

## ETHNOGENESIS FROM WITHIN THE CHADIC STATE Some Thoughts on the History of Kanem-Borno<sup>1</sup>

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The contemporary evidence pertaining to the medieval history of the region of Lake Chad is relatively abundant. Nevertheless it is insufficient to derive from it a clear picture with respect to the ethnic basis of the Kanem-Borno empire. Situated on the crossroads of influences from the Nile valley and North Africa, Kanem-Borno was the major state of the Central Sudan throughout the medieval period. Its domination extended in the south to the Sao principalities and Bagirmi, in the west to Hausaland and in the north to Fezzān. All the other states which emerged in this vast area were the result of secondary developments. To designate this major polity by the term Chadic state seems to be a convenient compression for the cumbersome geographical concept Kanem-Borno, while indicating at the same time that the administration was not exclusively controlled by members of the ruling dynasty.<sup>2</sup>

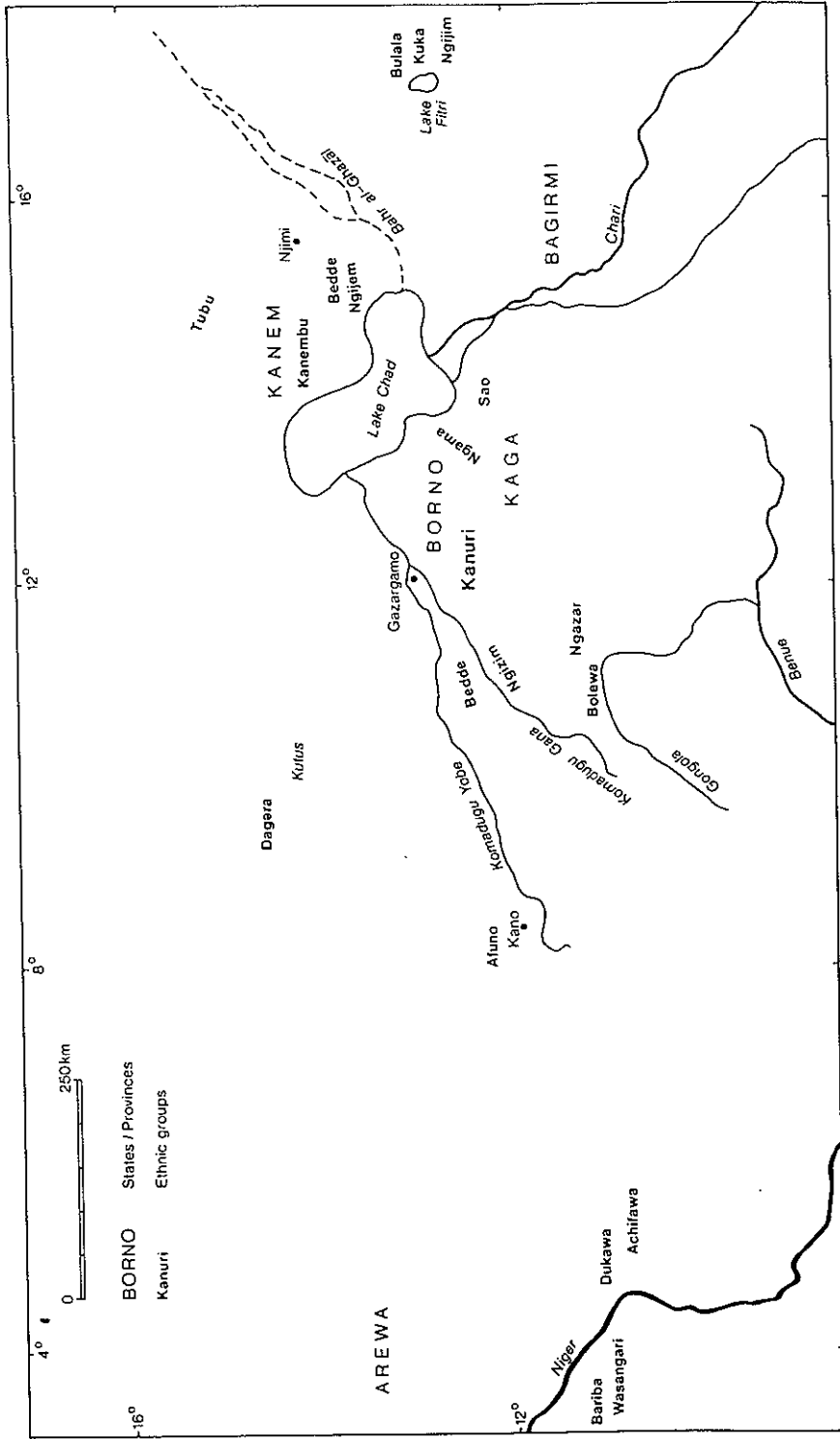
With the model of the European nation-state in mind historians took it for granted that the medieval West-African empires were based on a well-defined territory and that they developed out of a particular ethnic substratum. The analysis of the relevant traditions of origin of the great West African people shows that the ethnic groups concerned emerged all in more recent times than the states they are supposed to have founded. This is true for the Soninke of Ghana, the Malinke or Maninka of Mali, the Songhay of Gawgaw as well as for the Kanuri of Kanem-Borno.

If therefore we turn our attention to the analysis of the major historical events which occurred in the Central Sudan from the eleventh to the fifteenth century we should take care not to consider individual people as the main subjects of the historical narrative. Also it would be wrong to assume that in the Chad region the state was an administrative structure imposed on specific tribes living each in its own territory. What emerges instead is the concept of a state which has to be defined in terms of its dynastic components. Particular ethnic groups should be conceived through their own traditions of origin, although in actual fact these belong in each case solely to the ruling elite.

The events concerned are the following: first, the rise of the Sayfuwa and the consecutive fall of the Duguwa in about 1068; second, the abolition of the Amun cult by Dunama Dibalemi (1203-1242); third, the surrendering of the Kanem province to the Bulala in the second half of the fourteenth century and fourth, the foundation of Gazargamo by 'Alī Gaji (1455-1487).

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2 It goes without saying that the term Chadic, here applied to the main state of the Chad region, is to be distinguished from the term Chadic languages, first used by Greenberg to identify a particular family of Afro-Asiatic languages (1966: 45).



