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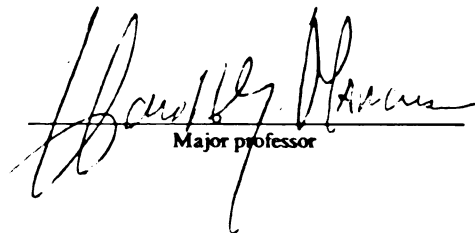
POLITICS AND PROFITS:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF MERCHANT CAPITALISM
AND ITS IMPACT ON THE POLITICAL
ECONOMY OF KORDOFAN, 1820-1898

presented by

DAVID FRED STERLING-DECKER

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**POLITICS AND PROFITS:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF MERCHANT CAPITALISM AND ITS IMPACT
ON THE PPOLITICAL ECONOMY OF KORDOFAN, 1820-1898**

By

David Fred Sterling-Decker

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

POLITICS AND PROFITS: THE DEVELOPMENT OF MERCHANT CAPITALISM AND ITS IMPACT ON THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF KORDOFAN, 1820-1898

By

DAVID FRED STERLING-DECKER

This is a study of the impact of merchant capitalism on the political economy of Sudan's Northern Kordofan region from 1820-1898. It posits that the predominant theme in the commercial history of Northern Kordofan between 1820-1898 was the struggle for control of the machinery of exchange between the state, the merchant class and groups within the merchant class. It also argues that the rapid development of commercial capitalism in the region fostered the growth of a merchant diaspora which dominated the economic life of the region. Their control and abuse of the commercial and political power fostered society wide animosities which eventually precipitated a socio political upheaval which significantly altered the political economy of Kordofan. The result of the altered political economic situation stifled further capitalist development until the imposition of colonial rule under the Anglo-Egyptian regime.

The first chapter of this study outlines the period from c.1700 to 1820 when an indigenous commercial class developed in northern kordofan which controlled the machinery of exchange and operated it according to

capitalist principals. The second chapter discusses Egypt's conquest of Northern Kordofan in 1821 and the immediate imposition of an imperial monopoly over trade which altered the political economy of the province and deprived the commercial community of control over critical components within the machinery of exchange. The third chapter argues that by 1860 the merchant class had succeeded in gaining control of the provincial administration and reestablished its influence over the machinery of exchange. This chapter also suggests that the commercial elite faced a series of political, economic, demographic and environmental crises which threatened to undercut their dominant position within Kordofan. It also argues that the desire to guarantee their autonomy and dominance in political and economic affairs led to their support of the Mahdi in the early 1880s. The fourth chapter describes the commercial operations within the theocratic state created by the Mahdi and continued by the Khalifa. Finally it posits that the merchant class's relatively quick realization that they were not benefiting from the new Mahdist-imposed social order prompted them to abandon their support of the Omdurman regime and eagerly anticipate its demise.

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1990

FOR MY DAUGHTER
SHANNON

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is the result of 15 months of research carried out in Sudan, Egypt, Britain and France. During both the research and writing phases it has accumulated many personal, intellectual and institutional debts of gratitude.

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which Abdallah and I shared forged a bond which can never be broken.

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Most special thanks belong to my graduate advisor Dr. Harold Marcus and to Dr. Jay Spaulding. These men have become both mentors and close friends. Without their support this dissertation would have never been attempted.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
INTRODUCTION	Historiographical Overview The Environment The Human Milieu The Producers The Merchants	1
One	KORDOFAN 1700-1820: THE ORIGINS OF THE COMMERCIAL COMMUNITY	34
Two	KORDOFAN AND THE EARLY TURKIYYA: 1821-1860 Conquest and New Administrative Structure Demographic Factors in the Early Turkiyya Kordofan's Commercial Community The Internal Economy The Slave Sector of the Economy Slaves and the Military Slaves and the Commercial Community The Gum Sector of the Economy The Ivory and Ostrich Feather Sectors the Economy	76
Three	THE CRISIS YEARS: 1860-1880 Elements of the Ecological Crisis Internal Conflicts The Leadership Structure Within Kordofan Indigenous Challenges to the Diaspora Intra-Merchant Conflicts Merchant Elite Conflict External Factors State Intervention and the Slave Trade Muhammad Ahmed's First Visit to Kordofan The Crisis Deepens	146
Four	KORDOFAN: 1881-1898, THE YEARS OF THE MAHDIYYA Concepts and Conflicts Within the New Order Mahdist Administration in Kordofan Internal Opposition to Mahdist Rule Military Unrest	201

Indigenous Unrest
Merchant Unrest
Changes in the Economy and Commercial
Community
Constraints on Re-investment and
Capitalist Development

Five	CONCLUSION	254
	SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY	266
	Oral Sources	
	Archival Sources	
	Travel Literature	
	Secondary Sources	
	Books	
	Articles	
	Unpublished Sources	
	Thesis	
	Papers	

INTRODUCTION

This is a study of the impact of merchant capitalism on the political economy of Sudan's Northern Kordofan region from 1820 to 1898.¹ It posits that the predominant theme in the commercial history of Northern Kordofan between 1820-1898 was the struggle for control of the machinery of exchange between the state, the merchant class as a whole and groups within the merchant class. It also argues that the rapid development of commercial capitalism in the region fostered the growth of a merchant diaspora which dominated the economic life of the region. It's control and abuse of commercial and political power fostered society wide animosities which eventually precipitated a reaction which significantly altered the political economy of Kordofan. The result of the altered political economic situation stifled further capitalist

¹ In conducting the research for this study it was impossible to include the large and complex Nuba Mountains region of southeastern Kordofan. Aside from time constraints, the cultural, political, environmental and economic context of the Nuba Mountains is distinctly different from that of the lands and people to the north and west. This region deserves extensive research in its own right as well as studies specifically designed to investigate the historic connections and interactions of these two neighboring regions within Kordofan. The far southwest corner of Kordofan was also inaccessible at the time this research was carried out. Military operations by various armed groups made travel between Muglad and Abyei extremely hazardous. Therefore, the term Northern Kordofan will be used to describe the research area discussed in this study. Northern Kordofan is considered to be the region north of a line extending from Muglad along the rail line northeast through Abu Zabad, Er-Rahad to Kosti on the White Nile.

development until the imposition of colonial rule under the Anglo-Egyptian regime. The examination of this struggle and the parties involved in it constitutes an essential yet under utilized perspective for understanding the general history of Kordofan.

The first chapter of this study outlines the period from c.1700 to 1820 when an indigenous commercial class developed in Northern Kordofan which controlled the machinery of exchange and operated it according to capitalist principles. The second chapter discusses Egypt's conquest of Northern Kordofan in 1821 and the immediate imposition of an imperial monopoly over trade which altered the political economy of the province and deprived the commercial community of control over critical components within the machinery of exchange. This chapter will also discuss the commercial operations carried on by the merchant community and detail the methods used by the merchant class to regain control over the machinery of exchange.

The third chapter argues that by 1860 the merchant class had succeeded in gaining control of the provincial administration and reestablished its influence over the machinery of exchange. This chapter also suggests that the commercial elite faced a series of political, economic, demographic and environmental crises which threatened to undercut their dominant position within Kordofan. It also

argues that the desire to guarantee the elite's autonomy and dominance in political and economic affairs led to it's support of the Mahdi in the early 1880s. The fourth chapter describes commercial operations within the theocratic state created by the Mahdi and continued by the Khalifa. It also suggests that the new political/religious climate within Kordofan stunted economic growth and expansion in the province. Finally, it posits that the merchant class's relatively quick realization that it was not benefiting from the new Mahdist-imposed social order prompted it to abandon it's support of the Omdurman regime and eagerly anticipate its demise.

The Kordofan region, situated squarely in the heart of the the Sudan, is one of the few places in Africa where historians interested in colonialism and imperialism can study the impact of a non-European intrusion and its subsequent impact within Africa.² It is also a part of Africa with a long and close connection to the Mediterranean mercantile world. These two factors, combined with Northern Kordofan's importance in nineteenth

² Sudan's colonial history began with the invasion of Ottoman troops in 1820. They destroyed the feudal Sultanate of Sinnar, wrested Kordofan from the Sultanate of Dar Fur and established a colonial regime. The Turkiyya administered the Sudan until driven out in 1885 by the followers of Muhammad Ahmad al Mahdi, a Muslim holyman. The Mahdiyya ended in 1898, when a combined Anglo-Egyptian expedition, led by Kitchener, crushed the Mahdist army at Karari. The Sudan remained under the control of a British-dominated colonial administration until its independence in 1956.

century commerce, make it an especially rich research area for the study of merchant capitalism and political economy.

While at one level this study provides historical information for students of Sudanese history it also discusses wider issues such as the consequences of the penetration of the world economy and the development of a bourgeoisie within a non-western setting. It also links the work of Jay Spaulding and Lidwien Kapteijns on the Sultanic period (c.1500-c.1800) with Fatima Mahmoud's research on the Condominium period (1898-1956).³ By providing a link between these authors it is possible to form a general outline of the growth and development of capitalism within Kordofan and, in so doing, better understand the development of the commercial community in Sudan.

While considerable research remains to be done, the commercial development of the Kordofan region provides a case study which sheds light on the existence and growth of capitalism within Muslim societies. The commercial history of Kordofan vindicates many of the conclusions posited by Maxime Rodinson and Peter Gran on capitalism in Egypt and raises serious questions as to the validity of Perry

³ L.Kapteijns and J.L.Spaulding, "Precolonial Trade Between States in the Eastern Sudan, ca.1700-ca.1900," African Economic History, no.11, (1982); J.L.Spaulding, "The Management of Exchange in Sinnar," in Lief O. Manger, ed., Trade and Traders in the Sudan, (Bergan,1984); J.L.Spaulding, The Heroic Age in Sinnar, (East Lansing,1985); Fatima Babikar Mahmoud, The Sudanese Bourgeoisie: Vanguard of Development?, (London,1984).

Anderson's conclusions on the nature of capitalism "in the house of Islam."⁴ This study of commercial relationships and developments in the periphery of the Mediterranean, Kordofan in particular and the Sudan in general, also casts doubt on Samir Amin's hypothesis concerning the nature of center/periphery commercial operations in the Sudan during the nineteenth century.⁵ The evidence from Northern Kordofan does not contradict the dependency theory of writers such as Amin but rather alters the time frame within which their argument must be made. The scramble for Africa and imposition of formal colonial rule in the late nineteenth-century can not be universally applied as the starting point for dependency relationships between Europe and Africa. The merchants who operated as independent businessmen in Kordofan did not require direct connections to European trading companies or colonial officials to be influenced, both positively and negatively by the world economy.

Fernand Braudel used the term "machinery of exchange" to describe the spectrum of economic activity

⁴ Maxime Rodinson, Islam et Capitalisme, (Paris, 1966); Peter Gran, Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt 1760-1840, (Austin, 1979); Perry Anderson, Linages of the Absolutist State, (London, 1974), pp. 375.

⁵ Samir Amin, Le Developpement Inegal: Essai sur les Formations Sociales du Capitalisme Peripherique, (Paris, 1973), pp. 282-284. In his analysis Amin states that nomads acted as middlemen for the movement of goods between the Sudan and Europe.

"from primitive barter up to and including the most sophisticated capitalism."⁶ Braudel's term "machinery of exchange" evokes a useful image when trying to conceptualize an abstract topic such as the economy of Northern Kordofan. The region's merchants and traders, like their counterparts across the globe, found it necessary to utilize diverse mechanisms and networks in order to carry out commercial operations. They also altered their political and social relationships within existing systems as political and economic changes occurred within the market or region in which they lived and worked.

The potential for confrontation and conflict constantly simmered below the surface within Kordofan because of divergent views on the ways in which the mechanism should operate and to whose benefit. The potential combatants within Kordofan consisted of rival members of the merchant class, traditional leaders and the imperial governing apparatus which attempted to control and profit from the commercial life of the region. It is at this point that historians can begin to explore what Bill Freund calls "the web of social and economic relations that emerges from human satisfaction of material needs."⁷

⁶ Fernand Braudel, Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century, vol.II The Wheels of Commerce (New York, 1979), p.21.

⁷ Bill Freund, The Making of Contemporary Africa: The Development of African Society since 1800 (Bloomington, 1984), p.xi.

Kordofan's commercial community and state bureaucracy were organized and run by individuals and interest groups with potentially conflicting material needs and desires. The satisfaction of these social, political and economic, needs fueled the struggles over the control of the machinery of exchange and its operation. By tracing the actions and reactions of merchants and traders in a continually changing political and economic environment, it is possible to gain insight into the infrastructure and networks which supported commercial operations in Northern Kordofan.⁸ It is also possible to discern the roots of popular discontent with in Kordofan which exploded into violent action in the early 1880s.

In keeping with this concentration on the material and human element, an analytical approach based on class and/or interest group is used throughout this study to investigate Northern Kordofan's merchants and traders. This type of analysis avoids assumptions of ethno-solidarity and explanatory process words such as tribalism, Arabization, Islamization, migration, and miscegenation. While this overt concern with Orientalism may be inappropriate in

⁸ The differentiation between merchant and traders in this study is a qualitative one. the term merchant(s) denotes an individual or group of people who operate with a larger amount of capital and therefore have greater power politically, economically and socially. The term trader implies those members of the commercial community with relatively small capital backing and proportionately less power.

other research areas of Africa or the Middle East, the Sudan remains a fertile field for the propagation of this type of research.⁹ This conscious attempt to avoid Orientalist explanations does not dismiss the importance of ethnicity within Kordofanese society. To the contrary, it places it within the fuller context of a changing society and shows how it, as well as religion, could be manipulated to achieve political and economic ends.¹⁰

⁹ The research of Jay Spaulding and Lidwien Kapteijns on precolonial Sudan and that of Maxime Rodinson and Peter Gran on Egypt indicates that capitalist institutions and groups did exist and operate under the broader rubric of Islam. The general historiography of the Sudan, however, remains interlaced with works which can only be classified as orientalist in their conception and content. As an example, a short passage from H.A.MacMichael's The Tribes of Northern and Central Kordofan should suffice:

The Kabbabish...will be found to be less contaminated with non-Arab blood than those of any other Sudan-Arab tribe to which a single name is now applied. The fact is sufficiently accounted for when one remembers that they are desert nomads as their fathers and their father's fathers were for generation after generation both since the Arab conquest of Northern Africa and in the centuries since the days when Jacob watered the flocks of Laban at Haran.

Jay Spaulding, The Heroic Age in Sinnar; L.Kapteijns and Jay Spaulding, "Pre-colonial Trade Between States in the Eastern Sudan, ca.1700-ca.1900; Maxime Rodinson, Islam et Capitalisme; Peter Gran, Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt 1760-1840; H.A.MacMichael, The Tribes of Northern and Central Kordofan (Cambridge, 1912), pp.172-172; For a more complete discussion of the Orientalist intellectual tradition, see Edward E.Said, Orientalism (New York, 1978), An excellent critique of the "essentialist" approach is that of Karl Popper in David Hackett Fischer's Historian's Fallacies (New York, 1970), pp.68-60.

¹⁰ Study of the commercial history of the Western and Central Sudan which offers a similar type of analysis is found in: P. Lovejoy, "plantations in the Economy of the

A class/interest group analysis also facilitates the detection of patterns of change and/or continuity within Kordofan's commercial community. It should be noted, however, that the term class should not be taken to mean that a fully developed class structure existed in Kordofan. It is much more useful and accurate to visualize a less rigidly organized social system. Within the multi-ethnic environment of Kordofan, society was divided into various socio-economic strata. Ethnicity alone never fully defined an individual's position in society.

The formula for determining social position included other non-ethnic factors such as occupation, wealth, power, prestige, religious training and affiliation. By concentrating on these non-ethnic factors individuals and families could, within certain limits, work to acquire the prerequisites necessary for overcoming any "weakness" in lineage and improve their social and economic standing. The intertwined nature of the part played by both ethnicity and non-ethnic factors makes the social political and economic history of Kordofan an intriguing one. The use of a materialist/class analysis allows the most fruitful line of investigation into this history because it neither negates

Sokoto Caliphate," Journal of African History, xix,3 (1975):341-68; P.Lovejoy and S. Baier, "The desert side-economy of the central Sudan," International Journal of African Historical Studies, viii,4 (1975):551-81.

the ethnic factor nor obscures in a forest of family trees the material and class realities which existed in Kordofan.

This study also attempts to view Kordofan's history from the perspective of regional political ecology as well as regional political economy. The former is an approach pioneered by Piers Blaikie and Harold Brookfield. The word "regional" is used "to take account the of environmental variability and the spatial variations in resilience and sensitivity of the land, as different demands are put on the land through time."¹¹ The phrase "political ecology" "combines the concerns of ecology and a broadly defined political economy. Together this encompasses the constantly shifting dialectic between society and land-based resources, and also within classes and groups within society itself."¹² The combination of these two approaches is especially useful in determining the impact of ecological changes in Kordofan during the nineteenth century

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW

Recent historical research on the political-economy of the Sudan during the late pre-colonial and early colonial period is dominated by state-centered research. The subject matter for these studies are The Sinnar Sultanate, the

¹¹ Piers Blaikie and Harold Brookfield, Land Degradation and Society, (:1986), p.17.

¹² *ibid.*, p.17.

Kingdom of Tagali, the Fur Sultanate and the mini-Sultanates of Southwestern Sudan. The Kordofan region, which never produced an independent political authority has by and large remained on the periphery of these studies and therefore a relatively neglected area of research. The preoccupation with Sinnar, Tagali, Dar Fur and the western mini-states is understandable given the importance of the Funj Sultanate in the history of the Nile Valley, the position of Tagali on the African Arab frontier and the power wielded by the Sultans of Dar Fur.¹³ In addition each of these Sudanic states left a record in the form of land charters, confirming charters, tax documents, letters and other bureaucratic paperwork, which can be examined and analyzed.

At the forefront of the Nile Valley historiography is Spaulding's research which describes the rise of commercial centers and an autonomous middle class in the Nile Valley during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His work also sets out the general political and economic

¹³ The Funj state or Sultanate of Sinnar and the Sultanate of Dar Fur constituted the two major powers in the pre-colonial Sudan. Between them they controlled all of the territory from the Egyptian boarder south to the swamps and forests of southern Sudan. They also controlled the region between eastern Chad and the Red Sea. For more detail on these Sultanates see: R.S. O'Fahey and J.L. Spaulding, Kingdoms of the Sudan (London, 1974); Spaulding, The Heroic Age; R.S. O'Fahey, State and Society in Dar Fur, (London, 1980); R.S. O'Fahey and M.I. Abu Salim, Land in Dar Fur: Charters and related documents from the Dar Fur Sultanate (Cambridge, 1983).

conditions in the Nile Valley and its hinterlands at the time of the invasion from Egypt in 1821. Anders Bjorkelo's more tightly focused research concentrates on the impact of the invasion in 1821 by Egypt and subsequent colonial regime on the Ja'aliyyin people of the Shendi reach. While Bjorkelo clearly lays out the reasons for the emigration of people from that region and their adoption of trade as a way of life, the subsequent settlement and commercial operations of these immigrants from the Nile within Kordofan is only lightly explored.¹⁴

Janet Ewald's research on the Kingdom of Taqali, located in the Nuba Mountains, centers on the internal development of the kingdom and its Meks (kings). Through the use of oral history, travelers accounts and documentary evidence Ewald discusses the development of the office of Mek whose holders manipulated old traditions or created new ones to maintain power. She also analyses the impact which Taqali's powerful northern neighbors, the Fur, Funj and Turks, had on the development, organization and operation of this "frontier" state.¹⁵

Research on the Fur Sultanate has also attracted several talented scholars. R.S.O'Fahey's research

¹⁴ Spaulding, Heroic Age; Anders Bjorkelo, "From King to Khashif, Shendi in the Nineteenth-Century," PH.D. Thesis, Bergen: University of Bergen, 1982.

¹⁵ Janet Ewald, "Leadership and Social Change on an Islamic Frontier: The Kingdom of Taqali, 1780-1900." Ph.D. Thesis, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1982.

concentrates on the origins and administrative history of the Dar Fur Sultanate. His collaboration with M.I. Abu Salim on the subject of land in Dar Fur describes the origin and use of the hakura system (land grants) by which Dar Fur's Sultans rewarded and controlled court officials and merchants. Michael LaRue's research delves into the commercial community's role and activities in pre-colonial Dar Fur (pre-1875). Musa al-Mubarak's work is a detailed political history of the Dar Fur region during the Mahdiyya. Lidwien Kapteijns' study of southwestern Dar Fur traces the emergence and development of the Sultanate of Dar Masalit in the period 1870-1930.¹⁶

While each of these authors sheds light on the history of the areas adjacent to Kordofan the region itself remains relatively little studied, a rather surprising situation given the importance of the area in terms of commercial and political developments during the nineteenth-century.

Historical research on the period after the Anglo-Egyptian reconquest of Sudan in 1898 is more generalized in

¹⁶ Musa al-Mubarak, Tarikh Dar Fur al-Siyasi, 1882-1898 (Khartoum, 1970); R.S.O'Fahey, State and Society in Dar Fur (London, 1980); R.S.O'Fahey and M.I. Abu Salim, Land in Dar Fur; R.S.O'Fahey and J.L. Spaulding, Kingdoms of the Sudan, (London, 1974); Michael LaRue, "Kabir Ali at Home in Kobbei" Paper presented at the African Studies Association Conference, Boston; Michael LaRue "Hakuras in the Area Between al-Fashir, Kobbei and Katul," Paper presented to the Postgraduate Seminar, History Department, University of Khartoum, 16 December 1980; Lidwien Kapteijns, Mahdist Faith and Islamic Tradition: A History of Dar Masalit 1870-1930, (London, 1985).

approach and examines how colonial policy developed and affected Sudan as a whole. There is also, understandably, a preoccupation with north/south relations which has diverted resources and talent from examining other important aspects of Sudanese history. The continuing lack of historical research on the social and economic history of the nineteenth century, which remains a largely unwritten chapter of Sudanese history, handicaps efforts to understanding developments in the twentieth century.¹⁷

In conducting the research for this study it became clear that Kordofan's machinery of exchange and those who organized and ran it did not operate in isolation. Government administrators, religious leaders, and commoners, both nomadic and sedentary, interacted in some form or another with the commercial community. Therefore, these complex social relations within Kordofan require a description of conditions which existed outside of the mercantile sector proper. This study, however, is not intended to be a complete history of Northern Kordofan.

The Environment

Northern Kordofan's history is intimately linked to its environment. Its peoples have organized their lives in ways which make survival in this difficult land possible. The brief ecological summary which follows provides a

¹⁷ Susan Grabler "From Kashif to Concessionaire," Ph.D. Thesis, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1987.

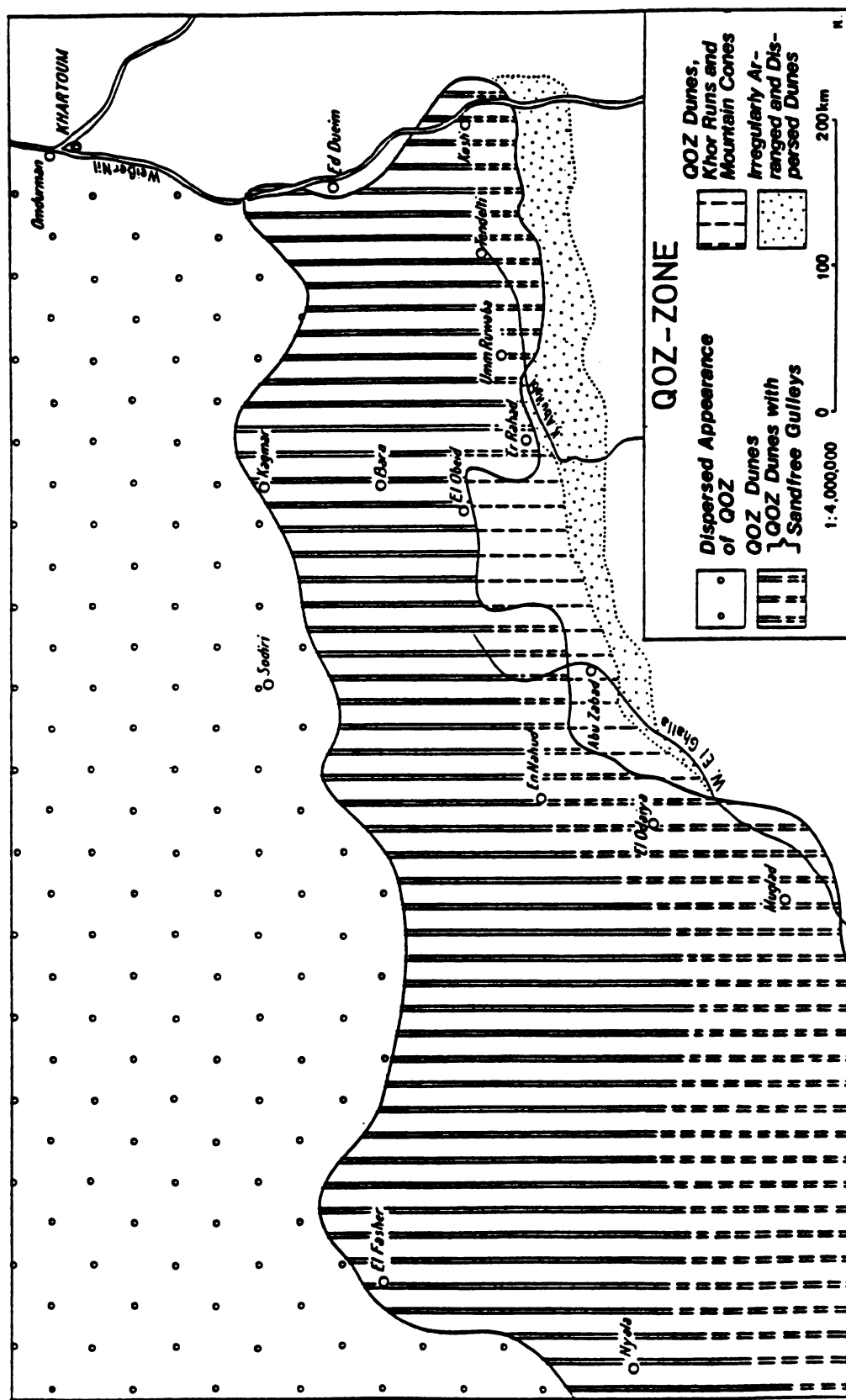
sketch of the environment and its potential so that the reader will better understand the stage on which Northern Kordofan's history was acted out.

The region consists of three general ecological classifications: Acacia Desert Scrub, Acacia Short Grass and Acacia Tall Grass Forests.¹⁸ Within these three divisions further sub-areas also exist. North of approximately latitude 14 degrees is the Acacia Desert Scrub area, where rainfall is generally light, 2-12 inches per year, and the drought period is usually eight months long. The soil is not capable of sustaining cultivation but sufficient moisture does exist to support low scrub and drought resistant grasses.¹⁹ The nomadic peoples of this region are camel herders who also raise sheep, goats, and some cattle. In the far northwestern corner of this northern zone is a sub-area called the Gizzu, which in some years offers outstanding grazing for up to six months (October to March).²⁰

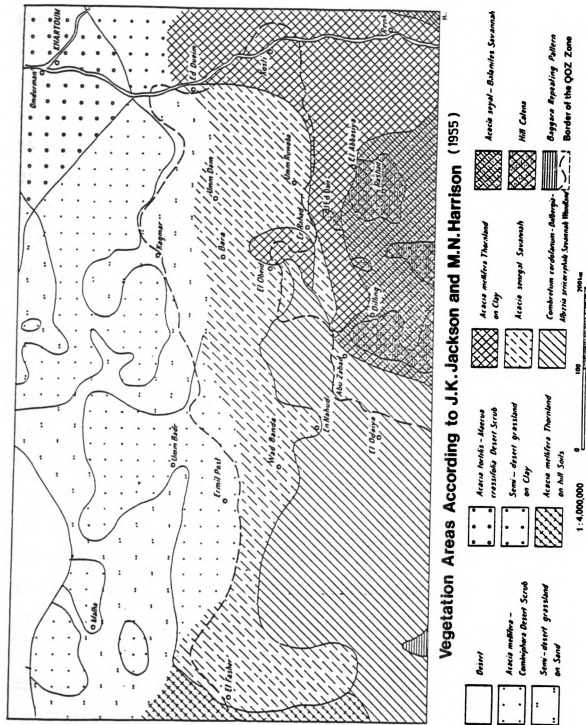
¹⁸ F.W. Andrews, "The Vegetation of the Sudan" in J.D. Tothil, ed. Agriculture in the Sudan (London: 1948) ,p33.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.35, and G.F. March, "Kordofan Province" in Tothil, Agriculture, p.831.

²⁰ March, "Kordofan", in Tothil, Agriculture, p.831; Douglas Newbold, who traveled in this sub-area, reported that "Camels grazing there do not require watering during the whole of this period and the Arabs herding them drink only camel's milk as the area is without water during the grazing period." Douglas Newbold, "A Desert Odyssey of a Thousand Miles" and "A Note on the Gizzu or Juzu," Sudan Notes and Records, vol. vii, nos. 1 and 2, 1924, *passim*.



Source: Born



Source: *Born*

Immediately south of the 14 degree line is the Acacia Short Grass, Scrub zone, known locally as the goz.²¹ It is in this zone that the vast majority of agricultural production takes place. The goz consists of red sands which cover an extended area from Omdurman southwest through Kordofan and on into Dar Fur. On the south edge of goz there is a sharp junction with the clay of the plains north of the Nuba mountains and Bhar al-Ghazal region. In the north, the goz passes into the rock, stones and sand wastes of the Sahara. The red sands of the goz are deep and consist of grains of uniform size which were formed by the wind blowing against and weathering the rock formations of the Nubian Series in the North and depositing them in sheets and long dunes running north and south. Trees and grasses have formed a cover and stabilized these dunes so that they are no longer blown by the wind.²²

Rainfall in the goz is 12-20 inches annually with a dry season of 4-6 months. An important characteristic of the goz is its capacity to quickly absorb all the rain which falls on it and store it for use by vegetation.²³ The varying depths of an underlying geomorphic strata of

²¹ G.F.March, "Kordofan Province", in J.D.Tothil, Agriculture in the Sudan, (London,1948), p.832.

²² G.A. Warrall, "A Simple Introduction to the Geology of the Sudan," Sudan Notes and Records, Vol.38, 1957, pp.2-9.

²³ March, "Kordofan", in Tothil, Agriculture, p. 832.

impermeable mica schist determines the depth of the stored water. As a result a greater variety of crops and wild vegetation grows in the soils of the goz than would be expected given the average annual rainfall. Cultivated crops include dura (Sorghum Vulgare), dukhn (Pennisetum Tyhoideum), SimSim (Sesamum Orientale), and groundnuts (Arachis Hypogaea).²⁴ Uncultivated goz areas also support various types of wild vegetation used in the local economy such as varieties of gum arabic trees, Tabeldi trees and light to medium bush.²⁵

Like the Gizzu of the northern zone, an atypical area called the Kheiran exists in the goz zone. The Kheiran is located north of El-Obeid and slightly west of the town of Bara. In this area a high water table, reached by shallow wells, allows irrigation by water wheel, or shaduf. The Kheiran produces onions, common varieties of vegetables, wheat, garlic, capsicum (shatta), fenug reck (helba), date palms (mostly males), dom palms (Hyphaene Thebaica Mart.) and sunt trees (Acacia Arabica).²⁶

Kordofan's Acacia Tall Grass/Forests Zone lies west of the Nuba Mountains and extends south from the goz to the Bahr al-Arab and Bhar al-Ghazal rivers and the swamps which

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 382.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 832.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 832; also see H.A. MacMichael, "The Kheiran," Sudan Notes and Records, Vol.3, 1920, pp.231-244.

form the head waters of the White Nile. The rainfall in this area is 20-40 inches a year. Moving from north to south the soil becomes increasingly heavier clay which is able to sustain rich coverings of grasses and herbs. The trees which grow in this area are Tahl (Acacia Seyal), hashab (Acacia Senegal) and tebeldi (Adansonia Digilata Lina). The relatively high rainfall also allows the cultivation of dukhn, dura, simsim, groundnuts, melons and vegetables. The region is much less desolate in general appearance than the far north and more wooded than the goz.²⁷

The major activity of this region's people is the herding of cattle. The abundant grasses and other vegetation make the region well suited for the raising of cattle, goats, sheep, and horses. The herds graze in the northern areas during the rains because insects infest the southern grazing areas and endanger the health of both man and beast. As the water and grazing become exhausted the herds move southward toward the Bahr al-Arab and Bahr al-Ghazal rivers. The onset of the rains initiates the northward trek once again.²⁸

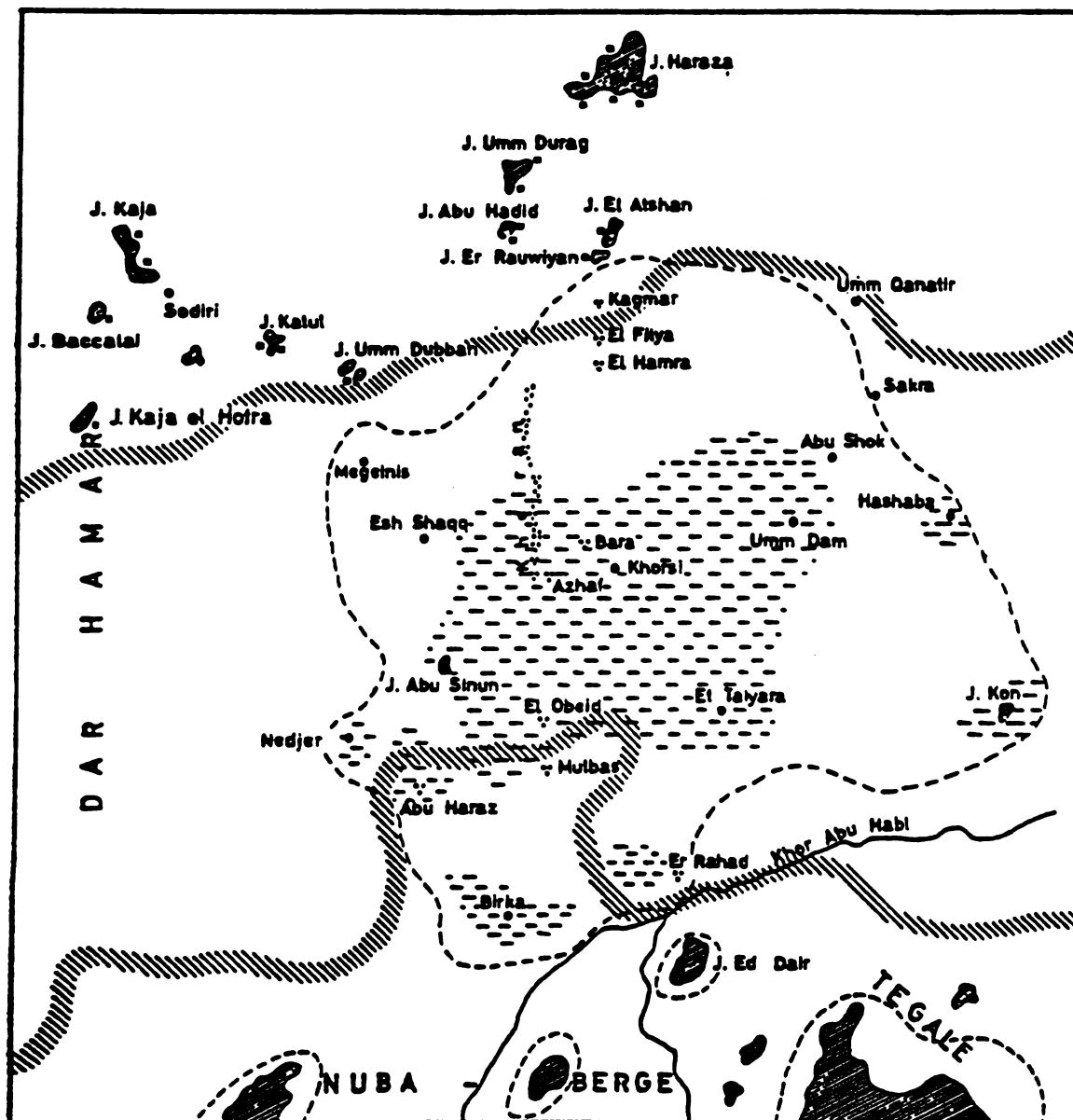
²⁷ F.W.Andrews, "The Vegetation of the Sudan," in Tothil, Agriculture, p.40.

²⁸ March, "Kordofan", in Tothil, Agriculture, p.835; also see: H.A. Macmichael, The Tribes of Northern and Central Kordofan, pp. 140-155; and I, Cunnison, The Baggara Arabs, (Oxford:1966).

While in broad terms the province's ecological configuration conforms to the continent-wide ecological classifications of desert, sahel, savannah and forest described above it also contains unique regional and sub-regional characteristics. Nineteenth-century Kordofan can be visualized as a set of irregular rings each with its own unique characteristics. The center-most of these rings consists of a broad flat plateau between the Nile Valley and Dar Fur Region. The surface configuration and altitude of this plateau obstructed the formation of any natural drainage systems which could have directed significant amounts of runoff water into the agricultural areas of the central zone during the rainy season or kharif.²⁹ The same topographical features have also made it non-cost effective for the area's inhabitants to attempt construction of artificial drainage systems.

Within this core area the largest urban center was El-Obeid. The city was surrounded by an agricultural hinterland dotted with smaller urban centers at Bara, Khursi, Melbis, Tayyara, Abu Harraz and Kagmar. The most important of these towns in terms of water supply were Kagmar, Bara, Abu Harraz and Melbis. The central zone contained the vast majority of the people, predominantly

²⁹ H.G.Prout, General Report on the Province of Kordofan, (Cairo, 1877), pp.1-4, 90-97; Martin Born, Zentralkordofan Bauern und Nomaden in Savannengebieten des Sudan, pp.1-42.



Settlements and Agriculture in the 19th Century

--- Boundaries of Agricultural Settlements

--- Densely Populated Areas

■ Mountains and Mountain Ranges

■ Nuba Settlements in Northern Kordofan (Schematized)

⋆ Irrigated Agriculture

/// Borders of the QOZ Zone

1:2,000,000

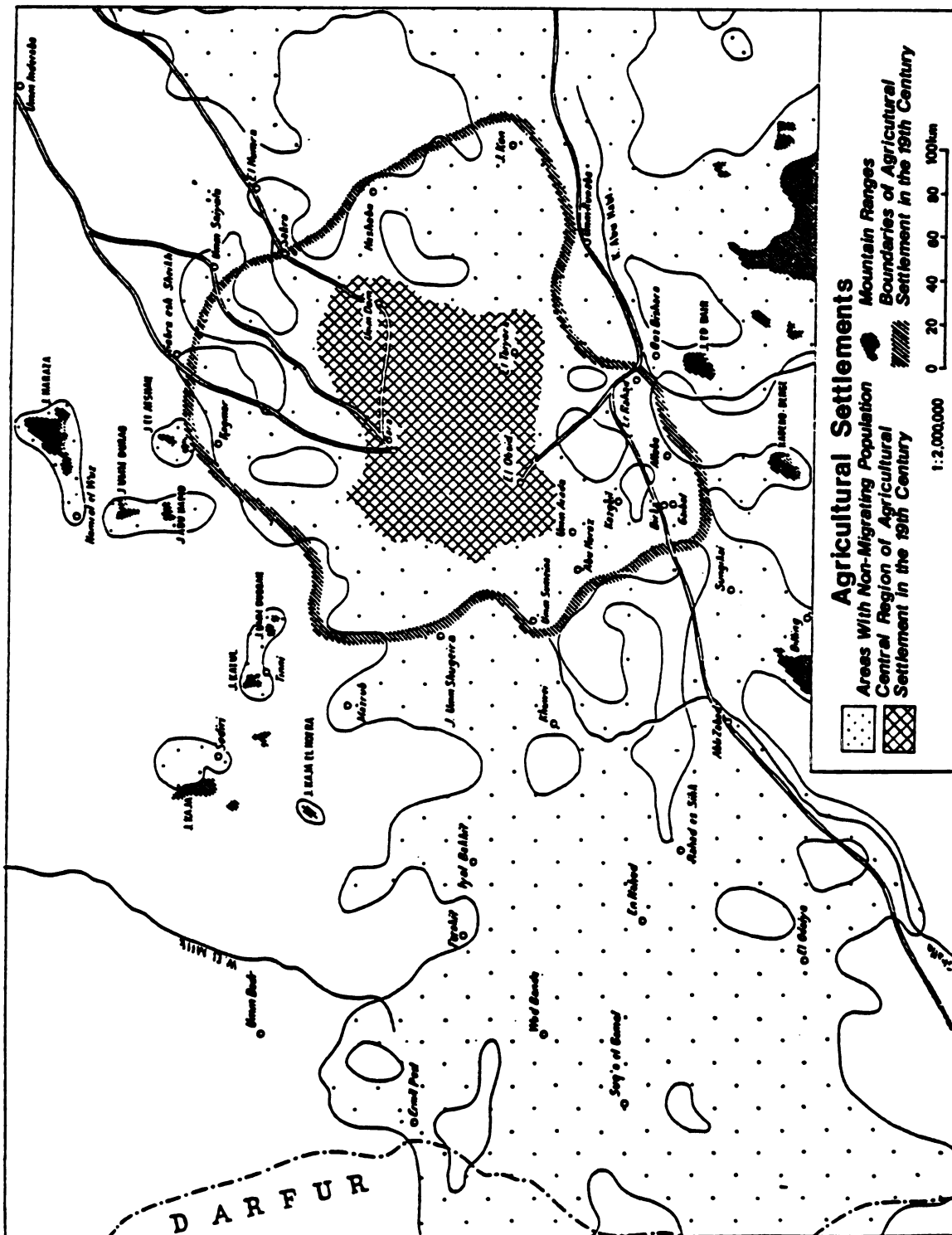
0 20 40 60 80 100 km

Source: Born

agriculturalists both slave and free, found in Kordofan. This zone also contained the most important areas of gum arabic production in the province. The remainder of the population was connected to the commercial or administrative community.

Herding groups dominated the next ring and completely encircled the agricultural area. Camel herding predominated in the north and west while cattle occupied the richer grazing lands to the south and east. The herding area had a much lower population density and the majority of the people were nomadic. Not all of the people in this area, however, were nomadic. The eastern and western edges of this ring were populated by settled or mixed farming groups who supplemented their incomes through the production of grain or gum arabic.³⁰ Nomadic groups also situated small villages of agricultural slaves along the inner and outer edges of the ring to produce grain as a hedge against hard times caused by drought or war. Many of these settlements were located at the extreme southern and southeast edge of the herding ring around the seasonal lakes of Al-Birkeh, Al-Rahad and Shirkeleh. These lakes which held surface water or water just below their beds were jealously guarded

³⁰ The Eastern area was occupied by the Guamma'a and was especially important in gum production. The western region was dominated by the Hamar who increasingly exploited the gum trees found in their lands. Also See: L.Holy "Cultivation as a long-term strategy of survival: the Berti of DarFur," in Johnson and Anderson, The Ecology of Survival, pp.135-154.



Source: *Born*

by the nomadic groups of the area who took a very dim view of government interference. Any attempts to wrest these areas from the control of their "owners" by the commercial community or provincial administration would have been vigorously opposed.

South and south-west of the "herding" ring lay the slave and ivory producing areas. These lands were subject to heavy raiding and over time suffered both human and animal depopulation. North of the second ring beyond the Sahara were the markets of Cairo and Alexandria, the destinations for the majority of the commodities produced in the three zones described above.

The Human Milieu

The Producers

Northern Kordofan is a place of great ethnic diversity. The region contains groups which claim both African and Arab descent. Groups which claim to have originated within the northern Sudan include the Dagu, Tungur, Kungara, Musaba'at, Ghodiat, Birged, Tomam and Tumbab. The groups of Northern Kordofan which claim a common Arab ancestry never-the-less make numerous distinctions between themselves and their respective homelands. Some of these groups are the Bedariyya, Hamid, Hamar, Kababish, Kenana, Kawahla, Humr, Missiriyya, Hawazma and Habbaniyya. In addition, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries large numbers of Nuba, Dinka, Shilluk

and others from the Nuba Mountains and regions which border the Bahr al-Ghazal were brought north as slaves. Groups from the Northern Nile Valley also moved into the region and added still further diversity to the ethnic mix. Among these are the Danagla, Ja'aliyyin and Shaqia.³¹

Even among the larger groups mentioned above there are numerous sub-divisions. The Hamid, for example, divide themselves into eight separate groups. The Ferahna, Hababin, Meramra, Awlad 'Akoi, 'Arifia, Gilaydat and Mejanin.³² These are then redivided into smaller sections. Among the Meganin there are eleven sub-sections (or Khashim Beit); the Tiebo, Al-Iadiyya, Al-Massiid, Awlad Rumiyya, Al-Homadiyya, Awlad Fadala, Awlad Sayyid, Awlad Muhammad, Al-Ghodanat, Al-Hayadira and Awlad Madi.³³

Within this study ethnic diversity means not only linguistic and/or racial distinctions but also those differentiations made by the people of Kordofan among groups which share a common language and heritage. Attempts to determine the veracity of the origins and/or immigration accounts told by each of Kordofan's ethnic groups is beyond

³¹ Interviews carried out in Kordofan from January through July of 1987 found that each of these group maintained distinct histories concerning their origins and customs particular to themselves.

³² Interview, Nazir Umum, Ali Muhammad Ebeid Timsah, Bara 25 September 1987. MacMichael, The Tribes of Northern and Central Kordofan, p.115.

³³ Interview, Nazir Al-Habib Juma'a Sahil, Maganin, Mazrub, 15-16 August 1987.

the scope of this study and will be discussed only where absolutely necessary. The critical point is the belief of the people of Kordofan that differences exist and that these perceived differences had an impact on the history of the region.

While the work of MacMichael on the ethnic composition of Northern and Central Kordofan is informative it is much too concerned with the Arab or non-Arab descent of the province's population.³⁴ His ethnographic research, because of its orientalist preconceptions, is of little help in exploring the economic and commercial history of the region. Research of this type is further weakened by the high degree of mobility open to people within Kordofan as R.S. O'Fahey has argued about Dar Fur:

Such mobility suggests that tribal labels have only limited ethnic content or stability and that mainly political mechanisms accounted for the preservation of territorially defined groups in an area of open frontiers. Changes in political allegiance were later legitimized by changing one's ancestors.³⁵

The vast majority of Kordofan's people organized themselves in groups based on common ethnic origin although they did not adhere to a rigid system of segregation between groups of different ethnic origin. Some groups contained sections not connected by heredity but by

³⁴ H.A. MacMichael, The Tribes of Northern and Central Kordofan; H.A. MacMichael, A History of the Arabs in the Sudan, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1922).

