CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Kanem, Bornu, and the Fazzan: Notes on the Political History of a Trade Route

Author(s): B. G. Martin

Source: *The Journal of African History*, 1969, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1969), pp. 15-27

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/180293

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms



Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of African History*

This content downloaded from
196.220.66.189 on Sat, 27 Apr 2024 12:32:58 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Journal of African History, x, 1 (1969), pp. 15–27
Printed in Great Britain

KANEM, BORNU, AND THE FAZZĀN: NOTES ON THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF A TRADE ROUTE

BY B. G. MARTIN

THE history of the political, cultural, and commercial relations between the two Chadian Muslim states of Kanem and Bornu and the rest of the Islamic world is not well known. These two states were linked to Egypt in the east by a number of routes, and to Libya and the Mediterranean littoral by an ancient and heavily travelled road which passed through the Kawar oases and the Fazzān. This route had been in use since Carthaginian or Roman times (and doubtless even earlier), and continued to be used by the Byzantines and Muslims. It was one of a number of routes which connected the settled North African coastal strip with the belt of territory traversing Africa from west to east along the southern edge of the Sahara known as the Sudan.[1]

Looking south from the coastal region of North Africa there were no real obstacles to invasion of the Sudan by the peoples of the Maghrib, nor to their mixing with the Negroes who lived within the Sahara or the lands to the south of it. Nor were there any permanent hindrances to trade, despite the long distances to the Sudan and the difficulties of the desert. And although much of the history of this region, particularly the evolution of the north–south trade and the foreign contacts of the inhabitants of the Sahara, is obscure and uncertain, it is clear that such mixed peoples as the Fulani, the Tubu or Teda-Daza, and the Kanuri were already in existence as coherent political groups in early Islamic times.

To supply those needs of life which the broad and barren Sahara could not provide, these peoples, who either lived in or nomadized through the Sahara or its southern fringes, tried throughout their history to maintain stable commercial links with North Africa. In this way they sought to assure themselves of a constant flow of goods from the Mediterranean basin. For these goods they traded salt, gold, animal skins, slaves, and other products. In return they obtained cloth, glassware, metal goods such as tools and weapons, and many other things. What is more, this north–south trade was of as much importance to the North African coastal peoples as it was to the peoples of the desert and the Sudan. It was an indispensable element in the economic life of North Africa. Carthage, and later Sabrata and Oea and Leptis Magna, like the towns of the Cyrenaican Pentapolis and other cities of Roman and Byzantine times, might have survived with-

[1] For a discussion of the trans-Saharan trade in classical times and earlier, see R.C.C. Law, 'The Garamantes and trans-Saharan enterprise in classical times', *J. Afr. Hist.* VIII (1967), 181–200.

This content downloaded from
196.220.66.189 on Sat, 27 Apr 2024 12:32:58 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

out the desert trade, but without it they might not have reached the high degree of prosperity, even luxury, which they attained. During the classical and Byzantine periods, the economic and political interests of the coastal towns dictated the channelling, regularizing, and organization of the southern trade. At a later time, the same political and economic motives may be seen at work among the Muslim states and dynasties of North Africa, like the Aghlabids, the Muwaḥḥids and Ḥafṣids, the Ottoman Turks, and the independent *pāshāliks* and *beyliks* of the Qaramānlīs of Tripoli and the Ḥusaynīs of Tunis.[2]

The pattern of economic activity which had united the Sudan and North Africa in earlier days was momentarily halted and disrupted, but not broken, by the Muslim invasions of North Africa in the seventh century. Among the Muslims of this period there was no lack of demand for goods from the south. Although the Berbers of the coastal areas and the mountains behind them were temporarily defeated by the forces of the Arab 'establishments' of Damascus and Baghdad in the seventh and eighth centuries, it was not long before they were again the masters of a network of commercial routes, crossing and recrossing the Sahara. From the northern termini of these roads, their 'inland ports' or 'caravan harbours', they continued their traditional trading activities. At this time (eighth to tenth centuries), it is certain that they used several principal routes: a western one through Sijilmāsa, controlled by the Banū Midrār or Miknāsa Berbers; one running through the land of Anbiya to Awdaghast or Old Ghana; and a more central one by way of Wargla (*Warjlān*) and Tademekket to Gao and the Niger bend country. The most easterly and the shortest route ran from Tripoli (ancient Oea) and the Jabal Nafūsa through the oases of the Fazzān and Kawar into the Chad Basin.[3] It is this route with which this paper is mostly concerned.

It is not surprising that the independent Berbers trading in the Sahara refused to accept the version of Islam which their Umayyad and Abbasid enemies offered them. Instead, they eagerly adopted the doctrines brought to them by Kharijite missionaries of the Ṣufrī and Ibādī sects about A.D. 740[4]. More enterprising, perhaps, and more energetic than the local Sunnis, some of the Berber Khawārij of the coastal tribes drew away into the interior, which was not so firmly held by the orthodox, into the deserts and mountain areas. There they established the Ṣufrī state of Sijilmāsa and the Ibāḍī imamate of Tahert. These new political creations existed through the eighth and ninth centuries, to be extinguished by the Fatimid invasions, and were to have their remnants again broken and dis-

[2] T. Lewicki, 'Traits d'histoire du commerce transsaharien: marchands et missionnaires ibadites en Soudan occidental et central au cours des VIIIe–XIIe siècles', *Etnografia polska*, VIII (Warsaw, 1964), 291-311, esp. 293.

