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Toponymic Practices in the Historical Geography of Sudan

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Abstract

This study, examines the origins purposes of use, and historical backgrounds of the names given to the historical geography of Sudan. The main objective of the research is to explore how naming practices for the Sudan region emerged, and to reveal the roles of internal and external dynamics in this process. The study follows a historical approach and employs a descriptive method based on sources from history, archaeology, and

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linguistics. The geographical, cultural, and political contexts of each name are explained. Most of the names attributed to Sudan were coined by external observers, while the names used by the local population have either been lost due to undeciphered languages or marginalized. This situation reflects the dominance of external perspective in the historiography of the region. The research concludes that the naming history of Sudan must also be evaluated within the context of cultural representation, identity construction, and power relations.

Keywords: Historical Geography, Sudan, Habesh Province, Nubia, Kush, Funj, Darfur.

Sudan Tarihi Coğrafyasında İsim Verme Pratiği

Öz

Bu çalışma, Sudan tarihi coğrafyasına verilen adların kökenlerini, kullanım amaçlarını ve tarihsel arka planlarını incelemektedir. Araştırmanın temel amacı, Sudan bölgesi için isimlendirme pratiklerinin nasıl ortaya çıkmıştır. İç ve dış dinamiklerin etkileri rollü da ortaya koymaktır. Çalışma, tarihsel bir yaklaşımı takip etmektedir. Tarih, arkeoloji ve dil kaynaklara dayalı betimleyici bir yöntem izledi. Yerel ve eski Mısırlılar, Yunanlılar, Araplar ve Avrupalı sömürgeciler tarafından Sudan'a verilen isimler arasinda olan Biladü's-Sudan, Mahdi Devleti, Habeş Eyaleti, Func ve Fur Sultanlıkları, Musabaait, Koş, Merevi, Nabata, Karma, Alava, Makurat, Nübatia, Nübye, Vavat, Ta-Siti, Ta Nehesy, Belemiler, Bica diyari gibi, ele alınarak, her bir adın coğrafi, kültürel ve siyasi bağlamı açıklanmıştır. Sudan'a dair isimlendirmelerin büyük kısmı dış gözlemciler tarafından yapılmış, yerli halkın kullandığı isimler ise ya çözülmemiş diller nedeniyle kaybolmuş ya da marjinalleşmiştir. Bu durum, bölgenin tarih yazımında sömürgeci ve dışa dönük bakışın hâkimiyetini göstermektedir. Araştırma, Sudan'ın adlandırılma tarihinin, aynı zamanda kültürel temsil, kimlik inşası ve güç ilişkileri bağlamında değerlendirilmesi gerektiği sonucuna varmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tarihi Coğrafya, Sudan, Habeş Eyaleti, Nübiye, Koş, Func, Darfur.

Introduction

Africa is one of the oldest inhabited regions in the world. Historical geography studies of this vast area have predominantly been authored by outsiders. As a result, the naming of African geography has often been shaped by external perspectives. In particular, civilizations such

as the Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and the British—who came into contact with the region and its peoples—assigned names that reflected their own viewpoints and categories. Conversely, the local names used by the indigenous populations during antiquity have largely been lost, primarily because the ancient native languages of the region remain undeciphered. Consequently, names given by outsiders frequently reflect the perceptions and imagined constructions of "the other" by visitors unfamiliar with local languages and cultures.

Sudan, both geographically and culturally, has engaged with a variety of civilizations and communities throughout history. This engagement has resulted in a multitude of names being applied to the region[1]. This study offers a comprehensive examination of the names historically attributed to the Sudanese landscape.

The study explicitly defines its interdisciplinary framework, combining historical geography, archaeology, linguistics and etymology. The source include to some extend ancient inscriptions, medieval Arabic geographical and historical works, and selected modern archaeological and linguistic studies.

This study addresses how were place names in the historical geography of Sudan produced and circulated over time. The external political and cultural powers role in shaping these naming practices. The ways of toponymy function as a mechanism of domination, knowledge production, and administrative control, and the implications for indigenous spatial knowledge and modern Sudanese historiography

Names Based on Skin Color

The Land of Black Peoples: Wawat, Ta Nehesy, and Bilād al-Sūdān

Ancient Egyptians referred to the peoples living to the south of their dominion as *Wawat*[2]. Archaeological studies of tomb inscriptions dating back to ca. 2300 BCE—found near the southern frontiers of ancient

[1] See the ancient writers given by Bortum: (Richard Burton, The Nile Basin, Tınsly Brothers, London, 1864 131- 134)

[2] Abdulakadir Mahmud Abdullah. "*Es Sudan El-Kadim: İhtilat'ül-Esma ve Dilalat'ül-Mafahim*." In *Dirasat fi Asar El-Watan El-Arabi 2: Kitab al-Multaqa al-'Arabi li'l-Asariyyin al-'Arab: al-Nadwa al-'Ilmiyya al-Thalitha*, Cairo 2001, p. 216.

Egyptian control—indicate that *Wawat*[3] was used to denote southerners. The area identified as Wawat corresponds to the northern regions of modern-day Sudan, though the term likely extended to southern areas as well[4].

The inhabitants of this region possessed distinct languages, traditions, and religions, leading Egyptians to view them as culturally separate. The core of Egyptian civilization remained concentrated in Northern and Central Egypt. Phrases such as "we came to subdue Wawat," found in ancient Egyptian records, refer to military conflicts between Egyptians and the southern peoples collectively identified as Wawat. This area, rich in gold and other minerals, drew the attention of pharaohs such as Thutmose III and Ramses II, who launched several military campaigns to assert control over the region. These campaigns illustrate both the tensions between Egypt and Wawat and the ambitions of pharaohs to expand their influence southward[5].

In later periods, the Egyptians also referred to these southern peoples with terms such as *Ta Nehesy*, *Nehesy*, *Nehesyu*, or *nḥsj(w)*. These designations were not limited to the Wawat people but extended to other southern populations sharing similar dark skin tones. Thus, *Nehesy* can be interpreted as referring broadly to "southerners" or "black people." Egyptologists working on hieroglyphic texts have translated *Nehesy* as *Negro*[6] or *black* in older studies. However, since

[3] The earliest attested reference to Wawat appears in the autobiographical inscription of the Sixth Dynasty official Harkhuf, governor of Upper Egypt, preserved in his tomb at Qubbet el-Hawa (Aswan), dating to the reign of Pepi II (ca. 2300–2200 BCE). In this inscription, Wawat is used as an Egyptian designation for the southern regions beyond the First Cataract, reflecting an external administrative and geographical classification rather than an indigenous toponym (Tomb of Harkhuf, Qubbet el-Hawa, Aswan, Sixth Dynasty, reign of Pepi II; Lichtheim, Miriam. Ancient Egyptian Literature, Vol. I, Berkeley, 1973, pp. 23–27); translation of the inscription of Herkhuf see: James Henry Breasted, Ancient Records of Egypt, Second Series, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1906, p. 102.

[4] Also, in these tombstones, words such as *Wavat*, *Irtjet*, *Setjau*, and *Yam* are used as geographical or tribal names, Geoff Emberling, *Nubia: Ancient Kingdoms of Africa*. New York 2011, P. 8.

