

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

SUAKIN AND ITS FISHERMEN:

A STUDY OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND

ETHNIC GROUPINGS IN A SUDANESE PORT

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of

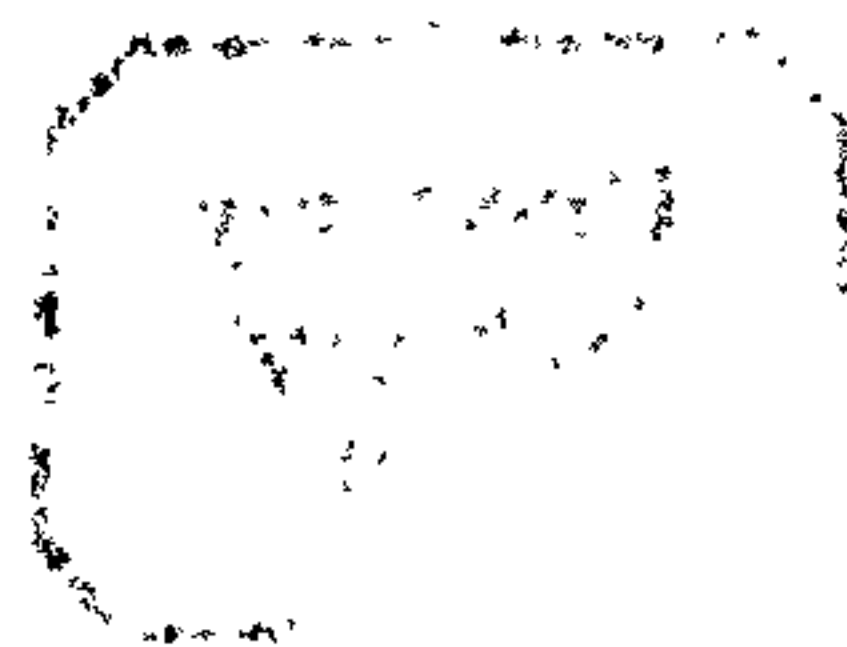
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by

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Summary Summary of Thesis submitted for Ph.D. degree
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on

Suakin and its Fishermen: a study of economic activities and ethnic groupings in a Sudanese port

This study examines the role that ethnic identity plays in economic activities within the context of Suakin, with particular reference to fishing. Chapter One defines the context physically and to some extent culturally. It begins with a discussion of the boats used by the fishermen, which suggests that in this respect at least Suakin is culturally more akin to the Middle East, or "dhow world", than to the interior of Sudan. The environment in which these boats operate and the appearance of the town is then described. This appearance and the presence of the current population is accounted for in Chapter Two, which relates the history of the town and its people. In Chapter Three, the concept of "ethnic grouping" is developed from earlier concepts in order to classify the present population. The concept is applied in Chapter Four, where there is also an examination of the activities, organisation and sizes of these groupings. Chapters Five and Six give a detailed account of the fishing industry in Suakin, including an assessment of a development project aimed at improving productivity and an elucidation of two "universal" methods of profit distribution by share allocation. In order to establish in what respects fishing is unique and in what respects it is a typical occupation, Chapter Seven surveys the other major economic activities in the town. It also locates fishing within the context of the town's total economic life. The concluding chapter argues that in terms of its organisation fishing is typical of private sector occupations and its organisation is maintained partly through the mode of remuneration and partly through the social organisation of the town into distinct ethnic groupings.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

A substantial body of anthropological literature exists which deals directly or indirectly with methods of earning a livelihood in Sudan. Monographs and papers have been published on transhumants, nomads, agriculturalists, merchants, stevedores and others. This study adds to the list, taking as its subject fishermen on the Red Sea coast. It is not a general survey, but is concerned only with those resident in the town of Suakin.

The choice of this town, and indeed the subject itself, came about by chance. It began through a conversation with the Team Leader of a British Ministry of Overseas Development project. He informed me that members of a certain "tribe", the Rashaida, had settled in Suakin and become fishermen. At that time no anthropological study had been made of the Rashaida, yet they were well-known and widely regarded as pastoral nomads. I had heard of the forced conversion of nomads into fishermen by the Somali government, but if this process was happening voluntarily in Suakin, it demanded further investigation. As will be revealed, the apparent occupational change was not a spontaneous conversion, but linked to another maritime activity which further research showed the Rashaida to have been involved with for some time: trading by dhows. This trading is not entirely legal and compiling information on it was extremely difficult. It soon became apparent that I would be unable

to collect data of sufficient quality to form a thesis simply on the process of Rashaida settlement in Suakin.

However, the town itself did not conform with my expectations. Before arriving, I was under the impression that it was almost deserted. The only statistics available were contained in the 1955/56 census, which gave a figure of 4,000 persons resident. As the town was not enumerated separately in 1972, the inference was that it was now much smaller. Yet the Suakin I arrived in had nearly 14,000 inhabitants, of which only some 13 per cent were Rashaida. Thus it was a logical progression to investigate not only the process of settlement and activities of the Rashaida but rather the processes of settlement and economic activities in the town as a whole. This is a vast subject and on advice I selected Suakin's fishing industry as the focus.

The population of the town is ethnically diverse and the information collected presents an opportunity to shed light on the long-standing anthropological concern with "tribes/ethnic groups". Most discussions of this topic have been restricted to social, cultural and political phenomena. Whilst these dimensions are not ignored, by examining economic activities in a non-industrial context, with particular reference to fishing, further aspects of ethnicity can be explored. This thesis will attempt to answer the question What relevance has ethnic identity to economic activities? Thus it can be classified as a study in both social and economic anthropology.

Yet, it may be argued that, as it is concerned with fishermen, it falls within the sub-discipline of "maritime anthropology". Certainly

on this ground alone it is within the definition put forward by the originators of the term, Casteel and Quimby (1975:1). Seeking to justify the inclusion between two covers of papers dealing with a wide variety of cultures scattered around the Pacific, they state that "maritime anthropology" incorporates everything within the context of anthropology connected with the sea, however tenuously. It may include linguistics, physical anthropology and archaeology. Not surprisingly, this has been criticised. Bernard (1976:479) attacks the use of "ecological adjectives" and the general proliferation of anthropologies, stating that Casteel and Quimby's definition is "so broad and so diffuse as to obscure any theoretical focus."

Smith (1977a:2) in the journal The Maritime Anthropologist (which perhaps significantly ran to only a single issue) puts up a poor defence for the sub-discipline. Seemingly unable to distinguish between ecology and culture areas, she argues that because such labels as "Africanist" and "Orientalist" are acceptable in anthropology, a similar tolerance should be shown towards "maritime". In the same year, she edited Those Who Live From the Sea: essays in maritime anthropology. With the exception of a paper on kinship in Tristan da Cunha, all contributions in this volume are concerned with fishing. Acheson (1981:275) meets Bernard's criticisms by arguing that the discipline should be restricted and presumably relabelled after the title of his paper - "The Anthropology of Fishing". Like Smith (1977a), he produces generalisations about fisheries organisation and fishing. Two assumptions underlie this approach: firstly, that fishermen everywhere face the same basic problems; and secondly, as Smith (1977a:2) states:

Fishermen, despite superficial similarities to other societies do in total configuration vary substantially from other groups.

This thesis will test the validity of the second assumption by examining the ethnic composition of the fishing population in the light of the ethnic composition of the town as a whole and its organisation in comparison to other economic activities in Suakin.

Fishermen use hooks and lines: no other occupational group does. There are obvious technological differences between fishermen and non-fishermen. Having stated this, is it necessary to describe the technology and techniques of the fishermen? The emphasis of present-day anthropology is on analysis and some writers feel they must justify the inclusion of material that is peripheral to the central (analytical) theme. Asad's (1970) study of the nomadic Kababish is such an example. His main concern is domination of the "tribe" by an elite, and he writes in his introduction:

In order to understand how the Kabbashi elite are able to maintain their domination I have found it necessary to give a detailed description of the social and economic circumstances in which the mass of Kababish live.

(Asad 1970:8)

He then describes such phenomena as migratory patterns and the organisation of the household. His conclusions about the elite are based almost entirely on material presented in two chapters (out of a total of twelve). He does not tie in his account of migrations with his conclusions: he shows simply that elite domination has come about through historical and political circumstances.

Therefore, although the inclusion of this descriptive material in no way undermines Asad's conclusions, his justification for its inclusion is ineligible. Yet I believe he is justified in presenting this peripheral material, on other grounds. An anthropological study based on fieldwork should not be a narrow analysis but to some extent

a portrait of a total phenomenon. Three types of reader may approach a monograph: one interested in the theoretical conclusions; a second in the methodology; and a third in the information contained about the society or an aspect of it - that is interested in the descriptive content. Monographs are reference works from which information can be abstracted for purposes other than those the author intended: taking Asad's study again as an example, information on migration and animal rearing amongst the Kababish is reproduced in Johnson (1969) and Dahl and Hjort (1976). It might be argued that descriptive content is all the more important in a thesis where the writer, a learner in the trade, may not yet be methodologically or analytically sophisticated. Cunnison (1966:40) has written: "Pastoral nomadism is a full-time activity with a high degree of skill". Yet, despite the number of publications there have been on the subject of nomadism, there is no adequate account of the nature of this skill. I have attempted here to describe the skills and techniques involved in fishing.

The information upon which this thesis is based was collected during the periods January to July 1979 and November 1979 to May 1980. During the first phase I lived within the Rashaida settlement in the al-Fula district of Suakin (see Map 5). I believe it would have been impossible to gather information about these people without residing amongst them for some time. However, there were negative aspects: relations with non-Rashaida were occasionally difficult as a consequence, and too close contact with non-Rashaida sometimes led to problems with the Rashaida. This was to some extent resolved during my second period, when I concentrated on the fishing industry, by residing in the rest-house of the Marine Fisheries Division of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources. This residential

address implied to many of the fishermen that I was connected in some way with the joint UK-Sudanese fisheries development project at that time in operation, which was widely regarded as beneficial. It also had the advantage of being close to the town's main fish landing sites (see Map 6).

The collection of information was difficult. There were several reasons for this. Initially my Sudanese Arabic was inadequate and even though it improved, it was not the first language of the majority of my informants. Although Sudanese Arabic is widely understood, Suakin is linguistically diverse, Tu-Bedawie, Tigray, Tigrinya, Hausa and the Rashaida's dialect of Saudi Arabian Arabic being the most common languages. Having no command of these, I was generally unable to gather oral data except through face-to-face interviews. As a non-Muslim I was excluded from certain events (such as eating with my Rashaida landlord): I considered it unethical to become a Muslim simply as a pragmatic device. As an unattached male, gathering information on and from women was almost impossible.

As will be shown, Suakin is composed of a number of distinct "ethnic groupings". There is little interaction between them, partly, I will argue, as a result of traditional hostility and suspicion. As a consequence, many people seemed reluctant to divulge any information about their own grouping for fear that I, who was visibly moving between groupings, would pass my findings on to members of other groupings. The nature of the town's economy further compounded my difficulties. Smuggling is a major activity with widespread primary and secondary involvement. Secrecy is of course essential in such work, and any outsider making enquiries into maritime affairs of any nature must inevitably fall under suspicion. It was also unfortunate that my

fieldwork periods coincided with major attempts by the Sudanese authorities to curtail this activity.

The methodology was developed by experience. During the early days, interpreters (usually volunteers from the Marine Fisheries Division) were used. This was unsatisfactory. The Rashaida in particular were highly suspicious of outsiders and several resented them being brought inside the settlement. Structured interviews were also unsuccessful: informants invariably grew restless when answers were being written down in front of them. The most appropriate methods of data gathering in the circumstances were through casual conversations in public places and going on fishing trips. Some data was obtained from informants met only once. However, over time, one builds up circles of friends and not only are these useful sources of information, they can also be used for verification. Largely, these persons were of my own general status, young unmarried men with few or no close relatives in the town. They, with fewer ties, tended to have contacts with people in ethnic groupings different to their own, and tended to present less idealised versions of their own groupings' activities and customs than their elders. However, there are no objective methods of verifying much of the sociological data that follows. What is presented is my interpretation of the economic and social life of Suakin.

This study, then, examines the role that ethnic identity plays in economic activities within the specific context of Suakin, with particular reference to fishing. Chapter One defines the context physically and to some extent culturally. It begins with a discussion of an aspect of the technology utilised by the fishermen - the boats - which suggests that in this respect at least Suakin is culturally more

akin to the Middle East, or the "dhow world", than to the interior of Sudan. The environment in which these boats operate and the appearance of the town itself are then described. The appearance of the town, again more akin to non-Sudanese regions, and the presence of the current population are accounted for in Chapter Two, which relates the history of the town and its people. In Chapter Three, the concept of "ethnic grouping" is developed from earlier concepts in order to classify the present population. The concept is applied in Chapter Four, where there is also an examination of the activities, organisation and sizes of these groupings. Chapters Five and Six give a detailed account of the fishing industry in Suakin, including an assessment of a development project aimed at improving the efficiency of the fishermen and an elucidation of two "universal" methods of profit distribution by share allocation. In order to establish in what respects fishing is a unique occupation and in what respects it is typical, Chapter Seven surveys the other major economic activities in the town. It also locates fishing within the context of the total economic life of Suakin. The concluding chapter argues that in terms of its organisation fishing is typical of private sector occupations in the town and its organisation is maintained partly through the mode of remuneration and partly through the social organisation of the town into distinct ethnic groupings.

Where it is not possible to avoid Arabic words in the text, the Sudan Notes and Records system of transliteration has been followed. However, because Arabic plurals are often formed by internal changes, which may render them unrecognisable to non-Arabic speakers, plurals

have been anglicised. In order to further reduce unnecessary complications, the names of "tribes" will be used to denote an individual from that tribe: thus a Takari, rather than a Takturi; a Rashaida woman, rather than a Rashidiya. Furthermore, Arabic words that have a generally accepted transliteration are spelt according to common usage. This applies to geographical names: thus the town, which is more correctly transliterated (and incidentally pronounced) as Sawākin, will be spelt as Suakin.

During my initial fieldwork period, one Sudanese pound (fs 1.00) was valued at approximately f 1.10 sterling. The currency was later devalued and the system of exchange reformed. A "parallel rate" was introduced: one for business (fs 1.00 = f 0.85 sterling) and one for tourism (fs 1.00 = f 0.65 sterling). These rates are, of course, poor guides to purchasing power. It may be helpful to bear in mind that during this time the government-regulated minimum wage was fs 28.00 a month.

C H A P T E R O N E

B O A T S A N D P L A C E S

The Boats of Suakin

This thesis is concerned with economic activities and ethnicity, not in general but within a specific context. The opening chapters will outline this context, physically, environmentally, historically and to a lesser extent culturally. I consider it appropriate in a study focussing on the exploitation of the sea to begin with an examination of an aspect of the technology which makes this exploitation possible - the boats. These are not only a part of the context but also in several respects a reflection of the context as a whole. Boats are the products of craftsmen working within an historical and cultural tradition as a response to environmental conditions. Commencing thus, a convenient introduction can be made to the cultural, environmental and historical aspects of the context, as well as providing essential information for later chapters.

In terms of McGrail's (1981:4-5) classification, all water craft in use out of Suakin are boats, in that their buoyancy is derived from a (near) watertight hull.¹ These boats can be divided into five,

¹In contrast to, for example, rafts, which obtain their buoyancy from the flotational qualities of their individual elements.

or perhaps more strictly six, types of planked boat, all of which are constructed in Suakin's boatyard. In addition, there is one type of logboat (or dugout canoe), imported from India's Malabar Coast.

The largest boat constructed in Suakin is a type of dhow. "Dhow" is seemingly a European word of uncertain origin, possibly derived from the Swahili dau or the Persian dawh (Hawkins 1977:21-22). It is applied to a range of large, keeled, carvel-built (that is, with flush-laid or edge-joined planking) vessels of the Red Sea, Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean (see Map 1), capable of long sea voyages. Hawkins (1977:138-41) illustrates thirty types of dhow (and this is not exhaustive) which clearly show that the word cannot be defined in terms of hull shape or rig. However, the word can be usefully utilised to be more than simply a term to encompass boats from a certain geographical area, and I propose a new definition. These various types have a constructional feature that is unique to boats of this area: the shape of the keel, which is rabbetted on its upper surface to take the landing of the garboard (first) strake. This is shown in Figures 1 and 2. One of the most common European methods of keel/garboard fastening, the one that comes closest to the method found in dhows, is also shown in Figure 2 for comparison.

The dhow of Suakin is known as a sanbūk,¹ a type commonly associated with the Red Sea, but also found in small numbers in the Persian Gulf. Although technical differences in design may distinguish

¹In virtually all the literature on dhows this is transliterated as sambuk. However, the pronunciation of the plural sanābīk makes it quite clear that the word contains the letter nun, not mim. Hourani (1951:89) and Donaldson (1979:80) transliterate it as sanbuq, but as it is written سنبوک, k is the usual transliteration for the letter kaff.

MAP 1
THE DHOW WORLD

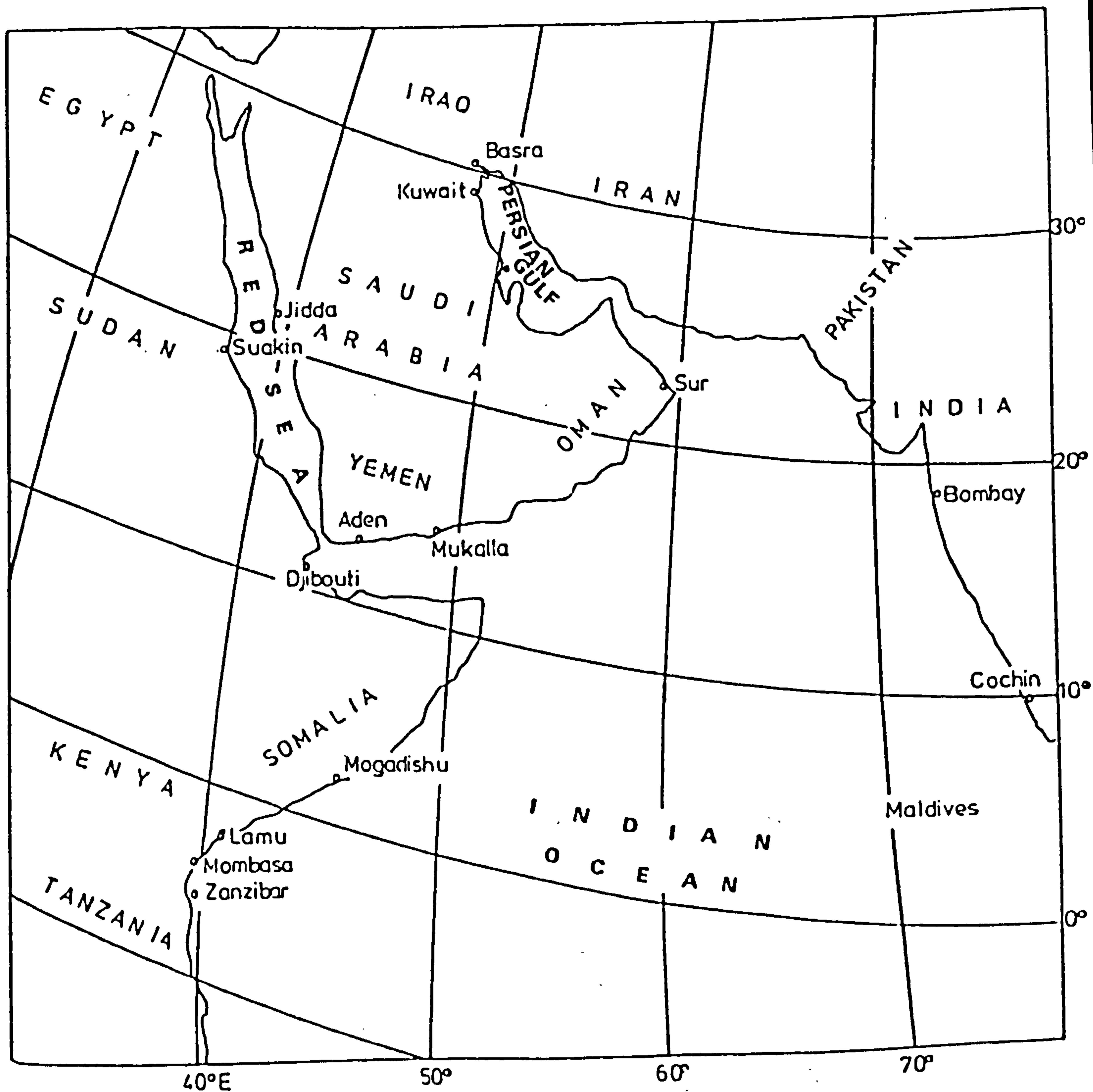


FIGURE 1
THE SHAPED DHOW KEEL
(with scarf joint shown)

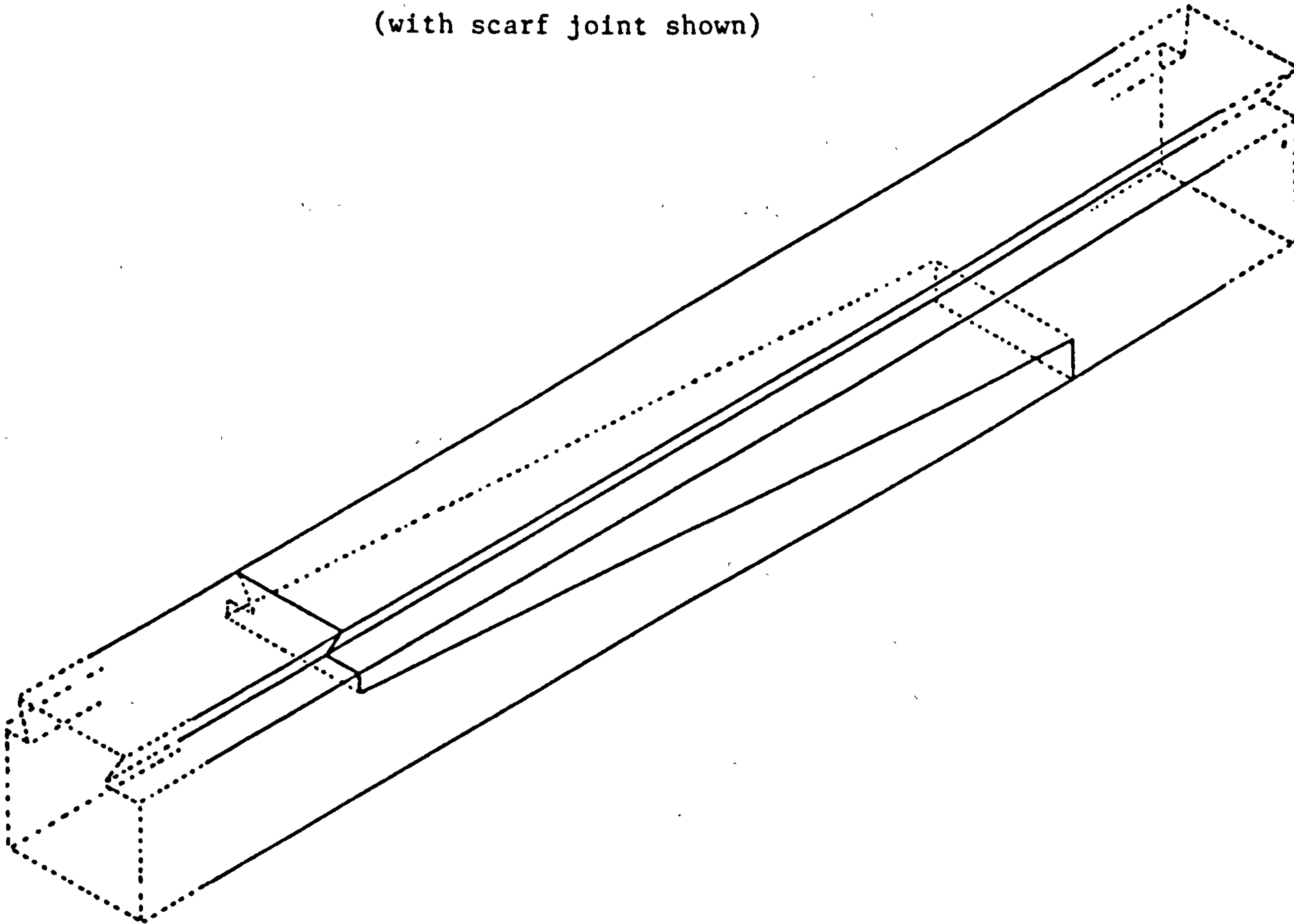
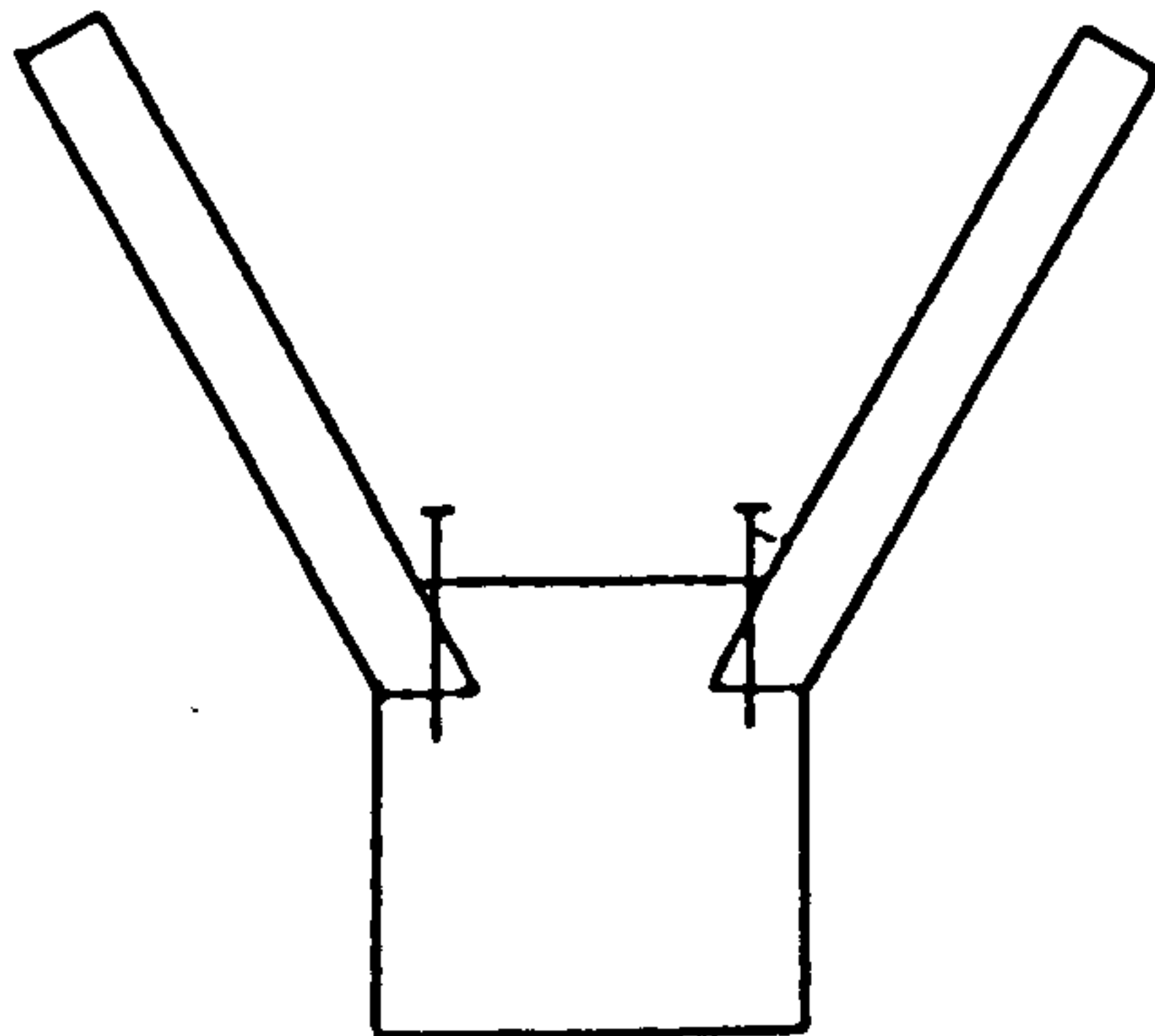
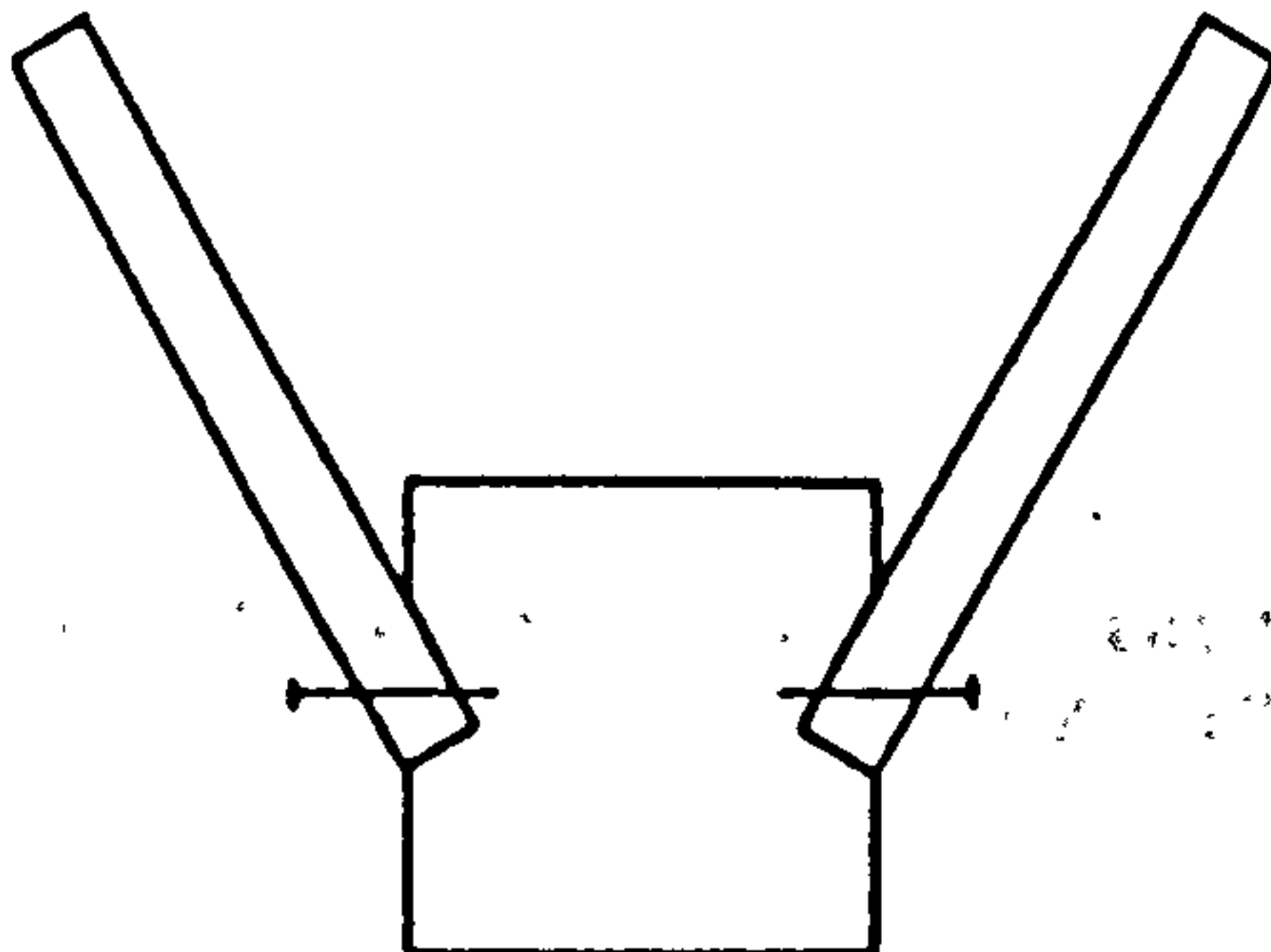


FIGURE 2
CONTRASTING METHODS OF KEEL/GARBOARD FASTENING

Dhow keel and garboard



Western rabbeted keel



one type of dhow from another, insufficient detailed information has been published on this subject. I would suggest that the simplest method of distinguishing types is by the shape of the stempost and stempost head.¹ On the sanbūk, the stempost is scimitar-shaped. Regional variations are discernable: on the Sudanese sanbūk there is a comparatively sharp junction between the upper and lower parts of the post, in contrast to the more gently sweeping curves of the Adeni and Somali sanbūks.

Hornell (1942) devises a system whereby dhows are classified into one of two types: transom-sterned or pointed sterned. He places the sanbūk in the former class, and substantiates this with a photograph of a Port Sudan sanbūk (Hornell 1942:17-20, Plate 1 (a)). However, although Egyptian and (so far as I am aware) Gulf sanbūks are indeed transom-sterned, those of Sudan and Saudi Arabia are today pointed sterned. Hornell's comments on the zarūk, a small Yemeni dhow, may provide an explanation:

It is probable that it (the zarūk) approximates to the appearance of what Red Sea craft were prior to that contact with European maritime enterprise which caused the transformation of the old, sharp ended craft into the square transom, a change of construction now being reversed owing to the increased cost of building materials and lessened profits due to steamer competition.

(Hornell 1942:23-24)²

Like the zarūk, the sanbūk is an open waisted vessel with a

¹See Appendix I and Figure 11.

²Curiously, the reverse, a change from pointed to transom stern has happened recently to the Kuwaiti dhow, the bum (Zainal 1982:139).

small decked platform at the bow, but with a slightly raised poop deck. Examples vary in length from seventeen to twenty-five metres. As with all craft in the Red Sea, in contrast to other areas of the dhow world, they are brightly painted in primary colours. This appears to be the only form of decoration.¹ All Sudanese sanbūks are motorised but travel with a stepped mast and a settee sail (that is triangular with the leading edge cut perpendicular to the foot) stowed for emergency use.

A description of the construction of the sanbūk is given in Appendix I. However, it is important to note here that the method of building cannot be properly defined as either shell (that is, making a shell of planking and then inserting frames) or skeleton (that is, erecting a series of frames and then attaching the planking) construction: the two methods generally thought of as the two fundamental techniques of boatbuilding (Hassloef 1972). Rather, sanbūk, and indeed all dhow construction is a combination of both methods: briefly, the keel is laid, then planking joined up to the point where the curve of the hull starts to turn more pronouncedly upwards. Then the main frames are erected, and planking-up continues, but now working from the sheer (top) strake downwards. Once planking-up is completed, further frames are inserted.

This method of building is also employed in the construction of all the smaller types of planked boat in Suakin, save one. Unlike the dhow, which is primarily a trading and shell collecting vessel, these

¹Hornell (1942:19-20) notes that these boats may have an oculus on the bow: I did not find such a device on any of the boats in the area.

smaller boats are predominantly fishing boats. Roden (1970:20) refers to the fishing boats of the town as "a small sambuk". Crossland (1913:59) describes it as a gatīra, a term I understand to be Egyptian and not in use in Suakin today. Reed (1962a:4) adds a further term, naming the fishing boats of Port Sudan "fellūkas".

If craft are to be classified following Hornell's (1942) scheme, that is according to stern shape, then five types of small planked boat can be distinguished.

"Hūrī" is frequently used as a general term to mean a small boat, but is also applied to a specific type:

Hori is the Arabic rendering of hodi, the term applied on the Bombay coast to narrow double-ended plank built boats of canoe shape.

(Hornell 1942:30)

This is a fair description of the Sudanese hūrī, from five to eleven metres in length (see Plate 1). It is not strictly "double-ended" in the sense that either end may be used as a bow, although this term is sometimes imprecisely used to denote a pointed stern. It resembles a small zarūk, being open waisted and with no raised poop deck. It has the characteristically sharp junction of the lower and upper stempost of the Sudanese sanbūk, but the stemhead is cut off, roughly on a line parallel to the keel, making it clearly distinguishable. It is propelled by a settee sail or an outboard engine affixed to a board over the side of the stern, or both.

The fallūka is similar to the hūrī, the main difference being that the stern ends in a tucked transom (see Plate 3). It bears no relation to the lateen-rigged "feluccas" of the Lower Nile. Builders maintain that this type of craft is easier to construct than the hūrī (possibly because the upper planking requires less bending). Because of this and because the design will take an outboard engine

without modification, the majority of boats under construction during my fieldwork period were of this type. I was led to believe that this design was a fairly recent importation from Egypt. However, Moore (1920:76) describes a felouka as a Port Sudan craft. Unfortunately he gives no description. The word fallūka possibly derives from fulk, a general Koranic term for ship (Hourani 1951:89).

The term "lansh" (an Arabisation of the English "launch" or Portuguese "lança") covers two types of craft: one pointed sterned, the other transom-sterned (see Plates 2 and 3). The pointed sterned lansh differs from the hūri and the transom-sterned lansh from the fallūka only in having an inboard engine and, consequently, a propellor arch. Lanshs are generally around eleven metres in length, and carry a settee sail, for emergency use or additional speed. Donaldson (1979:80) describes craft in Oman with inboard engines of approximately the same design as the Sudanese hūri-type lansh as hūris, although he also notes the existence of a craft known as a lansh.

The lansh, fallūka and hūri, as one might expect, are all built in the same fashion with minor variations, an abbreviated version of dhow construction. Further details are given in Appendix I. Although these boats differ from the sanbūk in form, they can be distinguished from dhows in general only by size: they also display the characteristic keel/garboard joint.

The final type of planked boat does not display this. It is known as the ramas and is about three metres in length with a pointed stern and a flat bottom (although a batten may be nailed on to act as a rudimentary keel). It has no decking whatsoever (see Plate 4). Some ramases are used for fishing, hoisting a settee sail, although some

have their sterns ingeniously adapted to take an outboard motor. Others are employed as dhow tenders and are propelled by paddle. I have come across no references to this type of boat, but have been told that in Northern Yemen ramas refers to a reed boat.¹ Moore (1929:76), on the other hand defines "ramasth" as a raft.

It is highly probable that the ramas has been developed fairly recently (within the last fifteen years?) as a substitute for logboats which have ceased to be imported from India. However, these logboats are still to be found in use, although many are so heavily repaired that there appears to be more plank repair than original log body. As with the ramas, the logboat is used either as a dhow tender or a fishing vessel, being paddled or sailed and a very few being fitted with outboard engines. According to Hornell (1942:30) "hori" is the Red Sea term for a logboat imported from India,² but as we have seen hūri in Suakin refers to a planked boat. The logboat is known amongst the town's fishermen as the hūri luh wāhid ("one board huri", see Plate 2).

Suakin is not the only site of boat building or boat use in Sudan. Dhows and fishing boats of the types described are constructed at Khor Kilab in Port Sudan. Carpenters are located at Anharis and Towartit, two inlets between Port Sudan and Suakin (see Map 4), to make repairs on dhows.

Descriptions of water craft in the interior of Sudan are sketchy. Hornell (1946: Plates VIIA, XXVIIA) shows an ambach reed raft and

¹ Possibly the shasha of Oman.

² "Hori" is Swahili for logboat (Martin and Martin 1972:27).

a square-ended palm logboat both in use in Southern Sudan. Elsewhere he gives more detailed descriptions of the planked boats of Northern Sudan, the "frameless boats of the Middle Nile" (Hornell 1939, 1940). The gharab, markab and naggr are all beamy, square sterned vessels, with a low bcw, massive rudder and curved tiller. Employing the same tools as the dhow builders on the coast, the riverain builders construct craft along very different lines. These Nile boat represent shell construction in its most extreme form: no ribs or frames whatsoever are present, lateral strength is provided by thwarts inserted after the completion of planking-up. The keel is not grooved to take the garboard: the latter is simply butted against the former. The hull is neither painted nor tarred. The mast is stepped vertically amidships, with numerous shrouds. On the gharab and naggr the sail is truly lateen (that is, triangular); on the markab it is long and parallel sided with a boom at the foot:¹ a type of sail found nowhere else but Indonesia (Hornell 1940:136).

Hornell (1946:215) argues that these boats of the Nile are directly comparable to those of Ancient Egypt (in contrast to those of modern Egypt, which are skeleton built). Basing his assertion on the archaeological finds at Dashur, he claims that the only difference between the craft of 4,000 years ago and those of the Northern Sudanese Nile today is the substitution of iron fastenings for trenails.

Thus, even from this brief summary, it becomes clear that neither historically nor currently are there common denominators in the construction, rig and sail of Sudanese Nile and Sudanese Red Sea

¹Termed a rectangular boom lugsail by Doran (1981:40).

craft. Although the boatbuilders of Omdurman (the main centre for Nile boat construction) and Suakin are encompassed within the same political unit, they work within very different traditions. Those of Suakin, in terms of their products, are more culturally akin to the boatbuilders of India, Kuwait and Mombasa than to their riverain countrymen.

It is possible, although unlikely, that at one time the boats of the Red Sea and Ancient Egypt (and consequently the Sudanese Nile) were of similar shell construction. The two areas were not isolated: indeed, as will be detailed in Chapter Two, it was the Ptolomies who founded many Red Sea settlements, including Suakin (Hebbert 1935:308). However, Chapter Two will also reveal that historically Suakin has been subjected to a much greater influence from the Arabian peninsula, through immigration and as a sea-port in a network extending down the Red Sea and across the Indian Ocean, than from Egypt and indeed the interior of Sudan. Yet even if the Nile and Red Sea craft were built within the same tradition, it is almost certain that they would differ in form. Boats are built to fulfill particular functions (such as cargo-carrying), but in a fashion designed to cope with the stresses imposed by water and wind. These stresses are of course variable. Very generally, a riverain craft requires less freeboard and less transverse strength than a sea boat. Large flat-bottomed craft are usually riverain, whereas large sea boats are normally keeled to counteract the changeable current. Therefore, some explanation of the form of craft is to be found in an examination of the environment in which the craft are found.

The Environment

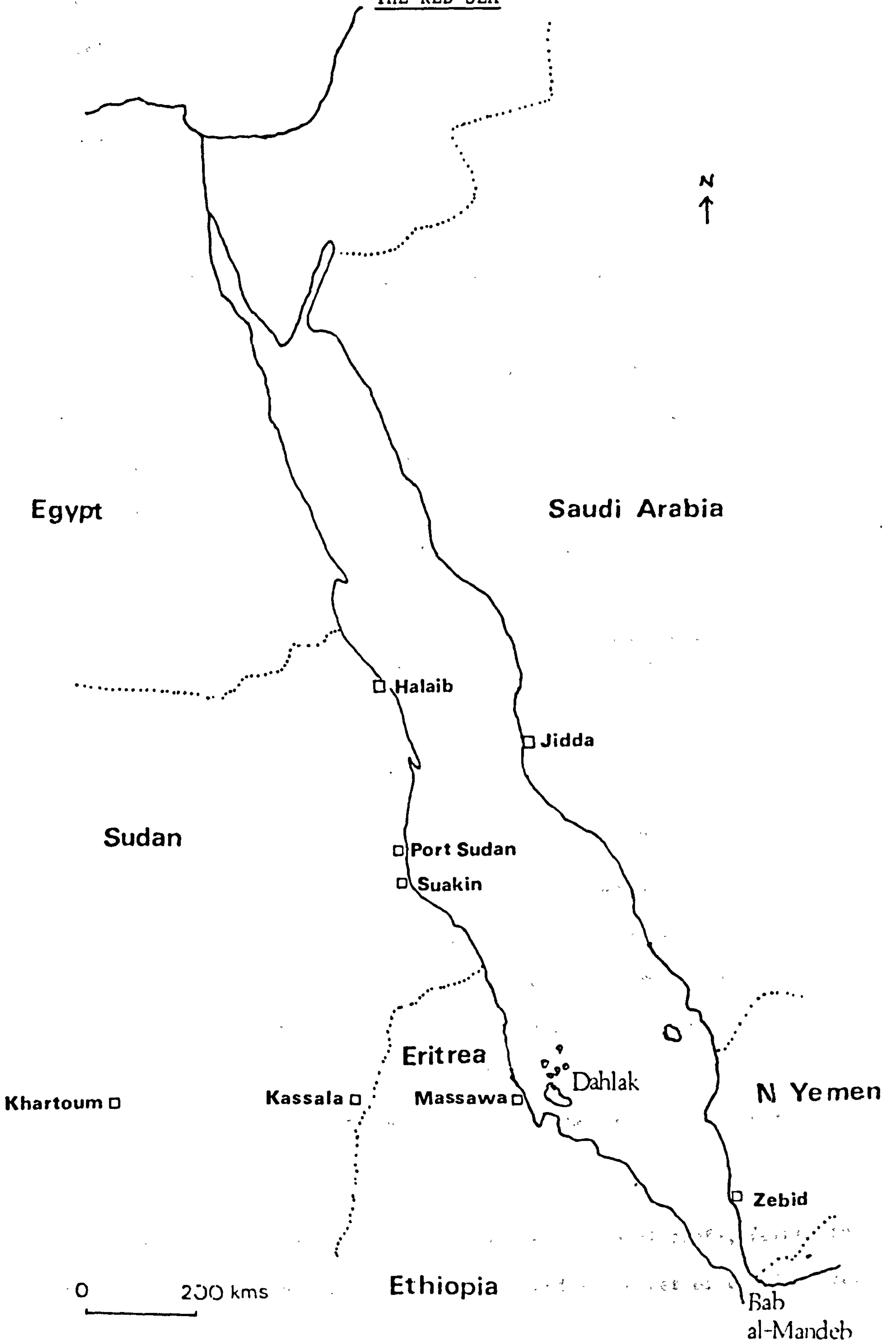
The Climate and Character of the Red Sea

Although recent events have resulted in Sudanese dhows trading exclusively with Jidda, historically they plied the length of the Red Sea (Reed 1962b:6). Separating Africa from the Arabian peninsula by distances of between 210 and 400 kilometres, the Red Sea stretches for a total length of 2,100 kilometres, from Suez to Bab al-Mandeb, giving a coastline to Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia on the western side and Saudi Arabia and Northern Yemen on the eastern (see Map 2). It is part of a large rift valley, which includes the East African Rift Valley, in the continental crust of Africa and Asia (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1974:XV,545). No rivers, only seasonal watercourses in the southern part which drain the mountains flanking the sea, run into it. The currents are directed by the monsoons in the northern part of the Indian Ocean (Ritchie 1967:18). Northeasterly monsoons draw water out; southwesterlies create a west-going current pushing water in. The tide of the Indian Ocean itself, however, does not enter. The major Red Sea tide is oscillatory semi-diurnal - like a swinging balance: when the water is at its height at one end of the sea, it is at its lowest at the other (Ritchie 1967:26). At the most this is a difference of only one metre. In the central region, in the vicinity of Suakin and Jidda, this tide is barely perceptible. Here however Ritchie (1967:25) notes the existence of a small diurnal tide which does not oscillate in the same manner, but no further details are given.

High temperatures in the area obviously result in considerable evaporation, although there is disagreement over the amount. Ritchie

MAP 2

THE RED SEA



(1967:26) states that there is a one-foot difference in the sea's level between winter and summer; the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1974:XV,545) states the difference to be eighty inches. Whatever the figure, this evaporation is largely responsible for the sea's high salinity: forty parts per thousand. The temperature of the water is also increased by the existence, in the deep trough that runs along the middle of the sea (over 2,000 metres directly below the main shipping lane), of pools of brine (with a salinity of 256 parts per thousand) heated by cracks in the sea floor to 60°C. These pools are unstable and much heat is lost to the surrounding water (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1974:XV,545). It is also here that an estimated £ 1,500 million worth of gold, silver, zinc, iron, lead and copper is to be found (Woldegabriel 1980:27-30).

From the beginning of November until March the climate is equable and pleasant, never very hot in the day and always cool at night. The heat is very great during June, July, August and September, the thermometer rising in sandstorm to 115° on board and to several degrees higher in the town (Suakin).

(Ritchie 1967:220)

The heat is accentuated by relative humidities of 40 to 50 per cent (Barbour 1961:228). Sandstorms are common in summer, both on land and up to eighty kilometres out to sea, and sudden squalls can spring up unexpectedly (Ritchie 1967:30-34). However, the summer winds are generally light to moderate northwesterlies. The stronger southwesterlies of winter have a greater effect in curtailing maritime activities. It should be noted that both summer and winter winds blow parallel to the shore.

The coast of the Red Sea is paralleled by coral reefs, formed in two observable strips: the fringing reef and the outer or barrier reef

(see Figure 3). From the shore to the fringing reef is approximately one kilometre, the water's depth being from one-third to one metre. Reed (1964:5) describes this area as the "boat channel". The reef then plunges away to considerable depths. In this "deep channel" there are two rises in the sea bed: the "teena" and "keefa", lying at approximately 150 and 250 metres respectively beneath the surface. The outer reef is located between five and ten kilometres offshore, rising to within one metre of the surface. It then plunges away sharply into the open sea (Reed 1964:5-8).

The fringing reef is not continuous, but has numerous inlets, kept open by the flow of fresh water from seasonal watercourses. The outer reef is much less broken, yet is classified as a Discontinuous Barrier Reef (Reed 1964:6). The reefs, through the action of the coral polyps, are continually growing (Crossland 1913:98). Bab al-Mandeb, for example, is kept open only by continual dredging and blasting.

The sea has numerous islands. The majority are thought to be simply exposed stretches of reef; the major exceptions being those of the Dahlak Archipelago (see Map 1) which are volcanic in origin (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1974:XV,545).

Sudan's Coast and Coastal Waters

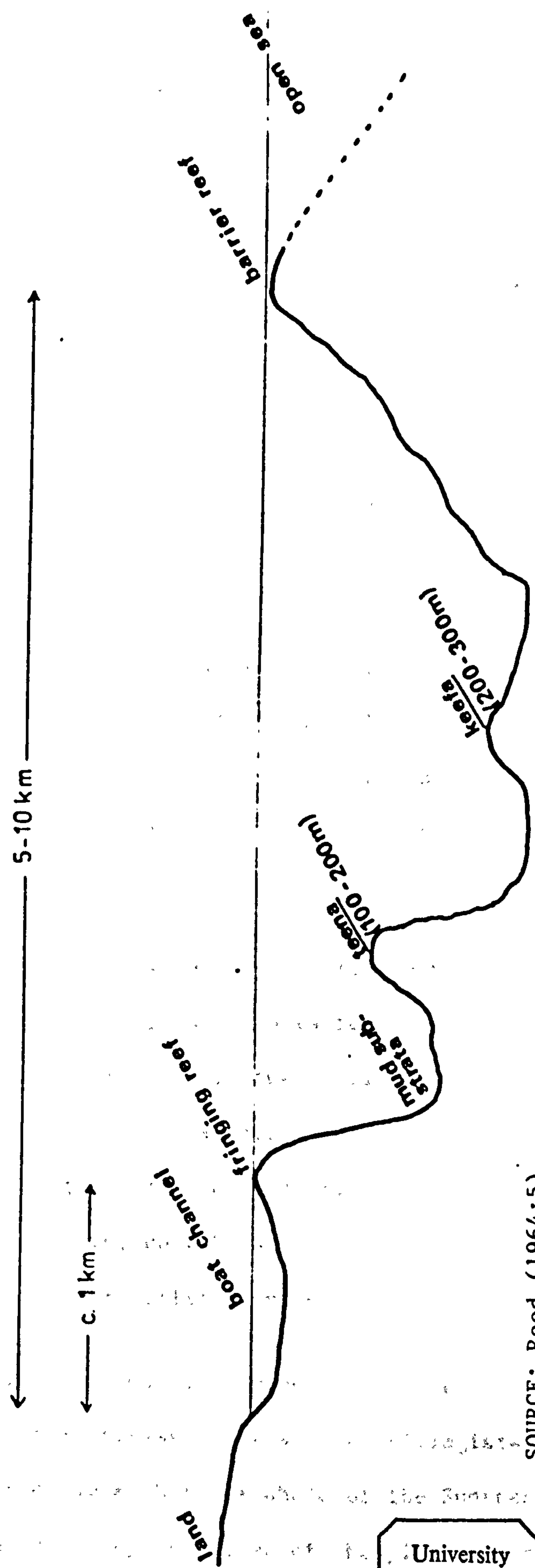
Sudan's share of the Red Sea coastline is approximately 700 kilometres in length, from north of Halaib to Ras Kasr on the Ethiopian border. It is a fairly typical stretch of the sea's coast, with the fringing reef broken in many places by inlets (marsas):

A narrow entrance with a shallow fringing coral reef drops almost vertically to depths of 10 to 12 fathoms. This depth is generally uniform throughout the length of the marsa except in the headwaters where there are shallow mud flats which are formed by the inflow of fresh water during the wet season.

(Reed 1964:5-6)

FIGURE 3

CROSS-SECTION OF FRINGING AND BARRIER REEFS



SOURCE: Reed (1964:5)

There is a large stretch where no fringing reef has been formed at all because of this flow of fresh water: the outlet of the seasonal Baraka watercourse (see Map 3). The marsas thus give access to the deep channel, and several have semi-permanent fishing encampments. Map 3 shows the marsas used in this fashion by the fishermen of Suakin.

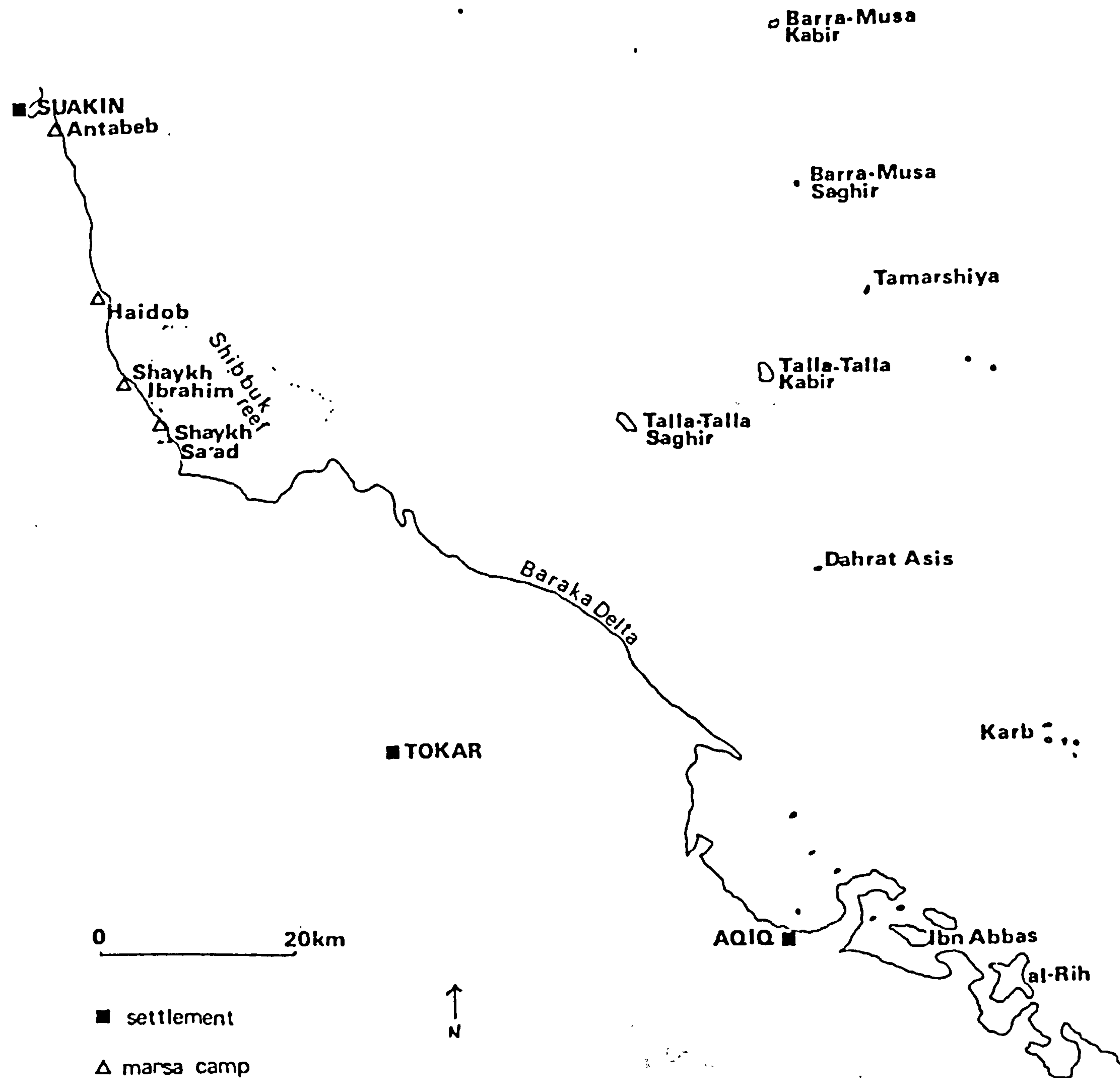
Offshore, there are two groups of islands (see Map 3), one very close to the land in the vicinity of Aqiq and the other, known as the Suakin Archipelago, consisting of numerous small islands between Suakin and Trinkitat. The latter are not exposed parts of the barrier reef, as they are found up to sixty kilometres from land. So far as I am aware no oceanographic study has been made of them and their geological composition is unknown. They may possibly be atolls. All are similar, being sandy and low with lush but stunted vegetation. Only four of Sudan's islands have any record of inhabitation: al-Rih (Hebbert 1935); Ibn Abbas (also known as Badhour (Monfried 1935)), both near Aqiq; the island once known as Suakin and the island close to it, Condenser, or Quarantine Island.

On land a strip of coastal plain stretches out to the Red Sea Hills, which rise to over a thousand metres. This plain varies in width from fifty-five kilometres in the Tokar region to twenty-five kilometres and less north of Port Sudan (see Map 4). Rainfall on the plain is slight, but variable from north to south. North of Port Sudan it is less than fifty millimetres annually; Port Sudan itself and Tokar have between seventy-five and one hundred millimetres annually.

Although, again so far as I am aware, no papers have been written on the subject, it is the impression of several biologists I met during the course of my fieldwork that the whole of the Sudanese coastal plain and hills area is drying out. Some of the plants recorded

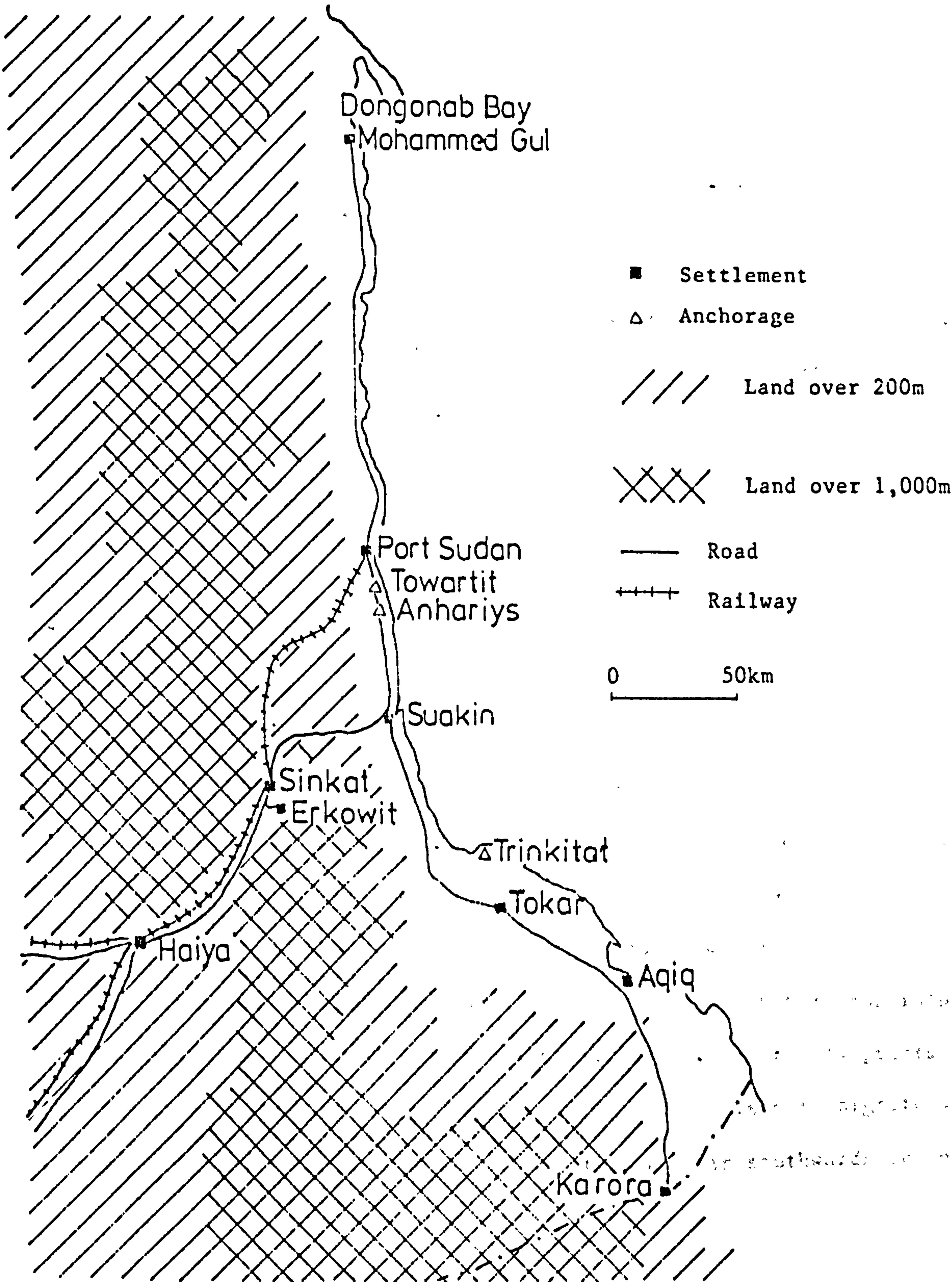
MAP 3

THE MAJOR ISLANDS OF THE SUAKIN ARCHIPELAGO



MAP 4

THE LAND ENVIRONS OF SUAKIN



as existing in Erkowit (see Map 4) in the 1920s were one requiring more water than present rainfall levels provide and have disappeared.

