

THE HISTORY OF THE ISMA'ILIYYA TARIQA
IN THE SUDAN: 1792-1914

by

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ABSTRACT

This study hopes to shed some light on the history of a holy family and a Sufi *ṭarīqa* which developed in Kordofan. It traces the origin of the family of Sh. Ismā'īl al-Walī, follows its progress through the Turco-Egyptian, the Mahdia and the Condominium periods, and sees its impact on the society of Kordofan in particular, and on Sudanese society in general. The progress of the *ṭarīqa* and its structure show that, although it borrowed from the Khatmiyya and the Qādiriyya, it developed into a distinct order. The main emphasis here is on the historical and structural development of the order.

The sources may be divided into two main categories: oral and written. Although a number of people have been interviewed, we have depended primarily on the written sources. Most of these are manuscripts in the Sudan Government Archives, Khartoum. In addition to these we have made use of other archival materials dealing with other *ṭarīqas* and other relevant topics in the Sudan Government Archives, Khartoum and in the Sudan Archives of the University of Durham Library.

The work has been divided into five chapters. The first deals with the environment in which Sh. Ismā'īl, his family and his *ṭarīqa* grew, and explains their geographical, historical and religious background. The second chapter deals with the founder of the family and the *ṭarīqa*, Sh. Ismā'īl, his genealogy, his educational background, his ideas and his writings. The third chapter follows the progress of the Ismā'īliyya during the Mahdia, and deals with their relationship with that movement. It traces some elements of schism which led to the emergence of a branch of the family under the new name of al-Azharī. The fourth chapter deals with the Ismā'īliyya after the establishment of the Condominium rule. During this period the Ismā'īliyya, both *ṭarīqa* and family, were exposed to new political and economic changes and were brought in touch with new social forces and experiences. The chapter deals with the impact of these new conditions on the Ismā'īliyya. The fifth chapter is devoted mainly to the distinctive organization and rituals of the *ṭarīqa*.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND SHORT REFERENCES

Adāb	The Journal of the Faculty of Arts, University of Khartoum
Am. Anth.	American Anthropologist
BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
BBS	Bulletin of Sudanese Studies
EI	Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1st and 2nd editions
G.G. Reports	Reports on the Finance, Administration and Conditions of the Sudan
GMS	Gibbs Memorial Series
IRE	Intelligence Reports, Egypt
MEA	Middle Eastern Affairs
MW	Muslim World
NMC	Numismatic Chronicle
Sud. Govt. Arch. (Khart.)	Sudan Government Archives, Khartoum
Sud. Govt. Arch. (Durham)	Sudan Archives, Oriental Section, University of Durham Library
SUDINT	Sudan Intelligence Files
SIR	Sudan Intelligence Reports
SNR	Sudan Notes and Records
<i>Tabaqat</i>	Muhammad al-Nūr d. Dayf Allah, <i>Kitāb al-Tabaqat fi Kusūs al-awliyā' wa'l salihin wa'l ulamā' wa'l Shu'arā'</i> , ed. Y.F. Hasan, Khartoum, 1971.
W.G. Browne, <i>Travels</i>	<i>Travels in Egypt, Syria and Africa</i> , London, 1799.
R. Hill, Biog. Dict:	Biographical Dictionary of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Oxford, 1951.
P.M. Holt	i) <i>The Mahdist State = The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-98</i> , Oxford 1970. <i>2nd Edition</i> ii) <i>Modern History = A Modern History of the Sudan</i> , 2nd ed., London, 1963.
H. MacMichael	i) <i>Tribes = The Tribes of Northern and Central Kordofan</i> , Cambridge, 1912. ii) <i>Arabs = A History of the Arabs in the Sudan</i> , 2 vols., Cambridge, 1922.
R.S. O'Fahey and J. Spaulding	<i>Kingdoms = Kingdoms of the Sudan</i> , London, 1974.
Pallme	<i>Travels = Travels in Kordofan</i> , London, 1844.
N. Shuqair	<i>Ta'rikh = Tarikh al-Sudan al-qadīm wa'l hadīth wa- jugrafiyatuh</i> , Cairo, 1903.

Y. Mikhā'il

Memoirs = S.M. Nur, "A Critical Edition of the Memoirs of Yusuf Mikha'il", unpublished PhD thesis, London, 1963.

Y.F. Hasan

i) *Muqaddima* = *Muqaddima fī ta'rīkh al-mamālik al-Islāmiyya fī al-Sūdān al-Sharqī*, Khartoum, 1971.
 ii) *Arabs* = *The Arabs and the Sudan*, Khartoum, 1973.

Syd.

Sayyid, e.g. *Syd. al-Makkī* or *Syd. Abū al-Fadl*.

Sh.

Shaykh, e.g. Sh. Ismā'il.

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Finally, although much of the credit for this work is shared with the above, the blame for any errors or shortcomings which it may still contain, is mine alone.

CHAPTER I
KORDOFAN IN THE TIME OF
SHAYKH ISMĀ'IL AL-WALĪ

In many of his writings Sh. Ismā'īl emphasized his ties with Kordofan and stressed his deeply rooted cultural and social links with that part of the Nilotic Sudan. In his *al-'Uḥūd al-wāfiyya*,¹ he boastfully stated that he was born, grew up, was educated and initiated in the *ṭarīqa* in El-Obeid, and did not have to travel away from it like others in search of a master to guide him; His Shaykh, Muhammad 'Uthmān al-Mirghani,² met him in Kordofan. In fact, with the exception of two brief intervals - one shortly after the conquest of Kordofan by the Turco-Egyptian forces when he left El-Obeid for a self-imposed exile in the Nūba Mountains, and the other in 1841 when he went on pilgrimage - Ismā'īl did not leave Kordofan at all. His life there spanned the decades immediately preceding the Turco-Egyptian conquest of the Sudan in 1821 and the larger part of the transformation of Kordofan into a province of the Egyptian Sudan. The Ismā'īliya *ṭarīqa* which he created at that time was thus closely linked with that region and strongly tied to it. Such were those links and ties that when Sayyid al-Makkī wanted to revive it after the end of the Mahdia, he had to take it back from Omdurman to its home in El-Obeid, where it has remained highly localized and strong up to this day. A study of the town of El-Obeid and the land of Kordofan in the latter part of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries may thus help in drawing a picture of the home in which the Ismā'īliya *ṭarīqa* was nursed and the environment in which it grew and took shape.

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1. Sh. Ismā'īl, *al-'Uḥūd al-wāfiyya al-jaliyya*, Ms. Sud. Govt. Archives, (Khartoum) 1/82/1315.
 2. Muhammad 'Uthmān al-Mirghani I, one of the disciples of Ahmad b. Idrīs, al-Fāsī, was sent to the Sudan in 1817 to propagate the ideas of Ibn Idrīs; there Muhammad 'Uthmān was tempted to establish his own *ṭarīqa* the Khatmiyya, R. Hill, *Biographical Dictionary*, p.278.

Unfortunately for this account, there is very little written information to rely on. Many of the historians writing about the Sudan have always complained about the absence of recorded materials and scarcity of reliable information. The lack of literary traditions and the difficulties of transportation to the interior of this country rendered much of the information about it unrecorded and unknown to the outside world up to the nineteenth century. Those conditions were more particularly true of Kordofan than of many other parts. With no teaching religious institutions comparable to Masīd Wad 'Isā¹ in the Gezira or Khalāwī al-Ghubush² in Dongola, to combat illiteracy, reading and writing remained arts unknown to the people of Kordofan, let alone the recording of incidents and historical happenings. Furthermore, being the only break in a chain of kingdoms and sultanates extending through Central and Eastern Sudan from Bornu, Waddai, Darfur and Sennar, and with no tradition of a ruling dynasty interested in tracing the origins of its ancestors, or in recording the glories and achievements of its kings, Kordofan failed to attract or encourage any writer such as al-Tūnūsī³ or a traveller like Reubeni⁴. The result of this is the

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1. About ten miles south of Khartoum, this institution founded by Ahmad Wad 'Isā al-Anṣārī, played an important role in the literary and religious progress of the Sudan. See I. al-Amīm, *Qaryat Kutrānj*, Khartoum 1975, p.21.
 2. See *Tabaqāt*, pp.279-80.
 3. Muhammad ibn 'Umar al-Tūnūsī, Arab traveller who visited Darfur as a young boy (1803 to 1811) and wrote a very good account of the history and society of that kingdom. His work *Tashhīḥ al-Adhhān*, ed. by K.M. 'Asākir and M.M. Musa'ad, Cairo, 1965, has been translated into French by Dr. Perron.
 4. David Reubeni, a Jewish traveller, who visited Sennar about 1523 disguised as a Meccan Sharīfī. The account of his adventures contain very useful information about the Funj Kingdom in that period. See S. Hillelson, "David Reubeni", *S.N.R.*, XIV, 1933, pp.55-66.

absence of any local historical works¹ similar to *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*,² *T'ārīkh mulūk Sennar*,³ or *Makhtūtat Kātīb al-Shūna*.⁴ Thus much of the early history of Kordofan has to be pieced together from incidents mentioned in these chronicles, which were few; from oral traditions,⁵ of which not very much could be found; and from whatever has been written about this territory in the accounts of travellers visiting the neighbouring sultanates, which were not very reliable. Those early travellers depended on what they had heard about Kordofan from others, and in such accounts it is not difficult to find factual mistakes, mistranslations, misrepresentations and unfair judgments. Typical of these is James Bruce (1730-94) who is judged by Beckingham to be inaccurate and, "His method of composition, at least as described by Latrobe, was unlikely to promote accuracy or even clarity. He was obviously casual about details and his prejudices were violent".⁶ He visited Sennar in 1772 and his account throws some light on the relationship between the Funj and Kordofan during this and the earlier period. The story which he told of the Funj conquest of Kordofan in

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1. The only claim to the presence of such a kind of work was made by A.E. Robinson, *S.N.R.*, VII, 1924, p.142, where he suggested that a manuscript containing a written history of Kordofan and Darfur was given to Koenig in 1824, and is now in 'Abdīn Palace Archives in Cairo. This, however, does not seem to be traceable.
 2. Muḥammad al-Nūr wad Dayf Allah, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt fī Khūṣūs al-awliyā' wa'l Sālihīn*, ed. Y.F. Hasan, is a biographical account of the saints, jurists and religious notables of the Funj sultanate.
 3. Aḥmad Kātīb al-Shūna and three others, *T'ārīkh mulūk Sennar*, ed. M. Shibeika.
 4. Aḥmad ibn al-Hājj 'Alī, *Makhtūtat Kātīb al-Shūna*, ed. al-Shatir Busaylī.
 5. Some oral tradition about the Musabba'āt was collected by H. MacMichael, *Tribes and Arabs*, his main informant being Hāmid Muḥammad Jābr al-Dār (d. 1933), last of the hereditary Musabba'āwi sultans. Other stories have been collected by Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥīm, *Abtāl al-Sūdān*, and R.S. O'Fahey whose informant was the son of MacMichael's informant. See O'Fahey and Spaulding, "Hāshim and the Musabba'at", *B.S.O.A.S.*, XXX, 1972, pp.316-33.
 6. C.F. Beckingham, *Travels....*, by James Bruce, abridged, Edinburgh, 1964, Introduction, p.16.

1774 produced some interesting remarks from H. MacMichael¹ and O.G.S. Crawford,² with regard to the date on which Kordofan was subjugated and the officer (Abū Likaylik) who led the victorious expedition.³

Another eighteenth century traveller who mentioned something about Kordofan was W.G. Browne, who visited Darfur in 1793 and stayed there for three years up to 1796. During these years, however, his movements were restricted and his activities suspect. Most of his information then came from stories related to him by the traders whom he had met in Cobbe' and in turn he proceeded to state some relations that were made to him concerning Kordofan and other adjacent countries.⁴ The story which he told throws some light on the relationship between Kordofan and Darfur at a time of unrest in both. This was the time when Tayrāb of the Keira Fūr was leading an army against the Musabba'at in Kordofan, mainly to clear the way for his son Ishāq to rule in Darfur. The result was trouble in Kordofan and instability in Darfur. Browne thus was told that the people in Kordofan still remembered the good old days when Abū Likaylak ruled fourteen years back with justice.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, and especially after the Turco-Egyptian conquest of Kordofan, a number of European travellers, encouraged by the relative safety of the routes or employed in Muhammad 'Alī's service, started to come to that territory for a variety of purposes: gold, minerals, trade, discoveries and adventure. They put

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1. H. MacMichael, *Tribes*, p.10, nn. 1 and 2.
 2. O.G.S. Crawford, *The Fung Kingdom*, p.244.
 3. In his preface of the third and last complete edition of the *Travels*, published 1813, Murray wrote that after 20 years' lapse, between his journey and the writing of his story, Bruce's dates were bound to be faulty.
 4. W.G. Browne, *Travels*, p.307.

their observations and adventures down in print and thus added some very valuable information to the otherwise extremely sketchy records of this area. But although they are very useful and informative, these accounts should be approached with some caution and their observations and moral judgments be considered in the light of their social and cultural backgrounds. Most of these travellers were the product of a European society which was witnessing a social and industrial revolution with an ever-growing nationalism and European patriotism. Coupled with a missionary feeling, this gave rise to the admiration of everything that was European and Christian, and an undisguised contempt for all things that were deviant from these. Accordingly, they saw almost everything through European eyes, and judged everything against the moral, material and cultural standards of their European societies of that period.

Another factor which also affected their writings was that the governments, or the public to whom those accounts were addressed, had preconceived ideas about these territories of "primitive natives" and the writers were expected to harmonize with these accepted views. So the accounts of their adventures in those remote areas were meant to appeal to a European imagination of those "primitive societies" rather than to offer objective observation and historical analysis. Many are meant to be interesting more than instructive: thus Pallme states that he noted down in his journal "everything that appeared to me remarkable, which I laid before my friends for their amusement on my return".¹

This being said, we may now turn to mention something about some of these nineteenth century travellers to Kordofan.

1. I. Pallme, *Travels*, Preface.

E. de Cadalvène and J. de Breuverly, two French travellers, did not actually visit Kordofan, but their account of it in *L'Egypte et la Nubie*, pp.197-215,¹ seems to be a rare and valuable attempt to deal with the history of that territory from the fifteenth century to the eve of the Turco-Egyptian conquest in 1821. Their visit to the Sudan took them to Jabal al-Barkal in Dongola after which they returned to write a general account of their investigations in the Sudan which they published in Paris in 1841.² Their information about Kordofan came mainly, as they acknowledged, from another French traveller, Mathieu-August Koenig (1802-1865). Koenig in turn seems to have got his information from a certain Sh. Tayma al-Musabba'āwī.³ This makes it especially valuable since it seems to be the only version that gives the Musabba'at story of this period to compare with that of the Funj and that of the Keira. Furthermore, the historical material in this account seems to be generally reliable, though the dates should be put in a more accurate chronological context and compared with other works.

Ignatius Pallme (1810-1841?), an Austrian traveller who came to Egypt as a trader. Between 1838-39 he visited El-Obeid on a mission to advise the viceroy of Egypt, Muhammad 'Alī, on the prospects of trade in that area. But in addition to commercial information, he was interested in the social and political activities of Kordofan. For information he said that he had depended on his own personal observations

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1. R.S. O'Fahey translated and edited this account in his "Kordofan in the eighteenth century", *S.N.R.*, 1973, pp.32-42.
 2. *Ibid.*, p.32, fn.2, says that it seems that there are two editions: *L'Egypte et la Turquie de 1829 à 1836*, Paris, 1836, reprinted as *L'Egypte et la Nubie*, 2 vols., Paris, 1841, with the same pagination.
 3. A.E. Robinson, *S.N.R.*, VII, 42, suggests that this information was given to Koenig in the form of a written manuscript.

but these were supplemented by what he got from a man whose name he did not give, but who he described as an old *faqih*, over seventy years of age who had been an eye-witness of all recent events. This information was published in his *Travels in Kordofan*, originally in German in 1843, then shortly afterwards translated into English and published in London in 1844.

In writing his *Travels* Pallme seems to have set himself to do three things: to collect information on commerce; to note down everything which appeared to him remarkable and interesting to his friends; and to make some contribution which, as he put it, "Will at least form a short guide for those who may be willing to explore those countries more fully...."¹ To get these, he was luckier than his European predecessors Dr. Ruppell² and Russegger,³ who, he said, had to travel in so much company that it hindered their movements and limited their scope of observation. He came at a time when the Turco-Egyptian rule had been firmly established, and could thus travel safely with very little company. He was therefore able to collect some valuable first-hand information to satisfy the aims that he had set himself to achieve.

His writings, however, were highly and uncompromisingly critical of the Egyptian administration of that area. He showed that the system was excessively oppressive and the means used to implement the government decision were inhumane. He observed that this was very

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1. I. Pallme, *Travels*, Preface.
 2. Dr. E.W. Ruppell (1794-1884), a German naturalist. He left Cairo in 1822 via Dongola for the northern approaches of Kordofan. He was there between 1823-25. His journey was recorded in *Reisen in Nubien...*, Frankfurt. 1829. Holroyd (d.1888) an English traveller, followed in Ruppell's footsteps and recorded his account in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol.9, 1839. See R. Hill, *Biographical Dictionary*, p.322.
 3. J. Russegger (1802-63) an Austrian geologist; in 1838 he was commissioned by Muhammad 'Alī to explore the mineral resources of the Sudan; visited the Nūba mountains; his very optimistic reports led Muhammad 'Alī to spend much money and energy which were not rewarded; his *Reisen in.... Afrika* published in Stuttgart, 1841-9. See R. Hill, *Biographical Dictionary*, p.322.

damaging to the economy of that area; women who used to wear golden ornaments could no longer afford to do that and nomadic tribes found it easier to drive their herds out of the government's reach. He also talked about the twice-annually organized government raids on the Nūba mountains and neighbouring countries for slave hunting. In general he showed how the oppressive Turco-Egyptian rule was helping to break the tribal, social and economic systems of that territory. His account in this respect was very useful.

John Petherick (1813-82)¹, a Welsh mining engineer, entered the service of Muhammad 'Alī in 1845 to look for coal in Upper Egypt, the Red Sea and Kordofan. In 1848 he gave up his service with Muhammad 'Alī and went to live in Kordofan as a trader - 1848 to 1853. He was British Vice-Consul in Khartoum from 1859 to 1864, when the post was suppressed because there were rumours that he was engaged in the slave trade.

His account of Kordofan appeared mainly in his book, *Egypt, the Sudan and Central Africa*,² The other book, which he wrote jointly with his wife, *Travels in Central Africa*,³ deals mainly with other parts of the Sudan, especially the Upper Nile regions in Southern Sudan. His writings about Kordofan are very interesting and full of details, especially on trade, commercial activity and society. His historical account, however, is very short, generalized and lacking in details.⁴ He gave as his authorities a certain Makkāwī; a schoolmaster whom he described as a grey-headed old *faqīh*; and the *shaykh* of the village (Bāra). From these he said, "After regaling them with coffee, I gleaned the following information connected with the history of Kordofan, in which Bāra and its inhabitants

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1. R. Hill, *Biographical Dictionary*, p.305, and MacMichael, *Tribes*, p.31.
 2. See J. Petherick, *Egypt, the Sudan and Central Africa*, Edinburgh, 1861, ppp.301-5.
 3. J. and K.H. Petherick, *Travels in Central Africa*, 1869.
 4. Petherick, *Egypt, the Sudan and Central Africa*, Ch.XVII, pp.261-85.

occupied a conspicuous part".¹ Then followed about twenty-four pages of a general account of how Kordofan took its name, its aborigines, Arab immigrants to it, and the Funj-Fur conflict over it.

Though very valuable for its detailed and accurate information otherwise, Petherick's historical information does not add very much to what Pallme had said before him. In fact, MacMichael suggests that Petherick plagiarizes freely from Pallme and adds flowery details of his own. MacMichael then goes on to say that both Pallme and Petherick are vague and inaccurate.²

Le Comte D'Escayrac de Lauture (1826-1868), was a French traveller who came to live in Egypt between 1847 and 1850. In 1849 he went on a journey which took him up the Nile to Dongola, then he crossed the Bayūda desert to Kordofan and later to Sennar. He was corresponding with Dr. Charles Cuny³ and advised him on the preparations for his journey to Darfur where Cuny died in 1858.⁴ He later went on another journey, which took him to the Far East where he was imprisoned and died in China.

While in Kordofan, he met and was very much impressed by Sh. Ismā'il al-Walī. His remarks about this meeting were recorded in his *Le Desert et le Soudan*.⁵

Joseph H. Churi (1828-), a Syrian Maronite traveller. In the company of Capt. W. Peel, the son of the British Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, he set out on a journey of exploration to the interior of Africa in 1851. They crossed the Nubian desert and came to El-Obeid

1. *Ibid.*, p.261.

2. See H. MacMichael, *Tribes*, p.10, n.2.

3. See R. Hill, *Biographical Dictionary*, p.106.

4. Charles Cuny (1811-1848), French traveller, see *ibid.*, p.106.

5. See D'Escayrac de Lauture, *Le Desert et le Soudan*, Paris, 1853, p.443.

where they were warmly welcomed by the Governor of the province. They were planning to continue their journey up to Darfur and further west, but their plans were frustrated first by a discouraging account related to them by a certain *faqīh*¹ about his plight when he went to visit his *shaykh* in Bornu. He explained to them the dangers and the state of lawlessness in those areas and how he narrowly escaped death a number of times. A further blow to their plans came when they both suffered from a high fever and had to stay for a long time in El-Obeid before they decided to call off their journey and return speedily to Cairo. Chūri's account of this journey appeared in a book called *Sea Nile, the Desert and Nigritia*² which he published in London in 1853. The account is very personal and does not give much new information about that region. It seems that their travelling more or less in high government circles did not give them much chance for observation and limited their scope to the society round the governor and high-ranking officials. On the other hand, their illness must have added to their difficulties of getting first-hand information. So most of the book dealt with incidents directly affecting him and Capt. Peel, and the story of the fever in El-Obeid took a sizeable portion of that.

Having said all this about eighteenth and nineteenth century accounts generally and individually, one should necessarily point out that judging them by modern standards of historical scholarship and objectivity could be unjust and unfair. One should be grateful to the efforts they made - in spite of their many limitations and difficulties - to present some work which though prejudicial, ill-informed, naive and

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1. J.H. Chūri, *Sea Nile, the Desert and Nigritia*. p.183 (fns.), gives the story of this *faqīh* whom Chūri calls *Mufdi* (*sic*) Mahmūd Debadī.
 2. *Ibid.*

faulty in some parts, have contributed very much to the present day stories of this territory. It is hoped that by comparing their notes and weighing their judgments against each other, we may form an opinion about the history of Kordofan during this period.

Dār Kurdufān,¹ (the land of Kordofan) has been used in different forms and by many people - including Sh. Ismā'il - to refer loosely to the land between the Sultantes of Sennar and Darfur, which during the Turco-Egyptian rule and ever since came to be known as *mudīriyyat Kordofan* (the Province of Kordofan).² It included the lands bounded by the Libyan and Bajūda deserts, the White Nile, Bahr al-Ghazāl and the range of low mountains of Kaja al-Surūj. Thus surrounded by difficult natural barriers of the desert in the north, the sandy wasteland formerly known as Bājat Umm Lammā' in the east, the muddy mountainous region in the south, and the sandy wastes in the west, Kordofan tended to be isolated from the rest of the country and the world. With the exception of a few modifying factors like Khor Abū Habil and Wādī al-Malik (seasonal streams) which linked it with the White Nile and Dongola respectively, Kordofan was difficult of approach from all directions. This is clearly illustrated by the attitude of the King of Taqalī in the story told about him and the Sultān of Sennar.³ This king was said to have allowed a friend of Bādī II Abū Diqn to be robbed in Taqalī.

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1. It has, and still is being used and written in various forms both in Arabic and English, e.g., Kordofan, Kurdufān and Kordofal in English, and in Arabic: كُردفان ، كُردوفان ، كُردفان
For more details on the term Kordofan, see H. MacMichael, *Tribes*, App.I, pp.222-4, and M. ibn 'Umar al-Tūnisī, *Tashhīdh al-adhhan*, ed. K.M. 'Asākir and M.M. Mus'ad, Introduction.
 2. During the Mahdia this term temporarily lost its significance. *Markaz Kordofan*, mainly referring to El-Obeid and its vicinity, became part of *Imārāt al-Gharb* which included Kordofan and Darfur together.
 3. Read the story in *Ta'rīkh mulūk Sennār*, ed. M. Shibeika, p.3, and in *Makhtutat Kātib al-Shūna*, ed. al-Shātīr Busaylī, pp.9-10.

When the king was warned of the consequences of this act, he did not seem to be worried and thought that he was beyond the reach of that sultan, since the unpassable desert known then as Bājat Umm Lammā' separated their two countries. Even as late as 1820, Maqdūm Musallam who was ruling Kordofan in the name of the Fur Sultan felt secure there and refused to believe the rumours brought by the riverain traders about an army advancing against him from Dongola.

Certain factors, however, have contributed towards turning this territory into a unique border zone of many complexities. It is a land of wandering nomads and sedentary cultivators and townspeople; of Arabized tribes and negroid Africans; of Muslims and pagans; and a cultural watershed for a Hijazi-Egyptian influence from the East and a Maghribi-West African one from the West. The first of these factors is a geographical one.

The Geographical Factor

Situated in a unique intermediary position between the arid desert and the wet tropical forests of Bahr al-Ghazāl, and with no high mountains, except on its fringes, this area has very few sharp divisions into distinctive physical regions, but rather a gradation in which vegetation and soil are the most important elements of variation. These elements, to a large extent, governed the mode of life in each gradation, and dictated the economic activities of its inhabitants. With this in mind, Kordofan can thus be roughly divided into three regions descending from north to south.

The northern region is a vast area extending from the Libyan and Bayūda desert - part of the Great Sahara. Though its rainfall is too sparse and erratic for the cultivation of any crops, it cannot properly

be called a barren desert because some sorts of seeds do germinate and grow into grass as soon as any rain falls on them, even if they have been lying dry for years. It is a great open, empty space littered with occasional rocky outcrops, few of which are of any considerable height, and a scattering of some thorny bushes here and there. There are very few *khōrs* and *wādīs* (seasonal streams), most noticeable of which is Wādī al-Malik, which runs from Dongola to the borders of Darfur. With very little water and vegetation, it remained a desolate and very thinly populated area. Very difficult to traverse and uneasy to control, this region became a haven for unruly nomadic tribes and a refuge for those who rebelled against any government which controlled the Nile. Untamed by any government and unfettered by any laws, these nomads posed a permanent threat to the trade routes ~~crossing~~ the desert from the north to the interior of the country. W.G. Browne, who travelled from Asiyūt to Cobbe' in 1793, tells us that the caravans coming that way had grown accustomed to give certain dues to those marauding nomads in order to avoid their attacks, which in spite of that, had claimed the lives of many whose bones could still be seen littering the road between Dongola and the Western Sudan.¹

Difficult as it may seem, this area supported a number of camel nomadic tribes chief among whom are the Kabābīsh, al-Majānīn, Dār Hāmid, Banī Jarrār and al-Ma'āliya. These are Arabized tribes which swept through Nūbia since the fourteenth century and finding these lands suitable to their way of life, stuck to these plains and were reluctant to change. A very important aspect in that pattern is a

1. See W.G. Browne, *Travels*, pp.240-1.

regular movement between their summer quarters near the watering places and a north and north-westerly limit varying from one year to another, according to the incidence of rain, which decided the availability of grass. This is a highly organized process and the *shaykh* enforces much discipline with regard to the routes to be followed by each group of the tribe to ensure the availability of grass for the animals on their return journey.

They are all dependent on themselves and their animals for most of their needs. They make a good part of their equipment, carpets, sacks and the like from the wool of their camels and sheep; but certain things like tea, sugar and clothes had to be bought from town. Thus, every year the nomad Arabs of Northern Kordofan sent male animals to Omdurman and Egypt, spending part of the price there on sugar, tea, clothes and ornaments for their women. And on the other hand, every year they also went southwards into areas where *dura* is cultivated to purchase their year's supply.

Apart from these economic contacts, the Arab nomads of Northern Kordofan preferred to roam freely in their *Khalā'* (open space) to the contamination of towns, and considered them evil places which sapped morals and destroyed character. Thus with so very few contacts with the rest of Kordofan, the Arab tribes of the north kept much of their nomadic characteristics: loving the most complete liberty and independence, rebellious against any tie of discipline, always ready for wars and raids, and ever prepared to resist governmental restraints.

The southern region is mainly the mountainous territory generally known as *Jibāl al-Nūba* (the Nūba Mountains). With comparatively heavy rainfall, there is an abundant water supply for cultivation and enough

grass for animal grazing, though the tsetse fly in its southernmost part, closer to Bahr al-Ghazal makes it unhealthy for both man and animal during the rainy season.

The region is inhabited mainly by the Nūba who are believed at one time to have been spread over the whole of the central plains of Kordofan before they were systematically pushed southwards in front of the thrust first of the riverain, then of the Baqqāra Arabs, which confined them to their present home.¹ The well-guarded mountains and the rough climatic conditions during the muddy rainy season, gave this region a great degree of security and protection from any external attacks, but deprived it of much needed cultural contacts with the rest of the country and the world. Consequently this region, with the exception of the Eastern Hills where the Kingdom of Taqalī was founded with strong links with the Funj of Sennar, escaped the early effects of Arabization and Islamization, which were gradually gaining ground in Kordofan throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and afterwards. This isolation, though kept for some time, was, however, broken, mainly by the immigration in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of Baqqāra tribes - namely, the Ḥawāzma, Awlād Ḥāmid, Kināna, Kawāhla, Missairiya and Habbāniya - some of whom intermarried with the Nūba and settled in the plains.²

The coming of the Baqqāra in the eighteenth century brought about a great deal of change and activity to this area. They created a situation of restless fluidity in an area which once formed some sort of

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1. C.G. and B.Z. Seligman, *Pagan Tribes*, p.369; also, Pallme, *Travels*, p.156.
 2. See H. MacMichael, *Arabs*, I, pp.272-8. See also I. Cunnison, *Baggara Arabs*, p.2, and K.D.D. Henderson, "The Migration of the Missiria Tribe into South West Kordofan", *S.N.R.*, XXII, 1, 1939, p.52.

a fixed border between the Arabized north, and the still predominantly negroid south. They were mainly cattle grazers, and like many other nomadic tribes, depended very much on the markets of settled people for their grain, clothes and other necessities, but at the same time had no desire to be subjected to any control of any government. Finding themselves in a territory lying between the Sultanate of Sennār and that of Darfur, and claimed by each, the Baqqāra tried to evade them both by allying each time with one against the other. Baqqāra horsemen then became an important part of the irregular armies of these sultans. In his *Travels*, W.G. Browne tells us that the Sultans of Darfur began to rely very much on them: "In their campaigns much reliance is placed on the Arabs who accompany them and who are properly tributaries rather than subjects".¹ The Turco-Egyptian conquest of Kordofan did not change the situation very much. Pallme describing the fluidity of the southern frontier of the province of Kordofan, suggests that still (in 1838) this attitude of the nomads had not changed. The frontier of the province, he states, "Increases or decreases accordingly as the inhabitants of this part of the country become tributary either by their own free will or are rendered subjects by force".²

Another aspect of the Baqqāra activity which very much influenced the stability of this area was their active role in the slave raids. Finding it a lucrative business, they formed groups which penetrated deep into the Nūba mountains and neighbouring territories for slave hunting. Through these raids and also through penetration and intermarriage, they helped to break the tribal, social and economic systems of this area.

1. W.G. Browne, *Travels*, p.288.
2. I. Pallme, *Travels*, p.118.

The central region is a fertile plain, part of the savannah belt with moderately good rainfall, a variety of vegetation and acacia shrubs. While good rainfall and fertile land supported good agriculture for food crops, gum Arabic, collected from the acacia shrubs, provided the inhabitants of this area with a good source of cash. The fact that this gum is collected after the harvest of the food crops, makes it especially useful. Another source of income in this region was trade. Before the beginning of the nineteenth century, it seems that the trade route connecting Western Sudan to Egypt and the Nile via Kordofan, was beginning to flourish at the expense of the Nile-Red Sea route and the westernmost route via the Libyan oases.¹ The Nile-Red Sea route leading to Sennār seems to have suffered because of the unstable conditions in the northern parts of the Funj Kingdom created by the Shāiqiya activities and the decline in the power of the Funj Sultan. The westerly route via the Libyan oases seems to have declined because of political unrest, but also because of the redirection of the Takrūr gold trade to the south, rather than the north.² A number of caravan routes then began to converge into central Kordofan from the north, from the Nile and from the west carrying lucrative trade, and giving rise to a number of towns and trade centres, like El-Obeid, al-Nuhūd and Bāra, and attracting many settlers from the Nile regions who were looking for new opportunities in these new areas. The main items in this trade from the interior were gum Arabic, ivory and ostrich feathers, but when trade in these items began to decline, their place was taken by the slave traffic which engaged that route for some time and very much influenced the social and economic structure of that area.

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1. See Terence Walz, "Notes on the organization of the African trade in Cairo 1800-1850", *Annales Islamologiques*, t. XI, 1972, p.36.
 2. See F.W. Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the Moors*, London, 1968, pp.85-88.

Another important traffic connected with this route also, was that of the pilgrimage. Pilgrims from West Africa and Darfur took this route through Kordofan to the Nile and Suakin-Jeddah to Egypt and thence to Mecca. This traffic also had a very profound effect on the social, economic and cultural conditions of this region. The West African pilgrims followed a certain pattern in their travelling which is worth mentioning here to illustrate the importance of this route as a cultural channel. They moved from one place to another by stages, earning their living as they moved and wherever they settled, they formed small distinctive communities of West African ethnic groups - known in the Sudan as Fallāta.

The inhabitants of this central region, as can be seen from what has been stated above, were a mixture of different peoples. In fact, it became a melting pot where the Awlād al-Bahr (as the riverain people are known there) met the Baqqāra, where the Arabized tribes from the north met the negroid Africans from the south and west, and where the nomads came to deal with the cultivators and townspeople.

A description of a town may give a fair picture of how this process was taking place, and at hand is the description of El-Obeid given by Pallme where he showed how the town was divided into a number of quarters, each dominated mainly by a group of people clustering together, either by ethnic origin or cultural background.¹

1. I. Pallme, *Travels*, pp.258-78. A more recent description of El-Obeid is given by T. al-A.A. Al-Dawī, "Social characteristics of big merchants and businessmen in El-Obeid", *Essays in Sudan Ethnography*, ed. I. Cunnison and Wendy James, p.201-16.

The Historical Factor

The second factor in the development of Kordofan in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, was an historical one. Kordofan was essentially a no-man's land separating the two Sultanates of Sennar and Darfur. Too weak to maintain any independent rule, it tempted each of its neighbouring sultans to consider it a natural extension of his domains. Thus its history was that of a buffer zone which reflected the respective strengths and weaknesses of Sennar and Darfur.

Towards the close of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, Sennar was in decline and Darfur was greatly weakened by internal struggles between the various factions of the Keira family, on the one hand, and by costly wars with its western neighbours - Waddāi and Bornū - on the other.¹ Although both Funj and Fur sultans were anxious to control Kordofan, none of them was capable of establishing a permanent and unchallenged rule there. That region continually changed hands between its two neighbours, and for the whole of this period it became the theatre of their bloody conflicts. A certain pattern is observable in this process of continuous change of sovereignty in Kordofan in that era: internal troubles in Sennar repeatedly forced the Funj governor of Kordofan to lead his strong army towards Sennar to set things in order there. His departure would leave a power vacuum and the Fur were tempted to fill it. In Darfur, where the succession to the throne was regulated by no definite law and no compelling ancient custom, disputes were only to be expected after the death of every

1. Details of this decline in Sennar and Darfur can be referred to in R.S. O'Fahey and J. Spaulding, *Kingdoms*, pp.78-88 and 129-140. See also Crawford, *The Funj Kingdom*, p.255-61.

sovereign and conflicts were only settled in combat between the claimants to the throne. The defeated faction would move eastwards, establish some kind of rule in Kordofan and after feeling strong enough, would return to make another bid for the throne of Darfur. That would again leave a power vacuum, which would be filled in by the Funj in their turn.

The emergence of the Musabba'āt dynasty¹ in the early eighteenth century and the strenuous efforts of its leaders to establish themselves as a third power in that region, had added a new dimension to the state of unrest in Kordofan. Beginning with Janqal b. Bahr² the Musabba'āt, for three successive generations had persistently employed their limited resources and political skill to fulfil two ambitions: to establish a kingdom in Kordofan, and to use that as a springboard from which they could jump over to the throne of Darfur. Their relentless efforts to realize those dreams had repeatedly brought them into conflict with both Sennar and Darfur.

A fourth element which should not be overlooked in this struggle was the Ghidayyāt, who by repeatedly changing allegiance from one party to the other, had helped to perpetuate this struggle and to sustain the state of unrest.

Details of the early phases of this struggle, in the first half of the eighteenth century, may not be relevant to this study and have been dealt with by O'Fahey and Hasan.³ The events of the second half of that century may, perhaps, give a clear picture of the relationships between these various factions, and may show how Kordofan had become the

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1. R.S. O'Fahey and J. Spaulding, "Hāshim and the Musabba'āt", *B.S.O.A.S.*, XXX, 1972, 316-33. See also Y.F. Hasan, *Muqaddima*, pp.110-11.
 2. See Nachtigal, *Sahara*, trans. A. and H. Fisher and O'Fahey, p.280.
 3. R.S. O'Fahey, "Kordofan in the eighteenth century", *S.N.R.*, LIV, 32-42, and Y.F. Hasan, *Muqaddima*, pp.107-17.

theatre of their perpetual conflicts. During this period, the history of Kordofan was dominated by the activities of two leaders of the Musabba'āt, 'Īsāwī b. Janqal and his son, Hāshim,¹ and the reactions of the Funj and the Ghidayyāt on the one hand, and the Fur on the other, to these activities.

