1960, pp.17-74.
- YUSUF ALI, Abdullah, The Meaning of the Glorious Qur 'ân, Dar al-Kitâb  
al-Masrî, Cairo, 1934.
- ZEKARIA, A., Dictionary Amharic-English/English-Amharic ,  
Languages of the World Publications, New Delhi, 1991.