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The Chad region as a crossroads

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The Lake Chad region, which is a savanna zone, has been inhabited by pastoral and agricultural peoples since before the beginning of the Christian era. To the north, where the savanna gradually merges into desert, nomad peoples predominate, though there are also oases with settled communities. To the south, especially along the banks of the rivers that flow into Lake Chad, mainly sedentary cultures are found. The desiccation of the Sahara and the shrinkage of Lake Chad drew peoples from various directions towards the diminishing lake. The coming together of peoples from various no longer viable areas and their attempts to adjust to the changing environment and circumstances form the background of the history of the area.

For a clearer insight into the significance of the historical facts, a precise account of the climatic changes which occurred during the period under review would have been desirable. In fact very little is known about the climate of the Sahel during the first millennium of the Christian era. However, there are several indications that climatic conditions during that period were, on the whole, better than those now prevailing. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that, between the third century and the beginning of the thirteenth century of the Christian era, the waters of Lake Chad flowed almost continuously into the Baḥr al-Ghazāl, which presupposes that the lake level exceeded 286 m.[1] Moreover, J. Maley considers, in the light of various data, that a wet period occurred in the middle of the first millennium, and that the Sahelian region underwent an arid phase in the eleventh century.[2] The area of contact between sedentary and nomadic peoples must therefore have extended further to the north than at present.

Moreover, it cannot be taken for granted that the Lake Chad region was always a crossroads for trade and fruitful interactions. Currently available dates for the spread of iron-working techniques suggest that some populations in the region long remained cut off from the major innovatory trends. The main divide in this regard would seem to be between west and east

1. J. Maley, 1981, pp. 65, 101. Lake Chad's present level is situated at 282 m.
2. ibid., pp. 65, 278.

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rather than between north and south. Indeed, it is now known that, to the south of Aïr, at Ekne Wan Aparan, iron-smelting techniques were known as early as -540 ± 90,[3] a date closely concordant with that of -440 ± 140 obtained at Taruga (Nok culture) in central Nigeria.[4] In the region of Termit, between Aïr and Lake Chad, iron-working would seem to have been practised in the seventh century before the Christian era.[5] Elsewhere, iron-working techniques were adopted much later. At Koro Toro, between Lake Chad and Tibesti, the vestiges of a culture based on iron metallurgy have been discovered. Known as *ḥaddād* after the Arabic term for 'blacksmith', this culture flourished only between the fourth and eighth centuries of the Christian era. The painted pottery found on the same sites points to affinities with two major civilizations of the Nile Valley: Meroe and Nubia during its Christian period.[6] Other data are available for the region around the southern shores of Lake Chad. According to relatively unreliable datings, iron was not to be found on the major site of Daima until the fifth or sixth century of the Christian era, and it was later still before iron-smelting techniques were adopted.[7] These few indications concerning the archaeology of iron show that, prior to the foundation of Kānem, the Lake Chad region was remarkable more for its divisions and unequal levels of development than for any unifying factor.

A process of more rapid and spectacular changes appears to have begun around the middle of the first millennium of the Christian era. It was triggered off probably indirectly by the introduction of the camel into the area either from North Africa or – as seems more probable – from the Nile Valley, and its adoption by the Zaghāwa and the Tubu. Being far better adapted to the natural conditions prevailing in the Sahara than was the horse, the camel made long desert crossings perfectly feasible, and could transport relatively heavy loads into the bargain. Between the Fezzān and the Lake Chad region, the natural conditions were particularly propitious for crossing the Sahara: a whole series of small oases and natural waterholes and, mid-way, the vast oasis of Kawār, provided an ideal caravan route.

Another opportunity for commerce was with the Nile Valley through Dārfūr and Kordofān. In the absence of any precise archaeological data concerning these routes one can only conjecture; it would seem that in the earlier period trade with the Nile Valley was more important. On the other hand the existence of the ancient kingdom of the Garamantes in the Fezzān was undoubtedly a major factor in the organization of long-distance trade;[8]

3. D. Grébénard, personal communication.
4. B. Fagg, 1969; see also R. Tylecote, 1975.
5. G. Quéchon and J.-P. Roset, 1974, p. 97.
6. F. Treinen-Claustre, 1978, pp. 330–3; see also P. Huard, 1966; Y. Coppens, 1969.
7. G. Connah, 1971, p. 57. Having reassessed previous datings, the same author now proposes +50 as the date of the introduction of iron to Daima (G. Connah, 1981, pp. 146–7).
8. R. C. C. Law, 1967b.

but again the absence of evidence concerning the southern oases of the Fezzān and Kawār, where remains of fortifications of uncertain date are visible to the naked eye, makes any positive conclusion uncertain.[9]

It would seem, however, that as early as the seventh century of the Christian era the central Saharan route was plied by small caravans from the Fezzān, since the celebrated Arab conqueror 'Uḳba b. Nāfi' would have found it difficult to penetrate as far as Kawār – which third/ninth century sources assert he did – had the trail not been blazed before him by either Berber or Zaghāwa traders.[10] The Kawār oasis[11] was certainly not the final destination of these caravans and the traders had undoubtedly already passed beyond it, to reach the Lake Chad region. In later times the central Saharan route became more important following the establishment of regular trade between the Lake Chad area and the Mediterranean coast which followed the Islamic conquests and the rise of Muslim states in North Africa and later in the Sahara.

In the south, around Lake Chad, a whole series of factors, including not only trade expansion but also the development of better weapons and tools and the evolution of new ways of life to deal with changing circumstances, were to lead to the foundation and expansion of a vast political entity, Kānem-Bornu, whose unifying power and capacity for innovation helped to shape the destiny of the entire region up to the beginning of the colonial era. However, before describing the foundation and early development of that political entity in greater detail, it is proper to give a concise, chronologically balanced account of the principal peoples or, where precise knowledge of them is lacking, of the linguistic groups dwelling between the middle Niger and the Dārfūr mountains.

Peoples and languages of the Chad region

The Arab geographers provide information that throws a revealing light on the early history of Africa. Concerned as they were to recreate as accurate as possible a 'word picture' (*ṣūrat al-arḍ*), these authors gathered geographical data on the Muslim countries and on the lands situated beyond Islam's boundaries. Their information should, however, be treated with caution since most of them had never visited black Africa but gathered their information from traders who were not unbiased and from black African pilgrims many of whom had left home a long time before and may

9. D. Lange and S. Berthoud, 1977; see also H. Ziegert, 1969.

10. Two authors write of the expedition of 'Uḳba b. Nāfi' to the Kawār: Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, 1922, p. 195, and al-Bakrī, 1911, pp. 13–14. The former was writing before 257/871, while the latter wrote his work in 460/1068, albeit basing his account in part on earlier sources. Cf. Chapters 9 and 11 above.

11. The name Kawār is probably of Berber origin, and denotes the 'Blacks' or Negroes. This meaning survived in *ḥasaniyya* (Mauritania) where the term *kūri* (pl. *kowār*) was applied to black Africans whose status was that of freemen.

therefore not have been in a position to know the current situation at home. When describing foreign peoples the Arab geographers often used literary clichés and the names given by them are in many cases generic terms.[12] Thus we invariably encounter references to the *Zandj* in East Africa, the *Ḥabash* in Ethiopia and the *Sūdān* in West Africa, without the defining characteristics of these 'peoples' ever being properly established. In addition to general terms, a few authors also mention ethnonyms passed on by travellers; however, their identification often poses problems. Moreover, the geographical placing of these ethnic entities varies considerably from one author to another. It was not until Ibn Sa'īd produced his *Geography* in the seventh/thirteenth century that highly precise information on the Lake Chad region became available.[13] Only in modern times do we find its equivalent.

Before Ibn Sa'īd, most Arab geographers mention the *Zaghāwa* people when referring to the Central Sudan (an expression used here synonymously with the 'Chad region'). Until the fourth/tenth century, well-informed Arab authors suggest that the Zaghāwa held sway over Kānem; however, al-Idrīsī, writing in the sixth/twelfth century, gives particulars that bring out their purely nomadic nature.[14] Disregarding the lessons to be learned from earlier sources, modern authors have frequently played down the role of the Zaghāwa, either regarding them as a marginal group[15] or, on the contrary, supposing them to be an extremely extensive group, identical to the present-day Tubu.[16] As will be seen below, the Zaghāwa did in fact undergo radical transformations as a result of a dynastic change which occurred in Kānem in the middle of the second half of the fifth/eleventh century. The ethnic balance and the ratio of sedentary to nomadic peoples ceased to be the same after the advent of the new dynasty in Kānem.

