

A COLONIAL SERVANT AL-SALĀWĪ AND THE SUDAN

R.S. O'FAHEY¹

The colonial rulers of twentieth-century Africa had little in common culturally with those they ruled. The 'Egyptian'² rulers of the Sudan during the latter's first colonial period, 1820 to 1885, shared at least a religion with most of their subjects.

Nonetheless the Sudan was not an attractive colonial posting. Professor Harran concludes an account of the famous Egyptian scholar Rifā' al-Rāfi' al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's exile (1850-54) in the Sudan with the words, 'He was no doubt content to spend the rest of his days in Egypt, far from the heat and dust of the Sudan'.³ Khartoum was not Paris and al-Ṭaḥṭāwī had not flourished there. Another scholar who came to the Sudan as a colonial official of the Turkiyya was to have a much more positive attitude.

Al-ḥājj Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Nāṣir al-Salāwī was to play a significant role in transmitting to the Sudanese religious class some of the ideas and preoccupations of the wider Muslim world in the early nineteenth century. In this respect, he had a greater impact on the Sudan than the much better known al-Ṭaḥṭāwī. His life can be briefly told: he was born in Ṣafar 1206/September–October 1791 in Salé (Salā) on

1 The present note is an amplification of *ALA*, I, 57-9.

2 The period of Egyptian rule in the Sudan is known usually as the Turkiyya, but few of the rulers were Turks in the ethnic sense; see Richard Hill, *Egypt in the Sudan, 1820-1881*, London 1959, 1.

3 Tag Elsir Ahmed Harran, 'Shaykh Rifaa Rafi al-Tahtawi in the Sudan', *Sudan Notes and Records*, lvii, 1976, 1-9.

Morocco's Atlantic coast to a family of Andalusian origin.⁴ Like most of Morocco, the family was Shādhilī by Sufi affiliation; his great-grandfather, Muḥammad al-Salāwī, had been a student of Muḥammad b. Nāṣir al-Dar[°]ī (d. 1085/1674-5), who established an offshoot of the Shādhiliyya known as the Nāṣiriyya.⁵ Al-Salāwī studied both in Salé, where his teacher was one °Abd Allāh °Īsā, and in Fez, presumably at the Qarawiyyīn mosque-school. In 1226/1811-12 he left Morocco on pilgrimage, travelling via Egypt where he stayed for three years. He completed the pilgrimage in 1229/1813-14 and then returned to settle in Egypt. In 1231/1815-16 he was appointed mufti for Fayyūm, a position he held for over two years.

Al-Salāwī was one of the three *'ulamā'* appointed by Muḥammad °Alī Pasha, ruler of Egypt, to accompany his son Ismā'īl Pasha's expedition to occupy the Sudan in 1820; the other two were Aḥmad al-Baqlī al-Shāfi[°]ī and Muḥammad al-Asyūṭī al-Ḥanafī, *qāḍī* of Asyūṭ and the senior of the three.⁶ The judicial affiliations of the three were appropriately chosen; the Ḥanafī School was the official Ottoman *madhhab*, the Shāfi[°]ī prevailed in Sawākin and certain other towns in the Sudan, while the Mālikī, which al-Salāwī administered, was the most widely accepted. In the Sudan, al-Salāwī functioned as mufti while al-Baqlī took over as *qāḍī* following al-Asyūṭī's death in 1238/1822-3. Al-Salāwī returned to Egypt two years later in 1240/1824-5, but came back with the new

4 This is based on his own short autobiography in *Ṭabaqāt wad Ḍayf Allāh, al-dhayl wa'l-takmila*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Abū Salīm and Yūsuf Faḍl Ḥasan, Khartoum 1982, 46-7.

5 al-Salāwī (*Ṭabaqāt, al-dhayl*, 46) inadvertently calls him Aḥmad al-Dar[°]ī.

