

Nuba Mountain Language Studies

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RÜDIGER KÖPPE VERLAG · KÖLN

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

ISBN 978-3-89645-427-0

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RÜDIGER KÖPPE VERLAG

P.O. Box 45 06 43

50881 Cologne

Germany

www.koeppe.de

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Cover: Houses on terraced hill side (Photograph by Sarah Gould)

Production: Druckerei Hubert & Co, Göttingen / Germany

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The Nuba Mountain languages: an introduction

Thilo C. Schadeberg and Roger M. Blench

1. The Nuba Mountain language conference

This book is the outcome of the first international conference on the Nuba Mountain languages, held in Leiden, September 2-4, 2011. The conference was organized by Heleen Smits and Jade Comfort, both active linguists with recent experience of linguistic field work in the Nuba Mountains. The conference brought together ca. 45 researchers from the Sudan, Europe and the United States.¹



As far as we are aware, this was the first time that a whole linguistic conference has been dedicated to the languages of the Nuba Mountains. Although the languages of the area are linguistically very diverse, the interactions of the participants were intense and enthusiastic. Originally no proceedings were envisaged, but the suggestion was made after the

¹ The conference was sponsored by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), the Leiden University Centre of Linguistics (LUCL) and the Leiden University Fund (LUF). We are grateful for their financial and logistic support without which the conference could not have been held.

conference and a cautious inquiry among the participants found such a positive response that we decided to put together a volume of articles on the Nuba Mountain languages.² Most articles in this book are revised versions of papers read at the NML Conference. Some contributors offered a different paper, while additional papers known to be floating around were recruited by the editors. Authors were given four months to submit their contribution, editing and correspondence with the authors was completed within another nine months. The result is a volume with 32 original contributions. They constitute an important leap forward in the linguistic exploration of this complex area.

The articles in this book deal with languages from each of the ten indigenous language groups of the Nuba Mountains. They also cover a wide range of topics, with a focus on descriptive linguistics. However, it is often impossible to put a particular contribution into one of the traditional linguistic boxes syntax – morphology – phonology. This is to be expected in pioneer studies of previously poorly researched languages.

2. The Nuba Mountains as an area

The Nuba Mountains are seen as a well circumscribed geographical and cultural area by its inhabitants and outsiders alike. They are almost entirely located in the centre of the State of South Kordofan (*wilāyat janūb kordufān*) within the Republic of the Sudan. The area stretches 325 km from west to east and 275 km from north to south. The outer limits are:

in the north:	Jebel Dair (North Kordofan)	12°29'N (1397 m)
in the east	Jebel Fungor	31°34'E
in the south:	Jebel Kurondi	10°00'N
in the west:	Jebel Bosha	28°34'E

We cite from Stevenson's brief description of the physical geography of the Nuba Mountains, itself a paraphrase of the opening paragraph of Nadel's book on the Nuba people (Nadel 1947: 1):

“The Nuba Mountains region ... lies in the savannah summer-rain belt, which means that it has sufficient rainfall for crop-raising (millet, cotton) and cattle-grazing, and (on the whole) well-watered valleys and hillsides. It is studded with rugged granite hills which rise sharply

² Financial support for publishing this volume by the Kay Williamson Education Fund is gratefully acknowledged.

from a wide clay plain. These are scattered all over the area like the islands in an archipelago and vary considerably in size and extent, from small isolated outcrops of boulders to quite large ranges or massifs” (Stevenson 1962-64, 43: 118).

The plains are roughly 500 to 600 m above sea level, and the highest mountain, Jebel Temading on the Rashad range in the north-east, reaches a height of 1460 m.

Some 1.7 million people live in this area today, and we may assume that more than one million of them are more or less active speakers of one of the Nuba Mountain languages.³ This is twice as much as when the Sudan gained independence in 1956.⁴

