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**Domestic Slavery  
in the Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century  
Northern Sudan**

by  
Heather Jane Sharkey

A thesis submitted to the University of Durham in  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Philosophy in Modern Middle Eastern Studies.

Centre for Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies  
University of Durham  
1992



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Although I have benefitted tremendously from the kindness of friends, peers, and faculty members, any shortcomings in the following work are nonetheless my responsibility alone.

## Domestic Slavery in the Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Sudan

*by Heather Jane Sharkey*

*MPhil Thesis, University of Durham 1992*

### **Abstract**

This study concentrates on the experience of domestic slaves--men, women, and children who were affiliated to an owner's household--in the nineteenth-and early twentieth-century northern Sudan. Whereas most studies on Sudanese slavery show concern for the slave trade, the anti-slavery movement, or the abolition effort, this study instead examines the slaves themselves, and how they lived, worked, and functioned within their society.

A few key themes surface throughout this thesis. One relates to the rapid pace of change, both political and social, which occurred in the northern Sudan in the period under study and had a profound effect on slavery. In the course of a single century, slave-owning changed from a preserve of the elite to a commodity for the free majority, before coming under the onslaught of abolition. Another recurring theme pertains to the tremendous diversity within the slave experience--in terms of occupation, treatment, outlook, and so forth. Finally, the study also grapples with the question of slavery's relative benevolence in the Sudan, while discussing opportunities for the eventual assimilation and social integration of the servile elements.

A gaping hole exists in the historical record: namely, the absence of a large body of materials revealing the slave's own perspective. Thus the selfsame travellers' accounts and administrative records from which historians have shaped their narratives on trading, raiding, and abolition inform this study. Undeterred, this thesis launches an indirect attack on the subject. By piecing together observations made by witnesses to the slavery scene, and by filling in the gaps with carefully-considered hypotheses, a clearer and more colourful portrait emerges of the slave experience.

## **A Note on Orthography and Transliteration**

Where this thesis uses Arabic words in their classical Arabic sense, such as umm al-walad, it has applied a consistent transliteration based roughly on the Library of Congress system. An apostrophe (') serves to represent the letter 'ayn, while the hamza has been omitted. Unfortunately, computer graphics limitations prevent the writer from indicating vowel length as one would expect according to the system.

Where this thesis uses Arabic words in a strictly Sudanese colloquial sense, however, there has been no attempt to impose any standard transliteration system. Pronunciation and/or common written usage have determined spelling. Thus melek or mekk, meaning "petty chief", appears instead of the strictly classical malik.

Place names do not appear in any strictly transliterated form at all. Instead, recognizability has been the main goal. Two sources have furnished most spellings: the Sudan Government's Index Gazetteer of place names, compiled in 1920, and The Oxford Map of the Sudan, published in 1980. Hence "Merowe" appears instead of "Marawi," "El Obeid" instead of "al-'Ubayyid," and so forth.

## Chapter 1:

### **The Subject and the Sources**

Writing about domestic slavery in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century northern Sudan, as this thesis attempts to do, is a daunting task. Abolitionist fervour charges many of the Western sources and ultimately taints their assessment of the Sudanese social landscape. The relatively fewer sources by Sudanese and other Arab scholars often respond by pointing to Islamic guidelines of benevolence towards slaves, delineated in the Quran, as "proof" of the mildness and social acceptability of slavery in the Sudan. Ironically, in the course of this struggle over the ideology of slavery, both groups lose sight of the slave protagonist who is at the base of the argument.

This thesis attempts to sketch a picture of the Sudanese slave experience, an aspect of slavery which many nineteenth- and even twentieth-century sources have largely overlooked or forgotten. The relatively well-documented concerns of slave raiding and trading, the anti-slavery movement, and the abolition/ emancipation effort will momentarily fall to the wayside. Instead, the goal at hand is to piece together as many pieces of the jigsaw puzzle as possible, drawn from scattered references, in order to gain a clearer image of the diverse ways that Sudanese slaves lived, worked, and functioned within Sudanese society.

By covering a time-frame that stretches from the early nineteenth through to the early twentieth century, the following study straddles a period of tremendous social and political change. Two dynasties presided over most of the region at the dawn of the nineteenth century: while the Kayra sultanate continued to rule Dar Fur (in the west) until 1874, the Fung sultanate based at Sennar (on the Blue Nile) held a faltering grip on the northern riverain regions over which it had once strongly dominated.



In 1820, the Turco-Egyptians under Muhammad 'Ali initiated a conquest of the northern Sudan, destroyed the remnants of Fung power, and instituted their own regime in its place. Approximately fifty years later, the Turco-Egyptians added Dar Fur to the territories under their rule. Yet alienation towards the regime's policies intensified over the decades. Finally, in 1881, a man named Muhammad Ahmad ibn 'Abdullah emerged and called himself the "Mahdi"--the Expected One, according to Muslim millenarian thinking of the time, who it was believed would guide the region out of its troubles in a period foreshadowing the Day of Judgment. The Mahdi and his supporters challenged and ultimately defeated the Turco-Egyptians in a series of battles, which culminated with the death of Gordon at Khartoum in 1885. The Mahdi set up a government at Omdurman and ruled on the basis of his own interpretation of Islamic law.

Although the Mahdi died in 1885, shortly after the fall of Khartoum, Mahdist rule nevertheless continued under his successor, the Khalifa 'Abdullahi. British and Egyptian forces vanquished the Mahdist state in 1898, and set up a new government, called the Condominium, which theoretically represented a joint British-Egyptian rule (with the British in fact retaining most of the power). Condominium rule prevailed until 1956, when the Sudan gained independence.

This study of slavery in the northern Sudan therefore takes place against a political backdrop of four changing governments. These include the Kayra and Fung sultanates of Dar Fur and Sennar respectively; the Turco-Egyptian regime; the Mahdist regime; and the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium.

Sudanese historiography by and large remains a frontier. R.L. Hill argued as late as 1962 that the paltry number of European scholars who were attracted to Sudanese studies since the 1820 Turco-Egyptian conquest covered a very limited range of subjects and reflected a consensus of opinion--on such issues as the career of Gordon--so uniform as to beg

critical revision for the modern historian<sup>1</sup>. Yusuf Fadl Hasan concurred with Hill in calling for greater exploration of the Sudanese past, especially on the part of Sudanese scholars, and traced the steady surge of historical work in the field until 1978<sup>2</sup>.

Much still remains to be done. Though many studies have emerged on military and political history, emphasizing the ruling elites, there is still the need for more work on social history<sup>3</sup>: a brand of scholarship which will attempt to chronicle the lives of the rich and the poor, the free and the slave, the male and the female. This thesis tries to narrow that historiographical gap.

Yet one major pitfall hinders the subject at hand and explains why so many historians have avoided dealing with the slave experience issue. The problem is that no substantial record exists which can yield insights into the slave's own perspective. For in spite of the fact that raids extracted tens of thousands of slaves from the northern Sudan's peripheries, almost all passed the rest of their lives without leaving behind any historical record.

An exception is Salim Wilson's autobiography I Was a Slave<sup>4</sup>. Wilson's case is somewhat unusual, though. Eventually freed by an Englishman, he converted to Christianity, and moved to England. His Christian zeal is apparent, for Wilson devotes the final chapter of his autobiography to "The Horrors of Heathenism"!

The dearth of a significant body of sources displaying the slave's own point of view has discouraged many historians from grappling with the slave experience issue. Still, this thesis forges ahead while tackling the topic indirectly. It ventures into the murky world of speculation to

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1 R.L. Hill, "Historical Writing on the Sudan since 1820," Historians of the Middle East, Ed. P.M. Holt, A.K. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 357.

2 See Yusuf Fadl Hasan, "Some Aspects of the Writing of History in Modern Sudan," Occasional Papers No. 12, Institute of African and Asian Studies, University of Khartoum (Khartoum: Khartoum University Press, 1978).

3 In this regard, see also G.N. Sanderson, "The Modern Sudan, 1820-1956: the Present Position of Historical Studies," Journal of African History, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1963, pp. 435-61.

4 Salim C. Wilson, I Was a Slave (London: Stanley Paul & Co., 193-? [n.d.]).

reconstruct a model of slave life, by utilizing eye-witness accounts to infer how these men, women, and children may have thought, felt, and acted.

Aside from relying on the available secondary-source histories of the Sudan, this thesis also turns to a growing body of works on comparative slavery studies. Reference to these works can inject a much-needed theoretical element into the dry data. Its usage serves a twofold purpose. First, such a study helps to pin down a general explanation, albeit not a precise definition, of the unwieldy term "slavery," by noting the commonalities in cross-cultural slave experiences. Second, this theoretical framework facilitates characterization of the complex, highly contoured Sudanese slave experience.

Documents from the Sudan Archive, University of Durham<sup>5</sup>, provide critical clues to the subject at hand. These documents, mainly from the Condominium period (1899-1956) but with a few from the late Turco-Egyptian and Mahdist periods, are highly varied in nature. They include private letters between British administrators, discussing the slavery problem and the slow process of abolition; confidential memoranda outlining slavery policy; newspaper clippings; reminiscences of retired administrators; and the like. A few Arabic documents exist, including a slave bill of sale signed by the Mahdi and a petition from Omdurman notables lamenting the seizure of their property (including slaves) after the final Mahdist defeat.

Another critical Condominium-era source consists of a few Sudan Government publications, issued on an annual basis. The most important of these include the Sudan Government Gazette, listing new laws, ordinances, and proclamations; and the Reports on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan, including annual reports from each provincial governor and the heads of the various central government

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<sup>5</sup> The abbreviation SAD (Sudan Archive Durham) distinguishes such documents as cited in this thesis.

departments. The latter are especially detailed in the period leading up to World War I. They provide many interesting clues about slavery in decline.

The bulk of the information for this study comes from late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travellers' accounts. European and American men (and a handful of women!<sup>6</sup>) trickled into the Sudan in ever-increasing numbers, beginning with James Bruce's 1772 visit to Sennar, but halting for almost twenty years after the first Mahdist successes in 1881<sup>7</sup>. These travellers came to the Sudan for a variety of reasons: they were archaeologists, military men, leisured tourists, botanists, adventurers, administrators, traders, and more. They provide the most fascinating details on the subject: without them, any study of the Sudanese slave experience would be impossible.

However, a degree of controversy does surround the heavy use of travellers' accounts in this thesis. Inevitably, all the travellers came with some bias, though some were especially convinced of their own innate superiority, and a few held the populations of the Sudan in clear contempt. Abbas Ibrahim Muhammad Ali has discussed their negative (and positive) attitudes to the Sudanese peoples at some length<sup>8</sup>. Elsewhere he shows how anti-slavery views, which were almost obligatory in fashionable British society by the mid-nineteenth century, pervade many of these accounts as well<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> One noteworthy example includes the Tinne family trio, three women who explored little-known regions of the southern Sudan by boat (John A. Tinne, "Geographical Notes of Expeditions in Central Africa, by Three Dutch Ladies," Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, Series 4, 1864, pp. 107-48.)

<sup>7</sup> The odd traveller slipped into the Sudan before that period but by and large the information is very scanty indeed. About the Jewish traveller David Reubeni, who visited the Fung kingdom in 1523, see S. Hillelson, "David Reubeni, an Early Visitor to Sennar," Sudan Notes and Records, Vol. 16, Part 1, 1933, pp. 55-66.

<sup>8</sup> Abbas Ibrahim Muhammad Ali, "Anglo-Saxon Teutonic Images of the People of the Sudan, 1772-1881," African Studies Seminar Paper No. 6 (Khartoum: Sudan Research Unit, Faculty of Arts, University of Khartoum, May, 1969).

<sup>9</sup> Abbas Ibrahim Muhammad Ali, The British, the Slave Trade, and Slavery in the Sudan, 1820-1881 (Khartoum: Khartoum University Press, 1972), p. 34.

In Time on the Cross, the controversial and hotly-disputed study of slavery in the U.S. South, Fogel and Engerman made this comment on travellers' accounts which detail American slavery:

The prevailing view of the slave trade has been fashioned by historians primarily from the accounts of firsthand observers of the slave South. Since such observers lacked the hard data needed to actually determine the scope and nature of this trade, they could only convey their impressions. Unfortunately these impressions are far from uniform. There were not many detached and objective observers of slavery after 1830. Most so-called observations or travel accounts were actually polemics against or for slavery<sup>10</sup>.

Many travellers' accounts on the Sudan, if studied for information on the slave trade, reflect the same weakness. By avoiding the subject of abolition, and by ignoring high-handed anti-slavery rhetoric where it appears, this thesis hopes to bypass much of that problem.

One other major weakness hampered many, though not all, of the travellers in the Sudan: they did not know Arabic. Consequently, many relied on interpreters who fed them what they wanted to hear. The bizarre situation arises whereby some travellers deplore slavery while simultaneously emphasizing the excellent treatment and the expanded range of opportunities which the slaves received.

The Swiss-English traveller George Melly provides a funny glimpse of what could happen with an interpreter. "I have often thought...", he says, "that Daireh was a very free translator. The first time I had any doubt about his veracity as an interpreter, was at Ossioot, where the following conversation ensued between the Governor and myself, through his agency.

'Daireh, tell his Excellency that I could not pass through this city without having the honour of seeing him.'

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<sup>10</sup> Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., Inc., 1974), p. 51.

'No, Herr George, I not say that, I say his having honour to see you: then give you pipe directly.'

The Pasha: 'What are you saying?'

Daireh: 'He say he very great man from England, come on purpose all the way to call upon very mighty Governor of Ossioot.'

The Pasha: 'Taib hah tchibouque.' (Good, bring pipe for him.)

'Daireh,' I asked, 'what did you tell him?'

'Oh! I tell him he ought to make much honour to see you. You very great man.'

'Undeceive him directly. Tell him I am an English traveller.'

Pasha (evidently uneasy about our prolonged "asides.") 'Is the Cavaghi [foreigner] come by himself?'

Daireh: 'No; he have very big family on very fine boat.'

Pasha: 'Taib' (And a long smoke ensued.)

I now began to insist on a real translation of my speeches, and I made some progress in Oriental conversation<sup>11</sup>."

Faced with these shortcomings inherent in the travel literature, the temptation is to conclude that oral history techniques might serve better. Unfortunately, circumstances prevented this writer from undertaking such fieldwork in the Sudan. Other scholars, such as Ewald and Kapteijns, have indeed used some oral source materials to gain information on nineteenth-century slavery. Yet here, too, the pitfalls gape open. In discussing the nineteenth century, informants yield stories about their grandparents and great-grandparents, who died long, long ago. Not surprisingly, their information is often vague and cloudy. Moreover, the population of the Sudan today lives in a society where slavery has been officially abolished for almost a century. The natural tendency can be to look to the past through the lens of the present: where mid-nineteenth century Europeans

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<sup>11</sup> George Melly, Khartoum and the Blue and White Niles, Vol. 1 (London: Coburn and Co., Publishers, 1851), pp. 285-86.

deplored the cruel practices of slavery, late-twentieth century Sudanese may play down the harsher aspects of the past and stress the possibilities for social mobility and cultural absorption that slavery offered. Neither view is completely right or wrong; both hold some truth.

Writing history without bias is impossible. There is no scientific way to distill the pure truths of the past for a present-day audience. Unfortunately, too, there is no litmus test for determining the reliability of a travel account's or of a document's observations.

Certainly this thesis represents an attempt to project as fair, as balanced, and as well-documented a portrayal of domestic slavery in the Sudan as any historian can hope to have done in such a limited time. Priority will of course go to on-the-spot observations, as bias-laden as they might have been, over second-hand rumours. It will heed the high standards of the traveller W.G. Browne, who as far back as 1799, justified his account by assuring the reader that he tried to write only what he saw with his own two eyes, and not to relate the garbled stories that the local merchants [jallaba] seemed to invent for him at times<sup>12</sup>.

The ensuing two chapters serve as an introduction to the subject under scrutiny. While Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical contours of slavery studies and proposes a definition for the term "domestic slavery" as used in the thesis, Chapter 3 focusses on slavery's specific Sudanese context. It provides a sweeping survey of the history of slavery in the Sudan, intended as a mere sketch of a very detailed topic.

Chapters 4 through 12 address the slave experience at much greater depth by using an issue-oriented, rather than a chronological or regional, approach. Chapter 4 deals with the utilization of slaves. It shows the tremendous breadth of their labour activities, in different areas at different times. Chapter 5 considers the status-enhancing, ostentatious, and

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<sup>12</sup> W.G. Browne, Travels in Africa, Egypt, and Syria, from the year 1792 to 1798 (London: T. Cadell Junior and W. Davies, Strand, 1799), pp. vi-vii.

luxurious use of slaves. The debate over the relative mildness or harshness of domestic slavery in the northern Sudan comes under scrutiny in Chapter 6. This leads into Chapters 7 and 8, which deal with the slave's psychological response to slavery, and the interaction between the slave and the host community in the process of adaptation and integration. Chapter 9 zeroes in on the subject of slave nomenclature, in order to show just how northern Sudanese society could stigmatize their slaves. Chapters 10, 11, and 12 discuss slave concubinage, prostitution, and family life in some depth. Finally, Chapter 13 draws together and sums up the important points which have emerged.

What follows is a study drawn from the sadly limited range of sources available. The hope is that by carefully sifting through and analyzing the information, a worthy picture of the Sudanese slave experience, however impressionistic, will take shape.

## Chapter 2:

# Slavery, Domestic Slavery, and Theory

## Introduction

In the Sudan alone, the term "slavery" covers such a broad range of occupations that its meaning easily becomes clouded. Household servants, court eunuchs, field hands, soldiers, concubines, herders, merchants' assistants, and many others often shared the same servile status. But what united all these people?

By relying on a variety of conceptual models, many drawn from the burgeoning field of comparative slavery studies, this chapter hopes to answer that question. It will first attempt to extract a few of the basic, overarching qualities of slavery which transcend mere occupational differences. Later, efforts will turn towards clarifying the term "domestic slavery" as this thesis uses it. The ultimate objective is to situate Sudanese slavery into a broad theoretical context.

Attempt to define slavery in general, much less slavery in the Sudan in particular, and one quickly lands into a semantic quagmire proliferating in meanings and nuances. In his work Slavery and Human Progress, the historian David Brion Davis illustrates the vastness of the semantic field surrounding the term when he writes,

The word for slaves has been applied to captives held for ceremonial sacrifice; to household servants who were part of a familia and under the domination of a paterfamilias; to the concubines and eunuchs of a harem; to children held as pawns for their parents' debts; to female children sold as brides; and, by analogy, to subject or conquered populations; to the industrial proletariat; to the victims of racial or

political tyranny; and to men or women supposedly dominated by drugs, alcohol, sexual passion, mental disease, or sin<sup>13</sup>.

In the face of such complexity, the best way to begin enquiry into what slavery meant in the northern Sudan is to start with the basic building blocks of slavery concepts.

### Concepts of Slavery

Innumerable slave societies have existed in different places at different points on the historical timeline, and each has had its own slave-owning practices and precepts. A growing body of scholars sees common denominators in the slave experience amidst all of this diversity. Attention will now turn towards exploring some of these factors.

The one overarching characteristic of slavery institutions which many historians and anthropologists agree upon is the kinless nature of slaves. That is, with the possible exceptions of China, Japan, Korea, and Pharaonic Egypt, most slaves in most societies have been outsiders, social isolates, with either they or their forbears having been snatched from their natal homes, deracinated and unattached. It is the slave's full outsider status which in fact distinguishes him or her from other involuntary labourers<sup>14</sup>.

Finley explains the preference for outsider slaves in one simple stroke: "Insiders en masse cannot be so totally transformed; no community could survive that<sup>15</sup>." He goes on to explain that, in ancient Greece, custom precluded Greek parents from selling their children into slavery, even if they could not support them. The only way to sidestep this rule was

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<sup>13</sup> David Brion Davis, Slavery and Human Progress (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> Orlando Patterson, "On Slavery and Slave Formations," New Left Review, No. 117, Sept-Oct 1979, p. 34.

<sup>15</sup> M.I. Finley, "Slavery," International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol. 14, Ed. David L. Sills (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 308.

to "abandon" their children, so that orphaned and putatively kinless, they could pass into slavery. Moreover, Roman law code dictated in writing that any Roman enslaved as a punishment (such as for murder) could not remain in Rome but had to be sold abroad, as a stranger in a foreign land.

The anthropologist Jack Goody has noted that the practice of slavery generally hinges upon an unequal balance of power, whereby strong, slave-holding states target zones of stateless or tribal peoples who would be unable to retaliate. He says, "All slave-holding societies required victims, only a small number of whom ever came from within. What they needed were victim societies, groups who consisted not of subjects but of outsiders who could be dominated by force<sup>16</sup>." Goody's victim societies represent the same peoples as Finley and Patterson's kinless outsiders.

The northern Sudan is, of course, the example par excellence of the organized society targetting a group of victim societies. As an Islamic society, the northern Sudan theoretically operated under the aegis of Islamic slavery law, expounded in the Quran and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). This law forbade the enslavement of free Muslims and specified only two ways to obtain slaves: by birth into slavery (by two slave parents), or more commonly, by capture in holy war (jihad) against infidels (non-Muslims). Indeed the Sudan had a vast backyard of pagan "infidel" areas in which to raid and trade for slaves. These regions included the southern Sudan, the Nuba Mountains, Dar Fertit (the fringe areas of Dar Fur), parts of Abyssinia, and regions of central West Africa stretching beyond Dar Fur towards Lake Chad and Hausaland.

These theories on slaves as outsiders from targetted societies are in harmony with the status of slaves not only in the northern Sudan, but in all slave-holding societies where Islamic law predominated. Willis argues that the "ideology of enslavement in Islam came to rest upon the premise that

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<sup>16</sup> Jack Goody, "Slavery in Time and Space," Asian and African Systems of Slavery, Ed. James L. Watson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 31.

the servile estate was somehow preordained--that some persons were predestined to servility....<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Islamic law sharply dictated that slaves had to be outsiders to the Islamic community of believers (the umma) initially, taken not from dar al-Islam (the abode of Islam), but from dar al-harb (the abode of war)--the ultimate sanctioned victim society. That Islam and not ethnicity was the determining factor in insider/outsider status, is clear from the writings of the Timbuktu religious scholar, Ahmad Baba (1556-1627), who identified the basic characteristic of the enslavable outsider by stating that "the cause of slavery is non-belief<sup>18</sup>."

Aside from the fact that most societies cannot withstand internal enslavement, there is one other major advantage to kinless outsider slaves. Shorn of their own familial bonds as strangers in a foreign land, they are completely dependent upon their owners, having no competing loyalties or outside obligations. Historically this loyalty often put slaves into the unique position of holding delicate, often high-ranking, positions requiring deep-rooted trust<sup>19</sup>. The ultimate example of the privileged outsider is, of course, the Mamluke. Enslaved but then cultivated through a fine education, such slaves were tailored to become a reliable, capable, and highly successful ruling elite<sup>20</sup>.

Finley suggests that the tremendous potential for [elite] slave loyalty may have resulted from a distinct slave psychology. "In order to survive as human beings, slaves had to adapt to their new state of deracination by

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<sup>17</sup> John Ralph Willis, Ed., Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa, Vol. 1 (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1985), p. ix.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Barbour and Michelle Jacobs, "The Mi'raj: A Legal Treatise on Slavery by Ahmad Baba," Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa, Vol. 1, Ed. John Ralph Willis (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1985), p. 125.

<sup>19</sup> Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers, "African Slavery as an Institution of Marginality," Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives, Ed. Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), pp. 27-8.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, David Ayalon, Studies on the Mamlukes of Egypt (1250-1517) (London: Variorum Reprints, 1977).

developing new psychological features and new focuses of attachment, including their overseers and masters<sup>21</sup>."

Slaves as outsiders were marginal beings. Yet it would be wrong to assume that slaves necessarily occupied the bottom rung of any social ladder. In some societies, and many African societies such as the Sudan in particular, the actual case was frequently very different. Kopytoff and Miers have noted that "slaves as a group are often marginal to society precisely in this 'side' manner and need not be a bottom stratum or indeed a stratum at all; and stratification can exist among the 'slaves' as a direct extension of the stratification in the society at large<sup>22</sup>."

In the Sudan, the unique potential loyalty of slaves meant that military leaders actively sought slave men for their armies, and these men often rose through the ranks. Even sultans cultivated and promoted some of their slaves for high-ranking administrative posts. It was not unusual for concubine slave women to receive more tender treatment and affection from masters than legal wives did, presumably for the very same reason of their total dependence and unstinting loyalty. Parallels appear in many other slave-holding societies. In regard to concubines, for example, one scholar has commented on the preferential treatment bestowed on concubines rather than wives in the Afro-Arab Comoros Islands near Madagascar<sup>23</sup>.

Yet if theories on the outsider status of slaves reflect a remarkable level of agreement among scholars, then views on the totality of slave status show no such concord. Hot debate surrounds the issue of whether slavery forms part of an absolute slave/free dichotomy, or alternately, a spectrum with various levels of relative servitude and freedom.

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<sup>21</sup> Finley (1968), p. 311.

<sup>22</sup> Kopytoff and Miers (1977), p. 41.

<sup>23</sup> See Gill Shepherd, "The Comorians and the East African Slave Trade," Asian and African Systems of Slavery, Ed. James L. Watson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), pp. 73-99.

There is less disagreement over the dividing line between slave, peon, client, and serf. Finley points out that it is the totality of their powerlessness as human property which sets slaves apart from these other groups<sup>24</sup>. Serfs, peons, and clients have the power to make certain basic decisions about their lives, and notably in regard to family rights: what to name their children; how to discipline them; how to specify inheritance; and the like. By contrast, the slave has no such family rights; the master's word may ultimately subsume any of the decision-making powers that a slave would otherwise have<sup>25</sup>. This totality of powerlessness is what often earns slaves the designation as "chattel".

The potential extremity of the slave's powerlessness comes out clearly in a pioneering yet now somewhat dated theoretical study of slavery by the anthropologist Bernard Siegel, who discussed chattel slavery at perhaps its most severe among the Northwest Coast American Indians. In this society, slaves were things, objects sought after purely for status-enhancing value. Men proved their wealth in the potlatch ceremony at which "the killing of slaves was merely incidental to the destruction of other kinds of property.... [Otherwise,] outside of the potlatch the killing of slaves merely showed the owner's disdain for wealth<sup>26</sup>." More common, perhaps, was the Dahomean version of chattel slavery, in which the king's agricultural slaves were literally worked to death and replaced when they "wore out"<sup>27</sup>.

However, in contrast to these extreme examples, one traditional view expounded in regard to slavery in the Sudan, throughout the Islamic Africa, in the Ottoman Empire, and in fact, to all slavery systems purportedly regulated by Islamic law, is that chattel slavery as described above did not

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<sup>24</sup> Finley (1968), p. 307.

<sup>25</sup> See Martin A. Klein, "The Study of Slavery in Africa," Journal of African History, Vol. 19, No. 4, 1978, p. 602.

<sup>26</sup> Bernard J. Siegel, "Some Methodological Considerations for a Comparative Study of Slavery," American Anthropologist, Vol. 47, 1945 (Reprint 1975), p. 366.

<sup>27</sup> Siegel (1945), p. 374.

exist in Islamic lands. Instead, some writers have stressed a much more benign version of slavery, in which Islamic laws protecting slaves are used as primary evidence. Their belief rests upon the assumption that Islamic slave-holding societies did indeed implement Islamic law in the benevolent manner which it enjoins.

This study concerns itself with the actual practice of slavery in the northern Sudan's Islamic society, and not with the intricacies of Islamic jurisprudence. To embark on a serious study of the discrepancies between law and practice would require access to legal documents of that era which this study does not have. Nonetheless, a quick description of the slavery-related ideals of Islamic jurisprudence will no doubt serve as useful background information here.

The Quran was revealed in the seventh century AD, and like the Old and the New Testaments, assumed the existence of slavery while attempting to regulate it<sup>28</sup>. What the Quran said regarding slavery, fiqh (the body of Islamic jurisprudence) elaborated upon in the early centuries of Islam. Hence a corpus of law emerged, advocating a framework of minimal ethics for both slavery and the slave trade.

Though this law regarded slaves as a form of property, it simultaneously respected the slave as a human being who had the same spiritual and religious value as a free man. Moreover, it demanded slave-owners to provide a certain minimal standard of living to their slaves, including sufficient food, clothing, and shelter; medical attention when necessary; and upkeep in old age. Theoretically slaves had the right to seek redress in court if their owners denied proper treatment<sup>29</sup>. And while captured slaves had to be non-Muslims, there was an implicit obligation for slave-owners to convert their slaves to Islam and to incorporate them into

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<sup>28</sup> Bernard Lewis, Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 5-6.

<sup>29</sup> See Lewis (1990), pp. 5-6, 10; and R. Brunschwig, "'Abd," The Encyclopaedia of Islam (New Edition). Ed. H.A.R. Gibb et al. Vol. 1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), pp. 24-40.

the community of believers. (Conversion after enslavement, however, did not nullify enslavement.)

Many see Islam as representing one ideology and legal system under which slavery flourished. However, as Cooper warns in a study on slavery in the Omani Arab clove plantations of Zanzibar, one should not view the Islamic ideology of slavery as a monolithic whole<sup>30</sup>. Variations in the slave-holding practices of Islamic Africa are so great that one could arguably identify a series of Islamic ideologies. Lovejoy clarifies what any ideology, including an Islamic one, could mean: "The focus on ideology...is intended to emphasize the distinction between the theory and practice of slavery in different contexts. People perceived the institution of slavery within their own cultural setting...[so that] the correspondence between the ideological sphere and the social and economic reality was never exact<sup>31</sup>." Indeed, one goal of this study will be to examine how slavery in the Sudan diverged from the Islamic ideal.

The existence of benign Islamic slavery laws did not automatically translate into their application. Many overlook this fact, however, and continue to stress the mildness of the northern Sudan's (or of any other Muslim society's) slavery. Proponents of these views would undoubtedly see slavery as a spectrum rather than a dichotomy, and would argue that slavery in Islamic lands fell at the gentler end of the range<sup>32</sup>.

A similar argument has surfaced in regard to indigenous African slave-holding systems. In particular, Miers and Kopytoff present a rather benign picture of African slave-holding societies, which they say naturally

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<sup>30</sup> Frederick Cooper, "Islam and Cultural Hegemony: The Ideology of Slaveowners on the East African Coast," The Ideology of Slavery in Africa, Ed. Paul E. Lovejoy (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981), pp. 271-74.

<sup>31</sup> Paul E. Lovejoy, "Slavery in the Context of Ideology," The Ideology of Slavery in Africa, Ed. Paul E. Lovejoy (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981), p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> See 'Abbas Ibrahim Muhammad 'Ali (1972), pp. 75-76. While arguing that Sudanese slavery was quite benevolent, this author nevertheless points out that slave-raiding in the Sudan contravened Islamic law, which only authorized enslavement as a by-product of jihad, and not as a product of wars instigated for commercial profit ('Abbas Ibrahim Muhammad 'Ali [1972], pp. 67-69.)

tend to absorb and assimilate their slaves over time, until they become full-fledged members of society<sup>33</sup>.

Patterson, perhaps the staunchest adherent of the view that a sharp dichotomy does exist between slave and free, with all slaves no matter how elite burdened with the same weight of servitude, would reject the notion that a benign Islamic or African version of slavery exists as less than "full" slavery. No matter how "benign" a society purports to be towards its slaves, all slavery, he says, is "a relation of domination." Patterson highlights three features which characterize the slave's powerlessness. First, there is need for continuous, naked violence to initiate slavery and to maintain it<sup>34</sup>. Second, the slave's powerlessness is an individualized condition, with a lack of power vis-a-vis another individual, making the slave an extension of the master's power and honour. The master has much honour through slave-holding; the slave lacks all honour.

Finally, slavery remains a substitute for death, usually violent death-- "Archetypally it is a substitute for death in war<sup>35</sup>." Spared actual death on the battlefield in the course of the raid, slaves become social zeroes, lacking kin and therefore lacking identity. This leads Patterson to propose a preliminary definition for slavery itself. "[S]lavery is the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonoured persons<sup>36</sup>."

Toledano, who has studied Ottoman slavery and Ottoman concepts of slavery at some length, rejects Patterson's thesis as being too extreme. Toledano feels that it is inadequate and misleading to group an elite Ottoman military-administrative slave (kul) in the same category as a slave kitchen-maid, for instance, especially since the kuls's servile origins

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<sup>33</sup> Kopytoff and Miers (1977), pp. 15-16.

<sup>34</sup> Klein agrees and stresses the role of violence as well (Klein [1978], p. 602).

<sup>35</sup> Patterson (1979), pp. 32-3. See also his introductory chapter, "The Constituent Elements of Slavery," in Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 1-14.

<sup>36</sup> Patterson (1982), p. 13.

became "more a symbol of their high status and less a practical fact of life" by the nineteenth century. He concludes, "[I]t is quite obvious that what we are dealing with here is a continuum of various degrees of servility rather than a dichotomy between slave and free." At the bottom of the pile are the "domestic and agricultural slaves, those most 'slavish' of Ottoman slaves<sup>37</sup>."

Toledano, therefore, envisages a spectrum of slave statuses not between Islamic and non-Islamic slave-holding systems--with Islamic slave-holding being at the milder end, but rather within the Islamic (or more precisely Ottoman) slave-holding system itself. In this sense Finley lends credence to this view as well when he writes, "One may speak of a spectrum of statuses between the two extremes of absolute rightlessness and of absolute freedom to exercise all rights at all times<sup>38</sup>."

### The Domestic Slave

Grappling with the term "slavery" has been no simple task. Dealing with the term "domestic slavery," as used in this thesis, proves equally difficult--especially since the many sources which use the phrase offer no explanation for its meaning.

Whereas the term "chattel" bears negative connotations, "domestic slavery," in contrast, frequently has connotations of mildness. Siegel articulated this in 1945 when he proposed a dichotomy between two types of slavery: harsh chattel slavery on the one hand, and a more benevolent counterpart on the other, the latter being integrated with systems of kinship organization. He said, "The...attitudes towards the slave, his treatment in

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<sup>37</sup> Ehud R. Toledano, "Late Ottoman Concepts of Slavery (1830s-1880s)," paper delivered at the Workshop on Cultural Processes in Muslim and Arab Societies, Tel-Aviv University, December 1991.

<sup>38</sup> Finley (1968), p. 308.

large measure as a human being and as a member of the extended family, suggest the term household slavery to describe this phenomenon<sup>39</sup>."

What Siegel called household slavery, British administrators in the earliest years of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan called domestic slavery. This term displayed a hidden agenda; it was a lexical palliative designed to mask the more unpleasant, less benign face of slavery as actually practiced, in order to allay the anti-slavery sentiments of the British public back home until the process of abolition and emancipation really took root. By appending the word "domestic" to the term "slavery," the administrators hoped to cash in on the homey, family-oriented quality which the term suggested.

Soon, though, Condominium policy-makers abandoned the term "domestic slavery" for the much more innocuous term "domestic servant," in an effort to pretend that slavery had disappeared. As early as 1912, one top administrator penned a letter to Wingate, Governor-General of the Sudan, and mentioned that he had bumped into an official who had broken the taboo: "I...told him that if in an official document I find again that he calls Sudanese servants "slaves"--a finger from his right hand will be cut off....<sup>40</sup>"

At times sources use "domestic slavery" in order to distance one form of slavery--especially an Islamic version--from the bleak associations of plantation slavery in the Americas. As far back as 1877, the Anti-Slavery Society in London wrote to Charles Gordon saying,

We have ever been aware of the wide distinction between the...slavery of the Western World, with its systematic and cruel exaction of the utmost labour the negro is capable of yielding; and the strictly domestic slavery of the East. This last, however degrading, is

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<sup>39</sup> Siegel (1945), pp. 376, 387.

<sup>40</sup> SAD 183/3/16-17: F.R. Wingate. Slatin to Wingate, El Obeid, 2 December 1912.

doubtless a comparatively easy condition; but as you well know it is maintained, and as long as it exists, will be maintained by the murder of nations and tribes, and the desolation of Africa<sup>41</sup>.

Labelling slavery in all Islamic societies as "domestic slavery," as the Anti-Slavery Society has done in this letter, assumes and implies that slavery in Islamic lands did indeed fulfill the noble aspirations of the Islamic slave-owning ideology.

Nonetheless, the Anti-Slavery Society astutely noted one very misleading aspect of the term "domestic slavery": its pleasant connotations obscure the cycle of violence that surrounded the enslavement process. "When we speak of domestic negro slavery in Egypt, as in other Mahomedan Countries we have to bear it in mind that a very small number indeed have been 'born in the house' and that nearly all have at some period or other been captured in Africa<sup>42</sup>."

In using the term "domestic slavery" (for want of a better term), this thesis starts with no assumption on the relative benignity or malignity of slave-owning in the Sudan, nor does it mean to suggest anything on the relative rightlessness or freedom that the slave experienced. Instead, in the context of the Sudan it simply refers to those slaves who were affiliated to a master's household, serving a broad range of roles from concubine to water-carrier, from carpenter to guard. It thereby excludes military slavery--the large-scale incorporation of slaves into the army--as well as elite administrative slavery, which was by and large limited to the Fung and Kayra dynasties of Sennar and Dar Fur respectively<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> Rhodes House Anti-Slavery Society Archive, G29, Anti-Slavery Society to Gordon, June 1877.

<sup>42</sup> Rhodes House Anti-Slavery Society Archive, G29, Anti-Slavery Society to Gordon, June 1877.

<sup>43</sup> Even this definition, by highlighting household affiliation as the distinguishing feature of domestic slavery, is not air-tight in excluding all forms of military and elite slavery. Ayalon notes that the process of training an Ottoman Mamluke normally entailed affiliating the protege to a household. Moreover, Mamlukes persisted in using kinship terminology vis-a-vis the members of their sponsor's household. See David Ayalon, 'Studies in al-Jabarti: I. Notes on the Transformation of Mamluke Society in Egypt under the Ottomans,' Studies on the Mamlukes of Egypt (1250-1517) (London: Variorum Reprints, 1977), pp. 172-74, 285-88.

Agricultural slavery, however, does form a small part of this study. Plantation slavery was lacking in the Sudan, almost without exception; using slaves to cultivate and herd, on the other hand, was commonplace. Moreover, the slaves who cultivated and harvested during peak season may have performed a broad range of [non-agricultural] work in the off-season. Thus a dividing line between "agricultural" and "domestic" slave is vague, if not non-existent, in the Sudanese context. Slaves in agriculture necessarily form only one limited portion of the thesis, though admittedly, nineteenth-century sources contain such a wealth of information on the subject that it could warrant a separate study.

A variety of theoretical approaches to slavery studies appear outlined above. In the pages following, this thesis will weave many of these concepts into the historical narrative. By re-examining available scholarship on Sudanese slavery, by referring to original administrative sources and travellers' accounts, and by considering all of this in light of the theoretical literature, a clearer view on the nature of Sudanese slavery may appear, throwing light onto how the slaves lived and worked in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

## Chapter 3:

### **Slavery in the Sudan: A Historical Survey**

The annals of history reveal that the relationship between the Eastern Bilad al-Sudan<sup>44</sup> and slavery is an intimate one. Indeed, over the course of centuries and culminating in the late nineteenth century, the institution of slavery virtually carved out the territories of the Democratic Republic of the Sudan as it now stands.

This chapter surveys the history of slavery in the northern regions of the modern state of the Sudan, from ancient times to the twentieth century, and considers the rise and development of the abolition movement. All of this represents merely a thumbnail sketch, designed to provide a critical background for understanding what follows.

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In a seamless history stretching through dynastic Egypt, into the Roman and Byzantine periods, and well beyond, the Sudan appears to have been the target of slave raids. Some of the earliest written sources state that in the early fourth millennium BC, Egyptians under the Pharaoh Seneferu penetrated Nubia up to the fourth cataract and collected slaves from the area between Abu Hamad and Khartoum; much later Ptolemaic records, meanwhile, mention the Sudanese ivory and slave eunuchs which were subject to duty at the port of Alexandria<sup>45</sup>. Thus the link between the Sudan and slavery is old and strong.

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<sup>44</sup> Bilad al-Sudan, meaning "The Lands of the Blacks," was the traditional term used by Arab geographers to indicate those regions of sub-Saharan Africa stretching in a belt from the Red Sea in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the west.

<sup>45</sup> R.W. Beachey, The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa (London: Rex Collings, 1976), pp. 2-3, 121.

The Nubian Christian kingdoms established in the early centuries after Christ--'Alwa, al-Maris, and al-Muqurra--undoubtedly participated in the slave trade also, well before the Muslim Arab powers in Egypt began to eclipse them after the mid-seventh century. Slaves even figure in the earliest formal relationship forged between these two groups. For when Muslim Arabs under 'Amr ibn al-As finally quelled Christian Nubian attacks on Upper Egypt in 651 AD, the parties involved signed a mutual and highly unique non-aggression treaty. Christian Nubia assumed the designation not of dar al-Islam ("the abode of Islam") nor dar al-harb ("the abode of war"), but rather dar al-'ahada or dar al-aman--"the abode of pact or guarantee." The most important stipulation in the treaty was the Baqt: a provision requiring the Nubians to deliver 360 slaves annually (plus another forty as a bonus) to the Egyptian Muslim leaders. And though not required to do so, the Muslims generously bestowed textiles and gifts, equal in value to the slaves, in return<sup>46</sup>.

The Christian Nubian kingdoms weakened steadily over time, as Muslim Arabs migrated southwards through Egypt and settled in Nubia. During this period of gradual Islamization, Nubia continued to supply slaves for the Tulunid, Ikhshidid, and Fatimid regimes in Egypt. Many of these male slaves fortified the armies as soldiers. Ahmad ibn Tulun (d. 884 AD), for example, is said to have left 45,000 black slaves (and 24,000 white) at his death<sup>47</sup>. The Fatimid caliph al-Mustansir (1035-94 AD)--who was himself the son of a black Sudanese slave woman<sup>48</sup>--is said to have had 50,000 black slaves<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> Yusuf Fadl Hasan, "The Penetration of Islam in the Eastern Sudan," Islam in Tropical Africa, Ed. I.M. Lewis (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 144, 147; Yusuf Fadl Hasan, The Arabs and the Sudan, from the Seventh to the Early Sixteenth Century (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967), pp. 17-28.

<sup>47</sup> Lewis (1990), p. 65.

<sup>48</sup> J.O. Hunwick, "Black Africans in the Islamic World: An Understudied Dimension of the Black Diaspora," Tarikh, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1978, p. 28.

<sup>49</sup> Hasan (1966), p. 151.

