OCCASIONAL PAPERS

No 61

THE SOUTHERN FUNJ OF THE SUDAN UNDER ANGLO-EGYPTIAN RULE
1900-1933

M C Jedrej
1996

CENTRE OF AFRICAN STUDIES
Edinburgh University

Price: £ 2.50 or US $ 5.00
Dr M. C. Jedrej is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Social Anthropology and a Member of the Centre of African Studies, Edinburgh University. He has carried out ethnographic research in Sierra Leone, The Sudan, and Ethiopia.
The Southern Funj of the Sudan under Anglo-Egyptian Rule 1900-1933

Introduction

This paper presents a review of political and administrative events and developments in the southern Funj, a region on the Ethiopian borderlands of the Sudan, during the first thirty years of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium. There are a number of reasons behind this attempt. First of all, it arises out of researches which sought to provide a historical and regional context for the results of ethnographic field research among the people of the Ingessana Hills, one of a diverse congeries of small ethnic groups in the region. The purpose here was not simply to provide the usual geographical and historical background which so often has only marginal analytical relevance to the synchronic and functionalist ethnographic study of the society in question in the subsequent chapters of the monograph. I had argued that Ingessana culture in all its distinctiveness was not the outcome of a self-contained history detached and isolated from the wider region but, on the contrary, the consequence of a long and deep engagement of a particular kind. In the process of defending themselves from subordination both materially and in terms of their identity, their culture in general and their religious institutions in particular have come to reflect precisely those forces, among which must be reckoned invading imperial powers from the North, firstly the Funj Kingdom, followed by Turco-Egyptian rule, the Mahdist state, and then the Condominium, all of which in different ways threatened the people and their society. Such an argument requires that these circumstances, though often inchoate from the perspective and experience of the people, be identified as enduring and as having appropriately hostile and

1 The alternative spelling Fung frequently occurs especially in Sudan Government publications and documents, eg., as in 'Fung Province', or 'the Fung Kings of Sennar'. Spaulding, the historian of the Funj, uses 'Funj'. See eg R. S. O'Fahey and J. L. Spaulding, Kingdoms of the Sudan, Methuen, London (1974). In this paper the phrase 'southern Funj' refers to a geo-historical region while 'Southern Fung' and 'Fung Province' are the names of local government districts.
unpredictable characteristics. This was indicated in an all too brief survey of the historical record from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. This paper sets out to put on record some further evidence for the later part of that history.

As regards the early decades of Anglo-Egyptian rule in the southern Funj there is relatively little material in the public domain which can be cited. Yet this is precisely the era which could be crucial as regards any general argument about the historical formation of Ingessana society. In particular there needs to be some assessment of the continuities and discontinuities of local government rule in the southern Funj. Crudely speaking, if the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium ushered in two generations of Pax Britannica after eighty years of slaving and pillaging, of fire and sword, then, given the argument about the historical constitution of Ingessana society one would expect correspondingly drastic transformations in the institutions of that society. To a certain extent the possibility of such changes was indicated by the researches of the geographer H R J Davies who revealed that there had been changes in Ingessana settlement patterns, changes which he attributed to the establishment of a more peaceful era than had prevailed before the introduction of Anglo-Egyptian rule. The question then is a matter of assessing whether the new practices as regards settlement are restricted to that level or whether they are indicative of deeper changes in the structure of the society. This in turn becomes a matter of judging the extent to which there was a radical discontinuity in the material reality of government in the southern Funj such as to bring about a corresponding change in the perception and experience of the people of the Ingessana Hills as to the wider circumstances of their social

---


lives. The evidence presented here suggests that for the first thirty years of the century there were considerable continuities from the nineteenth century in terms of the actualities of local government in the southern Funj.

The question of continuities and discontinuities relates to the second purpose of the paper which is offered as a contribution to the more general matter of the history of British rule at the local level in Africa. The issue of 'the colonial inheritance' has a peculiarly ambiguous resonance in the Sudan. The independent Sudan in 1956 took over the state structure of the Condominium, but when the Sudan fell under Anglo-Egyptian rule in 1898 it seems that what remained of the old Turco-Egyptian apparatus, at least at the level of local government, was rehabilitated, and it may well have been the case that there were some continuities through the period of Mahdist rule. These are difficult matters of judgement given the present state of knowledge. The southern Funj presents a particularly complex ethnic, political, and administrative situation which has sometimes been compared to southern Kordofan where a number of small Muslim and non-Muslim ethnic groups, the Nuba Hills people, are surrounded by nomadic Baggara Arabs while to the south are the great Nilotic peoples such as Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk. However, in the case of the southern Funj there are additional complications arising out of the fact that it is part of the Ethiopian marches of the Sudan and that part of the administrative boundary of Southern Fung District has always also been an international frontier. On the Ethiopian side of the frontier were the Muslim rulers of Gubba and the Beni Shangul who at various times previously enjoyed degrees of independence, or acknowledged allegiance to powers in the Sudan or in Ethiopia according to political expediency. The international boundary was agreed by a treaty signed in Addis