Some medieval ethnic groups of the Central Sudan

Before giving an account of these events a word of caution should be voiced: our main sources, internal and external, all centre on the two successive ruling dynasties of Kanem-Borno. Therefore it must be recognized that the official sources of later periods have a strong bias in favour of Kanem, the homeland of the Sayfuwa, but completely disregard Hausaland.<sup>3</sup> Further, it should be noted that the royal chronicle of the Sayfuwa, the *Dīwān*, gives hardly any geographical information since it focuses entirely on events of dynastic significance. This again applies only to the main ruling house and not to any dynastic offshoots, although the latter emerged at times as powerful opponents to the main political forces. In particular the *Dīwān* carefully conceals the role of the Duguwa in the history of Kanem-Borno.

### 1. *The Rise of the Sayfuwa*

First we are concerned with the overthrow of the Duguwa – or Zaghāwa as they are called in the external sources – by the Sayfuwa. As far as we know this event occurred shortly before the Almoravid-inspired take-over in Ghana.<sup>4</sup> Most scholars seem now to be convinced that such a dynastic change did in fact take place in the Chad region and that the Sayfuwa, whom the first European travellers met in Borno during the nineteenth century, were not the first dynasty to have ruled over the Central Sudan in spite of their vehement claims to such.<sup>5</sup> Therefore – instead of trying to convince the stragglers – it would now appear to be more important to determine the scope of the political change involved. The available evidence as such is certainly not sufficient to find any straightforward answer to this question. Hence it will be suggested here that a better understanding of the process of ethnogenesis through dynastic groups will throw new light on this particular event – as also on others – and that it will allow us to get a better grasp of certain characteristics of the medieval West-African state than would be possible through the narrow reliance on the available texts.

In the first place it should be noted that the early Arab geographers and historians refer in general to the great Chadic kingdom not under the territorial name Kanem, but only under the tribal name Zaghāwa. Only al-Ya'qūbī, in the ninth century, links the two notions by providing the important information that the Zaghāwa were living in Kanem.<sup>6</sup> Now, it would appear on the basis of structural similitude that the name Zaghāwa is actually connected with the dynastic name Duguwa, which the authors of the *Dīwān* applied in an Arabic form to the early rulers of Kanem. Therefore, if the name Zaghāwa is collectively applied to the inhabitants of the Kanem kingdom since the early ninth – or perhaps the early eighth<sup>7</sup> – century this would seem to imply that Dugu, the eponymous founder of the kingdom, must belong to a much earlier period. An early date for the foundation of Kanem

3 *Dīwān*, 1977; Ibn Furtū, 1987.

4 Lange, 1977: 95–112; *id.*, 1993b (forthcoming).

5 Lange, 1977: 95–129; Zeltner, 1980: 38–45; Cuoq, 1984: 236–243; Hallam, 1987: 33–46. Some authors are reluctant to accept the idea that Hummay was the founder of a new dynasty (Lavers, 1982: 123; Barkindo, 1984: 235; Nur Alkali, 1987: 57).

6 *K. al-ta'rikh* part. transl. in: Hopkins and Levtzion, 1981: 21.

7 Wahb b. Munabbih in: Ibn Qutayga, *K. al-ma'arif* part. transl. in: Hopkins and Levtzion, 1981: 15.

would appear to be consistent with the seventh century expedition of the Arab conqueror 'Uqbā b. Nāfi' to Fezznā and Kawār.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, this expedition to an area far away from the Mediterranean world can best be explained if the way had been paved by earlier trade links between the region of Lake Chad and the north.<sup>9</sup> The kingdom of Kanem, the emergence of which was partly a consequence of trans-Saharan trade, may therefore have been founded earlier than was hitherto supposed.

From the twelfth century onwards Arab writers no longer use the name Zaghāwa with respect to the Central Sudan. Instead they continually employ the name Kanem, while the name Zaghāwa is applied to a tribal group living in the area between Kanem and Nubia. What had happened? It can be shown that the reason for this geographical and semantic shift was the occurrence of dynastic disturbances in the course of which the Duguwa were replaced by the Sayfuwa who claimed to descend from the Yemenite hero Sayf b. Dhī Yazan. According to the internal evidence provided by the *Dīwān* the fall of the Duguwa took place around the year 1068, i.e. shortly before the dynastic change in Ghana.<sup>10</sup> And in fact, apart from this synchronism there are several other reasons, in particular the Berber origin of Ḥummay, the founder of the Sayfuwa dynasty, which lead on to suppose that the dynastic change in Kanem is linked to the religious and political turmoil created by the Almoravids in the western Sahara and Sudan.<sup>11</sup> An external account from 1067-8 gives some support to the idea that there was an important opposition force in Kanem with foreign links since it notes the presence of descendants of the Umayyads among the inhabitants of Kanem. These 'Umayyads' would appear to have been supporters of Ḥummay (1068-1080).<sup>12</sup>

Considering the elements presented so far it would seem that the dynastic change corresponded to a major political upheaval in the course of which a group of Berbers assumed power in Kanem.<sup>13</sup>

The following arguments can be brought forward in favour of such a thesis: first, the disappearance of the name Zaghāwa from the external record as a consequence of the dynastic change; second, the survival of the Duguwa in Kanem in the form of a subservient caste of blacksmiths and elsewhere as minor rulers (Dukawa, Wasangari); third, the simultaneity with the Almoravid-inspired activities in Ghana and Gaogao. These different elements would, at first sight, seem to suggest that the local Duguwa were defeated by foreign Berbers.

In fact, it can be shown that the conquest theory is in this case based on false assumptions and that actually the rise of the Sayfuwa corresponded more to a rebellion staged by court officials than to a major ethnic upheaval. Indeed, it should be fully appreciated that none of the testimonies referring to the early history of the Sayfuwa points to a radical change of the political set-up of the state. It could, of course, be argued that the court

8 Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, and al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, part. transl. in: Hopkins and Levzion, 1981: 12-13, 18.

9 Lange and Berthoud, 1977: 19-22.

10 Note that Ḥummay and other Kanem-Borno rulers of the medieval period had previously been given later dates (Lange, 1977: 82-94).