The Muslim Fung dynasty emerged in the early sixteenth century with its capital at Sennar and filled the power vacuum created by the collapse of the Christian kingdoms. The Fung remained in power until the Turco-Egyptian conquest of 1820. To the west, the region of Dar Fur witnessed the birth of another Muslim sultanate, the Kayra dynasty, which emerged in the early seventeenth century, survived until 1874, and then rose from the ashes under 'Ali Dinar from 1898 to 1916. Both dynasties actively promoted and regulated the slave trade over the centuries, and indeed, the power and well-being of both relied to a great extent on the hefty slave trade profits.

Throughout most of the Fung and Kayra periods, slave-holding remained by and large a prerogative of the elite. By reading the accounts of the few European men who visited these sultanates, such as Nachtigal and Browne in the case of Dar Fur and Bruce in the case of Sennar, one forms an image of the sumptuous use of slaves. Elaborately attired in costumes, such slaves served as royal bodyguards, attendants, harem women, and the like. Slaves also held important posts in the military, and even more significantly, in the administration. This led Bruce to comment on the Fung kingdom that "the first title of nobility in this country is that of slave; indeed, there is no other....All titles and dignities are undervalued, and precarious, unless they are in the hands of one who is a slave. Slavery in Sennaar is the only true nobility<sup>50</sup>."

The sultans and the ruling elite were the big-slaveowners, who settled entire slave villages to farm on the royal lands. But what about slave-owning on the part of the middle classes? For most of the Fung period at least, slave-owning by the middle classes could not flourish because feudal noblemen reserved the right to bestow slaves<sup>51</sup>. Regarding

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<sup>50</sup> James Bruce of Kinnaird, Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, and 1773, Vol. 4. (Edinburgh: J. Ruthven, 1790), p. 459.

<sup>51</sup> Jay Spaulding, "Slavery, Land Tenure, and Social Class in the Northern Turkish Sudan," The International Journal of African Historical Studies, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1982, pp. 8-9.

Dar Fur, O'Fahey speculates that an elite of 500 to 600 people may have been substantial slave-owners; otherwise, "what is still unknown is the proportion of ordinary households owning slaves. It may have been relatively circumscribed, although nomads may have made greater use of slaves, to whom in any case they had easier access. In general it is probable that slaves were the prerogative of the great, the rich, and the holy, indeed that they were a symbol of power, wealth, or sanctity<sup>52</sup>."

But by the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, patterns of slave-owning were changing as dynastic power grew weaker and as a broader segment of the population obtained slaves. In the trading centres along the Nile, such as Shendi, a prosperous and hard-working middle class of traders emerged for whom slave-owning was a necessity. Even a trader of modest means had a few slaves to cultivate the family land, to grind grain and fetch water, and so forth<sup>53</sup>. The same trend appears in Dar Fur; as O'Fahey has noted, the travellers' accounts of men such as Browne and Nachtigal are dotted with casual references which attest to the cheapness of slaves and suggest that domestic slavery was indeed widespread<sup>54</sup>.

A new chapter opened in Sudanese history in 1820 when Muhammad 'Ali's troops invaded the Sudan and toppled the remnants of the Fung dynasty, which had been suffering and splintering over the previous hundred years. One primary motive for the invasion was, in fact, to obtain access to a source of black slaves in order to strengthen his armies; Muhammad 'Ali hoped that slave troops would prove more docile and obedient than his regular troops--in light of the fact that his Albanian contingents had mutinied in 1815. Getting slaves would also spare him from having to divert Egyptian peasant labour away from his massive

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<sup>52</sup> R.S. O'Fahey, "Slavery and Society in Dar Fur," Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa, Ed. John Ralph Willis, Vol. 2 (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1985), pp. 88, 94.

<sup>53</sup> R.S. O'Fahey and J.L. Spaulding, Kingdoms of the Sudan (London: Methuen & Co., 1974), pp. 81-82.

<sup>54</sup> O'Fahey (1985), p. 94.

agricultural projects. Of course, he had other motives for conquering the Sudan as well. He [mistakenly] believed the Sudan to be rich in gold, and he aspired to dominating the Red Sea<sup>55</sup>. On top of that, he wanted to root out the surviving Mamlukes, who had sought refuge in the north over a decade earlier<sup>56</sup>.

The Turco-Egyptians seized unknown numbers of men, though they took an equal or greater number of women and children in the process, too. The men went into the army, while the women and children ended up in the slave markets of the Sudan and across the Red Sea in Arabia: the profits from the sale of these women and children defrayed the costs of maintaining the slave armies<sup>57</sup>. Thus the southern Sudan served as a reservoir for slaves who stocked both internal (i.e. northern Sudanese) and external (export-oriented, Egyptian, Arabian, and other Ottoman) markets. One Egyptian prince alone, 'Umar Tusun, is said to have produced 30,000 black slaves for the army in 1822 and 1823<sup>58</sup>. One can only wonder how many women and children they captured, even more the number of people who were slaughtered in the course of the raids or who perished from hunger, thirst, fatigue, or disease during the slave march.

The Turco-Egyptian period launched slave-owning on an unprecedented scale in the northern Sudan. The vast numbers of slaves that poured into the local markets at cheap prices meant that almost the entire spectrum of free Sudanese society, from the very rich to the poor, began to experience slave-owning. Thus Holroyd was able to write of Sennar in 1839 that "[m]ost of the lower orders possess one or two slaves<sup>59</sup>."

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<sup>55</sup> Richard Hill, Egypt in the Sudan: 1820-1881 (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 7-8, 25, 27.

<sup>56</sup> Eduard Rüppell, Reisen in Nubien, Kordofan und dem peträischen Arabien (Frankfurt am Main: Friedrich Wilmans, 1829), p. 23.

<sup>57</sup> Hill (1959), pp. 10-12.

<sup>58</sup> Hill (1959), p. 25.

<sup>59</sup> Arthur T. Holroyd, "Notes on a Journey to Kordofan, in 1836-7," Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, Vol. 9, 1839, p. 169.

Another set of factors contributed to the widespread increase of slave-holding in the nineteenth-century Sudan, and they revolved around the zariba system. The Turco-Egyptian conquest created an atmosphere of greater security for an international motley of European, Levantine, and northern Sudanese traders, who flocked to the southern Sudan in the 1840's with aims of dealing in ivory<sup>60</sup>. These traders set up zara'ib [singular, zariba], heavily fortified thorn enclosure camps, as their bases. They attracted jallaba [singular, jallab], itinerant petty traders from the north, and fugara' [singular, faqih<sup>61</sup>], itinerant Sufi religious scholars, as well<sup>62</sup>. These traders soon began dabbling in the slave trade as an offshoot of the ivory trade, so that by the mid-1840's, they were supplying Muhammad 'Ali with practically all the slave recruits he needed.

By 1855, however, ivory supplies began to dwindle seriously. Profits lagged while the traders faced ever-greater demands from their [often European] creditors who provided the capital for the ventures and from the middlemen who dealt with the ivory after its arrival in Khartoum. To make up for their ivory losses, the traders began to deal in slaves on a massive scale, in part by spurring on internecine wars that led to slave-raids among the southern peoples themselves, using the promise of cattle as a lure<sup>63</sup>. The complexion of the trading community changed over time, as a greater number of northern Sudanese, the "Khartoumers," began to replace the European elements. The raiding continued, though, into the 1870's, and

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<sup>60</sup> Hill (1959), p. 49.

<sup>61</sup> It is odd but true that the singular and plural forms of the Sudanese word for a Sufi holy man come from two different roots: faqih, the singular, means "jurisprudent" in classical or modern standard Arabic, whereas fugara, the plural, means "poor men" (Hans Wehr, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, Ed. J. Milton Cowan, 3rd edition [Ithaca: Spoken Languages Services, Inc., 1976, pp. 722, 723]). The Sudanese usage thus suggests a figure who combines the qualities of scholar and ascetic.

<sup>62</sup> See Ahmad Alawad Sikainga, "The Legacy of Slavery and Slave Trade in the Western Bahr al-Ghazal, 1850-1939," Northeast African Studies, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1989, pp. 75-95, regarding this aspect and many other aspects of the zariba system.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Gray, A History of the Southern Sudan, 1839-1889 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), pp. 50-54. See also Lawrence Mire, "Al-Zubayr Pasha and the Zariba-Based Slave Trade in the Bahr al-Ghazal, 1855-1879," Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa, Ed. John Ralph Willis, Vol. 2 (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1985), p. 107.

then shifted west, where it thrived on a similar scale in regions such as the Central African Republic and the southwestern fringes of the Sudan as late as 1911<sup>64</sup>.

Throughout this post-conquest period, demand rose to meet the increased supply of slaves as former patterns of slave-holding were transformed. The effect on the economy and society of the northern Sudan was indeed profound. Prior to 1820, for example, in the region north of the Nile confluence, free cultivators had predominated while the agricultural use of slaves was limited to the more affluent classes<sup>65</sup>. Ruppell estimated the number of slaves between Wadi Halfa and the fourth cataract at around 4,500, or approximately four percent of the total population, by 1820<sup>66</sup>. All of this changed quickly. Spaulding writes, "By the end of the nineteenth century it could be said that throughout the northern Sudan all the agricultural work was done by slaves, who were then said to account for almost a third of the population<sup>67</sup>." This rapid spread of agricultural slavery at almost all levels of the socio-economic spectrum arguably transformed popular attitudes towards physical labour, and created not a new work ethic but rather a leisure ethic which proved hard to erase.

Just as slave-raiding and slave-owning were rising to unrivalled heights in the northern Sudan, an abolitionist movement, emanating mainly from Great Britain, began to make its weight felt. As early as 1807, Britain had abolished the slave trade to her colonies and had emancipated all the slaves remaining in them by 1833. Abolitionist fervour then focussed its

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<sup>64</sup> See Dennis Cordell, Dar al-Kuti and the Last Years of the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), [for example] pp. 109-10. See also SAD 300/1/77, SAD 300/1/78-79, and SAD 300/1/80-81 (F.R. Wingate) for official Condominium correspondence regarding the implications of the French Congo slave trade for the Bahr al-Ghazal (1911).

<sup>65</sup> Spaulding (1982), p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> Ruppell (1829), p. 29.

<sup>67</sup> Spaulding (1982), p. 11. Also see Gabriel Warburg, "Slavery and Labour in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan," Asian and African Studies, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1978, p. 221; and Peter F.M. McLoughlin, "Economic Development and the Heritage of Slavery in the Sudan Republic," Africa, Vol. 32, No. 4, 1962, p. 361.

attention on other remaining slave-holding zones. When the United States ended slavery in 1865 after a bloody civil war, British anti-slavery circles next shifted their concentration onto the Ottoman Empire and to the slave trade which sprang from the Sudan.

Efforts to abolish the Sudanese slave trade and Sudanese slave exports developed after the 1850's, as a direct result of pressure from European anti-slavery groups. An imperial Ottoman firman abolished black slavery in Ottoman lands as early as 1857, although this had no effect and was not fully imposed in the empire's core until the Young Turks came to power in 1908<sup>68</sup>. Following his accession as khedive of Egypt, Sa'id, bowing to the same anti-slavery pressure, had ordered his governors to bar the entry of slaves from the Sudan in 1856-57. How sincere Sa'id was in this regard is difficult to determine, since he himself placed an order for 500 black soldiers with the notorious slavers, the 'Aqqad brothers, in 1860<sup>69</sup>. Subsequently, in 1877, the British pushed through the Anglo-Egyptian Convention, which prohibited the import and export of slaves from the Sudan<sup>70</sup>. The burden of stamping out the slave trade fell largely to Charles Gordon, in his capacity as Governor-General of the Sudan. Though Gordon certainly managed to make slave-trading more difficult for a while, he by no means stopped it<sup>71</sup>.

Resentment against the Turco-Egyptian regime snowballed in the northern Sudan until a full scale revolt emerged by 1881, under the guidance of a devout Dongolawi Sufi scholar named Muhammad Ahmad ibn 'Abdullah. This man declared himself to be the Mahdi--the expected one, according to millenarian thinking of the time--who would guide the community of Muslims in a period of crisis foreshadowing the Day of

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<sup>68</sup> Brunschwig (1960), pp. 36-37.

<sup>69</sup> Gray (1978), pp. 52-53.

<sup>70</sup> Beachey (1976), pp. 137-47. On the 1877 convention and other earlier "abolitions" of slavery, see M.F. Shukry, The Khedive Ismail and Slavery in the Sudan (1863-1879), PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, 1935, pp. 80, 85, 111, 123, 276-78.

<sup>71</sup> See Gray (1978), p. 126.

Judgment. Though lacking the regime's strength in arms, the Mahdi and his supporters nonetheless enjoyed a series of victories, which culminated in 1885 with the defeat and murder of Gordon in Khartoum. A curtain fell down on the Sudan, virtually cutting it off from any European contact until 1898<sup>72</sup>. The Mahdi, and after 1885 his successor the Khalifa 'Abdullahi, presided over a state based upon their own interpretations of Islam and Islamic law.

Slavery had a direct bearing on the rise of the Mahdi. Muhammed Ahmad found one substantial base of his support among the slave traders, whom anti-slavery forces had harassed and economically destroyed after 1865. The slave soldiers who worked for the traders were highly disillusioned, too, since they had previously enjoyed a share in the spoils of the raiding expeditions<sup>73</sup>. An even larger segment of the population resented the anti-slavery drives of the previous twenty years, and those were the slave-owners themselves. They regarded slavery as a Quran-sanctioned (i.e. God-sanctioned) right which was critical to their way of life<sup>74</sup>.

Disgruntled slave-owners were also disgruntled tax-payers<sup>75</sup>. Since 1820 the Turco-Egyptians had imposed such an oppressive tax burden upon the people that they not only paid in money and goods, but in slaves. Immediately after the conquest, for instance, the regime had levied a tax of one slave for each five waterwheels in many northern riverain villages, with the result that the region lost almost 4,000 working slaves over a mere

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<sup>72</sup> On the nature of sources available for the Mahdist period, see P.M. Holt, "The Source Materials of the Sudanese Mahdia," St. Antony's Papers, Number 4: Middle Eastern Affairs, Number 1 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958), pp. 107-18.

<sup>73</sup> P.M. Holt, The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 42-44.

<sup>74</sup> Na'um Shuqayr, Jughrafiyat wa-Tarikh al-Sudan (Beirut: Dar al-Thaqafah, 1972), pp. 631-34. Also see SAD 110/2/225-42: F.R. Wingate. The Reasons of the Sudan Revolt.

<sup>75</sup> See the chapter on Turco-Egyptian taxation in Anders Bjorkelo, Prelude to the Mahdiyya: Peasants and Traders in the Shendi Region, 1821-1885 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 82-103. Also see SAD 245/3/27-28: F.R. Wingate. Wingate's recollections on Turco-Egyptian taxation policy in Dongola, c. 1883 (in "Items on Zubayr Pasha").

five years<sup>76</sup>. Changes in taxation policy accompanied changes in land tenure and the growth of private property. As a consequence, an increasingly large segment of the northern population found itself landless and without livelihoods. These were the men who migrated south, to become the jallaba, the petty traders who dealt in slaves and other goods on a large or small scale<sup>77</sup>. They saw themselves as victims of both the regime's taxation policies and anti-slavery policies, and they had no doubt about throwing their lot in with the Mahdi who stood against the regime.

In the Mahdist period, as before, slavery continued to be an accepted and widely practiced social institution. Raids resumed and brought many slaves to the local markets for sale. According to Slatin, a prisoner of the Mahdist state for many years, the Mahdi and later the Khalifa, as well as other members of the ruling elite, were able to skim off the strongest males and the most beautiful females for the armies and the harems respectively<sup>78</sup>. The only major change was that the Mahdist regime prohibited the export of slaves to Egypt, not wanting slaves from the Sudan to strengthen the enemy's armies<sup>79</sup>.

British-led forces finally toppled the Mahdist regime in 1898 at the Battle of Karari, outside Omdurman. A so-called "Condominium" government filled the power vacuum, and though it ostensibly represented a joint British-Egyptian administrative venture, the British in fact dominated. The abolition of slavery became a top priority of the new government. Learning from their mistakes--such as the bitterness over their anti-slavery policy that had fomented the Mahdist revolt and led to the death of Gordon --they decided to proceed slowly, and to curtail the slave trade while allowing the remaining slave population either to gain manumission and

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<sup>76</sup> Rüppell (1829), pp. 27, 29-30.

<sup>77</sup> Spaulding (1982), pp. 17-18.

<sup>78</sup> Rudolf C. Slatin, Fire and Sword in the Sudan, Trans. F.R. Wingate, popular edition (London: Edward Arnold, 1898), pp. 237, 254.

<sup>79</sup> Slatin (1898), p. 337.

pass into wage labour, or to eventually die out. They began by declaring that all men and women born after 1898 would indeed be free<sup>80</sup>.

The demise of slavery came very slowly. By 1924, P.W. Diggle, an agricultural inspector in Berber, felt that the demise of slavery was coming much **too** slowly. He felt that the administration was neither addressing the issue of the widespread domestic slavery that remained nor assisting those slaves who wanted freedom<sup>81</sup>. His exposé to the League of Nations via the Anti-Slavery Society in part triggered the administration to change its policy and dedicate renewed efforts to stamping out the remnants of slavery and the slave trade<sup>82</sup>.

As late as 1926; though, a small-scale slave trade flourished under the guise of the pilgrimage traffic, from Red Sea ports to Arabia<sup>83</sup>. Sporadic raiding and kidnapping also continued in fringe areas, such as along the Sudan-Ethiopia border, until World War II, while domestic slavery itself may have continued to exist in parts of the Sudan as late as 1962<sup>84</sup>. Yet pinpointing an end to the slave trade is much easier than finding an end to domestic slavery itself.

Slavery very gradually blended into wage labour. Many men gained their freedom or simply ran away from their masters and found lucrative wage-paying jobs in a variety of public works projects, such as the Makwar Dam, Gezira Scheme, Nile/Red Sea Railway, Gash and Tokar irrigation works, and docks of Port Sudan<sup>85</sup>. Women found it much harder to leave

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<sup>80</sup> The key text on the abolition process is Taj Hargey, The Suppression of Slavery in the Sudan, 1898-1939, Oxford DPhil thesis, 1981. For the legal implications, see SAD 710/11/23-25: D.M.H Evans. Draft memorandum from the Civil Secretary on the status of slavery in Islamic law, c. 1952.

<sup>81</sup> See P.W. Diggle, "Slavery in the Sudan," Anti-Slavery Reporter and Aborigines' Friend, Series 5, Vol. 15, 1925, pp. 83-5.

<sup>82</sup> See M.W. Daly, Empire on the Nile: The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1898-1934 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 444-46 in particular, and pp. 439-46 in general.

<sup>83</sup> SAD 212/2: C.A. Willis. Report on Slavery and the Pilgrimage, 1926.

<sup>84</sup> McLoughlin (1962), pp. 372, 383. The story of the Ethiopian slave-raiding bandit Yahya 'Awad appears in SAD 294/18/3-15: A.S. Redfern. "The Bandit," by A.S. Redfern, 1935. See also SAD 606/4/1-2: E.A. Balfour. Memoirs of Life in Singa, Fung Province, 1933-34, including a reference to the suppression of the slave trade.

<sup>85</sup> P.F.M. McLoughlin, "Labour Market Conditions and Wages in the Three Towns, 1900-1950," Sudan Notes and Records, Vol. 51, 1970, p. 105.

their lives of servitude; saddled with children, under the close supervision of their male owners, and having almost no options in the growing wage-labour market, their choices remained virtually nil for a few decades<sup>86</sup>.

If some would argue that slavery died a slow death in the Sudan, then others would argue that it never really passed away. An Anti-Slavery Society report to the United Nations Working Group on Slavery in 1988 summarized evidence on a revival of slavery in the midst of the Sudan's current civil war. Armed Baqqara Arab militias have raided Dinka communities and have taken men, women, and children as slaves to be used for household and agricultural work<sup>87</sup>. Sikainga argues that although the abolition of slavery in the Sudan (announced in 1898) may have changed laws, it did nothing to change attitudes and ideologies on slavery: the Northern Sudanese continue to regard Southerners as the culturally inferior descendants of slaves<sup>88</sup>. Hence it comes as no surprise that the civil war has so easily resurrected slavery.

What binds together a history of slavery that stretches over several millennia? Adams argues that the Sudan has almost always been at the periphery of some world system throughout its long history, supplying exotic goods--including slaves--to the Pharaonic, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Early Islamic, Mamluke, Ottoman, and Turco-Egyptian empires. And he writes, "Almost throughout history there has always been a part of the Sudan--the North--that was encompassed within a world-system, and another part--the South--that was not....The northerners were collectors; the southerners were a part of the collected. They were fair game for capture

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<sup>86</sup> See Sudan Government, Reports on the Finances, Administration and Condition of the Sudan: 1906, p. 451 regarding the lack of job opportunities for women; and Sudan Government, Reports on the Finances, Administration and Condition of the Sudan: 1908, p. 503 regarding the plight of the destitute slave women in Dongola Province whose husbands abandoned them and their children.

<sup>87</sup> Anti-Slavery Society for the Protection of Human Rights: Report to the United Nations Working Group on Slavery 1988, "Slavery in Sudan." Also see their report, Anti-Slavery Society, "Slavery in Sudan," Cultural Survival Quarterly, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1988, pp. 41-42.

<sup>88</sup> Sikainga (1989), p. 92.

and sale on the same basis as were other indigenous resources<sup>89</sup>." The North and South divide has shifted slowly southward over the millennia, with the collected merging into the collectors over time. The boundaries of the Sudan today can be seen as the legacy of that southward push, in the quest for slaves and other trade goods.

An external demand for luxury items stimulated the Sudanese slave trade over the ages. Recognizing this, many have studied those black slaves of the diaspora, who poured out of the Sudan and into the kingdoms and empires beyond. There is no doubt, however, that this same slave trade stimulated a desire for slaves within the Sudan itself. This study, therefore, focusses not on those slaves who enriched the local merchants and traders as exports, but rather on those who satisfied growing internal markets and developing social demands.

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<sup>89</sup> William Y. Adams, "North and South in Sudanese History," Papers of the Second International Sudan Studies Conference held at the University of Durham, 8-11 April 1991, Vol. 1, pp. 17-24.

## Chapter 4:

# **The Labour and Utilization of Slaves**

## Introduction

"In Egypt and Turkey, domestic work only is done by slaves, the cases being rare in which they are employed even in stables or light gardening....<sup>90</sup>" So said J.C. McCoan in 1877, describing a type of servitude amongst the upper classes which presumably involved tasks such as serving refreshments, answering doors and attending to guests--anything in keeping with the slave's position as virtually "a member of the family<sup>91</sup>".

The picture which McCoan paints of domestic slavery in Egypt and Turkey in no way portrays its Sudanese counterpart. Domestic slaves in the Sudan did far more than cater to the whims of the well-heeled. They engaged in an extremely broad range of activities, inside and outside of a house setting. Though it may have been the lot of some to perform light housekeeping, many toiled away at quite arduous work, or engaged in crafts and occupations that required skill and training. This chapter tries to illustrate how much breadth and diversity there actually was in the slave labour experience of men, women, boys, and girls.

## Slaves and Housework

Many slaves in the Sudan did indeed work inside the house. On the surface their experiences might closely resemble the picture that McCoan formed of household slaves in Egypt and Turkey. Male slaves, both men and boys, for example, were popular as the waiters and servants of the very

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<sup>90</sup> J.C. McCoan, "Slavery in Egypt," Fraser's Magazine, Vol. 15, May 1877, p. 563.

<sup>91</sup> McCoan (1877), p. 564.

rich. The American tourist, Bayard Taylor, commented on the young men in "rich blue dresses" who served coffee in the house of the Albanian military governor of Berber and Shendi<sup>92</sup>. Mealtimes were even more impressive. "First, a slave appeared, and gave each of us a napkin....He was followed by another, who bore a brass ewer, and a pitcher from which he poured water over our hands." Then others emerged to place fine dishes of food in front of those seated<sup>93</sup>.

Being owned by a member of the Turco-Egyptian ruling elite was the exception, of course: few domestic slaves lived in the midst of such opulence. Moreover, it seems that most slaves who worked in a household setting were actually women. This female majority performed the bulk of the domestic chores, which were often slow, dreary, and tiring. Women ground the grain necessary to make the day's bread, cooked the meals, and fetched the drinking water. They also took care of children: Babikr Bedri, after becoming a semi-prosperous gum merchant by 1895, bought a slave-girl for a friend upon the birth of a baby, and then bought even more for himself and others after the Battle of al-Matamma, when the slaves of dead soldiers were auctioned off<sup>94</sup>. Some slaves were wet-nurses: Taylor encountered one such woman, who tended the child of a Hassaniyah shaykh<sup>95</sup>.

### Slaves and Agriculture

Slaves did not engage so much in "light gardening," to use McCoan's phrase, but rather in serious agriculture. The prevalence of agricultural slavery skyrocketed after the Turco-Egyptian conquest of 1820, when

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<sup>92</sup> Bayard Taylor, Life and Landscapes from Egypt to the Negro Kingdoms of the White Nile, Being a Journey to Central Africa (London: Sampson Low, Son & Co., 1854), p. 208.

<sup>93</sup> Taylor (1854), p. 216.

<sup>94</sup> Babikr Bedri, The Memoirs of Babikr Bedri, Trans. from the Arabic by Yousef Bedri and George Scott, Intro by P.M. Holt, Vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 192, 204, 215.

<sup>95</sup> Taylor (1854), p. 368.

slave-owning became accessible to almost all free Sudanese families. In part, one can also attribute this growth in agricultural slavery to an intensification of agriculture itself. The Turco-Egyptians embarked on a policy of encouraging the development of cash crops such as indigo, cotton, and sugar in the northern riverain Sudan. In addition to taxing the land-owners heavily, they held the trade monopolies on the crops, and steered the goods towards both internal and external (export-oriented) markets, thereby enriching the Egyptian treasury<sup>96</sup>.

In spite of these new developments, the concept of using slaves for cultivation and herding was not new to the Sudan: the Fung and Kayra elite, as well as many powerful holy men, had long patronized slave agriculture as a large-scale venture--at times settling entire slave villages to work the lands<sup>97</sup>. This continued into the post-conquest period among the political elite and the very rich as well<sup>98</sup>. For example, Salih Bey Idris, the Takruri notable who served as the local Turco-Egyptian administration official in Qallabat near the Ethiopian border until his evacuation in 1885, owned 4,000 slaves, who cultivated his villages in peace-time and carried his firearms in war-time<sup>99</sup>.

In many areas, such as the northern riverain Sudan, slave labour replaced free labour almost entirely by the mid-nineteenth century. Slaves worked the shaduf, a hand-operated bucket at the end of a rope, to water the vegetable gardens, and also drove the oxen at the waterwheels, or saqias, which irrigated the fields of wheat, cotton, durra, and other crops<sup>100</sup>.

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<sup>96</sup> Anders Bjorkelo, "The Struggle over Land and Water in Berber Province during the Turkiyya," Papers of the Second International Sudan Studies Conference held at the University of Durham, 8-11 April 1991, Vol. 2, pp. 276, 287.

<sup>97</sup> See Lord Prudhoe, "Extracts from Private Memoranda Kept by Lord Prudhoe on a Journey from Cairo to Sennar in 1829, Describing the Peninsula of Sennar," Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, 1835, p. 48.

<sup>98</sup> See H.G. Prout, General Report on the Province of Kordofan (Cairo: Printing Office of the General Staff, 1877), pp. 4-5. Also, al-Sanusi, sultan of Dar al-Kuti (Central African Republic/Chad) from 1890 to 1911, settled slaves in agricultural villages throughout his reign (Cordell [1985], pp. 122-29).

<sup>99</sup> Holt (1970), p. 167.

<sup>100</sup> For a succinct description of the shaduf and saqia, see Anders Bjorkelo, From King to Kashif: Shendi in the Nineteenth Century, PhD thesis, University of Bergen, Norway, 1983, p. 117. Beautiful

Sometimes children, boys and girls of six or seven years old, manned the waterwheels<sup>101</sup>, though Taylor encountered adult male Dinka slaves near El Damer and Merowe who performed this work, too<sup>102</sup>.

Throughout the northern Sudan, both male and female slaves worked to prepare the soil, sow the seed, weed the fields, harvest, thresh and winnow the grain. Children also worked by scaring birds away from the crops<sup>103</sup>, while adults in the Shendi area hunted or scared away hippopotamuses and household animals which broke the fences and ravaged the fields<sup>104</sup>. In Kordofan, slaves dug and maintained water-storage tanks, hafirs, which enabled them to bring some of the region's heavy clay soils under cultivation<sup>105</sup>.

Tending livestock was also a common feature of the slave's work. At Abu Hashim, near Abu Hamad, Taylor passed a family working in both cultivation and herding: "The men were at work among the grain, directing the course of the water, and shy children tended the herds of black goats that browsed on the thorns skirting the Desert<sup>106</sup>." Women watered and pastured cows, donkeys, and horses<sup>107</sup>. Many slaves herded large flocks belonging to nomadic groups, such as the Baqqarah Arabs; however, according to Yunes Bedis, the son of a petty slave-trader, slaves disliked being sold to such groups as shepherds and preferred to work for a "town

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and highly detailed etchings of the saqia appear in Frederick Lewis Norden, Travels in Egypt and Nubia, Trans. from the French, Vol. 1 (London, 1757), plates XL and LIII.

<sup>101</sup> F. Sidney Ensor, Incidents on a Journey through Nubia to Darfoor (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1881), p. 11.

<sup>102</sup> Taylor (1854), pp. 222, 228.

<sup>103</sup> Rüppell (1829), pp. 42-43. A photograph of two boys at Bagrawiya employed in scaring birds from the durra crop appears in E.A. Wallis Budge, The Egyptian Sudan: Its History and Monuments, Vol. 1 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1907), p. 268.

<sup>104</sup> Bjorkelo (1983), p. 118.

<sup>105</sup> Janet Joran Ewald, Leadership and Social Change on an Islamic Frontier: The Kingdom of Taqali, 1780-1900, PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1982, p. 230.

<sup>106</sup> Taylor (1854), p. 200.

<sup>107</sup> Lidwien Kapteijns, "The Uses of Slaves in Precolonial Western Dar Fur: the Case of Dar Masalit, 1870-1905," Northeast African Studies, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1984, pp. 112-13.

family," because herding was an isolated task that provided them with little company from fellow slaves<sup>108</sup>.

Even if slaves did most of the agricultural work in the Sudan after the Turco-Egyptian conquest, they did not do all of it. With the exception of the very rich, slave-owners and their families--husbands, wives, and children--did perform some cultivation and herding, and it was not unusual for them to work side-by-side with their slaves<sup>109</sup>. Likewise, in regard to the kingdom of Taqali prior to the 1850's, Ewald has noted that the ruler periodically mustered obligatory work parties from the free people of the countryside, and these people supplemented the king's slave cultivators in clearing, planting, harvesting, and threshing his grain<sup>110</sup>.

In spite of the free population's participation in agricultural work, one quality does set the slave's labour apart: its heaviness. Free men worked, but only slaves toiled. Rüppell commented that few free men ever worked for more than a few hours per day<sup>111</sup>--and they certainly never worked during the hottest hours, it being only the slaves who did the weeding in the mid-day sun<sup>112</sup>. Kapteijns similarly argues that though slaves in Dar Masalit did much of the same sort of work as free commoners, slaves did more of it--and generally performed the hardest or most dangerous tasks, such as sinking wells<sup>113</sup>.

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<sup>108</sup> Yunes Bedis and W.E. Jennings Bramley, "Tales of the Wadai Slaves Trade in the Nineties (Told by Yunes Bedis of the Majabra to W.E. Jennings Bramley)," Sudan Notes and Records, Vol. 23, Part 1, 1940, p. 183.

<sup>109</sup> See Bjorkelo (1983), pp. 120-21, and Kapteijns (1984), pp. 112-13.

<sup>110</sup> Ewald (1982), p. 149.

<sup>111</sup> Rüppell (1829), pp. 42-43.

<sup>112</sup> Bjorkelo (1983), pp. 120-21.

<sup>113</sup> Lidwien Kapteijns, Mahdist Faith and Sudanic Tradition: the History of the Masalit Sultanate, 1870-1930 (London: KPI, 1985), p. 56; and Kapteijns (1984), pp. 112-13.

## The Intensity of Slave Labour: The Case of Women

Few slaves in the Sudan lived the life of relative ease and domestic comfort that some slavery apologists were and are wont to suggest. Slaves quite often worked hard, though female slaves in particular worked extremely hard. The tasks ascribed to them in the preceding paragraphs--grinding grain, fetching water, and so forth--demanded great physical energy and even endurance. In fact, it is fair to say that women in general, both free and slave, bore a proportionally heavier workload than men.

In the course of his travels to Dar Fur in the 1790's, Browne was amazed at the heavy and diverse workload that women juggled--cultivating, cooking, cleaning, child-minding, washing clothes--in contrast to the man's workload. He remarked, "It is not uncommon to see a man on a journey, mounted idly on an ass, while his wife is pacing many a weary step on foot behind him, and moreover, perhaps, carrying a supply of provisions or culinary utensils<sup>114</sup>."

In his travels to Kordofan in the 1830's, Pallme described in meticulous detail the labour involved in converting grain into bread for the daily meals. He wrote,

Every family possesses an additional hut...in which the flour necessary for the consumption of the house is ground. This operation is performed in a hollow stone, a species of rude mortar, which is fixed into the ground, whilst a girl, generally a slave, reduces the grain (dokn) with another cylindrical stone to a powder. In a family consisting of eight persons, one girl would be occupied throughout the whole year in grinding the necessary quantity of corn. This simple labour required great exertion, and is only to be performed by girls who have attained their fourteenth year, younger children being unequal to the task. Even grown persons suffer considerably in this occupation, for it requires no slight exertion to roll a heavy stone all

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<sup>114</sup> Browne (1799), p. 295.

day backwards and forwards in the heat of these huts; the poor creatures thus employed are generally bathed in perspiration....<sup>115</sup>

Pallme continues by saying that converting the flour into bread required another hour's labour in order to have enough for two people at dinner-time.

Even fetching water was an onerous job. While on a reconnaissance mission in the province of Kordofan towards the end of 1874, Major H.G. Prout noted just how serious an undertaking it was for the women to get a small day's supply of water. He later wrote, "The water must be drawn from wells from thirty to fifty metres deep, by a bucket at the end of a cord; and, when raised to the surface, it must often be carried five or six hours' journey to the place where it is used<sup>116</sup>." Frank G. Carpenter, an American journalist, came to the same conclusion during his 1907 trip to the Sudan. In one of his articles, he mentions the women who lugged gallons of water up from the Nile, and says, "Some of the streets are sprinkled with this water, and many of the gardens of Khartoum are kept moist in this way. Here, at the Grand Hotel, we have a half dozen women who carry water all day long to irrigate the garden<sup>117</sup>." Of course, it is impossible to determine by this stage whether these women were still slaves, or whether they were ex-slaves receiving nominal wages.

It surprised Browne in 1799 that women's work included constructing the clay buildings in Dar Fur<sup>118</sup>. It surprised Carpenter over a century later in Khartoum. Carpenter describes the dark-skinned, half-naked [slave or ex-slave] women who received pitifully low wages for work that involved a tremendous amount of exertion.

I have been interested in watching the women at work in the building of Khartoum. Now houses and business blocks are going up almost

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<sup>115</sup> Ignatius Pallme, *Travels in Kordofan* (London: J. Madden and Co., 1844), pp. 47-48.

<sup>116</sup> Prout (1877), p. 28.

<sup>117</sup> SAD 133/22/42-43: F.R. Wingate. "Letters about the Soudan," a series of articles by Frank G. Carpenter detailing life in the Sudan [c. 1907].

<sup>118</sup> Browne (1799), p. 295.

everywhere, and every mason and mechanic has his women helpers. The laborers come from all parts of the Sudan, and the women of a half dozen tribes may be working on the same building.... For these wages [of ten or fifteen cents a day] the women unload the stone boats on the Nile, wading out into the river and coming back up the banks with two or three rocks piled high on the head. They carry sand in baskets, and spread it over the stones on the roadways, and they sit down on the sides of the roads and break stones for the macadamizing. They carry the mortar up the scaffolding to the masons, and quite an army of them is employed in bringing water in [fi]ve gallon coal oil cans up from the Nile<sup>119</sup>.

In her study of slavery in Dar Masalit from 1870 to 1905, Kapteijns confirms that women there also built and repaired huts and fences<sup>120</sup>. Construction work appears to have been a common aspect of the women's labour experience.

Numerous travellers condemn the inhabitants of the northern Sudan, free and slave alike, as being lazy and idle. Yet despite this, it is very interesting to note that many of the same travellers seem to exempt women, slave and free, from the verdict. Rüppell, for example, consciously or unconsciously makes the distinction in his 1829 account. In talking of the northern riverain Sudanese, he writes, "The adult Barabra spend the biggest part of the year in complete idleness...." A few sentences later, however, he remarks that the "women must be busy" and goes on to enumerate the long round of daily chores that filled their lives<sup>121</sup>.

While travelling through Beja country in the northeastern Sudan in 1814, Burckhardt wrote that the "Hadendowa are very indolent; the business of the house is left to the wives and slaves, while the men pass the day either in paying an idle visit to some neighbouring encampment, or at home reclined upon the Angareyg, smoking their pipes, and generally

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119 SAD 113/22/42-43: F.R. Wingate. "Letters about the Soudan," a series of newspaper articles by Frank G. Carpenter detailing life in the Sudan [c. 1907].

120 Kapteijns (1984), p. 112-13.

121 Rüppell (1829), pp. 42-43.

going drunk to bed in the evening<sup>122</sup>." Franz Xaver Geyer, a high-ranking figure in the Catholic Church who had his base at Khartoum, referred in 1907 to "the slavish position of the woman, in that most of the housework and fieldwork falls to her," and not to the many [free] idle men<sup>123</sup>. Even Prout launched a tirade against the "brutally lazy" natives of Kordofan in the same paragraph in which he emphasized the hard work of the women<sup>124</sup>.

Cordell argues that the higher prices paid for female slaves marked a recognition of the seriousness of female labour. He writes, "Perhaps because they could bear children, but more likely because the sexual division of labour in Africa made them more suitable for labor-intensive tasks, young women were worth more than young men<sup>125</sup>."

This discussion on the heavy nature of the female slave's work addresses a key issue on slave labour, yet by no means exhausts the subject. Until now discussion has largely concentrated on household and agricultural work. Attention will now turn to a variety of other work modes.

### Slaves and Factory Work

Although the evidence is scanty, it appears that a few individuals were buying up slaves in order to man factories by the mid-nineteenth century<sup>126</sup>. The archaeologist, Dr. Richard Lepsius, who travelled in the northern Sudan around 1850, makes a couple of references to such factory ventures. He encountered a fellow German named Bauer who had set up a

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<sup>122</sup> John Lewis Burckhardt, Travels in Nubia (London: Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa, 1819), p. 394.

<sup>123</sup> Franz Xaver Geyer, Khartum: Ein Zentrum der Kultur in Inner-Afrika (München, 1907), p. 66.

<sup>124</sup> Prout (1877), pp. 27-28.

<sup>125</sup> Cordell (1985), p. 117.

<sup>126</sup> Shukry (1935), p. 80.

soap and brandy factory near Kamlin<sup>127</sup>. Children as well as adults seem to have constituted its labour force. He also refers to an indigo factory at nearby Tamaniat, owned by an Ahmad Pasha. If Lepsius presents his facts accurately, then this indigo factory was huge, manned by five or six hundred adult male slaves and perhaps their wives and children<sup>128</sup>. Conditions must have been grim in both factories, for the slaves and their families joined a revolt of slave soldiers initiated in Wad Madina, and fled en masse. Lepsius arrived at Tamaniat several days later and found the mutilated corpses of slaves who had been recaptured and shot<sup>129</sup>.

By the early Condominium era, small factories at least were certainly underway. The journalist Carpenter stumbled upon a factory in Omdurman, where black-skinned women ginned and spinned in a few mud huts, while the men and boys wove the yarn into a fine cotton fabric on simple looms in some huts at the back<sup>130</sup>.

Someone told Carpenter that the boys in the factory received wages of ten cents per day. This would seem to suggest that these workers were all ex-slaves, benefitting from the developing wage-labour economy. However, it is difficult if not impossible to gauge where slavery ended and free wage labour began. That is, owners might have farmed out their slaves to factories and other businesses, and then have taken their wages from them. This scenario prevailed as late as the 1950's among the British and American oil companies in the Gulf States. Knowingly or unknowingly, these oil companies fostered a system whereby owners farmed out their slaves to them as wage-earning workers and then extracted between eighty

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<sup>127</sup> [Dr.] Richard Lepsius, Letters from Egypt, Ethiopia, and the Peninsula of Sinai, Revised edition, Trans. from the German by Leonora and Joanna B. Horner (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853), p. 164.

<sup>128</sup> Lepsius (1853), p. 190.

<sup>129</sup> Lepsius (1853), p. 193.

<sup>130</sup> SAD 133/22/89: F.R. Wingate. "Letters about the Soudan," a series of newspaper articles by Frank G. Carpenter detailing life in the Sudan [c. 1907]. For a photograph of two woman working at the Omdurman cotton factory, see SAD 133/22/90.

and ninety-five percent of the wages for themselves<sup>131</sup>. In the Sudan as in the Gulf States, receiving wages and remaining a slave were not necessarily mutually exclusive variables. According to Hargey, for example, the practice of hiring out slaves in Berber Province survived as late as 1930<sup>132</sup>.

### Slaves and Skilled Work

Another facet of the slave labour experience which deserves mention is the skill and training which many slave occupations required. Holroyd came upon a group of slave shipbuilders at Munqara, who provided boats for the Turco-Egyptian regime. He said, "I observed eighteen or twenty pairs of sawyers, and five or six boats on the stocks. The sawyers are negro slaves and convicts. The whole population may be 100 persons<sup>133</sup>."

Burckhardt makes reference to a variety of skilled slave workers. For instance, he encountered a slave blacksmith at Taka who worked the bellows while his master mended knives, lance heads, and iron chains<sup>134</sup>. He came across a few slaves who acted as caravan assistants in treks across the desert; they knew the territory, they understood the camels' needs and how to load them, and they also cooked and carried water<sup>135</sup>. As Fisher and Fisher have pointed out, slaves made good caravan assistants and porters because the "variety of languages which a miscellaneous group of slaves would speak might greatly help a caravan passing through several countries<sup>136</sup>."

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<sup>131</sup> Ian Seccombe and Richard Lawless, "The Gulf Labour Market and the Early Oil Industry: Traditional Structures and New Forms of Organization," The Gulf in the Early Twentieth Century: Foreign Institutions and Local Responses, Ed. R.I. Lawless (Durham: Centre for Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies, University of Durham, 1986), p. 102.

