A Reconsideration of the 'Eastern Sudan'
Monsieur Michael M. Horowitz
In 1924, Melville J. Herskovits classified the culture areas of Africa. His original division of the continent into ten regions (Hottentot, Bushmen, East African Cattle, East Horn, Eastern Sudan, Congo, Western Sudan, Desert, Egypt, and North Africa) continued with slight modification—by 1945 a thin sliver of Guinea Coast had been detached from the Western Sudan, East African Cattle people had 'extended' to the Atlantic Coast, and the formerly distinct Bushmen and Hottentot regions were joined into a single 'Khoisan' region—until his final statement in 1962.

The areal boundaries remained fairly constant from edition to edition with the prominent exception of that between the Eastern and Western Sudan. In 1924, the separation between the Sudanic areas was drawn immediately west of Lake Chad. By 1945, the line shifted considerably eastward, so that the lacustrine peoples were classed in the West. Spencer and Johnson (1960) repeat the 1945 mapping (with a broken line), while Herskovits in 1962 and Gibbs in 1965 set the boundary neutrally as the Lake itself.

As Wissler suggested in the earlier classification of North America (1922), the decision where to draw the limits of an area is rarely very important. Herskovits said that the boundaries are "more or less arbitrarily drawn" and are sharply defined only where some pronounced "climatic or geographical feature is strongly present" (1924:52).

* A version of this paper was presented at the 1965 meetings of the American Anthropological Association. I am very grateful to Professors Fredrik Barth, University of Bergen, and Morton Klass, Columbia University, for their helpful criticisms; they are in no way responsible, of course, for the remaining shortcomings.
Thus the separation between the Congo and East African Cattle areas is determined by the 60" rainfall line, separating cattle and tsetse flies, and two ways of life. However, Lake Chad is a pronounced geographic feature, and the peoples of the Chaddic region, including the Kanuri of Bornu and Kanem, do not manifest that cultural unimpressiveness which, "presenting few outstanding traits of themselves" (Herskovits 1924:51), merits the appellation 'marginal'.

Herskovits last delimited the area in 1962. The Eastern Sudan, he wrote,

"reached from the Nile to Lake Chad, lying west of the northermost portion of the East African Cattle area. It comprehends the southern part of the
Sudanese Republic, the Republic of Chad and the northern part of the Central African Republic, while its extreme westerly extension touches on Northern Nigeria” (1962:72).

In 1924, he termed the area ‘marginal’:

“The language of the people living there is Arabic; the religion, the Mohammedan. The geographical character of the region is pronounced desert, and the occupation of the people, which is largely herding, is influenced greatly by this fact, as they are forced to keep on the move the greater portion of the year in order to find sufficient water and food for their animals [...]. This region is [...] the breeding ground of the camel and the horse, and the cow plays a very insignificant role in comparison” (1924:61).

The type people are the Kababish: nomadic, patrilineal, Islamic. Perhaps because of an evaluative connotation marginal was replaced by ‘residual’. Part of the difficulty in describing the Eastern Sudan, Herskovits wrote in 1962, is that it is residual: “Historically no less than geographically and ethnically.” (72).

“Its cultures do not extend to neighboring areas; yet they are too heterogeneous to permit descriptive generalization for the area as a whole, as for the Cattle Area. The characteristics of the cultures of the neighboring areas are present in attenuated form; yet none of them, even in new combinations, are sharp enough to yield distinct configurations” (1962:72-73).

A second difficulty in coming to terms with the Eastern Sudan, says Herskovits in 1962, is that

“the cultures themselves, with a few notable exceptions, have not been adequately described. Most of the available data, found in the files of Sudan Notes and Records, or the Journal de la Société des Africanistes, are fragmentary and too often report the observations of devoted and interested amateurs, rather than the findings of trained ethnographers” (1962:73).

Gibbs singles out the Eastern Sudan for exclusion from his survey of the “major sub-Saharan culture areas and ecological zones [...] because, surprisingly enough, it has not been adequately studied” (1965:viii).