11 Lange, 1988: 460; Lange, 1993b (forthcoming).

12 Al-Bakrī, *Masālik al-abṣār*, transl. in: Hopkins and Levzion, 1981: 64.

13 Lange, 1977: 95-112.

historians were eager to rewrite the dynastic history of Kanem in such a way that any suspicion concerning the usurpation of power by the Sayfuwa was discarded. But still, if it was possible to write a chronicle only one and a half centuries after the event with the main purpose to conceal the break in the dynastic continuity – and this certainly was the main purpose of the *Dīwān* – then the event itself cannot possibly have corresponded to a military take-over staged by foreign invaders. Furthermore, it should be noted that the twelfth century – as will be seen – must have been a period of peaceful coexistence between the Duguwa and the Sayfuwa. Therefore the impression created by the disappearance of the name Zaghāwa from the records should not be considered as sufficient evidence for any major ethnic change. Later it will become apparent that the shift of names points to a process of dynastic readjustments but that this process was about to be reversed towards the end of the fourteenth century when the name Zaghāwa – in its form Zaghāy – was once more used in the reports given by knowledgeable informants from the Central Sudan to North-African scholars.

A supplementary remark must concern the role of Islam in the advent of the Sayfuwa. No doubt, the new religion was the most important single factor which led to the fall of the Duguwa in Kanem and to the rise of the Sayfuwa. The authors of the *Dīwān* make it clear that Ḥummay was not the first Islamic ruler of Kanem, but that he was preceded by two Duguwa rulers, Ḥawwā' and 'Abd al-Jalīl, who were already Muslims.<sup>14</sup> The short rule of these kings – which for each lasted only four years – as well as the fact that Ḥawwā' appears to have been a woman<sup>15</sup>, tend to show that the Duguwa were no longer in command of the situation. We may therefore suppose that an Islamic party – comprising in particular various Berbers from a Saharan and perhaps an eastern background as well as Black African officials of the Duguwa court – was actively working towards the overthrow of the ruling dynasty. Indeed, the preparation of such a coup from within the ruling establishment presupposes the existence of a powerful common denominator or, more precisely, an ideological platform capable of welding together the different dynastic and non-dynastic factions which were opposed to the ruling section of the Duguwa. Obviously this was the case with Islam.<sup>16</sup>

Today the Duguwa survive within the Kanembu society as a caste of blacksmiths. They no longer remember that their ancestors once ruled over Kanem.<sup>17</sup>

## II. The Abolishment of the Amun Cult

The second major event in the history of Kanem-Borno is the destruction by Dunama Dibalemi (1203–1242) of the royal emblem called *mune*. What exactly this emblem was does not become apparent from the available texts. The *Dīwān* and Ibn Fuṭū both refer to it vaguely as “a thing” and make its destruction appear to be a reprehensible act. As a result of the deliberate cutting or breaking in pieces of this undefined object various people

14 *Dīwān*, 1977: § 10, 11.

15 Lange, 1978: 504.

16 Lange, 1993b (forthcoming).

17 Lange, 1977: 151–153; Conte, 1983: 55–142.

rebelled against the Sayfuwa. It is therefore appropriate to consider the *mune* incident in more detail.

Among the meagre information provided by the *Dīwān* the “cutting of the *mune*” emerges as an event of outstanding importance. From the phrasing used by the author it would appear that the object was considered by the people as being something sacred: “only God knew it”. The two events mentioned next – the war against a certain Gāyu b. Lafrad and the dispersal of the princes – may be supposed to have been more or less direct consequences of the destroying of the royal emblem.<sup>18</sup>

Ibn Furtū, writing in 1578, refers to the *mune* incident in his concluding remarks at the end of his two volume account of the reign of Sultan Idrīs Alauma. He claims that Sultan Dunama was warned by the people not to open the *mune* since it had been handed down from the early rulers of Kanem as a device to assure the victory of the Sayfuwa against their enemies. When, in spite of this warning, “he broke it open” the results were disastrous: “Henceforth the great people of the kingdom became greedy for power and rank”.<sup>19</sup> Ibn Furtū does not say who these powerful people were, but it is clear that he thought of them as members of the royal establishment. More specifically he asserts that the *mune* incident was responsible for the outbreak of a war between the Sayfuwa and the Tubu which lasted for the conventional time of “seven years, seven months and seven days”.<sup>20</sup> He is furthermore of the opinion that even the Bulala wars, which started more than a century later, could have been avoided if the royal talisman – as Barth calls it – had not been opened.<sup>21</sup> Thus the opening – or destruction – of the *mune* caused a movement of widespread opposition among the great officers of the state and it gave rise to tribal disturbances.

As for the actual shape of the *mune* Ibn Furtū is hardly more specific than the *Dīwān*: apart from being a “thing” it was also an object from “ancient times” (*aṣl qadīm*). Furthermore, he considers the *mune* as having been something which was “encased in wrappers and covered up” being thus concealed from the eyes of the spectators. When Sultan Dunama had opened it “the thing which was contained therein flew away”.<sup>22</sup>

It is not clear to what extent Ibn Furtū relies in his account on oral traditions. He explicitly compares the *mune* with the qur’ānic *sakīna*<sup>23</sup> and quotes on its behalf Arabic lexicographers. These were in turn influenced by the *jinn*-like description given to the *sakīna* by the exegists of the Qur’ān.<sup>24</sup> It appears from the lexicographical definitions that a certain amount of pagan demonology was thought by these scholars to be compatible with their Islamic faith.<sup>25</sup> But surely, if the *mune* was a statue of the Egyptian god Amun, as is

18 *Dīwān*, 1977: § 17.

19 Ibn Furtū, *K. ghazawāt Kānim*, ed. Palmer, 1932: 128; transl. Redhouse 1862: 92, 122.

20 Ibn Furtū, *K. ghazawāt Kānim*, ed. Palmer, 1932: 99, 128; transl. Redhouse, 1862: 92, 122.

21 *Ibid.*, 128/transl. 122; Barth, 1857, II: 584.

22 Redhouse, 1862: 122.

23 *Qur’ān*, II, 248; IX, 26, 40; XLVIII, 4, 18, 26.

