

CHAPTER 4: PEOPLE AND PLACE: THE IDENTITY OF THE REGION THROUGH SELECTED ARTEFACTS

4.1 SUB PROBLEM 3

Relevant tangible artefacts need to be identified with a focus on the built environment. This analysis progresses from the level of the body/clothing and is extended to the scale of shelter/house and finally the village/urban centre.

4.2 HYPOTHESIS 3

Careful and purposeful selection and analysis of a group of tangible artefacts that refer to the recurring themes can articulate the characteristics of the delineated context on the scale of the body, the shelter and the village, and be used in revealing the meaning inherent in the built culture.

4.3 OUTLINE OF CHAPTER 4

This chapter sets out to investigate the determinants of the spatial and physical structure and character of the area under study. Through analysis of the available literature and through personal experience and observation, it became apparent that buildings as artefacts were delegated a secondary role in the cultural set-up of the region – though it needs to be noted that there is rapid transformation in Sudanese society, especially in its recent history.

Firstly, building and place-making activities can be explained through an understanding of the structuring principles of the society at lower level configurations. Thus, this chapter starts with an analysis of perceptions of body images, related clothing forms and their associated meanings in the region under study.

Secondly, several of the themes investigated revolve around the house, such as the symbolic relationship between the house and the tomb, the influence of the cardinal directions on house layouts and a reading of people's attitudes to 'house' or 'habitation models'. This is deemed important as the 'house' is seen to be a vital unit where the attitudes of a society are manifested.

Finally, the establishment of religious centres in Sudan, the nuclei for urban centres, is explored. Some religious centres are referred to, leading to a review of the

Omdurman centre. The qualities of these centres, now sacred sites of visitations, are identified. The relationship between the bearers of Islam to the country and the later teachers of Islam is recognised.

The intention of the chapter is to explain the positioning of architecture in a cultural realm by studying it in relation to other artefacts and modes of expression. A summation is then presented on the issue of the importance (or lack of) placed on the physical artefact in society. Stating the outcome of the above investigations concludes the chapter.

4.4 GENDER ROLES AND BODY IMAGES

Biological sex is a natural given while gender perceptions are social constructs (Vagenes, 1998: 96). Gender perceptions govern our ideas of body and relations between men and women and social ritual. It is not restricted to understanding the role of women in a given society but extends to all social structures involving both sexes. In the northern riverain Sudan, these relationships were transformed by the arrival of Islam. New lifestyles were adopted and the equivalent of the *harem* established. This became more evident after the invasion of the Turks. The roles of women were not only assigned to the home as they also came to have a very important function as the guardians of tradition, expressed through body images.

Perceptions of the body play a major role in the structuring of social space and ultimately on settlement patterns. This has been discussed in Chapter 2. It is not clear how this has changed through time or when the seclusion and veiling of woman gained prominence. Islamisation no doubt played a major role. Apparently, even after people converted to the new religion, old forms of dress and exposure to the external world (that is outside the home) were still common. The more affluent the family, the more secluded the woman were, as they did not have to go out and work in the fields or practice any other type of income-generating activity.

“There are reasons to believe that the position of women became encircled by ever more restrictions throughout the nineteenth century, particularly among the better-off who could afford to clothe and seclude their womenfolk properly.” (Bjørkelo, 1989: 55).

This is still apparent today, but the form of it is changing as girls and woman from most families, and all well-to-do families in particular, are almost unremittingly being

exposed to the outside world through education and later practicing professions. These domains of educational institutes at various levels, and later professional contexts, have come to be seen as 'suitable' for woman. Traditionally woman who had to work due to economic circumstances would be midwives, tailors or food sellers/vendors (Barclay, 1964: 15). Based on the author's observations, these are currently considered to be menial jobs that 'expose' woman unnecessarily. This appears to be contradictory as work in any form exposes a woman to the external world.

Exposure in any form has not significantly changed the form of social interaction at the level of the home and neighbourhood, from which one can infer a continuous influence on the construction of space. These are still assembled to reinforce the physical enclosure of women and the external exposure of men. Again, from the author's observations, the advancement of woman in the academic and professional fields has not changed her role much within the home and among her family. It has also not changed the ideas revolving around the body and concepts of femininity and masculinity, though the visible forms of expressing this may have been slightly changed and modernised.¹

It must be noted that ideas of female subordination and concepts of emancipation are very different in the riverain society and cannot be judged using Western beliefs. Vagenes makes the same observation regarding the Hadendawa of eastern Sudan. She states that, for this people, Western images of woman and emancipation are not desired (Vagenes, 1998: 91). The same can be said of the riverain people. Concepts of desirable relations between men and women and desirable roles for woman can only be judged using the standards and values of a specific people.

Today, many Sudanese women view the lifestyle of the West as being demeaning to women. The author has observed this even among highly educated Sudanese women. This is to be acknowledged within a context that greatly values the education and professionalism of women. Sudanese womens' liberation movements (including that affiliated to the Islamic political movement) have been some of the most powerful

¹ Though the visible aspects of the culture seem to be very modern (western), in terms of daily routines of people, their clothing etc., many of these actually conceal underlying adherence to traditional approaches to concepts of the body. This would be an interesting aspect for future research on the region.

since the 1960's, not only compared to Arab and African states, but also compared to various European states. The most visible feature of the subordination of women today is expressed in various restrictions on dress forms, rarely in terms of access to work or education.

The table below is used as a starting point to identify gender differences. Researchers use this to explain female subordination. Here, it is used in a loose manner to initiate a discussion on gender roles and later on body images.

Nature	Culture
Domestic	Public
Reproduction	Production
Female	Male

Table 4.1 Gender differences (Vagenes, 1998: 92)

It should be noted that Vagenes (1998: 92-95) goes on to discuss this construct critically in terms of its Western limitations and, for example, the under-valued perceptions of reproduction. This is beyond the scope of this study. She also explains that the spatial connotations of the public/private divide and reproduction/production divide are blurred with the Hadendawa, and that economic activity spans several households, age groups and both sexes. She therefore argues in favour of a continuum between notions of interior and exterior to replace, what she terms, rigid dichotomies of the above.

In order to relate the above concepts to the study context, Table 4.1 has been extended to include spheres of interaction, beliefs (and corresponding ritual), social roles, duties and contacts existing in the riverain area. This is portrayed as follows:

Female	Male
Feminine – expressed through gestures, dress, roles, contacts and body mutilations	Masculine – also visibly expressed and reinforced through social practice
Guardians of tradition and pre-Islamic beliefs and ritual.	Guardians of the Muslim faith according to the Quranic scriptures. These divisions in roles have a profound influence in terms of 'spheres of activity' as explained by Kronenberg (1986: 394).
Zar (rituals for interacting with the spirits). <i>Zar</i> is one way by which a woman can cross over to traditionally male domains through dress form and actions	Zikr (poetry for remembrance of the <i>shaykhs</i> and Prophet Mohammed). Again, here men cross over into traditionally female domains through openly expressing emotion and through dancing
Healing sought with the Fuqara (poor, religious men, religious healers) or through <i>Zar</i>	Healing sought with the Hakim (medical assistant – literally wise man) or the Basir (traditional healer). Contact with the Imam (prayer leader at the mosque)
Social networks traditionally restricted to home, neighbours and relatives – the <i>fareeq</i>	Wider social networks through education and professions
Social order through gossip . Actions revolving around emotions and persons	Order through politics . Actions revolving around more abstract concepts
Traditional restriction to the private, domestic sphere. Major role is house keeping and child-rearing	Exposure to the public sphere . Major role as breadwinners through work outside the home
Contact with others revolves around the concept of Mujamalat , loosely meaning socialising (Nordenstam, 1968: 75, refers to it as 'amiability'; Kronenberg defines it as 'a person's interest and active participation', 1986: 394).	Contacts as Wajibat or duties ("The fulfilment of the social and ceremonial obligations", Kronenberg, 1986: 394). This is perhaps perceived as more essential and of a higher status.

Table 4.2 Gender perceptions, roles and social/cultural domains present in the northern riverain area.

This must not be read too strictly as male/female roles shift and the corresponding domains are transient and fluid. Women appear to be subservient actors in this process. Yet, they play a major role in day-to-day decisions and the functioning of a community within the set structures. Vagenes (1998: 182) refers to them as 'disguised actors'. Crossing over between domains is perceived to happen through actions and not necessarily by traversing space. For example, a man gossiping is referred to as a woman. For a female to have access to traditionally male domains, in the physical as well as social sense, she must be either very young or very old. Dress forms that cover the body and act as a boundary in the physical sense also give her more freedom of movement. If a woman is perceived to be ill and is being treated through *zar*, she will also be permitted to act out of line with tradition and to practice 'male' actions such as wearing a *jalabiya*, smoking or drinking alcohol.

Generally, the conservatism expressed visually is contradicted verbally by the explicit use of the Arabic language, in descriptions of womens' bodies, for example.

Reinforcing ideas of feminine/masculine is expressed through body images. Circumcision, tattoos and scarification are all ways of extending these concepts onto the body. Inscription on the body of perceived universal and social order are further extended onto clothes, shelter and ultimately into place-making practices.

4.5 DRESS FORM AND MEANING

Study of dress forms enables one to identify characteristic approaches to their use and symbolic significance that shed light on space and place making. Conformity and identity are two such aspects, as well as the potential to express group affiliation. As discussed in Chapter 2, cultural codes are perceived as extensions of body images, an attitude closely linked to gender issues. Material, techniques of production, colours, methods of wearing garments and associated meanings are important aspects of study as they initiate debates in terms of similarities/differences to ways of inhabiting space. The development of clothing forms in terms of external influences, through foreign contacts and trade, illuminate the origins of cultural practices.



Fig. 4.1 and 4.2 Unidentified Sudanese man and woman in 1920 (www.sudan.net)

4.5.1 Conformity, identity and group affiliation

4.5.1 i) Conformity – *albas al bi'jib al nas*

Thieme and Eicher (1987: 116) distinguish between forms of dress that enhance and reveal individual identity of the wearer and those that conceal individual identity. As in many conservative societies, in northern Sudan, conformity is encouraged and

deviation from the 'norm' is discouraged. It may be even more evident in this region because of 'other-determined' ethical systems mentioned in Chapter 3. A well-known saying that sheds light on the other-determined ethical and cultural system is: *awkul al bi'jibak wa albas al bi'jib al nas* (eat what you like but wear what people like) (Gasim, 1985: 1032).

Al-Amin explains how 'good' and 'bad' are seen to be the degree of conformity to traditional behaviour or deviation from it:

"Villagers consider those who acquire strange habits or misbehave as deviators from the way of their people and from Islam. Such people who do not observe the rules of tradition are usually shamed and considered misfits and bad." (Al-Amin, 1989: 8-9)

They would also say that in the past, people used to be better mannered, 'simpler in their clothes and way of life and humbler in their conduct'. This is perceived as positive as it meant that people were more generous, stable and faithful.

4.5.1 ii) Identity – *al shilookh*

For the above reasons, people are very conservative about dress forms. This is palpable still today. Traditionally, some distinguishing factors have nevertheless been evident, such as *shilookh* (Fig. 4.2). These are cuts into the skin of the face leaving permanent markings, originating probably around the 1820's according to Hasan (1976: 76). They differentiated between ethnic groups and also expressed individuality. When tribal distinctions became less dominant, the *shilookh* came to have even more aesthetic reasoning as the *al-shalakha* (the women doing the *shilookh*) now chose suitable designs to complement a woman's face. For men it remained as a method of distinguishing tribes. The patterns used reflect the mix of cultures evident in all aspects of life: the T-shaped pattern is very similar to a cross, for example (Hasan, 1976: 74).

Al-shilookh have been used to get rid of *al-sibr*, a kind of magic that is believed to make people's lives very difficult. If one is believed to have been cursed with *al-asabeer* (plural of *sibr*) he/she is given *shilookh* of a different tribe, for example, confusing the person's identity thus, the curse will not affect them. If the spirit of a dead relative is not to hover over a child, he/she will be given *shilookh* that are different to the norm of that particular social grouping (Hasan, 1976: 83). In West Africa the same concept is applied by dressing a sick female, for example, in male

dress, so that the evil spirits cannot identify her. In Sudan, women wear male clothes and do what are traditionally considered male actions, such as drinking or smoking, during *zar*. This resembles another approach used by the Sudanese to dispel misfortunes by naming a child in an unfamiliar term or a name that is considered to be ugly, or is associated with other tribes, to dispel the evil eye.

4.5.1 iii) Group affiliation

Group affiliation is an important structuring aspect of life and is expressed through dress forms thus, reflecting the values and beliefs of a group's cultural patterns. Dress forms communicate an individual's position within a group (Theime et al, 1987: 116). It is perceived as a quest for order in all aspects of life, including the individual's personal appearance. Thus, *al shilookh* have been important to distinguish between tribes.

4.5.2 Clothing as environmental control

Dress, no doubt also reflects people's response to climate. Big garments that hang freely over the body protect from the harsh sunrays and from the dust, even though the obvious/accepted interpretation is that it is Islamic dress. Several layers of loose fitting garments, in light colours, are the norm for both men and women. The reality that the northern riverain people are very conservative and do not change their dress forms easily may be due to the fact that the weather is excessively hot and western form of dress is unsuited to the climate (Barclay, 1964: 8). The function of the skin is supplemented by extensions on our clothing and shelter. Clothing acts as an environmental control system in the same way that the skin regulates body temperature. Shelter has a further regulatory function and all three components work together in creating a comfortable climatic environment.

The skin, the flexible covering of a body, is *jild* in Sudan. Used in different ways it can also mean *al-dar*, the home or the place, *al-ard*, land or it can mean *asl*, origin: *ho ma min jildatna*, he is not from our 'skin' meaning origins. *Al-jood qat'an min al-jilood* refers to very poor people who will still be generous to others even if they have to cut from their own skin to give (Gasim, 1985: 230-231).

Clothes, garments worn to cover body and limbs, are referred to as *libs*, which are used for *satr al jism*, cover the body. It is also interesting to note that body; *jism* also

refers to 'model' or 'idea', or image representing a physical artefact (*tajasam*, *taṣawar*) (Gasim, 1985: 221).

Shelter, to protect from danger, bad weather and refuge, to conceal or defend, can be translated into *qitaa: al-asbaa' al wahid ma biyqaty al wash*, one finger will not cover the face. *Al-qitaa* is that which covers. '*Ala qadr ghitaak mid kr'aak*, stretch your legs only as far as your cover (Gasim 826). Shelter can also mean *satarah* (again from *satr*) what covers. *Mawaa*, *sakan* (abode) or *dul* (shade) can all be used to refer to shelter. *Al 'indo dulala yarfa'ha foq raso* says he who has a *dulala* (something that shades) should lift it over his head (Gasim, 1985: 696).



Fig. 4.3 Man and woman in traditional attire. The man is wearing a 'araqi and 'ima (turban). Formal attire would mean that a jalabiya would be worn over the 'araqi. Notice that the woman has her face covered with the tob (Potter, 1984: 125).

The meanings of words associated with skin, clothing and shelter are similar and convey strong feelings about the notion of protection or shelter, which, as will still be elaborated, is not necessarily focussed on the physical act of sheltering. The word *satr* is seen as key to the understanding of the concept of *sutraa*, protection and cover.