³⁵ R.S.O'Fahey, State and Society in Dar Fur, p.8.

cooperation and mutual protection agreements of long standing.³⁶ While the leadership of individual groups was confined to individuals with the proper hereditary credentials, the incorporation of both individuals and larger groups at lower levels was generally open to all.³⁷

³⁶ Almost all of the travelers and administrators who crossed or ruled Kordofan during the nineteenth and early twentieth century make some mention of the ethnic divisions found in the region. Some of these are: W.G. Browne, Travels in Egypt, Syria and Africa, (London, 1806); J.L. Burckhardt, Travels in Nubia, (London, 1822); A.T. Holroyd, "Notes on a Journey to Kordofan in 1836-37", Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, ix, pp. 163-191; I. Pallme, Travels in Kordofan, (London, 1846); Muhammad b. Umar al-Tunisi, Voyage au Darfour, transl. N. Perron, (Paris, 1845); H.G. Prout, General Report on the Province of Kordofan 1876, (Cairo, 1877); F.S. Ensor, Incidents on a journey through Nubia to Darfour, (London, 1881); Na'um Shuqayr, Jughrafiyyat wa-ta'rikh al-Sudan al-qadim, (Cairo, 1903); For the works of early British colonial administrators on the subject see: MacMichael, The Tribes of Northern and Central Kordofan, and A History of the Arabs in the Sudan; Interviews in Kordofan during 1987 confirm that not only did sections of various ethnic groups join other groups in the past but that these same groups continue to honor historic commitments. In one particular interview it was explained that sections of the Bedariyya had joined the Hawazma because of their similar occupation of cattle raising. Interview, Nazir Abd al-Jabar Hussain Zaki Al-Din, Bedariyya, El-Obeid, March/1987.

³⁷ Interviews in Kordofan in 1987 with the leaders of numerous ethnic groups confirm the willingness of all these leaders to follow the example of their predecessors and welcome new people into their groups. The evidence from oral histories and that collected by travelers and administrators of the province leave little or no doubt as to the openness of Kordofan's ethnic communities. Interviews: Nazir, Abd al-Jabar Hussain Zaki Al-Din, Bedariyya, El-Obeid, March and April 1987; Nazir, Ali Nimr, Missriyya/Humr, El-Obeid, 18 May 1987; July 1987; Nazir, Al-Habib Juma'a Sahil, Majanin, Mazrub, 25-26 June 1987; Nazir Umum, Ali Ebied Muhammad Timsah, Hamid, Bara, 25 September 1987; Hamid Assousa, elder of the Hawazma, Hamadi, July 1987. Hassan Ahmed Adil, Sharti, Hamar, Abu Zabad, 10-11 July 1987.

The reason for this openness lay in the need for leaders to attract labor and an increasingly larger base from which to extract goods and services. The low population density of the savannas (twenty to thirty people per square mile in areas of cultivation to less than two to three in the semi-deserts and pastoral zones) made the control of people and their labor more important than control of land.³⁸ Leaders used taxes and dues in the form of animals, crops, and men for military operations to increase their personal power and that of their families. The continual competition for control of people throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century assured the continued permeability of ethnic relationships.

A second reason for the fluidity of ethnic relations among groups in Kordofan stems from the nature of occupational choices and survival strategies made by the people of the region. The majority of Northern Kordofan's cultivators practiced mixed farming. They raised animals such as sheep, goats, cattle and camels in addition to growing crops and gathering wild flora and fauna. Mixed farming increased the options available to cultivators and improved their chances of survival in the harsh and

³⁸ Martin Born, Zentralkordofan: Bauern und Nomaden in Savannengebieten des Sudan; R.S.O'Fahey, State and Society in Dar Fur; J.L.Spaulding, The Heroic Age in Sinnar; K.D.D. Henderson, "A Note on the History of the Hamar."

unyielding environment of the central Sudan. The province's herders provided meat, hides, milk and transport for the region. Camels predominated in the dryer north and pack oxen in the wetter and muddier south.

Cultivators and herders exchanged crops, animals, animal products and salt regularly as migration patterns brought them together on a seasonal basis. The northern nomads were especially important in regional salt trading operations. Cultivators and cattle herders of the southern areas exchanged export and household goods, grain and animals for salt from the far north of the province. These types of relationships among Kordofan's people, the movement of individuals and families between the groups involved, illustrates the adaptability of the province's people.³⁹

The movement of individuals and families across ethnic/occupational boundaries has been noted by both historians and anthropologists. Their research shows that successful cultivators invest in cattle until their value is greater than that of the lands used for farming. At that point the farmer will switch his occupation and also his

³⁹ As in the case of the ethnic divisions found in the province the travelers and administrators who observed life in Northern Kordofan noted the interrelationships of the various peoples of Kordofan. Aside from those authors mentioned in note 15 also see P. Lovejoy, and S. Baier, "The desert-side economy of the central Sudan", International Journal of African Historical Studies, viii/4, pp.551-581 for a similar phenomenon in West Africa.

ethnic affiliation to that of a pastoralist group. The reverse situation can also occur. If a herder loses a high percentage of his animal wealth through drought, disease or war, he can opt to become a cultivator while he rebuilds his herd. In doing so he will attach himself and his family to a group of cultivators and as a result often change language and social patterns to conform to his new ethnic and occupational surroundings.⁴⁰

Cultivators and herders also cooperated at an intermediate level by entrusting each other with various forms of wealth and even family members. Cultivators annually entrusted their cattle to nomadic herders with whom they also on occasion sent their sons or other close relatives. Herders for their part, would leave grain, salt and other goods with farmers as emergency stores in case of trouble. Nomads also depended on farmers to provide land for growing crops if disaster struck and their herds were lost.⁴¹

Contact of a less benign nature, however, also took place. Small scale raiding, kidnapping, cattle and camel theft occurred on a regular basis and was a normal part of

⁴⁰ G. Haaland, "Economic determinants in ethnic process", in F. Barth, (ed.) Ethnic Groups and Boundaries, (London: 1969) pp. 58-73; G. Haaland, "Nomadism as an economic career among sedentaries of the Sudan Savannah Belt", in I. Cunlison, and W. James, (ed.) Essays in Sudan Ethnography, (London: 1972) pp. 149-172.

⁴¹ Haaland, "Economic determinants" and Haaland, "Nomadism".

life in Northern Kordofan. Large scale raiding and enslavement, however, did not threaten the general population during the 19th and 20th centuries. The only notable exception occurred during the years of Mahdist rule when the opponents of the Omdurman regime were hunted and enslaved. It was the Nilotic and Nuba peoples who lived immediately to the south who were the targets of major raiding expeditions throughout the nineteenth century and less intensive attacks after 1900.⁴²

The Merchants

The merchant community was not a homogeneous one, and its membership was characterized by ethnic, political, religious, and linguistic diversity. Like the cultivators and herders, they organized themselves in groups based on common ethnic origins. In addition to a common lineage,

⁴² R.S. O'Fahey and J.L. Spaulding, Kingdoms of the Sudan, (London: 1974); Spaulding, The Heroic Age in Sinnar; O'Fahey, State and Society in Dar Fur; MacMichael, The Tribes of Northern and Central Kordofan; The traveler's accounts of Northern Kordofan also contain references to raiding, kidnapping and theft of animals. In some cases these travelers were eyewitnesses to the accounts they give. See: W.G. Browne, Travels in Egypt, Syria, and Africa; J.L. Burckhardt, Travels in Nubia; I. Pallme, Travels in Kordofan; National Records Office, Mahdiyya Class 1 and 2 Documents on Kordofan. In Interviews done in 1987 with members of the leadership of the Maganiin of Northern Kordofan provided a detailed listing of the most renowned camel thieves, past and present of the district. They also discussed the ways in which kidnapping was carried out in the past.

however, merchant groups often defined themselves by the area from which the individual family originally migrated to Northern Kordofan, the length of time they had resided in the province, and, in the second half of the 19th century, by religious confraternity.

This second set of defining characteristics resulted from the fact that the majority of Kordofan's merchants were part of a diaspora which originated in the Nile Valley. While these people may have lived in Kordofan for generations, they considered their true homes to be in the villages which lined the banks of the Nile. The practice of keeping multiple households and locating them in different commercial centers reinforced the merchant's belief that Kordofan was not his only home.⁴³ As was true with the other inhabitants of the province, no rigid system of ethnic segregation existed among the merchant groups and it was possible to become a member of a group with a different ethnic origin.⁴⁴

Leadership within these groups was usually based on heredity but changes could and did occur when people lost

⁴³ Anders Bjorkelo, "From King to Kashif: Shendi in the Nineteenth century;" D.F. Sterling-Decker, "Suakin: A City-State in the Red Sea" Paper presented to the African Studies Association Conference, (New Orleans: 1985).

⁴⁴ Spaulding, The Heroic Age; O'Fahey, State and Society in Dar Fur; O'Fahey and Spaulding, Kingdoms in the Sudan; Bjorkelo, "From King to Kashif,"; Interviews carried out in El-Obeid in 1987 with merchant families which had been in Kordofan since the early nineteenth century.

confidence in their leaders. The rapid increase in commercial operations throughout the province during the years after 1820 ensured the continued freedom of movement by individuals and groups. It also increased the possibility of attaining leadership positions through a shrewd business sense and not heredity alone. As successful merchants expanded their operations they satisfied their need for larger numbers of retainers and associates by taking men away from less prosperous merchants.⁴⁵

The location of Kordofan between the import and export producing regions of the Mediterranean and Africa made it a natural home for merchants. Its agricultural potential in grain, vegetables, gum arabic and animals provided sustenance and a secondary economic sector in which merchants could invest. Finally, no local merchant group existed within the region to discourage or hinder the settlement or operations of any trader who wished to locate in Kordofan.

One of the first problems that confronted the forefathers of Kordofan's diaspora merchant community was gaining the acceptance and protection of the indigenous population of the region. This was especially important for the petty traders engaged in the traveling trade. These men

⁴⁵ Interviews carried out in El-Obeid in 1987 with Merchant families which had been in Kordofan since the early nineteenth century. Interview, Hamid al-Nil, Merchant, El-Obeid, 1987.

had very small amounts of capital and often operated alone or in very small groups in isolated areas. Petty merchants depended on their wits and on the good will of the local population to successfully carry on their business. The laws and protection of the Funj, Fur and Turco-Egyptian regimes could be used by powerful merchants in areas close to the seats of power but in the more distant hinterlands was only effective as a threat of retaliation for attacks on merchants.

Initially the diaspora community accomplished this integration with the local population by claiming descent through a distant yet common ancestor named Dahmash. The majority of the inhabitants in the area around El-Obeid identify themselves as Bedariyya. They claim to have migrated to their present location from Arabia by way of the Nile Valley or in some cases Dar Fur. Like the Bedariyya, the Ja'aliyyin and Danagla, who formed the majority of the newcomers, also claim descent from Arab migrants who settled in the Nile Valley.⁴⁶ The newcomers

⁴⁶ For a general outline of the Arab ancestry claimed by the Northern Sudanese see: H.A. MacMichael, The Tribes of Norther and Central Kordofan; and H.A. MacMichael, A History of the Arabs in the Sudan. For an opposing view which posits that the Arab migration was more mythical than substantive, see: J.L. Spaulding, "The End of Nubian Kingship in Northern Sudan 1720-1762," in M.W. Daly ed., Modernization in the Sudan: Essays in Honor of Richard Hill, (New York, 1985); The Arab roots of these families was steadfastly defended during interviews carried out in Kordofan among the diaspora merchant families who have lived in El-Obeid since ca. 1800 and local non-merchant groups. Interview: Abd al-Jabbar Hussan Zaki al-Din, El-

therefore played up the family connection through their distant relative Dahmash in order to gain the acceptance of their new hosts. The descendants of the Dongolawi merchant family of Siwar al-Dahab still claim a connection to the Bedariyya through Dahmash as do the Ja'aliyyin merchant family of Ilyas Um Brayr Mek Nimr.⁴⁷ The genealogical accuracy of these connections is not, however, of primary importance. The critical point here is that the connections were believed to be genuine and served the purpose of providing a legitimate linkage between the newcomers and indigenous population.

On the Bedariyya side of the equation the leaders of the Bedariyya, the Zaki al-Din family, saw no harm in allowing a few distant cousins to settle among their people. The immigrants arrived in small numbers and asked only to live in peace and carry on their trading operations. To the leadership of the Bedariyya these refugees from the Nile posed no threat to their authority and had contacts with the sources of desirable imports goods.⁴⁸ These leaders were also no doubt aware that their Funj and Fur overlords practiced a policy of enticing

Obeid, March 1987; Abd al-Rahman Siwar al-Dahab, Khartoum, April 1987; Hamid al-Nil, El-Obeid, May 1987.

⁴⁷ Interview: Ziyad Siwar al-Dahab, El-Obeid, February, 1987; Hamid al-Nil, El-Obeid, May 1987.

⁴⁸ Interview: Abd al-Jabbar Hussan Zaki al-Din, El-Obeid, March 1987.

learned Muslim scholars into their kingdoms with gifts of land and tax exemptions.⁴⁹ Their hospitality towards merchants who were potential tax payers, therefore, carried little danger of censure from Funj or Fur superiors.

The merchants who settled in Kordofan were not only important at the level of exchange, they also played an increasingly important role in the political life of the region throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their increasing affluence and desire to enhance and assure their prosperity motivated their interest in politics and power within Northern Kordofan and the Sudan.

⁴⁹ Kordofan was a buffer zone between the Sultanate of Sinnar and the Sultanate of Dar Fur. Both of these states controlled the Kordofan region for varying periods of time. On the inducement of Muslim scholars see: J.L.Spaulding, The Heroic Age in Sinnar, pp.151-198; R.S.O'Fahey and J.L.Spaulding, Kingdoms of the Sudan, p.124.

Chapter One

Kordofan 1700-1820: The Origins of the Commercial Community

This chapter presents an overview of the period from c.1700-1820. It is during this period that an indigenous commercial class developed in Northern Kordofan which controlled the machinery of exchange and operated it according to capitalist principles. The proximity of water and intersection of trade routes made the towns of Bara and El-Obeid the principal centers of commercial activity in Kordofan. Both towns are located in the goz zone and within an area surrounded by basins which hold water nearly year round. Bara is an oasis town which is located near the large series of basins called the Kheiran. El-Obeid is close to a similar basin area called Ban Gadid.

The Kordofan region's geographical position between the Sultanate of Dar Fur, to its west, and the Sultanate of Sinnar, to its east in the Nile valley, made it a much disputed territory. As a buffer zone it was plagued by sporadic fighting and continuous intrigue as both sultanates and renegade nobles vied for control of the region.¹ Consequently, neither side found itself able to

¹ R.S.O'Fahey and J.L.Spaulding, "Hashim and the Musabbaat," Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 35,2 (1972):pp.316-333; Jay Spaulding, The Heroic Age in Sinnar, (East Lansing,1985) pp.391-395,402-411; R.S.O'Fahey, State and Society in Dar Fur, (London,1980), pp.39-41,82-83,98-99.

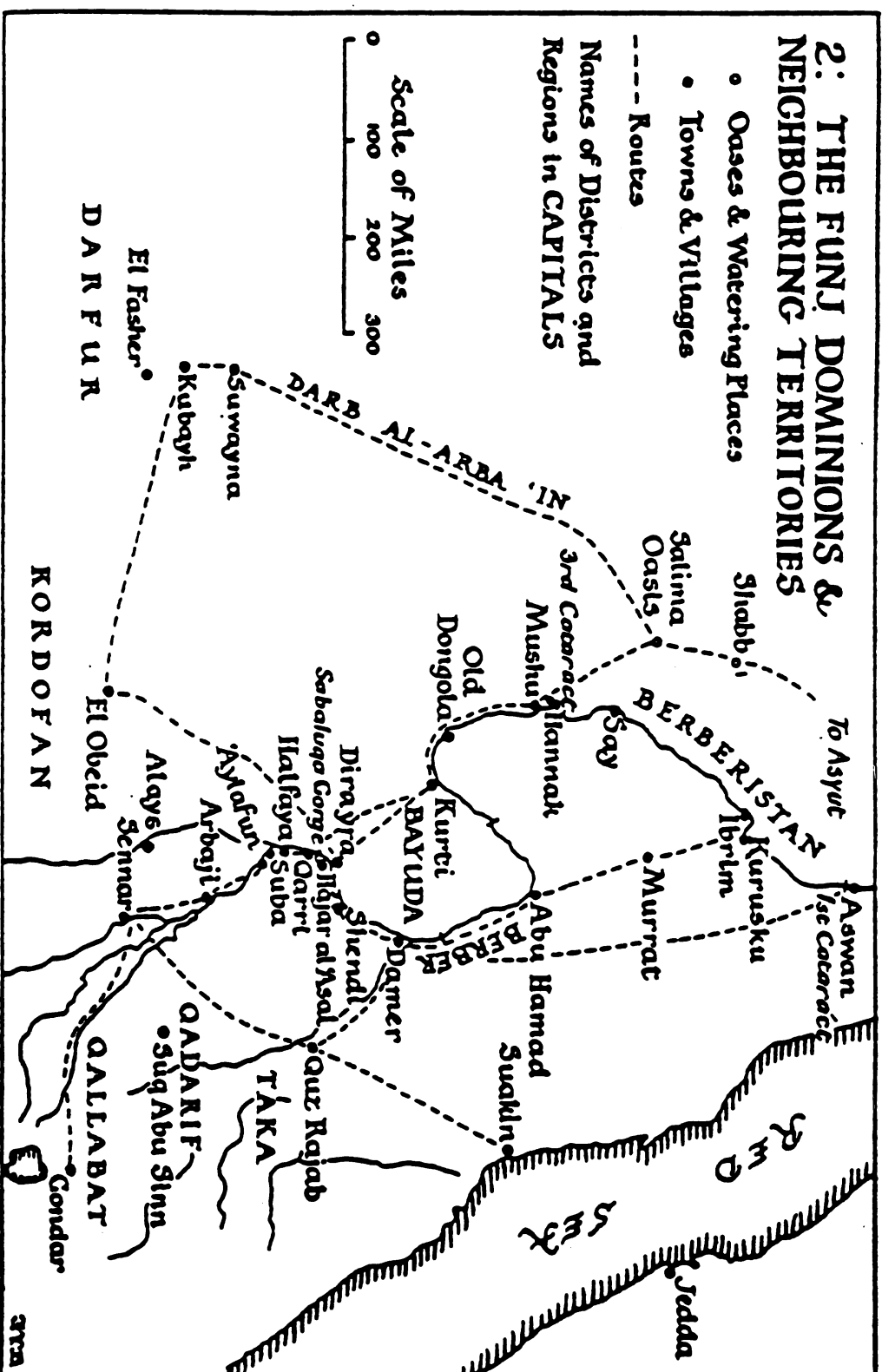
2: THE FUNJ DOMINIONS & NEIGHBOURING TERRITORIES

- Oases & Watering Places
- Towns & Villages

----- Routes

Names of Districts and Regions in CAPITALS

Scale of Miles
0 100 200 300



Source: Holt

rule with an iron hand and each in its turn had a relatively tenuous hold on the area. The Fur governors' careful and cordial handling of the merchant class clearly indicates the importance of merchant groups in the region during the latter decades of the eighteenth century. The importance of religious and commercial elites in maintaining Fur control over Kordofan made it easier for these local leaders to avoid or ignore rules and regulations designed to control their relationships with the political elite and wherever possible attempt to gain concessions from rulers who hoped to secure their support in times of crisis. The merchants could also make a handsome profit supplying all of the contending forces with the food, equipment and other goods necessary to maintain military units, garrisons and retainers within Kordofan's political arena.

As a result, the commercial towns of El-Obeid and Bara were, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the most important towns west of the Nile.² Their economic importance meant power for the merchants who lived in these two towns and controlled the trade that passed through them. They were located outside the politically unstable Nile Valley, beyond the effective reach of the Fur Sultans

² Browne, Travels in Egypt, Syria and Africa, (London, 1806), pp. 558-559, 566, 578; El-Sayed El-Bushra, "Towns in the Sudan in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century," Sudan Notes and Records 52 (1971) pp. 63-70.

and poised between the export producing regions of southern and southwestern Sudan and the markets of the Nile Valley, Indian Ocean and Mediterranean economic systems of trade.

Kordofan's merchants were an intricate part of a new and powerful segment of society which had developed in the Sudan during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. According to Spaulding this new segment of society had created an economic system in which they:

appropriated the surplus of subordinate producers through means unknown or unacceptable to ancient custom, but characteristic of commercial capitalism. The new middle class claimed Arab identity, practiced patrilineal descent, employed coin currencies, and bound itself in its dealings by standards of Islamic law, it elicited alms, purchased slaves, monopolized relationships and imposed perpetual indebtedness upon its free subjects; it imposed its own legal and ideological concepts upon the government, demanded exception from all obligation to the state and took up a variety of duties hitherto exercised by the state or the nobility, such as the administration of justice and the collection of taxes.³

Because of the influence which The Funj and Fur Sultanates had over the larger Eastern Sudan in general, and Kordofan in particular, this chapter must discuss, at some length, the ways in which these states organized themselves internally, carried out territorial expansion and attempted to control trade within their respective spheres of influence. An especially important aspect of this discussion is the expanded presence and impact of religious and commercial communities within the region and their increased power within each state. In particular,

³ Spaulding, The Heroic Age, pp.xviii-xix.

attention is given to how the coming of a new social order based on capitalism within the Funj and Fur heartlands affected Northern Kordofan and its commercial development.⁴

The Funj state, or Sultanate of Sinnar, and the Sultanate of Dar Fur constituted the two major powers in pre-colonial Sudan (pre-1820).⁵ Between them they controlled the vast stretch of territory from the Red Sea to the Chad border. Northern Kordofan occupied a position almost exactly midway between the capitals and heartlands of these two powerful sultanates. Because of its location Northern Kordofan was at various times under the control of each of these states.

Sinnar controlled the northern Nile Valley from about 1500 to 1821. The Funj began their consolidation of control over the northern Nile Valley by defeating the Abdallab Kingdom in 1504. They then continued to extend their control northward and westward throughout the remainder of

⁴ For a more complete overview of the political history of Kordofan see: O'Fahey and Spaulding, Kingdoms in the Sudan; O'Fahey, State and Society; Spaulding, The Heroic Age; Francis Mading Deng, The Recollections of Babo Nimir, (London, 1982); R.L.Hill, Egypt in the Sudan, (London, 1959); H.A.MacMichael, The Tribes of Northern and Central Kordofan, (Cambridge, 1967); K.D.D. Henderson, "A Note of the History of the Hamar" Sudan Archive, Durham; R.S.O'Fahey, Some Articles on Dar Fur and Kordofan, (Bergan: 1980); O'Fahey and Spaulding, "Hashim and the Musabbaat,"; Na'um Shugayr, Jughrafiyyat wa-ta'rikh al-Sudan al-qadim, (Cairo, 1903).

⁵ The terms Funj, Funj Sultanate and Sultanate of Sinnar are interchangeable. The same holds true for the terms Keira, Fur and Sultanate of Dar Fur.

the sixteenth century and well into the late seventeenth century. The northeastward thrust of the Funj and their allies eventually reached the Red Sea and brought the important sea port of Suakin under its influence.⁶

In the first quarter of the 18th century the Funj extended their authority into the region of Northern Kordofan. Within the Funj administrative system the "manjil" or governor of Qarri (see map 1) was responsible for Northern Kordofan.⁷ This region was an important possession because of its economic potential in the production of gum arabic, ivory, gold and slaves. There were also large herds of camels in the north of the province and cattle and horses in the southern areas.⁸

The Sultanate of Dar Fur, which originated in the Marra Mountains of western Sudan, expanded greatly during the seventeenth century and eventually exerted control over the area from the Chad border north into the Sahara and southward to the swamps of equatorial Sudan. In 1785 the Fur Sultan Tayrab invaded Northern Kordofan and wrested control of the province from the state of Sinnar. Dar Fur

⁶O'Fahey and Spaulding, Kingdoms, pp.25-26; Sterling-Decker, "Suakin a City State in the Red Sea," Paper Presented at the African Studies Association Conference, New Orleans, November/1985.

⁷O'Fahey and Spaulding, Kingdoms, p.63.

⁸O'Fahey and Spaulding, Kingdoms, p.136; Spaulding, The Heroic Age, pp.75-103 passim.

remained in control of Northern Kordofan from 1785 until the Ottoman invasion of 1820-21.⁹

Within both states society was divided into two classes, the rulers and the ruled. The elite controlled land in the more heavily populated farming areas and taxed agriculturists a portion of their crop for the privilege of using the land. In the pastoral zones land was of less value and the elite exerted their control over people and their herds. The rulers of both states used armed retainers to control the population, assure security along roads and extract surplus to fund the state. The failure of a group to produce its taxes in the form of grain, animals or other items would bring out a squadron of cavalry to force collection or take hostages until the delinquent taxes, plus interest, were forthcoming. In times of hunger and distress, however, the sultan was expected to feed the people from the royal granaries and defend his subjects from outlaws and invaders.¹⁰

Both the Fur and Funj states administered their southern frontier regions in a different manner than found in their heartlands. These border areas produced items not associated with agriculture or herding, such as iron, gold, honey, skins, civet, rhinoceros horn, ivory and slaves.

⁹ O'Fahey and Spaulding, Kingdoms, p.173.

¹⁰ O'Fahey, State and Society in Dar Fur, pp.92-93,100-112; Spaulding, "Taxation in Sinnar," Northeast African Studies, 6,1-2 (1984):p.20.

Spaulding used the term "institutionalized instability" to describe the conditions found in southern Sinnar.¹¹ Stated simply, "institutionalized instability" made the extortion of goods and enslavement of people easier and reduced the possibility of organized resistance to the demands of the state.

In Dar Fur a slightly different means was used to obtain the same results. The State relied heavily on court sponsored raids called "ghazwa" to obtain slaves and other forms of booty. The cattle nomads of the southern frontier, renowned as elephant hunters, were exempted from raiding if they included slaves and ivory with their regular tribute payments.¹² The direct incursion of Fur military forces into the southern region was, however, less successful than the Funj system of institutionalized instability. Potential victims knew the time of year these raids tended to occur and on hearing of the approach of a raiding force retreated into areas impassable to the sultan's heavy cavalry.

Within both states there occurred a centralizing period in which the power of one clan and/or family became supreme. The winner in this struggle occupied the position

¹¹ Spaulding, "Taxation in Sinnar", pp.19-20.

¹² O'Fahey and Spaulding, Kingdoms, p.161; O'Fahey, State and Society, pp.135-137; O'Fahey also states that "It is probable that kidnapping and small scale raiding by the nomads was cumulatively as significant as the more spectacular state-sponsored raiding parties."

of Sultan. The losers often retained power at the local level but were required to recognize the sovereignty of the Sultan as supreme lord of the land. In both Sinnar and Dar Fur the ruling sultans also concentrated control over trade and commerce within the realm of royal power.¹³

In theory, the sultan's monopoly over trade meant that royal caravans under the auspices of the head of state carried the vast majority of inter-state trade which supplied the needs of the court. All incoming merchants were required to halt at the border, present their goods for inventory and receive a patron responsible for their safe arrival at the sultan's court. Trade along the route to the capital was forbidden, and the first choice of all goods reserved for the Sultan. The head of state also set the price which he would pay for the goods he desired which in turn tended to establish the market price for all subsequent sales.

The nature of trade in the region reinforced this situation. Imports were generally luxury items reserved for the elite, through sumptuary laws, who in turn controlled

¹³ For a detailed analysis of class divisions and the extensive set of rules which governed relations between classes see: Spaulding, The Heroic Age, pp.75-103 passim; Spaulding, "Taxation in Sinnar," pp.147-146; J.L.Spaulding, "The Government of Sinnar", International Journal of African Historical Studies, vi,1 (1973) pp.19-37; Spaulding, "Farmers, Herdsman and the State in Rainland Sinnar." Journal of African History, 20,3 (1979) pp.329-347.

the flow of exports exchanged for them.¹⁴ W.G.Browne, an eyewitness to trading in Dar Fur, stated:

The king is the chief merchant in the country, and not only dispatches with every caravan to Egypt a great quantity of his own merchandise, but also employs his slaves and dependents to trade with goods of Egypt, on his own account, in the countries adjacent to the Sudan.¹⁵

In practice ,however, a much more open system came into existence which allowed others outside the sultans household or staff to participate in commerce. The rulers of both Sinnar and Dar Fur hastened the end of "royal trade", and ultimately their own power, by recruiting private traders with valuable goods and/or skills to enter the Sudan. The sultans wished to retain control over exchange but leave the work and risk to others. O'Fahey writes, "essentially the caravan trade was controlled by an informal alliance of rulers and traders, the former providing the exports and protection, the latter supplying the know-how and capital and carrying on the day to day trading."¹⁶ The shift away from administered trade to the use of private individuals of neither royal nor common lineage to conduct commercial operations within the state

¹⁴ Kapteijns and Spaulding, "Precolonial Trade Between States in the Eastern Sudan, ca 1700 - ca 1900," African Economic History, no.11, (1982) pp.29-62; Spaulding, "The Management of Exchange in Sinnar," in Leif O. Manger, ed., Trade and Traders in the Sudan, (Bergan,1984).

¹⁵ W.G.Browne, Travels in Egypt, Syria, and Africa, p.346.

¹⁶ O'Fahey, State and Society, p.132.

effectively sanctioned the creation of a middle class. A class which increasingly looked to its own interests and survival.

Another important element in the development of a middle class was the introduction of Muslim holy men, or fugara, into Sinnar and Dar Fur. Their entrance into Sudan was the result of an effort to regularize and improve the religious life of court and subjects. The rulers of both Sinnar and Dar Fur induced these Muslim scholars to settle in the Sudan with land grants, tax exemptions and other incentives.

The introduction of these religious scholars and lawyers with their law codes, which transcended local traditions and customs, marked the beginning of radical change in the Sudan. At the most basic level it signified the establishment and legitimization by the Sultan of a second set of rules by which social and commercial relations could be regulated. It meant that two parallel systems of social regulation existed within society. One was based on prerogative, tradition and custom and the other grounded in the Koran and principles of Islamic jurisprudence.

Their entitlement officially codified in charters which meticulously set out their land grants and tax exemptions in a proper Islamic form, the scholars proceeded to found communities, which Spaulding calls enclaves, which

were outside direct royal control. The majority of the scholars, however, did not see fit to pass on to their followers or the producers who came with their lands the exemption from taxation which they enjoyed. Instead these Muslim intellectuals developed a new tax system based on Islamic precepts which allowed them to obtain the produce of the land and the labor of their people. As this system became better established, the more enterprising of the religious teachers or fugara (plural of faqih) used their tax receipts as capital for the organization and operation of trading operations.¹⁷ On these communities Spaulding notes:

each community was organized as a sufi tariqa, and often received a charter from the Funj government freeing it from all obligations to the state; it paid no taxes, nor were royal officials even permitted to enter it without permission.¹⁸

Al-Damir, one of the earliest and most active of these communities located in the Nile Valley, provides an instructive view of the workings of an enclave. The community was founded by Hammad b. Muhammad al-Majdhub (1693-1776) and given its charter by the Funj Sultan. The community was located near the confluence of the Nile and Atbara rivers and enjoyed the advantage of occupying lands which could be irrigated. The community expanded through

¹⁷ Spaulding, The Heroic Age, pp.151-198; O'Fahey and Spaulding, Kingdoms, p.124.

¹⁸ O'Fahey and Spaulding, Kingdoms, p.84.

various means. One such method was through the gifts of the pious:

Al-Sayim b. al-arbab Him has bestowed as alms upon the sons of the faqih Hammad al-Majdhub, al-faqih Ahmad and al-Amin his brother, eighty uds as a wagf for God and His Apostle.... On the north its boundary is Abd Allah b. al-arbab Na'im, and its boundary on the south is Muhammad walad al-Asihib.... The sons of the faqih Hammad b. al-Majdhub have appointed al-sadiq walad 'Ali as authorized wakil over the estate, and Muhammad walad al-Asihib, neighbor to the estate, has the power to collect taxes under the guidance of al-Sadiq.¹⁹

There was also the occasional annexation of land to which claims of ownership were confused.²⁰

Within the boundaries of the community, taxes were based upon Islamic law and included fitra and zakah payments. The fitra amounted to five and one third rotl of grain (2.4kg) and was payable on the first day of the feast which ended the season of fasting, Ramadan. The more substantial zakah tax was levied annually and divided into the following categories. The zakah al-nugud was a five percent tax on the value of all specie or jewelry of gold or silver. The zakah al-aysh consisted of a one tenth tax

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.170.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.170; In the case noted by Spaulding a local noble had been dispossessed of land in a dispute with the Sultan and the community took advantage of the situation to appropriate the land before a replacement could be found.

on all crops over 1,600 rotls (144kg) and zakah al-mal, a tax on livestock.²¹

The presence of holymen and religious communities in Kordofan during the eighteenth century indicates that a model similar to that found in the Nile Valley also applied to Kordofan's commercial communities. A document in the possession the Nazir of the Maganin, Al-Habib Juma'a Sahil, sets out the privileges accorded to one family in Northern Kordofan. The document is from Sultan Muhammad al-Husayn and reconfirms an earlier charter granted by his father, Muhammad Al-Fadl Abd al-Rahman. It states that "...it is the scholar Ahmed and his sons, awlad Shimala who showed us the book (document) of the father Muhammad al-Fadl; we looked into the document and found that it permits them to maintain their status, this includes all the sons of Shimala al-Majnuni. I have set them free in all legal matters and normal administrative procedures; no one is allowed to interfere in their affairs by asking for services, tax, custom or even the carrying of baggage." It concludes with "...no one is to interfere neither a shartai, nor dimlii, or any Arab shaykh, state courier; no

²¹ Ibid., pp.161-163; The zakah al-mal was calculated according to the type of livestock concerned. The complicated system of calculating payment is shown by Spaulding through the report of Layall on the Hawazama a group of herders who lived in Kordofan.

son of a sultan or Mayram.²² The freedoms granted in this charter could be used to great advantage by a family who supplement their religious occupation with trading.

A second document concerning the status and privileges of a Kordofanese holy family further indicates the position of these communities with Kordofan. The document is dated 19 Dhu al-hijja 1220/ March 10 1806 and addressed to the "pious saint Shaykh al-Daw, son of the saint Shaykh 'Abd al-Hamid al-Shuwayhi."²³ The document granted to the Shaykh al-Daw the sultan's share of taxes and fines for the upkeep of his mosque. A second document written Ramadan 1222/ November 1807 pertaining to the same lands, Umm Diraysa, Kordofan, mentioned in the 1806 document. In the second document the sultan upbraids the magdum of Kordofan, Musallim, for collecting fines and taxes within the boundaries of Shaykh al-Daw's estate.²⁴

A second important religious family who settled briefly in Kordofan was the Mirghani. They entered Kordofan early in the nineteenth century and settled near Bara. Here, Muhammad Uthman al-Merghani (called al-Khatim)

²² Confirming charter issued by Sultan Muhammad Al-Husayn to the Faqih Ahmed Awlad Shimala. A photocopy is in the possession of the author.

²³ Michael LaRue, "The Hakura System: Land and Social Stratification in the Social and Economic History of the Sultanate of Dar Fur (Sudan), ca.1785-1875." Ph.D. Thesis, Boston: University of Boston, 1989, p.250.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.250.

married and began a family. Among the children born to him was Muhammad Uthman al-Mirghani (called al-sughaiyr) who became his successor and leader of the Khatmiya Tariqa in the latter half of the nineteenth-century. In addition to establishing his own community within Kordofan, Muhammad Uthman also gave his blessing to the founding of the Isma'iliya Tariqa by one his first pupils, Isma'il Abdallah al-Wali of El-Obeid. Just prior to the Turco-Egyptian invasion he departed from Kordofan and moved on to Sinnar.

Both the Khatmiya and Isma'iliya prospered in Kordofan and members of both orders engaged in trade.²⁵ A third tariqa which had adherents in Kordofan from the pre-Turkiyya period was the Qadriyya. Its principal Khilwa (school) was founded Northwest of El-Obeid in the mid 1780s by Shiekh al-Daw in the village of Umm Janu.²⁶ Each of these confraternities located themselves within close proximity of the agriculturally productive basins and settlements of Bara and El-Obeid. Each of these three

²⁵ Nicole Grandin, "Sayyid Muhammad Uthman al-Mirghani (1793-1853) Une double lecture de ses hagiographies," in F.Constantin, ed., Les Voies de l'islam en Afrique orientale, (Paris, 1987) pp.35-41; J.Voll, "A History of the Khatmiyyah Tariqa in the Sudan, Unpublished PH.D dissertation, Harvard 1969, p.106-8; Taj al-Anbiyya Ali al-Dawi, "Al-Tariqa al-Isma'iliyya fi madinat al-Ubayyid," Sudan Society, (Khartoum, 1969). Interview, Khalifa Al-Bakri Ismail al-Wali head of Isma'iliya, El-Obeid, April 1987.

²⁶ interview, Sheikh Al-Tyb Al-Daw, Shuwiehat, El-Obeid, 24 April 1987.

elements reinforced the other and contributing to the development of the central zone in Northern Kordofan.

In terms of merchant/state relations within Sinnar and Dar Fur, the most fundamental changes began in the late seventeenth century and carried on through the eighteenth century. The key to these changes was the shift of economic power and political leverage from the Sultan's court to the markets and houses of the newly formed middle class which populated the religious and merchant communities. The shift in economic power was made possible in part by the increasingly widespread use of the new law code by the emerging middle class. Commercial and social relations became regulated by cleverly written contracts intelligible only to those who were literate and well versed in Islamic jurisprudence. The people, as well as their leaders, were trapped within a system they no longer controlled. Neither ruler or ruled could bring the old protections or prerogatives of customary law to bear. They were also unable to ignore the orders of an Islamic judge especially when a document was involved that had been properly witnessed and sealed. To be sure, Sultan and noble each attempted to play the game for their own benefit which usually caused increased suffering for the lowly producer. The real advantage ,however, lay with the new middle class as they alone were free of any constraints associated with the older system and therefore in a

position to make the most advantageous use of the new system.

The centers of the new system were the enclaves of religious men and merchants such as al-Damir which developed in areas protected by royal charters from outside interference. These enclaves of the new middle class provided bases from which attacks on royal prerogative and power were launched. These attacks were neither swift, calculated nor direct physical assaults, but they were ultimately lethal to royal dominance.

Spaulding's work on Sinnar demonstrates that the development of these enclaves created a situation which ultimately led to the destruction of the Funj state. He shows that the enclaves and their leaders, while often attempting to achieve differing objectives for different reasons, remained unified on three basic points of the Islamic legal code: that private property existed, that such property possessed a monetary value in relation to specie, and that the Koran defined the terms of exchange concerning property.²⁷ He goes on to say that "the idiom of this allegiance was the use of coin currencies."²⁸

The use of coin currencies marked one of the first salvos in the attack on royal control of the state economy. The increased volume of trade brought on by increased

²⁷ Spaulding, The Heroic Age, p.142.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.149.

deregulation of commerce caused a shortage of coin in the Sudan. The demand for small denominations became especially acute as merchants began to open up new networks and commercial transactions took place between producers and middlemen. As a result, the making of coins became a very profitable enterprise. By the late eighteenth century Spaulding notes that the successful acceptance of the silver dollars of Carlos IV indicate that an extensive network of currency exchange systems was in place before its introduction.²⁹

The lack of policies on the part of the central government to control the introduction and use of coin currencies indicates that it was not seen as a threat. The sultans seem to have thought that they could control the values assigned to the coins which were circulating in their realm. They were badly mistaken, however, and lost control of the regulatory power over exchange that their fathers had held within their domains. Their troubles were caused by merchants who used coin currencies and circumvented wherever possible the customary regulations which set the values of coins vis-a-vis commodities. They accomplished this circumvention through the use of supply and demand and free market bargaining.³⁰

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.145-147.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.148.

The possibility of the royal court redeeming the situation was thwarted in part by the lesser nobility which ruled at the province and district level. These nobles, who had lost power to the Sultan and his retainers, slave and free, often allied themselves with the new merchant class. The nobility at the province and district level found merchants useful partners in defying the economic monopoly of the Sultan and appropriating for themselves a portion of the wealth generated by long-distance trade.³¹

The general desire of the lower nobility, merchants and Muslim holymen to break down royal power made each useful to the other. The nobles who wished to enter into long-distance trade would first create a bandar of their own. They would next employ merchants as business agents in foreign countries or distant regions of Sudan. They would also appoint Muslim qadis (judges) to arbitrate affairs between foreign merchants, native born traders and others involved in the commercial activities of the noble's bandar.

Merchants, who hoped to operate outside of the restrictions of the royal bandar, realized that protection by members of the nobility offered many advantages. The nobles provided security in areas not previously visited by merchants and also a source of leverage when dealing with reluctant producers. The merchant's relationship with a

³¹ *ibid.*, p.178.

nobleman could be precarious. For example, it was not uncommon for a noble to close his market to private traders until his goods had been sold at higher prices created by his exclusion of the goods of other merchants. The noble, however, increasingly became a merchant first and feudal lord second which was a dangerous position to be in. He was often unable to take action against merchants when complaints surfaced from his subjects for fear of endangering his own profits. He also had to deal with the rulings of Qadis (judges) and a relatively uniform code of Islamic commercial law which reduced his ability to use power arbitrarily.

The growth of bourgeois enclaves in the form of towns and religious communities created a new locus for concentrations of power, wealth and population. This new locus had no parallel equivalent in the old order and was in many respects at odds with the mores of the ancien regime. While luxury goods remained the mainstay of the Sudanese commercial world, other commodities also played an increasingly important role in the noble/merchant alliance. Spaulding's research illustrates how a staple crop, such as grain, was also drawn into the commercial dealings of merchants and nobles.

In the old world of ruler and ruled producers provided, through taxation in kind, for the court of the lord. In the new world of the growing middle class,

however, no mechanism existed for the provisioning of the towns populated by merchants, religious teachers and their retainers. As a result the towns suffered from a perpetual shortage of food grains. Two methods of coping with this situation emerged. Nobles seeking quick profits placed surplus tax grain, traditionally held in reserves for famine relief, on the open market or, acting as intermediate wholesale merchants, they organized the importation of grain from other regions. In both cases the lords relied on full time merchants with established networks in the market to carry out the necessary commercial operations involved in the sale, resale and distribution of grain. Spaulding notes, "while tradition gave him (the lord) the right to gather food, it allowed him no legitimate way of disposing of it than by giving it away to the deserving or needy."³²

The commoditization of grain within the economy opened for merchants a lucrative avenue of trade formerly closed to them. They became increasingly able to deal directly with producers. This was accomplished through the debt and credit system called sha'il. In the grain producing regions of Sudan, as elsewhere in Africa, the stores of grain from the previous year's harvest are often exhausted in the weeks immediately prior to the new harvest. Traditionally, this deficit was made up by drawing on the surplus tax

³² *ibid.*, pp.200-201.

grain held in the lord's storehouses. In the new market oriented economy the lord's grain supply was no longer a dependable source because of purchases by merchants for resale to the middle class in the growing cities and towns. The merchants who controlled grain, however, could and did step into the role previously occupied by the noble as a source of grain for needy producers. But, unlike the former system, where grain in time of need was free, the merchant's grain could only be had for a price. The producers borrowed food and seed grain against the coming crop. Given the unfavorable credit arrangements hungry producers were forced to accept they were soon in perpetual debt to the inhabitants of the towns.³³

For the merchants the development of noble/merchant relations and the sha'il system meant less dependence on the urban marketplace and a more secure place in society. It allowed him to diversify his product line and escape the proverbial situation of having all his eggs in one basket. The middle class merchant had in effect escaped from the Sultan's monopolistic bandar to the less restrictive market of the noble and from there broken free into the open hinterlands. Merchants moved from a position of dependence vis-a-vis the ruling elite to one of independence and control. The nobility relied on merchants to provide the luxury goods demanded by retainers as well as the men

³³ *ibid.*, pp.202-203.

(slaves) and arms necessary for political independence. The peasant producers for their part depended on the merchants for food and seed.

The rise of the middle class, however, did not go wholly unchallenged. The lords and their military units, while economically weak, were physically more powerful than the middle class towns. The wealth of the towns often proved too tempting a target for lords who lacked any other means of acquiring a portion of the riches contained in them. During the eighteenth century powerful lords attacked and razed the market centers of Old Dongola, Berber, Shandi, Al-Halfaya, Arbaji and Alays.³⁴

This intermittent destruction of merchant enclaves retarded the growth of merchant power but did not change the underlying system which made their regeneration possible. The lords, moreover, generally attacked merchants associated with rival lords and attempted to protect their own from a similar fate. While individual merchants died in these attacks and their businesses suffered looting and destruction, the commercial class remained a vital part of society.

Documents and accounts from Kordofan indicate that similar developments were taking place there as well. Kordofan, however, was not simply a mirror image of the conditions pertaining in the Nile Valley. Its merchants and

³⁴ *ibid.*, pp.204-205.

commercial elements played a more prominent role than did their compatriots in the Nile Valley. Merchants in Kordofan were able to develop a more conspicuous commercial community with less regard for religious trappings because of their distance from the centers of power and proximity to an export frontier.³⁵

Kordofan's development was influenced by events outside of Sinnar and the changes in the political economy of the Eastern Sudan. The conquest of the province by the Fur Sultan's armies in 1785 exposed it to political and economic developments which had occurred within Dar Fur. Research on the Fur Sultanate indicates that the Sultans integrated the religious and merchant elite into the court and state apparatus to a greater extent than did the Sultans of Sinnar. The fugara and merchant class played important roles in the state and lived in chartered communities but they had a far less disruptive impact on the state than in Sinnar.

The evidence for this comes primarily from charters and traveler's accounts which capture the political-economic landscape of the time. The longstanding role of the fugara is shown in two charters found in the position of Ali Hassaballah in al-Fashir. These two charters are

³⁵ This is not to say that important religious families did not perform important functions in Kordofan. The role of powerful religious men and religious communities in Kordofan, however, was less conspicuous than in Dar Fur of the Nile Valley.

believed to be the sole survivors of seven original documents and trace the control over a specific piece of land by a holyman's family during a one hundred year period.

An examination of these documents indicates that the original grant of land at Qiraywud al-Zaraf was made to the holyman Muhammad Izz al-Din by the Sultan Muhammad Dawra (1720-1730) and was a "donation, benefice and endowment."³⁶ This land grant is later ratified by the Sultans Umar Lel (1730-1739), Abu'l-Qasim (1739-1752) and Muhammad Tayrab (1752/3-1785/6).³⁷ The sons of the holyman had the charter reconfirmed by the Sultan Abd al-Rahman (1787/8-1803).

In 1807 during the reign of Muhammad al-Fadl (1803-1838) Musallam b. Muhammad Izz al-Din presented the charter to the Sultan and a commission was sent out to demarcate the exact boundaries of the estate. Musallam's action was possibly the result of some type of dispute between other land owners and the leaders of the religious community. At that time Muhammad al-Fadl confirmed the charter once again and wrote that the estate was "a perpetual endowment so that they can make use of its land tax (kharaj) for the mosque."³⁸

³⁶ R.S.O'Fahey and M.I.Abu Salim, Land in Dar Fur, (Cambridge, 1983), p.38.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.4 and p.38.

