Immigration of the Chadic-speaking Sao towards 600 BCE

Dierk Lange

Introduction: The Sao and the history of Kanem-Borno

In recent years the region of Lake Chad has benefited from considerable advances in archaeological research. Several teams undertook excavations in the centre and the western border of the *firki* floodplains south of Lake Chad. New facts and new dates concerning the material culture of the inhabitants of the *firki* lands came to light. Historical research did not keep pace with these enormous advances. The old questions asked since the rise of African history as an academic discipline remained more or less unanswered. They concern the emergence of the Kanuri people, the rise of the Kanem empire, the expansion of Kanem towards the west, the emergence of Borno and, most important of all, the origin, the scope and the collapse of the civilisation of the Sao.[1] In fact, the Sao became more and more the great stumbling block of Kanem-Borno history. According to oral traditions they preceded the Kanuri all over Borno, but written sources refer to them only since the fourteenth century, long after the expansion of the Sefuwa to the west. Whom to believe?[2] And, in the absence of a consensus about the Sao, how to write Kanem-Borno history without them?

The recent discovery of the site of Zilum between Maiduguri and Lake Chad, the detection of its surrounding wall and its dating to 500 BCE correspond certainly to a major breakthrough in research. Nearly as striking are the findings and the similar dating of the site of Maibe east of Bama. In both cases considerable advances in social complexity and in technology are to be noted. However, there are as yet no signs of the usage of iron, although sites further south dated to a slightly earlier period prove that iron technology was already known at that time by the people living in the region of Lake Chad.[3] This is another of the tricky questions to be answered. How can it be that some cultural traits – like burial practices – spread quickly, while others – like the usage of iron technology - remained restricted to certain people? Moreover, who were the people living in early town-like settlements? Were they the enigmatic Sao of oral traditions and written sources or were they just an unaccountable X-group?

Another but related topic is the relationship with the outside world. Restricting their research on material culture and on the local horizon, archaeologists reject the idea of any outside influences categorically.[4] By comparing sacred kingdoms all over Africa and finding their basic institutions

---

1   Urvoy, *Empire*, 17-44; Smith, 'Early states', 158-171; Lange, 'Chad region', 436-450.
2   Urvoy and Trimingham favour an early date (*Histoire*, 17-20; *History*, 105-6), Smith and Lange a late date ('Early states', 179; 'Chad region', 448-9).
3   Magnavita, 'Zilum', 73-100; Breunig, 'Glanz', 255-270.
4   Magnavita/Breunig, 'Facts' (see the preceding article).

very similar, anthropologists from the culture-historical school were the first to suggest waves of influences or migrations from the outside world.[5] The first historians to write about the African past adopted these ideas favouring either pre-Roman North Africa or the Pharaonic civilisation as the source of these influences.[6] Other historians, though still convinced that sub-Saharan societies were connected with the outside world by important cultural loans, were more careful about these 'waves of influences'. Following the 'state and trade' approach they mostly argued in favour of early trans-Saharan trade relations having contributed to considerable exchange between the two rims of the Sahara.[7] On the other hand, nowadays some historians prefer to think that purely local events, such as the nomad pressure on the sedentary societies of the south, led to the increase of social complexity.[8] In view of the on-going debate it might be fruitful to have a new look at the evidence and to take advantage of the much richer source material of the Central Sudan. Indeed, historians generally favoured the Western and neglected the Central Sudan, because apparently they were on safer ground in the west than in the centre. This may be true for the written sources of the medieval period. Less conventional sources, such as oral historical, linguistic and anthropological evidence, which are relevant for the earlier period, are particularly abundant in the region of Lake Chad. In conjunction with the recent results of archaeological research, they should be put into use under the auspices of new daring questions.

Indeed, all available sources need to be analysed in view of relevant historical questions. Up until now, historians and archaeologists alike mainly took into account local factors of change and development. An approach with wider horizons and *longue durée* is at its very beginning and as such may be fraught with mistakes.[9] Still, led by new questions it may be useful to have a fresh look at written sources, oral traditions and linguistic evidence concerning the old problem of the Sao, their relations with the Kanuri and their cultural characteristics within the context of Chadic languages. By doing so the researcher should neither shun away from comparisons with the outside world, nor from considering regressive evolutions in a hostile environment. Unbiased in the use of his sources and the asking of new challenging questions, he may discover an amazing marginalisation and regression of the direct descendants of foreign immigrants and an even more remarkable redeployment of originally foreign loans by purely African people. Such a stimulating African history cannot be written under the umbrella of a restrictive and overcautious frame of mind.

5   Frobenius, 'Und Afrika', 607-616; 462-488; Baumann, 'Völker', 56-71.
6   Westermann, *Geschichte*, 50-71; Oliver/Fage, *History*, 31-38.
7   Fage, *History*, 55-81; Oliver, *Experience*, 130-140.
8   Fage, *History*, 66; Barkindo, 'Early states', 225-8.
9   Liverani, 'Garamantes', 17-24; Lange, *Kingdoms*, 277-287, 369-371.

1. The Sao as reflected by written sources and oral traditions

The Sao are well-known for their urban culture, their walled-towns, their divine kingship associated with ritual murder and the elaborate hierarchization of their political organization. Their material culture is characterised by highly developed bronze technique and ceramic art, of which the huge storage and burial pots are most out-standing, both degenerating under Islamic influence.[10] Present-day Kotoko consider their Sao ancestors as culture heroes whose material culture was more refined than their own. Archaeologists also paying attention to processes of cultural regression noted these remarkable differences.[11]

The Sao – also called Sau, Soo or So – are first mentioned in the *Dīwān* with respect to the four sons of 'Abd Allāh b. Kade (1310-1328) because they all died in wars against the Sao. It would have been very important to be able to identify the places where these kings died, but this is difficult. There is however a certain probability that three of the localities were situated in the *firki* region south of Lake Chad.[12]

Next, the Arab traveller, Leo Africanus, writing in 1526, mentions a people of the Central Sudan by the name of Seu living close to Lake Chad and more particularly south of Borno. They are said to have been very aggressive, but on the other hand the sultan of Borno took advantage of them by raiding and enslaving them and by selling them to the North African merchants. It is generally supposed that these Seu were the Sao and particularly the Sao-Kotoko living south of Lake Chad.[13]

The third written source referring to the Sao is Ibn Furṭū, the grand Imam of Borno, who in 1576 wrote an account of the wars of his king Idrīs Alauma in Borno. In this case we find a very precise description of the areas inhabited by the Sao. According to the Imam, they lived on the banks of the Komadugu Yobe and Komadugu Gana in a region extending fifty km west and fifty km east of Birni Gazargamo, the capital of Borno, and they lived in the *firki* clay plains south of Lake Chad up to eighty km south of the Lake. These are the regions where the Imam locates them, but without trying to provide a comprehensive description of their region, their habitations may have extended far beyond these areas. In the second half of the sixteenth century the former peaceful cohabitation involving certainly the payment of regular tributes was broken off by Idrīs Alauma who wanted to establish his power on an ethnically safer basis. His warriors cut down the bushes and trees, destroyed the fortified villages of the Sao and forced the inhabitants to seek refuge elsewhere. He also attacked the Sao living close to Lake Chad, uprooted them and made them flee by boats to the islands of Lake Chad. Further to the east he laid siege to certain towns of the Sao-Kotoko, conquered them and

10   Lebeuf/Masson Detourbet, *Civilisation*, 26-73; Trimingham, *History*, 104-6
11   Lebeuf/Masson Detourbet, *Civilisation*, 98; Lebeuf, *Archéologie*, 120.
12   Barth, *Travels*, II, 585; Smith, 'Early states', 179 n. 68; Lange, *Dīwān*, 75.
13   Épaulard, *Description*, II, 480.

made many of the inhabitants captives. Clearly under the pen of Ibn Furṭū the Sao are the great pagan enemies of Borno.[14] By expelling them from the central regions of Borno, Idrīs Alauma contributed considerably to the creation of an ethnically homogeneous state.

Present day oral traditions confirm to a large extent the geographical distribution of the Sao within the central regions of Borno. They localise them in precisely the same region close to Birni Gazargamo as Ibn Furṭū, but they also indicate the extension of their settlements along the Komadugu Yobe – a name probably meaning 'river of the Sao"[15] – up to Lake Chad.[16] With respect to their origin, the central Sao are most often considered as autochthones.