<sup>132</sup> Hargey (1981), p. 332. Regarding the practice in Kordofan Province, see Hargey (1981), p. 382.

<sup>133</sup> Holroyd (1839), p. 171.

<sup>134</sup> Burckhardt (1819), p. 399.

<sup>135</sup> Burckhardt (1819), pp. 419, 427.

<sup>136</sup> Allan G.B. Fisher and Humphrey J. Fisher, Slavery and Muslim Society in Africa (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1970), p. 120.

Indeed, the linguistic knowledge that many slaves possessed was a skill which travellers, Arabs and Europeans alike, often tapped. Burckhardt was only able to compile a Bishariya vocabulary list with the help of a slave whom Bishariya Arabs had educated, since the latter were too suspicious to answer his questions about their language<sup>137</sup>. Lepsius targetted some Dinka slaves for linguistic study<sup>138</sup>, while Linant de Bellefonds sought a Shilluk slave interpreter to accompany him into Shilluk territory during his 1827 travels<sup>139</sup>.

Women gained valuable skills through training as well. As Burckhardt remarked, "The female slaves who have served an apprenticeship in the houses at Dongola are eagerly sought for by all traders, as expert cooks, and good servants<sup>140</sup>." Presumably the Dar Fur elite depended on highly skilled slave cooks as well, for it was critical for them to produce lavish hospitality displays that would impress their frequent guests<sup>141</sup>.

Many of the tasks mentioned throughout this chapter involved skill--not only shipbuilding and translating, but also sinking wells, building huts, making cotton cloth, and much more. Some slave women, even when relaxing, kept busy by weaving elaborate baskets and trays of variegated colours that covered food dishes: "The preparation of these tabaqas which are often twenty inches or more in diameter, forms an important branch of female industry in Sudan. They may be seen exposed for sale in every market place from Sennar to Khartum and Berber<sup>142</sup>." It is obvious,

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<sup>137</sup> Burckhardt (1819), p. 151.

<sup>138</sup> Lepsius (1853), p. 161.

<sup>139</sup> L.M.A. Linant de Bellefonds, "Journal of a Voyage on the Bahr-Abiad or White Nile, with Some General Notes on That River, and Some Remarks on the District of Atbara, Made in a Tour from Hartoum [sic]," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol. 2, 1832, p. 175.

<sup>140</sup> Burckhardt (1819), p. 321.

<sup>141</sup> Gustav Nachtigal, *Sahara and Sudan*, Trans. from the German with notes by Allan G.B. Fisher, Humphrey J. Fisher, with Rex S. O'Fahey, Vol. 4 (London; C. Hurst & Co., 1971 [first published 1889]), p. 253.

<sup>142</sup> [Dr.] Wilhelm Junker, *Travels in Africa during the Years 1875-1878*, Trans. from the German by A.H. Keane (London: Chapman and Hall, 1890), pp. 160-61; photograph p. 506.

therefore, that the diverse abilities of slaves represented a great asset to their owners.

### Sexual Aspects of Slave Utilization

Labour power was not the only purpose for which owners bought slaves. The sexual motive was often paramount, mostly in regard to female slaves who could become concubines. The higher prices paid for young females reflected in large part their sexual appeal and beauty. Since Islamic law granted men sexual access to their slave women, male owners could engage in sexual intercourse without compunction. Traders appreciated having concubines, because they could compel these women to accompany them on long journeys; indeed, in his 1824 travel account, Sir Frederick Henniker mentions a caravan of slave-traders and their concubines whom he passed near Esne, in Upper Egypt<sup>143</sup>. Willis sums up the appeal of slave women in this regard when he says that "female slaves were the mats of the male pleasure-ground; unlike their counterparts among the freeborn, they could be folded up and transported over long distances against their will<sup>144</sup>."

In the Sudan at least, very many slave women, perhaps the majority, served as both labourers and concubines; only the very rich could afford to maintain concubines whose sole occupation was to satisfy the master. Renting out slaves as prostitutes was quite common as well, and it reaped considerable profits for the owners. The issues of concubinage and prostitution will, however, be treated separately in subsequent chapters.

Young boys may have served a sexual purpose, too, though references to this are almost non-existent. Browne does say outright that

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<sup>143</sup> Sir Frederick Henniker, Notes during a Visit to Egypt, Nubia, the Oasis Boeris, Mount Sinai, and Jerusalem, Second edition (London: John Murray, 1824), pp. 192-93.

<sup>144</sup> Willis (1985), p. viii.

paederasty, common in Asia and North Africa, was little known or practiced in the Sudan; on the same page, however, he implies that it was not unusual for parents and children to engage in incestuous relations<sup>145</sup>! This paradox effectively destroys any argument he might have. Meanwhile, in a discussion of Shaihu Umar, a Hausa novel about a Muslim boy named Umar who was enslaved and taken to Egypt via the Sudan, Hiskett plausibly suggests that Umar's affluent Egyptian purchaser may have had a paederastic interest in him<sup>146</sup>. No doubt paederasty existed among some slave-owners in the Sudan, uncommon as it may have been.

Wealthy slave-owners valued another group, eunuchs, not for their sexuality but for their lack of it--that is, for the eunuch's inability to impregnate their womenfolk. The great majority of eunuchs seem to have supplied external markets in Egypt and Istanbul, rather than Sudanese markets<sup>147</sup>. Aside from the Upper Egyptian production centre run by Coptic monks at Zawiyat al-Dayr, near Asyut<sup>148</sup>, another centre existed in El Obeid, the capital of Kordofan.

No one, incidentally, seems to agree on the mortality rates faced by eunuchs as a result of the operation. Referring to the Kordofan centre, Pallme says that a shaykh named Tehme performed the operation on boys of eight or nine years old. He claims that over half of the boys died from the operation, in which all the sexual organs (i.e., not only the testicles) were removed<sup>149</sup>. Supposedly these eunuchs were destined for the harems of the Turks. Holroyd contradicts Pallme regarding death rates. Having

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<sup>145</sup> Browne (1799), p. 293.

<sup>146</sup> See [Alhaji Sir] Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Shaihu Umar: A Novel about Slavery in Africa, Trans. from the Hausa by Mervin Hiskett, Intro. by Beverly B. Mack (New York: Markus Wiener Publishing, 1989 [first Hausa publication, 1955]), pp 53-54; and M. Hiskett, "Enslavement, Slavery and Attitudes towards the Legally Enslavable in Hausa Islamic Literature," Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa, Ed. John Ralph Willis, Vol. 1 (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1985), p. 116.

<sup>147</sup> See, for example, Ehud Toledano, "The Imperial Eunuchs of Istanbul: From Africa to the Heart of Islam," Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 20, No. 3, July 1984, pp. 379-90.

<sup>148</sup> See Burckhardt (1819), pp. 329-31.

<sup>149</sup> Pallme (1844), pp. 86-87. See Ch. Pellat, "Khasi," The Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition, Ed. E. van Donzel, B. Lewis, and Ch. Pellat, Vol. 4 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), p. 1087, for a discussion of the various types of eunuchs.

talked to the same shaykh (whom he calls Tamar), Holroyd agrees that all the organs were removed but says that the operation proved fatal only about 5% of the time<sup>150</sup>.

Statistics presented on the Asyut branch of the trade are just as mysterious. Burckhardt says that two boys out of sixty died from the operation in 1813 (about 3%), though normally the rate was two in two hundred (1%)<sup>151</sup>. Henry Light, travelling a year later, saw two Istanbul-bound boats full of 150 new boy eunuchs. Supposedly only eleven out of 160 had died (about 7%)<sup>152</sup>. But Thomas Legh, who journeyed in the region around the same time, talks about a form of emasculation performed by the jallaba (traders) themselves, and says that only one out of three survived (67% mortality rate)<sup>153</sup>!

The few eunuchs that did remain in the Sudan remained a preserve of the very rich, often intended to protect wives and cherished concubines. While visiting Berber, for example, Taylor passed a group of Cairene ladies taking a stroll under the supervision of a eunuch<sup>154</sup>. Not all eunuchs were harem guards, though. When Gessi, the Italian official who worked to suppress the slave trade for the Turco-Egyptian regime, was on his deathbed in 1881 and was being sent from Khartoum to an Egyptian hospital in Suez, he begged to take along his trusted servant Almas, "who happened to be a eunuch." However, the Governor-General, Ra'uf Pasha, feared that it might create a scandal among European circles in Egypt, and hesitated before letting the eunuch go along<sup>155</sup>.

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<sup>150</sup> Holroyd (1839), p. 178.

<sup>151</sup> Burckhardt (1819), pp. 329-31.

<sup>152</sup> Henry Light, Travels in Egypt, Nubia, Holy Land, Mount Libanon [sic], and Cyprus, in the Year 1814 (London: Rodwell & Martin, 1818), p. 46.

<sup>153</sup> Thomas Legh, Narrative of a Journey in Egypt and the Country beyond the Cataracts, 2nd edition (London: John Murray, 1817), p. 94.

<sup>154</sup> Taylor (1854), p. 205.

<sup>155</sup> Slatin (1898), p. 35.

## The Utilization of Slaves as Gifts and Currency

Owners often benefitted from slaves in yet another way. Because of their widely recognized value and popular demand, slaves represented an ideal gift item for those who could afford it. Giving a slave cemented social relations among friends, relatives, business associates, political allies--anyone whom one wanted to impress. This custom prevailed throughout the Bilad al-Sudan for centuries. In fact, one of the first traveller's references to such gift-giving comes from the eccentric Jewish traveller, David Reubeni, who posed as a Meccan sharif in his 1523 visit to the Fung kingdom. Reubeni must have impressed the king greatly, for he sent his visitor four virgin slave girls and four other slaves as a token of his esteem<sup>156</sup>.

In a similar vein, Browne wrote that the Kayra sultan of Dar Fur, 'Abd al-Rahman, decided to send a present to the Ottomans in Istanbul upon his accession: "It consisted of three of the choicest eunuchs, and three of the most beautiful female slaves that could be procured. The Ottoman emperor, when they were presented, had, it is said, never heard of the Sultan of Dar-Fur, but he returned a highly-ornamented sabre, a rich pelisse, and a ring set with a single diamond of no inconsiderable value<sup>157</sup>." Sultana Nasr, the surviving daughter of the conquered Fung monarch, tried to give the visitor Dr. Lepsius a little slave girl as a sign of her generosity. He refused the gift, saying that such things were against his custom, but accepted an Abyssinian slave boy named Rehan in its stead<sup>158</sup>. On a couple of occasions, the Khalifa 'Abdullahi bestowed a slave girl upon his captive Slatin, ostensibly as a gesture of kindness

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<sup>156</sup> Hillelson (1933), p. 58.

<sup>157</sup> Browne (1799), pp. 214-15.

<sup>158</sup> Lepsius (1853), p. 180.

(though Slatin later wrote that he dreaded the extra expenses which upkeep of the slaves would require)<sup>159</sup>.

When money was short, slaves acted as a handy, universally accepted form of currency, too. An owner could exchange them for money or for goods. Burckhardt wrote of the Mamlukes who survived Muhammad 'Ali's massacre in Egypt and took refuge in Nubia while plotting a counterattack: "Woe to the country occupied by these tyrannical and unprincipled slaves! At present, they have no money left, but they have plenty of slaves with them, with which they can purchase anything; a slave being a kind of currency in the southern countries<sup>160</sup>." Yunes Bedis, meanwhile, recounted that the Sultan of Wadai (Wadai now being a part of Chad) admired a horse belonging to his father so much that he wanted to buy it. His father liked the horse, too, and did not want to sell it, recognizing its value. As Bedis says, "My father had paid three slaves for this horse<sup>161</sup>." Finally, Fisher and Fisher have remarked that many Mecca-bound pilgrims took slaves along on their journey "as a form of travellers' cheques, to help finance the trip<sup>162</sup>."

## Conclusion

This chapter has discussed some of the functions and purposes which slaves served in the Sudan, yet it has by no means exhausted the repertoire of slave occupations. Still deserving mention are the slave men working as private messengers<sup>163</sup>, as waiters in cafés<sup>164</sup>, and as policemen<sup>165</sup>;

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<sup>159</sup> See, for example, Slatin (1898), pp. 226-28.

<sup>160</sup> Burckhardt (1819), p. 73.

<sup>161</sup> Bedis and Bramley (1940), p. 178.

<sup>162</sup> Fisher and Fisher (1970), pp. 122-23.

<sup>163</sup> Bedri (1969), p. 233.

<sup>164</sup> Junker (1890), p. 112.

<sup>165</sup> [Mrs.] Cornelia Mary Speedy, My Wanderings in the Soudan, Vol. 1 (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1884), pp. 80-81; and also Burckhardt (1819), p. 280.

professional dancers and musicians of both sexes<sup>166</sup>; coffee boys ("kawad") who followed their masters wherever they went, owned by the people of the middling classes<sup>167</sup>; women brewing brandy and the local liquor known as merissa<sup>168</sup>; females working on a ship who cooked for the crew<sup>169</sup>; and more. Even nineteenth-century European Christian missionaries, opposed to slavery in principle, bought slaves (and freed them) as the only way of gaining converts for their churches<sup>170</sup>! The list goes on and on.

Slaves performed a tremendous variety of tasks, in a great variety of atmospheres--on boats, in factories, in palaces, in simple houses, and more. Their owners represented people from all across the socio-economic spectrum. The intensity of their work varied as well: while a smartly dressed servant in Khartoum may have served coffee to a Pasha a few times per day, a young woman of Kordofan may have been sweating profusely in a daily routine of grinding grain, fetching water, and keeping a watchful eye out for the master's children. Differences in skill requirements are yet another variable in the equation. Thus no single picture emerges of domestic slavery in the Sudan; the slave was far more than the stereotypical untaxed servant-cum-family member. In sum, the labour experiences of Sudanese slaves reflect so much diversity that they defy generalization.

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166 Junker (1890), pp. 128-29.

167 SAD 110/2/233: F.R. Wingate. *The Reasons of the Sudan Revolt*.

168 Georg Schweinfurth, *The Heart of Africa: Three Years Travels and Adventures in the Unexplored Regions of Central Africa, from 1868 to 1871*, Trans. from the German by Ellen E. Frewer, Intro. by Winwood Reade, Vol. 1 (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low and Searle, 1873), pp. 238-39; Junker (1890), p. 143; Pallme (1844), p. 80; etc.

169 Taylor (1854), p. 227; Schweinfurth (1873), Vol. 1, p. 50.

170 Prout (1877), p. 36.

## Chapter 5:

# Luxury, Labour, and the Value of Slavery

### Introduction

Almost immediately after the official abolition of slavery in 1899, the Condominium administration began to worry about the exodus of slaves from the farmlands of their owners and the corresponding slump in the northern Sudan's overall agricultural output<sup>171</sup>. In his study entitled, "Economic Development and the Heritage of Slavery in the Sudan Republic," McLoughlin comments on this period's labour shortage and the hardship that it created. He explains that the pains of social and economic adjustment were not surprising, since "the Sudan has been a slave-based economy for at least three millennia<sup>172</sup>."

Based upon McLoughlin's analysis, one might conclude that the overriding importance of slaves rested upon their contribution to the region's economic productivity. Certainly slaves did make great contributions to society in the rich variety of labour functions which they served, as the previous chapter has shown. Nevertheless, were one to assess the significance of slavery and slave labour in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, taking the viewpoint of the slave-owners into account, a very different picture might form. As this chapter contends, the greatest service which slaves may have provided their owners--through the eyes of the owners themselves--was not so much to cook their food or plant their fields, nor to boost the regional economy, but rather to enhance their social status and prestige.

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<sup>171</sup> Hargey (1981), p. 110.

<sup>172</sup> McLoughlin (1962), p. 368.

## The Economics of Slavery in the Northern Sudan

No one can deny that free agriculturalists depended largely on slave labour by the latter half of the nineteenth century. Neither can one refute the notion that abolition attempts, in the late Turco-Egyptian period (under Gordon) hurt this segment of the population badly (thereby drawing support towards the Mahdi), just as it did when the Condominium era oversaw the true demise of the institution early in this century.

As Spaulding has convincingly argued, however, slave labour had not always been the cornerstone of the region's agriculture nor of its economy. Prior to the 1820 Turco-Egyptian conquest, slave-owning in the northern Sudan had been the preserve of the elite--within the context of the Dar Fur and Fung dynastic hierarchies and latterly among the region's wealthiest merchants and most powerful families. As a result, free cultivators predominated until 1820 with slaves (not all of whom performed agricultural labour) hovering at an estimated mere four percent of the population in the lands north of the Nile confluence<sup>173</sup>. In the post-conquest era, slaves flooded into the markets of the northern Sudan to such an extent that even families of relatively low income owned at least one slave, or perhaps a share in a slave, by the end of the century. Consequently, says Spaulding, it could be said only in the years after the conquest that slaves began to perform all or most of the region's agricultural work<sup>174</sup>.

One could delve much further back into the past and still find little to suggest that the Sudan had a deep-rooted, slave-based economy over the ages, as McLoughlin claims. In fact, the sands of time have so thoroughly obscured internal Sudanese slave-owning practices of the past few millennia that positing any theories on slavery's overall social and

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<sup>173</sup> Spaulding derives this statistic from Ruppell (1829), p. 29.

<sup>174</sup> Spaulding (1982), pp. 9-11.

economic impact becomes futile for this massive time-span. It is easier to stake claims for the centuries following the advent of Islam in the northern Sudan: after the eighth century<sup>175</sup> but especially after the foundation of the Fung and Kayra sultanates in the early sixteenth and seventeenth century respectively. If slave-owning patterns in the pre-Islamic Sudanese period mirrored those of the post-Islamic (but pre-nineteenth-century) era, then slavery over that wide time-span existed as a preserve of the elite--way beyond the scope of the common masses that shuffled on and off the stage of life.

Available historical evidence makes it possible to argue of the few centuries preceding the Turco-Egyptian conquest, at least, that only a fraction of society apparently relied on slaves for their economic well-being and enrichment (thus endorsing Spaulding's contentions). This thin social layer of slave-owners no doubt included the petty chiefs who built their power bases on slave agricultural and perhaps military labour, the traders responsible for transporting slaves from regions outside of and within the Sudan for both internal and external markets, as well as the most influential [Sufi] Muslim holy men who had consolidated much wealth.

After speculating on the economic importance of slavery in Islamic lands over the centuries, Brunshwig concludes that its primary importance in most areas must have come via the taxes imposed on the trade, which accrued to government authorities--and not from any profits generated by slave labour itself<sup>176</sup>. His thesis implies that the elite--that is, the social and political leaders, "the authorities"--stood to reap the rewards of slavery. Brunshwig's notion is very interesting, though verifying it in the case of the Sudan would require in-depth research on existing nineteenth-century tax and trade documents. Nevertheless, judging from the comments of a

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<sup>175</sup> Muslims began to trickle into the northern Sudan as early as the eighth century, though the large-scale Islamization of the populace did not occur until several centuries later.

<sup>176</sup> Brunshwig (1960), p. 34.

few travellers, the taxes imposed on the slave trade did indeed swell the pockets of many petty chiefs whose territories dotted the trade routes<sup>177</sup>.

Kapteijs provides a detailed roster of the labour functions which slaves performed in Dar Masalit: planting and harvesting fields, sinking wells, fetching wood and water, building huts and fences, and the like. Much of this work, she says, was heavy or dangerous, especially for women. Nonetheless, Kapteijs is still able to say with confidence that economic motives were not the main impetus to slave-owning: "Slave labour was not used to maximize production for the market, oral sources suggest, but to make life easier and more comfortable for the slave owners<sup>178</sup>."

In light of the extensive range of jobs that slaves undertook, the contentions of this chapter (by minimizing the importance of some slaves as labourers and producers) may appear contradictory or misconstrued. Yet many strokes remain to be painted in before a complete and realistic portrait of the slave's functions emerges. These missing details relate to the intentional under-utilization of slave labour, and/or the use of slaves for purposes of luxury and prestige.

### The Prestige Use of Slave Labour

Liberally sprinkled over the pages of the travel accounts are references to slaves who, by all appearances, seemed to be doing nothing much; that is, accomplishing little in the way of productive labour. It amazed European travellers and humble Sudanese onlookers alike, just as slave-owners hoped it would. After all, the decadence of openly channeling

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<sup>177</sup> See, for example, Browne (1799), pp. 57, 298, 299; Burckhardt (1819), pp. 236-38, 259, 306, 374, 403, 451.

<sup>178</sup> Kapteijs (1984), pp. 112-16.

slaves into unproductive activities could only highlight an owner's wealth, comfort, and social elevation.

Browne visited the Kayra sultanate of Dar Fur during his travels of the 1790's, and eventually had an audience with the sultan himself. It was not so much this ruler who impressed him, but rather the fourteen or fifteen silk-enrobed eunuchs who surrounded his throne, men whom as he later learned had been castrated right in the sultan's palace<sup>179</sup>. Such ceremonial use of slaves was typical among the rich and powerful. Nachtigal, who toured not only through Dar Fur but through Wadai and other sultanates as well, frequently referred to this scenario. Speaking of one part of Wadai society (Wadai now being in Chad), he wrote, "In Dar-Ziyud and Dar Said, the Maba women are frequently seen followed by young slaves who carry for them the luxurious train of the firda endurki [robe]<sup>180</sup>." The same traveller mentions that deaf, dumb, and/or dwarf slaves demanded very high prices (they cost about the same as eunuchs); magnates and princes throughout the Bilad al-Sudan valued these luxury item slaves as playthings or as prestige objects to enhance their retinues<sup>181</sup>.

Hillelson furnishes an example from the life of the famous Sudanese holy man, Shaykh Hasan ibn Hassuna (d. 1664) which shows that the ceremonial and decadent use of slaves applied not only to the political elite, but to the religious elite as well. This "ascetic" had so many slaves that they "became whole villages;" it appears that up to 500 of his slaves were armed as soldiers. At one sumptuous Ramadan fast-breaking feast, this shaykh entertained his innumerable guests with a lavish display of hospitality. "[The meal] was served by 120 gorgeously dressed slave girls, adorned with precious jewels, carrying dishes of kisra. Each of these was followed by another, more gorgeously dressed, who carried a plate, and

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<sup>179</sup> Browne (1799), pp. 213, 350.

<sup>180</sup> Nachtigal, Vol. 4 (1889/1971), p. 197.

<sup>181</sup> Cited in Fisher and Fisher (1970), pp. 163-64.

after each of these followed another with a gourd.... But Shaykh Hasan's own breakfast was that of an ascetic: to him the gate-keeper brought a basin of water in which qarad pods were soaked, and a tray of muttala cooked in ashes<sup>182</sup>."

Having an entourage of slaves was clearly important for maintaining the image of the elite. In the mid-nineteenth century, the archaeologist Lepsius met Sultana Nasr (called Lady Nasra by Bayard Taylor who describes his audience with her in a roughly contemporary account<sup>183</sup>), the blue-blooded daughter of the last Fung sultan. Lepsius's description sounds quite similar to lines from the account of Browne or Nachtigal: "Black slave girls in light white dresses, which are fastened round the hips, and drawn over the bosom and shoulders, handed the refreshments...." When the royal lady herself came out, her female entourage followed, "eight or ten girls in white dresses, bordered with red, and [wearing] ornamental sandals....<sup>184</sup>"

Junker comes closest to recognizing the social function of this brand of slave use in describing the head shaykh of the Shukriya, a man named 'Awad al-Karim. "As became his exalted station, Awad was surrounded by a numerous following of chiefs, officials, and courtiers, while a whole troop of negro slaves were at hand to obey his every behest<sup>185</sup>." Presumably it was slave labour which maintained his wealth in cultivated fields and date palms as well.

Ostentation in the use of slaves was critical, as Junker suggests, to prove the exalted station of rich and powerful men and women. Secreting one's wealth and projecting a modest front were not acceptable social avenues for the rich. Flagrant display, involving the use of slaves for

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<sup>182</sup> S. Hillelson, "Tabaqat Wad Dayf Allah: Studies in the Lives of the Scholars and Saints," Sudan Notes and Records, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1923, pp. 213, 229-30.

<sup>183</sup> Taylor (1854), p. 295.

<sup>184</sup> Lepsius (1853), p. 179.

<sup>185</sup> Junker (1890), p. 163.

luxury or prestige purposes, enabled an individual to gain social respect and honour. Even the ascetic Sufi holy man Shaykh Hasan ibn Hassuna played the game by the rules, engaging in the ostentatious use of hundreds of slaves as proof of his beneficence and charity, while just as flagrantly subsisting on crumbs to prove his own piety.

Not only mighty sultans and revered holy men sought to enhance their glory by slave-owning. Slave-owners exploited the prestige-enhancing use of slaves as much as their means allowed them.

One main route leading to the luxury use of slave labour involved hair-dressing. The great appeal of this practice rested in the fact that after slaves lavished vast amounts of time on an owner's head of hair, the resultant coiffure stood as a symbol, indeed a beacon, announcing the bearer's access to the time-consuming and sumptuous application of slave labour.

The American G.B. English noted the social importance of the coiffure while travelling with a caravan near Berber at the time of the 1820-21 Turco-Egyptian conquest. He observed two men bustling around the caravan guide. "They were a long time engaged in frizzing and plaiting his hair, and finished the operation by pouring over it a bowlful of melted mutton suet, which made his hair quite white. I asked for the meaning of this operation at this time; they told me that we should be at the river tomorrow morning, and that our guide was adorning himself to see and salute his friends there<sup>186</sup>."

About a decade later, someone informed the archaeologist Hoskins that the elaborate coiffure of the Shendi melek's [petty chief's] wife took nine hours for her slaves to arrange. (This lady was also the daughter of the former Shendi leader, Mekk Nimr, the man responsible for killing Isma'il Pasha, Muhammad 'Ali's son who had headed the 1820 conquest.) Hoskins,

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<sup>186</sup> G.B. English, A Narrative of the Expedition to Dongola and Sennaar (London: John Murray, 1822), p. 224.

too, saw twenty of this lady's slaves grinding spices for an ointment to rub into her hair and skin<sup>187</sup>.

The desirability of lavishing attention on hair, on the part of all able slave-owners, comes through in a comment by Schweinfurth. He says of slavery in the Red Sea port town of Suakin, "Black female slaves, instead of asses, which in Suakin would cost too much to feed, are indispensable to [the free residents] for carrying water from the well to the town. Whoever possesses fifty dollars in his bag and has one slave besides his water-bearer, is quite a magnate, and spends much labour in the profuse adornment of his hair<sup>188</sup>." That is, although having a slave who could perform the critical but highly strenuous task of water-fetching was first priority, adorning the hair came in as a close second--for the latter certainly proved how much of a "magnate" a particular slave-owner was.

The sheer decadence of such slave-owning (that is, from the modern reader's perspective) comes across in the following detailed description of the toilette of a Baqqara Arab shaykh's wife, provided in Pallme's account on Kordofan.

The lady sat on an angareb (bedstead), surrounded by a number of young and beautiful negro girls, upon each of which a particular duty was incumbent. The one fanned away the flies with a handful of the most beautiful ostrich feathers, whilst the others arranged her hair, an occupation requiring several hours for its performance; for it is no easy task to open all the various matted curls with a single pointed wooden peg. A third slave washed her feet, a fourth ground sulphur to a powder between two stones. Another slave held a gourd, filled with merissa, in her hand, to offer her mistress a cooling draught whenever she might demand it; while another girl held a cup, containing more than one pound of melted butter, which was poured over the lady's head as soon as the hair was undone. All the butter that dropped off

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<sup>187</sup> G.A. Hoskins, Travels in Ethiopia, anove the Second Cataract of the Nile (London: Longman, Rees, et al, 1835), pp. 124, 125.

<sup>188</sup> Schweinfurth, Vol. 1 (1873), p. 29.

her hair onto her back was rubbed in over her whole body by an additional attendant<sup>189</sup>.

Obviously, owning so many slaves to perform luxury services at this level must have been rather exceptional, even within northern Sudanese society. On however small or large a scale, though, elaborate hair-styling, the result of slave labour, no doubt served as a common symbol of leisure, luxury, and affluence in the northern Sudan.

### Striving for Idleness

Ultimately, the quality for which most northern Sudanese were striving was idleness. Personal idleness indicated that a man (or woman) was successful and affluent enough not to toil for subsistence. Thus the cultivation of idleness, perceived as a noble trait, became the aim of all who could afford it.

Although the following quotation by Burckhardt has appeared in the previous chapter as an example of the discrepancy between the labour intensity of men and women, it deserves mention again for the insights it casts onto the appeal of idleness. Burckhardt wrote of the Hadendowa who inhabited the Red Sea hills: "The Hadendowa are very indolent; the business of the house is left to the wives and slaves, while the men pass the day either in paying an idle visit to some neighbouring encampment, or at home reclined upon the Angareyg [angareb, bedstead], smoking their pipes, and generally going drunk to bed in the evening<sup>190</sup>."

Ignatius Pallme encountered these attitudes and values while visiting Kordofan. He wrote, "Every man, be his means ever so small, endeavours

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<sup>189</sup> Pallme (1844), pp. 124-25.

<sup>190</sup> Burckhardt (1819), p. 394.

to purchase a slave, and this poor wretch must then do all the work, in order that his master may lie all day in the shade, indulging in idleness<sup>191</sup>."

Prout's verdict on the idleness--or as he saw it, plain laziness, of the Kordofanians was much harsher than Pallme's. Based on his 1874 government-sponsored mission, he wrote,

Passing through the country, one is constantly struck by the few people seen in the fields, and the proportionately greater number of men seen sunning themselves in the villages. Many illustrations of their laziness and unthrift, may be seen in the market-place of El Obeiyad [sic]. Here, a man will sit all day, and haggle over his bundle of dried grass, and carry it off at night, unsold, when he knows, that if he were to sell it for the price offered, he could get another, for the mere trouble of gathering it. This stupid indolence, pervades their whole lives. It is next to impossible to hire laborers. Neither money nor food, will tempt them to work. Only the lash of necessity will stir them from their sloth<sup>192</sup>.

An ocean divided the work ethic espoused by the American, Major Prout, and the idleness or leisure ethic valued by the natives of Kordofan.

Sonnini, who had travelled in Egypt in the 1760's, illustrated this great gap in social values with wit. He said,

The Orientalists [sic], who are not under the necessity of labouring, remain almost always in a sitting posture...; they never walk, unless they are obliged to do so.... They have no idea of taking a walk.... It is a great curiosity to observe their looks, as they contemplate an European walking backward and forward, in his chamber, or in the open air, re-treading continually the self-same steps which he had trodden before. It is impossible for them to comprehend the meaning of that coming and going, without any apparent object, and which they consider as an act of folly. The more sensible among them conceive it to be a prescription of our physicians that sets us a-walking about in this manner, in order to take an exercise necessary to the cure of some

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<sup>191</sup> Pallme (1844), pp. 58-59.

<sup>192</sup> Prout (1877), pp. 38-39.

disorder. The negroes in Africa, have a similar idea of this practice....<sup>193</sup>

Sonnini's observation is so valuable in that it tries to give an idea of the idle man's outlook on the apparently ludicrous, superfluous hustle and bustle of the European.

Northern Sudanese society's admiration for idleness was not an anomaly limited to that region. Many writers on slavery, covering a variety of cultures throughout the world, have discussed this resurfacing theme, emphasizing not only the appeal of idleness for slave-owners, but the appeal of relative idleness or unproductivity for slaves themselves. In a comparative study of African and Asian slavery systems, for example, Watson has written, "By supporting slaves who might be less productive than hired workers, the masters are, in effect, displaying their wealth for all to see<sup>194</sup>." What the anthropologist Siegel wrote about the kings of Dahomey applies to the petty chiefs and powerful merchants or holy men in the northern Sudan as well. He said, "Political rank had constantly to be justified by concomitant renewal and increase of social prestige through the accumulation and regular display of articles of wealth<sup>195</sup>." In both societies, these articles of wealth were inevitably slaves.

Equally applicable to the Sudanese case is Shepherd's observation on idleness among owners and their slaves on the Comoros Islands, a trading outpost in the waters east of Madagascar, which, like the Sudan, had a mixed Arab/African population. Shepherd writes, "Arabs, Swahilis, and Comorians concurred in finding a man who did no manual work (because he could afford slaves) superior to a man who did. What is more, the ideal was apparently to own so many slaves that they were idle much of the time,

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<sup>193</sup> Charles Nicolas Sigisbert Sonnini de Manoncourt, Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt: Undertaken by Order of the Old Government of France, Trans. from the French by Henry Hunter, Vol. 1 (London: J. Stockdale, 1799), pp. 246-47.

<sup>194</sup> James L. Watson, "Slavery as an Institution: Open and Closed Systems," Asian and African Systems of Slavery, Ed. James L. Watson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 8.

<sup>195</sup> Siegel (1945/1975), p. 374.

too. One of the important ways of rating a man was to observe how many dependents--kin, clients, or slaves--he could afford to support....<sup>196</sup>"

It would be wrong, however, to reject the prestige uses of slaves as forms of slave labour. Writing on "unproductive" labour, Watson says, "The coercive element is no less real in this form of slavery than it is in any 'productive' system; even slaves who are little more than status symbols are expected to perform some type of service, if only to stand in hallways. The exhibition of idleness may be the slave's only real duty but this has to be extracted like any other service<sup>197</sup>." Hairdressers, eunuchs bodyguards, and train-bearers sweated a lot less than water-carriers, well-diggers, and grain-grinders, but they were all equally slaves doing slave labour.

### The Idleness Ethic and Post-Abolition Attitudes

Only by understanding the importance of slaves as critical enhancers of social standing and as power indicators, can one fathom the deep sense of loss which many northern Sudanese felt as abolition attempts jeopardized this human commodity. Slaves were virtually the only way to earn prestige. They provided the major route to social differentiation, pushing their owners up a few rungs on the social ladder in accordance with their numbers<sup>198</sup>. Davis makes the following comment in regard to medieval Mediterranean society, yet it is as applicable to the nineteenth-century Sudan: "...the demand for slaves reflected a world in which there were few purchasable commodities that signified private wealth, leisure, and power<sup>199</sup>."

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<sup>196</sup> Shepherd (1980), pp. 84-85.

<sup>197</sup> Watson (1980), p. 8.

<sup>198</sup> Patterson has made a similar point. "In many primitive societies where there was little differentiation in the possession of wealth, slaves were usually the major (sometimes the only) form of wealth that made such differentiation possible" (Patterson [1982], p. 33).

<sup>199</sup> Davis (1984), p. 28.

Any suggestion that the post-abolition slave exodus triggered the Sudan's agricultural slump is both misleading and simplistic. Years of war during the Mahdiya, the result of both internal strife and external battles with British, Egyptian, Abyssinian, and even Italian forces, ravaged the population--with the population of North and South dipping from an estimated 8.5 million at the start of the Mahdiya to 1.75 million by the end. Adding to the sheer drop in population figures were a host of epidemics that left death and desolation in their trail<sup>200</sup>. Men and women, slave and free, died by the thousands, and this made the task of post-Mahdiya reconstruction more difficult in the agricultural sector. Labour shortages should have come as no great surprise.

Concerns over agricultural production were genuine: Hargey notes, "With thousands of slaves abandoning their impoverished masters, food supplies dipped to dangerously low levels by 1900<sup>201</sup>." The burden of blame does not rest solely on the slaves, however. Part of the problem was that the slave-owning classes, though faced with the prospect of slavelessness, remained reluctant to work the land themselves. Thus they exacerbated their own labour shortages--though few sources dare to point the finger of blame at this sector.

For a while, at least, owners contrived to keep their slaves on the land and under their control, or managed to get hold of a few new slaves through the flourishing underground slave traffic<sup>202</sup>. Some were lucky enough to have access to the cheap labour of the West African migrants, called the "Fellata." Many of these people had journeyed into the Sudan as pilgrims on their route to Mecca, though large numbers settled down

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<sup>200</sup> On these population losses, see Sudan Government, "Statistics of Population in the Sudan," Reports on the Finances, Administration and Condition of the Sudan: 1903, pp. xii-xiii; Peter F.M. McLoughlin, "A Note on the Reliability of the Earliest Sudan Republic Population Estimates," Population Review, Vol. 7, 1963, p. 55; and SAD 400/8/6: Ryder Memoirs, "Destruction under the Mahdists." It is difficult to determine the extent to which these figures have swelled through anti-Mahdist propaganda.

<sup>201</sup> Hargey (1981), p. 107.

<sup>202</sup> Hargey (1981), p. 111.

permanently, and formed a critical class of unskilled labour in the Sudan<sup>203</sup>.

Eventually, many families resorted to having their own children do the agricultural work--even if that meant pulling them out of school before they completed their studies<sup>204</sup>. This scenario prompted one official to note in 1907, "The new generation promises, so far as the riverain population is concerned, to be a better race than their fathers, as, whether the parents work or no, the whole of the children have to work," starting around the age of four. He goes on to explain that many of the men in the region formerly owned from twenty to two hundred slaves, but suffered badly when many of these slaves ran away after the 1898 Anglo-Egyptian "reconquest." He continued, "Now they are better off; they decline to work, but they make their children work. On the estate of the Sudan Plantation Syndicate there are generally at least 100 children working, while their fathers recline leisurely at home dressed in fine raiment. I have reprovved them for turning their children into slaves, but without much result<sup>205</sup>." As this excerpt shows, many tried to follow old customs of the leisure and idleness ethic in spite of the staggering social changes caused by abolition.

### Conclusion

Arguably, many slaves absorbed some of the social values of their owners, and thus came to revere idleness as well. By labelling many slaves and ex-slaves as lazy pleasure-seekers, travellers and administrators alike missed the point<sup>206</sup>. They failed to see that the servile classes were

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<sup>203</sup> "Memorandum from Lieutenant Sir R. Wingate to Sir Eldon Gorst," in Sudan Government, Reports on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan: 1909, pp. 54-55.

<sup>204</sup> McLoughlin (1962), p. 373.

<sup>205</sup> "Annual Report, Berber Province," in Sudan Government, Reports on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan: 1907, p. 190.

<sup>206</sup> See SAD 270/1/99-100: F.R. Wingate. Slatin to the Sirdar, Cairo, 27 January 1900; and Sudan Government, "The Vagabonds Ordinance, 1905: An Ordinance for More Effectually Dealing with Idle

emulating the leisured lifestyle of the community which had enslaved them. They, too, wanted to lounge around for all the world to see.

The reliance of the free northern Sudanese population, rich and humble alike, upon slaves for farming, tending livestock, cooking, child-minding, or even for arranging their hair and serving their guests was indeed great. Yet partially their reliance was so heavy because the idea of doing "slave" work galled Sudanese slave-owners so thoroughly<sup>207</sup>. Baqqara Arab cattle nomads, Nile farmers, and urban Khartoum merchants alike undoubtedly felt a tremendous jolt at the mere thought of abolition. Picking up a hoe, herding some cattle, or fetching a cup of water--basically, doing any of the degrading, mundane work associated with slaves or catering to their own minimal subsistence needs--would have symbolized a blot on their social prestige. What ultimately worried slave-owners about abolition was not only the prospect of labour shortages but also, and more significantly, the threat to personal honour that slavelessness would pose.

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Persons and Vagabonds," The Sudan Government Gazette, 1905, pp. 374-76. The Vagabonds Ordinance was directed at slaves and ex-slaves.

<sup>207</sup> For a parallel with the attitudes of Ethiopian (Abyssinian) slave-owners towards manual labour, see Richard Pankhurst, "The Ethiopian Slave Trade in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: A Statistical Enquiry," Journal of Semitic Studies, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1964, pp. 220-21.

## Chapter 6:

### **The Treatment of Slaves**

Anti-slavery circles in Britain had their eye on the Sudan as early as the 1830's, though the region only attracted widespread attention after the mid-1860's. By that time it had become highly fashionable in European circles to condemn the evils of slavery. However, the odd situation arose whereby many of the same observers who vilified slavery in the Sudan and Egypt simultaneously praised it for its benevolence.

In light of these conflicting reports, one question begs to be asked: how harsh or mild was domestic slavery in the Sudan after all? This chapter deals with the treatment of slaves in the Sudan, and unearths some of the observations and incidents which fueled such contradictory stories.

#### The Benevolence of Slave Treatment

It is an indisputable fact that the Quran and Islamic jurisprudence set very high standards for the treatment of slaves which reflected great concern for their well-being. These rulings exhorted owners to clothe and feed their slaves adequately, to give them medical attention when necessary, and to care for them in their old age. At the same time they emphasized that the slave was spiritually equal to the free in the eyes of God, and they at all times encouraged manumission as a pious act<sup>208</sup>.

Many good Muslims heeded these exhortations and treated their slaves very well indeed. Instances of kind treatment were so common that they impressed many Europeans deeply. Baedeker's 1908 tourist guide for Egypt and the Sudan, for example, advised travellers on the status of the "Sudan Negroes" in Egypt by saying, "Most of the older negroes and

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<sup>208</sup> Lewis (1990), pp. 7-8; Brunschwig (1960), p. 25; Quran iv:92, v:92, lviii:3, ii:77; xc:13, ix:60.

negresses with whom the traveller meets have originally been brought to Egypt as slaves, and belong to natives, by whom they are treated more like members of the family than like servants<sup>209</sup>."

Other examples of good treatment dot the pages of the primary and secondary source literature. E.W. Lane no doubt helped to shape the positive impressions on Islamic slavery when he wrote about Egypt that it was "considered disgraceful for [the master] to sell a slave who has been long in his possession<sup>210</sup>." Burckhardt relates another example which shows how kind owners could be in the Sudan. One day he sought lodging in a house but found it unavailable, the Mekk of Shendi having sealed it off for one of his Abyssinian slave women, whom he had inoculated against small-pox. It is obvious that he inoculated her not simply for the sake of protecting his human investment, but out of genuine concern: he went to the trouble of placing her in the house courtyard so that she could "pass the time of her illness in an open, airy, and insulated place<sup>211</sup>." Babikr Bedri must have been good to his slaves, too, since he claims that one old woman, Umm Na'im, whom he had bought for his wife, lived to the ripe old age of 130 (Umm Na'im had said that she was older than Sultan Husayn of Dar Fur [crowned 1838] and she died in 1939)<sup>212</sup>! Whatever her true age at death, she must have been very old indeed.

Browne wrote that a discontented slave in Egypt had the right to demand his master to sell him<sup>213</sup>; Burckhardt had heard the same rumour not only about Egypt, but about Arabia as well<sup>214</sup>. The rumour clearly had grounding in fact in regard to areas of the Bilad al-Sudan. Recalling his

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<sup>209</sup> G. Schweinfurth, "Origin and Present Condition of the Egyptians," in Karl Baedeker, Egypt and the Sudan: Handbook for Travellers, 6th edition (Leipzig: Karl Baedeker, Publisher, 1908), p. xlii.

