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THE FUNCTIONS AND ECONOMY
OF THE INSTITUTIONS LINKED TO
THE SUFI ORDERS IN THE SUDAN

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The present paper does not claim to be exhaustive on such a complex subject. It gives only the highlights of the multi-functional character of these institutions and attempts to answer the question of how these institutions were financed.

Although the main theme of this paper is the functions and economy of institutions linked to the Sufi orders, this requires a survey of their coming and the nature of Islam in the Sudan.

The Islamization of the Sudan, which was a result of cultural, political, socio-economic and military factors, was a gradual and continuing process. It may, however, be divided roughly into two broad stages; superficial or primary Islamization which preceded the beginning of the sixteenth century; and real or secondary Islamization which began with the emergence of the Funj kingdom in about 1504.

The initial spread of Islamic teaching owed its impetus to holy men, often adherents of Sufi orders, who came from the Islamic heartlands, Egypt, the Hijaz, the Yemen and, at a later stage, Morocco. Most of these holy men were to come after the rise of the Funj Kingdom, also known as the Sinnar Sultanate after its capital Sinnar.

The Funj were at some stage formally converted to Islam. However, as elsewhere in the Sudanic belt, African rituals, specially at the installation of a new sultan, were maintained.1

The Funj rulers in their anxiety to legitimize their Islamic identity, welcomed 'Ulama' and Sufi Teachers to the country. These holy men were usually granted land and exemption from taxes and other dues.

The early phase of effective Islamization was dominated by foreign Sufi and other scholars. Sudanese who had studied abroad, mainly in the Hijaz and at al-Azhar, began to dominate the scene.

The Funj period (c. 1504 to 1820) was dominated by the activities of the Qadiriyya and the Shadhiliyya orders. One has to emphasize the essentially decentralized nature of these Sufi affiliations which became assimilated into the characteristic Sudanese pattern of localized holy clans. These affiliations were autonomous branches, each with its independent,

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shaykh and its particular chain of spiritual authority, "silsila." The meeting ground for these sometimes rival branches was the common respect they paid to the founder. None of these "units", however, seems to have established a proper hierarchy during the Funj period. A shaykh of a tariqa unit, who was usually a religious teacher, had no barrier between him and his students and followers. As Dr. Mahmoud Abdalla Ibrahim notes,

His (the shaykh's) relationship with them (the followers) was direct, face-to-face and personal.²

However, the latter half of the eighteenth century saw the coming of a new form of tariqa; the Sammaniyaa. This order was brought to the Sudan by Ahmad al-Tayyib w. al-Bashir (1155/1742-3 to 1239/1824), a Sudanese who had been initiated into the order while on the pilgrimage in Medina.

Ahmad al-Tayyib was to infuse a new spirit into the Sudnaese Sufism, leading to a renewed emphasis, not only on such practical aspects as dhikr (remembrance, sc. of God, in communal ritual) and madih (songs of praise), but also on the philosophy of Sufism. Ahmad al-Tayyib was said to have found the Qadiriyya and the Shadhiliyya at a very low ebb. He felt the need for reform and began to make contact with the leading shaykhs of his day seeking to persuade them to unite under his leadership.³

The Sammaniyaa may be considered a "half-way house" between the early decentralized orders and the new centralized ones that were to dominate the Sudanese religious landscape during the nineteenth century, such as the Khatmiyya, Idrisiyya and the Tijaniyya.⁴

Sufism and orthodoxy cannot be divorced from each other in Sudanese Islam. The Sufi orders drew their members from all walks of life, from both towns and countryside. These members included sultans, rulers, tribal chiefs, religious teachers, qadis, merchants, farmers, nomads, women, children and slaves. As is shown below, the latter were frequently given to religious men as endowments in the Sudan. In this sense, the hypotheses of Geertz and Gellner of dividing Islam in Morocco into two opposing models of "orthodox urban" and "mystic rural", are inapplicable to the Sudan.⁵

The tariqas in the Sudan operated on two different levels. They carried out missionary activities among those who were already Muslims and converted them to Sufism. However, they also functioned in areas on the frontiers of Islam, in the western Sudan and the southern parts
of the Gezira where they converted non-Muslims to Islam.