The emergence of the Musabba'āt as a power in this region and their involvement in the affairs of Kordofan started with Janqal b. Bahr. Janqal and his family seem to have been driven out of Darfur after a struggle within the ruling family in which he was defeated by a certain Mūsā b. Sulaymān.² Janqal then moved to the Darfur/Kordofan borderland where, for some time, he continued to gather supporters and established a base from which he and succeeding Musabba'āt leaders were able to invade central Kordofan. Janqal himself was associated with one of those invasions in which, after an initial success in which a certain *faqīh* called Mukhtar b. Muhammad Jōdat Allāh was killed, Janqal was finally defeated and killed.³

In 1745, his son 'Īsāwī, succeeded where his father had failed. Taking advantage of the preoccupation of Sennar with its war on the eastern borders against Ethiopia,⁴ and of Darfur with its internal

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1. R.S. O'Fahey and J. Spaulding, "Hāshim and the Musabba'āt", *op.cit.*, also Nachtigal, *Sahara, op.cit.*, p.284.
 2. *Ibid.*, p.280. Mūsā's reign is dated here as from 1637 to 1682. In Cadalvène and Breuvery's list the dates are 1701-2 to 1704-5. Al-Tūnūsī gives yet another different date - 1715-26. Though al-Tūnūsī's dates seem to be more acceptable, he does not seem to have included all the years before and after Mūsā was temporarily deposed. Nachtigal states that he had ruled, in all, for about 45 years.
 3. His defeat and death appeared in *Ṭabaqāt*, ed. Y.F. Hasan, p.345, and ~~was~~ attributed to a curse resulting from Janqal's killing of al-Faqīh Mukhtar b. Muhammad Jōdat Allāh. No date is given for the death of Janqal, but the date 1603 given by Cadalvène and Breuvery seems to be a century too early.
 4. The preparations to meet the threat of an invasion by Iyāsū II in 1743-44 are described in *Makhtūṭat Kātib al-Shūna*, ed. al-Shātir Buṣaylī, p.21.

troubles,¹ 'Īsāwī marched to conquer central Kordofan. The Funj were offended and Bādī IV, who had just returned victorious from his engagement with the Ethiopians, immediately despatched an army to check 'Īsāwī's advance. Thus in 1747, an army led by some 'Abdallābi dignitaries, accompanied by Muhammad Abū Likaylik,² the commander of the Funj cavalry, and Khamīs b. Janqal³ left Sennar for that purpose. In the two bloody battles which followed in Qihayf and Shamaqta, the Funj army was severely beaten and its leaders 'Abdallāh walad Tōma, the *wasīr*, 'Abdallāh Rās Taira walad 'Ajīb and his brother Shammām walad 'Ajīb were all killed. It was only through the courage and cool-headedness of Muhammad Abū Likaylik that the Funj army was saved from a complete and humiliating disaster.⁴ 'Īsāwī then started to settle at al-Rīl. But instead of consolidating his position there, he was anxious to use his newly found strength in a bid for the throne of Darfur. This proved in the end to be a very disastrous adventure. He was utterly defeated and his army was dispersed.⁵ On the other hand, his uncle Mustafā, whom he had entrusted with the government of Kordofan, proved to be disloyal. A conspiracy was hatched between this Mustafā and a certain 'Alī al-Karrār of the Ghidayyāt who had been sent by the Funj to reconquer Kordofan. Thus 'Alī al-Karrār abandoned his army and allowed the Funj to be massacred at Mitaiwi' and 'Īsāwī was murdered - possibly

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1. Reference is here made to the troubles around 1745 when the sons of Ahmad Bakr were robbed of their right to the throne in favour of their cousin 'Umar Layl. See Nachtigal, *Sahara, op.cit.*, 284-5.
 2. For more information about him see A.E. Robinson, "Abu El Kaylik, the king-maker of the Funj of Sennar", *American Anthropology*, Vol.31, No.2, 1929, pp.232-64.
 3. Khamīs b. Janqal b. Bahr, see R.S. O'Fahey and J. Spaulding, "Hashīm and the Musabba'āt", *op.cit.*, p.321.
 4. See *Makhtūṭat Kātib al-Shūna, op.cit.*, p.24, and *Ta'rīkh Mulūk Sennār*, ed. M. Shibeika, p.6.
 5. R.S. O'Fahey, "Kordofan in the eighteenth century", *op.cit.*, p.38.

on orders of Mustafā - on his way back from his last campaign.¹

Mustafā then declared himself independent ruler of Kordofan; but his rule soon became unpopular and the province was once again plunged into a new phase of instability and unrest.

In 1755 the Funj despatched an army under the leadership of Muhammad Abū Likaylik who was able to reconquer Kordofan for the Funj without much resistance, and became governor of that province. His rule there was said to have been fair and just and very well remembered long after he had gone.² Internal troubles in Sennar, however, soon forced Abū Likaylik in 1760 to abandon Kordofan and return to settle matters in the capital of the sultanate.³ Once there, he found himself more and more involved in the intricate problems of Sennar, and the real government of Kordofan was left to his nephew Bādī wad Rajab. Then, when Abū Likaylik died in 1776, Sennar politics forced Bādī wad Rajab to go there in his turn leaving Kordofan to his young nephew Dakīn and a guardian, Muhammad wad Kannayr. Hāshim b. 'Isāwī who had by this time succeeded to the leadership of the Musabba'āt was tempted to invade the province and regain his father's possessions. With the help of dissatisfied nomadic tribes and some assistance from Darfur, he marched over Kordofan and captured its capital, El-Obeid. He was hardly settled there when in 1780 he was forced to retreat north-westwards away from an advancing Funj army led by Rajab b. Muhammad Abū Likaylik. Rajab then secured central Kordofan for the Funj for six years, but in

1. *Ibid.*

2. See W.G. Browne, *Travels*, p.307; see also H. MacMichael, *Tribes*, pp.10-11.

3. For an account of those troubles in Sennar, see A.E. Robinson, "Abū El-Kaylik", *op.cit.*, pp.240-4.

1786, again the troubles of Sennar demanded the return of this governor of Kordofan with his troops.¹ Hāshim was quick to seize the opportunity and was back in El-Obeid as soon as the Funj army had left. But he was not destined to remain there for long. The Sultan of Darfur, Tayrāb² had soon come to chase him out of it.

According to al-Tūnūsī,³ Tayrāb's invasion of Kordofan was prompted by the unfriendly activities of Hāshim near the eastern borders of Darfur. His real reasons, however, were more complicated and had very much to do with the internal affairs of Darfur itself. To secure an easy succession to the throne for his son Ishāq, Tayrāb planned this big campaign which he led himself and took with him every possible strong candidate to that throne. Tayrāb had an easy victory, but soon after the end of the campaign, the Fur became weary of Kordofan and wanted to return to their home. In 1789 Tayrāb suddenly became ill and died soon afterwards. The first thing his successor, 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Rashīd⁴ did was to return with the army to Darfur, and Kordofan was once more abandoned to Hāshim of the Musabba'āt. This was only a short interlude, after which the Fur once again came back in a big army led jointly by Muhammad Kurra and Ibrahim b. Rammād, probably in 1791.⁵ Hāshim refused to give battle to them and quickly withdrew from Kordofan, leaving it to be governed jointly by Kurra and wad Rammād for the Fur. In 1796 Hāshim made another appearance in Kordofan when a conflict between its two

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1. See *Ta'rīkh Mulūk Sinnār*, ed. Shibeika, pp.9-10.
 2. Sultan of Darfur 1762-3, 1785-6, Cadalvène and Breuvery dates. 1768-1787 in Shuqair, and 1752-1785 in Nachtigal.
 3. M. ibn. 'Umar al-Tūnūsī, *Tashhīdh al-adhhān*, ed. 'Asakir and Mus'ad, pp.82-7.
 4. Sultan of Darfur 1789-90, and 1799-80, according to Cadalvène and Breuvery; 1787-1801 according to al-Tūnūsī.
 5. R.S. O'Fahey and J. Spaulding, "Hāshim and the Musabba'āt", *op.cit.*, p.330.

governors¹ gave him the impression that the position of the Fur there was weakening. To check any further menace by Hāshim, the Sultan of Darfur, 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Rashīd despatched his eunuch Maqdūm Musallam with an army to go and fight this Musabba'āwī even if he had to chase him up to Egypt. Hāshim again slipped out of Kordofan and the province remained as part of the Fur domains until it was conquered by the Turco-Egyptian armies in 1821. During this period of Fur rule, and particularly at the time when Maqdūm Musallam was governor, Kordofan enjoyed some years of peace and prosperity. More people came to settle there, particularly from Dongola and the Gezira, encouraged by this state of affairs, and trade was greatly revived.² Those years of peace and prosperity came to an end when, in 1821, a Turco-Egyptian army led by Muhammad Bey Khusrū al-Daftardār came to conquer that province for Muhammad 'Alī of Egypt.

Under the Turco-Egyptian administration, though there was some sort of stability as far as the government of the province was concerned, the general feeling of unrest took other forms. Kordofan, like other parts of the Sudan during this era, was subjected to a great deal of oppression and maladministration. People were excessively taxed and the methods applied in the collection of those taxes were harsh and inhumane. As a result of this, the inhabitants, especially the nomads, began to move away from the areas where the government could reach them. They found it necessary to drive their herds and penetrate further south, thus coming into contact with the Nūba and the inhabitants of the Southern Sudan.

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1. *Ibid.*, p.331. See also note 73.
 2. J. Petherick, *Egypt, the Sudan and Central Africa*, p.269-72, describes this period as "The happiest era of its existence."

Another aspect of this Turco-Egyptian administration was its involvement in and encouragement of the slave trade and slave raidings. Twice annually the government sent raiding parties to the Nūba mountains to bring slaves to be recruited into the army as *jihādiyya*. The effect of those raids and the recruitment of slaves in the army helped a great deal in breaking the tribal institutions in the Nūba mountains and in bringing about a noticeable social change.

Of this general history of Kordofan during this period therefore, little more can be said than that rulers of both Darfur and Sennar regarded that region as a province of their respective kingdoms, though without real justification. The Musabba'āt, on the other hand, originally emigrants from Darfur who managed to establish some presence in Kordofan, considered themselves subject to neither, and steadily consolidated their power. Twice they came close to establishing a kingdom there, but were forced to abandon it by the Funj and the Ghidayyāt, or by the Fur. Although there was some peace and stability towards the end of this period, under the Fur, which encouraged immigration to Kordofan, the Turco-Egyptian rule which followed brought about new forms of pressure and unrest in the region.

The Religious Factor

The third factor in the development of Kordofan was a religious one. Towards the close of the eighteenth century, Kordofan was growing into a frontier of Islamicization. The margin of Islamic territory in the Nilotic Sudan has been, and still is, continually shifting south and westwards since the Arabs came into contact with the Nubians after

the conquest of Egypt early in the seventh century A.D. A gradual but continuous penetration of Arab "or Arabized"¹ Muslims has transplanted the frontier of Islam into the interior by stages. A certain pattern can be observed in the development of these stages and in the shifting of the frontier from one stage to the other: agents of the Islamic faith (mainly nomads and traders) migrated into the neighbouring lands, settled and intermarried with the local population many of whom adopted their religion, customs and their Arabic language. Gradually the territory was nominally Islamized: then in a second phase it would be properly Islamized, and a new frontier would start further inland and the same process repeated all over again.

Two approaches have been taken to explain this pattern: one with much emphasis on the religious motivation and the importance of individual missionaries is best represented by Y.F. Hasan,² and the other emphasizing the commercial and cultural contacts, is that of J.S. Trimingham.³

Hasan suggests that the main impact of the Arab migratory movement was exhausted in Nubia. When that area was sufficiently Arabized and Islamized, "Educated Nubians migrated further south to areas where the Arab migratory movement had just spent itself and where the process of Islamization had hardly begun".⁴ Thus, when the area north of the confluence of the two Niles was sufficiently Islamized, produced a number of jurists and Sufi missionaries who continued the job of Islamization in the Gezira, and later in the west. A two-way

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1. Trimingham, *Islam in the Sudan*, p.100, states that it must be emphasized that the spread of Islam in Africa has always been the work of Africans and chiefly Hamites whatever Arab blood they had in them.
 2. See Y.S. Hasan, "External Islamic influences....in the Eastern Sudan". *Sudan in Africa*, p.73.
 3. Trimingham, *Islam*, Ch.III and p.100.
 4. Y.S. Hasan, "External Islamic influences....in the Eastern Sudan", p.77.

traffic was maintained between the newly-Islamized area and the old Islamic centres to revive and revitalize the faith. Teachers, jurists and reformers came to the new areas from the old centres, and students came from the new areas to be educated there, and returned to their homes to take their share in the process.

Associated with this process of Islamization in marginal areas, was the phenomenon of the "wise stranger", probably an Arabized Muslim who settled among non-Arabs taught them new civilized habits and was thus accepted in the new home as a "wise stranger". Then after marrying into the indigenous population, he benefited from the practice of matrilineal succession and inherited a position of wealth and leadership.¹

Hasan then gives a number of names associated with the development of these stages and with the shifting of the frontiers of Islamization. Thus Ghulām Allāh b. 'Āid and Hamad Abū Dunnāna were associated with Dongola as learned Muslims who came from old centres, while Ibrāhīm al-Būlād and Mahmūd al-'Arakī were examples of students who went from the new areas and came back as '*ulamā*'. Not only individuals, but also some families became part of this process. Thus the Rikābiya, the Dawālīb, the family of Sh. Abū Safiyya and that of al-Faqīh Bushāra al-Gharbāwī were all instrumental in this process of Islamization.²

Trimingham, however, suggests that the personal missionary work of traders and *faqīhs* has been overstressed, and that the religious factor

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1. The concept of the "wise stranger" as a factor in Sudanese history has been explained by P.M. Holt, "Funj Origin: A Critique and new evidence", *J.A.H.*, IV, i, 1963, pp.49-55.
 2. For more details on names of individuals read, Hasan, "External Influences", p.73, *Arabs*, p.177-80, and P.M. Holt, "Holy families", *Princeton N.E. Papers*, No.4, 1967, and "The Sons of Jābir", *B.S.O.A.S.*, XXX, 1967, pp.142-57, for families.

was given more importance than was its due. Instead he emphasized the more pragmatic factors of commercial and cultural contacts: "The nomad Arab, who is rarely fanatical and completely devoid of missionary zeal makes no attempt at proselytization. The spread of Islam was mainly through penetration, marriage, a strategic policy of winning chiefs and group leaders (which includes forcible measures), trade and the appropriation of slaves. As in the early days of the primary Islamic conquest, conversion to Islam connected the convert with the Arab tribal system as a client".¹

Arab penetration into the Nilotic Sudan, he suggests, was only limited to a few nomadic tribes who settled in Nubia, wherefrom Islamization, and Islam, spread into the interior by the Hamites "as the civilization of aristocratic African people". Being Africans themselves and possessing no prejudices or discriminations of any sort, they were able to intermarry with the local population and live a common social life with them. A continuous process of cultural and social change took place as the Islamic frontier came into contact with the African breaking down his existing social institutions and creating new social groups. A number of factors combined to undermine the existing tribal and social institutions and exposed the African to the wind of change. Slave raiding and penetration by nomads and traders broke down his tribal system, undermined his cultural and religious institutions leaving him open to the temptations of a new and higher status. Daily practices and behaviour of traders and *faqīhs* demonstrated the actions of a more attractive social system and a higher culture. A very lively demonstration of this process in action can be seen in the example given

1. See Trimingham, *Islam*, p.99.

by J.W. Crowfoot in his description of the social change taking place among the Nūba of the Eastern Hills of Taqalī. He observed that they began to wear clothes, to speak a good deal of Arabic and that some of them had pretended to Arab pedigrees. They also abandoned their habit of eating pigs, which is forbidden by Islam, and began to look down upon the "naked Nūba". They adopted Muhammadan customs with regards to weddings, rites, circumcision and the practice of infibulation.¹

It seems that a number of factors have all combined and contributed to this process of Islamization and continuous forward movement of the margin of Islamic territory and no single factor can be considered as decisive or more important than the others. Thus commercial interest, cultural contacts, religious zeal and individual missionary efforts have all contributed to this process from one stage to the other.

The frontier of Islamization was stabilized by the sixteenth century, roughly around lat.13°N,² where it remained for three centuries before it started to shift again towards the beginning of the nineteenth century. During these three centuries, Kordofan was passing through the process of proper Islamization, which characterized earlier stages in the Sudan, and which transformed its frontiers into a marginal territory ready for the new phase to start.

The awakening of the activities in this frontier during the nineteenth century came as a result of various factors: important population movements brought about some profound social changes; political change was another active force; and a religious revival was a third one.

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1. J.W. Crowfoot, "Further notes on pottery", *S.N.R.*, VIII, 125.
 2. It seems that this has come to be generally accepted. See P.M. Holt, "Holy families", *P.N.E.P.*, No.4, p.1.

Three important population movements affected Kordofan during this period.¹ The first of these was that of the riverain tribes from Dongola southwards and westwards into the Gezira, Kordofan and Darfur. Though this process had been going on for decades, it was increased during this period, particularly when the Shaiqiya raids had threatened the trade routes along the Nile and the livelihood of the tribes which lived there. Many inhabitants of Dongola moved to Kordofan and Darfur and Browne, who visited the latter region in 1793-4, noticed that the Danagla were a sizeable community in Cobbe' and were an important element in the social and economic life of the sultanate.²

The second movement was that of the Baqqāra, who during the eighteenth century had found their way into some parts of Kordofan,³ and were very active in slave raiding in this area, especially in the Nūba mountains.

The third movement was that of the pilgrims from Darfur and further west, known in the Sudan as Fallātā or Takārīr, who came across the Sudan to the Red Sea and thence to Mecca. This process had also been going on for a long time, and was only interrupted for a short while during the Mahdia. The journey of the Takārīr to Mecca often took years as they walked and worked their way through it. They therefore made some settlements which became a permanent feature of many Sudanese towns along their routes.⁴

The political change came with the Turco-Egyptian administration. This had helped a great deal in undermining the tribal, social and economic systems through the imposition of high taxation, the use of oppressive methods and the encouragement of slave traffic.

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1. For more on the description of these population movements and their impact on the course of Sudanese history, see P.M. Holt, *The Mahdist State*, pp.9-12.
 2. W.G. Browne, *Travels*, p.241.
 3. H. MacMichael, *Arabs I*, pp.272-8, and I. Cunnison, *Baggara Arabs*, p.2.
 4. See W.G. Browne, *Travels*, pp.253 and 291.

The religious revival had its origins outside the Sudan, however, but its effects were soon felt and it generated an activity which was very instrumental in this process. The general feeling of awakening and need for revival of the Islamic faith which took shape in the Wahābī movement and the reawakening of Sufism began to be felt throughout the whole of the Islamic world towards the close of the eighteenth century. The ideas of Ahmad b. Idrīs al-Fāsī began to reach the Sudan through a number of his disciples, one of whom was Muhammad 'Uthmān I who first introduced Sh. Ismā'il to the Sufi path.

To conclude, Kordofan, during the time of Sh. Ismā'il can be described as a border zone by virtue of its geographical position, its historical and religious development. The nature of that frontier zone should, however, be dealt with in brief in order to explain the kind of society that existed there and the nature of its people.

The frontiersmen are men who should be rated above the average for courage and initiative. In Kordofan this was demonstrated by the attitude of the riverain groups who settled there. They played a more active part in the Mahdia than their kin who stayed at home.¹ Their courage and endurance found its way into folk songs: a popular song praising the courage of some men from the village of Abū Juwaylī who went to Kordofan, is very well known and sung in many parts of the Nile valley.²

Culturally this region turned into a cultural watershed subjected to the influence of the Hijāz and Egypt on the one hand, and that of al-

1. See P.M. Holt, *The Mahdist State*, Introduction, pp.11-12.

2. The song starts with the verses:
 "'Iyāl Abū Juwaylī al-kambalū wa 'adalū
 fī Dār Kurdufān itgharrabū wa satarū
 darbu al jōz 'adīl dail ḥāsha ma dallū
 li banāt al-balad samh al-khabar jābū".

Maghrib and West Africa on the other. Ideas from the north and the east were carried to Kordofan by traders, students who went to the Gezira and even as far as al-Azhar for education, and by *faqīhs* who came to settle there. From the Maghrib and West Africa, ideas were carried in by pilgrims and itinerant *faqīhs*, many of whom were Shanāqīt¹ or Takārīr.²

Religiously this frontier region had attracted a number of fanatics and Sufi missionaries, as well as enthusiastic *faqīhs* such as Abū Safiyya, 'Arabī, Kantīsh, al-Dalīl and Jōdat Allāh.³ It also attracted a number of holy families, such as Awlād Dolīb,⁴ the Rikābiyya⁵ and the Suwārāb.⁶ With no established religious orders and no old holy families, Kordofan offered a good chance for those new arrivals to set new seeds for these orders and to strike new roots for their holy families.

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1. Light-skinned religious men who came to the Sudan from north-west Africa, especially from Mauritania, and often claimed Sharīfī origins and were looked upon as carriers of *baraka*.
 2. These came mainly as pilgrims on their way to Mecca, but settled down in the Sudan, see above p.36. In the Sudan they have gained a reputation as exorcists and they are the main followers of the Tijāniyya *tariqa*.
 3. All these *faqīhs* have got *qubbas* in EL-Obeid except Jōdat Allāh, for whom see *Tabaqāt*, ed. Y.F. Hasan, p.130.
 4. Some of the descendents of Muḥammad W. Dōlīb, *ibid.*, p.348.
 5. Some of the descendents of Rikāb b. Jābir, see P.M. Holt, "The Sons of Jābir", *B.S.O.A.S.*, XXX, Part I, 1967, pp.133-57.
 6. Some of the descendents of Muḥammad b. 'Isā Suwār al-Dahab, *Tabaqat*, p.347. Through their contact with Muḥammad 'Uthmān I, the Suwārāb became and still are the principal *Khalīfas* of the Khatimyya in Kordofan.

CHAPTER II

THE FOUNDER OF THE *TARĪQA* SHAYKH ISMĀ'IL
AL-WALI (1207-80/1793-1863)

The pedigree of Sh. Ismā'īl represents him as being the descendant in the fifth generation of al-Faqīh Bushāra al-Gharbāwī.¹ The genealogical work of his son Ahmad al-Azhari² tells us that Bushāra was a holy man who lived in the first half of the twelfth/seventeenth century; that he descended from the Ja'alī ruling family - his predecessor being the kings of al-Dufār - and that he was linked directly with al-Makk Nāsir, the founder of the Maknasriyya branch who had their independent *ṭāqiya*.³ Bushāra, however, became famous as a religious man and founded his own clan which came to be called after him, al-Gharbāwinjī. After Bushāra Ahmad tells us that the fame of al-Gharbāwinjī continued to grow, and that they accumulated enormous wealth and power, but not much seems to be recorded, and although the gap between Bushāra and Ismā'īl is only five generations, we find very little information about them apart from al-Azhari's account and a few sometimes contradictory oral traditions and family anecdotes.⁴ Few as they are, both Ahmad's account and those oral traditions seem to be complicated and often confusing because of the habit amongst the family, more than many other Sudanese, of using the same name and popular title.

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1. See *al-Nash'a al-Ismā'īliyya* (the obituary) of Sh. Ismā'īl which states that he is "Sh. Ismā'īl b. 'Abdullāhi b. Ismā'īl b. 'Abd al-Rahīm Baba b. al-Hajj Ḥamad b. al-Faqīh Bushāra al-Gharbāwī". Ms. Sud. Govt. Archives (Khartoum), 1/83/1310.
 2. See Ahmad al-Azhari, *Khulāṣat al-iqtibās*, Ms. Sud. Govt. Archives (Khartoum), 1/14/75. This Ms. also appears translated in H. MacMichael, *Arabs*, Vol. II, AB.
 3. *Ṭāqiya* (head-cap) was one of the insignia of kingship in the Funj Sultanate. See O.G.S. Crawford, *The Funj Kingdom*, App.15, and N. Shuqair, *Ta'rikh*, II, 100.
 4. One such tradition is the story which tries to explain the sudden departure of this family and associate it with an ~~implication~~ *implication* by al-Faqīh Muḥammad wad Dōlīb after a quarrel between his descendants and Awlād Bushāra. The outcome of this ~~implication~~ *implication* was that the family of Bushāra were forced to fly away (*tārū*) from Dongola for good.

implication

for different persons and repeating these in different generations. Thus it became difficult to know with such popular names as Bushāra and Ismā'īl which one is referred to, and in which time. This seems to be the reason why N. Shuqair got his story about al-Faqīh Bushāra al-Gharbāwī rather confused. In his narrative about the village of al-Hattānī, Shuqair states, "There is an old building far from the Nile known as Hōsh Bāba, built by Bushāra Qaila, the grandfather of the famous Ismā'īl al-Walī al-Kordofani. It is rumoured that he was notoriously rich, that he had used virgin maidens to build it and that he had spent uncounted money on it".¹ This story, as it is, seems to be distorted in many parts. The use of virgins in building a palace is clearly out of place and obviously contrary to the nature of al-Faqīh Bushāra who is represented as being a holy man; the statement that Bushāra Qaila was the grandfather of Sh. Ismā'īl is misleading; and the association of Hōsh Bāba with Bushāra Qaila is erroneous. Shuqair seems to be confusing three persons here, namely, al-Faqīh Bushāra al-Gharbāwī, the founder of this holy family; Bushāra Qaila, a grandson of al-Gharbāwī, but not the immediate grandfather of Sh. Ismā'īl, reputed for his enormous wealth and notorious extravagance; and 'Abd al-Rahīm Bāba, the immediate great-grandfather of Sh. Ismā'īl, very rich and famous, but not extravagant.² The local traditions about the holiness of al-Gharbāwī, the extravagance of Qaila and the fame of Bāba were all fused into one story in Shuqair's narrative.

The re-establishment of the family in Kordofan, in a new environment and under a new head, Sh. Ismā'īl, seems to have added to

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1. N. Shuqair, *Ta'rīkh*, I, 85.
 2. See genealogical tables, Appendix A, below.

this confusion. A story which took place only a few years before, at the time of Sh. Ismā'il's father, cannot be clearly verified and its details are mixed up. The narrative of 'Abdullāhī's riding a horse in the presence of a holy man called al-Shaykh 'Arabi, to illustrate a prenatal *karāma* of Sh. Ismā'il leaves us uncertain about the place and time where and when it happened. As related by the present members of the Ismā'iliyya, the incident seems to have occurred in El-Obeid just before the birth of Sh. Ismā'il; and it is associated with 'Arabi Makkāwī, a holy man who thrived in El-Obeid in the eighteenth century, and is now buried in a tomb not far from that of Sh. Ismā'il. But as it is related in al-Azhari's account, the incident seems to have taken place in Dongola and is associated with an unidentified *faqīh* called 'Arabī of the well-known Rikabiyya clan.¹ The local traditions and family anecdotes about the ancestors of Sh. Ismā'il should therefore be considered with much caution, and the names, dates and places mentioned in them must be very carefully verified.

Ahmad al-Azhari's account, however, has the advantage of being written by a graduate of al-Azhar and of being presented in a rather sophisticated and organized shape. It is divided into five chapters, each devoted to a specific topic. He deals with the ancestral record of his family mainly in the third chapter, which he devoted to the descendants of Bushāra al-Gharbāwī. In his first chapter, he takes Bushāra's pedigree back to al-'Abbās, but more importantly, he explains in the second chapter how honourable is the kinship with al-'Abbās, uncle of the Prophet Muhammad. The account in these and the other

1. Ahmad al-Azhari, *Khulāṣat al-iqtibās*, p.32. The story as known in El-Obeid was related to me by *Syd.* Abu al-Fadl, *Syd.* 'Abd al-Hafīz, and Hajj Ahmad al-Faki 'Abdalla, in 1975.

three chapters seems to be well researched and sufficiently illustrated and decorated with traditions where necessary. To present it in this shape Ahmad tells us that he had consulted the history books, the genealogical authorities and spent a long time sifting the information he had collected. But in spite of all its beautiful arrangement and illustrated arguments, Ahmad's work does not really add very much to what is generally known about the claim of the Ja'aliyyīn to an 'Abbāsī origin.¹ Ahmad's work, in fact, does not seem to have been intended for its historical value, nor was it meant just to clarify the confusion into which his relatives were falling about their real relations as he states in his introductory paragraph. He was anxious from the start to establish three things: the 'Abbāsī Qurayshī origin of his father; a continuous line of holy ancestors through whom the *baraka* was transferred uninterrupted to Sh. Ismā'il; and a high social and economic status of their family, which was only matched by their piety and holiness.

Ahmad's intentions to prove their 'Abbāsī origins and his father's desire to assert that, are betrayed in the title chosen for this work, *Khulāṣat al-iqtibās fī ittṣāl nasabina bi'l 'Abbās*; and also in the first few introductory lines where al-Azharī states his reasons for writing this genealogy by saying, "...The *Imām* of the age...my lord and my father...ordered me to make a genealogical record showing every one of the ancestors from whom were variously descended those that were yet alive and to point out all the seeds of our ancestor al-Faki Bishāra al-Gharbāwī...and to carry back his pedigree to al-Sayyid al-

1. See al-Tāhir b. 'Abdalla, *Ma'ārif furū' usūl al-'Arab*, Sud.Archives (Durham), 97/5/11, pp.3-10. Also MacMichāel, *Arabs*, Vol.II, AB, BA and other Ja'alī genealogies there.

'Abbās the uncle of the Prophet..."¹ Then he devoted most of his first chapter to the glorification of al-'Abbās and the honour of all those who descended from him.

The honour of belonging to al-'Abbās or establishing a *sharīfī* origin had always been a very important prerequisite for any *faqīh* or ruler who wanted to gain recognition in Sudanese society since the advent of Islam. This became apparent in the Funj sultanate, where both the sultans and *faqīhs* went to great trouble to trace their origins back to a Sharīfī, 'Abbāsī or a Qurayshī link. A number of genealogists were encouraged to come to the Funj sultanate, and many itinerant *faqīhs* found a very hospitable reception from the sultans who wanted them to write down their ancestral records. Many names such as al-Maghribī and al-Sanhūrī² began to be referred to as unquestioned authorities in genealogies and some works like those of Abī Mahmūd al-Samarqandī³ and Abu Salman 'Abd al-Rahmān al-'Irāqī⁴ were being accepted as authentic references in this field. So important was this claim to the Sharīfī origin that some *shaykhs* who failed to establish good cases through their paternal lineage have tried to do so through their maternal one, or even through a spiritual

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1. Ahmad al-Azhari, *Khulāṣat al-iqtibās*, trans. by H. MacMichael, *Arabs*, Vol.II, AB.
 2. These two names seem to be very familiar at the time. We can only now identify them with (a) Sh. al-Sanusi al-Maghribi (d.1490), famous for his *Risālas* (tracts) on *al-'aqa'id* (the Creed) or possibly Sh. al-Salawi al-Maghribi, one of the 'ulama who accompanied the Turco-Egyptian army in 1820; (b) Salim b. Muhammad al-Sanhuri (d.1606) a known commentator on *Mukhtasar Khalil*. None of these had anything to do with genealogy.
 3. See R. Hill, *Biographical Dictionary*, p.331.
 4. Al-Tahir b. 'Abdalla, *Ma'arif Furū' usul al-'Arab*, p.2.

adoption by the Prophet.¹

The importance of finding a Sharīfī, 'Abbāsī or Qurayshī link was not limited to the Nilotic Sudanese people only, but seems to be widespread throughout most parts of Muslim Africa and particularly the Sudanic Belt. Palmer's *Sudanese Memoirs*² is rich in examples of traditions intended for this purpose of a Sharīfī link.

This search for a Sharīfī origin has always been associated with an idea which has come to be widely accepted in all parts of Muslim Africa; that is the idea of the supremacy of Quraysh and their unchallenged right to both secular and religious leadership in the community.³ The idea seems to have originated since the early days of the Islamic Empire when the expansion brought the Arabs into contact with many non-Arab peoples who threatened to undermine their Arab culture and traditions. To preserve the Arabic nature of Islam and to keep their privileged status, the Arabs seem to have encouraged this idea of Qurayshi supremacy and right of leadership and many traditions were sought to support it. The Abbasids and the Fatimids later limited this right, the former to Awlād al-'Abbās and the latter to Ahl al-Bayt, and each of these also sought the traditions which supported their case. When Islam came to the Sudan, many of these ideas had already become an accepted part of Islamic culture, and were thus transferred to the Sudan as such. Thus a number of traditions

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1. An example of this is provided by the case of Muhammad b. Surūr, whose descendants have tried to superimpose a Sharīfī ancestry on his established pedigree. See 'Abd al-Mahmūd Nūr al-Dāyīm, *Azahār al-riyād*, 18-19. Also P.M. Holt, "Holy Families", (*Princeton, N.E.P.*, 1967), p.2.
 2. H.R. Palmer, *Sudanese Memoirs*, being mainly translations of Arabic manuscripts relating to the Central and Western Sudan, 1967.
 3. A localized form of this idea is reflected in some of the Sudanese proverbs like, "Asl al-Jūd Juhayna, wa asl al muluk Sennar wa asl al-'izz Ja'al".

glorifying Quraysh and praising it found their way into many Sudanese writings,¹ and aspirations for leadership had also come to be linked in their minds with Quraysh and a Sharīfī descent. Another reason for the importance attached to the Sharīfī origin came to the Sudan with the ideas associated with the Mahdi and al-Khatim who were believed to be of Ahl al-Bayt.²

Ahmad's desire to establish the 'Abbāsī origin of his kin was obviously sparked by a new development in the history of the family, and the date on which he started to write very significantly indicates this. Ahmad states that the first draft was completed in Jumada II 1263/May 1847.³ He said that he had been working on it for some years before finishing it, which takes us back to 1260/1844. At this time Sh. Ismā'īl was just coming back from pilgrimage. His *tariqa* was established and his place in the society recognized. What remained was to seal this with the establishment of his 'Abbāsī pedigree and give all this a form of legitimacy. Sh. Ismā'īl himself expressed his personal desire of doing this by writing his *Dīwān jāmi' al Shathāt*

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1. See al-Tāhir b. 'Abdalla, *Ma'ārif furu' usul al-'Arab*, Sud.Gov. Arch.(Durham) 97/5/11, pp.9-10, and al-Azhari, *Khulāṣat al-iqtibās* Sud.Gov.Arch.(Khartoum) 1/14/75, p.8, for traditions like "*Qaddimū Quraysh walā taqaddamūha, wat'llamū min Quraysh walā tu'allimūhā....*" and "*Man arād ihānat Quraysh ahānahu Allāh*".
 2. This is discussed in more detail in our Chap.III, "The Ismā'īliyya and the Mahdia", below.
 3. This is the date when the first draft of the work was completed - see al-Azhari, *Khulāṣat al-iqtibās*, p.3. Ahmad states that he had spent a number of years after that revising that draft until he wrote it in its final form. The date he puts for its completion (1207) - see last page of Ms. - was obviously wrong. MacMichael must have reached his date 1853 by correcting this date to read 1270 instead of 1207. See H. MacMichael, *Arabs*, Vol.II, AB.

which is full of praise for himself and glorification of his role.¹

Ahmad al-Azharī was writing this pedigree mainly to augment this new-found status and strengthen it.² To do this Ahmad was not only anxious to trace their 'Abbāsī origin, but also to remind the reader continuously of Sh. Ismā'il's honour and high status. His work is thus full of titles of honour and glorification, like *al-Ustādh*, *imām al 'Asr wal tarīqa*, *mujaddīd'ulūm al-Sharī'a* and *Ustadh al-zamān*.

He is also very keen on explaining why they came to be called al-Gharbāwinji to dismiss any possible confusion that may lead to the idea that their origin was in *al-Gharb*, i.e. the western Sudan and weaken their claim to the 'Abbāsī link.

The second thing which Ahmad wanted to establish was a continuous chain of holy ancestors who transferred the *baraka*³ to his father.

To do this, he went to great trouble to single out each of his ancestors, starting with Bushāra, who were directly connected with his father, and showed how this *baraka* was transferred through them, and even supported that with suitable anecdotes where necessary. Thus, Bushāra's father, 'Ali Bursī was selected out of his brothers to be represented as a very religious person who learnt the Qur'ān by heart and encouraged his son Bushāra to follow his example. When Ibrāhīm al-Bulād⁴ came to the Island of Turunj in Dongola, Bushāra as a young boy went to study under his guidance. As a holy man, Bushāra became

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1. Ms. Sh. Ismā'il, *Dīwān jāmi' Shataḥāt*, Sud.Gov. Archives (Khartoum)
 2. A parallel can be found in the story of Muḥammad b. Surur, discussed in P.M. Holt, "Holy Families", *Princeton N.E. Papers*, No.4, 1967, pp. 1 and 2.
 3. *Baraka*, meaning 'benediction; blessing or holiness' in the Sudanese Islamic sense, is granted by God to those whom He chooses and it enables them to perform miracles. *Baraka* is possessed in its highest degree by the *walīs* who, it is generally believed in the Sudan, are able to transmit it to their successors.
 4. One of the sons of Jābir, who played a very important role in the proper Islamization of the Northern Sudan. See P.M. Holt, "The Sons of Jabir", *BSOAS*, XXX, 1967, and *Tabaqat*, ed. Y.F. Hasan, p.45.

so famous that by 1145/1732-3, the Funj Sultan Bādi b.Nōl gave him a big plot of land in recognition of his holiness and in a bid to gain his favours and *baraka*. Of Bushāra's two sons, al-Hajj Ḥamad was chosen rather than Muḥammad to be the carrier of this *baraka*. Of Muḥammad nothing much is said, and his descendants are only mentioned in connection with their riches and extravagance.¹ Ḥamad, on the other hand, is shown as a very religious man whom God had given great wealth, which Ḥamad in turn spent in gaining divine favour. He repeatedly went on pilgrimage until he numbered seven visits, each time taking with him many members of his household. The next person selected for this honour from amongst the numerous sons of al-Hajj Ḥamad is 'Abd al-Rahīm Bāba. The name *Bāba* itself is linked with his visit to the Holy Lands to add to his *baraka*. It is related that when he was in Jeddah as a young boy with his father on one of his visits to Mecca, there were some *a'ājim*² (non-Arabs) attending to 'Abd al-Rahīm's mother. These used to call him *bāba* as a sign of respect. Since that time, the name stuck to him and he began to be known by it. 'Abd al-Rahīm is also associated with some *ʿādāt* (taboos)

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1. See Aḥmad's reference to Bushāra Qailla in *Khulāṣat al-iqtibās*, p.25.
 2. The use of *a'ājim* needs to be explained here since it is often used in most Arabic texts to refer to the Persians who earned the title by virtue of their being the first non-Arabs to come in touch with the Arabs. Aḥmad here must be using it in its Sudanese context which refers mainly to the non-Arabic speaking people from the Sudanic Belt, more commonly called Fallāta, who could possibly be in the household of Hajj Ḥamad as attendants. Another probability is that it could be referring to the Beja tribes where the use of the title *Bāba* for respect was common. One of their famous kings who fought against the Muslim armies led by ibn al-Qummī during the reign of al-Mutawakkil, was called 'Alī Bāba. See N. Daftar, "The Medallion of al-Mutawakkil", *The Numismatic Chronicle*, 1977. All Hajj Ḥamad's trips on pilgrimage were through Beja lands to Egypt and then Mecca. And still another possible explanation is that he could be referring to some Turks whom Hajj Ḥamad had met in Mecca. These Turks could have given him this name *Bāba*, which they often use for reverence.

which were kept in the family until Sh. Ismā'īl came to break them and these are quoted also as some of the *karāmāt* of Sh. Ismā'īl. It is related¹ that when a baby was born to 'Abd al-Rahim, he slew a hundred heads of each kind of domestic animals for the child's naming ceremony. Only seven days after that, the child died. Since that incident, these ceremonies became *'ādāt* (taboos) for the members of that family until Sh. Ismā'īl came to abolish them and revive the tradition of entertaining his guests to a big feast on the occasion of naming his sons.

