

DIERK LANGE

**A SUDANIC CHRONICLE:
THE BORNO EXPEDITIONS
OF IDRĪS ALAUMA (1564-1576)**

ACCORDING TO THE ACCOUNT OF
AḤMAD B. FURTŪ

ARABIC TEXT, ENGLISH TRANSLATION,
COMMENTARY AND GEOGRAPHICAL GAZETTEER



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في تاريخ السودان:

كتاب غزوات السلطان

إدريس أَلْوَمَا في بَرْنُو (١٥٦٤-١٥٧٦)

للإمام أحمد بن قُرْطُو

حققه وعلق عليه وترجمه إلى الإنجليزية

الدكتور ديرك لانجى

الناشر

فرانز شتينر

شتوتغارت

١٩٨٧

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Many historians believe that African history rests mainly on oral traditions. This may be true for the precolonial period of certain interior regions of Africa. The more accessible coastal regions of Africa have been known to us for a longer period and in greater detail through the writings of European soldiers, officials, doctors, etc. The Sudanic belt, which stretches from the Atlantic coast to the Red Sea, and the coastal region of East Africa have been part of the Islamic world since medieval times. Information concerning this part of Africa has been preserved in the writings of Arab geographers. In the Sudanic belt the long tradition of literacy in Arabic led in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to the composition of some chronicles in which African realities are expressed through the medium of the Arabic language and through literary models derived from Muslim historiography. By then, after five or more centuries of a process of continuous islamisation the Muslim cultural heritage was no longer foreign to the Sudanic societies. The surviving chronicles of the Sudan should therefore be considered to be early documents of African self-expression.

The Sudanic chronicles reaching back to an early period are few. Among the earliest which survive are the *K. ghazawāt Barnū*¹ and the *K. ghazawāt Kānim*.² They were written by the Grand Imam of Borno, Aḥmad b. Furṭū, in 1576 and 1578 respectively. Up to now they have not received the attention which they deserve as historical sources and as documents revealing an African mind.

We have no precise knowledge about the circulation of the two books; some copies were certainly preserved at the court of the Sayfuwa, the ruling dynasty of Borno. It is unlikely that during the period of the Sayfuwa any copy of either work ever reached the outside world. It is even doubtful whether Bornoan scholars who did not belong to court circles had access to the chronicles. With the demise of the Sayfuwa in 1846 the very survival of the chronicles was threatened.

That the chronicles of Ibn Furṭū have survived until the present day is mainly due to the diligence of Heinrich Barth. In 1851 the German traveller, who had a keen interest in history, was shown these chronicles by *al-ḥājj* Beshir, the

1 Henceforth abbreviated as *K. Barnū* (or *K/B*). The book has no formal title. Closer to the author's own phrasing would be the title: *Aḥwāl Sulṭān Barnū Idrīs b. 'Alī wa-waqā'i'uhu* ("The deeds and encounters of the Sultan of Borno, Idrīs b. 'Alī"); but then the distinction between *K. Barnū* and *K. Kānim* becomes difficult.

2 Abbreviated as *K. Kānim* (or *K/K*).

Vizier of Borno.³ He at once recognized their great importance and asked his host to provide copies both for himself and for the British Government. These copies were made in April and June 1853, as can be seen from the colophons of the different manuscripts, while Barth was on his way to Timbuktu. A few months later, in December 1853, *al-ḥājj* Beshir fell victim to a plot and was executed.⁴ Fortunately the two copies of Ibn Furtū's chronicles survived his death: one was sent by the Vizier himself during his last months of office to the British Foreign Office; the other was handed over to Barth on his return from Timbuktu in December 1854.⁵

Today we only know of the two copies made at the request of the German traveller. No further copy has yet come to light in Borno or elsewhere.

After the initial interest stirred up in Europe by these copies, Ibn Furtū's work once more sank into oblivion. The present writer had the good fortune to find a copy at an early stage of his research in the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies. Later he was fortunate enough to discover another copy in the Library of the Royal Asiatic Institute. The manuscript of the *K. ghazawāt Barnū* held in the Royal Asiatic Institute will be called ms. A and the manuscript of the same book held in the School of Oriental and African Studies ms. B.

Ms. A is easy to identify: it is the copy of the *K. ghazawāt Barnū* which was sent by *al-ḥājj* Beshir in 1853 to the British Foreign Office. This copy was given to the orientalist J.W. Redhouse for translation. Redhouse himself notes that his translation was ready in 1854, but it was published only in 1862.⁶ By then the manuscript had passed through the hands of Earl Russell, who, in 1861, donated it to the Royal Asiatic Institute.