In the region of the Komadugu Yobe the Sao were the predecessors of the Kanuri who were subjected by the Sefuwa when they established themselves west of Lake Chad from at least the early thirteenth century onward.[17] In the most western part of their earlier settlements they are thought to have originated form a place near Mecca.[18] Having preceded the Kanuri in the area, they are mostly considered as autochthones. At the place of their later capital, Birni Gazargamo, the Sefuwa found Dala Gumami, the king of the Sao, who helped the invaders from Kanem to build the new capital,[19] an event dated from the middle of the fifteenth century.[20] According to a tradition from Ndufu in the *firki* plains Dala Gumami lived before Moses and also founded Cairo and Kano.[21] As a personification of the local urban culture of the Sao he was able to provide the newcomers with the necessary know-how and man-power to contribute to the erecting of the new capital city. Apparently, the policy of dispersion of the Sao pursued by Idrīs Alauma was not extended to the inhabitants of the valley of the Komadugu Yobe north of Birni Gazargamo and east of Damasak towards Lake Chad, because in this region it is until today possible to meet people who claim direct descent from the Sao.[22] These Sao were progressively Kanurizised keeping their own traditions of origin and their original Bedde identity in spite of the linguistic and religious change under the disguise of the Kanuri and Borno cultural overlay now being called Mobber. However, those Bedde and Ngizim, who withdrew to regions further west for some time out of reach of the Sefuwa, lost their Sao traditions because their predecessors in their present localities were not the Sao but other people.

14   Lange, *Chronicle*, 43-57, 92-98; id., *Kingdoms* ('Préliminaires'. 139-203). 115-129.

15   Tourneux derives the name Yobe from Soo-be, 'of (the) Sao', hence Komadugu Yobe means 'the river of Soo' ('Nom'. 35). N. Cyffer confirms this derivation (oral communication).

16   Migeod, 'So people'. 25-29; Forkl, *Beziehungen*. 184-5.

17   Lange, *Kingdoms* ('Éviction'. 317-322). 85-90.

18   Freemantle, 'History', 303.

19   In Palmer's tradition he is not a king (*Memoirs*, II, 66-68). In Diekwa, west of Birni Gazargamo, he is called *mai* Dala Gumami and in Dagambi, southwest of Birni Gazargamo, he is considered to have been a king who lived near the later capital (FN 77, 22b, 32a).

20   Lange, *Dīwān*, 79; id., *Chronicle*, 58, 114-7.

21   The authenticity of this tradition is not fully established (FN 77, -20).

22   Migeod with respect to the villages Gumsai Gagala, north of Birni Gazargamo, and Yo/Yau, close to Lake Chad ('So people', 26-27).

Traditions referring to the Sao are strongest among people living south of Lake Chad. The most elaborate among them claim that the ancestors of the present people immigrated from the ancient Near East and brought with them a complex culture. The Kotoko consider themselves direct descendants of the Sao, the coming of Islam having introduced a sharp distinction between themselves and their highly respected ancestors.[23] More particularly, they tell stories of origin akin to those of the Bible, yet too different as to suspect any recent influence by Islamic knowledge. According to one story, their ancestors came from a coastal town beyond the desert situated on a dark island called *Goulefou*, a name in which one may be tempted to recognize with a metathesis of the last two consonants the Semitic name of Byblos *Gubla*. Another regional tradition carries Biblical connotations insofar as it brings Noah and other people to the south of Lake Chad by Noah's Ark and as it has the Sao originate from Noah's body and the mud of Lake Chad. Yet another Biblically coloured story traces the Sao-Kotoko back to Adam and Eve by Sita (Set), Anak (Henoch) and Iwètche, a genealogy which echoes the ancestry of the Sefuwa according to the *Dīwān*.[24] Finally, it should be noted that the king of the Kanurizised Kotoko town of Sangaya claims to originate from the two founding heros, Adimun and Adisun from the east, two names which might have been derived from the Assyrian royal names Adamu and Adasi, the second being the founder of new Assyrian dynasty. In view of the fact that the *Dīwān* of Kanem-Borno likewise has in its early section several Assyrian names, this identification is by no means isolated and implausible.[25]

Other traditions referring to the Sao are overlaid by Arab notions concerning *Tubbaʿ al-awwal*, the great Yemenite hero, who at an early period had conquered most of the countries of the ancient Near East.[26] Still, at an older level one finds in the traditions of the Babaliya, the most eastern people claiming to belong to the same Sao culture, the idea of a common descent of the Babaliya kings, the Sefuwa rulers of Kanem-Borno and the kings of the Bulala of the region of Lake Fitri. They are supposed to have originated from the east and to have travelled to Tripoli, whence they dispersed to the Maghrib, the Jabal Nafusa, the oasis of Fezzan and to the region of Lake Chad, where they built the first walled towns.[27] Hence Babaliya traditions suggest a similar origin of the Chadic people as the Bayajidda tradition of the Hausa which considers the peopling of Hausaland and the rise of urban civilisation to have been the consequence of a migration from Palestine via Tripoli.[28]

---

[23] Lebeuf/Masson Detourbet, *Civilisation*, 28-33; Lebeuf, *Principautés*, 36-41.

[24] Boulnois, 'Migrations', 85, 101; Lebeuf/Masson Detourbet, *Civilisation*, 28-33; Lange, *Dīwān*, 65.

[25] Lange, 'Emergence', 59-64; *id.*, 'Early history' (in preparation).

[26] Lange, 'New evidence' (in press).

[27] Palmer, *Memoirs*, II, 110; Lebeuf, 'Origines', 151-8.

[28] Palmer, *Memoirs*, III, 132-3; Lange, *Kingdoms*, 289; *id.*, 'Turning' (in preparation).

Before leaving the southern region and turning our attention to the traditions of the Kanuri of the Sahara, let us take a look at the important myth of origin available for the Kotoko. It explains the foundation of their capital city Makari by a dragon-killing legend resembling ancient Near Eastern myths of creation based on the *Chaoskampf*. According to the legend of Makari, the town was founded by Ma Sugu, 'the king Sugu' (Sao), who was the leader of a group of Sao coming from the east. By pacifying a couple of monitors by sacrifices he could establish himself and his people on the spot and build the first settlement. After the reign of many of his descendants, the town came under the rule of a powerful and tyrannical snake. Therefore the people were happy with the arrival of Husseini from Birni Gazargamo, who killed the snake and cut it into different pieces. The most important cut was lengthwise and split the corpse of the snake into two halves, which became the northern and the southern part of the town, Halaka and Alagué.[29] Considering that the legend in its present form is an Islamised version of the original account reflecting the submission of Makari under Bornoan rule, it is clear that the killing of the snake explained in the first place the foundation of the town by the cutting of the body of a primordial monster. The different quarters of the town – along with the main sections of the country of the Kotoko – were supposed to have originated out of different parts of the snake with particular emphasis given to the sanctuary and the palace.[30] This idea corresponds precisely to the widespread ancient Near Eastern combat myth which is best preserved in the Babylonian *Enuma elish* from the end of the second millennium BCE.[31] Its deep roots in the conception of the Kotoko concerning their towns, their country and the whole world suggest that it was part of the cultural heritage of the immigrated Sao.

Further to the north we find Kanuri living in the Saharan oasis of Fachi, Kawar and Tedjerhe and until recently in four small hill-towns: Jado, Shirfa, Sara and Siggidim. All these Kanuri inhabitants claim that they were preceded by Sao or Soo, who were the constructors of the remarkable castles and fortified town-like settlements. These culture heroes of huge size corresponding to their huge buildings are said to have arrived either from the north or from the Nile valley via Darfur, Bagirmi and the towns of the Kotoko. Their ancestor is supposed to have been Numurudu Kinana, i.e. Nimrod, son of Canaan.[32] In some instances, particularly in Tedjerhe, traditions refer not to the collective Soo, but to an individual Soo, who accomplished all the notable deeds by himself. Soo is said to have been very tall and different from the Kanuri, to have lived in the time before the Prophet and to have built himself the citadels of Agram/Fachi, Jado, Tedjerhe and Traghen, the latter being in a town of Fezzan, where place names bear witness to an earlier Kanuri

---

29 Lebeuf, *Archéologie*, 75-81; Lebeuf, *Principautés*, 61-63.
30 One sanctuary was the place of the primordial monitors, the other the hollow of the snake, which later became the mosque (Lebeuf, *Archéologie*, 16-17, 77).
31 ANET, 60-72, 501-3; Heidel, *Genesis*, 42-49.
32 Le Sourd, 'Tarikh', 1-5; Forkl, *Beziehungen*, 230-242.

population.[33] This northerly extension of Soo traditions brings the urban civilisation of the Sao close to that of the Garamantes, which might go back to a similar origin.

