



# SUDAN STUDIES

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## EDITORIAL

*Sudan Studies* 36 is the second issue of our journal for 2007. In future, we plan to have the first issue of the year appear in the summer and the second one soon after our Annual General Meeting and Symposium which normally takes place in September or early October. The 2007 AGM appointed three new officers, and it seems appropriate to include something about their interests in relation to Sudan.

**Dr Douglas Johnson is the new Chairperson.** The Society is indeed very pleased to welcome him to this post. Douglas's interest in the Sudan began nearly 40 years ago when, as an 'occasional' student at Makerere University College, he met a number of Sudanese refugee students. His university education was in the USA and he obtained his Ph.D from UCLA. He took up the post of Assistant Director of Archives in the Southern Regional Government from 1980 to 1983. From 1990 to 1996 he worked with Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS). More recently, he was a resource person at the Sudan Peace Talks held in Karen in 2003, and was an international expert on the Abyei Boundaries Commission in 2005. He has recently completed a background paper on the 1956 North-South boundary for the Government of South Sudan. Douglas is author and/or editor of numerous books and papers on the Sudan including, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, James Currey, 2003. He is married to Wendy James, another scholar of the Sudan, and lives in Oxford.

**Ms Gill Lusk is our new Secretary.** Gill first went to the Sudan in 1975 and taught English in Nyala in Southern Darfur and Kamlin in the Gezira. She worked on *Sudanow* for four years and then continued as a freelance journalist in Khartoum until 1987. Thereafter, she became Deputy Editor of *Africa Confidential*. She now writes and broadcasts on the Sudan and related topics.

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**Mr Adrian Thomas** is our new Treasurer. Adrian first visited Sudan in 1968 on his way home from a VSO teaching assignment in Tanzania. Some ten years later, whilst at the University of London Institute of Education, he wrote a dissertation on education in the southern Sudan. From 1991 he spent four fascinating years in Khartoum as Director of the British Council. He is currently a trustee for the charity *Together for Sudan*.

Readers will know that **Professor Holt**, the noted Sudan historian, died on 2 November 2006 and in this issue we include two appreciations.

Two of the three main articles in this issue are edited versions of papers presented at the 2006 Bergen Conference. The first comprises extracts from a diary by a Greek prisoner of the Mahdist Government and gives a rather different picture to that of many other European prisoners. The author, **Dr Gerasimos Makris**, a Social Anthropologist at the Panteion University in Athens is a relation of the family. The second paper, about the motives behind British intervention in the Sudan in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century is by Professor **Terje Tvedt**, Research Director, Centre for Development Studies at Bergen University. The third contribution, by **Philip Bowcock** is a personal account of the 2006 visit to the Sudan by British 'veterans'. Philip was District Commissioner in Upper Nile from 1952 to 1955.

Members can obtain a **25% discount** on **The Kenana Handbook of Sudan**, published by Kegan Paul, 2007 at £29-95, by contacting: Melanie Khosla, Customer Service Manager, Marston Book Services, P O Box 269, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4YN. Tel: 01235 465535; e-mail: [melanie.khosla@marston.co.uk](mailto:melanie.khosla@marston.co.uk). State that you are a member of SSSUK.

*Jack Davies*

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## Professor Peter Malcolm Holt

We were all saddened to learn of the death in Oxford on 2 November 2006 of this well-known and well respected Professor of Middle East history. Professor Holt was born in Astley in Lancashire on 28 November 1918, the son of a Unitarian minister. His father died when he was nine and the family moved to Ickford in Buckinghamshire. Peter went to Lord Williams's Grammar School in Thame, and from there went on to University College, Oxford, in 1937 to read History. He joined the Sudan Service in 1941. For much of his service Peter was a teacher at Hantoub Secondary School. He became very proficient in Arabic and this, in part, led to his appointment as Government Archivist in 1954, where his particular interest was in records relating to the Mahdist State in the Sudan. He wrote several highly rated books on the history of the Sudan, all of which appeared after he had left in 1955. However, his academic interests spread outside the Sudan to other parts of the Middle East, especially to Egypt and Syria. He joined the staff of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London in 1955, becoming Professor of Arab History in 1964 and from 1975 to retirement in 1982, Professor of History of the Near and Middle East. In 1953 he married Nancy Mawle (died 2006), and is succeeded by a son and a daughter.

(A full obituary appeared in *The Independent* newspaper on 28 November 2006).

Two recollections of Peter Holt now follow, the first, contributed by a retired Sudanese diplomat, Mohammed B Ahmed, better known to many Sudanese as Abdul Aziz H Alsawi; and the second, by Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim, Professor of History at the International Islamic University in Malaysia, who was one of Professor Holt's Ph.D students at SOAS.



## PROFESSOR HOLT AND THE MAHDIST REVOLUTION: THE OTHER FACE OF COLONIALISM

Mohammed B Ahmed

The second of November 2006 witnessed the disappearance of one of the brightest stars in the firmament of academic endeavour related to Sudan. Professor Peter Malcolm Holt, author of *The Mahdist State in the Sudan* (1958), *The Modern History of the Sudan* (1961) and *The Sudan of the Three Niles* (1999) died at the age of 90. The first book is considered a pioneering work on the deeper understanding of the Mahdist Revolution, but Holt's presence in the field of historical studies is varied covering many areas, especially Egypt and Syria. Since joining the British administration in Sudan in 1941 he worked as a teacher in Hantoub Secondary School where his most famous student was the future-former President Gaafar Nimeiri about whose athletic skills Holt was later to make positive remarks but not about his academic skills. Holt remained in Sudan until 1955. He left teaching in 1954 to establish the Government Archives. He is credited particularly with collecting, classifying and studying Mahdist documents. The obituary in *The Independent* newspaper sums him up well:

*"Holt was a quiet unassuming man, though there was lurking a singularly sharp mind..... He was invariably helpful and constructive, a man of profound integrity"*

It is the Sudanese academic A.A. Ibrahim in his book *The Struggle Between The Mahdi and the Ulama or Religious Clerics* who described Holt's analysis of the Mahdist Revolution as pioneering in that it transcended the traditional explanation of the outbreak of the Revolution by explaining its particular timing: *"The practice of maladministration and oppression had been the hallmark of the Turkish regime for 60 years, so why did the Revolution occur in 1881? Why not earlier?"* According to

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Dr. Ibrahim there were reasons for discontent and grievance which did not become positive resistance until two other reasons came into play. These were the weakness of the Turkish rule due to the situation in Egypt and maturation of Al-Mahdi's character as a leader.

Inspired by this analysis the writer of this piece has attempted to explore an additional dimension for this more comprehensive explanation of the Mahdist Revolution having to do with the crystallization of the national, cultural identity of Northern Sudan. The following quote comes from, *The Sudanese Dialogue on Identity and National Unity*:

*"There is an unignorable implication in the fact that the inception of the Mahdist Revolution and establishment of its decisive stage took place in central Sudan and Kordofan, because here lies the focal point of the Arab-Islamic side of the country's national identity. While it is true that absence of substantive agricultural, urban and population life bridging the gap between the two areas have militated against accumulation of the common experiences engendered by involvement with the Turkish rule between the two areas, yet the speed and strength of their response to the Mahdist elevation of this experience into positive action indicates that oneness of the Arab national make-up shared by the two areas continued to be highly effective. Across the tribal and geographical hurdles the basic similarities in psychological and value-system Arab-Islamic cultural make-up, but specially the Arabic language, operated as a bridge which ensured speedy transformation for the Mahdist Revolution from potential to reality. In the absence of this national identity factor the policies of the Turkish regime would have resulted in the outbreak of the Revolution any way but at a point in time further than that brought about by its presence."*

Regardless of the real value of this particular contribution, the greater value is that of a member of the Colonial Administration who succeeded in guiding the Sudanese to a better

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understanding of an epoch-making episode in their modern history, and this cannot be in doubt.

On the other hand Peter Holt's contribution is also an example of the mixture of positive and negative aspects constituting the colonial phenomenon. In pursuit of its strategic objectives the colonial administration sets up modern political, economic, military, administrative and justice systems. Controlling all the ramifications of these systems which lead eventually to its own demise, however, is not entirely in its hands. Through modern education and professions these innovations generate an enlightened domestic class able to realize and express independence aspirations. In addition the mere presence of foreign occupation opens a window of interaction with the West where the imperial machine coexists with democracy and material and non-material products of the unfettered human intellect.

Herein also lies the dilemma of many Third World nations and peoples, especially in Muslim countries, particularly in this age of globalization which enhances the impact of mutual influences. How to deal with Western, especially American, strategies and interests which might come into conflict, sometimes very severely, with those of the countries concerned while keeping the avenues of interaction with those achievements open is an important problem. In view of what is happening in Iraq, Afghanistan and, also Sudan where zealots of all kinds are striving (*jihadizing*) to get rid of the baby as well as the afterbirth, and unfortunately succeeding in galvanizing popular emotions, one has to conclude that we Muslims have failed in striking the right balance in our relationship with the West.



## PROFESSOR PETER MALCOLM HOLT: SOME PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim

I am not one of the fortunate Sudanese who had been educated by the remarkable and dedicated teacher Peter Malcolm Holt in the Sudan Government's primary and secondary schools. However, on graduating from Khartoum University in the mid 1960s with Honours and an M.A in History, my *Alma Mater cum employer*, the University of Khartoum, decided that I should continue my area studies on the *Nile Valley*, and be exposed to an educational experience abroad. Hence the Dean of Faculty of Arts and the first professional Sudanese historian, Professor Mekki Shibeika, and the Head of the Department of History, Professor G.N. Sanderson, sent me on a full scholarship to the School of Oriental and African Studies (S.O.A.S) of the University of London to pursue an M.Phil/Ph.D programme under the supervision of their former colleague Professor Holt, who, on retirement from the Sudan Civil Service in 1955, took up a teaching post in this renowned School. My association with Professor Holt continued on and off until his demise on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 2006.

I still remember the particulars of my first face to face encounter with Professor Holt. In the late afternoon of a day early in October 1966, I, hesitantly and without a prior appointment, knocked at the door of his office on the fourth floor of the old S.O.A.S. building to hear a gentle voice saying "*Come in*", and I did. The Professor must have been uneasy about this uncourteous intrusion of his privacy, which, I later knew, he valued a lot. Nonetheless, seemingly acquainted with the Sudanese excessive informality, he warmly welcomed me and invited me to have a seat. For a while I remained tight-lipped, not even introducing myself. Realizing this confusion and perplexity, the Professor came to my rescue by asking some general and personal questions like my home town and formative education. I responded, rather incoherently, that I

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came from a town in the White Nile called Ed Dueim, and that I had my primary and intermediate education in the nearby Bakht er-Ruda Educational Institute.

This gave him an opportunity to exhibit his abundant knowledge of the town and the region, and to speak of his personal experience in, and with, the pioneering Institute of Bakht er-Ruda, which he admired greatly. He even mentioned some of its personnel, including two of my uncles, Gafar al-Khalifa al-Hassan and his younger brother Sir al-Khatim who took up in 1964 the premiership of the country at a very delicate period of its history. To my surprise, and elation too, he mentioned the name of my late father, the owner of the Institute's canteen. In particular, the Professor highly commended my role model Sir al-Khatim, and the two men soon re-established contacts and got along very well when Sir al-Khatim became in early 1967 the ambassador of the Sudan to the United Kingdom.

Guided by this cordiality, I assumed that I will have an 'easy academic ride' with my supervisor. But I soon discovered that this was a grossly mistaken presumption because of the man's vigorous persistence on high academic standards. From my personal experience, and that of some of my colleagues who had the honour of working under his supervision, I can confidently say that Professor Holt never compromised in standards no matter what personal relationship he had with his supervisees. When I impatiently requested at an early stage of my study the upgrading of my thesis from M. Phil. to Ph.D., he stared at me for ten seconds, and told me *"This is not your business. The transfer will take place only when you perform, and perform very well"*. This sharp rebuff was enough to alert me that this supervisor tolerates no nonsense, and that I have to work very hard if I intend to sail through. But I must admit that this firmness, occasional harshness, was often cushioned by his habitual humanity, humility and subtle sense of humor to make it more palatable. In the first draft of the first chapter of my thesis, I designated Isma'il Sidiq's premiership

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of 1930-1933 as 'Sidiq's black three years', to which he sarcastically remarked, "*Surely, you are not Muhammad Hassanain Haikal!*" This was enough to caution me that journalistic language and style is unacceptable in academic discourse.