24 He quotes Ibn Fāris, *K. al-afṛād*, and al-Firūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs*.

25 Cf. B. Joe, “Sakīna”, in: Houtsma *et al.*, 1913, VII: 78.

suggested by its name,<sup>26</sup> neither the author of the *Dīwān* nor Ibn Furṭū would have used the word *ṣanam* (statue, idol) without wishing to insinuate that its worship was an unislamic practice. This and other reasons make it likely that Dunama Dībalemi actually abolished the main emblem of a cult inherited through the filter of Meroe from Ancient Egypt.<sup>27</sup>

Historians tend to see in the opening of the *mune* an important instance of the attempts of the Sayfuwa to promote Islam among the people of Kanem.<sup>28</sup> This interpretation agrees with the account of Ibn Sa'īd according to which Dunama Dībalemi was noted for his religious endeavours. It also makes sense of his shift of alliance from the Tubu to the Berbers, since it can hardly be doubted that the Berbers were better Muslims than the Tubu. However, it must be asked why Ibn Furṭū, who held the position of a grand Imam of Borno, criticizes Dunama Dībalemi for not having respected the symbol of royal power. Is it conceivable that such an outstanding religious and historical authority as the Imam Ibn Furṭū was not aware of the proselytizing fervour of the great Dunama, even if the latter ruled three and a half centuries before his time?<sup>29</sup> In fact, it must have been the disastrous consequences of the *mune* incident, which in the eyes of later observers, made it appear a sacrilegious act rather than a courageous assault against pagan idolatry. Indeed, we know that on the long run the Bulala opposition – which Ibn Furṭū considers to have been a result of the deplorable deed – proved extremely detrimental to the Sayfuwa.

According to the *Dīwān* the Bulala were the most dangerous enemies of the Sayfuwa throughout the late Middle Age. Dāwūd b. Nikale (1359–1369) is said to have been the first to wage war against them.<sup>30</sup> Ibn Furṭū explicitly states that they did not exist in the days of Dunama Dībalemi.<sup>31</sup> He believes that they came from the area of Lake Fitri (beyond the Baḥr al-Ghazāl of Chad) and that from there they conquered Kanem. As the *Dīwān* he dates the outbreak of hostilities to the reign of Dāwūd b. Nikale.<sup>32</sup> Between 1369 and 1382 seven rulers of the Sayfuwa fell in war, six against the Bulala and one against the nomadic Arabs who were their allies.<sup>33</sup> If we further consider that the fighting between the Sayfuwa and the Bulala was resumed in the sixteenth century<sup>34</sup>, it must be clear that the antagonism between the two groups must have arisen from very deep-rooted hatred.

26 In Meroitic the Egyptian name Amun is transcribed as Mni or Amni (Hofmann, 1981: 81). Palmer suggested already that *mune* stands for Amun but he did not explore the implications of this identification (1928, I: 75–76; 1936: 184–185). Historians – including myself – were up to now unwilling to explore this line of thought.

27 The kings of Napata and Meroe were supposed to be chosen by Amun (Török, 1986, 179, 196–7) and they were considered to be his sons (Török, 1988: 229–231). Amun is still represented in a Ballana crown found by modern archaeologists (Arnell, 1962: 181–2). Camps thinks that his importance for the Berbers has been exaggerated (1980: 215–218).

28 Palmer, 1936: 184–5; Urvoy, 1949: 52–53; Trimmingham, 1962: 106, 108, 117–8; Fisher, 1977: 290; Lange, 1978: 510–1; Zeltner, 1980: 47–49; Cuoq, 1984: 246–248. However, A. Smith rejects the idea that the opening of the *mune* was inspired by Islamic proselytism (1971: 173 n. 41).

29 Urvoy, 1949: 52–3; Smith, 1971: 173 n. 41.

30 *Dīwān*, 1977: § 27.

31 *K. gazawāt Kānim*, in: Palmer, 1932: 100; transl. Redhouse, 1862: 93.

32 *Ibid.*, 1926: 54, 128; transl. Redhouse, 1862: 46, 122.

33 *Ibid.*, 76–7.

34 Ibn Furṭū, *K. ghazawāt Kānim*, Palmer, 1932: 54–6; transl. Redhouse, 1862: 46–8.

Who were the Bulala? It would appear that present-day traditions offer valuable supplementary elements for the answer to this question. Considering the dynastic lists of the Bulala we notice that in the earlier part they are nearly identical with those of the Sayfuwa.<sup>35</sup> This may be partly due to the fact that some elements have been borrowed from the Sayfuwa lists in recent times. Nevertheless it shows at least that the Bulala think of themselves as being close relatives of the Sayfuwa. Such a contention is supported by the similarity existing between the titles used in the Bulala kingdom of Fitri and those of pre-Kanemi Borno.<sup>36</sup> As for their language it should be noted that the Bulala speak at present the language of their Kuka subjects as well as Arabic<sup>37</sup>, but this does not preclude the possibility that they earlier spoke a Kanembu dialect.

Looking at the Bulala traditions of origin we find that they claim the same Yemenite origin as the Sayfuwa. This may have led Barth to suspect that Jil Shikomēni, the royal ancestor, was a son of Dunama Dibalemi.<sup>38</sup> A better explanation for the close relationship between the Bulala and the Sayfuwa is offered by a Kanembu oral tradition recorded at the beginning of this century by the Colonial officer Landeroin. In Mao, the capital of Kanem, he was told by court officials that the Bulala were residing in Kanem before the arrival of the Sayfuwa from Yemen.<sup>39</sup> This tradition is consistent with an etymology proposed by Palmer according to which the Bulala name is derived from Bulu, the penultimate of the pre-Islamic rulers of the Duguwa.<sup>40</sup> Whatever the origin of their name it can hardly be doubted that the Bulala were part of the Duguwa ruling elite. They may even have been priests of the *Mune/Amun* cult.<sup>41</sup> The connection with the Duguwa is no longer known to the Bulala. This is, however, not surprising since after their last defeat at the hands of the Sayfuwa and their final expulsion from Kanem towards the end of the sixteenth century,<sup>42</sup> a Sayfuwa origin must have appeared more attractive to them than the reference to a dynasty the name of which mainly survived in the Duguwa caste of low standing. The situation was different in the fourteenth century when the Bulala must have still prided themselves – as we will see later – on being descendants of the Zaghāwa. It is this early genealogical claim which would seem to establish most clearly that the present petty rulers of Fitri were indeed closely related to the first dynasty of Kanem.<sup>43</sup>

In the mid-thirteenth century the Bulala were forced to withdraw to the area of Lake Fitri where they subdued the Kuka. One century later, however, they rose against the

35 Carbou, 1912: 302; Hagenbucher, 1968: 51.

36 Hagenbucher, 1968: 54–56.

37 Carbou, 1912: 293.

38 Barth, 1857, II: 586.

39 Landeroin, 1911: 353; Nachtigal was told that the Bulala were related to the Duguwa (Danoa) (1879, II: 261.)

40 *Dīwān*, 1977: § 8; Palmer, 1936: 217. Bulu is likely to correspond to the Christian name Paul (Lange, 1977: 67 n. 1).

