

WISDOM FROM THE DESERT: THE FLOOD WILL COME AGAIN

A Collection of Folk-Stories
from desert regions
of the Sudan

collected and
translated with an
introduction by

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AND

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The Arabic texts can be difficult to read, even for those who know standard Arabic, not only because of the special vocabulary and style of various Sudanese dialects as well as their particular phonetic characteristics, but also because they record speech. The story-tellers, men and women, often made invocations to their audience, like ‘Hey, listen to this!’ or ‘By the way, I forgot to mention that before all this happened ...’, or ‘let’s go to the next one,’ or ‘what a fine thing!’ and so forth. We also asked those who collected the stories to retain phonetic peculiarities in their transcriptions if they could (a minor example is the Sudanese بنت — *bitt* instead of the standard Arabic بنت — *bint*, for ‘daughter’ or ‘girl’).

We have often used the dictionary of Sudanese Arabic compiled by the late ‘Awn al-Sharif Qasim, which, despite some almost inevitable imperfections in what was a very long and large undertaking, gives a good picture of Arabic dialects in the Sudan, including many vocabulary

items not found in other Arabic-speaking countries. The origins of these are not always known, but, for instance, some seem to be loan-words from the Nubian languages (such as *'angaraib* — عنقريب for a bedstead), or, for instance, from Beja. Where 'Awn al-Sharif did not provide an answer to a problem of translation, we have tried to find suitable informants to advise us. Since Arabic, like other Semitic languages, is basically ordered by verbal roots, the variety of derivatives is often extensive and bewildering, and variable from place to place.

The subtitle of our volume is taken from the first story, in which a husband lavishes gifts on his beautiful wife. But when he becomes poor, she refuses him her bed. He rails and rhymes against his wife, and at night, still rhyming, he concludes with the words:

‘All night awake again!

‘Those dry river banks, so deep!

‘One day, for sure, the flood will come again.’

For a nomad, a flood in a watercourse, occurring from time to time even in arid regions, can be both a considerable danger and a great boon. Like the narrator, we leave the reader to seize other implications.

Finally, we acknowledge the story-tellers themselves. Oral traditions in their traditional forms have been steadily and more and more rapidly disappearing from our world since the various technologies of the written word were developed over five thousand years ago in different places. The progressive disappearance of these traditions has been further accelerated by the more recent technologies of printing, recording, and lately modern computer-based information systems. To say this is not to regret the advance of literacy, with all its advantages, and in its increasingly varied forms (to the extent that the term ‘literacy’ itself is being overtaken by technological change, as forms of communication less dependent on conventional reading and writing become more prevalent than ever before).

But it would be unfortunate to forget or simply to lose all those older traditions where grandmothers or uncles or poets or minstrels or others could again and again retell stories, and transmit the knowledge or wisdom or lessons which they may sometimes contain, not to

mention the entertainment which they could afford; the passing moments of beauty, and the sometimes brutal wit, or wonderful humanity or uncomfortable cruelty or prejudice which they may evidence. These story-tellers speak from memory, though they often improvise and interact with their audiences, giving rise to considerable variations in detail, but not usually in basic plot structures.

If what we have done here helps to preserve something of their traditions, that will be the best way of thanking all those, named or unnamed, who have helped us in this work over a period of more than forty years.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

THE TRANSLATED folktales in this collection represent less than half of the 139 tales collected in the 1970s from the nomadic communities in Northern and Central Sudan. Using a research grant awarded to Tim Moore, we commissioned a number of students from the University of Khartoum to help collect stories from these regions. Some were recorded, and some were taken verbatim from the narrators. The full text is given in *Ḥikma min al-Sahra (Wisdom from the Desert)*, published in 2018 by the Abdul Karim Mirghani Centre, Omdurman, Sudan. The Centre had also published *Ḥikma min al-Nil* in 2017, a collection of 114 tales (of which 71 had been translated into English as *Wisdom from the Nile: a collection of folk stories from Northern and Central Sudan*, and published by the Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978 in the series *The Oxford Library of African Literature*. We offered an anthropological and structural analysis of certain themes in these stories, but no such analysis is offered in the present collection of nomadic stories).

Our main purpose in making these collections is not so much to compare and contrast nomadic and sedentary story-telling, but rather to record rich oral traditions which are rapidly disappearing. We hope that our volumes will stimulate interest in collecting further oral collections from the Sudan, and that our volumes will be available in bookshops for all those interested. One publisher remarked that these stories are *mādā khām*, or original material never before published. He further commented that the stories should reach a wider audience because of their importance in preserving local cultural and literary creativity. Some scholars in the past have rendered and published such stories in classical literary Arabic, but we have made efforts to preserve the Sudanese vernaculars. This may prove of interest for linguists and grammarians.

In translating some of these stories, we have aimed at an approachable text which can be read well enough in English. Thus free translations have often been preferred to more exact ones, and words characteristic of Sudanese dialects of spoken Arabic have often been rendered loosely. Footnotes give the text of a word or expression, and the glossary at the end in

alphabetical order of transliteration provides an explanation. (Arabic originals are provided both in the footnotes and the glossary.)

Use of free translations in the case of an oral story-telling tradition can be justified by the practice of the story-tellers themselves, since they do not necessarily recite the very same words each time they tell the same story. We have not tried to tidy up the texts very much, apart from attempts to make them more approachable for an outsider; nor have we tried to convert them into a more 'literary' form. This is not necessarily to imply disapproval of those over centuries in many different traditions of folklore throughout the world who have made literary versions of such traditions. It is simply to try to present to the reader more directly how the original story-telling went.

The following points may be noted:

- (1) Arabic words for which there is a conventional transliteration into English are generally given in that form (e.g. 'genie', though 'jinnee' is also used in English).
- (2) Geographical names follow the transliterations used by the Sudan Survey Department (see the 2004 paper of the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names at <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20140402150947/http://www.pcgn.org.uk/geographical%20Names%20of%20Sudan-2004.pdf> , on the Geographical Names of Sudan, which has a brief chronicle of attempts to improve on or modify the original SSD system). The SSD did not originally use diacritical marks such as the macron to indicate a long vowel, or underdotting to indicate velarization, etc. We have followed this practice, though in fact it seems that the SSD later came to use diacriticals in some cases.
- (3) Names of trees and plants which are native to various Sudanese regions have generally been translated only when there is an English name for them which may be recognized by an ordinary reader of English (e.g. the baobab tree or the tamarind). The resonance of other names for people in those regions is therefore lost, though this is to some extent rectified in the glossary.

(4) Personal names are mostly transliterated according to the system in (5) below, but without the use of diacritical marks for common names. Generally, Arabic names have a meaning, known automatically to ordinary speakers of Arabic (for instance, ‘Abd al-Rahim’ literally means ‘slave of the Merciful’). But the usual practice is to transliterate these names into other writing systems, rather than translating them. Here, we follow the usual practice, except in the case of picturesque names such as the girl’s name *Al-Li’aib* (which we render ‘Little Frolic’), or another girl’s name *Filaifila* (which we render ‘Little Pepper’). Names like this would not be used as given names in real life, though they might be used as nicknames. Not all nicknames of this sort lent themselves to such rendering in English. For instance, *Nijaidun* means ‘little ripe one’, but we left it as it stood. (Other names are more obscure: for instance, *Wad al-Lihaiu*.)

(5) In other cases, we follow the *Sudan Notes and Records* system of transliteration as follows:

ā	ا	r	ر
b	ب	z	ز
t	ت	s	س
th	ث	sh	ش
j	ج	ṣ	ص
ḥ	ح	ḍ	ض
kh	خ	ṭ	ط
d	د	ẓ	ظ
dh	ذ	’	ء
‘	ع	a	ا
gh	غ	i	ي
f	ف	u	و

g (classically q)	ق
k	ك
l	ل
m	م
n	ن
h	ه
w	و
y	ي

Long vowels and diphthongs are rendered as follows:

ī	e.g. زير	zīr	(waterpot)
ū	e.g. سوق	sūq	(market)
ai	e.g. بيت	bait	(house)
aw	e.g. ثوب	thawb	(outer robe)

The *shadda* can be used in Arabic to indicate a doubled consonant. In such cases, the corresponding transliterated consonant is written twice, e.g.

baggāra بَقَّارَة (a word which refers to nomadic groups who herd cattle).

- (6) At the head of each story, we give on the right the name of the place and/or region of collection of the story, and on the left the reported tribal affiliation of the story-teller, to the extent that this information is available to us.
- (7) Where the story-teller was clearly making invocations to his or her audience rather than simply recounting the tale itself, we have used italics in the translation.
- (8) One somewhat awkward but minor problem of translation concerns dwelling places. A nomadic group may have temporary dwelling places varying according to

circumstances. Some groups may have regular but seasonal dwelling places. Others may just choose a suitable place according to the conditions. The word *hilla* (حَلَّة) is often used for such a dwelling place. For sedentary populations, the word *hilla* commonly applies to a part of the settlement (village or town). In the present volume, our translations vary between words like ‘settlement’, ‘home’, ‘camp’, ‘encampment’, depending upon the circumstances in or implied by the story. There are other terms as well, such as *farīg* (فريق).

In preparing the English translation for inclusion on the website, we thank above all the story-tellers, and the students who helped in recording this rich and stimulating collection of stories, and hope that readers will enjoy reading the tales themselves, and perhaps to their children or grandchildren. If any of these have any comments, please write to us via:

info@sudaneseprogramme.org.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. Nomads

‘NOMAD’ IS FROM AN ANCIENT GREEK WORD νομάδες meaning ‘people who roam about for pasturage’. But the term is more generally used today to refer to human populations who rely upon any activities to support themselves which preclude a settled place of residence. Such activities can include hunting and gathering, some kinds of trading, as well as some kinds of herding. Populations of this kind may be constantly on the move, but they may also have semi-permanent settlements in different locations. The contrast is with sedentary populations relying upon agriculture, since agriculture typically though not always requires staying in one place to look after your land and your crops.

Today however vastly more human beings live in cities than ever before, accounting for more than half of the world’s population. And city dwelling is unlike the lives of the nomad or of the settled agriculturalist. Though the phenomenon of the city is very ancient, we do not discuss this aspect further here, since cities do not figure in the tales we have collected (except occasionally or by implication, when ‘kings’ are mentioned, one of whom is said to live in a stone house with two storeys).

When we made our collection of oral story-telling traditions in the northern and central part of the Sudan entitled *Wisdom from the Nile* (Clarendon Press, 1979), the stories we collected came from Arabic-speaking sedentary populations in that area. They lived in towns and villages on or near the Nile, and relied mainly on agriculture to make a living, though of course this did not exclude other activities or travels.

We thought that it would be interesting to make another collection from Sudanese nomadic groups. The present collection comes from widely separated regions, though these tales are also in Arabic. The collections, therefore, should not be viewed as representative of all traditional, story-tellers whether sedentary or nomadic in that large country (now two countries), in which according to the Sudan Survey Department, 136 languages are spoken (see reference on p. xi above).

We expected that there might be interesting differences between the nomadic tales and the sedentary tales. We found that there were interesting differences. At the same time, there were

strong commonalities, even down to the same personal names or nicknames of protagonists, and plot structure.

We were particularly struck by one tale from the West (no. 3 ‘Hospitality’ from the Hamar in Kordofan), where the story-teller said that it was more important to look after other people than to look after one’s herds: this is at first sight paradoxical since such nomads are entirely dependent on their herds. But the story-teller commented that this story had often been told at times of conflict by peacemakers in that area trying to bring together people who were after all cousins, as he put it.

This is poignant, given the severe problems which have occurred in certain Sudanese regions where nomadic groups have come into armed conflict with settled populations. This is because the underlying economic interests of the nomadic and settled groups are at odds, somewhat as in the USA during the nineteenth century the interests of cattle ranchers were at odds with those of the agriculturalists. We do not here address the complexities of these political issues. We simply try to indicate both the affinities and the differences between the oral traditions of such groups.

In our introduction to *Wisdom from the Nile* we suggested that the stories collected there reflected issues arising from the socio-economic structures of the communities where they were told. In particular, we drew attention to the social preference for marriage between cousins, and linked this to the need that family lands, however modest, should not be unduly sub-divided or alienated. We suggested that this provided an explanation for the frequent occurrence of stories in which a brother tries to marry a sister (which would in real life be an extreme and forbidden kind of ‘insider’ marriage, and would never cross anyone’s mind, still less occur), and in which the sister typically escapes and ends up marrying a complete outsider after various cross-dressing disguises and adventures, this being a kind of mapping of real dilemmas by picturesque and indeed funny or shocking exaggeration.

In the present collection, the entitlements to land which are important for sedentary agricultural populations do not arise, since wealth consists, for nomads, not in possessing land, but in possessing livestock (or trading, or hunting and gathering, or some combination of these). However, similar issues related to ‘insider’ marriage (e.g. to first cousins) versus ‘outsider’ marriage do arise, since undue subdivision of a patrimony can still be a danger when the patrimony consists not of land but of herds of camels or cattle or sheep, or commodities like gold and jewellery. Thus, tales in this collection do have a number of striking similarities with those in the earlier one. They may also have some roots in the traditions of nomadic peoples

more generally in desert regions of Northern Africa which go back to classical antiquity and beyond.

Here, we do not attempt to rerun the analysis offered in our introduction to *Wisdom from the Nile*.

We now offer an outline of the nomadic populations where the stories were told, and give some account of the special features these stories, in which the narratives can vary between the brutal events often found in folklore traditions world-wide and sometimes happy resolutions. Often a story ends with a comment like: ‘They lived in joy and happiness.’ But there are exceptions. One ends darkly: ‘The girl’s father never returned, and she stayed in her hole in the ground until she died.’

2. Sudanese Nomadic Groups

THESE GROUPS ARE VARIED AND not always permanently on the move. That depends upon how they gain their livelihood. Though some of these communities have been studied by ethnographers and others, and written about, the studies do not cover the full range of communities from which the stories were collected. Thus what follows is an outline.

Let us begin with a saying of the *Baggāra*: ‘Devils riding devils!’. The *Baggāra*, as mentioned above, are cattle-nomads, which means that their own movements are governed by finding suitable grazing for their herds, so that they are not always wandering. The practice of such seasonal migrations is sometimes called ‘transhumance’. But some of the neighbouring groups are camel nomads, who are constantly wandering, not only for pasturage (since camels, unlike cattle, can sustain themselves for long periods in arid climatic conditions, and so are less dependent on pasturage), but also for trade. The ‘devils’ who ride in the *Baggāra* saying are the camel-nomads, and the ‘devils’ on which they ride are the camels themselves.

Some camel-nomads made and still make the *arba ‘in—forty (days)*, a trip across the desert to Upper Egypt. This would involve trade. They could sell livestock. They might buy natron, (*atrūn* in Sudanese dialect) a naturally occurring mixture of salts with numerous uses found in lake-beds since the times of Ancient Egypt. In fact, the word ‘natron’ derives through Arabic from an Ancient Greek word which derives in turn from an Ancient Egyptian word. These nomads would be constantly on the move, unlike their cousins the *Baggāra*, whose cattle

needed a gentler rhythm than camels can sustain. So the *Baggāra* are sometimes described as ‘semi-nomadic’. Such differences are well reflected in the stories.

It should be noted that certain tribal groupings such as the Shaigiyya and the Shukriyya, though largely sedentary and living on or near the Nile, also include nomadic sections. Hence the fact that the present collection contains Shaigiyya tales, as did our earlier collection from sedentary communities.

There is a dearth of ethnographic material concerning the nomadic tribes of Western Sudan. But interested readers could consult Ian Cunnison, *Baggara Arabs: power and the lineage in a Sudanese nomad tribe*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966 (published online by Cambridge University Press), and Talal Asad, *The Kababish Arabs: Power, Authority and Consent in a Nomadic Tribe* (Praeger Publishers, New York, 1970).

PART TWO: THE STORIES

1. Tahamid

Hamar

Abud Zaid (Northern Kordofan)

Listen to me, my son, I have another story for you which I think you have not yet heard.

This is the story of Tahamīd, the grandfather of the people of Hamid. He married a very beautiful woman, and whatever she asked for he obtained for her. He brought her things like fine clothes, cooking oil, soap, and a soft and silky bridal shawl¹.

But when he became very poor, ouff! what a surprise! She would have nothing more to do with him².

He chanted out to her:

‘A man brings good things for a woman—
‘whatever they are, better bring them for a billy-goat—
‘the billy-goat may bring brothers!
‘A man clothes a woman
‘with silky shawls of three colours,
‘but she—she refuses him when he becomes poor.’

He was a tolerant person, so he accepted his wife’s refusal, and remained patient. But *wah!*—he was inseparable from his song:

‘At every moment she is in my brain.
‘Thinking of her keeps me from sleep.
‘All night awake again!
‘Those dry river banks, so deep!
‘One day, for sure, the flood will come again.’

¹. garmaṣīṣ, قرمصيص

². ṭamahatu, طمحت

2. Nijaidun

Hamar (see story 9 from the Kababish)

Northern Kordofan

There was a boy by the name of Nijaidun³. His mother had died, and he lived with his aunt⁴. *Now, do you know which of his aunties he lived with? — It was his father's wife!* She did not like him, at all at all⁵! And on his side, he just made her life impossible⁶.

Now this silly aunt dug a big hole near⁷ the bedstead for Nijaidun, so that she could push⁸ him into it in the night. But he of this name was cunning. She put him on the side of the charcoal burning in the pit and her daughter on the other, and stayed awake till the night was dark. But she could not work out how to push Nijaidun into the pit. *Ah, what a pity!* She stayed awake till midnight, *like someone really afraid of a wolf*⁹! But in the middle of the night, she went to sleep.

Then, Nijaidun removed the girl's tattered¹⁰ clothes and put them on himself, and after that he dressed the girl in his own clothes. And he went to sleep in his aunt's bosom. The silly¹¹ aunt woke up. She was still half asleep, but feeling the clothes beside her, she said to herself: 'This is my daughter.' She embraced Nijaidun, and pushed¹² her daughter into the charcoal fire, where she was burned up like a grasshopper¹³. When morning came, there was Nijaidun, simply gazing into space! The trick he had played was a terrible blow to his aunt, who burst into tears! All that was left was to grieve for her daughter.

³. Nijaidun, نجيضون

⁴. 'amma, عمّة

⁵. tab tab, تب تب

⁶. marāzīha, مرآزيهة

⁷. shigg, شقّ

⁸. tadizu, تذر

⁹. marfa'aib, مرفعيب

¹⁰. khulgān, خلقان

¹¹. manjūha, منجوهة

¹². daraza, درز

¹³. gabūra, قبورة

She told Nijaidun to go to the people of the settlement and tell them that his sister was dead, and that his aunt wanted them to come. But this ill-begotten creature¹⁴— *like a grown camel brought up in the settlement and well-looked after!* — put on a big act¹⁵. He said to the nomads of the settlement: ‘My sister is going to be circumcised. Come to our place, singing beautiful songs and wearing your gold ornaments!’ So they went, wearing the golden ornaments and carrying the drum¹⁶ and singing. When they came quite close to where Nijaidun’s aunt was, she said: ‘Be silent! My daughter is dead.’ They turned to Nijaidun to learn what his aunt had said, and he replied: ‘She said: “Sing as loudly as you can!” ’ They continued their songs with loud melody¹⁷. But when the women¹⁸ arrived, they found out what had happened, and took off all their golden ornaments. Nijaidun collected them, and went to a faraway place. He found a big tree, and hung the ornaments on it.

