

# SUDAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION

BULLETIN

نشرة جمعية الدراسات  
السودانية



**Changing Khartoum skyline and new bridge connecting Khartoum and Tuti Island**

**In this issue:** 2009 SSA conference change in venue; Tributes to El-Tom Babiker Umbarak and Elizabeth Warnock Fernea; Featured Articles: *Indigenous Efforts to Revitalize and Digitize the Nubian Languages*; *Selim Aga: New Light on his Life and his Explorations in West Africa*; *Interview with Osman Musa Bawanin, Chairman of the Beja Conference for Reform and Development*; Book Reviews: *Proud to be Nuba: Faces and Voices* by Nanne op't Ende; *Darfur's Sorrow: A History of Destruction and Genocide* by M.W. Daly; *Quest for Divinity: A Critical Examination of the Thought of Mahmud Muhammed Taha*.

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## our purpose

The *Sudan Studies Association* (SSA) is an independent professional society founded in the United States in 1981. Membership is open to scholars, teachers, students, and others with interest in the Sudan. The Association exists primarily to promote Sudanese studies and scholarship. It maintains a co-operative relationship with the Institute of African and Asian Studies, University of Khartoum. SSA works to foster closer ties among scholars in the Sudan, North America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and other places. Normal activities of the SSA include the publication of this Newsletter, organizing meetings for the exchange of ideas, and recommending research candidates for affiliation with appropriate institutions of higher education in the Sudan. The Association also sponsors panels and programs during the meetings of other academic organizations. It occasionally publishes the proceedings of its annual meetings in book form.

## join us

*Membership* is for each academic calendar year which entitles the subscriber to receive all the issues of the SSA Newsletter, and to discounted registration rates for attending the annual meetings of the Association.

### Membership Categories

Regular	\$30.00
Life Membership	\$200.00
Non-Profit Org.'s	\$30.00
Profit-Making Org.'s	\$150.00

For information about membership, change of address, registration for meetings, or back issues of SSA publications, please contact the Executive Director. Financial and other Donations: The SSA is legally incorporated as a non-profit making organization. Thus all contributions and other donations are tax-exempt. Your gift is appreciated.

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## Notice of Change of Venue for 2009 Annual SSA Conference

**The 28th Annual SSA Conference**  
will be held at **Michigan State University**.

The conference will NOT be held at Boston University,  
due to a personnel change.

The conference will be held on **May 21-24, 2009**.

### CONFERENCE THEME:

*Languages and cultures of Sudan*

### CONFERENCE ORGANIZER:

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[WWW.SUDANSTUDIES.ORG](http://WWW.SUDANSTUDIES.ORG)

## News and Notes

### British team discovers ancient pyramid in Sudan that “rewrites history”

*By Stephen Adams  
Arts Correspondent*

A team of British archeologists has discovered new evidence of the power of a civilization that once dominated ancient Egypt.

The Second Kushite Kingdom controlled the entire Nile valley from Khartoum to the Mediterranean from 720BC to 660BC, but an expedition from the British Museum has discovered that a region of northern Sudan, once considered a forgotten backwater, was also “a real power base”.

The archaeologists found a ruined pyramid containing fine gold jewelry dating from 700BC on a remote, 100-mile stretch of the Nile known as the Fourth Cataract, plus pottery from as far away as Turkey. Other finds included numerous examples of ancient rock art and “musical” rocks that were tapped to create a melodic sound.

The items came to light after the team was incited by the Sudanese authorities to help excavate part of the Merowe region, which is soon to be flooded as part of a hydroelectric dam project.

Historians had dismissed the area as being of little interest. Dr. Derek Welsby, of the British Museum, said the finds revolutionized the history and geography of the Kushite Kingdoms.

He said the First Kushite Kingdom rivaled Egypt for power between 2500BC and 1500BC, when many of Egypt’s largest pyramids were built: “All our preconceptions about this being a relatively poor, inhospitable area were completely wrong. We thought the First Kingdom gradually grew over 1,000 years; now

we know it happened right at the beginning, very rapidly.

“During the Second Kingdom we thought it was an area everybody bypassed. But finding the pyramid meant it was a real power base. It was partaking in the major trade routes.

A selection of the finds is to be displayed at the British Museum early next year.



### Formation of the Sudanese Graduates’ Association

*Courtesy: Sudanese Refugee Education Fund Sept. 1, 2009  
(Syracuse, NY, USA NSV)-*

After nearly a decade since the first Sudanese refugee set foot in Syracuse, New York, a group of graduate students called for a meeting to form a professional union that will bring all of them in one place for a common purpose today.

The union, known as the Sudanese Graduates’ Association, was formed in Syracuse, New York on Saturday, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008 under the supervision of elders Uncle Andrew Wieu Riak, and Uncle Manoah Majok – all of them graduates with masters’ degrees from the United States and France respectively.

Syracuse, a home to about 600 Sudanese nationals (now Sudanese Americans), has nearly 40 Sudanese graduates with associate degrees to master’s degrees. Of that number, two have master’s degrees and three more will graduate with master’s degrees at the end of this year. Several more are pursuing their undergraduate studies in different areas of interest. One Sudanese national has recently been admitted to a doctorate program at Upstate Medical University.

Called to session by Jeremiah Gai, the assembly unanimously seconded the formation of the “Sudanese Graduates’ Association” as the start to contribution to the community. “You are the example to the rest of the community,” commented Jeremiah Gai in reference to the professionals. Andrew Wieu, one of the two observers, added that education is like a fire and can not be hidden; “put it up where everybody can see it,” he added.

The three members of the executive are: Jeremiah Ater Gai, Provisional Chairperson; Maker Costa Mapuor, Provisional Deputy Chairperson; Chol Majok Aguto, Provisional Secretary General.



## Passages

### El-Tom Babiker Umbarak (1938-2008)

*Alice Irvine Umbarak*  
*Mississauga, Canada*  
*July 2008*

Tom described himself, in the CV he wrote in November 2007 when applying for a visitor’s visa to Canada, as “farmer, humanitarian, retired translator” – in that order. He could have added “teacher”, not only because his early career was teaching secondary school geography and science, but because all his life my husband went out of his way to share with anyone who would listen, whatever knowledge he had acquired. It is therefore fitting that his grave in Tabat cemetery, just north of Kamlin in Sudan’s Gezira State, is the one closest to the gate of the local school.



*Tom and Alice Umbarak*

The last photo I took of Tom was on April 29, the day he left Canada to return to our home in Sudan ahead of me: it shows him smiling broadly. Many people have remarked on Tom’s constant warm smile, and seemingly indefatigable optimism. Few realise just how many reversals he endured, how many disappointed dreams, how many betrayals of ideals.

Changes of government in Khartoum affected him more than once. When we met in January 1970 as fellow teachers in Zambia, he was there not because he wanted to teach, but because his U.K. training as an airline pilot had been cut short by the 1969 coup – a dream shattered. A few years before, government pressure had shattered another dream, forcing him to abandon his master’s at the American University of Beirut: his chosen field – oceanography, an area of expertise not filled by any Sudanese national for many years to come. In 1989, he was pursuing his life-long dream of living and working on his own farm; by the end of that year, unable to live under the new regime, he was ready to turn away from the plot of land he had bought with his earnings during a decade working as a translator in Saudi Arabia, leaving behind an unfinished house, several containers of household possessions, and a collection of agricultural and workshop equipment that included welding machines, stone cutters, a backhoe, and a Komatsu earthmover. The shattering of this dream was rendered more painful by subsequent events, when those he left in



*Tom Umbarak with Dinka*

charge squandered his assets and all but ruined the farm.

Yet throughout his years in the United States of America – from July 1990 to his retirement from the World Bank at the end of 2002 – Tom kept alive not only the personal dream of the two of us living out our years in our home by the banks of the Blue Nile, but the broader dream that all of Sudan would one day know peace and prosperity. For fourteen years he did not set foot in Sudan. On retirement, he tried to find a place to settle that was close to Sudan – in Eritrea, in Uganda – but in the end, in January 2004, encouraged by the fragile hope of Machakos, he moved from Entebbe back home to Gezira. I joined him on the farm when I myself retired in September 2005.

As a farmer, Tom achieved much over the four years from 2004 to 2008. Although barely one half of the fifty feddans, barren when purchased in 1986, are currently under cultivation, there is a riverside plot with some 500 lime trees that are, with this season's rains, ready to give the first marketable crop. There are 1500 more, up by the main highway, that are planted and thriving, but still immature. Of the 9000 eucalyptus trees planted in the 1980s, perhaps 1000 remain, enough to provide wind shelter for the areas available for vegetables and animal feed, but not for the original plan of harvesting for charcoal and timber.

As a humanitarian, in 1999 he set up a non-government organization (NGO) registered in Maryland, USA. Sudan Care Founda-

tion, Incorporated (SCF), is now defunct from lack of support, but it did accomplish some things. One major achievement was the shipping to southern Sudan of a large quantity of used computers. At one point, the basement and family room of our home in Bethesda were filled with donated items, with the overflow in our son's room while he was away studying in Canada.

Tom's major humanitarian achievement, however, was to my mind in the area of advocacy. As SCF's president and founder, he was highly visible at all lectures, conferences, congressional hearings and NGO meetings in Washington DC that had any bearing on the situation in Sudan. He was a member of the lobbying group that directly resulted in the Sudan Peace Act of October 2002, and actively participated in the sub-committee investigating war crimes. As an employee of the World Bank he had to keep a low profile, but took care to notify and obtain approval from his supervisors for his humanitarian efforts. At the photo op ceremony honoring his ten years with the Bank, he startled those present by handing to President Wolfensohn a copy of the SCF brochure and giving him a short lecture on Sudan's needs.

The achievement I am thinking of, however, is not Tom's attendance at public events, but what he did for a number of years anonymously – maintaining regular multiple emailings to a select group of several hundred people, many of whom were unaware of his identity, and most of whom were in high positions of direct relevance to the situation in Sudan, including appointed envoys. The material he emailed was collected from the internet, from a wide range of sources. This meant many hours at the computer – and a number of drastic computer crashes. When he announced he was no longer in a position to offer this service, there was a flood of dismayed messages, some with pleas for him to continue, some with profuse thanks for what he had done.

Even before setting up the NGO, Tom was deeply involved in helping people. While



working in Saudi Arabia, he contributed financially to the construction of a health clinic in Kamlin, and collected used clothing and blankets to bring back for distribution to the needy. Today, the rest area he set up on the farm is well known to those who travel along the Khartoum-Wad Medani highway. Dedicated to his parents, it has pit latrines and a shaded area with traditional “angareeb” beds; and its “zeers” (clay jars) are filled with river water, filtered through sand and gravel in a system he himself devised.

Despite rumours to the contrary, he was never a member of any political party. Association with the Sudan Alliance Forces (SAF) allowed him to travel to non-government-held areas in the east; association with the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM), to those areas in the south. In 1997, Tom and I, with our son Ramsay, made the first of several visits to Eritrea, identifying areas where humanitarian efforts were needed. In 2001, Tom and I made a trip to southern Sudan under the auspices of Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA), and the following year Ramsay spent a month working with them in Akot.

Tom and I always loved travel. Our two major trips were in 1972, when the two of us traveled by Landrover from Lusaka to Khartoum, through Tanzania, Kenya and Ethiopia; and in 1981, when we traveled in a Renault towing a trailer tent with our two children, aged 8 and 3, from Saudi Arabia to England, through Jordan, Syria, Turkey and into Europe. On my retirement, we planned a third major trip, and purchased a motor home for our intended travel across the United States and Canada, visiting the many friends we had made over the years. Unfortunately that trip did not materialize.

Tom, I know, regretted not making that trip. The demands of rehabilitating the farm, he said, required his constant presence. Unfortunately, not leaving Sudan meant that he had not seen his daughter or grandchildren in the last three years, although he spoke with them now and then by phone. Mona and her husband Bob

live in Johnson City in New York; on his recent trip across the Atlantic, Tom had a visa for Canada, but not for the United States.

Our granddaughter Siobhan turned ten this year, and her brother Andrew will be eight in September. They both play lacrosse, and both are active in the scouting movement. Their interest in scouting pleased Tom, because part of our life in Bethesda was involvement with our son’s boy scout troop. Both Tom and I undertook training and became assistant scoutmasters in Troop 204, attending most of the monthly campouts. The scouts looked up to him; he had the ability to engage their interest and earn their respect. I have been moved by the messages of condolence that I have received from young men who knew Tom and learned from him.

I have happy memories of camping with the boy scouts. I have happy memories of the grandkids in Bethesda, where they liked to help Jidu weed the garden and plant flowers. Memories of travel in Africa and in Europe, of staying with friends, of welcoming friends to our home. Memories in Zambia, where we taught together in Solwezi and Lusaka; in Sudan, where we both worked at the Ministry of Culture and Information; in Saudi Arabia where he worked for the Arab Petroleum Investment Corporation (APICORP) and I taught at King Faisal University; in England, while he studied for his master’s degree in translation; and in the United States, where he was in the World Bank’s translation unit and I was with the Saudi Arabian Information Office.

And that is what I must hold on to – the happy memories. Tom and I had 38 years together, and we were friends as well as husband and wife. We disagreed on many things, but we also shared many dreams. One of them was of spending our last years together on our farm on the banks of the Blue Nile.