[5] Ibid., P. 8–9.

[6] Breasted, Ancient Records of Egypt, p. 89.

1921, and with increased sensitivity to racial terminology, the term has more often been translated as *Nubian* rather than *Negro*[7].

Interestingly, in 1705 BCE, a local governor named *Aasehre Nehesy* ruled over parts of southern Egypt. Some scholars consider him a pharaoh of the 14th Dynasty, possibly its second or sixth ruler[8]. This suggests that *Nehesy* may also have served as an ethnogeographic term denoting a region governed by this figure.

Another color-based name for the region is *Bilād al-Sūdān*[9], meaning "Land of the Blacks,"[10] coined by Arabs[11]. This term became common in medieval Islamic sources to describe the territories south of sub-Saharan Africa[12]. Specifically, it referred to the regions south of the Sahara inhabited by dark-skinned peoples and stretched from West to East Africa. The medieval geographer Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī described *Bilad al-Sudan* as extending from Western Africa to India, noting that the term covered all regions inhabited by black people[13]. Ibn Khaldun, in his *Muqaddimah*, also mentions Sudan as a region of diverse and numerous tribes, including the prominent *Zanj* of East Africa[14].

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[7] Hermann Junker, "The First Appearance of the Negroes in History," Journal of Egyptian Archaeology 7, no. 1 (April 1, 1921): PP. 121–132, https://doi.org/10.1177/030751332100700114.

[8] Aidan Dodson, "Second Intermediate Period," October 26, 2012. https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/publications/second-intermediate-period-egypt

[9] Abu al-ʿAbbas Aḥmad b. ʿAli al-Qalqashandi, Qalaʾid al-Juman fi al-Taʿrif bi-Qabaʾil ʿArab al-Zaman, ed. Ibrahim al-Ibyari, 2nd ed., Cairo–Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Miṣri / Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 1402 AH / 1982, p. 19.

[10] Shams al-Din al Sami. *Qamus al-Aʿlam*. "Sudan", IV, Istanbul1311H, p 2672.

[11] E. A. Wallis Budge, A History of Ethiopia: Nubia and Abyssinia, vol. 1 (London 1925), p. 5–6.

[12] Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Idrisi, *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq fi Ikhtiraq al-Afaq*, vol. 1, Cairo, 2002 vol. 1, p. 18; In the 750s (132 AH), the Abbasids used the color black as their flag and emblem, and for this reason, they were also referred to as "Sudān" (the blacks), Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, *Al-Tarikh al-Saghir*, vol. 1, edited by Mahmoud Ibrahim Zayed, 1st ed., Beirut 1986, p. 26.

[13] Yaqut al-Hamawi, Shihab al-Din Yaqut ibn Abdullah al-Rumi al-Baghdadi. *Muʿjam al-Buldan*. Vol. 1. Beirut 1977, pp. 18–28

[14] The Tuba people and another group with a special place among the Sudanese peoples are the Zawawa (Zaghawa), a well-known tribe believed to reside today in the regions of Chad and Sudan. The Kanem people are a tribe historically associated with the Kanem-Bornu Empire. The Kuku people are a less well-known community in historical

The term *Bilad al-Sudan* came to define a broad area, encompassing present-day territories from Senegal to Sudan and covering large parts of West and Central Africa[15]. Known for its cultural richness, trade routes, and resources such as gold and salt, the region remained central to both African and external powers. During colonialism, this name gained prominence as European powers used it to classify and dominate African regions. Today, *Bilād al-Sūdān* continues to be viewed as a symbol of Africa's historical identity and diversity.

Land of Burnt Faces: The Ethiopians or Abyssinians

In antiquity, the Greeks used the term *Ethiopia*[16] and *Ethiopians* to refer to dark-skinned peoples living south of Egypt[17]. Herodotus provides one of the earliest and most detailed Greek accounts of these people and their customs[18]. The term *Aithiopes* literally means "burnt-faced" (*aithō* = to burn, *ōps* = face), and by extension, "black-skinned" or "dark-faced"[19]. Pliny the Elder, in his writings, also alludes to the intense heat experienced by the Ethiopians, which he associates with the darkening of their bodies[20.]

In Greek usage, *Aithiopia* denoted the land of black-skinned peoples, and the term was extended to include all such populations known to

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sources; however, in Sudan, "Kuku" is a common male name. The Takrur people lived in West Africa and are believed to have formed the basis of kingdoms such as Mali and Songhai. Ibn Khaldun notes that these peoples extended to the ocean (possibly the Atlantic Ocean) and reached a region called "Ghaniyah", which is thought to refer to Ghana, one of the ancient West African kingdoms, Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun, *Kitab al-'Ibar wa Diwan al-Mubtada' wa al-Khabar fi Ayyam al-'Arab wa al-'Ajam wa Man 'Asarahum min Dhawi al-Sultan al-Akbar* (Beirut 2000), vol. 6, p. 410.

[15] Ibn Said al-Maghribi, Abu al-Hasan Abdullah ibn Musa. *Kitab al-Jughrafiya*. Beirut 1971, P. 80–81.

[16] Vitruvius Pollio. De Architectura (Vitruvii de Architectura, ed. F. Krohn, 1912). (1056: 001), bk. 8, ch. 3, s.6, l. 4.

17 L. Annaeus Seneca iunior, Naturales Quaestiones, 1876, book 4a, ch 2, section 17, line 3.

[18] Herodotus, The Histories, trans. A. D. Godley, Vol. I, Books I–II, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1920, p. 299.

[19] Maia Kotrosits, and Philip A. Harland, eds. *Ethnic Relations and Migration in the Ancient World*. Accessed 2023. https://philipharland.com

[20] Pliny the Elder, Natural History, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938), bk. 6, §§22–56.

the Greeks in Africa. The term thus reflects the perceptions of foreign observers who named the region based on physical characteristics of its inhabitants[21]. Herodotus praised the Ethiopians for their beauty and noted that many African peoples shared similar features—dark skin and curly hair[22].

The term *Habasha* (Abyssinians) also came to denote peoples inhabiting the regions of present-day Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Eritrea, particularly along the Red Sea[23]. In pre-Islamic Arab culture, if a woman gave birth to a black child, the child was sometimes referred to as *Habashi*. Likewise, black-colored camels, ants, or even lush green gardens could be described as *Habashi*[24], reflecting the broad symbolic use of the term[25].

In Islamic history, *Habasha* held a significant place. The first hijrah (migration) of Muslims during the Prophet Muhammads time was to Abyssinia, where the Christian king (the Negus) provided them refuge[26]. During the Ottoman period, *Ḥabesh Eyaleti* (the Abyssinian province) encompassed regions of East Africa, while *Habashistan* came to denote the core territories of modern Ethiopia. Although today *Ethiopia* is the internationally recognized name, historically, the names and borders of the region shifted frequently, reflecting changing political and cultural landscapes.

