

RECENT BOOKS

OUARA, VILLE PERDUE

Jean-Paul Lebeuf and Johannes Hermann Immo Kirsch, *Ouara, ville perdue (Tchad)*. Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, Mémoire No 79, 1989. ISSN 0291-1655, ISBN 2-86538-191-9, pp 100, figs 27, photo, XX plates.

Ouara—or Wara in the English form—was the capital of the Sultanate of Wadai from its foundation in the seventeenth century to its abandonment in the 1850s. Even after this date it remained the burial place of many of the rulers. It is a curious fact that this site has generated more interest among historians and archaeologists than any other of the capitals of the states scattered across the *bilād as-sūdān*. This might, in part, be due to the wealth of eyewitness accounts from the period before the colonial era or it might be accounted for by the fact that far more survives on this site than on the sites of other capitals. It has never been sacked as has Birni Gazargamu in Borno, or Massenya in Bagirmi, nor has it been a quarry for the builders of later regimes as have Gazargamu and Nguru in the west and Sinnar in the east. No matter what the reason, more has been published on Wara than on any other similar site. Among the many contributors has been Professor Lebeuf, one of the co-authors of this volume. In this elegantly produced and lavishly illustrated publication—how rarely nowadays is the reader presented with such a ‘user friendly’ work—we are provided with a survey of sources relating to Wadai in general and to Wara in particular.

After an introduction setting the scene, the authors present a survey of the published sources with some evaluation of their value. This is of considerable value although it is not exhaustive. Among the surprising omissions are Johann Ludwig Burckhardt’s *Travels in Nubia* (London 1819), and Ulrich Jasper Seetzen’s ‘Information on the Negro lands of Mobba

and the neighbouring countries', which was published in Baron von Zach's *Monatliche Correspondenz* (xxi, 13, 1810, 137-55). Burkhardt interviewed numerous pilgrims from the Chad region and the countries to the west. He provides some of the earliest accounts of Wadai, its administrative and economic organisation —material demonstrating that Wadai was the point at which western (or Maghribi) and Nilotic Islamic influences overlapped. Above all he provides us with the earliest information relating to the new Wadai-Benghazi trade route pioneered by °Abd al-Karīm Ṣābūn, c.1808-9.¹ Seetzen also interviewed pilgrims and was able to gather descriptions of Wara in addition to data on the political and economic condition of the state:

He [Seetzen's informant] assured me that the residential town of the sultan of Mobba is three times bigger than Bulak near Kahira, that it has two gateways and a wall built of mud and wood. In the town there are some mud houses....[Another informant reported that] the residence of the sultan of Mobba is called Vara, a considerable town. The palace has a large circumference, and is built of bricks, but it consists only of a ground floor. Although he is allowed by law to have only four wives, there are a great number of women and girls who perform all the work in his palace, and who are always under his orders. In the palace is the only mosque which can be found in Vara; nevertheless, one finds, beside this mosque, various prayer houses, which are called sanwijeh [*zāwiya?*], and can be compared to our chapels. Only in the mosque are many glass oil lamps burning, which one finds nowhere else in the country.....²

The authors rely on and quote extensively from *Le livre du Soudan* by Zayn al-Abdin.³ This work was supposedly published in Arabic in Bulaq in the late 1830s or early 1840s (no copy is known to exist) and purports to be an account of the author's travels through Darfur and Wadai, perhaps in the

- 1 D.D. Cordell, 'Eastern Libya, Wadai and the Sanusiyya. A Tariqa and a trade route', *J. Afr. Hist.*, xviii, 1977, 21-36.
- 2 Translated by the late Dr. Gerard Hoffman of the French Dept., Abdullahi Bayero College, Ahmadu Bello University, now Bayero University, Kano (1972), for use in the reviewer's Special Honours course 'The states of the Chad Basin, c. 1400-1800'.
- 3 Muḥammad b. °Alī b. Zayn al-°Ābidīn al-Tūnisī, of whom nothing else is known.

period 1820-1830. It was translated into and was certainly published in Ottoman Turkish and then again translated and published in German in 1847.⁴ Grisard and Grammont produced a French translation from the Turkish which appeared in two versions, first a draft for comments by other scholars in 1973 and then the final published work in 1981.⁵ An English translation was made in 1971, at Bayero University, Kano, from the German text (which unfortunately remains unpublished).⁶ On reading this translation I was persuaded that *Le livre* should be treated with extreme caution, a view I saw no reason to change after reading the French translation. I was extremely pleased to observe Fr. Cuog's doubts on the reliability of Zain al-Abdin as a genuine traveller.⁷ He surely falls into the category—so aptly named by Richard Hill—of pseudo-traveller.⁸

Perhaps this is the point to mention chronology, or the lack thereof. In archaeological terms the site is recent but in similar contexts archaeologists have made attempts to obtain dates from one of the modern scientific methods. Here, although test trenches were sunk and suitable materials presumably obtained, nothing was submitted for analysis. The chronology followed is based upon Nachtigal and the refinements published by M-J. Tubiana, ('Un document inédit sur les sultans du Wadday', *Cahiers d'études africaines*, ii, 1960, 49-122). The reliability of

- 4 Georg Rosen, interpreter to the Prussian Embassy in Istanbul translated the Turkish text, which had been published in Istanbul in 1262/1846, as *Das Buch des Sudans*, Leipzig 1847.
- 5 Marcel Grisard et Jean-Louis-Bacque-Grammont, *Le livre du Soudan*, Paris: Société d'Ethnologie, 1981.
- 6 Translated by the late Dr. G. Hoffman, at the then Abdullahi Bayero College, Ahmadu Bello University, Kano.
- 7 Quoted in *Ouara*. In my view there are too many similarities with al-Tūnisi's, *Voyage au Darfour*, Paris 1845 and *Voyage au Ouadday*, Paris 1851, to be taken on trust. As early as 1848 a German writer noted similarities with the earlier work of al-Tūnisi. If he had been resident in Cairo in the 1830s and '40s he would undoubtedly have heard al-Tūnisi's reminiscences. Prof. Monod contributes a useful survey of the history of Zayn al-Abidin and his book as an introduction to *Le livre du Soudan*, although he believes it to be genuine.
- 8 Richard Hill produced a small brochure in 1968(?) entitled 'Pseudo-travellers', introducing a list of pseudo accounts he hoped to republish.