How to interpret the wide distribution of Sao legends within certain regions of Borno up to Kawar and Tedjerhe? First of all, it has to be noted that not all Kanuri claim descent from these legendary people: The western Kanuri of Damergu, Munio and Mangari, the central Kanuri of the region between the Komadugu Yobe and the *firki* lands and the Kanembu ignore them. They are still known by the southern Ngazar-Kanuri of Gujba, but they are absent from the traditions of the Bedde, the Ngizim, the Kerekere and the Bolewa who are Chadic-speakers living south-west of the Kanuri.[34] This is surprising for the Bedde and the Ngizim, whose towns along the Komadugu Yobe and the Komadugu Gana have similar features to the Sao towns situated further downstream, although due to the environment they often do not have the shape of settlement hills. Many of the Bedde and the Ngizim living close to the Kanuri were so heavily influenced by Borno that they gave up their own language in favour of Kanuri.[35] In view of this situation, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that these two people, in spite of their urban and Chadic culture, must have lost their Sao traditions, insofar as they were uprooted from their earlier settlements further east on the two rivers and as they did not find similar people having preceded them in their present regions of habitation.[36] Hence, a number of Chadic people may have preserved their former Sao urban culture to a large extent, but building new towns in new, further south-western environments, they did not carry with them the notion of a Sao ancestry. Legends of the Sao can apparently only survive in connection with urban settlements which were originally built by their ancient ancestors in their primary place of establishment.[37]

The northern extension of the Sao legends up till Fezzan would seem to indicate that Kanuri met people capable of building citadels and towns and calling themselves by the name Sao or a name similar to it, in this region. Today the most northern community of Kanuri is that of Tedjerhe, however the names of wells further north in Traghen indicate an earlier Kanuri settlement there. Since present-day traditions of Tedjerhe mention that Soo was the

33   FN 76, 24b, 25a (only traditions of the Kanuri, not of the Tubu). For the Kanuri place
      names in Fezzan see Lange, *Kingdoms* ('Al-Qasaba', 31-32), 25-26.
34   FN 77, 58ab (Gujba), 58b (Ngazar Gana); Waziri, 'Traditions', 17-24.
35   Lange, *Chronicle*, 122 (Daura: Ngizim), 155 (Mugulum: Ngizim); 130 (Gamazam: Ngizim).
      Guba 40 km east of Gashua with its Kanuri population is the last town close to the K.
      Yobe having Sao traditions (FN 77, 39a). Rinekunu and (Gassima) further to the west
      with their Kanurizised Bedde inhabitants lack these traditions (FN 77, 40a, 40b).
36   Ibn Sa'id clearly localizes the Bedde at the mouth of the Komadugu Yobe and they must
      have been Sao then (Lange, 'Région', 167, 171). According to Migeod the majority of the
      inhabitants of Yo/Yau (=Sao) are Ngissim of the former Soo/Sao ('Ancient So', 26).
37   The dating of the foundation of Yo/Yau to the ninth century CE (Connah, *Years*, 205)
      does not exclude the possibility that the inhabitants of the town lived earlier in another
      site nearby.

builder of the citadel (*qaṣba*) of Traghen and since the traditions of the Babaliya likewise claim that their Sao ancestors were the builders of the castles of Jabal Nefusa and Fezzan, these items of information may be taken as evidence of the ethnical similarity of the town-builders of Fezzan, known by classical sources as Garamantes, and the town-builders of the *firki* plains. Supplementary evidence comes from the names Garama, designating the capital town of the Garamantes and their name-giver, and Agram, designating the Saharan Kanuri town of Fachi, and possibly also the Kotoko word γ*ʋ* for 'town', which all seem to go back to the Phoenician-Canaanean root *ġir* meaning 'town'. [38] Being by the same traditions referred to the same ancestors, being called by the same name and being dated to the same period[39] the urban civilisation of the Sao and that of the Garamantes may indeed have been established by the same people.

2. The Sao as speakers of a Chadic language

It has often been suggested that the Sao were Chadic-speakers and that on behalf of their language they were Afroasiatics who arrived in the region of Lake Chad coming from the north or the east, but the historical implications of this insight have not yet been explored.[40] The distribution of Chadic languages from North-western Nigeria to close to the border of Chad to Sudan indicates a wide range of influence of these immigrants, not restricted to an incursion from the north towards Lake Chad and its immediate neighbourhood.[41] However, only those Chadic-speakers who lived within the sphere of the Borno Empire may be considered as Sao properly speaking, although the others were very similar to them.

At what time did the Sao arrive to their settlements south, west and north of Lake Chad? Being constantly adapted to new geographical and historical features of the Near East oral traditions provide hardly any reliable indication in this respect. For the dating of the arrival of the Sao we rather have to turn our attention to the language spoken by them. The Kotoko and the Buduma/Yedina being still Chadic-speakers today, their language may be considered the closest relative of the Sao language. Taking into account the considerable difference between the individual Chadic languages and the climatic history of the Sahara, linguists generally suppose that the immigration of the Chadic-speaking people to the region of Lake Chad took place between 6000 and 2000 BCE.[42] However, in the absence of precise chronological markers, it is not excluded that the incursion took place much later. In particular, culturally relevant terms like those referring to urbanism and kingship might be useful in establishing the date of arrival of the Chadic-speakers and hence the Sao to the region of Lake Chad.
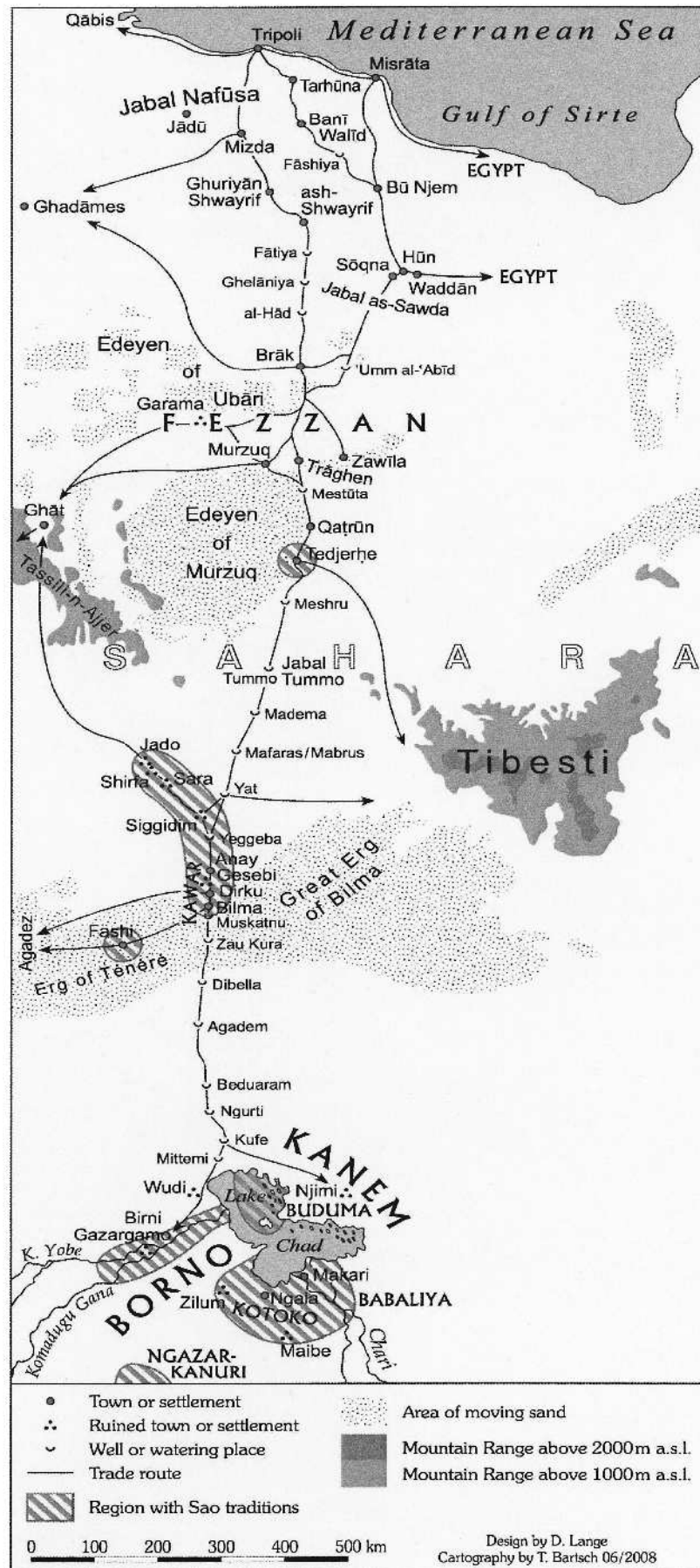
---

[38] See below the different Chadic terms for 'town' (p. 81).
[39] Liverani, 'Garamantes', 22-24; Trimingham, *History*, 12.
[40] Oliver, *Experience*, 92, 98; Trimingham, *History*, 104; Lange, 'Chad region', 448-9.
[41] Jungraithmayr/Ibriszimow, *Roots*, I, 195 (map);
[42] Jungraithmayr/Ibriszimow, *Roots*, I, XII; Ehret, *Civilizations*, 79.