After this long, but important, digression, let me go back to my decisive first meeting with my supervisor. When I did not mention a word about my research topic because, anyhow, I had none in mind, the Professor directed the conversation to this important issue. He told me that he knew about my 'interesting' Master's thesis on Muhammad Ali's period in the Sudan, apparently through the external examiner, Professor Richard Hill, and added that I am lucky to come at this juncture to Britain as the British government had just amended its archival law from fifty to thirty years. When this exciting news did not ring a bell in my mind, he patiently said that the amendment will enable researchers to consult the British archival data until 1936, and casually suggested that I consider researching on the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. My initial reaction was rather negative because my knowledge of Egyptian history was then quite limited, and, secondly, I ignorantly presumed that 'one year' was too short for a Ph.D. Having detected my reluctance, Professor Holt gently said that this is just a proposal, but advised me to spend some time in the Public Records Office (P.R.O.), then in Chancery Lane, before I make a final decision. Finally, he opened his diary, looked straight in my face, and fixed the time for the next meeting. I immediately got the embarrassing message, to 'behave in Rome like the Romans', and never to drop in people's homes and workplaces without a prior date as we do in the Sudan.

After three weeks of intense exploratory study in the P.R.O., I came to realize that the learned Professor was absolutely right and I was absolutely wrong. For the topic - the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty - was not only viable for a Ph.D., but also fresh from the oven. For I was the first researcher to sift through its huge British

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archival data that took me over twelve months of continuous search and research in the P.R.O., Colindale Newspapers' Library, Durham archives and other British Centres and Institutes, and not a couple of weeks as I had initially, but naively, assumed. However, when I reported the 'breakthrough' to my supervisor during our next scheduled meeting, he firmly reminded me that the British data gives only one side of the story, and that I should explore the role of the other two players, the Egyptians and the Sudanese. Hence was my subsequent fruitful six-months visit to the messy Egyptian archives in al-Qal'ah, Cairo, and the well organized Sudanese Central Records Office, thanks to the perseverance and dedication of the first Sudan Government Archivist (1954-1955), Professor Holt himself, and to his successor and student Professor Muhammad Ibrahim Abu Salim.

The outcome of three and half years of study under the able supervision of Professor Holt was a thesis that was published, by Khartoum University Press in 1976, under the title, *The 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty: An Historical Study with Special Reference to the Contemporary Situation in Egypt and the Sudan*. In his report, Professor Holt said that the manuscript had 'three considerable merits' of which one read as follows, "*In spite of the sensitivity of the topic, the manuscript is written in a scholarly and detached manner.*" I am happy to record that I learned this impartiality from him.

Professor Holt had not only set the stage for my doctorate thesis but was also instrumental in directing my attention and interest to what I consider to be the most important post doctorate research project in which I had been engaged for many years, namely the 20<sup>th</sup> century Mahdiyya, popularly known as *Neo-Mahdism*, and its founding Imam, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi. Immediately after earning my Ph.D., the Professor invited me to our first social occasion, a luncheon at S.O.A.S. Senior Common Room. While enjoying his company, the issue of *Neo-Mahdism* was put on the table. Being a *Khatimi* by upbringing, and, like most Sudanese

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youngsters of my generation, a 'Communist' by fashion and imitation, and not conviction, I accepted at face value the then, and now, prevalent condemnation of the movement and its leader as 'agents' and 'stooges' of imperialist Britain! Meanwhile, while consulting the British archival data for my Ph.D. research, I came across some remarks by British officials that they viewed Sayyid 'Abd al-Rahman with suspicion, sometimes outright hostility. These comments, coupled with Professor Holt's continuous alert of objectivity and academic honesty, engendered an urge to explore this notion of 'treason'.

Subsequently, Professor Holt suggested that I exchange views on the topic of *Neo-Mahdism* with two of his former Ph.D. students, Professor Gabriel Warburg and Professor Martin Daly, who wrote extensively on the 20<sup>th</sup> Century history of the Sudan. Professor Warburg's numerous scholarly works were most beneficial, particularly his latest book *Islam, Sectarianism and Politics in the Sudan since the Mahdiyya* (C. Hurst, London, 2003). A year later, 2004, Brill published my Sayyid 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi: *a Study of Neo-Mahdism in the Sudan 1899-1956*, in which I argue that the Imam was essentially a nationalist *par excellence*. On this occasion, Gaby wrote me on 25 October, 2004, "'Alf Mabruk' on your new book, which arrived today. I am happy for both of us since we two, of Peter Holt's ex-students, have now published the definitive history of the post – Mahdist Millennium. He should be a happy old man". In response, I told Gaby on 25 October 2004, "A while ago, I wrote to Prof. Holt, but, I did not hear from him.....He is a great man and an outstanding scholar". Sadly, our mentor could not review the books because of his deteriorating health, and regrettable death on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2006.

Being apolitical by temperament, Professor Holt had usually distanced himself from politics and refrained from commenting on the political developments in the Sudan. In an attempt to persuade him to confirm the widely presumed 'stupidity' of his former pupil in Hamdoub Secondary School, Gaafar Nimeiri who accidentally

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became the leader of the Sudan for sixteen disastrous years (1969-1985), I discreetly requested sometime in June 1969 the Professor's views on the General. He evasively said, "*He was a good football player*", and quickly changed the subject. Nonetheless, Professor Holt could not afford this reservation *vis-à-vis* the appalling and catastrophic post-1989 developments in the Sudan that threaten the very entity and identity of the country in which he spent a good part of his life, and genuinely loved. In response to a letter that I sent him from the *diaspora*, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, he wrote to me a passionate and moving letter, dated 25<sup>th</sup> March, 1995, in which he, *inter alia*, recorded.

*"Very many thanks for your letter. I am delighted to hear from you again, although deeply sorry you are writing from exile. Anybody who has worked in the Sudan must indeed deplore its present conditions, which seem like an ever spiral of misery, and which is driving many of its best sons abroad. I hope this unhappy time will come to an end, and that the habitual tolerance and goodness of heart of the Sudanese people will triumph. In the meantime, congratulations for your appointment in Malaysia. I hope that you will find the country and the post congenial, and that your work will not suffer from this transition. Your project sounds most interesting."*

**Professor Holt's three main publications on the history of the Sudan were:**

*The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898: a study of its origins, development and overthrow*, 1958 [Later edn, 1970].

*The Modern History of the Sudan: from the Funj Sultanate to the present day*, 1961 [Later edn, 1963].

*The Sudan of the Three Niles: the Funj chronicle 910-1288/1504-1871*, translated and edited by P M Holt, 1999.

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## A PRISONER OF THE MAHDI NICOLAS P. FROM SAMOS

**Gerasimos Makris**

Nicolas P's 300 page narrative cannot be seen as a diary in the strict sense of the word. It is more correctly a long account of the Mahdist rule in the Sudan. In this account the Greeks are not always present. In a rather unsystematic way Nicolas paints vignettes of the life of the Greeks in Khartoum before the revolution and of their fate in Omdurman, only to open up his vista suddenly and give us descriptions of the Mahdist armies and of various campaigns against the government.

The document is written by himself quite some time after the 1898 Reconquest in more or less standard Greek of the era, with a rather imaginative orthography and no capital letters after full stops. It certainly makes very difficult reading. All in all, it is a remarkable piece of work which reveals Nicolas P. as a careful observer and author of captivating prose. The rather peculiar style and ordering of information that we come across in several sections indicates that P. may have written his account in the presence of, or with the indirect assistance of others who, through questioning, reminded him of personalities, incidents and other information which somehow should be included in such a work.

Also, if we remember that under British rule the growing Greek ex-patriate community in the Sudan prospered economically as well as socially, and that the Mahdiyya was routinely demonised by the government and its allies, it is uncommon that Nicolas's account is more or less balanced and occasionally fairly positive of the Mahdists and, perhaps surprisingly, of Khalifa Abdullahi himself. Further study would perhaps reveal that this is related to the fact that the Condominium Greeks, around 7,000 souls in the 1950s, knew that they could never attain but the status of 'honorary

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whites' in the eyes of the British overlords. It is not without importance that some of them called themselves 'White Arabs'.

Presently, the original copy of Nicolas P's account is with one of his many grandsons in Athens, and a fairly good copy, which I consulted, with one of his, numerous again, granddaughters. As I am related to the family through marriage, I was allowed to see it and keep extensive notes from it. Some members of the family even suggested I could photocopy it, just to get a working copy from which I could extract all the historical information I wanted to utilise *scientifically*, as it was put. But on no account was I to publish the work itself.

For years I agonised over the question as to how could I present to the public information from a publicly absent diary, from an invisible source! In the end, being a social anthropologist rather than a historian suggested an answer. Anthropologists, I argue, construct rich ethnographies and exquisite theoretical structures based on participant observation and on informants' accounts, most of which are verbal. Nicolas's account I take to be such a source.

It is an intimately related narrative of the past, written straight from the heart and jealously guarded by the author's descendants as an inalienable element of their past in a country which all of them have left behind more than thirty years ago. Photographs of Nicolas's pages could have been included in the present article. Substantially though, their significance, indeed their reality, lies with the importance attributed to the manuscript by its guardians. Like a saint's relics, which we never see, but which we suppose to be buried in the foundation of every Christian Orthodox church, the words of Nicolas offer a glimpse of another world. Not that they disturb, let alone overturn, accepted realities concerning the Mahdiyya, but they do offer evidence of a slightly modified, more benign conception of some of the principal characters from the





point view of a third party beyond the conquerors and the conquered. Not that the Greek Sudanese perspective was ever neutral, but it certainly belonged to people from a poor trading community, often with an Ottoman past, and a healthy scepticism towards the British, the French and the other 'Big Powers' and their political schemes; people who, in the long run, have proved to be culturally and sentimentally surprisingly close to the Sudanese.

Nicolas P. starts with his arrival at the Red Sea port of Sawakin from the Aegean island of Samos and this is followed by his journey to Khartoum in May-June 1881. Nicolas, an eleven years old pupil, had come to the Sudan to strengthen his health. Nicolas was supposed to stay in the country for a short period of time before returning home, but the outbreak of the Mahdist revolution and his long captivity in Omdurman did not allow him to do that. He, his children and grandchildren were destined to stay in the Sudan for a period of one hundred years.

After a description of the journey from Sawakin to Khartoum, Nicolas gives an account of the 193 Greeks who were in the Sudan in 1881, of whom 132 of them were in Khartoum. The five bigger general stores in the capital belonged to them together with a number of smaller emporiums specialising in liquors, tobacco, sweets and grocery. There were also four Greek coffee-shops, a big grocery shop which also sold liquor, five bakeries, and another five shops which worked with local products and for local consumption as it was unprofitable to export their products by camel. Significantly, P. notes that very few Greeks were employees, nearly all of them were in Greek businesses. This was true especially for Greeks who resided in the provinces and managed the trade interests of Greek Khartoumers

### NICOLAS P's ACCOUNT OF EVENTS IN EL OBEID

In the battle for El Obeid, P. writes, that five Greeks played a prominent role. These were Demetris Kakabouras, George

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Kalamatianos, Andreas Pylitsis, Pandelis Demitruilas and Sava Karayiannis. El Obeid fell on Friday 19 January 1883. The population of the city was treated leniently and, apart from the Copts who were organised separately, all the other Christians (i.e. Greeks, Syrians and Italians) who were captured were converted to Islam. Some of the Greeks have already been identified. As for the Italians and Syrians, the former included eleven Catholic priests and nuns, as well as six lay brothers. A Syrian merchant, George Stambuli, had already surrendered himself and his family (wife, three daughters and two boys) to the Mahdists. For that reason, the Mahdi allowed him to retain his property in the town whereas the properties of the other prisoners were confiscated as booty (*ghanima*).

What follows the description of the town's surrender includes without doubt, two of the most evocative scenes of P's whole account. The first (pp. 31-2) concerns the introduction of the Greek prisoners to the Mahdi and the latter's request/order to recant their Christianity and embrace Islam and Mahdism.

