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# A Genealogical and Historical Study of the Mahas of the "Three Towns," Sudan

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## A GENEALOGICAL AND HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE MAHAS OF THE "THREE TOWNS," SUDAN\*

*Richard A. Lobban, Jr.*

The Mahas (a Nubian ethnic group) in the central Sudan have made a fundamental contribution to the Islamization and urbanization of this Afro-Arab nation. Their building of the first permanent structures in the "Three Towns" (Khartoum area) may be claimed as the start of the modern process of Sudanese urbanization. The Mahas leaders who became teachers and advisors to the Funj state were also centrally responsible for the spread of Islam along the Blue and White Niles at their confluence at the "Three Towns" in communities which have been occupied continuously for about five centuries.

This paper attempts to unify this historical study with reference to published and unpublished genealogies (*nisba*, sing.; *nasib* pl.) collected in my 1979-1980 fieldwork in the Sudan. The main foci of this paper are the examination of the Mahas and Islam in the context of Sudanese urban history in the Nile valley. This work also presents case material with which judgments may be made on the historiographic questions of using genealogy as history. The genealogical data presented here, many for the first time in print, are given in the standard Arabic fashion of relying exclusively on the patri-lineal descendants. Other work analyzing the patterns and practices of spouse selection and preferential marriage has been published elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> but additional analysis is now underway with reference to the *nasib* provided here.

This present article contains four main sections. First is a guide to the genealogical material which follows. This section is prepared to give an easier access to the thirteen genealogical

\*It is impossible to adequately express my appreciation to all who assisted in this research, but several people must be acknowledged. First of all is my friend of more than a decade, Muhammad 'Osman Agabash and his family to whom I am perpetually grateful. Omer Yousif Al-Tayib, a Tuti Island post-graduate student in anthropology was also particularly helpful as was his faithful blue car. Others who helped in various ways were: Abu Zed Musa, Hassan Babiker Bodani, 'Ali Mustafa 'Ali, Amin Arbab Amin, Khalifa Ahmed, Mustafa Araki, Sayed Wad Shaheen, Muhammad Misherif, Taj el Anbia el Dawi, El Haj Ahmed El Hadi, Gebre Egziabher Habtu, my research assistant, and Asma 'Abdel Rahman 'Abdel Fatah, my fellow researcher who tragically died of malaria during the course of our respective studies on Tuti Island. Sabbatical research leave from Rhode Island College provided the free time and financial support which sustained this effort. I am also grateful for the secretarial support of Hekmat Tadros, Yvonne Shunbo, and Mona Tewfik Ibrahim.

<sup>1</sup>Richard A. Lobban, Jr., "Class, Endogamy, and Urbanization in the Three Towns of the Sudan," *African Studies Review*, XXII, 3 (1979), 99-114; Richard A. Lobban, Jr., "Class and Kinship in Sudanese Urban Communities," *Africa* (IAI), 52, 2 (1982).

charts which are an appendix to this article. The guide and charts will serve to locate lineage founders and other important personages in space, time, and in kin relation to the wider study. The second section focuses on the study of the Mahas in Medieval Christian times in Nubia and during the time of the 'Abdallab and Funj rule in the central Sudan. The third section presents biographical information of four of the best known Mahas religious teachers of the central Sudan who lived and taught during the time of the 'Abdallab and Funj. The final section is an appraisal and discussion of the first three parts. Here, I seek to summarize the whole article and, more importantly I attempt to draw some broader conclusions about the use of genealogical material in historiography.

A note is perhaps in order on the orthography used here. The problem of standard Arabic transliteration is always a difficult one. In the case of this article it is more complicated. Much of the research was conducted in Sudanese colloquial Arabic with its own peculiarities and differences with modern standard Arabic. Shall I be faithful to the actual pronunciation or to written forms which are not used? Another dimension is the difference in transliteration of Arabic by speakers of Egyptian Arabic which has been used in some published accounts which today may not be the "proper" transliterated form. With all of this in mind I have transliterated as much as possible into the "correct" form but in a few cases (such as those which include the softer and more authentic Sudanese "j" sounds rather than the harder "g") I have opted for the Sudanese style. This compromise will offend those seeking a kind of literary precision for the historian or Orientalist but will be more satisfactory to anthropologists who tend to favor "emic" rather than "etic" solutions to such problems.

#### Guiding Thoughts on Mahas Genealogy

Genealogical data always reflect some perceived reality, that is, their very collection is slanted toward the goal of establishing relations between known and distantly related ancestors. The recording of *nasib* may thus correspond with precision to historical events and personages or it may only seek to suggest fictive ties to ancestral figures to legitimate one's social or political status. Every genealogical tree will inevitably reach the point where it is difficult or impossible to determine which is the case. Even when there is correspondence with historical fact one may, within reason, sometimes suspect that the genealogy was simply fabricated with more thought and care.

The claims or judgments I make must be viewed with the above in mind. Readers are especially encouraged to formulate alternative views and hypotheses. Scientific inquiry does not expect initial perfection and, in fact, thrives on error and contradiction; as such I have developed some explanations for the patterns in these collected *nasib* which are certainly subject to scrutiny. My object was to search for deviations between the *nasib* as collected and recorded and from the contemporary or subsequent history in which they were located. The more unexplained or contradictory the pieces, the less credible the whole and vice-versa the more consistent the data the more likely, unless of course, the role of a sophisticated fabricator is considered to be the most reasonable alternative.

Whether these sections correlate with historical reality by accident, *post facto* reconstruction, or by their accurate recording of family history is difficult to determine. Whatever the case, some rough calculations do suggest surprisingly close coordination with historical fact. Counting back from known, living members of the *nisba* to Ubaia ibn Ka'ab there are 47 generations spanning the 1360 years between 1980 and 620 AD the time of the *Hegira*. This gives a mean generational length of 28.9 years, which is not an unrealistic figure. Given this lengthy period and various sources of error it is probably not meaningful to make further calculations, but in any case, this does help to support the tentative periodization for the entire genealogical sequence. In addition this gives encouragement to judge these data with less scepticism than would normally be the case in evaluating African genealogies.

With respect to the most distant genealogical segment of Figure I, one may speculate that its long, un-bifurcated nature may reflect either the artificial reaching back to the Khazrag<sup>2</sup> roots or that its lack of branching may relate to the limited expansion permitted by the block in Sudanese Nubia provided by the Christian kingdoms. The lack of branching may also suggest a lack of accuracy, but perhaps *nasib* collected even now in the northern Sudan would trace connections to the higher parts of this section before the "Melik Series."

The *nasib* which are presented and organized here fall into several sections and categories.

Figure I from Kenana to Fikr may be considered as the Pre-Islamic sequence showing the putative ancestors of Ka'ab el Khazrag from whom all respondents identified as their principle ancestor. Still in the same Figure I from Ka'ab el Khazrag to 'Abdullah, is the lineal sequence which would approximate the time of 'Arab expansion and consolidation in Egypt roughly from the seventh century AD until about the mid-eleventh century AD. Until the end of this period, 'Arab settlement was generally restricted to areas north of Nubia.

Figure II may be termed the "Melik (King) Series" and covers a span from about the eleventh century AD with El Melik 'Abdel Karim and continues until the early fourteenth century AD with el Melik Zibeir. I offer the name "Melik Series" since the *nasib* in this sequence are all identified by "El Melik-." It may be that the three-centuries span in this "Melik Series" represents 'Arab colonization of Nubia which brought their dominance over autochthonous Nubian Mahas.

<sup>2</sup>Yusuf Fadl Hassan, *The Arabs and the Sudan* (Khartoum, 1973), 143. In this work it is noted that there are two prevalent claims to the Mahas origins. One speaks of Juhayna descent, and the other identifies a Khazrag origin. In this research I was not able to locate any family trees which indicated roots with the Juhayna, but all uniformly cited the Khazrag roots. The Khazrag were a nomadic, warrior clan that lived in the western regions of the Arab peninsula at the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Most Mahas of the Three Towns claim that they are descended of either 'Abada, or 'Ubaia ibn Ka'ab El Khazrag. During the Egyptian campaigns of the Khazrag leader, 'Abdallah ibn Sa'ad, many of his followers migrated and settled along the Egyptian Nile. Little by little they percolated southward up the Nile into northern Nubia where they took Nubian wives. The loss of Nubian pedigrees casts some doubt on the accuracy of the claim of Khazrag origins, but would be in general line with history, if the Arab colonizers arrived and settled in the context of cultural and/or political dominance whereby patrilineal kinship of the Arabs tended to extinguish the former matrilineal descent of the Mahas.

Figure III provides an overview of the linkage between the "Melik Series" and the principle descent groups of the Three Towns. This diagram should be used as a unifying reference for the subsequent Figures IV to XIII. Key individuals may be found in Figure III and then they are also found on the other diagrams to achieve the coupling of the total collection of all figures. Some of the genealogical data collected is so extensive (for example for the Shakartab) that further sub-divisions of a given Figure were required.

#### Some of the Mahas Descent Groups

The principal lineage groups of the Mahas in the central Sudan are projected as founded by either Ajim or by El Melik Mekin (ancestor of the Meknab). Ajim, as shown in Figure III, had a number of sons who relate to this genealogical study. For the communities in Tuti Island, Burri and Mahas and other Mahas communities in the Three Towns, Sa'adallah ibn Ajim was very important. He founded the Sa'adallah descent group or lineage (*fariiq*, sing.; *faruq*, pl.) found in these communities and gave rise to the large and successful Shakartab *fariiq* which arose from the Sa'adallah and has descendants through the Three Towns, especially in Tuti Island, Shambat and in other communities or neighborhoods of Khartoum North. The Kabanab are also descended from Ajim and they gave rise to Sheikh Khojali, perhaps one of the most illustrious and important Mahas religious teachers or consultants (*fakih*, sing.; *fukahaa*, pl.) to have been born in Tuti Island; we will return later to his biography.

Beyond these groups there is also Misherif or (Sherif ed Din) who may have been born in the north and perhaps migrated to the central Sudan either with his son Fellah or to have had this son born once he arrived. The historical record is not clear about these points but it was at about this time that the Funj Sultanates came into existence and the major southward migrations of the Islamized Mahas took place. Figure VI shows the four sons of Fellah ibn Misherif who are sometimes grouped under the collective term Misherifia. These sons, Subuh, Marzuq, Qandal, and Gardaga, in addition to the Sa'adallah, Kabanab, and Meknab mentioned above account for the origin of most Mahas in the Three Towns and in many Blue Nile communities, except, of course, the Mahas who are still arriving at the present time as modern urban migrants.

