

# The Ottomans and the Funj sultanate in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

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## Abstract

This article examines sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Ottoman sources for the Funj sultanate that ruled the Gezira and Nile Valley regions of the modern Sudan. It also aims to elucidate the relationship between the Ottoman empire and the Funj sultanate. In the first part of the article, the sixteenth-century Ottoman sources, largely documents from the Ottoman archives in Istanbul, are translated and analysed. In the second part, two seventeenth-century Ottoman accounts of the Funj are examined: that by the famous Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi, and that by the geographer Abu Bekr el-Dimaşki. The text of the relevant passage from Dimaşki's work is provided alongside a translation. The article also examines evidence for religious links between the Ottomans and the Funj.

**Keywords:** Funj sultanate, Ottoman empire, Sudan, Evliya Çelebi, Ethiopia, Habeş

Although the potential for Ottoman sources to illuminate the history of Africa has occasionally been noted,<sup>1</sup> they have rarely been exploited. The greatest contribution by a Turkish scholar to the history of sub-Saharan Africa is undoubtedly Cengiz Orhonlu's study of the Ottoman province of Habeş on the Red Sea coast of the modern Sudan and Eritrea.<sup>2</sup> Yet Ottoman documents also contain valuable information about the states and peoples they encountered in Africa which has to date received very little attention. In this paper, I will examine the Ottoman evidence for the Funj sultanate based at the city of Sinnār which dominated the Gezira and Nile Valley regions of the modern Sudan (Figure 1) between 1504 and 1821. The Funj thus shared a border in the north and east with the Ottoman provinces of Egypt and Habeş respectively.

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- 1 E.g. John Hunwick, "Arabic sources for African history", in John Edward Philips (ed.), *Writing African History* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 226–7, with references.
- 2 Cengiz Orhonlu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Güney Siyaseti: Habeş Eyaleti* (Istanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Matbaası, 1974). Selected Ottoman documents on the history of Sudan have also been published in Arabic translation and facsimile in Şalih Sa'dawī (tr.), *al-Sūdān fī 'l-'Ahd al-'Uthmānī min khilāl wathā'iq al-Arshīf al-'Uthmānī* (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2007), but the vast majority date to the nineteenth century.

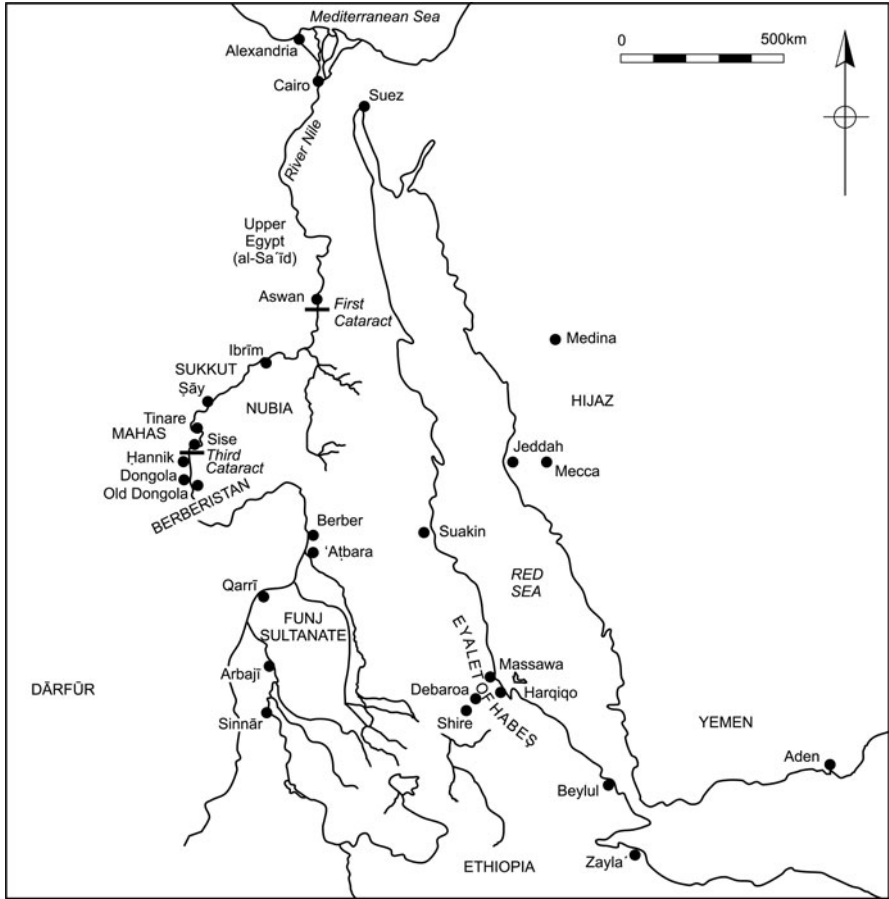


Figure 1. The Nile Valley and Red Sea showing major places mentioned in the text

The Funj sultanate was one of the major Islamic states in pre-colonial sub-Saharan Africa, controlling the trade and pilgrimage routes at the eastern extremity of the Bilād al-Sūdān. The Funj exported gold and slaves through the Ottoman lands to the worlds of both the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean.<sup>3</sup> It was under the Funj that Islam became the dominant faith in the

3 This trade has been most extensively studied from the eighteenth century onwards. See Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 98–102, 129–32; Terence Walz, *Trade between Egypt and Bilād as-Sūdān 1700–1820* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1978); Terence Walz, "Gold and silver exchanges between Egypt and Sudan, 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries", in J.F. Richards (ed.), *Precious Metals in the Later Medieval and Early Modern Worlds* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1983), 305–25; Lidwein Kapteijns and Jay Spaulding, "Precolonial trade between states in the eastern Sudan ca. 1700–ca. 1900", *African Economic History* 11, 1982, 29–62; Jay Spaulding, "Suakin: a port city of the early modern Sudan", in Kenneth R. Hall (ed.), *Secondary Cities and Urban Networking in the Indian Ocean Realm, c. 1400–1800* (Plymouth: Lexington Books,

Nilotic Sudan, although the sultanate itself retained institutions that may be traced back to Christian Nubia, where its own origins probably lay.<sup>4</sup> Yet sources for the political history of the Funj prior to the eighteenth century are few and far between. Local traditions of historiography offer little more than king lists for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while the earliest surviving archival documents from Sinnār are also from the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Thus we are largely reliant for the first two centuries of Funj history on oral traditions recorded much later, although there are also occasional references in Ethiopian sources and, even more rarely, reports of travellers, of whom the earliest was David Reubeni, who left an account in Hebrew of his visit to the Funj lands and Sinnār in 1521–22. The first Westerner to describe Sinnār was the Frenchman Poncet who visited in 1699.<sup>6</sup>

Given this paucity of sources, the Ottoman references to the Funj are, if relatively few, especially significant as rare contemporary documents on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Funj history. The sixteenth-century Ottoman materials largely comprise archival documents connected with Ottoman efforts to secure Habeş and wage war on Ethiopia, with which the Funj sultanate was allied. No explicit references to the Funj have yet come to light in any sixteenth-century Ottoman chronicles or literary sources, but such texts tend to be firmly focused on the central lands of the empire and only extremely rarely mention the Ethiopian campaigns or events in Habeş itself. However, there are allusions to Ottoman manoeuvres against the Funj in the anonymous *Rüstem Paşa Tarihi*, which will be discussed further below. Conversely, from the end of the sixteenth century, as Habeş declined in importance and the war against Ethiopia was

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2008), 39–53; A.C.S. Peacock, “Suakin: a northeast African port in the Ottoman Empire”, *Northeast African Studies* 12 (2012).

- 4 In general on the history of the Funj see R.S. O’Fahey and J.L. Spaulding, *Kingdoms of the Sudan* (Studies in African History. London: Methuen, 1974), 15–104; a dated but still sometimes useful survey is O.G.S. Crawford, *The Fung Kingdom of Sennar* (Gloucester: John Bellows, 1951). On the spread of Islam see Neil McHugh, *Holy men of the Blue Nile: The Making of an Arab-Islamic Community in the Nilotic Sudan, 1500–1850* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994). On the Funj kingdom as a “Nubian renaissance” see Jay Spaulding, *The Heroic Age in Sinnār* (Asmara: The Red Sea Press, 2007 [1st ed. 1985]), 4, 9, 19.
- 5 The so-called “Funj chronicle” refers to at least thirteen nineteenth- and twentieth-century manuscripts, the terminus and contents of which vary considerably, but all of which seem to draw on a source similar to the king list seen by James Bruce in 1772 for the period before the eighteenth century. See McHugh, *Holy men of the Blue Nile*, 217–26, and P.M. Holt, *The Sudan of the Three Niles: The Funj Chronicle 910–1288/1504–1871* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), vii–xviii. Holt provides an English translation based on probably the oldest version of the text, composed by an official known as Kātib al-Shūna in the last years of the Funj monarchy and the first decades of Turco-Egyptian rule, with selected passages from other versions. Kātib al-Shūna’s Arabic text was published as Aḥmad b. al-Ḥājj Abū ‘Alī, *Makḥḥūtat Kātib al-Shūna fī Ta’rīkh al-Salṭana al-Sinnārīya wa-’l-Idāra al-Miṣrīya*, ed. al-Shāṭir Būṣaylī ‘Abd al-Jalīl (Cairo: ‘Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1961).
- 6 For an overview of the sources, see O’Fahey and Spaulding, *Kingdoms of the Sudan*, 8–10; for Reubeni, Poncet and other Western travellers to Sinnār see John O. Udal, *The Nile in Darkness: Conquest and Exploration 1504–1862* (Wilby: Michael Russell, 1998), 7–17, 36 ff.

abandoned, the Funj very rarely appear in archival materials. Instead our main sources are literary: an account by Evliya Çelebi, the famous Ottoman traveller, of a journey he purported to have made to the Funj lands in 1671, accompanied by a map, and a brief account of the Funj given in Abu Bekr el-Dimaşki's geography of the world completed just over a decade later.

