Ancient Kingdoms of West Africa

tures of the widespread Kanta legend, my attention was attracted to the narrative of Sargon of Akkad (XIV, 1995e). But comparisons of such a far-reaching nature seemed too speculative as long as they were based only on oral data. Therefore I turned my attention to the Hausa legend and focused on how it was embedded in cult-mythological and social structures. Exploring at the same time the North African and Canaanite horizon of West African history I finally came to the conclusion that the history of contacts with Phoenician North Africa is important for understanding a number of significant features of the Hausa and other Sudanic states (XII).

To Article X (1987d: "Evolution – Bayajidda")

As a first attempt at examining the age of one of the great oral traditions of West Africa, this study considers the reflexes of the Bayajidda legend in various written sources and reaches the conclusion that the core elements of the narrative are older than the available texts. Furthermore, it subscribes to the Bornu tax list theory, according to which a tributary relationship between Bornu and the Hausa states is evidenced in the legend.35 Neglecting the distortions and simplifications of the Hausa tradition of origin in other Hausa towns, the study proposes the erroneous concept of an early nineteenth-century enlargement of the story that was done for the purpose of concealing the former political dependency of the Hausa states on Bornu. The single most important argument in favour of an ancient form of the legend, with Bayajidda as the primordial foundation hero and his two sons as the ancestors of two sets of states, is provided by the parallel Israelite narrative of Abraham and his two sons, Isaac/Jacob and Ishmael, defined as tribal ancestors of the Israelite and Arab tribes (1993b: 56; XII: 235-236). However, the real character of the Bayajidda legend as an ancient foundation charter can only be established by recognising the close connections which exist between the main components of the legend and the different cult-dramatic performances of the Gani festival. Involving the participation of key officials of the Daura state, the re-enactment of the legend during this pre-Islamic festival points to the legend’s elaboration as early as the period of state formation (see above pp. 221-229 and 285-286).

To Article XI (1995a: "Pre-Islamic dimension")

Based on field research in Daura, this article shows that the Bayajidda legend is more than a purely oral narrative since its most significant features are related to ceremonial re-enactments and the tight connections between actions performed during festivals of origin are less evident (XII, 1999b). By pointing to the similarities between the oral traditions carried out by former priests of ancient Nima, the study comes close to the Abuja ritual school in its focus on the study of oral traditions and in the reference of the new research in parallel oral traditions. Methodologically, the study does not provide any evidence of the study of oral traditions (XII, 1999b). The study systematically examines the ritual school in its full account of traditional oral traditions. The study does not provide any evidence of the study of oral traditions (XII, 1999b). The study systematically examines the ritual school in its full account of traditional oral traditions. The study does not provide any evidence of the study of oral traditions (XII, 1999b). The study systematically examines the ritual school in its full account of traditional oral traditions.

Section Four: Yoruba

The history of the Yoruba people is closely linked with written texts. The two major oral traditions recognized by Probyn (1988: 56) are the history of the Kebbi on the Kanta river and the cosmological history recognized by Probyn (1988: 56) is the history of the Kebbi on the Kanta river and the cosmological history of the Kebbi on the Kanta river which is clearly connected to the Kebbi political history. The Kebbi royal title to the name of the Kebbi king is a popular understanding of the Kebbi royal title. The Kebbi royal title to the name of the Kebbi king is a popular understanding of the Kebbi royal title. The Kebbi royal title to the name of the Kebbi king is a popular understanding of the Kebbi royal title. The Kebbi royal title to the name of the Kebbi king is a popular understanding of the Kebbi royal title. The Kebbi royal title to the name of the Kebbi king is a popular understanding of the Kebbi royal title.

ceremonial re-enactments during the pre-Islamic Gani festival. On account of the tight connection between incidents in the oral narrative and cult-dramatic actions performed during New Year festivals, I argue in this article that traditions of origin are less amenable to modifications than earlier thought (1998b; 1999b). By pointing out that the main figures of the Bayajiadda legend survive as former deities within the Bori cult, the article suggests that prior to its legendary form the Hausa story was a myth (see also 1999b: 133-145). In fact, primordial mythology provides the best explanation for the on-going cult-dramatic performances by former priests and priestesses acting on behalf of their former deities. Methodologically, the attempt to relate mythical incidents to ritual performances comes close to the approach adopted by scholars of the well-known myth and ritual school in the field of ancient Near Eastern studies.

The shortcomings of the article consist mainly in haphazardly etymologies and in the reference to isolated culture traits. Furthermore, by restricting itself to the study of parallel phenomena in Hausa and in Canaanite-Israelite societies, it does not provide any historical explanation for the spread of Semitic influences to the societies south of the Sahara. A comprehensive study setting the comparative approach systematically into an historical perspective – without however taking full account of trans-Saharan trade in classical times and related state building processes – is now available with Walter Kühme’s doctoral study on the kingdom of Gobir.36

Section Four: Yoruba States

The history of the Yoruba was not a major concern for historians who deal mainly with written texts. It came to my attention subsequent to my field research in Kebbi on the Kanta legends (1995c; XIII). It struck me that the figure of Sango, recognised by Frobenius to be of central relevance for Yoruba mythology, was clearly connected to the Semitic Baal (1994b: 227-235). The transfer of a priestly royal title to the name of a legendary thunder-god must have been the result of a popular understanding of cult-mythological performances. Ade Obayemi and Biodun Adediran drew my attention to a similar cult-mythological puzzle, the Ifa festval of Ife, which they interpreted as a re-enactment of historical events. Pursuing my readings in ancient Near Eastern mythology and continuing brief interviews with Ife priests, I came to realize that the Ifa festival provided in

36 Kühme, Königstum. Frauke Jäger suggests that the spread of iron technology across the Sahara was linked to the trans-Saharan trade in the Phoenician period ("Craftmen", 174-180). For the Phoenician factor in the state building process south of the Sahara see Lange 2003: 3-6, and above pp. 277-287.