19. internationale tagung - vereinigung von afrikanisten in deutschland e.v. - 02.06.-05.06.2004 - universität hannover

AFRIKA IM KONTEXT

WELTBEZÜGE IN GESCHICHTE UND GEGENWART

SPECIAL LECTURE:

WESTAFRICA AND THE CLASSICAL WORLD - NEGLECTED CONTEXTS*

Dierk Lange, Universität Bayreuth, Kulturwissenschaftliche Fakultät, Facheinheit Geschichte

Email: Dierk.Lange@uni-bayreuth.de

Introduction

For more than forty years, fear to brake with the canon of nationalistic historiography has prevented Africanist historians to consider ancient links between sub-Saharan Africa and the outside world. Whenever contacts were supposed to have taken place, these were postulated – as for instance by Martin Bernal[1] – to have led to the expansion of African cultures. Contributions from other civilisations were admitted to have taken place only in those cases where internal developments had to be excluded for reasons beyond doubt. Pre-Islamic sub-Saharan Africa was therefore thought to have remained largely unaffected by world history.

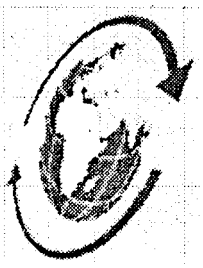
This introspective attitude has to be understood as a reaction against colonial historiography which reduced sub-Saharan Africa to a continent open to massive outside influences. Furthermore, foreign inputs were at best thought to have been preserved, but more often they were considered to have undergone a process of cultural decay. African creative initiatives building on indigenous

* This public lecture given on the invitation of Prof. Helmut Bley the 3rd June 2004 during the Conference of the African Studies Association in Germany (VAD) in Hannover was designed to present the author's forthcoming book *Ancient Kingdoms of West Africa: Africa Centred and Canaanite-Israelite Perspectives (A Collection of Published and Unpublished Studies)*, Dettelbach 2004. The book has three newly written chapters titled "Hausa History in the Context of the Ancient Near Eastern World", "The Dying and Rising God in the New Year Festival of Ife" and "From Ghana and Mali to Songhay: The Mande Factor in Gao History" as well as sub-chapters on ancient North African, Arab and Somali history (pp. 1-8, 215-306, 343-376, 495-567).

19. internationale tagung - vereinigung von afrikanisten in deutschland e.v. - 02.06.-05.06.2004 - universität hannover

AFRIKA IM KONTEXT

WELTBEZÜGE IN GESCHICHTE UND GEGENWART



Many of the presenters at the 19th international VAD conference in Hannover have been kind enough to make their revised texts available for compilation as a CD-ROM. We are pleased to offer conference guests, VAD members, and all interested parties the chance to read the individual contributions. At the top of each contribution you will find information concerning the author's home institution and e-mail address. The authors themselves are responsible for the content and form of the texts. We hope to have adequately documented the conference in this very affordable and practical manner, and we hope that you enjoy reading the contributions.

Helmut Bley, Kirsten Rüther und Verena Uka

Hannover 2004

CD-ROM:
HISTORISCHES SEMINAR
UNIVERSITÄT HANNOVER

roots or earlier foreign inputs received little or no attention. Worse, many authors of the colonial period subscribed to the ill-famed Hamitic hypothesis of racial superiority according to which people of Caucasian or semi-Caucasian background were declared to be *ipso facto* carriers of a higher culture than that of black Africans. The so-called Hamites were credited with the spread of northern cultures to the south irrespective of whether their way of life was sedentary or nomadic.[2] Hence the standard idea that white or Hamitic nomads introduced the concept of state to black African peasant communities south of the Sahara.[3]

Post-colonial historiography rejected these racist assumptions but in the process also stopped looking for any kind of cultural transfers from the civilisations of the north to the south. Yet, world historians like William McNeill insist on the singularity of most inventions and their later diffusions from central to peripheral regions of the world.[4] Furthermore, for long periods of time, sub-Saharan societies lay geographically adjacent to a Semitic crescent stretching from Morocco on the Atlantic Ocean in the west, to Yemen on the Indian Ocean in the east.[5] It would be quite surprising if none of the specific traits of these Semitic societies of the north reached the sub-Saharan societies of the south. This question however remains unexplored in current African historiography.[6]

1. Theories on the Origin of the Hausa States

Let us now turn our attention to the Hausa states which are situated in the Sahelian belt immediatelly south of the central Sahara. Hausaland is not as easily accessible from the north as the region of Lake Chad where the Kanem-Bornu empire was Islamized as early as the eleventh century. Among the Hausa, Islam became firmly implanted only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Therefore the pre-Islamic institutions of divine kingship and the clan organization of

[1] M. Bernal, *Black Athena*, 2 vols., New Brunswick, 1987, 1991.
[2] G. Seligman, *Races of Africa*, London 1930; J. D. Fage, *A History of Africa*, London 1978, 62-69.
[3] D. Westermann, *Geschichte Afrikas*, Cologne 1952, 30-32; R. Oliver and J. D. Fage, *Short History of Africa*, 6th ed. London 1988, 35-38.
[4] W. H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West*, London 1963.
[5] Fage, *History of Africa*, 44-46, 54-55.
[6] In present historical research on early African societies only archaelogical and linguistic data are considered to provide valid evidence for contacts with the external world (D. W. Phillipson, *African Archaeology*, Cambridge 1985; C. Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa*, Oxford 2002)

society are far better preserved in Hausaland than in Kanem-Bornu. Owing to the rarity of Arabic sources, Hausa history is a battle field of many theories and few certainties. With respect to the foundation of the state we can discern the following main tendencies.