[3] See Lewicki, loc. cit. 293, for a map of these routes.

[4] For a good account of the Ibāḍīs of the earliest times in N. Africa, see T. Lewicki, 'La Répartition des groupements ibadites dans l'Afrique du Nord au moyen-âge', *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, XXI (Warsaw, 1957), 301–43, esp. 307 ff.

This content downloaded from 196.220.66.189 on Sat, 27 Apr 2024 12:32:58 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

persed by the invasions of the Arabs of the Hilāl and Sulaym tribes in the eleventh century.[5]

Throughout the high period of Ibāḍī and Ṣufrī political and commercial activity centering on Tahert and Sijilmāsa in the eighth and ninth centuries, the degree of Khārijī enterprise and penetration into the deserts and beyond was astonishing. They journeyed as far as ancient Ghana, they traded along the Niger at Gao, and they certainly carried on commerce round Lake Chad. Along with their trade goods, they imported their religious views. There is little doubt that the primitive form of West African Islam in areas adjacent to Khārijī trade-routes was often of the Ibāḍī (and less frequently of the Ṣufrī) variety. After the Fatimid destruction of Tahert in A.D. 909, another wave of Kharijites was driven southwards into the deserts. Always tenacious, they built their own towns and continued their trade southwards from the Fazzān, from the Jabal Nafūsa, from centres in southern Algeria, and from Mali. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa notes their presence in Mali as traders in the mid-fourteenth century.[6]

For the earliest Islamic period, the history of the trade-route to the Chad Basin through the Fazzān and Kawar is imperfectly known. According to the Arab traditions embodied in the *maghāzī* literature (accounts of the campaigns of conquests during the first days of Islam), an expedition under 'Uqba ibn Nāfi' al-Fihrī penetrated into the Fazzān about A.D. 670. This story appears both in al-Bakrī's *Al-Masālik wa'l-mamālik* and Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's *Futūḥ Miṣr*. 'Uqba is said to have occupied Ghadāmis and the Waddān district south and east of Tripoli, and to have gone into the desert by the southern road, as far as a place called *Mā' al-Faras* (visited by Barth in 1857, and situated just north of the present Libyan–Niger Republic frontier in the Tummo Mountains).[7] 'Uqba is also said to have passed through Germa, or Jarma, in the Wadi Irāwān, where the local ruler presented him with many slaves, and whose people were ready to accept Islam. This *maghāzī* tradition has been questioned by R. Brunschwig, who has shown that 'Uqba's campaign was no permanent conquest, but that the primary islamization of the Fazzān was accomplished in the 760s.[8] This date is entirely consistent with new evidence assembled by T. Lewicki for the settlement of Ibāḍīs in that region.[9]

[5] A rather fuller but very opinionated treatment of the history of the Khārijī states can be found in Muḥammad 'Alī Dabbūz, *Ta'rīkh al-Maghrib al-kabīr*, III (Cairo, 1963).

[6] See C. Defrémery and B. R. Sanguinetti, *Voyages d'Ibn Batoutah*, IV (Paris, 1922), 394–5. Also T. Lewicki, 'La Ville de Tahert et ses connections commerciales au Soudan occidental au VIIIe et IXe siècles', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, VIII (1962).

[7] H. Barth, *Reisen*, II (Gotha, 1861), 235.

[8] R. Brunschwig, 'Ibn 'Abd al H'akam et la conquête de l'Afrique du Nord par les Arabes, étude critique', *Annales de l'Institut d'Études Orientales*, VI (Algiers, 1942–7), 108–55. For further discussion of 'Uqba's activities, see E. Lévi-Provençal, 'Un nouveau récit de la conquête de l'Afrique du Nord par les Arabes', *Arabica*, I (1954), 17–43, and Sa'd Zaghlūl 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, *Ta'rīkh al-Maghrib al-'Arabī: Lībyā wa Tūnus wa'l-Ǧazā'ir wa'l-Maghrib min al-fatḥ al-'Arabī ḥatta qiyām duwal al-Aghāliba wa'l-Rustamīyīn wa'l-Adārisa* (Cairo, 1965), 83 ff.

[9] Lewicki, 'Répartition', 339–43.

This content downloaded from 196.220.66.189 on Sat, 27 Apr 2024 12:32:58 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

By A.D. 761 two small states had established themselves across the route from Tripoli to the Chad Basin, one at Ajar Fazzān, perhaps just north of Zawīla, which, like Zawīla, had a mixed population of Berbers, Arabs, and Blacks. The other state was at Zawīla itself, which by this time was a considerable Ibāḍī centre.[10] But in A.D. 761 an Abbasid army under Ibn al-Ash'ath defeated the forces of Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb 'Abd al-'Alā b. al-Samḥ al-Ma'āfirī, the Ibāḍī *imām* of Ifrīqīya, near Tripoli. Ibn al-Ash'ath then attacked Zawīla and massacred its Ibāḍī population.[11] In spite of this blow, Zawīla for many centuries remained an Ibāḍī town of importance, one of the main points of departure for caravans going to the Sudan.