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[21] Christian Nel. "The Changing Face of Nubian Religion: The Lion Temples at Musawwarat es-Sufra and Naqa and the Three-Headed and Four-Armed Apedemak." Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages 27, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): pp. 101–120

[22] As early as the time of Homer, nearly three centuries before Herodotus, Greek sources described the distant Ethiopians south of Egypt as an ideal society blessed with abundant food (the "Sun Table" legend), where even the gods of Olympus were said to join the "pious" Ethiopians in feasts, Maia Kotrosits and Philip A. Harland, eds., *Ethnic Relations and Migration in the Ancient World*, accessed 2023, https://philipharland.com.

[23] Michael Russell, *Nubia and Abyssinia: Comprehending Their Civil History, Antiquities, Arts, Religion, Literature, and Natural History*. New York 1833, p. 31.

[24] Ibn Manzur, Abu al-Fadl Jamal al-Din Muhammad ibn Makram. *Lisan al-'Arab*. Vol. 4. Cairo, p. 753–754

[25] Large groups of people were called "Habash". Before Islam, various tribes including Banu Lays and Arab Kare fought against Quraysh, and they were also labeled as "Habash", Ibd. p. 754.

[26] Abu Muhammad 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Hisham. *Sirat al-Nabawiyya*. Vol. 1. Edited by Majdi Fathi al-Sayyid. 1st ed. Tanta: Dar al-Sahaba, 1990, p. 408–409.

Geographical Richness and Names Based on Human Abilities

The Land of Fertile Soils: The Land of Kush and Meroe

The name Kush appears in ancient Egyptian, Sudanese, Assyrian, Hebrew, and Coptic sources to refer to the lands south of Egypt[27]. The rulers of Egypt's Twenty-fifth Dynasty were pharaohs of Sudanese (Nubian) origin. This land came to be called the "Land of Kush" in reference to the Kushite origin of these rulers and to Banhi, the son of a Kushite pharaoh of this dynasty, which also ruled over Egypt[28]. Kush not only referred to the longest-lasting and most politically powerful dynasty but also became one of the most widely used names for the entire region[29].

This name was used in ancient Egypt to define the Sudanese territories located south of Egypt. It is said that Kush, in addition to being one of the legendary ancestors of the peoples living in southern Egypt and Sudan, also means "fertile land" or "black land." From the Egyptian expeditions to Kush, we learn that "some areas of Kush were inhabited by people who were naturally brave and born soldiers."

Another name given to the geography of Sudan is Nabata. The name is of local origin, though its meaning is unknown[30]. The Nabata Civilization, which emerged and developed in the Nile River Basin, is notable for its Neolithic developments and ceremonial practices in the

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[27] Salamah b. Muslim b. Ibrahim al-Ṣaḥari al-ʿUtbi, al-Ansab (Ansab al-ʿArab = Tārīkh al-ʿUtbī), ed. (n.p.: n.pub., n.d.), p. 23, https://shamela.ws/book/491/23#p2.

[28] Among the Kushites, there were also (Black) individuals or Negroes with woolly curly hair, thick lips, and protruding jaws. These were in no way different from the ancient and modern peoples of Sudan who had straight black hair, dark skin, and straight (orthognathous) jaws. The name *Kush* may have derived from Kush, one of the sons of Ham, the son of Noah. In the Christian holy book, the Bible, it refers to the time of the Prophet David.
The population of the Nile Valley began to increase around 8000 BCE with the establishment of the first permanent settlements. Around 5000 BCE, with the climate becoming more arid and the Sahara Desert expanding, people began to domesticate sheep, goats, and cattle, and later cultivated wheat, barley, dates, millet, and sorghum, (*Bible*, 15:16–18)

[29] Budge, *A History of Ethiopia*, vol. 1, p. 5.

[30] Geoff Emberling, et al. "Jebel Barkal 2018-2023: New Research on the Napatan and Meroitic City." Sudan & Nubia 28 (2024): 73–98. p. 73.

Nabata region of southern Egypt. This civilization thrived between approximately 11,000 and 4,800 years ago during a period when seasonal rains turned the area into a habitable basin. Important archaeological findings reveal a complex society involved in ritual activities, animal domestication, and the construction of structures aligned with celestial bodies[31].

Another name attributed to Sudan's geography is Kerma. Like Nabata, this is a local term with an unknown meaning. Located in northern Sudan, Kerma is one of the region's oldest civilizations, having existed during the Bronze Age. The development of settled communities dating back nearly 10,000 years shaped this civilization. Long-term archaeological excavations over the Kerma region and its necropolis have provided detailed information[32]. Large tumuli were built in Kerma for the burial of rulers, and many valuable artifacts have been found in these structures[33].

Another name for this geography is Meroe, "Meroe is a kingdom in southern Ethiopia"[34]. The name Meroe is also local in origin, and its meaning is unknown. The Meroitic civilization in northern Sudan flourished from around 800 BCE to 350 CE. The people of Meroe practiced agriculture, mining (especially for gold), and iron production. They also had their own script, known as Meroitic, and a significant cultural heritage[35]. Meroe's pyramids, architecture, and art represent key aspects of this civilization. The identification of Meroe is associated with archaeological excavations conducted by archaeologist Raizner[36].

The term Kush is used inclusively with Nabata, Kerma, and Meroe to refer to the entire historical and civilizational heritage of Sudan's

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[31] Donald T. Haynie, "A Great Comet and Ceremonial Site Development at Nabta Playa," February 3, 2015.
[32] Matthieu Honegger, "The Archers of Kerma: Warrior Image and Birth of a State," *Dotawo* 8 (2023). https://doi.org/10.5070/d68061375.
[33] Julia Budka, Hassan Aglan, and Chloe Ward, "Reconstructing Contact Space Biographies in Sudan During the Bronze Age," *Humans* 5, no. 1 (December 27, 2024): 1.
[34] Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, bk. 8, ch. 3, §6, l. 4.
[35] David N. Edwards, *The Nubian Past: An Archaeology of the Sudan*, 2004.
[36] George A. Reisner, "The Royal Family of Ethiopia," *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin* XIX, nos. 112–113 (April–June 1921), p. 35.

geography. Due to the fertility of this region, many civilizations have been established here.

The Land of Gold: Nubia

The ancient Egyptians called Sudan "Nubia,"[37] meaning "Land of Gold," due to its wealth in gold and mineral resources. In ancient Egyptian, the word *nub* means "gold".[38] Some researchers associate the name Nubia with the ancient Egyptian word ***nwb***, meaning gold. Others connect it to the Greek term *Noubades*, used in the 4th century CE to refer to people who settled in northern Sudan (Nubia), the land of gold[39].

In the early phases of Egyptian civilization, Nubia was seen as an important source of gold and other precious minerals. Thus, it is significant that the term *nub* is associated both with gold and the Nubia region where gold was abundant. Geographically, Nubia lies to the south of Egypt and the north of Sudan, and for centuries it hosted major mining operations[40]. Gold and other jewels extracted from Nubia were used by Egyptians to create religious artifacts and statues[41].

Nubia also served as a vital trade center between Egypt and other African regions. Precious items such as gold, ivory, and ebony were among the chief products transported from Nubia to Egypt. Reliefs from the Pharaonic period depict Nubia as a source of wealth and prosperity. In ancient Egyptian culture, gold symbolized eternity and purity, and it was believed that the bodies of gods were made of gold. This association endowed Nubia with not only economic but also religious and symbolic significance.

