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Source: *Arabica*, Feb., 1967, T. 14, Fasc. 1 (Feb., 1967), pp. 14-31

Published by: Brill

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4055902>

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MAIN ASPECTS OF THE ARAB MIGRATION TO THE SUDAN ¹

BY

YÛSUF FAḌL ḤASAN

THE appearance of Islam is an important land mark in Arab history: it provided the Arabs with a religious and intellectual bond that helped them in creating a vast empire. Under the banner of Islam Arab forces marched towards the north, east and west reaching places which were probably never visited by Arab immigrants before. The early conquests coincided with an overpopulation, which time and again compelled the Arabs to cross their borders in search of food and pasture. There is indeed some evidence to suggest that some Arabs reached the Sudan in pre-Islamic times either directly across the Red Sea or via Egypt. These were the two major routes that the Arabs followed in later times.

Before discussing the factors that led to the Arab migration into the Sudan we should consider briefly the condition of the country lying south of Aswan, which may be called for convenience the «Sudan».

At the time the prophet Muḥammad was born, that country consisted firstly of the Beja living in more or less their present habitat, secondly of three kingdoms whose sphere of influence was mainly confined to the Nile Valley between Aswan and Sennar on the Blue Nile. The first Kingdom was Nobatia or al-Marīs which was eventually united to the second one, al-Muqurra, thus forming the Kingdom of Nubia which extended as far as Kaboshiyya. Dongola was the capital. The third Kingdom was known as 'Alwa, and Soba was its capital ².

The people of the Sudan, and especially the northerners and the

1. For a more detailed background of this paper see: YÛSUF FAḌL ḤASAN, *The Arabs and the Eastern Sudan from the seventh to the early sixteenth century*, Ph. D. thesis, London 1964.

2. C. G. SELIGMAN, *Some aspects of the Hamitic problem in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, in *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute (JRAI)*, XLIII (1913), pp. 593-610; A. M. BATRAWI, *The racial history of Egypt and Nubia*, in *JRAI*, LXXVI (1946), p. 115.

easterners were originally more akin to the predynastic Egyptian of Negada and were influenced in varying degrees by the semi-negroid tribes that came from the south¹. These peoples remained pagan until the sixth century when the Christian faith was extensively adopted by the inhabitants of 'Alwa and Nubia where only a portion of the Beja were converted. When the Muslims raided Nubia, Christianity was undoubtedly the predominant religion among the Nubians². This point may explain Nubian resentment to Muslim domination over the Copts and their increasing attacks on Upper Egypt. The Nubians were accustomed to harassing the Egyptian border whenever it was opportune or when they felt that the rulers of Egypt were not strong enough to defend it. But it seems that the present attacks were so alarming that the Caliph 'Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb ordered his viceroy in Egypt, 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ to put an end to them³.

The nature and the number of the early Muslim attacks is not clear from Arabic accounts. There were probably at least two major campaigns one in 641 and the other in 651. The first campaign was met with stout resistance from the famous Nubian bowmen. A Ḥimyarite elder who claims to have participated in two expeditions against the Nubians in the time of 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ relates: «There were no warriors as brave as they are. I saw one of them asking a Muslim in which part of your body do you want me to put my arrow, and, when the Muslim shows him a certain spot, he would not miss it»⁴. Indeed the resistance was so strong and the booty was so meagre that the Muslims asked 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ to make peace⁵. 'Amr rejected the idea and the Arabs continued their campaigns until 651 when 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abi Sarḥ, the governor of Egypt marched with a force of 5000 as far as Dongola. In the ensuing battle between the Arabs and the Nubians, the latter exhibited the same gallant fighting powers and were only scared by the catapults which bombarded their cathedral. The presence of this strange siege weapon prompted the Nubian King Qalaydarūt to ask for peace⁶. Having failed to defeat their enemies

1. U. MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Storia della Nubia Christiana*, Roma 1938, pp. 53-70.

2. J. W. CROWFOOT, *Christian Nubia*, in *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, XIII (1927), p. 142.

3. AL-MAS'ŪDĪ, *Murūğ al-Dahab*, Paris (1861), III, pp. 38-9.

4. IBN 'ABD AL-ḤAKAM, *Kitāb Futūḥ Miṣr wa-aḥbārihā*, Leiden 1920, 169, 170, 174.

5. AL-BALĀDURĪ, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, Cairo 1938, 238, 239.

6. IBN 'ABD AL-ḤAKAM, *op. cit.*, 188; AL-MAQRĪZĪ, *al-Ḥiṭaṭ*, Cairo 1922, III, 290.

decisively and discouraged by the long distance that separated them from their base, the Arabs accepted the peace offers.

The Arabs' attitude indicates that they were not aiming at subjugating the Nubians but wanted to check their raids. This view is based on a detailed study of the treaty concluded in 651-2¹.