Immediately after the surrender, the Mahdi asked to see the Christian prisoners. Firstly, he was presented with the Greeks and Syrians whom he received saying, *Welcome*. He then said to them, *I know that you are men of trade and that you have no responsibility for what has happened. I know also that you are Christians and have no knowledge of the Mohamedan [sic] religion so as to know that the Mahdi was due to appear, in order to believe in me immediately after my appearance. For that reason you have no sin. But now I only ask you to utter the word 'la ilaha illa llah wa Muhammad rasul Allah' in order to become my followers and have a place in paradise alongside the other faithful. And right from the beginning I am telling you that the purpose of Mahdism is to conquer the whole world and to make all Christians and Hebrews Mohammedans. And you are the most happy ones because you become [Mohammedans] before all the others. Come*

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*then, utter what I am saying to you.* And the Mahdi started saying, *la ilaha illa llah wa Muhammad rasul Allah*, but also *Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi Khalifat rasul Allah*.

And then all together the prisoners repeated this. Now the Mahdi wished them well, gave them the *baya* (oath) to the Mahdist regime, and gave them the new names which they would have to use henceforth. He also gave them some money to get Mahdist costumes, and houses in the *deim*. There houses did not cost more than 50-60 pts. because they were made of wood and grass. In the same manner, he ordered the Amir of *beit al-mal* to give each of them a monthly allowance of 15 rials for his subsistence until he found a job.

(Interestingly, the captives were circumcised only later, in 1891-2. The order was given by Khalifa Abdullahi and was executed with the aid of a barber named Hasan Nanni. The younger captives convalesced in about eight days, while the older ones took ten to twelve (p. 255)).

The second scene (pp. 37-9) concerns the next meeting between the (male?) prisoners and the Mahdi where he informed them, first, that according to the Islamic law the nuns should get married, and second, that he preferred them married to the converted prisoners rather than to some of the other Faithful. For that reason, the Mahdi appointed an old sheikh, Faki Abd al-Aziz, to bless their unions and teach them a few things about Islam, i.e. how to wash themselves before the prayers and how to recite one or two lines from the Koran. The prisoners accepted the Mahdi's offer and thanked him profusely. P. writes that they all realised that the Mahdi had come under pressure from his own men who wanted the nuns for themselves. That is why he said that he preferred to give them to the prisoners. Why the Mahdi did that, P. does not say. Perhaps, it was from genuine pity or again from political



expediency, as marrying the nuns to his Amirs might compromise the security of his camp.

As soon as the prisoners were left alone, Abd Allah Kakabouras [Demetris] said to his fellow Greeks that *these feeble creatures who are brides of Lord Jesus Christ had to be protected in any way possible until the advent of freedom* (p. 38). He asked them to think with themselves and decide to marry one if they were sure that they could display the necessary continence. The Greeks, however, suggested that it was the duty of the priests and the Syrians to assume the responsibility; after all they all followed the same dogma (Catholicism). The priests accepted this immediately but pointed out that there were still some nuns left. So Kakabouras turned to the Syrians who admitted that they could not see themselves possessing the necessary continence which would enable them to 'protect' the women. Seeing this the renamed Ahmad Trambas, Adam Kokorembas and Idris Pylitsis came forward and accepted to marry three of the nuns, while Metropolitan Lois, Dean Giuzepe and Fr. Eudoro decided to marry the other three.

When the whole matter was arranged, Faki Abd al-Aziz blessed their unions and announced the event to the Mahdi. The latter told him that he should always treat the prisoners whose hearts were under catechism (*mualifin gulubuhum*) with the utmost politeness and that he did not want to hear of any complaints about him. The way the weddings were arranged was as follows: Kokorembas married Mother Superior Tereza *whom he did not protect until the end*; Trampas married Katerina whom he protected until the Reconquest and, as a result, received a decoration from the Austrian Emperor Francis-Joseph, Pylitsis married Fortunata whom he protected until his death during the Mahdiyya, Eudoro married Contseta whom he did not protect (?both died before 1898?) and Giuzepe married Pitina and Marjeta whom he protected until all three of them were freed in 1893.

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Of the married life of the prisoners P. says almost nothing, except the following anecdote. One day, Khalifa Abdullahi went to the prisoners' quarters to wish them well for their weddings. Unfortunately, the prisoners' female slaves had just prepared native beer (*marisa*), which was strictly forbidden. When they heard the *darawish* approaching the house they got so terrified that they emptied all the beer into the toilet (cesspit). As it was, the strong smell of *marisa* lingered around long enough for the thickening crowd to detect it and raise an outcry demanding punishment. The Khalifa scolded his agitated followers telling them, *Did we come here to offer good wishes and teach the newly converted or to look for marisa?*

P. also records another incident when the Mahdi suggested to the catholic priests that they should accept Islam only nominally in front of his followers saying, *You can have whatever you like in your heart; we are not going to examine it* (p. 35). This shows that when the Mahdi was still alive the regime was lenient and pragmatic towards the Christian captives.

What I also find striking is that the Mahdi did not look upon the Christian prisoners as an undivided group of infidels, but distinguished between the Greeks and the Syrians, on the one hand, and the Italian priests, on the other, while a further distinction was also drawn between Greeks and Syrians. If anything, the Mahdi's label of the Greeks as 'men of trade' with no responsibility for political and social developments summarises the way the Sudanese have always seen the Greek settlers. Naturally, this conception has been warmly embraced by the Greeks themselves although, strictly speaking, it has never corresponded to reality. In what sense, one could ask, were the Greek prisoners mere 'men of trade' with no political associations or sympathies since they were among the defenders of El Obeid from the Mahdist forces? The situation becomes even more complicated when we move on in time and consider the role of great traders in the 1898 Reconquest

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of the Sudan and, later, their relationship with the colonial authorities. Neutrality and a 'clean hands' ideology has always been central to the Greek settlers' self-image, though it is difficult to be reconciled with political developments. But we have run ahead of our narrative and we must now return to the next appearance of the Greeks in P.'s account of the Mahdiyya.

### LIFE IN OMDURMAN

On the whole, P. paints a relatively positive portrait of the Mahdi and his movement, especially when he compares it with the arrogant, tyrannical and hated Turkish rule. On p. 178, Nicolas describes another episode, this time from the reign of the Khalifa. Unfortunately, we cannot date it with any accuracy, except that it comes after the revolt of Khalifa Sharif. As Nicolas writes, until that time the Sudanese *Ansar* showed little respect towards the Egyptian, Turkish, Syrian and European converts. When they wanted to call one of their members, even when they knew the name, they used abusive terms such as *ya gagarawi*, *ghanima* or *wad al-rif*. Especially the last one was considered to be a great insult because it implied cowardice. They also sang an offending song to that effect.

So one day, just after the end of the prayer session in the mosque, the Khalifa stood up in front of the congregation and said: *Brothers, from now on all the Ansar, be they black or white, are brothers to each other. No one is better than the other and words like gagarawi, ghanima or wad al-rif are totally forbidden. Whoever disobeys my order will be severely punished. And whoever does not have in his veins blood from the rif, he is a slave*[(abd)].

Most probably, Nicolas muses, he said that because the Sudanese Arabs come initially from Arabia, which is considered *rif*. From that day, the abusive terms were abandoned and the non-Sudanese *Ansar* were called either 'brothers' or by name.

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It is most probable that the Khalifa did not act this way out of the goodness of his heart. Perhaps, he wanted to minimise sources of tension which could complicate an already restive situation. In all cases, though, Nicolas says nothing about it. He describes the event without allowing us to hypothesise that he had second thoughts or that he felt any sense of disbelief. He apparently read nothing under the surface except what he states in so many words, namely, that the Khalifa 'loved' the captives. Indeed, he comes back to the same theme in the same manner almost 25 pages later in pp. 215-7. This part of the manuscript is particularly revealing and offers a rare glimpse into the relationship between the Khalifa and the Mahdist administration, on the one hand, and the captives, on the other.

Again, in an almost programmed manner, Nicolas starts the passage by emphasising how much the Khalifa loved the Greek, Syrian and Israeli captives, especially the Greeks. In addition, he was well disposed towards the captive Egyptians and Turks. These feelings, Nicolas continues, the Khalifa made known to the other *Ansar* repeatedly. For example, once, after the prayer session was over, the Khalifa declared to the assembly that the captive Egyptians and Turks were far better than some of the indigenous Sudanese. The worse they could do or think was to abandon Omdurman in an effort to return to their own country; but they would never dream of harming the regime. Contrary to this, the local enemies of the Mahdiyya, that is those tribes which had fought against Mahdism, had only one purpose, the annihilation of the Mahdist movement. Was that not a profession of love? In the same context, as if to underline his meaning, Nicolas points out that no one was permitted to stare at the Khalifa when discoursing with him. Everybody's eyes had to be lowered to the ground, everybody's except the eyes of the Greek, Syrian and Israeli captives.

He then describes another similar incident. During the *Eid* celebrations, the Khalifa used to receive the captives in the mosque, near the *mihrab*, where he performed his prayers in front of the assembly. There he allowed them to sit down around him in the presence of the *ulama* and the judges. As soon as the captives entered, the Khalifa used to stand up and greet them first. After the customary exchange of seasonal greetings he started the conversation, addressing himself first to the older ones and then to the rest. On one such occasion George K...kos (?) said something in Greek to another captive and one of the *Amirs* present chided him in a low voice. The Khalifa heard him and said: *Let them talk in their language*. He then turned to the captives and said: *I do know that your heart is clean and you love me*. Then he turned to the assembly, the *Amirs* and the elders, and said: *These people are traders and foreigners. They were not government employees and for this reason I trust and love them*. It was obvious, Nicolas suggests, that he expected the assembly to do the same. And adducing further proof to this, he remarks that when the Khalifa realised that Fr. Isidore could not go down on his knees during prayers, he told him not to worry at all; he could sit in the mosque just like he did in his own house.

But if these small kindnesses of the Khalifa could be related to some sort of political message whose recipients were the masses of the *Ansar*, things went a step further when the captives went to court for all sorts of trading disputes against Sudanese. Even when they were found in error, judges advised their Sudanese opponents to abandon the case as the captives were still young in their new faith and, consequently, prone to make mistakes. And Nicolas concludes the section by saying that, *No captive was ever mistreated during the reign of the Khalifa*. The only wrong the latter did to the captive was that he did not allow them to return to their own lands.

Not that he did not try - or did he? Sometime after the execution of Ibrahim Muhammad Adlan in 21 February 1890 and the November 1891 showdown with Khalifa Muhammad Sharif Karrar and the *Ashraf*, three Europeans made their entry into Omdurman with an escort of heavily armed *Ansar*. One of them, a heavy-built man, was wearing a red fez. To the Greek captives it was not immediately apparent if the three were captives, just like John Karkanis and another Greek from the island of Crete, who had been captured some time ago, or if they were some sort of travellers. The newcomers were presented to the Khalifa in front of a crowd who shouted at them *kufar*, *kufar* (infidels, infidels). The Khalifa received them in front of his house squatting on an angareeb. The Europeans were offered chairs.

Demitri Kakabouras [*Amir Abd Allah Demitri*] and George Kalamatianos [*Jabir Jurgi al-Ansari*] had already rushed to the mosque to see the prisoners before the Khalifa in order to advise them how to answer his questions. It is not entirely clear from the text if they had managed to do so. Most probably not, because as soon as the Greek captives presented themselves to the Khalifa, the three Europeans had already explained themselves to the latter, who, in high spirits, addressed the kneeling captives as following: *You see, my brothers! Two [captives] left us [here he referred to the recent escape of Frs Guiseppe and Paul], but God sent us three.* And in front of the eyes of the startled Greeks he repeatedly asked the three Europeans if they wanted to be sent back to where they had come from. To this, all three protested *la, la, la*, arguing that they had come out of their own free will to serve the Mahdiyya. Still, the Khalifa insisted on his questioning them, proposing to send them back wherever they wanted to go through Massawa, then under the Italians. But again the Europeans declined the offer and, after taking the oath of allegiance (*baya*), they received each a patched *jibba* and the equivalent of five thallers in cash.



As Nicolas argues, the Khalifa's persistence in setting the three newcomers free through Massawa was a clever ploy that would enable him to detect if they were criminals escaping the Turco-Egyptian authorities. If that was the case, the Khalifa was bent on punishing them himself. In a touching way, Nicolas is adamant that the regime would never harbour criminals; *It existed for the good and law-abiding people* (p. 243-4). And let us remember here that Nicolas's account was written years after the 1898 Reconquest.