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[37] Muhammad b. Muhammad b. ʿAbdallāh b. Idrīs known as al-Sharīf al-Idrisi, Nuzhat al-Mushtaq fi Ikhtiraq al-Afaq, vol. 1, p. 38.

[38] Stefan Bojowald, "A Wordplay Between the Egyptian Words *Wbn* 'Arise' and *Nbw* 'Gold'!", *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol. 64, no. 3 (2011): 357–362, p. 358.

[39] E. A. Wallis Budge, *A History of Ethiopia*, vol. 1, p. 5.

[40] Yvonne J. Markowitz and Denise M. Doxey, "Jewels of Ancient Nubia," November 2014.

[41] Rosemarie Klemm and Dietrich Klemm, *Value of Gold in Ancient Egypt*, 2013, pp. 21–27, p. 21.

The term “Nubia” includes a Greek grammatical form meaning “the land of Nubia” and refers to the Nuba tribes. This designation first appears in historical records in the 3rd century BCE, during the reign of the Greek-speaking rulers from the lineage of Ptolemy, a general of Alexander the Great. Hence, Nubia is a relatively late term reflecting foreign rather than indigenous perspectives. Today, it is also the name of various ethnic groups in the region who speak Nubian languages, which claim descent from this ancient culture. As such, the term “Nubia” obscures various groups and regions under a single cultural tradition.[42].

In early Arabic sources, the term Nubia was used in connection with Muslim conquests to describe the Nubians. According to al-Maqrizi, “The beginning of the Nubian land is at a village called Kasr, five miles from Aswan. The last fortress of the Muslims is on an island known as the land of Nubia, located a mile away. This is the Nubian shore. From Aswan to this point, there are many rocky areas that can only be traversed with the guidance of local fishermen familiar with them. These rocks form obstacles in the Nile, and the currents here produce a loud and resonating sound audible from afar”[43].

The term Nubia was given to the region south of Egypt[44] and continued to be used after the Islamic conquests. Nubia maintained distinct characteristics, history, and civilization different from Egypt. According to the famous 12th-century Arab geographer al-Idrisi, “the people of this region are black due to the extreme heat and scorching sun, and their hair is disheveled.” He also refers to the region south of Aswan as Nubia, indicating that the Nubian region begins at Aswan and extends southward[45].

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[42] Ahmed bin Ishak Abu Yaqub bin Jafar bin Wahb bin Wadih al-Yaqubi, *Kitab al-Buldan*, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, First Edition, Beirut 1422 AH, p. 174.

[43] Ahmed ibn Ali al-Maqrizi, *al-Mawaiẓ wa al-Iʿtibar bi Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa al-Athar* (*al-Khiṭaṭ al-Maqriziyya*), vol. 1, critical edition by Muhammad Zaynahum and Madiha al-Sharqawi, 1st edition, Cairo, 1997, p. 535.

[44] Sami. *Qamus al-Aʿlam*, “Nubia”, VI, p 4602.

[45] As al-Idrisi states: “Aswan is the final point of Upper Egypt and a small city. In this city, wheat, other grains, fruits, melons, and all kinds of vegetables grow in abundance. Moreover, there is plenty of beef, camel meat, goat and sheep meat; the meat is very delicious and a large amount of butter is produced. Prices are generally

It can be said that Nubia is one of the most well-known names for this region since ancient times. The connection between *nub* and Nubia reveals the strong relationship between language, geography, and economy in antiquity. This connection illustrates how natural resources influenced naming and cultural formation. Unfortunately, the region continues to be referred to by names given by outsiders—Arabs or Europeans—and the original names used by the local populations remain unknown due to the loss of local languages.

Land of the Bow and Sharpshooters: *Ta-Siti and* Rumat el- ḥadaq

One of the names given to the geography of Sudan is *Ta-Siti*[46], meaning "Land of the Bow." The name "Land of the Bow" is one of the ancient names given to the Sudanese region due to the military skills of its inhabitants, particularly their mastery of the bow and arrow. From ancient Egyptian sources, we learn that the people of southern Egypt and northern Sudan were famous for their exceptional archery skills This reputation was so strong that Egyptian pharaohs recruited Nubian archers into their armies and praised their effectiveness in warfare.

This designation, given to the region south of the First Cataract•, was not used by the local population, but rather—like in many other parts of Africa—was assigned by outsiders[47]. *Ta-Siti* was one of the first regions to establish cultural and commercial relations with the Egyptian pharaohs, and it is mentioned in ancient texts as one of the southern territories of Egypt. It was known as the homeland of dark-skinned

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very cheap. The trade goods and products from the city are transported to the lands of Nubia.", *al-Idrisi*, *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq fī Ikhtirāq al-Āfāq*, vol. 1, p. 18.

[46] Hasan Ahmed Muhammad Hasan al-Nush, *A Comprehensive Archaeological Survey of the Kushite Royal Cemeteries at Kawa (Kawa III–VII)*, 1st ed. (Al-Hasan Press) 2024, p 11.

• The cataracts of the Nile, stretching from the first cataract in Egypt to the sixth cataract north of Khartoum, form a chain of small and medium-sized cataracts that span the Nile region between Egypt and Sudan. These cataracts represent a set of natural features that create difficulties and obstacles in the riverbed and are also of great geographical and historical significance, Yvonne J. Markowitz, Jewels of Ancient Nubia, 2014.

[47] Geoff, Nubia: Ancient Kingdoms of Africa, p. 7.

people renowned for their skill in using the bow and arrow[48]. This name demonstrates the strong cultural and military identity of the Nubian people and their importance in Egyptian military history.

The bow was not only a military tool but also a cultural symbol among the Nubians. It represented strength, courage, and honor. Therefore, the use of the bow was embedded in the daily life and identity of the people. Many tombs and wall reliefs in ancient Nubia and Upper Egypt depict Nubians with bows, indicating their elite status as archers. In addition, Nubians used their archery skills in hunting, an essential part of their sustenance. They hunted both for food and for trade. The exceptional skill of Nubian archers made them a significant and respected group in both the local and neighboring cultures. The title "Land of the Bow" persisted for centuries, appearing in records from the Egyptian Middle Kingdom to the New Kingdom periods.

Greek and Roman sources also mention Nubian archers and their precision. For instance, the Roman historian Strabo referred to the "Ethiopians" (a term often used for the inhabitants of Nubia) as excellent archers. This fame continued into the Islamic period, where early Muslim chroniclers and geographers praised the Nubians' unmatched skill with the bow.

The name given to the Sudanese region in classical Arabic is Rumat el- ḥadaq. It means "Land of the Eye Shooters." This term was particularly used to describe the people's exceptional archery skills and often served as a general label for the local population. The people of these southern regions were highly skilled in archery. The term "Eye Shooters" metaphorically signifies the precision and accuracy of their archery. In Arabic, the word **"ḥadaq"** refers to the pupil or center of the eye. This expression was used to describe extraordinary archery prowess in warfare and conflict. According to one legend, when the Muslims came to Egypt, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ dispatched cavalry units to the villages and advanced into Nubian territory. However, the Nubians mounted fierce resistance, wounding many soldiers and blinding some

[48] Markowitz, *Jewels of Ancient Nubia*, 2014.

with a hail of arrows. As a result, the locals were nicknamed "the Eye Shooters"[49].

