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Born in 1907, Sir William was educated at Clifton College and Christ's College Cambridge, where he read History and Modern Languages. Entering the Sudan Political Service in 1930, he served in Berber, Darfur, Blue Nile and Equatoria Provinces and finally as Adviser to the Governor-General on Constitutional and External Affairs in the immediate period leading to the Sudan's independence in 1956. He was later able to bring his many talents to other offices.

He was Governor of Aden from 1956 to 1960. From 1961 until 1966 and again from 1970 to 1972 he was intimately connected with the Gulf area, first as Political Resident, based in Bahrain and then recalled from retirement - as the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's Personal Representative for Gulf Affairs.

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**KHARTOUM: PAST, PRESENT AND THE PROSPECTS  
FOR THE FUTURE**

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*by*

**Bushra Babiker**

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**Dr. Bushra Babiker** was the 1997 Sir William Luce Fellow. Associate Professor, University of Khartoum.

# **KHARTOUM: PAST, PRESENT AND THE PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE**

Based on a lecture given by the 1997 Sir William Luce Fellow

**Dr. Bushra El Tayed Babiker**

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to commence this lecture by expressing my gratitude to The Sir William Luce Memorial Fund for granting the fellowship that has enabled me to realise an ambition; to visit the University of Durham and make use of the extensive resources of the Sudan Archive. I am honoured to be first recipient of this fellowship, which has allowed me the rare opportunity to research and document the urban history of Khartoum.

It is only appropriate that special thanks are given to both the institutions and individuals who have supported my research activities, and made my stay at Durham an enjoyable one. In the first instance, thanks must go to those organising The Sudan Archive at the University of Durham's Palace Green Library, and its show-piece effort; the Sudan Project. Additional thanks must go to the Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies and Trevelyan College for hosting and providing me with invaluable assistance. Thanks must also go to Mrs. L. E. Harding - better known in academia by her maiden name: Miss Lesley E. Forbes - who in her twin capacities as Sub-Librarian and Secretary to the Sir William Luce Memorial Fund, was responsible for the fellowship and all the arrangements leading up to this lecture.

The objective of this lecture is twofold. Firstly, as indicated in the title this lecture, I will aim to provide an insight into the subject area of the research fellowship: Khartoum. Secondly, the lecture will aim to reveal and shed more light on the wealth of photographic records available in the Sudan Archive. The Sudan Archive at the University of Durham maintains some of the best photographic collections about the Condominium Era outside Sudan. Most of these are unique with many not available within Sudan. Together with documents, records, and artefacts, these pictures constitute an invaluable component of Sudan's heritage and history. In examining the past, present, and future prospects of Khartoum, this paper will aim to reveal and shed more light on the wealth of photographic records available within the Sudan Archive.

The title selected of this paper is not altogether unique as it was once used by E. G. Sarsfield-Hall;<sup>1</sup> the distinguished and long-term Governor of Khartoum (1929-36). Sarsfield-Hall is also one of the main contributors of manuscripts, published-works, papers, sketches and photographic material to the Sudan Archive. He lectured and wrote extensively about Khartoum during and after his term in office. The scope of

this study will however be limited to a demonstrative rather than a critical examination of the photographic material of the Sudan Archive.<sup>2</sup>

## **KHARTOUM: PAST, PRESENT AND THE PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE**

**Dr. Bushra El Tayed Babiker**

The modern Khartoum metropolitan area is comprised of the three historic urban entities of Al Khartoum Town, Omdurman and Al Khartoum-Bahri. These combine with other surrounding villages to form Greater Khartoum; the urban conglomeration known as the 'Tripolitan Capital' of modern Sudan. Therefore the name Al Khartoum denotes three levels of human settlement: the province, the sprawling metropolis, and the historic township on the southern bank of the Blue Nile. The origins of Khartoum can best be shown from its historical rural context. This situation remains almost intact in the existing settlement systems of Tuti Island and Burri village. It is evident that the site of the CBD<sup>3</sup> would have had modest beginnings prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In providing this form of examination it is only appropriate to begin with the name itself; Al Khartoum. Several interpretations have been advanced with one theory maintaining that Khartoum-Giziret-Sinnar, the name mentioned in 19<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts, simply meant the "tip" of the peninsula of Sinnar, which was the capital of the Funj. This referred to the northern-most tip of the landmass between the White Nile and the Blue Nile. Another more plausible interpretation relates the name, like many other names in the vicinity, to Tuti Island - the much older and more well-known settlement at the confluence of the two rivers. It argues that Al Khartoum referred to the narrow mud bank opposite the island that always remained dry during flood-time, and was used by fishermen as a trading location or as a place to repair their nets. This implies that Al Khartoum has always been a progeny of Tuti, though others insist to relate it to Sinnar. To support the credibility of the Tuti argument, the name of a settlement in the same vicinity - Burri<sup>4</sup>, is probably a corruption of Al Barr, meaning simply 'the land side'. This name would have originally been given to the general water-front opposite Tuti Island. The name remained in use up until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the old Mahas villages which occupied the higher ground located to the east of the Khartoum University site. This was to the extent that one might be tempted to speculate that the name of the city might have well been Burri instead of Al Khartoum. The old Burris were cleared to build the British Army barracks after the resident population had been moved to sites further to the east.<sup>5</sup> Many places in this area, like Al Moqran and Al Morada in Omdurman are derivatives from the relationship between the land, the river and the island. For example the local name Al Moqran, nowadays an integral part of the CBD, means both the actual confluence of the two currents as well as the land tip: apparently the aforementioned "tip" of the Sinnar Peninsula. Apart from the Burris there were also other settlements: the Kalakas, Lamabs, Gereif West and Soba to mention but a few. On the opposite bank of the Blue Nile there were the sister villages of Hamad, Khojali and Sababi. Halfaya lay a



