

Francia. Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte
Herausgegeben vom Deutschen Historischen Institut Paris
(Institut historique allemand)
Band 48 (2021)

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of Architecture in the Making of a Cultural Capital in
Mali**

DOI: 10.11588/fr.2021.1.93966

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LAURE CARBONNEL

FROM HEROES TO PLACES

Bureaucratization and the Role of Architecture in the Making of a Cultural Capital in Mali

»It was Europeans and Arabs who had the bureaucratic notion that power belonged to a place rather than to a person or a clan!.«

Bureaucracy – its administrations, its officers, its tools (preservation, archiving, records, lists and so on) – are well-documented phenomena². According to Bayart, the domain of bureaucratization is not restricted to public services: bureaucratic imaginaries are also conveyed by dances, clothes, and so on³. Is there a bureaucratic conception of culture, or of towns as proposed by David C. Conrad above?

The point of departure of this study is the town of Segu (or Ségou⁴) presented as a »cultural capital«⁵ by Malian cultural entrepreneurs and administrators since the beginning of the twenty-first century. The French colonizers had already considered the city, as a political centre of the Segu kingdom⁶ (from Biton's assumption of power in 1712 to 1862, the year of Segu's occupa-

1 David C. CONRAD, *A Town Called Dakajalan: The Sunjata Tradition and the Question of Ancient Mali's Capital*, in: *The Journal of African History* 35 (1994), no. 3, p. 355–377, p. 362.

2 For the domain of culture see: KONSTANZE N'GUESSAN, *The Bureaucratic Making of National Culture in North-Western Ghana*, in: *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 5 (2014), no. 2, p. 277–299.

3 Jean-François BAYART, *La cité bureaucratique en Afrique subsaharienne*, in: Béatrice HIBOU (ed.), *La bureaucratisation néolibérale*, Paris 2013, p. 291–313.

4 The two spellings are used both in French and in English. »Segu« is based on the official Mandingo alphabet fixed by decree in 1982 in Mali. »Ségou« is the spelling of the administration based on the French alphabet. As the aim of this paper is to deconstruct what is taken for granted about this area, and this article is in English I will use the spelling Segu except in quotations.

5 For Segu, »cultural capital of Mali«, cf. Mamou DAFFÉ, *Le festival sur le Niger*, in: ID., *Festival sur le Niger. 10 ans. La promesse de Ségou, Segu 2016* (Fondation du festival sur le Niger). For the concept of Segu as »capital of African cultures« cf. Sasha GANKIN, *Ségou, capitale des cultures africaines*, in: *Les Dépêches de Brazzaville*, no. 3141, 10 February 2018, p. 2, 8. »Land of history, land of culture« was coined by the Malian tourism development agency in a logic of assigning a specific qualifier to each region. This label is also used by cultural actors who apply for project funding.

6 The notion of state is used by Jean Bazin who worked on the history of the area. Jean BAZIN, *Commerce et prédation. L'État Bambara de Ségou et ses communautés marka*. Conférence au Congrès d'Études Manding/Manding Studies, London 1972. Jean BAZIN, *Genèse de l'État et formation d'un champ politique: le royaume de Segu*, in: *Revue française de science politique* 38 (1988), no. 5, p. 709–719, p. 712, 716. In African literature, the notion of empire is used: Lilyan KESTELOOT, *Tairou BEMBERA, Mamadou Boidié DIARRA, Le mythe et l'histoire dans la formation de l'empire de Ségou*, Dakar 1980, p. 601–602.

tion by the forces of El Hadj Umar Tall⁷), before its conquest in 1890. Just after the First World War, the town became an economic centre (with the construction of a dam and an irrigated agricultural area for exports) and the administrative centre of the region, which it remains today. Its history and culture had been advertised by the French residents.

The notion of a cultural capital has recently been advertised through a number of annual international competitions: the European Capital of Culture, launched in 1985, the Arab Capital of Culture, launched in 1996, and the new African Capital of Culture competition, launched in 2020. Although Segou's label as a cultural capital did not result from one of these competitions, it shares the same imaginaries⁸: the staging of a city⁹, and of history, by means of iconic architecture, as we will see. This paper addresses less the bureaucratic procedures involved in these competitions or the explicit politics of heritage than the bureaucratization involved in the making of a cultural capital and in the associated shaping of the very conception of »culture«. I argue that the notion of a cultural capital itself conveys a bureaucratic conception of cities, based on an iconic architecture created to produce and preserve a specific way of representing history.

History of a cultural city

In 1795, the traveller Mungo Park portrayed Segou as a cultural, economic and political centre¹⁰. Administrators and ethnologists have continued to document Segou's cultural wealth (textiles, music, ceremonies, etc.) and cultural practices. Since independence in 1960, this cultural heritage has been highlighted in national cultural policies that focused on regions¹¹. Nowadays, the label »cultural capital« highlights less the region (as a part of the nation) than the city itself. The designation was given later, by the president of a cultural festival organized in the city by the Association des Hôteliers et Restaurateurs pour le Tourisme in Segou since 2005. One of his aims was to make the city a tourist destination in its own right, rather than being simply a point of departure for the touristic triangle of Timbuktu-Djenné-Mopti. His project soon became much broader, and was directed towards the development of the city and its cultural industries. Between 2005 and 2015 he and his team launched over a dozen institutions, events, networks and websites¹² that cover every part of the cultural production chain (in the domain of music,

7 Adama BA KONARÉ, *L'épopée de Segou. Da Monzon, un pouvoir guerrier*, Lausanne, Paris 1987, p. 90, 180.

8 Further fieldwork is needed to explore the production of this imaginary and its networks. International cultural events in Segou, such as the Festival sur le Niger (discussed below), have also been designed and organized with the help of organizers who have worked on existing events elsewhere in the world.

