

TRADING IN SLAVES IN BELA-SHANGUL AND GUMUZ, ETHIOPIA: BORDER ENCLAVES IN HISTORY, 1897–1938

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LIKE other empires in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, expansion and slavery went hand in hand in Ethiopia, contrary to imperial justifications based on the abolition of the slave trade and slavery.¹ Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Ethiopian empire incorporated the northwestern border enclaves of Bela-Shangul and Gumuz into greater Ethiopia. Having obtained the subordination of the local Muslim warlords, the emperor then demanded tribute from them in slaves, ivory and gold. Slaves were used as domestics in the imperial palace at Addis Ababa and the houses of state dignitaries and as farm labor on their farms elsewhere in the country. Responding to the demands of the central government as well as their own needs, borderland chiefs raided local villages and neighbouring chiefdoms for slaves. Expanding state control thus led to intensified slave raiding and the extension of the slave trade from the borderlands into the centre of the empire in spite of Ethiopia's public commitment to end slavery and the slave trade as a member of the League of Nations. The end of slavery in Ethiopia only came with the Italian occupation in 1935.²

BELA-SHANGUL AND GUMUZ IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

A number of Watawit sheikhdoms dominated Bela-Shangul and Gumuz in the northwestern Ethiopian-Sudanese borderlands from the early nineteenth century. The Watawit were the descendants of Sudanese Arabs who had first come to Bela-Shangul as merchants and Muslim preachers in the first quarter of the century. They then intermarried with the local ruling elite

¹ See, for example, Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge, 1983); Paul E. Lovejoy and Jan S. Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery: The Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897–1936* (Cambridge, 1993); Frederick Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890–1925* (New Haven, 1980); Suzanne Miers and Martin Klein, 'Slavery in Colonial Africa,' special issue, *Slavery and Abolition*, 19(1998), 1–272.

² Ato Alämu Agäñähu (75 years old) interviewed at Yäjjube on 21–22 Aug. 1979; Ato Asräs Yänesäw (84) interviewed at Däbrä Marqos on 14–15 Aug. 1979; Fitawrari Algamar Hamdan Abu Shok (50), governor of Gubba until 1991, interviewed at Addis Ababa on 27–28 Feb. 1982; Ato Mäkuriya Bizunäh (55) and Grazmach Taddässa Jämbäre (57) interviewed on 1–3 Sept. 1979 at Chagni town in Gumuz country; and Sheikh Abd al Wahid Yussuf (82), Ato Harun Sosso (90) and Ato Muhammad al-Hassan (68), interviewed at Qush-Mängäl 18 km to the west of Asossa on 30 March 1998. I am grateful to Ato Ibrahim Muhammad for the translation of the interviews from the Arabic to Amharic. Letter of Emperor Minilik II to Sheikh Khojele al-Hassan, 30 Aug. 1898. See also Emilio De Bono, *Anno XIII: The Conquest of an Empire* (London, 1937), 252. I am grateful to Mr David Chapple, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, for reading and comments.

and established their dominance over the local Bertha people. Having established their control over Bela-Shangul, the Watawit then expanded their power and territory at the expense of neighbouring Mao and Khoma peoples to the south.³

In the process, Bela-Shangul and Gumuz became incorporated into the slave trade of southern Nubia, and the Watawit became the principal slave traders of the area. Some Watawit transported slaves to the Sudan, but more often they sold slaves to Sudanese Arab merchants who visited the markets of Bela-Shangul.⁴ Slaves served as cultivators, servile soldiers and concubines in Nubia, and Nubian noblemen hired out their female slaves to travelers.⁵ As female slaves gave birth, their offspring belonged to their owners, just as calves belonged to the owners of the cows and not to owners of the bulls.⁶

Baqqara Arabs continued to raid the Bertha, Burun, Gunza, Ingessana, Jum Jum, Mao, Khoma, Meban and Uduk during the period of Mahdist rule in the Sudan (1881–98). At the same time, Bela-Shangul and Gubba became autonomous sheikhdoms in return for supplying slaves to the Mahdist state,⁷ and Watawit sheikhs continued to trade in slaves even after the British occupied Nubia in 1898.⁸

The Bertha and Gumuz had much in common with each other and with related peoples in the Sudan. Linguistically, Bertha and Gumuz speak related Nilo-Saharan languages.⁹ The ruling house of Gubba and the sultans of the small Gumuz sheikhdoms, by contrast, spoke Arabic, and even the village sheikhs in Bela-Shangul spoke Arabic as well as Bertha.¹⁰ Bertha inhabited the area to the south of the Blue Nile, while most of the Gumuz inhabited the area to the north of the river, but some Gumuz sections inhabited the Dabus, Diddessa and Angär valleys to its south.

³ Interviews: Abd al-Wahid Yussuf, Harun Sosso and Muhammad al-Hassan. See also Rashed Mohammad, 'A biography of Däjjazmach Abdulrahim Khojele' (B. A. thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1995), 1–3. Margery Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia* (Evanston, 1969), 326–7.

⁴ *Ibid.* National Record Office, Khartoum (hereafter NRO) Blue Nile Province, 1/27/202, FP/31/A16, 'The Dinder Reserve', 64. Upper Nile Province 1/12/104, A. J. Arkell, District Commissioner, Southern District, 'Subject: Slave Trade Between Abyssinia and the Sudan', 29 Apr. 1928.

⁵ Jay Spaulding, 'Slavery, land tenure and social class in the northern Turkish Sudan', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 15 (1982), 8–9. Janet J. Ewald, 'The Nile Valley system and the Red Sea slave trade 1820–1880', in William Gervase Clarence-Smith (ed.), *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1989), 72–83.