little bit further to the north, while E'ilafoon, Gereif East and Soba Proper lay to the south-east. Soba was the Christian Kingdom of Aloa which was plundered and destroyed by the Funj warriors of Sinnar at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The inhabitants of all these places are mostly Mahas and are related to Tuti.

Many foreign travellers would have passed through the Khartoum region before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but rarely was the site mentioned before 1821 - i.e. the date of the Turkish invasion. Those who used the narrow landing as a crossing would have done so without mentioning or probably even knowing its local name. This indicates that in spite its strategic location, no specific importance was attached to the site. There is substantial evidence however, that the Mahas of the surrounding villages of Burri and Soba West on the Blue Nile, the Kalaklas and Lamabs on the White Nile, and those of Tuti Island itself sent their children to a religious school: a Khalwa. This was established by Sheikh Arbab Al A'gaid - a renowned faqih of the Sudanese Sufi tradition who is believed to have crossed the Nile from Tuti<sup>6</sup> and settled there.

The inhabitants of the island had always cultivated the opposite side of the Nile to their settlement. Until recently, the river submerged its north-western section during the flood season. This typically lasted for three months. The water wheels therefore provided irrigation until the next flood. This suggests intensive perennial farming, and at least a semi-permanent settlement. Historical records indicate that the inhabitants continuously farmed the land, and always took refuge inside the island during times of turmoil and war - a situation that would have precipitated the xenophobic attitude that still marks the island's relationship with the outside world. Until recently, one could still see Tutians crossing the river at dusk, retreating to their castle-island for the night. No outsider dared be caught on the wrong side of the river after nightfall. The presence of the indigenous Mahas farmers and fishermen in the vicinity and the proximity of the populous island would have created a degree of demand for the Arbab's Khalwa. The established cultivation would have guaranteed the areas prosperity. Some even claim that the Khalwa preceded the settlement itself. It is very difficult to determine this assertion or to indicate with any degree of certainty, the exact location of this school.<sup>7</sup> It was most likely destroyed together with the mosque carrying the name of its founder during the Turkish invasion or possibly during the subsequent punitive expeditions. It is believed however that the mosque used to be located on the site of Farouq Mosque - named in the 1940s after the Egyptian monarch toppled by the 1952 Egyptian Revolution. It is not certain if the Khalwa was attached to the mosque in the Maseed tradition of the time or if it existed together with other ancillary buildings on a separate site.

This would have been the general circumstances of permanent settlement until 1821 until Mohammed Ali Pasha, the Turkish Vassal in Egypt, decided to invade the Funj Sultanate in the name of his master in Istanbul. Although the invading force was mainly comprised of Egyptian soldiers, it was led by Turkish, Circassian, and Albanian officers, hence the name: the "Turkiyya". The expedition showed that the silt bank opposite the island offered a very suitable crossing point during the flood

season. The narrow crossing proved very useful for Al Dafter-dar, the pasha's son-in-law, who had begun a punitive terror campaign that was unleashed to put down the Ja'aliyin revolt and avenge the assassination of his brother-in-law at Shendi in December 1823. The long narrow strip of land provided the only dry foothold in the impassable muddy swamps of the confluence.<sup>8</sup> It was later extended westwards and widened southwards, and was repeatedly used from this time forth as a staging platform to ferry troops and military supplies across the river. This enabled the "Turks"<sup>9</sup> to mercilessly crush any sign of resistance. The Gezira region and other remaining areas of sedition were also pacified. Recognising the strategic advantages of the site, the Turks established a temporary military camp in the immediate vicinity, and erected a mud fort to control the crossing. The fort was rebuilt several times, and remained there until the late 1920s when it was ultimately pulled down and an amusement park was built on the site.

The intention was initially for the newly acquired territories to be ruled directly from Cairo, but this proved to be very difficult given the distance and the nature of the country. An alternative option was to use the old capital – Sinnar – as the seat of the new government. This plan was dropped because of its remoteness and the endemic diseases of its sub-tropical humid climate. Malaria and dysentery spread rapidly amongst the soldiers and their officers. In the quest for a healthier and a more central site for the military command, the Turks abandoned Sinnar in 1822 and established a temporary camp near Wad Medani. It soon became apparent that Wad Medani was also plagued with malaria, and it was decided in 1824/25 to look for a location nearer to Cairo. There were several realistic options with Dongola, Berber, Shendi and Al Khartoum being the most eligible.