Other than 'Abd al-Rahim Bāba, the rest of Hamad's sons were mentioned only in connection with their wealth, except al-Khawāja whose daughter Khālisa was the grandmother of Sh. Ismā'īl. Al-Khawāja is shown as a religious man and ten of his sons are said to have memorized the Qur'ān. Khālisa herself was endowed with *baraka* and her maternal uncle, al-Faqih Abū Salāma told her in a prophecy that one of her descendants would be a holy man who would outshine all others. Since then people began to look out for the realization of that prophecy until Sh. Ismā'īl was born.²

After 'Abd al-Rahim Bāba, the *baraka* passed to his only son, Ismā'īl after whom Sh. Ismā'īl himself was named. From Ismā'īl the *baraka* then passed to 'Abdullāhi who is said to have studied under a very pious *walī* called al-Hajj 'Arabī, a descendant of the famous

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1. Ahmad al-Azhari, *Khulāṣat al-iqtibās*, p.29.
 2. A number of stories have been cited in *Ṭabaqāt* about such pre-natal prophecies. See *Ṭabaqāt*, ed., Y.F. Ḥasan, notices of Abū Sinayna, p.89, Mukhtār Abū 'Ināya, p.446, and Makkī al-Daqlāshi, p.332. Both Azhari and Wad Dayfalla must have had in mind such similar stories mentioned in the books of *al-Sīra* of the Prophet.

Habīb Nassī al-Riokābī.¹ Hajj 'Arabī was said to have been pleased with 'Abdullāhi and even made a prophecy that his son would grow to outshine all the *shaykhs* of his time.²

The third thing which al-Azharī wanted to assert in addition to their honourable pedigree and their unbroken chain of holy ancestors, was the social and economic prestige of that family. Thus he tells us that Sh. Ismā'īl had come from a very wealthy family which handed its riches from one generation to the other until the time of Sh. Ismā'īl. It was in keeping with this desire to emphasize the wealth and influence enjoyed by this family that Sh. Ismā'īl is represented as a very rich man who could afford to slay sixty rams in a feast to celebrate the naming of his eldest son Muhammad al-Makki, and another forty and a bull for the naming ceremony of Ahmad himself.³

Ahmad's account of the wealth of his family could be exaggerated, and his description of the riches of his father may now be questioned in the light of what has been written by D'Escayrac de Luture, who had met Sh. Ismā'īl in El-Obeid in 1849.⁴

The Early Life of Sh. Ismā'īl

Sh. Ismā'īl was born the eldest son in a family of four, two boys and two girls.⁵ Famous though his predecessors might have been before,

1. See *Tabaqāt*, ed., Y.F. Hasan, notice No.74, p.154.

2. Ahmad al-Azharī, *Khulāṣat al-iqtibās*, p.32.

3. *Ibid.*, p.30.

4. D'Escayrac de Luture, *Le désert et le Soudan*, pp.447-8.

5. See genealogical tables, Appendix A, below. Sh. Ismā'īl's mother remarried later, and thus he had another half-brother called Muhammad Dōlīb.

the reputation and power of the family when Sh. Ismā'il was born by 1792, had surely declined and its fame was evidently reduced. His father 'Abdullāhi was hardly known in El-Obeid and he could scarcely make any claim to a reputable position in that region, either by virtue of his wealth or his piety. After his death he was even further neglected, and very little is now known about him; not even the place in which he was buried.

'Abdullāhi was the first member of the family to settle in Kordofan. He came there as a trader, and then made his home in El-Obeid where his son Ismā'il was destined to revive the family reputation under a new name.¹ The circumstances in which 'Abdullāhi had left Dongola are not clear, and the works of al-Azharī and Shuqair give very little help in this connection. In fact, Ahmad's account takes us through the history of the family, both in Dongola and Kordofan, as though they were one and the same region, and he does not make any reference to a change in the social or economic status of that family.² Shuqair deals with them in two different places in his book, and treats them as two different groups, that of al-Faqīh Bushāra and that of Sh. Ismā'il, without making any effort to bridge the gap between them. He makes a reference to the change of the family fortune, and clearly states that their once famous *hōsh* has now been reduced to ruins; but he does not attempt to explain how and when it happened, nor does he venture to suggest any link between this change of fortune and 'Abdullāhi's emigration from Dongola.³ 'Abdullahī's emigration and the loss of power and prestige of his family, should not, however, be considered in

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1. N. Shuqair, *Ta'rikh*, 1/139.
 2. See A. al-Azharī, *Khulāsat al-iqtibās*, p.32.
 3. N. Shuqair, *Ta'rikh*, 1/85 and 1/139.

isolation of what was taking place in that region in the second half of the eighteenth century. The decline of the Funj sultanate, the raids of the Shāyqiya and the disruption of trade along the Nile, referred to earlier,¹ had all contributed to the emigration of many inhabitants out of Dongola. The departure of the family of Bushāra should be viewed in the light of this exodus. 'Abdullāhi, probably the head of the remaining family of Bushāra, then very much reduced in wealth and power, was part of the waves of riverain tribesmen whose fortunes had turned in their homeland and who were coming to Kordofan looking for a new and better life. It was in such a modest family of a riverain frontiersman that Sh. Ismā'il was born, rather than the big and wealthy one which is suggested in al-Azharī's account.

As a young boy, Sh. Ismā'il started his education in the *Khalwa* and showed a great interest and desire to learn. He memorized the Qur'ān even before reaching manhood. In addition to that, he learnt Arabic, religious laws and related subjects. He must have studied under a number of known *faqīhs* who were teaching in El-Obeid at that time, like al-Hajj 'Arabī Makkāwī, al-Faqīh Dalīl and others; but neither Sh. Ismā'il, nor his son Ahmad, ever mentioned any of those who taught Sh. Ismā'il by name. Rather than that, Sh. Ismā'il states "....I was educated at the hands of some eminent, respectable and pious *shaykhs* from whom I learnt some of the earthly sciences like *usul*, *fiqh*, ancillary subjects and suchlike".² Ahmad who at one time went out of

1. See Chap.I, p.36, above. See also, R. O'Fahey and J. Spaulding, *Kingdoms*, 78-82.

2. See Ismā'il, *al-'Uhd al-Wafiya*, p.4.

his way to give a lengthy account of Ibrahīm al-Būlād,¹ the teacher of his grandfather Bushāra al-Gharbāwī, declines to mention any of those who taught his father. This silence about the teachers of Sh. Ismā'īl may be intended to strengthen the idea, often advocated by his descendants and followers, that his real education was of a higher status and that it was 'ilm *ladunī* علم لدنی i.e., given directly from God. Getting this 'ilm *ladunī* is one of the greatest privileges to which a *faqīh* may aspire, since it raises him to a status close to that of al-Khadir² who is very highly regarded by the Sufis; and also associates him with the Prophet Muhammad who did not have any formal education. Claims to this special privilege have been made by many *faqīhs* in the Sudan and the *Ṭabaqāt* of Wad Dayf Allah has a number of these to tell.³ Sh. Ismā'īl's desire to be associated with this special heavenly knowledge is expressed in a number of his writings in which he explains how these favours may descend by the grace of God on a person if he works rightly and hard for that purpose. He showed how he himself had done that, and how he was rewarded.⁴

As a young man, Sh. Ismā'īl spent most of his life in Kordofan and never left it for any other place in search of knowledge, and so his education was limited to what he could get in that part of the Sudan at that time. This was limited to the traditional Islamic subjects which begin with the memorization of the whole, or some parts

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1. Ms. Aḥmad al-Azhari, *Khulāṣat al-iqtibās*, p.33-4.
 2. The story which is often quoted in support of this 'ilm *ladunī* is that of al-Khadir in Qur'ān (18:65), "فوجدنا عبداً من عندنا آتيناه حرة" "هو جده عبداً من عندنا آتيناه حرة" See also J. Wensinck, "Al-Khadir", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 11, 2, 861-5.
 3. See for example, *Ṭabaqāt*, ed. Y.F. Ḥasan, p.41, notices of Shaykh Idrīs b. al-Arbāb, Shaykh Ḥasan wad Ḥusūna, and p.51 Shaykh Muḥammad al-Hanūm.
 4. See Ismā'īl, *al-'Uhūd al-Wafiya*, Ms. Sud.Gov. Archives (Khartoum), 1/82/1/1315.

of the Qur'ān and Traditions, then *Fiqh* and *Tawhīd*, then a few related subjects like Arabic, arithmetic and a little astrology.¹ The teachers of these subjects were unoriginal, uncreative and very limited in scope to the ideas which they found in the orthodox Islamic literature, which they learnt and reproduced without any discussion. The majority of these *faqīhs* did not take teaching as a full-time profession, and they often mixed it with trade or agricultural activities. This left them very little time to devote to the luxury of studies in philosophy, science or any such controversial subjects. Even in the orthodox Islamic subjects of *usūl* (Qur'ān and Sunna), *fiqh* (religious law) and *tawhīd* (theology) no critical studies of the standard texts had been attempted. Thus the *Risāla* of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qīrawānī (d.996),² and *al-Mukhtasar* (abridgement) by Khalīl (d.1374),³ were considered the pinnacles of learning in *fiqh*; and the three tracts⁴ of al-Sanūsī al-Maghribī were the climax in *al-Tawhīd*. No one ever dared to question their contents, express a personal opinion or pass a judgment on the value of knowledge presented by the authors of these books. Any *faqīh* who could only manage to write a *Sharh* (commentary), a *hāshiya* (glossary), or an *ikhtisār* (abridgement) was highly praised for that kind of effort.⁵

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1. Sh. Ismā'il, *al-'Uhd al-Wafiya*, p.4, referring to the subjects which he had studied there mentioned the *usūl* (i.e. Qur'ān and Sunna), *Fiqh* and *āla* (ancilliary subjects). ^{Qayrawānī}
 2. Abdullāhī Abū Muhammad b. Abī Zayd al-Qīrawānī, one of the most prominent *shaykhs* of the Mālikī *madhhabs* wrote a number of books and tracts, most famous of which was his *al-Risāla*.
 3. Khalīl b. Ishāq b. Mūsa b. Shu'ayb is another famous Mālikī *shaykh* in Egypt. He composed his *Mukhtasar* in this *madhhab* and became famous for it.
 4. These are known as (a) *Risalat ahl al-tawhīd*; (b) *Umm al-barāhīn* or *al-Sanūsīya al-Sughra*; and (c) *al-Murshida* or *al-Sanūsīya a Wusta*.
 5. See *Ṭabaqat*, ed., Y.F. Haṣan, notice No.228, p.345, Mukhtar b. Muhammad Jodat Alla.

Kordofan did not see any blossoming of Islamic schools like those of the Funj sultanate in Dongola and the Gezīra, but a few students from Kordofan who sought education in those comparatively older Islamic centres came back to their homes to set up their own *Khalwas*. In *Ṭabaqāt* we are told that Jōdat Allā¹ of Banī Muhammad who lived in al-Zalata, north-east of El-Obeid, in Dār-al-Rih, had come to study in the Gezīra under al-Faqīh Muhammad al-Qaddāl.² He then returned and established his own centre there and after his death his son Mukhtār continued his work. Then there were Jōda and al-Dūma³ of Banī 'Umrān, who studied under Shaykh Sughayrun⁴ in al-Qōz near Shendi. These names mentioned in the *Ṭabaqāt* should not, however, lead us to think that they have made any new contributions or innovations. Their *Khalwas* were not more than smaller copies of the original centres where they had studied. Thus Sh. Ismā'īl in Kordofan, could only come in touch with a limited religious and cultural experience. The effect of this on his *tariqa* was to make it also very limited and very much localized in outlook.

The next stage in Sh. Ismā'īl's life was when he himself became a *faqīh*. In addition to teaching the Qur'ān to the young children, he was devoting much of his time to the recitation of the Qur'ān, praying for the Prophet and other acts of worship. One function of the *faqīh*, however, did not appeal to him and he very much disapproved of it: that is, the writing of amulets. Though it was a very lucrative job at that time, he considered it degrading to use the verses of Qur'ān to harm some people or to achieve some worldly gains.⁵

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1. *Ibid.*, notice No.60(A), p.130.
 2. *Ibid.*, notice No.20, p.79.
 3. *Ibid.*, notice No.60(B), p.130.
 4. *Ibid.*, notice No.14, p.73.
 5. See Sh. Ismā'īl, *Tahdhīr al-Salīkīn*, Ms. Sud.Govt. Archives (Khartoum), 1/82/1334.

At this stage, Sh. Ismā'īl was following an energetic devotional life. He tells us that he was subjecting himself to a very rigorous discipline by keeping the nights reciting the Qur'ān and praying for the Prophet. Sometimes he would recite the whole Book, and at others he would read only parts of it; then after finishing that he would turn to the prayer for the Prophet until the break of dawn.¹ He continued to do so until he met Muhammad 'Uthmān al-Mirghani² who initiated him in the Khatimiyya *tariqa*.

When Muhammad 'Uthmān came to Kordofan in Shawwāl (Shawwāl 1231/September 1816) Sh. Ismā'īl became one of his devoted followers. Once initiated, Sh. Ismā'īl showed much enthusiasm and soon became a very active member in the order. Muhammad 'Uthmān was so impressed by his devotion that he chose him to be a *murshid* (director) and encouraged him to attract more people to their *tariqa*. During Muhammad 'Uthmān's absence in the Gezira, Sh. Ismā'īl exerted himself in recruiting followers, and in organizing the *tariqa*. When Muhammad 'Uthman returned to El-Obeid, he found that Sh. Ismā'īl had, as he puts it, "...set the *tariqa* in the most perfect form and in the best organization. I recruited many followers who are keenly bent on worshipping God and eagerly seeking gnosis. While he was still with us, I attained perfection and before his departure I attended the *hadrat* [colloquia of saints] and became one of the heads of the *dīwān* [register of saints] by the Grace of God. I became a master directing to God and leading towards Him".³

1. See Sh. Ismā'īl, *al-'Uḥūd al-Wafiya*, p.5

2. Muhammad 'Uthmān I al-Mirghani, was one of the disciples of Ahmad b. Idrīs who was sent to propagate his ideas in the Sudan. There he (al-Mirghani) managed to establish his own *tariqa*, which came to be known as al-Khatmiyya.

3. Sh. Ismā'īl, *al-'Uḥūd al-Wafiya*, p.5.

Muhammad 'Uthmān's stay in Kordofan was not long enough to establish a firm base for his *tariqa* or a strong bond with the people of that region. In all he stayed for about three years and three months and even these three years were interrupted by a visit of some months to the Gezira.¹ In his efforts to establish the Khatmiyya *tariqa* and recruit people to it, therefore, Sh. Ismā'il was depending on his own power of persuasion. This must have tempted him to think of establishing his own *tariqa* even while Muhammad 'Uthmān was still in Kordofan, especially as Muhammad 'Uthmān was the same age as he, and had established his *tariqa* in the same way by breaking away from his Shaykh Ahmad b. Idrīs. These temptations are betrayed in his claim that he had attained the status of sainthood only seven months after having been initiated in the *tariqa*.² He suppressed these intentions, however, because he did not want to risk any conflict with his *shaykh* and followers at that time. Thus, while Muhammad 'Uthmān was in Kordofan and for a short time after his departure, Sh. Ismā'il was torn between his desire to break away and announce his own *tariqa* and his obligation and loyalty to his *shaykh*. He thus states, "...So the Divine orders were heaped upon me in conformity with the Prophetic permission that I should bring out my own *tariqa* from the intimate place of visions of my drinking place at my spring, and thereby enable the disciples to travel to the Presence of the Lord. I held back from doing so in respect to my honourable *shaykh*....hoping that I might be relieved of these orders from above".³ He could only extricate himself

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1. Sh. Ismā'il, *al-'Uḥūd al-Wafiya*, p.6.
 2. *Ibid.* Sh. Ismā'il also mentioned in *Miftah bāb al dukhul*, p.4, that in 1235 - i.e., the last days of Muhammad 'Uthmān in Kordofan - he was favoured with *al-fatḥ al-rabbanī*.
 3. Sh. Ismā'il, *al-'Uḥūd al-Wafiya*, Ms. Sud.Govt. Archives (Khartoum), 1/8/1315.

from this dilemma by claiming that the act of breaking away from his *shaykh* was by a Divine order which neither he nor anybody else could ignore or disobey. Even a delay in its implementation had already resulted in catastrophes which fell on the people of Kordofan and on him personally. It was only after obeying these orders that, as he states, "The sufferings and miseries were lifted, when I declared it, by Divine Assistance and matters were set in order".¹

The catastrophes to which Sh. Ismā'il referred coincided with the departure of Muhammad 'Uthmān in about 1235/1819-20. Shortly after his departure the Turco-Egyptian armies invaded Kordofan and overran Bara and El-Obeid in two bloody battles. The rule of Muhammad Bey al-Daftardār which followed was very harsh and destructive. Sh. Ismā'il's personal tragedy came in 1237/1821-22² when he was confined to prison for three days. Why Sh. Ismā'il was imprisoned is not explained and how he came to be released after three days also remains unknown to us. Much attention is given to the mystical connotations of that incident, how Sh. Ismā'il had known beforehand what was going to happen and in the end, the whole episode is told as one of the *karāmas* of Sh. Ismā'il. In this respect, the story of the imprisonment of Sh. Ismā'il is very similar to that of Sayyidī Abū al-Hasan al-Shādhilī in Tunisia known as the story of *Bayt al-arba'in* in which also a story of the imprisonment of a *shaykh*, Sayyidī Abū

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1. Sh. Ismā'il, *al-'Uhid al-Wafiya*, p.6.
 2. Sh. Ismā'il in fact does not give any date for this incident in any of his writings. Ahmad never even mentions it. The above date is arrived at from what is said by Abū al-Fadla and Abd al-Hafiz, that after his release he went to the Nuba mountains and that at that time his eldest son al-Makkī was born.

al-Hasan, is related with much emphasis on the religious and mystical connotations and is then turned into a *karāma* of that saint.¹

After his release from prison, Sh. Ismā'il went into a self-imposed seclusion in the Nūba Mountains in Kundukur and Kundukaira.² It was during this period that Sh. Ismā'il began to think seriously of forming his own *ṭariqa*. He was by this time free from the direct influence of his *shaykh*, and two years had elapsed since they last met. He began to feel more independent and confident of himself and of his place in the society of El-Obeid. When he was imprisoned, it is said that many people gathered round the prison and would not move until he was released. The birth of his eldest son Muhammad al-Makki in 1237/1821-2 was an additional factor in his newly-felt paternalism and sense of responsibility. He also discovered his writing talents when he produced his first works - about ten books and tracts in 1237/1821-2 - which were followed by many others after that. By 1239/1823-24, his writings betrayed a feeling of frustration and dissatisfaction with the religious and political situation around him. His *Intidham al-ri'āsa*³ was an expression of his desire for change. The ideas of an expected saviour - al-Mahdi or al-Khatim - which were becoming very popular in the Sudan at that time,⁴ inspired him to write

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1. In its popular form, the story of Abū al-Hasan, as related in the Tunisian magazine *al-Ma'rifa*, 1, 5, p.340, has borrowed much from the Qur'ānic story of Ahl al-Kahf. Abū al-Hasan and his disciples were said to have been kept in prison for forty days without food and water, and when they came to take them, they were found to be safe and healthy.
 2. These are two small villages situated in the deep south-western part of the Nūba mountains. See map Appendix B, below.
 3. Sh. Ismā'il, *Khayfiyyat intidham al-ri'āsa li abnā' al-dunya ahl al-Siyāsa*, Sud.Govt.Archives (Khartoum), 1/82 unnumbered.
 4. See Chap.III, p.71-2 below; also M.I. Abū Salīm, *al-Haraka al-fikriyya*, pp.4-10.

three tracts on this subject.¹ In these he expressed an anxiety about the state of affairs around him and indicated the way they were going to be corrected through a proper return to God and the Islamic principles. On his part he was taking some practical steps in this direction. He tells us that by that time, 1239/1823-24, he was beginning to lay the foundations of his *ṭarīqa*. Some of *awrād al-ṭarīqā* and its *khalwa* had already been written then. The announcement of the new *ṭarīqa*, however, had to wait for another two years, until 1241/1825-26.

In addition to his own desires, a number of factors had favoured the breaking away of Sh. Ismā'īl from the Khatmiyya and the declaration of his own *ṭarīqa* on that date.

The first of these was the position of the Khatmiyya as a *ṭarīqa* in Kordofan. Though Muhammad 'Uthmān did not meet in Kordofan the enmity and aggression with which he was met in Dongola and the Gezīra, neither did he win the hearts of the people completely, since his stay with them was not long. Then soon his followers began to lose the sympathy of the people as the Khatmiyya moved closer and closer towards the new oppressive government. The favouritism with which their *Khalīfās* were treated began to alienate them from the people.² So Sh. Ismā'īl would do better by dissociating himself from the Khatmiyya without offending them.

The second factor is that some of the followers of Muhammad 'Uthmān were said to have tried to spoil the good relationship between him and

1. Sh. Ismā'īl, (a) *al-Lam' al-bādī 'an kashf haqīqat al-Khatīm wal-imām al-hādī*; (b) *Jāmi' al-Kalim wa wajīz al-nadhīm fī ma'rifat al-sayyid al-imām al-hādī wal-Khatīm*; (c) *al-Bayān al-Kamil fī ma'rifat al-kawkab al-fāḍil al-imām al-Mahdī wal-Khatīm al-shāmil Liasrār al-ṭali' wal-nāzil*.

2. See our Chap. III on the Ismā'īliyya and the Mahdia, p. 84.

Sh. Ismā'il. They went about telling Muhammad 'Uthmān many unfavourable things about Sh. Ismā'il hoping that he might dismiss him from his position as a *murshid* (director) in the *tariqa*. A group of these are associated with one of the miracles of Sh. Ismā'il. These were called *Jamā'at Rayra*, who were said to have gone all the way to Kasala to convince Muhammad 'Uthmān that Sh. Ismā'il was not worthy of his favours. They never returned, but died of thirst in Rayra, a small village in Eastern Sudan. Sh. Ismā'il refers to these groups in some of his writings and expressed his feelings and concern about them.¹ By declaring his own *tariqa* he would have no need to take any notice of such people.

The third factor was that by 1241/1825-26, conditions in Kordofan were favourable to take this step without fear of reprisal from the government or acts of repression. By this time the notorious Daftardār had left the country, and his harsh and unjust rule was replaced by a more tolerable one. Muhammad 'Ali Pasha was beginning to think of establishing some sort of good government and stop the unjustified harshness.

The establishment of the *Tariqa*

Though no specific reason can be cited to explain why he decided to declare his *tariqa* in 1241/1825-26, the choice of the last ten days of Ramadan in that year is significant. These are some of the most important days in the Muslim calendar. *Laylat al-qadr* "The Night of

1. See Sh. Ismā'il, *Muzīl al-ishkāl*, and also *Wasiyyat al-Muhibbīn fī qarar al-rī'āsa li'l salikīn*. Sud. Govt. Archives (Khartoum), 1/82 unnumbered and 1/82/1324.

Power" in which the Qur'ān descended to earth is an unspecified night in the last days of Ramadān. Many popular beliefs are associated with it, and many good happenings are attributed to that special night. Muslims worship until very late in the last ten nights of Ramadān in the hope of meeting with some of its favours.

The new *tarīqa* - the Ismā'īliyya - was no different in many aspects from the Khatmiyya. A comparison between the two may show this great interrelationship. There are only some minor differences in their *awrād*, their *Khalwas* and their organizations and administration. The *Sanad* "spiritual support", i.e., bases of teaching of the Khatmiyya *tarīqa* has been summarized by Muhammad 'Uthmān in the expression *Naqshjām* نقشجم referring to the Naqshbandiyya, Qadriyya, Shaziliyya, Junaidiyya and Mirghaniyya *tarīqas*. For his *sanad* Sh. Ismā'īl simply took the same with some rearrangement of the letters and added one to represent the Khatmiyya. Then he summarized it in the expression *Najshqamkh* نجشقمخ. Sh. Ismā'īl further added that for his *Najshqamkh* depended entirely on that of his Shaykh Muhammad 'Uthmān and that they both in turn depended heavily on the *sanad* of the Naqshbandiyya "...and the *sanad* on which we mainly depend now is one *sanad* in the Naqshbandiyya *tarīqa* from which all our *adhkār* are borrowed sometimes in shape as well as in meaning".¹

As for the *silsila* "chain of spiritual descent", Sh. Ismā'īl again took that of the Khatmiyya and states that he is connected to it through Muhammad 'Uthmān. Then he added that in addition he had a closer and more important one to Abū Bakr al-Siddīq and 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib and

1. Ms. Sh. Ismā'īl, *al-Sanad wa al-ijāza*, Sud. Govt. Archives (Khartoum), 1/82/1309.

even a still closer contact directly with the Prophet since some of his litanies had come directly from him.

The procedure of initiating the *murīd* "novice", in both *ṭarīqas* is basically the same with very insignificant differences. The aspirant is asked in both to make an ablution on Monday: at noon, then pray two *rak'as* reciting in the first one *al-fātiḥa* (Qur'ān 1) and *al-Khāfirūn* (Qur'ān 109); in the second he reads *al-fātiḥa* and *al-nasr* (Qur'ān 110) in the Khatmiyya or *al-fātiḥa* and *al-ikhlās* (Qur'ān 112) in the Ismā'īliyya. Then he is given a collection of *awrād* "litanies" which may keep him busy for a day or two. All this is considered to be a *muqaddima* "introduction". After going through this *muqaddima*, he makes another ablution on a Wednesday noon, and his *shaykh* prompts him in the *dhikr* and instructs him in the *asās* (basic litanies); and lets him take the covenant.¹

The *awrād* "litanies" of the Khatmiyya are very elaborate and detailed. Sh. Ismā'īl, though, sometimes used the same wording, managed to shorten these and rearranged some of them. Thus the *asās* which Muhammad 'Uthmān presents in eight pages is cut down to one page by Sh. Ismā'īl. In *al-Tawassul* "supplication", which is in verse, *al-Tahajjud* "all-night prayers", and *al-munājāh* "meditation", the wording and construction are different, but the essence and meaning are the same. One *dhikr*, that is *al-dhikr al-Qalbī*, which Sh. Ismā'īl says is the basic litany of the *ṭarīqa* seems to be original and different in many ways. It describes in seven pages how the follower should approach the *dhikr*, how to sit for it, what to say

1. For more details on Ismā'īliyya initiation procedure see Sh. Ismā'īl, *al-'Uḥūd al-Wafīya*, p.6. For that of the Khatmiyya, see Muhammad 'Uthmān, *Majmū' al-awrād*, p.62.

and what to expect from it in reward if it is performed in the right manner.¹

The *Khalwa* "seclusion" in both *tarīqas* follows the same pattern also. A worshipper should choose a clean place in which he will retire; make the ablution and when entering that place he should step with the right foot first. While reciting his litanies he should always keep his eyes closed, keep the image of his *shaykh* in his mind and continually recall his name in prayers.²

As for the organization and administration of the *tarīqa*, the Ismā'īliyya was limited by two factors in its initial stage: the experience and organizational ability of its founder, and the boundaries of its influence. The only experience Sh. Ismā'īl had in this respect was gained from Muhammad 'Uthmān and from his experience as a *faqīh* in a *Khalwa* in El-Obeid. The influence of the *tarīqa* in the time of Sh. Ismā'īl did not spread very far beyond the boundaries of Kordofan, and particularly the areas round El.Obeid. For these reasons the need did not arise for any elaborate structure or complicated administration. When he needed, Sh. Ismā'īl borrowed freely from the Khatmiyya system and terminology; and until his death, the Ismā'īliyya was administered like a big household. The present organization of the Ismā'īliyya owes much more to its first *Khalīfa* Muhammad al-Makki than to its founder Sh. Ismā'īl.³

1. Sh. Ismā'īl, *al-'Uhūd*, pp.20-26.

2. For his *Khalwa* of the Ismā'īliyya, see Sh. Ismā'īl, *Mashāriq Shumūis al-anwār*, pp.162-68, and for that of the Khatmiyya see Muhammad 'Uthmān, *Majmu' al-awrad*, p.63-66.

3. This will come in detail in our Chap.V below on the organization and administration of the *tarīqa*.

The Writings of Sh. Ismā'il

By 1257/1842-3 the Ismā'īliyya *tarīqa* was well established in Kordofan and Sh. Ismā'il was able to let his son Muhammad al-Makki take charge so that he could go on pilgrimage. When he returned to El-Obeid, he decided to retire in the *Khalwa* for a life of literary activity, as he considered this to be of the highest importance for the propagation and preservation of his ideas and *tarīqa*, "...whoever desires to see the greatness of our *tarīqa* and our command of the secrets of all the other *tarīqas*, should read our writings....because my books carry my thoughts wherever they may be while I live or after my death".¹ The next twenty years or so after his return from pilgrimage were thus devoted mainly to writing. When he died, Sh. Ismā'il left behind a great wealth of works, most of which remain in manuscript.²

His works followed the pattern of development in his character and the phases through which he had passed in his life. Thus they reflect three stages from the time he is said to have started writing in 1237/1821-2, until his death in 1280/1863.

The first of these is the period 1237/1821-1241/1825). These were troubled years in which Sh. Ismā'il's life was in turmoil and his character undergoing a great deal of change. His initiation in the *tarīqa* had introduced him to the ideas of Sufism in which he became absorbed, but these were still raw in his mind and still undigested. He was personally troubled by his conflicting desires

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1. Sh. Ismā'il, *al-'Uḥūd al-wāfiya*, p.11.
 2. He is reported to have written about 45 books and tracts. For list see Appendix C. Of these, seven at least have been printed. See Trimmingham, *Islām*, p.235, n.2.

of declaring his own *tariqa* and keeping loyal to his Shaykh Muhammad 'Uthmān. He was further troubled by the coming of the Turco-Egyptian armies, which not only conquered Kordofan and subjected it to many miseries, but also affected his own personal life by committing him to prison for three days. He was restless and felt insecure, a matter which led him to leave El-Obeid in 1237/1821-2, and travel far south in the Nuba mountains to Kundukur and Kundukaira. His writings during this period thus reflected these conflicts and this disturbed character.¹ Some of them were only primitive attempts at tackling some of the Sufi ideas to which he was newly introduced, and others were an expression of his hidden feelings towards the new invaders and his longing for an expected saviour.² His ideas in this period were not original, but a poor reproduction of what he had learnt as a *faqih* and as a newcomer to Sufism. He made no attempts to discuss these ideas or challenge their argumentation. His style was familiar, easy and close to the minds of the semi-illiterate people of Kordofan. The words were easy and of everyday use - sometimes colloquial - and composed in short sentences with sweet ornamental rhythmic sounds of *saj'*. His experience as a *faqih* teaching in the *Khalwa* accounts very much for this simplicity and choice of easy words.

The second period which marks the development in Sh. Ismā'il's literary activity is 1241/1825-1251/1842, which is dominated mainly by his attempts to establish his own *tariqa* and find his place among the

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1. Examples of these are *Munyat al-Tullāb fī tafsīr qawlihim 'ilm al-ẓāhir hijāb* in 1237/1822, and *Risālat al-Kamāl fī adhwaq al-rijāl* 1238/1823.
 2. See *al-lam' al-bādī 'an khasf haqīqat al-khatim wa'l imān al-hādi*, 1239/1824 and *Kayfiyat intidhām al-ri'āsa li abna' al-dunya ahl al-siyāsa*, 1239/1824.

Sufi *shaykhs*. His Sufi ideas were now well developed and digested, and he became familiar with many mystical terms and versed in technical Sufi expressions. His social position now changed, and not only in El-Obeid, but also through the whole of Kordofan and parts of Darfur.¹ His audience also changed, and instead of addressing the simple and common people, he was now addressing Sufis whom he was trying to impress and convince in their own field using their own ideas and style. According to these new developments, the nature of his writings changed. They now showed a greater tendency towards mysticism and Sufism. His style followed the same pattern. The topics which he chose to tackle in this period were related mainly to his *tariqa* and showing his tendency to be independent. His words became more flowery and his expressions more ornamental. His use of some vague terms, complicated phrases and a lot of Sufi vocabulary was intended to give these writings an atmosphere of mysticism and place them outside the range of the ordinary person.

The final stage of development in his writings came in 1260/1843-1280/1863. Now Sh. Ismā'il is mature, confident, no longer excited, under no pressure from the government or from his relationship with his Shaykh Muhammad 'Uthmān, and above all, his *tariqa* is now recognized and his respectable place in the society is ensured. His pilgrimage to Mecca had added to his experience and increased his knowledge. All this is reflected in his writings which now show more substance, greater depth, and a better approach to the subjects discussed. When dealing with a sophisticated topic, he followed his

1. D'Escayrac de Lauture, *Le Désert et le Soudan*, pp.447-8.

arguments intelligently and consistently, even making sure that they are supported by appropriate verses from the Qur'ān, some Traditions and some quotations from known and respectable authorities. Though many of the ideas he presented in these writings were part of the Sufi culture, his approach to them is original and different.¹

On the topics related to his *ṭarīqa*, this maturity is also reflected and his clarity of mind shown. He retraced his steps soberly, reassessing his previous works, giving them a new appreciation and presenting them in a better shape. Thus he took all his dispersed *aiḥrād* (litanies), arranged them according to the days of the week and times of the day, and then explained clearly and convincingly why he did that in a well-argued introduction.² The arguments he presented in these writings are also sound and systematic. His attitude in this period in contrast to the previous one is that of persuasion and by producing convincing arguments rather than threatening his opponents and promising them trouble and addressing them in mystical and complicated language. Here again in this period he carefully supports his arguments by quotations from the Qur'ān, the Sunna and known authorities, because he thought that any work which is not authenticated is considered to be unsound, even to '*ulamā'* *al-rusūm* (earthly sciences).³ His enthusiasm for quotation is only equalled by his attention to dates. He very carefully punctuated the development of his career by fixing dates, marking every important event in his life. He is so obsessed by

1. For example, see Sh. Ismā'īl, *Mashāriq*, pp.60-77, for his approach to the ideas of *al-Wilāya*, *al-'Urūj* (ascension) and his description of *al-marātib* of *al-Islām*, *al-Imān* and *al-Ihsān*.

2. See Sh. Ismā'īl, *Rawḍat al-salikīn*.

3. See Sh. Ismā'īl, *al-'Uḥūd al-wāfiya*, p.10.

the importance of dates that he is careful to mention the day and even the time of the day on which a particular incident had taken place. Thus, in showing how he came to write one of his books he says, "...And then on the blessed Monday eighteen days before the end of Ramadān 1263 A.H., an idea flashed in my mind that I should collect all the prayers which I had written before in one book".¹

To close this chapter on the founder of the Ismā'īliyya, it may be stated that, although his pedigree represents him as a descendent of honourable and very wealthy ancestors, Sh. Ismā'īl himself was born and grew up in a modest family. It was through his own efforts, rather than an inherited fame that the Ismā'īliyya was established in Kordofan. His education was limited to the study of traditional Islamic literature, Arabic and a few ancillary subjects, and his cultural experience did not go beyond what he could get in Kordofan at that time, which was neither original nor stimulating. It was through his contact with Muhammad 'Uthmān al-Mirghanī that he was first introduced to Sufism, in which he was destined to make some contribution to the Sudanese society.

It was these elements of his family background, his educational experience and his cultural contacts that determined the development of Sh. Ismā'īl's character, the quality of his writing and the nature of his *tariqa*.

1. Sh. Ismā'īl, *Rawdat al-Sālikīn*, introduction.

CHAPTER III

THE ISMĀ'ILIYYA AND THE MAHDIA

The Ismā'īliyya were one of the many Sudanese families which towards the beginning of the nineteenth century tended to be satisfied with their limited role as religious teachers and their place as *faqīhs* in the society. The founder of the family (under this name) Shaykh Ismā'īl al-Walī was, at most, hoping to establish his reputation as a *faqīh* in the new community of Khordofan and at best to revive the prestige and fame of his ancestors as far back as al-Faqīh Bushāra al-Gharbāwī in Dongola, through whom he claimed descent from al-'Abbās, the uncle of the Prophet.¹

Ismā'īl was successful in gaining a good reputation for himself and his family. Le Comte d'Escayrac de Lauture, who met him in El-Obeid in 1849, was very much impressed by the holiness of his life, his active and heartfelt charity, and his religious teachings; qualities which earned him a reputation celebrated as far as Darfur. The Comte observed that the people of El-Obeid, where Ismā'īl had made his home, professed a profound veneration for him, and that even the government officials, who did not do the same with others, were very polite with him: "I saw one of them recently arriving from Cairo, show him respect such as Turks rarely show to natives, or soldiers to *faqīhs*. As he approached, this governor, who was a colonel, rose, went to receive him at his palace-gate, and kissed his hand".²

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1. See Chapter II, pp.39 and 44-6, above .
 2. D'Escayrac de Lauture, *Le désert et le Soudan*, pp.447-8, trans. P.M. Holt.

The satisfaction of the Ismā'īliyya with their limited role of the traditional *faqīh's* family is further illustrated by some of the writings of Sh. Ismā'il himself. In his *al-'Uḥūd al-wāfiya*,¹ he states that until he met al-Sayyid Muhammad 'Uthmān al-Mirghanī, he was content with the recitation of the Qur'ān, prayer, the study of some religious and earthly sciences and teaching the children of Muslims² - a typical attitude of a *faqīh* of that time. He made no effort to go and look for any new role or any new idea like some of his contemporaries, such as Sh. Ahmad al-Tayyib al-Bashīr and Muhammad al-Majdhūb al-Saghīr, who went to Mecca about 1800 and were influenced by some of the reformist ideas.