Regions inhabited by Sao

92

First there is the word *birni* designating in Hausa, Kotoko and Kanuri a fortified town. Remnants of the word are recognizable in the Central Chadic languages Gudu, Nzangi, Mwulyen and Bachama where *vura* and *vəra* designate a 'town', the equivalent in Mandara being *bəre*. Similar forms are attested in some West Chadic languages where they have the meaning 'hut' and 'place'. The word is considered to be cognate with the Akkadian *bīrtu* (pl. *birānātu*) meaning 'city, citadel, castle (as part of a city), fort'.[43] In Hebrew and Aramean it exists as a loanword in the form of *bīrā* (pl. *birānə*), while in middle Hebrew and in Judaic-Aramean we find the plural form *bīrāniyōt* and the singular forms *bīrnīt* and *bīrnītī*.[44] There can be hardly any doubt that the Chadic *birni* and related forms are derived from this Akkadian-Aramaic root.[45] Among the Bulala living close to Lake Fitri in Chad, *Birnyi* refers to the local clans of the Bulala as different from the immigrants. To the west of Lake Chad the word might have given rise to the name of Borno.[46] Borno, the western province of Kanem-Borno, being centred on the Komadugu Yobe and including the western *firki* plains, was in contradistinction to Kanem the land of the walled towns. In consequence its capital town was called *Birni* Gazargamo, sometimes shortened to *Birni*.[47]

A second term of Semitic origin designating 'town' in Chadic languages is *ger*. In Hausa we find the reflection *gàrī*, in Bole *ngúró* 'ward, quarter', in the Kotoko dialect of Logone *γọ*, in the Central Chadic language Boko *xura'a* and in Eastern Chadic Jegu *gēr*, in Migima *gēger* 'village', in Mubi *gir*, in Bidya *geeru*, in Dangla und Migama *ger* 'house'.[48] The Semitic root *gīr* is very common: It is attested in Ugaritic, Hebrew, Aramaic, Phoenician and Punic.[49] Moreover in Tuareg the root appears as *agrem* 'town' and as the designation of the Garamantian capital *Garama* situated in the Fezzan and to the ethnic name Garamantes itself.[50] The term is also used in old Kanuri and in Tuareg for the oasis of Fachi or Agram. In modern Kanuri the root has the form *ngúro* and means 'quarter of a town, forsaken village'.[51] This and the preceding term strongly suggest that the urban culture of the region of Lake Chad and that of the Central Sahara go back to a common origin.

Another cultural term insufficiently considered in Chadic is *pərsi* 'horse' which is usually considered as a loan from Arabic. In Central Chadic it is found as *pərsi* in Tera, *pilisi* in Lamang, *bilsa* in Wandala, as *pəlisha* and similar forms in Glavda, Dghwede, Matakam, Musgoy, Daba, Gidar, Musgum.

[43] Orel/Stolbova, *Dictionary*, n° 359. It should be noted that due to missing special symbols the transcriptions in the present article are not always fully adequate.
[44] CAD, II, 261-3; HALAT, I, 119.
[45] Orel/Stolbova, *Dictionary*, n° 359; Skinner, *Dictionary*, 22.
[46] Carbou, *Région*, 21-23.
[47] Barth, *Travels*, II, 589; Lange, *Chronicle*, 35, 114-117.
[48] Orel/Stolbova, *Dictionary*, n° 1012; Ibriszimow/Gimba, *Boldu I*, 134.
[49] HALAT, III, 776-7; Krahmalkov, *Dictionary*, 776-7; Orel/Stolbova, *Dictionary*, n° 1012.
[50] Ghoubeïd, *Lexique*, 72.
[51] Cyffer/Hutchison, *Dictionary*, 139

In Eastern Chadic we have *píssō* in Dangla, *bòráw* in Migama, *pèsó* in Jegu und *fírsó* in Mubi.[52] Kanuri borrowed *fər* as also *ngúro* and *bírni* from Chadic.[53] In Semitic there is the common root *far* meaning 'equid' attested in Akkadian, Ugaritic, Hebrew and Arabic, moreover we find in Hebrew *pārāš* meaning 'riding horse' and in Judaic-Aramaic (Qumran) *pārāšī* 'horseman'.[54] However, in the Bible *pārāš* usually means 'horses of chariots', riding horses being most often called *sūs*.[55] Nevertheless, in an Aramaic inscription from 800 BCE found between Aleppo and Damascus, riding horses (*frs*) seems to be mentioned in conjunction with 'horses of chariots' (*rkd*).[56]

Progressively replacing the horse-drawn chariots, horse-riding became an important factor in the Assyrian army only from the ninth and the eighth century BCE onward. Although technically the invention of a special belt in the period of Sargon II (722-705) made the use of arches on riding horses possible, this way of fighting is attested only since the reign of Ashurbanipal (669-631).[57] Influences of the Assyrian empire are difficult to identify, because of the difference between the written Akkadian and the spoken Aramaic language. Akkadian words for horse are *akkannu*, *azukaraštum* and *būlu*.[58] However, the well documented Akkadian language was only used by the scribes during the height of the neo-Assyrian empire. From the eighth century BCE onward, Aramaic became the most widely spoken language in the Assyrian empire, but it is poorly documented.[59] We can therefore not expect to find any direct evidence of the actual term used by the Assyrians to refer to horses in the available texts.

On the other hand, horses figure prominently in oral traditions concerning the early immigrants of the Central Sudan.[60] In forms of toys, they are found at an early period in the settlement mounds of the *firki* plains.[61] Therefore it seems quite plausible that horses were introduced into West Africa as early as the middle of the first millennium BCE.[62] It may even be argued that complex society comprising state craft, iron technology and the use of riding horses emerged in West Africa at the same period subsequent to a particular historical event.

52	Jungraithmayr/Ibriszimow, *Roots*, I, 95; II, 194-5.
53	*Cf.* Cyffer/Hutchison, *Dictionary*, 47.
54	Orel/Stolbova, *Dictionary*, n° 780; HALAT, III, 919; DNWSI, II, 945.
55	HALAT, III, 704; Krahmalkov, *Dictionary*, 346.
56	KAI, II, 202 B 2.
57	Starke, 'Pferd', NP, IX, 695; 'Reiterei', NP, X, 867.
58	CAD, I, 1, 274 (*akkannu*: wild donkey, breed of horses); I, 2, 529 (Nuzi: *azukaraštum* – horse); II, 313 (*būlu*: herd of cattle, sheep or horses).
59	Kessler, 'Aramäisch', NP, I, 954.
60	Ka'ti, *T. al-Fattāsh*, 62-4/119-123; Palmer, *Memoirs*, III, 133; Fisher, 'Swalloweth', 367-388.
61	Lebeuf/Masson Detourbet, *Civilisation*, 101-2, 112; Lebeuf, *Mdaga*, 160.
62	Ehret on the basis of linguistic evidence (*Civilization*, 222-3).

The conclusion to be drawn from this brief survey of Chadic terms related to the 'town', and incidentally also to 'horse', is that any historical study concerning the rise of urbanism in the region of Lake Chad should take into account the linguistic evidence, which points to an important Semitic factor. Considering this phenomenon without taking into account the terms related to clearly leads to one-sided and biased results.

In view of the significant impact of the spoken Semitic languages of the western Assyrian empire, Aramaic and Hebrew, on the Chadic-speakers in general and the Sao in particular it seems plausible that the name Sao itself is derived from an important onomastic marker of the Assyrian state observable in sub-Saharan Africa. For other societies it has been shown that the priestly royal title *šangû* of the Assyrian kings was such an orally transmitted memorial item with a collective meaning. Derived names of *šangû* can be found in the region of Sao traditions in the name of Ma Sugu, 'king' Sugu/*šangû*, the founder of Makari and leader of the Sao and other early names of the king list of Makari like Sungu *dumu* (Kot.: "Sungu, the strong"), Sungu *ʿ̃imē* (Kot.: "Sungu, the second") and Sungu *dalé*, in the prominent name Dongo of the dynastic traditions of Babaliya and in Shogo Nana, the ancestral ruler of Borno connected with Arabia according to scholarly oral traditions of Bilma.[63] In Kanuri the Sao are usually referred to as *âm Sôobè* 'people of Soo', a genitival construction implying that Soo was the name of a person or conceivably also the name of a phenomenon, widely known from Fezzan to Lake Chad. Hence, it appears that this name going through the same process of middle consonant elimination in Kanuri as noted in many words, developed on the pattern *šangû* > Sago/Sugu > Sao and Soo.[64] If this is correct, Sao would be one of the numerous Shango names of West Africa.[65]

3. The rise of states in the region of Lake Chad: written sources

It is a common error propagated by the "states and trade" approach of African history to believe that states were founded in sub-Saharan Africa only after the rise of intensive trans-Saharan trade following either the introduction of the camel towards the end of the Roman period or the Arab-Islamic conquest in the seventh century CE.[66] On account of the relatively abundant evidence available for the region of Lake Chad, this error is particularly easy to redress on the basis of external and internal written sources as well as oral, linguistic and onomastic testimonies. Only a brief overview of the arguments

---

[63]   Lebeuf, *Archéologie*, 75; FN 76, 50r (Shogo Nana made the pilgrimage to Mecca); Lange, 'Emergence', 63-64.