As soon as Al Khartoum was selected and without waiting for a formal recognition, which did not come until 1830s, its Governor, Osman Bey Al Biringi, started to build and seek recognition for the new town as the de-facto Capital of all "Bilad As-Sudan". A main reason for the delay was the indecisiveness over the form of government most suitable for ruling Sudan: was it going to be regional with different governors administering several autonomous provinces or more central from a capital coached from Cairo? After several attempts to solve this problem, it seems that the latter option prevailed. It took several years for the Governor's aspiration to become officially granted but unfortunately he was not there to celebrate it. The recognition came during his successor's first year in Khartoum and from none other than the Pasha himself. As a sign of approval, Mohammed Ali visited the city for 3 weeks in 1839 and spent several months touring the Sudan.<sup>10</sup>

The 1798 French expedition into Egypt was a landmark which opened the 'dark continent' for exploration. Its failure encouraged Mohammed Ali and the European colonial powers to take the first steps towards establishing themselves within Africa. Khartoum was a new town and served as a bridgehead into the interior of the virgin continent. It was not expected to compete with Cairo in attracting the stray European traveller; but at least it proved to be the farthest point that a telegraph, a newspaper or

a basket of fresh Mediterranean fruit could still be delivered in a matter of days to those who wanted to obtain the luxuries they left behind. After 1835, the town developed quickly into a beacon of civilization within the surrounding wilderness. It was a comfortable market town and administrative centre for the expansive new territories. On the other hand, for many of its numerous foreign visitors, Khartoum was often a frame of mind rather than a mere physical place. It was a novel name that conjured up many different exotic connotations. Little was known about the continent, the Nile or Upper Egypt and the savage interior beyond. Less was known about the spot where the two great rivers merged and thereafter flowed together into the Great Nile. What attracted the Europeans to this part of the virgin continent remains a mystery.<sup>11</sup>

Khartoum was an attractive destination for several reasons: for those with the inquisitive mind, Khartoum was an exotic distant place that offered adventure into the unknown. For the business-minded it held the promise of untold opportunities of making fortunes and careers. For the desperate and the disillusioned it was an escape from it all.

The town began to develop and like any new fashionable attraction it saw an increased number of travellers. Scholars, scientists and seasoned explorers were part of the influx with some of them even bringing their family. Journalists, intellectuals, merchants, traders, and hopeful entrepreneurs passed through Khartoum and many remained. A variety of people met in Al Khartoum with young unemployed optimistic fortune-seekers and inexperienced adventurers sharing the same modest accommodations of the town with vagabonds, cutthroats and slave-drivers. One sometimes has to admire their perseverance and resolve to remain when faced with all of the adversities and hardships they encountered in such a hostile climate and alien culture. Some of them survived the ordeal whilst others returned home with broken spirits and permanent psychological and physical scars.

Many of these visitors were representatives of foreign countries. Established colonial powers such as England, France, Spain and Italy; together with others such as Austria, Italy and Belgium; saw the strategic, political and economic opportunities of Khartoum. They sent their agents and recruited within Khartoum for representatives. Within a couple of years, the quiet place was a hornet nest of intrigue and an international arena for foreign agents representing the colonial powers of the day. There was a unique blend of official consuls and undercover agents operating in Khartoum.

It would have been very difficult during the mid-1800s to distinguish between the consuls and agents as well as the professional from the amateurs spies. Beside the natives, the Circassian Turks and the Egyptians, the town comprised Armenians, Syrians, Copts, and Greeks who were ready to do whatever was necessary to earn

money. Khartoum thus became entangled in the intricate webs of international politics, colonial power struggles and conflicting trade and commercial interests. Different churches stepped in and used the place as a convenient stepping stone to reach the animistic interior of the continent i.e. the Nuba Mountains, Upper Nile and Equatorial Africa. Most of the records from that period are housed at the Arab National Archives Centre in Cairo with map material being very rare. The few surviving maps and drawings depicting Khartoum from that initial period are mostly sketches used to illustrate the books published by travellers such as Arnauld in the 1840s and Lejean in the 1860s.<sup>12</sup> The majority of these maps were drawn from memory and seldom in conformity with ordinance mapping standards. It is therefore difficult to ascertain with any degree of accuracy the relative locations of most of the urban sectors of Lejean's town map, needless to say identifying buildings or even roads. Maps from that period show the developed area in the form of an elongated but compact urban cluster corresponding to about 1/3 of the present-day Khartoum CBD area. This urban cluster was surrounded by cultivated land from the East, North and West i.e. the water-fronts with the desert landscape extending southwards as far as the eye could see.