Be that as it may, the truth about the three Europeans came out later, at least among the Greeks. The three were Greeks from Halfa, habitually unemployed, good-for-nothing individuals who had embarked upon a crazy and ill-conceived plan. The two, Anthony Katsounis from the Greek harbour city of Volos and Kostis Bordo from Macedonia, had been persuaded by the third, Panayotis Dimitriou from the Aegean island of Limnos, to go to Omdurman. As Dimitriou claimed, the Khalifa was an old acquaintance of his from Berber. Unfortunately, for all three, Dimitriou had mixed the religious/political title of the Khalifa with the proper name al-Khalifa which, indeed, belonged to a Berber trader before the Mahdiyya.

The above incident, in conjunction with smaller ones concerning the captives' plight and their hopes for the future which are interspersed throughout the manuscript, suggest that it was not the Khalifa's intention to let the captives go free for a number of reasons. First, although there was no love lost between the Muslimaniyya and the Sudanese *Ansar*, the Mahdi himself had accepted the former as part of the Mahdist movement. Second, the presence of foreigners amongst their midst upheld the pretence, or claim, that the Mahdiyya was a potentially international movement and not one geographically and ethnically confined. Third, the captives' presence allowed the Khalifa to present himself as a considerate ruler who extended his piety and assistance to foreign converts according to the stipulations of the *sharia*. Fourth, in the

future the captives' presence might prove to be an asset in some unspecified manner.

Did he 'love' them, then, as N. claims more than once? Did he act out of magnanimity, Islamic piety, tribal pride or pragmatism, shrewdness, political astuteness? I think all these qualities informed the mind of Khalifa Abdullahi when it came to the captives. We have only to compare his attitude towards the veritable Europeans who had been connected to the previous regime and towards the 'semi-European' Greeks as well as the Syrians, the Jews, even the Italian priests and the Egyptians. Our final vignette from pp. 267-270 corroborates this most elegantly.

One day of 1897, Nicolas writes, the captives were suddenly summoned to the presence of the Khalifa. Next to him sat the *Qadi al-Islam* Ahmad Ali. This was an unusual invitation - what was the significance of the *Qadi's* presence? The captives' hearts were filled with foreboding. After the customary greetings, which were a touch too amicable than anticipated, the Khalifa informed the captives that Dongola had fallen to the Turks. The Khalifa had gathered the captives to advise them not to attempt any communication with the enemy, not even with their own relatives. He was certain that no one had ever tried to contact the government of the infidels, but he wanted them to be extra careful not to be involved in any compromising situation.

Jabir Kalamatianos retorted that they had never ever tried to write letters to their relatives throughout their long years of captivity. But the Khalifa calmly responded: *If I present you at this very moment with such a letter written by one of you, can I then cut off the head of the culprit?* Shaken, the captives remained silent. *Answer me!*, the Khalifa demanded. Finally, Kalamatianos spoke again: *If that is so, this is the work of a madman, of an idiot. And since our master has gathered us in order to offer his advice, let him forgive him. And we will all be more careful from now on.*

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*Quite so*, the Khalifa said, *This is what I said myself - from now on!* And continued, advising the captives not to sign any paper in Arabic. The captives all thanked him profusely and Nicolas points out that the whole affair clearly proved the Khalifa's love towards them.

But the more interesting part comes after this. True, the Khalifa said, he dearly loved the captives because otherwise he would have killed them all since he knew very well that their conduct was not in accordance with the *sharia*. Of course he knew that they were not true Muslims. People of forty, fifty or sixty years of age do not change their faith, but there was some hope for their children. And of course he knew that they were praying without having first performed their ablutions. Yea, they had always clung to their old faith. They were smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol; some of them even committed adultery. But he did not mind all this. He only wanted them not to write letters and to avoid the company of the locals. He wanted them to come to the mosque in order to be seen by their enemies and the ignorant masses.

This was for Nicolas the uttermost proof of the Khalifa's love: his advice would keep them out of harm's way. And they thanked him again and again. And Nicolas comes towards the end of this passage musing that, most probably, the Khalifa was afraid that after Slatin's escape the latter had arranged with some of the captives to inform him of the Mahdists' moves. To this, all captives agreed. It was a time rife with rumours, that a French army was coming through the Congo, that the Sanusi was coming from Tripoli and Zubeir Pasha through Darfur. But the captives prayed for the Dongola expedition in fervent anticipation.

## CONCLUSION

In the end, Nicolas' humanising account of the Khalifa and the Mahdist state tells us more about the way a Greek trader who





elected to stay in the country after the Mahdiyya understood the Sudanese as a people.

A matter of fact situation of people under duress both captives and captors. No hectoring, no big words, little ideology, even less colonial posturing sets this diary apart from those published of the same period by other European captives. Thinking back, Nicolas seems to be astonished that they fared relatively well during their long years of captivity and that they came out of the whole affair alive. It was a difficult experience they could do without and, of course, he rejoiced of their liberty and the toppling of the regime. But, throughout his long account, except in those parts where he describes the horrors of besieged Khartoum and a number of other instances, he let us sense that a rough kind of justice prevailed in Omdurman under the reign of Khalifa Abdullahi.



# THE BRITISH RIVER EMPIRE AND THE UNKNOWN STORY OF THE ANGLO-EGYPTIAN OCCUPATION OF THE SUDAN

*A historiographical introduction: An imperialism without impetus*

Terje Tvedt

Why did the Anglo-Egyptian re-occupation of the Sudan take place? The answer to this question has direct relevance for narratives and theories about imperialism in general and the partition of Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in particular. It will also influence our understanding of some of the main issues in the history of modern Sudan and the relationship between Egypt and the Sudan. The reconstruction of the British-Egyptian Nile discourse in the 1890s and of the motives behind and the visions embedded in the planned waterworks on the Nile in the Sudan presented in this article, puts forward an explanation that contradicts dominant interpretations of the partition of Africa and British policies in the Nile valley. It is based on a reading of hitherto unused reports and letters and of re-interpretations of the more conventional sources. It also differs from the mainstream diplomatic history that has dominated this research field, in the way it emphasises and integrates analytically geographical factors and hydrological characteristics of the Nile and how these impacted the room for action and the thinking of the most central British decision makers.

There are a great number of books and articles written on the partition of Africa and the Sudan question (Tvedt, 2004). The most influential study has been *Africa and the Victorians* by Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher (1981). Its great and lasting impact has to a large extent been due to what was a forceful proposition of a broad explanation of late-Victorian British expansion in Africa, regarded at the same time as a relevant contribution to the general theory of imperialism. A central

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element and building stone in this theory was their interpretation of what they described as the British *way to Fashoda* in the late 1890s (Robinson & Gallagher 1981: 475),

The reconstruction of British motives and politics presented in this article explicitly and systematically opposes the analysis in *Africa and the Victorians*. Therefore, it is first necessary to summarize how Robinson and Gallagher explained British policies and Nile strategy: the overriding motive was *Security of the Empire*; to protect and control the major lifeline, the Suez Canal, to the strategic and economic lynch-pin of the Empire, India. What so to say compelled the British to occupy the regions south of Egypt was the fear that other European powers might take control over the Upper Nile as a lever to shove the British away from Suez. The occupation of the Sudan was thus seen as a pre-emptive measure by and large forced upon an unwilling and defensive British leadership in London and Cairo by the expansionist policies of other European states in the valley. According to this interpretation, the importance of Sudan in British imperial strategy was fundamentally shaped by its conceived role as a buffer state *vis-à-vis* other European powers in the defence of British positions in Egypt. Robinson and Gallagher therefore likened the Sudan with the historical prototype of a buffer state, and called it *another Afghanistan* (Robinson & Gallagher, 1981: 475). The existence of an Islamic and anti-British Mahdist State in the Sudan from 1884 to 1898 did not cause any serious problems for the British in Egypt. On the contrary, as long as the country lay in the hands of the Mahdists, the British were complacent. The relationship between Britain and the Mahdists was a kind of collaboration by default. The reason was that, although the Mahdist state was anti-British, "*the Dervishes who held the Sudan could not cut off the flow of the river ..... for they were no engineers*" (Robinson & Gallagher, 1981: 284). Formal empire became a necessity because of the weakening of the Mahdist regime, because that again could strengthen the hand of other European powers. Consequently, if this buffer state, i.e. the Mahdist Sudan, had not weakened, and had it not been for the strategic dangers caused by the encroaching European

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powers, the Sudan could have maintained its sovereignty. Robinson and Gallagher's thesis can therefore be reformulated:

*Had there been no European rivalry on the Upper Nile, the British fear would not have been aroused, and the occupation of the Sudan would most likely not have happened.*

An important premise for this interpretation is its assessment of the intrinsic, economic value of the Upper Nile and especially the Southern Sudan. According to this theory there was nothing there to utilize for the benefit of the Empire. The British policy-makers prior to the occupation did not regard the region as valuable for economic enterprise, according to Robinson and Gallagher (1953:15). As in the rest of Tropical Africa, they were merely scraping the 'bottom of the barrel', but partly based on misconceptions and myths they were still making ready for war with France for the "*mastery of these 'deserts'*" (Robinson & Gallagher, 1981: 25). The British extended their reign, but without expansionist motives. The British came to fight in the Southern Sudan, but not for exploiting the resources of the region. What took place therefore, according to Robinson & Gallagher, was a very typical example of what was called *an imperialism without impetus*. This explanation has by and large, although in modified versions, been supported by later historians (Note 1).

## **AN IMPERIALISM WITH A STRONG IMPETUS: RIVER EMPIRE AND WATER IMPERIALISM**

In the very voluminous literature on the partition of Africa and the Nile quest, European rivalry has been interpreted as a necessary and sufficient precondition for British expansion in the Nile Valley. This article will show that although this factor should not be discarded altogether, it cannot alone explain the shifts in British Sudan policy in the 1880s and 1890s, or make intelligible all the sources that clearly reveal the plans for British hydro-imperialism in the Nile valley.

The argument in this article is that the character and potentials of

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crisis in Egypt in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was what shaped the destiny of the Sudan and the rest of the Upper Nile (Note 2). Whereas Robinson and Gallagher claimed that it was the *frontiers of fear* on the move which motivated the British march upstream, the interpretation here focuses on another, but rational impetus; the *limits of irrigation water* in Egypt on the one hand and the abundance of Nile waters waiting to be controlled upstream.

The dominant literature has underlined that the British perception of the Southern Sudan was that of being a worthless region, metaphorically described as the *bottom of the barrel*. This article will instead argue that the Southern Sudan, by the British strategists, was regarded as the very opposite – a *barrel filled with water*. The region possessed a lot of unused water which, to the British-controlled irrigation economy in Egypt, was considered and actually described as more valuable than gold. To understand the Sudan as a *buffer state* between European rivals is therefore for this reason misleading. The fact was that the Sudan was the very key to the planned development of Egypt and its cotton industry, due to its physical location in the Nile basin.

This analysis defies therefore also the general and dominant description of the British policy makers at the time as being influenced by that *defensive psychology*, which kept watch over northern India and had been *transformed* into Africa (Robinson & Gallagher, 1981: 288). On the contrary, this article shows that their plans for controlling the waters of the longest and most famous river in the world with the most modern technology available at the time, or *taking the Nile in hand* as they described the undertaking themselves, were grounded in a feeling of imperial strength and modernizing confidence. Instead of a theory that *suggests the kind of defensive imperialism that extends beyond the areas of expanding economy but acts for their strategic protection* (Robinson & Gallagher, 1981: 474-5), this analysis suggests that the British Nile policy was a kind of promethean hydro-political river imperialism, and an imperialism that extended beyond the areas of expanding economy but acted for Egypt's continued agricultural and economic development.

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The River Nile and its physical characteristics made upriver expansion a rational policy and the number of plans formulated for Nile development; the Annual Reports written by Her Majesty's Agent in Egypt, Lord Cromer; letters and minutes of discussions between Cromer and London; and the private papers of the leading British actors in the Nile valley clearly show that the Sudan campaign was no occupation by default or a step in the dark. Nile hydrology and Nile valley geology made on the contrary the British occupation of the Upper Nile an example of a far-sighted imperial policy. It was driven by a complex mixture of economic and political considerations, basically influenced by the structuring capabilities of the Nile's geographical, physical and hydrological characteristics.

