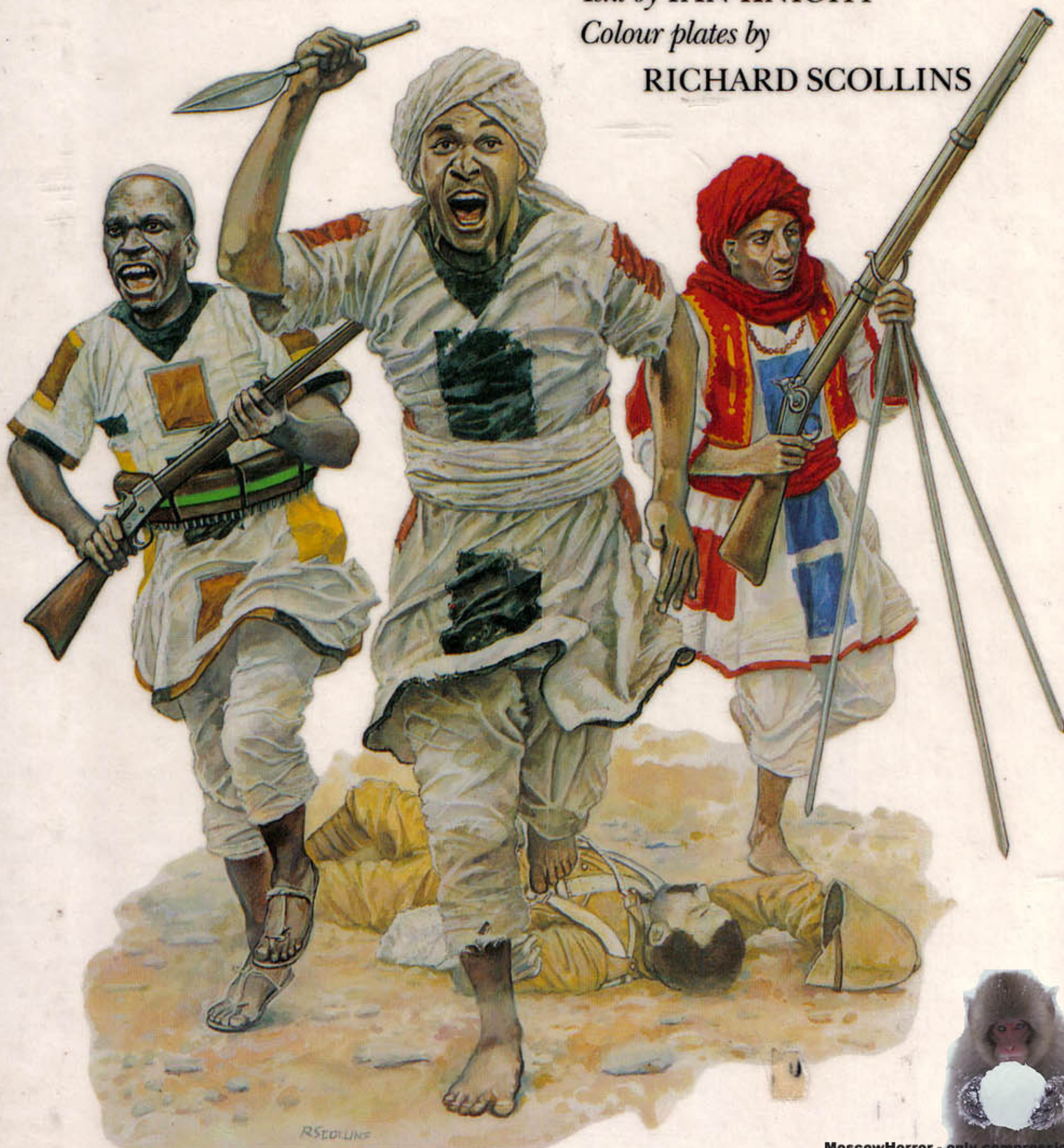


Queen Victoria's Enemies (2): Northern Africa

Text by IAN KNIGHT

Colour plates by

RICHARD SCOLLINS



MEN-AT-ARMS SERIES

EDITOR: MARTIN WINDROW

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Uniforms of British troops engaged in the African colonial wars can be found in Michael Barthorp's *The British Army Uniforms on Campaign 1816-1902*, nos. 193, 196, 198 and 201 in the Men-at-Arms series.

Queen Victoria's Enemies (2): Northern Africa

Introduction

Unlike the situation in southern Africa, where the wars waged against the different local inhabitants were often politically and economically interconnected, the British Army in Queen Victoria's reign had to fight a series of separate and unrelated regional campaigns across the northern half of the continent. The local conditions and peoples varied greatly, from the forest-dwellers of Asante to Moslem fundamentalists in the burning desert wastes of the Sudan, requiring considerable flexibility and professionalism from an Army often popularly held to be rigid and traditionalist. It is

not the purpose of this book to consider the British experience, however, but to chart, however briefly, something of the history of these campaigns, and to describe the African groups against which they were waged. Many had complex military traditions which were well suited to their environment, and the outcome of the ensuing fighting was by no means one-sided. Because of the large number of minor campaigns waged between 1838 and 1900, it has not been possible to cover them all; attention has therefore been given to those large-scale wars in which British regular troops were engaged, although a number of 'small wars' have been considered as examples of their type and to suggest the variety of enemies faced.



Abyssinia 1868

The British campaign against Abyssinia in 1868 was a curious affair in a number of respects. Unlike most Colonial expeditions, it was not the result of a political or economic imperative, but rather of a clash of national pride. The British Army's greatest achievement was not so much the battle it won, as the fact that it managed to reach the heart of Abyssinia in the first place. And much revolved around the enigmatic and volatile personality of the Emperor of Abyssinia, Tewodros II.

Tewodros became known to the British by the Anglicised version of his name, Theodore, the 'mad king'. The British had a habit of labelling their enemies 'mad', if only because of the assumed folly of taking on the might of the Empire in the first place (cf. the 'Mad Mullah' of Somaliland; there were even a few contemporary references to 'mad King Cetshwayo' of the Zulus, although there was not the slightest question concerning his sanity).

A 19th century study of an Abyssinian chief in his magnificent finery. His cope and headdress are decorated with lion's hair, and his shield is heavily ornamented with metal, probably silver. (R. Ruggeri)

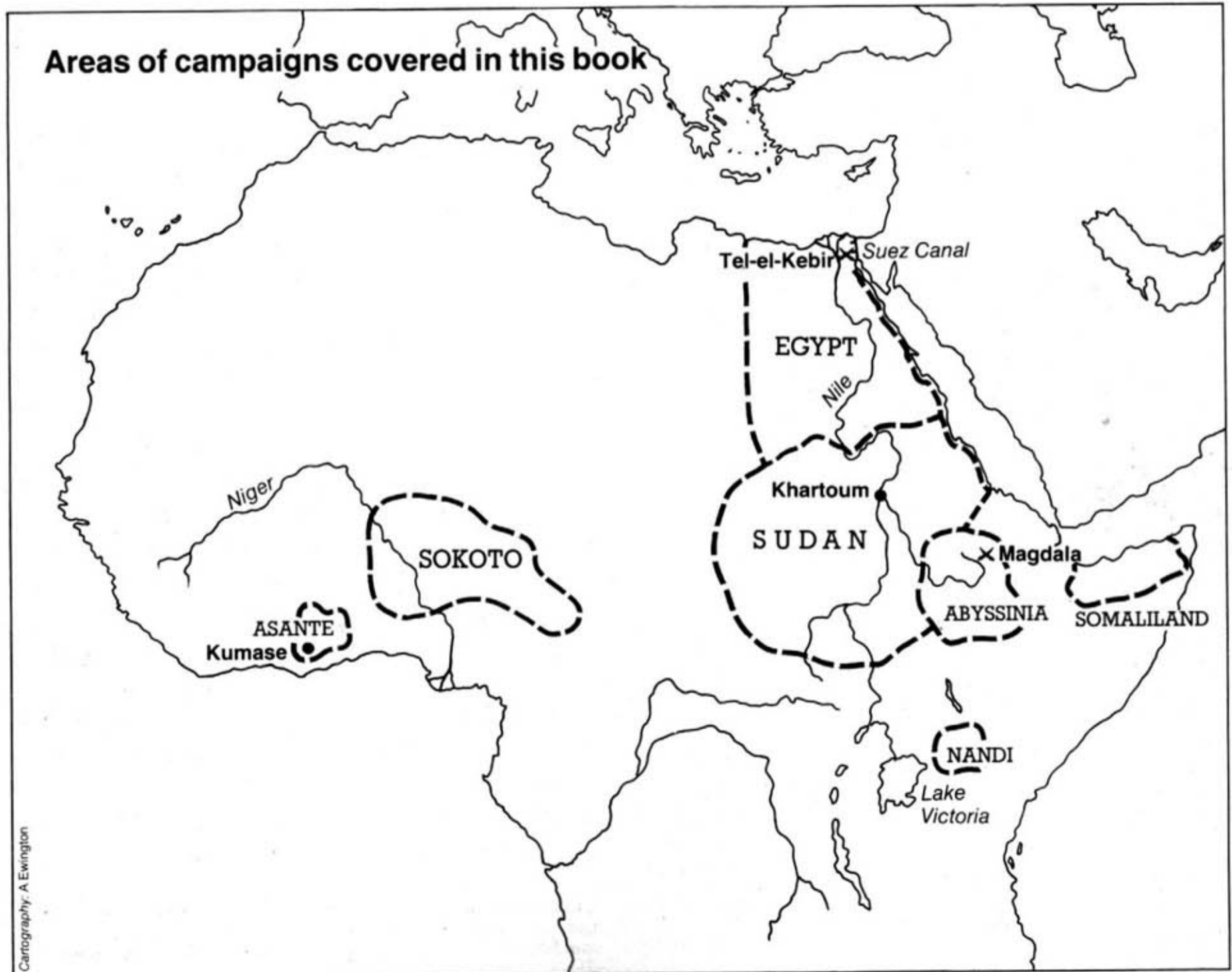
Tewodros' behaviour was distinctly mercurial however, and became increasingly unpredictable and erratic towards the end of his reign. There is a distinct trace of paranoia in the way in which an imagined slight led him to war with a European power with whom he had had little previous involvement.

In the middle of the 19th century, Abyssinia was an introverted and isolated country, frequently at war with itself. A high, impenetrable upland, characterised by sheer flat-topped mountains called *ambas*, divided by deep, wide gorges, it was populated by a number of almost feudal tribes. These tribes, led by hereditary rulers known as *ras*—a rank roughly equivalent to a duke in medieval Europe—strove to secure ascendancy over one another. A number were Moslem, but many were Coptic Christians.

Tewodros was a Christian chief who, in a series of

campaigns between 1853 and 1855, had defeated most of his rivals, and had proclaimed himself Emperor of all Abyssinia. He was a man driven by a desire to unite and modernise a backward country, without having a very clear vision of what such a task involved. The frustration that he felt throughout his reign at his inability to motivate his people, and the constant provincial revolts against his authority, exacerbated his instability.

Tewodros looked to Europe to help his country's enforced progress, and here the trouble started. He attracted to his court a number of foreign missionaries and envoys, including one from Britain. Tewodros was hungry for their technical expertise, which some were reluctant to give; the missionaries, in particular, were disturbed by Tewodros' demand that they should make him firearms. Nevertheless, the Emperor was delighted to have such prestigious contacts with the outside





world, and was mortified when the British envoy, Plowden, was killed by rebels during one of the periodic uprisings. Tewodros took bloody revenge on the culprits, and asked Britain to send a new envoy. Sadly, the new man, Cameron, was not as adroit as Plowden had been. With Tewodros' help, Cameron drafted a letter of friendship to the British cabinet, which apparently got lost in the Colonial Office files. Tewodros was insulted by the lack of reply, and outraged when Cameron, on instructions from London, established contact with Moslem tribes who were traditional enemies of the Abyssinian Christians. Suspecting a European plot against him, Tewodros had Cameron imprisoned. He was soon joined behind bars first by a group of German missionaries, and then by another British envoy sent to secure Cameron's release.

Hitherto, Britain's only policy in the region had been to try to establish friendly relations with the tribes of the Red Sea coast; but Abyssinia now achieved an unexpected prominence as the diplomatic situation rapidly deteriorated. If Tewodros did not release the European prisoners, Britain would feel compelled to send an army to free them; the Emperor, who felt cheated and slighted by countries he had sought to befriend, refused. In some illogical way he seemed keen to provoke a confrontation with a power whose inevitable superiority he much admired.

Tigrean envoys with British troops, Abyssinia, 1868. Tigre was a province of the Abyssinian empire in revolt against Tewodros. This photo conveys the general impression of Abyssinian warriors—note percussion rifles. (Bryan Maggs)

In late 1867 Britain sent an army to the small port of Zula on the Red Sea coast. It had been despatched from India, and comprised both Imperial and Indian regiments under the command of Gen. Lord Napier, a hero of the Indian Mutiny. In keeping with the rather bizarre circumstances of the campaign, the opposing armies were most inappropriate for their respective tasks. Napier would have to march his men across 400 miles of some of the most inhospitable terrain in the world simply to get within striking distance of Tewodros. The coastal plains were baking hot, and in the dry season, when Napier landed, there was no water. His columns would have to make roads as they advanced, bridging huge chasms, and keeping free of disease until they reached the inland heights where the weather alternated between burning sunshine and chilling thunderstorms. Napier, however, was a thorough organiser, and his success lay in the professionalism of his preparations. Even Tewodros did not expect the Abyssinian army to be a match for the British in the field. In January 1868 Napier's army—13,000 soldiers, 19,000 non-combatants, and 55,000 animals, including Indian elephants—began their advance.



The summit of Magdala, Tewodros' stronghold. (Bryan Maggs)

The Abyssinian army, by contrast, was most experienced at fighting in its own environment, but by nature it was feudal rather than modern. Tewodros had made some attempt to superimpose a central, imperial superstructure on the tribal nature of the kingdom, and in the more assimilated provinces his military appointees had superseded the power of the *rasses*; but for the most part, power resided in the chiefs, who were hereditary warlords. Each *ras* or chief commanded his own followers, and their support for national campaigns depended on their allegiance to the Emperor. Since they were not a standing army, Abyssinian warriors were not paid, but were expected to profit by looting, with the result that a class of warriors emerged who had enriched themselves through war, and whose continued prestige depended upon it. They were the nearest thing that Abyssinia had to professional soldiers.

Organisation

When the army mustered, the Emperor would call up his subject chiefs. On the march, the Emperor and his own followers, who were the best trained, armed and most reliable warriors, would form the centre, with the chiefs on the wings. A great many of the soldiers would have been poorly armed peasants, mobilised by the chiefs for a period of a few weeks, who joined the fighting in the hope of gaining booty. These peasants seem to have been generally placed on the flanks, although an advancing army was usually screened by a cloud of ill-disciplined foragers and scouts. There were no logistical services, and the army survived as best it could by living off the land. There was usually a large train of camp-followers, however, transporting the luxurious tents and possessions of the chiefs.

The army did have a definite command

Capt. Charles Speedy, 1868. Speedy was a British adventurer who served for a time as a commander in Tewodros' army. He is wearing the costume of a chief: silk trousers and tunic, and a cope. Note the strip of lion-skin on the shield. (Bryan Maggs)



structure, each section having officers appointed from among the chiefs (advance guard, wings, rearguard, etc), and bodies of 1,000, 500, 100 and 50 warriors all had specified commanders. In battle, however, there was an almost total lack of discipline, the standard tactic being a wild rush prompted as much by a desire to get amongst the loot as by the need to overwhelm the enemy himself. Not that the Abyssinians were not courageous: they showed great bravery in attack, and were reluctant to retreat, often rallying around their tribal chiefs and returning to the attack time after time. In defence, they made the most of the natural

A *lembd*, the cope worn by the Abyssinian warrior class. This one is of leopard-skin with brass decorations. (Royal Engineers Museum)



inaccessibility of the *ambas*, retiring to the flat, secure summits and barricading the points of access.

Tewodros himself recognised the limitations of this military outlook, and attempted to introduce a number of modern features from Europe. Firearms had been known in Abyssinia for centuries, but for the most part they were antiquated matchlocks. The various warring chiefs periodically attempted to secure more modern weapons, and Tewodros had managed to arm a significant number of his followers with double-barrelled percussion rifles. Like most African rulers in the 19th century, however, he had difficulty in obtaining powder and ammunition, and his warriors remained poorly trained. His need for more effective firepower was one aspect of his yearning for European assistance. He did accumulate a number of German craftsmen, who helped him forge several cannon and—his great pride and joy—a huge mortar. His intentions appear to have been to use the mortar to lob shells onto the *ambas* in the rebellious provinces, but the British invasion forestalled him.

There is no doubt that military expertise was a factor in Tewodros' rise to power, but the evidence suggests that his tactical innovations were limited. He was renowned for achieving surprise through rapid forced marches and dawn attacks. On occasion, when he had cavalry—the size of the mounted contingent varied according to the tribes present in an engagement, some tribes having more horses than others—he used them to scout and harass enemy concentrations; but he seldom seems to have had enough to mount the shock charges which worked so well for later Abyssinian leaders.

