



# GLOBAL SECURITY WATCH SUDAN

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Richard A. Lobban, Jr.



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# SUDAN

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GLOBAL SECURITY WATCH  
**SUDAN**

**Richard A. Lobban, Jr.**

*Foreword by Mahgoub El-Tigani Mahmoud*



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### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Lobban, Richard Andrew, 1943-

Global security watch—Sudan / Richard A. Lobban, Jr.

p. cm. — (Global security watch)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-313-35332-1 (hard copy : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-313-35333-8 (ebook)

1. Sudan—History. 2. Sudan—Strategic aspects. 3. National security—Sudan. 4. Regionalism—Sudan. 5. Sudan—Politics and government—1985- I. Title. II. Title: Sudan.

DT155.6.L63 2010

355'.0330624—dc22

2010019799

ISBN: 978-0-313-35332-1

EISBN: 978-0-313-35333-8

14 13 12 11 10 1 2 3 4 5

This book is also available on the World Wide Web as an eBook.

Visit [www.abc-clio.com](http://www.abc-clio.com) for details.


Praeger

An Imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC

ABC-CLIO, LLC

130 Cremona Drive, P.O. Box 1911

Santa Barbara, California 93116-1911

This book is printed on acid-free paper 

Manufactured in the United States of America

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# Foreword

Based on four decades' guru knowledge on the social cultures and structures of Sudanese society in the past and present times, Professor Richard Lobban, Jr., provides a unique evaluation of the current dilemma that continues to develop in long pursuit to bring about a consensual "national identification," or to end the twentieth century's longest armed conflict by peaceful co-existence of two separate states.

It is the first time, however, since national independence in January 1956 that a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) opens an internationally recognized constitutional path for the Southerners to make their own choice by referendum, in the year 2011. The Sudanese people are excited to see the outcome of the referendum following scheduled elections in 2010 in spite of many different expectations already adopted on the possibilities of optional unity vis-à-vis the two states' option. Key questions are specifically raised: whether the NCP/SPLM ruling parties would secure the settlement of these issues or whether the reemerging popular democratic opposition would finally bring a lasting and just peace by national elections.

*Global Security Watch—Sudan* is an intriguing volume on the urgent and most critical agenda of peace, unity, and development in contemporary Sudan, an essential guide to assess the national, regional, and international concerns regarding the present state of affairs and future prospects of the country, as well as timely analysis for the Sudanese community, with whom the author and his wife and lifelong research partner, Professor Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, share a special passion for the history, archaeology, and anthropology of the social life, religious beliefs, and politics of Sudan. I would add to the Lobbans' works on the country a tremendous range of friendships that accumulated over the years with many individuals and groups.



Characterizing the South as “extremely complex [with] inherent ethnographic diversity, major disruptions and dispersals, slave raids and war, differing religions, migrations, and refugee situations, as well as complex interactions with neighboring peoples . . .,” Lobban highlights a most interesting fact about the North-South relationship despite the South’s “heterogeneous record in glottochronology and lexicostatistics, which is coupled with a relatively weak record in ethnoarchaeology . . . The relationship with the North is perhaps even more complex, as many Northerners *have genetic links to the South through their maternal lines.*” [italics mine]

The Sudanese ancient civilization stands out as a challenging reminder of unity implications in the long run: “While this link is easy to verify by genetics and phenotypes, the cultural fact is one of deep denial, and so many Northerners are fundamentally linked to the South while simultaneously subjecting its population to violence and exploitation.” Will the post-independence war-trodden Sudan prevail as a unified country, or will it move on by the 2011 referendum to exist as two neighborly North-South states? The CPA emphasizes rightfully the unity option, with due respect to the right of self-determination.

“The burial of Sudanese vice president John Garang brought grave concern that the CPA, ending two decades of civil war, might join him in the grave,” notes Lobban. This and other negative views are justified with arguments that, nonetheless, are equally contested by unionist Northerners and Southerners. The *Summary’s* political map entails several predictive scenarios on the possibilities of separation on the final episode, or some desirable settlement on the basis of optional unity. Still, the intratribal and intertribal powers, as well as contending armed and/or civil society groups in Darfur, might play a significant role in the possibilities of a far-sighted democratic solution of the crisis.