**Is the ‘Eastern Sudan’ a Culture Area?**

Wissler’s notion of the culture area was a collection of self-contained tribes which by virtue of a history of contact facilitating the diffusion of culture traits and by virtue of similar techniques of environmental exploitation, resembled each other. It was particularly useful heuristically, allowing for an economy of presentation—in the museum
or classroom—in which one or several tribes could be selected to give a reasonable picture of a large area:

"... the number of social groups in the New World is so large that no one can hope to hold in mind more than a small portion of them. Hence, even if we accept the extreme view that our subject should be limited to observing the separate functioning of these social units, some mode of classifying these many groups would still be imperative..." (Wissler 1938:219).

His approach was to analyze cultures into traits, and plot their occurrence—positive and negative—over a geographic region. The Southeastern Area, for example, included the following:

"... great use of vegetable food and intensive agriculture [...] large use of wild vegetables also; dogs eaten, the only domestic animal [...]; deer, bear and bison in the west were the large game, for deer the stalking and surround methods were used; turkeys and small game were hunted and fish taken when convenient [...]; of manufactured foods—bears' oil, hickory nut oil, persimmon bread, and hominy are noteworthy; houses were generally rectangular [...]; towns well fortified with palisades; dug-out canoes; costume was moderate, chiefly of deerskins, robes of bison, etc.; [...] some buffalo-hair weaving in the west, weaving downward with the fingers [...]; work in stone of a high order, but no true sculpture; little metal work; ceremonial houses, or temples, for sun worship in which there were perpetual fires; these, and other important buildings set upon mounds; elaborate planting and harvest rituals [...]; a clan system with society composed of chiefs and four grades of subjects [...]; political systems developed, with strong confederacies; strong development of the calumet procedure; shamanism prominent" (Wissler 1938:240-241).

Among the groups which were included in the Southeastern Area were the Natchez, Muskhogean, Cherokee and Tuscarora, Yuchi, Eastern Siouan, Tunica, and Quapaw.

Herskovits' principal difficulty in coming to terms with the Eastern Sudan lay in the inadequacy of Wissler's methods to deal with heterogeneity. He was also misled, especially in the early editions of the classification, by the limited reportage for the area. Before carrying the critique further, we shall try to present the major outlines of this display. Since Herskovits defined the area as extending "from the Nile to Lake Chad", and stretching from the Fali of the Cameroons in the Southwest to the Kababish in the Northeast, we have selected for comparison the thirty-three societies coded in the Ethnographic Atlas through July 1966, which are located between 7° and 19° latitude North and 14° and 31° longitude East.

If these societies reasonably sample the area—and I shall not here discuss the methodological and epistemological difficulties inherent in comparative analysis (Naroll et al. 1964)—clearly the Eastern Sudan is principally agricultural, and pastoralism, though of course important, is secondary. While six societies, 18 percent of the sample,
## Table I. — Eastern Sudanic Societies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Latitude North</th>
<th>Longitude East</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daza</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kababish</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midobi</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanembu</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buduma</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shuwa</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kotoko</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fur</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyima</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dilling</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otoro</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koalib</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musgu</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bagirmi</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemat</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habbania</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messiria</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesakin</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moro</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tira</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyaro</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fali</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mundang</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gisiga</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuburi</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masa</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korongo</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laka</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jur</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mbum</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banda</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bongo</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indicate a 50 percent or greater dependence upon husbandry, more than four times as many indicate a similar dependence upon agriculture. The median dependence upon pastoralism is 30 percent; on agriculture it is 50 percent. These data are summarized on Table II.

