

**THE COW EMERGES FROM THE WATER
MYTHS RELATING TO THE ORIGIN OF CATTLE IN THE CHAD
BASIN¹**

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Abstract

The region of Lake Chad is one of the earliest and most important focusses of cattle-breeding in the Sudanic savanna zone. Today, the area is inhabited by three pastoral groups, the Buduma (Yedina), the Fulbe (Fulani) and the Shuwa Arabs, who possess different breeds of cattle. The Buduma are the old-established population, and their animals have extremely well been adapted to their aquatic habitat. Fulbe nomads infiltrated the region from the west from the 13th century onwards, and Shuwa Arabs reached the plains west of the lake in the 18th century, after they had adopted cattle-breeding from the Fulbe in the eastern Sudanic zone.

Among the Fulbe a type of narrative was preserved which can be labelled the "cattle-water mythologem". A wide-spread version reports about a water-spirit (*djinn*) who impregnated a woman called Bajomanga and became the ancestor of the Bororo, the nomadic Fulbe. By that time cattle used to live in the water like hippopotami. The *djinn*, by employing magical practices, made the cattle come out of the water and presented them to his human sons after he had taught them all necessary techniques of herding and breeding. The Shuwa adopted the basic pattern of this myth from the Fulbe, but they modified the topic according to their specific historical and environmental experiences. It can be concluded that among pastoralists of the Chad basin the "cow-water mythologem" is thus to be regarded as a reflection of real incidents and a core element of their cultural identity.

¹ The data of this article are mainly based on fieldwork which was carried out in the Nigerian Borno State between 1990 and 1993 in the course of a research programme entitled "History of culture and language in the natural environment of the West African savanna". I am grateful to the German Research Council for its financial support, to our Nigerian colleagues of the University of Maiduguri and to all my informants on the topic of this article, particularly Al-Amin Djibrin, who died in 1991, and to his son Danna Allamein in Maiduguri, to Muhammad Abakr in Kamzamo, to Abakr °Ali in Kirenowa and to Abakr Adam living in a nomadic camp.

Key-words: cattle pastoralism, cattle originated from the water, mythology, euhemeristic interpretation of myths, Buduma, Fulbe, Shuwa Arabs, Lake Chad basin.

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The Chad basin is one of the most humid habitats of the African sahel/savanna belt, and, at the same time, the density of its cattle population ranks among the highest of the whole area.² An abundance of water resources favourable to pastures as well as suitable geo-medical conditions on the one hand and a large quantity of grazing animals on the other hand obviously correlate. There are three major pastoral groups in the area of our concern possessing different breeds of cattle:

1. the old-established Chadic-speaking Buduma (Yedina);
2. the Fulbe (Fulani), who migrated to the Chad basin from the West from the 13th century onwards; and
3. the Shuwa Arabs, who reached the plains west of Lake Chad in the 18th century.

This article is not dealing with economic facts and realities concerning the keeping of cattle, but rather with spiritual concepts associated with these animals. In the sphere of oral literature, folk-tales, legends and myths of people in the Chad basin, connections between cattle and water have obviously gained a degree of importance which deserves the attention of cultural anthropologists. There is a particular pattern of these narratives which can be labelled the "cattle-water mythologem". (Mythologem is defined as a mythical narrative, a basic or recurrent theme of a myth.) It cannot be classified as a "genuine" type of myths in the sense that every primal event would be an organizing act instigated by creative force which requires no motivation, but it is derived from the nature of the phenomenon itself.³ It belongs to a group of tales which anthropologists have usually separated from the true myths by calling them etiological or explanatory.

² In the early 1990s the number of cattle in Borno State amounted to c. 2.7 million out of a total number of c. 13.9 million in Nigeria. With 23.428 heads per km² the density of cattle was one of the highest in the country (Nigerian National Livestock Survey (RIM), Section II, 1992, pp. 33 sq.). The greatest density is to be found in the Chad basin of Borno State.