The NCP Northern beneficiaries’ “supportive impression” about the government’s stability and successful development, as reported in the *Summary* for the twenty-year repressive rule is counterbalanced with unrelenting struggles all over the country by the civil society democratic opposition (including the SPLM) to succeed the NCP/SPLM failing partnership. The uncertainties of the 2010 elections and the 2011 upcoming referendum might be removed by the Sudanese popular realities; “No Sudanese postcolonial military regime proved to be ‘dynastic,’” this book eloquently stresses.

Earlier, William Adams’s *Nubia Corridor to Africa* called for archaeological research on the North-South cultural anthropology. Since 1992, the late Sudanese archaeologist Usama Abdal-Rahman al-Nour discussed ideas on unraveled ancient connections that might stimulate further discoveries in the area. Dedicated research by the Sudanist scholar Richard Lobban, Jr., has advanced both historical and contemporary works on the issue, including explorations on linguistics, social change, and this masterpiece summary of a possible postelection Sudan.

In the final analysis, it is the Sudanese willpower that emerges decisively as the most powerful force of political change in the one Afro-Arab country that alone toppled dictatorial regimes by popular movements throughout the twentieth century.

Mahgoub El-Tigani Mahmoud  
Nashville, March 2010  
Professor of Sociology  
Tennessee State University

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# Preface

This work is something of a summary of four decades of studying Sudan, first as a Ph.D. researcher, but then as a journalist, visitor to friends, extensive traveler, tour group leader, teacher, researcher, consultant, and founder and administrator of the Sudan Studies Association. From my first visit in 1970 during the Nimieri military regime, to a visit during the democratic administration of Sadiq al-Mahdi, to visits in 2008 during the military administration of Hassan Omer al-Beshir, forty years have passed. It is said of Africa and equally of Sudan that you will visit once and never again, or you will drink from the Nile and endlessly return. I am in the second category for sure. Yes, there are plenty of challenges to life in Sudan, first of all for Sudanese, but also for its visitors, but like your first love . . . you never forget.

There are other reasons that I am inspired to write this book; much of my Sudanist life was spent with my colleague wife, Dr. Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, with whom we first lived on a houseboat floating on the Nile, just behind the armored river steamer that was used by General Kitchener to conquer Sudan. From our most recent travels to the South, and archaeology in the North, we have had virtually endless conversations about Sudan. Writing for the *Nile Mirror* and the *Sudan Standard* gave us firsthand journalistic views of Sudanese events. This conversation is essentially continuing here. Intellectually, Sudan is such a delightfully complex place that it is very stimulating to try to understand it. Human curiosity is certainly a factor to try to explain the marvelous Sudanese people, who live in such curious relations of sometimes glorious heroism and sometimes dysfunctional rivalries.

In order to make this work synthetic, analytical, and readable, I have kept notes at a minimum, but have provided an extensive bibliography for those seeking more sources and deeper study on Sudan. Much of my professional career as an anthropologist and an ethnographer of Africa I spent at Rhode Island College,

where the curriculum featured non-Western studies that welcomed courses with African and Middle Eastern content. I often taught courses on Sudan with both ancient and modern orientations. As a Director of the Program of African and Afro-American studies for about thirteen years, and finally as the Chair of the Anthropology Department, I had the opportunity to appoint others who would teach about these regions. While earning the status of retired *Professor Emeritus*, I was contacted by the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. It seems that the Department of Defense was about to reconfigure its command structure, dubbed AFRICOM (Africa Combatant Command); they wanted to hire someone to teach basic graduate-level courses on African culture and history, and African religion and politics, to civilians and military officers from around the world. Security interests of the Departments of State and Defense were added to our usual menu of discussion topics. These several roles added to the seamless conversations and reflections on Sudan that make writing this work a genuine summarizing pleasure.