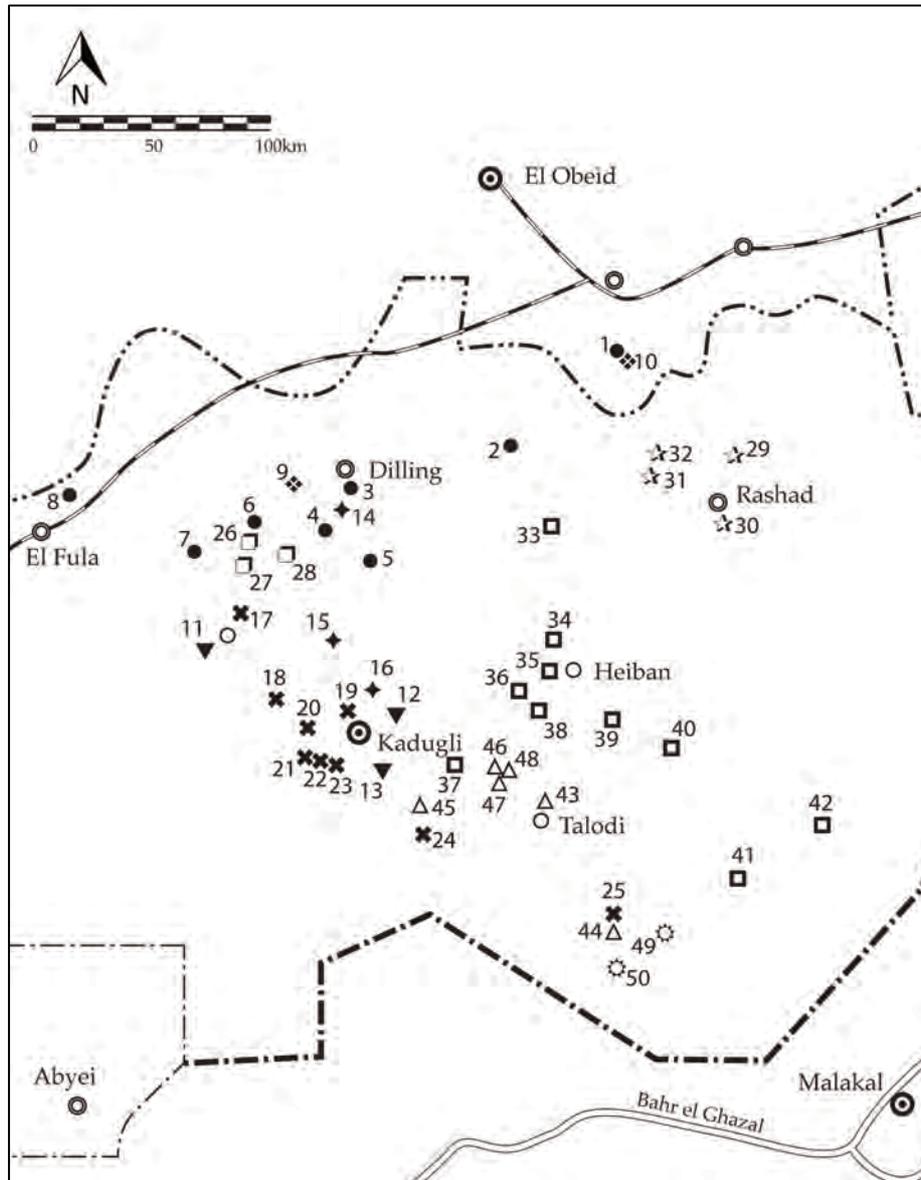
The term “Nuba Mountain languages” refers to the forty-plus languages⁵ natively spoken in this area, to the exclusion of regional varieties of Arabic. These languages can uncontroversially be assigned to ten linguistic (genetic) groups (language numbers according to the *Ethnologue*, Lewis et al. 2013):

- Heiban (10 languages)
- Talodi (8 languages)
- Lafofa (1 language)
- Katla (2 languages)
- Rashad (2 languages)
- Nyimang (2 languages)
- Temein (2 languages)
- Daju (2 languages)
- Nubian (7 languages)
- Kadu (6 languages)

³ The census of 2010 resulted in a population figure of 2.5 million for the South Kordofan Province. The OCHA Map 972 gives population figures from this census for each of the 19 Localities (*maḥalliyāt*) including Abyei Locality but excluding the contested Abyei Area). If we subtract the figures for the Localities outside the geographic area of the Nuba Mountains, i.e., El Salam, Babanusa and Abyei in the west, Al Qoz in the north, and El Abassiya and Abu Jubaiyah in the east, the population of the Nuba Mountains can be set at 1.7 million. This figure includes non-Nuba populations such as the Baggara Arabs, immigrant families in various agricultural schemes and urban communities in the provincial capital, Kadugli, and other towns.

⁴ “The Nuba peoples number upwards of 500,000 ... 572,935 according to the Sudan Census of 1955/56.” (Stevenson 1962-1964, 43: 118)

⁵ No exact number of languages can be given. This is not just due to insufficient knowledge but to the blurry border between “language” and “dialect”.



Map. The Nuba Mountain languages, South Kordofan

Legend

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| ● NUBIAN | □ KATLA |
| 1 Dair | 26 Katla |
| 2 Kadaru | 27 Tima |
| 3 Dilling | 28 Julud |
| 4 Ghulfan (Uncunwee) | |
| 5 Karko | ☆ RASHAD |
| 6 Wali | 29 Tegali |
| 7 Tabag | 30 Tagom |
| 8 El Hugeirat | 31 Tagoi |
| | 32 Turjok |
| ❖ NYIMANG | □ HEIBAN |
| 9 Nyimang (Ama) | 33 Koalib |
| 10 Afitti | 34 Laro |
| | 35 Ebang |
| ▼ DAJU | 36 Shwai |
| 11 Lagawa | 37 Moro |
| 12 Laggori | 38 Otoro |
| 13 Shatt | 39 Tira |
| | 40 Lukha |
| ◆ TEMEIN | 41 Werni |
| 14 Temein | 42 Kau, Nyaro, Fungor |
| 15 Keiga Jirru | |
| 16 Tese | |
| | △ TALODI |
| ✕ KADU | 43 Talodi |
| 17 Tulishi | 44 Eliri |
| 18 Keiga | 45 Masakin, Dagig |
| 19 Kadugli | 46 Acheron |
| 20 Miri | 47 Tocho |
| 21 Kanga | 48 Lumun |
| 22 Tumma | |
| 23 Katcha | ⚙ LAFOFA |
| 24 Krongo | 49 Tekeim |
| 25 Tumtum | 50 Al Amira |

Eight of the ten groups are confined to the Nuba Mountains, only Nubian and Daju have members outside the area. Almost all proposals to assign some of these groups to higher levels of classification (Kordofanian, Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan) have been challenged at some time or other (see section 5 below).

Surprisingly perhaps, it appears that the Nuba Mountains cannot usefully be characterized as an area of linguistic convergence. In his keynote lecture at the Nuba Mountains Conference, Gerrit Dimmendaal called the Nuba Mountains a linguistic accretion zone, maintaining a high genetic and typological diversity. He linked this to the relative economic self-sufficiency of the numerous separate populations and to their endogamous marriage patterns. Of course, this did not totally preclude inter-group contacts, as evidenced by such widespread words (data from Stevenson) as exist, e.g., for ‘pig’ (Nyimang *kudur*, Krongo *kuḍuru*, Talodi *p-uḍuru*, Temein *kuḍur* — origin unknown) and ‘horse’ (Katcha *moṭo*, Otoro *li-mörṭa*, Tagoi *murda*, Masakin *moṭu*, Nyimang *mordu*, Katla *murta* — loan from Nubian, cf. Rilly 2010: 431f.: Proto-Nubian **mur-ti*, itself a loan from Meroitic *mre-ke*).

During the last three centuries, the Nuba Mountains gradually came under the influence of Kordofan to the extent that they were regarded Kordofan’s southern extension. However, the name Kordofan primarily applies to the area of the present-day State of North Kordofan (*šamāl kurdufān*), with El Obeid as its capital. The historical Kordofan was situated between the sultanate Darfur in the west and the Funj sultanate of Sennar in the east to which it was a tributary.

In 1820-1821, an army sent by the Ottoman ruler over Egypt, the Khedive Muhammad Ali, conquered northern Sudan including Kordofan. Since then, we may distinguish the following periods, which are mirrored in the scientific exploration of the Nuba Mountains and its languages.

1821-1881	Turkiya (the period of Ottoman control)
1881-1899	Mahdiya (the period of the Mahdist regime)
1899-1956	Anglo-Egyptian Condominium
1956	Sudan gains independence
1955-1972	First Civil War
1983-2005	Second Civil War
2011	South Sudan secedes
2011-	renewed hostilities in South Kordofan

3. Early research history (before 1900)⁶

Prior to the Ottoman conquest in 1821, little was known to the outside world about the Nuba Mountains. The earliest references to recognizable Nuba ethnonyms and place names occur in travelogues by Bruce of Kinnaird (1790, vol. 4: 479f.⁷), Browne (1799: 460-462) and Burckhardt (1819: 438). Such books became more numerous as the frequency of European travellers increased during the following “Turkiya” decades — and stopped again in the Mahdiya period. They typically contain descriptions of the physical geography, flora and fauna, and also of the native peoples. Most travellers did not reach the Nuba Mountains but reported what they heard about the region in El Obeid or Khartoum. Three topics recur: slavery, gold from Sheibun⁸, and the unconquerable kingdom of Tegale⁹. We cite a typical extract from this kind of literature written by the German eccentric Prince Pückler-Muskau who relates an interview held in Khartoum with “General Mustapha Bey, the military governor of the town and commander of the Viceroy’s regular troops in Soudan” (1845, vol 2: 296ff.):

[p. 303] He told us a great deal about Kordofan and the gold-mines of Sheibon (not Shabun, as it is called in the maps), where the Austrian mineralogists are now engaged in exploring the gold-mines under the able direction of M. Russegger, but are expected to return to this place on the approach of the rainy season. They have an escort of 400 Infantry and 200 Cavalry — a large convoy for a party of scientific explorers; but this was considered indispensable for their protection, as the brave and warlike blacks are rather jealous of their gold, and pursue the washings of the sand, though very imperfectly, yet with great diligence, and carry on a considerable trade in this ore with Kordofan, Sennaar, and even Dongola.

Mustapha Bey has lately been at war with them, burnt Sheibon, and subdued some of the mountain districts, but it would seem could not maintain his position there. The chief object of the expedition [p. 304] was the capture of slaves. [...]

⁶ Our account of the research history makes intensive use of Dabitz (1985), a book-length study of the subject with a chronological bibliography written in German.

⁷ The phrase “Dyre and Tegla” occurs at least six times in vol. 4 (pp. 419, 461, 479, 480, 484, 523) and on the map following p. 230 in vol. 5.

⁸ See Ille (2011) for an attempt to unravel the mysteries surrounding the gold of Sheibun.

⁹ See Ewald (1990) for a historian’s account of the Tegale kingdom.

He knew nothing of any volcanoes or hot springs, nor of grottoes with Egyptian hieroglyphics, of which Dr. Rüppel [sic!] speaks; but he gave me a long account of the remarkable territory of Tagaleh, to the south-east of Kordofan, which is rich, and not wholly uncivilised. Though lying directly between Kordofan and Sennaar, yet its naturally strong position, seconded by an excellent system of military organisation, has hitherto enabled its brave population to withstand all the attacks of their enemies. [...]

[p. 305] The government is thoroughly despotic. The present sultan is a young man of distinguished talents, and able to raise an army of 50,000 men. Gold is found in this district, and the gold washing at Sheibon, which adjoins it, is principally managed by Negroes in the service of the ruler of Tagaleh. They carry on some trade with the foreign Djellabs, and are not destitute of a certain degree of luxury, which at the court of the sultan is displayed in a very elegant costume.

All the land is the property of the sovereign, who also possesses the same right over every one of his subjects. Yet it is said that the people are governed with justice and mildness. [...]

[p. 306] The Nuba negroes, a handsome and vigorous race, who have remarkably pleasing countenances, live more to the south, on the Djebel Kadro. [...] They make use of poisoned lances, pointed with iron and wood, sometimes paint part of their body of a red colour, and wear sandals of elephant's skin, of which their shields also are made. They have some manufactures, and make elaborate and elegant articles of leather and rushes. They are brave and warlike, but at the same time of a savage character.

Rüppell (1829) is the first published account containing vocabularies of Nuba Mountain languages ("Schabun", "Takele", "Koldagi", pp. 370-373). Short wordlists also appear in Holroyd (1839: "Jebel Nubah", p. 191), Russegger (1844: "Kulfan", pp. 355-360), Munzinger (1864a: "Tegelé", "Nuba", pp. 11-12; 1864b: "Nuba", pp. 543-550) and Lepsius (1880: "Kargo", p. lxxvii-lxxviii). Lepsius compared the available data and had no great difficulty in recognizing that some — but not all — "Nuba" languages were closely related to Nile Nubian (1880: lxxiv-lxxviii). Remarkably, the richest source during this period on any Nuba people and its language was collected in Munich by the brothers Karl and Lorenz Tutschke(c)k. It was Karl who collected the information from Djalo Djondan Arè, a young man born in Tumale on the Tegali range, enslaved and brought to Egypt, where he and three other Africans were sold to the visiting young Duke Maximilian and

taken to Munich. The four of them were then sent to live in the house of Karl Tutsche(c)k, a former tutor of the princes at the court, who collected a wealth of geographical, anthropological and linguistic data (Tutschek 1841). After Karl's death more of the data was published by his brother Lorenz (Tutschek 1847-1853¹⁰; Tutschek 1848). For the rest of the nineteenth century, there are numerous references to the Nuba Mountains, the beginnings of natural history and much improved cartography of the region, but little in the way of language data or detailed ethnography.

4. Linguistic research (20th century)

The Anglo-Egyptian condominium made the Nuba Mountains accessible to ethnographers and linguists from the outside. New data on more languages were collected by Seligman (1910/1911) and Meinhof (1915-1919) who compiled previously published data and added what was collected by himself and A. Klingenheben.

Kordofan (or "Hill") Nubian was well represented in the early wordlists and continued to attract linguists' attention. H. Junker and W. Czermak were both, like Lepsius, originally Egyptologists. Their joint publication (1913) contains texts, wordlists and a grammatical sketch. Contrary to what the title suggests, the dialect described is probably from Ghulfan (Uncunwee), see Jakobi & Kümmerle (1993: 72). The first full-size grammar of a Kordofan Nubian dialect — and indeed of any Nuba Mountain language — was published in 1920 by the catholic missionary D. Kauczor who lived in Dilling from 1913 to 1916. A vocabulary by the same author followed in 1930.

The first real survey of the Nuba Mountain languages was carried out on behalf of the Sudan Government by the missionary couple Phoebe and Donald MacDiarmid during three months in the dry season 1930-1931. They had been living at Heiban since 1920 where they had started a mission station, complete with school and dispensary (MacDiarmid 1925). Mrs. MacDiarmid had made a study of the Heiban language (Ebang) and even wrote a brief grammar that served as an D.Litt. thesis.¹¹ The results from the

¹⁰ This is a wide-ranging descriptive account. It has never been republished or translated, in part because of the way it is fragmented in multiple parts across several issues of a long-forgotten journal.

¹¹ We have made several unsuccessful attempts to get hold of this thesis. A grandson of the MacDiarmids living in New Zealand has found a typed copy in his attic but has so far only shared a couple of pages with us. He wrote: "My grandmother Phoebe graduated 1915 Master of Arts from the Otago campus of the University of New

MacDiarmids' survey (1931) have stood the test of time remarkably well. Their ten groups of clearly related languages are undisputed and still recur in any overview of the Nuba Mountain languages, this volume included.

Roland Stevenson's oeuvre represents the major contribution to the documentation of the Nuba Mountain languages. It spans a period of more than 50 years (1937–1991) from the colonial to the post-independence era. He came to the Nuba Mountains as a missionary, living with his family in Katcha. His PhD thesis (SOAS 1951, published 1956-1957) names his three "major" languages Otoro, Katcha and Nyimang, but he substantially also contributed to several other languages of the region. The sections on Nuba Mountain languages in the once-famous *Handbook of African Languages* (Tucker & Bryan 1956, 1966) were for a large part based on his knowledge. After his death, a preliminary catalogue of his papers was prepared by A. Jakobi & R. Blench (2005). Most of these papers are now kept in the UCLA library¹². Two manuscript grammars on Tira (1942) and Otoro (1943) have been published (Schadeberg 2009). His Temein wordlists are the core source for Blench (this volume), and his Nyimang dictionary is at the base of Fiedler (this volume).

Christian mission stations produced primers and some literature for "early readers" and initiated translations of parts of the Bible. Meinhof's descriptive sketch of Heiban (1943/1944) is based on such a translation. A whole grammar of Moro was written by the missionaries Keith and Betty Black¹³ (1971).

Zealand. After marriage several years later she accompanied my grandfather back to Heiban. She wrote the grammar as practical excise to facilitate the mission work. On the trip down the Nile on furlough a fellow companion on the boat was Dr Westermann. He discussed her work and in New Zealand some friends encouraged her to submit the grammar to the University of New Zealand. [...] The University of New Zealand had no African language expertise in 1928 sent the document to a British University who then realised that they also lacked the sufficient expertise and sent the thesis to Dr Westermann. The D.Litt was confirmed in 1928." [Email from Mr. Murray MacDiarmid to TCS, Sept. 11, 2006].

¹² Two relevant links (last accessed April 1st, 2013):

<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8mp51qq/?query=collection%2520of%2520ethno-linguistic>

<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/data/13030/qq/c8mp51qq/files/c8mp51qq.pdf>

¹³ Rev. K. Black has confirmed that the correct full names are Betty Effie Black, née Christie, and Keith William Black (email received July 17, 2012, TCS). See also Naser (this volume).

From the same period stems what probably is the first publication on a Nuba language by a native speaker (Abdalla 1969)¹⁴.

The period between the 1st and the 2nd Civil War made it possible for foreign academics to conduct research in the Nuba Mountains. Schadeberg took advantage of this and conducted a new survey (Schadeberg 1981a,b; 1994; this volume). Reh achieved an in-depth analysis of Krongo (1985) and a grammar sketch of Deiga (1994). Matsushita (1984-1986) is a Kadugli vocabulary in two parts, each with an introduction dealing with phonology and grammar. (For more recent developments, see section 8.)

5. African language classification

The mid-19th century discovery of Tumale having a noun class system immediately put the Nuba Mountains in the focus of African language classification. As early as 1854 Bleek wrote in his introduction to a comparative wordlist of Mozambican (Bantu) languages (pp. iv-v):

“The languages of these vocabularies all belong to that great family which, with the exception of the Hottentot dialects, includes the whole of South Africa, and most of the tongues of Western Africa; certainly the Otsi, or Ashantee, the Bullom, and the Timneh of Sierra Leone. The Gōr family, which includes the wide-spread Fulah, the Accra, and the Wolof, may be considered as related to these; as may also the Ukuafi, spoken near the source of the White Nile, and the Tumale of Darfur.”

The significance of these noun classes for African language classification has been a controversial issue — and still is. Meinhof (1916) heavily relied on them in a rather simplistic way. Greenberg, too, used them as evidence, first, for positing a Kordofanian language family (1950), and later for joining Kordofanian and Niger-Congo (1963). Greenberg’s Kordofanian assembles six of the ten language groups established by the MacDiarmids (1931): Heiban, Talodi and Lafofa, Katla, Rashad, and Kadu. Since Schadeberg (1981c), Kadu

¹⁴ The author, Abdalla Ibrahim Abdalla Kumodo, born just outside Kadugli in 1945, was R. Stevenson’s pupil at the primary school in Katcha until 1956, attended intermediate school at Dilling and then senior secondary school at Khartoum until 1964. Later he became a student of English at the University of Khartoum where he received a B.A. (Phil.) in 1970. — This biographical information was provided by Mr. Abdalla to TCS in 1974-1975 in Khartoum. His 4th name only appears on the inside cover where it is mistyped as KUTOADO; the digraph *oa* is intended to represent long [ɔ:].

is no longer considered to be related to Kordofanian. However, the genetic relation of the other five groups to each other and to Niger-Congo are all presently controversial (cf. Dimmendaal 2011, and in this volume Blench and Hammarström). By contrast, Greenberg's (1963) inclusion of the four remaining language groups (Nubian, Nyimang, Temein and Daju) into Eastern Sudanic, a single branch of Nilo-Saharan, has never seriously been challenged.

6. Anthropological research (20th century)

The curiosity of linguists about the Nuba hills has been paralleled by that of ethnographers and cultural historians. With the establishment of Anglo-Egyptian condominium in the Sudan in 1899 and an interest from the colonial administration in the governance of tribal areas, a more modern anthropology emerges. Sagar (1910) produced a first Intelligence Report with "Notes on the history, religion and customs of the Nuba" which was later formally published (Sagar 1922). At the same time Lloyd (1910) produced his geographical study of Kordofan. Other studies of this period include Hawkesworth (1932) and Corkill (1939). The nineteenth century enthusiasm for physical anthropology was still alive in the first decades of the twentieth, and Seligman's (1910) first paper on this area is largely concerned with head measurements. The beginning of a historical account of the area can be seen in MacMichael's (1912) account of Kordofan and in particular the affiliations of the Arab populations and Elles' (1935) account of the Tegali kingdom. Broadly speaking, the style of this early period ethnography can be discerned in the Seligmans' (1932) magisterial *Pagan tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*. In a text like this, some key features can be discerned:

- a tendency to treat Nuba as a unitary group, with a common character and culture, despite the recognition of the diversity of their languages;
- a continuing interest in body measurement and racial origins;
- a classic anthropological interest in kinship systems and terminology;
- lengthy descriptions of religion, rain-making and funeral ceremonies.

There is a complete absence of reference to everyday activities, such as agriculture, hunting, economy, trade and material culture. This is very much in contrast with the more typical 'District Officer' accounts of the period, which attempted to give an overview of all aspects of a society. This shows how far the anthropologists in the Sudan were in tune with the intellectual concerns of the period, in particular the interest in kinship and religion.

The next phase of colonial anthropology was marked by the studies of Siegfried Nadel (1941, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1955). Nadel was an experienced ethnographer, trained originally in the Viennese ethnological tradition, having previously worked both among the Nupe in Nigeria and in Eritrea, who was invited to undertake this research by the colonial government. His main publication, *The Nuba*, published in 1947, gives summary accounts of ten Nuba groups, focusing on kinship and religion. The book begins with an overview of the linguistic and geographical background and the agricultural cycle, generalised for the whole region. His detailed studies are then strongly focused on kinship and traditional legal systems. Indeed the final passage is entitled 'The Future of Nuba Law'. Nadel was following an agenda set by the colonial authorities, seeking to develop a system of governance and law appropriate and effective for the region. This link with the rulers came later to be seen as complicity with oppressors. Faris (1973), in a strongly worded discussion, links Nadel's mission with punitive military patrols, and asks how reasonable it was for informants to provide reliable information under these circumstances. This may be so, but subsequent research has not shown Nadel's work to be more or less accurate than other research conducted in a more collaborative atmosphere. Taatgen (1988) has a more measured appraisal of Nadel, and concludes that he remains an important figure for the ethnography of the Nuba Mountains and had an awareness of the deficiencies of colonial policy.

The 1960s onwards were a period of relative openness for research, and Stevenson (1966, 1984), Sweeney (1969), Faris (1969a, 1969b, 1972, 1983, 1988, 1992a, 1992b), Iten (1979), Husmann (1984), Bedigian & Harlan (1983), Ibrahim & Ruppert (1984), Baumann (1984, 1985a,b, 1987), Rottenburg (1989) and Manger (1994, [review Ibrahim 1997], this volume) took advantage of the situation, as did many of the linguists described elsewhere. A rather exceptional document is Kursany (1983) describing the Nuba from a Marxist perspective, reflecting the dominant political mode in Sudanese academia at the time. Many of the same topics were pursued with kinship, religion and Islamisation constituting the major part of the published literature. These writings provide very little hint of the violent changes and conflictual ethnicity which were in the offing. Indeed more than one sceptical researcher has noticed the marked contradiction between Baumann's account of the smooth integration of the Miri into national Sudanese value systems and the violent repression of minorities which followed shortly afterwards.

7. The impact of photography and film



The extremely visual nature of the traditional manners of body decoration has attracted photographers and film-makers. No overview of Nuba Mountains anthropology can bypass the publications of Leni Riefenstahl (born 1903, died 2003). Hitler's favourite cinematographer, she re-invented herself in the 1970s as a documenter of traditional life among the Nuba (Riefenstahl 1974a, b; 1982). Her publications, with their seductive images of body-painting, bloody wrestling and bare-breasted maidens fixed the Nuba in the public eye in a way no other accounts have managed to achieve. Although Faris (1972) had described and published images of body-painting for a more academic audience and George Rodger had

pictured Nuba life before (Naggar 2003) Riefenstahl's books became best-sellers. Any dispassionate viewing of them is bound to enmesh the anthropologist in moral snares. There is no doubt they present one side of African life and with great technical skill, but also with great selectivity. Susan Sontag, the American photographer, wrote a well-known essay in the *New York Times* in which she traced their descent from the Nazi imagery of "Triumph of the Will" and its glorification of beautiful bodies (Sontag 1975). However, probably more distorting still is the way all signs of modernity have been carefully expunged from the images. Not an enamel pot, plastic bag or glass bottle disfigures the images. Faris (1976, 1980) criticises the books for their biases from a more informed perspective. The bizarre secondary consequence of these publications was that they brought the Nuba to the attention of hardline Muslims, but also to the attention of tourists. For a while after the publication of these books, tourist minibuses would roll into Nuba villages to observe and encourage body painting. The Nuba then obliged by expanding and exaggerating this aspect of their culture, something documented rather well in a BBC documentary (Curling 1982; reviews Loizos 1982; Mack 1986). Another presentation of the Nuba on film was the wrestling in Khartoum, conducted between expatriate Nuba

communities (Husmann 1991; review Faris 1992b) which presented a more realistic picture of participants and audience. A critique of the impact of visual media on the conduct of anthropology which includes analysis of the films mentioned here is Weiner (1997). The visual aspect of Nuba culture came to attract a wider audience, both through the studies of Faris, the books of Leni Riefenstahl and later, ethnographic films. This in turn became controversial, and a debate opened which had increasingly little to do with the Nuba themselves (e.g. Synnott & Howes 1992).

The subsequent history of the Nuba Mountains might well cause us to rethink this perspective, however. The process of Islamisation and integration into the larger Sudanese culture has been well under way for centuries (Baumann 1985a; Stevenson 1966; Near 1971). However, the fragmentation and dispersal of many communities and the formation of diaspora communities in Khartoum resulted in a major cultural loss as well as conversion to world religions. For all the selectivity in Riefenstahl's images, they construct a vanished way of life that can never be recovered with an energy that hardly emerges from more academic studies. Moreover, Riefenstahl also took some films of Nuba life, fragments of which are included in the rather hostile film biography by Ray Müller (1993). Other revisionist accounts of Riefenstahl's life include Infield (1976) and Berg-Pan (1980). It is hard not to imagine future Nuba viewing these with the same fascination that British folklorists treasure the few remaining films of British folk customs.

8. Recent developments, some conclusions and outlook

Modern anthropology in the Nuba Mountains seems to be marked by a diversity of themes, but with a particular focus on the social disruption caused by the war. Publications include M. A. M. Salih (1991, 1995), Prendergast & Hopkins (1994), African Rights (1995) and Bradbury (1998) and Varhola (2007), and incidentally mark the first engagement of Sudanese scholars with the issues relevant to the Nuba Mountains. The striking feature of these publications is that they are engaged but ephemeral. The other aspect of modern scholarship is the type of historical work appearing in Spaulding (1987), K. O. Salih (1990), Willis (2003a,b) and Jedrej (2006). This material is relatively dry, based on archive materials and providing accounts of missionary activities and colonial administrative procedures. There was a brief window after the Comprehensive Peace agreement signed in 2005 when anthropological and linguistic studies in the Nuba Mountains restarted, but renewed hostilities block this again.

Anthropological, linguistic and historical studies in the Nuba Mountains remain sparse and there is no archaeology at all. This is partially a reflection of the difficulties of access and the periods of civil insecurity over long periods. It also underlines the sheer ethnic diversity of the region and the difficulties of describing so many individual groups. It could be argued that ethnological and linguistic description is hardly a priority in periods of famine, social upheaval and forced migration. Nonetheless, it is clear that Nuba peoples are strongly attached to their culture, making every effort to reinforce and transmit it during periods of exile. Cultural festivals, the wrestling competitions in Khartoum, the rapid rebuilding of “traditional” house forms after 2005 all testify to a newly strengthened group identity. Even much-criticised materials remain of value to the Nuba and can and should feed into the rebuilding of this identity. Nuba Mountains peoples clearly wish to focus on the documentation of their language and culture, threatened as they are by dispersal and assimilation.

In linguistics, the documentation of the Nuba Mountain languages profits from the awareness that small languages all over the world are in grave danger of being lost, as part of general processes of urbanization and globalization. Research projects for the documentation and analysis of several Nuba Mountain languages have been under way for some time now, and the present volume shows some of the results. Some researchers found individual support, others have raised funds for larger projects involving several researchers. Two outstanding examples are the Moro Language Project at the University of California San Diego (moro.ucsd.edu) and the Tima Documentation Project in which researchers from Cologne and Khartoum universities cooperate (dobes.mpi.nl/projects/tima). Each of these projects is represented in this volume by three or four papers: Ackerman & Moore, Jenks and Rose on Moro; Alamin, Bashir, Mugaddam & Abdelhay and Schneider-Blum on Tima. Indeed, the present volume provides a good overview of on-going scholarly activities in relation to Nuba Mountain languages. It is more than reasonable to hope that future generations of researchers will increasingly be from the Nuba Mountains.

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