---

5 There is a reference to ma'murs in at least one Mahdist document. See P. M. Holt, The Mahdist State in the Sudan, Clarendon Press, Oxford (1958), p.111. The lowest level of administrative officer during Turco-Egyptian (Ottoman) and then Anglo-Egyptian rule was known as a ma'mur sometimes assisted by a sub-ma'mur, and the area of his jurisdiction was a ma'muriya. The ma'muriya offices and the residence of the ma'mur were called the merkaz ('centre'). Several ma'murs, who were during the first twenty five years of Condominium rule mainly Egyptian together with some Sudanese, came under the authority of a mufti (inspector) who was an Englishman. In the early years they were invariably officers from the Egyptian Army on secondment from British regiments, but later they were replaced by civilians recruited directly into the Sudan Political Service. In 1921 the term 'inspector' was replaced by 'district commissioner' in English. In Arabic 'district commissioner' continued to be rendered as mufti. The military ethos was preserved in so far as these civilian officials wore a military style uniform with epaulettes of rank. The uniform, complete with pith helmets, has persisted for more than a quarter of a century after independence.
Ababa in 1902 after earlier negotiations broke up because the British government refused to recognise Ethiopian claims to the Beni Shangul. Despite the hostilities and disputes arising out of, or amplified by, this international frontier, the boundary line itself, has endured as one of the least disputed in Africa.6

The Beni Shangul Sheikhs
In 1897-8 Ras Makonnen led a campaign to occupy the Beni Shangul and subordinate the rulers of Asosa, Beni Shangul, and Ghomasa, namely, Sheikhs Khojali Hasan, Tor el Juri, and wad Mahmud, respectively.7 These families, representatives of an Arab Muslim elite who originated in the Nile valley to the north, had since the period of the Funj Kingdom of Sennar, and more recently when Makk Nimr Mohammed of the Ja'aliyin and his followers fled from Shendi to escape the retribution of the Turco Egyptian army after the assassination of Ismail Pasha in 1821, carved out domains by subordinating the indigenous non-Muslim population, mainly Berta, through marriage, clientship and enslavement. Since then this ruling elite, sometimes referred to as the Watawit, have variously recognised and rebelled against the authority of rulers in Khartoum or Omdurman, and it was the revolt of Tor el Juri against the Khalifa which seems to have encouraged the Showan ruler Menelik to annex the Beni Shangul, now only nominally under Mahdist authority. According to Triulzi, Tor el Juri attempted to rally the other sheikhs to defend their independence but Khojali, though his father had been made an emir by the Mahdi, submitted to the authority of Ras Makonnen, and then assisted the Ethiopian forces in the pursuit of the other two. Tor el Juri fled to Fazoghli in the Sudan and wad Mahmud with his brother Ibrahim to Jebel Jerok in the Sudan. The Ethiopians met with representatives of the Sudan Government at Fazoghli and Tor el Juri and wad Mahmud eventually submitted to Ras Makonnen. Ibrahim wad Mahmud remained in Jebel Jerok from where he conducted raids among the surrounding populations. He was eventually captured by an Anglo-Egyptian military force led by G F Gorringe, then Governor of Sennar Province, brought back and executed.

---

7 Beni Shangul is also commonly used to refer to the wider area comprising Asosa, Beni Shangul, and Ghomasa. Where it is used in that sense here this is indicated by the phrase 'the Beni Shangul'.
THE SUDAN

ROSEIRES
Sudan Government District HQ

Gule  Chief settlement of a sheikh or other local ruler

1000 metre contour

Map 1. The southern Funj showing some locations mentioned in the text.
at Wad Medani in 1904. Though at first only Tor el Juri and wad Mahmud were taken to Showa, in 1900 Khojali Hasan was also summoned.8

The occupation of the Beni Shangul by Menelik's forces did not result in the establishment of a civil government but instead the country was more or less continuously plundered by the Ethiopians. During the eight years of Ethiopian occupation it is likely that there was a considerable migration of refugees into the Sudan. For example, in 1905 Sitt Amna, the wife of Khojali Hasan, fled with about 600 followers from Kirin to Jebel Ora in the Sudan.9 Probably for similar reasons Nazeer Ali emigrated with his dependants in 1908 into the Sudan and settled east of Keili.10 However, in the same year, Menelik, perhaps aware of the diminishing returns from the Beni Shangul, allowed the three sheikhs to return to their domains. Nevertheless, Sitt Amna significantly enough, remained in the Sudan. She eventually received official recognition as a local ruler and even exchanged gifts with Sir Reginald Wingate and Lady Wingate in 1916, the Governor General's last year in office.11

The rivalry between the sheikhs persisted and Khojali Hasan appears to have considered the other two to have been his subordinates in terms of their relationship to Abyssinian rule. After all he had fought alongside Ras Makonnen in the campaign against them. As early as 1912 Khojali Hasan demanded of Tor el Juri's successor, Mohammed Tor el Juri, that he pay tribute to him, and then, when this was rejected, with the assistance of Ethiopian soldiers, overran his country in 1917. Khojali Hasan similarly won the assistance of Ras Tafari and Dejaz Aggezzu in 1921 to pursue and arrest wad Mahmud who had been attempting to extract tribute from villages under the protection of Khojali Hasan, and to interfere with a foreign gold prospecting company working under the auspices of the Ethiopian government in western provinces of the country.12