³⁸ *ibid.*, pp.38-45.

The importance of documentation and Islamic jurisprudence in land disputes also increased within Dar Fur as it did in Sinnar. An example of this is the long running quarrel (1770-1840) between the descendants of a holyman and noble over an estate northwest of the sultanate's capital, Al-Fashir. On five different occasions the case reached the courts and each time the family of the holyman, using documentation, won, or retained, rights to the estate.³⁹

Land documents from Dar Fur also indicate that the "sons of Sultans" were also bound by the dictates of the law and Muslim judges. Court documents show that the Tunjur and Fallata fugara of the Khiriban region had numerous confrontations with royal offspring who attempted to appropriate or trespass on lands belonging to religious communities. In 1805-6 a royal son named Agrab claimed to have been granted land already occupied by the Tunjur holyman Badawi b. Abdallah Matluq. In the resulting court case Agrab appears with a charter but on examination it was found to be unrelated to the lands in question. Later, in 1815, Agrab was again found guilty of trespassing when brought to court by representatives of a community of Fallata holymen.⁴⁰

³⁹ *ibid.*, pp.53-61.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp.61-68.

The second royal son to run afoul of holymen and courts was Muhammad Hud, son of the Sultan Muhammad al-Fadl. In this case the fagih Muhammadayn claimed that Muhammad Hud had "attacked and seized our villages and farms-everything. He has left us nothing."⁴¹ The holyman argued that the lands in question had been granted to his family by the Sultan Muhammad Tayrab and that he possessed the documentation to prove his ownership. The judgement of the court was in favor of the fagih Muhammadayn. The royal lineage of Muhammad Hud seems to have had no force in the case. Royal prerogative was clearly not an effective weapon when in front of an Islamic court in Dar Fur.

The confirming charters of Ahmed Shimala al-Majnuni and ***** from Northern Kordofan falls within this genre of legal documents. Just as Muhammad Hud had been forbidden from interfering with chartered communities within Dar Fur, administrators sent to govern Kordofan would have been prohibited from intervening in the affairs, commercial or otherwise, of the province's chartered communities. The attempts of Hashim b. Issawi and the Fur Sultans to control Kordofan during the last quarter of the eighteenth century prompted administrators to extend favors and maintain good relations with indigenous leaders. Some of these leaders were merchants who made Kordofan their base of operation.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.74.

The merchants who operated in Dar Fur were also able to find favor in the court of the sultan but not without paying a price. The travel accounts of W.G.Browne, who resided in Dar Fur from 1793-1795, and Mercure Joseph Lapanouse, who traveled in the Sudan from 1799-1801, offer valuable insights on trade, commerce and political control.⁴² The accounts of these travelers, when combined with charters and land documents, indicate that during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Sultans of Dar Fur exerted tighter control over merchants than did the Sultans of Sinnar.⁴³

As outlined earlier, the power of the Sultans who ruled in the Nile Valley was assailed by the fuggara, merchant class and lesser nobility. In Dar Fur, however, the Sultans appear to have been able to maintain royal power in the face of similar groups and pressures within their state. Part of the reason for this may lie in the

⁴² Browne, W.G. Travels in Africa; J.Lapanouse, Memoire sur les caravans du Dar Fur et du Sennaar. (Paris, 1802).

⁴³ The existence of this differentiation and reasons for it has fueled a general debate within Sudanese studies over merchant/state relations within the Eastern Sudan. Two opposing views dominate the recent historiography on this subject. The one side represented by the work of R.S.O'Fahey and the other by J.L.Spaulding. The discussion presented here is not intended to prove or disprove either side but rather to mine both veins of research to better understand the forces which shaped the merchant community in Kordofan. For a general outline of the arguments surrounding this debate see: R.S.O'Fahey State and Society in Dar Fur; J.L.Spaulding The Heroic Age In Sinnar; L.Kapteijns and J.L.Spaulding, "Precolonial Trade Between States in the Eastern Sudan, ca.1700-ca.1900."

differing geographical position of Dar Fur vis-a-vis the outside world and physical environment within the Sultanate.

Browne for example notes that certain towns acted as "keys" to routes in and out of the Sultanate. He mentions three towns in particular; Sweini, which was strategically placed on the forty-days road which led north to Egypt, Ril, which governed the traffic moving east and south, and Cubcabia (Kabkabiyya), which controlled the western roads. He goes on to say that in each of these towns there was a government officer and garrison of royal troops.⁴⁴ The relative isolation of Dar Fur from major trading metropolis and its limited number of access points made control of trade and merchants an easier task for the Fur Sultans than for their counterparts in the more easily assessable Nile Valley.

In describing the merchant community of Kobbi, the merchant's town north-west of El-Fasher, Browne says the majority of the inhabitants were there because of "bloodshed and lack of settled government in the Nile Valley."⁴⁵ He also notes that the non-Egyptian merchants were "foreigners coming from Dongola, Mahas, Sennar and Kordofan, who are generally remarked as indefatigable in

⁴⁴ W.G.Browne, Travels in Egypt, Syria and Africa, pp.266-269.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, pp.271-272.

commerce, but daring, restless, and seditious, (which consideration has induced the present Sultan to use some efforts to banish them from his dominions)."⁴⁶ From Browne's observations it is also known that, unlike the situation in Sinnar, coins were not used as currency, the market for grain was strictly controlled, the merchant community was supervised by a "head of the merchants" who answered directly to the Sultan and that the Sultan could effectively tax merchants and derive revenue from their activity.⁴⁷ Those merchants and traders banished by the Sultan found a relatively safe haven in Kordofan. They would also find a far less restricted system of trade routes.

The means by which the Fur Sultans controlled the merchants, fuggara and nobility was through a process of playing each off against the other. Rather than isolating themselves from the economy and political life of the state the Sultans of Dar Fur took the offensive and offered position and power to the highest bidder. The winners of these positions formed a small group of elites who had no formal power or position within the context of the older hierarchy. They did, however, because of their ties to the

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.273.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, for currency see: pp.220,331-332; for the grain market see: 292; for the head of merchants see: 232-233,243-245; for control over revenue and taxing merchants see: 342-344,200-207,211.

sultan, exert influence within the palace and play an active role in the political intrigue that swirled around the Sultan and his court.

O'Fahey uses the narratives of al-Tunisi, who visited Dar Fur in 1803-1811, and Gustav Nachtigal, who visited the Sultanate in 1870, to show the two tiered nature of the state's hierarchy. One body he calls the "older Sudanic Kingship hierarchy" and the other smaller body which operated within it the political elite.⁴⁸ The latter consisted of "fuggara, merchants, slaves, soldiers and courtiers."⁴⁹ Soldiers and slaves were able to move into high office within the state as exemplified by Muhammad Kurra and Adam Bosh.⁵⁰ As for the holymen, the land charters of the Fur Sultans discussed above show the position of the fuggara within the state. Also well documented is their role in the mediation of disputes over land rights and the succession crises which shook the royal

⁴⁸ O'Fahey, State and Society, p.36; R.L.Hill, A Biographical Dictionary of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, (Oxford, 1951) pp.277-278, 289.

⁴⁹ O'Fahey, State and Society, pp.29-37.

⁵⁰ ibid., pp.41-43; R.L.Hill, A Biographical Dictionary, pp.263. Muhammad Kurra's free or slave origins are in question but, his role as military commander, Governor of Kordofan and king maker are well established. Adam Bosh's origins as a slave are clear as are his powerful role in the Fur state as a royal merchant, and second man in the Sultanate.

In dealing with each element of the new political elite the Sultans placed merchants, fuggara, soldiers and slaves in positions of power, prestige and wealth which could only be maintained if the state and its civil society continued to function uninterrupted. In so doing they created a parallel hierarchy to off-set the power of the titled nobility of Dar Fur and made themselves the arbiters of disputes among the elite. Along with developing a new political elite the Sultans also used campaigns in Kordofan and the western border areas of the state as well as the large state-sponsored slave hunts to occupy the nobility's time and energy.

In Kordofan the impact of merchant\state relationships in the Nile Valley and Dar Fur led to favorable conditions for commercial development. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the religious/merchant class controlled the machinery of exchange within the heartland of the Sultanate of Sinnar and were on the way to similar control in Dar Fur. Within Kordofan, a buffer zone never under the same strong control as the heartland of these states, it was even easier for control to pass into the hands of the new middle class.

After 1715 several factors combined to make El-Obeid and Bara the primary commercial centers west of the Nile. It was after this date that the Funj state was convulsed by

a series of political crises and civil wars. As a result, exploitation of the population became more arbitrary and violent. Nile Valley merchants took the opportunity to fleece both producers and buyers of scarce food and goods. Nobles often supported some merchants by destroying their competitors and then extorted funds and goods from their former clients. Disgruntled merchants who had had their businesses ruined looked for other places, most often to the west, to rebuild their trading companies.

The same situation confronted cultivators and land holders who had lost their land to the tax collectors of the elite who needed ever increasing amounts of money to finance their fighting men and court intrigues. For these people Kordofan was a place to begin anew. The loss of agricultural labor along the Nile caused by the flight of free born men was made good through the increased use of slave labor. These slaves were often captured and traded eastward by the same men they were to replace.⁵⁵

The chaos caused by the turmoil in the Nile Valley weakened the hold of the Funj over Kordofan. In 1771-72, Hashim b. Isawi became the new sultan of the Mussaba'at, the chief rivals of the Keira lineage for the throne of Dar Fur, who had moved east during the preceding years to establish a rival state in central Kordofan. Hashim forced the Funj

⁵⁵ O'Fahey and Spaulding, Kingdoms, pp.103-104; Spaulding, The Heroic Age, pp.192-194.

to retreat into the Nile Valley and took control of Kordofan. Funj attempts to oust Hashim failed and he was able to hold his position in Kordofan.⁵⁶ During his reign Hashim made alliances with two important groups in central Kordofan, the Danaqla and Shaqla. These riverain groups were primarily merchants who dominated the commerce of the region and had founded the trading towns of El-Obeid and Bara. Al-Tunisi states that at one point Hashim had assembled a mercenary force of 10,000 men from the Danaqla, Shaqla, Kababish and Riziqat.⁵⁷ The ability of Hashim to maintain control of Kordofan for twelve years indicates the extent to which he was able to maintain good relations with the commercial elite of the region.

Initially, the Keira Sultan Tayrab did not object to Hashim's actions but by 1785 he felt compelled to move against his rival. Tayrab's invasion force swept the Mussaba'at out of Kordofan and established Fur control. O'Fahey believes that Tayrab's actions were both economic and political because of Kordofan's gum arabic, ivory, alluvial gold and slaves, all of which passed through the commercial centers of Bara and El-Obeid.⁵⁸ The Fur leadership seems to have realized that in order to control

⁵⁶ E. de Cadalvene and j. de Breuvery, L'Egypte et la Turquie, pp.197-214; R.S.O'Fahey and J.L.Spaulding, "Hashim and the Musabba'at," pp.316-333.

⁵⁷ Al-Tunisi, Voyage au Darfour, p.67.

⁵⁸ O'Fahey, State and Society in Dar Fur, p.131.

Kordofan they would need to establish good relations with the merchants who controlled the region's trade.⁵⁹ Because of the unique set of geographic, political and economic realities present in Kordofan the Sultans of Dar Fur never attempted to control the economy of Kordofan in the ways they did in Dar Fur. The pragmatic policy adopted by their governors appears to have pacified the commercial community and Kordofan remained under their control until the Ottoman invasion of 1820-21.

The size and wealth of Kordofan combined with its active commercial community and close ties to the merchants of the northern Nile Valley trading centers made the creation of a powerful independent state a real possibility. The political instability of the Nile Valley, while not the optimal environment for commerce, reduced the ability of the Funj to exert any kind of effective monopoly control over trade moving through the Northern Nile market towns of Shendi, Berber, Debba and Dongola. The Fur governors, and their troops, increased the security of trade routes between Kordofan and the Nile and initiated good relations with the leaders of the northern riverain kingdoms. As a result the towns of the northern Nile Valley became increasingly prosperous commercial centers which

⁵⁹ I. Pallme, Travels in Kordofan, (London, 1846), pp. 11-16; C. Cuny, Journal de Voyage de Siout a el-Obeid, (Paris, 1863), p. 177; O'Fahey and Spaulding, "Hashim and the Musabba'at." pp. 326-328, 330.

linked the trading centers of El-Obeid and Bara in Kordofan to Egypt, the Red Sea port of Suakin and Ethiopia.⁶⁰ In short, the absence of strong state interference in Kordofan created a political/economic environment within which a prosperous independent state could be founded. The one missing element was a powerful leader who could knit it together and reap the benefits of the commercial community through taxation and control of trade.

A powerful leader of Hashim b. Issawi's character, however, did not arise to exploit the situation that existed within Kordofan. The two most powerful and long tenured Fur governors in Kordofan, Muhammad Kurra and Musallam b. Umar, were accused of attempting to establish an independent kingdom, but they succeeded in convincing the Sultan of their innocence.⁶¹ Muhammad Kurra's ambitions appears to have been focused on the Fur throne and not Kordofan. After playing a major role in the succession crisis following the Sultan Tayrab's death, Muhammad Kurra became one of the most powerful men in Dar

⁶⁰ J. Bruce, Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile in the Years 1768-1773, (Dublin, 1790) pp. 485, 529-530, 536; Burckhardt, Travels in Nubia, pp. 215, 227, 248, 283, 287.

⁶¹ Cadalvene and Breuvery, ii, p. 213; al-Tunisi, p. 128; Nachtigal, pp. 294-295.

Fur because of his influence at court and potential as a king-maker.⁶²

Musallam b. Umar was well aware of his predecessor's near fatal troubles concerning independent action in Kordofan. Much of his tenure was also consumed with thwarting Hashim's attempts to return to Kordofan. Throughout his term as governor of Kordofan he loyally served his Sultan and avoided major confrontations with his masters in El-Fashir. His defense of Dar Fur's eastern possessions led to closer ties with the local merchant and Nile Valley elites.⁶³ The extent of his devotion and the popularity of his policies is evidenced by his death in battle while confronting the Egyptian invasion force outside Bara in 1821. In that battle he led a force composed of merchants and local troops.

The merchant class and its commercial elite thrived in the relatively open and deregulated environment permitted by the new Fur administration. The international import/export trade flourished.⁶⁴ Burckhardt asserted that "the very

⁶² Cadalvene and Breuvery, L'Egypte et la Turquie, pp.211-214; Al-Tunisi, Voyage au Darfour, pp.63-72, 93-116; Nachtigal, Sahara and Sudan, pp.294-301, 329; O'Fahey and Spaulding, "Hashim and the Musabba'at", pp.330-331; O'Fahey and Spaulding, Kingdoms in the Sudan, pp.93-95.

⁶³ On Musallam's actions relating to the Nile Valley see: Spaulding, The Heroic Age, pp.404-411.

⁶⁴ A. Bjorkelo, "From King to Kashif: Shendi in the Nineteenth Century," PH.D. Thesis, (Bergan, 1984), p.33. In his study of the town of Shendi Bjorkelo states that in the period from 1772-1814 Shendi reemerged, after a period of

life of these countries is commerce."⁶⁵ Merchants exchanged beads, spices, cloth and arms for slaves from the Nuba mountains, Ostrich feathers and ivory from the southwest, and gum arabic from the qoz areas of central Kordofan. At the regional and local level iron, salt, grain, slaves and vegetables moved over Kordofan's trade routes.⁶⁶

The commercial community in Kordofan consisted almost exclusively of a trading diaspora who considered their true home to be in the Nile Valley or elsewhere outside Kordofan. The close ties between El-Obeid's and Bara's merchants and their relatives in Shendi, al-Matamma, Berber, Old Dongola and Ad-Dabba facilitated the operation

steady decline, as an important trading center. Much of the impetus for its revival came from its contacts with the thriving commercial community in Kordofan.

⁶⁵ Burckhardt, Travels, p.289.

⁶⁶ Burckhardt provides a detailed account of the wide variety of goods which passed through the market centers of the Sudan. Among these are: beads of Indian agate, paper, old copper, marcasite, sunbul (spikenard), mahlab (aromatic plant), sandal wood, cloves, salt, antimony, dates, beans, coffee, silk, cambric, Indian cottons, linen, hardware, slaves, tamarind, gum arabic, natron, white nutmeg, leather, ropes and sacks, water skins, feathers, dhufur. In addition the centers also served as markets for pack animals and food stuffs for the caravans moving in and out of the region. Burckhardt, pp.214, 220, 260-261, 267-268, 285-291. The salt, vegetable and grain trade at the regional level remains unstudied but its importance is hinted at in the sources. Burckhardt says salt was very expensive in shendi. Burckhardt, Travels in Nubia, p.260. In a report from 1908 Watkiss Lloyd noted the potential for salt production, both past and present, in Northern Kordofan. Sudan Archive, Durham 283/9/37-64.

of trade between Kordofan and outside markets. Al-Tunisi, Browne and Burckhardt noted the cosmopolitan nature of these merchant communities and also the intense rivalry between the various merchant groups found in the market place.⁶⁷ The rival groups appear to have been differentiated by their ability or inability to obtain capital and credit and therefore power in the market. In many cases these groups organized and identified themselves through the use of ethnic affiliation. Burckhardt noted specific differences in the credit levels and sums of working capital available to various groups of merchants in the Sudan. Merchants from Suakin, called collectively "hadariba", had the highest credit levels on the eastern routes while the Dar Fur merchants had that distinction on the western trade routes.⁶⁸ Burckhardt noted that the merchants of Kordofan would often withdraw from the market in order to await the arrival of merchants from Suakin and the possibility of higher prices for their commodities. He also said that Egyptian merchants and independent North African merchants were especially angered by this tactic as they were often shut out of the market by richer competitors.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Al-Tunisi, Voyage au Darfour, pp.48-54,154; Browne, Travels in Egypte, Syria, and Africa, pp.271-273,324; Burckhardt, Travels in Nubia, pp.260,264,272-274,285-287.

⁶⁸ Burckhardt, Travels in Nubia, pp.285-286.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, pp.285-286.

The merchants of Kordofan and their Nile Valley associates were also more deeply involved in a currency based economy than in the regions to the west such as Dar Fur. Al-Tunisi and Browne noted a general absence of coins in commercial operations in Dar Fur, while Burckhardt found them in general use among Kordofan and Nile Valley merchants. Burckhardt even reported that a counterfeiting scheme was uncovered by the local authorities in Shendi during his stay in that market town.⁷⁰ Bjorkelo's research on Shendi reveals that the market had wholesalers, retailers and subgroups which worked in specialty items.⁷¹ The sophistication of market operations in the region is further alluded to by Brown's observations of Kordofan's merchants. He noted that the commercial community Kordofan had an established set of bankruptcy procedures which were set in motion whenever a merchant failed to honor a contract because of a shortage of capital. Merchants who became insolvent faced a commission of fuggara assembled to examine the matter. If the merchant was declared innocent of fraud or gross incompetence he was not punished. If on

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, pp.257-258 ,272-273. Burckhardt found the most common coin in circulation was the spanish Carlos 111 and Carlos 1111. The Carlos 111 being 1/6 less valuable than the Carlos 111. The counterfeiter was found stamping an extra "1" on coins so as to increase their value in the market.

⁷¹ Bjorkelo, "From King to Kashif", pp.50-52.

the other hand he was found guilty of fraud or incompetence:

the debtor is regarded as culpable, and disgrace and ignominy are adjudged him. The least esteemed part of his wife's dress (called kanfus, by which her nakedness is concealed) is by general consent affixed to his neck, he is mounted on an ass, with his face to the tail, and thus led round the town or hamlet, attended by an executioner or other base person, who loudly proclaims the cause of this disgrace.⁷²

The individual commercial towns which grew at the junctions of major trade routes each possessed their own unique character. The towns of the far west in Dar Fur enjoyed maximum security but labored under the heavy hand of royal control. The Nile Valley centers encountered less regulation but they fought each other and outside interests, both local and foreign, to maintain their independence and high profits. Kordofan's merchants may well have had the best of both worlds.

The Ottoman invasion of 1821, however, shattered the control of the merchants over the machinery of exchange. They did not sit and remain idle observers, however, and immediately began the process of regaining control of the machinery of exchange and the power which came with that control.

⁷² Browne, Travels in Egypte, Syria and Africa, p.353.

Chapter 2

KORDOFAN AND THE EARLY TURKIYYA: 1821-1860

Conquest and New Administrative Structure¹

In August of 1821 Muhammad Ali's troops, under the command of his son-in-law, Muhammad Bey Khusraw al-Daramali (the Deftadar), entered Kordofan. En route they clashed with the Fur governor Musallam near the town of Bara. Musallam's force consisted of regular troops, local levees, and soldiers from the commercial communities of Bara and El-Obeid. The invaders were initially hard pressed but, through the effective use of fire arms and artillery, eventually routed the Sudanese and killed Musallam. The invaders encountered no further resistance and Muhammad Bey Khusraw set up his administrative headquarters at El-Obeid. The Turkiyya imposed on the population of Kordofan a regime more powerful and organized than had previously existed. The new regime demonstrated its power to crush overt

¹ R.L. Hill, Egypt in the Sudan, (London, 1959), p.1; J.L. Spaulding, "Slavery, Land Tenure and Social Class in the Northern Turkish Sudan," International Journal of African Historical Studies, 15, 1 (1982):fn.1. Both Hill and Spaulding discuss the difficulties of nomenclature during the period under study. In order to follow Sudanese usage and also the recent works produced on the nineteenth-century Sudan this period will be referred to as the Turkiyya Turco-Egyptian government and its non-sudanese representatives as Turks.

3: THE EGYPTIAN SUDAN

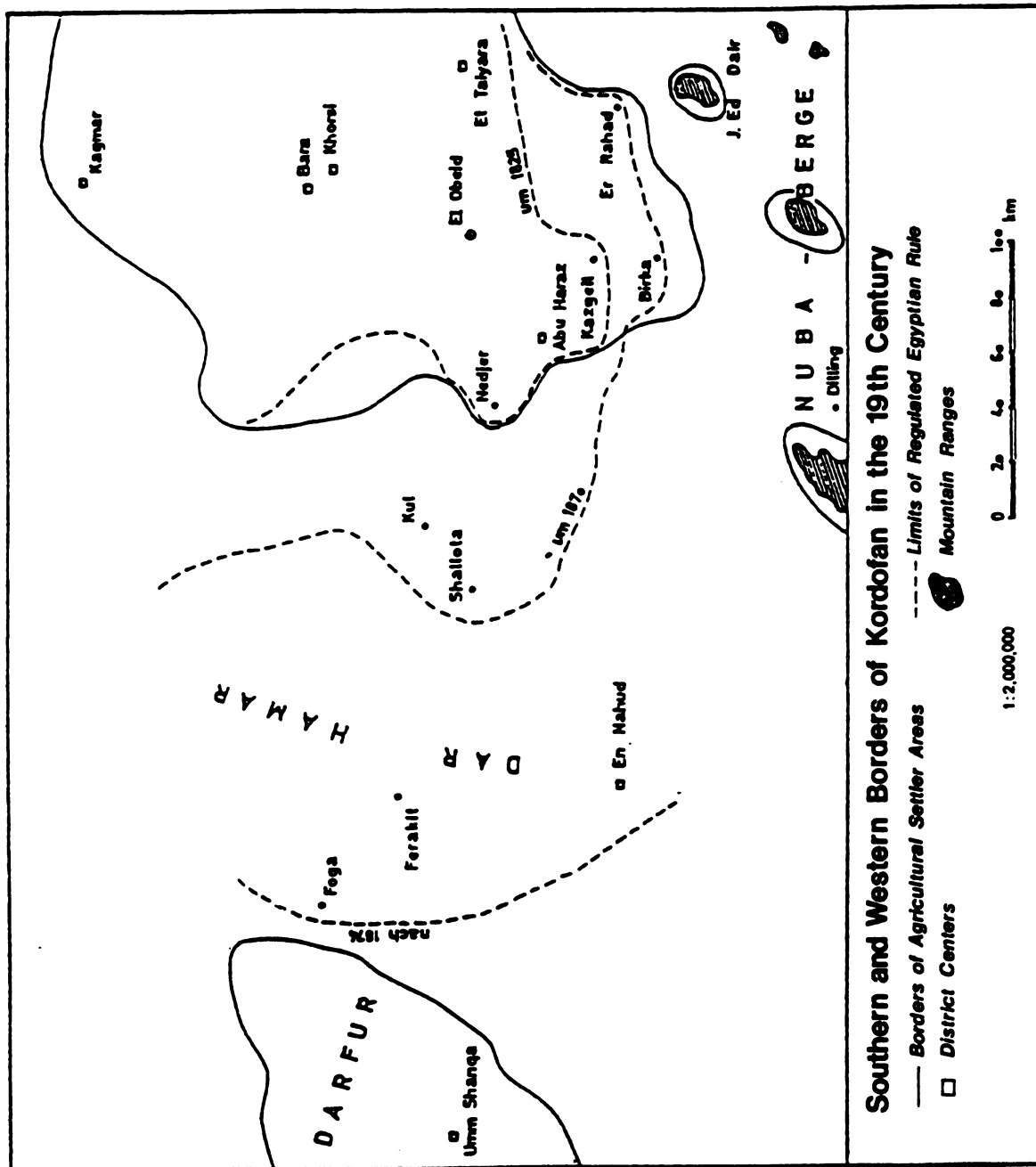
----- Approximate Provincial Boundaries

Dates of Acquisition given in brackets

The map illustrates the Egyptian Sudan with the following details:

- Regions and Acquisition Dates:**
 - DARFUR** (1874)
 - KORDOFAN** (1821)
 - SENNAR** (1821)
 - FASHODA** (1863)
 - EQUATORIAL PROVINCE** (1871)
- Towns and Locations:**
 - Wadi Halfa
 - Al-Urdi (Dongola)
 - Marawi
 - Dabba
 - Kurt
 - Chubush
 - Berber
 - El Damer
 - Meremmas
 - Shendi
 - Karari
 - Omdurman
 - Abu Dilayq
 - Rhartoum
 - Wad Medania
 - Bara
 - El Obeid
 - Aba
 - Scnnar
 - GALLABAT
 - Qallabat
 - Rusayris
 - Fazughita
 - efashoda
 - Lado
 - Condokoro
 - L. Abaya
 - L. Victoria
- Geographical Features:**
 - RED SEA**
 - SIKKIN** (1865)
 - MASSAWA** (1865)
 - TAKA** (1840)
 - BAHR AL-GHAZAL** (1873)
- Scale of Miles:** 0, 100, 200, 300, 400

Source: Holt



Source: Born

opposition and its willingness to use its military power during the bloody suppression of the 1822-23 revolt.²

The administration of the newly conquered territory of Kordofan differed in some aspects from the system imposed on the neighboring Nile Valley. Turco-Egyptian officers posted to Kordofan quickly realized that the size of the region would require additional troops to properly administer it. They also hired 500 soldiers from the former Fur garrison. These men proved especially useful in helping the new conquerors in locating villages and indicating the best routes along which to travel in order to raid for slaves.³ The vastness of the region compelled the Turks to concentrate their troops and administrators at strategically located outposts such as the goz zone towns of Bara, El-Obeid, Abu Haraz, Tayyara and Khorsi.⁴ Each town contained a government post with administrative staff and garrison. Their hinterlands provided grain, sesame, gum

² Correspondance Consulaire et Commerciale, Alexandrie, volume 21, 22 Dec. and 6 Fev. 1821; A. Peney, "Le Sennar, Les Turcs au Soudan," Revue d'Ethnologie, 1, (1882) 379-404; I. Pallme, Travels in Kordofan, (London, 1844), pp. 16-25; H. Deherain, Le Soudan Sous Mehemet Ali, (Paris, 1898), pp. 72, 88-89; F. Cailliaud, Voyage a Meroe, (Paris, 1823), pp. 315-6; Hill, Egypt in the Sudan, pp. 13-18; Anders Bjorkelo, "From King to Khashif: Shendi in the nineteenth-Century," PH.D. Thesis, (Bergan: 1984), pp. 26-28, 157-158.

³ A. Peney, "Le Sennar, Les Turcs au Soudan," p. 401; G. Douin, "Le Penetration," Histoire du Soudan Egyptien, (Cairo, 1944), pp. 302-303.

⁴ T. Kotschy, "Reise von Chartum nach Kordofan, 1839," Petermanns Mittheilungen, Ergantung II, (1862) p. 13.

arabic, ostrich feathers and secure bases from which to launch raids southward to obtain slaves and ivory and search for gold.⁵

From these bases the khashif, a captain of the 1st Regiment, governed his district and his tax collectors, backed by troops, gathered taxes from all within their reach.⁶ The transition to the direct administration of the central qoz districts by khashifs undercut the positions of traditional leaders within these districts. Unlike their more nomadic counterparts on the edges of the province they were not able to maintain their independence for a price. The imposition of direct rule also shifted the decision making over land allocation from local leaders to the khashifs. In the oasis areas of the central zone this change offered local diaspora merchants the opportunity to obtain land at the expense of local groups.

Direct control also created the need for more extensive account keeping. During an inspection tour of Sudan in 1839 Muhammad Ali Pasha, appalled at poor record keeping, ordered 40 Coptic clerks and their families sent

⁵ Hill, Egypt, p.12; I Pallme, Travels in Kordofan, pp.2-5; Hill states that in the initially the administrative headquarters for Khashifs were "Bara, Taiyara, and Khorsi." By the time of Pallme's visit 18 years later the principal kashifs had expanded from the initial three to five with the addition of Ketshmar (Kajmar) and Abu Haraz.

⁶ T.Kotschy, "Reise von Chartum nach Kordofan, 1839," pp.12-13; Pallme, Travels in Kordofan, pp.28-29,37-39.

from Egypt to reinforce the administrative bureaucracy. The clerks instituted a school for the training of their sons in the bureaucratic arts, and the government recruited the graduates for government service in El-Obeid and its environs. These Coptic families also became merchants and obtained land in the better watered areas.⁷

The new government also used local leaders to control its more remote areas.⁸ In the case of the Kababish, the Deftardar quickly realized that they controlled the routes which connected Egypt and Kordofan. He suggested that Muhammad Ali send a letter to their head shaykh, Salem, and attempt to win them over to the service of Egypt.⁹ The letter was indeed sent and the Kababish gave the new regime little trouble. The other shaykys who received the aman, paid a yearly tribute to the central administration and governed their people and lands with little or no interference from the governor or his khasifs. They and

⁷ Nur, Muhammad Salih, "A Critical edition of the Memoirs of Yusif Mikha'il with an Introduction, Translation, Notes, and commentary," Ph.D. Thesis, (London, 1962), pp. 7-8, 21-25; R.L.Hill, On the Frontiers of Islam, (Oxford, 1970), pp.

⁸ Deherain, Le Soudan Egyptien, p.152; Pallme, Travels, pp.114-115. Pallme recorded the following "Arab" leaders as tribute payers in the latter half of the 1830s:

Giomme Hababin
El Hawasma
Messeria
Kabbabeesh

Sheikh Abdel Mahmud
Sheikh Musa
Sheikh La Baeid al Nassarie
Sheikh Sale

⁹ Douin, "La Penetration," pp.301-302.

their men also operated as irregulars for the government and conducted raids on groups which had fallen behind in tax or tribute payments.¹⁰

With the exception of the Kababish who occupied the northern desert margins of the province all the other groups lived south, southeast and southwest of the core area controlled by the Turkiyya. The Shaykhs who headed these primarily nomadic groups traded cattle, slaves, honey and butter with the merchants of the towns during the cool season and moved off to more remote regions during the hot season. These nomadic groups did not always have perfect relations with the state and often fled to remote areas when the new regime inflicted unacceptable impositions on them in the form of taxation or confiscation of animals and other property.¹¹ For some of these nomads, however, their attempts to escape were not always a permanent solution to their problems because the infestation of their southern-most pastures by insects

¹⁰ Petherick, Egypt the Soudan and Central Africa, (Edinburgh, 1861), pp. 299, 321; Hill, Biographical Dictionary, p. 15. Petherick observed one of the more colorful of these leaders the Hamar shaykh Abd al-Rahim Bey Salim abu Dugal the leader of the Gharaisiya section of the Hamar. Abd al-Rahim led a raid with 1000 Hamar horsemen along with some Hawazma against the "Seleam" (Selim, White Nile herders) for withholding tribute and returned with thousands of cattle looted from the Selim.

¹¹ G. Thibaut, "Expedition a la recherche des sources du Nil (1839-1840)" (Paris, 1856), p. 21; Ruppel, Reisen in Nubien, Kordofan, und dem petraeischen Arabien, (Frankfort, 1829), pp. 148-9.

during the wet season forced most of these groups back within reach of the government. The governors, aware of this, sent troops to occupy their well sites and await their return.¹²

The importance of the local elites was evident during the 1839 inspection tour of Muhammad Ali Pasha. Local leaders from Kordofan travelled to Khartoum and lodged complaints against corrupt government officials and called for a rise in the freight rates paid to local people engaged in the transport trade. In response Muhammad Ali boosted freight rates and dismissed or transferred the governor, all of his immediate staff, nine other officers and a number of Coptic clerks.¹³ The continued importance of local rulers allowed the commercial elites to enjoy, and eventually benefit from, a degree of maneuver not permitted their colleagues in the Nile Valley.

Demographic Factors in the Early Turkiyya

The physical size and environmental composition of Kordofan dictated to a large degree the distribution of the

¹² Pallme, Travels in Kordofan, pp.118-120, C.Dubois, "Miel et Sucre en Afrique Orientale, 1830-1870: Complementarite ou Concurrence," International Journal of African Historical Studies, 22,3, (1989) pp.454-446,449.

¹³ Pallme, Travels in Kordofan, pp.42,138-139. One of the principal members of the delegation from Kordofan was Shaykh Salem of the Kababish. It was his people who received the greatest benefit from the increased freight hauling rates.

population found in the province. The towns and core area of the province came to be dominated by "non-Kordofanese" peoples, including Turks, North Africans, Copts, Levanters, and Northern Nile Valley Sudanese who worked as soldiers, administrators, freebooters and merchants. The "native" Kordofanese populated the hinterlands of the towns and areas outside of the province's core. They looked no further than their local elites for leadership and protection. The invasion, however, increased the numbers of people moving into the core region of the province and escalated the pressure for goods and services on adjacent producers. This pattern developed slowly throughout the period from the conquest to 1860 and had far reaching effects in subsequent years.

The policies of the Turkish administration spurred the existing tradition of emigration from the Nile Valley to Kordofan. Spaulding's analysis of the Turkiyya's impact on the political economy of the Nile Valley clearly sets out the reasons for and consequences of this emigration westward.¹⁴ Spaulding concentrates on the ways in which the Turkish taxation system and judicial system affected land tenure and facilitated the development of the growing bourgeois class at the expense of small scale land owners and farmers.

¹⁴ The following overview of conditions in the Nile Valley is based on Spaulding, "Slavery, Land Tenure and Social Class", pp.1-21.

The Turks implemented a new system of taxation which demanded payment in coin rather than in kind. This innovation intensified an on-going process whereby land acquired a monetary value. This situation benefited those with access to money since they could obtain tax-delinquent properties by paying the arrears. Property holders attempting to avoid the loss of land were forced into mortgage arrangements with persons willing to pay back taxes. While the owners had the right in theory to redeem their lands, Spaulding has discovered no such instances. He has, however, found ample evidence that the inability of land owners to meet the terms of their mortgages resulted in the loss of property.

Spaulding's research has also shown that the application of Islamic law to property disputes and inheritance grew under the Turkish administration. As a result, small holdings along the Nile became increasingly fractionalized, and less capable of providing the means of a livelihood for the owners. These parcels became the prime targets of land speculators and landowners wishing to obtain larger holdings to exploit through the use of slave labor. The intensified agriculture allowed the owners to extract higher profits and more cash with which to buy more land.

The repercussions of this situation reached into Kordofan. The displaced Nile Valley inhabitants moved west

in search of a new livelihood; the new wealth generated by slave labor agriculture was invested in western trading ventures; and the demand for slaves increased. From this situation grew an army of small merchants who manned the infrastructure of Kordofan's expanding commercial machinery of exchange.

The nerve center of Kordofan's commerce was the town of El-Obeid. Its choice as the administrative center by the Turks was a natural one. It was a crossroads for the trade routes from the Nuba Mountains, Dar Fur and the Nile Valley. It had also served as the administrative center for governors sent from Sinnar and Dar Fur. It was also the interim headquarters of Hashim b. Isawi.¹⁵ The city's commercial importance, which grew steadily during the eighteenth-century, regularly drew foreigners to the town and from these sources a fairly accurate picture of the city can be developed. After the conquest, one of the first European visitors was Edouard Ruppell who arrived in 1824. He reported that El-Obeid consisted of three sections or quarters. "Wadi Naghele" housed the market and merchants, "al-Orta" was the fortified military and administrative area, and "Wadi Safiya" comprised the residence of the Fur.

¹⁵ James Bruce, Travels to Discover the Sources of the Nile, (London, 1790), A. Murray, Life and Writings of James Bruce, (Edinburgh, 1808) 425; Cadalvene and Breuvery, L'Egypte et la Turquie vol.II; R.S.O'Fahey and J.L.Spaulding, Hashim and the Musabba'at," Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 35,2, (1972), pp.316-333.

Ruppell estimated the population at 5000, eighty percent of whom resided in al-Orta and Wadi Naghele.¹⁶

While his accuracy is doubtful the observations of subsequent visitors indicate that the town grew and expanded substantially in the period between 1820 and 1860.¹⁷ The evidence at hand would indicate that approximately 20,000 to 25,000 people lived in the city and its immediate environs. In the period after 1825 the city witnessed a substantial jump in population consisting of a substantial diversity of ethnic groups. In addition to the Fur, Nile Valley peoples such as Danagla, Ja'aliyn and Shaqia the city was home to Turks with their "Mogghreban" (North African cavalry), Copts, Nuba, "Takruri" (West African pilgrims), and assorted Eastern Mediterranean and European traders and visitors.¹⁸

¹⁶ Eduard Ruppell, Reisen in Nubien, Kordofan, und dem Petraischen Arabien, pp.135-138.

¹⁷ Population estimates from 1837 to 1858: 30,000 (1837, T. Holroyd), 20,000 (1837, J. Russegger), 12,000 (1838, I. Pallme), 20,000 (1848, A.E. Brehm), 23,000-25,000 (1858, J. Lejean). See: Holroyd, "Notes on a Journey to Kordofan in 1836-7," Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, Vol.9 (1839), p.175; Russegger, Reise, p.149; Pallme, Travels in Kordofan, p.258-9; A.E. Brehm, Reiseskizzen aus Nord-Ost-Afrika, (Jena, 1862): p.302; J. Lejean, "Voyage Au Kordofan," Le Tour du Monde, Jan., (1863): p.25; Martin Born, Zentralkordofan: Bauern und Nomaden in Savannengebieten des Sudan, (Marburg, 1965) p.49.

¹⁸ Pallme, Travels, pp.258-259; Russegger, Reise, p.148; Baron J.W. von Muller, "Extracts from Notes Taken During His Travels in Africa, 1847-9," Proceedings of the Royal Geographical society, Vol.20 (1850), p.282; J. Petherick, Egypt, the Sudan, and Central Africa, p.300.

The Economic Impact of the New Regime

From a commercial viewpoint the trade centers of El-Obeid and Bara retained similar, albeit expanded, functions as in the previous century. They continued as the home towns and bases of operations for the commercial community which operated the trading network between the African export producing areas, the Red Sea, Indian Ocean and Mediterranean economic systems.¹⁹

Egypt's conquest of Northern Kordofan and subsequent imposition of an imperial monopoly over trade, however, altered the political economy of the region and deprived the local commercial community of control over critical components within the machinery of exchange. The new administration was primarily interested in minerals and slaves but also extended its monopoly over the trade in gum arabic, ostrich feathers and ivory.²⁰

The initial restrictions placed on trade in the immediate wake of the conquest, especially on commerce in slaves, threw Kordofan into an economic crisis. When

¹⁹ C.C.C., volumes 22-35, 1821-1860, passim; Pallme, Travels in Kordofan, pp.279-304. The traveler Pallme was a merchant who undertook his journey into Kordofan with the express purpose of examining commercial conditions there. He is therefore an unusually fine source of information on trade and commerce.

²⁰ A. Peney, "Le Sennar, Les Turcs au Soudan," pp.402-405; Pallme, Travels in Kordofan, pp.29,37-41,225-226,279-304; Douin, "La Penetration," pp.305-308.

Muhammad Ali realized that the stranglehold he had initiated over the slave trade was ruining the larger economy of the province he amended his earlier orders. The relaxed conditions of monopoly instituted in 1824, however, still caused critical changes within the commercial operations of the province.²¹ The commercial community was initially unable to mount a successful counter-attack but within a relatively short period of time began to regain control of the market place. This was accomplished by gaining access to low and middle level positions within the province's administration and combining these posts with commercial activity. These posts enabled them to protect themselves, family members and business partners.

The monopoly on trade imposed by Muhammad Ali followed the model used by the Sultans of Istanbul for centuries. European powers had long fought to break this barrier to free trade within the Empire. In 1838 they accomplished that goal when the Ottoman Sultan signed the Ponsonby treaty with Great Britain which opened the entire empire to free trade. Egypt officially followed the terms of the

²¹ Douin, "La Penetration," pp.306-308; Douin states that: "Ainsi les restrictions apportees au commerce des esclaves risquaient de jeter le Kordofan dans une crise economique." Also see: Ahmed abdel-Rahim Mustafa, "The Breakdown of the Monopoly System in Egypt after 1840," in, Holt, Modernization and Social Change in Egypt, (London, 1968), pp.292.

treaty but de facto continued its monopoly in a modified form.²²

To Muhammad Ali's mind, however, the Sudan was not Egypt and he worked hard to maintain his control over trade there. The viceroy ordered a heavy increase in the export duties on selected items and monopolized all transport, especially on the Nile.²³ Muhammad Ali's refusal to comply fully with the terms of the treaty rested on his claim to have conquered the Sudan with his own money and troops. He reasoned that the Sudan was his personal domain and, therefore, did not fall under the realm of the concessionary treaty signed by the Ottoman Sultan. As the viceroy's personal property all of the receipts and profits derived from the monopoly flowed directly into the royal treasury, a state of affairs which continued until the death of Muhammad Ali.²⁴ The European Consuls in Cairo

²² C.C.C., Alexandrie, volume 28, dispatch no.88, 30/Oct./1838; Mustafa, "The Breakdown of the Monopoly System in Egypt After 1840," p.295.

²³ C.C.C., Alexandrie, Volume 28, dispatch no.141, 1/Sept/1839.

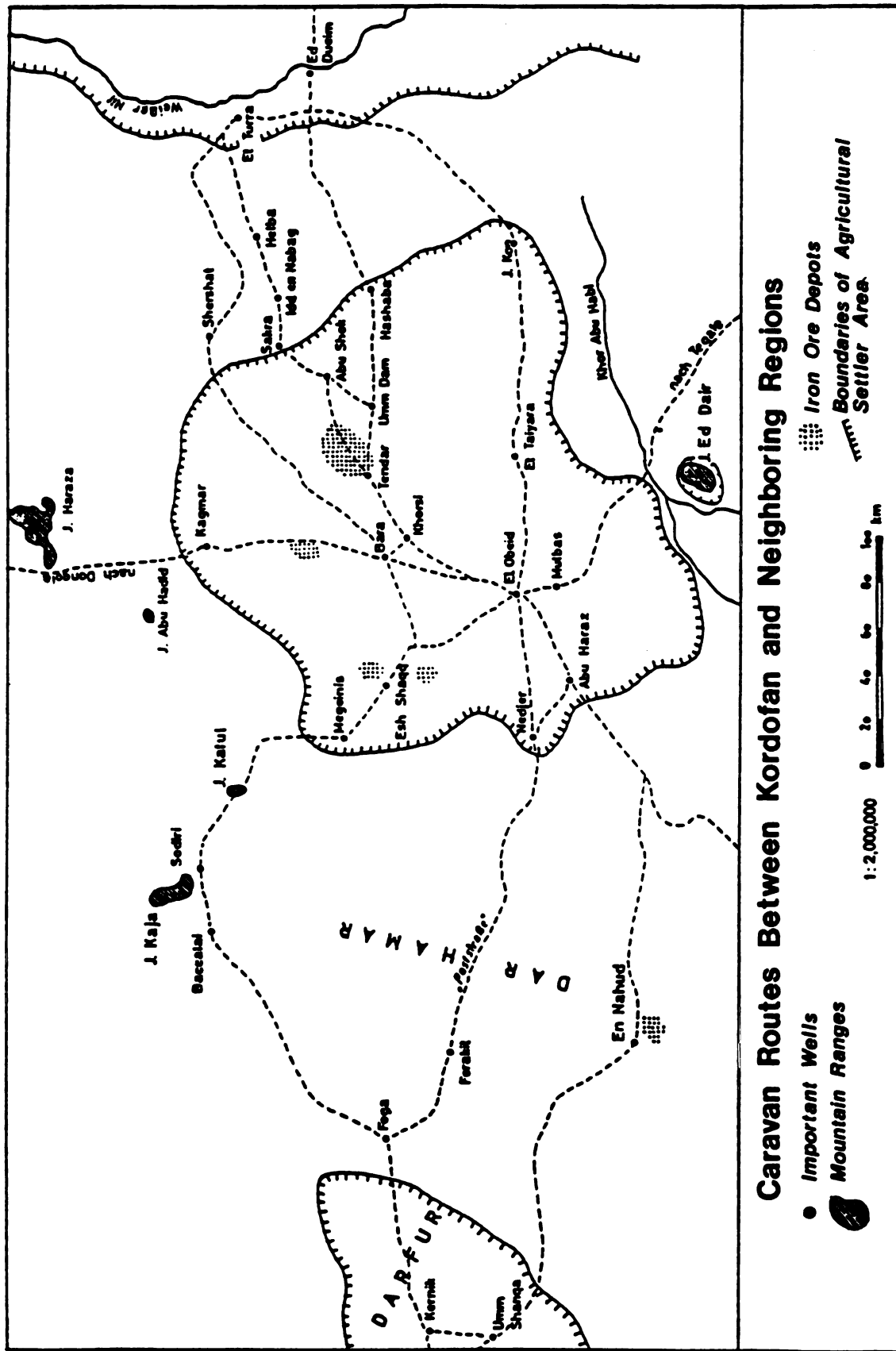
²⁴ C.C.C., Caire, volume 31, dispatch no.15, 10/Feb/1844; dispatch no.14, 16/Jan/1845; Caire, volume 32, dispatch no.20, 16/Jan/1845, see enclosed "Rapport" of 10/Jan/1843. A French report from 1836 calculated the amount of revenue realized by Muhammad Ali through his use of the monopoly laws at 11,500,000 francs. The loss of some of this revenue from the implementation of the Ponsonby treaty in 1838 undoubtedly hardened the Vice-roy's resolve to exclude the Sudan from the provisions of the treaty for as long as possible. C.C.C., s.l., volume 26, dispatch no.247, 16/Aug/1836.

received a steady stream of complaints from merchants operating in the Nile Valley and Kordofan concerning the damage this state of affairs caused their commercial ventures. The Consuls in turn protested to the Viceroy and his ministers against the hindrance to free trade caused by the monopoly. In 1842, bowing to the pressure of the European powers, the Viceroy ordered the monopoly ended.²⁵

Merchants in the Sudan initially welcomed the end of the monopoly but quickly found the order nothing but a propaganda ploy to mollify the Consuls. Merchants complained that officials in the Sudan were under orders from Cairo to continue the monopoly by any means possible and to continue sending the proceeds to the Vice-roy.²⁶ Restrictions on trade in the Sudan remained in force,

²⁵ The announcement was published as follows:
 "Avis au commerce: Le public est prevenue que dupris les orders par son Altese le Vice-roi, le 22 Gilhigge 1257 (3 Fev.1842) a son excellence le Pasha goveneur du Sennar et le 25 Gilhigge 1257 (6 Fev.1842) au conseil surpreme prive qu'a partir d aujour'hui le commerce du sene, dl'ivoire de la gomme, des peanux et du henne est libre."
 Alexandrie le 25 Mars 1842
 (signe) Boghos Youssouf
 Enclosed in: C.C.C, Alexandrie, volume 29, dispatch no.18, 6/avril/1842.