Two developments combined to bring about some very important changes in the history of the Ismā'īliyya. The first of these was Sh. Ismā'il's contact with Muhammad 'Uthmān al-Mirghanī (al-Kabīr) who introduced him to the Sufi ideas and initiated him in the *ṭarīqa* in Shawwāl 1231/ August 1816, a matter which is discussed elsewhere.³ The second was the contact of the Ismā'īliyya with the Mahdia. The present chapter examines the various factors that affected the relationship between the Ismā'īliyya as a family, as a *ṭarīqa* and as individuals, and the Mahdia. Then it deals with the effects of the Mahdia on the family structure, and thirdly with its effects on the structure of the *ṭarīqa*.

The relationship between the Ismā'īliyya and the Mahdia was determined on the one hand by the nature and development of the Mahdia, and on the other by the reactions of the Ismā'īliyya to that movement throughout the various phases of its development.

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1. Sh. Ismā'il, *al-'Uḥūd al-wāfiya*, Sud. Govt. Archives (Khartoum), 1/82/1315.
 2. *Ibid.*, p.4.
 3. See Chapter II, pp.55-7.

The Nature of the Mahdia

The Mahdia was a revolutionary movement both in its religious and political contexts. It sought to revive the Faith and to reform society by uprooting the existing social and political systems and establishing an ideal Islamic *umma* governed by the *Sharī'ā*. To do that, the Mahdi claimed an authority for his actions derived directly from God and the Prophet, by divine inspiration, which was unrestricted by any worldly powers. Thus, by taking the title of *Khalīfat Rasūl Allāh*, Muhammad Ahmad, the Mahdi of the Sudan, was challenging the authority of the Khedive and asserting a higher sanction for his acts over the authority of the Khedival administration. By assuming the title of *Imām al-Muslimīn*, he claimed special initiative (*ijtihād*)¹ in the interpretation of the Qur'an and the Sunna unchecked by any established *madhhab* or any religious institution.

By the nature of his movement, therefore, Muhammad Ahmad was in direct conflict with the existing establishment, the Khedival officials and troops, and with the official religious institutions, the cadre of 'Ulamā', the *qādīs* and *muftīs* who compromised with the administration and gave it moral support. The former he called *al-Turk* and to the latter he gave the term '*ulamā' al-Sū'*'.

On the other hand, Muhammad Ahmad found immediate support from those who had suffered socially and politically under the existing system, and the Mahdist ideas were readily accepted and propagated by the *faqīhs*, *shaykhs*, *tarīqas* and the common people who had looked forward to his manifestation as a saviour from the tyranny and injustices of their Turco-Egyptian oppressors, and had expected his appearance at that time. Reflecting

1. See P.M. Holt, *The Mahdist State*, p.122, note 2.

these attitudes of the common people, Yūsuf Mikhā'īl described the state of affairs in El-Obeid at that time in these words, "One would hear nothing but curses on the rulers and on everyone who controlled one of the government departments. Indeed by the will of God Most High, most people, both men and women, began to ask: Isn't there a Mahdi for us? Isn't it said that this is the right time for the reappearance of the Mahdi?"¹ Then when these heard of Muhammad Ahmad, they did not go, like the '*ulamā'*', to test him or to look for the canonical criteria of the True Mahdi but, in Yūsuf Mikhā'īl's words, "...they came to him in large numbers for his blessing..."²

Attitudes towards the Sudan^{ese} Mahdia and loyalty to its ideals were also influenced and modified by the progress of that movement in stages from a religious reformist organization, through a short phase of a theocracy, to an autocracy under the Khalīfa 'Abdullāhi al-Ta'ishī. In its initial stages thus, when Muhammad Ahmad was mainly a *faqīh* and a religious reformer, his movement appealed to the *faqīhs*, Sufis and *shaykhs* of *tarīqas*. His earliest associates - who later came to be known as *Abkār al-Mahdi* (the first born of the Mahdi) - were from amongst these. After 1881, the movement developed a political and militant attitude, thus attracting to its support groups of people who were motivated not only by religious enthusiasm, but also by political and economic reasons. The Mahdi provided a link between religious, social and political grievances, "Verily these Turks....judged by other than God's revelation and altered the Sharī'ā of Our Lord Muhammad, the Apostle of God and corrupted the Faith of God and placed poll tax (*al-jizya*)³ on your necks

1. Y. Mikhā'īl, *Memoirs*, trans. S.M. Nūr, p.68.

2. *Ibid.*, p.74.

3. The significance of this is that *al-jizya* is levied on the non-Muslims.

together with the rest of the Muslims....Verily the Turks would drag away your men in chains, imprison them in fetters, take captive your women and children....Moreover, they had no mercy upon the small among you nor respect for the great among you".¹ Amongst the chief supporters of the Mahdia at this stage were the *jallāba*. These were men of riverain origin, mainly Ja'aliyyīn and Danāqla, who came to settle in the Western Sudan as traders, particularly in slaves, and as carriers of Arab and Islamic culture.

Two things are worth emphasizing about the attitude of these *jallāba*: the first is that their active support of the Mahdia was in marked contrast to the passive attitude of their kinsmen who remained in their original homelands;² and the second is that this support originated from a negative rather than a positive motivation. They were mainly inspired by a feeling of hatred towards a government which adopted a policy of suppression of their slave trade which was enforced by Christian administrators, and they were motivated by a desire to get rid of that government rather than by a genuine belief in Muhammad Ahmad's Divine mission. These two factors may partly explain the lack of enthusiasm amongst these *jallāba* and their changed attitudes towards the Mahdia in its next phases after the fall of Khartoum in 1885. The final defeat of the hated Khedival government removed the main motive which attracted their enthusiastic support, and with the establishment of the new Mahdist capital in Omdurman, they came back nearer to their homelands and thus closer to the attitudes of their kinsmen.

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1. *Manshūrāt*, l. 15-16; Ms. Nujumi, 7, trans. P.M. Holt, *Mahdist State*, 2nd ed., p.110.
 2. P.M. Holt, "The Place in History of the Sudanese Mahdia", *SNR*.XL, 1959, p.109.

The next important date marking these stages in the development of the Mahdia was 1885 in which Khartoum, the capital of the Khedival government fell (in January) and then Muhammad Ahmad, the leader of this movement died (in June). The call for a *jihād* against a common enemy, and the charisma of Muhammad Ahmad were two very important unifying factors which kept the Ansār together. The fall of Khartoum, signifying the defeat of the common enemy, removed one of these unifying factors, the death of al-Mahdi removed the other. After the death of al-Mahdi, the struggle for succession to the *Khilāfa* created a rift between 'Abdullāhi al-Ta'ishī and the Ashrāf (relatives of the Mahdi). The struggle was, however, settled in favour of 'Abdullāhi, but by no means could the rift between the Ansār be closed afterwards. It even grew wider and developed into a feeling of distrust between the Khalīfa Abdullāhi and his kinsmen, the Baqqāra on the one hand, and Awlād al-Balad (people of riverain origin) on the other. Events which followed after 1885 led those two factions to drift further and further apart from each other. Natural catastrophes¹ and checks in military progress before the fulfilment of the Mahdi's predictions, which promised the conquest of Egypt and Mecca,² left the Ansār dismayed and disillusioned. Gradually between 1885 and 1898, their religious zeal began to subside, and their desire to establish a theocracy to give way to a form of secular despotism depending on the military support of the Baqqāra. The loyalty of Awlād al-Balad was more and more doubtful, and they were further and further alienated as internal and external pressures continued

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1. Most famous of these was *majā'āt sanāt sittā*, the famine of A.H. 1306 (1888/89).
 2. Prophetic vision of the Mahdi, referred to in P.M. Holt, *The Mahdist State*, 2nd ed., p.112.

on the Khalīfa's rule. Towards the closing years of the Mahdia, many of Awlād al-Balād were conspiring against the Khalīfa and some riverain tribes rose in open rebellion against his rule.

The reaction of the Ismā'īliyya to the Mahdia and to the events that marked the various stages of its development was influenced by their tribal attachments, their religious and spiritual loyalties and by the attitudes of some important individuals among them.

The Tribal Attachment

The Bidayriyya to whom the family of Sh. Ismā'īl belong had shown much support and enthusiasm for the Mahdia from the start. Their famous religious leaders, such as 'Abd al-Rahīm b. Badawī Abū Safiyya¹ and al-Makkī b. Sh. Ismā'īl were amongst the earliest adherents of the Mahdi, and the Bidayriyya tribesmen were among the first groups to make successful raids against the government forces in Abū Harāz, al-Birka and other similar outposts in Kordofan.² Their early support and enthusiasm were an expression of a protest against an intolerable Turco-Egyptian rule towards which they were feeling bitter and frustrated.

The Bidayriyya in Kordofan were a large sedentary tribe living around El-Obeid as cultivators, traders and *faqīhs*. It was those three categories, more than any other, which felt the oppression and injustices of the Turco-Egyptian rule. Nomads could drive their herds and move out of the government's reach when they were pressed, but as sedentary people, the Bidayriyya could only stay and bear the burden.³ As cultivators they

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1. See Y. Mikhā'il, *Memoirs*, trans., S.M. Nūr, p. 37.
 2. P.M. Holt, *The Mahdist State*, p.51. See also Slatin, *Fire and Sword*, p.145 for pro-Mahdist activities of the Bidayriyya.
 3. P.M. Holt, *A Modern History*, 2nd ed., p.43, observed that while the taxes levied on the settled riverain people were unbelievably onerous, there was no mention of a camel tax and that the nomads were practically outside government control.

found the government policies to be harmful in various ways. Because taxes were high and were mainly paid in cash, much of their effort was directed to the collection of that cash, either by selling their slaves or by engaging them in the collection of gum; both of which meant a shortage of labour on the farms. This in turn also led to much good land being left uncultivated and to a great deal of reduction in output. And on top of all that, the government armies were an additional heavy burden on those people since the soldiers, who were always on the move in Kordofan, had to be fed by the villages out of their continually depleted resources. Referring to the misery of these people, Pallme states,

"....It is impossible to describe the cruelty with which the taxes and contributions are collected.... Droughts, or excess of rains may cause the harvest, in many districts, to fail, or the locusts may totally devour it..., but none of these circumstances is ever taken into consideration, and the contributions are levied without mercy or compassion".¹

He thought that such an oppressive policy could only lead to trouble in that province and he, therefore, predicted that the people would, in fact, eventually be obliged to emigrate, as they had already, from several parts, or a general insurrection would be the result.²

As traders, the Bidayriyya were also provoked and irritated by the government policies and by repeated harassment. Prior to the establishment of the Turco-Egyptian rule in Kordofan, the Bidayriyya had found very favourable conditions for commercial activities in the Western Sudan. The disruption of trade along the Nile in the eighteenth century and the revival of the Trans-Saharan caravan routes brought about

1. I. Pallme, *Travels*, pp.37-8.
2. *Ibid.*, p.38.

a great deal of commerce and prosperity to Kordofan.¹ A long period of peace under the Fur, especially between 1790 and 1821, was a blessing and a further incentive for the creation of wealth. Taking advantage of these conditions, the Bidayriyya were able to spread as successful traders in various parts of Kordofan and the Nūba mountains where many of their famous families can be found up to the present day. With contacts in both Kordofan and Dongola, they must have found this very advantageous; and it was during this period that their influence in Kordofan was appreciated.

During the Turco-Egyptian rule 1821-1881, a strong government and a stricter enforcement of law and order brought about a greater degree of safety to the caravan routes, and an encouragement to trade, but unfortunately, this did not mean more prosperity for the inhabitants. The government monopoly on the sale of practically every item of importance very much impeded trade in general, and hurt the *jallāba*.² The unaccustomed and inequitable system of taxation was another impediment for trade, and the violence and extortion which accompanied it was a permanent source of bitterness and discontent. More harmful than these was the government interference with the slave trade. The recruitment of slaves in Muhammad 'Ali's armies as *jihādīya* brought about some changes in the social and economic pattern of the society, which were not appreciated by the *jallāba*, but their greater disappointment came

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1. See Terence Walz, "Wakālat al-jallāba", *Annales Islamologiques*, t.XIII, 1977, pp.217-45; also, "Notes on the organization of the African trade in Cairo 1800-1850", *Annales Islamologiques*, 1972, pp.263-86.
 2. See Pallme, *Travels*, pp.279-304. The term *jallāba* (small traders) came to be associated with riverain tribesmen and particularly the Ja'aliyyīn who traded between Egypt, the Nile, Western Sudan and, later, on the Southern Sudan.

when the government started to implement the policy of abolition of the slave trade. The situation was even more aggravated by the appointment in 1877 of Gordon as Governor-General of the Sudan. He started to implement this policy with more enthusiasm and rigidity. His policy made life intolerable for the riverain people (*awlād al-balad*) in general and the *jallāba*, traders, in particular in the Western Sudan. In an effort to curtail their activity in the areas south of El-Obeid, he ordered them to evacuate all the districts south of the route from El-Obeid to Dārā in southern Darfur. When they ignored this order, he instructed the tribal *shaykhs* of the area to seize the *jallāba* and bring them to the government posts and warned them that they would be held responsible for any *jallāba* found in their districts. This order was happily received by the *shaykhs* and their people, as it gave them a chance for looting and robbery from the *jallāba*. In this harrying of the *jallāba*, the Ja'aliyyīn were perhaps the principal sufferers.... The Bidayriyya as Ja'aliyyīn and as *jallāba* shared the plight of their kinsmen.

The *faqīhs* of the Bidayriyya also found the Turco-Egyptian regime odious, and had more than one reason to be dissatisfied with it. These were genuinely pious men who were active as missionaries in the frontier of Islamization. It was to some groups of those Bidayriyya *faqīhs* with some Rikābiyya that R.C. Stevenson gives credit for the spreading of Islam among the mixed Arab-Nūba population of the central plains and outlying hills in the Nūba mountains. These *faqīhs* were primarily

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1. P.M. Holt, *The Mahdist State*, 2nd ed., p.31.
 2. R.C. Stevenson, "Some aspects of Islam in the Nuba mountains", *SNR*, Vol.43, 1962, p.10.

motivated by a religious zeal and a true desire to spread the Faith. They went out to establish centres of worship in the midst of a pagan population on the fringes of the Islamic frontier, and through their piety and teaching attracted many converts. Typical examples of such men were Sh. Ismā'il al-Walī and Badawī Abū Safiyya who is described by Pallme as:

"A pious man and anything but a hypocrit, hence he is beloved and enjoys the good opinion of all men. He settles disputes and gives friendly advice to all who come to ask for it, knows no partiality and in no instance receives a present....In short he is a Mahomedan missionary. He had made thousands of proselytes among the heathen negroes....He also defends his faith according to the letter of the Koran, sword in hand, and has even lost a son in the fight for the good cause".¹

Towards the close of the eighteenth century, the ascendancy of the Fur, following the campaign of Sultan Tayrāb, missionary activities, especially in the Nūba mountains, received much encouragement. Under Tayrāb's successor, 'Abd al-Rahmān, who was himself a *faqīh* in Kordofan before coming to the throne, conditions were even better, and the *faqīhs* were happier. These favourable conditions were upset during the Turco-Egyptian administration. Apart from the fact that the status of the *faqīhs* in this province - like that of their colleagues in other parts of the Sudan - had declined, some had suffered personally as individuals and their activities had been hampered. Sh. Ismā'il was actually imprisoned,² and Badawī could only evade capture by keeping out of government reach far away in the Nūba mountains.³ The discontent of the Bidayriyya *faqīhs* with the Turco-Egyptian regime was clearly expressed

1. Pallme, *Travels*, pp.189-90.

2. See our Chapter II, p.57, above.

3. Trimmingham, *Islam*, p.103.

by Badawī Abū Safiyya addressing an Egyptian, "You call yourself Muslim, God alone knows the truth, but to me you are only the oppressors of my country".¹

In all those aspects, as cultivators, as traders and as *faqīhs*, the Bidayriyya had shared the injustices with other inhabitants of Kordofan, but on top of that, they were sometimes the victims of ill-advised tribal policies carried out by some of the governors of that province. Yūsuf Mikhā'il relates in his memoirs how the Bidayriyya and the Ghidayyāt tribes were drawn, through such policies, into the conflict between Ahmad wad Dafa'Alla and Ilyās Umm Barīr; and how both these tribes were disappointed in the end. When Ilyās was appointed Pasha and Governor of Kordofan, Ahmad wad Dafa'Alla urged 'Alī Kanōna of the Ghidayyāt to revolt against such an appointment of a *jallābī* as his governor. 'Alī did rise and defeated the government forces sent against him. Ilyās turned to the Bidayriyya who came to his rescue. 'Alī Kanōna was defeated and killed. But soon after that a new governor, Muhammad Sa'id, was appointed in Kordofan and the first thing he did was to change the policy adopted by Ilyās in relation to the tribes. He came to terms with the Ghidayyāt and held their chiefs, the sons of 'Alī Kanōna, in great respect and honour. Ilyās Umm Barīr, on the other hand, was deposed, discredited, and with him also were his allies the Bidayriyya.²

Thus frustrated, the Bidayriyya would be expected to be only too glad to join a movement which promised them an opportunity to challenge the Turco-Egyptian regime.

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1. Peney, *Revue d'Ethnographie*, i, 492, quoted in Trimmingham, *Islam*, p.103.
 2. Y. Mikhā'il, *Memoirs*, trans. S.M. Nūr, p.42.

Spiritual Attachments and Loyalties

The second influence on the Ismā'īliyya's attitude towards the Mahdia is connected with their spiritual attachments and loyalties: i.e. the loyalty of the family of Sh. Ismā'īl to its *faqīh* and Sufi tradition as opposed to a growing trend among some of its members who were becoming '*ulamā'*'¹ and loyalty to the Khatmiyya whose founder was the spiritual master of Sh. Ismā'īl.

The tradition of the family as *faqīhs* goes back five generations to a founding father, al-Faqīh Bushāra al-Gharbāwī to whom reference is made elsewhere.² After al-Faqīh Bushāra very little is known about the family for some time. With Sh. Ismā'īl al-Walī (1792-1863) the prestige of the family was revived and through him it became famous as far as Darfur. Not only was he a devoted religious man, but he was also very active as a missionary spreading Islam in some areas, especially in the Nūba mountains. This made him and his family feel a sense of responsibility towards the Muslims of that area in general, and his new recruits in particular. Under the Turco-Egyptian administration the status of the *faqīhs* in general began to decline. Although the authorities continued to give subsidies to their *khalwas* and to be conciliatory towards them, their political influence was undermined by the establishment of an official cadre of '*ulamā'*' and their prestige was challenged by the encouragement given to the graduates of al-Azhar as the true and authoritative expositors of the religious sciences. As

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1. In addition to Aḥmad al-Azharī and Ismā'īl al-Kūrdufani, this family had a number of other '*ulamā'*' some of whom later joined the Mahdia and took important jobs as *qādis* and *muftīs*: e.g. al-Bāqir b. Sh. Ismā'īl *qadī* of al-Sabīl in the Gezīra. See, H. Sīd Ahmad al-Muftī, *Tatawur nidham al-qaḍā'*, 1, 132, 149 and 150.
 2. See Chapter II, p.39, above.

the '*ulamā*' were drawing closer and closer towards government circles, gaining higher status and more material benefits, the *faqīhs* were farther and farther alienated and becoming more and more deprived of the comforts of life, but nearer to the hearts of the common people. D'Escayrac de Lauture describes the drifting apart of these two categories in these words,

"The '*ulamā*' are met with in the Sudan only in the large towns, particularly in the capitals and beside the rulers. In the villages, one only sees a secondary order of clergy [sic] - insignificant and poor clergy, unknown everywhere else; holding their powers only by public confidence, living on alms and hardships, yet asking nothing of anyone, and lavishing to all what a pure heart and lively fraternal love can give - the bread of the spirit".¹

True to the tradition of their family, Sh. Ismā'īl was leading the life of a simple and poor *faqīh*. His elder son, Muḥammad al-Makkī inherited his *baraka* and following in the steps of his father, was keeping this tradition: he had a *khalwa* for teaching the Qur'ān, worshipped God and led a simple life. Challenge to this tradition started with Ahmad al-Azharī, a younger son of Sh. Ismā'īl who pursued a different line in life. In fact, his dissatisfaction with the traditions of the family became apparent even before the start of the Mahdia. It was said that when he returned from al-Azhar, he began to be very critical about many of his elder brother's practices, and particularly his beating of the drums - *ḍarb al-nōba* - during the *dhikr*. Al-Makkī reluctantly ordered his followers to pack up the drums, store them inside the tomb of Sh. Ismā'īl and beat them no more. But as soon as the *dhikr* started, we are told, everyone began to hear the drums making a sound by themselves inside the tomb, thus convincing all those present, including Ahmad, that the practice

1. D'Escayrac, *Le Desert et le Soudan*, p.448, trans. P.M. Holt.

of *darb al-nōba* was not to be challenged any more.¹ During the Mahdia the difference between the two brothers became very evident. Al-Makkī became one of the first and strongest supporters of the Mahdia, while Ahmad came to be one of its bitterest enemies and was killed in one of battles against the Mahdists near Bara.

Loyalty and spiritual attachment to the Khatmiyya were also a very important factor in determining the attitudes of the descendants of Sh. Ismā'il and the followers of his *ṭarīqa* towards the Mahdia.

Muhammad 'Uthmān I al-Mirghanī was the spiritual master of Sh. Ismā'il and his guide in the Sufi path. Sh. Ismā'il thus had the greatest respect and veneration for him and for the Mirghanī family, which is reflected in most of his writings; wherever the name of Muhammad 'Uthmān is mentioned in them, it is preceded by many *alqāb* (titles) of distinction and honour. The Khatmiyya *ṭarīqa* is equally respected and venerated. This tradition of respect for the Mirghaniyya and their Khatmiyya *ṭarīqa* continued amongst the members of Sh. Ismā'il's family and the followers of his Ismā'īliyya *ṭarīqa* even up to the present day. It would have been expected thus that the Ismā'īliyya would have followed the Khatmiyya in their opposition to the Mahdia. Instead, the Ismā'īliyya showed an independent attitude. This may have been because the Khatmiyya were at that time associated with the Shayqiyya, and also with the Turco-Egyptian administration, both of which were unpopular with the people, especially those in Kordofan.

The unpopularity of the Shayqiyya was associated first with their raids during the eighteenth century, which disrupted trade and forced many people to leave their homes in Dongola.² Secondly, the Shayqiyya

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1. This story is often relates as a *karāma* of al-Makkī was told me by Hājj Ahmad al-Faki 'Abdalla, in El-Obeid, 1975.
 2. Chapter I, p.36, above.

were associated with the unpopular Turco-Egyptian regime which they served very enthusiastically. They were the special protégés of that alien administration, and a number of them were appointed to government office, especially in the collection of taxes, and as such they incurred hatred.

The Mirghaniyya as a family, and their *ṭarīqa* as well, were also linked in the minds of the Sudanese people with the Turco-Egyptian regime. The coming of Muhammad 'Uthmān al-Mirghani himself to the Sudan was only a few years before the armies of Muhammad 'Alī invaded the country, and some people did not fail to correlate his coming with that invasion. Even before the invasion, the presence of Muhammad 'Uthmān was not welcomed, and Ahmad Kātīb al-Shūna tells us how he was ill-treated in Kordofan.¹ Unpopularity of the Khatmiyya was also increased by the preferential treatment which they received from the rulers over the other Sudanese *ṭarīqas*, thus giving them more prestige and power. Their followers increased, especially among the Shayqiyya and their *Khalīfas* began to behave arrogantly.

Association with the Khatmiyya would have meant for the Ismā'īliyya an association with the Shayqiyya and with the rulers, both of whom were very unpopular with the Sudanese, especially the religious men and heads of *ṭarīqas*. Furthermore, closer links with the Khatmiyya brought the Ismā'īliyya into conflict with some of their relatives, and renewed some old quarrels which they both hoped to settle and forget. Those were known as al-Dufariyyin or Awlād Abū Qussī or Jamā'at Reirā, who were relatives of the family of al-Faqīh Bushāra al-Gharbāwī, with whom they

1. See *Makhtūṭat Khātīb al-Shūna*, ed. al-Shāṭir Buṣaylī, p. 73.

had some conflicts in Dongola. These, forgotten in Kordofan, were about to be renewed when Ismā'īl began to gain importance among the Khatimiyya.¹ Further still, association with the Khatmiyya would have isolated the Ismā'īliyya from the tribes with whom they were living in Kordofan. Muhammad 'Uthmān al-Mirghanī did not stay very long in Kordofan - only a mere three years and a half, during which time he did not find many followers among the indigenous tribes of the Western Sudan. Being far away from the centre of the Khatmiyya in Kassala, the Ismā'īliyya were more inclined to be influenced by their local environment, tribal and family interests in their relationships with the Mahdia, rather than their spiritual attachments,

The Attitude of Some Important Individuals

The attitudes of some important individual members of the family of Sh. Ismā'īl were also a determining factor in the relationship between the Ismā'īliyya and the Mahdia. The importance of the attitude of these particular individuals may best be appreciated if taken in the context of the tribal structure, since the religious orders and holy families in the Sudan were very closely connected with tribal systems.² A look at some aspects of this may offer some help in understanding the nature of these different attitudes.

The title of *shaykh* was given both to the chief of the tribe as well as to the head of the religious order or of a holy family. The authority of the tribal *shaykh* was not formalized, but rested on

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1. Sh. Ismā'īl referred to this possibility of a renewed conflict in his *Wasīyyat al-Muhibbīn*. The story of their conflict in Dongola and that of "Jamā'at Reira" are dealt with in Chapter II, p.60.
 2. See Burckhardt, *Travels*, 256-70, for a description of the Majādhīb of al-Dāmar. Also see P.M. Holt, "Holy families", *P.N.E.P.*, for Majādhīb and others.

tradition. It rested not on force, but rather on the renown and esteem he enjoyed. Loyalty to the *shaykh* depended on an intricate and complicated structure of kinship ties and relationships. He commanded the respect and loyalty of his people so long as he could keep his prestige and use his wisdom and tact in settling conflicts between individuals or groups, so that they would not fall apart. Divisions and subdivisions were always a threat and a possibility. Any important member might, for one reason or another, split and form a clan, a branch or a *hōsh*. At the beginning of his movement, the Mahdī very rightly assessed the benefits of this structure, and by contacting the right people, soon gained much support. Thus it was to Sayyid al-Makkī, Faqīh al-Manna, Shaykh al-Mukāshfī, and the rest of the *shaykhs* of religious orders, the *faqīhs* in holy families and tribal chiefs that he made his appeal.

The individuals with whom we are concerned are: Muḥammad al-Makkī, Aḥmad al-Azharī and Ismā'īl 'Abd al-Qādir al-Kurdufānī.

Muḥammad al-Makkī (1822-1906) was the eldest son of Sh. Ismā'īl, and his successor as the head of the Ismā'īliyya *tarīqa*. Educated in the *khalwa* of his father in the traditional Sudanese religious studies, and brought up in a traditional tribal setting, he was very appropriately prepared for leadership in his role both as head of a religious order and a chief of his family. Like a typical tribal chief, he was married to four wives - one a cousin and three from different other families and tribes - so as to widen the scope of his influence through intermarriage. As a teaching *faqīh* in his father's *khalwa*, he established his place as one of the *faqīhs* of El-Obeid. To promote him as a leader, his

father appointed him as head of the *tarīqa* before he himself died, and stood behind him in prayer.¹

Thus equipped, al-Makkī smoothly replaced his father as head of the Ismā'īliyya and demonstrated some remarkable qualities of leadership. To illustrate this, two anecdotes are told about him in this context. In the first one he demonstrated his ability of persuasion, hence *al-wasāta* or *al-shafā'a*,² and in the second he demonstrated the qualities of a shrewd politician and a valued adviser.

The first of these was connected with his brother Ahmad al-Azharī. When Ahmad wanted to go to Egypt to join al-Azhar, his father was not willing to let him go. All efforts to make Sh. Ismā'īl change his mind failed. So Ahmad went to al-Makkī, the favourite of their father, and asked him to intercede. When al-Makkī talked to his father, he was warned that he would be the first to suffer when Ahmad came back from al-Azhar. But in spite of that, al-Makkī insisted, and the father gave permission.³

The second story is related in connection with the *bay'a* to the Khalīfa and the conditions in which the Khalīfa 'Abdullāhī succeeded after the death of the Mahdi. The Khalīfa was said to have asked al-Makkī for advice on three points: whether he, the Khalīfa, should

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1. This is an unusual practice in succession. The Khalīfa took over the leadership of the *tarīqa* while the Shaykh was still alive. See *al-Nash'ā al-Ismā'īliyya*, ms. "وقدمه في الصلاة" The usual practice would have been *وأنا في الصلاة* which was what the Prophet had done, and also the Mahdi in the Sudan. This unusual practice was followed later by al-Makkī himself.
 2. The ability to intercede on behalf of others against punishment (*Shafā'a*) or in order to achieve something (*wasāta*) is a highly valued quality of leadership in the Sudan. See Chapter IV, p.103, below.
 3. The influence of the story of Yūsuf (Qur'ān XII) is very evident here. Al-Makkī here is made like Yūsuf the favourite son amongst his brothers and Sh. Ismā'īl, like Ya'qūb a man of vision on whom God had bestowed the power of seeing into the future. The end of the story confirms this, and shows that after his return from al-Azhar, Ahmad was always contradicting al-Makkī.

announce the Mahdi's death immediately or after some delay; whether he should wash the Mahdi's body and prepare it for burial, or leave that to the Ashrāf, the Mahdi's relatives; whether he should lead the people in prayer for the burial, or leave that to someone else. Al-Makkī advised him to declare the death immediately, to let the Ashrāf prepare the body for burial, but to lead the people in prayer. The burial over, al-Makkī was said to have taken the hand of 'Abdullāhī and declared his *bay'a*, then the others followed him.¹

The death of the Mahdi and the subsequent events leading to the accession of the Khalīfa, received much attention, especially from Yūsuf Mīkhā'il whose version of the incident has generally been accepted by subsequent writers. In his version Yūsuf Mīkhā'il makes al-Makkī the third or fourth person to declare his *bay'a* after al-Faqīh al-Dādārī, Ahmad Sharfī, the grandsire of the Ashrāf, and 'Alī wad Hilū. He stated that after the burial the people then began to dispute the question of the succession.

"But the Khalīfa 'Abdullāhī was silent and did not say a word....Then al-fakī al-Dādārī stood up and took the Khalīfa 'Abdullāhī al-Ta'āshī by the hand and said to him: 'we swear allegiance, Khalīfat al-Mahdi'. The grandsire of the Ashrāf, Ahmad Sharfī then stood up, took the Mahdi's sword and turban and handed them over to the Khalīfa 'Abdullāhī and said to him: 'we swear allegiance'. Thereafter *Khalīfat al-Faruq* [Alī w. Hilū] and al-Sayid al-Makkī came forward and took the oath".²

This account of the *bay'a* by Yūsuf Mīkhā'il, which makes al-Makkī the third or fourth person to swear allegiance, may bring into question

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1. This has very much resemblance to *bay'at al-Saqīfa* where 'Umar b. al-Khattāb, seeing the possibility of a division between the Muslims after the death of the Prophet, immediately took the hand of Abū Bakr and declared him Khalīfa, thus obliging others to follow. The story is very well known amongst the Ismā'iliyya, and was related to me by Abū al-Faḍla, a grandson of al-Makkī, in 1975.
 2. Y. Mīkhā'il, *Memoirs*, trans. S.M. Nūr, p.167, and for an analytical approach to the incident, refer to P.M. Holt, *The Mahdist State*, pp.119-20.

the whole of the Ismā'īliyya story; and consequently, the explanation of the Khalīfa's special respect for al-Makkī, which was based on it. But their account is supported by the story related by Slatin, which comes very close to that of the Ismā'īliyya, especially with regard to the order in which the oath was taken - al-Makkī being the first to do so.¹

In dealing with al-Makkī in the few preceding paragraphs, we have tried to indicate his qualities as a *shaykh* who was capable of acting and leading both as a tribal chief and as a religious *faqīh*. Those qualities made him ready to follow the Mahdia and most capable of commanding the respect and loyalty of his people.

In contrast to al-Makkī, the second person with whom we are dealing, Ahmad al-Azhari (d. 1881), was a completely different character: very much detribalized and little concerned with the popular beliefs of his family. Although he started his education as a student in the *khalwa* of his father, learning the same subjects as those taught to his elder brother, al-Makkī, and exposed to the same popular religious beliefs, he showed a different attitude and a singular determination to go to al-Azhar for further education. His father's objection did not change his mind, and he persisted until, as mentioned above,² his father finally gave his consent. His long stay of ten or twelve years in Egypt detached him from his tribal and provincial background. When he came back to Kordofan, it seems that he felt a stranger to the atmosphere of El-Obeid and could not adjust himself easily to its provincial community. So, as

1. See R. Slatin, *Fire and Sword*, p.370.
 2. See p.87, above.

we are told by Shuqair, he left it for Khartoum and was about to return to Cairo when the Mahdia broke out. He was requested by the Governor-General at that time, Ra'ūf Pasha, to accompany an expedition to relieve the town of Bāra where he was killed by the Mahdist forces in 1881.¹

Some of his writings, however, may suggest that he was still associated with the traditional Sudanese religious and tribal background. His *Khulāsat al-iqtibās*² may, therefore, be compared with the efforts of those Sudanese *faqīhs* and tribal chiefs who considered the establishment of a Sharīfī or 'Abbāsī pedigree to be most essential; and his poems³ in praise of his father and his brother al-Makkī may also be taken as an indication of a deeply rooted desire to establish the holiness and prestige of his family, and through that, to establish his own holiness and his possession of an inherited *baraka*. But this suggestion is immediately dismissed once Ahmad has explained why he was making this pedigree. In writing this *nasab* he said that he was obeying an order from his father Sh. Ismā'īl who was obviously keen on establishing his 'Abbāsī origin and inheritance of *baraka*. Ahmad's personal lack of interest was very clearly shown in the first few lines of this treatise when he says:

"Since the study of the pedigrees of men is one of which the knowledge is useless and ignorance is harmless, and since by expending one's energies on such study one shortens one's days, I paid no attention to it nor did I feel any tendency to do so..."⁴

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1. N. Shuqair, *Ta'rikh*, 1/141-2, and R. Hill, *Biographical Dictionary*, p.34.
 2. Ahmad al-Azharī, *Khulāsat al-iqtibās*, ms. Sud.Govt. Archives (Khartoum), trans. M. MacMichael, *Arabs*, II, AB.
 3. See ms. Sud.Govt. Archives (Khartoum), 1/82/1334.
 4. Ahmad al-Azharī, *Khulāsat al-iqtibās*, *op.cit.*, 62, para.III.

Rather than his sharīfi origin or *baraka*, Ahmad, in the true spirit of the 'ulamā', was keen on demonstrating his abilities of investigation, and by his application of his newly acquired techniques of 'ilm al-*hadīth*, he showed how much he was absorbed in his role as one of the 'ulamā', and how much satisfaction he was getting from this academic exercise. In a style very similar to that of al-Bukhārī¹ in investigation, examination of documents and cross references, Ahmad went about collecting the information for his *nasab*. He said that he had collected numerous manuscripts related to the pedigrees of the Ja'aliyyin and compared these with some which were copied in the holy lands by authentic pious saints such as Muhammad b. 'Isā b. 'Abd al-Baqī and al-Sanhūrī.² Then after having made a rough copy of his work, he continued to study the contents for several years, ascertaining the truth from the authentic works of famous *imāms*.³ After finishing this work in prose, Ahmad then went on to put it into verse to demonstrate some other abilities, and to impress people with his skill in this field as well.

In contrast to al-Makkī then, Ahmad was an 'ālim who was much more at home in the company of the 'ulamā' and orthodox Muslims than of *faqīhs* and holymen. He was very competent and sure when dealing with topics related to the *sharī'a* and orthodox beliefs, but quite a stranger to the world of Sufism and popular Islamic beliefs. He was perfectly convinced and happy with the Islam of the Qur'ān and Sunna contained in

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1. He is Muhammad b. Ismā'il al. Bukhārī (809-870), the famous traditionalist who is believed to have been very meticulous in his investigations.
 2. It was common practice amongst Sudanese genealogists to refer to the works of some pious medieval authors even though they may have nothing to do with genealogy. Of the two names mentioned by al-Azharī here, one can be identified with Sālim b. Muhammad al-Sanhūrī, a known commentator on *Mukhtasar Khalīl* on the Mālikī *madhhab*.
 3. See al-Azharī, *Khulāsat al-iqtibās*, trans. MacMichael, *Arabs*, II, AB.

books to which he could refer, but he was unable to comprehend the idea of having Islamic rules superior to the *Sharī'a* derived from a superior knowledge bestowed upon certain chosen *awliyā'* who claimed direct contact with the Prophet al-Khaḍīr.¹

The Mahdī whom Ahmad al-Azharī expected could not have come from amongst the *faqīhs* and *awliyā'*. His idea of the Mahdī was confined to the *sharī'a* and had to conform with its criteria. At most, to Ahmad, the Sudanese Mahdī could only be a *mujaddīd*² with no special supernatural powers or any extra esoteric knowledge. Muhammad Ahmad did not fit into the frame of al-Azharī of the Mahdia, so he refuted his claim, giving eleven reasons in a published manifesto.³ His aggressive attitude towards the Mahdia did not win al-Azharī much support amongst the members of his family or amongst the Ismā'īliyya at first, and most of them followed the leadership of al-Makkī throughout the Mahdia. But by this attitude Ahmad made it possible for many of the family members and followers of the Ismā'īliyya *ṭarīqa* later on to discontinue their relationship with the Mahdists without much difficulty, and easily turn in the twentieth century under a great-grandson of al-Azharī into the main rival political group to the Mahdists.

