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Excerpt

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PART IV

THE NATIVE MANUSCRIPTS OF THE SUDAN

INTRODUCTION

I The line of cleavage between the two great Arab groups of descendants of Ẓaḥṭán on the one hand and of Ismá'íl and 'Adnán on the other has not been obscured by the lapse of ages, nor by the tremendous unifying force of a common religion, nor by continuous intermarriage, nor by migration to distant lands. The distinction, still jealously preserved in Arabia¹, is, in another form, clearly traceable in the Sudan at the present day, and its persistence is due to the unquestioned authority of the Ẓurán and of certain of the Traditions.

As being a revelation from the very mouth of God the contents of the Ẓurán are familiar to the masses and unimpeachable both in doctrinal matters and as a storehouse of historical facts. The best authenticated traditions carry an almost equal weight.

No one familiar with the historical portions of the Ẓurán and the biography of the Prophet could be oblivious of the distinction between the Ẓaḥṭánite and the Ismá'ílite; and, in the second place, the careful preservation of pedigrees is enjoined by the Ẓurán and the traditions as an act of piety. The injunction is frequently quoted and to some extent obeyed.

Thus any respectable member of society, and particularly the *feki* whose concern is immediately with things of religion, must needs be prepared to produce his pedigree. Some of the links may be faulty—they invariably are so—but the ground is fairly sure in places, and by a system of comparison one obtains certain valuable indications.

II Corresponding to the old division between Ẓaḥṭánite and Ismá'ílite we find in the Sudan a definite line drawn between the two great groups of tribes claiming descent on the one hand from GÜ-HAYNA and on the other from 'Abbás the uncle of the Prophet.

The period from the present day to that of the Aṣḥáb is generally shewn as covering about forty generations, and in the case of a typical *feki* or sheikh of good family one may generally accept the first five or six generations from the present as stated accurately, and

¹ See Zwemer, p. 259. "The animosity of these two races to each other is unaccountable but invincible. Like two chemical products which instantly explode when placed in contact, so has it always been found impossible for Yemenite and Maadite [*i.e.* 'Adnánite] to live quietly together."

the next eight or nine as less so. Then follow seven or eight successive ancestors whose names rest more firmly on the accepted authority of contemporary *nisbas* compiled during that Augustan age of the Sudan, the period of the early FUNG kingdom.

Beyond these are the weakest links in the chain, some fourteen or fifteen names probably due in part to the inventiveness of the genealogists of the FUNG period and their anxiety to connect their own generation with that of the immediate descendants of the Companions of the Prophet.

III In the early centuries of Islam so much attention was paid, by generations that scrupulously observed the behest of Muḥammad concerning pedigrees, to the exact inter-relationship of his Companions and their ancestors that the native scribe of the present is naturally content to accept without question the statement of any ancient genealogist whose work may be accessible to him.

The popular idea of the value of a long pedigree is easily estimated from the opening paragraphs of the larger *nisbas* that have been translated.

Unfortunately the Arab genealogies have always been almost purely patrilinear, and little account is taken of the wives and daughters and the collateral lines. It is noticeable, however, that whereas in the more recent generations the mother is not mentioned at all unless for some very special reason, her name is not infrequently given in the groups of ancestors who lived about the early FUNG period, but then only incidentally and with a view to showing which of the sons of some particular man were full brothers and which half-brothers. So, too, in the group of ancestors connecting the generations last mentioned with the better-known generations of those who lived in the seventh and eighth centuries A.D. one sometimes finds such names as “*so and so el Khazragi*,” meaning that his mother was a Khazragia¹.

IV Now the traditions current among the Arabs of the Sudan on the subject of their racial origins and the circumstances and date of the migration of their forebears to the Sudan are almost entirely based upon statements they have found in the *nisbas* handed down to them, though in a few cases their stock of information has been supplemented by the result of inadequate uncritical and unenlightened foragings among the works of one or two mediaeval Arabic historians.

The Arabic historians if studied with greater care might well have saved the genealogists of the Sudan from a vast number of inaccuracies, but, as it is, they have been so neglected that, unless the context

¹ See BA, CXXXIII note.

forbids, one is often inclined to accept a similarity between two statements as corroborative evidence.