## Elizabeth Warnock Fernea (1927-2008)



*BJ Fernea in the 1980s (from CMES web site)*

It is with great sorrow that we report that Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, Professor Emerita of Comparative Literature and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, passed away on Tuesday afternoon, December 2, 2008, at the home of her daughter, Laila Stroben, in La Canada, California. She is survived by her husband, Robert A. Fernea (Professor Emeritus of Anthropology and Middle Eastern Studies), daughters Laura Ann and Laila and son David, and several grandchildren.

Known as "BJ" to friends and family, Mrs. Fernea's interest and passion in the Middle East, especially in women's issues, was clear to anyone who had the opportunity to work with her during her forty year career as a writer, lecturer, professor, and film maker. She served as an energetic, enthusiastic champion of the Middle Eastern Studies program at UT for many decades.

A graduate of Reed College in Oregon, BJ's initial exposure to the Middle East came through trial-by-fire when she accompanied her husband on his doctoral field study to the village of al-Nahra in southern Iraq from 1956-1958. In her bestselling ethnographic memoir, "Guests of the Sheik: An Ethnography of an Iraqi Village" (1965, reprinted in 1969 and 1989), BJ recorded how she was able to navigate into the spheres of the village women, areas where her husband was unable to go. After Robert Fernea attained his doctorate from the University of Chicago, the couple moved to Cairo, where two of their children were born.

The Ferneas arrived in Austin in 1966, when Robert assumed the directorship of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas. BJ was hired as a Senior Lecturer in 1975 in the Comparative Literature Program in the Department of English and in the Center for Middle Eastern Studies. She was promoted to full Professorship in 1990. BJ retired from teaching in the spring of 1999, but continued to be active as Professor Emerita for the rest of her life. She was the recipient of numerous grants, awards, and honors, and also served as president of the Middle East Studies Association of North America from 1985-86.

Over the course of their forty years in Austin, BJ authored a number of books, some autobiographical--such as "A View of the Nile" (1970) and "A Street in Marrakech" (1975)--others more scholarly in nature, including the edited volumes "Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak" (co-edited with Basima Qattan Bezirgan, 1977), "Women and Family in the Middle East: New Voices of Change" (1985), "In Search of Islamic Feminism: One Woman's Global Journey" (1998), and "Remembering Childhood in the Middle East" (2002). She also co-authored two publications with Robert Fernea: "The Arab World: Personal Encounters" (1985, reissued as "The Arab World: Forty Years of change" in 1997), and "Nubian Ethnographies" (1991).

In addition to her prolific career as an author, BJ produced several films about the



Middle East, including "Saints and Spirits" (1979), "Reformers and Revolutionaries: Middle Eastern Women" (1984), "The Struggle for Peace: Israelis and Palestinians" (1992), "The Road to Peace: Israelis and Palestinians" (1994), and "Living With the Past" (2001).

We at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies fondly remember Elizabeth Fernea as a friend and colleague who created a warm, dynamic environment for visiting scholars, fostered an open forum for the discussion of Middle Eastern women's issues, and helped to forge an international reputation for the University of Texas's Middle East Studies program.

The Center for Middle Eastern Studies is planning a symposium on women in the Middle East in honor of Elizabeth Warnock Fernea to take place in 2009. A formal announcement will be made after the winter holiday.

The Fernea family has announced that a memorial service will be held in Austin at St. Austin's Catholic Church early next week. Specific information will be posted on the CMES Web site when it becomes available, at:

<http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/cmes/>

We extend our deepest sympathies to the Ferneas at this difficult time. We will greatly miss BJ's enthusiasm and energy.



## 50th Anniversary of the University of Khartoum's Department of Anthropology and Sociology

The Sudan Studies Association extends its congratulations and best wishes to the Department of Social Anthropology of the University of Khartoum on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary. The department has produced some of Sudan's finest ethnographers and scholars, and it has also acted as generous host to many international scholars visiting the Su-

dan, whether they have been graduate students working on their doctoral studies or senior visiting scholars. We in the Sudan Studies Association who have been the recipients of your hospitality and have benefited from the sharing of ideas wish to extend our collective gratitude to all past and present members of the department.

The October 2008 International Symposium marking this historic event is reproduced here for the information and edification of the SSA membership.



## Celebrating the Golden Jubilee of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Khartoum 1958-2008

*"Anthropology in the Sudan:  
Past, Present and Future"*  
25-26 October 2008

*Venue: Oil House, Nile Avenue*

### Conference timetable

#### Day 1

8:30-9:00am: Registration

#### Opening session 9:00-11:00

**Chairperson: Fahima Zahir**

9:00-9:10 *Munzoul Assal*, Chairman of the Organizing Committee

9:10-9:20 *Musa A. Abdul-Jalil*, Head of the Department of Social Anthropology

9:20-9:30 *Hassan Haj Ali*, Dean, Faculty of Economic and Social Studies

9:30-9:40	<i>Mohamed Ahmed El-Sheikh</i> , Vice Chancellor, University of Khartoum	2:50-3:15	Historical thinking in political discourses: the case of land issues in Southern Kordufan. <i>Enrico Ille</i> , Martin Luther University, Halle
9:40-10:30	Keynote address: Rethinking ethnicity: from Darfur to China and back. <i>Gunnar Haaland</i> , University of Bergen, Norway	3:15-3:40	Rethinking livelihoods in Gezira agricultural scheme. <i>Abdalla M. Gasimelseed</i> , Sweden.
10:30-11:00	Break	3:40-4:00	General discussion
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Session 11:00-1:00</b>		4:00-4:15	Tea/Coffee Break
<b>Chairperson: Leif Manger</b>		<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Session 4:15-6:15</b>	
11:00-11:25:	Identity conflicts and culture concepts: insights from Sudan. <i>Jay O'Brien</i> , Purdue University	<b>Chairperson: Abdel Ghaffar M. Ahmed</b>	
11:25-11:50:	Gendering the politics of memory: women identity and conflict in Sudan. <i>Sondra Hale</i> , University of California, Los Angeles.	4:15-4:40	Sudanese folklorists: no longer harmless fogies. <i>Mohamed E. Bushra</i> , Dongola University
11:50-12:15:	Pluralism and governance in Sudan: reflections on the local and national perspectives. <i>Ahmed Al-Shabi</i> , University of Oxford	4:40-5:05	Scarcity and resource competition in western Sudan. <i>Leif Manger</i> , University of Bergen, Norway
12:15-12:40	Dark tunnels or new horizons: mobility, identity and ethnic violence in Sudan. <i>Abdel Ghaffar Mohamed Ahmed</i> , Ahfad University for Women	5:05-5:30	From harmful traditions to pathologies of power: revamping the anthropological analysis of health in Sudan. <i>Ellen Gruenbaum</i> , Purdue University
12:40-1:00:	General Discussion	5:30-5:50	General discussion
1:00-2:00	Lunch	7:30-9:30	Conference Dinner
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Session 2:00-4:00</b>		<b>Day 2</b>	
<b>Chairperson: Khalil Abdalla El-Madani</b>		<b>4<sup>th</sup> Session 9:00-11:00</b>	
2:00-2:25	On authorizing historical narratives after civil war: the case of paganism in Nuba Mountains since 1978. <i>Richard Rottenburg</i> , Martin Luther University, Halle.	<b>Chairperson: Richard Rottenburg</b>	
2:25-2:50	The predicament in access to and management of resources in globalized Sudan: some notes from case studies among Arab pastoralists in Butana and Southern Kordufan. <i>Barbara Casciarri</i> , University of Paris 8 and CEDEJ.	9:00-9:25	Urbanization and social change in Sudan. <i>Fahima Zahir</i> , University of Khartoum.
		9:25-9:50	Cosmetic modernity and failed cities: Omdurman's myth, Khartoum's impotence and national integration. <i>Idris Salim Elhassan</i> , University of Khartoum.
		9:50-10:15	From native administration to native system: the reinvention of colonial tradition. <i>Musa Adam Abdul-Jalil</i> , University of Khartoum.
		10:15-10:40	General Discussion
		10:40-11:00	Tea/Coffee Break

## 11



Left to Right: Wife Dr. Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, Dr. Richard Lobban, daughters Nicki and Josina

## Richard A. Lobban honored upon retiring and celebrating his 65th birthday

Richard Lobban, founding member and Executive Director of the SSA, was honored on November 8, 2008 by the African Alliance of Rhode Island on the occasion of his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday and his recent retirement after 36 years of teaching and scholarship while a member of the Department of Anthropology at Rhode Island College. Julius Kolawole and James Vincent of the Alliance joined many friends, former students, and present colleagues to celebrate the occasion and present him with a variety of African gifts, including African clothing and a commemorative plaque.



Richard Lobban speaking at AARI dinner

Friend and colleague John Foban-jong bestowed a new African name “Bakari” on Richard which he is proud to add to his Sudanese name Abdel Fadil al-Maz.





## Featured Articles

### Indigenous Efforts to Revitalize and Digitize the Nubian Languages

Marcus Jaeger

#### 1 Introduction

The Nile Nubian languages consist of Nobiin and Kenzi-Dongolawi. The focus of this article is the Kenzi-Dongolawi people group, which is settled in two areas geographically far distant from each other. The Kenzi live around the towns of Kom Ombo and Aswan in Southern Egypt, the Dongolawi area in Northern Sudan stretches along the Nile from Kerma as far as Al Goolid near Old Dongola.

The most southerly Kenzi village and the most northerly Dongolawi one are nearly 800 km apart. In between live the Nobiin, who are also called Fadidja in Egypt and Mahas in the Sudan (see map, right, from JAKOBI and KÜMMERLE, 1993 for the geographical situation).

Today the Nubians are widely dispersed beyond this region. Many Kenzi-Dongolawi live in Egyptian towns as well as in the Sudanese capital Khartoum, wherever they can find work.

Nile Nubians have been sensing at least since the completion of the Aswan dam (1964) that their languages are threatened with extinction. After observing this development quite passively for a long time they have been trying for some years to work

actively against it. In section 3 of this paper I will present five initiatives that have stimulated the revitalizing of Nile Nubian languages in the last twenty years, emanating from the Nubians' own initiative and with which the author is familiar from his own observation.

One further aspects which will be introduced is the planning of a digitalized documentation of the language and culture of the Nile Nubians.



#### 2 Language Loss

The first ideas for this article arose in a small village on the East coast of Scotland. One hundred years ago all the inhabitants of this village spoke Gaelic, whilst in the nearby town English was spoken. The Gaelic-speaking father of my retired hostess had married an English-speaking wife. The daughter grew up in a Gaelic-speaking environment, where however English was regarded as having higher status. At school in the neighboring town and in further education in England English was the language of instruction. In her working life too she spoke only English. In the holidays she did go back regularly to her home village, but replied to her Gaelic-speaking father in English

<sup>1</sup> revised by Monika Feinen, 2008

When after retirement she returned to her home village she spoke only English because in the meantime she had lost confidence in using Gaelic. And she is not thrown back upon her knowledge of Gaelic any more as only English is now spoken in the village. Gaelic-speaking visitors today would probably have difficulty in making themselves understood.

With the Kenuzi-Dongolawi a similar changeover of language usage to the prestige language can be observed. Until 1964 only Kenzi was spoken in the Kenuzi villages. The sole use of Arabic was for official language of instruction in the small number of schools they had, which were not attended by all children. From December 1963, coinciding with the completion of the Aswan dam most of the inhabitants of Old Nubia (south of Aswan) were resettled in New Nubia where their new villages were set up circling the town of Kom Ombo whose inhabitants always spoke Arabic. In the resettlement villages school attendance was simplified by the shorter distances. Since that time there is no Kenzi remaining who does not attend school as child nor does his shopping regularly in Kom Ombo.

The influence of Arabic is so significant that there are no longer any monolingual Kenzi speakers left who were born after 1950. In many Kenuzi villages it is hard for those who are monolingual to have a conversation with their grandchildren's generation. Only on the streets of the resettlement village of Ombarkaab can Kenzi be heard regularly. However in the old villages which lie between Aswan and the Dam Kenzi is still in regular use, especially in West Aswan.

Dongolawi villages escaped such a resettlement. Nevertheless a similar changeover into Arabic use is evident in the villages near Dongola. Inhabitants less than 50 years of age speak mainly Arabic. It was reported in Khartoum in 2000 that in some villages further away from Dongola nothing but Dongolawi was spoken. However, when visiting these villages I ascertained that here too Arabic was preferred; i.e. in a short time scale in the 1990's a language change from Dongolawi to Arabic had taken place but it took some time to be noticed by the Nubians in Khartoum.

The language change was pushed forward mainly by the elite of each village and had religious motives as well as commercial. For one thing Friday prayers are spoken in Arabic; for another the Dongolawi have to try to find work in an Arabic-speaking environment, since they can no longer be sure of supporting themselves with what they get from farming alone. This means that Arabic is accorded higher religio-cultural and socioeconomic prestige than Nubian.

Only on the islands in the Nile and in a very few other villages a long way from Dongola is Dongolawi still the predominant language, but there too the pressure of Arabic as the prestige language grows stronger. It is the language of instruction in school, and employment opportunities in Arabic-speaking Khartoum and the Arab oil states are increasing. That is why it is perhaps only a matter of time before, even in these villages, Dongolawi will cease to exist as the language of everyday life.

A similar change is happening with the Nobiin, though the influence of Arabic is less strong.



### 3 Initiatives to revitalise the Nile Nubian Languages

#### 3.1 First Attempt at Kenzi Orthography

As far as I know the first modern attempt to write down the Kenzi language was done by Omar Hassan AlDaboodi (meaning that he originates from Dabood). He lives in Cairo, has no linguistic training at all and works on Kenzi after working hours. He has a great love for his language, combined with a great desire to get involved. All his research on Kenzi is done without payment.