The third person whose attitude towards the Mahdia could have affected that of the Ismā'īliyya was Ismā'il 'Abd al-Qādir al-Kurdufānī (1844-1893). He was related to the family through his mother 'A'isha,

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1. Prophet al-Khaḍīr is generally believed to be the intermediary between God and the founder of a religious order, and to exercise great influence with holymen to unveil the future to them and give them supernatural powers. The Mahdī made very much use of this popular belief for the success of his movement. The Khalīfa 'Abdullahī tried but failed. See also A.J. Wensinck, "al-Khaḍīr", *E.I.*, vol.II, Part 2, p.861.
 2. For more details on the various views about the Mahdi amongst the Sunnis and Shī'is, refer to Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddīma*, trans. Rosenthal, vol.II, pp.156-200.
 3. See "Risalat al-Azharī", Shuqair, *Ta'rīkh*, 3, 383.

daughter of Sh. Ismā'īl al-Walī. Authority and *baraka* in the Ismā'īliyya family and *tariqa* continued to be transmitted through the men only and none of the women achieved recognition similar to that of Fātima b. Jābir or Maryam al-Mirghaniyya, although some of them were said to have studied in *khalwas*.¹ Thus al-Kurdufānī being related to the family on his mother's side, had very little chance of being a *shaykh* or establishing a *hōsh* (a branch of the holy family), but through his own efforts and personal abilities, he managed to rise to a very respectable position comparable to those of his uncles Ahmad and al-Makkī. Though his attitude towards the Mahdia did not reflect directly on the Ismā'īliyya, and could not be equated with those of al-Azharī and al-Makkī, it must, however, have contributed its share to that relationship. His approach to the Mahdia was different from that of either of his uncles; he was, on the one hand an 'ālim like Ahmad, but on the other he was closely associated with Sudanese provincial society like al-Makkī. Like al-Azharī, after early training in his grandfather's *khalwa* in El-Obeid, he went to study at al-Azhar where he showed a great deal of interest and intelligence.² On his return to Kordofan, he was appointed as *mufti* and settled in El-Obeid. But unlike al-Azharī, he had a strong feeling towards Kordofan. This was clearly expressed by the *nīsba* which was affixed to his name in preference to the name of his grandfather, and even to the more glamorous one of al-Azharī to which his education would have entitled him. It was also shown in his desire to return to Kordofan

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1. Inheritance of *baraka* and fame in Sudanese holy families has normally descended always through male members, but in some cases a number of women have managed to establish their own lines, such as Fatima bint Jābir, grandmother of Awlād Sighayrūn, see P.M. Holt, "The Sons of Jābir", *BSOAS*, XXX, p.151; another is Maryam bint Hāshim b. Muhammad 'Uthmān. She was married to 'Uthmān Tājal-Sir b. Muhammad Sir al-Khatim; together with her husband she provided the leadership of the Khatmiyya in the Eastern Sudan, especially during the Mahdia. See Voll, *Khatmiyya*, p.258.
 2. See Shuqair, *Ta'rikh*, vol.3, p.559.

in spite of the fact that he was very honourably received in Darfur and could have risen to a very prominent place if he had stayed there.¹ His association with Kordofan is also shown by his style of writing - he quite often used Kordofanī words and expressions, typical only of that area.² Unlike Ahmad al-Azharī also, he seemed satisfied with the provincial community of El-Obeid where he decided to settle down rather than go to Khartoum or even return to Cairo.

When the Mahdia broke out al-Kurdufānī must have found himself in a situation very similar to that of the 'u^lmā' and religious men whom Sh. Mudawwī 'Abd al-Rahmān had found with al-Mahdī when he went to meet him in Qadīr and whom he described in his statement to Na'ūm Shuqair later in 1890.³ Al-Kurdufānī was in a state of uncertainty and indecision. But soon after the Mahdi had reached Kāba, al-Kurdufānī made up his mind and defected from El-Obeid to the Mahdī's camp.⁴ He was quick to show his abilities and utilize his talents. He demonstrated that by applying himself to writing down the events of the Mahdia in *Sa'adat al-mustahdī bi-sīrat al-Imām al-Mahdī*⁵ which must have pleased the Mahdī and the Khalīfa. When that was finished he was commissioned with another similar task, that of writing the events of the Mahdia in Eastern Sudan, which he entitled *al-Tirāz al-manqūsh bi-bushrā qatl Yūhannā malik al-Hubūsh*. Al-Kurdufānī continuously gained favours and importance until suddenly in August 1893, he came into disfavour, was caught and banished to al-Rajjāf.

1. Sa'd Mikhā'il, *Shu'arā' al-sudan*, 40, cited Abū Salīm, ed., *Sa'adat al-Mustahidī*, 17.

2. See *Sa'adat al-Mustahidī*, ed. Abū Salīm, p.203, an example is "ولم اقف على اللاتيين، بل اكون حينئذ حتى [عقبهم] في هذه السيرة وولدي [بجدهم] بعد ذلك [فغضبته] عليها"

3. *Ibid.*, p.18. This gives three possible reasons for this defection: (a) his dissatisfaction with the whole political system (influenced by Egyptian reformists), (b) genuinely belief in the Mahdī like the rest of his family, except Azharī, (c) that it was an unavoidable evil since he became sure that the Turkish rule was coming to an end.

4. See H. Shāked, "A manuscript biography of the Sudanese Mahdī", *BSOAS*, XXXII, 1969, 527-40.

5. See "Statement of Sh. al-Mudawwī", N. Shuqair, *Ta'rīkh*, 3, 145.

This sudden and tragic end cannot easily be explained, and a number of suggestions have been examined in detail by H. Shāked¹ and M.I. Abū Salīm.² Shāked discusses three of these, two given by Shuqair,³ and the third by Slatin,⁴ then he puts forward his own version: that the Khalīfa wanted to eradicate the only contemporary chronicle which stressed the roles of eminent men in the development of the Mahdia other than the Khalīfa himself. Thus he ordered all the books of al-Kurdufānī to be burnt and he himself to be banished to a remote place. To support this argument Shāked notes that simultaneously with the banishment of Ismā'īl and the burning of his books, a number of prominent people had fallen foul of the Khalīfa.⁵ Shāked, however, does not seem to be very much satisfied with this suggestion, and puts it "with reservation". The reason given by him does not merit such a drastic measure, especially as these books were very few in number and too limited in circulation to be of any particular importance or threat.

Abū Salīm also follows these versions critically, including that of Shāked. Then he tries to find a link between the cause of this tragedy and the writings of al-Kurdufānī which betray him as being out of step with the system. In his books al-Kurdufani shows respect to the Mirghaniyya, does not condemn their opposition to the Mahdia, and calls

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1. H. Shāked, "A manuscript biography of the Sudanese Mahdi", *op.cit.*, 527.40.
 2. M.I. Abū Salīm, ed. *Sa'ādat al-Mustahdī*, 21-23.
 3. N. Shuqair, the first version is in *Memorandum*, fols.2-3, and the second is in *Ta'rīkh*, III, 559.
 4. R. Slatin, *Fire and Sword*, 309-10, 323-4.
 5. H. Shāked, "A manuscript biography of the Sudanese Mahdi", *op.cit.*, 532, n.34, quoting P.M. Holt, *The Mahdist State (passim)*, gives the names of many such persons who had fallen out of the Khalīfa's favour close to the banishment of al-Kurdufānī, and who had always been mentioned favourably in his books. Eg. Mahmūd 'Abd al-Qādir, Muhammad al-Khayr, al-Zākī Tamal and Wad al-Zahrā.

them a holy family; he does not condemn al-Ashrāf and presents their role in the Mahdia in a better light than that of the Baqqāra and he does not paint a good picture of Ya'qūb, the Khalīfa's brother and his right hand, in these writings. But again, Abū Salīm fails to give the reasons why these writings suddenly became so important in 1893 as to turn the Khalīfa's heart so dramatically against al-Kurdufānī.

A possible explanation may be sought in the Khalīfa's growing distrust of the '*ulamā*' in general, and Awlād al-Balad among them, in particular. The revolt of the Ashrāf, in which some of his closest advisers took active part, had convinced 'Adullāhi that he could no longer trust those close to him who were of riverain stock. Thus, after successfully dealing with that revolt, the Khalīfa started to consolidate his powers and systematically eliminated all those who were suspected of having sympathy with the Ashrāf or any others who posed any threat to the Khalīfa's power. Between 1893 and 1895 he cracked down upon a number of such men, one after the other. Al-Kurdufānī's banishment was, therefore, immediately followed by the arrest of Ahmad wad 'Alī, *Qādī al-Islam*, in May 1894, and soon afterwards his successor al-Husayn Ibrāhīm wad al-Zahrā was imprisoned as well.¹

Most interesting for the purpose of this study are two explanations given for the tragedy of al-Kurdufānī by some members of his family.

The first of these related to M.I. Abū Salīm by Mīrghanī al-Sayyid al-Bāqir, a grandson of al-Kurdufānī, suggests that he had fallen victim to the suspicions of the Khalīfa. The Khalīfa was said to have stated to an assembly of elders that al-Kurdufānī had done nothing to offend him, but only aroused his suspicions. Whenever the Khalīfa asked for

1. See P.M. Holt, *The Mahdist State*, 2nd ed., pp.178-191.

an opinion on any matter, al-Kurdufānī would come up with a variety of answers which bewildered the Khalīfa, and made his opinion look comparably very weak. Suspecting that al-Kurdufānī might be inclined by his tribal attachment to sympathize with the Ashrāf, and fearing that with such talents, that man could be harmful if he should turn to their side, the Khalīfa decided to get rid of him.¹

The second explanation related by a grandson of al-Makkī² links al-Kurdufānī's disaster with his unjustified hostility towards his uncle al-Makkī, and as such, it may also help to explain why the latter had kept silent throughout the whole tragedy. The story suggests that for an unknown reason al-Kurdufānī was trying to spoil the good relationship between al-Makkī and the Khalīfa. Thus he told the Khalīfa that al-Makkī was not an honest believer because he went back to his house to repeat his prayer every time he prayed behind the Khalīfa - meaning that he did not recognize the latter as *imām* and prayer behind him was invalid. He reported also that al-Makkī had encouraged the people to kiss the hands of the Mirghanī boys who were under his custody, thus increasing their popularity and prestige, though they should have been treated as enemies of the Mahdia. This report was said to have made the Khalīfa very angry. He ordered that al-Makkī should be summoned to his presence immediately. Miraculously, however, when al-Makkī reached the Khalīfa that night, things took a different turn. The Khalīfa instead invited al-Makkī to supper on a special Western Sudanese

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1. See M.I. Abū Salīm, ed. *Sa'ādat al-Mustahdī*, p.24.
 2. Related to me by Syd. Muhammad Abū al-Fadl, El-Obeid, 1975.

dish ('*asīda*) and a few days later al-Kurdufānī was sent to al-Rajjāf in the same boat which was supposedly brought to take al-Makkī.

As one of the '*ulamā*', al-Kurdufānī must have been one of those who were giving advice which turned out always to be misleading and confusing. By 1893, the Khalīfa grew impatient with these '*ulamā*' and many of them suffered at his hands.

The attitude of al-Kurdufānī to the Mahdia must have affected the Ismā'īliyya in two ways: his decision to join the Mahdia, being an '*ālim*', must have served to counterbalance the attitude of Ahmad al-Azhari and encouraged some members of their family to join the Mahdist cause. His banishment and unfair treatment later must, on the other hand, have made some members of his immediate family waver in their loyalty to the Mahdia and perhaps to the leadership of al-Makkī as *shaykh* of the Ismā'īliyya. There was no immediate reaction to what had happened to al-Kurdufānī, but as in the case of Ahmad al-Azhari, this incident must have contributed to the development during the Condominium period which made increasing numbers of this family turn away from any association with the Mahdia.

As a result of their contact with the Mahdia, the structure of the Ismā'īliyya, both as a family and a *ṭarīqa*, began to undergo some important developments. A rift in the family which began, in its early stages, with occasional disagreements between al-Makkī and al-Azhari over social and religious matters,¹ widened during the Mahdia and led to the polarization of the family into two distinct groups. Those who followed

1. After his return from Al-Azhar, Ahmad was said to have been very critical of al-Makkī's Sufi activities, and especially objected to the beating of the drums during the *dhīkr*, see p.80, above.

al-Makkī remained loyal to him and to the Mahdia until the Mahdist state was brought to an end in 1899. Then they returned to Kordofan to form the bulk of the present Ismā'īliyya family and *ṭarīqa* in that region. The other group which opposed the Mahdia with Ahmad, began to take a new identity under the name of al-Azharī. The two groups continued to drift apart, and during the Condominium period their separate developments were expressed in their different religious, social and political outlooks.¹ The followers of al-Makkī stuck to the traditions of the family, those of al-Azharī opted for change. Thus, while al-Bashīr b. al-Makkī² was very reluctant to allow his children to take modern education, a grandson of al-Azharī, Ismā'īl, was one of the first Sudanese to be sent abroad for a modern university education in Beirut. To emphasize this rift further, the separation of these two groups took a geographical form with the Azharīs centred mainly in Omdurman and Khartoum, away from the Ismā'īliyya main branch in El-Obeid.

This trend had also found its way to the *ṭarīqa* itself, and at times even threatened its unity. Differences between its third khalīfa, Mīrghani (1908-1950), his uncles and the elders of the family, created a great deal of tension within the order, and divided the loyalties of its followers. During Mīrghani's long term of office as Khalīfa, the *ṭarīqa* was evidently divided between its original headquarters in El-Obeid and its centre in Omdurman, where the recognized *Khalīfa* lived. A permanent schism was only averted when Mīrghani returned to El-Obeid early in 1950 to make peace with his uncles, and remained there until his death in April of the same year.

1. See Chapter IV, pp.123-4, below.

2. Bashīr was the youngest son of al-Makkī, see genealogical tables, Appendix A below. He lived long after the death of his father, and though he did not become *Khalīfa* of the order, he was for a long time the real head of the family in El-Obeid.

CHAPTER IV

THE ISMĀ'ĪLIYYA AFTER THE RECONQUEST

The defeat and final collapse of the Mahdist state in the Sudan in 1899 and the establishment of an Anglo-Egyptian Condominium rule in its place, marked the beginning of a new era in the history and development of religious *ṭarīqas* and Sudanese holy families. During the Mahdia, though the rise and quick success of Muhammad Ahmad owed a great deal to their support, all the *ṭarīqas* were abolished and their practices suspended. The early years of the Condominium Government witnessed continuous efforts on the part of these *ṭarīqas* and families to reorganize their orders, rally their supports and re-establish their places and fame in the society. This chapter attempts to follow the efforts of the Ismā'īliyya - both as a *ṭarīqa* and as a family - in this respect. It will discuss the facts which favoured an early revival of the *ṭarīqa* and then the conditions which led later on to its decline and reversion into a localized organization. It will also deal with the conflicting tendencies in the family which, after having remained dormant throughout the Mahdia, were now finding expression in a clear division between those who kept the tradition of the family and the *ṭarīqa* under al-Makkī and a new forward-looking branch under the name of al-Azhari.

The revival of the Ismā'īliyya religious and political powers during this period, after such a long eclipse throughout the Mahdia, was a rather difficult and laborious process. They were lucky to have al-Makkī to lead them in the early phases through these difficulties, and it was to him that much of the credit goes for the rebirth of the *ṭarīqa*

and its revitalization. His abilities, referred to earlier,¹ enabled him to come to terms very quickly with the new government and thus paved the way for an easy return for himself and for the Ismā'īliyya to an active and distinguished role in the society. His earlier support of the Mahdia and the respectable position he held during the Khalīfa's reign meant that most of the writings of his father were not destroyed and many of the family's belongings, which were connected with the *tariqa*, were also saved. This also helped very much in the process of revival.

Al-Makkī set himself to do two things: to regain a position of prestige for himself and his family with the new rulers, and to re-establish his *tariqa* and take it back to its original home in Kordofan. The first task was not as difficult as the second. Soon after the battle of Omdurman in 1898 al-Makkī was beginning to feel his way about establishing some contacts with the new regime. His personal friendships and some of his family relationships were found to be very useful and were readily utilized. One of these was their spiritual ties with the Mirghaniyya family. Faithful to the memory of the *shaykh* of his father, al-Makkī maintained a good relationship with the Mirghaniyya who were forced to stay in Omdurman during the Mahdia. A number of the Mirghani youngsters² found refuge in al-Makkī's house where they remained

1. See above Chapter III, pp. 86-9.

2.. Ahmad, Mirghani and al-Hasan were said to have lived with al-Makkī and studied with his sons 'Abd al-Rahīm, Karrār and others. Related to me by Ḥajj 'Abd al-Ḥafīz, in El-Obeid, 1975. Mirghani ladies Faṭima and Nafīsa were also believed to have been there. See INTEL, Reports, Egypt, No.32, November 1894, Father Rosignoli's statements.

in his custody until the reconquest. In spite of the fact that their presence with him had sometimes caused much embarrassment,¹ they were treated with respect and they were given an education with his own children. This must have gained him some sympathy from the new rulers since the Mirghaniyya and their associates were considered to be very loyal to the government and were held in great respect.

Another thing which recommended al-Makkī to the new government was his acquaintance with Muhammad wad al-Badawī, a graduate of al-Azhar who had formed a friendship with Slatin when the latter was a prisoner in Omdurman. Wad al-Badawī was a citizen of Kordofan and during the Mahdia he maintained a very close and friendly relationship with al-Makkī and the Isma'īliyya family. Through him al-Makkī must have obtained some access to the leaders of the new regime. Al-Makkī was soon selected as a member of the Board of Ulema' and religious notables² headed by wad al-Badawī to interrogate 'Alī wad 'Abd al-Karīm³ in 1900.

Throughout this period and until his death in 1906, al-Makkī built on these early contacts and continually improved his relationship with the government officials in the capital, and then later with its provincial representatives in Kordofan. Thus when in 1898 he was asked to pay the rates, he took that opportunity to write a petition to the *ma'mūr* of Omdurman stating his case for an exemption.⁴ He significantly

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1. A number of rumours designed to spoil the relationship between al-Makkī and the Khalīfa were connected with these Mirghani youths. The most common of those rumours was that al-Makkī had allowed their followers to see them secretly and kiss their hands in respect. See above pp.108.
 2. See N. Shuqair, *Ta'rikh*, 3, 670, for a list of names of the eight members of this board.
 3. 'Alī wad 'Abd al-Karīm was a relative of the Mahdī who advocated some heretical ideas after the end of the Mahdist state, see *ibid.*
 4. Sud.Govt. Archives (Khartoum) 1/82/1308, al-Makkī to *ma'mūr*, Omdurman, 10 November 1898.

indicated that he was a *faqīh* whose family had enjoyed this privilege of tax exemption even during the Turco-Egyptian rule. The *ma'mūr* of Omdurman not only agreed to his request for exemption from paying those rates, but also recognized al-Makkī's status and expressed a desire to meet him.¹ Al-Makkī's friendly attitude was not limited to the government quarters and official contacts only, but was also extended to personal relationships with a number of Egyptian officers. Some of those who made his acquaintance continued their relationship and kept correspondence with him even after they were transferred far away. Typical of those was Yuzbashi Sa'id 'Uthmān, who, in April 1900, wrote to al-Makkī from Halfa expressing his gratitude for the receipt of three papers "probably *hijābs* containing some Qur'ānic verses" and asking for other services.² Other officers who were personally impressed by al-Makkī when they met him in Kordofan included Ibrāhīm Effendi, the ex-director of investigation in Kordofan Province, Yuzbashi Labīb Effendi, and Muhammad Effendi Tawfiq, the *ma'mūr* of al-Kawwa district in the White Nile.³

Al-Makkī's efforts to strengthen his ties with the government and to impress its officials were very much in keeping with the tradition of the Sudanese holy men who, although different in their approach, have always aimed at enjoying some influence with the rulers. This was essential to facilitate one of the most important functions in the society: that of interceding with the rulers on behalf of the oppressed (*al-Shafā'a*

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1. Sud. Govt. Archives (Khartoum) 1/82/1308, al-Makkī's petition to *ma'mūr* Omdurman, 1898. See the comments of the *ma'mūr*.
 2. Sud. Govt. Archives (Khartoum), 1/82/1334, letter from Yuzbashi Sa'id 'Uthmān to al-Makkī dated April 1900.
 3. See *al-nash'a al-Makkiyya* (obituary of *Syd.* al-Makkī), ms. Sud. Govt. Archives (Khartoum), 1/82/1321.

'*ind al-mulūk*).¹ It was this tradition which tempted 'Alī Dīnār, the Sultan of Darfur, to write to al-Makkī in 1902 in the hope of getting him to intercede on his behalf with the Sudan Government and help him in his delicate relationship with it.²

Al-Makkī was also very quick to restore his reputation as a *faqīh* and soon after the battle of Omdurman he began to devote more attention to his *khalwa* where he was teaching the Qur'ān. This was turned into a rallying centre for many of his relatives, countrymen and followers and developed into one of Omdurman's important quarters still carrying his names (*hayy al-sayyid al-Makkī*). By 1902 his followers had grown to be no less in importance than those of 'Alī al-Mirghanī.³ When he made his way back to Kordofan in 1902, al-Makkī's first task was the re-establishment of the *Ismā'īliyya khalwa* where he continued his teaching of the Qur'ān; but more important than that was his return to *hayy-al Qubba*, a quarter around the tomb of Sh. *Ismā'īl*, to which were attracted most of the returning riverain merchants, and which became the most important quarter in El-Obeid. He also began to revive the literary tradition of the family and wrote a number of religious works.⁴ He also went on pilgrimage in 1904 for the second time, an act which, in those days, appealed very much to the religious sentiments of the people and added to the veneration of al-Makkī and his family and to their association with piety and holiness. Before al-Makkī's death, therefore,

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1. The importance of this function is clearly emphasized by Wad Dayf Allāh in the *Ṭabaqāt*. He seldom mentions any great *shaykh* without attributing this privilege to him. E.g., see *Ṭabaqāt*, ed. Y.F. Hasan, pp. 83, 106, 150 and 188.
 2. Ms. letter from Sultan 'Alī Dīnār to al-Makkī, Sud. Govt. Archives (Khartoum), 1/82/1332.
 3. *S.I.R.*, No.95, June 1902. See also J. Voll, *The Khatmiyya*, p.535.
 4. For a list of these works see *al-nash'a al-Makkiyya*, Sud. Govt. Archives (Khartoum), 1/82/1321.

the family of Sh. Ismā'īl had already restored much of their prestige and respect especially in the Western Sudan. Mindful of this, Slatin, who was otherwise very suspicious of all *tarīqa shaykhs*, found it necessary to recognize al-Makkī's place and importance in that area, and to try to use his influence in dealing with the people there. In 1902, Slatin was consulting him on the affairs of Darfur and expressing the Government's anxiety over the Sanūsī activities there.¹ In 1906 the Governor of Kordofan considered al-Makkī to be an important man, "...who had great influence in religious circles".² Thus, when he died, his funeral was attended by very many notable people or their representatives and many learned men, such as al-Tāhir al-Majdhūb, Muhammad Hāshim and his son, Ahmad Hāshim, and Muhammad wad al-Bannā. All praised him in poetry and prose.³

It was at his second task of re-establishing the Ismā'īliyya *tarīqa* that al-Makkī had to labour to achieve his end. His attempts in this respect were influenced by three main factors: the first stemming from the Condominium Government's attitude towards Islam and Islamic organizations; the second related to its position and its administrative policy in the Western Sudan, especially the efforts directed towards the pacification and resettlement of the people in Kordofan and Darfur; and the third, to the adjustment of the Ismā'īliyya and its adaptation to the changing social and political trends during this period.

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1. R. Hill, *Slatin*, p.88.
 2. J.R. O'Connell, "Annual Report, Kordofan province", G.G. Reports, Khartoum, 1907, p.677.
 3. A number of these are mentioned in *al-Nash'a al-Makkiyya*, Sud.Govt. Archives (Khartoum), 1/82/1321.

The Government, Islam and the Ismā'īliyya

The attitude of the Sudan government to Islam in the early condominium period has been discussed very thoroughly by Warburg, to whose works reference can be made for more details.¹ Suffice it here to consider very briefly the main features of this attitude, see how it had affected the Ismā'īliyya and how they had responded to it.

Warburg suggests that the main principle underlying the government's attitude towards Islam during this period was that of fostering orthodox Islam, as opposed to the unorthodox Sufi beliefs. While making every effort to raise the status of the '*ulamā'*', encourage the rebuilding of mosques in towns, and facilitate pilgrimage, its attitude towards the '*tariqas*' and Sufi leaders remained that of suspicion bordering on hostility. This attitude was clearly formulated in a religious policy which was consistently pursued throughout this period from 1899 to 1914. The general principles of that policy were laid down by Lord Cromer as early as January 1899 in his speech to the '*ulamā'*' and notables of the Sudan,² and then formulated in a memorandum by Kitchener, the first Governor-General, to all his subordinates in the provinces.³ After Kitchener, the policy was pursued with much enthusiasm and vigour by Wingate, as Governor-General, assisted by Slatin as Inspector-General. The realization of that policy is indicated by the creation of the Board of Ulema,⁴ the establishment of '*sharī'a*' courts, the assistance in the building of central mosques and other acts which encouraged orthodox

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1. See G. Warburg, *The Sudan under Wingate*, 95-108, and "Religious policy in the Northern Sudan", *J. Isr. Orient. Soc.*, 7, 1971, pp.89-119. See also J. Voll, *The Khatmiyya*, pp.385-423, and R. Hill, *Slatin*, pp.79-104.
 2. See FO/633/25, Cromer speech to the sheikhs and notables of the Sudan.
 3. Kitchener's memorandum to *mydīrs* enclosure in Cromer to Salisbury, 17 March 1899, FO/78/5022.
 4. This body first established to deal with the heresy of 'Alī wad al-Karīm, was soon to be useful in giving official Islamic recognition to government policies related to Islam.

Muslim organizations. On the other hand, hostility to *tarīqas* and Sufism was clearly spelled out in the government circulars and official correspondence. Administrators were continually reminded that *tarīqas* were an evil which they should always discountenance and that the heads of these organizations should always be suspected as a potential threat to stability and public security. They even became the subject of scornful comments and unfavourable remarks in government papers and personal diaries of its officials.¹

Apart from Warburg's works, much has been written on this subject of the government's attitude to Islam during this period; and they practically all agree with him on this generally accepted theme that it tended to favour orthodox Islam as opposed to unorthodox Sufi beliefs. It should, however, be pointed out here that these explanations rest mainly on the implicit acceptance of the idea that there was a clear division between orthodox and unorthodox Islam. This assumption may have to be reconsidered in the light of the nature of Sudanese Islam and the difficulty of making such a division. The suggestion also that the Condominium government had, at such an early date - January 1899 - been able to formulate an attitude based on such a clear-cut distinction between these two categories may be unrealistic. The inconsistency of the government in its relationship with the various Islamic leaders and organizations at different times and places in this period may illustrate this. While a number of Sufi *shaykhs* and heads of *tarīqas*, such as 'Alī al-Mirghanī of the Khatmiyya, Muhammad al-Makkī of the Ismā'iliyya and Muhammad Sharīf Nūr al-Dayin of the Sammaniyya, had received government favours, not a few of those who could be described as orthodox,

1. E.g., *Butler's Journal*, 1911, Sud.Govt. Archives (Durham) 422/12.

such as al-Mudawwī,¹ were actually ill-treated. Rather than being suppressed, *tariqas* were in fact revived, some like the Khatmiyya were even thriving, and a few new orders were coming to life, such as the Hindiyya and the 'Azmiyya. The explanation of the government's attitude to Islam through this categorization, therefore, may not be full and satisfactory. It may, perhaps, be claimed that the government's attitude to Islam during this period had two different aspects: a declared government policy which was expressed in broad lines in Cromer's speech of January 1899, then detailed in Kitchener's memorandum to the provincial governors, and other similar official circulars;² and an actual applied practice of contacts and relationships with individual Muslim leaders and groups at different times and in various circumstances.

In its declared policy, the government maintained throughout the whole of this period an attitude which favoured orthodox Islam and distrusted Sufi *tariqas*. A hostile attitude can, therefore, be seen consistently coming out in all the government proclamations, intelligence reports and administrative circulars. This attitude was particularly evident in the first few months after the reconquest when the government was anxious to regain the confidence of the people and undermine the influence of Mahdism. In its actual relationships with the various individuals and religious groups, the government's attitude was continually changing and modifying according to the political needs prevailing, and in response to the requirements of sound administration. Thus, after the initial few years of uncertainty, the Condominium government began to

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1. See R. Hill, *Slatin*, pp.88-9, for a description of the government attitude towards al-Mudawwī 'Abd al-Rahmān.
 2. E.g., "Proclamation on religion", Sud.Int./2/3/260, 3 August 1901. Cf., also Civil Secretary to Intel.Sud.Int./2/32/260, 15 August 1901.

develop some understanding of the nature of Sudanese popular Islam and to appreciate the importance and deeply rooted traditions of Sufism in Sudanese society. It therefore started to be tolerant of these *shaykhs* and of their followers, provided they did not get involved in politics or subversive activities which interfered with government administration and plans for reform. The key personality in the direction and implementation of these practical relationships was Slatin, who as Inspector-General, was the chief adviser to the Governor-General on all matters pertaining to religion and tribal affairs. Slatin's personal experience in the Sudan, and especially his long years of captivity with the Khalifa in Omdurman, had taught him to be very suspicious of all the heads of *tariqas* and to consider them as frauds and profit seekers. His prejudiced attitude was reflected in his relationships with those religious leaders and weighed heavily against them. Slatin, however, had also made some friends during this period among those Sufi and tribal notables. It was through his personal contacts with those friends that his prejudices were modified and the government was able to court some important leaders.

The attitude of the Condominium government towards the Ismā'īliyya followed this same pattern. While on the one hand it maintained a feeling of suspicion and hostility towards the *tariqa* throughout this period, it continued, on the other, to have a relationship with its leaders which was based on pragmatic considerations, and which kept on changing with different persons and at different times. Like all other *tariqas*, the Ismā'īliyya was viewed with distrust and got its share of hostility in the government reports and circulars, but at the same time and out of sheer political expediency, the co-operation and support of

its leaders was sought from time to time. Thus, early in 1899, al-Makkī's co-operation was sought and obtained when he was selected to the membership of the 'Board of Ulema'.¹ A cordial relationship was then started which made it possible for the Ismā'īliyya to be revived in favourable conditions. So long as its activities were confined to religious affairs, it was tolerated and its practices condoned. By 1902, it had become one of the two most influential *tariqas* in the Sudan.² Its quick revival and growth obviously led to some rivalry and conflict with the Khatmiyya, which was then also regaining its strength and fame. The government had no reason or desire to favour one *tariqa* or the other in their rivalries, but it was quite evident from its dealings with the heads of these two orders that 'Alī al-Mirghanī, and through him the Khatmiyya, were getting the better treatment.³ A conflict which ensued between the followers of these *tariqas* in that year during the *Mawlid* celebrations was one of the most pressing reasons which convinced al-Makkī of the need to return with his *tariqa* to its home in El-Obeid. This proved to be a very crucial decision which affected the history and future development of the Ismā'īliyya *tariqa* and family. Its immediate result was the quick resettlement of the *tariqa* and its flourishing in the Western Sudan. The long-term result was that the centre of the Ismā'īliyya having been drawn away from the capital, was that its head was no longer in touch with national affairs at first hand,

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1. N. Shuqair, *Ta'rikh*, 3, 670.
 2. *S.I.R.*, No.95, June 1902, described the Sammaniyya as the most widespread and possibly the most numerous, and the Khatmiyya and Ismā'īliyya as the most influential.
 3. Although his *tariqa* was not officially recognized, 'Alī al-Mirghanī's position of respect was recognized, and he was always referred to as being loyal and worthy of respect. See *Sud.Govt. Archives* (Durham), 201/2, Wingate to Cecil, 5 July 1916.

and consequently he and his followers were becoming more and more confined to provincial issues and highly localized in their outlook. The influence of the *ṭarīqa* in the western Sudan, however, remained paramount and unchallenged for quite some time. By 1904, only two years after his return to El-Obeid, al-Makkī felt so confident about its prospects, that he decided to leave it under the leadership of his eldest son - Ismā'il - and went on pilgrimage, where he is claimed to have enlisted some followers.¹

This love-hate relationship between the government and the Ismā'īliyya continued throughout the remaining lifetime of al-Makkī. At one time he was praised by Slatin as being a loyal person, "who acted in our interest",² and his advice and co-operation were sought, especially with regards to the affairs in Darfur,³ but at the same time he was still distrusted and his interpretations of the affairs of Darfur were viewed with suspicion. When Slatin conveyed to him the government's fears of the spread of the Sanusiyya in Darfur, al-Makkī dismissed that possibility because the Sultan of Darfur was one of his followers. Slatin thought that was presumptuous, and suspected that it was only an indication of al-Makkī's own anxiety and fear of losing the income which came to him from his followers there.⁴

As long as al-Makkī was living, his *ṭarīqa* was still benefiting from his established fame and his good relationship with the government, and thus saw much of the brighter side of its attitude towards Islamic

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1. See *al-Nash'a al-Makkiyya*, ms. Sud.Govt. Archives, 1/82/1321.
 2. *S.I.R.*, No.80, March 1901, Appendix E.
 3. See R. Hill, *Slatin*, p.88.
 4. *S.I.R.*, No.87, October 1901, and No.93, April 1902. See also R. Hill, *Slatin*, p.88.

organizations. With al-Makkī dead in 1906 and his *ṭarīqa* suffering from internal conflicts and in decline, the Ismā'īliyya began to see the other and more gloomy side of that government attitude. An intelligence report of 1907 described its second *khalīfa*, Ismā'il al-Raqīq as unco-operative and obstructive to the government efforts to clean El-Obeid.¹ In 1908, he was even reported as being on friendly terms with a *faqīh* who was viewed as a possible cause of unrest.² The third *khalīfa* - Mirghanī - was on no better terms, and his closer ties with 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi at that time, brought about a more hostile reaction from the government. This became apparent in 1911 when Savile, then acting Governor of Kordofan, was trying to support the appointment of Ibrahim b. al-Makkī as head of the order, rather than Mirghanī, because the former was thought to be more co-operative. Savile was advised to stop interfering with the internal affairs of the order since such an interference could be interpreted as a recognition of the *ṭarīqa*.³ The unfriendly attitude persisted throughout the rest of the period in which Mirghanī was head of the Ismā'īliyya, i.e. until 1950. Although the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 had forced the government to modify its attitude towards the *ṭarīqas*, and although Mirghanī's friend 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi and his associates were no longer considered enemies of the government the Ismā'īliyya was still viewed with some suspicion. One of the virtues that recommended Ismā'il b. Ahmad al-Azharī to the government was his dissociation from the *ṭarīqa*. A report in 1915 described him as having nothing to do with it.⁴ It was this member of the family who was seen to be more suitable

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1. S.I.R., No.159, October 1907, Appendix B.
 2. S.I.R., No.169, August 1908.
 3. See *Butler's diary*, October-November 1911, Sud.Govt. Archives (Durham), 400/10.
 4. Sud.Govt.Archives (Khartoum), Intel. 2/32/261, 14 July 1915.

than the head of the Ismā'īliyya *ṭarīqa* as a member of the Sudanese delegation of notables to London to congratulate King George V in 1919.

The Government, the Western Sudan and the Ismā'īliyya

The second factor which affected the revival and development of the Ismā'īliyya in this period was related to the delicate position of the government in its early days in the western Sudan. Taking advantage of that situation, the Ismā'īliyya, both *ṭarīqa* and family, managed quickly to restore their prestige, and making use of the favourable conditions at the time, to extend their influence more widely than before. Then, after their early good start, they began to settle down to the role of a localized traditional *ṭarīqa* and a holy family.