4.5.3 *Sutraa* and *hijab*: the *tob*

In terms of religious principles, both sexes have to cover larger parts of their bodies than what is generally accepted in non-Muslim contexts. Men need to be covered from the navel down to the knees and the women have all their bodies covered except for the hands and the face (See Fig. 4.3). The latter is referred to as *hijab*.

Hajab (Gasim, 1985: 257) is defined as *satr* (defined above), or as *hirz yuktab fihi shay wa yulbas wighaya lisahibihi fi za'mihim min tatheer al silah wal 'ayn*, that is an amulet with writing (usually verses from the Quran) that is believed to protect one from weapons or the evil eye. Protection from the evil eye or bad luck and protection of the woman's body from the eyes of men are treated with the same degree of importance. People will cover their hair, if they have beautiful hair, from the view of others, male or female, for example. They will cover their child from people they believe could harm them if they admire them.

Cover, physical *sutraa* or protection, has traditionally been achieved with the *tob*: a continuous run of 4.5 meters of fabric that is wrapped around the bodies of both men and woman. This serves the climatic and social functions very well. The difference between the male and female *tobs* is in the method of wearing and in the colours used. Men will wrap the *tob* around the body with each end thrown over each shoulder (Barclay, 1964: 8) and women will wrap it so that one end is thrown over the left shoulder. The woman's *tob* is still visible today as the traditional Sudanese dress. Women wear it throughout the day and also cover themselves with it when lying down (Gasim, 1985: 188). It is not known for how long the *tob* has been the traditional form of dress for women of this region, but in some depictions of dress in the pre-Meroitic age a man is shown naked, while the woman is wearing a wrapped white angle length skirt with the open edge in the front (Adams, 1994: 3). Because of its versatility, it is worn while resting, working or visiting. It usually covers the body up to the ankles, but when a woman is working in the fields, for example, the *tob* is raised higher up so that it resembles a short dress. Underneath the *tob*, a woman will usually wear a short dress.

Unlike the *'ibaya* (a long, loose cloak worn over clothing as *hijab*) in other Arab contexts, the *tob* is not necessarily removed once a woman is in the house. Perhaps the woman will just change into a house *tob*, i.e. *tob bayt*. Thus, it allows the men and the woman more freedom of movement within the house, freeing space from strict physical separation. It should be noted that the Nubian in the far north of the country do wear a form of *'ibaya* usually in black. These are tribes that have retained their pre-Arab identity and language. These are not discussed here.

4.5.4 Wrapping containers, wrapping bodies

According to Adams (1994: 1), a unique technique of textile wrapping (dated to 1550 BC) has been discovered in archaeological sites in Sudanese Nubia, which gives a lattice effect. It is believed that the intention was originally to imitate bead network as some of the vessels found were covered with ornamental beaded pot-nets. Later, in Meroe, it was used as a decorative border on the edges of woven cloth rather than as pot-net containers (Adams, 1994: 2-3): "...the beaded pot-nets, which furnished the original inspiration for the wrapping technique, are seen on jebana pots in the central Sudan today." (Adams, 1994: 5-6)(The *jebana* is a clay coffee pot – refer to Glossary).

Adams (1994: 5-6) continues to explain how the fringe tassels of open work borders were mostly the same colour as the fabric to which they were attached: that is the colour of un-dyed raw cotton. In some cases it is dyed in blue. These fringed materials were also used as ornamental clothes and furnishing fabrics. Though decorative wrapping techniques are not as common today, they were used till quite recently (See Glossary at the end of this document).

The interesting concept of 'wrapping' has persisted through the ages in the region (Figs 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3). Till today, both men and woman will wrap their bodies in a *tob*. The *tob* acts as *hijab* in an adaptable way. It covers the woman's body so it is hidden from sight. It is also sometimes wrapped around a woman's hand when she is shaking a man's hand in greeting. 'Wrapping' seems to have strong symbolic meaning in this society of the northern riverain people. This becomes apparent again in the way that the body is prepared for burial discussed in a later section.

4.5.5 Dress forms: history and origins

"The wall behind Saeda and Ashara the hairdresser was of sun-dried brick plastered over with brown mud. The bricks and plaster were made from Nile silt and donkey manure. The wall was very old and had been replastered many times; there were cracks and loose material adhering to it. The sun was setting and some of its rays filtered onto the wall, pink and brown. The figures before me cast their shadows on this wall – the hands working dextrously on the hair. The stillness of the heads and shoulders took me back two thousand years to the reliefs on the temple walls of ancient Meroe..." (Cloudsley, 1983: 32)

Adams (1994: 5) believes that Meroitic dress styles were derived from ancient Egypt. He states that most clothing was plain white and the use of colour was limited,

usually restricted to blue. Clothing decoration was provided mainly by rich textures: pile weaves, ribbing, fringes, and wrapped open work borders. The coming of Christianity around 550 AD meant new clothing styles. These were modelled from Roman apparel, with mantels and tunics prevailing. It is important to note that the decorative emphasis later changed from texture to colour (Adams, 1994: 5).

Up until the 1800's women went unveiled and the young girls wore nothing but a *rahāt*, a girdle of leather tassels around their waists (el-Tayib, 1987: 44). Both men and women used *kohl* for the eyes. Both sexes rubbed their bodies with scented oils and for special occasions people would use a mixture of sheep's fat with musk and pulverised sandalwood for massages. These cosmetics are still a part of the culture today.

Foreign influence is strong in terms of dress and cosmetics and beauty treatments, yet many processes of perfume making and body rubs have been linked to the pharaohs or more recently to the Funj. Indian influence is evident; yet, it is difficult to draw a line between what is Sudanese and what has been adopted from other cultures, since they have totally merged. Foreign-made artefacts become incorporated to such an extent that they become a part of the culture. "[The] 'traditional' costume of Sudanese women is quite distinct and relatively recent." (el-Tayib, 1987: 40). Foreign influences on Sudanese dress that can be seen today came mostly during the Turkiyyah because of organised trade. The Mahdiyya rather isolated people and puritanical reform and rejection of foreign ways was encouraged (el-Tayib, 1987: 44-45).

Influences followed trade routes: Weaving techniques were borrowed from Egypt, while clothing and cosmetics were brought by caravans from the East and became a part of the culture's identity. Beads were imported and manufactured locally (el-Tayib, 1987: 42-43). Clothes worn by the Funj Kings or the Shaykhs showed that many luxury items were being imported via the Red Sea ports. The predecessor of the *tob* as it is known today was the *farada* made in Shendi with a coloured boarder (el-Tayib, 1987: 44). The *dammur* is the most revered material and is discussed further below (refer to the Glossary for more descriptive information on the above).

4.5.6 Attitudes to mechanization and material as economic currency

“...knowing how to weave the tribal cloth, the magic of which is that as long as it is woven, the tribe exists; as long as you know how to weave it, so do you.” (Walker, 1989: 256)

The *dammur* exists till today: the mother of a bride will still give the bridegroom a *dammur tob* usually used as cover when sleeping. There is a long history of spinning cotton in the region. The role it plays in the economy and also as a medium defining status is significant. This material is almost always white with a blue border.

Hand spinning was more revered, as ‘satisfactory results could not be expected from machine-ginned cotton, in which the fibres were worn and matted’. The varied quality of the thread was seen to add to the ‘attraction of homespun *dammur*, which was strong, light, soft and durable’ (Daly and Forbes, 1994: 190-1).

The cloth was used as a medium of exchange before the Turkish invasion in 1821 and cotton was an important component of the subsistence economy of that region (Bjørkelo, 1989: 72). According to Bjørkelo (1989: 31), documentary evidence shows how land was being exchanged for *tob dammur* between the 1770’s and 1820:

“A locally-made and controlled medium of exchange was used to facilitate this process. Access to *dammur* was fairly equally distributed, at least in moderate quantities, as it could be produced in the households.”

Market mechanisms were established using a locally made material.

4.5.7 Clothing and associated meanings

Dress forms, used in specific ways by social agents, become a sign and are assigned meanings by these social actors. The social/ideological aspects that influence spatial/material manifestations are important to develop and understand the context (Vagenes, 1998: 150). People ascribe meanings to certain objects, colours or clothing that indicate importance or power (Abu Salim, 1992: 9-11). The gestures (manipulation of garment when wearing), effects on posture, gait, freedom or restriction of the body movement that this style generates all constitute a part of the symbolism of garments (Theime et al, 1987: 116).

Female dress symbols are more easily identified than male dress symbols. Dress form and colour and the beautification processes and rituals are strongly adhered to and reflect different stages and situations in a woman's life:

"Sudanese women have very definite ideas on what constitutes beauty and they devote a great deal of time to the pursuit of it. This is as true of the poor women in the grass hut as it is of the wealthy housewife in Omdurman...The beauty they pursue lies not in the cultivation of the arts nor in the creation of works of art; they are less concerned with beauty around them than in creating beauty in and about their personal selves. While there are very strong sexual overtones about their preoccupations, these are not exclusive. Women are concerned with personal beauty because of the expectations of other women and even more vitally because they perceive that their mental and physical well-being rests on the care they take of their bodies and themselves. It should be emphasised that this is apparently felt more strongly by Sudanese, particularly Sudanese women, than has been noted in many other parts of the world, and it gives a very distinctive, not to say dramatic or sensual, tinge to their culture." (Kenyon, 1991: 230)

The seclusion of women mentioned earlier, is important in terms of how much of her body is covered. Traditional gender roles have been linked to the domestic domain and the woman is seen to be in an enclosure, be that of her home or by enclosing her body with garments. Personal appearance maintains gender distinctions. Hair, colour, skin, texture, dress, movement and even circumcision are all carefully delineated to maintain differences between the sexes (Kenyon, 1991: 230). This author goes on to confirm an aspect that is focused on in this study: "...the maintenance of gender differences is a much more effective method of segregation than the erection of physical barriers." (Kenyon, 1991: 230).

4.5.8 Clothing and national identity

It is evident that some ancient techniques and materials disappeared, some re-appeared after many centuries and some are still in existence. Basketry techniques are still maintained while decorative wrapping techniques are disappearing, for example. It is also apparent that some of the techniques were unique to the region, some evident in artefacts today. Colour appears to have gained more significance during Christianity. But, till today, reverence is reserved for textured, white material and where colour is used there is a historical preference for blue. Wrapping material around the body is still predominant as a dress form and the practice appears to be rooted in the ancient history of the region, despite the many foreign influences.

The question of national identity and riverain peoples' affiliation to the Arab or African world has been discussed elsewhere. Clothing plays a major role in this dilemma. Today, a new process of Sudanisation is being encouraged. This can be described as detribalisation and integration into a Sudanese national identity and lifestyle (Vagenes, 1998: 160). The concept is mainly realized in urban areas (Vagenes, 1998: 294) where the process has influenced the apparent changes in dress, many times politically motivated. Today, the Arab *'ibaya* and scarf are seen as often as the *tob*. Unfortunately, the religion that previously merged with local tradition is now seen to be in conflict with it.

4.6 CLOTHES, BUILDINGS AND SPACE USE

Clothes, buildings and space use, in combination, are seen to reinforce and maintain the gender order of the region. Both dress forms and buildings are forms of climate control and comfort regulators; therefore, the algorithm skin/clothes/shelter is explored this manages to include the range of spatial scales included in the study.

Psychological comfort relates strongly to values and beliefs of a community. These concepts are transposed onto any physical context to make it more suited to the cultural identity of a people. This does not always have to be in the form of space-manipulation, but can be achieved by dress form, positioning of the body within the space and the movement of the body in space. Through observation, it becomes apparent that people from different cultures use the same space in different ways and that the movement patterns are varied.²

There are two ways of assessing the degree of psychological comfort of space. The sense of moving through a space, kinaesthetics, is difficult to measure, describe or predict (Groak, 1992: 83). Distance may be a medium of separation as important as a physical barrier, thus space acts as a buffer/transitional zone, as a 'wall', and as a regulator of daily activities, setting up a system that is respected and adhered to. Space thus, acts as a separation 'wall' with its characteristics defined by distance or

² The author has noticed this in striking ways in gatherings of different social groups in the same space, at the same time.

the size of a gap, acting as a substitute for the mass or thickness of a conventional wall.³ But distance is not necessarily the only form of separation.

Socially established organisations of space, proxemics or the sense of interpersonal space is the distance at which we position ourselves from other people. It is a particular form of comfort that varies from culture to culture (Groak, 1992: 83 and Altman and Vinsel, 1977: 182). As seen above, in Sudan creating 'distance' between a male and a female can sometimes be expressed by a simple wrapping of the hand by the *tob*, or by wrapping the *tob* around the face so that only the eyes are visible.

"In building science 'comfort' is principally expressed in terms of human physiology and sensations. But as our responses to external stimuli are informed by sensory perception, they are affected by experience – personal or social, deliberate or accidental, confusing or coherent, intimate or remote, pleasurable or painful, mundane or traumatic. Although structured by physiology, they are also learnt and/or interpreted." (Groak, 1992: 84-85)

Groak (1992: 85) elaborates on a 'holistic concept of total comfort', which is only in part determined by a building or by services provided. It is stated that for someone reading a book, that the 'book maybe as important as the room'. When talking of the seclusion of women in a Muslim context, the attire may be as important as a screen or wall. Maintaining distance between people may be another form of 'barrier'.

By thus broadening the concept of comfort, a variety of interpretations of the social practices regarding clothing, as religious expression or conformity and as physical and psychological comfort regulators, are allowed for. Yet, spatial extensions of these concepts are no doubt apparent and reinforce understanding of body images and expression through clothing. These are explored in the following sections.

4.7 DETERMINANTS OF HOUSE FORM AND LAYOUT

The basic shelter containing a family unit is perceived as a further extension of body images and clothing. This structure articulates social concepts at a larger scale, and is a higher-level configuration within which stylistic variations represent the same, shared social meaning through layout, form or material. "*The higher-level configuration dominates the lower level; and the latter is dependant on the former.*"

³ "...space serves as a medium within which communication occurs." (Altman and Vinsel, 1977: 183). These two authors proceed to distinguish between intimate, personal, social and public distance; cultural differences are acknowledged as well as the varieties within the same cultural groupings (ibid: 189-191).

(Habraken, 1998: 32). Thus, a house design, for example, will determine dress forms (the lower-level configuration). To explain: if male/female domains are not screened off from each other then people of that culture will cover their bodies in certain ways and act in certain ways to maintain a 'barrier' that compensates for the lack of a physical barrier. The lower-level configuration of body or garment transforms more easily and with greater frequency, thus maintaining stability at the higher-level configuration of the house (Habraken, 1998: 42-43).

The house comprises all of these lower-level configurations: body/garment/utensils, food, furniture, partitioning and building. The house provides continuity within the neighbourhood structure, mostly through its internal partitioning. Stylistic variations at the building level are not disruptive to the social functioning, even though, traditionally, they are not frequent. An inquiry is initiated in the following sections and elaborated in Chapter 5, which deals with the invisible forces that maintain stability in northern riverain settlements.

4.7.1 Social Structure and spatial articulation: hierarchical differentiation in the physical environment – changes through time

Social structure represents the primary influence on the organisational configuration of domestic space of a community and the individual house (as discussed in Chapter 2). Within the house itself different *loci* have degrees of importance attached to them based on related functions. Houses have been seen as models of society (Donley-Reid, 1990: 114). They are also seen to convey social structure from one generation to the other; they set up divisions and hierarchies reinforcing underlying principles of a culture. House layouts maintain the importance of certain people, and thus power structures, within a community (*ibid* 115).