[64]   Lange, 'Emergence', 63. A derivation of the name Sao from a term referring to fortifications made from thorn bushes is hardly possible, because thorn bushes were not available in a Saharan environment (Tourneux, 'Nom', 35).

[65]   Lange, 'Schango', 214-221.

[66]   Fage, *History*, 51, 64; Oliver, *Experience*, 97. Liverani links the emergence of the Garamantian state to a supposedly very early introduction of the camel giving rise to an early trans-Saharan trade ('Caravan road', 496-520).

in favour of an alternative view insisting on the importance of migrations can be given here.

External documentary evidence shows that in the first century CE Mediterranean traders regularly reached Agisymba, which should be situated in the region of Lake Chad.[67] Agisymba was by that time subject to the Garamantes and it might have been forced to pay tribute in slaves, the most important product of export of both Kanem and Borno until the nineteenth century. In 666 CE the Arab conqueror ʿUqba b. Nāfiʿ reached the oasis of Fezzan and from there Kawar and found that there was a thriving slave-trade of which he took advantage by imposing on both oases a tribute of slaves resembling the *baqt* between Egypt and Nubia.[68] Slaves being acquired by raids and later exchanged for horses, their trade does not leave the same traces in the archaeological record as the usual exchange of goods. Therefore, the absence of northern importation goods in the sites of the *firki* region, particularly exposed to raids from Borno,[69] should not be taken as sufficient evidence for the absence of long distance trade. As long as the important sites of the central trans-Sahara route itself, in particular Gesebi in Kawar,[70] have not been touched by the spade of the archaeologists, non-archaeological evidence should certainly be given more weight on the issue of early trans-Saharan trade relations.

An important, though neglected documentary source is al-Yaʿqūbī's *Ta'rīkh* of 873 concerning a great migration of various West African people from Babylon. Well-known for his accuracy the Arab historian refers to a migration taking the route from Babylon to the west, hence to Egypt and further on to West Africa. His account of Kanem is correct and with respect to the people further west, he mentions the Hausa who were under the rule of a king of the Zaghawa.[71] Once we are able to understand the proper meaning given by Arab authors to the term 'Zaghawa' and once we know the proper meaning of 'Hausa', his description of the Hausa as a *ṣanf* ('sort, species') might also turn out to be fully adequate. Moreover, his account reflects precisely the information provided by the important Bayajidda legend of Daura concerning a great migration from Mesopotamia.[72] In Kanem-Borno a similar tradition might have been replaced by the account of *Tubbaʿ al-awwal* influenced by Arab scholarship and hence more difficult to analyse.[73]

Turning to the internal written sources, we first find the important but largely neglected *Dīwān* of the sultans of Kanem-Borno. Most historians who used this intriguing but at its beginning very enigmatic enlarged king list,

---

[67]   Lange, *Kingdoms*, 280-1; The name be parallel to Ngizim (Last, 'Kingdoms', 172).
[68]   Levtzion/Hopkins, *Corpus*, 13; Lange, *Kingdoms*, 282.
[69]   Leo Africanus provides valid information on the raiding of the Seu/Sao (Épaulard, *Description*, II, 480).
[70]   Lange, *Kingdoms* ('Al-Qasaba', 21-22), 15-16.
[71]   Levtzion/Hopkins, *Corpus*, 21.
[72]   Lange, *Kingdoms*, 289; *id.*, 'Turning', *in:* Haour/Rossi, *Emergence* (in preparation).
[73]   Lange, 'New evidence' (in press).

which might be called a chronicle, started with the seventh king who ruled at the end of the tenth century. However, all the names of the pre-Islamic and early Islamic period including that of the pre-Sefuwa Selmama (11), also called 'Abd al-Jalīl, and that of his successor Humē (12) are not Kanuri and they are not understood.[74] Moreover, the *Dīwān* has at its beginning a nearly complete list of Biblical patriarchs starting with Adam and ending with Ishmael, the son of Abraham, which by certain peculiarities can be shown not to have been borrowed from Arabic authors.[75] Also, it is striking to see that the Chronicle begins with the mother of the dynastic founder Sayf or Sēf, who is described as a woman from Mecca, 'daughter of the king of Baghdad'. Who is this 'king of Baghdad', who does not make sense in the context of the sixth century, i.e. pre-Islamic Sayf b. Dhī Yazan, since Baghdad was founded as the capital of the Abbasids in 762 AD?[76] And most important of all, who was Sēf, the dynastic ancestor himself, who from the thirteenth century onward was identified with the Yemenite pre-Islamic hero Sayf b. Dhī Yazan?[77] He was the provider of the name of the Sefuwa dynasty, while the preceding Duguwa dynasty has its name from Dugu, the third ruler of the Chronicle. Between the two we find Ibrāhīm/Abraham, a name which in the form of Biram and within an Israelite legendary context, also figures prominently in the Hausa legend.[78] Apparently indicating Israelite influences such a name seems to suggest the existence of early connections with Palestine. A last point with respect to the *Dīwān*, is its second name *girgam* which is only orally transmitted. The name also used in neighbouring countries to refer to chronicles written in Arabic is most likely derived from the Akkadian *girginakku* meaning 'box for tablets, library', which designated the library founded in Nineveh by Ashurbanipal (669-631).[79] It might have been brought to West Africa together with the idea of writing a chronicle by Assyrian refugees. Hence, the town of Baghdad mentioned at the beginning of the *Dīwān* could correspond to an actualisation of Nineveh and the three great ancestral names could designate an Assyrian, an Israelite and a Babylonian patriarch according to the origin of early immigrants.[80]

The second important internal source relevant to the question of origins is the account of the Imam Ibn Furtū concerning the Kanem wars of Idrīs Alauma written in 1578. Basing himself on oral traditions, the learned author

---

[74]   For an analysis of these names see Lange, 'Early history' (in press).

[75]   Lange, *Kingdoms*, 243-5.

[76]   Lange, *Dīwān*, 65.

[77]   From at least the thirteenth century onward the ancestral figure Sēf was identified with the Yemenite hero Sayf b. Dhī Yazan (Levtzion/Hopkins, *Corpus*, 188). For arguments in favour of an identification with the Assyrian state god Aššur see Lange, 'Early history' (in press).

[78]   In the Hausa legend the Israelite Biram/Abraham is superseded by the Assyrian Bayajidda (Lange, 'Turning the Bayajidda legend into history' (to be published)).

[79]   Unger, 'Bibliothek', RLA, II, 24; Lange, *Kingdoms*, 245.

[80]   Lange, 'Für und Wider' (in preparation); *id.*, 'New evidence' (in press).

claims that Ibrāhīm, having buried his father Sayf b. Dhī Yazan in Yemen, migrated thence to the land of Kanem where he settled. He further expresses his conviction that the national shrine of the Sefuwa destroyed by Dunama Dibbalemi (1203-1242) and called *Mune* was identical to the Israelite Ark of the Covenant, the equivalent of the Koranic *sakīna*, which was once in the possession of King Saul.[81] Considering that in Kano, within a similar context of Israelite descent, the pre-Islamic shrine was referred to as *cīkana*,[82] the implication of a transfer of the copy of the Ark of the Covenant by immigrants from Israel, and other former provinces of Assyria, has to be seriously taken into account.

Conclusions reached by earlier historians with respect to the foundation of states in the region of Lake Chad should be confronted to considerations based on more recent analysis of the primary sources and other evidence. By only taking into account the clearly understandable information of the written sources and by leaving out the odd and difficult data of the prologues pointing to early beginnings in connection with immigrations from the ancient Near East, earlier authors were clearly biased in favour of the "trade and state" concept of African history. If historical studies benefit in future from the same enthusiasm as archaeological research, it will certainly not take long before reaching better substantiated and more generally acceptable reconstructions than those which are at present available.