The treaty referred to is no more than a truce or a non-aggression pact in which neither would attack the other. It also recognizes officially the mutual commercial interests of the Muslims and the Nubians. This transaction is commonly known as the *Baqṭ*. The *Baqṭ* or *pactum* is a Graecised Latin word, current in the Byzantine Empire of which Egypt was a province, to denote «a compact of mutual obligations and its connected payments»². After concluding the truce in 651-2. The Muslims and the Nubians agreed to the following: the Nubians should deliver annually four hundred slaves to the Muslims in exchange for food stuff and clothing, and that Muslims were allowed to enter Nubia as traders, but not as settlers, and the same privilege was conferred on Nubian traders in Egypt. The treaty then confirms, as we mentioned earlier, that the Muslims were primarily seeking to protect their southern borders. They had however, unintentionally succeeded in opening that country to the Arab trade and Muslim influence³.

As might be expected the Nubians tried to get rid of those obligations by raiding Upper Egypt in the last days of the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750) but they failed. In the reign of al-Mahdī (777-85) the 'Abbāsīd Caliph, they complained of the difficulties they face in procuring the required number of slaves to deliver the *Baqṭ* annually. As a result of this complaint al-Mahdī allowed them to deliver the quota once every three years. Some Arabic accounts indicate that some exchange was introduced in the time of al-Mu'taṣim (833-842) the sources add that the Nubians were unwilling to pay the *Baqṭ*. It seems that the confusion which reigned over Egypt in the days of al-Ma'mūn (813-33) encouraged them not to fulfill their obligations. The Muslims on their part stopped the good supplies and started harrying Nubia. The new development did not please Zakariyyā b. Yaḥnus, the Nubian King, who sent his son George to Baghdad to secure a reduction on the *Baqṭ*. The result of this visit was similar to the amendment reached during the reign of al-Mahdī.

1. YŪSUF FAḌL ḤASAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-97.

2. F. LØKKEGAARD, *Baqṭ*, in *EI*², I, 966.

3. YŪSUF FAḌL ḤASAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-97.

The important fact is that the *Baqt* treaty remained a major factor in the Muslim-Nubian relations for six centuries without basic alteration ¹.

Despite the fact that the agreement was directed in the past against Arab encroachment and settlement in Nubia, this could not be prevented. Indeed after the death of the last Umayyad Caliph, Marwān, his two sons ‘Abd Allāh and ‘Ubayd Allāh together with two or four thousands of their followers headed towards Nubia with the intention of setting there in a position to regain their lost state. Aware of the transfer of power from the Umayyads to the ‘Abbāsids, the Nubian King did not hesitate to drive them away from his country. So ‘Abd Allāh and his supporters had no alternative but to go back to Arabia ². Although those political refugees could not remain in Nubia, the road they took was the path used by many immigrants in the following centuries. Indeed as early as the reign of al Ma’mūn, the Nubian King had complained that the Arabs had begun to buy the lands of his subjects in the region between Aswan and Baġrāš, where Muslims were not allowed to settle. His complaint did not stop Arab encroachment in that area and when the Fāṭimid traveller Ibn Sulaym al-Aswānī visited the area in c. 975 he found that the Arabs had intermixed with the natives to such a degree that many of them had forgotten the Arabic language. However, the existence of a powerful Kingdom, which only allowed selected traders to pass the second cataract compelled the Arab immigrants to seek another route via the Eastern Desert ³.

Egypt was not the only route by which the Arabs entered the Sudan. Other groups penetrated, from the early years of the Muslim era, across the Red Sea. Al-Ṭabarī, the Arab historian, mentioned that a companion of the Prophet named Abū Miḥġan al-Ṭaqafī went to Bāḍi‘ (a Sudanese port) in A. H. 16-637 ⁴. About the same time, in retaliation for Abyssinian pirate-raids on Jedda, the Muslim sent five ships. The result of the campaign was inconclusive as the Abyssinians recommenced their raids in the reign of Sulaymān b. ‘Abd al-Malik (715-17) who ordered the occupation of their lair, the Archipelago of Dahlak in order to end their activi-

1. AL-BALĀDURĪ, *op. cit.*, 239; AL-MAQRĪZĪ, *op. cit.*, III, 295.

2. AL-YA‘QŪBĪ, *Ta’rīḥ Ibn Wāḍiḥ*, Leiden 1883, II, pp. 415-6.

3. AL-MAS‘ŪDĪ, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 42-3; AL-MAQRĪZĪ, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 252-3.

4. AL-ṬABARĪ, *Ta’rīḥ al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, Leiden 1879, I, 2479-80.

ties¹. This occupation was the first real penetration of Muslim influence on the western coast of the Red Sea. However, Arab merchants had always played an important role in the commercial activities of that coast since time immemorial.