Costume and Weapons

Despite his modernising efforts, most of Tewodros' army was dressed and armed in the traditional manner. Ordinary male dress consisted of a pair of white cotton trousers and a white shirt. An oblong cotton cloak called the *shamma* was worn draped around the shoulders. Men of rank or wealth wore a silk tunic, the *kamis*, which was often richly embroidered, red being a favourite base colour. Distinguished warriors wore a distinctive cope, the *lembd*, which was either draped around the body or worn across the shoulders. Often made of animal-hide, it hung in long panels at the front and back,

decorated around the edges and over the chest with brass or silver plates. Those warriors who had proved their courage by killing a lion were allowed to wear the hair of the mane on the shoulders of the cope. A *ras* or chief might wear a spectacular headdress made of lion-hair and trimmed with streamers. There were no marks of rank, but a man's authority could be determined by the quality of his costume, that of the chiefs being spectacularly lavish.

Weapons consisted of a spear and a large, double-edged, sickle-shaped sabre with a large pommel. Shields were round, and made of hide or wood. Shields had a rather mystical significance because of their protective qualities, and they were often decorated with strips of metal on the face. Peasants would have carried plain shields, whilst those of senior warriors were covered in ornate silver or brass patterns. Sometimes strips of lion-skin were also fastened to the front of the shield.

The Campaign

During his campaigns of conquest, Tewodros was able to muster armies of 10,000–15,000 men, but the advance of the British found him with just 7,000, excluding any cavalry. He was also troubled by the usual uprisings in the provinces. He had established his headquarters at Magdala, an *amba* with sides dropping a thousand feet in places, which he had seized from its original owners in one of the tribal wars. Leaving his European prisoners in chains at Magdala, Tewodros set off to put down the rebellions. The prisoners waited anxiously to see who would arrive at Magdala first, Napier or Tewodros. Tewodros won, but, to everyone's surprise, did not kill the prisoners, and seemed to relish the prospect of seeing a European army in action. On 10 April 1868 Napier finally reached his goal after his astonishing journey, and his men deployed on the Aroge plain on the slopes of the Magdala massif. With a thunderstorm as a dramatic backdrop, the Abyssinian warriors advanced to the attack.

Napier's men opened fire with rockets and cannon. The Abyssinian charge wavered slightly, but then came on in the usual wild rush. In a few places it struck home, and there were brief flurries of hand-to-hand fighting, but for the most part it was scythed down by Napier's volley-fire. The Abys-



A typical Abyssinian hide shield, decorated with silver. (Royal Engineers Museum)

sinians rallied and regrouped time and again, but they were hopelessly outclassed. Tewodros did not join the attack himself, and his picked commander, Gabre, was killed in action. The great mortar, upon which the Emperor had placed so much trust, was fired for the first time, and promptly burst. The Abyssinian artillery had opened up at the start of the battle, but proved ineffective, and soon fell silent. By the time the Abyssinians finally drifted from the field, they had suffered 700 dead and 1,200 wounded. Napier's losses were 20 wounded, of whom two later died.

The Abyssinian army had been spectacularly defeated at Aroge. Tewodros himself remained secure on Magdala, however, and with him were the prisoners. Everyone expected Tewodros—who, in a sudden fury the night before the battle, had slaughtered large numbers of Abyssinian captives and thrown their bodies from the cliffs—to kill the Europeans; in the event, he now released them. He would not surrender, however; and on 13 April a British storming party forced its way along the single track leading into Magdala, and broke through its defended gateway. The gate was lightly held but well defended, and the troops sustained a number of casualties before they forced their way

Asante



An Abyssinian saddle, taken during the 1868 expedition. (Royal Engineers Museum)

through. As they did so the Abyssinian commander at the gate put a pistol into his own mouth, and pulled the trigger. On inspecting the body he was found to be Tewodros himself.

Napier had secured his objective: the prisoners had been released and Tewodros punished. All that remained was to slight Magdala. Engineers spiked Tewodros' guns, and blew up the larger buildings on the summit; the rest were destroyed by fire. The same day, 16 April, Napier began the long march back to Zula.

Unlike most colonial wars, there was no attempt to impose a settlement or new regime on Abyssinia; it was simply left to pick up the pieces. In time a new *negus*, or king, would emerge, and the centralising process would begin anew. The later Abyssinian empire would be strong enough to contest the advance of Mahdism, and of a new European imperial power, Italy. Queen Victoria's enemy, King Tewodros, had, however, paid the price of his madness.

Of all the peoples in the northern half of Africa whom the British fought in the 19th century, the Asante (pronounced *Ashanti*), who lived in the great rain forests of present-day Ghana in West Africa, remained the most intractable enemy, maintaining their resistance to European encroachment for over a hundred years.

Gold and slaves, both available cheaply and in abundance, drew the European powers to West Africa, and by the 18th century a number of rival trading outposts had been established on the coast. Unlike other parts of Africa, however, the inhospitable climate—the area was so dangerous to European health that it was nicknamed 'The White Man's Grave'—made colonisation impractical, and the white settlements remained little more than enclaves, often literally shut up in castles on the shore. Their economic influence was immense, however; and their demand for slaves and gold, often paid for in highly desirable commodities such as firearms, influenced the balance of economic power for hundreds of miles into the interior. So did their rivalries and their different ways of dealing with the local population. The Dutch and British in particular competed vigorously for the lucrative Gold Coast trade, which was generated inland amongst the Asante, but passed through the intermediary Fante who lived along the coast. The Asante and Fante were part of the same cultural group, the Akan; but the complex manoeuvring between the four parties, each seeking to profit at the expense of the rest, resulted in a series of wars which gradually became a contest for supremacy between the Asante and the British.

The Asante state was basically a confederation of forest tribes, and had emerged under a chief named Osei Tutu who reigned from 1697 to 1731. Tutu had established a capital at Kumase, a strategic spot which commanded a number of crossroads along the important trade routes running north/south and east/west. Tutu had brought a number of his neighbours under his control by a combination of force and diplomacy, and had secured their allegiance by means of a mystical symbol of unity, the Golden Stool. According to Asante legend, the Golden Stool fell from heaven to

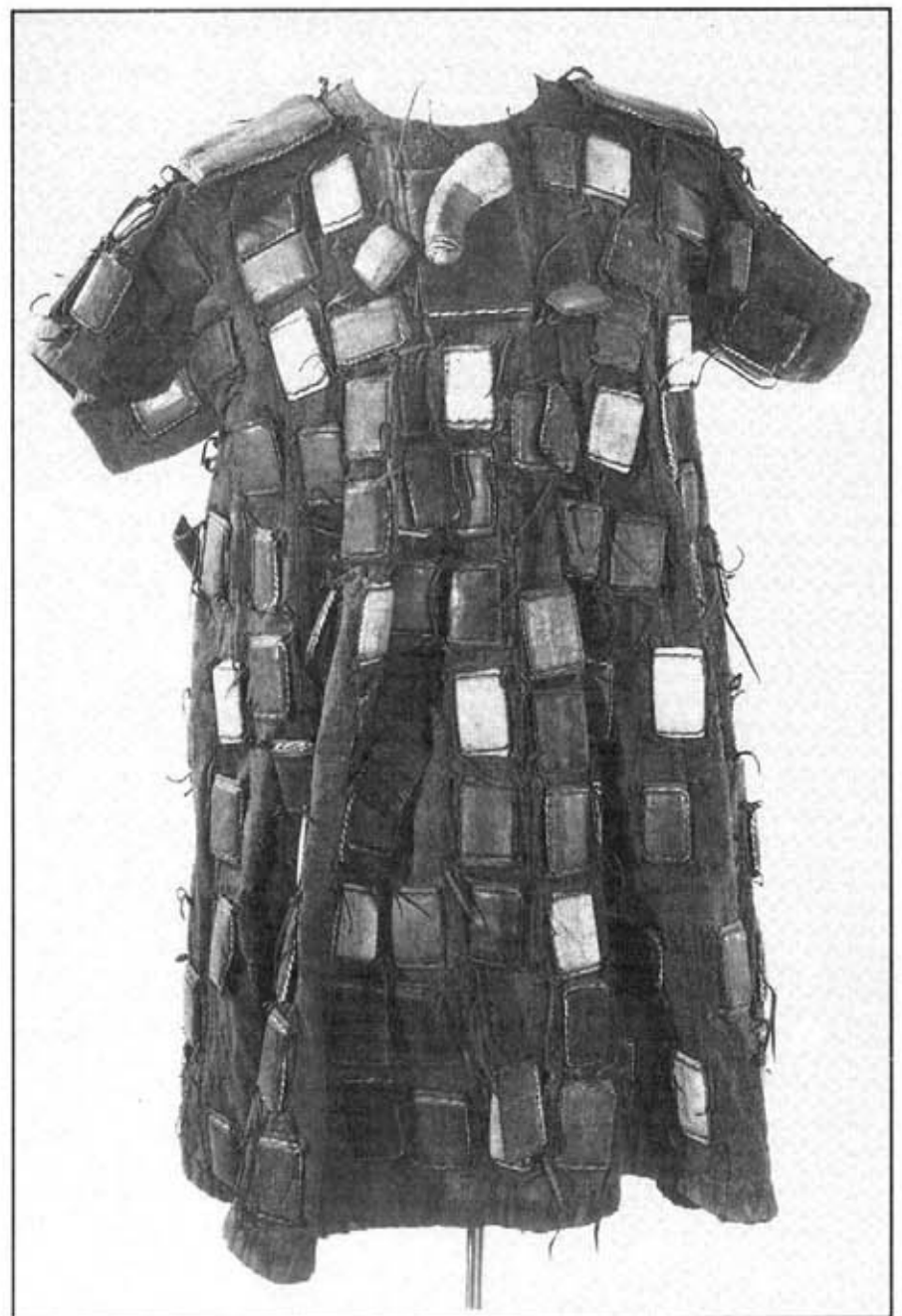
Tutu's court; the embodiment of Asante power, it was never sat upon, but was displayed on a throne of its own next to the reigning *Asantehene*, or king of Asante.

In the 18th century Tutu's successors extended the Asante empire until, at its height, it controlled an area 200 miles long by 200 miles wide. Most of this area was dense, almost impenetrable rain forest, and the climate is hot and humid, with two distinct wet seasons in May–June and September–October. The Asante built neat villages of square thatched and plastered huts in the clearings along the forest paths. Kumase was an important metropolitan centre, with economic and cultural links extending to the Moslem sub-Saharan. The River Pra, 60 miles from the coast, marked the southern limit of Asante influence, and the border with the Fante.

By the late 18th century the Asante were already heavily engaged with the European trade, and resentful of the interference of the Fante. They were keen to open direct contact with the whites, a policy encouraged by the Dutch but opposed by the British, who believed the existence of a middle-man enabled them to exploit local differences. The Asante drive to the coast led to Britain's first experience of Asante military might. In 1806 the Asante moved south into Fante territory, and the Fante appealed to British interests at Cape Coast Castle to support them. The British, who maintained only a few irregular troops, could do little except offer sanctuary to fleeing Fante. The result was that the Asante swept through Fante territory, and advanced along the beach right up to the walls of Cape Coast Castle, massacring Fante sheltering there, despite valiant and bloody attempts to drive them off.

In 1824 a British governor at the Cape Coast, Sir Charles Macarthy, attempted to organise a Fante army to put the Asante in their place; it was so severely defeated that Macarthy lost his head, which was taken as a trophy of great power and significance to Kumase. On the whole, Britain was content to learn from these experiences and to confine her attention to the coast; but in 1873 the usual machinations led to a major expedition, this time undertaken by British troops.

The principal cause of friction was the disputed title to a number of trading posts occupied by the



A Batakari war-smock, as worn by senior Asante commanders. It is covered in talismanic charms sewn into small leather pouches. (British Museum)

Dutch. The Dutch were giving up their part in the struggle, and sought to sell their possessions to the British. They had, however, always paid annual tribute to the Asante; and the king at that time, a young and vigorous ruler named Kofi Karikari, claimed that this had been rent, and that the Dutch had no right to pass the settlements over to the British. Britain took them anyway, and the *Asantehene* sent his forces south across the Pra. Britain was reluctant to fight a full-scale war, and 'that very model of a modern Major-General', Sir Garnet Wolseley, was despatched to organise a Fante army to defend the coast. This proved an impractical proposition, and Wolseley applied to use British troops.

He tackled his task with no less thoroughness than had Napier in Abyssinia. He devised a special practical uniform for his troops, expended huge amounts of his prodigious energy in organising

transport, ensured competent medical facilities for the inevitable sick and wounded, and wrote copious, detailed instructions on the tactical complexities of forest-fighting.

In fact, the Asante army—a main body of some 20,000 men under a famous general named Amankwa Tia—had fallen back to its own territory before Wolseley had time to advance. Asante armies traditionally had problems sustaining themselves for long periods in Fante territory, where the different climate of the more open country made them prone to disease. In January 1874 Wolseley concentrated his forces on the banks of the Pra, while last-minute negotiations proceeded with Kofi Karikari. By now it was Britain which was making demands, and when the *Asantehene* proved unwilling to comply, Wolseley's force crossed the Pra.

Organisation

The army which he was about to take on was a most formidable one, tried and tested in the sort of warfare best suited to its environment. The Asante army was basically a mobilised citizenry, the

majority of the male population being expected to serve. Estimates of its strength vary greatly: one account put it as high as 204,000 in 1817, but this was probably an exaggeration, and combined Asante and allied field forces seem to have numbered 20,000 or so. The standard war formation was said to have originated by watching ants on the march. It consisted of a body of scouts, who were known to spend long periods in tree-tops looking for enemy movement, when necessary; an advance guard; a main body; the commander and his bodyguard; and a rearguard. It was flanked on either side by two wings, each consisting of five self-contained bodies supplied by allied states within the confederation. The exact position of each contingent seldom varied, and was a matter of great pride. The *Asantehene* himself seldom accompanied an expedition, and if he did, it was usually as observer. The battlefield command was left to an experienced general, and senior officers were usually state appointees whose position was the result of merit rather than tribal rank.

Weapons and Tactics

The early rise of the Asante had been accomplished using bows and spears, and large rectangular shields made of hide stretched over a wicker

A war-belt taken during Wolseley's 1874 Asante campaign. The gourd is for powder; shot is contained in the wooden boxes encased in hide. (British Museum)





framework. Although there are some references to bows being used in the battle against Governor Macarthy, for the most part these had been replaced by guns by the 19th century. Guns had come to West Africa early, in the form of matchlocks traded by the first Portuguese explorers. If Europeans had any qualms about arming potentially hostile groups, the vast profits to be made from the trade soon reassured them, and guns were sold literally by the thousand. The Danes had been among the first to enter into the trade and such firearms were known by the generic name of 'Dane Guns', though in fact they came from all over the world, many being made in Birmingham. Most of them were long-barrelled flintlocks of dubious quality and accuracy. By the time of Wolseley's campaign, guns were the universal arm of the Asante, but like most African warriors they had problems obtaining spare parts and ammunition. To some extent these were overcome by using home-produced powder and bullets, though the powder was coarse, and the danger of guns exploding remained very real.

Asante warriors, in the open for once: 1874 campaign. The general appearance is more or less accurate although it is unlikely that this many men wore head-cloths. (Author's collection)

Theoretically such guns had a range of 200 yards, but in fact few marksmen could aim with accuracy beyond 30 yards, and the flight of the slug was often erratic. Weather conditions did not help since humidity and sudden downpours could both ruin the powder. Nevertheless, it should not be thought that these drawbacks made the Asante gunmen ineffective: far from it. In the forest where they fought, visibility was strictly limited anyway, and casualties were usually achieved by heavy fire at close quarters, by quantity rather than quality of musketry. British observers were impressed by the dexterity with which the Asante used their firearms: they understood the principle of sights and the necessity of firing from the shoulder—while many other African groups held guns at arm's length, or fired from the hip to reduce the risk from explosions—and they were able to perform complex drill, and to fire in a number of postures.



A rare moment of hand-to-hand fighting, Asante, 1874. This picture gives a good impression of the forest environment. (Author's collection)

The guns themselves were usually very long-barrelled, and the Asante often bound round the barrels with wire or thongs to prevent them bursting, and decorated them with cowrie shells. Powder and shot were carried in ornate war-belts of hide. The belts were festooned with gourds for the powder, and wooden containers for the shot. They were often decorated with large shells, sometimes covered in a layer of gold. Several daggers and knives were also often attached to the belt: though they might be used in hand-to-hand combat, their chief function was to remove the head of a fallen enemy, which was a prize trophy. Human skulls and bones decorated Asante war-drums, conferring something of the spiritual power of the victim on the army. The Asante did have swords, but their significance was symbolic rather than physical: they represented the power of the state, and were carried by Asante messengers and envoys as proof of their status. The swords themselves had curved blades, often pierced with geometric designs, and gold handles with round guards and pommels.