8 Trulzı, op. cit., pp. 172-179; A. J. Arkell, 'A note on the history of the country of the Berta lying east of Kurmuk within the Abyssinian frontier' which was compiled by Arkell when District Commissioner, Southern District, White Nile Province, from information received from Watawii and others recently convicted of complicity in the importation of slaves into White Nile Province and forwarded to the province Governor in 1928. Sudan Archive, Durham University Library, SAD 783/3/40-55
9 Arkell, op. cit SAD 783/3/45
10 J. W. Robertson, 'A note on the Abyssinian frontier 1933', SAD 517/2/6-7
11 Report by C. A. Willis, special commissioner for slavery and the pilgrimage, 12th July 1926, National Records Office, Khartoum, CRO CIVSEC 60/6/18.
12 Arkell, op. cit., SAD 783/3/47; Robertson, op. cit., SAD517/25
While wad Mahmud was in captivity in Showa his soldiers, now out of control, engaged in banditry on their own account from refuges within territory controlled by Tor el Juri. Khojali Hasan again, after appealing to Tor el Juri to restrain these raiders, turned to Showa and in 1923 Tor el Juri was summoned to Dami Dello where he was arrested by Dejaz Birro and Khojali Hasan. Reparations in slaves and gold were demanded of Tor el Juri and his lieutenants, while at the same time Dejaz Birro and Khojali proceeded against the soldiery and lieutenants of wad Mahmud. In effect this left Khojali Hasan as ruler of not just Asosa but also Ghomasa and Beni Shangul. In 1925 Khojali was summoned to Showa to ensure his allegiance to Ethiopian overlordship. His sons, however, made formal visits to Sayed 'Abd el Rahman el Mahdi, the son of the Mahdi, in the Sudan. However, as late as 1925 wad Mahmud's ex-slave soldiers were still raiding this time from Jebel Jerok in the Sudan. For example, in January 1926 Mohammed el Mahdi Khojali, the son of Sheikh Hojali Hasan and Sitt Amna wrote to the ADC Kurmuk, Mr C G Davies, stating that a party of ex-slaves of wad Mahmud had attacked Dul from Jerok and carried off 40 persons. Their return and the removal of the brigands from the border was requested. A Sudan Government Police patrol searched Jerok in January 1926 and found an abandoned camp and 21 people hiding in a cave.

Refugees and the frontier
As a consequence of these internecine hostilities and conflicts in the Beni Shangul there appeared in the Sudan a second wave of refugees during the two years 1921-1923, when they sometimes appeared in the Sudan as entire settlements of up to a hundred at a time. Whole communities of 'Watawit and their Berta' left the Beni Shangul and settled in the Sudan at Queissan, at Hillet Hudur on the Tomat, and at Hillet Abu Rahma near Uffat el Tom. Refugees from Dul (Ghomasha) were now in villages around Roseires, and in Ludu, Arbodi and Jerok around Kurmuk. More usually, and steadily throughout the early decades of the century, refugees appeared in the Sudan in twos and threes.
The reasons for these movements are much more complicated than the Sudan Government's view that the refugees were runaway slaves fleeing to freedom under the Union Jack. The fact that whole communities, 'Watawit and their Berta', in other words, masters and patrons with their slaves and clients, were migrating into the Sudan confounds that view. J W Robertson, DC Roseires, in a review of the recent history of the border in 1933, attributed the movement of refugees into the Sudan to two causes. In the first place people were fleeing from the disturbances arising out of Khojali's campaigns to subordinaite the other two sheikhs, wad Mahmud and Tor el Juri. Secondly, people were also fleeing from heavy, and sometimes arbitrary, taxation. 'These, as much as real slavery, are the reasons for the incursions of refugees'.

However, in both situations, that is banditry and the arbitrary extraction of tribute, slaves are particularly vulnerable and likely to find themselves being abducted and then the objects of a series of sales and purchases. In other words, it is not simply slavery they are fleeing but the status of slave in certain critical circumstances. Finally, some are merely outlaws escaping from arrest and punishment in Ethiopia. A common complaint made by Khojali Hasan to the merkaz in Kurmuk is that the ma'mur refuses to hand over to him those of his subordinates who have from time to time absconded with his arms and weapons, as well as the taxes which they have collected as his agents and in his name.

The Southern Fung local authority had set up special refugee villages for people fleeing from Ethiopia at Roseires and supplied the people with seeds and tools. Those who were seriously destitute were even given cash loans to be repaid after the harvest. In this the government was following a pattern that had been started as long ago as 1899 when supervised settlements of demobilised soldiers of the Egyptian army, many of whom had in fact been slaves before being recruited into the army, were first established. The purpose of these ex-soldiers' settlements was, in the first place, to make the soldiers into self-supporting peasant farmers and so reduce the cost of pensions for the government, and, secondly, to establish communities which would produce a supply of 'de-tribalised' young men who could be recruited into the army in the future. Four of such villages

---

17 Robertson, op. cit., SAD5172/10
18 Robertson, op. cit., SAD 5172/6; Minute of the frontier meeting of 29th January to 7th March at Kurmuk, CRO BNP 1/60/416
already existed around Roseires and, given the local government's experience of the ex-soldiers' settlements, it was administratively easy to replicate such villages, but this time for the purposes of accepting and settling refugees.19

Local government administration

Until 1926 there was 'only military administration' in Kurmuk District, and in the Koma Hills after G S Nickerson's political and military reconnaissance patrol in 1907, it was twenty years before another English officer was seen there.20 In the same year, 1926, the prospect of troop withdrawals led the DC for Southern Fung to plead for an additional ADC and he remarked that 'a hurried trek once a year is all that is available for the Ingessana, and I have no doubt that the last three patrols there could have been avoided if the inspectors could have spent longer periods among them'.21 What is being referred to here in these rather bland statements about 'military administration' and 'patrols' is best understood by a concrete example.