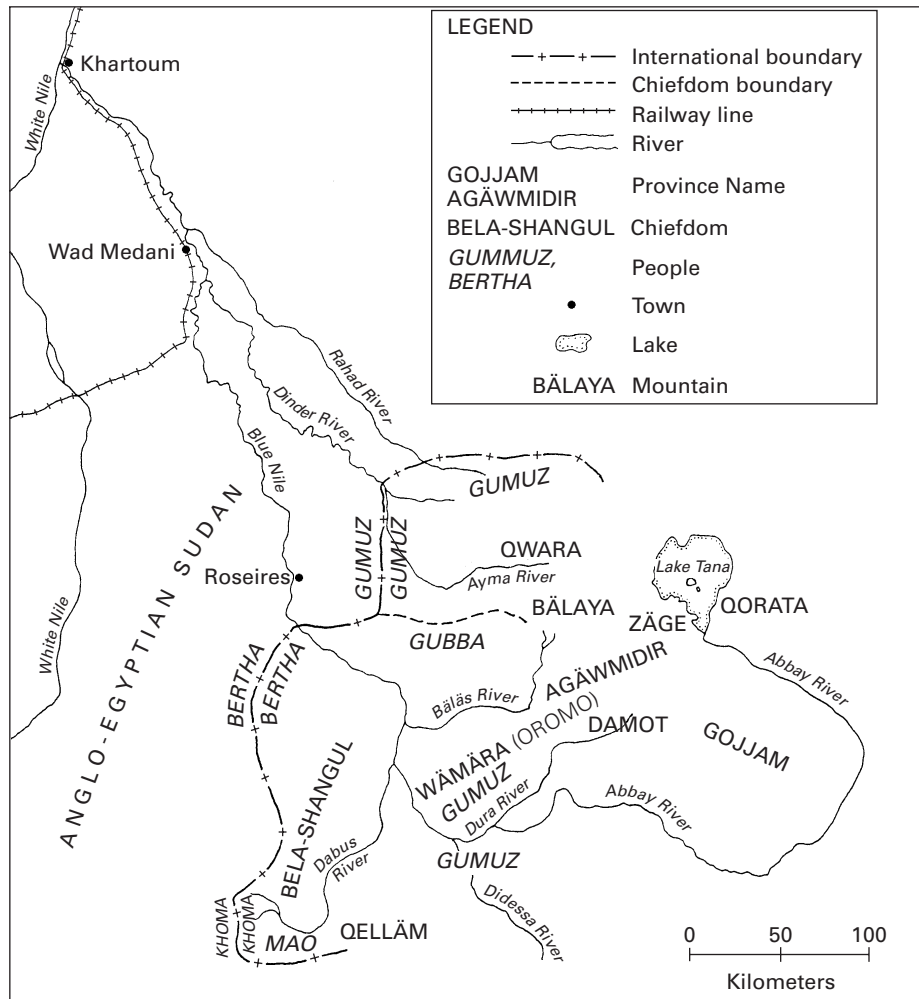
⁶ Richard Hill, *On the Frontiers of Islam: The Sudan Under Turco-Egyptian Rule, 1822–1845* (Oxford, 1970), 115–6, 183.

⁷ P. M. Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881–1898* (Oxford, 1977), 47.

⁸ Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge, 1984), 240. For an account of the battle of Karari, see Ismat Hasan Zulfo (Peter Clark, trans.), *Karari: the Sudanese Account of the Battle of Omdurman* (London, 1980).

⁹ NRO Blue Nile Province, 1/62/435, G. M. Hancock, 'Sudan Abyssinian Border', 26/10/1941, 2. Regarding the languages spoken by the Gumuz and Bertha, see M. Lionel Bender, *The Ethiopian Nilo-Saharan* (Addis Ababa, 1975), 61; A. Triulzi, A. A. Dafallah, and M. L. Bender, 'Bertha', in M. L. Bender (ed.), *The Non-Semitic Languages of Ethiopia* (East Lansing, 1976), 513–32.

¹⁰ NRO Blue Nile Province, 1/62/435, G. M. Hancock, 'Sudan Abyssinian Border', 26/10/1941, 2–3.



Map 1. Bela-Shangul and Gumuz. After Andrien Zervos, *L'empire d'Ethiopie : le miroir de l'Ethiopie moderne, 1906–1935* (Alexandria, 1936), 322.

INCORPORATION OF THE BORDERLANDS INTO GREATER ETHIOPIA

Three Watawit rulers—Sheikh Khojele al-Hassan of Aqoldi (Asossa) (1897–1938), Sheikh Mahmud of Khomosha and Sheikh Abd al-Rahman Khojele of Bela-Shangul proper (Qebesh)—dominated the borderlands at the end of the nineteenth century.¹¹ Then, in 1897, Ras Mekonnen, governor of Hararge in southeastern Ethiopia, led an imperial expedition west into Bela-Shangul that brought most of the Bertha and some of the so-called black

¹¹ Interviews: Abd al-Wahid Yussuf, Harun Sosso and Muhammad al-Hassan. Gäbrä Sillassie, *Tarikä Zämän Zä-Dagmawi Minilik Nigusä Nägäst Zä-Ityopya* (Addis Ababa, 1959, Ethiopian calendar), 285. Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855–1974* (London, 1991), 66. For the life of Sheikh Khojele, see Atieb Ahmed Dafallah, 'Sheikh Khojele al-Hassan and Bela-Shangul (1825–1938)' (B. A. thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1973).

Arabs into Ethiopia. Emperor Minilik II (1889–1913) wanted to annex Bela-Shangul because of the economic and strategic importance of the region, and by exploiting the traditional enmity of the three Watawit sheikhdoms towards each other, he was able to ensure their subordination.¹²

Following the fall of the Mahdist state in 1898, King Täklä-Häymanot of Gojjam (1881–1901) was also able to conquer the Gumuz chiefdoms between Agäwmidir and the Bäläs River. These Gumuz were ‘stateless’ and too weak to counter the military threat of their Amhara and Agäw neighbours.¹³ Other Gumuz between the Bäläs river and Bumbode (now Bambudī) on the Ethiopian-Sudanese frontier, however, had established a border enclave known as Gubba. Subject to the Mek of Gule during the period of the Fung kingdom,¹⁴ Gubba continued to be ruled by Manjil Hamdan Abu Shok (1898–1938), a seventh generation descendant of the Fung kingdom of Sennar, while also being incorporated into greater Ethiopia.¹⁵

Following their conquest, Bela-Shangul and Gubba began to pay tribute in slaves, ivory and gold to the central government at Addis Ababa, while Hamdan and Khojele became the equals of other subordinate rulers, such as Däjjach Jote Tulu of Qellām, Däjjach Kumsa (later Gäbrä Igziabher) Morada of Nāqāmtē, Däjjach Muhammad Yayu of Awssa and Abba Jiffar of Jimma.¹⁶ In 1902, when Ethiopia and the Sudan demarcated the border between them, Gubba, Bela-Shangul and Fadasi passed into Ethiopia, while Bertha and Gumuz, who had little to say on the outcome of the border negotiations between Ethiopia and the Sudan, became divided by the new border.¹⁷

¹² Ato Al-Mamun Ahmad (72) and Sheikh Babākir Ahmad (58), interviewed at Asossa on 31 March 1998. I am indebted to Ato Al-Qurayish Ahmad for translation from the Arabic to Amharic. Harold G. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II Ethiopia, 1844–1913* (Oxford, 1975), 190. Zervos, *L’empire d’Ethiopie*, 333–4.