The significance of the Sufi orders to the religious life of the Sudanese may be seen in the fact that the Mahdist revolution of 1881 against the Turco-Egyptian rule, had its roots within the Sudanese Sufi context. Muhammad Ahmad was a Sammani shaykh and a follower of the teachings of the famous Sufi and scholar Ahmad b. Idris before manifesting himself as the Mahdi.6

The Sufi orders in the Sudan, as elsewhere in the Muslim world, drew their local representatives mainly from among established religious teachers. Consequently, the different religious centres of these holy men, khalwas, masids and masjids, came to be integrated into these orders. The Tabaqat, as Professor Yusuf Fadl Hasan has noted, fails to make clear the difference in function of these various institutions.7 This is presumably due to considerable functional overlapping.

Because it was widespread and the social and educational roles of its central figure, the faqih, the most important tariqa - linked institution was the khalwa or Quranic school.8

Although the usual meaning of Khalwa is the place where the Sufi mystic goes into retreat, in the Sudan it describes the place where the Quran and Islamic sciences were taught. The origin of this usage lies in the nature of Islam in the Sudan. The holy men who propagated Islam in most of the country combined fi'ilm or the exoteric Islamic sciences with Sufism and naturally used the same place to teach both.

Teaching in a Khalwa was at two levels; the first, known as nar al-Qur'an, "the fire of the Quran", the second, nar al-fi'ilm. They were so-called because the students studied by the light of a fire.9 The pupils, irrespective of their age, were divided into the seniors, al-hiran al-kabar, and juniors, al-hiran al-sighar. Moreover, no fees were paid by these students to their teacher.10

The physical structure may be illustrated by the Khalwa of al-Ghrayba, just south of Kurti in the northern Sudan. This khalwa was attached to the mosque of the village which has been in existence since as far back as the fifteenth century. It consists of the faqih's private room, a row of cells for the pupils, two classrooms called respectively Qur'aniyya, where the Quran was taught, and fi'ilmiyya, where fi'ilm was taught. The former is, however, known in the Gezira in the central Sudan, as al-jami'a, a term that denotes "congregation".

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Outside the khalwa there was an open area known as al-buq'ā, lit. "the spot", where the early morning and evening lessons were taught. The Khalwa has special room with a shelf hanging from the ceiling known as al-kabas (al-roshan in the Gezira) for keeping the wooden tablets (sing. lawh or loh) of the students at the end of their lessons. Because of its social function, the Khalwa also has rooms for visitors and travellers.11

Some khalwas had grottos (sing. ghar) built by holy men for their individual worship.

The khalwas in the Sudan have never had a standard curriculum. It was the individual faqih who made up the syllabus and chose those texts that appealed or were accessible to him. Most of the books derived from the curriculum of al-Azhar in Cairo, although a number of Sudanese scholars wrote and taught their own commentaries. In addition to the Quran, tajwid, tawhid, fiqh and Sufism were also taught.12

The Khalwa of al-Ghurayba possessed a considerable number of printed books and manuscripts. Despite this, the faqih of the khalwa usually taught from memory dictating the syllabus, lesson by lesson, to the students who wrote it down on their wooden tablets. After they had memorized the lesson, the tablets were cleaned.13

This Khalwa was at first a Qadiri centre. Later, however, it became an important centre for the Khatmiyya order. Its ties with this tariqa were established when Muhammad `Uthman al-Mirghani, the founder of the order visited the region in 1814–15. Because of the Khalwa's position as a centre for the tariqa, the Khatmiyya's ceremonies and rituals were held at the buq'ā and the students were taught its devotions.14

The Khalwa had and has other functions in addition to its religious and educational ones. It played a social role by serving as a centre of hospitality with a resthouse for visitors, travellers and traders. The Tabaqat gives several names of holy men in various parts of the Sudan who were famous for their hospitality.15