The Land of Nomads: The Land of the Beja or the Land of the Blemmyes

The term "Land of the Beja" has been used to refer to the eastern regions of Sudan in connection with the Beja[50] people living near the Red Sea. "Beja Lands" refers to the area inhabited by the Beja people, a group residing in the regions stretching along the Red Sea between Sudan, Eritrea, and Egypt. The Beja people have a deep-rooted history going back thousands of years and are among the oldest inhabitants of this region. They occupy a vast and challenging geography that includes the Red Sea Mountains and the eastern deserts. They speak the Bedawiye (Bedawit) language and also use other languages such as Arabic. Traditionally, they make a living through animal husbandry, trade, and fishing. The Beja people interacted with neighboring civilizations like Kush, which was located along the Nile[51].

For thousands of years, various Beja tribes have roamed the valleys of Eastern Sudan, climbed its mountains, and crossed its deserts and steppes, transporting their goods, animals, and sheep on camelback. They cultivate only millet, sorghum, and corn, from which they make their food, producing just enough to meet their annual needs. If there is no rain in a given season, they face hardship—their water sources run dry, their animals perish, and their bodies weaken[52]. The Beja played an important role in trade across the Red Sea; their territory served as a transit point for caravan routes between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula[53]. During the Islamic era, a large portion of the

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[49] Ahmad ibn Yahya ibn Jabir ibn Dawud al-Baladhuri, Futūḥ al-Buldān, Beirut, 1988, p. 234.

[50] Idrisi, *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq fi Ikhtiraq al-Afaq*, vol. 1, p. 30.

[51] Mohamed Salih Dirar, Tarih Şark es'Sudan: Memaliku'l- Bica Kaba'iliha ve Tarihiha, Riyadh, 2012, pp. 24–25.

52 Dirar, Mohamed Salih. The History of Eastern Sudan: The Kingdoms of the Beja, Their Tribes and Their History, p. 25.

53 Ahmed, Hassan Abdel Aziz. "Caravan Trade and Routes in the Northern Sudan in the 19th Century: A Study in Historical Geography." January 1, 1967. http://etheses.Ddur.ac.uk/9655/.

population embraced Islam, yet they preserved their distinct culture and traditions.

The Blemmyes were an ancient ethnic group who lived in Africa, particularly in the eastern desert regions between Egypt and present-day Sudan. This area became known as the land of the Blemmyes. The region lies between the Nile River and the Red Sea. The Blemmyes were an important people living in the Aswan region and especially in southern Egypt. In a text mentioned by Ibn Hawqal, it is stated that ʿAbdullah ibn Saʿd (the commander who led the Islamic conquests in Egypt) conquered the Pharaohs of the Beja and other peoples in the Aswan and Upper Egypt regions. The people referred to here as the "Pharaohs of the Beja" are known as the Blemmyes. According to Dirar, the term "Blemmyes" may also have been used for the Beja tribes living in the area between southern Egypt and the region from the Nile to the Red Sea[54]. The Blemmyes were one of the peoples who co-governed the region south of Luxor alongside the Byzantines[55].

Al-Idrisi indicated that the Blemmyes lived in northeastern Africa, especially in the Sudanese region between the Nile and the Red Sea in southern Egypt. It is plausible to consider that the name Blemmyes was used as a general designation for the Beja tribes [56]. The Blemmyes are considered part of Kush or local indigenous populations. They led a nomadic lifestyle between Beja territories and Ethiopian lands, not settling in any single place. They cooperated with the Byzantines in governing this region. Even after ʿAbdullah ibn Saʿd conquered this territory, the Blemmyes remained a significant power in the region for a long time. As a nomadic society based on herding and trade, they became known for their warrior culture and cavalry skills, rising to become a regional power in southern Egypt and Sudan. The Blemmyes

[54] Mohamed Salih Dirar. *Tarih Şark es'Sudan: Memaliku'l- Bica Kaba'iliha ve Tarihiha*, Riyadh 2012, s. 24-25., p. 61.

[55] Al-Idrisi. *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq fi Ikhtiraq al-Afaq*, vol. 1, pp. 39–40.

[56] Dirar, *The History of Eastern Sudan*, p. 35: "From time to time, horsemen from Sudan—known as the Blemmyes—would raid the outskirts of the city. These individuals claimed that they were Romans and adhered to the Christian faith that had survived from the Coptic era before the advent of Islam. However, they were in fact Christians of the Jacobite sect. They roamed between the lands of Beja and Abyssinia and also maintained connections with Nubia."

were a nomadic community that played a significant historical role in northeastern Africa. They were in frequent conflict with both the Romans and Byzantines, and due to their strategic location, they not only engaged in struggles with these empires but also occasionally established commercial and diplomatic relations[57].

The spread of Islam in the region reshaped the social and cultural structures. This transformation accelerated both the regional power dynamics and cultural integration, paving the way for a new era among the communities around the Nile and its surroundings.

Names Given During the Christian and Islamic Eras

Names Given During the Christian Period: Nobatia, Makuria, Alodia

During the Christian period, the names associated with the Christian kingdoms that developed in the region were Nobatia (also referred to as Monobatia), Makuria, and Alodia[58]. These were the three ancient Nubian kingdoms that emerged in the Nubia region during the Middle Ages following the collapse of the Meroitic Kingdom.

The Kingdom of Nobatia was established in the 4th century in the northern part of Nubia, specifically in the region of Faras, near the Egyptian border. This kingdom played a significant cultural and religious role throughout its history. Faras, as the capital, was located close to present-day Aswan in Egypt and was deeply influenced by early Christianity. Nobatia was the first Sudanese kingdom to adopt Christianity and became a pioneer of religious change and cultural transformation in the region[59]. The ruling class embraced the teachings of Christianity at the time, facilitating the spread of Christian belief throughout Nobatia. Remnants of churches and monasteries in Faras reflect the religious activities and architectural developments of the period. Particularly notable are wall paintings found in Faras, which are significant archaeological findings reflecting Christian culture and religious life of that time.

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[57] Al-Idrisi, *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq fi Ikhtiraq al-Afaq*, vol. 1, p. 40.
[58] *Idrisi*, *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq*, *vol. 1, p. 38*; Małgorzata Martens and Czarnecka Warszawa, "The Christian Nubia and the Arabs", *Studia Ceranea*, *5, 2015, p. 249–265*, p. 249.
[59] W. GodlewskiChristian Nubia- after the Nubian Campaign, 1995, p. 267-277.