¹³ Interviews: Abd al-Wahid Yussuf, Alamar Hamdan, Harun Sosso and Muhammad al-Hassan. Taj Hargey, ‘The suppression of slavery in the Sudan 1898–1939’ (Ph.D. thesis, Oxford University, 1981), 59. Public Record Office (PRO), Foreign Office, London (FO): 403/275, Rodd to the Marquess of Salisbury, Aug. 1898. NRO Intelligence 2/18/151, Armbruster’s Report on his 1908 Mission to Abyssinia, 105. Täklä Iyyāsus, *Yä Ityopia Tarik: Nigus Täklä-Haymanot*, ms 254, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, folio 106.

¹⁴ For the Fung kings of Sennar, see Jay Spaulding, *The Heroic Age in Sennar* (East Lansing, 1985), 21–38.

¹⁵ PRO, FO 371/20940 J2157/2157/1, Abyssinia Confidential, ‘Records of Leading Personalities in Abyssinia’, 4 May 1937, 5. The orders of his ancestors were: Wawirt, Hamad, Hasan, Muhammad Nur, Ibrahim, Abu Shok and Hamdan; see PRO, FO 371/15389 84783, R. E. Cheesman, ‘The Abbay: Second Reconnaissance Via Wambara and Roseires’, Confidential, 1929, 46. See also Peter P. Garreston, ‘Manjil Hamdan Abu Shok (1898–1938) and the administration of Gubba’, in Joseph Tubiana (ed.), *Modern Ethiopia: From the Accession of Menelik II to the Present* (Rotterdam, 1980), 197–210.

¹⁶ Mahtämä-Sillassie Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zikrā Nāgār* (Addis Ababa, 1962, Ethiopian calendar), 164. See also Wendy James, ‘Lifelines: exchange marriage among the Gumuz’, in Donald Donham and Wendy James (eds.), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia* (Cambridge, 1986), esp. 122.

¹⁷ NRO Blue Nile Province, 1/27/202, L. F. Nalder, ‘The Fung: Tribal and Political’, 1929–30, 8. Blue Nile Province, 1/62/435, G. M. Hancock, ‘Sudan Abyssinian Border’, 26/10/1941, 2. For the dubious status of Bela-Shangul and Gubba, see Bahru Zewde, ‘Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the western Ethiopian frontier 1898–1935’ (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1976), 83–4.

EXPANSION OF SLAVERY

With the new demand for tribute in slaves, gold and ivory at the imperial court in Addis Ababa, Sheikh Khojele revived slave raiding, hunting and gold mining using slave labor. Large numbers of Bertha cultivators and cattle herders were forced to mine gold as a result; faced with the superior power of Khojele and his Amhara overlords, they had little opportunity to resist. Slaves, meanwhile, came mainly from Mao and Khoma.

Khojele carried on raiding and trading for slaves, coffee and ivory along with politics. His soldiers raided the Mao of Beggi and Khoma to the west. Beggi was a buffer zone between Khojele and Däjjäzmach Jote Tulu (1855–1918) of Qelläm. Taking advantage of Khojele's imprisonment in Addis Ababa in 1903, Jote Tulu and his Oromo soldiers moved on Beggi and defeated Kutu Golja, the Mao chief, at the battle of Gitten. The Mao and their western neighbours, the Khoma, were decimated; Kutu Golja was forced to flee to Illubabor; and many of the remaining Mao were taken captive. Beggi remained under Oromo rule until Khojele was released in 1908.¹⁸

Minilik well understood the commercial and political rivalry of Qelläm and Bela-Shangul as well as the economic and strategic importance of Bela-Shangul, and in 1910 he granted Khojele autonomy and encouraged him to build up his power at the expense of Jote and other local chiefs.¹⁹ Khojele's regional leadership and wealth in gold and slaves allowed him great influence at the Shäwan court at Addis Ababa, and the extension of central government influence and power over Bela-Shangul facilitated Khojele's expansion against the Mao and Khoma. Just as Khojele at Asossa was a vassal to Addis Ababa, so the Mao and Khoma became dependent chiefdoms of Asossa. Consequently, Khojele ordered his Bertha soldiers to raid the Mao and Khoma, and as a result, Khoma retreated to the Sudan to seek the protection of British officials.²⁰

¹⁸ Ato Abdisa Wäraqa (75), Ato Abdella Shita (26), Ato Adam Abul-Hassan (45), Ato Bānti Ahmad (30), Ato Matewos Bāltaj (35), Wäyzāro Momina Harun (28) and Ato Muhammad Yilbi (74), interviewed at Tongo town in Mao territory, 2 April 1998. I am grateful to Ato Abd al-Qadir Angäre for translation of the interviews from Afan Oromo to Amharic. It is worth noting that the Mao are bilingual, speaking Mao and Afan Oromo. For a report of anthropological fieldwork among the Mao of Gidami and Anfillo areas, see Vinigi Grottanelli, *I Mao: Missione Etnografica nel Uollega Occidentale* (Rome, 1940); and Harold C. Fleming, 'The importance of Mao in Ethiopian history', in Sven Rubenson (ed.), *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Uppsala, 1984), 1–38. Regarding the Khoma, see Samuel Burns and C. J. Guth, 'Koma language', mimeograph (n.d.) available at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, 1; Ernesta Cerulli, *Peoples of South-west Ethiopia and Its Borderland* (London, 1956), 12, 13, 17, 20. Enrico Cerulli, *Etiopia Occidentale* (Rome, 1933), II, 87–91. Tesema Ta'a, 'The Oromo of Wollega: a historical survey to 1910' (M.A. thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1980), 77. For a biography of Däjjäzmach Jote Tulu, see Bahru Zewde, 'Dejazmach Jote Tulu (1855–1918)' (B. A. thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1970).

¹⁹ Interviews: Abd al Wahid Yussuf, Abdisa Wäraqa, Harun Sosso, Muhammad al-Hassan and Muhammad Yilbi. Letter of Emperor Minilik II to Sheikh Khojele al-Hassan, 7 July 1908. See also Atieb, 'Sheikh Khojele al-Hassan', 42.