Some nomads saw this gold on the tree, and Nijaidun said to them: ‘My tree bears gold.’ So they bought the tree from him, but he told them that he would collect the present harvest before leaving the tree to them. When he was paid, he went away.

He came across a donkey, mounted it, and left the place. On his way, there was a torrential storm. He found a place to hide¹⁹, and took refuge in it. When the rain stopped, he went to a nearby settlement. They asked: ‘Where did you take shelter from the rain?’ He replied: ‘Ah, it was my donkey. Not a single rain-drop can touch him!’ This fascinated them, and they bought the donkey from him. But later, when there was rain and the mother of all floods, one of them mounted the donkey. And the rain made the fool²⁰ look like a waterlogged bird.

¹⁴. māl al-ḥarām, مال الحرام

¹⁵. māni‘a, مانع

¹⁶. dallūka, دلوكة

¹⁷. tantan, تنتن

¹⁸. ‘awīn, عوين

¹⁹. karkūr, كركور

²⁰. ‘awīr, عوير

3. Hospitality

Hamar

Northern Kordofan

My friend, I'm going to confide in you! There was once an important person with many pens²¹ of sheep and camels. One day, he went to a place really far away with very few trees. He became a guest of one of the nomads of the settlement. His host, head of the household, seemed to be also the head of the whole settlement, and yet he had no livestock except for one goat. This host dissimulated nothing, and he slaughtered the goat. His children began to cry²², but he paid no attention to them at all.

The proverb tells us that no-one knows if he may die today or tomorrow, as the host himself often used to say. He also would say: 'What else is there in our life, except doing good to others? How many people had lots of livestock in their pens, but their wealth flew away and they became poor! It is better to look after the welfare of other people than to look after livestock.'

The guest ate his fill, and continued his journey. After two or three years, he heard the gossip whispered that so-and-so had slaughtered his one goat for a guest. The guest could not let this good deed go without reward. So he sent for the person who had slaughtered his goat. The former guest gave him a wonderful reception: there were invitations to meals and slaughtered animals without limit. The former guest gave his former host half a pen of camels, saying: 'Take this livestock! You deserve it. Even if a human being were to be slaughtered to entertain you, my guest, it would not be a loss!'

²¹. murāḥ, مراح

²². yaḍārkhū, يضارخو

4. The Son of the King and the Son of the Woodcutter

Al-Duwaim (White Nile)

Once upon a time, there was a son of a king, and there was a son of a woodcutter, and they were friends. The other boys in the settlement tried to separate them. One of them said that he knew of a way to do this. He went to an old woman, and paid her to help.

The son of the king and the son of the woodcutter came past, and the old woman called the woodcutter's son, and said: 'Come here, my boy! I want to speak to you.' When the woodcutter's son went to her, she asked him to bend down a little, so that she could speak in his ear. The woodcutter's son did as she asked. Whisperingly, she seemed to tell him a secret. Then she said: 'Go away!' The king's son asked the woodcutter's son what she had said to him. He said: 'Nothing at all!' The king's son said: 'you are hiding what she said to you,' and their friendship came to an end.

One day the king's son was having a good time on the river bank, when a girl in a boat appeared. She threw him a stone and a piece of charcoal, tapped her tooth, and went on her way. The king's son wondered why she had tapped her tooth, and thought about it. Eventually, he went to the woodcutter's son, made it up with him, and told him the story. So the woodcutter's son solved the riddle. 'She was telling you,' he said, 'that she is the daughter of King Sinainat, and that they live in a stone building, and that she lives on the second floor.'

The son of the king and his friend the woodcutter's son go to the place where King Sinainat lives. The king's son dresses up as a girl, and the woodcutter's son takes his place.

Then they went to the place which the girl had indicated. There were guards at the entrance to the king's house. The woodcutter's son, dressed as a prince, told them that he wanted to see the king. He was taken to the king, and told him that he was himself a king's son, and that this lady was his wife. He explained that he wanted to leave her with the king for two or three months, since he had some private business to attend to. The king said to the guards: 'Take her to her sister upstairs.' So the real king's son in his guise as a girl stayed with the king's daughter. He had agreed with the woodcutter's son that he should come back after three months with a ladder as high as the house, so that the king's son could climb down.

At the agreed time, the woodcutter's son brought the ladder in the middle of the night, and the king's son climbed down. They went and brought a sheep, which they slaughtered in front of the palace near where the guards used to stand, splashing blood on the ground. That night, the king's son went to the woodland. In the morning, the woodcutter's son came in his guise as a prince, and asked after his wife.

The king sent the guards for her. But when they asked the king's daughter where she was, she replied: 'The guards came during the night. They took her away with them.' Now the guards returned and informed the king. The woodcutter's son in his disguise said: 'It is quite clear. This blood means that my wife has been killed!' The king said to him: 'We shall give you anything, money or gold or whatever, if you are willing to set aside this matter.' But the woodcutter's son refused, saying: 'The only proper solution that I can find is that you should give your daughter in marriage to me.' The king agreed, and they were married. The woodcutter's son took her with him, and set off to see the real prince in the wood. Then they all went back to their own place, and the king's son married the girl and his friend the woodcutter's son married the sister of the prince. They all lived in happiness, and their friendship endured.

5. The House of the Ogre

Misairiyya

Southern Darfur

In the olden days, there was a famine in a certain place, and there was hardly anything there to live on. Yet one person there, Halima, became known for the clever and assiduous way in which she managed to provide morsels of food for her children. She used to leave early in the morning to search for sustenance.

One day, by chance, she came to the house of a ogress, where she found plenty of goods. There was honey, milk, millet, and meat. She took enough to last herself and her children for one day, meaning to keep the source of these good things secret from her lazy husband Hassan. But he was obstinate, and insisted that she should tell him where this bounty came from. Even so, Halima refused to tell him. But Hassan was a clever enough man, and he managed to tie a bundle of ash to the edge of her robe, without Halima noticing.

She went out secretly, so that her husband would not spot her, and went again to where the honey and milk could be found. As she walked, the ash fell, making a line on the ground which showed where she went. Hassan followed these traces and found the ogress's house which was where the good things came from. Obstinate, he insisted on taking his seven children to the ogress's house, despite Halima's opposition to this. They all went to the house. The ogress was not there, having gone to visit her mother. This house had two rooms, one of them underground, and the other one on top. The family chose to stay in the underground room.

When the ogress came back, she sensed that something unusual had happened. At that point, the family was eating breakfast, and there was a disagreement between Hassan and one of his sons, and the ogress heard the sounds. So the ogress called upon all the animals in the woodland to find out where the strange sounds came from.

The ostrich took this task very seriously, and wanted to be the first to discover the source of the sounds. She said to all those there: 'I shall put my head inside. If I don't move my leg, that means that all is well. But if I move both my legs, it means danger, and everyone should flee!' After she put her head inside the hole, she began to move both her legs, so that the ogress

and all the others fled. In this way, the family of Hassan and Halima escaped the evils of the ogress.

6. Al-Zayy and the Ogre

Misairiyya

Southern Darfur

In one of the camps²³ there was a group of girls who were friends. They used to go together to bring firewood, and water from the stream²⁴. The most beautiful among them was a girl by the name of Al-Zayy.

One day they went to the stream to bring water, and all the girls put the filled water-cans²⁵ on their heads, and went back. Al-Zayy remained alone because she did not find anyone to help her put the can on her head. She cried out: ‘O Lord, who is going to help me lift the water-can?’

Near her she saw a black and dry branch. The branch was laughing. She said to it: ‘Are you a human being or a genie?’ The branch took no notice of her or of her question. But steadfastly it put the water-can on her head. While doing so, it made a light scratch on her side. When she got back, she told the people of the camp what had happened.

As the days and the nights passed, Al-Zayy became more beautiful, more bright, and more mature. She became the desire of every young man in the camp: each one wanted her as his partner in life. Whispers of this, becoming loud, reached her cousin. He did not hesitate. He asked his uncle to be betrothed to her, and his uncle agreed at once.

The wedding was planned by the cousin and his uncle for the season of harvest²⁶. When this came, the marriage preparations began. The bridegroom, Hamdan, purchased beautiful clothes and fine perfumes and took them to his uncle’s house. The drum²⁷ began to beat there in the house of the bride, and there was singing and dancing filling the earth and the heavens.

²³. farīg, فريق

²⁴. ragaba, رقب

²⁵. şafā’ih, صفائح

²⁶. ḍarāt, ضرات

²⁷. nuggāra, نقارة

According to custom, the bride was set apart in a secluded tent, away from her father and mother. That way, her girl-friends could prepare her for the bridal procession, removing hair from her body and applying perfume to it²⁸, and encouraging her with pleasant talk.

When the day came for the bridal procession²⁹, a handsome youth came riding on a white horse, saying that he came from another camp, and that he had come to take part in Hamdan's festivities. At this moment, Al-Zayy felt a slight pain on her left side, where the branch had hit her long before, while she was fetching³⁰ water. The youth, the stranger, was treated with sumptuous hospitality, and given lodging in a tent near that of the bride.

Al-Zayy's pain became intense, and she asked her young friends to find some medication to treat it. When they went searching, the stranger took the opportunity to enter her tent. He said: 'I am the branch, the same branch which helped you carry the water, and I alone can cure you from your pain.' He touched her side with his hand, and the pain vanished. He threatened her, saying: 'I will kill you if you shout.' It was the time of sunset. He carried her away rapidly on his horse.

When the girls came back, what a calamity! The tent of Al-Zayy was empty. Looking outside, they found no trace of their friend. When they looked in the tent of the stranger, they found that he too was not there. They called out: 'Al-Zayy is gone, and the stranger is not in his tent.' All those attending the celebration searched for the guest's horse, but it was not to be found. They realized that he had seized and made off with al-Zayy. The men got on their horses and followed the tracks of the stranger. But when they caught up with him, he turned into an ogre! And behind him came a strong blinding whirlwind which delayed them in tracking³¹ the ogre. They gave up hope for Al-Zayy.

But her brother and the cousin who had married her insisted. They must rescue her. So they roamed many days and many months in the desert asking everyone they met about al-Zayy, until they came across a caravan, and in the caravan was a wise man. He told them that the girl must be in the land of the ogre. This was a land with much grass, with mountains and with poisonous snakes. He warned them against going there. But they insisted so much that he

²⁸. jilfa, جلفة

²⁹. zaffa, زفة

³⁰. warda, وردة

³¹. tard, طرد

agreed to tell them how to get there. They must travel south³² for seven days and nights. They thanked the wise man and set off with all speed.

During their journey, al-Zayy's brother and husband were happy and joyful, just as if they had already found her. When they reached the land of the ogre, they found a land with difficult paths and many snakes, with long and plenteous grass, with many mountains, rocks and hillocks. It was just as the wise man from the caravan had described.

They wandered in this land of the ogre, but took great precautions, in the fear that they might encounter the ogre, and that the ogre would make an end of them. They roamed all over this land, every part of it, for two weeks, hoping to find al-Zayy. Despair crept into their hearts. They said to themselves: 'The leader of the caravan³³ wished us misfortune; that is why we were sent to this inhospitable land.' They took an oath: 'If ever we meet him again, we shall take vengeance.'

In this state of fatigue and despair, they decided to sit under a shady tree, which grew on a secluded hill. They were planning to go back to their own people. Their provisions had come to an end, since it was difficult to find food in the land of the ogre. They were hungry.

At this point, fruit and roast meat fell for them from the tree-top. They ate their fill, and then looked up to see who was sending it down. It was al-Zayy! What fear they felt! She told them to keep still, because the ogre was awake. Then she said that they should go away, and come back after two weeks, because then the ogre was likely to be asleep, that he slept deeply, and that his sleep was long-lasting. They followed what she said, and crept away.

Soon the ogre came, and began to repeat his familiar words:

'Al-Zayy, Al-Zayy,

'Oh beautiful voice of little gazelle,

'Let down, down, down and well

'Your beautiful hair³⁴

'For me, for me, for me.'

³². ṣa'īd, صعيد

³³. shaikh, شيخ

³⁴. garn, قرن

Al-Zayy replied:

‘Oh ogre, you are fierce;

‘Oh wretched beast of the desert

‘God has inflicted you upon me!’

The ogre replied loudly in his fearsome voice. ‘What are you saying?’ And Al-Zayy was frightened, and replied, saying:

‘Oh ogre, you are the son of the good uncle,

‘And God has given you to me.’

Then she lowered her plaited hair, and the ogre tied food and drink on it.

After the two week period, her cousin and brother, together with a group of horsemen came back. But, what bad luck! The ogre was still awake. But he was away wandering in his land.

At first, al-Zayy would not go with her people, because she feared that the ogre might harm them. But her brother insisted. He drew his sword, and threatened to kill her if she did not come down and ride with them. She came down, and rode with them.

In a short while, the ogre came back. He did not find Al-Zayy, but he found the tracks of the horsemen. He was enraged, and chased after them. This was close to sunset. The ogre’s speed was so great that he quickly came in sight of the caravan. The horsemen realized that he would soon catch up. They lit their torches to see the road ahead, and to confuse the ogre, since the ogre does not like lights. But the ogre was very near, and al-Zayy told them that if they could put fire inside him he would perish at once, and be forever dead. But no-one knew how to put fire inside an ogre. Al-Zayy announced a trick. She would shout:

‘Darling, darling ogre, dear,

‘People have seized me and taken me away;

‘And you, lord of the desert, I fear,

‘Cannot catch up with me this day.’

The ogre, said al-Zayy to her companions, would call out at the top of his voice. He would open his mouth with joy, because she had not run away from him, but had been kidnapped.

This plan went well. The ogre speeded up still more, and opened his mouth wide. So al-Zayy's brother took his torch, and using all his strength threw it into the ogre's body, through his mouth. In an instant, the ogre exploded and was scattered into pieces, with a great sound like a mountain falling.

So it was, by the wit of al-Zayy and the initiative of her people, that the ogre came to an end. After that, they lived in peace and happiness.

7. Al-Zayy

Kababish

Kordofan

Al-Zayy and her girl-friends went to collect dates from palm trees which grew in a water-course far, far away from where her people lived. They agreed that one of them would climb the tree, cut the dates and throw them down to her friends, so long as they filled her bowl with dates in return. They drew lots, and it fell to al-Zayy to climb the tree.

Al-Zayy climbed the tree, cut the dates, and continued dropping them to her sisters until they had filled their bowls with fine dates. But as for al-Zayy's bowl, they filled it with bad dates! When al-Zayy came down from the tree, she found her bowl full of dates. They all left together.

Half-way home, the girls took their bowls from their heads, and emptied them on the ground. They started boasting how good their dates were. Al-Zayy discovered that her dates were the worst of all, and the girls laughed at her, mockingly. Al-Zayy was determined. She would go back to the water-course, to bring good dates for her family. While she was at the water-course, the sun went down. Al-Zayy started to cry. She was afraid: the water-course was so vast! Now the ogre heard her. He came and took her with him. He hid her away in an isolated place.

When the girls arrived home, they told al-Zayy's family that al-Zayy had gone back to the water-course. When night came, her family realized that something bad had happened to her. In the morning, her cousin went to the water-course, but he did not find her among the date-palms. He carried on searching for her until he found her hidden in a difficult and isolated place, and in a pitiful state of fear, inspired by the ogre. She warned her cousin that he should not risk his life for her sake: the ogre was a very difficult creature. She insisted on this, but her cousin threatened her with his sword, put her behind him on his horse, and left. But during this time their people had broken camp, and left on their migration.

As al-Zayy and her cousin made their way back, numerous different whirlwinds appeared, and among them was a red whirlwind. This meant that the ogre was near at hand. The red

whirlwind got nearer and nearer, and the hideous ogre appeared. Al-Zayy's cousin drew his sword and struck the ogre's neck. But the ogre did not die: it turned into a beautiful camel.

This camel was later bought by al-Zayy's people to carry al-Zayy's howdah³⁵. As they travelled, this camel occasionally overtook other camels, and sometimes lagged behind. During this time, it had amorous exchanges with al-Zayy. She told her cousin, and he rode with her, and saw and heard the camel taking part in this amorous talk. He took his sword, and beheaded the camel, but the camel said: 'Do you think I have just one head?' Another head appeared. The cousin said: 'My sword is blunt!' This activity continued until seven heads had been severed. But the matter did not end here.

Just as the ogre had become a camel, now it turned into pumpkin plants full of gourds, which people picked. Now, when all al-Zayy's people left the encampment, all the gourds gathered, jumped up and down, and said:

'Quick, quick, come and see the gourds playing.'

Al-Zayy heard this and told her family, who came, smashed all the gourds, and left the remains. But again, the matter didn't end here. The ogre this time changed into bamboo.

So everyone cut the bamboo to fashion it into walking sticks. During quiet periods, the walking sticks gathered and struck al-Zayy very strongly. She told her family of this. They in turn burned all the walking sticks until only fine ash remained. Thus they were free of the ogre and his horrendous deeds. And they lived in peace.

³⁵. jihfa, جحفة

8. Camel People and Cattle People

Misairiyya

Southern Kordofan

There was once a great she-camel that belonged to a large family. They depended on the camel for their livelihood. In their arrogance³⁶, they decided to attack their weaker cousins who depended on a cow for their living. Now there was an old woman who egged them on. She was responsible for the bad feeling between the two groups. The cattle people became aware of this. Now the cattle people and the camel people lived in the same place. The old woman used to ride the she-camel, having insisted that she should be in the lead, and required all her children to keep up with her. Whenever she went through a place, she would kill everyone she came across.

The cattle people decided to gather together in one place. A wise man among them said: ‘the secret of the camel people is in the camel itself.’ So they jabbed the camel, and the camel bolted with the old woman on her back. The camel roamed in the desert, followed by the camel people, who became spread out.

So they became nomads looking after camels, and they are the Kababish, the Hamar, the Rizaigat and others including the Jafala who came from the Rizaigat. So the cattle people became populous, and they are the Fair Misairiyya and the Dark Misairiyya.³⁷

³⁶. badan, بدن

³⁷. Comment of the story-teller: ‘When a conflict occurs between the Rizaigat and the Baggara, and peace is desired, the peace-makers usually tell this story, showing that the two peoples are cousins and that they should settle their disputes.’

9. Fatma of the Anklet

Kababish

Kordofan

Fatma was a beautiful girl with long hair. She used to go with the girls of the encampment to draw water in water-skins from a pool, and bring it back on donkeys. One day she went with the girls to the water-pool, and one hair from her head fell in the water. When her brother came to let his horse drink, the horse choked on this single hair. He brother took an oath: 'As God is my witness, I shall marry the woman whose hair this is!' He brought all the girls of the encampment, and measured the hair against each one. But the hair was always much longer than theirs, until it was Fatma's turn. The hair was identical to hers.

Now her brother had to abide by his oath. He would have to marry her. He gathered the people of the encampment together to attend the wedding. Fatma was brought in her bridal procession to the nuptial tent³⁸, but she absolutely refused to marry him, and thought up a way to escape. She left him in his sleep in the night, and left, wandering in the desert, but not knowing where she was going. A sorcerer came across her, seized her, and took her to a place very far from any people, where he left her under the guard of his harsh and ugly female slave. Every day the sorcerer brought food, gold and beautiful and expensive gifts, so that she would live with him. But she could not stand the idea of living with him. She would have preferred to be dead. Only that would bring comfort to her spirit. Each day she tried to think of a way to escape, but she failed, because he told the slave to strengthen her guard.