Ms. B is not an original Borno manuscript. It is a copy of Barth's copy which was made before 1921, perhaps by a student of Professor E.S. Brown. Although it is said to have belonged to H.R. Palmer, it was deposited in the School of Oriental and African Studies by Mr. Minns in 1926.⁷ Barth's original Borno copy, which was once part of his *Nachlaß* in the Hamburger Staatsarchiv, has now disappeared.

The Arabic text of the *K. ghazawāt Barnū* was never properly edited. However, a printed text was issued in 1932 by the Emir of Kano's Press together with the *K. ghazawāt Kānim* and the *Diwān salāfīn Barnū*. The book

3 Barth, 1857 (a), II: 44.

4 *Ibid.*: The fact that Barth could obtain Ibn Furtū's work from one of the highest officials of the al-Kānemī dynasty invalidates his statement that "the new dynasty ... has assiduously destroyed all records [of the old dynasty] wherever they could be laid hold of" (1857 (a), II: 16).

5 Barth, 1857 (b), II: 381.

6 Redhouse, 1862 (a): 259.

7 See additional documents adjoined to ms. B.

was given the title: *Hādhā al-kitāb min sha'n sultān Idrīs Alawma wa-mā waqa' baynahu wa bayna umarā' bilād Kānim*.⁸ At the beginning to the book there is a brief introduction signed by H.R. Palmer. It reads as follows: "The proofs of the typed transcript of Bornu Arabic Manuscripts now printed by the Emir of Kano's Press under the general direction of Mr. H. Morphy have been corrected and seen through the press by Capt. R.C. Abraham and Mr. T.H. Baldwin of the Nigerian Service, to whom whatever credit there may be for this publication is due. The manuscripts themselves are photographs kindly provided by the German Government of the original manuscripts, brought to Europe in 1855 from Bornu, by the traveller Barth. The originals are at present at Hamburg."

There is no doubt that the Kano text is derived from Barth's Borno copy of the *K. ghazawāt Barnū*; but it is obvious from the text that the "editors" of the Kano publication did not have access to the original manuscript. If there had been photographs of Barth's manuscripts, as Palmer claims, these had become largely unreadable by the time Abraham and Baldwin tried to correct the existing text in preparation for its publication. A comparison between the Kano text and the text of ms. B makes it clear that Abraham and Baldwin were in fact working on the basis of ms. B. The Arabic letter *qāf* which they used for their footnotes apparently stands for different versions of ms. B, either "corrected" or uncorrected. It is clear that the "editors" of the Kano text were aware of the fact that ms. B was a poor copy of Barth's Borno manuscript — the main reason being perhaps the copyist's insufficient knowledge of Arabic — and they therefore tried to improve it. But again, their own insufficient knowledge of classical Arabic and their inexperience with editorial work turned many of their "improvements" into new mistakes. With five to ten mistakes on each page the Kano text is less reliable than ms. B and, of course, its value cannot be compared with ms. A.

The present edition of the *K. ghazawāt Barnū* is based on a comparison between ms. A and ms. B.

— Ms. A is now preserved in the Library of the Royal Asiatic Institute (London) under the accession number "Add. mss. 68, case 6, lower right A". It is written in a fine oriental *naskh* script, with seventeen lines per page, and 43 folios. In the notes of the Arabic text this manuscript is referred to by the letter *alif*.

— Ms. B is preserved in the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies (London) under the catalogue number "Arabic manuscript n° 41384 (a)". It is written in an irregular *naskhī* script with Maghrebi features, and has between 13 and 15 lines per page and 53 folios. In the notes of the Arabic text

8 A different title is given at the back of the book: *Ta'rikh may Idrīs wa-ghazawātihi*.

9 Palmer, 1932: 1.

this manuscript is referred to by the letter *bā'*. The letters *bā'* and *nūn* are used for corrections made by the copyist himself (*nāsikh*) and the letters *bā'* and *mīm* for corrections made by the "corrector" (*muṣahḥih*).¹⁰

Since both manuscripts derive from the same nineteenth-century original the differences between them are not very important, consisting most often in different vowelings of proper names, affecting the meaning of the text only in a limited number of instances.¹¹