By the first quarter of the eighth century the Beja tribes began to harass southern Egypt. So ‘Ubayd Allāh b. al-Ḥabḥāb, the superintendent of finance, sent an army which defeated the Beja. The victors imposed a treaty by which the Beja were to deliver an annual tax of 300 camels and to refrain from attacking the Muslims or their subjects in the Beja country or any other place. On the other hand the Arabs granted the Beja the right to travel in Egypt. In short this treaty was similar to the Nubian treaty, for it did not only curtail the Beja aggression, but also opened the gates of that country to Arab immigrants and Muslim culture. The period of tranquility that preceded this agreement encouraged pilgrims to go to the Ḥiḡāz across the Beja country. But in 814 a pilgrim caravan, led by the ruler of Qifṭ who was so knowledgeable of the Beja country that its inhabitants felt unsafe and killed him together with all his followers, except a youth who bore the tidings to the citizens of Qifṭ. The matter was kept secret until the Beja came to trade in Qifṭ as was their habit, then they were annihilated. The Beja retaliated by raiding Qifṭ killing many of its inhabitants and capturing others. The people of Qifṭ continued to beg the assistance of the Governor for eight years without success. At last assistance came from Ḥakam al-Nābiḡī of the Qays ‘Aylān who resided at al-Ḥawf in Lower Egypt. Ḥakam advanced at the head of a thousand of his tribesmen and fought the Beja for eight years until he regained more than they captured. The fact that some of the Arabs volunteered and left the rich land of al-Ḥawf to support Qifṭ against the Beja shows that there were profound motives for their action². However the relations between the Sudan and Muslim world did not reach any degree of importance until the position of the Arabs had deteriorated in the Muslim Empire in general and in Egypt in particular. To explain this point one should look at the early Arab history.

During the patriarch, the Umayyad and the early time of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphates the Arabs, in Egypt were a select minority,

1. YŪSUF FADL ḤASAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-1.

2. IBN ‘ABD AL-ḤAKAM, *op. cit.*, 189; IBN ḤAWQAL, *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-arḍ*, Leiden 1938, pp. 51-2.

then comprised the soldiery and ruling aristocracy. They received generous pensions and paid few taxes. As a fighting group they were not allowed to own land nor to till it, thus they lived mainly in towns. But towards the end of the Umayyad Caliphate some began to engage in agricultural activities and hence intermingled with the Egyptians.

Since the Muslim invasion in 641, the Arabs continued to infiltrate into Egypt for a variety of reasons. New governors were accustomed to introduce their own tribesmen to consolidate their position. The number of such supporters were at times six thousand, ten thousand or even twenty thousand. If we bear in mind that thirty three governors ruled Egypt between the second governorship of 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ (658) and 'Anbasa b. Ishāq al-Ḍabbī (856), the last of the Arab governors of Egypt, we could have a rough idea of the number of Arabs who came in such circumstances. The Umayyads, too, encouraged the migration of the Qays to balance the power of the Yaman who had settled in large numbers ¹.

By the time of the collapse of the Umayyad dynasty the power of the Arabs was greatly undermined. The new masters, though Arabs, sought their support among the *Mawālī* (non-Arab Muslims) and discontented Arabs. The 'Abbāsids however, found it extremely difficult to please all their supporters and hence relied almost exclusively on the Ḥurāsānī soldiers who were a mixture of Persians and Arabs. Thus the Arab fighters lost a great deal of their privileges as salaries were only granted to those in active service—even those who remained lost their positions to the Turks ². Realising this drastic change some Arabs turned to farming, others reverted once more to nomadism, while the rest, being displeased drafted to the distant parts of the Empire. Since that time the term '*Arab* or '*ʿrāb* was generally applied to the nomads.

In Egypt, the Arab expressed their indignation at the new policy by a series of revolts that lasted throughout the first century of 'Abbāsīd rule. It was only with great effort that the central government succeeded in crushing the rebels. Most of those rebels wanted to enjoy the produce of the land they tilled without paying any taxes to the state. By 831 the situation had grown so bad that

1. S. LANE-POOLE, *A history of Egypt in the Middle Ages*, London 1901, 29; AL-MAQRĪZĪ, *al-Bayān wa-l-iʿrāb ʿan-mā bi-arḍ Miṣr min al-Aʿrāb*, Cairo 1961, 66, 68, 98, 99.

2. B. LEWIS, *The Arabs in history*, London 1958, 80, 84, 92-3.

the Caliph al-Ma'mūn had to send his brother al-Mu'taṣim with 4,000 Turkish soldiers to disperse the Arabs who besieged al-Fuṣṭāṭ. A year later the Caliph was obliged to deal personally with the rebels. These wars had undoubtedly increased the antagonism between the Arabs and the rulers of Egypt¹.

When al-Mu'taṣim came to power he instructed his governor in Egypt to cross off the register of pensioners the names of all Arabs. This resolution, a turning point in the history of the Arabs in Egypt, meant that the Arabs were gradually replaced by Turkish fighters².

The Turks were known to the Muslim world since the Umayyad period, but they began to acquire importance when al-Mu'taṣim recruited them as his personal body guard and entrusted them with the suppression of the Arab revolt in Egypt before his succession. When he became Caliph he continued to rely on them for reasons on which we can not dwell here. It is certain, however, that their military skill excelled that of the Arab militia and the Ḥurāsānīs. From that date the Turks (and the Nubians, mainly in Egypt) formed the core of the 'Abbāsīd army.

Al-Mu'taṣim's decision met with loud disapproval in Egypt: Yaḥyā b. al-Wazīr al-Ġarawī supported by the Ġudām and the Laḥm tribesmen, declared disobedience until they regained their «usurped rights»³. Their revolt did not change the situation such as they soon discovered that there remained only two alternatives: either to settle and mix with the Egyptian or move further to the south away from the immediate control of the government. The appointment of the Turks as rulers of Egypt from 856 increased Arab discontent.

In short the turkification policy initiated by al-Mu'taṣim is to my mind the basic factor that encouraged the Arabs to migrate to the Sudan. As Turkish influence became more apparent in the army and the administration the more the Arabs began to drift away. This development reached its zenith during the Mamlūk era.