Figures IV to XIII offer much genealogical information which has never been published before and is derived from my research in oral history and in endless interviews with those who hold fragments of the existing *nasib*. These data embrace the principle *faruq* cited in the preceding paragraph and should offer considerable assistance to historians, anthropologists, students of Islam, genealogists, and those interested in aspects of marriage affiliation and social organization. These data are presented in considerable detail since they may serve so many different potential functions in the scholarly study of the Sudan.

The descendants of Gardaga (also parent to the Muhammadab and Barakatab *faruq*) are especially concentrated in Tuti Island but are found as well in Eilafun, Beshagra East, Shigla, and Elti.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>H.A. MacMichael, *A History of the Arabs in the Sudan* (London, 1967), I, 342; II, 83.

Radallah and Ta'allah, sons of El Haj Ahmed El Bak, are considered to be directly ancestral to most of the Gardagab in Tuti Island (see Figure VIII B). The links between the Gardagab and other *faruq* such as the Bodanab are particularly close, complex, and enduring. For example, Ibrahim Bodani, a *fariiq* founder (see Figs. VI, VII) married a Gardagabia woman; and children of El Fakih Musa El Dayig, a Gardagab, (see Fig. VIII [b]) spread this *fariiq*. His son Suleiman left the Khartoum area to establish a large family group in Sennar. Another son, Radallah, formed a large family group in Bishagra where his descendants may still be found.

The children of Marzuq are found at Rakayba, Hillet Bilula, Tuti Island, Shambat, Omdurman, Khartoum North, and especially at Burri al Mahas where they have generated the Bodanab *fariiq* through Ibrahim Bodani. Another large *fariiq* in Burri al Mahas is sometimes known as the Farahab, but Farah was just one of the four sons of Ibrahim Bodani. One source (Amin Arbab Amin) claims that Marzuq also had some Moroccan ancestry in addition to that of the Khazrag, but I can offer no specifics in this respect. Other descendants of Marzuq are found through the offspring of Sheikh Muhammad 'Osman of Gerri, the former capital town of the Abdallab Sultanate.

Qandal ibn Fellah ibn Misherif gave rise to the family which included Sheikh Idris el Arbab, founder of the Eilafun community and having important on-going ties with other Mahas *faruq*. Subuh, ancestor of the Subuhab, left his offspring in many of the same communities but especially on Tuti Island, and Beshagra West where the Subuhab descent groups may be known as the 'Aonab and Bilulab. Other descendants of Fellah are settled at Halfaya, Shambat, and in Hillet Khojali. Fellah himself is said to be buried at Sababi, on the east bank of the Nile opposite Tuti Island.

### The Mahas in History

Clear references to Nubians begin in Dynastic times some 5,000 years ago. Likewise, Nubian out-migration as servants, soldiers, workers and administrators can be dated to the earliest times. This present work focuses however, on the period in Nubian history when Islam first percolated into the Christian kingdoms of the northern Sudan. Subsequently, the interest is shifted to the period when a significant number of Nubians migrated to and settled in the central Sudan from the sixteenth century forward. This second topic is critical for the understanding of the roots of both Islamization and urbanization in the Sudan. This historical section finally examines the role between the Mahas and 'Abdallab with whom they had access to the power and influence of the Funj Confederacy based in Sennar.

### Medieval Christian Times

The "Melik Series" (See Figure II), which descends from the reputed Khazrag origins, provides a substantial historical marker in the Mahas *nasib*. There is probably little question that this genealogical segment related to the time when Islam was penetrating more effectively into the northern Sudan at the expense of the Christian kingdoms of Makurra and Dongola.

Vantini notes various attacks and conflicts between Christian Nubia and Omayyad Egypt (661-750 AD) even though the well-known *baqt*

or treaty between the two spheres of influence permitted generally peaceful relations with the Nubian peoples.<sup>4</sup> In the same work it is stated that perhaps some 50,000 Nubians enrolled in the Fatimid army (969-1171 AD) and there were many thousands of others who sought employment in Egypt.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, many of these migrants returned to their homes in Nubia and brought back the ideas they acquired in the Nubian diaspora. Vantini notes the close association between these patterns of migration and the slow but steady Islamization of Nubia, especially in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

The rise and fall of the reference term "Melik" (King) hints that some political differentiation had taken place and the uninterrupted run of nine generations of this title suggests that there may have been some hereditary nature of the perpetuation of this socio-political differentiation. If the rough attempt to periodize these data is approximately correct, the "Melik Series" covers a time from about the mid-eleventh century with El Melik 'Abdel Karim until the early fourteenth century, when the series ends with El 'Melik Zubeir.

This time-frame would make the "Melik Series" contemporary with the closing centuries of the Christian kingdoms of Nubia at Makurra and Dongola and one may project that the "Melik Series" may have some relationship to the period of Egyptian Mamluke rule (1250-1517) or to the period after their overthrow in 1517 when number of them took refuge in Nubia from the Ottoman rulers.

More data and specific dates are required before these issues will be resolved, but I am convinced that the "Melik Series" does represent an increasingly reliable convergence with the known history of the region. At the least, we can say with confidence that the "Melik Series" does refer to the time when the internal strength of the Christian kingdoms underwent continual erosion and Arab authority grew in strength. The historical record also tells us that the Egyptian Mamlukes gave the final blow to the Christian Nubian kingdoms in the early fourteenth century, the same time when the "Melik Series" of the Mahas comes to an end. In fact the last two names in the Melik group, El Melik 'Ali Birsi and El Melik Zubeir have an Egyptian flavor to their names. It is also worth noting in Figure II that the sons of El Melik Jama'a represent the first major genealogical diversification, a time when the Mahas began to be on the move further southward to spread Islam on the one hand, but also maintain some degree of political influence by escaping the challenge to their authority by the expanding Mamlukes. El Melik Jama'a is considered to have been the "Father of the Mahas of the North" at least by those Mahas now residing in the central Sudan. By my rough generational and historical reconstruction, El Melik Jama'a may have lived sometime in the late twelfth century AD, a time in the northern Sudan when Arabs had reached significant numbers, but before the Christian kingdoms had finally fallen. Figure II shows the six sons of El Melik Jama'a; of these the descendants of Nasr, Galal, Hussein, and Hassan stayed mainly in the northern Sudan. The descendants of El Melik Mikin (the Meknab) moved to the central Sudan in large numbers but they still have many relatives in the vicinity of Dongola today. Perhaps most important for the Mahas in the Central

<sup>4</sup>Giovanni Vantini, *Christianity in the Sudan* (Rome, 1981), 75, 116.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 131.



Sudan was El Melik Sa'ad, whose descendants are among the most numerous Mahas on Tuti Island and in the many communities along the Blue Nile which have large or significant Mahas populations. It is from Muhammad El Mahas, one of El Melik Sa'ad that the majority of the major Mahas branches find their common ancestor.

At this point the Khazrag version may be confused with the alternative version of Mahas origins. MacMichael speaks of an 'Abdel Aziz Al-Mahasi, one of ten sons of Dhubyan who had descended from the Juhayna,<sup>6</sup> rather than the Khazrag. As MacMichael notes, the "southern" Mahas are mostly of the Khazrag origin even though some admixture with Juhayna or Kababish may also have taken place.<sup>7</sup>

Just as El Melik Jama'a was probably central in the spread of Islam in Nubia, Ajim, his descendant six generations later, was central in the formation of most of the major Mahas *faruq* on the Sudanese Nile, except for the Meknab branch as we have already seen. MacMichael cites eight sons of 'Ajim<sup>8</sup> (See Figures III, V, VI, VIII) who were Sa'adallah (founder of the Sa'adallah), Ziad (if he has not been confused with the descendants of Sa'adallah), 'Aboudi (who founded the 'Aboudab descent groups in the Dongola and elsewhere), Sherif el Din (or Misherif) who heads the Misherifia group including about a half dozen modern *faruq*, Muhammad Kabani (who was the ancestor of the very illustrious *fakih* Sheikh Khogali, Sidran, Mazad abu Shama, and Saridi (founder of the Swarda descent groups in Halfayat al-Muluk and elsewhere in Khartoum Province). Muhammad Al-Nur also mentions a Hamid El-Swarda, a Mahas from the north,<sup>9</sup> but related to 'Abdel Aziz Al-Mahasi who, as we have just seen, may have been of Juhayna origin.<sup>10</sup>

Again, making an effort at historical reconstruction, it would appear that the motivations for southward migration were strengthened in 1504 when the Christian kingdom of Soba (just southeast of Khartoum) finally collapsed and was sacked by the growing Funj state. Now, supported by the Funj, the Mahas could be legitimized in their object of spreading Islam through their *fukahaa*, a subject to which we shall shortly return. Only slightly later, in 1517, Sultan Selim I of Turkey toppled the Mamluke rulers and immediately set about constructing the administration of Ottoman rule in Egypt. Repeatedly, over the millenia of Sudanese and Egyptian history, the powers in the Sudan and in Egypt competed for territory and influence. In the sixteenth century, the Funj state sought northward expansion of its trade routes and authority while the expeditionary forces of Sultan Selin I began to push past Aswan. By 1520 the Turks had reached Hannek at the Third Cataract, just north of Dongola. Fleeing from this contested zone, still more Mahas fled to the south where they could be secure under the umbrella of the Islamic Funj state.

<sup>6</sup>MacMichael, *History of the Arabs*, II, 23.

<sup>7</sup>MacMichael, *History of the Arabs*, I, 341.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, II, 100.

<sup>9</sup>Muhammad Al-Nur ibn Dayfallah, *Kitab Al-Tabaqat*, Yusuf Fadl Hassan, ed., (Khartoum, 1974), 186.

<sup>10</sup>Yusuf Fadl Hassan, *The Arabs and the Sudan*, 143-144, 154, 157.

Mahas in the Central Sudan

Arriving from the land-starved and insecure north, these Nubian migrants certainly looked favorably at the rich alluvial soils of the central Sudan, which could easily be irrigated by both *shaduf* and *sagia* (water-lifting devices). Tuti Island, at the confluence of the Blue and White Niles, was settled during these times and was to become the birthplace of many important Islamic teachers and by virtue of its location was to be at the center of the Three Towns conurbation which was to grow into the capital city area of today.

