

The Chronicle of Kanem-Bornu introduces two concepts of origin: one turns the South Arabian hero Sayf b. Dhi Yazan of the late pre-Islamic period into the great ancestral figure of the Chadic state, and the other proposes a genealogical link of the Kanem-Bornu rulers with the long line of biblical patriarchs down to Abraham and Ishmael. Although it is documented as early as the thirteenth Century, the connection with Sayf b. Dhi Yazan is certainly due to Islamic Feedback.⁹⁸ It might have resulted from the attempt to turn an earlier clan deity called Sef — perhaps identical with the Arabic-Canaanite Isāf and the Canaanite Baal Saphon — into a legendary figure by identifying it, on account of the similarity of names, with the Yemenite hero Sayf (b. Dhi Yazan). The genealogical list at the beginning of the Chronicle further refers to the mother of the hero as a princess of Baghdad. An ancient legend calls this princess Aisria and depicts her as a great ancestral figure having several sons. The first, Ngalma Duku, was the ancestor of the Duguwa, the first dynasty of Kanem-Bornu, and the second, Sef, the ancestor of the Sefuwa, the second dynasty. Having vanquished his elder brother in a mock fight and accidentally killed him, Sef became ruler of the kingdom.¹⁰⁰ This incident would seem to refer to the great cultural revolution of Kanem which resulted in the demise of the Duguwa and the rise of the Sefuwa around 1068 AD. Earlier scholarship considers the advent of the Sefuwa as a dynastic change.¹⁰¹ Yet, to conceive the Duguwa and the Sefuwa merely as two dynasties or two royal houses misses the cultural dimension of the upheaval of 1068 AD, does not take into account the resurgence of the Duguwa or Zaghāwa state in the fourteenth Century, and disregards the dualistic social organization common to the Kanuri and Hausa societies.¹⁰²

The second concept of origin refers to biblical ancestors. It starts with Adam and mentions all the patriarchs down to Abraham and Ishmael with the exception of one. It further adds seventeen Arabic names including Quraysh, the ancestor of the Prophet Muhammad, but these names, being incompatible with southern and northern Arabic genealogical figures, are clearly late artificial insertions.¹⁰³ Only

⁹⁸ Lange, *Diwan*, 22-23, 65. For the text of the thirteenth century Arab geographer Ibn Sa'id see *id.*, "Region du lac Tchad", 163, 168.

⁹⁹ For Isāf, the companion of Nā'ila, see Fahd, *Pantheon*, 175, and for Baal Saphon see Pope, "Baal-Hadad", in: Haussig, *Wörterbuch*, 257-258.

¹⁰⁰ Legend of the "Five tribes of Kanem", Palmer, *Memoirs*, II, 83-84; Jäger, "Ursprungstradition", 198-199.

¹⁰¹ Lange, "Progres de l'Islam", 498-509; *id.*, "Ethnogenesis", 263-265; Hiskett, *Course of Islam*, 104-105.

[02] ^{or the} lajgg jcjenticy between the Duguwa and the Zaghāwa see Lange, *Diwan*, 148-153, and for the return of the Zaghāy or Zaghāwa to power Lange, *Ethnogenesis'u*, 271-272.¹⁰³ Lange, *Diwan*, 65 n. 7.

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| 1. Adam |
| 2. Seth |
| 3. Enosh |
| 4. Kenan (= Qenan) |
| 5. Mahalalel |
| 6. Zayd b. Mabrak (= Jared) |
| 7. Enoch |
| 8. Methuselah Matusalim |
| 9. Lamak |
| 10. Noah |
| 11. Shem |
| 12. Arphaxad |
| 13. Shelah |
| 14. Eber, <i>commander</i> |
| 15. – |
| 16. Arku (= Re‘u) |
| 17. Serug |
| 18. Nahor |
| 19. Azar, <i>brother of Terah</i> |
| 20. Abraham |
| 21. Ishmael |
| ⋮ |
| (<i>followed by 17 Arabic names</i>) |
| ⋮ |
| 39. Sayf b. Dhi Yazan,
<i>son of a princess of Baghdad (=Aisha)</i> |