Since the beginning of the ninth century, it seems to me that the Arabs had entered the Sudan in small groups unheeded by any one and unregistered by chroniclers. These groups were attracted by the

1. AL-MAQRĪZĪ, *al-Ḥiṭaṭ*, Cairo edition, 1853, I, 307-8, 339-40.

2. IBN TAĠRĪ BIRDĪ, *al-Nuġūm al-zāhira fī ta'riḥ mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira*, Cairo 1929-, II, 223.

3. AL-MAQRĪZĪ, *al-Ḥiṭaṭ*, II, 44; IBN TAĠRĪ BIRDĪ, *op. cit.*, II, 223.

news of the rich pasture plains that lay south of Nubia. Although the border between Egypt and the Sudan, on the Nile, was guarded by the Lord of the Mountain at Bağrāš (Faras), this post could easily be evaded ¹.

By the beginning of the ninth century too, the Beja took advantage of the preoccupation of the rulers of Egypt with internal strife and started raiding Upper Egypt. Then al-Mu‘taşim despatched an army under ‘Alī b. al-Ġahm who defeated the Beja chief Kannūn b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and forced a settlement on him similar to that of ‘Ubayd Allāh b. al-Ḥabḥāb: the Beja country extending from Aswān to Bādi‘ became a personal property of the Caliph and Kannūn would remain as his deputy. The Beja were to pay a hundred camels or three hundred *dīnārs* to the Muslim treasury and they were not to harm the Muslim who travel or settle in their country and they were prevented from destroying the mosques built in their country or hindering Muslim officials from collecting alms. The treaty in short laid the foundation of Muslim influence in that region more effectively than ever before ².

During the campaigns of ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Ġahm it was rumoured that there were gold and emerald mines in the Eastern Desert. The discontented Arabs rushed in big numbers in search of wealth.

Before going any further it is important to show the nature of these migrations. Although the state policy did not persuade the Arabs to stay in Egypt, sheer economic reasons motivated many Arabs and their families to penetrate into the Sudan: they were attracted by the lucrative slave trade, mining activities in the Eastern Desert, the conveyance of pilgrimages and the Indian trade which led ultimately to the development of the Red Sea Ports.

The trade factor might be the chief incentive that induced the Arabs to penetrate into al-Muqurra and ‘Alwa during the first Muslim centuries. Arab traders exchanged food stuffs, clothes and beads for local commodities such as ostrich feathers, ivory, cattle and slaves. Slave trade represented an important part of this trade owing to the increasing demand for slaves after the end of the early Muslim expansion. Other than domestic jobs and labourers the majority of these slaves became soldiers particularly in the time of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn the governor of Egypt (868-84) who

1. ABŪ ŠĀLIḤ AL-ARMANĪ, *Ta’rīḥ al-Šayḥ Abī Šāliḥ al-Armanī*, Oxford 1894, 12.

2. AL-MAQRĪZĪ, *al-Ḥiṭat*, III, 273-5.

recruited 40,000. This number increased during the Iḥšīdīd and the Fāṭimīd periods. The demand was not restricted to Egypt; the Ḥiġāz was also an important market.

Where was the home-land of these slaves? Most likely that the bulk were obtained from the territories to the south-west of al-Muqurra and 'Alwa i.e. the western and central parts of *Bilād al-Sūdān*. Arab traders however, depended on local merchants for procuring these slaves.

The extensive slave trade had paved the way for Arab migration for two reasons: firstly although most of the slaves were obtained from *Bilād al-Sūdān* in general, the portion brought from al-Muqurra and 'Alwa deprived those countries of its young people and hence reduced their chances of checking the Arab advance later. Secondly through travelling in those regions the Arab traders became acquainted with the land, its pastures and its people. This knowledge undoubtedly opened their minds to new horizons. In the light of what happened later, it seems after widening the scope of their commercial activities, traders acted as missionaries for Islam in those parts ¹.

The discovery of the gold and emerald mines in the Eastern Desert had attracted many Arabs who rushed in huge numbers from Egypt at the beginning of the ninth century. Their main centre was Wādī l-'Allāqī. The Beja, though disinterested in mining activities, could not tolerate the Arabs in their lands. They killed some, drove the rest back and refused to pay taxes. After some reluctance, fearing the ferocious Beja and their desolate desert, the government of Baghdad ordered the despatch of an army under al-Qummī in 855. The majority of the army consisted of the tribes of Muḍar, Rabī'a and Yaman which were driven from the mines earlier. After their defeat, the Beja agreed to pay the tribute and to allow the Muslims to continue their mining activities. To confirm this settlement 'Alī Bābā, the Beja chief accompanied the victorious general back to Baghdad to pay homage to the 'Abbāsīd Caliph, al-Mutawakkil ².

When conditions quietened in the Land of the Mines the Arabs began to infiltrate once more—they came from Egypt and Arabia. The best documented example of Arab activities is that of 'Abd

1. YŪSUF FAḌL ḤASAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-27; IBN BUṬLAN, *Risāla fī Šary al-raqīq wa-taqīb al-'abīd*, Cairo 1954, pp. 371-8.