There is very little information available on domestic architecture through the different eras (Hakim, 1988: 79).⁴ Typical of general history and architectural historical writings the focus is always on accommodation of the royals, palaces and major public

⁴ Even more difficult to obtain, is information on settlements and house typologies of the present. Rapoport compares the situation of sub-Saharan Africa with the rest of world: "...it proved almost impossible to obtain data, in spite of major effort... the situation in many traditional settlements of sub-Saharan Africa is a puzzling anomaly and needs investigation." (Rapoport, 1990b: 456-457). The value of this study is in contributing to establishing a tradition on writing about the architecture of the region.

buildings and religious buildings. From what information could be sourced, such as plans or photos of buildings that have not been measured or documented, it appears that there was historically more complexity and more sub-division of functional space than there is in present day house forms. Shinnie (1967: 156-157) describes one Meroitic house (refer to Glossary) with a repetitive arrangement in groups of two rooms. The cooking pots and the fireplace have always been found in the main room so it appears that most activities took place indoors; the smaller room seems to have been a store. This pattern was repeated in many houses and it is assumed that they were the dwelling places of small communities or large extended families. Later in history, houses became less compact: "...houses are rarely built directly contiguous to one another, and structures of more than one storey are unknown." (Adams, 1977:50).⁵ This is still a characteristic of Sudanese villages today.

In the pre-Turkish and Turkish eras:

"House types in the Northern Sudan included both flat roofed mud-houses (*murabba*), round huts (*qutṭiyya* or *tukul*) and rectangular shelters of mats (*rakuba*), depending on wealth, domestic stability, regional security and many other factors." (Bjørkelo, 1989: 54).

In reality, and till today, a family *hosh* (compound) may contain all three types mentioned by Bjørkelo. That is, the rectangular rooms (*murabba*' literally means 'square') as the main part of the house, the *qutṭiyya* or *tukul* may be used as the kitchen and the *rakuba* may be used as a cooler sitting/sleeping area or for outside activities including cooking.

Generally, it is accurate to say that the rectangular typology is strongly linked to the riverain regions:

"Flat-roofed mud-houses and dried brick houses were associated with the North, being suitable to a climate with little or no rain. Outside this area, such 'Berberine houses', to quote Brocchi, were a sign of northern immigration, traders particularly, and reflected the wealth and position of their owners. Also in the north such houses, with the characteristic court-yard walls (*hōsh*) surrounding them, were first built by the traders and well-to-do villagers. Thus low status *qutṭiyyas*, *tukuls* and *rakūbas* were far more widespread in the riverain villages than today. In the years of political

⁵ Adams (ibid, 356-358) offers descriptions of earlier settlements of the Meroitic era, which had 2- and 3- storey houses and where class differentiation was evident through the size and qualities of the dwellings. 'Ordinary' houses of that time were densely clustered, while houses of apparently wealthier groups were identifiable as a separate family unit and stood slightly apart. This comparison between the forms of social expression evident in village and town morphologies of the different eras needs to be further researched.

disturbances before the Turkiyya, mud-houses ceased to be built in the most threatened areas, since *quṭṭiyyas* were cheaper to build and the building could be moved and hidden in an emergency.” (Bjørkelo, 1989: 54 and 1984: 96).

The mud house prevails in the region, and other forms are a response to exceptional circumstances. As Prof. O’Fahey communicated in a private conversation: “...the buildings are rectangular along the Nile and become rounder and rounder as one moves away from the river to the west” (2002). Bjørkelo (1989: 55) elaborates:

“Walled courtyards of different materials may well have had a long history in the Sudan, but they gained a particular socio-economic significance from the eighteenth century onwards as a sign of wealth, prestige and female seclusion in the north, and as a sign of Nubian, Arab and Islamic penetration in the diaspora.”

The rectangular form definitely did have a longer history in the region as is evident from ancient archaeological sites. There were two types of settlement in the Meroitic Kingdom: that of the urban agriculturalists and of the semi-nomadic pastorlists of the Butana *wadis* (valleys). The first comprised rectangular houses built in mud brick. The settlement of the Butana consisted only of a Hafir and a temple, sometimes with a priest’s house (Hakim, 1988: 80). Some round straw huts have been found in the Nile valley (Hakim, 1988: 80-81 and Crawford, 1951 in various images of villages as depicted in the Funj era). As in later eras, the straw huts were apparently associated with the housing of the commoners. Arkell recounts how an ambassador of Salah ed-Din al-Ayubi to Christian Dongola, describes that: “The king had ridden bare-back on a horse out of his palace, the only building in Dongola not constructed of grass.” (1955: 192).

The start of the decline in the building sophistication, evident in the earlier eras of the region, is always dated to the Christian period and after:

“No more of the stoutly built unit houses were constructed after the end of the Christian period... At some period before modern times there occurred a still more radical simplification in Nubian domestic architecture. The unit house design with its ‘interior plumbing’ gave way to the rudest of two-room huts, in which one room was presumably occupied by the male members of the family and the other by the females.” (Adams, 1977: 581)

Looking at palace designs, about which there is more information, it is apparent that plans were highly segmented and compartmentalised (Refer to the ancient palace of Wad-Ban-Naga in the Glossary). This typology seems to have persisted through the

eras: detected from the images of the Shaygiyya castles during the Funj and the Khalifa house built during the Mahdiyya in Omdurman also in the Glossary.

From these developed a house type typical of the region, described by a number of writers:

“...though most houses are made of a combination of mud and manure, several are of fired red brick... The ‘house’ usually consists of a compound (*hawsh*) containing a number of small, usually one- or two-room, buildings, surrounded by a wall from five to seven feet high. Each compound has at least two doors on the street – one considered the men’s entry, which any stranger may approach, and the other considered the women’s entry, which only persons close to the family may use. The men’s entry is always the more elaborate doorway. Some doors are made of iron with grillwork on the upper part and are painted, bright green being the favourite colour. Others, less pretentious, are either unpainted iron or wood.” (Barclay, 1964: 4).

The interiors of the compound may vary, but the shared characteristics, as explained by Barclay, are as follows:

“The men’s entry leads into an open court, to one side of which is a guest’s or men’s building. This is usually a separate structure with the typical rectangular shape and flat roof. It has a porch and one or two rooms.” (1964: 4).

For more details on house designs and examples of plans and from please refer to the Glossary at the end of this document. This house form is the most predominant and is the one used for the discussion on house design and layout below.

4.7.2 Social themes concerning gender roles and their impact on house layout

Gender roles and gender segregation no doubt play a major role in the structuring of residential buildings, especially in a Muslim context. Many activities associated with women, although highly structured, are perceived as being less formal. The men’s domains almost always have a more formal character. Women’s activities are always performed within the house, be it her family’s house or another house, while men’s activities extend to the streets, the public spaces, the mosque and the *suq* (market). The *hosh*, the most conspicuous feature of the Sudanese house, is divided into two sections that are visually screened off from each other: *Hosh niswan* and *hosh rijal*. The rooms, *tukul* (kitchen) and *rakuba* (veranda) are associated with the *hosh niswan*, while the *daywan*, prominent in size and elaboration, faces the *hosh rijal*.

The typical plan form generated from these requirements is the *qurfatayn makhloofat* or crossed rooms shown in Fig. 4.4. The principles of this simple plan form are found

even in modern day houses in the capital city, as they provide for convenient screening off of the men/women domains without resorting to the addition of expensive walls and partitions (Fig. 4.5). Often the barriers are visual and social rather than physical. For example, there is no door between the men/women areas. The separation is socially accepted and adhered to.

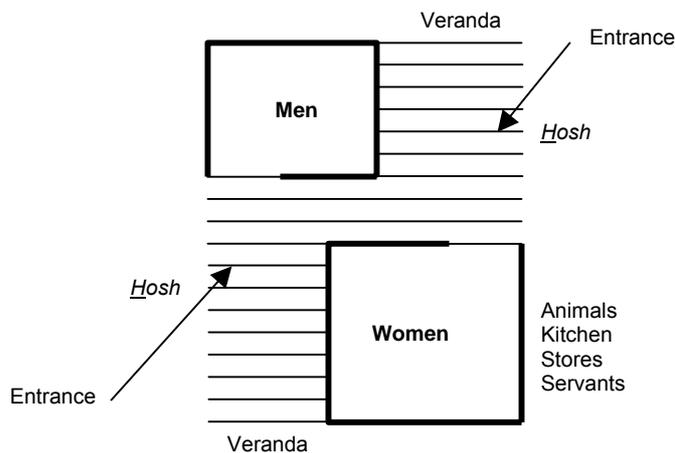


Fig. 4.4 A typical pattern in house design: *qurfatayn makhloofat*.

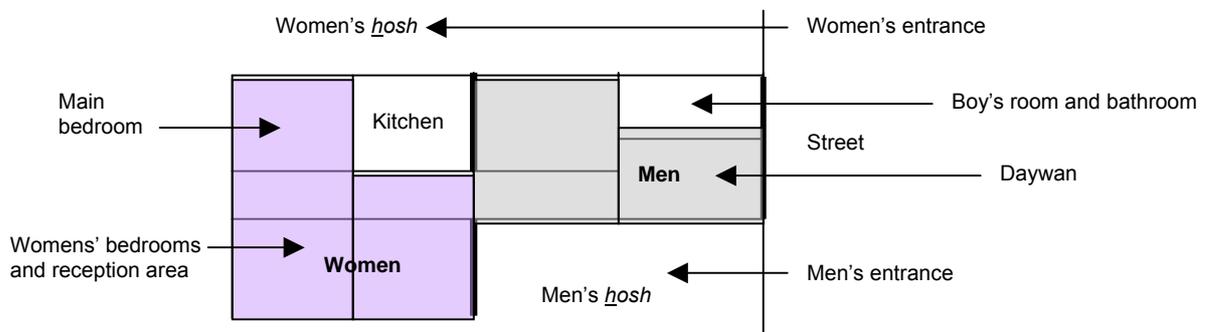


Fig. 4.5 A modern interpretation of the *qurfatayn makhloofat* in a Khartoum house built in 1992.

4.7.3 Connotations of the word *bayt*

Literally translated, the word *bayt* means house. But it does not always refer to a physical structure. It can also mean wife or family. Many times it implies a single room – a house could be one room where all the functions take place such as sleeping, cooking, eating, bathing or storage. When the word *bayt* is mentioned it can be understood as the women's domains within the house. This is probably due to the fact that this is the centre of their world, whereas the public spaces are the domain of

men. Houses are built by men, yet inhabited mainly by women as they spend the most time in them and carry out most activities within the confines of their own house or the houses of relatives, neighbours, friends. Women maintain the daily rhythm of life within the house.

The *daywan* is *bayt al-rijal* (men's house), and the rest of the house is *bayt al-niswan*. (*Bayt* is house, *rijal* men and *niswan* women). Thus, the *daywan*, even though it is within the house, has more of a public than private function. Cloudsey (1983: 167) describes how the *daywan* may run the whole length of a house and dominates in size (refer to the Glossary).

Thus, the meaning of the word *bayt* is very loose and allows for many interpretations. This is obvious from the way that a house is used. Men's areas of habitation extend beyond the boundaries of the house. Various social groups may use the same place but at different times (Donley-Reid, 1990: 115). The women, for example, can use the *daywan*, when the men are away or on the occasions when the men use the street or a neighbouring house. Fluid space-use patterns are still evident today.

4.7.4 Privacy and the individual's use of space

The contrast between "micro" personal/parameters with "macro" social/shared ones is seen to be less evident in this context. Vagenes (1998) explains how the Hadendawa, of eastern Sudan, are never alone. Silence is seen as an indication of psychological problems and solitude is unnatural and unhealthy. This attitude is very similar to that of the riverain communities. Spatially, public and private zones are difficult to identify. Male and female zones are accessible to all males or females in the community at most times of the day.

Concepts of individuality and privacy, predominating in Western society, do not apply here. Being independent or different is taboo. Distinct characteristics and actions among people are traditionally rare. This no doubt implies that the creation of private space, free from intrusion and public interest, is viewed with suspicion. Most activities, decisions and daily functioning of people are under the critical scrutiny of all members of the community at most times of the day. Perhaps this is a reason for the apparent simplicity in the structure of the house.

These attitudes are still prevalent but slowly but surely changing as peoples' lifestyles change and as privacy is valued more.

4.7.5 Time as a structuring element in place making – nomadic cycles

Another important theme in house layouts is related to the time of the day and linked activities: "The round of life and activity corresponds closely to the daylight hours." (Adams, 1977: 50). Time and space are seen as equally important structuring elements. In traditional agricultural societies the day starts early, due to the extreme heat. The men would leave the house after morning prayers at sunrise. They would return at noon for a siesta and lunch and leave again for their work after the sun cools in the late afternoon. After sunset prayers is the time for socialising. The courtyards are prepared: swept, sprayed with water and the '*angaribs* (traditional wooden beds – refer to Glossary) brought out and people find relief in the coolness after the harshness of the day. The day is structured as follows:

- *Fajr-duqush* (sunrise) prayers
- *Sabah* (morning) tea
- *Duha* (late morning) work time
- *Ghayloola duhr* (noon-afternoon) breakfast- siesta- prayers- lunch
- '*Asr – duhriya* (late afternoon) work time
- *Maghrib* (sunset) tea
- '*Isha* (evening) prayers, meal and end of activities

As mentioned above, female space is extended when men are away. Thus, time acquires spatial significance. The *daywan* becomes the domain of women at certain times, when the man is supposed to be working outside the house. For a man to be there at those times is unacceptable.

The different times of the day, the related activities as well as the changing seasons all contribute to a pattern of nomadic movement within the house. In a *hosh*, people rotate throughout the day, following the *duh* or shadows as the sun move across the sky. Nomadic transient patterns are reflected at many levels in Sudanese towns and villages. One representation of this, at the micro-level, is that architecturally undifferentiated functional *loci*, where life occurs as social and religious ritual and everyday activities, are contained within a single enclosed, semi-enclosed or open space. Such *loci* are not necessarily separated.

Nomadic rotation, what Kazimee and McQuillan (2002: 25) call circular 'migration' within the courtyard, relates to diurnal rotation. It creates a spatial order related to time and orientation. The house is a microcosm of other spaces and public buildings where the same cycles take place. These rhythms and movement, from internal to external space and between different parts of the external spaces, reflect formal and informal gatherings throughout the day. Daily, seasonal and social cycles influence the way the outdoor spaces around a house are used.

The majority of functions are performed outdoors and the courtyards and streets become 'outdoor rooms', while built areas are used mostly for storage or sleeping during the short winter season. The following quote refers to a typical mosque in a northern village:

"For about nine months of the year sunset and evening prayers are recited outside the mosque in the mosque compound to take advantage of the cool evening breeze. The mosque building itself is used only during the daytime and on winter evenings or in a rainstorm." (Barclay, 1964: 163)

Other nomadic characteristics are makeshift structures and temporary spatial arrangements, which are the norm for different social functions, such as *zar*, *bikkah* or weddings. Makeshift kitchens are also an important feature as cooking space is shifted from internal to external spaces. The buildings and surrounding courtyards fulfil their function of providing living space for the different activities within the house in a suitable environment, in terms of the dust and the heat that characterise the climate.