About 15 years ago ALDABOODI (undated) wrote a first language learning primer and a small Kenzi dictionary entitled "Matokki", the Kenzi self-designation for their people group and their language. He used the Arabic orthography, being the only one he knew at that time. The primer was written and distributed by hand.

When writing the Nubian words AlDaboodi noticed that the Arabic letters were not suitable for what was needed to write Kenzi, so he developed an alphabet of his own (see picture right) and introduced it in his textbook. The table should be read from right to left; two lines go together in each case. On the right are the 'new Nubian' symbols he invented, next to each on the left is the corresponding Arabic letter. The last two lines on the left contain Arabic diacritics and their 'new Nubian' version.

ألف	ب	ت	ث	ج	د	هـ	و	ز	ح	ط	ق	ك	ل	م	ن	ي	الف	الهمزة
⬠	⬢	⬡	⬣	⬤	⬥	⬦	⬧	⬨	⬩	⬪	⬫	⬬	⬭	⬮	⬯	⬰	⬱	⬲
⬳	⬴	⬵	⬶	⬷	⬸	⬹	⬺	⬻	⬼	⬽	⬾	⬿	⬰	⬱	⬲	⬳	⬴	⬵
⬶	⬷	⬸	⬹	⬺	⬻	⬼	⬽	⬾	⬿	⬰	⬱	⬲	⬳	⬴	⬵	⬶	⬷	⬸
⬹	⬺	⬻	⬼	⬽	⬾	⬿	⬰	⬱	⬲	⬳	⬴	⬵	⬶	⬷	⬸	⬹	⬺	⬻
⬰	⬱	⬲	⬳	⬴	⬵	⬶	⬷	⬸	⬹	⬺	⬻	⬼	⬽	⬾	⬿	⬰	⬱	⬲
⬶	⬷	⬸	⬹	⬺	⬻	⬼	⬽	⬾	⬿	⬰	⬱	⬲	⬳	⬴	⬵	⬶	⬷	⬸
⬰	⬱	⬲	⬳	⬴	⬵	⬶	⬷	⬸	⬹	⬺	⬻	⬼	⬽	⬾	⬿	⬰	⬱	⬲

I do not know if the alphabet was later used, but in any case it is a significant step for the Nubians in the discovering of their own identity. The reason why AlDaboodi's alphabet may well have remained unused was that shortly afterwards knowledge of the old Nubian alphabet revived among the Nubians and became widespread.

AlDaboodi's campaign for the Nubian language is unabated. He is already aware that as far as his children are concerned Nubian is irrelevant for everyday use in Egyptian towns, but now that Nubian children and young people use the computer a lot he is currently developing, with the aid of Microsoft Power Point Software<sup>®</sup>, a word learning programme for Kenzi, and for that he is using the Old Nubian alphabet.

#### 3.2 Nubian Studies and Documentation Centre

The Nubian Studies and Documentation Centre (NSDC) was founded in the 1990s by Sudanese refugees in Cairo. At first they rented a flat in Mohandesiin, and then in the city centre. Two Nubian coworkers of Sudanese origin represented the Mahas and Dongolawi people groups. At the same time they collaborated with Egyptian Nubians.

The NSDC was the first Nubian organisation to carry out literacy courses, both in New Nubia and in Cairo. The aim was to instruct young Fadidja and Kenzi Nubian women in reading

and writing. The participants had to speak a Nubian language. The reason for limiting it to young women was the expectation that as future mothers they would have more influence on the next generation than the men.

The writing system used was the Old Nubian alphabet in a slightly modified version.

Important differences are:

- The expression of the single Old Nubian affricate (s) distinguishes a voiced variant (δ) “dsh” and a voiceless variant (θ) “tsh”.
- Depending on context a vocalic “i” (i) and a semi-vocalic “j”, written with two dots (ĭ), correspond to Old Nubian “i”.
- On principle all the vowels are written and vowel length is marked with a macron. Example: (a - ā)

As a teaching aid for the literacy course a book for students was put together based on material from the prematurely deceased Dr Mukhtar Khalil Kabbara. For teachers a handbook was published (1999). In 2000 this handbook was extended so that it can be used for teaching both Nobiin (i.e. Fadidja) and also Dongolawi (i.e. “Oshkir”) speakers.

The name “Oshkir” in the NSDC report by SUAD IBRAHIM (unpublished) points to the strong influence of Nobiin speakers on the preparation of this material. The name “Oshkir” is a foreign import by the Nobiin meaning the Dongolawi, who do not use it for themselves.

Since all the Nubian teachers listed in the NSDC report come from Fadidja villages, one must assume that instruction is shaped by Nobiin.

At the Festival of Sacrifice in March 2002 a celebration took place in the Fadidja village of Ballana in New Nubia for the women graduates of the literacy course. As the course was restricted to young female participants, the male visitors to the event left the party immediately after the welcome speeches (in Arabic) and made a rush for the food set out in the school. As a result the female students’ awards ceremony took place without their village notables.

The following year I met a young Kenuzi-Nubian woman from Dabood who showed me how she could write the Nubian alphabet. She had learned it from her aunt which shows that the women pass on what they have learned among themselves. However, as there is a lack of further written materials the effect on the literacy classes remains limited. This was confirmed by a Kenuzi from another village.

In 2002 the NSDC was registered in Khartoum. Soon afterwards the library, which until then had been in Cairo, was brought to Khartoum, but by 2005 it had still not been unpacked. Since the move nothing has been heard of structured activities. One of the Cairo staff members moved to Khartoum, the other stayed in Cairo.

### 3.3 Literary courses in Egyptian Nubian Clubs

Nubians living in Alexandria, Cairo and other Egyptian cities and towns meet regularly in clubs. Indeed almost every Nubian village has its own club. In these clubs social rites are carried out, rites which the Nubians would otherwise attend in their home villages. These involve particularly funeral ceremonies. The clubs enable the Nubians to maintain their social obligations when in town.

Many Nubian clubs take over cultural functions, including literacy courses. Here respected older speakers of Kenzi and Fadidja teach younger Nubians how to read and write Nubian.

POESCHKE (1996, p. 116) describes these courses held in the Nubian General Club in Cairo:

The Nubian language is considered to be of great importance ..., and therefore one of its dialects, namely Mahasi/Fadija (or Nobiyin), is now being taught in Cairo. Additionally, efforts have been made by Sudanese and Egyptian Nubian intellectuals to develop a script, ... According to correspondents, the existence of an alphabetic system would embody the language within the Nubian community.

In the meantime courses are also held in Kenzi. In 2003 I visited one of these literacy courses in a Kenzi club in Alexandria. In the front sat the young women, at the back the few young men. The 15 participants, nearly all young people, originated from different villages, but had always lived in Alexandria. Hardly any of them spoke Kenzi although in the course their teacher assumed some knowledge of the language.

This shows that the students not only wanted to learn to read and write Kenzi but also to be able to speak it. However, although a foundation was laid, only vocabulary was taught without any conversation or grammar, with the result that the transition to independent usage did not happen (yet). Without constant translation into Arabic two poems the teacher had written could not have been understood by most of the students.

The course took place twice weekly. It was taught using Old Nubian letters, with similar modification to that in the NSDC, as its basis. The teacher used teaching material he had put together himself. The course finished with an examination which was taken very seriously by the participants.

Similar courses are repeated regularly. It is noticeable that it is those young people who have grown up in towns with a better education who have the desire to learn Kenzi.

In Cairo it is difficult for students to attend a regular course like this because of the distance they have to travel. I was told about Kenzi literacy courses in a Nubian women's club there.

### 3.4 Nubian Language Society

The Nubian Language Society (NLS, in Nobiin: Nobiin Taamenn Orban) was founded by Sudanese Nubians with the following objective:



"... the promotion and the development of the Nubian Language (Nobiin now and other languages later), we thought making our first step backwards where the history of our forefathers."<sup>2</sup>

With this in mind one of the first official events of the NLS was a memorial evening for the researcher of ancient Nubian, Gerald M. Browne, in the General Nubian Club in Khartoum (see JAEGER, 2006). For this occasion an enlarged copy of the ancient Nubian Menas legend was hung up on display, which made a great impression on the participants.

The NLS is very well organised. It is the only one of the groups introduced here to have set up a website (<http://nlsnubia.net/>) and facilitates inspection of its necessary finances. Whilst the Nobiin work is making good progress work with Dongolawi has not yet started.

Its goals for the future are (quoted from <http://nlsnubia.net/vision.html>):

<sup>2</sup> written communication with the NLS secretary, meaning "... in order to take a step back into the cultural history of our forefathers."

The Revival of the Nubian Language.

The Teaching of the Nubian Language to all Nubian people.

The development of the Nubian Language to cope with the technology and the modern life.

The work on introducing the Nubian Language to the curricula of schools in the areas of Northern Nubia and New Halfa.

The NLS regards Dongolawi and Nobiin as two variants of a single Nile Nubian language, which is why in its publications it uses the term “language” in the singular. However it is only planning school lessons in Northern Nubia in the Nobiin-speaking areas.

Every Friday afternoon predominantly younger Nobiin speakers meet up. The focus of their work is to produce a Nobiin dictionary. Individual semantic areas are worked on by voluntary helpers who test out the entries with older speakers.

A first literacy book (SABAR, 2006) was produced in the Roman alphabet. The following additional symbols were inserted:

- ɲ (for the palatal nasal, which does not occur in English, cf. “ny” in other languages)
- ɓ (for the velar nasal, cf. English “ng”) and
- ʃ (for the post-alveolar fricative, cf. English “sh”).

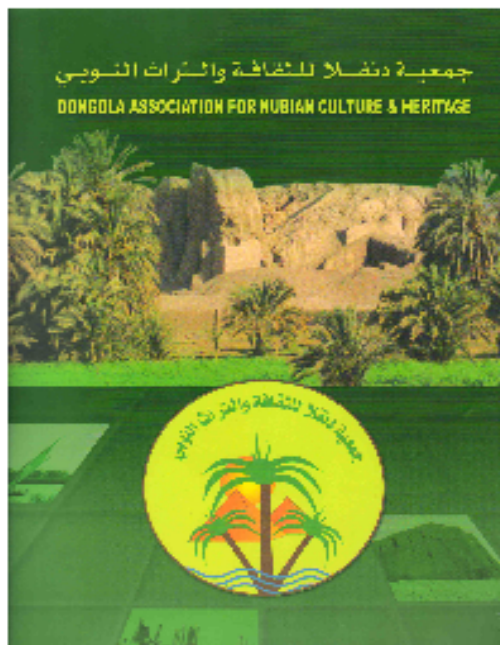
According to a NLS statement, Nobiin literacy courses have been carried out using this book.

In the future a comprehensive grammar is to be produced and a digitalised corpus of Nubian culture and music created. However, according to the NLS the financial support needed for digitisation to begin is still lacking. In order to guarantee the highest possible standard it is planned to set up different academic working groups (e.g. dictionary, grammar). Non-Nubian specialists are being invited to work with these groups.

### 3.5 Dongola Association for Nubian Culture and Heritage

Similarly, in 2005, the Dongola Association in Sudan was formed, only for Dongolawi members. Before 2005 the music played at Dongolawi weddings was almost entirely Arabic, so this society concentrated especially on promoting the traditional music and culture of the Dongolawi. A Dongolawi music group was set up, consisting of a few solo singers, a backing group of singers, two dance groups (one of men, one of women), a keyboard player and some technicians to enable the smooth running of performances. The composition of the group signified rather more emphasis on use of the Dongolawi language than on the rhythmic Dongolawi music. Traditional music was less rhythmic.

The most well-known singer in this group is Manal Abdel Rassoul, who is the lead singer on the first Dongolawi music cassette (see picture below). She has appeared on Sudan national TV





and performed abroad before an international audience.



Nearly all the active members of the Dongola Association are less than 35 years old. Besides Manal Abdel Rassoul the Association also offers other Dongolawi singers the opportunity to perform in public, among them Anwar Salah and Hissein Hamza. The keyboard player is a Mahas, so the music group exceeds the limits of its own ethnic group. Primarily their concerts take place in Khartoum and in the villages around Dongola. Their music cassettes are played in many Dongolawi households and women especially like listening to them. Their appearances on Sudanese television, both state and private, is making the Dongola Association known to a national and an international audience.

A performance of the Dongolawi Music Group from around 2006 can be seen on the Internet at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A\\_bF931l2pw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_bF931l2pw)

Up to now the Dongola Association has not made any great efforts in the areas of literacy, language research or language archiving. An initial publication about Dongolawi was written by MEKKAWI and URBAWI (around 2006). But the performances of the Dongolawi music group have motivated some Dongolawi also to use their language outside their own villages.

#### 4 Excursus: New Nubian Orthography

The Old Nubian alphabet was used until the 14<sup>th</sup> century and consisted mainly of Greek letters, extended by some Coptic and Meroitic letters. Afterwards it was forgotten. One hundred years ago BREASTED (1908) wrote:

The modern Nubians never write their own language and the two systems of writing under discussion [in this article] long ago ceased to be used in Nubia.

The Old Nubian alphabet became the foundation for the New Nubian alphabet, as used by the NSDC and in the literacy courses of the Egyptian Nubian clubs.

