

## The kingdoms and peoples of Chad

D. LANGE

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In the twelfth century, the major part of the region of Lake Chad lay under the sway of a powerful kingdom, Kanem. Other kingdoms probably existed in the area at the time, and a variety of peoples lived there in separate clans or ethnic groups. Kanem was known in very early times to Arab travellers and geographers and was the only political entity of international renown between the Nuba of the Nile valley and the Kaukau on the Niger Bend to the west. In view of the existing sources and the state of our knowledge, this survey will of necessity deal more with Kanem and the peoples living in that kingdom than with those outside, who did not attract the attention of the chroniclers and on whom, therefore, we have very little documentation.

Kanem, which is mentioned in various external sources from the ninth century onwards, is also distinguished by the existence of an internal source: the *Divān* of the sultans of Kanem-Bornu.<sup>1</sup> The origins of the *Divān* probably date back to the first half of the thirteenth century. At that time, the court chroniclers began to set down in writing certain facts relating to dynastic history that had formerly been handed down by word of mouth. But before moving on to the events of their own era, the chroniclers undertook to make a written record of the main elements of a tradition that dated back to the end of the tenth century. Subsequently, the work was brought continuously up to date until the end of the Sefuwa dynasty in the nineteenth century; on the death of each sovereign, a short paragraph was added relating to his reign. This method of composition might, after six centuries, have produced a voluminous work. In point of fact, the *Divān* in its present state consists of only 5½ pages. To be sure, the *Divān* informs us above all of the dynastic history of Kanem-Bornu, but it is possible to deduce from it certain elements of information relating to other aspects of the history of the central Sudan.<sup>2</sup>

There is, in addition, a certain amount of information provided by Arab geographers. Of particular value for the study of the history of the central

1. The text of the *Divān* has been translated with a commentary in D. Lange, 1977a.

2. *ibid.*

# GENERAL HISTORY OF AFRICA · IV

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## Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century

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EDITOR D.T.NIANE

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Sudan are the records of al-Idrīsī (writing in 1154), Ibn Saʿīd (d. 1286) and al-Maḥrīzī (d. 1442).<sup>3</sup> The two series of records largely complement one another: the African chroniclers provide the temporal framework and the Arab geographers the spatial dimension. (See the maps based on al-Idrīsī and Ibn Saʿīd, Figs. 10.1–10.3.)

## The Sefuwa dynasty

It is shown in the previous volume of this series that Kanem was for several centuries under the rule of the Zaghawa.<sup>4</sup> This came to an end during the second half of the eleventh century with the advent of a new dynasty that bore the name of Sefuwa, claiming as it did to descend from the Yemenite hero, Sayf b. Dhī Yazan (see Fig. 10.6). The founder of this dynasty was Hummay (c. 1075–1180). Everything suggests that he was a Berber; to judge by his name (derived from Muḥammad) and his genealogy, he came from a profoundly Islamized community. We know from al-Idrīsī that many of the inhabitants of Kavar were at that time *mulaththamūn* Berbers (wearing the *lithām*).<sup>5</sup> Other sources indicate that the Islamization of this area dates back to before the middle of the ninth century.<sup>6</sup> It would be tempting to conclude that Hummay originated from Kavar, but it is also possible that he was descended from a Berber group that had already been integrated into Kanem at a time when that province was still ruled by the Zaghawa.

However, the claim to Yemeni ancestry clearly indicates that Hummay and his men were in contact with North African Berbers. The latter readily laid claim to Himyarite ancestors, to distinguish themselves from the Adnanite Arabs. Accordingly, it cannot be an accident that, among the presumed ancestors of Sayf b. Dhī Yazan, only such names as relate to the northern Arab context are mentioned in the *Dimān*. We find there the names of Quraysh (the eponymous ancestor of the tribe of the Prophet), Mecca (the place of pilgrimage) and Baghdad (the capital of the Abbasids), but no mention of Himyar, Ḳaḥṭān nor indeed of Yemen. At the start of the thirteenth century, Hummay's genealogy was clearly emptied of its Berber content and assigned a new function: instead of testifying to a Himyarite origin, the official genealogy of the Sefuwa kings was required above all to prove their long fidelity to Islam. The name of Sayf b. Dhī Yazan had by that time become a fossil devoid of significance.<sup>7</sup>

3. Al-Idrīsī, French transl. 1866; Ibn Saʿīd, al-Maḥrībī, French transl. 1958; al-Maḥrīzī, French transl. 1979; for the latter, see also J. Cuq, 1975, pp. 382–9.

4. Cf. Volume III, Chapter 15.

5. Al-Idrīsī, loc. cit.

6. Al-Yaʿqūbī, French transl. 1937, p. 205.

7. In a letter from Bornu dating from the end of the fourteenth century, Sayf b. Dhī Yazan is also linked to the eponymous ancestor of the tribe of the Prophet. Al-Ḳalkashandī comments: 'This is a mistake on their part, since Sayf b. Dhī Yazan was a descendant of the Tubba of the Yemen, who are Himyarites.'

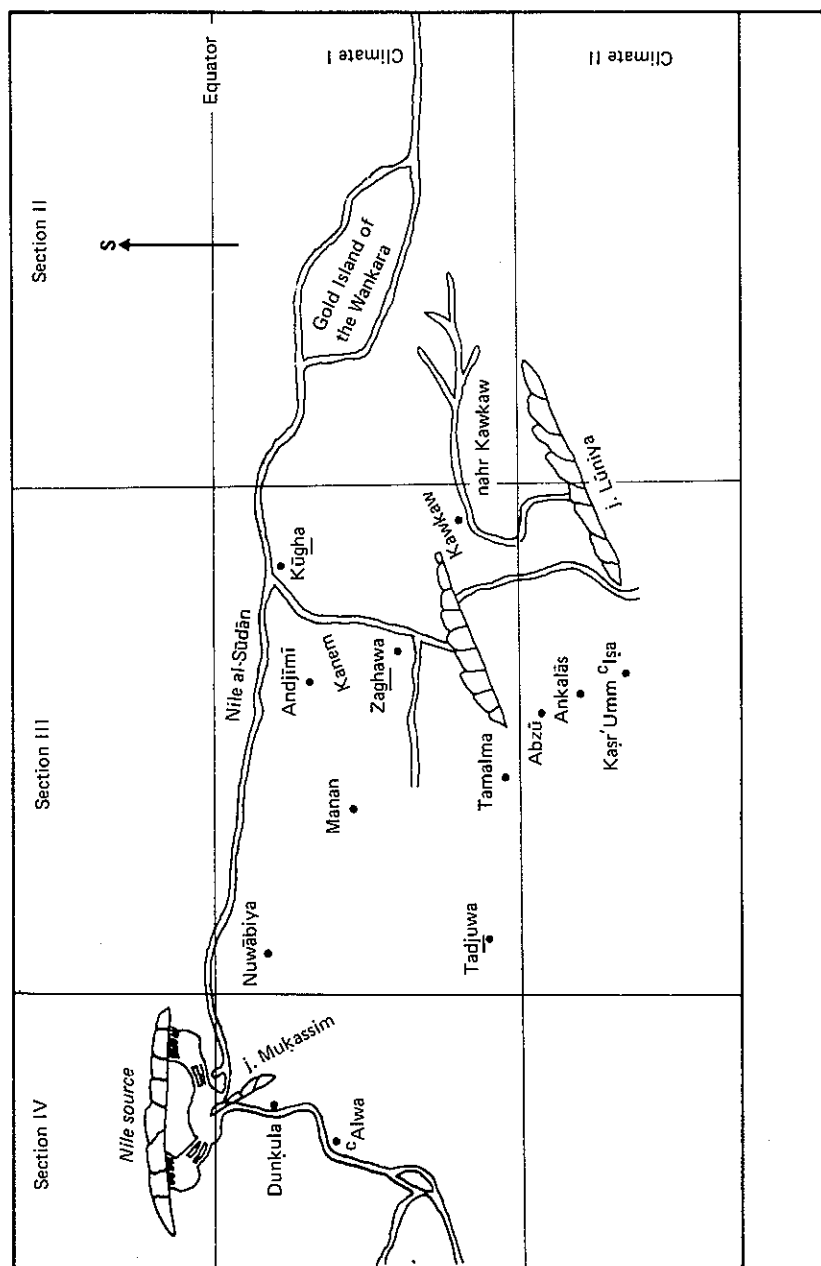


FIG. 10.1 Simplified extract from the large map by al-Idrisi (1154) (after the reconstruction of K. Miller in Y. Kamal, *Monumenta*, 3 (4), p. 867)

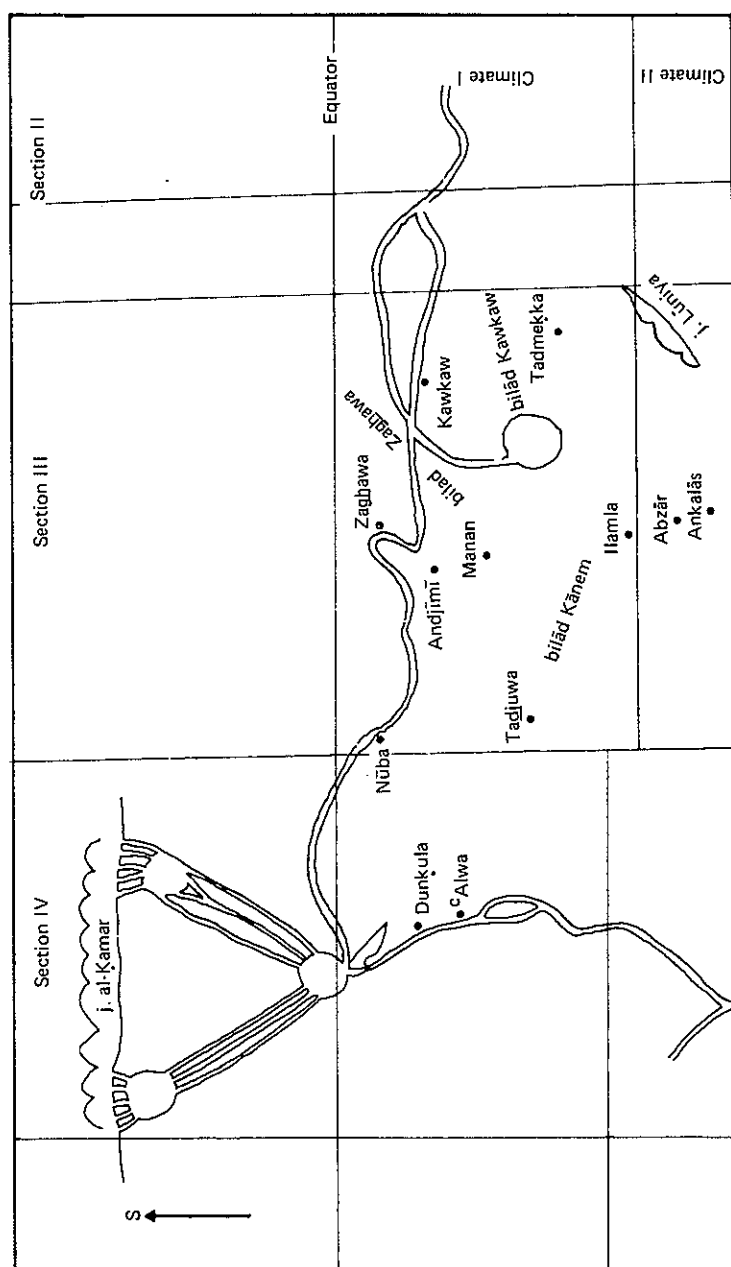


FIG. 10.2 Simplified extract from the 'Shorter Idrisi' (1192) (after the reconstruction by K. Miller, Mappae Arabicae, I (3), p. 99)