Traditional rituals are not necessarily accommodated for in a permanent manner, but are rather contained in an open space that remains empty after the people have dispersed. These kinds of habitation patterns are made possible by the climate. It also represents a memory of cultural traits of the spatial freedom of mobility of the nomads (Kazimee et al, 2002: 28).

Similar to other Muslim contexts the courtyard plays a central role in daily life, not only in the home but also in public buildings. Lee explains that:

"The antiquity of the courtyard as a feature of domestic architecture has by no means been satisfactorily established. Archaeological evidence suggests that courtyards were not constructed with Christian and pre-Christian houses, so probably the

courtyard was brought to Nubia by the Arabs after the thirteenth century A.D. as Nubian and the areas to the south were being converted from Christianity to Islam. The courtyard in Islamic architecture is one of many devises designed primarily to provide seclusion for the women of the family, and was probably taken over by the Nubians for this reason.” (Lee, 1969: 37)

This influence in terms of space use and built form is interesting, but the non-tangible influence of nomadic patterns is still evident at all levels as well as in a traditional sedentary pattern of life. Kazimee (et al, 2002: 23) in Afghanistan, describe this as ‘co-existing modes of living’.

Figure 4.6 below explains the above concepts by example. This house in Shendi is approximately half a century old. The subdivisions follow the typical *qurfatayn makhloofat* pattern.

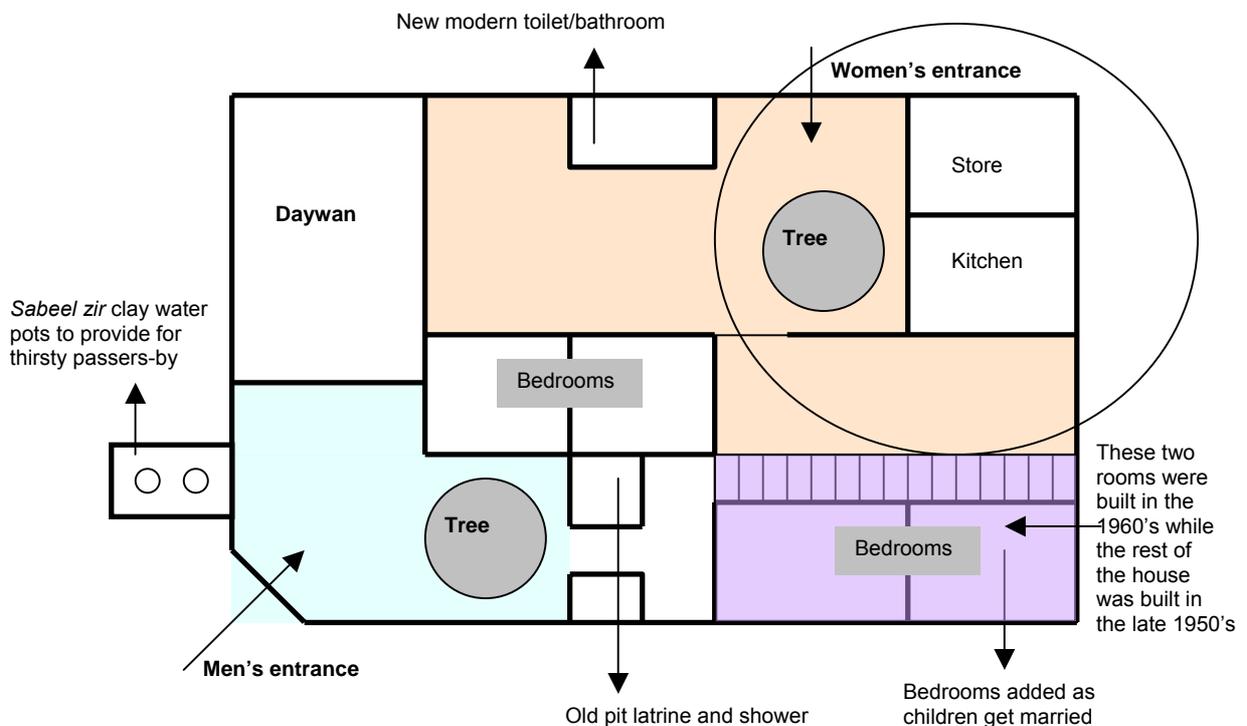


Fig. 4.6 Old Shendi house. The different colours denote men and woman courtyards. The area indicated by a circle is enlarged in Fig. 4.8.

An enlargement of the women’s section of the house illustrates how patterns of use interchange between in and out.

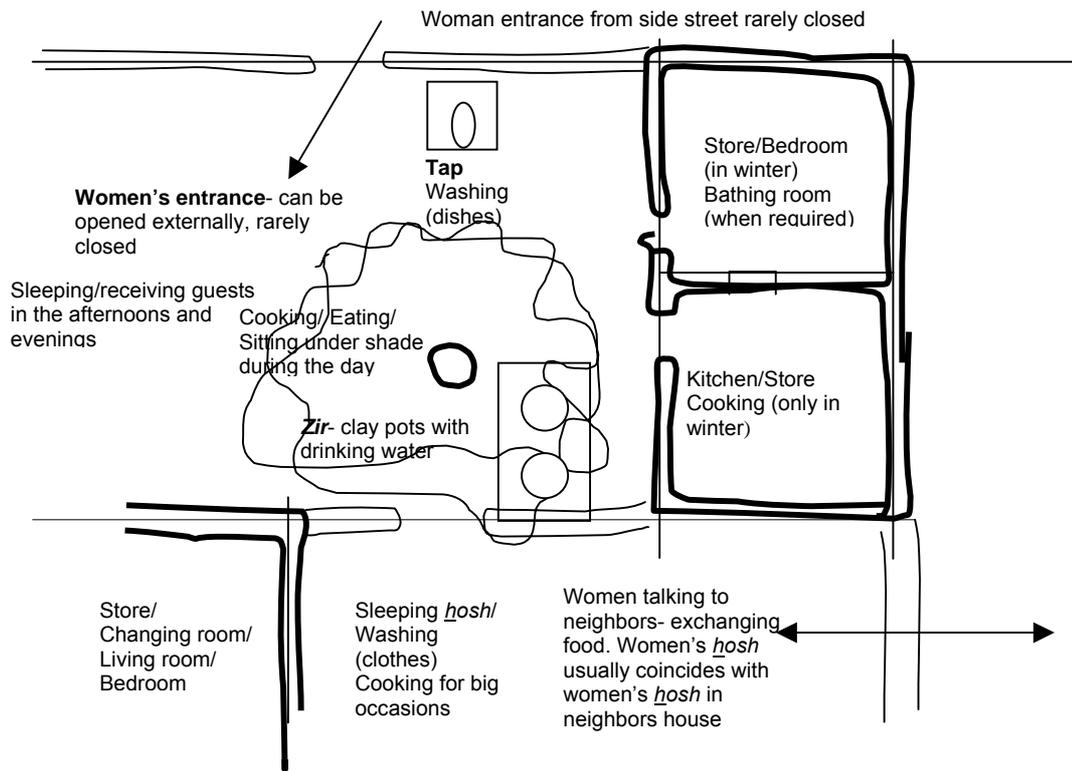


Fig. 4.7 Indoor rooms/Outdoor rooms in a Shendi House

The fact that the women's entrance is rarely closed indicates that the functions of this part of the house are strongly linked with activities in neighbouring houses. The rooms are all multi-purpose in function. Rooms are mostly used as storage spaces. This applies to the kitchen as well, as most cooking takes place under the tree outside.

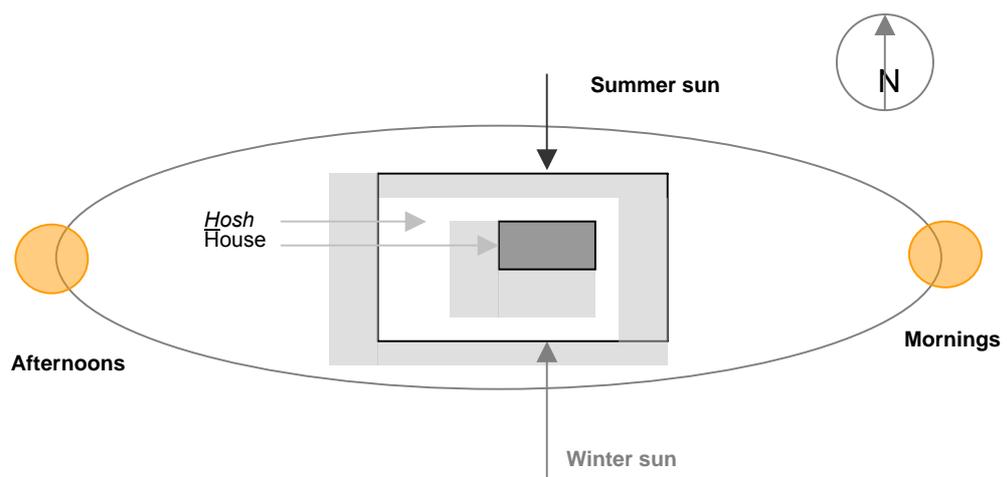


Fig. 4.8 Sun directions and shadow pattern on a summer morning (on a simplified plan).

Figure 4.8 above explains how people would follow shadows during the day, within the courtyard and out on the streets. The rotation cycles would differ in winter where people would be trying to get more sun on the southern sides of the buildings and courtyard walls. Thus, there is continuous migration within the courtyards and on the streets with set patterns during a summer or winter day.

4.7.6 The cardinal directions and spatial perception

The east is referred to as *dar ṣabah* or *bilad ṣabah* (Gasim, 1985: 658), meaning 'home' or 'land' of the morning. It can also mean *qidam* – the front. The east usually implies the *qibla* (direction of Mecca) and not the exact eastern direction. Thus, east is used to refer to *qibla* in all the riverain regions from Kosti to Halfa, even though some of them may face northeast for *qibla*. *Dar Ṣabah* also refers to the land of the Nile, which is referred to as the 'land of the morning'. The west is seen to be the rear, *dar al qarib*. North is *safil* (below), while south is *ṣa'eed* (above). This probably relates to the direction of the flow of the Nile (Osman, personal communication: 2002).

Anything that people want to be blessed will be done while the person is facing east, such as *jirtiq* (wedding ritual) or *henna* (decoration with henna) of the bridegroom. Spatial ordering with reference to the cardinal directions was gradually lost in practice due to more complex design of houses and the implications of formal planning. Generally it is preferred that a house be oriented towards the east and toilets oriented towards a neutral axis (that is, not towards the east or west).

The inclination to perceive the east direction as blessed may have reinforced existing racial attitudes towards the west. Everything positive is associated with the east: the morning, the rising sun, the *qibla* and the Nile. That the east is referred to as the 'front' emphasises the importance it is given in this culture.

Though the apparent reason for the importance of the easterly direction is that it is the direction of Mecca, its importance can be traced back to ancient pre-Islamic eras. The main figures in the decoration at a leading Meroitic temple, without exception, face east (Hakem, 1988: 204). The main temple building in this complex is approached on the east, apparently a recurring pattern in the archaeological regions of Sudanese Nubia (Hakem, 1988: 200 and 217). The carved shapes on the city wall

In this region, the way that the body is prepared for burial, how the grave is prepared and how the final prayers are performed (according to the Muslim faith) seem to have influenced the way that the community views the world as a whole. And it could be seen as reflecting on the way society operates and how that is manifested physically. The simplicity of the ceremony is key to the beliefs of the religion. Graveyards do not seem to have the same symbolic significance as in other societies. The dead person has moved on: there is no elaborate ceremony. It is immediate, quick and simple. What is quite elaborate is the mourning process that could previously last for up to forty days. Lengthy periods for these ceremonies have changed, as previously they were designed to accommodate for camel transport, which took up several days (Barclay, 1964: 266); now ceremonies may be just three days long.

The body is wrapped in white cotton cloth; a silk wrap is sometimes kept in the house and used to take the body to the burial place. It is then removed and kept for another death. After the creed is recited in the deceased ear, and the corpse is washed according to Islamic principles: "The deceased is dressed in the hand-sewn garb of the pilgrim to Mecca. The corpse is finally wrapped and carried to the cemetery." The corpse is carried on an *'angarib* (Barclay, 1964: 261). The washing of the body (performed in the same manner as other ritual washing) and the attire reinforce the symbolic allusion to the trip to Mecca, a final pilgrimage. The concept of 'wrapping', mentioned previously, is again evident.

The grave is dug and a rough mud brick vault is built over the corpse, before the pit is filled with earth again. People are buried lying on their right side with their faces towards the east.

"...a hole is dug extending north and south a little longer than a man's height, two meters wide, and seventy-five centimetres deep. At the bottom of this hole another is dug the length of the person, to a width of about one foot and a depth of one meter. The body is deposited in the second hole on its side so that the head, resting on a clay pillow, is to the south and the face is towards the *qibla* at Mecca. The arms and the legs are extended. The opening containing the body is bricked over and the rest filled with dirt. After seven months stones are usually placed at the head and the foot of the grave. These may be ordinary rough stones or square plaques, sometimes inscribed with the name of the deceased and Koranic verse." (Barclay, 1964: 262).

Stones and flags distinguish the graveyards. There are rarely elaborate edifices, except for a religious shaykh. Orientation of the graves is perhaps the most important structuring factor. The location of the country, on the northeast of the continent, with

Mecca, the *qibla*, to the east, has meant that the east orientation has gained immense significance in the culture of the people. This does not always have positive repercussions as we see below.

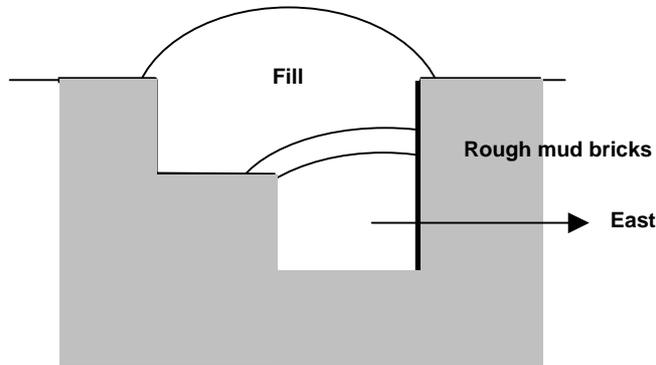


Fig. 4.10 A typical northern Sudanese grave.