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Chart 5: The patriarchs of Israel as legendary ancestors of the kings of Kanem-Bornu

the link of the name Eber with the ethnonym Hebrew and hence any outstanding quality of this patriarch.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, the fourth patriarch is called Kenan in spite of the biblical form Qenan and a corresponding spelling in the Arabic chronicles. Similarly Re‘u, the name of the sixteenth patriarch called Arghu by the Arab authors, is written Arku.¹⁰⁸ Support for the existence of a pre-Arabic version of the Chronicle of Kanem-Bornu comes from the Kanuri loanword

the reference to Ishmael is highly significant as it indicates a non-Israelite line of descent, either among the northern Arabs or among the Phoenicians.¹⁰⁴ One might have expected that the earlier, purely biblical section of this genealogy was likewise copied from a late Arabic source. However some details make it likely that these names derive rather from an earlier internal written source than from any Muslim world history – although the latter also tend to begin with an account of the successive biblical patriarchs.¹⁰⁵ Most strikingly, the patriarch Methuselah is given the second, explanatory name Matusalim mentioned in early Christian literature but unknown to the biblical books and to Muslim authors.¹⁰⁶ Next, the importance of Eber, the eponymic ancestor of the Hebrews, is highlighted by the additional epithet “commander”, although Muslim historians ignore

¹⁰⁴ For Ishmael as ancestor of the northern Arabs and as builder – together with Abraham – of the Ka‘ba see Kor., 2: 125-127; Paret, “Ismā‘īl”, EI², IV, 193.

¹⁰⁵ For example al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh* (872), al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* (915) and Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī’l-tārīkh* (1230).

¹⁰⁶ The name Matusalim first appears in the old church (*BHHW*, II, 1207). The Septuagint and the Vulgata have Mathusala.

¹⁰⁷ Num 24: 24 implies this qualification but Islamic authors do not mention it.

¹⁰⁸ Since the Chronicle of Bornu has an initial *kāf* in Qenan one may expect that it was based on a Greek text like the Septuagint which does not distinguish between *kāf* and *kōf*

girgām referring to both written and oral historical information and which seems to derive from *girginakku* “box for tablets, library”, an Akkadian loanword from Sumerian.¹⁰⁹ Other Sumerian loanwords noted in Kanuri corroborate the hypothesis of ancient Near Eastern cultural influences reaching the region of Lake Chad via the Canaanites of North Africa.¹¹⁰ Considering that the Ugaritic ancestors of these Canaanites also collected Sumerian documents in their archives, especially scribal exercises based on oral traditions,¹¹¹ it would not be surprising if similar traditions were once cherished in the Phoenician cities of North Africa and – why not – in their colonies south of the Sahara. Early Christian influences may have penetrated to the Central Sudan as a consequence of the political involvement of the Byzantine Empire in Fezzan in the second half of the sixth century.¹¹² The internal transmission of a biblical genealogy – perhaps successively in Hebrew and Greek – can hardly be interpreted other than as an indication of Israelite origins.

In spite of the deep influence of Islam on Kanuri culture, there are also a number of legendary and institutional survivals which point to a considerable degree of earlier exposure to Canaanite-Israelite culture.¹¹³ Most notably, the Chronicle of Kanem-Bornu, besides its claim of a Yemenite and Israelite origin of the ruling group, states that the first rulers of the kingdom were not black in complexion but “red as the Arab Bedouins”. It is only from Salmama b. ‘Abd Allāh (1176-1203) onwards that they are said to have been “very black”.¹¹⁴ Owing to the fact that Ḥumē (1068-1080), the first Sefuwa ruler, belonged to an ancient local clan, the reference to white ancestors can hardly be related to Berbers.¹¹⁵ It is certainly based on authentic traditions, although it does not necessarily refer to the twelfth century since mainly folk-etymological considerations seem to have

(Luke 3: 37). The *kāf* in Arku (Hebrew: Re‘u) may be explained by the Greek transcription of ‘*ayin* by *gamma* (Luke 3: 35).

¹⁰⁹ CAD, V, 86-87. An illustration of a box in which the tablets were kept is to be found in: Meissner, *Babylonien*, II, 331 and ill. n° 44.

¹¹⁰ Drexel, “Bornu und Sumer”, 215-294; Lange, “Ursprung des Bösen”, 4-6.

¹¹¹ The bibliography of Cunchillos lists 127 Sumerian and 757 Accadian texts (*Trouvaille épigraphique*, 15-83). For the written and oral use of Sumerian in Ugarit see Krecher, “Schreiberschulung in Ugarit”, 132-133.