Nachtigal's chronology recently received some support from information in marginal glosses on an Arabic MS discovered by R.S. O'Fahey in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris:

'This year (1068/1657-8) travelling [to Bilād al-Sūdān] by way of Nubia was taken up by Fur and Tunjur (?) merchants and this year a group [of them] travelled from Egypt through the land of the Nubians making for Borno via the the land of al-Ṣulayḥ whose people were recently converted to Islam.'⁹

The 'land of al-Ṣulayḥ' is clearly a reference to the state founded by °Abd al-Karīm b. Jame, the founder and first sultan of Wadai, one of whose epithets was Ṣāliḥ (or Saliyeh) and hence 'Dār Ṣāliḥ' one of the numerous variant names for the state, others being Dar Mobba or Maba, Borgu or Bergo etc. There is, surprisingly, no reference to M-J. Tubiana's *Abd al-Karim, propagateur de l'Islam et fondateur du royaume de Ouaddai* (Paris 1978), which deals with the foundation of the sultanate and its capital. Lebeuf and Kirsch make mention of certain associates of °Abd al-Karīm b. Jame, among whom is a certain Dede. It should be noted that a Shaykh Dede was involved in the building of the palace at Massenya in Bagirmi.¹⁰ A Shaykh Waldede was the companion of Shaykh Muḥammad Jarmī al-Tāriqī (i.e. the Tuareg), often cited as °Abd al-Karīm's teacher. Most of these men seem to have had some link with the Fulani community of Bidderi in Bagirmi and with Kalumbardo in Borno.¹¹ Unfortunately we do not have the space to explore further, but there must certainly be more than simple coincidence in these events.

Chapter Three is, in many ways, the most valuable section. It deals with the actual site of Wara and attempts to relate the

9 R.S. O'Fahey, *et al.*, 'Two glosses concerning Bilād al-Sūdān on a MS of al-Nuwayrī's *Nihāyat al-arab*', *Bulletin of Information, Fontes Historiae Africae*, 5, 1979, 16-24.

10 G. Nachtigal, *Sahara and Sudan*, trans. A.G.B. Fisher and H.J. Fisher, III, London 1987, 403; J.E. Lavers, 'An introduction to the history of Bagirmi', *Annals of Borno*, 1, 1981, 33.

11 J.E. Lavers, 'Diversions on a Journey: the travels of Shaykh Ahmad al-Yamani', in Y.F. Hasan and P.E. Doornbos (eds.), *The Central Bilad as-Sudan*, Khartoum: Khartoum University Press, 1981, 216-33.

authors' surveys with earlier work. They utilise aerial photos to distinguish features not visible on the ground and they attempt reconstructions. They also attempt to interpret the symbolic nature of the structures and plan and compare this with earlier work on the Kotoko towns and palaces. There is also a section on Mount Treya, the sacred hill that contains pre-Islamic remains and whose influence continued into the later period. Accession and fertility ceremonies seem to have survived into recent times. The very name Treya (Thurayya), meaning the Pleiades, links it with the agricultural calendar.¹² Its sacred nature is indicated by the fact that Dr Vogel was executed for ascending the hill in 1855.¹³ The royal cemetery and the mosque also receive careful treatment. One very interesting discovery was that many of the fired bricks carried makers' (?) marks. One brick in the mosque carried the date 1211 AH [1796 AD].

It is unfortunate that the book is spoilt by a number of shortcomings and errors. The fine photos of buildings and artifacts are not as useful as they might be for lack of any indication of scale. References to von Oppenheim consistently give him the initial 'H' when his given name was Max; on p. 27 n. 10, J.A.Warks should be Works; on p. 36 n. 21, read Kharifain *not* Kanifain; on p. 40 Hachtigal should be Nachtigal. The date of Neufville and Houghton's description of the site appears correctly as 1965 in the bibliography but as 1954 in the text. There are other errors.

12 The Pleiades appear at the beginning of the planting season.

13 Dr Edouard Vogel was a young German traveller retained by the British Government to join Dr Heinrich Barth in the Central Sudan. After Barth returned to Europe Vogel set out for Wadai in 1855. Nothing more was heard from him for some time. In October 1857 Muḥammad al-Shinqīṭī, Dar Fur Ambassador to Cairo, reported: 'In the neighbourhood of Wara there is a sacred mountain, the ascent of which is forbidden to all persons. Abdul Wahed (Vogel's travelling name), whether informed of this or not, ascended this sacred mountain; and when the prince learnt it, he ordered him to be put to death, and so it was....', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, ii, 1858, 79 and P.A. Benton, *Notes on Some Languages of the Western Sudan*, London 1912, 269.

Notwithstanding my criticisms this is an extremely useful publication and one that is indispensable for any student of the Tchad region in the pre-colonial period.

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