9 John R. GOLD, Margaret GOLD, Introduction, in: *IID*. (eds.), *Cities of Culture. Staging International Festivals and the Urban Agenda, 1851–2000*, London 2004.

10 Mungo PARK, *Travels into the Interior of Africa*, London 1983.

11 Through regional orchestras – such as Super Biton de Ségou (after the eighteenth-century king of the Segou kingdom, Biton) – and the biennial of culture and sport organized by the State, in which Segou has won competitions in different disciplines over the years.

12 2003: Association des Hôteliers et Restaurateurs pour le Tourisme à Ségou (AHRTS); 2005: first edition of the annual Festival sur le Niger; 2006: Conseil pour la promotion de l'économie locale (Council for the promotion of the local economy, CPEL), which helps with management and funding applications and carries out studies on behalf of participants in the fields of cultural practices, agribusiness, and sanitation; 2007: Arterial Network, a pan-African network on cultural policies; 2006: Talents de la cité competition; 2009: Fondation Festival sur le Niger, whose offices now act as the headquarters of all of these organizations; 2010: Réseau Kya (throughout Mali); 2011: Centre Koré and IKAM Institut Koré des arts et métiers; 2012: opening of the information and tourism centre Quai des arts and the Koré gallery; 2015: Ségou Ville; 2015: Koré Web TV; 2016: Ségou'Art, a contemporary art fair whose second edition took place in 2018, at

publishing, visual arts...) and the local economy (tourism, handicrafts, agribusiness, sanitation). They all work under the patronage of the foundation of the Festival sur le Niger, created in 2009. The beginning of the festival, and of the focus on the city, was a result of a bureaucratic process: the 1999 decentralization process in Mali¹³. Urban and rural municipalities were given more autonomy and encouraged to find funding, at a time when culture was becoming one of the most prominent economic tools for international development institutions and the Malian government. Today, the festival foundation shares the imaginary of »urban regeneration« that the European competition has introduced since the 1990s¹⁴. This turn has been part of an international policy that puts culture at the core of urban economic development (and not only national identity).

The cultural city project was built around presenting the town of Segou as the former capital of the Segou Bambara state (around 1720–1861)¹⁵, as administrations, tourism actors, journalists, and researchers (including the present author) are used to do¹⁶. It followed the same power-centred conceptions of the historical role of cities as conveyed by »European Capitals of Culture«: the chosen cities were mainly historic national capitals widely known for their cultural legacy (Athens, Florence, Amsterdam, Berlin, Paris). The attribution of the label of cultural capital was based on their capacity to evoke something bigger than just the present-day town, as in the case of Rome: »Like Paris, Rome is a city with a universal dimension, thanks to memories of the Roman Empire and the international influence of the papacy«¹⁷, with stone-built constructions rather than events as cultural landmarks. The name of Segou has the same capacity to evoke something more than the present-day town: a historic kingdom (or empire, or state) just before colonization. In addition, the making of cultural capitals nowadays involves well-known bureaucratic procedures (the creation of an office for the organization, the application of management standards, planning, quantitative reports, and so on), either founded on a managerial conception of culture or on patrimonialization¹⁸ and the organization of large international events. The contemporary construction of Segou as a »cultural capital« is thus bureaucratic in a sense that has already been widely studied and recognized. But what about the bureaucratic aspect of the very notion of a capital, as a centre of state power? What about the role of culture, and in particular architecture, in the bureaucratization process? The first section, inspired by the statement of Conrad quoted in the epigraph, analyses the cultural meanings of the notion of

the same time as the Festival sur le Niger; 2018: Local Tourism Promotion Day, which is aimed at schoolchildren.

- 13 Anne DOQUET, Décentralisation et reformulation des traditions en pays dogon. Les manifestations culturelles des communes de Dourou et Sangha, in: Claude FAX, Yaouga Félix KONÉ (eds.), Décentralisation et pouvoirs en Afrique: en contrepoint, modèles territoriaux français, Paris, Bamako 2006, p. 303–319.
- 14 Beatriz GARCIA, Deconstructing the City of Culture: The Long-Term Cultural Legacies of Glasgow 1990, in: *Urban Studies* 42 (2005), no. 5–6, p. 841–868.
- 15 This date of creation of the kingdom should not obscure continuities. »The phases of state expansion (great empires of Ghana, Mali, Songhai) were followed by a phase of political withdrawal into small states (*kafo* or *jamana*) before a new phase of political expansion with the kingdom of Segou and that of the Samori empire«. Jean-Loup AMSELLE, Jean BAZIN, Présentation, in: *Cahiers d'études africaines* 29 (1988), no. 111–112, p. 325–330, p. 327 (my translation). The Segou region previously included a number of chiefdoms, which laid the foundations of the Segou state: Jean BAZIN, *Commerce et Prédation* (as in n. 6).
- 16 André BIME, *Ségou, Vieille Capitale*, Angoulême 1952.
- 17 Christophe CHARLE, Daniel ROCHE, *Capitales culturelles, capitales symboliques. Paris et les expériences européennes (XVIII^e–XX^e siècles)*, Paris 2002, p. 12.
- 18 Regina F. BENDIX, Aditya EGGERT, Arnika PESELMANN, Introduction: Heritage Regimes and the State, in: EAED. (eds.), *Heritage Regimes and the State*, Göttingen 2013, p. 11–20.

the capital as a site of bureaucracy. The second section focuses on the notion of a cultural capital and on architecture's role in the bureaucratization process.