<sup>210</sup> Edward William Lane, Arabian Society in the Middle Ages: Studies from The Thousand and One Nights, Ed. Stanley Lane-Poole, Intro. C.E. Bosworth (London: Curzon Press, 1987 [original text published 1883]), p. 254.

<sup>211</sup> Burckhardt (1819), p. 277.

<sup>212</sup> Bedri, Vol. 1 (1969), p. 156.

<sup>213</sup> Browne (1799), p. 48.

<sup>214</sup> Burckhardt (1819), p. 342.

early days as a petty trader in the Wadai-Dar Fur area, Yunus Bedis says, "[Once] I sold my goods for ostrich feathers and ivory, a slave and a slave girl. I bought the girl from the Sultan's gunsmith, a man called Mohammed Mendarani who had got her from the Sultan of the Fur as a reward for repairing some guns. Mohammed had quarreled with the woman--the woman said 'Sell me' and he swore to sell her<sup>215</sup>." His anecdote shows that slaves could have rights, and that they could have some say in shaping their own future.

It is difficult to say how many slave-owners in the Sudan satisfied the Prophet's injunctions regarding the kind treatment of slaves. But certainly Musa Bedri, the brother of Babikr Bedri and a fellow religious scholar, put his high ideals into action. Musa arguably represents the model of the selfless and utterly benevolent slave-owner. Babikr wrote of one occasion:

I told Musa that I was hungry, and he bought some provisions for us, leaving himself enough money to get us to Khartoum. During this journey I realized that my brother (with whom be God's mercy) was more generous than I. This was when we reached the village of al-Jadid, and found millet-bread for sale in the market. We were very hungry, and Musa spent the whole of what he had left on a little of it, and gave the two slaves a share of it equal to the share he left for us, while I thought that we should have more than the slaves. Then a beggar came along, and I thought that we might give him a little of the food, and make up the rest with kind words, but what must Musa do but invite him to sit and share the meal with us. Then I felt mean, and admired my brother greatly<sup>216</sup>.

If all slave-owners had been like Musa Bedri, the abolitionists would have had much less fuel with which to feed their anti-slavery crusade.

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<sup>215</sup> Bedis and Bramley (1940), p. 176.

<sup>216</sup> Bedri, Vol.1 (1969), p. 41.

## The Benevolence of Enslavement?

In fact, anti-slavery circles had plenty of horror stories to use as ideological ammunition. For although there may have been such a thing as a benevolent form of domestic slavery, there was no such thing as a benevolent form of the slave raid or the slave march. The details of the raids and marches need no sensationalizing. They were bloody and brutal; they left deep scars on individuals as well as on entire communities.

In late 1838 and early 1839, the Bohemian traveller Ignatius Pallme accompanied a slave-raiding expedition to the Nuba Mountains, the purpose of the expedition being to satisfy Muhammad Ali's order for 4,000 slaves from Kordofan for that year alone. Pallme wrote at length on what he witnessed. He describes how some avoided enslavement by mass suicide, or by remaining in their blockaded villages until they died of starvation or thirst; he gives details of the carnage involved when the men and women of a village chose to fight rather than surrender; he mentions the plunder and seizure of the local harvests which left the survivors destitute; and he emphasizes the psychological trauma resulting from families wrenched apart<sup>217</sup>.

Surviving the raid was no guarantee for surviving the march. Fatigue, thirst, hunger, and disease claimed many lives. In the late 1860's, Schweinfurth spent time in the zariba zone of the southern Sudan. He noted that the territories surrounding one zariba were scattered with the bones of the Dinka who had dropped by the dozens from starvation during the march<sup>218</sup>. On the raid which Pallme witnessed, over ten percent died en route from the Nuba Mountains to El Obeid alone<sup>219</sup>. Many faced even

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<sup>217</sup> Pallme (1844), pp. 305-44. The raids sponsored by the Kayra sultans of Dar Fur had different tactics and organization but no doubt left behind a similar train of violence. Regarding the Dar Fur raids, see R.S. O'Fahey, "Slavery and the Slave Trade in Dar Fur," Journal of African History, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1973, pp. 29-43 (esp. pp. 31-37).

<sup>218</sup> Schweinfurth, Vol. 1 (1873), p. 346.

<sup>219</sup> Pallme (1844), p. 324.

longer marches ahead of them, if they were destined for markets in Khartoum or perhaps Cairo<sup>220</sup>.

Cordell has estimated an overall slave march death toll in Dar al-Kuti, a satellite sultanate of the larger Dar Fur and Wadai sultanates (and now in the Central African Republic), at between 37% and 87%<sup>221</sup>. Indeed, this estimate correlates with one presented by Bowring in an 1840 Parliamentary address. Referring to the raids which targetted the southern Sudan, Bowring proposed a death toll of 30% for the first ten days after capture alone<sup>222</sup>.

Adding to the misery of the slaves on the march was the wooden yoke that many men had to drag as they plodded along. It shocked several travellers deeply. The archaeologist Hoskins passed a slave march near Handak, en route to Cairo, and later wrote,

The manner in which they were clogged, to prevent their escaping or rebelling against their owners, was disgraceful in the extreme. Each slave wore a clog made of a wooden pole, four feet long, with a collar, or a triangular form, large enough to admit his head: this triangular collar rests upon their shoulders, and is so contrived with straps that it is impossible for them to throw it off. When they walk, they are obliged to carry it before them<sup>223</sup>; and at night their hands are tied to the centre of the pole, and their feet to the bottom of it. The owners of the slaves showed me, with the malicious grin of fiends, the effect of the cords, and the weight of the machine on the hands, necks, and legs of their victims. They confessed that they were often obliged to free their slaves entirely from this torture, in order to preserve their lives: I saw several in this situation....<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Melly encountered a ragged group that had marched from Dar Fur to Asyut, whose numbers had been depleted through death from fatigue (Melly, Vol. 1 [1851], p. 138).

<sup>221</sup> Cordell (1985), p. 110.

<sup>222</sup> Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, No. 21, 1840, p. 84.

<sup>223</sup> That is, the man in front shoulders the log of the man behind him in order to ease the burden, so that the yoked slaves walk single file.

<sup>224</sup> Hoskins (1835), pp. 172-73.

Boys from ten to fifteen years old, who could not carry the yoke, were handcuffed together by wooden manacles. It churned Pallme's stomach to see the necks of the yoked men and the wrists of the manacled boys rubbed raw by friction until severe infections developed; indeed, death occasionally resulted from the infections, or at times a youth lost a hand to gangrene<sup>225</sup>. Though the traders did not bind the women, females suffered as much as males. It was the women's responsibility to carry their children when they fell by the wayside, or to hold up an older male relative if he began to sink under the weight of the yoke.

Salim Wilson's description of his own enslavement (circa 1870) shows that these European travellers were right on target in characterizing the brutality of the raid. Through his eyes one may envision the slaughter, rape, pillaging, and trauma that the raid brought in its train. He affirms stories of the agony which the slave yoke inflicted; he relates how the women sagged under the weight of the plundered goods which they were forced to carry on the march. He, too, refers to the human bones which littered their path. He speaks of one woman, for instance, who was marching far too slowly to suit the slavers; they grabbed her baby off her back, slit its throat, and cast it aside. The next day the woman went stark raving mad and began foaming at the mouth, so the raiders simply bound her to a stake at the roadside and left her to die<sup>226</sup>.

For many, prospects brightened somewhat after they survived the gauntlet of the march. To increase the salability of their human merchandise, traders often exchanged the slaves' rags for a new set of clothing and insured that they appeared in the slave-market washed and clean. Travelling around Dar Fur in the early 1870's, Nachtigal saw a group of slaves being transported from Kobbe to El Fasher for sale: "The

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<sup>225</sup> Pallme (1844), pp. 321-22, 337. See also Richard Hill, "An Unpublished Chronicle of the Sudan, 1822-41," Sudan Notes and Records, Vol. 37, 1956, pp. 11-12.

<sup>226</sup> Wilson (193-?), pp. 99, 102-3, 105, 109.

slaves had new clothes, and their hair was arranged in favourite Darfur style, in small short plaits, joined together at both sides, as well as at the back of the head, so that they formed a coil, and had red clay, butter, cloves, mahaleb, and the like thoroughly rubbed into them. The slaves were carried two on one camel<sup>227</sup>."

Not all slaves enjoyed such good treatment after the march. Observing from Khartoum in the late 1870's, Junker remarked,

About the beginning of June another steamer arrived from the Upper Nile with more Shilluk captives, who were all landed stark naked and chained together in couples. After a bath in the Nile they received some clothing, and many of the younger victims, separately shackled, were then employed on the various public works in Khartoum. The heavy iron rings on their feet caused painful sores, and it was a pitiful sight to witness the efforts of the unhappy victims to ease the friction by inserting bits of soft rags and the like between the cruel iron and the leg. One would scarcely believe to what a wretched plight these poor devils were reduced--mere bundles of bones with scarcely the semblance of human beings<sup>228</sup>.

The benignity of slavery in the Sudan comes into question when one considers the brute force and destruction that provided the backdrop for the institution.

The comforts and benefits of slave-owning which most northern Sudanese began to experience in the nineteenth century coincided with the devastation, depopulation, and impoverishment of the South. The enslavement process altered the ethnic map of the northern Sudan's southward perimeters, as the remnants of entire communities migrated, or rather fled, to escape the raiders. Such was the fate of the Binga, Yulu, Kara, and Kreish peoples, among others, who darted south, southwest, and

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<sup>227</sup> Nachtigal, Vol. 4 (1889/1971), p. 256.

<sup>228</sup> Junker (1890), p. 199.

even back east to escape the raids<sup>229</sup>. Abandoned villages and neglected fields created scenes of desolation throughout the southern Sudan. Schweinfurth noticed the devastation wrought on the Bongo people in particular: targeted for raids, plundered of their harvests and livestock, they had given up on cultivation and animal husbandry. They tottered on the brink of famine and relied on edible tubers and wild fruits to stave off hunger<sup>230</sup>.

The demographic effects were equally pronounced. The slave raid/trade process devastated the male population in particular. Wilson wrote that of a force of 400 of the best [male] Dinka warriors sent out to defend their villages against the Arabs, only fifty returned, and most of them were wounded<sup>231</sup>. As Cordell points out, the slaving tactics in Dar al-Kuti were very similar. He says that "in several instances the entire male population of a village was bound and burned in piles of grass or severely mutilated and then slaughtered<sup>232</sup>." The fact that so many men died in defending their villages against raiders, and that so many of the men who were captured were enlisted into the army, meant that the gender balance of domestic slaves tilted heavily towards women. Indeed, the population of the Sudan as a whole, slave and free, remained predominantly female into the twentieth century<sup>233</sup>--with the estimated 400,000 residents of Omdurman, for example, having been described as mainly female by 1884, largely as a result of the loss of men to war<sup>234</sup>.

Some populations, such as the Azande, were so badly traumatized by the terror and warfare which the raiders/traders inflicted prior to the turn of

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<sup>229</sup> This is a recurring theme in Cordell's Dar al-Kuti and the Last Years of the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade (1985). See also Sikainga (1989), pp. 75-77.

<sup>230</sup> Schweinfurth, Vol. 1 (1873), pp. 355-56.

<sup>231</sup> Wilson (193-?), p. 71.

<sup>232</sup> Cordell (1985), pp. 109-11.

<sup>233</sup> McLoughlin, (1963), p. 54.

<sup>234</sup> SAD 452/302: R. von Slatin. Confidential: General Report on the Egyptian Sudan, March 1895, compiled from statements made by Slatin Pasha; and [Captain Count] Gleichen, Confidential Report on the Nile and Country between Dongola, Suakin, Kassala, and Omdurman: 1897 (London: War Office, 1897), p. 81.

the century that they were still not replenishing their numbers as late as 1956, the year of the first census<sup>235</sup>. The same can no doubt be said of other ethnic groups, too. As of 1987, for example, only 5,000 to 10,000 Bongo-speakers were believed to exist<sup>236</sup>.

It is indisputable that slave-raiding was one factor, in addition to disease and warfare, which caused the population of the Sudan to plummet drastically in the nineteenth century--though how drastically it is difficult to gauge. No reliable statistics are available. Still, according to one estimate, at the start of the Mahdist period alone (circa 1881), for example, there were 8.5 million people in the northern and southern regions, roughly defined, while by the end of the period (1898) there were a mere 1.75 million<sup>237</sup>.

The main platform of anti-slavery sentiment towards the Sudan came from the evils of the raid and march. McCoan, for example, said in 1877 that "the sufferings and consequent mortality of the victims before they reach the Nile are very great, and form, indeed, the main argument against an institution which, however mild in its subsequent working, is condemned in advance by these antecedent horrors<sup>238</sup>." 'Abbas Ibrahim Muhammad 'Ali likewise condemns the raids, and argues that they had no grounding in Islamic law. He writes, "The raids were in direct contravention of the precepts of Islam. No Islamic law has authorized making war for the purpose of capturing slaves, which was really the aim of the ghazwas [raids]. The 'Turkish' Governor who gloried in slave-raiding was no more a representative of Islam than the Sudanese who kidnapped or purchased his fellow Sudanese<sup>239</sup>."

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<sup>235</sup> McLoughlin (1963), pp. 54-55.

<sup>236</sup> William Bright, Editor. International Encyclopedia of Linguistics, Vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 251.

<sup>237</sup> SAD 400/8/6: Ryder Memoirs--Portion Concerning Sudan, 1905-16: Destruction under the Mahdists.

<sup>238</sup> McCoan (1877), p. 568.

<sup>239</sup> 'Abbas Ibrahim Muhammad 'Ali (1972), pp. 67-69.

Nevertheless, many found it easy to jump from condemning the enslavement process to praising the kind and generous treatment of slave-owners towards their slaves. 'Abbas Ibrahim Muhammad 'Ali makes this quantum leap. He claims that a slave in the Sudan "was above all a human being, a member of a society or a family," and he argues that the level of treatment was so high that "by the standards of western slavery, most slaves, if not all, in the Sudan who were categorized by European visitors as slaves were not slaves<sup>240</sup>."

### The Malevolence of Slavery

The standards were not as uniformly high as 'Abbas Ibrahim Muhammad 'Ali would like to believe, for Sudanese slavery did not operate in a Quranic utopia. The travellers who noted exemplary treatment towards slaves also observed instances of abuse and neglect. They saw that some owners savoured the power they had over their human property and used it for bad ends. Discussion will now turn towards the cases of ill-treatment towards slaves which visitors frequently observed.

Certainly the fetters and chains that burdened so many slaves even after their purchase did nothing to make them feel like new members of the family. Burckhardt commented that adult male slaves wore fetters until they became accustomed to their slave status<sup>241</sup>. As mentioned above, Junker saw a group of newly-arrived Shilluk slaves in Khartoum, labouring with chains around their ankles, and suffering from the sores that the chains inflicted<sup>242</sup>. Pallme provides the best description of the fetters worn by male slaves in Kordofan. "These fetters...consist of rings round both ankles, kept asunder by an iron bar, attached to the rings round the ankles

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<sup>240</sup> 'Abbas Ibrahim Muhammad 'Ali (1972), pp. 74-6.

<sup>241</sup> Burckhardt (1819), p. 335.

<sup>242</sup> Junker (1890), p. 199.

by two smaller rings. Thus the slave can make but one pace at a time, and never approximate his two feet<sup>243</sup>."

The obvious motive for keeping the slaves in fetters was to prevent them from running away. Slaves in Kordofan, in particular, stood a good chance of running away, since many remained relatively close to their native Nuba Mountains. Pallme met one man who had urinated on his fetters over the course of fourteen months; when the iron finally corroded and softened, he had made his escape, only to be recaptured<sup>244</sup>. A good number of slaves must have escaped successfully, for Holroyd noted the existence of a maroon community in a chain of hills only one day's journey from El Obeid<sup>245</sup>. In any case, once owners began to trust their slaves, presumably in a few years, they removed the fetters.

Though Islamic law discouraged masters from breaking up families by sale, and custom frowned upon masters who sold loyal slaves who had been long in their possession, both at times occurred. Kapteijns says that the sale of second generation slaves and the separation of mothers and children were quite common in Dar Masalit, despite the fact that both practices met with social disapproval<sup>246</sup>.

Some owners obviously felt no guilt about ignoring the upkeep of slaves in old age, and did anything to shirk their responsibilities. While passing through a village outside of Khartoum in 1862, Henry Dufton met a local resident who tried to sell him an aged, frail donkey--a "lemon," so to speak. Dufton, who turned his offer down, wrote, "He then offered me an old female slave, in constitution very much like his donkey. He asked one pound for her, which, were it not that the poor creature was minus teeth, and had one foot in the grave, was perhaps not dear<sup>247</sup>."

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<sup>243</sup> Pallme (1844), pp. 110-12.

<sup>244</sup> Pallme (1844), pp. 111-12.

<sup>245</sup> Holroyd (1839), p. 180.

<sup>246</sup> Kapteijns (1984), p. 112.

<sup>247</sup> Henry Dufton, Narrative of a Journey through Abyssinia in 1862-3 (Westport, Connecticut: Negro Universities Press, 1970 [first published 1867]), pp. 3-4.

While serving as agricultural inspector in Berber, P.R.W. Diggle came across so many cases of gross neglect that he finally brought the details to the attention of the League of Nations Slavery Commission in 1923-4<sup>248</sup>. One boy came to him to plead for his elderly father who was very ill and who had been neglected for months by his master; Diggle went to see the slave, and found him malnourished and covered with sores. Another old slave woman, who was too old to work, complained that her owner was starving her: "It was obvious, for her ribs were sticking out everywhere and she was practically naked." Many other cases came to Diggle's attention as well<sup>249</sup>.

Tayeb Salih's novella, The Wedding of Zein, contains a veritable cast of characters who had continued to serve their masters loyally despite the 1899 abolition but who found themselves discarded in their old age. Such was the case with Mousa the Lame. Mousa's original master had been very good to him, treating him like a member of the family. But then his master died, and left Mousa to his son, who kicked the aging man out into the streets. "Overtaken by old age, Mousa had found himself destitute, without a family or anyone to look after him. He therefore lived on the fringe of life in the village, just like the old stray dogs that howled in the waste plots of land at night and, harassed by boys, spent their days scavenging hither and thither for food<sup>250</sup>."

One other odd custom prevailed in the first half of the nineteenth century which throws further doubt onto whether the slave was indeed like "a member of the family", and that was the denial of a proper Muslim burial to slaves. Pallme noted that in Kordofan, "as soon as a slave dies, a rope is bound round his foot, by which he is dragged out of the hut with as

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<sup>248</sup> See Daly (1986), p. 444.

<sup>249</sup> Diggle (1925), p. 83.

<sup>250</sup> Tayeb Salih, The Wedding of Zein, Trans. from the Arabic by Denys Johnson-Davies (London: Heinemann, 1968), p. 46. See also Heather J. Sharkey, "The Sudan's Ex-Slaves: A Study of Tayeb Salih's The Wedding of Zein," Sudan Studies, No. 11, January 1992, pp. 18-23.

little ceremony as a dead beast, and scraped into the sand anywhere, or even left to decompose in the grass until the hyenas gnaw his bones in the night; the remains are devoured in the morning by dogs, two or more of which may not unfrequently be seen fighting over a human arm or foot<sup>251</sup>." A few travellers commented on this custom. It disturbed one [unidentified] Italian visitor, who deplored the way that the slaves were treated like base property<sup>252</sup>, just as it disturbed Holroyd in his 1837 wanderings. Holroyd tells us, however, that around the time of his travels, Muhammad Bey, successor to Mustafa Bey as the Turco-Egyptian governor of Kordofan, collected and burnt all the human bones scattered around El Obeid and ordered that, in future, slaves should receive a proper Muslim burial<sup>253</sup>. It is indeed odd that custom denied slaves a proper Muslim burial for so long, considering that slaves owned by Muslims inevitably converted to Islam themselves.

Severely violent behaviour towards slaves was very rare, though not unheard of. Schweinfurth says that he saw one Nubian, that is, a Northern Sudanese zariba soldier, strike a porter until his face streamed with blood simply because the man had broken a common calabash<sup>254</sup>. In his early years as a slave, too, the Dinka, Salim Wilson, suffered at the hands of one abusive master, who goaded, indeed forced him to fight with another boy slave until one fell unconscious. His master relished the sight of this spectator sport. This man also whipped Wilson daily, and fed him little. On one occasion, while out on a hunt, this man flogged him unconscious and left him to die<sup>255</sup>.

Occasionally the violence was so extreme that it did lead to murder. One traveller emphasized the cruelties inflicted on slaves. He wrote,

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<sup>251</sup> Pallme (1844), p. 7.

<sup>252</sup> Hill (1956), p. 12. This Italian wrote his account sometime between 1822 and 1841.

<sup>253</sup> Holroyd (1839), p. 177.

<sup>254</sup> Schweinfurth, Vol. 1 (1873), p. 451.

<sup>255</sup> Wilson (193-?), pp. 162-73, 175.

If anyone kills a slave of his for some alleged shortcoming, he goes unpunished, as the slave is considered as his property. With my own eyes I have been witness. A Turk called Husain Efendi, known as Sakran Daima, which means "always drunk," had already killed several of his slaves, when one evening he beat a girl-slave to death for failing to hear him when he called her. He then had the corpse dragged away and thrown into a hole behind my house. Horror-struck at this I reported him to the governor, but the latter paid no attention and the murderer went unpunished<sup>256</sup>.

Law enforcement officials may have looked away when this Turkish gentleman murdered his slave girl, but Sudanese society as a whole in no way condoned this behaviour.

Desperation occasionally drove people to murder their slaves in the face of anti-slavery measures. Especially after 1899, being caught for slave raiding, trading, or kidnapping with the intent to enslave exposed an individual to serious punishment, which at its mildest might be a hefty prison sentence<sup>257</sup>.

The Legal Secretary's Annual Report for 1904 discusses two of the year's most brutal murders which involved the violation of slavery laws. In the first case, two men persuaded a slave woman named Bakhita, from Kassala, to run away with her two boys, although they actually intended to sell all three of them to nomadic Arabs. Fearing that Bakhita would realize their motive and expose them to officials, the criminals killed her while she slept and stuffed her body down a well. An observant Arab, recognizing the boys and suspecting foul play, reported the men to the local shaykh. The second case involved a little boy named Koko from Kordofan whom a man from Dongola Province had purchased two years before, i.e. three years after abolition. Someone finally reported him to the officials, and his

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<sup>256</sup> Hill (1956), p. 12.

<sup>257</sup> SAD 194/3/186-87: F.R. Wingate. C.E. Wilson to F.R. Wingate, Port Sudan 19 March 1915; and SAD 414/2/3-7: T.R.H. Owen. T.R.H. Owen to his mother, Kosti, 18-19 July 1928.

owner, fearing retribution, tried to "destroy the evidence," so to speak, by killing the boy and burying him in a sand dune. Another one of his slaves turned him in<sup>258</sup>.

There were other ways to "destroy the evidence" in human terms before being caught for slavery violation laws. W.E. Jennings Bramley wrote, "On the shores of the Red Sea an old slave said to me once, 'The only thing we fear in crossing the sea is the wicked boats of your countrymen [the British Slavery Department], for we are put into irons and if one of your boats gives chase we are dropped into the sea in our irons; so that we all offer prayers to God when we reach the shores of Arabia in safety<sup>259</sup>.'"

### Gross Cruelty to Slaves: The European Case

Perhaps the greatest irony regarding the gross ill-treatment of slaves is that the biggest culprits may not have been from amongst the Sudanese slave-owners, but rather from the very small community of Europeans who settled in the Sudan and benefitted from slave-owning themselves. Bizarre though it seems, European circles were the greatest crusaders against the cruelties of slavery, while European circles may also have been the greatest perpetrators of cruelty to slaves; one can only assume that these circles did not overlap.

Taylor refers to the problem of European slave-owners but does not give details. He simply states that while Egyptians rarely maltreated their slaves, European expatriates in the Sudan frequently maltreated them. "The latter became so notorious for their violence that the Government was obliged to establish a law forbidding any Frank to strike his slave, but in

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<sup>258</sup> "Annual Report, Legal Secretary's Department," in Sudan Government, Reports on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan: 1904, pp. 54-55.

<sup>259</sup> Bedis and Bramley (1940), p. 183.

case of disobedience to send him before the Cadi, or Judge, who could decide on the proper punishment<sup>260</sup>."

Pallme makes the point with a few deft strokes. Distinguishing between the quality of slave treatments, he writes,

The natives of Kordofan treat their slaves with much humanity; the Turks, on the other hand, (and I am sorry to say, within the last few years, two Europeans also) are guilty of the greatest cruelty, and are not deterred by qualms of conscience from staining their hands with the blood of these unfortunate beings. Thus, an Italian doctor bound a rope round the neck of his slave and strangled him with his own hands; another medical man, a renegade, castrated his slave with his own razor, for some trifling offence he had been guilty of. The man died of the effects of the operation<sup>261</sup>.

The poor record of the European slave-owners in the region helped (and helps) to make the northern Sudanese slave-owners look highly benign.

An unidentified Italian who wrote a brief chronicle on the Sudan from 1822 to 1841 emphasized the barbaric cruelties of the raids and the frequent abusive behaviour of Sudanese masters towards their slaves. However, he then wrote, "What is particularly amazing is that the Europeans, who are called humane and civilized and who have come to Egypt to civilize a barbarous people, commit the worst atrocities<sup>262</sup>."

He goes on to illustrate his claim with examples. He seems to provide even more details on that same Italian doctor, mentioned by Pallme, who strangled his slave. This writer adds that the slave had first made an unsuccessful attempt to commit suicide, in order to escape his master's daily abuse, by throwing himself down a well. Enraged that his slave would dare to do such a thing, the doctor decided to fulfil the man's death wish by murdering him himself<sup>263</sup>.

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<sup>260</sup> Taylor (1854), p. 390.

<sup>261</sup> Pallme (1844), pp. 113-14.

<sup>262</sup> Hill (1956), p. 12.

<sup>263</sup> Hill (1956), p. 12.

Another Italian, he says, repeatedly beat his slaves on the head with a hammer, burned them with a firebrand, bound them up and left them in the midday sun, or tied them up by their feet and hung them in a tree. A Sardinian not only killed several of his slaves by excessive beating, but also "converted his house into a seraglio." A Corsican, he continues, killed many of his slaves during bouts of rage and buried them in the garden. Some Europeans had pendants for inflicting cruel and unusual punishments on slave criminals. A group of Europeans with a Frenchman at the lead, given the choice of how to punish a slave who had murdered his Greek owner, decided to hang the man alive by means of two hooks stuck into his ribs. When the slave criminal spoke contemptuously in spite of the hooks tearing at his flesh, the Frenchman ordered the Turkish official in charge to cut out the man's tongue, which he did<sup>264</sup>.

Stories of the abusive behaviour of Europeans continued to circulate in the early years of the Condominium. Obviously, laws could abolish slavery, but not attitudes; many Europeans still held slaves and ex-slave elements in contempt. A letter survives in which Wingate, Governor-General of the Sudan, cautions one American-British employer on his behaviour towards his workers at an archaeological dig. The man was Henry Solomon Wellcome, the famous manufacturing chemist and partner of Burroughs and Wellcome, who donated the Wellcome Tropical Research Laboratories at Gordon Memorial College in Khartoum and who engaged in excavations from 1910 to 1914<sup>265</sup>. Because Wellcome was such an important personage, Wingate felt obligated to chide him with exceptional tact. Writing at the behest of the Acting Governor of Sennar Province, who had brought the issue to his attention more than once, Wingate wrote,

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<sup>264</sup> Hill (1956), pp. 13-14.

<sup>265</sup> Richard Hill, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Sudan*, 2nd edition (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1967), pp. 376-77.

I refer to the treatment of your labourers at Gebel Moya and the system of fines and punishments instituted by you. Last year some of your European staff thought fit to make statements imputing to you gross ill-treatment and cruelty to natives. I need hardly say that I never believed for a moment such statements, but the fact remains that rumours of peculiar treatment of natives have been circulated in this country, and it would lead to endless trouble and annoyance if such rumours gained credence further afield<sup>266</sup>.

Not only did Wellcome devise his own system of [what were clearly] bodily punishments, but he also devised his own scheme for holding back the wages of his workers to guarantee their good behaviour--another source of criticism from Wingate. Wellcome's workers were not his slaves, but he obviously felt that he could treat them as if they were.

### Conclusion

The purpose of discussing the varying standards of treatment towards slaves has not been to plead a case for the relative mildness or severity of domestic slavery in the Sudan. The tremendous range of treatments thwarts any such attempt. Complicating the equation further is the European slave-owning factor, to which are attributed many of the grisliest stories on slave abuse.

The essential point of this chapter is the following: domestic slavery in the Sudan was indeed "real" slavery, in every sense of the term, regardless of the treatment which the slave received. The man who belonged to the selfless, munificent Musa Bedri was as much a slave as the little boy Koko who met his death by the sand dune--and as much a slave as the man whom the Italian doctor strangled. They or their forebears came to slavery unwillingly, as the yield of a violent raid--the prospect of being

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<sup>266</sup> SAD 183/3/11-13: F.R. Wingate. Wingate to Wellcome, 1 December 1912.

possibly treated almost like a family member was certainly no incentive in itself<sup>267</sup>. Moreover, all slaves in the Sudan were victims of the same powerlessness. Musa's slave was lucky, while Koko and the doctor's slave were not, but none of them had a say in the treatment they received. Generalizing on the treatment of slaves therefore becomes irrelevant, when each individual slave lived according to the whim of his or her master.

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<sup>267</sup> In many ways, this writer shares the views of Orlando Patterson, who has so clearly expounded his theories on the subject in his Slavery and Social Death (1982).

## Chapter 7:

# **The Slave Psychology: Adaptation and Acculturation**

## Introduction

There are many approaches to the study of slavery in the Sudan, as the extant histories on the subject show. Some have considered it in terms of trade and economy, discussing slaves as an item of import and export<sup>268</sup>; others trace administrative records in presenting studies on slave-raiding and -trading or abolition<sup>269</sup>; while still others visit contemporary Sudanese communities to glean information from the descendants of slaves<sup>270</sup>. Historians generally choose to go where their data can take them, and often hesitate to venture down the misty avenues of speculation--an understandable yet at times unfortunate situation, which can cause scholars to overlook some of the most interesting questions and issues.

Nobody wanted to be a slave--one only earned that status through brute force and coercion. If the slave raid devastated communities, then it devastated individuals as well. In the nineteenth century alone, thousands upon thousands of men and women had to adjust to their imposed servility. But how did they cope?

This chapter represents a foray into the nebulous realm of slave psychology. As mentioned before, very few sources speak from the slave's own point of view, with the exception perhaps being Salim Wilson's I Was a Slave. This chapter is therefore highly speculative, relying upon the scattered remarks of travellers who noticed some of the ways that slaves

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<sup>268</sup> See Terence Walz, Trade between Egypt and Bilad as-Sudan, 1700-1820 (Cairo: Institut Francais D'Archeologie Orientale du Caire, 1978).

<sup>269</sup> See Shukry (1935); Reda Mowafi, Slavery, Slave Trade, and Abolition Attempts in Egypt and the Sudan, 1820-1882, (Lund, Sweden: 1981); Hargey (1981); and Gabriel Warburg, The Sudan under Wingate (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1971), pp. 170-82.

<sup>270</sup> See Ewald (1982); Kapteijns (1984).

behaved in and interacted with the society around them. Like the effort of an archaeological conservator, who examines the faded chips of pigment remaining in a fresco and attempts to paint in the details of what might have been there before, this chapter tries to reconstruct a picture of how slaves coped with their status and adapted to their host environment.

### The Trauma of Enslavement

No matter how kind an owner may have been to the new slave, he or she must have been experiencing intense psychological trauma. While travelling through Kordofan, Pallme came upon many newcomers who were suffering from the anguish of enslavement, and from the pain of having been irrevocably ripped away from family and homeland. He wrote, "The negroes are, generally, at the commencement of their slavery, morose, and speak very little, unless spoken to. Their thoughts are continually directed to their homes, or at work inventing all manner of means of escape, for the prevention of which they are bound in irons." Their grief, he said, endured for at least a few years after enslavement<sup>271</sup>.

In their study of Islamic slave-holding systems in Africa, Fisher and Fisher comment on the psychological trauma of enslavement as well. Some coped with the situation with relative ease, others committed suicide, while still others died from a broken heart. In certain areas, some slaves had access to better food and clothing than they would have had in their native land, while they were expected to do very little work. Yet this comfortable material situation did nothing to assuage their grief over enslavement<sup>272</sup>.

The powerlessness and kinlessness imposed on slaves caused them unfathomable trauma. Strangely enough, though, it appears that slave

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<sup>271</sup> Pallme (1844), pp. 48, 111.

<sup>272</sup> Fisher and Fisher (1970), p. 83 and footnote #1.

traders may have tried their best to enhance that torment. Referring to the Nuba, Pallme says,

[The] ill-treatment and oppression they occasionally suffer from the neighbouring Turks...has imbued them with an almost incontrovertible hatred towards all white men. The slave merchants greatly contribute to keep up this aversion by assuring the negroes, that all captives who fall into the hands of the white men are fattened in their country for slaughter. When the Djelabi have reached Kordofan and set out for their journey to Cairo, they make the poor slaves understand that those white men who, like the Arabs and Turks, profess the true faith, do not eat the flesh of the negroes; but that the Giaours, or unbelievers, by which denomination they distinguish the Franks, follow that barbarous custom<sup>273</sup>.

As Fisher and Fisher have pointed out, the German traveller Gustav Nachtigal (who wrote a detailed account of the Kayra sultanate in Dar Fur) tried to make contact with some pagans near Bagirmi (Lake Chad area). Unfortunately, the rumours had reached them, too: they thought that Europeans "were not only expert sorcerers, but also brought up black men as slaves...to satisfy their culinary tastes, or to provide blood for dyeing cloth red....<sup>274</sup>"

Whether about Arabs, Turks, Europeans, or others, these rumours of cannibalism served as a very useful tool for the traders. By instilling sheer terror into the slaves before they reached markets, traders expected the slaves to accept their condition more easily: they would breathe a tremendous sigh of relief once they realized that they would neither be eaten nor turned into dye, and that life as a slave would therefore be less of a nightmare than they had envisaged. Indeed, Wilson affirms that the

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<sup>273</sup> Pallme (1844), pp. 163-64.

<sup>274</sup> They also cite a similar rumour which Doughty encountered in north Arabia (C.M. Doughty, *Arabia Deserta*, London 1888 [reprinted 1923], i. 149, in Fisher and Fisher [1970], p. 15.)

future looked quite sanguine indeed when he found that his fate would not be as harsh as he had expected<sup>275</sup>.

In an 1870 booklet which covers "the negroes of Stamboul" (i.e. Istanbul), Major Millingen discusses the slaves from Dar Fur, Kordofan, Abyssinia, and other such locales who stocked the slave emporiums of Cairo, Alexandria, Istanbul, Smyrna, Beirut, Jeddah, Mecca and Medina. He mentions the harsh journey by land and sea which brought them to these markets, and the dry bread and soup which kept them alive until their sale. He, too, argues that traders partially calculated this treatment for its desired effect. "It must be known," wrote Millingen, "that ill-treatment is a part of the craft of slave-dealers; by this method the slave is sure to look up to the first customer as a deliverer and a benefactor, and will therefore show no dislike at being sold<sup>276</sup>."

Slaves ran the gauntlet in the period after enslavement and before sale; not only might they find their trauma enhanced by grisly stories of cannibalism and torture, but they also suffered from hunger, thirst, fatigue, and disease on the march. Most of the survivors, who had no doubt witnessed many of their peers and relatives drop dead in the dust en route, must have been glad to be alive. Indeed survival may have helped to soothe the pain of enslavement.

In his 1851 travel account on Egypt and the Sudan, George Melly describes how well-fed and contented the women looked in the Cairo slave market. He stopped to talk to one in particular, a woman "who was a beauty in her way, though of the negro style," and later wrote, "I put several questions to her, for the purpose of ascertaining how she was reconciled to her condition, and was surprised to find, from her replies, that she did not consider captivity irksome, preferring Cairo to her own country, and having

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<sup>275</sup> Wilson (193-?), p. 148.

<sup>276</sup> Major F. Millingen, Slavery in Turkey (London: Stanford, 1870), pp. 6-7.

a sanguine expectation that she would obtain a good master<sup>277</sup>." The woman may have been optimistic about finding a kind master--she certainly deserved one after having survived through the raid and the march in her recent past. It is highly unlikely, however, that she relished being a slave. Much more likely is it that the translator who mediated between Melly and the slave woman distorted the woman's response to provide a rosier picture to his employer. After all, Melly had had problems with his assistant Daireh on at least one other occasion, precisely because he was such a "very free translator<sup>278</sup>."

In spite of the fact that Melly met a ragged, miserable lot of slaves in Asyut who had marched all the way from Dar Fur, he still seems to have maintained his image of the jolly slave at ease with the thought of proceeding to market. In Aswan he came upon a group of young girls, from twelve to sixteen years old; "a merrier set could not be met with<sup>279</sup>." The laughter of these girls, who had seen the worst behind them, should not be interpreted as a sign of pleasure at their status. These girls would not have been delighted with their enslavement nor starry-eyed with any prospects of tremendous social mobility before them; their laughter more probably represented a positive step towards accepting their lot and continuing with their lives.

Another explanation may be in order for the apparent joviality and contentedness of slaves on which so many travellers commented. As Wilson explains of his own early days as a slave, a fellow Dinka taught him the importance of projecting a happy image. This mentor told him, "Our masters like their slaves to be bright and cheerful--to sing as they work, and to smile and make jokes. If you don't--if you sulk, or pine, or walk about with a sad or sullen face--you will find that you will get some terrible

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<sup>277</sup> Melly, Vol. 1 (1851), pp. 63-65.

<sup>278</sup> Melly, Vol. 1 (1851), pp. 285-86.

<sup>279</sup> Melly, Vol. 1 (1851), pp. 205-7.

thrashings...." The appearance of happiness, on the other hand, could evoke very kindly treatment indeed--and Wilson later vouched for this himself<sup>280</sup>.

The well-intentioned traveller, Sir Frederick Henniker, mentions slaves repeatedly throughout his account, and yet he says, "I never saw but three instances of real slavery." He explains that he witnessed a man being kidnapped and enslaved in the desert; he saw a group of slaves being driven through a town like cattle; and he observed the haggling that took place over the price of a man at market<sup>281</sup>. These three cases were, to him, authentic slavery. Presumably, the many other slaves whom he met were not "real slaves", simply because their relative comfort and apparent lack of anguish did not fit his stereotype of how a slave could or should behave.

In Upper Egypt, north of Esne, however, Henniker came upon some slave women who were heading to markets with a caravan. One woman seemed particularly sad over her condition. The good-hearted but highly naive Henniker paid for the girl, intending to free her and send her back home, and she then ran for his boat.

On joining the boat, my first object was to inform the girl that she was no longer a slave; she burst into tears; and when I told her that I would send her back to her own country, she redoubled her sorrow. All the sufferings that she had undergone in traversing the desert presented themselves before her, and she told me that she had rather die than go back, and "if you give me what you call liberty, you will throw me adrift upon the world, and who will take care of me; there will be nobody obliged to support me, and what shall I do?" Here she renewed her lamentations so earnestly, that I promised her that she should remain a slave<sup>282</sup>.

If Henniker simply concluded from this experience that slaves were grateful to be slaves, then he missed the main point. For most slaves, there was no

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<sup>280</sup> Wilson (193-?), pp. 136-37, 149.

<sup>281</sup> Henniker (1824), p. 178.

<sup>282</sup> Henniker (1824), pp. 176-77.

return from enslavement<sup>283</sup>. Cast adrift by Henniker's freedom grant, this girl would have been re-enslaved almost immediately. She had no hope of finding her way home--quite possibly there would have been no family members surviving and no home to go back to anyway--and the thought of re-tracing the desert march would be too much to bear. But perhaps Henniker did understand something of the slave's predicament, after all, for he does say that the harshness of the march and the rumours of cannibals weaned them from any thought of attempting return<sup>284</sup>.

### Coping with Slavery

Slaves did not love slavery, but circumstance forced them to deal with it. Coming to terms with their enslavement, and giving up the emotional struggle of grief and psychological torment that they experienced in the early stages, represented an important step in progressing with their lives. Each slave responded differently to his or her environment, using a variety of mechanisms to inject meaning into their new existence.

Defiance, for example, rather than submissiveness, was a common response to enslavement. Many slaves denied free men [other than their owners] honour and deferential treatment, simply because free society so completely denied it to them. Rude behaviour on the part of slaves--as well as the relative indifference of their owners to such rudeness--shocked, appalled, or occasionally amused travellers.

Bruce was one of the first Europeans to comment on the rudeness of slaves, during his late eighteenth-century visit to Sennar, the seat of the declining Fung empire. On one occasion, a fairly high-ranking slave assaulted Bruce in a state of drunkenness. Bruce complained to a friend,

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<sup>283</sup> Exceptions might include men whose native lands were relatively close to the site of their servitude, such as Nuba Mountain slaves taken to other locations in Kordofan. Escape was virtually impossible for women.

<sup>284</sup> Henniker (1824), p. 178.

Shaykh Adelan, who shrugged his shoulders and said, "It is all the king's fault; every slave does what he pleases....<sup>285</sup>"

Bruce's experiences parallel quite closely those of Burckhardt. This latter traveller had even more to say about the appalling manners of slaves:

Among the plagues that await the traveller in Berber the insolence of the slaves is the most intolerable. Being considered as members of the family in which they reside, they assume airs of importance superior even to those of their masters. The latter are afraid to punish or even seriously to reprimand them for their offences, as they can easily find opportunities of running away.... One of the slaves of Edris, to whom I had already made some little presents, tore my shirt into pieces because I refused to give it to him, and when I applied to Edris for redress, he recommended patience to me, for that no insult was meant. The grown up slaves are always armed; they hold themselves upon a par with the best Arabs, and feel humbled only by the conviction that they cannot marry the Arab girls....<sup>286</sup>

Many other travellers related their encounters with insolent slaves.

While following Muhammad 'Ali's army into the Sudan in 1820, Waddington and Hanbury encountered a slave whose mere personality intimidated them. This slave, who was travelling along with their group, belonged to the personal doctor of Isma'il Pasha. As they were travelling through the vicinity of Mahas, he stole the wages of one of their Ababde guides who witnessed the crime, but who was too afraid of the slave to confront him. Although the Ababde informed Waddington and Hanbury's Irish assistant, all three Europeans were likewise too intimidated by this slave to challenge him.