The Kingdom of Nobatia later united with the Kingdom of Makuria, forming a powerful political union[60]. The capital of this unified kingdom became Dongola. This union enabled the Christian kingdoms in the region to consolidate under a larger political structure, thereby strengthening the power of the Christian states in Sudan and influencing the political balance in the area. Both Nobatia and Makuria eventually engaged with the Byzantine Empire, and these interactions had a notable impact on Christian missionary activities, cultural exchanges, and military strategies in the region. This union became a cornerstone of Nubian history and cultural heritage, marking a significant step in the spread of Christianity in the region. Thus, the name "Nubatia" came to be strongly associated with the Nubian identity and served as a place name for this part of Sudan governed by the kingdom.

The Kingdom of Makuria, located to the south of Nobatia, had its capital in Old Dongola, situated in present-day northern Sudan[61]. This kingdom developed after Nobatia and held great cultural and military significance. It showed strong resistance during the early years of Muslims coming to the earia. As Muslims advanced into Africa, the Kingdom of Makuria resisted the Islamic Caliphate in Egypt[62]. Moreover, Makuria established both commercial and military relations with the Islamic Caliphate in Egypt, thereby increasing its regional power. Toward the end of the 7th century, a treaty known as the Baqt Agreement was signed between the Kingdom of Makuria and the Islamic Caliphate[63].

Through this treaty, Makuria was able to protect itself from external threats while maintaining trade with Egypt. The Kingdom of Makuria continued to uphold the Christian faith, particularly under the influence of Byzantium. Churches and monasteries found in Dongola have preserved this cultural heritage to the present day. Influenced by Egyptian art and architecture, the kingdom also developed its own distinctive artistic tradition. Makuria was one of the most powerful and influential kingdoms in the region, both in terms of military resistance

[60] Martens, “The Christian Nubia and the Arabs”, p. 249.
[61] Nuum Shugair, Coğrafiyet ve Taru’s-Sudan, Darucil, Beyrut, 1981 p. 55.
[62] Geoff, *Nubia: ancient kingdoms of Africa*, p. 9.
[63] Belazuri, *Fütuhü’l-Büldan*, p. 540

and cultural legacy. The kingdom's conversion from Christianity to Islam was not forced; it occurred after most of its population peacefully accepted Islam, followed by the conversion of its ruler. "Makuria" was known as a local civilization and as the name of a state. It is also plausible that the kingdom's name was derived from Mograt Island, which is located near its capital.

The Kingdom of Alodia (Alwa)[64] was the southernmost of the three Nubian states, with its capital in Soba[65], near modern-day Khartoum. It was the last of the Nubian kingdoms to adopt Christianity. These kingdoms were affiliated with the Orthodox Christian Church in terms of religion and culture, though they maintained political independence. The kingdom was religiously and culturally advanced, with churches and monasteries playing a central role. Christianity was a key factor in spreading education and culture in the region. During this period, Alodia was recognized as the main religious center of Nubia[66].

Economically and commercially, Alodia was also strong, benefiting from its connections with Egypt and maritime trade routes[67]. The kingdom lasted until the 16th century but gradually lost its former power as its people embraced Islam peacefully and in large numbers. Toward the end of the 16th century, the armies of the Funj Sultanate, which had been established in the region, conquered Alodia, bringing the kingdom to an end. Following its collapse, the cultural and religious heritage left behind by the Kingdom of Alodia remained of great significance. Today, the ruins of Soba, the former capital of Alodia, are important archaeological sites that testify to the kingdom’s power and influence. The origin of the name "Alodia" remains unknown.

Names Given During the Islamic Period: Funj (Sennar) and Fur

The Funj Sultanate, also known as the Sultanate of Sennar, was established in Sudan in 1505 and lasted until 1821. The name *Sennar* is associated with the city of Sennar, which became the capital of the Funj

[64] Al-Maqrizi, *al-Mawa’iz wa al-I’tibar bi Dhikr al-Khitat wa al-Athar*, vol. 1, p. 540.
[65] Martens, “The Christian Nubia and the Arabs”, p. 249.
[66] K. A. Mich, Elements of Christian Popular Piety in Nubia (VI-XVI Century) – an Outline of Aspects, no. 23, pp. 41–54, January 5, 2019. DOI: 10.14746/AMP.2018.23.3
[67] Laurence Kirwan et al., Studies on the History of Late Antique and Christian Nubia, 2002, https://openlibrary.org/books/OL3959777M/Studies.

Sultanate during the Islamic era[68]. This capital city ruled over the region situated between the Blue Nile and the White Nile. The Funj Sultanate played a significant role in the spread of Islam in Sudan. Especially the capital, Sennar, became a commercial hub for foreign merchants arriving from both the East and West, integrating into global trade networks. The sultanate was governed under a loose feudal system in which tribal leaders paid annual tributes. Sennar, located in the region between the White and Blue Nile, functioned as an administrative center for various communities affiliated with the sultanate[69].

Another name given to the Funj state and its capital Sennar was the "Azraq Sultanate" or "Sultanate az-Zarqāʾ" (The Blue Sultanate). This state was the first Islamic polity established along the Nile in southern Egypt, founded upon the remnants of the Christian Kingdom of Alodia. The Blue Sultanate facilitated the expansion of Islam into the eastern regions of Sub-Saharan Africa. The Funj Sultanate was ultimately dissolved in 1821 following a military intervention by the Egyptian governor, Muhammad Ali Pasha[70].

The Fur Sultanate, also known as the Sultanate of Darfur, was founded in 1650 in the Marrah Mountains by Sulayman Solong (1650–1680) as the Keira Dynasty[71]. Within a century, this sultanate had gained control over nearly the entire region of what is now modern Darfur. This historical state, located in the Darfur region, persisted from the 17th century to the early 20th century. Throughout this time, Darfur

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[68] Nuum Şugair, Coğrafiyet ve Taru's-Sudan, Beyrut 1981, p. 97.

[69] P. M. Holt, The Sudan of the Three Niles: The Funj Chronicle 910-1288/1504-1871, 1999, http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA44298785.

[70] Tarig Mohamed Nour Ali, *Osmanlı Sudan'ı: Sevakin'de Türk İngiliz Rekabeti*, Istanbul 2020, pp. 54–55: In any case, the establishment of Islamic states in sub-Saharan Africa in the 16th century can be associated with two major events that enriched the course of global politics: the fall of the Muslims in Andalusia and their subsequent expulsion to North Africa — a group that included scholars and mujahideen — and the founding of the Ottoman Empire, which expanded from Anatolia and achieved victory over the Eastern Roman Empire, entering Istanbul. These developments awakened among Muslims a hope of preserving their identity in the face of Portuguese invasions targeting the region.

[71] Tarig Mohamed Nour, "Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Emperyalizme Karşı Türklerin Yanında Yer Alan Darfur Hâkimi Ali Dinar (1898-1916)", Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi, Sayı 61, Cilt: XXI, Mart 2005, p. 369-370.

was an important region that developed significantly in areas such as trade, culture, and the arts[72]. The Keira family, descending from African tribes settled in the region, governed the state. They established a strong and stable government that lasted for several centuries. Darfur's strategic geographic position facilitated trade with other regions such as Central, Eastern, and North Africa[73].