The following chart summarises the Old Nubian letters and compares them with their slightly altered New Nubian counterparts. For the Old Nubian letters a computer font is used which is in widespread use by researchers of Old Nubian, for the New Nubian letters a font that is in common use by Nubians (from JAEGER and HISSEIN, unpublished):

Old Nubian	New Nubian	IPA symbols (approximate)
ⲁ	ⲁ	[a]
ⲃ	ⲃ	[b]
Ⲅ	Ⲅ	[g]
ⲅ	ⲅ	[d]

Old Nubian	New Nubian	IPA symbols (approximate)
ε	Ε	[ε]
	Ϸ <sup>3</sup>	[tʃ] "tsch"
z	z <sup>4</sup>	[z]
h	- <sup>5</sup>	[i] or [i:]
θ	-	[θ] or [ð]
i	i <sup>6</sup>	[i]
κ	κ	[k]
λ	λ	[l]
μ	μ	[m]
ν	ν	[n]
ξ	-	[kʰ]
ο	ο	[ɔ]
π	-	[b]
ρ	ρ	[r]
σ	σ	[s]
τ	τ	[t]
υ ου	ου <sup>7</sup>	[u]
φ	φ	[f]
χ	-	[x]
ψ	-	[pʰ]
	ω	[w]
ϣ	ϣ	[ʃ]
ζ	ζ	[h]
δ	δ	[dʒ] "dsch"
	ι	[j]
ϣ	ϣ	[ŋ]

<sup>3</sup> This is the additional affricate in New Nubian. In Old Nubian a voiced affricate always occurred doubled and was written doubled, while a voiceless affricate never occurred doubled. That means the same symbol was used for both sounds.

<sup>4</sup> occurs in Old and New Nubian alike only in loan words

<sup>5</sup> replaced in New Nubian by the normal /i/

<sup>6</sup> In Old Nubian a macron is often placed on the following consonant instead of using /i/.

<sup>7</sup> used in Old Nubian for vowels as for consonant approximants



Old Nubian	New Nubian	IPA symbols (approximate)
ϣ	ϣ	[ɲ]
ṣ	-	[w]

The symbols  $\mathfrak{B}$ ,  $\mathfrak{C}$ ,  $\mathfrak{X}$  and  $\mathfrak{W}$  occur only in Old Nubian loan words.

Old Nubian does not mark vowel length. In New Nubian long vowels are marked with a macron:  $\bar{A}$ ,  $\bar{E}$ ,  $\bar{I}$ ,  $\bar{O}$ ,  $\bar{OY}$ . This macron had a different meaning in Old Nubian. It denoted a preceding /i/.

The computer fonts used were designed in the old style ('Legacy'). Since then modern computer software like MS Word<sup>®</sup> works with so-called Unicode based fonts. Their symbols are defined in Unicode tables and are intended eventually to involve all the written symbols in the world. In 2005 the influential Unicode Consortium, that primarily consists of representatives of computer firms, linguistic organisations and government representatives from countries with many different alphabets, incorporated the Nubian symbols into a Unicode table<sup>8</sup>.

Currently the author is working on a Nubian 'Unicode' based character set, based on his own phonological investigations (JAEGER and HISSEIN, unpublished), which respects the Unicode Consortium guidelines for the Nubian alphabet and which should satisfy the demands of a modern computer font in the future. By this means digital documentation of the spoken Nubian languages should be made easier in the long term. The font, which is not yet published, is being tested using a digital Kenzi-Dongolawi dictionary.

## 5 Summary and Outlook

The Nile Nubian languages, and especially Kenzi-Dongolawi, are threatened in this century with extinction. There are several Nubian initiatives seeking to retain the languages. Until now these initiatives have not been interlinked and are having little effect.

If parents see their language as sufficiently valuable that they speak it with their children, if the Nile Nubian languages are used in kindergarten and school, and the groups referred to above put more value on linguistic competence, this will all be crucial for the preservation of these languages in the long term.

## 6 Acknowledgements and Bibliography

A true insight into the efforts to revitalise the Nubian languages would not be possible without the kind welcome received in the various societies and clubs. In this Omar Hassan Al-Daboodi, Prof Suad Ibrahim (founder of NSDC), Mahjuub Mirghani (Kenzi from Dehmiit, who runs literacy classes in Alexandria), Mohamed Khidir (Secretary of NLS) and Mohamed Awad (Leader of the Dongola Association) were especially helpful to me.

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<sup>8</sup> The first attempt to define Nubian letters within Unicode was undertaken by Prof Ibrahim Suad around 2004. Because of illness this initial attempt came to nothing. - Unicode has its own Internet page: <http://unicode.org/>. It is explained there e.g. what Unicode is, who the members of the Unicode-Consortium are; and which written symbols already belong in Unicode.

Among the Nubians Shafie Al Gazuli Sayed from Al Khannag (Dongolawi) was especially helpful to me in testing the new Nubian font. He is one more of the many Nubians who are working on their language in their spare time.

I want to thank Dr. Angelika Jakobi and Dr. Helma Pasch (Köln University) for their extensive suggestions regarding the text. The initiatives described in this paper were published first in German in JAEGER (2008). Barbara Cheeseman assisted me a lot with the English translation of the original text which has been revised to fit the different audience.

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## Selim Aga: New Light on his Life and his Explorations In West Africa

by James McCarthy  
*The Journal of the Hakluyt Society*  
July 2007

Around 1834, an eight-year-old shepherd boy, Selim Aga, was captured by Arab kidnappers from near his home in the Muslim kingdom of Taqali on the edge of the Nuba Mountains in what is now Kordofan in Sudan. For the next year, he travelled down the Nile, passed from one master to another, and crossed the feared Bayuda Desert. After many privations and abuses, he arrived at the slave market in Cairo. Some weeks later, he was purchased by Robert Thurburn, the British commercial consul in Alexandria and taken back to the family home near Aberdeen in Scotland. However, before that, Selim accompanied the Thurburn family (complete with housekeeper and Italian servant) on a tourist trip up the Nile as far as the first cataracts, the whole journey taking a month. The purpose of this was to view the great antiquities, and given Thurburn's wealth and position, they would have travelled in considerable style, with every possible comfort. There could hardly have been a greater contrast to the wretched circumstances in which the young slave had travelled by the same route only a short time previously, now properly fed, clothed and having become something of a pet with the indulgent Thurburns. He undoubtedly used the experience over ten years later when lecturing to accompany the famous 'Panorama of the Nile' in the heart of London.

Although he was born in Taqali in the Nuba Mountains which is in present day Kordofan, Selim in one of his publications describes himself as 'A native of Darfur.' Given what is happening in that region today, there are striking parallels to his own experience

in 1834, when government-sponsored raids from the north were commonplace. The enslavement of the twelve-year-old Mende Nazer in 1998, also from the Nuba Mountains, and so graphically described in her book *Slave: The True Story of a Girl's Lost Childhood and her Fight for Survival*, is a very close modern parallel.

At Peterculter, near Aberdeen, Selim was left in the care of Thurburn's brother, John and his wife Elizabeth, residing in one of the finest mansions in the area, derived from the Thurburns' profitable business in Egypt. He was educated in the local school and in the Thurburn home. There is a complete dearth of information between his arrival in Scotland around 1836 and his departure for London in 1849.

What is known is that he had a son as a result of a liaison with a local woman, and his direct living descendants have been traced in Scotland and USA. (There is evidence from the 1891 census that the couple may have had another son.) There is no record however that he ever returned to his natal home in the Sudan. He did however write a remarkable narrative of his capture and enslavement in faultless idiomatic English.

The work was published in Aberdeen and London in 1846 and 1850 respectively. To this author's knowledge, this is the only such record of someone caught up in the greatly-increased incidence of slavery and slave raiding brought about by local rivalries and the needs of the Turco-Egyptian regime under Muhammad Ali for more troops.

After leaving the Thurburn household around 1846, Selim lectured for a year to fashionable London audiences at the popular illustrated 'Panorama of the Nile' at the time of the Great Exhibition of 1851. He even petitioned Lord Palmerston with his ambitious '*Plan for the Amelioration of Africa*' and was given an audience with one of the Foreign Secretary's staff. His 'Plan' was based on nothing less than the construction of an East-West transcontinental railway to encourage local commerce.

In 1857, Selim accompanied Dr William Baikie's expedition up the Niger as steward to

the expedition surveyor, Lieutenant John Glover, RN. There is evidence that he played a not insignificant part in the subsequent rescue of that important pioneering expedition, when he accompanied Glover on a hazardous overland journey to Lagos to obtain help for the shipwrecked crew. He subsequently became Richard Burton's much-valued servant in the English explorer's various travels in West Africa in the early 1860s. Burton, no admirer of Africans, accorded Selim many accolades for his skills and reliability in many dangerous situations. Burton was a notorious racist who held negroid Africans in contempt, suggesting from his physical characteristics that Selim must have had northern blood-lines. From his experience of Selim on a number of hazardous journeys in West Africa, Burton has nothing but praise for the man he came to regard as a friend as much as a servant. When he travelled with Burton up the Congo, his is likely to have been the only African of his time, let alone a former slave, who had travelled on the three great rivers of Africa.

When Selim had the narrative of his capture and transportation down the Nile published in the *Geographical Magazine* of 1875, doubt was cast on its authenticity, one editor claiming that 'it was manifestly the work of a cultured European'. In a subsequent letter to the magazine, Burton refuted this, giving an admiring portrait of his valet. In an article for the Royal Geographical Society Burton refers to '... my steward, Selim Agha, an invaluable man, a native of Tegulet, and a protégé of the late venerable Mr Robert Thurburn, of Alexandria. He had spent a dozen years of his life at a school in Scotland, where he learned to cook, doctor, spin, carpenter, shoot, collect specimens, and stuff birds –briefly everything ... he took all the trouble of life off my hands.' He might also have mentioned that Selim was both literate and numerate; capable, for example, of accurately recording meteorological observations.

While Selim tells of his early years up to his arrival in Scotland, apart from a solitary

reference to his time with the Niger expedition of 1857, we are dependent on the sparse mentions of him by Burton for the years 1861 to 1864.

Apart from its personal interest, Selim's story may be of some historical significance, not least in its descriptions of the culture and customs of the remote Kingdom of Taqali, where he himself was betrothed at the age of eight. In Selim's early recollections of his life there is a valuable addition to our knowledge of one of the most fascinating societies in Africa at this time, not least because of its lineage as a Muslim domain straddling both Arabic and Black African cultures. The most comprehensive background to this region from earliest times is provided by Professor Janet Ewald in her scholarly study *Soldiers, Traders, and Slaves: State Formation and Economic Transformation in the Greater Nile Valley, 1700-1885*, although she was apparently unaware of Selim's account. There are numerous accounts by former slaves taken from West Africa to the American plantations, but there is nothing comparable in length, quality or style which relates to the East or North African trade. Indeed, Selim's work rivals even that of the West African former slave, Olaudah Equiano. Nor is there any record of a European having penetrated the Nuba Mountains by the 1830s, although the Austrian Pallme got close around the time of Selim's capture, but was prevented from entering Taqali itself. He did however have extended conversations in El Obeid with a Prince of Taqali, who may well have been one of the three princes of that territory referred to by Selim.

All of the above is contained in the biography of Selim Aga published in 2006(1) and first presented at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in August of that year. However, as a result of further research, new and interesting information has come to light which helps to fill in some of the many gaps in Selim's history. The Reverend William Jowett on his visit to Egypt and Palestine on behalf of the Church Missionary Society in 1818 reported on 'Abyssinians in Egypt' (According to the *Mission-*

any Register of 1819 natives of Abyssinia and the neighbouring parts had frequently come under Mr Jowett's notice in Egypt.) On the sight of some of them in Alexandria he has the following reflections:

At dinner, Mr. Thurburn's slave waited. He is a black youth, a native of Darfur; a Mahomedan, with a white turban and scarlet clothes. Mr. Thurburn also has two Slaves, a mother and daughter from Abyssinia, natives of Gondar. When I see such people, I feel immediately a secret affection pringing up in my inmost soul... (2) This is a reference to the household of the British commercial consul Robert Thurburn who was subsequently to bring Selim to Scotland for his education. However, despite the similarity to Selim in this description of a 'black youth', especially his origin in Darfur, the dates do not accord with other records. Selim was brought to Britain in 1836 when he was described as a 'young slave boy', whereas the Darfur native referred to by Jowett would by then have been no younger than his late twenties.

Another more relevant item has come from a somewhat surprising source and is of special interest as a pen-picture of the young man, given that until Burton's description of 1861 (when Selim would have been in his thirties) there is apparently no other for his earlier years. The English novelist Sarah Harriet Burney, a half sister of the more celebrated Fanny Burney, was a prolific letter writer. From a boarding house in Cheltenham where the Thurburn family was staying, she wrote to Anna Grosvenor on 2 February 1843:

Their names Thurburn. They have a beautiful place, a sort of Castle, in full sight of the Grampians, of which the daughter shewed me a sketch. They have moreover, a young Abyssinian, or Nubian servant, purchased from motives of compassion when ten years old by a brother of Mr. Thurburn who saw him in the slave market at Cairo, and sent him to Scotland as a present to his sister-inlaw.

He is now 17. She has had him thoroughly instructed, Christened & confirmed. He

keeps his original name of Selim, and wears on week days, the dress of his country (a very becoming one, I assure you) and, on Sundays, a livery Jacket and trowsers. A better creature more honest, affectionate, and true, I have seldom heard of. He sings scotch ballads like a nightingale, & we have had him frequently in the drawing-room for the sake of hearing him. He has no *mauvaise honte* [false modesty], and no conceit, but sings because his sweet mistress tells him to do so. His handwriting is that of a gentleman & he spells as well as you or I. When Mr. Thurburn is indisposed, which is not seldom, poor soul! Selim sits by his bed-side & reads to him. He waits at table incomparably and as far as he has been taught, does everything well.