All the farmers cultivate the Sudanic inventory of cereals—millet and sorghum—except the Daza who raise dates on irrigated oasis fields. Slightly more than half practice swidden horticulture, in which fields are cleared for a season or two of planting and then allowed to return to bush. About a third farm intensively, cultivating the same fields year after year, with the aid of manuring, crop rotation, and occasionally irrigation. Only the pastoral Kababish and Midobi casually.
Table II. — Dependence of Eastern Sudanic Societies on Five Types of Subsistence Activities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent Dependence</th>
<th>Gathering</th>
<th>Hunting</th>
<th>Fishing</th>
<th>Husbandry</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o to 5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 60</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 70</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


seed their fields and then devote themselves exclusively to their herds until the harvest. As in most of sub-Saharan Africa, the plough, either animal- or man-powered, is absent.

Although Herskovits originally credited cattle with “a very insignificant role” in the region, in fact they are kept wherever environmental conditions permit. At the southern limits of the Eastern Sudan sheep and goats predominate among the Banda, Fali, Laka, Mbun, Bongo, Jur, and Gisiga. Camels are the main domestic beast among the northern Daza and Kababish, where they are used for milk as well as for transport. Camels, sheep, goats, horses, and donkeys are found throughout the region, but the cow, for milk, meat, and sometimes for transport, is supreme among the other groups.

Marriage almost everywhere involves a bride price, prestation from the groom and his kinsmen to the bride’s kin. But the choice of a marital partner opposes five societies, mostly Baggara, who permit the Arabic practice of marrying any cousin, two societies which permit only cross-cousin marriage, and fourteen which prohibit marriage among first cousins altogether. Information on kin terminology is scanty. A ‘descriptive’ cousin terminology is reported for seven groups, in which cousins are distinguished from each other and from siblings; three groups use Hawaiian terms, lumping cousins and siblings, and one has an Omaha terminology, equating persons who are agnatically linked regardless of generation.

Great variation is seen in community organization and settlement pattern, as shown in Tables III and IV.

The linguistic complexity of the region is well-known. Three of the four massive groupings of languages in Africa—Congo-Kordo-
Table III. — Community Organization among Eastern Sudanic Societies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Agamous, without localized clans or marked tendency to endogamy or exogamy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Clan-communities, single localized exogamous kin group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Exogamous community, without specific clan structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Segmented community, divided into several localized kin groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IV. — Settlement Pattern among Eastern Sudanic Societies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nomadic band.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Separated hamlets joined in a permanent single community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Neighborhoods of dispersed family homesteads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Seminomadic community, with permanent settlement for part of year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Compact, relatively permanent nucleated villages.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The cultures of the Eastern Sudan are, as Herskovits said, too heterogeneous, despite certain commonalities—i.e., little hunting, no matrilineality—, to be grouped into an area in Wissler's terms. If we were creating a display of Eastern Sudanic ethnography it would be difficult to select some group to stand as the area type. Herskovits' 1924 choice of the Kababish represents only one among several existing patterns.

The addition of the notion of 'cultural focus', which Herskovits used to bring the area approach into fuller harmony with cultural relativism, is not useful in the Eastern Sudan. Herskovits suggested that instead of a universal, cross-culturally applicable set of criteria, or a trait list, an area might be delimited by those aspects of culture perseverated by the people who live in it. He wrote:

"It is not always necessary to analyze trait-distributions and to find the points of greatest coincidence of 'typical' traits, in establishing and characterizing areas. It sometimes occurs that the life of the tribes inhabiting a given region is so strikingly oriented that the incidence of this focusing of interest is sufficient by itself to mark off an area. The area where cultures of this kind..."
Table V. **Classification of Eastern Sudanic Languages**

I. — Congo-Kordofanian

1. Niger-Congo
   — Adamawa-Eastern:
     Mundang, Fali, Mbum, Masa, Banda.

2. Kordofanian
   — Koalib:
     Koalib, Moro, Nyaro, Tira, Otoro.
   — Tumtum:
     Korongo.

II. — Nilo-Saharan

1. Saharan
   Kanembu, Daza.

2. Fur
   Fur.

3. Chari-Nile
   — Eastern Sudanic:
     Midobi, Dilling, Nyima, Jur.
   — Central Sudanic:
     Bagirmi, Laka, Sara, Bongo.