When the Mahas arrived, the immediate area was already inhabited by sections of the Rufa'a, Ja'aliyin, Shayqia, and Jummu'iya peoples who were using the region for grazing, semi-sedentary herding and, to some degree, for agriculture. Arkell suggests that the Mahas actually acquired the land at Tuti Island from the Jummu'iya who had, themselves, displaced the so-called Anaj group of hunters and fishermen.<sup>11</sup>

By the early sixteenth century AD, the Mahas communities had become well established and were growing in number. Many of the communities were founded by the leading *fukahaa* of the day. Each would bring his family to the site of his home and *khalwa* (religious school) where other religious buildings would be added as possible. A typical community would include homes, the *khalwa*, a *mesjid* or mosque, and as the founding *fakih* died a *gubba* (tomb) would often be erected in his honor around which would be the cemetery for his deceased followers and their families. For the larger villages there would also be buildings for craft specialities and a periodic market area for the sale or exchange of livestock, crafts, meat, and vegetables.

Aside from the founding of the community at Tuti Island and on the adjacent mainland, another early Mahas village was built at Eilafun ("family of Funj"). As a reward for religious services and political advice, one of the early Funj Sultans issued land grants to various Mahas fekis such as Fakh Muhammad 'Ali, who is credited with establishing Eilafun in about 1500 AD. Relations between Tuti Island and Eilafun are still very close five hundred years later. Just to the east of present-day Khartoum, another Mahas named Shukayry organized the community of Burri al Lamaab.<sup>12</sup>

Burri al Mahas was then located between the Mogren and Burri Lamaab roughly on the site of the present University of Khartoum and was founded by the Mahas leader Sheikh Heteik Gasuma in 1575 AD. Figures VI and VII show many of the Mahas ancestors for Burri al Mahas. It is not clear whether Sheikh Heteik Gasmua is the individual identified (in Figure VI) as Hamad Heiteik, or as simply Gusuma, or as El-fakih Gusuma. In any case these three possibilities were rough contemporaries of each other and of Ibrahim Bodani (see figures III, VI, VII) who was the founder of the Bodanab *fariq* of Burri al Mahas at about the same time. Like so many of the Mahas *fukahaa*, Bodani (who may also be considered as a member of the Misherifia) was born on Tuti Island. After the British conquest of the Sudan in 1898, the original town of Burri al Mahas was moved

<sup>11</sup> A. J. Arkell, *Early Khartoum* (London, 1949), 107-110.

<sup>12</sup> Harold Barclay, *Burri al Lamaab: a suburban village in the Sudan* (Ithaca, 1964),

further eastward to its present location to make way for the British military barracks.

The community of Burri ad Dareisa, between Burri al Mahas and Burri al Lamaab emerged at this time, founded by Sheikh Shama Hereiz. Burri ad Dareisa was also the home of various Jummu'iya and Arab peoples and, like Burri al Lamaab, was not homogenously Mahas. Many other villages such as Mangara, Burri abu Hashish, Wawissi, Halfayat al Muluk, Goz, Islanj, Gayli, Gereif East, Gereif West, Kutranj, Shambat, Kamlin, Kakol, Rukayba, Shigla, Omorat, Jebel et Teina, and various Gezira communities also trace an important role for the Mahas in general or to specific *fukahaa* as their founding inspiration in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The community at Tuti Island is particularly interesting in Mahas history in a number of respects. It is among the oldest of these Mahas communities and has continuously occupied the same site for about five hundred years. It is also remarkably stable in its composition and its main residential areas are still virtually homogenously Mahas. Tuti Island *fukahaa* were central to the Islamization of the Sudan in the fifteenth century and thereafter and as the first built permanent structures at Khartoum, they may be credited with starting the process of urbanization at that location. The strategic location of Tuti Island regularly captures the attention of today's tourists and gave Tuti Islanders a chance to witness the Turkish expansion of Khartoum, the building of the Mahdist city at Omdurman, the redevelopment of Khartoum under the British, and now, the burgeoning growth of the Three Towns under post-colonial governments.

For only a small place, Tuti Island has not only generated more than its share of religious teachers, but, for example, the "Keeper of the Khalifa's 'Privy Purse'" was Tuti-born 'Omda (mayor) Ahmed ibn 'Ali Bur. Tuti was also the base for the Mahdist treasury as well as an earthworks which fort still stands. During British colonialism, 'Omda Ahmed Ibrahim was the Tuti leader who was also a prosperous merchant. Even in the post-colonial government of Ja'far Nimieri, a Tuti Islander was a member of his Revolutionary Command Council.

#### The Mahas and the 'Abdallab

The 'Abdallab represented a *fariiq* of the Rufa'a and other ethnic groups based at Gerri to the north of Khartoum North (Halfaya). At various times during the Funj Confederacy (1504-1821) the 'Abdallab were in alliance with the Funj sultans in Sennar, their capital city. The nature of the confederation was such that each local authority had considerable autonomy and was empowered with various rights including the granting of title to farm and residential land. Since the 'Abdallab held authority over the lands at the confluence of the Niles, it was to them that the Mahas settlers appealed for title to land. For example, it was from the 'Abdallab that Arbab el-Agayed received authority to move from Tuti Island to establish his *khalwa* in the Mogren area of the Khartoum.

In 1604, the 'Abdallab *fariiq* was defeated at the battle of Karkoj (just south of Gereif East) by forces of the Sultan of Sennar who was seeking to consolidate and expand his authority. This defeat

effectively curtailed the local influence of the 'Abdallab. When the Scottish traveler Bruce visited Gerri in the 1770s, he reported that it consisted of only some 140 houses or just a few hundred people. Neighboring Halfaya to the south was twice as large with about 300 houses, showing the beginnings of population concentration at the confluence of the Niles. However, the loss of the 'Abdallab did not end the Mahas *fukahaa* links to the Funj rulers to the south who continued to seek their advice. Sultan Badi I (1611-1616) for example, was among the most devoted followers of Sheikh Idris ibn Arbab of Eilafun. The Mahas were widely respected as learned people and were the accepted teachers of the ways of proper prayer and other aspects of devotional and religious training.

Little is known of Gerri and the 'Abdallab throughout the eighteenth century, but the people and area return to the historical record in 1821 when the 'Abdallab clashed with the forces of the Turks under Isma'il Pasha. The 'Abdallab leader, Sheikh Nasir El Amin was finally forced to surrender to a battalion of 400 well-armed Shayqia recruits who had been mustered into the Turkish army with the Turks playing upon long-standing rivalries between the 'Abdallab and Shayqia.

Mek Nimr, king of the trading town at Shendi, organized a successful trap and counter-attack against Isma'il Pasha and his men. The victory was, however, short-lived. Later, seeking revenge, the pasha's brother-in-law and fellow Turkish administrator, Muhammad Bey El Stambouli (El Daftardar), went up and down the Nile valley sacking and murdering at will in his punitive expeditions. The remaining lands of the 'Abdallab were granted to the Shayqia who supported the Turks in this endeavor. Tuti Island and other Mahas communities also came under assault during the murderous campaigns (1821-1823) of the Daftardar. Today there are still many associations and ties of the Mahas and the Rufa'a and Jummu'iya, who together made up much of the population formerly constituting the 'Abdallab.

#### Biographical Sketches of Some Leading Mahas Fukahaa During 'Abdallab and Funj Times

As we have now seen with the above historical and genealogical data, the Mahas were well established in the central Sudan. Already a few of the leading religious teachers have been noted in passing as the central effort was directed toward reconstructing their historical and cultural context. At this point it is appropriate to present some of what is known about the men themselves. Needless to say, the information is fragmentary but a flavor of their influence and the respect shown them will become apparent.

The four following *fukahaa*, Fakih Arbab el-Agayed, Sheikh Hamad wad Marium, Sheikh Idris wad Muhammad el Arbab, and el Fakih el-Sheikh Khojali ibn 'Abdel Rahman ibn Ibrahim were among the very best known but were typical of the model of inspired Islamic teaching. All of these *fukahaa*, except Sheikh Hamad may be located on Figure III. Sheikh Hamad was the *fakih* who founded the Mariumab *fariiq* which is not included in this study. These four are singled out because they not only typify the spirit and dynamism of Islam of the time but it was they who founded the villages and towns which ultimately became the Three Towns (Khartoum) capital city area.

Fakih Arbab El Agayed  
(See Figures III, IX)

As with many of the leading *fukahaa* of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Arbab El Agayed was born in Tuti Island in something like the third quarter of the seventeenth century. *Fakih* Arbab was himself, related to Mohammed Busati, who had been responsible for spreading Sunni Islam in Kordofan. As the result of a dispute in the Tuti Island community, *Fakih* Arbab moved to the Mogren area of Khartoum in 1691 to establish his own community and regional center of Islamic learning. His *khalwa* (religious school) is said to have attracted some 500 students and of these some 300 were Nubians. His followers were found among the Mahas, Ja'aliyin, Jumu'iyah and especially among the Funj Sultans.<sup>13</sup> His knowledge of Islam and his teaching abilities were well known over a considerable area. His village, *khalwa*, and *masjid* (mosque) grew with his reputation. His most famous students were Sheikh Khojali and Sheikh Hamad wad Marium, about whom we shall hear more.

The organization of this community of religious scholars also represented the first permanent settlement on the land at the confluence of the White and Blue Niles at the present site of modern Khartoum. As with other *fukahaa* of the period and region *Fakih* Arbab became a consultant to the Funj Sultans at Sennar and was likely a contemporary of Sultan Badi el Ahmar (1692-1716). In fact, it was during a consultation at Sennar that *Fakih* Arbab died and he was buried in that town. His son, 'Ali (see Figure IX), became his successor and continued the tradition of religious teaching at the Mogren *masjid* and *khalwa*.