A number of these documents on the Funj were published by Orhonlu, who also included a brief survey of Ottoman–Funj relations in his work,<sup>7</sup> but they have attracted little attention from Africanists, doubtless largely for linguistic reasons. Evliya Çelebi's account has also long been known to scholarship, but the reliability of the passages relating to the Funj has never been thoroughly discussed. This paper aims, first, to make this Ottoman documentation available to a wider audience and to evaluate it in its historical context. Second, it presents a fuller analysis of Ottoman–Funj relations than has yet appeared: despite growing interest in Ottoman relations with neighbouring powers,<sup>8</sup> the documentary evidence for Ottoman frontier policies in north-east Africa in this period has been largely ignored since the publication of Orhonlu's book. Indeed, the lands of the modern Sudan present the possibly unique example of an Ottoman frontier that is better-known archaeologically than through textual evidence.<sup>9</sup> It is hoped that this paper will help rectify this imbalance. It should be stated at the outset that I have not tried to locate every possible piece of evidence on the topic: the archival materials used here are exclusively those of the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archive in Istanbul, and no effort has been made to consult the potentially valuable Ottoman archives in Cairo. The reader's indulgence is therefore begged for what is very much a preliminary survey.

## I. The Ottomans and the Funj in the sixteenth century

### Ottoman attempts to conquer the Funj in the sixteenth century

The first Ottoman reference to the Funj occurs in a report dated 1525 attributed to Selman Reis, a naval commander commissioned by the Ottoman grand vizier İbrahim Pasha to inspect the military resources available in Jeddah. Selman Reis also described the political situation in the region in the context of a growing threat from Portuguese expansion in the Indian Ocean, and presented an agenda for action in the wake of the Ottoman conquest of Egypt and the Mamluk lands in the Ḥijāz. After listing the ships, guns and men mustered at Jeddah available for use against the Portuguese, he outlines the latter's activities in India and South-East Asia. Selman Reis then surveys potential Ottoman conquests in the Red Sea, arguing that Yemen and Aden, keys to the India trade, should be captured, along with Suakin, favoured by Indian merchants trying to escape taxes in Ottoman-controlled Jeddah. To secure the entrance to the Red Sea and

7 Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 73–8.

8 For example, Suraiya Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

9 For the archaeology of the Ottoman frontier in the Sudan, see the articles by John Alexander, Intisar Elzein, Michael Mallinson *et al.* and Paul Lane and Douglas Johnson in A.C.S. Peacock (ed.), *The Frontiers of the Ottoman World* (Proceedings of the British Academy, 156. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), with references.

prevent Portuguese plans to build a fort there, Dahlak should be taken. Finally, the report recommends the invasion of the Funj lands and Ethiopia. Although the text has been published three times and translated into French and English,<sup>10</sup> it has not attracted the attention of scholars of Africa, as textual problems and faulty translations have prevented a proper appreciation of the relevant passage, of which a new English version is offered here:

A black slave, ‘Amāra, rules over a territory three months’ [journey wide], stretching from the port of Suakin over the mountains to the waters of the Nile.<sup>11</sup> They are such weak people that they give 9,000 camels each year to the infidels of Ethiopia as tribute (*kharāj*). This region from Suakin to the Nile has vegetation and water, and at the place where it meets the Nile, the Nile’s waters split into two branches. In the middle of them there is a big city and port called [Sinnār].<sup>12</sup> Endless merchandise, most of it gold, musk and ivory, comes from Ethiopia and from other unknown regions . . . . God knows best [but in our view], with a thousand men not only could the town of [Sinnār] and these three-month-broad territories be conquered, but also it would be easy to take the land of Ethiopia.<sup>13</sup>

The “black slave ‘Amāra” is clearly ‘Amāra Dūnqas, the founder of the Funj sultanate. This is the earliest extant account of the Funj after that of David Reubeni.

Ambitious though the report’s programme of conquest was, the Ottomans attempted to implement all of it in time, starting with the occupation of

10 Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi E. 6455; first published by Fevzi Kurdoğlu, “Meşhur Türk Amiralı Layihası”, *Deniz Mecmuası* 47/336, 1943, 67–73; discussion, facsimile, transcription and French translation in Michel Lesure, “Un document ottoman de 1525 sur l’Inde portugaise et les pays de la Mer Rouge”, *Mare Luso-Indicum* 3, 1976, 137–60; English translation in Salih Özbaran, “A Turkish report on the Red Sea and the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean (1525)”, in Salih Özbaran, *The Ottoman Response to European Expansion: Studies on Ottoman–Portuguese Relations in the Indian Ocean and Ottoman Administration in the Arab Lands During the Sixteenth Century* (Analecta Isisiana XII. Istanbul: Isis, 1994), 99–109 (originally published in *Arabian Studies* 4, 1974). For the background to the composition of Reis’ report, see Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), esp. 34–47 and Salih Özbaran, *Ottoman Expansion towards the Indian Ocean in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century* (Istanbul: Bilgi University Press, 2009), 39–75.

11 The Ottoman is somewhat ambiguous: “asil Sevvakin iskelesinden öte dağ aşırı Nil suyuna varıncıya değin üç aylık vilayete ‘Amare adlu bir siyah kara ‘abid hükm eder”. This could suggest that the province ruled by ‘Amāra started around Suakin, but it could also mean it started on the other side of the Red Sea mountains.

12 The text has Tabāra, which has been interpreted as referring to ‘Aṭbara, at the junction of the River ‘Aṭbara and the Nile. However, ‘Aṭbara was not founded until the beginning of the twentieth century, whereas the great trading city of Sinnār near the junction of the Blue Nile and the Nahr al-Dindar, was established by ‘Amāra Dunqas in the sixteenth century. Tabāra (تبارہ) is much more likely to be a scribal mistake for Sinnāre (سنناره) than for ‘Aṭbara (عظيره). Sinnāre is also the form for Sinnār used by Evliya Çelebi. Furthermore, the territory between Suakin and ‘Aṭbara is arid desert, and the lands around Kassala and the Gezira better match the text’s description of a fertile land. Kurdoğlu was the first to suggest the reading ‘Aṭbara, followed by Lesure, “Un document ottoman”, 160, n. 43, and Özbaran, “A Turkish report”, 108, n. 26.

13 Lesure, “Un document ottoman”, 147, 151.

Suakin. This may have been a direct response to the recommendations of 1525, for the port's revenues are included in the budget for Egypt for the financial year 1527–28, indicating it must have been captured in the intervening years.<sup>14</sup> The Ottoman penetration of Yemen started rather later with the seizure of Aden in 1538,<sup>15</sup> and a foothold in Eritrea was secured with the capture of Massawa, Dahlak and Harqiqo in 1557.<sup>16</sup> However, with the exception of their tenuous hold on Debaroa, captured in 1559, the Ottomans never succeeded in establishing themselves inland. The report of 1525 suggests they drastically underestimated their opponents, dismissing 'Amāra Dūnqas as "a black slave" and describing the Ethiopians as "naked infidels with wooden arrows and elephant-hide shields; apparently most of them are bare-footed, weak infidel foot-soldiers".<sup>17</sup> This impression is confirmed by the proposal to conquer the vast lands of the Funj and Ethiopia with an army a mere thousand strong.

The Ottomans soon found their commitments in the region a significant burden. Establishing Ottoman authority in Yemen was an uphill – and ultimately unsuccessful – struggle. Their hold on Suakin was tenuous, and the only obstacle the Portuguese fleet faced on sailing into the port in 1541, staying for ten days, was navigating the treacherous reefs that protected its approaches.<sup>18</sup> Any Ottoman military presence was too insignificant to be noted in the Portuguese expedition's log. Even in Egypt, Ottoman control was undermined by insurrections and dissent; it was much easier, therefore, to leave Upper Egypt largely to its own devices, appointing the longstanding local rulers, the Banū 'Umar, to administer the area on the Ottomans' behalf.<sup>19</sup>

The eventual adoption of the plan to attack Ethiopia was, it seems, the initiative of one individual, Özdemir Pasha, Ottoman governor of Yemen between 1549 and 1554. According to the Yemeni chronicler al-Nahrawālī, Özdemir was granted an audience with Süleyman the Magnificent in which he persuaded him that a jihad against Ethiopia should be launched.<sup>20</sup> The plan promised to gain Ottoman access to the sources of African gold as well as thwarting the efforts of the Portuguese to establish a hold on the region through their Ethiopian allies. As a result, in July 1555, the Ottoman province of Habeş, with its capital at Suakin and Özdemir Pasha its first governor, was founded to serve as a bridgehead.<sup>21</sup> Although like most provinces in the Arab world Habeş was meant to be self-financing, for most of the sixteenth century there

14 Ömer Lütfi Barkan, "H. 933–934 (M. 1527–1528) Mali Yılma Ait Bir Bütçe Örneği", *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası* 15, 1953, 291.

15 Hulûsi Yavuz, *Yemen'de Osmanlı İdaresi ve Rumuzi Tarihi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2003), vol. I, lxxxv–lxxxviii.

16 Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 42.

17 Lesure, "Un document ottoman", 151, 160; Özbaran, "A Turkish report", 109.

18 A. Kammerer, *Le Routier de Dom Joam de Castro: L'exploration de la Mer Rouge par les Portugais en 1541* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1936), 86–7, 91–7; see also Peacock, "Suakin", for further discussion.

19 V.L. Ménage, "The Ottomans and Nubia in the sixteenth century", *Annales Islamologiques* 24, 1998, 138–40.

20 Quṭb al-Dīn al-Nahrawālī, *al-Barq al-Yamānī fī 'l-Faṭḥ al-'Uṭhmānī* (ed. H. Jāsir), (Riyadh: Dar al-Yamāna, 1967), 121–2.

21 Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 37–42; Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 107–8.



was a gaping chasm between what the province earned (mainly from customs revenues and pearl diving) and what it cost to defend.<sup>22</sup> The shortfall was met by nearby provinces, sometimes Yemen but more usually Egypt.

No sooner had Habeş been established than a party was pressing for action against the Funj, as is suggested by an undated document held in the Topkapı Palace. This must have been written around the time of the foundation of the province in 1555, for none of the basic structures of government had yet been established, as the document itself makes clear: “In the province of Habeş there should be a *beylerbeyi* [governor-general], a financial official, a qadi, soldiers and gold suitable for minting coins. At the moment they deal with scales, coins are needed in that land”. The document – whose author may have been Özdemir Pasha himself – was apparently designed to persuade the Porte to solve these problems by the conquest of the Funj.

