

This debate has recently been reopened. Dierk Lange, a professor of African history at the University of Bayreuth (Germany), in *Ancient Kingdoms of West Africa: Africa-Centred and Canaanite-Israelite Perspective* (2004), using hitherto unexplored sources, presents the development of the West African empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay from a new perspective of ethnogenesis.⁸⁸ He maintains that the main clan and state structures of several West African kingdoms are based on the same dualistic pattern as that of the Canaanite-Israelite and hence also Phoenician societies. Supported by written records, oral traditions, and cult-dramatic performances, these similarities suggest the existence of early trans-Saharan contacts reaching back to the pre-Roman period.⁸⁹ The Phoenician trade appears to have been the single most important factor explaining the transfer of these organizational forms from North Africa to the sub-Saharan region,⁹⁰ where they could be particularly prominent in the Hausa and Yoruba societies. The Hausa and Yoruba traditions are considered by Lange as a phenomenon of *longue durée* that can be traced back to an Israelite model based on Canaanite antecedents. According to Lange, similar social institutions were transmitted from the Semitic world to the Horn of Africa, as a result of the ancient myrrh and frankincense trade, and some of these polities grew so powerful that they conquered and controlled a number of kingdoms in West and East Africa.⁹¹

Although these ideas have been branded as diffusionist and Hamitic, Lange's approach to Africa's regional history is a bold attempt to place East and West Africa kingdoms in the context of ancient Near Eastern history and culture. Lange's hypotheses represent a real challenge to the present paradigm of African history and open up new perspectives for research.