4. The rise of states in the region of Lake Chad: linguistic evidence

With respect to the linguistic evidence for early kingship in the Central Sudan there are four roots which are attested in more than one branch of Chadic. First we consider *mai* 'king', which on account of the powerful Kanem-Borno Empire, is mostly supposed to be a loan from Kanuri. It is found in the following Western Chadic languages: in Yiwon as *mòi*, in Tangale as *mai*, in Kirfi as *me*, in Bole as *moi*, in Ngizim as *mài* and in Hausa as *mài* 'owner, oil'. In Central and Eastern Chadic languages we have in Buduma/Yedina *mei* and in Mokolu *môytá*.[83] In Bagirmi the root became *bay*, *boy* and *mbang*. Its Semitic root seems to be the Hebrew, Sabaic, Judaic-Aramaic and Punic *mašīḥ* 'the anointed'. In the Old Testament, the title is applied to Israelite kings and also to the Persian ruler Kyros.[84] The second consonant appears in Hausa in *mäsū*, the plural form of *mài*, while the second and the third consonants are present in Tuareg *məssh* 'lord, master, proprietor'.[85]

The second most widespread root in Chadic designating a king is *mlb*. In Western Chadic it is found in Geruma as *malbu*, in the Northern Bauchi languages as *málvuna, múwùn, málvú* and similar forms, in Central Chadic in

81   Palmer, *Memoirs*, I, 70-71; Lange, 'Mune-symbol', 15-24.
82   Palmer, *Memoirs*, III, 116; Last, 'Metaphors', 172.
83   Jungraithmayr/Ibriszimow, *Roots*, I, 30; II, 72-73; Skinner, *Dictionary*, 192.
84   Jes 45, 1; HALAT, II, 609-610.
85   Ghoubeïd, *Lexique*, 132; Abraham, *Dictionary*, 637.

Gidar as *múlya* and in Masa as *mùllà* and in Eastern Chadic in Kwang as *mùlà:tɔ*, in Kera as *kumná*, in Kabalai as *kùmàlɔ* and in Lele as *kùrmbàlò*.[86] By deriving the Central Chadic forms *malak* and *mulak*, which in Sukur and Gisiga mean 'stranger', from the same root, some authors suggest that the Semitic root *malik* is cognate to it.[87] The root *mlb* may therefore have been derived from Semitic via the oral address of a king *malik ba'lī* 'the king, my lord'.[88]

The third root in Chadic for 'king' to be considered is *mkm*. In Western Chadic it is found in the Southern Bauchi languages as *gun*, *pan-kwàl*, *gung*, *kung* and *gùn*, in Central Chadic in Higi as *mbɔgɔ* and as *ngɔ*, in Bata as *hɔ́me* and *hɔmin*, in Laamang as *mbagam* and in Dghwede as *màgàmá*.[89] Moreover, Magumi is in Borno the generic name for the ruling dynasty.[90] In all likelihood these forms go back to the Phoenician-Punic and also Canaanite designation *mīqim 'elīm* of the *suffet* in charge of the dying and rising god.[91] In a situation of institutional simplification the leading *suffet* could easily rise to the position of a holder of supreme authority.

The fourth root in Chadic for 'king' to be considered here is *sar*. It is attested in the Western Chadic languages Daffo-Butura as *sàràm* 'governor' and in Warji as *cāra* 'king'.[92] In Hausa the 'king' is called *sarkī* 'king', with an extra suffix *-kī*, the queen *saraunīyā* and the abstract for office and kingship is *sàrautà*.[93] These forms are paralleled in Daffo-Butura by *sàràm* 'governor' and *sàràm-àt* 'government, kingship'. Furthermore, the royal designations *līksé*, *tlɔksa* and *tidi* in the Central Chadic languages Wandala, Glavda and Sukur are supposed to go back by metathesis to *sarki*.[94] They are ultimately derived from Akkadian *šarr-um* 'king', *šarratu* 'queen' and *šarrutu* 'royalty, kingship'.[95] The suffix *-ki* of *sarki* reflects the Assyrian royal epithet *šarr KIŠI*, which can be read as *šarr kiššati* 'king of the totality' or as *šarr Kiši* 'king of Kish.[96] The derivation of these Chadic terms from Assyro-Akkadian designations of royal figures and institutions strongly suggests a direct influence of Assyria on the Chadic polities of the Central Sudan.

With respect to the onomastic evidence it should be noted that many of the enigmatic names of the dynastic lists of Makari and Ndufu can by

86	Jungraithmayr/Ibriszimow, *Roots*, I. 30; II. 72-73.
87	Orel/Stolbova, *Dictionary*, n° 1791.
88	An Ugaritic letter begins by these words (DULAT, II, 551).
89	Jungraithmayr/Ibriszimow, *Roots*, I. 30; II. 72-73.
90	Smith, 'Early states', 165, 176; Barkindo, 'Early states', 236-7.
91	Bonnet, *Melqart*, 174-9; Lange, *Kingdoms*, 367.
92	Orel/Stolbova, *Dictionary*, n° 386. Jungraithmayr/Ibriszimow have *tsaarà* and *malvɔna* for Warji (*Roots*, II, 72). For *sàràm* as an Akkadian root see Jungraithmayr, 'Hamito-Semitic remnants', 19-20.
93	Greenberg considers *sár-(kī)* as a derivation from Akkadian *šarr* 'king' and Egyptian *śr* 'high official' ('Linguistic evidence', 207 n. 6).
94	Jungraithmayr and Ibriszimow suppose a reverse influence (*Roots*, I, 34).
95	CAD, XVII, 2, 72-5, 76-123; Jungraithmayr, 'Hamito-Semitic remnants', 19-20.
96	Seux, *Épithèthes*, 308-312; Lange, *Kingdoms*, ('Links', 356-7), 328-9.

analysed in terms of loans from Babylonian, Kassite, Elamite and Assyrian king lists.[97] The early portion of the *Dīwān* also contains royal names of ancient Near Eastern origin.[98] Hence two of the above noted Assyrian figures Adimu and Adisu remembered in Sangaya are in no way exceptions.

Particularly relevant for dating purposes are the titles *mai*, *sar* and *sarki*. If it is correct that they are derived from an Israelite and an Assyrian royal title, they cannot be older than the eighth century BCE. Tiglathpileser III (744-721) extended the frontiers of the neo-Assyrian empire to the Mediterranean Sea by integrating Syrian, Phoenician and Israelite polities into his Western provinces. Only from that time on is it conceivable that specific Assyrian and Israelite royal titles could reach sub-Saharan Africa.

The evidence presented here for the rise of states in the Central Sudan concerns in the first place the speakers of Chadic languages. Linguistically Chadic speakers preserve the cultural heritage of their ancestors from the ancient Near East more directly than Nilo-Saharan speakers such as the Kanuri. The later development of Kanem-Borno to a powerful empire of sub-Saharan Africa has misled numerous researchers with respect to the direction of influence by supposing that Kanem and Borno were the primary source of many items concerning state organisations, while in fact these elements were in the first instance part of the Semitic heritage of the Chadic-speakers.

As for the Sao they represent only a small section of all the Chadic-speakers. In fact, their zone of settlements hardly goes beyond the limits of the Borno Empire and it does not even extend to Kanem. Though traditions indicate important links with the Hausa city states and with societies extending east of Lake Chad, the name as such is restricted to regions inhabited by the Kanuri and to the zone of influence of the Borno Empire. An important characteristic of the Sao is therefore, that they were conquered by the Kanuri. For the Kanuri they are the great preceding civilisation which they subjected, dominated and assimilated, Islamisation in this respect being a minor issue. Only among the Kotoko has Islam to be considered as a sign of submission to Borno. To confess Islam therefore meant for the Kotoko ruling elite to accept the domination of Borno and to reject the prior cultural heritage of the Sao.[99]

At the earliest period of state building in the region of Lake Chad, there were only politics of the Sao. It is at a later stage that one of these politics was able to associate the surrounding Nilo-Saharan-speakers and to build up with their assistance considerable military strength. From these small beginnings Kanem became the most powerful state of the Central Sudan. In the course of history it surpassed all the Chadic kingdoms and incorporated many of them.

97   For a similar analysis with respect to the Kebbi, Zamfara, Kano and Oyo king lists see Lange, *Kingdoms*, 239-242, 248-9, 252-4.

98   Lange, 'Early history' (in press).

99   Trimingham, *History*, 118; Lebeuf, *Principautés*, 20, 45-46

Conclusion: Assyria, the Sao/*šangû*, the Garamantes and Zilum

The migration of foreign people to Africa was a favourite topic of colonial authors propagating the Hamitic hypothesis. According to this idea, the racial characteristics of particular people were the most important prerequisites for their ability to create and to propagate any form of higher culture. Accordingly, Berbers of the Sahara were in spite of their nomadic style of life supposed to have been the main transmitters of the Mediterranean culture to sub-Saharan Africa by way of migrations and conquests.[100] Post-colonial historiography rejected this simplistic explanation of culture diffusion and replaced it by a model based on trade relations. Trans-Saharan trade was accordingly supposed to have established new and intensive means of communication and to have permitted the transplantation of important innovations.[101]

Recent research revealed that African people such as the Yoruba, living far to the south of the Berbers were carriers of a civilisation having ancient Near Eastern characteristics for hundreds of years. The same was shown to apply to the Hausa states situated closer to the Sahara and to the Sao urban communities of the region of Lake Chad.[102] Following the trade model, these important reflexes of Canaanite-Israelite culture were explained by commercial exchanges implying for the sub-Saharan polities the exportation of slaves.[103] However, neither the demand for slaves in the ancient world, nor the available evidence for early trans-Saharan trade supported this hypothesis sufficiently.[104] Nevertheless, this negative conclusion should not distract from the main issue – how to explain the numerous social and cultural remnants of ancient Near Eastern societies in the Central Sudan?