The *nisba*-writer relies as a rule upon the accuracy of the inherited or copied *nisba*, and it is only in dealing with the more recent generations that tradition, other than that derived from the *nisbas*, plays any important part.

V From among the mass of useless and untrustworthy material contained in the manuscripts it is not difficult to pick out certain definite and persistent traditions which are distinctly interesting. In addition to them there are made in passing numerous remarks and asides from which one may make some not unimportant deductions. It cannot be too often insisted that the proper method is to regard the tribal *nisbas* rather as parables than as statements of fact. Considered in that light they have a very definite value.

By piecing together such scraps of historical information as are available from the native manuscripts into an abbreviated and coherent whole one discovers to what extent the result coincides with or differs from or supplements the information similarly derivable from the works of non-Sudanese authors, whether they be mediaeval Arabs or modern European travellers; and from certain of the manuscripts one learns something of the sociology of the people and of their customs and beliefs.

VI But one must make some attempt to reply to the inevitable questions—"What is the general character of these native manuscripts?" "Who wrote them?" "What is their date?"

VII The word *nisba*, by which the majority is known, means literally a pedigree. Hence the true *nisba* is avowedly genealogical in purpose and items of narrative are only incidental to the main theme.

As a rule the author or copyist, after the usual confession of faith, if he desires to do more than give a bald list of his ancestors, recapitulates his reasons for writing the *nisba*: it is an act of piety enjoined by the Prophet, and the author had found that there was some danger of links in the genealogical chain being lost or confused¹. Then follows a genealogical exposition, usually of the GUYAYNA or the 'Abbásid stock in the Sudan, or of both, including the author's or the copyist's own pedigree from father to son. In addition the *nisba* often contains towards the end a series of short stereotyped notes on the origin of the chief Arab tribes of the Sudan.

¹ Much of what is said about this bears a very strong resemblance to the contents of the first chapter of Ibn Khaldūn's second book, *i.e.* Vol. II in the Arabic edition. This second book, unlike the first and third, has not, I believe, been yet translated into either English or French.

This type of *nisba* is both the oldest and the commonest. Hundreds of examples must exist in the Sudan, but the great majority of them are not merely incomplete but hardly pretend to be more than extracts copied from a larger manuscript. Misreadings and omissions abound. Interpolations also occur fairly frequently, but happily the Sudanese Arab excels at the type of work that demands no mental effort whatever, and as a copyist he may count this as a merit. Where interpolations have been added the fact is almost always obvious and consequently not without use.

VIII The father of this type of *nisba* is undoubtedly that renowned but very elusive person, "el Samarḳandi." As a writer of parables in the form of genealogies he deserves a considerable meed of praise.

The second type of manuscript, sometimes included under the term *nisba*, takes the form of a semi-historical, semi-genealogical hotch-potch founded partly on *nisbas* proper and partly on some ill-digested Arabic history or encyclopaedia.

Thirdly, we have copies of a history¹ of the FUNG kingdom and the Turkish period which followed it by an unknown author, who probably wrote between 1870 and 1880 but had access to older records.

Fourthly, we meet occasionally with a treasured copy of the well-known *Ṭabaḳāt wad Ḍayfulla*², a series of biographies of the Arab holy men of the Sudan, containing many anecdotes and historical data.

Into a fifth category may be classed a number of present-day works dealing with the history of some particular region or with certain specified tribes. These are founded partly on tradition and partly on the manuscripts described³.

IX A word must be said here as to the "Samarḳandi" referred to as the originator of the most typical *nisbas*. It must be confessed that nothing really definite is known about him at all. All we have to go upon may be summed up as follows: hardly had the FUNG and their Arab allies overthrown the kingdom of Sôba in 1504 when they were threatened with invasion by Sultan Selîm who had conquered Egypt in 1517. 'Omâra Dûnḳas therefore thought it well to write to Selîm and explain that the inhabitants of his kingdom were Arabs of exalted lineage. "With this letter he sent a book of the pedigrees of the Arab tribes in his kingdom compiled for him by el Imâm el Samarḳandi, one of the learned men of Sennâr; and when

¹ D 7.² D 3.³ Part IV consists of examples of all these types of MSS., and remarks as to authorship and reliability are given in each case in an introductory note.

this book reached the Sultan Selīm its contents delighted him and he renounced the attack on Sennár¹.”