The Fur Sultanate recognized the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire. However, on October 24, 1874, it was defeated in the Battle of Manawashi and subsequently annexed as a province of the Khedivate of Egypt. When the Mahdist movement succeeded and Egyptian control over Sudan collapsed, Darfur also came under Mahdist control. After the Battle of Karari in 1898, in which the Mahdist forces suffered a major defeat, Ali Dinar, who had been residing under supervision in Omdurman, returned to Darfur with his followers and proclaimed the restoration of the sultanate[74].

Toward the end of the 19th century, European colonial powers began to interfere in Darfur, and the region was colonized by Anglo-Egyptian forces. Finally, in 1916, the reign of Sultan Ali Dinar ended after defeat at the hands of the British colonial army. The history of the Fur Sultanate represents an important chapter in Sudan's rich past and played a major role in shaping the cultural and ethnic identity of the Darfur region. The Sultan of Fur also had authority over several smaller principalities, among which the most notable were Musabaʿat, Dar Gimir, Dar Zaghawa, and Dar Masalit.

Names Given During the Ottoman/Turkish Period: The Province of Habesh, Egypto-Turkish Sudan, and the Mahdist State

The Ottoman presence in Sudan began after the conquest of the Mamluk territories by Sultan Selim I, who defeated Mamluk Sultan Qansuh al-Ghawri (r. 1501–1516) and triumphantly entered Cairo. Following this victory, the Red Sea ports—especially Suakin and

[72] Noah R. Bassil, "The Rise and Demise of the Keira Sultanate of Dar Fur," The Journal of North African Studies, 11, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 347–64.
[73] O'Fahey, R. S. The Darfur Sultanate: A History, 2008. https://www.amazon.com/Darfur-Sultanate-History-Columbia-Hurst/dp/0231700385.
[74] Nour, "Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Emperyalizme Karşı Türklerin Yanında Yer Alan Darfur Hâkimi Ali Dinar (1898-1916)", p. 269-370.

Massawa—and the Nubian region in northern Sudan became part of the Ottoman Empire. During this period, the Ottomans applied older regional names. Thus, Suakin and Massawa were incorporated into the newly established Province of Habesh (Habesh Eyaleti), while the Sanjak of Ibrim, Nubia, and Beja lands were the names used for northern Sudanese regions.

In the interior, the Ottomans maintained amicable relations with local polities such as the Funj Sultanate[75] (ruled from Sennar), the Abdallab Sheikhdom in Gerri, the Fur Sultanate, and the Musabbāt Kingdom in Kordofan. The Ottomans considered the acknowledgment of their sovereignty by these states sufficient and did not impose direct rule[76]. Notably, during this period, the Ottomans did not use the name "Sudan" for these territories.

Ottoman sources from this era frequently referenced the Habesh region, describing its boundaries as stretching from southern Egypt along the entire Red Sea coast down to the shores of the Indian Ocean. The first beylerbey (governor-general) of the Habesh Eyaleti was Özdemir Pasha, appointed on 15 Sha'ban 962 AH (5 July 1555 CE), with Suakin as the administrative center[77]. After the establishment of this eyalet, ports such as Massawa and the Dahlak Archipelago, which were previously under Yemen's jurisdiction, were integrated into the Habesh Province. Thus, all Ottoman-controlled ports along the African coast of the Red Sea were brought under Habesh's authority.

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[75] "The expression 'Blue Sultanate' is a translation of 'Azrak Sultanate'; however, in the Sudanese context, the word Azrak, which literally means 'blue', does not refer to the actual color blue but rather conveys the meaning of 'dark'.", (Qasim, Qamus al-Lahja al-'Amiyya fi al-Sudan, p. 494)

[76] Nour, "Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Emperyalizme Karşı Türklerin Yanında Yer Alan Darfur Hâkimi Ali Dinar (1898-1916)", p. 370.

[77] Cengiz Orhonlu, "The Ottoman Policy in Abyssinia: 1554–1560", Tarih Dergisi, Vol. XV, no. 20, March 1965, p. 45; 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, Istanbul, 1994, p. 136, In Ottoman sources, this appointment is recorded as follows:
"… It was ordered that the aforementioned be appointed to Suakin and that he secure its control …" BOA. KK. 212 p. 78.

This name also encompassed vast eastern African lands, including areas inhabited by Muslim tribes loyal to the Ottoman state. Among these were the Hadandawa, Beni Amir, Habab, Bishariyyin, and others in the interior regions, including groups under the rule of the Funj sultan. In sum, the Ottomans used the name "Habesh" to refer to eastern African territories—from the Nile Basin in southern Egypt to the Red Sea and the Indian "Ocean".

In 1821, the Ottoman-Egyptian army under Muhammad Ali Pasha, the governor of Egypt, took military control of the region[78]. From then on, the region came to be known as "Egypto-Turkish Sudan" (Mısır-Türk Sudan'ı)[79]. Muhammad Ali established a new capital city in Khartoum. In 1876, Zubayr ved[80]Rahama, governor of Bahr al-Ghazal, ruled independently from his capital in Deim Zubayr, but later acknowledged the sovereignty of the Khedivate of Egypt. He then defeated the ruler of the Fur Sultanate, effectively ending a two-century-old polity based in al-Fashir, which had maintained loyalty to the Ottomans since the time of Selim I.

Despite this integration, the harsh actions of Muhammad Ali's commanders in Sudan, especially the massacre ordered by his son-in-law Defterdar Mehmet Bey along the White Nile[81], drew criticism from Istanbul. In a letter from the Ottoman capital, the killings in Shendi and along the White Nile were condemned, and it was emphasized that the central government did not approve such brutal measures[82]. Official correspondence frequently emphasized security and public welfare, and following the annexation of Nubia, Sennar, and Kordofan, these concerns were reiterated in imperial decrees[83].

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[78] Ali, Osmanlı Sudan'ı, p. 54-55.

[79] H. C. Jakson, Osman Digna, 1. Baski London 1926, p. 5.

[80] The term "Ved" in Sudan means "son": Qasim, Qāmūs al-Lahja al-ʿĀmmiyya fī al-Sūdān, p. 1219.

[81] Ahmed bin El- Hac Ali, Tarihu'l-Selteneti'l-Sinariyye ve'l-İdare'l-Misriyye, tahik: El-Şatir El-Buseyli, Kahire n.d. p. 95.

[82] Ali, Osmanlı Sudan'ı, p. 38.

[83] "... for the proper administration and development, and for ensuring the security and welfare of the people and residents...": BOA. İ.M. 245/2.

The Ottomans, in their official records, referred to the territories as Nubia, Sennar, and Kordofan[84]. The term "Sudan" did not officially appear in their documents until 1873, when an administrative reform document used the phrase "Eyalât-ı Sudaniyye" (Sudanese Provinces), stating that the region should be governed directly under the authority of the Khedive, independent from foreign interference but still within the domain of the Ottoman Sultan[85]. Later, during the Mahdist uprising, Ottoman administrator Ömer Kamil Pasha referred to the region as "Sudani Mısri" (Egyptian Sudan)[86], reflecting Egyptian and British influence rather than a central Ottoman perspective.

The Mahdist[87] State (1885–1898) emerged as a resistance movement against Anglo-Egyptian control, which began in 1882. The leader of this movement, Muhammad Ahmad bin Abdullah, declared himself the Mahdi and called upon the people to rise against the oppressive and heavily taxed regime. His religious rhetoric and anti-colonial stance quickly garnered widespread support[88].