This sheds considerable light, not only on Selim's personality and skills, but also on his relationship with the Thurburns. It confirms Burton's statement that he was a Christian, despite being referred to frequently as a Muslim elsewhere, and his deportment also fits with Burton's high opinion of him. The image of Selim singing 'scotch ballads like a nightingale' and reading to the ailing John Thurburn, is perhaps no less surprising than his later appearance in the heart of Piccadilly as an informed lecturer on the Nile. (There is evidence that while he was in London, he was a member of the Scottish Presbyterian Church there.) The author goes on to say: As for Mrs Thurburn I have no words to express my liking for her. She is the gentlest, most unselfish, the most quietly well-informed, & the most interesting both in looks and manner of any person I have for a long time been so fortunate as to encounter... (3) The reference to Selim being a 'present' specifically to Mrs Thurburn perhaps explains his exclusive dedication to her in the narrative of his early years. The writer's admiration for Mrs Thurburn's character and knowledge is also significant, as Selim's dedication indicates how large a part she played personally in his upbringing and education. Prior to his service with Burton, Selim wrote on 3 October 1860 from Lagos to the then president of the Royal Geographical Society:

I have the honour to introduce myself as the late confidential attendant of Lieut. Glover late of the Niger Expedition and respectfully beg to state that I am now collecting objects of natural his-

tory for the Liverpool Company (?) Museum, and have in my employ five of the most efficient native interpreters lately attached to the escort of Lieut. Glover. It is my intention next dry season to make a hunting excursion into the interior and with a view to visit Kano and the Hausa Country I will try if possible to recover the papers and books of the late Dr. Vogel, now I believe in possession of Sidi Ali the Great Shereif of Mohammedan Africa.

With this view I write request the countenance of the Royal Geographical Society to aid my efforts in procuring a gratuity for the purchase of presents for the King and Chiefs of the Yoruba, Nufeh (?) and the Faria (?) countries, and also a suitable gift to Sidi Ali of Kano to induce him to give up those valuable papers.

The journey there and back will not occupy more than five months. I have the honour to be Your Obedient humble Servant, Selim Aga (4) There is no record in the present Liverpool Museum of any collection of natural history specimens by Selim Aga, but neither is there anything to suggest that Selim, noted for his truthfulness and integrity, did not collect on behalf of one of that city's institutions. However, this activity on the part of Selim was quite unknown to the present author. The 'hunting excursion' referred to would have been for that very purpose, and it says something for Selim's enterprising attitude that he should have mustered the most reliable staff from the Baikie expedition to prosecute this venture.

The German explorer Dr Eduard Vogel, an astronomer and naturalist, had been sent to link up with Dr Heinrich Barth. However, after setting out alone from Lake Chad in December 1855, Vogel had disappeared somewhere to the east, and it would not be until 1873 that Gustav Nachtigal, travelling in the same region, would discover that he had been murdered in the district of Ouaddai. Selim is likely to have been made aware of Vogel's disappearance during his time with the second Baikie expedition up the Niger.

On 21 November 1860, Glover (to be appointed first governor of Lagos in 1863) wrote to Dr Norton Shaw, secretary of the Royal Geographical Society, from Bonn:

Selim Aga was my most trusty and trusted Head servant during my stay in Africa, since which he has settled in Lagos, and has written to me about his intended visit to Kano. I first heard of Vogel's papers being in the possession of the shereif Sidi Ali at Kano in October last year while on a visit to

Dasaba, the king of Nuppe and Bidda. Dr. Baikie heard the same report some months earlier, but like him in everything else he kept it to himself: from the account of the man who told me and who was an old servant of Barth's they are the papers sent by Vogel to Corporal McGuire before he started the Corporal from Kano on his journey home, and the papers recovered after he was murdered, that is they are the Dispatches which Corporal McGuire was bearing at the time of his murder, and not the papers of Vogel at the time of his death... .

...With regard to Selim Aga and my five other old followers who are with him, I think that their enterprise is deserving of all encouragement, and I am quite sure that Selim Aga properly authorised would be more likely to bring back not only a good account of the last hours of the murdered men, but would be able to recover their missing papers at less cost than the more imposing expedition which is to start from the North, and there cannot be a doubt that the way to Kano, Katsena and Kuka, is from Lagos not Tripoli—I am sorry that I had left London before I got your letter. Any further or more detailed information I shall be happy to give if called upon.

Ever very sincerely yours,  
John H Glover (5)

In his description of his servant, Burton states that 'Selim returned to Africa in 1857 with that failure of failures, the Niger expedition'. In a letter to the *Geographic Magazine*, Burton makes a further reference: In 1860, [Selim] returned to his natal continent, after volunteering personally to ascertain the facts concerning the murder, in Waday, of Dr. Vogel, attached to the Central African Expedition. The late Sir Roderick Murchison and others were favourable to the plan, but they at length determined that all measures should be left in the hands of the late Dr. Baikie. (6)

At another point in the same narrative Burton says, 'In 1860 Selim Aga proposed to recover the papers of the late Dr Vogel... Dr Baikie, chief of the Niger expedition, proposed to do this himself. So Selim was thrown out, and Dr Baikie had not yet done it—a typically waspish Burton remark to diminish explorers other than himself, with the implication that Selim was quite up to the job, as Glover had indicated, had it not been for the preferences of the British geographical establishment. (7) Liberia became a sovereign state in 1847. The out-



standing Liberian patriot Edward Wilmot Bryden was appointed secretary of state in 1864 following his visit to England. However his championing of the blacks of the interior against the dominance of the mulattoes led to considerable tensions, and by 1870 the country was in uproar, with the indigenous Greboes in open revolt against the settlers from USA. Serious violence broke out in 1871 when Wilmot was forced into exile and the president, Roye, died in suspicious circumstances.<sup>(8)</sup> This is the background to Burton's claim that in a letter to him from Selim, the latter stated that he had been 'put up for President'.<sup>(9)</sup>

It seems now that Selim must have spent a minimum of nine years in Liberia, since the Société de Géographie refers to him in their *Bulletin* of 1868 as having spent the last two years in that country. Further, the same publication claims that he conducted an expedition to the higher reaches of the Niger, having accomplished this in nine days from Cap Palmas, but was prevented from going further by the local people, who did not welcome foreigners into their territory. <sup>(10)</sup> That Selim was engaged in exploration while in Liberia is confirmed by Burton who says '... he made sundry journeys into the interior'. Some of these expeditions were reported briefly in *The Anti-Slavery Reporter & Aborigines Friend of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society* and by the American Colonisation Society in its *African Repository*, claiming in 1867 that Selim had made 'some important discoveries' by the time he had travelled eighty miles up the Cavalla [Cavally] River. <sup>(11)</sup>

It is known that around this time that Liberian settlers were interested in the potential of the resources of the interior for exploitation. The question arises as to how Selim was financed for these expeditions or indeed how he made a living during this time. In his *West African Sketches*, Ellis described the preliminaries to the attack by the Greboes on the settlers, which resulted in Selim's death, including the complete incompetence of the Liberians. He quoted the *Liberian Independent* of 23 December 1875 which described the complete disarray and demoralisation of the Liberian army, which was quickly put to flight by the native tribesmen. According to the *Independent*:

Mr. Selim Aga, the Egyptian traveller, was also overtaken by the barbarous Greboes, and one of them 'Bye Weah' by name, after allowing him to read his Bible, which he had by him in his pocket, and which he made a present to the barbarian, chopped his body all about, cut off his head, which he took to his town, and threw the body with the gift into the swamp. Mr. Aga went to the battlefield as assistant-surgeon, and his head makes eighteen Liberian heads cut off by the Greboes and placed in a circle, around which they made a fence, according to the sayings of the Greboes themselves. <sup>(12)</sup>

According to Burton in *To the Gold Coast*, 'The account sounds trustworthy, especially that about the Bible: it is exactly what the poor fellow would have done. But many have assured me that he was slaughtered by mistake during the rout of his party. R.I.P.'<sup>(13)</sup> In 1868 G.W. Gibson, missionary to the Episcopal Church of Liberia, in commending the opportunities of the land to the ex-slave settlers, was moved to say:

The interior of Africa, hitherto unknown, is now being thrown open, and its climate soil, rivers, productions, its unbounded wealth and treasures, made known to the world. Burton, Livingstone, Barth, Speke, Baker, Du Chaillu, Sims, Seymour, and Selim Aga, are so many agencies raised by a wise Providence, to go out and view the land, preparatory to His great work. <sup>(14)</sup>

The inclusion of Selim in this pantheon of august explorers may in part be because he is the only non-European among them, at a time when the Liberians were seeking to promote home-grown heroes. Nevertheless, it confirms that by this time he was regarded as a *bona fide* explorer in his own right, while the record of his life demonstrates that by any standard, he was a quite remarkable individual of wideranging talents. In piecing together Selim's story, I have unsurprisingly come to regard him with great admiration, given his inauspicious start in life. He clearly took every opportunity for education and self improvement, and but for his untimely death, would almost certainly have

become an important figure in the Africa of his time.

1. McCarthy, James, *Selim Aga: A Slave's Odyssey*, Edinburgh, 2006.
2. *The Missionary Register*, 1819, p. 367.
3. Clark, L.J., ed., *The Letters of Sarah Harriet Burney*, London & Athens [GA], 1997.
4. Royal Geographical Society Archives, CB4/1488.
5. *Ibid.*, CB4/703.
6. *Geographical Magazine*, 1875, p. 204.
7. Burton, Richard Francis, *Abeokuta and the Cameroons Mountains*, vol.1, London, 1863, p. 10.
8. West, Richard, *Back to Africa*, London, 1970, pp. 236-41.
9. Burton, Richard Francis & Cameron, Verney Lovett, *To the Gold Coast for Gold*, London, 1883, vol. 2, pp. 62-4.
10. *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*, series 5, vol. 6, 1868, pp. 166-7.
11. American Colonisation Society, *The African Repository*, Washington, 1868, vol. 43, p. 203.
12. Ellis, B.A., *West African Sketches*, London, 1851, pp. 170-71.
13. Burton, R.F. & Cameron, V.L., loc. cit.
14. American Colonisation Society, vol. 44, p. 232.

*James McCarthy is a writer whose published works have focussed on the links between Scotland and Africa, especially through Scottish explorers. He was the first European post-graduate student at Makerere College, Kampala, Uganda in 1959 and previously commanded African troops during the Mau Mau uprising.*  
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## Interview with Osman Musa Bawanin, Chairman of the Beja Conference for Reform and Development

*\*Interview submission courtesy Laura Beny. Reprinted for information only; the SSA is a non-profit 401C3 entity and does not take any political positions.*

*Beijing Hotel, Juba, Sudan, July 25, 2008*



I met Mr. Osman Musa Bawanin, the Chairman of the Beja Conference for Reform and Development (hereafter “Chairman Bawanin” and “Beja Conference”), in Juba during July 2008. He expressed to me a keen interest in getting his party’s message out to American policymakers and the international community and he asked me to interview him and distribute his party’s message abroad, particularly in the United States.

According to Chairman Bawanin, the Beja Conference is the political representative of the majority of the people of Eastern Sudan, which consists of three states (Red Sea, Kessala and Al Gedarif). The party dates back to 1958, when it was popularly formed by the people of Eastern Sudan, including the Beja and their traditional leaders (chiefs, etc.). When the Beja Conference was formed in 1958, its main objective was to provide services (water, sanitation, education, civil administration, etc.) and development to the area. Those remain its objectives. The party also seeks to ensure that Eastern Sudan gets its fair share of the national wealth from the development of the country.

On the political front, the party calls for a federal system to be established in all of the Sudan, including the East, to give local populations a voice in federal government.

According to Chairman Bawanin, when the National Congress Party (hereafter “NCP”) (then called the National Islamic Front) took over the government in 1989 they seriously oppressed the people of Eastern Sudan, including the Beja. As a result, the Beja Conference opted for armed revolution in 1994, which it launched from Eritrea. However, in 1999, the government of Eritrea began to intervene in the party’s internal affairs and the party departed Eritrea in 2003 when the pressure became too great. Members of the party then scattered all over the globe, including in London, Cairo, and Saudi Arabia. In 2004, the Beja Conference began to negotiate with the NCP government. The negotiations led to an agreement between the two parties that met all of the Beja Conference’s demands articulated in the party’s 1958 manifesto, according to Chairman Bawanin. These demands include political autonomy, civil services, power-sharing, local development, etc. After signing the agreement with the NCP, the Beja Conference formally registered as a political party on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2004 and began to mobilize its supporters.

The agreement between the Beja Conference and the NCP was short-lived, however. According to Chairman Bawanin, the government began to ignore the party and its demands. On 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2005, the Beja Conference conducted a peaceful demonstration in Eastern Sudan, the objective of which was to submit a paper to the governor of Red Sea State (an NCP appointee) notifying the government that it was not honoring the Beja Conference-NCP agreement of 2004. According to Chairman Bawanin, the NCP dealt forcefully with the peaceful demonstration. Thirty-two people were killed that day and many were left with permanent disabilities. The Beja Conference then requested an investigation of the events, but the government did not conduct an investigation. As a result, on July 31, 2005, the Beja

Conference terminated its agreement with the NCP before any of its provisions had been implemented. The Beja Conference has made a legal case against the government for the deaths and injuries that resulted from its attacks against the demonstrators. According to Mr. Bawanin, the Beja Conference would like this issue to be considered by the United Nations Security Council, if the government refuses to conduct an investigation.