If an imperial order is issued to the *shaykh al-‘arab* of the Banū ‘Umar in Upper Egypt and the *beylerbeyi* of Egypt to go and conquer the Funj, when this task is completed neither cash nor provisions will be spent from the Imperial treasury and no requests will be made for any Janissaries to conquer more provinces for you. It is certain that – if God wills it – the entire land of the Funj [can] be conquered. It is a place suitable for a *beylerbeyilik* [governorate, province] comprised of five *sancaks*. There are suitable men who will tax-farm the aforementioned country for 60,000 gold pieces a year.<sup>23</sup>

At one stroke, the Porte could not only solve the problem of financing its impoverished East African territories, but could even make a tidy profit out of the venture by assigning the Funj lands to tax farmers. Even better, it was to be conquest on the cheap, the only budgetary implication being 200 men whom it was requested to recruit for the campaign.

According to the anonymous sixteenth-century *Rüstem Paşa Tarihi*, Özdemir in fact set off against the Funj (who are not mentioned by name) and Ethiopia before establishing himself in Suakin. On appointment as governor of “Habeş” – and it appears from the context that Ethiopia itself is meant,<sup>24</sup> rather than merely the Red Sea strip in Ottoman hands – he advanced southwards from Egypt where he had raised a Janissary army. Some of his army went by land, some by the Nile, but at the border of Upper Egypt, by the First Cataract, the troops mutinied and Özdemir was forced to abandon the expedition and return to

22 Cf. Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 83–4; Özbaran, *Ottoman Expansion*, 151–61, 210–12.

23 Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi, N.E. 3462, transcribed in Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 185. Orhonlu (*ibid.*, 77) argued that the document dated to *c.* 1577, when Süleyman Pasha launched an expedition against the Funj; however, the lack of any administrative structures in Habeş when it was composed clearly points to a date around 1555.

24 See the text in notes 25 and 26 below. The term “Habeş” in Ottoman can refer either to the Ottoman province occupying roughly the Red Sea coast of Sudan and Eritrea, or to Ethiopia itself, although in this paper Habeş is used to refer to the province, Ethiopia to the country.

Istanbul.<sup>25</sup> What made the troops rebel is not specified, but very probably the realization of their lack of preparation for the vast distances and unknown foe contributed. In Istanbul, Özdemiş was instructed to go to Suakin and use that instead as the base for the campaign to conquer Ethiopia.<sup>26</sup>

The failure of Özdemiş's expedition up the Nile did not end Ottoman interest in this approach. Within fifteen years, the Ottomans had occupied and fortified the Nubian fortress of Ibrīm, which may have been intended as a base against the Funj;<sup>27</sup> whether, however, it was envisaged as being pre-eminently defensive or rather as an outpost from which to launch future campaigns in the south is open to question. For the moment, Ottoman attempts to conquer the Funj were abandoned, even though they remained a threat to Ottoman control in north-east Africa. In 1564 the governor of Habeş was complaining to Istanbul that the "Funj who are rebellious Bedouin" (*asat-ı 'urbandan Func 'arabi*) had cut off the water supply on which Suakin depended and were allowing supplies to be sold only for an exorbitant price. It was decided to build a fortress and appoint a *sancakbey*, a certain Yusuf from Egypt, with the task of "protecting those places and suppressing the Funj tribesmen".<sup>28</sup> A few years later, another attack was sufficiently serious to warrant a report to Istanbul. On 10 Muḥarram 979/4 July 1571, while the governor was absent, the rebellious tribal chiefs (*meşayih-i 'arab*) made a move on Suakin, and fought fiercely with the castle defenders, only retreating on hearing of the return of the governor (and presumably his army).<sup>29</sup>

The condemnatory rhetoric of the documents rather obscures the precise identity of these "tribesmen" whom one would expect to have been Beja or Ḥaḍāriba given their apparent proximity to Suakin. The term Funj probably indicates that they were allied or subject to the sultanate of Sinnār. It might be argued that Funj in this context is a vague term that the Ottomans had encountered locally, and not too much should be read into its use in these documents. Yet the Ottoman authorities in Habeş were well informed about the peoples surrounding them. A document dated 1586 (MD 60, no. 580, translated below) indicates that the government of Habeş was alarmed at the possibility that the tribes might act in concert with the Ethiopians and the Funj, and sent agents to woo wavering chiefs. Furthermore, local groups played an important part in the administration of Suakin even in the sixteenth century: responsibility for defence, for instance, was shared between the Ottoman

25 *Rüstem Paşa Tarihi*, Istanbul University, TY 2438, fol. 275b: "Özdemiş Paşa vilayet-i Habeş emirü'l-ümerası olup irsal olunmuştur Mahruse-i Mısır'a vardıkta Mısır yeniçerilerinden dahi adam alup ve cami-i masalihin görüp leşkerün ba'zısı karadan ve ba'zısı Nil-i mübarekten gidip vilayet-i Sa'id serhaddinde Şelale nam bir mevzi'e vardıklarında kul mabeyninde ihtilaf olup Paşa-yı mezbure nev'an muhalefet eyledikleri ecelden ol sefer müyesser olmayup yine 'avdet olunup Mısır'a gelinüp andan Paşa-yı mezkur der-i devlete revane olup gelüp vusul buldı".

26 *Ibid.*, fol. 276a: "Bundan akdem Özdemiş Paşa ki Habeş seferin edemeyüp der-i devlete gelmiştir Sevvakin beğlerbeğliği verilüp ol canibden vilayet-i Habeşin açılması tefviz olunup irsal olundu".

27 Ménage, "The Ottomans and Nubia", 145–6. The southernmost Ottoman fortification in Nubia was Sāy, but exactly when this was occupied by the Ottomans is unclear.

28 Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Istanbul (BOA), Ruus KK, no. 218, p. 168; Ahkam, KK, no. 74, p. 525, both transcribed in Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 186; cf. Ménage, "The Ottomans and Nubia", 145.

29 BOA, Mühimme Defteri (MD) 16, p. 61, no. 126; Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 190–1.



*dizdar* (castle warden) and the *shaykh al-‘arab*, a local chief.<sup>30</sup> One document even lists some of the tribes subject to one such *shaykh al-‘arab*, among them the Ḥaḍārība, Kammālāb and ‘Amrāb.<sup>31</sup> The Ottoman authorities in Habeş, then, knew with whom they were dealing, as indeed they had to in order to maintain their hold on this remote province. We can thus be fairly confident that the “Funj tribesmen”, whatever their actual ethnicity, were indeed affiliated to the sultanate in Sinnār. Funj is thus a political, not an ethnic, term in these documents.

The Funj were thus able to present a severe threat to Ottoman control of the capital of Habeş itself, but were either unable or chose not to press home their advantage. Suakin was allowed to survive, but at a cost. The water supply was under constant threat, and purely to protect it the Ottomans had been obliged to construct three, admittedly quite small, forts by the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, provisions vital for Habeş, such as grain, came entirely from “the rebels from the land of the Funj”. In exchange, the Ottomans paid 200 bolts of cloth every year,<sup>33</sup> cloth being the Funj’s preferred currency for outside trade. It is doubtful whether Ottoman control could have been maintained without Funj acquiescence; perhaps the attacks described above were designed to remind the Ottoman authorities of this reality and extort suitable subsidies.

The Ottoman response to the threat from the Funj fluctuated according to the personalities on the ground as well as imperial policy set by Istanbul. An attempt by Süleyman Pasha to conquer the Funj around 1577 was apparently a personal initiative, and did not meet with Istanbul’s approval. Süleyman had been appointed governor of Upper Egypt in 1576 to keep an eye on the Banū ‘Umar, with whose misgovernance Istanbul was growing increasingly weary, and to ensure revenues reached Cairo.<sup>34</sup> Shortly afterwards, Süleyman became governor of Habeş, but he did not proceed directly to his new province, to the annoyance of the Porte, which wrote to him in Muḥarram 985/March 1577:

It is reported that a long time has passed since you were appointed to the aforementioned province [of Habeş], and you have still not gone there because you have some ideas concerning the conquest of the land of the Funj. You must give up that project and hasten to Habeş.<sup>35</sup>

Süleyman seems to have been undeterred, for two years later Istanbul was again writing to him complaining he had not yet gone to Habeş.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps such an

30 Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 99–100, 213, 221.

31 BOA, Ruus, KK, p. 47, no. 238, reproduced in facsimile and transcribed in Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 200–1. Orhonlu did not succeed in reading any of the tribal names, and there are another four I could not decipher.

32 MD 39, p. 199, no 413; Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 213.

33 MD 26, p. 9, no. 27; MD Zeyli 2, p. 10; MD 28, p. 235, no. 563; transcribed in Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 200, 202.

34 Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 149–50.

35 MD 30, p. 14, no. 35: “Habeş beğlerbeğisine hüküm ki zikr olunan beğlerbeğlik sana tevcih olanalı hayli zaman olup henüz gitmeyüp vilayet-i Funcin fethine mute‘allik ba‘zı efkar düşündüğün i‘lam olundu imdi ol sevdadan feraget idüp mu‘acellen Habeşe varmak lazım olmağın...” cf. MD 30, p. 14 no. 34 in Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 204–6.

36 MD 36, p. 313, no. 829, 831; p. 343, no. 902.

impoverished province was not an attractive posting,<sup>37</sup> and Süleyman's scheme to conquer the Funj may have been little more than a pretext to disguise his unwillingness to leave the presumably more lucrative pickings of Upper Egypt.

The Sublime Porte's reluctance to attack the Funj did not last. As the military situation in Habesh deteriorated with fierce fighting over Debaroa, new attempts to strike against the Funj from the north were made. In early 1584, the Porte authorized a substantial reward of 60,000 *akçes* for a soldier named Mehmed for a campaign he had led against "the princes and rebellious Bedouin on the frontiers of İbrīm". He had conquered "many places" as far south as Sise, just north of the Third Cataract, cutting off the head of the governor of Sise castle, Melik Sa'id.<sup>38</sup> Later in the same year, a sancak ("liva") of the Maḥās (in the Third Cataract area) is mentioned in the Ottoman archives.<sup>39</sup> That the ultimate target of these operations was the Funj is confirmed by a Venetian traveller who visited the region in 1589, and provides the most detailed known account of how the Ottoman advance up the Nile was frustrated.