They were usually carried by the blades, with the handle presented, or resting on the shoulder. In general the Asante relied upon their firearms, even as close-quarter weapons. Firefights often took place in thick undergrowth at only a few paces range.

Costume

The standard dress for male Asante was a large oblong of brightly woven or printed cloth, wrapped around the waist and thrown over the left shoulder rather like the Roman toga. Since this restricted the movement of the left arm, it was usually just wrapped around the waist in time of war, and sometimes gathered up to leave the legs free below the knees. A distinctive item worn by senior Asante commanders was a war-smock, called *batakari*. These reflected the influence of Moslem societies to the north, since they were completely covered with magical talismans said to protect the wearer against harm. Each talisman was encased in a small brightly coloured square of leather or cloth which was then sewn to the smock.

Surviving 19th century photographs of Asante officials often show them wearing bright head-

scarves, and these also feature extensively in contemporary newspaper engravings of warriors. However, it seems likely that most warriors went into action bare-headed, although many wore characteristic caps. Made from animal skin—examples quoted vary from crocodile to leopardskin—these usually fitted over the top and back of the head. Those of ordinary warriors were decorated with large red shells, and sometimes held in place by a chin-strap covered in cowries. Wealthier or more senior men might have caps decorated with gold or silver patterns; and senior officers or commanders had a profusion of gold shells and horns on their caps, which had a large plume of eagle feathers fanning out from the back. Commanders could also be distinguished by the sheer quantity of gold about their persons—necklaces, arm-bands, and finger- and toe-rings. One early 19th-century account speaks of commanders wearing large boots of red leather, perhaps another borrowing from the north; however, these do not feature in later photographs, so presumably their use had died out.

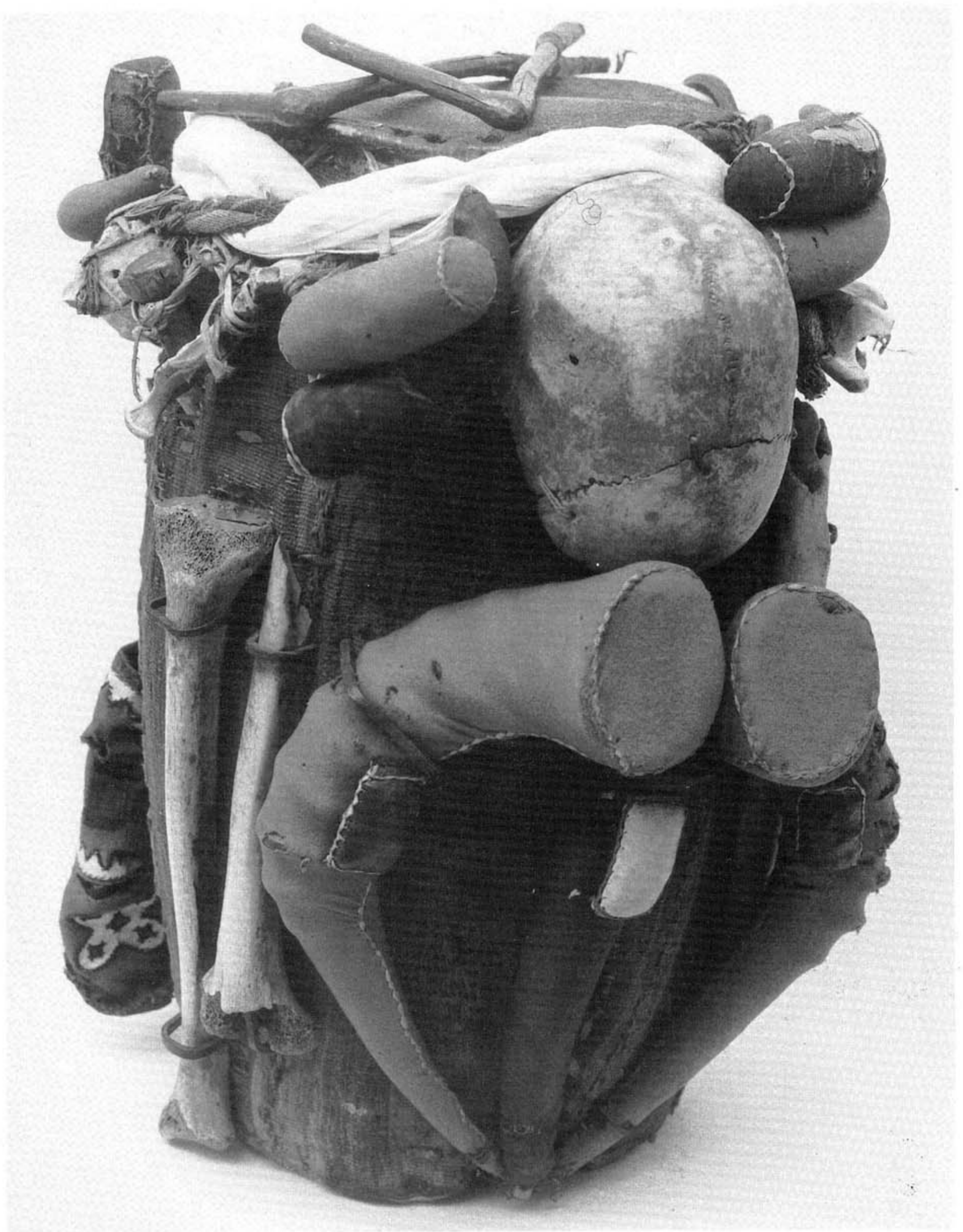
The Asante capital, Kumase, pictured in 1874. (Author's collection)

The Campaign

Wolseley was soon to have an opportunity to test the effectiveness of the Asante military machine. His troops crossed the Pra at the end of January 1874, and advanced up the forest track towards Kumase. His column was approaching the village of Amofo when his advance guard was fired upon. The resulting battle was an effective demonstration of Asante tactics.

Wolseley's troops fanned out on either side of the road, keeping close together, and trying to form a hollow box. They came under a very heavy fire from Asante who remained totally concealed in the undergrowth. Wolseley had realised the dangers of men becoming separated from their comrades in the forest, and his force included a very high proportion of officers; but the psychological effect of fighting an invisible enemy at close range in the smoky forest gloom was most wearing. The Asante were able to manoeuvre rapidly, bringing their firepower to bear on apparent weak spots, and attacks on the flanks alternated with disconcerting rapidity. At one point Wolseley's headquarters was hard pressed. The British finally broke through by alternating short rushes with salvos of cannon-fire.





An Asante war-drum, 1874. The skulls and bones are from defeated enemies. Note that the horns in the foreground have

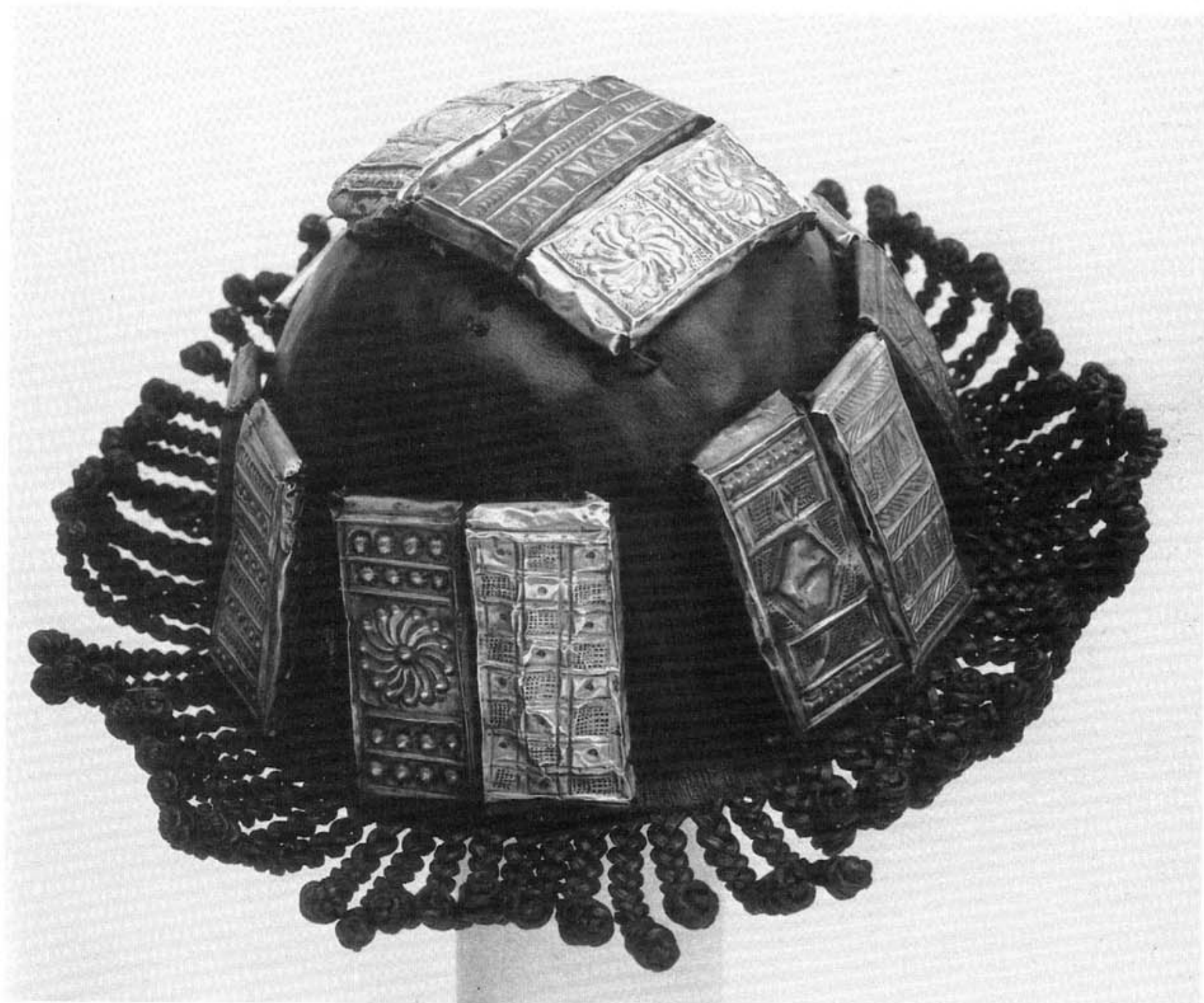
additional charms encased in leather amulets. (National Army Museum)

It was impossible to gain any impression of Asante casualties, since they were most meticulous about removing their dead. Indeed, the only sure indication that the Asante had been repulsed was when their casualties were found on the field. Several times during the battle Asante gunmen infiltrated between British lines, or slipped round to re-take ground that had already been cleared. Wolseley had begun the campaign with the comment that 'Providence has implanted in the heart of every native of Africa a superstitious awe and dread of the white man that prevents the negro from daring to meet us face to face in combat'; the battle of Amofo had surely and deservedly dispelled that illusion.

From Amofo Wolseley pushed on towards Kumase. Nearing the village of Odasu, a few days later, he ran into a stockade across the road. There

was a familiar crash of Asante musketry, and there followed a repetition of Amofo. Wolseley's men stormed the village, and then spent several hours defending it against Asante counterattacks. At last he managed to punch a way through, and a storming party rushed down the road, barely overrunning a number of well-placed Asante ambushes. So swift was this final advance, however, that it pressed right on and into Kumase itself, apparently taking the Asante by surprise. When Wolseley entered the capital it was full of curious crowds, amongst them many warriors who had clearly just come from the fight. Wolseley seized the royal palace, and looting parties began to round up as much Asante gold as they could find. Kofi Karikari himself had fled, however, and the next morning

King Kofi Karikari's cap, taken from Kumase in 1874. (National Army Museum)



the bulk of the population had deserted Kumase. With bad weather brewing, Wolseley organised an immediate retreat to the coast.

His expedition was hailed as a great success in Britain, and there is no doubt that he had defeated the Asante in battle; but the Asante army was still intact. Kofi was not deposed, and no attempt was made to install a more favourable regime in Kumase. It was a curious victory; and Asante was left to its own devices. Perhaps the most damaging aspect of the British invasion had been the blow to Asante prestige, and the consequent weakening of central authority. Kofi was deposed in a palace coup, and there followed a prolonged period of internal struggle which did not end until the accession of *Asantehene* Prempe I in 1888. Prempe had asked the British on the coast to support his cause, and in due course this became a door through which Britain, now pursuing a more expansionist policy in West Africa, sought to influence Asante. Prempe resisted. He was asked to join the Protectorate the British had established on the Gold Coast, but refused. In 1895–96 an expedition was mounted against him. The king and his councillors decided not to resist, and this time British troops marched into Kumase unopposed. Prempe was taken into custody and exiled to the Seychelles. A British resident was established at Kumase.

The 1900 Rebellion

The Asante were far from subdued, however. Resentment built up slowly over the next few years, and erupted into rebellion in 1900 provoked by a heinous insult by the British governor, Sir Frederick Hodgson. Hodgson came up from the Coast in March 1900, and addressed a gathering of Asante chiefs. In the course of his speech he demanded to know why the famous Golden Stool—which had been carefully hidden since Prempe's downfall—had not been brought out for him, as Queen Victoria's representative, to sit upon. Hodgson no doubt considered the stool some sort of throne which he, as master of Asante, should now occupy—but no Asante had ever dared to sit upon the Golden Stool, and to suggest such a thing was outrageous blasphemy. Within a few days the Asante had risen in arms, and Hodgson was besieged in the British fort at Kumase.

With Imperial commitments in South Africa and China, there were few regular troops to spare for his rescue, which fell instead to Colonial troops from across West Africa. For two months Hodgson was besieged, and the relieving columns had a hard fight to reach him. The Asante fought with their traditional 'Dane guns', though a number had acquired more modern breech-loaders, even including a number of .303s. They kept up a very efficient harassing fire on the fort. Under the command of a formidable female member of the royal family, Queen Yaa Asantewa, the Asante built stockades at strategic points around the fort, and along all the tracks. Although the nature of the revolt mitigated against their traditional military organisation, their tactics remained the same: the close-range fire-fight. They perfected a technique of firing and re-loading by three ranks, which produced a terrific volume of fire.

Eventually, however, sufficient troops were assembled in the area, and the fort at Kumase was relieved. The rebellion entered a second phase in which the British went onto the offensive, and the stockades were gradually reduced. Yaa Asantewa's forces were finally defeated on 30 September and the queen herself was captured shortly thereafter. She, too, was sent into exile; yet no great reprisals followed the end of the Asante rebellion. British administrators adopted a more enlightened and sympathetic approach. In due course *Asantehene* Prempe was allowed back to Kumase, and restored to his throne. Eventually the Golden Stool was brought out of hiding and took its rightful place among the sacred royal regalia.

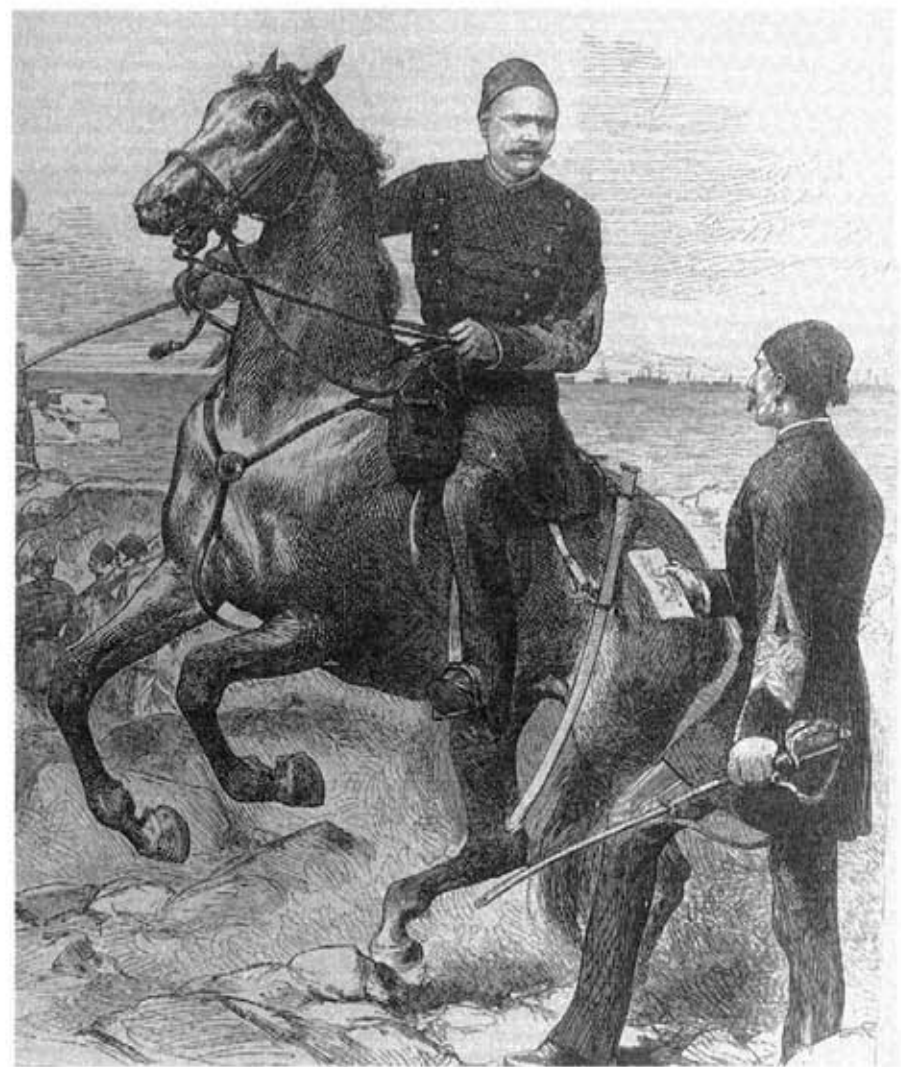
In the long run, one cannot help but wonder whether it was the British or Asante who finally won the long struggle for supremacy.