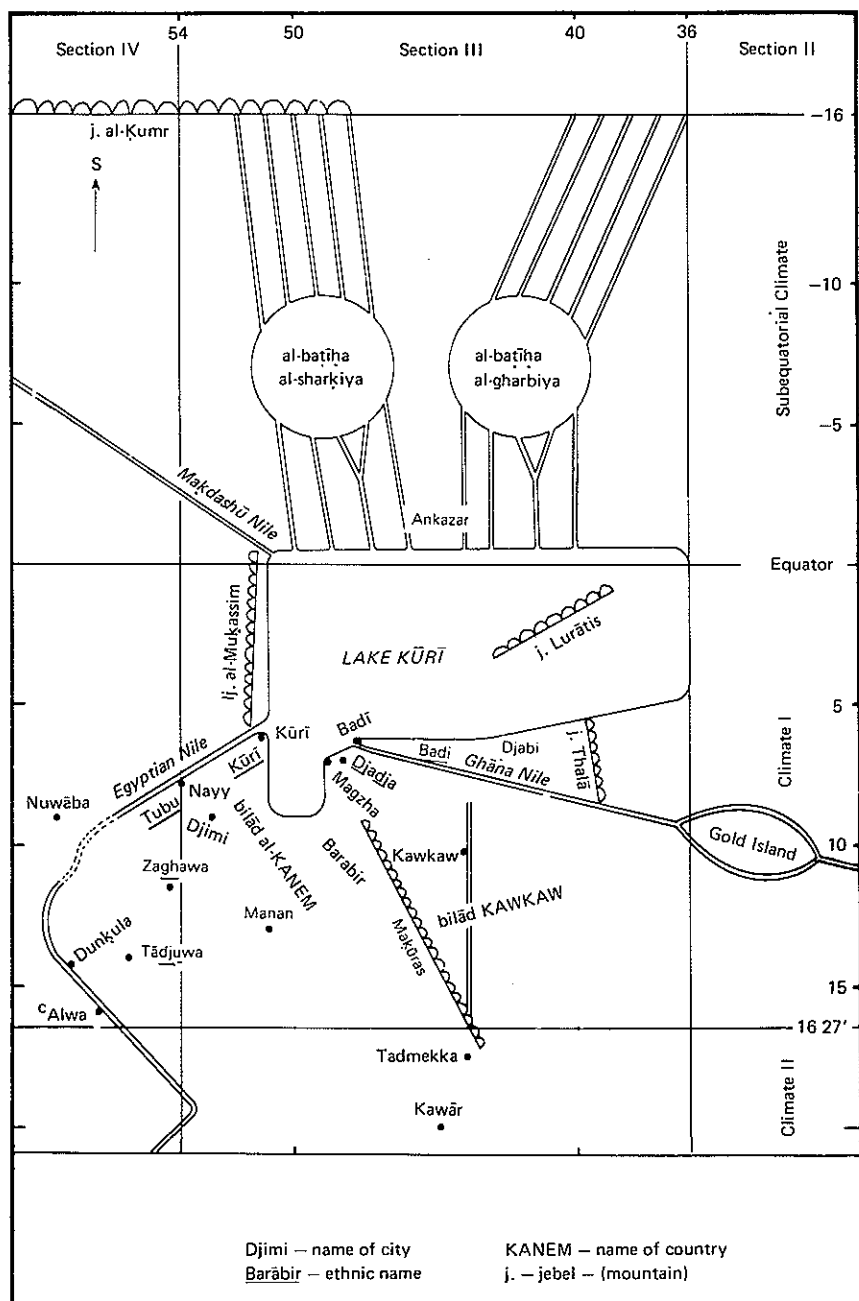


FIG. 10.3 The Lake Chad area (Lake Kūrī) (after the reconstruction of an extract from the map by Ibn Sa'īd (first half of the 13th century) carried out by the author of this chapter)

Other evidence indicates that the Sefuwa kings wished their Berber origins to be forgotten; for example, the thirteenth-century chroniclers' record of Salmama b. 'Abd Allāh (c. 1182–1210), son of the great-grandson of Hummay, that he was 'very dark'. According to the chroniclers, 'no sultan has been born black since sultan Sayf until this one, but all were of the redness of Bedouin Arabs'.<sup>8</sup> To be sure, this information relates solely to the second dynasty. We might, however, have expected to find a reference to the Berber origins of the Sefuwa, but once again the chroniclers prefer to gloss over it, alluding to the Arabs rather than the Berbers. This example shows clearly that, in the chroniclers' eyes, a white skin was esteemed only in so far as it was associated with the Muslim religion. In other words, what mattered was not a man's colour but his religion.

A passage from Ibn Sa'īd shows that the foreign origins of the Sefuwa had rapidly faded in popular memory. Basing himself on the evidence of Ibn Fāṭima, who had himself visited Kanem, Ibn Sa'īd writes:

The sultan of Kanem ... is Muḥammadi b. Djabl, of the lineage of Sayf b. Dhī Yazan. The capital of his infidel ancestors, prior to their conversion to Islam, was Manan; subsequently one of them, his fourth great-grandfather, became a Muslim under the influence of a juris-consult, after which Islam spread throughout the country of Kanem.<sup>9</sup>

Now Muḥammad b. Djil was the name by which the great king Dunama Dibalami (c. 1210–48) was known to the outside world. (Ibn Fāṭima had stayed in Kanem during his reign, in the first half of the thirteenth century.) This means that at that time the Sefuwa were considered to be the direct descendants of the Duguwa (Zaghawa kings). Only the introduction of Islam – which had become a matter of peaceful 'conversion' – and the change of capital remained within the popular tradition to recall the political upheavals of the second half of the eleventh century.

It may be inferred from the continuity of the dynastic traditions, also borne out by the *Dīwān*, that Kanem was by that time a powerfully structured state with a firmly established territorial organization. The introduction of Islam and the dynastic change had apparently not impaired the foundations of this state, whose origins probably date back to the end of the sixth century.<sup>10</sup> Even the change of capital, which was either con-

8. *Dīwān*, para. 17.

9. Ibn Sa'īd, loc. cit., p. 95; Cuoq, op. cit., p. 209.

10. It has been noted that the tradition reported by Ibn Sa'īd is not very trustworthy. Al-Idrīsī, writing in the middle of the twelfth century, mentions both Manan and Djimi. According to him, Manan had been 'the seat of the prince and lord of the land' (of the Zaghawa?) whereas Djimi, which was smaller, is said merely to have belonged to Kanem. Quite clearly, al-Idrīsī has attempted to combine contemporary information with information stemming from the Zaghawa period. It is therefore not impossible that in his time Djimi was already the capital of Kanem.

temporary with or subsequent to the dynastic change,<sup>11</sup> appears to have had no major consequences for the political development of Kanem. The states of both the Zaghawa and the Sefuwa had permanent central capitals: Manan was the residence of the Duguwa kings for at least a century, and Djimi of the Sefuwa kings for three centuries. It was not until the end of the fourteenth century, when the Sefuwa were forced to leave Kanem, that Djimi lost its special status and became a city like any other.<sup>12</sup> As regards the change of capital that occurred in the second half of the eleventh century (or the beginning of the twelfth), it is important to note that Djimi was situated considerably further south than Manan. This shift might therefore be seen as evidence of the increasing influence of the sedentary peoples of Kanem, at the expense of the semi-nomads of the Sahel.

If we follow the matrimonial policy of the first Sefuwa kings, as this emerges from the information contained in the *Dimān*, we discover that the 'de-Berberization' of the new dynasty – quite perceptible at the ideological level – went hand in hand with a progressive increase in the political weight of the sedentary peoples. Thanks to the care taken by the chroniclers to note the ethnic origins of the queen-mothers, the following list can be drawn up: the mother of Hummay (*c.* 1075–86) was descended from the Kay; the mother of Dunama b. Hummay (*c.* 1086–1140) was a Tubu; the mother of Bir b. Dunama (*c.* 1140–66) was a Kay (Koyam); the mother of 'Abd Allāh b. Bir (*c.* 1166–82) was a Tubu; the mother of Salmama b. 'Abd Allāh (1182–1210) was a Dabir; the mother of Dunama b. Salmama (*c.* 1210–48) was a Magomi (royal lineage). Subsequently, all the queen-mothers appear to have been Magomi, except the mother of Ibrāhīm b. Bir (*c.* 1296–1315) who was a Kunkuna.