²⁰ Interviews: Abd al-Wahid Yussuf, Abdisa Wäraqa and Muhammad Yilbi. See also Atieb, 'Sheikh Khojele al-Hassan', 51.

Khojele relied upon the labor of Bertha military slaves to extract gold, while his agents sold slaves to Sudanese Arab merchants who visited Asossa. From Asossa, trade routes led to Kurmuk, a frontier post on the Ethiopian-Sudanese border that served as the main outlet of slaves to the Sudan. From there, separate routes branched off to Belwara, Surkum, Abeldagu, Dehnima, Sillak, Khor Doleib and thence to the White Nile; to Belwara, Abeldagu or Yakah, Khor Doleib and Gule; and to Mortosoro, Beni Mayok, Khor Samaa, Ulu and Gelhak on the White Nile. According to an official estimate, Bela-Shangul exported 200–500 slaves annually. The average price of a slave was 7–10 in Bela-Shangul, but it reached 40–50 in the White Nile Province in the Sudan, making the trade enormously profitable.²¹

Sheikh Khojele himself took part in *razzia* into the territories of the Mao, Khoma and other minority groups. Between 1909 and 1911, he introduced a new tax, *lij gibir* (child tribute), into the newly conquered Mao territory of Beggi. Khojele bred slave children, and when they reached maturity, he sent them as tribute to the central government at Addis Ababa. Khojele provided slave children to Emperor Minilik II (1889–1913), Lij Iyassu (1913–16), Ras Tafari (1916–30) and Emperor Haile Sellasie I (1930–74).²²

Khojele's wife, Asit Amna, also traded in slaves from Bela-Shangul to the Sudan. As early as 1905, she emigrated from Bela-Shangul to the Sudan and settled first at Jebel Ora, then at Khor Yabus and finally at Mortosoro, an established slave depot. Khojele, himself, established another slave entrepôt in the Sudan through which some 600 slave children passed. The Sudanese slave trade yielded Khojele and Amna much revenue before Amna was imprisoned at Wadi Halfa for slaving in 1928. Released in 1935, she settled at Wad Medani.²³

One of Sheikh Khojele's sons raided Khoma in the Sudan for slaves to give to influential notables in Addis Ababa.²⁴ Another son, Muhammad al-Mahdi, sent slaves to his mother at Wad Medani, who then supplied slaves to Ja'aliiyyin merchants from Badiyana, Watish and Araba Gumal. Abdel Galil al-Mahdi, a grandson, also traded in slaves, and Khojele himself supplied slaves to his son and wife from Asossa.²⁵

In contrast to the involvement of the entire Khojele family in slave raiding and trading, Manjil Hamdan Abu Shok of Gubba does not seem to have raided either Sudanese or his own villages for slaves. Nor did he engage in the slave trade to any great extent. There is no record of the slave trade in the Blue Nile Province of the Sudan adjoining Gubba, and Hamdan protected Gumuz in his domain from being raided by Amhara-Agäw.²⁶

²¹ NRO Upper Nile Province, 1/12/104, 'Notes on a Meeting Held at Roseires', 19/4/1928. The Sudanese and Egyptian pounds were based on the pound sterling, but were divided into 100 piasters and 1,000 millièmes respectively.

²² Interviews: Abd al-Wahid Yussuf, Abdissa Wäraqa, Harun Sosso and Muhammad al-Hassan. See also Atieb, 'Sheikh Khojele al-Hassan', 54.

²³ Atieb, 'Sheikh Khojele al-Hassan', 16–17; Hargey, 'Suppression of slavery', 149, 351; PRO, FO 371/16996 J1891/429/1, Lord Noel Buxton to Mr Peterson, 24 July 1933, 2. See also Perham, *Government of Ethiopia*, 326–7, 360.

²⁴ PRO, FO 371/12344, A. D. Home, 2 May 1927. Hargey, 'Suppression of slavery', 150.

²⁵ NRO Upper Nile Province, 1/12/104, R. K. Winter, Acting Civil Secretary for Governor of Fung Province, Khartoum, 30 June 1927. Hargey, 'Suppression of slavery', 149.

²⁶ Interviews: Algamar Hamdan and Mäkurīya Bizunäh.

Hamdan appeared more progressive than Khojele and the other Ethiopian lords. He brought motor cars to Gubba, developed cotton and tobacco plantations and sold cotton and tobacco at Roseires. His guards were trained in the Sudan Defense Force, and he sent some of his children to be educated in the Sudan. The expansion of Islam and trade under Hamdan hindered the spread of the Orthodox Church and Amhara political culture associated with the imperial court at Addis Ababa to the Gubba lowlands and other Gumuz sheikhdoms. As a result, Gumuz were not incorporated into the orbit of Ethiopian feudalism to the same degree as Bertha, Mao and Khoma.²⁷

Although Hamdan Abu Shok did not directly take part in the slave trade, however, he possessed large numbers of slaves on his cotton and tobacco farms.²⁸ Further, he raided neighbouring 'pagan' Gumuz chiefdoms to get slaves for his plantations in the early 1900s, and he appointed his own candidate to rule there in 1915.²⁹ In 1918, a number of Hamdan's slaves fled Gubba for the Sudan. Hamdan sent his soldiers into the Sudan to catch them. Police of the Slavery Repression Department of the Sudan were dispatched from Roseires to intercept them, but Hamdan's soldiers retired before their arrival.³⁰

The Agäw chief, Fitawrari Zäläqä, governor of Bäläya and Tumha (1905–35), and his troops also raided widely in the borderlands.³¹ The Gumuz lowlands between the Bäläs river and Agäwmidir served as a reservoir of slaves, and Amhara-Agäw raided it continually through the first three and a half decades of the twentieth century.³² Zäläqä unabashedly informed Mr Armbruster, a British official visiting Agäwmidir: 'though there were [Agäw] men living in Bäläya mountain, all the low country between the plateau and the Sudan frontier was inhabited by his slaves'.³³ Zäläqä took Gumuz slaves from the lowlands to his seat at Bäläya and thence to Dangila in Agäwmidir, the great slave market in northwestern Ethiopia during the early decades of the twentieth century, where he sold them secretly at night.³⁴

In 1912, some 100 people sought to escape ill-treatment by Zäläqä and his retainers. Zäläqä raided their villages, killed the men and took the women and children as slaves.³⁵ Eight years later, in 1920, a report reached the

²⁷ PRO, FO 371/20940 J2157/2157/1, Abyssinia Confidential, 'Records of Leading Personalities in Abyssinia', 4 May 1937, 5. NRO Blue Nile Province, 1/27/202, FP/31/A/6, 'The Dinder Reserve', 69. Garreston, 'Manjil Hamdan Abu Shok', 203. For the concept and discussions of Ethiopian feudalism, see Addis Hiwet, *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution* (Occasional Publication, no. 1, *Review of African Political Economy*, London, 1975), 3–4; and Donald Crummey, 'Abyssinian feudalism', *Past and Present*, 89(1980), 115–38.

²⁸ PRO, FO 371/15389 84783, R. E. Cheesman, 'The Abbay: Second Reconnaissance via Wambara and Roseires', Confidential, 1929, 39.

²⁹ Garreston, 'Manjil Hamdan Abu Shok', 205.

³⁰ NRO Intelligence, 1/16/75, Sudan Abyssinian Report, Aug. 1918.

³¹ Leone Zanni, 'La tribu dei Gumus', *La Nigrizia*, 57 (1939–40), 156.

³² Interviews: Algamar Hamdan, Mäkuriya Bizunäh and Taddässa Jämbäre.

³³ NRO Intelligence, 6/5/18, Sudan Intelligence Report no. 169, 'Mr. Armbruster's Report on His Recent Journey in Abyssinia', Aug. 1908, 47.

³⁴ PRO, FO 371/1294 71463, Major Doughty Wylie to Sir Edward Grey, East Africa, Confidential, 5.

³⁵ NRO Intelligence 2/19/157, Maralai, Governor of Kassala Province.

Sudan that Zäläqä had occupied Gubba without opposition from the governor, Hamdan Abu Shok, and proceeded to raid Gumuz villages for slaves.³⁶ A year later, in June 1921, Zäläqä sent thirty of his riflemen to raid the region between Wämbära and Gubba under the orders of his overlord *Ras* Haylu of Gojjam, Damot and Agäwmidir (1911–32). The raiders returned with 20 captives.³⁷

A. D. Home, the British Consul at Dangila from 1922 to 1925, reported that Zäläqä and his private army raided from Bäläya Mountain to the Gumuz lowlands, selling their captives at Dangila. Gumuz slaves were in high demand at Dangila, where the average price for a slave was 60 Maria Theresa thalers.³⁸ Prices varied by sex and age:³⁹

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Price</i>
Male	about ten years	about 50 thalers
Female	about ten years	about 50 thalers
Male	about twenty years	about 65 thalers
Female	about twenty years	about 95 thalers

Gumuz, for their part, were hostile to Christian highlanders, and fearful of raids, often fled to the low country south of Gallabat in the Sudan.⁴⁰ Gumuz who inhabited Abu Ramla, Dunkur, Gubba, the lowlands between Agäwmidir and the Bäläs river and the hills to the southeast of Roseires were among those raided most frequently.⁴¹ They followed traditional religious beliefs and were looked down upon by their Agäw and Amhara neighbours.⁴² Armed with only spears, bows and arrows that were no match for the firearms of the Ethiopian military, Gumuz trusted more to flight than to fighting their heavily armed neighbours.⁴³

By 1901, one Gumuz clan, the Hamez Umzikr, became fugitives and sought refuge in Dunkur, a Gumuz market place four days east of Qwara in Bägämidir. The ruler of Dunkur, Sheikh Nasr Wad Hamed El Nur, was a relative of the Fung ruler of Gubba, and he helped the slaves proceed to the Sudan to seek their freedom in spite of pressure from Amhara officials resident in Dunkur who had been appointed by the governor of Damot and Agäwmidir.⁴⁴

But Dunkur was also a garrison station that served as a slave depot for Gumuz slaves being sent to Qwara, Agäwmidir and Damot. In March 1901,

³⁶ NRO Intelligence, 2/22/175, Lewa, Governor of Sennar Province, 13 Jan. 1920.

³⁷ NRO Intelligence, 1/5/19, A. D. Home, British Consulate Office at Dangila, 'Intelligence Notes Abyssinia', no. 148 Secret, 31 July 1982, 3. PRO, FO 371/16096, no. 8, Confidential, Consul R. E. Cheesman to Sir S. Barton, 20 May 1932, 91–2.

³⁸ NRO Intelligence, 1/5/20, A. D. Home, Northwest Abyssinia Intelligence Notes, 24 Feb. 1925. Maria Theresa thalers will hereafter be referred to as thalers.

³⁹ NRO Intelligence, 1/5/20, A. D. Home, British Consul at Dangila, 15 Aug. 1925.

⁴⁰ NRO Intelligence 6/5/18, Sudan Intelligence Report no. 169, Mr Armbruster's Report on His Recent Journey in Abyssinia, Aug. 1908, 49. Interview: Algamar Hamdan.

⁴¹ They belonged to the following sections: Dabanja, Daboda, Damachogo, Damagat, Datobi, Degana, Dugma, Naseih and Zateih.

⁴² NRO 4 Kassala, 1/26/150, Civil Secretary's Office, Sudan Government, Khartoum to Acting Civil Secretary, S. Hillilim, 7 Sept. 1929.

⁴³ NRO 4 Kassala, 1/26/150, Civil Secretary's Office, Sudan government, Khartoum to Acting Civil Secretary, S. Hillilim, 7 Sept. 1929.

⁴⁴ NRO Sudan Intelligence Report, no. 84, 1 to 31 July 1901., 5. Interview: Algamar Hamdan.

Ras Bitwädäd Mängäsha Atikäm, Governor of Damot, Agäwmidir, Mecha, Achäfär, Wändige and Qwara, sent his soldiers to Gubba to collect taxes in gold and cotton. His soldiers raided Gumuz and took 25 captives, ostensibly for failure to pay taxes, who were then sent to Dunkur.⁴⁵

Malik Adam Wad Dafan of Abu Ramla also paid tribute to the governor of Qwara, but like Gubba under Manjil Hamdan, Abu Ramla did not have resident Amhara officials. Nor did Adam collaborate with the central government in the Gumuz slave trade.⁴⁶

The period from 1900 to 1935 encompasses the peak of Amhara-Agäw slave raiding activities in Gumuz country west of Damot and Agäwmidir. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Amhara-Agäw military class intensified slave raiding activities, raiding Gumuz villages and selling their captives at Dangila. Slave raiding greatly reduced the population of the Gumuz country and Bela-Shangul.⁴⁷ Gumuz slaves were used in the Christian highlands for domestic purposes, but the documents are less clear as to the actual destination of the slaves and the ways they were employed in the distant lands of the Sudan. Such raids forced Gumuz belonging to the Zateih section to become refugees at Roseires in the Sudan.