The main internal source, the *Dīwān salāṭīn Barnū*, contains an ethnic nomenclature that cannot be checked against that of external sources. For until the end of the seventh/thirteenth century, the chroniclers of the royal court took pains to indicate the names of the ethnic groups from which the successive queen mothers had originated. We know, for example, that in the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries the kings of Kānem married women of the Tomaghra, the Kay and the Tubu.[17] Today, the name Tomaghra is applied to a clan dwelling among the Teda, the Kānembu and the Kanuri. The name Kay denotes a Kanuri clan, while Tubu is the generic name used by the Kānembu speakers to refer to the Teda-Daza.

12. Concerning the merits of the Arab sources of this period, see Unesco, *General History of Africa*, Vol. I, ch. 5.
13. D. Lange, 1980.
14. Al-Idrīsī, 1866, pp. 33–4; translation, pp. 39–41.
15. See, for example, Y. Urvoy, 1949, p. 16; A. Smith, 1971, pp. 168–9.
16. M.-J. Tubiana, 1964, p. 18.
17. D. Lange, 1977, pp. 27–32; translation, pp. 67–9.

According to the most likely hypothesis, the traditions recorded in the *Dīwān* refer to the successive matrimonial alliances between the kings of Kānem and the various nomadic groups whose martial prowess the earlier kings found useful in sustaining their power.

Further to the east, between the Zaghāwa and the Nūba, al-Idrīsī situates the Tādjū, whose existence, probably already dating back to the remote past, seems to have been overlooked by earlier authors.[18] According to oral traditions collected by the German traveller Gustav Nachtigal, the Dādjo – probably identical to the Tādjū – gave rise to the first development of Dārfūr as a state structure.[19] The nomadic influence was less perceptible in this region than around Lake Chad. The present distribution of the small Dādjo communities between the Wadai plateau and the Nūba hills, as well as their traditions concerning their origins and their sedentary way of life, indicate rather that they are of Nilotic origin. Nevertheless, in the seventh/thirteenth century, they appear to have been under pressure from the Zaghāwa who, having been excluded from power in Kānem, apparently sought to re-establish a coherent political entity at the southern extremity of the great trans-Saharan route linking the Dārfūr region to Egypt.[20] In fact, the Dādjo surrendered power not to the Zaghāwa but to the Tundjur, resisting assimilation only by withdrawing into areas of refuge. The Zaghāwa, by contrast, were able to preserve their ethnic cohesion, despite the fact that their grazing area had been considerably reduced by the expansion of the Teda-Daza (Tubu). Even today, the Arabs of Chad and the Sudan recognize the specific identity of the Zaghāwa (who call themselves Beri) and the Gorhan (Daza), despite the fact that they survive only in the form of small residual communities, which no longer seem united to anyone but an outside observer.

Taking as his basis a source dating back to the first half of the seventh/thirteenth century, Ibn Sa'īd provides some extremely valuable particulars concerning the Lake Chad region. It is indeed clear from his *Geography* that, in the time of Dūnama Dībalāmi (*c.* 607/1210–646/1248), the Kānem people had not yet driven the ancestors of the Buduma back to the Lake Chad islands, and it is reasonable to suppose that the area inhabited by the Kotoko extended beyond the clay lands (*firki*) of the alluvial plain of the lower Chari. Situating several ethnic groups with great precision, Ibn Sa'īd gives the impression that the Komadugu Yobe valley was still settled by Bede communities (later assimilated by the Kanuri or driven back on to the territory of the Ngizim) and that, on the other side of Lake Chad, the Kurī

18. Al-Idrīsī, 1866, pp. 13, 40; translation, pp. 15, 47.

19. G. Nachtigal, 1879–81, Vol. III, p. 358; for English translation by A. G. B and H. J. Fisher, see G. Nachtigal, 1971–80, Vol. 4, pp. 273–4. See also Unesco, *General History of Africa*, Vol. IV, ch. 16.

20. The route is known by the Arabic expression *darb al-arba'īn* ('forty-day route'). It is described by R. S. O'Fahey, 1980, pp. 139–44, who points out its importance for more recent periods.

(today assimilated to the Buduma) still inhabited the *terra firma* to the north of the entrance to the Baḥr al-Ghazāl. South of the lake lived the Kotoko, under a name that appears to belong to Kānembu nomenclature.[21] In all these regions, the Kānembu were therefore already a people of consequence in the seventh/thirteenth century, and it can readily be accepted that in earlier times the area inhabited by Chadic-speaking peoples extended over a large part of Kānem and Bornu. It would, however, be rash to claim that the region's earliest farmers all spoke Chadic languages only, and it would be a mistake to suppose that the sole occupation of all speakers of Saharan languages, including proto-Kanuri languages, was animal husbandry.

South of Lake Chad, in the region of the clay plains of the lower Chari, the Kānembu came into contact with an ancient civilization outstanding for its remarkable figurative art.[22] We know from the archaeological excavations conducted by G. Connah on the Daima site that the inhabitants of the *firki* plains engaged in a mixed economy for an initial period, before the Christian era, when agriculture was practised alongside stock-breeding and fishing. According to the same author, the second period, commencing at the beginning of the Christian era, was marked by the introduction of iron-working techniques. This major innovation had a direct impact upon productivity and upon the process of sedentarization: the intensification of agricultural activities, particularly the practice of flood-retreat cultivation, was to relegate other activities – animal husbandry and fishing – to the background. The emergence during the second period of mud-brick architecture reveals that the inhabitants of Daima had adopted a sedentary way of life quite incompatible with transhumance. During the third period, extending from *c.* +700 to *c.* +1050, the inhabitants of the *firki* plains began to enjoy a life of less austerity: various artefacts deriving from long-distance trade make their appearance for the first time, and the vestiges of a weaving industry are to be found (long before Islam). The production of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic objects appears to have gained new momentum during this period, and, for the first time, Daima potters began to make extremely large earthenware jars, which are today regarded by the inhabitants of the region as the distinctive sign of the 'Sao'. Another major innovation concerned fortifications. In Daima, Connah discovered the remains of a ditch surrounding the dwelling-mound, and it may well be that a defensive wall was erected on other mounds to protect the inhabitants.[23] It would surely not be venturing too far to see the advent of fortifications as the first sign of an external threat that was later to affect the lives of the

21. D. Lange, 1980.

22. J.-P. Lebeuf and A. M. Detourbet, 1950; J.-P. Lebeuf and A. Lebeuf, 1977. The archaeological work of J.-P. Lebeuf is unfortunately characterized by a total lack of concern for chronology.

23. This account of the chronological sequences of the 'Daima culture' closely follows that of G. Connah, 1981, pp. 99–196.