³ Cf. JENSEN 1963, p. 69. Cf. BOLLE 1987, pp. 270 sqq.

Etiological myths lack foundation in religion, and the belief that they state a truth, which is essential for the cultural core of the group, is less evident.

If we accept the view that myths - to a certain extent at least - are reflections of real facts, however remote in the past, our approach has preferably to be an euhemeristic one. This means that the myth is conceived as a kind of historical source which can be subjected to a rationalistic interpretation.

In other words, myths are accepted as traditional accounts of real incidents in human history.⁴ Consequently, the position of structuralist researchers who tend to classify myths as patterns of imaginative concepts, is not of much relevance here. In his recent stimulating article on the traditions of origin of man and cattle among the pastoral Fulani, ADEBAYO (1991) in principle advocated a similar position, although he employed the methodology of structural anthropology in an attempt to reconcile the imaginative and symbolic aspects with historical analysis.

2. DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNTS OF THE "CATTLE-WATER MYTHOLOGEM"

Narratives relating to a particular connection of cattle with water are obviously not restricted to the western part of Africa but can be found - though less distinctively - also in other parts of the continent. This is for example indicated by the belief of people in Ancient Egypt that the sacred Apis bull represented an incarnation of Ptah, the god of the river Nile. In the area of our concern there are two ethnic clusters which conserved the "cattle-water-theme", the Fulbe and the Shuwa Arabs.

2.1. Fulbe versions

There is hardly a people in Africa which is more distinctively associated with the keeping of cattle than the Fulbe, particularly the semi-nomadic *Fulbe na'i* and, even more, the nomadic *Bororo. Na'i* (Sg. *nagge*) means cattle in the language of the Fulbe (Fulfulde). The Bororo are sometimes also called *Fulbe ladde* (*ladde* = bush), because they used to roam around with their herds in

⁴ In this context, the following statement by MILLER (1980, p. 50) is convincing to me: "The style of presentation in no way changes the fact that evidence, something surviving from the past, may occur in even the most structured narratives. 'History' does not stand in opposition to 'myth', nor even 'histories' to 'myths'."

remote places.⁵ In a positive affection they were called "parasites on the bovine species"⁶ and their religious roots have been labelled "bôolatrie".⁷

At present, the Fulbe (Fulani, Peul; called Fellata in the Chad basin and in the eastern Sudanic zone) are spread all over the Sudanic belt from the Senegal to the escarpment of the Ethiopian highlands. Myths which refer to the origin of these people have been documented by different researchers in various parts of West Africa.⁸ Given the central focus of cattle in the economy and society of the nomadic Fulbe, it is not surprising that the narratives often include the topic of how these animals became the property (and the partners) of their ancestors. Most versions of such mythical stories were not collected before the beginning of the 20th century.⁹ They usually refer to the evolution of the cultural division of the Fulbe into clusters of sedentary and semi-nomadic Muslim Fulbe (*Fulbe siire* and *Fulbe na'i*) and of the nomadic Bororo. According to these myths the ancestors of both clusters were born from the same mother (in most versions called Bajomanga or Bajemongo), but they were begot by different fathers. Whereas 'Ukba b. Nafi', an Arabic war leader in the Maghrib, who died in A.D. 683, is claimed to have fathered the first-mentioned cluster, a *djinn*, a water-spirit, is said to have been the ancestor of the Bororo. The 'Ukba legend, although of high importance for the cultural and historical consciousness of the Fulbe, is not relevant in this context. The focus is to be laid on the story of the water-spirit. One version of the particular legend was documented by WILSON-HAFFENDEN (1930, pp. 98 sqq.):

"The two sons of the water-spirit were given a bad time by the other sons of Bajemon[g]o, who derided them for not having a father who had either named them or given them riches. Bajemongo appealed at the river-side to

⁵ Among many Bororo, the cow is explicitly regarded as a mediator between Man and the bush. Cf. RIESMAN 1974, p. 242.