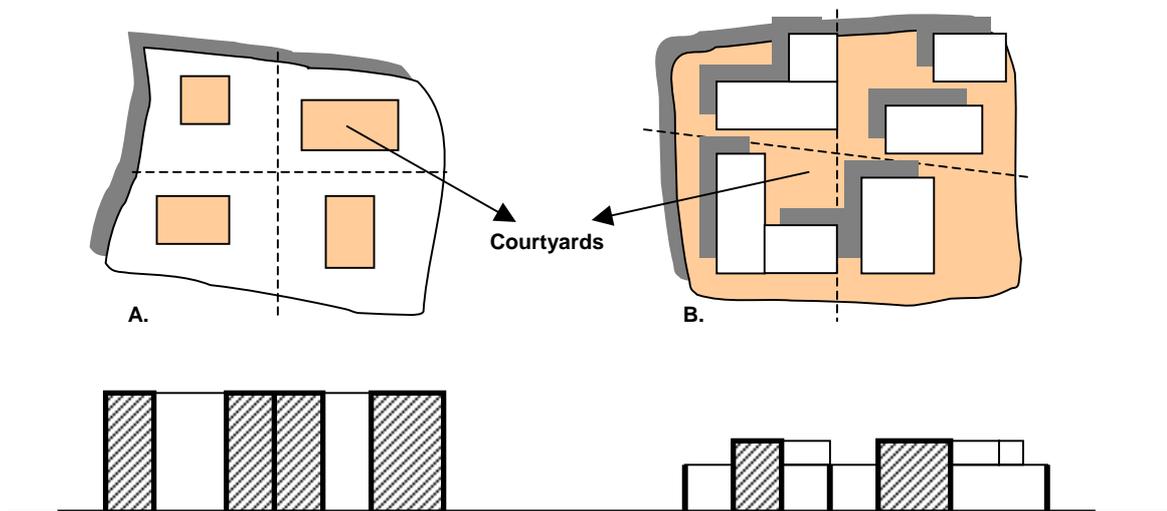
4.7.8 The courtyards, the streets and the public spaces

Like in many Muslim contexts, the house has precedence over the street in village, town and city layouts. The residential units are not easily identified within the urban matrix. This results in irregular streets and open spaces in the public domains. In private domains, left over garden and courtyard spaces are the norm. This often results in alleyways left between the building and the external wall. Square, rectangular or L-shaped blocks of buildings and their positioning separate *hosh rijal* and *hosh harim* or *niswan*. The *hosh rijal* and *hosh harim* usually correspond with *hosh rijal* or *harim* of the neighbour's house. This is the result of subtle negotiation processes that are not formally articulated. Dewar and Uytendogaard (1991) refer to this as 'negotiated reactions', an 'alchemy of design and social interaction', which add complexity to an urban setting. This is considered to be one of the identifying features of successful urbanism.

Kitchens open onto *hosh harim*, even if they are incorporated as part of the main building, but they are more frequently separate. Even in present day Khartoum, wealthier families will have one small kitchen within the house and a large kitchen in the courtyard. Servants' rooms, ablutions, stores and animal pens are also grouped near the *hosh niswan*. House models express transience, movement and temporality. Internally and externally, the same space becomes a series of different settings. This ultimately impacts on the town/village layout where forms are less consolidated, more

fragmented, compared to the typical 'medina' layout of other Arab cities. Several houses create the courtyards spaces, rather than one family house surrounding a private courtyard.

An aspect needing to be researched is to what extent identifiable residential units implied nuclear, or extended, families in traditional villages. Hantub, across the river from Wad Medani, was previously like a maze with no identifiable boundaries to a family unit, when visited by the author in the 1980's. It is not known to what extent that was typical of other villages and towns or unique to that town. But, generally, the domains between different family homes also merge through visits and the sending of food and gifts. The morphology of villages/towns sometimes dissolves the distinction between one family home and the other.



A typical medina layout: a family house surrounds each private courtyard – the buildings create the street edge. This is a courtyard typology.

The situation in many parts of Sudan: high densities are maintained yet houses are less consolidated, that is, more fragmented – the street edge and privacy for the family space is achieved by a 2 meter high wall surrounding the *hosh*. This is a compound typology.

Fig. 4.11 Comparison between the morphology of Sudanese towns and villages and that of other Muslim cities.

Lee (1969: 37) explains how a variety of courtyard forms can be found right next to each other in some villages, where the Arab courtyards would have small rooms scattered around within it and the Nubian courtyard would have rooms lined with numerous connected rooms in a larger space. Both still apparently pertain to the compound typology; it is the location of rooms, the size of the courtyard and the relation of the rooms to each other that differs.

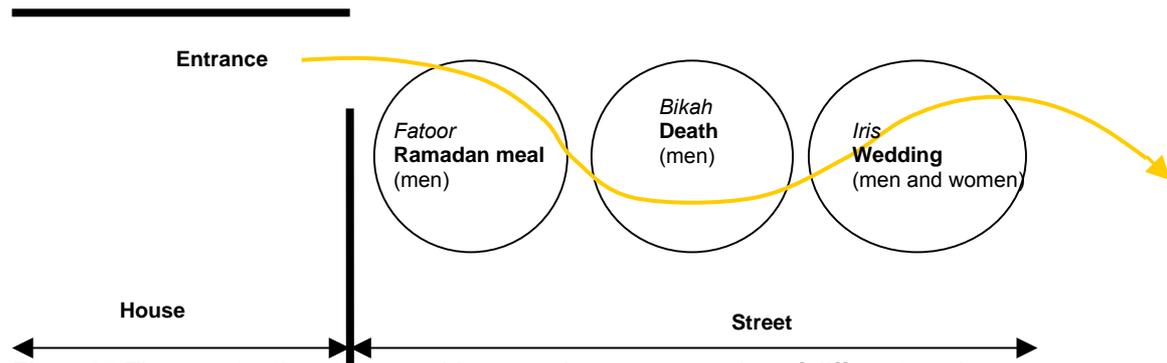


Fig. 4.12 The streets: the same outside space becomes a series of different settings.

Rapoport identifies the 'street' as a morphological unit and relates the different uses of streets to speed and spatial requirements (1990b: 298). He explains that, where streets are used mainly for walking (low speed), they have certain characteristics and are used differently. This unit, street, can thus be defined morphologically or as a behaviour 'setting' for particular activities (*ibid*).

The streets in the region under study, as behavioural settings, support Rapoport's hypothesis that there are certain characteristics (attributes of pedestrian streets) that are supportive of 'walking' (*ibid*, 303) (Fig. 4.6). As different settings are experienced in the same street at different times, this creates a degree of complexity, which Rapoport relates to the concept of Multiple Characteristics in defining the attributes of vernacular contexts (*ibid*, 287 and 296).

The above hypothesis identifies attributes that are found in this particular case study, such as 'high levels of enclosure' on pedestrian streets, but some of attributes that are not found in the region under study, such as rich texture and elaboration of detail (*ibid*, 284). The author relates this to the harsh temperatures and glare, which result in forms being more moulded, with lack of intricate detailing and dependence rather on massing and the play of shadows.⁷

4.8 SHAYKHS, VILLAGES, TOWNS AND TOMBS

The 'urban centre' is an important artefact. How it originates and develops can give valuable clues as to the attitudes of people to life and, ultimately, to how people inhabit space and the creation of place. This is researched eco-systemically by

⁷ These characteristics relate more to Rapoport's descriptions of streets designed for high-speed, rather than for walking. The comparisons are interesting and would make for a good topic for future research.

appreciating the Sudanese religious centre/urban centre within its complex, multi-faceted context of the northern riverain region.

The establishment of religious centres in Sudan, the nuclei for many urban centres, was greatly influenced by Sudanese Sufism. Spiritual life and loyalties affected urbanism processes and patterns of habitation. Some religious centres are used as examples to explain this. The qualities of these centres, now sacred sites of visitations, are identified. The relationship between the bearers of Islam to the country and the future teachers of Islam is recognised. It is concluded that there was a paradoxical relationship between the migrant Arabs and the sedentary Nubians on the banks of the Nile, that is, between nomadic lifestyles and urbanism.

It needs to be emphasised that other factors that influenced the development of urban centres such as trade, agriculture, military and political issues. But the context is considered to be unique in terms of the large number of centres that did develop as religious centres initially. It is also acknowledged that while an urban centre may have been initially a religious centre, there were probably a combination of reasons that led to the establishment of the religious centre in a particular location.

In many cases, the nucleus for a settlement is perceived to be a religious *shaykh*. Around the *shaykh's* religious school a village would develop, which systematically and gradually developed into a town. On his death, a *shaykh* would be buried in a *qubba*. This became a visitation site for the *shaykh's* followers in a town, which would by then have grown into an urban centre of significance. This is the pattern of Sudanese urbanism that is elaborated below.

4.8.1 Islam and Sufism

The establishment of the Funj Kingdom in 1504 was an event of great significance in the history of the Sudan. The *Ṭabaqat* by Ibn Dayf-Allah (1727-1809/10) written in 1753 (Hasan, 1992: 17-18), a biographical dictionary, is a major literary source of Sufi history. According to its author, the state of Islam when the Funj came to power was that of ignorance as there were no schools of learning (*'ilm*) or of the Quran. Karrar (1992, 16) explains that this is sometimes disputed as schools such as Halfayat al-Muluk and al-Sababi, in the present day area of Khartoum North, existed in the pre-Funj era. This means that there may have been a number of settlements,

initially established as religious centres, even before the 16th Century. Refer to Fig. 4.13 for location of places mentioned in the following text.

Before the transition to the Middle Eastern and North African pattern of organised Sufi brotherhoods, around 1780 (elaborated by Karrar, 1992: 20), Sufi practice was characterised by the pattern of individualistic *fuqara'* (holy men) typical of the Sudanic belt. This refers to the east-west strip spanning from the Red Sea to the West African Atlantic Coast. Individualistic *shaykhs* came to dominate daily life and were scattered through the countryside. This contrasted strongly with the highly centralised and bureaucratic authority of the Funj in Sennar, yet these systems co-existed. These decentralised, ancient *ṭariqas* (Sufi orders) were autonomous and each had their own *silsila* (chain of spiritual descent) as compared to the centralised, reformist brotherhoods of the early 19th Century.

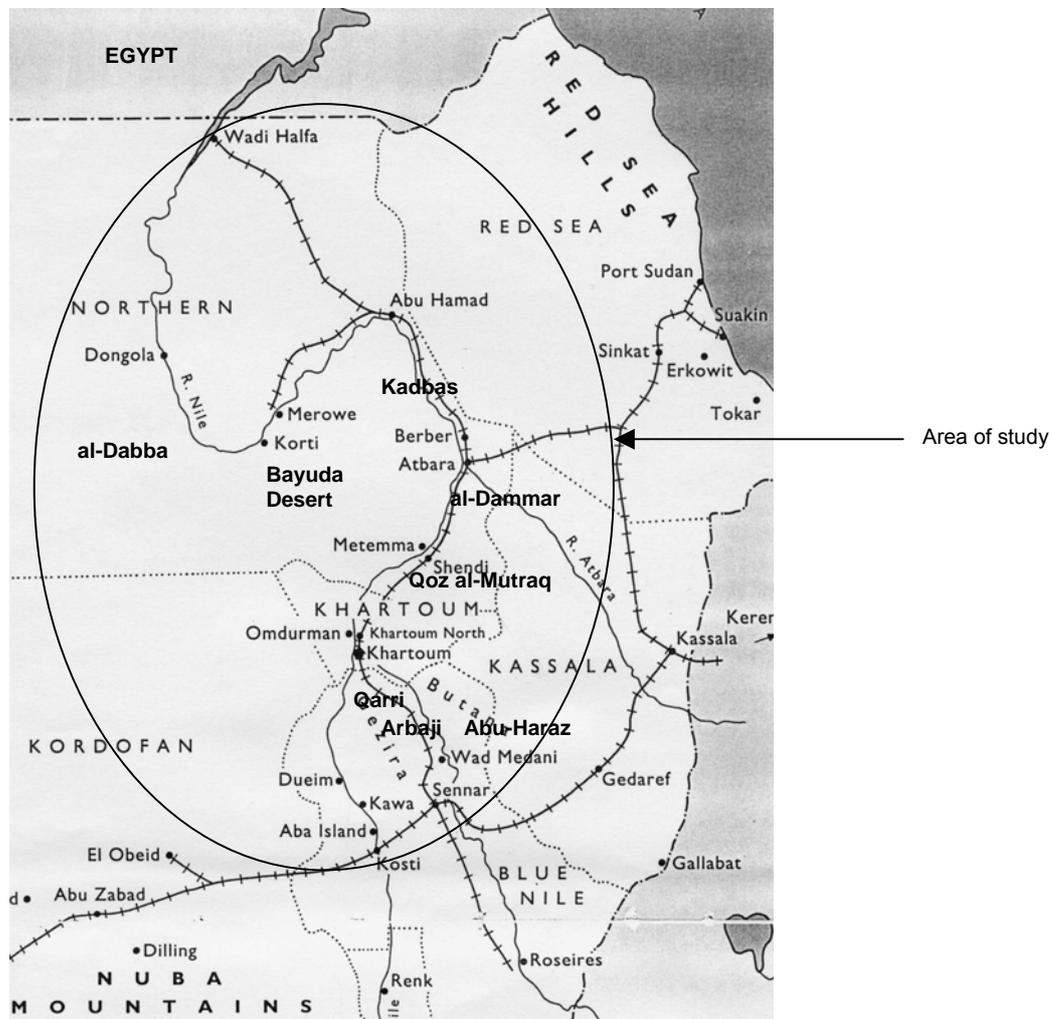
Loyalty to the *shaykh* and to the *ṭariqa* dominates Sudanese daily life even today. Many aspects contributed to this dependence on a shaykh. Political persecution by the Funj and the later Turkish rulers meant that people were disenfranchised and poor; the harsh natural environment and the daily struggle for survival were additional factors, as were as political instability and the resultant insecurity felt by the ordinary people. Consequential fatalism in peoples' attitudes meant dependence on the shaykhs and his miracles. These are well-researched aspects of Sudanese life, but spiritual life and loyalties have not been extensively explored in terms of how urban centres were initially located or how the Sudanese inhabit space.

4.8.2 Bearers of the new religion, Nile dwellers and teachers of Islam

According to Badri (1970: vi), the society that existed at the beginning of the 16th Century in the Nubian region comprised three heterogeneous groups: Christian Nubians had reverted to pre-Christian ritual, xenophobic 'pagan' Nilotics practiced traditional animistic beliefs and immigrants introduced vague Islamic beliefs. It is explained that Islamic theologians had to yield to the influence of debased Islam, as it was more adaptable to widespread working of miracles and use of ritual. Newcomers to the region were absorbed into the existing culture, despite the strong influences they brought. The assimilation between the cultures that resulted is described in Chapter 3.

The nomads had come to the region to escape authority and Mamluk power, which they resented, and to seek pasturage. The traders were seeking a free independent life – they formed small tribal groups and gained political dominance through the African matrilineal tradition of succession. Their codes of *'adah* and *'urf* still override the *Shari'a*, Islamic law (Badri, 1970: 7-8).

“The nomad of the Sudan regards the sedentary man as a toiler, eating only after severe labours, whereas he is a gentleman living on the income from his capital, i.e. his animals. In fact, one of the greatest misfortunes that can overcome a nomad is to become sedentary. The nomad Arab prefers his freedom to the confinement of the town, which soon corrupts the young and undermines the family structure.” (Verity, 1971: 25)



4.13 Places mentioned in the text: map of North East Sudan from Daly and Forbes (1994: 22-23) with additions by the author.

A symbiotic, sometimes contradictory relationship developed between the new arrivals and the original people of the region. This is the situation to which teachers of Islam during the Funj era, many of them non-Sudanese or half-Sudanese, had to

adapt. Sufi rituals became a hybrid mix of inherited Muslim, Christian and 'pagan' African ritual. Also, transient models, as opposed to those based on permanence, reflected not only nomadic practices of movement and temporality but also an attitude based on less concern for worldly possessions and wealth. Urbanisation and material wealth were despised. In fact, a well-known nomad curse is: "May God make you live in cities."

"The Bedu place great value on austerity and asceticism. The harder one's life the less one eats or drinks- and this is minimal. The harder one drives oneself the greater one's esteem. So things of luxury are usually scorned. One would rather sit on the ground than on a seat; one would rather sit upright than sprawl; one must give, not take. Generosity is paramount; one must share what food one has with anyone who is near..." (Verity 1971: 35)(The Bedu are nomadic tribes of Beja origin in the Red Sea Hills of the Sudan).