A first point to be noted is that the Tomaghra, from whom two queen-mothers of the Duguwa period were descended, are no longer mentioned in connection with the Sefuwa kings. This may be evidence that they had lost their dominant position at the time of the dynastic change which occurred in the second half of the eleventh century. Subsequently, the Tomaghra undoubtedly continued to play a major role in the central Sudan, for they are today to be found in Tibesti and Kawar (the oasis of Bilma),

11. Cf. Lange, *op. cit.*, ch. 7.

12. Apart from Djimi and Manan, the only cities in Kanem mentioned by external sources are Tarazaki (al-Muhallabī) and Nay (Ibn Sa'īd). Later, Ibn Furtūwa, describing the martial expeditions of Idrīs Alawoma (1564–96), mentions a large number of localities situated in the Lake Chad area, including Djimi. Moreover, it should be noted that the *Dimān* indicates the burial places of all the kings of Kanem-Bornu from the eleventh century. Some of these may have been fair-sized cities: in particular, Zamtam (*Dimān* paras 17 and 38), Nanigham (paras 25 and 36) and Diskama (para. 20) were places situated to the west of Lake Chad but have otherwise not been identified. Djimi is mentioned as the burial place of four kings (paras 19, 21, 28 and 29).



where they predominate over other Tubu groups. They are also to be encountered in Kanem and in Bornu, where they are largely assimilated with the Kanembu and the Kanuri. According to the traditions collected in Bornu, it is from them that the dynasties of the Munio and Mandara originated.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to the Tomaghra, the Kay are mentioned in connection with both dynasties. It would therefore seem that their political status was not affected by the fall of the Duguwa. It will be noted in particular that the mother of the founder of the new dynasty was a Kay. Today, the Kay – known by the name of Koyam – live to the north of Bornu, in the vicinity of the Komadugu Yoo. They are a sedentary people, but the fact that they continue to raise camels in an unfavourable environment is evidence of their northern, nomadic origins.

The Tubu are mentioned in the *Dīwān* solely in connection with the Sefuwa. This may be due to the nature of the information transmitted, as the chroniclers tell us only about the Duguwa reigns following that of Ayuma (c. 987–1007) with any degree of precision. None the less, the fact that the mother of Dunama b. Hummay – and hence Hummay's principal wife – was a Tubu appears significant; it is very possible that the Tubu contributed to the fall of the Duguwa. It must be acknowledged, however, that the relationship between the Tubu of the *Dīwān* and the Zaghawa mentioned in the external sources is far from clear. It is only the evidence of Ibn Faṭīma, dating from the first half of the thirteenth century and transmitted by Ibn Saʿīd, that enables a clear distinction to be made between the two ethnic entities. The Zaghawa, mentioned in conjunction with the Tadjuwa (Djadja), are vaguely located between Kanem and Nubia, whereas the Tubu are situated very precisely in the vicinity of Baḥr al-Ghazal.<sup>14</sup> There are a number of Tubu groups still living today in this region to the east of Kanem. They are collectively called Daza or Gorhan. The 'true' Tubu live in Tibesti and its vicinity. This mountain range is generally considered to be the country of origin of all the Tubu people (the name *tu-bu* is taken to mean 'inhabitants of the mountain'), but this is by no means certain.<sup>15</sup>

Two other ethnic groups mentioned in the *Dīwān*, the Dabir and the Kunkuna, no longer exist today. According to information collected by Nachtigal, the Dabir (more correctly, the Dibbiri) were a sedentary Kanembu people; after merging with Daza nomads, they are thought to have formed the Kadawa group, which is still living in Kanem. Barth and

13. G. Nachtigal, 1967 edn, Vol. 2, p. 338.

14. In the existing texts of the *K. al-djughrāfiyya*, the name Tubu appears in distorted forms. Cf. J. Marquart, 1913; see also Lange, op. cit., ch. 2, para. 13, no. 2.

15. Concerning the Tubu in general, see J. Chapelle, 1957. It should be noted, however, that the chapter on the history of the Tubu is not very trustworthy, in so far as the author has largely based himself on the hasty, superficial compilation by Y. Urvoy, 1949.

Nachtigal believe that the Kunkuna too were originally a sedentary Kanembu people, but neither authority has succeeded in establishing a clear line of descent to modern ethnic groups.<sup>16</sup>

Lastly, the Magomi – spelt M.gh.r.m by the chroniclers – constituted the patrilineage of the Sefuwa kings. If we are to believe the information contained in the *Diwān*, the mother of Dunama Dibalami (c. 1210–48) was the daughter of a brother of ‘Abd Allāh Bakaru (c. 1166–82). This may be seen as evidence of the gradual establishment of a lineage group that was later to constitute the nucleus of the Kanuri people. There is nothing to suggest that the Magomi existed before the reign of the Sefuwa, and it would certainly be mistaken to see in them the political force that enabled Hummay to accede to power. By contrast, it is highly likely that the Magomi in fact comprise all the descendants of the Sefuwa kings (in agnatic line), as their genealogies and the names of their different sub-sections suggest.<sup>17</sup> If these considerations are correct, the Magomi are the nucleus of a people (the Kanuri) that gradually established itself from a dynastic stock (that of the Sefuwa); however, the actual origin of the state of Kanem-Bornu would have antedated that of the people who today form its main substratum.

Before the emergence of the Kanuri people, the Kanem kings derived their power from different ethnic groups, comprising both nomadic and sedentary peoples, who spoke either Nilotic-Saharan languages – as do the Tubu, Zaghawa and Kanuri today<sup>18</sup> – or Chad languages.<sup>19</sup> In certain periods, the power of the Kanem kings must also have extended, as in the thirteenth century, to Berber-speaking groups; but these appear always to have been in the minority in relation to the Nilotic-Saharan groups.<sup>20</sup> If the meagre evidence contained in the *Diwān* is to be believed, it would seem that there were three phases in the development and reinforcement of the ethnic base of the Sefuwa kings.

During the first phase, which extended from the advent of Hummay to the middle of the twelfth century, two nomadic tribes – the Tubu and the Kay – appear to have played a predominant role. In the second phase, the Dabir and Kunkuna – and probably other sedentary tribes – superseded

16. Concerning the Dabir, see Nachtigal, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 319–20.

17. Nachtigal, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 418–19, mentions the following sections: the Magomi Umewa (descended from Hummay), the Magomi Tsilimwa (from Salmama), the Magomi Biriwa (from Bir) and the Magomi Dalawa (from ‘Abd-Allāh). See also *Diwān*, paras 17–18.

18. The present-day Zaghawa no more resemble the Zaghawa mentioned by Arab authors before Ibn Sa‘īd than the Kanuri resemble any Nilotic-Saharan group prior to the thirteenth century. Perhaps only the Tubu have preserved their ethnic identity from this period without major changes.

19. Among these are the Ngizim, Kotoko and Hadjeray languages of today.

20. Barth supposes the Tomaghra to be of Berber origin, just as he sees in the paramount role of the queen-mother (*ghumsa*) a Berber survival. He also notes the absence of Berber borrowings in the Kanuri vocabulary.

the Tubu and the Kay as the main allies of the Sefuwa.<sup>21</sup> It was following this reversal of alliances that, during the third phase, the political power of the royal line of the Magomi became more firmly established; the mother of Dunama Dibalami (c. 1210–48) was a Magomi, as was one of his wives – the mother of Kaday (c. 1248–77). His other wife – the mother of Bir (c. 1277–96) – may also have been a Magomi, but the chroniclers do not specify her ethnic origin. In any case, the son and successor of Bir, Ibrāhīm Nikale (c. 1296–1315), had a Kunkuna mother. After this, the *Diwān* ceases to indicate the ethnic origins of the queen-mothers, and it may be supposed that by the start of the fourteenth century the Magomi had finally eclipsed all the other sedentary groups of Kanem.

The closing of ranks around the royal line might go some way to explaining the power of the kingdom in the reigns of Dunama Dibalami (c. 1210–48) and his immediate successors. Moreover, it may also have been the cause – at least indirectly – of the long war against the Tubu that broke out during his reign. Barth believed that Dunama's second wife – the mother of Bir – came from an ethnic group bearing the name of Lakmama;<sup>22</sup> if this is true, the founding of rival lines by Dunama's two sons, Kaday (whose mother was a Magomi) and Bir, could be attributed to the power struggle between the sedentary groups of Kanem and the royal patrilineage of the Magomi. It is in any case highly significant that the peaceful period, marked by succession from father to son, came to an end when the Sefuwa kings ceased to take foreign women as their (principal) wives and married women descended from their own patrilineage instead.<sup>23</sup>

## Kanem at its zenith

The development of the state of Kanem cannot be explained without reference to trans-Saharan trade. It is doubtless no accident that the greatest state of the central Sudan came into being at the southern terminus of the major caravan route passing through Fezzān and the oases of Kawar. This trail had probably been in use since Roman times: it was the most direct line of communication between the Lake Chad region and the

21. It would be tempting to attribute the transfer of the Kanem capital to this change of alliance. We should then have to accept that al-Idrīsī was right, and not Ibn Saʿīd (cf. n. 10 above).

22. H. Barth, 1857–9, Eng. transl. 1965, Vol. 2, p. 584. It has already been pointed out above that Bir's principal wife – the mother of Ibrāhīm Nikale – was not a Magomi.

23. The chroniclers say of the reign of Dunama Dibalami: 'in his time the sultan's sons split into different factions' (*Diwān*, para. 17). These conflicts between the sons of Dunama may have been the expression, at the dynastic level, of the opposition between the Magomi and other ethnic groups. It is thus possible that this opposition was at the root of the first collateral succession in the history of the second Kanem dynasty. The first collateral succession may also be attributed to the weakening of the status of the principal wife, which may in turn have been a consequence of the slow 'de-Berberization' of the Sefuwa.

Mediterranean. To the east, only the extremely difficult trail that traversed the Kufra oases could be considered a potential rival and, to the west, the trail that passed through Takedda (later Agades).

### Political structure

The *Dīmān* provides virtually no information on the political organization of Kanem. We may assume, however, that during an initial period, up to the reign of Dunama Dibalami (1210–48), the members of the royal family occupied the premier position in the machinery of the state.

That situation changed in the thirteenth century, according to the chroniclers, when the sultan came into conflict with his own sons, and later Ibrāhīm Nikale had his son executed.<sup>24</sup> We may infer from these indications that, from the thirteenth century onward, the Sefuwa excluded members of their family from key government posts, and depended rather upon officials who were unrelated, such as local chiefs. The *kagīama* (governor of the south) and the *yerīma* (governor of the north) probably date from the period of Bornu. Both seem to have come from regions west of Lake Chad. Yeri was the name of a province north-west of Komadugu Yobe, and Kaga is the name of the area around the present town of Maiduguri.

In more recent times, the queen-mothers played a pre-eminent role in Bornu. It is not by chance that the *Dīmān* gives the ethnic origins of the queen-mothers of the first ten kings. It is worth noting that the support of the queen-mother's clan could be decisive at the time of a succession. Later, the *ghumsa* (the king's first wife) became the most important wife and the king designated his successor (the *shiroma*) from among her sons.