Egypt 1882

The Egyptian Campaign of 1882 evokes little interest today, partly because it was brief and, for the British, totally successful. Yet it was prompted by strategic considerations of the greatest importance, and it led directly to the long and costly British involvement in the Sudan.

The revolt of the Egyptian Army under Col. Ahmad 'Urabi had its origins in the complex political situation in Egypt. Egypt was nominally a part of the empire of Ottoman Turkey; but since the days of Muhammad Ali in the 1820s–30s it had been ruled by a dynasty of Khedives, who had sought as much independence from Turkey as possible. Nonetheless the social élite which formed the officer class within the army were mostly Turco-Circassians. The lower ranks were drawn from the native Egyptian peasantry, and it was not until the 1860s that Egyptians were allowed to hold officer rank. Even then they could not rise beyond colonel; and when the country's frequent financial difficulties necessitated cuts in pay or temporary retirement, it was the Egyptian officers who were sacrificed for the sake of economy. Moreover, the Turco-Circassians had proved themselves incompetent and inept in the wars against Abyssinia in the 1870s, and the morale and efficiency of the Egyptian Army sunk to a very low level.

Discontent among Egyptian officers within the army was thus one cause of the rebellion; this was exacerbated by the disastrous financial policies of the Khedive Isma'il, who had sanctioned the



Col. Ahmed 'Urabi, the leader of the 1882 Egyptian revolt. He and his fellow officer are wearing blue winter uniform. (Author's collection)

building of the Suez Canal, and his successor, Tawfiq. To pay off crippling foreign debts, Isma'il had proposed a drastic reduction in the strength of

Egyptian troops in camp, 1882. They are wearing the white summer uniform favoured by other ranks during this campaign. (Author's collection)



the army, and the axe naturally hovered over the heads of the Egyptian officers. The European powers, financially committed to the Khedives, were bound to support them. Isma'il was replaced by Tawfiq, but the crisis continued; and the Egyptian officers elected Ahmad 'Urabi, the son of a village sheik who had risen through the ranks, and who was an eloquent speaker, as their representative. 'Urabi was able to capitalise on popular Egyptian feeling against the Turco-Circassian ruling class and the foreign powers who appeared to be propping it up, and an internal squabble within the army soon turned into a nationalist revolt.

Britain's main concern in all this was the Suez Canal. Her imperatives in Africa had always been to safeguard the routes to India. This had led to entanglements in southern Africa, and, once the Canal was built in the 1860s—drastically reducing the sailing time to India—in Egypt. The Disraeli government had bought up a controlling interest in the Canal, and anything which threatened the stability of Egypt was perceived as a threat to

British interests in India. 'Urabi and Britain therefore moved rapidly into confrontation.

An Anglo-Egyptian fleet was sent to Alexandria to support Tawfiq; and 'Urabi began to repair the series of forts which guarded the port. The British admiral sent an ultimatum to 'Urabi demanding that he cease work on the forts; and on 11 July 1882 the fleet opened fire. The Egyptian troops manned their guns bravely and efficiently, but the concentrated firepower of the fleet systematically reduced the forts to rubble. Widespread anti-European rioting erupted in Alexandria the next day, and British troops were landed to restore order. 'Urabi himself withdrew to the south of the town, and prepared for a British attack.

Command of the British expeditionary force was once more given to Sir Garnet Wolseley, who tackled it with characteristic thoroughness. A combined invasion of troops from Britain and India was planned, and, after much spreading of false information, Wolseley landed at Port Said, the northern outlet of the Canal, while the Indian contingent landed at Suez at the southern end. The two forces met at Ismailia, a small town mid-way along the Canal. It was Wolseley's intention to

Egyptian gunners attempt to save a Krupp gun from the advancing British at Tel-el-Kebir. (Author's collection)



push west, following the course of the Sweet-Water Canal, striking the Nile delta at Zag-a-Zig, a point some 50 miles north of Cairo. 'Urabi had initially been surprised by Wolseley's moves, but managed to amass some 12,000 men at Tel-el-Kebir along the projected British line of advance. By the time Wolseley approached them, some estimates suggest that they had increased to 25,000 infantry, 30,000 irregular cavalry, and 70 guns.

The Egyptian Army of the period was made up of infantry battalions, each one consisting of four *baluks*, or companies, of roughly 200 men apiece. The years of neglect had had their effect on training and morale, but the ordinary soldiers were capable of being both competent and brave; and, if the Turco-Circassian officers were generally inept, it was mostly the Egyptian officers who had joined the rebellion, and independent observers were impressed by their proficiency. The uniforms of the regulars were largely European in style, apart from a red fez, or *tarbush*, with a black tassel. In winter the troops wore a blue uniform with white trim, and in summer a plain white one of jacket, trousers and gaiters. Contemporary illustrations of the 1882 campaign show the white uniform, although officers seem to have preferred their dark blue summer frockcoats. Equipment was simple: a black leather waist-belt with a single ammunition pouch, and a bayonet scabbard at the rear. The black leather pack and blanket roll, where worn, were secured with simple straps over the shoulders. Some illustrations show a canvas haversack over the right shoulder. Soldiers' weapons were the comparatively modern Remington rolling-block rifle and its brass-hilted sword bayonet. Officers carried Eastern-pattern swords. Artillery consisted of 80mm and 90mm breech-loading Krupp guns, and 90mm rifled muzzle-loading brass howitzers. Most of 'Urabi's cavalry seem to have been irregular tribesmen, who wore their traditional white robes and turbans, and carried antiquated firearms and swords.

The first engagement of the campaign took place when the British vanguard ran into Egyptians preparing to defend the Kassasin Lock. After some initial fighting, the Egyptians fell back, and the British cavalry, arriving at night, fell on them in the spectacular 'moonlight charge'. Caught disorganised, the Egyptians were heavily defeated.



The dark blue coat worn by 'Urabi at Tel-el-Kebir. The buttons have a star and crescent design. (National Army Museum)

Wolseley then pushed on to the main defensive position at Tel-el-Kebir.

The Egyptian position was a strong one. Impressive earthworks—a deep ditch and a high, wide rampart—straddled the Canal, squarely blocking the British advance. 'Urabi's men were well prepared. Wolseley, reluctant to risk the inevitable casualties of a frontal assault in daylight, spent several days planning a night attack—a notoriously difficult manoeuvre to accomplish over broken ground. To his credit, it worked perfectly. On the night of 12 September 1882 Wolseley moved his carefully briefed troops forward across the 12 miles from Kassasin to Tel-el-Kebir. When dawn broke, they were only a few hundred yards from the Egyptian trenches. As soon as they were discovered, the Egyptians opened up a tremendous fire, and the Highland Brigade, on the British right



Rudolph Slatin—'Slatin Pasha'—an Austrian in the service of the Egyptians, captured and imprisoned by the Mahdists. Apart from the boots, he is wearing the specified Ansar

uniform. He has a large sash around his waist, which obscures any patches on the front of his *jibbeh*. The ammunition belt is typical of those made by the Mahdists. (Royal Collection)

The Sudan

and somewhat ahead of the line, broke into a charge. There was a fierce fight for the parapet, but at last the Highlanders overran the defences and the Egyptian force broke, to be pursued by the British cavalry.

Tel-el-Kebir broke the back of the rebellion. 'Urabi surrendered his sword a few days later, and the British marched into Cairo unopposed. 'Urabi was subsequently tried, but his dignified defence won public sympathy, and he was exiled rather than executed for treason. Tawfiq was confirmed on his throne, and the British grip tightened over Egypt. The Egyptian Army was reorganised under British officers. There was much fighting still to come in the region, however: with Egypt, Britain inherited her southern colony, the Sudan, where a far more serious nationalist and religious revolt was brewing.

In many respects, Britain's assumption of authority in Egypt following the suppression of the 'Urabi revolt was bad historical timing, since it was to lead to her most serious military commitment in northern Africa—the campaigns against the *Mahdiyya*, the state of the Sudanese Mahdi. Yet the causes of this series of costly wars had little to do with Britain. The Sudan had been incorporated into Egypt by the conquests of Muhammed Ali, and was administered as a provincial colony. The Sudan is one of the largest countries in Africa, a vast inhospitable tract of desert and semi-desert, where

Mahmud Ahmad, the Mahdist general captured at Atbara, photographed shortly after the battle. He wears an ornate amir's *jibbeh*, and his *imma* in the Mahdist style. (Bryan Maggs)



communications become difficult a few miles from the life-line of the Nile. The Egypt of the Khedives lacked the power or the resources to administer it efficiently. By the time of Tel-el-Kebir the Sudanese tribes, discontented with Egyptian interference in their traditional customs, with taxation and with corruption, were ripe for revolt.

When the uprising did come, it was led by an inspired and mystical religious leader. Muhammad Ahmad was a Danaqla Arab from the Dongola province of northern Sudan. He was born on an island in the Nile in 1844, and his early life was

A young Ansar warrior with a throwing spear. Although he is clearly of no rank, his *jibbeh* is still quite ornate. (R. Ruggeri)



marked by a scholarly devotion to Islam. In 1881 Muhammad Ahmad declared himself *al-Mahdi*, 'the proclaimed one', an apostle of the Prophet whose coming was promised in the beliefs of some Islamic sects. The Mahdi's initial supporters were from the poorest sectors of the riverine Arab community, to whom the promise of paradise had an immediate appeal, but his cause spread rapidly, offering as it did both fundamentalist religious certainty and a nationalist rejection of the ungodly ways of the 'Turkish' oppressors. The Mahdi claimed that the Prophet had appeared to him in a dream and ordered him to pray in the great mosques of the East, as far afield as Constantinople; he therefore called a *jihad*, or holy war, against all those who opposed him, and set out to establish his rule throughout the Middle East.

His first objective was to drive the Egyptians out of the Sudan, and his rise was so meteoric that his followers believed it miraculous. The Mahdi had deserted his original homeland on the Nile, and established a base in the inhospitable wastes of the western Kordofan province. Here he easily overwhelmed small Egyptian patrols sent to arrest him. By 1882 his following was so great that he was able to lay siege to the provincial capital, El Obeid. In January 1883 it fell, giving the Mahdi's cause an enormous moral and—with the capture of the garrison's armoury—military boost.

The Egyptians responded by sending a large force down from Egypt under the command of a British general, William Hicks, 'Hicks Pasha'. Hicks' force was totally destroyed at the battle of Shaykan in November 1883. At the same time, a Mahdist supporter in the east, Uthman Digna ('Osman Digna') succeeded in calling out the semi-nomadic Beja tribes in the hills of the Red Sea littoral. The British government was seriously worried by the deteriorating conditions in the Sudan, but was reluctant to commit British troops to the area. Instead it sent the enigmatic and charismatic Col. Charles Gordon to the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, at the junction of the Blue and White Niles, with orders to make what he could of the situation, and if necessary to withdraw the Egyptian garrisons. The Mahdi moved up and established a camp at Omdurman, across the river from Khartoum, and laid siege to it. Gordon refused to retreat, and Britain was forced to mount

Abyssinian warriors, 1868

1: Wealthy warrior

2: Chief

3: Lower class warrior





Abyssinian warriors, 1868

1: Commander

2: Chief's retainer

3: Warrior

Asante warriors, 1873-1900

1: 'Gunman'

2: General

3: Sword-bearer



Egyptian troops, 1882

1: Infantryman, summer dress

2: Infantryman, winter dress

3: Officer



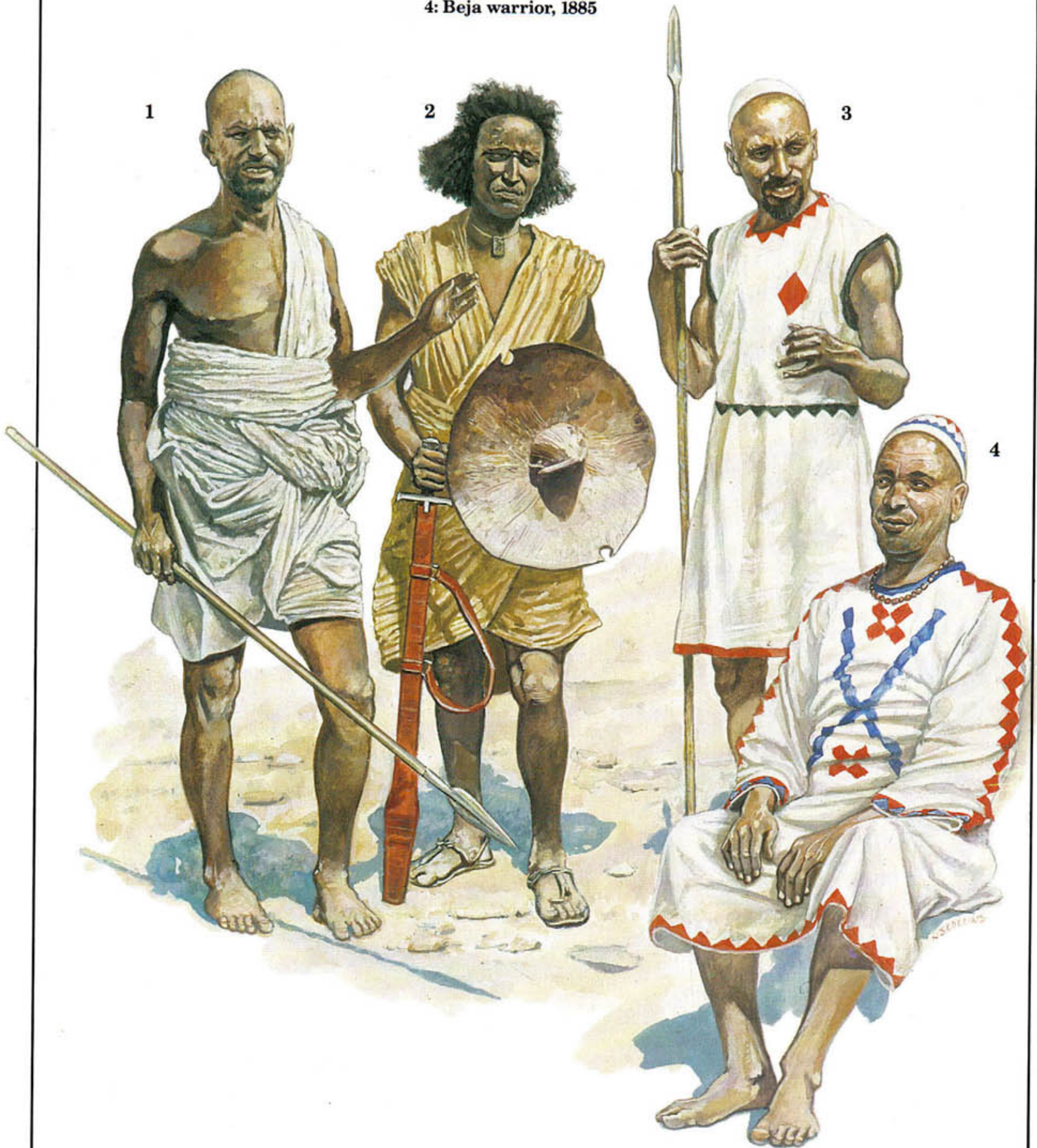
Early Mahdists, Sudan, 1882-5

1: Riverine Arab, 1884

2: Beja warrior, 1884

3: Mahdist Ansar, 1884

4: Beja warrior, 1885



Mahdists, 1885-98
1: Warrior
2: Amir
3: Standard-bearer



Mahdists, 1898

1: *Jihadiyya* rifleman

2: *Ansar*

3: *Khashkhashan* rifleman, Omdurman



Miscellaneous warriors, 1890s
1: Somali, 'Mad Mullah' campaigns
2: Fulani horseman, N. Nigeria
3: Nandi warrior, Kenya