## THE SUEZ CANAL AND NILE WATER CONTROL

When the British government finally decided to take control over Egypt in 1882, they had many reasons. A memo by the headquarters of the Egyptian Army, written in 1892, summarized the country's strategic importance: *"It is indisputable that whatever Power is in military occupation of Egypt can close the Canal at will to all undesirable transport"*. In the early 1890s the British government in London and Lord Cromer and his administration in Egypt had already, for some years, understood the consequences of being the ruler of a hydraulic society whose development always had been and still was dependent on the Nile waters. All rulers of Egypt have experienced that the provision of enough water for the crops has been fundamental in achieving political stability and economic prosperity. The British rulers realized that their position at Suez hinged on the development of the Nile. Egypt had also become more and more important as a cotton producer for the Lancashire textile industry, partly because of the repercussions of the American Civil War, and partly because of the good cotton produced in the land of the Nile. The then Egyptian prime minister Nubar Pasha summarized the situation in a famous one-liner: *"The Egyptian question is the irrigation question"* (Willcocks, 1936: 67). Words and deeds show that the British concurred. Britain very soon realized that to become the

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virtual ruler of a downstream state on one of the longest rivers in the world required focus on the Nile waters and how to use it.

## THE NILE QUESTION IN THE FIRST DECADES OF BRITISH RULE

When the British administration under Lord Cromer (1883-1907), the 'puppet-master' of Egyptian politics, took firm control, the central focus in the development of the economy became water development. This policy should not simply be regarded as one solely of their own making, but as a priority that also was forced upon them, since the demand for more summer water was heard from all corners of the Egyptian society and from influential pressure groups in Britain. In Egypt the most powerful foreign trade agencies dealt in cotton (Tignor, 1966: 67). The big landowners owned about two-thirds of the cotton harvest. The population doubled during a few decades and reached almost ten million in 1897, and the growing number of poor peasants put pressure on the government for more reliable water supplies. In England, the cotton industry in Lancashire aimed for a number of reasons at reducing their dependency on American cotton. Imports of cheaper but very good cotton from Egypt became more and more important. In addition, British banks had a great and growing interest in a thriving Egyptian economy. In 1882 Egypt's foreign debt had increased to 100 million pounds, and the annual debt servicing amounted to 5 million pound (Crouchley, 1938: 145), of which a great part went to Britain. Egypt's ability to pay back the loans was to a large extent depended on cotton exports and the value of the agricultural land. A telling contemporary reflection of this 'Nile water awareness' in Britain was the fact that *The Times* reported regularly on the water discharges of the Nile! Thus the general political and economic development and the changes in the world trade patterns of cotton led to mounting pressure on the British rulers in Cairo to provide more water to the fertile lands along the banks of the Nile.

The British had barely planted their flag on the shores of the Nile before they were met by demands of implementing large hydraulic enterprises

(Scott-Moncrieff, 1895). With a growing water demand on the Nile

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hand, and a river far from being harnessed on the other, any administration in Egypt in the late 19th century would have been obliged to make increased water control a top-priority:

*How to increase the Nile yield in the 'timely season', that is, during the summer season, when cotton was grown and the natural Nile discharge at its lowest? How to protect the agricultural lands against devastating floods? How to dam the excess water in September, October and November for utilization in the season of scarcity? How to construct dams which could reduce the differences in the yearly discharge fluctuations?*

To narrow the gap between accessibility and demand for water was a permanent worry to the British. The complexities of this task increased as perennial irrigation spread and demonstrated its economic potentials. The British faced rising expectations, and their legitimacy as rulers of an irrigation society required that they succeeded in narrowing the growing gap between water demand and supply.

Naturally, the British politicians were looking to the water engineers as the trouble-shooters. At first, they concentrated on what could be done with the river in Egypt by improving existing irrigation facilities and building some new water controlling structures within the borders of Egypt.

## **NILE WORKS IN EGYPT**

Egyptian agriculture had, because of a revolution in irrigation methods, undergone important transformations in the decades prior to the British invasion in 1882. The old system of flood-irrigation had been replaced by all-year irrigation. Perennial irrigation on a larger scale had started under Mohammed Ali. He developed an agricultural strategy based on an assessment of Egypt as having the perfect climate, fertile soil and an abundance of people; the problem was water. In 1820 cotton production and exports were negligible, whereas after the delta barrages had been built and new canals dug, cotton made up about 80 per cent of Egypt's total exports from 1860s onward. These water works fell into disrepair

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in the following decades and during the nationalist rebellion that the British crushed, the nationalists destroyed canals and canal beds. After the occupation, and under Cromer's watchful eyes, the priority first became repair and improvement of the existing system (Willcocks & Craig, 1913).

What was regarded by the Egyptian elite and the British strategists as the saviour of the Egyptian economy, the cotton plant, required even and ample watering in spring and summer when the Nile's natural water level was at its lowest. A series of important though smaller projects were completed, like remodelling of the Upper Egypt basin, cleaning and digging out deposited silt in the canals and starting operations at the Mex Pumping Station. Altogether these works and improved organization of the irrigation sector and a better system of drainage and crop rotation contributed to the doubling of the cotton production from 1888 to 1892 (Crouchley 1938: 148). In 1891 the British repaired and made functional the Delta-barrage system just north of Cairo. It extended the area over which cotton could be grown and it reduced the amount of labour required to put a given amount of water onto the fields. Perennial irrigation was now possible over the entire cultivated area of the Delta. It proved a great material advantage to Egypt and it also led to the abolition of the *corvee*. As long as this work within the borders of Egypt was the priority of the water planners, and the government at the same time had grave financial difficulties, there was neither capacity nor need to look upstream of Egypt for a more efficient way of using the Nile waters.

In the early 1890s, however, the upper limit for expansion within the existing system had been reached. The yearly and seasonal discharge fluctuations demonstrated that the existing water control system, despite the great efforts put into it, did not even always satisfy actual demand with grave economic consequences for the cotton industry. In 1888, for instance, about 250 000 acres in Upper Egypt received no irrigation water (Willcocks 1894: 5). In other years the seasonal autumn flood caused great damage to the harvest and the economy in general, since

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the flood control system was not very different from what it had been for centuries.

The combination of the great potentials of the irrigation economy and the growing water gap asked for more revolutionary developments in water control. In the early 1890s this was an opinion shared by most people, especially the most influential water planners and politicians. J.C.P. Ross, former Inspector-General of the Egyptian Irrigation Service, wrote in 1893: *"We have now arrived at a stage in the summer irrigation of Egypt where the available natural supply has been completely exhausted, and there still remains more land to grow cotton"*. Both the years 1889 and 1890 had experienced exceptionally bad summer supply due to low natural river discharges, immediately causing great falls in profits and increased danger of political unrest. Water works of an altogether new type and technology were required, and considered. It became increasingly evident that simple adaptations to the seasonal fluctuations of the Nile had become insufficient, and that the fluctuations had to be controlled and evened out. Scott-Moncrieff, the Under-Secretary, decided that a detailed study of reservoir sites should be a top priority. In 1894, the *Report on Perennial Irrigation and Flood Protection of Egypt* was published by the Government, after having been secretly circulated in 1893. It estimated the future annual need for summer water at 3,610,000 m<sup>3</sup>. It asserted that if irrigation were introduced in Upper Egypt, where agriculture still depended on the basin system, and improved in Lower Egypt, the annual income would rise from 32,315,000 Egyptian pounds to 38,540,000 pounds. The overshadowing political and administrative questions therefore became:

*How to secure over 3.5 billion m<sup>3</sup> of irrigation water in the summer season, creating an estimated net gain of 6,225,000 pounds to the country per year? And how to ensure the country against floods?*

The most concrete suggestion of the 1894 report was to build that reservoir which had been discussed by the government for many years, at Aswan in Upper Egypt. This reservoir was, however, seen as a temporary solution only, because the planned capacity satisfied only

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half of Egypt's estimated needs. The Council of Ministers discussed, for example, in a meeting the 3rd June 1894, possible dam-sites in the Sudan (Garstin 1894). Cromer wrote the same year: The dam within Egypt's borders may *"at some future time,..... perhaps be supplemented by another dam south of Wady Halfa"* (Cromer to Kimberley 1894). And Garstin underlined in his annual report (1894) that the *"construction of a second...[dam]... to the south will be merely a question of time"*. In the 1894 report he wrote that *"we may confidently predict"* that the Egyptian dam will be *"only one of a chain which will eventually extend from the First Cataract to the junction of the White and Blue Niles"*. Willcocks stated that the *"infinitely better and more reliable"* flood protection for Egypt was to *"control the Nile before it enters Egypt"*.

Moreover, the planned storage capacity of the Egyptian Aswan dam, 2,550,000,000m<sup>3</sup> of water, was limited by technical and ecological constraints. Additionally, unexpected political problems arose. In autumn 1894, just after the new report and plan was published, archaeological milieus in France and Great Britain united in demanding a lower water level than planned in order to save the temple at Philæ from inundation (Scott-Moncrieff, 1895: 417). This opposition was so strong that it forced the government in Cairo to yield and to amend its 1894-plan. The capacity was therefore, according to Garstin, reduced by more than fifty per cent, to 1,065,000,000 m<sup>3</sup>. The reservoir could therefore meet only 25 per cent of Egypt's future needs.

According to Garstin the reduction implied that 2,610 billion m<sup>3</sup> had to be supplied from elsewhere (Garstin 1901). This 'elsewhere' could not be along the Nile in Egypt, first and foremost because of the silt which the Blue Nile carried with it from Ethiopia. This also excluded *"any hope of constructing solid dams of the ordinary type in the valley of the Nile downstream of the Atbara junction"* (Willcocks 1894: 12). The problem, it was thought, could only be solved upstream, and it made the question of upstream control a much more pressing issue.

## PLANS FOR THE UPPER NILE

Moreover, even a more modest dam at Aswan within the borders of Egypt, could not be rationally operated without better and more exact knowledge of the Nile upstream. Without information on the river-fluctuations before they reached the reservoir, it would be virtually impossible to make the necessary estimations required for its management. In 1894, Willcocks showed that the time the waters takes between Khartoum and Aswan are only 10 days in flood and between Aswan and Cairo only five days. Obviously, proper management of the reservoir therefore required a number of gauging stations along the Nile and its tributaries in the Sudan, as well as the re-establishment of a working nilometer in Khartoum at the junction of the Blue and White Niles. Already in 1881, before the era of reservoirs, Major Mason-Bey had shown the necessity for establishing more nilometers on both the main Nile and its tributaries in the Sudan for planning purposes in Egypt (Mason-Bey 1881). In May 1893 the Société Khédivale de Géographie discussed in detail information on water discharges collected by the gauging-stations in Sudan, established on the order of Ismail, from the time when the Sudan was not closed. The need for more hydrological information was felt so pressing that immediately after the British annexation of the Lake Victoria area in 1894, Cairo asked the government there, through the 'English Foreign Office' in London, to erect and read a gauge on Lake Victoria. Until 1885, Egypt had daily received information by telegraph from the nilometer at Khartoum, and in 1875 a station was erected close to the village of Dakla in order to measure the Atbara (Chelu 1891). The 'fall of Gordon' was dramatic and caught the attention of the day (and of historians later on), but the loss of the Nilometer at Khartoum represented a more direct threat to Egypt, because it jeopardized the optimal management of the irrigation system. But what the water planners in Cairo considered a great loss already in 1885 had far greater consequences in the mid-1890s because of the growing water gap, the vulnerability of the new crop rotation system and because of the more exact hydrological information required for the planned big reservoirs. Willcocks wrote in 1893: "*As Egypt possesses no barometric, thermometric, or rain gauge stations in the valley of the Nile, we are always ignorant of the coming flood*".

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The British hydrologists and engineers in the 1890s did not have any in-depth knowledge of the Nile's upper reaches. Those 'in charge' of the life artery of Egypt, had no first hand knowledge of the river in the Sudan. Ross (1893) wrote that, "*unfortunately the Dervishes prevent any scientific examination*" of the Nile upstream. Scott Moncrieff (1895) complained, while speaking in Britain in 1895, that he, like his audience, had to go to, the works of Speke, Baker, Stanley and our other great explorers for information regarding anything higher up than Philæ, and said that, "*if a foreigner were to lecture to his countrymen about the river Thames, and were to begin by informing them that he had never been above Greenwich, he might be looked upon as an imposter*". William Garstin (1909) described these years when it came to hydrological studies, as if a "*thick veil had settled down on the Upper Nile*".

