

1. Theories on the Origin of the Hausa States

Current scholarship dates the origins of the Hausa Kingdoms to the middle ages. 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 in the fourteenth Century.³ The most relevant local Arabic source, the *Kano Chronicle*, seems to date the beginning of Kano (according to its unverifiable lengths of reign) to the end of the tenth Century.⁴ Considerations based on trans-Saharan trade tend to explain such an apparently late emergence of these states by the marginality of Hausaland with respect to major trade routes to the north, Kanem-Bornu and Ghana-Gao, lying close to the terminus of well-known caravan routes through the Sahara, appear to have had the benefit of direct communication to the north, while Hausaland seems to have been dependent on its neighbours for similar connections. Hence many historians assume that the Hausa states rose in consequence of an intensification of the medieval trade of the Central Sudan with North Africa.⁵ 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 by M. G. Smith and G. Nicolas emphasise the complexities and the composite nature of many political offices.⁶ It is therefore difficult, if not impossible, to trace the political institutions of Hausaland back to precise political and economic functions.

Five theories try to explain the emergence of the Hausa states without taking into account the impact of medieval trans-Saharan trade. The oldest theory was put forward by anthropologists of the culture-historical school, On the basis of structural comparisons between a great number of African polities, it claims that the Hausa states are best described as divine kingships of the neo-Sudanic type. The many culture traits shared by these kingdoms suggest that they originated from a common source. The geographic point of diffusion of the neo-Sudanic state was variously supposed to have been the ancient Mediterranean world, Pharaonic Egypt or the Semitic cultures of the ancient Near East.⁷ In spite of the fact that this idea has been branded as diffusionist and Hamitic, it survives at present in the form of the Sudanic state theory. The proponents of the Sudanic state theory suppose that at some time during the first centuries AD, migrants from the Nile valley carried the idea of the Pharaonic state towards the

³ Al-Ya'qūbl, al-Fazārl, Ibn Battūta *in*: Levczlon/Hopkins, *Corpus*, 21, 42, 302; Hogben/Kirk-Greene, *Emirates*, 28-98.

⁴ Palmer, *Memoirs*, III, 99; Smith, "Beginnings", 340.

⁵ Smith, "Considerations", 332-333; Hiskett, *Development of Islam*, 70-71; Adamu, "Hausa", 269-271.

⁶ Smith, *Datira*; *id.*, *Kano*, 511-530; Nicolas, *Dynamique*, 203-205. See also Kührne, *Königtum*, 63-92.

⁷ Frobenius, *Und Afrika*, 323-351; Baumann, *Völkerkunde*, 56-57, 61; Westermann, *Geschichte*, 34-46.

west.⁸ However, five arguments must be raised against this idea. First, there is no evidence for the existence of continued relations between the Nile valley and West Africa. Second, the particular structures of West African kingdoms cannot be shown to be 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 that any further diffusion during that period appears very unlikely.

A second theory is of an etymological nature and builds solely on the similarity of names. Thus the legendary hero Bayajidda or Abuyazidu is supposed to have inherited his name from the Berber rebel Abuyazidu who fell in 947 AD fighting against the Fatimids. Followers of the Berber and Khārijid leader are thought to have escaped to the Central Sudan where they conquered segmentary Hausa communities thus founding the Hausa states.⁹ Three shortcomings of the Abu Yazid theory are noteworthy. First, although the hero died in North Africa, the theory assumes that his name spread with some refugees to the Sudan. Second, it postulates that the followers of Abu Yazid were, in spite of their misfortune in the north, able to establish one or several conquest states in the south. Third, the theory very implausibly credits North African Muslims with the foundation of pre-Islamic divine kingships south of the Sahara.¹⁰

A third theory explains the origins of the Hausa states through the expansion of the Kanem-Bornu empire and the later breakaway of its western provinces. This argument also draws on the Bayajidda legend, as before arriving in Hausaland the founding hero stayed for a long time in Bornu and fathered his first descendant with a local wife there. Building further on evidence that prior to the nineteenth Century the Hausa states paid annual tributes to Bornu, it suggests that the Bayajidda legend corresponded to a Bornu tax list.¹¹ Along the same line certain authors suppose that a number of royal symbols and institutions were borrowed by the Hausa states from the suzerain court of Bornu.¹² Although these

⁸ Oliver/Fage, *Short History*, 31-37; Dittmer, "Afrika", 596-618.

⁹ Palmer, *Bornu Sahara*, 273; Hallam, "Bayajidda legend", 49-51; Fage, *History*, 63; Hiskett, *Development of Islam*, 69-71.

¹⁰ Hallam is aware of this contradiction when he writes that the Islamic faith of the immigrants lapsed or lay dormant until later ("Bayajidda legend", 59).

¹¹ Smith, "Beginnings", 347-352; Smith, "Considerations", 336; Sutton, "Less orthodox history", 196-197.

¹² Smith, "Beginnings", 351-352; Lange, "Amt der Königinmutter", 143-144; *id.*, "Hausa-Traditionen", 67-70.

ideas are widely shared by scholars, there is disagreement on chronology. While some historians link the Bornu factor to the state building process, others prefer to date the expansion of Bornu to the late medieval period when the states of Hausaland were already fully developed.¹³ Nevertheless, most of them subscribe to the idea that the Bayajidda legend provides evidence of Bornoan suzerainty: if it can be shown that the legend is old, then Kanem-Bornu must have had considerable influence on the formation of states in Hausaland, but if the legend is a recent invention, then this would imply that the expansion of the Chadic state towards the west occurred too late to significantly influence the emergence of the Hausa states. Both hypotheses assume the validity of the medieval paradigm.