⁶ This expression used by VIEILLARD was quoted from CORNEVIN 1965, p. 939.

⁷ This term, which indicates that cattle are the core element of a religion, seems to have first been used by TAUXIER (1937, p. 9).

⁸ Hypotheses referring to an origin of the Fulbe from outside Africa, particularly from India, as it was for example advocated by D.L. HOMBURGER (1964, pp. 57 sqq.), are completely outside consideration here.

⁹ For example STEPHANI 1912, pp. 352-57; BRACKENBURY 1923/24, pp. 211 sqq.; WILSON-HAFFENDEN 1927:276 sq.; WILSON-HAFFENDEN 1930, pp. 99 sqq.; WEBSTER 1931, p. 238; cf. also FROBENIUS 1921, p. 228 for another version.

have this state of affairs remedied. As a result the water-spirit appeared in public and named the children. Later he brought out twenty-two cattle (twenty cows and two bulls) and two male slaves and two female slaves from the river and divided them equally between the two boys ...

According to another version of the above story, the son of the water-spirit was seven years old when he asked his mother concerning his father's name. Bajemongo took her son to the river to see the water-spirit, who told the boy to make seven piles of wood and to light them, but on no account to look round. The cattle then appeared at six of the piles, but the boy looked round and saw the queen of the cattle disappearing in the water. His father then said to him that had he not been disobedient all white races would have had cattle, but on account of his act some would now be without. The water-spirit, whose name was *Fu*, led away the boy from the river, followed by the cattle. After a time he halted, instructed his son to light a fire and then dived down an ant-hill. And that is why cattle will put their horns into an ant-heap, and when lying on the ground you can hear them sniff and call 'Fu, Fu, Fu!'

With respect to northern Nigeria and southern Niger similar versions were collected by DE ST CROIX (1972, pp. 8 sq.) and DUPIRE (1962, pp. 29 sqq.). A comparative summary of their slightly divergent contents was presented by STENNING (1959, p. 20):

"The first Fulani to own cattle is expelled from a Fulani settlement. The context of this expulsion is not stated. He wanders alone in the bush, enduring great hardship. A water spirit appears and tells him that if he obeys his orders he will acquire great wealth and be the envy of those who despised him. In one version he waters all the wild animals in turn, until finally, in reward for his exertions, the spirit sends him cattle to water. In another version the Fulani is enjoined to wait patiently by the lake until the source of his future wealth appears. The water spirit then tells him to lead the cattle away and never to fail to light a fire for them at dusk, lest they revert to their wild state and leave him. The settled Fulani despise the nomad and pour ridicule upon his harsh way of life. But he takes a wife from them, and his progeny are eventually able to pursue their pastoral existence without intermarriage with those who spurned their ancestor. While explaining and justifying the way of life of the cattle-owning Fulani, this myth retails a stereotype of the relations of Pastoral and sedentary Fulani".

There are numerous differences in the versions of the myth. The Fulbe pastoralists of north-western Nigeria, for example, refer to white cattle emerging

from the water to join them, whereas those of Borno claim to have first received cattle of red colour.¹⁰

A geographical division of two major breeds, the "White Fulani" in the western and southern parts and the "Red Fulani" in the north-eastern parts of northern Nigeria is still more or less clearly recognizable.¹¹

2.2 Shuwa versions

From among all the Baggara, the cattle-raising Arabs of the eastern Sudanic zone, only the Shuwa of the Chad basin seem to have preserved versions of the "cattle-water myth". (According to my state of knowledge it has so far not been documented in the dry savanna regions between Lake Chad and the White Nile.) One of the Shuwa versions is as follows:¹²