SUPPRESSION OF THE SLAVE TRADE

Like Ras Haylu or Nigus Wäldä Giyorgis of Bägemidir, most northwestern Ethiopian notables and rich farmers owned Gumuz slaves,⁴⁸ and Gumuz were frequently forced to flee from slave raids on their villages to the low country south of Gallabat, where they increasingly found freedom under the protection of the British. By 1900, British colonization of the Sudan made it possible to establish a settlement, or 'battalion garden', for liberated slaves at Wadi Halfa. The British administration also created agricultural settlements at Gallabat, Gedarif and Kassala as sanctuaries for runaway slaves from the Ethiopian-Sudanese borderlands.⁴⁹ The flight of Gumuz from the Ethiopian borderlands to the Sudan also forced British officials to establish a regional anti-slavery headquarters at Roseires in 1902. Increasingly, runaway Gumuz came to recognize the Sudanese Slavery Repression Department as their protectors and liberators.

The Slavery Repression Department had 110 men, a headquarters at Roseires and a widespread network of posts along the Ethiopian border at Gule, Jebel Geri, Khor Tumat, Belatoma and the Yabus.⁵⁰ In June 1911, the Department at Roseires came into contact with armed parties of Sudanese slave dealers returning from Ethiopia along the Dinder River to the Nile. Then, they proceeded from the ford at Um Benein just south of Singa to Kannana country and further west in the Sudan.⁵¹ The following year,

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* NRO Blue Nile Province, 1/27/202, FP/31/A/6, 'The Dinder Reserve', 69.

⁴⁷ Interviews: Algamar Hamdan, Mäkuriya Bizunäh and Taddässa Jämbäre. PRO, FO 371/16096 J2090/3/1, Consul Cheesman to Sir S. Barton, no. 8, Confidential, 20 May 1932, 92.

⁴⁸ Interviews: Algamar Hamdan, Mäkuriya Bizunäh and Taddässa Jämbäre.

⁴⁹ Hargey, 'Suppression of slavery', 139.

⁵⁰ NRO Blue Nile Province, 1/27/202, FP/31/A/6, 'The Dinder Reserve', 76.

⁵¹ NRO Blue Nile Province, 1/27/202, The Civil Secretary, 'Subject: Registration of Slaves', Sennar Province, 30 Sept. 1912, 2.

members of the Slavery Repression Department ran into a caravan of 60 slaves near Disa to the north of Roseires, and the police killed the notorious slaver Lina in the ensuing fight.

Four years later, in Janaury 1916, some 38 Gumuz took refuge in the Sudan, complaining of cruel treatment by the Agäw military class, and subsequently a Gumuz captive who had been mutilated died.⁵² The Sudan government gave them permission to stay at Roseires. The following year, the inspector at Roseires reported that an unspecified number of refugees had fled from Gubba and registered under Arabic aliases when they crossed the Ethiopian-Sudanese border. Nigus Wäldä Giyorgis, governor of Bägemidir (1910–18), protested to the Sudan government and demanded it return his slaves to him. The Gumuz refugees were unanimous in refusing to return to Ethiopia, however, and their names could not be traced from the list provided by Nigus Wäldä Giyorgis.⁵³

Some Gumuz raided by the military class of Bägemidir later took refuge in the monastery of Mahbärä Sillassie, where they worked for a few years before leaving for the Sudan, where conditions were better. Like Wäldä Giyorgis, the monks at Mahbärä Sillassie were used to employing slave labor, and they requested that the Sudanese government return the runaway slaves. The Sudanese government rejected their claims, however, and made it clear to the monks that the Gumuz seeking refuge at their monastery were not slaves at all, but villagers escaping from raids by Ethiopian border chiefs.⁵⁴

IMPERIAL SLAVERY AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Local Agäwmidir and Damot chiefs, from the top of the hierarchy to the *chiga shum* (chiefs of soil), were all beneficiaries of the slave trade from the Gumuz and Bela-Shangul borderlands for the first three and a half decades of the twentieth century. The introduction of new rifles helped them to take Bertha, Khoma, Mao and the Gumuz into slavery, while plundering and warfare in the Christian highlands was often linked with slavery.⁵⁵ The Orthodox clergy also benefited from slavery.⁵⁶ But the continued unrest caused by slave raiding depopulated the Ethiopian-Sudanese borderlands and alerted the British to the continued existence of slavery and the slave trade in Ethiopia.

At the same time, however, on 28 September 1923,⁵⁷ Ethiopia had become

⁵² NRO Intelligence, 2/20/166, Kaimakam, Assistant Director of Intelligence to the Private Secretary, 25 Nov. 1917.

⁵³ NRO Intelligence, 2/20/166, Lewa, Governor of Sennar Province to the Assistant Director of Intelligence, 'Subject: Gumuz Refugees', 17 Nov. 1917.

⁵⁴ NRO Intelligence, 2/20/168, Mr. A. W. Skrine D. C. (n.d.).

⁵⁵ Interviews: Algamar Hamdan, Mäkuriya Bizunäh and Taddässa Jämbäre. Zanni, 'La Tribu dei Gumus', 156.

⁵⁶ Interviews: Algamar Hamdan, Mäkuriya Bizunäh and Taddässa Jämbäre. See also Zervos, *L'empire d'Ethiopie*, 50–3.