Furthermore, the absence of fringing reef at the Baraka delta must have been caused by a watercourse considerably more forceful than the current one. On the other hand, the former fact could be explained simply as the result of periodic droughts, particularly in the 1940s, 1960s and early 1970s.

Occasional patches of mangrove trees are to be found along the sea shore. The coastal plain itself can be described as semi-desert scrubland. The vegetation, chiefly browse bushes and grasses that spring up after the rains, is extremely scanty in the north, becoming slightly lusher further south. The flood area of the Baraka is undoubtedly the plain's more fertile region. It is moderately rich in small trees, and cotton, sorghum and vegetables are grown. Elsewhere horticulture is more precarious and one finds only rare and small cultivated plots. These generally rely on rainfall, although some are hand-watered. This latter method, employing well-drawn water, enables a greater variety of produce to be grown, but naturally restricts to a greater extent than with rain-fed and flood water cultivation, the size of the area under cultivation. Indeed, horticulture plays a relatively minor role in the exploitation of the plain north of the Baraka. Pastoralism is the major economic activity outside the urban centres. Goats and sheep are the principal animals herded, although sizable numbers of camels and cattle are also kept. The chief sources of water for these are hafirs, man-made reservoirs that retain the rainfall. As these invariably dry up before the rains come again and the grazing in the vicinity of the hafirs disappears even more quickly, it is necessary for the pastoralists to migrate with their herds. The basic pattern of this migration is southwards in the

late summer to catch the early rains, then following the rains as they move northwards.

Boats and the Environment

Without wishing to embark upon a major discussion on naval architecture, this brief examination of the environment in which the boats are used leads to a fuller appreciation of the boatbuilder's skill in responding to the demands of the environment. With such depths as are found in the open sea and deep channel it is essential that any vessel venturing into these areas must be keeled in order to counteract the pull of the current. On the other hand, the vessels must be of sufficiently shallow draught to make use of the marsas, the natural harbours. The boats must also be of considerable strength to stand up to the pounding of short, choppy waves created by the tide and current rebounding off the reefs and the inevitable knocks from the reefs themselves. With the winds blowing parallel to the shore, a reasonably manoeuvrable and efficient sail type must be employed. The settee rig is excellent in this respect. With few shrouds and stays, the yard can be swiftly hauled from one side of the mast to the other, even set athwartships to act in almost the same way as a square sail. The very existence of the dhow today alongside ships and boats of steel and other modern industrial processes is testimony in itself to the sophistication of its design. Interestingly, the part of these vessels which appears to be most frequently damaged is the most recently adopted feature: the propellor arch.

The land environment is not directly relevant to boat design. However, it does supply some of the materials from which the boats are made. Frames are adzed from branches of sunt (Acacia nilotica) obtained from the Tokar region. This wood, although incidentally adequate for

Nile boat planking, is too brittle for planking sea boats. Therefore, as no suitable alternative is available locally, wood for planking must be imported.

Finally, at the point where land and sea environment meet, an interesting contrast can be made between the boatbuilding sites of the Nile and those of the Red Sea. The construction of the Nile boats commences as soon as the river has fallen sufficiently to lay bare a suitable stretch of foreshore (Hornell 1939:418-19). The advantage of this is that the rising river can be utilised to float the craft off its stocks, but obviously also means that construction must be completed before the river floods. Thus there is a definite boatbuilding season. On the Red Sea however there is no phenomenon equivalent to the rising and falling river, and boats are constructed on a permanently dry stretch of shore, and boatbuilding is a perennial activity.

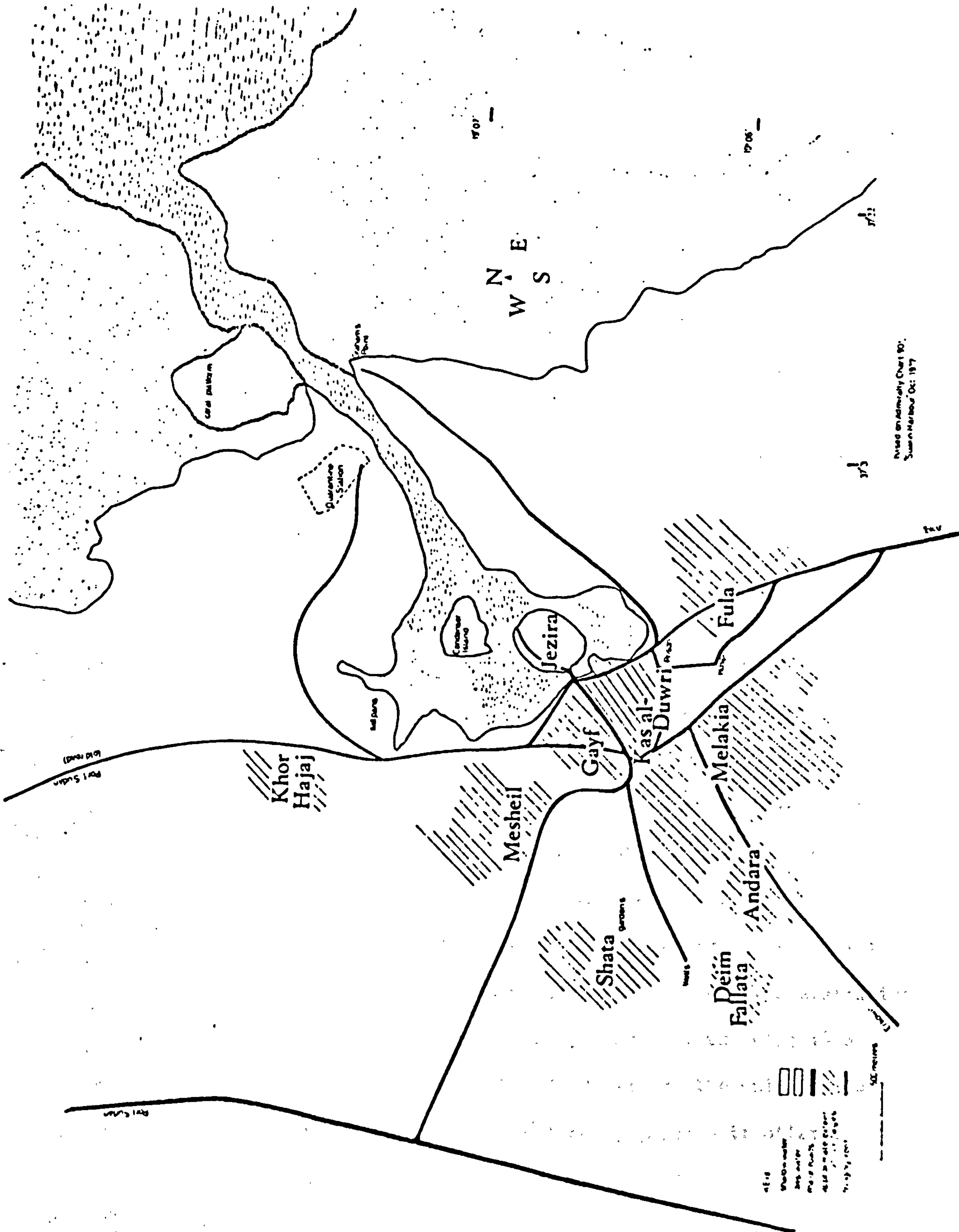
The Aspect of Suakin

The Approaches

The boatyard is located at what may be described as a creek or large marsa and is almost semi-circled by the town of Suakin, which lies at 19° 07' N, 37° 20' E. A deep channel runs from a break in the fringing reef and twists inland southeastwards for approximately five kilometres. In the headwaters are two islands, each separated from the shore by about a hundred metres of shallow water (see Maps 5 and 6).

A naval observation tower stands at the southern tip of the entrance to the creek. Behind it is an uninhabited region known as Jeriyim, derived from the British name for the tip: Graham's point.

MAP 5
SKETCHMAP OF SUAKIN



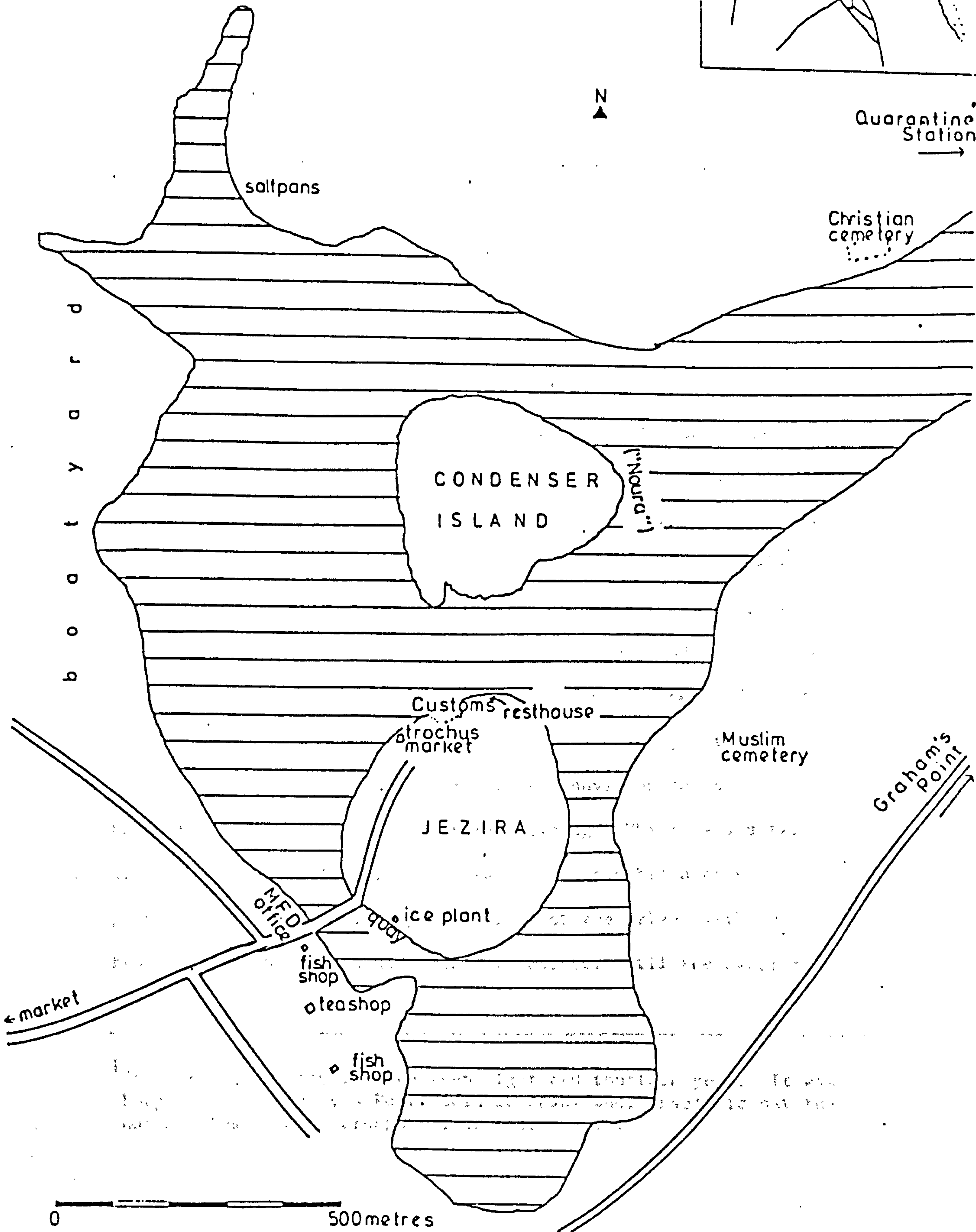
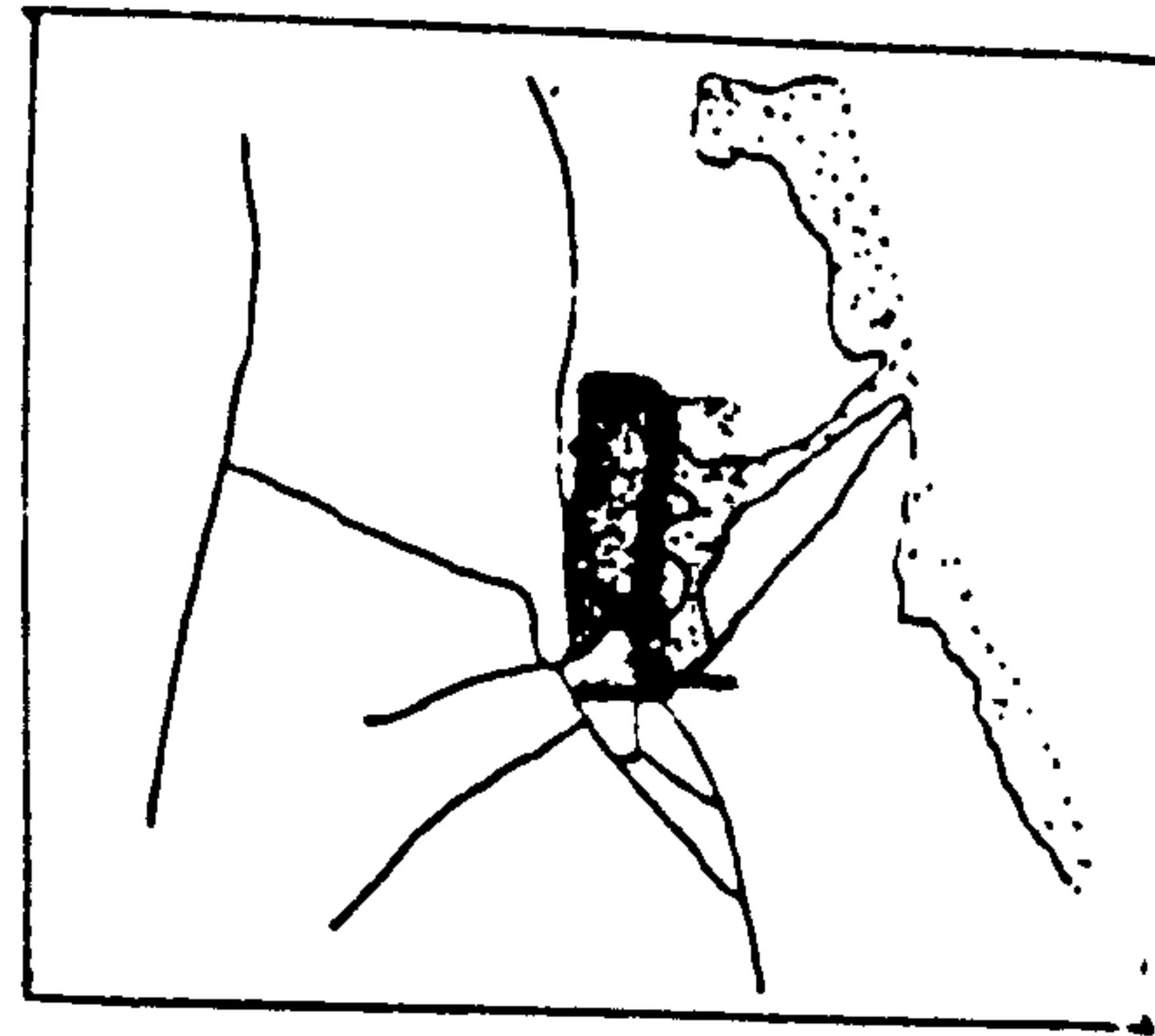
Based on Admiralty Chart 101.
Suakin Harbour Oct. 1917

In Jeriyim, there is evidence of a vanished railway station: a water tower stands and, although rusty and leaking, is still in occasional use, supplying the University of Khartoum's marine biological laboratory; and the platforms are still discernable. Beyond lie a large Muslim cemetery, lime kilns belonging to the town's prison, an old cotton ginnery and the prison itself. Opposite the naval tower on the northern bank a large complex of buildings is to be found: the Quarantine Station, once used to regulate the flow of pilgrims to Mecca. Now abandoned, its only visitors are occasional picnickers. A little further down the bank is a disused Christian cemetery, its reinforced concrete crosses and winged angels weathered and crumbled. Farther along are salt pans, again the property of the prison. At the head of the creek lies the boatyard, an area known as Shellak ("shore"), sweeping round almost to the causeway that links the southernmost island, known simply as Jezira, "island", with the mainland (see Map 6).

The Islands

A large part of the causeway that linked the other, the northern, island with the mainland has been washed away, but it is within easy wading distance of the shore. Perhaps because of this it is no longer recognised as an island and has no name. During the latter years of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth, it was known to the British as Condenser or Quarantine Island. A few piles of bricks, a couple of ruined piers and a cannon's muzzle standing in the sand indicate that the island was at one time in use: in fact it bore a hospital, a condenser plant and several administrative buildings (Admiralty Chart 90, 1977). Today, the only building is a faki's tomb and even on this the roof has collapsed. The only visitors to the island are camels in search of the scant grazing it offers.

MAP 6
THE HEADWATERS OF
THE SUAKIN CREEK



However, three quaystones are still in use, securing a small rusting coaster, "Noura", which has been there long enough for no-one to be quite sure when it arrived.¹

Approaching Suakin from land or sea, it is the buildings of Jezira that dominate the town. Yet even from a considerable distance no-one could be deceived, as they could be in 1967 (Roden 1970:17), into thinking that these buildings are intact. The immediate impression is of a bomb-site. Jezira is an island of densely packed houses, offices and shops, dating back to the latter years of the nineteenth century or earlier, some reaching four storeys, all constructed from blocks of coral bleached white by the sun, sometimes ornately carved, all deserted, all in ruins. Architecturally similar buildings may still exist in Jidda, Massawa and Hodeida. Those of Suakin are unique in Sudan. The streets of the island are obscured by the debris of collapsed floors, roofs and walls. Some buildings are now shells; some merely a wall or two; others are entirely rubble. The sole 'survivor', the only completely intact structure, is the government rest-house. The government has undertaken some restoration work: most noticeably the near-complete rebuilding of the island's gatehouse (Gordon's Gate). However, the majority of the ruins are privately owned and therefore renovation has by necessity been restricted to public buildings. The island's two mosques are currently being restored. Various schemes have been proposed, such as rebuilding a quarter of the island with one house from each of the town's historic periods, but until the ownership

¹ Estimates generally vary between eight and fourteen years. It was bought as a wreck by a Port Sudan merchant who, unable to pay the harbour fees there, brought it down to Suakin.

problem is resolved, little can be done.¹

Yet Jezira is not uninhabited: Gordon's Gate houses the island's gaffīr and nestling here and there amid the ruins are some fifteen occupied wooden houses (sandagas). It is also of some economic consequence. Returning dhows veer to the northern side of the island, towards the customs shed - dilapidated but still in use - and, for those dhows engaged in shell collection, the open stretch of ground that serves as a market (see Map 6). Here the shells are unloaded to await the auctions that are held on Sunday mornings during the season. Fishing vessels generally turn to the southern side, towards the ice factory and quay - new structures of breeze block and concrete - of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources' Marine Fisheries Division (MFD) and the town's fish shops on the mainland, two of which are shown on Map 6.

The interior of the island is economically exploited only by one old man who grazes a small herd of camels on the grasses and shrubs that grow amidst the rubble, but it is used as an amenity particularly by residents of Port Sudan. The recent construction of asphalt roads linking the two towns has resulted in Jezira becoming a popular picnic spot on Fridays. It is only an hour's drive from the larger port and its ruins provide shade - something that can be found nowhere else on Sudan's accessible coastline.

The Mainland Settlements

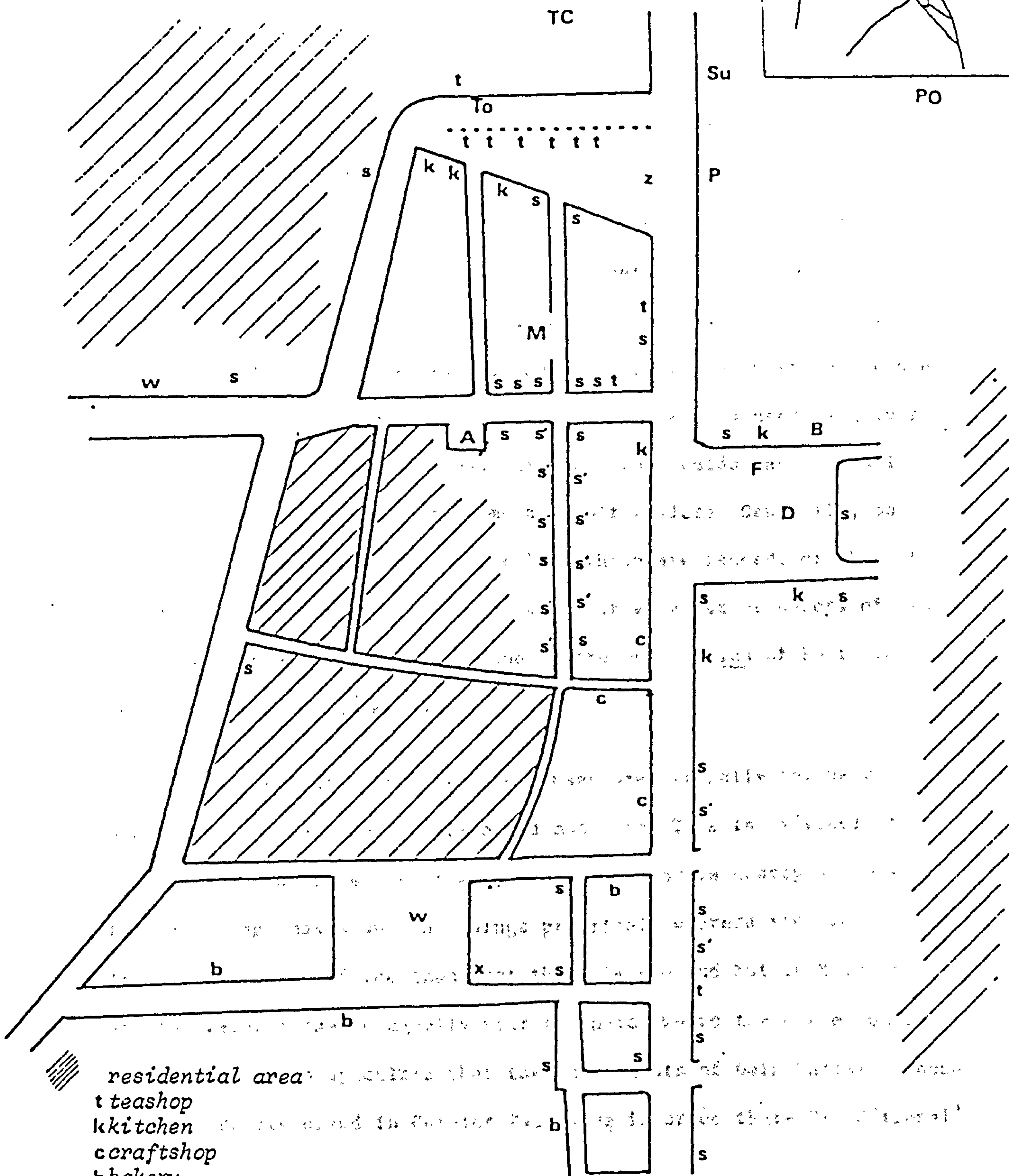
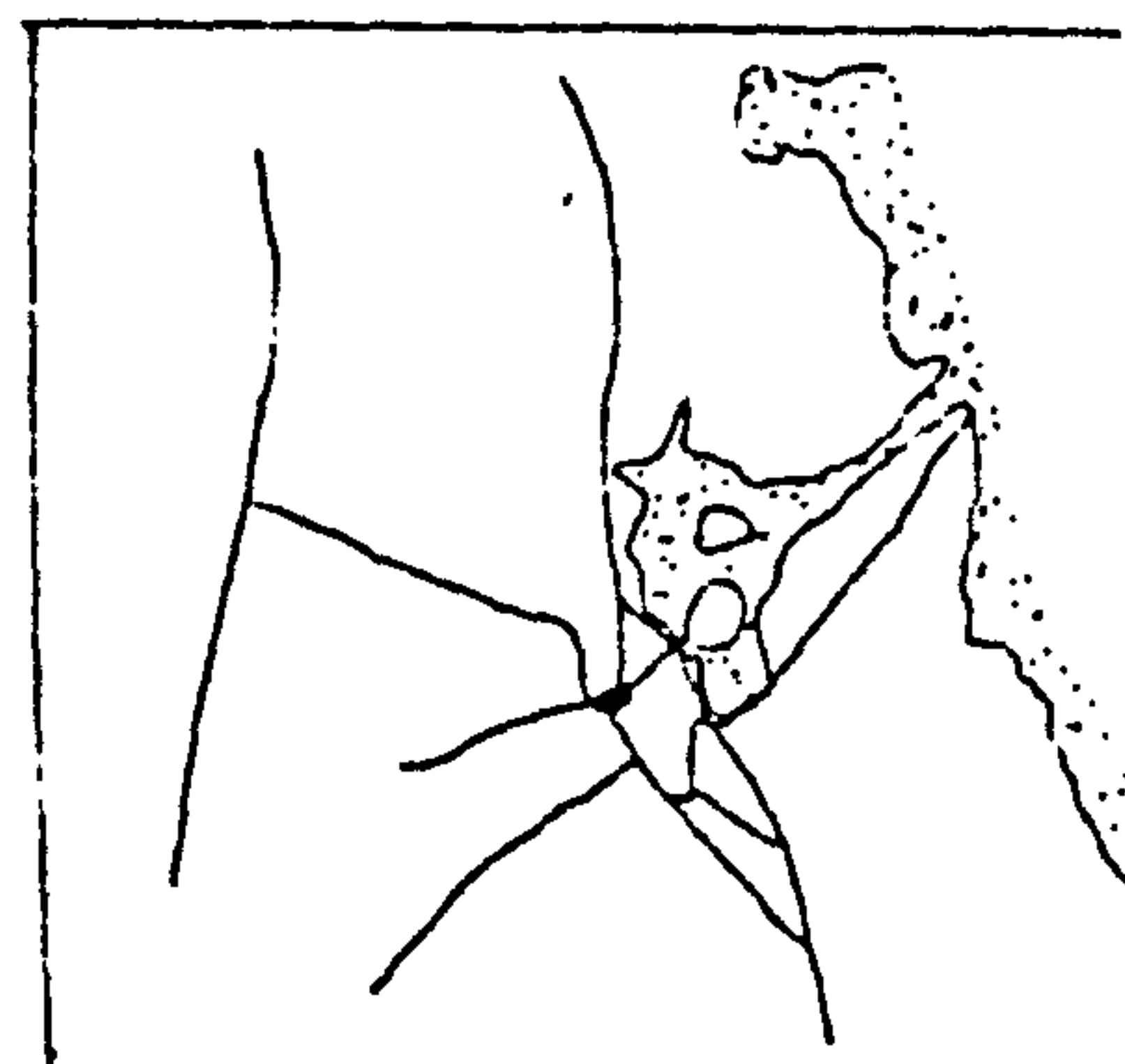
Crossing the causeway from Jezira onto the mainland, the road

¹ The authorities are reluctant to opt for the most pragmatic solution, nationalisation, as they fear this would jeopardise the chances of a UNESCO grant for restoration.

curves gently up towards the market. En route the road and the streets to the side are flanked by single storied coral buildings, crumbling and seemingly used only as storehouses. The market area itself, the general layout of which is shown in Map 7, is a mixture of dilapidated and repaired coral buildings, interspersed with ruins and, where the ruins have been cleared, wooden shops. The offices of the Town Council, Police and Post Office are of breeze block construction. Shata Gate (or Kitchener's Gate, or the Gateway to the Eastern Sudan, the old entrance to the town) stands on the opposite side of the road to the Town Council and a little further east. To the north of it, semi-circling round almost to the boatyard (encompassing al-Gayf, shown on Map 5), are the remains of a defensive wall. To the south it has disappeared amid new housing. Some distance away two forts can be seen, neither now more than shells. Historical military involvement with the town is further evidenced by the cannons and mortars that adorn almost every public building.

The road leading from Jezira to the market forms an administrative division: the settlement to the north is al-Gayf ("the bank"); on the south is Kas al-Duwri (or Kas al-Duwr - "cup of the half". In Sudanese football a cup is awarded to the best team in each half. This area is said to be named after its one-time successful football team). As Map 5 shows, other settlements semi-circle this area: Khor Hajaj ("pilgrims watercourse"), Mesheil ("flat"?), Shata (named after a West African settler, the location of the town's wells), Deim Fallata (or Deim Takarīn, the Fallata or Takari quarter), Andara ("circle"), Melakia ("slave area") and al-Fula ("the waterhole"). Each of these settlements is referred to as a hayy, which to avoid possible confusion at a later stage I will translate as "village".

SKETCHMAP OF
SUAKIN'S MARKET AREA



residential area

t teashop

kkitchen

ccraftshop

bbakery

wlaundry

s general store

s general store

with tailor

x tailor

B butchers

z garage

TC Town Council

Su embarkation point for Port Sudan

To " " " Tokar

P Police

PO Post Office

F Fruit & vegetable market

A animal market

D driftwood market

Housing

In both al-Gayf and Kas al-Duwri there are some coral buildings intact and inhabited, but with only one exception (and the General Secondary School) they are small, single-storied dwellings. The predominant form of housing is the single-roomed wooden sandaga, often built of driftwood planks¹ and with the exterior wall surfaces covered with flattened oil cans, an attempt to keep out the blowing sands. Floors are generally unconcreted and uncarpeted. Roofs are symmetrically gabled and ridged, and each sandaga has a verandah. It is under this, rather than in the sandaga itself that most people sleep, except in the depths of winter. The sandaga itself is used largely as a store for the family's possessions. Most households have a small outside kitchen and washroom. Some have pit toilets. Generally, one or two sandagas form a compound, all of which are fenced, or about to be fenced, with wooden stakes, planking, dried grass or sheets of tin. This style of housing is also found in the outer deims of Port Sudan (such as Salabona, Suakin and Korea).

In Deim Fallata, however, the houses are typically Northern Sudanese: single-roomed, flat-roofed mud huts. This is difficult to account for. The presence of a seasonal watercourse nearby and a well in the village makes such buildings practical, whereas they would not be in other parts of the town, yet there is one mud hut in Melakia and the watercourse is equally near to Shata; where there are none. It is tempting to speculate that the inhabitants of Deim Fallata, whose origins are discussed in Chapter Two, have imported their "traditional"

¹Flush-laid, like the boats!

building methods into the town, but the inhabitants of Sinkat and Tokar (see Map 4), who belong to the same ethnic entities as the majority of Suakin's inhabitants also build mud huts rather than sandagas.

Most of the government-built houses, for example those that accommodate the prison warders and the police officers, are of breeze block. In Mesheil, Deim Fallata and Melakia there are a few houses of this material belonging to some of the wealthier inhabitants of the town. Some are currently under construction on the western edge of Shata. Although the town is expanding in all directions, it appears to be growing most rapidly in the direction of the junction of the Port Sudan-Haiya highway and the Suakin by-road (see Map 5). Commerce has already arrived: there are a dozen teashops and two general stores at this point.

With the exception of most of the government-built houses, the vast majority of the town's dwellings, regardless of building material, face eastwards. Unlike the tents of the Shukriya in the Butana, for example, they are not positioned thus for religious reasons. Nor is it a protective measure against the winds: these whip through the verandahs at all times of the year and many householders put up screens. However, thus positioned, the afternoon sun is directly behind the dwelling, making the verandah the coolest area and the ideal spot for afternoon rest. Interestingly, the sandagas of Port Sudan are not arranged in this fashion.

Clues to the Past and Present

This sketch of the town's appearance will be enlarged upon in

Chapter Four, but even from this brief description several enigmas emerge. The present-day town - a collection of shanty villages - appears to have been built amidst the ruins of an earlier, more opulent settlement, of sufficient importance to justify military defences and of sufficient grandeur to warrant restoration plans. This settlement was furthermore architecturally similar to other coastal towns of the Red Sea, not to the interior of Sudan. However, the extent of the coral buildings and the location of the defensive wall (which encircled what is now the two villages of al-Gayf and Kas al-Duwri) suggests that the Suakin of today is considerably larger than the old town, which may indicate that the present is not simply a remnant of the past, but in fact a new town.

During this transition, Suakin in some respects 'dis-developed': it lost its railway station, its ginnery, its pilgrim traffic and, judging by the rows of derelict premises, many businesses. Yet, as Map 7 shows, the present market area is densely packed with shops; new roads have given the town better communications with the rest of Sudan; dhows bring in goods from abroad and numerous other enterprises appear to prosper.

Of all the artifacts produced by the town's enterprises, the most sophisticated are undoubtedly the boats. As has been shown, these are built in the manner of the dhow world, not of the interior of Sudan. The old coral buildings and the predominant style of housing today, the sandaga, are both forms of architecture not found in the interior of the country (the availability of materials being, of course, one of the reasons for this). Can it be concluded therefore that the present-day Suakin continues an historic pattern of material culture that is more akin to other parts of the Arab world than to the interior

of Sudan? Or do the mud huts of Deim Fallata indicate the reverse? Later chapters will attempt to examine these questions. However, the immediate concern is to explain the appearance of present-day Suakin, to account for its ruins, defences, 'dis-development' and current economic situation by examining its history and the history of its present inhabitants, from the ranks of which the fishermen are drawn.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORY OF SUAKIN AND ITS INHABITANTS

Early Inhabitants, Early Ports

Both the Red Sea Hills and the coastal plain are occupied chiefly, although sparsely, by the Beja, a people who migrated from Arabia at an unknown but very early date (Paul 1954:20). They are

... the Bugiha of Leo Africanus, the Bugiens of seventeenth century cartographers, the Blemmyes of Roman times, the Bugas of the Axumite inscriptions (and) quite possibly also the Buka of the Egyptian hieroglyphics... who for the forty centuries of their known history have watched civilisations flourish and decay and, themselves almost unchanging, have survived them all.

(Paul 1954:1)

The Beja are predominantly pastoralists and hunters and are divided into three main sections: the Hadendowa, who are largely found to the southwest of Suakin towards Kassala; the Amrar, who occupy the hills behind the town; and the Bisharin, who inhabit the area to the north of Port Sudan. Racially, the Beni Amer, who occupy the coastal plain south of Tokar are considered to be a fourth major section (for example by Paul 1954), but as will be shown in Chapter Four, they are culturally distinctive from the other three sections. All four are represented in Suakin today, although there are very few Bisharin.

In addition to these major sections, the Beja also incorporate numerous smaller groups of people, descended from much later immigrants from the Arabian peninsula. In 833 AD Muhammad Gamal al-Din arrived in Suakin from Hadramaut in Yemen and became the ancestor from whom all Arteiga claim descent (Paul 1954:140). In 1010 the Shadhaliab arrived; in 1212 the Hassenab from Yemen; in 1457, the Ashraf from Mecca (Bloss 1936:280). These people, together with the Kimmeilab, the Nurab (originally a section of the Amarar) and the Shaiab (now a branch of the Arteiga) are known collectively to both Beja and non-Beja as the gabail ukhra - "other tribes" - and are found on the coastal plain between Port Sudan and Tokar.

By the time the Ashraf arrived, Suakin had become the chief port of the area but earlier it had been overshadowed by others, now vanished. As noted in Chapter One, it was the Ptolemies who initiated ports on the Red Sea. They established settlements on the coast and islands, not for trade but as bases for launching hunting expeditions into the interior. Suakin was one such settlement. Its ancient name has never been definitively identified: the Sudan Survey maps have it as Enaggelon Portus. However, the most important of these bases was at or near the present port of Aqiq (see Map 3), Ptolemais Thērōn, "Ptolemais of the Huntings" named after Ptolemy II Philadelphos, 282 - 247 BC (Huntingford 1980:20,166). The hunting expeditions appear to have been organised principally to capture elephants for the army of Ptolemy, an idea derived from the Indians' struggles against Alexander. Unfortunately, African elephants proved to be entirely unsuitable for warfare and the enterprise collapsed (Hebbert 1935:308).

It was not until the Arab conquests of the seventh century that

commerce arose on any scale in the Red Sea. The Arabs developed the port of Bādī' on the island of al-Rih (Hebbert 1935). Although close to Ptolemais, as can be seen from Map 3, its advantages were in being slightly closer to Arabia and, more importantly, as an island, offering better protection to its inhabitants. Little is known of its history: it was flourishing in 650 and in ruins by 1170. Hasan (1971:66) suggests that it declined, despite the above-mentioned advantages, primarily because of its location. It was orientated more towards Abyssinia, which was better served by the ports of the Dahlak, than towards the Sudanese kingdoms of al-Muqurra and 'Alwa. Trade was localised and Bādī' in its isolation could not establish itself within the expanding international trade network.

The story of 'Aydhab is better known, of greater importance and much more dramatic. Lying near to the present-day anchorage of Halaib (see Map 2), 'Aydhab was close to the gold mines of the Red Sea Hills (which had been worked since Ptolemaic times), close to Mecca and Jidda and only fifteen days by camel caravan from the Nile at Aswan (Hasan 1971:69). The Crusades (666 - 1268) rendered the overland pilgrimage route to Mecca impossible, and 'Aydhab arose as the major port for pilgrims from Egypt and the west. From this beginning it grew to become by the twelfth century one of the busiest ports in the Muslim world:

Seven centuries or so ago it could be said of Aidhab as of Venice, 'Once she did hold the gorgeous East in fee'... here was the desert terminus of the Indian, Arabian and Chinese trade routes to the West where ships from Ceylon, Burma and beyond discharged their cargoes of silks and celadon besides cinnamon, cloves, ginger, pepper and other spices and loaded in exchange the glassware of Alexandria, dates, cotton and sugar, as well as sea products such as tortoise-shell, sharks fins, mother-of-pearl and the edible sea slugs for which the Red Sea is famous.

(Paul 1955:64)

The port, if not all of the inhabitants, survived a sacking by the crusader Renauld de Chatillion, Lord of Kerak, in 1183. Its decline began two centuries later, when the gold and emerald mines became exhausted, when, as a result of successive years of drought and famine, the whole of Upper Egypt was plunged into a severe economic depression, and when Jidda was rising to become the principal port for eastern goods. Hasan (1971:67) suggests that it was out of desperation that in 1426 the inhabitants plundered a caravan of goods destined for Mecca. Retaliation by the Mamluk Sultan Barsbāy was harsh:

There were in one day slaine of them aboue fower thousand and a thousand were carried captive to Suachin who were massacred by the women and children of the citie.

(Leo Africanus III, 837)

Understandably, 'Aydhāb never recovered.

Suakin from 750 to mid-nineteenth century

The Rise of Suakin

Bloss (1936:272-73) relates the legend that the king of Abyssinia once sent to the king of Egypt (or perhaps it was King Choroos of Persia (Jackson 1926:55) or even Selim I of Turkey (Hebbert 1938:343)) the gift of seven beautiful virgins. En route, they spent one night on an island at the head of a creek near the sea. On arrival in Egypt (or wherever) they were all found to be pregnant. Pressed for an explanation, the seven answered that whilst upon the island each had been visited by a jinn. Believing them, the king sent them back to this island to live. It became known as Suakin, a corruption of sawwa jinn - "the jinn did it" or "the place of the jinn".

Other tales have it that King Solomon used the island as a prison, perhaps for criminals (Bloss 1936:273), perhaps for devils (Hasan 1971:83). Thus the name is derived from the Arabic for prison, sijn, or rather "the fanciful plural swajin" (Hasan 1971:83). A less fanciful hypothesis is that the name is derived from the Tu-Bedawie - the language of the Beja - word for market in the everyday locative case, iSo-okim (Hasan 1971:83).¹

Legends aside, Suakin appears to have become known by that name between 750 and 950 AD. The prosperity of 'Aydhab indirectly aided the development of the town: it was a Beja, as opposed to an Arab, port, where goods could be loaded and discharged without paying the heavy duties levied at 'Aydhab. However, there is no record of Renauld de Chatillion's expedition sacking the town "which they most certainly would have done if it had been of any importance at this time" (Bloss 1936:281).² Nevertheless, as 'Aydhab declined, so Suakin, seemingly unaffected by the economy of Upper Egypt, grew. Indeed, several years before the caravan incident the Indian trade had been diverted to the new port (Paul 1955:70). Once 'Aydhab was destroyed, Suakin, under Mamluk control, took over its functions, becoming the most important harbour on the western shore of the Red Sea, rivalled only by Massawa. The Fung Kingdom based at Sennar had brief control over the town, but did not install a governor. When the Turks captured Egypt in 1516, expeditions were sent southwards to recapture the old

¹ Indeed, the Beja refer to Suakin specifically as iSo-okim. Anyone who has spent a summer in the town however may be inclined to favour the explanation offered by Haidan Aga, that the name is derived from sawwa gehennum - "like hell" (Coombes 1846:336).

² Newbold (1945:222), on the other hand, thinks it likely that they did.

Mamluk possessions - Suakin, Massawa and Jidda. Thus although the Fung Kingdom was to last a further two centuries they thereby lost whatever tenuous control they had over the town (Bloss 1936:287). One Fung relic is still to be seen however: a hafir behind al-Fula.

Prosperity and Stagnation

Despite the Portuguese discovery of the Cape route to India in the sixteenth century, which diverted a substantial amount of the Eastern trade with Europe away from the ports of the Red Sea, Suakin appears to have prospered during the early years of Turkish rule. In 1523 the explorer David Reubeni left the town for Sennar in a caravan of 3,000 camels (Bloss 1936:288). The Scottish explorer James Bruce described Massawa as a more important harbour at the time of the Turkish invasion but notes that it later declined through Portuguese-Turkish rivalry (Bruce III,202). Suakin had the advantage over Massawa in being a Muslim (as opposed to a Christian) port and in being closer to Jidda and Mecca, thus combining the roles of trading and pilgrim port.

A description of Suakin in 1540 is given by Don Juan de Castro, a Portuguese captain ¹ in a fleet of galleys under Don Stephano de Gama en route to burn Turkish galleys at Suez:

Swaken is one of the richest cities of the East... It equals if not exceeds the most eminent places in goodness and security of port. (...)... it is able to contain 200 ships and galleys without number! (...) The ships come up close to the shore, quite round the city and may be laden by laying a plank from them to the merchants' warehouses; to the doors of which the galleys are fastened with their beaks

¹ Later Governor and Viceroy of India.

stretching over the streets which serve as bridges
 ... it trades with both peninsulas of the Indies,
 particularly Kambaya, Tamasarin, Pegu and Malaka,
 with the Arabian Gulph to Juddah, Kairo, Alexandria;
 besides what it carries on with Ethiopia and the
 land of the Abeshins, from whence it hath vast
 quantities of Gold and Ivory... (...)... all the
 island is a city and all the City an Island. This
 is Swaken.

(Kennedy-Cooke 1933:152-53)

Unfortunately, no account is given of how the Portuguese gained access to the town. However, one point should be noted: in this account, and incidentally in the tales which account for the origin of the name, "Suakin" (or a variant spelling of this) refers to the island, which is now Jezira, and to the island alone.

Later in the same century the Arteiga gained predominance in the town, acquiring the alternative name "Hadharebe" about the same time (Paul 1954:140).

Indian goods were exchanged in Suakin and Massawa for a wide range of natural products: pearls from the sea, gold, tortoise shell, rhinoceros horn, elephant's teeth, gum Arabic, cassia, myrrh, frankincense and other commodities from the interior (Bruce III, 246-50). However, during the seventeenth century the trade ceased and consequently revenue was lost to the Turks through their own mal-administration. Bruce accuses them of extortion, cruelty and the direct seizure of cargoes. Not only did the Indian trade vanish but apparently also the fishing industry:

The Aga at Suakem endeavoured in vain to make the Arabs and the people near him work without salary and they abandoned an employment which produced nothing but punishment and they in time grew ignorant of the fishery in which they had once been so well skilled... This great nursery of fishermen was therefore lost.

(Bruce III, 250)

Despite the gradual recession of the Turkish empire and the re-emergence of Egypt as an international power, the Turks maintained control over Suakin until the mid-nineteenth century, but as with all their Red Sea possessions with no improvement in its fortunes. Lord Valentia visited the port briefly in 1805 and poignantly portrays its decline:

The town is nearly in ruins... it covers the whole of a small island as it did in the days of Da Castro but the extensive trade which according to his account rendered it superior to every city he had seen except Lisbon has nearly vanished and instead of numerous ships unloading their cargoes on every side of the island I could only perceive a few miserable dhows anchored alongside a few wretched houses. (...) Since the Turks have ceased to have a fleet and have sunk into political insignificance in Arabia, Suakin has been kept from total ruin only by the caravans which still come annually from the interior of Africa by Sennar to that place on their way to Mecca... I learnt... that nothing was brought from the interior... to this place except slaves, gold and ivory in which articles however a considerable trade was carried on.

(Valentia d.n.k.:274-300)

Bloss (1936:298) estimates that between two and three thousand slaves were exported to Jidda annually. The explorer Burckhardt visited in 1814 and portrays the town as gloomily as Valentia. He also adds tobacco and ostrich feathers to the list of exports (Burckhardt 1822:398-404).

Burckhardt is one of the earliest writers to mention a settlement on the mainland, "which is rapidly increasing in size and population and is now larger than the town itself" (Burckhardt 1822:398). This settlement was known as al-Gayf and was occupied by "(t)he Bedouins who comprise the Hadharebe, Hadendoa etc. etc., including the descendents of the ancient Turks" whilst the inhabitants of the island, largely merchants, were "either Arabs of the opposite coast or Turks

of modern extraction", the total population being approximately 8,000 (Burckhardt 1822:398-404). There is no record of when the mainland settlement was first established. However, as rainfall is low and the island has no independent water supply, and furthermore as the island's population, possibly as early as the time of De Castro's visit, appears to have consisted of a foreign merchant group, it is likely that some form of mainland settlement has been in existence as long as the island has been a port of significance, if only to accommodate men to keep the island supplied with fresh water from nearby wells.

Population Movements

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, leaving behind a small aristocratic remnant, the main body of the Arteiga, for reasons unknown, left Suakin for the Tokar region. There, paying dues to the Benī Amer who had used the land for grazing their cattle, they became the first cultivators in the Baraka delta (Paul 1954:141).

Meanwhile, on the Arabian peninsula, another population movement took place, which was not to affect Suakin significantly for 130 years. Three of the five sections of the Rashaida people - the Barāsa, Baratīkh and Zenaymāt - and their slaves left the Najd in 1846 and crossed the Red Sea into Sudan (MacMichael 1922:345). Again the reasons are unknown. Some Rashaida informants claim that the migration was simply in search for better grazing for their animals. Non-Rashaida informants have suggested religious persecution. The Rashaida, although comparatively devout Muslims, are also quite superstitious and may have fallen foul of the puritanical Wahhabist movement that arose in Najd during that period. Unlike some of the earlier immigrants, the Rashaida

were not absorbed into the Beja, although they were, like the Beja, predominantly a pastoralist people. Initially they established themselves along the coastline from Suakin to Aqiq (Trimingham 1965:222).

The movement of the Rashaida may have been the last large-scale migration across the Red Sea. MacMichael (1922:345-46), however, mentions another "tribe" of comparatively recent immigrants, the Zebaydia, who came from the Hejaz port of Rabigh, near Jidda, and notes their distinctive camel brand, ♀. Today this is the brand of the Barāsa section of the Rashaida, and indeed all Rashaida brands are variations on this pattern. "Zebaydia" is an alternative, and outside Eastern Sudan, better known name for the Rashaida. They themselves do not acknowledge the existence of a separate Zebaydia "tribe" or section. Several non-Rashaida informants suggested to me that the Rashaida are called Zebaydia by some as a subtle form of insult. They claim descent from the Abbasid Caliph Harūn al-Rashīd, hence the name Rashaida. One of the Caliph's most famous wives was Zubayda, from whom is derived the name Zebaydia. Thus in calling them Zebaydia rather than Rashaida their ancestry is being traced back to a female.

MacMichael (1922:346) on the other hand does not present this theory, but states that "Zebaydia" is derived from the Yemeni town of Zebid (see Map 2), from where, he claims, the Zebaydia originally came.

On other matters, MacMichael's study is remarkable in its detail and precision. That he should give two separate accounts of what appear to be the same "tribe" is extraordinary. I consider it most unlikely that he was simply misinformed about the Zebaydia: given the scope of his work, he must have had considerable experience in distinguishing between reliable and unreliable sources. Again, it would seem unlikely that since the time of writing the Zebaydia have been


absorbed into the Rashaïda without a trace, or memory, of their former, separate identity.

An explanation may be that the present-day Rashaïda in Sudan are a mixture of peoples from the Arabian peninsula. One of their sub-sections is the Awāzim, which is the name of a separate "tribe" still found in Saudi Arabia, just to the south of the two Rashaïda sections which did not migrate. According to MacMichael (1922:345) the Zebaydiya were sea-farers and pirates. Therefore it is probable that they were known to the Sudanese before the arrival of the Rashaïda. It is also possible that the Rashaïda crossed the Red Sea in Zebaydiya boats. According to present-day Rashaïda informants, they entered Sudan by Halaïb - an anchorage almost directly opposite Rabigh.¹ The fact that the Barāsa and alleged Zebaydiya camel brands are identical may suggest that at least some Zebaydiya settled in Sudan with the Rashaïda. All these immigrants may have been labelled by the local population as Zebaydiya, a name already familiar to them.

Unfortunately, I have been unable to establish the existence or non-existence of a people known as the Zebaydiya in Saudi Arabia today. There is no mention of them in Oppenheim's (1943) survey of the Hejaz.² A single brief conversation with a Guhayna (which MacMichael states were neighbours of the Zebaydiya) from Jidda revealed that he knew the name Zebaydiya only as an alternative name for the Rashaïda.

About the turn of the century, a migration of people began on

¹ A few kilometres north of Rabigh is a small port called Masturah. In Sudan, near Kassala, there is a Rashaïda village of the same name.

² However, Oppenheim (1943:350) notes the camel brand of the "El Fehjāt" division of El Fukarā, , which is very similar to many of the brands used by the Rashaïda.

the other side of the African continent that was to affect not only Suakin but the entire Northern Sudan. This was the movement of large numbers of Hausa, Bornu, Fulani and others from Nigeria, collectively known as the Fallata or Takari (Duffield 1980:210). Earlier theories¹ have ascribed this movement to individuals' choices to make the haj to Mecca, the pilgrims settling down en route because of hardship, growing families, local obligations and suchlike. Duffield (1980:213-23) regards such explanations as too simplistic. He attributes the causes to the destruction of the slave-labour-based economy of the Fulani aristocracy and its replacement by capitalist relations of production. By this process the aristocracy became dependent upon the peasantry as a whole for its labour supply, rather than the slave section alone. The increased exploitation that resulted, Duffield argues, was the key factor, which, coupled with droughts, famine, economic stagnation and land shortage, decided many of the poorest peasants to make the pilgrimage, or at least leave Nigeria. The underpopulation of the Sudan and, by that time, the presence of a colonial government anxious to increase the wage labour supply made conditions suitable for settlement in that country. Today the Takari are to be found throughout Northern Sudan. There is however no record of when they began to settle in Suakin.

¹ Duffield cites, amongst others, Hassoun (1952: 65-67), Nadel (d.n.k.:8) and Davies (1964:224).

Suakin From Mid-Nineteenth Century to 1967

The Re-emergence

The abuses of the Turks led to a gradual decline of all their Red Sea possessions. Eventually they were unable to find men willing to govern or even garrison the ports and Suakin was finally given to the Egyptians in exchange for Jidda with an additional annual tribute of 125,000 dollars (Bloss 1936:292-98). Bloss mentions that this transfer took place despite the protests of the merchants of Suakin, without explaining why they should object to the removal of an administration that had lost them the Eastern trade and the town's fishery.

The Egyptians had complete control of the town by 1865. The first Egyptian governor arrived the following year and began energetically enlarging, repairing and building houses on the island. He also initiated cotton cultivation in the Baraka delta, thereby making several Arteiga extremely rich (Bloss 1937:247, Paul 1954:140). The cotton ginning factory was built at this time to process the harvest.

Egyptian merchants settled in Suakin and built themselves large houses on the island, which once built were scarcely ever repaired; for their owners had not the money to pay for their upkeep, with the result that they soon became as unsafe as the money that had been loaned for their construction.

(Bloss 1937:247-48)

It is from this period that most of the present-day ruins on Jezira date.

There was however still no regular shipping coming into the port, which even the opening of the Suez canal in 1869 did not immediately rectify. Contributory factors to this situation were high storage charges, loading and unloading delays and high taxes and duties.

Statistique de l'Egypte 1872 records that only eighteen vessels with a total tonnage of 4,331 left the port in that year, chiefly exporting gum, ivory and sesame (Bloss 1937:249). Before 1882 only some eighteen per cent of Sudan's export trade was routed through Suakin, the remainder passing down the Nile (Ahmed 1974:29). However it was discovered that, for example, ivory from Khartoum shipped to London via Suakin arrived within six weeks and was sold six months before ivory dispatched at the same time but sent down the Nile. Furthermore, despite the factors mentioned above, it was cheaper. After a seemingly slow start, Suez opened up the Red Sea as a major shipping lane and trade developed rapidly. Europe received ivory, gum and coffee from Abyssinia, gold from Sennar, senna and ostrich feathers from Darfur and Kassala and cotton, simsim oil and cattle from the local Beja. These were goods that had always been brought to the town by caravans from the interior: the real revival came through the demands of the inhabitants for European goods - sugar, candles, rice and cloth from Manchester, cutlery and other metal goods from Birmingham, to mention but a few (Bloss 1937:250). In 1882 the value of these imports was £ 240,000, compared to £ 145,000 worth of exports. The following year the value of imports had risen to £ 290,000, whilst exports had fallen to £ 120,000 (Ahmed 1974:29). From Suakin the merchandise was transported by caravans of between five hundred and a thousand camels which left every three months for Berber and Kassala: smaller caravans than in Reuben's time, but nevertheless not large enough to cope with the demand (Bloss 1937:250).

Between 1874 and 1883 Suakin achieved an unprecedented level of prosperity. But some aspects of the town's administration and economy had not changed from the days of Turkish rule:

There could be no doubt that a brisk traffic in

slaves was still being carried on with Arabia.
 (...) The governor of Sawakin is an official who
 seemed to concentrate in his person all the vices
 of an oriental despot.

(Junker 1890:51-53)

In 1877 General Gordon made a second brief visit to the town and ordered the construction of a causeway to link the island with the mainland. This is the causeway still in use today and was built by prison labour. Shennawi Bey's massive caravanserai, completed in 1881, situated on the mainland adjacent to the causeway and now completely in ruins, was by contrast built entirely by slave labour (Bloss 1937:252-53).

No population statistics are available for the town during this period. Undoubtedly it was greater than the eight thousand estimated by Burckhardt in 1814. Bloss (1936:271) states that the population of the town was once over 30,000, which is scarcely credible, but he gives no actual date.

The Seige

Exports through Suakin fell to less than £ 10,000 in 1884 and remained at this level and lower until 1889 (Ahmed 1974:29). The reason for this was supply problems, due to the Mahdist uprising in Sudan against Egyptian rule. The Mahdi's capture of El Obeid in 1881 led Uthman ibn Abi Bakr Digna - better known as Osman Digna, whose mother was an Arteiga - to offer his services. He was appointed Amir of the Eastern Sudan. Egyptian troops garrisoned in Suakin under Valentine Baker Pasha attempted to regain control of the area and prevent Osman Digna's Beja warriors capturing such towns as Tokar and Sinkat. They had little success: an entire battalion save 35 men was

wiped out at Tama'i; at al-Tayb a force of 3,656 troops encountered 1,200 Beja armed only with swords and sticks. 2,250 men and 112 officers were killed (Bloss 1937:256-57, Warner 1963).

At this point the British, who by 1882 were occupying Egypt, decided to garrison the town with their own troops. On 10 February 1884 Suakin was declared to be in a state of seige. Shortly afterwards a further battle was fought at Tama'i. This was later immortalised by Rudyard Kipling in a poem which claims that the Beja were superior warriors to the Pathans. Giving their, to British readers, more familiar name, it concludes:

So 'ere's to you Fuzzy Wuzzy, at your 'ome in the Soudan,
You're a poor benighted 'eathen but a first class fightin' man;
An' 'ere's to you Fuzzy Wuzzy, with your 'ayrick 'ead of 'air -
You big black boundin' beggar - for you bruk a British square.

(Kipling 1909:12)¹

Fortunately for the British, two squares were formed in the course of the battle, one of which held. The British were victorious on that occasion.

Kitchener arrived to direct operations in 1886 and remained in command of Suakin until 1889, during which time he replaced a defensive earthwork wall around the mainland settlement (still known as al-Gayf) with one of brick. As noted in Chapter One a substantial part of this wall is still intact. He was also responsible for the construction of

¹The poem mentions the town of "Suakim". This is not poetic licence but appears to be an alternative transliteration widely used during the latter years of the nineteenth century (although Bruce had used it earlier) and possibly later. In some of its "reports" Punch employs this spelling (see Appendix II). In the vicinity of the old railway station in Jeriym (which was not built until the early years of this century) and the boatyard I found several old bottles embossed with the names of British companies and "Suakim".

several outer forts, built within sight of the town, of which two shells remain. As his headquarters he used the palace of the old Turkish governors, which is now the government rest-house. Yet Kitchener failed to defeat Osman Digna: indeed he was wounded in the neck and jaw during a rout of his troops at Handub, a few miles out of Suakin (Bloss 1937:271, Magnus 1958:71). On the other hand, beyond a few skirmishes around Shata, Osman Digna appears to have made no serious attempt to capture Suakin. Thus the town remained an enclave of Egyptian territory (but under British control) in a Sudan otherwise entirely controlled by the Dervish warriors of the Mahdi's successor, the Caliph Abdullah.

If the British taxpayers and voters were only marginally aware of the events in Suakin up to 1885, the army's attempt to build a railway from Suakin to Berber must have brought their attention to the town.

From every point of view except perhaps the humourist's the Suakin-Berber railway was a failure. It was never completed; it was scarcely even begun. It carried no paying passengers and no profitable merchandise. It cost the British taxpayers close on a million pounds sterling... Its failure was one of the principal reasons which brought down Mr Gladstone's second ministry.

(Hill 1965:34)

Gross inefficiency coupled with harassment from Osman Digna's warriors resulted in the railway reaching no further than eighteen miles from Suakin.¹

The young Churchill was briefly on active service in Suakin and

¹ This railway started on Condenser Island. No sign of it is visible in the town today. Near a waterhole called Oti (Otao on the Sudan Survey map), eighteen miles from the town are the only remains: a small strip of embankment and, a little further, on two separate rock-faces, words in English have been scratched: "Otao Junction" and "Pear's Soap Is The Best". For "the humourist's point of view" see Appendix II.

gives a gloomy picture:

The atmosphere is rank with memories of waste and failure. (...) The Christian cemetery alone shows a decided progress... (...) Upon the mainland stands the crescent-shaped suburb of El Kaff. It comprises a few mean coral-built houses, a large area covered with mud huts inhabited by Arabs and fishermen and all the barracks and military buildings. The whole is surrounded by a strong wall a mile and a half long, fifteen feet high and six feet thick, with a parapet pierced for musketry and strengthened at intervals by bastions armed with Krupp guns.

(Churchill 1933:110-12)¹

No decisive victory in the field settled the outcome of the seige. The last actual battle that Osman Digna fought in the east was in 1891 at Tokar, where he lost both the fight and seven hundred men. Famine had caused many of his troops to desert and after that date the area was peaceful, seven years before the Battle of Omdurman. The export trade actually began to revive as early as 1889 and although it did not reach the level of 1882, by 1895 it was valued at £ 80,000 (Ahmed 1974:29).

Officially Suakin was still an Egyptian possession. However, once Sudan was completely occupied, it was incorporated into the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium of Sudan (Bloss 1937:275).

The Mahdist movement forced large numbers of refugees, particularly pastoralists, into Abyssinia. The Rashaida had moved into the coastal plain of Eritrea, as far south as Massawa. Once the movement was

¹ The crosses that mark the graves in the Christian cemetery are not those that Churchill would have seen, but are in fact replacement erected in the 1920s. Of all the armaments which adorn the town today, none are Krupp, although two Krupp cannon can be seen outside the police station in Tokar.

defeated they returned, occupying a much wider area roughly bordered by Suakin, Kassala and Massawa, with the greatest concentration in the vicinity of Kassala. The Zenaymāt however moved further northwards, to al-Damer on the Nile.

The Decline

Jackson (1926:52-53) provides a lively description of the town in the early years of the twentieth century:

(The island) is connected by a causeway nearly 200 yards long with the mainland where are clustered the petty merchants with their shops and also all the hangers-on who gain a living from the maritime commerce of the port, the pilgrim traffic or by supplying the varied needs of a fairly numerous population... The Geif... is perhaps typically Eastern in its narrow tortuous streets, overhung in many places with odd pieces of cloth or sacking that effectively prevent the sun's rays from performing their cleansing, purifying duties... In the old days, especially when the damp rainy weather of late autumn afforded ideal conditions for the breeding of the domestic fly, Suakin was as dirty a place as can well be imagined. Today in spite of some permanent buildings that were erected in the early 'eighties the Geif is little more than a rabbit warren of ramshackle huts and buildings composed of any old bits of sacking, iron woodwork or mud that the ingenuity of the native can piece together in some sort of shelter from sun and wind... Yet even so the Geif, or O'Keif as the Hadendoa call it, is not without its picturesqueness. On market days in particular a busy chaffering crowd haggles to the last millieme over a sword, a tin of oil or a handful of dates. The shops are open to the street, their fronts are festooned with all the requisities for supplying the simple needs of the nomad of the hills - knives, charms sewn up in leather, camel bags or whips. Almost every other shop is full, from dirty floor to its low hung ceiling with bales of vermilion, scarlet or the dark blue strips of Indian cloth that are used for draping the chocolate-coloured or ebony limbs of Fuzzy or Sudanee. Some enterprising Greeks stand within the doors of their general store, where almost everything - except what one wants - can be obtained, from Manchester goods to Monkey Brand soap, from bootlaces to Benger's. The hotter the day the more heated the bargaining... A braying

donkey crashes through the throng; an inquisitive dog is driven from a meat shop amid the curses of half a dozen different languages; a mule gives tongue to an emasculated moan; cats, chickens, goats and sheep are everywhere, in or out of the shops. Insistent through the general tumult, as a drone of bagpipes, is the everlasting buzzing of flies as they are whisked at the whim of a somnolent merchant from the mess of squashed dates or stinking fish on which they have settled.