In 2009, I was asked to join a winning grant as adjunct professor and SME (subject matter expert) with Carnegie Mellon University (CMU), which had received a grant from the Office of Naval Research (ONR MURI N00014-08-1-1186) to study the causes and resolutions of conflict in Africa in general, and in Sudan in particular. Believing in the moral and practical and moral importance of this project and that it could save lives and have wider application, I assembled a research staff of graduate students to assist in systematic data collection so that CMU's Computer Center leaders, especially Dr. Kathleen Carley, could formulate accurate models on conflict in which early proactive interventions might help spare the long-term bloodshed that Sudan has known so painfully.

I want to acknowledge the great help of the research team that has been assembled for this project. These include Adam Gerard, Erica Fontaine, Evgeni Riabovolik, Fred Fullerton, Agnieszka Marczak, and Laila Wattar. Since this is all from open-source documents, all are welcome to make use of it: <http://www.riresearch.net>. As of this writing, this project is still underway, and this present book has benefitted from this data collection as well as papers presented at Sudan Studies Association's national meetings and at the International Sudan Studies meetings held in Pretoria, South Africa in November 2009 hosted by the University of South Africa (UNISA) and with the active participation of former South African president Mbeki, who is highly engaged in the diplomacy of Sudanese conflict resolution.

The many modern issues of global and humanitarian concern, such as ecology, environmental change, and climate change all converge on Sudan in general and on Darfur in particular, as it appears that desertification and declining rainfall have played some role in the crisis there. Not unrelated are issues of human rights, political asylum, refugees, foreign policy, gender, international law, and justice, which have attracted considerable attention as well. Parallel concerns with

development, the evolution of regional autonomy in the South, and the relationship of Islam and the state in the post-9/11 era have also been very engaging. Tactical military issues of armed revolts by insurgent forces and counterinsurgency by the state are equally fundamental in Sudan's postcolonial history. Likewise, there are the uses of antipersonnel mines and their tragically lingering effects on civilian populations. More interest has grown about Islamic history, culture, and practices, sometimes linked with concerns about "terrorism" and global security, as well as increasing note of the major role of China in Africa and the world as it seeks ever-scarcer petroleum in a time of deep questioning about global energy supplies. Even issues of trafficking of small arms and people are raised in Sudan studies. With such a whirlwind of complex and confounding topics circling in and around the Sudan, it is clear that the Sudan that was ignored by the world when my career began is a Sudan that is now featured in multiple worldwide forums today.

## INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL OBJECTIVES

This present work intends to look at Sudan's long history in all of its modern regions to determine the various strategic security issues that have been or are present. The fundamental assumption is that history shines a bright light on the present. This is either to be alert for age-old strategies and tactics that failed or succeeded, or to reveal when past patterns are over and new Sudanese security relations are established. The basic belief is that comparative analysis, over time, will give better chances of anticipating the future or, at least, more rapidly coming to the realization that something new in Sudanese security is unfolding. For a state that is so very large and internally diversified, it is equally necessary to deconstruct the regions of Sudan, since this political mosaic is, at least, the sum of its parts, or more. It is a state of juggled balance, or perhaps gridlock, with all the many actors and interests that constitute its modern form.

The analysis is also guided by the outlook of the discipline of anthropology, which is not only historical and comparative but assumes that all component parts of a state system are integrated and need to be viewed in a holistic, interactive, and potentially transformational manner. Here, old relations can be transformed into new, such as colonialism evolving to anticolonialism; expansive empires overextend to their own destruction, and systems of rich exploitation by one group lead to resistance and challenge to that group's own interests. Such is the flow of history, and with the Sudanese record so long, there is very much to be seen and understood.

## DEFINITIONS

As a first step, some basic terms need to be defined, as well as the nature of conflicts with which they may be associated. When the term *state* is referenced, it implies a stratified political system having unitary central control with the basic

goals of regime and state security supplied by an armed force to control the means of production and access to critical resources. The state is sovereign in the territory that it controls, and any threats to the state are considered existential and are resisted to the fullest possible extent. States are symbolized by their monumental works, iconography, and associated belief systems.