⁵⁷ PRO, FO 371/16096 J1081/3/1, Lord Noel Buxton and Lord Polwarth, 'Report on Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society of Abyssinia', 20 Apr. 1932, 5. See also Antoinette Iadarola, 'Ethiopia's admission into the League of Nations: an assessment of motives', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 8 (1975), 601–22.

a member of the League of Nations and as such was forbidden from engaging in the slave trade under the terms of the Brussels Act of 1890:

The slave trade includes all acts involved in the capture, acquisition or disposal of a person with intent to reduce him to slavery; all acts involved in the acquisition of a slave with a view to selling or exchanging him, all acts of disposal by sale or exchange of a slave acquired with a view to being sold or exchanged, and, in general, every act of trade or transport in slaves.⁵⁸

In an attempt to counter European criticism, Ras Tafari issued an edict in 1924 imposing heavy penalties on the slave trade without, however, abolishing the legal status of slavery itself. Later, Ethiopia became a signatory to the Slavery Convention of 1926.⁵⁹

The official policy of the Ethiopian government against the slave trade, however, did little to stop the regional warlords from continuing to raid the borderlands for slaves. Border enclaves on the periphery of greater Ethiopia served as hunting grounds to capture slaves and obtain ivory. The military class of Christian Ethiopia continued to conduct raids against weak communities along the Ethiopian-Sudanese borderlands like the Añuak, Bertha, Gumuz, Khoma, Maji, Mao and Turkana. The military also raided Barya and Kunama in Eritrea.⁶⁰ The Amhara-Tigrean elite referred to Bertha, Mao, Khoma and Gumuz and other 'dark skinned lowlanders' as *shanqilla*, or slaves. Sudanese Arabs, on their part, considered Bertha, together with other border groups – Mao, Khoma and Gumuz – as synonyms for slave ('*abid*').⁶¹ The military class raided peoples of the borderlands and took men, women and children. They sold their captives to Muslim merchants who in turn sold them to the well-to-do in northwestern Ethiopia. The Christian military class worked in harmony with the Muslim merchants in enslaving Gumuz to the west of Agäwmidir and Damot. Both the Christian military and the Muslim merchants claimed religious merit for despoiling and enslaving the 'pagan' of the borderlands.⁶²

Significantly, the emperor's court at Addis Ababa continued to support Muslim slave raiding polities and to employ slave labor itself. Even after Ras Tafari issued the decree making the slave trade illegal, the royal court commissioned the procurement of fresh slaves. Ras Tafari's wife, Wäyzäro

⁵⁸ NRO Blue Nile Province, 1/28/211, the General Act of Brussels Conference of 1888–90, Article 1.

⁵⁹ NRO Blue Nile Province, 1/29/214, No. CS/60/A/6, Civil Secretary, Khartoum to the Governor of Fung Province, Singa, 29 Dec. 1929.

⁶⁰ For a study of the earlier period, see Richard Pankhurst, 'The history of the Bareya, Shanqella and other Ethiopian slaves from the borderlands of the Sudan', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 63 (1977), esp. 11–17, 23; Stephen H. Longrigg, *A History of Eritrea* (Oxford, 1945), 43, 68; and Suzanne Miers, 'Britain and the suppression of slavery in Ethiopia', in Tadesse Beyene (ed.), *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Addis Ababa, 1989), II, 254–7.

⁶¹ NRO Blue Nile Province, 1/62/434, Abyssinia Intelligence, M. S. Lush 1932, 6. P. M. Merab, *Impressions d'Ethiopie: L'Abyssinie sous Menelik II* (Paris, 1921–1929), Vol. 1, 367; III, 132. Alessandro Triulzi, *Salt, Gold and Legitimacy: Prelude to the History of a No-man's Land, Bela Shangul, Wallagga, Ethiopia, ca. 1800–1898* (Napoli, 1981), 2. Richard Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia 1800–1935* (Addis Ababa, 1968), 74.

⁶² Interviews: Alämu Agäñähu, Asräs Yänesäw, Algamar Hamadan, Mäkuriya Bizunäh and Taddässa Jämbäre.

Manan, advanced 30,000 thalers to Sheikh Khojele to buy 600 young slaves between seven and thirteen years old.⁶³ Tafari and Manan kept the slaves as servants in their own palace and in the house of their son-in-law, Fitawrari Dästa Damtäw, in Addis Ababa.⁶⁴

The complicity of the court in the acquisition of slaves certainly violated the commitments which Ethiopia had made when it became a member of the League and subsequently signed the Slavery Convention of 1926. While still employing slave labour at the court in August 1930, Tafari created a Slavery Department with a British advisor, Frank De Halpert, under the Ministry of the Interior.⁶⁵ Still, the Ethiopian government did not report on the continued existence of the slave trade in its border enclaves to the Sudan government, and the local power elite in northwestern Ethiopia either openly engaged in the slave trade themselves or profited from taxing it.⁶⁶

Their ongoing raids into Bela-Shangul and Gumuz forced Bertha, Khoma and Gumuz to seek refuge at Kurmuk, Roseires and other places in the Sudan, where the Sudanese government allowed them to settle more than a hundred miles from the border.⁶⁷ In 1926, the Sudan government closed the districts from Kurmuk to Roseires and from the left bank of the Dinder River to the Rahad River.⁶⁸ This measure and the subsequent imprisonment of Amna in 1928 reduced large scale border raids and slave caravans across the Sudan, but the traffic was merely driven underground, and slaves continued to be sold secretly.⁶⁹

Some four years later, on 2 June 1932, Khojele's slavers under one of his relatives, Tahir Ibrahim Afodi, raided the village of Shima in the Sudan. In the course of the raid, they captured six men, 20 women and 30 children among the Bertha. The Sudan government lodged a strong protest with the Ethiopian government, which then ordered Khojele to investigate the matter. Khojele's reply was terse: he denied that any such raids had taken place or that he had any knowledge of Tahir Ibrahim Afodi. At the end of 1932, Tahir Ibrahim Afodi conducted two more raids on the villages of Kadingil and Hareiga in the Sudan. At the end of January 1933, Sudanese and Ethiopian officials met at Kurmuk to settle the incidents.⁷⁰ Raids by the

⁶³ PRO, FO 371 12344, A. D. Home, 2 May 1927. Zervos, *L'empire d'Ethiopie*, 51; Hargey, 'Suppression of slavery', 150.

⁶⁴ PRO, FO 371/12344, A. D. Home, 2 May 1927.

⁶⁵ Frank de Halpert Papers, Rhodes House, Mss. Af. S. 1459 (17).

⁶⁶ NRO Upper Nile Province, 1/12/104, J. L. Maffey, Governor General of the Sudan to Governor General's Office, Cairo, no. 60/A/19, 24 May 1928. Interviews: Abd al-Wahid Yussuf, Algamar Hamdan, Mäkuriya Bizunäh, Muhammad al-Hassan and Taddässa Jämbäre.

⁶⁷ NRO 4 Kassala, 1/14/82, C. E. Lyall, Governor of Kassala Province to Civil Secretary's Department, Khartoum 'Subject: Refugees from Abyssinia Escaped, Slaves', 27 July 1924; Upper Nile Province, 1/12/104, D. T. Bethell, Acting Governor General to the Civil Secretary Khartoum, 'Slavery in Abyssinia', 15 Dec. 1927.