As the capital of the new Turkish administration, all roads and other means of transportation converged in Khartoum. Dry season caravan routes went southwards to Arbaji, Massalamiya and Sinnar. It seems that these were the only caravans that actually entered the city as such, as those from other directions would have had to unload or transfer their merchandise to other means of transportation, i.e. boats, donkeys or porters. This was however unless it was destined to the markets of Al Obeid, Shendi, Berber, Dongola, Suakin or Suq Abu Sin in Al Gedarif. In this instance, the caravans would pass through Khartoum and changed hands several times before continuing their journey. Khartoum and its surrounding area was therefore a big clearing house for trade using caravans as well as river transportation.

It is remarkable how the Turks managed to pacify the hostile countryside and subsequently introduce both central government and maintain safe trade routes in a country that had just emerged from a protracted civil war. The Turks knew that prosperity bred stability and thus employed a variety of means including force to foster and maintain this stability. However prosperous the town and its population may have been in the mid-1800s, successful business in the marketplace required not only luck but also stamina and special survival skills. Its wholesale dealers were among the most affluent in the Middle East, but there were no rules or guarantees. Most of them traded in one of the riskiest businesses of all time: the illicit slave trade. Like gold prospecting or trade in ivory, the slave trade was a state monopoly up until 1840. Substantial fortunes were lost as quickly as they were made. Governors, administrators and lesser officials had varying degrees of vested interests in the illicit trade. Higher officials, who were driven by corruption, greed and the absence of accountability, could at will make or break the traders.

Blackmail, extortion, and intimidation were all used to embezzle exorbitant bribes and protection money from the petty traders. They used their authority to harass them via threats of imprisonment, confiscation of possessions or fines for their refusal to comply.<sup>13</sup> These measures were not necessary for the more affluent as they knew the rules of the game. The officials also managed frequently to embezzle part of the State revenues and thereby enhance their private businesses. The Pasha in Cairo had knowledge of this through his spies in Khartoum. He continuously transferred officials to and from the Sudan. There was a mutual understanding that no official would be allowed to stay long enough to amass a large fortune or to build up a permanent influence there.

By the mid-1800s the town consisted of three major “quarters”: the Hakim-dariya, the Market and the Deims. The Market was surrounded by the expatriate residential neighbourhood which lay to the south of the Hakim-dariya; the Government Quarter. Considerable fortunes flowed within the market-place; a large rather peripheral area about one square kilometre located at the southern edge of the town in the vicinity of the present-day Al Khartoum Grand Mosque. The peripheral location was traditional: mainly to accommodate caravans and outdoor vending, but its relative proximity to the official quarters - the Hakim-dariya - was meant as a reminder of the Government’s trade interests and the role that the Governor played in control and regulation of commercial and trade activities in Sudan. The marketplace itself consisted of a large open space surrounded by makeshift stalls of the type that could still be found in the markets of many towns in the Sudan. These stalls were mainly sponsored or even owned by the wealthier wholesale traders who were able to trade indoor. Replicas of such arrangements could still be found in old Cairo, Damascus and Istanbul.

Since the town was first settled, it faced away from the river with only a curved, undulating dirt track separating the Hakim-dariya from the Nile. The waterfront comprised government buildings and the residences of senior officials and other notables. This sector was dominated by the Hakim-dariya itself, the Palace, the cathedral and the Austrian mission compound. Due its large plots and proximity to the river, this part of the town has remained predominantly green. Some of the more affluent citizens, mostly Europeans, Turks, Egyptians, Greeks, Syrians and a few native Sudanese, lived nearby in smaller plots. The latter included the well connected and the partners of high/medium-rank government officials. The poorer merchants, together with the destitute consuls and the missionaries of the poorer churches, lived in closed communities scattered around rest of the town. The remaining townsmen who were mostly natives, lived in deims (native cantonments) situated at the edge of the desert-side of the town. These are still within the boundaries of the present-day CBD. Local natives lived with their families in the surrounding villages and walked daily into the town to work in government offices, the market-place or the town gardens. Tuti Island still maintains this relationship with the CBD along with other employment centres of the capital.

In spite of the availability of 'red bricks' and the Hakim-dars' requests for more enduring building materials to be used, the wealthier citizens preferred to live in one storey adobe or mud brick houses, with the compounds containing thatch and bamboo structures. This may have been a result of the requirements of the hot and dry climate, but would have also been indicative of the unwillingness in following the official lead in this matter. Othman Bey Al Biringi<sup>14</sup> and Khorshid Bey<sup>15</sup>, the cofounders of Al Khartoum, were very proud of the new town and they tried with varying degrees of success to convince others to adopt a similar attitude. The Pasha's long visit to the Sudan in 1839 would have helped produce some positive results, but most of the improvements were only cosmetic and skin-deep. On the whole, there was little evidence of any serious attempt at improving the exterior of the modest urban fabric and there was no real effort at creativity, extravagance or even good taste. In the native quarter, the main building materials remained mud, bamboo and wood covered with barasty, hides and straw. These materials are more suited to nomadic ephemeral structures rather than new urban dwellings.

In spite of the decorum of the waterfront buildings and its opulent greenery, the general impression given from the remainder of the town was one of squalor and rustic homeliness. Sanitation was inadequate and diseases spread effortlessly during the rainy season. The narrow streets and the tortuousness alleyways were waterlogged year round and the congestion prevented adequate air circulation which would have proved to be very oppressive given the humidity and the high summer temperatures. The only positive feature of the town was the cool waterfront along the bank of the Blue Nile. Fortunately for the CBD, this part of the city still maintains this original character.