By centralizing control, a state seeks a monopoly of established and legitimate *authority* to adjudicate disputes, set standards, make decisive judgments, legitimate ownership of lands and property, regulate barter or currency, establish foreign pacts, maintain domestic order, and have unique access to the commanding heights of that state. Authority can be institutionalized by a system for formal codified law or by legitimate councils who maintain respected knowledge of the legal or customary past and of what are considered equitable and appropriate judgments that will be respected. Authority is very often, but not necessarily, wielded by a religious class and its institutions that bring supernatural forces into play to support the state.

If state authority fails to prevail in resolving issues, the state still has access to its instruments of *power* that can include bodyguards, palace retainers, a soldier cohort, militias, standing armies, and all the human and physical instruments of the military and police forces that can be mustered for offensive or defensive action. Power should be *legitimate*—that is, it should operate by established legally accepted rule and standards. *State power* is the ability to act with strength of force of arms, law, or legal sanctions that are either accepted, or so feared that they are not resisted.

The combined exercise of *authority* and *power* is the essence of the state as it seeks to govern public and private affairs, control commerce, exploit natural resources, make judgments, and control normal interactions with its proscribed territory. The study of these relationships is generally understood to be “political.”

## POLITICAL GROUPS

Political groups can include stateless, decentralized or acephalous *bands* that were autonomous, non-tribute-paying, and beyond state control. In ancient times, such groups existed in Sudan/Nubia/“Ethiopia,” but they are virtually extinct at present, unless one might consider transitory insurgent guerilla groups to fall into this taxonomy. Bands can have short and spontaneous interpersonal conflicts, but group solidarity is so important for collective survival that major efforts are made to keep conflict minimized and quickly resolved.

Commonly, the state also regulates *tribes*, which by their name means that they are “tributary” or under state control and must pay “tribute” to the state on some periodic basis. Failing to pay can bring negative judgment in front of state “tribunals.” Tribes usually have the reality or fiction of common values, descent, and origin, as well as other unifying features like language, religion, and territory to achieve internal cohesion or external administration. Many pastoral peoples of the northern

Sudan with clear patrilineal descent groups and lineage heads could be called tribes, especially during times of colonial rule with systems of “native administration.” Bands can be rendered as tribes if they lose their autonomy, and tribes can become self-determining *nations* if they can topple the authority that subordinates them. Likewise, nations can become tribes if their state autonomy is crushed by colonial or imperial forces that are greater or stronger than they are. This was precisely the case when the term *tribe* emerged in the context of the expansion of the Roman Empire beyond the three “tribes” of Etruscans, Latins, and Sabines; imperial forces went on to absorb and conquer far more other traditional nations, which became *tribalized*. Also problematic is the casual or journalistic use of the term *tribalism*, in which the implication is that some “throwback” group of people are incapable of seeing beyond their circumstances and responding in some sort of instinctive fashion to wider events. Clearly, such application of this concept does more to “blame the victims” of their circumstances than to really explain or understand them. The important point is that these three terms are implicitly expressing some relationship to state power; in short, these three terms are relative and not absolute or fixed. Because of the contextual nature of the word *tribe* and because it can easily carry pejorative or even downright racist connotations, many anthropologists have abandoned the term and replaced it with the more neutral expression of *ethnic group*. Nations can use sustained and campaign warfare to acquire more territory, resources, or tribute payers.