No precise information is available on the local administration, but we know that at the end of the fifteenth century the Sefuwa ruled over twelve vassal kingdoms.<sup>25</sup> Direct administration extended over a more limited area, and was probably exercised by slaves of the royal household. On military matters, the written texts indicate that the king maintained a standing army. They distinguish between a *djūnūd*, a soldier called up for a campaign and an *aṣākīr*, or professional soldier.

Justice was dispensed by the king, as at the court of the mansa of Mali, despite the conversion of the rulers to Islam. Nevertheless, during certain reigns, attempts were made to base justice on the *shari'a*, as during the rule of Idrīs Alawoma.<sup>26</sup> Almost all the states in the area were influenced directly or indirectly by Kanem-Bornu, whose political organization was a model for the Hausa, the Kotoso and the Bagirmi.

24. *Dīmān*, para. 17.

25. See al-Maḳrīzī, loc. cit.

26. See Ibn Fuṭūwa, Eng. transl. 1932.

## Trade and commerce

Situated to the north-east of Lake Chad, Kanem inevitably sought to control the region to the west of Lake Chad, where Bornu was later to take shape, in order to secure a stranglehold on the trade routes from Kavar towards the south. However, Kavar was also accessible from Aïr (Takedda, subsequently Agades), and thus the control of this major staging post itself was bound to constitute a prime objective for the kings of Kanem no less than for those of Bornu. The control of Kavar assumed an even greater importance than its strategic location for trans-Saharan trade might suggest, for the extremely rich salt-mines at Bilma and Agram (Fachi) provided their owners with a large income from the massive export of salt to the countries of the Sahel. No other salt-mines of the central Sahara had a comparable economic value. We do not know, however, when these mines were first exploited. The authors of the *Dīwān* are perhaps referring to control of the salt-mines by Kanem, when they note that Arku (1023–67) established slave colonies at Dirku and Siggedim, but this is by no means certain.<sup>27</sup>

In the first half of the twelfth century, the inhabitants of Kavar enjoyed independence from their powerful neighbours to the north and south. Al-Idrīsī mentions the existence of several small towns inhabited by traders and salt-miners. The chiefs of these communities were Berbers (Tawāriḳ or Tuareg), wearing the *liḥām*. According to al-Idrīsī, the inhabitants of Kavar were primarily occupied in the mining and marketing of alum (used for dyeing and tanning), which they transported as far as Egypt and westwards to Wargla.<sup>28</sup> This picture is undoubtedly falsified by the perspective of an outside observer. If the salt trade with the countries of the Sahel region was then in existence, it was certainly far greater in volume than the export of alum to the cities of North Africa. Moreover, it should be noted that al-Idrīsī makes no mention of the extensive trans-Saharan trade, for which Kavar was the sole staging post between Fezzān and the Lake Chad region. His silence on this point is perhaps indicative of the relative importance of these two types of commercial activity: the flourishing regional trade was perhaps not greatly inferior – at least by volume, if not by value – to the large-scale international trade.

The group of oases of the Fezzān were more important for long-distance trade than those of Kavar, being situated at the crossroads of two of the major trade routes of West Africa. Domination of the Fezzān made it possible to control both the north–south trade (Ifrikiya/Tripoli–Kanem–Bornu) and the east–west routes (Egypt–Ghana/Mali/Songhay). Kanem had no alternative for its long-distance trade with the Mediterranean countries

27. A recent study provides precise data concerning the enormous profits obtained by the Tuareg of Aïr, who today handle the transport of salt from Bilma and Fachi to the countries of the Sahel. P. Fuchs, 1974.

28. Al-Idrīsī, loc. cit.

(except for the far Maghrib); most imports and exports had to pass that way. Only merchants who traded with the countries of the Maghrib could bypass the Fezzān, taking the extremely arduous route passing through Djado and Tassili. Security on the north-south caravan route and control of the staging posts therefore had to be among the primary objectives of the kings of Kanem-Bornu.

What were the goods that Kanem traded with the north? On this subject, the sources yield scant information, but we may suppose that there was little change between the beginning of the Muslim period and the nineteenth century; slaves were probably always a major element. Our earliest information on this comes from al-Ya'qūbī, who records that in the ninth century Berber traders from Kavar brought black slaves, probably from Kanem, to Zawila, the capital of the Fezzān.<sup>29</sup> At the start of the sixteenth century, Leo Africanus gives us more precise information concerning the North African traders who travelled personally to Bornu to procure slaves in exchange for horses; they were frequently obliged to wait a whole year before the king had rounded up a sufficient number of slaves.<sup>30</sup> Apparently the king's slave raids against the pagan peoples south of Bornu did not suffice to meet the keen demand. When the kingdom became weak, the inhabitants of Kanem-Bornu themselves were in danger of being sold into bondage by external enemies, despite the fact that most of them had been Muslims since the thirteenth century. At the end of the fourteenth century, in a letter to Caliph Baybars of Egypt, Bir b. Idrīs (c. 1389-1421) complained of the Arabs who were reducing his Muslim subjects to slavery.<sup>31</sup> We know from D. Girard that in the seventeenth century certain inhabitants of Bornu suffered the same fate, as a result of Tuareg raids.<sup>32</sup>

Along with the slaves, the caravans travelling to the Fezzān and the Mediterranean centres also transported certain exotic products, such as elephant tusks, ostrich feathers and even live animals.<sup>33</sup> However, if the slave trade is to be assessed at its true value, it must be considered primarily in relation to productive activity as a whole. In this connection, there can be no doubt that Kanem-Bornu owed its prosperity more to its thriving agriculture, stock-raising and salt-mining than to the income derived from the slave trade. An important role was also played by craftsmen, some of whose products were exported to neighbouring countries. In the fourteenth century, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa recorded that, in addition to slaves, Bornu

29. Al-Ya'qūbī, loc. cit., p. 205.

30. Leo Africanus, French transl. 1956, Vol. 2, p. 480.

31. Al-Kāḷashandī, French transl. in Cuq, 1975, p. 40.

32. Cf. C. de la Roncière, 1919, pp. 78-88. With respect to slavery and the slave trade in central Sudan, see A. and H. Fisher, 1970.

33. We know that in 1268 'the sovereign of Kanem and lord of Bornu had dispatched to the Hafsids, Sultan al-Muṣṭanṣir, a giraffe that created a considerable stir in Tunis.' From Ibn Khaldūn, French transl. 1852-6, Vol. 2, pp. 346-7.

exported embroidered garments.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, it should be borne in mind that, according to al-Idrīsī in the twelfth century, the alum of Kavar was much sought after in North Africa.<sup>35</sup>

Imports consisted mainly of horses, which were greatly valued for their military uses. The chroniclers state that the cavalry of Dunama Dibalami (c. 1210–48) comprised 41 000 horses.<sup>36</sup> Al-Maḥrīzī provides the interesting information that the horses of Kanem were particularly small: it seems permissible to infer from this the indigenous practice of horse-breeding in earlier times.<sup>37</sup>

Manufactured products such as garments and fabrics were also imported from the north, as well as iron weapons. Ibn Saʿīd notes in passing that in the age of Dunama Dibalami garments were imported into Kanem from the Tunisian capital.<sup>38</sup> Earlier, al-Muhallabī had mentioned that the king of the Zaghawa wore woollen and silk garments from Sousse. In the fourteenth century, local weaving was sufficiently well developed for the inhabitants of Kanem to use strips of cotton as a measure of value in their commercial activities.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, it may be supposed that copper was also one of the commodities transported to the central Sudan. We know that in the fourteenth century this metal was extracted – probably in small quantities – from mines situated close to Takedda.<sup>40</sup> By this time, the tin deposits of the Nigerian plateau had probably already begun to be mined. Petis de la Croix informs us that, at the end of the seventeenth century, tin was one of the exports from Bornu to Tripoli.<sup>41</sup> Copper and tin (as well as zinc) are of course essential for the manufacture of bronze; and it is known that in Benin and Nupe a remarkable art in bronze was flourishing well before the arrival of the Portuguese on the Atlantic seaboard.

The volume of north–south trade depended heavily upon the security of the central caravan route across the Sahara. In the first half of the twelfth century, this security was guaranteed by three different powers: in the north by the kingdom of the Fezzān, dominated since the beginning of the tenth century by the Berber dynasty of the Banū *Kharrāb*; in the centre by the Berber chiefs of Kavar; and to the south by Kanem. When *Sharīf al-Dīn Karāḳūsh*, the Mamluk war leader, conquered the Fezzān in 1172–3, putting the country to fire and sword, the old equilibrium was gravely threatened.<sup>42</sup> The political vacuum created by the disappearance of the

34. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, French transl. 1853–9, Vol. 4, pp. 441–2.

35. Al-Idrīsī, loc. cit., p. 39.

36. *Dīwān*, para. 17.

37. Al-Maḥrīzī, in H. A. Hamaker, 1820, p. 206.

38. Ibn Saʿīd, loc. cit., p. 95.

39. Al-ʿUmarī, French transl. 1927, p. 45.

40. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, loc. cit., Vol. 4, p. 441.

41. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, *nouvelles acquisitions*, MS 7488 (hereafter referred to as B. N. Paris, *n.acq.*).

42. Al-Tidjānī, French transl. 1852, pp. 55–208, and 1853, pp. 101–68 and 354–424.

Banū Khaṭṭāb was sooner or later bound to lead the Kanem kings to intervene in the Fezzān.