In spite of the squalor, the town took on a different character in the evening. There are records of a reasonably varied nightlife and entertainments on hand in the small city. Sudanese hospitality was infectious and visitors were frequently surprised to find themselves besieged by total strangers eager to entertain newcomers and stray travellers. Given the limited population, the isolation of the natives and the monotony of a closed community resulted in the arrival of a new person, the departure of an official or the passage of a journalist, being eagerly seized upon by the expatriate community as a pretext for extravagant socialising. This experience was also the norm during the Condominium years.

Life in Khartoum could not have always remained as idyllic as described above. During that century, history was often written by the blade of the sword. Al Khartoum was no exception as the town was established by force in 1823/4 after a conquest that had drenched the whole country in blood. It was built in a manner and style which was alien to the traditions of its people. This is in addition to it being populated by a mixture of races that had very little or nothing in common with its indigenous inhabitants who also had little admiration this new alien culture. Sixty years later, it was defended by a self-styled British Messiah against a native self-appointed saviour, who brought it down to its knees following a year-long siege. It was ransacked,

abandoned in ruins and neglected for the next fourteen years; the darkest hour in its brief history. Ultimately it was to be another British General who was destined to resurrect it from the dead and rebuild it in the image of colonial glory.

In 1881 the Mahdiya rebelled with slogans of ascetic Moslem fundamentalism and the rejection of the culture of the nominally Moslem Turks. There can be nothing more unfortunate than a conflict based on resentment between two opposing factions professing the same faith. Bitterness towards the decadent Turks had accumulated and simmered for decades under the surface. So numerous were the grievances against them and so many social injustices committed during 60 years of occupation, it was virtually impossible for the Mahdi to restrain his followers when the town fell and the opportunity of retribution presented itself. It would have been obvious that the Mahdist fiery and puritanical slogans would make Al Khartoum, a symbol of an evil Turkish empire, look far worse than Sodom or Gomorra. The morally induced anger that swept across the city in January 1885 was overwhelming and intent on destruction. With the prime targets being the "Turk", vengeful acts occurred during and after the fall of Khartoum. These took many forms which sometimes matched or even surpassed the atrocities of the Turks. Charles Gordon, heir apparent to the long Turkish record of cruelty and the excesses of his predecessors, happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and might not have necessarily been killed as far as the Mahdi is concerned. However, his palace which had definitely been a target long before he arrived in Sudan was one of the first buildings to be ransacked. It was gutted and left in ruins until 1898, when the raising of the two flags symbolized the lowering of the final curtain on the Mahdiya. The garrison defending the city was destroyed and the tax officials were speared to death. The real target for vengeful acts of retribution was in spite of this the community leaders: the Moslem preachers and notables who together with the pro-government merchants were widely responsible for the corruption of government and the misery of the poor. They were believed to be part of the rampant corruption and through using their influence in the Palace and the Hakim-dariya, they made enormous fortunes at the expense of the impoverished population. Most of them remained hostile to the Mahdiya until the bitter end and they were killed in the first hours after the fall of the town. Their properties were confiscated and their valuables, goods and foodstuffs were transported to Beit Al Mal. The dwellings which escaped the fires were briefly occupied afterwards, but even these were ultimately abandoned. Their modest furniture, fittings, roofs, doors and windows were transported across the river to Omdurman. It is not clear exactly how many thousands perished, who they were, what nationalities they had, where their graves are or if they were buried at all.

In retrospect, it is ironic that the city's defences were breached only a few hundred meters to the south at the point where the invading Turks crossed into Al Khartoum for the first time in 1821. Like any city surrendering after a long siege; Khartoum as had been described by travellers, gradually ceased to exist in January 1885. It was not until 13 years later that Lord Kitchener of Khartoum achieved his victory at Kereri in 1898; his triumphant entry into Khartoum marked the beginning of a new era, which began by a symbolic act: a memorial service to commemorate Charles Gordon's last

stand on the steps of the Palace. It was a new chapter, a new era, and a new century. Although Omdurman provided for a couple of years as a make-shift seat of military government and continued to do so for certain functions; this time there was no indecisiveness about Khartoum. Within days of the emotional memorial service in front of the ruins of the Palace, the Royal Engineers were ordered to commence the arduous task of rebuilding the city within one year.<sup>16</sup> The prisoners taken at Kereri were put to work clearing the rubble and filling in the potholes.<sup>17</sup> Using sketchy plans prepared by Kitchener himself, the expedition's surveyors and engineers cut into the old urban fabric and opened new roads and public squares whilst disregarding the old plans.