Of el Samarḳandi nothing more is known. He was probably one of the itinerant *fekis* who were attracted from Egypt by the fame of the new kingdom founded in the Gezira and by the probability that in the vanity and credulity of its rulers some profit might be found for himself. His original work has entirely disappeared and the numerous “exact copies” of it that are periodically reported are never more than garbled extracts.

There are nine references to el Samarḳandi in the manuscripts that follow: four of them are in A 2, two in A 11, two in C 5, and one in D 6. From A 2 one gathers that el Samarḳandi’s method was to give the pedigree and branches of the Ga’ali stock and so connect them with the BENI ’ABBÁS; then to tell how one Sulaymán of the BENI OMMAYYA migrated through Abyssinia to the Sudan about 750 A.D., when the ’Abbásids were supplanting the Ommayyads, and became ancestor of the FUNG; and finally, perhaps, to enumerate the Arab tribes of the Sudan and state very shortly from what Arabian ancestor each was descended and whence and when it migrated to the Sudan.

From A 11 one gets the same impression but is told that there were two persons named el Samarḳandi, Maḥmūd el Samarḳandi and ’Abdulla ibn Sa’id el Samarḳandi. One of them was apparently called “el Samarḳandi the Great.” C 5 adds nothing to our information. D 6 speaks of “Abu Maḥmūd el Samarḳandi.” No direct information is vouchsafed in any of the manuscripts as to the date or life of el Samarḳandi; and D 7, which makes a point of mentioning such savants as came to the FUNG court, refers to no such person. To non-Sudanese literature so far as I am aware he is entirely unknown.

It would be unjustifiable, I think, to write him down a myth. His fame must rest on some basis or other of actuality. If one accept the gist of Na’üm Bey’s account of him it is certainly allowable to remark that at the time when el Samarḳandi composed his work there must have been a fairly large fund of information still available about the circumstances of the entry of the Arabs into the Sudan and their tribal affinities. El Samarḳandi would naturally make use of this, and the Arab chieftains of the day would be only too eager to supply him with genealogical details and tradition concerning

¹ Translated from Na’üm Bey Shuḳayr, II, pp. 73, 74. Cp. Crowfoot in *A.-E. Sudan*, I, 319. Na’üm Bey, I believe, got his facts by hearsay at Khartoum about the time of the reoccupation of the Sudan.

themselves and their immediate forebears. Where links in the chain were missing no doubt others were supplied by the imagination, and the critical faculty was presumably brought into play as little as possible; but it appears to me that it is easy to over-estimate the part played by sheer inventiveness and to under-estimate the general amount of truth underlying statements which as regards the exact form in which they have survived are inaccurate in many details.

X Let us now summarise the information to be gleaned from the manuscripts as to historical and sociological matters.

No mention is made in any manuscript of an Arab immigration to the Sudan prior to the foundation of Islam. The reason is obviously the lack of interest felt for any ancestor who left Arabia in the pagan "Days of Ignorance." The desire of all was to display their fathers as pillars of the true faith.

One also notes that the tide of immigration is always represented as having been by way of the Red Sea ports or of the Nile valley¹, and generally the former². Nothing is said of any tribe wandering southwards from Tripoli, Algiers or Morocco into the western kingdoms and thence eastwards into the Sudan.

The Ismá'ílitic tribes most commonly mentioned in the manuscripts as having sent branches to the Sudan are *ḲURAYSH* (including *BENI 'ABBÁS* and *BENI OMMAYYA*) and *ḲAYS 'AYLÁN*, who include *GHATAFÁN*, *BENI DHUBIÁN* (*FEZÁRA*, etc.), *BENI 'ABS*, *THAḲÍF* and others.

Among the *Ḳaḥṭánite* group we most often meet with *ḤIMYAR*, who include *ḲUDÁ'A* and *GUHAYNA* (a branch of *ḲUDÁ'A*), and with *BENI GHASSÁN*.