2. AL-ṬABARĪ, *op. cit.*, III, 1429-33.

Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-ʿUmarī and his allies. In 855 al-ʿUmarī, entered the Land of the Mines with a number of slaves to work his mines. He then allied himself to some Arabs and after some trouble moved further to the south to a region not far from modern Abū Ḥamad where he launched many raids against the Nubians who forced him after a considerable time, to return to Upper Egypt. After defeating an army of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn near Aswān he went back to the Land of the Mines where he established his authority over the Rabīʿa, the Ġuhayna, and the Saʿd al-ʿAšīra. His fame reached such heights that it was said no less than sixty thousand camels were engaged in conveying supplies to his followers. Al-ʿUmarī's hegemony was soon undermined as a result of disagreement among his supporters, some of whom sided with the Beja against him. Though successful against overwhelming odds he was assassinated by two Arabs¹.

By his success in establishing the first Arab principality in North-Eastern Sudan, al-ʿUmarī had paved the way and inspired many adventurers to imitate his career. Twenty years after al-ʿUmarī's death, the Land of the Mines, according to the detailed account of al-Yaʿqūbī, was teeming with Arabs engaged in mining, trade, and the transportation of goods.

The Rabīʿa and their supporters played a leading role in the spread of Islam and Arab influence in the Land of the Mines: After their quarrel with al-ʿUmarī, they allied themselves with the Beja, with whom they intermarried extensively. They were thus to benefit from the matrilineal system of succession (prevalent all over the Sudan at that time) and inherit the control of the whole region. A contemporary source (al-Masʿūdī) states that in 943, the chief of the Rabīʿa, Bišr b. Marwān, also entitled the «Owner of the Mines» had at his disposal 3000 horsemen from the Rabīʿa and 30,000 from the Ḥadāriba i.e. the Beja Muslims. A descendent of this Bišr, called Abū l-Makārim Hibat Allāh, was rewarded with the title of Kanz al-Dawla or the Treasure of the State for his collaboration with the Fāṭimid Caliph al-Ḥākim, to capture Abū Rakwa, the Umayyad rebel, in 1006. This title was used by his successors who became known as Banū l-Kanz and who became a

1. IBN ḤAWQAL, *op. cit.*, 53; AL-YAʿQŪBĪ, *Kitāb al-Buldān* Leiden 1891, 334; AL-MAQRĪZĪ, *al-Muqaffā*, Bibliothèque Nationale, Arabe 2144, Paris, IV, f. 164-7.

local force whose authority covered much of al-Marīs and the Land of the Mines¹.

In time the produce of the mines decreased gradually until it stopped completely about the middle of the fourteenth century and they were smothered with sand. The reasons for this decline were probably due to the simple exhaustion of the best mines, the attacks of the Beja and the Arab tribes and also because the produce did not cover the expenses. Hence those engaged in mining activities started to search for other occupations further to the south.

The Arab migration to the Beja country was not confined to the Land of the Mines, but reached as far as Khor Nubt about seventy miles north-east of Haiya station, near Sinkat, where the remains of an Arab colony that dates from 825-941 were discovered. Its inhabitants were probably engaged in rearing and trading in camels which played an important role in the conveyance of goods between the mines, the Nile and the Red Sea Ports².

Since the dawn of history the Red Sea had always been one of the two commercial routes which linked the East with the Mediterranean Sea. In the Islamic era there arose on its Sudanese coast three important ports, Bādi', 'Aydāb and Sawākin, each of which participated in the Arab commercial activities and the migratory movement. Bādi', which was mentioned as early as 637 in Arabic sources and had collapsed by the end of the eleventh century, was an important trade centre, but it was soon supplanted by the rise of 'Aydāb. When the Fāṭimids conquered Egypt they attempted to divert the Eastern Trade that passed by the second route—which runs from the Persian Gulf, through Baghdad to the Mediterranean Sea—as part of their struggle against the 'Abbāsīd Empire. Having succeeded in diverting the Eastern Trade to the Red Sea, they realised that the Egyptian port of al-Qulzum (Suez) was not suitable for receiving the eastern wares as the port was infested with coral reefs and the journey to it would take a long time against the prevailing northerly winds. So the Fāṭimids turned to 'Aydāb

1. AL-MAS'ŪDĪ, *op. cit.*, III, 33-4; AL-MAQRĪZĪ, *al-Bayān*, 46; IBN AL-AṬĪR, *al-Kāmil fī l-ta'rīḥ*, Leiden 1862, IX, 139-43.

2. G. E. R. SANDERS and T. R. H. OWEN, *Notes on ancient Villages in Khor Nubt and Khor Omek*, in *Sudan Notes and Records*, XXXII (1951), pp. 326-31; H. GLIDDEN, *Khor Nubt Tomb stones*, *Kush* II, (1954), pp. 63-5; G. WIET, *Stèles Cufiques d'Égypte et du Soudan*, in *JA*, CCXL (1952), 292-7.

which was both nearer to Yemen than al-Qulzum and free of coral reefs ¹.