For the purpose of the present edition, the translation and the analysis of the *K. ghazawāt Barnū* the text has been divided into nine chapters and each chapter has been subdivided into paragraphs. These divisions follow the sequences of the book which the author has himself distinguished through his style of writing. The different chapters are more explicitly announced in the introduction, but some announced chapters have in fact been omitted from the book¹² and one chapter has been added.¹³ The paragraphs distinguish between different passages of the text which, in fact, often tend to reflect the working of the author's memory rather than his ability — or desire — to write a straight forward narrative account of subsequent events. But it has to be recognized that not all paragraphs correspond to clearly distinguishable units in the text — some will perhaps appear to be the result of a somewhat arbitrary dissection of a running account. In fact, since the author himself did not organize his text according to small units, any subdivision must remain to a certain extent arbitrary. However, the subdivision of the text into paragraphs should prove particularly useful in view of the many cross-references to either complementary or contradictory items of information, which have necessarily to be introduced in order to throw some light on a text which, through its uncoordinated nature, loses much of its documentary value.¹⁴ The Arabic text and the English translation have been subdivided into the same units, thus allowing easy cross-checking.

There are two earlier English translations of the *K. ghazawāt Barnū*, one by the orientalist J.W. Redhouse and the other by the colonial administrator H.R. Palmer. Redhouse's translation is based on ms. A; it was finished in 1854 and published in 1862.¹⁵ Although it is a straightforward translation without any cross-references its general accuracy and literary quality deserve considerable credit. However, on closer scrutiny it appears that Redhouse could not avoid

10 A more detailed description of the available manuscripts is given in the Arabic introduction of the present edition.

11 See Arabic text chapter II §§ 2, 7, 10, 15, 22, 35, 36; chapter VII § 38; chapter VIII §§ 16, 17.

12 See chapter I §§ 13, 14, 20.

13 See chapter VI (Mandara).

14 Some future exeget might attempt to reorganize the text by assembling its constituent parts according to a coherent outline.

15 Redhouse, 1862 (a): 259.

a certain number of more or less serious mistranslations¹⁶ and some misleading interpretations¹⁷, the latter due to his tendency to give to the text a highly literary flavour. In this way he sometimes veils inconsistencies and obscures some sober and factual formulations. In particular he made no attempt to find solutions to the many inconsistencies of the text which are a result of the author's peculiar style of writing. The quality of this early translation also suffers from the author's lack of familiarity with the Sudanic context. In this respect it has to be noted that Redhouse worked at a time when the Central Sudan was only known through the superficial account given by Denham and Clapperton¹⁸, the results of the intensive investigations of Barth not yet being available.¹⁹

Far better known today is the translation of H.R. Palmer which was first published in 1926²⁰ and again, without any change, in 1970²¹. Palmer, who ignored the earlier translation of Redhouse, was for several years Resident in Borno and he knew the country, therefore a few interpretations of his text are helpful and some of the additional notes provide useful indications as to the geographical context. However, on the whole, his translation is of an extremely poor quality, containing an average of more than ten serious mistakes on every page.²² It is obvious that Palmer's knowledge of Arabic — or rather his local

16 As examples the following inaccuracies may be noted for chapter II (long passages of chapter I dealing with religious matters): p. 208 l. 8 ("... has been said in the same sense" instead of "similar are his earlier words"), 1. 36 ("his servants of the tribe of Kirdi" instead of "slaves of his tribe, the Kirdé"), 209 l. 7 ("herdsmen" instead of "people of low standing"), 1. 29 ("horsemen ... not unarmed" instead of "horsemen ... not separated"), 210 l. 7 ("God grant honour ... also to his armies" instead of "he ... went forth with his soldiers"), 1. 42 ("with the Vizier Kursu" omitted by Redhouse), 212 ll. 39–40 ("troops returned ... i.e. those who still remained in that country after the Sultan had gone forth to the holy war" instead of "troops returned ... i.e. those who used to stay in the country 'when' the Sultan left for 'war'"), 215 l. 35 ("written in the page (*tabaq*) of revelation" instead of "as it is (*tibq*) written in the revelation"), 216 ll. 30–31 ("taking the lower road which ... passes between the stronghold and where its inhabitants had advanced to" instead of "taking the lower road ... in order that he might pass between the stronghold and its people"), 217 ll. 4–5 ("an atheist, who had sometimes joined the Muslims and again..." instead of "a false Muslim ... who was going between the Sultan and the pagans"), 217 ll. 29–30 ("skins exposed to the effects of their hostilities" instead of "from fierce starvation their bellies clung to their back").

17 In chapter II note for example: p. 208 l. 1 ("from amongst his tribe or nation" instead of "from amongst the sons of his line"), 208 l. 37 ("throng" instead of "particular slaves"), 211 l. 13 ("ploughs" instead of "cultivate their fields"); 212 l. 23 ("public register" instead of "register"), 221 l. 41 ("cities" instead of "plots of land").