Extra stress is laid on *ḲURAYSH* for obvious reasons, and the *BENI GHASSÁN* are similarly favoured because the tribes of "Anṣár," *AUS* and *KHAZRAG*, the "Helpers of the Prophet," were of their number.

From the frequency with which *Ḥimyarite* names³ occur in *Ga'ali nisbas* it would appear that some of the Arabs who claimed an *'Abbásid* (Ismá'ílitic) origin were really of *Ḳaḥṭánite* stock.

XI As regards the various epochs at which Islamic immigration occurred the following data are available from the manuscripts.

Speaking of the conquest of Egypt by 'Amr ibn el 'Aṣi the author of D 4 says the armies of the Muhammadans penetrated "to the furthest limits of the land of the Nūba, to Dábat el Dólib and the hills of the Nūba⁴," that is, roughly speaking, to Debba and el Ḥaráza.

¹ See D 2, iv.

² In particular see D 6.

³ E.g. *Dhu el Kilá'a* and *Masrūk*. See BA, cxxxiii note.

⁴ D 4, vi.

In the next paragraph he alludes to a further immigration in the following century.

Secondly, we are told of the FEZÁRA that they “have dwelt in the Sudan since the conquest of el Bahnasá,” that is, since ‘Abdulla ibn Sa’ad’s expedition of 641–642¹.

Thirdly, the MAḤASS, who are Nūbian rather than Arab by race, claim to be

descended from the Anšár who conquered the Sudan in 43 A.H. [663 A.D.] during the period of the rule of ‘Abdulla ibn Abu Sarah [*i.e.* ibn Sa’ad], the Companion. After the conquest the KHAZRAG settled in this country.... At the time of their coming to conquer the Sudan they numbered about 81,000².

Fourthly, the ḤADÁRMA are said to have migrated from Ḥadramaut “in the time of Ḥaggág ibn Yūsef” and settled at Sūákin³, that is, between 662 and 713 A.D.

Fifthly, the ancestor of the MESALLAMÍA is recorded to have come to the Sudan from Syria “in the time of ‘Omar ibn ‘Abd el ‘Azíz⁴,” or between 679 and 718 A.D.

Sixthly, we have the entry of Sulaymán ibn ‘Abd el Malik, the alleged Ommawi ancestor of the FUNG, into Abyssinia between 750 and 754 A.D., and his passage thence to the Sudan⁵.

Seventhly, it is generally implied by genealogists of the Ga’ali group⁶ that Kerdam or his son Serrár was the first of their ancestors to immigrate from Arabia.

Aḥmad ibn Ismá’il el Wali, the author of AB, was born about 1830–1840 and his pedigree makes him the twenty-second in descent from Kerdam. The latter or Serrár would therefore, if one reckon the generation at about thirty years, seem to have immigrated in the latter part of the thirteenth century⁷.

Another *nisba* says the first Ga’ali ancestor to immigrate was Ghánim (the fourth in descent from Serrár), and that he came in the middle of the thirteenth century A.D. after the fall of Baghdád before the Tartars⁸.

A third document makes Ghánim’s grandfather Şubuḥ the original settler⁹. A fourth represents the forefathers of the GA’ALIÍN

¹ A 11, LIV, and D 6, XIII. Cp. account in Part II, Chap. 2.

² ABC, IX, and see note thereto.

³ BA, CLXXVI.

⁴ BA, CLXXVIII.

⁵ *E.g.* BA, CCXIII and note.

⁶ *E.g.* BA, CXXXIII and AB, CLXVI.

⁷ See Part III, Chap. 1 (*a*). One arrives at the same conclusion if one start with the reasonably legitimate assumption that ‘Armán, who lived seven generations after Kerdam, was a contemporary of el Samarkandi.

⁸ ABC, XXII.

⁹ D 5 (*c*).

as coming to Egypt about 969 A.D. and migrating to the Sudan about 1171¹.

Other passages suggest that the date of their coming was about 750 A.D. and the cause of it the overthrow of the Ommayyads by the 'Abbásids, but one naturally regards these with even more suspicion than the other stories².

Eighthly, we read that "according to Ibn Khaldūn the tribes of Arabs descended from GUHAYNA came after the Muhammadan conquest of the Northern Nūba in 1318 A.D....³," and this statement we have seen to be correct.