Now when her brother woke up, Fatma was not to be found. He was anxious about her, and used all his resources to try to find her. He searched near and far, but he did not find her. Well, there were nomads in the desert who used to bring soda³⁹ for their animals. When some of the traders were going home, they ran out of water, and were thirsty. One of them, searching left and right for water, came close to the mountain where Fatma was. She saw him, and came out, taking care to avoid the female slave. She was afraid that the sorcerer might see the trader

³⁸. حجيل, hijail

³⁹. عطرون, 'atrūn

and kill him. She told the trader her story, and showed him how to get to the sorcerer's well. He went there, filled his water-skins and went back to his companions.

One day the traders were celebrating the wedding of one of them, and people came from far away to join the festivities. Fatma's brother came. There were many groups of men engaged in long conversations. The person who had found Fatma told his story, and her brother realized from the precise description that this was Fatma herself. The story-teller explained that the place of Fatma's captivity was dangerous, and that a human being could not reach it.

Fatma's brother vowed that the trader should go with him to the place and help him to rescue her. If so, he would give her in marriage to him. At first, the trader refused, out of fear, but when he thought about her beauty and the plight she was in, he agreed to help in the attempt to rescue her, even if it should cost him his life.

The next day, they took their horses, mounted and set off towards the place where Fatma was. The journey lasted long months. They reached a mountainous place which they crossed, sometimes riding their animals and sometimes on foot. When they came near to Fatma's place, she saw them and came out to meet them. She told them that the sorcerer was asleep. But when he awoke, he would follow their tracks and kill them. Now normally the sorcerer slept for a long time, and it was a deep sleep. Fatma's brother insisted that she should ride with them and go back home, but she refused in fear for their lives. But her brother threatened her with his sword, so she rode with them.

The female slave saw this, and beat the drums in order to wake up the sorcerer so that he could follow the fugitives and rescue Fatma. As she beat the drums, the slave chanted:

You who sleep for years and years
and wake at last for thirty days
open your ears, open your ears
the light of this house, today
her people have taken her away.

The sorcerer slept for some days more. When he woke up, he did not find Fatma but he found the female slave alone and chanting. He was agitated, and followed the tracks of the fugitives, now half way back home, Fatma looked back and saw a dense sandstorm which

reached to the sky. She cried out, and her brother realized what was coming. He dismounted from his horse, and prepared his sword for battle. Fatma was crying out, and running right and left. She felt sure that her brother would meet his death.

Her brother's companion held the two horses, and her brother himself went to confront the sorcerer. A violent battle raged between them. But with the sand clouds you couldn't see anything! After a great effort, Fatma's brother managed to cut off the sorcerer's head. He took it to show it to Fatma and his companion.

When Fatma saw her brother, she trilled and went to embrace him. They mounted their horses and carried on with their journey, until at last they reached their people. The people came out and met them outside the camp, clapping and praising God. On the very same day, Fatma married the nomad, and they all lived in great happiness.

10. Nijaidun

Kababish

Kordofan

In the old days there was a young boy by the name of Nijaidun who lived with his father's sister. He was known for being deceitful and cunning, which constantly caused his aunt trouble. Nijaidun's aunt thought of a clever way to get rid of him. She lit a fire at night beside Nijaidun's bed after digging a hole deeper than the boy's height but narrower than his girth. When they went to bed, his aunt put him near the fire. But he knew what was going on in his aunt's mind, and so he went to sleep early in order to be awake during the night and not go to sleep again until early morning.

He had learned of her ruse when he was hiding behind the tent-curtain⁴⁰ with a view to stealing some sugar. He heard his aunt talking to her daughter about her plan, thinking that Nijaidun had gone out to play with the boys of the encampment.

When she put him near the fire by the edge of the bed, he was awake, and he remained where he was near the fire until his aunt fell fast asleep. He got up and took off his clothes and put them on his aunt's daughter, and in turn he put on her clothes, and put her where he had been, while he slept in her place. His aunt woke up in the middle of the night in order to rid herself and her daughter of this scourge which made their lives unbearable. It never crossed her mind that Nijaidun could have planned such a trick, and she pushed her daughter into the pit which she had prepared, and went to sleep feeling at ease, paying no attention to the loud cries from the pit, as if she were already in a deep sleep.

The aunt woke up early next morning, and said: 'Now at last I am free of Nijaidun.' Nijaidun woke up and jumped from his bed, saying 'And I am free of my aunt's daughter!' His aunt wept bitterly, but he said firmly:

'The person who digs a pit will fall into it.'⁴¹

⁴⁰. zugāg, زقاق

⁴¹. hufra, حفرة

The aunt sent him to the people of the encampment to inform them of the death of her daughter. He went, very pleased and happy, and told them that today was the circumcision⁴² of that cousin. The women put on their golden jewellery and beautiful dresses, and went to the aunt's tent, singing and joyful. Nijaidun was at the head of the procession, joining the women in their happiness.

When the women reached the tent, they heard weeping and wailing. Nijaidun told them that he was wrong, because his cousin had died. Therefore, happiness turned into sorrow and the women took off their jewellery and hung it on a tree guarded by Nijaidun. Some nomads passed by and asked him why he was waiting under the tree, and why was that gold hanging from it. He said to them that it was his tree, and it was a tree which bore gold. They decided to buy it from him. He agreed with them that he would take the present crop of gold, and they would have to guard it until it bore gold again in three months' time. He sold it to them for the price of five camels and a hundred guineas.

He took his camels and gold and wealth and left his aunt's encampment. He went to live in a faraway place with people who were no kin of his, a happy man and a master.

⁴². طهورة, ṭaḥūra,

11. The Ogress and the Seven Girls

Kababish

Kordofan

There were seven girls. One of whom was called Lulu, and she was very beautiful. Their families used to make them tired, and they were unhappy with this. So they decided to escape from the encampment to another place so as to feel at their ease.

At midnight, they gathered together, and escaped from the camp. On their way, they saw a fire, and went to it, and found that it was a ogress. She was very persuasive, intending to lull them into a sense of security, so that she could kill them. She said that she would bring them milk from her goats. But really she was going to take milk from her own breasts. When she milked her milk, the girls realized what she was up to, and poured it away secretly, so that the ogress would not notice. But one of them, who lisped, drank the milk. The others ran away, when the ogress was not paying attention, except the one who drank the milk, who was unable to move. The ogress ate her up, and ran after the others.

When she caught up with them, the girls were near a tree, and they said to it: ‘Oh tree of our father and mother, make yourself short so that we can climb up.’ So they climbed up. Every girl had a razor, and they tied their razors with ropes, and dangled the ropes to the ogress. They said: ‘Come up to us.’ When she tried, she was cut by the razors, she cried out, and ran away, leaving the girls behind.

When the girls felt safe, they came down from the tree, and continued their journey. On their way they saw an old man, and they asked him: ‘When a person is to be skinned, how do they do it?’ And the old man replied that a thorn should be stuck in his head. Then they said to him: ‘We want to throw you some fodder.’ He gave them tools to pull the branches down⁴³. As they pulled the fruit down, they threw their tools on him, and one of them says regretfully: ‘You have broken the old man’s head.’ But the old man says: ‘If the daughters of Karan*** have had their fill, that’s fine by me.’ But as a result of all the tools being thrown, the old man died, and

⁴³. maḥājīn, محاجين

they stuck a thorn in his head and skinned him. Lulu, the most beautiful of the girls, put the skin on, and they all left.

On their way, they found tracks and traces: a group of people⁴⁴ had camped here, but moved on their way with their animals. They realised that the traces were those of the caravan of Wad al-Nimair⁴⁵. They went into a hole, and the first to go in was Lulu. When the caravan of Wad al-Nimair arrived, they found that there were girls in the hole. Wad al-Nimair was at the back of the caravan. People said: ‘You in the hole, a genie in the shape of a human being⁴⁶ is coming for you.’

All the girls came out except Lulu, who refused. So Wad al-Nimair did not have his share, because he was last to come. Lulu chanted:

‘They have taken the ugly one-eyed,
and left the bright flower inside.’

Wad al-Nimair heard this. After going a short distance with the group, he said; ‘I have forgotten my ring.’ So he went back, and brought Lulu out of the hole. Of course, she was wearing the skin of the old man. He put her behind him on his camel, still thinking that she was really an old man. They left. As the camel was going fast, the golden ornaments which Lulu was wearing under the skin began to make a noise. Wad al-Nimair asked Lulu: ‘What is that?’ Lulu replies: ‘These are my ribs, my son.’

When Wad al-Nimair arrived back home, he left the old man under a sun-shelter⁴⁷ with the chicken. He just gave the old man scraps of food, and treated him very badly. But Lulu was lucky. There was a girl from the same family who brought her proper food, and fed the scraps to the chicken.

The task which Wad al-Nimair gave to the old man was to take the ducks to the river in the company of a deaf person. At the river, Lulu used to take off the old man’s skin and her ornaments, put them on a tree beside the river, and bathe. The deaf person observed this, and saw Lulu’s beauty. When he goes back in the evening, he tells Wad al-Nimair what he saw. Of

⁴⁴. da‘in, دعن

⁴⁵ Wad al-Nimair, ود النمير

⁴⁶. shakalūta, شكلوتة

⁴⁷. rakūba, راکوبة

course, this was done using sign-language. But Wad al-Nimair did not understand, and chastised him. Yet when the deaf man repeated the gestures, Wad al-Nimair realized what was afoot. One day, he went ahead of Lulu and the deaf man to the river, and climbed a tree on the river bank near the tree where Lulu used to take off the old man's skin and her ornaments. When Lulu came, driving the ducks in front of her, she reached the river, took off the old man's skin and her ornaments, and put them on the tree. Wad al-Nimair saw her captivating beauty when she removed the skin. As she bathed, Wad al-Nimair came down from his tree, took her rings, and scarpered. When she came out of the river, she was astonished not to find her rings. She asked the deaf man, who gave no answer.

One day, Wad al-Nimair said to the old man: 'I would like to gamble with you.' They played some games. They had agreed that the winner would skin the loser. This was planned by Wad al-Nimair, to reveal the identity of his friend who was disguised in an old man's skin. The old man defeated Wad al-Nimair twice, but this game requires a lot of effort and work. So the old man, who was Lulu, became tired and Wad al-Nimair won the third round, and tore off the old man's skin. There, revealed to him, was this very beautiful girl, just as he had seen her at the river. Wad al-Nimair revealed that it was he who had taken her rings. He married her, and they lived in joy and happiness.

12. Muhammed and Fatma

Kababish

Bara (Kordofan)

The story goes that there was once a boy named Muhammed who had a sister by the name of Fatma. Their father was a trader, and he went to the fertile lands of the Nile⁴⁸ on business. When he went, he left his children with brother who was a farmer. Their father was away for a long time.

Now their uncle treated them very harshly, to the point of preventing them from eating. And whenever they did something wrong, he would beat them severely. He required them look after his plantation, and forbade them to eat anything from it. He even counted the ears of millet⁴⁹ which were growing there.

Now the children became very hungry, and ate one ear of millet. When their uncle came, he counted the ears and found that one was missing. He beat Muhammed very severely. Fatma ran away. and when she encountered passers-by, she said to them:

‘Merchants, hear me do!

‘Is my father there with you?

‘He knows Upper Egypt and how to go there.

‘He is tall and dark,

‘A grumbling camel at his heels.

‘A hissing whip he wields.’

Each caravan she met said that her father was in the next caravan.

When her uncle realized what had happened, he pursued her, to prevent her talking to the caravans. But she runs ahead, and whenever he comes close, she says: ‘Earth, swallow me!’ and the earth opens, and she goes in. So her uncle was unable to catch her.

⁴⁸. al-rīf, الريف

⁴⁹. gandūl, قندول

When she sensed that another caravan was coming, she came out and chanted:

‘Merchants, hear me do!

‘Is my father there with you?

‘He knows Upper Egypt and how to go there.

‘He is tall and dark,

‘A grumbling camel at his heels.

‘A hissing whip he wields.

‘My uncle, the brother of my father,

‘Beat my brother Muhammad for an ear of millet.’

When her uncle sees her, he runs towards her and the same thing happens again; she asks the earth to swallow her. So her uncle could not catch her. And in the end her father came.

13. The Heat of the Market

Hamar

Abu Zabad (Northern Kordofan)

Listen! I am going to tell you something important, which you can write in your notebook. I'm going to tell you a true story of something which happened very recently. OK, you can write it now.

In our open market, we have a problem between the Tayyasa tribe and the Awlad Sari on the one side and the Ghishaimat and the Jilda on the other. Some of the Mima joined the Ghishaimat and the Jilda. The Ghishaimat had pens for livestock. They grazed the livestock in the wadis. They decided to establish their own market. The Tayyasa also established a market.

But brother, the place is too small for two markets. They said that the two markets should be combined, but they didn't have any idea at all⁵⁰ of how to set about this. So they remained enemies. One of the Tayyasa named Wad al-Lihaiu⁵¹ started to chant:

'When the rains fall
'there's no-one in the market at all;
'even one who is some good
'is like a bent nail half-driven through wood.'

Then one of the Ghishaimat replied to him:

'So many here at mart!
'The engine ticks over but won't start.
'You have a hospital with a physician
'Your people are faithful Ansar⁵²
'Who prayed prostrate in their position.

⁵⁰. tab, تب

⁵¹. Wad al-Lihaiu, ود الليهو

⁵². Anṣār, أنصار

‘Some kneeled saying ‘God is great’.
‘And some went West to their fate.
‘Those who go north as they can
‘meet Wad Isa the hospitable man,
‘who swears by God that come what may,
‘if they wait a little, something will come their way.
‘A leader from long ago.
‘Whip them, the infidels, so!
‘In the past your sword was sharp and true.
‘Is it the cutlass of accursed Jabrallah?
‘All thugs and criminals are you!’

Then Wad al-Lihaiu said:

‘Our market is full of life
Seas of beer⁵³, no strife
youths⁵⁴ with their canes all round.
‘Not one of you is a decent man.
‘You should speak with respect if you can!’

When the Ghishaimat person heard this, he said:

‘Traders everywhere! Our market is a boon.
‘The potter is like the new moon.
‘Your wealth is rightful, you with your sword⁵⁵.
‘Wad Isa is the traders’ lord.

⁵³. marīsa, مريسة

⁵⁴. ḡagāla, ضقالة

⁵⁵. Abu Nimaīsha, ابو نميشة

‘All the tailors have great skill
‘Say to Umm Dinji “cut the cloth, if you will,
‘and make a tight waistline for Umm Jamal.”
‘Let her, the young gazelle, pace
‘proudly and beautifully in the market-place!.’

I swear he shut up Wad al-Lihaiu then and there and to this day, and the market has flourished.

14. The Nomads who were Robbed

Hamar

Abu Zaid (Northern Kordofan)

This time, brother, we'll tell you the story of the nomads who were robbed! These nomads have livestock, camels and sheep, and their wealth is something to be reckoned with. Now there were armed thieves who stole some camels from them. They were very angry; they steeled themselves, and followed the thieves. They followed them for two days, and when the stolen camels became tired they closed up, and reached the place where the thieves tethered their livestock. One of the thieves said to his friends: 'The people who came to get their camels back are nearby.' His friend replied: 'We are very tired after two days leading those camels. What do you think? Shall we let them take their camels back?' Anyway, the thieves drove the camels on, and one of them took his rifle⁵⁶ and began to shoot at the owners of the camels. What a shoot-out it was! Like it or not, the owners had to accept the outcome.

One of them was very angry with his companions, and started to chant:

'You lily-livered bunch⁵⁷! of men!

'Just like the black ostrich⁵⁸! once again!

'Lily-livered all of you. Stupid! Hey!

'A few shots and you run away!

'Lily-livered! Like being peppered with shot⁵⁹!

'Tired donkeys full of too much water, like as not!

'Lily-livered! This ostrich⁶⁰ looks like an owl

'That brings bad luck, as we know,

⁵⁶. jammālī, جَمَّالِي

⁵⁷. Umm Kujūr, أُمُّ كَجُور

⁵⁸. hiḍlīm, هِضْلِيم

⁵⁹. kabsūla, كَبْسُولَة

⁶⁰. na'āma, نَعَامَة

‘We vow to bring a he-goat as an offering to show

‘If you ask for help from the people I name

‘Shahgaib will bring nothing but shame.’

15. Wad Ajib

Hamar

Al-Nuhud (Northern Kordofan)

Hey listen! Take this stupid nomad in the distant past who was one of the people of Muhammed Wad Ajib. His family belonged to the Shanabla⁶¹. He said: ‘We all know each other; we live together⁶² like brothers; we share water and bread⁶³.’

The nomad travelled to a faraway place. The moment⁶⁴ he approached a camp of nomads he met a very beautiful woman. Her beauty was stunning. He asked her about her home, her husband and her name. She reached the camp before him; and he was a little behind. While he was walking he met another nomad feeding his camel with melon. He said to him: ‘I met a very beautiful woman’ and described her. The other nomad who was feeding his camel said to him: ‘Get on this camel, and it will take you straight away to her.’ The first nomad said: ‘Is this really true, or are you having me on?’ The second nomad replied: ‘As God is my witness, we wouldn’t cheat you!’ The first nomad did not hesitate. He mounted the camel and gave it its head, to go where it wished. The camel took him straight away to her dwelling. At midnight, he couched the camel and unloaded his belongings and found this gazelle asleep. He came near and simply embraced the beautiful woman, without making love to her. Just before dawn he mounted his camel and left. The woman herself, little gazelle, had noticed nothing.

The nomad went back and found the second nomad who had spoken to him and given him the camel waiting for him outside the camp. The second nomad said to the first: ‘Did you find what you wanted?’ He replied: ‘Yes, I succeeded!’ For two more nights the same things happened.

On the fourth day, the owner of the camel, who was the husband of the beautiful woman, arrived. When he came to make love to his wife, she said to him: ‘You have not made love to

⁶¹. Shanābla, شَنَابِلَة

⁶². rabā‘ رِبَاء

⁶³. ‘aish bi-mayy, عَيْشٌ بِمَيِّ

⁶⁴. habāb هَبَاب

me for three nights, and at sunrise you leave. What has happened to you at night?’ He said to her: ‘Nothing!’

So the woman’s husband realized that the nomad who had come to his wife was a good man, because he did not take the opportunity to have sex with her. He searched for the first nomad, and finally found him, and said. ‘You are a fine man, and an honourable man! Lord knows, I have never seen anyone like you. Let us go to my home, and find a wife for you.’ So it came about that the husband gave his sister to the nomad in marriage. And of course the two men were joined together like brothers, sharing bread, milk and brotherhood, for that night and the nights to follow.

16. Jabir, Son of the Well

Hamar

Al-Khawi (Northern Kordofan)

A long time ago there was a handsome boy. He grew up and the young men of the encampment were envious of him. He was so handsome, and all the girls were dying for him. The young men came to the boy's father and said to him: 'We want Jabir to go hunting with us,' When they were far off in the middle of a wadi they became very thirsty. They found a well. 'Ha!' they said. 'Who's going in?'

Jabir, the darling of the girls, went in. The other young men said to each other: 'Let's seal the well, and leave!' But one youth, who was a decent person, said: 'Brothers, this is not right. At least leave a small opening so that Jabir can breathe.' They returned to the encampment and said to his mother: 'We have lost Jabir. We don't know where he is.' Jabir's mother told the girls: 'Your companion has died,' and the girls began to chant:

'Girls, girls, start weeping and wailing!

'divide yourselves into three groups on each side:

'Jabir has died!'