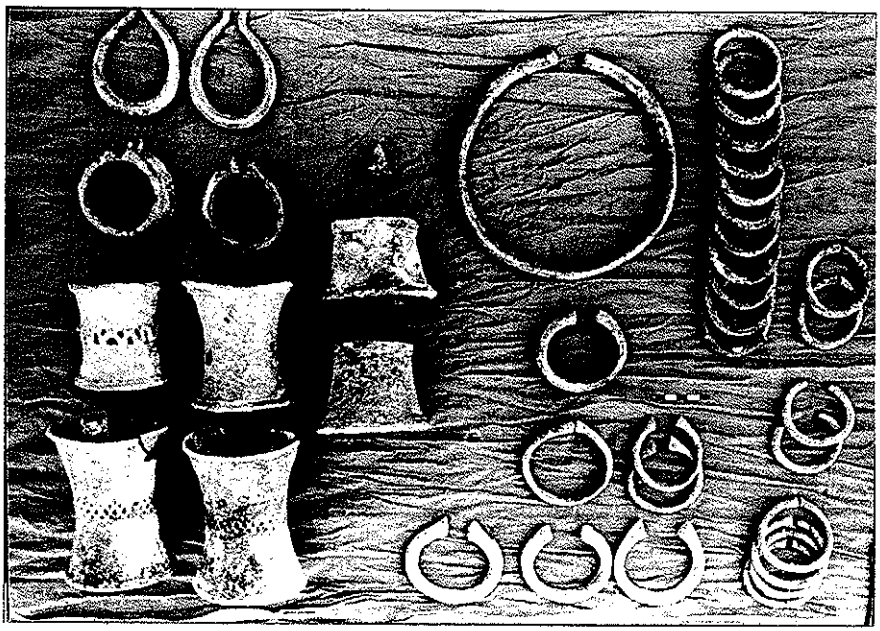

PLATE 15.1 *Bronze objects from excavations at Houlouf (North Cameroon)*

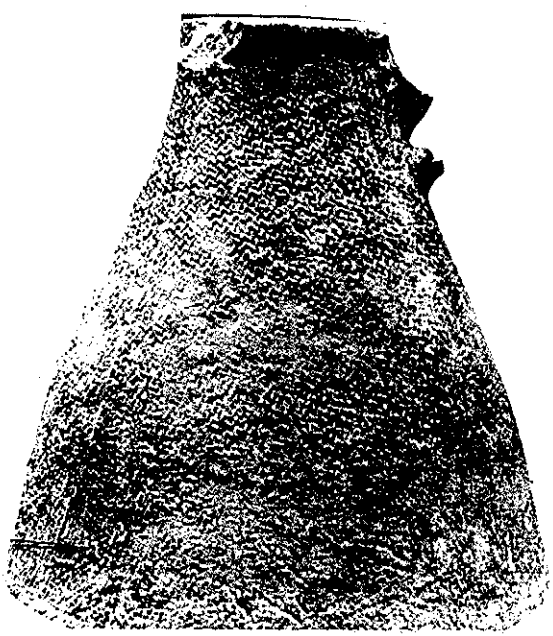

PLATE 15.2 *Primitive anthropomorphous earthenware jar from Houlouf (North Cameroon)*

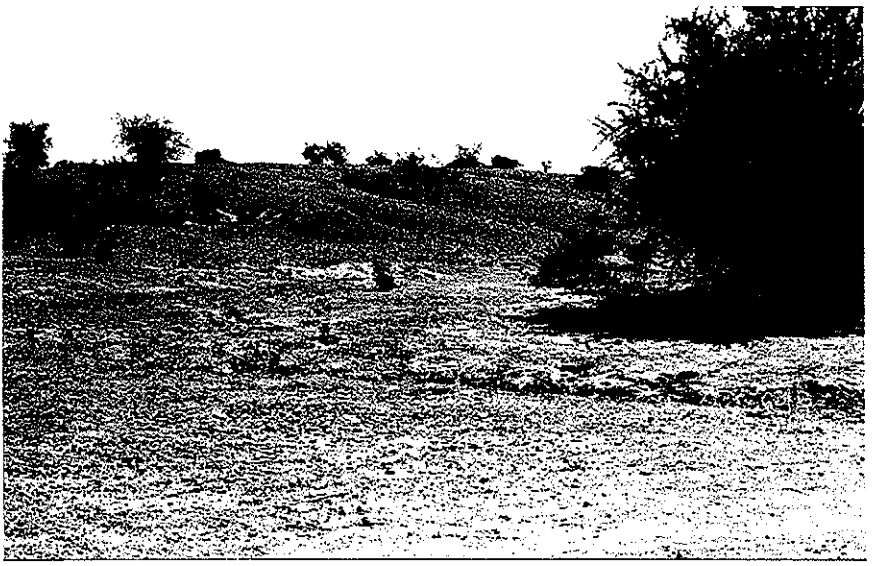

PLATE 15.3 *Deguesse hill, in the far north of Cameroon*

farmers of the Chari plain to a marked degree. This threat may be fairly readily identified as the expansion of the Kānem peoples.

After many centuries under the political and cultural sway of Kānem-Bornu, the present-day inhabitants of the *firki* plains, the Kokoto, use the term *Sao* or *Soo* to refer to their ancestors. Since the same term recurs in every region in which the Kānem peoples have superseded earlier populations, it is reasonable to suppose that it belonged originally to Kānembu nomenclature, and was used everywhere to denote the indigenous populations which were unable to resist assimilation.[24] In its precise sense, the expression 'Sao civilization' must therefore be applied both to the relatively well-known culture of the ancestors of the Kotoko – corresponding to its established present-day use[25] – and to the earlier cultures of the Komadugu Yobe and the southern part of the Baḥr al-Ghazāl. In architectural terms, however, these three entities seem to have no affinities. Linguistic kinship alone can confer some semblance of unity upon these disparate groups.

Nevertheless, in the case of earlier periods, comparative linguistics provides a number of pointers of considerable interest. It is acknowledged

24. In the Daima region, the Kotoko adopted the Kanuri language only a few generations ago.

25. It is worth noting that Connah, drawing a clear distinction between the cultures of the *firki* plains and those of the Komadugu Yobe, no longer uses the term Sao to refer to a specific archaeologically identified culture.

today that Chadic languages constitute a branch of the great Afro-Asian (or Hamito-Semitic) family. The coherence of the Chadic group is doubtless to be explained by a lengthy evolution of the proto-languages in a geographical environment conducive to linguistic contacts and exchanges. It may be supposed that conditions in various southern regions of the central Sahara became optimal when these received sufficient rainfall during the wet periods. At the beginning of the third millennium before the Christian era, living conditions began to deteriorate rapidly, and it is possible that the proto-Chadic-speaking peoples were already obliged at that time to withdraw into more southerly regions. However, it is not impossible that their withdrawal from Ténéré and the neighbouring regions occurred during a more recent period. As they entered into contact with black African groups they must gradually have lost their Sudano-Mediterranean characteristics. Today, various groups of Chadic-speakers are to be found settled in refuge areas between the Niger and the Wadai Plateau. Of these groups, only the Hausa developed a new dynamism, resulting in a renewed expansion of their language. However, the history of the 'economic take-off' of the Hausa city-states pertains to a later period.[26]

The second major language family of the Chad region is the Nilo-Saharan family. In contrast to Afro-Asian languages, the languages of this family do not extend beyond the black African sphere. The most westerly language of this group is Songhay, which is spoken all along the Niger River, from Jenne to Gaya. Further to the north, however, there are also small groups of farmers (Sudanese) cultivating oases and a few groups of nomadic camel-drivers (of Berber origin) who speak different dialectal forms of Songhay.[27] The second sub-group of the Nilo-Saharan family consists of Saharan languages (Zaghāwa, Teda-Daza and Kānembu-Kanuri).[28] Today, all contact between Songhay and Saharan languages has ceased; however, the many lexical forms common to the two language groups suggest that Sudanese herdsmen (and probably also farmers) speaking Nilo-Saharan languages occupied a large part of the region between the great bend of the Niger and the Ennedi mountains. The geographical continuity of this process of settlement must have been broken by the combined effect of the desertification of the Sahara and the advance of the Libyco-Berbers during the last centuries before the Christian era.[29] To

26. See Unesco, *General History of Africa*, Vol. IV, ch. 11.

27. R. Nicolaï, 1979.

28. The linguistic classification followed here is that of J. H. Greenberg, 1963b. Although the inclusion of Songhay in the Nilo-Saharan family has been disputed by P.-F. Lacroix, 1969, R. Nicolaï has shown (in a forthcoming study) that the relationship between the Songhay and Saharan languages is even closer than Greenberg had thought.

29. According to P. Munson, 1980, p. 462, the Dhār Tichītt region (Mauritania) was invaded by Libyco-Berber warriors in the seventh century before the Christian era. The arrival of the Libyco-Berber in the Aïr by -370 ± 40 has been attested (Iwalen site to the south of Mount Grebun: J.-P. Roset, personal communication).

the west, the proto-Songhay-speaking peoples were to initiate the founding of the Kāw-Kāw (Gao), while in the Lake Chad region the proto-Saharan speaking peoples imposed their sway over Kānem. The relatively slight linguistic variation within the Saharan group can be fairly easily explained by the subsequent history of Kānem and, in particular, by the evolution of relations between the central power and the various groups of 'black Saharan nomads'.[30]

The kingdom of Zaghāwa

The first mention of Kānem in written sources is to be found in a text by al-Ya'ḳūbī dated 258/872. This author tells us that in his time Kānem was under the rule of a people called the Zaghāwa.[31] The same people are also mentioned by Ibn Ḳutayba (d. 276/889) on the basis of a report going back to the beginning of the second/eighth century.[32] At the end of the fourth/tenth century, another Arab author, al-Muhallabī, gives a great deal of information about the king of the Zaghāwa from which it is clear that the boundaries of his realm were the same as those of the kingdom of Kānem.[33] Zaghāwa rule over Kānem only came to an end around 468/1075, when a new dynasty, the Sēfuwa, came to power in the same state and drove the Zaghāwa eastward, into a region where they are still to be found today.[34]

But what role exactly did the Zaghāwa play in the founding of Kānem? Al-Ya'ḳūbī states that the various West African peoples he knew of 'took possession of their realms' after a long east–west migration:

> The first of their realms is that of the Zaghāwa. They established themselves at a place called Kānem. Their dwellings are reed huts, and they have no towns. Their king is called Kākura. Among the Zaghāwa there is a clan called Ḥawḍīn: they have a Zaghāwa king.[35]

From the explicit wording of the text it might be deduced that the Zaghāwa were among the earliest inhabitants of Kānem, but without further evidence this is thought to be quite unlikely. The reference to the Ḥawḍīn[36]

30. The expression is used by J. Chapelle, 1957. Concerning the evolution of relations between Kānem and the nomadic groups, more precise information will be found in Unesco, *General History of Africa*, Vol. IV, ch. 10. The following articles containing some more recent interpretations may also usefully be consulted: D. Lange, 1978, 1982a.