1.1. State and Trade Theory

According to the state and trade theory, the Hausa states rose towards the tenth century as a consequence of the intensification of the trans-Saharan trade. Arguments for this late emergence of the Hausa polities are based on textual and circumstantial evidence. Arab geographers mention Kanem and Ghana as early as the ninth century, but first refer to particular Hausa states only in the fourteenth century.[7] The most relevant local Arabic source, the Kano Chronicle, seems to date the beginning of Kano – the major trading city of Hausaland - to the end of the tenth century.[8] Considerations based on trans-Saharan trade tend to support such an apparently late emergence of states by reference to the marginality of Hausaland with respect to major trade routes to the north.

However, if trade was the most important factor for the rise of the Hausa states, it would follow that these states fulfilled primarily bureaucratic and protective functions. The descriptions of various Hausa states provided by anthropologists emphasise the complexities and the priestly nature of many political offices.[9] It is therefore questionable to trace the state institutions of Hausaland back to merely political and economic functions related to trade from the tenth century onward.

1.2. Culture-Historical and Diffusionsionist Theories

Other influentual theories try to explain the emergence of the Hausa states either by diffusion or by conquest. The oldest theory was put forward by anthropologists of the German culture-historical school. On the basis of structural comparisons between a great number of African polities, it claims

[7] N. Levtzion and J. Hopkins, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*, Cambridge 1981, 21, 302.
[8] H. R. Palmer, *Sudanese Memoirs*, vol. III, Lagos 1928, 99.
[9] G. Nicolas, *Dynamique sociale et appréhension du monde au sein d'une société hausa*, Paris 1975; M. G. Smith, *Affairs of Daura*, Berkeley 1978; W. Kühme, *Das Königtum von Gobir*, Hamburg 2003.

that the Hausa states are best described as divine kingships of the neo-Sudanic type. Among the most important culture traits shared by these kingdoms are the ritual seclusion of the king, his humiliation during the rituals of enthronement, the great constitutional power bestowed on the 'official' queen-mother and the priestly functions of the king and of most of the great state officials. These and other common traits made the culture-historians believe that kingdoms of this type originated from a single source.

As to the concrete geographical localisation of the point of origin the culture-historians were of different opinions. Some favoured Pharaonic Egypt, others the ancient Mediterranean world and yet others the Semitic cultures of the ancient Near East.[10] Further unexplored aspects of the theory concern the concrete ways the idea of the state was transferred to sub-Saharan Africa. In the post-colonial period only the idea of a late Egyptian origin via Meroe on the upper Nile has followers.[11]

However, some important objections have been raised against diffusion from Egypt via Meroe. First, there is no evidence for the existence of continued relations between the Nile valley and West Africa. Second, the specific structures of West African kingdoms are not similar to those of ancient Egypt. Third, it is difficult to conceive that nomads who themselves lived only at the margins of particular states were the carriers of the idea of the state. Fourth, the spread of divine kingships is much more likely to have occurred during expansionist phases of the core state than during periods of decay. Fifth, the spread of Christianity in Egypt and North Africa must have contributed considerably to the weakening of divine kingship so any further diffusion during that period appears very unlikely.[12]

1.3. Conquest Theories

A number of conquest theories have been put forward by scholars specializing in Hausa history. Some authors subscribe to etymological considerations by linking the legendary Hausa-hero

[10] L. Frobenius, *Und Afrika sprach*, Berlin 1912, 323-351; H. Baumann *et al.* (eds.), *Les peuples et les civilisations de l'Afrique*, Paris 1957, 71-88; Westermann, *Geschichte*, 30-54.
[11] Oliver/Fage, *Short History*, 36-37.
[12] Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms*, 216-221.

Bayajidda to the North African Kharijid rebel Abu Yazid who was defeated and killed by the Fatimids in the middle of the tenth century. They suppose that refugee Berbers from North Africa founded the Hausa states fleeing to the south after their defeat by Arab forces.[13] But the surviving institutions of divine kingship make it highly unlikely that the Hausa states were founded by Muslims from North Africa.

Other authors suggest that the Hausa states rose in consequence of the expansion of the Kanem-Bornu empire and the later breakaway of its western provinces.[14] But this idea is not supported by sufficiently close similarities between the state institutions of Kanem-Bornu and Hausaland.