18 Denham, Clapperton and Oudney, 1826 (first ed.).

19 Barth, 1857–1859.

20 Palmer, 1926.

21 *Ibid.*, 1970 (reprint).

22 The first page of chapter II (which is again taken as a sample) contains the following mistranslations: p. 15 ll. 1–3 ("an account of his era" instead of "during the time of his reign"), 1.

assistant(s) knowledge of that language²³ — was insufficient to grasp the meaning of the more complex passages of the book. Also, it would appear that the translation was meant to be a loose paraphrase rather than a literal rendering of the original text.²⁴ Altogether this translation further obscures the original, sometimes very complex meaning of innumerable passages of the text and thus increases the difficulties which the reader has to confront. Therefore it would appear that the wide circulation of Palmer's translation instead of revealing the value of a precious document of African self-expression has rather contributed to obscuring both the literary and the documentary content of an outstanding text.

It would be useful to provide some further information on the author of the *K. ghazawāt Barnū*²⁵ as well as on the style, the language and the content of the book.

The author of the *K. ghazawāt Barnū* is only known to us through his own writings.²⁶ At the beginning of the book he calls himself Aḥmad b. Furṭū after his father's name, but this form of his name occurs only once in both books.²⁷ Elsewhere the author calls himself Aḥmad b. Ṣafiyya after his

- 7 ("days of his posterity" instead of "favour of God on his offspring"), 11. 14, 17–19 (poetry misunderstood), 11. 30–31 ("left part of their equipment there as for instance the horses, the quilted armour" instead of "settled there . . . troops who had horses and quilted armour"), 1. 35 ("fend off the enemies" instead of "in quest of the enemies"), 11. 37–38 ("built a town north of Birni near Sansana and south of it" instead of "built a 'war-camp' north of the stronghold opposite to the southern *sansana*").
- 23 Possibly Palmer's assistant(s) translated from Arabic into Hausa and Palmer himself translated from Hausa into English. If the translation was indeed indirect it would help to explain the careless rendering of the original Arabic.
- 24 The following examples are from the second page of chapter II: p. 16 l. 5 ("without quarrels" instead of "without slackening"), 1. 6 ("wicked towns" instead of "strongholds of the evildoers"), 1. 11 ("leather shields" instead of "shields"), 11. 15–16 ("find no means of hiding" instead of "leave no place of retreat"), 1. 21 ("worked together" instead of "came together"), 1. 29 ("picked shieldbearers" instead of "shieldsmen and bucklersmen"), 1. 32 ("they were . . . in companies" instead of "he drew them up . . . in ranks"), 1. 33 ("Sultan choose people with matchets" instead of "the axe-men lined up"), 11. 34–35 ("they were stout of hearts" instead of "feeling themselves secure"), 1. 36 ("dancers" instead of none), 1. 40 ("oblivious of home-going" instead of "rid themselves of hardship"), 1. 41 ("surprising array" instead of "remarkable enterprise").
- 25 In an abbreviated form the book will also be called *K. Barnū* or, even shorter, *K/B*. Similarly the second book will be called *K. Kānim*, or *K/K*. The *K/K* will be quoted after the Kano edition.
- 26 The owner of the so-called "mahram of Ummē Jilmi" has a similar name: Ahmed b. Muhammad b. Walii b. Farto (Palmer, 1928, III: 5).
- 27 *K/B*, I § 3. The spelling "Fartuwa" adopted by Palmer is based on a misreading of the final *wāw* followed by an *alif* (i.e. in Borno manuscripts one has to read Barnū and not Barnuwa, Gamargū and not Gamarguwa etc.).
- 28 *K/B*, IX § 7 and *K/K*, pp. 72 l. 2; 76 l. 20; 81 l. 2; 85 l. 12; 95 l. 12; 105 l. 9.

mother's name.²⁸ The geographical information contained in his books suggests that Ibn Furṭū was born and educated in Borno and it would seem that he left his country only during the Sultan's expeditions to Kānem. There is no doubt that his mother tongue was Kanuri. Descending from Muḥammad b. Māni, he belonged to a widespread and famous family.²⁹ It would appear that during the period covered by his writings he held the important office of Grand Imam, in which capacity he led the Friday prayers.³⁰ According to his own reports he did not perform religious duties only: on one occasion he registered the names of captives, on another he took part in a military council and once he participated in the pursuit of an enemy force.³¹ In spite of these more "worldly" activities he does not seem to have been engaged in active fighting. Prayers, Friday sermons and pious readings were certainly his main concern.³² Therefore it is not surprising that in his narratives he expresses himself in very stylish classical Arabic frequently using Koranic expressions.³³ Yet, Ibn Furṭū's learning was not restricted to the basic Islamic sciences: the range of his literary vocabulary and his use of poetic verses show that, in the field of scholarship, he studied more than the *Qur'ān*, *Ḥadīth* and *fiqh* ("jurisprudence"). It is undeniable that his writings display a certain degree of intellectual sophistication. This is evident in his ability to concentrate on his main subject matter, discarding certain irrelevancies such as court intrigues or religiously orientated scholarship. Throughout his book the Imam provides detailed and colourful descriptions of events and, *en passant*, he also mentions various aspects of material culture. Further, it is noteworthy that he does not give any consideration to magical procedures, or indeed to any supernatural forces other than those recognized by Islam.³⁴