31. Al-Ya'ḳūbī, 1983, Vol. 1, pp. 219–20; J. M. Cuoq, 1975, p. 52.

32. Ibn Ḳutayba, 1850, p. 14; J. M. Cuoq, 1975, p. 41.

33. Al-Muhallabī, *apud* Yāḳūt, 1866–73, Vol. 2, p. 932; J. M. Cuoq, 1975, p. 79.

34. D. Lange, 1977, pp. 124–9. On the modern Zaghāwa see M.-J. Tubiana, 1964.

35. Al-Ya'ḳūbī, 1883, Vol. 1, pp. 219–20; J. M. Cuoq, 1975, p. 52.

36. It is possible, as suggested also by other modern writers, that this name refers to the Hausa.

as a particular clan among the Zaghāwa seems to indicate, in fact, that the Zaghāwa were far from being a homogeneous people.

It seems probable that a dominant aristocracy, which produced both the king of Kānem and the king of the Ḥawḍīn gave its name to the whole group of peoples settled in both countries.

Al-Muhallabī, a century later, supplies the important detail that the Zaghāwa (using the term in a broad sense) comprised many peoples. While he does not refer to a dominant aristocracy (the 'true' Zaghāwa) he lays great stress on their king's omnipotence:

> [The Zaghāwa] venerate their king and worship him in place of Allāh the Most High. They imagine that he eats no food. His servants take it to him secretly in his houses: no one knows whence it comes. If any one of his subjects happens to meet the camel carrying the victuals, he is immediately killed on the spot [. . .] As he has absolute power over his subjects, he reduces to slavery whom he wishes [. . .] The religion [of the Zaghāwa] is the worship of their kings: they believe it is they who bring life and death and sickness and health.[37]

The great power of the king of the Zaghāwa, already apparent from al-Ya'ḳūbī's much more concise account, and the very elaborate royal ritual described by al-Muhallabī, must be the result of a considerable number of factors, as has already been mentioned above. It is also unlikely that Kānem was founded as the result of a massive invasion by diverse migrants, as some writers have suggested. The most plausible hypothesis is that a small group of people triggered off state-building development in a region where iron-working techniques had been known since the fourth century of the Christian era (*ḥaddād* culture) and where the possession of horses was not only the mark of very considerable prestige but also a guarantee of superior fighting power. Equipped with weapons made of iron, and having the advantage of contacts, however rudimentary, with the outside world, this group – doubtless the Zaghāwa – gradually brought under its sway the agricultural and pastoral peoples living in the region south-east of Kawār, between Lake Chad and the Baḥr al-Ghazāl[38] the region later to be known as Kānem. The dominant Zaghāwa aristocracy is not likely to have come into being until later, although according to this hypothesis, the Zaghāwa as a whole may not have been ethnically different from the major groups of cultivators and pastoralists over whom they ruled at first. It seems to have been only at a very much later stage, in the time of al-Muhallabī, that diverse ethnic groups were integrated into one and the same state structure.

Al-Idrīsī, in the middle of the sixth/twelfth century, distinguished

37. Al-Muhallabī, *apud* Yāḳūt, 1866–73, Vol. 2, p. 932; J. M. Cuoq, 1975, p. 79.

38. The outfall of Lake Chad, not to be confused with the White Nile tributary of the same name.

between the kingdom of the Zaghāwa and that of Kānem and his evidence has misled many historians about the role of the Zaghāwa in the Lake Chad region. In reality, if al-Idrīsī's reports about the Central Sudan are taken together, if becomes clear that he juxtaposes items of information relating to two different periods in the history of Kānem: the period of Zaghāwa domination and the Sēfuwa period. Instead of putting these items of information into chronological perspective, the author projects them on to the geographical plane.[39] Ibn Sa'īd, writing in the seventh/thirteenth century, puts the Zaghāwa to the east of Kānem, near the Dādjo – where they still live today – and states that the majority of them were at that time under the rule of the king of Kānem.[40] In the light of this body of evidence, we find, in the end, that it is more natural to explain the emergence of the Zaghāwa by the birth and growth of the state of Kānem than to postulate that an earlier ethnic group of Zaghāwa, homogeneous and distinct from the other groups in the region, conquered all the indigenous communities and thereby brought into being the first and largest state to be founded between the Nile and the Niger.

We can go a step further. If it is true that the history of Kānem and that of the Zaghāwa form an inseparable whole up to the fifth/eleventh century, we may deduce that the earliest mention of the Zaghāwa, which we owe to Wahb b. Munabbih, indicates that a state of Kānem was already in existence in his time. Wahb b. Munabbih (d. *c.* 112/730) was one of the famous traditionists of the Yemen in the Umayyad period. His evidence was reported by Ibn Ḳutayba (213/828–276/889). In addition to the Zaghāwa, the text mentions the Nūba, the Zandj, the Fezzān, the Ḥabasha, the Copts and the Berbers.[41] The main point to note is that, according to this early piece of evidence, the Zaghāwa were differentiated both from the Fezzān (the successors of the Garamantes) and from the Berbers. The Zaghāwa were mentioned again at the beginning of the third/ninth century by the great geographer al-Khuwārizmī (d. *c.* 231/840), who shows them on his map both south of the Fezzān and south of the Nubian kingdom of 'Alwa.[42] Half a century later, as we have seen, al-Ya'ḳūbī places the Zaghāwa kingdom in Kānem. Had al-Muhallabī not subsequently described the Zaghāwa kingdom in great detail without mentioning Kānem, we might have been tempted to interpret al-Ya'ḳūbī's reference to Kānem as meaning that the inhabitants of that region had completed an important stage in the general process of becoming settled. All the evidence goes to show that under the concept of Zaghāwa and that of Kānem there lies, in reality, one and the same historial fact: the first mention of the Zaghāwa, dating from the beginning of the second/eighth century, certainly seems to

39. Al-Idrīsī, 1866, pp. 12–15, 33–4; J. M. Cuoq, 1975, pp. 141–51.
40. Ibn Sa'īd, 1970, p. 96; J. M. Cuoq, 1975, p. 211.
41. Ibn Ḳutayba, 1850, pp. 12–13; J. M. Cuoq, 1975, p. 41.
42. Al-Khuwārizmī, 1926, p. 6; J. M. Cuoq, 1975, p. 44.

indicate that the large state at the southern end of the central Saharan route was already in existence then. Moreover, if it is true that in the seventh/thirteenth century the indigenous Kānem traditionists had extensive knowledge of the royal genealogies and that traces of their knowledge are to be found in the *Dīwān* and in information transmitted by al-Maḳrīzī at the beginning of the ninth/fifteenth century, we can even date the beginning of the state of Kānem to slightly before the *hidjra*.[43] The expedition to Kawār undertaken by 'Uḳba b. Nafī' in the early days of the Arab conquest shows the importance of north–south exchanges in this region. The control of these exchanges was no doubt in the hands of a Sudanic state beyond the Arabs' range.

Largely on the strength of oral tradition, some authors have taken the view that the *Sao* were the indigenous inhabitants of Kānem, and that from an early date they were under pressure from the nomad peoples further to the north.[44] According to this theory, the *Sao*, being a sedentary people, lived in village communities – or even small fortified towns – and had been organized into chieftaincies since time immemorial. After their subjugation by the Zaghāwa nomads, the latter were believed to have learned from them the forms of political organization which made it possible to establish a large-scale state.