In the thirteenth century, Ibn Saʿīd – whose information about Kanem refers to the reign of Dunama Dibalami (c. 1210–48) – recorded that the king of Kanem was in control of Kavar and the Fezzān.<sup>43</sup> The expansion of Kanem towards the north is confirmed by al-ʿUmarī, writing in the middle of the fourteenth century: 'The empire [of Kanem] commences on the Egyptian side at a town called Zella [north-east of the Fezzān] and ends on the other side at a town called Kaka; a three-month journey separates these two towns.'<sup>44</sup> The might of Kanem at that time is also attested by the traveller al-Tidjānī, who records that emissaries of the king of Kanem succeeded in 1258–9 in killing one of the sons of Qarākuṣh who had invaded the Waddan, a region north of the Fezzān.<sup>45</sup>

However, for effective control of all trade between the central Sudan and North Africa, it was necessary to prevent the diversion of trade to secondary routes. In fact, Ibn Saʿīd states that the king of Kanem held the western town of Takedda (Tadmekka in the text) and ruled over the Tadjuwa (Dadjo) and the Zaghawa in the east.<sup>46</sup> The king of Kanem also ruled over the kingdom of Djadja, situated to the north-west of Lake Chad, and over the Berbers of the south (Tuwarik).<sup>47</sup>

It would be rash, however, to assert that in the thirteenth century Kanem was a vast empire with a strong territorial organization. In particular, we have no information enabling us to establish the precise nature of the power that Kanem wielded over the Fezzān. The *may* 'Alī, whose tomb can still be seen today at Traghen, was in reality King Idrīs b. 'Alī (c. 1677–96), who died in the Fezzān during the pilgrimage, and not, as was formerly thought, a governor or viceroy representing the king of Kanem.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, it is not certain whether Kanem extended to the east as far as the outskirts of Darfūr. Ibn Saʿīd himself says that the Tubu of Baḥr al-Ghazal – not far from Djimi – were an independent people.<sup>49</sup> Apparently Dunama Dibalami had not succeeded in subjugating them, despite the long war, lasting 'seven years, seven months and seven days', of which Ibn Furṭūwa speaks.<sup>50</sup>

43. Ibn Saʿīd, 1970 edn, pp. 114–15 and 127.

44. Al-ʿUmarī, loc. cit., p. 43. According to al-Kalkaṣhandī, Kaka was the name of the capital of Bornu; al-Kalkaṣhandī, French transl. 1913–19, p. 281. Kaka is probably the same as the 'Djadja' of Ibn Saʿīd (see p. 256, n. 69 below).

45. Al-Tidjānī, 1958 edn, p. 111.

46. On the problems of identification, cf. R. Bucaille, 1975, pp. 720–78.

47. Ibn Saʿīd, 1970 edn, pp. 94–5.

48. B. N. Paris, *n.acq.*

49. Ibn Saʿīd specifies that the Tubu were a black, infidel people. According to information collected by Nachtigal, the Tubu groups of Baḥr al-Ghazal were the first to adopt Islam (op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 213). Cf. p. 245 and nn. 14 and 15 above.

50. Ibn Furṭūwa, loc. cit., pp. 123–4.



The peoples living around Lake Chad and on the islands also continued to defend their independence successfully. Ibn Saʿīd asserts, from the information provided by Ibn Fātima, that 'Lake Kuri [Chad] is surrounded by unsubjugated infidels of the Sudan who eat human flesh'.<sup>51</sup> He places the Badi (Bedde ?) – who, according to al-Maḳrīzī, were organized in the form of a kingdom<sup>52</sup> – to the north of Lake Chad; the Ankazar (synonymous with the Kotoko?), to the south; the Djabi to the north-west; and the Kūrī to the north-east, at the mouth of the Bahr al-Ghazal (today the latter are established on the islands). Moreover, there was on the shore of the lake a place called *dar al-sinā'a* (meaning 'the arsenal' or, by etymology, 'manufacture'), concerning which Ibn Saʿīd records: 'It is from here that, on most occasions, the sultan sets sail with his fleet on campaigns to the infidel lands on the borders of the lake, in order to attack their vessels, killing and taking prisoners.'<sup>53</sup> Al-Maḳrīzī, also basing himself on a thirteenth-century source, mentions the names of several pagan peoples living in the vicinity of Kanem. Among these, it is possible to identify the Bedde (?), the Afnu (a Kanuri name for the Hausa) and the Kotoko (written 'Kan.ku' in the text).<sup>54</sup> The same author records that about 1252–3 the king of Kanem came from Djimi to raid the Kalkin, a subgroup of the Mabna (the Mabba of the Wadday?), doubtless also for the purpose of taking prisoners.<sup>55</sup>

It seems permissible to infer from all this that the expansion of Kanem was limited to the northern region. In the south, relations with the non-Muslim peoples apparently had not changed. This need cause no surprise, since the prosperity of the kingdom – or at least the king's prosperity – depended directly upon the income derived from trans-Saharan trade rather than any increase in agricultural or pastoral production. Moreover, slaves constituted the main 'merchandise' exchanged for imports from the north, and they were obtained by organizing raids against the non-Muslim peoples of the south. It was therefore not in the interests of the kings of Kanem to facilitate the expansion of Islam beyond certain limits.

Even in Kanem, Islam did not take deep root before the thirteenth century. Al-Maḳrīzī, writing in the fifteenth century, considered Dunama Dibalami to have been the first Muslim king of Kanem, but he is certainly mistaken. The *Dīwān* contains information showing that all the Sefuwa were Muslims. If the chroniclers are to be believed, the second king of the Sefuwa, Dunama b. Hummay (c. 1086–1140), even made the pilgrimage twice and died during a third. Hummay himself, the founder of the Sefuwa

51. Ibn Saʿīd, 1970 edn, p. 94.

52. Al-Maḳrīzī, loc. cit., pp. 187–209.

53. Ibn Saʿīd, loc. cit., pp. 94–5.

54. The fortifications of the Kotoko towns are thought to date from the thirteenth century; at that time the towns would have been walled, to enable the inhabitants to resist raids from Kanem.

55. Al-Maḳrīzī, loc. cit., pp. 187–209.

dynasty, is reported to have died in Egypt. If this is true, it would suggest that he too had undertaken the pilgrimage.<sup>56</sup> It is also worth noting that, starting from the reign of Bir b. Dunama (c. 1140–66), the principal wives of various kings were Muslims, judging by their names – or the names of their fathers – as indicated in the *Dimān*. However, it was probably not until the reign of Dunama Dibalami (c. 1210–48) that Islam, in its orthodox form, made any deep imprint on the people at large.

It may be inferred from the internal and external sources that Dunama Dibalami was a great Muslim reformer. The authors of the *Dimān* pass over in silence the pilgrimages of two fourteenth-century kings and, with Ibn Furtūwa, accuse Dunama Dibalami of having destroyed a sacred object called *mune*. This was probably the focal element of a royal cult handed down from pre-Islamic times. Ibn Furtūwa – although himself an imam, writing in the sixteenth century – sees this ‘sacrilegious act’ as the cause of several disturbances, in particular, the lengthy war against the Tubu.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Dunama Dibalami was probably also the founder of a *madrasa* in Cairo intended for the subjects of Kanem.<sup>58</sup> Ibn Saʿīd records that he was ‘renowned for the holy war and for his praiseworthy actions’, and states that his entourage was composed of Muslim jurists. He forced certain peoples of the central Sudan, notably Berbers, to accept Islam.<sup>59</sup> It is thus quite clear that, in the first half of the thirteenth century, the dissemination of Islam went hand in hand with territorial expansion.

Dunama Dibalami died around 1248 and was buried at Zamtam, a town north-west of Lake Chad. There is no source comparable with Ibn Saʿīd’s *Kitāb al-djughrāfiyya* to tell us of the extension of Kanem and the growth of Islam in the subsequent period. The *Dimān* records the visit to Kanem of two ‘Fellata’ (Fulani) *shaykhs* from Mali during the reign of Bir b. Dunama (c. 1277–96), but does not even mention the pilgrimages of Ibrāhīm b. Bir (c. 1296–1315) or Idrīs b. Ibrāhīm (c. 1342–66).<sup>60</sup> Writing in the middle of the fourteenth century, al-ʿUmarī too gives little precise information. According to him, Kanem was an extremely weak empire whose resources were minimal and whose troops were very few. On the other hand, the religious zeal of the inhabitants of Kanem must have been remarkable, for he asserts: ‘Justice reigns in their country; they follow the rite of Imām Mālik. They banish from their dress all that is superfluous, and have an ardent faith.’<sup>61</sup>

If al-ʿUmarī is to be credited, Kanem still dominated the Fezzān at

56. *Dimān*, paras. 12–13.

57. Ibn Furtūwa, loc. cit., pp. 123–7.

58. Al-ʿUmarī, loc. cit., p. 46. The *madrasa* was founded in the decade following AH 620 (1242–52 of the Christian era).

59. Ibn Saʿīd, 1970 edn, pp. 95–6.

60. In his letter to the caliph of Egypt, Bir b. Idrīs refers to them by the title of *hadjdj*. See al-Ḳalkashandī, loc. cit., Vol. 8, p. 117.

61. Al-ʿUmarī, loc. cit., p. 43.

that time. Takedda, on the other hand, undoubtedly possessed an independent sultan.<sup>62</sup> It was doubtless as a result of the dynastic troubles that broke out in the second half of the fourteenth century that Kanem was forced to relinquish its exclusive control over the central Saharan caravan route. When, at the end of the fourteenth century, the Bulala succeeded in conquering Kanem and breaking its trading monopoly with North Africa, the Sefuwa entered the darkest period of their history.

## From Kanem to Bornu

By the twelfth century at the latest, the different peoples of Kanem began to migrate westwards, settling in Bornu, west of Lake Chad. The Tomaghra, the Tura, the Kay (Koyam) and the Ngalma Dukko must have been among the earliest immigrants to Bornu. The oldest Magomi groups must also have originated in Kanem, while the groups formed after the end of the fourteenth century existed only in Bornu. In the second half of the sixteenth century, following the victorious expeditions of Idrīs Alawoma, a large number of Tubu and Arabs left Kanem in their turn for the more fertile and better protected lands west of Lake Chad. This migratory movement, which in the case of the semi-nomadic tribes was probably accompanied by political expansion, came to an end only at the beginning of the colonial era.<sup>63</sup>

West of Lake Chad, the groups that had come from Kanem encountered various sedentary peoples speaking Chad languages. We may follow Kanuri traditions in applying to them the collective name of Sao or Saw. Neither Ibn Saʿīd nor al-Maḳrīzī mentions any people of that name. However, the chroniclers record that in the middle of the fourteenth century four Sefuwa kings fell in battle against the Sao, two of them in Ghaliwa.<sup>64</sup> This town may tentatively be identified with the modern Ngala – south of Lake Chad – which is today inhabited by the Kotoko. According to oral traditions recorded in the nineteenth century, their early predecessors were the Sao.<sup>65</sup>

As far as written sources are concerned, the Sao reappear in the first half of the sixteenth century in the writings of Leo Africanus, who places them west of Lake Chad and south of Bornu.<sup>66</sup> Half a century later, Ibn Fuṭūwa applies the name Sao to two ethnic groups: the Ghafata, living along the Komadugu Yoo, and the Tatala, who were settled on the western shore of Lake Chad. Idrīs Alawoma (1564–96) launched a series of

62. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, loc. cit., Vol. 4, pp. 441–2.