The *masjid* established by *Fakih* Arbab, and continued by his descendants, flourished until the conquest of the Sudan by the Turks. As noted earlier, it was the brutal expedition of the Turkish "Dafterdar" that brought destruction to many of the significant buildings in the Khartoum area, including the *gubba* of Sheikh Khojali and the *masjid* of *Fakih* Arbab. Worse still, the "Dafterdar" tied the great grandson of *Fakih* Arbab to the mouth of a cannon and had him executed in this way.<sup>14</sup> It is not certain in the record but presumably this victim was Muhammad ibn el-Kamel ibn 'Ali. Throughout the Turkiyah the *masjid* was not restored to the best of my knowledge, but the site is still remembered on the west side of Khartoum city a couple of blocks south of the Blue Nile. The memory of *Fakih* Arbab is very much alive and the current Khalifa, Uztaz Muhammad el-Khalifa Malik Yassin maintains the *nisba* of his ancestry where he now resides in Bashagra.

Sheikh Hamad wad Marium

Sheikh Hamad, like *Fakih* Arbab, was born on Tuti Island in perhaps 1646, but it may have been later. He followed the Qadriyah *tariqa* (religious order) and was a student of *Fakih* Arbab. Sheikh Hamad was very close to Sheikh Khojali whose sister-in-law was the mother of Sheikh Hamad. Furthermore, Sheikh Khojali's daughter married the

<sup>13</sup>E.G. Sarsfield-Hall, *Khartoum Province Handbook* (Khartoum, 1936).

<sup>14</sup>C.E.J. Walkley, "The Story of Khartoum," *Sudan Notes and Records*, XVIII, (1935), 277-278.

Jummu'ia leader Sheikh 'Abdel Mahmoud el-Nofalabi who often consulted with Sheikh Hamad while he resided in the area which was to become Omdurman. Thus the historical record is not rich but we do know that very close relations existed between all three of these important religious leaders with their common origin on Tuti Island.

For reasons unknown, Sheikh Hamad moved off of Tuti to settle Hillet Hammad wad Marium on the western shore of the white Nile. Just as *Fakih* Arbab may be said to have founded Khartoum, Sheikh Hamad was one of the founders of Omdurman. Funj Chronicles of the period cite his village as the only settled area at that point. His contribution to urban evolution came to an end when he fell into an intense dispute with his neighbor, Sheikh 'Abdel Mahmoud abu Shaba Araki which ended with Sheikh Hamad's house and *khalwa* being left in ashes. Sheikh Khojali came to the aid of his friend and invited him to settle in the area of Khartoum North known as Hillet Hamad which still exists today as a Mahas stronghold in Khartoum North. In this way, Sheikh Hamad continued to contribute to the urban development of the Three Towns at the start of the eighteenth century.

Sheikh Hamad received religious training from Sheikh Yacoub ibn el-Sheikh Mengelli, a Mahas, who had founded the community of Gereif West (across from the Karkoj battlefield) and the settlement of Abu Said which is populated today largely by the Zanarkab and Fitehab just south of Omdurman on the west bank of the White Nile. Sheikh Yacoub was also a religious consultant to the 'Abdallab at Gerri before their downfall. Whether it was from Sheikh Yacoub or from *Fakih* Arbab, the religious teaching of Sheikh Hamad specialized in the education of women and in combating the "bad habits" which then prevailed in some of the local interpretations in the practice of Islam.

Sheikh Hamad was buried in a *gubba* of somewhat lesser size than that of Sheikh Khojali, but in the adjacent community of Hillet Hamad which he had founded. Conflicting dates are offered for his death but it was probably sometime after 1730. Today, many descendants of Sheikh Hamad wad Marium have settled on the east bank of the White Nile south of Khartoum.

#### Sheikh Idris wad Muhammad el Arbab (See Figures III, XII.)

This important *fakih* was a founder of Eilafun, where he was born in 1507 AD. His *fariiq* is of the Misherifia as were many of the Mahas in this study. His ancestry is traced from Qandal and is shown in Figure XII. His father, El Arbab Muhammad, is not to be confused with El-Fakih Arbab El Agayed and his mother, also a Mahasiyia, was Fatma bint Sherif Hammad abu Denana.<sup>15</sup> She may, in fact, be the daughter of El Haj Hamad Dudana who was likely a contemporary of Sheikh Idris. The difference between Denana and Dudana could result easily in Arabic by failing to put a dot on the letter "nun" or "n" to allow to be interpreted as a "dal" or "d" instead. The wife of Sheikh Idris, Fahra bint Walad abu Agrib was also of Mahas origin. The *Kitab Al-Tabaqat wad Dafallah* provides biographical details about Sheikh Idris and several of his important descendants. Sheikh Idris had three sons, Hamad, Kham, and Abdel Qadir (the youngest).

<sup>15</sup>MacMichael, *History of the Arabs*, II, 192.

Since Sheikh Idris was born shortly after the formation of Funj Sultanates he became one of the first of the Mahas *fukahaa* to serve in the fashion of religious advisors, as did many of those who followed him. He studied Islam under Wali Sheikh el Bandari and under Hamad wad Zaruq. He is considered by some to have been the founder of the Qadriya *tariqa* in the Sudan.<sup>16</sup> Later in life Sheikh Idris was called upon to cure the mother of Funj Sultan Amara Abu Sakakin (1558-1569) who was ailing. Jackson notes that his prayers and treatment were successful.<sup>17</sup> Funj Sultan Badi I (1611-1616) was also an especially noted follower of Sheikh Idris. In the Funj Chronicles there are some seventy cases of consultations with Sheikh Idris by the Funj Sultans. He was also considered to possess considerable magical powers and could restore youth, cure sterility, and had a widespread reputation for his generosity. For these accomplishments and services he was officially awarded the several tracts of land which subsequently became known as Eilafun. His death in 1651 indicates an exceedingly long life, so much so that it may not be completely accurate since this would give him the unlikely age of 144 at his death! In any case he was buried in his own *gubba* at Eilafun. This impressive structure can be seen for miles before reaching the village. It was restored in 1928 and has become the center for local religious pilgrimages since the site also has the holy burial ground of his relatives and the smaller, loose brick *gubba* of his son Hamad.

Although Sheikh Idris was famed for his generosity in giving out some sixty plates of food each day to his needy followers, his son Hamad was even more notable in this respect. Muhammad Al-Nur states that Hamad gave out some 120 plates of food each day and that the food was of very high quality as well.<sup>18</sup> The pattern of extraordinary generosity was characteristic of his descendants (See Figure XII), as both Barakat and Modawi ibn Barakat gave gifts or redistributed virtually all that they received in tribute.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Modawi, a student of his uncle Najmi, worked his own fields, refused gifts from his own disciples and exhorted them to follow the spirit of Islam by giving food or money to any of those who were needy.<sup>20</sup> In an audience I had with Khalifa Ahmed in 1971, I found that this same spirit was still very much intact and although there was very respectable formality to the occasion, the simplicity and abundance of the offerings easily made it possible to recreate the atmosphere for decades passed. Khalifa Ahmed died in 1979 and as I left the field his successor had not been named.

El-Fakih El-Sheikh Khojali ibn 'Abdel Rahman ibn Ibrahim  
(See Figures III, XIII)

A number of the relatives and descendants of Sheikh Khojali are provided in Figures V and XIII. It is worth noting, however, that Sheikh Khojali descended from the Kabanab *fariiq* of the Misheria and thus had close relations with the other Mahas studied in this

<sup>16</sup> J. Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in the Sudan* (London, 1965), 131, 196, 220.

<sup>17</sup> H.C. Jackson, "The Mahas of Eilafun," *Sudan Notes and Records*, II, (1919), 288.

<sup>18</sup> Muhammad Al-Nur, *Kitab Al-Tabaqat*, 157.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

article. His mother, Dowa bint Khojali was also a Misherifia Mahas. MacMichael notes that his wife Bint al Mina bin Ta'allah ibn Suleiman was a Gardagabia, while his other wife, Wanasuna bint Omer ibn Hamad ibn Muhammad, was a Meknabia.<sup>21</sup> Other kin ties linked Sheikh Khojali to Idris wad Muhammad el Arbab, who was the uncle of his mother. Dowa, one of the sisters-in-law of Sheikh Khojali, was the wife of Sheikh Hamad wad Marium, whose biography has already been presented above.

Sheikh Khojali was born in Tuti Island in 1065 AH and it was there that he began his study of Islam under the Tuti woman, *fakira* 'Aisha bint Walad Qadal ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrahim el Fardi. He continued his Sufi religious education under *Fakih* Arbab and from Sheikh El Zein Walad Sagrirun.<sup>22</sup> Later he combined his Sufi background with the study of *Fikh*. He sought a very strict Sunni interpretation of the Quran and he followed the Shazliya *tariqa* unlike many Mahas in the central Sudan. The more extensive Qadriya *tariqa* encouraged austere habits such as wearing old or very simple clothes and a rather ascetic approach to religion. The Shazliya, on the other hand, were followers of Sheikh abu Hassan el Shazli who taught that dress should reflect the blessing of God and one should be clothed as well as possible. Accordingly, Sheikh Khojali was reputed for wearing beautiful garments such as those worn at a wedding, and he often had on a red *tarbush* (cap), white scarf, very well-made sandals, and wore incense in his beard and on his clothes.<sup>23</sup>

By all reports, Sheikh Khojali was an impressive figure to behold and he always commanded attention. His heavy beard and charismatic qualities were characteristics which gained him a reputation of brilliance appropriate to a "true" *wali* (religious consultant). This "Black Man of Tuti" made a number of pilgrimages to Mecca where he was initiated into the Sufi order of Sheikh Ahmed el-Tinbuktawi el Fellata, who was himself an important Islamic teacher from Africa then residing in the holy city.

The stature of the man may also be seen in his reputation for not rising to greet guests except for El-Khalifa Sheikh Idris and el-Khalifa Sagrirun, but not for others. He also refused to write to the Funj Sultans considering himself beyond such earthly affairs although there are cases of Sheikh Khojali's mediation in disputes which fell under the Funj jurisdiction. In this later respect, Sheikh Khojali contributed to the formation of *Shari'a* Islamic law in the Sudan, which was only beginning to be codified well after the rise of the Funj Sultanates. Sheikh Khojali specialized in interpretation and mediation in certain basic principles of Islamic justice. However, in one case<sup>24</sup> the followers of Sheikh Khojali were reported as litigants in a land dispute over land which had originally been given to Sheikh Khojali by Sultan Badi IV (1724-1762).

Even though he was reluctant to show respect to all but a select few, Sheikh Khojali himself commanded considerable respect throughout his community and region. His warnings to wrong-doers were taken seriously as were his barakat (blessings) to his followers. In the

<sup>21</sup> MacMichael, *History of the Arabs*, II, 83.