In point of fact, however, none of the assumptions underlying this theory of the foundation of Kānem rest on solid ground. Neither the sharp division between nomads and sedentary peoples, nor the distinction between indigenous and alien peoples, and least of all the postulated existence from an early date of a Sao people (or culture) is a tenable proposition. The Sao appear in written sources for the first time in the middle of the eighth/fourteenth century (*Dīwān*)[45] and they are mentioned by various tenth/sixteenth-century authors: at that time the term 'Sao' was used for a group of peoples established to the east and south-east of Lake Chad and probably speaking Chadic languages. It was only during their long resistance to the expansion of Kānem-Bornu that these peoples developed the forms of political and social organization that gave them their distinctive character. To attribute to the indigenous inhabitants of ancient Kānem the characteristics that were developed in relatively recent times by the indigenous inhabitants of Bornu (situated to the west of Lake Chad) is therefore a gross anachronism.

Moreover, there is no reason to assume that a sharp division existed,

43. D. Lange, 1977, pp. 141–3.

44. Y. Urvoy, 1949, pp. 17–30; J. S. Trimingham, 1962, pp. 105–6, 110–11; J. D. Fage, 1969; R. Cohen, 1962.

45. In connection with the matrimonial alliances of the kings of Kānem, the *Dīwān* records for the sixth/twelfth century the names of some sedentary Kānem clans, but they seem to reappear among the population of present-day Kānem (cf. Unesco, *General History of Africa*, Vol. IV, ch. 10).

particularly as regards ethnic characteristics, between nomads and sedentary peoples, or between indigenous and alien peoples, at the time of ancient Kānem. It would, for instance, be an entirely arbitrary statement to say that the indigenous inhabitants of Kānem, like the Sao, spoke a Chadic language. On the contrary, there may be a certain degree of cultural affinity between the sedentary and nomad groups – such as still exists to this day between the sedentary Kānembu and the nomadic Tubu and Daza (speaking closely related Saharan languages) – and if we accept this, it will be easier to understand how an aristocracy like that of the Zaghāwa (who today also speak a Saharan language) could have come to dominate the rest of the population without the division between two groups of peoples becoming particularly apparent to later foreign observers. Al-Muhallabī's account – the only one to include information about the way of life – suggests peaceful coexistence between cultivators and herdsmen, the power to take coercive action being apparently confined to the king:

> [The kingdom of the Zaghāwa] is under cultivation from one end to the other. Their houses are all reed huts, and likewise the palace of their king . . . As he has absolute power over his subjects, he reduces to slavery whom he wishes. His wealth consists of livestock: sheep, cattle, camels and horses. The principal crops of their country are millet, beans and also wheat. The majority of the King's subjects go naked, wearing nothing but leather loin-cloths. They live by tillage and herding livestock.[46]

The kingdom of the Zaghāwa is not portrayed in this text as an entirely homogeneous whole. On the contrary, the author states at the outset that it comprises 'many nations (*umam*)', which clearly suggests the coexistence of different ethnic groups within a single state structure. At the end of the fourth/tenth century, the kingdom of Zaghāwa evidently expanded considerably, and was no longer confined to the region inhabited by kindred peoples speaking Saharan languages: Kānem proper, lying between Lake Chad and the Baḥr al-Ghazāl, was still the centre of the kingdom, but other peoples on the periphery had been brought under its sway. According to al-Muhallabī, its length was fifteen days' journey and its width the same. In connection with Kāw-Kāw the same author states that the kingdom of the Zaghāwa was larger but the kingdom of Kāw-Kāw more prosperous.[47] It is undeniable that from that time on the largest state in the Central Sudan contributed greatly to the expansion of the Saharan languages and the cultural assimilation of neighbouring peoples. It was only later that the city-states of the Hausa came into being on its western border and the kingdom of Bagirmi was formed to the south-east of Lake Chad, in the

46. Al-Muhallabī, *apud* Yāḳūt, 1866–73, Vol. 2, p. 932. J. M. Cuoq, 1975, p. 79.
47. ibid., Vol. 4, p. 329; J. M. Cuoq, 1975, pp. 77–8.

land inhabited by Sara-Bongo-Bagirmian-speaking peoples, contributing in their turn to the expansion of other Sudanic cultures.[48]

In Kānem, another important development that took place at this time was an increase in the number of sedentary communities, together with the founding of small towns. Al-Ya'ḳūbī, at the end of the third/ninth century, wrote in so many words that the Zaghāwa had no towns.[49] But al-Muhallabī, writing more than a century later, gives the names of two towns, Mānān and Tarāzakī.[50] The town of Mānān is also known to us from the *Dīwān*, and Ibn Sa'īd, in the seventh/thirteenth century, stated that it was the capital of the 'pagan ancestors' of the Sēfuwa.[51] There is evidence to show, however, that in the fifth/eleventh century and the first half of the sixth/twelfth century the kings of Kānem still took their principal wives from two nomad groups, the Tomaghra and the Tubu. It was not until the first half of the thirteenth century, in the reign of Dūnama Dībalāmi (*c.* 607/1210–646/1248), that sedentary elements finally gained the upper hand. This development went hand in hand with the progress of Islamization.

The progress of Islamization

Written sources yield very little material bearing directly on the growth of Islam in Kānem or in the neighbouring regions, and we are reduced to making use of odd scraps of information to build up a very imperfect picture of the process which led first to the conversion of the kings of the old dynasty, and then to the decline of the Zaghāwa and the advent of the Sēfuwa. As regards the beginning of Kānem, it is well established that Islam played no part in the founding of this Sudanic state, nor in the early stages of its development. In Kawār, at the northern extremity of the central Sudan, Islam made a fleeting appearance with the expedition led by 'Uḳbā b. Nafī' shortly after the middle of the first/seventh century, but it probably did not leave a deep impression. It was only in the second/eighth century when the Berbers of the Fezzān and Kawār were converted in large numbers, that Islam began to reach more southerly regions.

48. On the formation of the Hausa city-states, cf. A. Smith, 1970, and Unesco, *General History of Africa*, Vol IV, ch. 11. As regards the origins of Bagirmi, we must probably accept a much earlier date than that suggested by oral tradition. Indeed, the *Dīwān* states that 'Abd Allāh b. Kaday (*c.* 1315–35) waged war against the Lord of Bagirmi (§ 21). Moreover, it would certainly seem that the name *Bakārmī* given by Ibn Sa'īd (mid-seventh/thirteenth century) also refers to Bagirmi (Ibn Sa'īd, 1958, p. 49); J. M. Cuoq, 1975, p. 217.

49. Al-Ya'ḳūbī, 1883, Vol. 1, pp. 219–20; J. M. Cuoq, 1975, p. 52.

50. Al-Muhallabī, *apud* Yāḳūt, 1866–73, Vol. 2, p. 932. In Kawār, al-Muhallabī mentions the towns of Bilma and al-Ḳaṣaba (*ibid.*). Djādo, situated further to the north and at some distance from the great trans-Saharan route, may already have been a staging-post on the Wargla route.

51. Ibn Sa'īd, 1970, p. 95; J. M. Cuoq, 1975, p. 209.

Like many Berber peoples, the inhabitants of the Fezzān initially adopted a heterodox form of Islam, the Ibāḍiyya, thus allying themselves with the Khāridjite faction. The Fezzān, situated at the northen end of the central Saharan caravan route, controlled the bulk of the trade between the Lake Chad area – and *a fortiori* the Kawār oases – and the Muslim world of the Mediterranean. Hence it is quite likely that the earliest form of Islam propagated south of the Sahara by Berber traders was in fact the Ibāḍiyya. Indirect evidence of Ibāḍite influence in Kānem is afforded by an item of bibliographical information concerning Abū 'Ubayda 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Djināwunī, a governor of Djabal Nafūsa, a region where the Ibāḍite sect well survives to this day. It is to the effect that this governor, who lived in the first half of the third/ninth century, knew the language of Kānem in addition to Berber and Arabic.[52] He no doubt learnt the language during a visit to the Central Sudan.

In the Fezzān the situation changed at the beginning of the fourth/tenth century when the new dynasty of the Banū Khaṭṭāb came to power: after that event Arab geographers ceased to mention the heterodox beliefs of the Berbers of the Fezzān, and it is very probable that the political change brought with it a change in the religious trend. This does not necessarily mean that the transition from Ibāḍīyya to Sunna took place with the same speed further south, though Khāridjite resistance eventually petered out there as well.