Then there is the widely held idea that the desertification of the Sahara and the subsequent shift of populations from north to south changed the balance between nomads and sedentaries and led to the rise of large scale political organizations.[15]

Finally the dual institutional theory has to be mentioned according to which foreign invaders are supposed to have subjected local peasants who were already organized in chieftaincies.[16] The invaders are believed to have added further institutions to the chieftaincies, thus giving rise to the complex Sudanic States.

Some of these ideas may seem attractive but they cannot be substantiated by concrete evidence and they do not make sense in the light of the Hausa institutions of divine kingship.

2. The Hausa Legend and the Myth and Ritual Connection

All scholars agree that the Bayajidda legend is the single most important source for the reconstruction of early Hausa history. They however disagree on the age, the origin and the overall significance of the legend. While some suppose that the legend has Near Eastern antecedents,

[13] H. R. Palmer, *The Bornu Sahara and Sudan*, London 1936, 273; Fage, *History of Africa*, 63.
[14] J. Sutton, "Towards a less orthodox history of Hausaland", *Journal of African History* 20 (1979), 196-197.
[15] S. J. Hogben and A. Kirk-Greene, *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria*, London 1966, 147, 368-369.
[16] F. Fuglestad, "A reconsideration of Hausa history before the Jihad", *Journal of African History* 19 (1978), 326-328.

others consider it a Bornu tax list and still others take it as a *Wandersage* or "travelling legend" which was introduced in recent times.[17]

I will try to show that in three different aspects the legend is far more than an oral account easily borrowed from travelling bards. It is clearly cognate to the Abraham story of the Old Testament and it is older than the Abraham narrative insofar as it is embedded in cult-mythology. It is a real founding charter of the Hausa states since it is tightly connected with the Hausa system of clans.

2.1. The Bayajidda Legend

The story runs in brief as follows. Immigrants from Canaan founded Daura, the oldest town in Hausaland. The first successive rulers of Daura were queens belonging to this group of immigrants, the last of which was known as Magajiya. However, in a certain way not Magajiya, but a snake living in the well called Dodo was the real ruler of the town. Magajiya was the priestess leading the cult of Dodo and thus making it possible for the people of the town to have water once a week.

Next the legend turns to the story of Bayajidda, the son of the king of Baghdad. Bayajidda first came to Bornu with a strong army. There he married the princess Magira, but subsequently he lost his army and had to flee. On his way west he left his pregnant wife at the entrance of Hausaland where she gave birth to his first son Biram. Then he continued to ride with his horse to the west until he finally reached Daura at night. Wanting to drink, he found that he could not get water because of the snake Dodo. Although he had been warned not to approach the well, he went there, killed the snake with his sword and drank to his satisfaction. Earlier Magajiya had promised that she would marry whoever was brave enough to kill the snake. When it was discovered that Bayajidda had killed the snake, the marriage between Magajiya and the hero was arranged.

[17] D. Lange, "The pre-Islamic dimension of Hausa history", *Saeculum* 46 (1995), 161-203; W. Hallam, "The Bayajidda legend in Hausa folklore", *Journal of African History* 7 (1966), 58; Sutton, "Towards a less orthodox history", 196-197; A. Smith, "Some considerations relating to the formation of states in Hausaland", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 5 (1970), 335-337.

However, since Magajiya had first to accomplish rituals to free herself from her queenly vow to remain a virgin, she gave the hero her slavemaid Bagwariya in her stead.

These two wives and their sons became the founders of the Central Sudanic states. The son of the slavemaid Bagwariya gave birth to the forefathers of the group of seven states called Banza and the son of the queen Magajiya gave birth to six forefathers who together with Biram founded the group of "seven Hausaa" states.[18]

2.2. The Bayajidda Legend as a Reflection of the Story of Abraham

There are a number of striking parallels between the legends of Bayajidda and of Abraham. Both focus on heros who were each first married to legitimate wives and later had slave concubines; both refer to the origin of two sets of people, respectively the Hausaa and the Banza states and the tribes of Israel and of the Arabs; both explain conflictual relationships between two groups of neighbouring people said to have originated from two women associated with one husband. Furthermore, both stories have the name Abraham in a prominent position: the biblical story as the founding hero and the Hausa narrative in the form of Biram as his first and most outstanding son.[19] The similarity between two related narratives is normally explained by diffusion in the form of *Wandersagen.* However, such an explanation is unlikely because the Bayajidda legend is so tightly intervowen with the festive culture and the clan structure of Hausa society.

2.3. The Bayajidda Legend as a Foundation Charter of Hausa Society

We note first of all a striking connection between the legend and the festivals of Daura which in spite of their present Islamic identity are clearly based on a pre-Islamic pattern. In fact, according to the palace tradition of Daura – which before had has never been properly recorded[20] – the different processions of the festival fulfill the major purpose of re-enacting the Bayajidda legend. The most complete connection between the legend and the cult-dramatic performances of the festival can be observed during the Gani- or Mawlud festival, the former New Year celebration.

[18] Palmer, *Memoirs*, III, 132-134; Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms*, 287-296.