²⁶ Peney, "Le Sennar," pp.404; C.C.C., Caire, volume 31, dispatch no.15, 10/Feb/1844; dispatch no.14, 29/Oct/1845; F.O. 195/200, Barnett to Canning, 6/April/1842; F.O. 78/708, no.49, Murray to Palmerston, 10/Aug./1847. The Viceroy opened trade of Sudanese commodities to all but retained in his hands the right to set export duties and transport fees. Also see: Mustafa, "Breakdown of the Monopoly System," pp.299-300.



Source: Born

albeit less stringently, until the death of the viceroy in 1849.

Kordofan's Commercial Community

The commercial community of Kordofan was a heterogeneous one in its ethnic composition, status and intra-market functions. The stereotypical jallabi (pl. jallaba) of the nineteenth century Sudan was, and remains until today, defined as an itinerant petty trader.²⁷ These men, often operating with very small amounts of capital, traveled the length and breadth of the countryside. The arabic root j l b indicates a person with the ability to bring or import goods. Terence Waltz and Anders Bjorkelo commented that the term jellaba had formally been reserved for caravan merchants who plied the trade routes between Egypt, Sinnar and Dar Fur. Waltz has found contracts in Egypt from the late sixteenth century which detail mercantile arrangements (commenda contracts) between Egyptian merchants (tujjar, sing. tajir) and jallaba traveling to the Sudan.

Waltz's definition of jellaba as "merchants who transported goods between Egypt and the interior, either on

²⁷ This definition has undergone modification in its meaning especially during the nineteenth century when European writers used the word almost exclusively to denote slave traders. In this study the term is used in its broader definition of a trader who carries on his business by dealing in a wide variety of import and export commodities.

their own account or on that of an associate" holds true in the nineteenth century but with an additional degree of meaning.²⁸ That additional element is offered by Bjorkelo, who indicates that the term was increasingly used in the nineteenth century to describe any commercial person operating in the Sudan.²⁹ The increased use of the term *jallaba* to indicate a trader or merchant coincided with the reduction in use of another commonly used term, *khawaja*. This term which has the alternative meaning of "foreigner" had been used within the Sinnar Sultanate to denote merchants.³⁰ The accounts of European travelers in Kordofan confirm this evolving usage, although they tended to further muddy the meaning of the word by using *jellaba* to indicate a slave trader.

Kordofan's merchant community used a distinctive vocabulary to define the status and particular areas of operation of its members. A large scale merchant was referred to as *khafir* (pl. *khubara*) or *tajir* (pl.

²⁸ Terence Waltz, Trade Between Egypt and Bilad as-Sudan, 1700-1820, (Cairo, 1978), pp. 71-72; also see Terence Waltz, "Trading into the Sudan in the Sixteenth Century," Annales Islamologiques, Vol. 15, (1979), pp. 211-233.

²⁹ Anders Bjorkelo, "From King to Kashif: Shendi in the Nineteenth Century," pp. 216-222.

³⁰ Bruce, Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, pp. 358-360.

tuijar).³¹ Bjorkelo's research on Shendi found the lower echelons of the community there divided into the following categories:

simsar (pl. samasra), a broker who worked within the market and negotiated buying and selling between merchants.

dallal (pl. dallalin), a crier or auctioneer who might move about in a market attempting to gain higher bids for slaves and other commodities on the behalf of another merchant.

sabbabi (pl. sababa), a small scale trader who exchanged market goods for foodstuffs from surrounding villages which were in turn sold wholesale or retail in the market.

tashshashi (tashshasha), a small scale merchant who specialized in spices.

musabbabi (pl. musabbabin), a small scale itinerate peddler who moved between towns and villages selling and bartering a wide variety of goods.³²

The same terms were current in the commercial community in Kordofan. Cadalvene and Breuvene, during their visit to El-Obeid in 1831, lived in the house of a khafir named "Hadjî Ambar" a native of Ethiopia, leading merchant of the town and witness to the Turco-Egyptian invasion.³³ Pallme's description of the El-Obeid market includes references to "public criers" (dallal, pl. dallalin) and brokers (simsar pl. samasra). The dallalin he observed hawked a wide variety of articles including

³¹ During the nineteenth-century the term kawaja, used in the Sinnar Sultanate to describe big merchants, does not appear to have been used. For a useful discussion of the term Khawaja and its usage in Sinnar see: J.Spaulding, The Heroic Age in Sinnar, pp.104-119.

³² Bjorkelo, "From King to Khashif," p.222.

³³ Cadalvene and Breuvery, Egypte et Nubie, pp.225-228.

slaves. Of the latter he noted "the unfortunate being offered for sale is led about like any other commodity by the crier... who bawls out the price."³⁴ The samasra received a commission to move about the market and carry on a mobile auction of goods owned by the merchant who had hired them.³⁵

Major market centers such as El-Obeid attracted a wide variety of merchants, traders and brokers. The khubara who controlled the large caravans and had commercial connections in Egypt operated as wholesalers. They owned or rented storehouses where they kept large quantities of goods which they sold to smaller wholesalers and retail merchants. Pallme and Petherick noted that the biggest merchants seldom appeared in the market to haggle and sell goods. They were more often found in their homes and employed others to move about the market and carry messages.³⁶ The competition between the khubara could be very intense as each attempted to control sectors of the market and increase their profits on both imports and exports. The khubara sold or traded their goods to smaller merchants, most often called musabbabin (sing. musabbabi) or simply jallaba (sing. jallabi), who formed the majority of the merchants in Kordofan.

³⁴ Pallme, Travels in Kordofan, pp.267-270.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.287.

³⁶ *ibid.*, pp.270-272; Petherick, Egypt, pp.304-305.

The latter moved throughout the countryside bartering and/or purchasing whatever they believed would bring them a profit. Petherick passed through the town of Abu Garad, a customs station at the White Nile and Kordofan province border and observed a market frequented by these petty traders. He saw small dealers who arrived from various directions on donkeys to trade/sell all types of goods.³⁷

On market days the town's population swelled from 300 to 600-700.³⁸ The Kababish arrived atop their camels and horses with animals for sale. The Hassaneyh brought in "cattle, sheep, bullocks laden with durra or eggs, fowls, butter, cotton, thread, and dried vegetables."³⁹ The merchants would set up shop by spreading mats out on the ground covered with coral and amber beads, ivory and bone bracelets, glass bead necklaces, sandals, amulets, small looking glasses, brass trinkets, cotton textiles, Manchester goods, saddles, swords, lances, cowery shells, needles, brass thimbles, hoes, hatchets, cords, bridles, oil, odoriferous herbs, spices, pepper, salt, tobacco, onions and grain.⁴⁰

³⁷ Petherick, Egypt, the Sudan and Central Africa, p.189.

³⁸ Petherick, Egypt the Sudan and Central Africa, p.190.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.190.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp.190-191.

The market at Abu Garad was a meeting place of peoples who exploited different ecological niches and merchants who brought in goods from outside Sudan and other regions within Kordofan. The Manchester goods, swords, needles and glass beads were imported in bulk by khubara while goods such as hoes, salt, tobacco, onions, sandals and amulets originated in Kordofan and passed through a variety of levels in the merchant community before being marketed.⁴¹ The continuous process of exchange in the province provided the livelihood for thousands of musabbabin.⁴² At the level of the musabbabin intra and inter-regional trade could be carried on without direct interference from the government. The state did not have the manpower resources necessary to track and tax all of the exchange transacted at this level of the economy.

The imposition of the government monopoly over trade, however, dealt a severe blow to the upper levels of Kordofan's merchant community. Especially hard hit were the

⁴¹ For lists of import goods see: Pallme, Travels, pp.295, 297-301; Petherick, Egypt, p.210; Waltz, Trade Between Egypt and Bilad as-Sudan, 1700-1820, pp71-72; For the internally produced goods see: Pallme, Travels, pp.47,119,142,166,217-225,253-257,290,294; Baron J.W. von Muller, "Extracts from Notes Taken during his Travels in Africa, 1847-9," p.280; Petherick, Egypt, pp.196,210,220,243,250-251,297-298,305,321.

⁴² For other examples of smaller markets in Kordofan see: Arthur T.Holroyd, "Notes on a Journey to Kordofan, in 1836-7," pp.163-191; Mansfield Parkyns, "The Kabbabish Arabs Between Dongola and Kordofan", Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, Vol.20, (1850), pp.254-275.

khubara who had begun to build up large and profitable commercial operations during the years prior to the invasion of 1821. In the period just before the invasion the Fur controlled the marketplace and caravan routes but Kordofan's merchants had established a profitable working relationship with their Fur overlords. The smooth operation of this system enabled jallaba at all levels to make a living. The merchant community received a severe setback with Muhammad Ali's decision to implement a series of monopolies which created immediate hardships in the short run and the need to adjust markets, alliances and relationships over the longer term.

The adaptability of these merchants was truly remarkable. Notwithstanding the monopoly on trade, Pallme observed that the Danagla were the "most opulent in Kordofan and that almost all of the export trade is in their hands... also the home trade with negroes in the hills".⁴³ His statement should not be taken to indicate that the monopoly had not caused them discomfort but that in relative terms they were still the most well off of Kordofan's people. To maintain themselves at this level merchants shifted the emphasis of their commercial operations to those areas of trade not monopolized by the state.

⁴³ Petherick, Egypt the Sudan and Central Africa, p.117.

The Internal Economy

In part the shift by merchants was possible because the monopoly imposed by the new regime was selective, unlike the older system which had controlled the entire trading economy. Merchants were also able to maintain their business operations because their home base, the towns of El-Obeid and Bara, remained important commercial and administrative centers under the new regime. Merchants sustained themselves during the early years of the monopoly by falling back on intra-regional trade and by supplying the large military and administrative presence in the province. The regular troops stationed in Kordofan required goods for their families, and the commanders of the irregular units which operated on a contract basis were required to supply all of the stores and equipment for their men.⁴⁴ The garrisons and administrators of the Turkiyya created an increased demand for all manner of foodstuffs and domestic items such as salt, spices, cloth, tobacco, beds, woven grass and palm mats and leather bags.⁴⁵

Merchant/producer relationships which pre-dated the conquest, especially the use of sha'il contracts, helped

⁴⁴ Pallme, Travels, pp.199,206; Hill, Egypt, p.27. The military component of the province's economy was not insignificant. Pallme put El-Obeid's garrison at 4000 and there were also barracks located at all of the district administrative centers.

⁴⁵ Pallme, Travels, pp.297-301.

merchants exploit the hinterlands surrounding the towns. One of the most important commodities which lay outside the state monopoly was grain, an item which had a myriad of uses in the local economy. Merchants sold it outright in the towns, used it to bargain for slaves and ivory in the Nuba mountains, and hoarded it in warehouses in anticipation of market and/or producer short falls which would lead to windfall profits and more sha'il contracts. Tax figures from 1838 indicate that the state took in 4000 ardebs of grain from agriculturalists in taxation. This amount of grain would have proved insufficient, however, to have even fed the El-Obeid garrison.⁴⁶ The grain deficit for the garrison and food requirements for the remainder of the population in the city would need to have been purchased directly from producers in the countryside, or from merchant middlemen.

The demand for foodstuffs occupied the attention of large numbers of merchants who augmented wholesale and retail sales with production of cash crops. Merchants, especially the Dongolawi, cultivated wheat, beans, radishes, celery, dill, garlic, lemons, pomegranates, rice,

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.37,205. The troops in Kordofan were paid 20 piasters a day and rations. The sons of regular troops were paid 11 piasters and a daily ration from the day of their birth until they reached the age to enter the ranks as regulars when their pay was raised. The 4000 ardebs of grain works out to 1.8 hectoliters per man per year. The scarcity of food is further indicated by reports that the troops were usually eight months to a year behind in their pay.

figs, onions, okra and dates. They also bought and sold other food commodities found in the market such as butter, honey, tamarind, coffee, green olives, cheese, vinegar, oil, wine and salt. Merissa, the indigenous beer of the region, required, in addition to grain, sugar, nutmeg and cloves for its production. The date brandy made of imported dates was considered very expensive at the price of 9 piasters per bottle.⁴⁷

A selected list of goods and their respective prices gives an idea of the exchange and profit possibilities in the food and non-food sectors of the economy.

coffee	3	pt. per 450 grams (in 1838 18 pt.)
sugar	9	pt. per 450 grams
rice	12	pt. per 1 kg
vinegar	15	pt. per bottle
pepper	12	pt. per 450 grams
soap	12	pt. per 450 grams
ox	35-40	pt.
sheep	15-18	pt.
slave	150-300+	pt. per adult
"	30+	pt. per child under 6 years

All of the items listed or mentioned above could demand higher prices if a drought, bad growing season or trouble along the trade routes caused scarcity in the market. In some districts of the goz zone, groups of agriculturalists were forced to move about in a given area in order to find

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, pp.74-75,80,160,218,266-67,297. Colette Dubois, "Miel et Sucre en Afrique Orientale, 1830-1870: Complementarite ou Concurrence?," pp.454,459. Pallme noted that the prices in the towns were twice, or more, the cost in the country-side for these items.

the water necessary to sustain village life.⁴⁸ The harshness and unpredictability of Kordofan's growing seasons made speculation in food commodities a profitable business strategy.

The oasis town of Bara, north of El-Obeid, was especially well-suited for the growing of vegetables. The water table was such that gardens could be irrigated and production maintained without the necessity of depending on Kordofan's rains. A typical example is given by John Petherick who visited the town in the 1840s. A farmer he met there was a native of Dongola, named Mackau (Makkawi), who about fifty years of age. Makkawi came to Bara as a child when his father and family migrated to Kordofan prior to the conquest of the province by the Deftardar. Makkawi possessed a few slaves and, like most of the occupiers of agricultural basins, supported himself by the produce of his garden. He irrigated his crops during the winter and summer months by means of a shaduf operated by his slaves. In the rainy season he abandoned his one acre garden and cultivated dukhen (millet) on the sandy slopes of the basin. By using the labor of his slaves and all of his family who were capable of labor they produced sufficient grain for their consumption during the

⁴⁸ For the prices quoted see: Pallme, Travels, pp.38-39,270,300-301; for the movement of agricultural villages see: p.88.

coming year.⁴⁹ Since Makkawi was not apparently involved with trade, he would have needed to procure the services of a merchant or sabbabi to sell his produce or buy it for resale in El-Obeid.

Located south of El-Obeid, near the village of Mulbis, there is another oasis area called Ban Jadid. This area contains numerous fruit orchards and grazing for milk cows. Informants in El-Obeid and Mulbis confirm that the Ban Jadid oasis was used during the Turkiyya for food production. Merchant families who trace their settlement in El-Obeid to before the Turkiyya continue to maintain ownership of land within this oasis. Most of the families of Mulbis continue to tend the cows and gardens of the merchants who own them as they have since the days before the Turco-Egyptian invasion. Each family in Mulbis has a particular merchant family to which it is attached and for whom it works. The relationship between these families is not simply one of wage labor but rather an extended family.⁵⁰

The merchants also provided non-food items to the towns and inhabitants of Kordofan: cloth, aromatic woods

⁴⁹ Petherick, Egypt, the Sudan and Central Africa, p.259.

⁵⁰ Interview, Abd al-Rahman Muhammad al-Hassan Siwar al-Dahab, Head of Danagla merchant family, Khartoum, April 1987; Ziyad al-Hassan, Danagla merchant, El-Obeid, February 1987; Abdallah Umar, Bedariyya farmer, Mulbis, February 1987.

and oils (sandalwood, spikenard etc.), glass bottles, blue porcelain plates (English), tobacco, Bohemian and Venetian glass beads, opaque coral, amber (Prussian), cooking pans, razors, camel bells, matches, mirrors, Calicos (English), brass, iron wire and swords.⁵¹ The continually expanding size of the province created increased demands for consumer goods throughout the period of 1821-1860 as more groups of people came into contact with non-indigenous goods. By the late 1830s the merchants of Northern Kordofan had expanded their operations to include the northern-most Nuba hills as well as the Dinka and Shilluk areas to the south and southeast. Some of these merchants took up permanent or semi-permanent residence and married Nuba women. The merchants do not, however, appear to have established bases in the west (the Hamar lands) or southwestern Baqqara areas.⁵²

In part the trade in the Nuba mountains was fueled by the defensive nature of Nuba life. The Baqqara had long raided the Nuba and, as a defensive precaution, the Nuba had moved up into the hills from the more fertile plains. The intensity of these raids had increased as the

⁵¹ Pallme, Travels, pp.49,54,69,91,137,154,160,297.

⁵² *ibid.*, pp.147,160-161,170-173; Pallme's discussion of the major groups in Kordofan and on its frontiers especially the Kabbabish, Baqqara, and Hammar makes no mention of merchants settling among them as he does the Nuba, Shilluk and people of Tagali. Also see: A. Peney, "Daher et Tagala," Revue d'Ethnologie, Vol.2, (1883), pp.520-524.

authority of the Funj and Fur diminished in these regions forcing the Nuba further into the hills. As a result, the Nuba suffered from food shortages more often than if they had stayed on the plains. The merchants of Northern Kordofan would often barter grain for slaves when famine struck a Nuba settlement. Pallme witnessed one such transaction and recorded that 50 handfuls of grain could purchase a child and 3 kantars (135 kilograms) of grain could purchase 8 children.⁵³

Salt provided another non-monopolized, vital commodity which could be profitably traded by merchants. In Kordofan salt is found in the northern reaches of the province, though there were no large scale production centers equivalent to those found around Ntrert and Idjil in the Western Sahel or Kavar in the Central Sahel.⁵⁴ The distance between sources and consumers and limited amounts of salt available made it a high demand item which could

⁵³ *ibid.*, p.159.

⁵⁴ For an excellent study of the importance of salt and its social, economic and political implications see: Paul E. Lovejoy, Salt in the Desert Sun: A History of Salt Production and Trade in the Central Sudan, (Cambridge, 1986). Also of interest is K.S. Vikor, "The Oasis of Salt. The History of Kavar, A Saharan Centre of Salt Production," M.A. Thesis, (Bergen, 1979); Elizabeth McDougal, "The Ijil Salt Industry: Its Role in the Pre-Colonial Economy of the Western Sudan," Ph.D. Thesis, (Birmingham, 1980). At present there is no comparable investigation of salt production and trade for the region east of Lake Chad to the Red Sea.

provide high profits for those who controlled its production, transport and sale.⁵⁵

It was also possible of course for merchants to sell monopolized goods to the government. They could no longer realize the profits enjoyed in former times but could maintain modest profits by using the sha'il system to squeeze the producers more ruthlessly than they had in the past. Among these monopolized goods were slaves, gum arabic, ivory, and ostrich feathers.

The Slave Sector of the Economy

The intense demand for slaves by Muhammad Ali not only precipitated the use of state-sponsored raids. It also prompted government protection for merchants who accompanied troops, transported and traded slaves. In addition to protection Kordofan's merchants were allowed to openly procure weapons and munitions which increased their effectiveness in taking captives. Private participation in the slave trade also received a boost when the monopoly on slave sales was lifted. The support of the state in the slave trade allowed private merchants to become more deeply involved in large scale slave raiding and trading. When the end of official government slave raiding did occur

⁵⁵ S.A.D. 283/9/38-86, Appendix "D", "Report on Kordofan Province" Edited by El-Kaimakam Watkiss Lloyd. pp.51-52; Interviews: Abd al-Jabar, El-Obeid, April 1987; Hamad al-Nil, El-Obeid, May 1987; Ali Nimr, Muglad, July 1987; Ali Ebeid Timsah, Bara, Sept. 1987.

private merchants were able to take over that sector of the economy. The state contented itself with the less expensive occupation of taxation and confiscation.

The slave trade, once the most stringent of the monopoly ordinances had been removed, was more lucrative than gum, ostrich feathers, or ivory. The low cost, high demand and government support for this commodity combined to make it a very attractive item to trade. Even in the monopoly phase, after government requirements had been filled, merchants traded the excess eunuchs, domestic and agricultural slaves to buyers in the Nile Valley, and to eastern markets across the Red Sea.⁵⁶

The overall pattern of the slave sector of Kordofan's economy from 1820-1860 was one of rising prices and steady demand. The increased use of slaves internally for food production in the rainlands and along the shores of the Nile buoyed a diminished export market and compensated for the loss of international sales. The increasing population of Kordofan after 1820, especially among the families of the commercial and administrative community, generated an increased internal need for slave labor. In their shops and business operations, merchants used slaves to cut wood, made and delivered furniture and charcoal and as armed retainers. In the homes of Kordofan, slaves performed domestic chores such as drawing water, gardening and food

⁵⁶ Pallme, Travels, pp.43,47,86-87,293-294.

preparation. They also worked at various handicrafts which produced the mundane yet essential commodities of everyday life. Slaves gathered the raw materials as well as fabricated mats, ropes and baskets. Slaves also herded animals and in some instances were used in gangs as field laborers.

The government also used slaves to improve its financial position. The administration levied a tax on the sale and transport of slaves within the province and set the rates at which slaves were valued in dealings with the government. Administrators found it useful to overvalue slaves taken as taxes and then make up the difference and gain a profit in the private sector of the marketplace. The government overvalued slaves used to pay its officers and troops and sold surplus captives wholesale in the market.

Slaves came from the south and southwest of the big commercial centers. The Nuba Mountains and White Nile tributaries in the Bahr Al-Ghazal region offered extensive slave catchment areas. The region's inhabitants were lightly armed, long suffering subjects of highly structured states. They had been subjects of the Fung and Fur Sultans who regulated the movements of traders and activities of slave raiding parties within their realms. The onslaught of unrestricted raiding initially by the Turco-Egyptian military and later by armed merchants took them by surprise. The relatively isolated raiding of the Baqqara

had never reached the intensity of that after 1821. As a result the Nuba were relatively defenseless against it. Years of relative peace had prompted the Nuba to organize themselves in a way which did not favor collective defense. Their family and/or village units lived on and around specific hills and did not have a closely integrated set of relationships with other hills. This isolation and lack of cohesion made them easier prey for raiders than groups such as the more decentralized Nuer of the White Nile.⁵⁷ The Muslim or non-Muslim status of these people was of no concern to the merchants and traders who made a living selling them. The only precaution taken in slave trading was to evacuate the captives as quickly as possible from the catchment area so that they could not be rescued by relatives or consider flight back to their homes.⁵⁸

The methods employed for the capture, transport and disposal of slaves in Kordofan were diverse. They ranged from large scale, government-sponsored attacks on

⁵⁷ Browne, Travels, Janet Ewald, "Leadership and Social Change on an Islamic Frontier: The Kingdom of Taqali, 1780-1900." Ph.D. Thesis, (Wisconsin, 1982), pp.200-207, 217-220; Richard Gray, A History of the Southern Sudan, 1839-1889, (London, 1961), pp.20-58; Patricia Mercer, "Shilluk Trade and Politics from the Mid-Seventeenth Century to 1861." Journal of African History, 12,3 (1971), pp.407-426; J.Spaulding, "A Premise for Precolonial Nuba History," in History in Africa, 14 (1987), pp.369-374.

⁵⁸ Spaulding "The business of Slave Trading. African Economic History,; A. Triulzi, Salt, Gold and Legitimacy: Prelude to the History of the Making of a No-Man's Land. Bela Shangul, Wallagga, Ethiopia, ca. 1800-1898. (Naples, 1981).

peripheral areas to the kidnapping of individual children and adults who wandered away from their homes or villages. In order to understand the ways in which the slave trade evolved in Kordofan, it is necessary to comprehend the changing patterns of demand and different types of slave labor required in Egypt, Sudan, and elsewhere in the Middle East.

Slaves and the Military

One of the earliest demands for Sudanese slaves arose from Muhammad Ali's determination to build the nizam al-jadid (new army). He wanted a western style force equipped with modern arms and trained by European officers which could ensure his control over Egypt and extend his realm in the Middle East and Africa. The manning of this army, however, was a thorny question.

The decision not to use Egyptians for the new army was prompted by two considerations: the impact of conscription on the agricultural labor force in Egypt and the extraordinary lengths to which the fellah went to avoid conscription. Consequently, the fellah would have displaced a large proportion of the labor force involved in agriculture. The loss of manpower would have been made up through the use of slaves, but that option would require the capture, importation and acclimatization of a substantial number of Africans at considerable cost.

The fellah's abhorrence of military service led them to take extraordinary measures of avoidance. They resorted to self mutilation which rendered them unfit for military service. The most often employed method was dismemberment. The cutting or incapacitating of the right index finger made the pulling of a rifle trigger impossible. The mutilation of the feet made marching impossible and conscription into the infantry unlikely. None of these tactics, however, hindered a man from performing agricultural work. The government, therefore, decided to leave the fellah to their farms and to man the nizam-al-jadid with non-Egyptians.⁵⁹

This decision made Sudan the primary source of men for the Viceroy's new military machine. In a letter to his son-in-law the Deftardar, soon after the capture of Kordofan, Muhammad Ali chided his field commander: "You are aware that the end of all our effort and this expense is to procure negroes. Please show zeal in carrying out our wishes in this capital matter."⁶⁰ The viceroy's admonition was not without result. In 1822-1823 the Prince Umar Tusun reported that 30,000 "negroes" were taken from the Sudan

⁵⁹ Holroyd in, Bowring, "Report on Egypt and Candia" British Parliamentary Papers, (1840) vol. XXI pp.5, 52ff.

⁶⁰ Muhammad Ali to the sar-i'askar (commander in Chief) of the Sudan and Kordofan (letter Book 14, ma'iyet-i seniye, no..195, 23 Sept. 1823, as quoted in Hill, Egypt, pp.12-13.

for the training camps in southern Egypt.⁶¹ Heavy losses of recruits in the camps from disease and desertion, however, required a continuous flow of men from the Sudan.

High mortality rates among the initial invasion and garrison forces also made the use of native born Sudanese a necessity in the transition period during the training and deployment of the nizam al-jadid. By 1839 the entire 1st regiment of the line stationed in Kordofan consisted of Sudanese men. Both the maintenance of troop strength in the old army and the building of the nizam al-jadid combined to inaugurate the long enduring practice of using slaves from the southern regions of the Sudan to fill the ranks of government forces. In later years this custom continued and slaves provided the manpower for the private armies created by powerful merchants to police and operate their commercial spheres of influence.⁶²

The steady demand for slave recruits by the military arm of the Sudan's administration was especially acute in the years prior to 1860. Internal and external wars involving Egyptian (Sudanese) troops helped fuel demand in Kordofan's slave markets. Internally, attacks against

⁶¹ Safha min ta'rikh misr fi ahd Muhammad Ali: al-jaish al-misri al-barri wa'lbahri (Cairo, 1940), p.38.

⁶² A. Peney, "Le Sennar, Les Turcs au Soudan," pp.405-407; Pallme, Travels in Kordofan, p.148; At that time the 1st Regiment consisted of three battalions each of which had 1000 men. The Regiment also had a French training officer employed by the Viceroy until 1837 when ill health forced him to return to Egypt.

recalcitrant subjects in the various frontier areas at times proved very costly undertakings. A raid in 1831-32 against the Hadendowa in the Taka region cost the Governor-General Khurshid 1,500 dead.⁶³

In 1831 Muhammad Ali ordered troops from the Sudan to support his war effort in Syria and Anatolia. By 1834 troop strength within Sudan had been reduced to such a low level that Khurshid, the Governor-General, wrote Cairo saying that he feared for the internal security of the Sudan. He believed this problem especially acute, since Cairo had recently ordered more expeditions to gather new recruits. The Viceroy grudgingly allowed Khurshid to increase the troop strength of his Sudanese battalions.

In the late 1830s Khurshid's successor Ahmad Pasha imposed a levy of slaves on the free population of the Sudan to supply needed replacements for the black regiments serving in the Sudan. Ahmed's decree stipulated that each taxable person was required to contribute to the government one or more negroes suitable for military service. Ahmad taxed himself fifty slaves and required his officers and the public to provide the remainder in proportion to their wealth.⁶⁴ The result of this action for the merchants of Kordofan was not only the loss of a few personal slaves but

⁶³ F.Werne, African Wanderings, (London, 1852), pp.105-111; Hill, Egypt in the Sudan, p.64.

⁶⁴ Hill, Egypt in the Sudan, p.76.

a potential increase in the demand for slaves by officers and other non-official owners to replace those requisitioned by the government.

In the 1840s and 1850s the central government faced renewed internal opposition from frontier populations, especially in Kordofan. The most singular disaster played itself out in the period from 1843-58. In 1843 Nasir ibn Abbukr, an aspirant to the throne of the Kingdom of Taqali in the Nuba mountains, persuaded Mustafa Pasha, the governor at El-Obeid, to provide him with troops and weapons in order to take the throne by force. Nasir succeeded but then reneged on his obligation to pay the agreed upon tribute to his benefactors. To add insult to injury he settled the Sudanese troops he had been given around him, provided them with wives and land, and then killed their officers.⁶⁵

The relations between Nasr and the authorities in Kordofan worsened, and three separate campaigns were launched against him. Latif Pasha led the first expedition in 1850-51, which ended in a rout of the government forces. Petherick believed the governor lost 400-500 men, while

⁶⁵ M.Parkyns, "Notes on Tugulla, the Noubas, Dowleeb, etc.," unpublished Manuscript, n.d., University of Khartoum Library, Sudan Collection; Peney, "Dahar et Tagala," p.15; A.E.Brehm, Reisen im Sudan: 1847-1852, new edition, (Tubingen and Basel, 1975), p.170-177; Hill, Egypt in the Sudan, p.47; Hill, A Biographical Dictionary, p.290; Ewald, "Leadership and Social Change on an Islamic Frontier: The Kingdom of Taqali, 1780-1900." pp.244-247, 254-258.

Alexander Peney placed the losses at nearly 1000. The second campaign commanded by Usman Bey al-Sinnari took place in 1857-58, and cost the government nearly an entire regiment and Usman his life.⁶⁶

The capture of "recruits" for internal and external military formations during the early years of the Turkiyya was the responsibility of military commanders stationed in the Sudan. Travelers accounts from Kordofan often include descriptions of raids by the governors or their junior officers.⁶⁷ The difficulties inherent in this system, however, were numerous.

A manuscript from 1824-25, the author of which may have been a French military trainer posted to Kordofan, describes some of the problems. A battalion assigned to attack a Nuba hill was accompanied by a huge array of "Arab auxiliaries" who made foraging for food during the three

⁶⁶ NRO, Khartoum, Miscellaneous 1/89/1424, "from Hikamdar to mudir of Kordofan" 7 Dhu Hajja 1268 (1852); Foreign Office, Series 140, Slave Trade, vol.21, 1852, Petherick to Murray, January 20, 1851; Brehm, Reisen, pp.176-77; Cuny, Journal de Voyage de Siout a el-Obeid du 1857 au 1858, (Paris,1863),p.115; Peney, "Kourdufan ou Kourdufai," Revue d'Ethnologie, 1, pp.483-499; Ewald, "Leadership and Social Change," pp.256-257.

⁶⁷ Descriptions of these state sponsored raids in Kordofan can be found in:R.L.Hill, "An Unpublished Itinerary to Kordofan, 1824-25", transl. R.L.Hill, Sudan Notes and Records, Vol.29 (1948), pp.62-66; R.L.Hill, On the Frontiers of Islam, pp.15; Peney, "Le Sennar, Les Turcs," pp.406-407; A. Holroyd, "Notes on a Journey to Kordofan in 1836-7," pp.177-179; Pallme, Travels in Kordofan, pp.305-344; Holroyd in Bowring, "Report," pp.83-84; J.Petherick, Egypt the Sudan and Central Africa, pp.299, 321-22.

day march very difficult. The large assemblage also made stealth or surprise impossible. The formal frontal assault on the hill was a disaster, the auxiliaries took no part in the attack, and carefully avoided any chance of injury. The furious governor led a retaliatory raid which netted 600 children and old people but no potential recruits.⁶⁸

State sponsored raids on the Nuba and Dinka continued on a regular basis through at least 1841. The graphic reports of Europeans who passed through Kordofan and Sudan in the 1820s and 1830s, however, provoked outrage in Europe. European consuls in Cairo increasingly pressed the Egyptian government to end the slave hunts. Egyptian officials assured the consuls that such raids would cease and that the responsible officers would be punished. European sentiments and official declarations notwithstanding, the demand for slaves remained and government raiding continued into the mid 1840s. The merchant community, however, had rapidly become increasingly active in the slave trade.

Throughout the period of state sponsored slave hunts, merchants were deeply involved in the sale and transport of slaves. As noted above, the raids conducted by military units often produced large numbers of women and children unsuitable for military service. These unfortunate captives were routinely used to pay the wages of the troops who had

⁶⁸ R.L.Hill, "An Unpublished Itinerary," pp.63-66.

captured them. They were of little practical use to their new owners who needed cash or goods rather than servants. The soldiers therefore marketed them to private merchants for the wherewithal to pay off creditors and/or obtain goods and/or credit against further purchases.

The accounts of these types of transactions by Europeans vividly illustrate the interaction of the military establishment and merchants in the trading centers, especially in El-Obeid. Pallme noted that the troops commonly went unpaid for up to 12 months. When they were paid the entire debt would be liquidated at one time in captives after the yearly slaves raids were completed.⁶⁹ Holroyd offers a more detailed account. He reported to Bowring that in one day he saw 300-400 slaves doled out to the El-Obeid garrison and its officers. A captain received four adults and three children equal to approximately 1800 piasters in back pay while two privates were required to share one adult slave.⁷⁰

In this manner the market was fed a substantial number of slaves which were then resold or used in other profitable ways by the merchant community. Approximately 1800 slaves worth approximately 1,125,000 piasters entered

⁶⁹ Pallme, Travels in Kordofan, pp.205-206.

⁷⁰ Holroyd in Bowring "Report," pp.83-84.

the market annually.⁷¹ For private merchants the rush of soldiers into the marketplace to sell slaves made it a buyer's market. The glutted situation resulted from the troops being paid in May, at the end of the March to May raiding season, when slaves from other sources also entered the market.⁷²

Holroyd found that in the market soldiers were paid only one-half to two-thirds the value assigned to slaves by the paymaster. The over-valuation of slaves given to soldiers by the government is certainly likely but the evidence at hand does not indicate that the entirety of the fifty to sixty percent loss of value was because of this over-valuation.⁷³ The soldier was also shorted, perhaps more so, by the merchant. The latter purchased individual

⁷¹ The figures used in the calculations for this estimate are based on Holroyd, "Notes on a Journey to Kordofan, in 1836-37," pp.177-178; Holroyd in, Bowring, "Report," pp.83-84,86,88; Russegger, Reise, vol.I, p.493, vol.II, p.20; Pallme, Travels in Kordofan, pp.199,205,270-272,326; Petherick, Egypt the Sudan and Central Africa, p.249; Hill, Egypt in the Sudan, pp.28-28; Hill, Biographical Dictionary, pp.ix-xvi. This estimate is conservative on two points: the irregular military units are not included, and the computation is based solely on adults and their sale prices. The inclusion of children would give a higher figure because of their lower value and therefore the greater number required to equal one adult. It must also be noted that there is at present no way to compute the impact of wholesale selling of slaves directly to merchants to obtain revenues for the treasury.

⁷² Holroyd, "Notes on a Journey to Kordofan",p.117; Russegger, Reisen, p.164; Pallme, Travels, pp.205-6,271,324-325; Bowring, "Report," p.84.

⁷³ Bowring, "Report," pp.83-88; Pallme, Travels, pp.270-272, Petherick, Egypt, p.196.

slaves for little more than 150-175 piasters and then sold them for over 300 piasters. The profit margin rose even higher as the slave moved further away from Kordofan.

Slaves and the Commercial Community

The price of slaves in markets along the Nile show the profitability of selling outside of Kordofan. In Berber a merchant could get 450-600 piasters, in Khartoum 250-500, in Dongola 450 and in Shendi 250-700 for males and 2000-3000 for females.⁷⁴ In Cairo the average price for slaves from Sudan was 1420 piasters.⁷⁵ The merchants who obtained slaves from soldiers for less than 200 piasters could make a handsome profit.

During its first 20 years, the Turco-Egyptian regime did little to discourage the internal and external trade in slaves largely because it gained a steady source of revenue from the sale and transit of slaves within its domains.⁷⁶ In the years prior to 1842 the taxes on slaves were relatively mild. After 1842, however, the tariff on slaves

⁷⁴ Russegger, vol.II/1 p.493 and vol.II/2, p.20; Holroyd in Bowring, "Report," pp.85-89. The relatively lower prices in Khartoum resulted from the influx of slaves from the White Nile slave catchment regions. Dinka from these areas could be bought for as little as 70 piasters but were considered to be inferior to slaves taken in the regions south and southwest of Kordofan.

⁷⁵ Ehud Toledano, The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression, (Princeton, 1982), pp.62-64.

⁷⁶ The pre-1842 duties paid on slaves moving between Kordofan and Cairo averaged 105 piasters.

entering Egypt was raised to a level which eliminated small scale merchants from this sector of the economy. A ban on slave imports initiated in 1852 further reduced the international trade possibilities for all merchants. The overall impact of the new taxes in 1842 and eventual ban on the flow of slaves after 1852 did not, however, completely disrupt slave trading activities in the Sudan. Beginning in the 1840's there was a steady rise in the price of food, making farming a more profitable undertaking. The rising tax burden prompted increased production, which required irrigated agriculture which demanded slave labor to power these irrigation systems.

The use of slaves allowed the intensification of agriculture and herding in the rainlands of central Kordofan. Slaves were used for herding duties as well as cereal cultivation. As early as 1836 Holroyd noted the increased use of slaves for cultivation within Kordofan. His report to Bowring stated that the average cost of an agricultural slave in Kordofan was 300 pt, that they were exempted from conscription, and employed in gangs as large as 150-250.⁷⁷

Pallme, in Kordofan two years after Holroyd, confirmed his predecessor's observations and noted the importance of slaves in the irrigation of food crops. Pallme also stated that only slaves ground grain for use in private

⁷⁷ Holroyd, in Bowring, "Report," pp.88,91.

residences. This task was usually assigned to a female slave 14 years old or older as it required a great deal of strength. All homes of 8 members or more required one slave working full time to keep it supplied with its daily requirements of ground grain. The drawing of water and field labor required additional slaves.⁷⁸

Petherick's observations, made during the years 1845-1853, indicate that the price of slaves in the El-Obeid market was low, that the average farmer used two to three slaves as agricultural labor and that slaves were also important as herders. His price list for slaves when compared with the lists of Holroyd and Pallme, however, reveals that the price of a slaves had risen despite the reduced international trade after 1842.⁷⁹

Government officials also engaged in mercantile activities and used slaves to work their estates. The clearest examples are provided by Hassan Aga Cafriot and Mustapha Pasha Kiridli. In 1847 the latter received the rank of pasha, promotion to mirliwa (brigadier general) and became governor of Kordofan a post in which he remained until 1848.⁸⁰ Petherick reported that the mudir owned 200-

⁷⁸ Pallme, Travels, pp.47,72,222.

⁷⁹ Petherick, Egypt, the Sudan and Central Africa, pp.244,246,249.

⁸⁰ Hill, Biographical Dictionary, pp.xii, 286-287; Hill, "Rulers of the Sudan, 1820-1885," Sudan Notes and Records, Vol.32, (1951), pp.91,93. Kiridli first became Mudir (governor) of Kordofan in 1833 with the rank of

300 acres, large herds and at least 20 adult slaves to work these lands and tend his herds.⁸¹

Cuny reported that Hassan Aga Cafriot, commander of the El-Obeid garrison, possessed a large fortune in money, lands and goods obtained through various types of dealings with local leaders, including the rulers of Taqali.⁸² Low level officials also operated farms to supplement their earnings. Petherick records that the little oasis of "Bouaera" belonged to "Darwish Effendi a Turkish officer."⁸³ Close cooperation of government officials and merchants continued through-out the Turkiyya until the arrival of European officials such as Charles Gordon and his lieutenants.

For Kordofan's merchants, the slave sector of the economy proved a steady profit. In conjunction with

Miralai (senior colonel) of the 1st regiment of the line. From 1837-1840 he was the governor of Sennar.

⁸¹ Petherick, Egypt, the Sudan and Central Africa, pp.252-255. The average length of office for the governors was 2.2 years. Mustafa al Kiridli's 8 years stands out as an anomaly. Given the fact that most non-sudanese officials considered a posting to the Sudan as a sign of disfavor in Cairo some other factors must be considered to explain Kiridli's lengthy stay in Kordofan.

⁸² Cuny, Journal de voyage de siout a el-obeid du 1857 au 1858, p.87; Parkyns, "Notes on tagulla, the Noubas, Dowleeb."

⁸³ Petherick, Egypt the Sudan and Central Africa, p.97; Darwish Effendi's low rank is denoted by the term Effendi or Mr. a designation given to all officials in the lower echelons of the Turkiyya. see Hill, Biographical Dictionary, p.X.

government-supplied slaves, merchants were able to trade with private jobbers. The Baggara nomads regularly raided the Nuba mountains in groups and kidnapped any individuals they encountered. The herders traded their captives to merchants for consumer goods and cattle. The cattle came to the traders from soldiers who received the animals, taken during raids on recalcitrant tax payers, in places of wages. Troops paid with animals instead of cash took them to the market as they had slaves in previous years. The change in payment from slaves to cattle coincided with the reduction and final elimination of formal state-sponsored raids for slaves.⁸⁴

Slaves also came through adventurous Muslims who proselytized actively and at times militantly in the Nuba Mountains. Pallme reported that many of Kordofan's "feki's" were also "merchants and brokers as well as holymen."⁸⁵ One of the most famous was Kordofan's Badawi abu Safiya, a Bedariyya fiki, who made yearly trips into the Nuba mountains to demand that its inhabitants submit to Islam. While Badawi abu Safiya is remembered as an essentially religious man, others in his family seem to have been more

⁸⁴ Petherick, Egypt the Sudan and Central Africa, p.321.

⁸⁵ Pallme, Travels, pp.185-186.

involved in the secular economic world of slave trading and profits.⁸⁶

The brothers Abd al-Samad abu Safiya and Abd al Rahim abu Safiya, near relatives of Badawi abu Safiya, are said to have been half-share slave hunters for the government in the Nuba Mountains in their youth. They accompanied their relative Badawi on his missions to the Nuba Mountains and attacked those who rejected Badawi's call to accept Islam. This neat combination of missionary zeal and profits on the part of Abd al-Samad and Abd al-Rahim abu Safiya shows the possibilities available to young men who were willing to take risks.⁸⁷

The numerous small scale merchants traveling throughout Kordofan also contributed slaves to the larger market centers such as El-Obeid. Individual jellaba or

⁸⁶ Badawi abu Safiya was born to one Abd al Rahman of the Husaynat of the White Nile and the daughter of the Bedariyyra chief Musa el-Safi'a. He was therefore a Bedariyya by marriage and through his mother and would not have been considered a member of the riverain merchant community as were the Ja'aliin or Danagla. Interview, Abd al-Jabar Hussain Zaki al-Din, Ahmad Hussain Zaki al-Din, El-Obeid, March 1987; Pallme, Travels, p.186; MacMichael, The Tribes of Northern and Central Sudan, p.73; Hill, Biographical Dictionary, pp.65-66. A similar situation of enslavement occurred in Northern Nigeria in the time of Usman Dan Fodio.

⁸⁷ Nur, "Memoirs of Yusif Mikha'il," p.37; Salman, "The Story of Sheikh Abdullahi Ahmed Abu Gelaha, A Sudanese Vicar of Bray," Sudan Notes and Records, XXI/1 (1939), p.82; Interview, Abd-al Jabar Hussain Zaki al-Din, Ahmad Mustafa Hussain Zaki al-Din, El-Obeid, March and April 1987; Pallme, Travels in Kordofan, pp.159-160; Hill, Biographical Dictionary, pp.19,65-66.

musabbabi rarely took slaves by force since they usually operated as middlemen who traveled to small markets and individual villages. Their services were generally used by small scale raiders and kidnappers who did not wish to travel to large market centers to dispose of their captives. The musabbabi traded consumer goods for slaves, which they in turn sold or traded to larger merchants or private individuals. Many of these musabbabi were semi-independent operators who had connections to the Khubara who operated in large centers such as El-Obeid.⁸⁸

Local merchants, however, were not alone in the slave trade. European traders in Kordofan also found slaves a profitable commodity. Two French citizens, Joseph Marie Francois Vessiere and Georges Thibaud, became especially notorious as slave traders. Their actions prompted the British consul in Egypt to send letters to his French counterpart in Cairo and the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Paris demanding that Vessiere and Thibaud end their slave trading. Vessiere's actions also drew condemnation from the British and his own countrymen. A.Cadeau, a French

⁸⁸ Interview, Abd al-Jabar Hussain Zaki al-Din, Ahmed Mustafa Hussain Zaki al-Din, El-Obeid, March, 1987; Interview, Hamid al-Nil U'Jal, El-Obeid May, 1987 and Sept, 1987; Ali Nimr, El-Obeid, May, 1987; Ali Nimr, Didiri Nimr, Mahmud Ali Jula, Muglad, July, 1987; Hassan Adil, Hamid Muhammad Dafallah Hassan, Abu Zabad, July, 1987; Interview, Ahmed Hamad Assusa, Hamadi, July, 1987; Holroyd in Bowering, Report, p.87; Pallme, Travels, pp.59,117,119,125,159,294; Petherick, Egypt the Sudan and Central Africa, pp.243-244,321.

military training officer in Egyptian employ and attached to the 1st regiment of infantry in El-Obeid, accused him of actions unbecoming to French honor.⁸⁹

European merchants such as Vessiere and Thibaud also competed with local merchants in the procurement and selling of Sudanese commodities such as gum arabic, ostrich feathers and ivory. Kordofan's merchants, European and African alike, detested the monopolization of these items by the Egyptian government but traded in them nonetheless. The lure of profits led them to remain involved in the export of these items.⁹⁰ To secure profits they relied on subterfuge and special privilege to circumvent state regulations. Vessiere used his close connections with Ibrahim, the Viceroy's son, to gain his special concession

⁸⁹ Holroyd in Bowring, Report, p.97; Thibaut, "Apercu du commerce du Soudan," n.p., Archive Biblioteque National. Joseph Marie Francois Vessiere served with Napoleon and later fled to Egypt where he became the aide-de-camp to Ibrahim Pasha during the Arabian war of 1816-1818. His contributions to the victory at Dariya earned him the gratitude of Muhammad Ali Pasha and a gift of 50,000 dollars. He left military service soon after and became a merchant. Between 1823 and 1828 he made numerous business trips to Kordofan. G.Thibaut served for two years in the ranks of the Greek insurgents from 1822-1823. He then changed sides and served in the staff of Sulaiman Pasha al-Faransawi as an instructor in the Nazim al-jadid. In 1826 he joined the trading company of Vessiere and traveled to Kordofan. He eventually became an independent trader and French consular agent in Khartoum for nearly forty years. Hill, Biographical Dictionary, pp.357-358,371; C.C.C., volumes,23,30,31,32.

