



**Gold miner  
(late 10th century CE)**

**Soninke/ Mande**



**King Basi  
(?—1063 CE)**

**Soninke/ Mande**



**Abdallah Ibn Yasin  
(d. 1059 CE)**

**Amazigh/ Sanhaja**



**Abu Bakr ibn Umar  
(d.1087 CE)**

**Amazigh/ Sanhaja**

I am King **Basi**, ruler of the empire known to Arab travelers as “Ghana,” although my Soninke people call it Wagadu. I am the protector of a large empire which includes farming villages and large cities where **gold, iron, salt, ivory, horses** and other commodities are exchanged. Our principal cities are **Walata, Taghaza** and **Kumbi Saleh** and now we control **Awdaghust**, once controlled by Sanhaja Amazigh. Awdaghust is an important trading center, some 125 miles to the north. I am known for my love of justice and as a friend of Muslims who come to live here. My tax collectors and 200,000 soldiers help me safeguard the empire. I am known for my love of justice and as a friend of Muslims who come to live here.

(Al-Bakri in Levtzion and Hopkins, 79)

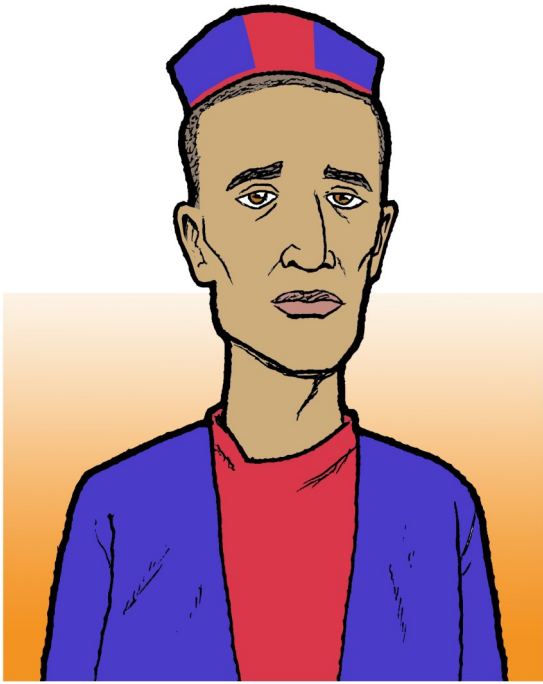
I am a **gold** miner in the empire of **Wagadu-Ghana**. I pan for **gold** in the **Faleme River** in the **Bambuk gold fields**. The Faleme is a tributary of the **Senegal River**. I capture **gold dust** and **gold nuggets** that are washed from veins of rock by the force of water. The gold from Bambuk is pure and plentiful. Large gold nuggets belong to the king, the gold dust belongs to us ordinary miners. Some of the nuggets weigh as much as a pound! We sell the gold to **Amazigh** traders. They take the gold by **camel** north across the **Sahara**. Most of the gold goes to a mint in **Sijilmasa, Morocco** where it is struck into **gold dinars**. Many northern Amazigh traders have tried to find the exact location of our gold. We will never tell!

I am **Abu Bakr** of the **Sanhaja Amazigh** of the Lamtuna clan. I am the founder of the great city of **Marrakesh** and supreme military commander of the righteous **Almoravid** movement. In 1054 my fellow Sanhaja **Ibn Yasin** conquered Ghana’s northernmost city but failed to totally defeat the **Soninke**. After he died, I resolved to finish the task. In 1070 I saw my chance. I allied with the **Takrur**, one of Ghana’s vassal kingdoms on the coast. Ghana’s powerful armies fought back for 6 long years but in 1076 we prevailed. We captured their capital, seized their property, took control of the **gold** trade, levied taxes and demanded that they accept Islam.

(Levtzion, 38-41).

I am **Abdallah Ibn Yasin** a **Sanhaja Amazigh**. I am the founder of the **Almoravid** Movement. We teach orthodox **Sunni Islam**, the version all true Muslims should follow. I sent missionaries to the **Ghana** Empire to show the **Soninke** kings the path to **Allah**. They allowed our people to live and trade there but they refused to accept **Islam**. I was determined to convert them and seize control of the **gold** trade. In 1054 we attacked Ghana’s northernmost city and wrenched **Awdaghust** from their grasp. Yet we failed to capture **Kumbi Saleh**, Ghana’s legendary capital.

