

PRIDE AND VILIFICATION - TWO TRIBAL VIEWPOINTS¹

In countries with a tribal diversity, such as the Sudan, one encounters the view that tribalism is divisive and consequently detrimental to the progress of the country. This view is to be found mainly among educated people who dislike the fact that tribalism is still prevalent in the ordering of their lives both in rural areas and in urban centres. But despite their apparent aversion to the persistence of tribalism, these same educated people are proud of their tribal background and they are the first to defend their tribes against criticism. This reaction against tribalism is based on certain controversial assumptions: that tribalism is an anachronistic form of organization and a parochial means of identity, that it creates conflicts and divisions between people, that it perpetuates favouritism, and that it is an unfashionable or a backward way of looking at society. According to the historical and political circumstances of a particular country, it may happen that a colonial power is blamed for the perpetuation of tribalism and the exploitation of tribal differences. The alternative aim expressed by educated people is the creation of a new national identity in which cultural, linguistic and political uniformities should prevail. Nevertheless, it is the case that the same educated people who shun tribalism are seen to act in a manner which not only furthurs the interests of their own tribe, but also inclines towards the prominence of one tribe over others.

In a multi-tribal society such as the Sudan, it is not surprising that people should emphasize or accentuate their tribal identity. The proliferation of tribes is looked upon by people as an interesting cause of social and cultural differences. People conceive of their society in terms of cultural and social

diversity: multiplicity of tribes, languages, religious practices and modes of living. The Sudan has a largely rural population brought up with a deep-rooted tribal awareness as a component part of a person's ideology and social reality such that tribal identity is not easily abandoned and does not run counter to the concept of national identity.

Generally speaking, the pride of people in their tribe leads an individual to defend and to elevate his own tribe if criticized and to demean others, in such a way that the dividing line between fact and fiction becomes blurred. Through time particular tribes have come to be associated with certain labels, accusations and falsifications which have been perpetuated and considered to be a true representation of reality. They have become common beliefs manifesting themselves not only in people's actions but also in their statements and in their folklore. The poems quoted in this paper illustrate how two tribes, the Shaygiyya and the Danagla,² make a subjective assessment of each other in terms of their respective backgrounds, achievements and history.

The poetical contest, *musājala*, between a Shaygi and a Dongolawi, who were friends and well-known poets in the Shaygiyya homeland,³ took place in the 1940s and pertained to pride in tribal identity, its assertion and the relative superiority of tribal characteristics. This poetical contest involved insult, abuse and vilification, *shatīma* or *ni'ail*, by both poets. The vilification started with the Shaygi poet demeaning the Danagla tribe and glorifying the Shaygiyya. The cause of this literary exchange was that the Shaygi poet had fallen in love with a Dongolawi woman. However, her family refused to give her to him in marriage and quickly married her to a member of her own tribe when the relationship came to be known. The Shaygi poet felt that this was an insult to him as by marrying the Dongolawi woman he considered that he would be doing the Danagla a 'favour'. The Shaygiyya, as a mark of superiority, do not give their women in marriage to Danagla men and the latter are only allowed, as popular Shaygiyya statements stipulate, to marry the ex-slave women of the Shaygiyya. Thus the Shaygi poet would have elevated the social standing of the Dongolawi woman had he married her. However, in marriage tribal loyalty and identity are of primary importance and love is of only secondary consideration. Generally, no Shaygi would give his daughter in marriage to a Dongolawi man and no Dongolawi would give his daughter in marriage to a Shaygi. They are both proud of their tribal identity and both emphasize the exclusiveness of their respective tribe. Though a few inter-tribal marriages have taken place, objections are raised particularly by women and pressure is brought upon people in order to dissuade them from such marital arrangements. Marriage is not looked upon as a matter of personal choice but rather as a matter that concerns all members of an individual's

kinship group. With the constraints of belonging to a closely knit kinship group, it would be difficult enough for a person to marry a woman from another related tribal group, and even more difficult to marry a woman from a different tribe. Among northern Sudanese communities, a crucial assessment made in the process of choosing a bride or a bridegroom is whether a person is *mu'aşşal*, of known descent or genealogy. A common question is asked about a stranger: *jinsū shinū* (literally, what is his race?), meaning what is his tribal affiliation. Such affiliation influences an individual's relationship with others in regard to marriage, as well as in social and economic relationships. Known descent refers to descent primarily from an Arabian tribe which is a matter of pride and respectability. There is boasting among the tribes of the North as to who can claim such descent and the poetical contest opened with the assertion of this claim by both poets.