<sup>22</sup> Trimmingham, *Islam in the Sudan*, 130.

<sup>23</sup> Muhammad Al-Nur, *Kitab Al-Tabaqat*, 191-202.

<sup>24</sup> Jay Spaulding, "The Evolution of the Islamic Judiciary in Sinnar," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, X, 3 (1977), 419.



spirit of his Shazliya *tariqa*, he was also known for his patience and his ability to endure petty offenses from friends and neighbors since such things were beneath Sheikh Khojali. He was also a man who did not like revenge. He was reputed to cure illnesses such as insanity and skin diseases and was responsible for many "miracles" like making the river water rise, finding good locations for wells, and finding various lost objects.<sup>25</sup>

This devout religious man, who had many famous students and a lasting effect in the urbanization and Islamization of the Sudan, is reported to have died at noon on a Sunday in 1155 AH (1743 AD).<sup>26</sup> He was buried in his community at Hillet Khojali and his *gubba* is among the very largest of the Mahas *fukahaa*. The grave site contains his remains next to which are those of his son Khalifa Ahmed Bushara who succeeded him and who maintained the religious center for some years. Their graves are covered with a colored cloth draped over a wooden framework. The graves of his other sons are found in long, narrow brick-walled grave "slots" about fifteen inches wide. Buried in order of their seniority and proximity to their father after Ahmed are Siraj El Nur, Ibrahim, Abdel Rahman, El Amin, Muhammad, Taha, and Yasin. His son Muhammad Nur died in the Suez area where he is buried. None of his four daughters is buried inside the *gubba*. In 1823 the *gubba* was destroyed during the predations of the Daftardar who killed villagers in neighboring Halfaya and presumably wrought terror on the people of Hillet Khojali. In the 1940s the *gubba* was fully rebuilt, as was the *masjid* and residential complex. A contractor from Tuti Island, Haj Yousif Al-Tayib, was in charge of the construction.

Today the *gubba* attracts local pilgrims who enter the structure from the only door on the south side and then make certain stations inside the building and circumnambulate the grave complex while saying prayers. Khalifa Ahmed, five generations after Sheikh Khojali, maintains the cemetery, *gubba*, and *masjid*, and preserves relics from his illustrious ancestor including his original sandals, a religious banner, caps, a long iron walking stick, and an example of a *nisba* for his descendants in the hand-writing of Sheikh Khojali himself.

### Discussion

Several final observations may be made to summarize this work. First of all, the historical record examined here has demonstrated the early contribution of Tuti Island-born Mahas in the incipient process of settled life at the confluence of the White and Blue Niles. Sheikh Arbab al Agayed was the first to establish permanent quarters at the Mogren area which became the western side of Khartoum. Sheikh Khojali and Sheikh Hamad wad Marium were central in the formation of, respectively, Hillet Khojali and Hillet Hamad, village nuclei around which we now find Khartoum North. Sheikh Hamad wad Marium and his contemporary Sheikh Abdel Mahmoud were the first to reside permanently at the site of what became Omdurman. Sheikhs Heteik and Bodani were originators of Burri al Mahas. Other Mahas played similar roles in the area along the Nile from south of

<sup>25</sup>Trimingham, *Islam in the Sudan*, 136-137, 143, 145.

<sup>26</sup>Muhammad Al-Nur, *Kitab Al-Tabaqat*, 191.

the Sixth Cataract at Sabaluka to Sennar on the Blue Nile and to Jebel Aulia on the White Nile. As inauspicious as their initial contributions may have been, considerable credit must come their way in this regard as their descendants have continuously occupied the same locations for centuries.

Second, the role of these Mahas, especially those born on Tuti Island, has been basic in the Islamization of the central Sudan. It is known that the Funj Sultans built their state on Islamic principles, but that they were themselves not famed in their Islamic scholarship.<sup>27</sup> It was in this function that Mahas *fukahaa* became the advisors to the Funj Sultans in religious as well as political and civil matters from the earliest times that the Sultans were receptive to the more formalized introduction of this religious component of their state and society. This article does not maintain that the Mahas were the only religious leaders; they were not, but that their influence far exceeded their numbers is certainly the case. They also were pioneers in the development of the Islamic judicial system, to a certain extent of the architectural styles found in their *masjids* and *gubbas*, and in the introduction of the Sufi brotherhoods which played such an important role in the Islamization of the Sudan and in many other places in Islamic Africa.

Third these data relate to a number of questions about the role and accuracy of genealogies in anthropological research. There are several ways in which this appraisal may be made. The extreme generational depth of the genealogical material found in the Mahas communities does have some correspondence with historical fact, that is, with the people and events of the time of Muhammad and with the "Melik Series" I have described above, which correlates roughly with the period of the Islamization of Nubia. There are also correlations with the diversification in the genealogical record and with the dispersal of the Mahas to, and in, the central Sudan. Furthermore, the personages cited in the *nisba* in the last four or five centuries are known from a number of independent historical records; there are no glaring discrepancies. This is not to say that some of the details were or were not constructed *post facto*; this cannot be ascertained. What can be claimed here is that there certainly is considerably more accuracy in the record than what is found in the general study of African genealogies. While I have inherited a good measure of skepticism from my intellectual foreparents, the data I have collected certainly tend to reduce the dubious opinion and tend to strengthen the view held by Irving in her study of Wolof genealogies which showed that while some African societies like the Nuer, Tiv, and Tallensi may have questionable and socially distorted genealogies, this was not the case for the Wolof.<sup>28</sup>

Cunnison and Lewis have already demonstrated that conquest states and, in general, more hierarchical societies have more historically accurate genealogical information.<sup>29</sup> Because of this pattern we are not surprised to find the sort of record available with the Mahas, who have been exposed to literate traditions since

<sup>27</sup> Spaulding, "Evolution of the Islamic Judiciary," 408-426.

<sup>28</sup> Judith T. Irving, "When is Genealogy History? Wolof Genealogies in Comparative Perspective," *American Ethnologist*, 5, 4 (1978), 651-674.

<sup>29</sup> Ian Cunnison, "History and Genealogies in a Conquest State," *American Anthropologist*, 59, 1 (1957) 26-27; I.M. Lewis, "Historical Aspects of Genealogies in Northern Somali Social Structure," *Journal of African History*, III, 1 (1962) 35-36.

the start of Old Kingdom Egypt five thousand years ago, not to mention the literate Arabic traditions from the Seventh Century forward. Lewis also found correlation in genealogical accuracy relating to primacy of settlement or to the acquisition of political power, and these conditions are certainly found in the influential role of the Mahas at the meeting of the White and Blue Niles.

In the Somali case, Lewis observed that the organizing principle for social cohesion and political maneuvering was found in the patrilineal descent group<sup>30</sup> and likewise this has been an element of the Mahas social organization at least since the time of their Islamization. For the Somalis, many children can recite 20 or 30 lineal relatives on the male line by heart and certain elders are able accurately to retain even more specialized genealogical knowledge. Such examples are also to be found with the Mahas, who may even display their *nisba* on an otherwise undecorated wall.

For Libyan Bedouin, Peters notes there is considerable accuracy for five generations back but that there is an "area of ambiguity" between those recent times and the period of the "cultural past" which shows a rather constant replication over the generations.<sup>31</sup> Cunnison writes that the existence of a named lineage head may prompt an accurate genealogical rendition back to seven generations<sup>32</sup> and this is certainly the case for the Mahas *faruq* which bear the names of the lineage founders. Royal lineages, he notes, may represent a true chronicle record for some nine generations. Once again, in the Mahas case, the *fukahaa* proximity to Funj royalty is supportive of genealogical accuracy.

Beyond these conditions which correlate with, or promote genealogical precision, Irving has found that the existence of ranked endogamous castes and intra-caste family ranks relates to the increasing precision as do patron-client relations, the politics of reputation, and patterns of patrilineal succession and inheritance.<sup>33</sup> Such aspects of social organization are legitimized by pedigree although she cautions by saying that genealogy does not determine such ranks and relations. In the case of Sheikh Khojali for example, there is abundant proof of his great influence and, in fact, of the persistent influence of his descendants who have continued to be at or near the centers of power in the Sudan.

Irving also determined that for the Wolof the existence of an historian (griot) segregated from the political arena, and long-lasting factionalism, will encourage the the development and maintenance of accurate genealogies which interpenetrate with historical events and personages.<sup>34</sup> Likewise the data presented here give strong support to these correlative relationships. Thus, these Mahas people and their leaders have not only brought Islam and the seeds of urbanism to the central Sudan, they have also carried with them an historical record of unusual length and accuracy.

<sup>30</sup> Lewis, "Historical Aspects," 35-48.

<sup>31</sup> E.L. Peters, "The Proliferation of Lineage Segments among the Bedouin of Cyrenaica," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 90 (1960), 40.

<sup>32</sup> Cunnison, "History and Genealogies," 29.

<sup>33</sup> Irving, "When Is Genealogy History?," 653-654.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 669-670.

Finally, some comment may be made about some patterning in Mahas marriages. Elsewhere<sup>35</sup> I have written about the unusually high degree of lineage (*fariiq*) and ethnic (*gabila*) endogamy of the Mahas. Given the very longstanding access to positions of influence in the central Sudan, many Mahas *faruq* use marriage alliances to develop or cement socio-political alliances. For those seeking to consolidate their social or class position the pattern of *fariiq* endogamy allows for maintenance of *mahar* (bridewealth) payments to be kept within the lineage. This type of endogamy is well-suited to the preservation of the status quo. On the other hand, *fariiq* or *gabila* exogamy is well-suited to achieve social mobility, or to develop new alliances such as would occur during periods of class formation or territorial acquisition. The biographies in this article give some additional data on this matter.

In the case of Sheikh Idris wad Muhammad el Arbab we have seen that he and his descendants were famed for their generosity and, in general, their austerity, in keeping with the simplicity of the Qadriya order. The limited data we have show a consistent pattern of *gabila* endogamy and I would tentatively postulate an outlook of preservation of the status quo which may still be seen today in the simple, small-scale life in Eilafun.