The town was once more thriving. However, great changes were about to take place. In 1904 the Public Works Department was ordered to draw up plans for improving the harbour. If it was to accommodate large ships extensive blasting of the encroaching coral at the entrance to the creek would be necessary. The subsequent report of the department was, however, largely concerned with demonstrating the superiority as a potential deep water port of Marsa Barghout, forty miles to the north. The report was accepted and work began on what was to become Port Sudan. Alterations to Suakin's harbour were abandoned, yet in October of the following year the first train from Atbara arrived, the line reaching Port Sudan in 1906. The new port was opened in 1909 and the Province Headquarters transferred from Suakin in 1910 (Roden 1970:9). Yet Suakin remained a port of consequence for a further decade. The Great War held up the new port's development and the government continued to bring its own imports through Suakin, in order to leave the new docks open for the private sector. Suakin's merchants mistakenly believed that the old port could survive. The illusion was shattered in the 1920s: the opening of the Kassala-Port Sudan rail link rendered obsolete the caravan haulage trade that had been the keystone of Suakin's economy for 1,200 years (Roden 1970:14). Without doubt the effect of this on the Beja, who worked the caravans, must have been severe. Furthermore the water problem that had hampered the expansion of Port Sudan was finally solved in 1923 when the underground reservoir at Khor Arba'at

was tapped. The National Bank closed its Suakin office on the shore of the island in the same year. Eastern Telegraph transferred their cable terminal to Port Sudan early in 1924. Without these and other facilities business was impossible and within the year most of the merchants remaining in the old port had moved to the new. The population fell from 10,500 in 1905 to no more than 6,000 in 1929. By the mid-1930s it was down to 4,000 (Roden 1970:14-16). The coral buildings were abandoned and through lack of maintenance began to decay almost immediately. In 1937 the streets of the island were closed because of the danger of falling rubble (Roden 1970:15).

The railway became a branch line linking the town only with Port Sudan. Clearly its functions were more social than economic: earlier the terminus had been in Jeriyim where goods were loaded and unloaded onto ships; now the terminus was located just outside Shata Gate. The line was eventually taken up in the 1950s.

The town did however retain a minor importance as a pilgrim port, although the pilgrims were contained in a complex of buildings several kilometres from the town, on the northern bank of the creek entrance - the Quarantine Station (see Map 5).

Despite the dwindling population, at least one new village was established. Mesheil grew around the house built for al-Sit Maryam al-Mirghani on a former market garden site she acquired in 1932 (Roden 1970:18). But the foreign merchant elite and the wealth and employment opportunities they had brought to the town had gone,¹ and

¹ A few foreigners may have remained for some years. Grave 318 in the Christian cemetery is that of Yanni Liyfos, a Greek photographer who committed suicide in 1932, aged 62. The final grave, 320, is that of 4190948 Pte. J C Shone, 1st Bn. Cheshire Regt., who died on 11 September 1939. (Source: Christian Cemetery Record book, held by Suakin rest-house caretaker).

Suakin seemed doomed to follow Bādī' and 'Aydhab into oblivion.

The 1955/56 Census

The population of Suakin appears to have remained fairly constant for the following forty years. The 1955/56 Census of Sudan gave a total of 4,228 inhabitants (see Table 1), making it the fortieth largest in the country. It is interesting to note that at this time more were living outside the "main town" (presumably al-Gayf and Jezira) than inside. Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 reproduce the information contained in the census concerning the "tribal composition of the town, languages, economic activities and birth, death and infant mortality rates" respectively.

However unreliable this census may be it does suggest a broad picture of the composition of the town. As one might expect, the largest component in the population is the Beja. Yet there is also a surprisingly large number of Southern Sudanese and a mysterious category of "Western Asiatics" (see Table 2).

A total of 280 Southern Sudanese are enumerated, the majority being Eastern Southerners, Latuka in particular. In 1955 a prison was built in Suakin (an earlier one had been removed to Port Sudan). This was also the year (and the two events may be related) that marked the beginning of the Southern rebellion in Sudan that was to last until 1972. One of the first events in the conflict was rioting in the town of Torit, then in Equatoria Province, the "tribal" headquarters of the Latuka. As Table 1 shows, there were 251 inmates of the prison at that time. It therefore seems highly probable that many of the Southern Sudanese were inmates. The Latuka are an easily recognisable people, as they have the custom of serating their ears. I neither saw nor heard reports of a single one in Suakin today.

TABLE 1
THE POPULATION OF SUAKIN 1955/56

	Number of persons			Sex ratio
	b.s.	m.	f.	
Suakin Town	4228	2069	2159	96
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Outskirts	1608	756	852	89
Mesheil	935	443	492	90
Main town	1443	619	815	76
Suakin Prison	251	251	-	-

b.s. = both sexes
m. = male
f. = female

SOURCE: First Population Census of the Sudan 1955/56,
2nd Interim Report, Table 3.

TABLE 2

THE "TRIBAL" COMPOSITION OF SUAKIN'S POPULATION 1955/65

"Race"	Tribal group	Number of persons
Arab		<u>179</u>
	Baggara	12
	Dar Hamid	10
	Gawama'a Bedeiriya	4
	Other Arab tribes N	4
	Other Arab tribes E	11
	Ga'aliyin	129
	Guhayna	9
Miscellaneous		<u>474</u>
	No tribe	474
Nuba		<u>11</u>
Beja		<u>2,594</u>
	Amarar	482
	Bisharin	33
	Hadendowa	442
	Beni Amer	142
	Other Beja	1,495
Nubiyin		<u>44</u>
Central Southerners		<u>62</u>
	Dinka SW	1
	Other Dinka	19
	Nuer	9
	Other Nilotic tribes	33
Eastern Southerners		<u>147</u>
	Ethiopian tribes	1
	Bari-speaking	10
	Latuka speaking	135
	Other E Southerners	1
Western Southerners		<u>80</u>
	Banda-Golo	25
	Bongo Baka Bagirma	14
	Ndogo Sere	3
	Zande	8
	Other W Southerners	30

TABLE 2 - Continued

"Race"	Tribal group	Number of persons
Westerners		<u>29</u>
	Tribes of W Darfur	11
	French Equitorial tribes	1
	Unknown group of Westerners	17
Foreigners with Sudanese status		<u>3</u>
	Italian and Maltese origin	2
	Western Asiatic origin	1
Other foreigners		<u>605</u>
	Cypriots and Greeks	1
	West Africans	441
	E & S Africans	1
	Ethiopians	22
	Egyptians	2
	Western Asiatics	138

SOURCE: First Population Census of Sudan, 1955/56, Second Interim Report, 1960, Table 7.

TABLE 3
LANGUAGE GROUPS IN SUAKIN 1955/56

<i>Language</i>	<i>Number of persons</i>	<i>%</i>
Arabic	916	21.7
Beja	2,632	62.5
Nubiyin	4	0.1
Nuba	13	0.3
Dinka	8	0.2
Northern Luo	8	0.2
Southern Luo	12	0.3
Nuer	7	0.2
Bari	6	0.2
Latuka	113	2.7
Teso	7	0.2
Moru-Nadi	33	0.8
Bongo-Baka	2	0.0
Ndogo-Sere	2	0.0
Zande	12	0.3
Other Sudanic	2	0.0
N. Darfurian	3	0.1
S. Darfurian	3	0.1
West African	428	10.1
Other African	16	0.4
East European	1	0.0

SOURCE: First Population Census of Sudan, 1955/56, Second Interim Report, 1960. Table 4.

TABLE 4

OCCUPATIONS IN SUAKIN 1955/56

	MALES		FEMALES	
	5 - puberty	over puberty	5 - puberty	over puberty
Gainfully employed	398	1,427	35	119
% of population	21.6	91.8	7.6	11
Professional non-technical		1		
Owners of large industrial undertakings		3		
Farm owners, farm managers		1		1
Intermediate & primary school teachers		5		
Junior religious occupations		7		
Other semi-professional non-technical		6		2
Semi-professional medicine		5		
Semi-professional natural science		1		
Other semi-professional technical		6		6
Shopkeepers		107		
Other semi-supervisory		1		
Senior clerical in local govt.		2		
Senior clerical other		1		
Other craftsmen		27		
Metal industry craftsmen		9		
Metal industry mechanics		1		
Woodworking craftsmen		14		
Building & kindren craftsmen		9		24
Textile craftsmen	1	15	2	30
Light industries craftsmen		37		
Other skilled professional services	3	2		29
Shop assistants	3	60		15
Domestic servants	1	15	5	1
Other servants	6	5		3
Farmers	2	303		
Fishermen and hunters		50		
Other animal owners		1		
Subgrade schoolteachers		10		
Junior clerical in local govt.		8		
Junior clerical other		2		
Other machinery operatives		2		
Ops. of stationary machinery, industry		5		5
Ops. in transport		30		
Other semi- & un-skilled personal services	5	127		
Sanitary services		18		
Other labourers except farm	2	91		2
Building & construction labourers		6		
Farm labourers		4		
Forestry workers		3		
Shepherds	63	55	28	

TABLE 4 - Continued

	MALES		FEMALES	
	<i>5 - puberty</i>	<i>over puberty</i>	<i>5 - puberty</i>	<i>over puberty</i>
Armed forces		158		
Police & prison warders		97		
Students, schoolboys, household duties	3		226	1,410
Unemployed beggars		3		
Unknown and no occupation	309	114	57	38

SOURCE: First Population Census of Sudan, 1955/56, Second Interim Report, 1960, Table 8.

TABLE 5BIRTH, DEATH AND INFANT MORTALITY RATES, SUAKIN 1955/56

Number of births during last year	147
Number of deaths during last year (all ages)	93
Number of deaths during last year (infants under 1)	37
Crude birth rate per 1,000 persons	34.8
Crude death rate per 1,000 persons	22.0
Excess of birth rate over death rate per 1,000 persons	12.8
Infant mortality rate per 1,000 births	251.7*

SOURCE: First Population Census of Sudan, Second Interim Report,
1960, Table 12.

*This is the highest infant mortality rate recorded in the Census
in the entire country.

I am unable to identify the "Western Asiatics" listed in Table 2. It is likely that they are Arabic speakers, as they are not listed separately in Table 3. It is possible that they were a people similar to the thirty-three households of Bisays presently in the town, who originated in Arabia but have come to Suakin via Eritrea. These particular people have however been in residence for only three years. Alternatively, Rashaida encamped on the outskirts of the town may have been enumerated under this category. Informants emphatically state that no Rashaida were permanently settled in the town at that time, although there may have been a few descendents of their slaves. These, for reasons that will become clear, are unlikely to have been classified as "Western Asiatics". It has been suggested that they were Syrians or other Middle Easterners. This I consider unlikely, as such persons would undoubtedly be merchants and as noted the foreign merchant class in Suakin left the town thirty years earlier.

Table 4, interestingly, does not have a category for seamen and gives the number of fishermen and hunters as only fifty, substantially fewer than the number of farmers. The latter are numbered at 303, which given the description of the environment of the town, may seem surprisingly high. However, what this table does not state is where these farmers farm. Roden (1970:18) notes the common practice of residents of Suakin leaving the town in the summer months to farm at Tokar. I suspect that this accounts for a large proportion of that number.

'Dis-Development'

The removal of the railway in the 1950s appears to have been a symptom of a process of 'dis-development' that affected both Suakin and the entire area to the south in the immediate post-colonial period.

Aqiq was once a small but important harbour trading with Yemen and connected to Port Sudan by a barge link. It is now a tiny settlement with only a few residents. During the British administration an asphalt road was constructed linking Suakin with Tokar (and as this was the route to Aqiq it was, and still is, known as the Yemen road). At one time the residents of Suakin were using coral blocks from the island's houses to maintain it. Today the few stretches of it that remain are practically unmotorable: lorries travelling between Suakin and Tokar drive alongside it. The anchorage of Trinkitat, which still appears on maps, was once linked to Tokar by rail and cotton was transported through it to Port Sudan. The entire settlement has completely vanished: only a solitary wall remains.

The precise reasons for this 'dis-development', the disintegration of infrastructure, are not clear. However, it may be linked to the droughts which devastated the Tokar cotton crop (which also caused some migration from the area, as will be shown), thus rendering the railway and the ports redundant. Certainly the area currently under cultivation is considerably less than that marked out on the Sudan Survey maps. On the other hand, cotton is still produced and is still transported to Port Sudan, although now on lorries which must pass through Suakin. Indeed there is a brisk lorry traffic to and from Tokar throughout the year. This suggests that in the case of the road its disintegration was not the result of lack of use. However the maintenance of roads, railways and ports requires considerable capital investment, on a scale that only a government can provide. It is possible that the newly-independent Sudanese government, short of funds and with Port Sudan to maintain and furthermore with gigantic cotton irrigation schemes to finance elsewhere in the country, did not regard as necessary, or simply did not have the funds for, the maintenance of such

relatively minor communications.

Suakin in 1967

David Roden visited the town in 1967 and gives a more pessimistic portrait than that of Lord Valentia, 153 years earlier. He describes the "abundant evidence of a prosperity far in excess of the limited commerce of today": the derelict island, the rows of padlocked shops, a dwindled fishing fleet, greatly reduced numbers of pilgrims and the general lack of permanent employment opportunities. He suggests that perhaps "a majority of families subsist on the remittances of a wage-earner labouring in the cotton fields of Tokar or the factories and harbour of Port Sudan". He predicted that the town would continue as a minor local trading centre. It would not develop as a marine leisure centre like some Egyptian Red Sea ports: it has a poor climate, poor communications and Sudan has no large urban middle class to support such a centre. A slim chance of revival he considered rested on the route of the then proposed asphalt Khartoum-Port Sudan highway: if it passed through the town, then the increased traffic would result in increased trade; if it by-passed Suakin, then the town's decline would be accelerated (Roden 1970:19-22).

Recent Events

Changes in the Appearance and Functions of Suakin

As Roden feared, the new asphalt road linking Port Sudan with Haiya (see Maps 4 and 5), running on to Khartoum via Kassala, by-passes Suakin by some two kilometres. This was officially opened in December 1979, but had been in use for four years before that date. However,

another asphalt road linking the town with this highway has been constructed and has been in use since early 1979. The company responsible for the building of these two roads, the West German firm Strabag Gmb., had its main camp approximately five kilometres from Suakin.

According to Roden's reasoning, the decline of Suakin should have been accelerated by the highway by-passing the town. This has not happened, for a variety of reasons. Amongst the minor, as noted in Chapter One, is the utilisation of the town as a picnic spot by residents of Port Sudan, who, of course, also make use of the local shops. A further reason, which Roden appears not to have appreciated, is that the new highway has not isolated Suakin. All traffic to and from Tokar must pass through the town: there is no separate by-road linking Tokar directly with the highway.

Other developments Roden could not have predicted. For many years the official dhow harbour and trochus shell market of Sudan was located at Mina Anqiyai (Flamingo Bay), three kilometres north of Port Sudan. This site was later acquired by the Sudanese Navy for the establishment of a naval base, and Suakin was designated as the "new" port and market. Not only did the dhows move but also a great number of their attendants: the crewmen, the boatbuilders and the carpenters. The first arrivals were in 1968, the bulk of the movement being completed by 1972. Roden (1970:20 f.n.5) mentions that in 1967 there were only two men working part-time on boat building in Suakin. I understand they worked on Jezira. By this movement Shellak was established as the largest boatyard in Sudan.

In 1973 the last pilgrim boat from Suakin left for Jidda. In an effort to stem the tide of illegal emigration, the government decreed

that all pilgrims should leave via Port Sudan. Thus Suakin's last inheritance from 'Aydhhab was ended and the Quarantine Station abandoned. By this time the ginnery was no longer processing cotton.

In his account of the town in 1967 Roden (1970:17) mentions "a group of outlying villages of recent origin". The establishment of Mesheil has been noted, but Roden gives no account of others. A closer investigation may have led him to revise his conclusions. Why were people settling in a declining town that offered very few employment opportunities? In brief, droughts forced pastoralists to settle and landless labourers to migrate from the Tokar region, and, in contrast to Port Sudan, Suakin was a relatively cheap place to live. These reasons will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter Four.

The Eritrean and Tigray Wars

Thus Suakin began to expand initially as a consequence of natural occurrences. However it was later to grow in population as the result of human actions. One of these, as we have seen, was the movement of the dhow harbour. Others took place outside Sudan but were to affect not only Suakin but the entire eastern part of the country. Even as Roden was writing his account, key events had already taken place.

The defeat of the Italians in 1941 resulted in the loss of their African colonies, and the disposal of Libya, Italian Somaliland and Eritrea was left initially to the World War II victors and subsequently to the United Nations. Various schemes were put forward concerning the fate of Eritrea, including immediate and unconditional independence (proposed by the USSR¹) but the resolution eventually adopted was

¹United Nations General Assembly Draft Resolution A/AC. 38/L31.

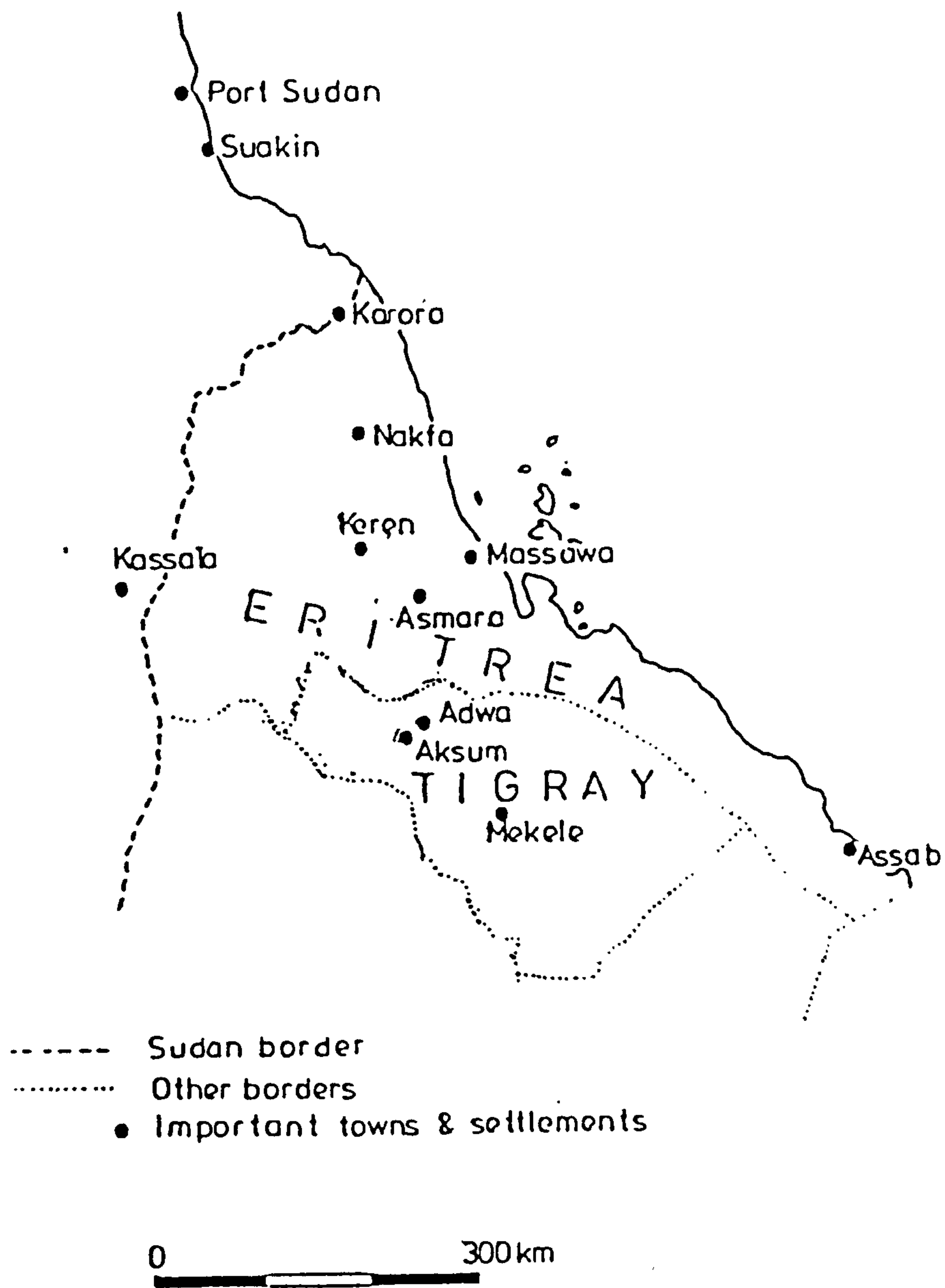
the one backed by the USA, who had at first proposed annexation by Ethiopia (Eritrean Liberation Front Foreign Information Centre 1979:17): that Eritrea should constitute an autonomous unit federally linked to Ethiopia. Not without opposition, this was affirmed by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1950.¹

Almost immediately after the implementation of the Federal Act, accusations of violations by the Ethiopians were made. Resistance was formalised in 1958 by the establishment of the Eritrean Liberation Movement and two years later the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). It was the latter group that initiated armed conflict with Ethiopia, the first shots being fired on 1 September 1961. The Ethiopians responded on 14 November by dissolving the federation (although as it had been established by the United Nations Ethiopia did not have the legal right to do so) and forcibly annexed Eritrea. Allegations have been made of hundreds of villages destroyed, thousands massacred. In February 1967, some 3,000 refugees crossed the border into Sudan, the first wave of a movement that still continues.

The overthrow of the Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974 and his replacement by a provisional military government, the Derg, has not resolved the conflict. A glance at Map 8 will reveal the main reason: an Ethiopia without Eritrea is an Ethiopia without a coast. The situation has been made worse since the Somali expulsion of the Russians in 1976, which left the latter without a base in the Horn of Africa. However, with the pro-American Emperor gone and fighting wars in both the north and the south, the broadly Marxist Derg welcomed the Russians.

¹United Nations General Assembly Resolution 390 A(V).

MAP 8

ERITREA AND TIGRAY

Russian advisers and Cuban troops have been assisting the Ethiopian army, primarily in the Ogaden conflict with Somalia but also to a lesser extent in Eritrea. The Ethiopians' military hardware is of course Russian; ironically so is a large part of the liberation armies', partly through capture and partly through supplies from Syria and Iraq.

The situation during my fieldwork was that from a bewildering variety of factions and parties, the resistance forces had narrowed themselves down to two tenuously allied groups: the once dominant ELF, operating chiefly in the southwest tropical lowlands; and the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF), now the militarily superior force, operating in the north.¹ The Ethiopian forces were firmly entrenched in most of the large towns, notably Massawa and the Eritrean capital Asmara. Despite numerous offensives, a large proportion of the countryside was under the control of the Fronts. The EPLF also retained control of the town of Nakfé (see Map 8) by the concentration of a considerable amount of their resources there. This led the Ethiopian commanders to believe that the entire faction could be destroyed in a single, decisive battle. On 25 July 1979 they launched their attack; and were forced to pull back, gaining no ground and leaving 15,000 of their troops dead (Connell 1979:24). Another Ethiopian offensive on Nakfe was continually expected. By June of the following year, this still had not happened but the Economist (1980:48) was predicting that when it did, the attack would be supported by Mi-24 helicopter gunships.

It is of attacks from the air that many refugees speak. The route

¹ In the autumn of 1980, after a long series of disputes and skirmishes the two groups formally declared war on one another.

to Sudan, a journey usually undertaken on foot, was frequently travelled only by night, through fear of Ethiopian aircraft. American journalist Dan Connell relates an incident similar to many I heard from refugees:

Shortly after 9 I heard the two MiGs fly over us. 'They're going to bomb the people', said... my EPLF escort. But I was doubtful. There was no mistaking the procession for anything but civilians with their goats and sheep being herded along by small children as they migrated inland. Seconds later we heard the first bomb, then close behind a second. And then a third and a fourth. By the time we reached the site of the attack the only sign of what had happened was a crimson pool of blood. In the sand nearby lay a grotesquely twisted steel bomb fragment with Russian letters engraved upon it. Two women and a seven-year old boy were wounded. Five camels injured, one dying. Five families by their own accounts more hardened than ever against the Ethiopian occupation.

(Connell 1979:23)

The aforementioned Mi-24 helicopter gunships are alleged to have already been in service, but not in Eritrea. Immediately to the south lies the Ethiopian province of Tigray (see Map 8). Here too there is armed conflict and the helicopter gunships are said to have been used with devastating effects. One of the poorest and most neglected provinces, Tigray has a history of exploitation reaching back to the middle of the last century. Resentment of the Amhara-dominated government in Addis Ababa erupted in a peasants' revolt in 1943. This was ruthlessly put down,¹ only to resurface again in 1975 when the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) began its guerrilla war. Less well equipped than its counterparts in Eritrea, the TPLF nevertheless has had considerable success in gaining control of large parts of the

¹ During the suppression of this revolt, a precedent was set for aerial bombardment in the province, by the British Royal Air Force.

countryside. The reaction of the government has been almost identical to their response in Eritrea and thousands of refugees have fled, both into Eritrea and into Sudan.

It is estimated that there are currently over a million refugees in Sudan, from Chad, Zaire, Uganda, Central Africa and Ethiopia, but the majority, perhaps half a million, are from Eritrea, with some 75,000 from Tigray.

Refugee settlement in Suakin in large numbers began rather later than in the larger towns of Eastern Sudan, such as Kassala and Port Sudan. The initial waves appear to have consisted of refugees from the large towns of Eritrea, of skilled workers and their families and students. Later came the peasants and pastoralists who had lost their herds through the war, and it is these types of people that make up the majority of Suakin's refugee population. There are some however from the urban areas, of particular note those working for the EPLF and the TPLF, both of which have offices in the town.¹ The settlement of refugees in Suakin began in the early 1970s and still continues. A more detailed account of the composition of these people will be given in Chapter Four.

Revival or Transformation?

The current population of Suakin, as we shall see, is more than three times that of Roden's (1967:17) estimate of 4,000 in 1967. Has the town undergone a revival? Historically, as we have seen, Suakin's fortunes have ebbed and flowed. It stagnated under the administration

¹The ELF does not have an office in the town.

of the Turks, only to flourish in the early years of Egyptian rule. As an export centre, it almost ceased to function during the seige, but began operations again once this was lifted, albeit briefly. If revival is to be regarded as simply an increase in trade then Suakin has indeed revived: the establishment of the dhow harbour has returned the import and export trades to the town, and although I have no statistics trade must have been further increased in the town simply to supply the increased population.

However, revival implies the restoration of what existed before within the same framework of conditions. Historically Suakin's trade has been controlled by a foreign merchant class and the town had a separate importance as a pilgrim departure point. Furthermore, the town was virtually unrivalled: during its periodic recessions, trade was diverted to another port. As we have seen these conditions no longer exist: the foreign merchants and pilgrims have gone and Suakin's decline in the 1920s was not due to a general economic depression or hostilities but to the construction of a still-existent port that took over its functions. Port Sudan is now the major port between Egypt and Massawa and has taken over the pilgrim traffic. The descendants of the foreign merchants of Suakin now form a substantial part of Port Sudan's business community.

Literally, as well as metaphorically, Suakin is not the place it was. Once an island, it is now a collection of villages semi-circling this near-deserted island. Architecturally its occupied buildings bear no relation to those of the latter part of the nineteenth century, perhaps not even to the "ramshackle huts... composed of any old bits of sacking, iron or woodwork" described by Jackson or the mud huts mentioned by Churchill. The town has changed its economic functions and

largely through the influx of refugees its population composition. Thus Suakin has not revived but transformed.

To some extent the present-day Suakin can be defined by its economic functions. Some have been outlined in these two chapters: it is a centre of boatbuilding, dhow trading and fishing. The town also contains a market. These and other features and activities and their role in the internal and wider economies will be examined in greater detail in later chapters.

The examination of these features is obviously of great importance in gaining an understanding of how Suakin continues to exist as a settlement. However, we are not concerned with the economy of the town as an abstracted system but as an aspect of the behaviour of the town's population. Therefore a close examination of this population is an essential prerequisite to an analysis of the economy.

It is clear from the account of its history given in this chapter that the population is not a homogeneous body in terms of language or culture. Broadly it can be said that the inhabitants fall into two groups: those long established and the recent arrivals.

To some extent it might be argued that the immigration into Suakin of refugees from Eritrea and Tigray, dhow workers and carpenters from Port Sudan and, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four, pastoralists from the hinterland and Eritrea forced to settle through herd loss, continue a historical trend of settlement in the town. We have noted, for example, the arrival of the Shadhaliab in the eleventh century, the Ashraf in the thirteenth and Egyptians in the nineteenth. However, the recent population

movements appear to be of a significantly different order, in that they do not concern the immigration into the town of a single "social entity" - a set of people with a culture and perhaps more in common - but rather small numbers of a wide range of "social entities". The situation is made more complex by the fact that recent immigrants may belong to the same "social entities" as persons whose families have been established in Suakin for generations. Not only that, the newcomers may be related to the established.

Clearly, "long-established" and "recent arrival", although of some explanatory value, cannot serve as the primary bases for classifying the population. We must turn to such classes as "Beja" and "Rashaida" - categories to which we have already referred and furthermore categories by which the inhabitants of Suakin themselves classify the population. But these too have their problems. Is "Eritrean", a widely used label denoting anyone from Eritrea (and often anyone from Tigray as well), a category of the same order as "Beja"? If it is not and we simply adopt, without critical examination, whatever categories that are used by the inhabitants to divide up the population we may well end up attempting to draw meaningful conclusions from comparisons and contrasts between overlapping sets of people belonging to geographic, linguistic, religious, cultural or kinship groups, where an individual may belong to more than one group.

We must therefore examine what exactly such categories as "Beja" and "Rashaida", and of course "Eritrean", represent. The Beja are commonly regarded as a "tribe" or a confederacy of tribes. This is however no explanation: as we shall see in the following chapter, "tribe" is a very loosely defined term, having different meanings to different writers. The purpose of Chapter Three is to examine the

use of "tribe" and related concepts in anthropology so that we can develop a precise definition which can be applied to the situation in Suakin, enabling us to distinguish from a large number of possible categories a set of categories which can be usefully compared and contrasted.

CHAPTER THREE

"TRIBE", "ETHNIC GROUP" AND RELATED CONCEPTS

Bases of Classification

From the evidence presented in Chapter Two it is possible to suggest that the population of Suakin has never constituted a homogeneous body in terms of physical characteristics, economic activities, language or a host of other variables. Classification of the inhabitants is not a wholly original exercise. As we have seen Burckhardt (1822:391-92) divided them into two groups on the basis of geographical origins, economic class and residence. Jackson (1926: 53) records hearing Tu-Bedawie, Greek, English, Hindustani and Yemeni, Egyptian and Northern Sudanese Arabic in the town's market, which suggests grounds for a linguistic classification. He also divides the "native" (as opposed to the recent immigrant) population into two groups: "Fuzzy or Sudanee", a division probably based on appearance. Churchill (1933:102), describing the same scene a few years earlier similarly divides the "native" population into two categories, but arrives at the rather odd and unexplained distinction between "Arabs and fishermen".

The First Population Census of the Sudan, 1955/56 was the first and up to this point only attempt at a systematic classification. As

can be seen from Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4, five criteria were employed: residence (the census allowed four options), occupation (forty-five options), language (twenty-one options), "race" (their inverted commas, ten options) and tribal group (thirty-seven options).

"Race" is used here in a peculiar sense. It is clearly not synonymous with the popular concept of "a group of people of common ancestry distinguished from others by physical characteristics such as hair type, colour of eyes and skin, stature etc." (Hanks et al. 1979:1202). Such classes as "Eastern Southerners" and "Foreigners with Sudanese Status" show that geographical and political criteria are also employed. Although it may, in theory, be possible to distinguish some small groups of persons racially, any attempt at a truly racial classification of the whole population is doomed to failure. The "Arabs" classified in the census are not pure Semites, but largely the descendents of marriages between immigrants from the Arabian peninsula and Egypt and the indigenous population - frequently Beja (MacMichael 1922), another "race". Thus the physical characteristics that may at one time have distinguished racial groups have become blurred. Our examination of the history of Suakin has shown that certain peoples, such as the Arteiga, claim a Semitic ancestry yet are classified and classify themselves and are physically indistinguishable from the Beja, who are sometimes thought of as of Hamitic ancestry.

The designers of the census were obviously aware that the population does not fall into convenient racial groups - hence their use of inverted commas. Here "race" is simply a pragmatic device to group together certain "tribal groups", another dubious concept to which we shall turn shortly. As "race" is not based on consistent criteria and has no practical value, this concept cannot be adopted for

for our purposes.

This leaves us with four possible bases of classification. As Chapter Four will show, not all speakers of the same language necessarily belong to the same "tribal group" as this term is used by the census, nor did they necessarily share a common culture, nor a common residential location. Suakin, as has been described, consists of a number of residential villages, yet none of these is inhabited entirely by one occupational group, nor is an entire occupational group to be found within one village. No village is entirely exclusive to one "tribal group". However, all members of a specific "tribal group" speak the same language. Furthermore, members tend to live in clusters within certain villages and frequently appear to have access to occupations directly attributable to their membership of a "tribal group". Therefore "tribal group" appears to be the logical choice of basis. However, the census employs this concept in a misleadingly broad and undefined manner. Through an examination of this and related concepts, I will argue for the substitution of more precise terms which will form a coherent and logical basis for classification.

Approaches to "Tribe"

The census' use of "tribal group" appears to be another pragmatic device. It contains such dubious "tribes" as Italians, Maltese, Ethiopians and Egyptians. The anthropological concept of "tribe" does not entirely co-incide with this. It is employed

... in three distinct but related ways: to stipulate an evolutionary stage, to distinguish one type of society from others and to label any population

whose members share a common culture.

(Moerman 1967:153)

Here we are concerned with the third way, although Moerman's definition of "tribe" as simply a communality of cultural traits is open to question. Naroll (1964:284) lists five alternative bases on which other anthropologists have founded the concept: territorial contiguity, political organisation, common language, ecological adjustment and local community structure. Different anthropologists appear therefore to be discussing different entities whilst employing the same word. The debate to reach an acceptable definition has been long and so far unproductive. To Morgan (1878:114-17) a tribe was primarily a political organisation with a common language and a name. According to Hoebel (1958:661), on the other hand, a tribe was not necessarily politically organised but a social group sharing a distinctive language or dialect and a distinctive culture that marked it off from other tribes. Fried (1967:5) in turn takes exception to this:

If a tribe must be a group as that word has been used as a technical term, all its members would have to interact or at least participate in a theoretically interacting structure... It may be submitted that however a tribe is defined it should be in terms of an aggregate and not of a group, although expectably rare cases may be found in which a true group exists.

Furthermore, he asks, how is the distinctiveness of a culture to be established? Fried is critical of the methods employed so far: the compilation of inventories of trait types wherein each trait type is treated as a separate unit, regardless of its frequency or functional importance, and thereby, one concludes, inevitably resulting in distortions.

Surprisingly, in the light of his simplistic definition cited above, Moerman (1965:1215) provides a concise summary of the problems

associated with this lack of consensus over a definition of "tribe":

1. Since language, culture, political organisation etc. do not correlate completely, the units delimited by one criterion do not necessarily coincide with the units delimited by another.
2. If by culture we wish to mean "a pattern, a set of plans, a blueprint for living"... the units delimited by combinations of these criteria... are only occasionally and accidentally culture bearing units.
3. It is often difficult to discern discontinuities of language, polity, society or economy with sufficient clarity to draw boundaries.

In the light of the information given in Chapter Two, there is a temptation to introduce an historical dimension into any proposed definition. For example, the "social entity" (to employ a cautious phrase) known as the Rashaida might be defined as that "tribe" which migrated from the Najd in the middle of the last century. Similarly, the "social entity" known as the Beni Amer might be defined as that "tribe" of which all individual members claim descent from the Amir ibn-Kunnu. However, if a "universal" definition of "tribe" is sought, there are dire warnings against this approach. "Tribes" have been created by administrators,¹ and "tribal unity" by changing circumstances:

For such a people as the Chiga, whatever sense of ethnic unity they possess can only be an emergent one, a response to experiences of the recent past. For the Chiga as I knew them in the 1930s had no tribal unity, whatsoever... The only sense of common Chiga identity came from a common rejection of alien overlordship.

(Edel 1965:368-69)

Citing the above passage and establishing a relationship between this usage of "tribe" and Moerman's 'first way', Fried

¹See, for example, Colson (1950).

(1967:15) goes further and suggests that most "tribes" may be "secondary phenomena" in the sense that they have emerged as a reaction to the appearance of comparatively complex political structures amidst societies organised much more simply. This hypothesis which Fried admits has yet to be proven would seem to invert completely the evolutionary model of societal development.

"Ethnic Group": a New Concept, Old Problems

Partly because of the controversy over the definition of "tribe", partly because of an awareness of its undesirable connotations with "backwardness" (particularly when used in the context of Moerman's 'second way') and partly because of an increasing interest in urban studies, where many aggregates of peoples were found which did not conveniently fit earlier definitions of "tribe", anthropologists borrowed new (to them at at least) terms from sociology. Gulliver (1969:7-8) summarises the event and announces his reservations:

Instead of tribe we might use "people", "cultural group", "community" etc. These alternatives are even more vague and confusing. The sociological alternative is "ethnic group" with its convenient "ethnic" and "ethnicity". Unfortunately perhaps, this usage seems to be largely confined to intellectuals - mainly non-African ones too - and sometimes with an almost desperate air of self-righteousness in refusing to use the allegedly out-of-date and pejorative term tribe. Yet advocates of this newer term mean and refer to precisely the same set of confused facts and elastically defined units as are encompassed by the older term. Moreover, this usage of a newer, seemingly scientific term wrongly suggests that the whole complex problem has somehow been cleared up.

On the one hand, it is impossible to agree with Gulliver's anti-intellectual stance. A concept cannot be condemned simply because

its use is restricted to academics. If put into practice, this would result in the destruction of the natural sciences. On the other hand he raises two noteworthy issues. Firstly, just as societies are no longer referred to as "primitive" but as "underdeveloped" or "pre-capitalist", Gulliver implies that some anthropologists change their words as their earlier ones acquire, or they become aware of, undesirable connotations in their everyday usage. Interestingly, the natural sciences have managed to keep such concepts as "work" and "force", both of which have very different everyday meanings. However it is perhaps not insignificant that the scientists' concepts are precise: work is force multiplied by distance; force is mass multiplied by acceleration. This degree of precision, as we have seen, is lacking in "tribe".

Secondly, Gulliver is quite right in his assertion that the basic problem of definition has not been solved by the introduction of the new term. "Ethnic group" is perhaps even more vaguely defined than "tribe" in many instances. These definitions are equally diverse and several writers use the two terms interchangeably.¹ However, it was the very vagueness of "ethnic group" which led two of its earliest employers, Huxley and Haddon (1935) to adopt it. Rather, they should be described as amongst the earliest modern employers, for they trace the concept back to Herodotus of Halicarnassus (484-425 BC) and his usage of ethnea/ethnos (which they claim has been mistranslated as "race"), which appears to have been as variable and ill-defined as the present-day use of "ethnic group":

... his ethnos was at times a tribe, at times a political unit, at times a larger grouping, and in using the word he guards himself against treating either type of unit as necessarily or

¹See, for example, Moerman (1967), Charsley (1974) and Grillo (1974).

even probably of common descent. It is in fact what we in this volume label, non-committally, an "ethnic group". He comes to the sensible conclusion that a group such as the Greeks is marked off from other groups by complex factors of which kinship is one but that at least as important are language, religion, culture or tradition.

(Huxley and Haddon 1935:31)

Huxley and Haddon's book is primarily an attack on anti-semitic literature and action prevalent in Europe at the time of writing: hence their concern with re-translating ethnos. As they point out, even those at the forefront of the anti-semitic movement displayed confusion over the concept of race: in Mein Kampf Hitler's analysis of Jewish "racial characteristics" is based almost entirely on social and cultural elements, not on biological factors (Huxley and Haddon 1935:28).

Although Haddon was himself an anthropologist, the concept of "ethnic group" appears to have become established as a sociological term¹ before being generally adopted by anthropologists:

An ethnic group is a distinct category of the population in a larger society whose culture is usually distinct from its own. The members of such a group are or feel themselves or are thought to be bound together by common ties of race or nationality or culture.

(Morris 1968:167)

This definition, although not definitive, is not substantially different from Herodotus's ethnos.

The appeal of "ethnic group" appears to have been and continues to be its universality of applicability. Unlike "tribe", the use of which is largely restricted to the underdeveloped world, "ethnic group"

¹See, for example, Warner and Srole (1945).

can be employed in any society, developed, developing or under-developed, to encompass any collection of persons sharing a culture, to use Moerman's definition, within that society. However, whereas "tribe" began its career as a political concept and later acquired cultural overtones, "ethnic group" appears to have begun as a cultural concept and then, for some writers at least, became a political concept. Cohen was a leading proponent of the latter view:

All ethnic groups can... be regarded as informal interest groups. and can therefore be regarded as political groupings. (...) The more fundamental the corporate interests of the group, the more elaborate the political organisation of the group. Ethnic groups can thus be heuristically arranged on one continuum, from the least political at the one end to the most political at the other.

(Cohen 1969:5)

To some extent, Webster's International Dictionary supports this, defining as it does "group" as, amongst other things:

... a number of individuals bound together by a community of interest, purpose or function as....
a social unit comprising individuals in continuous contact through intercommunication and shared participation in activities towards some commonly accepted end.

However such a formulation renders the prefix "ethnic" redundant. Cohen does not indicate how an ethnic group is to be distinguished from other types of political interest groups, the Trade Union Congress for example. Epstein (1978:94) criticises the formulation on different grounds, pointing out that, over time, the interests of a group may change and yet the group remains. This suggests to Epstein that some prior factor must exist by reference to which the group must be defined, unless of course simply the survival of the group is to be taken as its interest, which would render the concept tautologous.

Epstein (1978:95) also draws attention to the difficulties posed by the problem of establishing exactly what a particular group's

interests are. He concludes:

To see ethnicity as essentially a political phenomenon is to make the same kind of methodological error as those who earlier defined it in terms of culture: it is to confuse an aspect of the phenomenon with the phenomenon itself.

Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940:25) may be cited as support for this proposition. They argue that social relations are not bounded by political systems but always exist in some form between people belonging to different systems. These may be brought about through clans, ritual associations, age-sets or simply trade. Language and similarities of custom and belief may also unite people who do not all acknowledge a single ruler or government or unite for specific purposes. Political units do not necessarily coincide with social units.

However, even before Epstein wrote the above criticism, Cohen had redefined the concept. In 1974 an ethnic group was:

... a collectivity of people who (a) share some patterns of normative behaviour and (b) form a part of a larger population interacting with people from other collectivities within the framework of a social system.

(Cohen 1974:4)

For all intents and purposes, this reformulation is identical to Morris's definition cited earlier. Yet in both Morris's and Cohen's latest definition perhaps a false distinction between a "tribe" and an "ethnic group" is implied. The former can exist in isolation; the latter exists only in relation to a wider society. It therefore seems to follow that Italians in Italy are not to be conceptualised as an ethnic group, unless they are to be compared with, for example, the French in Italy, or taking Europe as the appropriate "wider society", the French in France. But as Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940:25) rightly point out, there is almost always some degree of interaction between peoples and

thus there is almost always a "wider society".

"Ethnic Group": Other Approaches

A different approach to the concept of "ethnic group" is taken by such writers as Barth and Moerman:

... we give primary emphasis to the fact that ethnic groups are categories of ascription by the actors themselves.

(Barth 1969a:10)

I consider the Lue to be an ethnic entity, a tribe, because they successfully present themselves as one.

(Moerman 1967:161)

Instead of intellectually constructing a concept as a step on the road to further analysis, these writers are characterised by their interest in the actual constitution of the groups. Of particular importance to them is the "native label" for the group and its use. I believe that Naroll (1967) is slightly off the mark, but his criticism of this approach is noteworthy (and incidentally constitutes a criticism of Morgan's (1878:114-17) definition of "tribe"):

Suppose that Moerman had happened to study the Gyem area of the Gabor district of Gabun in West Africa. There he would have found the ethnic label confusing. The Gyem are a boundary area along the Fang-Ntumu language chain. The Ntumu of Bitan call these Gyem people Fang. The Fang of Mitzik call them Ntumu. The Gyem people themselves say they do not know whether they are Fang or Ntumu. Or if Moerman had chosen to work among the Eskimo or the Basin Shoshoneans or the Navaho or the Yanomanoë, he would have found that the people had no name for their tribal group other than the word that meant "the people", "the human beings".

(Naroll 1967:75)

However, it is probable that Moerman would be more fascinated than confused if confronted with such situations. Doubtlessly he would make

a detailed study of which persons are counted as "human beings" and which not; when the Gye people count themselves as Fang and when as Ntumu. Southall (1976) indeed actively seeks "native labels" meaning simply "people": he renames two of the most famous "social entities" in anthropological literature, the Nuer and the Dinka, as Naath and Jieng respectively, both terms meaning "people". He claims that the earlier names were "convenient fictions" employed by Europeans, such as administrators and anthropologists (Southall 1976:464). The labels Naath and Jieng are used throughout his article in preference to the better known names. It is difficult to see how such an exercise aids one's understanding of the entities involved. One's mastery of plumbing is not enhanced by calling the toilet the rest room. Furthermore, Southall is discussing the two entities in their homelands. He does not indicate how he would label those members of these entities resident in, for example, Khartoum, where they are not surrounded by "people".

A slightly different type of renaming exercise is conducted by Duffield (1980) and has been followed by me. As noted in Chapter Two, the immigrants from Nigeria now settled throughout Northern Sudan are known as the Fallata or Takari. The label "Fallata" is fairly widely used by Sudanese, but rarely used by these people themselves. They tend to call themselves Takari, and this is the label that Duffield employs, and I will employ for the remainder of this thesis. Such a choice is perhaps more justifiable than Southall's re-labelling in that "Fallata" has derogatory overtones (echoes of "tribe"!) in Sudan. Nevertheless, a value judgement has been made, by both Duffield and Southall: that self-ascriptions are preferable to others' ascriptions. This is a position that Barth and Moerman would almost certainly support. On the other hand, by defining a "tribe/ethnic group" as a "blame-pinning device" Parkin (1969:274) implies exactly the reverse position.

(My justification for employing Takari rather than Fallata is dealt with in Chapter Four)

A criticism of Moerman's approach that Naroll, perhaps surprisingly, does not make is that "native labels" in use within an area, such as Suakin, may not be based on consistent criteria. It is unlikely however that Moerman would acknowledge such a criticism. The difference between him and Naroll is one of irreconcilable theoretical stances. Naroll is concerned with cross-cultural comparisons and as such recognises the importance of "universal" definitions such as "tribe" and "ethnic group", as

... statistical manipulations can be meaningless or worse if the units to which they pertain are ill-defined or quixotically variable.

(Fried 1967:3)

To Naroll, a definition is a means to an end; to Moerman the definition of a particular "ethnic group" is an end in itself.

Moerman's approach cannot be applied to the situation in Suakin for two reasons. Firstly, on a general level "native labels" are normally only used by members of a particular "social entity" when comparing or contrasting his or her entity with others. They are a presentation of the entity, in some circumstances to an anthropologist, and may be variable. For example, an informant in Suakin might present himself as Sudanese, perhaps in contrast to Eritreans, as a Beja, perhaps in contrast to Rashaida, or as a Hadendowa in contrast to an Amarar or an Emirab in contrast to other sections of the Hadendowa. It is therefore ultimately left to the anthropologist to make if not an arbitrary choice then a pragmatic one as to which he will consider to be the ethnic group. Essentially, the anthropologist defines the context, the "wider society".

Secondly, although we will not be concerned here with "statistical manipulations", what may be termed a "polyethnic" situation such as exists in Suakin demands a certain amount of comparing and contrasting of "social entities". Consistent criteria by which these entities can be defined are essential, otherwise distorted conclusions will result. In order to illustrate this, let us consider the Eritreans. The label "Eritrean" is frequently used in Suakin to denote any refugee from Eritrea. Leaving aside the complex problem of defining a refugee, it may be argued that the existence of this label and the people encompassed by it signifies the existence of an ethnic group. For simplicity, let us assume that the remainder of the town's population belongs to one of three other ethnic groupings - the Beja, the Rashaida and the Takari. The conclusion of such a study based on this premise would be that the Eritreans are strikingly heterogeneous: in comparison to the other three ethnic groups they have relatively few kinship links, widely different social and economic backgrounds and lack the overall political structures found in the other three. Indeed it would appear that some Eritreans have more in common with the Beja and Rashaida than with their fellow Eritreans.

A similar set of distorted conclusions could be drawn if the comparison was made between fishermen, the Beja, the Rashaida and the Takari. They result from inconsistent criteria of "ethnic group" definition. To give a single example: all Beja speak Tu-Bedawie, all Rashaida speak a Saudi Arabian dialect of Arabic, all Takari speak Hausa, but an Eritrean may speak Tigray, Tigrinya or 'Afar. He or she may even, if defined simply as a refugee, speak Tu-Bedawie or the Rashaida dialect. In the case of the Eritreans, a geographical group is being compared with non-geographical groups. Like must be compared

with like if this problem is to be avoided, and therefore a "universal" definition must be borrowed or constructed that will cover all "social entities" under consideration.

Barth's approach although broadly similar to that of Moerman is more comparative. He attempts to isolate not only the socio-cultural but also and primarily the political factors that give uniqueness to and maintain an ethnic group. In his examination of Pathan societies (Barth 1969b) he discovers on the one hand considerable variation in the forms of organisation amongst the Pathans and on the other a degree of similarity in values and social forms between some Pathans and neighbouring peoples not identified as Pathans. The obvious resulting problem is, to what do "native labels" refer? In order to answer this he reveals the "essential characteristics" of Pathans, which, if changed, would change their categorisation in relation to their neighbours, the Baluch. He dismisses specific items of custom such as dress as non-essential, but by focusing on social boundaries and boundary maintenance he finds the critical difference between the two ethnic groups to be one of differing political systems. The boundary of the Pathan society is maintained through the organisation of individuals into local segmentary descent groups. Clients are excluded from these groups, in contrast to the Baluch system, based on a contract of political submission by commoners to sub-chiefs and chiefs. Consequently, persons are able to move from Pathan to Baluch groups but not vice versa.

Barth (1969a:14) defines ethnic categories (he does not distinguish between groups, categories or tribes) broadly as:

... organisational vessels that may be given varying amounts and forms of content in different socio-cultural systems. They may be of great relevance to behaviour, but they need not

be; they may provide all social life, or they may be relevant only to limited sectors of activity.

Cohen (1974:xii-xiii) is highly critical of Barth's approach, describing it as "essentially similar" to that of the early urban anthropologists such as Mitchell (1956), Epstein (1958) and Gluckman (1961). They treated ethnicity, Cohen alleges, not as a "live" political issue but as primarily an epistemological device employed by Africans to make sense of urban society. To some extent, as we have seen, this also characterises Moerman's approach. Cohen attacks Barth's view of ethnic categories as classifications of persons in terms of their "basic most general identity" as merely descriptive and circular. All that can be proven by this, Cohen claims, is that ethnic categories exist.

However, both Cohen and Barth ignore the problem raised by our Emirab example: how is his identity established, or, in Cohen's phrase, what is his "basic most general identity"? Basically, he might be considered as either an Emirab or a Hadendowa; his most general identity on the other hand is surely Sudanese.

The problem appears to be one of levels of identity:

... since as members of a society we are involved with no one set of significant others, but with a number of such categories, each of us holds simultaneously a number of identities. (...) The identifications one makes for example with the village or town in which one lives, with the country, province or region within which it is set and with the wider nation may at times involve a clash of loyalties but for the most part they form a series in which different identities 'nest' within a hierarchy and mutually reinforce one another, the social context determining which identity shall be stressed.

(Epstein 1978:113)

This may be too simplistic. Prins (1965:57), whilst ignoring this dimension, suggests others:

If one is... to think of Lamu culture in... general terms, it seems advisable to characterise it not only as maritime and Islamic, but also a part culture in a double sense. It represents the local 'little' civilisation corresponding with the 'great' civilisation of Arabia and Persia, but it is also the 'little' one with respect to the 'great' one of Mombasa and Zanzibar... Thus the cultural focus is a double one, reflecting two 'great' civilisations, but mirrored in one glass.

Thus it could be argued that an individual from Lamu can claim three identities, which can be ordered hierarchically, by virtue of the fact that he or she is from Lamu, Kenya and Africa (there may indeed be more such identities). Furthermore, the above quotation suggests that if the simple "cultural group" definition of "ethnic group" is adopted, he or she can claim four ethnic identities as well, as a member of the maritime culture group, the Islamic culture group, the Arabian/Persian culture group and the Mombasa/Zanzibar culture group. These identities, in contrast to geographical identities, which Epstein suggest can be ranked according to the size of the geographical area, whether considered "ethnic" or not, cannot be arranged hierarchically but rather are linear, existing side-by-side, indeed overlapping.

Restricting Applicability

This further difficulty arises when "ethnic group" is used loosely. Although a relatively vague concept has many desirable consequences, unless it is used in a controlled manner, more difficulties are created than solved. Ironically, Cohen who provides two alternative definitions indicates that he would use "ethnic group" in an ultra-

broad manner, applying it to "Negroes, Jews, Yoruba, Catholic etc." (Cohen 1974:4). This is going too far. Even by his own definitions to conceptualise Negroes and Catholics as ethnic groups is a nonsense. Do they constitute political interest groups? Do all Negroes share patterns of normative behaviour? It is surely more sensible to classify "Negro" as a racial category. Again, although some patterns of normative behaviour are shared by, for example, an Irish and a Lango Catholic, it is more appropriate to classify Catholicism as a religious rather than an ethnic category.

I believe that Cohen employs the concept in such a sweeping manner because of a fallacious deduction from a premise of sociologists. Much work has been done on American Jews as an ethnic group.¹ The Jews are conceptually problematic in that they are neither properly a religious nor a racial collectivity. "Ethnic group" has been used as a convenient catch-all term, or "non-committal" as Huxley and Haddon (1935:31) have it. It is perhaps debatable, but according to both of Cohen's definitions the Jews probably do constitute an ethnic group, at least in some circumstances: in America, for example, they have formed a powerful political lobby, an interest group; and they share some patterns of normative behaviour, the "Jewish culture" of which Judaism is a part, within an obviously wider social system. Cohen's logic then appears to run as follows: the Jews are an ethnic group; Jewishness is an ascribed status - one is born a Jew and remains one, as one is born a Negro and remains one; Judaism, a part of the shared patterns of normative behaviour, is a religion, as is Catholicism; therefore, as the Jews are an ethnic group based

¹See, for example, Rogow (1961, Sklare and Greenblum (1967) and Berman (1968). Huxley and Haddon (1935), as noted, treat all Jews as an ethnic group.

on ascribed status and have a religion associated with them, it follows that all ascribed statuses and all religions constitute ethnic groups. This form of deduction is of the same order as "the King of France is bald. I am bald. Therefore I am the King of France.

It is pointless to employ the concept of "ethnic group" to cover collectivities, or sets of people, that can be adequately accommodated by other concepts. As we have seen these other concepts may be race and religion but should also, at least, include culture, politics, language and geography. To take any one of these factors to define a set of people and to label this set as an ethnic group is either a redundant exercise that will create confusion or a conceptual error, mistaking an aspect of the phenomenon with the phenomenon itself, which is exactly Epstein's criticism of Cohen's political definition cited above. Thus whilst Prins's description of Lamu culture may tell us a great deal about identity and culture itself, it reveals nothing about ethnic identity and ethnic groups. Similarly, Epstein's writings about identifications one makes with town and country reveal only information about geographical identity.

Fortunately not everyone is as sweeping in their usage as Cohen. Kantrowitz (1975:136) for example writes of "ethnic (foreign stock and Puerto Rican) and racial segregation" within New York. Stryker (1981) discusses "religio-ethnic categories" (such as Anglo-Saxon Catholics, Slavic Protestants and Jews) within the context of American society.

Groups, Categories and Other Units

Stryker, it should be noted, employs the term category, not group. Possibly his reason is that the word "group" implies as Fried (1967:5,

cited above) states, that all members interact, or at least have the theoretical framework for interaction. Williams (1964:17-18) gives one of the few attempts at defining these and related terms in sociological use:

The word 'group' is used in everyday parlance to refer to anything from a crowd at Yankee Stadium to members of a family. Although we too find it convenient to employ the term... it is necessary to understand that there are actually many kinds of groups, which may vary from one another in cohesiveness and social significance and which should technically be referred to by some term other than 'group'. The category of least social importance is the aggregate, a collection of human individuals having no relationships amongst themselves other than those that are intrinsic in occupying geographical space in some proximity. As the distinctiveness, units and internal organisation of the aggregate increases, we may recognise it as a social category, then as a collectivity, then as a group and finally as a society. The social category is exemplified by an occupational grouping or social class where there is only a vague sense of membership and a very rudimentary capacity for any sort of concerted collective action. A fully developed collectivity on the other hand is a people and is characterised by (1) a distinctive culture, (2) tests or criteria of membership, (3) a set of constitutive norms regulating social relations both within the collectivity and with outsiders, (4) an awareness of a distinct identity by both members and non-members, (5) obligations of solidarity... and (6) a high capacity for continued action... on behalf of its members or itself as a unit.

He adds that the "compromise term 'grouping'" is employed "when we wish to stress the loose aggregative quality of some part of the population" (Williams 1964:18).

To some extent this is helpful. Webster's International Dictionary has "aggregate" and "collectivity" as synonyms, but otherwise generally supports Williams' formulations. On the other hand, his definition of "people" leaves us with exactly the same set of problems that are posed by "tribe" and "ethnic group". Needless to say, other writers

have their own formulations. Cohen (1969:4), for example, draws a distinction between an ethnic group and an ethnic category (although he does not always keep to it):

When men from one cultural group migrate to town, they retain a great deal of their culture even without necessarily forming a corporate political group. They thus constitute an ethnic category. However, an ethnic category often becomes an ethnic group as a result of increasing interaction and communication between its members.

He gives an example of this process: of men in a town only marrying their own "tribeswomen", thus becoming an endogamous group, which leads to intensive social interaction within the group (Cohen 1969:4-5). Presumably corporate political interests follow. (Of particular note in the above quotation is the reference to "cultural group": this seems to imply, although never stated specifically, that the ethnic group, as a political group, is an urban phenomenon.) Grillo (1974:159) agrees with Cohen on this point of distinction, albeit unhelpfully. He defines an ethnic category as a "pragmatically defined set of people who... fall short of forming a corporate political group".

Neither writer develops this potentially fruitful theme. It leads to the conclusion that there may exist within, for example, one town an ethnic category within which an ethnic group is to be found. The methodological problems involved in exploring such a situation would be daunting to say the least.

Redefining "Ethnic", "Category", "Group", Etc.

All the definitions of "tribe" and "ethnic group" that we have considered are contentious. Most are vague. The task now at hand is to attempt to reconcile, as far as possible, the various arguments and

to emerge with a utilisable concept.

It appears to be preferable to employ the prefix "ethnic" rather than the term "tribe". Cohen (1969:3-4) writes of ethnicity (and the same applies to "ethnic"), that it is

... a term lacking in precision but has the advantage over tribalism in that it is more free from value judgement and can be applied to a much wider variety of groupings.

It is for the second reason, not the first, that it is selected here. It fulfils all the functions of "tribe", yet can be applied to such "social entities" as the Jews. Thus "tribe" is redundant. Furthermore, particularly in the context of Suakin, it can be an aid to simplification. As will be shown below and in Chapter Four, it will allow us to classify as a single unit people normally thought of as belonging to different "tribes". However, in order to do this, terms must be very precisely defined.

Many of the arguments in the literature are centred around not one but two sources of ambiguity: the meaning of "ethnic" and the meaning of "group/category" etc. Concerning the former, the common theme throughout all the definitions we have considered (with the exception of Cohen's early formulation), including those of "tribe", is the notion of a shared culture, of common cultural traits, or, as Cohen (1974:4) puts it, "shared patterns of normative behaviour". But as has been argued, a shared culture may be an aspect or a factor in the constitution of an ethnic entity, but it is not the entire constitution. Now, as the concept of "ethnic" incorporates that of "tribe", the literature we have considered on both concepts suggests that the following major factors may be involved: a shared and distinctive culture (agreed by all writers); a common language or

dialect (Morgan, Hoebel); some form of political organisation (Morgan, Cohen, Barth); the existence of a label (Morgan, Moerman); and territorial contiguity (Naroll). This list is not exhaustive, but is sufficient for our purposes.

To reiterate: singly none of these factors can be taken as determinate of the existence of an ethnic entity. A set of people who have only a political organisation in common should be given a label that indicates the nature of this organisation, such as an interest group, or a state. Similarly those who have only territorial contiguity in common (and I interpret this loosely to mean common geographical origins, whether actual or historical) should be given a label that shows the nature of the relationship between members (such as "nationals" or "villagers"); and so on.

However, it may be that a particular set of people share several or all of these factors. In such a case they can be conceptualised as forming an ethnic entity under at least one definition. Thus there is no difficulty in labelling the Rashaida an ethnic entity, as all Rashaida share all these factors. But what of, to take a further Suakin example, the Jenobia, those from the Southern Sudan, a few of whom have settled in the town? Certainly they have geographical origins in common and a label, but it is a label they rarely use themselves. As noted earlier, the establishment of the existence of a shared culture is always methodologically problematic, but I would argue that they are culturally distinctive from the rest of the population, by being non-Muslim, by having a different appearance in everyday dress and by having a Jenobia-orientated social life, which includes, if they are to be taken as a single unit, endogamous marriage patterns. Furthermore, they are regarded by non-Jenobia as

culturally distinctive.