According to Mr. Bawanin, the small group that remained in Eritrea formed the Eastern Front in March 2005 with the help of Eritrea. In October 2006, the Eastern Front entered a weak agreement – the “Asmara Agreement” – with the NCP that failed to address all the issues concerning the people of Eastern Sudan. According to the Chairman, the Beja Conference totally rejects the Asmara Agreement with the support of the majority of the people of Eastern Sudan. Currently, the situation on the ground in Eastern Sudan is terribly bad and the Beja Conference wants a referendum to be held on the agreement among the people of Eastern Sudan to demonstrate decisively that most of them do not support the agreement. The Beja Conference seeks internationally supervised negotiations between the Sudanese government and the people of Eastern Sudan in pursuit of an agreement with international guarantees, like the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (“CPA”), between the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (“SPLM”) and the NCP.

Members of the Beja Conference, including Chairman Bawanin, have been in Juba over the past several months to conduct negotiations for an alliance with the SPLM so the latter can support them in Eastern Sudan. They also seek an alliance with the SPLM, according to Chairman Bawanin, because they believe in the SPLM’s “New Sudan” project. They have been in Juba three times between August 2007 and the time of this interview, meeting with South Sudan’s President Salva Kiir Mayardit, Vice President Dr. Riek Machar Teny and other representatives of the Government of Southern Sudan (“GOSS”). The Beja Conference dele-

gates to Juba include the party's Executive Officer and undersecretaries. The party finances their travel, but once they are in Juba, they are supported by the SPLM, which provides hotel and board, according to Chairman Bawanin.

The Beja Conference would like to speak with U.S. government officials and to meet with them in the U.S. or in a country neighboring the Sudan. The party wishes to inform the U.S. government and people of the problems facing the people of Eastern Sudan. In particular, they would like the international community to understand that the problems of the Sudan do not involve just the North, South and Darfur. They believe that Eastern Sudan is also strategically important because Port Sudan, located in Eastern Sudan, provides crucial entry and exit to the Sudan via the Red Sea. On the very day of this interview, Chairman Bawanin communicated to Vice President Dr. Riak Machar Teny that the problems of Eastern Sudan are being ignored even by the GOSS. If the party is able to reach an agreement like the CPA with the NCP, it would be willing to join a government of national unity as the SPLM did in 2005.

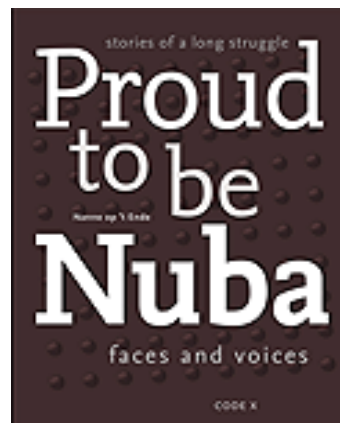
Laura N. Beny\*

*\*I do not necessarily agree with any or all of the views expressed in this interview and I have not confirmed or refuted the truth of any of Chairman Bawanin's factual claims. I have merely tried to report verbatim what Chairman Bawanin relayed to me independently and in response to some of my specific questions about his party and its activities.*



## Book Reviews

Proud to be Nuba: Faces and Voices. *Nanne op't Ende.*



Geel: Code X Publishing, 2007.  
Reviewed by Jay Spaulding

This valuable and attractive volume about the experiences of the contemporary Nuba Mountains community combines graphic illustration and oral testimony. In addition to numerous photographs and some drawings by the author, there are contributions by Jack Piccone, David Stewart-Smith, Yasuhiro Kunimori and Antonio Cores; all are gifted observers, and their respective perceptive sensibilities complement each other. While some pictures strike themes familiar from previous works on the famously photogenic Nuba, most are devoted to portraiture. The dominant effect is thus to personalize the community by endowing it with a sympathetic human face. Selections from the collection of the Sudan Archive, University of Durham, offer some older visual points of reference. Written commentary is provided by numerous voices, commencing with an eloquent introduction by Dutch emissary Jan Pronk and interspersed with selections from the author's journals. An encapsulated "Brief History of the Nuba" (pp. 84-95) reveals how marginalized the community has been, not only in historical reality but also in scholarly discourse. An insert of-

fers useful maps, a glossary, and explains some common abbreviations.

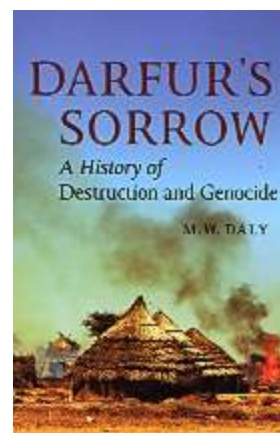
At the heart of the volume lies a series of testimonies by individual participants in recent Nuba Mountains history, most of them Sudanese. Some are prominent leaders, notably Father Philip Abbas Ghabush, Ismael Khamis Jelab and the late Yusif Kuwa Mekki, while others are officers in the SPLA or locally prominent individuals. Many, however, are ordinary people, each of whom has experienced recent history in his or her own way, and expresses this in a uniquely personal idiom. The roster of informants, in addition to the above, includes: Tunan Isa Teleb, Yuwil Manur Kafi, Gibrail Ismael Kuwa, Eskiell Kuku Talodi, Fatma Kuku Dowd, Colonels Kuku Jazz Kuwa and Ahmed Belga, Tia Tutu Meskin, Asha Kafi Kuwasu Kuku, Mudir Batallah Kapitulek, Faizal Adam Abdelwahi, Zahara Bashir Tutu, Brigadier Jagod Makwar Narada, Lieutenant Colonel John Ambaddi, Koang Tut Jing, Suleiman Musa Rahhal, Mohanna Bashir Kalo, Manal Idam, Jason Edward Matus, Daniel Kodi Angelo Comba, Um-massar Ali Juma`a, Marga Nasr Juma`a, Safa`a Fadl Rahamtalla, Ibrahim Mohamed Bellendia, Musa Kuwa Idris Kafata, Abdollai Kafi Tia, Adil Ahmed elBishari Abdelmajid, Martin Hassan Juma`a Karno, Muluk Ruya and Neroun Philip Aju Kuku.

It is not possible in the context of a brief review to do justice to the complete tapestry of experience recounted in the testimonies; however, a few recurring themes are worthy of emphasis. Striking is the geographical breadth of experience represented; if the Nuba homeland is in some sense isolated, her people have nevertheless as emigrants participated fully in the mainstream of Sudanese national existence both north and south, and their collective viewpoint is far from parochial. The pervasive theme of resistance to abusive pressures from outside forces may be paired with that of constructive adaptation to changing conditions of the modern world. The very diverse individual experiences and opinions of the informants shatter every conceivable preconceived stereo-

type; for example, one meets highly assertive women, Arab partisans of the SPLA, soldiers who encourage education, and patriotic politicians who nevertheless seem to advocate mutually exclusive agendas. Rebuilding the Nuba Mountains community into the next generation—if the present tenuous peace prevails—will test the collective creative abilities of this admirably resourceful people.



**Darfur's Sorrow:  
A History of Destruction and  
Genocide. M.W. Daly.**



**Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,  
2007. Reviewed by Steve Howard,  
The Ohio University**

The many tones of the current global concern for the war and violence in Darfur—from description to debate to outrage—have strained the limits of understanding. “Crisis in Darfur,” “violence in Darfur,” “conflict in Darfur” are headlines that have generated fund and consciousness-raising drives from world political bodies to movie stars to neighborhood car-washes. Noted historian of Sudan Martin Daly has produced a volume on Darfur that sorts a prodigious amount of documentation to confirm the truth that understanding emerges from comprehension of what happened historically.

*Darfur's Sorrow* takes us through a straightforward chronology of 12 chapters, through the region's earliest identification to the origins of the Fur state, the Turkiya, Mahdiyya, Anglo-Egyptian rule, Sudan's independence, Darfur's fate during the 'May Regime,' and the events surrounding the current tragedy up to 2006. Daly reviews with great care the multi-staged incorporation of Darfur into Sudan and north-east Africa generally. As he describes Turkish and Egyptian military forays in Sudan- for slaves primarily- we are reminded of Sudan's ethnic and geographic vastness, and signaling for the Egyptians particularly, a real penetration of Africa. His maps and photos, primarily from the Sudan Library at the University of Durham, are very useful and interesting.

Daly's new book is consistent with his pattern of scholarship, gleaning and organizing of important archival materials to tell a good story. His previous books, including (with P.M. Holt) *A History of Sudan: from the Coming of Islam to the Present Day*, and *Imperial Sudan: the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, 1934-1956* have outlined Sudan's emergence as polity, state and object of colonial conquest and occupation. In effect *Darfur's Sorrow* is a sharp regional focusing of Daly's previous work, extending the themes of Islamization, trade, conquest, imperial rule, and post-colonial consolidation to Sudan's vast west. It is as Daly says, a history of "Darfur besieged" (5), apparently a term appropriate in any era, "a kingdom in almost constant revolt" (100). At the same time the book is as much about what is happening in riverain Sudan that impacts the west as the country changes and develops, changes that assured the underdevelopment and impoverishment of this the last chunk of Africa to fall under colonial rule. The early chapters outline the demographic and ecological dynamics that have contributed to the current crisis.

*Darfur's Sorrow* provides commentary on the sources for the study of the early Fur era, their nuances and what history these sources capture or do not. It also deepens our understanding of the vast social phenomenon of

"slavery" and its particular Fur permutations. In alluding to a tradition of "knights" among the Fur, "heavily armed horsemen who terrorized the farmers, raided for slaves and upheld their honor" (28), Daly demonstrates the continuity of ancient traditions. And he provides precise descriptions of a Darfur sultan's powers which help us to compare the title's use in other polities.

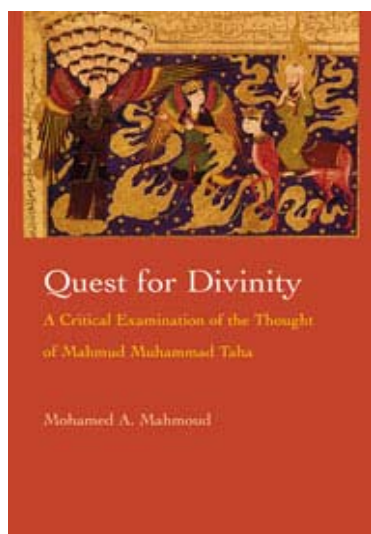
The last two chapters, "The State of Jihad," and "The Destruction of Darfur," are excellent and detailed reviews of the period from 1985 to 2006 in which Sudan's politics were in oppressive turmoil and Darfur was seething from its division into multiple "emirates". I found the tone of these chapters reminiscent of the staccato style of the newsletter *Africa Confidential* (quick succession of events described around their attendant personalities) and then noted that *AC* indeed was the most important source for these chapters. Given the contemporary nature of the history related in this section of the book and the access that a scholar of Daly's stature would have been afforded, the history of the last 20 years in regards to Darfur would have been enriched with interviews with the many living witnesses- prominent and not- to these events. This is also material covered in the Prunier and de Waal books, among others, but they all certainly are describing complex and destructive politics that bear repetition.

Daly's explanation of the origins of the *janjawid* is a careful and comprehensible one, placing it in the construction of "Arab" militias allied with the government that represented "Arab" anger against their perceived lack of representation in local governments, land distribution politics and the like across Darfur. *Darfur's Sorrows* gives us enough historical material to understand and differentiate the politics of the region from the rest of Sudan, describing a difficult place to live and its difficult history.





**Quest for Divinity:  
A Critical Examination of  
the Thought of Mahmud  
Muhammad Taha.**  
Mohamed A Mahmoud.  
Syracuse: Syracuse University Press 2007. ix, 309 pp.  
ISBN 978-0-8156-3100-2



*Reprinted from:*  
*Mahgoub El-Tigani*  
*Contemporary Islam, Tennessee State*  
*University, Nashville,*  
*July 18, 2008*

In *Quest for Divinity*, Mohamed A. Mahmoud exhibits rich analytical knowledge on multiple aspects of the Muslim sources and thought of Mahmud Muhammad Taha. The author notes correctly that although 'an increasing number of scholars are recognizing the importance of [Taha's] intellectual contributions on many key issues of Islamic reform, there is still a dearth of studies of Taha's scholarship and a great need to examine the nature of his thought and its relevance in the light of the serious challenges facing contemporary Mus-

lims' (p. xi). The author has carefully analyzed Taha's orthodox contentions and Sufi orientations with documented materials and well-thought arguments. Some of the author's assertions challenge Taha's specific statements, a situation which invites more scrutiny to the thinker's quest for divinity, as well as the author's quest for modernity with respect to the fundamental sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the Hadith. These discrepancies will be briefly outlined in this review.