But Jabir was lucky, because some nomads found him in the well. Surreptitiously they brought him back to his mother. His mother was delighted, and fed him rich fatty food and plenty of sweet things. He put on weight and was fine. His mother brought him deerskin saddlebags. Every day, he gradually put on weight, until he was just right. Then his mother invited all the boys who had sealed him in the well: 'There is a feast,' she said, without letting them know that Jabir was still alive.

When they had their fill, Jabir mounted his horse: 'I'm coming for you,' he called. Jabir beheaded all the young men except the one who had told them to leave an opening in the top of the well. Jabir just cut off his hand.

17. The Fortune-teller and his Friends

Hamar

Al-Khawi (Northern Kordofan)

There were three men, one a fortune-teller, one a womanizer, and one who always had bright ideas. The three of them went off together to a faraway place. They encountered the king of the place, who was a fine man.

Now the womanizer had the king's wife in mind. He managed to sleep with her. The watchman informed the king of what had happened. The king hung the womanizer high up with a rope, and left him there. When his companions asked after him, the king said: 'I do not know where he is.'

Next the fortune-teller began to do his divinations, and said to the man who always had bright ideas: 'Your friend is tied high up, and he is going to die!' 'Are you quite sure?' was the reply. And the fortune-teller said: 'Yes!'

So the man who always had bright ideas took with him a very large bone and a coin, which was so shiny that it seemed white. When he went inside the king's house, the watchman saw him and said: 'Go away!', but he threw the gleaming coin to the watchman, and went inside. The dog began to bark, alerting even those far away who had lost their way in the desert and were looking for an encampment. The man threw the dog the bone, and the dog began to chew it, *crunch, crunch!*

Then the man who always had bright ideas went cautiously to the place where the womanizer was tied up. When he was freed, the two climbed over the king's roof, and fled, asking themselves the way home. In the end, they reached it, and lived in peace and prosperity.

18. The Genie

Hamar

Al-Khawi (Northern Kordofan)

This time we'll show you the tale of the genie⁶⁵. This genie, my little boy, was already a thief, but he never stole from people he knew. My grandfather used to tell me about this thief. Goodness me, I can't remember his name! Oh well, it doesn't matter. Our thief depended on holy men for his thieving, as you will see.⁶⁶ One day, he stole an entire pen⁶⁷ of camels, a whole caravan. Oh yes, I forgot to tell you, before he left he went to a well-known holy man and said to him: 'Look here, I want to rob some nomads. I mean to steal a whole pen of camels.' The holy man gave him a stone, a lump of mud, and a thorn, and said to him: 'Put these in your pocket. If the owners of the animals follow you, and approach you, throw these at them, one by one.' The thief got on his camel, carrying the stone, the lump of mud and the thorn, and said: 'I am in the hands of the Everlasting One'.

He reached the pen, took all the camels, struck his own camel with his whip, and drove the animals ahead of him. He went very fast. The nomads followed his tracks. Two days passed, and on the third day they found him quite a long way off. They put on speed, and when they got near, he threw the stone at them. At once the stone turned into a huge mountain. They said to themselves they would go round the mountain. But by the time they had done so, he was far, far away.

They chased and chased. And when they came near, he threw the thorn at them. The thorn went: 'Whoosh!' and turned into a large wood. Wow! It took the pursuers two days to cut it down. The thief had gone far, far away.

But the nomads did not give up, and continued the chase. When they drew near, the thief threw the lump of mud at them. The mud went: 'Whoosh!' and turned into an enormous sea. Now, how could the sea be crossed? The nomads became convinced that they could never catch up with him, and so they went back.

⁶⁵. jān, جان

⁶⁶. fugara (sing. fagīr) فقرا، فقير

⁶⁷. murāḥ, مراح

The thief went on his way, and the camels truly became his property!

19. Patience

Hamar

Al-Khawi (Northern Kordofan)

Once upon a time, there was a very handsome boy. All the girls of the camp desired him. One day he went with the boys of the camp to water their horses from a pool⁶⁸ which was near their camp. His horse was thoroughly enjoying his drink, but a hair⁶⁹ came and blocked his mouth. The boy said: ‘By God, I swear that I shall take the owner of this hair in marriage!’

Back at the camp, he tried matching the hair with each of the girls, and said: ‘By measuring, we shall find out who owns this hair, and give her in marriage.’ But the hair was shorter than those of all the girls except his own sister. Then he said: ‘Heavens, I’ll have to marry her!’ When his sister heard this, she fled, accompanied by seven girls.

When they were far, far away, they became frightened and entered the burrow of an ant-eater⁷⁰. *Oh brother, I forgot to mention something!* Before they went into the burrow, they killed an old man and the sister of the boy skinned the man, and put his skin on her. While they were sitting in the burrow, seven youths came and each one chose a girl, except the last one, who found the old man in the burrow. He took the old man with him, and left.

The old man was given the task of herding the goats, together with a deaf person as a second shepherd. *Do you know who this old man is? He is the young girl herself!* When she is in the desert with the deaf man, she takes off the skin and goes: ‘Swim, geese⁷¹, swim, geese’ and swims in the water. The deaf man was puzzled. This one sometimes turned into an old man, and sometimes becomes a beautiful woman and swims! He told his master, who followed them into God’s desert. He saw the old man turning into a beautiful girl, and swimming. He went back home straight away. When they came back from herding their animals, the master of the herd said to him: ‘Hey, old man, come here. Let’s have a wrestle and see which of us can throw

⁶⁸. rahad, رهد

⁶⁹. şūfāya, صوفاية

⁷⁰. abū nuḍlāf, ابو نضلاف

⁷¹. wizzīn, وزيين

the other.' So they began to wrestle, and the master removed the old man's skin and this beautiful woman appeared. So he married her, and remained in the safe-keeping of God.

20. The Ugly and the Beautiful

Hamar

Al Khawi (Northern Kordofan)

Hey, friend, there was a beautiful woman, but her daughter was even more beautiful. An ogre came at night when she and her daughter were asleep. The ogre ate the daughter right up⁷², leaving nothing except her bones

At that time there were famous holy men. One of them brought a bull and chanted over it for three days and three nights. They gathered the bones of the beautiful girl, and the holy man mounted the bull and the mother of the girl gave him so many things, like dates, water and money, you name it!

Listen! He brought the bones and pounded them using a pestle and mortar. The bull says: ‘Pound well! Her eyes are two, she has two legs and she has two ears. Pound well, pound well!’ *Hey!* The girl emerged, more beautiful than before. Her mother was very pleased, and took her away.

There was a woman whose daughter was ugly, and she wanted to make her beautiful. She brought the holy man, who mounted the bull. But the mother didn’t bring the holy man any fine presents, failing to show him due respect. The holy man brought the pestle and mortar, put the girl in the mortar, and began to pound. The bull bellowed, saying: ‘Don’t pound well! She has one leg, she has one eye.’ The girl emerged as a devil. The holy man refused to change her back, and left her in her ugliness.

⁷². jamm, جم

21. Trust

Hamar

Al Khawi (Northern Kordofan)

Brother, there was once a man whose father died leaving him with three sisters. So he became responsible for his sisters and their dwelling place, like the head of the family⁷³. *Then, hey!* when his father was alive, he told his son: ‘If anyone comes to marry any of your sisters, do not refuse him. Son, marry one of your sisters to him! People build with straw. Fair enough! But safer still, build with people!’

Then three men came. One could turn into a crocodile, one into a crow, and one into a lion. So the son married his sisters to them. This generous⁷⁴ lad wanted to marry a beautiful girl, and this girl should have high standing and be wealthy. In reality, the girl he wished for was the king’s daughter. The king said to him: ‘I swear by all that is holy, I shall scatter some bushels⁷⁵ of sesame seeds. If you pick them all up, I shall give my daughter to you in marriage.’ The lad called out to his brother-in-law, the one who could turn into a crow: ‘Collect all these seeds, and don’t miss any!’ So all the seeds were collected.

The lad, so well-behaved and generous in his hospitality, was confronted with another task. The king threw a golden sword into the river, and said to him: ‘This is important. I must have the sword back, whatever it takes. You are to search in the river, and bring it out.’ So the lad took out the ring of the crocodile, and went ‘Hey!’ and dived in, far, far down. He found the sword and brought it out.

The lad, so well-behaved and generous in his hospitality, was still not spared. He was confronted with another difficult task. The king said to him: ‘This time we want you to bring us a live gazelle.’ This time, the lad took out the ring of the lion and ran after a gazelle. *Wah!* In an instant, he caught up with her, and brought her back, alive. So he had successfully completed the three tasks set by the king. The king was pleased and gave his daughter to him in marriage.

⁷³. yāmūm, ياموم

⁷⁴. fanjarī, فنجري

⁷⁵. ardab, اردب

22. The Little Ogress

Hamar

Umm Lubana (Northern Kordofan)

Hey! There was once a little ogress who made friends with a man who had a family. Every day, she comes to the man's wife, and says: 'Prepare one of your children for me.' The wife then shaves the hair of a child, and gathers the child's nails and hair, and gives them to the ogress to be eaten, saying: 'Ogress, take this little son of mine.' The ogress eats the hair and the nails, and comes again the following day. The wife shaves the hair of another son, and gives it to the ogre to be eaten. While the ogress is eating this, the mother hides the children from the sight of the ogress. One day, she said to the ogress: 'All my children are gone!' The ogress said: 'Then prepare your husband for me!' The wife shaved her husband and cut his nails for the ogress. The ogress ate the hair and the nails.

When the children and the husband were hidden and quiet, the ogress came and said to the man's wife: 'I want you to prepare yourself for me!' When the ogress went to eat her, her children and her husband pushed her to the ground, and stabbed her dead.

23. Umm Tamayim, the Beautiful

Hamar

Umm Lubana (Northern Kordofan)

Long, long ago, there were some girls who went out to collect firewood⁷⁶. The beautiful Umm Tamayim⁷⁷ went with them. *Hey!* Walking so far, they became thirsty. They found a well. Umm Tamayim went into the well to get some water. But the girls went away and left her. A long time passed. In the end, she found water, and drank. A girl came to her, wanting water from the well. She helped Umm Tamayim out, and took her to a new place.

There she married someone who asked her about her family. She told him everything that was in her head. Then he took her back to her family. The other girls became envious of her, and said: ‘We have no connection with your husband. ***God between us and him; di di la la (this this no no). But he will turn into a wolf⁷⁸ and eat you. We’ll show you what to do. Put these thorns⁷⁹ in his bed, and they will kill him.’ Umm Tamayim refused to do this, but the girls did it. When she came back into the room, she removed all the thorns, except one which she did not notice. When her husband came to sleep, the thorn pricked him, and it made him shout and run away at great speed. Nobody knew where he went.

Umm Tamayim was in a very difficult situation. No matter where she went to look for her husband, she couldn’t find him. In the end, she dressed herself as a holy man to continue her search. When she became tired, she found a tree under which she could lie down to rest and sleep. Then some tiny birds flew over her, and one of them said: ‘The husband of Umm Tamayim is ill. How can he be cured?’ A second little bird replied: ‘With my liver and yours, and my blood and yours!’ The birds flew into Umm Tamayim’s bosom, and she caught them and went to her husband. She cured him. When he was well, he said to Umm Tamayim, ‘Umm Tamayim, you look like a holy man; how shall we reward you?’ The holy man—Umm Tamayim—replied: ‘The only reward is for you to go back to our home.’ When her husband

⁷⁶. ‘adān عدان

⁷⁷. Umm Tamāyīm, أم تماييم

⁷⁸. marfa‘ain, مرفعين

⁷⁹. ḥaskanīt, حسكنيت

reached their home, she told him the whole story. He was very pleased, and full of generosity, and their life tasted of honey.

24. Fatma the Ripe Sugar-Cane

Shukriyya

Al Butana (Central/Eastern Sudan)

Fatma and the girls went to the desert to fetch dates. The girls said to her: 'Climb the tree, and shake it to make the dates fall.' Afterwards they told her to come down,

Meanwhile, the girls had collected ripe dates in their saddle-bags, but put unripe ones in Fatma's, with a layer of ripe ones on top. When they had gone some way, they said: 'Let's see which of us has ripe dates,' and emptied their saddle-bags on the ground. Fatma found that her dates were not ripe, and told them that she would go back to the tree. She did so by herself, and filled her bag with ripe dates.

Then the girls said: 'Let's go to the well'. They did so, and drank water. They said to Fatma: 'Let's put our golden ornaments⁸⁰ in cakes of mud, and throw them in the well.' However, they did not put their own ornaments in the cakes of mud, while Fatma did coat hers with mud, and threw them into the well. They said to her: 'We are amazed! Our ornaments are here, but you have thrown yours in the well.' Fatma replied: 'By the life of my father, I shall not leave here without my ornaments.' So they left her behind.

Then there came a red whirlwind, and she said to it: 'Oh my! May God protect me from you!' The red whirlwind said: 'And may God protect you from what comes after me!' Then came a black whirlwind, and said to her: 'Why are you standing there?' 'My ornaments are in the well,' she said. The whirlwind said: 'If you marry me, I will get them out for you.' She assented. Then he told her to cover his eyes and ears. He drank the water in the well and brought out Fatma's ornaments. But one of Fatma's rings fell back into the well. And she said: 'My ring has fallen into the well.' Again, she plastered mud over his eyes and ears. Once more he went down into the well, drank the water, and brought the ring out. Then he took her to his palace on the river. Now this ogre sleeps for one year, and then wakes for another. And this year was the year of his sleep. So it was that he had brooms and shells hanging in the palace to tell him what happened.

After this, her father's slave came to the river herding the camels to drink. The slave shouted out to the she-camel, and said: 'Khidair, you are lost'. The camel replied by chanting:

Oh Bakhit,

Is the camel your mother's

⁸⁰. حفلة, ḥafla

Or your father's?

It is the property of Fatma, daughter of kings.

Taken by her maternal aunts

Who put me on top of the date-palm trees?

Then Bakhit with his camels went to Fatma's family and said to them: 'I have heard the voice of Fatma in the palace by the river.' 'You're a liar,' replied the family. But he took them to river. They said: 'Call for the female camel!' Bakhit called for (khidair dawh⁸¹), but Fatma replied:

Oh Bakhit, son of an uncircumcised woman⁸²,

Does Khidair (endearment for animals) belong to your mother or your father.

It is the property of Fatma daughter of kings

Taken by aunts

and put me on top of the date-palm trees.

Her family came to her and went into the palace while the ogre was asleep. They took her away but the brooms and the shells called out: 'You ogre who sleeps for a year, you ogre who sleeps for a year, the light of the house has been taken to her home'. The period of sleep came to an end, and the ogre woke up. It turned into a whirlwind and went to the place where Fatma lived.

In the encampment there was an old woman, and the ogre, in the shape of a whirlwind, said to her: 'I shall change myself into goods which you must sell to Fatma the ripe sugar-cane.' The old woman went to Fatma, taking a mirror with her. But Fatma refused. Next she brought slippers, but again Fatma refused. Then the ogre said to the old woman: 'I shall turn myself into a camel. Sell me to Fatma's father.' So Fatma's father bought the camel.

They left their home, and put Fatma's howdah on this camel. The group, people and livestock, came to a wadi. Everyone crossed the wadi, except Fatma in her howdah. Her camel got stuck in the mud. The family came back for her, and discovered that Fatma could not be separated from the howdah and the howdah could not be separated from the camel. Her family gave up the attempt, left Fatma behind, and went on their way.

With her there were two female animals, a cat and a dog. Well, the ogre said to her: 'Fatma the ripe sugar-cane, tonight your blood will be drunk, and your flesh will be a tasty morsel in the mouth.' Fatma cut off the paw of the cat and gave it to the ogre. The ogre ate it. She gave him another paw and he ate it. And so on until he had eaten the whole cat. Then Fatma said to

⁸¹. khidair dawh, خضير دوه

⁸². ghalfa, غلفة

the dog: 'Open your mouth and swallow me!' So the bitch opened her mouth and swallowed Fatma. Then the camel separated itself from the howdah and turned back into an ogre. He found nothing but the dog. He beat the dog, so the dog ran away, and hid with people who had goats. One of these people had the decoration of the howdah, one had the howdah itself, and another had the dog. Then the goatherds went home and were met by their mothers. Their mothers said: 'What have you brought for us?' The mother of the boy who had the dog said to him: 'Look at the beautiful things the others brought! And you—you bring me a dog!' He said to her: 'Let's look after the dog, and rear her.' His mother had no daughter. She goes to her plantation with her son, and they tie up the dog in the hut. Then Fatma the ripe sugar-cane emerged from the dog. She bathed and prepared and kneaded the dough to make bread⁸³ for herself and her dog. She left some of the bread hanging from the ceiling for the boy and his mother. Then she went to the dog and said: 'Open your mouth', and the dog swallowed the girl.

When the girls of the hut came and asked the mother and the youth for sugar-cane, she said to them: 'Who is it who prepared bread for me?' And they said: 'We did!' and ate it. The following day, the same thing happened, but on the third day, the young man said to his mother: 'You go ahead to the beds of earth'. Then he hid in the hut. When the time came, Fatma emerged from the dog and she did the same as before. The young man saw her, but did not speak to her. When his mother came back, he did not tell her what he had seen, but he said: 'Tomorrow, I'm going to the market to buy gold ornaments.' She said to him: 'Where is the money box with the dowry⁸⁴?' He said: 'I'm not going to tell you!' Then he went, and bought an animal for slaughter, and gold. His mother said to him: 'Show me the bride!' He said: 'I want to marry the dog!' His mother berated him. 'Wej! A terrible thing! Shame on you!', she said. 'The (people buried in the) graveyard want to marry the dog. Then the bridegroom and the people there ate and drank. They said: 'We want to give the bride a golden necklace and ornaments!' The young man's mother collected the droppings of chicken and dogs in order to dress the hair of the dog. She called the dog: 'Come here!' The young man came with his sword and said to her: 'You inside the dog, come out, or I'll cut off the head.' The dog opened its mouth and beautiful Fatma came out. Those present fainted at her beauty. Fatma cut her finger, and scattered her blood over them until they woke up. In the end, she told them her name, and the people ululated. Mother and son were very happy, and the marriage took place.

⁸³. kisra, كسرة

⁸⁴. khatiyya, ختيّة

25. Fatma the Beautiful

Shukriyya

Al Butana (Central/Eastern Sudan)

They say that there was a girl who went to the river to fetch water. She had a lock of hair⁸⁵ on her forehead. This lock of hair got caught and carried away in the river by a branch. Some men with their camels came along, and her brother found the lock of hair and removed it from the branch. Holding it up, he said: ‘I will marry the girl whose hair this is!’ They said to him: ‘If it is the hair of your sister, Fatma, will you marry her?’ To which he replied: ‘Yes, I will marry her!’

When they returned home, he was carrying the lock of hair, and tried to match it with all the girls there, but he did not find a match. But it did match the hair of his sister Fatma. She heard what he said about marriage, and said to the girls: ‘If my brother wants to marry me, the same will happen to you: your brothers will marry you too.’