Zawīla's slave-traders were famous throughout the Islamic world for the great number of captives they brought back across the deserts from the Chad region. Many of the slavers were Berbers of the Hawwāra, the Lawāta, and the Mazāta tribes, and there were some from the Nafūsa. Lewicki has pointed out the antiquity of the commercial links between the Berbers of the Jabal Nafūsa and Kanem. Jabal Nafūsa lay some distance to the north of Zawīla on the road to Tripoli. An Ibāḍī governor of the Jabal Nafūsa, Abū 'Ubayda 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Jināwunī by name (*ca.* A.D. 800–850), was able to speak the 'language of Kanem [Kanembu?]', as well as Arabic and Berber. His name itself may be etymologically related to the Berber word for the Sudan (*Genawa*) and the English word 'Guinea'.[12] Also the main town of his district, Jādū, is commemorated by a second Jādū in the Kawar oasis, on the road from Zawīla to Lake Chad.

At the start of the tenth century Zawīla was still to be an important Ibāḍī town. By now it was ruled by the Berber family of the Banū Khaṭṭāb, whose founder was a certain 'Abdallāh ibn al-Khaṭṭāb of the Banū Mazlikesh clan.[13] By this time Zawīla had gained in size and significance. It was the point where a subordinate trade and pilgrim route running east and west crossed the main north–south road. This east–west route now reached Cairo, where it entered the Fatimid city by the *Bab Zawīla* or *Zuwayla*, the 'Zawīla Gate'. The Andalusian geographer al-Bakrī, writing about A.D. 1030, who compiled a 'Book of roads and countries' from travellers' reports, calls Zawīla 'an unwalled town in the midst of the desert...the beginning of the land of the Blacks'. He also mentions the Fazzānī towns of Sabha, Timassa, and Hūn as important commercial points. Like Zawīla under the Banū Khaṭṭāb, after 306 H./A.D. 918–19 these towns presumably participated in the Kanem–Chad trade. According to al-Bakrī, from Zawīla to Kanem was a distance of forty days journey.[14]

Some time after A.D. 1050 Libya was invaded from the east by the Banū Hilāl and the Banū Sulaym, who had originated in the Arabian Peninsula and then moved into upper Egypt. At Fatimid behest they migrated west-

[10] Ibid. 340–1.
[11] Ibid. 308, 341.
[12] Lewicki, 'Traits', 309–10; Dabbūz, op. cit, III, 514.
[13] Lewicki, 'Répartition', 342.
[14] Al-Bakrī, ed. de Slane, *Kitab al-Masālik wa'l-Mamālik*, 11.

This content downloaded from 196.220.66.189 on Sat, 27 Apr 2024 12:32:58 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

wards into the Maghrib against a rebellious vassal dynasty, the Zirids of Tunis. Whereas the Hilāl Arabs moved westwards into Ifrīqīya (modern Tunisia) fairly close to the coastline, within 150 years the Sulaym had swarmed into the Fazzān and the country to the south, where they mingled with the indigenous Berber, Ṭawāriq and Tubu populations. These peoples already contained elements of an African stock from farther south. Not only did the Sulaym complete the arabization and islamization of the Fazzān, but as Lewicki says, 'the invasions of the Arab tribes...much modified the economic, political, and religious situation in the Maghrib, and brought about a disintegration of the Ibāḍī sect over almost all of its historical area in North Africa'.[15] This was in fact the final dispersal of the Ibāḍīya in the Maghrib: today the North African Ibāḍīs survive as communities only in the Jabal Nafūsa, the Mīzāb region of southern Algeria, and the island of Jarba off the Tunisian coast.

Slightly more than a century after the Hilālī and Sulaymī invasions, in 568 H./A.D. 1172–3, a Mamlūk named Sharaf al-Dīn Qaraqūsh al-Ghuzzī (or al-Armanī), a follower of Taqī al-Dīn ibn Ayyūb, a brother of Salāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī (Saladin) raided the Fazzān from Egypt. Assisted by Ibn Qaratekin the Silāḥdār ('armour-bearer'), Qaraqūsh first invaded the oasis of Siwa, then moved into the Fazzān. At Zawīla he tortured and murdered the last of the Ibāḍī Banū Khaṭṭāb rulers for his money. Having occupied Tunis and Tripoli for a brief time, Qaraqūsh founded a short-lived state, but was soon killed with one of his sons by a rival *condottiere*, Yaḥya al-Mayūrqī, who crucified both of them in the Waddān about A.D. 1212. Some years later another son of Qaraqūsh revolted against the Ḥafṣid caliph at-Mustanṣir and fled to the Fazzān. He entered Waddān, and according to al-Tijānī, 'set the country ablaze. But the King of Kanem sent emissaries to kill him and [so] delivered the land from strife. His head was sent to Kanem and exhibited to the people. That happened in the year 656 H. [A.D. 1258–9].'[16]

In the late thirteenth century it seems clear that Kanem was much stronger than it had been before and that its size was increasing. It now controlled a long tongue of territory to the northwards, and a new period of Chadian political control in the Fazzān had begun. It was doubtless dictated by the wish of the rulers of Kanem to keep the trade-routes to the north open and functioning smoothly. Hence the assassination of Qaraqūsh's son at Kanemi instigation. On the authority of Ibn Sa'īd, Abū'l-Fidā' states that Zawīla (and probably parts of Waddān as well) was under Kanemi control after 1300.[17] Furthermore, Ibn Khaldūn declares that Kanem maintained friendly relations with the Ḥafṣids of Tunis from the beginnings of their dynasty (about A.D. 1230), and that a

[15] Lewicki, 'Traits', 296.