29 See *K/B*, I § 3 where the author states that he belonged to the "tribe" of Muḥammad Māni. According to the so-called *Mahram of Umme Jilmi* Muḥammad Māni converted Ḥummay. This cannot be true; Ḥummay, who reigned from c. 1075 to c. 1086, was not a convert: he was born into a Muslim milieu of long standing and seized power in Kānem from a dynasty which had already adopted Islam (Lange, 1977: 95–112). The name of Muḥammad Māni could have been borrowed by the author of the *Mahram* from the *K. ghazawāt Barnū*.

30 Besides the Grand Imam Ibn Furṭū mentions a Lesser Imam (*K/K*, pp. 72 l. 4; 76 l. 7; 76 l. 15; 111 l. 1). The two titles still exist in present day Borno (information provided by Ibrahim Ubcama, the *limān kūrā*, 25/5/1977; see also Lukas, 1937: 223).

31 *K/B*, II § 21 and *K/K*, pp. 76 l. 20; 81 l. 2.

32 *K/B*, IX § 7 and *K/K*, pp. 82 l. 7; 111 l. 1.

33 Only the more extensive Koranic expressions have been indicated in the notes of the English translation of the *K. Barnū*.

34 When in his *K. Kānim* the author mentions "praise-singers" (*al-shu'arā' al-maddāhūn*) who ordered the Sultan to alight at a certain place, he describes a custom without giving his own interpretation (*K/K*, p. 109 l. 4). The "beautiful egg" falling near one of the horsemen exists only in Palmer's translation (1928, I: 23); it is in fact a "beautiful helmet (*bayḍa*)" (*K/K*, p. 63 l. 19).

Why did the Grand Imam decide to write an historical narrative? From the outset Ibn Furṭū makes it clear that his intention was to write a panegyric for his Sultan Idrīs b. 'Alī (1564–1596), better known by his posthumous name Idrīs Alauma³⁵, but also called Idrīs Amsāmi after his mother's name.³⁶ The model for his book was the account given by the Masfarma 'Umar b. 'Uthmān of the military expeditions of Sultan Idrīs b. 'Alī b. Aḥmad (c. 1497–1519), or Idrīs Katakarmābi.³⁷ However, besides military expeditions the author also had the intention of dealing with holy wars (*jihād*), defensive measures (*ribāʿ*) and making the highways safe for travelling merchants.³⁸ Thus, chronological and even geographical precision were of little importance to him compared with the praise and celebration of his Sultan's sagacity and glorious deeds. From this point of view it was sufficient to inform the reader that such-and-such a kingdom or tribe had to be subdued because it had acted "mischievously" or "rebelliously" — the more objective reasons being irrelevant or unknown. His intention was in the first place to describe and properly emphasize the "outstanding virtues" of the Caliph and the particular "sagacious stratagems" he had employed in order to achieve great and memorable victories. He is therefore very much preoccupied with the necessity of expressing himself in a style appropriate for the eulogy of his Sultan and much less concerned with the establishing of clear facts.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of the *K. ghazawāt Barnū* the Imam Aḥmad b. Furṭū indirectly admits that a chronological framework was needed for the account of his Sultan's exploits, although he claims to believe that it was impossible to establish such a chronology for the Borno expeditions³⁹, despite the fact that they extend over a period of only twelve years. Thus, in his first book very little consideration is given to the time perspective and the author incorporates into the different chapters accounts of the various expeditions and raids directed against each particular country or tribe without specifying whether they took place earlier or later than other expeditions. Hence only a relative dating of events emerges for each chapter as well as a few interconnections; to establish a satisfactory chronology covering all events seems impossible. It is only in his *K. ghazawāt Kānim* that the author proceeds chronologically — although he still omits to mention the year of the Muslim calendar, speci-

35 The Sultan died near the town of Alau or Alawo (Barth, 1857, II: 99, 597), which is situated at 11° 43' N and 13° 16' E.