In fact, nothing very definite can be said on this point, and it is noticeable that al-Ya'ḳūbī – though attesting to the existence of the Ibāḍite sect at Zawīla (the capital of the Fezzān)[53] – is content, in his remarks about the inhabitants of Kawār, to state that they were Muslims:

> Fifteen days journey beyond Zawīla, you come to the town [*madīna*] called Kuwwār inhabited by a Muslim community composed of various peoples. The majority are Berbers. They bring *Sūdān* [slaves].[54]

It is clear from this text that in the second half of the third/ninth century Kawār was inhabited by Berbers; their main occupation seems to have been slave-trading. The other peoples mentioned were probably Sudanic; even at that early date they may have been the Tubu who nowadays live there alongside the Kanuri. Most of the slaves whom the Berber traders of Kawār brought to the Fezzān no doubt came from Kānem, where the king of the Zaghāwa 'reduced to slavery those among his subjects whom he wished'.[55] Al-Ya'ḳūbī himself says that 'the kings of the Sūdān sell the Sūdān [their subjects?] for no reason, and quite apart from any wars'.[56]

52. Al-Shammākhī, *Kitāb al-siyar*, quoted by T. Lewicki, 1964, pp. 309–10; see also T. Lewicki, 1969, p. 97; J. M. Cuoq, 1975, p. 167.
53. Al-Ya'ḳūbī, 1892, p. 345; J. M. Cuoq, 1975, p. 49.
54. ibid.
55. Al-Muhallabī, *apud* Yāḳūt, 1866–73, Vol. 2, p. 932.
56. Al-Ya'ḳūbī, 1892, p. 345.

But this could not be true if we accept the fact that for the purpose of his trade with the outside world, the king of Kānem needed a considerable number of slaves.[57] He must have been capturing most of these from the neighbouring peoples. It was not in his interests that Islam should spread among them, for Islamic law strictly forbids the enslaving of a free Muslim.

At that time, however, the kings of Kānem already seem to have established diplomatic relations with the Muslim states of North Africa. The available sources yield the following information: in 382/992 Ibn Khaṭṭāb, Governor of Zawīla, received a present from one of the countries of the *Bilād al-Sūdān* whose name is not specified,[58] but which, in view of the geographical position of Zawīla, it is reasonable to suppose was Kānem; in the same year, the Zīrīd Sultan of Ifrīḳiya, al-Manṣūr (373/984–386/996), likewise received a gift dispatched by a country of the *Bilād al-Sūdān*, the name of which is not stated.[59] In 442/1031, one of his successors, al-Mu'izz (406/1016–454/1062) received a present of slaves sent by a *malik al-Sūdān*.[60] We cannot be certain that it really was the king of Kānem who initiated these diplomatic missions,[61] but we know that he was at least indirectly in contact with Ifrīḳiya (Tunisia) for according to al-Muhallabī, he wore clothes made of Sousse (Sūs) silk.[62] As regards a later period, Ibn Khaldūn tells us that the kings of Kānem were in touch with the Ḥafṣid dynasty (625/1228–748/1347) from the time of its foundation, and he reports in particular that in 1257 'the king of Kānem and the Lord of Bornu' sent the Ḥafṣid Sultan al-Mustansir (647/1249–675/1277) a giraffe, which caused a great stir in Tunis.[63] There is nothing surprising about the fact that the king, who was one of the major suppliers of slaves and had some sort of monopoly over their acquisition in his own country, should have courted the goodwill of his principal customers. In the eyes of the Muslim rulers, his economic importance no doubt outweighed any objections to his religious position.

Trade relations with the countries of North Africa and frequent contacts with Muslim merchants could not have gone on for long without enabling Islam to make considerable progress in court circles and certain sections of the population. It would probably be a mistake to visualize the progressive

57. The number of slaves exported northward by Kānem must have been substantial. Zawīla, on the route between Kānem and Tripoli, was according to several sources the biggest slave centre in the Sahara (al-Ya'ḳūbī, 1892, p. 345, al-Iṣṭakhrī, 1870, p. 40; al-Bakrī, 1911, p. 11; J. M. Cuoq, 1975, pp. 49, 65, 81).

58. Ibn 'Idhārī al-Marrākushī, 1948–53, Vol. 1, p. 247; J. M. Cuoq, 1975, pp. 219–20.

59. Ibn 'Idhārī al-Marrākushī, 1948–53, Vol. 1, p. 275.

60. ibid.

61. We have very detailed information about diplomatic relations between Bornu and Tripoli in the seventeenth century: the King of Bornu's envoys brought written messages and presents to the Governors of Tripoli (cf. D. Girard, 1686).

62. Al-Muhallabī, *apud* Yāḳūt, 1866–73, Vol. 2, p. 932.

63. Ibn Khaldūn, 1847–51, Vol. 1, pp. 262, 429; cf. J. M. Cuoq, 1975, p. 351.

Islamization of Kānem as an uninterrupted growth process: it would be strange if the king and the Zaghāwa aristocracy had not tried to curb a movement that threatened to undermine the economic order on which their power was at least partially founded. It is interesting to note in this connection that, according to the *Dīwān*, Arkū b. Būlū (*c.* 414/1023–459/1067), one of the last Zaghāwa kings,[64] established colonies of slaves in several of the Kawār oases and even at Zaylā in the southern Fezzān, a region which today forms part of Libya. This information is of course difficult to check[65] but it is quite understandable that Arkū b. Būlū should have felt impelled by an instinct of self-preservation to extend his sway over the Berber communities of Kawār in order the better to control both their trading activities and their religious proselytizing. The authors of the *Dīwān* do not, of course, state the motives that led to the occupation of Kawār by Kānem, but they abruptly mention the 'mosque' at Sakadam (Seggedine), which may at least be taken as a sign of the importance of the 'religious question'. Moreover, we know that at the same period the king of Ghana was extending his authority over the important trading centre of Awdāghust,[66] and the conjunction of these developments may not be fortuitous.

Arkū's successor was the first Muslim king of Kānem. His name is given in the *Dīwān* in three different forms: Ladsū, Sū (or Sawā) and Ḥū (or Ḥawwā') – the correct form, overlaid by a recent interpolation, no doubt being Ḥū (or Ḥawwā'). The authors of the *Dīwān*, reporting the crucial event in the history of the Chad region, which was the accession to power of a Muslim sovereign in the kingdom of Kānem, were content with an extremely brief note: 'he was invested by the Caliph' (Dīwān, §10). Neither this manner of investiture nor the unorthodox form of the first Muslim king's name admit of the hypothesis of a conversion. On the contrary, it is very likely that after Arkū's death (at Zaylā') the pro-Muslim faction within the old dynasty put forward the strongest candidate it could find having regard to the rules of succession then in force. In the absence of other evidence, we cannot dismiss the possibility that Ḥū (or Ḥawwā') was in reality – as certain pointers suggest – a woman bearing the very Muslim name of Ḥawwā'.[67] He (or she) reigned for only four years, and was succeeded by 'Abd al-Djalīl, whose reign likewise lasted four years. The next

64. It has been established that the *Banū Dūkū* of the *Dīwān* correspond to the *Zaghāwa* mentioned in external sources. See D. Lange, 1977, pp. 113–29.

65. Traces of an early Sudanic presence can easily be recognized in certain archaeological vestiges in the Fezzān: Ganderma, in the vicinity of Trāghen, and Mbīle, to the north of Gatrūn, are fortifications which were undoubtedly erected on the orders of the kings of Kānem (D. Lange and S. Berthoud, 1977, pp. 30–2, 37–8); however, the dates remain uncertain.

66. Al-Bakrī, 1911, p. 180; but see J. Devisse, 1970, pp. 152 ff.

67. If the first Muslim ruler of Kānem was in fact a woman, then the chroniclers' efforts to conceal her real name becomes quite understandable (D. Lange, 1977, pp. 29–30, 67–8).

king, Ḥummay, was the first of a new dynasty, the Sēfuwa.[68] The very short reigns of Ḥū or Ḥawwā', (*c.* 459/1067–478/1071) and 'Abd al-Djalīl (*c.* 478/1071–483/1075) stand in contrast with the long reigns of their predecessors: Ayūma, according to the *Dīwān*, reigned for twenty years (*c.* 376/987–397/1007) Būlū for sixteen years (*c.* 397/1007–414/1023) and Arkū for forty-four years (*c.* 414/1023–459/1067).[69] The shortness of the reigns of the last Zaghāwa rulers may be interpreted as a sign of a serious crisis: after a long period of incubation, when the crucial stage was reached in the growing power of Islam, the Muslims first undermined the stability of the old regime and then brought about a drastic political change.[70]

The advent of the Sēfuwa

By an extraordinary coincidence, the dynastic change that occurred in Kānem around the year 467/1075[71] is not reported clearly in any of the available sources. Consequently there is absolutely no way of establishing for certain the sequence of events that led up to the dynastic change, nor its precise economic and social effects. Since there is a dearth of information about this period despite its great importance, we must make do with what little evidence there is. The first step will be to establish that there really was a change of dynasty at that time, we shall then have to answer the question: 'Who were the Sēfuwa?' We may then be in a position to shed some light on the overall significance of the events that took place.

