

Dierk Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms of West Africa. Africa-Centred and Canaanite-Israelite Perspectives*, Dettelbach, J.H. Röll GmbH, 2004, 586 pp.

This book is a collection of published and unpublished studies in English and French of Dierk Lange's authorship. The author avows himself in the "Preface" (pp. 1-8) that initially he based his approach to African history solely on written texts, reports of both European consuls and travellers, and later he turned to much more difficult task to analyse writings of Arab geographers, historians and chroniclers. Field research in Libya, Niger and Nigeria made him convinced that the oral narratives and remnants of social and political institutions were of prime importance for rediscovering of the African past. On the basis of written sources and various ethnographic records D. Lange detects "striking parallels" between extant African cultures and written testimonies concerning ancient Near Eastern societies. He tries to prove that in the period preceding the textual evidence of the Middle Ages, African societies were not isolated, but that instead they took part in global exchange. Especially during the Canaanite-Phoenician period, "[...] many culture traits of ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern societies were adopted in African contexts almost unchanged, but others were modified due to local factors, thus giving rise to new cultures with specific forms of their own" (p. 1).

The essential bulk of the collection is preceded by "Bibliography of the Author" (9-12), counting 62 entries (60 articles and 2 books). The book is divided into six sections that are thematically differentiated. These sections are singled out only in the "Contents": somewhere else the articles are arranged in a sequence from I to XX.

The first section (The Central Saharan Route) focuses on trans-

Saharan relations and comprises three studies. The first article, titled "*Al-Qaṣaba* et d'autres villes de la route centrale du Sahara" (pp. 13-34), which has been written with Silvion Berthoud, is a result of a joint research journey along central Saharan trade route between Tripoli and Kavar. This route was one of the oldest commercial ways between Fezzan and the lake Chad. On the basis of archaeological documents a gamut of localities between Lake Chad and Kavar have been detected and described. A special attention is paid to the commercial town of Gezōbi (on map p. 14 - Gesōbi), now abandoned. The authors came to a conclusion that in some regions the Sahara desert provided conditions for easy communication between Sahelian societies and North Africa. Article II, "L'Alun du Kavar. Une exportation africaine vers l'Europe" (pp. 41-47), deals with the medieval export of alum from Kavar. This commodity served colouring the cloths in red and yellow, and was used for tanning the hides and for production of the parchment. In the twelfth century it briefly played an important role in the economy of the Western World. In 1977, when the author conducted his research in Kavar, he was able to detect an abandoned mine of the alun in the vicinity of Bilma. The third article, "Notes sur le Kavar au Moyen-Âge" (pp. 43-47), is also based on the author's observations during his stay in Bilma. It contains further remarks on the alum production in Kavar, and pays attention to the earlier, unrecorded exploitation of salt in that oasis.

Six studies in section two, IV to IX, refer to the history of Kanem-Borno. In article IV, "Progrès de l'islam et changements politiques au Kānem du XI^e au XIII^e siècle: un essai d'interprétation" (pp. 49-67), D. Lange tries to explain the demise of the Duguwa and the rise of the Sefuwa dynasty in the eleven century. According to him, it was a result of the shift from an internal to the external recruitment of slaves. Hummay Jilme, the first ruler of the Sefuwa dynasty, probably belonged to the group of the slave traders on the way between Kanem and Egypt. In article V, "Les lieux de sepulture des rois Sefuwa (Kānem-Bornū): textes écrits et traditions orales" (pp. 69-157) one can find a comparison of information pertaining to the death of a fourteenth century Borno king. The information was provided by the oral narratives on the one hand, and the chronicle of the sultans of Kanem-Bornu (known as *Girgam*) on