These sentiments are shared between the nomads and the Sufis. The Sudanese word *feki* refers to the local successors of the missionaries of the early Funj period. The word is a combination of *faqir* (poor) and *faqih* (someone erudite in Islamic legal matters and jurisprudence or *fiqh*.). This is defined as *rajul al-din al-warai'*, the man of religion (Gasim 1985: 869) – *warai'* means God-fearing, pious person. The combination of the two words not only expresses people's attitude to people learned in *'ilm*, but also the importance attributed to 'living simply', to the extent that these values are seen as one and the same.

The approach of the local *fekis* to religion was different to the approach of the original *shaykhs*; whose writings were elaborate religious studies. Sudanese *shaykhs* focussed on the ritualistic. Sudanese Sufism was superficial rather than intellectual or philosophical. To use Muhammad al-Hassan bin Muhammad 'Uthman al-Mirghani (d. 1869) as an example, his writings were short works of a devotional nature when compared to the writings of his father, Muhammad 'Uthman al-Mirghani (d. 1852), who was a Meccan *'alim* and a student of Ibn Idris. Thus, Muhammad al-Hassan is perceived as a miracle working holy man (Karrar, 1992: 87).

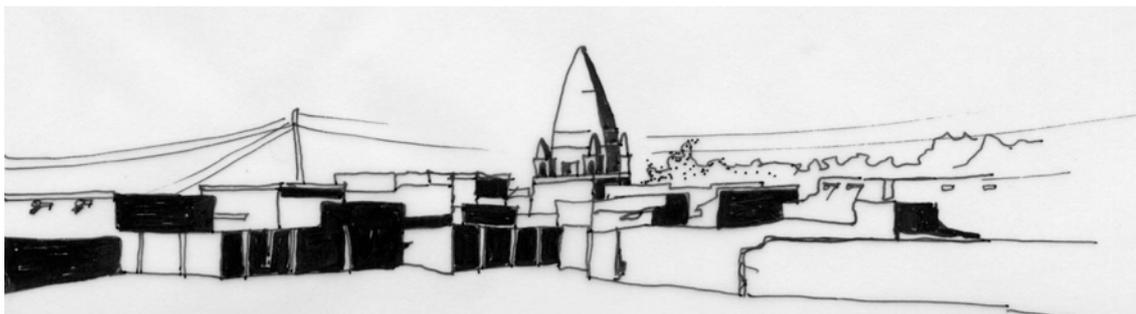
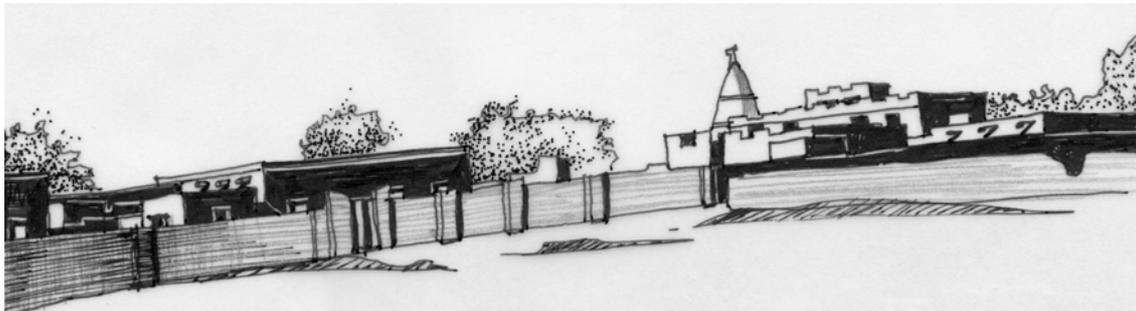
Despite the fact that the two modes of living, sedentary and nomadic, co-existed historically (refer to Meroitic domestic architecture mentioned above), after Islam, there was a bias towards urbanisation as the early Muslim teachers regarded this as a condition for religious learning. That is, they favoured the life of the Nubian riverain

dwellers to the lifestyle of the nomads. The city for the Muslim stands for the setting that permits people's interaction with God (Spahic, 2003: 153).

“To the Muslim, a town was a settlement in which his religious duties and social ideals could be completely fulfilled. Canon law permits performance of the obligatory communal prayer in the open air, and it does not prescribe for its validity a minimum of participants. The community prayer of the Friday noon service, however, may be held only in a fixed settlement with a permanent population, of whom at least forty legally responsible men must be present to make the ceremony valid. In the later period the consensus of the learned seems to have insisted that the Friday prayer should take place under a roof in a fully walled mosque.” (Grunebaum, 1955: 142).

Grunebaum further explains how these stipulations excluded the nomads from full participation in the rituals of his faith. Conflicts between sedentary and nomadic lifestyles are ancient in the history of the region and have been manifest more recently in history, such as the concerns that emerged among the nomadic Shukriyya when the traditionally sedentary Halfawi Nubians were relocated to the Butana region due to the construction of the Aswan dam (Sørbø, 1985: 136).

4.8.3 The Nuclei of Urban Centres: the Religious Centre



Figs. 4.14 and 4.15 Villages on the Khartoum-Shendi route sketched from photographs taken in January 2000 by the author.

Elleh uses Mazrui's concept of triple heritage in Africa to analyse African cities. In Khartoum, for example, Islam meets Africa within the structure of an

“...iron grid world of Western functional-spatial determinism that was based on the Union Jack.” This idea is probably most apparent because greater Khartoum is physically three cities. “No city in Africa wears the symbols of the cultural trilogy – traditional African Egypto-Nubian culture, Greco-Roman and later Western culture, and Islamic culture – more than Khartoum, the capital of the Republic of Sudan.” (Elleh, 1997: 154).

Elleh elaborates:

“In the Sudan pure and absolute Islam meets Africa proper. Khartoum is at the centre of several worlds, which also includes the iron grid world of Western functional-spatial determinism that was based on the Union Jack. The directions of the city plan are thus as Islamic as they are Britannic, and the union of African, European, and Islamic architectural vocabularies reinforces the triple heritage concept.” (1997: 158)

New centres, established as religious centres during the Funj era, were deliberately located where there was previously no settlement. This is one of the most unique features of these urban centres. In the case of Omdurman, there was a purposeful attempt to avoid settlement in Khartoum, as it was associated with the non-believers. Such attitudes have, in a number of cases, influenced decisions to move away from existing settlements. So the integration of the three forces that make up African cities was implemented in a reversed manner and very reluctantly. Islam, being seen as the main identity in the newly established centres, gradually became incorporated with more ancient and African traits. The western characteristics superimposed on the existing setting came later. The intention was to create an urban centre based purely on a Sudanese interpretation of the religion.

Many villages and towns were established as centres of trade on trade routes, and were sometimes far from the banks of the Niles. The eastern town of Geddarif was previously known as Suq Abu Sin, indicating its original function as a market. It was on the route linking Sennar with Suakin. Dueim, on the White Nile, was a centre of trade linking the riverain region with the west. Shendi was once a major terminus of caravan routes from the east of Sudan. Some *ṭariqa* shaykhs were very successful in existing trading towns.

Yet, the new religious centres of learning were mostly in the Gezira. Many *masids*, centres of a *shaykhs'* cults, are clustered around the Qarri and Arbaji areas (Badri, 1970: 130). Thus, the main source of income was agriculture and land played a central role in the economic and social organisation of people. The following centres are just examples of a pattern that dominated Sudanese urbanisation and many

other villages or towns could have been used as examples such as Abu Haraz or Wad Medani (Hill, 1970: 28). These examples were selected from a number of non-architectural sources that focussed on Sufi sects in the region. Their portrayal is simply to express how, in many cases, the reason behind the selection of a location for a town depended on the religious beliefs of a people.

Grunebaum (1955: 145) refers to towns that developed around a sanctuary, the hermitage or tomb of a saint, as spontaneous developments, as he comments that they evolved without systematic planning on the part of a governmental body, or even against the wishes of a ruler (where he refers to Shiite Kerbela), when compared to 'created' settlements. Spontaneous cities grow over a long period of time, but it is evident that created cities have to become spontaneous to flourish, as political power alone will not maintain them (Hourani and Stern, 1970: 9-10).

It will be seen below that many of these urban centres developed through systematic planning on the part of the *shaykhs*, but it is true that most of them were under limited governmental control. The Shaykh here may be considered as the founder through a deliberate act of creating an urban centre.⁸ It needs to be emphasised here that the following towns are mainly portrayed to show how they were initiated and where. There is not enough information available regarding a detailed study of their various morphologies.

4.8.3 i) al-Dammar

This town has a large weekly market for livestock to which the surrounding nomads, the Hadendawa, bring their camels to be sold. It is the centre of the Majadhib religious sect. The fact that the inhabitants mainly work in 'Atbara (a major town to the north, at the confluence of the 'Atbara and Nile rivers)(Badri, 1970: 18) indicates that its establishment was for religious reasons and a means of livelihood for its inhabitants had to be sought elsewhere.

⁸ It would have been interesting to be able to elaborate on the morphological characteristics of these urban centres and find out how the religious centre has influenced the town layout. This is seen to be an opportunity for future research, firstly descriptive and documentation and then interpretative. The placement of mosques and *qubbas* and street layouts is only well documented in Omdurman and this is discussed in the following sections.

According to Abd Allah al-Tayyib, as quoted by Badri (1970: 97), the 'College of Damir' started 400 years ago where the village of al-Shaadinab now stands, south of this present site of the al-Dammar town. The foundation of a college by Shaykh Hamad al-Majdhab al-Kabir (1693-1776) in al-Dammar started a new era in the tradition of learning, as it transferred the centre of learning from the already urbanised riverain towns to the countryside, and thus introduced *'ilm* to the nomads, to whom Hamad belonged. Yusuf Badri, partial to urban lifestyles, explains how the *'ulama* (religious scholars) contributed to the urbanisation process and how the first building to be erected was always the *masjid* (mosque):

"It was not natural that the Arabs should continue in such a state of stagnation, living all their lives in tents. Therefore the *'ulamā*' took the lead in attracting them to urban life. Two main factors had to be considered in deciding the nature of the attractions. First a suitable site had to be found where the nomads could find enough grazing for their herds. Secondly there had to be adequate provision for their social and cultural needs. To this end Hamad chose a strategic site, in the middle of the pastoral district, which lay at the conjunction of the 'Atbrāwī and the Nile, so that he could command both the trade route and the grazing lands. There on a plateau overlooking the 'Atbrāwī, observing that it was free from disease bearing insects and flies, he erected a simple *masjid* built of wood and thatch. In order to add to the popularity of his new sanctuary among the nomads, he called it Dammar, a word which was derived from their own technical terms of pastoralism, which according to their practice, is the mating period for cattle and sheep. He thus connected his chosen abode with an important event in the life cycle of the nomads." (1970: 90-91)

Al-Dammar is described as being, at the time of the original shaykh, a large settlement of 500 houses built with some uniformity in regular streets. Hamad developed the area to be more appealing for the nomads by digging wells, erecting a guesthouse and watering troughs. He then convinced the nomads to leave the young boys behind during *nushuq*, the nomad's outward journey from the river to the desert during the rainy season. The boys were taught at the newly erected *khalwa* (Quranic school) and, in the tradition of the *khalwa*, a fire was built around which students of the Quran would study.

To attract the nomads even more to the faith Hamad wrote a book of poems and set it to music, which he taught to some disciples who accompanied the *fareeqs* (nomad settlements) during *nushuq*. Badri believes that due to the nomad's fascination with linguistic ability, as well as other factors, al-Dammar grew into a large town (Badri, 1970: 91-93).

4.8.3 ii) Hillat Khojali

Another *shaykh* who attempted to initiate a process of urbanisation in a very deliberate and structured manner was Shaykh Khojali (d. 1743) (Karrar, 1992:37). His college, established at Hallfaya, in the present-day Khartoum North, contributed to the process of urbanisation in the area. His choice of site encouraged the development of an urban centre around it. With the rulers help, he acquired estates and annexed schools, hostels, guest rooms and large residential areas to the mosque.

Shaykh Khojali refused the traditional pattern of the *'ulama's* and wore magnificent clothes, soft shoes and good perfumes (Karrar, 1992: 135 and Badri, 1970: 115). He was also know for his concern for women and is praised for teaching them how to pray. This is interesting as the *masids* and mosques are predominantly the domains of men. Generally, Khojali's teachings and religious establishment survived because of his willingness to adapt to changes in society (Badri, 1970: 118).

4.8.3 iii) Wad Hassuna

Wad Hassuna was established by Shaykh Hassan wad (son of...) Hassuna who died in 1664-5 (Karrar, 1992:27). A grandson of a *Maghribi* immigrant from Tunisia he was celebrated for protecting the people against the rulers (Ibrahim, 1979: 152). Wad Hassuna is is inhabited by his descendants, known as al-Hussunab, who claim *sharafi* descent, that is, relatives to the Prophet Mohammad. Shaykh Hassan's Qadiri centre of learning was new in that it was deep in the country, away from the river, between the Red Sea and Sennar. The Qadiriyya is one of the ancient de-centralised *tariqas*, established by Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166) of Persian origin (Karrar, 1992: 23).

This village was a centre of hospitality. It was situated on the caravan route to Suakin and a large *hafir* (reservoir) and mud huts were built for wayfarers and guests. "Certain observers said that his guest houses were equal in number to those of the king at Sennar." (Badri, 1970: 141. He refers to Ibn Dayf Allah in the *Tabaqat*). In spite of his wealth it is said that he lived a very frugal life and his diet was mainly durra porridge and milk, his clothes were a short shirt and long trousers, he was often bareheaded and barefoot and he preferred the solitude of the countryside. He also wore a course dammur, rough hand-woven cotton cloth.

When he came to the village from the countryside, it is said, the shaykh was always greeted with much fanfare and drum beating. His stays at the village would be brief. He always had a *'alim* (religious scholar) with him as he had not studied *'ilm*. He would receive visitors in an orderly fashion in his *daywan* (room for receiving visitors). The last to be received were the patients who would pay for their treatment, sometimes in gold (Hasan, 1992: 139-140). This no doubt contributed to the sustenance of the village.

His *masid*, which contains his tomb, was built in 1669 and was an important sanctuary and his *hafir* a source of water but according to Badri, the village has grown little because the caravan route no longer passes through it and new roads were constructed further east. Social and economic change led to the development of new urban centres at the expense of the original *masids* (Badri, 1970: 144-145).

4.8.3 iv) al-Fijayja

Mohammad bin (son of) Sirhan al-'Awdi, *Sughayrun* (another Qadiri teacher), eldest son of Fatima bint (daughter of) Jabir, followed his maternal uncles the *Awlad Jabir*. He combined *ilm*, *'amal* (performance, action or practice), *fiqh* (Islamic law, jurisprudence) and Sufism and taught at the school of *Awlad Jabir*. *Awlad Jabir* were the most eminent religious teachers in the northern region during the second half of the sixteenth century:

“The four sons of Jabir were like four elements; each one had its own virtue. The most learned of them was Ibrahim, the most worthy Abd al-Rahman, the most pious Abd al-Rahim, and their sister, Fatima, was their equal in learning and faith.” (Karrar, 1992: 27).