(Ibn Khaldun in Levtzion and Hopkins 329-30; (Levtzion, Conrad 35).



Dinga  
(c. 8<sup>th</sup>- 9<sup>th</sup> century CE)  
**Soninke/ Mande**



Amazigh, Zanata Trader  
(c. late 10<sup>th</sup> century CE)  
**Amazigh/ Zanata**



Bouctou  
(12<sup>th</sup> century CE)  
**Amazigh/ Tuareg**



Sumanguru Kante  
(13<sup>th</sup> century CE)  
**Susu / Mande**

I am an **Amazigh** trader from the **Zanata** clan. Some call us Berbers but we reject this Roman term which means barbarians. My **Muslim** roots go back to the 8th century when my family converted. **Islam** helped us connect to Muslim traders in the wider world and become prosperous. I was born near the **Atlas mountains** in **Morocco**. When I was a young man, I moved to **Awdaghust** in the south to work in the lucrative **gold trade**.

We buy gold from the **Soninke** and take it by **camel** to **Sijilmasa, Morocco** where it is minted into **gold coins**. In exchange, we sell the Soninke **salt, horses, books, cloth**, and luxury goods. Most of the traders are Muslim like me but we are taxed by **Soninke** kings from **Ghana**. Their capital, **Kumbi Saleh** is about 125 miles away. Some years ago, the Soninke kings seized Awdaghust from the **Sanhaja** Amazigh. We Zanata have no quarrel with the Soninke kings but the Sanhaja are plotting to take the city back. Awdaghust is a valuable commercial city for those who control it. (Conrad, 33, Al Bakri)

I am **Sumanguru Kante** a blacksmith, sorcerer, and **mansa** of the **Susu** Kingdom of **Kaniaga**. Some called me a cruel, ruthless terrorist but I was simply building an empire. My Susu people were once vassals to **Ghana**. I ended that humiliating posture. After the **Almoravids** weakened Ghana, I conquered **Soninke** communities including their capital city of **Kumbi Saleh** and brought them under Susu rule.

Unfortunately our victory over Ghana was short-lived. We were ultimately defeated in the battle at **Kirina** by the upstart **Malinke** prince **Sunjata** and his generals. I managed to survive the battle and escape. Years after my death, the **jeli** Abdoulaye Sako told the real story of my triumphs.

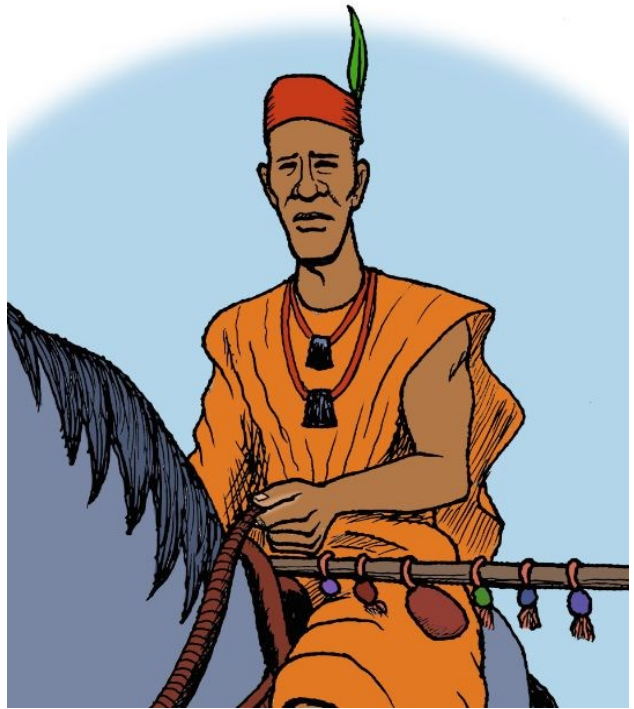
(The Epic of Sunjata)

I am **Dinga**, the **Soninke** founder of **Wagadu**, known to some as **Ghana**. I left my home in the east searching for a new place to live. For a time I stayed in the ancient city of **Jenne-Jeno** located on the **Niger River**. Later I moved to the town of **Dia** in the **Middle Delta**. There I married and had two sons. I left Dia (Ja) and came to this part of the **Sahel** with a band of followers searching for a better place to settle. The place I chose had good water and looked just right for us. There was enough grass for pasturing our cattle, sheep, and goats and the soil was very fertile. The **Bambuk** gold fields lay to the south on the **Faleme** River. We built the town of **Kumbi Saleh** and soon began a brisk trade in gold.