In the case of Sheikh Khojali there is a sharp contrast. His biography and family history show notable patterns of *fariiq* and *gabila* exogamy. For example, one of his four daughters was encouraged to marry 'Abdel Mahmoud El-Nofalabi, an important contemporary leader of the Gummyi'iya rather than Mahas ethnic group. More specifically, the pattern of *fariiq* endogamy may be fine for the consolidation of established influence, wealth or position, but his preference would be counterproductive at other times. An example of strategic alliance building may be seen in Figure XIII. Here I have shown Fatma, daughter of Muhammad el-Fakih, who has married into the influential Mirghani family which is at the heart of the Khatmiya *tariqa*. This politically important sect has long opposed the Mahdiya *tariqa* as have many Mahas whose positions were eroded during Mahdist rule (1885-1898).

Children of Khalifa Ahmed, the present successor to Sheikh Khojali have already distinguished themselves in higher education, including medical school and other professional training. Thus, although there is clearly a new wave in the process of class formation in the Sudan today, one may also see recruitment to these new socio-economic strata following from kin ties having centuries of depth. There is, in short, both continuity and change. Links in kinship and marriage may be mobilized to achieve these ends.

<sup>35</sup>Lobban, "Class, Endogamy and Urbanization," 99-114.

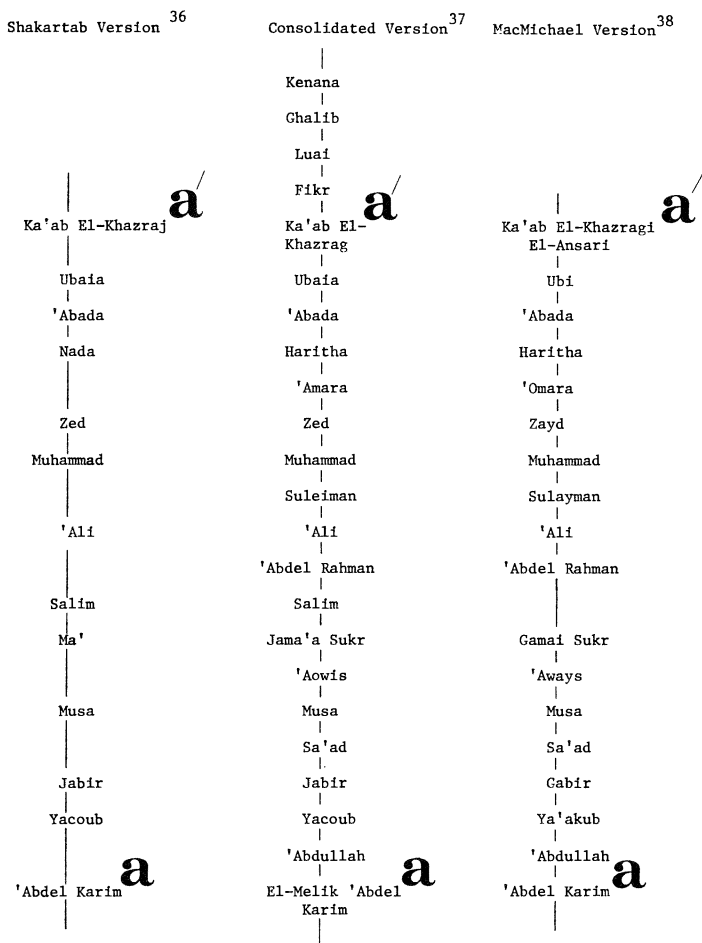


Figure I  
Mahas line of descent based on Khazrag Origins

<sup>36</sup>The Shakartab version was formulated in conversations with 'Omer Yousif Al-Tayib, Qadi Muhammad Misherif and others, and by the various written records which they hold.

<sup>37</sup>The consolidated version seeks to unify all of the existing genealogies and is built upon them as well as my own research and thinking on the subject. The *nisba* of El-Fakih Ahmed El-Hadi of Tuti Island was especially useful in this version, and the Bashagra *nisba* of Amin Arbab Amin was also consulted and compared in detail.

<sup>38</sup>The MacMichael Version is from MacMichael, *History of the Arabs*, II, 100.

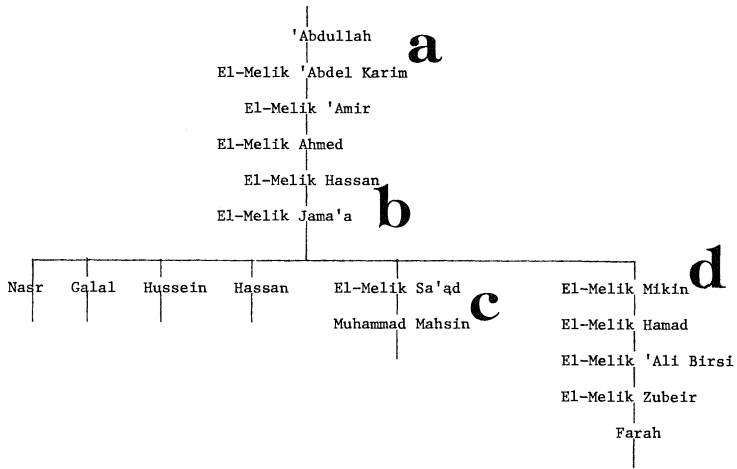


Figure II 39  
Mahas Descent, the "Melik Series"

<sup>39</sup>This section is from *ibid.*

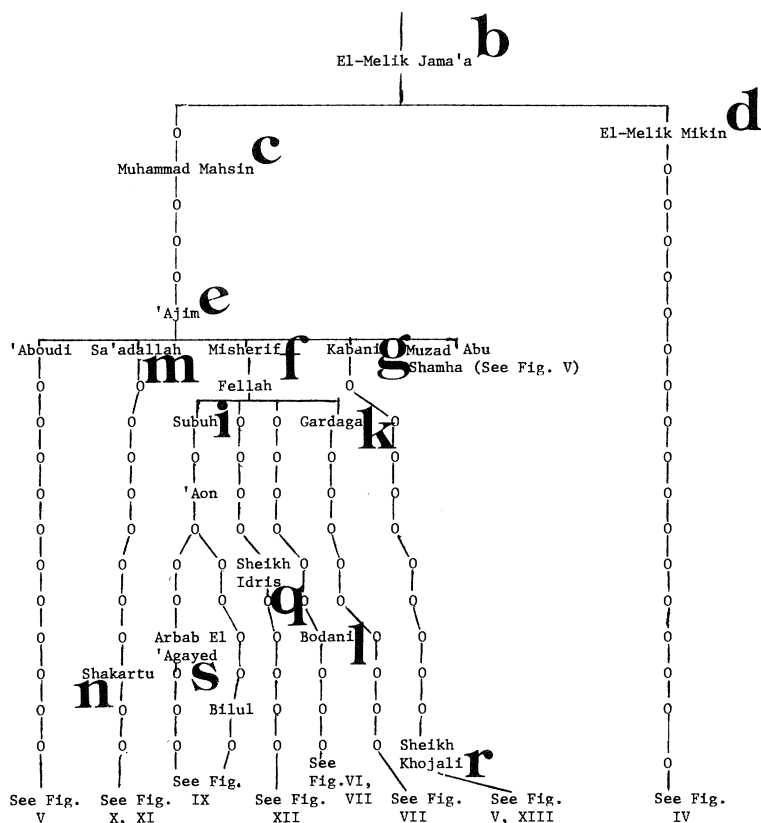


Figure III  
Schematic Genealogy of the Mahas of the Three Towns

and Guide to Subsequent Figures<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup>This section is compiled and unified for the first time by the author.

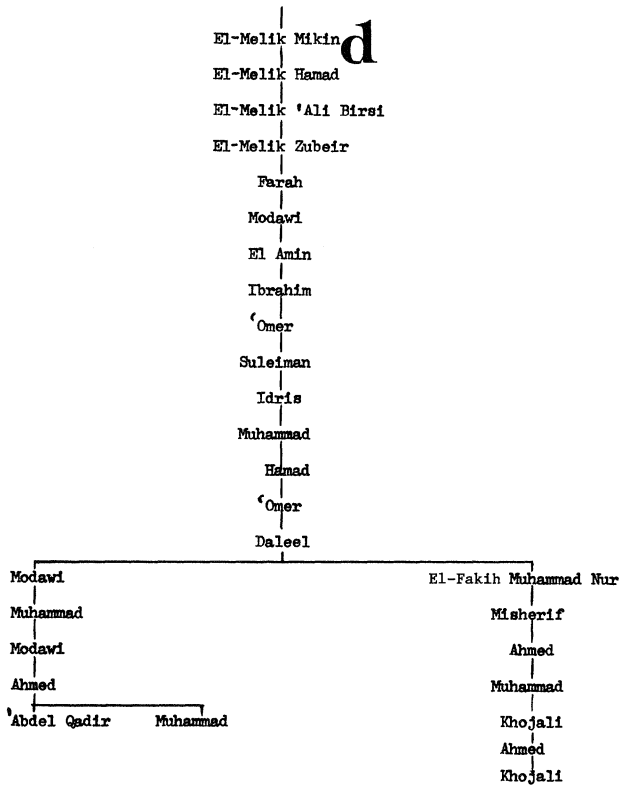


Figure IV 41  
Elements of the Meknab Fariiq

<sup>41</sup>These data are mainly from El-Hadi Ahmed El-Hadi Tutui Island.



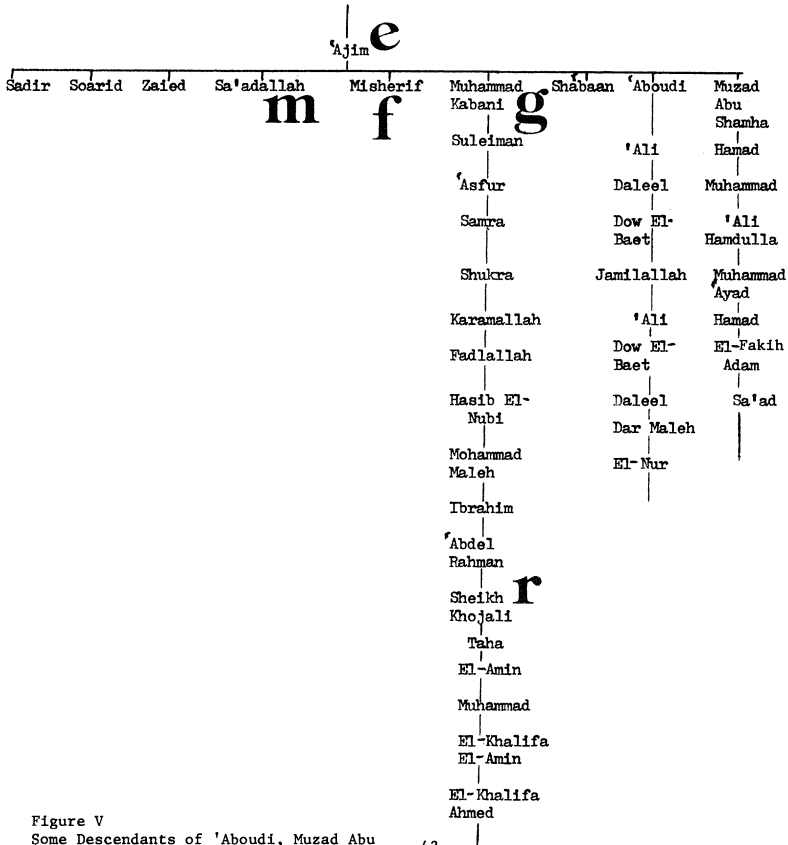
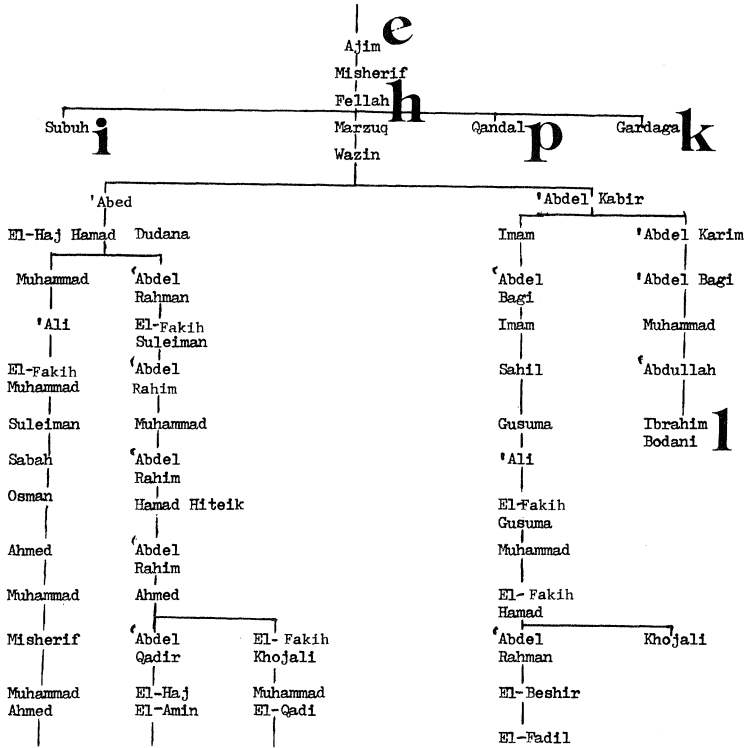


Figure V  
Some Descendants of 'Aboudi, Muzad Abu Shamha, and Muhammad Kabani (Sons of 'Ajim) <sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup>These data are mainly from Khalifa Ahmed of Hillet Khojali, and from MacMichael, *History of the Arabs*, II, 100.

Figure VI

Descendants of Marzuq,<sup>43</sup> son of Fellah, son of Misherif  
 (some early inhabitants of Burri al Mahas)



<sup>43</sup> These data are from Abu Zed Musa and Hassan Babiker Bodani of Burri al-Mahas and Mustafa Araki of Qoz.

Figure VII  
Genealogy of the Bodanab fariiq

(see Figure VI)

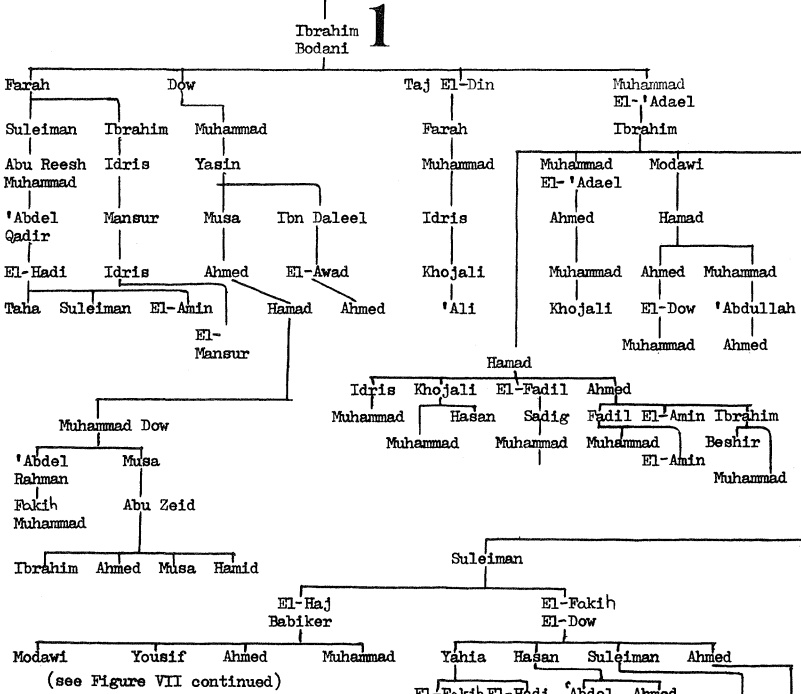
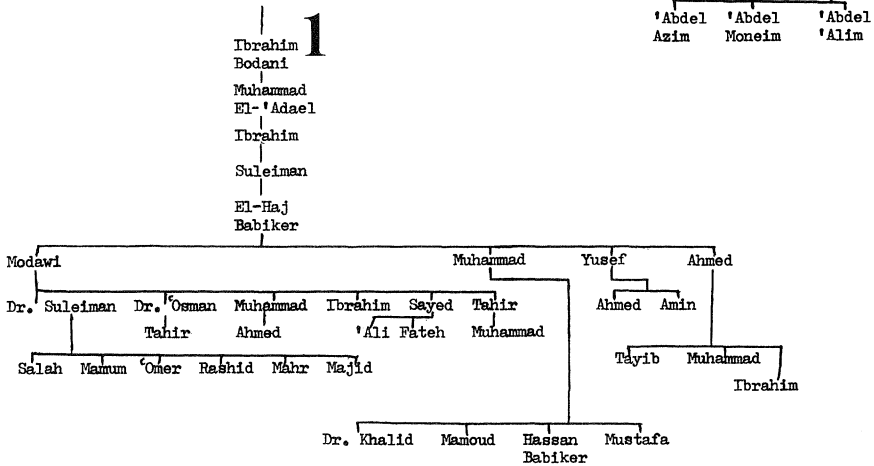
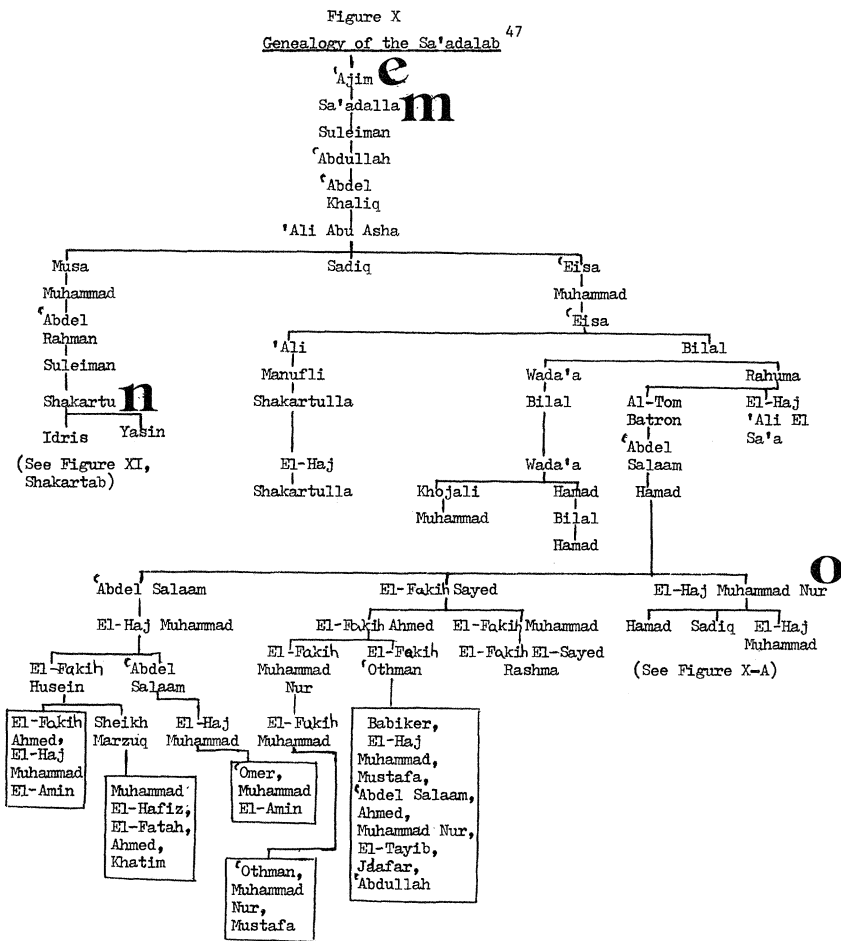


Figure VII (continued)  
Genealogy of the Bodanab fariiq









<sup>45</sup> These data are from Muhammad Misherif of Shambat, Muhammad 'Osman Agabash of Tuti Island, Amin Arbab Amin of Bashagra, and Abu Zed Musa of Burri al-Mahas.

<sup>46</sup> The data for Figure X are from Sayed Wad Shaheen, 'Omer Yousif AL-Tayib, and 'Abdel Rahman Gibreel all of Tuti Island, and Qadi Muhammad Misherif of Khartoum North.

<sup>47</sup> These data are from 'Abdullahi el-Fakih 'Osman of Hillet Khojali, and from Sayed Wad Shaheen, and Muhammad Misherif.