63. Nachtigal, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 415–47, provides much information concerning the settlement of Bornu.

64. *Diwān*, paras. 22–5 and 66. The last chroniclers write the name of the town as *Ghala*.

65. Nachtigal recorded the existence at Ngala of a large mausoleum containing the tombs of 45 Kotoko kings. He took this to be the number of kings who had reigned at Ngala since the Kotoko replaced the Sao. Nachtigal, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 426–7.

66. Leo Africanus, loc. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 5 and 53; Vol. 2, p. 480.

murderous attacks against these two peoples and forced the survivors to abandon their ancestral homes.<sup>67</sup> Some took refuge on the islands of Lake Chad. In 1582, the Italian geographer G. L. Anania applied to Lake Chad the name 'Saou'.<sup>68</sup> Today, the name Sao (So or Saw) designates, in the culture of the Kanuri, the peoples who preceded them – whether in Kanem, Bornu or Kwarar – concerning whom there is no longer any certain knowledge.

It is difficult to determine the nature of the relations that existed between Kanem and Bornu before the end of the fourteenth century. One thing is certain: between the beginning of the thirteenth century and the end of the fourteenth, Bornu gained in relative importance. Ibn Saʿīd mentions a kingdom west of Lake Chad; although he gives only the name of its capital, *Djadja*, the geographical situation suggests that it was Bornu.<sup>69</sup> He notes: 'The town of *Djadja* is the residence [*kursi*] of a separate kingdom, possessing towns and lands. At present, it belongs to the sultan of Kanem.'<sup>70</sup>

There is therefore a strong possibility that before the thirteenth century Bornu was an independent kingdom. Al-Maḥrīzī, who knew a text by Ibn Saʿīd that has since disappeared, uses the same ambiguous term *kursi*, but applies it to both Kanem and Bornu. According to him, Ibrāhīm b. Bir (c. 1296–1315) held the thrones (*kursi*) of Kanem and of Bornu.<sup>71</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, writing of the year 1268, mentions 'the sovereign of Kanem and lord of Bornu'.<sup>72</sup> Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, who visited Takedda – to the south of Aīr – in 1353, knew of a Sefuwa king of Bornu, but the distance he gives to its capital brings us to the east of Lake Chad, to Kanem.<sup>73</sup> These different statements can be reconciled, if it is accepted that Kanem and Bornu were initially two separate kingdoms, but from the thirteenth century on were brought under the rule of a single dynasty, that of the Sefuwa.

However, writing in the middle of the fourteenth century, al-ʿUmarī asserts that the Mamluk sultans of Egypt exchanged letters with both the king of Kanem and the king of Bornu.<sup>74</sup> From this it may reasonably be inferred that Bornu had preserved a measure of autonomy, despite the suzerainty of the kings of Kanem, and that the old dynasty probably continued to play an important role there. When the power of the Sefuwa declined, the authority of the local kings was strengthened; but when the

67. Ibn Furtūwa, Eng. transl. 1926, pp. 63–9.

68. D. Lange and S. Berthoud, 1972, pp. 350–1.

69. *Djadja* was probably the town called Kaka by al-ʿUmarī; loc. cit., p. 43.

70. Ibn Saʿīd, 1970 edn, p. 94. On the subject of Kwarar, Ibn Saʿīd expresses himself in almost identical terms, but in this case the existence of earlier chieftaincies is confirmed by al-Idrīsī, loc. cit., p. 114.

71. Al-Maḥrīzī, 1820 edn, p. 207.

72. *Kitāb al-ʾIbār*, translation 2, pp. 346–7; Ibn Khaldūn, 1925, 1956, pp. 346–7.

73. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, loc. cit., Vol. 4, pp. 441–2.

74. Al-ʿUmarī, 1894 edn, pp. 27 ff.

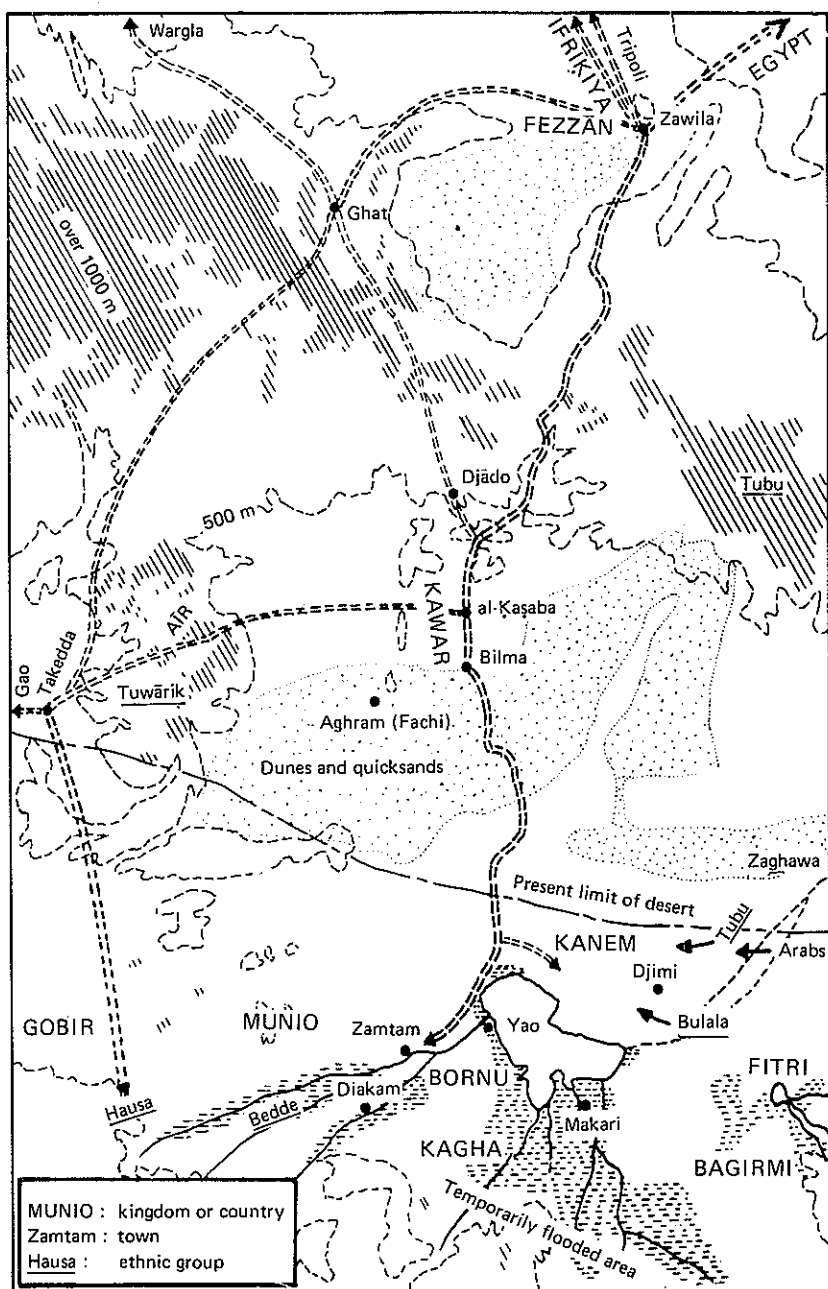


FIG. 10.4 *Peoples and kingdoms of Chad in the 14th century (D. Lange)*

Sefuwa were strong the latter had less room for manoeuvre. Nevertheless, the ethnic substratum must have been the same, otherwise how could Ibn Baṭṭūṭa have used the name Bornu to designate the Sefuwa empire?

This situation must have changed towards the end of the fourteenth century, when the attacks launched by the Bulala forced the Sefuwa to abandon Kanem and settle finally in Bornu (see Fig. 10.4). The Bulala were a pastoral people who were probably already settled in the region of Lake Fitri, where they live today, before their incursions into Kanem.<sup>75</sup> There they ruled over the Kuka, a people speaking a language allied to Sara. Was their drive towards Kanem perhaps connected with the westward migration of certain Arab tribes that followed the dislocation of the Christian kingdom of Nubia at the beginning of the fourteenth century? At the end of the sixteenth century, Arabs were to be found among the allies of the Bulala, according to Ibn Fuṭūwa. At the end of the fourteenth century, one of the Sefuwa kings had fallen in battle against the Arabs.

It appears that the immediate reason for the intervention of the Bulala in Kanem was the weakening of the Sefuwa kingdom by the dynastic conflict between Dāwūd b. Ibrāhīm Nikale (c. 1366–76) and the sons of his brother and predecessor, Idrīs. Dāwūd himself was killed by the Bulala king, ‘Abd al-Djālīl. His three successors were all killed fighting against the Bulala. The fourth, ‘Umar b. Idrīs (c. 1382–7), finally had to leave Djimi and seems to have abandoned Kanem entirely.<sup>76</sup> According to a letter written by his brother, Bir b. Idrīs, he was killed by Djudhām (Djuhayna?) Arabs.<sup>77</sup> Two further Sefuwa kings were to die fighting the Bulala before the threat of these redoubtable foes of the Sefuwa empire was finally averted during the long reign of Bir b. Idrīs (c. 1389–1421).

These events did not pass unnoticed in the other Muslim countries. Al-Maḳrīzī summarized them in the following terms:

About the year 700 [= + 1300], their king was al-Hadjdj Ibrāhīm, a descendant of Sayf b. Dhī Yazan. He held the thrones of Kanem and Bornu. After him, his son, al-Hadjdj Idrīs, reigned, then his brother, Dāwūd b. Ibrāhīm, then ‘Umar, son of his brother, al-Hadjdj Idrīs; lastly, his brother, ‘Uthmān b. Idrīs, who reigned shortly before the year 800 [= + 1397–8]. But the people of Kanem revolted against them [i.e. the kings] and renounced the faith. Bornu remained in

75. Ibn Fuṭūwa, loc. cit., pp. 4–5. According to Barth, the Bulala were descended from a certain Djil Shikomeni, said to be a son of Dunama Dibalami: R. Barth, 1857–9, Eng. trans. 1965, Vol. 2, pp. 545 and 586; it is more likely, however, that there were no kinship ties between the Bulala and the Sefuwa; Nachtigal, loc. cit., Vol. 3, pp. 38–9.

76. *Diwān*, paras. 27–31.