This example introduces two further dimensions beyond a simple list of factors. Firstly, although as we have noted a wider social context always exists it must be stated when discussing sets of people and their cultures. Thus rather than simply focusing on a shared culture, attention must be centred on distinctive shared culture within a stated wider context. Secondly, not only must there be self-perception of cultural distinctiveness on the part of the members, but also non-members' perception of distinctiveness. This brings the concept very close to Morris's definition of "ethnic group" cited earlier. Furthermore it avoids the methodological difficulties posed by insistence on an objective measure of shared culture.

A final point that must be made is that ethnic entities must, if they are to have practical and analytical value, be exclusive. No person can be a member of more than one within a stated context.

We are now in a position to formulate a definition. In deference to earlier usage, culture must play a key role. Therefore an ethnic entity can be defined as an exclusive social unit whose members share a culture that is thought by them and others to be distinctive within a stated social context and who also share at least one of the following: a common language or dialect; some form of political organisation; or common geographical origins, whether actual or historical. A label for the entity is usual, but not essential.

The definition is thus factorial. It incorporates most of the definitions we have considered. Obviously members of some ethnic entities will share all these factors, others may have perhaps only a distinctive culture and one other factor in common. This then affirms

Barth's (1969a:14) proposition that ethnic entities are highly variable in their form and content.

We are now left with the other source of ambiguity: "group". As we have seen, there are inherent difficulties with this term: it is a narrow concept employed too broadly. Williams (1964:17-18) is helpful, but common English is equally obliging. Four concepts will suffice:

An ethnic category will be defined as a classificatory device, by which individuals of an ethnic entity are labelled. Normally this will coincide with the label used by the members themselves, but exceptionally, as in those cases cited by Naroll (1967:75) where no "native label" appears to exist, it may be a label devised by the anthropologist. (This is significantly different from Cohen's (1969:4) definition, but see "ethnic grouping" below.)

An ethnic collectivity will be defined as the entire population of individuals that are classified under an ethnic category.

An ethnic grouping will be defined as a part of an ethnic collectivity within a defined locality.

An ethnic group will be defined as a part of an ethnic collectivity or a part of an ethnic grouping where all the individual members are bound together by common interests, purpose or function.

On the basis of these definitions Chapter Four will argue that the population of Suakin consists of nine major ethnic groupings. Together with later chapters it will attempt to show the implications of this, both for the individuals within these groupings and for the town as a whole. The intention is to explore Barth's hypothesis that ethnic entities are organisational vessels that may pervade all social life or be limited to certain sectors of activity (Barth 1969a:14). This will involve examining the effect of ethnic grouping membership on

everyday life and, to borrow another Barthian concept, the boundaries of these groupings: both the boundaries that determine membership and the boundaries of their influence.

It has been essential to examine the concepts of "tribe" and "ethnic group" as they are used in anthropological literature at some length in order to arrive at these practical definitions which we can now apply to the situation in Suakin. Although the inhabitants of the town divide themselves into categories, such as "Beja", "Rashaida" and "Eritrean", we cannot automatically assume that these self-ascribed and designated labels necessarily coincide with ethnic categories or that they are necessarily based on consistent criteria. Indeed, I will argue in Chapter Four that "Eritrean" is not an ethnic but a geographic category, and this highlights the problem: of the many labels used by the inhabitants to classify themselves, which are the ethnic labels? Only by working out a precise definition of "ethnic", as we have done, are we in a position to answer.

Were we concerned with just one social grouping the problem might not have arisen. Had this thesis dealt solely with, for example, the Rashaida, it could have been argued that they constitute a "tribe" under almost all the definitions we have discussed, including Moerman's criterion that they successfully present themselves as one. However, our concern is not with social and economic behaviour amongst the Rashaida alone or any other single grouping, but with social and economic behaviour in the town as a whole. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, the population is not homogeneous but falls into a number of groupings - residential, linguistic, occupational and ethnic. On page 88 it was asserted that of these, ethnicity was fundamental to understanding residential, linguistic and occupational groupings, and the following

chapters will present the evidence. By reformulating "ethnic" and developing the suffixes "category", "collectivity", "grouping" and "group", we are able to divide the population into a number of comparable units. Without a consistent basis for this however we would be led towards the type of distorted conclusions that would have arisen had we adopted Churchill's classification of the inhabitants into "Arabs and fishermen".

Our next step is therefore to utilise these concepts, to identify the ethnic groupings, the fragments of ethnic collectivities present in Suakin. Chapter Four will show that the town contains eight major groupings, each commonly known by an ethnic label. However it will also be demonstrated that in Suakin at least ethnicity is not just an epistemological device but a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon that is the key to understanding the recent growth of the town, the distribution of the population within it, the maintenance of social order and even to some extent the physical appearance of the town and its inhabitants. As Cohen might phrase it, ethnicity is very much a live issue in the town.

CHAPTER FOUR

ETHNIC GROUPINGS AND

EVERYDAY LIFE

Classifying the Population

The Non-Refugee Population

Beja. Unresolved from Chapter Three is the question of the ethnic identity of our Emirab example. It was postulated that, depending upon the context, he might be considered as Sudanese, Beja, Hadendowa or simply as Emirab. The context has now been established as Suakin. Therefore he cannot be considered as ethnically Sudanese: there is no distinctive culture that could be labelled as Sudanese within the town. Neither can his ethnic identity be considered as Emirab: the language, geographical origins, political organisation and culture of the Emirab are not exclusive to them but are common to all the Hadendowa. The Emirab are a kin-based section, or sub-section of a larger ethnic collectivity. The contenders for the title of this ethnic collectivity are therefore reduced to "Hadendowa" and "Beja". As noted in Chapter Two, the Hadendowa are a part of the Beja. All Beja share a common language, Tu-Bedawie, originate from the Red Sea Hills and coastal plain area and have a common culture that is regarded as distinctive by both Beja and non-Beja. Thus it is

"Beja" that is the ethnic category. What then is "Hadendowa"? The essential difference between, for example, a Hadendowa and an Amarar, another 'part' of the Beja, is that they belong to different and independent political systems. Thus "Hadendowa" is a political category, one of several that comprise the ethnic category "Beja".

It is convenient to regard the members of a division resident within a defined area (such as Suakin) as forming a sub-grouping within the entire Beja grouping. The Beja sub-grouping most commonly associated with Suakin is undoubtedly the Arteiga, who as noted in Chapter Two, have been prominent since the late sixteenth century. However, numbers of Amarar, Hassenab and Hadendowa have without question been established in the town for similar lengths of time. These sub-groupings, or political categories, are parts of the divisions of the Beja inhabiting the hills and plain. Segmented into diwabs - lineage groups with collective rights in land - the Beja in these areas largely practice a limited annual migration with their herds of sheep, goats, camels and, in some parts, cattle. Milne (1974:72) states that the ideal of the Amarar is "self-sufficient pastoralism" and this is probably true of most of the other rural Beja. It is an ideal difficult to achieve when the rains fail, as they frequently do. The consequences, overgrazing and falling milk production, leave the individual with three choices: to sell his animals and cultivate millet, to move to a village, or to migrate to the urban centres as a temporary or permanent labourer (Milne 1974:72). Since 1931 and increasingly since 1964 migrants have been drawn to Port Sudan (Milne 1974:75). More recently numbers have settled in Suakin. However, rain failure is not the sole cause of migration:

Temporary disenchantment with the tribe resulting from quarrels or to establish some prestige or to

gain experience or to seek adventure or merely drawn by the bright lights of the city are all reasons for which Amarar migrate to the towns and which they share with migrants in other parts of East Africa.

(Milne 1974:75)

These reasons may apply to some Beja, and indeed other migrants, in Suakin. Additional causes may have been the destruction of the caravan haulage trade, initially by the railway and later by lorry transport, and the restriction of the option of seasonal labouring in the cotton producing area around Tokar.

However, a major factor in the choice of migration to Port Sudan is the prospect of employment, particularly in the docks. Although the prospect is not always realised, it has resulted in considerable numbers of young, single men migrating to the port. Suakin on the other hand, has no such large-scale employers and, as we shall see, only limited employment prospects. Those who choose to settle in the town normally do so in family units.

Paul's (1954:1) assertion that the Beja have remained virtually unchanged in forty centuries is something of an exaggeration. They have adopted Islam and are gradually becoming increasingly sedentarised and in some cases urbanised. Although, as Milne (1974) points out, a considerable proportion of migration to Port Sudan is temporary in nature, a substantial section, indeed the majority of the population of Port Sudan consists of permanently settled Beja. From the ranks of these have come further immigrants to Suakin: largely carpenters, seamen and boatbuilders who have moved with the relocation of the dhow harbour.

Takari

My reasons for employing "Takari" rather than

"Fallata" partly coincide with those of Duffield (1980): that the latter has derogatory overtones and the former is a self-ascription. Additionally, although "Fallata" is a widely used term elsewhere in Sudan, it is rarely used in Suakin. Here amongst non-Takari an Arabised version of "Takari" is employed, "Takarīn" (although the village occupied mainly by these people is frequently called Deim Fallata as well as Deim Takarīn). Rather than introduce a third term, it seems appropriate to follow Duffield's usage.

The Takari are a collectivity of Hausa-speaking Muslims, found in both the urban and rural areas of Northern Sudan. Possibly because of Suakin's historic role as a pilgrim port, Takari may have been settled in the town since the early years of this century, perhaps longer. The eponymous Shata who founded the village by the wells was very probably of Takari origin. Members of the collectivity are also found as wage-labourers in the cultivated regions around Tokar and the general recession of agriculture in that area may have caused some to migrate to Suakin and other urban centres more recently.

Jenobia The Jenobia, who are Christians, currently settled in Suakin are predominantly what the First Population Census of Sudan 1955/56 classes as "Central Southerners"¹ - Nuer in particular - although there are small numbers from other parts of Southern Sudan. It is my impression that the town's prison has played a major role in the settlement of these people. I have argued in Chapter Two that at the time of the census the majority of Jenobia enumerated may have been

¹See Table 2.

prisoners. Today the Jenobia still make up a significant proportion of the prison population. However, they appear to have come largely from the Three Towns area (see Map 9), not directly from the South. On release, it is not uncommon to find individuals settling in the town, some temporarily until they have the finances to move on, others more permanently. It also happens that the family of a man in prison may move to the town in order to be near him. This is not to assert that all Jenobia in the town are ex-prisoners or relatives of prisoners. Some have come to the town for other reasons. To give a single example: one Jenobia had been a labourer on a building site in Port Sudan (a common occupation for Jenobia in urban areas). Disliking the danger involved and the expense of the town, he moved to Suakin to live with other Jenobia he knew, eventually finding employment as a washerman in a Nuba's laundry.

Nuba The presence of Nuba in Suakin can also be explained to some extent by reference to the prison. A substantial number of the Prison Service warders are recruited from amongst the Nuba in Kordofan (see Map 9), and are brought to the town for tours of duty. Married warders bring their families. Other relatives may arrive subsequently to seek employment in the town. On retirement from the Service, a few Nuba have settled permanently in Suakin. There are however some Nuba who claim to have no connection whatsoever with the prison and state that their families have been settled in the town since the days of British administration.

Although animist Nuba are still to be found in the Nuba Mountains, those who migrate to other parts of Sudan have adopted Islam. Nevertheless they are regarded as a distinctive grouping within Suakin.

Northern Sudanese Amongst the Prison Service warders, after the Nuba, the Baggara, again from Kordofan are probably the most numerous. Other government agencies have the same effect of bringing individuals and often their families from areas outside Eastern Sudan into the town. Of course, not all government employees are from beyond Eastern Sudan: several police officers, teachers and particularly those in unskilled occupation such as caretaking and general labouring are Beja. However, the government's policy of transferring personnel at certain levels, in theory every two years, frequently in practice rather longer, accounts for a small amount of the ethnic diversity of the town's population. Thus, for example, during my fieldwork period, the Local Government Officer was from Dongola, the Customs Officer and the town's doctor from Khartoum and the majority of the Marine Fisheries Division personnel from Kordofan.

There are also a few persons from elsewhere in Northern Sudan who have no connections with government service. Some claim their families have been settled in Suakin for generations; others have settled more recently. An example of the latter is a man from the Shukriya collectivity who worked for several years as a cook on ships out of Port Sudan. He then moved down to Suakin to open a kitchen.

All these people are Muslim and originate, or in a few cases, their forebears originated, from non-eastern parts of Northern Sudan. They also have the distinction of speaking Sudanese Arabic in some form as a first language, unlike the ethnic groupings we have considered or will consider. However, a common language and, broadly speaking, common geographical origins are not sufficient to constitute an ethnic grouping. The absence of a "native label" for these people indicates that they are not thought of, nor consider themselves, as forming a

single ethnic grouping. One might argue that they share a vague "Sudanese culture" but even if this can be demonstrated as existing, it is not exclusive to these people, but is shared to some degree, with such ethnic groupings as the Beja, Nuba and Takari. The Northern Sudanese lack a common cultural background that would distinguish them from other collectivities represented in the town. Some are from pastoral collectivities, others from sedentary collectivities. Even amongst the pastoralists there may be few common cultural practices. Indeed in certain items of material culture, such as traditional dwellings, the pastoral Shukriya, for example, are more akin to the Beja than to the pastoral Baggara. Even in Islam they are not united but may belong to different sects. Therefore the Northern Sudanese do not form an ethnic grouping in the town, but a geo-linguistic grouping, composed of numerous small groupings, such as the Baggara, Dar Hamid, Shukriya and Sha'qiya

The Refugee Population

Amongst the refugees from the Eritrean and Tigray wars now in Suakin, three groupings can readily be distinguished.

Tigrinya

The Tigrinya are an ethnic collectivity from the Eritrean highlands, including many of the major towns, and the province of Tigray. Unlike the Jenobia they are monophysitic Christians. In the rural areas they are predominantly agriculturalists, within, until recent land reforms after the fall of the Emperor, a feudal-type economy where freehold landowners were taxed and had obligations to a provincial governor, and tenant farmers were obliged to surrender a proportion of their produce and labour to the church, provincial governors and the empire (Shack 1974:39-46). Unlike the other ethnic

collectivities we have considered the Tigrinya are not divided into sub-collectivities or sections. They speak Tigrinya, or Habasha¹ as they call it, a language related to Amharic (Shack 1974:15).

Danakil The Danakil are a loosely organised collectivity of Hamitic stock from the same branch as the Somalis (Trimingham 1965:171). They inhabit the Eritrean coastal plain south of Massawa, and although Trimingham (1965:176) notes that a few on the actual coast are fishermen and sailors, the Danakil are predominantly pastoral nomads. They are Muslims. Trimingham (1965:171) states that they call themselves 'Afar, which he also gives as the name of their language, but are known to Ethiopians and Arabs as Danakil (sing. Dankali). I do not recall the label 'Afar being employed, even by informants of this identity. In Suakin the label for these people is "Danakla". However, to avoid possible confusion with the Sudanese category "Danagla" Trimingham's ascription of Danakil will be used.

Other Eritreans The lowlands of Eritrea are inhabited by Muslim peoples, who, with the exception of the Bilen who have their own language, speak Tigray (which is not to be confused with the province of the same name). Some, such as the Marya, are pastoralists; others such as the Mansa are agriculturalists. However it is my impression that the majority of refugees from this area now in Suakin are from pastoralist collectivities. Some have similar forms of social organisation; others are more akin to such ethnic groupings as the Danakil. Thus these people cannot be classified as a single ethnic

¹From which the Arabic word for Ethiopians, Habash, is derived.

grouping within Suakin, but, as with the Northern Sudanese, several small groupings. However, for convenience, the term "Eritreans" will be employed to classify these people, with the exception of the Beni Amer and Habab (who form a "special case" which will be described shortly) as a geographical grouping distinct from such ethnic, and consequently also geographical, groupings as the Tigrinya and Danakil.

"Crypto-Refugees"

Khasa Like the Marya, the Beni Amer and Habab are predominantly pastoralist, are Muslim and largely speak Tigray as a first language. However they are not confined to the territory of Eritrea but straddle the border with Sudan. As noted in Chapter Two, it was from the Beni Amer that the Arteiga rented the cultivation area in the Baraka delta. Since the initiation of large-scale cotton cultivation at Tokar until the escalation of the present conflict in Eritrea it was customary for large numbers of Beni Amer and Habab to migrate northwards to engage in wage-labour during the cotton picking season. However, Trimingham (1965:157) estimates that one-third of all the Beni Amer are permanently located in Sudan. The First Population Census of Sudan 1955/56 notes 142 Beni Amer resident in Suakin,¹ a little over three per cent of the total population. I estimate the present proportion of Beni Amer and Habab to be in the region of fifteen per cent. Naturally, given the current political climate they largely claim to have always been resident somewhere

¹See Table 2

in Sudan. However, I believe this increase can be attributed almost entirely to the Eritrean conflict: the majority of those Beni Amer and Habab now in Suakin are in fact refugees and not simply pastoralists who have come to the town from the Tokar region because of herd loss, as with the Beja.

The Beni Amer and Habab are labelled together as "Khasa" in Port Sudan (James 1969) and Suakin,¹ and although not politically unified they have an almost identical politico-cultural system. Until the advent of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, the Beni Amer were divided into two castes, the aristocratic nabtab and the serfs, called, to further confuse matters, tigray.² According to Paul (1950:223-24), this system was borrowed from the Habab. Although the obligations of the tigray to the nabtab are no longer fulfilled, the elites in both the Beni Amer and the Habab remain.

There is some diversity within the sections of these entities:

The affinities linking the Beni Amer sections are several: religion, language, customs and habits and links of common descent. But neither is the range of these affinities co-extensive nor are they socially integrated. They do not coincide for the whole of the tribe but rather overlap irregularly, different affinities extending over different sections.

(Nadel 1945:53)

Given the loose nature of the linkages between the Beni Amer themselves,

¹Trimingham (1965:157) however gives two alternative accounts of this label: that it is the name of a section of the Beni Amer, and it is the label for those Beni Amer who speak Tu-Bedawie.

²A similar source of confusion is the use of the word "Arab" in Suakin. Generally it is used to mean Beja, but is also employed to mean a pastoralist or a person from the Arabian peninsula.

the existence of the "Khasa" label, the distinctive politico-cultural system and the ambiguous geographical origins of the Habab and Beni Amer, these two entities can be classified as forming a distinctive ethnic grouping within Suakin.

Rashaida Another collectivity with members migrating continually over the border between Sudan and Eritrea are the Rashaida, although the majority of them are based in Sudan, largely in the vicinity of Kassala. As noted in Chapter Two, descendants of the slaves of the Rashaida have been settled in the town for some time, probably since the 1950s. Today these people are frequently referred to as mawaliyd, "born here". In different places and at different times in Sudan, this designation has referred to a variety of peoples. For example, in Dongola the term Falaliyd was

... used for the Sudanese of Turkish or Mamlūk origin. (...) Most of them were counted under the categories of "No tribe" and "Sudanese of Egyptian origin in the 1955/56 Population Census. (...) After 1916 they were referred to (in official documents) as mawaliyd.

(Omer 1979:46)

Similarly Roden (1970:11) notes that the Suakin school of 1912 has thirty-five mawaliyd pupils: more than from any other group. This certainly could not refer to the mawaliyd of the Rashaida, as there was none resident in the town. Even today, few send their children to school. The alternative name for these Rashaida mawaliyd is Black Rashaida, as distinct from the Rashaida proper, the Red Rashaida. Superficially similar classifications are common: the Marya, for example, are divided into Red and Black, the Danakil into Red Men and White Men (Trimingham 1965:167, 173). However, unlike the Marya system, which is purely a territorial division with free intermarriage between Red and Black, amongst the Rashaida the distinction is based on

different lines of descent, the Blacks being regarded as the descendants of the slaves of the Red Rashaïda. However, the Reds and Blacks do not form separate sections within the political organisation of the collectivity: as with the Khasa division between nabtab and tigray there are Reds and Blacks within each section; for example the Awaymirāt (a section of the Baratīkh) and the Jeladīn (a section of the Barāsa) have both Red and Black members. The distinction is maintained by marriage rules: Red male/Red female and Black male/Black female marriages are permitted, and a Red male may marry Black females and the resulting offspring will be Red; Black male/Red female marriages are not permitted and, so far as I am aware, do not occur. Although Red/Black marriages are not all that common, such a system, given the generally polygamous nature of Rashaïda family life, naturally results in a shortage of Black females. Thus Black men tend to marry outside the collectivity more frequently than Red men, often taking women from the Takari. Like the Khasa and the Beja, the Rashaïda are not a politically unified collectivity but are organised under their three main sections. The leaders, the nazirs, of the Baratīkh and Barāsa reside in Kassala; the nazir of the Zenaymāt in al-Damer. All Rashaïda are Muslim and speak a Saudi Arabian dialect of Arabic.

The process of Rashaïda settlement in Suakin is in some respects unique but in others reflects patterns found amongst other groupings. It appears that although the collectivity is generally thought of as one of pastoral nomads, many Black Rashaïda have either never had herds or have been settled for a considerable period, particularly in the Tokar area. It was from such a background that the man came who claims to have been the first Rashaïda to settle in the town. From the Jeladīn, he came to the town thirty or forty years ago after the death of his father, a cultivator. As a boy, for the first few years in the town he lived with Khasa who were known to him through relatives

in Tokar. Eventually he took a wife from the Black Jeladīn in the vicinity of Tokar and built his own sandaga in Melakia. A few relatives joined him over the following years. The first Red Rashaida came in 1968, having lost his herds in Eritrea, through drought rather than the conflict. He was not from the Jeladīn or any other section of the Barāsa, but a Baratīkh. Nevertheless he built a sandaga alongside the Blacks in Melakia. Some three years later a particularly rich and influential Red Baratīkh, a nephew of the original Red, established himself in Suakin. This was not, he explained, because of herd loss, but because of the danger to his family through the Eritrean war. I suspect that he was also at this time beginning to invest in dhows and wanted a home near them. He arrived with his family and one brother and his family, and built sandagas in what is now al-Fula but which was at that time a completely undeveloped area. The reason he chose to build there and not Melakia was, he claimed, a matter of climate: a cool wind tends to blow from the sea down the Yemen road. His herds were kept intact in the borderlands and he was soon joined by another brother, his step-father and a host of other relatives. The original Red had by this time moved across to al-Fula which emerged as, so far as the Rashaida are concerned, an exclusively Baratīkh, exclusively Red (except for those Black women married to Reds) settlement. The Rashaida settlement within Melakia on the other hand did not become an exclusively Black settlement, but accommodated numbers of Reds, particularly Barāsa, arriving from Eritrea.

As this immigration from the south was taking place, there may have also been a small immigration from the north as the dhow harbour moved. Unfortunately at this point accounts become contradictory. Port Sudan merchants involved with the dhow trade when

interviewed stated emphatically that no Rashaïda were involved with the dhows before the moving of the harbour to Suakin. Several Rashaïda informants, including Red Baratîkh on the other hand claim that they had been employed in this industry for many years and had moved when the harbour did.¹

Once established, the settlements in al-Fula and Melakia attracted a third wave of immigration. Rashaïda, both Red and Black, largely from the settled villages around Kassala and, more rarely, al-Damer, came in the hope of finding eventual employment on the dhows. The actual number of Rashaïda in the town on any given day is however far greater than the number who actually reside in the town. Suakin is used as a transit point for young men en route to Saudi Arabia by dhow to engage in wage labour. Others come to make use of the town's facilities, the hospital in particular.

Of the settled Rashaïda, the majority are Red, but the settlement process is by no means complete.

Other "crypto-refugees" It is impossible, and to some extent unnecessary, to distinguish between those Rashaïda and Khasa from Sudan and those from Eritrea. Those from pastoral groups rarely know where they were born precisely. A similar problem, albeit on a smaller scale, arises with the Hadendowa. A few of these Beja are found in Eritrea and some may have lost their herds through the war, or droughts, and found their way to Suakin. Under this heading the Bisays, mentioned in Chapter Two, may be counted. A fragment of an Arabian

¹ Rashaïda involvement with the sea will be dealt with more fully in Chapter Five.

collectivity, they were resident in Eritrea but thirty-three households are now settled in Suakin.

Suakin and Settlement

Map 9 shows the geographical relations between the homelands of the major ethnic collectivities represented in Suakin, with the exception of the Takari. The foregoing discussion has elucidated four primary causes of migration from these areas: the Eritrean and Tigray wars; herd loss (which in some cases coincides with the Eritrean war); government service (in various forms); and the recession of agriculture in the Tokar region. Additionally, the relocation of the dhow harbour has caused a limited migration from Port Sudan and from the settled Rashaida villages in the vicinity of Kassala.

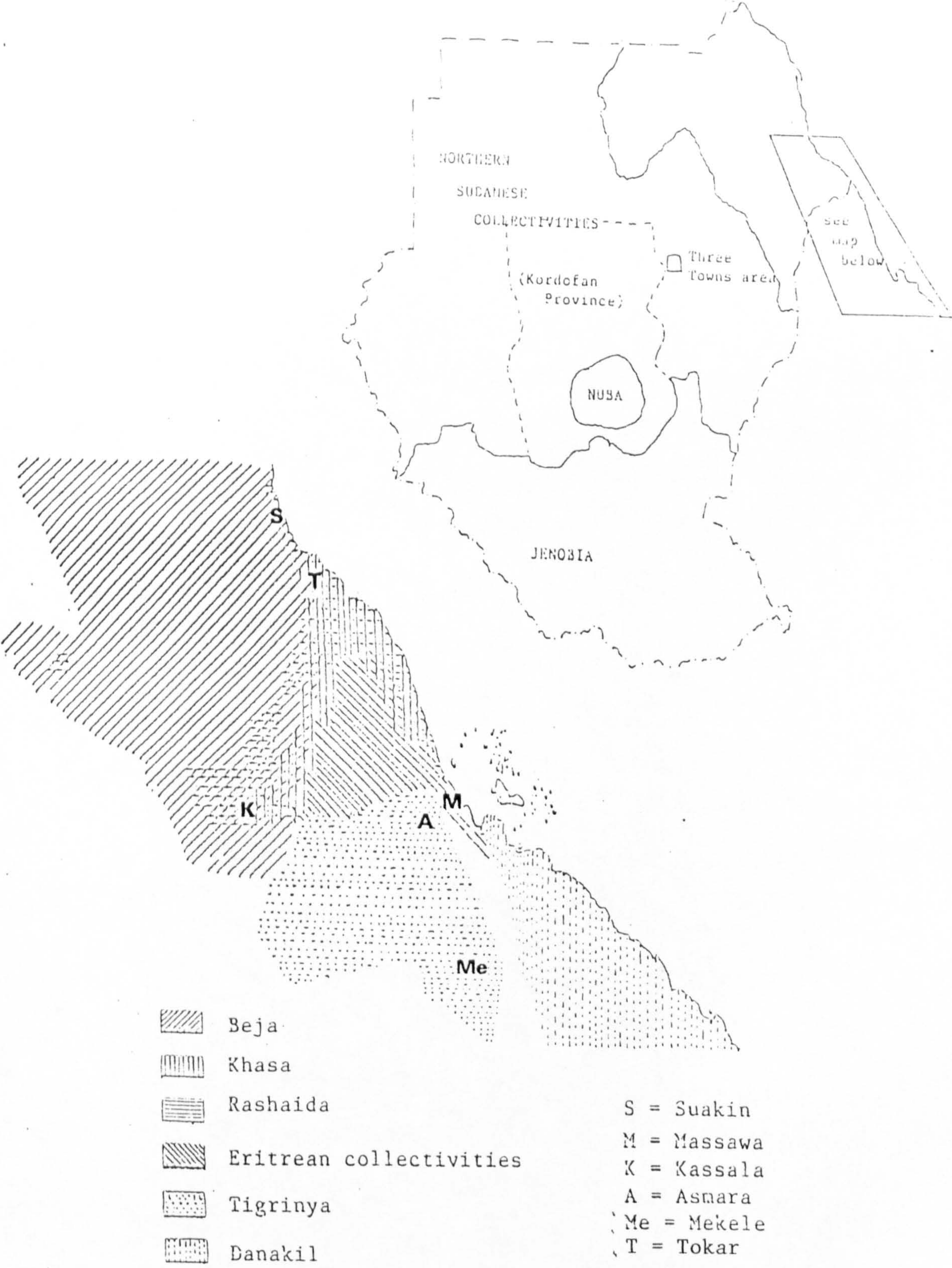
With the exceptions of government service and the relocation of the dhow harbour, these reasons, whilst they account for emigration, do not account for immigration specifically into Suakin. This can be explained only by a close examination of the behaviour of members of ethnic groupings and to the economic life of the town, which will be dealt with in this and the following chapters.

Ethnic Groupings and Numbers

In April 1979 a census of Suakin was conducted by the Town Council to aid the subsequent issue of ration cards for certain scarce commodities (sugar in particular). The data was arranged in the Census Register on a village council basis. These councils do not coincide with each village now in existence, but were established in

MAP 9

SKETCHMAP OF THE HOMELANDS OF
COLLECTIVITIES REPRESENTED IN SUAKIN



1971 when there were only five villages of significant size. A total of 13,714 persons were enumerated (see Table 6). Undoubtedly, given the purpose of the census, this figure is somewhat exaggerated, but it does provide an approximate guide to the size of the town.

Unfortunately, nothing is revealed in this census about the ethnic composition of the town. However, using the village council breakdown as a basis, coupled with informants' estimates and personal observation, it is possible to provide an indication of the relative sizes of the ethnic groupings in the town. This is given in Table 7. The Beja are considerably larger than any other grouping in the town, with more than twice the numbers of the second and third largest groupings, the Khasa and Rashaida.

The Distribution of Ethnic Groupings Within the Town

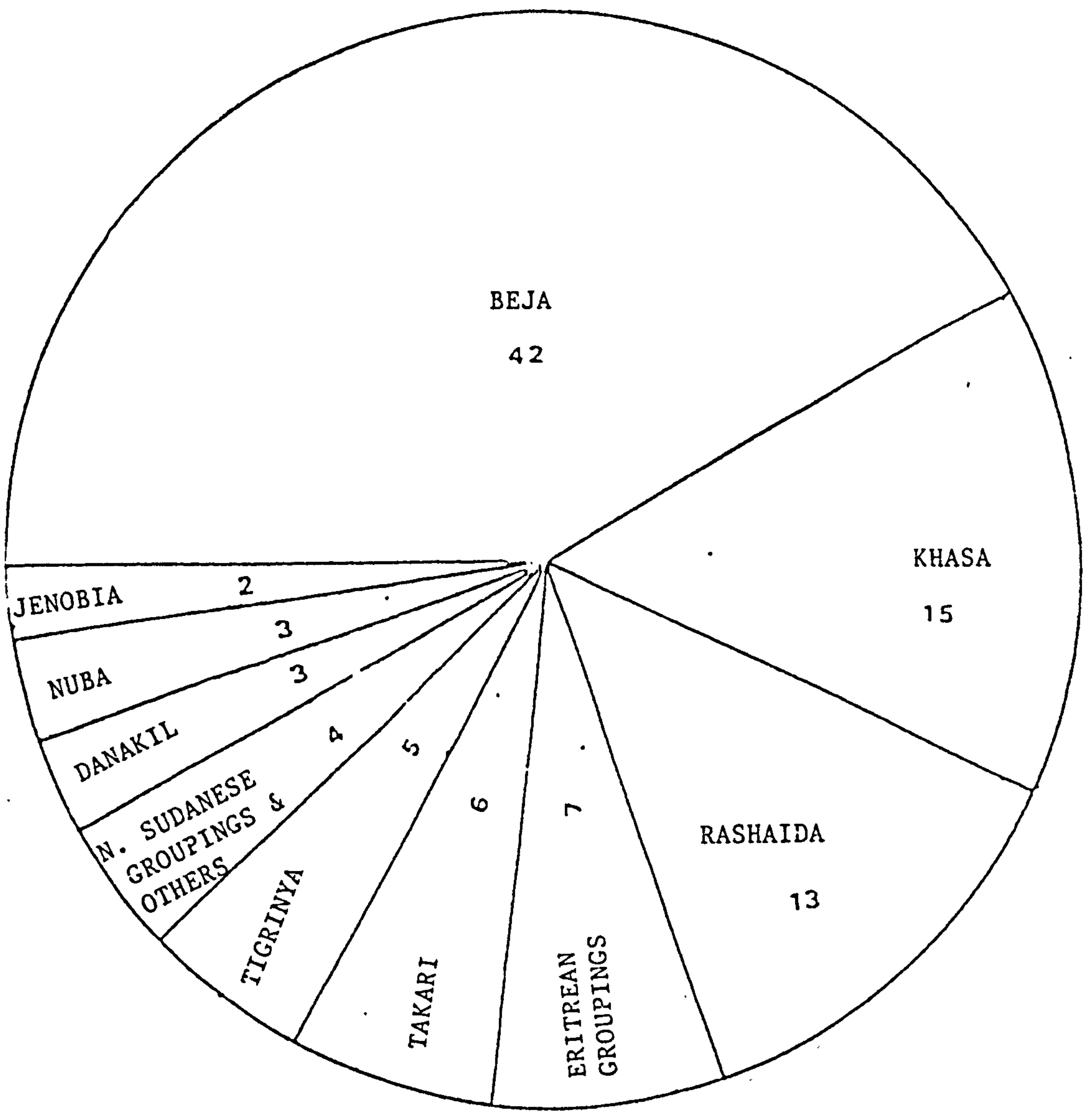
The village council arrangement of the census is helpful in estimating the sizes of ethnic groupings because the members of each particular grouping are not dispersed evenly throughout the town but are found in "blocs" within certain villages only. Broadly, the town can be divided into two sectors: the north and the south. The northern sector, consisting of Khor Hajaj, Mesheil, Andara, Shata and parts of al-Gayf and Melakia, is occupied almost entirely by Beja. The remainder of the town, the southern sector, consisting of al-Fula, Kas al-Duwri, Deim Fallata and the remainder of al-Gayf and Melakia, is occupied by the other groupings. With the exception of Deim Fallata (which is also an exception in that it is not strictly within the southern sector), which is almost exclusively a Takari village, as can be deduced from its name, these remaining

TABLE 6THE POPULATION OF SUAKIN 1979

	Persons	Households
Al-Gayf	1,324	215
Kas al-Duwri (including al-Fula and Jezira)	2,702	569
Melakia (including Andara)	3,948	891
Shata and Fallata	3,210	400
Mesheil (including Khor Hajaj)	2,530	721
TOTAL	13,714	2,796

SOURCE: Local Government Census Register, Suakin.

TABLE 7
AN ESTIMATION OF THE RELATIVE SIZES
OF ETHNIC GROUPINGS IN SUAKIN



NOTE: Figures give approximate percentages of total population.

villages are not exclusively occupied by one single grouping. Furthermore, no one village contains all the members of one particular grouping. Thus, although there are no Rashaida but Red Baratīkh in al-Fula, these Red Baratīkh share the village with a number of other groupings. Map 10 shows the approximate locations of groupings within the town.

Two points concerning this pattern of settlement are noteworthy. Firstly, it is generally those who have come from the south, whether Kassala and beyond or Eritrea and Tigray that have settled in the southern part of the town. Secondly, the layout of the villages leaves considerable open spaces, as can be seen most clearly in Map 5. This is a feature common to all Sudanese towns, but here it results in those with interests and relatives in the immediate hinterland having direct access to it. Lewis (1962:17-18) writes of the same phenomenon in Port Sudan:

(The tribal elders) heartily disliked many aspects of the life their tribesmen lived in the deim but they valued its position at the western edge of the town because this made it accessible to the open plains and the hills beyond.

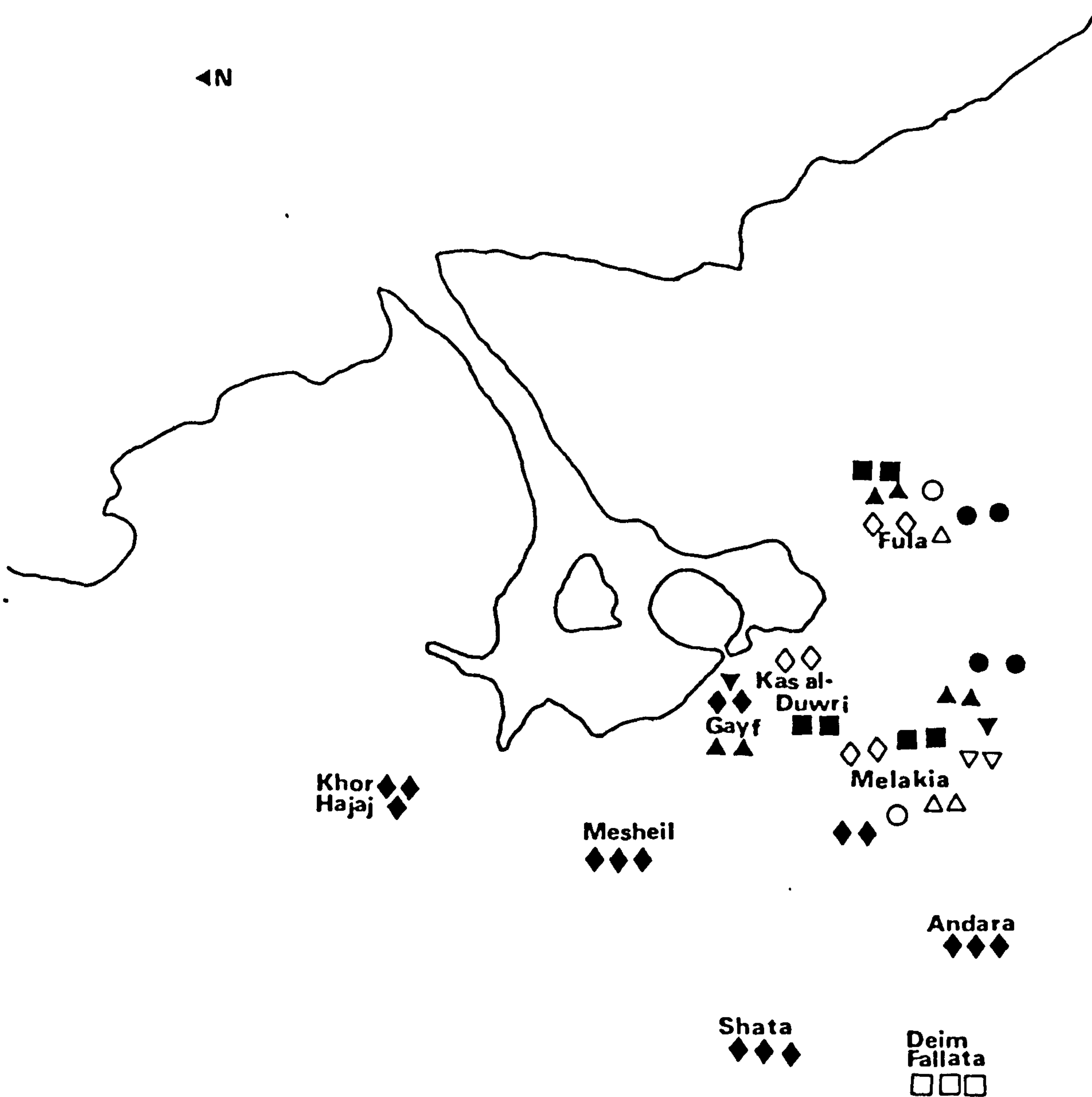
The advantages are easily observed: there are always a number of Beja tents on the outskirts of Khor Hajaj, Andara, Shata and Melakia, and Rashaida tents on the fringes of al-Fula and Melakia. Conversely, those groupings without interests or relatives in the immediate hinterland are as a rule to be found in the more built-up areas, such as Tigrinya in Kas al-Duwri and the town-facing side of al-Fula, and the Jenobia in the heart of Melakia. Similarly, neither the Khasa nor the Eritrean groupings have interests in the immediate hinterland and are not to be found on the edges of the town.

A seeming exception to this is the Takari village, which is open to the hinterland where the Takari have neither interests nor

MAP 10

THE DISTRIBUTION OF ETHNIC
GROUPINGS WITHIN SUAKIN

◀N



- ◆ Beja
- Rashaida
- ▲ Khasa
- "Eritreans"
- Takari
- ◇ Tigrinya
- Nuba
- △ Danakil
- ▽ Jenobia
- ▼ Others

○○○ dominant

○○ large

○ medium

relative size of grouping

relatives. However, it is not spaciouly laid out in the manner of, for example, Khor Hajaj where each household has access to the hinterland. It is a compact settlement clustered around a well, in close proximity to the seasonal watercourse that provides the basic building material. It is possible that this village was founded because of its proximity to the wells that supply the whole town with water, and that the Takari were involved with the drawing and distribution of water. However, this is no longer the case, except for a few individuals from this grouping who are engaged in water distribution. However, the Takari appear to be a collectivity that is always to be found on the outer fringes of a town. In Khartoum, for example, they were long established in Deim Fallata on the city's outskirts, until the city expanded at such a rate that the deim was no longer on the outskirts, rents went up and the Takari moved to Mayo, a new outer suburb.

Another collectivity of the outer suburbs are the Rashaïda, perhaps displaying the legendary Bedouin dislike of towns. Certainly it is in such terms that they explain their settlement patterns in Suakin and Port Sudan. In the Three Towns area they are found at Shambat, on the edge of Khartoum North; and they are to be found at Deim al-Arab on the edge of Kassala. The majority of those resident in Port Sudan are located at Hamash Kurmash, on the southern edge of the town. As Map 10 shows, in Suakin their areas are the most southern parts of al-Fula and Melakia.

The density of dwellings within villages is determined by two processes. Firstly, as in the account of Rashaïda settlement in al-Fula, clusters of kinsmen have congregated to form "blocs" within the grouping within the village. Amongst the Beja, these clusters are often

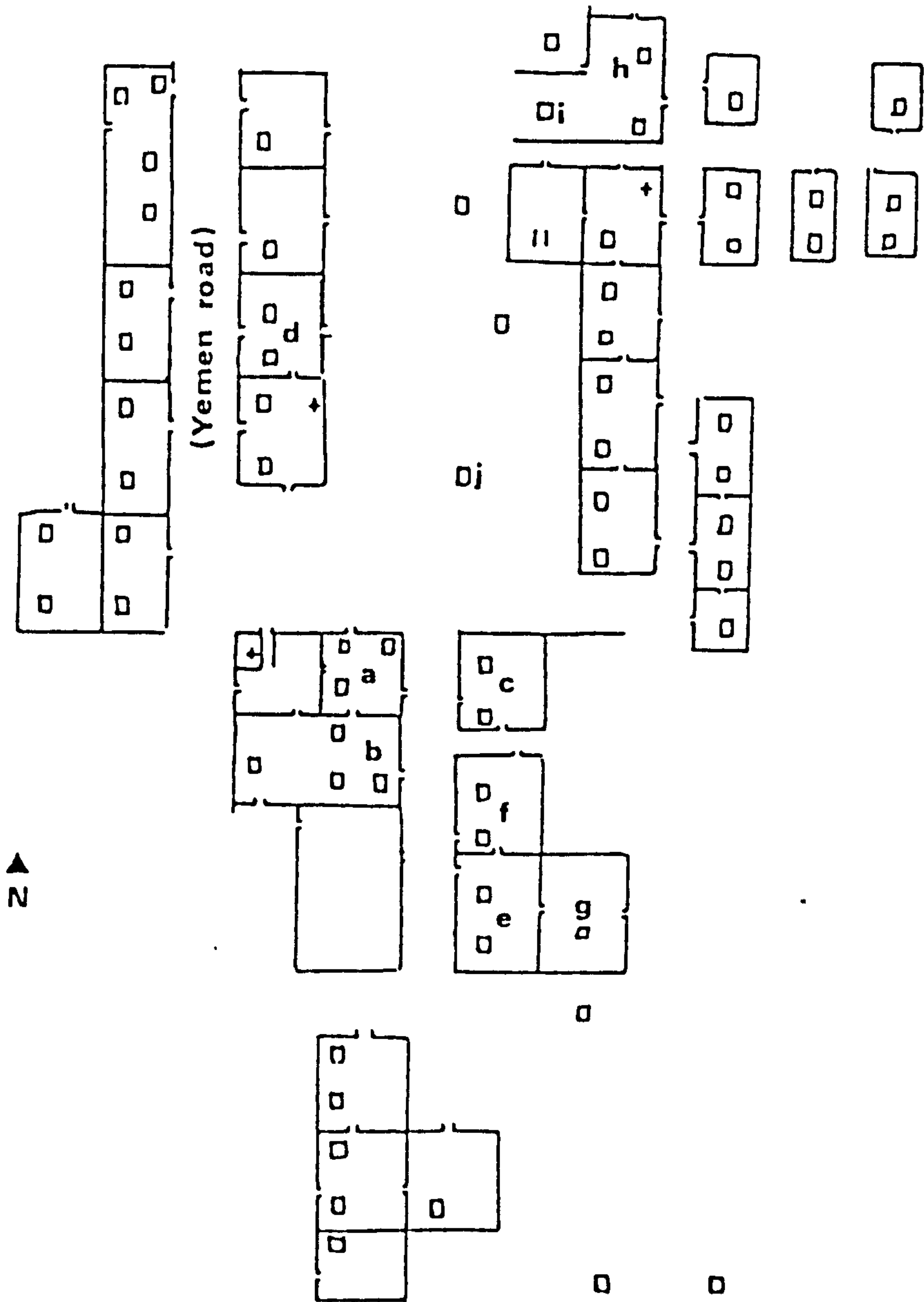
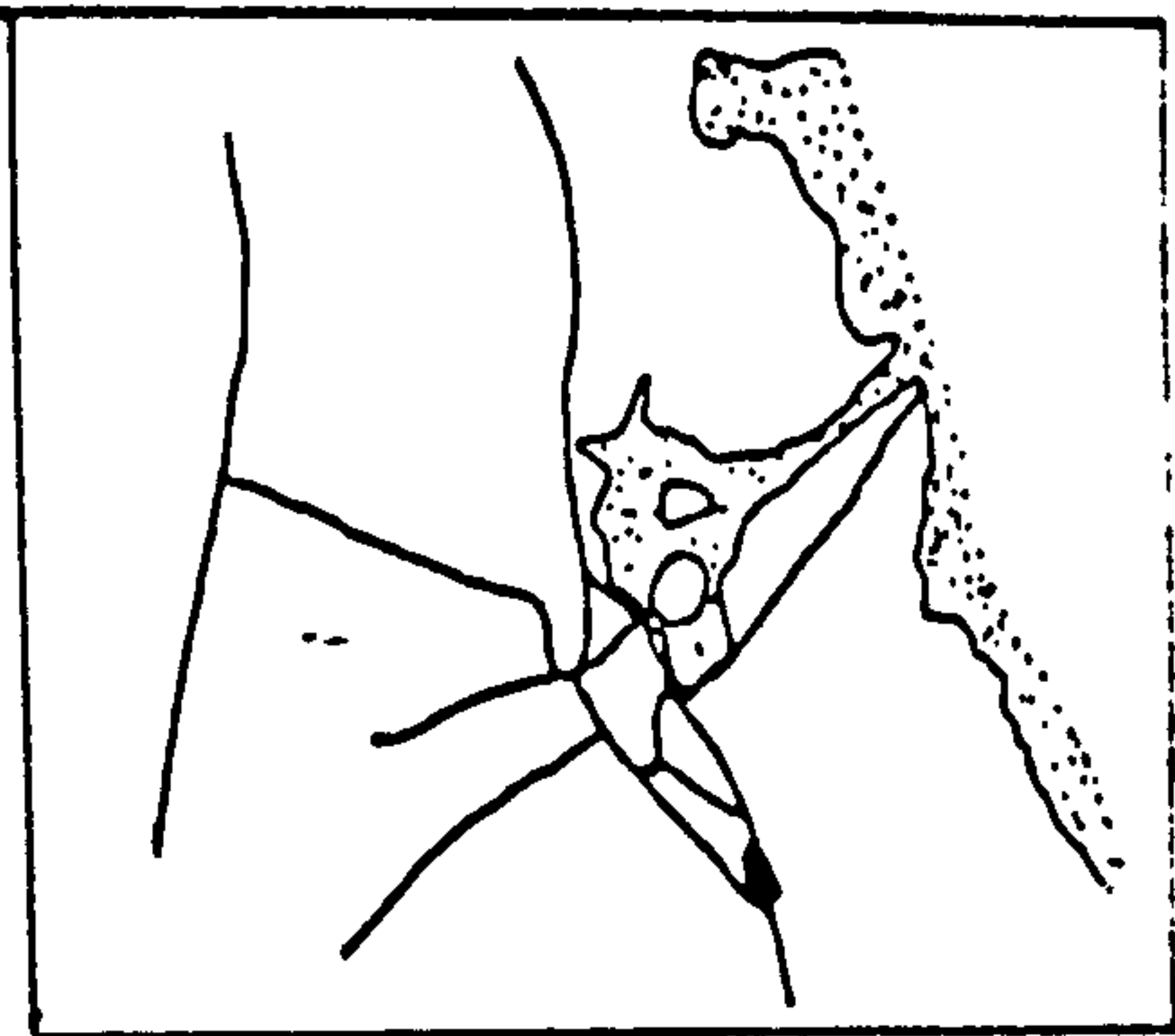
spaciously spread out, so that each dwelling can accommodate a tent or two in close proximity. The fences around Beja sandagas are often, but by no means invariably of dried grass. Elsewhere however, particularly where fences are of wooden planking, sandagas may have shared fences, with a gateway to give access to separate compounds without the necessity of going out into the street. An example of this is given in Map 11, a sketchmap of part of the Rashaida settlement in al-Fula. It will be noted that when this map was drawn some of the sandagas did not have completed fences surrounding them. However, all had the boundaries marked where fences were to be erected. Figure 4 shows some of the relationships between certain residents of sandagas illustrated in Map 11. This is not intended to portray more than a fragment of the total kinship network within the settlement or to map out the entire kinship pattern between these individuals.

Between clusters of kinsmen, open spaces are left. These are often diminished by the arrival of kinsmen who require space to build their own sandagas. Between groupings within a village, very much larger spaces are normally left, and generally maintained.

The second factor determining the density of dwellings is the amount of rented accommodation. The above observation on fences apply only to those in the financial position to build their own homes. Many, particularly refugees, are not in such a position, and the influx of these people has stimulated a demand for rented property. Land actually owned in Suakin is largely restricted to Jezira and parts of al-Gayf and Kas al-Duwri. The majority of villages are illegal settlements, in that their residents live in houses built without official permission on land that belongs, in the absence of private owners, to the government. Those who have built breeze block homes, however, have

MAP 11
SKETCHMAP OF
PART OF THE
RASHAIDA SETTLEMENT
IN AL-FULA

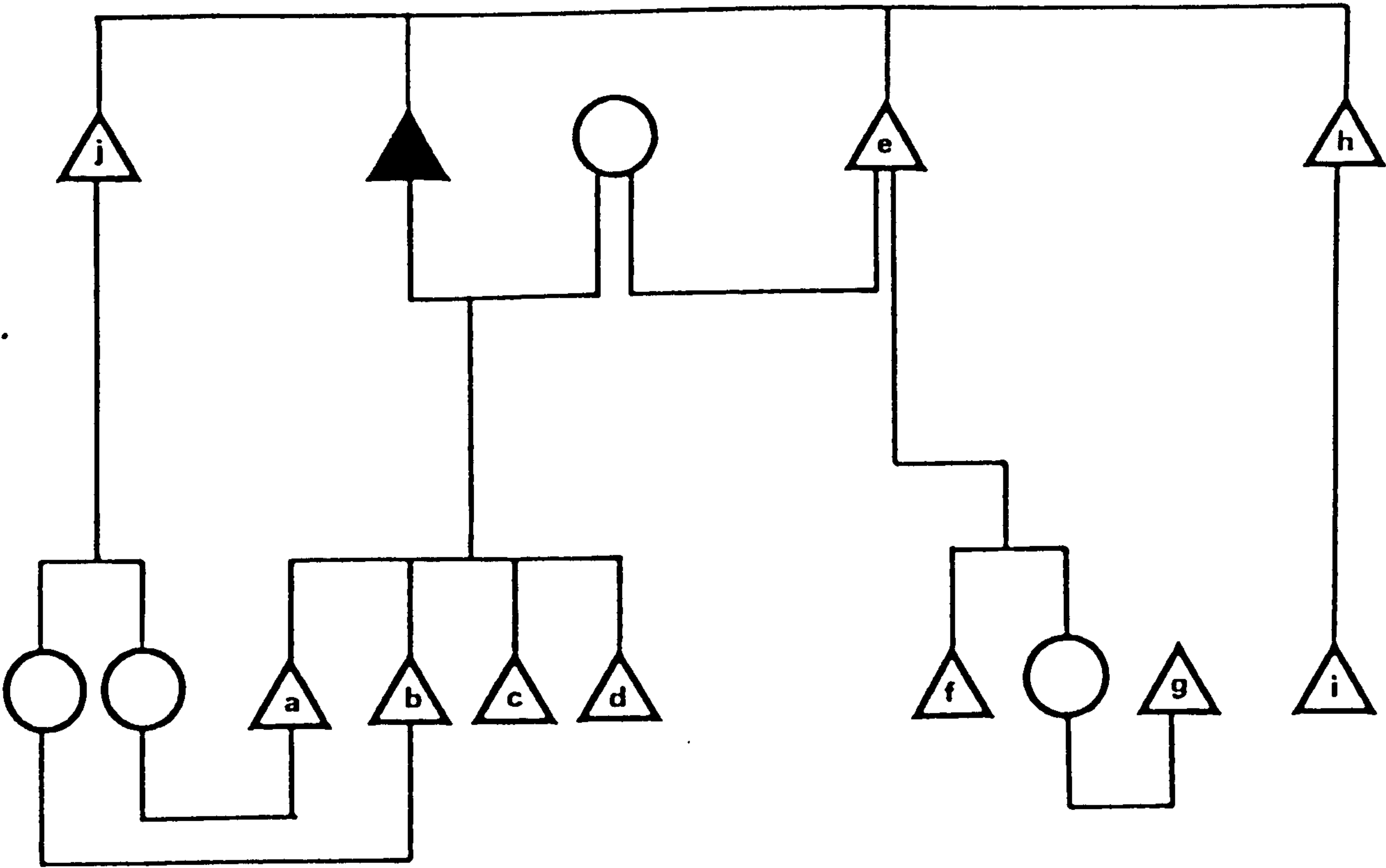
Mosque



+ = shop

Letters refer to householders related as shown in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4
KINSHIP RELATIONS BETWEEN SOME
RASHAIDA HOUSEHOLDERS IN AL-FULA



NOTE: Letters refer to sandagas located on Map 11.

generally acquired their plots officially. Owners of land on Jezira and in al-Gayf and Kas al-Duwri are on the other hand often no longer resident in the town and frequently not in the financial position to develop their holdings. In such cases, merchants of the town may rent the land for a nominal sum and then build as many sandagas in as small an area as possible. Al-Gayf and Kas al-Duwri have been developed in this way (but not Jezira, as the removal of rubble from the island, a precondition of any large-scale building programme, is prohibited by the Province Commissioner's Office and enforced by the island's caretaker). Shared fences are the rule in such developments, but without the internal access gateways of the owner-built dwellings. However merchants have also built sandagas for rental in all of the southern sector villages (including a few in Deim Fallata) - the five compounds on the western side of the Yemen Road shown on Map 11 are examples. The town's most highly built-up area is the "red light district" in Kas al-Duwri, a seemingly purpose-built complex where not only fences but also walls are shared. This, like the developments in the other villages, is built on unregistered land.

Perhaps more than half the total number of homes in Suakin are rented. Broadly generalising, the Beja and Rashaida tend to build their own sandagas, whilst members of other groupings tend to rent. Those renting out property are largely Beja and Khasa. They appear to play no conscious role in regulating the distribution of ethnic groupings within the town. However, merchants do not build single dwellings, but, in order to economise on fencing, rows of dwellings. This results in a number of homes being completed at roughly the same time and groups of related families may then arrange, or may have negotiated prior to completion, to rent the entire row. This explains

why some groups of members of ethnic groupings are to be found in clusters within villages and also why some ethnic groupings, for example the Tigrinya, are to be found in three villages. Of course there is also a certain amount of self-regulation. People seek accommodation in close proximity to members of their own ethnic grouping.

A single sandaga in the "red light district" in Kas al-Duwri is rented for fs 15.00 a month. Elsewhere a two-sandaga compound (the norm, often built of better quality wood than non-rented homes) can be rented for only fs 5.00 a month. Importantly, as we shall see, similar accommodation in the outer deims of Port Sudan is said to cost fs 20.00 a month.

Appearances

With the possible exception of Deim Fallata, which has been described in Chapter One, no ethnic differences are manifest in the style of housing. Rented property is constructed by teams of carpenters, who also build sandagas for individuals (a few enterprising non-carpenters however have built their own). I was told that Rashaida sandagas are distinguished by finials but this is neither invariably true nor a feature exclusive to Rashaida dwellings.

Thus the homes themselves give no clues to the ethnic identity of their occupants. The layout of compounds gives only the most general of indications: scattered sandagas may indicate Beja or Rashaida, highly built-up areas may indicate the absence of Beja and Rashaida. In establishing the ethnic identity of the inhabitants of a particular area of the town, the most valuable clues are personal appearance: not simply physical differences in size and colour, but in

dress, in "make-up".

Markings Although scarification is on the wane throughout Sudan, amongst the Beja three vertical slits on either cheek are still the rule rather than the exception amongst men. Tigrinya women, as Christians, have an elaborate cross tattooed on their foreheads, whilst Rashaida women have very extensive tattooing on their faces. The same design, not hidden behind a veil, is to be found on another ex-Arabian grouping, the Bisays.

Clothes The black dresses and veils, embroidered with tiny silver beads, hemmed with red (but sometimes yellow, blue or fluorescentgreen) patches of the Rashaida women make them the most clearly distinctive grouping. Young girls of the collectivity wear a near-opposite combination: red skirts hemmed with black patches, with separate black hood and cape and veil. The majority of the remainder of the town's women wear tobs, the more prosperous wearing a short Western-style dress underneath. Often, particularly amongst the Khasa and older Beja, the tob is a simple sari imported from India, purple or green with a single band of contrasting colour, the band being bordered with 'gold' thread. Younger Beja women, particularly the unmarried, tend to wear single bright colours: blue or yellow.¹ Takari women have a preference for patterned tobs. Remarkable by its absence, even amongst members of Northern Sudanese groupings, is the black tob, favoured by women in other parts of Northern Sudan. Headscarves are worn by Takari girls and some Tigrinya women. The latter may also use a short white tob covering only the head and shoulders, similar to that worn by schoolgirls, but in this case patterned. Alternatively

¹ Fashion appears to have changed since the early years of this century: see Jackson (1926:53), cited above, p. 61.

they may wear a gorbab (a sarong imported from Jidda) draped around the head and shoulders. This is also favoured by Tigrinya men, particularly those involved in the war effort, as it doubles as a thin blanket. They may wear it in a similar fashion to the women or wrap it around the head in a rudimentary turban (imma). The most widely worn uniform amongst townsmen is the white jelabia and turban found throughout Sudan. Several groupings have distinct methods of tying the turban. The jelabia is accompanied by a sideria - a sleeveless, collarless jacket - and sirwal - extremely baggy trousers with the crutch no more than six inches from the leg bottoms. However, sideria and sirwal are not normally worn by those from Northern Sudanese groupings and the sirwal is not worn by the Nuba. The Rashaida are distinctive by wearing a closer cut, collared jelabia and white sideria (or a more fancy waistcoat imported from Jidda), in contrast to the darker colours (predominantly black) worn by other groupings. Their skull caps (again an importation from Jidda but manufactured in Indonesia) are of wool, of one colour with black stripes, rather than the white or orange tagias worn by others. Beja, Khasa, Danakil and those from Eritrean groupings, when working wear a collarless, short-sleeved shirt - 'aragi - with sirwal and mahahiat gidah - black plastic sandals that cover the toes. Footwear for most others, both men and women, is safinja - "flip-flop" sandals. Only the richer merchants and some government employees wear shabat - sandals of leather. Trousers and shirts, Western-style, are only worn regularly by Tigrinya men (who also wear mahahiat gidah) and Jenobia, although they are also worn by some government officials during office hours and by some schoolboys.

Of what relevance is this information? Barth (1969b) is dismissive of such specific items of culture as dress as being non-essential characteristics of an ethnic collectivity. He is probably

correct - the Nuba would not cease to be Nuba if they adopted the sirwal. However, in Suakin at least, such items are manifest badges of ethnic identity and their use, or non-use, provides a key, albeit a crude one, to the degree of allegiance with the collectivity beyond the particular geographical location. Take for example one aspect that has not been discussed so far: men's hair. It is only the Rashaida that can readily be distinguished, by their pencil beards. The famous bushy, ringletted hairstyle that earned the Beja the nickname "Fuzzy Wuzzy" is sported by almost no Beja resident in the town, although it is still widely favoured by the hill-dwelling Beja, who come to the town to sell milk and firewood. Again in the hinterland Khasa children are distinguished by having their heads shaved leaving two clumps, one at the crown and one on the forepart of the head; Beja children have only one clump at the crown. Yet in Suakin these styles are rare: nearly all children, regardless of grouping, have their heads either completely shaved or a more Western-style cut. Thus it appears that residence in the town may modify certain aspects of behaviour, or rather may alter certain behaviours into patterns that are not identifiable with a particular grouping. Beja and Khasa hairstyles are only one example. Other badges are being dropped, most noticeably, perhaps because their badges are so obvious, amongst some Rashaida. Some Black women have dropped the veil and taken up the tob; some Red schoolboys have abandoned the close-cut jelabia and dress in an unclassifiable Sudanese style, or have taken up Western-style clothing.