The poetical duel consisted of five poems: two by the Shaygi poet and three by the Dongolawi poet. The Shaygi poet opened the contest and the Dongolawi poet replied; then the Shaygi poet wrote another poem and the Dongolawi had the last word with two poems. As my intention is to elucidate themes from these poems, the works will not be given in full but couplets or stanzas from these poems will be cited. The themes which I will elaborate are those of descent and genealogy, mode of living, history, character and cultural traditions. I realize that poetry should be translated as poetry but this is difficult to achieve without some divergence from the original text and in my translation I have tried to convey as nearly as possible the meaning of the Arabic.

After the marriage of the Dongolawi woman to a man of her own tribe, the Shaygi poet began his attack on the Danagla tribe by glorifying the genealogy of his tribe in the following line:

We are Shaygiyya and Abbasi⁴

The implication is that the Shaygiyya are *mu'aşşalīn*; they are descendants of Shayg, the founder of the tribe, who in turn is claimed to be a descendant of Al-Abbas, the Prophet's uncle, of Quraysh tribe. Such descent is considered prestigious and the Shaygiyya share this with other tribes chiefly the Ja'aliyyin group who inhabit the banks of the river Nile from north of Khartoum to al-Dabba. The Arabic language is associated with this descent claim. To the Shaygiyya, who speak no other language but Arabic, the Danagla are people of the *ruṭāna*, a non-Arabic language, and thus their claim of descent from an Arabian tribe is in doubt. Hence the Shaygi poet berates the ancestry of the Danagla:

You, Dongolawi of lowly origins⁵

to which the Dongolawi poet retorts:

It is obvious your tongue is too long
 And you are a thousand miles away from truth
 We are the descendants⁶ of al-Abbas but we
 do not boast
 Unlike so many people who falsely claim such
 descent and are a burden on al-Abbas
 We are the sons of the virgin Fatima⁷
 We are also the descendants of the exemplary ten⁸
 We are descendants of notables from earlier times
 Consult history and look with impartiality
 Our genealogy goes back to the Hasanain⁹
 It is too well-known¹⁰ to need boasting about.

To the Dongolawi poet the Shaygiyya's claim of descent from al-Abbas is false:

To al-Abbas they (the Shaygiyya) are like a
 dummy calf [tolchen in O.E.D.] to a cow
 Or like attributing the pyramids to the sphinx

Moreover, the Dongolawi poet debases the Shaygiyya ancestry on the pretext that it is obscure:

All knowledgeable men have agreed
 That Shayg's genealogy is obscure
 He must be a jinn or a ghoul - we do not know
 which
 Only his language¹¹ made people suppose him
 human
 We are not descended from Bitt al-Jibail¹²

The Dongolawi poet's assertion that the Shaygiyya are not related to al-Abbas does not conform to the statements of the Shaygiyya. From local traditions and genealogies the Shaygiyya relate themselves to al-Abbas through Ibrahim Ja'al who is claimed to be the ancestor of the Ja'ali group of tribes in the Sudan.¹³ But the Shaygiyya, like the rest of the riverain tribes of the North, are labelled as Arabized Nubians,¹⁴ a term which implies an intermixture of immigrant Arabs from Arabia with the local Nubian population. Thus there is no contradiction between claiming Arabian descent and being partially Nubian, assuming that the intermixture took place and assuming that the land occupied by the Ja'ali group of tribes was inhabited by Nubians. However, the riverain tribes do not look at themselves in this way: they regard themselves as Arabs. The term Ja'ali with its connotation of Arabized Nubian has been applied to people living as far north as Dongola, the homeland of the Danagla. Holt states that

The most northerly tribes of the Ja'ali Group lie downstream of the Shaygiyya, between al-Dabba and the country of the Barabra.¹⁵ Their homeland is the historical region of Dongola (Arabic: Dunqula), whence these tribesmen are known collectively as Danaqla (singular:

Dunqulawi), i.e. 'men of Dongola'. Among them there is far more consciousness of Nubian origin than among the tribes of the southern Ja'ali Group, and a Nubian dialect continues to be spoken.¹⁶

The Dongolawi poet denies the lowly genealogy attributed to him by the Shaygi poet in the following couplet which gives credibility to the incorporation of the Danagla within the Ja'ali Group:

What else can you say against us except that we
are Danagla
The name of our home has nothing to do with our
genealogy

It is not my intention here to discuss the validity of the genealogical links claimed with Arabian tribes of the Shaygiyya or the Danagla. However, Holt's classification of the Danagla within the Ja'ali Group does raise the question: how did it come about that the southern Ja'ali Group lost their Nubian dialect or 'consciousness' while the northern Ja'ali Group retained the Nubian dialect and 'consciousness'?

In addition to his denigration of the Shaygiyya, the Dongolawi poet berates the Shaygi poet personally and suggests that he is not a Shaygi:

I know you forebear by forebear
History proves that you are not a Shaygi¹⁷
The Isayab¹⁸ are kind and helpful people
When they saw your grandfather passing through
their homeland
They asked him where he came from and he
replied: from Wad Hamad
They made him welcome and among them he settled
They made him head¹⁹ of a Koranic school and
he showed ability
You and I are strangers in the Shaygiyya homeland
We do not own a water-wheel²⁰ or a plot of land

Mode of livelihood features prominently in the contest. The Shaygiyya are sedentary agriculturalists. In view of the relatively wide area of cultivable land along the banks of the river Nile, most of the Shaygiyya are farmers cultivating mainly cash and some subsistence crops. However, a number of Shaygiyya sections are nomadic, roaming the Bayuda Desert: this mode of life does not exist among the Danagla and is looked down upon by both tribes. Moreover, surplus men in the middle age groups among the Shaygiyya tend to leave their villages and seek employment in towns and cities. This is partly due to the limited land available for cultivation and partly to the absence of alternative sources of livelihood in the area. In contrast, migration among the Danagla, like the rest of the Nubians, is more noticeable as the existing agricultural land is more limited than

that of the Shaygiyya. The Shaygi poet belittles the Danagla migratory way of life by praising the sedentary mode of living of his own tribe:

The Shaygiyya are settled in their homeland
 Tenacious of their leader and their tribal
 boundaries
 To help those who come round begging, they
 cultivate bigger plots²¹ than they need

Traditionally all the riverain tribes of the North, including the Danagla, grow date-palm trees but the Shaygi poet boasts about the varieties of dates harvested in his homeland:

They (the Shaygiyya) harvest *tamūda*, *kulma*
 and *gundail*²²

The Shaygi poet is contemptuous of the Danagla way of life; the Danagla's pursuits are not respectable and are looked down upon by the Shaygiyya:

They (the Shaygiyya) do not pull or moor boats
 As boatmen, the Danagla need to store food on their journeys, a
 custom scorned by the Shaygiyya:

They (the Shaygiyya) did not carry salted fish²³
 nor take other food with them

The Danagla, like the rest of the riverain tribes of the North, are engaged not only in agriculture but also in a variety of occupations at home and much more so in urban centres. However, there are two traditional occupations known to be prevalent among the Danagla which are stigmatized. The Shaygi poet highlights these:

You (the Dongolawi) are either a boatman or a
 helmsman
 And if you succeed you become an Englishman's
 cook²⁴

The Dongolawi poet retorts:

You fool, what is wrong with helmsmen?
 With their intelligence they have conquered
 the Nile
 They know what is possible and what is not²⁵

He is proud of this profession and continues:

I am a helmsman and the son of a helmsman and I
 know how to steer a boat with a pole
 And in my boats I was well brought up

The Shaygiyya do not have the experience of the Danagla as boatmen. Hence the Dongolawi poet mocks the Shaygiyya in the following line which implies that the Shaygiyya are afraid of sailing their small boats in the middle of the river:

And among you are those who pull the small boat

near the river bank

As the Shaygi poet demeans certain aspects of the Danagla way of life, so also the Dongolawi poet shows his contempt of the pursuits of the Shaygiyya. But first the Dongolawi poet claims that if it were not for the Danagla the Shaygiyya would still be backward. Thus he taunts the Shaygiyya and becomes grandiloquent about the Danagla:

You (the Shaygiyya) only know how to clear the
mud from the canal
We came to civilize you greatly
You became clean and stopped wearing rags
We are not people who sleep at the foot of
date-palm trees
We have taught you to sleep on a bed²⁶

The vituperation of the Dongolawi poet is further expressed in demeaning an array of occupations to be found among the Shaygiyya as well as among other riverain tribes:

Among you the wicked tax collector²⁷
And among you the lowly builder
And among you the porter with his rope
And among you the cross-pollinator of date-
palm trees
And among you the trimmer of donkey's hair²⁸
And among you the eulogist²⁹ with his drum³⁰
And among you those who wander in the deserts³¹
And we (the Danagla) did not mix mud³² in the
midday heat

Both among the Shaygiyya and among the Danagla there are people engaged in occupations which are necessary and useful to their society but which are considered lowly occupations by the sedentary agriculturalists of both tribes. Moreover, there is an additional stigma attached to these lowly occupations by members of the other tribe because they are not customary to that tribe. For example, the occupations of boatman and cook are to be found among the Danagla but not among the Shaygiyya but these occupations are necessary and much in demand. Among the Shaygiyya some of these lowly occupations are undertaken by people who are non-Shaygiyya and this has occurred as a result of the developing cash economy. For the Dongolawi poet to include the eulogist among the lowly occupations of the Shaygiyya is surprising since the eulogists referred to in the poem are famous in the Sudan and are respected people among the Shaygiyya and elsewhere.

The Shaygi poet shows his pride in the important people in his homeland:

Among us there are those who are a tribal head and
a Branch President³³
And we have those who are guarded by policemen

The Dongolawi poet replies by asserting the superiority of military ranks among the Danagla:

We are officers and there is no sergeant major
among us

He continues to taunt the Shaygiyya who are traditionally associated with the occupation of policemen and soldiers in the army:

If it is true that you have a police guardsman
Then his only duty is to collect date tax

Another theme dwelt upon by both poets is that of religious education. The spread of Islam in the Sudan came via the missionary work of indigenous people and immigrants. They established Koranic schools, *khalwas*, and founded religious brotherhoods, *ṭarīqas*. Among the Shaygiyya were such men of religion who became famous for their piety, zeal and work and who either remained at home or established themselves elsewhere.³⁴ The Shaygi poet boasts about this achievement:

We read the books of Traditions³⁵
And we teach the Koran
And at night the religious institutions³⁶ are
ablaze with light for the teaching of our
children

To the Dongolawi poet such claim to religious fame is unjustifiable:

You read but you do not understand what Khalil³⁷
states
May the words of God be cleansed of you

In evaluating the role of the Shaygiyya and the Danagla in the history of northern Sudan, the Shaygi poet takes it for granted that people already know the heroics of his tribe and thus he says little. The Dongolawi poet, on the other hand, portrays the history of the Shaygiyya in a subjective manner. An important landmark in the history of the Shaygiyya was when the Shaygiyya confederacy became powerful and asserted its independence from the Funj Kingdom of Sennar (1504-1820) during the seventeenth century. It appears that the revolt of the Shaygiyya against the Funj took place in about 1690 after which the Shaygiyya cut off Dongola from Sennar. Later in 1782 they ejected the Funj representative from Dongola and thus the Shaygiyya remained dominant and 'absolute masters of Dongola and the surrounding areas...'³⁸ Their raids and battles, particularly with the Turco-Egyptian forces in 1820-21, lead the Shaygi poet to say:

Everyone knows the history of their ancestors'
wars
In war we are found in the thick of the fight
We do not retreat from the battlefield
We hurry to rally round the flag

The bravery of the Shaygiyya which is mentioned so often by historians, and their descent and way of life leads the Shaygi

poet to come to the conclusion that:

Other tribes have copied our tribal markings³⁹

The power of the Shaygiyya was checked when the Mamelukes, due to the policy of Muhammed Ali to drive them away from Egypt, came to the northern Sudan after 1811. A number of battles ensued and in collaboration with the Danagla, the Mamelukes succeeded in removing the influence of the Shaygiyya from the Dongola area. It is likely that the humiliation of the Shaygiyya portrayed by the Dongolawi poet refers to this period. He parallels the alleged cowardice of the Shaygiyya with that of their ancestor, Shayg:

At the hour of decision Shayg says
You wait here, I want to go and relieve myself

He goes on to shame the Shaygiyya on their performance in battle:

When the war drum was beaten
You retreated from the battlefield one
thousand miles
You abandoned the wounded and the dead
And those who survived became captives
We have not forgotten your past shame
You always say: close the line and keep it
straight⁴⁰
But you ran and hid in the water-course
And the witness to your cowardice are the dom-
trees of al-Shikail⁴¹
We have compelled your women to sing death songs
many times
And the guide did not know what to do about your
child⁴²

In contrast to the alleged cowardice of the Shaygiyya, the Dongolawi poet exalts the bravery of the Danagla:

To our enemy we are like fire and our swords are
drawn

The cowardice of the Shaygiyya as portrayed by the Dongolawi poet is not supported by the observations and reports⁴³ which speak of the Shaygiyya's courage, military superiority and dominance in the region. To give one example, Waddington and Hanbury reported that the Shaygiyya 'are singularly fearless in attack, and ride up to the very faces of their enemy with levity and gaiety of heart as to a festival, or with joy as if to meet friends from whom they have separated...'⁴⁴

The Dongolawi poet is also sarcastic about the Shaygiyya character in respect of two socially esteemed patterns of behaviour, generosity and hospitality. In his description he elevates his own tribe and denigrates the Shaygiyya. Of the Shaygiyya he says:

You chase after alms⁴⁵ like galloping horses
Even when you have had your fill you also

take the leftovers
 You are proud of *kharrūm*⁴⁶ and roasted millet
 You are so hungry that you eat the unripe dates⁴⁷
 You salivate for beer
 But the distilled spirit is for us⁴⁸

As for the hospitality of his own tribe, the Dongolawi poet boasts:

Our generosity to those we love is like
 torrential rain
 We have charitable watering-places⁴⁹ by the
 road
 And we have the guest-room for hospitality
 We welcome guests
 From the guest we do not run away or waver
 God forbid! we do not say it is night when it
 is day
 We are generous with the little we have

Moreover, the Dongolawi poet reproaches the Shaygiyya for their insincerity:

You do not understand the friend or friendship
 And I do not betray a brother or a friend
 And I do not tempt my women neighbours at night

The Dongolawi poet's portrayal of the Shaygiyya as inhospitable is a misrepresentation of the reality.⁵⁰ Traditionally, among the Shaygiyya, like the rest of the riverain communities, each household contains a guest-room for entertaining relatives, friends and guests. From my experience of living with the Shaygiyya for two years they are generous and hospitable; they value friendship and they welcome strangers and try to assist those in need of help in any way they can. Politeness and etiquette in the serving of food are strictly observed. The inhospitality of the Shaygiyya may have become a popular myth since I have heard remarks about their inhospitality from members of other tribes who have not been among the Shaygiyya. In comparison with the rest of the riverain tribes of the North, the Shaygiyya are relatively prosperous due to influx of wealth resulting from cash crop cultivation and this prosperity is displayed in their style of life including the way they entertain and look after guests.

The Dongolawi poet wants to demean the Shaygiyya further but refrains on account of his love for his Shaygiyya wife:

Were it not for the beautiful woman
 The one with the long hair and the narrow waist
 The one with blushing cheeks
 The shy one who does not look people in the
 eyes⁵¹

Otherwise, as if the Dongolawi poet had not been offensive enough to the Shaygiyya:

I would have cursed your ancestors
And I would have made your day into night
My language is not like yours, not the
chatter of birds⁵²
I care nothing for you or people like you

After this impassioned contest in which both poets make unpleasant statements about the other's tribe, they decided to be reconciled and the vilification ceased. The poems speak of social values and give the outsider a clear picture of esteemed as well as derisive patterns of behaviour. The portrayal of the characteristics of each tribe in the poems is meant to evoke an emotional response since it touches upon the very essence of tribal identity and background. The poetical contest shows how deeply each poet felt about the honour of his own tribe to a point where, in his criticism of the other's tribe, each poet has cared little about falsification of the reality. The poems provide us with ethnographic data of interest and they also illustrate the stereotypes of the Shaygiyya and the Danagla which are challenged by both poets. Each poet shares a common purpose: the glorification of his own tribe and the denigration of the tribe of the other. The defence of and pride in his tribal identity is the duty of an individual and he should seek to counteract accusations or false impressions about his tribe.

My main concern with the poems has been the understanding of their meaning and the elucidation of their implications. Both poets have shown, deliberately or otherwise, pretention and ignorance about the tribe of the other. It could be said for each poet that his own portrayal regarding both tribes is to the other poet a falsification of reality. The stereotypes constructed by both poets, whether based on fact or falsehood, emphasize the social distance between their two tribes and the tribal differences which exist. In the country at large there is a diversity of tribes, each with its own cultural and social characteristics, and the poetical contest illustrates people's awareness of and pride in their tribal background. While both the Shaygiyya and the Danagla tribes have some characteristics in common (e.g. Islam, certain cultural practices, ecological conditions and, to some extent, language) the poems emphasize the distinctive characteristics of each tribe which are important to people in establishing their tribal identity. Whereas the two poets have confused reality with falsehood in the emotional contest of their poetical dialogue, the significant fact remains that two individuals from different tribes have each sought to defend the integrity of his tribe and its honour.

What first provoked this poetical contest was love and a proposal of marriage between two people of different tribes: a relationship which is discouraged. The normal pattern of marriage is for a person to marry within his own tribe. Had there been regular intermarriage between the Shaygiyya and the Danagla, no objection would have been raised to the union of

the Shaygi poet and the Dongolawi girl, and the poems would not have been written. But intermarriage between these two tribes is rare and this maintains their separateness and inequality. The themes I have chosen and illustrated by lines from the poems express poetically a sense of inequality and mutual dislike between members of the two tribes. Thus, in order to exalt their own tribes, the Shaygi and Dongolawi poets must demean each other. An impartial assessment of separate 'equality' is of no interest to either poet. Accepted 'equality' cannot be separate; it has to be proved by a tradition of such intermarriage as the one which, being refused, provoked the poems.

AHMED AL-SHAHI

Notes

- 1 My thanks to my wife Anne, Peter Lienhardt and Mahmood Taha Abd al-Gadir who made valuable comments and suggestions. Mr. Ahmed Mahdi has assisted me in collecting poetry from the Shaygiyya region and I am thankful for his help. The Ford Foundation financed my research on the Shaygiyya tribe and the University of Khartoum granted me leave of absence, while I was teaching at the Department of Anthropology and Sociology (1965-1970). My thanks to both. I also thank the British Council for their help in facilitating my passage to Khartoum to attend the Symposium on Folklore and National Development in February 1981 at which this paper was given.
- 2 The Shaygiyya and the Danagla tribes are riverain tribes of the North who inhabit the banks of the river Nile. The Shaygiyya are sedentary agriculturalists in the main and inhabit the bend of the Nile in the Northern Province. The Danagla live north of al-Dabba where the river Nile swings northwards and within the same province, and they pursue the same mode of livelihood. However, the Danagla are economically poorer than the Shaygiyya due to the small area of cultivable land in their homeland. Both tribes inhabit the narrow strips of cultivable land on both banks of the river. On the whole, the settlement pattern among both tribes is of a lineal type though in certain cases settlements are located away from the river banks. The Shaygiyya and Danagla number 216,054

and 146,114 people respectively. See: The Republic of Sudan, H.Q. Council of Ministers, Department of Statistics: *First Population Census of Sudan*, Final Report, vol. 3, Khartoum 1962, pp. 170 and 174.

- 3 The Shaygi poet was born in Barkal and had a Koranic school, *khalwa*, education. He joined Sudan Railways but left in 1943. He is a deputy, *khalifa*, in the Khatmiyya religious Order and works as a chief of stores in Kareims for the property of the Mirghani family, the spiritual leaders of the Order. He is a staunch supporter of the Khatmiyya politics. He did not write down his poetry but it is known among the Shaygiyya. Though the Dongolawi poet's family came originally from Dongola, he was born in Merowe East in the Shaygiyya region. His Koranic schooling was cut short and he had to rely on himself and on his brother for the continuation of his education. Like the Shaygi poet, he worked in Sudan Railways and rose to the position of station master. He retired in 1955. He wrote down his poetry himself. I am grateful to both poets for making their poetry available to me.
- 4 *'abbābīs*, the descendants of al-Abbas, Prophet Muhammed's uncle, of the Quraysh tribe.
- 5 *jinsak/rakhīṣ*, literally: your origin is cheap.
- 6 *assig*, also means a date-palm shoot.
- 7 Fatima, the daughter of Prophet Muhammed who married Ali, the Prophet's cousin. She is described by the enigmatic epithet *al-batūl*, the virgin. This term is also used for Mary the Virgin.
- 8 The exemplary ten, *al-'ashra al-'adūl*, are thought to be men of religion who were the ancestors of the Danagla tribe and who claimed descent from al-Abbas. They were buried in Old Dongola.
- 9 Hasanain: is a dual name for Hasan and Husain, the sons of Ali and Fatima.
- 10 *asīl*. A literal translation of the line is: It is not shameful if a person is of known descent.
- 11 Language implies Arabic.
- 12 Bitt al-Jibail, literally 'the daughter of the mountain'. It is related by the Dongolawi poet that the grandmother of the Shaygiyya was known by the name of Nasira (Naṣīra) Bitt al-Jabal. It is alleged, by the Dongolawi poet, that she was a jinnie and lived at Jabal Barkal. Jabal Barkal is a massive hill on the right bank of the river Nile close to Kareima. The Jabal is an archaeological site consisting of temples and pyramids built during the Napatan period (or the XXV Dynasty) c.725-660 B.C. The implication of this line may be that the Shaygiyya are the descendants of a foundling woman.

- 13 These traditions and genealogies were collected by me during my fieldwork research among the Shaygiyya tribe in 1966-7. P.M. Holt's claim that the Shaygiyya tribe 'does not claim Ja'ali origin' is not consistent with the Shaygiyya genealogies. See P.M. Holt, *A Modern History of the Sudan*, 1961, p. 7. Genealogies collected by certain writers confirm Shaygiyya's Ja'ali origin. See W. Nicholls, *The Shaikiya*, Dublin 1913 and Sir. H.A. MacMichael, *A History of the Arabs in the Sudan*, Cambridge 1922.
- 14 Holt, *op cit.*, Chapter I.
- 15 The Barabra are the Mahas and Sukkot people who inhabit the area north of Dongola to the Egyptian border.
- 16 Holt, *op cit.*, p. 7.
- 17 It is thought that the Shaygi poet belongs to the Hamadtayab, a group of people who claim descent from Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, and known as Bakriyya. However, he considers himself to be a Shaygi. The term Shaygi has acquired a regional connotation: people coming from the homeland of the Shaygiyya, whether they have true or fictitious genealogical links with the ancestor of the tribe, consider themselves to be Shaygiyya.
- 18 The Isayab is a large clan of the Shaygiyya.
- 19 *shaikh*, also means a village headman.
- 20 *matara*, technically it means the well on which a water-wheel, *sāgiya*, is erected in order to draw water for irrigation. With the introduction of mechanical irrigation, the word now refers to the plot of land irrigated by this method.
- 21 The word used is *ḥauḍ*, a customary measure of a small plot of land measuring 42 sq. metres.
- 22 These varieties, with the addition of *barakāwī*, are considered the best types.
- 23 *tarākīn*, dry salted fish. The dish made out of salted fish is known as *malūḥa*. Though this culinary speciality is associated with the Danagla, people of the riverain communities do occasionally eat this dish. Fishing is considered a lowly occupation among the riverain tribes.
- 24 Traditionally some of the Nubians, to whom the Danagla belong, are employed as cooks and house servants by Sudanese and non-Sudanese.
- 25 The implication of this line is that because of their experience as boatmen they have become proficient in river navigation.
- 26 The implication is that the Shaygiyya sleep at the foot of date-palm trees or know only the use of *'angarib*, a bedstead made of a wooden frame with a seat made of ropes. The poet

uses *al-sarīr* which is considered to be a modern bed and is made of a metal frame with a base of wires. This bed requires a mattress. The view expressed by the Dongolawi poet illustrates line two of the stanza and indicates that the Danagla are more in touch with city life and customs in view of their travels.

- 27 *hajjānī*: a camel-riding soldier or 'askarī who is responsible for supervising irrigation canals and for collecting taxes from farmers.
- 28 *gassās*: in general it is considered a lowly and grimy occupation.
- 29 Reference to the famous eulogists, *maddāhīn*, Awlad Hajj al-Mahi of Kasinjer in the Shaygiyya homeland.
- 30 *tiwair*, diminutive of *ṭār*; a circular hand drum used by eulogists to accompany the chanting of religious praises.
- 31 *ṭāsh*, wandering and 'atāmīr (singular 'atmūr), deserts. The implication is that some Shaygiyya are homeless vagabonds.
- 32 The plaster which is used for building traditional houses, locally known as *jālūs*, is made by mixing mud with straw. It is a specialized but messy occupation and those practising it do not share the same status as farmers.
- 33 Tribal head, *nāzīr*, and Branch President, *ra'īs*. These two offices were part of the dissolved system of Native Administration according to which the riverain tribes of the North were divided into tribes, branches, districts and villages. This system was abolished in 1969 with the exception of the position of *shaikh*, village headman.
- 34 See Muhammed Daif Allah, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt*, Cairo 1930. This book contains biographies of holy-men who lived during the Funj Kingdom of Senna (1504-1820).
- 35 *kutub al-aḥādīth*, books of Traditions which refer to the manuals written by jurists and others. They contain traditions, sayings and actions attributed to Prophet Muhammed, and these manuals became the standard references of the major Sunni sects in Islam.
- 36 *ma'āhid* (singular: *ma'had*) is a modern terminology which the poet used to describe the modern religious institutions, *ma'āhid dīniyya*.
- 37 Khalil refers to Khalil Ibn Ishaq known as al-Jundi (d. A.D. 1365) a well-known Egyptian Maliki scholar. He wrote an important manual on jurisprudence by the name of al-Mukhtasar (*Summary*).
- 38 See W. Nicholls, *op.cit.*, p.21.
- 39 Tribal markings are known as *fasāda* or *shulūkh*. Among the Shaygiyya men and women the tribal markings are recognised by the three horizontal lines on each cheek. It is true that

some people who are not Shaygiyya by descent, have adopted Shaygiyya tribal markings. Tribal markings are a means of identity and are considered to be beautiful. This custom is dying out.

- 40 The implication is that the Shaygiyya flee from the battle-field.
- 41 The implication is that because dom-trees are tall, they are the only 'witness' to the Shaygiyya hiding in the water-course. Al-Shikail is a water-course south of Merowe East.
- 42 The implication is that many Shaygiyya men were killed in battle and the guide was perplexed with so many orphans who were trying to identify their fathers.
- 43 See F. Cailliaud, *Voyage à Méroé*, Paris 1826; J.L. Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia*, London 1819; and G. Waddington and B. Hanbury, *Travels of the Visit to Some Parts of Ethiopia*, London 1822.
- 44 G. Waddington and B. Hanbury, *op. cit.*, p. 98
- 45 *ṣadagāt* (singular: *ṣadaga*): to commemorate the death of a person, an animal - usually a sheep - is sacrificed and the meat is distributed to the poor.
- 46 *kharrūm*, *Randia nilotica*, is a stiff, spinous shrub with leaves usually obovate, flowers usually creamy-white and the fruit is subglobose, crowned by calyx lobes. The fruit is said to act as a fish poison and is a useful emetic. The shrub is to be found in Kordofan, Upper White Nile and Bahr al-Ghazal.
- 47 Unripe dates, *ṣīṣ*, usually used as feed for domestic animals.
- 48 The essence of the brew, *khulāṣat al-'asīr*, referring to the spirit '*aragī*', brewed from dates. The Danagla area is well-known for the brewing of this spirit.
- 49 *sabīl*: a group of large water pots made of porous clay, *azyār* (singular: *zīr*), erected by people in public places or adjacent to their homes.
- 50 In one of his poems the Dongolawi poet retracts his criticism of the Shaygiyya as being inhospitable. He considers himself to be a guest of the Shaygiyya and he recalls the generosity shown to him by them:
 God is witness, we made our living with their help
 They are the people of plentiful and limitless wealth
- 51 The expected behaviour from a woman when meeting a man.
- 52 *kalām ṭair*, literally: bird's speech or language. The underlying meaning of the line is that his description and statements about the Shaygiyya are meaningful and to the point.