They wrote in their account, "It may be recollected, that one of our party was a negro in the service of the Pasha's physician: this man was accused by Achmet of the theft, and his violent and ferocious character left us no room to doubt the charge; however, we conducted the whole party,

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<sup>285</sup> Bruce. Vol. 4 (1790), pp. 451-52.

<sup>286</sup> Burckhardt (1819), pp. 223-25.

and making a show of searching all equally, found the money upon him." They did not dare punish the guilty man, so they fobbed him off onto a nearby group of Turkish officials who were also heading south<sup>287</sup>.

As luck would have it, they bumped into this scoundrel-slave again. In their account, they then provide a succinct profile of the man. Having come originally from Dar Fur, he was first owned by a Shaiqiya mekk (petty chief), before being sold to the doctor. Rumour had it that he had poisoned many patients at his master's behest. At that moment, however, in the course of the Turco-Egyptian conquest, he was stealing slaves from the Shaiqiya to give to the Pasha. "He was naturally a very active and intelligent fellow; violent in temper, insolent to his inferiors, daring and desperate, and capable, and probably guilty, of every crime<sup>288</sup>."

The impudence of slaves did not bother Taylor, but he did find it rather surprising. Taylor was the first man from Yenkee-Doonea that the Turco-Egyptian military governor at Berber and Shendi had ever seen. (As Taylor explains, "This sounds very much like Yankee-Doodledom, but is in reality the Turkish for 'New World'<sup>289</sup>.") Consequently the governor treated him like royalty, and took him on a processional walk through the bazaar. All the merchants respectfully stood aside as they passed. But Taylor later commented, "Two of the Governor's slaves attended me, and one of them, who had a remarkably insolent and scornful expression, was the only person who did not seem impressed by my presence<sup>290</sup>."

Insolence provided slaves with a means of resistance to their situation--however subtle. By refusing to play the game of courtesy to all free men, slaves regained a fragment of dignity and power.

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<sup>287</sup> George Waddington and the Rev. Barnard Hanbury, Journal of a Visit to Some Parts of Ethiopia (London: John Murray, 1822), pp. 32-33.

<sup>288</sup> Waddington and Hanbury (1822), pp. 132-33.

<sup>289</sup> What Taylor heard as 'Yenkee Doonea' was no doubt the Turkish yeni dunya.

<sup>290</sup> Taylor (1854), pp. 212-24.

Many other social and behavioural responses existed, too. Most of these seem to fall into two broad categories: consciously holding onto native customs and values well after enslavement, or consciously adopting the customs and values of the host community. Slaves did not necessarily fall absolutely into one category or the other; they may have clung to some old values while embracing new ones. Thus there is a dynamic relationship between the maintenance of one heritage (pre-enslavement) and the acculturation to another (post-enslavement).

One simple way for the slave to cling to the past was to tap the evocative power of native songs, sung in native languages. Of a visit with a Baqqara Arab family, Prudhoe wrote, "The evening was beautiful, and we listened to a plaintive Bornou air which a slave girl sung while making bread<sup>291</sup>." Millingen furnishes an example by referring to the African ex-slave musicians of Istanbul: "The Stamboul minstrels are poor old men broken to pieces by infirmities, and their evening and morning suits are rags. The way in which these poor fellows gain their livelihood is by singing and playing on the guitar their national airs. It is interesting, and at the same time touching, to see how the negro maids on catching the first notes of their African tunes are electrified, and gather around the musician like so many flies on a sugar-lump<sup>292</sup>."

Although virtually all slaves converted to Islam, many held onto pagan religious beliefs at the same time. Admittedly, the process of Islamization among free or slave communities almost always entails some continuation of traditional, non-Islamic practices<sup>293</sup>. This makes it especially difficult to ascertain whether the behaviour of slaves reflected a conscious effort to hold onto their pre-enslavement past, a natural step in the Islamization process, or both.

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<sup>291</sup> Prudhoe (1835), pp. 57-58.

<sup>292</sup> Millingen (1870), p. 11.

<sup>293</sup> See for example, Bruce's discussion on Islamization among the pagan Nubas who lived in villages around Sennar and who served as the Fung sultan's soldiers (Bruce, Vol. 4 [1790], pp. 419-21).

As Ewald points out, the Italian traveller Brocchi, who visited the Sennar area in the 1820's, recorded the existence of "Cuguiris," religious experts or shamans who catered to the needs of the "Nubah" slaves settled in the region<sup>294</sup>. Millingen tells us that slaves in Istanbul formed a cooperative or mutual help society, which was divided into a number of lodges with a woman, called the "Col-bashi," invested with the highest authority in each.

The Col-bashi is said to represent a powerful spirit known under the name of Yavrube; she is also said to be intimately connected with all sorts of other spirits; moreover, the breath of the Col-bashi and her power in reading something from the Koran are deemed to be as good panaceas as the prescriptions of the best of physicians. Once or twice a month the whole of the lodge assembles around the Col-bashi.... All on [sic] a sudden the Col-bashi attains a stage of high excitement and frenzy, becomes an incarnation of the spirit Yavrube, and is thus transformed into the male element<sup>295</sup>.

In a similar fashion, slave women in particular became associated with performances of zar in both the Sudan and Egypt. Walz, who succinctly describes zar as "a psychotherapeutic exercise that attempted to release victims from the grip of evil spirits," notes that this became quite popular among black female slaves in Cairo in the nineteenth century<sup>296</sup>.

The zar cult thrives among women in the Sudan even today<sup>297</sup>. In the process of social incorporation, therefore, slaves took one cultural practice, Islam, from the the northern Sudan, and gave it another, the zar cult. Northern Sudanese culture did not subsume slave culture in the

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<sup>294</sup> Ewald (1982), p. 81.

<sup>295</sup> Millingen (1870), pp. 10-11. Perhaps by Col-bashi Millingen means 'head slave,' or the Turkish kul bashi.

<sup>296</sup> Terence Walz, "Black Slavery in Egypt during the Nineteenth Century as Reflected in the Mahkama Archives of Cairo," Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa, Ed. John Ralph Willis, Vol. 2 (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1985), p. 146.

<sup>297</sup> A good introduction to the issue is Sophie Zenovsky, "Zar and Tambura as Practiced by the Women of Omdurman," Sudan Notes and Records, Vol. 31, 1950, pp. 65-81. A very recent study is Janice Boddy, Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

process of absorption; rather, what occurred was a merging--a new hybridization--between cultures.

It is worth noting that female slaves much more than males may have carried on aspects of their pre-enslavement heritage. The anthropologist Harold Barclay points out in regard to the Sudan, "Largely due to their secondary status in the more institutional religious practices, women are often the primary perpetrators of pre-Islamic traditions." Relics of such pre-Islamic traditions in the Sudan today may include the cult of the Nile spirits, the doctrine of mushahara (supernatural danger connected with life crises), the practice of infibulation, beliefs in the evil eye, and of course, the zar cult<sup>298</sup>.

### Adopting New Values, Relinquishing Old

Some slaves reacted to their status by forsaking the cultural heritage of their past while zealously seizing onto the values and customs of their enslavers. For example, a number of sources comment that slaves not only converted to Islam, but became its biggest fanatics. Burckhardt wrote, "In Soudan, the slaves, though made Mussulman by the act of circumcision, are never taught to read or pray: and even in Egypt and Arabia this instruction is seldom given to any but those for whom their masters take a particular liking. It may be observed, nevertheless, that they are greater fanatics than the proudest Olemas [orthodox religious scholars]....<sup>299</sup>" McCoan remarked in 1877 that "the whole of the slaves imported into Egypt readily adopt the established faith, and soon become the most bigoted and fanatical section of the Moslem population<sup>300</sup>." Even Walz says, "As regards the private life of slaves, almost all became Muslim, even

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<sup>298</sup> Harold B. Barclay, "Sudan (North): On the Frontier of Islam," Religion and Societies: Asia and the Middle East, Ed. C. Caldarola (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1982), pp. 149-50.

<sup>299</sup> Burckhardt (1819), p. 328.

<sup>300</sup> McCoan (1877), p. 569.

those owned by Christians and Jews, and they seem to have brought to the practice of religion an unusual zeal<sup>301</sup>."

The appeal of Islam is obvious. If the Quran emphasized that the slave was spiritually equal to the free in the eyes of God, then close adherence to the doctrines and practices of the faith could bring tremendous assurance to the slave. Not only might he (or possibly she) take solace in the fact that his faith and zeal might be a ticket to Paradise on the Day of Judgement, but he could also have the satisfaction of knowing that he observed the faith more punctiliously and wholeheartedly than the society which enslaved him. It might enhance his own self-confidence and self-esteem, while possibly earning him a bit of respect from the Muslim society around him.

Perhaps the most startling reaction to slavery, however, was to enslave. The slave soldiers belonging to the big traders of the zariba zone themselves looted communities and raided for slaves; they enjoyed their share of the human and material spoils, retaining what they wanted and selling off the rest. Johnson says of the slave soldier: "A product of oppression, he helped to oppress<sup>302</sup>." In fact, slave soldiers constituted one platform of the Mahdi's support after 1881, for they were outraged by the anti-slavery measures which threatened the benefits that slave-raiding had provided them<sup>303</sup>. It appears, too, that one the Sudan's most notorious slave-raiders, Rabih Fadl Allah (the protege of Zubayr Rahma Mansur, who was arguably the Sudan's mightiest slave-raider), was a slave by origin<sup>304</sup>: Rabih carved out a slaving empire for himself in the late nineteenth century, which stretched at times from Bahr al-Ghazal, through Dar al-Kuti

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<sup>301</sup> Walz (1985), p. 146.

<sup>302</sup> Douglas H. Johnson, "Sudanese Military Slavery from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century," Slavery and Other Forms of Unfree Labour, Ed. Leonie J. Archer, (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 149.

<sup>303</sup> Holt (1970), pp. 42-44.

<sup>304</sup> W.K.R. Hallam, The Life and Times of Rabih Fadl Allah (Ilfracombe, Devon: Arthur H. Stockwell Ltd., 1977), p. 48.

(Central African Republic), and as far west as Borno and the fringes of Hausaland (Nigeria/Niger).

What kind of slave could enslave without remorse? Clearly, it could be an individual who had thoroughly adopted the values of his enslavers-- someone who had so far distanced himself from his former, pre-slave self that he could painlessly, even pleasurably, repeat the cycle on someone else. In part, he may have thoroughly internalized the values of Islam, which not only sanctioned slavery, but provided a conduit whereby infidels could gain exposure to the true faith<sup>305</sup>.

Slaves absorbed many values, and not only religious ones, from their host community. Arguably, they often adopted their owners' attitudes towards land and labour. According to social values in the northern riverain Sudan, owning land is good, while working on it is not. The Governor of Halfa Province summed it up in his annual report of 1909:

The cupidity of the Berberine to acquire land in this district is extraordinary, and arises more, I think, from a desire to attain additional importance as a landowner than from the business point of view that the land may increase largely in value. Much of the land sold in Halfa Province in 1907 has never yet been touched with a view to cultivation<sup>306</sup>.

Bjorkelo has discussed this rather paradoxical value system among the Ja'ali in the Shendi area<sup>307</sup>--a set of values which travellers such as Ruppell have commented on and which perturbed British administrators during the Condominium period<sup>308</sup>.

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<sup>305</sup> Some Christians had at one time shared the same attitudes. It is said, for example, that when Prince Henry of Portugal reviewed the first shipment of African slaves destined for European markets in 1441, he "reflected with great pleasure on the [pagan] souls that before were lost" (Davis [1984], pp. xvi-xvii.)

<sup>306</sup> "Annual Report, Halfa Province," in Sudan Government, Reports on the Finances, Administration and Condition of the Sudan: 1909, p. 675.

<sup>307</sup> Bjorkelo (1983), p. 95.

<sup>308</sup> On the refusal of land-owners to work their land despite labour shortages, see "Annual Report, Berber Province," in Sudan Government, Reports on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan: 1907, p. 190.



Numerous sources allude to the laziness of slaves. British officials in particular complained bitterly about it in the early twentieth century, when wage labour was developing. Labour shortages resulted, especially in cultivation, because slaves and ex-slaves refused to work full-time, week by week. Instead, they worked for a day here and a day there, amassing just enough money to satisfy their family's food needs and to buy merissa (an alcoholic beverage) for friends<sup>309</sup>. The verdict, according to administrators, was that slave elements were just plain lazy, having no sense of responsibility towards their work.

Another interpretation may be in order. Europeans came to the northern Sudan with one value system, while the northern Sudanese already had another. If the Europeans had a work ethic, then the Sudanese had a leisure ethic. A man gained respect not by "slaving away," figuratively speaking, but by showing that he did not need to work heavily in order to survive in relative comfort. The free, slave-owning "workaholic" was an unknown species in the northern Sudan. Slaves and ex-slaves alike understood this value system, and tried to imitate the behaviour which society deemed respectable. Their "laziness" may have been a bid for social equity with the slave-owners who cultivated leisure as a way of life-- a social statement to the effect that, as their own bosses, they did not need to sweat and toil to survive.

## Conclusion

At some point the trauma of enslavement began to give way to social adaptation, until the veils of time reduced the former life to a mere memory. Pallme, who noted the pain of newcomers with such sensitivity,

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<sup>309</sup> For example, see "Annual Report, Berber Province," pp. 192-93, and "Annual Report, Halfa Province," p. 256, in Sudan Government, Reports on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan: 1907; and Budge, Vol. 1 (1907), pp. 199, 230.

also remarked on how completely that pain receded with the years: "In Egypt I have often conversed with both male and female slaves who scarcely remembered their fatherlands...[and who...] adopt the customs and habits of the people with whom they are forced to live, and frequently laugh at the simple customs of their own country<sup>310</sup>."

In his 1840 report to Parliament, Bowring, too, noted the process by which time effaced the slave's former-life memories. He said, "Of a number of Abyssinian girls who were being instructed in midwifery in the Medical School at Cairo, there was not one who could tell me the name of her birthplace, or give any distinct account of the scenes of her infancy<sup>311</sup>."

This brief study on the "slave psychology," so to speak, has tried to show that individual slaves responded in a variety of ways over time to the environments in which slavery transplanted them. That is, they responded, and they interacted. They found ways to inject meaning into their everyday lives, often by adopting and adapting the values and customs of the host society to their own needs. The site of their servility became home, until slowly, over the course of years and decades, they evolved from outsiders into insiders.

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<sup>310</sup> Pallme (1844), p. 48-49.

<sup>311</sup> Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, No. 21, 1840, p. 91.

## Chapter 8:

# **The Social Absorption and Integration of Slaves**

### Introduction

If slaves came to northern Sudanese communities feeling like outsiders, then they frequently died years later feeling quite at home. The previous chapter has tried to chart this process of adaptation and acculturation as it may have unfolded for the individual slave. Nonetheless, many critical questions still remain unanswered. Slaves with a raid in their past may have slowly grown to see their host community as home--but how did their host community grow to see them? And how did the host community see their slaves' offspring, children with no raid in their past, children who were not strangers but native-born?

The issue of the social absorption and integration of slaves in the northern Sudan is extremely complex: difficult to trace, and difficult to pin down. This chapter attempts to tackle the issue. It speculates on the ease with which slaves and their descendants gained a niche in the kinship system of northern Sudanese society, on the speed of the social absorption process (a few years, a lifetime, or a few generations?), and on the differences in integration potential among slaves. At the same time, this chapter approaches one very unwieldy question, and that relates to the residual stigma attached to freed slaves and their descendants in the nineteenth as well as the twentieth century.

### Absorption Theory

A few scholars have devoted much of their time and energy to examining the absorption issue. In a comparative study of African and Asian slavery systems, Watson speculates on whether such systems are

what he calls "open" or "closed." That is, he suggests that in most Asian societies which practiced slavery, such as Nepal, Tibetan-speaking Nyinba, and China, slaves were closed out of the society and could never be accepted into the kinship system of their owners. In contrast, argues Watson, most systems in Africa tended to be "open" in the sense that the master's kinship groups did indeed eventually absorb their slaves<sup>312</sup>.

Miers and Kopytoff have developed the theme of the absorptiveness of African slavery systems. While recognizing that slaves are usually all outsiders at the start, they identify a gradual but clear process of incorporation into the main kin group--what they call a "slavery-to-kinship continuum"<sup>313</sup>.

They claim that the basic problem of slavery is the "rehumanization" of the slave non-person/property into a new social setting, and they have termed this latter process "the institutionalization of marginality." In other words, they generalize that most African slavery systems benignly though gradually incorporated slave outsiders until they or their descendants gained a place in the society, that is, within one lifetime or over a few generations. They also emphasize that slaves in Africa often served a "domestic" function: sought after not just for labour power, but for their ability to enlarge the owner's kin group, and thereby to enhance his prestige<sup>314</sup>.

Ewald portrays a type of slavery in the Taqali kingdom of the Nuba Mountains in Kordofan which serves the important function of increasing their master's lineage. She writes,

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<sup>312</sup> Watson (1980), pp. 9-10.

<sup>313</sup> Kopytoff and Miers (1977), p. 22.

<sup>314</sup> Kopytoff and Miers (1977), pp. 19-22, 67.

[A]s strangers, slaves became absorbed into the khashm al-bayt<sup>315</sup> of their master. The king's many slaves increased the ranks of his khashm al-bayt as they moved up in status. A king's daughter typically received slaves for her household when she married, and they too eventually joined the royal khashm al-bayt as clients of their royal patroness<sup>316</sup>.

The theories of Miers and Kopytoff may have influenced Ewald to a large extent, for the lines above closely echo their arguments on the kinship-oriented, inclusive nature of African slavery systems. The same may be said of Kapteijns, who plainly states that slaves were important in Dar Masalit not because of their agricultural labour, but because they "strengthened the household and kin group of the master<sup>317</sup>."

The theories of Watson and Miers and Kopytoff provide valuable and thought-provoking models for the integration of slaves into the societies that held them. However, the process of social absorption and integration appears to be far more complex than their model suggests.

### The Ease of Integration?

Spaulding exposes and challenges the optimism of the views outlined above and its happy picture of slave social integration. He writes,

Prevailing historiography asserts that slavery in the Turkish Sudan [1820-1881] was a benign institution, a view usually supported by the claim that slaves or the offspring of slaves were integrated into northern Sudanese society at the family level through processes similar to marriage or adoption, culminating in manumission. Private

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<sup>315</sup> Ewald explains that while the term khashm al-bayt often refers to lineage, in Taqali it applies to "the political group formed by a new king and his maternal kin and perpetuated by his descendants and clients" (Ewald [1982], p. 338).

<sup>316</sup> Ewald (1982), p. 145.

<sup>317</sup> Kapteijns (1984), p. 115.

documents of the period give little support to this comfortable interpretation<sup>318</sup>.

A number of factors hindered the development of close, familial bonds between slaves and their owners. Attention will now turn towards a few of those hindrances.

Slaves appear to have experienced unusually high mortality rates--many sources agree on this, without being able to explain the phenomenon<sup>319</sup>. The culprits were smallpox, malaria, bronchial infections, and a host of other diseases. Bruce wrote of the Fung capital at Sennar, "There is a constant mortality among the children in and about this metropolis, insomuch that, in all appearance, the people would be extinct were they not supplied by a number of slaves brought from all the different countries to the southward<sup>320</sup>." Burckhardt emphasized slaves' unusual susceptibility to disease, by relating an oft-quoted proverb: "A blow [illness] which scarcely makes an Arab stagger, knocks down a slave." By way of example, he mentions that 8,000 slaves perished from the plague in Cairo in 1815 alone<sup>321</sup>--perhaps two-thirds of the entire slave population of that city<sup>322</sup>.

The men, women, and children whom Muhammad 'Ali's troops collected for his armies and for Sudanese and Arabian markets suffered greatly. Hill notes that dysentery killed one-third of those gathered in Sennar garrisons in 1821; malaria felled 300 in the same garrisons in 1824; while an 1840 typhus epidemic took its toll in Khartoum. Among slave

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<sup>318</sup> Spaulding (1982), pp. 11-12.

<sup>319</sup> Not only did black slaves in particular suffer from high mortality rates, but in some areas, such as Egypt and Turkey, they failed to produce offspring, with their progeny becoming extinct by the first or second generation. This applied whether they were slave or ex-slave, and whether they married other blacks, Arabs, or Turks/Europeans. See Walz (1985), pp. 150-52; and Millingen (1870), p. 9.

<sup>320</sup> Bruce, Vol. 4 (1790), p. 468.

<sup>321</sup> Burckhardt (1819), pp. 339, 342.

<sup>322</sup> Walz (1978), pp. 200-1.

soldiers especially, advanced forms of venereal disease claimed many lives, too<sup>323</sup>.

The turn-over rate of slaves must have been very rapid in the Sudan, in different places at different times, and these mortality rates partially explain the steady, unmitigated demand for slaves in Sudanese markets. In regard to the subject at hand, these high death tolls meant that many slaves never had a chance to adapt and acculturate to their owner's society. That certainly must have halted the process of social absorption and integration, and may have minimized owners' expectations of deep, long-lasting, family-style relations to form with their slaves.

Spaulding highlights two other factors which curbed assimilative familial tendencies in the Sudan: taxation policy and multiple slave sales. By the former, he means the Turco-Egyptian administration's practice of levying a tax or tribute in slaves from northern Sudanese owners<sup>324</sup>. (The German geologist Eduard Rüppell describes this practice in his 1829 travel account<sup>325</sup>.) Once again, the high turn-over rate of slaves may have halted the integration process. By the multiple slave sales, Spaulding refers to the growing practice in the late Turco-Egyptian period for speculators to buy up slaves and to sell them in order to profit from daily fluctuations in market value. "For example," he writes, "during an interval of three days in 1877 a Koma woman named Fadl al-Saq, having been certified not pregnant and no longer desired by her previous owner, was sold five times in succession to different men for the respective prices of 53, 66, 72, 70, and finally 74 riyals<sup>326</sup>."

The image of the slave serving his or her kindly family over the course of a lifetime comes into question further when one considers the case of Zulaykha bint Hamad al-Malik Jawish, whose story Walz

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<sup>323</sup> Hill (1959), p. 48.

<sup>324</sup> Spaulding (1982), p. 12.

<sup>325</sup> Rüppell (1829), pp. 27, 29-30.

<sup>326</sup> Spaulding (1982), p. 13.

discovered in archival documents. Zulaykha was a free Muslim Shaiqiyya woman, who married a man from her home in the northern riverain Sudan. He took her to Egypt as his wife and proceeded to sell her [illegally] into slavery. Over the course of fifteen years she had fifteen owners, and went up for sale in the slave market at least twice. Finally she went to court to plead her case<sup>327</sup>. This story lends credence to Millingen's claim: he suggests that many black slaves in Istanbul passed through the hands of ten or twenty masters within their lifetime<sup>328</sup>. Further evidence in the case of the Sudan comes from one legal document of the Mahdist period, dated 1884, relating to an ownership dispute over a woman named Zamzam, who was seized as war booty and enslaved. It appears that Zamzam passed through at least six owners in the space of a few years<sup>329</sup>. Frequent slave sales and re-sales appear to have been commonplace.

For Spaulding, the fact that slaves in the nineteenth-century northern Sudan were legally classified as livestock along with cattle or sheep, or occasionally as "talking animals" (hayawan al-natiq), throws the greatest doubt on the slave's purported status as a member of the family<sup>330</sup>. Burckhardt provides an explanation of this classification scheme for slaves when he says,

The word Ras (head) is applied to them as to the brute species; and a man is said to possess ten Ras Raghig [/raqiq/], or ten head of slaves, in the same manner as he would be said to possess fifty Ras Ghanam, or head of sheep. When the buyer is desired to take the slave away, it is usual to say, Soughe [/suqhu/], drive him out, an expression which is only applied to cattle, as Soug el ghanam go damek [/suq al-ghanam quddamak/--literally, drive the sheep in front of you]<sup>331</sup>.

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327 Walz (1985), p. 141.

328 Millingen (1870), p. 8.

329 SAD 100/1/18-19 [Arabic, handlist #205]: Dispute over a slave girl named Zamzam, 8 Rajab 1301 AH (4 May 1884 AD).

330 Spaulding (1982), p. 12 and footnote #51. Spaulding explains that this practice does not conflict with Islamic law, but arguably interprets it in its harshest form.

331 Burckhardt (1819), pp. 326-27.

In fact, Pallme says that slaves in Kordofan at least were regarded so much as cattle, and not as men, that any slave who murdered another slave did not face the standard sentence of execution. The owner of the murderer simply compensated the owner of the deceased. "In this case, the affair is regarded in the same light as when, in Europe, one horse kills the other, both belonging to the same owner<sup>332</sup>."

This legal--and indeed, social--categorization of slaves as livestock portends ill for prospects of swift family integration: unless, of course, one changes the terms of this integration. That is, families may have grown to love, accept, and "integrate" their slaves not as respected adults, but rather in a way more akin to cherished pets--like the calico cat or cocker spaniel that might be pampered in some families today. Admittedly this verdict on slavery in the northern Sudan sounds terribly dehumanizing for the slave; one must remember, though, that they did bear the designation of "talking animals."

Henniker came to a similar conclusion, and dared to express it, too. In the course of his travels through Upper Egypt and Nubia, he said, "The fact is that the slave is much better off than the Arab fellah; the latter is governed by a despot, the former is under the care of a master who remembers how much he paid for him, and that he may sell him again, [and] he therefore treats him (I mean no contempt by the comparison) as well as a favourite dog or horse<sup>333</sup>."

Even Wilson says the same of his first owner, who treated him with great kindness. When guests were present, his master liked to clap his hands briskly to prove how quickly the boy (Wilson) ran to his service. Wrote Wilson, "These Arabs were in the habit of showing off their slaves to each other, as civilized men might show off their dogs or horses<sup>334</sup>."

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<sup>332</sup> Pallme (1844), p. 36.

<sup>333</sup> Henniker (1824), p. 177.

<sup>334</sup> Wilson (193-?), p. 151.

Differences between the benevolent ideology of Islamic slavery and actual widespread attitudes towards slaves surface once again in regard to proverbs. Sersen has conducted a study of proverbs about slaves in nineteenth-century North Africa. Prevalent proverbs included, "The slave is beaten with a stick, and advice is sufficient for the free-born man," "A white man (is made to obey) with a wink, a negro (al-'abd<sup>335</sup>) with a blow," and "If the negro (al-'abd) does not taste the stick Sunday after Sunday, he says that there is nobody like him<sup>336</sup>." Burckhardt quotes a similar trader's saying: "Never trust a black slave; whip him well, and feed him well, and the work will be done<sup>337</sup>." Browne quotes an "ancient observation" which he said seemed to apply, and that was: "When a man becomes a slave, he loses half his virtue<sup>338</sup>."

After analyzing many of these slave-related proverbs, Sersen concludes that they fall into themes which stress slaves' greediness, stupidity, unwarranted haughtiness, and untrustworthiness, or suggest that slaves deserve to be treated with contempt. Virtually all these proverbs, in other words, have little good to say about slaves. Their blatant contempt contrasts with the kindness and respect advocated in the hadith literature (relating to the deeds and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions)<sup>339</sup>; many hadiths, for instance, discourage the beating of slaves. As Sersen explains, "The difference here may be a question of common attitudes and prejudice versus religious ethic, as the latter is depicted in the hadith literature<sup>340</sup>."

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335 The standard definition of the Arabic word 'abd is simply "slave." Over the centuries, however, this word came to imply a black slave in particular.

336 William John Sersen, "Stereotypes and Attitudes towards Slaves in Arabic Proverbs: A Preliminary View," Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa, Ed. John Ralph Willis, Vol. 1 (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1985), p. 97.

337 Burckhardt (1819), p. 339.

338 Browne (1799), p. 190.

339 One famous hadith goes, "The man who frees a Muslim slave, God will free from hell, limb for limb" (Brunschwig [1960], p. 26.)

340 Sersen (1985), p. 98.

All of this evidence suggests that the road to social integration was far more rocky than Miers and Kopytoff might admit. High mortality rates, frequent sales, social conventions that categorized slaves as livestock, and deep-rooted prejudices (implied in one sense through proverbs) thwarted the development of intimacy and respect between slaves and owners. Already the "slave-to-kinship continuum" model, as postulated by Miers and Kopytoff, begins to look less and less like a smooth arc of progress. If charted on a graph, the line of progress and integration might appear jagged, up and down, with stops and starts, eventually though unevenly making its ascent.

Even some slaves (and ex-slaves) who had been with their owners for years, and who had begun to enjoy a level of acceptance and security within their families, bore the taint of stigma. Clearly some social circles felt that "slave blood" marred the purity of their family genealogy. Burckhardt observed,

The Meyrefab [of the Berber area], like the other Arab tribes of these parts of Africa, are careful in maintaining the purity of their race. A free born Meyrefab never marries a slave, whether Abyssinian or black, but always an Arab girl of his own or some neighbouring tribe, and if he has any children from his slave concubines, they are looked upon only as fit matches for slaves or their descendants<sup>341</sup>.

Hoskins says that the same custom prevailed among the meleks<sup>342</sup> (petty chiefs) and the aristocracy in the northern towns along the Nile before, and apparently after, the Turco-Egyptian conquest of 1820. The wives of these men were always daughters of other meleks, for it was "considered a

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<sup>341</sup> Burckhardt (1819), p. 217.

<sup>342</sup> I have chosen to spell it here as Hoskins did to distinguish its localized meaning from the classical/standard Arabic malik, meaning king. In colloquial Sudanese Arabic the term for petty chief was often shortened to mekk (/makk/) (See 'Awn al-Sharif Qasim, Qamus al-Lahja al-'Ammiyah fi al-Sudan [Khartoum: Al-Dar al-Sudaniyah lil-Kutub, 1972], p. 749).

degradation to have a son by a slave or woman of low rank, or to allow their wives to work<sup>343</sup>."

One must not assume, however, that the social stigma attached to slaves deterred all free northern Sudanese from intermarrying with and/or having children by them. The attitudes which Burckhardt and Hoskins discussed did not prevail over the whole of the northern Sudan, nor did they necessarily apply to other areas that imported black slaves, such as Egypt and Arabia.

### Men and Women in the Integration Process

Henniker was right when he said that liberty was of no particular use to a slave woman<sup>344</sup>, for free and slave women in most Islamic societies, the northern Sudan included, depended on male kin or patrons for social support. Therefore, at least before a wage-labour economy began to develop in the Condominium period (1899-1956), freed women tended to stay within the security of their former owner's or kinsman's social circle. Manumission in the nineteenth century meant a great deal more to men than to women, for men would then theoretically enjoy greater geographical mobility and have a choice in the type of work that they would perform.

In spite of the social limitations placed upon women--free, slave, and ex-slave alike in the northern Sudan--it seems that women enjoyed far greater prospects for a relatively swift social integration than men. Miers and Kopytoff have noted this phenomenon in many African slave-holding systems<sup>345</sup>. Patterson notes it in regard to Islamic slave-holding systems, and writes,

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<sup>343</sup> Hoskins (1835), p. 90.

<sup>344</sup> Henniker (1824), p. 177.

<sup>345</sup> Kopytoff and Miers (1977), pp. 21-22.

The majority of freed persons were women who were absorbed as concubines or wives. Their children were wholly absorbed into the family of the master, and the stigma of slavery disappeared within a generation or two. Male freedmen and their spouses and descendants experienced a separate fate<sup>346</sup>.

The explanation for the greater integration potential of slave women lies in their social malleability. Islamic law not only permitted male owners to have sexual access to their slave women, but it also regarded those children as being perfectly legitimate in the eyes of the law. This explains how men whose mothers were palace slaves in the harem so frequently rose to be sultan in both the Abbasid and Ottoman dynasties. Within the scope of these latter two dynasties, there may have been no shame whatsoever in having a sultan whose mother was a slave.

Custom differed in the northern Sudan, however. For some sectors of the elite there, free parentage on both sides clearly held high value. Consequently, some groups, like the Meyrefab according to Burckhardt and the meleks according to Hoskins, could afford to be choosy by picking free women for wives. "Afford" is the key; paying bride-wealth for a free woman cost much more than bride-wealth for a slave<sup>347</sup>.

More significantly, however, slave women did not bequeath a burdensome legacy of social stigma to their children in the highly patriarchal structure of almost all Islamic societies. The father's genealogy, and not so much the mother's, was what counted, and this more than anything else explains why slave women were much more likely to gain swift entry into the mainstream, free society kinship system than men. A slave-origin on the father's side, on the other hand, might have been very damning indeed.

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<sup>346</sup> Patterson (1982), p. 251.

<sup>347</sup> Kapteijns (1984), p. 114.

Concubinage among slave-women in the northern Sudan was a widespread practice, with many slave women bearing children to their masters. Orthodox Islamic law considered such children to be free, providing a major avenue for the social absorption of slaves. But as this thesis tries to show, the existence of slavery laws did not necessarily mean the implementation of slavery laws. Moreover, it is wrong to assume that the free offspring of slaves and ex-slaves completely escaped the taint of stigma. An ensuing chapter takes up this issue of concubinage and gives it more of the scrutiny which it deserves.

McCoan wrote on the slaves of Egypt, "Slaves [who] are bought young (as most of them are) are seldom or never sold again, and in nine cases out of ten they are set free at the owner's death<sup>348</sup>." What McCoan wrote about the frequency of manumissions in Egypt may have been accurate: Burckhardt, after all, does state that a slave in Egypt or Arabia "very seldom remains in a respectable family for a series of years without being made free<sup>349</sup>," while Walz mentions that he found thousands of emancipation deeds in the Mahkama Archives of Cairo, these having been registered by individual slave-owners over a few hundred years<sup>350</sup>. Perhaps these owners followed the exhortations of the Quran, which declared the emancipation of slaves to be a meritorious act.

The story of manumissions tells a different tale in the Sudan. Burckhardt wrote, "In Soudan it is rare that male slaves are emancipated (ma'tuuq), but we find many females who have obtained their liberty." As he goes on to explain, these freed females were generally those who had borne their master a child<sup>351</sup>. This is not surprising, in light of the "umm al-walad" principle clarified under early Islamic jurisprudence, by which slave women who bear children to their master should gain freedom upon

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348 McCoan (1877), p. 567.

349 Burckhardt (1819), pp. 340-41.

350 Walz (1985), p. 146-47.

351 Burckhardt (1819), pp. 340-41.

his death. Spaulding, meanwhile, scanned the documentary record for manumitted slaves in the northern Sudan and similarly concluded that in the nineteenth century, freed slaves were "extraordinarily rare<sup>352</sup>."

Social absorption and manumission may have been easier for women to attain, yet nevertheless exceptions did exist whereby men gained freedom and rose through the family ranks. Kapteijns cites a few such cases in her study of slavery in Dar Masalit. (Perhaps one should bear in mind, though, that Dar Masalit, on the western fringes of the Sudan and at one time a satellite of the Dar Fur and Wadai sultanates, quite possibly differed in many points of its slavery practices from other areas in the northern Sudanese heartland.) She uncovered several cases in which an owner freed his [male] slave and married him to his daughter--admittedly, exceptional circumstances prevailed. In one instance, the father married his daughter off to the slave because he had good grounds to believe that she would remain a spinster otherwise. In another case, a man had no son. By cultivating a slave as a future son-in-law, and by freeing him and marrying him to his daughter, he could guarantee that the daughter would stay with her father and produce children for her father's (and not for her ex-slave/outsider husband's) lineage<sup>353</sup>.

### Absorption after Freedom

Manumission did not mean a break with the past. Theoretically, it endowed [male] slaves with geographical and occupational mobility, although in practice little changed. The vast majority of freed slaves in the nineteenth century stayed where they were, and even into the twentieth century, many remained in the vicinity of their former owners<sup>354</sup>. This

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<sup>352</sup> Spaulding (1982), p. 12.

<sup>353</sup> Kapteijns (1984), p. 114.

<sup>354</sup> SAD 288/2/94-95: F.R. Wingate. Slatin to Wingate, 31 July [1909]; and SAD 414/2/17-18: T.R.H. Owen. T.R.H Owen's letter discussing slave registration, Tendelti District, c. 1928.

pattern occurred in other areas of Africa, as well: Martin Klein states that as many as 500,000 slaves/ex-slaves may have left their masters in the early period of colonial French West Africa--although this only represents about one-tenth of the slave population, with approximately 4,500,000 having stayed behind<sup>355</sup>. Miers and Kopytoff plausibly suggest that many slaves and ex-slaves in the post-abolition period throughout Africa remained where they were because there were few new economic niches open to them; they felt well-grounded in their host community; or they hoped to move further into the host community, preferring absorption to freedom abroad<sup>356</sup>.

Whether in the pre-abolition nineteenth century or the post-abolition twentieth century, relations between owners and their former slaves in the Sudan remained ambiguous and complex. Obligations did not end. Spaulding has noted that, in the Turco-Egyptian period, one could buy, sell, inherit, or give as alms shares in a freedman! (The same period had seen the splintering of slave ownership into shares as well, enabling relatively poor free people to participate in slave-owning<sup>357</sup>.) The "freedman" undoubtedly owed his shareholders a certain amount of his agricultural labour.

The sources are vague on when, typically, slaves or their descendants gained freedom. Judging from most accounts, though, it appears that slave status disappeared after about three generations<sup>358</sup>. Did a formal manumission ceremony finally occur, or did slave status simply blur out? It is difficult to determine.

In an 1829 account of his visit to the Sennar area, Lord Prudhoe talks about two kinds of natives: the free cultivators, and the "Mowelled." He says,

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<sup>355</sup> In Kopytoff and Miers (1977), p. 74.

<sup>356</sup> Kopytoff and Miers (1977), p. 73.

<sup>357</sup> Spaulding (1982), pp. 11-13.

<sup>358</sup> Spaulding says that "at least" three generations typically passed (Spaulding [1982], p. 12).

These latter are a peculiar race: they are descendants of slaves, who from generation to generation live at large, and pay their masters monthly a part of their gains, which the men derive from labour and the women too often from prostitution. If two slaves of different masters marry, the children become their joint property; and it is not unusual for six or even more masters to possess as property a single slave. If a woman has a child without marriage, it belongs to her master. Some of the great Sheicks [sic] have five or six hundred Mowelled, who may be sold like other slaves, and are frequently light-coloured and handsome. In appearance there is no difference between the Mowelled and the free population. The proportions of each depend on the state of society of the district: thus, in the island of Sennar, the great majority were Mowelled, while in Dar Shagei [Shaiqiyya] there were hardly any<sup>359</sup>.

Who were these "Mowelled" of whom Prudhoe speaks? As the apparently distant descendants of slaves, they seem to have been free, yet they paid their "masters" monthly. Perhaps they are like the freedmen which Spaulding describes, under allegiance to (if not owned by) the many who held shares to them, and changing allegiance when the shares were sold in a process that was beyond their control.

This term muwallad (passive participle; plural, muwalladin) is a mystery in itself: full of nuance, it reveals little about the person who carried the title. In the context of the Taqali kingdom of the Nuba Mountains, Ewald defines it as "a slave who, by his birth in Taqali, possessed a higher status than a newly captured or purchased slave<sup>360</sup>." The classical or modern standard Arabic definition of the term is much less precise: it can mean simply "born or begotten," or more specifically, "born and raised among Arabs (but not of pure Arab blood)." It can also have a more stigma-laden meaning, such as "half-breed or half-caste<sup>361</sup>." One colloquial Sudanese Arabic dictionary synthesizes these meanings, saying

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<sup>359</sup> Prudhoe (1835), p. 38.

<sup>360</sup> Ewald (1982), p. 340.

<sup>361</sup> Wehr (1976), p. 1098.

that it denotes "not of pure lineage (not an Arab pure-blood), also meaning a slave<sup>362</sup>." The complication arises from the fact that the term does not necessarily imply slave-status; in fact, children borne to a free Egyptian father and a [free non-Arab Muslim] Sudanese mother were at times called "muwalladin" (half-breeds), too.

One official provided his own description of the muwalladin in an 1928 letter. Administrators were somewhat confused about the ambiguous status of these people, too, but just to be safe they tried to list them in the government registries for so-called domestic servants (i.e. slaves). "The 'slaves' in this district [Tendelti] are not *pukka* recently acquired slaves, but 'muwalladin,' or 'born-in-the-place,' the old slaves who chose to remain with their masters, and their children, who lead a life of semi-independence and semi-domestic slavery, being brought up by their masters and living and sharing with them and often even inheriting from them like their own children....<sup>363</sup>"

The muwalladin of Ewald's Taqali may have been slaves, while the muwalladin of Prudhoe's Sennar may have been free but of slave origins, yet they did share much in common: their ambiguous position of having been native-born "slaves," people with no raid in their past, individuals hovering somewhere between alien and full-fledged native status. Especially in the case of the muwalladin described by Prudhoe, they were a cut above most servile elements, but not yet embraced by the free elements. One may conclude that at some point, after an unspecified number of generations, "masters" stopped owning shares in these people of Sennar, the distinctions of slave-origin stigma began to fade away, the groups intermarried, and their separateness blurred.

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<sup>362</sup> Qasim (1972), p. 849.

<sup>363</sup> SAD 414/2/17-18: T.R.H. Owen. T.R.H. Owen's letter discussing slave registration, Tendelti District, c. 1928.

Prudhoe's group may have been the exception rather than the rule--for they had blended in, literally and figuratively, to the point that one could not distinguish a Sennar muwallad from a free man. Other ex-slave groups gained their freedom and formed virtually endogamous communities which survive to the present day. The best example of this are the Bandala or Mandala of the western Bahr al-Ghazal, who were formerly slaves of the Rizaiqat and Habbaniya Baqqara Arabs of Dar Fur<sup>364</sup>. The community developed and expanded in the nineteenth century when a group of slaves escaped from their masters and sought refuge further south. Thereafter one became a Bandala by asking one's owner for manumission and joining the group, or by running away until the master finally yielded and granted them the ambiguous status of Bandala rather than slave<sup>365</sup>. Even after joining the community, however, they did not cut all links with their former owners, but continued a patron/guardian type of relationship. This entailed paying homage and showing deference to former owners, requesting permission from ex-owners to marry, and so forth.

When did free, Baqqara society absorb the Bandala until they merged without a trace? It never happened. "In fact," says Sikainga, "the Bandala, in their own view and that of the Baqqara, have never attained full freedom. A modified, if loose, social and political connection has been maintained between the two groups<sup>366</sup>." In the case of the Bandala, the reason for their continuing secondary status may not only be caused by the social rejection of their long-standing Baqqara Arab "patrons." They may have played a role in their own continued non-integration, possibly seeing

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<sup>364</sup> See G.K.C. Hebbert, "The Bandala of Bahr al-Ghazal," Sudan Notes and Records, Vol. 8, 1925, pp. 187-94.