The Khalwas of the Qadiri shaykh Idris w. al-Arbab and his son Hamad, for instance, used to serve respectively 60 and 120 plates of food every day. The source also gives a striking description of how food was served at the Khalwa of another Qadiri shaykh, Hasan w. Hassuna, at the end of a day in Ramadan. The process of serving the food by 240 slave girls and women, who were well-dressed and adorned with gold and ivory, shows the wealth of this holy man and
also demonstrates his well-organized system.\footnote{16}

The \textit{Khalwa} was also a place of refuge or sanctuary; the community of Dabbat al-Fuqara' in the northern Sudan, for instance, enjoyed such a status during the Funj regime.\footnote{17} The \textit{Khalwa} also functioned as a place for settling disputes, hearing complaints, issuing fatwas or legal opinions. Finally, the \textit{Khalwa} functioned as a medical centre where people with physical and psychological illnesses could come for treatment. The various means adopted for curing these illnesses included writing amulets, preparing \textit{mikaya}, i.e. water used for washing some Quranic verses off a wooden tablet and then given to a sick person to drink, and the making of incantations (sing. \textit{azima}).\footnote{18}

The various \textit{tariqas} also operated within the framework of the mosque. This religious institution had been in the Sudan and elsewhere in the Muslim world not only a place of worship but also a centre for teaching \textit{ilm}. The combination of Sufism and \textit{ilm} by a number of Sufi teachers led many mosques to be automatically integrated into the orders. The mosque of the Hamaduiyyah religious clan of Nuri in the northern Sudan, for instance, functioned as an important Qadiriyya and, at a later stage, Khatmiyya centre in the region.\footnote{19}

The \textit{tariqas} generally tended to operate within a number of institutions apart from the mosque. It is not out of place to mention here that the sons and descendants of the famous nineteenth-century Sufi and scholar Ahmad b. Idris made use of the mosque as their main centre for teaching. In this they were probably maintaining Ahmad's practice, since he used the mosque as his centre.\footnote{20}

The \textit{tariqas} also made use of another centre of learning, namely, the \textit{masid}. This term, which denotes the place where \textit{ilm} was taught, is merely a dialectical variant of the classical word \textit{masjid}, "mosque"; the term is not unique to the Sudan, but was also common in Morocco and Sicily.\footnote{21}

The most celebrated \textit{masids} in the Sudan were those of Ahmad b. \textit{I}s\,a\,h and his son Ibrahim, in the Gezira. The former was integrated into the Khatmiyya tariqa at the time of al-Mirghani's visit to the Gezira in 1817-18. The \textit{masid} was a comprehensive religious centre with \textit{Khalwas}, lodgings and a kitchen. Physically and functionally, the Sudanese \textit{masid} echoes the Egyptian \textit{Khangah}.\footnote{22}

No \textit{masids} comparable to these of the Gezira existed at least in the

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Shayqiyya region in the northern Sudan. This is also true for Dar Fur where the masid was a simple physical structure; often no more than a small shed (rakuba) or a shady tree. In some areas, its function was more social than religious.\textsuperscript{23}

A holy man whether a member of a tariqa or not, played a number of different roles within his community. He was believed to be divinely-guided and incapable of sin. Whatever his actions, even if they were in open contravention of the Sharia, they had to be understood within the context of his infallibility. Thus the term, imam, appears in the biography of, for example, shaykh Idris w. al Arbab, presumably in the same sense of the infallible imam of the Shi\textsuperscript{a}.