I am the legendary **Bouctou**, a **Tuareg Amazigh** trader. I established a **camel** refreshment station on the banks of the **Niger River** shortly after the Ghana empire lost power. My station eventually became the great city of **Timbuctou**. The city is actually named for me! Timbuctou means the place of Bouctou! Traders arrive at my station with **camels** laden with **salt slabs, books, horses**, imported **cloth** and other goods from the north. They depart with **gold, ivory**, and amazing **animal hide** leather shields. The shields are often given as presents to the kings of the **Maghrib** and to buyers in Al-Andalus.



**Tunka Manin**  
(r. 1063-10?? CE)  
**Soninke/ Mande**



**Cavalry Horseman**  
(c. late 10<sup>th</sup> century CE)  
**Soninke/ Mande**



**Farmer**  
(10th century CE )  
**Soninke/ Mande**



**Ti-n-Yarutan ibn Wasinu ibn Nazar**  
(961-971 CE)  
**Amazigh / Sanhaja**

I am a horseman in **Wagadu's** cavalry. Our empire is divided into provinces headed by military commanders collectively called "**wago**" hence the name Wagadu, which means the land of the "wago." Our mastery of iron technology enabled our Soninke people to grow more food, have more children and make deadly weapons. When we acquired **horses** from the **Amazigh** of North Africa we were unstoppable. We conquered communities near and far and brought them into the empire. Horses are also important in everyday life. Every morning our **tunka** (king) mounts his horse and rides at the head of our officers through town. People who have suffered an injustice can appeal to him for a remedy. (Al-Idrisi in Levtzion & Spaulding 32-33).

I am **King Manin, Soninke** ruler of **Wagadu-Ghana**. I came to power in 1063 upon the death **Basi**, my maternal uncle. Our capital city is made up of two towns. One is reserved for our Soninke people, the other for **Amazigh Muslims**. The Amazigh keep arriving from the north and expanding their population. There are so many of them now, that they have no less than twelve **mosques** where they gather to pray on Fridays.

Unlike the Muslims with their beards, Soninke men shave their faces. Also, our women shave their heads because we prefer that look. I stand out from everybody else, because I wear a lot of expensive necklaces and bracelets and a tall cap decorated with **gold** and wrapped in a cotton turban, a habit we picked up from the Muslims. When the big drum beats to announce my appearance in public, I sit in a domed pavilion guarded by ten young soldiers with shields and swords and with dogs wearing collars of gold and silver. All those attendants are encircled by **horses** draped in colorful **embroidered cloth**. (Al-Bakri in Levtzion and Hopkins 79-80)

I am Ti-n-Yarutan, a Sanhaja nomad of the Lamtuna clan. I rule over the great trading city of Awdaghust, and my authority is recognized by twenty chiefs of the black people we call *sudani* (*sudan* = "land of the blacks"). *My domain stretches the distance of two months' travel in all directions. Awdaghust is populated by Zanata Amazigh and Arab traders from the northern edge of the Sahara. Although we Sanhaja control that city and tax its merchants, my people and I live with our herds of camels, donkeys, goats and sheep in desert encampments. I have been known to send into battle as many as 50,000 warriors mounted on camels. We control the trans-Saharan routes as protectors, guides and sometimes bandits, which is how we gained authority over Awdaghust.* have been known to send into battle as many as 50,000 soldiers mounted on camels. We control the trans-Saharan routes as protectors, guides and sometimes bandits, which is how we gained authority over Awdaghust.