the other. The study focuses on identification and elucidation of two place-names, Zamtam (burial place of Dūnama Dibalāmi) and Diskam (burial place of Ibrāhīm Nikāle), ancient Kanuri villages which were flourishing between XIIIth and XIVth centuries. A reconsideration of the shift of the Sefuwa dynasty from Kanem to Borno can be found in article VI, "L'éviction des Sēfuwa du Kānem et l'origine des Bulāla" (pp. 83-99). It is shown here that this event was not a desperate flight of the ruling dynasty to the foreign land of Borno in the fourteenth century (as assumed by some historians). Already towards the end of the reign of Dūnama Dibalāmi (1210-1248) the court of the Sefuwa was shifted to Borno, mainly as a result of disturbances in Kanem. The territorial loss of Kanem during the reign of 'Umar b. Idrīs (1382-1387) was largely compensated by earlier gains in the west. In article VII, "Trois hauts dignitaires bornoans du XVI^e siècle: le digma, le grand jarma et le cikama" (pp. 101-113), the offices and functions of three leading title-holders in Borno are analysed. Their Arabic equivalents are contained in two chronicles of the imam Aḥmad b. Furṭū, which were written in 1576 and 1578 respectively. In spite of the Arabic versions of those titles, all of them were of local derivation and owed very little to the Islamic influence. Article VIII, "Preliminaires à une histoire des Sao" (pp. 115-136) raises the question of the identity of the Sao people which were living to the south of Lake Chad, and were named by the imam Aḥmad b. Furṭū as Sao-Gafata and Sao-Tatala. D. Lange comes to conclusion that all the inhabitants of the Kanembu new Bornoan dominions were called Sao. In a long lasting process of Kanurisation, the autochthons were first dominated and then either assimilated or eliminated. In the last article of the second section, "Ethnogenesis from within the Chadic State. Some Thoughts on the History of Kanem-Borno" (pp. 137-153), one can find a criticism of the widespread assumption that the specific peoples of the Sahelian zone founded and developed their own states. For example, the present-day Kanuri should be considered as an outcome of a long process of ethnic homogenisation and not as a stable ethnic entity existing from the period prior to the foundation of this Chadic state. They can be seen as immigrants from Kanem, who developed their own identity as people of the Borno state. In spite of their close linguistic parentage, the Kanuri must be distinguished from the

Kanembu.

The third section (X-XII) is dealing with the history of the Hausa city-states. Article X, "The Evolution of the Hausa Story: From Bawo to Bayajidda" (pp. 155-169), is dedicated to a flexible character of the Bayajidda legend which reflects rapid and far-reaching changes in pre-colonial African societies. Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, some time after the rise of the Sokoto Caliphate, there appeared a modified version of the Hausa story. Bawo and the prominence given to the Borno connection started to be gradually replaced by Bayajidda and his connections with the Middle East. In article XI, "The Pre-Islamic Dimension of Hausa History" (pp. 171-213), D. Lange looks at the basic pattern of the Hausa tradition and connects it with an Israelite model based on Canaanite antecedents. According to him, "[...] a rather coherent body of legend, myth, ritual and linguistic elements supports the idea that the earliest bearers of Hausa culture, insofar as they are at present identifiable, were Hebrews" (p. 172). Having described and analysed the Hausa legend of origin, the Gani festival of Daura, the Dongo festival of Kebbi and the Bori pantheon, he comes to a conclusion that the forebears of the Hausa had added to their Israelite and Canaanite heritage concepts derived from the Mesopotamian culture. Such statement is very provocative and re-introducing the outdated Hamitic hypothesis by a back door. One can treat it as really "[...] no more than a preliminary attempt to overcome the medieval paradigm in West African history" (p. 3). Various etymological arguments like *Magajiya = Asherah* (p. 184), *Bayajidda = b'l zbl arš* (p. 187), *Bawo = Baal* (p. 190) and others are simply unacceptable. The new essay XII, "Hausa History in the Context of the Ancient Near Eastern World" (pp. 215-305), is a continuation of the preceding one and compares the cult-mythological system of the Hausa city-states with that of various other states of the Central Sudan and of the ancient Near East. It provides also some information on the spread of the Canaanite-Israelite culture pattern to East Africa, and proposes precise ways and periods for the expansion of the foreign cultural pattern to West and East Africa.

The studies of section four (XIII-XV) concern Ife, the traditional centre of the Yoruba culture, and refer also to some other Yoruba states. In article XIII, "Ife and the Origin of the Yorùbá:

Historical Considerations" (pp. 307-318), one can find a review of pre-independence theories on the Yoruba origin, which were advocated by L. Frobenius, Muhammad Bello, S. Johnson, S. Farrow, J.O. Lucas, P.A. Talbot and S. Biobaku. Those theories have been dismissed by post-colonial scholars who had taken into account some internal factors of the development and growth. D. Lange raises here also some dating problems of the naturalistic bronze and terracotta heads that were found by Frobenius in Ife at the beginning of the twentieth century. Article XIV, "Links between West Africa and the Ancient Orient" (pp. 319-369), compares the Yoruba myth of Shango, the war god, with the Baal stories of Ugarit, and the Yoruba myth of Yemoja with the Babylonian creation epic. Then the Kanta legend is compared with that of Sargon of Akkad, thus strengthening the suggestion that some elements of the Near Eastern cultures were introduced into West Africa during the pre-Christian era. One has to remark that the hypothesis is based on an accidental similarity of the gods' and heroes' names. A correction of the main shortcomings of the above analysis was thought to be presented in a new essay entitled "The Dying and the Rising God in the New Year Festival of Ife" (pp. 343-375). It is based on the African connections between oral narrative, cult-dramatic performance, and respective clan organisation. It examines some parallels between the festival of dying and rising god in Ife with the history of a similar deity in the Baal cycle of Ugarit,

Five studies of section five, XVI to XX, are dealing with the history of the kingdoms of the Middle Niger, and make use of the evidence provided by the royal stelae of Gao-Saney. Article XVI, "Les rois de Gao-Sané et les Almoravides" (pp. 377-401), points to a new field of investigation which was opened by the discovery in 1939 of a number of royal tombstones in Gao-Saney. Their inscriptions make the author believe that the commemorated rulers can be identified as members of a new Berber dynasty – the Zāghē, who by the middle of the thirteenth century adopted the title Za, which was the title of the former ruling clan. Article XVII, "From Mande to Songhay: Towards a Political and Ethnic History of Medieval Gao" (pp. 403-429), maintains the Berber hypothesis but suggests also the existence of a Mande ethnic substratum on the eastern Middle Niger. It is claimed that Gao was subject to

influences from both Old Mali and Kebbi. Two further articles reject the Berber hypothesis in favour of the Mande origin of the Gao-Saney kings. In article XVIII, "La chute de la dynastie des Sissé: Considerations sur la dislocation de l'empire du Ghana à partir de l'histoire de Gao" (pp. 431-178) there is a suggestion that the kings of Gao-Senay were descendants of an ancient and powerful dynasty of black Africans. Possibly they were Sissé refugees of the far-removed province of the Ghana Empire. It was the Soninke who contributed a lot towards the promotion of the Islam in Ghana in the Almoravids' period. Article XIX, "The Almoravid Expansion and the Downfall of Ghana" (pp. 455-493), is dedicated to a detailed and internally oriented history of Ghana. The author tries to show that the ancient central province of Ghana was situated in the Lakes region of the Niger. Having distinguished two successive dynastic disruptions in the empire, he came to a conclusion that neither the Islamisation of Ghana, nor the dislocation of the kingdom resulted from the onslaught of the Almoravids. Its decline was rather a result of the collapse of the fundamental institutions of the divine kinship. A new essay number XX, "From Ghana and Mali to Songhay. The Mande Factor in Gao History" (pp. 495-544), contains discussion on the transmission of power on the Middle Niger from Ghana to Mali, and further to Songhay. It is claimed that the Malian expansion resulted in the creation of a vast Muslim empire on the institutional basis of ancient Ghana. After a long domination of the Soninke nobility in Gao, in the seventeenth century the Songhay fully absorbed their former Soninke overlords in their ethnic mould.

The sixth section of the book, "Addenda and Corrigenda" (pp. 545-567), contains a critical re-evaluation and updating of the different articles, which were republished in this book. Particularly interesting is the commentary to article IX ("Ethnogenesis...") with its suggestions on the origin of *mune*, *dirki* and *din tur* cult objects. According to D. Lange all of them reflect important Hebrew-Phoenician influences on early state building processes in the Sahelian belt. In his opinion *mune* could refer to Biblical *manna*! Such etymology of the word does not satisfy the reader, especially

the one who is familiar with an article by Kyari Tijani on this topic.²⁰

The book testifies to the enormous influence of D. Lange on the revaluation and reinterpretation of the West African history. His careful reading and analysis of the historical sources, his own re-edition of some of them, his long-lasting and wide-spread field research not only enormously enlarge our knowledge but also inspire new generations of historians and Africanists representing other scientific disciplines. Of course, it is difficult to agree with the alleged Canaanite-Israelite influences on West African cultures and societies, which are being constantly advocated by the author, ideologically rather than based on sound scientific proofs.

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