6 °Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī, *'Ajā'ib al-athār fī 'l-tarājim wa'l-akhbār*, 3 vols., Beirut 1978, III, 612 (Ramadān 1235/June-July 1820). Al-Asyūṭī received 20 *kīs* (10,000 piastre) as salary, the other two fifteen (7,500 piastre) as well as robes. G. Douin (*Histoire du Soudan Égyptien*, Cairo 1944, I (all published), 87) erroneously gives al-Salāwī the higher salary.

governor, Khurshīd Agha, in Dhū 'l-Qā' da 1241/February-March 1826, this time as *qāḍī 'alā 'umūm bilād al-Sūdān*, which position he seems to have held until his death sometime after 1256/1840-1.⁷

This career profile suggests an establishment figure, a functionary of the Turco-Egyptian colonial administration. This, al-Salāwī surely was,⁸ but he seems from the outset to have established close ties with at least some sections of the local Sudanese religious elite, or, as he himself puts it,

I met the eminent, the *'ulamā'* and the notables [of the Sudan] and between us and them, there arose perfect unity.⁹

Al-Salāwī came from a distinguished intellectual milieu; Fez, centred on the Qarawiyyīn, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries produced or educated a number of scholars who profoundly influenced the Muslim world, not least Islamic Africa, among them Aḥmad al-Tijānī (in Fez for various periods after 1171/1757-8), Aḥmad b. Idrīs (at the Qarawiyyīn in the 1780s and 90s) and Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Sanūsī (in Fez between 1805 and 1819).¹⁰ The position of these figures within the parameters of Islam is far from clear; they were Sufis, but whether labelling them neo-Sufis or linking them to the Wahhābīs are useful exercises is doubtful.

7 The above is based on the two printed versions of the Funj Chronicle; *Ta'rikh mulūk al-Sūdān*, ed. Makkī Shibayka, Khartoum 1947, 22-3, 26-8 & 30, and *Makḥṭūṭat Kātib al-shūna fī ta'rikh al-salṭana al-Sinnāriyya wa'l-idāra al-Miṣriyya*, ed. al-Shāṭir Buṣaylī 'Abd al-Jalīl, Cairo n.d. [c. 1963], 88-90, 94, 102-3 & 112-13. Neither gives the date of his death; he refers to a visit to al-Tāka in 1256/1840-1 (*al-Dhayl wa'l-takmila*, 100), and the Funj Chronicle records the appointment of Ibrāhīm al-Haytamī as *qāḍī 'āmm* in 1262/1845-6 (*Ta'rikh mulūk al-Sūdān*, 34).

8 As is sycophantically said in *Makḥṭūṭat Kātib al-shūna*, 112.

9 *al-Dhayl wa'l-takmila*, 46.

10 There is, of course, a very considerable literature on these figures. In regard to the Sudan, Ibn Idrīs was undoubtedly the most significant; see further, my *Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad ibn Idris and the Idrisi tradition*, London 1990.

What does seem certain is that their primary intellectual formation was in Fez. Al-Salāwī followed humbly in the footsteps of Ibn Idrīs and al-Sanūsī in spending the rest of life in the East. Little is known of al-Salāwī's teachers or intellectual associates before he came to the Sudan, although he appears to have studied with the famous Egyptian scholar, Muḥammad al-Amīr *al-kabīr* 'the elder' (d. 1817), who like his student was a Shādhilī (as was Ibn Idrīs) and whose reputation was known in Morocco.¹¹

Al-Salāwī's *œuvre* is what one would expect of such a scholar; among his writings is a commentary on the *āyat al-mīthāq*, 'God took compact with the Prophets' [3:81], on *al-Aḥādīth al-arbaʿūna* of Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā al-Nawawī (d. 1278) and on the celebrated *Mawlid al-nabī* of Aḥmad al-Dardīr (d. 1786). Another work is a *précis* of a commentary by the prolific Sufī writer, ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulī (d. 1731) on Muḥammad al-Birkawī (d. 1573), *al-Ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*.

As a learned Mālikī jurist and a Shādhilī, al-Salāwī would have been welcomed in at least certain circles among the Sudanese religious elite.¹² From his side, he was conscious of having a mission,

Indeed, God, through us, revived (*aḥyā*) this Sudanese region—to God be praise. Indeed, God thus revived, by our presence, their dead (*amwātahum*)—the ʿulamāʾ and the pious.¹³

11 That al-Salāwī was a student of al-Amīr is noted in *Fihris al-khizāna al-Taymūriyya*, 4 vols., Cairo 1948-50, I, 75. It is also implied in ʿAbd al-Maḥmūd Nūr al-Dāʾim, *Azāhīr al-riyād fī manāqib ... al-shaykh Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib b. al-Bashīr*, Cairo 1954, 78. On al-Amīr, see G. Delanoue, *Moralistes et politiques musulmans dans l'Égypte du XIXe siècle*, Cairo 1982, 198-9.