III. — Afro-Asiatic

1. Semitic (Arabic)
   Kababish, Habbania, Shuwa, Messiria, Hemat.

2. Chad
   Buduma, Gisiga, Kotoko, Tuburi, Musgu.

exist can be described in terms of this principal orientation, and mapped accordingly. In such cases, it is not the concurrence of traits that distinguishes the culture of the area; it is the preponderant role of a complex that for the people who live in that area, gives point and reason to their ways of life, and is a dominating, integrating force in their existence” (1948:195).

The paradigm case of focus is East Africa, where activities and sentiments relating to cattle appear to ethnographers as the most prominent features of culture, although the caloric return from agriculture may equal or exceed that from cattle, some people in the area keep few if any cattle, and there are people in other regions for whom cattle are economically more significant, and who occasionally even sing to and about them. While Herskovits showed that East Africa formed an area in Wissler’s trait-listing terms (Herskovits 1926), he could not find any single, integrating cross-cultural focus for the Eastern Sudan. Thus neither Wissler’s nor Herskovits’ terms is the Eastern Sudan a culture area.

The classic culture area approach was peculiarly appropriate to native America, for it is predicated upon the existence of a plurality of tribes which parallel each other in cultural display, which are historically connected, though essentially independent. Each Plains Indian society was supposed to form a self-contained whole, providing for its own economic, social, political, and religious life.

This tribal self-sufficiency is not characteristic of most of Africa, Southwest Asia, and many other parts of the world. For in these areas the emphasis is upon societal interdependence. The regions do not contain independent groups, but rather series of peoples whose economies interlock, and who are in intimate political association, typically stratified. There is an ethnic and ecologic mosaic, in which the division of labor, as Coon notes for the Middle East (Coon 1958), is by peoples rather than by persons.

In the Middle East, in North Africa, and in the Western Sudan, economic and political interrelationships tie together peoples of diverse racial, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. We have learned that the Western Sudan forms a region composed of at least as heterogeneous a collection of peoples as those on the other side of Lake Chad. Berber-speaking Tuareg herding camels, Fulani herdsmen, Hausa farmers and townsmen, Kanuri, Mossi, Songhai, Bouzou, participate in complex ecosystems, tied together by intimate exchange relationships, political systems, and Islam. The key to the region, which explains how large-scale political organization was able to exist in an area of very unimpressive agricultural surplus, was trade, in particular long distance trade connecting sub-Sudanic areas with North Africa and the Circum-Mediterranean. It was the location of the trade routes, and the camel-given ability to control them, which
accounted for the rise of the ‘Sudanic’ State, and it was the decline of trade, through warfare and through the development of alternate means of access to West Africa by sea, which accounted for their demise. It is possible that the extent of disruption of trans-Saharan trade, following the decline of Songhai, has been exaggerated: it does appear at least to have flourished in the middle 19th century (Newbury 1966).

What is the ‘Eastern Sudan’?

Similar conditions obtained for the Eastern Sudan until quite recent times. Here was a region whose ecologic complexity made possible economic specializations and interrelationships among ethnically different peoples and required political systems beyond the tribe to regulate them. Such political regulation both facilitated long distance trade, by insuring an area of order and tranquillity, and permitted multiple exploitation of the same land by nomads and farmers, by scheduling their access, and by providing means for the resolution of their disputes.

Viewing the region in these terms allows us to see it as a culture area, as an arena within which there was a high degree of cultural diffusion, despite the obvious heterogeneity of its populations. We are not concerned here with redrawing the boundaries, particularly the northern and southern ones: we want to focus attention on the broad central belt of the region, the character of which was quite ignored by Herskovits.