Some sources and some circumstances make note of other political organizations, such as *chiefdoms* or ranked societies, in which the ruling authority is either a (sometimes hereditary) chief or a consultative council of elders that appoints or regulates chiefly functions. There are many examples of such societies in southern Sudan. Such entities are typically small-scale in territory and have authority in buffer areas where state power has not penetrated. Chiefdoms can also be used as an instrument of indirect rule, where local authority is granted as long as central authority is respected. Models of chiefdoms can be traced to ancient and medieval times, and the *ethnarchs* of Greco-Roman imperial administration, where all manner of personal-status issues were solved at the local level, but rights to control currency and taxation, and to raise armies, were exclusively relegated to a higher power. This ethnarch model prevailed through Turkish colonial rule with the “millet” system and with British colonial administration of Lord Lugard’s “indirect rule,” as was the case they tried to implement in the Closed Districts Ordinance in southern Sudan.

There were many cases of “kingdom” states in Sudan’s political history. A kingdom is typically an amalgam of or unification of tributary-paying chiefdoms (or feudal lords), which have a defined territory with a usually hereditary figurehead who is linked to the royal religion of the state. Past state-level kingdoms in Sudan included Kerma, Napata, Meroë, the three Christian kingdoms, and the Sultanates (sultans are essentially kings) of the Funj and Darfur. While these are all concluded,



there was a serious, but failed, postcolonial effort to make Sudan a kingdom, and the last ruler of pre-independence, neighboring Egypt was King Farouk, and there was a long line of kings in Ethiopia, also now concluded with the overthrow of Haile Sellasie. In southern Sudan, at least two kingdoms still have a titular existence, with the kingdom of the Azande and the Shilluk with its hereditary *reth*.

Then there is the *nation*—that is, a group of people associated with a particular territory that is aware of cultural, linguistic, and historical unity to mobilize, defend, or seek a government of its own interests and objectives. Under the framework of a colonial “nation,” a spirit of anticolonialism or African nationalism was frequently born. This was all in the wake of the infamous colonial partition of Africa in the Berlin Congress of 1884 to 1885, which failed to consult with any Africans whatsoever as their continent was divided and conquered by force on the basis of European nationalism. In Arabic, the word *nation* can be quite nuanced, from the generic *umma*, implying the broad “nation of Muslims.” It could also indicate national consciousness, with the term *balad*, which is more connotative of authenticity or the “country” that is in your heart and soul, to the term *wataniya*, which suggests something closer to the modern political entity of a nation-state. In addition, one could have irredentist “nations,” such as the effort to achieve “national” reintegration of the five component territories in which Somali people were traditionally found. Since the Berlin Congress often divided people who were spiritually together and also unified people who had little in common, so the postcolonial nation in Africa has been a difficult construct to administer; this is particularly the case in the heterogeneous Sudan. There are also “national liberation movements” that sought freedom from European colonialism or, for some southern Sudanese, freedom from Arab domination and Islamization. For nations that ceased to function as normal states, the term *failed state* is sometimes used; this assumes that they were once an effective state and lost capacity, but it may be that they never properly functioned as a state at all.

Finally, there are *city-states* and *imperial states*. Typically, empires are conglomerates of “tribes,” “kingdoms,” and “states” ruled by a king or emperor and controlling a territory far more extensive than the one that began as a city-state or single nation-state. For Sudan (ancient Nubia), Kerma was a medium-sized imperial state, and Nubian Dynasty XXV was as extensive an imperial state as the New Kingdom Egypt that ruled over Nubia for five centuries. Napatan and Meroitic rule may be considered small-scale imperial states. The three Christian kingdoms of Nubia that never amalgamated fully may be considered city-states. The Funj and Darfur Sultanates may be considered large kingdoms or city-states (Sennar or al-Fasher) that advanced to considerable complexity and expanded to substantial territory. When the Turks and English came to rule Sudan, briefly in both cases, Sudan was conquered by military forces and made tributary to those external imperial states. In the case of the Turks, this intrusion launched the Islamic-nationalist revival or *jihad* of Mahdism that was essentially a nineteenth-century national liberation movement

that had its own imperial ambitions, with blunted attacks on Egypt and Ethiopia. Across the eighteenth and nineteenth century, in the Sahel (sub-Saharan) region, there were a number of parallel *jihad* movements. Once Sudan regained its authority as a sovereign state in Africa, it was generally satisfied as a postcolonial state, but in the case of the training camps for units of al-Qa'eda, ambitions of reconstructing the Islamic "umma" were clearly in the minds of Hasan al-Turabi and his guest, Osama bin Laden.