Up to the eleventh century most of the pilgrim caravans journeyed by the Sinai desert, but the frequent famines and the years of hardship that began in 1067 led to the abandonment of that route and the pilgrims crossed via 'Aydāb. This route remained in use up to 1266. It was made more popular by the advent of the crusaders who endangered the Sinai route. At the end of the twelfth century 'Aydāb had become one of the most important ports in the Islamic world. It was a meeting place of ships from India, Yemen, East Africa and Jedda. Out of it came caravans to Upper Egypt under the guidance of Arab tribesmen e.g. from the Tamīm and the Bally ².

After the Mamlūks got rid of the last of the crusaders, the pilgrim caravans, shifted back to the Sinai route, but the commercial caravans remained in the 'Aydāb route for a considerable time. However that route became less safe. In 1272 King Dāwūd of Nubia sacked 'Aydāb. There followed a period of intense fighting among the Arab tribes in that century so that by 1281 the Sultan had to intervene to pacify the Ġuhayna and the Rifā'a. In 1315 Arab tribesmen harried a Yemenite caravan carrying presents to the Sultan, who sent an army of 500 professional soldiers to punish the raiders. The army searched for six months visiting 'Aydāb, Sawākin, Jebel Kasala and coming down the Atbara River to the Nile, but achieved nothing. These attacks, anti-Mamlūk campaigns in essence, affected the safety of the traders and the flow of the Eastern Trade. For these reasons and other factors the Mamlūks encouraged the transfer of the Eastern Trade to Jedda. In 1426 'Aydāb was completely destroyed by Sultan Barsbāy in revenge because its inhabitants had looted an Egyptian caravan ³.

With the stoppage of the mining activities, the destruction of

1. YŪSUF FAḌL ḤASAN, *op. cit.*, 149-56.

2. AL-MAQRĪZĪ, *al-Ḥiṭāṭ*, III, pp. 299-300; IBN ĠUBAYR, *Riḥlat Ibn Ġubayr*, Leiden 1907, pp. 65-73.

3. MUFAḌḌAL B. ABĪ L-FAḌĀ'IL, *al-Nahğ al-Sadīd wa-l-durr al-farīd fī ma ba'd ta'riḥ Ibn al-'Amīd*, Paris 1919, II, p. 221 (or 375); IBN AL-FURĀT, *Ta'riḥ Ibn al-Furāt*, Beirut 1936-42, VII, 226; AL-NUWAYRĪ, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī funūn al-adab*, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, Ma'ārif 'Āmma, 549, Cairo, XXX, f. 97-8; YŪSUF FAḌL ḤASAN, *op. cit.*, 172-5; LEO AFRICANUS, *The history and the description of Africa*, Hakluyt Society, London 1958, III, 226.

‘Aydāb and the transfer of the trade and the pilgrim caravan, the Eastern Desert lost its economic importance and those who worked there moved to the interior, except for a small minority which went to Sawākin.

Sawākin was first heard of in 945. It gained a great deal from the decline of Bādi‘ and ‘Aydāb but it could not equal the latter. It was well connected with the interior by numerous routes and had close links with the Ḥiḡāz: The Muslim traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭa tells us that in 1332 Sawākin was ruled by an Arab from the Ḥiḡāz who inherited its governorship from his Bejāwī uncles. His army was composed of the Beja, Ğuhayna and Banū Kāhil tribesmen ¹.

All these features of the Arab economic activities were the preliminary steps which paved the way for large scale Arab immigration and the spread of Islamic culture. Each economic factor had contributed in one way or another to the opening of the country to Muslim influence and encouraging Arab migration, which had become more significant through the positive intervention of the Mamlūks in the affairs of Christian states and as a result of their mounting pressure on the Arabs in Egypt.

Although the mining, the pilgrimage and trade caravan had opened various channels of livelihood for Arabs discontented with life in Egypt, the relations between them and the rulers of Egypt were deteriorating increasingly. When the Fāṭimids came to power they tried to ingratiate themselves with the Arabs, especially the Qurayš whom they invited to Egypt to gain their support. They also encouraged the coming of the Banū Hilāl and their allies for other reasons. No sooner had they reached Egypt than they began to vex the farmers and to harry the caravans, the result of which was their removal to north Africa. Some of them however remained behind and scattered across the Eastern Desert as far as ‘Aydāb. Despite this fair handling, the Arabs went on revolting for no clear reason. So the Fāṭimid Vezir Badr al-Ğamālī suppressed many of them particularly the Banū l-Kanz who were aiming at establishing an Arab principality in the region of Aswan ².

Under the Ayyūbids (1171-1249) relations remained as cold as

1. AL-HAMADĀNĪ, *Ṣifat Ğazirat al-‘Arab*, Leiden 1884, I, 40, 133; IBN BAṬṬŪṬA, *Tuhfat al-nuẓẓār fi ġarā’ib al-amṣār*, Paris 1893-, II, pp. 160-3.

2. AL-MAQRĪZĪ, *al-Bayān*, 28, 32-3, 121-2.

ever. It is noticeable that the Arabs never forgave the rulers of Egypt for removing their own military and administrative elite. The Ayyūbids recruited their army from Kurdish and Turkish elements but rarely from the Arabs. Hence the latter voiced their discontent whenever they felt some weakness in the state. However, when the Turkish soldiers or Mamlūks assumed authority from their masters in Egypt and Syria, the struggle was much intensified. This signalled the beginning of a harsh conflict between the majority of the Arabs, who were still leading a nomadic or semi nomadic existence, and the settled population. The Arabs refused to submit to the authority of Turkish slaves (Mamlūks) and continued to defy them. The Mamlūks on the other hand were primarily concerned with keeping law and order. Their attempts to suppress Arab up-risings was not a result of a racial hatred, but was rather a general expression of a mutual hostility between the settled communities and Beduins; which had existed since time immemorial¹.