Three movements must be distinguished in this celebration. Until recently, on the eve of the festival the king went to the well of Daura to placate the snake in commemoration of Bayajidda, whom he still incarnates. On the first day of the festival the king leads a procession from a meeting place outside the town to the palace. He thereby celebrates the victory of his ancestor over the snake Dodo. On a more interpretative level he incarnates the resurrected "dying and rising god" who after the victory over the chaos-dragon re-enters the town.

On the second day of the festival the king leads a procession to the house of Magajiya, who is the great female official of Daura with the power to depose the king.[21] This procession is meant to honour the first legendary queen of Daura, Magajiya, and to recall her former rulership over Daura by way of her official representative. On a more interpretative level the meeting between the king and Magajiya corresponds to the re-enactement of the link between Bayajidda and the Queen of Daura. It therefore formerly was a cult-dramatic performance of a *hieros gamos* or sacred marriage.[22]

Further relations between the Bayajidda legend and Hausa culture can be observed on the level of the pre-Islamic religion of Hausaland preserved in the Bori possession cult. Indeed, the hero, his two wives and a prominent child, as the main figures of the Bayajidda legend, were re-incarnated in certain areas of Hausaland during the sessions of a possession theatre. But this could only be observed before the application of the *sharîa* in the Islamic states of Nigeria. Other considerations confirm that the remnant cult-mythology of Bori is a parallel and independent ancient tradition which does not correspond to the reflection of the Bayajidda legend.[23]

Historically more significant are the connections between the Bayajidda legend and the most important state offices. We have seen that the two supreme officials of the Daura state – the king and Magajiya – are considered to be re-incarnations of the legendary hero and the local queen. The

---

[19] Lange, "Pre-Islamic dimension", 198-199; id., *Ancient Kingdoms*, 289-296.
[20] See now Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms*, 289-296.
[21] Smith, *Daura*, 257-258.
[22] D. Lange, "Das kanaanäisch-israelitische Neujahrsfest der Hausa", *in:* M. Kropp and A. Wagner (eds.), *Schnittpunkt Ugarit*, Frankfurt/M, 1999, 129-149. On the sacred marriage in the ancient Near East see S. N. Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite*, Bloomington 1969.

legend mentions two other important officials – Galadima and Kaura – describing the first as cautious and the second as brave with respect to the snake Dodo. This explains why Galadima became the main civil functionary and Kaura the chief military leader.[24] Hence, it would appear that the Bayajidda legend depicts not only the foundation of the Daura state as a whole but also the establishment of its main officials.

Further, there is a connection between the legend and the clans of the Hausa society which can be observed in a clear-cut way in the Hausa state of Gobir. Indeed, in Gobir we find an opposition between two sections of society: the Hausaa properly speaking who are represented by the king and the so-called Azna who have their own secondary king called *Sarkin* Azna. The two sections of the society are best explained in reference to two sets of deities: the white or Hausaa deities and the black or Azna deities. It would appear that during the pre-Islamic period, when the clans were most likely – as in other African societies – composed by descendants of a single deity, the Hausaa properly speaking were that section of society composed by clans of the white deities while the Azna were composed of clans of the black deities. With respect to the Bayajidda legend, we note that the king of Gobir claims descent from Magajiya and her son while the secondary king, *Sarkin* Azna, considers himself to be a descendant and an incarnation of the son of the slavemaid Bagwariya. During the New Year festival there was a confrontation between *Sarkin* Azna and the king corresponding to a working-out of the tensions between the two constitutive sections of the society.[25]

From all these relations – which to a certain extent can also be shown to exist in other Hausa states – it can be deduced that the Bayajidda legend is indeed a foundation charter of the Hausa society giving expression to a bi-focal clan-structure reaching most likely back to the beginning of the Hausa states.

3. The Dualistic Organization of Yoruba Society

[23] Lange, "Dimension", 189-191; id., *Ancient Kingdoms*, 221-229.

Let us now turn our attention to the Yoruba who in terms of the Bayajidda legend belong to the group of Banza states. The dualistic organization of Yoruba society is still clearly recognizable since neither Islam nor Christianity has until now been able to fully eliminate the ancient clan structure related to a polytheistic pantheon.

3.1. Yoruba Legend of Origin and Myth of Creation

We find in Ife, the traditional capital of Yorubaland, the most significant connection between legend, myth and clan-structure. According to the Yoruba tradition of origin, Ife was founded by Oduduwa, the immigrant hero from Mecca. The other Yoruba states were later established by the seven or sixteen sons of Oduduwa. From this simple and well-known legend of origin no social duality can be deduced.