The shaykhs of the various orders enjoyed great authority and expected the total submission of their adherents. Ahmad al-Tayyib of the Sammaniyya warned the followers of all tariqas against arguing with their spiritual masters for,

He who says to his shaykh "why" will never succeed (sc. in any endeavour).\textsuperscript{24}

The sanctity of a holy man and its value to the community is believed to survive or transcend his death. His baraka (benediction or blessing) is believed to emanate from his grave and from the places where he had lived.\textsuperscript{25} It is presumably because of the belief in baraka and its transcendence of death that each tariqa developed its own cult of saints. The tombs or qubbas, lit. "dome", of these holy men were and still are a conspicuous feature of the Sudanese religious landscape. The region of Dongola in the north of the Sudan alone has more than ninety-nine tombs.\textsuperscript{26} After his death, the holy man's tomb became an integral component of his community's life.\textsuperscript{27}

The tombs were usually built by the sons of holy men or followers. Some of these tombs were renovated by followers or through votive offerings from ordinary people.

The tariqas also had another type or shrine known as bayan, lit. "revealing", meaning where a particular holy man revealed himself in a dream. Such places were usually enclosed with flags (rayat or bawariq) and became places of local pilgrimage.\textsuperscript{28}

The qubbas and other shrines, like all religious centres, were honoured as places of refuge and sanctuary. People also used them as places where they could deposit their goods for safekeeping.\textsuperscript{29} The tombs
and shrines also served as places where ceremonies for the anniversaries of the birth (mawlid) and death (hawlilyya) of the holy man were held.

The account above shows the multi-functional character of the institutions linked to the Sufi tariqas in the Sudan. It, however, also raises the question of how these institutions were maintained and financed.

Our sources show that the financial and other support of these institutions derived from several sources. These included, for example, gifts from the pupils' parents, grants of land from the community, grants from political authorities, pious endowments (sadaqa and waqf) from rulers, well-to-do families and individuals, zakah, and, finally, offerings in fulfillment of vows (sing. nadhr).

Holy men in the Sudan, as indeed in most Muslim countries, were held in high honour by the political authorities. This can be illustrated further by the example of the Qadiri shaykh, Idris b. Muhammad al-Arbab, of Mahasi origin. He was born, died and was buried at al-Aylafun, southeast of Khartoum, where his tomb is still a place of visits. He is said to have cured the mother of the Funj sultan, Amara b. Nayil, known as Abu Sikaykin (965/1557-8 to 976/1568-9) after the famous shaykh, Ban al-Naqqa al-Darir had failed to do so. This incident undoubtedly enhanced his fame as a holy man. He eventually possessed considerable political influence and throughout his life was consulted by various Funj sultans and local rulers. He was famous for his role as a mediator in a number of political disputes. This successful mediation may be attributed to the learning and charisma of shaykh Idris as well as to the attachment of members of the Funj ruling class to his branch of the Qadiriyya; one example was Sultan Badi b. Rubat who died in 1680.

The Tabaqat demonstrates that shaykh Idris enjoyed religious prestige over a wide geographical area. Although his religious centre was situated in the centre of the Sudan, he received gifts from places as far away as the Red Sea region in the eastern Sudan. His student shaykh, Muhammad b. Fa'id used to visit him every year from the Red Sea area, and with him came representatives of the tribes of the east bringing gifts of honey, cloth, camels and slaves.

The same source shows that the Shukriyya peoples of the Eastern Sudan used to send the zakah on their livestock to shaykh Idris to help him to maintain his numerous guests and students.
Another Qadiri centre which possessed considerable political and economic influence during the Funj period was that of shaykh Hasan w. hassuna (d.1075/1664-5). Hasan established the village known as Wad Hassuna, twenty-seven miles west of Abu Dilalyq, from whvh he propagated his own branch of the Qadiriyya. His centre occupied a strategic position, being just west of the domain of Batahin nomadic peoples and along the Red Sea trade routes.34

_Shaykh_ Hasan, like several other holy men, combined religion with trade. He traded in horses on massive scale, exporting them as far as Taqali in Kordofan, Dar Fur and Dar Barqu (Waday). He owned about 500 slaves whom he used to dig his reservoir (_hafl_ ) at Umm al-Qinayir, and to form his own troops.