Judged by the comparative dialogues between orthodox and modernist religious Muslim thought, Mahmoud's book is a serious effort to define the position of the Sudanese thinker within his comprehensive scheme on a new message of Islam. Notwithstanding the diversity and complexities of the analyzed theme, two major issues seem to overshadow the varying discussions of the book. First is the striving of Sufi Muslim thinkers to reach communion with God, including interpretation of the Qur'an and the Hadith by spiritual imagination, according to mystic 'authentic' vision and practice vis-à-vis the majority of Muslims who line up behind Muhammad's mediation as the most authentic path of Islam. Second, there is the unique contributions of Taha, a Sudanese reformer who 'belongs to the modern revivalist tradition of Islam' (p. 215) with a 'neo-Islamist' vision 'as the basis of radical Islamic reform' (p. 18). Mahmoud views him as a 'mystical thinker... a radical Sufi who did not accept the absolute alterity of God and insisted that the human is in fact a "God in the making"' (pp. xii-xiii). Furthermore, Taha is a Sufi 'who belonged to [the Uwaisi] class of Sufis' (p. 70). Taha 'did not place himself under the guidance of a sheikh' (p. 70) but 'viewed individual and collective human action in terms of a "salvific determinism": human life ... intrinsically oriented toward God' (p. xii). Although Taha shares the basic tenets of Islamism, including the belief that 'Islam can address the global crisis characterized by a pervasive state of depravity... Islam can address this crisis and indeed provide the only solution... [And yet] what

is significant in his case is the degree of his willingness to open Islam to change' (pp. 18-19).

The author's evaluation of Taha's thought is based on his contention that there is a dilemma 'which may be that of many religious modernists whether Muslim or non-Muslim: while he seeks to expand the horizons of his religious tradition and make it coincide with a more expansive and inclusive horizon *produced by modernity* [italics mine], he calls at the same time for an impregnation of this modernity with the values of his specific religious tradition without which, he claims, he will lose its spirit and be condemned to alienation' (p. 222). Taha's ideas on democracy, socialism, and gender relations are founded on the Qur'an and Hadith, as genuine references of his religious thought. However, this contention colors the author's analysis and conclusions with a priori secular modernity regarding the thinker's thought; the result confuses Taha's spiritualities with the author's modernist expectations. Saying that Taha 'cannot present us with fully fledged formulations of democracy, socialism, or gender and social equality but only the most general of statements' (p. 220), the author labels the humanitarian principle of Islam to voluntarily provide a material surplus to a needy person, as encouraged by Muhammad, a form of 'primitive socialism.' There is need to clarify why Muhammad's humanitarian rule is 'primitive socialism.' Moreover, the author's labeling is not clearly advocated by Taha in his book.

Taha's concrete adherence to the fundamental premises of Islam, i.e., the divine authenticity of the Qur'an and the supreme position of the Prophet Muhammad, recognizes admirably the achieving level of humanity in science and socio-political organization. Touching critically upon Taha's reform projects for a number of societal issues, a great portion of *Quest* is dedicated to analyze his neo-Islamist contributions, including his doctrinal perspectives on evolution, gender and women's emancipation, art, Shari'a law reforms, socialism, and social equality. Taha's emphasis is placed on

the inspirational continuities of Islam as contained in the letter of the Qur'an, which is a divine book free of human contradiction side-by-side with the authenticated Hadith as knowledge free of inconsistencies. What really needs change, therefore, is the world's ignorance about the treasures of the Qur'an and the eternal miracles it bears being "a book which wonders is not extinctive," according to the Prophet's Hadith.

Mahmoud elucidates Taha's plan to mobilize creative utilization of a Sufi nature on the basis of these divine sources to bring about an intellectually refined moral society. Towards this end, an interesting comparison is undertaken with respect to *medieval* exegeses of the Qur'an and Sufi interpretations. But the author skips proposed scientific proofs of the miraculous authenticity of the Qur'an, specifically those recently advocated with the aid of advanced informational systems. An example would be the mathematical computerization of the number 19 as a common denominator for the Qur'an, as proved by Rashad Khalifa (see Rashad Khalifa: *Miracle of the Quran: Significance of the Mysterious Alphabets*, Islamic Productions: 1973).

Mahmoud tackles the balances and counterbalances between Muslim orthodox faith and Sufi thought through a modernist perspective rather than Muslim perspectives; this underemphasizes significant agreements between the two domains. Examples include their consensus on the ultimate supremacy of God's Will and Oneness above all His creatures, the self-contained sufficiency of God's words in the Qur'an vis-à-vis positivist criticisms alleging contradictions and inconsistencies, the omnipotence of Islam, and the completion of God's favor as revealed *upon Muhammad*, the person that God favors of all humans or jinn according to decisive words in the Qur'an.

Mahmoud affirms Taha's traditional belief in the superior divinity of the Qur'an, including the Arabic language *of the Qur'an*, with full acknowledgement to Taha's attempt to link Qura'nic verses over time by place of revela-

tion. The verses revealed in Mecca are distinguished from the verses revealed in Medina only for the Muslim community at the time of revelation. Earlier jurists, including Al-Shafi'i, and contemporary jurists of the Al-Azhar, for example al-Sheikh Mohamed Abu Zahra, in addition to the modernist mathematician Rashad Khalifa, contend that the language of the Qur'an, as a statute book, warranted the use of the superior accuracy that the Arabic language enjoys over all other languages.

Taha believes in the scientific authenticity of the Qur'an with respect to the planet's spherical shape, called the 'the flimsiest': 'In premodern times, neither the history of Islamic thought in general nor that of Muslim geographical thought in particular attested to a Qur'an-inspired counterperception suggesting that the earth is round' (p. 91) and 'The concept of the earth as round was introduced into Muslim geographical thought during the third-fifth/ninth-eleventh centuries with the exposure of geographers to Indian, Iranian, and Greek geographical sciences' (p. 253). More accurately, however, the Prophet described the planet in the creation of God as 'a *zarrah* (atom) of sand in an endless space' where an atom is now known as nothing but a spherical evolving thing.

Muslims believe that there is much to learn from the Qur'an and Hadith about religion, science, and knowledge at large. More investigation promises clearer facts on the impact of the Qur'an and Hadith in Muslim scientific thought on contemporary scientists whose findings share Taha's belief in decisive facts of creation included in the Qur'an. For example, geologist al-Naggar cites the Qur'an authentic descriptions of the environmental cycles of winds, rains, growth, and drought (Abu Dhabi T.V., October, 2007). Other scientific issues includes the evolution of earth in space by the *takwir* (overlapping, coiling, or folding up as a garment that is laid away) of night and day and the phases of human creation. The Holy Book of Islam is not meant *in the first place* for scientific epistemology, theories or laboratories, inas-

much as *it is* a book to know and to worship God, as earlier affirmed in the mid 1960s by the al-Azhar Chief Sheikh Mahmoud Shaltut in his *Tafsir of the Qur'an*. Taha's claim of the embodiment of the *zahir* (exterior) and *batin* (hidden) truths in the verses of the Qur'an (p. 137) in correspondence with the simultaneous solidness and movement of the universe coincides nicely with the modern scientific discoveries that realize the binary opposition of the earth's flatness and roundness, the solidness and movement of mountains and the centrality and orbiting of solar systems. The impact of Islam on the most productive Muslim intellectuality, more than any other sources of knowledge, is undeniable; it suffices to mention the encyclopedic works of Abu Zayd 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), for example, in both religious and scientific disciplines.

I suggest that there is a need in *Quest* to refer with more accuracy to the position of Islam on enslavement. Neither the Qur'an nor the Hadith call for enslavement of any human, in principle; instead, they dictate and enforce the salvage of victims by multiple efficient ways towards full liberation of Muslim societies from servitude and the scourge of slavery. This is a methodology appreciated by contemporary researchers with fair-minded accounts of history and comparative studies. (See Sayed Sabiq, *Fiqh al-Sunna*, Volume III, Maktabat Dar al-Turath, Cairo, undated, pp. 88-90 on the Prophet's liberation of his own slaves; Mohamed Abu Zahara, *Usul al-Fiqh*, Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, Cairo, 2004, pp. 88-89 on how Muslim jurisprudence encouraged emancipation; Subhi 'Abdu Sa'eed: *al-Islam wa Huquq al-Insan*, Cairo, 1415 A.H., pp. 55-65 on Islamic teachings constituting advanced models of social equality; and 'Ali 'Abd al-Wahid Wafi, *al-Riq fi al-Islam*, Cairo, on principled application of Islamic principles which eradicate enslavement.)

*Quest* portrays Taha as a person who may have been influenced by his family's Sufi background, especially his great-grandfather al-Hamim and the 'celebrated confrontation and exchange between him and the orthodox

[judge] Dushain' (p. 12) in which the Shaikh justified his non-Shari'a marriages with seven wives and two combined sisters by claiming: 'The Messenger of God gave me the permission' (p. 2). The book mentions Taha's respect for the Sufi traditions versus the Muslim Brotherhood fundamentalist group whose judges collaborated with President Nimeiri to condemn him to death in 1984. It is not made clear, however, whether Taha had been following this Sufi background in spiritual ideas and/or material practices in any way that might link his 20<sup>th</sup> century developed thought with the medieval *shatahat* (theopathic statements; abstruse exorbitance) of the Sudanese mystics documented by the al-*Tabaqat* stories of Ibn Daif-Allah.

Here, the author believes that Taha 'viewed himself as a sober mystic who was rooted in the Prophet's way and followed the traditions of sober mystics' such as Abu al-Qasim al-Junaid who 'did not approve of divulging one's mystical experience to the public' as Halaj did (p. 33). Mahmoud, however, asserts that Taha was influenced by the Sufi tradition of al-Halaj and Ibn 'Arabi who excluded Muhammad's mediation by their own conceivable individual authenticity to allow direct communion with God far beyond the orthodox Muslim faith, which is genuinely based on Muhammad's supreme mediation. Taha's denial of achieving such communion with God is further noted when the issue was addressed in an internal meeting of the [Jumhuri] group in April 1982: 'Taha said in that meeting, "people would undoubtedly ask you: am I the Authentic One? ... I hope to be, but I am in doubt." Quoting verse 19:78, which says reprimandingly, "What, has he observed the Unseen, or taken a covenant with the All-merciful?" he affirms, "I have neither had access to the Unseen nor have I taken a covenant with the All-merciful... Am I going to finish the journey or does God have someone else, better than me..." (p. 71). Despite this decisive negation by Taha himself of any direct communion with God of the sort Halaj or his fellow Sufis claimed, the author affirms that Taha's uncertainty 'is the best the gnostic

can do... to be "in a state of constant preparedness" at the receiving end of God's ceaseless act of descent"' (p. 71). This state of preparedness is a public practice for all Muslims, whether they practice orthodox prayers or follow some other tradition; this point questions the author's aggrandizement of Taha's 'mystical doubt' as 'a marked dynamism and openness within the mystical tradition of Islam' (p. 71).

Mahmoud dwells on the story of Muhammad's ascension to the heavens with reference to many sources saying Muhammad's communion with God went through Gabriel whom Muhammad saw figuratively twice before his communion with God. But the author has not referred to the authentic negation in Ibn Kathir of the story saying that the Prophet saw God eye-to-eye. Here, the traditions by the Prophet's wife 'Aisha and his companions Ibn Mas'oud, Abu Hurayra, and Anas Ibn Malik, as well as al-Bayhaqi, state decisively that the Prophet did not say he had seen God 'eye-to-eye'; but he said he 'saw light' and that 'Allah revealed to him what he revealed at Sidrat al-Muntah.' 'How could I see *The Light*? I saw light,' the Prophet said to Abu Zar (Ibn Kathir, *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, edited by Mohamed 'Ali al-Sabouni, Volume III, Dar al-Galil, Beirut, 8<sup>th</sup> edition, 1995, pp. 356-357; 397-399).

According to Mahmoud, Taha did approach the issue of mediation, especially after a period of early seclusion: 'It may, however, be argued that it is in Taha's theory of prayer that we find the culmination and most mature expression of prophetic marginalization. When he characterizes ordinary Muslim prayer as a prayer of "imitation" or "gestures" of "ascension," he in fact views it primarily in terms of a worshipper-Muhammad relationship' (p. 70). Mahmoud discusses Taha's 'claims of being authentic' (p. 216), but this is contradicted with Taha's own announcement of his doubts (p. 71). Nevertheless, he declares that 'the prophetic marginalization is a logical and plausible consequence of the Sufi experience' (p. 216). This alleged marginalization is hardly existent in the life of Sudanese mysticism which 'tended on the whole to stress the ideal of soberness and a balanced syn-

thesis of the esoteric and the exoteric,' as the author notes correctly (p. 3), and is solidly founded on the belief in Muhammad as the leader of religion and the closest to Allah of all humans.

Mahmoud analyzes 'Taha's 'assertion that the Prophet is in fact a "veil" between the servant and God that should be removed' (p. 216), but he asserts repeatedly in his analysis that 'Taha 'always stressed that the Prophet should be imitated' (p. 31), 'Muhammad set the perfect example for Muslims' (p. 54), 'Not only did the Prophet differ from his community in being authentic' (p. 55), and 'Muhammad's community knew him only partially because [he] was not from the society of seventh century [Arabia]. He came to [his community] from the future' (p. 56). However, the book does not include a decisive statement by Taha himself that warrants the author's conclusion: 'According to Taha... the historical perception that Muhammad succeeded in spreading the "message of Islam" is mistaken or, at best, inaccurate: what triumphed under Muhammad and his successors was not the real message of Islam but rather a watered down, accommodationist version of what God has originally intended for humankind. Hence, the promise of a Second Message of Islam that can, for the first time in the history of mankind, combine the ideals of democracy and socialism in one politico-social system and realize a complete social equality' (p. 218).