The situation is different, when we consider the Ife myth of creation which seems to have been the matrix from which the Yoruba legend of origin was derived. According to Ife mythology, the high god charged Obatala with the task to create the world. However, Obatala indulged in too much palm wine, became drunk and fell asleep. As a result, his brother Oduduwa descended onto the primordial ocean and began the work of creating the earth. When Obatala awoke, he learned of this betrayal and demanded an explanation from his brother. So began the never ending quarrel between the descendants of the two deities and their associates over the issue of creation.[26]

3.3. The New Year Festival of Ife

As in Daura, the Ife myth of origin is embedded into the cult-drama of a New Year festival. But in this case the conflictual relation between two clan-parties is clearly apparent. According to the festal myth, there was a conflict between Oduduwa and Obatala. As a result, Obatala was expelled from power. Henceforth, he stayed in his grove out-side of the town. There he was watched by

[24] Smith, *Daura*, 54; Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms*, 293.
[25] Nicolas, *Dynamique*, 64-65, 362; Kühme, *Königtum*, 79, 93.
[26] Frobenius, *Und Afrika*, 285-287; D. Lange, "Preservation of Canaanite Creation Culture in Ife", *in*: P. Probst and G. Spittler (eds.), *Between Resistance and Expansion: Dimensions of Local Vitality in Africa*, Hamburg 2004, 132.

Obameri, the general of Oduduwa. In the end, he triumphantly returned.[27]

The re-enactement of the myth involves several cult-dramatic performances of the two clan-parties, of which the following are the most important. The followers of Obatala carry the statue of the deity and his wife out of the temple into the grove. On an interpretative level this movement corresponds to the descent into the netherworld of a "dying and rising god". Next, the priest of Obameri pours palm wine on the procession road in order to keep Obatala out of town. Then the party of Oduduwa celebrates its victory over Obatala and his associates in the palace of Ife. After three days the people of Obatala celebrate the re-entry of their deity into the town. This movement should be interpreted as a "procession of resurrection" in honour of the "dying and rising god" Obatala. Finally the procession reaches the temple of Obatala where the king himself venerated the deity and thus obtained the honorary title which distinguished him as a divine ruler ("owner of a power like that of Orisha/Obatala").[28]

3.4. The Dualistic Clan Structure of Ife

We have seen that the New Year festival of Ife re-enacts a myth of creation. Both the myth and its cult-dramatic actualisation involve two parties. On the level of myth there is the party of Oduduwa and his followers on one hand and the party of Obatala and his followers on the other. On the cult-dramatic level this corresponds to the performances of various cult-groups or clans belonging to either the Oduduwa or the Obatala party. Even the palace organisation of Ife reflects the dualistic arrangement of the society insofar as each section of the society has its own group of palace servants and officials.[29]

4. Regional and Cross-Continental Comparisons

[27] Ph. Stevens, "Orisha-nla festival", *Nigeria Magazine*, 90 (1966), 184-199.
[28] Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms*, 359-366. See for the ancient Near East T. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection: "Dying and Rising Gods" in the Ancient Near East*, Stockholm 2001.
[29] Lange, "Preservation", 131-135. For the first description of the palace of Ife see B. Adediran, "A descriptive analysis of the Ife palace organisation", in: *The African Historian* 8 (1976), 3-29.

Due to name differences, it was up till now impossible to procede to any systematic comparisons between the traditions of the Hausa and the Yoruba, let alone between the traditions of the central Sudan and North Africa. To procede with our comparative approach, we have to find out what the Hausa and Yoruba pantheons and clan structures have in common and whether there exists any common denominator between them and the North African cultural horizon of the Canaanite-Phoenician period.

4.1. Comparison between the Clan Dualism of the Hausa and the Yoruba

By simplifying to the extreme, we can reduce the former Hausa society into two sections: the Hausaa properly speaking and the Azna. The Yoruba society – as far as Ife is concerned – consists of an Obatala and an Oduduwa section. How is it possible to compare these two situations on a higher level without distorting them? The answer can be found in the characteristics of the two groups of deities. Without going into details here, it can be shown that the Hausaa deities properly speaking, who in legendary terms correspond to Magajiya and her descendants, belong to the upperworld, while the Azna deities, who in legendary terms correspond to Bagwariya and her descendants, belong to the netherworld. This opposition is clearly apparent in Gobir where the real king, the "king of the Hausaa", who traces his origin to Magajiya, represents the sun, while the *Sarkin* Azna, "the king of the Azna", who traces his origin to Bagwariya, represents the moon.[30]

The confrontation between the two major officials during the New Year festival amounts to a combat between "sun" and "moon" and also – in terms of the mythology of the Hausa legend – to the conflict between the deities of the upperworld and the netherworld. The same distinction can be shown to apply to the Yoruba of Ife. In this case the members of the Obatala section, who predominate in the eastern half of the city and the palace, constitute the party of the upperworld deities, while the members of the Oduduwa section, who rule over the western half of the city and the palace, correspond to the party of the netherworld deities. Altogether we find that among the

[30] Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms*, 229-235.

Hausa the deities and the clans of the upperworld are in a dominant position, while among the Yoruba it is the deities and clans of the netherworld which prevail.

One further striking correspondence should be noted. In terms of the Hausa legend, the Yoruba are classified among the Banza or Azna states, a group of states we can now associate with the people of the netherworld in view of the predominance of Oduduwa and his clans. This classification can furthermore be shown to be born out by the clan structure of the Yoruba. Similar analogies can be found with respect to the Duguwa and the Sefuwa of Kanem-Bornu, with the important difference that in this case we observe changing situations in which clans of the nether- and of the upperworld succeeded each other in the ruling positions of the state.[31]

4.2. Comparsions between the Central Sudan and Pheonician-Canaanite North Africa.

As we have seen, the Hausa legend refers to origins from Canaan and Baghdad while the Yoruba tradition mentions Mecca as the point of origin. Irrespective of the social background of the traditions, historians normally consider these references to the Semitic world as Islamic feedback. However, a closer look at the social embedding of the traditions makes it clear that not only the proclaimed starting points of migrations but also the traditions as a whole show close similarities between West African and ancient Near Eastern situations.

There are first of all the clear parallels between the Bayajidda legend and the Abraham narrative of the Bible. Next, we should note that the cult-dramatic performances of the New Year festival of Ife can easily be analysed as the ritual underpinning of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle, which is our most explicit source of the Canaanite New Year festival.[32] Furthermore, we have to consider that the dualistic Canaanite-Israelite descent pattern can be observed among the Yoruba and the Hausa as well as in Israel and in Ugarit.[33]

Again, without going into details I would further like to mention the following West African

[31] Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms*, 235-254.
[32] J. de Moor, *New Year with Canaanites and Israelites*, 2 vols., Kampen 1972.
[33] D. Lange, "Der Ursprung des Bösen: neue Evidenzen aus Afrika, Kanaan und Israel", *in:* W. H. Ritter und J. Schlumberger (eds.), *Das Böse in der Geschichte*, Dettelbach 2003, 1-27.

historical sources which provide ancestral names and characteristics pointing to ancient Near Eastern backgrounds: The *Girgam* or Chronicle of Kanem-Bornu, the Kano-Chronicle, the king lists of Kebbi and Zamfara and the oral records of the Yoruba empire of Oyo. In all these cases we find clear evidence for the desire of the earliest West African Chroniclers and custodians of oral traditions to record ancient Near Eastern antecedents.[34]

4.3. Dualisms in the Semitic World.

Antagonistic situations can be found in various contexts in the ancient Semitic Crescent surrounding sub-Saharan Africa from the Atlantic to the Horn of Africa. Following up the West African evidence I have tried to show – in my book - that a similar cult-mythological dualism can be discerned in several specific situations of different periods and regions. I would just like to mention here the Ugaritic New Year festival as discernable in the Baal Cycle, the Israelite antagonism between Priests and Levites, the Arab identification with Ishmael as opposed to the Israelite claim to descent from Isaac and Jacob, the cult-dramatic underpinning of the pilgrimage of Mecca, and the prevalence of the moon cult with respect to the worship of the sun in the South Arabian kingdoms.[35]

Still, it must be admitted that ancient Semitic history itself is a field of many conflicting theories. Although a number of scholars are convinced that there exists a more or less uniform cultural pattern stretching from one end to the other of the Semitic world, few authors would subscribe to the idea that the polytheistic pantheon is characterized by the conflicting divine parties of the upperworld and the netherworld deities.[36] That this bi-polarity had important implications for social and political organizations is suggested by African evidences. The inscriptional material from the ancient Semitic world is too meagre in itself to reach similar far-reaching conclusions.

[34] Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms*, 242-254.
[35] Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms*, 235-277; 351-354.
[36] See however J. Day who distinguises between astral and underworld deities (*Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, Sheffield 2002, 151-225).

5. The Phoenician Slavery and the Rise of the Canaanite State in the Region of Lake Chad

The numerous cultural parallels between Central Sudanic and ancient Semitic societies lead us to the question of historical contacts and transmissions. Anthropologists of the culture-historical school related cultural innovations spreading north to south to unsubstantiated migrations and 'streams of diffusion'.[37]

5.1. Two Facets of the Phoenician Expansion

Historians will think in this respect of the Phoenician expansion which began before 1000 BC and reached as far as the Atlantic coast of the Iberian peninsular and the Maghrib. The expansion was not restricted to the coastal strips of the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean but also extended to vast regions of the hinterland, particularly in modern Morocco, Tunisia and Libya.[38] In Libya inscriptional evidence shows that Phoenician presence reached at least as far as the central Saharan oasis of Fezzan. Classical authors were aware of the considerable cultural impact Phoenicians had on the indigenous Berber society and they therefore designated the people of the Hinterland as Libyphoencians.[39]

But who actually were these Phoenicians who hailed from the Levantian coast of present day Lebanon? In fact, Phoenicia is a term which Greek authors applied to a country whose people called themselves "Canaanites" and whom the Bible describes as the indigenous inhabitants of Israel. On the basis of populous Israelite communities found in North Africa at the beginning of our era, many authors suppose that Israelites joined the Phoenician expansion to the west in great numbers, perhaps because of the invasions of Assyria of Babylonia.[40] In view of the numerous Canaanite culture traits found in Central Sudanic societies, it is certainly not absurd to consider that the Phoenician expansion had two facets: One known and described by various classical authors with respect to the Mediterrranean coasts up to the Atlantic Ocean and a second one unknown to

[37] Frobenius, *Und Afrika*, 607-616; Baumann, *Civilisations*, 82-88.
[38] P. Rouillard, S. Lancel, H. Ben Younès and M. Longerstay *in:* V. Krings (ed.), *La civilisation phénicienne et punique. Manuel de recherche*, Leiden 1995, 776-844.
[39] Lipinski *in:* E. Lipinski (ed.), *Dictionnaire de la civilisation phénicienne et punique* (DCPP), Brepols 1992, 184, 260.

these authors leading to the Lake Chad region of West Africa. Contrary to Greek and Latin sources, the literature of the Canaanites has with a few exceptions not survived owing to Roman and Hellenistic conquests and the ensuing eradication of Canaanite language and culture. The most notable exceptions are the Babylonian and Assyrian texts of Mesopotamia, the narrative and cultic texts of Ugarit at the Syrian coast of the Mediterranean Sea and to a certain extent also the Old Testament.[41] Given the considerable homogenity of the Canaanite-Semitic world, these sources are highly relevant for Phoenician North Africa and – as it would seem – also for certain sub-Saharan societies. Inversely, the cultural heritage of these extant West African cultures informs us to an unexpected degree about the barely known societies of the ancient Near East.

5.2. The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade in Classical Times

Numerous iconographic representations show that black African slaves were widely known and appreciated in the Greek and Roman world. They were employed not just as musicians and dancers but also as doorkeepers, servicemen in public baths, grooms and soldiers. Because of their distant origins, flight was practically impossible. Where did they come from? It is often suggested that Egypt was the main provider of black African slaves. However, since in medieval and modern times Egypt itself relied, due to insufficient supply from the upper Nile and Darfur, in part on West African slave imports, there are reasons to suppose that in earlier periods the situation was similar. Thus, the central Saharan route leading from Tripoli via Fezzan and Kawar to Lake Chad seems also to have been, in classical times, the main provider of African slaves for the Mediterranean markets.[42]

Historians have not sufficiantly recognized the importance of the central Saharan route. In

[40] Oliver/Fage, *Short History*, 41-42; G. Bunnens, DCPP, 167.
[41] J. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton 1969; W. W. Hallo (ed.), *The Context of Scripture. Vol. 1: Canonical Compositions of the Biblical World. Vol. 2: Monumental Inscriptions of the Biblical World*, Leiden 1997, 2000.
[42] E. W. Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the Moors*, 2nd ed., London 1968, 21-23; F. M. Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, Cambridge, Mass., 1970, 165-191.

fact, the two thousand kilometres between Tripoli and Lake Chad were easy to cross even before the introduction of the camel. Watering places were never more than three days apart, the two widely-spaced oasis of Fezzan and Kawar provided good opportunities for rest and replenishment, while loose sand only posed serious difficulties for sixty kilometres south of Fezzan. On the whole, the central Saharan route was by far the most advantageous line of contact across the Sahara between the Atlantic Ocean and the River Nile.[43]

5.3. The Phoenicians as Slavers and as Slave Traders

It is well-known that the main factor of Phoenician expansion was trade. On the Mediterranean Sea the Phoenicians traded in precious and ordinary metals, timber, luxury and other refined goods, textiles and weapons. Moreover, they also traded extensively in human beings. Homer and Herodotus considered them dangerous pirates and kidnappers. Various books of the Old Testament describe them as slave traders eager to acquire war captives in order to sell them in distant lands. As a result of their far-reaching trade contacts, the Phoenicians were particularly well acquainted with different methods of enslavement and the volume of their slave trade seems to have reached greater proportions than that of other Mediterranean people.[44]

From the two Roman-Carthagenean treaties it appears that many slaves were obtained by organized brigandage. Concluded in 509 BC, the first treaty forbade the Carthagenians to build forts in Latium and to spend the night on land. This implies that Carthagenian pirates and brigands regularly attacked towns and villages in the neighbourhood of Rome in order to obtain booty. From classical and modern evidence it appears that attacking in the early morning to take the inhabitants by surprise was a well-known strategy for seizing and enslaving human beings. The second treaty from 326 BC focusses likewise on slavery since it prevented the Carthagenians from selling captured people from towns allied to Rome in Roman markets.[45] It is quite conceivable that the Carthagenians extended their slave-raiding activities to the region of Lake Chad either in response

[43] Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms*, 277-287.

to the growing demand in the Mediterranean world or for compensating the loss of slaving grounds in Italy due to the expanding Roman empire.[46]

5.4. The Written Evidence for Pre-Islamic Trade on the Central Saharan Route

Classical authors mention only isolated trans-Saharan crossings. The five Nasamones are said to have left from the Cyrenaican hinterland and a certain Mago apparently crossed the Sahara several times from Carthage. Furthermore, Herodotus refers to the Garamantes of Fezzan as people who raided the Troglodyte Ethiopians with four-horsed chariots.[47] It is only during the Roman period that the veil covering the activities of the northerners in Fezzan and the Central Sudan is slightly lifted.