It is impossible to navigate [the Third Cataract] with boats because of the very numerous large rocks that one can see there. In the last few years, the Turks armed some boats to go to conquer Dongola, which is ten or twelve days distant from this cataract. Concerning Dongola, everyone I asked told me that the largest number of Nubians live there, which is why the Turks regard it with desire. It belongs to the King of the Funj. If it had not been for the obstacle of the rocks in the river, the Turks could easily have seized it and the whole Kingdom of the Funj, but beneficent, almighty God has established frontiers across the whole world. As for the fate of the boats that the Turks armed – only a single one came back intact, all the rest were broken. The realm of the Turks extends as far as Sukkot. . .<sup>40</sup>

These events are also reflected in the traditions of the 'Abdallāb, the Funj's former Arab rivals who from the early sixteenth century ruled the lands north of Arbajī as Funj vassals, which recall a major battle in which the Ottomans were defeated at Ḥannik by the Third Cataract, which is said to have become

37 See further my comments on the difficulty outsiders had in making money from Suakin in Peacock, "Suakin".

38 MD 50, p. 16, no. 61: "İbrim sancağından munfasıl olup ümera-i Mısır'dan olan Mehmed Beğ İbrim serhaddinde olan melikler ve 'isyan üzere olan 'arablar ile leyl nahar ceng-i ceddal ve harb-i kıttaldan hali olmayup nice yerler feth idüp kemal-ı yoldaşlık ve delaverlik itdüğünden gayri ca-i Sise nam kal'eyi feth idüp [di]zdarı olan Melik Sa'id nam nefesin başı kesilüp kal'eyi zabt ettiğinde zuhura gelen hizmeti mukabelesinde almış bin akçe terakki verilmek buyuruldu. 2 Muharrem 992."

39 MD 50, p. 38, no. 164, transcribed and discussed in Ménage, "The Ottomans and Nubia", 152. Maḥās correctly refers to a people who originally lived in the Third Cataract region. The word is written here with a penultimate alif (Maḥās) as opposed to the better-attested spelling Maḥas. See also Intisar Soghayroun el Zein, "The Ottomans and the Mahas in the Third Cataract region", *Azania* 39, 2004, 50–57.

40 *Voyages en Egypte des années 1589, 1590 et 1591*, tr. and ed. Carla Burri et al. (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1971), 146–9. Sukkot is the region of Şāy, the southernmost Ottoman fortress on the Nile.

the frontier.<sup>41</sup> This expedition, which must have occurred around 1585,<sup>42</sup> was, as far as we know, the last Ottoman attempt to conquer the Funj. It underlines the persistent failures in Ottoman planning and intelligence. Despite the operations in the Third Cataract area around 1583–84, preparation for surmounting the natural difficulties presented by the river was clearly completely inadequate. In any case, had the Ottomans reached Dongola, the chances of them continuing successfully as far south as Sinnār were slim. Even in 1820–21, the major expedition sent by the Egyptian viceroy Muḥammad ‘Alī to seize the feeble remnants of the Funj sultanate faced huge logistical problems in maintaining supply lines from Egypt to Sinnār.<sup>43</sup>

By the end of the sixteenth century, then, the Ottomans had not achieved any appreciable success against the Funj. Further attempts were doubtless discouraged by Ottoman recognition of their failure in Ethiopia. Although the first Ethiopian attack on Debaroa in 1574 was thwarted, the Ottomans do seem to have lost control of the town briefly around this date, and it fell to the Emperor Serse Dingil after the battle of Addi Qaro in 1579. Debaroa was retaken by the Ottomans in 1582, but was captured by the Ethiopians again around 1588–89, after which the Ottoman military and administrative presence was restricted to the coast.<sup>44</sup> At this juncture, the Ottomans settled for peaceful coexistence with the Ethiopians rather than jihad. Any thoughts of conquering the Funj were probably abandoned alongside the Ethiopian campaign. The Ottomans’ East African territories remained confined to the Red Sea coast, while the southernmost Ottoman territory on the Nile was Sukkot, where the Ottomans built their frontier fortress of Şāy.

Even before the loss of Debaroa and the consequent contraction of Ottoman ambitions and territories in East Africa, sixteenth-century Ottoman policy towards the Funj was not entirely consistent, as is illustrated by the widely differing instructions issued by Istanbul. This ebb and flow of interest reflects shifting imperial policies towards expansion. These have been elucidated by Casale with regard to the Indian Ocean. Although Ottoman politics in the mid-sixteenth century was dominated by the vizier Rüstem Pasha, known for his scepticism towards expansion, from 1553 to summer 1555 Kara Ahmed Pasha held office. He was much more sympathetic to adventures in far-flung places, hence the foundation of Habeş as a base to prosecute the jihad against Ethiopia, and the

41 O’Fahey and Spaulding, *Kingdoms of the Sudan*, 35.

42 Ménage, “The Ottomans and Nubia”, 153, suggests that the Dongola campaign must be dated to 1582 or 1583 for reasons that are not entirely clear. The campaign must have been launched *after* the establishment of the short-lived sancak of the Maḥās on 27 Shawwal 992/1 November 1584 – this can hardly have been founded in the wake of the defeat and withdrawal to Sukkot – and “some years” before the report of the Venetian traveller of 1589.

43 Udal, *The Nile in Darkness: Conquest and Exploration*, 215, 217, 222–3, 230.

44 Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 46, 55, 57, 60, 63, 67; Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea: The Rise and Decline of the Solomonid Dynasty and Muslim–European Rivalry in the Region* (London: Frank Cass, 1980), 127; Yaqob Beyene, “Il tentativo turco di islamizzare l’Etiopia”, in Ugo Marazzi (ed.), *Turcica et Islamica: Studi in memoria di Aldo Gallotta* (Naples: Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”, 2003), vol. I, 89–93; Paolo Marrassini, “I Possenti di Rom’: I Turchi ottomani nella letteratura etiopica”, in Marazzi, *Turcica et Islamica*, vol. II, 602–9.

apparent authorization of Özdemiş's abortive attempt to conquer the Funj lands.<sup>45</sup> Between 1565 and 1579, Sokollu Mehmed Pasha was vizier, adopting a policy of what Casale describes as "soft empire", avoiding military confrontation in the east,<sup>46</sup> hence the lack of enthusiasm for Süleyman Pasha's proposed Funj campaign. Although Sokollu Mehmed Pasha was murdered in 1579, even in the months before his death he had been planning a new, aggressive strategy designed to shore up Ottoman prestige, challenged by a concatenation of threats, among them Ethiopian victory at Addi Qarro over the Ottomans and the fall of Debaroa. The pro-expansion party remained influential throughout the following decade.<sup>47</sup> It is in this context that we must understand the renewed initiative against the Funj of c. 1583–85. However, alongside these questions of imperial policy, the situation on the ground influenced Ottoman attitudes towards the Funj, in part perhaps attacks on Suakin, but more particularly fear of the Funj alliance with Ethiopia.

### The Funj–Ethiopian alliance

It has generally been assumed that the rise of the Funj presented a headache to their Christian neighbour to the south. They have been blamed for blocking communication with Egypt between 1480 and 1516, meaning that a new head of the Ethiopian church, who had to be a Coptic monk, could not be appointed. The accounts of Portuguese embassies to Ethiopia indicate that in 1519–20 there was fighting between the governor of the Ethiopian coast and "Moors" to the north, who have been identified with the Funj.<sup>48</sup> Yet it is by no means certain that these "Moors" were the Funj of Sinnār; they may well have been some Beja grouping, albeit possibly subjects of Sinnār, as the Ethiopian governor's expedition was launched from the Ethiopian coast in the direction of Egypt, i.e. through the Beja lands.<sup>49</sup> A further possibility is that the 'Abdallāb are meant, for the great 'Abdallāh Jammā' is reported to have been active around Suakin in the early sixteenth century.<sup>50</sup> The 'Abdallāb had complex relations with the Beja – sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile. According to 'Abdallāb tradition, the 'Abdallāb themselves waged war on these Beja around Suakin and even as far away as Massawa. These traditions, it has been argued, reflect, albeit in exaggerated form, the reality of the situation in the Red Sea–Eastern Desert region on the eve of the Ottoman conquest of Suakin around 1526.<sup>51</sup> These may be the disturbances that the Portuguese sources record. The Ethiopian sources are silent about Funj–Ethiopian relations in the first half of the sixteenth century, for Ethiopia was politically orientated towards the south. Its capital was in the southern province of Shewa, and it

45 On the policies of Rüstem Pasha and Kara Ahmed Pasha, see Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 84–8, 95–6, 102, 108; "Ahmed Paşa, Kara", *İslam Ansiklopedisi* 1: 193.

46 Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 117–51, esp. 149–50.

47 *Ibid.*, 154–8, 163–6.

48 O'Fahey and Spaulding, *Kingdoms of the Sudan*, 33–4.

49 João de Barros, *Da Asia* (Lisbon: Na Regia Officina Typografica, 1777), Decada III, Book IV, chapter 3, 402.

50 O'Fahey and Spaulding, *Kingdoms of the Sudan*, 22.

51 Yūsuf Faḍl Ḥasan, *Muqaddima fi Ta'riḫ al-Mamālik al-Islāmīya fi 'l-Sūdān al-Sharqī, 1450–1821* (Khartoum: SUADTek Ltd, 2003 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1971)), 80–81.

was from the south that Aḥmad Grañ's jihad against Ethiopia – which was supported by the Ottomans – originated.<sup>52</sup>

In contrast, Selman Reis' report of 1525 (cited in section I, note 10) sheds unexpected light on early Funj–Ethiopian relations, stressing Funj weakness and political subordination to Ethiopia. Selman suggests that exports from Ethiopia lay behind Sinnār's commercial vitality. This also casts doubt on the Funj tradition heard by James Bruce in the eighteenth century that the Funj's conversion to Islam (which occurred in the years shortly before this report was written) was motivated by the desire to facilitate trade with their neighbours, especially Egypt.<sup>53</sup> Egypt was certainly Sinnār's major trading partner when Bruce visited the Funj lands, but it is far from certain that this was the case in the sixteenth century. The importance of Sinnār's economic relations with Ethiopia has long been recognized, but the apparent contradiction with the thesis of conversion for commercial gain has been discounted on the grounds that Ethiopian traders “were exclusively Muslim”.<sup>54</sup> The Ottoman report that Sinnār's relationship with Ethiopia was one of political as well as economic dependence (through paying *kharāj*, tribute) casts some doubt on the traditional explanations for Funj conversion.