_Khaykh_ Hasan was held in high respect by the Funj sultan Badi w. Rubat who, on an occasion of their meeting, granted every request of _shaykh_ Hasan.35

In his capacity as a healer, _shaykh_ Hasan received gifts in cash and in kind. For example, he received an ounce of gold for curing the illness of a girl.36

Like the Qadiriyya, the Shadhiliyya combined religion with trade. This is supported by the case of the Majdhubiya, an offshoot of the Nasiriyya Shadhiliyya, which began as a local tariqa founded by Hamad b. Muhammad al-Majdhub (1105/1693-4 to 1190/1776-7) early in the eighteenth century in al-Damer in northern Sudan. According to Burckhardt, who visited the area in 1814, many members of the Majdhib were traders.37 Dr. al-Karsani in a recent book states in this respect,

Therefore, the Majdhib were also preserving their material interests when they acted as escorts for the caravans.

The same author also argues that the accumulated family wealth may be seen in the vast land the family bought in al-Damer area. He, basing his discussion on some land certificates from the area, states that the family through buying land succeeded in reinvesting its wealth.38

The economic and other support received by religious centres may be illustrated further by the example of the Nadifab community in the Shayqiyya region. The Nadifab were a holy clan who lived on Abu Rannat island in the Shayqiyya region from about the beginning of the seventeenth century until 1917, when the encroachment of the Nile forced them and the inhabitants of the island to desert it and move to live at Tanqasi al-Ruways, just opposite on the eastern (locally known as the west) bank. The island, and indeed the new settlement at Tanqasi

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al-Ruways, occupied a strategic position, being just north of the famous Shayqiyya region trading-centre of Tanqasi, commonly known as Tanqasi al-Suq (Tanqasi the market-place).\(^{39}\)

The pedigree of the Nadifab claims that they were of Sawarda origin and that their ancestor Sarid was a brother of ʿAbd al-ʿAziz, the founding father "of the Mahas".\(^{40}\) According to oral tradition, as part of the Mahas diaspora, which began in the sixteenth century, members of the Sawarda began to migrate to the Shayqiyya region which, apart from the fertility of its soil, was known for its hospitality to men of learning.\(^{41}\) These immigrants included shaykh Hidirbi, who settled at Abu Dom near modern Marawi, and al-hajj ʿAmara, who chose to live at al-Kur. Both of these holy men married locally and received gifts of land and date palms.\(^{42}\) These holy men were adherents of the Qadiriyya order. Their descendants, however, were to become among the prominent representatives of the Khatriyya order when it came to dominate the Shayqiyya area in the nineteenth century.

Our main concern here is with the descendants of al-hajj ʿAmara, who lived, died and was buried at al-Kur. Six of his great-grandsons, known as the Awlad Fatima (the sons of Fatima) played a considerable religious role in the area. Among these was Ibrahim, nicknamed al-Nazif, "the clean", known colloquially as al-Nadif, "the founding father" of the Nadifab. His cousin shaykh Qayadi was the founder of Awlad Qayadi, who, like several other religious families on Abu Rannat island, operated under the umbrella of the Nadifab.

The Nadifab used the mosque as their religious centre. It was not until about the latter half of the seventeenth century that Muhammad Ibrahim al-Nadif established the Khabwa of the Nadifab on the island.

The Nadifab performed the traditional role of the holy men in their community. They were the leaders in prayers, teachers, mediators, healers, and they issued legal opinions. For their role as religious teachers, the Nadifab received gifts from the pupils' parents. These, according to the economic and social status of the donors, usually consisted of date-palms or the produce of a hawd (hod) or more from the saqiyah-land.\(^{43}\) The people of Abu Rannat, like those of other communities in the Shayqiyya region, used to endow the khabwa and the mosque with a collective waqf (charitable gift) of land known as ʿurada. This was a strip of fertile land extending along the bank of the Nile lying immediately above the jarf land (the slope of the Nile bank down to the main
water course.44