A 'patrol' is, in fact, a savagely repressive military action against a civilian population. For example, in the dry season of 1922, a year of considerable hardship for the people of the Ingessana Hills because of widespread crop failures, a tax collecting company of mounted police was attacked and the police killed. Four days later four merchants, who had probably been buying from the government stock taken in tax by the police, were also killed, and the government post at Soda, where livestock collected in tax was being held, was also attacked. The police responded by burning houses in two settlements. In November a military patrol under a Major Davies arrived in the Hills from Roseires to restore order. This they did by systematically burning houses, capturing livestock, and killing those who showed any resistance, until the population betrayed the 'ring leaders'. It was not until early in January that the 'ringleaders' were taken by which time thirty one 'rebels' had been killed and twenty six wounded. In addition 1500 head of cattle and small livestock had been seized, most of which

20 A note on aspects of the administration of Kurmuk District 1926-31 by A. W. W. Disney, dated 7th August 1932, CRO 2CIVSEC 1/29
21 DC Southern Fung, Roseires, to Governor, Fung Province, Singa, 21st September 1926, CRO BNP 1 Box 7.
were sold, as was normal procedure, to defray the expenses of the patrol. The ringleaders were publicly executed at Soda on 18th February.22

Although in 1926 a British ADC was assigned to Kurmuk to oversee the ma'mur the ADC was there only during the dry season. For some six years after 1926 the poll tax continued to be collected by the ma'mur and police without any supervision from either an ADC or a DC. A number of 'irregularities', including the 'Abyssinian swindle fund' which was an unauthorised impost levied by the merkaz on Ethiopian coffee traders passing through Kurmuk, were later revealed as a result of investigations in connection with disciplinary charges brought against the ma'mur in 1932.23

Poll tax collection was also carried out on behalf of the government by the meks of Keili and Kurmuk, the omdas of Ora and Ulu, and by Sheikh Mohammed Zubeir among the various ethnic groups referred to collectively as the southern Baruns for whom the sheikh claimed to be, and was recognised by the government as, the mu'allim.24 According to H G Wedderburn-Maxwell, DC Kurmuk, it was not until 1934 in Fung Province that 'raiding for livestock by mounted police as a system of tribute collection was abandoned'. Wedderburn-Maxwell, who was particularly critical of the state of local government in the region, also related how a Governor of Fung Province on a recent tour had entered a village where all the inhabitants had fled into the surrounding grasslands 'leaving some goats tied to a tree in the hope that this would satisfy 'the Turk' and leave the village in peace'. 25

J W Robertson, DC Roseires in the early thirties, 'found a Mek at Fazoghli with undefined customary powers' and with 'a horde of followers battening on to the people'. In 1926 Sheikh 'Abd el Kadir, a lieutenant of old Sheikh Idris wad Regab in Gule, was still in charge of the Ingressana twenty years after Nickerson

---

22 Military Intelligence Report, CRO 1 Dakhlia 112/1/100
23 Disney, op. cit.
24 Disney, op. cit. Mu'allim, 'teacher', but here in the sense of a master of Islamic learning and civilisation with a following of obedient but still ignorant pupils. Omda is the title of a notable officially recognised as having legitimate fiscal and judicial authority in the structure of Native Administration introduced widely after 1927. A nazir had similar powers but they normally extended to include more than one ethnic group or several tribal sections of the same ethnic group. A mek in the southern Funj was equivalent to an omda
25 H. G. Wedderburn Maxwell, DC Kurmuk, to Governor, Blue Nile Province, November 1935, CRO 1 Dakhlia 112/16/105
Bey had identified him as their government agent. Even in 1938 the *omdas* at Keili and Ora were still, as before, hearing cases far beyond any authorised jurisdiction. A police post and court had been established at Bau in the Ingessana Hills but a report in 1928 remarked that 'it is was not clear whether or not they are yet working'. The inhabitants of the villages around Kurmuk, the Hill Barun, and the Jumjum were administered directly from Kurmuk, though in practice they 'settle their own affairs except for homicide'. The Gule Nazir, Sheikh Idris wad Regab, controlled the rest of the District.26

This situation, it seems, was the outcome of a degree of continuity from the old Ottoman administration together with attempts by different Provincial Governors of the Anglo-Egyptian regime to implement a policy of indirect rule or at least as a matter of expediency to find and use local individuals of authority and influence through whom to exercise control. This administrative policy had been endorsed by the Milner report on the Constitutional development of Egypt which also devoted several chapters to future policy for the Sudan. An influential figure was A W Keown-Boyd, a Sudanese Government official on secondment to the Egyptian Government in Cairo and who returned to the Sudan on Milner's behalf in 1920. Keown-Boyd argued for the elimination of the offices and grades, and therefore for the removal of the Egyptian and Sudanese officials who staffed them, which were necessary to a system of direct rule, and for the division of the Sudan into ethnically distinct regions under 'tribal organisations' which could be supervised by British officials. This resulted in the Powers of Nomadic Sheikhs Ordinance which was promulgated in 1922, and then its extension by Sir John Maffey, an enthusiastic advocate of indirect rule, in 1927 to sedentary and territorial sheikhs.27

Besides the problems of 'excavating the original tribal structure', as the Governor of White Nile Province put it,28 and of dealing with the consequences of investing as *sheikhs*, *nazirs*, and *omdas*, titles with fiscal and judicial powers, individuals described by one contemporary critic of the policy, as 'old

---

26 G. M. Hancock, DC Fung, to Governor, Blue Nile Province 11th May 1938, CRO 2 CIVSEC 1/2/9
27 M. Daly, *Empire on the Nile*, pp.360-379
28 Daly, ibid., p. 367.
picturesque rascals', there was also the particular complexity of the political and ethnic relationships in regions such as the southern Funj. These realities could not be accommodated by the simple minded vision of indirect rule imagined by officials such as Keown-Boyd, far less be incorporated into ordinances such as those of 1922 and 1927, even when they were quickly modified to recognise that many, often the majority, of cases brought to the courts of nazirs and omdas were inter-ethnic. Implementation of indirect rule in a particular region fell to a succession of provincial governors and their district commissioners who each had their own interpretation of what the local situation demanded in terms of indirect rule. The result was often quite dramatic inconsistencies of policy.