It might of course be argued that undue credence should not be given to the report of 1525. While contemporary, Selman Reis had clearly never been to Ethiopia or Sinnār, and his depiction of the Ethiopians as naked savages reflects prejudice rather than sound information. On the other hand, he was well informed about Ethiopia's struggle against the Muslim emirates in the Horn of Africa, and other evidence supports the existence of a Funj–Ethiopian coalition, in particular the rather scanty Ethiopian material,<sup>55</sup> confirmed by Ottoman documents from the later sixteenth century. The Funj supplied Ethiopia with camels and were also the major intermediary in the sale of Egyptian horses there.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, Selman Reis had noted that the thousand horses imported annually via Suakin (and thence probably through the Funj lands) to Ethiopia were being used against the Muslims of Zayla.<sup>57</sup> With the start of the Ottoman campaign to conquer Ethiopia in 1555, the Ottomans found that these horses were now directed against them, and their irritation is reflected in an order issued by the Sublime Porte in 980/1572–73:

Instruction to the *beylerbeyi* of Egypt: It has been reported that horses are currently being taken via the place named Funj to the *Dār al-Ḥarb* by caravan. I have not permitted the export of horses to the *Dār al-Ḥarb*. When this order arrives, the *shaykh al-ʿarab* of the Banū ʿUmar province who is responsible for this and the rest of the *kāshifs* [deputy governors] in this

52 Merid Wolde Aregay and Segew Hable Selassie, “Sudanese–Ethiopian relations before the nineteenth century”, in Yūsuf Faḍl Ḥasan (ed.), *Sudan in Africa: Studies Presented to the First International Conference Sponsored by The Sudan Research Unit, 7–12 February 1968* (Khartoum: University of Khartoum, 2006 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1971)), 63–4.

53 O'Fahey and Spaulding, *Kingdoms of the Sudan*, 32.

54 *Ibid.*, 32–3; Aregay and Selassie, “Sudanese–Ethiopian relations”, 70.

55 Aregay and Selassie, “Sudanese–Ethiopian relations”, 64.

56 See also Crawford, *The Fung Kingdom of Sennar*, 113–6.

57 Lesure, “Un document ottoman”, 151; Özbaran, “A Turkish report”, 108.

region should pay attention to my instructions and should beware of contravening my noble decrees in future.<sup>58</sup>

The *Dār al-Ḥarb* can only be Ethiopia, the sole significant non-Muslim power in the region likely to have worried the Ottomans.

Efforts to suppress the trade seem to have been unsuccessful. Ten years later, in 990/1582, the governor of Habeş complained to the Porte that the Funj were still supplying the Ethiopians with horses, while military equipment was reaching them via the port of Beylul, whose ruler had apparently thrown off Ottoman suzerainty.<sup>59</sup> In 1586, when Suakin was in danger of attack from the Funj and the Ethiopians had advanced towards Debaroa, the Porte sent an instruction that horses should be bought in Upper Egypt and sent via Alexandria to Istanbul, doubtless in an attempt to stop them falling into the wrong hands.<sup>60</sup>

Ottoman preparations for war in 1586 seem to reflect worries that the Funj might act in concert with the Ethiopians. A letter addressed to the *beylerbeyi* of Habeş summarized the concerns he had presented to the Porte:<sup>61</sup>

According to your report, when you heard that the infidel king of Ethiopia had set out from his capital with an army 40,000 strong and had come to the province of Shire,<sup>62</sup> you sent two spies, the first of whom was lost, and the second of whom reported that provisions were being made ready. Therefore a man was sent to the Bedouin chiefs (*Bedvan şeyhlerine*) and every possible precaution was taken. A man was also sent to the aforementioned accursed [king of the Ethiopians] to ask, “While relations between us are peaceful, what is the reason for these movements and unfriendly actions?” [The king] replied that, “We do not deserve this reputation [for hostility],”<sup>63</sup> but his intentions are unknown. Therefore fortifications and ports have been put [on a war footing], trenches have been dug, and the country is in a state of defence and vigilance. Furthermore, with the death of the Funj king, his elder son has become king in his place and

58 MD 24, p. 301, no. 817: “Mısır beğlerbeğisine hüküm ki hala Func nam mahallden kafil ile at alup Darü 'l-Harbe gittikleri i'lam olundu Darü 'l-Harbe at gitmeğe emrim yokdur buyurdum ki varıcak bu babda mükayyed olup ‘Ömer oğlu vilayeti şeyhü 'l-arabına ve sair ol cevanibde olan kuşşafa hükme tenbih ve te'kid eylesesin ki min ba'd firman-ı şerifime mugayir iş olmaktan hazer eylesin”.

59 MD 48, p. 3, no. 6, transcribed in Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 227.

60 MD 60, p. 250, no. 585.

61 BOA, MD 60, p. 248, no. 580. The document is dated 26 Jumādā I 994, corresponding to 15 July 1586; almost identical to text in MD 60, p. 247, no. 578, addressed to the *beylerbeyi* of Egypt. Incidentally, the date of this document and its reference to the death of the Funj king and the accession of his son offers a useful confirmation of the accuracy of the king-list that Bruce acquired in Sinnār: O'Fahey and Spaulding, *Kingdoms of the Sudan*, 35–6; Jay Spaulding and 'Abd al-Ghaffar Muhammad Ahmad, “The Sinnar king-list of the *Sīd al-Qūm* Ahmad, 1772”, *Sudan Notes and Records* 56, 1975, 234–42.

62 Corrected from Orhonlu's reading Sira; Shire is on the northern frontier of modern Ethiopia, not far from ancient Aksum.

63 The phrase “adımız zahir olmuş” appears to correspond to the modern Turkish phrase “adımız çıkmış” with this meaning. I am grateful to İ.H. Kadı for alerting me to this.



is certain to attack Suakin. For the moment, however, he is fighting with his paternal uncles, so he has not yet mobilized.<sup>64</sup>

The new Funj sultan mentioned must have been Dawra b. Dakīn. Later Ethiopian sources mention the friendship between Dawra's father Dakīn (976/1568 to 999/1585–86) and the Ethiopian Emperor Serse Dingil (1563–96).<sup>65</sup>

Strategic considerations kept Sinnār aligned with Ethiopia against the Ottomans, despite the latter being fellow Muslims. First, there was the question of access to the fabled gold of Ethiopia. Aḥmad Grañ's jihad had deprived the Ethiopians of most ports, and the main export route that remained open to them lay through the Sudan via Sinnār and Suakin.<sup>66</sup> Gold was of crucial importance to the Funj too. In the absence of a mint in the Funj realms, the gold ounce seems to have served as the effective currency of Sinnār. Maintaining control over gold, both imported and that mined within his kingdom, was crucial to the Funj sultan's authority.<sup>67</sup> Ottoman interest in Ethiopian gold, and awareness of Sinnār's involvement in its export, is clear from the report of 1525. Ethiopia and the Funj thus had a common desire to maintain their control over the production and export of this commodity.

Alongside Ethiopian–Funj collaboration, there were periods of tension, even hostility, between the two sides. The Ottoman report of 1525 suggests that 'Amāra Dūnqas' subjugation to the Ethiopians was not entirely voluntary. Ethiopian sources confirm that from the late sixteenth century the boundary disputes and cross-border slaving expeditions that both the Ethiopians and the Funj directed against each other's territories resulted in tensions between the two sides, culminating in outright war in 1618–19. Periods of war and peace alternated throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>68</sup> Even in the sixteenth century, the Funj allowed the Ottomans to hang on to Suakin, the main base through which the Ethiopian campaigns were supplied, suggesting their alliance with Ethiopia was somewhat half-hearted. It is easy to discern the strategic considerations that would have influenced them. Firstly, the Funj were themselves reliant on Suakin as their main entrepot for trade with the outside world, and they probably welcomed the access to world markets provided by Ottoman Suakin's prominent place on the trade routes connecting the Red Sea coast of Africa with India, South-East Asia and the Mediterranean.<sup>69</sup> Secondly, the Funj are unlikely to have wanted Ethiopia to win an absolute victory which might threaten Sinnār's own position and even independence. So they supplied both sides, Ethiopia with horses to keep the war going, the Ottomans with enough provisions to allow them to retain their East African foothold. At the same time, they could easily tighten the noose around Suakin by cutting off water or communications with other Ottoman possessions in Habeş, like Debaroa.<sup>70</sup>

64 BOA, MD 60, p. 248, no. 580; transcribed in Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 238.

65 Aregay and Selassie, "Sudanese–Ethiopian relations", 64.

66 See Walz, "Gold and silver exchanges between Egypt and Sudan", 319–21.

67 O'Fahey and Spaulding, *Kingdoms of the Sudan*, 55–6.

68 Aregay and Selassie, "Sudanese–Ethiopian relations", 65–8.

69 See Mallinson et al., "Ottoman Suakin 1540–1865 – lost and found", in Peacock, *The Frontiers of the Ottoman World*, 469–92; Spaulding, "Suakin"; Peacock, "Suakin".

70 On disruption to communications with Debaroa, see MD 28, p. 236, no. 564; Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 204.

Thus when Ottoman pressure on Ethiopia and the Funj relaxed from the 1590s onwards, neither party needed the alliance that had protected them during the epoch of Ottoman expansion. This opened the way to their often tense relations from the seventeenth century onwards. Even then the occasional fragment of evidence suggests that the two sides continued to collude against the Ottomans from time to time, such as an appeal for help (of questionable authenticity) from the Funj to Ethiopia around 1654, after the former's involvement in murdering the governor of Suakin.<sup>71</sup>

## II. The Ottomans and the Funj in the seventeenth century

Increasing military and financial problems closer to home forced the Ottomans to abandon their ambitions for expansion in the Indian Ocean and Africa, adventures which had anyway met with very limited success. Habeş continued to exist but is mentioned with increasing rarity in the Ottoman archives. Janissaries posted to Habeş and to Nubia began to intermarry with the local population and to identify increasingly closely with local, rather than Ottoman, interests. Sometimes power was more or less entirely devolved to local agents, such as the *nā'ibs* of Harqīqo.<sup>72</sup> At the same time, the seventeenth century saw the Funj rise to the apogee of their power while becoming increasingly open to foreign influences. Sinnār, with its substantial colonies of foreign merchants, became a cosmopolitan city, and the Funj sultans attempted to modernize their army by importing firearms and cannons.<sup>73</sup> Ottoman Egypt may have been one channel through which knowledge about military technology was diffused, but so probably was Habeş. Suakin, on the front line with the Funj, was certainly defended by cannon and muskets.<sup>74</sup> Culturally, too, there are suggestions of a certain rivalry with the Ottomans. The panegyric *qaṣīda* dedicated to Sultan Bādī II (r. 1644/5–1681) by the Azhar scholar 'Umar al-Maghribī was inspired by a poem originally dedicated to the Ottoman Bayezid II (1481–1512), and went so far as to promote the Funj sultan as Caliph himself.<sup>75</sup>

71 Jay Spaulding and Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Abū Salīm, *Public Documents from Sinnār* (African Historical Sources 1. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1989), 3.