"A long time ago cattle used to live in the water just like hippopotami and were not yet domesticated by men. A Fellata *mallam* [a Fulbe koranic teacher] saw the animals and was attracted by them. He therefore performed magic with herbs which made them come out of the water. At first men were afraid of the big animals and ran away, but soon they started domesticating them. They learnt to make camp fires around which they could gather at night and to feel comfortable [as it is still the habit in the *Diran*, the cattle camps]. Men also learnt to build wells for watering their cattle in the savanna bushland. After the Fellata had domesticated cattle, the Arabs realized that this was a splendid means of livelihood. They decided to take the cattle from the Fellata by force. But the Fellata were prepared to fight for their property. However, the *mallam*, who had allured the cattle out of the water, convinced his people not to fight the Arabs, because they were people of very noble descent. He advised them to accept the suzerainty of the Arabs and to serve them as their *Ra'ayye* [Arab.: herdsmen, Sg. *Ra'i*]. Those who followed this advice became the Fellata-Maare [arabicized Fulbe, particularly from the clans of the Yillaga, Kessodji, Ba'en and Ganni]. From the very beginning

¹⁰ Personal communications by Fulbe, Fellata Maare and Shuwa informants in Maiduguri, Damboa and the regions of Marte and Ngala 1992/93.

¹¹ Cf. also BLENCH 1993, pp. 7, *passim*. I am indebted to Roger Blench for valuable hints, comments and criticisms on the topic of cattle in Nigeria.

¹² I recorded this legend from Alhaji Hasan Salih in Maiduguri on August 14, 1991. Slightly different versions were reported by Muhammad al-Nur Harun al-Rashid in Khaddamari near Maiduguri on March 2, 1990, by Beshir Muhammad in Sire (Marte District) on July 3, 1992, and Ramat Abakr in Gaddadei (Marte District) on May 12, 1992.

they were offered the chance to acquire cattle and become proprietors of their own herds, because their Arabic masters used to donate them calves for a certain period of service".

For the Fellata-Maare¹³ it is obvious that they are in a process of being assimilated into Shuwa society and culture. It can be concluded from historical sources that the Shuwa, from the very beginning of the formation of their *gabail* (arab.; "tribes", ethnic groups, Sg. *gabila*) were mixed with Fulbe.¹⁴ With respect to a historical interpretation the legend reflects two aspects:

1. the Arabs acknowledge the priority of the Fulbe as cattle-keepers in time, and
2. impoverished Fulbe groups joined the Shuwa and were assimilated by them as Fellata-Maare.

The story of the emergence of the first cow from the water became an integrate part of mythology all over the Shuwa-inhabited areas of Borno, but its preservation is obviously most vivid among members of the Fellata-Maare clans. It is therefore not surprising that the contents and narrative elements are very similar to those described for the Fulbe in the last chapter.¹⁵ The common features are as follows. A woman, whose name is however not remembered in the Shuwa versions, is impregnated by a *djinn* at the shore of a lake or a river. Their common son (sometimes male twins) is mocked by his group and decides to search for his father. He meets him, and the *djinn* by his magic power makes cattle emerge from the water, which are presented as a highly valuable gift from the supernatural father to his hitherto unlucky and unpropertied son. The *djinn* teaches his human son the techniques of husbandry, the building of wells, the arrangements of ropes for tying the calves, milking the cows, riding the bulls, the construction of enclosures surrounded by thorn twigs (Shuwa: *zeraib*, sg. *zeribe*) and the lighting of camp fires. This last-mentioned fact is of particular

¹³ The origin of this name remains uncertain. According to an etological explanation which I collected from Shuwa informants it came into existence as follows. When Fulbe herdsmen came to Borno they were asked by the autochthonous Kanuri: "Are you Fellata?" They answered "Fellata, mare." *Maré* means "of course" in Kanuri (cf. CYFFER/HUTCHISON 1990, p. 119).

¹⁴ Cf. BARTH 1857/58,III, p. 236; CARBOU 1912,II, pp. 51 sqq, 60. The mixture of Arabs with Fulbe seems to be highest in the western part of the Baggara Belt (cf. MACMICHAEL 1967,I, pp. 260, 271, 283). I have dealt with this problem in another article (BRAUKÄMPER 1993).