E N Corbyn, Governor of Fung Province from 1924-1926, advocated a policy of separating the non-Arab peoples of the southern Funj, such as the Ingessana, Uduk, and Meban, from Arabic speaking peoples with the deliberate intention, as he saw it, of preventing the Arabization of the former. To this effect he specifically instructed his DC for Southern Fung to cease using Sheikh 'Abd el Kadir Ahmed 'to run the Ingessana'. However, a review of policy in the Southern Fung by G M Hancock, DC Roseires in 1938, remarked that Corbyn's policy had little effect in practice.

L F Nalder, who succeeded Corbyn in 1927 as Governor of Fung Province, tried to rebuild or recreate the old Funj sovereignty as an instrument of rule, and so he 'recognised Fung overlords' and even 'introduced them where they did not exist previously'. Since the 'Funj overlords' were simply the usual Arab agents of government administration, 'the picturesque old rascals', Nalder had turned Corbyn's policy upside down, though he could still claim through an appeal to history and the excavation of old tribal structures to be implementing the Milner report on indirect rule.

Slavery

---

29 Sir James Currie, Director of Education in the Sudan, in a letter dated 30th June 1929. Cited by Daly, ibid., p368.
30 E. N. Corbyn, Governor, Fung Province, Singa, to D C Southern Fung, Roseires, CRO 4 Dakhlia 112/16/101
31 Hancock, op. cit., CRO 2CIVSEC1/2/9
32 Hancock, ibid.
The Anglo-Egyptian government of the Sudan was, from the beginning, distinctly ambivalent as regards slavery within its borders. While the trade in slaves was absolutely prohibited Kitchener's memorandum to the first provincial governors stated that 'slavery is not recognised in the Soudan, but as long as service is willingly rendered by servants to masters it is unnecessary to interfere in the conditions existing between them'. As Daly points out such a position obviously anticipates the toleration of slavery for pragmatic economic and internal political reasons. Particularly irritating for the Sudan Government in Khartoum were the activities of the Slavery Repression Department of the Ministry of the Interior of the Egyptian Government whose headquarters were moved from Cairo to Khartoum in 1901 but who remained, nevertheless, answerable to Cairo. One of several regional headquarters in the Sudan was established at Roseires in 1902. There were, at any one time, about a hundred and ten Slavery Repression Police in Fung Province where there were posts at Gule, Gerri, Khor Tumat, Belatoma, and on the River Yabus. While the Sudanese government presumed the necessity of tolerating slavery, the Slavery Repression Department was determined to eradicate it, and refused to be confined in its activities to suppressing only the trade in slaves. The Sudan Government finally succeeding in having the Slavery Repression Department abolished in 1922 and its function transferred to the Sudan Police.

While this organisational change may well have been taken as a signal that trading in slaves could be resumed with impunity, there was also, it has to be noted, the wider context of the Sudanese economy, and in particular the labour shortages during the period 1919 to 1925 when the great Gezira irrigation scheme and the associated Sennar dam were being constructed. The years 1923-5 were the years of maximum export of slaves from the Beni Shangul. It may very well have been the case that heads of households engaged in agricultural and pastoral production in Kordofan sought to overcome labour shortages caused by the migration of men pursuing money wages by buying slaves.

However, in 1923-4 P G W Diggle, a government official in the agriculture department, as a result of his experiences in Berber, resigned over the issue of

33 Daly, Empire on the Nile, pp232-3.
34 Daly, Empire on the Nile, pp. 235, 444; Hargey, op. cit., pp 209, 225.
35 Arkell, op. cit., SAD 783/3/53
the government's attitude to slavery and took his evidence to the Anti-Slavery Society. The case was taken up by the press and questions were asked in parliament. The Foreign Office was deeply embarrassed as regards its negotiations with Egypt, and its position in the League of Nations, which body had pressed Britain in 1923 about the steps that were being taken in the Sudan to deal with slavery.36

On November 30th 1925 the Governor General, G F Archer, appointed C A Willis, the head of the intelligence department, Special Commissioner to enquire into aspects of slavery and the pilgrimage, it being suspected that Fellata pilgrims were involved in slave trading, and that some of the pilgrims were themselves vulnerable to enslavement in the Hedjaz. Willis's report, dated 12 July 1926, identified the Ethiopian frontier immediately south of Kurmu as one of the few places where slave traffic was carried on. Anticipating Willis's report the government in May 1926 revised the Closed Districts Order for Fung Province to extend the affected area from ten miles from the Ethiopian border to the whole of the Kurmu and the Southern Fung Districts.37

In White Nile province during the dry season 1927-8, the DC for Southern District, A J Arkell, through the testimony of freed slaves in his magistrate court, was unravelling an unsuspected traffic in slaves on a quite surprising scale. By June 1928 there were two large camps at Kosti, the District Headquarters. One comprised arrested slave dealers numbering around 450, and the other, described as a village, was made up of 600 freed slaves, men, women, and children. Further supplies of barbed wire for the prisoners, and medical and food supplies for the freed slaves were demanded urgently of Khartoum as both camps increased in size. The freed slaves were allocated land for cultivations and households were set up by Arkell and his staff arranging marriages and distributing the children.38 According to Arkell's summary of the evidence of