⁹⁰ Holroyd in Bowring, Report, p.100; Pallme, Travels, pp.266,279; Thibaut in C.C.C., volumes,30,32; Petherick, Egypt the Sudan and Central Africa, p.336.

and Thibaud utilized his initial partnership with Vessiere and later, a special dispensation from Muhammad Ali Pasha to trade outside of the monopoly.⁹¹

For other merchants in Kordofan the road to profits was more difficult. They could sell to merchants with special privileges, such as Vessiere and Thibaud, or attempt to find subterfuges for avoiding the monopoly.⁹² Alternatives included working in partnership with an officer within the administration or obtaining a bureaucratic position which provided special privileges.

The Gum Arabic Sector of the Economy

The trade in gum arabic increased steadily during the years 1820-1860 and came to rival ivory as a high profit item. Gum followed a procurement and profit pattern similar to that found in the slave sector of the economy. Data gleaned from French commercial reports indicate the general trend in gum prices in Cairo and Alexandria between 1835 and 1846.

⁹¹ For the background of Vessiere's and Thibaut's privileged status see: note 89 above. For Thibaut's special arrangement with Muhammad Ali see: C.C.C., Alexandrie, volume 30, dispatch no.48, 17/Mar/1843; Alexandrie, volume 32, dispatch no.42, 28/Aout/1846.

⁹² For a instance of Thibaut contracting with local merchants for the delivery of gum arabic see: C.C.C., Alexandrie, volume 32, dispatch no.42, 28/Aout/1846. The privileges accorded to Thibaut were neither easily won nor maintained. On at least one occasion the intervention of the French Consul on the behalf of Thibaut with Muhammad Ali saved Thibaut from huge losses on at least one occasion.

**Gum Arabic Prices on the Cairo and Alexandria Markets:
1835-1846a**

Sale Dates	Avg.Price	Yr. Avg.	10 Yr.Avg.
Oct.1835	312	312	-
Nov.1835-Jan.1836	269	-	-
Feb.-Mar.1836	242	-	-
Apr.-Oct.1836	254	-	-
Oct.-Dec.1836	257	255.2	-
Jan.-Feb.1837	150.5b	-	-
Feb.-Mar.1837	no sales	-	-
May-Sept.1837	no sales	-	-
Oct.1837	246	246c	-
Jan.-Mar.1838	288.5	-	-
Nov.1838	321.5	305	-
Feb.1939	357.3	-	-
Aug.-Dec.1839	350	353.65	-
Records lost 1841	-	-	-
None reported 1842	-	-	-
Mar.-Jul.1843	211	-	-
Dec.1843	386.5d	298.75e	-
Feb.1844	475	475	-
1846	350	350	320.8

a. All prices are computed in Egyptian piasters per Kantar (roughly equivalent to 110 pounds).

b. The low price resulted from the sale of damaged gum but is recorded here for informational purposes.

c. The slight drop in the average price for 1837 results from the inclusion of the price of damaged gum noted above.

d. This figure is a futures price bargained for in the expectation of gum en route to the market place.

e. The average is computed with the futures price included.⁹³

⁹³ The information presented in the chart on gum prices comes from calculations made from data culled from the following sources: C.C.C., volume 26 (1835-36), pp.136,201,231,431, dispatch no.247, 5/Jul/1836; volume 27, dispatch no.35, 2/Mar/1836, dispatch no.65, 7/Jul/1837, dispatch no.23, 18/Jan/1837, volume 28, dispatch no.64, 26/Jul/1838, dispatch no.112, 27/Jan/1839, dispatch no.141, 1/Sept/1839, dispatch no.177, 6/Mar/1840, volume 30, dispatch no.44, 6/Mar/1843, dispatch no.45, 6/Mar/1843, dispatch no.41, 26/Aou/1843, dispatch no.52, 8/Oct/1843, volume 31, s.n. 10/Mar/1844, dispatch no.42, 19/Sept/1844; volume 33, dispatch no.31, 20/Aug/1850, dispatch no.44, 6/Oct/1850, volume 33, dispatch no.9, 22/Mar/1850; Bullettino Commerciale, Alessandria d'Egitto, 19/Luglio/1850, 6/Agosto//1850, 20/Agosto/1850.

Travelers' accounts and French commercial intelligence collected in Kordofan provide information on the prices paid to producers for gum, quantities of gum extracted, transport costs, and customs duties collected en route to the markets of Cairo and Alexandria. In the early years of the Turkiyya the state tightly controlled the procurement and export of gum. Throughout the period for 1824 -1860, however, the administration increasingly loosened its grip on the collection and sale of gum in favor of control over transport and taxation of the product. The initial movement away from direct control began after 1838. The decree of 1842 further deregulated the trade and the remaining restrictions limited to transport and export taxes.⁹⁴

The changes in policy made it increasingly feasible for merchants of modest means to become involved in the gum trade either as middlemen or direct exporters. Throughout the early period, traders on the lowest levels of the commercial ladder found employment as collectors of gum for the privileged few. As the restrictions fell away other members in the commercial system became involved in the trade. The musabbabin/jallaba dealt directly with the producers or their leaders and procured raw gum which they carried, or had forwarded, to the larger centers of the

⁹⁴ For a general overview see: Deherain, Le Soudan Egyptien Sous Mehemet Ali, pp.168,177-80.

trade. At these centers, Bara, Khursi, Tayyara, the samasra and dallalin performed their intermediary role of brokering and arranging sales for the Khubara who operated out of El-Obeid and negotiated directly with European merchants and/or trading houses in Egypt.⁹⁵

The gum arabic found in Kordofan commanded a higher price than that of the Nile Valley, Ethiopia, Arabian peninsula, and West Africa because of its reputation as the Highest quality gum in the world.⁹⁶ Kordofan's gum forests grew primarily in the goz zone and therefore within the

⁹⁵ For definitions of the terms used above see page. The general outline of trading operations described above comes from the letters and commercial correspondence surrounding the business transactions of G.Thibaut in Kordofan during the late 1830's and 1840's. see: C.C.C., Alexandrie, volume 30, dispatch no.37, (date omis), dispatch no.48, 17/Mar/1843; Caire, volume 32, dispatch no.42, 28/aout/1846. The system described is also reflected in interviews with merchant families in Kordofan. Interview, Hamad al-Nil U'Jal, El-Obeid, May/87 and Sept./87. Also see H.S.Blunt, Gum Arabic, With Special Reference to its Production in the Sudan, (London, 1926), pp.18-24.

⁹⁶ Cadalvene, and Breuvery, L'Egypte et La Turquie de 1829 a 1836, pp.232-233; Holroyd, in Bowring, "Report," p.68; Pallme, Travels, p.225; C.C.C., Alexandrie, volume 34, dispatch no.84, 22/Nov/1851; Guillaume Lejean, "Rapport adresse a son Excellence M. le Ministre des affaires etrangeres," Bulletin de la Societe de Geographie, 1862, p.10; The superior quality of Kordofan's gum is also reflected in the higher prices it commanded at auction in the Cairo and Alexandria markets where other varieties of gum were also sold. C.C.C., volume 27, dispatch no.35, 2/Mar/1837, dispatch no.88, 17/Oct/1837; volume 28, dispatch no.112, 27/Jan/1837, no.132, 8/Jul/1839, tome 33; no.26 21/Jul/1850; Bullettino Commerciale, 9/Agosto/1850, 6/Oct/1850.

core area of the province.⁹⁷ The collection of gum took place in December, January and February.⁹⁸ The location of gum gardens in the core of the province, Bara, Khursi, and Tayyara districts, and predictable collection season made the control of gum trading relatively easy for the government during the monopoly period and the Khubara in later years.⁹⁹

Travelers differed greatly in their estimates of Kordofan's gum production. Holroyd believed that 40,000 kantars (quintals) could be acquired per year while Pallme put forward a more conservative estimate of 20,000 kantars.¹⁰⁰ The actual quantities of gum exported from Kordofan are difficult, but not impossible, to assess. Cadalvene and Breuvery estimated the 1831 harvest at 5000 quintals while an anonymous european reported seeing 5000 quintals pass through Dongola in 1840.¹⁰¹ Petherick,

⁹⁷ The range of Gum Arabic trees (Acacia verec) extends from the Red Sea to Senegal between parallels 11 and 14, but especially in the 12 to 13 degree range. see H.S.Blunt, Gum Arabic, p.13; M. Born, Zentralkordofan, pp.3, and Karte 5 (following page 32).

⁹⁸ Pallme, Travels, p.226.

⁹⁹ The term "gum garden" is misleading but nonetheless the standard term for gum producing areas owned or used by individuals and groups within a gum forest. A "gum garden" may consist of 1 to 200 trees per acre.

¹⁰⁰ Holroyd, in "Report,"p.68; Pallme, Travels, pp.280-281.

¹⁰¹ Cadalvene et Breuvery, l'Egypte et la Turquie, p.333; Hill, On the Frontiers of Islam, p.203. Hill's work is a translation of a notebook written by an unnamed

himself a trader in gum during 1847-53, estimated that 20,000 kantars were shipped each year.¹⁰² Guillaume Lejean reported an annual export amount of 20,000 quintals in his post mission report to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹⁰³

The paucity of government export records is to some degree offset by the records of public auctions of gum in Cairo during the monopoly period. While not perfect, the auction records offer an indication of the amounts taken from the province.

Gum exports from Kordofan ca.1835-1850
(based on French consular reports)

1835-Jan.1836	10,090 quintals
1836	13,934 quintals
1837	1,800 quintals
1838	3,046 quintals
1839	8,375 quintals
1841	23,094 quintals
1842	3,900 quintals
1843	8,184 quintals
1850	13,500 quintals 104

European employed by the Egyptian government and stationed in the Sudan.

¹⁰² Petherick, Egypt, The Sudan and Central Africa, p.203.

¹⁰³ Guillaume Lejean, "Rapport adresse a son Excellence M. le Ministre des affaires etrangeres," p.11.

¹⁰⁴ C.C.C., Alexandrie, volume 25. dispatch no.104, 15/Mai/1835; Alexandrie, volume 25, p.136, 1836; Alexandrie, volume 26, p.201, Mar/1836; Alexandrie, volume 26, p.231,n.d., dispatch no.247, n.d.; Alexandrie, volume 26 p.431, n.d.; Alexandrie, volume 27, dispatch no.23, 18/jan/1837; Alexandrie, dispatch no.33, 29/fev/1837; volume 28, dispatch no.64, Alexandrie, 26/jul/1838, dispatch no.88, Alexandrie, 30/oct/1838, dispatch no.132, Alexandrie, 8/jul/1839, dispatch no.177, Alexandrie, 6/mar/1840; volume 30, dispatch no.44, Alexandrie,

Gum gardens in Kordofan were operated on a semi-communal basis. All of the gum producing trees in a given area belonged to the group living in that area. The elders of the group allocated garden plots to individuals and/or families according to criteria acceptable to the group as a whole. Ownership was neither absolute nor hereditary and was subject to modification if and when circumstances arose which required the forfeiture, reduction or expansion of a given garden. Leaders received a portion of all gum produced as remuneration for setting garden boundaries and resolving disputes over boundary locations.¹⁰⁵

At present there is no reason to believe that merchants attempted to intrude on this arrangement. Evidence from the period 1820-1860 indicates that merchants bought directly from the "owner/producer" and did not become involved in production. The high cost inherent in their direct exploitation of extensive gum gardens is probably the reason for their reluctance to directly involve themselves in production. The process of gum

6/mar/1843, dispatch no.45, Alexandrie, 6/mar/1843, dispatch no.41 Alexandrie, 26/aout/1843, dispatch no.52, Alexandrie, 8/oct/1843, s.n. 31/Dec/1843, volume 31, s.n., Alexandrie, 10/Mar/1844, volume 34, dispatch no.84, Alexandrie, 22/nov/1851.

¹⁰⁵ Interview, Ahmed Omer, El-Obeid, Sept,1987. Ali Ebied Muhammad Timsah, Bara, 25,Sept,1987. Hamad al-Nil ,El-Obeid, Sept,1987. Sudan Archive Durham, "Report of H.C.Franklin on Gum industry in Kordofan," 402/12/12-20; SAD, "Record of Service: H.C.Franklin," 646/3/1-22 ; Blunt, Gum Arabic, pp. 18-19.

collection is labor intensive and requires a certain degree of skill in order to maximize the output of trees and to avoid damaging trees for future use. Merchants considered it impracticable to maintain a skilled labor force, intrude on the prerogatives of local leaders and deprive producers of a cash crop with which they could buy imported goods. They also realized that the low prices paid to producers for gum (15-100pt/kantar) made the middleman's role a more profitable one than direct production.¹⁰⁶

As in the case of the slave sector of the economy, the gum industry experienced consistent and/or growing demand along with stable and/or rising prices throughout the period of 1820-1860. These conditions made it possible for Kordofan's merchants, large and small, to profit from gum exportation, albeit on a reduced scale, during the monopoly period and on an expanded scale after the lifting of government restrictions on gum trading. The non-merchant population also benefited from the gum trade. The producers of gum gained tax credits and/or cash while the

¹⁰⁶ Interview, Ahmed Omer, El-Obeid, Sept, 1987; Hamad Al-Nil, El-Obeid, Aug & Sept, 1987; Ali Ebied Muhammad Timsah, Bara, Sept, 1987. Von Muller reported that a family of five could collect approximately 3 kantars per month. A portion of this amount was reserved for the leader of the group as compensation for his work in apportioning plots and adjudicating disputes over garden boundaries. J.W. Von Muller, "Extracts from notes taken during his travels in Africa in the years of 1847-8-9," p.278.

nomad groups in the north received tax credits, goods or cash for the transport of gum from Kordofan to the Nile.¹⁰⁷

The Ivory and Ostrich Feather Sectors of the Economy

The ivory and ostrich feather trade operated on a system similar to the gum trade. The producers sold or traded the ivory and/or feathers they collected to musabbabin who passed the items on to larger operators and finally to the khubara who arranged for their sale outside of Kordofan.

Ivory

The market for ivory was especially lucrative. Cadalvene and Breuvery reported that the viceroy paid 500 piasters per kantar under the rules of the monopoly and sold it on the Cairo and Alexandria markets for 1400 piasters. They estimated that the Muhammad Ali obtained 1000 kantars a year from the Sudan.¹⁰⁸ Kordofan also had a thriving black market trade in ivory. The destination of most of Sudan's black market ivory was the Red Sea port of

¹⁰⁷ Cadalvene et Breuvery, Egypte et Nubie, pp.333-335; Pallme, Travels in Kordofan, pp.41,132-137,281; Mansfield Parkyns "The Kabbabish Arabs between Dongola and Kordofan," Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, Vol.20, (1850), p.257; Von Muller, "Extracts," p. 278; Petherick, Egypt, The Sudan and Central Africa, pp.200, 230,305.

¹⁰⁸ Cadalvene et Breuvery, Egypte, p.335.

Suakin where Indian agents who purchased it for English buyers paid considerably more than the Viceroy.¹⁰⁹

The black market resulted from the inability of the state to impose its monopoly over the commodity, in part because ivory shared none of gum's production or collection characteristics. Ivory hunters worked well beyond the areas controlled by the administration and sold to merchant middlemen who ventured to the frontier areas. Unlike gum arabic, which spoiled if improperly packed or left unused, ivory retained its market value for long periods of time and could be held or transported long distances with few ill effects. Ivory also had a high value to weight ratio well suited to the black market trade.

Ivory Prices 1831-1859

YEAR	PRODUCER/MIDDLEMAN	RETAIL
1831	500 pt/cwt.	1400pt/cwt.
1835	NA	1560pt/cwt.
1836	NA	1335pt/cwt.
1837	NA	1275pt/cwt.
1838/39	750pt/cwt. (El-Obeid) 375pt/cwt. (Frontier) 310pt/88lbs. (Kobbe)	1000-1200pt/88lbs
1842	NA	1000pt/cwt.
1847/49	850-1200pt/88lbs	1200-1500pt/88lbs
1850	NA	1850pt/cwt.
1859	780pt/cwt	23636pt/cwt. ¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Pallme, Travels, pp.284-285; Von Muller, "Extracts," p.729.

¹¹⁰ Cadalvene et Breuvery, Egypte, p.335; C.C.C. volume 26, s.n., 28/Aout/1835; volume 26, p.136, 13/Juin/1836; volume 27, s.n., 24/Fev/1837; Pallme, Travels, pp.284-287; C.C.C., volume 30, dispatch no.53,

Pallme noted that the price at the source was half that in the market at El-Obeid. He also believed that it was better to pay the higher price (750 piasters) than undertake the dangerous journey to the southwest frontier. He also warned that it was better to trade in the name of a government official than to become too closely involved with local "Dongolawi" merchants.¹¹¹ Von Muller observed that when ivory exchanged hands, the price was influenced by the method of payment or who was buying the ivory.

Cash	850-900 piasters per Kantar			
1/2 cash & 1/2 Goods	1050	"	"	"
1/3 cash & 2/3 Goods	1200	"	"	"
Suakin Merchant w/Cash	1200	"	"	"

112

Lejean reported to his superiors that the price of ivory in Khartoum was 780 piasters per cwt. in 1859, and other

17/Mar/1842; Von Muller, "Extracts," p.279; C.C.C., volume 33, 6/Aout/1850 & 6/Oct/1850; Lejean, "Report," p.11; C.C.C., Alexandrie, volume, 38, 29/Dec/1866, (report for 1863).

¹¹¹ Pallme, Travels, p.287.

¹¹² Von Muller, "Extracts," p. 279. Von Muller also outlines the various classifications for ivory used by merchants in Sudan.

1st class	perfect: No blemishes.	1500pt/88 cwt		
2nd class	large, fine but with blemishes or	1500pt	"	"
"	fissure. water test to determine value.			
3rd class	(a) 2nd class characteristics but failed to hold water in water test.(called "bara").	1500pt/150	"	
	(b) Very poor quality, extensive weathering and poor color.(called "shamise").	1500pt	"	"

sources indicate that the retail price outside Sudan was 23,636 piasters for the same cwt (hundred weight).¹¹³

Ostrich Feathers

Ostrich feathers constituted another important export item for Kordofan's merchants. The majority of feathers were gathered in the northern, western and south-western districts of the province and like ivory outside of the closely regulated central zone. The average adult bird yielded 3 1/2 pounds of black, gray and white feathers. Whites brought the highest prices followed by grays and blacks.

Prices of Ostrich Feathers 1831-1850

1831	200-250 piasters	10 pounds white (choice)
	45 "	10 " " (inferior)
	45 "	30 " black
1838-39	300 "	10 " white (inferior)*
	25 "	10 " gray
1845-53	9,600 "	10 " white (choice)
	1,500 "	10 " " (inferior)
	550 "	10 " black
1850	1,500 "	10 " mixed ¹¹⁴

*includes duty

¹¹³ Lejean, "Rapport," p.11; C.C.C., Alexandrie, volume 38, dispatch no.36, 29/Dec/1866,(Report for 1863).

¹¹⁴ Cadalvene et Breuvery, Egypte, p.335; Pallme, Travels, pp.252,290; Petherick, Egypt, p.164; C.C.C. Alexandrie, volume 34, dispatch no.84, 22/Nov/1851, pp.77-78.

The Emergence of an Independent Local Merchant Community

For the merchants of Kordofan the period of 1820-1860 constituted a time of change and opportunity. The imposition of the monopoly wrested control of the machinery of exchange from their grasp and tested their capacity to adapt to new economic realities. The commercial community proved resilient and adjusted to the new situation forced upon them. In addition to their own efforts they benefited from the pressure exerted by European powers on Egypt to rescind the state monopoly on trade in the Sudan. The relaxation of control over trade aided the commercial community in regaining their power within the market and, in re-establishing themselves as the controllers of the machinery of exchange within Kordofan.

The re-emergence of local merchants in Kordofan irritated rival European merchants such as Pallme and Petherick. Both complained about the power of the local merchant community and its ability to regulate the economy to its advantage. Pallme warned fellow merchants to avoid working with local "Dongolawi" merchants and Petherick complained that by 1853 the gum trade had been "paralysed by native competition" and that it was "no longer remunerative."¹¹⁵ Petherick also noted that by the early 1850's barter was still used in some cases but that the

¹¹⁵ Pallme, Travels, p.287; Petherick, Egypt, p.336.

majority of the province operated on a cash economy basis.¹¹⁶

The merchant elite succeeded in carving out a new position for themselves within Kordofan's economy. They were no longer the *khubara* of old, who had been the Sultan's merchants and caravan guides, subject to the orders of the great lord. They had become independent merchants responsible to no man save the tax collector of the Turco-Egyptian regime. As long as their taxes were paid they could operate their commercial operations as they saw fit and trade in the commodities they wished with whom they wished.

The peak of merchant power, however, was yet to come. In the period from 1860 to the establishment of the Mahdist state the khubara of the merchant community utilized their control of the inter- and intra-regional economy to attain powerful positions. They became the tax collectors and on occasion attained the governorship of the province. From these positions of authority the elite of the commercial community controlled the political and commercial life of the province.

The commercial elite depended on the lower levels of their own community and producers to carry out their political, economic and social agenda for Kordofan. Without the active or tacit support of Kordofan's population the

¹¹⁶ Petherick, Egypt, pp.284,305.

Khubara would not have been able to regain and/or maintain control over the machinery of exchange. The commercial elite's greatest asset proved to be the expanding economy of the province.

At all levels of society connections with the outside world and its commodities increased throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. These intensified links bound the population as a whole, not just the commercial community, to the import/export trade and continued growth of the province's economy. The stagnation or failure of the various sectors of the regional economy spelled potential disaster for merchant and producer alike. The inability to sell cash crops such as gum would deprive producers of cash used to pay taxes, purchase slaves, livestock or consumer goods. The musabbabin with nothing to buy or sell in the villages would lose his *raison d'etre*. The same fate would befall the samasra, dallalin and sababa, who worked in the market place and depended on trade and the operations of the musabbabin.

The khubara, therefore, became the "captains" of the economy and of the population. Their elevation to formal administrative positions by the Turco-Egyptian regime further cemented that position of leadership in the province. This linkage of commercial elite and community to the larger population tended to isolate the Turco-Egyptian administration from those it was to rule. As a

result the merchant elite while in the imperial administration were not considered to be of the imperial administration- a distinction which the elite would exploit to the fullest in the coming years.

Figure 1

Tax rate for slaves sent for sale in Cairo

Kordofan	20-80pt.+
Dongola	15pt. *
Asswan	34.5pt. *
Cairo	11pt. *

+According to the value of the slave

*Flat rate ¹¹⁷

Slaves sold in the Sudan were subject to taxes on the following scale:

slaves moving out of Kordofan	20-80pt. per head+
slaves passing through Khartoum	45-60pt. per head*
slaves sold in Khartoum	20pt. per head
slaves passing through Dongola	15pt. per head

+According to the value of the slave

*Not applicable if merchant produced a receipt for payment of tax in Kordofan.¹¹⁸

Holroyd's price list for slaves in Sudanese markets c.1836-37:

Good adult male	400-500	pt.
Ordinary adult male	150-300	pt.
Male Dinka child	70-100	pt.
Male Ethiopian child	600-1000	pt.
Female adult	200-400	pt.
Female Dinka	100-200	pt.
Female Ethiopian child	600-1500	pt. ¹¹⁹

Holroyd's price list for slaves in El-Obeid market c. 1836-37:

Adult (male & female)	400-600	pt.
Female (Dar Fur, Attractive)	1500-2000	pt.
Female (Ethiopian)	1000-2000	pt.
child (4-5 years)	50-60	pt. ¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Bowring, "Report," pp.85,87-88; PRO, London, F.O. 84/974, Bruce to Clarendon, 17 January 1855.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, pp.85,87

¹¹⁹ Holroyd in Bowring, Report, p.86.

¹²⁰ Holroyd, "Notes on a Journey to Kordofan, in 1836-37," p.249.

Figure 2

Pallme price list for slaves taken by government as taxes in El-Obeid c.1847:

Adults (male & female)	150-300 pt.
child (3-4 years)	30-60 pt.
child (10-15 years)	100-300 pt. ¹²¹

Petherick price list for slaves in El-Obeid c.1848-53:1,2,

Adult (male, newly captured, 15-20 years)	500-800 pt.
Adult (female, newly captured, 15-20 years)	800-1200 pt.
Child (male & female, newly captured 0-15)	400-1200 pt.

1.Trained domestic slaves could fetch from one half to twice the price of newly captured slaves in the market.
 2.The government valued slaves bought from citizens or taken for taxes at 600-800 pt.¹²²

Note: Prices shown were consistently valued at below market price.

¹²¹ Pallme Travels, pp. 38-39,270-272.

¹²² Petherick, Egypt, the Sudan and Central Africa, p.249.

Figure 3

Comparative Price List for slaves:
1836-1853 ¹²³

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	CHILDREN
1836-37	400-500 pt.	1500-2000	50-60 pt.
1838	150-300 pt.	no info	30-60 pt. 100-300 pt.
1848-53	500-800 pt.	800-1200 pt.	400-1200 pt.

Note: The sources make it clear that the price of eunuchs was 450 pt. or more. Approximately 300 eunuchs a year were placed on the market in El-Obeid.

¹²³ Holroyd, "Notes on a Journey to Kordofan," pp.177-178; Holroyd in Bowring, "Report," pp.86-88; Pallme, Travels, pp.38-39, 270-272; Petherick, Egypt, the Sudan and Central Africa, pp.196.

Figure 4

The principal salt deposits that do exist are located at:

1. J. Abu Asal and J. Al-Subari
2. Al-Rueis, (due east of Kaja Sodrei)
3. Gehenia, (4.5 miles east of Kajmar)
4. Abu Geragir and Mehl Al-Maagir, (north of J. Abu Tabr)
5. Fula Sherhsar or Al-Ghaba'in and Al-Meleiha, (in the Wadi Lugud east of Um Seiala)
6. Firga and um Kherig, (E.N.E. of Kaja and near J. Um Dam)
7. North of J. Abu Fas
8. Shershar and Al-Ghar
9. Al-Meia, (close to the east of J. Abu Hadid and J. Durrage).

(note: J. denotes Jebal the Arabic word for mountain).

Salt was, and remains today, divided into two categories, that suitable for human consumption and that used for animals. Locations 8 and 9 above produced the finest quality salt and provided the majority of the salt used by humans. Locations 1-7 provided the salt used to keep the herds of pastoralist and mixed farmers healthy and also constituted an important ingredient in local medicinal preparations given to sick animals. The salt of all these locations was traded throughout the region and carried as far south as the Bahr al-Ghazal and southern Nuba mountains.

Chapter Three

The Crisis Years: 1860-1880

The period from 1860-1880 proved an eventful one for the merchant community in Kordofan. The final cessation of all aspects of the monopoly, re-establishment of merchant control over the machinery of exchange and economic prosperity seemed to herald the dawning of a golden age for the commercial community. The promise of good times, however, proved illusionary. The province was wracked by internal disputes and the state made an effort to reimpose its control over the economy. These difficulties were compounded by an ecological crisis in the central region of the province which could not be remedied without radical social reorganization.

The internal dissension of the period was economic, political and lethal. It pitted members of the merchant elite against one another as well as against the leaders of indigenous groups of cultivators and herders. Intra-merchant strife was primarily caused by fierce competition for economic and political power within the province. The concentration of economic power into the hands of fewer and fewer men created within the commercial community an oligarchy prone to cabals and fratricidal conflicts. Disputes between merchant elites and local leaders were also economic and political. On the one hand, local

elites resented the economic power exercised by the merchant elite which obstructed their entry into the marketplace. While on the other hand, merchants realized the potential threat posed by disgruntled local leaders because of their control over the production and/or gathering of important commodities such as grain and gum. Politically, local elites resented the usurping of social position formerly held by themselves and their forefathers.

The state's attempt to reimpose its control over the economy grew out of an effort to stop the slave trade. Egypt's signing of the anti-slavery convention of 1877, and subsequent actions of Sir Samuel Baker and Charles George Gordon in enforcing its provisions, alienated local merchants and their allies. The interdiction of all trade in ivory and other goods across huge areas of Kordofan, in order to cripple the slave trade, compounded the growing ecologically generated economic difficulties faced by the merchant community of Kordofan.

The ecological crisis which developed resulted from a water deficit caused by increased demand and a lack of technology which could increase the water supply. At the most basic level the population of the central zone, both animal and human, exceeded the carrying capacity possible given the ecological constraints which existed. The overburdening of the environment, especially the water supply, meant that this region could not sustain increased numbers

of people at an increasingly higher standard of living. The escalation of food and water prices and increased competition for resources sparked deep seated, long festering, economic and political discontent.

It was at this time of severe crisis in Kordofan that the Muslim holy man Muhammad Ahmed made his first visit to Kordofan. The province proved to be fertile soil for the seeds of Mahdism sown by Muhammad Ahmed.¹ People from every level of society in Kordofan rallied early and enthusiastically to the Mahdi's call for revolt against the Turkiyya. The support given to Muhammad Ahmed stemmed in large part from the general discontent caused by political, economic, and social tensions, which were exacerbated by an ecological crisis. Many believed that the situation could only be ameliorated by the type of radical political change offered by the Mahdi.

¹ Muhammad Ahmad b. 'Abdallah, called the Mahdi, led a successful revolt against the Turco-Egyptian regime in the Sudan. He based his call for revolt on his having been chosen by Allah as a Mahdi or Expected Deliverer sent to save the Sudanese from the misrule and oppression of the heretic Turks. For a discussion of Mahdism and associated millenarianism in Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities in Europe and the Middle East see: N.Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium, 2nd ed., London, 1931; C.E.Whiting, Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution, (London:1931); E.J.Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels, (Manchester:1959); H.Graetz, History of the Jews, (English Trans.) (London:1914); S.W.Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, (New York:1937); D.S.Margoliouth, "Mahdi," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, v.VIII, pp.336-40; D.B.Macdonald, "Al-Mahdi" in Encyclopedia of Islam, v.III, pp.111-15.

Elements of the Ecological Crisis

Kordofan's topographical, geomorphic and geohydrologic characteristics made an ecological crisis inevitable given the province's increasing population density and the limited well-drilling technology available to the inhabitants during the nineteenth century. The ringed configuration found in Kordofan resulted from a unique combination of rainfall patterns, topography, and the hydrogeological sub-strata underlying the region. Only two sources of water existed in nineteenth century Kordofan during the lengthy dry season: rainwater, collected during the Kherif (rainy season) and stored in hollowed Tabeldi trees, and wells which held water that leached through the soil.² The relatively short rainy season, uneven distribution of Tabeldi trees, rapid evaporation and/or leaching of rain water which did fall made collection and storage a difficult and unpredictable method of obtaining water. Wells, therefore, played a critical role in supplying the needs of the population in Kordofan.

² H.G.Prout, General Report on the Province of Kordofan, (Cairo:1877), pp.44-45,199. Major H.G. Prout was an American officer sent by the Egyptian general staff to survey Kordofan Province and assess its productive potential. He had served as a Union officer during the American Civil War and like several other of his brother officers, both Federal and Confederate, found employment after the war in Egypt. Hill, Biographical Dictionary, pp.309-310; P.Crabites, Americans in the Egyptian Army, (London:1938), pp.72-90; William Hesselstine, and Hazel C. Wolf, The Blue and The Grey On the Nile. (Chicago,1961), pp.140-148.

Prout's reports provide detailed information about Kordofan's ecological and hydrogeological conditions.³ Its soil consisted of granite sand mixed with clay. During the kherif rain rapidly penetrated the surface and made its way downward until it struck an impenetrable sub-stratum or mica-schist, the configuration of which was not uniform. Prout reported a general slope in this sub-layer which caused the water to flow towards the basins of Kagmar, Esh Shaqq, Bara, Abu Harraz and Melbis.

At these locations the mica-schist stratum lay very close to the surface, making it easy to dig wells and irrigate crops for an extended period because of the large amount and rapid flow of water into the wells. Outside of these areas the quantity of water and rate of flow to refill wells was lower. Wells sunk outside these basins which struck the slope leading to the basins would only supply water if the schist was penetrated and an artificial reservoir created. These wells would eventually become dry and need to be abandoned when the continual use of water in the basins drew water away from the slope. The greater the distance from the basins the shorter the period during which water remained in a well. The farming population therefore, even in the agricultural zone, was at times

³ The following description of the ecological and hydrogeological conditions found in nineteenth-century Kordofan are based on Prout's report submitted in 1877. See in particular pages, 43-72, 199.

"nomadic," moving as necessary to find sure sources of water. This nomadic cycle became more or less active according to the amount of rain which fell during the kherif.

Prout estimated the total area of the central agricultural zone at 43,000 sq.km. The four basins at Bara, Melbis, Abu Harraz and Kagmar accounted for less than 400 sq.km. of this larger area and were "quite exceptional."⁴ The remaining area was supported by approximately 900 wells at depths of between 25 to 80 meters. One quarter of these were dry for a least six months of the year. The majority of the remainder held only a small amount of water in the final weeks of the dry season and refilled at an extremely slow rate. Prout stated unequivocally that given the technology available and necessity of depending on the yearly rains any government expenditure of funds to try to increase the water supply in the province "would be a waste of money and life" and that irrigation was impossible outside the small basin areas.⁵ Prout concluded that the import and export trade had peaked and that no marked increase in either consumption or production could be expected.

His assessment is very different from those of earlier travelers such as Cadalvene and Breuvery, Holroyd or Pallme

⁴ *ibid.*, p.47.

⁵ *ibid.*, pp.58,68.

who hailed the economic potential of Kordofan. Petherick hinted that by the mid-1850's economic prosperity for European merchants was declining but Prout makes it clear that by the 1870's local merchants were also struggling in a stagnating economy. Prout reported that the price paid for gum in Kordofan had reduced the profit margins to only 4% to 5%. In addition he reported that the merchants did not use their own people because:

the work is so tedious and unremunerative that it can only be done with the lowest class of labor. The labor of men is of more value in the corn fields and at the wells than in the Acacia forests.⁶

The value of land in the central agricultural zone, especially in the basins, rose steadily throughout the nineteenth century. Ownership and use of the most productive areas passed increasingly into the hands of the commercial community and government officials at the expense of local families.⁷ The use of slave labor in these areas also increased as landowners turned increasingly to irrigation in order to intensify production. But even in the basins there were limits to production. Prout observed that the production of sesame, wheat, beans, bamieh (okra), onions, cotton and tobacco was

⁶ *ibid.*, p.72.

⁷ MacMichael, "The Kheiran," Sudan Notes and Records, vol.3 no.4, "The Kheiran," pp.231-244, Leif Manger, "The Sand Swallows our Land," Occasional Paper no.24, African Savannah Studies, University of Bergen, (Bergen,1981), pp.1-5.

confined to the watered areas and little or no possibility existed for increased production over the current levels.⁸ The steady flow of Nile Valley peoples into the central zone from the north and northeast and slaves from the south and southwest precipitated an increased intensification of food production. Prout observed that "in certain regions long the seat of a quite dense population, there is evidence of exhaustion of the soil."⁹

The ecological crisis which developed in the central region occurred neither rapidly nor suddenly. Its detection and implications were to a large degree masked by the relatively imperceptible nature of its development and the diversified nature of the economy within the province. The gradual influx of people to the province from the Nile Valley and their dispersement to areas outside the central zone moderated the demographic pressure placed on the water table. This transient situation combined with the economic benefits of trade in gum arabic, from the central zone, and slaves and ivory, from the frontier, cushioned to some degree the increased cost of life in the central zone.

This was especially true for members of the commercial community and administration who owned the most productive of the arable land in the area. The increased use of slaves and intensification of production in the basins of Bara,

⁸ Manger, The Sand Swallows Our Land, p.70.

⁹ *ibid.*, p.44.

Kagmar, Abu Harraz and Melbis also improved the conditions of rich merchants and administrators. This, however, was only a short term solution as the soil could not sustain its fertility under these conditions. Rising food prices dictated an increased need for profits from trade in gum, ivory and slaves. The overall welfare of the economy of the central region increasingly became wed to the use of slave labor for production and the uninterrupted flow of export commodities from an ever more distant frontier region.

Internal Conflicts

The Leadership Structure Within Kordofan

Like the extremely heterogenous ethnic composition of the general population, the leadership elite was also divided into at least five separate categories. Each of these categories had individuals or families who assumed leadership roles within each group or sector of society. While these five "levels" were in place during the period from 1821 to 1860 they played an increasingly important role in the post-1860 period because of the weakened position of the Imperial governors.

At the top of the administrative hierarchy reigned the "conquering Turk." These men were always non-Sudanese and came from the ranks of the Mamluk or Ottoman bureaucratic/military class which commanded troops and

governed provinces throughout the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰ They had initially been a powerful force in the governance of the province but became continually weaker throughout the nineteenth-century. Their weakness resulted from both external and internal factors. Egypt's rulers feared the ambitions of officers appointed to the Sudan and therefore often undercut the powers of these officers by decentralizing and purging suspected officers on very skimpy evidence.¹¹ Internally, the increasingly heavy use of local Sudanese in the administrative structure, especially members of the commercial community, tended to isolate the imperial ruler from the ruled. The appointment of Ilyas Pasha Um Brayr, a powerful local merchant, as governor in 1877 illustrates the inroads made by the merchant elite the expense of the Ottoman administrators.

A second level of leaders were the decedents of the earlier Fur occupation force. These men wielded limited power among the Mussabat and Kungara communities settled in and around El-Obeid.¹² While not of great importance in

¹⁰ R.L.Hill, "The Rulers of the Sudan: 1820-1885," Sudan Notes and Records, 32, 1951:85-95, R.L.Hill, Egypt in the Sudan: 1820-1881, (Oxford:1959); For individual biographical sketches of Turco-Egyptian officers see specific headings in: Hill, Biographical Dictionary.

¹¹ Hill, Egypt in the Sudan, pp.75-77,80-82,95-97.

¹² For the presence of these communities in El-Obeid see: Eduard Ruppell, Reisen in Nubien, Kordofan, und dem Petraischen Arabien, (Frankfurt:1829), pp.135-138; Prout, General Report, p.10.

the larger scheme of provincial politics these men remained important enough to receive a subsidy in the form of cattle until at least the mid-1870's.¹³

A third level consisted of leaders from the period of Fung domination in the region. These men came from the descendants of the Ghodiat ruling families. During much of the nineteenth century the family of Ali Kanunna maintained its authority on the strength of its possessing the hereditary right to use the title of Manjil which connected it directly to the Fung in the Nile Valley.¹⁴

The fourth level of leadership came from the various ethnic groups living in the first and second rings. Each of these peoples had their own leaders and seldom looked beyond these men. The transfer of tribute and taxes through the various levels of subservience was of little concern to them after their own contributions had been made. These groups consisted of the Bedariyya, Hawazma, Messiriyya, Hamid, Gawama'a, Hamar, Kawahla, Kababish, Habbania and assorted other smaller groups.¹⁵

¹³ Salmon, "The Story of Sheikh Ahmed Abu Gelaha," Sudan Notes and Records, pp.82-83.

¹⁴ Prout, General Report, p.8; Nur, "Memoir of Yusif Mikha'il," pp.33-45; Salmom, "The Story of Sheikh Abdullahi Ahmed Abu Gelaha," pp.82-83; Hill, Biographical Dictionary, p.48. Spaulding, "A Premise for Precolonial Nuba History," History in Africa, 14 (1987), 369-374.

¹⁵ MacMichael, The Tribes of Northern and Central Kordofan, pp.51-221 passim; Born, Zentralkordofan, pp.44-50, Kart 12 between pp.112-113.

The fifth level of leaders within Kordofan grew out of the increasing importance of the commercial community. The basis for their position in the government began with simple literacy. The ability to read and write, an essential skill for the running of a bureaucracy, made them a welcome addition to an administration which could ill afford to import large numbers of bureaucrats from Egypt or other parts of the Ottoman Empire. By mid-century, however, it was no longer literacy but commercial power and the control of the province's economy exercised by the commercial elite which propelled its members into the highest levels of the government.

Ilyas um Brayer and Ahmad wad Dafallah exemplified the culmination of a process which had been evolving since the late eighteenth century. These men succeeded in exercising the combined role of economic and political leader. Their control over both spheres gave them a degree of power within society not known since the days of the Fung Sultans, Unsa II b. Nasir b. Rubat and his successor Badi III.¹⁶ Their attainment of supreme power in the province, however, meant that the political economy of the region had been completely inverted. No longer did a hereditary, landed, political elite control all economic and merchant activity within its realm but rather the opposite situation

¹⁶ R.S.O'Fahey and J.L.Spaulding, Kingdoms of the Sudan, (London:1974); J.L.Spaulding, The Heroic Age in Sennar, (East Lansing:1985).

pertained. The merchant was now the political leader and he controlled all the economic activity of the hereditary local elites.¹⁷

While these two men had achieved extensive political and economic power they refused to share the uppermost rung within Kordofanese society. Ilyas and Ahmed each manipulated the other four levels of leadership, and the followers of these leaders, within Kordofan with the intention of destroying the other. The ecologically induced deterioration of economic conditions within the province and interjection of outside forces in the form of the anti-slavery crusade quickened the pace of this internecine warfare.

Indigenous Challenges to the Diaspora

The power and position of diaspora "outsiders", ie. Ja'alin, Dongolawi and Shagia, within Kordofan angered many of the "insiders", those agricultural and nomadic groups

¹⁷ General Charles Gordon's and other official's insistence that only al-Zubair Rahma Mansur, merchant prince of the Bahr al-Ghazal, could provide a successful counter force to the Mahdi indicates the degree to which the merchant class had broken the power of "traditional leaders" and the Turco-Egyptian regime within Sudanese society. No "traditional leader" possessed the prestige or connections necessary to unite large groups of people to oppose the Mahdi on the behalf of the Turco-Egyptian regime.

who believed that they had far deeper roots in the soil of Kordofan. The reaction on the part of the local population took many different forms. The nomads attempted to move their animals away from administrative centers and limited their contact with the state and its officials. This non-violent form of resistance had been used in the Nile Valley and in Kordofan since the early years of the Turkiyya.¹⁸ The Hamar shaykh Ismain Sakka, for example, steadfastly refused to divulge the numbers of his people living in Kordofan. He was at one point imprisoned in El-Obeid in order to get the information but he refused to be intimidated. His people withdrew westward, refused to pay tribute and ceased to transport goods until his release. The administration relented and Ismain returned to his still unnumbered people.¹⁹ The Hamar not only kept the government at bay but also grew as a political and economic threat to the commercial elite as well.

The Hamar, a nomad group to the west and northwest of El-Obeid, constituted a growing indigenous commercial and

¹⁸ For the Nile Valley see: "The Funj Chronicle" in H.A.MacMichael, A History of the Arabs in the Sudan, vol.II, (London:1967), pp.392-399; R.L.Hill, On the Frontiers of Islam: Two Manuscripts concerning the Sudan Under Turco-Egyptian Rule, (London:1970), pp.24,48,69-70; Hill, Egypt in the Sudan, p.41; For Kordofan see: Pallme, Travels in Kordofan; pp.118-120; Petherick, Egypt the Soudan and Central Africa, p.315; H.G.Prout, General Report on the Province of Kordofan, pp.13,29.

¹⁹ Petherick, Egypt the Soudan and Central Africa, p.315.

political power within Kordofan from the 1840s until the establishment of the Mahdist state. They occupied territory both in Eastern Dar Fur and Western Kordofan. One of the few written sources on the Hamar, in addition to travelers accounts, is a brief unpublished history by the British officer K.D.D.Henderson.²⁰

Hajj Mun'im controlled the Hamar of Kordofan at the time of the Turco-Egyptian conquest of Kordofan. In c.1830 he was replaced by his son Isma'il wad Al-Hajj Mun'im (called Ismain Sakkak) who continued the process begun by his father of consolidating the strength of the Hamar in Kordofan.²¹ Petherick, who visited Ismain at his camp at Firshala, alludes to the independent position of this young

²⁰ K.D.D.Henderson's "Note on Dar Hamar" is an interesting and rather unique piece of historical research which was researched in Kordofan in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Henderson with the help of A.E.D.Penn and R.C.M. collected oral histories from approximately 45 Hamar notables. They then cross checked their informants testimony and Henderson wrote a political history which also contained some social and economic information as well. The manuscripts of this work are in the Sudan Archive, University of Durham. One of the most interesting things about this file is that it contains two manuscripts and notes to Henderson from outside readers. The first manuscript is an original draft which Henderson sent to Khartoum for review with the hope of publication. The second manuscript is a sanitized version which conforms to the suggestion of his readers in Khartoum. The original it appears gave much too accurate an account, especially of British intervention in the selection of leaders and support of helpful Hamar notables, of Hamar history. In my own research in Kordofan I was able to interview two of Henderson's original informants and the sons of many others.

²¹ For brief biographical sketches of these men and other Hamar notables see: Hill, Biographical Dictionary, pp.15,149,175,185,228,281.

leader and called him the Shaykh of the Hamar making no mention of any subservience to the Sultan of Dar Fur on the part of Ismain.²² At the time of Petherick's visit, c.1840s, the Hamar expansion was in full swing.

In part the expansion of the Hamar resulted from their cooperation with the Turco-Egyptian administration. For a price, Mun'im, and after him Ismain, provided the Turks with condottieri to carry out or support government raids. 1000 Hamar horsemen accompanied Mustapha Pasha's Nuba expedition in 1847 and the Hamar leader Abd al-Rahim Salim abu Dugl led over 1000 irregulars on a raid against the Salim for tax evasion.²³

The Hamar expansion gained further momentum when a force under the command of Makki Abu al-Meleih, crushed a Kababish force and occupied its main camp. The defeat was so complete that the Kababish never seriously challenged the Hamar again for supremacy in Northwestern Kordofan until after the Mahdia. Mekki's victory increased his reputation and he attracted increasing numbers of followers, both Hamar and non-Hamar. Because of his proximity to El-Obeid Mekki quickly saw the advantages of

²² John Petherick, Egypt the Soudan and Central Africa, p.143.

