

Dierk LANGE, *A Sudanic Chronicle: The Borno Expeditions of Idrīs Alaumā (1564-1576) According to the Account of Aḥmad b. Furtū*. Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 1987, pp. 250.

This book is a result of a long-term project to edit and translate some Central Sudanic chronicles which were recovered in the middle of the nineteenth century by the well-known German traveller and explorer, Heinrich Barth (1821-1865). Since several years the project has been supported by Eike Haberland, Director of the Frobenius Institute in Frankfurt.

Despite popular opinion that African history rests mainly on oral traditions, many pieces of information concerning the so called Sudanese belt have been preserved in the writings of the Arab geographers. That long tradition of literacy in Arabic led in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to the composition of some local chronicles which could be considered to be early documents of African self-expression. Among the earliest that survive are *Kitāb ghazawāt Barnū* (Book of the Borno expeditions) and *Kitāb ghazawāt Kānim* (Book of the Kanem expeditions), both written by Grand Imam of Borno, Aḥmad b. Furtū, in 1576 and 1578 respectively.

The book under discussion, containing Arabic text, English translation, commentaries and geographical gazetteer, is the first critical edition of the famous Borno chronicle, describing the first twelve years of the reign of a great Borno ruler known as Mai Idrīs Alaumā (1564-1596). Although the Arabic text was never properly edited, its printed version was issued by the Emir of Kano Press, together with *Kitāb ghazawāt Kānim* and *Diwān salātīn Barnū* (List of Borno rulers). Many "improvements" introduced by its editors (who had an insufficient knowledge of classical Arabic and were inexperienced with editorial work) turned into new mistakes.

The present edition is based on a comparison between ms. A, now preserved in the library of the Royal Asiatic Institute, and ms. B from the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies. Both copies have survived up to date thanks to the diligence of Heinrich Barth, who had a keen interest in history.

Since both manuscripts derive from the same nineteenth century original, the differences between them (shown in foot-notes to the Arabic text) are not very important, consisting mainly in different vowelings of the proper names, affecting the meaning of the text only in few instances. The printed Arabic text consists of 68 pages and is supplemented with two folios of facsimiles of both manuscripts being their *exordia*.

For practical purposes, D. Lange has divided the text of the chronicle into nine chapters (and each chapter has been subdivided into paragraphs) taking into account sequences of the manuscripts which the chronicler himself had distinguished through his style of writing. The English translation (pp. 32-106) has been also divided into the same units, thus allowing easy crosschecking.

It is pertinent to mention here that there are two earlier translations of the *Kitāb ghazawāt Bārnu*, one by orientalist J.W. Redhouse (1862) and the other one by colonial administrator H.R. Palmer (two editions of 1926 and 1970). Redhouse's translation deserves considerable credit, although it suffers from the translator's lack of familiarity with the Sudanic context. That done by Palmer is a sort of paraphrase rather than a literal rendering of the original text, but it contains some additional notes which provide some useful indications to the geographical situation. That is why it has been widely used by the historians who tended to repeat his numerous mistakes.

All the insufficiencies of both translations and of the only existing so far edition have been eliminated in the work of D. Lange. At an early stage of the project he came to conclusion that an adequate translation and commentary of the chronicle could not be achieved solely through work behind the writing desk and that the geographical setting of the book could only be apprehended through research in the field. That is why in October, 1976 he crossed Sahara (Silvio Berthoud from the University of Geneva was his companion for the Saharan part of the trip) following the paths of the XVI century Borno ruler in Fezzan (Libya), Kavar, Damergu and Kutus (Niger), in Borno proper, in the present day Kano and Gongola states (Nigeria), in

Mandara and some Kotoko principalities (Cameroon), travelling finally round Lake Chad - through Mao and Nguigmi. Having arrived in Borno in January 1977, during the next four months he continued - encouraged by Norbert Cyffer - his attempts to identify towns and villages mentioned by Ibn Furṭū. As a result of this, he was able to collect information in all areas into which Idrīs Alaumā had directed his military expeditions during the first twelve years of his reign.