Because of the envy of *Sughayrun's* maternal cousins, he accepted the invitation of the Funj Sultan Badi I (1611-1616/7) and went to Dar al-Abwab near Shendi (Karrar, 1992: 28). According to Ibn Dayf Allah (Hasan, 1992: 225) he placed his *saqiyya* (water wheel) in a boat and left for the land of the *Shayqiyya*, a northern Sudanese riverain tribe, with his family and his sons: *Fa adkhal saqiatih fi markab wa qanjar ila dar al Shayqiyya bi ahlihi wa awladihi*.

It is said that after hours of disagreement with his students, he was guided by the Khadir to settle in Qoz al-Mutraq, south of Shendi, which was then an area of bush. The name Khadir is not mentioned in the Quran, he is believed to be a helper of

Moses – many folktales revolve around his character. Settling there, he made a small clearing and al-Fijayja was granted to him by Sultan Badi and became one of the centres of religious and legal education in the northern Funj territories. After Sughayrun's death the school continued under his son. When the son died in 1675-6 "...his pupils were said to number about a thousand, most of whom became jurists and judges over a vast area that extended as far as Waḍai (Dar Ṣulyh) in modern Chad." (Karrar, 1992: 28).

Fija means 'open', 'move apart' or 'create space between'. It also means widen (Gasim, 1985: 841 and *lisān al-'arab*). The word implies a clearing, an identified space or a place. This is of interest as these centres were mostly established on land that had otherwise not been used or identified for settlement purposes. This reinforced the idea that the location of settlements or schools of learning were identified through divine guidance.

4.8.3 v) al-Fara'/al-Qubba

Al-Kabbashi established his own Qadiri branch (*fara'*) and travelled widely in the Gezira instructing people in both *fiqh* and Sufism. At Qarri, the former capital of the Abdallab, he settled in a large area of wasteland, *ghaba*. The bush was teeming with wild animals, which attacked the Abdallab livestock; they requested him to pray to God to drive them off. In return for his prayers, al-Kabbashi was granted the area, which came to be known as al-Fara' (literally meaning "the branch"). After his death the village was known as al-Qubba (the dome) after his domed tomb (Karrar, 1992: 32).

4.8.3 vi) Kadbas

Shaykh Ahmed Al Ja'ali established a village of Kadbas on the west bank of the Nile across from Berber. On '*Umra* (minor pilgrimage) he was instructed by the prophet Al Khadir to detach himself from worldly matters. On returning, Shaykh Ahmed entered into a seven-year retreat in a *ghar* (artificial cave built in imitation of the prophet who retreated to a cave for religious devotions) built at Kadbas. After he emerged he contacted all the well-known Sufis asking to be initiated. He was told that the one who will initiate him would come to him. A Persian mystic later came to Berber and initiated him. It is believed that he arrived there by divine guidance (Karrar, 1992: 34).

4.8.3 vii) Um Dubban

Shaykh 'Ubayd wad Badr met Al-Hassan al-Mirghani in Mecca who prophesised that Ubayd would establish a religious centre in a place where there is a 'tree with many flies'. The *khalwa* and Sufi centre at Um Dubban (literally 'mother of flies'), near Khartoum North is considered to be one of his miracles or *karamat*. Some believe that '*dubban*' or flies actually refers to bees (Karrar, 1992: 80). The centre is now known as Um Dawanban (light that is revealed).

4.8.3 viii) al-Sanniyya

This village was established at the foot of Kassala Mountain, al-Taka in eastern Sudan, as a centre for the Khatmiyya *tariqa* of Mohammad al-Hassan bin Mohammad 'Uthman al-Mirghani. The village was later renamed al-Khatmiyya. It is interesting to note that this village attracted followers from all over Sudan (Karrar, 1992: 63 and 72). It is unclear if this created a new social dynamic or if it was merely a continuation of the old establishments. Looking at the economy of the village one could assume that it leaned to the latter as social hierarchies appear to resemble those of the slave establishments.

The economy of the village is also an indication of the economy of other villages set up initially as religious centres. Followers of the Khatmiyya showed loyalty to spiritual masters by granting shares (*shaqiqa*) in agricultural land or offering one or more palm trees. Some gave away sons and daughters to serve as attendants to the Mirghani family referred to as *Awlad al Bayt* and *Banat al Bayt* (literally 'the boys of the house' and 'the girls of the house'). The female *huwarat* offered to act as links between the female members of the Mirghani family and the female followers of the *Tariqa* (Karrar, 1992: 93).

Like Shaykh Khojali, al-Mirghani disliked the exaggerated dress and asceticism (*taqashuf*) of dervishes. So it is apparent that not all the *shaykhs* insisted on *taqashuf* like Shaykh wad Hassuna.

4.8.4 Descriptions of religious centres

The characteristics shared by all religious centres, around which urban centres developed, are elaborated below. Regardless of the size or the importance of the centre, it always had at its origins a *feki* and a *khalwa*. This section paints a verbal picture of how everyday life took place in these hubs of spiritual and social values.

Orthodox *'ilm* had its centres at the *khalwa*, an 'elementary school' conducted by one teacher, a *feki*, and could have a student population of several hundred. Its main purpose was to learn the Quran by heart and teaching was arduous. The *khalwa* was also a social centre and a guesthouse. The *feki* also visited the sick at home to recite from the Quran; he prepared amulets for protection from the evil eye and was given *bayad*, any form of gift or payment.



Fig. 4.16 Khalwa boy dipping a reed pen into ink for writing sections of the Quran on a *loh* (wooden board)(Photograph obtained from the Sudanese Embassy, Pretoria, 2000).

More *'ilm* was sought at the *masjid*, college, where a *'alim* was the teacher. These *masjids* played a large role in the formation of large villages, which became the nucleus for the future towns and cities of modern Sudan in the same way as the Sufi *masids*. Some *masjids* had a dual function where both *'ilm* and *tariqa* were observed. The centre of a saint's cult was the *masid*. Here the teacher was the *shaykh* of a *tariqa*. The *muridin* are the students of a *tariqa* discipline and they did not necessarily undergo literary tests as the *masjid* students did. Their tests were humility, obedience and worldly renunciation, the Sufi tests. This had very little in common with scholarly or intellectual Sufism.



Fig. 4.17 Dervishes in a procession in Khartoum (Photograph obtained from the Sudanese Embassy, Pretoria, 2000).

The religious centre was usually a large walled *hosh* (courtyard) that contained the *masjid*, *qubba*, guesthouses and the 'alim's private quarters (Fig. 4.18). Typical of Muslim spatial interpretation, any place where a person prays, or people gather for worship, acquires a sacred quality. Sanctity is not necessarily embedded in the built form. The *hosh* was where most functions took place and the *halaqa*, circle (of worshipers), the most sacred construct of the space. The village grew around these forming an urban centre for trade and cultivation with the *feki*, 'alim or *shaykh* as the prime mover of the village, which often bore his name (Badri, 1972: 33-44).

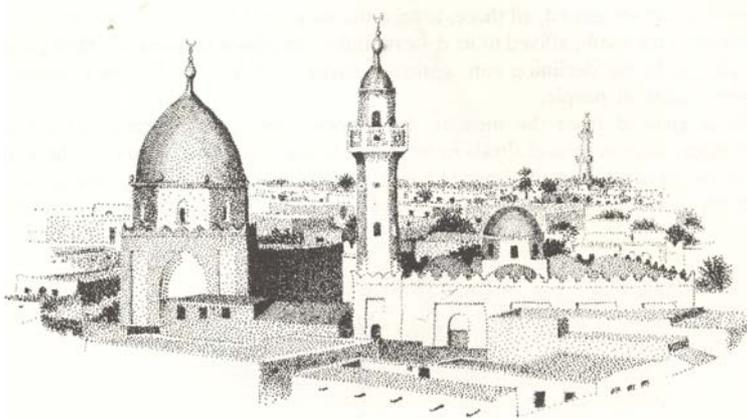


Fig. 4.18 “The domed *gubba* and minaret of Sheikh Gharieb Allah el Tayer” (Potter, 1984: 127)(*Tayer* literally means ‘the one who flies’. *Shaykh* Gharieb Allah was believed to be able to fly).

It is only *fekis* who are honoured by burial in a *qubba* and this maintains their status at the top of the social pyramid. There are some exceptions, the religious leaders buried in *Qubbas* in Abu Haraz near Khartoum are also political leaders (personal communication Omer S. Osman, 2003) but these are exceptions and not the norm. As mentioned elsewhere, these centres of learning are male dominated. Women mainly visit the *qubbas* for offerings and blessings, *baraka*, referred to as *ziyara*, and only rarely for 'ilm.⁹

⁹ Rapoport explains, of the southern Sinai, how: “the holy tomb is a very precise image of territorial claims on the land and of the Bedouin’s conception of territory as embodied in the group. As such it clearly structures communication. [The] two functions of tombs or shrines of saints – of marking ownership and structuring interaction and communication – were also found among the Nubian along the Nile before their relocation in New Nubia.” (1982: 191). To what extent these territorial claims influenced the location of various religious centres in the region of study still has to be studied. He also explains how different groups of people used tombs of saints to identify groups of people who also had different house and village forms (ibid. 141-142). The author could not find any information on these aspects and they will have to be covered in future research.



Fig. 4.19 Qubba of Shaykh Idris wad Arbab. Sketch by author from Crawford (1953: 73).

There are no doubt variations on this pattern of urbanisation. A future study could perhaps compare between these towns mentioned here, where the major reason for their establishment was religious (albeit other secondary reasons), with towns like Berber, Shendi or Al-Mattama (across the river from Shendi).¹⁰ The location of the different elements of a town or village is important to study in the future. To what extent the market, the mosque, *khalwa* or *qubba* complex affect the morphology of these urban centres is unclear. Bjorkelo (1984: 97) describes linear, cluster and nucleated villages. He also states that settlement morphology was mainly influenced by kinship, geography and economy (*ibid*).

“Shendi and its sister-town al-Matamma are located in a relatively fertile and well-populated area. Shendi could therefore have grown out of an earlier village; in fact, Shendi retained many ‘village’ features. However, its geographical position as a meeting-point of caravans, at least during more peaceful periods, as well as its function as the seat of a local king, were factors which turned the town into a major trading centre.” (Bjorkelo, 1989: 16)

One variation on the pattern of urbanisation listed above is Omdurman. It is perhaps the most interesting of town to research simply because of its magnitude. In other African cities of this size one would find a European style centre as a nucleus with the surroundings acquiring local characteristics. Omdurman’s initial centre is the *qubba* complex, and it was established initially as a military camp. This is further explained below.

¹⁰ Thank you to Bjorkelo for the suggestions.

4.9 OMDURMAN

Despite the military character of the Mahdiyya, and the initial establishment of Omdurman, their capital, as a military camp, it still follows in the pattern of Sudanese urbanisation. A town developed around the tomb of a shaykh, the Mahdi, and it was quickly populated by his followers. The first settlement in the area was established by Shaykh Hamad wad Umm Maryum (ca. 1646-1730) who moved there with his followers from Tuti Island and built a *khalwa* (Kramer, 1991: 44 and Ibn Dayf Allah in the *Tabaqat*). Kramer (1991: 44) explains that: “This would accord with a familiar pattern in Sudanese history, namely the founding of a settlement based on the family and retinue of a teacher or holyman, examples of which abound.”

Later, in the 1880s, the Mahdi, the divinely guided, was believed to have appeared to establish justice. He dedicated his efforts and those of his followers to ridding the country of its Turkish invaders. In late 1884 the Mahdi arrived at Daym Abu Si'd, south of Omdurman, to support the siege of Khartoum. General Gordon (Gordon was a European appointed by Khedive of Egypt Ismail (1863-79) as administrator in Sudan. He was the last Turkish governor (<http://www.sudan-embassy.co.uk/infobook/history.php>) and had built a fortress in Omdurman, in 1884, to guard the western flank of Khartoum. Its commandant was asked to surrender, which it did, and three weeks later in January 1885 Khartoum fell to the Mahdi, Gordon was killed, and Omdurman started to flourish.

The Mahdi's intention was not to establish a city but to have a large open space to assemble his troops for jihad. As a result Omdurman became a campsite and al-Mahdi remained at Daym Abu Si'd while his followers stayed in Khartoum. When visiting his campsite, in June 1885, he died and was buried in the future location of Omdurman.

His successor, al-Khalifa 'Abdullah, chose Omdurman as his capital, referred to as *buq'at al-mahdi*, the place of the Mahdi. The Mahdi had previously opposed settling in the capital of the Turks, as he had opposed living in el-Obayyid after its capture and referred to the following *aya* from Surat Ibrahim:

“And you dwelt in the dwelling-places of those who wronged themselves, and it became clear to you how We did with them, and how We struck similitudes for you.

They devised their devising, and their devising is known to God, though their devising were such as to remove mountains.” (Kramer, 1991: 46-47).

Thus, the domain of the unbelievers, Khartoum, was rejected. Omdurman was also close to the site of Karari, regarded as the site of the eventual and decisive clash between the believers and the infidels. It also lay at trade routes to the west and had a natural harbour. The strategic depth of the western hinterland was beneficial for security, as the Ta’aysha clans, to which the Khalifa could retreat, inhabited it. For all these reasons Omdurman quickly grew into a centre for the Mahdiyya.

Calls to immigrate to Omdurman by the Khalifa ‘Abdullah aimed to centralise the riverain Sudanese and the Egyptians who possessed the administrative skills crucial to the Mahdiyya. People moved and carried with them wood and other materials from their Khartoum homes. The depopulation of Khartoum was firmly implemented in September 1886. Khartoum was plundered and lay in ruins. Many Sudanese poured in to pledge their oath of allegiance to the Khalifa and the town grew. The Ta’aysha and Baqqara tribes immigrated to Omdurman in 1889, contributing to the famine during that year. The new tribes also shifted the political and social balance of the city and this led to institutional developments.

Omdurman’s initial character was military with Gordon’s fortress serving as the garrison for the *jihadiyya* or professional soldiers. There was an open buffer zone between this and the general population by the orders of the Khalifa. The settlement patterns of the city reveal a dynamic relationship between the Mahdist government policy, traditional practices and social interaction. In the centre was the mosque and the Mahdi’s grave and the homes of the major families. The *suq* (market) was at the edge of the town, on the desert side, because the economy depended on cattle and camels.

Till today the city is divided into sections inherited from that era. Bayt al-Mal was the previous treasury and Bayt al-Aman was the weapons depot. The Masalama was a quarter for former Christians and Jews who converted during the Mahdist uprising. They lived by the suq area and engaged in trade. The Ta’aysha westerners inhabited the south of the city and in the north and north western sectors people were riverain in origin and mercantile by nature. Egyptians, former employees of the Turkiyya regime who now served the Mahdist state, lived near Bayt al-Mal on the river. There

was a great mix of tribes and a growing population; thus, structural changes were eminent (This spatial construct is derived from the descriptions of Omdurman obtained from Kramer, 1991: 45-49 and 51-59).

Kramer (1991) explains that the dynamics of social relations allowed for more complex and fluid settlement patterns than these divisions suggest. The divisions, known as *fareeqs*, a military term, did not necessarily mean social rifts but was a means of organisation. At times of threat, the Khalifa shifted people around and removed, from around his home, people with questionable loyalty to increase space for his *mulazimin*, personal bodyguards (Kramer, 1991: 200 and 202).