²³ Pallme, Travels, p.119; Petherick, Egypt the Soudan, pp.229,321. One can gage the usefulness of the irregular formations led by Abu Dugl by the success of his mission against the Salim. The booty in cattle looted by his force enabled the administration to clear a ten month pay arrears with the garrison at El-Obeid.

gum production and moved to take advantage of the gum producing areas in his own domain. Because his own Hamar nomads were unwilling to lower themselves to the collection of gum or other agricultural pursuits Mekki recruited other groups skilled in tapping and marketing of gum to settle in his lands. He succeeded in enticing people away from the central area which at one stroke created competition for the diaspora gum merchants and increased the cost of tapping and marketing in the central zone.²⁴

At the zenith of the Hamar expansion a succession crisis struck the federation. The lack of a strong leader to replace Mekki Mun'im at his death and a disagreement over tribute distribution precipitated the split of the federation into three semi-autonomous sections. On the eve of the Mahdia the Asakira section followed Ibrahim Bey Mileh, the Daqaqim section Hamid Bey Fatin and the Gharaysia, newly split from Fatin's control, Abdul Rahim Abu Dugl.²⁵

While the leadership split ended any immediate political threat to the commercial elite the Hamar remained

²⁴ Some of the groups and their leaders were:

El-Feki el-Kersani	Shaigai
Ali Bokhari	Guama'a
Musa Hassabullah	N. Bedariyya
Nasr Muhammad	S. Bedariyya

²⁵ Henderson, "History of the Hamar," (original draft), pp.15-22,29-32; MacMichael, The Tribes of Northern and Central Kordofan, pp.158-159.

a potent economic rival. For the diaspora elite the problem remained that a resourceful leader might arise who could reunite the Hamar. Such a leader could quickly place the commercial elite in an uncomfortable position between the administration, which might not wish to anger the militarily potent group, and a Hamar elite who wanted more control over the economic and political life of the province.

Other nomads, however, were less successful. They were forced to use known well centers and the administration posted troops at these sites which took the tribute required by the administration. The Salim, Hawazma, Hamid and other nomad sections of mixed agricultural herding groups suffered at the hands of the administration and their condottieri. Among the settled population the friction between insiders and outsiders was also widespread. For townsmen and farmers this strife could not be completely dissipated by seasonal isolation or immigration. The joining of a religious brotherhood which enjoyed special privileges could only help a limited number of people and was limited to certain areas around the homes of religious shaykhs. The only option left was open fighting between the diaspora and indigenous groups. The revolt also illustrates the rapidity with which common men flocked to leaders who promised relief from the oppression of the government.

The cause for these tensions were numerous. Yusif Mikh'il, the son of a coptic clerk, who also became a clerk and worked for the administration in El-Obeid enumerated in detail the causes for the tensions between "insiders" and "outsiders." He recounts that as a young boy, not yet finished with his studies, he and his friends would eagerly await the yearly Meglis or meeting of all the administrators and local headmen of Kordofan. At this Meglis each administrative district was audited and administrators required to make a full accounting of all their financial records. Many of the district clerks were barely literate and would record their accounts on scraps of paper and leave the official books blank. On their arrival at El-Obeid for the financial review they would frantically hire a junior clerk to organize the accounts and fill in the official book. The clerks of the accounts section were also bribed to make mathematical adjustments for errors or shortfalls in the accounts.²⁶

At the same meeting it was customary for people with grievances against administrators to petition the governor for redress. The governor, however, would not receive petitions unless presented in written form. The young clerks charged "nomad Arabs" 10 piasters or more for each petition. The less naive townspeople refused to pay more than 4-5 piasters. Yusif claims he and his companions made

²⁶ Yusif Mikh'il, Memoirs, pp.46-47.

a small fortune each year because of the large numbers of complaints and petitions filed.²⁷ The complaints of the townspeople focused on two particularly rapacious Dongolawi officials named Sabr ibn Abd al Hadi Aga and Abd al-Majid Abu Nakhar. Sabr was accused of continually overcharging the town's folk for housing and market taxes.

Abd al-Magid used an extensive ring of informants to keep him apprised of all slaves which entered the town. He would then blackmail the jellaba who had these slaves by threatening to tell the government that these men had brought slaves into El-Obeid and not reported to the government. In the period prior to the outlawing of the slave trade the government would take a cut of all slaves brought into the city for military service. After the anti-slavery campaign began the jellaba had even more to fear from exposure. It was also said that they did not overcharge the more powerful men of the town such as Ahmad Dafallah or Ilyas Um Brayr.²⁸ Yusif also mentions an official named Malik, shaykh of the Takarir. He collected a sales tax on all animals sold in the market. He usually charged the unwary more than the official rate and pocketed the profit. He headed the animal tax section of the

²⁷ *ibid.*, pp.30-31.

²⁸ *ibid.*, 48-51.

accounts department and could thus get away with his actions.²⁹

The "nomad arabs" appear to have suffered greatly at the hands of the tax collectors as well. Yusif Mikh'il writes of them:

As far as the nomad Arabs were concerned, the lucky few among them had their injustices redressed, the unlucky ones became disgruntled, and the majority continued to suffer the injustices. They became miserable and some almost wept.³⁰

Their complaints were not always in vain, however, and Yusif Mikh'il records that Gordon ordered the dismissal of Abd al-Hadi Aga, Ahmad Aga Yassin and Uthman Aga.³¹ Subsequent records show, however, that each of these men quickly found their way back into the administration of the province.³²

One reaction to this situation remembered by Abdallahi Ahmed was an outbreak of violence which occurred in Abu Haraz. Abu Haraz basin was occupied by Bedariyya, Tumbab, Tomam, Bergid, a large number of Dongolawi and others "from the river."³³ The nazir of the Abu Haraz district was Muhammad Agha Rahma, a Shagia trader, who was awarded the

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.51.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.49.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.56.

³² Slatin, Fire and Sword in the Sudan, p.61.

³³ Salmon, "The Story of sheikh Abdullahi Ahmed, pp.79-80.

post for service to the government.³⁴ A Bedariyya named Hamad wad al-Sanjak raided a group of Maagla north of El-Obeid and drove a number of looted cattle to Abu Haraz. When the nazir of Abu Haraz ordered the cattle returned the Bedariyya "insulted him telling him that he was only a gallabi."³⁵

The Nazir appealed to the governor in El-Obeid for aid. The governor sent a message to the Bedariyya with Abd al-Rahim abu Safia.³⁶ The letter was to be delivered to officials of whom Abdullahi Ahmed was one. The message said that the governor,

promised that he would remit 3 years taxation, if the Bederia would give up the cattle and they and the Danagala would forbear from fighting.³⁷

When the Danagla learned the contents of the message they felt that the governor was making an unacceptable concession to a people they believed to be their inferiors.³⁸ The Danagla attacked the party carrying the message to prevent its delivery and in the resulting melee Abd al-Rahim was killed and the Bedariyya soundly beaten.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.80.

³⁵ *ibid.*, pp.83-84.

³⁶ The same Bedariyya freebooter who aided Ilyas Pasha in the crushing of Ali Kannuna's revolt in 1874-5.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.84.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.84, Shaykh Abdullahi Ahmed stated that the Dongola lorded it over the Bedariyya of Abu Haraz and would never allow their power to be threatened.

The Bedariyya, however, soon organized a large counter-attack which drove the Danagla out of Abu Haraz. The victorious Bedariyya then went on a rampage and destroyed the homes, shops, gardens, water wheels and any other property belonging to the Dongolawi they could lay hands on.³⁹

Intra-Merchant Conflicts

Religion and Identity Within the Commercial Structure

One of the results of the increasingly competitive climate which developed in the central region was a subtle change within the commercial community found there. As discussed earlier, the merchant community of northern Kordofan during the nineteenth century consisted overwhelmingly of members of a diaspora which considered their true home to be in the Nile Valley. During the course of the nineteenth-century members of this diaspora continuously redefined the criteria by which they identified themselves because of changes in the demographic, economic and political environment in Kordofan. As a result bonds of ethnicity, which had initially served to define interest group identity, became weaker and other criteria, such as membership in specific religious brotherhoods, gained importance in defining

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.84.

relationships.⁴⁰ This process of redefinition resulted in the alteration of relationships within the merchant community and between the merchant community and indigenous population.⁴¹

The expansion of trade in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries drew increasing numbers of merchants and adventurers into Kordofan. The presence of

⁴⁰ Tariqas are Sufi brotherhoods organized around a specific set of rituals within the broader religion of Islam. Within the Sudan there are more than ten such brotherhoods, each with its own particular rites and ceremonies.

⁴¹ The study of trading diasporas is not a new one. L. Fallers' Immigrants and Associations, (Paris:1967), presents numerous examples of the roles played by the Jewish and Arab merchant communities which dotted Europe and the Mediterranean during the middle ages, the Chinese merchants who operated in East and Southeast Asia, and the Arab and Indian traders who worked on the East African coast. In Africa's Sudanic belt researchers have also examined the role of diasporas in trade. R.B.Winder's research on the Lebanese in West Africa, W.T.Morrill's on the Ibo in Calabar, and Abner Cohen's studies of the Hausa in Nigeria offer an analysis of the diaspora phenomenon in the Western Sudan. see: R.B. Winder, "The Lebanese in West Africa;" and W.T.Morrill, "Immigrants and Associations: the Ibo in Twentieth Century Calabar" in L.Fallers, ed., Immigrants and Associations, and Abner Cohen, Customs and Politics in Urban Africa: A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns, (London:1969). S.Baier and D.Cordell discuss long distance trade and diasporas in the Central Sudan and A.Bjorkelo has explained the reasons behind the creation of a diaspora trading community in the Eastern Sudan. See: S.Baier, "Trans-Saharan Trade and the Sahel: Damergu 1870-1930," Journal of African History, 18,1 (1977) 37-60; P.Lovejoy and S.Baier, "The Desert Side Economy of the Central Sudan," International Journal of African Historical Studies, 8,4 (1975) 551-581; D.Cordell, "Eastern Libya, Wadai and the Sanusiya: A Tariqa and a Trade Route," Journal of African History, 18,1 (1977) 21-36; A Bjorkelo, "From King to Khashif: Shendi in the Nineteenth Century," Doctoral Dissertation, (Bergen:1982).

kinsmen within the established Ja'alín and Danagla diaspora communities of the west offered a secure starting point and a commercial network within which to begin trading activities. Employment was also available within the Turco-Egyptian colonial administration which throughout the mid-nineteenth-century became increasingly staffed by members of the diaspora community. The vast majority of these individuals established residences in the central zone.

Diaspora members who worked in the state bureaucracy often combined their administrative positions and commercial operations in ways which increased their power and prestige within the merchant community and society as a whole. The careers of Ilyas Um Brayr Mek Nimr, Ahmad wad Dafallah, Abd al-Rahman Ban Naga are outstanding examples of this phenomenon. Other families, such as those of Siwar al-Dahab and Ismail Abdallah al-Wali, combined religious leadership with commercial and administrative functions.⁴²

By the middle of the nineteenth century the large numbers of people from the Nile Valley living and working in Kordofan produced two changes in the political economy of the province. The first was the shift of the merchant diaspora from a position of dependence vis-a-vis the

⁴² Interviews: Abd al-Rahman Siwar al-Dahab, Khartoum, April/1987; al-Bakri Ismail al-Wali, El-Obeid, May/1987, (Descendent of Ismail Abd Allahi al-Wali founder of the Ismaila Tariqa and current head of the Tariqa.); R.L. Hill, Biographical Dictionary, pp.31,180; Mikha'il, Memoirs, pp.28,110-115; R.Salmon, "The Story of Abdullahi Ahmed Abu Gelaha," pp.79-103; P.M.Holt, The Mahdist State, pp.32-45.

indigenous population to one of independence and security. The second was the intensification of competition within the merchant community for control of the machinery of exchange.⁴³ These changes in Kordofan's political economy prompted the redefining of the criteria by which interest groups identified themselves. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century ethnicity had been a prominent factor in defining an individual's or family's position or occupation within society. During the two and a half decades prior to the Mahdist revolt, however, ethnicity was no longer a distinctive enough criteria and groups within the merchant community, developed more restrictive "marks". Membership in specific religious confraternities or Tariqas offered one way in which groups could redefine and narrow the membership of their interest group.

Four Tariqas in particular, the Qadriyya, Khatmiyya, Isma'iliyya and Tijiniyya had sizable numbers of adherents in Kordofan during the nineteenth century. The Qadriyya was the first to have its teachings carried into Kordofan and its arrival occurred during the eighteenth century. It was followed in the early nineteenth-century by the Khatmiyya

⁴³ One of the widely known cases of this rivalry was the power struggle and animosity which existed between Ilyas Um Brayr Mek Nimr and Ahmad wad Dafallah. These two powerful merchants battled each other with every means possible to effect the destruction of the other. The final act of this drama was played out during the siege of El-Obeid. Dafallah supported the government and Ilyas Um Brayr the Mahdi. Dafallah was killed after being taken prisoner at the fall of El-Obeid.

and Ismailiyya. The Khatmiyya's founder in the Sudan was Muhammad Uthman al-Mirghani who had been the disciple of Ahmad b. Idris al-Fasi. He arrived in Kordofan in approximately 1813 married a local woman and established a family. Isma'il Abdallah al-Wali, one of his first pupils from El-Obeid, founded his own order, the Isma'iliyya in approximately 1815. The last to arrive in Kordofan during the nineteenth-century was the Tijiniyya order which established itself in the late 1870's.⁴⁴

Membership in these confraternities was not based strictly on ethnicity. The Siwar al-Dahab family for example were staunch adherents to the Khatmiyya until the Mahdiyya while fellow Dongolawi relatives followed the Tariqa of Ismail al-Wali.⁴⁵ Membership within a tariqa was a matter of personal request and group acceptance which meant that a level of exclusiveness could be maintained which was not possible in ethnically based organizations. The religious orders also served to unify individuals who had little else in common by providing a bond of trust

⁴⁴ Interviews: Al-Bakri Ismail al-Wali, El-Obeid, May/1987; Abd al-Rahman Siwar al-Dahab, Khartoum, April; Al-Tyrib Al-Shuwiehat, El-Obeid, June/1987 (Descendent of the Qadriyya Sheikh al-Daw); Khalifa Dirdiri al-Dasuqi Jafar wad Daolib, Khorsi, Sept./1987, (Present Khalifa and head of the Tijiniyya Tariqa) ;C.A.Willis, "Religious Confraternities of the Sudan," Sudan Notes and Records, 4,1921: pp.175-194; Jamil m. Abun-Nasr, The Tiganiyya A Sufi Order in the Modern World, (Oxford:1965), pp.158-159.

⁴⁵ Interviews: Abd al-Rahman Siwar al Dahab, Khartoum, April/1987; Al-Bakri Ismail al-Wali, El-Obeid, May/1987; Abd al-Jabbar Hussain Zaki al-Din, El-Obeid, April/1987.

through membership in the common tariqa. Tariqas provided a socially acceptable mechanism through which individuals could escape unwanted responsibilities within a large unregulated interest group and increase their individual independence of operation. They also made it possible for select groups of individuals to effectively organize themselves in order to achieve a common goal. Of the four major nineteenth century brotherhoods in Kordofan the Tijiniyya offer an interesting example of how a tariqa could be used as a pole around which a commercial interest group could form.

The Tijiniyya tariqa was founded outside the Sudan in c.1781 and was a relative latecomer to the Sudan.⁴⁶ The Tariqa's administrative center was, and remains, in Khorsi, a large village near the commercial town of Bara. The founding and operation of this tariqa illustrates how the local merchant community could undercut their diaspora rivals, restrict participation by members of their own ethnic group and obtain special privileges from the state. By adopting this system of organization they benefited from distinctiveness, solidarity and trust which helped them to achieve economic power in the economy without the obligation to share the benefits derived from that power.

⁴⁶ Willis "Religious Confraternities," pp. ;Abun-Nasr, The Tiganiya, pp.

The tariqa's membership was made up primarily of Daolib and Hamid who live in the surrounding area. Very few Ja'alin or Danagla belonged to this brotherhood. The dominant position of the Danagla in the Bara region during the majority of the nineteenth century explains in part the ethnic makeup of this tariqa and its preoccupation with business. The tariqa was the most rigid in its intolerance of other brotherhoods and forbade its members to have contact with other tariqas. In its rituals it was the most simplistic and maintained as one of its tenets that business should always be well attended. This rule even applied when a brother might be prevented from performing his rituals because of the press of business. The logic behind this apparent laxity of vigor in religious duty was that it did little good to pray if ones mind was on business that had been left unfinished.⁴⁷

The impetus for its founding and development grew in part out of a frustration over Danagla control of the political economy of the area. The Danagla consolidated their control over the Bara area in the early nineteenth century by gaining access to posts within the Turco-Egyptian administration. The attraction of the area was that the Bara basin and near by Kheiran allowed irrigated

⁴⁷ Interview: Khalifa Dirdiri Al-Dasuqi Jafaar wad Daolib, Khorsi, Sept./1987; Ahmad al Amin Muhammad Nur, Khorsi, Sept./1987, (Historian to the Khalifa of the Tariqa).

cultivation to be carried out with the use of slave labor and water wheels.⁴⁸ By the mid-1850's the indigenous population, in particular the camel herding sections of the Hamid, had been pushed out of the more lucrative sectors of the economy and left to operate the transport arm of trade.⁴⁹ Those who wished to break the monopoly of the Danagla were forced to find a way of uniting themselves.

The Tariqa in Khorsi offered many attractive opportunities. It was located outside of Bara and was exempted from paying taxes.⁵⁰ The Khalifa of the brotherhood was a Daolib and his position and reputation as a pious holy man made retaliation by the Danagla dominated bureaucracy unlikely.⁵¹ Individuals unhappy with the Danagla monopoly for any reason became members of the Tariqa and created a parallel commercial community to counter the Danagla one operating in Bara. Large numbers of Hamid joined them and if it had not been for the rise of

⁴⁸ H.A. MacMichael, "The Kheiran," pp. 234-244, (The term Kheiran is used to distinguish the cultivated area from the more arid region around Bara).

⁴⁹ MacMichael, "The Kheiran," pp.; L.O. Manger, The Sand Swallows our Land, pp.

⁵⁰ The Tijiniyya, like other brotherhoods in Kordofan, was granted tax-exempt status for its property. The same exemption applied to the people living on its lands. Throughout the Anglo-Egyptian period and to the present day, the same tax-exempt status applies. Interview: Khalifa Dirdiri Dasuqi, Khorsi, Sept./1897.

⁵¹ The Daolib steadfastly deny that they are connected in any way with the Ja'aliyyn or the Danagla.

the Mahdi and subsequent disruption of trade in the region this coalition might have eliminated the Danagla monopoly.

Merchant Elite Conflicts

The struggle for power and profits also took on more secular and deadly forms within Kordofan's commercial community. As alluded to earlier, two of the key players in this struggle were Ilyas Um Brayr and Ahmad Dafallah, two powerful Ja'alin merchants. Ilyas Um Brayr was born and raised in a merchant family which seems to have been in Kordofan at the time of the Turco-Egyptian invasion. Ahmad Dafallah was born at Al-Juwair near Shendi and early in his professional life migrated to Kordofan and built a large trading company second only to that of Ilyas Um Brayr.⁵²

Both men lived in the central zone and directed their commercial enterprises from El-Obeid. Each stood at the apex of an extensive commercial machine which had connections extending from Cairo to the equatorial swamps of the Sudan and employed hundreds of small scale traders and armed retainers. They also lived in a social, political and economic milieu characterized by competing and shifting

⁵² Interview: Hamid Al-Nil, El-Obeid, May/1987 and Sept./1987; National Records Office, Khartoum, CARINT 1-10-51 "Memo on Ilyas Pasha," Report of Fall of Kordofan, pp.1-3; Hill, Biographical Dictionary, pp.31,180.

alliances which, if not skillfully monitored and managed, could lead to political and economic ruin.

The animosity between Ilyas and Ahmed first broke into the open in 1877-78. Gordon, the newly appointed Governor-General of the Sudan, sparked this particular outbreak by giving Ilyas the rank of Pasha and appointing him Mudir (governor) of Kordofan to replace Muhammad Said who had been reassigned to Berber. Ilyas immediately asked that his fellow merchant and ally Abd al-Rahman Ban Naga be made a Bey and Deputy Governor to replace Ali Bey Sherif who had been ordered to Khartoum. The elevation of Ilyas to Pasha made him Ahmed's superior since Ahmed held the grade of Bey and opened the way for Ilyas to take complete control of the merchant community. Yusif Mikha'il reported that Ahmed "was greatly vexed, but he concealed his rankling anger and began to plot the downfall of Ilyas Pasha."⁵³

Ahmed turned to the Ghodiat leader Ali Kannuna and incited him to rebel against the governorship of Ilyas pasha.⁵⁴ Ahmed bey reportedly said to Ali Kannuna:

Sheikh Ali Kannuna, do you agree that Ilyas Pasha is in control of the government while you are still alive? You are of the stock of the Funj, the people of the Sultanate,

⁵³ Yusif Mikha'il, Memories, pp.27-28,32; Bernard M.Allen, Gordon and the Sudan, (London:1931) p.118; Hill, Egypt in the Sudan, p.177; Salmon "The story of Sheikh Abdullahi Ahmed," p.81.

⁵⁴ Yusif Mikh'il, Memoirs, p.33, Salomn, "The Story of Sheikh Abdullahi Ahmed,"p.82.

the kings of Sinnar... You are a Mangil; you have a nihas, and you are feared by the nomad arabs.⁵⁵

Ahmed succeeded in his argument and Ali Kanunna revolted, saying that:

we shall not pay taxes any more in my domains while I am still alive because the Ja'ali has become our governor; he who after selling pepper and salt, is now in possession of great wealth and has obtained the rank of Pasha, and we are, in fact being ruled by a peddler!⁵⁶

Ahmed backed up his instigation of Ali Kanunna with shipments of arms and ammunition which included several "quarter cannon."⁵⁷ Ali Kanunna's forces included the Rowaga section of the Hawazma, as well as sections of the Humr, Dubab, Gawama'a and Takarir. The Abd al-Ali and Halafa sections of the Hawazma, however, remained loyal to the government as did the Bedariyya. Ali Kanunna's cousin Ismail al-Amin also remained loyal. Ilyas sent a government force with one piece of artillery to put down

⁵⁵ Yusif Mikh'il, Memoirs, pp.33-34. For the connections between the Funj sultanate and the Ghodiat and Family of Ali Kannuna see: Spaulding, "A Premise for Precolonial Nuba History," MacMichael, The Tribes of Northern and Central Kordofan, pp.65-69; O'Fahey and Spaulding, Kingdoms of the Sudan, p.93; Kordofan Province File, C.D.SCR.66.E.1, Appendix 1, El-Obeid 29/January/1933. (copy in the possession of the author.) The nihas referred to in the passage was a drum which was a traditional symbol of power and authority.

⁵⁶ Yusif Makh'il, Memoirs, p.34.

⁵⁷ The quarter cannon consisted of six large caliber rifle barrels mounted on a wheeled carriage. There is a quarter cannon from this period on display in the provincial museum in El-Obeid. The dates on this weapon correspond to the revolt of Ali Kannuna.

the revolt but it was badly mauled and retreated to El-Obeid.⁵⁸

Ilyas then turned to his own allies among the local elite. He called the Bedariyya leaders Abd al-Rahman Abu Safiya and his brother Abd al-Sammad and the still loyal Ismail al-Amin to the mudria (government building). He asked these men to form a force which could defeat Ali Kanunna and said that he would reinforce them with government troops and artillery. He also said, however, that "we will send with you enough solders under a Lieutenant Colonel and artillerymen with two guns, but it would be you who would fight him."⁵⁹ Abdullahi Ahmed Abu Gelaha, who claims to have been present at the battle of al-Ifayanat adds more intriguing information. He states that the government troops were ordered to avoid entering the fight until a winner was emerging and then to support that side. He also reported that while near the artillery he noticed their initial fire was off target because they had friends on the other side. The threat of decapitation by an officer if their aim did not improve, however, brought better results.

⁵⁸ Salmon, "The Story of Abdullahi Ahmed," p.82, Yusif Mikh'il, Memoires, pp.36-37. It appears that intra-group animosity among the Hawazma caused the split in those who joined the Ghodiat in revolt.

⁵⁹ Yusif Mikh'il, Memoirs, p.38.

Ali Kanunna was killed and the government forces moved in to support the irregulars of Abd al-Samid and Ismail al-Amin.⁶⁰ Ilyas succeeded in crushing the revolt and restoring order but the instability and expense caused by the revolt persuaded the Governor-General to recall Muhammad Said as governor and bring Ali Sharif back as deputy governor.⁶¹ Ahmad Dafallah had won an important power struggle at Ilyas's expense but the conflict between the two remained very much alive.

The revolt of Ali Kanunna and its suppression offers insight into the maze of alliances and competing interests in Kordofan. The merchant elite, in fights among themselves, used surrogates to achieve their ends. The surrogates took the form of mid-level and small scale jellaba in commercial warfare and local political leaders with armed retainers and followers in political struggles.

⁶⁰ Salmon, "The Story of Sheikh Abdullahi Ahmed, p.82-83; Yusif Mikh'il, Memoirs, pp.39-40.

⁶¹ Muhammad Said and Ali Bey were back in El-Obeid by early 1879. The swift return of these leaders may also be related to the general outcry at a merchant being placed in the seat of the Governor. Slatin notes that on a demand by Ilyas um Brayr for taxes Mek Adam stated bluntly that "I pay for goods I buy from merchants, but I do not pay tribute to them" he also sent a message to El-Obeid to inquire if "all the Turks and other whites had died, as the government had given high positions to men who were nearly merchants and not of high descent," Slatin, Fire and Sword, p.56. Both Muhammad and Ali were in El-Obeid at the time of Muhammad Ahmed's first visit to the city but were unconcerned by his presence. See: Holt, The Mahdist State in the Sudan, p.49.

The surrogates, however, often had their own agendas and vendettas which they pursued as well.

External Factors

State Intervention and the Slave Trade

The anti-slavery campaign in the Sudan intensified Kordofan's commercial, political and ethnic tensions. In June 1873 the Khedive obtained the right from the Ottoman Sultan to conclude non-political treaties and loan agreements with foreign powers. In August 1877, the Khedive Isma'il, under pressure from the European powers, signed an Anglo-Egyptian convention for the suppression of the slave trade. The agreement stipulated that the import and export of Sudanese and Ethiopian slaves was prohibited outright. Anyone found guilty faced a sentence of five months to five years of hard labor. The selling of slaves between families, however, was permitted for seven years in Egypt and was to cease in the Sudan after twelve years.⁶²

The signing of the anti-slavery convention brought Kordofan's deteriorating economy and political system to a critical juncture. The Khedive gave the British officer Charles Gordon extraordinary powers to implement the

⁶² Gabriel Baer, "Slavery in Nineteenth Century Egypt," Journal of African History, VIII,3(1967),pp. 430-431; Ehud R. Toledano, The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression, (Princeton:1982) pp.224-227.

convention. Gordon himself was surprised at the wide latitude given him by the Khedive.

His Highness today has signed the firman... I am astounded at the power he has placed in my hands. With the Governor-Generalship of the Sudan, it will be my fault if slavery does not cease and if those vast countries are not open to the world. So there is an end of slavery, if God wills, for the whole secret of the matter is in the government of the Sudan and, if the man who holds that government is against it, it must cease.⁶³

Gordon had the convention publicly proclaimed in Khartoum on November 4 and made it clear that slave trading was considered the equivalent of murder and would be punished accordingly.⁶⁴ Gordon soon realized, however, that, despite his actions in attempting to end the slave trade, he was losing the battle. He wrote that,

So long as slavery of any kind is a recognized institution, slave dealers can mask their transactions by declaring the slaves found in their possession...to be their personal property i.e. domestic slaves.⁶⁵

Gordon's answer to this fundamental flaw in the Convention was to end all trade between the slave catchment areas and the slave selling centers.

His action differed only slightly from previous attempts by the government to wipe out slavery. In each of these efforts to regain control of trade in the south a similar pattern had been followed. The state representative

⁶³ B.M.Allen, Gordon in the Sudan, p.111.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.124.

⁶⁵ See, Analysis of the slave trade convention of the 4th of August 1877," Zohrab to Malet, Cairo, 22 January, 1880 F.O.141/140.

would announce that he was under orders from the government to suppress the slave trade. He would then declare a government monopoly over commerce in the entire region and order all ivory surrendered to the government's representatives. Finally, all merchants would be ordered out of the region.

Gordon took this final order one step further. He proclaimed that any merchants found in the districts under the trading ban were outlaws who could be plundered and murdered with impunity.⁶⁶ Through Gordon's actions the cycle of violence and exploitation had come full circle. Those people long forced to submit to the power of the jellaba were given the opportunity to attack without fear of their oppressors. The intervention of the government or more precisely, Gordon and his officers, altered the power balance which had been established by the commercial community. Gordon and his associates used existing social instability to exacerbate an already chaotic situation. The Bahr al-Ghazal and trade routes across the nomad zone were

⁶⁶ For the establishment of the government monopoly see: S.W.Baker, Ismailia: A Narrative of the Expedition to Central Africa for the Suppression of the Slave Trade, (London:1874), p.122; Allen, Gordon in the Sudan, pp.17,94; R.Gessi, Seven Years in the Soudan, ed. F.Gessi, (London:1892), pp.36,344-349; H.C.Jackson, trans.and ed., Black Ivory the Story of El-Zubeir Pasha, Slaver and Sultan, as Told by Himself, 2nd ed., (New York:1970) pp.34-37; For the actions of Gordon see: Gessi, Seven Years in the Soudan, p.270; Holt, The Mahdist State, p.31.

who wished to instill in the people a desire to live a better life.

During his stay he lived with the city's various religious leaders: Muhammad al-Mekki Ismail, head of the Isma'iliyya order, Suwar al-Dahab family, leaders of the Khatmiyya tariqa, and Haj Khalid al-Umarabi, a respected Ja'alin religious teacher.⁶⁸ He also met with other important local leaders, including Ilyas um Brayr, Al-Iraq Muhammadayn and Abd al- Rahman ban Naga of the commercial elite and al-Feki Makkawi al-Rikabi, Walad Abu Safiya, Shaykh Al-Manna Ismail, and Shaykh Musa walid al-Ahmar of the local indigenous leadership.⁶⁹ Muhammad Ahmed did not see Muhammad Said, the governor, any of his officers, or Ahmed Dafallah, Muhammad Yassin Muhammad, Hamid bey Fatin or Abd al-Rahim Abu Dugal, who were closely allied with the administration. His presence was certainly not a secret in light of the highly efficient intelligence networks which men such as Ahmed Dafallah used to keep track of their rivals. It is more likely that his actions were so non-threatening that the administration simply ignored him.

⁶⁸ Yousif Mikh'il, Memoirs, pp.63,66; Holt, The Mahdist State, pp.49-50; Interviews: Ziyad al-Hassan, El-Obeid, Feb./1987; Al-Bakri Ismail al Wali, El-Obeid, May/1987; Hamid al-Nil, El-Obeid, Sept./1987 and May/1987.

⁶⁹ Yousif Mikh'al, Memoirs, pp.63-67; Naim Shuqair, Tarikh al-Sudan, (Cairo;1903), pp.152,154-6,158-9,161-3.

The Crisis Deepens

After a stay of two months Muhammad Ahmed returned to Aba island leaving behind growing tensions between the various commercial and local leadership factions. The merchant elite worked to consolidate their positions and the local people attempted to escape the tax collector whenever possible. For Ilyas um Brayr and his associates the period was especially difficult and he attempted to recoup losses in power and position stemming from the revolt of Ali Kannuna and Ahmed Dafallah's continuing scheming. The situation was further exacerbated by ecological deterioration within the central zone and Gordon's continuing attacks on merchants operating in southwestern Kordofan and the Bahr al-Ghazal.

Not only had the revolt of Ali Kannuna soiled Ilyas' reputation, but his alleged involvement with Sulieman Zubier, the son of Zubier Pasha, further estranged him from the administration.⁷⁰ According to Slatin, the rebels, led by Sulieman Zubier received a steady supply of arms and munitions from merchants in El-Obeid in exchange for slaves and ivory.⁷¹ Gessi captured and executed Sulieman in July 1879. Among his personal effects were papers which revealed

⁷⁰ For the Revolt of Sulieman Zubier in the Bahr al-Ghazal and Dar Fur see: Allen, Gordon in the Sudan, pp.118-123,144-152; Gessi, Rolomo, ed., Felix Gessi, Seven Years in the Soudan, pp.36,247-8,344-9,353,363,370,386.

⁷¹ Slatin, Fire and Sword in the Sudan, pp.9-11.

that Ilyas was directly involved in the flow of munitions to the rebels in the Bahr al-Ghazal. As a result of this revelation Gordon ordered him to Khartoum.⁷² Gordon's resignation seems to have allowed Ilyas to escape the deportation order and remain in El-Obeid.

In the meantime his rival, Ahmed Dafallah, made good use of the misfortune which had befallen his enemy. He assured the administration that he and his allies were friends and loyal supporters. He provided slaves, free of charge, to the governor to help fill the manpower needs of the garrison, made a great show of soothing the feelings of the sons of Ali Kannuna; and mediated good relations between the administration and the Ghodiat.

The increased population pressure on the central zone caused by merchants and their retainers fleeing the southern region placed increased pressure on the food supply and higher prices paid for food. An idea of the number of refugees flowing north to Kordofan can be derived from Georg Schweinfurth's observations. He estimated the numbers of merchants, traders and their retainers found in the Bahr al-Ghazal at 55,000.⁷³

⁷² CARINT 1-10-51, "Memo on Elias (sic) Pasha" in Report of Fall of Kordofan, pp.2-3, National Records Office, Khartoum.

⁷³ Georg Schweinfurth, The Heart of Africa, Ellen F.Frewer trans., (London:1874), p.228.

Water also found an increased market value as the populations in the basins of the central zone increased.⁷⁴ The tax structure continued to grind down the common people and even the European Slatin, Gordon's tax ombudsman, resigned his post as Financial Inspector in disgust. Slatin commented that,

It was an immense relief to me to be free from this hateful task; I had no qualms of conscience, for I felt my utter inability to cope with the situation such as I found it--radically wrong, and corrupt through and through.⁷⁵

As the ecological and economic crisis deepened in Kordofan and political feuds festered, Muhammad Ahmed returned once again to the West. During this visit, between March and April 1881, he again met with commercial, religious and local leaders and revealed his mission as the Mahdi of Allah. After administering an oath of allegiance to his followers he pledged his new followers to silence until he openly proclaimed his mission to the general population and then quietly returned to Aba island.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ For general increases in food prices and the deepening economic crisis in the Northern Sudan see: Bjorkelo, "From King to Khashif" pp.179-89; For economic problems in Kordofan see: S.F. Ensor, Incidents on a Journey Through Nubia to Dar Foor, (London:1881), pp.91,112-13; For the sale of water in El-Obeid and the central zone see: Prout, General Report on the Province of Kordofan, pp.50-51.

⁷⁵ Slatin, Fire and Sword in the Sudan, p.5.

⁷⁶ Shuqayr, Tarikh al-Sudan, p.121; Slatin, Fire and Sword, p.55.

The rise of Mahdism and the subsequent destruction of the Turco-Egyptian colonial regime by Mahdist armies profoundly affected the Sudan of the late nineteenth-century. The impact on Kordofan was deep and lasting. The regional economy ground to a halt and merchants saw their trade routes cut and commercial operations stagnate. Tens of thousands of people left their homes and migrated, willingly or otherwise, to the Nile Valley. Thousands more died in the service of the state's armies or during the series of ecological disasters which ravaged the Horn of Africa during the 1890s.⁷⁷ While the beginnings of the Mahdist upheaval lie at Aba Island in the person of the Muhammad Ahmed himself, Kordofan provided the crucial support during the early stages of his revolt which propelled the Mahdist cause forward to its apogee with the capture of Khartoum in 1885.⁷⁸ Without this early support in men and materiel the Mahdi, Muhammad Ahmed, would in all likelihood have failed in his revolt. He, like others before him who claimed divine inspiration for revolt, would

⁷⁷ For a discussion of the devastating series of drought and disease which struck the Horn of Africa in the late nineteenth-century see: Douglas Johnson, The Ecology of Survival,

⁷⁸ The Life of the Mahdi in all of its aspects has been examined extensively by numerous scholars. Among them are P.M.Holt, The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898, 2nd ed., London, 1970; Isma'il 'Abd al-Qadir al-Kurdufani, Sa'adat al mustahdi bi-sirat al-imam al-mahdi, Khartoum and Beirut, 1972;

have been hunted down and killed by government forces or driven out of the Sudan.⁷⁹

Muhammad Ahmed's Revolt

On 29 June 1881 Muhammad Ahmed publicly proclaimed himself as the Mahdi. The reaction of the government was slow and marked by bungling and ineptitude which enhanced the Mahdi's reputation. This was especially true in the west where the particulars of these confrontations were not known only that the government was being defeated by the followers of the Mahdi. By December 1881, the Mahdi and his followers had moved from Aba Island and were safely encamped at Jebel Qadir in Southeastern Kordofan where he attracted growing numbers of adherents.⁸⁰

In Kordofan the first signs of revolt came from the Hamar and Bedariyya under the command of Mekki Wad Ibrahim and Abd al Samad Abu Safiya. Accounts of the fighting during the six months leading up to an attack on El-Obeid indicate that the changing pattern of alliances and loyalties reflected the numerous divisions within Kordofanese society on the eve of the Mahdist revolt. Yusif Mikh'al relates that his brothers, Jurjirus and

⁷⁹ For a discussion of other instances of Mahdism in the Sudan see: Tabaqat, Deherian, Spaulding.

⁸⁰ For the details of the early months of the Mahdist revolt see: Holt, The Mahdist State, pp.53-58, Slatin, Fire and Sword, pp.57-63.

Milayka, and the District Officer serving in Dar Ghodiat were warned by the Ghodiat leader, Ilyas Ali Kannuna, of an impending attack led by his brother Ahmed Ali Kannuna. The action was in all likelihood an attempt by Ahmed to regain control over the Ghodiat. His brother's warning was an effort to maintain his recently obtained position. The intelligence allowed the government officials to escape to Mulbis and the protection of the pro-government shaykh Husayn Awad.⁸¹

The revolt of farmers and herders in Kordofan elicited the usual response from the administration. Irregular troops under local commanders moved into the disaffected areas and joined with the local garrison to protect administrators and tax receipts. The Hamar and Bederia attack on Nazim Effendi in Dar Hamar followed this pattern but also had some interesting twists. On hearing that Nazim Effendi and Iskandar Butrus were retreating from a large force of Hamar and Hawazma, Abdul Rahim Adu Dugl rushed to their assistance. Abu Dugl fought a skillful rear guard action and on 9 April reached the village of Hobis outside Abu Haraz. There he and his government charges found a large force of Bedariyya, Hamar, Birgid, Hawazma, Jawama'a

⁸¹ In the aftermath of Ali Kannuna's revolt and death Ali Kannuna Ahmed was elected leader of the Ghodiat to replace his slain father. In the period between his election in 1879 and early 1882 he ran afoul of the administration and was replaced by his brother Ilyas. See: Yousif Mikh'al, pp.41-45,88-90.

preparing for a surprise attack on Abu Haraz. Abu Dugl met with the insurgent leaders and obtained a safe conduct for his force on condition that he not warn or aid the residents of Abu Haraz. Iskander Butrus, however, was allowed to warn his brother and family to leave the town. The attack was carried out the next day and Abu Dugl and his cavaliers covered the fleeing survivors as they abandoned Abu Haraz in panic. Escorted by Abu Dugl, the survivors arrived in El-Obeid on 10 April. Meanwhile, Ibrahim Bey al-Milih, another Hamar leader, had arrived to bolster the government. He, along with Nur Angara and Abu Dugl, was ordered north to help in the defence of Bara which was under rebel attack.⁸²

It is interesting to note that loyalist Hamar leaders were those leaders who had only recently broken away to become semi-independent rulers. Their future lay with the government and not with the Mahdi who might well place them once again under the control of their former leaders. Nur Angara had been dismissed as an assistant governor in Dar Fur and subsequently lived in Bara. The rebellion offered him the opportunity to revive his reputation with the government. Each of these men, however, soon realized which direction the tide of events was running and submitted to the Mahdi. In the meantime, however, each had succeeded in

⁸² Shuqayr, Tarikh al-Sudan, pp.152-4; Yusif Mikh'al, Memoirs, pp.102-110.

establishing a reputation as a resourceful battlefield commander and obtained from the Mahdi commands which allowed them to maintain their independence from former superiors.⁸³

Within El-Obeid itself, the long simmering feud between Ilyas and Ahmed Dafallah moved into its final stages. The situation was intensified by the death of Ahmed's brother, Abdallah Dafallah, when Mahdist troops destroyed a government force commanded by Yusuf Hasan Shallali.⁸⁴ After the news of Shallali's defeat reached El-Obeid, Ahmed Dafallah attempted to force Ilyas to show his true intentions. Dafallah confronted Muhammad Said and stated that Ilyas should be forced immediately to enter the town's fortifications. Ahmed believed that if Ilyas

⁸³ Shugayr, Tarikh al-Sudan, pp.153-155, 162-163 ; Yusif Mikh'il, Memoirs, pp.115. For Abu Dugl, the decision to change sides seems to have resulted from a serious wound which took him out of the fighting and may have allowed him to contemplate the outcome of the revolt. There is some confusion regarding the exact engagement during which he received his wound. Henderson's history says Abu Dugl was wounded during the retreat from Abu Haraz. His posting to Bara and absence there soon after the destruction of Azhaf indicates he was more likely shot during the fighting in and around Azhaf prior to the siege of Bara.

⁸⁴ Abdallah Dafallah commanded a force of 300 volunteers, outfitted through private contributions from the Dafallah faction of the commercial community, raised to support government troops being sent to attempt the capture of the Mahdi in Southern Kordofan. Slatin hints that Ilyas um Brayr intrigued against the force and Ahmed Dafallah could well remember his role in the revolt of Ali Kanunna as well as Ilyas's support for Sulieman Zubir. Slatin, Fire and Sword, p.64.

entered the government camp "not a single Jaali would dare stay outside the parapet."⁸⁵

Muhammad Said called a meeting of city notables to decide if the city should resist or surrender to the Mahdi. The results of that meeting indicate that the city's elite remained uncertain and divided. The Governor and all his officers voted to fight, but, with the exception of Ahmed Daffallah's faction, the notables voted to take no provocative actions against the Mahdi. The Governor nonetheless declared his intention to defend the town and also decided to invite Ilyas to move his family and retainers within the city's fortifications. If, however, Ilyas would not come of his own free will he would not be forced to enter the government cantonment. Muhammad Said believed that it was better to have him outside than to have a possible conspirator on the inside. In the final few days before the assault on El-Obeid Ilyas um Brayr, Abd al-Rahman Ban Naqa, Muhammad al-Mekki b. Ismail, Khalid Ahmad al-Umarabi, Muhammadayn al-Irayq and members of the Salih Siwar al-Dahab family left El-Obeid for the camp of the Mahdi.⁸⁶

The actions of the commercial and religious elite of Kordofan raise an interesting question. If each of these

⁸⁵ Yusif Mikh'il, Memoirs, pp.110-111.

⁸⁶ Yusif Mikh'il, Memoirs, pp.112-113; Shuqayr, Tarikh al-Sudan, pp.155-157.

men had taken an oath of allegiance to the Mahdi, why did they refrain from open revolt after the public declaration of the Mahdi's cause and the beginning of armed clashes in Kordofan and the immediate vicinity of El-Obeid? The conventional explanation assumes innate treachery by merchant leaders such as Ilyas um Brayr and the desire for the resumption of unrestricted slave trading.⁸⁷ Such a simplistic rationale ignores the existence of a conflict between the commercial community and the state for control of the machinery of exchange within Kordofan and the Sudan which had played itself out during the past century. It also fails to account for the regional political, economic and social context and the complex web of relations among Kordofan's general population generated in part by the conflict over control of the regional economy.

The initial attacks on the administration came from the local leaders of agricultural and nomad groups who had suffered at the hands of both the commercial and political elite. For the majority of the common men and women who flocked to the Mahdi's banner, life's options were limited. They could continue to suffer under the old regime or attack it and perhaps regain their lands and freedom from the hands of outsiders. For the merchant elite, the options

⁸⁷ See: Slatin, Fire and Sword in the Sudan, pp.64,66-67,77; Ohrwalder, Ten Years Captivity in the Mahdi's Camp, p.42; Wingate, Mahdism and the Egyptian Sudan, passim.

available and possible consequences of overt action on their part were numerous.

The capacity of the Mahdi and his initial followers to overthrow the administration remained uncertain, and the commercial and religious elite appear to have been content to watch and wait until the outcome became more clearly defined. There is no evidence that during the first six months of the revolt El-Obeid's merchants and religious leaders provided any tangible aid to the administration or the Mahdi. The situation called for observation and actions which would buy time and leave room for maneuver no matter what the outcome. If the administration prevailed the merchants needed to avoid being branded as traitors. If on the other hand the Mahdi took control they could claim to have worked as a fifth column.

The problem facing the commercial elite, however, was more fundamental to their long term welfare than the immediate situation suggested. The merchant elite faced the difficult task of ascertaining whether support for the Mahdi would help create a state structure and society within which a native born Sudanese commercial elite controlled both the political administration and the machinery of exchange. They also needed to weigh the possibility that support for the existing administration might be rewarded with a return to the pre-Gordon situation.

The logic behind such thinking stemmed from the constant struggle waged by the commercial community over the past century or more to gain control of the economy. Beginning in the days of the Funj Sultanate the commercial community had worked long and hard to control the economic life of the Sudan.⁸⁸ In the first years of the Turkiyya that control was lost when Muhammad Ali imposed a monopoly on trade which his successors maintained until the late 1850s. At the end of the monopoly period the commercial elite had rapidly gained both political and commercial power but been challenged by local elites such as Ismain Sakka, Ali Kannuna, and Mek Adam. Then under the guise of suppressing the slave trade an administration increasingly staffed by European officers attempted to reassert state control over trade. On three separate occasions government representatives declared a state monopoly over trade. In the last of these attempts, Gordon even revoked all rights to protection of property and life for merchants. This final action precipitated the dislocation of thousands of merchants, disrupted the commercial infrastructure, and placed new pressure on the ecologically fragile home base of the commercial elite. Such a situation could not continue if the commercial community hoped to control the machinery of exchange and assure its dominance within

⁸⁸ For the success of the campaign by merchants to control the economy of the Sudan see: Spaulding, The Heroic Age in Sinnar.