The New "Turks" and the Egyptian masons were busy laying the foundations under the monumental buildings of a new City; this time as the Capital of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. It would take several years to accomplish and it would have been an unacknowledged and difficult job. The funds were limited and many building materials were unavailable with skilled labour in short supply. Even the trees had to be imported from India. In the absence of maps and correct town plans, Gorringer<sup>18</sup> of the Royal Engineers, re-invented the town and had to rely on sketches from the Sirdar.<sup>19</sup> By the 1930s with a population estimated at 40,000, Khartoum was the third city on the continent and the second largest of the three towns. As it was planned as a city of the elite, the population size was intentionally and selectively kept second to that of Omdurman. Hundreds of photographs, pictures and plans of that period show Khartoum, in contrast to the native city, as a neat model colonial town with two steel bridges spanning the two rivers, a railway station, an airdrome, modern river ways with steamers and amphibious planes, a tramway, an electric power plant and a modern water supply system. It was a town with a race course, a college, modern schools with wide tree-lined and well-lit avenues as well as several public squares complete with statues and monuments.<sup>20</sup> It developed into a town with three cathedrals, a Grand Mosque and different amenities such as a music hall and public houses. There were two markets: a European shopping precinct and a native Bazaar in the oriental tradition. The wide streets, avenues and thoroughfares enabled the municipal engineers to build a storm-water drainage scheme and enforce health regulations which helped regenerate the urban environment and went some way towards improving the sanitary conditions. The "deims"<sup>21</sup> remained strictly native and whilst they retained their relative location to the market-place they kept their distance away from the colonial government sector. Domestic animals such as goats and stray dogs were banned from public places and offenders were strictly fined. Government employees were encouraged to use permanent and semi-permanent building materials for their houses with some these supplied for free or at nominal cost. Housing for native Sudanese in Khartoum was rigorously controlled.

In 1900 a meticulous land survey project was begun where land claims were invited, investigated and verified. All proven and undisputed claims were registered accordingly by 1925. No new claims were considered after that date. All the remaining land was registered in name of the Government. This was perhaps the single most significant achievement that the British administration accomplished in



the Sudan. The 1925 Land Regulation Act allowed strict but effective control over the acquisition of land, thereby preventing land speculation. Restrictions on land-use conversion from agricultural to residential or commercial uses effectively protected land under cultivation around the city and discouraged excessive densities and developments on the riverbanks. Urban sprawl was also effectively controlled by the strict confinement of urban development within the boundaries of the City Council. These boundaries were virtually permanently un-changeable. To alleviate any ambiguities in land-use management and implementation, the Department of Urban Land Development was separated from that of the Rural Land Administration. Since the beginning of the British rule, the authority for acquisition of government land in the provinces had rested solely with the Governor of the Khartoum Province who relinquished only some of his powers to a planning committee after 1947 in the wake of the formation of the Central Town Planning Committee. In such a situation even the Governor General had no authority in this area. The town planning principles and land allocation policies outlined in 1908 by W. H. Mclean remained unchanged for nearly 40 years and were relaxed only once to provide housing for the Sudan Defence Force's veterans and war repatriates. Strict control was maintained until the end of the Condominium era in 1956.

With the rise of the nationalist movement things began to change. After independence, the effective authority over land allocation was transferred to central government and local government lost effective control. A Central Town Planning Board was nominally in charge, but had little real authority in the face of central government ministers equipped with the ability to transfer or sack difficult subordinates. Gradually the town planners and their Central Town Planning Committee caved in under popular demand for housing from one side and the relentless pressures from above.

In the absence of proper and effective legislation or long-term development plans, the government land in Khartoum was systematically wasted and the delicate balance between the different land uses was irrevocably disturbed. The few site-and-services housing projects designed to alleviate the housing shortages failed to solve the problem. These schemes were not properly equipped to address the fundamental issue of housing the urban poor i.e. poverty tackling itself. The good intentions of the planners were not enough because land speculators often managed to reach the desperately poor plot owners first. Cash was always a better option than an empty plot. Poor legislation was therefore responsible for the failure of the popular housing schemes.

Together with the negative effects of urbanisation, the uneven regional development and unequal distribution of national wealth, has led to an unprecedented and not catered for influx of the rural population to the urban environment. Khartoum has suffered to a large extent from this with its infrastructure networks being stretched to the limit. Khartoum in 1960-1990 saw its town population grow from under one-hundred thousand to over one million inhabitants; a factor of more than ten times in thirty years.<sup>22</sup> When the national rate of natural growth at 2.8% p.a. is applied,

Khartoum should have barely doubled during that period. The infrastructure networks consequently deteriorated quickly. Othman Bey's old town and our focus of interest in this lecture suffered the most from this. A recent study shows that endemic traffic congestion, constant infra-structural failures, absence of effective development control combined with negligence and official ineptitude, have transformed the model green town into a dusty and poverty stricken 18<sup>th</sup> century replica of itself. Al Khartoum is not alone: these problems are common to all the large urban centres of the developing world. Rapid urbanisation and failure in the management of metropolitan cities require finding and maintaining adequate financial resources for maintenance and development. These are daunting problems that are rarely addressed or even find priority within the crowded political agenda of governments. It is fairly common that even if planning is contemplated, it becomes an end in itself. Khartoum is a good example of this as it is perhaps the most over-planned city in the world. Since independence it had two master plans and one structural plan. Neither of these was seriously implemented. Whilst several major re-planning schemes are underway and there is no lack of ideas, they all remain on paper and the situation is deteriorating daily. The problem seems to be mainly one of methodology, approach and organisation.