Herskovits viewed the Eastern and Western Sudans as having different political natures, and denied the existence of large-scale political organization in the East. He wrote: “The marked political fragmentation of the area is an expression of its residual quality. Here we find no kingdoms such as mark Eastern Africa, or the Congo, or the Western Sudan” (1962:177). He did not appreciate the tremendous political and economic interdependence of ethnically distinct peoples in the region, and the diffusion of peoples, ideas, and institutions on a latitudinal axis, which implies that the entire Sudan, at least in its central belt, may be considered as a whole.

1. El Tounsy appreciated the unity of the Sudan in the early 19th century: “Le Dâr-el-Four ou Darfour est la troisième contrée du Soudan en allant de l’est à l’ouest. La première est le Sennâr; la seconde, le Kordofâl (Cordofan); en suivant cette direction, la quatrième est le Ouadadây ou Ouadây; la cinquième est le Bâguirmeh; la sixième, le Barnau; la septième, l’Adiguiz; la huitième, l’Afnau; la neuvième, le Dâr-Touboukto; la dixième, le Dâr-Mella, où réside le roi des Foullan ou Fellâta” (1845:126).

Herskovits may have been troubled by the separation of East from West, reflecting this uncertainty in shiftings of the boundary from mapping to mapping.
Many historians credit Meroe with the introduction of the major outlines of African polity. Bohannan, for example, recently noted:

"Meroitic civilization went into decline in the 3rd century A.D. However, many cultures which showed major influence by it flourished for centuries after Meroe itself had fallen into ruins. By 1100 A.D., the iron-based cultures had crossed the forest and had provided the beginnings on which the Ashanti, Dahomean, and Yoruba states were to be based centuries later. It also provided the base for the states of Kongo and Bushong. All of these states developed with the spread of ironworking, as well as many other items of the cultures of Egypt, Meroe, the Sudanic empires, and Monomotapa" (1964:89).

And he further writes:

"The metallurgical revolution which spread from Meroe by east-west trade routes and perhaps by movements of whole peoples as well, led to the organization of the great state of Ghana..." (1964:92).

This is not the place to review the rise of developed polity in the Western Sudan; but it is clear that more than a thousand years ago Ghanaian entrepreneurs were exchanging salt and gold, controlling farming peoples of diverse ethnicity. Kanem, in present day Chad, had also emerged. Between them, during the next millennium, began the kingdoms of Mali, Songhai, Bornu, and finally the Fulani emirates of Hausaland. The probable extent of these (other than the Fulani) and their relationship to Meroe-Cush is mapped in Bohannan's recent book (1964:90). The map shows a large empty zone, from Kanem to the Nile; this is the area of the Eastern Sudan, and of the kingdoms of Fung, Tegali, Darfur, Wadai, and Bagirmi.

As far as the evidence of archeology (Arkell 1951, 1961) and the reports of the 18th (i.e., Bruce in Fung, 1768-1773; Browne in Darfur, 1793-1796) and 19th (i.e., El Tounsy in Darfur and Wadai, 1803-1811; Barth in Bornu and Bagirmi, 1840-1855; Nachtigal in Bornu, Bagirmi, and Darfur, 1870's) century travelers take us, these kingdoms emerged to control the trade routes which crossed the Sahara from north to south and the Sudan from east to west. Their capitals sat on the principal route from Sennar on the Blue Nile, through Kordofan, El-Fasher, Abeche, to Lake Chad, and beyond. Arkell writes,

"it is to Meroitic influence if not to Meroitic royal blood that is due the rise of other divine kingdoms along the great east-west road across Africa between the desert and the forest, for instance as that of the Jukun in northern Nigeria" (1961:176-177).