A fourth theory connects Hausa origins to the desertification of the Sahara and to corresponding or later shifts of populations from north to south. It is based on the Bayajidda story insofar as the legend traces the origin of Daura to the reign of primordial queens from North Africa, and on Gobir traditions which suggest a movement of immigration from Air.¹⁴ The nomadic theory gave rise to the Hamitic hypothesis according to which Berber domination of the Hausa had a decisive influence on Hausa state building. The Berbers in question are often thought to have originated from North Africa where they had been acquainted with different types of states.¹⁵ The major problem with this emphasis on long distance diffusion lies in the process of culture transfer. As with the theory of nomads from Egypt discussed above, it is difficult to imagine that camel herders themselves living on the margins of the state and knowing little about royal urban life, could have transmitted detailed ideas about state structures. The theory is even more difficult to sustain if it supposes that local Berbers established conquest states without drawing on any model of a previously existing complex political organization.

The fifth theory is based on the notion of dual institutional structures traced back to the spread of Sudanic trade and Islam. Mainly based on the example of Katsina, the theory supposes that the establishment of a state-like institutional superstructure was the result of an ongoing process of social transformation due to the arrival of Wangara traders and clerics and the corresponding incorporation of Hausaland into the general West African network of long-distance trade

¹³ For the first position see Sutton, "Less orthodox history", 195-199; Lange, "Hausa-Traditionen", 55-60, 67-70; and for the second Smith, "Beginnings", 345-349, and Smith, "Considerations", 335-342.

¹⁴ Palmer, *Memoir*, III, 95-96; Urvoy, *Histoire des populations*, 238-239, 243-245, 251-254, 259-267; Smith, "Considerations", 330-333; Hogben/Kirk-Greene, *Emirates*, 147, 368-369. Similarly but later Last, "Early kingdoms", 189-192.

¹⁵ Palmer, *Bornu Sahara*, 1-3; Westermann, *Geschichte*, 30-32, 126-127; Johnston, *Futani Empire*, 2-6; Nicolas, *Dynamique*, 25-26; Cuoq, *Histoire*, 275-277.

routes. The theory further stipulates that following the conquest of the chieftaincy by members of the Muslim Community of traders, the priest-chief was superseded — without being eclipsed — by a king. In the new System of contrapuntal paramountcy established at the end of the fifteenth Century, the Muslim conqueror of Wangara origin is not only supposed to have confirmed the power of the earlier pagan priest-chief, but also to have raised him to the second highest position in the realm and to have entrusted him with the privilege of electing the king.¹⁶

In spite of the cogent connection between the expansion of trade and the rise of states, the dual institutional theory has a number of weaknesses. According to the Katsina king lists, the usurper Korau was a wrestler from Yandoro who killed his predecessor Sanau.¹⁷ Nothing suggests that Korau was a Wangara trader or a Muslim.¹⁸ In fact, the king lists explicitly state that Islam was introduced by Muhammad Korau, the third successor of Korau. Also, it is unlikely that Muslim traders seized power in Katsina by force of arms and it is even more suspicious that they should have bestowed considerable powers on the existing pagan chief. Therefore it is quite unwarranted to connect the elimination of Sanau with the expansion of Wangara trade and the spread of Islam.

Still, the dual institutional theory rightly considers the transition from Sanau to Korau as a pivotal event in Katsina history corresponding as such to more than just a dynastic change. As chief of the Durbawa, Sanau was the leader of the Aznā clan-family, while Korau, the head of the 'Yan Korau, the "people of Korau", was the leader of the Hausā clan-family, the two sections of Katsina society found all over Hausaland. As we shall see, the political prevalence of either the Hausā or the Aznā clan-family provides the decisive criterion for the distinction between the seven Hausā and the seven Banzā states. The Bayajidda legend itself has the character of a Foundation charter of Hausa society insofar as it not only explains the difference between the Hausā and the Banzā states but also the distinction between the Hausā and the Aznā clan-families within the two categories of Central Sudanic states.¹⁵ Since the coexistence of the two clan-families is constitutive for the Hausa societies and states, it cannot possibly have been introduced by foreign intruders in the late medieval period.

¹⁶ Fuglestad, "Reconsideration", 326-328; Palmer, "Katsina Emirate", in: Tempel/Temple, *Notes*, 472.

¹⁷ Palmer, "History of Katsina", 221-222; Nicolas, *Dynamique*, 65.

¹⁸ The supposition that Korau was a Wangara trader rests mainly on Korau's assumed Yandoro origin which itself is disputed by Usman (*Transformation*, 16).

¹⁹ This is only the case for the oral version of the legend (see below sec. 11), the validity of which is confirmed by independent traditions for Katsina and Gobir (Nicolas, *Dynamique*, 65, 161).

Hausa History in the Context of the Ancient Near Eastern World

The rise of African history as an academic discipline is characterized by an emphasis on local developments. From the example of Hausa historiography it can be seen that the dismissal of any important influence from the outside world, disregarding earlier proposals to this effect²⁰, has led research into a *cul-de-sac*. For more than two decades no significant attempts have been made to overcome these obvious chronological and conceptual shortcomings of the available reconstructions of Hausa history. At present we are therefore reduced to a number of confusing and mutually exclusive theories. The evidence of the following pages will show that placing Hausa society and history in the context of ancient Near Eastern history and culture opens up new perspectives for research.