The achievements of that extensive field research have been summarized in a chapter entitled *Gazetteer of identifiable place-names* (pp. 107-165) which - in my opinion - should be rather named *Gazetteer of identified place-names*, in order not to discourage potential future researchers! The identification of more than sixty place-names in the field, and the corresponding descriptions of the sites, are not only very helpful for historians, but they constitute also an indispensable guide for archeological work in Borno and the surrounding areas. The historical reconstructions based on oral tradition, and collected during the field research, provide the reader with new insights into the history of several border states of the Borno empire.

The work of D. Lange is supplemented by selected but very useful bibliography of both published and unpublished items, and by an index of proper names referring to Arabic text, translation and the geographical gazetteer. Six original maps illustrate the geographical research of the editor.

D. Lange's edition brings some revolutionary findings. First of all, he calls attention of the reader to the fact that the chronicler calls himself Aḥmad b. Furṭū, after his father's name. This form of the name occurs only once in both his books (i.e. *Kitāb ghazawāt Barnū* and *Kitāb ghazawāt Kānim*). Elsewhere the chronicler gives the form Aḥmad b. Safiyya, after his mother's name. The spelling Farṭuwa, adopted by H.R. Palmer and accepted by generations of historians, is based on misreading of the final *wāw* followed by an *alif*. In Borno manuscripts it should be read *ū* (i.e. one has to read *Barnū* and not *Barnuwa*, *Gamargū* and not *Gamarguwa*, etc.). Of course, D. Lange as a critic of the text and as an editor is entitled to struggle for preserving chronicler's

will. However, did he think about the confusion which his proposal will evoke in future? And which solution is better? That is the question! By the way, on the title pages one can find chronicler's name in Arabic characters without an *alif*, which is of course editor's licence!

As far as the Arabic title of the chronicle is concerned, one is surprised to find *Kitāb ghazawāt Barnū* inside the book and *Kitāb ghazawāt al-Sultān Alaumā fī Barnū* (Book of Expeditions of the Sultan Idrīs Alaumā in Borno) on the title pages. The hero of the chronicle, Sultān Idrīs b. <sup>c</sup>Alī, died near the town Alau or Alawo and he is better known by his posthumous name Idrīs Alomā. The spelling of Alaumā has been also introduced by D. Lange (after Arabic text) and it may become another source of confusion as up to date the form Aloma has been in current use.

More critical remarks are only few and they are of minor significance. The reviewer is of opinion that D. Lange could give in parentheses English translation of titles of those Arabic works which have been discussed in *Preface* and in *General Introduction*: not all the potential readers of his book are fluent in Arabic. It also seems to me that the foot-notes to the English translation might contain short information concerning place-names being mentioned in the text. This would facilitate the reading, without necessity of endless consulting rather large descriptions in the *Gazetteer*. As far as the *Gazetteer* is concerned, one should expect to find in it an information whether Daura from the chronicle has anything in common with the legendary cradle of the Hausa people. On p. 73 the name of Kingdom Sosobāki should be rather transliterated as Sosō Bākī, following the Arabic text. One should also keep in mind the fact, that it is better known under the Hausa spelling Sose Baki.

Only two cases of misprints have been noticed in the book. On p. 38 the word "where" should be replaced by "were", and instead of the foot-note number 14 on p. 69, one could expect number 19.

The main merit of D. Lange's book consists in the fact that it is the first critical edition of *Kitāb ghazawāt Barnū*. His careful philological analysis discovers some new aspects of the

political organisation and military technology of the XVI century  
Borno. Therefore it will be of interest not only to historians,  
but also to Arabists, archeologists, social anthropologists and  
others. Now we await the edition of *Kitāb ghazawāt Kānim* which is  
on the writing desk of D. Lange.

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