⁶⁸ NRO Upper Nile Province, 1/12/104, Governor of Fung Province, Singa, 15 June 1928.

⁶⁹ Hargey, 'Suppression of slavery', 149, 351. Perham, *Government of Ethiopia*, 326–7, 360. PRO, FO 371/16996 J189/429/1, Lord Noel Buxton to Mr Peterson, 24 July 1933, 2.

⁷⁰ PRO, FO 371/16996 J331/1, Sir S. Barton to Sir J. Simon, 'Annual Report, 1932', 12 Jan. 1933, 16.

Watawit aristocracy on the Bela-Shangul continued, however, and the Ja'aliyyin merchants still transported slaves by night further west in the Sudan.⁷¹

The conduct of the slave raids in the Bela-Shangul borderlands demonstrated the continued complicity and lack of control by the central government over the activities of the border warlords. From Agäwmidir and Damot, the Amhara-Agäw military class continued to raid Gumuz up until 1935. The raiders were untouched by the Ethiopian government, and the captives were sold at Dangila.⁷² Gumuz slaves continued to be absorbed into the domestic economy of northwestern Ethiopia.

Slavery continued in Ethiopia until the Italian invasion in October 1935. Anticipating the invasion, Gumuz first fled their villages through Gallabat to the Sudan in September 1935 in order to avoid becoming involved in conflict between Italy and Ethiopia.⁷³ As the Italians advanced through Tigray, however, they proclaimed on 14 October 1935 that all slaves were free. Like the French and British elsewhere, however, they then proceeded to forcibly induct suitable slaves into the Italian army.⁷⁴

CONCLUSION

The continuation of slave trading and slavery itself in Ethiopia into the 1930s, the involvement of the state in the trade and the continued use of slaves in the royal court were all functions of imperial expansion from the late nineteenth century and directly contrary to the public statements of Emperor Haile Sellassie I and the legal commitments of the Ethiopian state. Such an alliance between slavery and the extension of state power, in spite of official commitments to the contrary, help to place the 'slow death for slavery' in Ethiopia in the wider African context.⁷⁵

Bertha, Khoma, Mao, Gumuz and other minority groups on the Ethiopian-Sudanese borderlands were subject to extensive socio-economic dislocation by continued raids throughout the first three and a half decades of the twentieth century. The influx of refugees into the Sudan continued until 1941, and the legacy of slavery kept Bela-Shangul, Gubba and other Gumuz chiefdoms distant from the political activities of the Ethiopian government. The border peoples, on their part, hated both the Christian highlanders of Ethiopia and the Sudanese Arabs. In 1942, the Ethiopian government abolished slavery.⁷⁶

⁷¹ NRO Blue Nile Province, 1/29/212, The Kaimakam, Commandant Police of the Blue Nile Province to the Governor of the Blue Nile Province, Wad Medani, 3 Nov. 1928.

⁷² NRO Blue Nile Province, 1/62/434, M. S. Lush, Abyssinian Intelligence, 32. Interviews: Abd al-Wahid Yussuf, Algamar Hamdan, Mäkuriya Bizunäh, Muhammad al-Hassan and Taddässa Jämbäre.

⁷³ NRO 4 Kassala, 1/14/82, Acting District Commissioner Gedarif, 'Subject: Italo-Abyssinian Affairs Refugees', no. G.D./SCR. 95 E-3/2, 11 Sept. 1935. Interviews: Algamar Hamdan and Mäkuriya Bizunäh.

⁷⁴ Interviews: Algamar Hamdan, Mäkuriya Bizunäh and Taddässa Jämbäre. See also De Bono, *Anno XIII*, 252.

⁷⁵ Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*; Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery*; Cooper, *Slaves to Squatters*.

⁷⁶ Hargey, 'Suppression of slavery', 358. Miers, 'Britain and the suppression of slavery in Ethiopia', 260.

Slaves from Bela-Shangul and Gumuz had been a by-product of raids, and raids went on even after the overseas market had come to an end with the occupation of Massawa by Italy in 1885 and Suakin by Britain in 1898. Between 1898 and 1935, the Ethio-Sudanese borderlands were disorderly. Raids bred enslavement in the Sudan and Ethiopia. Even after British attempts to suppress the slave traffic, Watawit soldiers provided slaves cheaply in Bela-Shangul, and Ja'aliyyin merchants transported and sold them in the Sudan. While the documents do not mention how slaves were employed in the Sudan between 1898 and 1935, in Ethiopia slaves served as domestic servants as well as farm labourers. The slave traders in the Sudan were the Ja'aliyyin who had strong links with the Watawit aristocrats of Bela-Shangul and the trade language was Arabic. In Ethiopia, the slave traders were the Agäw and the trade languages were Agäw and Amharic.

The slave trade was a predatory commerce that affected Bela-Shangul and Gumuz territories with far greater intensity than any other part of the Ethiopian-Sudanese borderlands, as the same populations often fed both the Sudanese and Ethiopian markets. Statistics do not yet tell us the number of slaves transported from Bela-Shangul to the Sudan or from the Gumuz territory between the Bäläs river and Agäwmidir to northwestern Ethiopia, but the slave trade severely depopulated the borderlands at the same time as the imperial state extended its authority in the late nineteenth century. The central government of Ethiopia relied on the border warlords and failed to stop the slave raids, the slave trade or slavery itself in spite of its attempts to project a modern image as a member of the League. Moreover, the reigning emperors continued to rely on the warlords for a continuous supply of slaves for their court at Addis Ababa.

SUMMARY

Ethiopian imperial expansion and slavery accompanied one another through the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, contrary to imperial justifications based on the abolition of slavery or the state's legal obligations to oppose the slave trade and slavery. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Ethiopian empire incorporated the northwestern border enclaves of Bela-Shangul and Gumuz into greater Ethiopia. Having obtained the subordination of the local Muslim warlords, the emperor demanded tribute from them in slaves, ivory and gold. Slaves were used as domestics in the imperial palace at Addis Ababa and the houses of state dignitaries and as farm labor on their farms elsewhere in the country. Responding to the demands of the central government as well as to their own needs, borderland chiefs raided local villages and neighbouring chiefdoms for slaves. Expanding state control thus led to intensified slave raiding and the extension of the slave trade from the borderlands of the empire into its centre in spite of Ethiopia's legal commitment to oppose slavery and the slave trade as a member of the League of Nations. The end of slavery in Ethiopia only came in the aftermath of the Italian occupation in 1935.