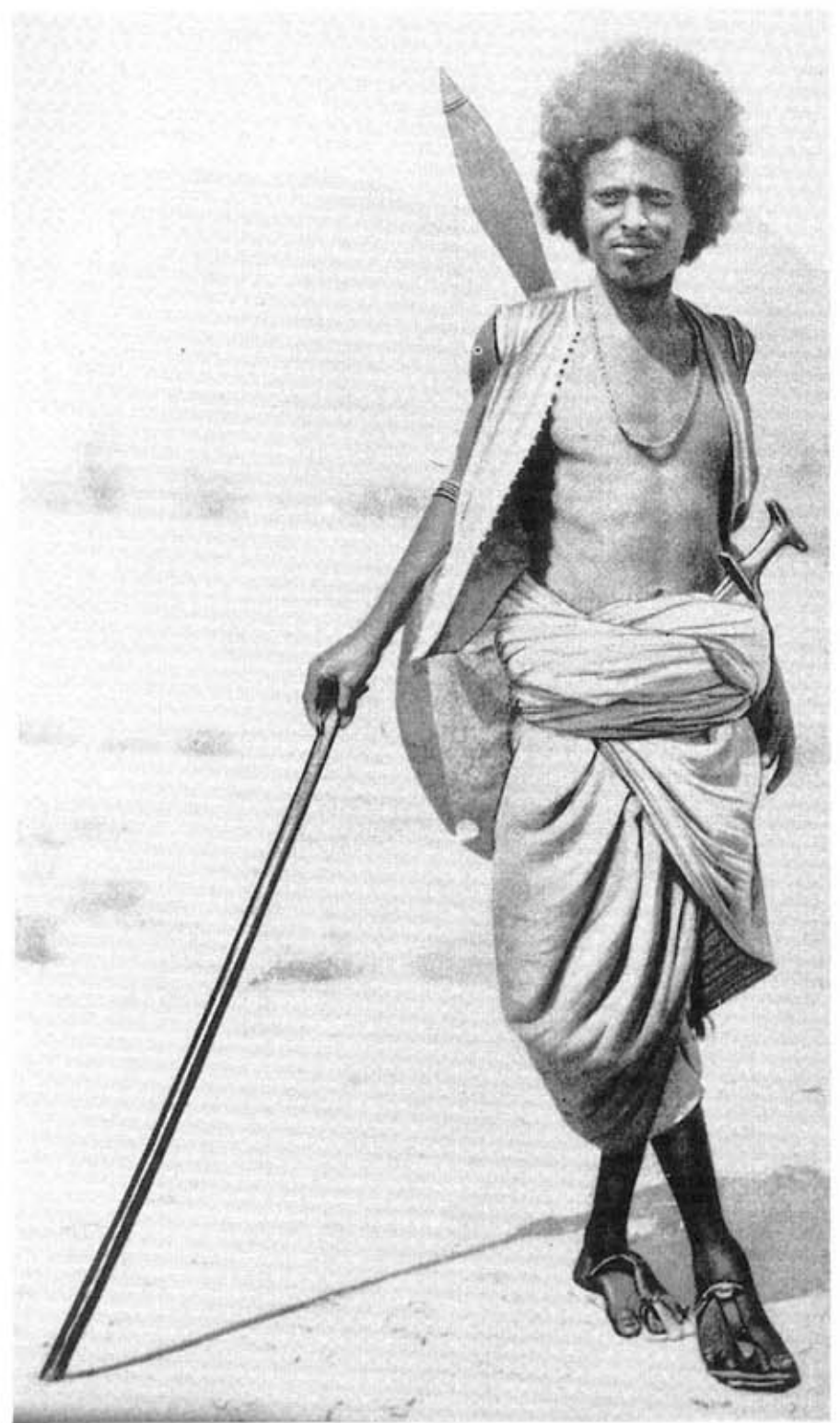


a relief expedition to extricate him. The Mahdists contested its advance, and stormed Khartoum before it could be relieved. Gordon died under their spears on 26 January 1885, two days before the relief force reached him. Curiously, the Mahdi did not survive him for long: he died six months later, probably from typhus.

The death of the Mahdi was far from the end of the *Mahdiyya*, however. He was succeeded by one of his early followers who had risen to power with him, the Khalifa Abdullahi. The Anglo-Egyptian forces fell back to southern Egypt, while Uthman Diqna's Beja pinned them in their coastal forts along the Red Sea. Under the Khalifa the early expansion of the *Mahdiyya* was consolidated, and a serious attempt was made to establish an administration, based on Islamic law, that cut across tribal divisions. The attempts to export the religious revolution were less successful, however; a Mahdist invasion of Egypt was defeated by Anglo-Egyptian forces at the battle of Toski in 1888, and a prolonged struggle with Abyssinia wasted military resources. In 1896 the British began the reconquest of the Sudan, to exact revenge for Gordon's death, to restore Egyptian rule, and to forestall the intervention of rival European powers. Dongola province fell following the Anglo-Egyptian victory at Atbara in April 1898, and by September the British had advanced via the Nile to Omdurman. On 2 September the Mahdist army hurled itself to destruction on the British Maxims. The Khalifa fled to the west, and retained considerable support in Kordofan until his defeat on 24 November 1899 at Umm Diwaykarat, where he was killed.

Costume

The British called the Mahdi's followers Dervishes, a corruption of the Persian word *darvish*, which meant originally a beggar. The Mahdi himself, however, followed the example of the Prophet and called his supporters *Ansar*, meaning 'helpers'. Because the movement was a religious rather than a tribal one, it strove to overcome regional differences, although the tension between central authority and leadership in the distant provinces is one of the themes of Mahdist history. The first Ansar were peasants, and the Mahdi, a pious ascetic, advocated virtuous poverty as a counter to worldly sin. Early on, therefore, the badge of



A Beja warrior from the Red Sea coast, in typical costume. (Author's collection)

Mahdism became the *jibbeh*, a white cotton smock worn by the Sudanese poor. As the *jibbeh* became torn, so it was patched, and the use of patches also proclaimed adherence to the Ansar. After the fall of El Obeid, the Mahdi prescribed a uniform for his followers. This consisted of the *jibbeh*, white trousers (*siraval*), sandal (*sayidan*), a girdle of plaited straw (*karaba*), and a white turban (*imma*) and skull-cap (*taggia*). The *imma* was wrapped around the *taggia* in a distinctive way, which was in itself a badge of Mahdism: the loose end was left dangling behind the left ear, while the successive folds formed an inverted 'V' above the forehead. A string of beads, *sibba*, completed the outfit.

It took some time for this uniform to spread



A group of friendly Beja, photographed c.1898. Their appearance is typical of Uthman Diqna's followers. (Bryan Maggs)

beyond the army under the Mahdi's immediate control, in Kordofan and later Omdurman. The Ansar who disputed the advance of the Gordon Relief Expedition across the Bayuda Desert, and fought at Abu Klea and Abu Kru, were mostly local Arabs of the Ja'aliyin and Danaqla tribes, who had not yet adopted Mahdist uniform. They wore their normal clothes: a discoloured white robe, the *tobe*, worn around the waist and fastened over the left shoulder. They shaved their heads, and many wore a white skull-cap. The force was stiffened by a number of troops from Omdurman, however, and these did wear the *jibbeh*, although of a rather different pattern to the more familiar later type. These early *jibbehs* had short sleeves, or no sleeves at all; and the symbolic patches were small lozenges or diamonds, with narrow 'dragon's teeth' patterning at the hems and waist.

In the eastern Sudan, the Beja sections—the Hadendowa, Bisharin and Beni-Amer—did not

begin to adopt the *jibbeh* until late 1885. They went into battle wearing either the *tobe* or a pair of loose cotton trousers. These started out as white, but soon weathered to all shades of dusty grey and terracotta. The Beja did not originally shave their heads, but wore their hair teased out into extravagant styles. They were Kipling's 'Fuzzy-Wuzzies', whose fierce charges, at Tamai and elsewhere, 'broke a British square'. When the Beja did at last adopt Mahdist dress, their *jibbehs* bore bright red and blue geometric patches, and their skull-caps were also embroidered.

As the Mahdiyya became more established, so its uniforms became regularised. Early converts made their own *jibbehs*, and sewed the patches on themselves. By the 1890s factories making *jibbehs* had been set up at Omdurman and in the provincial capitals. Designs became more standard. New victories, which brought an influx of prisoners to join the ranks of the Ansar, stimulated mass production, and there may have been periodic issues of new clothing to the main army at Omdurman. It is doubtful if particular tribes wore

uniform *jibbehs*, but under these circumstances it is possible that certain patterns were repeated in some areas¹.

A standard *jibbeh* of the late 1880s and 1890s was symmetrical, with the same patches on the front and back. There were two or three large rectangular patches on the body and skirt, with one or occasionally two patches on the top of the sleeves, and a patch on either side. The neck opening usually had a triangular patch pointing down the torso. Contemporary British sources suggested that the Ja'aliyin tribe wore *jibbehs* with blue patches, and the western Baqqara red and black patches; but these were the most popular colours and, although these may have been factory colours, it is unlikely that they were issued on a strict tribal basis. Other colours were also common, notably olive green; khaki and yellow. Clothing from captured Egyptian uniforms was often cut up to make patches. Although the majority of the Ansar probably had very simple *jibbehs*, surviving examples reveal a surprising sophistication of pattern. Neck openings and hems were often edged

with coloured strips and the patches themselves decorated with contrasting or complementary borders. Dark blue patches might be edged in light blue, red in black, or khaki in green. Small dark strips were often stitched under the arms, and narrow pointed bands ran vertically up from the bottom hem. Some patches were striped.

Mahdist commanders, *amirs*, seem to have worn no badges of rank as such, though their importance was reflected in the quality of their *jibbehs*. Amirs' *jibbehs* reveal the full potential of the different combinations and colours of patches. They may also have been distinguished by two particular designs: an ornately embroidered breastpocket, usually on the lefthand side, and large 'spade' patterns on the side of the skirt. These were usually in dark colours, often black, probably edged in a contrasting colour, and sometimes covered in gold or silver thread. Among the most senior Mahdist commanders, however, it seems to have been the fashion to wear unostentatious *jibbehs*, to emphasise their piety rather than flaunt their position. The

¹For a detailed study, see 'The Mahdist Patched Jibbeh', *Military Illustrated* No. 18, April/May 1989.

Egyptian troops and Ansar dead after the battle of Omdurman. The patched *jibbeh* and *taggia* skull-cap are clearly visible on the corpse on the left. (Bryan Maggs)



Khalifa himself is said to have worn a plain white *jibbeh*, and one exists which was taken from either his body, or that of one of his highest ranking generals, after Umm Diwaykarat: it has a simple pattern of light and dark brown patches, edged in blue and grey.

Much was made by the British at the time of the reconquest of ring-mail armour, apparently worn by Mahdist amirs. This certainly did exist, and examples survive in regimental and other museums. However, it was usually only worn for the occasional ceremonial parades held at Omdurman, and it is extremely unlikely that it was ever worn into battle. The mail shirts and Oriental helmets prompted British observers to suggest that the armour had its origins in the Crusades, but this is fanciful; it probably owed more to similar armour worn by horsemen in the western Sudan. When it was used, the mail was worn over quilted coats similar in shape to the *jibbeh*, often white with broad bands of colour, though they were not actually

Ansar prisoners marched into captivity after Omdurman. The patches on the *jibbehs* are visible on those nearest the foreground: note that some are wearing turbans, others just skull-caps. (Bryan Maggs)

patched. They were also slashed up the front and back of the skirt to facilitate riding.

Organisation

The organisation of the *Mahdiyya* reflected its regional nature. Early in his career the Mahdi divided the Ansar between his three Khalifas, or apostles. These divisions were known as *rayya*, or 'flags', a flag being both the unit of organisation and the standard which represented it. The Black Flag, the *al-rayya al-zarqa*, was commanded by the Khalifa Abdullahi, and was drawn from the west, containing the Baqqara and most of the *jihadiyya*. The Red Flag, *al-rayya al-hamra*, led by the Khalifa Muhammad al-Sharif, was drawn from the riverine tribes north of Khartoum; and the Green Flag, *al-rayya al-khadra* of the Khalifa Ali Hilu, from the tribes between the Blue and White Nile. Following the death of the Mahdi, the Black Flag became the most important section, commanded by the Khalifa's brother Yaqub. It became the main regular army stationed at Omdurman.

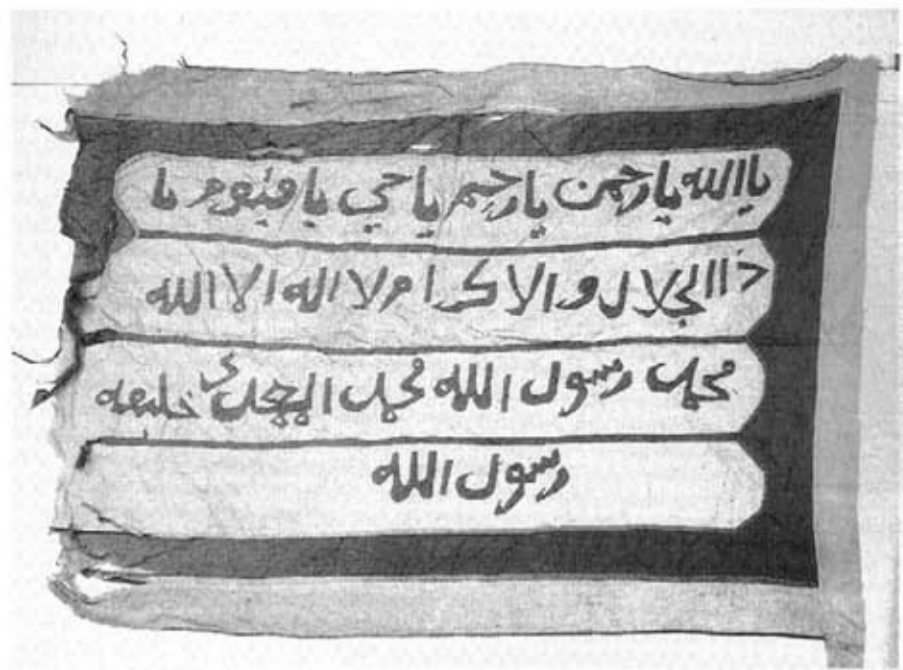
The *jihadiya* was the Mahdi's earliest attempt to organise a regular standing army. These were men armed with rifles, many of them blacks from the



southern Sudan, who had been raised and trained in the large slave-raiding armies there. Others were captured members of the Egyptian Army who were pressed into changing sides. They were therefore used to military life and well acquainted with firearms. Each flag within the army was divided up into *rubs*, 'quarters': battalions of irregular size, which averaged between 800 and 1200 men apiece. Each *rub*—as the name implies—was broken down into four sections, one administrative and three combatant. One of the latter consisted of the *jihadiyya*, which was further divided into 'standards' of 100 men, under an amir known as a *ra's mi'a*, a 'head of a hundred'; and then into *muqaddamiyya*, sections of 25 men, under a *muqaddam*. Of the remaining combatant sections, one consisted of swordsmen and spearmen in tribal and sub-tribal divisions, while the other consisted of cavalry, usually from the horse-owning Baqqara. The proportions of troops in any single engagement depended on the district; the *jihadiyya* and some of the tribal troops lived in barracks in the provincial capitals, but the numbers of Baqqara were not always evenly spread about the country. Amirs such as Uthman Diqna, a long way from the central authority of Omdurman, had their own standards.

The flags themselves were individually made, but followed particular patterns. They were usually oblongs, about 4ft by 3ft, and made by stitching strips of cloth together. Each carried phrases in Arabic, usually in four lines, calling on God, the Prophet, and declaring the Mahdi's relationship to the Prophet. The flags were usually white with coloured borders. The letters themselves were often picked out in different colours—the word 'Allah', for example, often being embroidered in green—and the borders were sometimes broken with contrasting strips. The design was often on one side only, the other being plain brown or white. The flag was attached to a spear by a cloth tube down one edge. Each commander and sub-commander had his own flag to which his troops would rally. Duplicate flags do exist, and may have indicated sub-divisions within the same unit. The Khalifa's Black Flag itself was 6ft square, and mounted on a 20ft bamboo pole.