At the beginning of the Mamlūk regime, in 1253 most of the Arabs in Upper Egypt rebelled against the government and refused to pay taxes. Their motto as declared by their leader al-Šarīf Ḥiṣn al-Dīn was: «We are the owners of the country and we ought to rule it». His supporters who numbered 12,000 horsemen and innumerable others thronged from all parts of Egypt, but were eventually defeated by the veteran Mamlūk soldiers².

In short the conflict between the Mamlūks and the Arabs continued for a long period. Indeed when the state failed to subdue the rebels they became more encouraged to challenge the Mamlūks and, if they were defeated, they fled to the south. This pattern continued with decreasing violence until the end of the fifteenth century. Two examples will suffice to illustrate this point.

To meet the Mongol menace in Syria, the Mamlūks imposed heavy taxes on the population in 1301. The Arabs refused to pay and resorted to looting. In relation the Mamluks killed the rebellious leaders and levied one million and a half *dirhams* together with 1000 camels and one thousand sheep, and confiscated all weapons and horses. The Arab reaction was violent: they refused to pay further levies, resorted to brigandage and imposed their own taxes

1. YŪSUF FAḌL ḤASAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-2.

2. AL-MAQRIZĪ, *Kitāb al-Sulūk fi maʿrifat duwal al-Mulūk*, Cairo 1934-, I, 386; *al-Bayān*, 9-10, 38.

on the inhabitants. The government then encircled the rebels who tried to escape in vain and established peace ¹.

Again in 1348 the 'Arak tribesmen were at loggerheads with the Mamlūks who defeated them in 1353. Their chief Muḥammad b. Wāṣil al-Aḥḍab continued to fight, but the despatch of a Mamlūk army under Šayḥū scared the nomads some of whom decided to migrate to Nubia. The two armies finally met near Aswān where the Mamlūks defeated the Arabs and pursued the fugitives for seven days into the Sudan. When the campaign was over a contemporary chronicler states that not a single Beduin remained behind in Upper Egypt. It is also noticeable that the Sultan al-Zāhir Barqūq transferred a group of the Hawwāra, a Berber tribe, from Lower to Upper Egypt in 1380; and few years later they became the chief of all tribes (including the Arabs) in Upper Egypt ².

It is evident that the Mamlūk policy gave the Arabs no alternative except to migrate largely to Nubia. Moreover the frequent famines and epidemics which characterized the first Mamlūk era encouraged many Arabs to migrate to the Sudan permanently. It should also be remembered that many of them accompanied the Mamlūk military expeditions which invaded Nubia.

At the beginning of this paper, I mentioned that the *Baqt* treaty continued to regulate the relations between Egypt and Nubia, which from time to time worsened, often leading to frontier skirmishes. The first serious attack took place when the Ayyūbids penetrated as far as Ibrīm in al-Marīs in 1172-3 with the intention of punishing the Nubians and possibly establishing an Ayyūbid state in the Sudan if they were driven out of Egypt. The enterprise was, however discarded when the Ayyūbids realized the poverty of Nubia. The second attempt occurred in Mamlūk times ³.

We have seen how the Arab revolts in Upper Egypt and the Eastern Desert affected the safety of the caravans and the flow of eastern merchandise. So the Mamlūk Sultan Baybars extended his authority as far as Sawākin to safeguard the routes. King Dāwūd

1. BAYBARS AL-DAWĀDĀR, *Zubdat al-fikra fī Ta'rīḥ al-Ḥiġra*, 656-907 A. H, British Museum, London, Add. 23325, pt II, 223A; AL-MAQRĪZĪ, *al-Sulūk*, I, 914, 920-22.

2. AL-MAQRĪZĪ, *al-Sulūk*, HSS, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya Ta'rīḥ n° 455, Cairo, VI, 619B, VII, 10A-12B; IBN IYĀS, *Badā'i' al-zuhūr fī waqā'i' al-duhūr*, Būlāq 1898, I, 220; AL-MAQRĪZĪ, *al-Bayān*, 58.

3. IBN AL-ATĪR, *op. cit.*, XI, 254.

of Nubia felt that the Mamluks meant to isolate the Christian Kingdoms from the rest of the world. He expressed his anxiety by sacking 'Aydāb and raiding Upper Egypt in 1272. While Baybars was preparing to punish Dāwūd, a Nubian prince named Šakanda came to Egypt complaining that King Dāwūd had usurped his throne from him. The Sultan adopted Šakanda's cause and despatched him with the invading army¹.