Trade between the Eastern Sudan and Egypt is at least as old as

1. Lewis (1966:406) properly objects to the implication that Jukun obtained its political forms directly from Meroe when in fact it was in close contact with other, earlier developed Sudanic States.
the 5th dynasty of the Old Kingdom. The principal Sudanese exports were gold, ebony, gum, ivory, feathers, animals, perfumes, and slaves (Arkell 1961:107). These continued to dominate the export trade through the early 19th century in Darfur and Wadai (El Tounsy 1851:332-333). The caravans were subject to attack, and the Egyptians built a series of forts along the Nile to defend the traders. Following their 7th century conquests of Egypt, the Arabs sent pacifying expeditions into Nubia, not for conquest or conversion, but to control raiding. Fadl Hasan refers to the treaty of 652, following the indefinite cessation of war between the Muslims, led by ‘Abdullāh b. Sa’d b. Abī Sarh, and the Nubians, as “unique […] in the annals of Islam”.

“In dealing with international relations Muslim jurists normally divide the world into two camps: dar al-Islam or the abode of Islam, which would ultimately dominate the second camp, dar al-harb or the abode of war. But Nubia had the unique position of dar al-mu'akhada or aman, that is, the abode of pact or guarantee. The treaty was a non-aggression pact in which neither side would defend the other against a third party. It conferred on the subjects of each side the right to travel and trade unhindered in the other’s domains, but not to take up permanent residence” (Fadl Hasan 1966:146-147).

The Nubians agreed to provide 360 slaves annually, and received grains, horses, and cloth (Fadl Hasan 1966:146-147; also Arkell 1961:188).

Supra-tribal political organization in the Sudan regulates contacts between ethnically and ecologically distinct groups, between pastoral nomadic Arabs, Zaghawa, and Beja, and sedentary horticultural Fur, Mesalit, etc., and controls export and import marketing.

“In each settled region, the hierarchy is controlled from an urban center located on one of the principal trade routes. The junction of the Niles, now the site of Khartoum, the capital, has always been important. Other centers include Al-Fasher in Darfur, Al-Obeid and Teqali in northern Kordofan, Sennar in Darfur, and Dongola in Nubia… They were sometimes independent and sometimes divisions of larger states which also included nomadic groups” (Cookson et al. 1964:106).

As in the West, the aristocracies became vulnerable as the kingdoms extended beyond their abilities to claim or coerce the loyalties of diverse peoples. Cookson et al. assert that the ruling Fur lost power to the Daju in the 13th century, who ruled “until they lost control of the trade routes to Tungur immigrants” a hundred or so years later (1964:15-16). Darfur may have been Christian in origin, and was not converted to Islam until the Tungur conquest, long after the kingdom had been politically established. Arkell suggests that the direction of Islamic movement was eastward from Bornu (1961:
194), paralleling Greenberg's assertion of the Islamization of the Hausa westward from Bornu (1960:205-212). There is a period of Kanuri ascendance over northern Darfur at least, probably during the 13th century (Arkell 1961:201).

"All the traces of Bornu institutions found in Darfur—the name of the palace (el fasher) and its pair of doors, the great front door and the small back door for women, the title of princess (meiram), and the spheres and titles of the four original viceroyes (dima, uma, etc.)—indicate that Darfur must have been part of the empire of Bornu at some time, and there is no period when it is more likely to have been a province of that empire than the latter half of the 16th century. As often happened with mushroom empires in medieval Africa, the empire of Idris Aloma broke up on his death in 1603; and that is the most probable date for the foundation of the historic Keira dynasty in Darfur" (Arkell 1961:212-213).

I shall here very briefly review some of the documentation about political organization in the Eastern Sudan, relying where possible on contemporary sources.