12 A study is needed of who, among the Sudanese *fuqarāʾ* and ʿulamāʾ of the time, did or did not collaborate with the Turco-Egyptian invaders. The evidence suggests a complex and far from uniform response.

13 *al-Dhayl wa'l-takmila*, 46-7.

The arrogant tone of this remark is tempered by the warmth with which al-Salāwī characterizes his new-found companions, ‘My students and dear friends’.¹⁴ It may also be contrasted with the more sensitive and subtle comment—made just before the Egyptian occupation when the Funj kingdom was collapsing—of Ibn Idrīs, ‘As for the holy men of the Sudan, they have been bearing excessive burdens and they wish to lay them upon the shoulders of others.’ The context was a request from the young Muḥammad °Uthmān al-Mīrghanī to his master for permission to undertake a missionary journey in the Sudan which, at first, Ibn Idrīs was disinclined to allow.¹⁵

Al-Salāwī formed a circle of students around him,¹⁶ but appears to have been especially close to two groups of Sudanese holy men, the Āl °Īsā of Kutrānj on the Blue Nile and the Sammāniyya brethren associated with Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib wad al-Bashīr (d. 1824). The leading figure of the former group was Aḥmad b. °Īsā al-Anṣārī (d. 1826) who had studied in Cairo with Aḥmad al-Dardīr and with the Indian traditionist and lexicographer, Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1791).¹⁷ Al-Salāwī taught his commentary on al-Dardīr’s *Mawlid* at Kutrānj and shared at least one student with al-Anṣārī: al-Amīn al-Darīr (d. 1885), who apart from two works on *fiqh* was also responsible for one of the recensions of the Funj Chronicle.¹⁸ Al-Salāwī celebrated his friendship with al-Anṣārī in an elegy following the latter’s death.¹⁹

14 *Ibid.*

15 From a letter given in *A°ṭār azhār aghṣān ḥaḏīrat al-taqdīs ... al-sayyid Aḥmad b. Idrīs*, ed. Ṣāliḥ al-Ja°farī, Cairo 1394/1974, 96, and B. Radtke and E. Thommassen (eds.), *The Letters of Aḥmad ibn Idrīs*, London 1993, 52-5.

16 °Abd al-°Azīz °Abd al-Majīd, *al-Tarbiyya fī ’l-Sūdān*, 3 vols., Cairo 1949, III, 21.

17 °Izz al-Dīn al-Amīn, *Qaryat Kutrānj wa-athāruhā al-°ilmī fī ’l-Sūdān*, Khartoum 1975, 40-7.

18 *Ta°rīkh mulūk al-Sūdān*, intro., 14-15

19 *Makhtūṭat Kātib al-shūna*, 102-3.

Both al-Anṣārī and al-Salāwī took the Sammāniyya *ṭarīqa* from Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib. Al-Salāwī's relations with al-Ṭayyib seem to have been close; he married one of his daughters.²⁰ He may well have taught al-Birkawī's *al-Ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*—either his own *précis* or the *Mukhtaṣar* composed by Muḥammad b. °Abd al-Karīm al-Sammān—at al-Ṭayyib's centre at Umm Marriḥ since it is quoted by the latter's grandson.²¹ Another brotherhood with whom he appears to have been on friendly terms were the Ismā'īliyya of Kordofan. There survives a short treatise by al-Salāwī in which he commends Ismā'īl al-Walī (d. 1863) and his *ṭarīqa*.²²

Al-Salāwī encouraged a number of his students and protégés to work as judges for the colonial administration. Thus, when he fell ill at the beginning of 1238/1822-3, he made the holy man Daf° Allāh b. Madanī executor of his will; when later in the same year Daf° Allāh died, it was al-Salāwī who took charge of his funeral and looked after his son, Aḥmad, who became his deputy at the court at Wad Madanī.²³ His pupil, al-Amīn al-Darīr, was later appointed (or probably, more accurately, given the honorific) by the Ottoman Sultan *ra'īs wa-mumayyiz °ulamā' al-Sūdān*, that is president and inspector of the *°ulamā'* of the Sudan.²⁴ Another student was Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. °Abd al-Dāfi° who functioned as mufti in al-Salāwī's court. Al-Salāwī says that it was he who encouraged Ibrāhīm to make a *manzūma*