36 Daly, Empire on the Nile, p. 444.
37 Willis, op. cit.
38 A. J. Arkell, DC Southern District, White Nile Province to Governor, White Nile Province, 3rd July 1928. CRO CIVSEC 60/6/19; also T. R. H. Owen SAD 414/2/5; White Nile Province Diary June 1928 CRO CIVSEC 60/6/19. Arkell's anti-slavery activities soon passed into British expatriate folklore in the Sudan. Miss Ina Beasley, inspector of girls' schools in the Department of Education, Omdurman, writing to her sister in 1945 recounted two such tales. The first is that the slaves were all brought together and the DC, Arkell by name, gave a man a plot of land to cultivate and then asked if the man was married. If he were not he then picked out a healthy looking wench and handed her over to the man, saying, 'and here's a
143 slaves brought into White Nile Province in the fifteen years between 1912 and 1927 only 12 were not from Fung Province or Ethiopia. Moreover Arkell was able to identify the main sources as Sitt Amna in the Sudan, 36 cases; one Fiki Ishag of Sergoli, a relative of Khojali Hasan's, with 34 cases; Khojali Hasan's son Mahdi at Megali, 18 cases, and Khogali Nuerein of Beshir, 41 cases.\(^{39}\) The last three all based in Ethiopia. In fact Sitt Amna's activities were already known to the authorities through allegations of having sold three girls to Dar Muharib Baggara in 1923. She had received an official warning through the police from the Acting Governor of Fung Province, W D Purves, in 1925 that she could face deportation to Ethiopia.\(^{40}\)

Arkell's reports shifted attention from the Fellata, the main suspects in Willis's earlier investigations, to the Baggara Arabs moving seasonally north and south in pursuit of grazing and water. This view came to be accepted by Fung Province officials. A young ADC at Singa in 1933 wrote of what was recalled as 'a bad scandal when it was found out there was an extensive trade in slaves from Ethiopia who were being brought north by our Arabs in the rains and sold (in quite significant numbers) to the Kababish at Kosti'.\(^{41}\) This view is repeated much later by Dr 'Abd al Ghaffar Mohammed Ahmed who, writing of the Rufa'a el Hoi, remarks that 'the nomads' activities and presence in the area have been thought to have contributed largely to the persistence of the slave trade in the region for a longer period than in other parts of the Sudan'.\(^{42}\)

Yet contemporary reports do not quite bear this out. In response to Arkell's reports and recommendations, C G Davies, ADC Kurmuk, was put in charge of special anti-slavery operations in Southern Fung. His report, dated 16th June

---

\(^{39}\) Arkell, ibid., SAD 783/3/34
\(^{40}\) Willis, op. cit CRO CIVSEC 60/6/18
\(^{41}\) E. A. Balfour, ADC Singa, 1933-4 in a letter home. SAD 606/4/1
\(^{42}\) 'Abd el Ghaffar Mohammed Ahmed, Shaykhs and Followers, political struggle in the Rufa'a al Hoi Nazirate in the Sudan, Khartoum University Press, Khartoum, 1974, pp.56-7.
1928, records considerable disappointment and frustration. Despite extensive operations among the encampments of herdsmen moving north he was able to report the release of only three slaves, two women and a boy. 'I cannot help feeling that...we should have probably stumbled across more than we did had there been any large numbers present when we started the operation'... Likely young men and women and children refused to go with Davies to 'freedom', and fiercely resisted 'liberation' with tears and cries. Certainly Davies could not find any of them understanding any language but Arabic.43

A closer look at Arkell's cases sheds some light on what was going on. From the testimony of the freed slaves it is clear that only a small minority are being bought and sold by Rufa'a herdsmen. The buying and selling of slaves seems on the whole to be carried out by small parties of two or three and seldom as many as six. Sometimes the buyers are acting as agents on behalf of powerful patrons west of the White Nile and have been sent on their behalf to acquire a slave for them. Others are engaged in opportunistic trading expeditions, taking cloth to sell in Ethiopia and with the proceeds buying a slave and a rifle to sell on the White Nile. Parties of two or three men never purchase more than one slave and a rifle each. For example, three men variously from Roseires, Kosti and Singa came together in eastern Kordofan where they bought three horses and rode them to the Ingessana Hills where they sold them. At Abuldugu south of the Ingessana Hills, with the proceeds of the sale of the horses, they bought two slave girls for £26.50 and sold them in Kordofan for £60. Some individuals are buying a slave for themselves, or as female servants for their wives. Rufa'a individuals as much as individual Baggara from west of the White Nile are likely to engage in buying slaves and for similar reasons. However, their location on the route from Ethiopia to Kordofan is likely to implicate them more than others. They may become directly involved but also indirectly as in the case when two Arabs with two slaves found themselves detained by the inhabitants of Jebel Silak and subject to blackmail demands. They refused to pay and managed to escape and near Jebel Gule found a Rufa'a camp in which they were given sanctuary.44

43 Davies to Governor, Fung Province, 16th June 1928, CRO CIVSEC 60/6/18
44 Arkell, op. cit., SAD783/1/1-53
Blackmail was also extracted, according to Arkell, not only at Jebel Silak but also at Jebel Abuldugu, Jebel Yakan, and Jebel Surkum, and at a rate of £4 per slave passing through. These places are all identified on Arkell's sketch map showing the main routes of import of slaves from Ethiopia. This detail is combined with the observation that other localities, specifically Jebel Gule, Jebel Ulu, Kurmu, and Jebel Buk 'are feared and avoided by traders'.45 All of which is rather curious because, firstly, Gule and Ulu are identified on the sketch map as part of the routes, and secondly the implication seems to be that traders will pay protection money. However, at a rate of £4 per slave the difference in buying and selling prices would be quickly eroded if such rates were payed more than once along the route.