¹⁵ I specially refer to a version which I recorded from Chiroma Salih, a member of the Yillaga clan in Chuma (Marte District) on May 9, 1992.

importance for alluring the cattle out of the water, because it makes them feel comfortable and offers protection against harmful insects.

The son of the *djinn* never liked to stay in a village, but he rather preferred to built his *dor* (arab.; cattle camp) outside permanent settlements. But he was later forced to share the products of his cattle with his half-brothers, i.e. his sedentary relatives. Certain obligations were involved by the possession of cattle for their new owner. He was told not to look back when the cows were leaving the water and following him and/or he was not allowed to hit them. Usually this order is to a certain extent violated by the receiver of the gift, and parts of the cattle therefore return back to the water and thus disappear from the control of men. In some cases, cattle of a certain colour were mentioned, for example white ones with a dark spot on their faces (called *ule*), which were looked at and beaten and then moved back into the water immediately. That is why - as it is said - animals of such colours are extremely rare in the herds of the Shuwa.

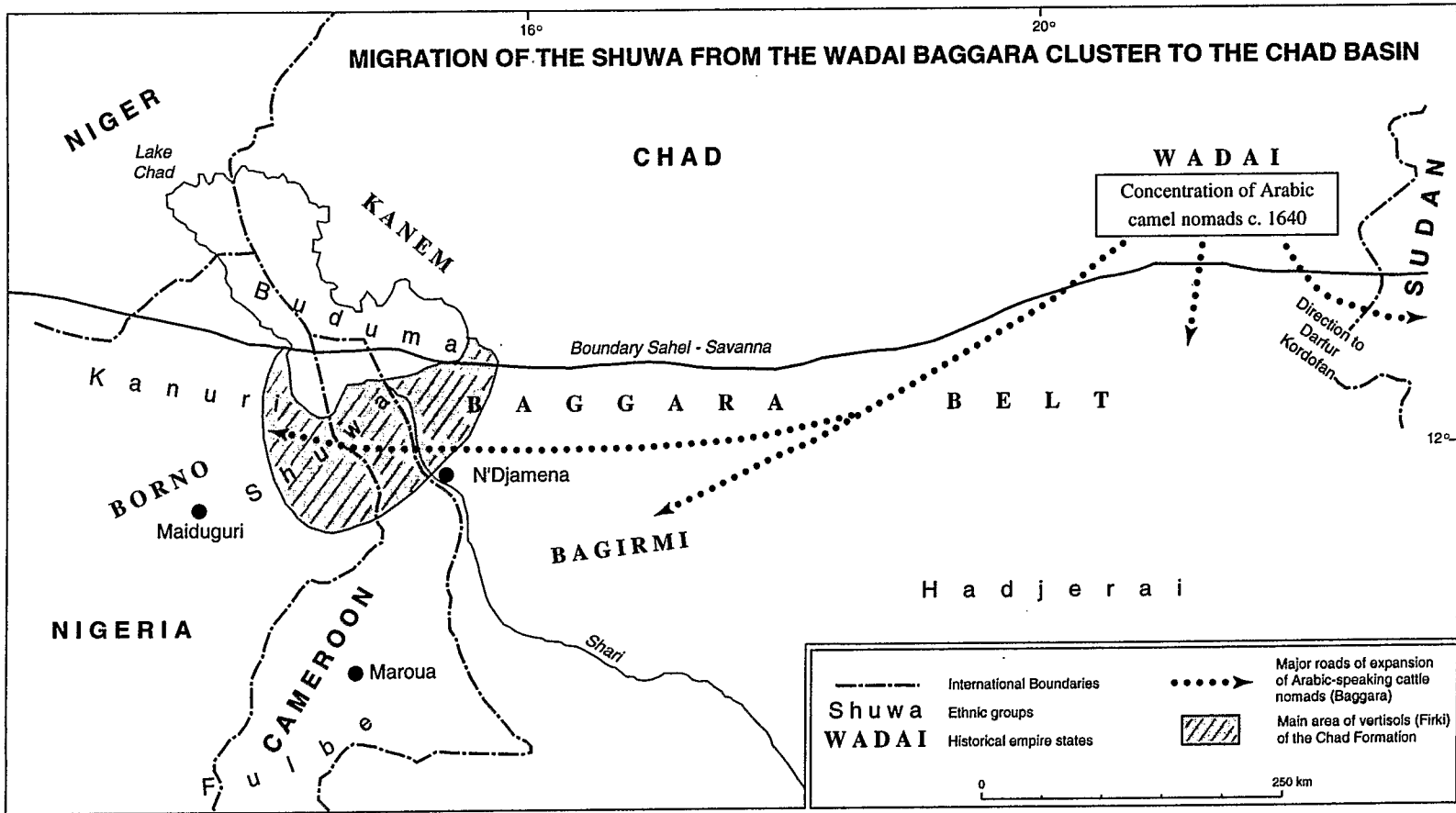
Apart from this basic pattern, which is very close to the Fulbe version, Muslim elements have entered the Shuwa version of the cow-water myth. *djinn* is a category of supernatural beings in Islamic religion, who can be benevolent as well as destructive. It is sometimes stated in Shuwa oral traditions that the cows were themselves living just like *djinns* in the water. In the other type of the myth it is a *mallam*, a learned man of the Fulbe tribe, who allures cattle out of the water by his magic with herbs and amulets.