20 Nur al-Dā'im, *Azāhīr al-riyād*, 60 & 239, and *al-Dhayl wa'l-takmila*, 46.

21 Nur al-Dā'im, *Azāhīr al-riyād*, 255.

22 The treatise of 6 ff. is untitled and undated; it may be found among the uncatalogued papers of the Ismā'īliyya *ṭarīqa* in the National Records Office, Khartoum. There is a photocopy in the photographic collection, Department of History, University of Bergen, accession no. 231.

23 *al-Dhayl wa'l-takmila*, 46.

24 R. Hill, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Sudan*, 2nd. edn., London 1967, 55 & 398.

or versified *resumé* of the *Ṭabaqāt* of Muḥammad al-Nūr b. Ḍayf Allāh, the famous biographical dictionary of Sudanese holy men. To this the Moroccan appended a commentary with some additional biographical notices in which he displays his familiarity with the original *Ṭabaqāt* and with his Sudanese contemporaries of the generation following those noticed in Ibn Ḍayf Allāh's work.²⁵

Al-Salāwī was not afraid to criticise his colonial masters; of the murder of the great Ja'ālī holy man, Aḥmad al-Rayyaḥ, together with his pupils in his mosque-school by the *daftardār* Muḥammad Bey Khusraw in revenge for the killing of Muḥammad 'Alī's son, Ismā'īl Pasha, he says laconically, 'He was killed a martyr in the year thirty-eight (=1238/1822-3) by fire at al-Matamma'.²⁶ He also attempted to mediate in 1840 between the Hadendowa nomads and the governor of the Sudan, Aḥmad Pasha Abū Adhān, by enlisting the help of Muḥammad al-Ḥasan, the half-Sudanese son of Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Mīrghanī and the local leader of the *Khatmiyya tarīqa*.²⁷

Al-Salāwī evidently died some time after 1256/1840-1, but seems to have left a numerous family behind in the Sudan. Several of his sons followed in their father's footsteps as judges; one was Mukhtār al-Salāwī, sometime judge in the

25 *al-Dhayl wa'l-takmila*, 1-14; on Ibrāhīm 'Abd al-Dāfi', see *Ta'rikh mulūk al-Sūdān*, intro., 13-14.

26 *al-Dhayl wa'l-takmila*, 45; see also, *Ta'rikh mulūk al-Sūdān*, 24.

27 F. Werne, *African Wanderings*, London 1852, 252-3 & 141. Werne describes al-Salāwī as having travelled in southern Europe, knowing some French, Italian and Spanish and as having once been a prosperous merchant in Tripoli. Richard Hill (*On the Frontiers of Islam*, London 1970, 94 n. 1) identifies Werne's al-Salāwī as a son, Muṣṭafā b. Aḥmad al-Salāwī, but it is clear from *al-Dhayl wa'l-takmila* (p. 100) that it is the father whom Werne is describing. The knowledge of European languages is by no means improbable given the cosmopolitan character of his home town, Salé. Similarly, Ali Salih Karrar (*The Sufi Brotherhoods in the Sudan*, London 1992, 76-7) prefers to identify the *faqīh* who is asked to mediate as al-Ḥasan al-Mīrghanī rather than his father.

province of Berber.²⁸ Another was Muṣṭafā who became *qāḍī* °amm in succession to al-Haytamī, his father's successor. He was accused of corruption during the visit to the Sudan of the Egyptian ruler, Muḥammad Sa°īd Pasha, in 1856-7. He was deported and imprisoned in Cairo, but was freed and given a pension in 1862. Three years later, in 1865, he was appointed *qāḍī* of Khartoum.²⁹ A third son, °Abd al-Ghanī (d. 1312/1895-6), served as judge in several towns including Dongola before going over to the Mahdi in 1882. °Abd al-Ghanī, who became an official calligrapher in the Mahdist chancery, wrote a eulogy on the Mahdi's manifestation as well as a gloss on al-Bayḍāwī's commentary on the Koran.³⁰ The Sudanese writer, Babikr Badrī, describes him thus:

He knew practically the whole dictionary by heart, and whatever you asked him about would recite the whole of all the relevant passages ... I followed his corpse to the grave grieving for the loss of this man who had been unique in his knowledge of etymology; though I had not inquired into his proficiency in other subjects.³¹

°Abd al-Ghanī's son, Yaḥyā, like his father and grandfather, also wrote eulogies. Born in Khartoum in about 1262/1845-6, Yaḥyā, at the time of °Urābī Pasha's revolt in Egypt, travelled from Khartoum to Dongola. There, he asked the provincial governor, Muṣṭafā Pasha Yāwar, for transport on to Egypt. When the governor refused, Yaḥyā sent a poetic telegram to Muḥammad Ra°ūf Pasha, the Governor-general in Khartoum,

28 Ḥusayn Sīd Aḥmad al-Muftī, *Tatawwur niẓām al-qadā° fī 'l-Sūdān*, Khartoum 1378/1959, I (all published), 85.

29 Hill, *Biographical Dictionary*, 286.

30 Muḥammad °Abd al-Raḥīm, *Nafaḥāt al-yarā° fī 'l-adab wa'l-ta°rīkh wa'l-ijtimā°*, Khartoum 1936, I (all published), 81-2. His eulogy of the Mahdi is quoted in Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Milayk, *Shu°arā° al-waṭaniyya fī 'l-Sūdān min °ahd al-Fūnj ilā °ām 1970*, Khartoum 1975, 332-3.

31 *The Memoirs of Babikr Bedri*, transl. Yousef Bedri and George Scott, London 1969, 201.

with the same request. Raʿūf Pasha telegraphed back ordering that Yaḥyā be sent on to Egypt at government expense. There, at ʿUrābī's request, he wrote a lengthy poem in praise of the Egyptian leader.³² Yaḥyā's subsequent career is unknown, although descendants of al-Salāwī are still living in the Sudan.

*The Writings of al-Salāwī*³³

1. *al-Dhayl*.
Publ. *Ṭabaqāt Wad Ḍayf Allāh, al-dhayl wa'l-takmila*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Abū Salīm & Yūsuf Faḍl Ḥasan, Khartoum 1982.
 2. *al-Durr al-manẓūm fī asānīdinā fī sā'ir al-ʿulūm*.
 3. *Ishrāq maṣābīḥ al-tanwīr fī sharḥ Mawlid al-bashīr al-nadhīr*.
MS: al-Maktaba al-baladiyya, Alexandria, *majmūʿa, alif* 139.
 4. *Ithāf ahl al-ṣidq*.
MS: Yale, L-9, 367ff., 1842,
 5. *al-Jawhar al-maknūn wa'l-sirr al-maṣūn alladhī tataqarrab ilayhi al-ʿuyūn*.
 6. *al-Minaḥ al-ṣamadiyya fī ikhtīṣār al-Ḥadīqa al-nadiyya fī sharḥ al-Ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadiyya wa'l-sīra al-Aḥmadiyya*.
MS: Cairo, Dar al-kutub, *taṣawwuf*, 171.
 7. *Risāla*. (Untitled and undated. A brief work in commendation of Ismāʿīl b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Walī and his *ṭarīqa*.)
MS: National Records Office, Khartoum, Misc., Ismāʿīliyya 2, 292-300.
 8. *Sharḥ ʿalā ʿaqīdat al-Risāla fī 'l-basmala wa'l-ḥamdala*.
- 32 ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, *Nafaḥāt al-yarāʿ*, I, 83-8, quoting both the poem on ʿUrābī Pasha and another to Muḥammad Sirr al-Khatim al-Mīrghanī.
- 33 For full details, see *ALA*, i, 58-9.

9. *Sharḥ ʿalā 'l-Arbaʿīn al-Nawawīyya.*
10. *Sharḥ ʿalā 'l-Ibtihāj bi'l-kalām [or fī 'l-kalām] ʿalā 'l-isrāʾ wa'l-miʿrāj.*
MS: al-Maktaba al-baladiyya, Alexandria, *majmūʿa alif* 139.
11. *Taʿzīm al-ittifāq fī āyat al-mīthāq.*