The most regular unit in the Ansar army was the *Mulazimiyya*, the Khalifa's bodyguard. These were raised during the administrative changes which

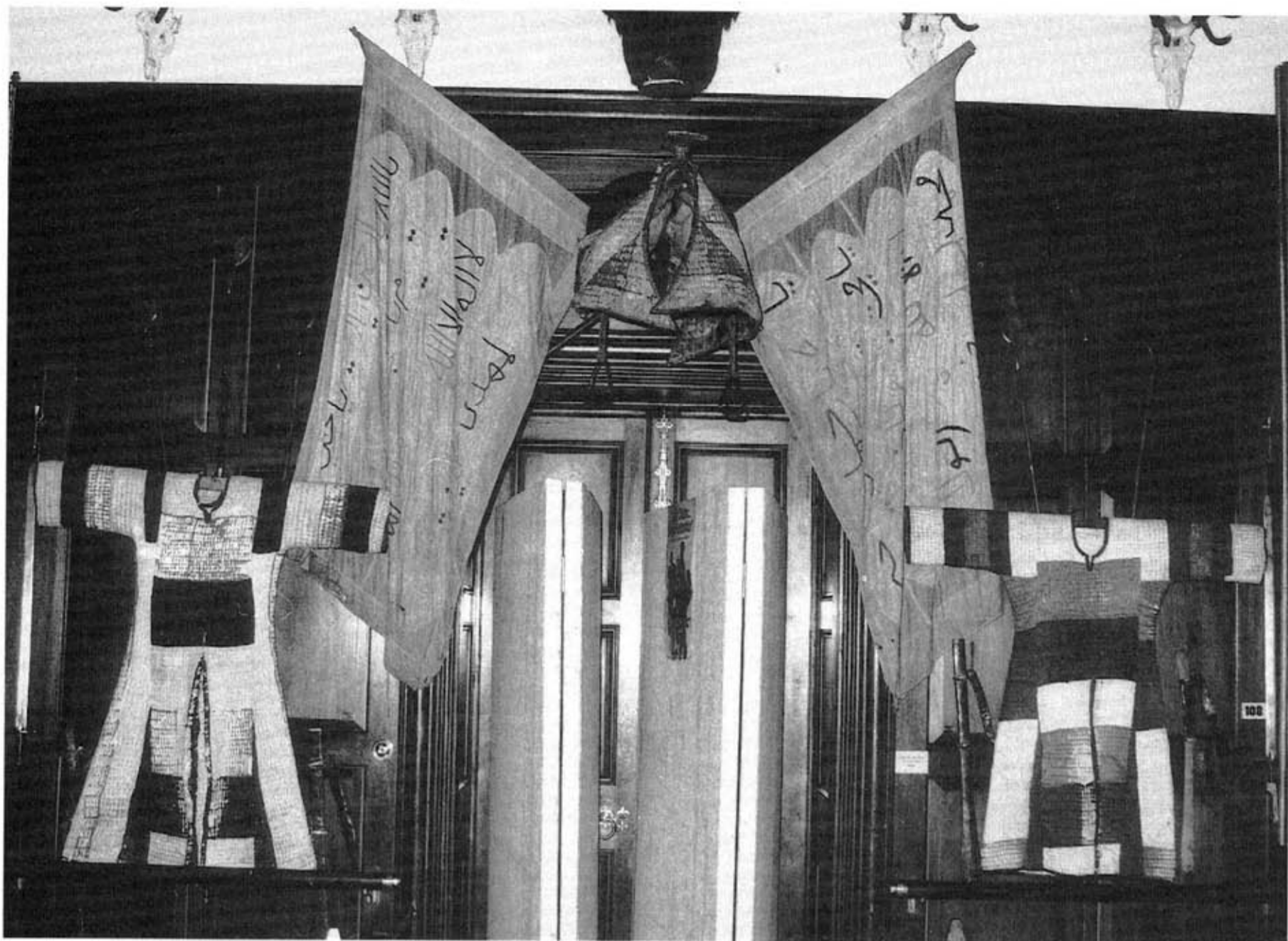


A Mahdist banner. This is the most typical type of design and lettering. (National Army Museum)



Another popular design of Mahdist banner. The lettering was often picked out in different colours, and the border sometimes broken by different coloured strips. (National Army Museum)

marked the Khalifa's consolidation of power within the *Mahdiyya*, and reflected his need to have troops more directly under his personal control. By the time of Omdurman they were 10,000 strong, commanded by Uthman Shaykh al-Din, and divided into 18 *rubs*, each divided into eight to ten standards of 100 men each. They contained swordsmen and spearmen, but the majority were armed with rifles. They were the one unit in the Mahdist army who did wear a uniform: *jibbehs* with large red and blue patches, a red *imma* with the loose end drawn under the chin, and probably a red waist-sash. A sub-unit of the *Mulazimiyya*, the 50-strong *Khashkhashan*, wore a red zouave-style bolero



Two quilted coats, worn by Mahdist amirs under mail armour on ceremonial occasions. Note also the banners, which appear to be of the same design. (Blair Atholl Collection)

over the *jibbeh*, and were armed with large muzzle-loading elephant guns mounted on tripods. Some senior amirs also wore red *immas* to signify their allegiance to the Khalifa's household.

Weapons

Tactically, the Mahdists screened their assaults with harassing fire from the *jihadiyya*, and mounted shock charges with their swordsmen and spearmen. A number of Mahdist guns were obsolete percussion types, but most were single-shot breech-loaders, notably the Remington rolling-block pattern issued to the Egyptians, of which thousands fell into Mahdist hands after the capture of El Obeid, and many more with each subsequent victory. They also had a number of Martini-Henrys and French and Italian rifles. The spearmen carried a large broad-bladed spear for thrusting, and a number of lighter weapons for throwing. The

sword was straight, with a simple cross-guard, and worn in a red leather scabbard over the left shoulder. Daggers were sometimes worn strapped to the left arm under the *jibbeh*.

The Ansar also had a number of small brass mountain guns, Krupp guns captured from the Egyptians, and multi-barrelled machine guns, though the latter do not seem to have been used much in action. The guns were manned by former Egyptian artillerymen pressed into Ansar service, and were only used in defence, in towns or on Nile steamers, three of which the Mahdists possessed.

In battle, the Ansar were brave to the point of fanaticism, buoyed up by belief that death in battle in a *jihad* opened the gates of Paradise. Properly used, their tactics were extremely effective, and on a number of occasions their charges penetrated British squares. Used unimaginatively, however, as at Omdurman, they could be suicidal, faith being a poor armour in a frontal attack across open ground on a line defended by Maxims.

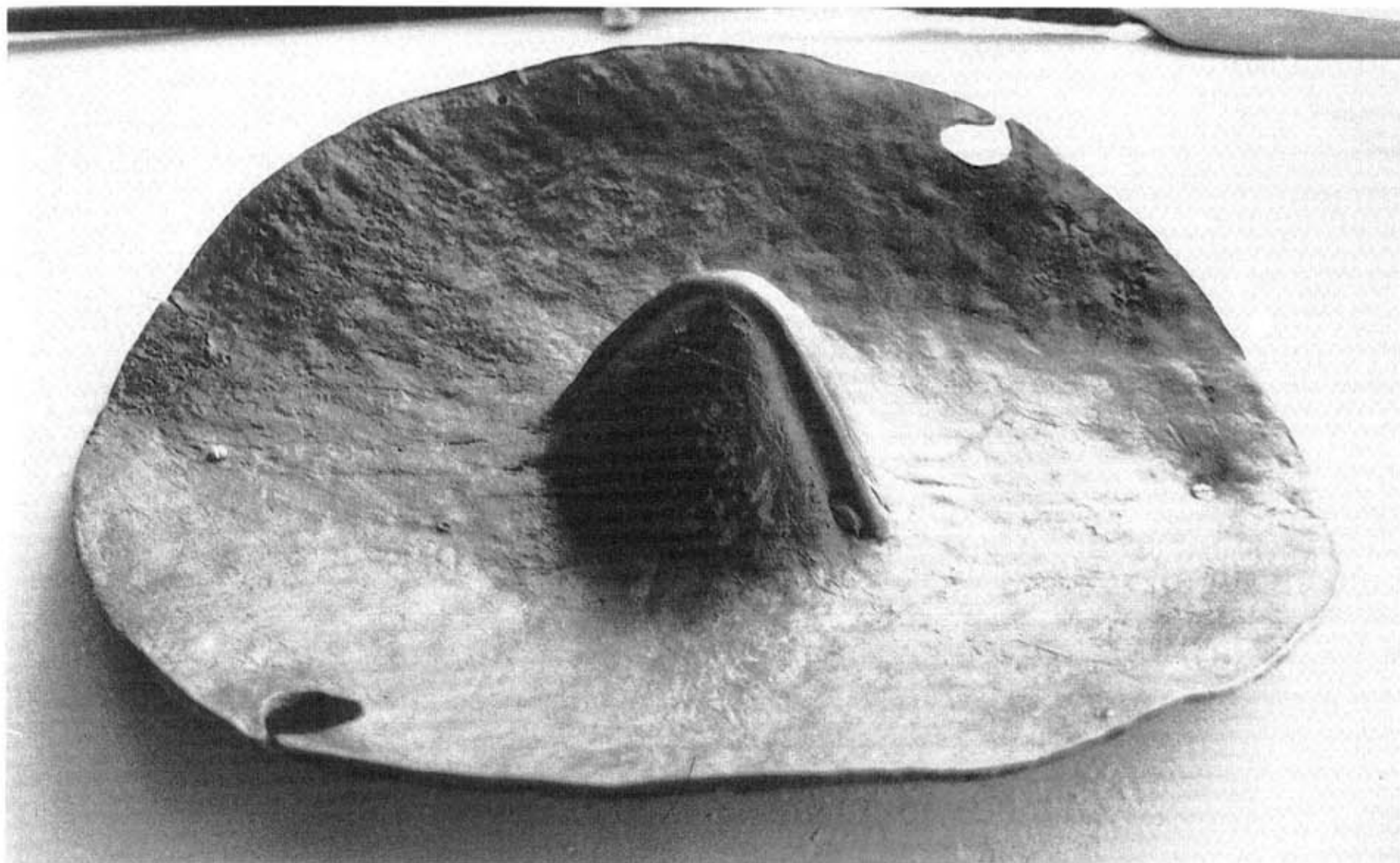
Kenya, Northern Nigeria, Somaliland

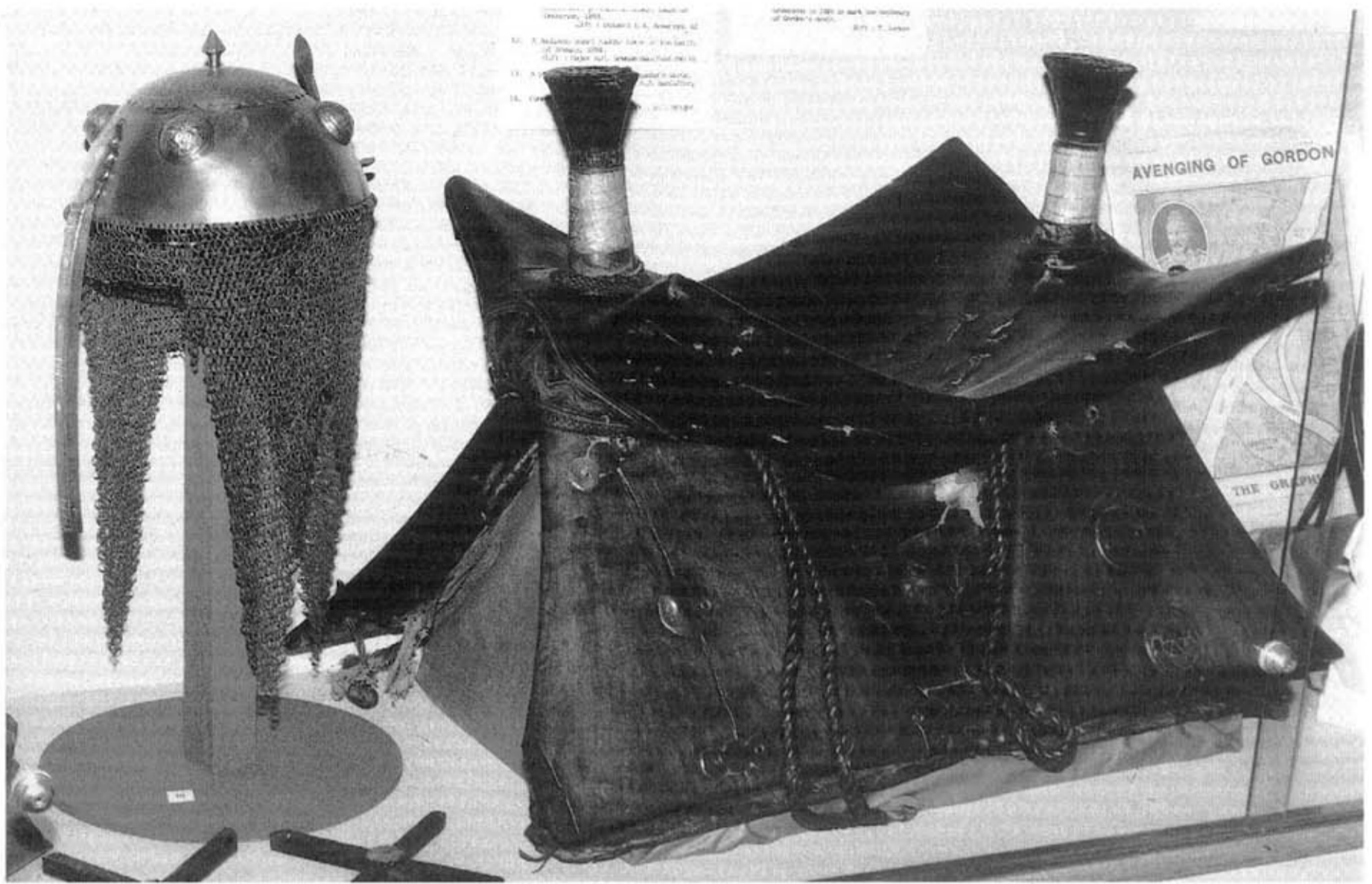
Towards the end of Queen Victoria's reign the British extended their power over a huge band of country running right across Africa into which they had hitherto been content to trade. This move was prompted by the 'scramble for Africa', when the European powers carved up what was left of free Africa between them. From the sub-Saharan grasslands of the upper Niger in the west, to the head-waters of the Nile and eastwards into Uganda and Kenya, the British found themselves forced to protect their commercial interests from European rivals. The result was a series of wars, usually waged by African troops under British officers, and under the auspices of commercial chartered companies (such as the Royal Niger Company) rather than the imperial government, which placed the local inhabitants more tightly under British control. The use of African troops and improved military technology, such as the Maxim gun, allowed the British to intervene directly in areas which had previously been considered beyond their range.

The Nandi

The response of African groups was varied. Few were united enough to offer major military opposition, and many felt collaboration with the newcomers to be the only practical policy. Thus some sections of the famous Masai tribe in Kenya opposed the advance of European power, whilst others allied themselves to it. One group which steadfastly opposed the British in East Africa were the Nandi, who lived in the hills to the north-east of Lake Victoria. Their resistance lasted from 1897 to 1905, and took the form of attacks on European traders, outposts and railways. A number of punitive expeditions were mounted to suppress them, each more or less of a pattern: African troops in British employ marching into the Nandi country, and bringing the warriors to battle. Initially the Nandi had no fear of firearms, having discovered that it was possible to overrun Europeans while they were reloading. They therefore attacked with great courage and daring; but the changed military conditions of the 1890s meant that they were usually driven off by Maxim and rapid breech-

A typical round hide shield, carried by the Beja of the eastern Sudan. (Nottingham Castle)





A fine Sudanese helmet, taken at Omdurman—probably from the armoury, which was extensively looted after the battle; also a camel-saddle, taken at Atbara. (Royal Engineers Museum)

loading volley fire. A favourite Nandi tactic was to attack encampments at night, and on several occasions their charges penetrated protective thorn barriers, *zaribas*, before they were repulsed. Nandi resistance finally collapsed in 1905 following the death of an important leader, apparently under treacherous circumstances.

Nandi society was divided up into a series of territorial wards, and the young warriors in each ward were responsible for the defence of their districts. They slept in a common hut, which gave them a sense of unity, and made them, in a very general sense, a standing army. The *orgoiyot* or traditional leader of the tribe was able to call out the warriors from each ward who therefore formed a 'national' army. In appearance, the Nandi warriors were similar to the more familiar Masai, although their battle finery was not quite so ornate. They wore a length of hide, coloured with red ochre, wrapped around their bodies; and their shields were the large oval Masai type, decorated

with simple devices painted in ochre. They wore headdresses of lion- and monkey-skin. Their weapons consisted of the *sime*, a short sword in a leather scabbard, common to many East African groups; and either a bow and small quiver of arrows, or a long-bladed spear. Towards the end of their campaigns they did acquire a number of firearms, but remained poorly trained.

The Nigerian Emirates

In northern Nigeria, the Moslem emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate had more formidable military organisations, but these were ultimately no more successful against the Maxim gun. Sokoto was a confederation of individual emirates, most of whom were Hausa people, though some, like Nupe and Ilorin in the south-west, were mainly Fulani. This vast sub-Saharan area was ideal cavalry country, and the emirates had perfected cavalry tactics in constant slave raids—Islam permitting the enslavement of 'non-believers'—and in internecine warfare. Each emirate had its own army, though the dominant power—Sokoto—could call them all out in support in times of a major threat.

Britain moved into the upper Niger principally

to prevent the expansion of the French from their colonies further west. In January 1897 the Royal Niger Company invaded Nupe and Ilorin, and effectively cut them out of the Caliphate. The attacks of the Fulani horsemen were easily countered by the British squares. When the Africans went on the defensive, their walled towns, so characteristic of the area, were no match for modern artillery. In the two-day battle (26–27 January 1897) at Bida against the Nupe Fulani, 500 Company troops with modern rifles, six Maxims, and seven field pieces repeatedly defeated 20,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry. Company losses amounted to eight killed and nine wounded, while the Nupe casualties ran into hundreds. In 1900 the Company moved against the remaining emirates, which were defeated piecemeal by 1903. Although much greater use was made of defensive strategy, it was not sufficient to overcome the technological imbalance.