The government position in Kordofan and Darfur was very sensitive and vulnerable in the early years after the reconquest. These are two vast areas, remote from the capital and had always been rebellious against all forms of central authority in Khartoum. During the Mahdia they saw a great deal of unrest, and for a long time after the reconquest no effective government authority was established in them. The government was hoping to reconquer those parts of the Sudan by stages, but while doing so it did not want its claim to sovereignty over them to be challenged. Thus after the battle of Omdurman, Kitchener, finding himself in no position to advance immediately to the west, published a proclamation in November 1898 to all the *shaykhs* of Kordofan and Darfur in which he stated that the government intended to resume its authority there, but that would be delayed until he had settled things in the Nile. When that was done, he promised, "...The government will turn its attention to the western Sudan, restore its authority and organize it to

the best advantage and welfare of the tribes and inhabitants".¹ The quick defeat of the Khalīfa in Um-Dibaykrat in the following year made it easy for the government to despatch a small force under Mahon to reconquer El-Obeid in December 1899. In Darfur it was thought better to lay claims to the area leaving its administration to the Sultan 'Alī Dīnār, a descendant of its last ruler, Muhammad al-Fadl. The main preoccupation of the government was with the pacification of these areas and then the establishment of a just and effective administrative structure. After the reconquest of El-Obeid, therefore, Wingate issued a proclamation to all the people of Kordofan encouraging them to return to their homes and promising to help them with transport and seeds for cultivation.² He also sent a letter to 'Alī Dīnār asking him to encourage the people to cultivate their lands, open schools and mosques and to resume trade with Kordofan and Khartoum.³ Those government promises were not fulfilled, and consequently its hopes for an immediate pacification of the inhabitants there were not achieved. The state of unrest in those areas continued, and up to 1916 no single year passed without a reported rising or conflict of one sort or another, in which the government was involved. A number of factors had contributed to this: the inhabitants of those *regions* - and especially Kordofan - had a deep-rooted and probably well-justified distrust of any foreign government or central authority. The fact that the new government was partly Christian and at the same time associated with the Khedivial rule had added to its unpopularity. Moreover, the fact that its presence was not always felt had tempted many to disregard its orders

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1. S.I.R., No.60, Appendix 97, p.1414.
 2. N. Shuqair, *Ta'rīkh*, 3, 671.
 3. Sud.Govt. Archives (Khartoum), Int.2/3/14, Wingate to Dīnār, 3 June 1900.

and ignore its decisions. Furthermore, the religious feelings and fanaticism were still very high there and the incidents which occurred during the early years of the Condominium showed that north of Omdurman, fanaticism had waned, but southwards, along the White Nile and in the western Sudan, it remained very strong and active.¹

The government's efforts to establish a good administration were also frustrated. It was hoped that the government would gain the confidence and co-operation of what Kitchener termed "the better class of natives", through whom the whole population could gradually be influenced.² Therefore one of the most important duties of Slatin, as Inspector-General under Wingate, was, "To acquaint himself with the names and characters of the principal sheikhs and other persons who either through their wealth, position or for reasons connected with religion, have influence over the natives".³ Slatin had no great difficulty in this respect in the Gezira and the Nile areas, where there were a number of *shaykhs* and tribal chiefs with whom he could establish contacts. In the western Sudan, tribal structure was disrupted during the Mahdia, and with the exception of a few notables like 'Alī al-Tōm of the Kabābīsh and Mūsā Madibbū of the Rizayqāt, there were no strong chiefs who could be of any real use to the government in influencing the population in its favour. Under the circumstances, the presence of an influential *tariqa* whose leader was willing to co-operate was a blessing. Thus, like the Khatmiyya in Kasala, the Majādhīb in the eastern Sudan and the Ahmadiyya in Dongola, the Ismā'īliyya presence in

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1. A number of these movements have been cited in A. Cudsi, "Sudanese resistance to British rule 1900-1920", unpublished MSc thesis, University of Khartoum, 1969.
 2. Kitchener's Memo. to Mudīrs, enclosure in Cromer to Salisbury, 17/3/1899, FO/78/5022.
 3. Sudan Gov. Archives (Durham), 403/6/4 April 1902, "Duties of Inspector-General, Sudan".

the western Sudan was a great help as a very important element of stability. The revival of the Ismā'īliyya and the restoration of its *zāwiyas* and organizations were therefore encouraged as a natural and healthy phenomenon. Though the government did not treat them to the same privileges given to the Mīrghaniyya when they came back to Kasala,¹ the Ismā'īliyya returned to a very welcoming atmosphere in Kordofan. Even before the return of al-Makkī to Kordofan, his envoys were tempted by the favourable conditions to restore their old *zāwiyas* and to expand by establishing new centres, especially in the Nūba mountains. Soon after settling down, the Ismā'īliyya, both the family and the *tariqa*, were set on the real task of adjustment to their new conditions. Unlike the Khatmiyya, their leaders were not in receipt of financial grants from the government, and none of them had accumulated any wealth during the Mahdia on which they could prosper. Al-Makkī was even complaining that they were in no position to pay the rates which the new government had imposed on houses.² The chances of improving their financial position in Omdurman did not look promising. In Kordofan, and with the government's favourable attitude, their chances looked far better. For this, they tried a number of sources. The first and the most important of these was trade. Although they could not be compared, in this context, with the Majādhīb,³ the members of Sh. Ismā'il's family had become very instrumental in the revival of trade and commercial activities all over Kordofan, the Nūba mountains and many parts of Darfur. Through

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1. When the Mīrghaniyya returned to Kasala after the Mahdia, they were given many privileges in the forms of land and government services. E.g., the Department of Public Works took part in rebuilding their mosques and *zāwiyas*. See *Egypt. Int. Reports*, No. 57, November-December 1898, and Warburg, *The Sudan under Wingate*, pp. 98-9.
 2. See p. 107 above.
 3. For a good description of the role of this holy family in trade and religious activities, see J. L. Buckhardt, *Travels in Nubia*, pp. 256-8.

their relatives and associates, they penetrated into the remotest parts of these regions for trade, and their *zāwiyās* in towns like El-Obeid, al-Dalanj and Kadugli were very closely associated with commercial activities. The heads of these *zāwiyās* were themselves normally traders by profession as well as religious *faqīhs*; and as such they were able to play a very important role in the religious and economic life of that region. A good example of such men was al-Makkī b. Bashīr, a great grandson of Sh. Ismā'īl, who went to settle in al-Dalanj. Taking advantage of the relative peace and security in the region after the reconquest, and the good contacts his family had made before the Mahdia, he managed to establish a profitable business in that town and a big Ismā'īliyya *zāwīya* too. Then, through active agents, both his trade and religious interests spread to the neighbouring villages, and covered a wide area. He was joined later by a few of his relatives, such as his brother Munīr and his cousin Ahmad b. Ibrahīm, and so their business expanded and their influence increased, and has remained so until the present day. They owned a number of shops and houses, and most of the trade in the region passed through them or their associates. Being respected both for his wealth and his religious status, al-Makkī was always referred to in cases of conflicts between traders, when there was need for a guarantor (*dāmin*), and for the settlement of inheritance according to the *Shari'a* law rather than taking it to court. His *zāwīya* served both as a shelter for his followers and a meeting centre for itinerant traders visiting the town. Another member related to the family by marriage was Makkī Hamad, through whom the influence of the Ismā'īliyya was extended to Kadugli and neighbouring villages. He was a very wealthy trader and his sons now carry the same social and economic

weight in the region. Apart from these members of the family, there were also very prominent *khalīfas* such as Ismā'īl Shaybūn and Ahmad Bēbiker who are still big merchants in Kaduglī.

The second source which the Ismā'īliyya had tried was agriculture. With vast fertile lands and a fair amount of rainfall, the most important factor in agriculture in Kordofan continued to be the labour force. On his return to El-Obeid, al-Makkī brought some of his slaves with him, and these were very useful as a productive labour force. But this force was continually in decline as ex-slaves were finding good prospects as recruits in the army on the one hand, and on the other the anti-slavery pressures were getting greater every year. Al-Makkī and his family were lucky however, in that their slaves remained with them for quite a long time; but more important than that was the alternative source of free labour which they began to get from the followers of the *ṭarīqa*. In a number of villages near El-Obeid, those *hīrān* willingly gave their services free in the large plots of land which were acquired by the head of the order or other senior members of Sh. Ismā'īl's family. Thus al-Jikka, al-Jallābiyya, Umm 'Arāda and other villages¹ were becoming very closely associated with the agricultural activities of the Ismā'īliyya and are until now the main source of their grain supply. In addition to these, some members of the family also began to take some interest in their lands in Dongola. The products of their date palms and wheat from small plots of land in al-Dabba were collected and sent over to Kordofan.

The third source from which the Ismā'īliyya had benefited was the *zakāt*. The *zakāt* is an obligatory due on every Muslim and is paid to *bayt al-māl* in an Islamic state.² In a non-Islamic state, people found

1. See map, Appendix B, below.

2. See Qur'ān, 9:103, 1:154, 73:20. On how the *zakāt* can best be distributed, see Qur'ān 9:60.

themselves in a dilemma and could not comprehend the idea of paying it to such a government. Paying it directly through their religious *shaykhs* and *faqīhs* was the easiest way out of this dilemma. In the first few years of the Condominium rule, the *zakāt* was a very good source of income and economic power to all the *shaykhs* and *faqīhs* throughout the Sudan. The income from this *zakāt* was so recognizable that an intelligence report of 1908 had even suggested that those *shaykhs* and *faqīhs* were actually collecting more money in this way than the government itself from taxes.¹ In Kordofan, much of that income was going to the Ismā'īliyya in the early days of Anglo-Egyptian rule. As time went by, the Ismā'īliyya income from this source began to decline gradually. On the one hand economic pressures and new social attitudes made the people less enthusiastic to pay this *zakāt*, and on the other, there was now more organized competition with the Ismā'īliyya for the collection of this *zakāt*, especially from the Mahdists under the new leadership of 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Mahdī, and also from the Tijāniyya.

Another source of income, closely related to the *zakāt* was that of the *ziyārāt* (pious gifts of pilgrims), and *al-nudhūr* (fulfilments of conditional vows and offerings) which were paid sometimes in cash, and at others in kind. Though payments for the *ziyārā* of the *qubba* or the head of the order was by no means obligatory, it grew into a custom and no visitor would come there empty-handed. Though the income from this source was not sizeable, it was enough to maintain some of the shrines and to keep those who guarded them happy.

In addition to all these sources, there was also the contribution of the wealthier members of the order for the big occasions, such as the *hawliyya* of the *shaykh* or the *Mawlid* of the Prophet.

1. See *S.I.R.*, No.162, January 1908, Appendix C.

Though the income from all these different sources was fairly large, the Ismā'īliyya did not manage it in such a manner as to make a central financial establishment like Dā'irat al-Mahdī or Dā'irat al-Mirghanī. Instead of investing this income in capital expenditure, the Ismā'īliyya used it in their daily maintenance of the *tariqa* duties, the upkeep of the *khalīfa's* household, and the feeding of the numerous disciples who made their lodgings in the *khalwas* and *sāwiyās* of that order. Up to 1906, although there was no central *dā'ira* to organize the finances of the Ismā'īliyya, al-Makkī, as the unchallenged head of the order and the family, was taking care of that fairly well. After his death, and following the gradual disintegration of the family, there was a growing tendency to tear the income from these sources apart, and for each household to insist on its share from it rather than pool it centrally. The lack of such financial management and the absence of a central *dā'ira* to control their income, left the Ismā'īliyya less capable of developing their resources, and as time passed these grew more and more inadequate. With a declining financial power, the political and social influences of the Ismā'īliyya were also in decline. They could no longer cope with the increasing demands of a central *tariqa* and the requirements of a big holy family, and therefore had to accept a secondary position after the Ansār and the Khatmiyya in political and social affairs.

Social and Political Change and the Ismā'īliyya

The third influence on the development of the Ismā'īliyya during this period is related to the changing social and political trends in the Sudan

at that time and the response of the *tarīqa* and the members of the family to those changes.

The reconquest of the Sudan by the Anglo-Egyptian forces brought about two important developments which greatly affected the society: the first was that Sudanese people had come in contact with outside influence in a more effective way. Up to the first half of the nineteenth century, the only influences to which they were exposed came in small doses through Egypt and the Hijāz, and even those were stopped during the Mahdia. With the conquest, there was a dramatic change and Sudanese society was once again exposed to foreign influence on a wider scale. Though the effects were not felt immediately, some tendencies towards an impending change began to be apparent. Many young people started to appreciate the material benefits of modern education and European technology. They began to look for inspiration and guidance towards a new "modern" type of leadership rather than their traditional tribal or religious *shaykhs*. The introduction of a new system of education, improvement of transport and the development of new economic tastes and trends had all fostered these tendencies and encouraged the emergence of some new social groups with modern attitudes and goals. Modern education gave the young Sudanese access to new ideas and introduced them to new concepts. Better communications and new economic trends tempted many of them to urban centres and big towns where they could hope to get better opportunities for employment and greater chances for an improved and modern life. New social relationships and organizations were created which cut across tribalism and religious ties. Social clubs, thus, replaced *zāwīyas*, *takiyyas* and *khalwas* as places for social gatherings in big towns. Economic interests were also beginning to take

the place of tribal and religious relationships as bases for social groupings. New social and political ideas, such as nationalism, progress and enlightenment, were also finding their way into the minds of those young men.

The second development arising from the conquest was of a psychological nature. The crushing defeat of the Mahdist-state and the imposition of a rule which was partly Christian in the Sudan, generated a feeling of frustration amongst the people who were brought up to believe that as Islam is the true religion of God, it should dominate the world. The victory of the infidels was seen not only as evidence that something had gone wrong with the universe, but also as proof that they themselves had deviated from the right path. This frustration was deepest among the religious people, and especially the Sufis. They reacted in two ways: the first was a violent reaction finding expression in the numerous religious uprisings against the government after 1900 which were inspired by the Sudanese popular beliefs about the *Nabi 'Isā* and *al-Masīh al-Dajjāl*.¹ The victory of a Christian power over the Mahdists led many Sudanese to associate the British administration with *al-Masīh al-Dajjāl* (anti-Christ) and brought to life the prophecy of al-Shaykh Farah Wad Taklūk: "At the end of time the English will come to you, whose soldiers are called police: they will measure the earth even to the blades of the sedge grass. There will be no deliverance except through the coming of 'Isā".² The second one was a passive reaction: that of accepting the blame for what had

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1. These uprisings have been discussed in detail by A. Cudsi, "Sudanese resistance to British Rule, 1900-1920", unpublished MSc dissertation, University of Khartoum, 1969.
 2. Hillelson, *Sudanese Arabic Texts*, p.159.

befallen as a just punishment for not abiding by the rules of God. The only cure for that was for the Muslims to purify their souls by returning to God and following the path of righteousness. Accepting their fate and seeing that they were no match for the superior armies of Britain and Egypt, many Sudanese gave up the idea of *jihād al-sayf* (the holy war) and comforting themselves with the belief that the Prophet himself had ranked *jihād al-nafs* (earnest striving with the carnal soul) as the greater *jihād*¹ they turned to worshipping God with passionate dedication. There was a renewed and vigorous revival of Sufi attitudes and *tariqa* activities.

Two distinct tendencies can therefore be discerned from these developments: the first was a gradual and continuous process of secularization which undermined the religious orders and subsequently led to their decline and eclipse. People, especially young men, no longer looked to religion alone for an explanation of all aspects of their lives. But parallel to that there was also a growing tendency among the Sudanese to return to Islam, to trust their faith in God and be satisfied with His designs.

Among the Ismā'īliyya, these conflicting tendencies found expression in a division, which had already been manifested during the Mahdia, between two of Sh. Ismā'il's sons - al-Makkī and Ahmad al-Azharī. The early years of the Condominium rule showed how these two branches of the family had reacted to these tendencies, and how they continued to drift apart in this respect. Though they both gained importance during this period,

1. A tradition by the Prophet to this effect is often quoted by many Sufis. See Abu'l Hasan al-Hijūrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, trns. A. Nicholson, p.200. Qur'ān 29:69 is also commonly quoted in this respect.

it was continually becoming apparent that the Azharis, with more readiness to adjust to modern society, were attracting more attention, were more appealing to the younger generation and were thus gaining more national prominence. Al-Makkī and the *tariqa*, on the other hand, though still strong and famous in Kordofan, had failed to adjust readily to such changes and could not attain to similar status on the national level.

After their retreat to El-Obeid in 1902, the Ismā'īliyya tended to be more conservative and more inclined to adopt a traditional and reactionary attitude of Islam which suspected anything new as *bid'a*¹ (innovation=heresy) and rejected any modernization as a threat to their accepted way of life. When Bashīr b. al-Makkī was advised to send his eldest son, al-Makkī,² to take a modern education, he adamantly refused to do so regarding it as being contrary to their traditional style of education. It was not until late in the Condominium rule that the descendants of al-Makkī had come to appreciate the importance of modern education and to benefit from it. Another leader of the Ismā'īliyya, Ibrahīm b. al-Makkī, the head of the order in El-Obeid (1908-1917) was considered by the authorities there to be a hindrance to the government plans for reforms and improvements.³

Another area in which the Ismā'īliyya did not appreciate the need for change and modernization was in relation to the role of women. Although a number of them had been educated during and after the Mahdia,

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1. With reference to the tradition "*kullu bid'a dalāla, wa kullu dalāla fi'l nār*". See also Bernard Lewis, "The Significance of Heresy in Islam", *Islam and History*, pp.217-36.
 2. See genealogical tables appendix below.
 3. *S.I.R.*, No.169, August 1908.

none of them was allowed to aspire to a status similar or even close to that of ladies like 'Alawiyya¹ or Maryam² of the Mirghaniyya. They all remained confined to their traditional inactive role in the *tariqa*, except during the big occasions when they could take part in the festivities, mainly in the preparation of food and the encouragement of the participants in the various functions and rituals.

The Ismā'iliyya reluctance to reform and modernize was also reflected in the subsiding spiritual vigour and mystical power of the *tariqa* during this period. There were now very few and insignificant *karāmāt* performed by its successive *khalīfas* and as the time went by the feelings of awe and reverence to those *khalīfas* were diminishing. In fact, after the death of al-Makkī, the head of the order ceased to be the main centre of spiritual attraction which emotionally drew the followers to the *tariqa*. The *qubba* of Sh. Ismā'il, rather than the living head of the order, became the centre of inspiration; and the *madad* (help) was sought from it more than from the *khalīfa*. Thus, to preserve the unity and cohesion in the *tariqa*, there was an increased attention to this *qubba* and to the rituals associated with it, more respect for the sacred relics of Sh. Ismā'il, and more glorification for his work and his *karāmāt*.³

The Ismā'iliyya also chose to be dormant even in literary activities. A tradition of writing on religious subjects started by Sh. Ismā'il and then followed by his son al-Makkī, was allowed to die out after that, and the only efforts made in this field by Bashīr b. al-Makkī, were a

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1. Daughter of Hāshim b. Muḥammad 'Uthmān; known as bint Masawwa'; became famous amongst the Banī 'Amir in the eastern Sudan, died in 1949 and has a shrine in Massawwa'. See Voll, *Khatmiyya*, Appendix II.
 2. Another daughter of Hāshim; with her husband gained fame in Sinkāt; died in 1951. See Chapter III, p.93n, above.
 3. See Chapter V, p.141, below.

reproduction of Sh. Ismā'il's and al-Makkī's works, the mere copying of which was considered to be an act of *baraka*.¹

Unlike the Khatmiyya and the Ansār, the Ismā'īliyya also failed to appreciate the importance of the para-military youth organizations known as *al-shabāb*, and did not offer any alternative which could have appealed to their young followers who were beginning to lose interest in their traditional organizations, rituals and mysticism. They also failed to provide for the rise of educated and prominent men outside the family to a position of leadership through the Ismā'īliyya. Thus, unlike the above mentioned two organizations, the Ismā'īliyya could not attract those young educated men who were destined to become the future leaders of the country.

In politics the *tariqa* was also very reluctant to take any initiative and its leaders were satisfied with a secondary position in this field. The Ismā'īliyya, therefore, did not attempt to patronize any political party and even refused to tie itself to one or the other of the then two rising political groups of the Ansār (Mahdists), and the Ashiqqā' (Mirghanis). The failure of the Ismā'īliyya leaders to see the nature of the new political trends and to comprehend their importance, left them in a dilemma and they could not even unite themselves as one pressure group behind their head. With no unifying ideology and no clear directives, the Ismā'īliyya leaders and followers were left to decide their political affiliations according to their personal individual judgments and in response to local issues rather than a comprehensive national outlook. In the early years of the Condominium rule, therefore,

1. All the copies reproduced from these works therefore finished with the names of their copier and a form of request from God to help him as a reward for this act of copying. E.g.

وقد صار إيفراغ من
خط هذه النسوة المباركة ... على يدي الزليل الحقيير الراجي به عفو ربه
كاثر لطيبه وابن سيده سيد محمد البشير --- افاض الله علينا من بركاته

al-Makkī collaborated with al-Mīrghanī, and his family at that time were in close contact with and highly respected by the government officials. But this co-operation between al-Makkī and the Mīrghanīyya soon gave way to competition and rivalry, which sometimes broke into open conflict.¹ This conflict could be one of the main reasons which forced al-Makkī to leave Omdurman, though his *tariqa* was growing there. After his departure, his *khalīfa* in Omdurman, Mīrghanī, was left in an even weaker position against the growing pressure of the Khatmiyya. It was this situation rather than any conflicting national issues that affected the attitude of Mīrghanī and the Ismā'īliyya of Omdurman towards the Ashiqqā and the Khatmiyya. In Kordofan, the Ismā'īliyya found no competition at first, but after 1910 this situation changed - especially with the beginning of 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Mahdi's restoration to political and religious power. 'Abd al-Rahmān hoped to get his support for this revival mainly from Kordofan and Darfur. With better organization and greater financial resources, the Ansa'r grew up to be the main competitors of the Ismā'īliyya and a threat to their, until then, unquestionable predominance in those areas. This situation then became the main issue which decided the political attitude of the Ismā'īliyya in El-Obeid towards the Ansār and the Mahdists.

Those views based on local situations were also reinforced by personal relationships and attitudes. Mīrghanī, the head of the Ismā'īliyya in Omdurman, was known to have been a very close friend of 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Mahdi and was more inclined to his way of thinking in politics. On the other hand, Bashīr, the senior member of the Ismā'īliyya

1. See p.110, above.

in El-Obeid, and Muhammad Sālih Suwār al-Dhahab, the head *khalīfa* of the Khatmiyya there, were on the best of terms and were said to have been at one time colleagues as clerks in the Grand Court of Islam in Omdurman during the Mahdia. They too were more inclined to have closer attitudes in political affairs.

Divided as they were on regional issues and with different personal inclinations, the leaders of the Ismā'īliyya *tariqa* could not form an effective political group, and as such made very little and continually diminishing impact on national political affairs.

With the *tariqa* in decline, internal strife and inability to cope with modern developments in the Sudan, there was no temptation for the youngsters of the family of Sh. Ismā'īl to take any active role in it. Thus, although the *tariqa* has continued to be respected in Kordofan until the present day, it was the Azharī branch of the family which was beginning to gain more national importance and prestige, and to revive the fame of Sh. Ismā'īl's family under a new name, al-Azharī, in a new geographical location, Omdurman, and under new circumstances, political activities.

Following in the steps of Ahmad al-Azharī, his descendants chose to be more susceptible to change and more open to modernization. Benefiting from Ahmad's earlier contacts with Egypt and his good reputation there, many of the young members of the family joined al-Azhar university and returned to the Sudan as *Shari'a* jurists. For a long time, a number of these filled the posts of *qadis* and *muftis* in various parts of the country.¹

1. Most prominent of these was Ismā'īl b. Ahmad al-Azharī, see R. Hill, *Biographical Dictionary*, p.184. For others, see Husayn S.A. al-Mufti, *Tatawur niṣam al-qada' fi al-Sudan*.

The Azharīs also readily accepted modern education and sent their children to benefit from it. They also preferred modern life in the capital to the provincial environment of El-Obeid. This also became a further attraction to the youngsters of the family who continued to move into the big towns, and to draw closer to the attitudes and ways of thinking of this Azharī branch. What attracted more fame and prestige to the Azharīs during this period, however, was their attitude in politics and their leaders' understanding of the nature of the new issues and emerging forces in this field. The continued residence of the Azharis in Omdurman allowed them to have first-hand information on current affairs and kept them always in touch with new developments on the national level. Their contacts with Egypt and modern education introduced them to new concepts and ideas such as nationalism and the quest for independence. They also came to realize that clubs and political parties, rather than the traditional religious and tribal ties, were the new and more effective methods of political organization. With this background, the Azharīs were more suited to engage in the nationalist movements and more equipped to tackle the new political trends and comprehend the new methods.

The nature of political change in the Sudan during this period has been discussed in various works to which reference can be made for further details.¹ The most important aspects of this change were the development of a nationalistic spirit and a growing awareness of the need

1. See P.M. Holt, *Modern History*, Chapters IX and X; Muddathir 'Abd al-Rahīm, *Imperialism and Nationalism*, Chapter IV, pp.89-134; and Warburg, *Islam Nationalism and Communism*, Chapters I and II, pp. 21-89.

for political organizations. Political activities, however, developed amongst the educated elite and continued, primarily, to engage the enlightened section of the population. Although those continued, for some time, to depend for support on the blessing of the traditional religious and tribal leaders, it was becoming evidently clear that those new politicians had their new approaches and tactics to match their new political issues.

The Ismā'īliyya failed to adapt quickly to these new changes and, in this field, they were still lagging behind. Their involvement in political activities and national affairs were, therefore, minimal and even when it became necessary for them to do so, their participation was half-hearted and their role was marginal. In 1919, when the heads of the religious orders saw fit to sign a declaration of loyalty¹ to the British Government in the face of growing Egyptian nationalism, the signature of Mīrghani, the head of the Ismā'īliyya *tariqa* then, came at the tail of the list in that document. Not only did the Ismā'īliyya leaders fail to take an active role in national politics, but they also declined to give any clear guidance to their followers to help them in their political allegiances. Disagreements between Ismā'īliyya leaders on political issues, were reflected also amongst the followers; and the *tariqa*, in this respect was never united behind its head on any issue.²

In contrast, the involvement of the Azharīs in political activities and national affairs was evident and more positive. They did this, not through the establishment of a mass organization, nor by the patronizing

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1. This is often referred to as *Sifr al-walā'*, and was handed to the Governor-General on 23 April 1919. See Milner Papers, Oxford, for an official translation of this document.
 2. See Chapter V, p.146, below.

of a political party, as did the Mahdists and the Mīrghanīs, but their fame and reputation were raised mainly through the emergence of some national figures from their members. One of these was Ismā'īl b. Ahmad al-Azharī (1869-1949) who in addition to his distinguished career as an Islamic *qadī* and *muftī*,¹ had also gained for himself and his family some reputation as a national figure, and did not hesitate to take an active role in political affairs. His involvement in politics was detected as early as 1911 by Butler, who registered in his diary on the 31st of October 1911, "Interviewed Ismail El Azhari, Kadi of Sennar. A clever powerful man. Was sent away from El-Obeid because he took an important part in the Morghani trika dispute".² More evident was his involvement through the Board of Ulema, of which he was a member, and through his involvement in the support of the government against the Egyptian nationalistic tide of 1919. He was one of the signatories of *sifr al-walā'* (the declaration of loyalty), and he was one of the distinguished members of the delegation to congratulate King George V that year.

Another member of the Azharīs whose involvement in this field was more significant, and whose fame even more closely associated with his career as a politician, was a great grandson of Ahmad al-Azharī, also with the name of Ismā'īl al-Azharī (1900-1969).³ Ismā'īl's involvement in politics started as early as his student days at the American University of Beirut, where he had tried unsuccessfully to stand for the presidency of the students' union. His years of study there (1927-30) were very

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1. See R. Hill, *Biographical Dictionary*, p.184.
 2. Sud.Govt.Archives (Durham), 400/10, Butler's diary, October-November 1911.
 3. For detailed information on Ismā'īl al-Azharī, see his memoirs in the Sudanese daily paper *al-Ayyām*, 3 June to 6 September 1957. See also his obituary in *The Times*, London, 27 August 1969. Also Warburg, *Islam, Nationalism and Communism*, Chapter 2.

informative. He came in touch with many students from various parts of the Arab world and was influenced by many ideas to which he was exposed through his reading of the papers and his discussions with fellow students. When he returned to the Sudan in 1931, he began to take an active role in politics. That year he was elected Chairman of the Graduates Club in Omdurman.¹ In 1938 he became the first Sudanese president of that club, and then in the same year was elected as one of four presidents of the Graduates Congress² which he helped to found to unify all the graduates of the different schools in the Sudan under one organization. Through his activities in this Congress and in association with its members, al-Azharī built his political career and brought himself up to hold the balance between the two major political organizations patronized by the Mahdists and the Khatmiyya. He became the first prime minister of the Sudan in 1954, and saw the country through the final stages leading to independence in January 1956. Before his death in 1969, Ismā'īl al-Azharī had managed to establish himself at the head of a political party - the National Unionist Party - and gained a political reputation which gave the family under this name a new fame and prestige.

To conclude, the Ismā'īliyya, in the early years of the Condominium had passed through two phases. The first under the wise and unchallenged leadership of al-Makkī, both the *tariqa* and the family were making use of

1. This was originally a social club first established with the help of Sayyed 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Mahdī in 1919 to counter balance the growing pro-Egyptian tendencies amongst the graduates of Gordon Memorial College, higher schools, army officers and such educated Sudanese. The Club developed later into one of the great centres of political activity.

his good leadership, of the favourable attitude of the government to them and of the state of affairs in the western Sudan to restore their prestige and revive their fame. In the second phase, mainly after the death of al-Makkī in 1906, a number of factors combined to bring about a division in the family and a decline in the *tariqa*. Internal strife and lack of good leadership forced the Ismā'iliyya to turn into a highly localized *tariqa* and greatly reduced its importance and national standing. At the same time, another branch of the family of Sh. Ismā'il, under the different name of al-Azharī and with new social and political attitudes, was beginning to gain fame and prestige during this second phase.

CHAPTER V

ORGANIZATION AND PRACTICE OF THE ISMĀ'ILIIYYA

In its initial stages the Ismā'īliyya started as a small group of followers around Sh. Ismā'īl in El-Obeid. By 1917, though still not comparable with the Ansar and the Khatmiyya in this respect, the order had branches in various parts of the Sudan, with an elaborate structure and regulations to control its members and with its own ritual ceremonials. This process of transformation passed through different phases and was influenced by a variety of factors, some of which the Ismā'īliyya shared with all other similar religious orders as an inevitable result of their natural expansion, but some factors were particular to the Ismā'īliyya and its social and political environment. This chapter attempts to look into these organizations, practices and rituals, their development through these phases and some of the factors that influenced these developments.

The Developmental Phases

Sh. Ismā'īl started this religious association with a limited number of disciples who were attracted by his *baraka* and who considered him to be a *walī* endowed with special links with God and capable, through these, of helping them in this and in the other world. They joined him of their own free will to teach and guide them in the path of righteousness and to cure them of their physical and spiritual ailments. In return, Sh. Ismā'īl received their unquestioned obedience, and his authority and judgment were placed above any doubts or disputes. His relationship with them was direct, face-to-face and personal. They were all looking

up to him for direct guidance and personal assistance, and they were all linked together by a common devotion and desire to attain, by methods of spiritual discipline, a vision of Reality. In this respect, Ismā'īl and his group were a continuation of the tradition of the *faqīh* system of the Funj Sultanate of Sennar where all the followers were equal *hīrān* (singular, *huwār*) or *fuqara* (singular, *faqīr*) each humbly serving the *Shaykh* and the group and none of them expecting any distinctive rank or special treatment.¹ There was no hierarchy, there were no ranks and there were no barriers between the *huwār* and his *Shaykh*. Some of Ismā'īl's disciples, however, managed to gain his special favour and closer attention - like al-Faqīh Abū Zumām - but this was in no way reflected in a structural or hierarchical order, nor did it in any way affect the direct, face-to-face, personal relationship between Sh. Ismā'īl and his followers.

In 1816, when Sh. Ismā'īl became a follower of Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Mīrghani, he came in touch with a new experience. As an ordinary disciple and then as a *murshid* in the Khatmiyya *tariqā*, he began to appreciate some new forms of relationships between the adepts and their *shaykhs*, and to see a hierarchy in which the followers were elevated to what could be termed *marātib* (stages). Those *marātib* were based mainly on the closeness of the person to the *shaykh* on the one hand, and on his efforts in worshipping on the other. Muḥammad 'Uthmān divided these into three stages, each of which is in turn divided into two sections.² He explained how these stages could be attained, the

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1. Y.B. Badrī, in "al-Makk wal-faqīh", *Sudan Society*, No.5, Vol.5, 1972, p.5, describes the group of *hīrān* called *awlād al-marātib* as some sort of hierarchy under *al-faqīh*. Those, however, were mainly his bodyguard.
 2. See M.U. al-Mīrghani, *al-zuhūr al-fā'iqa fi-ta'rīf huqūq al-tariqā al-Ṣādiqa*, p.89.

responsibilities attached to each one of them, and the duties of the followers towards those who held them. According to his explanation, the stage of *shaykh al-tahqīq* is a stage granted by God alone to those who, through their spiritual purification and by His Grace, are chosen for that honour. But that of *shaykh al-tabarruk* is a stage granted by the head of an Order to any of his disciples authorizing him to act as his deputy, often called a *khalīfa*, *naqīb* or a *murshid*.¹

Sh. Ismā'īl, however, did not commit himself to these divisions, and although the influence of Muhammad 'Uthmān's ideas can be traced in some of Sh. Ismā'īl's writings in this respect,² he did not actually implement them in his *tarīqa* during his lifetime. He felt no need for that at the time. His followers were still both numerically and geographically manageable. Unlike the Khatmiyya who were scattered in many parts of the Sudan, Sh. Ismā'īl's followers were gathered in one geographical area; and unlike Muhammad 'Uthmān, who was continually travelling, Ismā'īl was settled in El-Obeid. The conditions which forced Muhammad 'Uthmān to implement these stages in his order to maintain some links between him and his dispersed disciples through his *shuyūkh al-tabarruk* did not arise for the Ismā'īliyya. Sh. Ismā'īl maintained his direct face-to-face personal relationship with the members of his order. Although he talked about the spread of his *tarīqa* into many countries and among different peoples,³ he did not in fact experience any real expansion of the order beyond the boundaries of Kordofan, and did not envisage anything further than that during his lifetime. For

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1. Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Mīrghani, *al-zuhūr al-fā'iqa fi ta'rīf huqūq al-tarīqa al-ṣādiqa*, pp.90-102.
 2. See Sh. Ismā'īl, *al-'Uḥūd al-wāfiyā*, pp.3, 4 and 13, and *Mashāriq*, pp.60-8.
 3. See Sh. Ismā'īl, *Miftāḥ bāb al-dakhūl*, p.5.

those manageable disciples, therefore, he did not need any system of delegation or any form of hierarchy. Furthermore, Sh. Ismā'il believed that he had a Divine mission to guide his followers to God through his order; that he was personally chosen for that duty even though he did not go out in the world looking for it; it was rather forced on him.¹ Therefore, he could not run away from it nor could he delegate it to anyone else. Accordingly, apart from appointing his only *khalīfa*, his son Muhammad al-Makkī, Sh. Ismā'il did not attempt to establish any kind of administrative structure, nor did he try to delegate his authority through any organizational links. He saw no alternative to the personal contact between him and his follower so long as he was living; and even after his death, his writings, he thought, would be the best to deputise for him.² He consequently spent much of his time trying to reduce his ideas to writing, thus giving the *tariqā* its theoretical basis and a bank of literature leaving all the practical administration and organization to his son and *khalīfa*, Muhammad al-Makkī. Until his death in 1863, therefore, Sh. Ismā'il's contribution to the Order in this aspect was very small. The developments introduced by al-Makkī came in two phases: one starting before the death of his father up to the outbreak of the Mahdia, and the second starting after the end of the Mahdia up to his own death in 1906.

In the first phase the change was not dramatic and the process of development followed the pattern common to all other similar religious orders. In their natural desire for expansion, both numerically and geographically, they were faced with the problem of their tendency to lose their central control and cohesion. In order to maintain their

1. Sh. Ismā'il, *al-'Uhūd al-Wafīya*, pp.6-7.

2. *Ibid.*, p.7.

unity, they developed some methods of liaison to ensure the spiritual and administrative links between the head of the Order and the followers. Even before the death of Sh. Ismā'īl, the *tarīqa* was already stretched to the point of tension, and al-Makkī had to develop some means by which he could keep in touch with the regional centres. The death of Sh. Ismā'īl presented the Order with another problem. His charisma, his *baraka* and his special connections with God had been very central to attracting the followers to the Order. His death removed this power of attraction and other methods had to be developed to attract and maintain membership in the Order. The first step in this direction was the building of a dome (*qubba*) for the shaykh to be a focal point of veneration to which *ziyāra* (pilgrimage) was encouraged.¹ The *ziyāra* had its manners (*ādāb*) and rituals which were continually developed and added to. The spiritual ties of the followers with their shaykh were also kept by fixing the anniversary of his birth (*mawlid*) and death (*hawliyya*) to be celebrated centrally, and all the members from the various regions would participate. Then the transfer of *baraka* and spiritual qualities from Sh. Ismā'īl to his son and *Khalīfa* al-Makkī, was also emphasized. People were reminded immediately after the death of Ismā'īl that he had chosen his son al-Makkī as his deputy in all matters related to his sons, his finances and all that concerned the family, and that he had appointed him as his heir and *Khalīfa* of his *tarīqa* during his life and after his death. And to stress this fact even further, Ismā'īl had allowed al-Makkī to precede him in prayer as *imām* for twenty years.²

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1. *Ziyāra*: pilgrimage to the shrine of a holy man as distinct from *hajj*, pilgrimage to Mecca.
 2. See *al-Nash'a al-Saniyya* (the obituary of Sh. Ismā'īl), ms. Sud. Govt. Archives, 1/182/1310.

The first phase of al-Makkī's *Khilāfā*, therefore, witnessed a gradual development of administrative links and spiritual ties between the headquarters of the Order in El-Obeid and the affiliated regional groups of followers, as well as some new developments in forms of rituals. These developments were particularly evident in areas where the members of the family of Ismā'īl had settled as traders, especially in the Nūba Mountains. In such places as Kundukur, Kundukair and Kaduglī,¹ people gathered round one of the members of Sh. Ismā'īl's family or a relative by marriage and established a local centre with some spiritual and administrative liaison with El-Obeid. Those links, however, did not get enough time to develop gradually into a proper structure of a centralized *tarīqa* organization. When the Mahdia broke out, therefore, the Ismā'īliyya were, but not dramatically, beginning to change. Sayyid al-Makkī whom the Mahdi met was a head of a religious order rather than a local *faqīh*. People gathered around him not only to be educated in the Qur'an and other orthodox Islamic studies, but also to perform certain rituals and practices of the *tarīqa*. Yūsuf Mīkhā'īl in his memoirs gives a description of how Muḥammad Ahmad al-Mahdi used to come with some of his followers to participate in these ritual and Sufi practices.²

It was the second phase of al-Makkī's *Khilāfā* after the Mahdia, which witnessed the greater change and development that transformed the Ismā'īliyya into an organized religious order, not very much different from the presentday *tarīqa*. Like all other religious orders during the Mahdia, the Ismā'īliyya was disbanded and its practices suspended. By accepting the overlordship of the Mahdia, it had forfeited much of its

1. See map Appendix B, below.

2. Y. Mīkhā'īl, *Memoirs*, trans. S.M. Nūr, pp.63-5.

claim to spiritual leadership; and by moving with the Mahdī to Omdurman, al-Makkī had weakened the social and religious ties with his followers whom he had left behind. Without those ties and without its founding saint to give it renewed spiritual support, the Ismā'īliyya had to depend on other methods for revival after the Mahdia. To re-attract its old followers, it could no longer depend on the charisma of Sh. Ismā'īl, but it had to renew their faith in the continued strength and vitality of the *ṭarīqa*. To ensure continuity, methods had to be developed to recruit new members and for the order to survive it had to make some rules to regulate the relationship among its members, between the followers and the head of the *ṭarīqa* and between the *ṭarīqa* and the community. Then in order to facilitate and strengthen the ties between the head of the *ṭarīqa* and its members, now dispersed all over Omdurman and the western Sudan, a form of administration had to be organized.

The Ismā'īliyya attempted to regain the confidence of its followers first by reasserting their beliefs in the saintly powers of Sh. Ismā'īl and secondly by reassuring them of the transmission of those saintly privileges and *baraka* to his son and *Khalīfa*, al-Makkī. To stimulate the zeal of the followers, the *qubba* was renovated, a *ḥārīs* (guard) was appointed to keep it clean, to guard its sanctuary, to instruct the visitors on the pilgrimage observances, and to collect the offerings and gifts. The followers were strongly urged to make regular visits to the tomb for the blessing, to invoke the assistance of God through the *walī*, or simply to renew their spiritual ties with him. The mosque - adjacent to the *qubba* - also became a focal point for the

followers to gather regularly for prayers and to maintain their contacts with the Shaykh. Then there was a renewed enthusiasm for the collection and preservation of the relics of Sh. Ismā'īl, especially his writings. His works were therefore very carefully gathered together and copied by his grandson Bashīr b. al-Makkī. Those with some other items possessed by Ismā'īl came to acquire a great sentimental value and were kept in much respect. Furthermore, the anniversary of his death was also fixed to be celebrated by all his followers.