In 1888 the re organisation of the *suq* and the building of the Mahdi's tomb took place. The entire population, tribe-by-tribe and district-by-district, shared the labour as it was claimed that all would, thereby, gain entrance to heaven. The tomb became the religious and ideological symbol of the city (Kramer, 1991: 59).

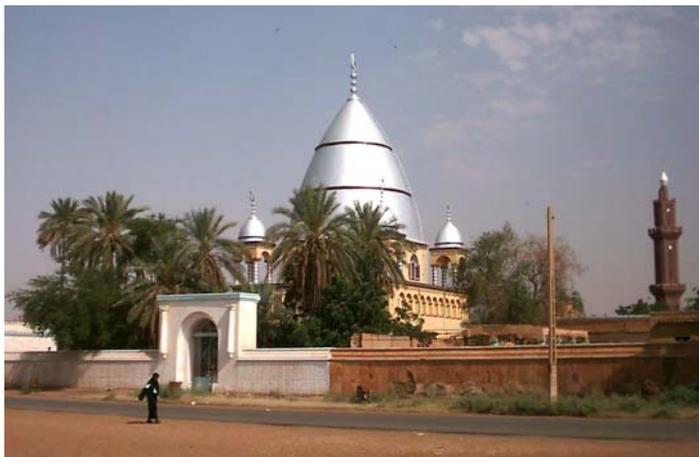


Fig. 4.20 Mahdi's Tomb, Omdurman (Photograph by O. S. Osman, 2003).

There was a critical period of political upheaval during 1889-91, after which the Khalifa ruled as a full autocratic sovereign. He attempted to express his power through buildings and large public work projects, the largest being a stone wall enclosing the administrative quarter of the city. The wall became a barrier between the Khalifa and his people and he then rarely ventured out to the people sending others to officiate the parades and the prayers. Separate mud structures were added for the Khalifa's *mulazimin*.



Fig. 4.21 The Khalifa House (Photographed by O.S. Osman, 2003).

Around 1894 Omdurman again took on the character of a military camp with weapons distributed to the people and an increase in the mulazimin, roads were widened, curfews enforced and all coffee shops closed so stories of the victories of foreign invaders could not be exchanged (Kramer, 1991: 62-63). The British now also rallied for the support of the invasion of Sudan to free it from its oppressive rulers. In 1896 major defensive measures began in the city and more troops and all food produced in the rest of the country was sent to Omdurman. The British started the construction of the railway to bring troops deeper into the country and the Mahdist state came to an end in September 1898, when the Ansar, followers of the Mahdi, attacked General Kitchener's troops at Karrari. (Kitchener was the leader of the Anglo-Egyptian invasion in the Sudan between 1896 and 1898)(<http://www.sudan-embassy.co.uk/infobook/history.php>). There were 11,000 casualties, the city was bombarded and the administrative capital transferred back to Khartoum.



Fig. 4.22 The Qubba viewed from the roof of the Khalifa House, showing part of the original dome that was destroyed by the British in 1898 (Photograph by O.S. Osman, 2003).

The history of the development Omdurman is representative of urbanisation in other parts of the country, but at a larger scale and with a more profound influence symbolically. In this case, the *shaykh*, the prime motivator, was an important figure for all Sudanese through his liberation efforts. The identification of a place for

settlement, the development of this settlement around the burial place of a shaykh and the symbolic significance of the city as related to religious beliefs are all factors that indicate that Omdurman was typical of the unique pattern of Sudanese urbanisation.

The difference in the magnitude of the urban manifestation of the values of a people are apparent in that, for most Sudanese, Omdurman still contains the holiness, *baraka*, of the Mahdi and his family (more so for the *ansar* – a strong political movement in the country till today). It is now considered the national capital, the symbol of the values of the people, while Khartoum is the administrative capital. Other villages and towns that developed around the burial places of various *shaykhs* would, by comparison, have significance for a limited number of people who are followers of that particular *shaykh*.

4.9.1 The morphology of Omdurman compared to the Medina Typology

Elleh (1997: 336) explains that African cities influenced by Islam have various shared characteristics. A comparison between Omdurman and other African cities is attempted in Table 4.3. The differences between the town layouts of Omdurman and al-Fashir in the Western Sudan are striking in Figs. 4.24 and 4.25 (Daly and Forbes, 1994). It is thus noted that while the two towns are both examples of Muslim contexts influenced by Islam, it does not mean that this interaction will necessarily produce the same layout. A map of Omdurman during the Mahdiyya is constructed, in Fig. 4.23, from fragmented sketches of plans of the city found in Abu Salim (1991: 214 and 215).

The Arab geographer Yaqt (d. 1229) identifies two indispensable characteristics of a town: a *jami'* (Friday service mosque) and a permanent market (in Grunebaum 1955: 141). A Muslim town, when compared to a classical town, does not include gymnasiums and theatres. These functions are compensated for by the social and educational aspects of a mosque, and later, from the 11th Century, by the institutions for legal and religious learning (Grunebaum 1955: 141). The *jami'* according to Grunebaum (1955:145) is placed along the main thoroughfare, or the crossing of the two main thoroughfares, which is marked by a square as is the case in Omdurman. The *jami'* is the political and the religious centre, with the house of the ruler next to it.

It is also the intellectual centre of the town (Grunebaum, 1955: 146). These are the characteristics of the city of Omdurman till the present day.

African cities influenced by Islam	Omdurman from the Mahdiyya to present
Medieval in character ¹¹	Medieval in character – in terms of the planning of the city
Compact labyrinth dwellings	Compact labyrinth dwellings
High population density	High population density in comparison to other cities, historically and today
Defence structure wall or ditch	Defence structure wall constructed during the Mahdiyya
Uniformity of building height	Uniformity of building height
Large civic buildings, mosque, etc. that break the uniformity	Large civic buildings, mosque, khalifa's house, Mahdi's Qubba, Bayt al-Mal, Bayt al-Aman, etc. that break the uniformity of the city and provide focal points and nodes
Square near the head person residence	Square near the khalifa's house where the complex contains the focal points of the city and where official functions are held
Major roads leading up to that square	Major roads leading up to that square evident from photographs, almost radiating out from the centre
Fully utilised public and semi public spaces	This applies in most Sudanese towns

Table 4.3 Comparison between Omdurman and other African cities influenced by Islam.

¹¹ Hourani (1970: 12-13) explain how, what is usually called and Islamic city today, was actually the interaction of Muslim culture superimposed on the existing structures of Greco-Roman cities. Because of the gradual encroachment of the shops and dwellings onto the broad avenues, the cities took up their current form. This is an interesting point but it does not explain the same characteristics of the cities where there were no previous Greco-Roman establishment. Here the term medieval is used to denote irregular and narrow streets, and a centrally located focal point. The morphology of Omdurman coincides in very interesting ways with the listed descriptions of the common characteristics of Muslim cities by Hourani (1970: 20-24) and also descriptions of Baghdad by El-Ali (1970: 99-100).

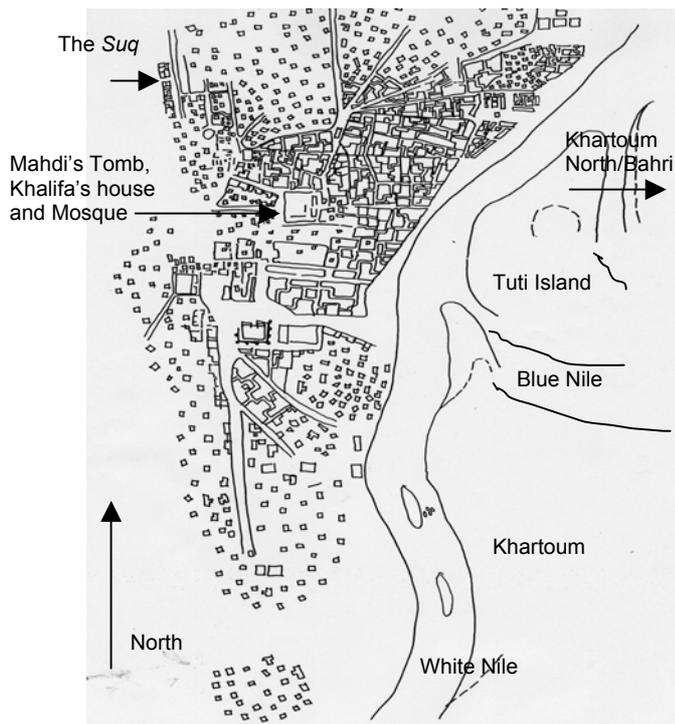


Fig. 4.23 Morphology of the city of Omdurman during the Mahdiyya (Re-drawn by author from maps in Abu Salim (1991: 214 and 215)



Fig. 4.24 Aerial photograph of Omdurman taken around 1930 (Daly and Forbes, 1994: 67).



Fig. 4.25 Aerial photograph of al Fashir, capital of Darfur in the Western Sudan, taken in 1916 (Daly et al, 1994: 139).

4.10 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The problem statement of this dissertation has been articulated through the study of selected artefacts. Some distinguishing factors have emerged and these are summarised below.

Many spatial and physical manifestations of the culture are perceived to be extensions of concepts relating to the body and to gender differentiation. The most spatially expressed factor is femininity being internally focussed and masculinity being externally focussed. As with patterns of space, clothing is a powerful tool of social control. Power structures are maintained through dress forms related to certain points in a person's life. Symbolic aspects of dress form reinforce concepts of masculinity and femininity. Some may see this as reinforcing male supremacy and perpetuating women's subordination and seclusion. Women's subordination is perhaps a reality, as in many contexts, but this aspect needs to be seen contextually to avoid imposing a Western gaze on a different social system.

Both house and dress forms were found to be modes of expression that reinforce gender differentiation and maintain social structures. Separation of each house into male/female domains meant that women had a lot of freedom of movement in the community. Thus, a woman's home could be seen as all women's domains in a village. At the domestic level, barriers between male/female domains are visual or social rather than physical. Many times the distinction between male and female realms dissolves.

Similar to building forms, conformity seems to be the norm in dress forms. For example, identity is sometimes expressed as *shilookh*, but this is always group identity and rarely individual identity. Expressing individuality is taboo. Certain clothes are also associated with political figures and this maintains their status regardless of the house type. In the context under study, the physical house does not necessarily define respect or standing.

Different materials and techniques associated with fabric production have inherent symbolism. What is accepted or rejected or revered depends on many factors, including what is encouraged by the *shaykh* of a *tariqa* for example. It is obvious that the roughness of *dammur* is very respected, as well as the patched clothing of the dervishes, *al-mubarqaa'*, expressing simple lifestyles and lack of concern for wealth.

While the idea of social differentiation through dress form has persisted through history, the form of clothing has evolved. Present day Sudanese clothing is a result of a large mixture of external influences. It is also apparent that the present-day accepted forms of Sudanese dress are actually quite recent inventions and they are still being transformed through political pressure. The loss or undermining of local tradition is a concern.

Personal space and interacting with spaces depends on the cultural traits of a people. As a Muslim culture, domains are identified mainly as male or female. Yet, it is elaborated that in the context of study physical expression of segregation is more relaxed since clothing restrictions compensate for the apparent spatial freedom. Freedom of movement within the home and at the level of the community is defined by the degree of cover of the body. The *tob*, for men and women, is a mobile shelter.

Women are evidently under more pressure of conform to dress patterns that maintain the segregation required by culture and religion.

In the context of study, it is believed that physical appearance is strongly linked to mental state. The interconnectedness of forms of dress, beautification techniques, social ritual and linguistic terms is noted. All appear to serve similar purposes in different forms: gender differentiation and separation, mental health, physical healing and keeping evil spirits at bay. *Satr* is perhaps the most expressive term as it is at the root of the meanings of many words relating to well-being, protection and social acceptance. It refers, not only, to physical cover, but also to protection from the evil eye and from the eyes of others who may envy you. It is protection bestowed on one by God as in: the protector is God, *al-satar Allah*. It refers to words for both clothing and physical shelter.

The other important feature highlighted by the inquiry, is the transient patterns of habitation that emerged at both the scale of the village and the smaller scale of the home. The nomadic backgrounds of the inhabitants, as well as Sufi beliefs, have influenced people's approach to life in which the physical artefact is often despised. Fewer possessions mean that within the house activities are very mobile and move between inside and outside depending on the time of the day, the season or the social rites being performed.

The idea of comfort in space finds specific expression in the study area. In a Muslim culture, separation needs to be maintained between male and female. This separation may be in the form of mere 'distance', or in the form of artefacts, such as clothes or walls. Expression of that separation may be in dress forms, rituals or cosmetics. These may be more important than built form or space articulation. Body images, extended to clothing systems, further extended to architecture or building systems, support social functions.

A general pattern is identified in the initial establishment of centres of religious learning. Many times the identification/selection of a location is based on a vision or by supernatural guidance. This is reflected in the names attributed to the locations. Urbanism is considered a condition for teaching *'ilm* and Sufism to the people. This conflicted with the nomad's way of life, which the Arabs greatly valued. Some

considered the sedentary living of the original inhabitants to be superior. This is some kind of paradox. The Arab nomads who introduced Islam to the Sudan were later confronted with the attitude of the Sufi *Shaykhs* who believed that urbanism is a condition for *'ilm*.

Each urban centre had a masjid, masjid, a khalwa and guesthouses. Aspects of urban living were introduced. Later the *shaykh's* dome would be built there and it would become an area of visitation. The urban centre would develop around these. The religious centres were mainly situated on land suitable for cultivation. Some centres were situated on then existing trade routes, which became redundant after the construction of modern roads and colonial imperatives.

While some *tariqa shaykh's* encouraged *taqashuf* or a frugal approach to life, some rejected that. *Shaykhs* acquired much wealth from gifts and payments in crops, gold or even people as servants but mostly a *shaykh* was more revered if he lived very simply. Generally, the adopted lifestyle of the *shaykh* and his followers is seen as a continuation of previous lifestyles. Even *shaykhs* of the centralised brotherhoods became assimilated to Sudanese Islam to a great degree.

Previous studies on the northern Sudan have focussed on specific areas or towns or buildings, but these have largely been descriptive, as opposed to being interpretative. By looking at the characteristics of the region from a distance, by stepping out of the conventional boundaries of one discipline, a more complex picture is drawn. It is concluded that spatial mappings of social themes are relatively unambiguous and that non-traditional symbols and practices are reconciled with the traditional in a never-ending symbiotic process. This skill has been important for the original inhabitants of the region as, due to the strategic location, they have always had to contend with new visitors, as peaceful migrants or invaders.

Thus the set problem has been addressed through the study of the tangible culture and exposure of aspects of order underlying the structuring of place. The recurring themes identified in the previous chapter have been elaborated. Social conscience, religion and ethics play a major role in space appropriation from the level of the body to the level of the urban centre or city. Elaborate social interaction systems have a profound influence on the day-to-day activities of people yet these are not always

easily seen physically. Power relations control social interaction and thus space organisation. Slave trade, racism and political power established status hierarchies but still have to be further investigated, preferably using case studies. Trade routes determined where towns were located and the influences that were brought into a region. The harshness of the environment and the poor economy raised the status of the religious leader and created elaborate social systems as a survival mechanism. Sudanese Sufism influences levels of authority, thus the influence of *shaykhs* and where they came from. The *shaykh's* cult generated a unique form of Sudanese urbanisation.