Sudanese society. A new order needed to be created which would assure the economic independence of the commercial community and the protection of life and property of all merchants.

For the merchants of Kordofan in the 1880s the optimum form for the new order would comprise a state which honored the role of the merchant, condoned slavery, and had as its leader a man of their own ethnic group. The Mahdi offered the possibility for just such a state. Kordofan's merchants needed to be assured of the certainty of the Mahdi's victory and establishment of such a state before they would risk their lives and extensive commercial holdings.⁸⁹ Only at the last moment with all other options exhausted did they declare themselves for the Mahdi. The subsequent fall of El-Obeid and early months of the Mahdi's rule appeared to justify the decision made by the merchants to back the Mahdi.

The enemies of the Ilyas faction were killed and Kordofan administered in much the same way it had been prior to the revolt. For example, the Mahdi directed Ilyas Kannuna and Jurjiyus Mikh'il (now called Ismail) to return to the Ghodiat lands and administer them as they had

⁸⁹ On this point even the ethnocentric and pro-imperialist Slatin briefly abandons his usual conspiracy theory and says that there was wide spread uncertainty in the ranks of the merchant community on the proper course of action to take as the Mahdi grew in strength. See: Slatin, Fire and Sword in the Sudan, p.67.

before.⁹⁰ The Mahdi ordered Hamdan Abu Anja to attack the Nuba mountains for slaves, Mahdist troops annihilated the Hicks expedition, and the merchant elite were consulted in matters of state.

The future, however, would prove extremely difficult for the merchants who supported the Mahdi and opted for radical change in the political structure of the Sudan. The Mahdi's ideology precluded any thought on his part of limiting his rule to Kordofan and the western Sudan. His divine mission required the conquest of the rest of the Sudan and lands beyond. Once that campaign for the rest of the Sudan began the commercial community of Kordofan became part of a struggle which would ultimately destroy them. The commercial elite participated in one more triumph at the fall of Khartoum but, during the subsequent decade and a half, witnessed the near collapse of the Sudanese economy. As a result of the disintegration of the Sudanese economy, the commercial elite lost their wealth and political influence. They also suffered a significant defeat during an internal power struggle within the Mahdist state and become a distrusted minority in their own land causing many to yearn for a return to the past. The erratic economic policy of the new regime and altered relations between the state and economy undercut the old elite and

⁹⁰ Yusif Mikh'il, Memoirs, p.137. Yusuf accompanied his brother to Dar Ghodiat to help administer the area for the Madhi.

created opportunity for a new group of merchants to emerge.

Chapter 4

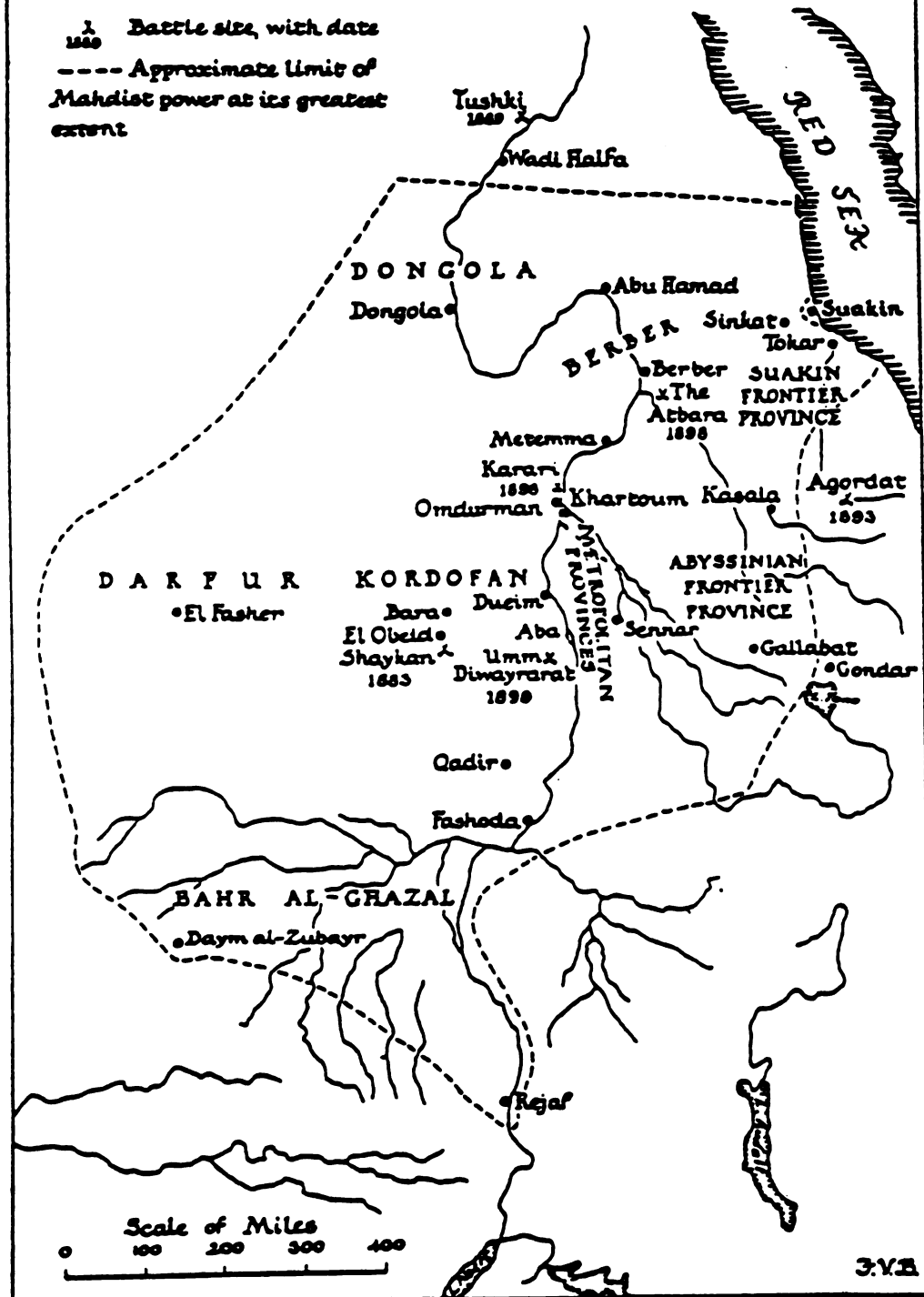
Kordofan:1881-1898, The Years of the Mahdiyya

The Mahdist revolt gained adherents at an ever quickening pace after its initial victories in Kordofan. It swept into the Nile Valley and spread to the Eastern Sudan, culminating in the siege and capture of Khartoum in early 1885. The Turco-Egyptian regime retreated from the Sudan and the region shifted to indigenous, albeit theocratic, rule. During the next decade and a half the Sudan suffered from a combination of internal and external warfare, erratic economic policy decisions, economic blockades and embargoes, and an ecological disaster of monumental proportions.¹ Documents left by Sudanese merchants and Mahdist officials record the magnitude of the changes which occurred within the economy of Kordofan, and Sudan, during the period from 1881-1898.²

¹ Because of the relatively limited impact of the 1890s drought and cattle epidemic upon Kordofan no detailed discussion of this episode in Sudan's ecological history will be given in this chapter. It is of interest to note, however, that while this ecological crisis may well have been of greater overall magnitude than the water deficit of the latter 1870; the absence of large numbers of people in Kordofan's central zone during this period meant that its carrying capacity was not exceeded. The scarcity of people was a result of the Khalifa's call for emigration to Omdurman.

² The sources used in this chapter differ from those of earlier chapters. In the present chapter there is a notable absence of travelers accounts and a much heavier reliance on documents found in the Mahdist Archive, the memoirs of Sudanese participants in the Mahdiyya and oral histories. The lack of European accounts stems from the isolation of the Sudan during the Mahdiyya. The notable

4: THE MAHDIST STATE



Source: Holt

This chapter argues that during the years of Mahdist rule the old commercial elite of Kordofan lost control of the machinery of exchange and of their personal empires. While commercial activity continued, the older system which had spawned men such as Ilyas um Brayr and Ahmad Wad Dafallah ceased to exist. This chapter also asserts that under the constraints imposed by the new regime merchant capitalism stagnated and that Kordofan's merchants were prevented from recreating the previous system and their dominant role in society. It is argued that their inability to maintain their dominance did not result, as some argue, from a collapse of the economy or a conscious effort on the part of the state to destroy the merchant class, but rather the profoundly changed political economic matrix within which they were forced to operate.³ Finally this chapter posits that Kordofan's merchant elite realized relatively quickly that they were not benefiting from the new Mahdist-imposed social order and that this realization prompted

exceptions being the accounts of two Mahdist prisoners, Joseph Ohrwalder and Rudolf Slatin, whose books were heavily influenced by the British head of military Intelligence F.R. Wingate.

³ This interpretation of the commercial history of Kordofan and to a certain degree the Sudan in general departs from the view of Muhammad Said Qaddal. In his discussion of the economy during the Mahdiyya indicates that the economic patterns and commercial operations during the Mahdiyya were characterized by plunder and confusion caused by warfare. His interpretation which says in short that there was no system or logic to the economy appears too simplistic in light of the evidence.

them to abandon their support of the Omdurman regime and anticipate its demise.

As a result of its far-reaching implications for the people of the Sudan the amount of secondary literature on the Mahdi and the Mahdist period is voluminous in comparison to that of the Turkiyya. Mahdist historiography falls into three broad categories: religious/mystical, Soviet Marxist and British colonial.⁴ Each of these attempts to explain the Mahdist upheaval yet fails to take fully into account the prevailing political, economic, environmental and social conditions within Kordofan where the Mahdi gained his earliest adherents and victories. They also fail to consider the possibility that internal contradictions and conflicts within Kordofan had created a situation in which a power vacuum existed- a void within which Turco-Egyptian officers struggled to maintain their legitimacy, a fractured merchant elite vied for power with each other and the state, and local indigenous leaders strove to reassert their control over their people and lands.

⁴ P.M.Holt is the only historian who has proposed an explanation for the cause of the Mahdiyya which does not fit neatly within one of these categories. His interpretation on the rise of Mahdiyya centers on the slave trade and its "suppression." In his work The Mahdist State in the Sudan: 1881-1898, he calls the years from 1869 onwards the "Eve of the Mahdiyya." He argues that the sole cause of the Mahdiyya was the suppression of the slave trade.

Research in the "Religious/ mystical" category discusses the rise of the Mahdi and Mahdiyya in terms of religious factors.⁵ Scholars mining this vein of research cite, for example, the fact that the end of a Muslim century was near; an Islamic revival was ongoing; and the Mahdi's imitation of the life of the prophet Muhammad. The basic weakness in this approach is its failure to take into consideration the vast amount of non-ideological evidence available to the historian.

The second category consists of work done by Marxist writers. This research characteristically interprets the Mahdist episode as illustrating the actions of a man compelled by economic forces to save his people from

⁵ See: Saburi Biobaku and Muhammad al-Hajj, "The Sudanese Mahdiyya and the Niger Chad Region," in I.M. Lewis ed., Islam in Tropical Africa, (Bloomington:1980), pp.226-239; L.E.M.Kapteijns, "The Religious Background of the Mahdi and his Followers," African Perspectives, 2,(1976):61-79; Ahmed Harran Taj, "The Idea of a Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism," (Paper presented at the International Conference on the Mahdiyya, Khartoum, 1981); Derek Hopwood, "The Mahdiyya in the Context of Islamic Revival Movements," (International Conference on the Mahdiyya, 1981); Ahmad Uthman Ibrahim "Some Aspects of the Ideology of the Mahdiyya," (International Conference on the Mahdiyya,1981); John O. Voll, "Abu Jumayza: the Mahdi's Musayliman," International Conference on the Mahdiyya, 1981); j. Voll, "The Sudanese Mahdi: Frontier Fundamentalist," International Journal of Middle East Studies, 10,(1979), pp.145-166; G.Lewy, Religion and Revolution, (New York:1974), pp.176-193; L. Carl Brown, "The Sudanese Mahdiya," in Rotberg and Mazrui, eds., Pretest and Power in Black Africa, (New York:1970), pp.145-168.

Ottoman imperialist encroachments.⁶ Marxist writers, with little concern for evidence, construct a history of the Sudan that fits neatly into their historical paradigm. The propaganda and correspondence of the Mahdi, which Marxist scholars tend to ignore as unimportant ideological epiphenomena, does not support this interpretation of history. Further, the Soviet Marxist explanation does not allow for the breakdown of the Turkiyya as a monolithic imperial force prior to the rise of the Mahdi.

The British Imperial interpretation deals exclusively with the Mahdi and Mahdiyya of the eastern Sudan, and was constructed to maintain a positive image of the Mahdi while at the same time condemning the regime of his successor, the Khalifa Abdallahi Muhammad Turshain. This rendering allowed the British to placate the Sudanese people and at the same time justify their reconquest and colonization of the region in conjunction with the Egyptian government.⁷

⁶ See: A.R.C.Bolton, "The Sudan," Soviet Middle East Studies, VII 1 (1930), pp.1-82; S.R.Smirnov, Africa as a Soviet Social Scientist Sees It, (Moscow:1974); D.E.Smith, Religion, Politics and Social Change in the Third World, (New York:1971), pp.155-161; T.Hodgkin, "Mahdism, Messianism and Marxism in the African Setting," in, Habsbaum, Primitive Rebels, (Manchester:1959); T.Hodgkin, "The Revolutionary Tradition in Islam, Race and Class, xxi,3, (1980).

⁷ F.R.Wingate, Mahdism and the Egyptian Sudan, (London:1891); A.B.Theobald, The Mahdiya, (London:1955); For two other example of this type of propaganda see: Joseph Ohrwalder, Ten Years captivity in the Mahdi's Camp, 1882-1892, from the Original Manuscripts of Father Joseph Ohrwalder, (London:1892) and Rudolf C. Slatin, Fire and Sword in the Sudan, (London:1896). One might also add

The role of religion and nationalist feeling may well have played a significant role as rallying points in what some have called the Mahdi's Islamic revolution or war of national independence but, there is also evidence which points beyond these explanations towards more fundamental motivations such as ecological, social, political and economic crises, which loomed increasingly large during the late nineteenth century.

Concepts and Conflicts Within the New Order

Many of the changes in the nature and composition of the Sudanese economy and commercial structure within Kordofan grew directly out of the Mahdi's vision of the type of society Allah wished him to create within the Sudan. In the early stages of the revolt the Mahdi outlined the form the new order would take. A central tenet of his vision of a new society and its government was the collective responsibility of the people to the state and of the state to the people. His conception of the ideal state closely paralleled the way of life found within the religious communities in which he had lived since childhood. All of the needs of the community were met by a central fund of goods, lands, money, and foodstuffs

that Wingate would have had little quarrel with the conclusions of some contemporary researchers. See: R.Dekmejian and M Wyszomirski, "Charismatic Leadership in Islam: The Mahdi of the Sudan," Comparative Studies in Social History, 14 (1974) PP.193-214.

produced by the community and distributed to the community on the basis of need. The Mahdi constantly preached against personal gain at the expense of others in the community. He made it clear in his sermons and writings that man should avoid thinking too much about the world and its treasures. He implored his followers to renounce this world and embrace a simplistic life dedicated to the worship of Allah and contemplation of the hereafter.⁸

The Mahdi's success in battle, however, put great temptations before his followers in the form of slaves, animals, goods, money and weapons. He, therefore, created the Bayt al-Mal (house of finance) to act as a repository for the wealth of the state which grew with each victory over the old regime.⁹ The Mahdi declared that all of the booty (ghanima) taken by his followers was the property of the Mahdist community and must be deposited in the Bayt al-Mal. In 1881-2 he wrote:

You have preferred earthly life to the world to come and loved to gather booty and wealth and deserted with

⁸ For the writings of the Mahdi see: M.I. Abu Salim, Manshurat al-Mahdiyya, (Beirut, 1969), Vols. I-IV,; For an analysis of the propaganda of the Mahdi see: P.M. Holt, The Mahdist State in the Sudan, (Oxford, 1970), pp.105-116.

⁹ The term Bayt al-Mal can be defined as treasury but in the Mahdist state it contained more than the taxes of the population. It was to act as a common house or treasury for all the wealth of the state which was in turn be dispensed to the needy. Its physical plant included storehouses, workshops, holding pens for slaves and animals. S.M.Nur, "a Critical edition of the Memoirs of Yusif Mihka'il," Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, (London, 1963), pp.168.

it.... I have warned you in this letter out of mercy towards you...so that you may restore the booty you have taken.¹⁰

The Mahdi intended the central Bayt al-Mal and its subsidiaries in the provinces to combine the roles of state treasury for military and administrative expenses and dispenser of social welfare funds on a grand scale.

The Mahdi's campaign against the accumulation of wealth and economic power took physical form in the existence of the Bayt al-Mal, which gave tangible form to the abstract concept of collective social organization. The Bayt al-Mal's functions harkened back to an earlier era in Sudanese history, when the sultan and his storehouses had been seen as the protector and provider for the common citizens. In the new order the Mahdi, as supreme leader within Sudanese society, and his principal institution, the Bayt al-Mal, took responsibility for the welfare of the people. In so doing the merchant and the market were expected to recede into a secondary role.

The operation of the Bayt al-Mal in Omdurman and its branches in provincial capitals such as El-Obeid was in theory very simple. Needy individuals or groups petitioned the staff for the things they required. Those items which were in the storehouses or holding pens of the Bayt al-Mal were given directly to the petitioner. If the Bayt al-Mal

¹⁰ From Manshurat, i,17 (undated) in Holt, The Mahdist State, p.125.

did not have the requested goods money, slaves or other items of equal value would be given to the petitioners so that they could exchange them elsewhere for the desired goods. In practice, the system was plagued by disagreements over the quality and quantity of goods handed out and their relative value in the market.

The creation of the Bayt al-Mal had important implications for the economy and commercial organization within the Mahdist state. It stood for collective rather than individual welfare, allowing the ambitious entrepreneur little room for maneuver. The administrators of the new state were also constrained in the type of economic decisions which they could make. The stature of the Mahdi as saint and deliverer meant that even after his death his actions and decisions could not be easily reversed.¹¹ In the Bayt al-Mal the Mahdi had established a structure which his successor, the Khalifa Abdallahi, could not disavow without undermining his position as the earthly continuation of the Mahdi's righteous mission- an action which would have been very dangerous politically given the hostility of the Awlad al-Balad to the rule of Abdallahi and his westerners.

¹¹ The sudden death of the Mahdi on 22 June 1885, shortly after the fall of Khartoum, left his successor the Khalifa Abdallahi in a especially difficult position. The Mahdi had outlined an ideal and then died before the realities of day to day administration tested this ideal.

Throughout the Khalifa's reign he was obliged to continue supporting the role of the state as the legitimate repository of wealth and as the provider for the people. This duality which altered the political economic climate and impinged on the merchants of Kordofan and the Sudan constituted a two-edged sword for the Khalifa. His opponents, especially among the Awlad al-Balad, which constituted the vast majority of the merchant community, chafed under the oppressive confiscations of the Bayt al-Mal.¹² In contrast, his strongest supporters, the western Baqqara, relied on the Bayt al-Mal for all of the staples of life.¹³ The Baqqara formed the majority of the army and from its ranks came the Khalifa's ablest commanders. As a result of this situation the Khalifa attempted to steer a precarious course between these two opposing forces.

The Khalifa also had to contend with a third powerful element within the state, the Jehadiyya or regular

¹² The term Awlad al-Balad was and is used in the Sudan to denote those groups of people with roots, ancestral or otherwise, in the Nile Valley. The Awlad al-Balad consisted of both settled cultivators and diaspora merchants. During the nineteenth-century the people of Kordofan use this term to describe any non-western Arabs. The most prominent ethnic groups found under this rubric are the Danagla, Ja'aliyyn and Shaqia. The Mahdi was a member of this group while his successor the Abdullahi was not.

¹³ The term Baqqara was used in the nineteenth-century to describe the vast majority of the ethnic groups who lives west of the Nile Valley. Prominent ethnic groups among the Baqqara were the Hamar, Missiriyya, Hamid, Hawazma and Bedariyya. The Khalifa Abdullahi came from a group called the Ta'isha who's home lands were in Southern Dar Fur.

infantry.¹⁴ This military unit, a substantial proportion of which was stationed in Omdurman, easily outgunned the Awlad al-Balad and rivaled the Baqqara as a military force. It therefore played a crucial role in the balance of power within the capital during political confrontations.¹⁵

As true professionals the loyalty of these soldiers was tied first and foremost to their personal well being. They were therefore likely to join forces with whichever faction offered the best terms of employment. The Khalifa's balancing act between these three groups, the Awlad al-Balad, Baqqara and Jehadiyya made political life precarious. Allotments of food and other goods made to the Jehadiyya from the Bayt al-Mal forestalled any serious shift in their loyalty to the Khalifa but irritated both the Awlad al-Balad and the Baqqara. In Kordofan the rift between the "free Arabs" and the Jehadiyya resulted in open violence on at least three occasions.

The end result was a situation which generated tensions between all involved and weakened the young state. The Khalifa and his aides, because of their need to buy the support of the Jehadiyya and Baqqara, exploited the commercial community and settled cultivators. While this

¹⁴ See note 3 above.

¹⁵ For examples of confrontations of this sort see: Ohrwalder, Ten years captivity in the Mahdi's Camp, 1882-1892, (London, 1893), pp.197-206, 211, 254-258; R.Slatin, Fire and Sword in the Sudan, (New York, 1899), pp.284-289; Holt, Mahdist State, pp.399-405.

officers posted in the region consisted of tax collection, provisioning the garrisons, providing assistance to those wishing to emigrate to the Nile Valley; and the collection of booty confiscated from adherents of the old regime. These revenues were divided in accordance with the law of the Mahdi which stated that one-fifth was to be dispatched to the central Bayt al-Mal in Omdurman and four-fifths kept in the Bayt al-Mal in El-Obeid.

The immediate resumption of commercial operations within the province was inhibited by ongoing warfare in the Nile Valley, economic isolation, and the dislocation of large numbers of people who had previously been occupied in production or business. The first sectors of the economy to return to operation were local produce and grain markets which fed the urban based garrisons and administrative personnel. This market had great potential since the fighting and heavy concentration of people in the area around El-Obeid, Abu Haraz, Mulbas and Bara had severely disrupted and depleted the food supply and drove up prices.¹⁸ The first sector of the export economy to revive was the slave trade followed by commerce in ivory, ostrich

northern Sudan. Their formations were usually ethnically based with smaller units being often near relatives of each other. Tensions between these "free" Ansar elements and "slave" riflemen permeated the entire Mahdist period.

¹⁸ Ohrwalder, Ten Years Captivity in the Mahdi's Camp, pp.204-5.

feathers, and gum. Each, however, operated in a much different manner than during the Turkiyya.

The boundaries of Kordofan and its administrative structure had much the same appearance in the early years of the Mahdiyya as it had during the late Turkiyya. The western boundary was marked by a line from Nahud to Al-Odaya; the northern by the jebels of Haraza, Kaja and Katul; the southern by the Nuba Mountains and eastern by the Shatt and Dueim areas near the white Nile.¹⁹

Administratively, Dar Fur and Kordofan were initially separate units. The Mahdi appointed Muhammad Khalid Zugal governor of Dar Fur and Mahmud Abd al-Qadir for Kordofan. In 1886, after the death of Mahmud in the Nuba Mountains and imprisonment of Muhammad Khalid Zugal by the Khalifa, the two regions were combined into one giant western province or imalat al Gharb. The Amir of the West (amil 'umumi) ruled this vast region and was directly accountable to the Khalifa. The most famous holders of this office were the Baqqara generals, Uthman Adam (1886-1889) and Mahmud Ahmed (1889-1898).²⁰

¹⁹ The Shatt and Dueim areas were added in 1889-90 after the Amir Mahmud Ahmed claimed that he could not feed his army without them. J.A.Reid, "Story of a Mahdist Amir," Sudan Notes and Records, vol.9, no.2, 1926: p.80.

²⁰ Holt, The Mahdist State in the Sudan, p.157; Hill, Biographical Dictionary of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, (Oxford, 1951), pp.224, 367.

Below the Amir was the Wakil or Deputy Governor. The Wakil saw to the day to day administration of Kordofan. This position was an important one especially when the Amil 'umumi was absent on military operations against rebels in Southwestern Kordofan, the Nuba Mountains or Dar Fur. The Wakil's staff included a six member board of judges, treasurer, clerks and tax collectors. The Treasurer or Amin Bayt al-Mal was second in importance and power only to the Wakil. Both the Wakil of Kordofan and the Amin Bayt al-Mal remained in El-Obeid which served as the capital of the province. Smaller administrative units within Kordofan were administered by an Amil who dealt with the local sheikhs. The Amils lived in the smaller towns of the province or near the watering points of nomadic cattle and camel herding groups. With the exception of the Amin Beit al-Mal each administrative position was a combined civil/military post.²¹ Below the Amils were the various traditional leaders within the agricultural and herding communities found in the district.

Initially the holders of the offices of Wakil, Amil and Amin Bayt al-Mal were distributed relatively evenly among the Baqqara and Awlad al-Balad. The exception to this general rule was the post of Amin Bayt Al-Mal which was generally held by members of the older commercial elite

²¹ Reid, "Story of a Mahdist Amir," pp.79-80; A.B. Theobald, The Mahdiya. A History of the Sudan 1881-1899, (London, 1951), p.177; Holt, The Mahdist State, pp.244-5.

(Awlad al-Balad). The death of the Mahdi and rising animosity between the followers of the Khalifa Abdallahi and the Awlad al-Balad, however, precipitated an increase in the number of Baqqara in leadership positions. The elevation of the Baqqara at the expense of the Danagla and Ja'aliyyin in Kordofan made it increasingly difficult for the older commercial elite to safeguard its control over the machinery of exchange.²²

The most notable change in the transition from Turkiyya to Mahdiyya was a significant lowering of the tax burden for the general population. The Mahdi in his initial attack on the old regime called on the people to refuse to pay taxes. This meant an immediate relief from taxation for at least a year or more. In the ensuing fighting most tax records were lost or intentionally destroyed so that arrears could be avoided.²³ After he had established administrative control in Kordofan the Mahdi instituted a lower taxation rate than had been the case under the

²² Holt, Mahdist State, pp.249,-250,252; Reid, "Story of a Mahdist Amir," pp.79-81. The clearest example of a politically motivated replacement in Kordofan occurred in 1889 when the Khalifa ordered the Mahmud Ahmed to find fault with Ali al-Hashim and replace him with a man of the Khalifa's family. NRO, Mahdiyya Class 1/11, doc.373 (17 Rabi Al-Awal 1307 = 11 December 1889).

²³ Yusuf Mikha'il, Memoirs, p.75. for translation see: MS. Yusuf Mikha'il, (1), 26 cited in Holt, Mahdist State, p.59.

"I am the Mahdi, the Successor of the Prophet of God. Cease to pay taxes to the infidel Turks and let everyone who finds a Turk kill him, for the Turks are infidels."

Turkiyya.²⁴ The Mahdi's revenue tax consisted of the zakah which in practice was divided into zakah and ushur. The zakah was a graduated tax collected in coin or kind on animals. The ushur was a tithe of ten percent on grain.²⁵ A circular issued by the Khalifa in 1883-4 to local tax collectors clearly sets out the system of collection.

And levy among your families the zakah; camels, cattle, sheep and goats in accordance with the ordinance imposed by God in regard to the beasts mentioned.. Take from the owners of arable land the zakah of grain. Everything which accrues to you from zakah or booty is to be set out in lists which are to be sent here in succession, with a letter from you, so that it may be brought into the Treasury of the Muslims and thence distributed to the weak, the poor and the party of God, the warriors.. Do not in any way remiss in gathering the dues of God and do not neglect to send them speedily. If anyone refuses them to you take them even against his will and tell Us at once for Our information.²⁶

In the early years of the Mahdiyya merchants also benefited from a lower tax burden, paying only a ten percent duty on all goods.²⁷ The Mahdi also minted currency which was of slightly higher value than that circulating at the end of the Turkiyya.²⁸ The lower taxes

²⁴ For a listing of the taxes paid by the general public and nomads on the eve of the Mahdiyya see: SAD 155/1/1-67, "Stewart's Report."

²⁵ Holt, Mahdist State, pp.126-127,205.

²⁶ NRO, Mahdiyya 1/31 doc.8, (no date).

²⁷ For a cursory outline of the tax rates paid by merchants on the eve of the Mahdiyya see: SAD 155/1/1-67 "Stewart's Report."

²⁸ For a fuller numismatic analysis of the currency of the Mahdi see: H.S.Job, "The Coinage of the Mahdi and Khalifa," Sudan Notes and Records, Vol.3,1920: 161-196.

and stable currency were offset, however, by the Bayt al-Mal's control of the trade in gum arabic, ostrich feathers, ivory and senna leaves; and chronic insurrection against Mahdist rule.²⁹

The Mahdist government also obtained revenue from the confiscation of enemy property. In the case of booty (Ghanima) one fifth (al-Khmus) went to Omdurman for the head of the religious community and the rest to the troops. In practice, however, the four fifths designated for the troops rarely went directly to those involved in a military operation but rather into the provincial Bayt al-Mal at El-Obeid for general redistribution. This system precipitated a certain amount of discontent among the common soldiery and their officers. The records of the Mahdi and Khalifa contain innumerable official protests concerning officers and men who were negligent in turning over booty to the Bayt al-Mal.³⁰

Internal Opposition to Mahdist Rule

Military Unrest

²⁹ Holt, Mahdist State, pp.205,256-257,260.

³⁰ NRO, Mahdiyya 1/11 doc.23 (26 Rajab 1303 = 29 April 1886); Mahdiyya 1/11 doc.33 (18 Dhu al-Qa'da 1303 = 4 August 1886); Mahdiyya 1/11 doc.208 (8 Shaban 1305 = 21 April 1888); Mahdiyya 1/11 doc.172 11 Rabi al-Aula 1310 = 3 October 1892); Mahdiyya 1/8 v.2 doc.89 (11 Jumada al-Aula 1315 = 8 October 1897).

The day to day administration of Kordofan and the operations of merchants within the province were plagued by numerous problems. None of these difficulties seriously threatened Mahdist rule within Kordofan's core area but did require constant attentiveness on the part of the province's administrators. As a result many of the ablest commanders in the Mahdists' ranks served in the West.

The administration within Kordofan faced its first serious internal difficulties in 1885 when a mutiny occurred within the El-Obeid garrison. A growing state of friction had been developing in El-Obeid between the Jehadiyya and the deputy governor Wad Hashimi since the departure of the Mahdi. The source of the irritation was Wad Hashmi's control over the housing, provisioning and military operations of the Jehadiyya. The garrison complained that they were being underfed, poorly housed and forced to bear the brunt of the fighting in military operations. Only the mediation of the governor Sharif Mahmud Abd al-Qadir, generally in favor of the Jehadiyya, had prevented previous disagreements and confrontations from exploding into violence.³¹

On hearing of the death of his nephew, the Mahdi, Sharif Mahmud departed immediately for the Nile Valley leaving Wad Hashami, his second-in-command in charge of the

³¹ Na'um Shuqayr, Jughrafiyyat wa-ta'rikh al-Sudan, (Cairo, 1903), p.450.

province.³² Wad Hashami took advantage of his superior's absence to berate the Jehadiyya whom he contemptuously called worthless slaves. His highhanded manner infuriated the riflemen, who mutinied. In the first round of fighting Wad Hashami was shot dead, and the rebels, with their families and a large supply of munitions, marched out of El-Obeid, much to the chagrin of the Awlad Arab.³³ They moved south until they reached the Nuba mountains, where they established a fortified settlement. This camp withstood several attacks by the Ansar of Mahmud Abd al-Qadir, who died in the initial assault.³⁴ They also withstood the attacks of the redoubtable Abu Anja. The military camp was eventually abandoned as individuals and small groups moved further south to make their own homesteads or join other Nuba villages in the Southern

³² Mahmud's hasty departure was in large part the result of the expected power struggle which his nephew's death precipitated between the Khalifa Abdallahi and his Baqqara and the other two Khalifas and their supporters from among the Awlad al-Balad.

³³ Awlad Arab was a term used to distinguish Baqqara and Awlad al-Balad units from Jehadiyya units within the Mahdist military. for reports on the mutiny see: Ohrwalder, Seven Years Captivity in the Madhi's Camp, pp.209-213; Ohrwalder witnessed the incident while resident in El-Obeid prior to his removal to Omdurman. Also See: Shuqayr, Ta'rikh al-Sudan, p.450.

³⁴ His death reportedly greatly relieved the Khalifa Abdullahi who feared the political and military power of the Mahdi's uncle.

hills. Abu Anja did, however, hunt down the rebel's leader, kill him, and send his head to the Khalifa.³⁵

The continuing presence of armed opponents in the southern hills made travel in the region dangerous for merchants and challenged the Mahdist for control of the area. Ohrwalder recounted that during his time of imprisonment in El-Obeid (1885-1886) armed groups hostile to the Ansar regime moved north and threatened the neighborhood immediately around the city.³⁶ In 1890 another mutiny by the Jehadiyya at Nahud caused considerable trouble for Mahdist officers. In a second Jehadiyya revolt at Nahud in 1891 the Governor Mahmud Ahmed nearly lost his life. Only a last minute leak of information about the plot saved Mahmud and his officers. Both plots were foiled and ended with numerous executions and the heads of the ringleaders being sent to Omdurman.³⁷

Indigenous Unrest

The new regime also faced resistance from the civilian population of Kordofan in the "frontier" areas populated by camel nomads in the north and west and cattle keepers in

³⁵ Ohrwalder, Ten Years Captivity, pp.214-219; Shuqayr, Ta'rikh al-Sudan, pp.450.

³⁶ Ohrwalder, Ten Years Captivity, p.220.

³⁷ NRO, Mahdiyya, 1/11 doc.250 (2 Rabi' al-Akhir 1307 = 27 November 1889); doc.94 (23 Jumada al-Ukhra 1307 = 13 February 1890); doc.398 (29 Jumada al-Ukhra 1307 = 20 February 1890); Shuqayr, Ta'rikh al-Sudan, p.451.

the south and southwest. The anti-Mahdist sections of the Messiriyya, Hamar, Humr, Hawazma and Kababish were among the most troublesome of these groups. Raids by the Mahdist Commander Abu Anja on the Hawazma in 1885-1886 resulted in the capture of 2700 cattle, 51 horses and 200 slaves.³⁸ To the west of Kordofan the people of Dar Fur never fully accepted the imposition of Mahdist rule. The sultans of the old Fur state and numerous small western sultanates challenged the legitimacy of the Mahdist administration in the region. As a result serious revolts and attacks against Mahdist garrisons, convoys and officials took place throughout the Mahdiyya.³⁹

The general discord and instability caused by the anti-Mahdist groups in Kordofan and the Western Sudan in

³⁸ Mahdist documents which passed between the central administration in Omdurman and El-Obeid contain numerous accounts of actions ordered and taken against the "anti-Mahdists" of Kordofan. For examples see: NRO, Mahdiyya 1/11 doc.35 (22 Safr 1303 = 9 November 1887); Mahdiyya 1/11 doc.281 (11 Ramadan 1305 = 23 May 1888); Mahdiyya 1/11 doc.127 (Shaban 1307 = April 1890); Mahdiyya 1/8 doc.140 (18 Rabi' Al-Awal 1310 = 9 November 1892); Also see: Shuqayr, Ta'rikh al-Sudan, p.449; Reid "Story of a Mahdist Amir," p.79.

³⁹ For an account of the history of the Mahdiyya in Dar Fur and its impact on that region see: Musa al-Mubarak, Tarikh Dar Fur al-siyassi, 1882-1895, (Khartoum, 1970); and Lidwien Kapteijns, "Dar Sila, the Sultanate in Precolonial Times, 1870-1916," Cashiers d'Etudes Africaines 92, XXIII-4 (1983):447-70; Lidwien Kapteijns, Mahdist faith and Sudanic Tradition: A History of the Dar Masalit Sultanate 1870-1930, (London, 1985); Lidwien Kapteijns and Jay Spaulding, After the Millennium Diplomatic Correspondance from Wadai and Dar Fur on the Eve of the Colonial conquest, 1885-1916, (East Lansing, 1988).

general forced the government to keep large numbers of troops in the region.⁴⁰ These large garrisons in turn constituted a debilitating drain on the revenues and resources of the region. The continuous unrest also made it impossible for the Mahdist administrators to realize the full agricultural production potential of Kordofan. The government, therefore, intensified the exploitation in those districts which they did control alienating producers and on occasion precipitating rebellion.⁴¹ The presence of groups hostile to the Ansar in adjacent areas also provided safe havens for producers who wished to flee government controlled areas.⁴² This instability increased internal security problems which made tax collection

⁴⁰ The Mahdist archive contains numerous list of troop strengths, losses and reenforcement for the entire period of 1885-1898. For example see: NRO, Mahdiyya 2/4 "Lists Kordofan," which indicate that Ansar and Jehadiyya numbered over 15,000 at any one time. Mahdiyya 2/3 doc., s.n. (Dhu Qa'da 1309 = June 1892) indicates that in 1309 (1892) 10,425 men were ordered from Kordofan to Omdurman. Mahdiyya 2/4 docs.41,42,43,44,45 indicate that in 1314 (1896-7) Mahmud moved 24,738 men to Omdurman and left almost 8000 behind in Kordofan.

⁴¹ NRO, Mahdiyya doc.35 (22 Safar 1305 = 9 November 1887); doc.299 (27 Sha'ban 1305 = 7 July 1888); doc. 338 (7 Dhu al-Qa'da 1306 = 5 July 1889) doc.250 (2 Rabi'al-Ukhir 1307 = 27 November 1889); doc.127 (Sha'ban 1307 = April 1890); Mahdiyya 1/8 doc.140 (7 Rabi' al-Akhir 1310 =29 October 1892); doc. 145 (18 Rabi' al-Akhir 1310 = 9 November 1310).

⁴² SAD 478/5, K.D.D.Henderson, "Note on Hamar History," pp.30-38; Henderson interviewed Heglig Hamid one of the Hamar heads who escaped to the "frontier" areas to escape the Mahdists.

difficult and hindered the movement of merchants along the roads which led to and from export producing areas.

Merchant Unrest

The most prominent export producing areas, aside from the Nuba Mountains, were located in the Bahr al-Ghazal. To the detriment of the Mahdist treasury and Kordofan's merchant community the Ansar lost control of these slave and ivory export producing areas. The loss of the Bahr al-Ghazal and its slave and ivory exports was caused by heavy fighting in the area and the Khalifa's distrust of the powerful merchant group headed by the Kurqusawi brothers.

Karamallah Kurqusawi, a powerful merchant in the Bahr al-Ghazal during the Turkiyya captured the Bahr al-Ghazal for the Mahdi in April of 1884.⁴³ At this point the ivory and slave rich area seemed securely in the hands of the Mahdist state. By 1886, however, Karamallah had withdrawn and the Bahr al-Ghazal ceased to be of benefit to the new regime.

The problems for western merchants who traded with and in the Bahr al-Ghazal began with the death of the Mahdi and

⁴³ For letters written by Lupton to Emin Pasha in Equatoria concerning the loss of Bahr al-Ghazal Province to the Mahdists see: SAD 155/1/43-44, letters dated 12 April 1884, 20 April 1884, 28 April 1884.

accession of the Khalifa to power. Karamallah and his brother Muhammad were Dongolawi and the majority of their troops were sympathetic to the Awlad al-Balad who opposed the Khalifa. Dispatches to Uthman Adam from the Khalifa reveal his distrust of the Kurqusawi brothers.⁴⁴ To allow them free reign to trade in the west would increase their wealth and power and attract adherents.

The Khalifa, no matter how much he distrusted the brothers, however, needed their soldiers to deal with the dual threat of the Riziqat under Madibbu Ali and the Fur under Yusif Ibrahim.⁴⁵ The fighting qualities of the Kurqusawi brothers and their troops had been honed from years of operations in the Bahr al-Ghazal, and they brutally crushed Madibbu's forces and sent the Riziqat leader to El-Obeid. They also succeeded in reducing the power of Yusif Ibrahim who eventually petitioned Uthman Adam for aid against the brothers.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ NRO, Mahdiyya 1/12 doc.115; Holt, Mahdist State, pp.155-6.

⁴⁵ The Riziqat were a Baqqara group who resisted the call of the Khalifa to join the ranks of the Ansar. Their leader Madibbu Ali preferred to take advantage of the power vacuum caused by the Mahdist revolt and reassert his own control over the Riziqat homelands and their neighbors. Likewise, Yusif Ibrahim, a descendent of the Fur Sultanid dynasty, wished to head a Fur separatist movement.

⁴⁶ NRO, Mahdiyya 1/11 docs 28 (25 Ramadan 1303 = 26 June 1886); doc.48 (12 Mahram 1304 = 11 October 1886); doc.204 (10 Muharram 1305 = 28 September 1887); Holt, Mahdist State, pp.153,155,156.

The success of the Kurgusawi brothers, while useful to the Khalifa, also made them dangerous, and Abdallahi ordered Uthman to watch them carefully. He also ordered Uthman to absorb their commands into his own, and called both men to Omdurman. Karamallah and Muhammad initially resisted these orders to appear in Omdurman. In 1887, however, Karamallah and his men were caught and badly mauled by a force of Riziqat survivors and forced from their old haunts. In 1888 the Khalifa ordered Uthman to forbid slave raiding by the brothers. With neither a place to hide nor a trade to ply, the two brothers made their way to Omdurman.⁴⁷

Other powerful merchant families from Kordofan also suffered drastic reductions in wealth and power after the death of the Mahdi. These victims of the Khalifa's moves to undercut the Awlad al-Balad opposition included the families of Ilyas Um Brayr, Abd al-Rahman Ban Naga and Siwar al-Dahab. Each family was systematically destroyed as a potential political rival and subsequently as commercial powers.

The family of Ilyas Um Brayr was the first to suffer the ill will of the Khalifa. In 1886 Abu Anja arrested Umar Ilyas, the son of Ilyas um Brayr, along with Muhammad

⁴⁷ NRO, Mahdiyya 1/11 doc.279 (5 Ramadan 1305 = 17 May 1888); doc.295 (27 Shawwal 1305 = 7 July 1888); Holt, Mahdist State, p.156. Ohrwalder, Ten Years Captivity, p.402.

Zugal. Abu Anja confiscated all of his property, took over command of his retainers and imprisoned Umar in El-Obeid.⁴⁸ These families were also forced to make "contributions" (tajrid) to the treasury.⁴⁹ The Siwar al-Dahab family suffered the additional burden of exile and execution. In 1891 after being sent to the southern frontier post of Regaf, Salih Suwar al-Dahab was executed by the Emir Zaki Tamil.⁵⁰ Other merchants of prominence during the Turkiyya such as Abdallah Bey Hamza retreated into Egypt until the end of the Mahdiyya.⁵¹

The merchants of Kordofan realized relatively quickly that their position within Sudanese society was in jeopardy. A message received by the Khedive in 1887 confirms the rapidity with which the merchants attempted to salvage their former status. The letter, dated 29 Dhu al-Hijja 1303, arrived on 12 January 1887 at the Egyptian frontier in the hands of Dafallah Bey, surnamed Khojal, a

⁴⁸ NRO, Mahdiyya 1/11 docs. 16,17,18,19,20 (21 Rajab 1303- 28 Rajab 1303 = 24 April 1886- 30 April 1886) ; Holt, Mahdist State, p.145.

⁴⁹ NRO, CAIRINT 1/10/51, December, 7 1890 "MEMO ON ELIAS PASHA" pp.11-13 also "Second Note" p.1; Yusif Mikh'al, Memoirs, p.249; Holt Mahdist State, p.259.

⁵⁰ Yusuf Mikh'al, Memoirs, p.205; Shuqayr, Ta'rihk, pp.551-2.

⁵¹ Babikr Bedri, The Memoirs of Babikr Bedri, (London, 1969), pp.101,104-9,117-20,123,214; A Bjorkelo, "From King To Kashif," Unpublished Ph.D.Thesis, (Bergen, 1984), p.264.

brother of Ilyas um Brayer.⁵² The letter sets out the ills which had befallen the Sudanese since the withdrawal of the Khedive's rule. In a telling line they lament that " ...the strong have been abased and the base have become strong; the rich have been impoverished and matters have been most unsatisfactorily reversed."⁵³ In the end the "sheikhs and notables of Kordofan" implored the Khedive to "put down this faction and deliver this people from out of its misery."⁵⁴

It was not for the Khedive to decide, however, when the Sudanese would be delivered from the Mahdist. That decision would be made by the British government through its consul-general, Sir Evelyn Baring, Lord Cromer. The reconquest would not be set in motion until 1896, and completed until 1899. The commercial community, however, continued to press for the return of Egyptian rule. They also served as a source of information on the internal conditions within the Mahdist state.⁵⁵ The Khalifa and his Baqqara commanders were well aware of this situation and

⁵² PRO, London FO. 4040/no.88 Intelligence report.

⁵³ *ibid.*, no.82

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, no.82.

⁵⁵ For examples see: Sudan Archive Durham, 155/1, Wingate Papers, Egyptian Army Papers, 1883-1887; SAD 253/2/1, "Memorandum on the Western Sudan," Cairo, 5 June 1891; SAD 255/1/135, "Report on the Western Sudan," 5 March 1892; SAD 255/1/372, "Statement of Esh Sheikh Mubarek Wad et Tilb, (Kordofan Merchant), 2 June 1893; SAD 178/9/1-22, "Intelligence Summary: Report of Onur Isa," 7 December 1894.

it served as a further reason for the strained relations between these two groups. The massacre of thousands of Awlad al-Balad at Matamma in 1897 resulted in large part from the long pent up animosity between the Baqqara and Awlad al-Balad.⁵⁶

Changes in the Economy and Commercial Community

With the virtual destruction of Kordofan's former merchant oligopoly the scale of individual merchant's operations declined significantly after 1885. Giant merchant houses in El-Obeid no longer controlled vast trade networks through capital manipulation, marriage alliances and contracts. Within the new political-economic complex of the Mahdist state, capital, marriage and business contracts remained functional but the locus of control shifted from a relatively small elite to the more numerous middle level members of the commercial population.

The merchants who occupied the lower and middle levels of the former commercial structure were not well situated, however, to step into the breach. The fighting which continued on the eastern, northern and western frontiers demanded manpower. The troops employed by the Khalifa included men who would have normally been engaged in the operations of the commercial community in Kordofan. His

⁵⁶ Mikh'al, Memoirs, pp.246-255; Shibeika. Sudan fi-garn, pp.284-8.

armies also utilized large units of Jehadiyya which made slaves unavailable for use in trade or production.