As regards the slaves themselves a common theme which emerges is that they are sold consequent to their abduction. For example, Fadl Kerim was the daughter of two of Khojali Hasan's slaves and lived at Goha. When she was thirteen she was kidnapped by a Watawit who took her north to Metemma in the domain of wad Mahmud. There she was sold in 1922 to a couple of traders who resold her in Tireitur in Southern District, White Nile Province. Similarly Saida, identified as a Berta and not as a slave, also lived in Goha and was abducted by two Khannaja who took her to Afoda, the village of Tor el Juri. There she was sold to a trader who took her to the White Nile and sold her to the Sheikh of Abu Teleih. Another slave, Bakhita, was born of slave parents in Beni Shangul, the domain of Tor el Juri. There she was kidnapped by another slave who sold her to a man in Dul, the domain of wad Mahmud, who sold her on immediately to a man from Jebel Abuldugu, from whence she was bought and taken to the White Nile. In 1924 a Rufa'a of Nas Eweida bought a Berta girl, Halima, from Sitt Amna and sold her in Dar el Ahamda. Halima was born in Agadi of slaves belonging to wad Mahmud. She was captured by Khojali Hasan's expedition against wad Mahmud and given to his son Mahdi. She was then taken to Sitt Amna and sold some months later.46

Given the evidence and testimony produced by Arkell it was not long before the Fung Province authorities acted and they moved first against Ali Idris of Jebel Jerok and his wife Shaia bint Subbal of Jebel Ulu who were both arrested and

45 Arkell, ibid.
46 Arkell, ibid.
charged with slave trading on 14th July 1928. Khojali Hasan's wife, Sitt Amna, removed herself into Ethiopia and remained there until 26th October when she returned to the Sudan. In between the was alleged to have organised a raid on the village of Wad Guma'a in the Sudan, perhaps to recover slaves who had not followed her into Ethiopia. On the 8th November in Khartoum, a meeting of the Governor General Sir John Maffey, Major general H J Huddleston, the Civil Secretary H A Macmichael, and L F Nalder the Governor of Fung Province, discussed moves against Sitt Amna. So it was agreed that a light armoured battery would be despatched to surround her village while the police arrested her and her chief henchmen. Exactly three weeks later a statement was released to the press announcing that Sitt Amna had been arrested.47

The Kurmuk Conference.48
On the 28th January 1933 what was known as the Kurmuk Conference opened. The object of this international conference from the point of view of the Sudan Government was to achieve a settlement of a number of outstanding grievances against the Ethiopian Government and those who acted in its name. The Sudan Government delegation was led by Mr C H Thomson, Governor of Fung Province, accompanied by T F G Carless, the District Commissioner Kurmuk, E D Corfield, the DC of Eastern Nuer District in Upper Nile Province, and by the DC Roseires, J W Robertson who also acted as secretary to the delegation. The Ethiopian Government was represented by the Governor of Southern Wellea, Dejazmatch Hailu, and the Governor of Lallo Kelli, Kanazmatch Kassa. Also in the Ethiopian delegation was Ato Debba Birru of the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and described as an 'adviser' to the Ethiopian delegation. Also in attendance with the Sudan delegation was Capt E N Erkine, HBM Consul in Gorei, Western Ethiopia, and Lt. Col Airey Bey, a General Staff Officer in the Sudan Defence Force. Accompanying the Ethiopian delegation was Sheikh Khojali Hasan. The Sudan Government delegation also brought along a detachment of infantry, a mobile machine gun battery, and three RAF fighter-bombers.

47 CRO CIVSEC 60/6/19
48 This account is based entirely on the material in CRO BNP 1/60/416 where besides a lengthy minute, probably written by Robertson, there are also several communications between army general staff officers and the provincial administration concerning the troops and military aircraft.
The object of the conference as far as the Sudan Government was concerned was to secure a settlement as regards raiding by Ethiopian subjects into the Sudan. The general demands of the Sudan delegation were the recovery and return of all men, women, children and livestock seized in Sudan territory and now held in Ethiopian territory within two months; the arrest and delivery of Sudanese subjects accused of crimes for trial in the Sudan, as well as Ethiopians who have committed crimes in the Sudan, and the punishment in Ethiopia of Ethiopians who have bought and sold Sudanese subjects in Ethiopia. Eleven specific cases were put to the Ethiopian delegation, some of which dated back to December 1918. The two most serious were the accusation that Khojali Hasan or his agents had raided the Koma settlement of Warragarra in December 1918 and, more recently in June 1932, a carried out a raid on Shima village near Kurmuk. In the former five women were abducted and five men killed, while in the latter nine men, thirteen women and twenty one children were abducted, though five men and seven women were later to escape back into the Sudan. At the same time there were raids on the Burun and Koma on the left bank of the Yabus by Nuer who were led by one Maneeseh, a subordinate of Khojali Hasan. The Sudan Government also listed four separate cases of abduction: a woman, a woman and her children, a girl and a boy, and a man and eight cattle. The Ethiopians were accused of harbouring two fugitives from Sudanese justice, and with the wrongful arrest of a Sudanese subject while he was in Ethiopia.

On the 30th January Khojali asked for permission to retire and consider the complaints, and announced that he, in turn, had complaints to lay before the Government of the Sudan. On the 31st Khojali requested a further extension. On the 1st of February the meeting resumed and for the next two days Khojali claimed that the complaints were without foundation or were a misrepresentation, and submitted a list of his own counter claims. For example, he denied that any raid was carried out in Warragarra and asserted that this was a fabricated allegation to justify a raid from the Sudan on one of his villages, Kawa, in Ethiopia. In another alleged raid, Khojali said that the people, who were originally from Ethiopia, had voluntarily returned and that he had merely provided them with protection. He also submitted a list of counter claims of fugitives from Ethiopian justice whom the Sudan authorities refused to hand

---

49 See Johnson op.cit., p 229 for details of Khojali Hasan's activities further south among the Nilotes
over, such as a subordinate of Khojali's who had absconded to Kurmuk with taxes and tribute, his rifle and ammunition, all of which belonged to Khojali, and which the mu'mur at Kurmuk refused to return despite repeated requests.

