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CONSTRUCTING A HISTORICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF SUKUR: DEMYSTIFICATION

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Prefatory note

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It is reproduced here with no substantive changes to the content. Typos have been corrected and the spelling updated to conform as closely as possible to that used by linguist Michael Thomas in his forthcoming dictionary of sakun (<http://sukur.info/Lang/langindex.htm>)¹

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Thursday, June 5th, 1851. Billama [Barth's Kanuri companion] gave me much interesting information about the country before us, chiefly with reference to Sugúr, a powerful and entirely independent pagan chief in the mountains south from Mándará. With regard to this latter country, I perceived more clearly, as I advanced, what a small province it must be, comprehending little more than the capital and a few hamlets lying close around. Heinrich Barth 1965 (1857), vol. 2:100.

Introduction

How right Barth was! Sukur (ca 13°33'-13°37' E.; 10°43'-10°46' N.), located in the Mandara highlands on a plateau, only 30 sq. km. in area, 25 kilometers due west of Mokolo in Cameroon and 17 kilometers south-south-west of Madagali, is a chiefdom that, by Barth's time, had achieved a reputation that was later to be romanticized but never understood (Fig. 1). In 1958, Anthony Kirk-Greene (1958: 19), former Assistant District Officer and later distinguished Oxford historian, referred to the Hidi (chief) of Sukur as 'still wield[ing] immense spiritual authority as the supreme repository of the dynastic concept of priest-kingship.' It is our purpose in this paper to prepare the ground for a historical ethnography of Sukur through a critical reevaluation of the precolonial and colonial texts in the context of materials gathered by us at Sukur between August 1992 and February 1993.²

We will explain how and why mystification of Sukur occurred, and something of the difficulties inherent in establishing even 'simple' ethnographic 'facts' such as the names of clans or the

¹ The following conventions have been used in writing names and words in *sakun*, the language of Sukur:

- dl - voiced lateral fricative
- tl - voiceless lateral fricative
- ɗ, ɗ̥ - implosive d
- ɓ, ɓ̥ - implosive b
- ə - schwa

Except in direct quotes, we have throughout substituted our transcriptions of Sukur names, e.g. Nzaani rather than 'Jainyi,' for those found in the colonial documents.

² We have consulted only the Nigerian National Archives in Kaduna, and those not exhaustively. There must be relevant information in the German archives in Potsdam or French colonial archives at Aix-en-Provence.

offices of title holders. Above all we wish to dispose of three European-inspired and ill-assorted myths about Sukur: that it was a militaristic power, that its ruler was or is a divine king, and that its political organization was such as to justify describing it as a 'state'. With the bush thus cleared, we will in a future publication (ND & JS 1996) propose an alternate interpretation of Sukur, arguing that its precolonial society and economic orientation were such as to justify the definition of a 'classless industrial' political form not to our knowledge previously documented in the anthropological literature.

Let us begin by acknowledging our debt to and respect for those persons, mainly colonial officers, who in the course of brief tours of the Madagali district amassed a substantial body of historical and socio-cultural data. While these can rarely be accepted at face value, yet they contain much that is historically and culturally precious. When reinterpreted in the broader context of historical and ethnographical studies in Nigeria and in Cameroon, and in the light of a half century of development in anthropology, they can even now throw much light on both past and present. We, who benefited from an extended period of fieldwork at Sukur undertaken after eight years' involvement in a long term study of Mandara montagnard peoples, are constantly humbled by the achievements of our predecessors.

The pre-colonial and colonial sources

Sukur entered the historical and ethnographic record of the west in 1851 when Heinrich Barth passed through the plains to the west of the Mandara chain on his way from Kukawa to Yola, capital of Fulani (Fulbe) Adamawa. He did not visit Sukur but was informed that this mountain plateau was the 'natural stronghold of a pagan king whom my Kanúri companion constantly called 'Mai Sugúr'...' (Barth 1965 (1857), vol. 2: 116). Barth continues:

Sugúr is said to be fortified by nature, there being only four entrances between the rocky ridges which surround it. The Prince of Sugúr overawes all the petty neighboring chiefs; and he is said to possess a great many idols, small round stones, to which the people sacrifice fowls of red, black, and white color, and sheep with a red line on the back (Ibid.: 117 fn.).

This description certainly implies some knowledge on the part of Barth's companion of the nature of chieftaincy in the Mandara. It would in fact better apply to one of the Mofu-Diamaré 'princes,' who possess and magically manipulate stones that bring and stop the rain (Vincent 1975, 1991).

The first European known to have set foot in Sukur was Kurt F. Strümpell, Resident of Adamaua administrative area of German Kamerun, in 1906.³ His account (Strümpell 1922-23:56-60),⁴ although not published until years later, is the only one to predate the conquest of Sukur by Hamman Yaji, Fulani lord of Madagali (Reed n.d.), and is therefore of special importance. It contains descriptive material on the paved ways, the house of the chief and the adjacent grove - the resting place not, as Strümpell thought, of Hidis' bodies but rather of their souls. There is the first mention of the Kapsiki and Sukur connection to Gudur in Cameroon, and Strümpell is also the only substantial source on the semi-legendary Hidi Watsə, described to him as an emigré Bornoan prince who, after becoming ruler of Sukur, was said to have briefly conquered

³ Moisel's (1912) famous map, sheet C3 - Mubi, shows that the German colonial officer Glauning traversed the eastern side of Sukur plateau in March 1904. This map also shows Strümpell further south in 1906 and we infer that his visit to Sukur took place in the same year.

⁴ Also available in French in Mohammadou 1982.

and controlled the Mandara plateau across to its eastern border. It is implied that cavalry was an important arm of his forces. Watsə's raiders brought back to Sukur herds of cattle and many slaves, some of whom, following a defeat at Oudahay, some 25 km east of Sukur, in which Watsə's son was killed, were destined for sacrifice to spirits that, disdaining certain of the victims, would toss their corpses out of the grave, demanding the immolation of yet another 'Matakam.' This is stirring stuff; it is almost incredible that in the course of a brief visit Strümpell could have obtained such material. And the historical material is, as we shall see, largely incredible.

One of the two great myths about Sukur, that it was once a great military power, is thus present in the first account written by a European visitor, and is denied, first by common sense and secondly by oral traditions and material evidence (see below). Regarding the other, that its ruler is a divine king, Strümpell says nothing. There is not long to wait.

On a more down-to-earth note, Strümpell classed the Sukur language, *sakun*, as a dialect of Kapsiki (*psikye*).⁵ While we as yet lack expert confirmation, our enquiries indicate that *sakun* is not a dialect but a language of the Central Chadic sub-group that includes *psikye*, *higi* and *bana*, and that it is more distantly related to *margi* (see Barreteau and Jungrathmayr 1993).

In 1920 British colonial officers took over from the French the responsibility for the 'Northern Touring Area' in which Sukur lay.⁶ There were very few British, in our region just one Touring Officer of Assistant District Officer rank based in Mubi and in charge of a large and changing administrative unit that had Madagali at its northern extremity. In part because they were unaware of Strümpell's writings, Hamman Yaji was able to hide Sukur's existence -- and the taxes he exacted -- from the British until early 1927, when Captain H. H. Wilkinson offered the Hidi a gown and later stayed on the mountain in Hamman Yaji's company (Reed n.d.).⁷ C. K. Meek, the government anthropologist, conducted enquiries in the region a few months afterwards.⁸ Although he did not climb up to Sukur, he had a 'short conversation' at Madagali with the Hidi, Nzaani, and two of his sons. The interview resulted in six pages of dense ethnographic information and a list of 103 words and short phrases (Meek 1931a, vol. 1:312-20). Meek was also told of Bornoan and Gudur (or Mpsakali) connections, and, like Strümpell, he attributed to precolonial Sukur 'considerable territorial authority,' gained in part through the

⁵ The Higi and Kapsiki and, we believe, Sukur speak closely related languages (Barreteau and Jungrathmayr 1993). Strümpell's definition of Kapsiki included many Nigerian settlements more usually designated as Higi. van Beek (e.g. 1981, 1987) considers that the Kapsiki of Cameroon and the Higi of Nigeria constitute a single ethnic group. The Sukur distinguish between Duwa (generally Kapsiki) and Rumshi! (generally Higi). Noone knows the precise correlation between the linguistic, national, cultural and other classifications.

⁶ Of the French administration that had succeeded the German after the fall of Mora in 1916 Kirk-Greene (1958:81) says, 'Little is known of their brief rule; there was not much of it.' Hamman Yaji's diary for 2 August 1920 states that 'a letter arrived from the [French] Captain saying that the English were coming: ... Then on Wednesday another letter arrived saying that my land has been transferred from the French to the English. Let us hope that the French are telling lies. There are three days between the two letters.' Five days later 'Dangadi returned from Marua with a letter from the Captain saying that he now had no authority in my land.' The fact is that neither colonial power was capable of exercising control of Hamman Yaji.

⁷ Sukur actually appears on a sketch map by Captain W.H. Price, A.D.O., attached to the Northern Division, Cameroons, Annual Report for the Year 1923 (National Archives Kaduna File Yolaprof B2 F). Whether this was attached at a later date or based on Barth's or Moisel's earlier maps, we leave to historians.

⁸ NAK File Yolaprof ACC-14 reports that Meek was expected in October of 1926 but the date of his arrival is not recorded.

raids of a cavalry, and still reflected (he believed) in the practice whereby 'the chiefs of Wula Vemngo and a number of other villages receive their formal appointment from the chief of Sukur, who ceremonially shaves the head of the nominee.' (Ibid. 316).⁹ Meek (1931b), influenced by the hyperdiffusionist Egyptocentric school of Grafton Elliot-Smith, had already found divine kingship among the Jukun. It is therefore no real surprise that in the course of his short conversation he should discover in his interlocutor a 'person ... charged with divinity,' thus setting in motion the second great myth of Sukur. He also includes information on religious rites, burial of the chief, and social organization, besides a distorted version of the Sukur Gədəm legend that tells of the establishment of the present chiefly dynasty.

The next visit of importance for history and ethnography is that of the remarkable Church of the Brethren missionary H. S. Kulp (1935), who passed two nights at Sukur in the company of the Touring Officer, W. R. Shirley, and, in considerably less than forty-eight hours on the 16th and 17th of June, 1935, accumulated a wealth of information on a variety of topics. These include: Sukur's relations with its neighbours, its origins and history, clans, the house (compound or palace) of the Hidi, a preliminary list of the 'Council of Elders,' economy, initiation rites and other ceremonies. Although Kulp conservatively and rightly discounts the existence of Sukur power achieved by force of arms, he accepts Meek's portrayal of the Hidi as a 'divinity' with considerable 'spiritual power' over neighbouring peoples and their chiefs. "His power was not attributed to any prowess in battle or that he had ever exercised large political power in the administrative sense. It was more the potency of the dynamism which is connected with his person which gave him a place of pre-eminence over such a large area." (Kulp 1935:16-17). Kulp was also the first to comment on Sukur's industrial specialization in smelting and exporting iron, a critical factor of production here as elsewhere in Africa.

At about the same time, A. D. O. J. Hunter Shaw (1935), clearly much influenced by Meek, submitted to his Resident an intelligence report on Madagali district that he had researched during a six week tour. His view of Sukur is simultaneously romantic, schizophrenic and naive. Like other 'hill pagans' the Sukur are 'generally extremely backward' in comparison with, for example, the Margi of Gulak and Duhu, who are "'enlightened" ..[as]... the result of close contact with the Fulani over a long period...' (p. 3). And yet, 'Gudur...[is]...the pagan Mecca of these northern regions, with Sukur as Medina.' (p. 5). 'The chief is of the order of Divine Kings...' (p.9), and 'the Yedseram [river, which flows northwards 29 km. west of Sukur] marks the western limits of Sukur hegemonical hierarchy.' (p. 15). However, 'the weight of ... the evidence tends to point to a Sukur hierarchism rather than an hegemony.' (p. 20). Nonetheless, despite these and other wild inferences, for example that Sukur 'may be a relict of the former kingdom of Haudama,' 'founded' before 1470, Shaw provides new and important information on the groups in the area that claim connections with Gudur, and on Sukur clans and counselors.

In 1937, D. F. H. MacBride, the then A. D. O., made use of Kulp's notes in a memorandum entitled 'Mandara district - village histories,' adding to them information obtained by A. D. O. Shirley and himself between 1932 and 1936. He had not seen Shaw's report, although Shaw had seen an early draft of MacBride's, and they must surely have discussed the local situation. MacBride is a strong protagonist of the 'divine kingdom' view of Sukur, claiming that four 'protectorates' (Sukur, Ngolo [Higi], Mubi-Gella [Fali] and Hong [Kilba and Margi]) 'once

⁹ Meek refers to Strümpell's vocabularies and classification of languages but does not appear to have seen his 1922-23 paper.

comprised the whole of the lowlands of the upper Yedseram basin...’ From where MacBride got this idea, we do not know. Extraordinarily, for it lacks any substantive historical or archaeological support, variants of MacBride’s romanticization have remained the received interpretation of the history of the region (cf. Mohammadou 1988: 8), though Barkindo (1985) takes a rather more conservative approach. On the other hand, MacBride provides new evidence regarding the limited spiritual authority of the Hidi in the region, and his report gives valuable information on the at that time very limited distribution of settlements of Sukur people away from the Sukur plateau. His account of Sukur history from the time of the murder by Hamman Yaji’s soldiers of its last independent Hidi, Ndushəkən, in 1922 or 23, to his own time is also most useful.¹⁰ But in Hidi Nzaani, where Meek had detected divinity, MacBride (1937:1) saw only ‘a most astute and unscrupulous man who is quite capable of so colouring his answers to questions of fact as to suit his political ends.’

The archives, so far as we have determined, are silent regarding Sukur during and after World War II, and until after the arrival of A. D. O. Anthony Kirk-Greene, whose ‘A note on the history of Madagali district’ in the Nigerian archives is dated May 1954. This is a collection and collation of scattered earlier records, complemented by ‘fresh information that I happened to gather when re-checking their facts.’ Kirk-Greene gives a condensed version of Margi oral traditions regarding their settlement in the area and relations with the Wandala, and goes on to sketch the history of Madagali from the time of the establishment of the first permanent Fulani settlement ‘at Rumirgo, a few miles north of the Marghi town of Madagali, at the turn of the XIX century.’ He offers a lively ‘narrative... based on three Madagali eye-witnesses’ accounts, of the death of Ardo Bakari of Madagali at the hands of Oberleutnant Dominik in 1902, and of the accession of his son, Hamman Yaji.¹¹ An important element in this story is that Ardo Bakari turned towards Sukur and ‘besought the Lidi, Kuratu, to hide the Fulani in the hills...’ While we may question the veracity of this statement, it provides the first historical date for a Hidi. The author’s summary of the subsequent history of the administrative unit proceeds without further mention of Sukur.

No doubt Kirk-Greene was saving his Sukur materials for publication in the Nigerian Field of 1960 of ‘The kingdom of Sukur: a northern Nigerian Ichabod’. This paper, which like the preceding note fuses others’ earlier observations with his own ‘made during a prolonged tour of the Madagali District ... in 1954,’ has remained the standard source on Sukur up till today. The romance of its title echoes through the text; we learn, for example, of a former ‘riverain Batta empire’ on the Benue, and, to the east of Sukur, ‘a Mabas dynasty that dominated the extensive

¹⁰ It is frustrating that one cannot date the defeat of Sukur with any accuracy, though it is shamefully certain that it took place *after* the British had taken over responsibility for the area. Hamman Yaji does not record the death of Ndushəkən (Diskin), but it happened after the 23rd of October 1920, for which day Hamman Yaji wrote, ‘On Saturday the 10th of Tumbindu Haramji while I was at Nyibango I heard that the pagans [*sic*] named Diskin [i.e. Hidi Ndushəkən] had raided Wappara, so I made arrangements and sent Fadhl al Nar with his men to raid the pagans of Sukur. They captured from them 39 slaves and 24 goats and killed 5 men.’ On 10 June, 1922, ‘I arrested 3 men of the pagans of Sukur and Damai on a charge of fighting with each other.’ Hamman Yaji was in Mildo and it sounds very much as if he was in charge and that Sukur and other montagnards were coming down to the market. Only eight months later, on 5 February, 1923, ‘Arnado Sukur gave me 2 small slaves, one a boy and the other a girl.’ While use of the Fulfulde term ‘Arnado,’ meaning leader or headman, does not necessarily imply that Hamman Yaji is in control, the gifts are suggestive of an arrangement between Hamman Yaji and Ndusheken’s successor, Hidi Nzaani. Kirk-Greene (1960:77) gives 1923 as the date of Ndushəkən’s murder.

¹¹ An account that differs in many ways from that of Dominik (1908:209-10), who was concerned to exculpate himself, and again from that of Bauer (1904:77), another German contemporary.

Matakam plateau'. Kirk-Greene provides new information on Hamman Yaji's depredations drawn from the latter's then confidential but now soon-to-be-published diary (Reed n.d.; Vaughan, J.H. and A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, (eds), 1995) and from Sukur eye-witnesses. Other new data include information on Sukur's 'local monopoly of iron' and a gruesome passage on the role of the Tlagama (a title holder) of Sukur as castrator of slaves.

It must be said that there has been much written of Sukur that strikes the modern reader as fanciful. How are we to control the elements in these texts and tales that are portrayed as historical chronicle? Colonial officials, representatives of conquering empires, were predisposed to view history in terms of states that, like their own and those of northern and western Nigeria, were often involved in military conflicts. Furthermore, the policy of indirect rule necessitated by their small numbers encouraged them to seek out and find political hierarchies. As they acquired information, they incorporated it into structures based on the Western and, in our area, Hausa-Fulani models with which they were familiar, thereby creating levels of organization that never existed and endowing them with a well-oiled, mechanistic, administrative functioning quite out of character for societies in which institutions are characteristically multifunctional and far less differentiated than in the west. It is significant that Kulp, the divine, was far more realistic about Sukur's secular characteristics than the District Officers!

Shaw's schizophrenic attitude, noted above, is symptomatic of the colonial mentality. Most District Officers were unable to integrate conflicting views of the hill peoples. On the one hand these were 'raw,' sometimes 'truculent,' pagans -- 'primitive' largely, one suspects, on account of their near nudity and failure to appreciate the benefits of colonial rule.¹² On the other hand, some of them possessed highly developed socio-political structures with 'royalties', 'electoral kindreds', councils and a degree of organization that would not have disgraced Ancient Greece or Birmingham. Resident L. S. Ward's summary appended to Shaw's (1935) Intelligence Reports indeed envisaged the possibility of a 'federal administration under a Sukur presidency' for part of Madagali district!

Let us also keep in mind the context of enquiry in the 1920s and 1930s -- Anthony Kirk-Greene (pers. comm.) assures me that relations were more relaxed by the 1950s. In the first decades of administration, the typical A. D. O. (and it differed little for other observers), recently assigned to the region and not long to remain, has arrived in (para)military fashion accompanied by police or soldiers; he has laid down the law on matters of tax and justice. Now, seated at a folding table, interpreter at his side, he prepares to question the chief and elders. His interpreter, an 'enlightened pagan' or Muslim, may well -- as did our young Wandala guide in 1984 -- regard the hillmen as primitives to be treated with a blend of condescension and arrogance. Time is short; tomorrow the A. D. O. and his train must trek on to Wula or Muduvu. There can be no doubt that such circumstances will generate certain types of answers, and that there can be none of the patient cross-checking and comparison of material gathered that may eventually allow a researcher working in favourable conditions to apprehend its significance.¹³ While it is clear

¹² 'Enlightened pagans' meanwhile live on the plains, wear clothes, and submit to the British as they had previously submitted to Wandala, Bornoans and the Fulbe.

¹³ We did no better than anyone else on our first visit. In June of 1991 we spent two nights in Sukur, and were graciously received by the late Hidi Zirangkwadā. From him and other elders, we elicited a list of past Hidis, just like our colonial predecessor MacBride (1937). Referring to this now, we see that they were amusing themselves

from the archives that many of the colonial officials had great sympathy for the natives in their charge,¹⁴ they were nonetheless representatives of a foreign and exploitative power. It is amazing that they obtained what they did.

They were also of a generation that perceived migration to be one of the prime historical processes and motors of culture change. This led to uncritical acceptance -- and some embroidery and elaboration -- of oral traditions that must, given the linguistic barriers, have been most imperfectly understood after summaries by interpreters who themselves lacked intimate understanding of montagnard cultural context. Second, the prevailing emphasis on the importance of 'great men' in shaping historical events made it easier for these amateur ethnohistorians to accept as literally true stories of immigrant dynasts and shadowy but supreme priest-kings. We have been taught by Vansina (1985) and others to see oral traditions in a very different light. The colonial sources include, for example, several examples of 'clichés,' stories that appear literally historical until it is realized that they are told as their own history by group after group from one side of the Mandara to the other. We shall give examples below. The traditions recorded were often re-presentations of important cultural contacts and influences by informants whose specific motives can only be guessed at, though they no doubt included the desire to establish their own political importance and the nobility of their ancestry - - much as some British intellectuals from the ninth to as late as the eighteenth centuries claimed affiliations with the biblical and Mediterranean classical worlds (Daniel and Renfrew 1988:11-12).

Meek's (1931b:24) epigram, 'Any imaginative Muslim who can write is capable of manufacturing history for the benefit of the unlettered' ignores the capacity of the unlettered to manufacture history for themselves! Thus, and especially since the Margi of Madagali 'ruling group' claimed to be of Kanuri descent and from the old Borno capital of 'Ngasr-Gamo' (Meek 1931a, vol. 1:213), we should not be surprised that Strümpell learned that Hidi Watsə was an adventuring Bornoan prince of Mai Dunama's time -- though it is most improbable that anyone in Sukur ever mentioned a Mai Dunama.¹⁵

Later sources and the fieldwork of 1992-93

Later sources on Sukur include the archaeologist Hamo Sassoon's (1964) useful report on what must, in 1962, have been the last blasts of its iron smelting industry (see Part II [ND & JS 1996]). James Vaughan is the only anthropologist to have carried out substantial fieldwork in the vicinity of Sukur. His papers (1962, 1964a, 1964b, 1970, 1973, 1977 and 1980) on the Margi Dzirngu mainly treat the chiefdom of Gulak, regarded as a political offshoot of Sukur by both communities. The Margi differ from the Sukur in many ways; Vaughan's materials are of great comparative value but include little information directly regarding Sukur. Walther van Beek (1981) paid a visit to Sukur and interviewed the then Hidi 'Zra Nggodu' (Zirangkwadə) in the context of his well-known studies of the Kapsiki. But it would be twenty years before the next paper, historian Bawuro M. Barkindo's (1985) study of 18th and 19th century Sukur as a case of

at our expense; one Hidi is Mbutu Patla, 'the big baobab growing in the Patla' (a ceremonial area), another is Muva, the hill that looms over the upper wards of Sukur.

¹⁴ Most notably, of course, Stanhope White (1963) who reworked a story of the montagnards of the Zelideva hills into his novel 'Descent from the Hills'.

¹⁵ Nor is the name of any chronologic value, there having been eight rulers of Bornu called Dunama, reigning at various times between A.D. 1098 and 1818 according to Barth (1965 (1857), vol 2: 582-600).

political centralization, that focussed on Sukur itself. This makes good use of that author's earlier intensive research on the Mandara state and he is the first to insist on Sukur's iron industry as a factor of critical historical importance. Unfortunately Barkindo was only able to make two brief visits to Sukur in 1972 and 1979, and, forced to rely on the documents discussed above, he sees in the development of the chiefdom of Sukur a conscious, sophisticated attempt at political evolution that may well have become a state, even if only briefly. He credits it with a central administration and 'four components of government: the Lidi, the councilors, the executives and the functionaries.' (ibid. 55). This is, as we shall show, unrealistic. Finally, in the course of doctoral research on the historical development of intergroup relations in the area, Johnson Pongri (1988) also went to Sukur to interview the Hidi and others. His dissertation is most useful to us for its treatment of the larger regional context.

In 1992, on our way back to Sukur, we met representatives of the Sukur Development Association in Yola. The SDA was founded in 1989 on the initiative of younger, educated men, and has engaged in various community development enterprises including the building of a primary school on the mountain. Its president told us that we were welcome in Sukur, and that we were working for them. Given that our work could only, so far as we could see, be of benefit to the community and the nation, and that 'working for Sukur' would not conflict with our obligations to the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, to our discipline or to our funding agency, we had no difficulty with this concept.¹⁶ In the event, the Hidi and the S. D. A. prepared the community for our arrival, and mutual confidence was achieved in a very short time. We arrived on the mountain in late August, 1992, just in time for the biennial Ber initiation ceremony, leaving at the end of February 1993 shortly after the Yawal ceremony, which had not been held since 1985. Oluwasola Adeoye of the National Museum, Yola, who had carried out preliminary fieldwork on its behalf, visited us during our stay and worked with Sterner on material culture,¹⁷ while we collaborated in a test excavation of a large midden close to the house of the Hidi. This, the first excavation ever undertaken in the Mandara highlands, was codirected by A. Adesina, the director of the National Museum, Yola, and N. David. Two other NCMM staff, James Ameje and Jude Anebi also participated.

Our work followed classic anthropological lines, which is to say that, on the advice of the Sukur Development Association, we engaged a Sukur assistant, John Tizhe Habəga, on the day of our arrival, and Philip E. Sukur a few weeks later. These were our interpreters, guides, and, in a very little while, friends, concerned like ourselves to record as much of Sukur history and culture as was possible within a limited time span. While we were never able to communicate freely in *sakun*, we soon found ourselves using numerous *sakun* words, not to mention greetings, incorporated into the English used with the assistants, and into Fulfulde in our interactions with other Sukur. Our research aims, ethnoarchaeological and ethnohistorical in the case of N. David, social anthropological for J. Sterner, required us to gather data on, among other things, material culture, oral traditions, kinship and ritual. We had from the start a fair idea of the range of information we required, and we obtained it in large part by practicing 'participant observation,' which is to say that when we heard that something was about to happen, we found out as much as we could about it beforehand, were present while it happened, and subsequently conducted

¹⁶ We were in any case formally bound by ethical considerations to preserve the anonymity of persons whose information might in any way be considered politically sensitive.

¹⁷ Oluwasola Adeoye and Joseph Ekefre on behalf of the NCMM and Sylvanus Papka of the (then) Gongola State Arts Council visited Sukur in 1990, and generously made their reports available to us.

post mortems with our assistants and with the actors. When, as often happened, we stumbled on interesting things, we would opportunistically find out as much about them as we could, following up at a later date. *Carpe diem*; 'Gather ye rosebuds while ye may;' but keep research priorities firmly in mind. We did not use formal questionnaires. Our aim, too rarely achieved, was always to gather data on a topic from a variety of sources until such time as the information coming in attained closure, became redundant. Given our interests, we sought our informants primarily, but far from exclusively, among older Sukur of both sexes, Sterner and Philip Sukur working mainly with women, David and John Habəga more commonly with men. The latter team also visited neighbouring chiefs in order to follow up Sukur accounts, and others in earlier sources, of Sukur's relations with its neighbours.

The trauma inflicted by Hamman Yaji, Ardo Madagali

Hamman Yaji's diary (Reed n.d.; <http://sukur.info/Mont/HammanYaji%20DIARY.pdf>) begins on 16 September 1912, a decade after the murder of his father by Oberleutnant Dominik. It reveals that his depredations had begun well before World War broke out in 1914. He had sufficient irregulars, many with firearms, to direct attacks on more than one montagnard settlement at a time, and he did so with tireless energy. Between 1912 and 1920 he records nine raids on the Sukur plateau, seven on Sukur and two on Kurang, a mixed Kapsiki and Sukur settlement on its southeastern edge. The third settlement, Damay, is not mentioned in a raiding context, and may have been too small to be worthy of attention or at least mention in the diary. His raids produced a total of 144 slaves, 1 horse (so much for the Sukur cavalry!), 100 cattle, and 24 small stock. According to his figures, 66 Sukur were killed in the course of these attacks, including at least 17 children who, one might suppose, would have been particularly desirable as slaves. Many others must have died from their wounds. The brutality of Hamman Yaji and his soldiery, of which Kirk-Greene (1960:75) gives several eye-witness accounts (seemingly including some historical clichés), is matched only by his stupidity. Had he concluded an alliance with Sukur, he could have cornered the iron of much of northeastern Nigeria (see Part II).

What Hamman Yaji could not record is the almost total disruption of Sukur society brought about by hostilities. Following an attack, probably the one on the 23rd of October, 1920, that had been occasioned by Hidi Ndushəkən's raid on the Vapura section of Mildo, Hidi Ndushəkən and many of his people abandoned their homes and fled to Kapsiki country. A later Hidi, Zirangkwadə, was born at Mogode during this period. Ndushəkən later returned, either in 1922 or 1923, and, resigned to the necessity of treating with the lord of Madagali, was on his way down the mountain when he met and was killed by some of Hamman Yaji's soldiers. Far from being an ambush, Sukur traditions have it that Hamman Yaji was greatly displeased by Ndushəkən's murder, committed by young men of Sukur birth who had some years before been captured by Hamman Yaji's men while they were initiates in the bush (probably on the 20th of July, 1913 or the 16th of August, 1917 if the records in the diary are complete), and inducted into his forces. Ironically, one of these men was Nasambi, a half-brother of Ndushəkən.¹⁸

The trauma inflicted on Sukur's collective memory by the Hamman Yaji years is such that there is no longer any coherent picture of the society that preceded it, only fragments that must be pieced together in the light of oral traditions, archival evidence, archaeology, and comparative information from other Mandara societies. The records of the precolonial and colonial periods,

¹⁸ Interview with Makandow Mamanda, Bulama of Məldəng, ca 70 years, on 27 Oct., 1992 (2:41)

and particularly eyewitness accounts, are thus most precious, but very little can be taken at face value.

In the following sections we will consider a number of topics treated in the earlier literature that are critical to a historically informed understanding of Sukur society and culture.

Sukur as a militaristic power

As Barth had noted from afar, Sukur is 'a small province...little more than the capital and a few hamlets.' There is practically no evidence, and none of it worthy of trust, either that *sakun*-speakers once occupied, or that the Hidi ever ruled a much larger area. Nor have we found evidence that any of its neighbours preserve any such traditions, except possibly for garbled memories of occasional raids.¹⁹ The Sukur plateau, not all of which the polity has ever claimed to have controlled in its entirety, is only 30 square kilometers in extent, far from sufficient to form the basis for a predatory state even if we assume a population density of 200 per sq. km., near the known Mandara highland maximum.

Midalla (war leader) Bizha Usmana's descriptions of inter-montagnard fighting are not of wars of conquest but rather of minor raids often with a definite sportive element.²⁰ In truth, even men who are old today have not fought serious battles and memories are dim. According to Kwoyni Donyima, who claims to be a fourth generation descendant of Hidi Watsə and is genealogically the eldest of the chiefly clan, a kind of horse (or pony) called in *sakun* 'duk makka' (lit. horse of Mecca) were introduced by a man called Watsə [not specifically identified with Hidi Watsə], a stranger who arrived on one that had run away with him.²¹ These beasts were of medium size and bred twice a year -- hence the name 'horse of Mecca' as opposed to *duk*, horses in general, or more specifically *duk Vuwa*, those of the northerners. An altar (*tson*) was used for offerings to ensure their fertility. People of Bakyaŋ clan were the riders, and they instructed someone of clan Zwahəi to make the offerings. Then the Bakyaŋ migrated; the Zwahəi buried the altar and the horses stopped breeding. They were used for a playing a game and for fighting against the Kapsiki and the Margi of the plains. They could enter narrow places. This all happened very long ago. His father had told him that a *duk makka* had once been stalled where his outer courtyard is now, but Kwoyni never saw a pony, nor did his 'father's father's father,' who, according to our genealogies was Hidi Watsə.

Another Dur elder, Kwoji Gamba, described the horses or ponies of Sukur as larger than donkeys, strong, fast and sure-footed in the mountains. They disappeared because the son of the man who used to sacrifice to ensure their increase was captured by the Fulani and the Hidi of the time did nothing about it. So he refused to sacrifice and the animals ceased to breed.²²

It is likely that the Sukur equines were ponies rather than horses (Christian Seignobos pers. comm. and 1987). Their comparatively late introduction and relative unimportance are

¹⁹ See Barkindo 1985: 61 fn.28. It is not clear to what extent Eldridge Mohammadou's (1988: 294-95) report on Bana traditions regarding Sukur has in fact blended these with received views on Sukur's place in regional history. It is worth noting that, despite its concern for history, Vincent's (1991) study of Mofu-Diamaré chiefdoms on the eastern edge of the Mandara highlands makes no mention of Sukur.

²⁰ Interview 10 Oct. 1992 (1:99).

²¹ So perhaps one should say that Watsə was introduced by the horse (or pony)! Interview 15 Sept. 1992.

²² Interview 4 Sept. 1992. (1:37)

suggested by the use of a compound term that refers to Mecca to describe them. It would seem that while a select few of the Sukur elite possessed ponies or horses, there was no Sukur cavalry, nor were we able to find any material evidence, such as stables, for their existence.²³

In short, although Strümpell's report of Watsə's conquests may indicate a brief and atypical phase of active raiding, Sukur had neither the population base nor the armaments necessary to impose its will on others by military means.

The Mpsakali connection and the establishment of the Dur dynasty

The linguistic separation of *sakun* from its near neighbours combined with the geographical coherence of the cluster that includes *sakun*, *higi*, *psikye* and *margi*, are strong evidence that these languages have been spoken in this region for many centuries. Barreteau and Jungraithmayr (1993: 113) suggest that the *bura-bana* group to which all these languages belong began to diversify almost two millennia ago, that is to say at about the beginning of the Iron Age in this region, and the *higi-bana* group, which excludes *margi*, some 750 years ago. This implies the continuity through time of sufficient elements of the Sukur population to ensure that their language would not be replaced by those of immigrants. However, the native Sukur theory of settlement is one of progressive immigration with ultimate origins in Cameroonian Mpsakali.

There are at present members of 20 clans (*səd*) resident in Sukur (Table 1). Two others are no longer represented, their members having migrated in recent times to Məldəng mountain to the west and to settlements on the plains. Damay and its daughter settlement on the plain has four clans, another, Bangsheng, having emigrated to Sir in Cameroon around 1960.²⁴ At both Sukur and Damay, each and every clan claims an ultimate origin from Mpsakali (Mcakali, Mcakiri, Cakiri and variants), and identified (as far back as Strümpell) with modern Gudur (Gudul, Goudul), where until recently the chief was the defense of last resort against plagues of locusts, caterpillars and leopards (Jouaux 1989, 1991; Seignobos 1991). Sukur oral traditions do not preserve a sequence of clan arrivals, which occurred over a long period. Inasmuch as earlier comers have, other things being equal, seniority over later arrivals, claims to priority of arrival are a form of political discourse. We are therefore not surprised to find conflicts between archival sources and between the accounts of members of different clans.

Only certain clans preserve memories of parts of the route taken to Sukur and of stops on the way. According to Shaw (1935) both Kiggi and Zwahəi claim 'aboriginal' status; we on the other hand were informed that the two clans descend from a single male ancestor and that they came to Sukur from Mpsakali via Sina, a complex of Higi settlements southwest of Mogode, the language of which they spoke before arrival in Sukur.²⁵ Clans can grow by accretion. Məldəng, a clan with connections to Mukava (near Michika in Higi territory), though the nature of those connections is unclear, comprises two sections, Məldəng xəy, the original, and Məldəng leyawad, said to be descended from a boy found lost in the bush. The abbreviated and coherent

²³ Interviews with Kwoji Gamba, Dur clan, ca 65-70 years, 9 Sept. 1992, with Kwoyni Donyima, Dur clan, ca 80 years, on 15 Sept. 1992, and other elders. In 1992, not even very old men had ever seen one of the native Mandara breed of ponies.

²⁴ Interview with Bulus Vayta, Mangu clan, Tlufu of Damay, 50-60 years, on 11 Dec. 1992.

²⁵ Interview with Nzayu Zamana (ca 70 yrs) and Kwada Ngadiwa (ca 40 years), both of Kigi clan, 4 Feb. 1993 (4:1). The Zwahəi are not 'funerary smiths' (*pace* Barkindo:1985:59); indeed this *səd* includes no smith-potter patriline.

genealogies of the junior section support the historicity of this story -- which is denied by the senior elder of that section! Similarly, a man and his descendants are presently and quietly being assimilated into Dur, the chiefly clan. Smith-potter immigrants sometimes

Table 1. Clans (*səD*), praisenames (*fwal*) and castes of Sukur and Damay.