41 Further to the west a particular spirit of the Bori and Holley pantheons is still called Bulala. In traditions of origin this name is sometimes reinterpreted in Islamic terms as referring to Bilāl b. Rabāh, the *mu'adhdhin* of the Prophet Muḥammad.

42 At the time of Ibn Furṭū (1578) the Sayfuwa ruler Idrīs Alauma tried to rule Kanem through the Bulala king Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh (Zeltner, 1980: 107–188).

43 I earlier failed to understand that the Bulala were descendants of the Duguwa ruling establishment (Lange, 1982: 315–331).



Sayfuwa who had temporarily reestablished their rule over Kanem. They forced the descendants of Ḥummay to abandon their earlier central province, but frequent inroads organized by their enemies obliged them to be on their guards by centering their power on both, Kanem and the region beyond the Baḥr al-Ghazāl. Hence Ibn Fuṭū could have the impression that the Bulala had originated from the area of Lake Fitri. This situation was still basically the same at the beginning of the sixteenth century when Leo Africanus called the Bulala kingdom by the name Gaoga, perhaps derived from its Kuka inhabitants.

With these developments in mind we may now interpret the *mune* incident in the light of its consequences, among which the Bulala ethnogenesis was the most detrimental for the Sayfuwa. First and foremost it would appear that Ḥummay and his men, after their rise to power, were prepared to share the advantages of high office with their Duguwa rivals. Practically, the coexistence of the two royal clans must have meant that the basis of Duguwa power remained intact and that a great number of titles and offices were bestowed on members of both clans. Kingship itself was most likely open to the Sayfuwa and the Duguwa, even if up to the reign of Dunama Dibalemi only descendants of Ḥummay had ruled. Islam was widely accepted as the creed of the new age, but under the surface the Amun cult survived. By destroying the *mune* Dunama Dibalemi obviously wanted to abolish the remains of the old state religion of the Duguwa. However, he underestimated the overall significance of the "pagan idol" for the Chadic state and he had no idea how difficult it would be to overcome the resistance of the pagan priests. Indeed, the more radical Duguwa, in particular the Bulala, rose against the Sayfuwa and protracted warfare ensued.<sup>44</sup> In the end the internal enemies were vanquished, but it was only possible for the Sayfuwa to win back the support of the moderate Duguwa by making drastic concessions.<sup>45</sup>

### III. From Kanem to Borno

The third major event in the history of the Central Sudan is the withdrawal of the Sayfuwa from Kanem during the reign of 'Umar b. Idrīs (1376–1381). According to the *Dīwān* the Sayfuwa surrendered at this time Njmi, their ancient seat of government, to the Bulala and fled to Kaghā.<sup>46</sup> Since it is well-established that the Sayfuwa first ruled in Kanem and later in Borno, historians were eager to find out under which circumstances the royal court was moved from the east of Lake Chad to the west. By turning the Kaghā province of Borno

44 Ibn Fuṭū candidly only mentions the rebellion of the Tubu without losing a word about its leadership which certainly consisted of Duguwa nobles, among whom the Bulala must have been prominent (Ibn Fuṭū, *K. ghazawāt Kānim*, ed. Palmer, 1932: 99, 128; transl. Redhouse, 1862: 92, 122). Since the Tubu are already mentioned in connection with a ruler of the eleventh century (*Dīwān*, 1977: § 13) their ethnogenesis is not likely to be related to the Sayfuwa-Duguwa conflict.

45 Note that the Imam Ibn Fuṭū was certainly not willing to express any reservations he may have had concerning the historical legitimacy of Sayfuwa rule.

46 *Dīwān*, 1977: § 32.

into a "place of refuge" the *Dīwān* provides a simple and plausible explanation which was consequently accepted at face value.<sup>47</sup>

From other sources we learn however that Borno had gained in importance over Kanem much earlier.<sup>48</sup> In the ninth century al-Ya'qūbī mentions the existence of hostile relations between Kanem and Mali, a remark which implies that both kingdoms were situated not too far from each other.<sup>49</sup> In the mid-thirteenth century the ruler of the Chadic state was called "king of Kanem, ruler (*ṣāhib*) of Borno".<sup>50</sup> In the mid-fourteenth century Ibn Baṭṭūṭa considered Idrīs (b. Nikale) to be the king of Borno.<sup>51</sup> About the same time the chancery records of Cairo list Kanem and Borno as two different kingdoms, the rulers of the first claiming descent from 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.<sup>52</sup> These elements cast considerable doubt on the validity of the idea suggested by the *Dīwān* that the royal court of the Sayfuwa was shifted from Kanem to Borno during the reign of 'Umar b. Idrīs. It is certainly not correct that earlier the center of the Chadic state was permanently situated in Kanem.

On the contrary it would appear that the Sayfuwa were firmly established in Borno by the middle of the fourteenth century. It is from the area west of Lake Chad that they tried to extend once more their political influence to Kanem which had earlier been lost to their Duguwa rivals.<sup>53</sup> The information concerning the death of two rulers, 'Uthmān b. Dāwūd (1369–1373) and 'Uthmān b. Idrīs (1373–1375), in Njīmi – which may also apply to Idrīs b. Nikale (1335–1359)<sup>54</sup> – should therefore be considered as evidence that the Sayfuwa were campaigning in Kanem. As a matter of fact, fighting in Kanem had been resumed in consequence of the dynastic conflict which had arisen between Dāwūd b. Nikale (1359–1369) and the sons of his predecessor Idrīs b. Nikale.<sup>55</sup> Taking advantage of this situation the Bulala tried once more to win back the ruling position of their ancestors.<sup>56</sup> And indeed, with the help of the local population they were able to expel the Sayfuwa from their eastern province.<sup>57</sup>

Contemporary sources confirm the marginal position of Kanem within the empire of the Sayfuwa in the second half of the fourteenth century. Al-Qalqashandī reproduces a letter from the Sayfuwa ruler 'Uthmān b. Idrīs which was handed over by a Bornoan emissary to the Sultan of Egypt in 794 AH (1391–2). The letter is a note of protest against the depredations committed by nomadic Arabs in Borno. In spite of the fact that the Arabs

47 Barth (1857, II: 587), Palmer (1936: 217) and A. Smith (1971: 179) follow the *Dīwān* by suggesting a transfer of the royal capital. See also Urvoy, 1949: 54 (departure of various tribes); Trimmingham, 1962: 120 (move to Kaha); Fisher, 1977: 291 (exodus); Zeltner, 1980: 65–66 (flight to Borno, an earlier temporary residence of the Sayfuwa); Lavers, 1980a: 192 (Borno a new home); Barkindo, 1984: 244–6 (migration to Borno); Cuoq, 1984: 250–251 (withdrawal to the small territory of Borno).