72 Jonathan Miran, *Red Sea Citizens: Cosmopolitan Society and Cultural Change in Massawa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 38–40; on Nubia see Martin Hinds and Victor Ménage, *Qasr Ibrim in the Ottoman Period: Turkish and Further Arabic Documents* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1991); for Suakin, see Peacock, "Suakin".

73 O'Fahey and Spaulding, *Kingdoms of the Sudan*, 57, 68–70.

74 E.g. MD 74, p. 84 no. 243, dated September 1596, ordering the provision of gunpowder, bullets and rifles to Harqīqo and Suakin (Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 246).

75 Aḥmad b. al-Ḥājj Abū 'Alī, *Makhtūṭat Kātib al-Shūna*, 11–17. According to the editor, this poem was derived from the *al-Durr al-Manzūm fī Manāqib Sulṭān Bāyazīd al-Rūm*, transmitted through al-Nahrawālī's *Kitāb al-īlām bi-Ālām Bayt al-Ḥarām* (ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld as *Die Chroniken der Stadt Mekka, III: Geschichte der Stadt Mekka und ihres Tempels von Cutb ed-Din* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1857), 242–4). However, few lines of either the original *qaṣīda*, which comes at the conclusion of the *al-Durr al-Manzūm*, or the abridged version in Nahrawālī, are identical with those in al-Maghribī's version: one of the few that does is the line, "fa-lā zilta mahruṣa 'l-janābi mu'ayyadan min Allāhi bi-'l-tawfīqi wa-'l-'izzī wa-'l-naṣri" (Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, MS Fatih 4357, f. 118a; cf. *Makhtūṭat Kātib al-Shūna*, 14).

Despite the occasional hostile incident, in general relations between the Ottomans and the sultanate thawed. With the growing irrelevance of Habeş, the Funj sank largely – but not entirely – beyond the horizons of the Sublime Porte, and Egypt became the main link between the two sides, the corridor through which Sudanese gold, swords and slaves were brought to the Mediterranean world.<sup>76</sup> The importance of the connection with Egypt is suggested by our principal Ottoman source for the Funj in the seventeenth century, the account of the Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi.

### Evliya Çelebi's travels in the Funj lands and Habeş

It was from Egypt that the famous Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi claims to have set off in July 1672 to explore the land of the Funj, armed with letters of recommendation from his patron, Kethüda İbrahim Pasha, the governor of Egypt.<sup>77</sup> Evliya's journey led him up the Nile, across the frontier at Şây into the 'Abdallâb territories (Berberistan in his terminology), and then south into the heart of the Funj kingdom. Indeed, Evliya purports to have been given a tour around Sinnâr by the Funj sultan in person, before penetrating deeper into Africa, into Ethiopia itself, where his ambition to see the source of the Nile was frustrated. A second journey took him from the Nile across the desert to Ottoman Habeş, whence he returned to Egypt.

Evliya's account should, then, be a source of exceptional importance for our theme, and it is widely cited in works on Sudanese history.<sup>78</sup> Yet the further Evliya's journey led him up the Nile, the more exotic his stories become and the further his itinerary diverges from the actual topography of the lands through which he purports to have passed. The descriptions of the two main Ottoman settlements towards the frontier, İbrîm and Şây, are reasonably detailed and convincing, as too is the later account of Suakin and Massawa. Immediately after Şây, Evliya mentions Mağrak, correctly locating it on the east bank (although it is in fact situated north of Şây), and Tinare and Sise on the west bank.<sup>79</sup>

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*Pace* Buşaylî, the line attributing “the burdens of the Caliphate” to Bâdî is not in the original or Nahrawâlî, and must be considered al-Maghribî's own, hyperbolic contribution (*Mahkûţat Kâtib al-Shûna*, 13: *yaqûmu bi-a'bâ'i l-khilâfati qawmattan* ...).

76 Walz, *Trade between Egypt and Bilâd as-Sûdân*, 1–2, 9–14, 32–9.

77 Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatnamesi*, 10. *Kitab*, ed. Seyit Ali Kahraman, Yücel Dağlı and Robert Dankoff (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2007), 285, 403.

78 Evliya's journey in Sudan is discussed in Udal, *The Nile in Darkness*, 17–35. The study of Maria Teresa Petti Suma, “Il viaggio in Sudan di Evliya Çelebi (1671–1672)”, *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 14, 1964, 433–52 consists largely of a summary of Evliya's journey, comparing it with the topography presented in the roughly contemporary Ottoman map held in the Vatican. On the latter see now the edition by Robert Dankoff and Nuran Tezcan, *Evliya Çelebi'nin Nil Haritası “Dürr-i bî-misil in ahbâr-ı Nil”* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2011), and Robert Dankoff, “Is the Vatican map of the Nile Evliya Çelebi's?” / “Vatikan'da Bulunan Nil Haritası, Evliya Çelebi'nin mi?” in *III. Uluslararası Türkiyat Araştırmaları Sempozyumu Bildiriler Kitabı*, 1. Cilt (Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 2011), 259–71/273–85; Nuran Tezcan, “Nil Haritası ile *Seyahatname* Arasındaki Paralellikler”, in *III. Uluslararası Türkiyat Araştırmaları Sempozyumu Bildiriler Kitabı*, 1. Cilt (Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 2011), 785–97.

79 Evliya, *Seyahatnamesi*, 10. *Kitap*, 440–1.

Yet doubts begin to arise. Where could the west bank castle and town of Hafir-i Kebir be, with its twenty *mihrabs*, numerous mosques, fifty *zaviyes* and hundred shops?<sup>80</sup> Evliya's persistent references to elephant and rhinoceros products, ranging from ivory cannonballs<sup>81</sup> to his tales of having ridden an elephant<sup>82</sup> and meeting rhinoceros-mounted dervishes<sup>83</sup> surely represent the exotica he imagined he might encounter in Africa rather than what he really did. "The valley of demons", with its wondrous columns and miraculous healing waters that were exported as far as the lands of the Franks and India, is the stuff of legend.<sup>84</sup> So too is the vast congregational mosque of the Prophet Solomon which Evliya claims to have seen in the desert, larger, he says, than any mosque he had seen in Constantinople or Mecca.<sup>85</sup> By the time we reach Ethiopia, we are in an entirely imaginary world of wonders such as a "land of monkeys".<sup>86</sup>

Evliya's account of the Funj sultan also owes more to mythology than to any real encounter. Although the sultan at the time of his visit was Bādī II, also known as Abū Diqn, Evliya calls him Qaqān b. Ghulām Muḥammad Qaqān b. Idrīs Qaqān.<sup>87</sup> Qaqān or Kakan is the word Evliya uses to mean sultan or king of the Funj, but is not otherwise attested, nor are the other names Evliya gives. In fact, they have nothing to do with the names or titles of any real Funj monarchs. Evliya's account of Nubia and Africa is permeated by legends associating these regions with the Prophet Idrīs, to whom he frequently connects the remains that he saw and the peoples he encountered.<sup>88</sup> This is why Evliya also claims to have heard "Hebrew" in Sinnār: it is part of his mythologizing of Africa, by which he attempts to link the wonders he claims to have seen with Muslim lore about pre-Islamic prophets.<sup>89</sup>

Despite his passion for travel, Evliya rarely went far beyond the Ottoman frontiers. His visits to Iran were restricted to the (formerly Ottoman) border provinces of Armenia and Azerbaijan, while his most exotic destination, the remote north Pontic steppe, was nominally subject to the Ottomans' vassals, the Tartars. His account of visits to Western Europe are fictitious, and his trip to Vienna of 1665 was made in the company of an Ottoman embassy.<sup>90</sup> In Africa, a visit to Habeş, and up the Nile to Ibrīm and Şāy, is credible, but Evliya probably got little further than Ottoman-controlled territories, as his confused and fantastic itineraries up the Nile and into Ethiopia so strongly suggest.

80 Ibid., 442. A town of Hafir did exist south of the Third Cataract, but the description is clearly fantastical.

81 E.g. Ibid., 442: "fil kemiğinden toplar var"; ibid., 448, "fil inciğinden vafır toplar atdı"; 461.

82 Ibid., 445.

83 Ibid., 457.

84 Ibid., 451–2.

85 Ibid., 451–3.

86 Ibid., 482.

87 Ibid., 460.

88 Ibid., 11–13, 430, 431, 432; Robert Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality: The World of Evliya Çelebi* (The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage. Leiden: Brill, 2006), 177, 180–1.

89 Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality*, 177.

90 Ibid., 57–8, 62.

Yet Evliya's account of the Funj kingdom is not complete nonsense. Many of the places mentioned are genuine toponyms, albeit in mangled form: for example, Petti Sumi suggests that Narnarinte is derived from the common Nubian toponym *narti*, meaning island.<sup>91</sup> Hannak must be Ḥannik, the site of the great Ottoman–Funj battle according to ‘Abdallāb tradition, although Evliya makes no mention of this. Tinare, Sise, Dongola, Qarrī and Arbajī are all real places on the route south to Sinnār. Even the samples of African languages Evliya gives are not entirely invented. Parts of them have been identified as Kanuri, the language of Bornu,<sup>92</sup> and, significantly, Evliya says that in Funjistan “they call their kings *mây*, which means sultan”.<sup>93</sup> They did not, but this title was used in the sultanate of Bornu, with which the Ottomans had diplomatic links.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, Ottoman soldiers served in the army of Bornu, and in the late sixteenth century, Bornu's sovereign even bore the name Idrīs, like the ancestor of Evliya's ruler of Sinnār. Evliya does tell us he encountered a diplomatic mission from the ruler of Bornu in Cairo,<sup>95</sup> and this may have served as his source for this information, which was then – accidentally or deliberately – displaced to the sections on the Funj.

Other possible sources may have been slaves from Funjistan whom Evliya mentions in his account of Cairo, and merchants doing business with the Funj.<sup>96</sup> Evliya claims to have undertaken the journey into Ethiopia in the company of Jabartī merchants from the Horn of Africa.<sup>97</sup> He also mentions the Banyans, or Indian merchants, who came from Habeş to do business in Sinnār, and he quotes verses in Hindi by them.<sup>98</sup> This Hindi is not one of the mythological languages, perpetrated as a “hoax” on his readers, as Dankoff puts it, but genuine quotations from a north Indian language. Banyans, then, may have been a source, and there was a community of them at Suakin, which Evliya is much more likely to have visited.<sup>99</sup> Thus even if Evliya's account of the Funj owes little or nothing to personal experience, it probably does reflect, in intentionally exaggerated and mythologizing form, tales the author heard from better-informed sources in Cairo, Suakin and elsewhere. In a sense, then, it can be said to offer an insight into the Ottoman experience and perception of Africa.