36 Barth, 1857, II: 592. In the introduction of the *K. Barnū* Ibn Furṭū states that he wanted to write a book for his Sultan in order to show that his deeds were more important than the deeds of his grandfather Idrīs b. 'Alī b. Aḥmad (I § 27).

37 *K/B*, I §§ 2, 26.

38 *K/B*, I § 5.

39 *K/B*, I § 6.

fyng only the day of the week and the day of the month⁴⁰ — but events described in his second book cover not more than four years and all expeditions were directed against the same country.

Discarding for his *K. ghazawāt Barnū* any chronological approach — for which he possibly did not even have an appropriate model⁴¹ — the Imam devotes more attention to geographical precision. This tendency emerges from the subdivisions of his book but also from the care he takes to mention the towns and villages crossed by the Sultan's army during the major expeditions. But the kind of topographical information which he abundantly provides can of course only be meaningful for a reader who himself is well acquainted with the geographical features of Borno and the surrounding countries. This is, it would seem, one of the reasons why the identification of place-names mentioned in the *K. ghazawāt Barnū* contributes considerably to the elucidation of the text.

Any critical assessment of the information provided by Ibn Furṭū should take into account not only his intellectual background but also his ability to write a narrative account solely on the basis of his own memory. Indeed, it would seem that he made little attempt, at the time of his writing, to supplement his own recollections by any systematic enquiries. Also, there is no evidence that prior to the beginning of his composition, on Sunday, 28 Rajab 984 A.H.⁴², he had made any preliminary attempt to outline the main features of the successive chapters. Neither is there any indication that he had gone over an initial text, eliminating conflicting or repetitive statements. Altogether the book has the appearance of a hastily drawn up collection of reminiscences — and indeed we know that it was produced within a period of less than two months, between 21 October and 23 December 1576.⁴³ As it stands, the text is in many parts so confusing that it gives the impression of being little more than a preliminary draft for a fully structured and well-balanced historical account.

However, the apparent insufficiencies of the text, which are certainly disturbing for the general reader, may prove to be of particular value to the analyst. Ibn Furṭū was the Grand Imam of Borno, and as such he must have been used to delivering Friday sermons (*khuṭab*) in Arabic. It is likely that on these specific occasions it was Arabic which was his medium of communication and not Kanuri. Although very classical and of a high standard, the Arabic which he uses must also have been a spoken language for the author. And indeed the

40 The dates are sufficient to reconstruct the absolute chronology of Idrīs Alauma's expeditions to Kānem and to establish the date of the composition of the *K. Barnū* (see Lange, 1977: 4, 87).

41 It would appear that the account of 'Umar b. 'Uthmān, which was his model, dealt with military expeditions directed against a single country, Kānem, for which a relative chronology was easy to establish (*K/B*, I §§ 2, 26).

42 *K/B*, I § 3.

43 Lange, 1977: 87.

religious phraseology⁴⁴ as well as the frequent occurrence of simple rhyming couplets (*saj'*)⁴⁵ are clear indications of the author's familiarity with the kind of spoken language which one would expect to be used for Friday sermons. The usage of public addresses, such as "O brothers", "O people"⁴⁶ or the more complex rhetorical question, "Where are you in relation (to such and such an event)?"⁴⁷ shows that Ibn Furṭū was more of an orator than a writer. It is obvious that he conceived his written text on lines similar to those of a spoken Friday sermon (*khuṭba*). It therefore would appear that the very peculiar style of the *K. ghazawāt Barnū* could conveniently be described as the style of a religious sermon or *khuṭba*. It is this unity of style, particularly apparent in the introduction and the conclusion⁴⁸, which conveys the impression that the text is more coherent than it really is. The apparent coherence of the book may, on the other hand, also be understood to be the result of the initial conception of the text as an oral discourse. As such the text has indeed conserved many traits of a spontaneous and vivid oral account which has not been pressed into the mould of a streamlined written text.⁴⁹ For this reason it would seem that a careful analysis of the text can bring to light certain facets of the recorded events which the author was not fully prepared to admit.⁵⁰

Another of the text's difficulties arises from the author's inconsistent use of technical terms. In this respect it should be noted that the Imam Aḥmad was trained to use Arabic for religious purposes, not for the description of worldly affairs. Also it should be realized that matters like warfare or imperial politics were in the court circles of Borno discussed in Kanuri and very rarely, if ever, in Arabic. Thus, in his attempt to describe certain actions of the Borno army or reactions of the enemy forces Ibn Furṭū is constantly confronted with the

44 See, for instance, the Koranic references.

45 See, for example, I § 5 and IX § 21 (*jihād/ribāʿ*), I § 16 (*dawla/ṣawla*), I § 18 (*umarāʿ/ulamāʿ*), II § 11 (*ashjār/qahār*).