In the early 19th century, the Sultan of Darfur at El-Fasher continued to impose authority over the governors of a number of States and provinces, such as Berti, Midob, Zagha wa in the North to Abadyma in the South, and attempted to extract tribute from often reluctant tribes of Arab pastoralists, such as the Rezeygat (El Tounsy 1845:128-130). El Tounsy estimates the tribute paying territory to have a distance equivalent to fifty days' journey from north to south and about eighteen days from the eastern desert which separates Darfur from Kordofan to the western savannah separating it from Wadai. Certain taxes, in grains and cattle, belonged exclusively to the Sultan. Other taxes went for the support of lesser administrators. Counted among the governing bureaucracy were the following:

1. **Orondolon** (‘the Sultan’s head’): a military leader, entoured with some of the insignia of the Sultan himself. His office carried as appanage several large estates;

2. **Kamneh** (‘the Sultan’s neck’): also a military leader, having almost as much freedom of action as the Sultan. He was supported by the revenues from several districts, and at the Sultan’s death, the kamneh was supposed to be ritually murdered;

3. **Abroman** (‘the Sultan’s backbone’): commanded the rear guard of the army;

4. **Abadyma** (‘the Sultan’s right arm’): commanded the right flank of the army. He was the senior administrator of twelve provinces, each one having its own governor, and he received for his own support revenues from the vast district of Termourkeh;
5. Ab-cheyk (‘the Sultan’s behind’): after the Sultan, the highest official in Darfur. He had his own court, and the authority to condemn to death without right of appeal. He owned lands scattered throughout the State, and administered a large province.

Beneath these dignitaries were many lesser officials—tax collectors, customs agents, district chiefs, head eunuch, head slave, buffoons, etc. (El Tounsy 1845: passim, esp. 172-180).

From the writings of El Tounsy in the early 19th century and of Nachtigal in the late 19th century, we can reconstruct something of the political organization of Wadai. The sultanate was divided into four sections, administered by a governor (kemakil) and lieutenant-governors (aqid) appointed by the Sultan (Lebeuf 1959:83-84). Each aqid enforced his rule over the nomadic Arabic and other groups with an army of slaves (Thomas 1959:146). Assuming his power to be substantial, the aqid collected tribute for the Sultan, removing and installing local chiefs at will. Tribute to the Sultan “was paid in camels, cattle and sheep, sometimes in hides, ostrich eggs, clarified butter and salt [. . . ], ivory, rhinoceros horns, crocodile skins, and honey . . .” (Thomas 1959: 146). Local chiefs were permitted access to land in exchange for promises of tribute and military support to the Sultan. The aqid themselves were not members of the nomadic and sedentary groups they administered: “to ensure loyalty the appointee was usually from one of the indigenous tribes of central Wadai, a eunuch and often slaveborn” (Thomas 1959:146). Where the power of the aqid was compromised, due to inadequate forces or great distance from the central administration,—first in Ouara, later in Abeche,—the local chiefs achieved considerable more independence of action. Once a year the governors returned to the capital to accompany the tribute going to the Sultan and report on the affairs of the region (Lebeuf 1959:84). The governors constituted a judicial tribunal whose decisions, El Tounsy writes, were enforced by the Sultan even when he believed them to be in error, “out of respect for the dignity of the judicial function” (1851:363). The faulting judges, however, were discharged.

The Sultan himself was a sacred as well as secular ruler, approached only with rigid ceremonial punctilio, reminiscent of Ibn Battuta’s account of the court of the Sultan of Mali in 1352-1353 (Ibn Battuta 1929:326-329). “Son pouvoir n’était effectif qu’après une intronisation marquée par un rituel complexe qui nous est très mal connu” (Lebeuf 1959:84).

“A law of respect for the dignity of the prince is that no one enters dressed, or in shoes or turban, to the Sultan in the interior of the palace. Whoever wants to go in to the Sultan must leave his shoes at the first door and enter
barefoot. At the second door, if he has a turban, he must take it off. At the third, he must pull his garment from his right shoulder and transfer it to his left shoulder. At the fourth, if he has a tarboosh he takes it off. At the fifth door, he girds his loins. At the sixth door, he throws his garment off his left shoulder and lets it hang down from his belt. At the seventh, he seizes the hanging portion of his clothing and turns it around onto his hips. Thus naked except from the navel to the knees, he is admitted to talk with the Sultan. The prime minister, like the most humble person, must follow this law” (El Tounsy 1851:374).