48 Lange, 1982: 315–331.

49 K. *al-ta'rikh* part. transl. in Hopkins and Levtzion, 1981: 21.

50 Ibn Khaldūn, K. *al-'ibar*, part. transl. in: Hopkins and Levtzion, 1981: 337.

51 *Tuḥfat al-nuẓẓār*, part. transl. in: Hopkins and Levtzion, 1981: 302.

52 Al-'Umarī, *al-Ta'rif*, part. transl. in: Hopkins and Levtzion, 1981: 277–278.

53 Lange, 1982: 317–326.

54 *Dīwān*, 1977: §§ 26, 28, 29.

55 *Dīwān*, 1977: § 27.

56 Both the *Dīwān* (1977: § 27) and Ibn Fuṭū (K. *ghazawāt Kānim*, ed. Palmer, 1932: 54; transl. Redhouse, 1862: 46) claim that the Bulala wars started during the reign of Dāwūd b. Nikale.

57 *Dīwān*, 1977: § 31.

must have come from the east the letter does not contain any reference to Kanem.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, if really the Sayfuwa had been utterly defeated under 'Umar b. Idrīs they would, among other things, certainly not have been able to send a royal delegate shortly afterwards to Cairo.

Al-Maqrīzī provides information which proves that the idea of a refugee government in Kaghā must be rejected. According to his statement the inhabitants of Kanem had rebelled against the Sayfuwa, but Borno and twelve other kingdoms had remained faithful to them.<sup>59</sup> There is no reason to suppose that the Bornoan delegate, who is at the origin of both elements of information,<sup>60</sup> gave a totally distorted picture with respect of the political situation in the Lake Chad area since, on the other hand, he candidly admits the devastations committed by the Arabs "in the whole of Borno".<sup>61</sup>

Al-Maqrīzī further notes that the people of Borno as well as those of Kanem were called Zaghāy.<sup>62</sup> It can hardly be doubted that Zaghāy is a name derived from Zaghāwa. The curious resurgence of the Duguwa/Zaghāwa towards the end of the fourteenth century reminds us that not only the Bulala claimed descent from the first dynasty of Kanem but also the Sayfuwa, whose early chroniclers had inserted the names of their Duguwa predecessors into the official kinglist.<sup>63</sup> And in fact, it must be remembered that it is precisely this distortion of past realities which had given rise in the first place to the idea to produce a written document, such as the *Dīwān*, in order to prop up the spurious dynastic claim to a dual ancestry.<sup>64</sup> Now, the revival of the name Zaghāwa/Zaghāy at the end of the fourteenth century would seem to imply that the Sayfuwa had by this time accepted the genealogical prominence of the Duguwa, even if their claim of descent from Sayf b. Dhī Yazan was not fully discarded. In any case, it clearly shows that the ideological position of the Sayfuwa had been weakened, although it in no way supports the idea that the royal court had taken refuge in Kaghā.

In the light of these elements it appears quite probable that the *Dīwān*, with respect to "the flight of the Sayfuwa from Njīmi to Kaghā", reproduces the opinion of a late court historiān who tried to link the ethnogenesis of the Kanuri to the destiny of the Sayfuwa dynasty. If the name Kanuri is derived from Kanem, as suggested by Nachtigal, this etymology would support the idea of a migratory movement from east to west.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand the term Beriberi applied by Hausa speakers to the Sayfuwa (because of their Berber origin)<sup>66</sup> and their subjects also implies a close connection between the Kanuri and the Sayfuwa dynasty. All this still does not prove, however, that the chronist was correct in

58 Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*, part. transl. in: Hopkins and Levtzion, 1981: 347-8.

59 *Ajnās al-Sūdān*, part. transl. in: Hopkins and Levtzion, 1981: 354; Lange, 1979: 208.

60 It is known that al-Maqrīzī was for some time a secretary in the chancellery; as such he was able to be present in audiences granted by the Sultan to foreign delegations (Garcin, 1977: 200; see also Lange, 1979: 208 n. 5).

61 Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*, part. transl. in: Hopkins and Levtzion, 1981: 347.

62 Lange, 1979: 207-9.

63 *Dīwān*, 1977: §§ 2-11.

64 Lange, 1977: 158.

65 Nachtigal, 1879, II: 418. It should also be noted that the Yoruba refer to the Kanuri as Kaniké (Lukas, 1937: 208).

66 Barth, 1857, II: 26.

suggesting that the Sayfuwa had fled “with all his people”<sup>67</sup>, i.e. the Kanuri<sup>68</sup>, at the time of ‘Umar b. Idrīs from Kanem to Kaghā. A far better candidate for the shift of the royal court from Kanem to Borno would appear to be Dunama Dibalemi (1203–1242).<sup>69</sup> He died in Zamtam, a locality situated to the west of Gazargamo, the later capital of Borno. It is for his successor Kaday (1242–1270) that Ibn Khaldūn mentions the exact title of the Chadic ruler: “king of Kanem, ruler (*ṣāhib*) of Borno”. Kaday had most probably established his court in Borno, while claiming at the same time authority over Kanem. Since the Kanuri can be defined as the people of Borno the process of their ethnogenesis has begun in the thirteenth century.

It is only at a late period that Kaghā rose to prominence. The actual position of Kaghā can be established with a certain degree of confidence. In various forms the same name appears in the writings of Arabic authors. Ibn Sa‘īd in the thirteenth century mentions the fertile land of Jāja which was apparently situated to the west of Lake Chad.<sup>70</sup> Towards the mid-fourteenth century al-‘Umarī considers Kākā to be the most southern town of Kanem,<sup>71</sup> while al-Qalqashandī, quoting a statement of the royal Sayfuwa envoy, refers to it as the capital of Borno.<sup>72</sup> Among modern writers the most authoritative identification of Kaghā has been provided by the knowledgeable traveller Heinrich Barth who located it in the area of the modern town of Maiduguri.<sup>73</sup> These various pieces of information show that Kaghā was situated somewhere to the southwest of Lake Chad in a region partly inhabited by the Chadic speaking Sao.<sup>74</sup> If we further consider that the abandonment of the Kanem province did in fact not imply any major disruption in the history of the Chadic state we come to the conclusion that the royal court of the Sayfuwa must have been established in Kaghā even before the reign of ‘Umar b. Idrīs.