Some further elements are worth mentioning in the Shuwa versions of the myths. Cattle originally had a way of life almost similar to the one of hippopotami. Those cows, which moved back from the son of the *djinn* and returned into the water, became the ancestors of the buffalos. This wild species has preferred wet habitats ever since. But also the cattle continued to love places with water so much that they can never be moved marching distances of more than two days away from them.

3. ATTEMPT AT A HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

With respect to the Fulbe of western Africa it seems hardly possible to analyse the myth of the origin of the cow from the water with rational categories of historical interpretation. The keeping of cattle by this group dates back many centuries, and we do not know in which area it started. (We can only assume that it might have occurred in the region of Senegal.) The myth refers to the evolution of a culturally relevant division of the Fulbe into a majority of sedentary and semi-nomadic people devoted to "Islamic values" and a minority of Bororo

MIGRATION OF THE SHUWA FROM THE WADAI BAGGARA CLUSTER TO THE CHAD BASIN



	International Boundaries		Major roads of expansion of Arabic-speaking cattle nomads (Baggara)
Shuwa	Ethnic groups		Main area of vertisols (Firk) of the Chad Formation
WADAI	Historical empire states		

0 250 km

characterised by "cattle values".¹⁶ This division can, however, be assumed to have occurred relatively late, i.e. not starting markedly before the 18th century in the regions between the Niger bend and the Hausa states.¹⁷ Thus, the Fulbe version of the myth associates the early event of adoption of cattle-breeding by their people with a relatively late cultural and ethnic partition.

It has been stated that the Shuwa Arabs received the basic pattern of the myth from the Fulbe. Although some of the elementary items are consequently similar, there are specific differences. These result from alterations which have been made in the course of time as well as from specific natural, cultural and historical preconditions. The ancestors of the Baggara Arabs, before they entered the savannas of the eastern Sudanic zone via the Nile valley from the 14th century A.D. onwards, had been camel-breeders. After they had crossed the ecological border line of the camel south of the sahel, they were confronted with the necessity of cultural change and subsequently adopted an agro-pastoral type of economy with cattle as their main domestic animal. Oral traditions and ethnographic data reveal that this change was accomplished in close interethnic relations with Fulbe pastoralists.¹⁸ This process of "baggarrisation" started in Wadai around 1640 when violent clashes occurred between the Arabic tribes of that area and the defeated groups were expelled southwards from the sahel to the savanna. Then it spread by migrations of people and by stimulus diffusion eastwards to Darfur and Kordofan and westwards to Bagirmi and Kanem-Borno. The peripheries of the "Baggara Belt", the White Nile and the plains west of Lake Chad were reached at the end of the 18th century.