During a further two days of meetings the Sudan delegation failed to persuade the Ethiopian delegation to hand over any Ethiopian subjects for trial in the Sudan. However, the Ethiopians did agree to investigate the complaints against Khojali and they visited Khojali's base at Jebel Dul and there interviewed witnesses and captives held by Khojali. On their return to Kurmuk on the 7th, the Sudanese delegation invited the Ethiopian delegation to interview the witnesses being held in Kurmuk. This the Ethiopian delegation declined. Instead the Ethiopian delegation wanted the conference to adjudicate upon the claims and counterclaims of each side. This the Sudan representatives declared to be impossible on the grounds that the conference could not constitute itself as a court of inquiry with power to try and settle the disputed cases. Politically this was also quite unacceptable since from the British perspective the Ethiopians and Khojali Hasan had in effect been summoned to answer charges, and they could not be allowed now jump out of the dock, as it were, and sit on the bench alongside the magistrates. So the conference ended and the fighter bombers, the machine gun battery, and the infantry returned to Khartoum, and the Sudanese delegation were left to ponder the outcome.

**Conclusions**

Shortly after the Kurmuk conference, at the end of April, Robertson, the Sudan delegation secretary, wrote a 'Note on the Ethiopian Frontier' addressed to the Governor Fung Province which was accompanied by a covering letter asking that it 'be brought to the notice of the competent authorities'.\(^{50}\) This document is largely taken up with the recent history of, and current state of relationships between the major parties on, the frontier between the Sudan and the domains of Abu Shok of Gubba, and of Khojali Hasan of the Beni Shangul. It would appear that Robertson considered his document to be a contribution to policy discussions after what he described as the 'failure' of the Kurmuk conference. Since towards the end of his note, Robertson, after a considered assessment, advises against military intervention, including air raids, as part of an operation to annex the Beni

\(^{50}\) Robertson, op. cit.
Shangul, it seems reasonable to suppose that such an option was being discussed in some quarters.

According to Robertson, Gubba is not a source of many refugees into the Sudan, and it is better known as an arms trading centre than as a source of slaves. Relations between Abu Shok and the Gumuz around Gubba, whom Abu Shok considers to be his 'serfs', seem settled. Abu Shok maintains three police posts on his frontier with the Sudan. Robertson concludes that 'I do not think, however, that he wishes to come into the Sudan. He is quite content with his position in no man's land'.

The situation in Khojali's domains is more complicated. 'Ninety per cent of the trouble on the frontier is caused by refugees and runaway slaves...most leave to escape heavy taxation. Four hundred and sixty are known to have entered the Sudan between 1930 and 1933, and 225 in the previous three years'. Otherwise 'people come and go about their normal proceedings without let or hindrance'. Greek merchants go up to Sirgholi for coffee, Ethiopian traders come into Kunnuk, 'and the Koma have not been raided since 1927'.

The difficulties on this part of the frontier, according to Robertson, 'are almost entirely due to our attitude about refugees. We studiously refuse to return these, and our requests for the return of criminals are, somewhat naturally, met with similar refusals.' Moreover, 'a good deal of the difficulties have also been due to the ill feeling of Sheikh Khojali and his relations against the Sudan Government for arresting Sitt Amna'. Khojali was also annoyed that his nephew Musa Ahmed Hasan had moved quickly, and apparently without his approval, to take over Sitt Amna's domain and subordinate himself to the Sudan Government who then recognised him as Omda.

Robertson's conclusion was that the frontier is not unsettled, but that 'punitive measures' would unsettle the frontier. It would lead to reprisals and organised raiding. He thought that it would be possible to take over all of Khojali's country with 300 hundred men without difficulty and little opposition. Ethiopia

---

51 This was not necessarily always the case. During the first two decades of the century it seems that Abu Shok raided his own domains extensively for slaves. See W James, 'Lifelines: exchange marriage among the Gumuz', in Donham and James op. cit., pp 121-2.
would then have to accept the annexation or mount an expedition to retake the country. But such action by the Sudan Government would be 'futile'. 'It is not worthwhile unsettling the thousands of persons living peacefully on both sides of the border for the sake of our amour propre as a government, or for the sake of, say, 50 Berta serfs'.

Robertson has come to realise that the interventions of the colonial government rather than creating a structure of law and order, of being a process of 'pacification', were actually provoking the unrest and civil disturbances. Imagining themselves encountering, rather than having brought about, a situation of hostilities and conflict, they intensified their efforts unaware that it was precisely such actions which amplified the level of conflict. Moreover, as Douglas Johnson has pointed out, there is widespread assumption that the development of colonial rule at the local level is a relatively continuous one of extension, deepening, and elaboration. This impression may represent the experience of administrators who saw a continuity in their life's work even as they were transferred from district to district. But for the indigenous people of the southern Funj, as in other parts of the Sudan, during the early decades of the twentieth century it seems likely that their experience was one of discontinuities and of disruption. Quite apart from tax collection and the brutality of punitive patrols, the unpredictable presence and activities of government could then hardly provide a reliable source of assurance as regards the predations of bandits and the slave traders who followed them and allowed them to exchange their human booty. In these circumstances it is understandable that the indigenous populations of the southern Funj, such as those of the Ingessana Hills, would continue to look to their own society and its institutions for peace and security.