This line of thinking leads to the idea that Sa‘īd, the next ruler of the Chadic state was a leading member of the royal court. He is the only ruler mentioned in the *Dīwān* who is given the title *malik* (“king”) instead of the usual “sultan”. Further, his name is not followed by the name of his father, a fact which is also quite exceptional for the chronicle.<sup>75</sup> On the basis of these elements Barth suggested that Sa‘īd was an usurper.<sup>76</sup> But considering that Sa‘īd was the first king to rule after the defeat of the Sayfuwa in Kanem it would appear to be more plausible that he was a non-royal official of the Sayfuwa court – perhaps precisely the Digma – who, in the absence of any legitimate ruler, had temporarily assumed power in the name of the Sayfuwa dynasty.<sup>77</sup>

67 *Dīwān*, 1977: § 31.

68 The Kanuri name is first mentioned in the eighteenth century by the Fulani scholar Ṭāhir b. Ibrāhīm (Bello, *Infāq al-maysūr*, transl. Hodgkin 1975: 209).

69 Lange, 1982: 321.

70 *K. al-jughrāfiyyā*, part. transl. in: Hopkins and Levtzion, 1981: 187–188.

71 *Masālik al-abṣār*, part. transl. in: Hopkins and Levtzion, 1981: 260.

72 *Subḥ al-a’shā*, part. transl. in: Hopkins and Levtzion, 1981: 344.

73 Barth, 1857, II: 587.

74 Lange, 1989: 203–210. Connah looks for Kaghā in the central *firki* lands close to Lake Chad (1981: 225). It should be further noted that Kagā is also the Tubu name given to the Kanuri of Kanem (Carbou, 1912: 26 n. 4, 298).

75 *Dīwān*, 1977: § 32.

76 Barth, 1857, II: 587.

77 Cf. Lange, 1989: 208.

#### IV. Al Gaji and the Foundation of Gazargamo

The fourth event under discussion is the foundation of Gazargamo, the first permanent and undisputed capital of the Sayfuwa since the days of Dunama Dībalemi (1203–1242). According to Ibn Furtū and to local oral traditions it was 'Alī Gaji (1455–1487) who built the town.<sup>78</sup> This is confirmed by the *Dīwān* which first mentions Gazargamo as the burial place of 'Alī Gaji. Located at a site near the confluence of the Komadugu Yobe with the Kamadugu Gana the new capital was in a better position than Kagha with respect to the trans-Saharan trade.<sup>80</sup> From here it was also easier to reach other towns of the Sahel, especially the Hausa cities.

'Alī Gaji inaugurated a new period in the history of the Chadic state, but he did not lay the foundations of the Borno empire. More than a century earlier Idrīs b. Nikale was already a powerful king of Borno even if his court was established in the southern part of the country. During their long stay in Kagha the Sayfuwa were exposed to the Sao culture. It is here that the Kanuri adopted the legends of the Sao giants which they later spread to all other areas where they settled, including the Saharan oasis.

Oral traditions of the Komadugu area claim that prior to the coming of the Sayfuwa the site of Gazargamo was inhabited by Sao people with a chief called Sao Dala Ngəmami.<sup>81</sup> If we are to believe these accounts the chief helped the newcomers build their capital, but later his people were eliminated by trickery. Although even Ibn Furtū uses the name Sao-Gafata to refer to the local inhabitants of the Komadugu area it would appear that the original Sao were living in the *firki* region south of Lake Chad, which included the eastern districts of Kagha. The specific name given to the Chadic speaking inhabitants of these districts was Ngəma. According to one possible etymology the name Gazargamo contains the Arabic *qaṣr* (stronghold) and the ethnonym Ngəma.<sup>82</sup> The same tribal name seems to be included in Sao Dala Ngəmami which may be analysed as "Sao Dala" – meaning perhaps the "urban Sao" – of "Ngəma origin". On the basis of these etymologies one might be tempted to believe that the Ngəma, who are today considered to be part of the Kanuri, contributed to a large extent to the building of Gazargamo.<sup>83</sup> However, it can more plausibly be argued that the tradition of Sao Dala Ngəmami has been transferred en bloc from the original Sao country in the *firki* region to the area of Gazargamo.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, in Kawar the same story of Sao Dala Ngəmami is told, although the pre-Kanuri inhabitants of the oasis are likely to have been Berbers.<sup>85</sup>

78 Ibn Furtū makes an explicit statement to this effect (1987: 36); in the *Dīwān* Gazargamo is first mentioned as the burial place of 'Alī Gaji (§ 48).

79 *Dīwān*, 1977: § 48.

80 Lange, 1987: 114–117.

81 Palmer, 1936, II: 64–68.

82 It can be objected to this etymology that the *Dīwān* has the spelling *Ghazr-*, not *Qaṣr-* as one could have expected if really the name was derived from the Arabic.

83 Lange, 1989: 205.

84 We entirely lack a survey of the Sao-traditions of the *firki*-lands. With respect to Sao Dala Ngəmami Lebeuf and Masson Detourbet, who mainly have in view the Sao-traditions of the Kotoko, reproduce the version provided by Palmer (1950: 31–31).

85 Le Sourd, 1946: 5. The archaeologist H. Ziegert discovered that the Kanuri conquered Jado in the fifteenth century. Prior to this date the inhabitants were Berbers (in George, 1992: 176).