<sup>365</sup> There were other ways of shedding slavery in different parts of the Islamic world. As Pipes has argued about the most powerful military slaves of the Islamic heartlands, some gained freedom not through formal manumission, but by a process which he calls "ipsimission," that is, a de facto self-assertion of freedom made possible by their unusual power (Daniel Pipes, Slave Soldiers and Islam [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981], pp. 18-22).

<sup>366</sup> Sikainga (1989), p. 87; for additional information on the Bandala, see pp. 87-90.

some advantages in their ambiguous, semi-autonomous, semi-dependent status.

In the late 1960's, al-Shahi undertook fieldwork on Nuri, a village sitting astride the Nile near Merowe, to see how its four discrete populations--the land-owning majority whom he calls the Nuri people, semi-nomadic Arabs, ex-slaves and their descendants, and tinkers--interacted. His findings show that after more than sixty years of abolition, the ex-slave elements continued to bear the burden of social stigma: the land-owners frowned upon inter-marriage with ex-slaves more than ever, and indeed, each group in the village remained largely endogamous. Moreover, the slave-descended group, still referred to as 'abid' (slaves) by the Nuri, continued to have social obligations towards the families who had owned them or their forbears, being expected to help at and attend marriages, circumcisions, and the like<sup>367</sup>.

Rather than absorbing former slaves, Nuri social boundaries seem to have crystallized and to have become more absorption-proof. Nuri people have also maintained the same negative attitudes towards [ex-]slaves [and slave descendants] suggested by Browne and Burckhardt over a century ago. Al-Shahi found that proverbs among the Nuri land-owners in the 1960's strongly emphasized the [ex-]slave's stupidity and contemptible nature. "His grandfather was a slave, and a hundred years later he reverts to being a slave;" "A slave understands a beating, and he does not come to his senses without one;" et cetera<sup>368</sup>. Prospects for social integration, land-owning, a political voice, and social equality appeared to be so bleak for the descendants of slaves that, as al-Shahi wrote, the "social stigma

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<sup>367</sup> Ahmad S. al-Shahi, "Proverbs and Social Values in a Northern Sudanese Village," Essays in Sudan Ethnography (presented to Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard), Ed. Ian Gunnison and Wendy James (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1972), pp. 91, 94.

<sup>368</sup> al-Shahi (1972), pp. 99-101.

attached to 'abid has led the younger generation to leave the village and seek residence and employment in the big towns<sup>369</sup>."

It is very likely that one factor unites the muwalladin (as described by Prudhoe), the Bandala, and the slave descendants of Nuri village, and that is that they were probably descended from two slave parents. The most important element in their failure to integrate quickly and smoothly into the kinship system of the free may have been the blot of slave status on the father's side--for in the strongly patriarchal system of the northern Sudan, descent on the father's side means most in shaping social status and group identity. Whether or not one's mother was a slave meant much less, for free birth on the father's side eventually subsumed or nullified the stigma of slave origins<sup>370</sup>.

### Conclusion

The reassuring stereotype of the slave-cum-family member breaks down under scrutiny. Some loyal slaves may have been lucky enough to get loyal families who eased their acculturation and absorption into northern Sudanese society. A few may have been lucky enough to have owners who rewarded their loyalty with manumission. Yet dark hints from a number of travellers, added to sharp analysis from Spaulding and others, reveal that this genial picture was probably not the norm.

Northern Sudanese society did easily absorb some slaves: most (though in truth, not all<sup>371</sup>) of those females who produced children for their masters. For many slave women, therefore, the northern Sudan was a

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<sup>369</sup> al-Shahi (1972), p. 91.

<sup>370</sup> Al-Shahi says that this held true even in Nuri society. The Nuri frowned upon marriages between a Nuri man and a female slave descendant, but when such marriages occurred, the resulting children assumed the [higher] status of their fathers (al-Shahi [1972], p. 94).

<sup>371</sup> This issue will be discussed in a separate chapter.

very "open" society indeed, enabling fairly rapid movement into the kinship circles of the slave-owning class.

The situation differed significantly for male slaves, and for the female slaves who married them. Instantaneous manumission rarely blessed these people, and instead a few generations may have passed before their descendants enjoyed freedom. But even when legal slavery was over, former slave-owners still retained superiority over them: slave-owners could demand their labour, deference, and possibly even a portion of wages, goods, or harvest items. Over some periods of Sudanese history, slave-owners could even buy and sell shares in a "freed" man or woman. Perhaps social and cultural barriers eroded over time, with ex-slaves eventually marrying into the fringes of their owners' kinship circles and slowly bleaching out the blot of slave stigma. Or perhaps full social absorption never came at all.

Male slaves and their descendants consistently faced barriers to social absorption throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. However, this does not mean that the rate and likelihood of social absorption remained constant over this period. Lovejoy has said of slavery in Africa that the "possibilities of social mobility...were as much a feature of easy access to new slaves as it was to Islamic norms<sup>372</sup>." This raises interesting questions when applied to the northern Sudan. Could integration (through manumission, intermarriage, etc.) have been relatively swifter and smoother prior to the late 1850's, before abolition efforts began to make their first dents in the slave supply? Did integration become much more difficult after 1898, when British officials finally began to cut off the slave supplies permanently? More research is needed on the dynamics of slave supplies and slave-owning patterns before tentative answers can emerge.

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<sup>372</sup> Paul Lovejoy, "Indigenous African Slavery," Roots and Branches: Current Directions in Slave Studies, Ed. Michael Craton (Toronto: Pergamon Press, 1979), p. 43.

Al-Shahi portrays a village community in the late 1960's in which the prospects of integration and social mobility were so bleak for the descendants of slaves that they had to migrate to the big cities just to escape them. This was a village which could no longer have muwalladin to represent an intermediate group of native-born, half-caste slaves/ex-slaves, one step above slave "greenhorns," moving up slowly on the social ladder. Perhaps in some areas, therefore, once access to slaves vanished, social strata ossified, social mobility became a thing of the past, and ex-slaves and their descendants found themselves more firmly fixed in place than ever.

## Chapter 9:

# Slave Names and Social Stigma

### Introduction

Though references to slaves abound in sources on the Sudan, history has by and large masked these vast numbers of servile men and women in anonymity. Legal documents, such as bills of sale, may mention a slave's name for the sake of clarification. Otherwise, such references are scanty in the historical literature. While the slaves' social functions were important, their individuality and personal identity were not; hence they remain nameless in the annals of time.

They remain nameless, unless, of course, their names stick in the mind of the historian, or catch the fancy of the traveller--and thereby deserve mention. Numerous sources do indeed throw in the name of a slave simply because it was so odd or ridiculous, perhaps offensive, or even cliched.

This essay will briefly attempt to assess the significance of slave nomenclature by pulling together scattered references in both the primary and secondary source literature on the Sudan. After surveying the nature of slave names, a more theoretical discussion will follow on the social significance of slave names and the way that naming practices often purposely highlighted servile status.

### What's in a Name?

What is in a name? A lot. A name serves as a subtle social marker, an identity tag. A name can potentially reveal religious affiliation, ethnicity, and sometimes, through popular usage, even age or social status. For better or for worse, one often draws conclusions on meeting a person or

reading about a person, based on the name: assuming that a man named Muhammad is Muslim; inferring that a boy named Juan comes from a Spanish-speaking country or background; guessing both that a German man called Adolph was born before the tragedies that Hitler wrought in World War II, and that a lady with the out-of-vogue name of Mabel dates to one's grandmother's generation and not to one's own; or concluding that the bearer of a double-barrelled name belongs to the upper crust and not to the blue-collar sector.

Slave names in the Sudan seem to have been equally evocative, despite the fact that slaves, almost without exception, initially or ultimately shared the free population's religious affiliation to Islam. Granted, some slaves did bear names that were common to the free population--such as Muhammad, Karim, and Fatima. Yunus Bedis, for instance, who engaged in the illicit slave trade out of Wadai in the 1890's, mentions a slave whom he had sold named Khadija<sup>373</sup>--a highly respectable name, associated with the Prophet's first wife. It is clear, however, that Yunus Bedis only remembered the slave called Khadija because she had testified to the police against his imprisoned father.

In the same vein, one 1884 Mahdist legal document mentions a slave woman over whom there is an ownership dispute<sup>374</sup>. The woman's name is Zamzam--aside from its alliterative quality, the name has fine religious associations: Zamzam is the sacred well of Mecca, from whose waters all pilgrims drink. Despite the fact that "Zamzam" has not generally been popular as a personal name for women in the Arab world<sup>375</sup>, it seems to have had some noble associations in the Sudan. That is, in the Kayra

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<sup>373</sup> Bedis and Bramley (1940), p. 170.

<sup>374</sup> SAD 100/1/18-19 [Arabic, handlist #205]: Dispute over a slave girl named Zamzam, 8 Rajab 1301 AH (4 May 1884 AD).

<sup>375</sup> Admittedly, modern-day upper-class Muslims in Turkey and Indo-Pakistan might use the name Zamzam for their daughters. This is part of a trend in those regions to choose lofty Islamic concepts, often extracted from the Quran, as girls' names--such as Sidra, referring to the lote-tree at the farthest end of Paradise (Annemarie Schimmel, Islamic Names [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989], p. 47).

sultanate of Dar Fur, there were two iiya baasis ("royal mothers," the title which the sultan gave to his favourite sister) named Zamzam, and one of these virtually ruled Dar Fur after her brother went blind in 1856<sup>376</sup>.

However, even some names which were openly Islamic carried traces of servility. Through common usage, certain Arabic names earned a slave-only status. Said Burckhardt, observing this in 1814, "[Slaves] are seldom honoured with a true Mussulman name, such as Hassan, Mohammed, Selim, Mustapha, etc. Most of them bear such names as Khayrallah, Fadlallah, Fadl al-Waasi', Jabr Waajid, Umm al-Khayr, and the like<sup>377</sup>."

In his study of black slavery in Cairo, Walz draws conclusions on the subtleties of Islamic slave names which further endorse Burckhardt. Based upon legal documents in Cairo's eighteenth-century Mahkama archives, Walz notes that while certain names such as Fatima and Zaynab for women were popular among all classes in Cairo, others, such as Bakhita, Mahbuba, Sa'ida, Zahra, and Halima seem to have been reserved for female slaves. 'Abdallah, Murjan, Sa'id, and Bakhit were reserved for males<sup>378</sup>.

Slaves in the Sudan obviously shared the same names, having come from the same stock. The association of the name "Bakhita" with servile status appears clearly in Taylor's account of his 1852 Nile journey. He talks about his boat's Dar Fur-born cook, Bakhita, and says, "She sat squatted on the forward deck all day, hideously and nakedly ugly, but performed her duties so regularly and with such a contented face, laughing heartily at all the jokes which the men made at her expense, that I soon learned to tolerate her presence, which was at first disgusting<sup>379</sup>."

Similarly, the name Bakhit for a man of servile origins appears in Tayeb Salih's The Wedding of Zein: Bakhit figures as one of the village

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<sup>376</sup> O'Fahey and Spaulding (1974), pp. 134, 150, 175, 180.

<sup>377</sup> Burckhardt (1819), p. 328.

<sup>378</sup> Walz (1985) pp. 141-42.

<sup>379</sup> Taylor (1854), p. 227.

destitutes, semi-paralyzed and slightly deformed<sup>380</sup>. And in describing to his family the details of one slavery-related trial, T.R.H. Owen wrote about an illegally enslaved Abyssinian boy whose name was changed to Bakhit, "the regular name given to 75% of the slaves<sup>381</sup>."

As explained above, certain Islamic personal names became closely associated with slave status--by and large through a process of common usage that developed over the course of centuries. One might have heard the name "Bakhita," therefore, and have assumed that it was a slave. Other slave names were less subtle; indeed some suggested slave status with the sharpness and immediacy of a slap in the face. Such names were whimsical, ridiculous, insulting, or just plain odd; they were names that no free person would ever or could ever bear.

Burckhardt made this very clear. He said, "Sometimes the names are more extraordinary, as Sabaah al-khayr (good morning), Jiraab (leather sack), etc<sup>382</sup>." Burckhardt's claims are solid. Supporting him, for instance, are references in the memoirs of the eminent Sudanese shaykh/educator Babikr Bedri; he repeatedly mentions his trusted slave assistant named Sabah al-Khayr ("Good Morning"), who accompanied him in the early days of the Mahdi<sup>383</sup>.

In reminiscing on his earliest days as a minor administrator in Kordofan, Harold MacMichael describes an ownership dispute that broke out over a group of captured slave women in 1906<sup>384</sup>. It fell upon him to make the preliminary enquiries, and to take evidence from the slave women. One name in particular stuck in his mind, it being quite unusual, and that belonged to a woman named Kunzishidaier--perhaps meaning something like "Little warehouse treasure."

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<sup>380</sup> Salih (1968) p. 45.

<sup>381</sup> SAD 414/2/3-7: T.R.H. Owen. T.R.H. Owen to his mother, Kosti, 18-19 July 1928.

<sup>382</sup> Burckhardt (1819), p. 328.

<sup>383</sup> References to Sabah al-Khayr appear throughout the first volume of Bedri (1969).

<sup>384</sup> SAD 294/18/23-24: H.A. MacMichael. "Reminiscences of Kordofan in 1906 (by Sir Harold MacMichael)."

Terence Walz devotes a couple of paragraphs and a few detailed footnotes to the issue of bizarre names of Sudan-derived slaves in eighteenth-century Cairo--and this makes his one of the most detailed treatments of the subject that has appeared. He says, "Slaves tended to be named after scents, fruits, or flowers, jewels, animals, or Quranic personalities, or were given names suggesting a happy or pleasing servile disposition or an alluring physical appearance<sup>385</sup>." He came across female slave names such as Nila (indigo), Hulkiyya (pitch black), Hibra (ink), and, for light-skinned Ethiopians, Za'faran (saffron)<sup>386</sup>. His observation also explains why names such as Sa'id (happy) and Zahra (rose) were in vogue.

Fitting into this pattern also is a name which the German archaeologist Lepsius encountered: he received as a gift a newly-captured Abyssinian slave boy, whom the enslavers had called "Rihan," meaning sweet-scented basil; Lepsius, however, restored the boy's original Christian Amharic name and vowed to take him to Europe<sup>387</sup>. Likewise, while a captive of the Mahdist state, Rudolf Slatin encountered a eunuch named "Almas," meaning diamond, who belonged to the Khalifa 'Abdallahi<sup>388</sup>.

Some slaves arrived from the Sudan bearing more outrageous names. Walz came across references to people named Shuna (granary), Jurada (hoe), Umm Ballina (mother of whale), Barwana (grass-snake). He also found some with names that reflected domestic work, such as Mantuf (hairdresser) and Nukh (carpet)<sup>389</sup>.

One could produce long lists of odd slave names. After a visit to Aba Island, Taylor remarked on the slave vizier of the [Muslim] Shilluk "sultan": the vizier's name was "Adjeb-Seedoo"; that is, "He pleases his

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<sup>385</sup> Walz (1985), p. 142. Schimmel notes that such names signifying jewels, flowers, etc., once used for slave women only, are now quite popular in the Islamic world (Schimmel [1989], p. 46).

<sup>386</sup> Walz (1985), pp. 141-42.

<sup>387</sup> Lepsius (1853), pp. 180-81.

<sup>388</sup> Slatin (1898), p. 240.

<sup>389</sup> Walz (1985), p. 156, footnotes 21, 22, 23.

master<sup>390</sup>." A Sudanese woman mentioned to this writer that the two women who helped her grandmother in raising her father, uncles, and aunts were named Zayd al-Mal (Increase of Wealth) and Rabbigoud (Lord Be Generous)<sup>391</sup>--they were obviously of servile origins. In the course of his research, O'Fahey came across a slave named Sallamth, i.e. "His [the master's] well-being<sup>392</sup>." Spaulding, meanwhile, has come across slave women named "Sea of Lusts" and "Patience is a Blessing<sup>393</sup>."

### The Significance of Slave Names

Many have mentioned the unusual naming practices displayed towards Sudanese slaves yet few have attempted any theoretical assessment of the data. The question that begs answering is this: Why did the names of slaves depart so frequently from the names of the free population? What was the social significance of slave nomenclature?

Slaves did not always hold the monopoly on bizarre names in the Islamic world. As Schimmel has shown in her study on Islamic names, it was often the custom in pre-Islamic Arabia to name the child after a frightening or harsh concept (such as Murra [bitterness] or Harb [war]), or after the first object seen following the birth (hence explaining how one man got the name Qunfudh [hedgehog]). According to one hadith, however, Muhammad discouraged this practice, stating that a father had the obligation to give his son a good name<sup>394</sup>.

Nevertheless, the custom continued to a very limited extent among free populations, and continues into the present day, largely because people have believed that an ugly, absurd, or ominous name may ward off the evil

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390 A'jaba sayyidahu--Taylor (1854), p. 335.

391 Private conversation, 25 August 1991, Durham, England.

392 O'Fahey (1985), p. 87.

393 Spaulding (1982), p. 12.

394 Schimmel (1989), p. 14.

eye. That may explain why the ninth-century scholar Ibn Qutayba came across names such as Bakraj (coffee pot) and Salm (bucket with one handle)<sup>395</sup>; or why Bedouin and peasant communities in modern times have been known to name their children Zibalah (garbage), Yamut (he dies), and Bunna (coffee bean)<sup>396</sup>. It likewise explains why the caliph al-Mutawakkil named his beautiful slave girl Qabiha (ugly)<sup>397</sup>.

These arguments are interesting, but inadequate for the subject at hand. Perhaps the occasional slave-owner, like the caliph al-Mutawakkil, was superstitious enough to protect a slave investment in the pre-Islamic manner, by bestowing a name that would deter the evil spirits. Yet bizarre names occurred far too frequently among slaves for that argument to suffice. Much more likely is the possibility that the intent of odd slave names was to separate and mark the servile classes with identity tags indicative of their social stature.

In this regard, the theories which Patterson propounds in his sweeping cross-cultural study of slavery over the ages are far more pertinent. Patterson points to the tremendous significance of slave names, and shows that the custom of assigning bizarre names to slaves is not unique to the Sudan and Egypt, but is rather a trend which has recurred in many slave-holding societies. Based on his own fieldwork in Jamaica, for instance, Patterson notes that the records of one estate list the names of Beauty (a woman), Monkey (a man), and Strumpet (a woman)--names which prove confusing to the researcher, since they correspond so closely to the names recorded for that estate's livestock<sup>398</sup>.

One need only to pick up an old copy of the abolitionist journal, the Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter, to find mentioned more examples of

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<sup>395</sup> Schimmel (1989), p. 3.

<sup>396</sup> Schimmel (1989), pp. 20-21, 47.

<sup>397</sup> Schimmel (1989), p. 13.

<sup>398</sup> Patterson (1982), p. 57. In the Sudan, indeed, legal documents classified slaves as livestock or hayawan al-natiq--talking animals (Spaulding [1982], p. 12).

outrageous names. A quick perusal of issues from 1826 and 1831 yielded names of Barbados slaves such as Orange (who was the mother of a boy named October), Friday, January, and Alabaster<sup>399</sup>.

Closer comparative study of slave-holding and slave-naming practices in the Middle East shows that the naming patterns suggested by Walz for eighteenth-century Sudan-derived slaves in Cairo have a very long history, stretching back centuries. Gotein, for example, utilized eleventh-century documents from the Cairo Geniza records to sketch the slave-owning practices of that city's Jewish community<sup>400</sup>. He noted that "Sudanese," Nubian, and European male slaves often had names which were in use among the free, presumably Jewish population, mainly because these slaves often held responsible positions as the business representatives of their owners, and even took charge of the businesses when the owners were out of town<sup>401</sup>. The situation differed for female slaves, who, "as a rule, bore proper names indicative of their social station....<sup>402</sup>" Some "Nubian" girls bore the names Musk, Salt ("denoting wittiness and grace"), Pleasure, Dexterity, and Arsenic ("possibly called so because of her light, silvery-white complexion"); white slave girls bore names of the same ilk, such as the Persian "Perfume" and the Greek "Steadiness"<sup>403</sup>.

In defining the social function of such slave nomenclature, one can only state the obvious: off-beat slave names served to distinguish slave from free. They highlighted the slave's social insignificance. A laughable or whimsical name suggested not only that its bearer was a slave, but that he or she had no claim to social honour and social respect.

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<sup>399</sup> Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter, No. 19, December 30, 1826, p. 273; and No. 13, July 25, 1831, pp. 350, 357.

<sup>400</sup> A "geniza" is a place, usually attached to a synagogue, where unusable books and ritual objects containing the name of God are stored. The Cairo Geniza is one of the best-known and best-preserved; it contained, among other things, numerous documents relating to the Egyptian Jewish communities from the rise of Islam to the First Crusade. See Abraham Meir Habermann, "Genizah," Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 7 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974), pp. 404-8.

<sup>401</sup> S.D. Gotein, "Slaves and Slavegirls in the Cairo Geniza Records," Arabica, Vol. 9, 1962, pp. 3,4.

<sup>402</sup> Gotein (1962), p. 3.

<sup>403</sup> Gotein (1962), pp. 8-9.

This honourlessness, according to Patterson, is one of the major elements of the slave condition. "A slave can have no honour," says Patterson, "because he has no independent social existence<sup>404</sup>." Indeed, the honourlessness of slaves is apparent in that slaves generally had no kunya in addition to their personal name (ism); the kunya, as Schimmel explains, is an honorific, the designation of a person as father (abu) or mother (umm) of so-and-so, a term of respect "not to be used for socially inferior people<sup>405</sup>."

Pitt-Rivers, one of the greatest theorists on the concept of honour, remarks on the link between name and honour in his study of a small Andalusian village. Although the people of this society placed great emphasis on courtesy, they nonetheless commonly denied courtesy to one group--the "shameless ones." These were the ones with sullied reputations, generally through promiscuity in the case of women, or petty thieving in the case of men. The critical way of expressing the society's verdict against them was to address them directly by their nicknames, and not by their proper Christian names<sup>406</sup>. This was the way to deny them honour.

As this shows, it may not be the name which a person receives at birth that matters; rather, it is the name by which others choose to address that individual which holds weight: this latter name, more than anything else, reflects society's verdict on one's honourable status. In the case of slaves, odd or stigmatized names such as Sabah al-khayr (Good Morning) reflected the verdict from the start; addressing a mature slave as "boy" or "girl"<sup>407</sup> would only further stress the point.

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<sup>404</sup> Patterson (1979), p. 35.

<sup>405</sup> Schimmel (1989), pp. 4-6. An example of the kunya structure would be Abu Salim ('Father of Salim').

<sup>406</sup> Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society, Ed. J.G. Peristiany (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), pp. 40-41. See also Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honor," International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol. 6, Ed. David L. Sills (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), pp. 503-11.

<sup>407</sup> For instance, see Gotein (1962), pp. 2-3.

A few historical examples from the Sudan will suffice to throw greater light on the stigma surrounding slave nomenclature. In his history of the Mahdist state, P.M. Holt mentions a decisive Italian victory over the Mahdist army at Kassala in 1894. The commander of the Mahdist forces, Musa'id Qaydum, fled from the scene of battle in ignominious defeat. Holt says, "Musa'id Qaydum's precipitate flight from Kassala...aroused the anger and contempt of [the Khalifa] 'Abdallahi, who referred to him as 'Halima,' as if he were a slave girl<sup>408</sup>." No better way was there for the Khalifa to express his scorn than to rail his defeated commander with a woman's name, and with an obviously slave name at that.

In her study of the kingdom of Taqali in the Nuba Mountains, Ewald notes that the Taqali king Isma'il (1783-1800) reportedly had so many "sons," that they formed their own armed fighting unit. Many of these men, however, had names and takniya (nicknames) referring to their strength and bravery, and not to their maternal origins--suggesting that their mother's kin did not play a role supporting them in disputes. Ewald concludes that many of these men must have been slaves and clients, rather than true sons, since "[such] takniya would also be likely if they were slaves or the sons of slave women<sup>409</sup>."

Kapteijns hints to slave-naming practices in her study on late nineteenth-century slavery in Dar Masalit. She devotes a section to the processes of manumission and social absorption for both male and female slaves, and says, "Manumission was a simple ceremony at which the faqih read the fatiha (the opening chapter of the Koran), the slave received a proper Muslim name, and a goat or ram was slaughtered for those who came to offer congratulations<sup>410</sup>." If the slave received a proper Muslim name upon manumission (though he or she had no doubt been living in a

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408 Holt (1970), pp. 214-15.

409 Ewald (1982), p. 155.

410 Kapteijns (1984), p. 115.

Muslim milieu for quite some time already), then one wonders what name he or she bore before! Unfortunately Kapteijns provides no examples.

This discussion of slave nomenclature helps to neutralize the claims of some that slavery in the Islamic Sudan was a purely benevolent institution. If the Quran guaranteed the spiritual equality between free and slave, then Islamic society in the Sudan and elsewhere did much to guarantee the social inequality between free and slave. A slave was socially powerless and socially honourless; a slave was property<sup>411</sup>, and subtly or not so subtly, the personal name proved it. Indeed, in the Sudan, as in the New World, a slave's name often stood out like a flag to herald the individual's servile position, and thereby to enforce it.

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<sup>411</sup> See Patterson (1979), pp. 32-35.

## Chapter 10:

# Concubinage and the Umm al-Walad

### Introduction

In clarifying laws against adultery (zina) and in setting guidelines for acceptable social behaviour, the Quran permitted slave-owning men to have sexual relations with their female slaves. That is, while the Quran and Islamic jurisprudence limited the number of wives that a man could legally have to four, the number of concubines remained limitless.

For many, the term "concubine" conjures up images of the opulent harems of the Islamic world, in which the concubines existed exclusively to satisfy the master's sexual appetite. In the Sudan, at least, this image would not have held true. By the Turco-Egyptian period, slave-owners represented a broad range of the socio-economic spectrum, and slave-owning was no longer a confine of the rich. A man of average wealth may have enjoyed the comfort that a few slaves brought, but would not have had a harem of the type mentioned above. Instead, in this context, the slave woman who baked the bread or looked after the children also may have received the master's sexual advances. Thus the average slave woman probably played a double role as labourer and concubine.

This chapter is devoted to one of the key issues--concubinage--which surrounded many of the Sudan's slave women, who as a whole constituted a majority of the slave population in most areas at most times during the period under study. More specifically, the chapter centres on those concubines who achieved a distinct social and legal status by bearing a

child to their owner. Such a woman became known as umm al-walad, or "the mother of children"<sup>412</sup>."

### Marriage, Concubinage, and Islam

The Quran limits the number of wives that a Muslim man may have to four, providing that he can support them all in a comfortable and equitable manner. The verse which reveals this ruling continues by saying, "But if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess. That will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice"<sup>413</sup>." In the Quran, "that [which] your right hands possess" means slaves; thus the holy book is here advising men to cohabit with slave concubines if they cannot afford the expense of maintaining a wife in style<sup>414</sup>.

Bruce displayed a remarkable understanding of Islamic law when he discussed polygamy in his 1790 travel account. He explains how the Quran sought to protect the rights and rank of the women married to a man, partially by imposing the four-wife limit, and says that in Arabia at least, each man was required to prove to the Qadi (judge) that he could support his prospective wife/wives. But then he states, "It was not so with concubines, with women who were purchased, or who were taken in war. Every man enjoyed these at his pleasure, and their peril, that is, whether he was able to maintain them or not"<sup>415</sup>."

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<sup>412</sup> It is Schacht (see below) who defines and translates umm al-walad as "the mother of children," rather than as "the mother of the boy." In so doing, he must be using the term walad in its collective, rather than singular, sense, in deference to the meaning implied by Islamic jurists.

<sup>413</sup> Quran iv:3 (based on translation by A. Yusuf Ali, [Jeddah: Dar al-Qiblah] undated reprint of 1934 edition).

<sup>414</sup> The Quran does not use the more specific term jariya (slave girl) or suriya (concubine) here. In fact, when talking about slaves of all types and of both genders, the phrase "ma malakat aymanukum" ("that which your right hands possess") is the only term used.

<sup>415</sup> Bruce, Vol. 1 (1790), p. 280.

Why did Islamic law not expect a man to maintain his concubines equally and in comfort? What made concubinage so different from marriage?

In defining marriage as an abstract term, Marshall highlights its features as a system of rights and obligations, not only between the husband and wife but between the blood relations of both partners. "In fact," she says, "it is the linkage of groups as well as individuals that is crucial to the formulation of the difference between marriage and its social analogues. Only marriage creates (or maintains) affinal relationships between the kinsmen of individuals who claim the roles of husband and wife<sup>416</sup>." Concubinage, by contrast, may exist side-by-side with marriage (as in the northern Sudan), but it lacks the latter's legal functions (e.g. regarding inheritance laws) and does not link the concubine's kin to the owner's. It therefore comes without the baggage of rights and obligations expected by the wife's kin group<sup>417</sup>. Essentially concubinage provides all the pleasures of marriage, but with "no strings attached." The above interpretation of marriage explains why concubinage was so desirable in the Sudan, as in many Islamic and non-Islamic societies. Concubines afforded men the sexual satisfaction they wanted without imposing any serious obligations upon them. Since the Quran implies that the non-wife partners of the free man would be slave women, by extension this means that concubinage in most Islamic contexts applied to any slave women who became the targets of their master's sexual advances.

Slave women made ideal concubines, in fact. Their enslavers wrenched them from their homes, thrust them into a foreign land, and in the process stripped them of all their rights. Thus they came kinless into the enslaver's society. By and large slave women had no families who could

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<sup>416</sup> Gloria A. Marshall, "Marriage: Comparative Analysis," International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Ed. David L. Sills, Vol. 10 (New York: Macmillan, Inc., 1968), pp. 8-9, 14.

<sup>417</sup> See Robert Briffault, "Concubinage," Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, Ed. Edwin R.A. Seligman, Vol. 4 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), p. 171-73.

press their demands; they had no one who could stand up to defend them against a husband figure, if necessary. Concubinage with slave women was relatively hassle-free. Not only did they bring a man pleasure, but they produced children who expanded his lineage, and who served as direct evidence of his virility. If and when a man tired of his concubines, he could sell them off and buy new ones, answering to no one.

### "Umm al-Walad": The Mother of Children

A man could sell them, that is, only if they had not yet borne him children. For Islamic law had, indeed, tried to ameliorate the slave concubine's situation to an extent, by stipulating that the concubine who had produced a child for her master earned the status of umm al-walad and gained special privileges.

Schacht presents the definitive article on the umm al-walad principle in the Encyclopaedia of Islam. He notes that Muhammad recognized the practice of concubinage as a continuation of pagan Arab practice. Only under the caliph 'Umar (634-644 AD), however, did Islamic jurisprudence fully codify the ruling that the umm al-walad achieved a special status: that she became free ipso jure on the death of her master, and that she could not be sold<sup>418</sup>.

Although the implementation of the law regarding the sale and manumission of the umm al-walad was at times open for debate, one thing was perfectly clear: the children of the union between a free owner and his concubine were legally free, fully equal in the eyes of the law to the children of two free parents. This was never open to dispute. The only prerequisite for establishing the free status of the child was that the father recognize paternity.

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<sup>418</sup> J. Schacht, "Umm al-Walad," E.J. Brill's First Encyclopedia of Islam, Ed. M. Th. Houtsma et al, Vol. 8 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), p. 1012.

Many sources on the Sudan point to the protected legal status of the umm al-walad and the free status of her children as incontrovertible evidence on the benign nature of Islamic slavery, and on the excellent opportunities for social mobility. Even Schacht acknowledges, however, that the picture might not always have been so rosy.

Just before the coming of Islam, for example, Arab society began to accord greater value to free birth on the mother's side rather than on the father's (the patrilineal) side alone. Indeed, the term umm al-walad ("mother of children") contrasted with the term for a free woman, umm al-banin ("mother of sons")--betraying a preference for the latter. Likewise, Schacht notes that many slave-owners tried to avoid endangering the pure slave status of the concubine by practicing 'azl (coitus interruptus), or by trying to deny paternity in cases of pregnancy. Partially in response to this behaviour, hadiths attributed to 'Umar and Ibn 'Umar declared that no one who has had intercourse with his slave woman can reasonably dispute paternity<sup>419</sup>.

The legal premise of umm al-walad had strong and clear-cut effects on northern Sudanese society as a whole. It provided a major avenue to manumission and social absorption for the female slave population, while enabling a cultural and biological fusion to occur amongst the ethnic populations of the Bilad al-Sudan. The loss of so many [female] slaves and their descendants through manumission partially explains why the slave population of the Sudan failed to reproduce on any significant scale. This prompted a continuous demand for replenishing slave populations over the course of centuries.

According to an orthodox interpretation of Islamic law, the children of a slave mother/free father union are absolutely free. Where society recognized this fully, such offspring encountered few obstacles to social

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<sup>419</sup> Schacht (1987), p. 1014.

and economic success. Perhaps the finest modern example of such a Sudanese individual was Sayyid 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi. Allegedly the posthumous son of the Mahdi by a slave concubine (umm al-walad), he rose to an extremely high and influential position in Sudanese politics and society during the interwar period and into the era of Sudanese independence after 1956<sup>420</sup>. We are told, too, that the Mahdi's successor, the Khalifa 'Abdullahi, had a brother named Harun, the son of his father by a concubine<sup>421</sup>. Harun appears to have been held in equal standing to his other siblings, another indicator that the umm al-walad principle went into practice.

Both Ewald, in her study of the Taqali kingdom, and Kapteijns, in her study on slavery in Dar Masalit, come to the conclusion that slave concubines were absorbed quickly and smoothly into society. Ewald suggests that any woman, whether slave or free, who bore a child to the king (and his lineage) stood in the highest standing as an artiya, who gained such privileges as sleeping on a bed instead of a mat and getting her own house which slave servants staffed<sup>422</sup>. Admittedly, it is difficult to determine whether or not the [Muslim] Taqali elite felt that it was obeying the umm al-walad principle by this practice; it may have been based on purely indigenous Taqali custom. Kapteijns is more specific. She claims that the umm al-walads of Dar Masalit were married and freed if they bore their master a child, and that their children were recognized as free, too<sup>423</sup>.

Islamic law clearly took the well-being of the concubine (and of her children) into some consideration; many slave-owners followed the law. Many slave-owners, too, lavished attention and care upon their slave concubines in ways that Islamic law did not and could not enjoin, so that

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<sup>420</sup> See Peter Woodward, "In the Footsteps of Gordon: the Sudan Government and the Rise of Sayyid Sir Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi, 1915-1935," African Affairs, Vol. 84, No. 334, January 1985, pp. 39-51.

<sup>421</sup> Holt (1970), pp. 51-52.

<sup>422</sup> Ewald (1982), p. 176.

<sup>423</sup> Kapteijns (1984), pp. 114-15.

their treatment at times far surpassed the minimal standards encouraged for slaves. According to one Dar Fur song's lyrics, some men relieved their slave concubines of all housework duties if they became their special favourites<sup>424</sup>. Pallme suggests, too, that many concubines received better treatment than a man's [free] wives, and also concludes that the fate of free women was not significantly better than that of ordinary slave women. He claims that free women were regarded as servants by their husband, and discarded as they got older in favour of young and pretty slave girls; and if they had the misfortune of bearing no children, then the husband might marry the umm al-walad who gave him offspring in their stead, while divorcing or utterly neglecting his old wives<sup>425</sup>.

Walz provides evidence from Cairo which similarly points to the fact that slave concubines there at times received greater consideration than free wives. Documents show that slave women who had borne children to their masters often received very generous wasiyas, or posthumous bequests, from their former owners. Indeed, the wasiya amount often exceeded the one-eighth share of the husband's estate which a wife received<sup>426</sup>.

As the above evidence has shown, some slave-owners accorded their slave concubines the status of umm al-walad. It appears from several references, however, that very many others did not.

### Departures from the Umm al-Walad Principle

For example, Pallme elaborated on concubinage in Kordofan, and in so doing noted common practices which bore no resemblance to orthodox Islamic practice--though he obviously did not realize this. Twice he emphasizes a rather shocking point: that masters sometimes sold the

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<sup>424</sup> O'Fahey (1985), p. 83.

<sup>425</sup> Pallme (1844), p. 63.

<sup>426</sup> Walz (1985), p. 145.

children of the umm al-walad. He says that, unlike Egyptian custom by which "all natural children are treated like Egyptians," Kordofanian custom considered the children of slave concubines to be the salable property of their [biological] fathers. The sale of these offspring to Cairo-bound traders constituted a lively branch of commerce for the slave-owning classes<sup>427</sup>.

If Pallme assessed the situation correctly, then such children fetched prime prices.

Children born in Kordofan of captive parents are generally of the highest price, because already accustomed to some species of work and more especially because acquainted with the Arabic language, for the owner of a married slave, or of a girl who brings a child into the world, is at the same time proprietor of the latter, and is permitted to sell it; masters even who have children by their female slaves may dispose of their offspring, and examples of this unnatural proceeding are by no means uncommon<sup>428</sup>.

Clearly some free men had no qualms whatsoever about selling their own offspring into slavery--though any religious scholar trained in orthodox teachings would have been aghast to find that these enslaved children were technically free Muslims.

Other travellers noted the same phenomenon. Based upon a visit to the Shendi area in the winter of 1824, Ruppell likewise wrote that he saw many children--the offspring of slave women and their masters--sold as slaves<sup>429</sup>. In his 1884 travel account, Josiah Williams mentions some information which one Greek resident of Kassala gave him. This man told him that "some Arabs and Greeks breed from slave-women, who are kept for profit just as cattle are in England. The children born under these circumstances are sold by their fathers<sup>430</sup>." Williams is probably

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<sup>427</sup> Pallme (1844), p. 73.

<sup>428</sup> Pallme (1844), pp. 293-94.

<sup>429</sup> Ruppell (1829), p. 107.

<sup>430</sup> Josiah Williams, Life in the Soudan: Adventures amongst the Tribes, and Travels in Egypt, in 1881 and 1882 (London: Remington and Co., Publishers, 1884), p. 152.

exaggerating somewhat by saying that owners "bred" from their slaves as one would do for livestock; rather, the children were the normal, expected product of the Quran-condoned sexual relationships between a master and his concubines. Nevertheless, the important point is that like Pallme and Rüppell, Williams does show that many slave-owners did not observe the umm al-walad principle and happily sold their own progeny for profit.

Judging from Slatin's Fire and Sword in the Sudan, it appears that Omdurman society under the Khalifa 'Abdullahi did grant some rights to those slave concubines who had experienced motherhood: in particular, these women could not be sold again. However, according to Slatin, very few slave concubines experienced the stability and continuity which might have led to motherhood and any kind of family life. Slatin says that "in the majority of cases, they are bought with the object of being retained for a very short time, and subsequently sold again at a profit<sup>431</sup>."

In addition to these fragmentary references, the sources have yielded a few detailed examples which show how northern Sudanese social practice could breach the umm al-walad principle as understood in orthodox Islam. Although these three examples, case studies of sorts, are fraught with ambiguity, they nonetheless indicate how far custom strayed from ideals.

Two anecdotes from The Memoirs of Babikr Bedri, the writings of a Sudanese man who was an ardent supporter of the Mahdist cause in his younger days, hint that the children of an umm al-walad were regarded and treated as full-fledged slaves. In one instance, Babikr Bedri relates,

Shaykh 'Abd al-Latif Waqi'allah had a slave called 'Ali, who had been born in his house and circumcised with his children, and to whom he gave a very expensive teak-wood bed, on which he had lain during the circumcision. In the year 1315 (1897-98) when this slave was twenty years old he ran away and joined the jihadiyya<sup>432</sup>. One day 'Abd al-Latif, who was my neighbour, sent for me by one of his sons, and

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<sup>431</sup> Slatin (1898), p. 344.

<sup>432</sup> The jihadiyya was a branch of the military forces consisting of enlisted men of slave origins.

when I got there I found his slave 'Ali with four of the Negro Guard, demanding his mother and the teak-wood bed on which he had been circumcised. I said, "Perhaps you have a right to the bed, since you were circumcised on it: but as for your mother--the law does not allow you to take her unless you pay her price." So he took the bed, and told his master that he would bring the money to pay for his mother<sup>433</sup>.

This passage is problematic in that it does not state 'Ali's precise relation to his "master." Much relies on interpretation. Was 'Ali the biological son of the master, and was his mother an umm al-walad? It certainly appears that 'Ali could have been no base slave of two slave parents, if he had enjoyed the privilege of being being circumcised with the master's other children on a fine teak bed.

Babikr Bedri, who had undergone rigorous religious training in his youth, was right: 'Ali could not take his mother without paying for her, for even if she were an umm al-walad, Islamic law stipulated that she would not acquire automatic freedom until her master's death. In other ways, though, it appears that religious law had been broken. If 'Ali were indeed the son of the master, then his half-slave parentage seems to have tainted him with the mark of slavery and denied him his rightful freedom (Bedri, after all, calls him a "slave".) Perhaps, though, the master did not recognize paternity of 'Ali. Even so, if his mother had indeed been a concubine then only the master could have had, or should have had, sexual access to her.

Another passage hovers in the realm of unorthodoxy. In discussing some of the atrocities perpetrated by ex-slave soldiers on their former masters at the fall of Omdurman in 1898, Babikr Bedri says:

As we reached the south-eastern corner of the market we saw a Negro soldier leading a slave-girl by the hand.... Then we saw Ibrahim Tamim the merchant from Aswan (who seemed to be the slave girl's

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<sup>433</sup> Bedri, Vol. 1 (1969), p. 218.

master) running after them; and when he had caught them up he seized hold of the girl's hand, to take her back with him. The soldier at once loaded his rifle and shot him, and he leapt up in the air and fell to the ground--we saw it from less than two hundred metres away. Then the soldier took the girl's hand again, and they went away laughing loudly. When we asked about it we learnt that the slave-girl had been Ibrahim Tamim's concubine, and that the soldier was her brother, and that both had been born in his house<sup>434</sup>.

This excerpt is even more ambiguous than the previous one. Could a married slave couple have produced a new generation of slaves for the master, including one slave-boy, who ran away and joined the army, and one slave-girl, who became the master's concubine? It might have been possible except for the fact that the siblings had been born in the master's house: it seems unlikely that a slave couple would have shared a house with their owner, rather than living in a hut of their own.

Another possibility is that the master, or a free member of his household perhaps, used his slave-woman as a concubine, and fathered these two children--hence explaining why and how they were born in his house. He may have even rented out his slave woman's sexual service to others, for profit, reaping benefits from a new generation of offspring regarded as slaves. (Such possibilities for prostitution are discussed at length in a separate chapter.) In any case, the scenario makes subtle and disturbing allusions to incest or some other form of sexual exploitation, which if true would help to explain the wrathful bitterness of the soldier who was willing to blast his former master to pieces in order to free his sister.

