

***Ancient Kingdoms of West Africa—Africa-Centred and Canaanite-Israelite Perspectives: A Collection of Published and Unpublished Studies in English and French.*** By Dierk Lange. Die Deutsche Bibliothek—CIP—Einheitsaufnahme. Dettelbach: Verlag J. H. Röhl, 2004. Pp. xiv, 586; 68 new and reprinted maps, charts, photographs, and tables. € 60.00.

What an eclectic volume University of Bayreuth Professor Dierk Lange has produced. The book reprints some seventeen of the professor's studies: articles in French and in English from various scholarly publications, particularly the *Journal of African History*. Ranging chronologically from 1977 to 1996 and topically over Kanem-Bornu, the Hausa states, the Yoruba states, and the states of the Middle Niger prior to 1591, Lange has selected these studies from a listed bibliography of his works that includes sixty-two journal articles and chapters from collectively written books plus unpublished field notes accumulated between

1976 and 2002. The republished studies reflect what Lange calls his "intellectual adventure" (p. 1).

The Preface explains that, like most African historians who came of age in the 1960s, Lange rejected the diffusionist theories of precolonial state formation in tropical Africa that had been popularized during the colonial period in favor of "a vigorously African perspective of the African past" (p. 102). However, in his later years, realizing that this perspective had "erected a formidable barrier between Africa and the outside world" (p. 162), he returned to a guardedly diffusionist perspective but with the caveat that the architects of ethnogenesis and state formation in the distant past of tropical Africa had been much more discerning in what they adopted from the outside than the old colonial historiography had recognized.

The volume opens with a 1977 study of the archaeological possibilities of the Central Saharan trade route linking Fezzan and Lake Chad, via Kawar. A 1982 study of the mining of alum in Medieval Kawar and its export to the Mediterranean world comes next. The studies appearing in the three succeeding sections reveal the steps by which Lange became a revisionist specialist in the early dynastic histories of Kanem-Bornu, the Hausa states, and the Yoruba states. The articles in the fifth section reveal the author's developing parallel interest in exploring the common origins and the fluidity of the historical interactions of Ghana, Mali, Songhay, and the Almoravids. These studies are followed by a final set of comments titled "*Addenda et Corrigenda*." Surprisingly, the studies are reprinted with the typefaces, formatting, and pagination of the original publications. Thus, the set as a whole gives the impression that it is a kind of festschrift that the author has assembled and dedicated to his own intellectual development.

But there is more to this volume than a re-display of old laurels. Two "new" studies written specifically for this volume—N<sup>os</sup>. XII, "Hausa History in the Context of the Ancient Near Eastern World," and XV, "The Dying and Rising God in the New Year Festival of Ife"—reflect Lange's developing interest in cultural influences of the ancient Near East on West Africa and a consequent undertaking of two multiyear research projects at the University of Bayreuth (from 1999 to 2004) funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft). These projects explored and speculated about possible links between ancient and surviving culture patterns, including patterns of state-formation identifiable in the savanna zone societies of West Africa, particularly the Hausa states and Kanem-Bornu, and the civilizations of the ancient Near East, particularly those of Mesopotamia and Canaan. The two resulting "new" studies plus a third one—N<sup>o</sup>. XX, "From Ghana and Mali to Songhay: The Mande Factor in Gao History"—that identifies and describes the very close links between the origins and the interactions of Ghana, the Almoravids, Mali, and Songhay, provide a core of originality to this volume. The first two studies, indeed, reflect the volume's secondary title, *Africa-Centred and Canaanite-Israelite Perspectives*.

Dierk Lange is clearly a revisionist who subjects the ideas and conclusions of other historians to intense analysis not so much to disprove them, but to carry

them several steps forward. His originality comes from his having taken very seriously the myths and traditions of origin of the Kanuri, the Hausa, and the Yoruba, among others. He subjects the *Diwan*, the written chronicle of the Sefuwa rulers of Kanem, the Bayajidda legend of the Hausa, and the Oduduwa tradition of the Yoruba (as well as other relevant oral traditions, and the writings of the medieval Arab/Berber geographers and historians of Africa) to intense textual, comparative, linguistic, anthropological, and historical analysis. Although more prone to proving his points by analogy than by evoking empirical data, Lange does argue empirically for the transmission of ancient Semitic cultural patterns to the interior of West Africa through intensive slave trading on the part of the Carthaginians, via the Central Saharan trade route.

Although Professor Lange's arguments regarding the Carthaginian slave trade appear to be well-founded, one wonders how a relatively small number of anonymous Semitic slave traders moving south could have had such a major cultural (political) impact in Black Africa. Given the numbers involved (far more slaves moving north than slave traders moving south) would not the cultural impact of Black Africans in the classical Mediterranean world have been much greater than the impact of Carthaginians in the African interior?

One has to conclude that Professor Lange's desire to popularize and to promote his latest scholarship is not well served by this book. The reader gets lost in study after study presenting materials that are old or obsolete however much they illustrate the evolution of the author's mind. It would have been far better if Lange had limited himself to writing a short targeted monograph, presenting and defending his arguments regarding the influence of the ancient Near East on the historical development of tropical Africa, particularly West Africa. Still, a specialist will enjoy reading this book both for the review of old materials and ideas that it offers as well as for the challenging new ideas offered by the new studies it includes.