77. The name of Djudhām had fallen into disuse in the fourteenth century (*Encyclopédie de l’Islam*, 1st edn, Vol. 1, pp. 1090–1). The Djuhayna, by contrast, played a major role in the dismantling of the Christian kingdom of Nubia. They subsequently moved towards the south and west. H. A. MacMichael, 1922, pp. 187 ff.

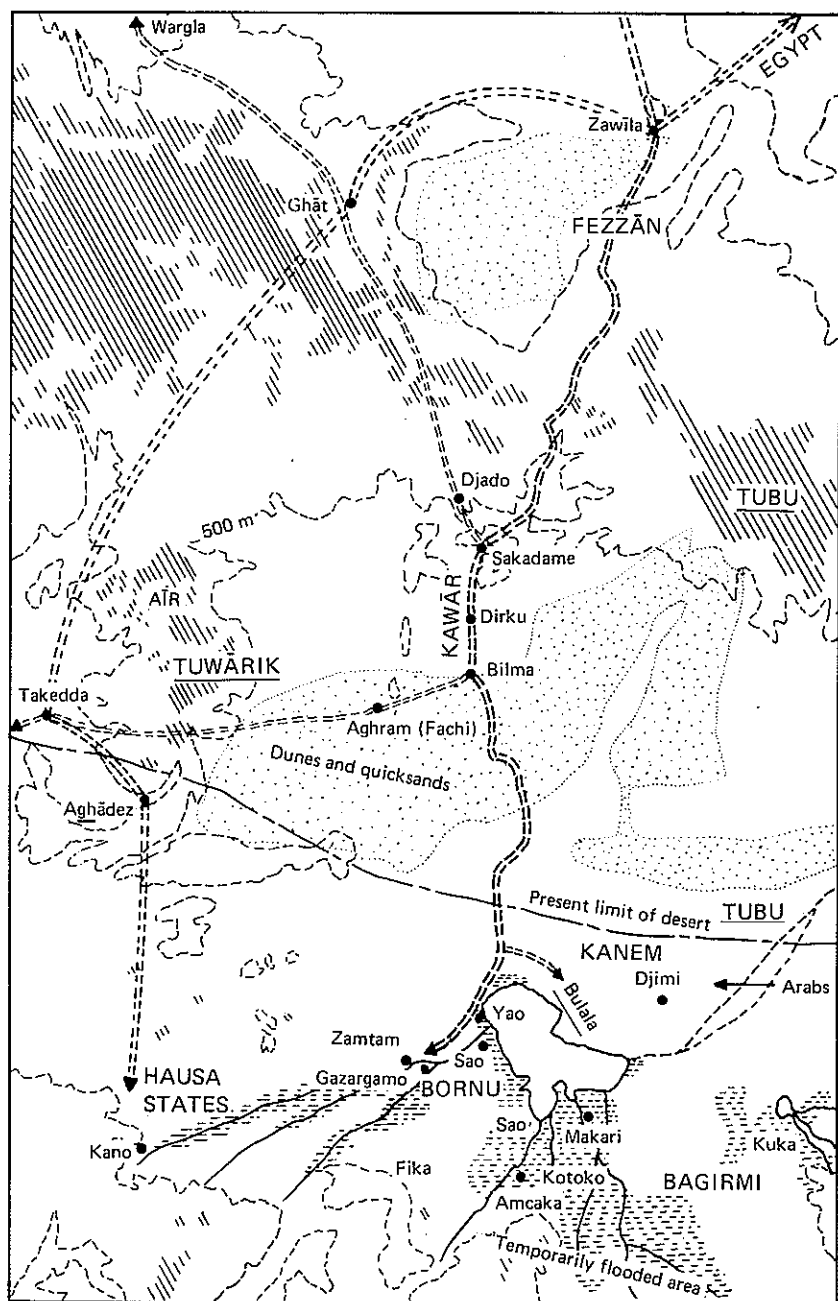


FIG. 10.5 Peoples and kingdoms of Chad in the 15th century (D. Lange)

their empire. Its inhabitants are Muslims and wage holy war against the people of Kanem. They have twelve kingdoms.<sup>78</sup>

Al-Maḳrīzī's statement might lead us to suppose that the Bulala were pagans, but neither the *Diwān* nor Ibn Fuṭūwa corroborates this. More credible is the information relating to the new Sefuwa empire, with Bornu as its centre; many local chiefs appear to have sworn allegiance to it. Kaka became the new capital.<sup>79</sup> Seemingly, Bir ('Uṭhmān) b. Idrīs was sufficiently strong to carry the war into enemy country.

Turning to the Bulala, we know that they founded a powerful kingdom in Kanem and that, as Ibn Fuṭūwa tells us, Tubu and Arab tribes were their allies. Leo Africanus knew their kingdom by the name of 'Gaoga', doubtless derived from Kuka.<sup>80</sup> According to his report, Kanem was more extensive and powerful than Bornu; its king enjoyed excellent relations with the caliph of Egypt.<sup>81</sup> This description cannot refer to the beginning of the sixteenth century – when Leo Africanus claims to have visited the kingdoms of the Sahel<sup>82</sup> – but might correspond to the situation prevailing at the end of the fifteenth century, as described to him by traders from North Africa. It is known that the Bornu forces recaptured Djimi around the beginning of the reign of Idrīs Katakarmabi (c. 1497–1519), 122 years after having been expelled from it.<sup>83</sup> The Bulala were not, however, decisively defeated until Idrīs Alawoma achieved this in the second half of the sixteenth century.

## Dynastic and political crises

Most of the information contained in the *Diwān* concerns dynastic history, which is therefore the best-known aspect of the history of Kanem-Bornu. (See Fig. 10.6.) As a rule, the *Diwān* provides only information relating to the succession (successive paragraphs are devoted to successive reigns); but this is enough to enable us to determine the lines of descent linking

78. Translated from al-Maḳrīzī, in B. N. Paris, *n. acq.*, MS 3744. Previous translations of this passage were made on the basis of a defective text (Hamaker, 1820, p. 207). Note that in the *Diwān* (para. 34) 'Uṭhmān b. Idrīs is called Bir b. Idrīs.

79. Al-Ḳalkaṣhandī, loc. cit., Vol. 5, p. 281. Kaka is also mentioned by al-'Umarī and may be identical to the *Djadja* referred to by Ibn Sa'īd and to the *Kagha* mentioned in the *Diwān* (para. 31). See p. 252, nn. 43 and 49 above.

80. This is an ethnic group and not the city of Gao or Gao-Gao, often spelt Kawkaw.

81. Leo Africanus, loc. cit., Vol. 1, p. 10; Vol. 2, pp. 479–83.

82. The numerous errors contained in his 'description' of the kingdoms of central Sudan rule out any possibility of Leo Africanus having himself visited this region. He calls the king of Bornu 'Habraam' (Ibrāhīm) and mentions two kings of the 'Gaoga', Mose (Mūsā) and Homara ('Umar). The only sovereign by the name of Ibrāhīm to have reigned in Bornu during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was Ibrāhīm b. 'Uṭhmān (c. 1431–9). Neither name – Mūsā or 'Umar – is confirmed for any Bulala king of this period.

83. Ibn Fuṭūwa, Eng. transl. 1932, fol. 5.



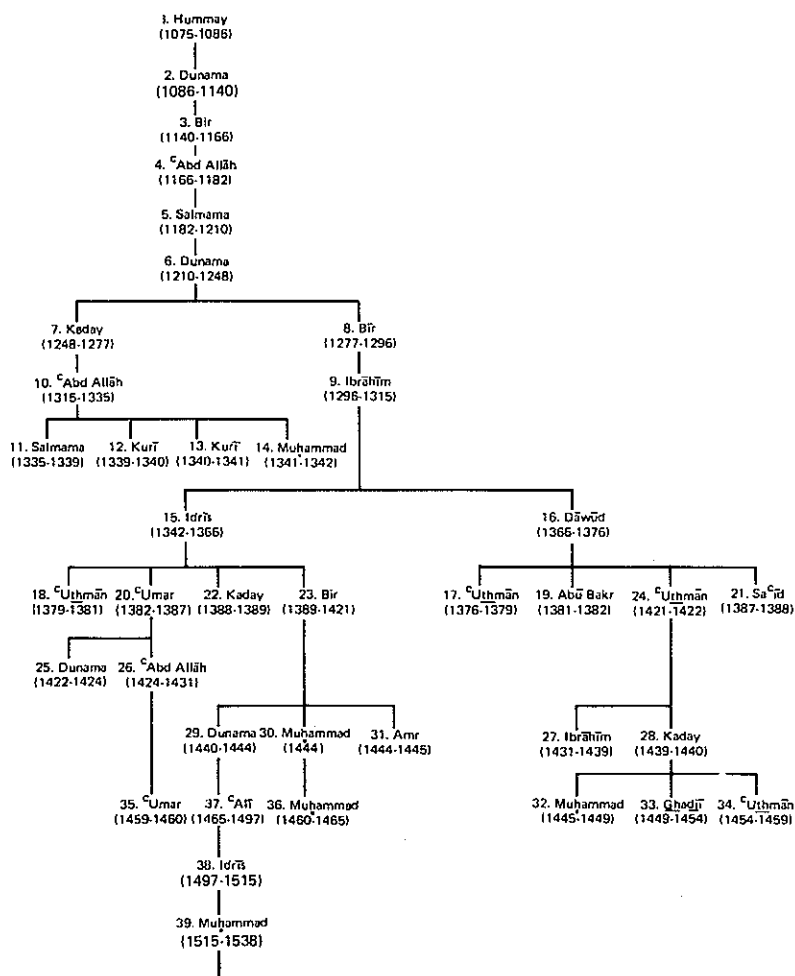


FIG. 10.6 *Genealogy of the Sefuwa (D. Lange)*

the different kings (their genealogy) and the evolution of the rules of succession. It was on the basis of such rules – or rather, of the precedents – that a successor to a deceased king was chosen. Although the balance of power between the different dynastic groups was also taken into account, it was conformity with existing rules that conferred legitimacy upon a successor. These unwritten rules proved more durable than our modern constitutions. They varied only over long periods and as a result of major changes. The dynastic groups were formed with reference to these rules, and were unable to manipulate them as they pleased. A reconstruction of the rules of succession, and of their variations, will facilitate an understanding not only of dynastic history – in the narrow sense of the term – but also of certain aspects of the historical process.