Al-Makkī's position as the true heir of the spiritual powers and *baraka* of the saint was also emphasized and in this respect the favourable attitude of the Condominium Government towards him was a great help. The fact that he was chosen as one of the religious notables and the respect shown to him by the Government officials and some of the army officers was portrayed as convincing proof that God had bestowed His grace upon him, so that he could easily obtain audience of the rulers (*wa-laqiya'l qabūl*), and could therefore mediate with them and arbitrate on behalf of his followers. His powers to perform miracles were widely asserted. Many of these were collected in a special book called *al-nafahāt al-miskiyya fī'l Karamāt al-Makkīyya*.¹ Prophetic dreams which suggested the ultimate victory of the disciples of al-Makkī over all others, such as the one related by a certain 'Ubayd Nāsir, were widely spread and held to be proof of al-Makkī's sainthood. 'Ubayd related that he had seen al-Makkī in a dream leading people in the Friday prayer. After finishing his sermon, al-Makkī ordered the congregation to stand up for prayer stating that only those who really believed in him

1. I could not obtain this book, though reference has often been made to it. See *al-nash'ā al-Makkīyya* (obituary of al-Makkī), ms. Sud. Govt. Archives, 1/82/1321.

would be able to do so. Only some - of whom 'Ubayd was one - managed to obey the order, but the rest failed to stand. 'Ubayd who was not a follower of al-Makkī prior to this incident, was then convinced after that dream and came to be one of his devoted disciples.¹

Furthermore, in order to induce the followers to return to their *ṭarīqa* and to recruit more, al-Makkī wrote a treatise, enumerating its good qualities and virtues, called *Kitāb al-aḥādīth al-Saniyya...*,² by which he hoped to convince them that the Ismā'īliyya was mainly based on the Qur'an and the Sunna and thus offered a most direct and easy way leading towards God.

By 1902, as a result of all those efforts and some other factors which favoured its development,³ the Ismā'īliyya *ṭarīqa* regained much of its vitality and was already becoming one of the two most important *ṭarīqas* in the country.⁴ By this time also al-Makkī, for a variety of reasons referred to earlier,⁵ decided to return with his *ṭarīqa* to El-Obeid to give it a headquarters. Encouraged by the continued success and expansion, he also began to send a number of propagandists (singular, *dā'ī*) to various parts of the western Sudan and the Northern Province where he hoped to recruit new followers. To maintain close links with those whom he had left behind in Omdurman, and to keep in touch and to control those whom he was sending around, a structure had to be devised. Then to preserve the uniformity of practice within the *ṭarīqa* some regulations had to be made to govern the various activities of its members.

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1. Ms. letter from 'Ubaid Nasir to al-Makkī, Sud.Govt.Archives, Khartoum, 1/82/1333.
 2. Muhammad al-Makkī; *Kitāb al-aḥādīth al-Saniyya fī'l ḥath wa'l targhīb 'alā al-ṭarīqa al-Ismā'īliyya*, ms. Sud.Govt. Archives, Khartoum, 1/82/1331.
 3. See Chapter IV, pp.105-20, above.
 4. See Report on the *ṭarīqas*, S.I.R., No.95, June 1902.
 5. See Chapter IV, p.110n, above.

Starting with Omdurman, al-Makkī, therefore, appointed some regional representatives (singular, *khalīfa*) to whom he delegated some of his authority so that they could take care of the affairs of the order and look after the welfare of its members in their local centres. On the other hand, *al-ādāb al-jaliyyā fī mā yalzam al-mufrīt fī'l tarīqa al-Ismā'īliyya*¹ provided those regional centres, with the same code of conduct as that applicable to the members in El-Obeid. Through those usages it was hoped that a continued active involvement in the affairs of the *tarīqa* would be maintained among its members; and that through the disciplinary procedures in them, the relations between the members, between members and *khalīfas* and between them all the community could be regulated. Since members' activities both as individuals and as groups, reflected on the reputation of the Order, they were advised to maintain good relationships between themselves: help each other, show respect to their leaders and maintain a regular and orderly presence in the *zāwiya* for the *dhikr*

To keep pace with those developments, the headquarters of the Order in El-Obeid started to develop some systematic procedures through which al-Makkī was able to keep in touch with and exercise some control over his regional *khalīfas*. A system of official correspondence was therefore set up, al-Makkī kept an official seal and appointed his son al-Bashīr to what developed, for a brief period, into the important post of *kātim asrār wa hāmīl akhtam al-khalīfa* (keeper of confidential records and bearer of the *khalīfā's* seals). His duties were mainly administrative and as such he had very little to do with the religious

1. The author of these regulations is not given in the manuscript, nor is the date. Judging by what is written in it, it seems to have been written or dictated by al-Makkī towards the end of Sh. Ishmā'il's life but were not applied earnestly until after the Mahdia. See *al-Adāb al-jaliyya*, ms. Sud.Govt. Archives (Khartoum) 1/82/1334.

hierarchy of the *tariqa*. A further illustration of this growing bureaucratic trend could be seen in the development of al-Makkī's reception room into an administrative centre for the Order to which all the secular affairs were transferred, thus leaving the *khalwā* mainly for the religious activities and rituals. The administrative role of this room was also closely linked with its social function. High-ranking government officials and other important guests were entertained by the head of the Order in that room and there also he held receptions for non-religious occasions. Thus, just as the *qubba*, the mosque and the *zāwiya* had each a certain role to play in the spiritual life of the *tariqa*, al-Makkī's reception room was beginning to acquire an important position in its social and administrative set up and came to be known as *al-dīwān* to distinguish it from the *khalwā* and other rooms.

Under al-Makkī, and especially during the period 1898-1906, the Ismā'īliyya was transformed into a centralized religious order and the basic framework for its organization was laid down. A central authority was established with al-Makkī being venerated as the inheritor of the position of Ismā'īl al-Walī, whose sainthood had already been recognized. A hierarchical structure was constructed to link the central office of the Order with its regional centres through spiritual as well as administrative ties of varying degrees. A system of recruitment was developed and propagandists were sent around for that purpose. A set of disciplinary principles was also made to govern the behaviour of the members. And the rituals of the *tariqa* were defined and its shrines rebuilt, which gave the Ismā'īliyya its own distinctive character. By 1902 it had already grown into one of the most highly organized *tariqas*

of the Sudan and an Intelligence Report of that year found it more important than the Sammāniyya Order in this respect, although the latter had more followers.¹ By 1904 its head, al-Makkī, felt quite confident to go on pilgrimage and leave the affairs of the Order in the hands of his son without fear of having any disruption during his absence. In 1906, a report of the Governor of Kordofan still found the head of the Ismā'īliyya to be one of the most influential religious figures in El-Obeid.²

After the death of al-Makkī these organizations which he had developed did not find enough time to strike roots. The second *khalīfā* of the Order, Ismā'īl al-Raqīq, lived for only two years after his father, and the *khalīfā* went after him to his son Mirghanī, who lived most of his time in Omdurman. The continued absence of Mirghanī from El-Obeid, the spiritual centre of the *ṭarīqa* and the differences which developed between him and the elders of the family had both weakened the central organization of the Ismā'īliyya. Competition between the various branches of the family led to divided loyalties, and lack of a centralized control led to disintegration and lack of uniformity within the Order. During his period of office which extended up to 1950, Mirghanī allowed the organizations of the Ismā'īliyya to decay and some of the important functions and offices to be discontinued.³ In the regional centres, the *khalīfās* were left with very little contacts with the headquarters of the order and with their loyalties more divided. The *zāwiyas* thus tended to be more independent with the minimum of ties to either El-Obeid or

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1. S.I.R., No.95, June 1902.
 2. See J.R. O'Connell, "Annual Report, Kordofan 1906", G.G. Reports, Khartoum, 1907.
 3. The most significant of these was the office of *Kātim asrār wa hāmīl akhtām al-khalīfā*

Omdurman. The decline in the organization of the Ismā'īliyya was reflected also in their lack of interest in the modern trends which were adopted by similar *tariqās* such as the para-military organizations called *al-Shabāb*, the increased use of the press for the circulation of their literature and ideas, photography¹ to distribute the photograph of the *shaykh* to the followers, thus giving them some feeling of closeness to him, or any other new method of propaganda.

Thus by 1914 the Ismā'īliyya organizations were in decline and by the 1920s even its very existence was being threatened by the advancing Tijāniyya *tariqa* which had a better organization.² By the 1940s, its central authority was so weak that it was not only unable to form its own political party, but it could not even stand united behind the one which its head had chosen to join. When Mirghanī asked his followers to join the Umma party they did not only refuse, but some of them in El-Obeid were even offended when he asked them to hold a tea-party for Siddiq al-Mahdī, the patron of the Umma. The rift between Mirghanī, the head of the Order, and his relatives in this respect was reflected in many other parts of the country among the followers, and each member chose his own political party and affiliation.

Though greatly weakened during Mirghanī's period of office, the *tariqa* remained basically the same in its structure, rituals and practice as those had developed during the *khilāfa* of al-Makkī. We may now turn to consider the structure, rituals and practices as they came through the above-mentioned phases.

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1. Photography was only very recently becoming popular in the Sudan, and even though it is still unaccepted by strict Muslims, the distribution of photographs of *Syd 'Alī al-Mirghanī*, *Syd 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Mahdī* and Sh. Ahmad wad Badr had for some time become very fashionable, and their photographs were kept in great honour by their followers.
 2. See Sud. Govt. Archives (Khartoum) INTEL.2/32/271, 25 May 1925.

The Structure of the *Tarīqa*

The main offices in the structure of the *tarīqa* are those of the *shaykh* and the *khalīfa*.

The *shaykh* is the divinely guided founder of the order who, it is claimed, was ordered by God to establish it and give it its spiritual and moral authority. His own authority, it is claimed, had come to him by divine grace directly from God, and as such it was supreme and unquestionable. He has absolute right to obedience and no question or proof was to be asked of him, for he is considered to be the trustee of God. He is also considered to be the source from whom all the *khalīfas* of the Order derive their powers, and to whom all those taking the covenant ('*ahd*') declare their allegiance. It is he who guides the people in the path of righteousness, who cures their souls and who assists them in their lives and comes to their rescue in times of difficulties. In the Ismā'īliyya *tarīqa* there is only one *shaykh*, and in fact the title *shaykh* itself is reserved only for al-Shaykh Ismā'īl al-Walī its founder, and is given to no one after him. He is often referred to simply as *al-Shaykh* or sometimes as *al-Ustādh*. During his lifetime Ismā'īl had formed the Order, given it a name and established its authority. After his death, he is still regarded as playing the important role of the saint who could still be invoked for support and assistance. His tomb is now the centre of attraction to all his followers. The celebrations of his death anniversary (*hawliyya*) is amongst the most important functions of the Order.

In its early phases the Ismā'īliyya had about seven more offices under the *shaykh* which were mainly concerned with the spiritual welfare and religious practices and discipline in the *tarīqa*. As described in

*al-Ādāb*¹ those offices were: (1) The *khalīfa*, sometimes referred to as *al-Khalīfa al-mutawallī* or *khalīfat al-Ustādh*; (2) the *wazīr* who was the deputy of the *khalīfa*; (3) the *naqīb al-Umanā'*; (4) the *wakīl al-naqīb*; and (5) the sven *umanā'*, whose duty it was to carry out the day-to-day observation and reporting on the functions of the Order and the activities of the ordinary members to their *wakīl* and *naqīb*. There was (6) an officer responsible for the sanctity of the mosque and for the organization of the rows and their correct adjustment in prayers, called *al-wā'iz*; and finally (7) the officer responsible for the implementation of punishment and disciplinary duties on the members, called *al-rā'ī*.

The officers of the Order could meet every day in their daily five ritual prayers, or in the evening when they came for their *dhikr* and discuss the business of the *tariqa*. With the natural expansion of the Order outside EL-Obeid, more *Umanā'* were needed to carry out these functions.

The death of Sh. Ismā'īl and the erection of a *qubba* on his grave, brought about another officer to the Order, that of *harīs al-darīh* whose duty was to look after its sanctuary, its cleaning and to ensure that the pilgrimage observances were properly followed so that the visitors might return with the maximum *baraka* from it.

The adoption of the drums (*al-nōba*) for the *dhikr* by al-Makkī brought about some new duties such as the bearing of standards, the beating of the drums, the chanting of canticles (*anāshīd*) and the orchestration of the *dhikr*. But with the exception of this last function for which a certain officer called *shaykh al-dhikr*, is appointed, all these duties have no fixed officers and no fixed post in the hierarchy of the Order, and are carried out by whoever is present and capable of doing the job.

1. *Al-ādab al-jaliyya*, ms. Sud.Govt. Archives, (Khartoum), 1/82/1334.

This structure of the Order was dissolved during the Mahdia, and when it was revived after that it had to undergo a great deal of change to suit the new conditions in which the *tariqa* was transformed. More emphasis was beginning to be laid on the secular and administrative affairs of the Order. The centres of the *tariqa* were growing bigger and geographically lying farther apart from the headquarters in El-Obeid, thus demanding a more elaborate administrative structure and a more senior officer to represent the head of the Order. The first significant development in this connection was the appointment of Mirghanī - a grandson of al-Makkī - as a *khalīfa* to the centre in Omdurman in 1902. After that a number of *khalīfas* were appointed to represent al-Makkī in various parts of western Sudan, and especially in the Nūba mountains. So many *khalīfas* were appointed during this period that there was confusion as to whom the term referred to. This was even further complicated by the fact that in their efforts to gain more followers, the *khalīfas* themselves were given the authority to recommend new members to the office of *khalīfa*. To differentiate between these various *khalīfas*, additions were sometimes used. Thus, the head of the Order is referred to as *al-Khalīfa al-Kabīr* (the grand *khalīfa*) or as *Khalīfat al-sajjāda* (*khalīfa* of the prayer mat). Then in each big centre there is a *khalīfāt al-khulafā'*, the most important of them being those in El-Obeid and Omdurman. Then there are the regional *khalīfas* who are: either a senior *khalīfa bi-nōba* or a junior *khalīfa bilā nōba*. There is, however, very little difference between *khalīfāt al-khulafā'*, *khalīfāt al-nōba* and the *khalīfa bilā nōba* with regard to their authority, their responsibilities or in their relationship with *khalīfa al-sajjāda*. They are all invested with the *khilāfa* in exactly the same manner and by the

same procedure.¹ Their duties are also the same: mainly to provide a *sāwiya* for the followers, to hold the *dhikr* of the *tarīqā*, to celebrate its important occasions and to represent the Order at religious and official gatherings. Because of its financial and social obligations, recruitment to the *khilāfa* is often made from among the same social group in the community - that of the upper-middle class. The only differences between these *khalīfas* seems to be set by the number of their followers and the sizes and importance of their *sāwiyas*.

The Ismā'īliyya also vaguely used the terms *khalīfāt ab* (*khalīfa* of the father) and *khalīfāt maqām* (*khalīfa* of a position) to make a distinction between the head of the Order and all the others.

Accession to the post of *khalīfāt al-sajjāda* is by inheritance from father to the eldest living son. Thus the first *khalīfa*, al-Makkī, inherited the *sajjāda* of his father Sh. Ismā'īl, then passed it to his eldest son Ismā'īl al-Raḳīq who in turn handed it to his son, Mirghanī. Mirghanī, however, died without a son and the *khilāfa* after him went to Ismā'īl's next son in line, Tāj al-Asfiyā', and then to the latter's son, Al-Bakrī, the present *khalīfa*. The post of *khalīfāt al-maqām* is not inherited, although a number of families have, for a long time now, been associated with an Ismā'īliyya *khilāfa* which has been transmitted from one generation to the other. Appointment to the post is made by *khalīfāt al-sajjāda* either through his own choice, by recommendation from another *khalīfa* or from a group of followers electing one of them for the leadership of their *sāwiya*.

Under the *khalīfa* a number of lieutenants are also elected to help him in his religious and ever-increasing administrative responsibilities,

1. See pp.161-2, below for more details on investiture rituals.

but the indiscriminate application of the term *khalīfa* to any officer in the Order is now making it extremely difficult to distinguish between the various ranks which these lieutenants occupy. The Ismā'īliyya again vaguely use terms like *naqīb*, *murshid* and *wakīl* without specifying where exactly they fit in the hierarchy of the Order.

There are also some ranks which are not strictly part of the hierarchy of the *tariqa*, but have gained a great deal of importance. The most important of these is that of the *mandūb* (emissary) who is chosen by *khalīfat al-sajjāda* from amongst his closest associates to do a specific job - often connected with the collection of money for the Order or settling a problem among some followers. Because of its delicate nature, and since he represents the *khalīfa*, the status of *mandūb* has come to gain a great deal of respect and honour. The choice of the *mandūb* is mainly decided by the nature of the mission for which he is intended to be sent, and thus it is not of a permanent nature, though certain individuals have come to be associated with specific types of these missions - like collecting the *zakāt* and offerings for the Order in certain areas - and have come to be permanently known as *mandūbs*. Other similar ranks are the *munshidīn* (precentors), the *tabl* and *nōba* beaters and the standard bearers, for which members qualify by their personal abilities, such as a good voice, the ability to memorize the elegies, and the desire to do the job.

Though many of the rules and qualifications for the various ranks in the *tariqa* have not been clearly specified, there are, however, some generally accepted conventions for electing members to them. Any member chosen for a rank of leadership in the Order is expected to be of high spiritual quality and have some status in the society. He must have some knowledge of the Qur'an, the *Sunna* and other related Islamic

subjects. He should also be very well acquainted with the *dhikr* and rituals of the *ṭarīqa* and be able to read some Sufi books. His promotion in the ranks of the Order is primarily decided by his devotion and efforts for it. At every stage he has a dual responsibility of being able to recruit members and to lead them. He must be fit to perform both his religious obligation of guiding the followers in the way of their *shaykh*, and that of helping and assisting them in their worldly problems. He should also be able to portray the dual characteristics of dignity and humility: of being "the servant of the people", and at the same time their master.

Once appointed, a *khalīfa* is then not very easily removed. This, in addition to the physical distances between some of the *sāwīyas* and the headquarters in El-Obeid, could lead to disintegration in the Order, and a tendency towards independence among the *khalīfas*. This is counteracted on one hand by the fact that *khalīfāt al-sajjāda* retained some of the essential powers to himself which made the regional *khalīfas* and *sāwīyas* dependent for their existence upon his goodwill, while his post does not depend on theirs, he alone has the right of investiture and dismissal. On the other hand, unity and harmony are preserved in the Order through its practices and its rituals.

Practices and Rituals

The rituals and practices of the Ismā'īliyya also passed through some phases of development from a simple form of worshipping under Sh. Ismā'īl to more and more elaborate ceremonials and complex procedures as the gap widened, through time, between him and his followers.¹ Under

1. See Gilseman, *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt*, p.76 for a description of this relationship between the development of these rituals and the passage of time after the death of the founder of the Order. See also p.156, below.

Sh. Ismā'īl the Order was a very loose voluntary association in which the followers were integrated by spirit and aim rather than by any formal controls. Joining the Order was a very simple process and membership was obtained with the minimum of formalities. There was no bar to entry and no test which the aspirant had to pass in order to be a member. He was subject to no examination and was not required to show any special qualities to make him fit to join the group. He was only required to come forward with a true desire (*niyya sādiqa*), take the covenant (*al-'ahd*) and he was a member. After that, the amount of work he wanted to put into the Order was his own affair, and there was no formal pressure on him to participate in any of the rituals or occasions of the *ṭariqa*, which were, in any case, only very few and limited. The two most important ceremonies then were the initiation procedure (*al-bay'a*) and the *dhikr*.

As described in *al-'Uhūd*,¹ the *bay'a* is a very short and simple formality. The initiate is required to make a ritual ablution on Monday at noon and immediately start his first stage by making his intention (*niyya*) of repentance to God and genuine desire to redirect his life from self to God by following the path of Sh. Ismā'īl. He then starts his introductory *dhikr* which he should take with ease. On the following Wednesday at noon, he makes another ritual ablution, takes the covenant (*akhdh al-'ad*) and is then given the instructions of the *dhikr* by word of mouth (*al-talqīn*).

The *'ahd* is very similar, in word and structure to that of the Qādiriyya and other *ṭariqas* which came after it in the Sudan. After his ablution, the initiate prays two *rak'as* and then sits facing his *shaykh*

1. Sh. Ismā'īl, *al-'Uhūd al-Wāfiyā*, pp.12-3 and 30. See also Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders*, p.186 for a description of the Qādirī procedure.

as though they are both in the act of prayer with the latter facing the *qibla*. Then with their right hands clasped together (*musāfaha*) and their eyes closed, the *shaykh* dictates and the initiate follows him sentence by sentence, some specified litanies, Qur'ānic verses and then closes with the declaration of the Faith (*al-shahāda*) and *al-istighfar* (asking for God's forgiveness) and finally concluding with the prayer for the Prophet, and the *du'ā'* for the *shaykh*, the chain of his spiritual support, his family and his followers.

The *dhikr*, the central and most important function of the Order was also very simple and straightforward under Sh. Ismā'il. Purification of the soul and unity with God were sought through simple disciplined worship and the recitation of some specified invocations, Qur'ānic verses and *awrād* (phrase-patterned devotions) of the Ismā'iliyya without the use of any musical instruments, extraordinary rituals or special movements. The most important aspect of the *dhikr* was the *talqīn* (giving the secrets of the *dhikr* by word of mouth) and no aspirant could take the *dhikr* on his own without the permission and guidance of his *shaykh*; and if he did, he could only fall an easy prey to the wiles of the devil. It was important also to see to it that the acolyte was gradually initiated in the precepts and guided easily (*bi-hasab taqatih*),¹ until his soul was gradually fortified and strengthened.

The *dhikr* of the Order under Sh. Ismā'il was basically a personal duty and each individual follower was prescribed a specified *dhikr* task (*'adad*) in accordance with his own personal capacity. *Al-dhikr al-khāss* was the backbone of this practice and the *ḥalqa* (circle of *dhikr* devotees), though much recommended, was not an essential part of

1. See Sh. Ismā'il, *al-Uhūd al-Wafiya*, p.13.

the *dhikr*. *Al-dhikr al-khass*, as described in a number of Sh. Ismā'il's works,¹ is the repetition of some specially composed *awrād* a certain number of times,² and some extra prayers performed in addition to the five ritual ones. These devotional duties are divided amongst the seven days of the week and then amongst the different times of the days so that the worshipper may continuously be engaged in the *dhikr*. The main emphasis is laid on the spiritual exercise through the recitation of some Qur'ānic verses, invocation of God's names and special prayers devoted to the Prophet, rather than any ritual acts or movements. The worshipper is free to stand up, sit or even lie down while reciting, so long as he is continuously engaged in his *dhikr*. Only in *al-dhikr al-qalbī* (the heart recollection), which Sh. Ismā'il describes as the basic and most important *wird* of his *ṭarīqa*, are some special manners prescribed. This *dhikr al-qalbī* is not particularly different from the other *awrād* in words, although he suggests that it should be performed with more dignity and respect. It is performed after the '*Ishā'*', and although each one can still do it on his own, it is considered to be more beneficial if the followers sit for it in a *ḥalqa* where the *dhikr* is recited loudly and when mention is made of the Names of God, half of them audibly and the other half secretly. This should also be in such a manner that the pronunciation is made with a deep voice coming from inside the chest and with the Name clearly defined. Apart from the special emphasis on this extra respect for it and more attention, which is expressed in their sitting as though for prayer, and in closing their

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1. See Sh. Ismā'il, *al-Uhūd al-Wafīya*, *Rawdat al-Sālikīn*, *Miftāh bāb al-dukhūl*.
 2. See Sh. Ismā'il, *al-Uhūd al-Wafīya*, p.13, the worshipper may choose to perform *al-'adad al-asghar*, 2,000 times, *al-awsat*, 3,000, or *al-akbar*, 4,000 times.

eyes, imagining the presence of their *shaykh*, the *ḥalqa* has no additional practice or ritual.

The gradual withdrawal of Sh. Ismā'īl from active involvement in the practical affairs of the Order made it necessary for it to resort to some formal ceremonies and ritual behaviour to compensate for the increasing spiritual separation of the *shaykh* from the followers. Gilsenan suggests that there is, in fact, a relationship between the development of these ceremonials and rituals and the degree of the spiritual separation between the founding *shaykh* of the Order and his followers. Thus he describes how these ceremonials and rituals progressively grew in the Hāmidiyyā Shādhaliyya *ṭarīqa* of Egypt in relation to the growing spiritual distance between its founder, al-Shaykh Salama al-Radī, and his followers.¹

Following this analysis we may find a similar trend in the Ismā'īliyya *ṭarīqa*. Sh. Ismā'īl's retirement, towards the end of his life, from active participation in the Order, brought about new additions to his simple form of the *dhikr* even before his death. The attendance of the congregational *dhikr* was becoming obligatory and more formal with the recitation of Sh. Ismā'īl's poem *al-Shidda* becoming the most important function in it; and to omit that recitation could, in effect, invalidate the whole *dhikr*.²

An important development immediately after the death of Sh. Ismā'īl was the adoption of the *nōba* (drums) in the Ismā'īliyya *dhikr*.³ Gradually after that, the *dhikr* which with Ismā'īl was a calm devotional act of

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1. Gilsenan, *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt*, p.76.
 2. See *al-adab al-jaliyya*, ms. Sud.Govt. Archives, 1/82/1334.
 3. The introduction of the *nōba* is associated with a *karāma* of Sh. Ismā'īl's prophetic powers and another of al-Makkī's *baraka*. See Chapter III, p.44, above.

worship, became a popular means of arousing collective religious enthusiasm. The traditional form of the *dhikr* - i.e. the recitation of the *awrād* - continued in the *tariqa* as *dhikr al-awrād* to distinguish it from the popular one, *dhikr al-nōba*, and in both its variations the *dhikr* continued to be the most emphasized form of spiritual advancement in the *tariqa*. In its traditional form - i.e. *dhikr al-awrād* - not much has been added to the words or to the procedure of the *dhikr* after Sh. Ismā'il, but in its popular form - *dhikr al-nōba* - it came to be associated with a number of ceremonials and ritual acts. The *layliyyas* (*dhikr* on specific nights) became the most important function, and twice a week on every Sunday and Thursday evenings a *dhikr ḥalqa* is held in every *sāwiya* of the Ismā'īliyya. The performance of the *dhikr* in these *ḥalqas* borrowed very much from the Sudanese Qādirīyya *tariqa* omitting much of its overt emotionalism and movements. Usually after the evening prayer has been completed, the members sit around talking to each other or drinking tea before one of the officials of the Order asked them to arrange themselves for the *dhikr*. They then sit in a circle with the *nōba* in the middle and the chanters of canticles (*al-munshidīn*) nearest to the *khalīfa*. Before beating the *nōba* the *khalīfa* or, in his absence, *shaykh al-dhikr* opens the *layliyya* by reciting some verses of the Qur'ān then he proclaims *al-tawhīd*, "*lā ilāh illā Allāh*" in a rhythmic tone and the others follow him for some time. Then he rises up and begins the *dhikr* accompanied by the *nōba* starting very softly and slowly, then gradually increasing the tone of the *dhikr* and its movement until they

1. For a description of the Qadiriyya *dhikr*, see Trimmingham, *Sufi Orders*, p.206.

reach a peak, after which, with a sign of his hands, the leader slows the *dhikr* down gradually to a complete halt. Then the *munshidīn* take over with a religious poem or a Sufi hymn and continue for a short time before the *dhikr* is resumed again. The *dhikr* is finally concluded by the *shahada* and some verses of the Qur'ān.

Closely linked with the *dhikr* and the *ḥalqa* ceremonials is the procession which usually starts from the *qubba*, in El-Obeid, or from the *zāwiyya*, elsewhere, to celebrate an occasion outside the usual place specified for the regular *layliyya*. It consists mainly of two long rows with the *khalīfa* in the middle of the first row and the standard bearers and his senior officers close to him on both sides. Between the two rows are the drum beaters and the *munshidīn*. Since the procession reflects the outward appearance and the place of the Order in the society, much emphasis is laid on the appearance and behaviour of the members taking part in it. Proper and clean clothes should be worn and discipline in behaviour and step should be observed while in the procession. Much attention is given to this appearance and discipline so as to impress possible recruits to the Order. This procession started to gain importance particularly after the Mahdia, especially when it began to be seen as a true measure of the strength of the Order in society. In 1915, therefore, the *Ismā'īliyya* were angry when their procession was not given its proper place in the public celebrations of *Mawlid al-Nabī*.¹

Participation in the public celebrations of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad also became an important ceremony of the Order. Contributions

1. Sud.Govt. Archives (Khartoum) Intel.2/32/261-9 May 1915. The *Ismā'īliyya* complained to the Governor about the *Khatmiyya* being placed in the same position as that of the *Ismā'īliyya* in the procession contrary to the earlier arrangements prior to that year.

are collected from all members and as many of them as possible are expected to take part in the festivities and *dhikr* in the Ismā'īliyya tent (*khayma*) during the eleven days and particularly on the twelfth night of Rabī'ī in the Muslim calendar. The tent is nicely decorated and illuminated; *madiḥ* (praise-songs), *dhikr* and Qur'ān are continually chanted in it every evening until the celebrations are over.

An occasion which grew to be the most important ceremony of the Order is that of the *ḥawliyya*. The death dates of the founder of the Order, Sh. Ismā'īl and each of his successive *khalīfas* have been fixed to be celebrated every year in all the *sāwiyas* of the Order in addition to the public celebration in the central *sāwiya* in El-Obeid. Contributions to this central celebration are gathered from all members and as much as possible the followers are also expected to participate in the ceremonies themselves to give the occasion its grandeur and importance.

In all these occasions of popular *dhikr*, celebrations and *ḥawliyyas* serving food and tea have become an integral part of the ceremony. On a big occasion, usually one or more oxen and a number of rams are slain to feed the visitors. It is also an occasion on which all members of the family participate: women take part in preparing the food, while men and children take part in the festivities of the occasion.

The holding of such feasts and the presentation of great quantities of food in them, have always been considered an important social and religious duty for every reputable holy man or family to perform. Emphasizing this, Hillelson suggests that in the Sudan, "Three forms of action, pertaining to the affairs of this world are much lauded in the saints: to offer lavish hospitality to travellers and pilgrims, to

intercede....on behalf of the oppressed..., and to give asylum to fugitives..."¹ A good example of such lavishness is seen in the description of a Ramadān breakfast to which a famous saint, Ḥasan waḍ Ḥusūna was said to have entertained some guests: "It was served by 120 gorgeously dressed slave girls, adorned with precious jewels, carrying dishes of *kisra*. Each of these was followed by another still more gorgeously dressed, who carried a plate and after each of these followed another with a gourd. The food served to the narrator consisted of two cocks, and inside each cock there were two pigeons and two small birds".² Hillelson explains this in the light of a growing tendency amongst the holy men in the Funj Kingdom, to assert their position in the society as compared with the rulers. Thus he suggests that it was in keeping with the wealth and influence enjoyed by these men that they surrounded themselves with the outward semblance of royal state, ceremonies and pomp of the court.³

The holding of such feasts and the distribution of food should, however, be considered in the light of a broader religious and social context. The slaying of animals as sacrifice (*karāma*), and the preparation of great quantities of food for visitors, have come to acquire some social and religious connotations and to be associated with wider and more important meanings than mere hospitality and socialization.⁴ The parallel between the duty of feeding the visitors of a holy man or his shrine, and that of feeding the pilgrimage in Mecca (*al-riḥāda*), can

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1. See S. Hillelson, "Tabaqat Wad Dayf Allah", *S.N.R.*, VI, 1, 1923, p.228.
 2. *Ibid.*, p.230.
 3. *Ibid.*, p.229.
 4. See D.B. MacDonald, "Karāma", *E.I.*, Vol.II, part 2.

hardly be overlooked. *Al-rifāda* was a highly regarded honour reserved for Quraysh and could only be performed by Banī Hāshim, the ancestors of the Prophet. No book of the *Sīra* would fail to mention this and explain how Hāshim, the Prophet's grandfather, got his name from the action of breaking the bread (*hasham*) for the preparation of food.¹

Apart from their religious significance and their social functions as opportunities when friends and neighbours could meet, these celebrations also served the purpose of gathering the followers together and giving the *khalīfa* a chance to meet his officers and discuss with them the affairs of the *ṭarīqa* in their different regions. The increasing number of *hawliyyas* and the tendency of each *hōsh* (branch of the holy family) to celebrate the *hawliyya* of its head, did not lead to disintegration in the Order, since the main emphasis is still laid on the central *hawliyyas* which are celebrated by the *khalīfat al-sajjāda* in El-Obeid.

An important development also after the death of Sh. Ismā'īl is the ceremony of investiture in the *khilāfa*. The only *khalīfa* appointed by Ismā'īl was his son al-Makkī, for whom he did not have any ceremony. As described in *al-nash'a*, he only proclaimed that decision in front of legal witnesses (*shuhūd 'udūl*) and put it in a written document which was signed by him in front of those witnesses. This was not very different

1. The most commonly used term is *wa summi Hāshim la'nnaḥu hasham al-tharīd*,

He was said to have made the *tharīd* by mixing broken bread with cooked meat and rice. It is significant to note that only this exact mixture is presented on Sudanese religious occasions and is called the *fatta*. See Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Mukhtasar sīrat al-Rasūl*.

2. See *al-nash'a* (obituary of Sh. Ismā'īl), ms. Sud.Govt. Archives, 1/82/1310.

from the procedure of the *ijāza*,¹ which was currently in use at that time amongst the Sufis and probably very much in line with that of Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Mirghanī to Ismā'īl himself. In fact, the expression used to describe the procedure in both is the same.² After the death of Sh. Ismā'īl, and especially during the second phase of al-Makkī's *khilāfa*, a number of new *khalīfas* were appointed. Since the appointments were not made by the founding saint himself, and in order to give the act an air of respect and some degree of solemnity, the investiture of a new *khalīfa* became a more elaborate ceremony with its special rituals. A special *dhikr* is made for the occasion in which the new *khalīfa* swears obedience to the *shaykh* (*akhdh al-bay'a*) and a special turban is also brought to be wound by *Khalīfat al-Sajjāda* around the head of the appointed *khalīfa*. The new *khalīfa* is also required to show his ability to lead the followers by leading the *dhikr* in the presence of *Khalīfat al-Sajjāda*. In the case of the initiation of a new *sāwiya* a special *dhikr* is also performed led by its new *khalīfā* in front of *Khalīfāt al-Khulafā'* in the region or in front of the *Khalīfāt al-Sajjāda* himself, if possible.

On the whole, these ceremonial practices and rituals of the Ismā'īliyya are not strikingly different from the other Sudanese Sufī orders, all of which have borrowed, in varying degrees, from the Qādiriyya in this respect. But, as they are, in some of the details, these ceremonials and practices have developed to give the Ismā'īliyya its own personality and through conformity to them, the *tariqa* maintained some uniformity and cohesion.

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1. For more details on this procedure see Izz al-Dīn al Amīn, "Ijāzāt 'ulamā' qaryat Kutrānj", *BSS*, No.2, Vol.11, April 1971, pp.80-107.
 2. The expression used in both is, "Wa dhālik bi-muqtaḍa mukataba 'alayhā Khitmuḥ amām shuhūd 'Udūl". See *al-Nash'a*, Sudanese Govt. Archives (Khartoum), 1/82/1310.

To conclude, the religious association over which Sh. Ismā'īl presided was, until his death, primarily a group of *ḥūrān* (disciples) under the guidance of their *faqīh*, hoping through his mediation to find their way to salvation. In this association they maintained a great deal of equality in status, easiness in their relationship with Sh. Ismā'īl, and with each other, and simplicity in the methods of their worship. The geographical and numerical expansion of this group and the historical phases through which it passed, brought about some changes in these direct and easy relationships, and also to the simple form of worship. The change reflected mainly three stages of development: an early stage in which there was a gradual expansion of the Order and a gradual development in its structure and rituals; followed by a second phase after the Mahdia in which there was a need for change, which entailed a more dramatic development in these structures and rituals; then a third stage, after the death of al-Makkī, which saw conflicts and divisions in the Order and a decline in its structures and ceremonials. By 1914, the Order to which Sh. Ismā'īl had given his name, though still keeping much of its original practices and forms of worship, had greatly changed, both in form and practice.

To close this account on the Ismā'īliyya, reference may be made to a pattern which has been observed about Sudanese holy families and their revival.¹ This account shows how one of these families whose reputation and fame were fading away, had been revived under a new name and a new leadership. Through the efforts of Sh. Ismā'īl and his new *tarīqa*, the family of Bushāra al-Gharbāwi, which once thrived in Dongola, is now being revived under the name of the Ismā'īliyya. The process started by Sh. Ismā'īl continued after him to give the family more reputation under one of his grandsons - al-Azharī, thus starting a new branch for it.

The *tarīqa* which Sh. Ismā'īl had established and the books he had written, though not original in ideas and adding very little to the Sufi thought, were, in fact, very useful and effective in their local setting. Their impact on the people of Kordofan is felt up to the present day.² Of particular importance is the effect of his *tarīqa* in the process of Islamization in the Nūba mountains. It proved more attractive and appealing to the Nūba, and through it more people were converted to Islam than through the traditional methods of teaching in the *Khalwas* or the *jihād* of Abū Sufiyya. In many parts of these Nūba mountains, and especially in the Dalanj and Kadugli areas, the Ismā'īliyya now claims the greatest number of followers.

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1. P.M. Holt, "Holy families", *Princeton N.E. Papers*, No.4, 1967, p.10.
 2. Many of his contemporaries seem to have been impressed by the quantity and quality of his writings. Of those was a Qādī of Kordofan Province who praised Sh. Ismā'īl in a long poem in which he mentioned his endowment with unequalled abilities in this respect: see, Shuqair *Ta'rīkh*, I, 139. أبدى ما لم يبدى من قدي
يا صديقه كلكم التقيل Trimingham, also accepting this praise, indicated that seven of his books and tracts have been printed; see Trimingham, *Islām*, p.235.

GLOSSARY OF ARABIC AND COLLOQUIAL SUDANESE TERMS

<i>A'ajim</i> (sing. <i>A'jamī</i>)	Unable to speak Arabic; of non-Arab origins: 47.
<i>Abkār</i> (sing. <i>Bikr</i>)	First born; <i>Abkār al-Mahdī</i> - the first followers of the Mahdi: 72.
<i>Ādāb</i>	Manners, etiquette, observances, usages: 130.
'Adad	Specified number of times: 154. <i>al-'adad al'aṣghar</i> - the smaller number <i>al-'adad al-awsaṭ</i> - the medium number <i>al-'adad al-akbar</i> - the greater number
'Ādat (sing. 'Āda)	Lit., customs - taboos: 47, 48.
<i>Adhkār</i>	See <i>dhikr</i> : 61.
'Ahd	Covenant: 147, 153.
<i>Alqāb</i> (sing. <i>laqab</i>)	Titles of distinction and honour: 83.
<i>Anāshīd</i>	Canticles: 148.
<i>Al-'aqā'id</i> (sing. 'aqīda)	The creeds: 43n.
Asās	Lit. the foundation = the basic litanies: 62.
'Asīda	Sorghum porridge: 98.
<i>Awliyā'</i> (sing. <i>walī</i>)	Saints, protégés of God: 93.
<i>Awrad</i> (sing. <i>wird</i>)	Phrase-patterned devotions, litanies: 59, 61, 63, 67, 154, 155, 157.
<i>Bāba</i>	Lit. father - title of respect: 47.
<i>Bid'a</i>	Innovation which amounts to heresy: 124.
<i>Baraka</i>	Benediction, blessing or holiness: 38(n), 42, 46, 47, 48, 82, 90, 93, 128, 134, 138, 140, 141, 148.
<i>Bay'a</i>	Oath of allegiance: 87, 88, 153. <i>akhdh al-bay'a</i> - took the oath of allegiance: 162.
<i>Bayt al-māl</i>	The treasury in an Islamic state: 118.