After the ancestors of the Shuwa had been expelled from the sahel regions of Wadai, they moved towards the Chad basin with their herds mainly consisting of sheep and camels. In the savannas of the eastern Sudanic zone they met Fulbe nomads from whom they adopted short-horned zebu cattle and gradually became "Baggara". In the Chad basin the natural conditions were however remarkably different from all other areas of the Baggara Belt, and this fact necessarily influenced the further cultural evolution and the value concepts of the Shuwa. In this context, it is only intended to analyse specific aspects relating to cattle.

¹⁶ This dichotomy of "Islamic values" and "cattle values" among the Fulbe of western Borno was particularly elaborated by STENNING (1966).

¹⁷ I have laid down this idea of a cultural specialization of the Bororo under the particular conditions of the establishment of the Fulbe hegemony in the Central Sudan in another article (BRAUKÄMPER 1971, pp. 55 sqq.).

¹⁸ For further information cf. BRAUKÄMPER 1992, chapters 3.3.1 and 3.4.1; BRAUKÄMPER 1993.

The humid areas of the Chad basin have been identified as one of the earliest focusses of cattle-breeding in the western part of sub-Saharan Africa. Recent excavations at Gajiganna in the Nigerian part of Borno (1991/92) provided bone materials of cattle which can be dated back as far as 3000 B.P.¹⁹ The Chadic-speaking Buduma (Yedina) and the Kuri of the Chad region²⁰ possess humpless cattle locally called *kuri*, which originated most probably from an ancient breed of *Bos primigenius*. This type of long-horned cattle preceded the introduction of zebus (*Bos indicus*) from western Asia.²¹ *Kuri* cattle are so much adapted in their way of life to the aquatic habitat of Lake Chad that their purebreds can apparently not be raised in regions outside its shores. This observation is supported by the fact that the Kuri breeds of the Kanembu and the Kanuri-speaking Mower along the lower Komadugu Yobe (i.e. west of the lake) are to a notable extent cross-bred with zebus. The cattle of the Yedina spend most of their lives feeding half-submerged in the swamps and use to swim from island to island. It is assumed that the hollow porous nature of their large horns, by their buoyancy, assist the animals as they stand in the marshes with only their heads above the water.²² They also seem to have acquired a high degree of resistance against sicknesses such as *Trypanosomiasis* transmitted by *Glossina morsitans* (the *tsetse* fly).

When observing the cattle of the Buduma, people originated from a sahel habitat, such as the Shuwa Arabs, must indeed have gained the impression that these animals were leading a life almost comparable to that of hippopotami. In their view, therefore, the cow became closely associated with water. A saying of the Shuwa refers to the origin of domesticated animals as follows: "*Al-baggar min al-baḥr, al-djimal min al-riḥ*". (The cattle are from the river, the camels are from the wind).²³ Among the Arabic inhabitants of the savanna *Dar al-riḥ* (the land of the wind) is a term for the arid sahel and desert regions.

¹⁹ Cf. BALLOUCHE, BREUNIG et al. 1993. I am indebted to the excavator, Peter Breunig, Frankfurt a.M., and Wim Van Neer, Tervuren/Belgium, for personal communications on respective results of their research.

²⁰ A hypothesis advocated by FREYDENBERG (1908, pp. 155, 159) and members of the "Mission Tilho" that the Buduma were of Fulbe origin does not seem acceptable, because it contradicts the majority of relevant linguistic, cultural and historical data. Cf. BOUQUET 1990, I, pp. 371 sqq.

²¹ *Bos indicus* seems to have first reached the African continent in Egypt during the XIIth dynasty, i.e. c. 1990-1780 B.C. (EPSTEIN 1971, I, p. 505).