### Abu Bekr el-Dimaşki's account of the Funj

Evliya may also have had access to literary sources on the Funj. His contemporary Abu Bekr b. Behram el-Dimaşki was commissioned to translate Johannes

91 Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatnamesi*, 10. Kitap, 442; Petti Suma, “Il Viaggio”, 440–41, n. 47.

92 Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality*, 176, 178; Tomasz Habraszewski, “Kanuri – language and people – in the ‘Travel Book’ (Siyahatname) of Evliya Çelebi”, *Africana Bulletin* 6, 1967, 59–66.

93 Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatnamesi*, 10. Kitap, 46.

94 B.G. Martin, “Kanem, Bornu and the Fezzan: notes on the political history of a trade route”, *Journal of African History* 10/1, 1969, 22–6.

95 Habraszewski, “Kanuri”, 64; Evliya, *Seyahatnamesi*, 10. Kitap, 47.

96 E.g. Evliya, *Seyahatnamesi*, 10. Kitap, 205, 209.

97 *Ibid.*, 464.

98 *Ibid.*, 460, 468–9.

99 *Ibid.*, 483–4.

Blaeu's famous world atlas into Ottoman by Sultan Mehmed IV in 1675. It was more than a simple translation, however, for Dimaşki greatly expanded the parts relating to Ottoman and adjoining territories, and included an account of the Funj kingdom, the source of which I have not been able to identify. Although Dimaşki's translation, entitled the *Nusretü'l-İslam ve'l-Surur fi Tahrir-i Atlas Mayor*, was not completed until 1685, after Evliya's death in 1682, it indicates that there were written accounts of the Funj in circulation, however fantastic in character, upon which Evliya may have drawn. As Dimaşki's account of the Funj has not previously attracted attention, I quote it in full here, firstly transcribed into Latin script, secondly in English translation. As will be seen, the account is too vague to allow a precise dating. Furthermore, there are often textual differences in the manuscripts I have inspected: rather surprisingly, the text of the abridgement of Dimaşki's *Nusretü'l-İslam* (MS Istanbul, Nuruosmaniye 2996, fol. 70a) is longer than that in the supposedly full version (MSS Istanbul, Nuruosmaniye 2994, fol. 385b; Istanbul University, TY 6609, fol. 34a). Significant lexical variations also appear in the text of the eighteenth-century Ottoman geographer Bartınlı İbrahim, who incorporated much of Dimaşki's work into his own *Atlas-ı Cihan* (MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Esad Efendi 2044, fol. 46a–b). This is not the place to provide a critical edition: I aim merely to introduce the fullest version of this text presented by Nuruosmaniye 2996 with a translation and noting any major discrepancies I have encountered in the other manuscripts.<sup>100</sup>

#### *Fasıl der beyan-ı Func saltanatı*

Bu vilayet Nubiya'dan bir kısımdır ve hududı şarktan Bece ve garptan Nube ve cenuptan Habeş ve şimaldan Mısır hududı ki ol semte livanın ibtidasıdır ve şark ve cenub-ı Cebel-i 'Acun dahi Ra's ül-Dünya derler. Ve bu memleketin en baş şehri Sinnar'dır ve bu medine büyük[tür] Nil kenarında olur Sevvakin'den yigirmi merhaledir ve bu şehirde Func meliki olur. Ve bu memleketin halkı ehl-i İslam'dır ve cümlesinin mezhepleri Malikidir. Ve bunların meliki kumaştan esbab<sup>101</sup> giyerler amma başı açıktır ve giydiği esbab astarsızdır dahi kumaştan don giyer ve bir peştimal kuşanur ve boynunda zi-kıymet bir şal<sup>102</sup> ve kulaklarında altundan mücevher küpeler ve kollarında altundan mücevher bilezik olur. Ve oturduğu odada sac ağacından ve üzerinde mücevher tahtalar kaplanmışır ve dört köşesinde altun mücevher toplar vaz' olunmuştur ve tavanı enva'-ı zinetlerle müzeyyendir. Bu irade<sup>103</sup> istediği yere nakl olunur ve kaçan ki taifesinden bir kimse buluşmak murad eylese yüzü üzerine düşer ve "şar şar" deyü söyler ya'ni "ey vallah" demektir. Ba'dahu kalkar ve 'arızhal eder. Ve bu melikin veziri [Arbaci]<sup>104</sup> şehrinde olur, Sinnar'dan bir

100 On Dimaşki, his works and their manuscripts see Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu et al., *Osmanlı Coğrafya Literatürü Tarihi* (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2000), vol. I, 108–13; on Bartınlı İbrahim see *ibid.*, I, 139–43.

101 Nuruosmaniye 2994: esvab.

102 Nuruosmaniye 2994: bir taş.

103 Istanbul University, TY 6609: bu *oda*.

104 Nuruosmaniye 2994 and 2996, Istanbul University, TY 6609: عربيجه; Bartınlı İbrahim (Esad Efendi 2044): اربك.



merhale ba'iddir. Ve bu vezirin ancak kulağında bir mücevher küpe, kolunda bir mücevher enlu bilezik ki buna vüzerat mührü derler.<sup>105</sup> Ve bu vilayetin bir garib vilayet 'adetleri vardır. Hatibleri 'İyü 'l-Adha namazı kıldıkta minbere çıkar ve hütbeyi okur. Tamam oldukça eline bir kalkan alur ve minberden iner ve kalkanı elinde tutar ve cema'atın her birinin elinde sığır tezeğinden bir top anar kadar yapılmıştır. Ol topı hatib minberden indüğü vaktinde ana atarlar. Her kim topunu hatibe dokunursa gayetle şadman olur, bu sene tali'i mübarek ve devesi ve mavaşisi ve evladı ve gayrısı cümlesi afatten amindir deyür. Eğer dokunmazsa mahzun olur ve der ki bu sene tali'i fenadır ve kendüye bir zarar ısalet eder. Fi 'l-vakı'a böyle olur ve anlarda mücerrebdir hatta padişahları Sevvakin'den va'izler ve şeyhler götürüp, va'z-ü nasihat ittirüp, bu şeyin aslı yokdur deyü. Olmadı, farig olmadılar ve bu taifenin mu'ameleleri demürdendür.

### Chapter describing the Funj sultanate

This land is part of Nubia. Its borders are the Beja in the east, Nubia in the west, Ethiopia in the south, and the borders of Egypt in the north which mark the beginning of that region [i.e. the Funj lands]. They call the south and east of Mount 'Ajün "The Head of the World". The most important town of this country is Sinnār, a large city on the banks of the Nile, twenty stages from Suakin, in which the king of the Funj lives. This country's people are Muslims, and they all belong to the Maliki *madhhab*. Their king wears robes of cloth, but does not cover his head. The robes he wears have no lining, and he wears cloth trousers and a waistcloth. On his neck is a valuable shawl (or stone) and he has gold earrings and gold bracelets on his arms. The room he lives in is made of teak and is covered with bejewelled wood. In each of its four corners are placed balls of gold, and its roof is decorated with various jewels. This [room] is taken wherever he wants, and when one of his people wants to meet [with the king], [the suppliant] falls on his face saying, "*Shar shar*", which means "Oh by God". Then he gets up and presents his petition. This king's minister lives in Arbajī, one stage distant from Sinnār. This minister has only a bejewelled earring and a bejewelled, decorated bracelet which is called the seal of the vizierate. This land has strange local customs. When their *khaṭībs* perform the 'Īd al-Aḏḥā prayers, they go up to the *minbar*, and read the *khuṭba*. When it is finished, they take a shield and come down from the *minbar* while holding the shield. Each one of the congregation has in his hand a ball the size of a pomegranate made of dried ox (or bull's) dung. When the *khaṭīb* comes down from the *minbar*, they throw it and whoever's ball touches the *khaṭīb* is very happy, and says, "This year my fortune will be good and my camel, cattle and children and so on safe from disaster". If [the ball] does not touch [the *khaṭīb*], he becomes sad, thinking his luck will be bad this year and he will be afflicted by harm. In truth, this is how it turns out, and it is tried and tested by them. Even their kings bring preachers and shaykhs from Suakin and make them preach and give advice, saying, "This custom has no basis". It did not work out, and they have not given it up, for this people's behaviour is unshakable.

105 The passage on the Funj in Nuruosmaniye 2994 concludes here.

It is easy to dismiss Dimaški's account of the Funj as being little more than tall tales of Africa designed to titillate the prejudices of his audience. Yet he should be given his due. The only mention of the Funj in Blaeu's Atlas was as the "Nova Fungi" who are marked on his map of Africa far to the south of Ethiopia, roughly in modern Kenya.<sup>106</sup> Dimaški's description locates them much more accurately, and this is also reflected in the maps accompanying at least some versions of his text.<sup>107</sup> Thus before Poncet undertook his famous trip to Sinnār in 1698–99, which was to introduce Europe to the Funj kingdom for the first time, a seventeenth-century Ottoman audience reading works like those of Dimaški and Evliya had access to better information than a European one: the Ottoman sources at least manage to locate the Funj lands accurately and name the capital Sinnār, and the second town of Arbajī. The reference to the king's minister residing in Arbajī is doubtless a reflection of the division of the Funj kingdom into two spheres, with the area to the north of the Nile confluence subject to the 'Abdallāb rather than directly to the sovereignty of the sultan of Sinnār.<sup>108</sup>

### Ottoman influences in seventeenth-century Sinnār

The concluding passage of Dimaški's account of the Funj points to Suakin as a source of religious instruction for the Funj. From the seventeenth century onwards, Islam in the eastern Bilād al-Sūdān was transformed from being the preserve of the ruling elite to the faith of the masses. Holy men from the Ottoman lands, especially from Egypt and the Ḥijāz, played a crucial part in these conversions.<sup>109</sup> The question of whether they brought anything specifically Ottoman with them has never been examined, perhaps because the Ḥanafī law-school which the Ottomans espoused never won any popularity in the Sudan. Even in Suakin, the Ḥanafī mosque and qadi faced stiff resistance,<sup>110</sup> and one of the more credible parts of Evliya's report on Sinnār notes the absence

106 Dutch edition, 1658, vol. II, map at 147.

107 However, the maps of Africa in MS Nuruosmaniye 2995, another manuscript of the "abridged" version of the *Nusretü'l-İslam*, are much less detailed and accurate and contain no mention of the Funj (although the text still does). Furthermore, in the "full" version of the work in Istanbul University, TY 6609, fol. 36a, the Funj are marked on the map as *Nahiye-i Funci* just where Blaeu had them, to the south of Ethiopia. Unfortunately none of the manuscripts inspected is dated. A thorough assessment both of the textual history and the illustrations of Dimaški's work is needed.