The objective of the Mamlūk army and the accompanying Arab tribesmen from Upper Egypt was to invade Nubia and place prince Šakanda on the throne. The army met with fierce resistance all the way through until they faced King Dāwūd near Dongola and defeated him. After pursuing the remnants of the Nubian army for three days the Mamlūks returned to Dongola and crowned Šakanda. He accepted the terms imposed by the invaders: firstly to rule Nubia as a deputy of the Mamluk Sultan, secondly to deliver half the country's revenue to him; thirdly that each Nubian adult should pay a tribute of two *dīnārs* and that all Nubians should pay homage to their King as long as he was faithful to the Sultan. The army then returned to Egypt laden with rich booty and a number of Nubian princes as hostages who could be used for interfering further in Nubian affairs.

With the Mamlūk intervention the Nubian Kingdom was no longer independent. Indeed dynastic divisions and quarrels encouraged the Mamlūks to intervene whenever they wanted—the Mamlūk policy was aimed at converting Nubia into a vassal state. This policy fostered the spread of Islam and Arabization which started centuries earlier in al-Marīs. Moreover, it helped the penetration of the Arabs who accompanied the Mamlūk armies into the Sudan and intermarried with the natives and the ruling families until they had become the leaders of the communities by the fourteenth century.

When Šakanda died in 1277, the question of succession caused an intense dispute among the Nubian princes, but they crowned Šamāmūn who soon declared disobedience and refused to pay the tribute. Sultan al-Manšūr Qalā'ūn sent a large force (in 1287) to dethrone him. The army included large numbers of Arabs. After defeating Šamāmūn who retreated to the south the Mamlūk army

1. IBN 'ABD AL-ZĀHIR, *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī sirat al-Malik al-Zāhir*, ed. by 'Abd al-'Aziz KHOYATIR, Ph. D. thesis, London 1960, I, 285-6; IBN AL-FURĀT, *op. cit.*, VII, pp. 45-6.

installed a new King and returned to Cairo. No sooner had the army gone out of sight than Šamāmūn snatched back his throne. The Mamlūks intervened once more with an even bigger army which included, it was said, no less than 40,000 Arab tribesmen. This number is probably much exaggerated but it is indicative of the large numbers that participated. Though defeated, Šamāmūn repeated his trick of re-assuming the throne, as soon as the Mamlūk forces went back, twice. Finally he succeeded in keeping the Nubian throne by the consent of the Mamlūk Sultans up to the end of the thirteenth century ¹.

In 1304, the Mamlūks set up another Nubian prince, Ammy, who was succeeded by his brother Karanbas in 1311. He soon broke with Egyptian domination and so the Mamlūk sent another army accompanied by a prince Sayf al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh Baršambū who embraced Islam during his stay in Cairo. When King Karanbas heard the news, he quickly sent his nephew the Kanz al-Dawla Naṣr of the Banū l-Kanz family to the Sultan saying: «If our Lord the Sultan intends to appoint a Muslim to rule the country, here is my nephew a Muslim, and who would normally have succeeded me». The Sultan refused lest the influence of the Banū l-Kanz and their supporters might increase. So in 1317 Sayf al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh Baršambū was crowned as the first Muslim King to ascend the throne of Christian Muqurra. Baršambū commemorated this by converting the Christian Church of Dongola into a mosque. Baršambū did not last long on the throne, as the Nubians, probably incited by Kanz al-Dawla, revolted against him. After many wars with the Mamlūks Kanz al-Dawla was acclaimed in 1323 by the Nubians and the Arabs as King of Dongola. After that time Nubia was rarely mentioned in Arabic sources and the country lapsed into a Dark Age which lasted until the beginning of the sixteenth century when the Fung Kingdom emerged on the Blue Nile and spread rapidly northwards ².

The Collapse of Christian Nubia, the ancient but effective bulwark against Arab infiltration along the Nile coincided with intensified Arab-Mamlūk warfare in Egypt. Refugee Arabs poured southwardly

1. *Ibid.*, VII, 46-7; MUFAḌDAL B. ABĪ L-FAḌĀ’IL, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 234-5; AL-NUWAYRĪ, *op. cit.*, XXVIII, f. 259.

2. IBN ‘ABD AL-ZĀHIR, *Tašrif al-ayyām wa l-‘uṣūr fī sirat al-malik al-Manšūr*, Cairo 1961, pp. 143-4, 154-5; IBN AL-FURĀT, *op. cit.*, VIII, 52-3, 69, 83-4, 91-2; AL-NUWAYRĪ, *op. cit.*, XXX, f. 95-6.

along the Nile. Others chose the Eastern Desert route finding that many Arabs from Egypt and Arabia had already settled in the Beja lands. The new comers moved on into the Buṭāna and the Gezira; the rest crossed the Nile to the plains of Kordofan and Darfur. There they met other groups which had migrated along the west bank of the Nile through Wādī l-Malik, and Wādī l-Muqaddam to Kordofan and Darfur.

As the ranks of the immigrants swelled they destroyed the Kingdom of 'Alwa, but exactly how this was achieved is not known.

Gradually the Nomadic new comers settled and intermarried with the native Sudanese many of whom adopted Islam some Arab customs and Arabic (though many Nubians, Beja and others kept their ancient tongues). It is at this time, in the early sixteenth century that the progress of Arabization and Islamization of the Sudan began in earnest¹.

1. This paper was first read at Southwest Asia and North Africa Seminar at Harpur College, State University of New York at Binghamton in May 1966.