At the end of the paragraph which the *Dīwān* devotes to 'Abd al-Djalīl, there is a curious passage whose real meaning has escaped most historians:

> That is what we have written about the history of the Banū Dūkū; we shall now proceed to set down the history of the Banū Ḥummay, who professed Islam.[72]

Even since the days of Heinrich Barth[73] this remark has been taken to refer solely to the adoption of Islam – and not to a dynastic change – since the authors of the *Dīwān* indicate in a later passage that the next king,

68. All previous writers, misled by an ambiguous passage in Dīwān (§ 11), have confused the introduction of Islam with the change of dynasty.

69. It seems that more weight should be given to the chronological data supplied by the *Dīwān* than to the report concerning the occupation of Kawār.

70. We cannot completely rule out the possibility that the first two Muslim rulers of Kānem were Ibāḍites.

71. This date is arrived at by adding up the lengths of the reigns given in the *Dīwān* (D. Lange, 1977, pp. 83–94).

72. *Dīwān*, § 11.

73. The German traveller Heinrich Barth visited Bornu – and part of Kānem – in the middle of the thirteenth/nineteenth century, and brought back with him the only two extant copies of the *Dīwān*. We also owe to Barth the first critical history of Kānem-Bornu, which is based on a knowledge both of the country and of the original texts.

Ḥummay, was the son of 'Abd al-Djalīl. We have seen above, however, that Ḥū (or Ḥawwā') was already a Muslim, as was his (or her) successor, 'Abd al-Djalīl and this could not have escaped the notice of the chroniclers. Hence the passage just quoted must relate to something other than the introduction of Islam.

It is an eighth/fourteenth century author, Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī, who establishes the succession of events. Basing his account indirectly on the evidence of Shaykh 'Uthmān al-Kānemī, 'one of their king's close relatives', he writes:

> The first to establish Islam [in Kānem] was al-Hādī al-'Uthmānī who claimed to be one of the descendants of 'Uthmān b. 'Affān. After him [Kānem] fell to the Yazaniyyūn of the Banī Dhī Yazan.[74]

The Yazaniyyūn to whom al-'Umarī refers are in fact none other that the Sēfuwa, whose name is derived from that of Sayf b. Dhī Yazan. The author says in so many words that the accession to power of the Sēfuwa was preceded by the introduction of Islam.

Much later, at the beginning of the thirteenth/nineteenth century, Muḥammad Bello offers more information about the advent of the Sēfuwa dynasty at a certain stage in the history of Kānem. He refers to a group of Berbers who, having left the Yemen, travelled all the way to Kānem:

> The Berbers found in this country different ['*adjam*] people under the domination of their *Ṭawāriḳ* brothers [called] *Amākīta*. They took their country away from them. During their occupation of the country, their state prospered so much that they dominated the most remote countries of this region.[75]

The first point to note is that the author distinguishes beween two ethnic groups of foreign origin which reigned over Kānem one after the other.[76] This remark in itself leads us to think that the author is referring to the change of dynasty in the fifth/eleventh century. The decisive point is that he makes the second group – and not the first one – come from the Yemen, the homeland of Sayf b. Dhī Yazan, the eponymous ancestor of the Sēfuwa. He must have known that the dynasty that still reigned over Bornu in his days claimed to have come from the Yemen and that it was not they who had founded the state of Kānem, as the *Dīwān* and popular tradition implied, but an earlier group that, according to him, was also of foreign origin.

As to the alleged Berber origins of the successive rulers of Kānem, it

74. Al-'Umarī, 1927, pp. 44–5; J. M. Cuoq, 1975, p. 259.

75. M. Bello, 1951, p. 8.

76. In Muḥammad Bello's time the Sēfuwa had left Kānem three and a half centuries earlier to settle in Bornu, west of Lake Chad. Bello, who himself reigned over the 'Caliphate' of Sokoto, west of Bornu, knows this, for he says that the group of Berbers from the Yemen (the Sēfuwa) reached Kānem and not Bornu.

must be borne in mind that Bello's work was written some 800 years after the events under discussion and that in the meantime the role of the Berbers in the Central Sudan had increased enormously, both politically and religiously. The Sēfuwa legend of origin appears to have been primarily the work of Muslim scholars many of whom came to early Kānem from the areas where the Himyarite traditions were still alive. In working out the legend, the clerics were no doubt influenced by the local folk tales and traditions, especially those referring to north–south migrations.[77]

The antiquity of the tradition that tends to conceal the dynastic change by putting the emphasis on the adoption of Islam is attested by Ibn Sa'īd in the thirteenth century. Drawing on sources going back to the reign of Dūnama Dībalāmi (*c.* 607/1210–646/1248) he provides the earliest evidence of the existence in Kānem of a dynasty claiming descent from Sayf b. Dhī Yazan:

> The Sultan of Kānem . . . is Muḥammad b. Djīl of the line of Sayf b. Dhī Yazan. The capital of his infidel ancestors, before they were converted to Islam, was Mānān; then one of them, his great-great-great-great-grandfather, became a Muslim under the influence of a jurist, after which Islam spread throughout the land of Kānem.[78]

The great-great-great-great-grandfather of Muḥammad b. Djīl (= Dūnama/Aḥmad b. Salmama/'Abd al-Djalīl = Dūnama Dībalāmī) was in fact Ḥummay (*c.* 467/1075–478/1086) and he, as we have seen, was by no means the first Muslim king of Kānem, still less a new convert. The only point in this passage that directly relates to the dynastic change is the change of capital: first Mānān, then Ndjīmī.

Another Arab geographer, al-Bakrī, writing in 460/1067–8 gives us a *terminus a quo* both for the introduction of Islam into Kānem and for the change of dynasty:

> Beyond the Zawīla desert and forty days' journey from that town there lies the land of Kānem, which is very difficult to get to. [The inhabitants of Kānem] are idolatrous Sūdān. It is said that there exists in those parts a clan descended from the Umayyads, who took refuge there when they were persecuted by the Abbāsids. They dress in the fashion of the Arabs and follow their customs.[79]

We do not know for certain to what period this information relates, but it

77. Cf. B. Barkindo, 1985.

78. Ibn Sa'īd, 1970, p. 95; J. M. Cuoq, 1975, p. 211.

79. Al-Bakrī, 1911, p. 11. The fact that this text does not mention Kawār (situated south of Zawīla) could perhaps be used as an argument in support of the report contained in the *Dīwān* (§ 9) to the effect that Arkū (*c.* 1023–67) had incorporated Kawār into Kānem. But it should be noted that the text does not mention the name of Zaghāwa either. *Co-editor's Note*: N. Levtzion and J. F. P. Hopkins (eds), 1981, p. 64 translate the end of the passage on the descendants of the Umayyads erroneously as 'they still preserve the dress and customs of the Arabs'. The author's translation is more correct.

cannot be later than 460/1067–8.[80] According to the chronology which emerges from the *Dīwān*, that was in fact the very year in which the first Muslim king, who was still a member of the old Zaghāwa dynasty, came to power in the kingdom of Kānem. Al-Bakrī, living in far-off Andalusia, could not yet have known of the event even under the most favourable circumstances;[81] and still less could he have known about the change of dynasty, which only happened around 468/1075. So his reference to the 'idolatrous' inhabitants of Kānem squares very well with the information in the *Dīwān*. As for the 'descendents of the Umayyads' who 'dressed *in the fashion of the Arabs*' – and who therefore were not Arabs – they must presumably have been a group of Berbers who had adopted certain Arab customs (at all events, they were not black Africans). This group had perhaps drawn attention to itself by its insubordination to authority and it may quite possibly have been one of the forces that were later to contribute to the success of the pro-Muslim faction within the old dynasty before they brought about the downfall of that dynasty.

Of all the Arab authors, al-Idrīsī (who wrote in 549/1154) should have given us the most accurate account of the changes that took place in Kānem – and the surrounding area – in the second half of the fifth/eleventh century. Writing only three-quarters of a century after the fall of the Zaghāwa, he had access to a wealth of information, most of it transmitted to him orally but also some derived from written sources. But in fact al-Idrīsī muddled all his material together, and also threw in some details that were pure inventions. Hence his description of the *Bilād al-Sūdān* must only be used with the greatest caution.