(Al-Bakri in Levtzion and Hopkins 68-69)

I am a farmer in **Wagadu-Ghana**. We women are the backbone of this empire. Our crops, especially **sorghum** and **millet**, keep our people fed and strong. Our men provide game with their traps and arrows but hunting is not as reliable as our hoes. We sell our extra crops to city-dwellers in towns like **Walata** and **Kumbi Saleh**. The income we earn buys items we need, like salt.



Zaynab an-Nafzawiyyahd  
(c. 1080-90 CE)  
Amazigh



Resident of Awdaghust  
Amazigh



Yahya ibn Ibrahim  
(d. 1040 CE)  
Amazigh/Sanhaja



Jeli (Griot)

I live in **Awdaghust**, a large crowded **oasis** city with handsome houses. The city is built on sandy ground, overlooked by a big mountain. There is one cathedral **mosque** and many smaller ones ... Around the town are gardens with **date palms**. Wheat is grown ... by digging with hoes, and it is watered with buckets ... Excellent cucumbers grow here, and there are a few small fig trees and some vines, as well as plantations of henna which produce a large crop. There are wells with sweet water. Cattle and sheep are numerous. Honey is brought from the land of the Sudan. Some people of Awdaghust are very wealthy. The market is at all times full of people. Transactions are in **gold**, rarely in silver. There are a few people from other countries and numerous enslaved people here. (Conrad, 33)

I am a jeli. Some call us griots. We are the masters of oral history. Before the wealthy and pious **Mansa Musa** traveled to **Mecca**, before **Sunjata Keita** founded the **Mali Empire**, there was **Dinga** who founded the **Ghana Empire**, the first of the three great empires in medieval West Africa.

The Ghana Empire is the topic today. The empire was located in what are now the countries of **Mauritania** and **Mali**.

Listen as the people of the Ghana Empire tell of their deeds and accomplishments.

I am **Zaynab**, the daughter of a wealthy **Amazigh** trader from **Kairouan** in **Tunisia**. I have been described as beautiful, intelligent and ambitious. My first husband was from the Masmuda clan and was chief of **Aghmat**. When the **Zanata** captured Aghmat, I abandoned the loser and married the Zanata leader. Then when the Zanata were driven away by the Almoravids, I gave up on the Zanata leader and married the great **Almoravid** commander **Abu Bakr ibn Umar**. Abu Bakr knew that I like my urban luxury and didn't want me to suffer desert hardships, so before he went home to his tents and camels, he divorced me. After an appropriate length of time, I married Abu Bakr's cousin **Ibn Tashfin** who had been appointed deputy of **Morocco**. I wasn't satisfied that my fourth husband was only a deputy. I wanted Ibn Tashfin to rise to kingly status, so I gave him a lot of money which he added to his own fortune to enlarge the Almoravid army. He bought Christians, enslaved them, made them horse warriors and introduced drums and flags to the army. With my support and encouragement, Ibn Tashfin became head of both branches of the Almoravids, and after Abu Bakr died in 1087, it was Ibn Tashfin's name that appeared on the golden **dinars**. (Levtzion 39-41)

I am **Yahya ibn Ibrahim**, a **Amazigh** chief from the Juddala (Joo-da-la) clan of the Sanhaja. Ever since the greatest days of the **Ghana Empire**, my people have lived in the remote Western Sahara in what is now the country of **Mauritania**. Thinking I was a good Muslim, I made a hajj (pilgrimage) to the holy city of Mecca in Arabia. But while I was there, I realized that we desert people were making a lot of mistakes in how we practiced **Islam**. To learn how to do it right, on my way home from Mecca I went to study at the great city of **Qayrawan (Kyrawan)** in southern **Morocco**. There I learned to pray five times a day, to read the **Koran**, to fast during the annual month of Ramadan, and to not drink alcohol or eat pork. While I was still in Morocco, I met a religious teacher named **Ibn Yasin** and took him back to the desert with me. Yasin turned out to be a religious fanatic who would punish people if they didn't follow his strict rules. Some of the Amazigh clans bitterly resented the way Ibn Yasin abused them, but violence was his way and I went along with it. (Al-Bakri and Ibn Khaldun in Levtzion and Hopkins 71, 329-30; Levtzion, 33 Conrad, 35-36).