Figure X-A  
Genealogy of the Sa'adalab  
(continued)

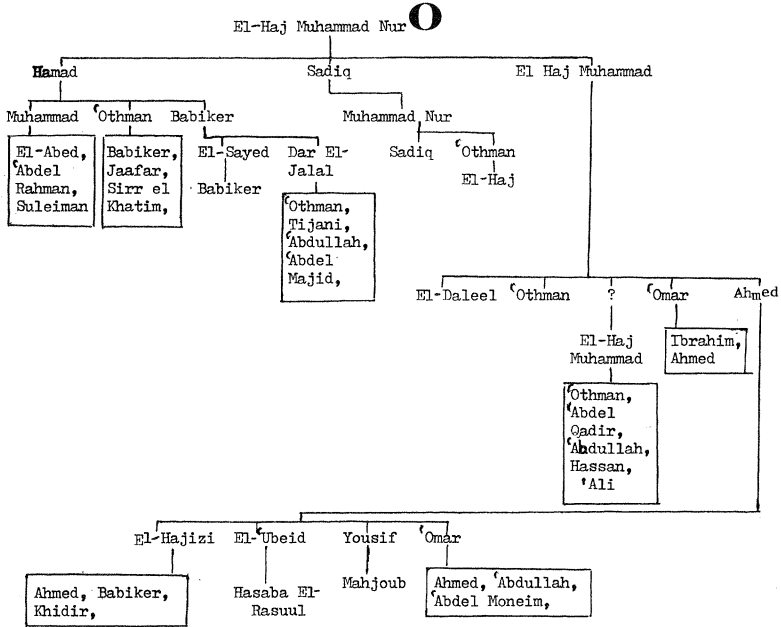


Figure XI  
Genealogy of the Shakartab  
(See Figure X for links between  
Shakartu and 'Ajim)

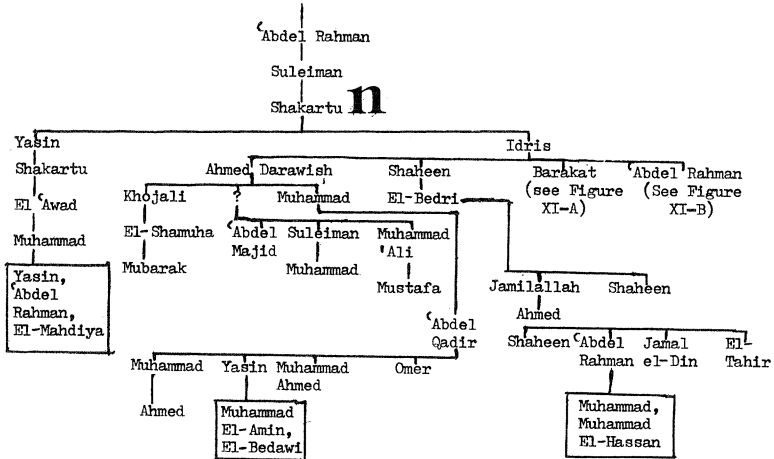


Figure XI-A  
Genealogy of the Shakartab  
(See Figure XI for links to other members of the Shakartab)

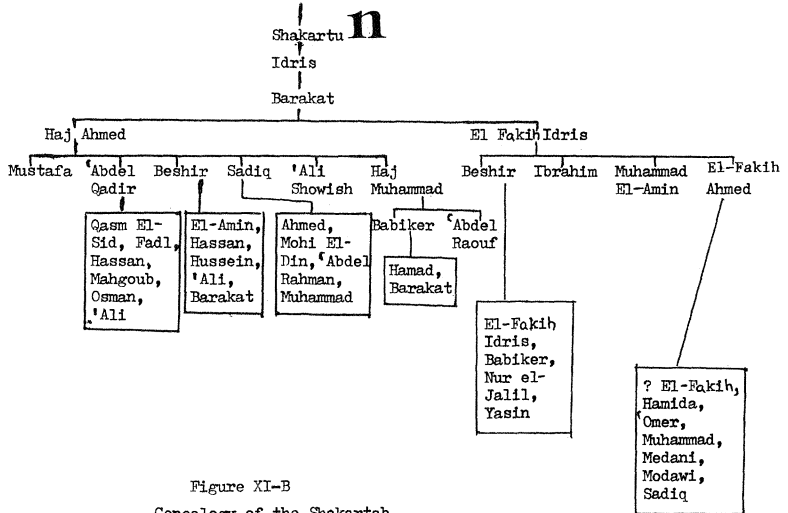


Figure XI-B  
Genealogy of the Shakartab  
(See Figure XI for links to other members of the Shakartab)

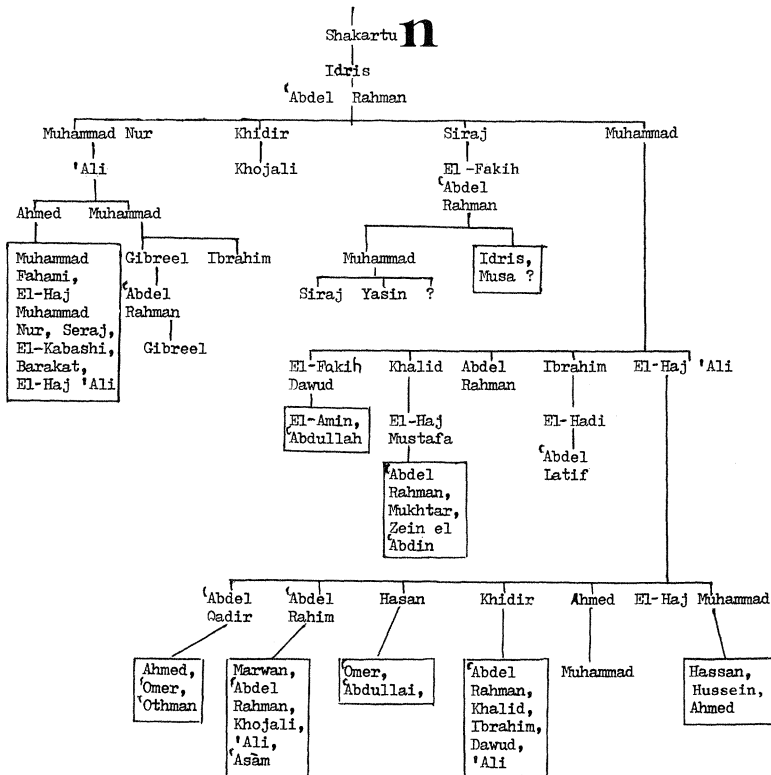
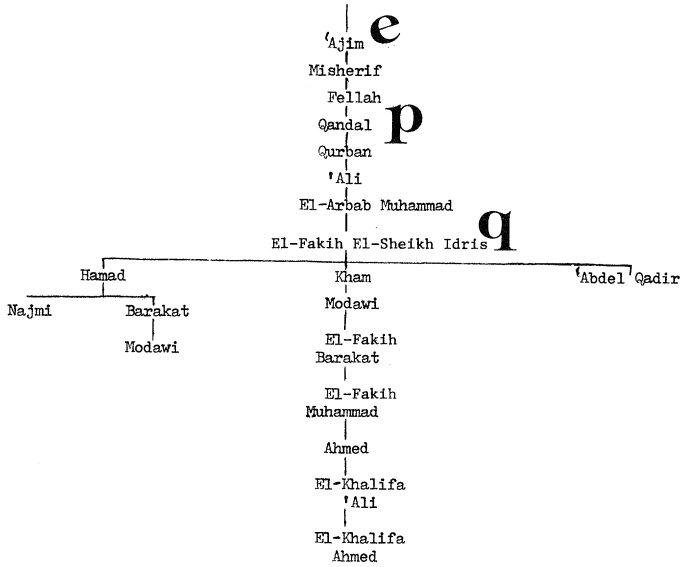




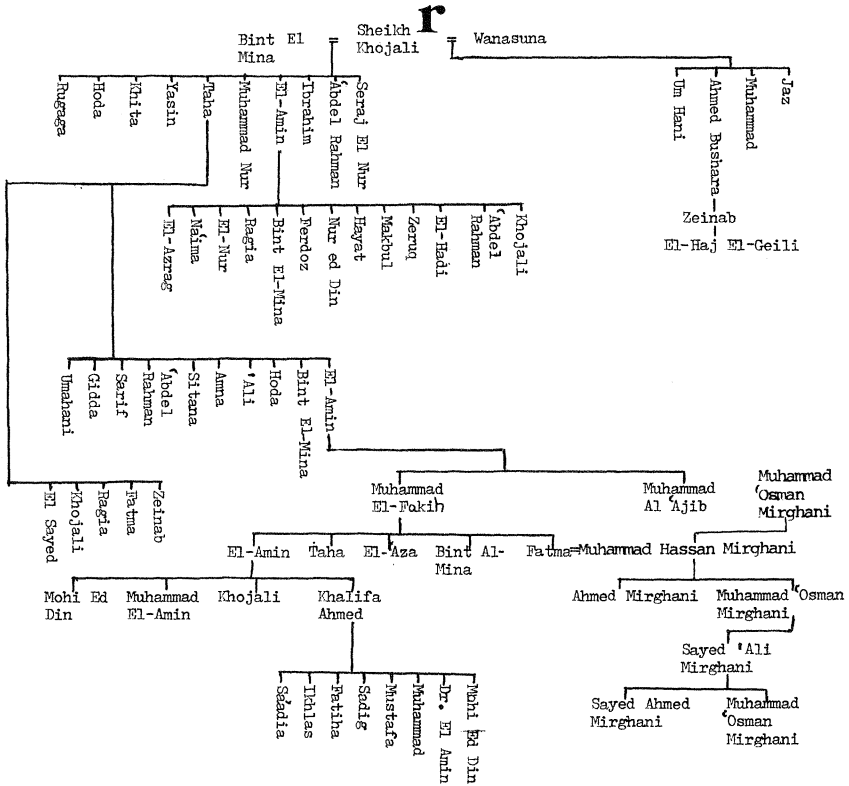
Figure XII

Some Elements <sup>48</sup> of the Fariiq of Sheikh Idris



<sup>48</sup>The data for Figure XII are mainly from Amin Arbab Amin and Mustafa Araki.

Figure XIII  
Some  
Descendants of Sheikh Khojali<sup>49</sup>



Note: For the ancestors of Sheikh Khojali see Figure V.

<sup>49</sup>The data for Figure XIII are from Khalifa Ahmed and MacMichael, *History of the Arabs*, II, 83.