Several years before the Sudan Campaign started, Scott-Moncrieff, Ross, Willcocks and Garstin were discussing the necessity of controlling the Nile upstream. A central idea in the government report of 1894 was that the hydrological features of the Nile and the future increase in summer water demand, would require the regulation of the Nile south of the Egyptian borders, at Lake Albert and Lake Victoria. Willcocks (1894) wrote that what, "*the Italian Lakes are to the plains of Lombardy, Lake Albert is to the land of Egypt*". By damming the lakes, a constant and plentiful supply of water to the Nile valley during the summer months could be ensured. There alone, he wrote, "*we deal with quantities of water which approach*" the demand. The previous year Ross had speculated along similar lines. He envisaged that by raising the water level of Lake Victoria by only one metre one would get a water flow in the Nile which was "*30 times more than wanted*". These plans would be impossible to implement or even be properly planned as long as the Sudan was still under the rule of the Mahdists. Moreover, no administration in Cairo would ever consider regulating Lake Victoria, a lake roughly the size of Scotland, without improving the White Nile's water transport capacity in Southern Sudan.

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The 1894 report pointed out that the White Nile was the tributary contributing most to the total water flow of the Nile during the summer season when cotton was grown. The waters of the White Nile was described 'as valuable as gold'. Garstin and Willcocks knew that *sudd* was blocking the river, and that the White Nile lost huge amounts of its waters on its way through the swamps in Southern Sudan. They knew very well that it would be impossible to improve the knowledge of the Nile unless the river was cleared of *sudd*. The British realized, of course, that a hostile Mahdist regime would arrest any plan for carrying out a task of such dimensions. (In fact in 1899 and 1900 the British sent out an expedition numbering 2,000 people who spent half a year clearing the river) (Note 3). Although their knowledge was deficient according to the standards of present-day hydrological science, both the 1894 report, Garstin's annual reports and the discussions in the Khédivial Society show that they regarded their knowledge to be sufficient to speculate and plan for waterworks upstream.

To develop plans for optimal usage of the Nile waters inspired thoughts about the Nile as one river basin that should be under one authority. The discovery of the sources of the Nile had brought fame to their countrymen Speke, Grant and Baker. Now Garstin, Scott-Moncrieff and Willcocks could 'take the river in hand'. Willcocks likened directly their plans for the Nile as a worthy follow-up of these British discoveries. Garstin later wrote that if they succeeded in taming the Nile, such an accomplishment could be compared with the building of the pyramids (Garstin 1904: 166). What was conceived as the main obstacle, and an obstacle which should and could be overcome, was neither technological nor economic constraints, but the fact that important sections of the Nile River were outside their domain. In 1895 Scott-Moncrieff (1895: 418) summed up the 'Nile vision' of the water planners when he said:

*"Is it not evident, then, that the Nile from the Victoria Nyanza to the Mediterranean should be under one rule?"*

## BRITISH NILE STRATEGY

As an echo of Scott-Moncrieff, Cromer wrote in *Modern Egypt* (1908, Vol 2: 110) that a central motive behind the occupation of the Sudan

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was “the effective control of the waters of the Nile from the Equatorial Lakes to the sea”. The British very soon realized that in order to control Suez, to maintain stability there and to bring some advantages back to Britain, the task of controlling and utilizing the Nile River became a top priority. The book otherwise confirms that he, by the word ‘control’, not only understood the absence of European rivals from the shores of the Nile, but efficient harnessing of its waters by the British in Cairo. Full of confidence he wrote (Vol 2: 461):

*“When, eventually, the waters of the Nile, from the Lakes to the sea, are brought fully under control, it will be possible to boast that Man, in this case the Englishman, has turned the gifts of Nature to the best possible advantage.”*

Cromer and the government in London regarded irrigation to be of fundamental importance to Egypt's development and therefore to London's position at the Suez Canal. Cromer's administration gave much weight to the planning and development of the irrigation sector from day one. Experienced water planners were brought from India in 1883, the same year Cromer took up service in Egypt. Their department was given an exceptional degree of autonomy and was deliberately shielded from the intervention by other European interests in Cairo, and staffed with a number of British experts (at least 18). Cromer later wrote that the cost of the necessary outlay on water planners contributed probably more than any one cause to the comparative prosperity of Egypt. It ensured no less than the solvency of the Egyptian Treasury. According to Cromer irrigation works were not only a permanent priority, but also a policy which continuously proved its success. From 1890 every Annual Report to the government in London enclosed a separate Memorandum on the irrigation activities. Everybody seemed to agree:

*“The best thing the Financial Ministry can do is to place as much money as it can afford at their disposal, [British water planners] confident that whatever is thus spent will bring in a splendid return” (Milner 1892: 310).*

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The character of Egypt's ecosystem and the state of the irrigation sector gave the water engineers a pivotal role, especially in the 1890's. The first decades of British rule on the Nile were by later irrigation advisors termed the 'Cromer-Garstin regime', a regime where the most powerful politician and the most powerful water planner developed a consistent and overall strategy and a plan for Britain as a River Empire in the Nile basin. Summing up British rule from 1882 to 1907 Cromer put hydraulic engineers on equal footing with the army for internal political reasons; they created the situation that made Egypt and Suez safe for the British. While the soldiers held the Egyptians down by force, the water planners conquered their minds, or as his financial adviser put it in 1892, the British engineer secured the support of Egyptian public opinion. They "*justified Western methods to Eastern minds*", Cromer wrote (Cromer 1908 Vol 2: 465). This was not ideas formed in hindsight. Already in 1886 he claimed that increased water supplies would entail that "*the good results of European administration can readily be brought home to the natives*" (Zetland 1932: 171). Two years later he wrote that British success in Egypt depended on development of the irrigation structure and increased access to summer water.

On 21 October 1891 Cromer wrote a long letter to Salisbury on the reservoir question. He said that all competent authorities agreed that something had to be done, but not on what to be done. He underlined that there were four different options; the reservoir might be constructed, "*either at Wadi Halfa, or at Kalabalah, or at Assuan, or at Silsileh, or a reservoir might be made in the Wady Raian*". He said that the subject was one of 'utmost importance', because, as Cromer put it; "*the prosperity of Egypt depends wholly on the Nile*". In November 1891 Cromer again informed Salisbury about the importance of the storage question in Egyptian public opinion. In 1893 he telegraphed Rosebury, supporting a circular which had been addressed to the Powers by the Government of His Majesty the Khedive, requesting that the economies "*effected by the conversion of the Debt should be applied to the constructing of reservoirs in Upper Egypt*". He supported the 1894 report and he not only actively backed the plan for the Aswan Dam but

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he was very active in securing money and political backing for its implementation.

Gradually the strategists were convinced that in order to control Egypt and the Suez Canal by creating political stability and to develop the cotton crop at the same time, it was necessary to take control over the rest of the Nile basin. The question therefore came to be not so much if they were to occupy the headwaters of the White Nile or the Sudan, but when they were to do it. As long as it was not clear whether they were to stay in Egypt and as long as Egypt had enough water for their summer cultivation and had no money to finance both reservoirs and wars, Cromer and the London government rejected more adventurous proposals to march southward. Cromer informed London that he disagreed strongly with those who in the 1880s wanted to occupy the Sudan. In 1884 he asked whether the English Government intended to establish a settled form of government at Khartoum or not and he answered himself in the negative. If the aim was slavery to be absolutely abolished in the Sudan, as somebody argued should be the aim, he said that, "*you must send an English army to occupy the country*". He discussed as one possibility the handing over of the Sudan to the Italians, but he was unsure, whether the Italians would be willing and able to undertake the task. Later in 1886 he wrote to London, saying that all the authorities in Cairo, except himself, were in favour of an advance to Dongola, but that he himself was opposed to making any advance at all, while the Egyptian authorities favoured the idea because they regarded it as a first step towards the reconquest of the Sudan.

Just before 1890 there is clear evidence that Cromer had changed his mind about occupation upstream. Now, he thought that occupation was necessary - one day - but at the same time he argued in favour of playing safe and act when time was right. In 1890 the British discussed the occupation of the Sudan. There was general agreement on the assessment that Dongola, from a purely military point of view, could only be of use to us as a stepping stone, as an advanced base for an advance upon Berber or Khartoum.

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Cromer wrote Salisbury a long letter on the issue, arguing (not entirely truthfully) that he had *"always been fully aware of the desirability of bringing the Soudan back to Egypt"*. He even drafted, but deleted the following sentence in the final letter: *"I have, therefore, always looked forward"* to the occupation of the Sudan. What Cromer awaited was the fulfilment of the 'essential conditions'. He wrote: *"The great mistake made by Ismail Pasha was that before he had learnt to administer efficiently the Delta of the Nile, he endeavoured to extent Egyptian territory to the centre of Africa"*. His experience should be a warning, which had to be told to and taught to the Egyptians.

Cromer's and London's plan was not easy to accomplish. For economic and political reasons they wanted Egyptian troops to do most of the fighting. Their aim was that the Egyptian Treasury should pay the cost of the conquest, and it required political competence to achieve this aim, because there was taken out a law-suit against the Egyptian government in regard to the appropriation of money from the general reserve fund to cover the expenses of the Dongola expedition. The government had demanded the withdrawal of £E 500,000 from this general reserve fund. The Commission of the Caisse of the Debt had allowed the withdrawal by majority vote. In July 1898 Cromer attended a Cabinet meeting to discuss the Nile valley policy. Salisbury wrote to the Queen about this meeting: *"The other question [of the Cabinet meeting] was our dealing with the Nile Valley, if, and when, we had taken Khartoum. For this question Lord Cromer attended the Cabinet and gave us the benefits of his views... He thought that the Egyptian and British flag should fly side by side: that the gunboats with Gen. Kitchener and a small force should go up the Nile as far as Fashoda (600 miles): and as much farther as was practicable: and that any other flag in that valley should be moved"* (Salisbury to Queen Victoria 25.7.1898). Since Britain's position and military advance depended upon Egyptian support, the sudden appearance of the French at Fashoda created a golden opportunity: the British emerged as a guardian of Egyptian interests vis-à-vis French imperialism and French opposition to the re-conquest.

*When the French flag went down, Kitchener therefore cleverly marked*

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not only the British but also the Egyptian flag on the shores of the Upper Nile.

The way Cromer connected the water planners to the military campaign clearly shows his concerns. Some months before the British occupied the Nile upstream in 1898 and he had sent his most senior water planners in their wake all the way up to Lake Victoria and Lake Tana, Cromer wrote to Prime Minister Salisbury: "*There can be no doubt that the most crying want of the country at present is an increase in the water supply*" (Cromer to Salisbury 27.2.1898). No sooner had the British moved into the Sudan than he sent - in his own view - his most important official in Egypt on an expedition up the Nile. Already in April 1897, Garstin had submitted his report on the Nile cataracts. In the wake of Kitchener's flotilla, Garstin studied the White Nile in 1899, the White Nile, Bahr al-Jebel, Bahr al-Zeraf and Bahr al-Ghazal in 1901, and again, in 1904. In 1903 he was in Uganda, along the Semliki River, at Lake Albert and again at Bahr al-Jebel (Gleichen Vol 1: 280). When Garstin in 1899 proposed to remove the *sudd* in the Bahr al-Jebel which blocked the river's flow, he received immediate financial support from Cromer. Cromer's argument was, "*The question of increasing the summer supply of the Nile is, however, of such a vital interest to Egypt, that the present expenditure is fully justified*" (Cromer 1899)..

In the introduction to Garstin's report from 1904, Cromer gave priority to the plans on the Upper Nile. Cromer suggested that 5.5 million pounds should be allocated for the proposed regulation works in the swamps. The cost of the recommended investments is most clearly illustrated when compared with the total cost of the Sudan campaigns from 1896 to 1898, (£2,345,345), and compared with the total revenues of the Sudan-budget in the years 1899-1903, (£1,132,000). Cromer did not, of course, intend to use this money, a sum which surpassed any investment the British had previously made in the Nile Valley, in a 'bottom of the barrel'.

This article has argued that the European rivalry in the upper Nile valley in the 1890s impacted British imperial tactics, but that it was not the

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fear of the French or of the Germans that primarily motivated British expansion upstream. London's and Cromer's grasp of the Nile and the importance of the irrigation question, made them fully aware of the fact that if they put their foot upstream they would also be able to control Egypt and secure their position at Suez, and that improved Nile control upstream was necessary in order to give Egypt the summer water that the cotton economy and the political stability at Suez required.