108 O'Fahey and Spaulding, *Kingdoms of the Sudan*, 37–40.

109 See McHugh, *Holy men of the Blue Nile*, esp. 38–41, 58–60, 72, 100. A good number of these holy men were the Maḥās who immigrated south to Tuti island and the Gezira. It would be interesting to know whether there was a connection between the Ottoman creation of the sancak of the Maḥās, the apparently profounder knowledge of Islam among the Maḥās, and their migration southwards, but our current sources do not allow us to do more than speculate. On Maḥās holy men, see McHugh, *Holy men of the Blue Nile*, 58–60; Richard A. Lobban, Jr, "A genealogical and historical study of the Maḥās of the 'Three Towns', Sudan", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 16/2, 1983, 231–62.

110 Albrecht Hofheinz, "Transcending the madhhab – in practice: the case of the Sudanese shaykh Muḥammad Majdhūb (1795/6–1831)", *Islamic Law and Society* 10/2, 2003, 246–8.

of any Ḥanafis there.<sup>111</sup> Yet Evliya also claims that the name of the Ottoman Caliph Mehmed IV was mentioned after that of the Funj sultan in the *khuṭba* at Friday prayers in Sinnār in his capacity as protector of the holy cities of the Ḥijāz.<sup>112</sup>

It might be tempting to dismiss the Ottoman *khuṭba* at Sinnār, along with tales of the Turkish-speaking members of local elites Evliya claimed to have encountered,<sup>113</sup> as examples of Evliya's overactive imagination and his Ottoman patriotism. Yet religious links between the Funj and Ottoman territories were strong. The *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt* of Wad Ḍayf Allāh, a work composed in the Gezira in the last years of the Funj monarchy in the early nineteenth century which is our main source for the religious history of the eastern Bilād al-Sūdān, frequently refers to such contacts, although I have not discovered any references to ulema from Suakin itself; perhaps all that is meant by Dimāṣki's report is that the ulema were brought via, rather than from, Suakin. A certain Muḥammad b. Fāyid al-Sharīf from Ottoman Massawa, however, is mentioned.<sup>114</sup> The name of another scholar, al-Khalīl b. al-Rūmī, suggests an Anatolian or Ottoman ancestor of some sort, even if he himself was a native of Dongola.<sup>115</sup> However, it was not purely a question of the Funj acting as passive recipients of religious knowledge from abroad. Links with the Ottoman territories across the Red Sea were cemented through the hajj, and some Funj ulema repeatedly undertook the journey to the Ḥijāz in search of knowledge.<sup>116</sup> The seventeenth-century Sinnār scholar, Junayd walad Ṭāhā, had great influence among both the elite and the ordinary people in the Ḥijāz.<sup>117</sup> Rather less welcome, presumably, were the activities of another seventeenth-century Sufi from the Funj lands, Ḥamad al-Nahlān, known as Ibn Turābī, who was beaten and imprisoned for declaring himself the Mahdi while on the hajj.<sup>118</sup> Visits to the Ḥijāz and the resulting association with men of learning from across the Ottoman Empire and Africa could consolidate a Funj scholar's reputation. When 'Abd al-Laṭīf, *khaṭīb* of Sinnār, was obliged to go into exile in the Ḥijāz in the wake of a dispute with the Funj sultan, he forged contacts with ulema from the Maghrib, Ḥijāz, Rūm and Takrūr who feted him as the leading learned man of Sinnār.<sup>119</sup>

The effect of these contacts can be seen in Wad Ḍayf Allāh's account of the debates among the Funj ulema over the permissibility of the consumption of tobacco. One of the leading holymen of Sinnār, Shaykh Idrīs b. Muḥammad al-Arbāb (d. c. 1650), had issued a fatwa that it was illicit, based on practice in the Ottoman empire, for "The Sultan [in] Istanbul, Mustafa, had banned it

111 Evliya, *Seyahatnamesi*, 10. *Kitap*, 459.

112 *Ibid.*, 460.

113 For instance, Hüseyin Kan of Hangoç on the Middle Nile, and perhaps rather more credibly the *nā'ib* of Harqīqo. *Ibid.*, 444, 487.

114 Muḥammad al-Nūr b. Ḍayf Allāh, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, ed. Yūsuf Faḍl Ḥasan (Khartoum: Jāmi'at al-Khartūm, 1974), 324.

115 *Ibid.*, 202.

116 E.g. *ibid.*, 136, 260–1.

117 *Ibid.*, 132.

118 *Ibid.*, 165.

119 *Ibid.*, 300–1.

and the Maliki *madhhab* requires obedience to the sultan in cases where there is no legal text".<sup>120</sup> The details of which Ottoman sultan was responsible are confused – Mustafa's predecessor Ahmed I had in fact introduced the ban, which was later reinforced by Osman II and Murad IV<sup>121</sup> – but it is a telling comment on the prestige of the Funj's old adversaries that the social policies of Istanbul should have been seen as authoritative in Sinnār, although not decisive, for Wad Ḍayf Allāh indicates the debate continued after this intervention. In this context, Evliya Çelebi's claim that the Ottoman sultan was mentioned in the khuṭba at Sinnār should perhaps be given a degree of credence.

By the seventeenth century, then, Sinnār looked towards the Ottoman empire not merely as a potential threat or as a source of military technology, but also as source of religious legitimacy, notwithstanding the differences of *madhhab*. For their part, the Ottomans' attitude towards the Funj had relaxed considerably, as is suggested by Suakin's role as the major port for the Funj and the apparently regular traffic between Cairo and Sinnār. This new attitude is attested by a directive dated Dhū 'l-Ḥijja 1112/July 1701 addressed to the *beylerbeyi* of Habeş by the Sublime Porte in response to a letter received from the Funj sultan, who must have been Bādī III, although he is not named. In contrast to the sixteenth-century Ottoman rhetoric about "rebellious tribesmen", the document of 1701 refers respectfully to the *vilayet-i Sinnarü's-Sudan hakimi*, "the ruler of the land of Sinnar in the Sudan". The governor of Habeş is rebuked by Istanbul for levying excessive taxes on slave caravans passing from Sinnār to the Ḥijāz via Suakin, taking, in contrast to the established rate of one gold piece per prisoner and one *esedi gurus* per head of camel, five gold pieces per slave, both children and adults, and three gold pieces per head for camels. The Porte demanded an immediate end to this oppression of the Sinnār merchants, as it was in breach of the custom established since the time of Sultan Selim.<sup>122</sup>

Elsewhere in the eastern Sudan, Istanbul's prestige became increasingly alluring to local rulers during the eighteenth century, who had long-established trade links with Ottoman Egypt.<sup>123</sup> This phenomenon is well illustrated by the titles adopted by Sultan 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Rashīd of Dārfūr (1787–1801). Even his *laqab* al-Rashīd is said to have been awarded to him by the Ottoman sultan in response to gifts he sent to Istanbul, and in his correspondence he styled himself by a number of Ottoman-sounding titles: *khādim al-ḥaramayn al-sharīfayn* and *sulṭān al-'arab wa-'l-'ajam*. Most preposterously of all, the ruler of landlocked Dārfūr called himself the *sulṭān al-barrayn wa-'l-baḥrayn*, "sultan of the two lands and the two seas", a typically Ottoman title.<sup>124</sup> That, as far as we know, such titles were not adopted in eighteenth-century Sinnār is probably

120 Ibid., 53.

121 Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300–1923* (London: John Murray, 2005), 212–3.

122 MD 111, no. 555 in Orhonlu, *Habeş Eyaleti*, 247–9. Whether Selim I (1512–20), or Selim II (1566–74) is meant is not specified, and this is probably little more than a formulaic statement that the custom was long-established.

123 See Walz, *Trade between Egypt and the Bilād as-Sūdān*, passim. On Darfur, see R.S. O'Fahey, *The Darfur Sultanate: A History* (London: Hurst and Company, 2008).

124 Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Tūnisī, *Tashḥīdh al-Adhhān bi-Sīrat Bilād al-'Arab wa-'l-Sūdān*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ziyāda, Khalīl Maḥmūd 'Asākīr and Muṣṭafā

more a reflection of the increasingly weak position of the Funj sultans than a continuation of the enmity and suspicion of earlier times.

The Porte's award of titles to the ruler of Dārfūr and its concern at the fate of trade with Sinnār indicates that even in the eighteenth century Istanbul never entirely lost interest in Africa. Its earlier policies towards the Funj in the sixteenth century suggest a combination of arrogance and bravado more popularly associated with European colonialism. Whereas for campaigns in Europe the Ottomans went to great lengths to acquire accurate intelligence and guides,<sup>125</sup> the circumstances in which the expeditions against the Funj failed indicate a gross lack of planning. It was bad enough that the Ottomans believed that the conquest of the Funj could be carried out with negligible forces, severely underestimating their opponents as the evidence from 1525 and 1555 shows; but the failure of the Ottomans to prepare for the entirely predictable hurdle of the Third Cataract, lying on the edge of the Ottoman-controlled Maḥās *sancak*, suggests sheer recklessness. It is tempting to think that the Ottomans were seduced by the rhetoric of their own reports that contemptuously mentioned the "black slave 'Amāra" and rebellious "Funj tribesmen" into neglecting the kind of preparations they would make as a matter of course for campaigns elsewhere. At the same time, the Ottoman authorities on the ground in Suakin clearly had, as we have argued, good quality local information. Despite the long-standing Portuguese involvement in neighbouring Ethiopia, for all the faults of Ottoman intelligence on the Funj, it was superior to anything available in Europe until the end of the seventeenth century.

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Muḥammad Mus'īd (Cairo: Maktabat al-Usra, 2007), 68, 380; O'Fahey, *The Darfur Sultanate*, 11, 68–9.

125 Gábor Ágoston, "Where environmental and frontier studies meet: rivers, forests, marshes and forts along the Ottoman–Hapsburg frontier in Hungary", in Peacock, *The Frontiers of the Ottoman World*, 57–79.