Ptolemy mentions two instances when Romans travelled beyond Fezzan and reached the country of the black Africans in the far south. Most significant is the journey in 90 AD of the Roman trader Maternus who accompagnied the king of the Garamantes in an expedition against Agisymba "a land of the Ethiopians, where the rhinoceroses gather".[48] Apparently the king wanted to re-establish a tributary relationship which was profitable enough to warrant a military expedition across the Sahara against a rebellious vassal. Situated most likely in the region of Lake Chad, Agisymba would appear to have been the nucleus of the later Kanem-Bornu state. Some archaeological remains in north-eastern Niger also seem to indicate that the central Saharan route was used at least since Roman times.[49] In the seventh century AD, Fezzan was incorporated into the Byzantine empire most likely because of its importance for the trans-Saharan trade. The Arab conqueror Uqba b. Nafi who is said to have reached the Atlantic Ocean, at one stage interrupted his advance to the west and led a small army on the Central Saharan route first to Fezzan and then to

---

[44] S. Moscati, *Il mondo de Fenici*, Milano 1966, 164, 347; W. v. Gucht, DCPP, 157.
[45] W. Ameling, *Karthago*, Munich 1993, 130-134.
[46] Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms*, 277-282, 285-286.
[47] Law, R., "The Garamantes and trans-Saharan enterprise in classical times", *Journal of African History* 8 (1967), 181-200; J. Desanges, J., *Recherches sur l'activité des Méditerranéens aux confins de l'Afrique*, Rome 1978, 185-213.
[48] E. L. Stevenson, *Claudius Ptolemy, the Geography*, 2nd ed., New York 1991, 33; Desanges, *Recherches*, 197-213.
[49] Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms*, 280-282, 546-547.

Kawar. Such a move far to the south can best be explained if we suppose that the conqueror re-established a praxis of slave tribute which was earlier employed by the Byzantines and the Romans.

Later Arabic and European sources make it clear that slaves had always been by far the most important commodity of trade from the Central Sudan to North Africa.[50]

Conclusion: The Slave Trade and the Rise of the Sudanic States

Oral traditions, written kinglists and institutional survivals of the Central Sudan suggest the transmission of Canaanite forms of organisation during the Phoenician period of North Africa. The ancient slave trade would appear to have been the single most important factor for the implantation and the rise of the Canaanite state south of the Sahara. Indeed, slaves were not a commodity that can be supposed to have been readily available in sub-Saharan Africa. They had to be "produced" by well-organized raids from fortified camps established for this purpose, they had to be guarded and taken care of.[51] Their long painful march across the Sahara had to be carefully organized in order to avoid heavy losses. We know from their ravages in Italy that the Carthagenians were efficiant slave raiders. From their vassal towns of Sabratha, Oea and Leptis Magna, they seem to have found ways and means to proceed to the lands of the Sahel. In the region of Lake Chad and to the west of it they may have established the same kind of trading posts and garrisons they built on the shores of the Mediterranean. However, south of the Sahara Phoenician foundations were apparently better rooted and more firmly integrated into local populations. Through intermarriage, the adoption of local customs and an ongoing process of localization, these settlements might finally have become the nuclei of a number of Sudanic states. The spread of iron and the introduction of the horse in African societies may also have been a consequence of Phoenician slave-raiding activities.[52]

---

[50] R. Mauny, *Tableau géographique de l'ouest africain au moyen-âge*, Dakar 1961, 374-379; S. Daget and F. Renault, *Les traites négrières en Afrique*, Paris 1985, 40-44.

[51] Cl. Meillassoux recognizes the outstanding importance of slaving raids for the rise of the great West African states (*The Anthropology of Slavery*, Chicago 1991, 45-53).

[52] Cf. R. Law, *The Horse in West African History*, 2-7; Phillipson, *African Archaeology*, 148-152; Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 223.

Later on, destructive raiding activities were more and more delegated to tributary vassal states so that in the end a vast system of regional security – implying mutual military and political obligations – took shape. At the apex of this system – of which the Bayajidda legend still bears witness – stood the Chadic state of Kanem-Bornu which had grown out of Agisymba. For a long time this state was subject to a tributary system implying the sending of tributs of slaves to the north.

Still later, in the Islamic period, when the great powers of the north had vanished, the balance of power slowly changed to the advantage of the south. In the eleventh century, before the advent of Islam, the rulers of the Chadic state established settlement colonies in Kawar and Fezzan. In the twelfth and thirteenth century, the Chadic state assumed control over the whole central Saharan route nearly up to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

Thus, the former situation of cultural and political dependency became reversed. Just as Carthage had once superseded its mother town Tyre, the Chadic kingdom took the political and cultural lead towards the successor polities of its earlier metropolitan state.[53]

Finally, I would like to point out that a number of ideas expressed here are suggestive and speculative in parts. They are based primarily on facts which hitherto have not been appreciated. My intention is to indicate lines for future research in potentially valuable directions. In this sense the present paper – based on my forthcoming book - is meant to stimulate further explorations into the understudied integration of parts of Africa into ancient world history.

[53] Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms*, 286-287.