So the seven girls and an eighth one who was young and spoke with a stutter⁸⁶ decided to escape that night. The other girls went outside. Fatma got up from her bed, and said to her mother: ‘I would like to drink some water from the water-skin⁸⁷.’ She put the gourd on the ground, and opened the water-skin. Water began to pour into the gourd. At once, she left to join her friends outside. Water was still pouring into the gourd, and Fatma’s mother thought that Fatma was drinking. The eight girls fled. They met an ogress who made gruel⁸⁸ for them. After tasting the gruel, the other girls threw it to the ground, except the stutterer who began to eat, despite the other girls pinching her to discourage her from eating. The stutterer called out ‘G-granny, g-granny, they’re stopping me from eating,’ and the ogress said: ‘eat up, my girl, eat up!’ The girls went to sleep, and so did the ogress. But during the night, when the girls were sleeping the ogress woke up and began to sharpen⁸⁹ her knife—*karash, karash!* One of the girls began to go ‘*ahh, ahh, ahh!*’ because she was alarmed. ‘Why can’t you sleep, my girl?’ asked

⁸⁵. masīra, مسيرة

⁸⁶. lījaina, ليجينة

⁸⁷. girba, قربة

⁸⁸. ‘asīda, عصيدة

⁸⁹. karasha, كرش

the ogress. And the girl replied: ‘As God is my witness, granny, your dogs barking sound just like ours!’ The ogress called out to the dogs’ masters: ‘Come on, come on, your dogs are keeping my little girls awake. Keep quiet now. Go to sleep! Go to sleep!’ Once again, she began to sharpen her knife: *karash, karash!* And once again the girl went ‘*ahh, ahh, ahh!*’ And the ogress said: ‘What is it now, little one? Why can’t you sleep?’ And the girl said: ‘As God is my witness, granny, the mooing⁹⁰ of your cattle sounds just like ours!’ The ogress called out to the owners of the cattle: ‘Keep your animals quiet! They are keeping my little ones awake.’

At dawn, the ogress told the girls to wait for her in her dwelling, and went out. The seven girls got up, but the eighth one was stuck in her bed, and her bed was stuck to the ground. The other girls ran away. The ogress came back and found the stutterer still there. ‘Granny,’ said the girl, ‘I have looked after your house for you.’ But the ogress heated the iron grid⁹¹, and put the girl upon it. *Shatatat!* The fire killed her, and the ogress ate the girl.

The ogress ran in pursuit of the other girls, and was catching up with them. But they had hammered nails, needles and blades⁹² into the ground under a tree and climbed up with a rope⁹³. The ogress called out: ‘I’m coming, I’m coming. Lift me up, daughters of my mother!’ So they lowered the rope, and when she was close to them as they hauled her up, they threw her down on to the nails, needles and blades. ‘Take pity on me,’ exclaimed the ogress. ‘Lift me again, daughters of my innards, lift me again!’ Do you know, they lifted her seven times, and threw her down seven times, until she died. Then they came down from the tree, and found that she was dead.

They fled far away. They came upon an old man who said: ‘Please, daughter, rid me of the lice in my hair.’ They said: ‘Grandpa, can the katāt⁹⁴ thorn kill someone?’ He replied: ‘Why? Do you want to kill me?’ The girl replied: ‘No, grandfather!’ but without the other girls noticing, she took a katāt thorn, and pricked his head with it. The old man died. Fatma the beautiful skinned him, and put on his skin.

The girls ran off. They found a fox-hole and went into it. Then Wad al-Niwairi’s camel came to graze near the entrance to the hole. One of the girls sitting at the entrance went ‘*het,*

⁹⁰. ju‘ār, جعار

⁹¹. dawka, دوكة

⁹². shaggāga, شقاقة

⁹³. salaba, سلبية

⁹⁴ *Dichrostachys glomerata* Chiov, large-armed shrub, the spine being often leaf-bearing.

het, we implore the power will remove your bridle. Why are you eating the grass of the hungry girls?' she asked. But the camel's master heard this, and said: 'You at the entrance there, there's an arrow here for you!' But all the girls came out, *fet, fet*. When the rider saw them, he said: 'I'd better take the old man. He can be a shepherd for me.' So he put the old man behind him on the camel. Her friends said:

'He took the beautiful one
and left the ugly one,
He took the beautiful one
and left the ugly one.'

As the camel went on its way, Wad al-Niwairi heard a noise: *kashak, kashak, kashak*. He said to the old man: 'Uncle, what's that noise?' And the old man replied: 'It's the tail of the camel!' So Wad al-Niwairi dismounted, and cut off the camel's tail to stop the noise. But as he went quickly on his way, again he heard *kashak, kashak, kashak*. Once more he asked: 'Uncle, what's that noise?' And the old man replied: 'My boy, it's my bones.'

Back home, he gave the old man a mat to sleep on in the camels' pen. Early the following morning, the old man went out to do his job as a shepherd, accompanied by the seven slaves of Wad al-Niwairi. When they arrived at the river, Fatma took off the old man's skin, and went into the river to bathe. One of the slaves, who was dumb, saw her, and she said:

'Dumb man, what do you see?
Hair rolled and rolled
to stuff a cushion
Hair rolled and rolled
to stuff a cushion.'

Then she put on her clothes, left the river bank, and they all set off home. When they arrived, the dumb man began to describe to Wad al-Niwairi the beautiful sight which he had seen, by moving parts of his body. Wad al-Niwairi asked the old man: 'What's the matter with this slave?' And the old man said: 'This slave is ill.' So Wad al-Niwairi beat the slave, *baff, baff*, until he died.

Next morning, the old man went to the river once more, this time accompanied by another dumb slave. When the camel began to drink, Fatma again took off her clothes and went to bathe in the river. The slave saw her, and once more she called out:

‘Dumb man, what do you see?’

Hair rolled and rolled

to stuff a cushion

Hair rolled and rolled

to stuff a cushion.

Dumb man, what do you see

but stuffing?’

She put on her clothes, and left. Once again, the slave tried to describe what had happened just as his friend had done before him. But of course, the dumb cannot speak. He tried to display the golden ornaments on his wrists and around his neck, to indicate Fatma’s beauty. But Wad al-Niwairi said to the old man: ‘What’s the matter with this slave?’ And again, the old man said: ‘This slave is ill.’ And once more, Wad al-Niwairi beat the slave to death. In this way, six slaves died. But Wad al-Niwairi then said: ‘Lord help us! Today I shall go down to the river myself, and see what brings my slaves to their death.’

He left the old man. And when he arrived at the river, he climbed a tree. As soon as Fatma came, she removed her clothing and went into the river. So Wad al-Niwairi saw her, and he snatched the clothing and the old man’s skin. He said to her: ‘By the grace of God, are you a genie or a human being?’ She replied: ‘I am human. My cousin, I beg you to protect me. Yes, I am not a genie, I am human, like you.’ He took off his own attire, and put it upon her, and he took her to his family. He said to them: ‘Behold! Behold this grace and beauty! I have done ill by my slaves!’

And Fatma became his wife, and mistress of his house.

26. Khadimallah

Shukriyya

Al Butana (Central/Eastern Sudan)

There was a woman called Khadimallah, and she made pots⁹⁵. She had one child. He was still crawling; he couldn't walk yet. There was another woman with her who was also making pots. Now boys came, and broke the pots, which were made of clay from the edge of the river. One of the women threw her son into the river and said:

You miserable creature!

When are you going to grow?

We're going to give you to the river.

After throwing him into the river, the daughter of the seven pots came to her friends and said to them:

rhyme

When I threw the deformed (nose cut)

I made seven pots

She said to her: Wub 'alaiki

One year he is angry and shedding tears

Another year he plays with birds

And I will not give my son to the river.

Bess at once the woman who threw her son in the river sat down and wept.

⁹⁵. burma, برمة

27. Little Frolic⁹⁶

Shukriyya

Al Butana (Central/Eastern Sudan)

Little Frolic went to fetch water, and a boy saw her. When he went back to his family, he said to his father: ‘There is a beautiful girl called Little Frolic, and I want to be betrothed to her.’ They went to her father, and were brought some coffee. The boy’s father said: ‘I shall not drink the coffee until you agree to what I came for.’ The girl’s father replied: ‘I shall do as you ask. But first, drink your coffee.’ The boy’s father insisted: ‘Not until you agree to what I came for.’ The girl’s father said: ‘Very well. What do you ask?’ And the boy’s father said: ‘I want your daughter for my son.’ And the girl’s father, agreeing, replied: ‘My congratulations!’

The girl’s father went to her mother, and said: ‘A man came, and I gave her your daughter, Little Frolic, to wed his son.’ ‘Stupid man,’ said his wife, ‘she is beautiful and can easily get a husband. We’ll give them the other Frolic, who can’t find a husband.’ The boy brought the golden ornaments, and the animal to be sacrificed, the bridewealth, and his slave, in the bridegroom’s procession.

Then the mother gave the boy the ugly girl in marriage. Other girls came for the breaking of the bridal skirt⁹⁷. The slave took the bride and placed her on a large mat. The girls were shy, and left the bride there, being told by her mother to leave. The bride was sitting there with her head between her knees. The bridegroom said: ‘Girl, why not sit on the bed?’ She replied: ‘I am trembling.’ His slave was known as Bushara, and the bridegroom began to recite:

‘What is the face of Little Frolic? Bushara, make reply!

—The full moon shining silver.

What are the hands of Little Frolic? Bushara, make reply!

—The whips which great men’s hands will ply.

What are the nostrils of Little Frolic? Bushara, make reply!

⁹⁶. Al-Li‘aib, اللعيب

⁹⁷. gaṭ al-raḥaṭ (قطع الرحط)

—A golden bottle⁹⁸ of Christian ware!

What is the back of Little Frolic? Bushara, make reply!

—The span of one's hand, and still plentiful.

Then he said: 'Get up, Bushara. Let's go, let's go. You, girl, are not permitted to me. You are permitted to someone else.' He left her there, took his slave, and went away.

⁹⁸. ga'gūm, قعقوم

28. Al-Tibir

Shukriyya

Al Butana (Central/Eastern Sudan)

It was al-Tibir's brother who brought her up, as her father and mother died. But her brother's wife was not on good terms with her—she was like a co-wife! She said to al-Tibir's brother: 'This girl does everything wrong. She steals, and everything.' Her brother saddled his camel, took food for the journey and took al-Tibir very far away. When they arrived at a place, he would say: 'Sister Tibir, do you know this place?' and she would reply: 'Brother Muhammed, we have been here before, and stayed here.' Again, on the second day, he asks: 'Sister Tibir, do you know this place?' and again she says: 'I do know it.' Muhammed carried on. The third day, he came to a place and asked her the same question. This time, she replied: 'No, brother Muhammed, I do not know this place.' He took her down from the camel, and said: 'I'm going to shackle this camel.' But he went back, cut off the tail of the camel, tied it to the branch of a tree, and returned to his family.

Al-Tibir sat waiting for him until the day passed and the sun went down. She went to the tree, and saw the tail of the camel hanging there. She realized at once that her brother had abandoned her. She said: 'What my brother has done to me is just like what his wife did!'

On the first day, she had some food, and ate and drank until the sun went down. Nobody came to her during the next two days. But on the fourth day, some merchants and the whole caravan of Wad al-Niwairi⁹⁹ came. Wad al-Niwairi dismounted. He took al-Tibir to his home to live with his two wives. Then he married her. Very soon, she bore a son, but no-one knew where he came from. He was small, and they called him 'Little Monkey'.

Wad al-Niwairi had a trading journey to make. He told his first two wives to be kind to al-Tibir, and set off. Now al-Tibir used to go to the two wives to remove lice from their hair. But they decided to kill her. So they arranged a feast, and bought a sheep. They told the slaves to dig a hole. They slaughtered the sheep, skinned it, and put it in the hole. They filled the hole

⁹⁹. Wad al-Niwairi, ود النويري

with firewood, and set fire to it. When the fire died down, they put a mat¹⁰⁰ over the hole, and called al-Tibir to come and deal with their lice. But as soon as she sat on the mat, whoosh! she fell into the hole. But her fingernails, the same which she used to remove lice, ran with*** water, and put out the fire. It was like a gift from God. Then the other wives brought the skin of the sheep, and covered the hole with it, intending to prevent earth getting in and damping down the fire. And they left the place.

Al-Tibir's son saw all this, he saw what the women had done. But he could not speak. After some days, Wad al-Niwairi returned. Now, while she was in the hole, al-Tibir had delivered a baby. It was virgins from paradise who helped her delivery.

Now al-Tibir had a tooth-pick from a liquorice tree which grew into a branch beside the hole. At this point, Wad al-Niwairi arrived, and said to his first two wives: 'Where is al-Tibir?' 'She died' was their reply. But then they remembered the boy, and were afraid that he might tell Wad al-Niwairi what had happened, and that Wad al-Niwairi would kill them. So they wanted to kill the boy. One of them said to some friends: 'We'll tell Wad al-Niwairi that someone came to us and told us that the flesh of a monkey is the cure for barrenness.' But Wad al-Niwairi said: 'God forbid! I cannot raise my hand against the boy!'

Then they told Wad al-Niwairi to call the boy for a haircut. Wad al-Niwairi called the boy. 'Come here, Little Monkey,' he said, 'we want to cut your hair.' He wetted Little Monkey's hair, but as Wad al-Niwairi began to shave his hair, the boy said: 'Let me go! I'll come back straight away!' The boy went to his mother in the hole, and said:

'Mother mine, al-Tibir, my own,

'They are coming for me with their sabres drawn,

'They are making me work very hard [lit. they have tied the earthenware water-wheel pots on me]

'A monkey's flesh, Then

'Will make a barren woman fertile.'

His mother replied:

¹⁰⁰. birish, برش

‘My monkey, my son, my dear,
‘My power and my wit are nothing here,
‘My plaits are caught in the liquorice tree
‘But the son of Wad al-Niwairi
‘Will never leave my lap, you hear.’

Al-Tibir repeated this more than three times. Then Little Monkey went back to Wad al-Niwairi for his haircut. Again, he said to Wad al-Niwairi: ‘Let me have walk!’ But Wad al-Niwairi followed him, and the boy began to speak to his mother:

‘Mother mine, al-Tibir, my own,
‘They have sharpened their sabres
‘They say a monkey’s flesh will make
‘a barren woman give birth.’

She replied:

‘My son, my dear,
‘My power and my wit are nothing here
‘The branch of the liquorice tree has trapped my hair,
‘And Wad al-Niwairi’s offspring will not leave my lap, you hear.’

Wad al-Niwairi heard her and removed the skin which covered the opening of the hole and said to her: ‘Come out!’ She said to him: ‘I shall not come out until you kill the co-wives who threw me in this hole.’ So he left her in the hole, and went to his wives, bringing cotton. He said to them: ‘I want you to comb this cotton today, and weave it into a *thawb*¹⁰¹. If you do not do this, you’ll not be left in peace.’ He was looking for a pretext. So while they were combing the cotton, *kash* he struck a match in the cotton, and the women were caught in the fire, which burned them and they were finished. Then he went to al-Tibir, brought her out of the hole, and took her back to his dwelling, where they lived in mutual trust.

¹⁰¹ See glossary.

29. Muhammed and Fatma

Shukriyya

Al Butana (Central/Eastern Sudan)

There were two young children whose mother died. The boy was Muhammed and the girl was Fatma. Their father went on a pilgrimage, leaving them with his people. After some time, they left, and went to another place. They took the boy and the girl to the river, carrying a net and a stone. The told them: ‘Wash this black stone until it is white and clean.’ They also told them to fill the net with water. The boy and the girl went to the river and kept filling the net with water until sunset, but the net did not hold the water, and the stone could not be cleaned. At night, they went to sleep in a wood. When they woke up, they found no-one in the camp. Their people had left.

But the children found some grains of millet in the place, and planted them on the river bank. They cultivated them, and seven ears¹⁰² grew on the river bank. Their uncle came, and counted the ears, and found that there was seven of them. He said to them: ‘If you eat these seven ears, I shall kill you.’ But the boy became hungry, and ate one of ears. When the uncle came back, he counted them, and found there were six. He struck the boy with a stick, and killed him. Then he went away, leaving the girl where she was. When he left, the girl dug a big hole and got into it.

Her uncle came the next day, but he could not find her. So he began to dig and search for her. Someone came and said: ‘What are you digging for?’ The uncle replied: ‘I am digging for a mouse; it keeps moving, and it harmed me and the woman who is my neighbour.’ Fatma said:

‘I am not a mouse that moves and moves around.

‘My uncle is the brother of my sire,

‘Who killed Muhammed my brother in ire,

‘Because of the ear of millet, his darling,

‘The ear which was pecked by a starling,

¹⁰². gandūl, قندول

‘And the starling crossed the seven seas with it.’

Some merchant pilgrims came, and she said to them:

‘Merchants, hear me do!

‘Is my father there with you?

‘He is tall and dark,

‘A grumbling camel at his heels.

‘A hissing whip he wields;

‘a stout stick he holds;

‘his robe is of silken folds!’

The pilgrims said:

‘We have travelled, and now come back.

‘But your father has gone to live in the city.’

The girl stayed in her hole until she died.

30. Little Pepper

Shukriyya

Al Butana (Central/Eastern Sudan)

Little Pepper's uncle was a sultan who had seven sons. Her father was poor, and had seven daughters, including Little Pepper. *And she is the one this story is all about!*

The sultan came to her poor father, and said: 'On pain of death, I command you to bring me milk, but milk which is neither from animals nor from human beings.' Her father went to Little Pepper. He was in tears as he said: 'Your uncle asked me to bring him what does not exist, or he will kill me!' She said: 'Go to him and ask him this question—"Will you drink it if I bring it to you?"' She, her sisters and her father went to a Sodom apple tree¹⁰³, and prepared a cup of its sap. 'Father,' said Little Pepper, take this to the sultan.' He took it. The sultan took a mouthful, and spat it out.

Then he said to the poor man: 'Bring me water which is neither from the river nor from a canal.' He went to Little Pepper, and said: 'Now, Little Pepper, your uncle has asked me to bring him water which does not exist in these lands.' So she shut herself, her sisters and her father inside their dwelling, and lit a fire. Soon they were all sweating profusely. She filled a cup with their sweat. Her father took the cup to the sultan. At first, the sultan did not know who was responsible for this. But someone told him that it was the work of Little Pepper, not of her father. So the sultan said to the poor man: 'Now we know what this water is. I want your daughter, and my son, Ahmed, to take camels and bring us millet on the camels.'

The poor man went to Little Pepper. Again, he was in tears. Again he said: 'Your uncle has asked me to do what is impossible.' 'What did he say?' asked Little Pepper. Her father replied: 'Your uncle said that you and your cousin Ahmed should go with camels and bring millet.' She said: 'Father this is easy.' So he saddled camels for her, and gave her money. 'Father,' she said, 'shave off my hair!' So he shaved her hair, and she put on a man's robe and undergarment, as well as a man's head-dress. Then she and her cousin went on their journey.

¹⁰³. 'ushar, عشر

At some distance from the camp, she found salt. She loaded the camels with the salt for the purpose of trading. She pointed, saying to her cousin: ‘This is the road which some people followed, but they did not come back. And this is the road which some people followed, and they did come back. Which road will you take?’ He replied: ‘I shall take the road which people followed, and came back.’ She said: ‘Well, I shall take the road which people followed, but did not come back.’

She came to some tribespeople. The headman brought her bread¹⁰⁴, to show hospitality. But the bread was dipped in gravy¹⁰⁵ without salt. After tasting it, she opened her basket, took some salt, and seasoned the bread with it. The man asked: ‘Brother, what did you put on the bread?’ Little Pepper replied: ‘Its seasoning!’ The headman tasted the bread. It was good! He said: ‘Can you sell me this seasoning?’ Little Pepper replied: ‘Yes, I am willing to sell, but salt is expensive!’ She showed him. A gourd of money for a gourd of salt! The following day, all the tribespeople came, and each one gave her a gourd of money in exchange for a gourd of salt. Among them was an old woman who knew *everything*! The hospitable headman said to her: ‘Grandmother, I am suspicious of this man. He wears men’s clothes, but he seems like a woman.’ She replied: ‘Very well. Go out tonight and do some milking. Put some milk in a gourd, and put the gourd near this person’s head while he sleeps. If the milk is curdled in the morning, it is a woman. But if not, it is a man!’ So the man brought the milk and put it near Little Pepper’s head. But Little Pepper understood what was going on. Later in the night, she threw the curdled milk away, and milked the herd¹⁰⁶. She put the gourd back with fresh milk in it. She covered herself, and went back to sleep.