In the region of Lake Chad there is additional evidence in form of unequivocal linguistic survivals of Semitic influences. Ever since it was discovered that the Chadic languages were off-shoots of Afro-asiatic, earlier called Hamito-Semitic, neither linguists nor historians doubted that these linguistic remains were the result of an important immigration of speakers of Afro-asiatic or more precisely Chadic languages and in particular of Semites.[105] On account of great linguistic diversification and Saharan climatic history, it is generally supposed that these corresponding migratory movements took place more than four thousand years ago.[106] As for the geographical origin of the people and their partly Semitic linguistic heritage, no precise conclusion could be reached. Basing themselves on the distributional evidence und unaware of any better historical solution, historical linguists mostly opted for a purely geographical solution by bringing

100	Urvoy, *Histoire*, 21-22; Westermann, *Geschichte*, 31-32.
101	Fage, *History*, 59-68; Shaw, *Nigeria*, 158-163.
102	Lange, *Kingdoms*, 155-306, 343-376; *id.*, 'Emergence', 49-68; Weisser, *Königtum*, 18-25.
103	Lange, *Kingdoms*, 277-287; *id.*, 'Emergence', 53-54.
104	Schumacher, *Sklaverei*, 34-64; Magnavita/Breunig, 'Facts' (see the preceding article).
105	Without distinguishing between Hamites and Semites, Lukas compares the early Chadic with the later Arab immigrants ('Bedeutung', 234).
106	Jungraithmayr/Ibriszimow, *Roots*, I, XII; Ehret, *Civilizations*, 79.

the cradle of Semitic speakers closer to sub-Saharan Africa than historians were prepared to do.[107]

From the above developments and related research it appears that the Sao and other Chadic-speakers reached the region of Lake Chad as the result of the fall of the Assyrian empire at the end of the seventh century BCE. By that time, various people who had been incorporated into the Assyrian empire since the middle of the eighth century fled Syria-Palestine because of insecurity and political turmoil.[108] They were particularly attracted by Egypt as a former ally of Assyria, but the densely populated Nile valley made it impossible for them to settle there. Further migration led them either to North Africa or to Nubia, whence they went south or west, reaching the region, where nowadays we find their descendants as speakers of Chadic languages. They might have been followers of other Chadic-speakers, but many of the Semitic items of Proto-Chadic are best explained by the notion of a massive immigration from Syria-Palestine during or at the end of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.[109] Before the arrival of Chadic-speakers the region west and south of Lake Chad was inhabited by Niger-Congo-speakers. Certainly the expansion of Chadic languages did not only involve the assimilation but also the expulsion of the former inhabitants of the Lake Chad basin. Further south it may have set into motion the Bantu expansion.

Among all the Chadic-speakers, the Sao are the only vanished people, whose memory is preserved by written and oral accounts. From the common name given to these outstanding builders of surviving monuments between the southern Fezzan and northern Cameroon, it appears that they were carriers of a rather homogeneous urban civilisation. On account of their remarkable innovations, the people of Zilum and Maibe[110] are most likely their earliest attested representatives. Still today the clan identity of the Kanuri Ngəma living in the immediate neighbourhood of Zilum and their Sao traditions bear witness to an earlier Kotoko and hence Chadic identity.[111] Moreover, the absence of iron should not be taken as an absolute criterion to classify the people as either technologically advanced or not: Some people of the *firki* plains may have been able to produce iron as early as the fifth century and their neighbours to the south even in the seventh century BCE, while others were still stone age people at the beginning of the Christian era.[112] This

---

[107] Ehret, *Civilization*, 36-39; Oliver, *Experience*, 38-39.

[108] Oded, *Deportations*, 33-115; Lange, 'Für und Wider' (in preparation); *id.*, 'New evidence' (in press).

[109] Items not discussed here include *btl* 'belly', *bn* 'built', *jambal/gml* 'camel', *dk* 'chicken, cock', *w-l* 'child', *bn* 'granary', *muut* 'corpse', *na:k* 'cow' (Sem. *n'g* 'sheep'), *muut* 'die', *w-l* 'give birth', *bkr* 'he-goat', *mtm* 'man', *b-n* 'hut, house', *sm* 'name', *bdr* 'seed', *ls* 'tongue, language', *sn* 'tooth', *ymn/yanm* 'water', *nkd/ mqds* 'woman'.

[110] Magnavita, 'Zilum', 85-94; Breunig, 'Glanz', 261-8.

[111] FN 77, 91a (Gajiram – 15 km north-west of Zilum: Zilum belongs to Ngomati and hence to Ngəma-country), 91b (Gajiram: Maiwa – 15 km south-west of Zilum - is at the border of Ngəma-country); Lange, 'Emergence', 56-57.

[112] Lebeuf, *Gisement*, 16, 168, 201; Connah, *Years*, 146-7; Mac Eachern, 'Iron', 425-9.

difference could in particular reflect varying degrees of incorporation of the local people into the urban society of the immigrants. Considerable isolation of the different Sao communities from each other, the scarcity of iron-producers and the latter's tight association with the major rulers of the region, may have contributed to restricting the iron technology to certain communities of the Chadic-speakers, while others had to survive with stone age tools produced by local Niger-Congo-speaking artisans.

Besides the ability of the Sao to build castles and towns, the contrast between these Chadic-speakers and the Kanuri, who were the people of the expanding Kanem-Borno Empire, should also be taken into account. Indeed, apart from the heavily Bornoan influenced Kotoko and Buduma/Yedina, Sao traditions are found only among the Kanuri. At an early date the Nilo-Saharan-speaking Kanuri must have realised that their urbanised predecessors in Borno, in the *firki* plains and in the Saharan oasis referred to themselves by the same generic name, Sâu, Sôo and Sâo, going back to a common ancestral figure and to a distinct political heritage. Probably derived from the Assyrian priestly royal title *šangû*, the Kanuri adopted the name in each region from the conquered or assimilated people. Hence, neither their language nor their urban culture, but this particular tradition transmitted by the Kanuri gave the Sao their specific identity and differentiated them from other Chadic speakers. Some neighbouring Chadic speakers, like the Bedde and the Ngizim, who were likewise incorporated into the world of the Kanuri-speakers, lost their Sao traditions because they were attached to the settlements of their ancestors, which were abandoned. Others like the Buduma/Yedina kept them in the form of a legend centred on an ancestral figure. Still others, like the Hausa and perhaps also the Bolewa and the Mandara, inherited traditions referring to the same urban culture but to different ancestral figures. With respect to the Garamantian civilisation of Fezzan, the Sao traditions of the Kanuri and of the Babaliya suggest a common ancestry, which the Tuareg inheritors of the Garamantes may have preserved under a different name. In view of the Assyrian heritage of the Sao going back to the end of the seventh century BCE, such a common ancestry is quite plausible.

The Kanuri are basically black Africans – they speak a Nilo-Saharan, *i.e.* purely African, language and by physical appearance they are likewise Africans. The Sao by contrast, though by intermarriage also Africanized, spoke an Afro-asiatic language strongly influenced by Semitic and they were fond of their ancient Near Eastern origins. The Kanuri adopted from their Sao predecessors fundamental elements of their state tradition and urban culture, but they remained distinct from them because of their more direct African origins and the sense of imperial rule derived from it. A similar process of acculturation followed by political expansion under the leadership of an African ruling class is observable in Darfur, Bagirmi, Yorubaland and Songhay. It gives the history of the Central Sudan a certain unity which it

would have lacked if all the main motive forces had reached it from the outside.[113]

Bibliography:

ANET: Pritchard, J. B., Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, 3rd ed., Princeton, 1969.

CAD: A. L. Oppenheim et al. (eds.), The Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago, 21 vols., Chicago 1956 sq.

DNWSI: Hoftijzer, J. and K. Jongeling, Dictionary of North-West Semitic Inscriptions, 2 vols., Leiden 1995.

DULAT: G. del Olmo Lete und J. Sanmartin, Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition, 2 vols., Leiden 2004.

FN: field notes from D. Lange; FN 77 – field notes from 1977.

HALAT: L. Koehler et al., Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon, 5 vols., Leiden 1967-1996.

KAI: H. Donner and W. Röllig (eds.), Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften, 3 vols., Wiesbaden 1964.

NP: H. Cancik (ed.), Der Neue Pauly: Encyklopädie der Antike, 15 vols., Stuttgart 1996-1999.

RLA: E. Ebeling et al. (eds.), Reallexikon der Assyriologie, 10 vols., Berlin 1932- (in progress).

ABRAHAM, R. C., Dictionary of the Hausa Language, 2nd ed., 1962.

BARKINDO. B., "Early States of the Central Sudan: Kanem, Borno and some of their Neighbours to c. 1500 A.D.", in: J. Ajayi und M. Crowder (eds.), History of West Africa, vol. I, 3rd ed.,Harlow 1985, 225-254.

