

To Article VI (1982: “Éviction des Sēfuwa”)

Dealing with the most dramatic territorial change in the history of the Chadic state, this study shows that the Sefuwa ruled over two separate states, Kanem and Bornu, from the middle of the thirteenth to the second half of the fourteenth century. Environmental degradation was probably the single most important factor explaining the on-going westward movement of people from Kanem to Bornu (1982: 329-330). However, the final withdrawal of the Sefuwa from Kanem towards 1380 was the consequence of a military confrontation between the Bulala and the Sefuwa precipitated by dynastic and clan conflicts. There is no doubt that the Bulala were the main oppositional force against the Sefuwa in Kanem. They belonged to the same population as the Sefuwa (1982: 328) and they were even descendants of the first ruling clan (1993b: 268-269) or rather clan-family, the Duguwa. The weakening of the Sefuwa as a consequence of the dynastic feuds between its two branches, the Idrīsids and the Dāwūdids, gave the Bulala the opportunity to assert their authority over the people of Kanem. The royal establishment of the Chadic state was torn apart by these conflicts to the extent that the first ruler to gain ascendancy after the withdrawal from Kanem was an outsider who belonged to neither of these branches (1977a: § 32).

With respect to the regional extension of the medieval Bornu state it should be noted that the area north of the Komadugu Yobe in the present Niger Republic, where Kanuri settlements extend up to 500 km west of Lake Chad, probably lay in the centre of the state. It is most likely to this region, easily accessible for the inhabitants of Kanem, that the Sefuwa and their loyal courtiers withdrew under the onslaught of the Bulala (1980: 174), and not to the Bornu province of Kagna southwest of Lake Chad (1989: 207-208).¹⁵ Wudi, close to Lake Chad, was apparently the major capital during this period.¹⁶ The later southward shift of the Kanuri was mainly the consequence of further environmental degradation in the sub-Saharan region of northern Bornu.

Other fights between the Sefuwa and the Bulala took place in Kawar. East of Bilma, people identify a place called “mound of skulls” where a great number of Bulala are said to have been massacred by a Bornoan army which came in defense of the local Kanuri.¹⁷ In fact, both states, Bornu and Kanem, obviously wanted to secure control over the central Saharan route for the benefit of direct trade with North Africa.

A note on chronology: On the basis of a new identification, the chronology of Kanem-Bornu rulers has to be slightly amended. The Bornu king Kandji b. Djemchach, mentioned in a letter to Tuat written the 10th Sha‘bān 843 (16th January 1440), should not be identified with King Kaday b. ‘Uthmān (39) of the Sefuwa but with King Ghadjī b. Imāta (44) of the Duguwa.¹⁸ With this change of identification Ghadjī b. Imāta has to be antedated by ten years to 1439-1444. Therefore Sa‘īd, the first king ruling only in Bornu, must have ruled six years earlier, from 1381-1382. From there on, the reigns of all kings have to be similarly dated backwards by six years (1993b: 52 n. 23). Consequently Ayūma, the first dated Duguwa king, reigned 983-1002, Ḥumē, the founder of the Sefuwa line of rulers, reigned 1068-1080 and Dūnama Dibbalemi 1203-1242.