Nevertheless, it emerges from the mass of information provided by al-Idrīsī that in his day 'Kānem' and 'Zaghāwa' were two separate entities. All the evidence goes to show that the Zaghāwa no longer ruled over Kānem: having lost their ancient privileges, they were apparently living in quite wretched conditions. Most of them seem to have been nomads. Nothing specific is said about the new rulers of Kānem, but some of the author's remarks suggest that the Zaghāwa were their subjects. There is the same vagueness about the capital: Mānān and Ndjīmi are both mentioned, and Mānān seems to have been the more important town, but it is not clear from the text whether it was the capital of Kānem. No information is given about the religious situation.[82]

It will be deduced from what has gone before that the dynastic change

80. Al-Bakrī bases his account on oral information – some of which dates from a period just preceding the time when he was writing – and also on written sources, the main one as regards the *Bilād al-Sūdan* being a work by Yūsuf al-Warrāk (292/904–5–363/973–4).

81. Al-Bakrī wrote in 460/1067–8. If we add up the lengths of the reigns given in the *Dīwān*, we find that Ḥu (or Ḥawwā') must have come to power in the eighth month of the year 460 AH).

82. Al-Idrīsī, 1866, pp. 12–15, 33–5. A more detailed analysis of this passage will be found in D. Lange, 1977, pp. 124–9.

referred to by Muḥammad Bello and the coming to power of the Yazaniyyūn reported by al-'Umarī must have taken place between al-Bakrī's time (460/1067–8) and al-Idrīsī's (549/1154). The dynastic change is then seen to coincide with the expulsion of the Zaghāwa from Kānem. This is as far as we can go on the strength of outside sources, but from analysis of the *Dīwān*, the range of dates for this event which is of crucial importance for the history of the Central Sudan, can be narrowed down to the beginning of Ḥummay's reign (*c.* 467/1075–478/1086) for his predecessor, 'Abd al-Djalīl, was the last king of the *Banū Dūkū* line and Ḥummay was to be the first of the *Banū Ḥummay* line. The distinction drawn between these two royal houses thus signifies that there was a sharp break in dynastic continuity; it does not coincide with the introduction of Islam.

Who were the new rulers of Kānem? The *Dīwān* provides no answer to this question: while linking Ḥummay genealogically with his predecessor, its authors are silent about his true paternal ancestry.[83] However, the traditions of Kānem and Borno which have been committed to writing in recent times say generally that the new dynasty was descendent from Sayf b. Dhī Yazan.[84]

Several authors have commented on the origin of this new dynasty. Abdullahi Smith suggested that they were a product of the nomad/semi-nomad world, probably Tubu who allied with the other groups through marriage relations in order to come to power. This appears also to be the view of John Lavers.[85] Nur Alkali as well as Bawuro Barkindo believe that they were of local origin but attempted to assume foreign origins in order to gain prestige.[86]

We know that it was during the rule of Ḥummay or of his successors that the Sayfid *nisba* was introduced. Sayf Ibn Dhī Yazan was a Yemenite hero who, according to legend, helped drive the Ethiopians out of the Yemen in the second half of the sixth century of the Christian era. And it is known that the Berbers of North Africa liked to claim Yemenite descent in order to differentiate themselves from the Adnanite Arabs of the Nadjd and the Ḥidjāz. This attitude was the equivalent in the genealogical field of the adoption of the Khāridjite heterodoxy in religious matters.

It should be noted, however, that Sayf b. Dhī Yazan distinguished himself in battle against an African people. The theme of war between white Muslim Arabs (at a time before the Prophet!) and black Africans who prac-

83. His mother was a Kay [Koyam] – a people of unknown origin – by the name of Takrama, the prefix *ta–* possibly indicating Berber influence. The analysis of the name Ḥummay itself shows the possibility of being derived from the name Muḥammad [loss of the prefix *Mu–* and the ending *–d*, acquisition of a new suffix] as a hypochoristicon, which is still common today among the Tawārik, and other people who were Islamized through Berber influence.

84. Cf. A. Smith, 1971, pp. 165–6.

85. ibid., pp. 166–7; J. E. Lavers, 1980, p. 190.

86. N. Alkali, 1980, pp. 2 ff; B. Barkindo, 1985.

tised a traditional religion (though the Ethiopians were in fact Christians!) came to appeal strongly to the imagination of certain classes of Arabs. In Egypt this theme eventually took the form of a true folk tale or novel which exalts the powers of Sayf b. Dhī Yazan in his innumerable battles with the 'impious blacks'.[87]

Whether those who introduced this strange genealogical concept into the black African environment of the Central Sudan were aware of its racialist overtones remains uncertain. That they were Berbers cannot be doubted; in North Africa the Himyarite legend was still current. H. T. Norris has found out that the Himyarite saga has been ancient and widespread among the Berbers of North Africa and the Sahara.[88] Those who flaunted the name of Sayf b. Dhī Yazan could not have been either Sudanese or Arabs, both of whom had highly respectable genealogies, whereas on the other hand the Berbers were proud of their Himyarite Yemeni origin. The Berber Muslim clerics who elaborated the Sayfid *nisba* were doubtless attracted also by the similarity in meaning or usage between 'Kānem' meaning South of Teda-Daza, and 'Yemen' often used colloquially to mean south.[89]

All that can be said here is that the Sēfuwa appear to have been of a different genealogy from their Zaghāwa predecessors and that their coming to power was not connected with the introduction of Islam since Ḥummay was not the first Muslim ruler of Kānem. Although there is no concrete evidence to show that the Sēfuwa were not of local origins, there is equally none to say convincingly that they were.

It has been shown that the Islamization of the Central Sudan started with the conversion of the inhabitants of Kawār, who later became the main agents of the expansion of Islam into the kingdom of the Zaghāwa. In Ḥummay's time (467/1075–478/1086) the gradual infiltration of Islam into the various sections of the population had been going on for at least two centuries. The political authorities eventually found that they could not remain indifferent to this process for it was bound to undermine the king's absolute power over his subjects and at the same time help to weaken the position of the Zaghāwa aristocracy. We have seen that the king probably enjoyed a monopoly of the acquisition of slaves and it was clearly in the Berber traders' interests to break the royal monopoly so as to have more direct access to the sources of supply. As for the Zaghāwa artistocracy, it can probably be regarded as the means whereby the king exercised his power over the common people. On the other hand, it was in the interests of the various peoples integrated into the kingdom to embrace Islam as a protection against the king's arbitrary power.

87. R. Paret, 1924, p. 88, has shown that the written form of this tale dates from the beginning of the ninth/fifteenth century. Oral versions certainly existed from a much earlier date.

88. H. T. Norris, 1972, p. 28.

89. Cf. J. E. Lavers, 1980 and B. Barkindo, 1985.

But at the end of the eleventh century, Islam was still restricted to the narrow circles of the royal court and the aristocracy, and it was only much later, at the time of Dūnama Dībalāmi (*c.* 607/1210–646/1248) when it became the instrument of an expansionist policy, that it was able to bridge the gap separating the ruling aristocracy from the ruled peoples and thereby to become a truly popular religion.[90]

Ḥummay came to power in Kānem around the year 468/1075. At the same period, the Berber movement of the Almoravids in the western Sahara was driving southwards to conquer the kingdom of Ghana, where it set up a Muslim dynasty.[91] Further to the east, the Almoravid movement resulted a little later in the establishment of a new Muslim dynasty in the kingdom of Kāw-Kāw (Gao) on the east bank of the Niger.[92] It would not be unreasonable to suppose that the movement led by Ḥummay in the Central Sudan was one of the consequences of the religious ferment that had been stirred up, in a different economic context, among the western Berbers. But unlike the new dynasties of the Western Sudan, the Sēfuwa of Kānem were integrated into an African context, thus ensuring the continuity of the state tradition they had inherited. A century and a half after their seizure of power, the Sēfuwa kings were doing their utmost to eradicate the memory of their real origins and so they linked themselves directly with their Zaghāwa predecessors. In the end, the state institutions had proved to be stronger than all particularist tendencies.

90. The theory of a decline of Islam at the beginning of the Sēfuwa period is presented in greater detail in D. Lange, 1978.

91. According to al-Zuhrī, the conquest of Ghana by the Almoravids took place in 469/1076–7 (cf. al-Zuhrī, 1968, pp. 182–3). But cf. Chapter 13 above.

92. J. O. Hunwick, 1980.