[16] Abū Muḥammad 'Abdallāh al-Tijānī, *Riḥlat al-Tijānī* (Tunis, 1378/1958), 111.

[17] Ismā'īl b. 'Alī' Imād al-Dīn Abū'l-Fidā', *apud* M. Reinaud, *Géographie d' Aboulféda*, II, no. 2 (Paris, 1848, Arabic text), 146–7.

This content downloaded from
196.220.66.189 on Sat, 27 Apr 2024 12:32:58 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

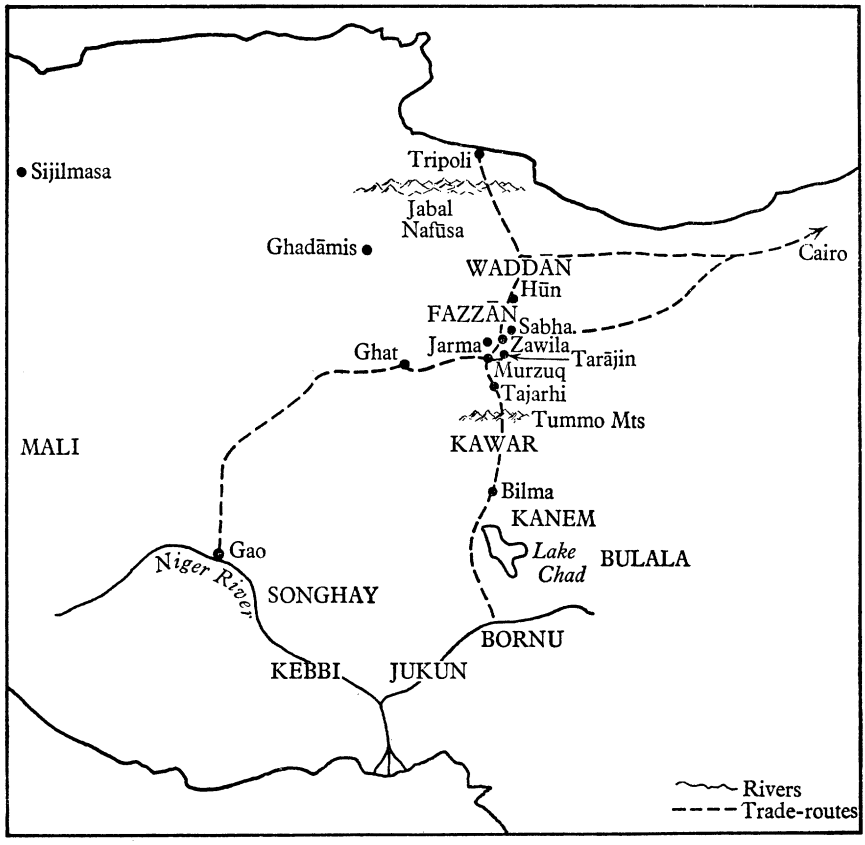


Fig. 1

king of Kanem had sent a giraffe as a present to the Ḥafṣid Caliph al-Mustanṣir in 655 H./A.D. 1257.[18] It is even likely that the Ḥafṣids and Kanem were in alliance. They may have fought together against the mysterious Qurmān, Khurmān, or Husmān group which gained temporary control of Zawīla some time in the late thirteenth century, an episode of which little is known in any detail.[19]

Between 1300 and 1500 lie the *siècles obscurs* of the Fazzān and of the relations between the Chad region and the Mediterranean littoral. It is

[18] Ibn Khaldūn, *Histoire des Berbères*, II, ed. P. Casanova (Paris, 1929), 346–7.

[19] J. S. Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa* (Oxford, 1962), 116, note 5. See also the genealogical table in Krause, *Geschichte*, 371, for the Awlād Muḥammad, and note 20 below. Al-Salāwī (see note 33 below), p. 49, notes that in the seventh century of the Hijra (A.D. 1204–1302) and after, the people of Kanem 'exchanged gifts and were in communication with the Ḥafṣids, just as the people of Mali were in contact with the Banū Marīn'. Salāwī also quotes two lines of poetry by a Kanemi poet, Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Ya'qūb al-Kānemī, which he recited to his patron, the Muwaḥḥid ruler Ya'qūb al-Mansūr (ruled A.D. 1184–99). The connexions between the Muwaḥḥids and Kanem seem otherwise to be unknown.

This content downloaded from 196.220.66.189 on Sat, 27 Apr 2024 12:32:58 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

hard to say with much certainty just how long the control of the king of Kanem over the Fazzān lasted. It has been suggested that Kanem controlled the Fazzān through a subordinate king or a viceroy, whose capital was at Tarājin near Murzuq, for about a century after the death of Qaraqūsh (i.e. to about A.D. 1310). About that time, the representatives of Kanem were supposedly expelled by a Moroccan *sharīf* named al-Muntaẓar, or perhaps al-Muntaṣir, b. Muḥammad al-Fāsī, traditionally the founder of Murzuq, south of Zawīla. Murzuq now became not only the capital of the Fazzān, but also the seat of a dynasty called the Awlād Muḥammad. Other sources put the establishment of the Awlād Muḥammad in the Fazzān at some time between 1500 and 1550, so that an accurate fixing of the end of Kanemi rule, of the chronology of the Qurmān and the Awlād Muḥammad (and possibly of a re-establishment of the rule of Bornu also) has yet to be worked out.[20]