- Bihāsab tāqatih* According to his ability: 154.
- Dā'ī* Propagandist: 142.
- Dā'ira* Lit. circle - body which administers the finances of a big family and runs its commercial activities: 121.
- Dāmin* Guarantor: 117.
- Darb al-nōba* Beating the drum for the *dhikr*: 82, 83.
- Darīh* Shrine of a saint: 148.
- Dhikr* A spiritual exercise designed to render God's presence in one's being: 61; the rhythmical repetition of God's names to attain spiritual realization: 82, 143, 148, 150, 152, 153-59, 162; *dhikr al-awrad* - the daily set repetition of phrase-patterned devotions: 157; *dhikr al-noba* - the popular communal exercise of *dhikr* accompanied by the beating of the drums: 157; *al-dhikr al-qalbi* - the heart recollection: 62, 155; *al-dhikr al-khass* - the private or elected *dhikr*: 154, 155.
- Dīwān* (i) Register of saints: 55;
(ii) Reception room: 144;
(iii) Book of poetic works, *dīwān jamī'* *al-shathat* - the anthology of ecstatic utterances: 48n.
- Du'ā'* Prayer, supplication: 154.
- Dura* Sorghum: 18.
- Faqīh [faqīr, faki]* Traditional Qur'ānic teacher in a small *khalwa*, a local religious man (to be distinguished from *faqīh* - one who is trained in *fiqh*, i.e. canonical system: 12, 13, 15, 26, 33, 34, 38, 41, 43, 51-4, 63, 65, 69-72, 75, 78-82, 86, 89-92, 103, 104, 112, 117, 118, 135, 138, 163.
- Al-Fath al-Rabbānī* The Divine revelation: 56n.
- Fatta* A mixture of rice, bread, lamb broth and some meat: 161n.
- Fiqh* Religious law, canonical system: 51, 53.

<i>Al-Gharb</i>	The west: 46.
<i>Ḥadrāt</i> (sing. <i>ḥadra</i>)	Lit. Presence - colloquia of saints: 55.
<i>Ḥalqa</i>	Circle of <i>dhikr</i> devotees: 154-8.
<i>Ḥaris</i>	Guard: 140, 148.
<i>Hasham</i>	Broke into piece: 161n.
<i>Ḥāshiya</i>	Glossary: 53.
<i>Ḥawliyya</i>	Anniversary of a saint's death: 119, 138, 147, 159, 161.
<i>Ḥijāb</i>	Amulet: 103.
<i>Ḥirān</i> (sing. <i>ḥuwār</i>)	Disciples: 118, 135, 162.
<i>Ijāza</i>	Licence testifying to the holder's link with a certain <i>shaykh</i> , <i>madhhab</i> or <i>ṭarīqa</i> : 162.
<i>Ikhtisār</i>	Abridgment: 53.
<i>'Ilm</i>	Knowledge, science; <i>'ilm ladunī</i> - knowledge which is inspired into the hearts of saints directly from God: 52; <i>'ilm al-ḥadīth</i> - the art of investigating the authenticity of the Traditions of the Prophet and the chain of witnesses who reported them: 91.
<i>Imām</i>	Leader in public prayer: 91, 97, 138; <i>imām al-'asr</i> - the spiritual leader of the age: 48; <i>imām al-Muslimīn</i> - the spiritual and temporal leader of the Muslims: 71.
<i>Al-'Ishā'</i>	The night ritual prayer: 155.
<i>Istighfār</i>	Asking forgiveness from God, the repetition of the formula, "I ask forgiveness of God": 154.
<i>Jallāba</i>	A party or group of traders, pedlars; in the Southern and the Western Sudan - traders of riverain origins, especially Ja'aliyyin: 73, 77, 78.
<i>Jihād</i>	Holy war: 74, 164. <i>jihad al-nafs</i> - earnest striving with the carnal soul: 123.

- Jihādīyya* Mercenaries of black origin: 31, 77.
- Al-Jizya* The poll-tax levied on the People of the Book (the Christians and Jews) in a Muslim state: 72.
- Karāma* (i) Grace, miracle, the gift of performing wonders and miracles: 41, 48, 57, 58, 83n.
(ii) Sacrifice: 160.
- Khalā'* Open space: 19.
- Khalīfa* Deputy, the leader of a religious order or a branch of it: 38n, 59, 63, 84, 99n, 112, 117, 120, 125, 126, 127, 136, 137, 140, 142, 143, 145, 147, 149, 150, 152, 157-9, 161, 162;
Khalīfat Rasūl Allāh - the successor of the Apostle of God: 71;
Khalīfat abb - the successor to the leadership of an order after his father: 150;
Khalīfat maqām - representative of the head of the order: 151;
Khalīfat al-sajjāda - the inheritor of the prayer-mat of the founder of the order: 150, 152, 161, 162;
al-Khalīfa al-Kabīr - the grand *Khalīfa*: 149;
Khalīfat al-Khulafā' - the most senior *Khalīfa*: 149, 162.
- Khalwa* (i) Small Islamic school, usually in rural areas, where Qur'ān, Arabic and such related subjects are taught: 51, 54, 63, 65, 81, 82, 86, 89, 93, 104, 164;
(ii) Retreat, seclusion, place of retreat or seclusion for the purpose of worshipping: 59, 61, 63, 64;
(iii) Lodge: 120, 121, 144.
- Khayma* Tent: 158.
- Khilāfa* Succession to the leadership of the order or the office of representative of the head of the order: 74, 139, 145, 146, 150, 161, 162.
- Kisra* Baked flat wafers made of sorghum flour: 160.
- Khōr* Seasonal stream: 18.

<i>Laylat al-Qadr</i>	The Night of Power: 60.
<i>Layliyya</i>	Session of <i>dhikr</i> on certain specified nights; term by which these sessions are known in some orders: 157, 158.
<i>Madad</i>	Help, support: 125.
<i>Madhhab</i> (pl. <i>madhahib</i>)	Legal school of thought in Sunnī Islam: 53n, 71, 91n.
<i>Madīh</i>	Praise songs: 159.
<i>Ma'mūr</i>	An administrative officer: 102, 103.
<i>Mandūb</i>	Emissary: 151.
<i>Maratib</i>	Stages: 67n, 135.
<i>Mawlid</i>	Birth anniversary: 110, 119, 138; <i>Mawlid al-Nabī</i> - the celebrations in the first twelve nights of Rabī' I in the Muslim calendar in honour of the birth of the Prophet: 158.
<i>Mudīr</i>	Governor: 117; <i>Mudīriyya</i> - Province: 16.
<i>Muftī</i>	A canon lawyer authorized to promulgate a <i>fatwa</i> or a formal legal opinion on religious matters: 71, 81n, 93, 128, 131.
<i>Mujaddid</i>	Reformer, innovator, renewer: 46, 92.
<i>Mukhtasar</i>	Abridged: 53.
<i>Al-Munājāh</i>	Meditation: 62.
<i>Munshidīn</i>	Precentors, chanters of canticles: 151, 157, 158.
<i>Muqaddima</i>	Introduction: 61.
<i>Murīd</i>	An aspirant, a novice: 61.
<i>Murshid</i>	Director: 55, 60, 135, 136, 151.
<i>Musāfaha</i>	Handclasp: 154.
<i>Nasab</i>	Genealogy, pedigree: 90, 91.
<i>Nisba</i>	Epithet of origin, affiliation: 93.

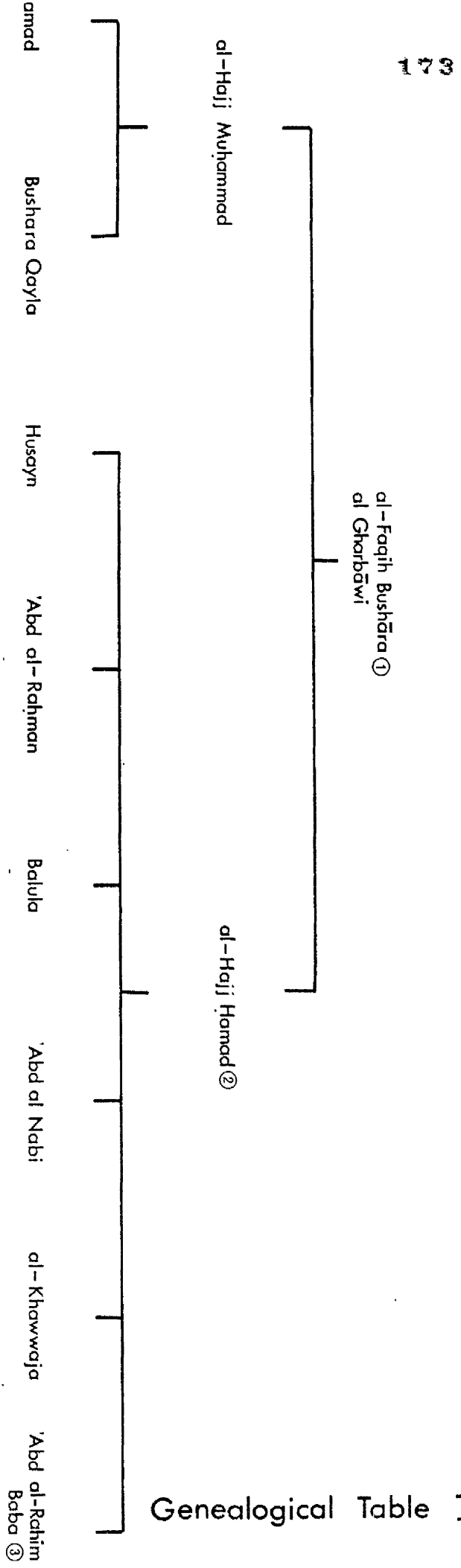
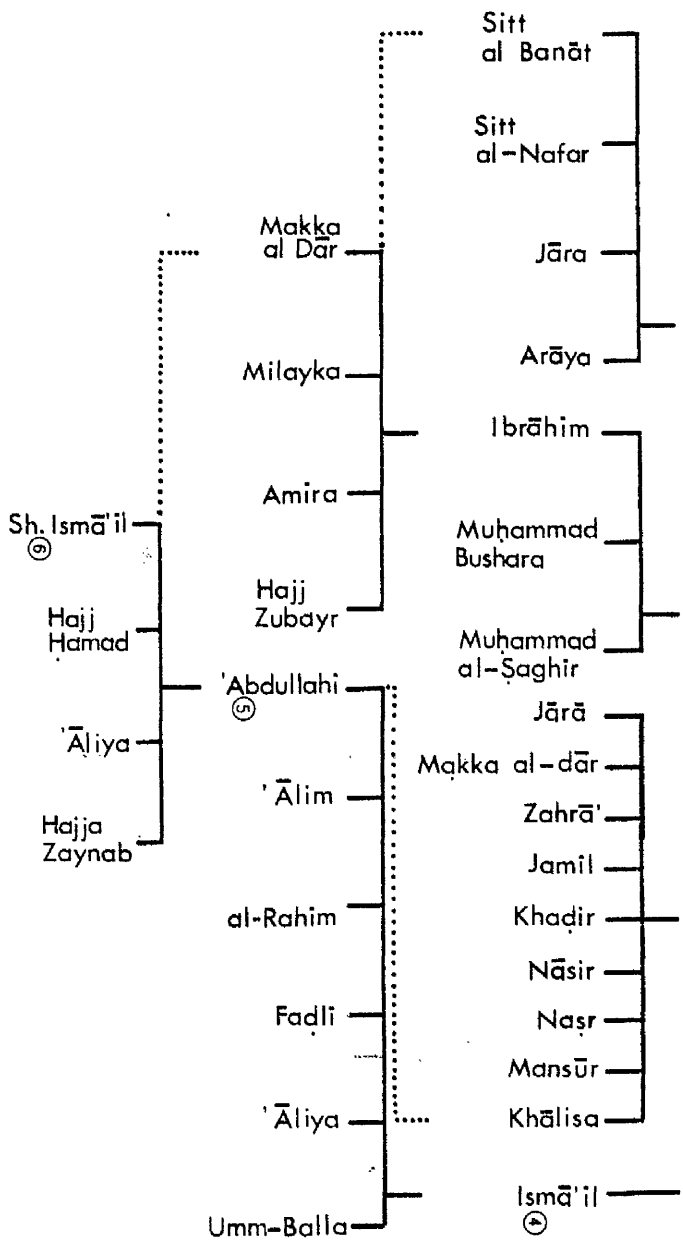
<i>Niyya Ṣādiqa</i>	True intention, genuine desire: 153.
<i>Al-Nōba</i>	The drum: 82, 83, 148, ¹⁴⁹ 151, 156, 157.
<i>Nudhūr</i> (sing. <i>nadhīr</i>)	Fulfilment of conditional vows, offerings: 121.
<i>Qādī</i>	A Muslim judge: 71, 81n, 131; <i>Qādī al-Islām</i> (in the Mahdia) - the chief judge of the grand court in Omdurman: 96.
<i>Qibla</i>	The direction which a worshipper faces while in ritual prayer - always towards Mecca: 154.
<i>Qubba</i>	Domed tomb of a saint: 119, 125, 138, 140, 144, 148, 158.
<i>Rak'a</i>	The cycle of words and acts surrounding a prostration in ritual prayer: 62.
<i>Al-Rīfāda</i>	The honourable duty of feeding the pilgrims of Mecca: 160, 161.
<i>Risāla</i>	Tract: 43n, 53.
<i>Saj'</i>	Rhyming: 65.
<i>Sanad</i>	Chain of spiritual support: 61.
<i>Al-Shabāb</i>	Lit. the youth - a para-military organization for the youths of the <i>tariqa</i> : 126, 146.
<i>Al-Shafa'a</i>	To intercede on behalf of the oppressed: 87, 103.
<i>Al-Shahāda</i>	Testimony, to witness, the act of professing the Islamic faith by declaring "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Prophet of God": 154, 158.
<i>Sharh</i>	Explanation, commentary: 53.
<i>Sharī'a</i>	The body of formally established Islamic law based primarily on God's commandments found in the Qur'ān and Traditions: 71, 91, 92, 96, 117, 118.
<i>Sharīfī</i>	One who claims descent from the Prophet Muhammad: 43.

<i>Shaykh</i>	Lit. old man: (i) head of an Arab family, clan, tribe or village: 13, 18, 78, 85, 86, 89, 113; (ii) head of a religious order; holy man: 15, 49, 51, 53n, 56, 58, 66, 71, 93, 98, 105, 107, 108, 115, 117, 119, 135, 146, 147, 152, 156; (iii) a form of respectful address: 101, 121.
<i>Shuhūd 'udūl</i>	Legal witnesses: 161.
<i>Silsila</i>	Chain of spiritual descent: 61.
<i>Al-Sīra</i>	The Biography of the Prophet: 48n, 161.
<i>Sifr al-walā'</i>	The declaration of loyalty: 130n, 131.
<i>Sunna</i>	Custom, tradition of custom, saying or act of the Prophet Muhammad: 151.
<i>Tabl</i>	Kettle drum: 151.
<i>Al-Tahajjud</i>	The all-night prayer: 62.
<i>Takiyya</i>	A lodge for the poor and vagrant <i>faqīhs</i> , maintained by charitable donations: 121.
<i>Taqīn</i>	Teaching the secrets of the <i>dhikr</i> by word of mouth: 153, 154.
<i>Taqiyya</i>	Head cap: 121.
<i>Tār</i>	Flew away: 39.
<i>Tarīqa</i>	A way, Sufi path, religious order: <i>passim</i> throughout.
<i>Al-Tawassul</i>	Supplication: 62.
<i>Tawhīd</i>	Testimony of the unity and unicity of God: 53.
<i>Tharīd</i>	Food composed of bread, rice, broth and meat mixed together: 161n.
' <i>Ulamā'</i> (sing. ' <i>ālim</i>)	Muslim theologians and scholars who are concerned and occupied with the interpretation of the canonical systems as derived from a close study and a strict adherence to the Qur'an and Hadīth: 33, 43, 71, 72, 81, 82, 91, 93, 94, 96, 98, 106; ' <i>Ulamā' al-rusūm</i> = scholars of: 67.

' <i>U</i> lūm	See ' <i>i</i> lm: 46.
Umma	Community: 71.
Al- <i>U</i> stādh	The teacher: 46, 147.
<i>U</i> sūl	Roots, fundamental principles: 51.
<i>W</i> ādī	Valley: 18.
<i>W</i> akīl	Custodian, officer in a religious order: 151.
<i>W</i> alī	A saint, a protégé of God: 48, 134, 140.
<i>W</i> asāta	Mediation, arbitration, go-between: 87.
<i>Z</i> akāt	Alms - tax paid by every capable Muslim as a religious duty; or offerings to the poor. It is used for charitable or religious purposes: 118, 151.
Al- <i>Z</i> amān	The time, the age: 46.
<i>Z</i> āwiya	Lit. corner: (i) centre for the religious activities of a <i>tarīqa</i> ; smaller and distinct from the mosque: 116, 117, 143, 144, 145, 150, 152, 157, 159, 162; (ii) lodge: 120, 121.
<i>Z</i> iyārāt	(i) Pilgrimage to the shrine of a saint as distinct from <i>Hajj</i> , pilgrimage to Mecca: 138; (ii) pious gifts of pilgrims: 119.

APPENDIX A

- paternal descent
- maternal descent
- ⑥ Sh. Ismā'il's line of descent

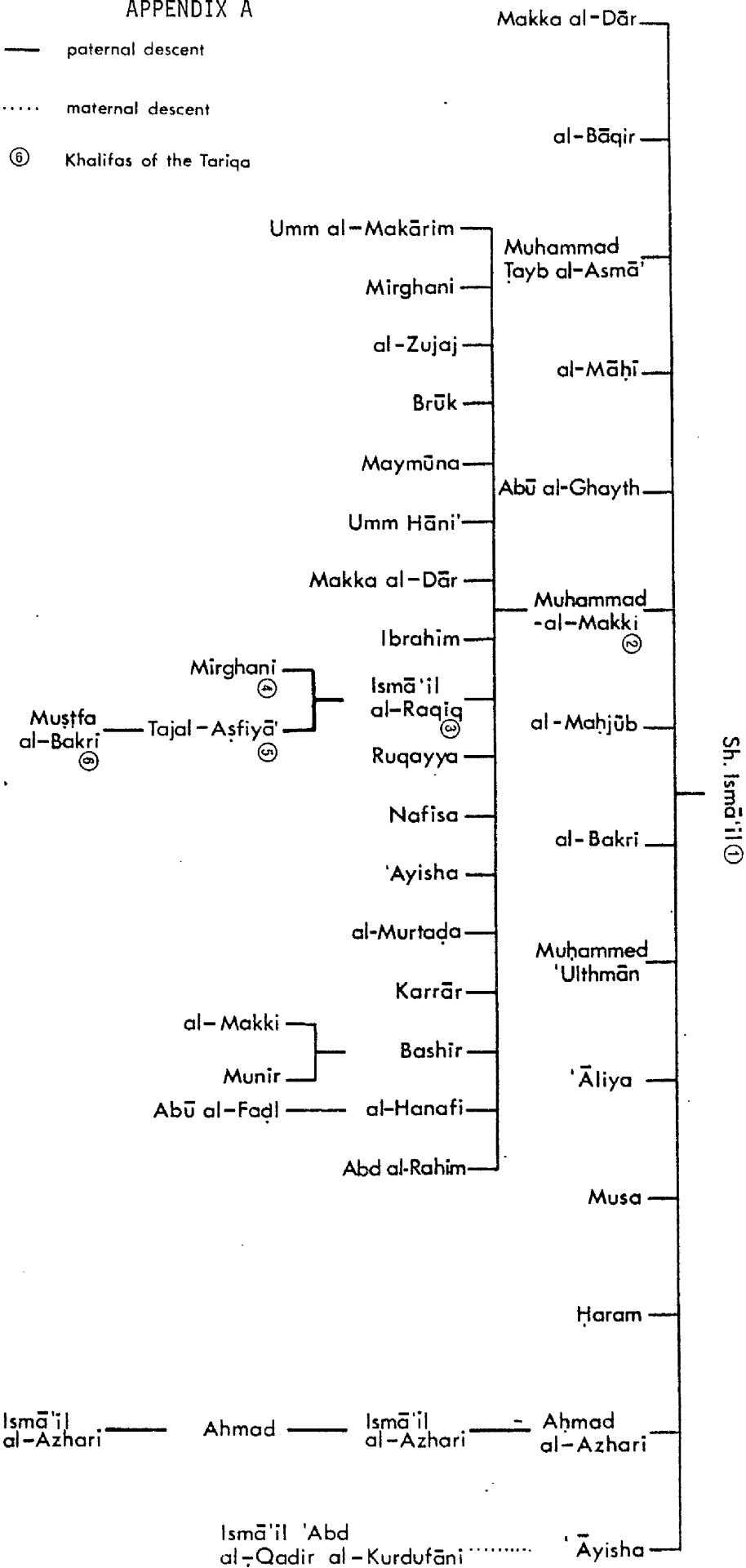


Genealogical Table I

— paternal descent

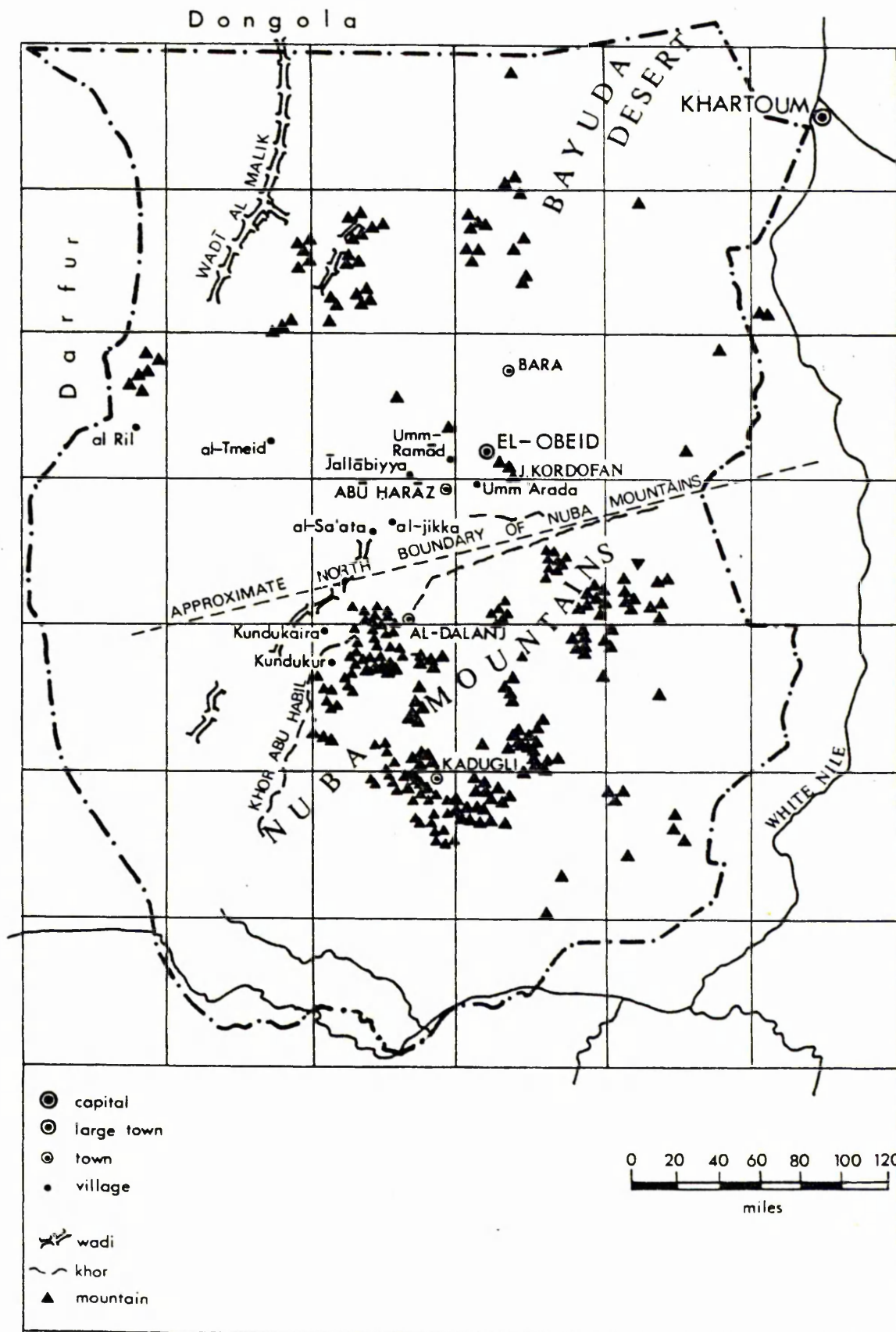
..... maternal descent

⊙ Khalifas of the Tariqa



Genealogical Table II.

Appendix B



Kordofan Province.

THE WORKS OF SH. ISMĀ'IL IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

At least nine of Sh. Ismā'il's works, shown here with a star * against each, have been published. The rest are still in manuscript in the hands of various members of his family. Some of these have been acquired by the Sudanese Government Archive (Khartoum), and are kept mainly under the classification 1/83/1308-1334 and 1/15/187-189.

It is very difficult to make a comprehensive list of these works now since those who keep them are very reluctant to part with them. This list has been compiled mainly from (a) *al-nash'a* (the obituary of Sh. Ismā'il, Sudanese Government Archives (Khartoum), 1/82/1310; (b) an incomplete and often erroneous list in Sh. Ismā'il's *Mashāriq Shumūs al-Anwār* (Beirut, 1973); and (c) his *al-'Uhūd al-wāfiya* (Khartoum, undated).

1237 (1821/2)

1. Kitāb: (book) *Muzīl al-iltibas fī ba'd 'ayn al-taslīm lihā'ulā'i al-nas.*
2. Kitāb: *al-wāridāt al-laduniya fī la'ib al-'ārifīn bi'l-dunya al-daniya.*
3. Kitāb: *al-sirāt al-mustaqīm ilā ḥadrat al-'alī al-'azīm.*
4. Kitāb: *Muḥyāt al-tullāb fī tafsīr qawlihim 'ilm al-zāhir hijāb.*
5. Kitāb: *Tahdhīr al-sālikīn fī akl al-dunya bi'l-dīn.*
6. Kitāb: *al-qawl al-muḥaq fī al-nahy 'an makhāfat al-khalq.*
7. Kitāb: *'Azīs al-murām fī lafẓat min tawhīd al-aqwām.*
8. Kitāb: *Sirāj al-salām fī fawa'id al-qiyām.*
9. Kitāb: *Tabyīn al-ḥaqīqa fī'l-ijtimā' 'ala ta'ām al-'aqeiqa.*
10. Kitāb: *Takhlīs al-ikhwān min hulūl al-khusrān.*

1238 (1822/23)

11. Kitāb: *Tahrīd al-ahbāb 'ala luzūm al-bāb.*
12. Risāla (tract): *'Ayn al-yaqīn fī nush al-murīdīn.*
13. Risāla: *Lisān al-Kamāl fī adhwāq al-rijāl.*

1239 (1823/24)

14. *al-Urjūza* (entitled) *al-farīda al-manzūma fī masā'il al-'aqīda* (in verse).
15. *al-Tawassul* (supplication) (entitled): *al-jawāhir al-fākhira fī qadā hawā'jjal-dunya wa'l-ākhirā.*
16. *al-Sharh* (explanation) (entitled): *al-fuyūdat al-zāhira fī hall alfāz al-jawāhir al-fakhira.*
17. Risāla: *al-lam' al-bādī 'an kashf haqīqat al-khatim wa'l imām al-hādī.*
18. Kitāb: *Jāmi' ma'ānī al-kalim wa wajiz al-nazm fī ma'rifat sayyidī al-imām al-mahdī wa'l-khatim.*
19. *Qasīda* (poem): *fī madh sādātina al-qawm yasil al-sālik biha 'ala dhīrwat al-rawm.*
20. Risāla: *Kayfiyyat intizām al-ri'āsa li'abnā' al-dunya ahl al-siyāsa.*
21. Risāla: *al-bayān al-kāmil fī ma'rifat al-kawkab al-fadil al-imām al-Mahdī wa'l-khatim al-Shāmī li asrar al-tāli' wa'l-nāzil.*
22. Risāla: *Tuhfat al-a'yān fī murāsalat al-ikhwān.*
23. *Al-ijāza al-Kubra fī al-tarīqa al-Ismā'īliyya al-fukhra.*

1240 (1824/25)

- *24 *Al-mawlid* (entitled): *al-wāridat al-multanasa min al-hadrāt al-muqaddasa.*
25. Risāla: *Muzīl al-ishkāl fī hall 'aqā'id al-'amāl.*
26. Risāla: *Munqidhat al-'uqalā' 'an ta'khīr al-sadaqa lil-mayyit wa'l-du'a.*
27. *Qasīda*: *al-jawāhir al-zakiyya fī madh sayyidna Muḥamad Khayr al-bariyya*

1241 (1825/26)

28. Kitāb: *Sharh al-urjūza al-musammāh bi'l-farīda al-manzuma fī masā'il al-'aqīda.*

1242 (1826/27)

29. Kitāb: *Rahmat al-wahhāb fī tahdhīb al-ahbāb.*
30. Kitāb: *Iyqāh al-maqāl fī nahy al-qawm 'an al-jam' fī al-akhdh bayn al-rijāl.*
31. Kitāb: *Wasīyyat al-muhibbīn fī darar al-ri'āsa li'l-sālikīn.*
32. Tafsīr: Verses "Wa nufikh fī al-sūr fasu'iq man fī al-samāwāt was man fī al-ard..." up to the end of the Sura (Qur'ān

1254 (1838-39)

33. Risāla: *Al-Kawkab al-Sha'il fī tayqīz al-qāfī 'an dunyāh al-balād al-ghāfil.*
34. Kitāb: *Al-Sahm al-Kharrāq liman i'tarad ahwāl awliyā' al-malik al-Khallāq.*

1260 (1844)

- *35. *Al-'Uhūd al-wāfiya al-jaliyya fī kayfiyyat Sifat al-tarīqa al-Ismā'īliyya.*
- *36. *Al-Kayra* (entitled): *Kitāb al-buyūt wa'l-dawā'ir fī al-Kashf 'an ma fī al-damā'ir.*

1261 (1845)

37. Risāla: *Muwaddihāt al-murām fī daf' ma yatawahham fīh ba'd al-'awām.*
38. *Khutbat 'Īd al-fitr.*
39. *Khutbat 'Īd al-nahr.*
40. *Khutbat al-istisqā'*

1261 (1845) (cont'd)

- *41. Kitāb: *Mashāriq Shumūs al-awwār wa maghārib hissiha fī man'naway 'uyūn al-'Ulūm wa'l-asrār.*
- *42. Kitāb: *Miftāh bāb al-dakhūl fī hadrat Allāh wa'l-Rasūl.*
- *43. Kitāb: *Rawdat al-sālikīn wa minhāt ahl al-dunya wa'l-dīn.*
44. Kitāb: *Dīwān al-shathāt*
45. Kitāb: *Rūh takhlīs al-mu'minīn 'an sulūk tariq al-mukhsirīn.*

1265 (1848/49)

- *46. *Madīh* (entitled): *Hadā'iq al-mushtāq fī madh habīb al-Khallāq.*
47. *Du'ā' Khatm al-Qur'an* (in prose and poetry).

Undated

- *48. Kitāb: *Al-barq al-sātl'.*
- *49. Kitāb: *Minhat al-wahhāb fī madhal-nabi al-awwāb.*
50. His famous odes entitled *al-Shidda* and *al-Munfarīja*.

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General Notes

- I. In placing the names of writers who have works both in Arabic and English, two main difficulties have been encountered:
- a) When the writer has a compounded surname, such as 'Abbās Ibrahim *Muḥammad* 'Alī should he be placed under M or A?
 - b) When the writer has used two different forms of his name, e.g. 'Uthmān Sīd Ahmad Ismā'il for works in Arabic, and O.S.A. Ismail for those in English, should he appear under U, O or I?
- To avoid any confusion, we stuck to the Arabic form with the writer placed under his first name, the name rigorously transliterated and the English form shown in brackets where necessary. Therefore, 'Uthmān Sīd Ahmad will appear under U as follows: 'Uthmān Sīd Ahmad Ismā'il (O.S.A. Ismail).
- II. Arabic names to which the definitive article al- is prefixed, will be found under their initial letter; thus al-Makkī will appear under the letter M.
- III. The b. between two names stands for ibn (son of).

II. Manuscripts and Archival Material, Comprising

- a) The works of Sh. Ismā'īl (see separate list, Appendix C) and other documents directly related to the Ismā'īliyya, classified in Sudan Government Archives (Khartoum) under Miscellaneous as follows:-
- 1/82/1308 Al-Makkī's petition to the *ma'mūr* of Omdurman in 1898
- 1/82/1309 The *sanad* and the *ijāza* of the *ṭarīqa*
- 1/82/1310 *Al-Nash'a* (the obituary of Sh. Ismā'īl)
- 1/82/1311 Sh. Ismā'īl, *Rahmat al-Wahhāb*
- 1/82/1312 Sh. Ismā'īl, *al-Farīda al-manzūma*
- 1/82/1313 Anonymous author, A study of the metres of Arabic poetry
- 1/82/1314 Sh. Ismā'īl, *al-Sahm al-Sharraḡ*
- 1/82/1315 Sh. Ismā'īl, *al-'Uḡūd al-wāfiya*
- 1/82/1316 Al-Makkī ??, *al-Nafā'ih al-'anbariyya fī al-Khutab al-minbariyya*
- 1/82/1317 Sh. Ismā'īl, *al-Fuyūḡāt al-zāhira*
- 1/82/1318 Sh. Ismā'īl, *Muwāḡḡihat al-murām*
- 1/82/1319 Sh. Ismā'īl, *Takhlīs al-ikhwān*
- 1/82/1320 Sh. Ismā'īl, *Du'ā' Khatm al-Qur'ān*
- 1/82/1321 *Al-Nash'a al-Makkiyya* (the obituary of al-Makkī)
- 1/82/1322 Sh. Ismā'īl, *Rahmat al-Wahhāb* (another copy)
- 1/82/1323 The *ādāb* (manners and etiquette) of the *ṭarīqa*
- 1/82/1324 Sh. Ismā'īl, *Wasiyyat al-muhibbīn*
- 1/82/1325 A tract written in praise of Sh. Ismā'īl - anonymous author
- 1/82/1326 A poem by al-Makkī
- 1/82/1327 Copies of some writings by the famous mystic al-Junayd.
- 1/82/1328 Poem in praise of Sh. Ismā'īl by his son, al-Bāqir.
- 1/82/1329 Copies of some works in
- 1/82/1330 Poem by al-Makkī
- 1/82/1331 Al-Makkī, *al-aḡādīth al-saniyya fī al-ḡath wa'l-tarḡīb fī al-ṭarīqa al-Ismā'īliyya*
- 1/82/1332 Letters from Sultan 'Alī Dīnār to al-Makkī
- 1/82/1333 A letter from 'Ubayd Nāsir to al-Makkī relating a dream in which he suggests a *karāma* of al-Makkī
- 1/82/1334 A collection of unclassified documents, mostly related to al-Makkī
- 1/15/187 Sh. Ismā'īl, *al-Kayra*
- 1/15/188 Sh. Ismā'īl, *Dīwan al-Shathāt*
- 1/15/189 Sh. Ismā'īl, *al-Mawlid*
- 1/14/175 Ahmad al-Azhari's genealogy, *al-iqtibās fī ittīṣal nasabina bi'l-'Abbās*
- 1/11/87 The Constitution (*dustūr*) of the Association of Sufi Orders in the Sudan

- b) Intelligence Reports: monthly reports which contained some information on the affairs of the Sudan. Numbers 1 to 59 appeared in Intelligence Reports Egypt (IRE); then after that from Number 60, Sudan affairs appeared independently as Sudan Intelligence Reports (SIR).

i) Intelligence Reports Egypt (IRE)

- No.1, April 1892: An account of the Ashrāf revolt in Omdurman.
 No.11, 1893: Report on the Sudan by Col.D.H. Stewart
 No.12, March 1893: The movement of Muzīl al-Dalāl in Kordofan against the Khalīfa 'Abdullāhī.
 No.32, November 1894: Father Rosignoli's statement concerning the Mīrghani family in Omdurman.
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 No.38, May 1895, App. : On the activities of Rābīh Zubayr in Bornu and on Islamic activities there.
 No.43, January 1896, App.A: Account of some pilgrims on the nature of Sanūsī movement and that of Rābīh Zubayr.
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 No.95, June 1902: Reports on the *ṭarīqas*
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III. People Interviewed in El-Obeid and Khartoum in 1975/76

1. *Syd* Mustāfa al-Bakrī b. Tāj al-Asfiyā', present head of the Ismā'īliyya *tarīqa*
2. *Syd* Abū al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥanafī, grandson of al-Makkī b. Sh. Ismā'īl.
3. Hajj 'Abd al-Ḥafīz 'Abdalla, grandson of al-Makkī - maternal, took active part in politics in El-Obeid in the 1930s and 40s.
4. Hajj Ahmad al-Fakī 'Abdalla, merchant and has many contacts with Ismā'īliyya trade and religious activities in Kordofan and Nūba Mountains.
5. Ismā'īl al-Muṣbāh al-Makkī, grandson of al-Makkī - maternal, ex-PUS, Ministry of Finance in the Sudan.
6. Makkī Ḥaṣan Abbo, grandson of al-Makkī, ex-Director of Police in the Sudan.
7. Dr. 'Uthmān Sīd Ahmad Ismā'īl al-Bīli, of the Bidayriyya Dahmashiyya of Dongola.

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