¹¹² For further details see below pp. 277-287 and Lange, “Slave trade” (in press).

¹¹³ Lange, “Dimension”, 171-172; Jäger, “Ursprungstraditionen”, 197-200.

¹¹⁴ Lange, *Diwān*, 70-71. For the slightly amended chronology see below p. 552.

¹¹⁵ As I wrongly assumed earlier (*Diwān*, 98-99, 157; “Kingdoms of Chad”, 239-243; “Ethnogenesis”, 264-265).

led to the singling out of a specific Sefuwa ruler as being the first black king of Kanem.¹¹⁶

Above all, it should be observed that the chronicle insists on the importance of the patriarchal figure of Abraham, and in connection with him on the great significance of Sef and Dugu, thus indicating a dualistic social organization. Followed by Ishmael – and not Isaac – Abraham is the last great patriarch of the genealogical list. As a successor of Sef, he is again mentioned in the king list properly speaking in the sequence Sayf – Abraham – Dūkū.¹¹⁷ In a legend of the sixteenth century, he is said to have led the migration to Kanem.¹¹⁸ More recent legends insist on the important role of Dugu Bremmi, who can be identified due to his name and his burial place of Yeri Arfasan with the third figure of the king list, Dūkū b. Ibrāhīm.¹¹⁹ According to legends he fought a war far to the south and left behind him a number of pagan descendants, the Mbum, the Tuburi, the Musgu and the Teda, some of whom were still tributaries of Bornu in the nineteenth century.¹²⁰ From the evidence presented so far, it appears that the Duguwa of Kanem-Bornu indeed occupied a position similar to that of the Aznā of Hausaland (especially in Katsina): they were descendants of Abraham, they were an internal and external ruling group and they stood in opposition to another ruling group.¹²¹

In comparative perspective, the evidence points to the antagonistic position between Sef and Dugu as parallel to the opposition between Bawo and Karbagari among the Hausa, Isaac-Jacob and Ishmael among the Israelites, and Obatala and Oduduwa among the Yoruba. Therefore it may be assumed that the Duguwa and the Sefuwa were two clans or groups of clans with mainly cult-mythological functions, one representing the deities of the netherworld and the other those of the upperworld. With the rise of Islam in the second half of the eleventh century, the party of upperworld deities naturally turned more easily to the new religion than

¹¹⁶ Moreover, it should be noted that Kanuri speakers are tempted to derive Salmama from *salām* “black”.

¹¹⁷ Lange, *Diwān*, 65-66.

¹¹⁸ Ibn Furtū, *K. ghazawāt Kānem*; transl. Palmer, *Memoirs*, I, 15. According to the *Girgam*, Sayf was buried in Kanem (Lange, *Diwān*, 66).

¹¹⁹ Barth notes that the Kanuri situate Yeri Arfasa in the Musgu country, *Travels*, II, 581. See also Palmer, *Memoirs*, II, 103-107, and Lange, *Diwān*, 66.

¹²⁰ Legend of “Mai Dugu Bremmi”, in: Palmer, *Memoirs*, II, 106-107; Last, “Early kingdoms”, 192-193. The Tuburi, Musgu and Mbum inhabit a region situated 300 to 400 km south of Lake Chad. The Teda live north and northeast of the lake up to the mountains of Tibesti.

¹²¹ The Arab geographers appear to have called them first Zaghāwa and later Zaghāy (Lange, *Diwān*, 151-153; *id.*, “Ethnogenesis”, 265).

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did the party of netherworld deities and hence the Sefuwa eclipsed the Duguwa. It was the incompatibility of the netherworld deities with Islam which seems to have led to the branding of the Duguwa as pagans – just as with the Aznā among the Hausa – although in fact they did convert to Islam.¹²² It also explains why the Duguwa rulers were overthrown by the Sefuwa despite their conversion to Islam. Nevertheless, contrary to the Aznā of Hausaland, the Duguwa continued to play important political roles in the fourteenth and in the first half of the fifteenth century. Some of them, in particular the Bulala, having organized a movement for the restoration of divine kingship under the cover of nominal Islam, expelled the Sefuwa from Kanem and confined them to Bornu, the western province of their ancient kingdom. Others, integrated into the state of the Sefuwa, were able to rule for short periods as kings.¹²³ By that time, Islam had largely eliminated the earlier polytheistic implications of clanship.