Ninthly, the RIKÁBIA are descended from Rikáb the son of Ghulámulla. Ghulámulla, it is said⁴, lived as a young man in Yemen and then moved with his father by way of the Red Sea to Dongola, where he found the people still "sunk in perplexity and error." He was the thirteenth in descent from Mūsa el Kázim, who, we know, died about 800 A.D.⁵; and the Awlád Gábir (the fifth generation from Ghulámulla) were junior by a generation to Maḥmūd el 'Araki who flourished in the middle of the sixteenth century⁶. We may therefore hazard the second half of the fourteenth century as being very approximately the date of the immigration of Ghulámulla, the ancestor of the tribe which is known by the name of his son Rikáb.

Tenthly, the manuscript D 7, speaking of the foundation of the FUNG kingdom in 1504 A.D., says that it was followed by a largely increased immigration of Arabs into the Sudan⁷.

Lastly, Ya'aqūb el Mugelli is said⁸ to have entered the Sudan and visited Sennár in 1592 A.D., and his father, the ancestor of the ZENÁRKHA, to have previously immigrated from the Yemen, that is perhaps about 1560 A.D.

XII Some of these traditions relate apparently to individuals only, but one gets a general impression of four tides of Arab immigration into the Sudan.

The first flowed through Egypt in the seventh and eighth centuries and was a natural sequel to the conquest of that country. It was probably of mixed composition and may have contained, among others, tribesmen of FEZÁRA and BENI OMMAYYA⁹ and some Anšár.

The second immigration took place in the eighth century across the Red Sea by way of Abyssinia as a result of the overthrow of the

¹ D 6, xxxix.

² See A 11, VII and D 6, x and notes thereto.

³ ABC, L.

⁴ BA, CLXXIX, CCVII, CCVIII.

⁵ Wüstenfeld, I, 324.

⁶ D 3, 157. The elder brother among the Awlád Gábir, Ibráhm el Bulád, came to the Sudan between 1554 and 1562 (see D 3, VI, and D 7, XV).

⁷ D 7, XI.

⁸ ABC, LIV.

⁹ *I.e.* the ancestors of the MESALLAMIA.

Ommayyads by the 'Abbásids, and eventually resulted in the foundation of the Arab-Fung hegemony in the Gezira.

The ancestors of the ḤADÁRMA or ḤADÁREB had similarly reached Sūákín by way of the Red Sea half a century earlier and settled on the coast—so at least say the *nisbas*; but colonies from Ḥadramaut had undoubtedly established themselves on the African shore at a much earlier date, and in any case the interior of the country was very little affected.

For several centuries after the rise of the 'Abbásids no immigration of tribes is mentioned by the *nisbas*. Then in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the conquests of the Mamlūk Sultans broke down the barrier which had been for so long presented by the Christian kingdom of Dongola and opened the way for a fresh inflow of Arabs into the Sudan. To this period belongs the great GUHAYNA movement, and, in so far as the DANÁGLA-GA'ALIÍN group are Arabs, it is probably to the same period that their genesis must be traced, though, as we have seen, the GA'ALIÍN proper—the people living between the Shablūka and the embouchure of the Atbara—may not have come into existence as a tribe until the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The fourth great immigration followed the foundation of the FUNG kingdom and the conquest of Egypt by Selím I: it does not seem to have been confined to any particular tribe.

XIII There is no reason to doubt the approximate correctness of this presentation if one have regard only to the dates at which the chief immigrations occurred, but the *nisbas* generally err in assuming that each tribe of the present day is descended from a single ancestor and deliberately ignoring the fact that each consists of a conglomeration of heterogeneous elements some of which may have reached the country at one time and some at another. Even apart from this it is dubious whether the particular tribal substrata to which certain periods of migration are reserved can be accepted as correct.

No mention is made of any extensive tribal movement into the Sudan occurring later than the first half of the sixteenth century; and, if one except the thin though constant infiltration of Arabs across the Red Sea from the Ḥegáz and the Yemen, it is probably correct to say there has not been any.

XIV Let us now briefly examine the sparse references that occur to the indigenous races with whom the Arab immigrants must have coalesced, though the *nisbas* naturally lay no great stress on the fact.