46 *K/B*, preface ("O Muslim brothers"), VI § 7, IX §§ 1, 17.

47 *K/B*, I § 9; IX § 25.

48 *K/B* chapter I and chapter IX.

49 For example II § 24 ("he allowed his armies to return to their homes — I want to say those . . ."); II § 25 ("he proceeded to Kablu — I want to say a place near to it"); II § 27 ("the story of the cutting of the trees — the trees of the enemy").

50 See, for example, the description of the attack on the four Ngizim towns: first the author suggests that the Sultan was the commander-in-chief (VII § 18), later he mentions that the Zarma Idrīs b. Hārūn was leading a minor operation (VII § 23), next the Zarma is said to have been responsible for drawing up the battle array for the attack of Bāni (VII § 29), finally the author makes it clear that the Zarma was leading the operations during all four attacks (VII § 40).

Another example is the way in which the author presents the expeditions against the Tuareg: first the Sultan is credited with having led three expeditions, apparently the most important, against the Tuareg (V §§ 2, 4, 5, 12), but later it becomes clear that the expedition to Agalwa, which was led by the Vizier, took place earlier and was more important than the other expeditions (V § 13).

problem of translation. It is only in a few cases that he uses Kanuri terms⁵¹; in other cases he uses terms which appear to be Arabic but are in fact idiosyncratic⁵²; but most often the author attempts to find Arabic terms in order to express Sudanic realities which he is used to referring to by Kanuri names. It should be recognized that in spite of the author's religious orientation, most features of military actions and material culture are adequately described with precise Arabic terms. However, the wide range of vocabulary which the author has at his disposal is not always put to appropriate use: certain terms do not cover the intended meaning⁵³; other terms, which are different from each other, are used in reference to the same meaning⁵⁴; finally there are those terms which are used to indicate meanings which do not figure in dictionaries of classical Arabic.⁵⁵ Ibn Furṭū's inconsistent usage of technical terms often makes it necessary to reject a literal translation in favour of a translation which reveals the intended meaning.⁵⁶ But no translation can guarantee full access to the original text. Any detailed study of the military culture of sixteenth-century Borno will have to be based on a philological analysis of the technical vocabulary not only of the *K. ghazawāt Barnū* but also of the *K. ghazawāt Kānim*.⁵⁷ The examples given here may suffice to show that the technical terms used by the Imam Aḥmad leave more room for interpretation than is at first apparent from the limited corpus of his writings.

- 51 Altogether five terms: see I § 22 (*jībī* — “gourd”); II § 6 (*sānsānā* — “war-camp”); V § 9 (*māgārā* — “boat”); VI § 2 (*gūmsū* — “senior wife”); IX § 10 (*gēltā* — “a red silk cotton tree”). Note further that all titles are given in Kanuri except the title of Great Zarma, which the author renders in Arabic as *al-rā'id al-kabīr* (“the great leader of expeditions”) (VII §§ 23, 29, 31, 40, 43) and the title of Cikama (written *shikama*, II § 6, and *sikama*, *K/K*, p. 64 l. 16) which he translates as *ḥājīb* (“chamberlain”) (II § 5; VIII §§ 11–15).
- 52 The best example is the term *shawkiyya*, derived from the Arabic *shawk* (“thorn”). Ibn Furṭū applies this term (a) to a “fortified capital town” (I § 10; III §§ 4, 10), (b) to a “protective wall” (III § 18), (c) to a “system of fortifications” (III § 12) and (d) to an “abatis of thorn-bushes and perhaps a “palisade”. The fourth meaning, which comes close to the Arabic etymology, can only be shown to exist in the *K. Kānim* (pp. 81 l. 6; 97 l. 12; 98 ll. 4, 8; 102 l. 12).
- 53 See, for example, *madīna*, used sometimes with the meaning “war-camp” instead of “town” (II §§ 5–6, 19), *ḥawānīt* (sing. *ḥānūt*), used apparently with the meaning “mud-built houses” (II § 15; VII § 21); *ḥiṣn*, used sometimes for a “town with connecting compound-walls” instead of a “fortified town” (VII §§ 29–30 and IV § 2).
- 54 See, for instance, III § 24, where the author uses both *nibāl* and *siḥām*, to indicate “arrows”. It is not clear whether key terms like *āmīl* (pl. *ummāl*), “officer”, and *amīr* (pl. *umarā*), “chiefs” are always used in reference to different categories of political and military leaders (see *K/K*, p. 118 l. 1, where they seem to be used interchangeably).
- 55 Such as the seasons of the sub-Saharan climate: *kharīf* (“autumn”) being applied to the “rainy season” and *ṣayf* (“summer”) to the “hot season” (II §§ 10, 12–13; VIII § 4).
- 56 Where the proper meaning of a word has been changed in favour of the supposed intended meaning this has been indicated by inverted commas.
- 57 A comprehensive glossary of technical terms will be part of an edition of the *K. ghazawāt Kānim* prepared by the present author.