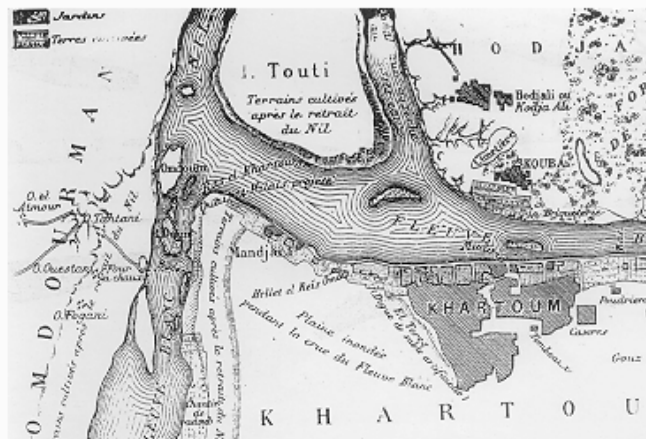
Very often major development projects are initiated before vital prerequisites such as feasibility studies or cost-benefit and environmental impact analyses are properly carried out. Definitions of goals and objectives, the setting of priorities and programs of work are therefore crucial to success.

To conclude: where do we go from here? Khartoum is in a beautiful and unique location endowed with assets that cannot be neglected or allowed to fall into a state of disrepair or mismanagement. Khartoum requires a feasible rehabilitation program that will fully utilise and diversify its available resources. Financial resources have been shown to be of minor importance. What is important is the simultaneous and effective mobilization of all other resources, especially the human initiative. What is in store for Khartoum? Khartoum's future depends largely on its decision maker's ability to employ the right mix of government planning and private initiatives. In practical terms, one could begin the same way Goringe, the Royal Engineer entrusted with the reconstruction of the abandoned city did. He began by starting with a comprehensive rehabilitation and comprehensive overhaul plan. This plan, executed exactly one hundred years ago, was able with meagre funds and with less advanced capabilities at their disposal, to overcome the problems of a devastated city and to create the model – albeit colonial – of the town we all came to know and like so much. This was achieved within thirty year. Possibly with the advantage of one-hundred years hindsight, technology and the benefit of a dynamic wholesome city, the same results may be achievable within half that period. In a recent study for the CBD<sup>23</sup> it was suggested that a Khartoum Core Development Board be established which would act as an enabling body with a wide-ranging degree of authority: to plan, regulate, rally resources and tap funds. Whilst there is no magic formula to dealing with these problems, the initial target could be a modest one: to bring the city back to the point and the standards of the British era.

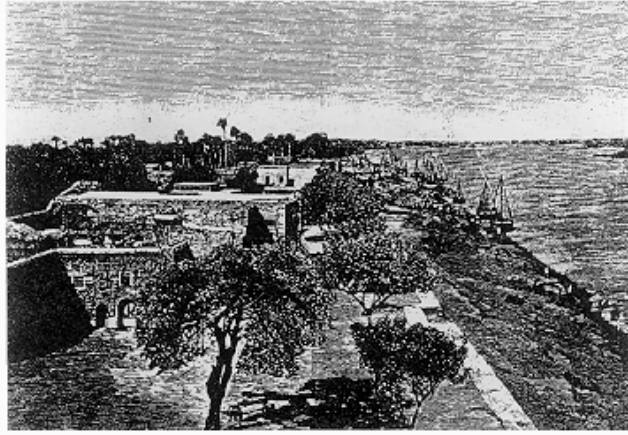
There is no intention here to trivialise the other urgent problems of urban poverty, inadequate housing and poor infrastructure which exist in Khartoum. The proposal is for a comprehensive approach to solving the problems faced by the city at the metropolitan level. It must be recognised that no change in the peripheries, however extensive, could be of any use if the city core is in disarray. The CBD has always been and will remain the symbol of urban and metropolitan pride. A rehabilitated CBD can easily become a model scheme for what can be achieved through resource management rather than high finance. A single successful action area program in this highly visible area would not only serve to show the public the potential, but can also be demonstrative to the decision-makers that major improvements typically cost less than is anticipated.



1. Al Khartoum. The mud bank where it all started



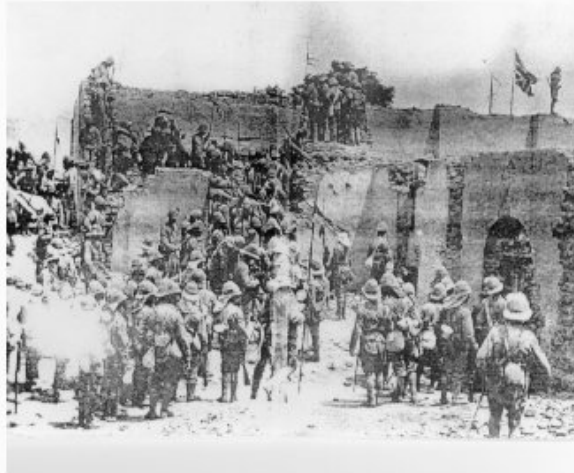
2. Al Khartoum around 1840 - according to Arnould.



3. Khartoum of the mid-1800s.



4 . Al Khartoum at the end of the Turkiya.



5. The victors celebrating after the Gordon memorial service.



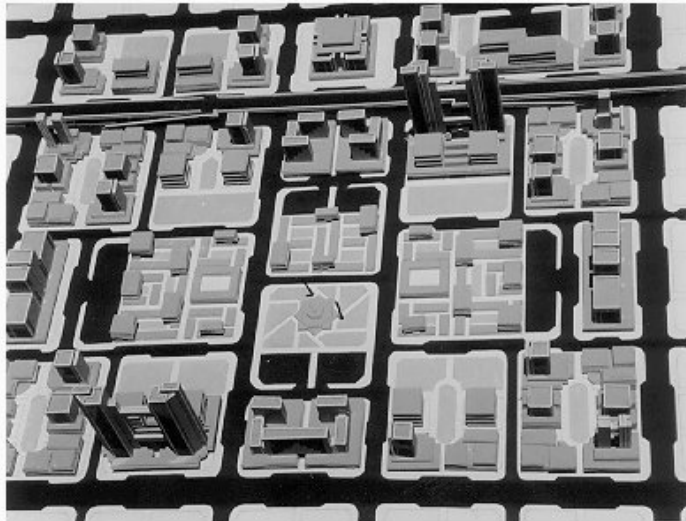
6. The vanquished marched to work among the ruins of Khartoum.



7. Khartoum. The Capital of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.



8. Khartoum. Development from the 1960s.



9. A 1977 proposal for the redevelopment of the Railway Station.



## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Sarsfield-Hall, E.G., *Khartoum: Past, Present and Future*. A lecture delivered in 1933 to The Town Planning Conference, Welwyn Garden City. Text: EGS-H papers, Durham Library at Palace Green. Under 646/4/1-83
- <sup>2</sup> More than 100 images were shown during the lecture. Some of them were original slides used by E. G. Sarsfield-Hall in his lectures.
- <sup>3</sup> The present-day Khartoum Central Business District
- <sup>4</sup> For more interpretations see Mohammed Ibrahim Abu Salim, *Tareekh Al Khaztoum*, (History of Khartoum), in Arabic, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1979
- <sup>5</sup> Sandes, E. W. G. *The Royal Engineers in Egypt and Sudan*, (1937)
- <sup>6</sup> Walkley, C. E. J. *Sudan Notes & Records*, Vol. XVIII. The Story of Khartoum
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Fig. 1
- <sup>9</sup> The general name given regardless of actual affiliation, to the regime, its troops, its officials and its ways
- <sup>10</sup> Shuqaiz, N., *The Geography and History of Sudan*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. (1972)
- <sup>11</sup> The Graphic, 1885
- <sup>12</sup> Fig. 3 & 4
- <sup>13</sup> Shuqaiz, N., *The Geography and History of Sudan*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. (1972)
- <sup>14</sup> Governor of Sudan 1825-1826
- <sup>15</sup> Governor of Sudan 1826-1839
- <sup>16</sup> Sandes, E. W. G. *The Royal Engineers in Egypt and Sudan*, (1937)
- <sup>17</sup> Neillands, R., *The Darnish Wars: Gordon & Kitchner in the Sudan*, (1996)
- <sup>18</sup> Lieutenant George F. Gorringer of the Royal Engineers. Later, Lieu.-General Sir George Gorringer.
- <sup>19</sup> Combined title of the highest ranking British officer in the British Army in Egypt; as such Governor of the Sudan. In 1898 General Horatio Herbert Kitchener of Khartoum.
- <sup>20</sup> McLean, W. H. The planning of Khartoum and Omdurman, from the transactions of the Town planning conference. October 1910, London. Papers published by RIBA 1911.
- <sup>21</sup> Originally a village. In the Khartoum area a vernacular community populated by the urban poor.
- <sup>22</sup> According to a 1991 study: The Khartoum Structure Plan (1990). Greater Khartoum population rose during the same period from 322 thousand to more than 3.3 million inhabitants.
- <sup>23</sup> Babiker, B. E. et al., *Optimal Use of Government Land & Premises in Khartoum – Report*. (1977)

### Recommended Further Reading

In addition to the footnotes, the following titles are recommended for further background reading:

1. Artin Yacoub Pasha, *England in the Sudan*. (1911)

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2. Daley and Forbes, *The Sudan – Photographic Record 1899-1950s*. (1994)
  3. Sarsfield-Hall, E.G., *From Cork to Khartoum*. (Manuscript) The Sudan Archive – Durham University Library. (1975)
  4. Toniolo, E. and Hill, R. (eds.), *The Opening of The Nile Basin*