The fighting also caused general insecurity along trade routes, especially on the Northern frontier where the Kababish harassed caravans moving between Kordofan and Egypt. The camel nomads could also refuse to rent their camels or sell their services as guides to those wishing to transport goods in or out of the province. The transport problem was compounded by the Mahdist expropriation of animals, especially camels. In one instance 3000 camels were collected and in another 30,000 captured and sent to Omdurman for military use.⁵⁷ The difficulties encountered on the northern route forced a large proportion of the import export trade to flow east into the Nile Valley and then on to the Red Sea port of Suakin. The redirection of trade into the eastern corridor aided the government in taxing trade and traders.

Merchants who escaped service in fighting units or direct danger from nearby warfare faced other obstacles in conducting trade. Mahdist documents detail one of the most direct of these difficulties - the confiscation of goods by Ansar officers. The tenor of dispatches passing between Omdurman and El-Obeid indicate that these attacks on

⁵⁷ NRO, Mahdiyya 1/11 doc.291, 295 (27 Shawwal 1305 = 7 July 1888); Mahdiyya 1/12 doc.217 (6 Dhu al-Qa'da 1305 = 16 July 1888). For a similar expropriation of camels see Bedri, Memoirs, p.181.

merchants were not sanctioned by the state and appear to have been cases of simple extortion on the part of military commanders who overstepped their authority while attempting to provide supplies for their men.

The merchant Naqib Omer Sultan fell victim to Muhammad Ibrahim, a junior officer under the command of Ali Hashim, an official in the Bayt al-Mal in Kordofan. Naqib immediately complained to higher authorities in Omdurman and demanded the return of his goods. The Khalifa sent a letter to the governor Uthman Adam dated 13 August 1886 and ordered all of the articles taken to be returned.⁵⁸ The same orders were issued once again on 6 September 1886 after complaints from the merchants Mahmud Leban, Adlan Juda and Adam Juda.⁵⁹ The situation continued, however, and records from 1889 indicate that the same problem still bedeviled those wishing to carry on trade.⁶⁰ While all of these merchants ultimately regained their possessions the time lost in their quest for justice made trading difficult and increased their expenses.

Even those merchants who were in fighting units attempted to trade but often with poor results. In 1894

⁵⁸ NRO, Mahdiyya doc.35 (1 Dhu al-Hijja 1303 = 30 August 1886).

⁵⁹ NRO, Mahdiyya 1/11 doc.37,38 (7 Dhu al-Hijja 1303 = 5 September 1886).

⁶⁰ NRO, Mahdiyya 1/11 doc 364 (17 Rabi' al-Akhir 1307 = 11 December 1889).

Adam Dom Ismail informed his brother Asbil Ismail that the female camel and ostrich feathers he had sent to be sold had produced very little profit because his unit had been forced to move on to fight at Qallabat and he could not wait for the market to improve. He goes on to inform his brother of goods that should be sent east for sale and that he has sent black tea back to the west for sale.⁶¹

Demographic factors also worked against the rebuilding of the economy in Kordofan. The continuous outflow of people to the Nile Valley took herders and cultivators away from their normal occupations and robbed the economy of its base.⁶² In many of the documents concerning the movement of people, the provisioning of these people for their trip to Omdurman is a primary concern. Food to feed both livestock and people became scarce and the great drought and famine of 1888-92 drove prices upward.⁶³ The increased competition for reduced food stocks from military units and emigrants meant that merchants faced increasingly

⁶¹ NRO. Mahdiyya 2/5 doc.55 (Ramadan 1311 = September/October 1894). For other incidents of merchants traveling with Mahdist armies see: Mikhi'al, Memoirs, p.193.

⁶² The Mahdist archive contains numerous calls for the movement of Kordofan's people to Omdurman. For example see: NRO, Mahdiyya 1/11 doc.66 (29 Safar 1304 = 27 November 1886); doc.286/4 (6 Shawwal 1305 = 17 June 1888); doc.14 (12 Rabi' al-Akhir 1311 = 23 September 1893).

⁶³ NRO, Mahdiyya, 1/11 doc.392/1 (3 Jumada al-Aula 1307 = 26 December 1889); doc.413 (13 Ramadan 1307 = 3 May 1890); Johnson and Anderson, The Ecology of Survival, (London, 1988), pp.1-26, 47-70.

higher prices for the provisioning of their own commercial caravans.

A steady stream of criticism about the economy reached the Khalifa. Complaints ranged from tainted sugar and insect-infested grain to high prices which caused residents and emigrants to suffer want. In response, Abdallahi sent a special investigating team to El-Obeid which ordered a reshuffling of the town's administration.⁶⁴ His actions, however, seem to have done little good and difficulties continued to plague the market in El-Obeid and those who traded in the West. In an attempt to induce merchants to operate in Kordofan the Khalifa wrote in a dispatch dated April 1891 that any persons wishing to engage in trade were free to do so but first they must obtain a pass from the military governor, Mahmud Ahmad.⁶⁵

While these measures were designed to encourage trade the state remained the most serious impediment faced by merchants. Traders who hoped to regain confiscated goods needed to remain on good terms with local administrators which meant being able to produce up to date tax receipts. The need for passes from the government to operate in the market made the taxation of merchants easier to

⁶⁴ NRO, Mahdiyya 1/8 doc.20,21 (25 Ramadan 1308 = 4 May 1891) doc.26 (26 Ramadan 1308 = 5 May 1891).

⁶⁵ NRO, Mahdiyya 1/8 doc.27 (26 Ramadan 1308 = 5 May 1891).

administer.⁶⁶ The commercial tax structure, which was simple and relatively light during the early years of the Mahdiyya, became increasingly confiscatory throughout the Khalifa's reign.

The contradictory nature of the Khalifa's commercial policy grew directly out of the disunity within the state he governed. In the Nile Valley and Kordofan the commercial community, while essential to the survival of the state, posed the greatest political threat faced by the Khalifa and his western supporters. The Baqqara, who had no experience in commerce and thought it demeaning work, had no desire to become merchants and take control of the economy. As a result the Khalifa's economic policy was often inconsistent and contradictory because of his need to simultaneously foster and tightly control a political enemy. For the commercial community this situation meant that their businesses could vacillate wildly between great success and complete ruin.

The gum arabic trade provides an instructive example of the potential opportunities and dangers faced by Kordofan's traders. At the eve of the Mahdiyya the Sudan, and especially Kordofan, supplied the vast majority of the world's supply of gum arabic. The fledgling European chemical industry fostered by the industrial revolution

⁶⁶ For an account of this general tax receipt rule in operation see: Bedri, Memoirs, p.149.

depended on natural resins rather than petroleum for the manufacture of most of its products. One of the most useful of these resins was gum Arabic. While the fighting in the Sudan and ensuing trade disruptions enabled the gum produced in West Africa, and Senegal in particular, to increase its share of the world market, the highest quality gum came from Kordofan and demand for it remained high throughout the Mahdiyya. Fluctuations in the amounts of gum exported from the Sudan during the Mahdiyya varied according to the intensity of internal and frontier fighting and the Khalifa's trade policy at any given time. While Sudan's gum exports revived briefly during the period 1892-1895 they remained below the levels attained during the Turkiyya and well below those which were recorded after the reconquest.⁶⁷

Merchants moving gum arabic from El-Obeid to the Red Sea port of Suakin were taxed one-third the value of their gum when they passed through Omdurman. Merchants could turn over to the Bayt al-Mal one-third of their gum or pay an equivalent amount in cash. At Berber officials levied another sixth of the value, and at the eastern boarder post of Kukrayb, merchants paid five Maria Theresa dollars per

⁶⁷ Hassan A. Aziz Ahmed, "Aspects of Sudan's Foreign Trade During the 19TH Century," Sudan Notes and Records, Vol.55, (1974): pp.17-32; Abdel Amin Beshari, Export Performance and Economic Development in the Sudan 1900-1967, (London,1976) pp.99-100; Imperial Institute, Report # 63, Gums and Resins, (London,1909), p.144.

camel-load or one twelfth of the value. On their return, merchants paid one tenth of the value of their import goods at Kukrayb, one tenth at Berber and again at Omdurman a tenth was taken.⁶⁸

An example of a way in which the state regulated merchants comes from a document dated El-Obeid, 2 Rabi al-Awal 1312 (3 September 1894) and sent to the Bayt al-Mal in Omdurman. It contained the names of 16 gum arabic traders or their agents, and the price and amount of gum purchased from the Bayt al-Mal in El-Obeid. In addition to price and weight, there are entries noting the payment of a one tenth tax, a nine riyal service charge and the number of packing cases used to transport the gum.⁶⁹ The latter was aimed at curtailing the smuggling of gum and evasion of tax payments.⁷⁰

The document reveals that the gum market was open to both large and small scale merchants, some of whom invested thousands of riyals while others spent barely a hundred. Seven traders invested over one thousand riyals or more while nine spent less than one thousand. There is also no

⁶⁸ Bedri, Memoirs, p.191.

⁶⁹ NRO, Mahdiyya 2/4 doc.56 (2 Rabi al-Awal 1312 = 3 September 1894).

⁷⁰ The need for these safe guards by government customs agents is clearly set out in Bedri's memoirs. Bedri outlines in detail all of the numerous and clever tricks used by merchants to reduce their tax burden. See: Bedri, Memoirs, pp.184-193.

indication that the richer merchants were given any price discounts for buying larger quantities of gum, none were exempted from the ten percent tax, and only one was charged less than a full nine riyal service fee.⁷¹

From the document we learn that at least four different types of merchants operated within the gum market. The simplest form of trade was the individual merchant buying on his own account. Second, there is one instance of simple partnership, with two merchants working together. Third, there are two examples of merchants buying for companies to which they are a part owner and fourth, one case of an agent buying for a third party.⁷²

Four of the merchants mentioned in the document, Ahmed Abu Alam, Muhammad Mansur, Mansur Abu Ku and Mahmud Isa, also appear in the accounts of the Nile Valley merchant Babikr Bedri.⁷³ The intersecting paths of these merchants provide interesting insights into the operations of traders in late nineteenth century Sudan. Alam appears to have been a larger merchant than the others. His name is followed by the notation "and company" and he was the largest purchaser

⁷¹ NRO, Mahdiyya 2/4 doc.56; The merchant in question, Mahmud Isa, purchased inferior gum and remnants. Consequently, he paid eight riyals in service charges and a slightly lower price per kantar.

⁷² *ibid.*, doc.56.

⁷³ The likelihood of connections between Bedri and merchants who operated in Kordofan was increased because of his uncle's trading in gum and traveling to Kordofan to purchase gum. Bedri, Memoirs, pp. 139,150-152.

on the list having bought 405 kantar, 35 rotl with a value of approximately 3901 riyals whereas Mansur's and Abu Ku's gum purchases were considerably smaller.⁷⁴

Members of the commercial community, especially small scale traders, depended heavily on personal and familial relationships in the conducting of their business. The inferior position of the merchant Mansur for example made it necessary for him to go to others for help in easing transactions which involved the state. In 1894, or the same trading season as the document from Kordofan, Mansur came to Bedri with a letter of introduction from Alam which asked Bedri to help Mansur pass his imports easily through customs. The request was based on Alam's apparent knowledge of the friendship between Bedri and a customs inspector at Omdurman named Mukhtar Muhammad Sulayman. Bedri called this relationship, "a firm friendship between us, to our mutual advantage."⁷⁵ Bedri also confessed that "the profits I got through him were twice the worth of what I gave him."⁷⁶ Bedri accompanied Mansur to the customs clearing area and spoke to Mukhtar on Mansur's behalf. When Mansur's turn for inspection arrived Mukhtar showed him no consideration, took the whole tenth and slapped the poor merchant in the face. The increasingly heavy hand of the

⁷⁴ NRO, Mahdiyya 2/4 doc.56.

⁷⁵ Bedri, Memoirs, p.192.

⁷⁶ ibid., p.192.

state and the inability of merchants to obtain offices from which they could "protect their own" hindered the growth of the economy and fostered intense competition between merchants because of the uncertainty of economic policy.

Bedri's memoir recounts the strained relations between merchants as they attempted to operate within the new and difficult circumstances. Abu Alam and Mahmud Isa witnessed a confrontation between Bedri and another merchant named Bashir al-Amin. Through an error in accounting Bedri had failed to inform Bashir al-Amin that he still owed Bedri for seven kantars of gum. As the gum had already departed by boat for Berber Bashir denied that he had the seven kantars in question. Mahmud Isa urged Bedri to confront Bashir. He did so and initially Abu Alam took Bashir's side because of Bashir's friendship with his brother. It soon came out through the use of the register of the public weigher, however, that Bashir was in the wrong. He was sternly rebuked by Abu Alam and in a clear case of adding insult to injury Bedri "forgave" the price of the gum owed by Bashir.⁷⁷

In this case the role of the public weigher was important. Such a weigher is mentioned in the gum sale document from El-Obeid.⁷⁸ It is also interesting that all of the merchants involved in the case took pains to avoid

⁷⁷ Bedri, pp.168-7.

⁷⁸ NRO Mahdiyya 2/4 doc.56.

taking the case to a market court. Both parties it seems wished to avoid contact with servants of the state which might well cost each of them dearly.

Profits were still potentially handsome despite the high taxes imposed by the state. Abu Alam's 405 kantar of gum was worth approximately 6075 riyals at Suakin. After subtracting the taxes and duties collected at Omdurman, Berber and Kukrayb the profit amounted to 3645.⁷⁹ With his profit the merchant bought goods to be sold in The Nile Valley and Kordofan and profit margins on these goods were extremely high. Merchants could expect 100% on cloth, 250% on oil, 300% on sugar, and 400% on soap.⁸⁰ Any merchant who could also persuade a customs agent to turn a blind eye made even higher profits. This scenario, however, depended on exceptional business acumen and sheer luck. Those merchants who were able to profit consistently from trading operations faced further and more fundamental problems, however, in how to use the wealth they acquired.

Constraints on Re-Investment and Capitalist Development

Merchants throughout the Sudan had traditionally diversified their commercial holdings and invested their

⁷⁹ NRO, Mahdiyya 2/4 doc.56. For a discussion of the volume of the import and export trade see A./Aziz Ahmed Hassan, "Aspects of Sudan's Foreign Trade During the 19th Century," pp.16-32.

⁸⁰ Holt, Mahdist State, p.196.

wealth in a variety of ways. The decision to remain solely in the import export sector of the economy limited a merchant's options and placed him in a financially precarious position. During the Turkiyya Kordofan's merchants invested in land, slaves and animals or expended wealth through conspicuous consumption at social events such as births, weddings or religious functions.

During the Mahdiyya it became especially important to carefully use profits. Merchants no longer controlled the political structure and found it very disadvantageous to operate only in a highly regulated and taxed sector of the economy. Moreover, the inconsistent enforcement of embargoes by the Khalifa and the British made operation in trans-frontier trade alone financially hazardous. The options for the use of wealth within the Mahdist state, however, were limited, especially opportunities for the re-investment of earnings outside of the import export trade.

The spending of wealth on weddings, naming ceremonies and other festive occasions was constrained by the close observation of the government and the possibility of forced contributions. The accounts of Bedri, Ohrwalder and Slatin indicate that conspicuous consumption often drew unwanted attention from the authorities and needed to be carefully handled. Other methods of using wealth obtained through trade included, making the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, endowing religious institutions, buying land for production

or rents, and buying slaves for resale or production. Each of these options, however, was blocked to some degree during the Mahdiyya.

The pilgrimage was outlawed during the Mahdiyya and replaced by adoration of the Mahdi. The rationale for this radical departure from orthodox Islamic practice centered on the belief in the divine nature of Muhammad Ahmed as the prophet and mahdi of Allah. Prior to his death the viewing of his person and attendance at his sermons were considered holy acts. After his death Sudanese pilgrims could express their piety by visiting his tomb (Qubba) in Omdurman.

The endowment of religious institutions through gifts of land, buildings or money (waqf) was hindered by the Mahdi's ban on tariqas, which he believed constituted an artificial division between Muslims. His feelings on this issue grew out of at least two personal experiences. While still a pupil within the Sammaniyya brotherhood he had an argument over conspicuous consumption at a wedding with his teacher Shaykh Muhammad Sharif which ended with his expulsion from that particular Shaykh's following.⁸¹ His second experience occurred after he proclaimed himself Mahdi and revolved around the activities of the Khatmiyya and Tijaniyya tariqas which disputed his religious claims,

⁸¹ For a more complete discussion of this incident see: Shuqayr, Tari'kh al-Sudan, iii, pp.116-119; E.L.Dietrich, "Der Mahdi Muhammad Ahmed vom Sudan nach arabischen Quellen," Der Islam, xvi, (1925):199-288; Holt, Mahdist State, pp.45-51; Slatin, Fire and Sword, pp.124-125.

opposed his rebellion, and actively supported the Turco-Egyptian regime in the Eastern Sudan and Kordofan.⁸² For political reasons the Mahdi and Khalifa carefully manipulated the appointments of Ulama and chief Qadi so as to place their own supporters in these offices. As a result the official religious community became an extension of the will of the head of state.⁸³ The official religious institutions, therefore, proved a poor repository for the wealth of merchants since they, like conspicuous consumption, brought the merchant into disconcertingly close contact with government officials.

The Mahdi's edict banning religious brotherhoods also played a role in undercutting the ability of merchants to build and operate commercial networks. The use of religious

⁸² Interview, Khorsi, 24-25 September 1987 with Khalifa Dirdiri Dasuqi Jafar, head of the Tijiniyya Tariqa. In the course of the interview the Khalifa clearly set out the complete opposition of this tariqa to the Mahdist cause and its cost in lives and property. These statements were a novel departure from the almost formulaic statements usually encountered in Kordofanese society which claimed adamant support for the Mahdi and his cause. For a more complete discussion on the Khatmiyya see: Holt, Mahdia, pp.82-3.

⁸³ For more information on the role of the Ulama and Qadi within the Mahdist state see: Holt, Mahdist State, pp.107-110, 128-132, 261-264. Holt's works concentrates on the central administrative hierarchy. For examples of the workings of the religious and judiciary at the province level in Kordofan see: NRO, Mahdiyya 1/12 doc.242 (7 Dhu al-Hijja 1305 = 16 August 1888); Mahdiyya 1/8 doc.80 (Dhu al-Qa'da 1309 = 23 July 1892); doc.194 (4 Dhu al-Hijja 1310 = 18 June 1893; R. Salmon "Story of Sheikh Abdallahi Ahmed Abu Gelaha, A Sudanese Vicar of Bray," Sudan Notes and Records, Vol. 21/1, (1938) pp.94-5, 98; Ried, "Story of a Mahdist Amir," p.80.

associations in the Nile Valley persisted, but in Kordofan the destruction of confraternity networks appears to have been more complete.⁸⁴ While the role of the Tijiniyya, Ismailiyya and Khatmiyya, in Kordofan's commercial development remains largely unstudied, the influence of tariqas appeared especially vital in the latter years of the Turkiyya. They facilitated the development of commercial networks, provided a means of re-defining interest groups and, in the case of the Tijiniyya, helped a nascent local merchant group to break into the marketplace. The latter which operated out of the Kheiran in northern Kordofan was especially hurt by the ban on tariqas because of its heavy reliance on religious affiliation rather than family ties to organize its commercial operations. This group constituted the only merchant "association" composed of non-diaspora merchants within Kordofan in the period from 1820-1898. Its demise assured the continued dominance of the diaspora merchant community within Kordofan well into the twentieth century.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ For the use of a religious/commercial connection in the Nile Valley involving the Khatmiyya and Nafisa a grand daughter of Uthman al Mirghani see: Bedri, Memories, pp.170-172.

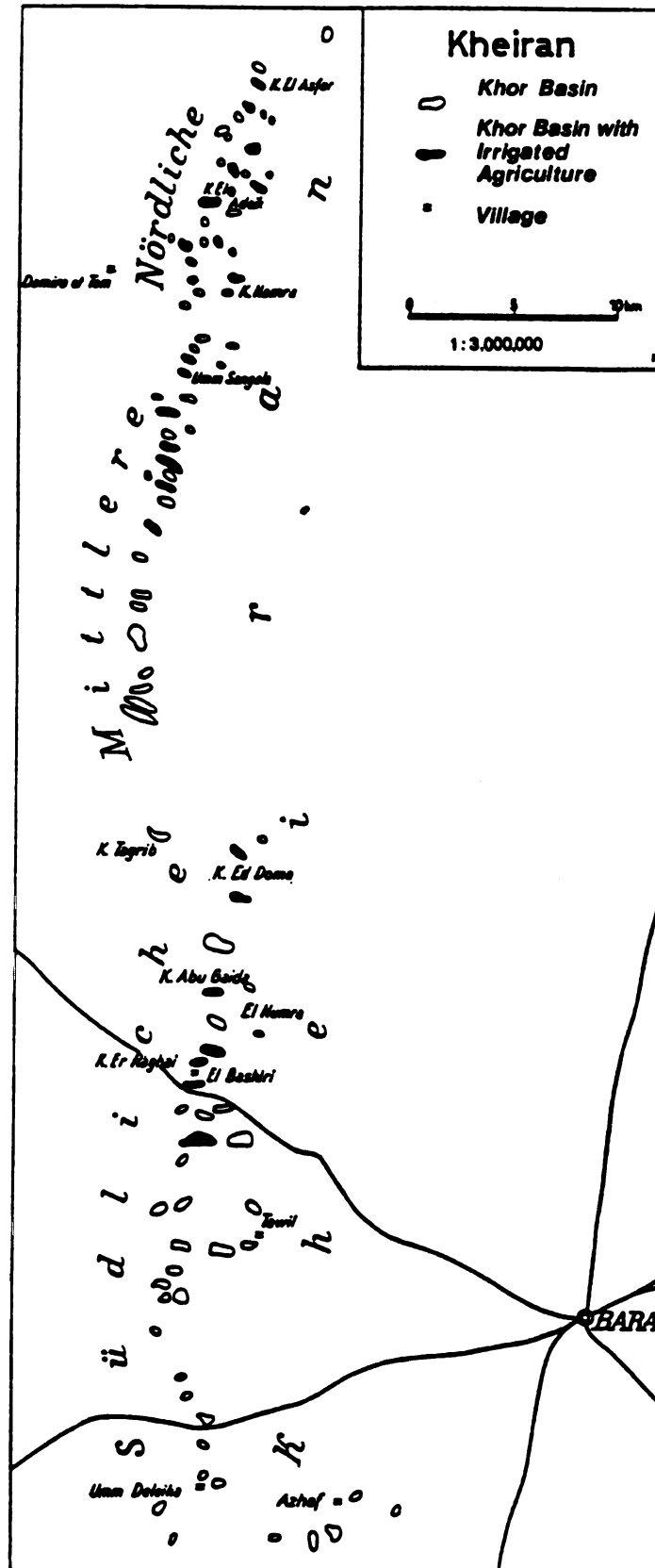
⁸⁵ Research in the Western and Central Sudanic regions strengthen this assumption that religious association helped foster and cement commercial ties. see: Dennis Cordell, "Dar Al-Kuti: A History of the Slave Trade and State Formation on the Islamic Frontier in Northern Equatorial Africa (Central African Republic and Chad) in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries." PH.D Thesis., University of Wisconsin, 1977; D.Cordell, "Eastern

Investment in land and slaves remained the only traditional options for the investment of wealth open to merchants. But in both of these sectors the merchant was also hindered by both the Mahdi's edicts and the needs of the regime. The strategy of investing in land was undermined by the a law forbidding the collection of rent on land which the owner did not cultivate.⁸⁶ In and of itself this injunction would not preclude investment in land because through the use of slave labor the owner could claim to work the land. Within Kordofan, however, merchants found both land and slaves hard to acquire.

The large scale use of slaves within the military structure of the Mahdist state priced those available beyond the resources of most buyers. The high cost of slaves was magnified by a loss of slave catchment areas which had been exploited during the Turkiyya. The general contraction of the borders of the Mahdist state included the loss of the Bahr al-Ghazal and a large portion of the Nuba Mountains. The impact of this combination of factors

Libya, Wadai and the Sanusiya: A Tariqa and a Trade Route," Journal of African History, XVIII,1 (1977):21-36; C.D.Joos, "Le Ouadai, le Dar el Kouti et la Senoussia en 1904: Matériaux pour une étude de l'histoire des Etats d'Afrique Centrale." Etudes Camerounaises, 53-54, (Octobre-December 1956);3-17; S.Santandrea, "Sanusi, Ruler of Dar Banda and Dar Kuti, in the History of the Bahr al-Ghazal," Sudan Notes and Records, 38(1957):151-155; Abner Cohen, Customs and Politics in Urban Africa: a Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba towns, (London,1969).

⁸⁶ Holt, Mahdist State, pp.129-130.



Source: Born

in Kordofan was profound. The experience of the Kheiran region near Bara offers a clear picture of the way in which various policies of the Mahdist leadership concerning religious practice, land tenure and allocation of slave labor undercut and restricted the operation and growth of the economy.

The Kheiran is a useful example for several reasons. This area comprises the type of well watered land in which merchants would invest.⁸⁷ The Kheiran, moreover, had a tradition of agricultural production using slave labor under the supervision of non-indigenous, Nile Valley immigrant owners. The immediate area, particularly El-Obeid and Bara, offered a ready market for agricultural produce traditionally grown in the region. Finally, the Kheiran was near the headquarters of the Tijiniyya tariqa.

⁸⁷ The importance of this seemingly obvious point has been the subject of debate in writing on the western Sudan. The work of R.S. O'Fahey and M.I. Abu Salim takes the position that all land is equal and the basic problem is one of the labor supply. The counter-argument to this approach is presented in the work of M. La Rue which contends that officials and others holding land charters were not preoccupied with the people who resided on the land but with the quality of the land itself. La Rue points out that when sites described in land documents are actually located they invariably delineate areas with water supplies at or near the surface. See: R.S. O'Fahey, State and Society in Dar Fur, (London, 1980); R.S. O'Fahey and M.I. Abu Salim, Land in Dar Fur: Charters and related documents from the Dar Fur Sultanate, (Cambridge, 1983); M. La Rue, "The hakura system: Land and social stratification in the Social and economic history of the Sultanate of Dar Fur (Sudan), ca. 1785-1875," Ph.D. Thesis, (Boston: 1989).

The name Kheiran is the plural form of the word Khor or watercourse. The Kheiran region, approximately fifty miles north to south and four miles east to west, extends from slightly east of Shershan to slightly west of Bara. The dominating topographical characteristic of the area is rolling dunes between which are small basins of clay soil. Within these basins the shallow water level makes irrigated cultivation possible.⁸⁸

The predominantly nomadic Ferahna section of the Hamid federation controlled the region in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They used the area primarily as a watering center or as an alternative means of survival for individuals who had suffered substantial losses in animals through raiding, disease, drought or mismanagement. The cultivation of basins provided a livelihood for families while they attempted to rebuild their herds. The Ferahna's control of this well watered area made their leaders influential within the Hamid federation. The availability of water also stimulated section heads to control, and derive revenues from, the basins within the Kheiran. As a result the area was not characterized by

⁸⁸ For a more extended discussion of the characteristics of the Kheiran see: M. Born, Zentralkordofan Bauern und Nomaden in Savannengebieten, (Marburg, 1965), pp. 182-190.

common ownership and free access to water and pasturage for all members of the Hamid or Ferahna.⁸⁹

The rich agricultural potential of the Kheiran also attracted the interest of Nile Valley immigrants and the merchant diaspora, especially after the establishment of the Turco-Egyptian regime. The Ferahna section heads who controlled the basins found it a lucrative practice to take rents from farmers who had migrated west from the Nile Valley. For the immigrants, the Kheiran was very similar to their homelands along the banks of the Nile. In the Kheiran they could use familiar irrigation technology, the shaduf and saqia. The former is a hand operated mechanism, and the saqia a water wheel powered by an ox or camel. Through the use of these water lifting devices a wide variety of crops could be produced throughout the year. Kheiran farmers grew wheat, onions, garlic, red and green peppers, tomatoes, aubergine, radishes, sesame, sorghum, okra, water melons and limes. Cultivators farmed 100-150 of the Kheiran's basins at the height of its production in the nineteenth century.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Interview, Nazir Umum, Ali Ebied Muhammad Timsah, Dar Hamid, Bara, 25/September/1987; H.A. MacMichael, The Tribes of Northern and Central Kordofan, (London, 1967), pp.115-121; H.A. MacMichael, "The Kheiran," Sudan Notes and Records, Vol.3 no.4 1920:231-244; Leif O. Manger, The Sand Swallows our Land, (Bergen, 1981) pp.19-22.

⁹⁰ Interview, Nazir Umum Ali Ebied Muhammad Timsah, Bara 25 September 1987; MacMichael, "The Kherian," pp.240-42.

Turco-Egyptian reliance on diaspora members for administrative manpower had a profound impact on the ownership of land in the Kheiran and Bara area. The Danagla were especially adept at undercutting Ferahna ownership of Kheiran lands through their use of political and economic connections. Danagla consolidation of control became especially pronounced after the implementation of a new administrative system in 1860. The Turco-Egyptian administrators in El-Obeid appointed the Nazirs for the northern area. These Nazirs came exclusively from diaspora families who had family and business connections with officials in El-Obeid. The first five Nazirs of Bara, which controlled the Kheiran's taxation, were Danagla from the merchant enclave of Azhaf who used their powers of tax collection to gain control over the Kheiran.⁹¹

The dominant position of the Danaqla, however, was destroyed during the first stages of fighting in Kordofan. Danagla loyalty to, and close connections with, the Turco-Egyptian regime made them a natural target for the Mahdi's followers. The town of Azhaf was destroyed and the majority of its inhabitants killed in May 1882. The Mahdist victory and the Khalifa's subsequent distrust of the Danaqla meant that control of the Kheiran region reverted back to the

⁹¹ Interview, Nazir Umum, Ali Ebeid Muhammad Timsah, Bara 24 September 1987; MacMichael, The Tribes of Northern and Central Kordofan, pp.122-124; MacMichael, "The Kheiran," pp.232-235; Manger, The Sand Swallows our Land, 31-33.

nomadic Hamid and Ferahna who were unlikely to once again permit the type of infiltration that had led to the loss of their lands. Mahdist records also indicate that part of the area was allocated to Hamar troops and their families from southwestern Kordofan who were serving in the Mahdist army.⁹² Finally, the ban on tariqas had destroyed the local merchant network and no indigenous commercial group existed which could or would take advantage of the dissolution of the older diaspora oligopoly.

In addition to the land ownership issue, the Mahdi's edict forbidding rent taking and the state's need for military and agricultural slaves made it exceedingly difficult for merchants to invest in the Kheiran. The outflow of slaves and free persons from Kordofan made agricultural production for profit very difficult to achieve. A cursory examination of Mahdist records indicates that between August 1886 and October 1890 at least 16,000 slaves left the province for the Nile Valley.⁹³ This figure is especially significant because

⁹² NRO, Mahdiyya 1/8 doc.59 (13 Ramadan 1315 = 5 February 1898). In a letter dated 13 Ramadan 1315 the Khalifa orders Mahmud Ahmed to keep the Hamar, presently in Bara, where they are and that he will send someone to investigate the recent troubles in Bara. The specific nature of the problems in Bara were not discussed but may have consisted of conflicts between the Hamid, Ferahna, Hamar and local Ansar administrators.

⁹³ NRO, Mahdiyya 1/11 doc.33 (18 Dhu al-Qa'da 1303 = 17 August 1886); Mahdiyya 1/12 doc.118 (1 Shaban 1305 = 15 April 1888); doc.122 (7 Shaban 1305 = 20 April 1888); doc.155 (22 Shaban 1305 = 5 May 1888); doc.162 (30 Shaban

the Bahr al-Ghazal and Nuba mountains no longer served as the primary sources of slaves. Emigration to the East by free Sudanese for the period November 1886 to August 1888 amounted to 8,200.⁹⁴ Desertions by free soldiers and their families from the El-Obeid and Bara areas also reduced the available labor supply. Desertion figures for 1889 alone indicate that 1,800 people were known to be missing, and this figure was probably even greater.⁹⁵ It seems safe to speculate that merchants who invested in land would have had difficulty obtaining labor either free or slave, and therefore would have been hard pressed to gain a profit from an investment in land. The evidence on production from the Kheiran bears this out. The number of basins cultivated in the area shrank markedly during the Mahdiyya. MacMichael

1305 = 12 May 1888); doc.277/4 (4 Ramadan 1305 = 16 May 1888); doc.281/1 (11 Ramadan 1305 = 23 May 1888); doc.212 (28 Shawwal 1305 = 9 July 1888); doc.291 (27 Shawwal 1305 = 7 July 1888); doc.220 (7 Dhu al-Qa'da 1305 = 17 July 1888); doc. 440 (14 Rabi al-Awal 1308 = 28 October 1890; doc.445 (14 Rabi al-Awal 1308 = 28 October 1890).

⁹⁴ NRO, Mahdiyya 1/11 doc.61 (20 Safar 1304 = 20 November 1886); doc.81 (3 Rabi al-Awal 1304 = 30 December 1886); doc.86 (10 Rabi al-Akhir 1304 = 6 January 1887) doc.96 (12 Jumada al-Aula 1304 = 6 February 1887); Mahdiyya 1/12 doc.118 (1 Shaban 1305 = 15 April 1888); doc.225 (27 Dhu al-Qa'da 1305 = 6 August 1888); doc.230 (27 Dhu al-Qa'da 1305 = 6 August 1888); doc.254 (12 Dhu al-Hijja 1305 = 21 August 1888).

⁹⁵ NRO, Mahdiyya 2/4 doc.16,19a,20,20a (s.n. 1306-7 = 1889).

found that at the end of the Mahdiyya only 60 basins remained under cultivation.⁹⁶

In significant ways the religious vision and edicts of the Mahdi and Khalifa the political and military needs of the state and social ferment generated by the establishment of a new regime profoundly reduced the options open to merchants. Men who worked in the import export trade or the reselling of goods within Kordofan had few if any investment opportunities for the profits derived from their activities. They remained essentially at the mercy of the state as they continued to operate in the import/export sector.

The political and economic climate remained unsure throughout the period, and prudent businessmen would have been very reluctant to take risks on large scale enterprises. The overall impact of this political/economic climate stunted the growth of business opportunity in Kordofan and led to stagnation. The economy never completely collapsed but it also failed to offer opportunities for growth or expansion.

When the Mahdist state fell, the economic and political fortunes of the Awlad al-Balad and merchant

⁹⁶ Macmichael, "The Kheiran," p.243. Interview, Nazir Umum Ali Ebeid Muhammad Timsah, Bara, 25 September 1987. The Nazir also confirmed that the number of basins cultivated during the Mahdia was much reduced from the Turkiyya. He added that the security of the northern basins was a major problem because of attacks by anti-Mahdist Kababish.

community in particular brightened. The establishment of an Anglo-Egyptian colonial regime in Sudan at the conclusion of the reconquest inaugurated a boom period for Kordofan's economy. The prosperity of the period from 1900-1920 enabled Kordofan's merchant community to re-establish itself as the controllers of the machinery of exchange and begin to recoup the losses of the past fifteen years.

Conclusion

In the above an attempt has been made to trace the development of the commercial community found in Northern Kordofan over an extended period of time. The period from 1820 to 1898 proved to be a volatile one for the merchants of Northern Kordofan. In the relatively short space of seventy-five years they experienced the full range of possibilities in terms of controlling the machinery of exchange, which drove the economic life of the province.

Driven by the desire to reassert their control over the economy after the Turco-Egyptian invasion the commercial community combined astute business policy and political office to gain their ends. By 1860 they had uncompromised control of the economy as well as de facto political control. But at the moment of apparent triumph a series of political, economic, demographic and environmental crises undercut their dominant position in Kordofan.

For the merchants of Kordofan the crisis that had begun in the late 1860's, just when they had gained control of the province's administration and economy, culminated in the Mahdiyya with their "demotion" politically and commercially. During the Mahdiyya they lost their positions within the administration of Kordofan province as well as command of the machinery of exchange. Both their political

and economic power lay in ruins. The reins of political power and control of the economy lay close at hand but outside their grasp.

As long as the Khalifa and his Baqqara supporters, backed by the Jehadiyya, controlled the administration and the British remained beyond the frontier the prospects of regaining political and economic control within Kordofan remained slim. Throughout the Turkiyya the merchant elite of Kordofan, along with their business partners and retainers, had manipulated both ethnicity and religion to enhance their commercial networks and increase their power within society. The astute use of ethnicity and religion by the Khalifa and his lieutenants, however, turned the tables on the commercial elite and emasculated both their political and economic power.

While considerable research remains to be done on the economic history of Kordofan the evidence presented above on the commercial community offers numerous insights. First, it adds support to the arguments of Maxime Rodinson and Peter Gran that capitalism could and did develop within Muslim societies without its formal introduction and/or supervision by non-muslim (European) agents. The research presented here traces the continued development during the nineteenth century of an economic system based on capitalism, the origins of which Spaulding traces to the eighteenth-century. It has been argued that Kordofan's

merchants conducted their business operations according to capitalist principles and that the capitalist mode of production became increasingly dominant throughout the nineteenth century.

The growth of capitalism in Kordofan, however, was not the result of a European presence, physical or financial, within the local market structure. Neither European merchants nor their agents operated to any great extent within the local market structure. Further, the business operations of local merchants were financed by members of the merchant community itself and not European trading companies. It is also important to note that the local commercial community controlled the market, and the trade networks which fed it, to such an extent that European merchants were unable to effectively penetrate the gum arabic, ivory or ostrich feather sectors of the export economy. Both the import and export sectors of the economy remained in the hands of the local merchant community.

Second, the discussion given above on the composition and development of the commercial community in Kordofan nullifies the simplistic approach taken by dependency theorists such as Samir Amin in his Unequal Development. In his estimation the Sudan was integrated into the world capitalist economy during the Turco-Egyptian period when Sudanese nomads participated in trade by acting as middlemen for Turkish, Syrian and European merchants. The

presence of a relatively sophisticated commercial community in the export producing regions of the Sudan does not detract from the Amin's overall dependency argument but rather strengthens the general dependency premise. If the research presented above causes difficulties for apologists for dependency theory it does so only for those writers who consciously construct a time frame which fits neatly into the late nineteenth century and the "scramble for Africa." In part this is a weakness found in Fatima Mahmoud's Sudanese Bourgeoisie; Vanguard of Development?. Her research on the origins of the Sudanese bourgeoisie and its role in development accepts Amin's premise of economic integration in the Turco-Egyptian period. The remainder of her work focuses on the Anglo-Egyptian period of colonial rule. Her general conclusions on the nature of the Sudanese bourgeoisie are in large part correct but her time frame very short sighted.

The discussion of Kordofan's commercial community put forward initially by Spaulding and followed up in this work greatly increase our understanding of the ways in which the Sudanese merchants interacted with the world economy and at the same time pushes back the time frame within which dependency must be considered. By moving the time frame back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the depth to which capitalism and dependency are embedded into some segments of Sudanese society becomes apparent. It is little

wonder that the contemporary Sudanese bourgeoisie as described by Mahmoud is so entrenched and resistant to change, internally or externally, which might undermine their control over the political and economic life of the Sudan. They are not a creation of the imposition of European colonization in Sudan. Their origins are much earlier and their contemporary forms and functions can not be properly understood apart from this long history.

Third, Kordofan's commercial community offers a unique long-term case study on merchant/state relations. The predominant theme which emerges from this study of Kordofan's commercial community is the tenacity with which the merchant community worked to integrate itself into the state bureaucracy. The Kordofan region offers historians an especially rich research area because of its long and intimate connection with the Mediterranean world and because of the extended and uninterrupted presence of organized state control spanning two hundred and fifty years by the Funj, Fur, Turco-Egyptian, Mahdist and Anglo-Egyptian regimes.

Spaulding's research explicates the ways in which the "bourgeoisie enclaves" of the Sultanic period administered justice and collected taxes within their chartered communities. The research presented above shows that during the Turco-Egyptian period members of the commercial community greatly extended their influence in and through

the governance system. Their realm of action no longer restricted of their chartered communities but extended to all levels of the imperial bureaucracy. The high water mark of this expansion came with the appointment of Ilyas Um Brayr to the post of governor of Kordofan.

It can also be argued that the commercial community sowed the seeds of its own downfall through its "capture" of the bureaucracy. In the years immediatly prior to the Mahdist revolt the leaders of the commercial community became increasingly identified with the government and the negitive aspects of the state. They were no longer the intermediary between the people and the government as they had been in the past.

In their intermediary role the merchants were a source of money, through the purchasing of raw materials, which the state demanded for the payment of taxes. Increasingly, however, the merchants became the tax setters and collectors as well as the providers of the means to pay taxes. In their desire to assure their control of the economy through the occupation of important political positions they became identified with the state. Their prosperity also engended animosity on the part of the people of Kordofan in part out of jealousy over the wealth and power these "outsiders" had acquired and the expense of the indeginous Kordofanese. The local elite also chafed at

the increased power, political and economic, of the merchant elite.

It can also be argued that during the nineteenth-century the merchant community within Kordofan was riven with factions fueled by competition for control of the machinery of exchange. Access to bureaucratic positions within the state allowed the concentration of political and economic power into the hands of a definable elite who attempted to destroy all other competition. An important element in the struggle for political and economic control was religion. The use of Sufi brotherhood affiliation to differentiate or define interest groups is especially evident in the beginnings and operation of the Tijiniyya confraternity in Khorsi.

The beginnings of the Tijiniyya in Kordofan were rooted in the desire of local merchants to counter the power and position of "non-indigenous" commercial elites. The situation which developed in Khorsi followed a pattern seen elsewhere in the Savannah regions of Africa. The Tijiniyya in particular emerge as the confraternity of choice for those who consider themselves alienated and shut out from political and economic power. The rise of the Tijiniyya was not a movement of the "common" people. It remained from beginning to end an effort by one segment of the commercial community to increase its share of control over the machinery of exchange.

The discussion of the Mahdist period shows the converse of this situation when the merchant community faced the concerted actions of the Khalifa to counterbalance the urban based commercial community and gain un-compromised control over the political and economic life of the Sudan. In large part the Khalifa's actions were successful because of the support he received from the "common" people and their leaders. The majority of the Khalifa's officers were leaders who had seen the power of their fathers and themselves diminished as the merchant elite extended their political and economic power during the third quarter of the nineteenth-century. Many had also been deprived of lands and water rights in conjunction with increased taxes, reduced earnings from export items and higher prices for consumer goods. It was during this period that the merchant community suffered its only serious diminution of power within society. Mahmud's research shows the resurgence of the commercial elite under the auspicious of the Condominium government.

The work of Spaulding and Mahmud taken together with this study of Kordofan increases our understanding of how merchants infiltrated state bureaucracies and "captured" them. Through this infiltration process members of the commercial community placed themselves in positions of power. From these positions they could use the coercive

powers of the state to protect and extend their control over the machinery of exchange. Through the use of taxation, the selective application of market ordinances and judicial influence merchant/bureaucrats could obtain access to land and resources, protect business partners and destroy competitors. Removed from these offices, as indeed was the case during the Mahdiyya, the merchant community lost its ability to perpetuate sha'il relationships, control the economy and dominate the machinery of exchange.

The reversal of this situation occurred only during the years of the Mahdiyya. According to Mahmud it re-emerged once again during the Condominium and continues to play an important role in the political configurations found in the present day Sudan. In the tradition of the nineteenth-century, present day merchant bureaucrats use the law and their political and economic connections to gain control of the machinery of exchange and then turn their economic power to political advantage. The most obvious example of this combination of economic and political power is the Siwar al-Dahab family who used their reinvigorated economic position to gain political power. Their ultimate success occurred when Abd al-Rahman Siwar al-Dahab became the Sudanese head of state after the coup which toppled Jafar Nimeri.

Finally, this study has shown the importance of combining environmental, political and economic history.

The climactic and geophysical composition of the space within which Kordofan's people found themselves consistently played an important role in influencing the context within which political and economic decisions were made. The melding of regional political economy and regional political ecology within the context of historical research enables scholars to gain a more comprehensive picture of the past.

In Kordofan the relatively localized ecological crisis of the mid-1870s to early 1880s had a more profound impact on the political situation than did the far greater ecological crisis which gripped the Horn of Africa in the 1890s. The inability of the environment to sustain increased numbers of people compounded the political and economic difficulties of the merchant elite during the first crisis (1875-1880) and constrained significantly the options available to them. It placed them in a position which permitted only a political response to what was not a political problem but an environmental and economic one. Without the insights offered by examining Kordofan's regional political ecology a significant piece of the Kordofan's historical puzzle would be missing.

This research project has attempted to reduce a small part of the large lacuna which exists in nineteenth-century Sudanese history. It has also, however, opened the door to a myriad of further topics for research. Hopefully, it will

entice other scholars to tackle some of these topics and further our understanding of Sudanese and African History.

Figure 5

Letter from the Sheikhs and notables of Kordofan to the Khedive.

Translation:

In the name of the all mighty God, to whom be glory and praise. Peace and blessings be upon the nobelist of all the apostles and upon all his posterity and companions.

From the servants of God, the sheikhs and notables of Kordofan to his excellent majesty our lord the ruler of Egypt, whose knees we kiss.

We lay before your highness some of the things that have befallen the subjects (of your highness), to wit, the Strong have been abased and the base have become strong; the rich have been impoverished and matters have been most unsatisfactorily reversed. so much so that all reproach themselves for having been led astray by the call to Mahdism. Indeed the ruin of the land and the people's distress is beyond description by reason of soar oppression; prayers and entreaties are not heard; and we recognize the reason of this vengeance and general retribution. This is what they have earned for rejecting their ruler. But if our lord desire us to set forth our present condition, we would say that all of the settled population, the wandering arabs and their chiefs and notables crave the gracious favor of looking forward to the reoccupation of the land by the troops and to the putting down of the rebellions and wicked faction, for its ranks are broken and its organization is shattered, defeat has overtaken it, so that we are able to declare ourselves against them and cooperate against them, being kept back only by the absence of government forces whereby our patience is well neigh exhausted, and our minds much perplexed. The law that was once so spacious has become too narrow for us.

Therefore, our lord, put down this faction and deliver this people out of its misery, and you will find us, God willing, ready with both word and deed. We, our folks and all our men look forward to seeing the Khedival troops, and we are determined, to help them without fear or relaxation.

We hang all our hope for deliverance upon the will of your highness; and thus the whole nation shall be subjects of one ruler as formerly.

We long for the glad tidings of a response to our supplications coupled with a clear explanation of the time and place so as to prepare for meeting. God is our refuge and stay.

29 Dhu al-Hijjah 1303

Names attached should not be published

Abd al Fareed	
Aboo Zeid Hussein	
Mohammad Haj Ali	
Ahmed Mohammad	
Saleh Abdallah	
Sultan Belal	
Mohammad Senoos	(Chief sheikh Iwardiah tribe of Arabs)
Hassan Rida	(Sheikh of the Tayreeniah Arabs)
Osman Mohammad	(Sheikh of the Maramira Arabs)
Ameen son of Arbab	(Sheikh of the Ma'akilah Arabs)
Fadl Mohammad	(Chief sheikh of the Furdazlieh Arabs)

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Abd al-Rahman Siwar al-Dahab, Dongolawi, Khartoum, April
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