Such evidence as there is that a Kanemi viceroy resided in the Fazzān during a part of this period comes from the nineteenth-century German explorer and traveller Gustav Nachtigal:

> At the start of the thirteenth century, the writ of the King of Kanem ran northwards over the entire Fazzan, as far as Waddan, and this situation continued... into the fourteenth century. At that time Traghen [or Tarājin] was the capital of the Fazzan, and the seat of a Kanemi viceroy. Owing to the great distance from the central government, the office of the latter was quite independent and doubtless hereditary. Tradition had kept alive in the minds of the people the Bornu dynasty of the Nesûr. The viceroys seem to have had the title of king, for the tomb of Mai (king) 'Ali is well known at Traghen.[21]

Nachtigal goes on to say that 'all such memories of this period are restricted to Traghen, where there are not only the remains of a citadel of the Nesûr, the tomb previously mentioned, but also a fountain built in the earliest times... and many gardens, open areas and wells, which today [1879] still bear names in the Kanuri language, i.e. the tongue of Kanem and Bornu'.

But, whether Kanemi control of the Fazzān lasted until 1500, as suggested by Ettore Rossi, or whether it had long since collapsed by that date, as claimed by Yves Urvoy, it is certain that a number of important political

[20] See Gustav Nachtigal, *Sahara und Sudan*, I (Berlin, 1879), 165 ff., and Ḥasan Sulaymān Maḥmūd, *Lībyā bayn al-maḍī wa'l-ḥāḍir* (Cario, 1962), 176. A useful but neglected source is Gottlob Adolf Krause, 'Zur Geschichte von Fesan und Tripoli in Afrika', *Zeitschrift der Gessellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1878), 356–73. Krause derived much of his information from an unpublished anonymous MS, MS 113 of the Public Library, Valetta, Malta. This MS, which ends with a description of some events in the Fazzān in 1166 H./A.D. 1752–3, gives better information on many points of Fazzānī history than the better-known chronicle by Ibn Ghalbun, *Al-Tidhkār fī man malaka Ṭarābulus wa man kāna bihā min al-akhbār*, the Arabic text of which was edited and published by Ṭāhir al-Zāwī (Cairo, 1349/1930–1), and an Italian translation with useful notes made by Ettore Rossi, *La Cronica araba tripolina di Ibn Ghalbun, sec. XVIII, tradotta ed annotata* (Bologna, Licinio Capelli), 1936.

[21] G. Nachtigal, op. cit. I, 164 ff.

This content downloaded from 196.220.66.189 on Sat, 27 Apr 2024 12:32:58 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

events were taking place in Kanem and Bornu between 1300 and 1500.[22] Briefly, the two states were engaged in a struggle for political supremacy. Bornu emerged as victor, its rulers endowed with new energies and a will to expand its territories and to continue its indispensable trading contacts over the Kawar–Fazzān route. Thus, after 1475, the *Mais* of Bornu were in touch with the local Banū Makkī and Banū Ghurāb *shaykhs* of Tripoli,[23] with the temporary Spanish occupiers in 1504 or 1512, and again at least once in the 1530s.[24] After the coming of the Ottoman Turks under Ṭurghūt Re'īs to Tripoli in 1551, the contacts continued as they had before. Just as Kanem had found it advantageous to be in alliance with the Ḥafṣids, so the *Mais* of Bornu found it of use to be in alliance, or at least on very friendly terms, with the Ottoman Turks at Tripoli, and on occasion directly in touch with the Sultan at Istanbul.

Fresh evidence of the diplomatic contacts between certain rulers of Bornu and the Ottoman Turks in the late sixteenth century has now come to light in the form of three documents from the *Mühimme Defterleri*, registers of the decrees of the Imperial Ottoman *Dīvān*. These records, which are preserved at the *Başvekâlet Arşivi* (Prime Minister's Archives) at Istanbul, have yielded two letters in Arabic. These two letters, dated May 1577, from Sultan Murād III to Mai Idrīs of Bornu, are accompanied by some instructions in Ottoman Turkish from the *Dīvān* to the Ottoman *Beylerbeyi* of Tunis, regarding the treatment of the emissary from Bornu returning home to his king.[25]

By 1576, the probable date of the dispatch of Mai Idrīs's emissary to Turkey, the friendly relations between Bornu and the Ottomans had been in existence for a little more than two decades. A thorough search in the Ottoman Archives will doubtless substantiate this claim. It is unlikely that these ties existed before 1551, the date of the Ottoman capture of Tripoli from the Spaniards. After the middle 1550s a variety of motives caused the *Mais* of Bornu to seek the friendship and aid of Ottoman Turkey. Chief among them was their wish to maintain commerce without a break over the traditional trade-route, the hopes of the *Mais* for Turkish weapons to use against their foreign enemies, and their desire to see Turkish troops dispatched in some numbers to aid them. Beyond this they wanted to be recognized as legitimate Muslim rulers of standing by the greatest Islamic power of the time, Ottoman Turkey, then standing at its political apogee.

In the 1550s the Bulala people of Kanem and the Jukun (or Kwararafa)

[22] See Ettore Rossi, 'Storia del medio evo e dell-età moderna', in Corrado Zoli et al., *Il Sahara Italiano*, I, *Fezzan e oasi di Gat* (Rome, 1937), 333–51, and Yves Urvoy, *Histoire de l'empire de Bornou* (Paris, 1949), passim.