A cultural conception of the capital city

»The land of Ségou includes the capital of the empire, Ségou-Sikoro, and the surrounding area peopled by Bambara, Toucouleur and Sarracolets villages, and traversed by a large number of nomadic Fulani tribes. The population, especially compared to that of the regions between Bafoulabé and Haut-Niger, is very dense. Some villages, such as Boghé, Dougassou, Koghé, and Ségou-Sikoro itself, are home to large weekly markets¹⁹«.

During colonization, French writers presented the town of Segou as the capital of the kingdom of Segou and, in the second half of the nineteenth century, as the capital of the Toucouleur empire. In these written sources, the town was known as Ségou-Sikoro.

In a paper on the controversial issue of the location of the capital of the Mali Empire (thirteenth to seventeenth centuries, founded by Soundiata Keita), Conrad highlights the ethnocentric conception of the notion of a »capital«: »There are not many points of convergence between Arabic descriptions of western Sudanic cities and Mandé griot references to towns of Malian kings«²⁰. Mandé griots and Arab chroniclers did not perceive Segou in the same way: the latter highlighted it as the centre of trade, whereas griots focused on lineages and the actions of individuals. Nevertheless, when griots do mention cities, they mainly mention »certain towns as meeting places«: »The center of authority was wherever the *mansa* [i. e. »king« in Bamana or Bambara, one of Mali's official and most spoken languages] happened to be«²¹. The organization of the Mali Empire was probably different, as we will see, but the issue that the term »capital city« is linked to a bureaucratic conception of power that may not be appropriate to historic Segou is a more general one.

Conrad suggests using a different term in the Mandé context²²: the king's town (*mansadugu*: *dugu* meaning »village or town« in Bamana)²³. In contemporary everyday usage in Mali, this may not be accurate. The city of Bamako, the national capital, is called a *duguba*, which means »big village or town«. The site of the presidential palace is called *koulouba*, or »big hill« in Bamana, and *colline du pouvoir* (»the hill of [the ruling] power[s]«) in French (another of Mali's official languages). The expression *faamadugu* in bamana (the town of the powers), is just part of a farce²⁴. Usually, the name of a place, its reputation, and the ceremonies that take place there

19 Joseph-Simon GALLIÉNI, Mission dans le Haut-Niger et à Ségou 1880–1881, in: Extrait du Bulletin de la société de géographie (1883), p. 131–133.

20 CONRAD, A Town Called Dakajalan (as in n. 1).

21 Ibid., p. 365.

22 Shaka Bagayoko describes the words Manding/Mandé/Manden as terms referring to a socio-cultural area that has developed through the alternating political control of different groups over the course of successive conquests, which has resulted over the centuries in highly homogenized hierarchical structures, norms and modes of exercising authority, however small, without eliminating local differences and specificities: Shaka BAGAYOGO, Lieux et théorie du pouvoir dans le monde mandé: Passé et présent, in: Cahier des sciences humaines 25 (1989), no. 4, p. 445–460. Historically, they refer to the West African empires – the Ghana or Wagadou Empire (300–1235), the Mali Empire (1240–1610) founded by Sundiata Keita, and the Songhai Empire (1464–1591), whose territories were situated in the present-day states of Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, and The Gambia.

23 For a detailed study of the different meanings of the term »mansa« and its variants in Segou, see AMSELLE, BAZIN, Présentation (as in n. 15).

24 Claude MEILLASSOUX, La farce villageoise à la ville: Le Koteba de Bamako, in: Présence africaine 52 (1964), p. 27–59, p. 37.

are sufficient to understand how important it is and why. It may be a centre of bureaucratic administration or other local authorities, or a well-known place for specific religious events, masquerades, or other public events.

Even in the era of the Segou kingdom, Bazin points out that it may be more accurate in this context to speak of a »capital area« (»zone capitale«), the size of a canton²⁵. The king's residence could move about within an area up to forty kilometres in diameter²⁶. In the Segou area, three decision-making spaces, referred to in Bambara as *bulonw* (sg. *bulon* or *blon*: a building with two entrances which is used as a vestibule for social and political gatherings), situated in three different villages on both sides of the Niger River, are currently attributed to King Biton. In the tales of Segou collected by Moussa Sow, different settlements together formed a centre of power called the *todaa* (literally, the »millet paste pot«²⁷). More broadly, the terms »Segou« and »people of Segou« are also used with flexible scope to refer to a political power, an empire seeking to expand. These conceptions of power are all different from the European and Arabic notions of the capital. The notion of the *bulon*, a building with two entrances which is used as a vestibule will help us to delve further into these questions.

Bureaucracy and the polysemy of »Segou«

When I started working on the notion of the »cultural capital« in Segou in 2019, I ended up asking different interlocutors: »When you say »Segou«, do you mean the city, the *cercle* or the region?« Sometimes, the answer was clear. For example, an administrator from the craft office might tell me: this is the list of the handicraft workers in the *cercle*. But very often, the area was vaguer. Usually people understand which sense is intended based on the context, even though a clear distinction is often unnecessary.