Integral to this work are three additional terms—*security*, *strategy*, and *tactics*—that need amplification since they also carry multiple meanings. For "security," one can safely say that this is freedom from worry or danger, but when the security of a regime is the insecurity of an administered group, there can be serious misunderstanding. Moreover, one can have security in health, resources, human rights, civil rights, judicial or legal access, constitutional rights, private property, and investments, and with police, military forces, and so forth, so one must exercise caution with this rather slippery word. Generally, "strategy" implies the formulation of a general plan that uses appropriate resources to achieve specific results or end goals. This too can range from military strategy, to political and economic strategies, to cultural and linguistic strategies, to combinations of all of these objectives. Last, "tactics" indicates the specific ways, means, and forces mobilized to achieve strategic objectives. Economists might have tactical mobilization of capital for the strategy of development; politicians mobilize and market the vote to have strategic success in an election; and military leaders move forces, arms, and supplies with appropriate timing and placement to win battles.

*Conflicts* result when the existing systems of authority face certain contradictions that cannot be resolved by existing solutions provided by law, diplomacy, and force. Recognizing the holistic intersection of politics, economics, and military force, a neat distinction in reality is often difficult to achieve. Such conflicts are tracked, in this case, through Sudanese history to see how they have evolved and been resolved. Implicitly or explicitly, political entities such as those identified above do see *strategic* objectives of self-sustenance or growth that they seek to achieve by the *tactical* decisions and resources they have available at any point in time. As conflicts are resolved, the objective of *stability* and *security* can be achieved, at least until new sources of stress or conflict need to be addressed.

The following chapters move through the historical foundations of conflicts in Sudan to reveal central and persistent themes. Then, chapters on the South, the East and North, Darfur, oil, and China bring out the modern specifics of these critical but sometimes marginal parts of the Sudanese state. The final chapter integrates all of these parts into contemporary regional strategic concerns.



## CHAPTER 1

# Historical Foundations of State Security: Lessons from the Past

### INTRODUCTORY ASSUMPTIONS

A basic assumption of this initial chapter is that the enduring strategic interests of modern Sudan can be seen in the political history of its previous states of Kerma, Kush, Meroë, and Nubia, and in its medieval Christian and Muslim states. From the dawn of this history for 5,000 years, there are remarkably persistent patterns between these “Sudanese” states and Egypt, the neighboring powerhouse to the north, as well as the western state of Darfur and Axum to the east, and the human and natural resources to the south. This historical span reveals enduring tactics and strategies that shed light from the past onto the security dynamics of today. As a second note, it is critical to recognize that modern Western security interests in Sudan (such as oil, stability, “terrorism,” concern with China, human rights, and such) are not necessarily the shared strategic concerns held by Sudan vis-à-vis their own national interests. Indeed, it is mainly when strategic interests are shared that there will be progress in advancing such interests with mutual strategic advantage. Moreover, changing administrations in Europe or the West, the Middle East, and other African nations, and internal opposition groups in Sudan, complicate the picture considerably. Despite the variant forms of Sudanese governments—from kingdoms, to sultanates, to regional autonomy agreements, to multiparty parliamentary democracies, to various forms of military rule, to the present coalition of national unity—the Sudanese administrations function as “normal” states, that is, they need *legitimacy* that can be achieved by elections, religion, constitutional agreements, repression, coalitions, treaties, and such, and they behave, or try to

behave, domestically and internationally as *sovereign entities*. This present work is not aimed at adjudicating the many complex conflicts in Sudan, but rather at understanding them with greater clarity.