If Nachtigal’s count can be trusted, the Sultan of Wadai had under arms about 60,000 troops, of which perhaps 10 percent were mounted (Lebeuf 1959:86, following Nachtigal 1903:82-83). Many were slaves; others were drafted from tribute villages. The armies were used not only in external campaigns against Darfur to the east and Bagirmi to the west (Thomas 1959:147), but also to regulate internal order and to enforce the rule of the Sultan and his administrators on the other peoples of the kingdom.1

The organization of Bagirmi is less well known, for its decline was already well-advanced before the arrival of Barth and Nachtigal. Even so, Barth estimates an army of 10,000 infantry and 3,000 cavalry at the time of his visit (Lebeuf 1959:72, following Barth 1861, III:125).

A well-armed mobile military force, particularly a cavalry, enabled the rulers of Sudanic States to protect caravans from attack within the territory, and so facilitated trade. Rotberg (1965:101-102) writes of Idris, the Sultan of Bornu during the late 16th century: “By imposing a new unity [i.e., Islam], he allowed the people of Bornu generally to indulge in peaceful production and trade. He eliminated brigandage and made the roads safe for travelers.” Rulers provided travelers with letters of safe passage, announcing to all the protection of the Sultan. Islam offered an organizational advantage in Arabic, for the document could be written specific to the case. El Tounsy (1851:340) mentions the importation of Moslem legal texts and writing paper into Darfur. The decline of central authority forced the voyager to depend less on the king’s assurance of protection, and made travel riskier. There is a poignant passage in Bruce’s writings reporting his request in 1772 for protection from the Sultan of Sennar, to travel to Egypt from Fung. The ruler replies: “There was a time when he could have done all this, and more, but those times were changed. Sennar was in ruin, and was not like it once was” (Bruce

1. The French newspaper Le Monde, 26 August 1966, notes that “Ouaddai, with an almost exclusively Muslim population, is a difficult province to administer by reason of its distance from Chad’s capital, Fort Lamy, and the strength of its authority still exercised there by local Sultans” (summarized in African Research Bulletin, Political, Social and Cultural Series, 1-31 August 1966:589).
Some forty years later, however, the “Grand Sultan of the Arabic and non-Arabic peoples” in Darfur was able to demand protection and hospitality for his guest Mohammed Ibn Omar El Tounsy: “I order all kings whom he visits, wrote the Sultan, to treat him with respect and deference” (El Tounsy 1845:140).

**Summary and Conclusions**

Herskovits' classifications of African culture areas included an 'Eastern Sudan', which differed from the other areas because of its 'marginality', 'residual character', 'heterogeneity', 'inadequate description', and 'marked political fragmentation'.

The culture area methodology as developed by Wissler and amended by Herskovits, because of its requirement that an area contain societies which largely recapitulate each other in culture content, does not lead to the delineation of an 'Eastern Sudan'. The nature of the area becomes clearer when the focus is shifted from the single society or tribe, to the complex multi-tribal level, in which pastoralists, farmers, and townspeople, because of historicocological factors, are linked in an intricate network of economic and political interdependence. Herskovits did not recognize this level of organization, and denied therefore the very existence of large-scale political organization in the area.

Seeing the Eastern Sudan in these terms throws into relief its connections with other areas, particularly with the region Herskovits called the 'Western Sudan'. While there are differences between them, particularly in the greater prominence of Arabs in the East, the whole was one of developed political States—'Sudanic empires'—from Fung in the East, to Darfur, Wadai, Bornu-Kanem, Songhai, Mali, and Ghana (to list the best known), which were based upon the regulation of external trade rather than upon the exploitation of indigenous agricultural surpluses. Although most of these States became Moslim, and profited from the economic and political possibilities presented by Islam, Islam was not a necessary condition to their emergence (Lewis 1966:406); some may have had a Christian past and others, like Mossi, remained pagan.
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