According to the *Divān*, the first six Sefuwa kings succeeded one another in direct line, from father to son. The chroniclers indicate a similar method of succession in the case of the Duguwa kings, but the duration of successive reigns shows that the kings could not have belonged to different generations. This patrilineal succession is therefore thought to have originated among the chiefs of Kavar, the probable ancestors of Hummay, who founded the new Sefuwa dynasty.

It was in the generation of Dunama Dibalami's sons that we find the first case of collateral succession (one brother succeeding another); however, it should be noted that Kaday b. Dunama (c. 1248–77) and Bir b. Dunama (c. 1277–96) were born of different mothers. Kaday's mother was probably a Magomi, whereas Bir's mother may have been descended from one of the ancient tribes of Kanem. This interpretation should be seen in the light of an important observation of the chroniclers regarding the reign of Dunama Dibalami: 'In his time, the sultan's sons split into different factions; formerly, there had been no factions.'<sup>84</sup> It is perhaps permissible to infer that the rivalry between the Kaday line and the Bir line reflects dynastic conflicts that were already breaking out in the first half of the thirteenth century. Probably, as we have seen, the growing antagonism between the royal line of the Magomi and the sedentary tribes of Kanem was at the root of these conflicts.

It should also be borne in mind that the first collateral succession in the history of the Sefuwa occurred, according to the chroniclers, after the first violent death of a Kanem king in Kanem (Dunama b. Hummay was killed during the pilgrimage). Kaday in fact died fighting against the '*andakama dunama* – doubtless one of the kingdom's great vassals. His brother Bir, on the other hand, died a natural death in Djimi. Ibrāhīm Nikale (c. 1296–1315) succeeded his father, following the patrilineal pattern, but was himself defeated by another great vassal, the *yerima* Muḥammad b. Ghadī, and power passed into the hands of his cousin, 'Abd Allāh b. Kaday (c. 1315–35). Then the former principle of succession was re-

84. *Divān*, para. 17.

established when, on 'Abd Allāh b. Kaday's natural death in Djimi, he was succeeded by his son, Salmama (c. 1335-9). From this it may be inferred that, during the second half of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth, patrilineal succession was still the dominant pattern – one, moreover, that could be broken only by resorting to violence.

Increasingly, from that time, collateral succession prevailed. Four sons of 'Abd Allāh wielded power in turn, but they were all killed in battles against the Sao after very short reigns. Seemingly incapable of defeating the Sao, the descendants of Kaday b. Dunama relinquished power to a grandson of Bir, Idrīs b. Ibrāhīm Nikale (c. 1342-66). This king may well have been more conciliatory towards the indigenous people of Bornu, as he himself was a descendant of the line of Bir b. Dunama, which enjoyed close relations with the non-Magomi people of Kanem. In any case, he appears to have succeeded in establishing a *modus vivendi* with the Sao tribes and in bringing order to Bornu.

On the death of Idrīs, the problem of succession became more acute than ever: who was to succeed him, a son or a brother? A brother, Dāwūd, born of a different mother, was in fact chosen, in preference to sons;<sup>85</sup> but the latter were not reconciled and during the reign of Dāwūd 'war broke out between the son [or sons] of the sultan and the sultan himself'.<sup>86</sup> It may be supposed that it was this war of succession and the consequent weakening of the Sefuwa that provoked the intervention of the Bulala: between 1376 and 1389, seven successive kings fell fighting the invaders.<sup>87</sup> It also resulted in the polarization of two lines of descent, the Dawudids and the Idrisids, who, in their frequently violent struggles for power, dangerously weakened the kingdom of the Sefuwa. It was another century before the problem of the succession was finally solved, by the total elimination of one of the two lines.

The immediate consequence of the external invasion was to trigger a defensive reflex: 'Uḥmān (c. 1376-9) succeeded his father Dāwūd without difficulty, and Dawudids and Idrisids subsequently reigned turn and turn about until the end of the fighting in Kanem. During this period, collateral succession tended increasingly to become the rule: 'Uḥmān b. Idrīs succeeded 'Uḥmān b. Dāwūd, and 'Umar b. Idrīs succeeded Abū Bakr b. Dāwūd. Clearly, the principle of legitimate succession was subordinated to the political imperatives of the moment.

In these circumstances, not surprisingly, it even became possible for

85. In contrast to the sons of Dunama Dibalāmi, the sons of Ibrāhīm Nikale do not appear to have represented two different groups; according to the *Dīwān*, the mothers of Idrīs and Dāwūd were in fact sisters. They were very probably Magomi.

86. *Dīwān*, para. 17. It might have been supposed that the sons in question were the sons of Dāwūd; in that case, however, the chroniclers would probably have written: 'war broke out between the sultan and his son(s)', as they did concerning the reign of Dunama Dibalāmi.

87. *ibid.*, paras 27-33.

a non-Sefuwa to accede to the throne. A 'king' (*malik*, not sultan), Sa'īd (c. 1387–8) in fact succeeded 'Umar, who had been forced by the Bulala to abandon Kanem. Sa'īd was therefore the first king to reign over Bornu alone. He was probably chosen because he represented the interests of the inhabitants of that part of the ancient kingdom better. It is indeed tempting to see in him a representative of the ancient Bornu dynasty. Both he and his successor, Kaday Afnu b. Idrīs (c. 1388–9), were also killed fighting the Bulala, before Bir ('Uthmān) b. Idrīs finally succeeded in repelling the invaders.

It might have been supposed that this victory would give the Idrisids sufficient trump cards to enable them to exclude the descendants of Dāwūd once and for all from power. By that time, the Dawudids had already been ousted from the succession three times, and the long reign of Bir ('Uthmān) b. Idrīs (c. 1389–1421) rendered their return to power still more doubtful. Nevertheless, 'Uthmān Kalnama b. Dāwūd (c. 1421–2) was able to succeed Bir ('Uthmān); but this was because the real holders of power at that time were clearly no longer the Sefuwa, but some of the kingdom's top-ranking officials.

The *Diwān* informs us that Bir ('Uthmān) had himself already had to fight the *kayghamma* (chief of the army), Muḥammad Dalatu. 'Uthmān Kalnama, his successor, was removed from power after only nine months by the *kayghamma*, Nikale b. Ibrāhīm and by the *yerima* (northern governor), Kaday Ka'aku. Power then passed into the hands of two of 'Umar b. Idrīs's sons, Dunama (c. 1422–4) and 'Abd Allāh (c. 1424–31), before returning to two Dawudids, Ibrāhīm b. 'Uthmān (c. 1431–9) and Kaday b. 'Uthmān (c. 1439–40). This oscillation of power between the two lines was undoubtedly due to the manipulation of the succession by the officers of the kingdom and, in particular, by the *kayghamma*. The chroniclers leave us in no doubt regarding the great power wielded by the *kayghamma* in that era. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar was dethroned by the *kayghamma*, 'Abd Allāh Daghalma, who set up in his place the Dawudid Ibrāhīm b. 'Uthmān; but after the death of the latter, the *kayghamma* reinstated 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar. For at least twenty years, the real masters of Bornu were thus the military chiefs and not the princes of royal blood.

It is perhaps no accident that the growing influence of the officers, and in particular of the *kayghamma*, began to make itself felt precisely during the reign of Bir ('Uthmān), at a time when the external threat represented by the Bulala had been averted. Once hostilities had ended, it was tempting for the chief architects of the consolidated kingdom to turn to account their influence with the reigning dynasty. They were too weak – and probably too disunited – to attempt to substitute their own rule for that of the Sefuwa.<sup>88</sup> However, by exploiting the existing cleavages

88. The names of the different *kayghamma* do not permit the inference that their office was at that time hereditary. However, Abdullahi Smith has put forward the hypothesis that the *kayghamma* were the chiefs of Kagma (in the southern part of Bornu) and that they

between the dynastic groups for their own purposes, they helped to revive the dynastic crisis, which might have been successfully settled after the long reign of Bir ('Uthmān).

For the next twenty years direct confrontation continued between Dawudids and Idrisids. Dunama b. Bir (c. 1440-4) attacked Kaday b. 'Uthmān and reconquered the kingdom for the descendants of Idrīs. Two brothers – Muḥammad b. Matala and 'Amr b. 'A'isha bint 'Uthmān<sup>89</sup> – succeeded him, but their two reigns combined lasted for less than two years before the Dawudids returned to power. It is not known in what circumstances Muḥammad b. Kaday (c. 1445-9) succeeded 'Amr, but it is probable that he imposed himself by force. He was also succeeded by his two brothers, Ghadjī b. Imāta (c. 1449-54) and 'Uthmān b. Kaday (c. 1454-9). The latter was defeated by 'Alī Ghadjjideni, with whom the Dawudids as a political power ceased to exist. The great dynastic conflict that had rent the country for almost a century thus ended with the complete victory of the Idrisids.

However, 'Alī Ghadjjideni, the son of Dunama b. Bir, was not necessarily assured of the succession. Apparently, two older members of his line had stronger claims. 'Alī Ghadjjideni did not in fact accede to the throne until after 'Umar b. 'Abd Allāh (c. 1459-60) and Muḥammad b. Muḥammad (c. 1460-5). It must be supposed that during the long-drawn-out struggle between Dawudids and Idrisids the two dynastic groups became strongly structured and that collateral succession, by seniority, down to the last surviving member of each generation, had become so binding a rule that even the conqueror of the Dawudids could not be exempted from it.

Very little reliable information has reached us concerning the reign of 'Alī Ghadjjideni (c. 1465-97). All that is known with certainty is that he built the city of Gazargamo (situated between Kano and Lake Chad), which was to remain the capital of the Sefuwa for over three centuries. Nevertheless, the importance of his reign may be measured by the fact that it saw a transformation of the rules of succession in favour of his direct descendants, his son Idrīs Katakarmabe (c. 1497-1515) and his grandson Muḥammad b. Idrīs (c. 1515-38). After the long period of troubles, the return to patrilineal succession must have seemed to the inhabitants of Bornu like a return to the golden age.

resented the encroachment of the Sefuwa on their own territory. H. F. C. (Abdullahi) Smith, 1971, p. 180. Since there is no evidence of the military function of the *kayghamma* until the second half of the sixteenth century (Ibn Furṭūwa), this hypothesis remains perfectly plausible.

89. If the chroniclers do not indicate the agnatic line of descent, this is doubtless because it was presumed to be known. It cannot be inferred from this that Muḥammad and 'Amr were usurpers.