It must be stated that Babikr Bedri was in no way an unbiased witness to the scene. He clearly shared the interests of the slave-owning classes, for he was a slave-owner himself. As he relates these anecdotes on the vengeful behaviour of ex-slaves, it is obvious that he is utterly appalled

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<sup>434</sup> Bedri, Vol. 1 (1969), p. 241.

by the turncoat ingratitude of these people. He fixes his sympathy to the slave-owners quite strongly.

The final case study comes from the 1911 annual report for the Repression of Slave Trade Department in the Condominium government. This case illustrates that in spite of the government's noble declarations advocating the gradual emancipation of slaves born before 1898 (as opposed to outright abolition for those Sudanese born after 1898), freedom remained beyond the grasp of many slaves who yearned for it. The government's underlying policy was instead to curry and maintain the good favour of the influential slave-owning sector as much as possible<sup>435</sup>.

One administrator relays the following example as evidence of the great difficulty which many slaves had in getting government-issued freedom papers in the face of an owner's opposition. Only the Khartoum Office, by the recommendation of the Governor and his staff, or the Legal Authorities, [reluctantly] granted these papers. The official wrote,

A case recently occurred where two slave boys, whose fathers were Arabs and mothers Furawi Sudanese women captured during the Mahdiah, left their village in the Ghezirah [sic], walked to Wad Medani, took the train from there to Khartoum, volunteered for service in the Egyptian Army Mounted Infantry, and were enlisted.

Both their fathers were killed during the Mahdiah, but the mother of one of the boys is still alive in his village. Shortly afterwards the master of one of these boys came and claimed them.

Both boys were unwilling to return, and in the end a compromise was made that each boy should pay his master Pt. 50 per month out of his pay.

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<sup>435</sup> SAD 479/2: H.C. Jackson. Confidential Memorandum to Mudirs [1899]. Article No. 8 says, "Slavery is not recognized in the Sudan, but as long as service is willingly rendered by servants to masters it is unnecessary to interfere in the conditions existing between them.... I leave it to your discretion to adopt the best methods of gradually eradicating the habit of depending on the slave labour...."

I mention this, as I should like to have given these smart young lads, who have volunteered to serve the Government, freedom papers<sup>436</sup>.

This anecdote illustrates a number of important points. First, the mother of these boys, as a Fur woman, was quite probably Muslim, and had been enslaved as war booty during the Mahdiah. This may represent just one of scores upon scores of cases whereby Muslims did enslave Muslims in the northern Sudan, in spite of the widely-known Islamic law strictures against the enslavement of fellow believers. (So many references point to the frequency of this practice that the subject deserves its own study.) Second, this case corroborates both of Bedri's anecdotes in showing that the military represented a major attraction for slave and ex-slave elements who perceived it as an avenue for greater autonomy, self-esteem, and also adventure.

The implications for the study at hand, on concubinage and the umm al-walad, are clear. Why should these boys have been slaves, so thoroughly under the yoke of their "masters" that both enlistment in the far-away army and intercession from the Slave Trade Department could not rid them of the fetters of servitude? Their mothers were Fur women, taken as booty in war; their fathers were [free] Arabs, presumably owners of the women. With free paternity clear, the free status of these two boys should have been clear, as well.

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<sup>436</sup> Sudan Government, "Annual Report, Repression of Slave Trade Department," Reports on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan: 1911, Vol. 2, p. 568.

## Nonconformity with the Umm al-Walad Principle:

### Genealogy or Islamization?

One can posit at least two explanations as to why the rulings on the special status of the umm al-walad and the fully free status of her children were so often ignored in the northern Sudan.

The first explanation relates to the stigma of slave ancestry. Although this has been covered at length in other chapters, more remains to be said on the issue at hand. In an 1829 account, the geologist Ruppell wrote that "one often finds bastards originating from connections with female slaves, but they [these offspring] have never been put into the same class as the free inhabitants<sup>437</sup>." In an 1833 visit to the Shendi/ Berber area, the archaeologist Hoskins noted that "it is considered a degradation [for one of the upper classes] to have a son by a slave or woman of low rank....<sup>438</sup>"

Genealogy meant a lot in the northern Sudan. It obviously meant a lot in other areas of Islamic North Africa, too. Sersen cites one proverb which the twelfth-century scholar al-Maydani quoted in a collection of sayings. "La umma laka" ("you have no mother"), actually meant, according to al-Maydani, that one did not have a free mother. His text says, "This is a veritable insult, because the children of slave-girls according to the Arabs are not found praiseworthy, nor do they have those attachments [of lineage or genealogy] which the children of free-born women have....<sup>439</sup>"

According to Slatin, slave origins going back eons were enough to make the Ja'ali tribe of the Nile Valley look down on their neighbours, the Danagla (based around Dongola). That is, while the Ja'aliyin claimed

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<sup>437</sup> Ruppell (1829), p. 107.

<sup>438</sup> Hoskins (1835), p. 90.

<sup>439</sup> Cited in Sersen (1985) pp. 93-94.

descent from 'Abbas, the Prophet Muhammad's uncle, this same tribe held the Danagla in disdain, claiming that their eponymous ancestor was a slave named Dungal, who rose to become the ruler of Nubia<sup>440</sup>.

The fact that a pedigree genealogy was held in such high esteem in northern Sudanese society calls for a re-examination of a few examples cited on the beneficent, absorptive treatment awarded to umm al-walads and on the freedom and equality granted to their children. Seen in this light, Sayyid 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi's meteoric rise to social prominence, in spite of his alleged half-slave parentage, should come as no surprise. He was, after all, the son of the Mahdi--and what better genealogy could a northern Sudanese man claim? His mother's status as a slave concubine became thoroughly irrelevant in the face of his father's greatness. It must be said, too, that Sayyid 'Abd al-Rahman had only one surviving brother, 'Ali al-Mahdi (two of his brothers having been swiftly killed in 1899)<sup>441</sup>, who could possibly compete with him for glory.

Ewald tells us that the women who bore children to the Taqali king enjoyed as high a rank as his free wives who had done the same. The children of these slave-mothers were held to be fully free, too. But the king was, indeed, the king: once again it comes as no shock that maternal ancestry was irrelevant for the children of the most powerful man in the realm. The question to be asked then is this: what happened to the concubines and concubine offspring of the kingdom's less exalted citizens?

Kapteijns states with assurance that the slave women who bore children to their owners were not only freed, but married. Presumably they were not married to a man who already had four legal wives, so perhaps this statement does not apply to Dar Masalit's larger slave-holdings. Her findings suggest a practice which was very benign. Perhaps one should bear in mind, though, that she acquired this information from oral sources,

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<sup>440</sup> Slatin (1898), p. 8.

<sup>441</sup> Woodward (1985), p. 41.

that is, from the descendants of slave-owners. These informants may or may not have been looking through a blurred lens of time which makes the past appear quite golden.

Some slave-owners might have been reluctant to acknowledge the special status of concubine mothers and the equality of their half-caste children. Others might not have even known that Islamic law expected them to do so. There is no doubt, though, that the 'ulama of al-Azhar in Cairo, the experts on orthodox doctrine, would have frowned upon these departures from Islamic law regarding the status of the umm al-walad and her children.

Were the slave-owners of Pallme's Kordofan, of Ruppell's Nile Valley, or of Williams's Kassala aware that they were sharply transgressing from Islamic law when they sold their concubine-borne children into slavery? They may have known but may not have cared, in an eagerness to squeeze the system for all it was worth. Alternately, they may have had no idea of these religious injunctions. Much of it depends on how far and to what extent orthodox Islam had actually penetrated northern Sudanese society by the nineteenth century. The Sudan certainly had no 'ulama class on a par with Egypt's based at al-Azhar. Moreover, though Islam had begun to enter the Sudan by the early eighth century, much of the credit for Islamizing the region goes to wandering Sufi mystics who doubled as petty traders--no bastions of orthodoxy themselves<sup>442</sup>. It is open to question just how complete was the Islamization process even over a millennium later.

Burckhardt, for example, made one rather surprising comment in regard to the Muslims he encountered along the Nubian Nile in 1813. He said, "Those Nubians who have resided in Egypt, and can speak Arabic, are for the most part good Mussulmen, and repeat their prayers daily: but in

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<sup>442</sup> See, for example, Nehemia Levtzion, "Slavery and Islamization in Africa: A Comparative Study," Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa, Ed. John Ralph Willis, Vol. 1 (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1985), pp. 182-98.

general the only prayer known to the others is the exclamation of Allahu Akbar<sup>443</sup>." Bearing this in mind, one can only wonder how well-versed most residents of the northern Sudan would have been in their own religion.

One might expect that Babikr Bedri, on the other hand, would have known more. After all, he had had a lengthy religious education during which time he memorized the Quran by heart. Even so, it is difficult to assess how far the legal precedents set centuries before by the caliph 'Umar would have been followed in the nineteenth-century Sudan. Hillelson has noted that until at least the early nineteenth century, when one religious scholar compiled Tabaqat Wad Dayf Allah<sup>444</sup>, the study of hadith, along with other key subjects of Islamic education such as tafsir (exegesis of the Quran), Arabic grammar, and rhetoric, did not form part of the religious education given to most Sudanese scholars. This means that the main sources elaborating codes for the umm al-walad and her children, hadith sources, may have been thoroughly overlooked by many of the region's Islamic "experts"<sup>445</sup>.

At the same time, policies that contradicted orthodox guidelines may simply have been pagan relics of Sudanese customs that pre-dated Islamization. H.C. Jackson wrote of the Fung that they "would sell the slaves they had lived with, even though they had borne them children<sup>446</sup>." (Bruce had amply described the pagan influences that survived in and near the Fung capital at Sennar in spite of Islamization as late as the 1790's, mentioning, for instance, the pork-eating propensities of many pagans and Muslims alike<sup>447</sup>.) Selling a concubine's children may have been a custom inherited from the Fung and their predecessors.

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<sup>443</sup> Burckhardt (1819), p. 148.

<sup>444</sup> Tabaqat Wad Dayf Allah is a biographical dictionary which contains information on about 260 religious scholars who lived in the Nile region north of Khartoum roughly between 1500 AD and 1800 AD.

<sup>445</sup> Hillelson (1923), pp. 191-92, 200-1.

<sup>446</sup> H.C. Jackson, Tooth of Fire: Being Some Account of the Ancient Kingdom of Sennar (Oxford: B.H. Blackwell, 1912), p. 87.

<sup>447</sup> Bruce, Vol. 4 (1790), pp. 419-21, 477.

## Conclusion

In sum, two points regarding concubinage and the umm al-walad stand out as being exceptionally important. The first is that slave-owners displayed a range of treatment and behaviour towards these women. Some women gained the privileges that Islamic orthodoxy sanctioned and some gained none. Many others experienced the partial application of such laws: an owner may have recognized, for instance, that the slave concubine who bore him children could not be re-sold herself, but he may nonetheless have viewed those offspring as slaves, and paradoxically, he might even have sold them. Infinite variations on the law existed. Many owners implemented the aspects of laws that benefitted them most: this explains why Babikr Bedri may have ordered that one slave soldier could not legally take his [umm al-walad] mother without paying her price--recognizing the loophole in the law which declares such women to be free only after their master's death--while denying recognition of the soldier as a free man himself.

The other main point worth emphasizing is that regardless of the variations in practice or the residual stigma clinging to children of half-slave origin, the northern Sudanese/Islamic institution of concubinage did eventually pave the way for the social integration and absorption of most slaves involved. Stigma may have remained, and remained long, but it did eventually erode, thereby enabling the descendants of female slaves to become full members of Sudanese society.

## Chapter 11:

# **Prostitution among the Sudan's Slave and Ex-Slave Women**

## Introduction

Though slave-owners in the northern Sudan utilized their male and female slaves for a broad variety of labour functions--planting and harvesting, food preparation, and the like--most reaped little, if any, profits from their work. Instead, a slave generally laboured just enough to satisfy a family's subsistence needs while enabling them to maintain a comfortable standard of living.

However, one slave occupation does not fit this pattern at all, and indeed stands out for having consistently produced profits--hefty, not flimsy, profits--flowing in year-round. That occupation was prostitution. At least from the late eighteenth century, and throughout the nineteenth century, northern Sudanese society witnessed a widespread channelling of female slaves into prostitution. This was not a clandestine operation limited to some kind of Sudanese underworld. On the contrary, as this chapter hopes to show, prostitution represented a significant avenue down which owners guided their slave women. It flourished in the open, while filling the coffers of some of society's most prominent citizens.

## Prostitution and Islamic Law

Slave prostitution thrived in the Islamic society of the northern Sudan in spite of the fact that the Quran, the ultimate Islamic authority revealed to man, specifically forbids it. The Quran orders believers, "Force not your

maids to prostitution when they desire chastity, in order that ye may make a gain in the goods of this life<sup>448</sup>."

As Mernissi has explained after a close study of pertinent Islamic sources, the Prophet Muhammad revealed this verse in response to the organized prostitution of seventh-century Medina--thus showing that the slave prostitution racket was neither new nor limited to the nineteenth-century Sudan. Al-Isaba fi tamyiz al-sahaba, a series of biographies compiled by the fifteenth-century scholar Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, discusses the plight of Umayma and Musayka, two female slaves belonging to one of the Prophet Muhammad's political and ideological rivals, 'Abdallah ibn Ubayy. The latter man was a scoundrel who forced Umayma and Musayka into prostitution, until they sought help and guidance from the Prophet, who in turn revealed the Quranic message that strongly forbid the practice for Muslims<sup>449</sup>.

By all appearances, the Quranic ban on prostitution had no effect on the northern Sudan's booming business, despite the fact that the owners who sponsored the sex trade were Muslims themselves, possibly even Muslims considered to be devout. In light of the fact that advanced literacy (such as the ability to read and comprehend the Quran) remained largely a preserve of the finest religious scholars, it is quite possible that many of the Sudan's Muslims did not know about the verse banning prostitution. Yet even if some did know about the ban, they might not have considered it important, or they might not have had the power to enforce it. For whatever reason, this flagrant breach of Islamic law was obviously not a major concern to the Muslims who either owned the slave prostitutes or came to them as customers.

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<sup>448</sup> Quran xxiv:33. (Based on English translation by A. Yusuf Ali, 1936.) Note that the same sura continues by stating that God shall be merciful and forgiving towards those who are forced into prostitution. On the Quran's ban against slave prostitution, see also Brunschwig (1960), p. 25.

<sup>449</sup> Fatima Mernissi, Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry, Trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 181.

## The Prostitute's Trade

Burckhardt stopped with a trade caravan in Berber town in 1813, and later provided one of the most detailed descriptions on the area's prostitution. The town's status as a trade depot meant that there was often a ready customer pool of traders, away from their homes and families, passing through with caravans as they dealt in slaves and other goods, and eager to have a good time. So many residents exploited the traders' presence, said Burckhardt, that almost every house, however respectable, had a room for the "public women."

He wrote, "[In] the house where I lodged, we had four of these girls, one of whom was living within the precincts, the three others in contiguous apartments. They are female slaves, whom their masters, upon marrying or being tired of them, have set at liberty, and who have no other livelihood but the preparation of the intoxicating drink called Bouza<sup>450</sup>."

He goes on to say, however, that prostitution was not merely the preserve of the ex-slave, but of the slave as well, with many masters encouraging or forcing their slave women to sell their bodies. Some of these women had arranged deals with their masters so that they could keep a portion of the profits to buy off their liberty over time. This represents a perversion of the legal principle of mukataba, whereby slaves could form a contract with their owners to purchase their freedom by installments<sup>451</sup>. In this case, however, even after the slave prostitutes gained freedom, their former owners skimmed off part of the profits as "rent," or in return for protecting them from the numerous quarrels that frequently erupted<sup>452</sup>.

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<sup>450</sup> Burckhardt (1819), p. 213. In the Sudan, the word buza suggests a kind of alcoholic beverage, although some other Arabic dialects use it to refer to ice cream--this latter sense of the word having derived from Farsi (Qasim [1972], p. 69.)

<sup>451</sup> A more detailed description of the mukataba process appears in Joseph Schacht, An Introduction to Islamic Law, 2nd edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 125, 129-30.

<sup>452</sup> Burckhardt (1819), pp. 213-15.

Strangely enough, "profits" may not only have been in coin, but in loaves of sugar--a delicacy valued and accepted as a form of currency by some women<sup>453</sup>. Whatever the payment, prostitution of slaves and ex-slaves alike often proved a highly lucrative business for both present and former owners.

The American G.B. English, who acted as Muhammad 'Ali's artillery advisor in his 1820-21 conquest of the Sudan<sup>454</sup>, corroborated some of Burckhardt's impressions on the rampant prostitution in Berber. English based his comments upon a brief stop which the Turco-Egyptian troops made in the city. He remarked, "Some of the owners of a female slave would, for a dollar, without scruple, permit the soldiers of our camp to sleep with them." Even in the house where he lodged, the lady in charge offered him her two "daughters" (i.e., slaves?) as bedfellows<sup>455</sup>.

Slave prostitution was not strictly confined to major trade depots. In smaller towns and villages, owners may have "free-lanced" a slave woman when a traveller passed through. So it appears from the account of Henry Dufton, who journeyed from Khartoum into Abyssinia in 1862. While passing through the village of Tayyiba, between Mesellemiya and Wad Madani, Dufton received a warm welcome from the local shaykh, Muhammad al-Nil. The shaykh brought him a bowl of sugared water, allocated him a house to himself rather than one of the ordinary travellers' huts, and then sent over "a damsel of seventeen" to entertain him. Much to the villagers' surprise, Dufton gracefully turned the damsel away, "alleging that Christians did not allow what Mohammedans permitted<sup>456</sup>."

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<sup>453</sup> "The most fashionable among the women at the town of Shendy have fixed the price of their favours at a loaf of sugar" (Burckhardt [1819], p. 300).

<sup>454</sup> In fact, it appears that English's contribution to the conquest was minimal. For a short biographical sketch on him, see Hill (1967), p. 120. Also see the brief chapter on him in David H. Finnie, Pioneers East: The Early American Experience in the Middle East (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 143-49.

<sup>455</sup> English (1822), pp. 115, 120-22.

<sup>456</sup> Dufton (1867/1970), p. 22.

Prostitution often went hand in hand with the production and sale of alcohol. (For though the Quran frowns upon intoxicating drinks, it appears that the vast majority of men and women thoroughly enjoyed drinking their local liquors anyway, with many brewing daily batches in their own homes.) One zealous sultan in Dar Fur, for instance, declared a 1795 ban on beer-drinking, with threat of execution for transgressors, yet demand remained so high and steady that the flow of merissa barely paused and the law became a dead letter<sup>457</sup>.

Pallme described the prostitute-liquor connection in his 1838 account on Kordofan. He says, "In Lobeid [El-Obeid], and in many villages, there are houses for the sale of merissa, where this beverage is served by very pretty girls, who are also excellent dancers, and thus attract many guests.... When the governor or other Turks gives a fete, they always engage some of these able performers to amuse their guests<sup>458</sup>." Almost forty years later, Prout had more to say about the Kordofan night-life. While village existence could be rather sombre, he said, with only merissa-drinking for entertainment, the situation in El-Obeid was wilder and more decadent, the nights reverberating with the sounds of tom-toms beating, women "lullilooing," and so forth. In a thorn-enclosed space between a few huts, he said, one "will see, squatting on a few mats and angarebs [bedsteads], a dozen men and women of various colors, and in various degrees of nudity. Somewhere in the group [one] will see some jars of merissa, on which the guests make frequent and prolonged attacks<sup>459</sup>."

Junker provides a detailed description of the goings-on at the market in Gedaref (not far from the Ethiopian border). He discusses the varied ethnicities of the slaves on sale, the type of goods being sold and the

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<sup>457</sup> Browne (1799), pp. 224-25. Note that merissa, the most popular locally-made liquor in the northern Sudan, is "a drink made from an infusion of sorghum or millet. The brew is steeped in the liquid of dates or of something similar...and is pressed by hand... (Qasim [1972], p. 737 [my translation]." The liquid undergoes fermentation and is drunk within a few days.

<sup>458</sup> Pallme (1844), p. 50.

<sup>459</sup> Prout (1877), pp. 30-31.

appearance of the crowds who came to purchase, and so forth. He also describes the booths at which women sold merissa. He says, "In the merissa booths wild orgies are often witnessed, as the day wears on and the toppers become inflamed by the intoxicating drink<sup>460</sup>."

This discussion, until now, has mainly illustrated slave prostitution from the customer's point of view, through the eyes of the travellers who saw prostitutes selling their favours (though none of the travellers admit to patronizing the trade themselves!). It has done little to suggest the mechanics of the trade; that is, the profit incentives and business strategies of the slave-owners who fostered the system.

### The Owner's Point of View: Prostitution and Profit

In this regard, one traveller presents detailed information which none of the other sources cited above provides. The lack of full corroboration may put the claims of G.A. Hoskins on somewhat shaky historical ground, although a number of sources, by both contemporary travellers and recent scholars, do hint to practices on which Hoskins elaborates. The views of Hoskins deserve greater scrutiny because they make sense: they offer a clear explanation for the motives that fuelled slave prostitution.

George Alexander Hoskins was a British archaeologist by trade who travelled through the northern Sudan with an Italian artist companion, visiting and sketching the ruins of Meroitic civilization<sup>461</sup>. Along the way he met numerous Sudanese--Ababdes, Bishariyin, Shaiqiya, and others. Indeed, his keen observations on the local people and their culture (rather than his archaeological descriptions) comprise the liveliest and most significant portion of his account, Travels in Ethiopia (1835)<sup>462</sup>.

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<sup>460</sup> Junker (1890), p. 143.

<sup>461</sup> For a brief biography, see Hill (1967), pp. 166-67.

<sup>462</sup> Despite the title, Hoskins never travelled in any part of what is now the modern nation-state of Ethiopia. From the Greek word meaning "burnt-faced men," Ethiopia was traditionally a vague

Hoskins refers to and outrightly confirms Burckhardt's evaluation of prostitution in Berber<sup>463</sup>; he also observes the prostitution-alcohol connection first-hand, noting, for example, the "jests and charms" of the pretty women who served bouza to his servants and Ababde caravan guides at Abu Hamad<sup>464</sup>.

Yet his most striking observations come when he discusses the traditional power base of the petty chiefs (meleks, or mekks) before the total collapse of the Fung kingdom in 1820--a power base that prevailed in slightly mutated form in the Turco-Egyptian period. Hoskins explains that at one time Shendi, Berber, Dongola and other large towns each had a melek, or chief, who was either independent from or tributary to the great melek of Sennar (the Fung sultan). These petty chiefs in turn had sons, who had estates. All of them together, he says, effectively consolidated much of their wealth and power via slave prostitution.

According to Hoskins, these petty chiefs and their sons obtained women through raiding and warfare and set aside thirty, one hundred, or even up to five hundred each. They settled these women in villages as prostitutes, and profitted heavily by their earnings. He claims, too, that the women were able to allocate a portion of their earnings to the masters so that they could not be sold again<sup>465</sup>. Obviously, Hoskins refers here, like Burckhardt, to the legal practice of mukataba, which technically bought freedom after full payment by installment. Hoskins probably did not understand that this was supposed to represent manumission, since the prostitutes continued to pay hefty profits to their former masters--merely trading full slave status for continued social and economic oppression.

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geographical term, often used interchangeably with "Kush" and "Nubia" (Frank Snowden, "Ethiopia and the Graeco-Roman World," The African Diaspora, Ed. Martin L. Kilson [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976], p. 12.) Indeed, Hoskins only went as far south along the Nile as the Shendi area.

<sup>463</sup> Hoskins (1835), pp. 58-59.

<sup>464</sup> Hoskins (1835), p. 33.

<sup>465</sup> Hoskins (1835), p. 89.

The children of prostitutes were born into slavery, for they had no free father to recognize legal paternity. It was up to the owners, Hoskins declared, whether or not to sell the offspring at birth; this rarely happened, unless the owning petty chief happened to be especially short of funds. Daughters were raised to become prostitutes like their mothers, while sons were usually brought up to cultivate the chief's land, and to go to battle with him when necessary<sup>466</sup>.

The picture that emerges from Hoskins's account leaves scope for a radical analysis of prostitution's impact on political power in the early nineteenth century. On the one hand, the funds that accrued to the petty chiefs from prostitute earnings, in addition to toll profits extracted from passing trade caravans, represented a major platform of their financial power. More profits accrued from the prostitutes' female children, raised as a new generation of prostitutes themselves, and from the male children, who worked the fields. However, as Hoskins himself noted, it was the political import of the prostitutes' male offspring which outweighed the economic import, for these men counted among the most zealous and faithful supporters of their melek/owner. They hoped, no doubt, that the reward for their unstinting loyalty would be manumission.

"The result of the system was that the melek had always a large force of slaves and dependents...who were also implicitly devoted to his will, and deeply interested in maintaining the peace and security of the kingdom<sup>467</sup>."

As Hoskins argues, slave prostitution, by generating profits and possibly more slave children, contributed significantly to the economic and political power base of the petty chiefs. However, although Hoskins focusses exclusively on the melek class, it does appear that merchants benefitted from slave prostitution in a similar way. For instance, Browne's

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<sup>466</sup> Hoskins (1835), pp. 89-90.

<sup>467</sup> Hoskins (1835), p. 90.

1799 account says that "in Sennaar... immodesty is only permitted among the female slaves. The chief merchants have companies of these slaves, and derive great profit from their prostitution<sup>468</sup>." A Parliamentary report of 1840, compiled by Bowring and Holroyd, specifically mentions a Sennar merchant named Hasan Tanta Lober, who dealt in slaves and who owned one hundred slaves himself, keeping fifty of them as prostitutes<sup>469</sup>.

O'Fahey and Spaulding have suggested that major slave-holders of all types (petty chiefs, merchants, possibly even the families of wealthy religious scholars) set their slave girls to work as prostitutes in trading depots by the late Fung period. They say, "This form of prostitution accompanied the spread of the money economy and the new bourgeoisie, though sometimes noblemen, faced with competition from the merchants, also adopted the system<sup>470</sup>." Likewise, Bjorkelo notes that slave prostitution--along with tribute, taxation, commercial enterprises, and slave-based agriculture--contributed significantly to the wealth of the elite (again, as a general class, and not specifically petty chiefs) whom the Turco-Egyptian conquest badly shattered<sup>471</sup>.

It seems that the Mahdist period brought no great changes to the practice. The Mahdi and later the Khalifah 'Abdullahi issued many declarations and injunctions relating to marriage, veiling, and the like<sup>472</sup>, but they seem to have made no attempt to challenge the big slave-owners who sponsored slave prostitution--possibly because neither leader wanted to alienate any sources of support by jeopardizing such a widespread and profitable business venture. In any case, Rudolf Slatin, a captive of the Mahdist state for many years, wrote in his memoirs from the period: "It is a common practice for merchants to make pecuniary profit out of the

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<sup>468</sup> Browne (1799), p. 307.

<sup>469</sup> Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, No. 21, 1840, p. 87.

<sup>470</sup> O'Fahey and Spaulding (1974), p. 82.

<sup>471</sup> Bjorkelo (1983), p. 65.

<sup>472</sup> SAD 97/5/96-97, 130-31 [Arabic, handlist #224 & #225]; SAD 99/1/90 [Arabic, handlist #272].

immorality of their slaves. They buy young girls, permit them to enjoy a certain amount of freedom by seeking a shelter and livelihood in the manner which suits them best, and for this privilege they refund to their masters a percentage of their gains<sup>473</sup>."

In addition to many of the large-scale slave prostitution ventures described above, other forms of small-scale prostitution existed as well. Some owners invested in a few slaves, male and female alike, and then hired them out on a short-term or long-term basis, profiting from the fees imposed. People may have rented the male slaves for agricultural labour. With female slaves, however, the motive was probably both sexual- and labour-oriented, considering that renters were free to use them as they liked. While visiting Kassala around 1881, Josiah Williams met a Greek resident named Demitrius Mosconas. "He [Mosconas] informed me that the woman (his servant) who had just brought us two small cups of coffee was a slave, one of a dozen owned by an Arab woman, and she realized a living by letting them out on hire. He paid three dollars per month for the hire of this slave<sup>474</sup>."

Owners rented out their slave woman with the expectation that they would be sexually exploited; no doubt they expected them to be used as a source of household labour as well. The two services went hand in hand. Over forty years after Williams visited Kassala, in the early 1920's, one agricultural inspector in Berber resigned his post after exposing some of the abuses of slavery that were continuing two decades after abolition. He said that he had encountered cases of owners hiring out their slave women as prostitutes quite often; indeed, he said, "their masters often hire them out and live on their earnings<sup>475</sup>." Hargey states that this practice of the

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<sup>473</sup> Slatin (1898), p. 344.

<sup>474</sup> Williams (1884), p. 152.

<sup>475</sup> Diggle (1925), p. 84.

"sexual and economic exploitation" of slave women continued in towns such as El-Obeid, in Kordofan, throughout the 1920's as well<sup>476</sup>.

In light of the substantial profits which large- and small-scale owners could reap from slave prostitution, its economic justification is obvious. Another topic requires clarification, however, and that refers to the identity of the women who became prostitutes in the Sudan and their indoctrination into the sex trades.

### The Prostitute's Profile: Social Background

Not all prostitutes were slaves, in the legal sense of the term. Burckhardt, after all, said that many of the prostitutes at Berber were "slaves" whom their masters had set at liberty: this implies that they were legally ex-slaves. He also suggests that many were Abyssinian by origin--not surprising, since numerous sources attest to the great beauty of Abyssinian women and their reputation for sensuality and sexual prowess<sup>477</sup>. The fact that Burckhardt calls them slaves, in spite of their "liberty," shows that legal manumission did little to transform their status in real terms. Moreover, their manumission did not come from an owner who beneficently, selflessly granted them freedom: on the contrary, these women appear to have earned their freedom, installment by installment, by earning large sums of money for their owners.

Manumission was therefore no ticket to automatic liberty and independence. Ex-slave prostitutes remained in virtually the same position as slave prostitutes, since former owners continued to skim hefty profits from their earnings. Manumission may have brought them a greater sense of integrity and self-worth, as well as a slightly greater level of

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<sup>476</sup> Hargey (1981), p. 382.

<sup>477</sup> On the beauty of Abyssinian women and the higher prices that they fetched, see, for example, Junker (1890), pp. 143-44.

independence and discretion in leading their lives, but outside control and supervision, imposed from above, still remained. Legal owners simply developed into masters, continuing to wield power over the women they had freed.

Not all prostitutes came to the northern Sudan with the slave traders. Indeed, it appears that very many may have been native-born women, raised on the land as the daughters of slave parents (muwalladin)<sup>478</sup>. Burckhardt mentions that a large number of slave prostitutes came from this background<sup>479</sup>; Prudhoe confirms the same in his 1835 account. The status of the muwalladin is so ambiguous that it becomes difficult to determine whether they were slaves or freed slaves. In any case, they and their children remained within the yoke of their owners'/former owners' control, obliged to pay them somehow on a monthly basis. What the sons earned through agricultural labour, the daughters, said Prudhoe, inevitably gained through prostitution<sup>480</sup>.

It appears that free women occasionally filled the prostitutes' ranks in exceptional circumstances. Writing about the northern riverain Sudan in his 1829 account, Rüppell said, "The number of public women has been greatly augmented through war-time; they are always either women left by their husbands or female negro slaves, the latter usually working for their owners' account. Female slaves have always been meant to do this<sup>481</sup>." Rüppell's words illustrate that though female slaves probably formed the great majority of prostitutes, free women in dire straits fell into the trade, too<sup>482</sup>.

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478 The muwalladin, as used here, were either slaves or descendants of slaves who were born and raised in the northern Sudan.

479 Burckhardt (1819), p. 215.

480 Prudhoe (1835), p. 38.

481 Rüppell (1829), p. 44.

482 Rüppell seems to be suggesting that this fate befell widowed women who had children to support but who had not undergone another excision or "circumcision," Ausschneidung--i.e. re-infibulation--after child-bearing (Rüppell [1829], pp. 42-44).

Another scenario might have led the daughters of free or freed parents into slavery and then prostitution, and that was illegitimate birth. Rüppell says that free women tended to be promiscuous; to clamp down on and deter this, an old custom prevailed, "according to which each illegitimate child born by a free woman was seen as a slave who became the possession of the melek<sup>483</sup>." Likewise, Prudhoe claimed that if a woman from the muwalladin (presumably here meaning ex-slaves or the free descendants of slaves) had a child outside the sphere of marriage, then that child, too, fell to the former owner<sup>484</sup>.

### The Prostitute's Profile: Indoctrination and Training

Not only do many Sudan-related travellers' accounts teem with references to slave and ex-slave prostitutes in particular, but some go further by commenting on and/or condemning the exceptional promiscuity of slave women--prostitutes and non-prostitutes--as a whole. Some of these accounts imply that these women were particularly suited to the prostitute profession, gravitating naturally towards sexual openness. Yet closer inspection reveals that many masters condoned and actively encouraged such behaviour, realizing that they could only benefit by harnessing it for pecuniary gain.

Men such as Rudolf Slatin, in his capacity as Inspector-General of the early Condominium government, at times pointed the finger of blame at the prostitutes and other slave women themselves. In an 1897 letter he complains bitterly about the sexually immoral slave and ex-slave women who attached themselves to the Anglo-Egyptian army's Sudanese soldiers. About the "black ladies" he wrote, "Their expectation of finding in the hearts of the Sudanese Soldier a response to their erotic inclinations seems

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<sup>483</sup> Rüppell (1829), p. 44.

<sup>484</sup> Prudhoe (1835), p. 38.

to have been thoroughly justified. Our soldiers bucked up by their long abstinence from amorous joys fall easy victims to these husky charmers, and the result is that close to my camp there is a colossal temple of Venus occupied by several hundreds of dark wenches of every shape and shade, but alas all alike in their unmitigated ugliness. These ladies carry the principle of individual freedom so far as to be ready at any moment to indulge in the freest of love....<sup>485</sup>"

However, if sources from the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century continually vouch for the sexual license of slave and ex-slave women, then it is critical to recognize that this behaviour may have often been encouraged or forced--and ultimately conditioned--by the slave-owning population. Slave women did not control sexual access to their bodies; their owners did. Islamic law afforded the individual male owner--but no one else--with sexual access to his slave women as well as control over their reproductive capacities<sup>486</sup>. Owners used, and abused, these rights; they exploited sexual access for personal profit. Bearing in mind that any [illegitimate] children borne to the prostitutes represented a new generation of slaves for the owners<sup>487</sup>, profits accrued in both human and monetary terms.

Sexual exploitation, and possibly sexual conditioning, started with the slave raid. Rape was a common feature of the brutality inflicted on the raided--in addition to mass murder, pillaging, and the like. Wilson alludes to the rape/gang rape of a couple of girls whom the raiders later herded into the queue of marching slaves<sup>488</sup>.

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<sup>485</sup> SAD 438/653/3: R. von Slatin. Slatin to Bigge, Merowe, 6 September 1897.

<sup>486</sup> Free women could own slaves, too, but alas, Islamic law (and custom) did not grant them sexual access to their slave men.

<sup>487</sup> Taj Hargey makes this point (Hargey [1981], pp. 20-21). This motive existed in pre-Islamic Arabia as well. The fifteenth-century scholar, al-'Asqalani, stressed that the Prophet's enemy, 'Abdallah ibn Ubayy, forced his slave women into prostitution with hopes that they would bear him slave children (Mermissi [1991], p. 181).

<sup>488</sup> Wilson (193-?), pp. 97, 121.

Burckhardt provides some more clues into the sexual indoctrination of slave girls. He affirms that female children were targets for sexual attention even before the captor/trader first sold them in the market. Said Burckhardt, "I may venture to state...that very few female slaves who have passed their tenth year, reach Egypt or Arabia in a state of virginity." His next lines seem to imply that traders began to sell the sexual favours of the women/girls even on the caravan journey. "In our caravan one of my companions openly sold the favours of one of his females for two measures of Dhourra<sup>489</sup>, of which he always received one<sup>490</sup>."

After a while even enslaved boys and girls had sexual relations whilst on the caravan march, not to mention the relations between traders and women/girls. Since pregnancy reduced the value of a woman at the market, however, induced abortion may have been one option which the trader considered<sup>491</sup>.

Pregnancy during the march was a big drawback, but at all other times, it represented a boon to any slave-owner. One traveller writing around 1824 described the promiscuity of the slaves belonging to Danaqla inhabitants in El-Obeid in Kordofan. "They own a large number of slaves of both sexes who, after having done their work which is not over hard, live like the beasts, that is, without any moral restraints. At the end of the year the children they have produced are sold<sup>492</sup>." Slave promiscuity could only benefit slave-owners, if it resulted in an annual "harvest" of children whom they could sell for profit.

A lot of people stood to benefit from slave prostitution, including, lest one forget, its customers. Traders on the road were a major beneficiary, but so were soldiers. Rudolf Slatin showed a greater

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489 "Dhourra" is a type of grain, sorghum or millet.

490 Burckhardt (1819), p. 337.

491 Burckhardt (1819), pp. 337-38. He explains that abortions were often enforced on slave women (usually by forcing women to swallow medicines), especially in Egypt.

492 Richard Hill, "An Unpublished Itinerary to Kordofan, 1824-25," Trans. from the French by R.L. Hill, Sudan Notes and Records, Vol. 29, Part 1, 1948, p. 64.

understanding of the system in his Mahdist-period memoirs, Fire and Sword in the Sudan. The mulazimin, one significant branch of the Mahdist forces, were notorious for frequenting prostitutes or drawing in women (probably slaves or ex-slaves, possibly prostitutes) for short-term relationships. The Khalifa Abdullahi, said Slatin, did nothing to stop this, "as he imagines that by allowing them to please themselves, his own slaves [i.e. soldiers] will become more attached to him....<sup>493</sup>" Even the Khalifa's favourite son was an eager customer for women and wine. An 1894 intelligence report, written by an escaped captive of the Mahdist state, describes Shaykh al-Din as "a youth of immoral habits [who] drinks to excess and thinks only of how to satisfy his sensual appetites<sup>494</sup>."

The northern Sudan's slave prostitution culture with its associated merissa orgies deviated from two injunctions of the Quran: the ruling which forbid owners to prostitute their slaves (xxiv:33), and the ruling which prohibited the consumption of alcohol (v:93). Their double-taboo profession as well as their [typically] slave origins and concomitant lack of kinship ties to free society put these women in marginalized social positions. In this abstract sense they operated at the fringes of northern Sudanese society. Yet while slave prostitution was a marginalized institution, it was simultaneously mainstream. At its base were a host of prominent characters including petty chiefs, merchants, travelling traders, administrators, soldiers, male and female petty slave-owners, and more.

### Prostitution Post-Abolition: 1898 and Beyond

Abolition obviously brought dramatic changes to slave prostitution. New political characters came to the scene after 1898 with the British

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<sup>493</sup> Slatin (1898), pp. 344-45.

<sup>494</sup> SAD 178/9/11-12: F.R. Wingate. Intelligence Report, November 1894, from Cairo on the present state of affairs in the Sudan, with observations by Fra Paolo Rossignoli.

administrators, who not only exerted efforts to halt fresh enslavements<sup>495</sup>, but who found prostitution anathema and made a concerted attempt to control and check it.

Slave prostitution became less and less common as the slave-owning classes found it impossible to buy new recruits. In contrast, ex-slave prostitution mushroomed, mainly because the developing wage labour market did not produce new jobs for the large numbers of freed and escaped female slaves who moved to big towns and sought a livelihood after abolition. (Males, on the other hand, had no trouble at all in finding waged work, especially on one of the many public works projects such as railway construction that the new government sponsored<sup>496</sup>.) Prostitution continued to be the only option for women--slave, ex-slave, and possibly even free--who desperately needed a means of self-support<sup>497</sup>. Many years passed into the current century before Sudanese women found "respectable" jobs within their grasp.

The old breed as well as the new breed of prostitutes were a scourge to the Condominium government. As an increasing number of ex-slave women found themselves unleashed in a society which gave them so few options for economic survival, prostitution and merissa-drinking formed a new triad with crime, notably among ex-slave elements: the vast majority of the women who committed petty crimes in the Sudan were ex-slaves<sup>498</sup>. Government officials tried to stifle the problem in 1902 by passing an

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<sup>495</sup> **Nota Bene:** Abolition in the Sudan did not mean automatic freedom for all slaves, as it had meant in the U.S. South. Instead, Sudanese abolition sought to end the slave trade and new enslavements after 1898, while encouraging (though not requiring) the gradual emancipation of those slaves in existence. Thus full-fledged slaves continued to exist in small numbers by the 1930's, and even beyond.

<sup>496</sup> Regarding this discrepancy in opportunities for men and women, see Hargey (1981), p. 46. Even administrators overlooked the situation of slave and ex-slave women in discussions on their labour, education, and social policy. For instance, one 1909 letter from Slatin to Wingate on the plight of slaves in the Sudan omits women completely (SAD 288/2/94-95: F.R. Wingate. Slatin to Wingate, 31 July [1909]).

<sup>497</sup> Burckhardt noted that the sheer lack of social and economic options had driven the freed female slaves in the [Egyptian] Nubian community of Derr into prostitution (Burckhardt [1819], p. 146). Ruppell stated, meanwhile, that free and freed women driven to prostitution did it purely for the need of money, and not for pleasure-seeking (Ruppell [1829], p. 44).

<sup>498</sup> Hargey (1981), p. 416.

ordinance which declared that in the granting of liquor licenses, "no immorality or solicitation to immorality is permitted on the premises<sup>499</sup>." The law appears to have made little impact. Seven years later, the governor's annual report on White Nile Province still noted that the most violent crimes, such as murder, inevitably revolved around the "sordid pleasures of the Merissa-maker's brothel": "The cause of these crimes of violence is nearly always the same, Merissa or women, one or the other, if not both<sup>500</sup>."

Venereal disease hounded the slave and ex-slave brothels throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth<sup>501</sup>; it caused great concern for Condominium officials, who embarked on a policy of requiring prostitutes in most districts to be regularly examined by doctors<sup>502</sup>. One official wrote, "...the worst form of venereal disease is contracted whilst under the influence of drink and the majority of native employees of the Sudan Government, absent on account of illness, are absent on account of venereal disease. Thus, there is good reason to believe that much Government time is wasted by disease contracted in these shops<sup>503</sup>." In an effort to control and minimize the problems surrounding prostitution, officials discreetly allocated funds--purposely disguising the expenditure--towards the building of government-sponsored brothels in Khartoum in 1911<sup>504</sup>.