²² Cf. BIRKETT 1952, pp. 328 sq.

²³ I recorded this saying for example from Muhammad al-Nur Harun al-Rashid in Khaddamari near Maiduguri on March 2, 1990.

The mythological concept of the cow coming from the water can at first be interpreted as a reflection of real observations the ancestors of the Shuwa made when meeting the Yedina, the autochthonous pastoralists of Lake Chad. However, they neither adopted their *kuri* cattle nor their way of life, but they rather became accustomed to the pastoral patterns of the Fulbe and their breeds of short-horned zebu. (These breeds are called *wadará* and *gudali* by the Shuwa; a cross-breeding with the long-horned "Red Bororo" has started to a noteworthy extent only during the last three decades.)

After the Shuwa had intensified their interethnic relations with the Fellata-Maare during the 19th century, the Fulbe type of cattle-water myth became an integral part of their oral literature. The concept itself was clearly already held, and so additional elements and details could easily be incorporated into an existing frame. The story about the *djinn* who made cattle come out of the water and donated them to his human relatives thus became wide-spread among the Shuwa. It is not surprising, however, that the etiological element of the separation of the Bororo and the Fulbe was abandoned in the Shuwa versions. They changed this topic according to their own historical traditions by referring to the incorporation of the Fellata-Maare into their own society.

The employing of magical practices in the myth comprises two aspects. The *djinn* performs magic in a traditional way in order to allure the cattle out of the water. This, in the eyes of many West African people including the Fulbe and the Shuwa, refers to an alleged enigmatic mastering of cattle by the Bororo and reflects a pre-Islamic "boolatric" element. On the other hand, the version that it was a *mallam*, a koranic teacher, who made cattle come out of the water, tries to attribute a Muslim character to the mythologem. Two conclusions can be assumed from the fact that this *mallam* is always specified as a Fellata: 1. the Shuwa tend to admit the historical priority of the Fulbe in cattle-breeding, and 2. magicians of this people are considered particularly powerful (a belief which is indeed wide-spread all over the eastern Sudanic zone).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Myths relating to the origin of cattle from the water are known among West African Fulbe groups and among the Shuwa of the Chad basin. They could not be documented in the savanna regions of the Baggara Belt between Lake Chad and the White Nile, which lack in large aquatic ecosystems (such as for example the inner delta of the Niger in the western Sudanic area). The Shuwa, however, occupied one of the most humid habitats in the African sahel/savanna zone, and their environmental experiences and adaptations were necessarily different from those of all other Baggara Arabs. By observation they became familiar with the

pastoral practices of the Buduma, and they were themselves constantly confronted with the peculiar conditions of seasonally inundated grazing areas. It can furthermore be stated that their connections with Fulbe nomads, protagonists of the mythological cattle-water syndrome, were more intensive than in any other part of the Baggara Belt. The contribution of the Fellata-Maare to the Shuwa *qabail* has been emphasised (cf. 2.2). The impact of ecological conditions on the one hand and specific interethnic relations on the other hand thus resulted in the fact that the myth of the emergence of the first cow from the water became an integrate part of Shuwa narratives. It can be regarded as an etiological myth trying to explain the real living conditions of pastoralists in the Chad basin. It emphasises the role of the cow as a central element of their cultural identity.

As it has been pointed out, I am presenting a basically euhemeristic analysis of the myth. The "cattle-water mythologem" clearly reflects the drive of West African pastoralists to reconcile their empirical knowledge with mental, conceptional control over the world of their environmental conditions. One could have made a structuralist analysis on this topic as well, but this has not been attempted here.

It can be concluded that the mythological concept of the origin of domesticated animals from an aquatic habitat was developed and spread by the Fulbe (most probably in the Senegal and upper Niger regions). It was transferred in a more or less standardised model to the Shuwa, the westernmost representatives of the Baggara Arabs in the Chad basin, who subsequently created their own modified versions.

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