[23] Ṭāhir Aḥmad al-Zāwī, *Ta'rīkh al-fatḥ al-'Arabī fi Lībyā* (Cairo, 1963), 274 ff.

[24] M. Fresnel, 'Mémoire sur le Waday', *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie* (Paris, 1849), 253.

[25] See B. G. Martin, 'Mai Idrīs of Bornu and the Ottoman Turks, 1576–78', in *Documents from Islamic Chanceries*, II, ed. S. M. Stern (Oxford, 1969). This article contains the Arabic and Turkish texts of the letters and instructions together with translations and a commentary.

This content downloaded from 196.220.66.189 on Sat, 27 Apr 2024 12:32:58 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

tribes of the Benue Valley, deadly enemies of Bornu in the recent past, were for the moment less dangerous. This could not be said of the Hausa state of Kebbi. Formerly a dependency of Songhay, Kebbi had asserted its independence under the Lekawa rulers in 1515, and again in 1535, when the reigning Kanta (probably a title rather than a personal name) of Kebbi won a resounding victory over a Songhay army led by Askia Muḥammad Benkan (or Bengan) at Wantaramasa. During the decade 1540–50 Kebbi made peace with Songhay and turned against Bornu. It is likely that these hostilities broke out because both Bornu and Kebbi wanted exclusive control over the southern termini of routes to the Mediterranean littoral, but this need not have been the only reason. These wars between Kebbi, under Kotal and other *kantas*, and Bornu, under the *Mais* Muḥammad b. Idrīs or Dunama b. Muḥammad, saw large-scale military operations in Hausaland.[26] Feeling threatened by Kebbi, the Kanuri kings of the 1550s turned to the Turks at Tripoli for assistance. In the so-called *Narrative of the French Prisoner*, the author credibly states that 'Mahi-Mahomet' of Bornu made an alliance with 'Dragud, bassa de Tripoly' in 1555, but somewhat less believably that Muḥammad had put 100,000 men into the field against 'Cabi'.[27]

These events form the background to the dispatch of the emissary to Istanbul by Mai Idrīs in 984 H./A.D. 1576–7. To renew the alliance, to pay his respects on his accession, to short-circuit momentarily the Turkish Pashas of Tripoli, to by-pass them with a direct request to the Sultan, to pave the way for future requests for arms and troops—all this led to an exchange of letters with Sultan Murād III.[28] Although the Bornu side of the correspondence is missing, the situation obtaining may be partially reconstructed from the two versions of an Arabic letter to the Sultan from Mai Idrīs. Idrīs's original letter, carried by an anonymous pilgrim who likewise returned with the reply (after the words *al-Ḥājj* in the Arabic texts, there are blanks for the insertion of the emissary's name) had included two requests.

The first of these requests concerned the return to Bornu of a frontier(?) fortress. The name of this stronghold is incompletely vocalized in the

[26] Lacking any better sources, I have had to depend on A. Mischlich and J. Lippert, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte der Hausastaaten', *MSOS*, VI (Berlin, 1903; *Afrikanische Studien*), 137–242, esp. 149–53 for the history of Kebbi.

[27] A very useful source for contacts between Bornu and Tripoli to 1677 is the *Narrative of the French Prisoner* (*Rélation du médecin-esclave*), which was written about 1685, probably by a certain Girard. It is listed under *Fonds Français* 12219 and 12220 at the Bibliothèque National, Paris. Used by L. C. Féraud in his *Annales tripolitaines* (Paris, 1927), extracts from it may also be found in Fresnel, loc. cit. (see note 24 above). This source was also used by C. de la Roncière, 'Une histoire de Bornou au XVIIe siècle par un chirurgien français captif à Tripoli', *Revue de l'histoire des colonies françaises* (1919), 78–88, which I have not seen. Girard also obtained some of his information from the *Cosmografia* of the Neapolitian nobleman Giovanni Lorenzo d'Anania (first edition Naples 1573, second and third editions Venice 1576 and 1582). This important source, of which the third section (*Trattato Terzo*) deals with Africa, requires a critical edition and a translation.

[28] See Aziz Samih İlter, *Şimali Afrikada Türkler*, II (Istanbul, 1937), 128.

This content downloaded from 196.220.66.189 on Sat, 27 Apr 2024 12:32:58 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

letters, but was probably pronounced *Qurān*. This place had evidently fallen into the hands of the Turks under Maḥmūd Bey, *Bey* of the Fazzān, in the course of his conquest of the Fazzān a short time before. Maḥmūd Bey was clearly a very energetic commander. According to the Turkish historian Aziz Samih Ilter,

> he had continually extended his governorate as far south as the basin of Lake Chad and the borders of the state of Bornu... In 984 H. [1576–7], the ruler of Bornu, Malik Idrīs, had sent an embassy to Istanbul to give expression to his submission and respect. After the ambassador had performed his mission, he had been given the Sultan's letter of reply and dismissed, and orders had been sent to the *Beylerbeyi* of Tunis to ensure that he was sent on without difficulty and in safety to his own country. The fact that the *Beylerbeyi* of Tunis was at this time ordered to warn the *Bey* of the Fazzān, Maḥmūd Bey, indicates that the ambassador had complained of Maḥmūd Bey in Istanbul. The fact, too, that orders concerning the Bornu affair and matters of the Fazzān...were sent to the *Beylerbeyi* of Tunis must be explained by the fact that the *eyâlet* of Tripoli was [temporarily?] subordinate to the *Beylerbeyi* of Tunis...[29]