The appearance, weapons and tactics of the western Sudanic Emirates were largely similar. Each force contained a very high proportion of cavalry. Some of these, the emir's bodyguard, were heavily armoured, with both horse and rider covered in brightly coloured quilted cotton armour, and some men wearing mail shirts. Most, however, were light cavalry, who wore flowing robes, usually white, and turbans bound tightly around the head and under the chin. The Fulani sometimes wore large straw hats over their turbans. Horse furniture was essentially Arabic in style. Traditional weapons consisted of a shield—a small round 'target' for the Fulani and a much larger oblong for the Hausa—a lance and a number of spears. Swords were worn in scabbards over the shoulder, like those in the Sudan, and were either straight with a simple cross-guard, or curved, with no guard. Light bows and arrows were also used. The infantry were similarly dressed and armed although, lacking the social standing of the cavalry, they were probably less impressive to look at.

On the march, the warriors of the northern Niger followed the traditional Moslem battle formation, specified by Mohammed: an advance guard, main body, and rearguard, protected by wings on either side. Traditional tactics employed the cavalry as shock troops, with the infantry exploiting any gaps that were opened in the enemy line. By the 1890s



A particularly ornate amir's *jibbeh*. Note the pocket design and the heavily embroidered 'spade' shapes on the sides of the skirts. (Blair Atholl Collection)

there were large numbers of guns in the area although, as usual, their quality was variable. This brought about a change in tactical emphasis, with a body of riflemen trying to break up the enemy line before the cavalry charged. Effective as this was against an enemy armed in the same way, however, it was hopeless in the face of the greater range and firepower of British-trained troops.

Somaliland

One Moslem leader who proved consistently difficult to overcome was Sayyid Muhammad Abdullah Hassan, who led a religious and nationalist revolt against the British in northern Somaliland, in the 'horn of Africa'. Inevitably dubbed the 'Mad Mullah' by the British, Sayyid Muhammed was born in 1864, and showed an early leaning towards religious studies. He travelled throughout Somaliland, and undertook the pilgrimage to Mecca. He is thought to have been inspired by the career of the Mahdi, and in 1898 he began preaching *jihad* against the ruling infidels, of the British. Britain had become involved in Somaliland, which had been an Egyptian pro-



A more simple *jibbeh*, with large light-blue patches. (Blair Atholl Collection)

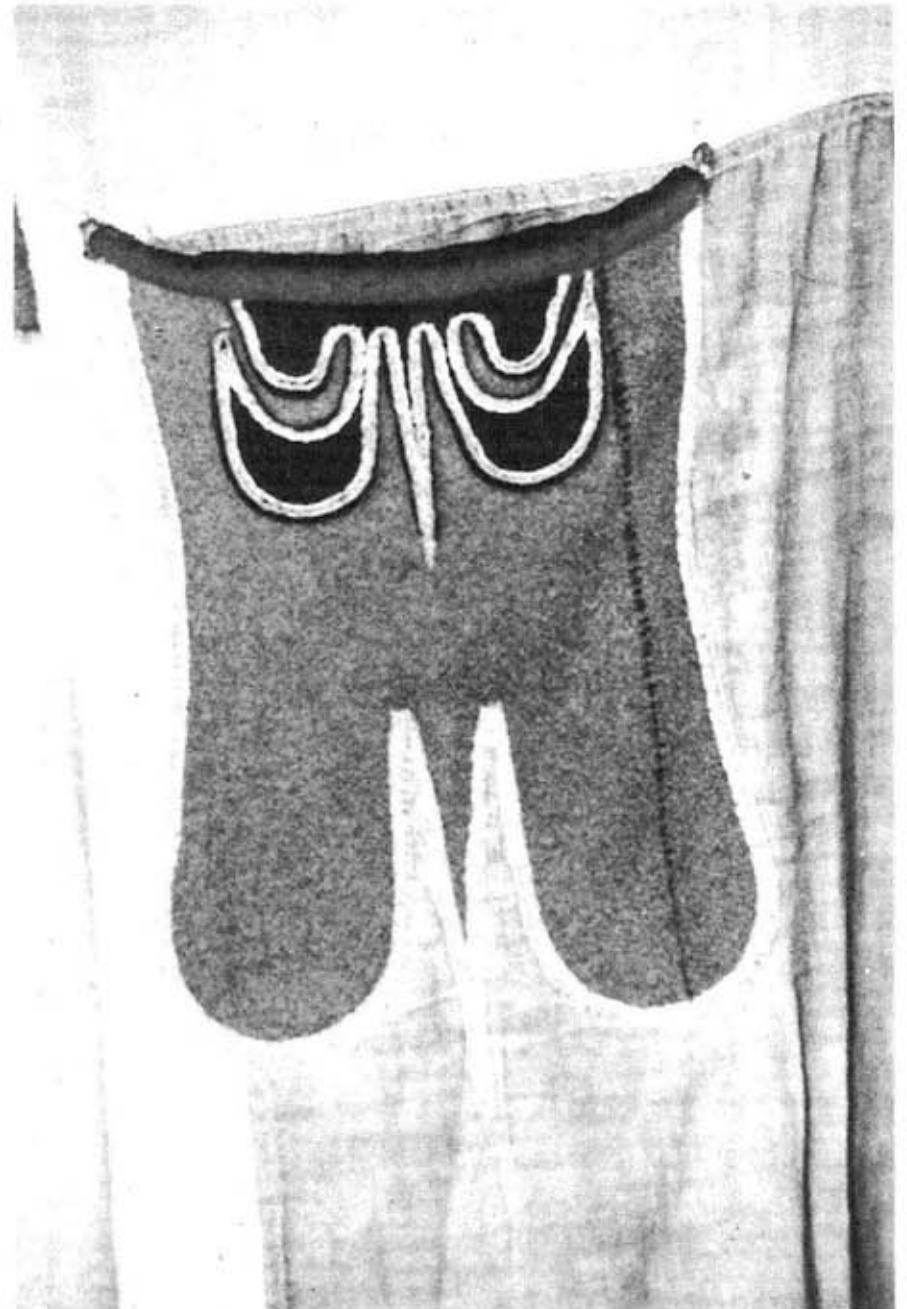
vince, following the war of 1882, and was keen to maintain her possessions there in view of the Italian presence to the south.

Sayyid Muhammed faced a difficult task, since the semi-nomadic Somalis were divided into clans, many of whom waged complex blood-feuds with one another. Nevertheless, he managed to rally thousands of supporters—also known as Dervishes to the British—to his banner; and the British were forced to wage no less than five separate campaigns against him between 1900 and 1920. On occasion they received support from both the Italians, who were keen to prevent Sayyid's cause from spreading to their territory, and the Abyssinians, who were trying to push their empire further towards the coast. Few of these campaigns were entirely successful, and some were downright disasters: at the battle of Gumburu in April 1903 the Somalis broke a small British square and killed 196 officers

A close-up of a breast-pocket design on an amir's *jibbeh*, showing the ornate stitching. (Blair Atholl Collection)

and men. These remarkable and little-known campaigns were fought by British regulars supported by Indian Army troops, African regiments, and even a unit of Boer mounted infantry, fighting a long way from home! Sayyid's rebellion finally collapsed in 1920 following his death, not from military action but from influenza.

Sayyid's forces varied from one campaign to the next according to his fortunes. At Gumburu they amounted to roughly 4,000 cavalry and 10,000 infantry, which was probably a typical ratio. Somali dress and armament were simple. A cotton robe, the *tobe*, usually white, was wrapped around the body. The head was usually left bare, although some wore an Arab-style turban. The hair was worn in a distinctive style, teased out at the side of the head. Weapons consisted of a throwing spear with a long, flat blade, and a stabbing spear with a heavier, barbed blade. Cavalry were dressed and armed much as infantry, though the *tobe* was either shorter, or gathered up to leave more of the legs free. Most cavalry and some infantry carried a small



round shield of tough oryx-hide. Bows, arrows and swords were also sometimes carried. Most Somalis wore distinctive sandals of hide with large flaps turned up at the front, although it was not unknown for them to go barefoot. Sayyid obtained firearms early in his *jihad*, although they were mostly obsolete trade guns. As his cause progressed, however, he obtained more, and more modern, rifles. During the first British expedition (1900) it was estimated that 600 of his 5,000 men had rifles, but by the fifth campaign (1920) the proportion had risen to over a third. Many were up-to-date breech-loaders acquired from rival European powers, particularly the French.

Tactically, Sayyid used his troops much as the Mahdi had done, and indeed there is a rumour that he was influenced by the campaigns of the Beja leader, 'Uthman Diqna. Cavalry were used to scout and harass, and riflemen covered the main tactical thrust, the shock-charge by the spearmen.

If Sayyid did not succeed in freeing his country from its invaders, he did carry on the fight for 20 years after the death of Queen Victoria, and into the very different political world of the 20th century.

The Plates

A: Abyssinian warriors, c.1868:

A1: Wealthy warrior

This well-to-do warrior has probably enriched himself by his military exploits. He wears a typical *lembd* cope with metal breast decorations, and lion-hair on the shoulders. His sword and spear are of typical design. His status is also reflected in the amount of metal decoration of his shield, and by his white head-scarf.

A2: Chief

A military commander, perhaps even a *ras*, whose rank is indicated by the quality of his costume, particularly the ornate tunic. British accounts of the battle of Aroge mention that Abyssinian forces were led by chiefs in scarlet robes. His cope and shield are both lavishly decorated, and he wears a headdress of lion's mane—a symbol of both rank and courage, since the wearer was supposed to have killed the lion himself.

A3: Lower class warrior

Most ordinary Abyssinian fighting men would have looked like this: he wears the peasant's everyday costume of white tunic and trousers, with a plain white cloak wrapped round the body. His hide shield is undecorated, and his weapon is an antiquated matchlock. Most peasant warriors would probably have carried either a spear or a sword, but shields seem to have been universal.

B: Abyssinian warriors, c.1868:

B1: Commander

His dress is similar to that of A2, but not quite so lavish. He wears a slightly different style of cope, around the body rather than over the shoulders. He too wears the lion's-mane headdress, and his shield is decorated with a strip of lion skin. Since most Abyssinians were Coptic Christians, the more wealthy often wore silver crosses suspended around their necks.

B2: Chief's retainer

Although dressed in basically the same way as A3, he shows some signs of favour: his cloak is of better quality, and he carries a double-barrelled percussion rifle, the most modern and sophisticated weapon then available. Tewodros imported a number of these and distributed them among his personal followers, and they also figure in photographs of other chiefs' bodyguards. Ammunition and caps were presumably carried in pouches on belts concealed by the cloak.

B3: Warrior

Yet another variation, showing a member of the warrior class of a rather lower level of wealth than A1. The exact design and patterning of the cope and shield varied according to individual means.

C: Asante warriors, 1873–1900:

C1: 'Gunman'

This man's appearance is typical of the majority of Asante warriors throughout the 19th century. He carries a long 'Dane gun' musket, decorated with shells and bound to prevent the barrel bursting. Powder and shot are carried on his 'war belt', as are several knives for removing the heads of fallen enemies, and large decorative shells coated with gold. Most Asante probably fought bare-headed,



A very typical *jibbeh* for the late 1890s. The majority of the Ansar would probably have worn *jibbehs* like this. (Royal Engineers Museum)

although some wore caps of animal skin, sometimes decorated with shells or even with gold, and others may have worn a head-cloth.

C2: General

He wears a *batakari* war-smock covered with protective amulets of leather and cloth. Rank is also indicated by the amount of gold displayed, particularly the armbands, rings, and decorated sandals. Photographs of Asante officials in the late 19th century show many wearing head-cloths, although it seems likely that ornate caps (see C3) would also have been worn by senior military officers. There is little evidence for the personal armament of Asante commanders; a photograph of Yaa Asantewa shows her holding a percussion carbine, and it seems reasonable to assume that

Asante leaders would have carried the best weapons available.

C3: Sword-bearer

A state official, probably an envoy or messenger; Asante swords were symbols of authority rather than weapons, and were carried with the hilts displayed upright. This man's cap is decorated with gold and eagle feathers, suggesting his importance.

D: Egyptian troops, c.1882:

D1: Infantryman, summer dress

The white summer uniform seems to have been the most popular in the field. Both the cut of the uniform and the design of the equipment are simple. The rolling-block Remington breech-loader, with its sword bayonet, was comparatively modern, however. This uniform was worn by 'Urabi's troops at Tel-el-Kebir, and also by the Egyptian garrisons at Khartoum and elsewhere during the early stages of the Mahdist revolt.

D2: Infantryman, winter dress

The blue winter uniform, with white trim; note also the pack and blanket roll. Once Britain assumed control of the Egyptian army following the 1882 war it was re-organised, and a khaki field service uniform was issued.

D3: Officer

Although issued with a white double-breasted summer tunic, most Egyptian officers seem to have preferred to wear the blue winter coat, which shows something of the French influence on Egyptian uniform design. Contemporary engravings show sword belts worn under the coat, although this seems impractical.

E: Early Madhists, Sudan 1882-85:

E1: Riverine Arab, c.1884

This Nile Arab's dress is typical of the simple costume worn by the Mahdists who opposed the advance of the Gordon Relief Expedition at Abu Klea. The Mahdi's patched *jibbeh* had not yet been adopted; instead he wears the *tobe*, a weathered white cotton robe, fastened over the left shoulder. While this man is bare-headed, many wore a white cotton skullcap. His weapon is a throwing spear.

E2: Beja warrior, c.1884

The Beja from the Red Sea Hills in eastern Sudan—Kipling's 'Fuzzy Wuzzies'—did not begin to adopt the Mahdi's uniform until late 1885, and fought their early battles (including Tamai, 13 March 1884) in their everyday dress of a discoloured robe or trousers. The Beja wore their hair teased out in extravagant patterns, but there appear to have been no obvious differences between the styles affected by the various Beja sections—the Haden-dowa, Bisharin, etc. The round hide shield with a large boss, and the sword worn in a shoulder-slung scabbard, are typical.

E3: Mahdist Ansar, c.1884

The *jibbeh* was adopted first by those directly under the Mahdi's command, and spread gradually throughout the Sudan. The detachment of Ansar sent by the Mahdi to support local tribes (cf.E1) against the Gordon Relief Expedition probably wore short-sleeved or sleeveless robes of this pattern. The more familiar style, with large oblong

patches, did not become standard until after 1885. Note the skullcap, another important part of Mahdist uniform.

E4: Beja warrior, c.1885

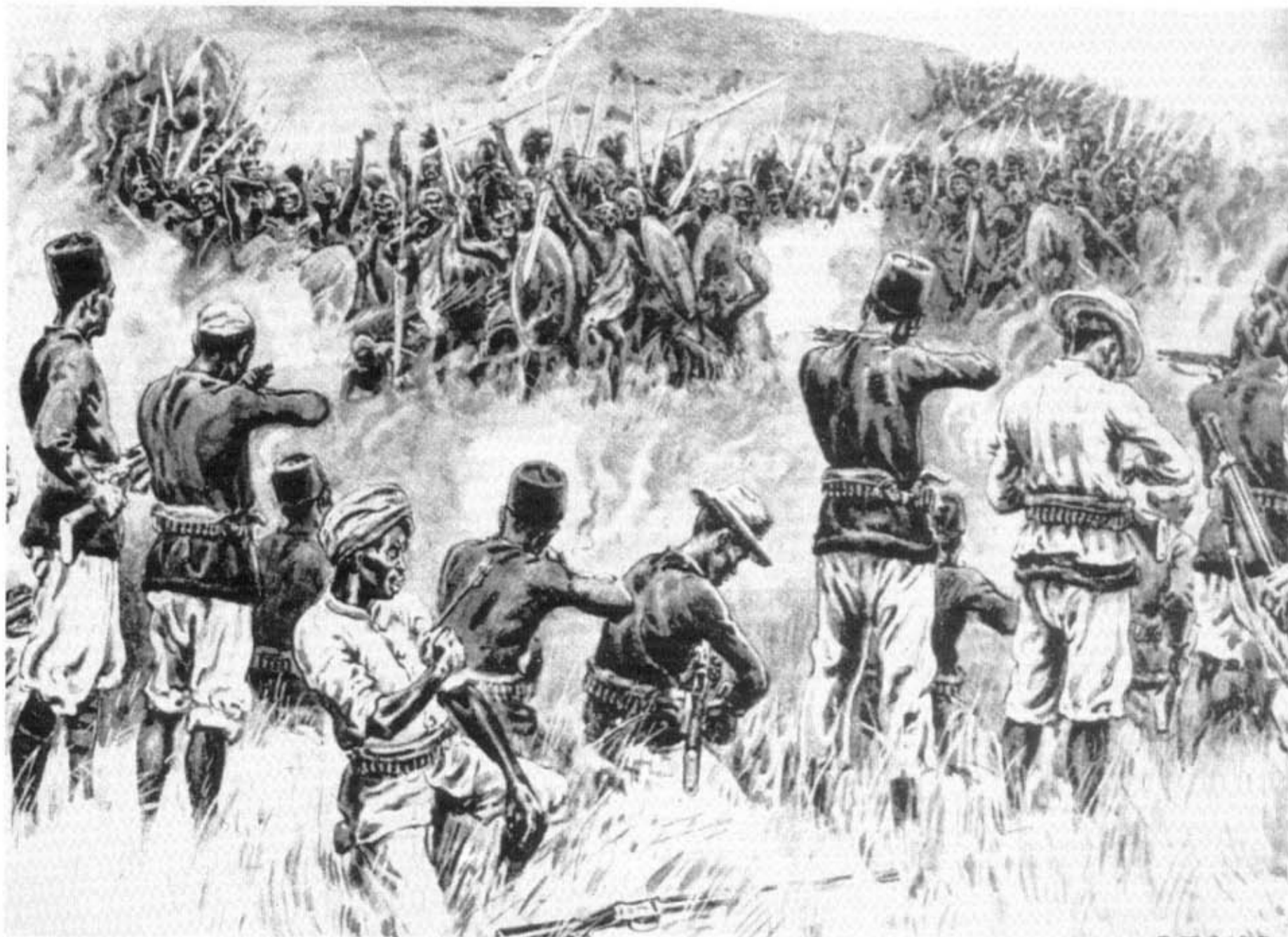
By this date the Beja were beginning to shave their heads and adopt the Ansar uniform. At the battle of Tofrek (22 March 1885) a number were seen wearing *jibbehs* and skullcaps, although the *jibbehs* had characteristic geometric patterns, as here, rather than the later type.