In the morning, the man came and found that the milk had not curdled. He told the old woman: ‘The milk is still milk!’ The old woman said: ‘Very well, try again! Bring this person goods for sale. Bring swords, golden ornaments, horses, women’s beads¹⁰⁷ and so on.’ Now Little Pepper bought swords, horses, slaves and so on. She said to the man: ‘These beads and this gold are for women. I shall not buy them. But this foreign gold can be sold. I can make a profit from it in my country, the Sudan.’ The headman went once again to the old woman, and said: ‘That person bought all the men’s objects, and refused those suitable for women!’

104. kisra, كسرة

105. mulāḥ, ملاح

106. si‘īya, سعية

107. suksuk, سكسك

Little Pepper bought a drum¹⁰⁸ and set off with her slaves, her horses, her drum, and the other things which she had bought. The hospitable man went to say farewell at the cross-roads where she could take her homeward road. He said: ‘Tell me, as God is your witness, are you a man or a woman?’ Little Pepper said to him: ‘I am a poor girl, and the daughter of a poor man. If you want to find us, this is the way.’ She told him the way, and added: ‘But now you should return to your people.’ He did so.

On her way, Little Pepper found her cousin Ahmed. He was tied up, daubed with henna, and wearing women’s clothes. She said to him: ‘Come with me!’ But he refused. But she said: ‘I shall not leave you here, even if it means chopping off your head, and going back with a corpse!’ So he got up. She took off the clothes which she was wearing and made him wear a man’s robe¹⁰⁹. She said: ‘Take these women’s clothes to your father and tell him that you brought them like gold for a wedding.’

When she came near her father’s house she began to beat the drum, and the horses were neighing. *That’s what it was like!* Many of those waiting thought that this was Ahmed coming back. But they found out the truth, and then Ahmed did come. What a return! He was in a miserable state on his little camel. His father was shattered by the shock. The father of Little Pepper, on the other hand, had a glorious victory!

¹⁰⁸. نَقَّارَة, nuggāra

¹⁰⁹. ثَوْب, thawb

31. The Tiny Little Thing

Shukriyya

Al Butana (Central/Eastern Sudan)

They say that there was a man married to a beautiful woman. He used to say: 'I am the strongest! No-one can defeat me!' But his wife used to say to him: 'Eve gave birth!' Every day when she says this, he replies to her: 'Nonsense!' One day, he said to her: 'Today I shall see Eve and her offspring!' As he left, his wife said: 'Say "God willing", so that God will bring you back safely!' He replied: 'I won't say "God willing" or anything!' He went off and met some herders of cattle

Now if one of them want to turns the cows round, he takes the calf, and lifts it up so that the cows follow. Then one of them said to the other: 'Are you Muhammed? Come and see this tiny little thing! What is it?' He took it in his hand, and began to play with it. Then he said to his companion: 'Bring it here! Let me drive the cattle with it by putting it in their way!' But his companion said: 'No, no, no! Don't drive the cattle with it! Let's take it to our mother, so that she can play with it.' When the cows reached home, they said to their mother: 'Mother, take this tiny little thing.' Their mother was very pleased, and took it. When the time came for people to go to sleep, the mother put the tiny little thing, put it in the fold of her skirt¹¹⁰, and went to sleep. During the night, the woman got up and had a pee. The urine washed the tiny little thing into a wadi, and the wadi took the tiny little thing towards the river. But before reaching the river, the tiny little thing came across the branch of a tree and climbed on to it. Then it managed to reach the woods, and stayed there for two days. On the third day, he discovered people with tails. When he saw them, he ran away. But they followed him. He went into the house of an old woman. 'Grandmother,' he said to her, 'hold me to you, and hide me! Those people have tails, and they want to eat me!' 'My son,' she replied, 'come and see whether their tails are like mine, or what!' When the tiny little thing saw the old woman's tail, he shot off.

¹¹⁰. gurbāb, قرباب

When he reached home after a few days, he knocked on the door and shouted out, because his wife wouldn't open the door. Then she said: 'Who is it?' 'It's me, God willing!' She smiled, and said to him: 'Didn't I say to you "Eve gave birth", and tell you to say "God willing"?'

32. The Prophet Elias

Shukriyya

Al Butana (Central/Eastern Sudan)

They say that there was once a rich man who had one son who was a spendthrift. His father did not like extravagance of his son, but the people would let him not act on this, saying: 'He is your only son. What can you do?'

Well, he gave a sum of money to his son, and said: 'Go and work for yourself. You should depend on yourself for your livelihood.' The son took the money. His father gave him a camel, a sword and a shield. The son mounted the camel and went away. On his way he encountered some people who were burying a dead person in a graveyard. He went up to them, and couched his camel. When the grave was ready, people from another settlement came. They said that the dead man had borrowed money from them, and had not paid them back. They said that they would not let him be buried unless they were paid what was owing. This commotion came to an end, but people did not know what to do. They said: 'Let us bury the man now, then you come with us to our settlement, and we promise that we shall give you your money.' But the others refused to agree. The son said: 'Never mind! I shall give you your money.' He went to his camel, put his hand in the saddle-bag, and took out the money which his father had given him. Then the people buried the dead man and went their own way.

The son went back to his father, with not a penny in his possession. The father said: 'What is your news?' The son told him what had happened. The father said: 'I will not give you a single penny more to help you work on your own, unless you bring someone from the settlement as a partner who can guarantee you.' The son said: 'Very well, father,' and went to the people of the settlement trying to find someone to be his partner, but he could not find anyone, because they all knew that he was a spendthrift. The son was fed up. He mounted his camel and left the settlement. When he reached a parting of the ways, he found a person sitting at the roadside. He told this person the story of his father and of his search for a partner. He said: 'Now, if you want to become my partner, let us go to my father in the settlement.' The person said: 'Very well, but listen very carefully. I will become your partner provided that you agree to what I tell you.' The son said: 'Agreed, brother. I will do what you say.' They went

back to the rich man, the boy's father. When the man told the father of the partnership, the father warned him that his son was a spendthrift. But in the end, the father gave them money, two camels, swords and shields. The boy and the man left.

When they reached the desert, night fell. The man said: 'Let us couch our camels and sleep here until morning.' The boy said: 'Brother, my father warned me that when we reach this place, we must not stay here.' But the man said: 'I told you that you should do as I tell you,' to which the boy replied: 'Very well, brother.' So they couched their camels and lay down, but the man did not go to sleep. Now there was a genie in this desert which was in the form of a snake with a glittering gemstone in its mouth. When the man saw the genie and the glitter, he quietly took his sword and cut off its head. Then he buried it in an obvious mound of earth so as to remember where he hid it. Then he went to sleep. The son was already asleep. When morning came, they left, and eventually reached the sultanate where they intended to trade. When they arrived, the sultan heard about the rich man's son, and received them with due hospitality in his palace.

Meanwhile, the boy's partner heard the talk of the sultan's people. They said that every time a bridegroom was brought for the sultan's daughter, he was always found dead on the same day as he goes to sit with her. Now, the man said to the rich man's son, his partner: 'Let us marry you to the king's daughter.' The son agreed straight away. The king organized the drumming¹¹¹ and the festivities, inviting guests, and slaughtering sheep. On the appointed day the bride was taken to the house of the bridegroom, the son of the rich man. The people of the sultanate were expecting the death of the rich man's son, and the king grieved; for his daughter had brought death to ninety-nine bridegrooms already! However, the rich man's son's partner went quietly into the bridegroom's house and hid under the bedstead¹¹², taking a water-melon with him. When the sultan's daughter went in and sat on the bedstead, she found the rich man's son asleep. Quietly, she went up to him, and bent her head over his face. But before she came, the person under the bedstead had put a slice of water-melon on the face of the bridegroom. The king's daughter placed herself over the bridegroom, and they slept until the morning. The king woke up at dawn and went to peep¹¹³ through the cracks in the door, to see whether his

¹¹¹. nuggāra, نقارة

¹¹². 'angaraib, عنقريب

¹¹³. tawaga, تواق

daughter had killed the rich man's son or not. The king was very pleased when he saw the son asleep and breathing, and his daughter with her arms around him, also sleeping.

The king ran, shouting with joy, had the drum beaten, and the people gathered around. He prepared a camel with a litter¹¹⁴ for the bride, and gave her gold and gems. To the bridegroom and his companion, he gave camels loaded with gold and slaves. Then the rich man's son, the man, and the camels went back to the settlement of the rich man, the boy's father. When they arrived at another settlement, the boy's father bought a hundred camels each with two saddle bags. Then they set off again. When they reached the desert where he had killed the genie, the man couched his hundred camels, and filled the saddle bags with gold. It was night, and he put earth on top of the gold. In the morning, the son said to the man: 'Brother, why have loaded your camels so heavily with earth? What is it for?' The man said: 'Didn't I tell you to accept anything I do?'

The camel caravan, the drum and the slaves continued on their way. When they reached the earlier place where the son had met his partner, the partner said: 'Brother, I have reached my place. Let us divide up the goods.' The rich man's son said: 'Fine!' They divided the slaves and gold given by the king between them, as well as dividing the hundred camels carrying the saddle bags filled with earth. At the end of all this, the man said: 'Now let us divide the sultan's daughter between us!' The boy: 'Don't talk like that! How can we divide her? Either you leave her to me, or I leave her to you.' The man said: 'First of all, remember that we are partners, which means that everything must be divided between us. Secondly, you promised to agree with everything I said.' The boy said: 'Very well, I agree with you. Now divide her!' The man brought the bride, the sultan's daughter, down from the camel, and drew his sword. He raised it to strike the girl's head. But as it came close, *fet!* something like a snake's tail came out of the girl's nostril. The boy was puzzled by this, but he was pleased that the man had not divided the girl of his desire. He said: 'Why didn't you divide her?' The man took the tail in his hand, and showed it to the boy. 'I'll tell you the whole story,' he said.

'I'll start from the beginning. When we went to sleep in the desert, a genie came. I killed it. Here is its head.' He took the head out of the saddle-bag and showed it to the boy. 'Now the genie had gold hidden in the ground. This is how, after we left the sultan, I could fill all the saddle-bags with gold, which I covered with a layer of earth. Now, when the sultan's daughter

¹¹⁴. عطفة, 'utfā.

came to you, I brought a slice of water-melon and put it on your face, because I knew that the girl had a genie in her head. This genie used to come out of her nostrils when she approached a bridegroom, and would kill him. This time, though, when the genie's head came out, it entered the water-melon, and died. But its body remained in the girl's head. Now when I raised my sword to divide her between us, the genie's body came out. If I had not done this, it would have grown again, and would have killed you. The rich man's son was pleased, and the man said to him: 'Now I shall go. I leave everything to you.' They went their separate ways. The son returned to his father, happy with his bride, his slaves, his gold and his drum. His father received him with great festivities.

33. Fatma and the Masalit

Hawazma

South Kordofan

Fatma's father told her, and showed her, that he wanted to give her in marriage to a kinsman, but Fatma did not want to marry him. Yet her father insisted on the marriage.

When they planned to go to Kordofan, Fatma was angry. She climbed a tall tree¹¹⁵ which was smooth and graceful. Her father set off, leaving her behind. They were followed by the Masalit, who eat people. They took her with them and went home. They put her under the bedding¹¹⁶. At night, Fatma's husband heard the news. So he mounted his horse, took his sword, and placed a bell which he had around the horse's neck. He went to bring Fatma back, but she was under the bedstead, and there were other bedsteads in the doorway of the house. When Muhammed, Fatma's husband, arrived at the settlement of the Masalit, he was met by an old Masalit man. The old man said: 'Those people will kill you, and eat you.' Muhammed said: 'No, I am not afraid! I must get her back!'

The old man told him that she was under the bedstead. Muhammed went to the house. He entered, without being noticed by the Masalit. Like a man, he rescued her from under the bedstead. When the Masalit awoke, they went out and mounted their horses. But Muhammed rang his bell and sped off on his horse. They did not catch up with him. When Muhammed arrived among his people, they married Fatma to him, because he desired her more than the cowardly man chosen by her father, and they lived happily ever after.

¹¹⁵. صهب, sahab

¹¹⁶. درنقل, darangal

34. The Adulteress

Hawazma

South Kordofan

A nomadic woman once wanted to kill her husband. Her husband had camels. So she said to her lover: ‘Come here in the early evening. When my husband comes back from herding his camels, I shall tie him to the bedstead.’ When the husband came back, she prepared food for him. He ate, and had his fill. Then he lay down on the bedstead. The wife said to her husband: ‘Would you like me to massage your legs?’ He agreed. When he went to sleep, she tied him with her hair, and called her lover. Her lover beat her husband with a stick, until he was nearly dead. But he did not actually die. The wife and her lover were waiting to leave, but the wife’s husband had a female slave¹¹⁷ who refused to go with them.

After some time, the husband began to get better. He took his female slave, and went to live with a tribal group. He lived there for some years. But unexpectedly, a man from the settlement said to him: ‘If I show you where the person who beat you can be found, what will you give me in return?’ ‘I shall give you whatever you desire,’ was the reply. So the man took the husband to the place of his wife’s lover. The lover was very rich. The husband took his horse and his sword, and fought and killed the lover.

Now the husband married another woman, though his female slave wanted him to marry her. When the husband went to herd the camels, the slave went to the man’s wife. She removed her clothes, and smeared her with charcoal, making her look as black as the female slave herself was. The husband returned, but the female slave had sent his wife to fetch firewood. When the husband heard what had happened, he married the slave as well and looked after them both.

¹¹⁷. khādim, خادم

35. The Tree-dweller

Hawazma

South Kordofan

There was once a nomad whose wife and his mother did not do what they were told. One day, he was herding the cattle and he wanted to know what his wife and mother had in mind, and said to them: 'There is a holy man that I want you to visit.' Both of them looked forward to hearing what the holy man would say.

The man went to a baobab tree, and hid inside it. Shortly afterwards the women arrived, and began to make their wishes. The wife said: 'Tree-dweller, may God convince you I wish that God would put stones in the head of the father of my children, so that I can go to my family and he will become blind.' The mother said: 'May God put stones in my son's head so that the slave of whoever it may be will marry me!' The female slave said: 'May God put stones in my master's head so that will clothe me!'

They went back home, but the man had heard all that they said. When he returned, he took a bull to the market, sold it, and gave his mother in marriage to the slave. He bought clothes for the female slave, and took his wife: 'I want to take you back to your family,' he said. On the way, he fell from his donkey and said to them: 'I'm finished! I've gone blind!' in order to find out how his wife would react.

When they arrived, the people of the encampment organized festivities with music and dancing¹¹⁸, because they were pleased with the return of the girl. The men came up since they wanted the wife of this man who was pretending to be blind, and was using his walking stick. But the man killed everyone who approached him. The wife realized what the situation was, and escaped to the desert. There she killed a snake, and brought it to her husband, so that the poison would kill him when he ate it. But the husband buried the flesh of the snake in the ground. His wife came and asked him, and he replied: 'The flesh of the snake has done me good! I'm fine now, and cured of my blindness!' The wife said to her mother: 'Mother, my

¹¹⁸. mardūm, مردوم

husband has eaten the flesh of the snake, and is cured of his blindness! Come and eat!’ So her mother went and ate some of the flesh of the snake, and died.

The husband took his wife and went back to his own people, where they lived happily ever after.

36. The Villagers

Hawazma

South Kordofan

There were some farmers. They would go out to their plantations leaving their wives and children in the village with an old woman. In the village there was a tamarind¹¹⁹ tree, and the old woman's house was next to this luxuriant tree with its shade.

Now an ogress appeared in the village; however, the people chased it away and killed it. At that point, a small flying creature came out of the tree, but no-one knew what it was. Then this creature turned into a big gourd¹²⁰, which then split up, producing small gourds. The big one used to lure the small ones under the tree, saying:

‘She who has one little chilli

‘Let her come!’

and the gourds with the chilli came.

‘And the one who has a grain of salt

‘Let her come!’

and the gourds with the salt came.

‘And the one with a lady's-finger,

‘Let her come!’

and the gourds with the lady's-fingers came.

So all the gourds gathered, and the biggest one said:

‘Slurp, slurp,

‘Go and beautify the hairless old woman!’

¹¹⁹. ‘aradaib, عرديب

¹²⁰. bakhsa, بخسة

and the gourds flew into the air and came down on the old woman's head. When the villagers came back, she said to them: 'I can't stay alone in the village; there are genies here!' But they did not believe her.

However, one man hid himself in the house to find out whether what she had said was true or false. In this way they came to know that what she said was true. So they took the gourds and burned them in the fire, all except one which turned into an ogress, who set out to chase away the villagers.

Now at that time there were two men, one blind and one crippled. The cripple said to the blind man: 'I'll get on your back, and we'll leave the village!' The blind man agreed and they escaped from the ogress.

On their way they sat down to have something to eat, but the daughter of the ogress came close. She was very beautiful. But they realized who she was, and fled. The blind man regained his sight, and the cripple in his fear was cured. The ogress laughed at them so much that she died from laughing.

37. Nuri Abu Ghabsha, the ‘Umda

Hawazma

South Kordofan

Once upon a time, there was an ‘Umda who governed an area. Now there was a foreigner¹²¹, a Christian, who came to him and said: ‘Umda Nuri, you must leave your position!’ ‘I shall die’ replied the ‘Umda ‘for the sake of my country (kailik mother of narrow lane***)!’

The foreigner said to the people: ‘Tie up the ‘Umda by the neck!’ So they tied him to the top of a tree with his turban. They lifted and lowered him three times. The foreigner said: ‘Now what do you say? Will you leave your position or not?’ ‘I shall die,’ replied the ‘Umda, ‘for the sake of my country!’

So the Christian realized that ‘Umda Nuri was a person who could not be disdained. He clapped him on the shoulder, and said: ‘You are a real man!’

¹²¹. تركاي, Turkāy No doubt the foreigner was not Turkish but British, since he is described as a Christian.

38. The woe of Al-Batūl's father¹²²

Hawazma

South Kordofan

There was once a horseman from the Hawazma tribe who possessed many goods including two settlements of slaves and horses. He said: 'I shall pay my tithe with slaves, and if that is not enough, with horses.'

The crowd killed the owner of the steam-boat in his vessel in Talodi by the pool. And the Turks wanted the Ruwwaga tribe to help them. He said: 'Hey presto!' and the Ruwwaga came and helped them.

Now the horseman, father of al-Ma'mun and al-Batul, took the nomads to Talodi and took from Talodi seven horses and seven shields. When his sister saw this, she chanted for him:

'You people gathered here

'Dig holes for the supporting pillars

'This is the mountain

'for the poor of the present and the future,

'Father of al-Batūl, leave him alone.

'They asked after the Hawazma tribesman

'This tethered leopard frightened us ...'

¹²². Al-Batul, البتول

39. The Impossible

Bidairiyya

Southern Kordofan

All the animals gathered in a large place to find out what the big animals wanted and what they were like. This way, they could respect them and live in peace in the forest.