If Samih İlter is right in his suggestion that Maḥmūd Bey extended his *beylik* to the south at the expense of Bornu, then this extension must be one of the deepest penetrations into the Sahara ever made by the Turks. Of course, the location of the fortress is quite uncertain. From its name, *Qurān*, one might guess that it was garrisoned by men of the *Qurān* (a fraction of the Teda-Daza tribe, known to Leo Africanus as the *Goran* and to H. R. Palmer and H. Carbou as the *Gura'ān*) or stood in their territory. Its identification is essentially an archaeological problem, but the fortress may well have stood somewhere along the main trade-route from Bornu to the Fazzān, quite possibly in the Kawar oasis, or between there and the Fazzān proper. Murād III, however, refused to return the fortress of *Qurān* to Mai Idrīs, claiming that his ancestors had never 'followed the practice of relinquishing or yielding fortresses to foreign states'.

Mai Idrīs's second request concerned military aid and a revival of the alliance with Turkey. To this proposal, Murād III seemed to agree, speak-in the grandiloquent chancery language of the time:

> We have already dispatched to them [Ottoman frontier commanders] Our Noble Letter in this respect, owing to Our Extreme Desire and Most Urgent Demand that the generality of the subjects and the entirety of humankind should be guarded within the shade of Our Protection, and rest easily within the shadow of Our Justice. If enemies should take control of your *wilāya* [province] and if you seek aid from them [frontier commanders] or vice-versa, it will be their duty and yours to help with troops, materials of war, and supplies, in such a way that it will be realized by those far and near, and by every obedient or rebellious person that the two states are protected on the sides and flanks from

[29] Ibid. 128–9.

This content downloaded from 196.220.66.189 on Sat, 27 Apr 2024 12:32:58 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

the evils of dissension and difference, and flourish inwardly and outwardly, through perfect concord and harmony...[30]

Although the *Narrative of the French Prisoner* claims that Ja'far (or perhaps Yaḥya) Pāshā of Tripoli sent one of his officers with a gift 'of fine horses and firearms' to Bornu in late 1577 or in 1578, it is clear that the formal alliance amounted to very little, and brought to Mai Idrīs few of the benefits he had expected.[31] The same source does mention, however, that the alliance was renewed in 1589 under 'Ussaim' (Ḥusayn?) Pāshā of Tripoli.[32] In the meantime, Idrīs, disappointed by the Turks, turned, about 1582, for military assistance to the other North African power of the day, the Sa'dī *sharīfs* of Morocco. The price wanted by Aḥmad al-Manṣūr al-Dhahabī was too high, and would have required Idrīs to accept some form of political subordination to Morocco.[33]

As the promised military aid of Sultan Murād III remained a mere pledge on paper, the question arises as to how Mai Idrīs obtained the services of Turks who served in his entourage (for which there are various pieces of contemporary evidence). An interesting passage in a contemporary Neapolitan source throws some light on this matter: the Turks were largely adventurers and soldiers of fortune who were recruited by the Kanuri king.[34]

[30] This passage is taken from Arabic Letter II, next-to-last paragraph.

[31] Fresnel, loc. cit. 254. [32] Fresnel, loc. cit. 254.

[33] See the chapter on 'Songhay, Bornu, and the Hausa states in the 16th century' by J. O. Hunwick in the forthcoming book by M. C. Crowder and J. F. A. Ajayi, *A History of West Africa* (Ibadan, 1969). Hunwick discusses the complex interrelationships of Bornu, Songhay, and Kebbi with Morocco. See also Aḥmad b. Khālid al-Nāṣirī al-Salāwī, *Kitāb al-Istiqṣā' li-akhbār duwal al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā'*, III (Bulāq, 1304 H./1886–7), 49–53. In this book the nineteenth-century Moroccan historian al-Salāwī (1855–97) quotes a long unpublished history of 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Fishtālī al-Ṣanhājī (956–1031/1549–1621), the *Manāhil al-ṣafā' fī akhbār Mulūk al-Shurafā'* ('The pure springs concerning the history of the Sharifian Kings', cf. Brockelmann, *GAL*, Supplement II, 680). Fishtālī, who served as *kātib al-dawla*, or state secretary to Mawlaī Aḥmad al-Manṣūr al-Dhahābī, has the following to say about Malik Idrīs's efforts to obtain firearms and military aid at Fas in 990 H./1582–83: 'And one of the motives of his Sultān [Malik Idrīs] in sending the letter which he despatched by him [emissary from Bornu to Aḥmad al-Manṣūr] was to seek help from the *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, soldiers, and an army, a number of muskets [*bunduq*] and some fire-belching cannons [*madāfi' al-nār*] to wage the *jihād* on the unbelievers adjoining their [territory] in a remote part of the Sūdān. Previously, this messenger had gone to visit the Turkish Sultan at Istanbul, Murād the 'Uthmānī, to obtain assistance from him...' (p. 50). I am grateful to Mr Hunwick for this reference. The *Manāhil* has now been published in an abridged form by 'Abdaltak Gannūn Tiṭwān, 1964; cf. pp. 61–62.