Social Behaviour in Groupings

We have established the existence of ethnic groupings, composed

of clusters of kin, in Suakin and noted a few distinctive features of these groupings: now we must examine the implications. In this and following sections it will be shown how social and political activities are organised around the grouping and kin cluster. In later chapters the importance of the grouping in economic activities will be examined. It is important to note from the outset that the grouping is not a form of mutual assistance society. There are vast differences in wealth between kinsmen and there are beggars. The latter highlight the vagueness of the rights and duties of kin and fellow grouping members. As noted above, Rashaida women are easily distinguished, therefore the town's two most conspicuous beggars are two Rashaida women. Both are Red Baratīkh: one is blind, the other mentally disturbed. Their fellow Baratīkh in al-Fula do not provide them with shelter, but will, if asked, provide food. However, the beggars are never invited to share a meal and do not participate in the social life of the grouping. A Khasa kitchen manager also regularly supplies these women with food: he explains this action as his duty as a Muslim.

Excepting unusual circumstances (one case of which will be described later) marriage takes place between members of the same ethnic collectivity, although not necessarily between members of the same grouping.¹ The celebration of marriage tends to be restricted exclusively to the collectivity concerned. Guests may come from far away or from other parts of the town, but all share a common ethnic identity. In such cases where members of other ethnic groupings are invited, these tend to be persons of special status. For example, when

¹ Amongst Muslim groupings, marriages to father's brother's daughter are the ideal, but I have no information on how often this is realised.

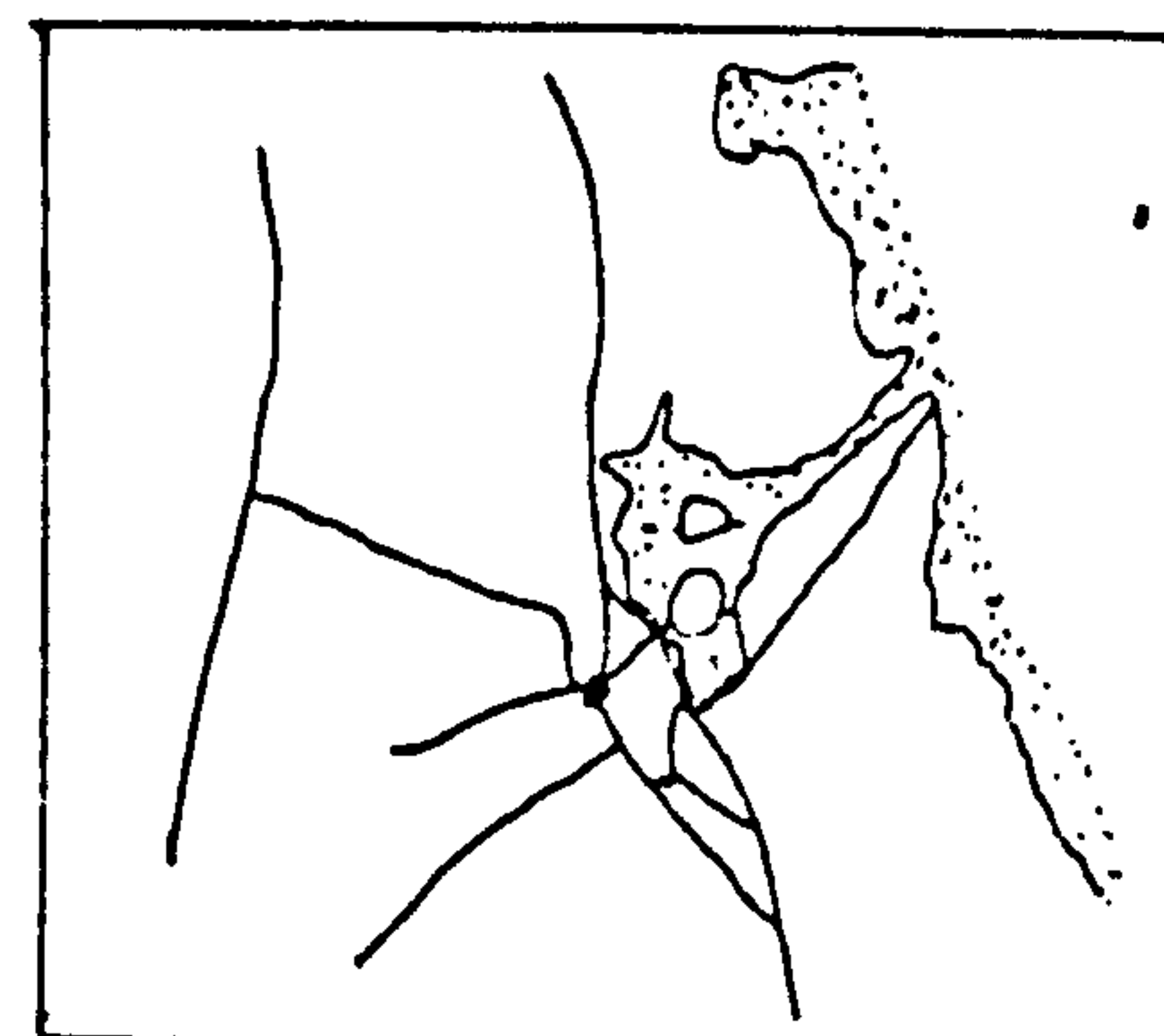
a son of the town's reputedly richest man, a Beja, was married, the Local Government Officer, the Marine Fisheries Division staff (who were close friends of the groom's elder brother), the leadership of the town's EPLF and I were invited to the celebratory party, along with literally hundreds of Beja. Reflecting the personal taste of the groom's father, there was also a Danakil band present (the members of which were employees of the groom's father as a dhow crew).

Exceptions to the general rule of ethnic exclusiveness are Takari women, who turn up at most social events, from Khasa circumcision parties to Rashaïda zars, to sell tesali (dried and salted melon seeds).

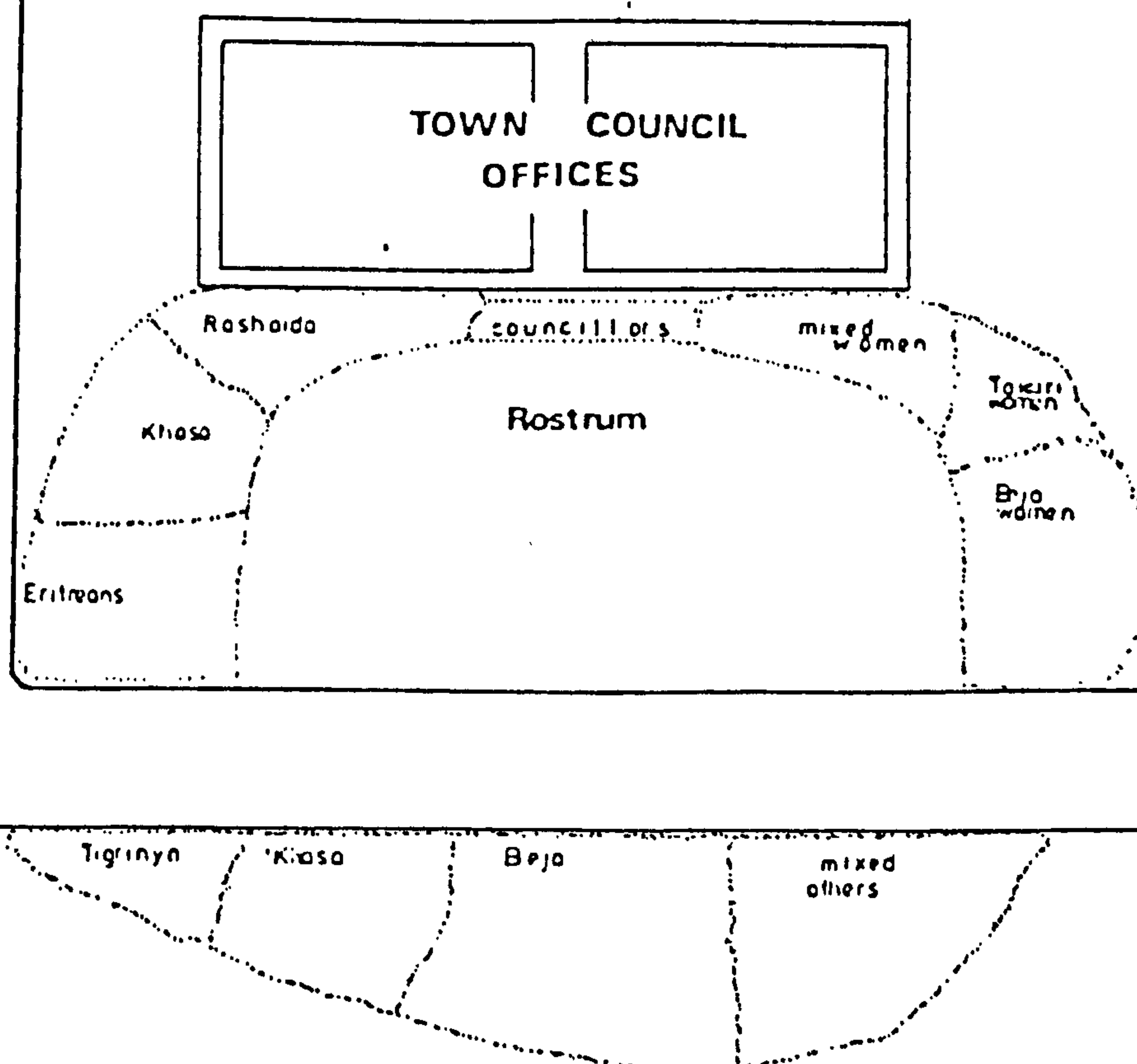
Social events organised by the EPLF and the TPLF, such as film shows and a party to celebrate the victory at Nakfe, are well attended by Tigrinya, Eritrean groupings and Danakil. As they generally take place in the streets of al-Fula there are also sizable numbers of Rashaïda, Khasa and others present.

At periodic social events which involve the whole town, such as the opening of the new roads by the President of Sudan and the switching-on of the electricity generator by the Province Commissioner, crowds organise themselves very clearly along ethnic lines. Figure 5 shows the approximate arrangement of the crowd outside the Town Council Offices in May 1979 during a speech by the Red Sea Province's Commissioner, prior to throwing the switch that gave the central market area electric light for the first time. The event was well publicised: a Land Rover equipped with loudspeakers had toured the villages the previous evening announcing that the President himself would conduct the ceremony. By early morning the news had

FIGURE 5
ARRANGEMENT OF THE CROWD OUTSIDE
THE TOWN COUNCIL OFFICES DURING
PROVINCE COMMISSIONER'S SPEECH, MAY 1979



N
 ↓



Beja

SHATA
GATE

spread that he had cancelled his plans. Nevertheless a crowd of well over a thousand assembled. I was particularly surprised by the behaviour of the Rashaïda men, who had always spoken disparagingly of Sudanese officialdom. In the event, a group¹ from Melakia was the first to arrive and positioned itself in one of the most favourable spots: under the verandah of the offices. It was later joined by a group from al-Fula. The Beja men meanwhile arranged themselves some distance away, opposite the rostrum, on the other side of the road, which was kept clear by the police. Other groups formed themselves between these two. A group of late-arriving Beja did not attach themselves to the main body but, in order to obtain a better view, stood some distance back. Women occupied the area to the west of the rostrum, but did not form themselves into such conspicuous ethnic groups as the men: only the Beja and Takari were clearly distinguishable. No Rashaïda women were present. There was a long delay before the arrival of the Commissioner, and several groups entertained themselves: Rashaïda men began sword dancing; Beja men sang and chanted.

No Rashaïda women were present again when in December of the same year the President did visit the town, although it seemed that everyone else was. Beforehand it was unclear what would happen on the day. Arrangements were made by the Local Government Officer and the Province Commissioner's Office for a reception in the rest-house, but the majority of the inhabitants were wise enough to realise that the only certain event would be the cutting of the tape at the junction of the Port Sudan-Haiya highway and the Suakin by-road.² Consequently,

¹ A true group, in that they had unity of purpose.

² In the event, the President, after cutting the tape, drove into Suakin, turned around in the market place and continued his journey to Port Sudan.

they made their way to this spot, or as close to it as possible. Again the crowd was divided into groups. However, it was much more fragmented than on the previous occasion. This was due to several circumstances. No group arrived en masse or in very substantial numbers at one time. Some had arranged lifts in bakassi (sing. boks, a passenger-carrying pick-up van) and on lorries; others arrived on foot. Furthermore, it was not possible to encircle the "centre of action" as it had been on the previous occasion: the crowd was forced to form along the southern side of the by-road, the other side being occupied by a line of some two hundred Beja from the hills mounted on camels, who, once the tape was cut, formed an "advance party", racing into the town ahead of the President's coach.

These two incidents serve to illustrate two points about social behaviour in Suakin. Firstly, people congregate into groups according to ethnic category, not according to village. This was particularly clear during the first event. Rashaida from al-Fula and Melakia mixed freely, whilst the Khasa kitchen manager, mentioned earlier in connection with beggars, the majority of whose customers were Rashaida, was to be found in the midst of one of the Khasa blocs. The second point concerns the question Why did so many people turn out to witness these events? They were not great social occasions in the entertainment sense (such as the EPLF events are), but occupied a couple of hours in the morning, mostly spent waiting. The major occurrence of the first event was a speech (the actual throwing of the switch took place in another location and with such rapidity after the speech that it was witnessed by very few) and of the second, the cutting of a tape, which few could see. A considerable proportion of Suakin's population is not Sudanese in the legal sense and yet they

came in their thousands for a glimpse of Sudan's president. Even the staff of the Marine Fisheries Division, critical of the President and his methods to a man, attended.

Doubtlessly some of the crowd present during the second event were there out of curiosity, others out of personal respect for the President and still others simply because it was an event. However, a number of informants explained their presence by stating that they were Sudanese, implying that attendance was a statement of national identity. This was a response elucidated not only from Beja and others legally Sudanese, including the Rashaïda who hold Sudanese passports but do not normally identify themselves as Sudanese, but also from people from Eritrea and Tigray. A similar phenomenon occurs on May 25th, the anniversary of President Nimeiri's coup d'etat, when every shop in the town and many homes fly a Sudanese flag, regardless of the ethnic identity of the occupants or owners.

Normally the Rashaïda would identify themselves, in terms of "nationality", as Saudi Arabian, the Takari as Nigerian, those from Eritrean groupings, the Tigrinya and the Danakil as Eritrean or Tigraynean. This is paradoxical only if one subscribes to Epstein's hierarchical model of identities (Epstein 1978:113, cited above p. 99), which, as has been suggested, is too simplistic. It can be explained by examining the nature of these "national" identities. When a Takari, for example, states that he is Nigerian, this is what we have described as his geographical identity, the place where he, or in this case his forebears, originated. It is equivalent to the Beja's geographical identity of the Red Sea Hills and coastal plain, and is a constituent part of his ethnic identity.¹ This is not equatable with

¹English-speaking South Indians use the term "native place" to cover this concept. Thus, for example, if one's forebears were born in

his Sudanese identity, which is derived from the political state whose protection he currently enjoys. This is therefore a political identity, and is not a part of ethnic identity. Thus all the inhabitants of Suakin are ipso facto Sudanese in this sense, and such events as those described allow for the display of this identity.

This also explains why the identity of "Suakinese" is exclusive to the Arteiga. It is a restricted geographical identity and not a political identity that can be acquired simply by residence.

Interaction Between Ethnic Groupings

The ethnic groupings in Suakin do not, of course, exist in total social isolation. Kitchens and teashops, particularly those in the central market area, allow for interaction between members of different ethnic groupings. Islam, the predominant religion, provides further opportunities. On Fridays the large coral-built mosques in the town centre are attended by Muslims from a variety of groupings and from a variety of villages. Some villages have their own mosques, normally wooden structures of sandaga style, but with the verandah facing west. One of these is shown on Map 11. It was built by a Rashaida, significantly in the open space that separates the Rashaida settlement from the rest of al-Fula. Positioned thus, non-Rashaida Muslims can make use of the facility without actually entering the Rashaida settlement. The Imam is in fact not a Rashaida, perhaps because

Kerala, one's "native place" would be Kerala, and if asked the question "Where do you come from?", one would answer Kerala, even if one had never been there.

illiteracy is almost total amongst the Rashaïda. He also runs a Koranic school in the mosque, which is attended by both Rashaïda and non-Rashaïda children. He receives no salary from the government, although the five imams of the central mosques receive fs 17.00 a month.

The clubs of the town are largely Beja-dominated, with the exception of "Nadi Sawākin" which is used by teachers and government officials. As will be shown in later chapters, economic activities allow for some interaction between members of different groupings in those cases where remuneration is by wage or salary.

Football is the only activity that is arranged on a village level, and even this is sometimes organised on quasi-ethnic lines (for example, Eritreans versus Sudanese, which tends to mean Tigrinya versus Beja and Khasa). It is of course an activity of the young and it is amongst the young, particularly schoolchildren, that interaction without regard to grouping is most commonly found.

Other "fringe-members" of groupings, such as the unmarried, those with few close relatives in the town, the wealthy and educated also tend to interact relatively freely. Nevertheless, for the majority of the population social interaction between members of different groupings is almost non-existent. This is not due to any caste-like or ranking system. Needless to say, one's informant is invariably from the only honest and morally correct collectivity, whatever it may be: the Beja are incurable rustlers; the Tigrinya are all prostitutes or murderers; the Rashaïda are dirty, brainless and 'Halab' (a collectivity of itinerant blacksmiths - tinkers) who swop sisters to avoid bridewealth; the Takari had until recently amongst their number persons who were men by day and wolves by night, perhaps only slightly better than the drunkard Nuba and the infidel Jenobia. According to some the very word

"Khasa" means "uncivilised".

Rather, the lack of interaction can be largely attributed to traditional hostility and suspicion. Most of the town's inhabitants - the Beja, Khasa, those from Eritrean groupings such as the Marya, the Rashaïda and possibly some of the Danakil - have either come directly from a pastoralist existence and/or still have relatives and other links with such a mode of livelihood. In pastoral societies, inter-collectivity conflict over water, grazing and theft are common, especially in late summer. Such a state of affairs is particularly acute between the Rashaïda and the Beja, especially the Hadendowa. The latter regard the Rashaïda as interlopers in an area that for centuries has been their exclusive grazing land. The Rashaïda refuse to acknowledge the Beja's arrangements concerning grazing and water. From such antagonism an ideology naturally arises, backed up with apocryphal tales. This ideology has been brought to Suakin, although there is no grazing or water to dispute. An example of the manifestation of this ideology can be given: I once planned a trip to Erkowit, a Beja settlement in the hills (see Map 4). Before leaving my Rashaïda acquaintances warned me of the disreputable character of the Beja, mentioning that they stole Rashaïda children. In conversation with the Beja shaykh at Erkowit, I said that I was living with the Rashaïda in Suakin. He then proceeded to warn me of their disreputable character, mentioning that they stole Beja children.

It must be emphasised that, despite obvious differences in modes of livelihood, members of ethnic groupings in Suakin are not divorced from their respective collectivities beyond the town. Links are most clearly manifested by kin relationships: wives are brought in and taken out; visits to relatives elsewhere are common, particularly for social occasions; and relatives may come to stay with kinsmen in the

town for similar events or to make use of the town's hospital or other facilities. A further dimension of this contact is apparent in predominantly pastoralist collectivities. Many settled Rashaïda and Beja in the town continue to hold, and to increase their holdings of, large herds of animals in the hinterland, tended by kinsmen. Milne (1974:75) notes the same phenomenon amongst the Amarar in Port Sudan:

There is usually some attempt to invest in livestock to¹ be kept with relatives in the rural areas.

These factors are of relevance in an explanation of the lack of inter-grouping interaction. Friedl (1964) developed the concept of a "post-peasant community" to define a society

... which lacks the key characteristics of peasantry but which had them until recently and which still thinks of itself as peasant, keeping many of the old values and attitudes.

(Naroll 1967:78)

This can be adapted to the situation in Suakin: a proportion of its population can be described as consisting of "post-pastoralist" groupings. As we have seen, numbers of Beja, Rashaïda, Khasa, Eritrean grouping members and possibly Danakil now resident in the town were pastoralists until very recently. The "key characteristics" of pastoralism, herds and, in the particular form of pastoralism found in Eastern Sudan/ Eritrea, migratory movements, are lacking in the life-style of these now-settled pastoralists, yet the attitudes of hostility and suspicion remain. The situation is made more complex by the factors just described: the persistence of links with co-collectivists still

¹On the other hand, Lewis (1962) found only 6.5 per cent of a sample of Beja stevedores in Port Sudan admitting to owning animals, which suggested to him that poverty was the main reason for their settlement. However, the stevedores are a specific occupational group, without equivalent in Suakin.

engaged in pastoralism and, in some cases, continued investment in herds, serve to re-inforce, to maintain, these attitudes.

However, these ex-pastoralists do not regard themselves as pastoralists: pastoralism is an economic activity in which they no longer directly participate, except during, in some cases, occasional visits to inspect their herds. But they regard themselves as members of collectivities that are still predominantly pastoralist and certain items of pastoralist culture persist in the urban setting. Amongst the Rashaida in town, for example, camels, as well as money, continue to be demanded as bride price; meals are often of asīda, a sorghum porridge which is the normal fare of pastoralists; camel brands are employed to denote personal property; and, as with most males from groupings connected with pastoral activities, the men carry sticks - which all pastoralists carry - when venturing outside their settlements.

Additionally, inter-grouping interaction is kept at a low level by differences in religion, between Muslims and Christians, but possibly most importantly by differences in language. As noted the only languages to be spoken by more than one grouping are Tigray and Sudanese Arabic. The latter has the status of a lingua franca in the town, but many refugees and, perhaps surprisingly, some Beja have only a limited knowledge of it.

Political Systems and the Maintenance of Social Order

In the Sudanese National Assembly, Suakin is represented by a democratically elected member who also represents the southern part of Port Sudan. Thus politically and, as we shall see, to some extent

administratively the town is not an independent unit but an annex of the larger port. Indeed, having less than the required five thousand inhabitants in the 1955/56 census - the only published record - Suakin is not, within the terms of the Ministry of Population and Census, a town at all.

Suakin is divided administratively into five districts, as the 1979 local census reproduced in Table 6 shows: Melakia (which now includes the village of Andara), Kas al-Duwri (including al-Fula and Jezira), al-Gayf, Shata and Deim Fallata and Mesheil (including Khor Hajaj). Each of these has its own council of twenty-four members, and there is also a council for traders in the central market area. I was unable to establish exactly how members of these councils are selected. The Local Government Officer informed me that they were "elected by consensus", which I take to mean that no formal ballot takes place (unlike with the election of the National Assembly member). The process may be similar to an example of "election by consensus" I witnessed. This was the selection of Suakin representatives for a committee to organise a fishermen's cooperative. A public meeting of the town's fishermen was called by the Marine Fisheries Division and chaired by officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources's office in Port Sudan and the Province Commissioner's Office. After explaining the aims of the cooperative, nominations were requested. Much discussion took place on the floor, but gradually names were called out and the nominated individuals' consent obtained until the required number (eleven) was fulfilled. Although Beja seemed to nominate fellow-Beja, Rashaida fellow-Rashaida and so on, there was no obvious attempt by any one group to dominate the committee: those selected were generally those regarded as the most able fishermen.

The district councils are effectively powerless bodies, their main function being to transmit and implement decisions taken by the Town Council. This council is composed of representatives from the district councils (who are all male) and others. In 1979, there were three representatives from Melakia, three from al-Gayf, two from Mesheil, two from Shata/Fallata, one from Kas al-Duwri and one from the market. This composition, giving seemingly unproportional representation when considered in conjunction with Table 6, reflects the distribution of the population amongst the villages in 1971 when this system was established.

In addition to these representatives, the Prison Governor, the doctor from the town's hospital, the headmaster of the General Secondary School and, although the system of Native Administration with its nazirs, omdas and shaykhs was officially abandoned in 1971, the omda of Suakin, an Arteiga, also sit on the Town Council. There are also six women members. These do not represent districts and I am unsure of how they are selected.

The Beja dominate the council: six representatives and four of the women are from this grouping. Of the others, two representatives are Khasa and one from the Sha'iqiya, a Northern Sudanese collectivity. One woman councillor is a Khasa, the other a Takari. All the representatives are merchants, whilst four of the women are married to merchants (the other two are nurses). However, these representatives are not drawn from the ranks of the town's most prosperous merchants, but are merchants whose interests - predominantly retail outlets and property - appear to be confined to Suakin itself. The "big merchants" do not formally participate in the town's official political structure.

This can perhaps be explained by the nature of the Town Council's work. Most of its business is concerned with the issue of trading licences and the distribution of rationed goods. Thus it attracts merchants who are predominantly concerned with retailing. It also deals with contracts for public works. One of its most notable recent achievements has been the installation of the public electricity system. As noted, within the terms of the Ministry of Population and Census, Suakin is not a town: therefore it is not entitled to government-supplied electricity. The entire project was organised by the council, with money raised by public subscription and labour from the prison. At present only the central market area is supplied but eventually the entire town will be connected.

Social order is more directly maintained through the town's court, which has three Beja judges with the power to impose fines of up to £s 1,000 or six months' imprisonment, and the Suakin police post. Administratively, this is run as a branch of the Port Sudan Town Police. The Chief of Police in Port Sudan regards Suakin as a peaceful town - which it is in comparison to Port Sudan - with a low crime rate. The majority of crimes are customs offences. The acts of violence and theft that do occur (the "red light district" being a particular trouble spot) are often not perpetrated by residents of the town at all, but by Beja hillmen that come to the town to sell their milk and firewood.

It is difficult to gauge with accuracy the ability of the authorities to exercise control. Their powers are ill-defined. In a campaign against smuggling in late 1979/early 1980, the police and customs officials repeatedly harassed the Rashaida grouping, eventually taking away all the livestock found (these few goats were in fact kept

simply for domestic milk supply, not a freight awaiting illegal shipment , as the authorities must have realised). Smuggling was abandoned for a short time, as winter is the season when few dhows sail anyway, but soon resumed its former level¹

In dealing with the Beja hillmen, the authorities' control appears extremely tenuous. In mid-1979 there was a violent dispute between four related Hassenab men, in which a sword and knives were used. No-one was killed or, miraculously, very seriously injured. All four were arrested, pending trial. When word reached their kinsmen in the hills, an ultimatum was sent to the police: the dispute was an internal one that fell within the jurisdiction of the Hassenab elders and unless the four were released the Hassenab would ride en masse into Suakin and take the four by force. They were released. Indeed, a deputation from the police drove into the hills to assure the Hassenab of this.

This illustrates the lengths to which a collectivity may be prepared to go in order to defend what is perceived as its right to arbitrate in its own internal disputes. Within the ethnic groupings in

¹ There may be an ethnic dimension to this harassment. The coordinator of these raids was a Customs Service helicopter pilot, a Beja from the Amarar. The Amarar are the main rivals of the Rashaïda in the dhow trade. A usually reliable source (neither a Beja nor a Rashaïda) informed me that this pilot had been threatened with death by his own collectivity unless he took action against the Rashaïda. It is also noteworthy that whilst the authorities are naturally opposed to smuggling as it deprives them of revenue and resources, many of the individuals that make up these authorities are alleged to supplement their incomes with bribes from the smugglers. Scrupulous policemen and customs officers are said to be transferred rapidly. During this lay-off period, the Rashaïda involved were frequently approached by policemen enquiring when the trade would resume. The subject of dhows and their work will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters Five and Seven.

Suakin itself most disputes are settled without recourse to the authorities. Each has its own headman or, more usually, headmen, each presiding over a certain section of the grouping. The headmen, normally referred to as shaykhs, have often inherited this position. The omda of Suakin, referred to above, is an example of this, having taken the title on the death of his father. He is one of the headmen of the Arteiga. However, they may simply be well-established and respected figures, such as the headman of the Jeladīn, in Melakia, who is, incidentally, the man who claims to have been the first Rashaida to settle in Suakin. Invariably, headmen are relatively wealthy individuals and some have achieved headman status through economic power. An example of this, which also illustrates the possible extent of a headman's authority, is the headman of the Baratīkh in al-Fula. His step-father (who is also his deceased father's brother) is an hereditary shaykh of the Baratīkh and also lives (for at least some of the year) in al-Fula, yet he fulfills the functions of the settlement's headman. This is undoubtedly because he controls considerable resources (such as dhows, fishing boats and shops) upon which many of the Fula Rashaida are dependent for their source of livelihood, and probably many are also in financial debt to him. His government of the Rashaida community extends beyond the settling of everyday disputes: he decides who may live within the community and even directs moral behaviour. At a kinsman's wedding he forbade dancing by women (for which the Rashaida are famous).

This man, whose economic interests extend beyond the town, qualifies and is regarded as a "tajir kabīr" - a big merchant - and it is at this level that he and other "big merchants" participate in the maintenance of social order, by acting as headmen amongst their respective

groupings. Their authority rests on their respect within the community, which in turn rests on their economic power.

The extent of a headman's powers, of course varies from individual to individual, but in the ordinary course of events most disputes between members of the same grouping, cases of petty theft and debt mostly, are arbitrated by one or more of the grouping's headmen. The authorities are content to let this happen. Yet the system does occasionally break down. The American anthropologist William Young, who was making a study of the Rashaida in the Kassala area during my field-work period, told me that Suakin is regarded by the Rashaida in that area as a place where customary law has broken down and internal disputes are dragged into open court. He cited a case that highlights the potential conflict between state and customary, that is collectivity, law. According to the laws of the Rashaida, if a debtor fails to repay within the agreed period the creditor has the right to take an animal from the debtor and place it under the care of a third party until the debt is settled. One creditor in Suakin took this action: the debtor took him to court for theft and won.

A third type of political organisation exists in the form of the EPLF and TPLF, which fulfill some of the functions of the headmen, particularly amongst the Tigrinya. They are sponsored by the refugees, particularly against the Tigrinya but also Danakil and those from Eritrean groupings, representing them to the authorities. They also run educational classes for both adults and children. It is obviously essential for these organisations to maintain good relations with the Sudanese authorities, and so they do. Thus when a Tigrinya stole an army Land Rover, representatives from the EPLF drove both it and the thief to the Suakin police post. Again, when one Tigrinya murdered another in

al-Fula it was the EPLF officials who handed the culprit over to the police.

Murder is one crime that the authorities are not content to leave the headmen of groupings to deal with. The case of the Land Rover illustrates another point: it was not an internal affair, but involved the theft of non-grouping property. Although headmen from one grouping may get together to arbitrate disputes between individuals from their respective spheres of influence, no similar mechanism exists for settling disputes between individuals from differing groupings. Thus, when a young Rashaida got an Eritrean girl pregnant, it was the town's court, not their respective headmen, that dictated he must marry the girl. This situation is not surprising: given the general suspicion and derogation between groupings it is highly unlikely that an individual from one grouping will recognise the authority of the headman of another grouping. Furthermore, economic dependency, an element supporting a headman's authority, tends to be kept within the grouping, as will be shown in later chapters.

Suakin: One Entity or Several?

The evidence presented in this chapter leads to the conclusion that Suakin can be regarded as a 'plural society' in miniature, consisting of

... two or more elements or social orders which live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit.

(Furnivall 1939:446)

Interaction between ethnic groupings is slight. Each grouping has retained its collectivity's manners and customs, language and its own

system of justice, utilising the political unit's, the state's, system of justice only as a last resort. It has been argued that this can be seen as a response to the recentness of the town's growth: the majority of the immigrants have come to Suakin from the rural areas, brought up in suspicion and distrust of other collectivities and now in an urban setting banding together with members of their own collectivity. However, indications that the boundaries are being eroded on the fringes and may be further reduced over time have been recorded.

Despite this 'plurality' there is a measure of common behaviour in Suakin that should not be overlooked. For example there is a prevalent architectural style, a prevalent religion in Islam and, as has been argued, a common political identity. There is also the obvious fact that all, despite diverse origins have chosen to settle in a common geographical location that is Suakin.

The expansion of Suakin through immigration is a phenomenon paralleled throughout the world: it is part of a prevalent trend of movement from the rural areas to the urban centres. Outside the Khartoum conurbation of the Three Towns, Red Sea Province has the highest proportion of urban dwellers in Sudan, 58.1 per cent (Pons 1980:xvii. The vast majority are of course located in Port Sudan). The reasons for migration in the area we are concerned with have been detailed: chiefly herd loss and the Eritrean war. Given such conditions, it is to be expected that the urban centres should act as magnets for the rural population. Yet, unlike Port Sudan, which can be characterised as an industrial centre surrounded by shanty settlements, Suakin is almost entirely a shanty settlement (in that it is largely illegally built, with no state-provided services)

with little scope for industrial employment. Again, unlike Tokar, Suakin is not surrounded by land under cultivation and thus offers no agricultural labouring opportunities. Therefore the question remains: why have large numbers of people chosen to settle specifically in Suakin? A partial answer is deducible from the history of Rashaida settlement in the town: people come because they already have relatives established in Suakin. However, further reasons can be elucidated from an examination of the economic opportunities that the town does offer.

In this chapter it has been shown that the inhabitants of Suakin can be divided into a number ethnic groupings. It has also been demonstrated that these ethnic groupings are not merely convenient labels by which the inhabitants and I can classify the population, but that ethnicity is a dynamic force, the most important factor in understanding the social organisation of the town. Ethnic identity determines where in Suakin one lives, one's immediate political authority, one's social network, even what one wears. Having found that ethnicity has a pervasive influence on social life, it will be of particular interest to explore the impact of ethnicity on the other aspect of everyday life to which we now turn our attention: economic activity.

In order to examine the social organisation of economic affairs in Suakin, a single industry, fishing, has been selected for detailed analysis. The choice of fishing, as explained in the Introduction, was primarily because very little has been written about this activity in Sudan (and indeed in anthropological literature relatively little about this activity elsewhere). However, it will be argued in Chapter Seven that despite superficial differences between fishing and other industries in the town, many of the conclusions that can be drawn about

the social organisation of fishing can also be applied to other private sector activities.

CHAPTER FIVE

FISHERMEN AND FISHING

Demography

The Red Sea Fisheries Development Project (RSFDP), a joint venture between Sudan's Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (Marine Fisheries Division) and Britain's Overseas Development Administration, estimate that in 1976 there were 376 fishermen on the Sudanese coast. Eighty-six of these were located to the north of Port Sudan; one hundred and thirty-nine in Port Sudan itself and the marsas to the south of the town; one hundred and seven in Suakin and the marsas to the south; and four in Aqiq.¹ Thus, according to these figures, 28.5 per cent of the total fishing population was based in Suakin. Possibly these figures are an underestimation. In 1979/80 I estimate the number of persons engaged in fishing from Suakin and the marsas to the south (who, as will become clear, are residents of Suakin) to be one hundred and fifty. With very few exceptions, all have this activity as their only source of income.

Writers have largely ignored the subject of fishing in Suakin, and

¹ Figures from ODA Team Leader. The work of this project will be discussed in Chapter Six.

it can only be speculated when the industry first arose in the town. Bruce (III,250) implies that it vanished under Turkish administration, although it must be borne in mind that he never visited the town. Most probably, Suakin has had some form of fishing industry since its foundation, its scale possibly enlarging and diminishing with the broader economic fortunes of the town. Unfortunately, no statistics prior to the mid-twentieth century appear to exist, and our only point of comparison is with the situation in 1955/56 as documented by the First Population Census of Sudan. This records fifty fishermen in the town.¹

In absolute terms therefore the number of fishermen has trebled in a quarter of a century. It is unlikely that this increase has been gradual: Roden (1970:20) gives the impression of a declining industry in 1967 due to competition from mechanised Egyptian trawlers. The increase has been partly the result of the expansion of Suakin in the 1970s and partly the result of factors we have yet to consider. However, assuming all statistics to be reliable, relative to the size of the town at these two dates there has actually been a small decline in the fishing population, from 1.18 per cent of the total population in 1955/56 to 1.09 per cent in 1979/80, but this is not statistically significant.²

All fishermen are male with ages between approximately thirteen and seventy, the mode lying between thirty and forty. Lansh workers

¹ See Table 4. In fact the category in the census is "fishermen and hunters". Although there is some game to be found in the Red Sea Hills there is little on the coastal plain until well south of Tokar. I consider it highly unlikely that any of these fifty were hunters: the category reflects the Arabic siadin, which covers the exponents of both hunting and fishing.

² $\chi^2 = 0.008$.

typically fall within these age boundaries, older men and boys generally being concentrated in the smaller boats. The fishermen appear to have no marriage patterns, nor, apart from their use of camps in some of the marsas, residential patterns that distinguish them from any other occupational group in the town. There is no fishermen's quarter: their residences are found within the areas occupied by their disparate ethnic groupings. Even within these there are no discernable fishermen's areas. Their homes are not appreciably closer to the sea than those of non-fishermen.

Ethnic Groupings: the Conversion of Pastoralists into Fishermen?

Of the estimated one hundred and fifty fishermen in Suakin only about fifteen do not employ boats. These are from the Takari, Danakil and Khasa groupings. Amongst the boat fishermen, the majority are from the Beja (approximately sixty-six) and Rashaida (approximately fifty) groupings. Some ten Takari, ten Danakil, two brothers of Yemeni descent, one man from the Northern Sudanese collectivity of the Sha'iqiya and one Egyptian constitute the remainder.

Thus fishing is not an activity in which members of all the town's ethnic groupings participate. There are no Nuba, Jenobia, Tigrinya nor Eritrean fishermen. It is tempting to explain this non-participation by reference to the 'traditional economies' pursued by these collectivities in their homelands. With the exception of some of the Eritrean collectivities, all are predominantly agriculturalist and have no history of exploiting the maritime ecozone.

Whilst this may have some validity, the traditional economies of those collectivities who do have fishermen in Suakin amongst their number are, with the exception of the Takāri, pastoralist. It is perhaps more surprising to find fishermen from pastoralist collectivities than it would be to find them from agriculturalist collectivities. Bloss (1936:271), for example, writes that the Beja are not interested in the sea and eat little fish. The American anthropologist William Young wrote, in connection with another water-based activity, trochus shell collection:

I am... quite surprised to hear that there are Rashayda divers because the nomads have a fear of water and occasionally their children drown when watering camels at a hafir. Nomads say the smell of fish nauseates them and those who have crossed the Red Sea for pilgrimage or wage-labour have always emphasised how terrifying the crossing was. I have met isolated individuals in Mastura who go to the River Atbara for a month's time every year to fish using nets but my¹ impression is that they are not numerous.

The fundamental difference between those collectivities that have fishermen in Suakin in their numbers and those that do not is perhaps not so much in that the former are traditionally pastoralists and the latter agriculturalists, but rather that the former inhabit regions in close proximity to the sea and the latter do not. This applies to the Rashaida: as we have seen in Chapter Four, most of those now in Suakin are from the coastal plain, not, as with those Young is discussing, from the inland Kassala region. Again, as with the "isolated individuals" Young mentions fishing on the Atbara, those near water may exploit it, irrespective of 'traditional economy'.

The Rashaida are not only involved with fishing but also with the

¹ Personal communication.

dhow trade with Jidda and the collection of trochus shells by these boats; indeed they dominate these occupations. As noted in Chapter Four, there is some discrepancy in accounts of how long they have been involved in these industries: Rashaida state that they have been working on dhows for a considerable time; Port Sudan merchants say that their involvement is a recent phenomenon. Perhaps when Reed (1962b:6) wrote that most of the trochus shell landed in Sudan was brought by foreigners such as Saudi Arabians he was in fact describing Rashaida. Certainly today even Saudi Arabian-registered dhows are frequently crewed by Rashaida holding Sudanese passports. Although there are many Red Rashaida dhow workers there are also a large number of Black Rashaida, particularly from the Jeladīn section of the Barāsa. The latter are very numerous amongst the mechanics the dhows carry. It is therefore interesting to note Villiers' (1970:162) observations on the dhow workers of Kuwait:

An astonishingly high proportion is of Negro origin, the descendants of slaves, though not now slaves themselves.

As speculated in Chapter Two, the Rashaida may have on first arrival in Sudan have been two (or possibly more) collectivities - the Rashaida and the Zebaydia. The latter are described by MacMichael (1922:346) as "sea-farers and pirates". Further evidence for their association with maritime affairs may be concealed in Trimingham's (1965:222 fn2) note on the collectivity:

They are divided into three main kinship groups: Zinenu, Barasa and Baratikh. A group of fishermen, Jahidin, who occupied the barren islands of Dohol and Harat in the north of the Dahlak Archipelago found them too inhospitable and returned to Arabia.

There is no such section as "Zinenu": this clearly should be Zenaymat. Perhaps it is possible that Trimingham was also misinformed about "Jahidin" (which again is non-existent): could this in fact be the

Jeladīn, who as noted above, constitute a considerable proportion of the present-day Rashaīda dhow workers?

Furthermore, consider de Monfried's (1935:104-06) description of the people on the island of Ibn Abbas (see Map 3), or Badhour as it was known to him:

(The women) were dressed in ample black robes of much the same style as those worn by the women of Upper Egypt. They were very Arabic in type but nearly as brown skinned as the Dankalis. (...) All the men were away fishing for trochus or mother-of-pearl. (...) (T)he inhabitants of Badhour... have the most profound contempt for their neighbours on the continent, as Arabs have for everything African.

Although de Monfried does not supply a label for these people, I consider the above passage to be a description of the Rashaīda. The community de Monfried saw in the early years of this century was sustained by "magic cisterns" of fresh water. During the course of a long fishing trip I passed this island (which is accessible only by boat) and observed two Rashaīda tents upon it and a number of goats. The boat crew, Rashaīda themselves, assured me that the "magic cisterns" were still functioning. During that trip, well to the south of Aqīq, we frequently pulled into marsas with Rashaīda camps nearby. Unlike those of Young's acquaintance, these Rashaīda showed no reluctance to eat fish (although like their Suakin co-collectivists they do not eat shrimp or lobster) and seemed to refrain from fishing merely because of lack of equipment. Men from these camps invariably begged the captain of the boat for hooks and lines, and fish. An American yachtsman told me that he had anchored off Trinkitat, expecting a small settlement but finding only a solitary beachcomber. From his description, it seems certain that this drift-wood collector was a Rashaīda, who indicated that he wanted to go

fishing. The American obliged, using his dinghy to convey the two of them to the fringing reef, where, using the American's hooks and lines, the beachcomber fished, apparently with great skill. On being taken back to the beach, he took his share of the catch and disappeared.

It should be noted that there is a small Rashaïda settlement in Port Sudan itself on the shore at Abu Hashish. The men there are engaged in fishing and claim to have been doing so long before the Rashaïda began to settle in numbers in Suakin or in the other, larger, Rashaïda settlement in Port Sudan at Hamash Kurmowsh. In some marsas between Suakin and Tokar, a small number of Rashaïda from pastoralist camps fish for shrimps. I have been told that a few Rashaïda women from these camps collect lobsters, but I have not seen this. Neither shrimps nor lobsters are consumed by their captors, but sold to a fish merchant.

Thus although the collectivity is predominantly pastoralist, numbers of fishermen and persons who show no aversion to fish and fishing are found along the stretch of coastline the Rashaïda inhabit. A similar situation occurs amongst the other collectivities that have fishermen in Suakin. Small numbers of Bisharin fishermen are found in the Mohammed Gul/Dongonab Bay area (see Map 4); Amarar and other Beja fishermen exist in Port Sudan and further south. Similarly some Danakil pursue this activity on the Eritrean coast (de Monfried, quoted on page 165, compares the colour of the inhabitants of Badhour with Danakil as his boat was crewed by members of the latter), although most of their co-collectivists are pastoralists. The Khasa 'foot' fishermen claim that they have followed this occupation on the Sudanese coast before coming to Suakin.

Accounting for the Takari fishermen is rather more problematic. Although Takari fishermen are to be found on the White Nile, I know of no other place except Suakin where they are involved in sea-fishing. As we have seen, the Takari community has been established in the town for a relatively long period. I suspect that they became involved in fishing during the demise in the town's fortunes after the building of Port Sudan, when the town offered very few economic opportunities.

Recruitment of Fishermen

We have established that amongst certain ethnic collectivities fishing is practised alongside the 'traditional economy', albeit as a minority activity. Therefore it is no surprise to find members of these collectivities pursuing this occupation in Suakin. However, even in Suakin fishing is a minority activity - only one person in ninety-one in the town is a fisherman - and we must now discuss the mechanisms by which individuals become fishermen.

Khalil is a Beja from the Hassenab sub-collectivity (indeed the Hassenab appear to constitute a considerable proportion of the town's Beja fishermen). He cannot recall the occupations of his grandfathers but thinks that neither were fishermen. His paternal grandfather had two sons: the elder becoming a shopkeeper, the younger, Khalil's father, becoming a fisherman. Khalil's uncle had four sons, none of whom are fishermen, whereas Khalil and both his brothers are. Again the elder brother of O Nur, another Hassenab, took over the running of his father's shop, whilst O Nur himself went fishing, initially with one of his father's brothers and later with one of his own younger brothers.

The stories of Khalil and O Nur illustrate two patterns that commonly recur in fishermen's accounts of how they were recruited to their occupation, particularly amongst Beja and Takari. Firstly, a fisherman's sons tend to become fishermen. Secondly, when a father is not a fisherman but a son is, it is likely that the latter is a younger son with close relatives already in the industry: elder sons in such situations tend to enter relatively higher status/income earning capability occupations (such as working with the father, often in a shop).

The two brothers of Yemeni descent provide an interesting variation on the younger-brother-goes-fishing scenario. Their father was a shopkeeper in a shop that belonged neither to him nor to a relative. He had three sons: Tālib, Kurmowsh and Hashim. Tālib joined the Prison Service and left Suakin. Kurmowsh found work in a fish shop and odd-jobbing in the boatyard. Hashim was still at school when their father died. The remittances sent by Tālib and the income Kurmowsh received were not sufficient to support the latter, Hashim and their mother. So Hashim was forced to leave school and went to work with Moktar, a Beja fisherman. Moktar was not a relative, but lived near the family on Jezira. He owned a lansh and sometime after Hashim had joined him tragically lost a leg in a propeller accident. However, at this point Hashim was sufficiently experienced to take over the running of the lansh himself. Shortly after this Tālib left the Prison Service and returned to Suakin. The only occupational opportunity open to him was fishing with his younger brother.

Of course, some men have individualistic reasons for becoming fishermen. The Sha'iqiya fisherman, for example, works at this activity only part-time. His primary occupation is nursing in Suakin's

hospital and he fishes, often with two Beja nurses, in his spare time. When asked why he fishes, he replied: "Meat is fs 2.00 a kilogramme; sugar is 16 piastres a rotl; tomatoes are 15 piastres a rotl..." Again, the Egyptian fisherman's reasons do not form any part of a common pattern. He has been in Suakin since 1978. His family were fishermen and from them he learned the skills. After a spell in the Egyptian army he returned to fishing. His explanation of why he came to Suakin is perhaps apocryphal: shortly after leaving the army he married. The following day he had second thoughts, loaded up a fallūka and sailed down the Red Sea to Suakin. Regardless of how much of this is true, he does have a fallūka that is of quite a different style from those produced in Sudan.

Although numbers of Beja and smaller numbers of Danakil are engaged in dhow work, the Rashaida dominate this activity as noted earlier and their involvement in fishing appears to be in some cases closely connected to their participation in the dhow activities. Employment on dhows is lucrative and much sought after. The industry however cannot accommodate all those Rashaida seeking employment in it. By the nature of the work, a dhow sailor must not only be able to swim, dive and know the basics of seamanship but also (for reasons that will become clear in a fuller description of the industry in Chapter Seven) be known to the grouping and be known to be trustworthy. One method by which chances of obtaining work on the dhows may be increased, particularly for those with few or no close relatives in the industry, is to serve time and gain experience as a fisherman. This option is often taken up by 13 to 17 year olds. The crew of a small fishing dhow on one particular trip consisted of a Red Rashaida captain, a Black mechanic and four Red boys of this age

group. All except the mechanic (typically, a Jeladīn) were Awaymirāt but had no close kinship connections. None of these boys had close relatives in the town and when not fishing stayed with the captain. Three of them were from the Kassala area: the fathers of two were cultivators and of the third a tailor. The family of the fourth boy were pastoralists in the region around Karora (see Map 4) on the Sudan/ Eritrea border. The latter instance was unusual: the only example I came across of a boy sent directly from a pastoralist group still functioning, as there is normally a shortage of labour in such groups.

By the time I was due to leave Suakin, two of these boys had found employment on the trading dhows. This can be seen as a movement 'upwards'. There is also a corresponding movement 'downwards', where dhow workers become fishermen. This may be voluntary, as was the case with the Black Rashaida mechanic mentioned above, where the individual no longer wishes to undertake the risks that the trading dhows run or the discomforts and long trips involved in trochus shell collection. The movement may be seasonal: in winter little trochus is harvested, seas are rough and many dhows are laid up. Dhow workers may then turn to fishing, but this is far from widespread as winter is also a poor season for fishing. The movement may also be forced by circumstances. The most outstanding example of this is the case of one Rashaida who owned three dhows. All were seized simultaneously by the Saudi Arabian authorities for drug smuggling (some informants stated that the owner escaped, others stated that he was not on board any of his boats). Fortunately as a competent seaman, the now ex-owner found no difficulty in obtaining employment as the captain of another Rashaida's fishing boat.

On the other hand, there are also Rashaida fishermen who have, or who have had, no personal connection with the dhows. An interesting example is Hamid, who claims to have been the first Red Rashaida to settle in Suakin. As noted in Chapter Four, he lost his herds through drought. However, he also claims to have done some fishing in Eritrea before coming to Suakin and he has continued in this occupation ever since. None of his sons is currently a fisherman (I do not know whether any of them were in their younger days) but all are dhow workers.

It is not only the Rashaida who are capable of moving from fishing to another occupation, nor is this movement necessarily to dhow work. The case of Hussain, a Beja from the Hadendowa, illustrates this well. He began his working life as a fisherman in Suakin, later moving down to Trinkitat (when that place was a small but thriving settlement and fish was transported to Tokar by rail). He then went on further south to Massawa where he claims that fishing was more lucrative than in Sudan. It was here that he saved enough money to abandon fishing and open a kitchen in Asmara. When the war started he sold out and returned to Sudan, opening another kitchen in Kassala. This he kept for several years, then sold it and returned to Suakin where he now works as the caretaker of the government rest-house. He has four sons, of whom none is a fisherman or, incidentally, is resident in Suakin.

Fishing is normally regarded as an occupation earning a relatively low income, hence persons such as Hussain will quit if more lucrative opportunities present themselves. This factor is in some degree responsible for the maintenance of the relatively small number of fishermen.

Crews

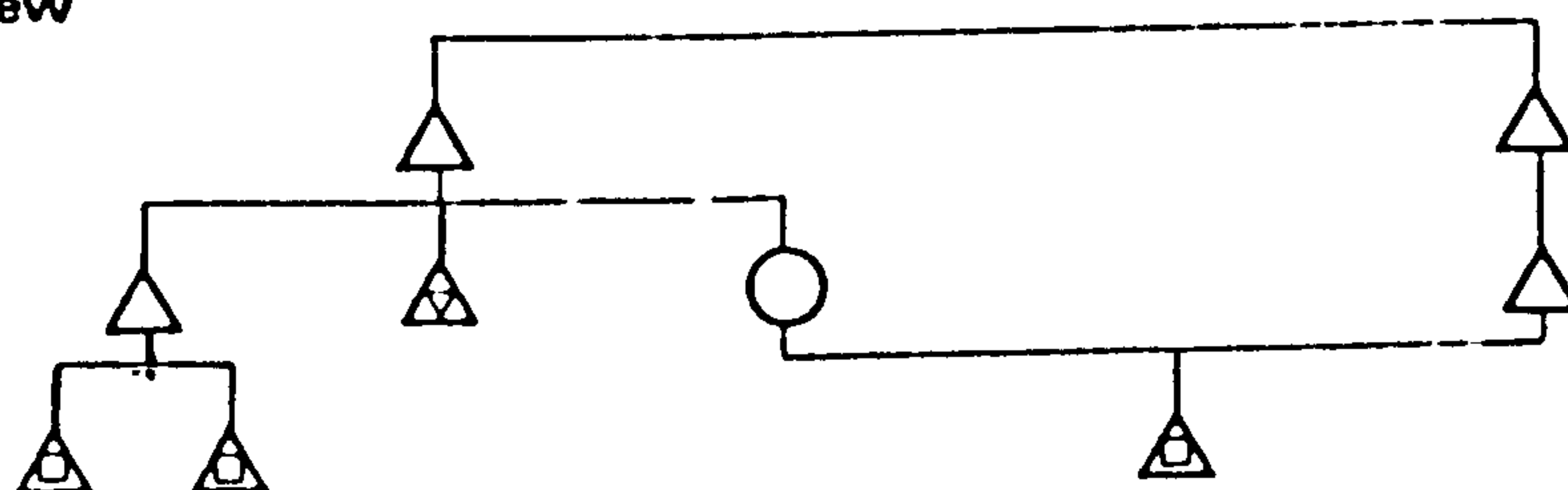
Having discussed recruitment in general we now turn to the recruitment of crewmen on the fishing vessels. The smaller boats, the hūri, fallūka, ramas and hūri luh wāhid, are normally crewed by only one or two persons. A lansh will be crewed by four to six men (although it may rarely have only two men on board; a small dhow used for fishing will take up to eight, although six is normal). Almost invariably, crew members are of the same ethnic grouping. Figure 6 shows the kinship relations between members of a Beja lansh crew and a Rashaida lansh crew. This supports my impression that amongst the Beja crews are more closely related than amongst the Rashaida. This can be accounted for by a fundamental difference between Beja (and Takari) and Rashaida (and Danakil) fishermen. The former are from families long established in Suakin. I found no recent immigrants to the town amongst the fishermen of this grouping. Thus they have many close kinsmen in the town from the ranks of which other fishermen may be drawn by the mechanisms described in the preceding section. The Rashaida on the other hand are recent immigrants to the town and although congregating in clusters of kin have not developed a large town-based community of closely related kin. Therefore comparatively fewer close kinsmen are available for recruitment as fishermen.

If a lansh or fishing dhow is laid up for any length of time, whether for repairs or other commitments of the captain, the crew may try to find temporary employment on other boats, filling in for crewmen on other business, until such times as the boat is ready to put to sea again. This is normally done by a direct approach to the captain of a lansh or a smaller boat. In the case of an exceptionally good fisherman the approach may come from the captain or owner.

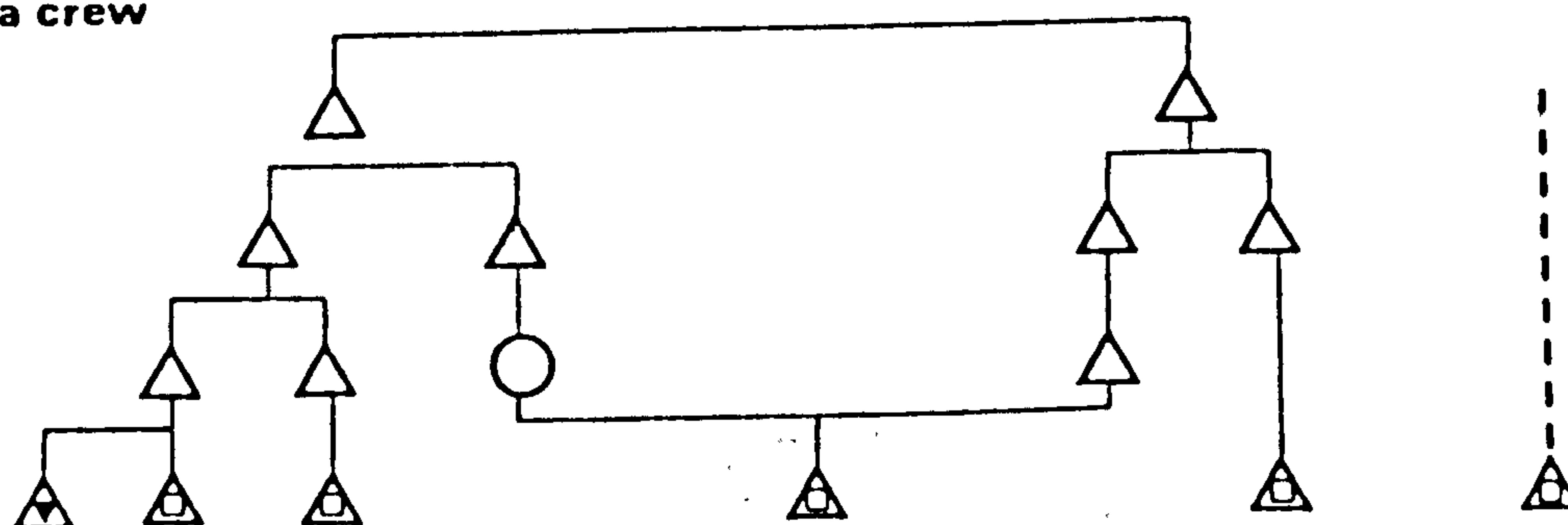
FIGURE 6

KINSHIP RELATIONS AMONGST LANSH CREWS: TWO EXAMPLES

(a) Beja crew



(b) Rashaida crew



▽ Owner/crewman

▼ Owner

□ Crewman

--- Distant relationship

(in those cases where these are not the same person). However, crews are generally stable, the crewmen fitting in with the requirements of the captain.

Fishing Grounds and Fish

The unifying factor between these small numbers of individuals from differing ethnic groupings is of course their common aim: the capture of fish. A general description of the sea and coastline has been given in Chapter One. Reed (1964:5-8) provides more pertinent detail, locating five distinct fishing areas:

(a) the marsas, where sardines (Sardinella melanura), anchovies (Anchoviella Spp.) and shrimps (Penaeus Spp.) are found. The marsas exploited by Suakin's fishermen are all to the south of the town: Antabeb, Haidob and al-Shūk (the two marsas Shaykh Ibrahim and Shaykh Sa'ad, which are shown on Map 3, page 27);

(b) the boat channel (see Figure 3, page 25), a shallow area with a substratum of coral, sand or silt with occasional patches of live coral and large areas of dead coral. The most important fish found here as far as the fishermen are concerned are mullet, sardines and red-mouthed bream. Goat fish, or red mullet and salmon herring are also found. Approximately twenty per cent of all fish caught in Sudan's waters are from this area;

(c) the fringing reef, around which are found coral trout, giant trevally, red-mouthed bream, red bass and barracuda. However, only ten percent of the total catch is taken from this area;

(d) the deep channel separating the fringing and barrier reefs. Most important are two 'rises' in the sea bed, the "teena"

and "keefa" at about 150 and 250 metres depth respectively. Around these two 'rises' Red Snappers (koreib) are abundant.

Sharks frequently harass fishermen in this area and when a school of koreib are biting it is not uncommon to haul in a catch of one whole fish and four heads.

(Reed 1964:8)

About twenty per cent of the total catch is from this area;

(e) the barrier or outer reef where the bulk of the total catch is taken. Coral trout, moontailed cod, red bass, spotted rock cod and hump-headed wrasse all abound.

The open sea beyond the barrier reef is not rich in marine life. Its extreme depths restrict the light necessary for the growth of marine flora in sufficient quantities to support a large fish population. Consequently, it is not a fishing area.

A note must be added about the islands of the Suakin Archipelago (see Map 3, page 27). The coral on and around them has been reduced to sand, thus making them poor fishing spots as, unlike the reefs, they offer the fish no hiding places from predators. However, many are frequently visited by fishermen who gather driftwood washed up upon them.

Fish are naturally seasonally available in the fishing areas. It would be tedious and unedifying to list all species found in Sudan's waters. Table 8 gives only those most commonly sought by fishermen and consumers, arranged according to season with a brief resume on the nature of these seasons. All are relatively large fish, weighing from one to five kilogrammes, commanding a single price per kilogramme when sold by the fishermen and again a single price when sold by retailers.

TABLE 8

FISH AND THEIR SEASONS

MARCH, APRIL, MAY, JUNE (best season; calm seas)		
Coral trout	(<u>Plectropomus maculatus</u>)	Arabic <u>najil</u>
Moontailed coral trout	(<u>Variola louti</u>)	<u>rishal</u>
Red snapper	(<u>Pristipomoides filamentosus</u>)	<u>koreib</u>
Red bass	(<u>Lutjanus bohar</u>)	<u>bohar</u>
Fingermarked perch	(<u>Lutjanus fulviflamma</u>)	<u>hababir</u>
Trigger fish	(<u>Balistidae Spp.</u>)	<u>faki sharam</u>
Hump-headed wrasse	(<u>Labridae Spp.</u>)	<u>abu jibba</u>
Spanish mackerel	(<u>Scomberomorus Spp.</u>)	<u>derak</u>
Barracuda	(<u>Sphyraena Spp.</u>)	<u>agham</u>
JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER (very hot, sand storms at sea)		
Red snapper	(<u>Aprion Spp.</u>)	<u>farsi</u>
Emperor bream	(<u>Lethrinus Spp.</u>)	<u>sha'oor</u>
Red bass	(<u>Lutjanus bohar</u>)	<u>bohar</u>
OCTOBER, NOVEMBER (often raining)		
Spotted rock cod	(<u>Epinephelus aerolatus</u>)	<u>goushur/shooni</u>
Emperor bream	(<u>Lethrinus Spp.</u>)	<u>sha'oor</u>
DECEMBER, JANUARY, FEBRUARY (very rough seas)		
Giant trevally	(<u>Caroux Spp.</u>)	<u>bayad/girin</u>
Emperor bream	(<u>Lethrinus Spp.</u>)	<u>sha'oor</u>
Unicorn fish	(<u>Naso unicornus</u>)	<u>abu garin</u>

NOTE: species identification and transliterations of Arabic names from Reed (1964).

Reef shark (Arabic girish) is found throughout the year but is not popular with consumers and commands a lower price than the fish listed in Table 8. There is a small demand from the sandwich shops of Port Sudan, as a consequence of this lower price (and also a small demand from one Port Sudan merchant who exports a limited quantity of shark fins to Singapore). The consumers are very discerning when purchasing and retailers may have difficulties selling uncommon fish. An illustration of this can be given: a merchant who bought three tons of tuna (which is red-fleshed and oily) from an Egyptian trawler was unable to sell any of it, even as animal feed. Fish that have a doubtful market value when caught are frequently used as bait.

There is no demand amongst the general population for shrimps, lobsters or crabs although these are caught often, as we have seen, by persons residing in pastoralist camps. They are consumed by Europeans in Port Sudan and by Port Sudan's sophisticated merchant elite, or are flown to luxury hotels in Khartoum. Sardines and anchovies are not consumed but are caught in considerable quantities to be used as bait.

Fishing Operations

There are several methods of fishing without a boat. A gill net may be set up in the shallows of a marsa or in the boat channel and left overnight. Alternatively two or three men will wade in the shallows with a net between them and encircle the shoals. Egyptian fishermen use two tenders for the same effect, for catching mullet (Mugil Spp.), but the fishermen of Suakin do not. The former also

favour the setting up of verandah nets in concentric circles: I have not seen this done by the local fishermen. For hook and line fishing the boatless fishermen will wade to the fringing reef and throw baited hooks (one per man) over the far side. This is also practised on the banks of the approach to Suakin. A cast net is used in the shallows to catch bait fish, for use both by themselves and by the boat fishermen to whom they occasionally sell. This net is also used to catch shrimps, but not by Suakin fishermen. All Suakin's boatless fishermen operate close to the town: unlike the boat fishermen they do not use camps in the marsas.

A few boat fishermen employ gill nets, sinking them near the reefs and leaving them overnight. Although one or two individuals from other ethnic groupings use them, it is my impression that nets are most favoured by the Takari. It is tempting to speculate that this readiness to employ nets is the result of contact with the White Nile, where many Takari net fishermen are found. However I could find no Takari fisherman in Suakin who claimed any connection with co-collectivists in that region. The vast majority of boat fisherman do not use nets, claiming that the combination of sharks entangling themselves and sharp coral would result in perpetual repair operations. However, the RSFDP and foreign fishermen, such as Egyptians and Yemenis, as well as the few local fishermen that do use them, have used nets in these waters quite successfully. But hook and line fishing is the norm for boat fishing by Suakin's fishermen.

Organising a fishing trip from Suakin, a lansh captain will seek information about fertile grounds and islands not recently visited. This may be obtained from other fishermen of his own ethnic grouping, although he may also visit the places frequented by fishermen of other

groupings, such as the teashops and fishshops near the causeway (see Map 6, page 34). In the afternoon before sailing he will either buy bait or catch his own in the shallows of the creek. The lansh's water barrel will be filled and a supply of small rocks obtained. If he intends to make an early start he will get his crew to load ice from the RSFDP's ice factory. The lansh must leave before the sun rises above the horizon or it will be directly in the faces of the crew, making the reefs impossible to see. If there are any delays, the boat will not move until around midday.

Most of the first day will be spent travelling southeastwards, either by engine alone or with assistance from the sail, towards the Archipelago and outer reef. Only once did I see a fisherman use a compass. He was an ex-dhow captain and had, he claimed, sailed to Bahrain using the very same device. The fishing vessel he was working on was a small dhow and he was travelling to the islands between Aqiq and the Eritrean borders (see Map 3, page 27), further than a lansh would go. Given that most fishing takes place between the fringing and outer reefs, it is perhaps difficult to get completely lost, but finding the islands is a different matter. All those of the Achipelago are out of sight of land and most are out of sight of each other. I was unable to detect any sign of celestial navigation.¹ A few boatmen said that they simply 'reef crawled'; others that they 'knew' the waters, the result of many years' experience.

A lansh requires a considerable amount of bailing as she travels. This is partly because of leaks but also because of the

¹ Dhow captains, by contrast, claim to use a combination of compass and star observation to navigate to Jidda.

drainage of melted ice from the boat's ice-box. Some fishing may be done in the late afternoon of this first day, generally only in one spot close to the outer reef. The operation commences by throwing bait into the water (the small stones that have been brought for red snapper fishing often play a role at this point: they are thrown at seagulls to prevent them from snatching the bait from the surface of the water). Each crewman is responsible for only one hooked line, and they arrange themselves along both sides of the boat, throwing the hooks, baited with two or three fish and weighted with a small piece of lead, as far as possible. Ideally, the boat should be anchored right above the reef: otherwise entanglement of the hooks in the coral is a great nuisance. As fish are brought on board they are stunned with a metal or wooden priest, the hook extracted and the fish tossed into a straw basket (two fishermen will share a basket). If small fish are caught, they are immediately cut up and used as bait - and are more successful than the sardines and anchovies, which are already rather stale. Attitudes towards sharks differ from captain to captain. When small ones are caught (the larger break the lines) some retain them but do not put them on ice, firstly because they take up a considerable amount of room and secondly because they keep rather better than other fish. Others stab them severely, thus rendering them ineffective as frighteners of other fish, and toss them back.

An hour or so before sunset, the lines will be hauled in and the caught fish taken from the baskets and put into the ice-box. A place to anchor for the night will then be sought. A good fishing site is rarely a good overnight anchorage. A spot will be sought either close to the reef, but not on top of it, or on the leeward side of an island, where there is relatively calm water. If the afternoon's catch has been

plentiful, fish will be cooked, helped down by bread. If it has been poor, the meal will be of whatever vegetables have been brought along. As with meals on land, this is washed down with tea or coffee. Cooking is by charcoal, on a small stove. Sleeping accommodation is found wherever space is available - under or on the decked areas at stem and stern or in the boat's open waist.

Some fishermen forgo prayers altogether whilst at sea. Others, particularly the Rashaïda, do not, but only pray in the morning and evening, when the boat is stationary. The top of the ice-box provides a convenient surface for these practices.

The second day starts, as on land, with milky tea (the milk being powdered) before the sun rises. A new fishing spot is then found. During the course of the day, the lansh will move several times, often travelling for over an hour at a time. The crew not engaged in tiller work, bailing or adjusting the sail keep an eye open for driftwood. If any is seen, the sail (if up) is dropped and the course altered to retrieve it. This day will often take in a visit to one or two of the islands. The lansh will be anchored as closely as possible and one or two crewmen dispatched with rope to gather what wood they can find. This will be tied in a bundle and towed by the crewmen as they swim back to the boat. Those remaining on board will either fish or, if the time is right, prepare a meal. Food by this time consists of boiled fish and rice or gorāsa, a flour pancake fried and eaten with sugar or as a bread substitute with an onion and tomato puree dip.

The early morning of the third day will take in a little fishing, usually for red snappers over the teena and keefa,

as the boat will now begin its return journey. The technique employed here is rather different to the reef fishing method. The anchors are dropped and the depth of the water tested with a weighted line. A small rock or stone is then taken, bait fish laid upon it with a baited hook and tied with the line by a slip knot. This is then dropped over the side of the boat. When the fisherman judges that the stone is nearing the bottom, he gives the line a sharp jerk, thereby releasing the bait fish, the stone and the hook at the depth the red snappers inhabit.

The next step in the trip may have been decided by the captain before he left Suakin, or he may decide at this point: he can either return to the town or put into one of the marsas to the south of it - al-Shūk or Haidob (Antabeb is too close to Suakin to be used in this fashion). Influencing factors will be the state of the ice and the time and distance from the town. Ideally, he will plan to make land in the mid-afternoon. If it is any later he will have the sun in his eyes and, if he is putting into a marsa, may miss the fish merchants' collections.

However, if he decides to put into a marsa, his choice is not entirely free but dependent upon his ethnic identity. Al-Shūk are Rashaida fishing camps; Haidob is Beja. This also means that the fish merchant who collects from al-Shūk is ipso facto the merchant the Rashaida deal with. He does not call at Haidob to collect fish (although he does in fact collect a small amount of shrimps from there), which is collected by another merchant. The RSFDP has occasional camps at al-Shūk, although no Rashaida work for that organisation, yet amongst the fishermen of Suakin a firm ethnic division of the marsas suitable for fishing from is recognised. Antabeb

is another Beja marsa.

On landing at either the town or in a marsa the fish is taken from the ice-box and washed in seawater, loaded into straw baskets (or RSFDP fish boxes if available) and brought ashore when the merchant's transport is ready. If the catch has been good, the fishermen usually take a couple of fish for their own consumption. If the fish has been landed in a marsa, the captain normally intends to make another trip within a few days and arranges with the merchant, or his representative, for ice to be brought. He and his crew will then camp at the marsa or return to Suakin with the merchant or by lorries passing from Tokar to Suakin. If the captain travels with the merchant, the latter can be prevailed upon to transport the driftwood collected to the captain's house. If on the other hand he travels by ordinary lorry, this must be paid for. The driftwood, if not required by the captain or any of the crew, will eventually be taken to the market in Suakin and sold, the money received being divided amongst the whole crew.

The operations of the fishing dhows are similar to those of the lanshs, with a few minor differences. The crews tend to be around six, one of whom may be a mechanic (lanshs do not carry a man specifically to fulfill this function), who is also expected to fish, and their trips may be longer - perhaps seven days in total - and they may go further afield - perhaps down to the very fruitful waters to the south of Aqiq. The problem of keeping the fish fresh on longer trips is solved by having two ice-boxes. The ice melts in both at the same rate, of course. Fish is put into only one, the other serving as a reservoir of ice to top up the first.

As dhows have a greater draught than lanshs, they cannot approach

the shore as closely. Therefore they take a tender, a hūri luh wāhid or ramas, with them to transport fish from dhow to shore. This tender may be used as an auxiliary fishing vessel: when the dhow is anchored for fishing one or two crewmen may be dispatched in the tender to fish a short distance away.

The dhows also troll for barracuda and Spanish mackerel, quite successfully, as, with larger engines, they can reach higher speeds than the lanshs and with a greater range can travel to the grounds where these particular fish are more plentiful.

Some of the larger hūris and fallūkas also have ice-boxes and may make trips of two or three days, but obviously do not have the range of the lanshs and dhows. The smaller craft, having no room to sleep in, generally make trips of just one morning, setting out before sun rise and returning around midday. The majority of these craft are based in Suakin, where they sail out almost daily to the area just beyond the fringing reef. A few travel further, out to the teena. Numbers of small craft are also to be found at Antabeb, Haidob and al-Shūk. Individual fishermen generally spend about a week in the marsa camps at a time, then return to their families in the town for a few days. The small craft fishermen are not strictly divided into those who always work from Suakin and those who use the camps. Rather they are divided into who always fish from Suakin, those who sometimes work from Suakin and sometimes from the marsas and a small minority who always fish from the marsas. The former category consists largely of Beja fishermen, generally of advanced years, the Takari, the Danakil and a few Black Rashaïda. Also in this category are the Egyptian fisherman and the Sha'iqiya nurse mentioned earlier. The Beja fishermen at Antabeb belong to the latter category by and large.

The fishermen at Haidob and al-Shūk, on the other hand, may switch between Suakin and the marsas. The availability of bait appears to be the major deciding factor.

Despite the fact that the marsas are divided along ethnic lines and despite the fact that the Beja on the one hand and the Rashaida on the other are both predominantly pastoralist collectivities, each with a distinctive form of tent, the marsa camps are fairly uniform and bear no resemblance to either collectivity's pastoralist encampments. They are composed of a number of rough shelters made of driftwood, an old mat or two, plastic sheeting, anything in fact that the sea yields that can be put to use. These shelters are arranged haphazardly, the pattern determined by the availability of relatively dry ground.

Pastoralist encampments are often found quite close to the marsa camps and fishermen of the appropriate ethnic identity staying in the marsa camps may make social calls to these in the evenings. However, they always return to their own shelters to sleep - even in these remote spots, fishermen do not seem to like being separated from their equipment and possessions for any length of time.

Ethnic Groupings, Fishing Techniques and Technology

No indication has been given in the above account of any differences in technique between members of differing ethnic groupings. None appear to exist. The practice of hook and line fishing near the reefs is perhaps too simple to allow variation, but even the relatively more complex method for red snapper fishing is uniform, as are such

minutiae as the manner of securing the hook to the line.¹ Some fishermen employ nets, most do not, but this differentiation can only be attributed to individual choice, not to ethnic identity.

The differences that do exist are not related to matters of technique but to the ownership of boats. For example, in contrast to some Beja and Rashaida, no Takari exploit the waters around Aqiq: they do not possess boats capable of returning with a marketable catch. Again all Khasa fishing activity is restricted to the vicinity of Suakin: they possess no boats at all and are thus confined to the fishing grounds within walking distance. Table 9 provides an estimation of the distribution of boats amongst the relevant ethnic groupings.

Roden (1970:20) estimated the number of fishing vessels in Suakin to be forty. None of these would have been lanshs, which are a recent introduction. Yet it has been asserted that fishing is regarded as a low income earning capability occupation, although Table 9 shows that there are now seventeen lanshs and twenty-five smaller boats equipped with outboard engines owned by residents of Suakin. The first section of the following chapter will attempt to explain this phenomenon and shed light on the pattern of the distribution of boats by examining the role of the RSFDP, the major agent in this mechanisation of the fishing fleet. This will lead naturally to an examination of the financial aspects of the industry, the costs, profits and incomes, and finally to the system of distribution of fish.

¹ A standard 'fisherman's knot': see Admiralty Manual of Seamanship (1972) vol. 1, figure 7-34.

TABLE 9

ESTIMATION OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF FISHING
BOATS AMONGST ETHNIC GROUPINGS

Ethnic Grouping	Total number of fishermen (including non-boat fishermen)	<u>Lanshs</u>	<u>Hūris, fallūkas with outboards</u>	<u>Sailing hūris, fallūkas</u>	<u>Hūris luh wāhid, ramases (not including tenders)</u>	Fishing dhows
Beja	66	9	14	10	12	1
Rashaīda	50	7	7	10	3	3
Takari	14	-	2	2	3	-
Danakīl	13	1	2	1	1	-
Khasa	3	-	-	-	-	-
Others	4	-	-	2	-	-
TOTAL	150	17	25	25	19	4

CHAPTER SIX

THE FISHING INDUSTRY : DEVELOPMENT, FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS AND FISH DISTRIBUTION

The Sudan/UK Red Sea Fisheries Development Project

Aims

It has been calculated by the RSFDP that Sudan's seas are capable of yielding an annual fish catch of twenty million kilogrammes. In 1974 the Marine Fisheries Division (MFD) of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (MAFNR) estimated that the actual amount landed by Sudanese marine fishermen was 562,700 kilogrammes (Suakin's fishermen landing some forty per cent of this). Additionally, about two million kilogrammes were caught by Egyptian fishermen in Sudanese waters and landed in Egypt and one million kilogrammes caught by Saudi Arabian boats (crewed by Yemenis) and taken to Jidda. Thus the Sudanese were landing only 17 per cent of the total catch and a mere 2.8 per cent of the potential catch.

It was against this background that in 1975 the Sudan/UK Red Sea Fisheries Development Project was established, as a joint venture between the MFD and the UK Ministry of Overseas Development (which

became the Overseas Development Administration - ODA - under the Foreign Office in 1979), in response to a request from the Sudanese government for assistance in developing its sea fishing industry. Subsequent interviews with MFD personnel have suggested two reasons behind this request: firstly, as is clear from the above paragraph, an abundant natural resource was being under-exploited; and secondly, there was a need for an increased supply of a cheap foodstuff in Port Sudan, which was, and still is, expanding.

According to the ODA Team Leader in 1979, the project, so far as his staff were concerned, had four objectives: to assess the fisheries resource; to increase fish production and fishermen's living standards through the introduction of locally-built mechanised boats equipped with improved fishing gear; to introduce a minimal distributional infrastructure; and to advise the MFD. Whether or not these are identical to the aims of 1975 is perhaps debatable: a brief conversation with a British member of the team that negotiated the establishment of the project revealed that one objective at that time had been to increase the number of fishermen.

Organisation and Personnel

The project is not an autonomous unit and there are several other organisations which must be consulted before major policy decisions are reached, and to which the project is responsible. Chief amongst these are the MAFNR's branch office in Port Sudan, the Province Commissioner's Office and the Fisheries Department in Khartoum on the one side, and the Aid Secretary in the British Embassy, Khartoum, and ODA in London on the other.

In comparison to other aid projects , whether concerned with fisheries or not, the RSFDP is small in terms of its budget. ODA has contributed £ 1.2 million, largely in the form of equipment: fifty-six outboard and seventy inboard engines, five lorries, four Land Rovers, a workboat, a three ton chilled ice store, a flake ice plant and a large quantity of fishing gear and engine spares. The Sudanese contribution has consisted of buildings in Port Sudan, six lanshs and the majority of the personnel.

The ODA staff has increased from an initial two to six, all based in Port Sudan: the Team Leader, his assistant (chiefly concerned with assessing the fisheries resource), a fishing gear specialist, a marine biologist (to assess the shrimp and lobster resource), a fish processing expert and a trainee ODA fisheries officer. The team has been supplemented at different times by two VSO mechanics.

With the exceptions of the few MFD staff dealing with licences and the few seconded to a United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) project,¹ all the MFD staff are involved to some extent with the RSFDP. They consist of the director and his assistant, the head of the Suakin sub-office (there is no official title for this post), some fifteen technical assistants of varying specialisations and experience, six mechanics, about the same number of carpenters and drivers, two storekeepers, twelve fishermen and about twenty-five labourers and nightwatchmen. Of these, although the number varies from time to time, four technical assistants, three mechanics, four labourers, two

¹ This was initiated in 1979 to establish a "community fisheries project" in the Mohammed Gul/Dongonab Bay area. During my fieldwork period, only one FAO representative was engaged.

carpenters, four watchmen, a storekeeper and, obviously, the head of the sub-office are based in Suakin. The remainder are stationed in Port Sudan, although some may be required to work in the marsas when fishing experiments are being conducted.

In contrast to the ODA team, which has merely increased in numbers with no turnover of actual personnel, the MFD has a high rate of staff change. The reason is largely financial: pay scales are low in comparison to the private sector. This is felt particularly by the carpenters and mechanics, most of whom supplement their salaries by work outside the contractual hours. The situation has been stabilised to some extent recently by bonus payments from ODA. Fishermen and technical assistants when required to work in the marsas (and consequently required to camp there) are, on the other hand, paid overtime by the MFD and do not receive these bonuses.

Three of the technical assistants are university graduates, the rest coming into the MFD or MAFNR directly from Higher Secondary schools. A few of the carpenters and mechanics have been recruited from the private sector, but most have come directly from technical schools.

The labourers and nightwatchmen are local people, almost all Beja. The fishermen are all Bisharin from the Mohammed Gul/Dongonab Bay area. Apart from these, very few of the MFD staff are from the east of Sudan. This can be partly accounted for by the policy of the Fisheries Department of the MAFNR in Khartoum which up until 1980, when it succumbed to pressure from the RSFDP, drew no distinction between marine and freshwater fisheries and transferred staff with great frequency between the two. Several of the technical assistants now on the coast have previously worked on the White Nile and on Lake Nubia.

However, this does not account for the fact that the majority of the technical assistants, as well as some of the carpenters, mechanics and drivers have originally come from Kordofan, which has no fisheries of any description, but as we have seen in Chapter Four is an area that supplies, in Suakin at least, a considerable proportion of public sector employees.

Activities

The project is regarded by ODA as consisting of two phases: the pilot project (1975-78) and the extended project (1978- ?). Much of the early work was concerned with assessing the fisheries resource, particularly shrimps, and the compilation of statistics on boats, fishermen and production. When these figures were analysed it appeared to the RSFDP that the fishermen of Suakin were the most productive on the coast. As noted above, they are alleged to have accounted for forty per cent of the 1974 landings. Therefore, interest became centred, but not to the total exclusion of all other areas, on Suakin. The reasoning was straightforward: the fundamental objective of the project as far as both the MFD and ODA were concerned was an increase in the landings of fish. Suakin exported its surplus catch to Port Sudan (this is mentioned by Roden, 1970:20), thus an increased supply of fish to that town could be obtained by giving the bulk of the benefits to the most efficient fishermen. Offices and a warehouse, a mechanics' workshop and an ice factory and quay were built on the shores of the island and inlet (see Map 6, page 34) and fishing equipment and engines were made available to the fishermen.

Prior to the project the MFD had rented out six lanshs to fishermen in the Mohammed Gul/Dongonab Bay area. This was not a successful scheme:

the fishermen refused to maintain the boats, claiming that this was the responsibility of the owners, the MFD. Eventually all six broke down and had to be brought back to Port Sudan for extensive repairs. They were not returned. Unless the RSFDP was prepared to undertake the maintenance of all the boats it mechanised, which it was not, a rent system was clearly unsatisfactory (although there was some pressure for it from the MAFNR and the Province Commissioner's Office). It was decided that the fishermen should purchase the engines by instalments.

The RSFDP offers three types of diesel engine: the 7.5 horsepower Coventry-Victor, costing £s 950; the 18 horsepower Perkins, costing £s 1,440; and the 22 horsepower Lister, at £s 2,100. These are paid off by monthly instalments of £s 40, £s 60 and £s 87.50 respectively over a period of two years. The outboard engine is the petrol-driven 5 horsepower Seagull, sold for £s 169. A deposit of £s 13 is required for this, and the remaining sum paid off by monthly instalments of £s 17 for one year.

To acquire an engine from the RSFDP three conditions should be fulfilled: the applicant must be Sudanese, must be dependent upon fishing as his primary source of income and must name a guarantor. There are non-fishermen engine owners and technically non-Sudanese engine owners, but unless one argues that the Rashaida cannot be classified as Sudanese (which the RSFDP does not), abuse of these conditions does not appear to be widespread. Although many fishermen complain that the engines are not powerful enough, and the boats must, as a consequence, be relatively small, the RSFDP is reluctant to provide anything larger for fear that they would be used not for fishing but for the lucrative trade with Jidda. Even the existing boats, as noted in Chapter Five, can be used for non-fishing purposes. The

pursuit of driftwood (mashi sabiah - "going for floating") rather than fish was such a problem to the RSFDP that in 1979 an order was issued by the Director of the MFD forbidding this activity by lanshs whose engines were not fully paid for.

The reason why the fishermen were required to pay, albeit at favourable rates, for what were after all gifts to the Sudanese government was not simply that the project officials believed that the fishermen would be more likely to maintain them, although this may have been a factor. It was planned that the monies accrued would form a "revolving credit fund" - a pool of money to be used for the purchase of more engines and equipment. Unfortunately the RSFDP was prevented from doing this by the Sudanese government: all sums received had to be paid into the latter's coffers.¹ This was a severe set-back to the long term plans of the project.

The RSFDP is the only 'retail' outlet in Sudan stocking marine engines. It also monopolises the sale of trolling lines, gill nets and cast nets (although of course many of the fishermen using these make their own). Hooks and lines are also sold but these are widely available in private sector general stores. The RSFDP's carpenters produce zinc-lined ice-boxes for fishing boats, although these are also made by local carpenters. Ice itself is sold at 3 piastres a kilogramme from the flake ice plant in Suakin, although fishermen may be supplied by merchants with ice in block form.

¹This appears to be a standard government practice. In Britain for example all monies received by national museums for book or photographic sales are paid back to the Treasury, from where the museums receive an annual grant.

To ensure that any rise in production would lead to a rise in the amount of fish reaching Port Sudan, a lorry was made available to collect fish from Suakin and transport it to Port Sudan's fish market (similarly a lorry was supplied to collect from the marsas to the north of Port Sudan). The fee for this service was initially 3 piastres per kilogramme of transported fish, which later rose to 4 piastres. It is difficult to establish whether or not this was cheaper than the fish merchants' transportation costs, but by mid-1979 it was clear that the main users of this service were in fact the fish merchants who were buying fish in Suakin and having it transported to their stalls in the Port Sudan market. When this was realised the service was discontinued (although the lorry travelling to the north still operates).

The MFD has made repeated but as yet unsuccessful attempts to monopolise the buying of fish from the fishermen. A short-lived co-operative folded in the 1960s amidst allegations of corruption among the government employees who ran it. The MAFNR and the Province Commissioner's Office are currently seeking to establish another.¹ However, the MFD is involved in retailing. Experiments with different types of gear in the marsas has produced catches which are sold by the MFD at a shop which adjoins the fifteen or so stalls that comprise the Port Sudan fish market. This is the only retail outlet that observes the official price for fish (currently 75 piastres a kilogram). As the private sector stalls sell at fs 1.20 a kilogramme, the MFD shop quickly sells out, its fish often reappearing on these stalls.² No government retailing takes place in Suakin. However there

¹ The election of representatives for this in Suakin has been described in Chapter Two.

² Taban (1980:27) implies that the MFD is able to supply all the fish

is equipment for fish smoking there and experiments have been made in drying and filletting, but as yet not on a regular or commercial scale.

No attempt has been made to encourage the supply of fish from non-Sudanese fishermen. In fact the reverse has occurred. Foreign fishermen - Egyptians and Yemenis - must now be licensed to fish in Sudanese waters.

Results

The project, although not yet completed, is regarded as proceeding successfully by its personnel,¹ a view supported by two interrelated claims: firstly, that a substantial part of Sudan's fishing fleet has been mechanised and, secondly, that fish production has been increased.

The first is undoubtedly true. The RSFDP estimates that in 1976 there were no more than one hundred and sixty fishing boats on the entire coast, all except the six MFD-owned lanshs unmotorised. If this number remains unchanged (which, however, is unlikely), given the total number of engines the RSFDP has at its disposal, eighty per cent of the fleet will be mechanised by the time the project terminates. Already in Suakin half the fleet is equipped with engines. This is almost entirely attributable to the project, but not quite. The four fishing dhows (like the trading and shell collecting dhows) are fitted with Yanmar engines imported from Jidda; four fishermen in

that Port Sudan requires. This is untrue.

¹ Presumably other organisations consider the project a success: the ODA Team Leader has received an OBE for his work.

Suakin have imported Johnstone 6 outboards and one has a twenty horse-power Mariner outboard (on a six-metre fallūka!). However, none of these craft was fishing before the RSFDP began its mechanisation programme. Perhaps then the project can be credited with introducing a technology into the industry that the fishermen are willing to imitate on their own initiative¹ - something that has, on the other hand, completely failed with respect to "improved fishing gear".

According to MFD and RSFDP estimates the second claim is equally justified. Fish production by Sudanese fishermen has risen from 562,700 kilogrammes in 1974 to 671,000 in 1976 to 770,500 in 1979, a thirty per cent increase in five years.

Assessment

But how reliable are these estimates? Table 10 shows the amount of fish landed in Suakin in 1979 and its fate. This is not an estimate but an extract from the log kept in the MFD office. It should be noted that the columns do not tally. Given the estimate above of the total production that year, fifteen per cent (using column 1) was landed in Suakin. This does not represent the total amount caught by Suakin's fishermen: neither the quantities caught by non-boat fishermen nor those landed in the marsas are incorporated. It is difficult to estimate these amounts, particularly the former. However, putting this aside, the "estimated unrecorded catch" column of Table 11, which gives a more detailed account of the production of three Suakin-based lanshs, suggests

¹ That is, if they have access to importation facilities. It is no coincidence that the owners of all the non-project outboard engines are Rashaida.

TABLE 10

FISH LANDINGS IN SUAKIN 1979

(Amounts in Kilogrammes)						
	(1) Total landed	(2) Landed by <u>lanshs</u>	(3) Landed by other boats	(4) Transported to Port Sudan	(5) Bought by Suakin merchant A	(6) Bought by Suakin merchant B
January	4,389	977	3,412	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
February	6,102	2,575	3,527	2,510	2,424	1,168
March	8,248	4,362	2,886	4,256	2,792	1,200
April	11,732	5,898	5,834	5,898	3,394	2,440
May	15,660	8,837	6,833	9,345	3,869	2,446
June	12,047	5,453	6,594	6,276	2,794	2,977
July	10,375	4,100	6,275	4,617	2,688	3,070
August	6,468	2,319	4,149	2,230	1,867	2,371
September	16,148	4,269	11,879	11,688	2,038	2,422
October	12,096	5,053	7,043	8,696	1,534	1,866
November	7,468	1,724	5,744	3,299	2,315	1,854
December	4,469	1,967	2,542	2,705	1,967	697
TOTALS*	115,202	47,534	66,718	61,520	27,682	22,511
%**		41.6	58.4	55.07	24.78	20.15

SOURCE: Record book, MFD Office, Suakin.

NOTES

*There are errors in the additions of the figures for March, May and December, resulting in the totals not agreeing. The sum of columns 2 and 3 equals 114,252; the sum of columns 4, 5 and 6 equals 116,102.

**Percentages are worked out from the sum of columns 2 and 3 and from the sum of columns 4, 5 and 6, not from column 1.

TABLE 11ESTIMATED CATCHES OF THREE LANSHS

<i>Owner/captain</i>	Muslim	Sa'ad	Abdel Gadir
<i>Engine</i>	Lister	C-V	Lister
<i>Length</i>	10m	8.5m	10m
<i>Recorded catch at Suakin (kgs)</i>	4,835	4,723	6,061
<i>Recorded days out of Suakin</i>	62	132	100
<i>Est. days out of <u>marisa</u></i>	30	68	80
<i>Est. unrecorded catch (kgs)</i>	2,340	2,448	4,848
<i>Est. total catch (kgs)</i>	7,175	7,171	10,909
<i>Est. total days</i>	92	200	180

SOURCE: ODA Team, Port Sudan.

that a lansh lands between thirty-three and forty-four per cent of its total catch in the marsas. If we take these figures as representative of the situation then the total amount of fish caught by Suakin's boat fishermen would be between 153,219 and 165,891 kilogrammes. This represents only twenty to twenty-one per cent of the total catch on the coast that year. Yet, as noted, it was estimated that in 1974 Suakin's fishermen landed forty per cent of the total catch and that in 1976 they constituted over twenty-eight per cent of the total fishing population.

We have also noted that the project estimates there were 376 fishermen on the coast in 1976 and the total catch for that year was 671,000 kilogrammes. This gives an average annual productivity of 1,785 kilogrammes per man. Suakin currently has an estimated 135 boat-using fishermen. For this level of productivity to be maintained in 1979 it would have been necessary for Suakin's boat-using fishermen to land 240,916. Subtracting the amount landed in Suakin (column 1 on Table 10) from this figure, it can be seen that this would involve fifty-two per cent of the fishermen's total catch being landed in the marsas. For them to maintain their alleged 1974 level of forty per cent of the coast's total catch, the figure for 1979 would have to be 308,200 kilogrammes, sixty-three per cent of which would have to have been landed in the marsas. From personal observation I consider this unlikely. I would estimate that the marsa landings are approximately equal to one-third of the town's landings.

The RSFDP has kept track of several lanshs and their average production in 1979 was 8,314.6 kilogrammes. In a report under preparation I was allowed to see, the ODA Team Leader estimated that a "canoe" (presumably a hūri luh wāhid or ramas) produces 2,000

kilogrammes of fish annually and a hūri (or fallūka), whether equipped with an outboard engine or not, 5,000 kilogrammes.¹ Now, if we assume that a lansh has four crewmen, then this gives an annual productivity of 2,078.65 kilogrammes per man. If the lansh is actually more productive in terms of kilogramme per man per year than the other two boat types, then the "canoe" must have at least two crewmen and the hūri at least three. But if this is true then these two boat types have a lower productivity per man than the average annual productivity in 1976.

One is forced to conclude that the "statistics" produced by the RSFDP are suspect. Yet it is the impression of those involved in the industry, RSFDP officials, fish merchants and fishermen, that the supply of fish has increased since the inception of the project. The supply of fish into Port Sudan has undoubtedly been increased if only through the RSFDP's provision of a lorry to collect fish from the marsas to the north and the project itself catching fish. It should be noted however that not all the fish landed in or taken to Port Sudan by fishermen and fish merchants actually passes through the fish market. The ODA Team Leader estimates that only one-third does. Of the other two-thirds, some goes to individuals connected with the fish merchants, but probably a considerable proportion goes to the town's first class hotels and clubs or is sold to ships.

All other things being equal, if the supply of fish has increased the price should have fallen. This has not happened. The price has risen sharply: both that charged to consumers and that received by the fishermen. In early 1979 the latter were paid between 36 and fifty piastres a kilogramme. In 1980 it varied from 65 piastres to fs 1.00 a kilogramme. The retail price at this time was fs 1.20 in Port Sudan

¹ No mention is made of dhows in this report. It is my impression that they are not greatly more productive than lanshs.

and fs 1.00 in Suakin.

What has happened is an increase in demand, brought about by a rise in the price of meat (for reasons that will be explained in Chapter Seven). The consequent rise in the price of fish, a substitute, may be a major cause of increased production. Speaking to the three nurses who fish in their spare time, all three stated that they had turned to fishing recently, simply because previously they had not considered it a worthwhile pursuit in terms of remuneration.

Thus an increased supply of a cheap foodstuff has not been achieved. It could have been ensured by monopolising distribution, but as noted attempts at this have so far failed. The MFD, operating within an official price framework, cannot offer competitive prices. Failure to maintain the official price in the private sector, however, is not the fault of the project but of the police and the Province Commissioner's Office. But if this was rigidly enforced on the open market, perhaps even less fish would pass through it. A further hindrance to monopolisation has been the attitude of ODA, who, given the past failures of the MFD, have not supported further attempts. They point out an example of an existing successful distributor: securing his supplies involves working roughly twelve hours a day. The ODA staff claim, with foundation, that there is no-one in the MFD willing to put in these hours. Furthermore the technical assistants have no experience in distribution and in retailing and indeed have little personal interest in it. The ODA team see the path to improved distribution as routed through the private sector. But private sector control results in private sector prices, which is not a cheap supply.

This highlights what appears to be the main contradiction between

the two organisations that comprise the RSFDP. The MFD is anxious to secure a cheap supply of fish; the ODA team do not appear to share this commitment. This is well evidenced by the latter's attitude towards shrimps. It is a matter of internal dispute amongst the team whether or not there are sufficient shrimps to justify the establishment of a shrimp fishery, but this aside, a considerable amount of time and funds have been spent upon them (including the hire of a trawler for a survey). But shrimps are an international luxury, not a locally-consumed foodstuff.¹

Yet, perhaps paradoxically, the ODA is committing the RSFDP and when this finishes the MFD to an even more active role in the fishing industry. The proposed development of a processing plant in Suakin means that the RSFDP will be involved in distribution at some level. The ice factory in Suakin (and the further one planned for the town) necessitate its continued involvement with the private sector fishermen. Furthermore, engines have been supplied, yet no private sector merchants have been encouraged to import spares, so the project must continue to retail these.

As briefly mentioned above, a further development scheme on the coast is planned by FAO for the Mohammed Gul/Dongonab Bay area. This will approach the problem of increasing production from a different angle: it will be a "community development project", concerned primarily with improving living standards within the community through fishing and the income derived from it. A well-documented example of this approach is the Indo-Norwegian Project in Kerala, India.² This

¹ Dietary habits aside, the price is prohibitive - fs 15.00 a kilogramme in Port Sudan.

² See Sandven (1959) and Klausen (1968).

aimed to increase production and improve distribution, thereby raising the material standard of living within the communities focused upon. However, not only was new fishing technology (including boat mechanisation) introduced but also health education schemes, nurseries and social clubs.

Although the RSFDP is also concerned with increasing production and improving distribution, it cannot be seen as primarily concerned with the well-being of the fishermen, whether in Suakin or elsewhere. It has made certain material items available to them, at a price, and that is all. If it can be said to have been concerned with one community then it has been orientated towards the community of consumers, particularly those in Port Sudan. All the project's actions, in the final analysis, have been concerned with increasing supply. And so far as this community is concerned the project has failed them. Its programme has been simply to introduce new technology and aids, but has failed to keep the price of the product low: in fact the price of fish has probably risen more steeply during the time of the project than any other. Furthermore, it has spent considerable resources on a foodstuff, shrimps, that few eat and fewer can afford.

Fishermen and Mechanisation

Yet the project has benefitted other groups. Unlike some development schemes, new technologies of boat-building such as fibre-glass and ferrocement¹ have not been introduced: full use has been made

¹The former has been introduced in Somalia by the Russians; the latter introduced on the White Nile by the Intermediate Technology Group.

of local skills and an increased demand has been created for the products of Suakin's boatyard. The fishermen almost invariably speak highly of the project, which has provided them with mechanisation at an affordable price. The selling of engines has been a great success. Only in Dongonab Bay have there been any problems: the ODA Team Leader related that one fisherman whose engine had repeatedly broken down solved his problem by setting fire to the boat. He told the project staff that there was an end to it, he would pay no more instalments.

Fishermen in particular and peasants in general are frequently regarded as conservative and unwilling to adopt new technologies:

Peasants in general do not react to new ideas with a positive attitude... the tendency for villagers to follow the prescribed ways of their ancestors may be attributed to their lack of knowledge about available alternatives. However even when innovations in agricultural production, health and marketing are presented to subsistence farmers their record of adoption has seldom been enthusiastic... His life pattern inclines the peasant to follow those ways he knows will produce positive even though small-scale results rather than try a new idea that might end in failure and thereby endanger his existence.

(Rogers and Svenning 1969:31)

There are a few elderly fishermen working out of Suakin who show no inclination towards mechanisation, and perhaps the above quotation is applicable to them, although those interviewed indicated that they did not consider that investment in an engine would provide a significantly increased return to make the proposition worthwhile. The majority of boat fishermen believe the reverse. A mechanised boat has a greater range and is less dependent upon the winds. Although the RSFDP has introduced mechanised fishing boats to the coast, the idea of mechanised boats in general is not new to the area. All dhows (with the exception of some Egyptian ones) are mechanised. And, of course,

mechanised transport is an established part of everyday life on land.

The majority of fishermen also believe that mechanised boats are more productive than sailing ones. They are also more effective driftwood collectors as they are considerably more manoeuvrable. This is an important industry in a town composed of mainly wooden buildings. There is also a further factor which the RSFDP does not appear to have taken into consideration. Table 11 records that three lanshs spent an average of one hundred and fifty-seven days each fishing in 1979. It is my impression that smaller boats work considerably more days than this in a year, possibly twenty-five days a month (although some fishermen take the entire month of Ramadan off). This difference can perhaps in part be attributable to the mechanical difficulties the lanshs experience, but it is remarkable how the fishing activity of a lansh increases when the captain is about to marry or undertake some other financial commitment. Thus it seems that to obtain a comparable income, less actual time needs to be spent on a motorised boat than on a sailing boat.

There is yet another reason which accounts in part for the success of the mechanisation scheme. Although the engines are sold over one or two year periods at a low interest-free price, the amount the owner of the vessel actually pays for the engine himself is a fraction of the original price. However, in order to explain this more fully, it is necessary to examine the financial organisation of the industry, its costs, profits and remuneration arrangements.

Capital and Running Costs

Whereas marine engines, as we have seen, may be bought over a period of up to two years, no similar credit or deferred payment arrangements exist for the purchase of boats. They are either bought outright or, more commonly, commissioned, the buyer giving sums of money to the boatbuilder periodically and the latter doing the equivalent amount of work then awaiting further instalments. This system applies to all boats: thus a trading dhow may be several years in the making. A smaller dhow suitable for fishing from Suakin's boatyard costs between fs 4,000 and fs 5,000 and a lansh fs 2,000 to fs 3,000, excluding in both cases the cost of the engine. A hūrī or fallūka, depending on size, will cost between fs 350 and fs 1,500, a ramas about fs 225. The hūrī luh wāhid, which is not available new, exchanges hands at approxiamtely fs 150.

Regular maintenance of boats is essential. Once a month they are taken out of the water for repainting and coating with a resin called sandaros.¹ For this operation a lansh will require about fs 10.00-worth of paint, five rotls of oil (at 50 piastres a rotl) and five rotls of sandaros (at 80 piastres a rotl). Although this work is performed by the boat's crew, additional labour is required to haul the boat out of and back into the water. This may cost up to fs 20.00. Obviously, the smaller boats do not require this labour and the amounts of materials used will be less. I estimate that a ramas or a small hūrī with a crew of one or two men will spend approximately fs 7.40 a month

¹ This is imported from India and is probably from the Red Sanders tree (Pterocarpus santalinus). However, it may be sandarach or sandarac from the Moroccan sandarach tree, Collistris quadrivalvis.

(that is £s 88.80 annually) on such maintenance; a larger hūri £s 20.90 (£s 250.80) and a lansh £s 36.50 (£s 438).

It is impossible to estimate accurately the costs of structural repairs and engine spares as these variably considerably from boat to boat. The RSFDP employs mechanics, as has been noted, to maintain fishermen's engines and in theory those fishermen who have obtained their engines through the project are entitled to these services free of charge.

The cost of mounting fishing trips is composed of a number of the following elements:

Diesel at £s 0.75 a gallon

Petrol at £s 1.00 a gallon

Oil at £s 2.75 a gallon

Ice sold in boxes of 30 kilogrammes at £s 0.90 a box

Fishing lines at £s 1.20 each

Hooks in boxes of 100 at £s 3.00 a box

Additionally there will be lead for weighting the lines, the cost of which will depend on size and source; unloading costs - a few fish given to non-crewmen if unloading is not done entirely by the crewmen; the cost of food for the days at sea or in the marsa; and the cost of bait for those who do not catch their own.

Table 12 gives an estimation of the monthly and annual running costs of a lansh with a crew of four, a three-man hūri with an outboard motor and a two-man sailing hūri. It is assumed that none have unloading costs or buy bait. It is further assumed that the lansh undertakes four three-day trips a month and that the two hūris work 275 days a year out of Suakin.

TABLE 12
ESTIMATE OF RUNNING COSTS
OF THREE FISHING CRAFT

Item	Quantity	Monthly quantity	Monthly cost (fs)	Annual cost (fs)
<u>Lansh (4-man crew)*</u>				
Diesel	10 gallons	x 4	30.00	360.00
Oil	$\frac{1}{2}$ gallon	x 4	5.50	66.00
Ice	20 boxes	x 4	72.00	864.00
Hooks	1 box	x 1	3.00	36.00
Lines	1 replacement	x 1	1.20	14.40
Lead			1.00	12.00
Food	fs 6.00	x 4	24.00	<u>288.00</u>
TOTAL				1,640.40
<u>Huri with outboard engine (3-man crew)**</u>				
Petrol	1 gallon	x23	23.00	276.00
Oil	1 gallon	x 1	2.75	33.00
Hooks	1 box	x $\frac{2}{3}$	2.00	24.00
Lines	1 replacement	x 1	1.20	14.40
Lead			0.66	<u>7.92</u>
TOTAL				355.32
<u>Sailing huri (2-man crew)**</u>				
Hooks	1 box	x $\frac{1}{2}$	1.50	18.00
Lines	1 replacement	x $\frac{1}{2}$	0.60	7.20
Lead			0.50	<u>6.00</u>
TOTAL				31.20

NOTES:

*Assumed to undertake four three-day trips a month.

**Assumed to work 275 days a year out of Suakin.

Sharing the Profits

Kuvua numbi si kazi; kuu magawioni - to make a good catch is not difficult; calculating the shares is the real work (Swahili proverb).

(Prins 1965:164)

Acheson (1981:278) asserts that throughout the world the pre-dominant mode of remuneration amongst fishermen is by share. This may be the allocation of particular parts of a fish to particular individuals, as with whales and manta rays in Lombok, Indonesia (Barnes 1980) or, where fish catches are sold, through the allocation of proportions of the proceeds to particular individuals. The systems of calculation of these allocations in the latter case appear at first sight to be quite diverse. Klausen (1968:128) describes a variety of methods in operation in two villages in Kerala, India. In one of these places, Puthenthura, the crewmen of small boats receive "twelve naye payse each of a catch of one rupee", a naye payse being one hundredth of a rupee, and on larger boats "six naye payse each of a catch of one rupee". In the other village, Sakthikulangara, the shares are not calculated thus. On a boat with a crew of nine, the proceeds of the sale are divided into equal parts. The boat owner takes eight and a half of these, the skipper one and a half and the remaining crew one each. On the recently introduced mechanised boats the proceeds are divided into two halves: one is taken by the owner and the other divided amongst the crew. When nylon nets are used on these boats, the initial division is into thirds: one for the boat owner, one for the net owner and the third part for the crew. Firth (1946:236-50) finds systems in Malaya based upon what he terms "fractional divisions" which vary according to the type of net used. For example, in deep gill-netting each crewman takes one share, the boat owner two shares and extra

shares go to the bailer, the "net expert" and the two men who handle the net at sea. Donaldson (1979:252) records five systems in Oman, although he notes that there are others. All those described are proportional divisions between gear owner, boat owner and crew: for example, half to the boat/gear owner and half to the crew, or two-thirds to the gear owner and one-third to the boat owner and the crew combined. Prins (1965:163-68) describes systems in Lamu, Kenya, which vary according to boat type being used. On the small fishing craft each crewman takes one share, the owner three-quarters of a share and the skipper one and a quarter shares. On larger craft the owner takes one-third of the total apportionable sum and the remainder is divided into a number of equal shares. Each crewman takes one, the skipper, the "remover of obstacles" and the cleaner of the boat taking two and the owner of the nets taking three.

These examples are drawn from geographically and culturally diverse areas and some reflect highly specialised divisions of labour. Yet regardless of this, two basic patterns of share division emerge and all the examples we have considered can be classified to one or the other of these methods:

Method 1 - the boat owner receives a share directly proportional to that received by each individual crewman. On the small boats of Lamu this is $3/4:1$, on the non-mechanised boats of Sakthikulangara it is $8\frac{1}{2}:1$ and in Malaya $2:1$. Although the fishermen of Puthenthura use a monetary sum as the basis for articulating how their system operates, in effect they follow this method.

Method 2 - the boat owner receives a share that is directly proportional to that received by the crew as a single unit. In the examples from Oman and on the mechanised boats of Sakthikulangara

this is 2:1, and on the larger boats of Lamu 3:1.

Thus when Method 1 is applied the owner's share is related to the size of the crew; with Method 2 it is independent of this factor.¹

It is interesting to note that in Lamu and Sakthikulangara both these methods are found, not least because this is the same situation as is found in Suakin.

Amongst the fishermen of Suakin there is no wage labour and apart from fishermen who own their own boats and have no crewmen and a few individuals working with their fathers who receive no related income, remuneration is entirely through share systems. This applies to both boat fishermen and non-boat fishermen working in teams.

In the case of the latter, the net will be the property of one member of the team and he will be entitled to a share for his participation in the team and a share for his ownership of the net. Although no boat is involved, it is clear that this system is a Method 1-type system, with "boat owner" being substituted by "net owner".

¹ It is not suggested here that these two methods are the only ways in which fishermen may be remunerated. Although I have found no examples of Third World fisheries which contradict this hypothesis or have systems which cannot be classified under one of these two methods, Western industrial fishing industries have more complex systems. Tunstall (1962:29,33,54-55,176) for instance describes some of the systems in use in the British trawling industry. Up until 1901 it appears that only the skipper and mate were remunerated by shares, the former receiving one and three-eighths and the latter one and one-eighth shares out of a total of fourteen. All other crewmen received wages. However, after that date all crewmen were given a basic wage plus a proportion of the gross profit, the actual proportion depending upon their position. It was articulated in a similar manner to the system in operation in Puthenthura, as "poundage", so much for every £100 gross sale. In some places the skipper's remuneration would be more intricate, such as a basic wage plus ten per cent of the net profit plus one per cent of the gross returns. Interestingly, Olsen (1885), which predates the introduction of 'shares for all' contains a "Fisherman's Settling Table", which calculates the value of 1/4 to 1½ shares out of totals of 8, 9 and 10, for values between one shilling and £1,000.

Amongst small boats Method 1 is also followed and can be expressed thus:

$$1 \text{ share} = \frac{a}{n + 1}$$

where a = the apportionable sum

n = the number of crewmen

The number of shares is equal to the number of crewmen plus one. This addition is articulated as "the boat's share" and of course goes to the boat owner. Each crewman receives one share. If the boat owner is also he crewman he will of course receive a total of two shares - one for being a crewman and one for being the boat owner.

The apportionable sum is the gross revenue from the sale of fish less the maintenance and running costs incurred. On boats that have an outboard engine which has not been paid off, the instalments due are regarded as costs, and are deducted from the revenue.

Variations exist. On one large hūri the value of each share was as above but the owner (who was not a crewman) received only three-quarters of a share and the captain one and a quarter shares. I also found a two-man hūri owned by one of the men where there appeared to be no reckoning of the "boat's share" but a simple division was made between them in the proportion of 5:3.

On lanshs, again the apportionable sum is equal to the revenue less the maintenance and running costs, less the instalments due on engines in those cases where these have not been paid off. But here Method 2 is applied. Normally the system is thus:

$$\text{Each crewman receives } \frac{2/3 a}{n}$$

$$\text{Owner/captain receives } \frac{a}{3} + \frac{2/3 a}{n}$$

in those cases where the captain is also the owner. Where he is not,

the captain will receive

$$\frac{2/3 a}{n} + \frac{1/4 a}{3}$$

and the owner

$$\frac{3/4 a}{3} = \frac{a}{4}$$

However, on at least one lansh Method 1 is applied in this fashion:

$$1 \text{ share} = \frac{a}{n + 2}$$

the captain/owner receiving a total of three shares. Nevertheless it is my impression that Method 2 is the predominant system for share division amongst lanshs. The fishing dhows also follow this system, with one exception. This particular dhow has been mentioned in the preceeding chapter in connection with the movement from fishing to trading dhow work and vice versa. It will be recalled that this boat carries a mechanic, which no other fishing vessel does, and its ordinary crew-members are teenage boys. I was told that the system employed here is the same as that used on the trochus-collecting dhows:

$$1 \text{ share} = \frac{\frac{1}{2}a}{n}$$

$$\text{Captain receives } 3 \left(\frac{\frac{1}{2}a}{n} \right)$$

$$\text{Mechanic receives } 1\frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{\frac{1}{2}a}{n} \right)$$

$$\text{Owner receives } \frac{1}{2}a - 2\frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{\frac{1}{2}a}{n} \right)$$

The system employed here is particularly interesting because it cannot be described as following either Method 1 or Method 2. Indeed it appears to be a combination of them. The owner receives half of the total apportionable sum (which is appropriate for Method 2), but from

this he pays out the equivalent of two crewmen's shares to the captain and half a share to the mechanic, and of course the size of these shares is dependent upon the size of the crew (a feature of Method 1).

As noted, this singular method is said to be the same as on trochus collecting dhows, of which both the captain and the mechanic have experience. The owner of this fishing dhow also owns trochus collecting and trading dhows. Although it is Rashaïda owned and crewed it would be erroneous to classify this method of share division as characteristic of Rashaïda fishermen. Of the other two methods, as we have seen, the selection is not based or in any way related to the ethnic identity of owners and crew but is dependent upon the type of boat. This situation is remarkably similar to that in Lamu and Sakthikulangara: Method 1 is applied to the smaller craft; Method 2 to the larger mechanised boats.

Estimating Incomes

Shares are not apportioned after each fish landing. Merchants frequently buy on credit and settle up after a number of collections or deliveries. Written records are kept by them although the fishermen usually keep an accurate mental record. Responsibility for the division of shares rests with the captain of the vessel and some are reluctant to pay out more frequently than monthly in case the crew go on a spree and are not seen until their money is spent.

Disregarding the additional income derived from the sale of driftwood, which is apportioned according to the share system in use but which is so variable that it cannot be assessed with any accuracy, it

is possible to estimate, very broadly, the incomes of fishermen and boat owners of different boat types, using the estimations of costs and catches given earlier in this chapter. Although the price paid for fish, as we shall see, varies from merchant to merchant, it will be assumed here that all boats in question receive fs 0.75 a kilogramme.

A small sailing hūri with a two-man crew is reckoned to catch 2,000 kilogrammes annually. Therefore the revenue will be fs 1,500. Maintenance costs are estimated at fs 88.80 and running costs at fs 31.20. Using the Method 1 share system described, each share will therefore be

$$\frac{1,500 - (88.80 + 31.20)}{2 + 1}$$

$$= \text{fs } 460$$

If the owner is also a crewman, he will receive fs 920.

A hūri with an outboard engine is estimated to catch 5,000 kilogrammes annually, giving a revenue of fs 3,750. Maintenance and running costs have been estimated at fs 250.80 and fs 355.32 respectively. If the engine is bought during this year then fs 169 must also be deducted from the revenue. If there is a three-man crew then, again using the Method 1 system, each share will be

$$\frac{3,750 - (250.80 + 355.32 + 169)}{3 + 1}$$

$$= \text{fs } 744.$$

Again, if the owner is also a member of the crew he will receive a total of two shares: fs 1,488.

The average lansh catches approximately 8,300 kilogrammes annually, thus giving a revenue of fs 6,225. Maintenance and running costs are estimated at fs 438 and fs 1,640.40 respectively. If the engine is a

Coventry Victor and is still being paid off, £s 720 will be due for payment to the RSFDP in one year. Thus the apportionable sum will be £s 3,427. If there are four crewmen, including the owner then each crewman will receive

$$\frac{2}{3} \times \frac{3,427}{4}$$

$$= \text{£s } 571$$

The owner will receive

$$571 + \frac{3,427}{3}$$

$$= \text{£s } 1,713$$

If on the other hand the owner was not a crewman and thus a captain was engaged, the captain would receive

$$571 + \frac{3,427}{4 \times 3}$$

$$= \text{£s } 857$$

and the owner

$$\frac{3,427}{4}$$

$$= \text{£s } 857$$

Using the same costings and number of crew, when the Method 1 system is applied to lanshs and the apportionable sum is divided into "n + 2" equal parts, actual incomes will be identical to those worked out above as "n" being 4:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{1 share under} \\ \text{Method 1} \end{array} = \frac{3,427}{4 + 2} = \begin{array}{l} \text{1 share under} \\ \text{Method 2} \end{array} = \frac{2}{3} \times \frac{3,427}{4}$$

and

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Owner/capn.'s} \\ \text{total shares} \\ \text{under Method 1} \end{array} = 3 \times \frac{3,427}{4 + 2} = \begin{array}{l} \text{Owner/capn.'s} \\ \text{total shares} \\ \text{under Method 2} \end{array} = \frac{3,427}{3} + \frac{2 \times 3,427}{3 \times 4}$$

However, with a larger crew, the owner/ captain's total share will be greater under Method 2 than under Method 1 and conversely the ordinary

crewman's share will be greater under Method 2 if the crew is smaller but greater under Method 1 if the crew is larger. With a three-man crew the owner/captain will receive fs 2,056 under Method 1 and fs 1,904 under Method 2, whereas an ordinary crewman will receive fs 685 or fs 762. With a five-man crew the owner/captain will receive fs 1,463 under Method 1 and fs 1,599 under Method 2, whereas the ordinary crewman will receive fs 490 or fs 457.

I have no reliable estimations of the costs of running and maintaining fishing dhows. However, in order to examine the workings of the share system in operation on one of these (and emphatically not to make a comparison in incomes between dhow and other fishermen), let the apportionable sum be fs 4,500 and the number of crewmen six.

The owner will receive

$$\frac{4,500}{2} - (2\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{4,500}{2 \times 6})$$

$$= \text{fs } 1,313$$

The captain will receive

$$3 \times \frac{4,500}{2 \times 6}$$

$$= \text{fs } 1,125$$

The mechanic will receive

$$1\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{4,500}{2 \times 6}$$

$$= \text{fs } 563$$

And the remaining four crewmen will each receive

$$\frac{4,500}{2 \times 6}$$

$$= \text{fs } 375$$

Using the same figures, a fishing dhow which divides its apportionable sum by the same system as the lanshs, having no mechanic but the same

total number of crewmen and a non-crewman owner¹ would have the following income distribution:

The owner will receive

$$\frac{4,500}{4}$$

$$= \text{£s } 1,125$$

The captain will receive

$$\frac{2 \times 4,500}{3 \times 6} + \frac{4,500}{4 \times 3}$$

$$\text{£s } 875$$

The remaining five crewmen will each receive

$$\frac{2 \times 4,500}{3 \times 6}$$

$$= \text{£s } 500$$

Thus this third system employed on the Rashaida dhow increases the income of the boat owner in relation to the ordinary crewmember in comparison to the Method 2 system used on the lanshs and other fishing dhows. The latter system itself increases the relative income of the owners of boats with crews of more than four in comparison to Method 1 and, as noted, is operated only on the lanshs and dhows. This is understandable: the capital investment in these types of boats is considerably greater than in sailing boats. It might be expected that with the addition of an outboard motor to a sailing craft the "boat's share" would increase. This does not happen. Although the engine, and this applies to both inboard and outboard engines, is the property of the boat owner, when it is paid for by instalments it is actually paid for by both the owner and the crew. Its cost is deducted in

¹ None of the owners of the four fishing dhows work on them: they are all merchants. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

exactly the same way as the cost of fishing lines. It must be noted however that the method of paying for engines is unique - nothing else can be bought in such a manner. Yet it results in a non-crewman owner of a three-man boat with an outboard engine costing fs 169 actually paying only fs 42.25; a captain/owner of a lansh with a fs 2,100 Lister engine will pay only fs 700. Undoubtedly this has been a major factor in the success of the RSFDP's boat mechanisation scheme (although the RSFDP seems unaware of it). Thus although Acheson (1981:278) appears to be aware only of Method 1-type share systems, his argument that they inhibit capital investment, as this falls entirely upon the owner, does not apply to the situation here.

The Distribution of Fish

Incomes of course depend on the sale of fish, and it is to this subject we now turn to complete the picture of the industry in Suakin. In 1966 it was estimated that a total of 20,316 tons of fish were marketed on the Sudanese coast.¹ Of this 14,700 tons were sold as fresh fish, 5,000 tons as unsalted sun-dried, 416 tons as salted sun-dried and 200 tons as fasikh.² Roden (1970:20) mentions drying and salting of fish in Suakin in 1967. This processing appears to have been organised by Yemenis from Hadramaut, the finished products being sent to Port Sudan or exported to Yemen via Aqiq. The enterprise folded in the

¹MFD figures.

²This is an odorous delicacy made from mullet stored in barrels of brine. It appears to be no longer produced by the Sudanese although Egyptian dhows fish for mullet for this purpose in Sudanese waters. The fasikh they produce is not sold in Sudan, but after fishing trips of several months' duration taken back to Egypt.

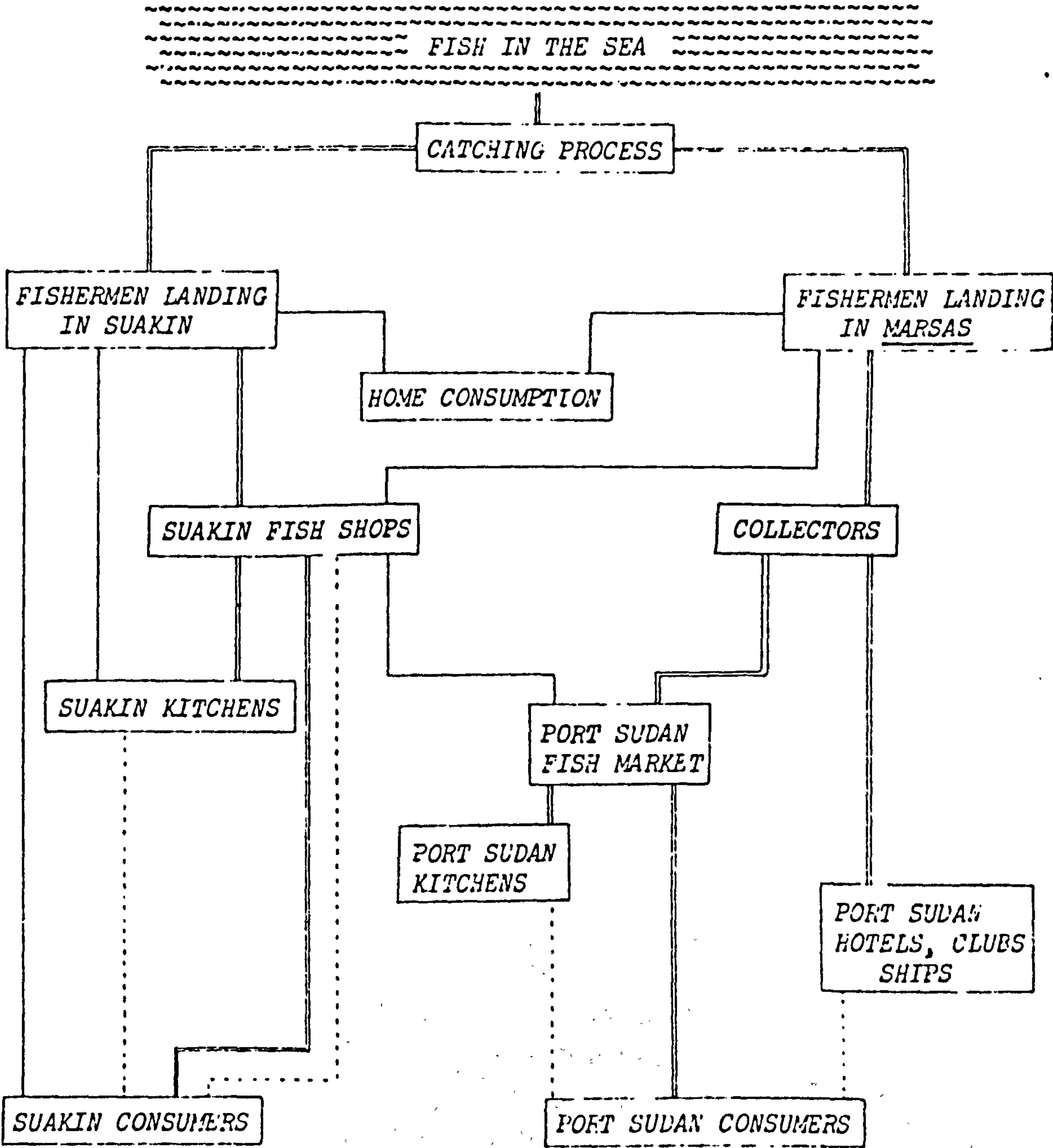
early 1970s, possibly through the expulsion of Yemenis at that time or because of rising transportation costs. There is currently no private sector salting or drying of fish in Suakin nor, so far as I am aware, anywhere else along the coast. The only processing that occurs today is frying and a very small amount of shark-fin drying (the latter does not occur in Suakin). Fish is marketed entirely as fresh.

The system of distributing fish caught by Suakin's fishermen is summarised in Figure 7. All non-boat using fishermen and one or two hūri luh wāhid fishermen sell directly to kitchens or individuals. Occasionally a lansh may take its catch to Port Sudan and sell to the merchants there, but this is rare. The usual practice, since the withdrawal of the RSFDP lorry which transported fish to Port Sudan, is to sell to one of the five merchants that have a shop in Suakin and/or collect from the marsas. Each of these five has a different source of supply and a different method of operation: they will be described in turn.

Ali (Suakin Merchant A on Table 10) is a Beja from the Ashraf, living in Mesheil. He has never been a fisherman and has no close relatives who are. His father was involved in lorry transport, but not as an owner, and Ali initially followed him, beginning his fish dealing career about 1973. He has a fish shop near the causeway to which the majority of his suppliers bring their catches. He also sends a donkey and cart daily to Antabeb (see Map 3, page 27), which is well off the Tokar road and therefore cannot be reached by motorised vehicles, to pick up landings there and to deliver food and water. The bulk of his supply is sold to individuals and kitchens in the town. If he has a surplus this is kept on ice until one of his sons is contacted who will bring his pick-up van (boks) from Port Sudan. Ali

FIGURE 7

THE DISTRIBUTION OF FISH CAUGHT
BY SUAKIN'S FISHERMEN



==== major flow
—— minor flow
..... flow of cooked fish

pays the cost of the petrol for this transport to the fish market in Port Sudan. He does not run the fish shop alone: he employs an ex-fisherman assistant who receives, Ali says, half the profits. He also employs a boy (at fs 30.00 a month) to make the daily trip to Antabeb. The fish shop is not Ali's only source of income: he owns at least one general store and several properties in Kas al-Duwri and at least two hūris.

Mohammed (Suakin Merchant B in Table 10) is a Takari, living in Deim Fallata. His shop is situated near the central market area and is supplied only by fishermen who bring their catches to him. He retails only fried fish, using about four rotls of oil and fs 2.00-worth of firewood daily. Unlike Ali, he does not own his shop but pays a token rent of fs 18.00 a year to the owner in Sinkat. His buyers are all individuals. Having been in business for twenty-three years, he can generally judge the amount of fish that he can sell. Surpluses, when they arise, are transported to Port Sudan by a boks or a lorry running to Port Sudan from the marketplace. This must be done on the day of purchase, as he has no ice-box. He owns two small fishing boats and is assisted in the shop by one of his sons. Adjoining his is the shop of another frier, Adam, an Amarar. Adam does not buy directly from the fishermen but from Ali, or the third Suakin-based fish merchant Hadab. He retails some of the fish from the shop, then, once he has fried his entire supply, takes it to a stall in the market from where he sells it.

Hadab, also an Amarar, is a newcomer to the fish-selling business, and it is very much a secondary source of income to him. He is one of the town's "big merchants" and has little to do with the day-to-day running of the shop. It is situated on the shore, quite

close to Ali's and is run by two close relatives of Hadab's, who take half the profits (which they split equally between them). The business began in February 1980 and in its first month handled fifty-three per cent of the town's total landings. The shop is equipped with an ice-box and any surpluses are taken to Port Sudan by Hadab himself in his boks. Amongst his many business interests is the ownership of a fishing dhow.

Shayba is a Hadendowa merchant from Port Sudan. He owns several fishing boats (he is the only merchant dealing with Suakin fishermen who has been a fisherman himself) and a lorry which makes daily collections from Haidob and the marsas to the north of Suakin. Occasionally this lorry makes pre-arranged collections from Suakin itself. All the fish collected is sold in Port Sudan, principally through Shayba's market stall. He began his collections in this area late in 1979, after the RSFDP withdrew its lorry. He is currently developing an interest in shrimps, brought on by another Port Sudan merchant, Abdel Ghani.

Abdel Ghani is of Egyptian extraction and is the manager of an elite club in Port Sudan, a ships' chandler and a supplier of fish to Port Sudan's better hotels. He has found it difficult to find reliable staff to make the daily collections from al-Shūk and at present makes this trip himself. In addition to his fish collections he also buys shrimps from cast-net fishermen in the marsas. Most of these are air-freighted to Khartoum. His transport for fish collection is a boks although both he and Shayba are planning to import refrigerated lorries to widen both their collecting and distribution areas.

No standard price is paid out by all merchants. Occasionally a

price is agreed before the fish is caught, but the general rule is that a price is offered upon delivery to the shop or merchant's transport (although often not actually paid at that moment). The guides the merchants use are quality (that is not too disfigured by the catching process) and size (too many small fish will result in a lower price overall). The merchant, or his representative, does not of course inspect every fish, but casts an expert eye over the catch and makes an offer accordingly. Generally, the smaller boats which do not venture far out tend to bring in smaller fish than other vessels and thus receive lower prices.

As noted earlier, there has been a considerable rise in the price of fish recently. Early in 1979 fishermen were receiving between thirty-six and fifty piastres a kilogramme. Today fifty piastres is the lowest price a fisherman is likely to receive. On average, Ali pays sixty-five. As he supplies the fishermen at Antabeb with food and water, the cost of these is deducted when the fish is paid for. Mohammed pays between fifty and seventy piastres a kilogramme. None of his suppliers use ice or are dependent upon him for the delivery of food or water and therefore no deductions are made. Hadab's shop pays a fixed price of seventy kilogrammes or sixty if ice has been supplied. Uniquely, this price is paid on the spot. Shayba's price is seventy piastres or over, with no subtractions for food, ice or water, for the fishermen in Haidob. Abdel Ghani similarly makes no deductions for the supplies he provides to the fishermen in the marsas, but his prices are the highest: usually around eighty piastres a kilogramme, although he has been known to pay fs 1.00.

Abdel Ghani can afford to pay relatively high prices because he is not dependent upon the Port Sudan market. His customers are not

individuals or small kitchens but organisations willing to pay higher than market-place prices. For example he sells to ships at fs 2.50 a kilogramme. Shayba sells in the Port Sudan market at fs 1.20, whereas the Suakin price is fs 1.00. Both Ali and Hadab sell at this price to individuals, kitchens and fish merchants in Port Sudan. Mohammed's retail prices are slightly higher, as he sells the product fried. Each fish is individually priced, but costs approximately fs 1.10 to fs 1.30 a kilogramme.

Obviously the location of the fisherman determines to some extent the merchant to whom he will sell. For example only Abdel Ghani collects from al-Shūk. Given the ethnic division of the marsa camps discussed in Chapter Five, Abdel Ghani is therefore probably the main buyer of fish caught by Rashaïda. This is not entirely coincidental: Abdel Ghani finds the Rashaïda fishermen more reliable than the Beja fishermen and has deliberately sought to secure the bulk of his supplies from them, which, given his prices, has been quite easy to accomplish. Undoubtedly his non-Beja ethnic identity is no hindrance. Yet not all Rashaïda sell to him. Although lanshs may arrange to have their landings picked up by Abdel Ghani in Suakin itself, Rashaïda using small boats and landing regularly in the town may sell to Ali or Hadab, both of whom are of course Beja. Again, although Mohammed's chief suppliers are Takari like himself, he also receives fish from fishermen belonging to other ethnic groupings. The relationship between fishermen and fish merchants appears to be more rooted in financial than in ethnic considerations. Hadab, by offering higher and on-the-spot prices managed to take suppliers from both Ali and Mohammed. Ali was at one time the sole buyer from the marsas to the south of the town (arranging collections with lorries

returning from Tokar) but was driven out by Shayba and Abdel Ghani.

Estimating a fish merchant's income is even more difficult than estimating a fisherman's. The only statistics available which reveal the amounts handled by particular merchants have been given in Table 10: the amounts handled by Ali and Mohammed. The latter differs from all other merchants in that he incurs the expenses of cooking oil and firewood, which the others do not. On the other hand, only Ali has a donkey and cart. Nevertheless, Table 10 shows that in eleven months of 1979 Ali handled 61,520 kilogrammes of fish. If, during that time, he bought ten boxes of ice from the ice plant daily to top up his ice-box, spent fs 15.00 a month on fodder for the donkey, paid fs 30.00 to the boy who takes it to Anatbeb daily, and used his son's boks three times a week to transport fish to the market in Port Sudan (using about two gallons of petrol for the round trip), his total expenses would amount to, given the fuel and ice prices cited above, about fs 3,729 for these eleven months. If every kilogramme of fish was bought for sixty-five piastres and sold for fs 1.00, this would give a net profit of fs 17,803. This seems to be an excessively high figure, yet even if the net profit on each kilogramme was just five piastres, both Ali and his assistant (if the profits are divided equally) would have earned over fs 1,500 in these eleven months.

Despite what appears to be a high income, Ali cannot realistically hope to expand his fish business greatly. Dependent largely upon selling in Suakin, he cannot compete for supplies with Shayba and Abdel Ghani, even if he were to invest in his own transport. His only hope would be to attempt to corner a greater proportion of the fish landings and retailing in Suakin itself. This must be achieved through an investment in fishing boats, which would

guarantee him supplies. However although he does own some small boats he is prevented from acquiring motorised craft through the RSFDP as he is not a fisherman himself. On the other hand he shows no inclination to do so. Rather than concentrate exclusively on the fishing industry he has diversified his interests to include property and a shop. This behaviour is typical of all Suakin merchants who have the opportunity, as will be shown in the following chapter. The current success of Hadab's enterprise may mean that Ali's fish business will decline considerably. At the moment he is dependent upon his own boats, the fishermen at Antabeb and perhaps the loyalty of certain fishermen. In other places it is frequently the case that merchants lend money to fishermen and thus ensure supplies.¹ Ali states that he does not do this, rather - as he does not always pay immediately for catches - the reverse. I have no evidence to suggest that any of the merchants lend to fishermen to ensure supplies.²

Discussing the operations of fish distributors such as Ali it is possible to employ almost entirely economic terms. The relationship between fishermen and distributors is first and foremost a financial one and ethnic identities play a very minor role. With the possible exception of Shayba (who may in fact collect from non-Beja fishermen elsewhere) no fish merchant collects exclusively from one ethnic grouping (Abdel Ghani collects shrimps from Beja). Furthermore, whereas

¹For example Newfoundland (Faris 1972).

²There appears to be no money-lending with interest in Suakin. Loans, possibly as a consequence, may be difficult to arrange. Asking some foot-fishermen why they did not borrow money from a merchant to buy new nets, I was told that even if they managed to find a merchant willing to buy them new nets, he would want to retain ownership, and thus be entitled to a share.

to become a fisherman it is almost essential to belong to an ethnic grouping with members engaged in fishing (and all exceptions to this have been discussed and accounted for), a similar rule does not apply to distributors. None of those engaged in distribution have relatives similarly engaged outside the same enterprise and as noted only Shayba has any personal experience of fishing.

Therefore a distributor can be drawn from the ranks of any ethnic grouping. All that is required are the financial resources to set up a shop with an ice-box, the means of transporting surpluses to Port Sudan (if established in Suakin) and the ability to offer a better price than competitors in the same locality. In theory, a Tigrinya could become a fish distributor. An explanation of why there are in fact no distributors of this identity can be partly revealed by an examination of the other economic activities of the town's population the subject of the next chapter, which will also discuss the role of the fishing industry in the total economic life of the town, and attempt to characterise this economy.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ECONOMIC LIFE OF SUAKIN

Fishing: A Typical Occupation?

The techniques and skills involved in fishing are, obviously, unique to this occupation. Furthermore, of all Suakin's private sector industries, fishing is the only one to have received aid from the public sector. But are there other features that we have examined, such as the methods of recruitment of labour, the share systems and the ethnic dimension also found only in this occupation? The purpose of this chapter is to describe the occupations of the non-fishing population of Suakin. This will enable us subsequently both to locate fishing within the total context of the town's economic life and to draw out the social and economic features that recur and those that are unique to fishing.

Public Sector Employment

The organisation, recruitment and remuneration of fishing and fishermen have little in common with these of the public sector. No government employees are remunerated by shares: all are paid a monthly salary for a fixed number of hours work. Increases in salary are gained by the number of years service. Accommodation is frequently provided. The Marine Fisheries Division staff, discussed in Chapter

Six, are typical of this.

The largest public sector employer, indeed the largest single employer in the town, is the Suakin Central Prison. The term "central" in this context signifies that it is for habitual offenders: those who have been in prison at least twice before. There are only three such prisons in Sudan: the other two being in Khartoum North and Port Sudan. Suakin's is the smallest, with a capacity for 505 prisoners, all male. In theory there should be one warder for every five prisoners. In April 1979 there were 105 warders, thirteen corporals, four sergeants, two captains, a deputy governor and a governor, again all male.

A warder's basic salary is fs 30.00 a month (fs 2.00 more than the government minimum wage) for an eight-hour, six day week. There are annual increments of fs 2.00 a month, with a pension after twenty-five years service or upon reaching the age of fifty-five. In theory, personnel are transferred after two years to another prison.

Most of the prisoners work outside the prison during the day, either in the salt pans, the lime kilns or drawing and distributing water (the prison has its own wells at Shata and motorised tanker). Inside, some are engaged in blacksmithing, carpentry and carpet making. The poles for the town's electricity supply were all erected by prison labour. Again, when it was believed that the President was coming to switch on the generator, prison labour was used to repaint most of the town's public buildings. It appears that the governor has a free hand in how he chooses to deploy the labour under his control: it was used to move a shipwrecked yacht from a nearby reef for its owner, and to construct a warehouse for the EPLF in al-Fula.

The convicts are not given any form of wages connected with their labour, but are given one piastre a day for good behaviour. This is intended to be put towards their fare home on release. They serve sentences of between six months and twenty years, most falling within the lower range. Commonly the crimes are theft and drunkenness and disturbance. Whilst serving their sentences they are almost completely independent of the town. All their food is brought from Port Sudan and very little of their produce is sold locally.

The warders play a slightly more active role, primarily as consumers, although some find part-time work in kitchens and shops. Single men are accommodated in barracks. Most married men live with their families in breeze-block houses immediately behind the prison, but a few rent sandagas in the villages, particularly al-Fula.

Between al-Fula and Melakia lies the town's hospital, which was opened in 1975. Primarily functioning as an outpatients, it contains twenty-four beds and is staffed by fifteen male nurses, five female nurses, two senior male nurses, a medical assistant and a doctor. In addition there are sixteen labourers and three clerks. All are permanently stationed, with the exception of the doctor who serves for a six-month period and is then transferred to Tokar, Gebeit or Port Sudan. Both the doctor and the medical assistant are provided with housing nearby.

The island's customs shed is manned by five soldiers and a Customs Officer. The latter, who also serves a six-month term before transfer, is provided with a house in Kas al-Duwri, whereas the soldiers stay at the shed. Out at the tip of Jeriyim are nine sailors who man the Naval Observation Tower. They are stationed there for only a few months. A little distance away is the University of Khartoum's

Marine Biological Station which hosts parties of students from the capital. It is maintained by a staff of four, the caretaker living there and the other three in the villages.

The postmaster has a staff of four and is accommodated in al-Gayf close to the police houses.

With the exceptions of the above and the MFD staff, all the remainder of the town's public sector employees receive their salaries through the Local Government Officer. The monthly bill comes to approximately fsl4,000, which pays the Local Government Officer himself and his staff of six, the Veterinary Assistant (who supervises inoculations and keeps records of the animal market) and his variable staff, the police (who should number twenty-four, but are always undermanned) and the teachers in the town's four schools (two boys' primary, one girls' primary and one boys' general secondary). In addition there are numerous others: a three-man mosquito control unit, the men who run the town's generator and a large number of labourers and caretakers. Taking a small slice of the salaries bill, more as a token for their services than an adequate income, are five imams, each receiving fsl7.00 a month, and four midwives, unconnected with the hospital, each receiving fsl2.00 a month.

Excepting the Local Government Officer, who is transferred every two years, those who are paid through his office are permanently stationed in Suakin. Overwhelmingly these persons are recruited in Red Sea Province and are predominantly Beja, although there are smaller numbers of Khasa, Nuba, Jenobia and Takari, and one or two from Northern Sudanese collectivities. Similarly, amongst the labourers and caretakers, both in this category and the remainder, the

Beja are the most numerous and are usually recruited from Suakin itself. However in those occupations that are subject to transfer large numbers of persons originating from outside the province are found. As we have seen in earlier chapters with reference to the prison warders and the MFD personnel, a significant proportion is from Kordofan.

Although legally there should be no discrimination against refugees in public sector employment, this is not so in practice. There are no Tigrinya, Danakil or Eritreans in any government service. There are also no Rashaida, which is more difficult to explain. Certainly, very few are literate, which disqualifies the majority from certain positions, but they are not to be found even amongst the labourers and the caretakers. Rashaida informants state that members of their collectivity do not engage in any form of wage labour, whether public or private sector, in Sudan (although as noted they may migrate to Saudi Arabia to do just this).

Private Sector Employment

"Modern Industries" Wage or salaried labour in Suakin is not restricted entirely to the public sector. A large wage-paying organisation existed until recently, its main camp being about five kilometres out of the town. This was the West German road construction company Strabag Gmb., which built the Port Sudan-Haiya highway and the by-road leading to Suakin over a four year period. During the peak of construction it employed between 600 and 700 men, recruited from all over Sudan and from the country's refugee population. All the town's ethnic groupings were represented, with the notable exception of the

Rashaida. The majority of the workforce were without their families and accommodated in a boarding house at the camp, although those from Suakin remained in the town itself. During my fieldwork period a workforce of 150 gradually dwindled down to fifty, and these were laid off in April 1980. Very few of those not originally from the town have remained in the area. All the work was salaried, supplemented by bonuses, and these salaries were comparatively high: a labourer earned between £s 45.00 and £s 50.00 a month.

Although there are a few mechanics working on their own, the majority work on the dhows. However several work in the town's two workshops, maintaining vehicles and marine engines. These men are salaried. One of the workshops is owned by a Beja merchant who employs principally Beja mechanics but also two Tigrinya and an Eritrean. The other has been opened since the coming of electricity to the town and is owned by a Port Sudan merchant, who has brought Port Sudan Beja workmen to man his enterprise.

The old cotton ginnery no longer has anything to do with cotton, but its presses are utilised in processing senna, brought by lorry from Kassala. After pressing, this is exported through Port Sudan to West Germany. The ginnery is owned by a Port Sudan firm and employs only five salaried men, four of them Khasa, and one Beja caretaker.

Perhaps also under the heading of "modern industries" we should also note that there are two bicycle repair shops, both Tigrinya owned and run.

The Dhows

The occupations that are mostly likely to be similar to fishing are of course those also connected with the sea, the dhow work. Although the prison is the largest single

employer, dhow work is the largest single industry, in terms of the number of workers, connected with the town. Not all dhows are Sudanese registered - some are Saudi Arabian - but the majority are crewed by persons resident in Suakin. I was unable to find any records of the total number of dhows operating in this area, but, excluding the Egyptian dhows that come to fish for mullet (and Suakin's fishing dhows), I would estimate the number to be somewhere between eighty and one hundred.

The dhows under consideration are involved in two activities: the collection of trochus shells (Arabic: kokian) and the import/export trade with Jidda. Concerning the former, Reed (1962b:1-6) wrote of the industry:

For the past sixty years mother of pearl and trochus shells have formed the basis of a small but significant industry in Sudan. Not only is the export value of the shell considerable, but these shell fisheries also employ a significant number of people along the dry desert Sudanese coast... (...) The only commercial shell fished from Sudan's waters are Trochus dentatus Forskal and the black lipped pearl shell Pinctada margaritifera (L) variety erythraensis Jameson (Arabic: sadaf)

Reed was in fact involved with the establishment of a farm for mother-of-pearl cultivation in Dongonab Bay. This closed in the early 1970s. Naturally occurring sadaf has been overfished and currently only trochus shells are sought on a commercial scale.

More than 90% of the shell landed in Sudan is fished by foreign fishermen, mainly Saudi Arabians and Somalis. In their sailing sambuks (sic) these people roam the whole of the Red Sea fishing from Yemen in the south to the Gulfs of Suez and Aqaba in the north, selling their produce either at Port Sudan, Jedda or Massawa, wherever prices and marketing conditions are best. As these shells are not perishable, time is unimportant. On the chance of an extra £ 5 a ton, these nomadic fishermen will sail for many days to the next port. A few Sudanese go to sea in these vessels but generally Sudanese shell divers work

only in the Dongonab Bay area, an area closed to foreign fishermen.

(Reed 1962b:6)

Massawa is no longer a port accepting shell landings and neither, so far as I can gather, is Jidda. Further changes have been the mechanisation of the entire dhow fleet and the apparent increase in Sudanese involvement, although it has been suggested in Chapter Five that Reed may have 'mistaken' Rashaida for Saudi Arabians. However, Dongonab Bay remains the best place for shell collection for boats on this side of the sea, with another productive area on the other, just to the south of Jidda.

There you find vast solitudes where cargo boats never venture. The coast of Arabia... is deserted and only frequented by smugglers or pirates who follow the inner channel between the reefs and the coast to avoid the everlasting north wind which comes down from Egypt and dies away in the middle of the Red Sea. The ship which is fishing for trochus is anchored among the big reefs which spread over the surface of the water like great tables, separated by winding straits. In the summer months the sea level is about two feet lower than in winter; therefore the summer, when the men can get a footing on the reefs, is the trochus fishing season. Even under the best conditions they are generally up to their armpits. They advance slowly, pushing before them a box with one side made of glass which they place against the surface of the water in order to get a better view of the bottom. Whenever they see a trochus they have to plunge their entire bodies under water in order to seize it.

(Monfried 1935:16)

This description accords well with informants' accounts of the activity. Imported cheap diving masks have now replaced the box Monfried notes. Yet the collectors claim that trochus often has to be actually dived for, an assertion that Reed (1962b:11) appears to support: he states that most trochus is found within three to five fathoms of the surface, which he describes as well within the reach of skin divers.

A dhow involved in shell collection carries a crew of around fifteen men, all of whom are expected to dive. Trips vary in length from two weeks to three months, and catches are highly variable, from half to several tons. The shells are unloaded in Suakin and sacked up by Takari, brought from Port Sudan by the two Port Sudan-based Greek merchants who bid for the produce at the weekly auction, in season. In the past, as Reed indicates, the price was highly variable. Now, with a slackening off of demand (because of man-made substitutes), it is less so. Quality is the determining factor, and the price fluctuates around fs 500 a ton.

In Sudan the animal matter is not removed from the trochus when they are fished but is simply left to rot out. The shells consequently have a rather offensive smell. Because of this they are acceptable in only a few countries.

(Reed 1962b:7)

At one time, between Reed's report and the present day, there was a small factory in Port Sudan engaged in making buttons from these conical shells. This is now closed and all Sudan's trochus shells are exported to Italy.

The other aspect of the dhow industry concerns the exportation of mainly foodstuffs to Jidda and the importation of a wide range of consumer goods, from cigarettes and cassette recorders, ready-made women's and children's clothes to refrigerators and television sets. Customs records show exports of thirty-six sacks of dried melon seeds in one dhow, two hundred in another, forty sacks of groundnuts in one dhow, 220 in another. Others have carried goat-hair and rush mats; still others have, so far as the customs records reveal, travelled empty. However, the customs officials are well aware that by no means all of the goods exported are checked by them. The most commonly smuggled commodity is livestock, mainly sheep. There are strict quotas and no

animals are officially allowed to be exported by dhows. Yet it is estimated (Taban 1980:25) that 15,000 head are smuggled to Saudi Arabia monthly. This has led to a meat shortage so severe that the slaughtering of animals is now prohibited in Sudan on two days of any one week. It has also led to an increased demand for, and a substantial rise in the price of, a substitute - fish.

The alleged procedure is quite simple: dhows leave Suakin, or the unofficial but tolerated anchorages of Towartit and Anharis,¹ with an officially registered cargo or a permit to collect trochus shells and then sail down to one of the numerous isolated marsas along the coast where contacts will be waiting with the livestock or other produce. The actual transfer is accomplished with the dhow's tender. There is also a certain amount of drug smuggling and illegal emigration, particularly of Rashaida and Tigrinya.

The importation of goods is also often illegal and is quite noticeable in some aspects. For example, in Sudan the only type of Benson & Hedges cigarettes officially imported are in packs of ten bearing the legend "Specially Manufactured for the Sudan". These are extremely rare in Port Sudan and Suakin. Most of the cigarettes sold are, or are from, packets of twenty, all of which are brought from Jidda. Although each dhow worker is allowed a duty-free allowance of 200 cigarettes, the enormous quantities available on the market cannot be attributed to this alone.

The reason behind smuggling is of course that certain goods, such as sheep, command prices considerably higher in Jidda than in Sudan.

¹There are customs posts at these places.

The smuggling of goods into Sudan is, as everywhere, an avoidance of paying duty, which in the case of some items may be as high as sixty per cent of the purchase price.

Yet smuggling is not an activity restricted to this part of Sudan. In the west, a considerable amount of livestock is being illegally exported to Libya. Furthermore, it is not only livestock:

The seriousness of the smuggling phenomenon in the Sudan may be illustrated by a simple example. According to the figures released by the Oil Seeds Corporation, 25% of the 1973/74 production of groundnuts and sesame was neither domestically used nor exported. It is estimated that this is about 154,405 tons. All indications are that a substantial proportion of this unaccounted-for production has been smuggled. Now using an average of £s 192/ton for groundnuts and sesame, simple calculations show that the Sudan lost £s 29.7 millions in export earnings. This should be compared to the balance of payments position in the same year. A similar story can be told regarding gum Arabic.

(Ali 1976:1)

On the other hand, throughout the dhow world, these craft are involved with smuggling. Villiers (1970:160), from personal experience regarded dhow workers as inveterate smugglers who declare almost nothing apart from their main cargo. Martin and Martin (1972) chronicle the variety of activities dhows have been and still are involved in - slavery, importing gold and watches to India from Dubai, exporting mangrove poles from East Africa - all illegal. After reading their book one is left with a very strong impression that the dhow owns its survival in the face of competition from Western-style craft to its relationship with smuggling.

Sudanese dhows are not individually exclusively traders or trochus shell collectors. They may alternate between the two, according to season, or because of the ample supplies of trochus near Jidda.

combine the two activities in a single voyage. However, if a dhow sets off just to trade with Jidda (which is twenty-four hours away from Suakin) its crew will normally only number six.

The system of revenue distribution amongst the crew and owner for trochus collecting dhows has already been described in Chapter Six. Acquiring information on any aspect of the operations of the trading dhows is, as one would expect, extremely difficult, and I do not know whether the same system is applied when this activity is pursued. It is probable that it is: if not then it is reasonable to assume that a Method 2 system is employed.

As noted in earlier chapters, the Rashaïda are the most numerous amongst the dhow workers, with Beja and smaller numbers of Danakil and Tigrinya also involved. The latter are usually seamen who have previously worked on ships and appear only to work when the dhows are purely on trading missions: I came across no Tigrinya who said they dived for trochus. Crews are normally composed of members of one ethnic grouping, although I have observed mixtures of Rashaïda and Danakil on some occasions. Several Rashaïda resident in the town own dhows, as do a few Beja. The majority of dhows however appear to be owned, or partly owned, by merchants based in Port Sudan, a substantial proportion of whom seem to be descendants of the foreign merchant class once resident in Suakin.

The Boatyard

Although there is some boatbuilding at Khor Kilab, Port Sudan, the majority of dhows and fishing vessels are built and repaired in Suakin's boatyard at Shellak (see Map 6). We have discussed its products briefly in Chapter One, and further details are given in Appendix I. There are five boatbuilders, all Beja, each

employing between five and fifteen carpenters. Carpenters are remunerated by wages, a skilled man receiving about fs 20.00 a week, an apprentice fs 7.00. In addition to these men there is also a large pool of labour which is used to haul boats in and out of the water. These labourers are not paid a wage as such, nor are they tied to a particular boat-builder, but are paid fs 5.00 each for every job. They are largely a mixture of Beja and Khasa, although most groupings - including Rashaida - seem to be represented. Danakil, Beja and Khasa make up the bulk of the carpenters.

It is impossible to estimate the number of boats that are produced in, for example, a year. Given the system of purchasing described in Chapter Six, it may take a year for a lansh to be built, or it may take three weeks. The yard is littered with half-built vessels, waiting for their purchasers to hand over more money to the builders. Furthermore, a substantial amount of work done by the carpenters is not on new boats but on repairing old ones.

Sandaga Building Sandaga builders are rarely also boat carpenters but tend to be drawn from the same ethnic groupings as the latter. They are not wage earners but self-employed teams of, on average, three men. Sandagas can be built in six days. In one example I followed, the cost of labour was fs 235 which was equally divided between the three men concerned. However, not all sandagas are built by carpenters: some residents construct their own. On the other hand merchants may have several teams of carpenters at work when developing an area.

Water Supplies

The prisoners deliver water to the

the houses of warders and various other government employees. The majority of the town's population is dependent upon private sector distribution. The source is the thirty wells at Shata, not all of which are operating at the same time.

Water is delivered to homes in Suakin by tankers, which are known by that name and are composed of two 44-gallon drums welded together with an opening on the side, laid lengthways on a two-wheeled purpose-built cart and pulled by a donkey. The tanker is filled at the Shata wells for thirty piastres and sold at ten piastres for five gallons. In the course of the day a tanker will make two or three trips from Shata. If the water distributor owns his own tanker, he may therefore make from fs 3.50 to fs 5.00 a day. If he does not own it (which is more usual), he may make between fs 1.70 and fs 2.50, as the revenue is divided equally between owner and distributor. This however will be net profit to the distributor, as the maintenance of the cart and the feeding of the donkey are the responsibilities of the owner.

Even in the case where the distributor is not the owner, his income is still considerably higher than that of the water drawers. The wells functioning are worked by two men using a rudimentary windlass and a leather bucket. The thirty piastres that is charged for filling the tanker is divided into three equal shares: one for each of the men and one for the owner of the wells (the owner employs a foreman to maintain the wells and keep the drawers supplied with buckets and ropes). On average two drawers will fill seven tankers a day, thus giving them a daily income of just seventy piastres.

The majority of distributors are Beja. There are also some Khasa, Takari and Nuba. Owners of tankers are usually of the same ethnic

grouping as their employees. The water drawers on the other hand are all Beja, and in fact all Arteiga, as is the owner of the wells.

Cultivation

Near the Shata wells are two cultivation sites, each of about ten acres, known as the Shata gardens. These are again Arteiga-owned. Vegetables, particularly tomatoes and okra, are grown, hand-watered from wells within the gardens. The areas are divided into a number of plots and the owners (or rather their representatives) supply the seeds to the horticulturalists of each plot and receive one-third of the value of the resulting produce. All the vegetables (except those taken for home consumption by the growers) are marketed in Suakin, but the quantities are insufficient to fulfil the demand. Most of the vegetables on sale in the town's market are in fact brought from other areas of Sudan (such as Kassala and Tokar), usually routed through Port Sudan.

The Shata gardens do not employ a great number of townsmen and indeed several of the men working there are Beja hillmen who have come to the town on a temporary basis and sleep beneath the trees. Residents of the town involved are largely Beja with some Khasa and Takari.

The gardens are the only cultivated land in the town and I would estimate that no more than fifty persons are employed here. Historically more land may have been under cultivation: as noted in Chapter Two, Mesheil was built on the site of a market garden. Yet the 1955/56 census records 303 farmers resident in the town. I have however suggested that a great many of these would have had their farms in the Tokar area. No rain-fed agriculture is practiced in Suakin (all grains are brought in), nor is there any historical record

of this taking place. Therefore it seems that hand-watered horticulture is the only method of cultivation that has been practised, and this must be limited to those areas close to a water supply. This effectively limits cultivation to the vicinity of Shata.

Animal Herding

Some rearing of animals takes place in Suakin, largely of goats kept by families as a source of milk. Some camels and cattle are also raised. The main source of meat however is from the Beja hillmen who bring animals to the market. They are also the main suppliers of milk and firewood. The former is sold in the market, the latter hawked around the villages. Some of these Beja actually camp within the town with their herds. For example, the area between Melakia and al-Fula has several hafirs and is often camped on by Shaiab (as noted in Chapter Two, a branch of the Arteiga).

Transport

There are two types of transport - motorised and unmotorised. The former category consists of the pick-up vans (bakassi, singular boks) that ferry people to and from Port Sudan and the lorries which transport both people and goods to all urban centres (but not around Suakin itself). In the case of the boks the driver is usually an employee and receives one-third of the boks' earnings. Petrol and maintenance are paid for by the owner. Twelve persons are carried on one journey, ten in the back at fifty piastres each and two in the front with the driver at sixty piastres each. Unlike the internal transport systems of, for example, Khartoum and Port Sudan, the bakassi running between Port Sudan and Suakin do not carry a boy to collect fares, as there is only one scheduled stop - either Suakin market or Deim Suakin, Port Sudan. The fare is fixed at fifty piastres whether one goes all the way or only

as far as Tobayn or Towartit. Instead fare collection is undertaken by men at the departure points who charge fifty piastres a boks for this service. Each boks makes about three round trips a day, giving the employed driver a daily income of around £s 11.40 - one of the highest for a non-capital equipment owner. Many of these drivers are Beja, although there are a considerable number of Tigrinya. The majority of boks drivers and owners are however not based in Suakin but in Port Sudan.

Lorry drivers are again not usually owners, but in contrast to the boks drivers are usually wage employees. This is understandable as the lorries do not have fixed routes but take merchandise where and when it is required. Some carry only a particular merchant's goods; others are contracted. The carriage of passengers is secondary.

Generally the driver is a member of the same ethnic category as the owner. I have however come across a perhaps surprising exception to this. An al-Fula Rashaida employs two Beja drivers, one for one of his lorries and one for his Land Rover. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that very few Rashaida living in Suakin can drive. Those that can have usually learned because they have been in the financial position to be able to afford a boks or Land Rover of their own and derive an income from it. Furthermore the Beja in question are not from Suakin, but have their families in Port Sudan. Yet when in Suakin they reside with the owner. Both are paid wages.

No organised system of motorised transport exists for moving people and goods around Suakin. For this the town is reliant on donkey-drawn carts. Unlike Port Sudan and most other Northern Sudanese towns, these are not large four-wheelers (although there is one of these) but are small two-wheelers. Most are worked by young boys whose fathers

own both the donkey and the cart. Those involved are from a variety of groupings.

Retailers and Services

According to the Local Government Officer's register of licences, there are seventy-seven shops in Suakin (in reality there are considerably more). For the most part these are general stores, strikingly similar to those described by Jackson (1926:52-53) in the early years of this century, selling such items as tinned foods, cooking oil, tea, coffee, sugar, milk powder, herbs and spices, some vegetables (chiefly onions), a few cooking utensils and, invariably, cloth. Few shops are specialised: there is for example one that keeps a large range of hardware (paint, nails, screws, locks etc.) but also the same range of goods as are found in every other general store. Similarly, another has a very large selection of household utensils (buckets, pans, lamps, stoves etc.) alongside his tins and cloth. Those that are truly specialised tend to have craftsmen on the premises: for example the leather goods and knives shop, the bicycle repair shops mentioned earlier, and two shops in the market that sell only cloth and ready-made siderias. However these latter two shops are not the only ones in the town to employ tailors. Several general stores, particularly in the central market area (see Map 7), have sewing machines under their verandahs. There are also premises, both in this area and the villages, which are confined to tailoring (and in the central area, particularly to women's tailoring).

There are basically two systems of financial relationship between the tailor and the shopkeeper under whose verandah he works. The former may own his sewing machine and pay the shopkeeper a rent

for the site, which may be in the form of one-third of his income. Otherwise, as seems to be more common, the shopkeeper owns the machine and takes half of the tailor's revenue.

Tailors are drawn from virtually every grouping. Tailors of women's clothes tend to be Tigrinya men, or Rashaïda catering to the specialised needs of their collectivity. In the central market area there is no necessary correspondence between the ethnic identity of the shopkeeper and that of the tailor on his verandah, but in the villages they are normally of the same identity.

Shops are run by members of all the major ethnic groupings. Although the greatest concentration is to be found in the central market area, general stores and smaller shops (known as kantīn) are to be found in all the villages. The same is true of kitchens and teashops. The former sell a range of dishes from fifteen to thirty piastres in price (such as boiled groundnuts, liver, boiled meat and lentils), the latter serve tea (normally black except in the early morning and late afternoon when it is served with milk) and coffee. Shortly after the advent of electricity, one teashop started selling liquidised fruit drinks (common in Port Sudan) and was shortly followed by a stall selling only such drinks.

All the town's bakeries, numbering seven, are housed in old coral buildings near the market. Each produce roughly 2,000 rounds of bread daily. This activity is dominated by the Khasa.

In the market itself, there are about a dozen fresh fruit and vegetable stalls, all Beja run, selling produce from the cultivation sites at Shata but considerably more brought from Port Sudan. There are also five butchers' stalls selling the meat of animals officially

slaughtered. The butchers, all Beja, purchase the animals on the days when slaughtering is permitted from the animal market (see Map 7), as do those purchasing for home consumption.

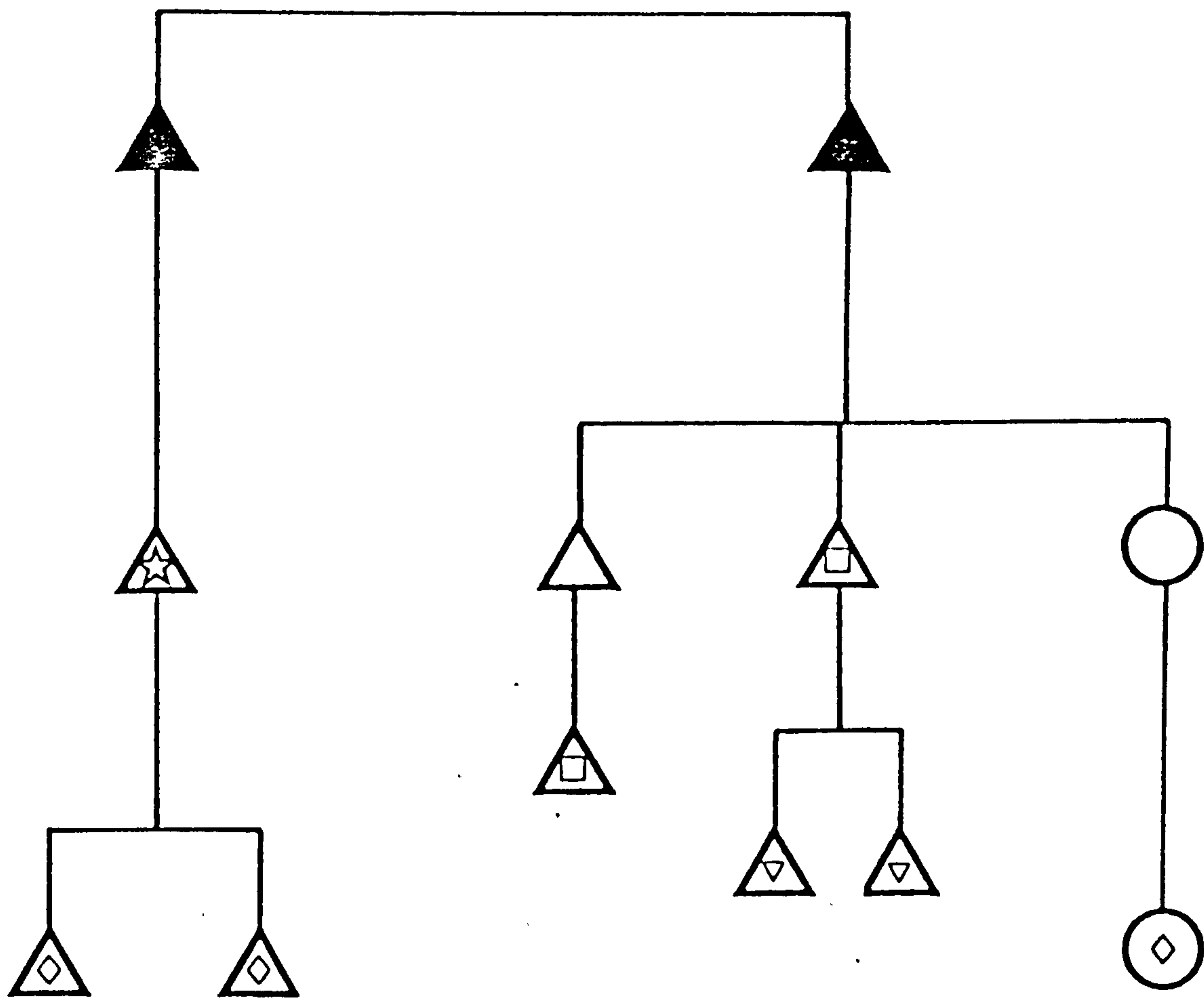
There are three laundries in the town: two are Nuba run and one, of recent origin, Tigrinya.

The mode of remuneration in these small businesses is not standard. In the case of shops, not all keepers are owners, not even in the kantīns. In those cases where the keeper is the owner, he rarely runs the business single-handedly. Often he is assisted by a son or another close relative who lives within his compound and receives no salary, but is given his board and lodging and occasional sums of money when required. Otherwise a man or boy is engaged for a monthly salary. For a man this is usually about fs 30.00 a month, the 'standard' private sector income in Suakin. The bakeries work in a similar way, regardless of whether the owner is a baker or not. However where the owner of a shop is not a keeper, there is some caution about having salaried employees and usually, as with a Rashaida shop in al-Fula, the running and supplying of the shop is left entirely to the keeper, in return for half of the resulting profits. In such cases it is left to the keeper to decide whether or not to engage assistants (in this particular instance of the Rashaida shop, it is one of the few run single-handedly).

Teashops and kitchens are not generally owner-run and again a system of profit sharing is often employed. One kitchen, which also serves tea, in al-Fula and all its equipment is owned by a Khasa, who runs a shop of his own in the same village. The kitchen is run by a cousin and his nephew (see Figure 13). Each take a third of the profit.

FIGURE 8

KINSHIP RELATIONS BETWEEN OWNER
AND WORKERS IN A KHASA KITCHEN, AL-FULA



- ☆ Owner
- Full-time workers
- ▽ Occasional workers
- ◇ Children selling foodstuffs in kitchen in evening

NOTE: Figure arranged to give an indication of relative ages.

This however is not the full extent of the family's involvement with the business. Two of the cousin's sons occasionally help out, without salary, and in the evenings, when most of the food has gone, two small sons of the owner and a small daughter of the sister of the cousin (who, with her mother lives with the cousin) come to the kitchen to sell cigarettes and sweets (from the owner's shop), biscuits (from one of the bakeries, made by another relative) and boiled eggs (which their mothers have prepared).

The vast majority of small businesses are family concerns, run in a similar fashion to this kitchen. The above-mentioned Rashaida shop is an exception in that the owner and keeper are only very distantly related. Some do employ outsiders: one Jenobia, as mentioned in Chapter Four, is employed by a Nuba in his laundry. Here, however, he is paid a salary and is not included in the share of the profits between the owner and his brother.

Merchants

Ownership of such items as tankers, shops, kitchens, teashops and so on, which can be described as capital equipment in that the utilisation of them produces wealth, is generally on an individual basis. This of course gives rise to varying degrees of wealth amongst the population as a whole. The very wealthy of the town, few in number, are known as tijār kubār - "big merchants". They have certain features in common that distinguish them from the ordinary tājir, who may be no more than a shopowner, with two exceptions. These exceptions are the 'traditional' big merchants of Suakin, whose wealth is based on the ownership of land. They are both Arteiga. The other big merchants may own property but this does appear to be the basis of their wealth. The common

characteristics are considerable livestock assets tended by kinsmen in the hinterland and ownership or part-ownership of dhows. Of course, only members of two ethnic groupings in the town are in the position to fulfil both of these conditions: Beja and Rashaïda. The actual process of accumulation has been impossible to trace accurately. However, let us take two examples, one from each grouping. According to the Rashaïda merchant himself, on arrival in Suakin as a settler he had a part-share in a dhow and a certain amount of livestock in the region of Karora.¹ Today his assets known to me consist of two dhows and a third-share in another, a fishing dhow, a shop, a tailors' shop with three sewing machines, a lorry, a Land Rover, a tanker and a number of sandagas. He has also continued to own livestock (like all Rashaïda, perhaps like all animal owners, he is not prepared to disclose actual numbers). Living in al-Fula, where both his shop and tailors' shop are located, he at one time had a general store in Melakia, close to the central market area. This he sold after repeated burglaries. He also had a boks, which was replaced by the Land Rover, which is more practical for visits to the hinterland.

The Beja is an Amarar whose family have been long resident in the town, yet have retained herds in the hills. This man is the owner of at least two dhows, two shops, two fishing boats, a mechanics' workshop, several lorries and a boks.

These two individuals illustrate what appears to be a common pattern of economic behaviour amongst Suakin's merchants. There is no

¹ I have the impression that "Karora" is often used by the Rashaïda as a euphemism for Eritrea.

specialisation, no concentration of investment in a single industry, but a diversity of interests. It will be recalled from Chapter Six that Ali the fish merchant displayed the same tendency. Yet Ali would not regard himself, nor would he be regarded by others as a big merchant. He has neither livestock nor dhows. Entire ethnic groupings are excluded from having big merchants amongst their numbers for the same reasons - Tigrinya, Jenobia, Nuba, Takari, Danakil, Khasa and Eritrean and Northern Sudanese groupings, although smaller merchants and shopkeepers are found in most of these groupings, as well as amongst the Beja and Rashaïda.

The four fishing dhows in use out of Suakin are all owned by different merchants, all big merchants. All are relatively recent investments, and it is my impression that they are the result of the rise in the price of fish.

Employment of Women and Children The majority of the town's women are engaged in unremunerated home labour. A few, as we have seen, are employed in the public sector, as nurses, midwives and teachers. The Local Government Office has a female secretary. These women are largely educated Beja. A few Beja women earn a little money by making mats from dried grasses, which are sold to local shopkeepers. Some Takari women make and sell kisra (a type of fermented bread) on the streets of the central market area; others sell dried and baked melon seeds and sweets. A small number of Takari girls and Tigrinya and Eritrean women are employed as cleaners and cooks in richer households. Only two women work in public kitchens: both are Tigrinya and both work in al-Fula.

However the largest single remunerated female industry in the town is prostitution. The Police Commissioner in Port Sudan admits

to there being more than sixty prostitutes in Suakin. There have always been some in the town, but their number increased greatly with the establishment of the Strabag road camp. Although this no longer functions, the women have remained. In addition to prostitution, they also sell beer and whisky, on which, as there are no bars as such in Suakin, they have a monopoly.¹ There are however indiyahs - drinking houses where local spirits and home-made beers are made and consumed. There are four of these, which, like the prostitutes, are to be found in Kas al-Duwri. The indiyahs are run by ex-prostitutes, but whereas most of these are Beja women, the current population of active prostitutes is almost entirely Tigrinya. It seems that few if any of these were prostitutes before coming to Sudan, although many have worked their trade in various parts of Eastern Sudan or Khartoum before coming to Suakin. Most appear to be either divorcees or widows.

Apart from cleaning and selling foodstuffs in the market, there are no other employment opportunities for girls. There are a great many more for boys. They are found in shops, kitchens and teashops; they deliver bread and work with carts. Most work with or for their fathers and are unpaid. They are not involved in share-systems, except for those over thirteen or so who are fishing without their fathers. A popular and lucrative activity for those with no regular employment or schooling is beachcombing, particularly for driftwood and bottles.

¹ Red Sea Province during my fieldwork period was not "dry". However, in 1983 a total prohibition on alcohol throughout the country was prescribed.

Unemployment

Although the range of economic activities in Suakin is quite wide, relatively few persons are required to fulfil them. It is difficult to assess accurately the numbers of persons without a full-time occupation. It may be as high as one-third of all adult males. However, even an accurate figure at any point may be deceptive: some find casual work for short periods in Suakin, in Port Sudan or in Tokar. Undoubtedly many families are dependent upon remittances sent by working relatives, particularly in Port Sudan, as Roden (1970:21) noted. Recently remittances have also come from wage-earners in Saudi Arabia. It must be emphasised that this situation has not necessarily arisen simply because of the shortage of employment opportunities in Suakin forcing breadwinners to seek work elsewhere. A breadwinner may deliberately choose to settle his family in Suakin, where accommodation is relatively cheap, whilst he remains, perhaps in dormitory lodgings, for six days of the week.

Perhaps ironically in a town where so many remittances are sent in, they are also now being sent out. Refugees, largely Tigrinya and Eritreans, who have succeeded in finding employment in the town are sending money to their relatives still in Eritrea and Tigray and to those in refugee camps near the Sudan/Eritrea border.

Ethnicity, Employment and Economy

The above sections have briefly outlined the range of the major employment opportunities available in Suakin. Table 13 summarises the information relating to the ethnic identities of the participants in those male occupations in which more than thirty persons are engaged. It is convenient here to take the public sector as a single unit. No

TABLE 13

MAJOR ETHNIC GROUPINGS AND
MAJOR ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

	Beja	Danakil	Eritrean groupings	Jenobia	Khasa	Nuba	Rashaida	Takari	Tigrinya
Public sector									
Bakers									
Boatyard carpenters									
Boatyard labourers									
Cultivators									
Dhow workers									
Fishermen									
Kitchen workers									
Merchants									
Sandaga builders									
Shop workers									
Tailors									
Teashop workers									
Transport									
Water distributors									
Water drawers									

■ = uninvolved in occupation.

NOTE: Northern Sudanese groupings are omitted from this table. Members of these are largely concentrated in the public sector. Within the private sector, their numbers are so small (e.g. one fisherman) that it would be misleading to include them.

ethnic division of labour can be said to exist in Suakin. The Beja participate in all the major activities and, whilst they monopolise only water-drawing, they are predominant in a large number of other occupations. Their numerical superiority and their long-establishment in the town account for this. Similarly, both the Takari and Khasa are also to be found in a wide range of occupations. Yet generally it is only in those occupations remunerated by wage that persons from different ethnic groupings are found engaged in tasks as teams, such as boatyard carpentry and public sector work. An exception is boatyard labouring, which must, because of the nature of its remuneration, be classified as self-employment.

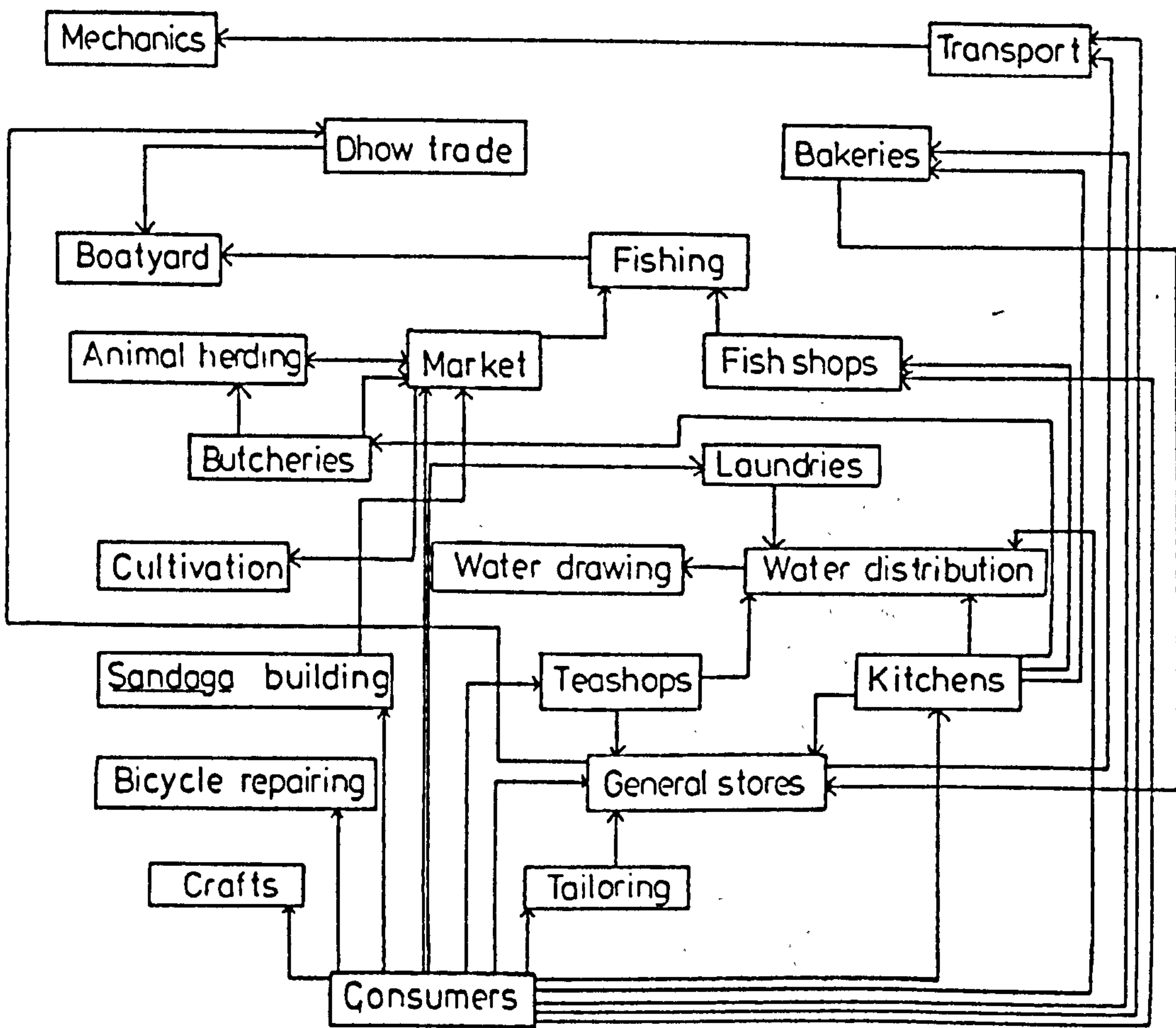
All ethnic groupings have members participating in share-systems. This mode of remuneration is commonly found in small enterprises, such as shops, bakassi and fishing. In such cases it is rare to find members of differing groupings co-operating in the same enterprise. As with the fishing boats we have examined and the Khasa teashop, it is often the case that those working together are closely related. However the operation of share-systems on land differs in some respects to that found amongst the fishermen and dhow workers. Inputs, whether feed for a donkey, petrol and upkeep of a boks, maintenance of premises, are deducted from the share of the owner, not shared between the owner and workers. Nevertheless, the same general principles are followed. The remuneration of cultivators is clearly an example of a Method 2 system; the Khasa teashop an example of a Method 1 system. On the other hand, with the bakassi, tankers and wells, although the principles are followed it is impossible to distinguish theoretically which method is in operation.

Although there are three modes of remuneration in operation - self-

employment, wage labour and share systems - they do not form independent economies. Similarly, although there is only a limited amount of cooperation between different ethnic groupings in economic activities, no ethnic grouping has an economy independent of the rest of the town's inhabitants. Rashaïda boat owners make demands for the products of Beja boatbuilders; Khasa shopkeepers (for example) make demands for the goods brought by Danakil dhow workers. With the exception of senna pressing, all private sector activities in the town are linked, directly or indirectly, with the raison d'être of any economic system, the consumers. It is as consumers that the employees of the public sector make their chief contribution to the town's economy. This economy forms a system, a simplified representation of which is given in Figure 9. Of course this system is not self-maintaining, a system capable of supplying all the needs of the town's inhabitants. It is dependent upon a much wider economy - ultimately the world economy - and is inextricably linked. The boatyard can fulfil the demands of the dhow and fishing industries only by the importation of wood; with limited cultivation, livestock and trees, the town's shops and kitchens are dependent upon other regions of Sudan for fruit, vegetables and cereals and upon the hillmen for supplies of meat, milk and firewood. Thus the economy of Suakin is linked to those of the hinterland, the Sudan and the world beyond. These links are not entirely through importation. Although not a production centre (except for boats and salt) Suakin is a distributional centre. It exports senna and trochus shells (indirectly) to Europe, livestock (again indirectly) to Saudi Arabia, fish to Port Sudan and foodstuffs and craft goods to the hinterland. Figure 10 illustrates the pattern of these links. However, not shown in this figure is the role that Suakin, or rather its retail outlets, plays

FIGURE 9

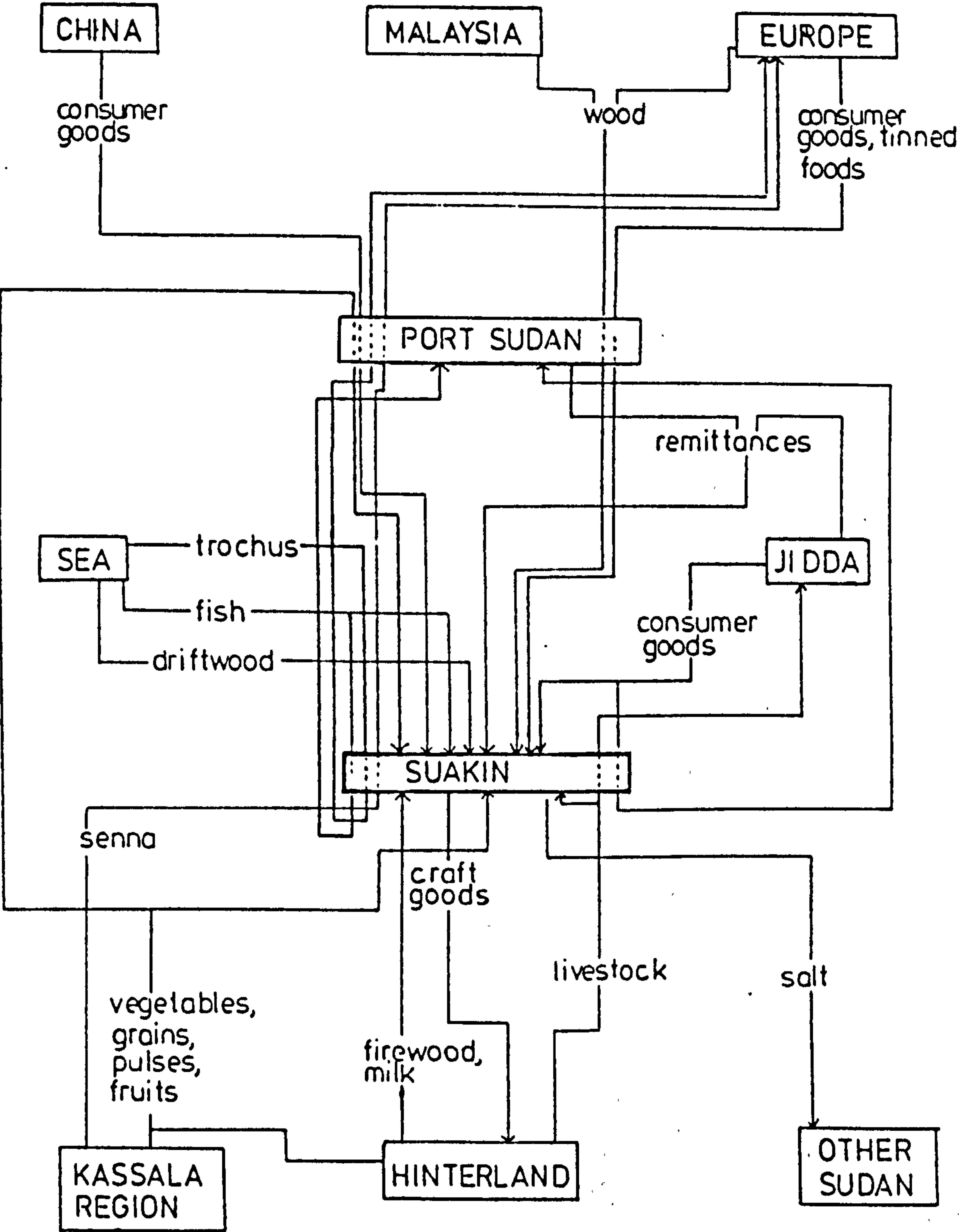
THE INTERNAL ECONOMY OF SUAKIN AS A SYSTEM



→ direction of demand

FIGURE 10

SUAKIN AND THE WIDER ECONOMY



as a distributional centre for the inhabitants of the town itself.

The Economy and Settlement

It is commonly argued¹ that the movement of persons from the rural to the urban areas is the consequence of job opportunities - real or perceived - available in the latter. The above examination of economic activities enables us to assess the applicability of this hypothesis to the situation in Suakin. Unlike, for example, Port Sudan, Suakin has few wage labour opportunities, such as stevedoring. Most of the private sector activities are characterised by remuneration through share systems and by the recruitment of labour from amongst kinsmen. As share systems depend upon a large measure of trust, they undoubtedly reinforce the kin-based pattern of labour recruitment. It could therefore be argued that share systems create a demand for kinsmen, of which all ethnic groupings have reserves in the rural areas. However, this is at best a partial and abstract explanation of the immigration process into Suakin. Labour is generally recruited from amongst kinsmen already resident in the town. A town with high unemployment, few large scale enterprises and, in comparison to Port Sudan, a relatively small population, will obviously have few economic opportunities, and it is unlikely that many immigrants come under a misconception. Immigrants do come to the town, but not generally as isolated individuals seeking employment, but as kinsmen of others already settled there. The attraction of Suakin

¹ See for example Abu Sin (1980:368)

must be seen at least partly in this very fact: it contains the kinsmen of potential immigrants. It also contains at least some employment opportunities and consequently incomes. Therefore families and individuals without means of support in the hinterland, or those fleeing from the wars, can arrive and settle, becoming dependent upon those of their kinsmen who do have remunerated occupations. Thus reserves of labour are formed. Additionally, it has been noted that families may be established in Suakin whilst breadwinners are employed elsewhere. This option is particularly attractive if the family already has relatives in Suakin.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has been concerned with Suakin, specifically with its ethnic composition and social and economic life. Its aim has been to discover how the town functions and survives as a settlement and as a centre of economic activities. The pursuit of this aim has involved the development of two major themes: firstly, the definition of ethnicity and the evaluation of its role in economic affairs; and secondly an analysis of Suakin's fishing industry, as an activity in its own right and as an example of an industry in the town from which generalisations about the nature of economic organisation can be drawn. We have also been concerned with the context, both physical and historical, within which these activities take place. As a result, the conclusions that can be drawn are wide-ranging.