One further question has to be asked in order to assess the validity of the information presented in the different chapters of Ibn Furṭū's account: was the author present at the events which he describes or does he rely on reports of other persons? Unfortunately he rarely indicates this himself, and it can often only be deduced from the quality of his description. Furthermore his memory of distant events is necessarily imprecise; but some expeditions are described in considerable and colourful detail and we may assume that he witnessed them himself. It is only once that he explicitly states that he was present at a particular event: this was during one of the episodes in the attacks launched against the settlements of the Sau-Gafata.⁵⁸ But he was certainly also present during the expedition against the four Ngizim towns, because in the course of his narrative account of this expedition he uses the first person plural.⁵⁹ It is likely that he was also present at the siege of Amsaka.⁶⁰ In all these cases the topographical information is detailed and accurate, and the narrative presents the sequence of events in a chronological order and with relatively few distortions. Other events apparently came to the knowledge of the author by hearsay. They would seem to include most episodes in the fighting against the Sau-Gafata, the great Kano expedition⁶¹, all the expeditions directed against the Tuareg and probably also the expedition against the Margi. In these cases the narrative is very imprecise and confused, events are presented with considerable distortion and a meaningful and balanced framework can only be reconstructed with great difficulty.

In spite of the Imam's inexperience with regard to historical chronicles, he shows himself to be well prepared to convey to writing detailed descriptions of precise events. An official chronicler would perhaps have written a more intelligible and better balanced account of the different military expeditions led by the Sultan, but he would also have been more concerned with intrigues of the court and the history of the political class. The Imam Aḥmad b. Furṭū does not see history from above, instead he tends to write from the point of view of the participant observer, and as such he also gives insights into the history of the humble. Furthermore his descriptions of particular events are often so precise that we can deduce from them precious information concerning military warfare and material culture. Therefore Ibn Furṭū's account should be valued not only as an historical narrative but also as a reliable basis for historical reconstruction.

The information contained in the *K. ghazawāt Barnū* is particularly relevant for an account of military organization and methods of warfare. Other, less ap-

58 *K/B*, II § 21.

59 See *K/B*, VII §§ 18, 19, 26, 35, 39.

60 *K/B*, III § 21.

61 Although the author was most probably not present during the Kano expedition, his description has very realistic touches (see IV § 8 and notes).

parent items of information give insight into more precise aspects of the military culture of Borno in the second half of the sixteenth century and into its social organization. As an example we may quote the reference to the *Kardē* slave settlements which, as may be inferred from other evidence, played an important role in the territorial expansion of the Borno state.⁶² The incidental remarks of the author concerning hippodromes, or race-courses, would seem to indicate that horsemanship was cultivated in Borno using similar methods to those of the Mamlūk Empire.⁶³ The author more explicitly mentions the employment of Turkish musketeers and of royal slaves trained in the use of firearms; and although he does not admit that muskets were introduced into Borno before the reign of his Sultan, the information he provides about their employment indicates that this achievement has to be attributed to some predecessor of *Idrīs Alauma*.⁶⁴ Also his allusion to the foreign origin of the two successive Viziers throws an interesting sidelight on the early integration of foreigners, probably of slave origin, into the political system of Borno.⁶⁵ Thus it would seem that it is precisely the non-conventional form of *Ibn Furtū*'s writing which allowed him to include in his narrative information which proves to be particularly valuable to the historian.⁶⁶

Finally it should be mentioned that *Ibn Furtū* also provides a wealth of geographical information, quite unexpected for an historical narrative. This aspect of his work will be discussed in the introduction to the geographical gazetteer.

62 *K/B*, II §§ 5, 39; III § 30. See also notes to II §§ 21, 22, 25.

63 See *K/B*, III § 7 and notes to III § 10.

64 See in particular I § 15, III §§ 19, 22 and notes.

65 See *K/B*, VII §§ 6–13 and notes.

66 The author hopes to be able to present soon an historical account in which this information will be used extensively.