The name »Segou« designates at once a Malian region, a *cercle*, and a city that is the capital of both as well as the former kingdom. There is nothing exceptional about this situation, which also applies to other regional capitals in Mali²⁸. National cultural policies immediately following independence played on this ambiguity of scale. The national artistic and cultural biennial, a competitive event launched after independence, highlights cultural specificities of different parts of the country. In the second stage of the biennial, the city of Segou is in competition with other cities and villages. But in the final stage, it is the best artists from the entire region who are all gathered in the city to represent the region. In other words, the town of Segou, in the context of cultural activities, also represents a wider area, potentially an entire region. But with a focus on the city as a cultural capital, as is the case today with Segou, all of this fluidity between territorial scales disappears: the bureaucratic urban centre of power is valued instead of the region.

When it comes to Segou's history as a state or kingdom of its own, one question is whether the name Segou meant the city as a centre of power or the ruling power itself. In his account of his travels (1795–1797), Mungo Park²⁹ stated that during the reign of Makoro alias Monzon Diarra (1792–1808)³⁰ the king resided in »Sego«³¹. But in the oral literature, Segou represents more than

25 Jean BAZIN, L'État, avec ou sans cité, in: *Journal des africanistes*, 74 (2004), no. 1/2, DOI: 10.4000/africanistes.222, §5. Jean BAZIN, Genèse de l'État et formation d'un champ politique: le royaume de Segou, in: *Revue française de science politique* 38 (1988), no. 5, p. 709–719, p. 712, 716.

26 Ibid.

27 Moussa SOW, Les traditions orales du centre de l'État de Ségou revisitées à la lumière de celles de sa périphérie en rive gauche, in: *Studia Africana* 23 (2012), p. 87–99.

28 Segou, Sikasso, Kayes, Mopti, Timbuktu, Gao, Kidal, and (since 2016) Ménaka and Taoudénit are the regional capitals. Bamako is a district in its own right, which is divided into six *communes*.

29 PARK, *Travels into the Interior of Africa* (as in n. 10).

30 BA KONARÉ, *L'épopée de Segou Da Monzon* (as in n. 7), p. 103.

31 The notions of an »itinerant monarchy« and the idea of a »capital« are mutually exclusive, ac-

this: it is an epic geographical space, a country³², a warlike power: it is said to have fought with Macina (another neighbouring state or kingdom) in the nineteenth century. Prima facie, the notion of »kingdom« itself may not be appropriate in this context: Biton's designation was as the chief (*tigi*) of an association (*ton*)³³. Bazin mentioned an association of warriors³⁴, which may have gathered together the heads of families and village chiefs from Segou and the surrounding areas, according to the story of Tairou Bembera³⁵. The same text, collected by Lilyan Kesteloot in the 1970s and transcribed in Bamana, has Biton presenting himself to his mother as the *jamana tontigi* literally »the head of the association of the land/country«. Epics have referred to »the four Segu«, which are, from west to east: Sekoro (or Ségoukoro), Sebugu (or Sébougou), Segukura (or Ségoucouira, a village that became a district of the city of Ségou), and finally the current city of Segou, a village formerly called Segu-Sikoro (Segu by the shea trees), the seat of the kingdom's second dynasty (the Diarra dynasty), after the dynasty of Coulibaly³⁶.

On the one hand, then, Segu can be understood in light of the full diversity of its referents, as in the oral literature. Or, on the other hand, it can be approached more bureaucratically, by »submitting reality to abstract and simplified formalities, reducing the entanglement of relations to simple and standardized causalities, obscuring the complexity and ambivalence of social [and, here, spatial] relations«³⁷ – notably, in this case, through the dissemination of an iconic conception of culture, as we will see below.

Cultural practices and conceptions of history

The question is not only what the kingdom or state of Segou was, but how and why we speak of a given aspect of history (such as the Biton *bulon*) rather than another³⁸, and why we speak of them in one way rather than another.

Cultural production runs through different political regimes. In November 1954³⁹, the commission for natural monuments and sites of French Sudan added Biton's tomb to the list of natural monuments and heritage sites under the French Overseas Ministry (*arrêté* no. 4179 of

- cording to Carlsruh BRÜHL, *Remarques sur les notions de «capitale» et de «résidence» pendant le haut Moyen Âge*, in: *Journal des savants* 4 (1967), no. 1, p. 193–215.
- 32 Lilyan KESTELOOT, Amadou TRAORÉ, Jean-Baptiste TRAORÉ, *Da Monzon de Ségou. Épopée bambara*, Paris 1972, p. 35, 18, 23–24.
- 33 Jean BAZIN, *Genèse de l'État et formation d'un champ politique. Le royaume de Segou*, in: *Revue française de science politique* 38 (1988), no. 5, p. 709–719, p. 712, 716
- 34 Other versions of the oral history of the Segou state describe it as an age-group organization or an association of hunters: KESTELOOT, BEMBERA, DIARRA, *Le mythe et l'histoire* (as in n. 6), p. 601–602.
- 35 *Ibid.*, cited p. 606 (§ 885), p. 660–666, and p. 670–671 (§1046): »Segu lamini dugutigi ni gwatigi faramé nyàn kan, Segu tun bè nyanye la bi k'u b'a fè nìn ka tigi nyinin. Jaman a tòn na. ne kèra jamana tontigi ye.«
- 36 KESTELOOT, TRAORÉ, TRAORÉ, *Da Monzon de Ségou* (as in n. 32); Sow, *Les traditions orales* (as in n. 27) cited other cities – Sekoro, Segou, Mpeba, and Banankoro – as the »four Segu«.
- 37 Béatrice HIBOU, Introduction, in: EAD. (ed.), *La Bureaucratisation néolibérale*, Paris 2013, p. 7–20, p. 16.
- 38 Jean BAZIN, *La production d'un récit historique*, in: *Cahiers d'études Africaines* 19/73–76 (1979), p. 435–483, p. 445–446.
- 39 At that time the city of Ségou was still a mixed municipality, ruled by both French and Malian municipal authorities. In November 1955, it was made a *commune de plein exercice*, under independent Malian municipal authority. Law no. 55-1489 of 18 November 1955 concerning municipal reorganization in French West Africa, French Equatorial Africa, Togo, Cameroon, and Madagascar.