## THE FUTURE OF THE SUDAN AS A NILE STATE

The British developed during the 1890s a strategy and plans for establishing a River Empire on the Nile. The so-called Anglo-Egyptian occupation was by and large supported by the Egyptian elite and paid for by the Egyptian treasury, reflecting the predominant view in Egypt that the Nile was an Egyptian river. London's strategy, however, was on the one hand to develop the Nile so as to bolster the cotton production and the economy in Egypt, but at the same time to develop a Sudan independent from Egypt by using Nile waters also in the Sudan. From the very beginning the British envisioned a drastic increase in the area of land under irrigation in the north of the Sudan, using the flood waters of the Blue Nile (especially on the Gezira plains). This was in line with the interests of the cotton lobby in England, but this water policy also at the same time built up a new Sudanese elite thriving on irrigation and Nile utilization, thus time and again creating a conflict of interest with Egyptian water demands. When the British later supported Sudan's initial struggle for autonomous action (under British rule) and then for independence (under British influence) vis-à-vis their co-domini, Egypt, London implemented their basic strategy in the decades they ruled the Nile basin: "*The power that holds the Sudan holds Egypt at its mercy, and through Egypt can dominate the Suez Canal*" (Quoted by Tvedt 2004: 87).

## Notes

- 1 There is a voluminous literature. Some examples might be quoted: Sanderson, G N (1965) *England, Europe and the Upper Nile*, Edinburgh; Holt, P M (1967) *A Modern History of the Sudan: from the Funj Sultanate to the present day*, London; Collins, R O (1968) *King Leopold, England and the Upper Nile*.

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New Haven; Collins, R O (1996), *Waters of the Nile: hydropolitics and the Jonglei Canal*, Princeton.

2 The interpretation of the Sudan presented in this article is put in much wider context in, Tvedt, T (2006) *The River Nile in the Age of the British. Political ecology and the Quest for Economic Power*, Cairo: American University Press.

3 For a detailed description of the composition and role of the *sudd*, see Rzooska, J (ed) (1976) *The Nile: Biology of an Ancient River*, The Hague: Junk.

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## **SUDAN REVISITED: JANUARY 2006**

### **A PERSONAL VIEW**

**Philip Bowcock**

The Sudan became an independent Republic on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1956. Because of the complications caused by Condominium status there was none of the ceremonial attending the moment of independence which was later arranged for former British colonies and protectorates, including the attendance of a member of the royal family. Most British officials had already left. It seemed more like a divorce than a coming of age. There was already a mutiny in Equatoria and fifty years of tribulation followed.

It was particularly welcome therefore to British servants of the Sudan under the Condominium to receive an invitation to revisit the country on the fiftieth anniversary of independence. The invitation came from the Sudanese Association for Archiving Knowledge, which has much wider cultural objectives than its reference to archives would suggest. The chairman is Sayyid Ibrahim Moneim Mansur, a former Minister of Finance and Economic Planning and currently the chairman of the Fiscal and Financial Allocation Commission set up under section 198 of the Interim Constitution following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, now universally referred to as the C.P.A. His son, Mohammed, was to be a most beguiling host and guide throughout our visit.

The invitation generously extended to sons and daughters, since most pensioners would by now be over eighty. In the end only one genuine pensioner was able to go, Sir Donald Hawley, who was the leader of what the Sudanese called the "delegation". There were, however, four other former Sudan Political Service members who were appointed after recruitment on pensionable terms ceased. (British officials were more percipient as to what the future might hold than Martin Daly gives them credit for in his fascinating

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book, produced with Jane Hogan, Keeper of the Sudan Archive in Durham, *Images of Empire, Photographic Sources for the British in the Sudan*, Brill 2005). K.D.D. (Bill) Henderson, one of the founders of the Archive and Glencairn Balfour Paul, who had just published his entertaining memoirs, *Bagpipes in Babylon*, were represented by descendants. Among others of our band of twenty were Professor Peter Woodward, Peter Evrington, who had taught in secondary schools after independence, their wives, and Mrs. Jane Hogan, already referred to.

The letter of invitation given to Sir Donald Hawley as Chairman of the Sudan Government British Pensioners Association said, *SUDAANK and many other Sudanese across the country appreciate the British staff who served in the political and civil service of the Sudan and contributed much to the shaping of contemporary history and development of the country*. Their invitation had the support of the Vice President, H.E. Ali Osman Taha who would be patron of the visit.

It became clear that Sudanese hospitality was to be the keynote of the visit when the Ambassador came to see us off and we flew business class. It was wonderful to arrive, after half a century, in Khartoum in the middle of the velvety night to be greeted by smiling, courteous gentlemen in *immans* and *jallabiyas* and ladies too, the executive committee of SUDAANK, and given refreshment in the VIP lounge, while the entry formalities were conducted elsewhere on our behalf. We were then taken with a motor cycle escort, which stayed with us during our week's stay at the Hilton Hotel.

It was very moving, the following morning, to raise the blinds and see the meeting of the White and Blue Niles with Tuti Island's neat cultivations right opposite. In the Mogren gardens below the *mudiria* clerks had entertained me to dinner before my transfer to Upper Nile. My future wife used to ride with me before work in the sun forest to the west. The public rooms had their Christmas



decorations still on display, an augury of the tolerant atmosphere we were to find everywhere.

We had arrived not knowing what to expect and found an excellent programme arranged for us. An early visit was to the former Anglican Cathedral, a red sandstone building by an Italian architect, and it was reassuring that there was none of the desecration or even neglect that I had feared. It is well maintained as a museum, its memorials in place, with an exhibition for the meeting of the African Union the following week. Sadly, the handsome clock tower has been removed as it was said to have been used by rebels to threaten the Republican Palace in Nimeiri's time. We went on to the Republican Palace and signed the book for the President as for the Governor General in former times. We also visited the National Museum with artefacts rescued from the Aswan High Dam flooding. Later on in our stay we went to the replacement Episcopal Cathedral where on Sundays there are seven services in different languages to cater for the refugees from the south.

We visited three universities, Ahfad, Ahlia and Khartoum. At Ahfad, one of the staff told me how much he owed to "Dougie" Udal, Warden of Gordon College. I was able to introduce him forthwith to Dougie's son, John and his granddaughter Joanna – a remarkable record of three generations of service to the Sudan. Rev. Joanna Udal is assistant to the Episcopal Archbishop. She joined our party and was obviously welcome wherever we went. Ahfad University is for women, carrying on the Bedri tradition of women's education. Students come from as far away as Tanzania and converse easily with charm and humour. Ahlia is a brave enterprise, being the people's university independent of government. Khartoum University is of course the flagship, having developed from Gordon College. It was there that we went to an excellent lecture by a lady, Dr. Mahasin Abdul Gadir Haj el Safi on *The Sudan and the Commonwealth* based on her research in the U.K. as well as the Sudan. There was a view in the hall that

joining the Commonwealth could be beneficial in a number of directions and if Mozambique can join why not Sudan? But this would have to await the outcome of the C.P.A. on completion of the transitional period.

There were two visits outside Khartoum, south to the impressive Kenana Sugar Company in Kosti and north to the pyramids at Bijarawiyah, each with a chapel on its east face. There are fascinating Meroitic reliefs and inscriptions dating from between 200 B.C. and 300 A.D. It is tantalising that the script has not yet been deciphered, although one scholar is said to have been close to it before his death.

Two very pleasurable outings were a cruise on the Blue Nile and a delightful lunch under the trees at the farm of Kemal and Taj Mohamed Osman Salih. The expansion of Khartoum and the desire for a higher standard of life have led to enormous demand for garden flowers and shrubs.

In the evenings there were receptions by SUDAAK, the Sudanese British Friendship Society, Mr. Anis Hajar, and by the British Ambassador, all most enjoyable with an opportunity to talk to a wide variety of people. There was also a cultural show in Omdurman. On Friday afternoon, not part of the official programme, most of us attended a *Gadiriya Sufi Zikr* in Omdurman, where we were warmly received and reassured that the generous openness of Islam in the Sudan still persisted.

Another unscheduled visit was to a refugee camp west of Omdurman. It is a difficult life and many have at last hopes of returning to their homes. Others will probably stay; many of the jobs as porters, *ghaffirs* and the like are now done by southerners. Though my Nuer is even poorer than my Arabic now, just a few words brought a delighted response.

We visited two of Harry's Homes in Khartoum, one for boy orphans and the other for girls. They live in normal, simple houses in a street, each with a house mother and supervision by Social

Services. The children attend school and church or mosque and most have some members of their extended family in the vicinity. They are delightful; polite, cheerful and obedient, turning off the children's cartoons on the television as soon as they were asked. It is hoped that foundling babies will be cared for in the near future. The 'Harry', whose name is used, died as a boy in a traffic accident and his family, the Hendersons, were part of the visiting group.

The fine mahogany trees along the Blue Nile waterfront are still there and the Ministry of Energy and Mining has been built beyond the trees over the water. There we enjoyed a memorable last evening, appreciating the fine collection of Condominium scientific and literary publications and learning about the vast differences to the life of the people that oil has made and will continue to make. It was evident also that it had brought numbers of Chinese and Malaysians to the country. Another sign is the huge expansion of Khartoum and the occasional new mansion sitting out in the desert on its plot waiting for the town to catch up. Yet, as the *Eid* approached, the flocks of sheep waited patiently to take their part in the feast, as they always have done.

What conclusions? The country appeared relaxed and peaceful with no traffic jams and no sign of security forces. The Government of National Unity is still in place and so is the Government of the Southern Sudan in Juba. The Evringtons went on to join in the first year celebrations of the C.P.A. there. Darfur is still a huge problem: the difficulty appears to be in getting the factions of the rebel movement to agree. The greatest change which we old Sudanis noticed was in the position of women attending the receptions and moving among guests with assurance and charm. The old black and indigo blue *tobes* have been replaced by colourful prints. We were accompanied and organised in most visits by the Hon. Secretary of SUDAAK, Fawzia Yousif Galaladdin, a journalist. For me it was like an old love affair, forgotten and then renewed after many years.



M.W. Daly, **Darfur's Sorrow: a history of destruction and genocide**, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007, XIX + 368pp. ISBN 978-0-521-69962-4, pbk £14.99.

Martin Daly covers the history of Darfur from the 18<sup>th</sup> century up to 2006 and demonstrates clearly the extraordinary position of this part of the modern Sudan over the whole of this period. He points out that there have always been tensions between Darfur and the lands of the Nile Valley. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was competition between the Darfur Sultanate and Sennar which was usually fought out in Kordofan, and Daly goes on to explain how this has been a major factor since independence culminating in the *destruction and genocide* of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Darfur during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was a marginal region to both the Turkiya and the Condominium. It was not incorporated into the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan until 1916 when the British authorities in Khartoum accused Ali Dinar of having sympathies with Turkey. In fact, Dar Masalit was not really part of the Sudan until the 1920s. Darfur was thus the 'odd' bit of Africa between the French colonies to the west and British interests to the east. The colonial powers really did not know what should be done with Darfur. It was thus a 'marginal' Sudan Province, considered rather separate by the Condominium authorities who were much more interested in the lands of the Nile Valley. Darfur was separated from the Nile by the *qoz* sands which were crossed by the notoriously difficult El Obeid to El Fasher road. At independence, by many criteria, Darfur was more poorly served by public services than the south. The railway extension westwards from El Obeid was not completed to Nyala until 1959, whereas the south had regular steamer services and some reasonable laterite roads. Daly describes how, politically since independence, the Darfur vote was taken for granted by the *Umma* and hence neglected by the others parties. Whereas, there were many development projects in the Nile valley and to the east there was little effort to develop Darfur's resources. This created a great deal of resentment which finally boiled up into a revolt.