Thus, linked to both *sovereignty* and *legitimacy* is that all Sudanese regimes from the past to the present manifest themselves essentially as *unitary states*, despite the various features that might bring this into question, such as models of failed states, unstable states, dysfunctional states, a state divided by plebiscite, or a state with ungoverned spaces. Because the political aim of being a state is so enduring, at least on an international level, one may conclude that the Sudanese strategic plan is to maximize, or try to ensure, a legitimate, sovereign unity government. Any external plans or policies that are, or are perceived to be, opposed to these foundational Sudanese strategic objectives will certainly face the strongest opposition and little hope of effective implementation. If Sudan is treated as a centrifugal or failed state, it is hard to hold it accountable for issues of management or mismanagement. In short, it is easier for the outside world to consider Sudan as a normal state, even when there is common agreement that it is not functioning effectively in this role. This is part of the problem that one faces in forming strategic policy for Sudan. Should we relate to Sudan as its wishes to be and as it is accepted in most political forums, or should we deal with Sudan as an entity that is not properly functioning, the outside world thereby being “entitled” to make up its own rules and policies that, in fact, undermine Sudan’s capacity to be the state it pretends to be? Such strategic patterns are embedded in Sudan’s extremely long history, and, in general terms, the present is not really that much different.

## SOME REFERENTIAL TERMINOLOGY

Ancient Nubia no longer exists as a political entity, but its name only very recently disappeared between the borders of Egypt and the modern Sudan. Lower (northern) Nubia is incorporated as southernmost Egypt. Upper (southern) Nubia is incorporated within the northern Sudan. Its complex history has been obscured by many changes in reference names and territorial boundaries. Its peoples have had names for themselves and names attributed to them by foreigners. Moreover, these names have shifted from time to time, and their encompassed territories have also been adjusted repeatedly. At times, Egypt has controlled Nubia; on other occasions, Nubia has controlled Egypt; at different points, the two have been military rivals with a policy of détente and peaceful coexistence. Thus, ancient Nubia straddles significant cultural and political frontiers as well as ethnic ones. Historically, Nubia has served metaphorically as a filter, frontier, barrier, and pathway between these ancient and modern regions. It also served as a trade and transportation route between the ancient peoples of the Red Sea coasts and the peoples across the Sahel and savanna into West Africa. Occupying this strategic position on the world’s longest river and connecting several climatic regions also

means that ancient Nubia was a bridge for ideas, technology, and materials passing between ancient Africa and the Middle East.

The name “Nubia” (from the Egyptian word *nb*, the “land of gold”) is the simplest term to define the region that lies between Aswan in modern Egypt at the first cataract (rapids) on the Nile and the confluence of the White and Blue Nile just above the sixth cataract. One must also include the banks of the river Nile, which interacted with the adjacent hinterland. Other early references were to the *Ta-Seti*, or the ancient Egyptian general reference to Nubia’s being a “land of the bowman.” Some sections of Nubia have more specific nomenclature. *Wawat* is the ancient Egyptian name for what is essentially the northern part of Lower Nubia. *Irtet* rested adjacent to Wawat but went to an indeterminate distance further south. Greeks and Romans used the term *Dodekashoenos* to describe the region of Lower Nubia that they sometimes controlled. Arab terminology provides the reference to the *Butn al-Hagar* (“belly of stones”) for the section of the Nile from the second to third cataracts. Above the third cataract was the ancient Nubian state now known as Kerma for the small village of that name in the vicinity, probably known to ancient Egyptians as *Yam* or *Irem*. At the crossroads of river and land transport, Kerma became the political, religious, and commercial capital, and included the majestic royal burial ground for the Kerma kings. The term *Kush* must also be highlighted, as it certainly appeared in the Egyptian Middle Kingdom (2050–1850 BCE) and was part of an important dynastic title throughout the New Kingdom (1570–1090 BCE). *Kush* appears to be a broad term roughly inclusive of Nubia, but it too shifts in its territory from time to time. It is likely a term that Nubians used for themselves.