On the whole it would appear to be etymologically more correct to link Ghazr to the Ethnonym Ngazar which is today applied to a specific group of Kanuri-speaking people living in southwestern Borno and who have their own king.<sup>86</sup> Both designations, Ghazr and Ngazar, are perhaps also connected with the name Kisra, which is used by Arabic authors to refer to the Sassanids. In the Central Sudan the idea of a Kisra origin was most likely put forward by the Duguwa – on the basis of earlier oral traditions pointing to the Nile valley – in order to fight the Sayfuwa by belittling the importance of their Yemenite origin.<sup>87</sup> That indeed Gazargamo harboured the main components of the Bornoan society is supported by local oral traditions which claim the city of ‘Alī Gaji to be inhabited by Magumi Sayfuwa and Magumi Duguwa.<sup>88</sup>

Gazargamo was also the starting point of the great Bornoan expansion during the second half of the fifteenth century. It would be out of place to develop this subject here any further. Suffice that it was not by vanquishing his internal enemies that ‘Alī Gaji was able to extend the political influence of Borno far to the west, but by concious efforts of reconciliation. His tolerant approach towards earlier adversaries of the Sayfuwa comprised both, dynastic groups and religious minorities. As a consequence the majority of the Duguwa nobles of Hausaland became his supporters and allies.<sup>89</sup>

As a matter of fact some neighbouring people have preserved the memory of the Bornoan expansion by recalling either Gazargamo or ‘Alī Gaji. The rulers of Kutus, north of Munio, trace their origin back to *Mai* Cillum Awami of Birni Gassalambo (Gazargamo). In the far west of Hausaland the rulers of Arewa claim decent from Ari, son of Kalumbu, two names in which we may recognize a reference to ‘Alī Gaji and Gazargamo.<sup>90</sup> The name Arewa itself, which in Hausa later took on the meaning “north”, stands for “the people of ‘Alī > Ali > Ari”. It is only on the basis of such elements of local traditions that we can hope to get an idea of the great Borno expansion which took place under the leadership of ‘Alī Gaji.<sup>91</sup>

In conclusion it may be said that the foundation of the Chadic state antedates the emergence of recognizable ethnic groups in the Central Sudan for several centuries. As far as we can see there was no single ethnic substratum on which Kanem was founded. It has been shown that the territorial base of the state underwent in the course of history more complex changes than is implied by the double name Kanem-Borno. The Bulala and the Sayfuwa Magumi are two examples for the numerous descent groups which emerged as a consequence of the competition for power. The Bulala became a distinct ethnic group, while the Sayfuwa Magumi are today part of the Kanuri. Other ethnic groups, like the Tubu, the Sao and, among the latter, the Ngama, were originally distinct from the Kanem-

86 The second part of the name, *-kamu* is also found in *komadugu*, one of the Kanuri terms for “river”.

87 Lange, 1993a (in press). To this etymology it can also be objected that if *Gazr-* stands for Kisra, why then was the name of the capital not written accordingly?

88 Fieldnotes, 7/1977.

89 Lange, 1993a (in press). Historians tend to consider ‘Alī Gaji as a powerful military leader (Barth, 1857, II: 588–590; A. Smith, 1971: 181–183) and founder of the Borno Caliphate (Palmer, 1936: 222–225; Trimmingham, 1962, 121–122; Lavers, 1980a: 192–194; Barkindo, 1984: 246–249).

90 Landeroin, 1911: 494; Zakari, 1985: 189.

91 Lange, 1993a (in press).

bu/Kanuri, but became progressively assimilated to them. With the failure of the Chadic state to maintain its authority over Kanem and the surrounding areas, the Tubu reverted to their former independence.

Many more people of the Central Sudan can be traced to dynastic descent groups of the Chadic state. This is true for the Zaghāwa, the Afuno (Kano people)<sup>92</sup> and other Hausa groups and the Bariba (Beriberi)<sup>93</sup> as well as for smaller people such as the Ngazar, the Dagəra, the Ngizim, the Bedde, the Bolewa, the Achifawa and many others.<sup>94</sup> The Kanuri themselves, now considered to be the carriers of the Chadic state, only emerged after the foundation of Borno in the thirteenth century. It is not yet established whether they are entirely identical with the Beriberi of Hausa parlance. If they were it would be correct to consider them as the “people of the Sayfuwa” in contrast to the “people of the Duguwa”. To the latter belong the Bulala, the Ngazar, the Dagəra, the Bolewa, the Ngizim, the Bedde, as well as most of the individual Hausa peoples. Other descendants of the once ruling Duguwa are today part of the Kanembu society as members of the Dugu caste of blacksmiths.

The Kanuri are of an heterogeneous origin, as reflected by their traditions: on one hand they have incorporated the fictitious Yemenite tradition of origin of the Sayfuwa and the idea of an original home in Kanem; on the other they have also adopted the more popular Sao-traditions of the people of the *firki* plains south of Lake Chad who had come under the sway of the Kanembu. Therefore, the Kanuri can be seen as immigrants from Kanem, who developed their own identity as people of the Borno state. According to this definition there were no Kanuri during the period when the main Chadic state was centered on Kanem. The inhabitants of the Kanem empire may be called Kanembu, but one should keep in mind that the leading Magumi and Dalatoa sections of the present-day Kanembu came from Borno and that they are therefore of Kanuri origin.

In the end it would appear that traditions of origin and ethnonyms – when properly analysed – are better guides for historians than conclusions drawn from the present-day ethno-linguistic situations. Thus, in spite of their close linguistic parentage the Kanuri must be distinguished from the Kanembu, but the Kanuri-speaking Ngazar and the Chadic-speaking Ngizim should be considered historically related. The same holds true for the Kanembu-speaking Bedde and Ngijem/Guiyim and the Chadic-speaking Bedde and Ngizim.<sup>95</sup> These groups are related through their common Duguwa parentage in spite of their present linguistic differences. Therefore, if many people in the neighbourhood of Borno pretend in our days to the same origin as the powerful Kanuri these claims should not automatically be discarded as being merely expressions of intellectual snobism. In fact, the gap between the history as it is seen by the people themselves and the history as it really

92 Lavers, 1980b: 117–118. Afuno would appear to derive from Funē, the name of the first historical ruler of the Duguwa (*Dīwān*, § 4).

93 Lange, 1993a (in press).

94 Lange, 1993a (in press).

95 On the Ngijem/Guiyim (Ngidschem) and the Bedde of Kanem see Nachtigal, 1879, II: 331–332). Another group of Ngijim is dominated by the Bulala of Lake Fitri (Hagenbucher, 1968: 54). Among the regalia of Kanem-Borno the ‘Ngiji’ which was a silver orb should be noted. It was held either by the *Mai* or by a royal singer called Ngijima (Palmer 1936, 11).

was is much smaller than was hitherto supposed on the basis of an excessive reliance on concepts establishing ethnic differences.

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