Tayeb Salih portrays one village's ex-slave prostitutes in his novella The Wedding of Zein, written as late as the 1960's. These women lived on the edges of the community, in an area known as the Oasis, and having

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<sup>499</sup> Sudan Government, The Sudan Government Gazette, No. 31, January 1st, 1902, p. 3 article 9.

<sup>500</sup> Sudan Government, "Annual Report, White Nile Province," Reports on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan: 1909, p. 827.

<sup>501</sup> See Slatin (1898), p. 345.

<sup>502</sup> For example, Sudan Government, Reports on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan: 1902, pp. 288, 299, 312, 334.

<sup>503</sup> Sudan Government, "Annual Report of the Sudan Medical Department, 1906," Reports on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan: 1906, pp. 387-88.

<sup>504</sup> SAD 300/4/171-172: F.R. Wingate. Bernard to Wingate, Khartoum, 29 April 1911.

found a settled life difficult after gaining their freedom, turned to prostitution. They made their living by brewing merissa for a clientele attracted by prospects of both alcohol and sex. However, by this time, more than sixty years after abolition, prostitution was no longer the widely accepted, prominent part of the social landscape that it had once been. Social values were beginning to change. Consequently, in the novella, the upstanding citizenry of the village has tried to burn the prostitutes' huts down or drive them away--all to no avail<sup>505</sup>.

### Conclusion

The scattered references to prostitution in the nineteenth-and early twentieth-century Sudan fit together like a jigsaw puzzle to reveal a fascinating portrait of one little-known dimension in the slave-and ex-slave experience. It represents yet another case whereby the practice of slavery distorted and utterly negated Quranic injunctions, ignoring the very clear restrictions placed on the sexual access to slaves. The theory of Islamic law and the application of Islamic law emerge as two discrete entities.

Close examination of the references suggests one main path which led slave and even ex-slave women into prostitution in the nineteenth century. This path followed the direct intercession of owners, who indoctrinated the women into a sex-for-sale operation, and who profitted extensively from the practice. In some cases of petty chiefs and important merchants, these profits may have been so hefty that they played a significant role in establishing an economic, and arguably political, power base. A large degree of financial and even social control over the prostitutes continued beyond manumission. In cases where prostitutes bore children, these children were an additional boon to their owners/patrons.

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<sup>505</sup> Salih (1968), p. 69.

The daughters of free parents were less likely to fall into prostitution. Unusual circumstances, such as those prevailing in war-time, may have driven some free women to sell their bodies for survival. Occasionally, the children of illegitimate births, whether by free or ex-slave parents, may have sunk into slavery and from there, for females, into prostitution. These exceptional situations excluded, women of slave background had the monopoly over prostitution thrust upon them.

The twentieth century ushered in abolition as well as many changes to prostitute culture. Great numbers of newly freed or escaped women flocked to the big towns and fell into prostitution, simply because other career options did not yet exist. Administrators tried to control prostitution, with varying degrees of success. They could not stamp it out, however, and the women-and-merissa combination begat, as it had no doubt been doing for years, associated violence and disease.

Nearly a hundred years have elapsed since Condominium government policy divorced slavery through new enslavement from the northern Sudan. The passage of time has seen prostitution lose favour in upright social circles. But if prostitution occupies a part of the Sudanese underworld nowadays, then it was not always so. Sources suggest that prostitution among slaves and ex-slaves was a widespread, widely-accepted, taken-for-granted fixture in slave-owning culture. It was mainstream, and many benefitted from it. This study, therefore, has tried to bring a forgotten though highly significant segment of the slave population back to the historical fore.

## **The Slave Family**

### Introduction

Ex-slave communities in the northern Sudan have persisted well into the current century; al-Shahi has provided a key study on one such settlement as a result of his research in the early 1960's<sup>506</sup>. Likewise, many travellers and administrators of the late eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries commented on the forebears of these communities, the large slave and ex-slave villages which appeared throughout the same region.

From this information, one may deduce that slavery in the Sudan, unlike its Egyptian or Turkish counterpart<sup>507</sup>, witnessed the formation of slave families on a large scale. That is, prior to the twentieth century, slave men and women in the northern Sudan intermarried, settled down, and produced slave children. The patrilineal structure of the northern Sudan's Muslim society meant that each slave man at the head of a family unit endowed his children with the legacy of his slave status. Over the generations, an apparently high reproductive rate swelled the numbers of the servile communities. Even when slave status blurred into ex-slave status, the male line often continued to pass on the dubious heritage of stigma attached to servility. Six decades after abolition, al-Shahi testified to the perseverance of this bitter legacy.

Inferring the existence of slave families is much easier than characterizing them. Though many of the sources consulted for this study mention the subject, few go into any depth at all. Travellers in particular may have observed slave settlements from afar without ever interacting

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<sup>506</sup> See al-Shahi (1972), pp. 87-104.

<sup>507</sup> See Walz (1985), pp. 149-52; and Millingen (1870), pp. 1, 9.

with these communities; instead, their direct encounters with slaves often involved the house-servants or concubines living in the homes of the illustrious men and women whom they visited. A different type of source--such as wills and estate inventories--might yield more information on marriage and reproductive patterns among slave couples<sup>508</sup>. The subject begs for much deeper study. Nevertheless, in spite of the shortcomings inherent in the sources used for this thesis, this chapter still persists in addressing some of the key features and issues surrounding the social phenomenon of slave families.

### Slave Villages and Slave Families

The sources abound in references to villages occupied exclusively by slaves, presumably living in family units of parents and offspring, and perhaps (though evidence is lacking) extended family relations. Especially prior to the Turco-Egyptian conquest, many of these villages were owned by very wealthy individuals. This class included petty chiefs, prosperous merchants, and rich Muslim holy men who amassed their fortunes largely in this human commodity. Hence we read, for example, of places such as seventeenth-century El Damer, where a small, elite "dynasty of saints" (holy men, or fugara) ruled over and lived off of their vast community of slaves who constituted the bulk of the population<sup>509</sup>. In the late eighteenth century, Bruce came upon large villages circling the capital and populated by about 12,000 people of slave families. The Fung sultan had settled these slaves there, arming some of the men so that they could defend his capital,

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<sup>508</sup> Walz utilized this latter resource when studying marriage patterns among Cairo's freed slaves. This data yielded no information on men and women who were still slaves, however (Walz [1985], p. 149.)

<sup>509</sup> Hillelson (1923), pp. 227-28.

without bothering to convert them to Islam but rather tolerating their religious practices<sup>510</sup>.

The pattern continued throughout the nineteenth century. Ewald refers to the slave families who belonged to the Taqali king and who lived in communities outside the royal compound<sup>511</sup>. Lepsius mentions the rich chief holy man (*faqih*) who lived in the village of Tayyiba, near Mesellemiyyah, and who owned several [slave] villages which he had inherited from his father before him<sup>512</sup>. Likewise, on the basis of his 1874-75 mission, Prout noted that the numerous arid satellite villages to the north and east of El Obeid in Kordofan were often occupied exclusively by slaves, sent there by their owners to cultivate grain during the rainy season<sup>513</sup>.

Slave families were just as important in Dar Masalit society. According to Kapteijns, owners there accorded [male] slaves with the almost inalienable right to marry and to lead a family life. "Slaves had the right to marry...[for] the Masalit were very conscious of the fact that the sexual activities of a slave needed to be controlled." Enforced celibacy was therefore regarded as one of the few legitimate complaints that a slave could tender<sup>514</sup>.

### Motives for Encouraging the Formation of Slave Families

Aside from making a [male] slave happier, the practice of allowing and/or encouraging slave marriages neatly coincided with the slave-owner's best interests. It certainly posed no hardship for the owners themselves to provide a slave man with a mate, for they had relatively easy access to

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<sup>510</sup> Bruce, Vol. 4 (1790), pp. 419-21.

<sup>511</sup> Ewald (1982), p. 183.

<sup>512</sup> Lepsius (1853), pp. 187-88.

<sup>513</sup> Prout (1877), pp. 4-5.

<sup>514</sup> Kapteijns (1984), pp. 112, 114.

female slaves. As this study has previously shown, slave-raiding patterns resulted in higher mortality rates for men, who played the key role in trying to defend their raided village, while resulting in the seizure of preponderantly larger numbers of women. The higher demand for female slaves reflected their value as labourers, sexual companions, and producers of children, and further contributed to the gender imbalance of the northern Sudan's domestic slave population. Slave markets were chock full of female merchandise. And so, phrased casually, there were generally plenty of slave women to go around for slave men, even if a male owner first skimmed off the prettiest purchases as his own concubines.

The ease of finding mates for one's slaves fueled the motives which prompted owners to marry off their slaves and to establish them in separate households. What were these motives? Three interlocking points stand out. First, by providing a male slave in particular with a wife, the slave-owner encouraged him to grow roots of family and kinship which would tie him down. This, it was hoped, would be enough to deter a slave from running away. (Run-aways were almost exclusively men: for women, slave and free, fears of the male-dominated world beyond posed enough of a deterrent.) Second, such marriages harnessed the female slave's reproductive powers, while guaranteeing that any offspring would inherit the male slave's social status. It produced a new, free crop of slave children for an owner. Third, the creation of kinship ties within the slave family, as well as the feeling of semi-autonomy that living in a separate household could bring, formed incentives which resulted in a relatively docile and stable labour supply for the owners.

Attention will now turn towards examining these three factors in greater detail.

Especially in the early stages after enslavement, intense mental anguish led many male slaves in particular to contrive elaborate schemes

for escape<sup>515</sup>. Some succeeded: Holroyd refers to isolated run-away slave communities that sought refuge in the Nuba Mountains of Kordofan<sup>516</sup>.

The psychological trauma of enslavement, as well as the gradual process of adaptation by which that trauma blurred and disappeared over the years, has already been discussed at length in a previous chapter. What this study has not yet emphasized, however, is the role that the slave-owner often played in reconciling the slave to his or her new situation. Slave-owners played this role because their own interests were at stake: a slave who languished long from a broken heart could represent a financial drain more than a benefit, while the slave who ran away represented a total loss on investment.

By giving a slave man and woman to each other as conjugal partners, the owner recognized that companionship in the form of a shared life could minimize misery, and ease the pains of isolation felt by those who had been wrenched from their natal home. As mentioned above, the formation of family ties, via spouse and offspring, meant that sinews of emotional attachment and responsibility could bond the slave to his site of servitude. Marriage brought the slave one big step closer towards forming a new home. It reduced the appeal of running away, and it safeguarded the owner's investment.

Marrying slaves also meant that an owner's investment could multiply--in human terms. It channelled the slaves' reproductive capacities in ways that could only benefit the owner. Thus Kapteijns mentions that the slave in Dar Masalit not only had the right to marry, but was expected and obliged to do so, "lest the owner lose the profit of his productive faculties<sup>517</sup>." Unlike the [free] child borne to a slave mother by a free

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<sup>515</sup> See Pallme (1844), pp. 48, 111; Wilson (193-?, p. 128).

<sup>516</sup> Holroyd (1839), p. 180.

<sup>517</sup> Kapteijns (1984), p. 114.

father, the children fathered by slaves were slaves themselves, with inherited status following the male line.

These children represented a boon to their owners: a new generation of free labour capable of cultivating fields, acting as military defense for their owner if necessary (in the case of male offspring) or even drawing in profits as prostitutes (in the case of females)<sup>518</sup>. When times were hard and owners suffered from a shortage of cash or of other goods, they could legally, if not ethically, sell the offspring of their slaves<sup>519</sup>. (One prisoner of the Mahdist state, an Italian priest named Rosignoli, suggested that the fluctuating fortunes of many slave-owners could prompt many such sales<sup>520</sup>.) After a few generations, when loyal slaves and their offspring gained de facto if not de jure freedom, the slave-owning classes continued to benefit from the labour or tribute of those who lived and worked on their lands, and to enjoy the deference shown by their inferiors<sup>521</sup>. Having so many ex-slaves in a quasi-dependent position was also a great source of prestige, well into the present century<sup>522</sup>.

The widespread exploitation of the slave family's reproductive capacities partially explains why the manumission rate for men may have been so low in the Sudan. Unlike in Egypt, where slaves "in nine cases out of ten...are set free at their owner's death<sup>523</sup>," the manumission of a slave man in the northern Sudan was very rare indeed (while female manumissions were more common)<sup>524</sup>. Manumission would ruin the male slave's potential for passing on his status to new generations of slaves.

Speculating on the birth rates of slave families is almost impossible. One thing appears to be certain, however, and that is that some of the

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<sup>518</sup> Hoskins (1835), pp. 89-90; and Prudhoe (1835), p. 38.

<sup>519</sup> Hoskins (1835), pp. 89-90.

<sup>520</sup> F. Rehfishch, Trans. and Ed. "Omdurman during the Mahdiya," Sudan Notes and Records, Vol. 48, 1967, p. 49.

<sup>521</sup> See, for example, Sikainga (1989), p. 87.

<sup>522</sup> al-Shahi (1972), p. 91.

<sup>523</sup> McCoan (1877), p. 567.

<sup>524</sup> Burckhardt (1819), pp. 340-41.

northern Sudan's slaves, unlike those of Egypt and Turkey, may not only have replaced their numbers but expanded them. In an 1877 article McCoan stressed the high mortality rate of Egypt's black slaves, a rate unsurpassed by any other sector of the population; in fact, he said, most of the black slave children who were born in the country died in infancy. Thus the overall effect was one of negative population growth<sup>525</sup>. With different sources at his disposal, Walz recently came to much the same conclusion on the shockingly low birth rates among Cairo's ex-slave population in the nineteenth century<sup>526</sup>. Meillassoux, meanwhile, devotes an entire chapter to the sterility and low birth rates of slaves in various African societies<sup>527</sup>.

In an 1870 essay on slavery in Turkey, Millingen, too, dwells upon the lack of any native-born black population in Turkey, and the failure of slaves to replenish their numbers. Children born to a black slave or ex-slave parent were very rare and generally died in infancy, whether their other parent was black or white. "The negro Hadji Abdullah offers a most curious illustration of this phenomenon. This old fellow was an athlete in strength and size; but of the twenty and so many children which he had from his various wives, not one outlived the period of infancy<sup>528</sup>."

The low birth rates among the black slave population in both Egypt and Turkey mystified contemporary observers as much as they perplex researchers today. Disease and climate have been suggested as causes, but the most likely possibility, postulated by Millingen in 1870 and by Walz in 1985, is that many of the slaves or ex-slaves may have been relatively old and past their child-bearing prime by the time they married<sup>529</sup>. Marriage

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<sup>525</sup> McCoan (1877), p. 567. Note that the white slaves of Egypt, including the Mamluke elite, also had a very low birth rate according to many European travellers (Ayalon [1977], pp. 157-58).

<sup>526</sup> Walz (1985), p. 151.

<sup>527</sup> Claude Meillassoux, The Anthropology of Slavery: The Womb of Iron and Gold, Trans. from the French by Alide Dasnois (London: The Athlone Press, 1991), pp. 78-84.

<sup>528</sup> Millingen (1870), p. 9.

<sup>529</sup> Millingen (1870), p. 9, and Walz (1985), pp. 151-52.

may have been a reward bestowed on slaves who had served faithfully for years. In the northern Sudan, by contrast, masters may have started their slaves on the path towards a family life soon after acquiring them.

Meillassoux refers to a population study undertaken in a Mali town in 1965, where even sixty years after abolition, families of slave origin still had smaller numbers of children than those of free-born origin<sup>530</sup>. So while saying that slave and slave-descended families did expand in the northern Sudan, this study by no means presumes a large growth-rate.

Following in the train of marriage was often a whole series of perquisites which together formed an appealing incentive package that kept slaves contented and well-grounded in their surroundings. Family life enabled slaves to feel semi-autonomous from their owners. Kapteijns writes of slave families in Dar Masalit that "they supported themselves...by their own labour. They grew their own millet, grew and spun their own cotton, built their own houses, entertained their own guests, and went to the market for their own purposes. Some slaves, particularly those belonging to the traditional rulers, could be materially as well off as commoners<sup>531</sup>." One administrator painted a similar picture of slave families in Khartoum Province when he wrote in a 1904 annual report, "These farm servants have their own flocks, live happily with their own families, and are fed, clothed, and housed by the masters whose land they till<sup>532</sup>."

The incentive scheme was a key tool in shaping a reliable slave labour force. In this case, what Fogel and Engerman wrote about the slave family in the U.S. South closely parallels the northern Sudanese case: "The family was...an important instrument for maintaining labour discipline. By encouraging strong family attachments, slaveowners reduced the danger that individual slaves would run away. By permitting families to have de

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<sup>530</sup> Meillassoux (1991), p. 79.

<sup>531</sup> Kapteijns (1984), p. 113.

<sup>532</sup> Sudan Government, "Annual Report, Khartoum Province," in Reports on the Finances, Administration and Condition of the Sudan: 1904, p. 95.

facto ownership of houses, furniture, clothing, garden plots, and small livestock, planters created an economic stake for slaves in the system<sup>533</sup>." Admittedly, slavery in the northern Sudan was not about hard-core, profit-generating plantation labour. Nonetheless, northern Sudanese slaveowners were just as interested in maintaining and somehow benefitting from their slave investments.

The ultra-rich who controlled entire slave villages relied on these slaves for continued wealth and social standing. Northern Sudanese society often measured wealth by an individual's ability to entertain guests lavishly: hence the agricultural production in the slave villages had to provide the owning classes with enough food for their own needs as well as for the needs of their innumerable guests and dependents<sup>534</sup>. Profit may have accrued in monetary terms, or in other forms of wealth such as cattle or land; agricultural work and perhaps even prostitution generated it. There were other means of creating profit, too: Bruce came upon one slave village, owned by a holy man, in which the slaves toiled as salt diggers in a local trade controlled by their master<sup>535</sup>.

One class of slaves whose loyalty was critical included those used for defensive purposes: slave soldiers and local slave policemen<sup>536</sup>, as well as cultivators who doubled as soldiers in tough times. For them the existence of an incentive scheme was critical. Perhaps the Fung sultan recognized the importance of soldier contentedness when he settled entire slave villages around his capital and granted them religious toleration<sup>537</sup>. In the heyday of the zariba slave-raiding, ivory-trading system of the 1850's and 1860's, slave soldiers were treated very leniently indeed: allowed to keep some of the newly-captured female slaves, they grew to have a stake

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<sup>533</sup> Fogel and Engerman (1974), p. 127.

<sup>534</sup> See Hillelson (1923), pp. 229-30.

<sup>535</sup> Bruce, Vol. 4 (1790), p. 526.

<sup>536</sup> On slave policemen, see Burckhardt (1819), p. 298; Speedy, Vol. 1 (1884), pp. 80, 91.

<sup>537</sup> Bruce, Vol. 4 (1790), pp. 419-21.

in the slave-raiding system themselves<sup>538</sup>. By the 1880's, meanwhile, the Mahdi himself and later the Khalifa 'Abdullahi granted the Mahdist state's slave soldiers a degree of autonomy by allowing them to accumulate large entourages of wives, children, and even concubines<sup>539</sup>. In his study of Sudanese military slavery, Johnson notes that soldiers of the Turco-Egyptian army not only had families but tended to pass on the military occupation to their sons, so that generations of Sudanese slave-descended soldiers have spread throughout East Africa. Descendant communities persist in Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya today, where the residents are called "Nubis"<sup>540</sup>.

The preceding section has tried to explain why slave families made sense to both slaves (providing them with a new kinship system, and fostering adaptation) and to owners (encouraging the development of a stable, reliable, and growing slave or ex-slave population). What follows is much more impressionistic: a few dabs to the historical canvas, conveying what a slave settlement might have been like, and speculating on the dynamics of marital and family relations.

### A Slave Village: One Tourist's View

The account of the jovial American tourist, Bayard Taylor, is the only nineteenth-century source consulted which vividly describes a slave settlement. (An inquisitive and easy-going man, Taylor befriended pashas and boat cooks alike; that it was he who deemed these observations worth writing about, on a par with his visit to the pasha's mansion, comes as no surprise.)

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<sup>538</sup> Holt (1970), pp. 42-44.

<sup>539</sup> SAD 452/302: R. von Slatin. Confidential: General Report on the Egyptian Soudan, March 1895, compiled from statements made by Slatin Pasha; and Slatin (1898), pp. 344-45.

<sup>540</sup> Douglas H. Johnson, "The Structure of a Legacy: Military Slavery in Northeast Africa," *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 36, No. 1, Winter 1989, pp. 73, 78, 82.

While departing from Khartoum on camel-back, Taylor passed through one area on the outskirts of the city where "the houses of the slaves...were springing up like anthills." The neighbourhood perplexed him with its anarchic layout and haphazard mud walls that twisted and turned like a maze. Taylor had tried to take a walk there before, but the honeycombing lanes had bewildered him and convinced him to go back. This time, however, mounted on the Austrian consul's tallest dromedary, he was able to look down boldly on the roofs of the native houses and to manoeuvre himself through the district with ease.

It is Taylor's bird's eye view, afforded by the camel's height, which follows:

All the mysteries of the lower life of Khartoum were revealed to me, from such a lofty post. On each side I looked into the pent yards where the miserable Arab and Negro families lazily basked in the sun during the day, or into the filthy nests where they crawled at night. The swarms of children which they bred in those dens sat naked in the dust, playing with the vile yellow dogs, and sometimes a lean burden camel stood in the corner. The only furniture to be seen was a water-skin, a few pots and jars, a basket or two, and sometimes an angareb, or coarse wooden frame covered with a netting or ropes, and serving as a seat and bed. Nearly half the population in the place are slaves, brought from the mountains above Fazogl, or from the land of the Dinkas, on the White Nile. One's commiseration of these degraded races is almost overcome by his disgust with their appearance and habits, and I found even the waste plain that stretches towards Sennaar a relief after threading the lanes of the quarters where they live<sup>541</sup>.

Taylor does not paint a rosy picture of slave family life based on the scenes he saw. Instead of depicting slave prosperity, if there could indeed be such a thing, he depicts misery.

Two points stand out from his passage. First, apparently not all the residents of the quarter were slaves: he estimates that only half were slaves.

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<sup>541</sup> Taylor (1854), p. 277.

Of the remainder, some may have been ex-slaves or muwalladin (free slave descendants or "half-breeds"), while others may have represented the free "Arab" Muslim poor. The second point to be made is that another type of slave settlement appears to have emerged in the urban milieu of mid-nineteenth-century Khartoum. It seems that one individual did not own this quarter of town on the pattern that existed previously; instead, it appears to have been a motley community of slaves (and perhaps ex-slaves) controlled by different owners.

Later accounts from the earliest years of the Condominium suggest that such a settlement pattern had indeed emerged. In 1907, Franz Xaver Geyer, a leader of the Catholic Church in the Sudan, described the layout of Khartoum. After surveying the highlights of the city centre and the general plan of the city, he says, "Further out into the desert [past the soldiers' barracks] the various Negro tribes live according to their native custom; there they play out the original life of Central Africans. Daily they go to work in the city and in the evening they go back to their quarters and villages<sup>542</sup>." If Geyer is accurate, then what might have been developing was a pristine "commuter" slave system of sorts. Satellite slave communities may have existed like shabby suburbs on the city perimeters, with a diverse population walking to their owners' work sites in the morning. At some distance from an owner's household, a slave family no doubt felt a degree of autonomy, since they could spend part of the day beyond the master's wary gaze.

Baedeker's 1908 travel guide advised the tourist of Khartoum's layout by providing a convenient map labelled with key sights. Talking of the region just outside the city limits, past the barracks, it says, "Beyond the fortifications [constructed by Gordon outside the town] we traverse a barren district to the Sudanese Village, known to the natives as Ed-Deim or 'The

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<sup>542</sup> Geyer (1907), p. 44.

Camp.' This shelters various tribes of the Sudan, partly in mud hovels, partly in the characteristic round huts. Native dances may often be witnessed here<sup>543</sup>."

Like the modern-day American tourists who flock to London hoping to catch a glimpse of "merry olde England," turn-of-the-century European tourists in Khartoum may have followed Baedeker's map to the "Sudanese Village" hoping to savour a bit of "savage Africa" in the "native dances." That Geyer and Baedeker both refer to the quarter's dances suggests that such slave communities may have been a successful nurturing ground for pre-enslavement (i.e. non-Islamic) customs and practices.

Other village communities popped up in the northern Sudan, which like the quarter mentioned above, included the slaves (and perhaps ex-slaves) of multiple owners. In assessing the labour supply of Khartoum Province, for example, one administrator wrote in 1911, "The ordinary establishment of labourers is composed of Arabs and Sudanese [i.e. slaves/ex-slaves] in the neighbourhood of an estate. The necessary supply is easily obtainable except in the case of an estate some distance from native villages, where special provision for houses and a market for labourers must be made<sup>544</sup>." Slaves, regardless of ownership, were clustering together in villages by this time<sup>545</sup>. Settlement patterns of slaves and ex-slaves in the post-abolition era represent a fascinating topic for further research.

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<sup>543</sup> Baedeker (1908), p. 414 and inset map.

<sup>544</sup> Sudan Government, Reports on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan: 1911, p. 25.

<sup>545</sup> See SAD 750/1/150, 182: I. Cunnison. Photographs of the village at Gideyhat, where former slaves reside permanently as cultivators, c. 1952-54.

## Marital Relations in the Slave Family

This chapter will now dip into one very murky aspect of family life--and that relates to marital relations. Not surprisingly, little appears on the subject, though a couple of references show that universal problems plagued slave marriages, too.

A remark in Taylor's account refers to the Shilluk husband and wife pair who belonged to Dr. Peney of Khartoum in the 1850's. One night this couple entertained Bayard Taylor and the Austrian Consul, Dr. Reitz, by dancing in the traditional Shilluk manner. As it soon became clear in the course of the evening, however, the two slaves had grown so annoyed with one another that they were intending to go their separate ways. Supposedly, the Austrian Consul stepped in as the marriage counsellor of the moment, listened to their mutual complaints, gave them a few piastres each, and thereby effected a happy reconciliation<sup>546</sup>!

Aside from mutual separation, abandonment may have been relatively common, too, especially among ex-slaves families. Bonds of marriage and family theoretically tied a man down, but some, especially in the post-abolition era, shrugged off their responsibilities and slipped away. Only men, possessing a physical/social mobility which women lacked, and at least in the Condominium era having greater access to wage employment, could be the abandoners. In this vein, the 1908 Annual Report for Dongola Province reads, "The certainty of good wages at Port Sudan, Khartoum, and elsewhere, has proved an irresistible attraction, and a large number of able-bodied men have left the Province, causing loud and continuous complaints on the part of landowners. In many instances these

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<sup>546</sup> Taylor (1854), pp. 382-83.

men have left their wives and families without any means of sustenance, and they are thus reduced to a state of abject poverty<sup>547</sup>."

Added to these few references, administrative reports in particular drop hints to the effect that notions of fidelity did not restrict many slave and ex-slave marriages. These allusions arise during the course of discussions on prostitution--that scourge of a problem which coincided with raucous merissa-drinking, petty crime, and rampant venereal disease. Doctors and administrators struggled to control the problem by subjecting prostitutes to regular medical check-ups, a prerequisite for licensing those who wished to ply the trade. In province after province, year after year, one thing foiled the officials: married women were exempt from the clinical examination requirement. And since vast numbers of the prostitutes were married slaves and ex-slaves, vast numbers went unchecked.

E.A. Stanton, the governor of Khartoum Province, wrote in 1902, "Public women have had special quarters built for them and are under control; where the immorality of the native women [i.e., women of slave background] is so pronounced as it is in the Sudan, it is a little difficult at times to discriminate between public women and others<sup>548</sup>." The Public Health official wrote in the same year, "Public women are segregated and inspected weekly by a Medical Officer, but there is a large amount of venereal disease rife which cannot be controlled owing to immorality among married women, who cannot be segregated<sup>549</sup>." An administrator in Kordofan Province wrote in 1903, "Control of public women cannot be properly carried out as nearly every woman living in the towns has very little idea of conjugal fidelity<sup>550</sup>."

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<sup>547</sup> Sudan Government, "Annual Report, Dongola Province," Reports on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan: 1908, p. 503. See also Budge, Vol. 1 (1907), p. 198.

<sup>548</sup> Sudan Government, Reports on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan: 1902, p. 312.

<sup>549</sup> 1902 Report, p. 299.

<sup>550</sup> 1903 Report, p. 74.

The public health officer of Berber Province explained the prostitute examination procedures in Abu Hamad, Berber, Atbara, El Damer and Shendi in his 1906 report. He says, "There is always a great difficulty in knowing who are the Public Women. A large proportion of the Sudanese black women [i.e., slaves/ex-slaves] are immoral especially when their husbands are absent....<sup>551</sup>" The governor of Kassala Province did not mince words in his 1909 report, when he explained why the district had abandoned the policy of medical examinations for prostitutes: "There are too many harlots among the married women for any system to be efficient<sup>552</sup>."

Available historical sources hardly de-mystify the sexual mores or the social value systems which regulated slave life. Can the unrestrictedness of slave and ex-slave marriages, as illustrated by the numerous married prostitutes, be attributed to some kind of sexual indoctrination of slave women (alluded to by Burckhardt, and supported by innumerable references to the ways in which owners pushed their slave and ex-slave women into prostitution<sup>553</sup>), to family/marital/social instability as a whole, or simply to tolerance? Was the behaviour of the servile community really so different from that of the free? Indeed, it does appear that for free northern Sudanese women, the nineteenth century may have brought tightening social restrictions as stricter Islamic values pervaded the region; the sexual mores of the free may have been much more conservative at the end of the century than they were at the beginning<sup>554</sup>. Unfortunately the sources keep relatively silent on this very interesting topic.

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<sup>551</sup> 1906 Report, p. 580.

<sup>552</sup> 1909 Report, p. 711.

<sup>553</sup> Burckhardt (1819), p. 337. These issues are discussed at length in the chapter on prostitution.

<sup>554</sup> Compare Waddington & Hanbury (1822), p. 84 and Ruppell (1829), p. 44 on the openness of free riverain-area women in the 1820's with Italian Missionaries, "Three Impressions of Khartoum during the Turkiya (from the Letters and Diaries of Italian Missionaries)," Sudan Notes and Records, Vol. 41, 1960, p. 106 on the increasing prevalence of veiling among Khartoum women in the 1850's. See also Bjorkelo (1983), p. 98.

## Conclusion

This chapter does not pretend to be an all-embracing study on the slave family. On the contrary, its goal has simply been to show that slave families not only existed in the northern Sudan, but were quite common. It is all too easy to overlook the slave family completely, as many nineteenth-century travellers' accounts did, or to assume that they did not exist, only because the Egyptian and Ottoman slavery systems generally lacked this element. Marriage and family represented a major step in the socialization process of slaves. Through it slaves gained relatives while owners gained more slaves. It is a critical, fascinating, but alas little documented aspect of the slave experience.

## Chapter 13:

### **\*\* Conclusion \*\***

Rather than directing more attention towards the fairly well-documented slave trade and abolition effort in the northern Sudan, the preceding study has addressed a topic which has long suffered from a lack of attention--and that is the slave experience itself. The nature of the sources available admittedly hampers this attempt. Much of the material consulted comes from the selfsame administrative records (such as Condominium-era official reports and private letters) and travellers' accounts from which historians have fashioned their narratives on trading, raiding, and abolition. Very few primary sources tell the story from the slave-owner's, or much more importantly, from the slave's point of view.

It is this gaping hole in the historical record--namely, the absence of any great corpus of sources revealing the slave's own perspective--which has deterred many a sane historian from writing on the slave experience. And yet, the experience of the thousands upon thousands of men, women, and children who were dragged to northern Sudanese markets lies at the base of every slave trade or abolition study that has ever emerged. Undaunted, this study has launched an indirect attack on the subject in an effort to elucidate the slave experience. It has pieced together observations made by witnesses to the slavery scene, whether they be archaeologists, tourists, military advisors, or province officials, and has filled in gaps with carefully-considered hypotheses. Ultimately it has tried to speculate on how the slave thought, felt, and functioned in his or her environment.

Anyone writing about the Sudan is graced with a very rich, if small, repertoire of extant secondary-source histories, ranging from general surveys to specific regional studies. This thesis has benefitted enormously from the thought-provoking array of texts on the subject, which illuminate

Sudanese history in all its complexity and diversity. On top of these sources, another brand of writing has proved extremely useful, and that includes the theoretical comparative slavery studies which represent a burgeoning field for anthropologists, sociologists, and historians. Such works argue over the qualities and characteristics which define the slave; they draw parallels between slave experiences world-wide, over different periods. Their importance in this project has been three-fold. They infused a much-needed theoretical dimension into the dry historical data; they provided a conceptual framework for building hypotheses in areas where the primary and secondary source histories have left holes; and perhaps most significantly, they situated northern Sudanese slavery into a much larger, world-wide context.

Slavery in the Sudan is a vast subject with a long, long history that goes back millennia. This study deals with only one thin slice from that timeline: it straddles the period from the last days of the Fung dynasty around the dawn of the nineteenth century, to the early decades of the Condominium era in the twentieth century when British officials began dismantling the region's slavery. The focus here has remained on those slaves who satisfied internal northern Sudanese markets--not on those who simply passed through the Sudan as outward-bound exports. The study has tried to hone itself down even further by focussing primarily on "domestic slavery," and has endeavoured to clarify this term as few sources have ever bothered to do before, by linking it to those slaves who were attached to an owner's household--thereby leaving aside military and perhaps administrative elite slavery for others.

The slave experience in the northern Sudan defies stereotyping. Certainly it was neither romantic nor utterly benign. Stereotypes of sultry, silk-clad concubines reclining on a harem's plush ottomans do not apply. Even the stereotype of the happy household servant, loved by all and responsible only for tasks such as light dusting and serving cool drinks to

guests, comes seriously into question. Reality, of course, was far more complex.

Owners in the northern Sudan bade their slaves to undertake a tremendous variety of chores and occupations. In large part this variety reflected the great differences in wealth, geographical location, and occupational interests among the swelling numbers of slave-owners in the nineteenth century. Consequently, while some smartly dressed boys served food to a Khartoum pasha's guests, others supervised the oxen at a Merowe farmer's waterwheel. While some women plied a trade as prostitutes in Kassala, others ground grain in El Obeid, and still others mended fences in Dar Masalit. Many women were concubines; some of these, like the ones lucky enough to bear children to the Taqali king in the Nuba Mountains, enjoyed a high status indeed. Meanwhile, men outside of Suakin functioned as the local policemen; others at Munqara built boats; many, many more planted and harvested fields throughout the entire region. Some slaves sweated and toiled. Many others exerted themselves very little. Labour intensity may often have been gender-related, with women commonly bearing the brunt of the hard-core, exhausting labour involved in mundane tasks such as water-fetching.

Owners valued the services of their slaves very highly. Nonetheless, owners did not necessarily consider productivity and profit to be the driving force behind slave-owning. Arguably, the appeal of slaves may have stood in their status-enhancing, power- and wealth-indicating potential. Slave labour, whether heavy or light, often meant that slave-owners did not have to toil and sweat in order to eke out a living; it provided owners with large amounts of leisure time. Northern Sudanese society deemed this leisure to be highly admirable, even noble; the man or woman who did not have to work thanks to slave labour gained much respect. These cultural values inspired what I have termed a leisure or idleness ethic, rather than a work

ethic. Free men and possibly ex-slaves alike aspired to this leisure ethic, which did nothing to help post-1898 labour shortages.

This study has tried to address another important, though unwieldy, issue which relates to the relative harshness or mildness of domestic slavery in the northern Sudan. Abolitionist fervour caused many a European to decry the evils of slavery; confusing and paradoxical though it seems, many of these same zealots praise the "domestic slavery" of the "East" (i.e. Islamic world) for its benignity. This study has tried to avoid using these incendiary, grossly biased, and contradictory sources as much as possible. Another less-pronounced tendency appears in the works of some Muslim scholars, who try to argue that benevolent Islamic laws successfully regulated slavery in the northern Sudan.

As close scrutiny reveals, however, the existence of Islamic laws in no way meant the application of Islamic laws. Ideology diverged far from practice in this regard. So while it is interesting to note the existence of a Quranic verse that prohibits slave prostitution, for instance, it is more interesting still to note this verse's total non-impact on northern Sudanese slavery practice. The Quran in itself stands as no proof of slavery's mildness.

Many slaves experienced relatively kind treatment from their owners, and they were very lucky indeed. A couple may have been fortunate enough to have owners who treated them as well as a member of their own family. Others, however, suffered badly at the hands of owners who were abusive, hot-headed, or perhaps even insane; expatriate European slave-owners had a particularly bad reputation in this regard. Slave treatment was as arbitrary as a lottery. Providence or blind fate determined a slave's owner, and every slave then lived according to the whims of his or her owner.

Even with slave-owning at its most benevolent, however, one must put slavery in the proper perspective by remembering its sombre backdrop

in the slave raid and march. The horrors of the slave trade need no exaggerating. Mass murder, rape, pillaging, and devastation were typical consequences of any raid. Death through exhaustion, starvation, thirst, or even infection and disease (at times resulting from the exposure of raw skin caused by chafing manacles, fetters, or yokes) felled many others on the march. The men, women, and children who stocked the northern Sudan's slave markets may have represented the small fraction of survivors from a particular raided village. And so, although slavery was a comfort-bringing benefit for the free population of the northern Sudan, it coincided with the crippling and devastation of entire communities and ethnic groups in the southern Sudan--and in parts of what is now Ethiopia, Zaire, Chad, the Central African Republic, and even areas further west as well.

How any individual could survive enslavement--the cycle of bloodshed and violence which ripped them from their homes and planted them in an alien land as a stranger's property--boggles the mind. Yet obviously many did survive. This study has speculated on the means by which slaves coped and adapted to their setting. The responses to slavery, and the ways that slaves injected meaning into their lives, were indeed diverse: some cultivated insolence rather than submissiveness, defying the society which had defied them; some embraced Islam, the religion of their enslavers, with more zeal and fervour than a holy man; some maintained the memory of their former lives, through songs, religious rituals, and the like; and most shockingly, some enslaved just as they had been enslaved.

Slaves adapted to their host society, and their host society adapted to them. Northern Sudanese society afforded many slaves the opportunity for social mobility, mainly by manumitting them and allowing them to merge into the free population. But this process of adaptation was by no means smooth. Anti-assimilative tendencies, at times caused by high slave mortality rates, and affected by multiple slave sales and attitudes which

classified slaves on a par with livestock, often thwarted the development of close, familial relations between slaves and owners.

By and large, women found it much easier to gain manumission and to merge into mainstream free society than men. Women had this greater integration potential in spite of the fact that they had little physical mobility: they were bound to a male guardian--owner or husband--whether they had slave or free status. Manumission, therefore, probably changed the daily routine of the average slave woman's life very little. It also had little impact on her children's inherited status. That is, the northern Sudan's patrilineal kinship system dictated that fathers, and not mothers, played the significant role in determining a child's status. This was a system endorsed by Islamic law, which declared the offspring of a slave mother (that is, a concubine) and free father to be free like the father, according to the umm al-walad principle. Very often northern Sudanese society did indeed follow this principle, so that the children of many slave women passed automatically into free society--though possibly facing some residual social stigma which time, in the course of a few generations, wore away.

Slave men faced a different lot in life. They quite commonly married at a master's behest soon after their purchase, and passed on the legacy of slavery to their children--thereby creating new generations of servile labour for their owners. Breaking into free, mainstream society was much harder for these men. Even the descendants of these slave men, who often gained de jure or de facto freedom after a couple of generations, typically remained attached somehow to former masters (or to their masters' descendants), obligated to work on their land and to show them deference. These slave descendants thrived in communities well into the current century, but continued to face stigma as the descendants of slaves.

Though social stigma is difficult to calibrate, slaves, ex-slaves, and their descendants often bore its mark for a few or several generations. For slaves, odd naming practices may have been one way to set them apart, and

to draw sharp attention to their servile status. For ex-slaves and their descendants, who gained greater control over their own lives, scorn on the part of the free or former slave-owning society managed to keep them on the lower rungs of the social ladder. Well into the twentieth century, mainstream society continued (and perhaps continues) to bar some slave descendants from entry into their ranks: good jobs, political office, and other positions of prestige were often far beyond the slave descendant's grasp in many small towns, prompting some disillusioned youth to migrate to the big cities in hopes of a brighter life.

Nevertheless, regardless of how rocky the road to social acceptance and integration has been, the descendants of male and female slaves alike have blended to a large extent into northern Sudanese society. That is, while their forefathers (and/or "foremothers"!) came to the northern Sudan as outsiders, time has worked upon the ensuing generations, fashioning these men and women into insiders, full-fledged members of the north's Muslim society. Today these descendants look to lands from which their great-grandparents may have come, lands occupied by Dinka, Shilluk, Bongo, and Berta; the people whom they see there, they regard not as "us" but "them." That is, in spite of a common heritage, the passage of time has eroded these links with the past, and has made them strangers in the lands which their predecessors called home. Though a bloodline exists between the North and the South, a vast cultural abyss fails to bind the two regions together. The existence of this abyss simply proves how thoroughly northern Sudanese society did indeed internalize and transform its deracinated, uprooted, kinless stranger-slaves into the mainstream Muslim citizenry.

Adding to the complexity in the cultural equation is the rather surprising background to Sudanese nationalism, an ideology which emerged in the 1920's and expounded the notion of the Sudan, North and South together, as a discrete whole worthy of self-determination. One key

group advocating this nationalism consisted of military ex-slaves, thoroughly Islamized but not yet fully incorporated into a niche in northern society<sup>555</sup>. Perhaps it was their personal sense of cultural ambiguity, of unsettledness, which caused the movement to mushroom. In any case, they helped to transform the meaning of the word "Sudanese": while it had served before as a vaguely pejorative term for a non-Arabized but "detrribalized" black and/or a person of slave origins<sup>556</sup>, it came to bear a new and noble meaning, referring to a shared North/South national affiliation.

This study covers domestic slavery in a time span stretching from the last days of the Fung to the early years of the Condominium, anticipating Sudanese independence by a few decades. This is a period which coincides with one of the most fascinating and complex epochs in Sudanese history. Slavery, like other social institutions, witnessed incredible changes in the course of one century. Developing from a preserve of the elite into a commodity for the free masses, only to be nipped in the bud by abolitionism, slavery underwent staggering transformations in the nineteenth century. It has been the aim of this thesis to paint a picture of the slave experience in all its kaleidoscopic diversity, against such a fleeting backdrop of massive social change.

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<sup>555</sup> Yoshiko Kurita, "The Role of the 'Negroid but Detribalized' People in Sudanese Society, 1920s-1940s," Unpublished paper delivered at the Second International Sudan Studies Conference. University of Durham, England. 8-11 April 1991.

<sup>556</sup> Peter Woodward, Sudan, 1898-1989: The Unstable State (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990), pp. 42-43, 47.

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