In 1883, a large army sent by the British-backed Khedive of Egypt was decisively defeated by Mahdist forces. In 1885, Mahdist troops captured Khartoum, killing British General Charles Gordon, and established the Mahdist State. However, the Mahdi died shortly after this victory, and his successor, Khalifa Abdullahi ibn Muhammad, faced growing internal conflicts among various tribal factions.

In 1898, General Horatio Kitchener, commanding an Anglo-Egyptian army, launched a campaign against the Mahdist State. The Battle of Omdurman resulted in a decisive defeat for the Mahdist forces, bringing the Mahdist State to an end. From that point forward, Sudan came under Anglo-Egyptian rule, often referred to as the Condominium Period, symbolized by the two flags of Britain and Egypt[89].

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[84] BOA, İ.M. 245/2.

[8585] BOA. HR.SYS 1004/50.

[86] İsa Gökgidik, "Kıdemli Bir Osmanlı Askerinin Gözüyle Sudan: Ömer Kâmil Paşa'nın Sûdân-I Mısrî Adlı Eserine Göre Mehdi Ayaklanması ve İngilizler", Osmanlı Mirası Araştırmaları Dergisi, c. 10, Sayı 28, Kasım 2023 p. 579.

[87]

[88] Ali, Osmanlı Sudan'ı, s. 165.

[89] Ali, Osmanlı Sudan'ı, s. 315.

Sudan in the Colonial Era

Naming According to Colonial Perceptions

After European colonial powers arrived in Africa—whether during the early colonial period of Spanish and Portuguese colonization, known for the capture of Africans and their forced transport to the Americas as slaves to work on plantations and in harsh labor, or during the modern colonial period dominated by British and French rule—they assigned various names to African regions according to their own colonial perceptions. They divided and named the region based on their interests:

Anglo-Egyptian Sudan

French Sudan

Italian Sudan

Even after Africa was freed from the chains of economic exploitation, these names persisted. However, the concept of cultural colonialism continued to divide Africa into Francophone (French-speaking Africa) and Anglophone (English-speaking Africa) regions[90].

From the colonial perspective, the region was divided as follows[91]:

Eastern Sudan: Encompasses the areas south of Nubia, including the Nile River and its upper tributaries.

Central Sudan: Includes areas around Lake Chad in Central Africa.

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[90] Lawrence Tshivhase, "Supremacy of Foreign Languages as Medium of Instruction over Indigenous African Languages," January 1, 2014.
In European colonial powers that arrived later in Africa—such as the Italians—the historical name Tripolitania (Trablusgarp), which had long been part of the Ottoman Eyalets, was changed to Libya in 1934. This name had originally been given to the region by the Roman Emperor Diocletian (A.D. 245–316), approximately sixteen hundred years earlier: İlhami Yurdakul, "Kıbrıs ve Trablusgarp'ta Hilafetin Dinî-Siyasî Nüfuzu ve bu Yetkinin Devri (1878-1923)" s.1033-1049, Bir İnsan-ı Selîm: Prof. Dr. Azmi Özcan'a Armağan, Editörler: Refik Arıkan – Halim Demiryürek, Lotus yayınevi, İstanbul 2016, p. 43; İlhami Yurdakul, "Diğer Sömürgeci Ülkeler (Almanya, İtalya, Belçika)", Sömürgecilik Tarihi, s. 92-108 (Afrika-Asya), pp. 92–108.

91 Humphrey, Fisher, The Western and Central Sudan and East Africa, 1977, p. 345-405.

Western Sudan: Refers to West Africa, including the Niger and Senegal river basins, and the surrounding areas such as Gambia, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), and Niger. The term “Western Sudan” was used to describe the region south of the Sahara Desert, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to Lake Chad in the east.

The name "Sudan" began to be widely used in the 19th century following European colonial intervention. It came to describe a vast region south of the Sahara, extending from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Red Sea in the east. Historically, these regions were referred to as “Bilād al-Sūdān” or “The Lands of the Blacks,” denoting the areas inhabited by dark-skinned Africans. This definition extended beyond the current political borders of the modern Sudanese state, covering large parts of West and Central Africa. Similarly, the name “Africa” was initially used for a city in North Africa before being applied to the entire continent.

From Anglo-Egyptian Sudan to the Republic of Sudan

After the occupation of Sudan, the Governor-General, Wingate, stated:

"Gordon Pasha, officers, and soldiers who gave their lives for the building of Egypt and Sudan are a constant hope for the creation of a new Sudan."[92]

The British had long been planning to colonize Sudan and sought to create a new version of it—one disconnected from its Islamic historical past and thus severed from its roots in Arab and Turkish heritage. They aimed to cut the country off from its legacy and transform it into a modern, secular state, whose resources could be exploited and whose people would be dependent on the British. Their rhetoric about abolishing slavery was in fact part of a larger strategy to dominate the world and control its resources. Thus, Sudan would become both a source of raw materials and a market for manufactured goods.

Initially, the British referred to the region as “Turco-Egyptian Sudan” (Sudan-i Misri). After occupying Egypt, they renamed the area “Anglo-

92 “Dispatch sent from the Imperial Ottoman Embassy in Berlin to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dated March 14, 1896; BOA. HR.SYS. 36/66.

Egyptian Sudan." Following the annexation of Suakin, they simplified the name to just "Sudan." This naming policy led to the erasure of earlier names for the region such as: "Kush", " Tasti" (Land of the Bow), " Nubia", "Beja", "Funj", "Kordofan", and "Darfur".

The elite class that came to power after independence was largely influenced by colonial culture and policies. This class began to act within a framework inspired solely by Western civilization, which had significant effects on language, religion, and culture. The British and Egyptians left lasting impacts not only on the naming of Sudan but also on its administrative, political, and social structures. These effects replaced the local civilizational heritage and led the people to adopt an identity heavily influenced by the colonial period. It could even be said that in Khartoum, some people came to live "like black Englishmen." There were those who would put on their overcoats and open their umbrellas when a cloud appeared over London.

Names incorporating "Bilād al-Sūdān" and "Sudan" were eventually shortened to just "Sudan," becoming the name of the region within the modern state's borders. When the independent Republic of Sudan was established in 1956, it retained the name "Sudan." In 2011, when Sudan was split into two states, the name "South Sudan" was adopted by the newly independent southern state. Thus, two states emerged in Africa: one called Sudan and the other South Sudan.

This region has historically been home to many civilizations such as Kush, Meroë, Nobatia, Makuria, Alodia, Funj, Darfur, Musabba'at, and the Mahdist State. This highlights the need for further comprehensive research to fully understand the history and geography of Sudan.

The historical toponymy of Sudan reflects enduring asymmetries of power and knowledge. External naming traditions- from Pharaonic and classical frameworks to Islamic and colonial discourses- came to dominate the representation of Sudanese space, often marginalizing indigenous terminologies. These processes continue to shape modern Sudanese identity and historical memory, highlighting the importance of critically reassessing naming practices within broader debates on power, geography, and history.

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