F: Mahdists, 1885-98:

F1: Warrior

The full uniform as specified by the Mahdi: *jibbeh*, trousers, turban, sandals, straw girdle and beads. The *jibbeh* patches are typical of the patterns which became common in 1885 and lasted until the

Sudanese troops, formerly in the Egyptian army, fighting for British East Africa Company against the Nandi in 1897. The Nandi are charging in a formation comprising three sides of a square. (Author's collection)



overthrow of the Mahdist state. In general the Arab tribes did not carry shields, but some warriors from the Nile did carry oval shields of this type.

F2: Amir

A Mahdist commander, his rank reflected in the quality of his *jibbeh*—note particularly the ‘spade’ patterns on the sides of the skirt, and the breast pocket design. Amirs usually led their men on horseback. Late in the 1890s some amirs attached to the Khalifa’s household troops wore red turbans.

F3: Standard-bearer

Each amir and subordinate commander had his own banner, and as they were made individually there were considerable variations in pattern. This style is typical, however: a number of panels bearing Arabic script on one side, with a plain reverse. Note the various small patches under the arms, and running up from the hem of the *jibbeh*. He is wearing a waist sash instead of a girdle, a common practice.

Fulani horseman charging a Royal Niger Company square: Ilorin campaign, Northern Nigeria, 1897. (Author’s collection)

G: Mahdists, c.1898:

G1: Jihadiyya rifleman

The *jihadiyya* were the result of the Mahdi’s early attempts to set up a body of semi-regular troops. Usually blacks from the southern Sudan, who had experience either in the Egyptian army or in the various slave-trading armies of the region, they do not appear to have worn uniform *jibbehs*. This man is not wearing his *imma* around his skullcap. The leather ammunition belt is typical.

G2: Ansar

The bulk of the Ansar came from the poorer levels of Sudanese society; although their *jibbehs* often bore quite complex patterns of patches, they might also show hard wear. This man carries a stabbing spear; he is typical of the bulk of the Mahdist shock-troops.

G3: Khashkhashan rifleman, Omdurman

The *khashkhashan* were a small sub-unit of the Khalifa’s bodyguard, the *mulazimiyya*; they were armed with large elephant guns mounted on tripods. The *mulazimiyya* were the only Mahdist unit known to have worn a specific uniform: a *jibbeh*



with red and blue patches, a red *imma*, and sometimes a red sash. The *khashkhashan* wore this uniform with a red waistcoat over the *jibbeh*—the exact pattern is not recorded, and this reconstruction is speculative.

H: Miscellaneous warriors, 1890s:

H1: Somali warrior, 'Mad Mullah' campaigns

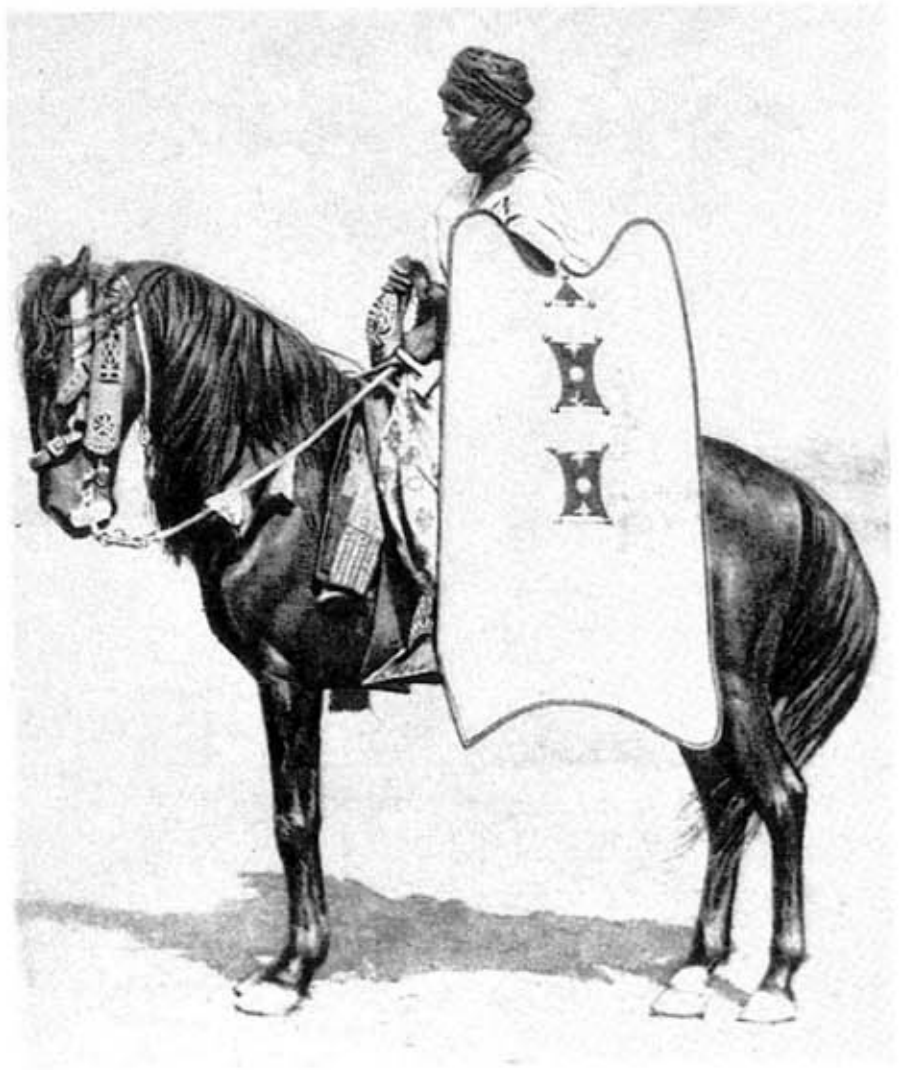
Somali dress was simple: a white robe worn round the body. The majority of the infantry carried spears of this type and swords, only a few carrying small round shields, which were otherwise used by the cavalry. Note distinctive hairstyle, and sandals.

H2: Fulani horseman, northern Nigeria

The armies of the Moslem Emirates of sub-Saharan Nigeria relied heavily upon cavalry. This outfit of voluminous robes and turban is typical, although the large straw hat and round shield are characteristic of the Fulani rather than the Hausa.

H3: Nandi warrior, Kenya

The dress of this people resembled that of the Masai, although it was less spectacular. The long-bladed spear and short *sime* sword are characteristic weapons, and the shield is typical of many East African groups.



A Hausa horseman, Nigerian Emirates. The Hausa and Fulani were similar in appearance, although this man carries a typical Hausa shield. (Author's collection)

Notes sur les planches en couleur

A1 Les décorations métalliques sur la chape et le bouclier, les poils de lion sur les épaules et l'écharpe blanche de couvre-chef sont signes de haut rang et de richesse. **A2** Ce costume très orné est à nouveau l'indication du haut statut; le chef porte une coiffure faite d'une crinière de lion, marque de son courage car il a dû le tuer de ses propres mains. **A3** Costume simple et caractéristique d'un guerrier issu de souche paysanne.

B1 Chape de modèle légèrement différent; notez la décoration en peau de lion sur le bouclier. Les soldats les plus riches portaient dex croix d'argent autour du cou, nous rappelant que les Abyssiniens étaient coptes. **B2** Son maître a distribué un fusil à baril double, l'arme à feu la plus moderne qui fut alors disponible en Abyssinie. **B3** Les détails des chapes et boucliers variaient selon la richesse personnelle.

C1 Son aspect est caractéristique de toute cette période. Notez le mousquet commercial "danois", le couteau servant à décapiter les ennemis au sol et les décorations faites de coquillages et d'or ouvragé. **C2** La chemise de guerre est couverte d'amulettes de protection; notez les somptueux ornements en or. **C3** L'épée était symbolique et non pas arme quotidienne, les hauts fonctionnaires qui en étaient parés remplissaient des missions d'envoyés ou de messagers.

D1 L'uniforme blanc d'été était la tenue de campagne préférée. Le fusil Remington était assez moderne à cette époque. C'est l'uniforme qui fut porté à Tel-el-Kebir et Khartoum. **D2** L'uniforme bleu d'hiver, garni de blanc; notez le paquetage et la couverture. **D3** Les officiers préféraient en toutes saisons la redingote bleue dénotant une influence française, bien qu'ils aient reçu des tuniques croisées blanches.

E1 Caractéristique des toute premières batailles contre le corps expéditionnaire de secours Gordon, une simple robe tobe portée quelquefois avec une calotte blanche. **E2** Les Beja – ou "Fuzzy Wuzzies", surnom dû à leurs coiffures tribales – n'avaient pas encore adopté la robe à pièces. **E3** Premier modèle de jibbeh portée par l'escorte personnelle de Mahdi, que l'on vit se battre contre le corps expéditionnaire Gordon de secours. **E4** Les Beja commencèrent cette année-là à se raser la tête et à adopter l'uniforme de Mahdi, bien que les pièces sur les jibbeh aient conservé cette forme initiale.

F1 L'uniforme mahdiste complet avec jibbeh à pièces, turban, ceinture de paille et perles; les pièces ont leur forme finale. Les Arabes se protégeaient rarement de boucliers, mais certaines tribus du Nil portèrent ce modèle oval. **F2** Notez la poche de poitrine et les pièces sur la jupe, toutes de formes élaborées, signes de statut. Certains amirs de la maison du khalife portaient des turbans rouges. **F3** Chaque bannière de commandant était dessinée individuellement, mais celle-ci est caractéristique; le revers était uni.

G1 Ce corps de troupes semi-régulier ne portait pas d'uniforme, il fut recruté parmi des noirs du sud qui avaient une expérience militaire. **G2** Guerrier caractéristique représentant le plus gros de l'armée mahdiste vers sa fin. **G3** Le seul uniforme qui soit "spécifique à une unité" était celui des mulazimiyya, la garde du khalife: jibbeh aux pièces rouges et bleues, imma rouge, et ceinture rouge parfois. Les Khashkhashan portaient un gilet rouge (reconstitué ici d'après des spéculations) sur la jibbeh, c'était une petite unité de garde qui utilisait des fusils pour éléphants montés sur trépid.

H1 Notez la coiffure distinctive et les sandales; peu de fantassins portaient en fait un bouclier. **H2** Le chapeau de paille et le bouclier rond sont caractéristiques des Fulani plutôt que des Hausa, bien que le costume de base soit spécifique à tous ces cavaliers. **H3** Le costume ressemble à celui des Masai, bien qu'en moins spectaculaire.

Farbtafeln

A1 Die Metallabzeichen, die am Chormantel und Schild angebracht sind, deuten auf hohen Rang und Reichtum. Das Löwenhaar ist auf der Schulter zu sehen. **A2** Auch hier weist die verzierte Bekleidung auf hohen Rang. Die Kopfbedeckung des Stammeshäuptlings ist eine Löwenmähne. Da er das Tier selbst erlegen mußte, galt dies als Zeichen für seinen Mut. **A3** Die typische, einfache Bekleidung eines bäuerlichen Kriegers.

B1 Ein Chormantel unterschiedlichen Stils; auffallend ist das verzierte Schild mit Löwenfell. Wohlhabendere Soldaten trugen silberne Kreuze um den Hals, was darauf hindeutete, daß es sich bei den Abessiniern um christliche Kopten handelte. **B2** Sein Meister gab zweiläufige Gewehre aus, die damals die modernste, in Abessinien existierende, Waffe war. **B3** Eine Einzelabbildung von Chormänteln und Schildern, die aufgrund des persönlichen Reichtums des Trägers unterschiedlich gestaltet sind.

C1 Bezeichnend für die gesamte Periode. Bemerkenswert ist die "dänische" Handelsmukete, Messer zur Enthauptung gefallener Feinde und Ehrenzeichen aus Muscheln und Gold. **C2** Das Kriegshemd ist mit schützenden Amuletten bedeckt; zu beachten sind die aufwendigen Goldverzierungen. **C3** Das Schwert hatte eine symbolische Funktion und war keine alltägliche Waffe. Schwerträger waren Beamte, die die Rolle von Abgesandten oder Vorboten übernahmen.

D1 Die weiße Sommeruniform war die bevorzugte Kampfbekleidung. Das Remington-Gewehr war damals ziemlich modern. Diese Uniform wurde in Tel-el-Kebir und Khartoum getragen. **D2** Die Winteruniform war blau und hatte einen weißen Besatz; zu beachten ist der Packen und die Decke. **D3** Der auf französischem Dessin beruhende blaue Gehrock wurde von den Offizieren während des ganzen Jahres gern getragen, obgleich er sich aus einem weißen, zweireihigen Waffenrock dazu gehörte.

E1 Ein einfaches Tobe-Gewand, gelegentlich auch mit weißem Käppchen getragen, stellte die typische Bekleidung während der anfänglichen Kämpfe gegen den Gordon Entlastungsfeldzug dar. **E2** Die Beja – aus dem Bergland am roten Meer im Ostsudän – die Kipling 'Fuzzy-Wuzzies' nannte, sind hier mit einer ihres Stammes entsprechenden Haartracht abgebildet. Das mit Flecken besetzte Gewand hatte man noch nicht eingeführt. **E3** Einer der ersten Jibbeh, die von den persönlichen Anhängern des Mahdi getragen wurde, und auch in den Kampfhandlungen gegen den Gordon Entlastungsfeldzug anzutreffen war. **E4** In diesem Jahr begannen die Beja ihre Köpfe zu rasieren und übernahmen die Uniform des Mahdi, dennoch waren weiterhin Flecken auf den ersten Jibbeh angebracht.

F1 Die vollständige Mahdist Uniform mit Flecken besetzten Jibbeh, Turban, Strohgürtel und Ketten. Das Fleckenmuster hat die endgültige Form. Die Araber waren selten mit einem Schild bewaffnet, von einigen Nilstämmen wurde dennoch dieses ovale Schild benutzt. **F2** Zu beachten sind die Brusttaschen und Rockflicken, die kunstvoll ausgearbeitet sind und den Rang andeuten. Einige "Amirs" aus Khalifas Haushalt trugen einen roten Turban. **F3** Das Banner von jedem Kommandanten wurde individuell entworfen. Abgebildet ist ein typischer Banner, dessen Rückseite schmucklos gehalten war.

G1 Diese halbregulären Soldaten der Truppen trugen keine Uniformen. Es handelte sich dabei um Farbige aus dem Süden mit Militärerfahrung. **G2** Ein typischer krieger, die später die Mehrheit der Mahdist-Armee bildete. **G3** Die einzige, bekannte "einheitspezifische" Uniform war die des Mulazimiyya, die Wache des Khalifen. Die Uniform setzte sich aus einem Jibbeh mit roten und blauen Flecken, rotem Imma und manchmal einer roten Kordel zusammen. Eine rote Weste (hier eine typische nachbildung) wurde von den Khashkhashan – eine kleinere Wacheinheit – getragen, die an Dreibein befestigte Elefantengewehre benutzte.

H1 Zu beachten ist die auffallende Haartracht und die Sandalen. Wenige der Infanteristen verfügten über ein Schild. **H2** Der Strohhut und das runde Schild war eher ein Merkmal der Fulani und nicht der Hausa, obgleich das Gewand für alle Reiter typisch war. **H3** Das Gewand ist dem der Masai ähnlich, war aber nicht so imposant.

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