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Furthermore, whilst the peoples of Darfur were Moslem they were ethnically 'African' and not 'Arab'. In the Nile Valley Westerners were often seen as similar to Southerners with all that has resulted from that since Independence. Martin is most informative about events leading up to and including the recent 'destruction' of Darfur. Here we have a catalogue of government activities in Darfur, the development of militias and the arming of and active support for the *janjawid*. He describes in detail the way that central government authority collapsed and how the intrigues and interventions of the Khartoum government in its neighbours' affairs, particularly in Chad and of Chad and Libyan incursions and activities in Darfur have helped to destabilize the situation in Darfur. He also describes the interminable talks in the UN and elsewhere, such as at Abuja, about Darfur and accuses the Khartoum government of deliberately spinning out such meetings and having little intention of fulfilling its obligations to any negotiated agreement

This book is timely and a truly scholarly work showing a great attention to detail and has been meticulously researched. Martin has demonstrated his remarkable ability to put together coherently, into a very readable and understandable form, a mass of published material and unpublished archival documentation held in Britain, Sudan and Egypt. It will become the standard work on the history of Darfur during the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and an authoritative commentary on many events in the modern Sudan over this period.

In view of material elsewhere in this issue it is both fitting and a pleasure to note that the dedication is *In Memory of Peter and Nancy Holt*.

*Jack Davies*

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Nanne op't Ende. **Proud to be Nuba: Faces and Voices.** Code X, Tilburg, 2007, 166pp. ISBN 978-90-78233-02-2, €25.00 plus postage.

This is a beautifully produced book, full of fascinating recent and archival photographs, and worthy of any coffee table. However, it is not simply another coffee-table collection of picturesque Africans, and indeed the book makes clear its desire to avoid the kind of 'posed' ethnographic photography previously conducted in the Nuba Mountains. In particular, a contributing photographer records his criticism of the earlier work of Leni Riefenstahl for 'falsifying reality', and the author explains his discomfort when encouraged to photograph what he sees as an undignified naked old man (although he nevertheless includes the photographs).

*Proud to be Nuba* is actually much more a political than an anthropological statement; the Nuba 'identity' is explored largely in political rather than cultural terms. The author includes a few diary extracts of his own intimate and sometimes harrowing experiences in the Nuba Mountains since 1997, and in the middle of the book there is a twelve-page history of the Nuba. Otherwise though, the writing consists of direct 'Nuba voices' recorded as interviews. There is a particularly significant interview with the late Yousif Kuwa Mekki, and contributions from many other military and political leaders in the Nuba Mountains, including prominent women. Much of what they say is unsurprising to anyone familiar with the region, but it forms a personal and 'empowering' means of presenting their experiences, as opposed to more conventional ethnographic accounts. The various interviews gradually build up a picture of the complicated political and cultural identities in the Nuba Mountains, and in particular of their relationship to the SPLM/A and Southern Sudan. The current concern that (particularly with the death of John Garang) the Nuba have been or may be abandoned by the SPLA, despite all their military efforts during the war, is both poignant and portentous. There are some useful

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and interesting accounts of the *Komolo* Nuba student movement formed in the 1970s, and of the conflicts between the Nuba military leaders during the SPLA war, including the arrest of Telefun Kuku. The inclusion of two Misseriya women also provides a nice illustration of local accommodation between sometime hostile groups.

The downside to this use of interviews, however, is that they mostly reflect a particular perspective, of the military and political leadership in the region, and largely those who sided with the SPLA during the war. Only in the 'brief history' are puzzled questions raised about the Nuba who sided instead with 'the Government' and what this says about Nuba identity and sense of 'their place in Sudan'. It is also only in the 'brief history' that reference is made to the fascinating amalgamation of cultural and religious practice that has resulted from arabisation and Islamisation in the Nuba Mountains; indeed Islam rarely appears in these pages. The photographs themselves, including the montages inside the covers, also raise interesting questions about cultural practices, so that the absence of captions or explanations, though well-intentioned, is sometimes frustrating. Finally, the inclusion of photographs and texts from the Sudan Archive should really also have been accompanied by some explanation for the benefit of anyone unfamiliar with the derogatory language used by colonial officials.

This is above all an introduction to some of the people of the Nuba Mountains: both an affectionate and intimate portrait of them and their lives, and a presentation of their political opinions and experiences through interviews. It will no doubt be welcomed by those Nuba who can access it as a means of disseminating their cause and recording the voices of their leaders for posterity. That it presents a largely political and rather one-sided interpretation of Nuba identity does not detract from its contribution to debates about the 'place' of the people of the Nuba Mountains within Sudan, and to raising awareness

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about their unique and often neglected position and culture. Above all it should be commended as a picture book that seeks to present individuals rather than 'a people'.

*Cherry Leonardi*

### SSSUK NOTICES

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## SSSUK 21<sup>ST</sup> AGM & SYMPOSIUM 2007

This was held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London on Saturday, 10 November 2007. There was a good attendance. As usual there was much lively discussion both on the floor and during the refreshment breaks. The selection of Sudanese food at lunch time was much appreciated by all who attended.

**The Symposium** was divided into three sessions, the first of which was concerned with the politics of petroleum and Sudan's relationships with Asia. Here, Dan Large explored the changes in the Sudan's economic relations and the strengthening of economic and diplomatic ties with Asia, especially with China and went on to examine some of the implications. Luke Patey then explored how the discovery and development of oil resources in the Sudan had contributed to armed conflict within the country and the impact that this had had on Sudan's relations with the outside world

The second session explored the different points of view about the Merowe Dam Project at the Fourth cataract. The generation of hydroelectric power for any developing country with suitable natural resources is always of importance to the government in power. However, these developments always come with a large number of adverse impacts on the local population, the local environment and the region's archaeology. Nick Hillyard focused on the impact of the Merowe Dam on the environment, the development of the area and the human rights of the local people. He thought that it was a human rights disaster in the making. Ali Askouri in his written paper (read by John Ryle) thought that after the Peace Agreement China had moved north to plunder more of Sudan's natural resources and to displace more communities. He gave details of three dams: Merowe, Kajabar and Shiriak. Derek Welsby described the impact the Merowe dam was having on

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important archaeology sites and the local populations.

The third session was mainly political and economic but it provided a very useful update to members present. Gamal Ibrahim discussed fiscal decentralisation in Sudan, Gill Lusk gave an overview of the current situation concentrating on recent developments in Darfur and Pieter Tesch described his whirlwind tour of Sudan along with his fellow parliamentarians.

**The AGM** saw the election of three new officers: Dr Douglas Johnson as Chair; Mr Adrian Thomas as Hon. Treasurer and Ms Gill Lusk as Hon. Secretary. Brief notes about the new officers appear elsewhere in this issue. Dr Cherry Leonardi was also elected onto the SSSUK Committee. A copy of the Society's accounts for 2006 and of the Minutes of the 2006 Annual General Meeting are also included in this issue of *Sudan Studies*.

The existing subscription rates were confirmed for 2008 and can be found on the inside of the front cover. As ever, the Hon Editor asked for material to be sent to him and he noted that some recent issues had not had much material contributed by Sudanese and that he would do his best to rectify this.

The consensus of opinion was that the day had gone well and had been enjoyable. As usual, it had provided a forum for gathering up-to-date news, meeting old and making new friends and eating a plentiful supply of excellent Sudanese food. We now look forward to the next Symposium in 2008 which it is planned will be concerned with Darfur.

*David Lindley*

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Sudan Studies Society of the United Kingdom  
Minutes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting  
Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS, University of London  
9<sup>th</sup> September 2006

Dr Anisa Dani called the meeting to order at 12.20 and welcomed members to the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Sudan Studies Society of the United Kingdom.

1. Apologies  
Apologies were received from: Mr Jacob Akol, Miss Joan Hall, Sir Donald Hawley, Mr John Kendrick and Mr John Ryle.
2. Minutes of the 19<sup>th</sup> AGM on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2005:  
The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the 19<sup>th</sup> AGM of 24<sup>th</sup> September 2005.
3. Matters arising from the 19<sup>th</sup> AGM on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2005:
  - 3.1 SSSUK had received an apology from SOAS over the disturbance. SOAS made no further charges for the hire of the Lecture Theatre.
  - 3.2 The total cost of hiring the Kensington Libraries Theatre was found not to be very different from SOAS.
  - 3.3 SSSUK were able to support 11 postgraduate students enabling them to attend the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference, Bergen
4. Chair's Report  
Dr Anisa Dani said that 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference at Bergen had been a great success and had been enjoyed by all those who attended.  
Dr Dani thanked the members for their support for the Committee and the Society.  
She also reported that the committee had held two statutory meetings during the year.
5. Secretary's Report  
The Secretary gave details of the Membership Subscription Status for 2006. 70% were fully paid, with 17% 1 year in arrears. The Web site had been further developed and some spamming problems had arisen. Two major mails slots had taken place.
6. Treasurer's Report  
The Hon. Treasurer, Mr David Lindley, said that the main purpose of his report was to present the Accounts for 2005 (signed copies of the audited Accounts were distributed to members and published in Sudan Studies No 35 )  
He reported that the balance on 31-Dec-05 was £7323.30 producing a surplus for the year of £1742.99. This surplus was boosted by a very generous donation of £900 from the Girdlers' Association. The cost of the 2005 symposium was reduced by £287 as compensation for the noise of the building works.  
Current balances on 1-Sept-06 were:

Reserve Account	£4746.43
Current Account	£1571.93
Total	£6318.36

  
SSSUK was able to support 11 post graduate students with travel grants to the 7<sup>th</sup> International Sudan Studies Conference (Bergen) totalling £1776.10.  
Additional donations in 2006 included £500 from Mr Haggard and Dr Douglas Johnson and £115 from one of our members Mr Roy Nelson. The travel grant was more than we had estimated due to SAS going on strike during the conference.  
The Accounts were approved by the AGM.

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7. Editor's Report

The Secretary informed the members that Dr Justin Willis had resigned from his post as Editor due to taking up a new appointment at the British Institute in Eastern Africa, Kenya. The Committee were actively looking for a new editor.

8. 7<sup>th</sup> International Studies Conference - Bergen

The Secretary said that the conference was successful. SSSUK was represented on both conference committees. SSSUK had hosted the conference website, and that we had provided registration services for members and other participants from the UK.

SSSUK had provided grants to enable 11 postgraduate students from the UK to present papers to the conference.

The Secretary itemised a number of problems had been encountered with the organisation and selection of papers. Full details were given of these problems so they could be referred to when helping organise future International conferences with the American Sudan Studies Association. Details have been documented for future reference.

9. A.O.B

The Secretary informed the meeting that the date for the next AGM would be earlier in September to avoid a clash with Ramadan.

The 20<sup>th</sup> AGM was brought to a close at 12.50.



## SUDAN STUDIES SOCIETY OF THE UK

Accounts 1 January -31 December 2006

	2006	2005		2006	2005
INCOME			EXPENDITURE		
Membership dues	1225.41	1363.93	Printing	350.31	159.20
Back Membership dues	n.a	n.a	Secretarial expenses	367.58	418.99
Future Membership dues	n.a	n.a	Committee Travel	69.20	57.00
Sale of Publications & CDs	10.00	32.97	Repayment of fees etc	25.00	
Interest on Bank accounts	79.87	78.71			
Donations	615.00	942.00	2005 AGM/Symposium		876.62
2005 AGM/Symposium		712.19	2006 AGM/Symposium	1304.75	
2006 AGM/Symposium	825.00		Support International conference	1,799.60	
7th International Conf. fees		125.00	Surplus/deficit for year	-1,161.16	1,742.99
	2,755.28	3,254.80		2,755.28	3,254.80

I have examined the accounting records kept in relation to the above period and certify that this income, expenditure and assets statement is in accordance with them

J.A.Sowden  
Chartered Accountant

## Assets

Bank balance on 1 Jan 06	7323.30	5580.31
Bank balance on 31 Dec 06	6162.14	7323.30

D. K Lindley  
Hon. Treasurer  
29/08 2007

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#### **Notes for Contributors**

SSSUK welcomes notes and articles intended for publication, which will be assessed by the Editorial Board. The normal maximum length of an article is 5,000 words including footnotes; longer articles may be accepted for publication in two or more parts. Notes and articles should be typed and double spaced and should normally be submitted as paper copy and as word processed files (in PC format) on diskette or as an e-mail attachment, if at all possible. SSSUK retains the right to edit articles for reasons of space and consistency of style and spelling. *Sudan Studies* aims to follow the editorial style of *African Affairs*, the Journal of the Royal African Society.

Manuscripts are not normally returned to authors, but original material such as photographs will be returned.

It is helpful to have, very briefly (2 to 3 lines), any relevant details about the author – any post held, or time recently spent in the Sudan

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