Although Suakin has been long established as a port and as a settlement, I have argued here that its functions and population composition have recently undergone substantial changes. If we dismiss Bloss's (1936: 271) statement that the population was once more than thirty thousand - a claim he does not substantiate with a date - the town now appears to be larger than at any time in its history. With over thirteen thousand inhabitants, it is bigger than during the peaks

of its prosperity in the years immediately prior to and immediately following the Mahdist period. The greatest population in earlier times was probably around ten and a half thousand - the figure given for 1910 (Roden 1970: 14). By the mid-1930s this had dropped to around four thousand, a level the available evidence suggests was maintained until the late 1960s.

Thus the population appears to have tripled within a decade. But this cannot be regarded as a revival in the strict sense of the term. The Suakin of today is not the same place, either economically or socially, as the Suakin of 1910 and earlier. It has transformed.

For over seven hundred years Suakin was, within the context of the Red Sea, a major international trading port, supported by camel caravans bringing natural products from the interior of Sudan - such as gold and gum, senna and slaves - and returning with consumer goods, initially from the East and later from Europe, brought to the town by ships from overseas. Suakin survived the long recession brought about by the maladministration of the Turks and the discovery of the Cape route to India. It survived the cessation of supplies from the interior during the Mahdist period. The town was able to do so in both instances because, after the fall of 'Aydhab in 1426, it was the only developed harbour between Lower Egypt and Massawa. Whereas Suakin grew initially as a direct consequence of the high duties levied at 'Aydhab, when, under Turkish rule, Suakin itself imposed high duties there was no alternative port to which trade could be diverted.

The opening of Port Sudan in 1910 provided just such an alternative, although its advantages lay in superior harbour facilities, not lesser levies. As the history of this part of the Red Sea shows, ports are destroyed by other ports: 'Aydhab and Bādi were both superseded by Suakin and Suakin in its turn was rendered redundant by Port Sudan.

There are two important differences between the fates of 'Aydhab and Suakin. While the merchants of the former were massacred, either by the Mamluks or by the women and children of Suakin, Suakin's merchants simply relocated to the new port. Thereby, not only did Port Sudan take away Suakin's trade but also a significant part of its population. From at least the beginning of the nineteenth century, and almost certainly earlier, Suakin's population was divided into two socio-economic classes: one of merchants of foreign extraction who regulated the overseas/interior trade; the other a labour and service class (although undoubtedly also containing a number of small traders) composed of members of local ethnic collectivities. The former took themselves, their families and their businesses to the new port (and many members of the latter class must also have made the move). This migration, during the years 1910 to 1924, made a revival of the town impossible (barring some calamity befalling Port Sudan and causing a reverse movement) and the social composition of the town was radically altered. Instead of two socio-economic classes, only the remnants of one, the labour and service class, remained.

Secondly, whereas 'Aydhab appears to have vanished completely after the Mamluk massacre, Suakin survived as a settlement. It did so principally as a small town, not as a port, although it remained for some time a harbour for pilgrims. What had previously been minor activities became major in a town with less than half its previous population. Its small-scale industries, such as fishing and cultivation, continued. So did its market, serving, as it always had, the inhabitants of both the town itself and the immediate hinterland.

The period between the 1930s and the late 1960s should not be seen as entirely static. Changes did take place. For example, the establishment of the Central Prison in 1955 must have enlarged the total population and increased demand in the town's market. On the other hand, some industries - such as cotton-ginning and fish-processing - collapsed and the town's rail link with Port Sudan was taken up in the 1950s. These were symptoms of a recession, or a process of 'disdevelopment', which affected the area from Suakin southwards in the immediate post-independence period. Whereas the 1955/56 Census portrays a town with an adult male employment rate of over ninety per cent (see Table 4, page 69), Roden, visiting the town twelve years later, lamented the lack of permanent employment opportunities and speculated that perhaps the majority of families were dependent upon remittances from relatives working outside the town, the cotton fields of Tokar or in the factories and harbour of Port Sudan (Roden 1970: 19).

Although Roden paints a picture of increasing decline in the town, this is economic or industrial, not demographic decline. There is evidence of immigration into Suakin during this period, not only because of the prison but also, for example, of Black Rashaida from the Tokar area. The droughts which devastated the cotton crop and caused such immigration must also have affected the local pastoralists - largely Beja - and it is more than probable that some, after losing herds, would have settled in Suakin. Roden (1970: 17-18) himself mentions the existence of "outlying villages of recent origin" and notes the establishment of Mesheil - a Beja village - as early as 1932.

Here we see the emergence of Suakin in a form that is recognisable today: a residential centre, presumably because (as now) of its relatively cheap accommodation, for families with wage-earners employed elsewhere, predominantly in Port Sudan, perhaps attracting ex-pastoralists, with some small-scale industries and retail outlets.

More recent events have not altered this situation as such but have given the town new economic functions and a new population composition. The most economically significant event has been the relocation of Sudan's dhow harbour from Flamingo Bay to the town over the period between 1967 and 1972. This relocation should perhaps be termed "return", as before the creation of Port Sudan and consequently the Flamingo Bay anchorage, dhows worked out of Suakin (as witnessed for example by Lord Valentia, cited on page 50). Thus when the last pilgrim boat sailed from the town in 1973 the returned dhow trade maintained Suakin's unbroken record of seven hundred years of maritime

traffic in some form. But although the dhows have brought Suakin back into the international trading arena, it cannot be said that the town has returned to its former status as a major international port.

Whilst of great importance to the town itself, directly and indirectly, the trade is with one country only - Saudi Arabia - not with the far-flung places of the East De Castro mentions (cited on pages 48-49) and compared to the volume of trade Port Sudan handles it is extremely small-scale. Although, as in earlier times, natural products are exported and consumer goods imported, no foreign vessels call. Furthermore, the social organisation of the trade has altered. The boats are crewed almost entirely by members of local ethnic collectivities and the trade is not organised by a resident foreign merchant group but partly by descendants of this group and partly by merchants of Suakin from the local ethnic collectivities.

Amongst the many effects the dhows have had on the town, they have led to the creation of the largest boatbuilding yard in Sudan and boatbuilding and repairing are major activities in the town today. They also account for some of the increased population. Boatbuilders, carpenters, crewmen and their families reversed the movement of the 1920s, leaving the new port for the old. Amongst one ethnic collectivity - the Rashaida - the dhows continue to draw young men into the town, looking for employment on them, not now from Port Sudan but from the settled villages in the vicinity of Kassala.

The bulk of the population increase can be accounted for by two other sets of events, which are not always easily differentiated: an

influx of refugees from the Eritrean and Tigray wars and an influx of pastoralists, forced to settle through successive droughts.

Since 1966 thousands of refugees have fled from Eritrea and Tigray into Sudan and from the early 1970s some have settled in Suakin. Although a few of those coming to the town are from the urban areas of the war zones, these tend to be exceptional. Examples are those working for the liberation armies - the EPLF and the TPLF - which have offices and other facilities in Suakin, and the Tigrinya prostitutes, initially attracted to the town by the (now defunct) road-building camp nearby. The majority of refugees have come from the rural areas and of these most are from pastoralist collectivities in the Eritrean lowlands. Some may have lost herds directly through the Eritrean war. Others have lost their herds through more natural causes. Droughts have affected pastoralists on both sides of the Sudan-Eritrea border. Whereas in more peaceful times pastoralists in Eritrea after losing herds would have gravitated towards the urban centres of that territory, the urban areas are now frequently the main theatres of war - either garrison towns of the Ethiopian army (such as Asmara and Massawa) or EPLF strongholds (such as Nakfa). Under such circumstances, emigration to Sudan is not surprising.

Some of the sedentarised pastoralists now resident in Suakin are originally from Eritrea and others are from the hinterland of the town. In other cases such a division is not so clear-cut. Certain peoples - specifically the Rashaida and Khasa but also to a lesser extent the Beja - have traditionally migrated across the border seasonally, either

with their herds or for wage-labour in the Tokar cotton fields. It is fruitless to attempt to classify such people as either Sudanese or Eritrean. They also limit the value of the concept of "refugee".

Yet this large-scale immigration into Suakin has not radically altered the economy of the town. It has simply increased the scale of certain activities. There are more shops, more water distributors, and more housebuilders; and there is an increased demand in the market for food and consumer goods. But no new economic activities of significance have been created by these immigrants.

The return of the dhows, brought about by government action, has been the only recent event of major economic significance. The boats have brought new employment opportunities - of particular note in the boatyard - but even they are an addition to the pre-existing economy, not a transformer of it. The chief characteristics of the town since the 1930s remain: a residential centre with a market and some small-scale economic activities.

On the other hand, the recent mass immigration into Suakin has greatly increased the heterogeneity of the town's population. Whereas, it is reasonable to assume, during the period between the mid-1920s and the late 1960s most of the residents were from families long established in the town, such persons are now outnumbered by recent arrivals from Eritrea, Tigray, Port Sudan and the hinterland. One still hears Tu-Bedawie and Northern Sudanese in the market place but the Greek, English, Hindustani and other languages Jackson (1926: 53)

heard at the turn of the century have now been replaced by, amongst others, Tigray, Tigrinya, 'Afar, Hausa and the Arabic of Saudi Arabia.

Having established in broad terms how the present population composition came about, it was necessary to examine the population in more detail and, in order to understand the nature of the heterogeneity and the social organisation of the town, to go beyond classifications based upon geographical origins and previous modes of livelihood and to classify the population according to social differences. This required a careful examination of theories of ethnicity.

The inhabitants of Suakin divide themselves into numerous sets according to a wide range of criteria, such as are reflected in the labels "Eritrean", "Arab", "Muslim", "Khasa" and "Emirab". Each of these examples could be regarded as sets based upon a communality of social attributes in some form. But, as we are concerned with the whole population rather than with any one set, however defined, classification must be conducted according to consistently applied criteria in order that comparisons and contrasts can be made between sets.

In certain circumstances it may be valid to subscribe to Moerman's (1967: 161) view that a set of people can be regarded as an ethnic entity if they successfully present themselves as one, and to Barth's (1969a: 10) definition of ethnic groups as categories of ascription by members of the groups, but the situation which confronts one in Suakin is one of numerous overlapping sets of people. In such circumstances,

ethnic entities cannot be taken for granted but must be precisely defined.

Accordingly, Chapter Three has surveyed the approaches to the defining of "tribe" and "ethnic group" in anthropological literature. It has been shown that there is little consensus amongst anthropologists on the meaning of these most basic of concepts. "Ethnic" covers the same broad set of ideas as "tribal" but has the advantage of a wider applicability and for this reason it was adopted here. A recurrent theme in earlier definitions is the existence of a shared distinctive culture or shared patterns of normative behaviour and this has been taken as central to the reformulation in this thesis. I have argued that the presence of this attribute alone amongst a set of people is not sufficient to classify such a set as an ethnic entity. A group of people who share only a culture would be better defined as a culture group. Taking key attributes from Morgan (1878), Hoebel (1958), Naroll (1964), Moerman (1965, 1967), Barth (1969a, b) and Cohen (1969, 1974), I have suggested that an ethnic entity can be defined as an exclusive set of people who not only share a distinctive culture within a specified context but also one or more of the following attributes: a common language or dialect, some form of political organisation, or common geographical origins, whether actual or historical. Such a definition is not a radical deviation: it does not contradict any of the earlier definitions, but it is more exact.

As Fried (1967: 15) and Williams (1964: 17) point out, "group" is an imprecise term and to Fried at least it implies that all members

interact or have the theoretical ability to do so. Because members of an ethnic entity may not in fact all interact, I have adopted the term "ethnic category" as, in Barth's (1969a) sense, the label by which an ethnic entity is known; the term "ethnic collectivity" to denote all the members of an ethnic category; and "ethnic grouping" to denote those members of an ethnic collectivity within a defined geographical location. "Ethnic group" is restricted to denote those members of an ethnic collectivity or an ethnic grouping who have common interests or pursue a common aim.

Chapter Four has argued that the population of Suakin today can be divided into eight major ethnic groupings, each of which has, by definition, its own distinctive culture:

- the Beja, who also share common geographical origins (the Red Sea Hills). Their language (Tu-Bedawie), which is spoken by all, is not exclusive to them but is also spoken by some Khasa;
- the Khasa, who share common geographical origins (the Sudan/Eritrea borderlands). They do not have an exclusive language: most speak Tigray but some speak Tu-Bedawie;
- the Rashaida, who share common historical origins (Najd) and a common dialect of Arabic;
- the Takari, who share common geographical origins, which are, as with the Rashaida, historic. In this case it is West Africa. They speak Hausa;
- the Jenobia, who share a common geographical origin (Southern Sudan). They do not have a common language;

- the Tigrinya, who speak the Tigrinya language and originate from the highlands of Eritrea and Tigray Province;
- the Danakil, who speak 'Afar and originate from the southern Eritrean coastal plain;
- the Nuba, who share a common geographical origin (the Nuba Mountains in Kordofan Province).

It is noteworthy that none of these groupings is politically unified.

In addition there are numerous smaller groupings from Northern Sudan, such as Baggara, and from the lowlands of Eritrea, such as the Marya. Although all the Northern Sudanese groupings speak Arabic and, obviously, share a common geographical origin and to some extent have a common culture, they do not share a culture that distinguishes them clearly from other groupings in the town. Thus we cannot speak of a Northern Sudanese ethnic grouping in Suakin. For the same reason, we cannot define an ethnic grouping composed of Tigray-speaking Eritreans.

As they have always been, the Beja remain the largest single ethnic grouping in Suakin, but their relative size has declined. Assuming that there were no Beja prisoners in the Central Prison in 1955/56 (it has been suggested on page 64 that the majority of prisoners were Jenobia) and therefore subtracting the prison population (which was not enumerated in the 1979 census) from the total population given in the census for those years (Table 1) and subtracting the Beni Amer (which I have classified as Khasa) from the Beja population (Table 2), a figure of nearly sixty-two per cent is obtained for the Beja

proportion of the town's total population in 1955/56. They now account for an estimated forty-two per cent.

The only non-Beja grouping of any substantial size recorded in the 1955/56 are the "West Africans" (Takari), who (excluding once again the prison population from the total population figure) accounted for eleven per cent. The remainder consisted of numerous small ethnic groupings, such as those from Northern Sudan, the largest of which constituted only three per cent of the total. The population now consists largely of the eight substantial ethnic groupings listed above. This has not been simply the result of the growth of the small groupings found earlier. An estimated twenty-eight per cent of the population belongs to ethnic categories not mentioned or detectable in the 1955/56 census.

In the absence of sociological data from the time of the census it is not possible to assess whether or not this change from a situation of one dominant ethnic grouping and numerous small groupings to one of eight substantial groupings has itself in any way affected the relevance and importance of ethnicity in the organisation of everyday life. Whereas membership of one of the two socio-economic classes in pre-1910 Suakin determined where one lived - the merchants on the island, the rest on the mainland - today ethnic identity appears to determine residential location. Unfortunately, as a parallel this may not be exact (but perhaps only because Burckhardt (1822) does not deal in depth with the subject, although, by reference to Turks, Hadendowa and Arteiga he does suggest an ethnic dimension to the old socio-

economic classes (1822: 391-92)). There is no equivalent to an area occupied by merchants: there is for example, no Khasa quarter of the town. Instead there are Khasa quarters in three of the town's nine villages - al-Fula, al-Gayf and Melakia. This phenomenon, which applies to nearly all the major ethnic groupings (although, of course, in respect to different villages) is a reflection of the settlement process in Suakin.

Large scale immigration into the Suakin region is not a new phenomenon. Bloss (1936: 80) notes the arrival between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries of the Shadhaliab, the Hassenab and the Ashraf from the Arabian peninsula. But whereas the implication here is that these peoples arrived *en masse*, recent immigration into the town itself has taken the form of families arriving in small numbers and establishing ethnic blocs within villages by renting or building *sandagas* near members of the same ethnic category, or establishing new settlements, as in the case of the Rashaïda in al-Fula.

The founding of the Rashaïda settlement in al-Fula, described in Chapter Four, reflects not only this process but also a lineage/political division within the Rashaïda collectivity. The settlement is of the Red Baratikh. Members of other divisions - largely Barāsa - reside in Melakia. Communities such as these are under the control of headmen and contain a large number of closely-related kin. As we have seen, there is a tendency throughout the town to recruit kin-members for work-teams, whether in shops, in kitchens or on boats. Therefore it is clear that these communities have a more

important role in the organisation of social life within the town than the grouping as a whole.

What unites members of an ethnic grouping living in different settlements is their common culture, one manifestation of which is clothing, the outward symbol of ethnic identity. In some cases the members are also bound by the customary law of the collectivity which makes possible the resolution of disputes between members under different headmen without recourse to the state's legal apparatus. Furthermore, social activities, such as wedding celebrations, tend to involve members of the grouping irrespective of settlement. The examination in Chapter Four of the opening of the Suakin by-road and the switching-on of the town's electricity supply clearly shows the social affinity of members of a grouping; there is a higher degree of interaction between members of a grouping than between members of different ethnic categories within the same village. Finally, there are examples of recruitment of labour from the grouping rather than from the village community: for example, the Black Jeladin mechanics working on Red Baratikh dhows.

It could be argued that social life in Suakin is regulated by a hierarchy of institutions - the family (in varying degrees of extendedness), the settlement (or part of a settlement under a headman) and the grouping - overlapping but each influencing certain aspects, such as residential location, social order and economic opportunities. Yet it is often difficult to establish where the family ends and the settlement begins: it is perhaps more useful to regard the settlement

and the grouping as "extensions" of the family. The family normally regulates residential location - relatives try to live as close to each other as possible. It is also the pool from which labour is recruited for enterprises (such as, for example, in the case of the Khasa teashop described in Chapter Seven). But the family does not invariably fulfil these functions. For example, the initial residential location of the first Red Rashaida to settle in Suakin was determined not by his kin (as there were none present) but by the presence of the grouping in Melakia. The Black Jeladīn mechanics working on the Baratīkh dhows owe their employment not to their kin but to their ethnic grouping membership.

All families, settlements and groupings in the town are under the umbrella of Suakin's political apparatus - the town and village councils, the law court and the police - which stands apart, to a large extent, from ethnicity. Therefore it could be argued that Suakin is indeed a microcosm of Furnivall's (1939: 446) "plural society", where the elements are the ethnic groupings, co-existing within the one political unit with very little interaction. However, this would be to treat the town and social life within it in isolation. The ethnic groupings are not self-sufficient entities but fractions of larger social bodies - the ethnic collectivities. The common culture all members of a grouping share is not exclusive to them but is shared with all members of the collectivity; the customary law of the grouping, where it operates, has not evolved in the town but is the law of the collectivity. The members of the lineage and political sets into which the town's ethnic groupings are divided (such as the Emirab of the

Hadendowa of the Beja and the Jeladin of the Barasa of the Rashaida) are not all resident in Suakin (not even in the case of the Arteiga, but as with the groupings themselves, only fragments of these divisions are resident. Ties - political, social, kinship and economic - extend beyond the confines of the town. Most members of groupings seem to maintain such ties, which are often most noticeably economic in nature and maintained with relatives within the collectivity beyond the town. These can take the form of remittances being sent in or (in a few cases) being sent out or through the maintenance of herds in the hinterland. Marriages with members of the collectivity outside the town are a further important link. The grouping is a geographically-based concept (as can be said of Suakin itself): socially its members cannot be considered in isolation from the collectivity. We have examined the ethnic groupings and settlements in Suakin because they are the available evidence - but the phenomenon under scrutiny is ethnicity.

I have argued that in general ethnicity is a major factor in the organisation of social life in Suakin. One's ethnic identity determines where one lives, one's social network, what economic opportunities are available, even what one wears. Yet ethnicity does not exert an equal force in all cases: account must be taken of individual circumstances. For example, many adult male members of the Northern Sudanese groupings are in public sector employment - such as the prison service and the Marine Fisheries Division. Here it is not ethnic identity which determines residential location: accommodation is provided by the employer. For those in such circumstances and their

families social life is orientated around the work-place and ethnicity has little relevance in day-to-day life. Some Nuba are in this situation, but there are also settlements, in Melakia and al-Fula, of Nuba not employed in the public sector, and in these settlements ethnicity plays a greater role. This is not simply a difference between those in public and those in private sector employment, it is a difference between those who regard themselves as temporary residents and those who regard themselves as permanent, or at least long-term, settlers. Even within settlements there are individuals to whom ethnicity is of less relevance than others. Such individuals are often socially on the fringe of a grouping. Amongst the Rashaida, for example, there are Black women and Red schoolboys who have abandoned the traditional dress. There seems however to be only a single example in this grouping of a person who has effectively left: a Red woman who has married a man of a Northern Sudanese collectivity.

This Red Rashaida woman is an interesting case, revealing some of the nature of ethnic identity. She has abandoned the dress of the Rashaida but of course retains the distinctive tattoos. Although avoided by the men of the collectivity she maintains contact with some of the women. Therefore her ostracism is not total, and although she is incorporated into her husband's social network she is still identified by all as a Rashaida woman.

As exemplified by this, and the characterisation of ethnic categories given on pages 150 and 151, ethnic groupings are categories of ascription in Suakin, as Barth (1969a: 10) defines "ethnic group".

As I hope I have shown, they are more than an epistemological device: as with a common culture, this is an aspect of the phenomenon, not the phenomenon itself. As Barth also states (1969a: 14) they are "organisational vessels" of variable content which may provide all social life or be limited to certain sectors of activity. We have seen that in general in Suakin they provide nearly all social life, with the qualification that individual circumstances must be taken into consideration.

The ethnic groupings provide social life and there is little interaction between groupings, yet there is a degree of economic integration within the town. This further limits the applicability of Furnivall's "plural society" concept. As argued in Chapter Seven, the internal economy of Suakin can be regarded as a system, without regard to ethnicity. Whilst there are within the settlements shops run by members of the same ethnic category as the residents, no ethnic grouping or settlement is economically self-supporting. All inhabitants of the town are dependent upon Beja hillmen for meat, milk and firewood and on largely Khasa bakers for bread. All depend upon the central market for vegetables, driftwood and some consumer goods. All depend on the Arteiga water drawers, and the water carriers do not supply only houses occupied by members of their own grouping.

The dhows can be seen as the major 'lynch-pin' in the town's economy. Although the crewing of them is overwhelmingly by Rashaida, the dhows affect a large number of persons from other ethnic groupings: not only because they bring in consumer goods from Saudi Arabia. They

provide a means of emigration for the Rashaida and others (particularly Tigrinya) and thus indirectly aid the flow of remittances back to the town. They have created employment in the boatyard for carpenters (largely Beja and Danakil) and for unskilled labourers (from all the major groupings except the Rashaida). Through the illegal exportation of livestock they have raised the demand for and consequently the price of fish, thus increasing, to some degree, the prosperity of fishermen from the Beja, Takari, Danakil and Khasa as well as from the Rashaida. Furthermore, they have created wealth, not only for the crewmen who live and consume in Suakin but also for the boats' owners, some of whom live and invest in numerous small enterprises in the town.

On the other hand, the dhows have not led to the emergence of a socially distinctive merchant class within the town. The 'big merchants' are drawn from and reside within the settlements of their respective ethnic groupings.

Against this background of the social isolation of ethnic groupings but with a degree of economic integration we must address ourselves to the central question of the relevance of ethnicity to economic activities. In order to answer this we have focussed upon a single industry in the town, fishing: an activity relatively overlooked in anthropological studies not only in Sudan but world-wide. It is an appropriate choice in a study of a town by the sea, but although there are obvious similarities between this activity and trochus shell collection, fishing is in several respects untypical of the town's industries. For example, the resources, unlike drinking water,

cultivable land and animals, are not owned but are held in common. Furthermore, fishing in Suakin (and indeed along the whole of the Sudanese coast) does not appear to be typical of fishing industries in other parts of the world. Over-exploitation would be the anticipated consequence of common resources (which has happened with *sadaf* collection), yet despite the introduction of mechanised boats the sea fishermen of Sudan landed only 3.85 per cent of the estimated potential annual yield in 1979. Marine fishing is not regarded as a zero-sum game: the catch taken by one boat is not seen as affecting the catches of others. The demand for fish in Port Sudan and Suakin combined exceeds the supply, so not only is there no competition amongst fishermen for catches, there is also no competition between them when selling their produce to the fish merchants. Indeed it is the merchants who compete for supplies. We have noted the three nurses who also fish: examples of the opposite situation, fishermen who have a subsidiary occupation, an expectable response to uncertainty, are rare. I have no evidence of fishermen depending upon fish merchants for credit. These observations suggest that whilst fishing may yield a more variable and, for the ordinary fisherman, relatively lower income than some of the other occupations in the town, it is a much less uncertain activity here than "maritime anthropologists" such as Acheson (1981) suggest can be the case elsewhere.

The technological aids employed by the fishermen are, of course, unique to this industry. They are a striking mixture of the elementary and the complex. The boats are well-constructed craft, by far the most sophisticated artefacts produced in the town. On the other hand it is

difficult to conceive of a more basic catching device than that in normal use by the fishermen - a single hook on a single line. Yet it is not the case that the hook and line method is the most appropriate or productive for these waters. Nets are successfully employed by Egyptians and Yemanis fishing off Sudan's coast. Even in those cultures where handlining is, or was, common (for example, in the Portuguese cod fishery on the Grand Banks), several hooks are normally attached to one line and the fishermen often control more than one line.

It may be argued that the artefacts employed by Suakin's fishermen fall into two categories - those that directly aid fish capture (hooks, lines and nets) and those that indirectly aid the process (principally boats and engines but also sails and ice boxes) - and that they should be assessed according to different criteria. However, it is important to note that, with the exception of some non-boat fishermen's nets, all these artefacts - in both categories - are imported, in the sense that they are not produced by the fishermen themselves. Most of the catching gear is Japanese, most of the engines are British and the boats are produced by non-fishing professional boatbuilders. The boats do not reflect the technological level of the fishermen primarily but the technological level of traditional Middle Eastern, or "dhow world", boatbuilding practices.

As described in Chapter One, in broad terms the method of boat construction found in Suakin is not unique but is substantially the same as that found from Mombasa to Bombay. It is a widespread method

but quite distinct from Western and Asian techniques. Presumably, it was diffused at a time when Suakin had closer and more wide-spread links with Arab ports than it has at present. The same may be true of the architecture of the town's old coral buildings: a style common to the prosperous ports of the Red Sea. Yet this style of land architecture did not take a deep root in Sudan. No similar buildings appear to have been constructed in Port Sudan. The style of naval architecture on the other hand has not only taken root but has flourished to the point of propagating new sub-species. It has been the boatbuilders of Sudan who have changed the design of the *sanbuk* from square-sterned to pointed-sterned, developed craft suitable for mechanisation and developed the *ramas*, possibly the only example of a flat-bottomed sea boat in the dhow world, as a substitute for the *huri lub wahid*. The method of boatbuilding is not a residual cultural element but an active and dynamic tradition.

What is also surprising, in a town linguistically diverse and socially divided into distinct, exclusive ethnic groupings, is the homogeneity of the fishermen in their operations and attitudes towards technological changes. Although there are some differences in fishermen's responses to the introduction of new technology by the RSFDP these cannot be correlated with ethnic groups (and here the term group can be applied, as fishermen share a common aim). Regardless of ethnic identity the majority of boat fishermen are in favour of new indirect aids - engines and ice boxes - but are opposed to new direct aids - nets. The uniformity of these responses and the uniformity of fishing techniques employed would seem to suggest that in the past

there has been a greater degree of interaction between fishermen belonging to different ethnic collectivities than is currently the case. It might be argued that the hook and line method is so simple that each group may have adopted it independently, but the technique of Red Snapper fishing using the hook and line, which has been described on page 182, seemingly known to all boat fishermen, is sufficiently complex to make independent invention unlikely. The techniques of the fishermen based in Sudan are quite distinct from those employed by others fishing in the same waters, for example the mullet fishermen from Egypt.

The fishermen of Suakin, obviously, form an occupational group. It could be argued that, as they share a common technology and a common set of techniques, there is a common fishing culture within the town - that the fishermen, as they share certain patterns of normative behaviour, comprise a culture group. This culture is distinct from any other in the town. The fishermen would of course fall short of forming an ethnic group: they do not share a common language or dialect, common geographical origins or any form of political organisation. To regard them as a cultural group is to abstract and overemphasise a relatively few behavioural traits. Furthermore, unlike our concept of "ethnicity", a member of such a culture group would also be a member of other culture groups - for example, all fishermen also belong to the Islamic "cultural group".

Even if it is allowed that there is a common fishing culture in the town, it cannot be argued that there is a fishing community, in

either a geographical or a social sense. The fishermen neither all live in one area nor all interact. Ethnicity is the determining factor in the residential location and social networks, not occupation (except as noted within the public sector). Although there is much in common between fishermen irrespective of ethnicity there are differences which can be correlated with ethnic grouping membership. Importantly, labour for the industry is not maintained by a uniform process. Amongst the Beja and Takari, the fishermen are likely to be the sons of fishermen or younger sons in families with relatives already engaged in fishing. Amongst the Rashaida, fishermen are often recruited from those who wish to work on the dhows and those who have retired from them. There is a rigid ethnic demarcation of *marsa* fishing camps: Antabeb and Haidob are exclusively Beja and the two *marsas* of al-Shuk are used only by Rashaida. The crew of a fishing boat is almost invariably drawn from one ethnic grouping.

On the other hand, the mode of remuneration is a further important trait which is common to fishermen regardless of ethnic category. Like the majority of private sector activities in Suakin, fishing is an all-male activity remunerated by share systems. Our examination of such systems in the town and amongst fishing cultures elsewhere has revealed two basic and seemingly universal methods of share division. In one, which we have called Method 1, the owner, usually of a boat but in some cases of a net, receives a portion of the apportionable sum directly related to that received by each individual crewman. In the other, Method 2, the owner receives a portion directly related to that received by the crew as a single unit. Both these systems are also

found in land-based activities in Suakin. Method 1 is used on small boats and, for example, in shops; Method 2 is used on *lanshs* and, for example, in sharing the profits from cultivation. It is clear, so far as fishing is concerned, that the situation regarding which method is used is identical to that found among fishermen in Sakthikulangara (Klausen 1968: 128) and Lamu (Prins 1965: 163-68) - that is the smaller, cheaper craft used Method 1, the larger boats Method 2. However, in some of Suakin's land-based enterprises, such as the drinking water wells and the *bakassi*, it is not obvious which method is in use. The result is the same whichever is employed. But what distinguishes the systems employed by the fishermen from those used on land is not the method of division but the calculation of the apportionable sum. In such activities as *boks* driving and water-drawing the apportionable sum is equal to the revenue. Amongst the fishermen the apportionable sum is equal to the revenue minus the running and maintenance costs. The monthly payments by which the marine engines are purchased from the RSFDP - the only example of a credit arrangement I found in the town - are regarded as deductible costs, a factor which, I have suggested, is contributory to the success of the project's mechanisation programme.

A superficial difference between fishing and some of the land-based economic activities is the range of ethnic groupings involved. Whereas one finds, for example, shopkeepers and tailors from virtually all the town's major ethnic groupings, fishermen are members of only certain groupings - the Beja, Rashaida, Takari, Danakil and Khasa, and even the latter are not found fishing from boats. Several factors

account for there being no Tigrinya, Eritrean, Nuba or Jenobia fishermen. One is that these last-named groupings do not appear to have any previous contact with marine fishing. Although fishing is not a predominant activity amongst any of the collectivities now with fishermen in Suakin in their ranks, there is evidence to suggest that small numbers of men from these collectivities have always engaged in maritime activities, whether in Sudan or Eritrea. With the exception of the Takari, who, it must be noted, are not recent arrivals to the town, these ethnic groups now fishing in Suakin have their traditional homelands in close proximity to the sea.

A further factor is that fishing is not an attractive occupation. Until recently it has been poorly remunerated. Even with the recent rise in the price of fish brought about by the meat shortage, the average fishermen probably earns less than a water distributor. Many currently engaged in fishing will not, or at least hope not to, spend the rest of their working lives as fishermen but will move onto dhows, enter commerce or become engaged in a land-based activity. Fishing is not an expanding industry in terms of man power as a proportion of Suakin's total population. The increase in the number of fishermen has barely kept par with the growth of the town.

Furthermore, if one wishes to set oneself up as a fisherman equipment must be bought. The cheapest boat is £s150 - more than five months' wages for someone on the government minimum wage (1979/80). There are therefore financial disincentives, or barriers for an independent individual to embark on a career as a fisherman. There are

also socio-technical barriers. Fishing is a skill: it requires an ability to locate fish, a knowledge of their habits and the geography of the sea and although the hook and line is technologically simple a considerable sensitivity is required to exploit it successfully. This skill must be acquired through working with other fishermen. As fishing crews are almost invariably composed of members of one ethnic category, it is virtually impossible for members of ethnic groupings which have no fishermen in their numbers in Suakin to become fishermen. Fishing is a "closed shop": without the appropriate ethnic identity one does not gain admittance.

This "closed shop" situation is not exclusive to fishing but is in fact found in most of the private sector occupations. Although there are shopkeepers from almost all ethnic groupings, in any one shop the workers and the owner will almost invariably be of the same ethnic identity. The same is true of most other economic activities, the extreme example being the water drawers, who are all Arteiga, as is the owner of the wells. The only major exception is the boatyard, where carpenters and labourers of different ethnic identities work together, the same situation as is found in the public sector. There is an essential difference between fishing, cultivation and shopkeeping on the one hand and on the other the public sector, the boatyard and three other cases we have noted, the Jenobia working in the Nuba Laundry (page 117), the two Beja drivers working for a Rashaida (page 250) and the town's mechanics' workshops (page 239). Workers in the former activities are remunerated by shares; workers in the latter are remunerated by wages.

Thus there is a correlation between mode of remuneration and the representation of one or more ethnic categories in a work-team. Where remuneration is by wage, it is probable that the work-team will be a mixture of individuals from different ethnic groupings. Where remuneration is by share, it is normal to find members of only one ethnic grouping in a work-team.

Why do the Rashaida recruit only Rashaida to work on their fishing boats, the Beja only Beja? The answer lies partly in the origins of the ethnic groupings. Many members are from pastoralist collectivities and still appear to retain suspicion of other ethnic collectivities. Fishing and many other economic activities reflect the social organisation of the town as a whole: it is divided into several clusters of members of various ethnic groupings with little interaction between members of differing groupings. The answer may also partly lie in the mode of remuneration. Unlike the straightforward system of standard payment for time or work achieved, or product, the calculation of shares is complex, in the case of fishing involving revenue from several trips and deductions for costs incurred perhaps weeks previously. This system, unlike for example the relationship between boatbuilder and carpenter, relies on trust, between owner, captain and crew. In such circumstances, bearing in mind that no mechanisms exist for redress between members of different ethnic groupings except the government courts, as noted in Chapter Four, it is to be expected that labour will be recruited from within the grouping. We find the same attitude in Suakin as Baks and Postel-Coster (1977: 26) found amongst

the fishermen of Aberdeen: "You can trust nobody like you can trust your own folk".

The evidence presented in this thesis does not support Smith's (1977a: 2) generalisation that "fishermen vary substantially from other groups". The fishermen of Suakin and I believe of the whole Sudanese Red Sea coast, have no separate political organisation and no unique social behaviour nor distinctive residence patterns other than those that are directly attributable to the demands or organisation of the occupation (specifically, the use of the *marsa* camps). The economic organisation of the industry is essentially identical to that of many land-based private sector industries. Not only are the work-teams drawn from the same ethnic grouping as the owner of the capital equipment (the boat or the net) but also the relationship between the producers and the buyers is ethnically neutral and purely mercantile. Thus Beja merchants buy fish from Rashaïda, Takari, Danakil and Khasa as well as from the fishermen of their own ethnic category, in much the same way as the Khasa bakers sell their produce to whosoever wishes to buy.

* * *

Since the fieldwork for this thesis was undertaken, whilst the Eritrean war has continued into its third decade and the Tigray war into its second, sub-Saharan Africa has experienced an exceptionally severe drought. Eastern Sudan and Ethiopia have been among the worst affected areas. The effect on Suakin has almost certainly been an acceleration of the processes described in Chapter Two: the settlement of pastoralists and the influx of refugees from the war zones. The town's survival as a residential centre at least seems guaranteed for the foreseeable future. It will not vanish as 'Aydhab and Bādi have. But its economic future is less easily predicted.

As its history shows, major swings in Suakin's fortunes seem to be brought about not directly by social factors or events but by government actions, and the town's future will probably depend on - perhaps has already been shaped by - administrative decisions. The drought and consequent famine, and the extra demand created by refugees, will have further depleted Sudan's food supply. It is no feat of clairvoyance to predict firstly the government being forced to take firmer steps to control the supply and secondly such steps entailing a harsh crackdown on smuggling, of livestock in particular. A restriction of the activities of dhows must be involved. The following passage, from a yachtsman's brief description of the town,¹ implies that the solution to the smuggling problem has been severe:

¹The exact date of visit is not noted in the article, but seems to have been 1986 or 1987.

The silted harbour is the graveyard of dozens of sailing dhows condemned by the authorities for smuggling from Saudi Arabia.

(Jones 1987: 86)

Whatever the exact nature of the steps taken to stop illegal exportation, it will have an impact on the economic life of Suakin, but by no means as profound as the removal of trade in the 1920s. Although unemployment amongst dhow workers and reduced incomes for middlemen and livestock breeders is likely, there is one sector of the town's economy which seems set to play a compensating and increasingly important role: its small but comparatively productive fishing industry. And there is a necessary and important ethnic constituent in its population: the Rashaida.

The drought and subsequent famine and influx of refugees, by increasing demand for all foodstuffs and depleting the supply, will have increased the demand and therefore (unless there is government intervention) the price of fish. Indeed, this was happening during the fieldwork period. This phenomenon has coincided with:

- (a) the RSFDP's scheme which presents a unique opportunity for fishermen to acquire mechanised craft at very advantageous rates;
- (b) the RSFDP's provision of ice at a convenient site for use by fishermen, giving them the ability to fish further from the town;

- (c) the opening of new roads linking Suakin with Port Sudan, making the marketing of catches in the larger town feasible.

Thus the economic and infrastructural conditions are ripe for an expansion of the fishing industry. This can only take place if there is an increase in the number of fishermen. With the possible collapse or at least predicted restriction of dhow activities, I believe these will be supplied from amongst the Rashaida.

As we have seen, the Rashaida, who dominate the dhow trade, are also one of the two major groups amongst the fishermen. It has also been noted that, within this grouping, dhow work and fishing are connected: some dhow workers turn to fishing seasonally; some men serve an "apprenticeship" as fishermen before moving on to dhow work; some dhow workers "retire" to fishing. Should the dhow trade be terminated, it is highly likely that many dhow workers will make a permanent switch: not only because there are few other employment opportunities in Suakin but also because, for the reason given above, fishing is becoming increasingly attractive financially. Unlike such grouping as the Danakil, the Rashaida, regarded as Sudanese by the RSFDP, have access to this organisation's mechanisation scheme. Unlike the Beja, the Rashaida do not appear to regard fishing as a low status occupation.

So, the social as well as the economic conditions appear set for the growth of Suakin's fishing industry. This will of course have a wider impact, particularly in the boatyard. After several hundred years, Suakin may be returning to its former role, in the words of Bruce (III, 250), as a great nursery of fishermen.

A P P E N D I X I

F U R T H E R N O T E S O N T H E B O A T S

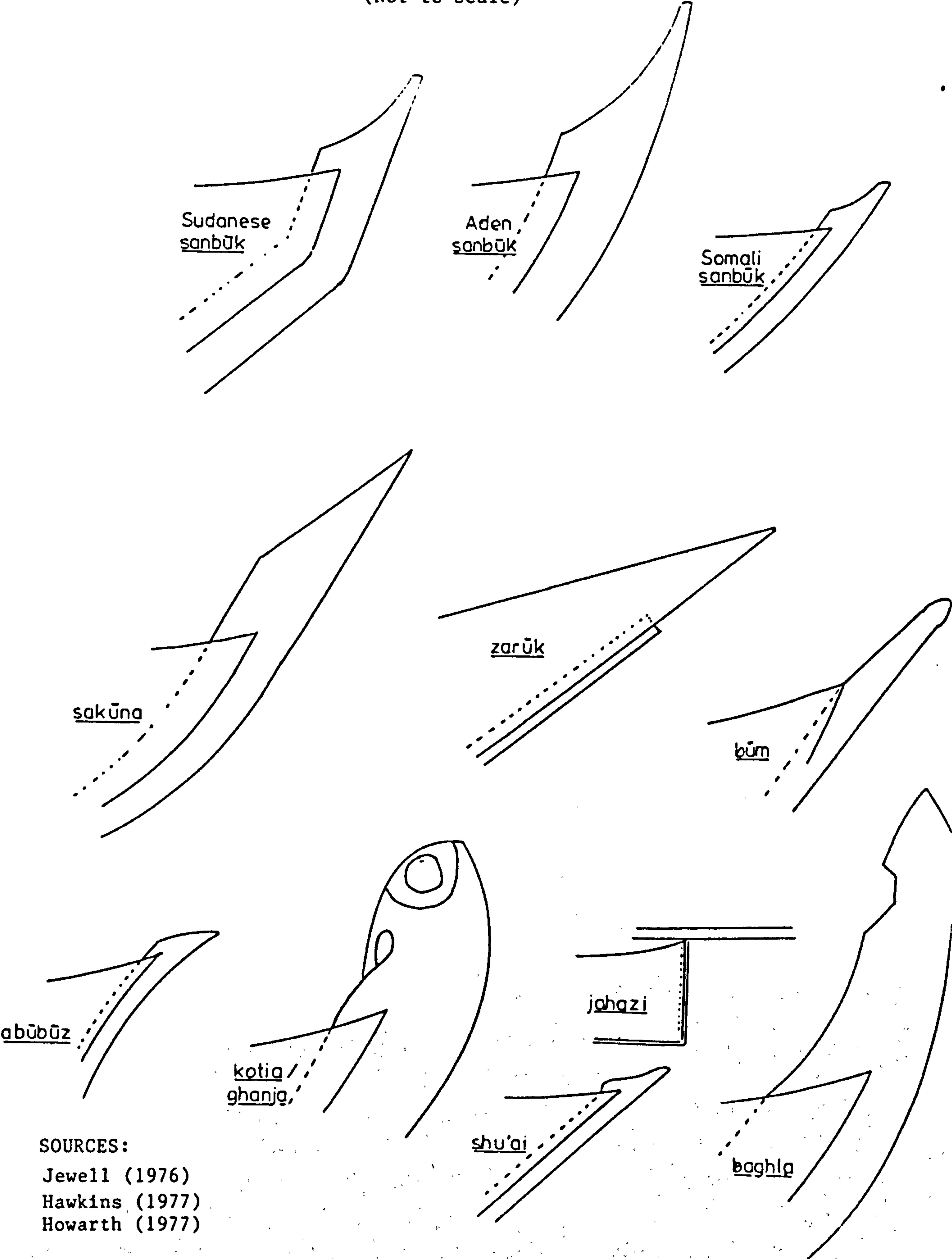
Hornell (1942) attempts to classify all dhows according to stern shape, dividing them into those with square (or transom) sterns and those with pointed sterns (or as he misleadingly terms them "double-ended"). This scheme is neither ^{3 fac}satisfactory nor particularly useful. Examples of both types are widely distributed throughout the dhow world: the baghla of Kuwait, the ghanja of Sur, the kotia of India (the "aristocrats" amongst dhows, with their elaborate decoration and sterns reminiscent of seventeenth century European ships) and the sakūna of Mukalla have square sterns; the zarūk of Yemen, the thoni of the Maldives, the mtepe of East Africa and the būm of Kuwait have pointed sterns. As noted in Chapter One, the sanbūk of Sudan has changed from a square to a pointed stern.

The simplest method of identifying dhows, I suggest, is through the observation of the shape of the stempost and the stempost head. These show considerable variation, from the "parrot's head" of the kotia to the cut-off stempost on the zarūk. Almost every type of dhow has a distinctive form of stemhead, which is constant, regardless of the place of manufacture. Figure 11 shows some of the varieties. As can be seen, the general shape of the sanbūk stemhead is scimitar, the Sudanese variety being distinguishable by the comparatively sharper

FIGURE 11

EXAMPLES OF DHOW STEMHEADS

(Not to scale)



SOURCES:
Jewell (1976)
Hawkins (1977)
Howarth (1977)

junction of the upper and lower stempost, in contrast to the more gently sweeping stemposts of the Adeni and Somali sanbūks.

Accounts of dhow building are sketchy, but some details are provided by Hawkins (1977), Howarth (1977) and Zainal (1982). Together they give a portrait in its essentials identical to the practices in Suakin. Dhows are built entirely without plans and with the most basic of tools. Howarth (1977:60) observed power tools lying unused at Ras al-Khumar. One boatbuilder in Suakin has a generator which is used to power electric drills but the majority of carpenters here and elsewhere rely on the bow-drill, adze, hammer and saw. The hardwood keel (of teak, normally in two parts, jointed by a checked scarf as shown on Figure 1) is raised on short baulks of timber. This is then grooved as shown on Figures 1 and 2. The stem and sternposts are then erected and the propellor arch is set in place between the keel and the sternpost. Planks, which are soaked in sea-water to render them flexible, are then nailed temporarily in position. The nailing of the garboard strake is done from the inside. This is in marked contrast to Western practice, where, regardless of the keel form, nailing is from the outside. The second strakes are butted edge to edge with the garboard and temporarily held in place by nailing battens of curved timber to the outside of the hull to which the strakes are fastened. Planking is then added until the point is reached where the curve of the hull starts to turn more pronouncedly upwards. Then the main ribs are inserted. Like the temporary battens, in Suakin these are of sunt (Acacia nilotica), in contrast to the planking, which is mainly pine imported from Scandanavia or Malaysia. The ribs are shaped by adze to fit in pairs and are erected with the support of temporary cross-beams. The planking is then added, in Suakin at least, starting with the sheer (uppermost) strake and working downwards. Zainal (1982:142)

implies that permanent nailing is driven in as the planking-up progresses. This does not seem logical and is not the practice in Suakin. All nailing of planks to ribs is done initially with small mass-produced nails. Once the entire planking-up process is complete, further ribs are inserted and holes made from the outside of the planking through to the ribs with the bow-drill. Into these large iron nails, made by blacksmiths in the boatyard, are driven and countersunk. The head of the shank is covered with cotton to ensure a watertight fit. Stringers, often driftwood planks or old planks from dhows beyond repair, are nailed onto the innermost aspect of the ribs. The decks are then laid. Cotton and putty are used for caulking. The Sudanese dhows are liberally coated with a mixture of sesame oil and sandaros, and painted as a further protective measure. Zainal (1982:143) notes that the unpainted būms of Kuwait are coated with an anti-fouling substance called shona - a mixture of lime and animal fat. Reed (1962a:3) states that a similar substance, jier or nura, is applied to fishing boats in Sudan. I have not seen this.

Finally, the engine is installed and the dhow is ready for launching. Once in the water, the mast is raised and the rudder slung from its pintles.

The method of constructing the hūri, fallūka and lansh is an abbreviated form of dhow building. Obviously, fewer planks and ribs are required and only one or two ribs, rather than a series, are erected before planking up (see Plate 2). With the fallūka and fallūka-type lansh a plumb transom is nailed to the top of the sternpost. Plate 3 shows the shape of this on a recently completed lansh. This form of stern is termed a tuck transom, the shape underneath the transom being identical to that found on the pointed sterned hūri.

Decking on all these boats is restricted to the bow and stern quarters, as on the sanbūk, and the methods of preservation are identical.

Construction of the ramas is a much simpler process, yet the main steps employed in building the larger craft are retained. A stem and stern post are erected on a central bottom plank, and a frame erected amidships. This consists of three parts: a member crossing what will be the flat bottom of the boat (floor timber) and two side timbers. The hull bottom is then planked, followed by the sides, beginning at the top and working down. Additional ribs are inserted after the planking up is completed. Caulking and preservation methods are the same as described above. Thus despite the fact that the ramas does not have the characteristic keel of the dhow world, and despite its superficial dory-like appearance (and dory-like function in some cases), which can be seen in Plate 4, the method of construction has so much in common with the procedure of building larger planked boats in Suakin that it is certainly a craft of "dhow world" origin and very probably of local design.



Plate 1: A large hūri

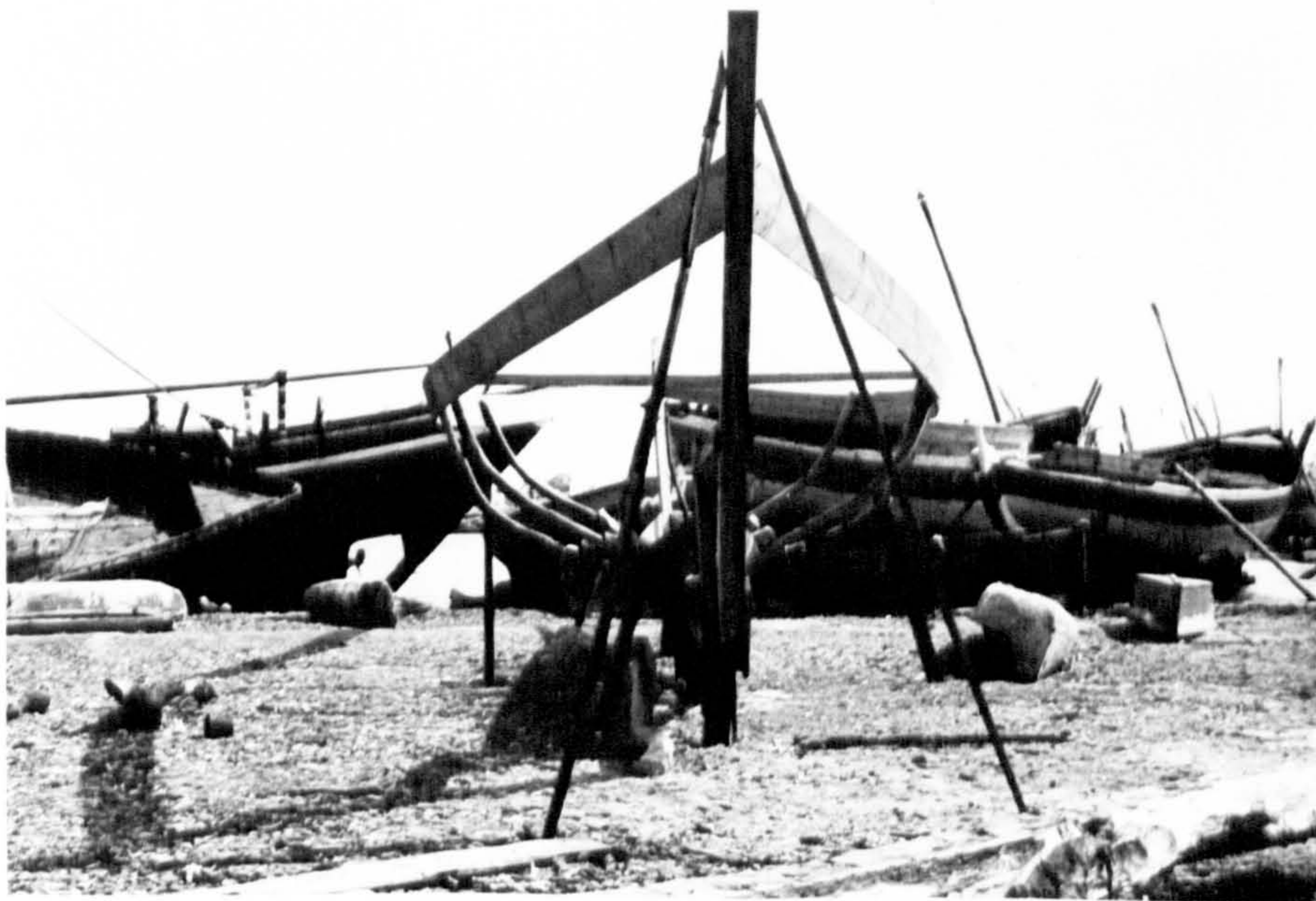


Plate 2: A lansh under construction (note the hūris luh wahid, ramases and dhows in the background).

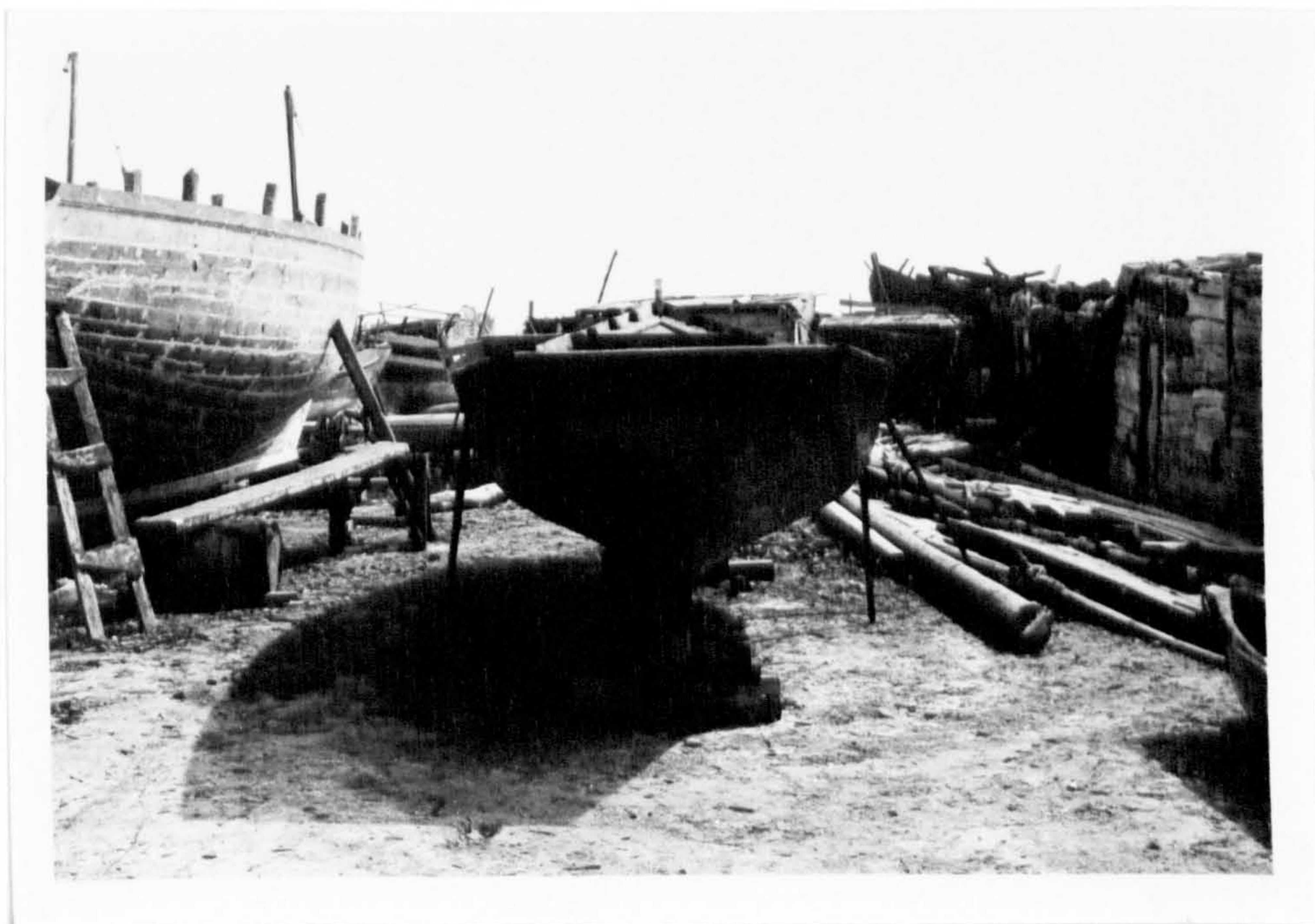


Plate 3: The transom-sterned fallūka-type lansh.



Plate 4: The ramas.

APPENDIX II

PUNCH'S VIEW OF THE
SUAKIM-BERBER RAILWAY

ON THE RIGHT LINE?

THE encouraging news that already six complete miles of the Suakim-Berber Railway had been actually laid, and the first station at Handoub reached under the protection of only 10,000 troops, all the while well on the alert against surprise, naturally has had a favourable effect on the Preference Shares, and the first week's passenger and traffic receipts are being looked forward to with much hopeful anxiety. As, however, our old friend OSMAN DIGNA is said for the last few days to have been seen hanging about an advanced signal-box with 3,000 followers, and manifesting a lively interest in the progress of the undertaking, it is hardly reasonable that the speculating public should look for a very large dividend in the earlier days of the working of the line.

It is calculated that with three or four batteries of artillery well placed on the roofs of the carriages, one Parliamentary train, that will be timed to stop at every telegraph-post, may be got through in the day, though the opinion is freely expressed that when the line finally reaches Berber, a well-organised British army of 150,000 men will be all that will be required to insure a fairly steady service between the two termini. It may be added that, owing to a certain amount of hazard being involved in any travelling at the present moment, the Company notify that Return Tickets, in the event of any difficulties at Handoub, will be available either by captured camel or flying squadron of the enemy's cavalry.

April 18, 1885, p 191.

QUITE THE RETURN TICKET.

As there has been a question raised in some quarters as to the possibility of the initial and completed portion of the Suakim-Berber Railway being opened for pleasure traffic in the approaching Whitsuntide holidays, it is satisfactory to know that the following Time-Table has already been drawn up, and will appear in its proper place in the current month's *Continental Bradshaw*:—

SUAKIM TO BERBER (VIA OSMAN-DIGNA)—INDIRECT ROUTE.

May 9, 1885, p 217.

Down.	Early Fast.	Mail. 1 2 3	Parl. 1 2 3	Ord. 1 2 3	Exp. 1 2	1 2 3	Cheap Fast. 1 2 3
Suakim	a.m. 2 0	a.m. 9 0	a.m. 12 0	p.m. 2 15	p.m. 5 40	p.m. 7 15	p.m. 8 0
Handoub	2 10	B	12 50	Ⓢ	..	F	Ⓢ
Otao	A	11 5	1 17	Arrival uncertain.	5 50	Saturdays only.	Never heard of again.
Osman-Digna..	Stop.	{ ar. 4 3 dep. "	7 26		D		Stop.
Berber		C	G		E		

- A This train, though it does not stop, is generally blown up here by friendlies' mine, the station, sleepers and refreshment department having been previously removed over-night.
- B Stops by artillery fire only.
- C Surviving passengers sent on from Osman-Digna the week after next in chains. No return tickets issued for this train.
- D First and Second class passengers, not wishing to be sent across Central Africa in gangs and sold a bargain at Mtempea, are advised to alight at the previous station and hide in the Mimosa bushes, and, if they can, catch the 9.17 up train for Suakim.
- E Does not arrive on Sundays without diplomatic intervention.
- F Besieged here on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays till relieved by treachery.
- G Accompanied by 15,000 men as far as Osman-Digna, but does not get much further.
- N.B.—Refreshment Room and Gallows at Osman-Digna Junction. Arrangements made for Schools and Pic-nics. Vide Special Handbills.

Appendix II Continued

QUITE A NEW LINE OF ITS OWN.

(*Sarkin to Berber. Official Report.*)

THE first half-yearly meeting of this now flourishing little line was held yesterday inside the Company's temporary Zareba, hastily thrown up for the purpose at Otao, and was largely attended by "friendly" and other shareholders interested in the success of the undertaking. Upon the Chairman, who was fully armed and prepared for any emergency that might arise during the reading of the report, taking his place, a few falling shots from the adjacent scrub, apparently aimed at the outgoing Directors, created some slight momentary excitement, which, however, speedily quieted down on the not altogether unexpected announcement being made that neither the Ordinary, Preference, nor Debenture Stock holders would anyone of them receive any dividend whatever.

The fact, the Chairman proceeded to point out, was not one that need discourage those who had embarked their capital in the concern, inasmuch as the line had, during the past quarter, been worked under singular disadvantages.

May 16, 1885, p 229.

The continual blowing-up of the permanent way, and shelling of the stations, signal-boxes, and rolling stock, had greatly added to the item of "Expenditure," while the receipts from the passenger traffic, he regretted to add, had, unfortunately, to be set down as nil. This was partly owing, no doubt, to the untoward circumstance that the very first excursion train of the season was captured in a cutting near Kobak, and sold with its contents then and there into slavery.

This had destroyed confidence in the regular working of the line, while the fact that the one season-ticket holder, an Arab Gentleman residing in Kordofan, was believed on several occasions to have murdered all the Guards, Stokers, and Engine-drivers, for the sake of securing the coal and stuffing of the carriage-seats, and carrying it all off on camels, purposely concealed in a secluded siding, did not lead the Directors to anticipate any very substantial increase in their profits in this direction. He was, at the same time, happy to state that the appearance of two new Mahdis in the neighbourhood of Berber, led him confidently to look for a large temporary up-traffic of homeless fugitives in the coming Autumn. On the whole, the Balance-Sheet was not all he would wish to see it; but he thought he might honestly say that there were many encouraging features about it. After a rather stormy protest from an armed minority, which was, however, allayed by the getting into position of two Gatlings, the report was unanimously adopted.

THE LATEST SUGGESTION FOR OUR TROOPS IN THE SOUDAN.—"Leave well alone!"

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