*Quest for Divinity* exposes the problematic claims of Sufism about ascension as a special aspect of human liberation from worldly affairs to a higher level of submission to God up to the *shatbat* of Bastami, Ibn 'Arabi, and Halaj of worshipping God in imaginable unionism. Ascension is an individualistic practice in the Muslim faith which rests largely on the exoteric deeds and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. In a section centered on Taha's configurations of the relationship between God and the individual Muslim, based on a theory of evolutionary ascension in all aspects of spiritual and material life, the author provides a critical over-

view of the thinker's complex concepts [especially pp. 44-75; 76-104]. Taha 'accepts the orthodox dogma that the Qur'an is God's word, although he sets out to subject the doctrine to a radical Sufi reconstruction' (p. 217). By his notion of authenticity, Taha believes that the Holy Qur'an is an esoteric 'journey in God... inasmuch as the one who has realized authenticity has his own individual testimony, prayer, *ṣalat*, fasting, and pilgrimage, he also has his own *qur'an* (p. 217)... by virtue of "hearing" from God and being in direct receipt from Him' (p. 218)... When Taha emerged out of his seclusion he stopped practicing the 'prayer of gestures.' By that time, he was certain of two things: that he had realized his authenticity and that his concept of the Second Message of Islam 'was not only the true understanding of Islam but also the only global answer to the problems of human beings in the modern age' (p. 70).

Mahmoud then notes that Taha's Second Message 'rests on a reconstructed Muhammad whose "real" message is expressed through modern ideas such as democracy, constitutionalism, and socialism. Additionally, Taha emphasizes a mystical and ethical Muhammad who is always in a state of presence with God and with others as manifestations of God. Taha hence projects Muhammad as a progressive mystic...' (p. 73). This bold imagery of Prophet Muhammad as a possibly *re-constructed* mystic by the words of the author, however, is not clearly made available, as such, in Taha's cited works. Much clearer is Taha's close adherence to the Path of Muhammad in humility and self-denial to be able to pursue his aimed level of sublimation: 'am I the Authentic One? ... I hope to be, but I am in doubt,' as he put it (p. 71). The seemingly contradicting levels of the Taha's theory might have allowed the author to infer bold statements on Sufi and orthodox thought alike, as is thus far reviewed. And yet, by studying Taha's whole project as an integrated eclectic whole with full attention to *his own assertions*, it might well hold that this Sudanese reformer never aimed to portray himself as a modern Ha-

laj marginalizing Prophet Muhammad, or even a 20<sup>th</sup> century Authentic One, or some expected Mahdi, let alone 'a reconstructed Muhammad,' since Taha denied decisively all that which might be deducted on his behalf in this respect being at best 'in doubt.'

In *Quest*, Taha is assigned to 'the modern revivalist tradition of Islam.' But 'he did not succeed in building a movement, as did al-Banna,' maintains the author (p. 215): 'His mystical vision and his reform project remain among the boldest and most original responses to the crisis of Islam in the modern world' (p. 222). The author's reference to Taha's belief in 'a crisis of Islam,' however, is not categorically claimed by the thinker himself who preached specifically about the crisis of humanity in the modern age (p. 70), and as a 'global crisis' (p. 18). Taha also saw a crisis of Muslims' *jahiliyya* or state of ignorance (p. 57) of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which Qutb of the Brotherhood somewhat earlier claimed, and a crisis of governance that led the Jumhuri group in the *al-Tofan* leaflet to reject application of the *hudud* and other acts by the September Laws under the Muslim Brotherhood guidance (p. 27), despite Taha's approval of the *hudud* penalties in accordance with his religious thought (pp. 198-204).

All this suggests in this reviewer's opinion the essential need to comprehend Taha's stands and ideas *in their pure originality and totality*, as a full package of his doctrinal commitments, rather than tearing them apart by a piece-meal approach, with due consideration to the significant analysis the author offers. For example, Mahmoud writes: 'Taha does not deny that Islam brought about significant change, but he does not accept the orthodox belief that the Prophet's time (and the time of his caliph successors in Medina) was the golden age of Islam and the highest point in human history' (p. 219). His statement is then cautiously modified, as he affirms: 'Taha neither uses the term "personal *qur'an*" nor refers to a *qur'an* that could replace the Qur'an that was revealed to Muhammad. Rather, the notion of a personal *qur'an* is implicit in what he writes and can be

deduced from his theory of authenticity, which entails a personal law or a personal religion' (p. 218). This author's view, however, might be strongly refuted by consideration of Taha's comprehensive thought or the other Jumhuri thinkers who stress that their drastic reformulation of the Shari'a traditional heritage is definitely constructed 'on the same fundamental sources of Islam and is fully consistent with its essential moral and religious percepts' (An-Na'im, 'Abdullahi A: *Towards an Islamic Reformation – civil liberties, human rights and international law*, Syracuse U. Press, New York, 1990, p. xiv).

Taha's thought might be acquainted in a few aspects with the Western secularist schools of Hegel and Marx, despite his criticisms of the revolutionary praxis of Marx and its advocacy of a polarized armed conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat for which he maintains no sympathy. Mahmoud analyzes the complex weaving of the issue of evolution based on both religious and scientific conceptualizations (pp. 184-192) to conclude finally in this sharp judgment: 'his subscription on the one hand to a Platonic epistemology theory stressing recollection as the foundation of knowledge and his mystical elevation of worship as the foundation of knowledge on the other militate against any real and meaningful acceptance of the method of science and the knowledge it provides' (p. 193). This view is not shared by those Muslim thinkers for whom philosophy, including neo-Platonic thought, is a poor substitute of the Islamic thought that believes in the plausibility of the Hierarchy of Being and its progression *only* by God's revelation. For example, Mohamed Ja'far writes: 'Muslim Sufism is different from both Indian and Christian Sufi traditions that have been widely studied by the Orientalists who thought that Muslim mystics should have adopted the Christian principle of unity with God. True, the Muslim Sufism begins with the belief in theism, the One God; but it ends with belief in the same God as the Illuminator of completeness, glory, and light. The Sufi comes closer to God inasmuch as the Sufi exerts the best effort to imitate



God's attributes. We must admit, however, that Sufism in essence is rampant with mental contradictions, which led some logisticians to reject it all together as Bertrand Russell did' (Mohamed Kamal Ibrahim Ja'far, *Al-Tasaouf Tariqqan wa Tajribatan wa Mazhaban*, Dar al-Kitab al-Jam'iyya, Cairo, 1970. Cited in Mahgoub El-Tigani, *Al-'Adl al-Islami: Maosua' Mugaja fi Fikr al-Islam wa 'Adlahu al-Jina'i*, Volume I, Cairo, 2006, pp. 122-139).

Taha's Program of Change focuses on Shari'a law, art, women rights, democracy, and socialism as key aspects of change in the Muslim world. Mahmoud lays out in a condensed chapter the religious and Sufi inter-connections of the doctrine on the basis of a Second Message of Islam. According to Mahmoud, "Taha's mention of "Marx, Lenin, Russell, Shaw, and Wells" indicated his indebtedness to the two major trends of socialism and liberal democracy – trends that played a decisive role in shaping the social and political content of his Second Message of Islam' (p. 39).

Mahmoud asserts that 'Islam alone has refused to call in the aid of pictorial art as a handmaid to religion... The roots of this antipathy go back to Muhammad's rejection of Arab idolatry... The ideal for Taha is to bring religion and art together in a harmonious relationship that enriches life intellectually and emotionally' (p. 207) and 'art should always be subordinated to Shari'a' (p. 214). He evaluates this 'liberal orthodoxy' by saying: 'Art, hence, cannot achieve its full aesthetic potential or transformative impact unless it recognizes its functions as the handmaiden of religion' (p. 214). Taha's position is perhaps mysteriously represented by the inclusion of a museum imaginary painting on the book's cover depicting scenery of Muhammad's journey to Heavens accompanied by the Archangel Gabriel. Such a scene is problematic or even prohibited for the vast majority of Muslims who prefer to know Muhammad, the Leader of Religion, and pray for him in their hearts inasmuch as they might see his lightning image without paintings in pictorial art that might well transform to sar-

castic caricatures of the most venerated human in Islamic faith.

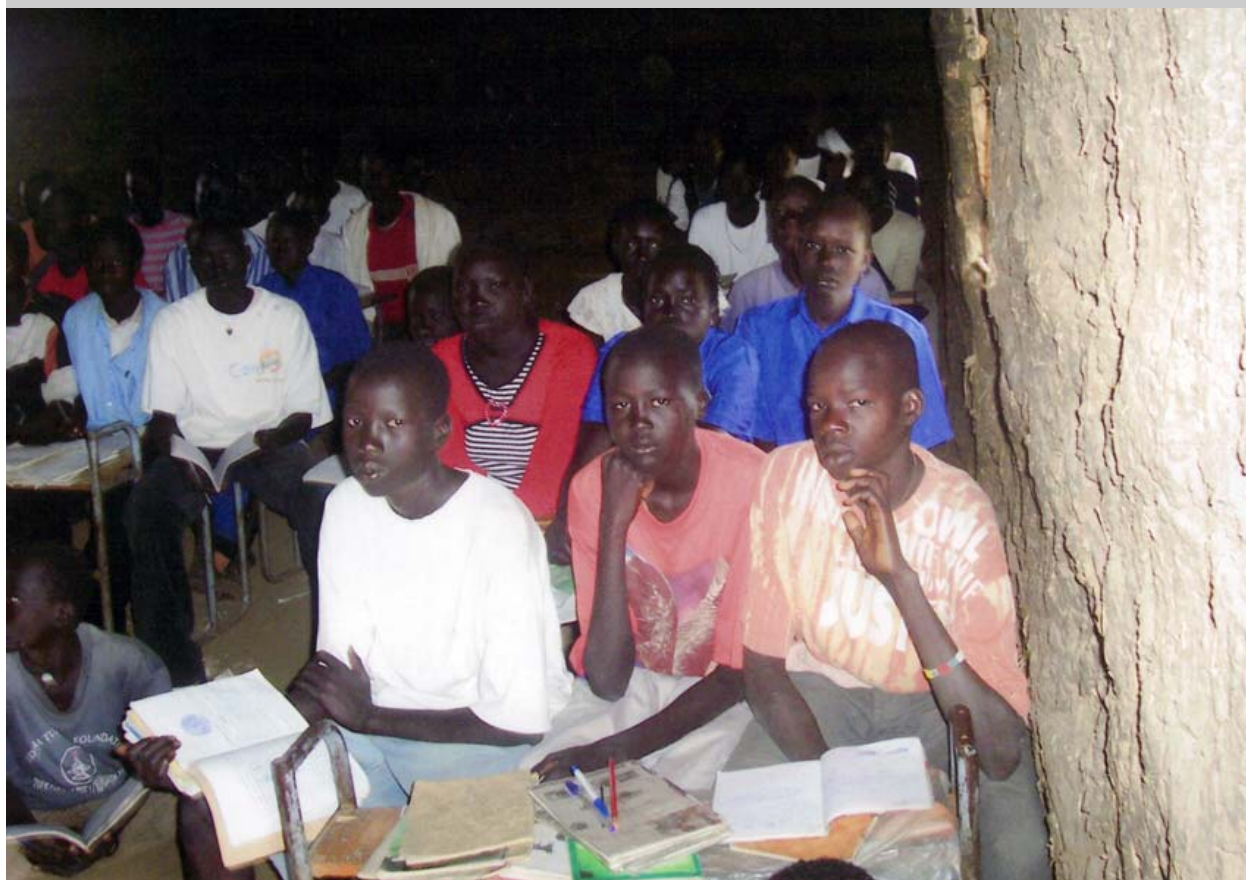
To conclude, *Quest for Divinity* makes an intriguing contribution to explain the debatable thought of Mahmud Muhammad Taha. Mahmoud competently analyzes different complexities, inter-relatedness, and comprehensiveness of Taha's doctrine, which articulates the unique accomplishment of his individuality. The fluent style, comparative research, and serious attempt to scrutinize the Jumhuri thought and reform project based on academic sources, in addition to personal acquaintance with the movement, provide an opportunity to both scholars and students of religious studies to better understand major similarities, differences, and spiritual linkages that link the Jumhuris with both Sufi spiritualities and orthodox Muslim faith.

'There is still a dearth of studies of Taha's scholarship and a great need to examine the nature of his thought,' acknowledges Mahmoud in his preface. Emphasizing the need for more accuracy concerning the Holy Qur'an and Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, this reviewer believes that *Quest* is interestingly illustrative of the author's bold assertions on Islam, in general, and the thought of Taha, in particular. Save for the critical need to incorporate significant orthodox interpretations, in addition to fair account of the scientific discoveries of the authenticity of the Qur'an (as noted in this review) side-by-side with the book's selected sources and notes, the book analyzes with documented materials the bold thought of Muslim Sufis. All this brings it to the fore as a valuable contribution in the field of Comparative Religions.

It was well known that the executed assassination of the Islamic thinker Mahmud Muhammad Taha by the Nimeiri/Muslim Brotherhood regime was legally lawless; the extra-judicial trial and killing of an elderly Muslim intellectual over the age of 70 years was a flagrant crime against humanity. Mohamed A. Mahmoud's work provides authoritative evidence that the assassination of Taha was gravely groundless in religious terms: intricately devel-

oped by Muslim Sufism, with all its exorbitant individuality, the man's mystic thought was originally founded on orthodox Islam. This latter context of this important book will surely invite continuous debates between scholars and students of humanities and comparative religious studies, including Sudanese orthodox Muslims and modernists alike, which should help in the final analysis to delineate complex issues of the Muslim faith in the context of a peaceful and thoughtful world, free of religious persecution and restricted thought.



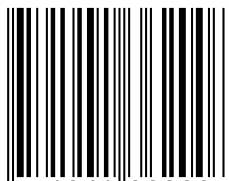


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