[34] Giovanni Lorenzo d'Anania, *Cosmografia* (*L'Universale fabrica del mondo, overo cosmografia*) in the Venice edition of 1582, 349–50, has the following to say about Bornu: 'Then comes Bornò on the banks of the River Negro (where there is a great lake, caused by the aforesaid river), a very great city having much commerce. It has its own king... In writing to foreign princes, they use the Arabic language, as I am informed by Signor Giovanni di Vesti, a most honourable person. Among the Turks, where he was the slave of a great count, he himself saw a letter which he [*Mai* of Bornu] wrote to the Bassa [*Pāshā*] of Tripoli, with much eloquence and very great art. This prince is so powerful, that he has several times put into the field 100,000 men against the King of Cabi [Kebbi]. Because of his power, the Negroes deem him to be an emperor. They also have a great multitude of horses, which the Arabs bring in from their countries, selling them for at least 700 or 1000 *scudi* each. These do not live for long, for when the sun enters the Sign

This content downloaded from 196.220.66.189 on Sat, 27 Apr 2024 12:32:58 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Because of their better discipline and superior firepower, the possession of Turkish mercenaries must have tipped the military balance very decisively in Idrīs's favour. One might guess that the opponents of the Kanuri rulers at this time had hand-weapons and bows and arrows, but few if any firearms, which must have been expensive and hard to obtain. Mai Idrīs's use of firearms in some quantity preceded by more than a decade the Moroccan invasion of Songhay under the Spanish renegade Judār Pāshā. On that occasion large numbers of muskets and some artillery were employed by the conquerors. But the question of the places and dates of the first introduction of firearms in decisive quantities into the Western Sudan is a very complex one which needs much more careful study before any definite conclusions can be reached.

These contacts between Bornu and Turkey at the end of the sixteenth century were not the last by any means. The *Narrative of the French Prisoner* records others in 1612, again in 1634, 1636 and 1638 under Mai 'Umar of Bornu, in 1647 under Mai Ḥājj 'Alī, and again in 1652–3 under the same ruler. The *Narrative* (cf. Fresnel, pp. 256–7) includes a French translation of a letter (originally in Arabic) from Mai Ḥājj 'Alī to 'Uthmān Pāshā of Tripoli dated 1653.[35] The Bornu trade continued in a no less lively way in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries under the Qaramānlīs (1711–1833) and during the second Ottoman period at Tripoli (1833–1911). A final embassy from Tripoli to Bornu, to 'Umar b. Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Kānemī in 1869–70 is recorded.[36] A full account of the political connexions between the Chad Basin area and the Mediterranean coast—of which this can only be the merest outline—would be of much historical and economic interest.

SUMMARY

The Chadian Muslim states of Kanem, and later Bornu, have been linked throughout their history to North Africa by an important trade-route across the Sahara, from the Libyan coast to Lake Chad. The popularity and permanence of this route throughout the centuries have been determined by the economic needs and specialities of the N. African littoral, as well as of the Western Sudan. This route, first controlled by Ibāḍī Muslim Berbers from Zawīla from the eighth to the twelfth centuries, then briefly by the Ayyubids of Cairo, came under the control of Kanem, which was expanding northwards in the thirteenth century. The Fazzān (and Zawīla) then came under the control of Kanem, which seems

of the Lion, many die each year from the extreme heat. . Many Turks go there to seek their fortunes, and also many Moors of Barbary, who are their learned men, and where, being very few, they are extremely well paid. This is the case amongst all of these Negroes who are Mahometans. And from there set out each year merchants who carry such quantities of the best Cordovan [leather] that it is accounted a great thing in the Fizzan [sic], and from where they return with infinite numbers of horses for their country, accompanying the caravans of Negro mechants.'

[35] Fresnel, op. cit. 254–7, and also Rossi, loc. cit. 337–51, also Krause, loc. cit. 362–70 for more detail.

[36] See B. G. Martin, 'Five Arabic letters from the Tripoli Archives', *J. Hist. Soc. Nigeria*, II, 3 (Ibadan, 1963), 350–70 (letter V).

This content downloaded from 196.220.66.189 on Sat, 27 Apr 2024 12:32:58 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

to have maintained friendly relations with the Hafsid dynasty of Tunis. After the thirteenth century, independent states arose in the Fazzān. Then, after the establishment of an Ottoman Turkish province in Libya, the Turks and the *Mais* of Bornu were soon in contact, probably from about 1555, and certainly in the time of Mai Idrīs of Bornu (on the throne in 1577–8), as some newly found correspondence from the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul makes clear. There was certainly a friendly association between Bornu and the Turks at this period, if not an actual alliance, as Mai Idrīs hoped to obtain arms and perhaps Turkish troops as well to use against his enemies of the W. Sudan, principally the Hausa state of Kebbi. However, Idris's hopes were deceived, and the Ottoman Sultan Murād III did not provide what was wanted, causing Idrīs to turn to the Sa'dī Sharifian ruler of Fās, Aḥmad al-Manṣūr al-Dhahābī, with a similar request.

The contacts between Bornu and the Turks, or at least with Tripoli, continued through the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a Turkish Pasha at Tripoli sending an emissary to Bornu in 1869–70.

This content downloaded from
196.220.66.189 on Sat, 27 Apr 2024 12:32:58 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms