

## DATING RULERS OF KANEM-BORNU

*Le diwan des sultans du (Kanem-) Bornu: Chronologie et Histoire d'un Royaume Africain.* Par DIERK LANGE. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1977. Pp. x+174. DM 36 (in 1977), soft Covers.

This is the revised version of a *thèse de 3<sup>e</sup> cycle* completed in 1974 under the supervision of Professors Mauny and Person. It falls into two main sections, an edition, translation and annotation of the *Diwan salaṭīn Bornu*, the chronicle of the Saifawa or, as Dr Lange insists, Sefuwa, rulers of Kanem and later Borno, together with a chronological study. The second section is concerned with the legends and early history of the area and in particular with the origin of the Saifawa.

It is the first section that most scholars will find most valuable. The *Diwān* was first brought to the attention of European scholarship by Henry Barth who obtained a copy in 1851 and sent it back to Europe where it was published in a German translation by Otto Blau. Barth, on his return from Borno, was very critical of Blau's work and included his own interpretation in the chronological outline of Borno history incorporated in his *Travels*. Some years later Gustav Nachtigal published a list with a chronology based upon a version of the *gīrgam* or simple kinglist that circulates widely in Borno. In the colonial period, Hanns Vischer and P. A. Benton published similar lists. It was only in the 1920s that a more scholarly approach was attempted. This was by H. R. Palmer who obtained a copy of the Barth/Blau manuscript from Germany. The Arabic text was published with the Arabic version of *Imām Aḥmad b. Fartuwa's* account of the campaigns of Mai Idrīs; the translation appeared in the English version of Ibn Fartuwa's *The First Twelve Years of the Reign of Mai Idrīs* and again in Palmer's *Bornu, Sahara and Sudan*. Five years later, Yves Urvoy brought out his comparative study of all the published lists. It is most unfortunate that the very inaccurate list resulting from his study has been widely used by those concerned with the area, giving rise to many errors of interpretation. Others - such as John Hunwick - have attempted revisions of the chronology for limited periods but Lange's is the first full-scale scholarly study, for both text and translation are accompanied by a full *apparatus criticus* with emendations of the text and alternative readings. The translation appears with place and personal names presented as directly transliterated from the Arabic, a most useful way of dealing with *ajami*. However, it does at times give rise to some unfamiliar forms of common names: thus Biri, a common name, is rendered Bir, while Ibn Fartuwa appears as Ibn Fartu. Surprisingly, Lange renders Nabiy Musa as the 'prophete Mo'ise'.

It is Lange's handling of the chronology that will interest most readers. The sixty-eight reigns have been broken down into blocks or sections based upon fixed points or Special criteria, and attempts have been made to ensure internal consistency within each block. The first section begins with the fall of Birni Gazargamu and the abdication of Mai Aḥmad in 1808 at the time of the Fullata War and not with the end of the dynasty in 1846. This has come about because although the latter event is known to us with more precision than any other happening in Saifawa history the sequence of events associated with the rise of the al-Kanemiyyin and the Fullata troubles is confused. Notwithstanding the related confusion over the precise date of the fall of Birni, we are certain of the year and Lange Starts from this point. A most happy discovery by Lange - an account of Tripoli taken down in Paris in 1697 - refers to the death in Fazzan in 1696 of Mai Idrīs b. 'All. This first block - 1808-1696 - reveals a divergence of less than a year (114.7 as against 115.5 years) between internal and external chronologies. While Lange's careful approach to the problem gives us confidence in his conclusions one

does wonder why he fails to take account of, if only to dismiss, the *Brief Diwan*, which purports to have been set down in the mid-eighteenth Century. The second section, 1696—1564, brings greater divergence from accepted chronologies but divergences that are persuasive. Thus the reign of AU b. 'Umar is now dated 1639-77 while his father, 'Umar b. Idris, ascends the throne in 1619, a date incidentally that makes more sense of references to him in the *Fazzan Chronicle*. Finally, Idris (Alawma) b. 'All is placed slightly earlier than 1564-1596. The rulers in the third section, 1564-1440, are all placed slightly earlier than they had been. 'All b. Dunama, the first *Khalifa*, rules from 1465-1497, but the reasoning is clear. It is with the fourth and fifth sections, 1440—1296 and 1296—c. 1078 that we find more controversial changes. Dunama (Dibalami) b. 'Abdullāh now rules 1210-1248 and thus cannot be the ruler mentioned by Ibn Khaldun as an associate of the Hafids. Hummay (perhaps more familiär as Umme or Hume), traditionally seen as the first Muslim ruler of Kanem, is now seen as ruling from 1075 to 1086. This reviewer was initially very unhappy with this section of Dr Lange's work (it was such misgivings that caused him to delay the preparation of this review), but he is now forced to admit that - while some doubts remain - his experience of using the new chronology shows many of the revised datings to be very convenient! Used with due care we have a valuable new tool at our disposal.

The second section of this book is far more speculative. It is concerned with the early history of the region, in the course of which Dr Lange revives the hypothesis that the Saifawa were an intrusive dynasty that supplanted an earlier group, the Duguwa or Bani Dugu. He suggests that the newcomers were of Berber origin coming in through Kawar Oasis. There is a valuable discussion of the material relating to this early period which brings together legends, data from the Arab geographers, and even some archaeological evidence: in all a very useful collection of material for those interested in the history of the region; but this reviewer remains to be convinced that the evidence supports Dr Lange's arguments.

Lest the foregoing be construed as a condemnation of Dr Lange's work, let me hasten to add that this is a book that no scholar concerned with the region between the Niger and the Nile, the Benue Valley and North Africa can ignore, indeed can afford not to have on his bookshelf. Dr Lange might put forward conclusions unacceptable to some of us but he never fails to provide us with sufficient evidence for us to reach our own differing conclusions.

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## TRADERS IN SOUTH-EASTERN NIGERIA

*Trade Without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-Eastern Nigeria.*

By DAVID NORTHRUP. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978: Pp. x + 269. £16.

This book should already be familiär to historians with a Special interest in south-eastern Nigeria, for it represents an important advance in the region's historiography. The author follows Professor K. O. Dike in identifying the development of the Atlantic slave and palm-oil trades as the central theme in the area's precolonial economic history, and in writing a history in which traders are the most prominent figures. However, Dr Northrup breaks with the Dike tradition in shifting the geographical focus of his concern from the coast to the hinterland, from city-states to scattered trading-posts. In doing this, he has moved from a relatively well-documented field into the unknown: both documentary evidence and formal oral traditions are sparse, for the hinterland, in the precolonial period.