16 December 1954⁴⁰). Biton's tomb represents the precolonial authority, and also a kingdom that fought against El-Hadj Omar Saidou Tall, as the French army did. But this patrimonialization of the tombs of kings is diametrically opposed to practices described in epics. According to the epics about another chief of the Segu kingdom/state/empire, Da Monzon (1808–1827)⁴¹, the exact location of his tomb remains hidden, which would be the tradition for any great Mandingo king⁴². The same is true for the kings studied by Bazin (peacemakers with no army)⁴³, who were buried in secret, unmarked locations. After independence, the cultural policy of the first president of Mali was oriented towards precolonial history as expressed in speech, art, and musical practices, although one of those epics, that of Da Monzon, »was stabilized under Futaka [Toucouleur] and French domination«⁴⁴.

The history of Segu kingdom (not the city) has been epically narrated by many actors, including griots, novelists, filmmakers, and academics⁴⁵. After independence, the history of king Da Monzon was particularly valued in Mali, as he was said to have been the last great king of Segu⁴⁶. The name of the kingdom's founder, Biton, was also valued, for example in the name of the well-known 1970's regional orchestra *Super Biton de Ségou*. The way history is being shown through architecture is nowadays linked with the production of a cultural city.

The production of a cultural capital city

In 2009, the city of Segu was the fourth-largest out of 37 urban municipalities in Mali (after Bamako, Sikasso, and Kayes), in demographic and economic terms⁴⁷. Because of the city's position as a regional capital, it also possesses the corresponding cultural infrastructure (two theatres with more than 300 seats, hotels, asphalt streets, etc.). According to one cultural officer who was working for the regional directorate for culture in 2005, the presence of such cultural infrastructure was among the national government's conditions on the choice of locations for the first decentralized biennial, which had to take place outside the state capital city Bamako (a general decentralisation process had started in Mali at the end of the 1990s).

40 Information provided by Cheick Boukounta Karamoko Sissoko, head of the cultural mission of Segu. Order registered in the Official Journal of the French Sudan of 1 January 1955, p. 8, URL: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9667333h/f16.image.r=Biton> last accessed 27 May 2021.

41 BA KONARÉ, *L'épopée de Segu* (as in n. 7), p. 9.

42 KESTELOOT, BEMBERA, DIARRA, *Le mythe et l'histoire* (as in n. 6), p. 601–602, p. 606.

43 Jean BAZIN, *Princes désarmés, corps dangereux. Les »rois-femmes« de la région de Segu*, in: *Cahiers d'études africaines* 29 (1988), no. 111–112, p. 420.

44 BA KONARÉ, *L'épopée de Segu* (as in n. 7), p. 13.

45 Sow, *Les traditions orales* (as in n. 27), p. 93. Concerning oral traditions of the provinces on the »left bank« of the middle Niger valley, Sow distinguishes between »rather short narratives of oral tradition, relating to warlords who were among Ségou's first antagonists, and traditions aspiring to the status of historical chronicles evoking later periods«. In a long article that is both analytical and methodological, Bazin reminds us that researchers must understand these narratives »because, treated as products and not just as »sources«, they no longer only *tell* of history, they *are* themselves a sedimented history«. BAZIN, *La production* (as in n. 38), p. 436 (my translation). For an analysis of two movies about the kingdom, see Tal TAMARI, »Les rois de Ségou: De l'épopée à la série télévisée, in: *Tydskrif vir letterkunde* 51/1 (2014), p. 102–117.

46 Adama BA KONARÉ, *L'épopée de Segu* (as in n. 7), p. 13.

47 Aïssatou TANGARA OUANÉ, Bandiougou SOUMAORO, 4^{ème} recensement général de la population et de l'habitat du Mali (RGPH-2009). Analyse des résultats définitifs. Thème: urbanisation, Ministère de l'économie, des finances et du budget, Institut national de la statistique, bureau central du recensement, Bamako 2012.

How is it possible to produce a capital city based on a history of power that itself has not been centralised in one city? We can observe a shift from literature to architecture as a vehicle for history, from the focus on heroes in oral history to the focus on place: a capital city.

From heroes to places: refocusing on the city

Biton's grave, which was made a heritage site during colonization, was restored in 2001 and covered with a finishing coat of red clay and shea butter, like other new-old buildings in Segou, as we will see. In 2006, a building that replicates the seven vestibules attributed to Biton (but also to Da Monzon⁴⁸) was built in the Sudanese style using this same red clay coating, next to his tomb (cf. Figures 1–3). Ministers visited the site on the Journée nationale du patrimoine (National Heritage Day) held in Segou in September 2019; the Festival sur le Niger organized a conference on tradition in the village of Sekoro; the *Ségou Ville Créative* website⁴⁹ suggests a tour of the landmarks of the kingdom; cultural associations in the town organize tours⁵⁰. In other words, the structure has become a major cultural venue for the tourism industry, politicians, administrators, entrepreneurs, and intellectuals, as well as local cultural associations.