The Ptolemaic Greeks (332–30 BCE) referred to Nubia as *Ethiopia*, referring to the “land of burnt faces” anyplace south of the first cataract. Greek and Roman references noted the contemporary civilization on the Nile known as *Meroë* (270 BCE to 340 CE). At its height, Meroë incorporated the entirety of Nubia from the first to sixth cataracts; at the time of its collapse, it was primarily concentrated in the “Island of Meroë,” or the savanna lands of the Butana steppe lying to the east of the Nile from the fifth to sixth cataracts. To abide by a standard convention, the word *Meroë* defines these ancient places, while *Merowe* (ancient Sanam) is the term for the modern Sudanese town just downstream from the fourth cataract and Jebel Barkal.

Christian Nubia refers to the three Kingdoms of Nobatia, Mukurra, and Alwa that covered this region, and *Nubia* was the reference to the region throughout medieval times down to the very end of the nineteenth century. It was then that the name “the Sudan” began to be used, coming from the Arabic expression *Bilad as-Sudan* (“the land of the blacks”) essentially as an Arabic translation of “Ethiopia.” In medieval Muslim literature, it was applied sweepingly to all of Africa south of the Sahara, meaning the broad belt of plains and savanna land stretching from the Atlantic to the Red Sea and lying between the Sahara and the forest areas.

Earlier in the nineteenth century, the region was either “Nubia” or “Turkish Nubia” when ruled by the Turco-Egyptian Khedive Muhammad ‘Ali Pasha. Now, in English or Arabic, the term is used specifically to refer to the nation south of Egypt that formed the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (1899–1955) and the contemporary independent Republic of the Sudan.

Ancient Nubia fluctuated in size over time, but its effective control was only about one-third to half of the territory represented by colonial or modern Sudan. The climate of Nubia for the last five millennia has been desert, and rainfall is light and rare. A semi-arid belt in the central plains extended much further north in ancient times. Moving south, the seasonal rainfall increases to sustain grasses, woodland savanna, and scrub and acacia trees. The Nile, and its tributary rivers, is the most dominant single feature of the physical landscape. The river system cuts across the climatic and vegetation belts, providing water for irrigation, a major means of transportation, and the locus for most of the settled agricultural life and economy of the country. The Nile is formed by the confluence of two great rivers, the Blue and White Niles at the Mogren in Khartoum. The Blue Nile rises from Lake Tana (Dambaa) in the Ethiopian highlands and contributes most of the floodwaters, since the White Nile loses a great percentage of its water by evaporation in the Sudd. The only major tributary north of Khartoum is the seasonal Atbara River. The region can be differentiated as follows: (1) the Upper Nile drainage system in the north and center, where farming is by irrigation; (2) the regions of the Red Sea Hills and Kordofan that supported pastoral nomadism and rainfed agriculture; (3) volcanic uplands in Darfur; and (4) southern Sudan and highlands of the Nuba Hills that support various forms of agriculture and animal husbandry. Generally, Nubia is built upon a sandstone foundation with areas of volcanic and granite infusion, along with emeralds and gold also found in its deserts.

Nubian peoples have maintained a cultural distinctiveness and blend since ancient times. Lower Nubia has experienced repeated demographic and ethnic population fluctuations, as it was the Nubian meeting place of ancient Egyptians as well as other foreigners such as Assyrians, Greeks, Romans, and Arabs. In Upper Nubia, one finds the ancient kingdom of Kush or Napata. Napata was often the main royal residence for Nubian kings and was a prominent religious center just at the foot of the impressive Jebel Barkal plateau and its huge temple to Amun and other gods and goddesses. It controlled a strategic river crossing and could be seen for miles across the flat plains. Further south, in the former grasslands, was the extensive commercial kingdom and trade and religious center of Meroë. It was bounded on three sides by the Nile and Atbara Rivers and was known as “the Island of Meroë.” Meroë was an important and early center for iron smelting and fabrication. Further up the river valley, the area between the Blue and White Niles came to be called the “Gezira” or “the island.” The southern third of the country has, in the twentieth century, come to be spoken of as a separate region, “the South.” This region included the former provinces of Equatoria, Bahr al-Ghazal,