

On Life In the Sudan

By Bayylnah Sharrleff

The students at the University of Khartoum, Sudan had just returned from their Edd (the celebration of the breaking of the fast) vacations and I was on my way to Wadi Halfa (the Nubian city on the Nile at the Egyptian-Sudanese borders) to work on an excavation. This was in January of 1966. I was very excited for this was my first such trip and archaeology was my major interest of that time: The archaeology of the Black Man.

THE TRAIN which I boarded was constructed in 1944. I remember the date being stamped on the steps of the train. It was a very well worn looking train. The windows had wooden blinds which could be alternated with a glass window by raising one and lowering the other. Seldom could I get the window of my compartment to stay closed and as the train moved, the dust of the desert sands blew in and formed a grey-white film on everything including myself. There was also a small fan about 8" in diameter which was mounted above the door of the compartment, and when the lights were on it was to work, but it did not. I enjoyed riding the trains in the Sudan however, for the people made the traveling so very pleasant.

I sat in a compartment with three other Sudanese women, and a few children. As always, the train was late in departure, but once we started moving, Wadi Halfa was just a two day journey away.

We stopped at Shendi, I got out and walked around the station. Shendi is known for its cotton mills. I also bought fruit here, for there is an open market at the train stop with many persons selling fresh fruits, and handmade objects. I liked Shendi.

AFTER A SHORT stop of approximately 15 minutes, we continued on to Atbara, which is at the junction of the River Nile and the river Atbara.

The train was to stop here only a few minutes, so I remained in my compartment to read over some printed literature, which I had on the Nubian valley which was under excavation. A tall distinguished looking Sudanese man knocked on the door. He asked if I was Christine Wilson (my slave name). I told him that I was. He said that he had instructions from Khartoum to take me off of the train and put me on the next train back to

Khartoum. I could not believe this. I told him that he must be joking. I had no intention of leaving the train. He said that he was the town commissioner and that he had received a telegram from the Vice Chancellor (a title equated to Vice president) of the University stating that I had left the university illegally without permission and that they did not know who I was with. That if I did not return, I would not be allowed to take my final examinations and thus have my scholarship terminated.

I was sick, really sick. The policeman who was with him took my luggage off while he was speaking to me. I told him that I was with Dr. Adams, the archaeologist from UNESCO with the Sudan Antiquities Service, and Mrs. Adams the anthropologist. I showed him the travel warrant which I had received from the university and asked him how could they say that I left without permission. He said that they thought I was to travel during the Edd vacation not afterwards. I cried, really cried. I was allowed to go and tell Dr. Adams who was in a first class compartment. I was escorted by the town commissioner who also told Dr. Adams of his instructions. Dr. Adams could do nothing. I had to leave. I was angry and upset. I was taken to a beautiful rest home (hotel) and placed in a large room with a private bath. There was no radio, television, or clock. I unpacked my things for there was

no train back to Khartoum until the next day.

I did not want to stay there alone. Mohammad Ibrahim Abdel Hafiz (the town commissioner) was very polite. He told me to rest and said that he would check with me after I had settled down. He spoke very clear English. He telephoned later and invited me to join him and his wife (Huda Ali Awad) for dinner and a visit to the cinema. I accepted his invitation. When he came for me he seemed concerned over my feelings. Huda, his wife did not speak very much English, but we were able

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to communicate fairly well. She was approximately 23 years of age and very beautiful. He drove us around part of the city on our way to his home. Atbara is where the trains are built. There are many wood, and mechanical shops in Atbara. I was more relaxed by the time we reached his house. After having a soft cold drink, we all went to the cinema which was an open theater (no ceiling).

AT THE CINEMA we sat in a reserve area for families. In the Sudan, the cinemas are so arranged that the single males sit separately from the females and the married persons with families sit separately from the single persons. With this arrangement one avoids the chance of temptation to insult or indecencies. The young women who sit with their families are not both-

ered by the men for they are guarded and protected by their families. This is Islam.

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches us that unlike attracts. Male and female are attracted to one another. This is the law of nature. To avoid the meeting of the two when undesired, is to separate the two. He teaches us not to mix up the two when the purpose is not for reproduction. When the followers of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad meet in his Mosques of Islam the men sit separately from the women. Both are therefore able to concentrate on the subject matter of the meeting.

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