As Spaulding notes, holy men usually possessed landed properties that were widely scattered outside their own localities. This is further illustrated by the example of those members of the Nadifab who possessed estates in various parts of the Shayqiyya region.45

The Nadifab, like other holy men, also possessed a number of slaves.46 The Tabaqat provides several examples of holy men and religious institutions that received waqfs of slaves. Al-hajj Sa'id, a grandson of Da'ud b. 'Abd al-Jalil who invited the Qadiri shaykh Taj al-Din al-Bahari to visit the Sudan, had a dream in which the Prophet ordered him to build a mosque for the Qadiri shaykh Da'4 Allah, a nephew of 'Abd Allah al-Asifi. Al-hajj Sa'id shipped stone from the village Bankiyu, built the mosque and endowed it with twelve slaves, some of both sexes, and five faddans.47

O'Fahey has discussed the concept of waqf as it seems to have operated in Dar Fur in the western Sudan. He also shows how the sultans induced holy men to settle by offering them land through the hakura system or jah for themselves and their descendants.48 The jah system, which denoted exemption from both the canonical and customary taxes, bears striking similarities to the mahram in Bornu.49

It is clear in the sources that it was usually the slaves and the students who worked the agricultural land of religious teachers.50

The holy man was also entitled to a portion (usually a hod) of the produce of the saqiya-land. This was because of the belief that he could protect the saqiya and oxen that pulled it against the evil-eye or evil underworld spirits.51

In the Mahas area, however, the share of the holy man in the produce of the saqiya was called in the Nubian language ati mashti. A farmer who had, for instance, one ox was expected to give one eighth of the sorghum, wheat and barley that his saqiya had produced. Moreover, holy men also received the zakah (Islamic tax) on livestock and that on the produce of agricultural land.52

To conclude, the Funj period did not see the development of a conscious government policy to subsidize the religious institutions. This and the nature of the decentralized tariqas that dominated the period

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should be understood within the context of the absence of an effective centralized political apparatus. This situation was, however, changed after the Turco-Egyptian invasion of the Sudan in 1820-21. Turco-Egyptian rule caused considerable change in the Sudanese society. It put an end to the traditional political order and imposed for the first time in the Sudan a highly-centralized administrative and legal system. Although the Turco-Egyptian regime is notorious for its maladministration, it brought some elements of modernization. These included, for instance, better communications by the introduction of steamers and a telegraph network.\textsuperscript{53} Trade routes and public security also improved considerably. All these facilities encouraged the jallaba or small-scale Muslim traders coming from the north to trade with areas as remote as the Nuba Mountains in the western Sudan. The Period also saw the development of a conscious religious policy in the Sudan. The government subsidized most of the religious centres and granted their heads monthly subventions.\textsuperscript{54}
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6 - See further, Karrar, Sufi Brotherhoods, 174-6.


15 - Ibid.

16 - Ibn Dayf Allah, 1974: 157, 142-3 and 158.

17 - T. Krump (translation by Jay Spaulding) typescript, 254.


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DIRASAT IFRIQIYYA (52) -
20 - Ibid, 15.


25 - Tringham, 1949, 144-5.

26 - Muhammad Saʿid Ahmad ʿAbd Allah, Min taʾrīkh mantaqat Dongola, mimeograph, Khartoum 1978, 40.


30 - Ibn Dayf Allah, 1974, 41 and 51.
31 - Ibid, 65.
32 - Ibid, 57.
33 - Ibid, 59.

34 - Hasan, Yusuf Fadl, Dirasat, 76.

35 - Ibn Dayf Allah, 146.
36 - Ibid, 140.


40 - Ibid.
41 - Ibid, 15-16.
42 Ibid, 154.
43 - Ibid, 156; hod (cl. Ar. hawd) small piece of agricultural land, usually rectangular in shape.
44 - Ibid.
45 - See further, J.L. Spaulding, The Heroic Age of Sinar, African Studies Center, Michigan State University, Monograph No. 15.
50 - Ibn Dayf Allah, 1974, 283.