A *bulon* is a building with two entrances, one on the street, one on the courtyard, a sheltered entrance to a courtyard, which offers visitors and inhabitants protection from heat and bad weather while remaining open both outward onto the street and inward to the courtyard. This space of everyday sociability, when it belongs to a chief (*tigui*), becomes a political space, a space for consultation. Samake describes in the Cendugu area different levels of grouping (household, lineage, village, province, or country) which all have their vestibules as a place of meeting and decision⁵¹. It is not a fixed building (like a town hall), but the entrance to the courtyard of the person who had achieved the status of chief. In the present-day city of Djenné, the pyramidal logic of the Malian authorities, who consider that a neighbourhood »chief« (*amir*) is subject to the »chief« of the city (*koy*) (the latter being an institution dating from colonization) coincides with another logic: »But within the city, [the neighbourhood] constitutes the only real political, religious, social and economic entity which bears witness to a polycentric city«⁵². For the chief of Segou kingdom in the eighteenth century, the three *bulonw* attributed to Biton were places to receive visitors, but they were also sites devoted to the protection of the kingdom, both military and supernatural⁵³.

In Segou, then, the *bulon*, which may have been the icon of a polycentric authority in time (moving with changes in the chief and his residence), in space (as in the case of Biton's three *bulon*), or in its architecture (no special marks distinguished the *bulon* of the head of the village from that of the head of a household), became the icon of a single centralized power.

Architecture: shaping a city, rereading history

During the reconstruction of one of the *bulonw* of King Biton, the experts from a mission co-organized by the National Directorate for Cultural Heritage and the Directorate for Tour-

48 KESTELOOT, TRAORÉ, TRAORÉ, Da Monzon de Ségou (as in n. 32), p. 33.

49 URL: <http://segouvillecreative.com>, consulted on 7 June 2020.

50 One local association on Indian culture had an opening event comprising the visit of the *bulon* and of the biggest bogolan (traditional mud-dyed fabric) workshops in 2019.

51 Maximin SAMAKÉ, *Kafo* et pouvoir lignager chez les Banmana. L'hégémonie gonkòròbi dans le Cendugu, in: *Cahiers d'études africaines* 29 (1988), no. 111–112, p. 331–354, p. 339

52 Gilles Holder mentionne le cas des quatre villages de Sparte qui formaient une cité: Gilles HOLDER, La cité comme statut politique. Places publiques, pratiques d'assemblée et citoyenneté au Mali, in: *Journal des africanistes* 74 (2004), no. 1/2, p. 56–95, §44.

53 Moussa Sow, Entre mythe et histoire, l'évolution du culte de Tyanaba à Samafoulala, au Mali, in: *Revue cArgo* 8 (2018), p. 195–214.



Figures 1 and 2: Biton's grave at Ségoukoro/Segu, in 2005, in concrete (left). The same grave in 2019 (right), recovered with red clay coating after the construction of the *bulon* (cf. Fig. 3). Photographs: KaTeznik, 2005, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=608344>; KA GILP2MDIAKITE, 2019, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=77733807>; both licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/> via Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 3: Biton *bulon* (2016) at Sekoro, Mali. Photograph: GMason, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=53271707>, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/> via Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 4: Entrance of the Soroble Bogolan workshop, Segou, 2019. Photograph by the author.



Figure 5: Exhibition gallery and festival entrance (outside the festival period), Segtu, 2019. Photograph by the author.

ism⁵⁴ asked in their report: »How can we build on this Sudanese architecture while giving this historic city its identity?« So-called Sudanese architecture (which in reality has various influences and includes varying styles) can be found throughout the area of the Ghana Empire (sixth to twelfth centuries)⁵⁵ and the Mali Empire (thirteenth to seventeenth centuries). It has »always intrigued and interested travellers and explorers by its monumental and urban appearance, which formed a striking contrast to the repetitive and monotonous forms of village dwellings [also built in mud]«⁵⁶. In recent years, hotel managers, festival organizers, bogolan masters, city administrations, and the national cultural administration have taken the initiative to build or to rebuild structures in this style. They found a way to set Segu apart: all of these new-old buildings are coated with red clay sifted and mixed with shea butter, which protects the building from rain and creates a smooth look and a striking aesthetic. Fadjiga Samounou, a master mason from the city of Djenné, rebuilt the Biton vestibule in 2006 (Biton himself is said to have also called a mason from Djenné) and participated in the rehabilitation of one of the city's oldest districts between 2007 and 2017. According to him, this red covering is a local specificity of Segu. Another specificity, according to both him and the village chief of Sekoro (who gave him directives for rebuilding Biton bulon), is a specific pattern for decorating walls.

»Were you inspired by the Biton bulon to build your workshop?« I asked Souleymane Coulibaly, who built his workshop for bogolan, a textile dyeing technique based on clay soil and plants applied to hand-woven cotton strips. It was not I who imitated the Biton bulon, it was the other way around, he replied⁵⁷. The image made me smile: a building erected in 2004 as a template for a structure attributed to the 18th century, in a region where much of the social structure is based on the relationship between elders and younger people, and on foundation narratives. And yet he was right. Biton's vestibule was only rebuilt two years later, in 2006, by the Ministry of Handicrafts, through the Malian Office of Tourism and Accommodation. His answer at once highlighted and challenged the temporal logic on which both the idea of a cultural capital city and my own question were based. Even though there was no trace of Biton's original vestibule, which was totally rebuilt in the recent past, after the other workshops, the temporal logic is that it is still considered older by virtue of its (ostensible) origin.

Souleymane Coulibaly was inspired by structures in Segu's administrative district built in the 1930s by the French colonizers in the neo-Sudanese style: a Sudanese style that uses cement and concrete (*maison en dur* as it is called in French in Mali). As he chose to build his workshop in banco, he enlarged the pillars to support the building. He was also inspired by the history of one of Biton's vestibules, which had a very small door to force people to crouch down and show respect even if they did not want to. He also chose what are known as Dogon symbols as

54 DIRECTION NATIONALE DU PATRIMOINE CULTUREL, Rapport de mission conjointe OMATHO-DNPC à Sekoro-Ségou. Inventaire du patrimoine et élaboration d'un projet culturel d'animation de l'espace culturel du Biton Bulon à Sekoro-Ségou, Bamako 2008, p. 12.

55 »One of the earliest of the medieval kingdoms of that region, the Ghana Empire came into existence some time after 500 C.E. and lasted until late in the 12th century.« In the eighth century, "[t]he Soninke's early involvement with the traders of the Sahara is one reason Ghana emerged as the first great power of the medieval Sahel«. David C. CONRAD, *Empires of Medieval West Africa. Ghana, Mali, and Songhay*, New York 2005, p. 17, p. 23. I would like to thank Lamine Faye for sharing his bibliographical references.

56 Sergio DOMIAN, *Architecture soudanaise. Vitalité d'une tradition urbaine et monumentale*. Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Paris 1989, p. 3.

57 Synthesis of the discussion in bamana. Exact translation: »Ah, you said Biton bulon was inspired by what? – By Ndommo and Soroblen [two bogolan workshops] styles of building. Because Biton bulon was constructed recently«. »Ah, biton bulon inspirela jumen ni jumen de la wa. – Ndommo ni Soroble ke cogo de la ka sɔɔ ka taa biton bulon jɔ parce que biton bulon jɔ kuma ma men kosebe.« Interview in Bambara and French, October 2019.

a pattern to decorate the walls. When I asked what guided his choice, he said: »As a Malian I consider myself Dogon, I consider myself Bambara, I don't know what my origins are. It's like before colonization the borders didn't exist, Mali, Burkina...«⁵⁸. As Rowlands⁵⁹ writes: »the restorative nostalgia that created ›Soudanic‹ architecture for French metropolitan consumption became a site of postcolonial resistance and then subsequently a mode of reincorporation of a distinctive Malian modernity«. Unlike Djenné, which has long been renowned both for its adobe architecture and for its masons' guild, the city of Segou is now mainly built in cement. Fired brick began to replace mudbrick as soon as the French colonizers took the area in the late nineteenth century. Whatever the inspiration, however, Sudanese-style architecture has now become part of »a process of producing territorial images and imaginaries«⁶⁰ for cultural officers and entrepreneurs.

The making of this imaginary is based on associating (or combining) this architecture with the purpose of the building. Segou and its surrounding areas have had three imposing Sudanese-style bogolan workshops since the 2000s: the N'Domo workshop, built in Pelengana, east of the city of Segou in 2004; the Gnesigiso workshop, built in Segukoura, west of the city of Segou (first constructed in cement in 1996, and then enlarged with mudbrick in 2006); and the Soroble workshop, in the centre of Segou, started in 2002 (cf. Figure 4.). The other buildings in this style are either cultural spaces (the Centre Culturel Kôrè in Sébougou, the Galerie Kôrè on the bank of the Niger River) or tourist complexes, including two hotels as well as the craft fair office and information centre mentioned above (cf. Figure 5). Segou's oldest district, founded by the Somono social group, known as fishermen, masters of the river, and specialists for transport with pirogues which was important in the history of the area, has also been rehabilitated using the same technique. Besides protecting against the heat, the choice to build a new building in this style thus supports activities already designated as either cultural or historical.

The 2006 construction of Biton *bulon*, and the renovation of the Somono district, completed in 2017, contributed to the construction of this imaginary as they helped to establish this aesthetic as symbol of the city's history⁶¹. There was no trace of the *bulon* before 2006, and the Somono district was mainly built in ordinary banco, and does not feature this stylized architecture with its bright red coat⁶². But the workshops, hotels, and cultural centres expanded the presence of this architecture in the city, motivating the label »city of architecture«⁶³, the theme of the 2018 edition of the Festival sur le Niger, following the rehabilitation of the Somono district. Although building in this architectural style is more expensive than the techniques used for ordinary mudbrick houses, it was nonetheless used in Somono, presented as one of the city's poorest districts by the organizers of this Franco-Malian project (2007–2017). The idea was not to reconstruct the area as it was in 2007, with ordinary village mudbrick, but to trans-

58 »Bon j'ai vu aussi les symboles de changement des bambaras. En tant que malien je me retrouve dogon, je me retrouve bambara, je ne sais pas quelles sont mes origines, c'est comme avant la colonisation, les frontières n'existaient pas mali burkina...«. Interview in Bambara and French October 2019.

59 F. Michael ROWLANDS, *Entangled Memories and Parallel Heritages in Mali*, in: Ferdinand DE JONG, F. Michael ROWLANDS (eds.), *Reclaiming Heritage. Alternative Imaginaries of Memory in West Africa*, Walnut Creek, CA 2007, p. 127–144, p. 131.

60 Sylvain GUYOT, Pauline GUINARD, *L'art de (ré)imaginer l'Afrique du Sud*, in: *L'Information géographique* 4 (2015), no. 4, p. 70–96, p. 71.

61 Details of this process remain to be examined more closely.

62 SITES ET CITÉS REMARQUABLES DE FRANCE, *Ségou, une coopération franco-malienne pour le bâti en terre*, URL: <https://www.sites-cites.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/GuideSe%CC%81gou.pdf>, consulted on 4 June 2020, p. 26.

63 DIRECTION NATIONALE DU PATRIMOINE CULTUREL, *Rapport de mission* (as in n. 54).

form the houses into a stylized architecture, to be seen by tourists. Their new aesthetics now fit with the imaginary associated with their historicity.

Culturalized bureaucracy and bureaucratized culture: the iconic dimension

The bureaucratic dimension can be found in different aspects of the production of the label of »cultural capital«. One is the funding process of such new-old buildings, mainly by the international development sector, with support from local and national administrations⁶⁴. The proliferation of cultural institutions, public and private⁶⁵, has been also part of a bureaucratization of the city, through decentralization and the role of UNESCO's Creative Cities Network in economic development. Cultural administration is not the only context in which this bureaucratization can be seen. Groups referred to as »traditional troupes« (in the Festival sur le Niger), which already had their own social organization (ritual clowns, masquerades of Pelengana, a local association in the Somono quarter of Segukura), have also organized themselves into bureaucratic associations in order to participate in the festival, receive funding, or work in the tourism sector. According to the members of the foundation of the Festival sur le Niger who I met, there was no need to create these associations. This bureaucratization is thus a matter not of legal obligation, but of shared bureaucratic imaginaries and the quest for legitimacy⁶⁶.

Architecture is another central element in this bureaucratization of culture. Buildings, just as the activity for which they were constructed, can be counted, measured, listed, visited. Buildings in Segou were standardized not based on any administrative decision, but through an imaginary that was spread by cultural entrepreneurs, public administrations, and NGOs. Buildings with an overtly cultural purpose now share their aesthetics with previous and current state buildings. The paths that have led to their construction are multiple, as are the actors involved and their goals. But together they have produced a common aesthetic. With their slender red pillars rising into the sky, these constructions seem to emerge out of the red laterite roads themselves, while forming a smooth mass that stands out from the ordinary houses in their surroundings. It is difficult not to notice them as one passes, from Sékoro in the west of Segou to Pelengana in the east.

64 Examples include the Dutch DOEN Foundation, an important partner of the Festival sur le Niger since the beginning; the European Union's Programme de Soutien aux Initiatives Culturelles (Support Programme for Cultural Initiatives, or PSIC) and the Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst (German development service, or DED) for the Gnesigiso bogolan workshop; and the association Sites & Cités Remarquables de France, created in 2000 by a network of French local authorities, for the Somono district. Souleymane Coulibaly himself built his workshop over the course of ten years with no external funding; it was part of a process of learning and transmitting culture (interview, October 2019). But he had networks within both the administrative and development spheres.

65 Regional Department of Cultural Action and Heritage, a *mission culturelle*, a Department of Hotels and Tourism, a Department of Youth and Sport (until recently the Department of Youth, Sport, and Culture), »cultural technicians« working for the *cercle* and municipal governments; but also the Chamber of Commerce, which organizes craft fairs; the Académie de Ségou, the administration in charge of schools in the region, which supports schoolchildren's participation in state-organized cultural events; the regional government, which creates territorial marketing campaigns; and the governor's protocol, which invites groups framed as traditional to each official ceremony.

66 On associations and bureaucratization see Laure Carbonnel, Kamina Diallo, Lamine Doumbia, Association et bureaucratization: perspectives africaines. Introduction, in: *Émulations*, 37/2021, p. 7–22, DOI: 1014428/emulations.037.01.

This aesthetic and its iconic and stereotypic dimensions have been studied in research on bureaucracy and in architecture. In his exploring of the symbolic roots of bureaucracy, Herzfeld points out:

»Every bureaucratic form is the icon of some edict, every rubber stamp the icon of a state seal. This pervasive reproducibility gives each bureaucrat a rhetoric of common sense, backed by the authority of law, that challenges and deflects close inspection. It is also what makes local and national levels of identity seem mutually convertible – the key feature of stereotypes⁶⁷.«

Giving a history of the notion of »iconic« architecture, Guillaume Éthier explains that Geoffrey Broadbent was the first to use this term to refer to architecture that copies models from the more or less distant historical past, while today the iconic architecture is characterized more by its exceptional form and uniqueness⁶⁸. Both nevertheless share an intrinsic link with stereotypical icons: namely, the intention to be known and to stand out. The iconic architecture of Segou combines these dimensions as a stereotypical icon of historical architecture, at once imitating that architecture and helping to establish it as a distinctive symbol in order to position the city on the international stage. Like other contemporary iconic architecture, it also »manifests a power that seems to have migrated to cultural institutions«, as today's iconic architecture consists of »museums and concert halls, not churches and state monuments as in the past«⁶⁹.

The physical continuity of architecture – between colonial administrative buildings, the old district of Segou adjacent to the festival stage, and tourist accommodations, cultural centres, and craft workshops – also gives »the semiotic illusion of invariance: constant signifiers conceal changing meanings«⁷⁰. Architecture, driven at multiple levels by various actors – private cultural entrepreneurs, foreign funders, public administrators, artists, and others –, is a privileged instrument for both standardizing history and giving an alternative meaning to history within the same dominant codes.

67 Michael HERZFELD, *The Social Production of Indifference. Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy*, New York 1992 (Global Issues), p. 76.

68 Guillaume ÉTHIER, *Architecture iconique. Les leçons de Toronto*, Québec 2015, p. 30.

69 *Ibid.*

70 *Ibid.*, p. 25.