BARTH, H.: Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa, 3 vols., New York 1857-9.

BAUMANN. H., "Völker und Kulturen", in: H. Baumann et al. (eds.), Völkerkunde von Afrika, Essen 1940, 3-374.

BONNET, C., Melqart. Cultes et mythes de l'Héraclès tyrien en Méditerranée, Leuven 1988.

BOULENOIS, J., "La migration des Sao au Tchad", Bulletin de l'IFAN, 5 (1943), 80-120.

BREUNIG, P. et al., " G(l)anz ohne Eisen: Große Siedlungen aus der Mitte des ersten Jahrtausends BCE im Tschadbecken von Nordost-Nigeria", in: H.-P. Wotzka (ed.), Grundlegungen, Tübingen 2006, 255-270.

CARBOU, H., La région du Tchad et du Ouaddaï, Paris 1912.

Connah, G., Three Thousand Years in Africa, Cambridge 1981.

CYFFER, N. and J. HUTCHISON, Dictionary of the Kanuri Language, Dordrecht 1990.

EHRET, C., The Civilizations of Africa: A History to 1800, Oxford 2002.

ÉPAULARD, A., Jean-Léon l'African: Description de l'Afrique, 2 vols., Paris 1956.

FAGE, J. D., History of Africa, 2nd ed., London 1988.

FISHER, H., "He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage: the horse in the Central Sudan", Journal of African History, 13 (1972), 369-388.

---

[113]   Oliver and Fage for a slightly different context (History, 38).

FORKL, H., *Die Beziehungen der zentralsudanischen Reiche Bornu, Mandara und Bagirmi sowie der Kotoko-Staaten zu ihren südlichen Nachbarn unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Sao-Problems*, München 1983.

FREEMANTLE. J. M., "A history of the region comprising the Katagum Division of Kano Province", *Journal of the Royal African Society* 11 (1912). 298-319.

FROBENIUS, L., *Und Afrika sprach*, Berlin 1912.

GHOUBEÏD. Alojaly, *Lexique Touareg-Français*. Copenhague 1980.

GREENBERG, J., "Linguistic evidence for the influence of the Kanuri on the Hausa", *Journal of African History*, 1 (1960), 205-212.

HEIDEL, A., *The Babylonian Genesis*, Chicago 1951.

IBRISZIMOW, D. and A. M. Gimba (eds.), *Bole Language and Documentation Unit. BOLDU*, 2 vols., Köln 1996.

JUNGRAITHMAYR, H., "Ancient Hamito-Semitic remnants in the Central Sudan", *African Language Review*, 7 (1968), 16-22.

JUNGRAITHMAYR, H. and D. IBRISZIMOW, *Chadic Lexical Roots*, 2 vols., Berlin 1994.

KATI, Maḥmūd, *Ta'rīkh al-Fattāsh*, transl. O. Houdas und M. Delafosse, Paris 1913.

KRAHMALKOV, Ch., R., *Phoenician-Punic Dictionary*, Leuven 2000.

KÜHME, W., *Das Königtum von Gobir: Götter, Priester. Feste einer sakralen Gesellschaft*, Hamburg 2003.

LANGE, D.. *Le Dīwān des sultans du Klnem-Bornū: Chronologie et histoire d'un royaume africain*, Wiesbaden 1977.

-   *A Sudanic Chronicle: The Borno Expeditions of Idrīs Alauma (1564-1576)*, Stuttgart 1987.

-   "Der Ursprung des westafrikanischen Wettergottes Schango", *Saeculum* 45 (1994), 213-238.

-   "La région du lac Tchad d'après la géographie d'Ibn Saʿīd: texte et cartes", *Revue d'Islamologie* 16 (1980), 149-181.

-   "The Chad region as a crossroads", *in:* M. Elfasi (ed.), *General History of Africa*, UNESCO, vol. III, London 1988, 436-460.

-   "Der Ursprung des westafrikanischen Wettergottes Schango". *Saeculum* 45 (1994), 213-238.

-   *Ancient Kingdoms of West Africa: Africa-Centred and Canaanite-Israelite Perspectives*, Dettelbach 2004.

-   "The *Mune*-Symbol as the Ark of the Covenant between Duguwa and Sefuwa", *BMS Newsletter* 66/67 (2006), 15-25.

-   "The emergence of social complexity in the southern Chad Basin towards 500 BCE: archaeological and other evidence," *BMS Newsletter* 68-71 (2007), 49-68.

-   "Islamic feedback or ancient Near Eastern survivals? A reply to David Henige", *Paideuma* 54 (2008), 253-264.

-   "New evidence on the foundation of Kanem: Archaeology, Yemenite traditions and Zaghawa origins", Maiduguri, Millenium Conference, 12-16, November 2007 (in press).

-   "The early history of Kanem: the indigenisation of Assyrian immigrants as Duguwa and Sefuwa", *in:* François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar et Bertrand Hirsch (eds.), *Mélanges Jean Boulègue* (in press).

LAST, M.. "Historical metaphors in the Kano Chronicle", *History in Africa* 7 (1980), 161-178.

-   "The early kingdoms of the Nigerian Savanna", *in:* J. Ajayi und M. Crowder (eds.), *History of West Africa*, Bd. I, 3rd ed.. Harlow 1985, 167-224.

LEBEUF, A., *Principautés kotoko*, Paris 1969.

LEBEUF, J.-P., *Archéologie tchadienne*, Paris 1962.

LEBEUF, J.-P. and A. Masson DETOURBET, *La civilisation du Tchad*, Paris 1950.

LEBEUF, J.-P. and A., "Les origins du royaume Babalya (Tchad)", *Paideuma* 24 (1978), 147-162.

LEBEUF, J.-P., *et al.*, *Le gisement Sao de Mdaga (Tchad): fouilles 1960-1968*, Paris 1980.

Le SOURD, M., "Tarikh el Kawar", *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, 8 (1946), 1-54.

LEVTZION, N. and J. HOPKINS, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*, Cambridge 1981.

LIVERANI, M., "The Garamantes: a fresh approach", *Libyan Studies* 31 (2000), 17-28.

- "The Libyan caravan road in Herodotus IV.181-185", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 43 (2000), 496-520.

LUKAS, J., "Die Bedeutung der Hamiten für die sprachliche Gestaltung Afrikas", *Forschungen und Fortschritte* 14 (1938), 233-4.

MacEACHERN, S., "Western African Iron Age", in: J. O. Vogel (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Precolonial Africa*, Walnut Creek 1997, 425-9.

MAGNAVITA, C., "Zilum. Towards the emergence of socio-political complexity in the Lake Chad region," in: M. Krings and E. Platte (eds.), *Living with the Lake*, Köln 2004, 73-100.

MAGNAVITA, C. and P. BREUNIG, "Facts and speculations: a reply to D. Lange's 'The emergence of social complexity in the southern Chad Basin towards 500 BCE: archaeological and other evidence'", *BMS Newsletter* 72/5 (2008), 55-70.

MIGEOD, F., "The ancient So people of Bornu", *Journal of the African Society* 23 (1923-4), 19-29.

ODED, B., *Mass Deportations in the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, Wiesbaden 1979.

OLIVER, R., *The African Experience*, London 1991.

OLIVER, R. and J. D., FAGE, *Short History of Africa*, 6th ed., London 1988.

OREL, V. E. and O. V. STOLBOVA (eds.), *Hamito-Semitic Etymological Dictionary*, Leiden 1995.

PALMER, H. R., *Sudanese Memoirs*, 3 vols., Lagos 1928.

SCHUMACHER, L., *Sklaverei in der Antike*, München 2001.

SEUX, M.-J., *Épithèthes royales akkadiennes et sumériennes*, Paris, 1967.

SHAW, Th., *Nigeria. Its Archaeology and Early History*, London 1978.

SKINNER, N., *Hausa Comparative Dictionary*, Cologne 1996.

SMITH, A., "The early states of the Central Sudan", in: J. Ajayi and M. Crowder (eds.), *History of West Africa*, 1st ed., vol. I, London 1971, 158-201.

TOURNEUX, H., "Le nom des Sao: approche linguistique", *Bulletin du Méga-Tchad* (2006), 29-37.

TRIMINGHAM, S., *A History of Islam in West Africa*, London 1962.

URVOY, Y., *Histoire de l'empire du Bornou*, Paris 1949.

WAZIRI, I. M., "Oral traditions as a muliplex historical source: examples of some Chadic groups in the southern and south-western Chad Basin (NE Nigeria)", *BMS Newsletter*, 68/71 (2007), 16-27.

WEISSER, G., *Das Königtum der Yoruba: Zwischen Mythologie und Geschichte*, Hamburg 2008.

WESTERMANN, D., *Geschichte Afrikas*, Köln 1952