The lion, king of the forest, said: 'I have a simple request. I do not like shouting and annoyance while I am asleep.' The small animals said: 'This is a simple request. Nobody will annoy you.' The leopard said: 'I do not mind being annoyed, but I don't want anyone to look at me with eyes that are red with anger.' The small animals said: 'This is a simple request. We agree to it. Do whatever you wish to anyone who annoys you.' The snake said: 'I do not want to be hit on my tail. If anyone hits me there, I shall bite him.' The small animals agreed, and said: 'This is a simple request.' The wolf said: 'I do not want people to chatter while I am sleeping; this will make me attack anyone who is nearby.' The small animals agreed: 'This is a simple request,' they said. The fox said: 'My request is very simple. Allow me to sit alone on the branch of a tree, far away from you. I do not feel well, and I want to stay in the sun.' All the animals said: 'This is a simple request. We agree. We shall all live in peace.'

Suddenly, the elephant stepped on the snake's tail, and the snake became very angry, and bit the elephant. The elephant bellowed, and annoyed the lion. The lion got up and looked at the leopard, his eyes red with anger. The lion struck the elephant and the elephant struck the wolf¹²³, who woke up and joined the fray. There was great commotion. The elephant began to strike out at all the animals, even the small ones, while the fox was far away, looking at them and laughing. He said:

'Death today will come to someone big, I fear,

'and we shall lose much that we hold dear.'

The fox¹²⁴ saw a man with a spear climbing a tree. The man threw the spear at the elephant, and the elephant was startled. He kicked out randomly, killing many of the animals, while the fox remained safe.

¹²³. marfa'ain, مرفعين

¹²⁴. Abu Ḥalima, أبو حليلة

40. Advice

Bidairiyya

Southern Kordofan

A man called his son to give him four pieces of advice. He would be able to live on these after his father's death, and they would open his eyes to the world.

He said to his son: 'That person is walking off the beaten track. How can he do that?' 'He's wearing shoes,' said the son.

Then the father said: 'This man is lying on his back. How can he do that?' 'He's wearing his long pants,' said the son.

'That man sitting in a group is speaking with great confidence. How can he do that?' 'He has supporters,' replied the son. 'Very well,' said his father. 'I would add that he needs those men. And a generous person also needs a good woman to look after his household, and look after the needs of their guests.'¹²⁵

¹²⁵ With regard to the first two pieces of advice, the story-teller explained that one would not go off the beaten track without wearing shoes to protect one's feet, though a nomad would not always wear shoes. He also explained that if a man lay on his back his private parts could become visible. To avoid that, wearing the customary long baggy pants would be the solution, and the person could be at ease in taking his rest.

41. Saying what is on your mind

Bidairiyya

Southern Kordofan

A man was once walking along a road with his wife, his daughter and their slave. He was leading a she-goat. On the road, they met a man. They were all distracted by their own problems. The man they met said: ‘Peace be upon you!’ ‘Mother of my daughter,’ said the father, ‘this man wants to buy our goat!’ ‘My daughter,’ said his wife to her daughter, ‘have you seen your father’s snuff-box?’ And the daughter said: ‘Are you marrying me to Bakhit, the slave? If so, I’ll break my neck!’

Then the girl said to Bakhit: ‘Is it true that you want to marry me?’ ‘As God is my witness, I shall not give myself airs,’ he replied. ‘I shall eat millet, if that is what you give me, whether it is unground¹²⁶ or boiled¹²⁷.’

¹²⁶. dashīsha, دَشِيْشَة

¹²⁷. balīla, بَلِيْلَة

42. Deceit ('The wily fox')

Bidairiyya

Southern Kordofan

The fennec we know as a fox¹²⁸ went to a water-melon patch. On the way back, he was caught in a snare which pulled him up. He began to rock to and fro, swinging. The wolf came by happily, and the fox said to him: 'I have a swing with its lines. Everyone should have a go on it before they die! Come and try it.' The wolf said, 'I'm ready!' Then the fox said 'Please, untie my paws from the swing'. Straight away the wolf untied the fox's paws. So the fox came down, and tied the snare round the wolf's paws. The wolf said:

'This is a snare, that's its name,

'And this is its two-cross frame;

'Even if your father and your mother came,

'They could not break this frame!'

The fox went off leaving the wolf in the snare. When the owner of the water-melon patch arrived, he killed the wolf, to keep people safe. The wily fox lived on!

¹²⁸. ba'ashūm, بعشوم

43. Peace between the cat and the mouse

Bidairiyya

Southern Kordofan

The mouse sent his son to his uncle the cat¹²⁹, saying: ‘tell your uncle the cat that your father said that we want to be your neighbours. So listen carefully to what the cat says, and come back and tell me.’ When the son of the mouse came to the cat, he said: ‘Uncle cat, my father has sent me to say that we want to be your neighbour.’ The cat laughed, and said: ‘You, boy with a tasty brain, if you want to be neighbours, well, we refuse!’ The son of the mouse went back and told his father. ‘The cat,’ he reported, said ‘ “You, boy with a tasty brain, if you want to be neighbours, well we refuse!” ’ ‘If this is what the cat said’ replied the father ‘then be on your guard at your holes, and don’t be tricked by what he says, this so-called pilgrim!’

***[But the cats kicked with their paws making piles of sand which blocked the entrance to the mouseholes. Then they pounced, and many of the mice died.]

¹²⁹. kadīs, کدیس

44. Like for like

Bidairiyya

Southern Kordofan

The fox heard the cock making the call to prayer at the top of a large tree. He thought of a way to eat the cock. He went and sat under tree. ‘Brother,’ he said to the cock, ‘come down and let’s pray together. The time for prayer has passed.’ But the cock replied: ‘No! Not at all! I made the call for people to gather, and it is not yet time for prayers. You’d better go to that tree over there. You’ll find the prayer-leader there.’ The fox reached the tree, and saw a sleeping dog. He was terrified, and returned to the cock.

‘What you said is true,’ he said to the cock, ‘it’s not yet time for prayer. Let’s put it off for another day.’ In fear of the dog, he ran away.

45. The son of your wife is your enemy

Bidairiyya

Southern Kordofan

There was once a very old man who married a woman after her husband died. She had children. He gave the children tasks which tired them out. However, he did bring them up, providing their food and drink and clothing. Now these were not good children. They hated their mother's husband, and thought up a way to kill him. The son and his brother said to each other: 'We must kill this old man!'

One day, the man went out to the well to fetch water. He brought the water, and felt very tired, because it was a long walk. He lay down on his back, and contemplated the world. The young son said to his brother: 'Look at him!' 'Prepare food and drink,' said the brother, 'for the person who married your mother.'

The younger brother said:

Your stupid and large donkey

Who is using him to bring water?

His brother replied to him:

Who is the unmanly outside?

The old man realised that the boys wanted to harm him. He did not ask any questions. And he left.

46. Can a slave understand?

Bidairiyya

Southern Kordofan

A man from the Hamar tribe went to Upper Egypt. He slaughtered a horse, skinned it, and took the flesh to sell in the market. 'I have brought good camel's meat!' said he. He sold the meat, and people took it home, but they found excrement in the intestines. They said: 'This man has fed us with horse-meat, and gone away.' When he comes back, we must complain to the court, and get our money back.'

In the winter, he went back, and camped with his camels near the place where he had been before. His brother from Upper Egypt said that the people there were cheats. They wouldn't leave him at peace. In fact, the villagers were about to attack him, and his brother said: [rhyme]

'See the saddle-bags are of leatherware,
'The finest wooden saddle there!
'The day you cut the head of the beast
'You do not pay attention to the intestine, upon my word
'They day you cut the tail of the beast
'You do not think of the horse's turd.
'As if with your camels you go,
'Spending your nights and days,
'Travelling during the day until the sun is low,
'Settling behind the camel's neck with its rays
'And travelling at night until the morn
'Lights the camels' noses at dawn.'

The man understood what his brother had said. 'Very well,' he said, 'I shall go away with my camels, and come back later to continue this matter.' So he went, but he did not return. So he escaped the hostility of his enemies.

47. The Root goes deep

Kinana

Southern Kordofan

Abu Zaid al-Hillali went to find a different place to get married. Abu Zaid said that he wanted to marry a good woman, even if she was not very beautiful. His brother said that he wanted to marry a woman of exceptional beauty.

They arrived at a settlement and camped there. They lived with the people, they began to know them and make friends. One day, there was a marriage, and the girls came to dance. Abu Zaid saw a modestly dressed woman who was quite comely, and said: 'This is the woman I want to marry.' His brother saw another woman of great beauty. He said: 'She is so beautiful. I want to marry her.' The brothers both went to the families of the two women and agreed to the marriages. After two or three months the women became pregnant, and each one gave birth to a son.

It is common knowledge that Abu Zaid travels a great deal. He went to a very distant place with his brother. They came back many years later. Their sons had grown up. When they reached the settlement, each of them recognized his son. Abu Zaid said to his brother: 'My son is more of a man than yours, in his benevolence, generosity and courage.' They had a fierce argument about this, and decided to put their sons to the test.

Abu Zaid's brother, who married the very beautiful woman, said to his son: 'Go and slaughter a sheep for us.' The son refused. 'If I slaughter my mother's brothers, I shall be beaten up.' Abu Zaid at once said to his son: 'Go and slaughter an animal for us.' And his son at once slaughtered a camel, and said to them: 'Sit under the sun-shade,' and treated them with great hospitality. Then he went to his mother's brothers, and they thanked him for his hospitality towards the guests. Abu Zaid's brother, the husband of the very beautiful woman, was annoyed with his son, and beat him.

His son burst into tears, and said:

'Father, why are you beating me this way?

'When you came to take my mother, your bride, away,

‘Didn’t you notice my mother’s brother

‘And how he quarrelled with my grandfather?

‘You liked her well as a woman to keep

‘But you did not look deep.’

His father stopped beating him, and realised that beauty is not everything in marriage.

So a person should know the background of his wife before getting married.

48. Wicked hearts

Kinana

Southern Kordofan

Abu Zaid al-Hillali and his son were going to their field when they came to a tamarind tree. Abu Zaid suddenly became penniless¹³⁰. His son went to relieve himself, but he caught up with his father though he had been some distance behind. On their way, they encountered a beautiful woman. Abu Zaid recognized her as the wife of a neighbour.

Abu Zaid said to his son: 'Aren't you ashamed to relieve yourself on the path?', as the woman approached. His son replied: 'Don't you feel ashamed that you lust for your neighbour's wife when her husband is away?' Abu Zaid realised that he was a good son. He said:

'My son, a woman is a fruit so tart

'And yet so fair¹³¹

'That nothing, nothing can compare.

'But men are far apart!

'Problems, problems, and bad things in their heart!'

¹³⁰ tag falas, تق فّلس

¹³¹ 'aradaib, عر ديب

49. Abu Zaid al-Hillali and the ugly woman

Kinana

Southern Kordofan

Abu Zaid al-Hillali was sitting outside, and his son was playing beside him. A man passed by and said: 'How come? This is *my* son, I'm quite sure!'

One night, Abu Zaid took his son with him, and on the path they met an ugly woman. When he saw her, Abu Zaid shook his head. Abu Zaid's son also shook his head. When they went further on, Abu Zaid said to his son: 'Just now I shook my head. And you did too. Why was that?' 'Father,' replied the son, 'you said: "Whoever would want to marry that ugly woman?" And I said: "You'll come across another one just like her!"'

Abu Zaid laughed. 'Very true! But you know what I mean!'

50. Daba Daba

Shaigiyya

Northern Sudan

Ah yes! This is the story of a birth in the desert.

Now there was a free woman who went to bring firewood. She became thirsty. ‘Lord God,’ she said, ‘give me something to drink, even if it is the urine of a she-ass!’ God gave her what she asked, and she drank it. ‘Lord God,’ she said, ‘is there anyone to make me pregnant? Lord God, just as you gave me the urine, give me a man.’ Daba Daba inside her belly said: ‘I shall make you pregnant!’ *God in heaven!* ‘Who are you?’ she asked. ‘My name is Daba Daba,’ came the reply. Well, she did become pregnant—from the urine of the donkey.

She said to Daba Daba: ‘If you come out through my mouth you will make it full of spittle; if you come out through my arse you will make it full of shit; if you come out through my fanny you will make it full of piss. What comes next?’ *Ba-dah!* In a trice, he came out through her belly button. *You know, someone was once riding a camel which threw him, and the person died. There’s danger everywhere!*

Daba Daba said to the woman: ‘Hold this, and you will become pregnant.’ She held her belly, and tied it *** [When she reached her settlement, young men from her folk welcomed her. Seeing Daba Daba, they frowned, and gestured], she wrapped him in clothing, and he made her pregnant, saying: ‘Wherever you go, I’ll go with you. Make me your little son, because you gave birth to me.’ She replied: ‘All right, let’s go.’ They met some boys, who said: ‘What’s this? Where did you get this devil from?’ ‘He will bring you nothing but good,’ she replied, ‘I promise you! Leave him alone.’ So they accepted him, and he lived with her.

Later, an ogress came along. She had seven daughters. She said to the woman, who had seven sons: ‘Will you marry your sons to my daughters?’ and the woman agreed. But Daba Daba said to the young men: ‘Don’t go with that woman! She is an ogress.’ The men said to him.

‘Hush, hush! Just keep your mouth shut!’ And they all went away with the ogress.

She said to them: 'Leave him alone,' and they said: 'Let's go!' They got on their horses, and left with the ogress. He sat, and she said: 'He will not go with us.' She said to them: 'Leave him alone, he will bring nothing but good.' She went and tied up the horses, and brought them fodder¹³² in a thingummy¹³³. He said: 'Don't give that fodder to those stallions'; so she brought them better food.

He ran and said to them: 'Dig holes, and don't eat'. He left. She came back again scattering

¹³². 'alūg, علوق

¹³³. hināi, هني

51. Fatma the Beautiful

Shaigiyya

Northern Sudan

And what next? they say there was a girl going to the river, and she threw a hair in the water. Now her mother said: ‘The person who finds my daughter Fatma’s hair, even if it is her brother Muhammed—well, I shall marry her to him.’ Then her brother Muhammed took his horse to the water, and found the hair of his sister. His mother said: ‘We shall marry her to him.’ Then Fatma said: ‘Mother, take down what I am carrying,’—*she was bringing water from the river in a pot on her head*—and her mother said: ‘Fatma, call me your mother-in-law.’ Then Fatma said to her mother’s sister: ‘Auntie, take down what I am carrying.’ And her auntie said: ‘call me your in-law’. Then she said: ‘Sister, take down what I am carrying.’ ‘Then say you are my sister-in-law.’ Then Fatma said: ‘brother Muhammed, take down what I am carrying,’ and Muhammed said to her: ‘Call me your husband.’

After this, Fatma gathered all the girls and said: ‘Let’s escape! They want to marry us to our brothers.’ *By the way*, one of the girls had a limp. They went away, and saw a very big fire, and a small one. They said: ‘let’s go to the big fire to find something to eat—the small one is not enough to provide for us,’ *now, you know, these fires belonged to the witch.*

When they went there, they said to the witch: ‘Peace be upon you,’ and the witch replied:

‘Welcome! God has brought you to me

And may He bring the people who follow you.’

Then the witch said: ‘Come and eat!’ She brought the bones, which is what she usually ate, and ground them on the grindstone¹³⁴, made porridge¹³⁵ from them, and went to serve it to the girls. But the girls had dug very deep holes. The witch drew milk from her breasts, and added it to the porridge. Well, the girls threw their portions into their holes. However, the girl with a limp went to eat the porridge, though the other girls said: ‘Don’t eat it!’ The girl with a

¹³⁴. murhāka, مرحاقة

¹³⁵. ‘aṣīda, عصيدة

limp said to the witch: ‘They are stopping me from eating,’ and the witch said: ‘Fatma the Beautiful, let her eat. The porridge and the milk are ready for her.’

The girls went to sleep, and the witch brought her knife¹³⁶ and began to sharpen it. Fatma woke from her sleep when the witch sharpened the knife, and she was making a coughing noise. The witch said to Fatma the Beautiful: ‘What’s up tonight? Can’t you sleep?’ ‘I have to tell you that I can hear the sound of a grumbling camel in the wood,’ said Fatma, ‘and it’s keeping me awake.’ The witch went up to the wood and wandered about, but she didn’t find anything.

When she came back, she found Fatma the Beautiful who was apparently asleep. She brought her knife and began to sharpen it. Fatma the Beautiful went ‘hmm, hmm’, and the witch said ‘Fatma, what is keeping you awake?’ and Fatma says ‘I have to tell you that it’s the he-goat looking for a mate and going “lub, lub” which is keeping me awake.’ So the witch rushed off to silence the he-goat and then came back.

Once more she started to sharpen her knife. Fatma went: ‘haheem!’ The witch said: ‘Fatma the Beautiful, what is keeping you awake?’ Fatma said: ‘I have to tell you that it’s the sound of the lute. Someone is playing it and the visitors keep clapping, so I can’t go to sleep.’ The witch hurried off, and had a good search. Then she came back.

Once more she set about sharpening her knife, thinking that the girls were asleep. Fatma the Beautiful went: ‘hum, hum’, and the witch said: ‘Fatma the Beautiful, what is keeping you awake?’ and Fatma replied: ‘I have to tell you that I am thirsty. I need water from the seventh sea brought in an unfired waterpot and in an unpierced gourd and in a fishing net.’

So the witch gathered the waterpot, the gourd and the net, and set off at speed. She crossed one sea after another, and finally reached the seventh sea. She throws the unpierced gourd in the water, but it floats. She throws in the unfired waterpot, and it turns into mud. She tries to scoop water with the net, but it doesn’t hold the water.

As the day wore on and the earth became hot, the girls ran off, asking the girl with a limp to join them, but she said: ‘No, I’m not coming; I’m waiting for my grannie.’ The girls escaped. When the witch came, she said to the girl with a limp: ‘Where are your friends?’ The girl replied: ‘They told me that you are a witch, and they wouldn’t wait for you.’

¹³⁶. khūsa, خوسة

The witch said to the lame girl: 'Light the fire for the griddle, so that we can make our breakfast. Then we'll catch up with the girls.' The lame girl lit the fire, and when the griddle became hot, the witch said to her: 'Clean it with your hand.' The girl tried that, and said: 'Ouch! It's burning my hand.' Then the witch said: 'Well, clean it with your face.' The girl did so, and went 'Ouch! It's burning my face.' Then the witch put the lame girl on the griddle to cook. She broke her bones and wrapped her up, tying her in a corner of her robe. Then she set off to find the girls, eating the remains of her victim during the pursuit. But she couldn't catch up with them.

Then the witch made an invocation: 'Beautiful Fatma, God willing, today you will find coins upon coins, so that while you are taking your choice of them, I'll be able to catch up with you.' But when they came upon the coins, Fatma the Beautiful said to the other girls: 'No, no! Don't let that addle-headed woman of the coins catch up with you.'

Then the witch said: 'Fatma, God willing you'll come across anklets upon anklets, so that while you are taking your choice, I'll be able to catch up with you.' Well, the girls did pick up one or two anklets but they soon ran off again.

In the end, the witch said to Fatma the Beautiful: 'God willing, you'll be pierced with an acacia thorn which can be taken out only by my talons.' *And she made a horrible gesture with her fingers.* Sure enough, the thorn broke off in Fatma's body, but she carried on running. In the end, the witch was unable to catch up.

But the witch persisted. She said: 'God willing, you'll come to a river, streams to streams, with a crocodile going: "lagagag".' Well, Fatma did come to the river with its crocodile, and she said to it: 'uncle croc¹³⁷', come here to us and take us across, and we'll give you your prey.' The crocodile said to them: 'There are scales on my back; go and fetch some grass to cover it, then we'll cross.' *What happened then? Well,* the witch arrived and stopped.

But the crocodile had taken all the girls across the river, and they said to him: 'Go and fetch our mother over there and we'll give you your prey.' The crocodile said to the witch: 'Get on then,' and she did so. But when they got to the middle of the river, the girls called to the crocodile: 'This is your prey, but before you take her, give us her talons.' *And they made a*

¹³⁷. Ab Ḥamad, أبو حمد

gesture with their hands. So the crocodile took the talons and gave them to the girls, and then dived down with the witch on its back.

So the girls were able to remove the thorn from Fatma's body with the talons. Then they went to a wood. They sat there, and came across an old man on the way, who said to them: 'Girls, come and help me get rid of my lice.'

One of the girls said to the old man: 'Uncle, how can one remove the skin of an old man?' He said to her: 'Stop your nonsense, my girl!' *** ربط' But she persisted. 'No!' And he gave in and said: 'Well, with an acacia thorn my skin will come off all in one piece!' So she took a thorn and pricked his head with it. The skin came off, and Fatma the Beautiful put it on her.

Now after some time, the girls were resting in a wood, and camels belonging to some merchants passed by. One of the camels starting browsing on the leaves of a tree beside a cave. The girls said to the camel: 'Don't start with Fatma's tree!' The camel owners heard this and said: 'Go and look inside the cave!' Another said: 'Go and look in the next cave!' Yet another said: 'Go and look at the entrance to the cave,' *and so on.* So it was that they brought all the girls out from the caves, and found a necklace of the person with the old man's skin *who was of course Fatma the beautiful.*

The master of the camels said to the old man: 'Let's go! You can herd the goats.' The old man said: 'Maa maa! I can't manage that!' 'Well then, the sheep!' 'Baa, baa! I can't manage that.' 'Well then, the camels.' 'Aaagh, Aaagh! I can't manage that!' 'Well then, the donkeys.' 'Hee haw! I can't manage that!' 'Well, what about the pigeons?' 'Very well,' said the old man.

So the master of the camels entrusted the pigeons to him, along with a dumb slave. They looked after the pigeons. The birds would come from the field where they were feeding, drink water, and perch in a tree.

Well, the two set off for the river, and when they arrive, Fatma takes off the old man's skin and dives into the river. She notices that the dumb man is looking at her and says:

'Dumb friend, what do you see

when you look at me?

Do you see the doves' down so white?

Do you see the hair so black?

Do you see the ostrich feathers in their glory?

Yet you cannot tell the story'

When the slave goes back to the master of the camels, he cannot speak, but goes 'ah, ah, ah', and points at the full moon. *You see what he means? But he keeps tapping his chest to explain that he can't speak!* The master said to the old man: 'Uncle, what is this?' And the old man replied: 'The man is telling you that his chest is hurting and he needs to be branded as a cure.' So they did brand him.

The next day, they went off again, looking after the pigeons, and Fatma takes off her clothes, removes the old man's skin, puts on her jewellery and begins to dance. Again, the dumb man went to the camel master *like this, you know, again it goes on.*

The next time, Fatma took off her jewellery, and as the slave is watching her, she says again:

'Dumb friend what do you see

when you look at me?

Do you see the doves' down so white?

Do you see the hair so black?

Do you see the ostrich feathers in their glory?

Yet you cannot tell the story'

What happened then was that the slave who could not speak took a ring from Fatma's jewellery lying there. And when Fatma came out of the water, and when she had put the old man's skin, and her clothes, and her shoes, she went to her jewellery, going 'This one is here, this one is here, Ah! this one is not here ... What's gone wrong?' So Fatma gave the slave a great push, and beat him, and the slave threw back the ring to her. Meanwhile the master of the camels had seen all this—*he had hidden away and was watching*—and the next morning, he said 'I'll come with you and the pigeons.' And he said to the old man 'let's play a game, and the one who wins will skin the other.' The old man replied: 'Very well, my son.' So they played dibs with camel droppings.

*Ha Ha! tie it all up in my little skin ...*** rabat fi jilaidi*

Now Fatma won the first game, but she did not remove the skin of her opponent. Again she won the second game, and again she leaves him alone. But the third time, it was the master of the camels who won, and removed the skin of his opponent, and found a beautiful girl! He married her, and she bore him a son.

In due course, he said to his people: 'You remember the person I took from the cave, the old man? Well, he turned out to be a woman, and a very beautiful woman!' So they said: 'Show her to us!' He told them that she didn't want to come out, but he fetched out his son and showed him to them. They said: 'What if the camels kill your son?' and from within Fatma says: 'These are not the camels of his father,' 'What if the sheep kill your son?' and she says 'These are not the sheep of his father.' 'What if the donkeys kill your son?' and she says 'These are not the donkeys of his father.' 'What if the horses kill your son?' and she says 'These are not the horses of his father.'

Then she came out and at long last they beheld her. She wafted them with incense from her fingernails, and went away. *And that's the end of the story.*

52. Juha

Shaigiyya

Northern Sudan

What's next? Well there was someone known as Juha. As he was walking along, he encountered some young boys playing. Their mother was grinding millet. He found one grain of millet and threw it to her to be ground. She ground the grain, and he came up to her and said: 'I found this grain; why don't you make some bread from it for me?' She gave him the bread.

Then he left. And he came across a female gipsy, who said to him: 'I am hungry. Can you give me that bread?' He said to her: 'well, if I go to a some place or other I'll find another grain' and the gipsy brought bread, and an awl. Only, he said: 'We weave with a thorn.' And he said to her: 'Throw away the awl¹³⁸, then. Here's a thorn.' Then she started weaving. In the evening, he said to her: 'Give me that container¹³⁹!' So she gave it to him and he went on his way.

He encountered a group of people who were milking a camel using a bowl¹⁴⁰. He said to them: 'Take this container and use that for milking,' and they did. He said to them: 'This container should be used for the milk of that camel.' They gave him the camel, and he left.

¹³⁸. أشفي, ashfī,

¹³⁹. 'umra, عمرة

¹⁴⁰. قحف, giḥif,

53. The Man and his Two Wives

Shaigiyya

Northern Sudan

There was a man with two wives. One of them died and left a daughter. The other one also had a daughter. The second wife did not want the dead wife's daughter to stay with here. So she gave her flour and dates, and sent her to the sorcerer.

She left and came to a tree. The tree asked the girl to give it some water. She did this, and the tree drank it, and said to the girl. 'God willing, you will see me green until the Autumn.'

Then the girl encountered a gazelle, and the gazelle said: 'Give me some water,' and the girl did so. The gazelle said: 'I give you my eyes.' And the girl's eyes became like those of the gazelle.

Then the girl encountered a crow, and gave it water. And the crow said: 'God willing, your hair will become as black as I am!'

Then she met the son of the witch. She gave him water and dates and told him what had happened to her. He said to her: 'When my mother asks you to take the hook to break down the door, you use it to shake the tree.' He went on: 'And when my mother tells you to break the mill-stone, she means you to grind. And when she tells you to break the pot¹⁴¹, start cooking with it.' So she just went.

The witch said to her: 'Bring the hook and break the animals!' So she brought down fruit for them. Then the witch said: 'Go and break the mill-stone,' but she used it for grinding. And then the witch said 'Go and break the cooking pot,' but she put it on the fire for cook. Then the witch said: 'Go and cut up the ingredients,' but she pulped them with a swizzle-stick.

Then she said: 'All right, start cooking,' and she did, and the witch said: 'Now look after them.' She went away, and later came back. She took a handful, and poured it over her, and it turned into gold. Then the girl went back to her family. Her sister saw her, beautiful as she had become. She gave her dates and water and everything.

¹⁴¹. burma, برمة

The girl came to a tree, and the tree asked for water. The girl said: 'No, I don't have any water to share with desert trees. The tree said to her: 'If God wills, you will have my dryness, why don't you live during the autumn.' Then she met a gazelle, and the gazelle said: 'Give me some water,' and the girl said: 'No, do you think I'll give my water to gazelles in the desert?' The gazelle said: 'If God wills, you will have my shroud.' Then she came upon a crow, which said to her 'Give me water,' and she replied: 'Do you want me to give water to birds?' and the crow said: 'If God wills, I give you ...'

Then she met the sons of the witch. They said: 'Give us some water,' and she replied: 'No!' They said to her: 'When our mother tells you to break the animals, do just that, and when she tells you to break the pot, you must really do that, and when she tells you to break the mill-stone, you do just that.' Now the girl went to the witch, who said to her: 'Break the animals' and she did. and then 'break the mill-stone' and she did, and then 'break the pot', and she did ... Everything was broken.

She began to cook camel tics, *and that's the end.*

GLOSSARY

(Many but not all of these entries show specifically Sudanese usage.)

- Ab Ḥamad (أب حمد) nickname for a crocodile
- Abū Ḥalīma (أبو حلّيمة) nickname for a fox
- Abū Nimaisha (أبو نميشة) one with a little sword
- Abū nuḍlāf (أبو نضلاف) characterized by its talons or claws
- ‘adān (عدان) firewood
- ‘aish bi-mayy (عيش بمّي) the sharing of ‘bread and water’ symbolizes fraternity
- Al-Batūl (البتول) ‘the virgin’
- Al-Li‘aib (اللعيب) a nickname meaning literally ‘the little playful one’ from the root la‘ba (لعب) meaning to play, and rendered by us as ‘Little Frolic’. It is a masculine noun, though applied in story 28 to a beautiful girl.
- al-rīf (الريف) fluvial region, fertile land
- ‘alūg (علوق) fodder
- al-Zayy (الزّي) how one looks; the term figures as a young woman’s name in the stories. One may compare the English usage ‘a looker’.
- ‘amma (عمّة) father’s sister
- ‘angaraib (عنقريب) a word of Nubian origin for a traditional bedstead made of wood and woven cord
- Anṣār (أنصار) ‘Literally, helpers’. The term was originally applied to those who helped the prophet Muhammed after the migration to Medina. It was adopted by the nineteenth century religious sect in the Sudan which fought against colonial power. This sect is still in existence, and there is an associated political party, the ‘Umma party (‘umma meaning an [Islamic] community).
- ‘aradaib (عرديب) The Tamarind tree (*Tamarindus Indica*) grows to a considerable size. It is native to the Sudan and to tropical Africa. But it came to be grown in India long ago, as well as in numerous other parts of the world. It is valued

for many culinary and medicinal purposes, as well as for its wood. Its fruit is in pods which become brittle, and are easily broken open. Inside is a pulp with seeds enclosed in fibrous matter. The fruit is called *'aradaib* in the Sudan, but is also more widely known there and in other Arabic-speaking countries as *tamr hindī* or 'Indian date'. It is sour, but its flavour is prized. In story 47, a man says: 'A woman is a tamarind,' comparing women to men, to the detriment of men. The resonance of this saying is strong. A woman is protected by her people, but the outer pod can be broken. She has an inner being full of savour, but which can be tart. Men, by contrast, just have bad thoughts. The metaphor in story 47 cannot readily be rendered into English.

ardab	(أردب) bushel (measure of quantity: 198 litres)
ashfī	(أشفي) awl
'aṣīda	(عصيدة) a form of quite solid and sticky gruel made from largely unleavened flour, and eaten hot. The word is sometimes applied to <i>lugma</i> , which is less solid, but sets into shape when cold, and is eaten cold.
'atrūn	(عطرون) Sudanese dialect form of <i>natrūn</i> , from the Greek νίτρον, itself derived from the Ancient Egyptian <i>nṯry</i> . Natron is a naturally occurring mixture of sodium carbonate decahydrate (or soda ash) and sodium bicarbonate (also called baking soda) along with small amounts of salt and sodium sulphate. This mixture of salts was harvested from dry lake beds in ancient Egypt. It was particularly prized for its use in mummification, and used in making faïence. It is also a general cleansing agent. It softens water and helps to remove oil and grease. It can also be used in the preservation of dried fish and meat, and as an insecticide and as a bleach for clothing. The symbol for the element Sodium, Na , derives from the word 'natron'.
'awīn	(عوين) family
'awīr	(عوير) fool
badan	(بدن) arrogance
bakhsa	(بخسة) gourd
balīla	(بليلة) boiled beans
birish	(برش) a word of Nubian origin meaning a long mat of woven grass, (pl. burūsh) palm fibre, or similar material. It is spread on the ground to sit on.

burma	(برمة) an earthenware pot, of the sort used on waterwheels; also used (pl. burum) for cooking
ḍaggāla	(ضقالة) youths
ḍa‘aīn	(ضعین) flock of livestock
dallūka	(دلوكة) a small drum which may be made from the top of a zīr (q.v.) covered with hide. It is used by women to accompany dancing.
darangal	(درنقل) bedding used by Baggara
daraza	(درز) push
dashīsha	(دشيشة) unground (millet)
dawka	(دوكة) a thin metal or earthenware griddle used for cooking kisra (كسرة) (q.v.)
fanjarī	(فنجري) generous
farīg	(فريق) camp
gādūs	(قادوس) an earthenware waterpot
ga‘gūm	(قعقوم) bottle
gandūl	(قندول) an ear of millet
garmaṣīṣ	(قرمصيص) bridal shawl
garn	(قرن) plait of hair/type of cloth worn by women
gaṭ al-raḥaṭ	(قطع الرحط) ‘breaking of the skirt’. As a prelude to the consummation of marriage, the bridegroom enters a room in the bride’s father’s dwelling to carry out a symbolic breaking of her ‘skirt’ (worn next to the skin).
ghalfa	(غلفة) uncircumcised woman
ghūl(a)	(غول، غولة) ogre(ss)
giḥif	(قحف) (earthenware) bowl
gurbāb	(قرباب) skirt
habāb	(هباب) as soon as
ḥafla	(حفلة) set of golden ornaments
ḥaskanīt	(حسكنيت) thorny bush

hiḍlīm	(هضليم) ostrich feathers
ḥijail	(حجيل) nuptial tent
hināi	(هنائي) a Sudanese expression meaning a thing, a whatsit, thingummy
Jamm	(جم) completely
jammālī	(جمالي) firearm
jihfa	(جحفة) howdah
jilfa	(جلفة) a piece of leather or rubber
kabsūla	(كبسولة) cartridge (Eng. ‘capsule)
katāt/kadāda	(كتات \ كداد) <i>Dichrastachys glomerata</i> Chiov; large-armed shrub, the spine being often leaf-bearing
kadīs	(كديس) cat
karasha	(كرش) sharpen; also onomatopoeic for the noise of sharpening
khādim	(خادم) female slave
khatiyya	(خنية) money-box
khīḍair	(خضير) grey or light black colour
khulgān	(خلقان) tattered cloths
khūsa	(خوسة) knife; apparently a word of Nubian origin
kisra	(كسرة) a kind of unleavened bread, made by spreading a thin layer of millet paste on a hot <i>dawka</i> (q.v.)
lījaina	(ليجينة) ellipsis
maḥājīn	(محاجن) a long wooden pole with twisted wire at the end to pull down fruit
mākin	(ماكن) strong, empowered
māl al-ḥarām	(مال الحرام) ill-gotten gains , literally ‘forbidden wealth’. When applied to a person, we have rendered this as ‘ill-begotten creature’.
mān‘a	(مانعة) fierce, strong
manjūha	(منجوهة) insolent, silly
marāzīha	(مرازيهة) made her work hard
mardū‘a	(مردوع) type of Baggara dance
marfa‘ain	(مرفعين) wolf

marfa‘īb	(مرفعيب) wolf
marīsa	(مريسة) a kind of beer made by putting millet paste with water in a zīr (q.v.). The zīr is buried up to the neck to ensure a constant temperature, and left to ferment.
masīra	(مسيرة) lock of hair over the forehead
mufṛāka	(مفراكة) a stick with a cross piece on the end used for pulping the ingredients of various gelatinous sauces or gravies. It is rolled between the hands.
mulāḥ	(ملاح) ingredients of food, before and after cooking
murāḥ	(مراح) animal pen
murḥāka	(مرحاكة) a mill-stone on which grain is ground by the use of a smaller flat, and usually more or less rectangular stone.
na‘āma	(نعامة) ostrich
Nijaiḍūn	(نجيضون) ‘little ripe one’
nuggāra	(نغارة) a small earthenware drum, commonly used by itself to accompany dancing, e.g. at weddings.
rabā‘a	(رباعة) colleagues, friends
ragaba	(رقبة) stream
rahad	(رهد) canal
rākūba	(راكوبة) Sudanese colloquial word for a sun-shelter, often made of bundles of millet stalks or palm branches supported on wooden poles
ṣahab	(صهب) <i>Anogeissus muriellii</i> Skan.
saḥḥār	(pl. siḥaḥīr) and saḥḥāra, siḥaḥīra (سحّار، سحّارة، سححير، سححيرة) wizard, witch, typically for a human being with evil intentions and some supernatural powers
salaba	(سلبة) a long thick rope
salīla	(سليفة) insolent, silly
shaggāga	(شقاقة) a type of hoe
shakalūta	(شكلوتة) a jinnee
shigg	(شق) direction, near
si‘īya	(سعية) herd

suksuk	(سكسك) beads
ṣūfāya	(صوفاية) hair
tab tab	(تب تب) a colloquial or improvised interjection, which we have rendered as ‘(not) at all’
tadaza	(تدر) push
Taḥamīd	(تحاميد) the name of the ancestor of the Dar Hamid tribe given by the story-teller
ṭahūra	(طهورة) circumcision, male or female. Female circumcision is a common practice in the Sudan, though the extent of genital mutilation is variable. It is not prescribed by Islam. The operation is often carried out by grandmothers. Men among men can be observed at times making crude gestures suggesting the pleasure to be obtained by entering the artificially narrow orifice. No doubt, a similar pleasure is not shared by their wives.
ṭamaḥa	(طمح) be disobedient to
ṭambūr	(طمبور) a musical instrument common in Northern Sudan, similar to a lute
tantan	(تنتن) humming
thawb	(ثوب) a robe by women as an outer garment.
tawaga	(توق) peep
Turkāy	(تركاي)
‘umda	(عمدة) a mayor, or local leader, formerly an important component of the ‘native administration’ in colonial Sudan. The Arabic word literally means a support, and can be applied to the head of a family or the leader of a party.
Umm ṣalūṭiyya	(أم سلوطية) a long and slender arrow
Umm Kujūr	(أم كجور) a magician or spiritual leader in the Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains
Umm Tamāyīm	(أم تمايم) the person with necklaces
‘umra	(عمرة) a container woven from palm fronds. Used in the past as milk containers, later often decorated.
‘ushar	(عشر) <i>Calotropis procera</i> . The Sodom Apple, or Dead Sea Apple, a common bush with milky sap and large globular fruit containing a silky floss.

‘uṭfa	(عطفة) litter, hound
Wad al-Lihaiu	(ود اللهيو) a person’s name
Wad al-Nimair	(ود النمير) a person’s name
Wad al-Niwairi	(ود النويري) a person’s name
warda	(ورد) fetch
wizzīn	(وزّين) geese
yāmūm	(ياموم) head of the family
zaffa	(زفّة) bridal procession
zīr	(زير) a large earthenware water-pot. It does not stand by itself, but is placed in a support through which the lower part of the vessel protrudes. The vessel is porous so that the water gradually seeps through and evaporates, keeping the water inside cool.
zugāg	(زقاق) a cloth hanging in a nomad’s tent, used to separate one quarter from another. Derivatives of the root زَقَّ in Arabic have a great variety of meanings.