Caste is indicated as follows: F = farmers only; FS= farmers and smith-potters; S= smith potters only. (It should be noted that the definition of *səD* is not simply a matter of exogamy, and that certain groups behave as clans in certain ways and not in others.)

Sukur	Praise names		
	Male	Both sexes	Female
Dur (chiefly clan) F	Gədəm		Zwodu
Karandu F	Gədəm		Zwodu
Shagwam F	Gədəm		Zwodu
Kəmavud F	Gədəm		Zwodu
Yanna F		Habəga	
Kwabala F		Habəga	
Bakyaŋ (emigrated) FS		Habəga	
Məldəng F		Habəga	
Habəga Humtəva F		Habəga	
Ka-ozha		Habəga	
Habəga 'wai F		Habəga-yam	
Kuləsəgəi (2 sections) F		Mutlin Tlidi and Zagwam	
Kiggi F		Garu-(hei)	
Zwahəi F		Zwahəi	
Hwatlə F		Hwatlə	
Gadə F		Gadə	
Berdleŋ (emigrated) F		Berdleŋ	
Rəvai FS		Rəvai	
Kwazhuwa S		Kwazhuwa	
Kwasha S		Kwasha	
Təvwa S		Təvwa (?-mbəzhir)	
Dumsa F		Dumsa-hei	

Damay clans

Bəgəda (chiefly clan) F	Biya		Mbalda
Makarma F	Biya		Mbalda
Ka-Mariya (also resident in Sukur) S	Biya		Mbalda
Baŋsheŋ (emig.) ?F	Biya		Mbalda
Mangu F		Gudul	

Notes:

1. The definition of *səD* is not simply a matter of exogamy; certain groups behave as clans in certain ways and not in others.
2. Ka-Mariya are a clan of smith-potters widely distributed in the Mandara. At Damay they are closely associated with the Makarma clan. Some Ka-Mariya families settled in Sukur during the 19th century.

became closely associated with the clan that had stood guarantor for them on their arrival. Thus the smith-potter Kwazhuwa clan is associated with Shagwam, and Kwasha, who are according to one source of Margi origin, with Yanna.²⁶

As among many other Mandara peoples, at Sukur a distinction is made between the name of the clan, *səd* and the term or 'praise name,' *fwal*, used to address its members. This was not recognized by earlier observers, with some resulting confusion. Clans that share a praisename are obviously associated in some way, though the Sukur have no general explanation for the phenomenon, nor is the association necessarily one of common historical origin. In the case of chiefly clan Dur, the praisenames, one for men and another for women, are shared with three others that can be regarded as its close allies (Table 1). In this case, common descent is sometimes invoked as an explanation, not unexpectedly since the metaphor of kinship is widely employed to represent political relationships.²⁷ The *fwal* Habəga group, as archival sources suggest (e.g. Shaw 1935), may represent (in whole or in large part) an earlier population. It is generally accepted in Sukur that the Təvwa-Dəmsa clan pairing represents the earliest migrants from Mpsakali.²⁸

Instead of searching for largely illusory historicity in these accounts, we might more usefully ask why it is that the connection with Gudur is so emphasized in Sukur, whereas in other Mandara settlements, for example the Gousda complex of the Mafa (Müller-Kosack 1991), among Mofu-Diamaré (Vincent 1991), Kapsiki (van Beek 1987:45-54) or Sirak (J. Sterner fieldnotes), a diversity of clan origins is recognized.²⁹ While a high proportion of Kapsiki (and presumably Higi) clans claim a Mpsakali/Gudur origin, only in Sukur is there the consistent claim that all their clans either originated in Mpsakali or, as may be the case of Dur and its allies, descended from an immigrant who came from there. We suggest that in Sukur the reference to Mpsakali has been used to weld disparate clans together, and that this was tolerated and eventually incorporated into the founding legends of other clans in large part because of the economic advantages of solidarity in a society specializing in iron production and concerned with maintaining access to factors of production.

The Gədəm legend

An early, abbreviated and probably poorly translated, version of the Gədəm legend appears in Meek 1931a:312-313). MacBride's (1937) version, very similar to those we recorded in 1992-93, is as follows:

There is a story which is sometimes told of the stranger from Bornu and sometimes of the leader of the immigrant family from Mpsakali. He arrived near Sukur with a ram and was met by the daughter of a blacksmith who gave him some water to drink, because he was thirsty. The girl then ran home to spread the news, and the men of the town came out to find the stranger. But they could not see him; they

²⁶ Interview with Tsittana Gawre, Yanna clan, Tlamburum of Sukur Təkā, on 23 Oct. 1992. (2:24)

²⁷ Interview with Midalla Bizha, Karandu clan (ca 75 yrs) 10 Oct., 1992.

²⁸ Although it can be argued that the two parts of Təvwa (Təvwa Hidi Dai and Təvwa Dai kurba) are in fact separate clans that arrived at different times from Mpsakali (J. Sterner, interview with Wadawa Kamanda, senior elder of Təvwa Hidi Dai 930213).

²⁹ It is not clear how the Higi clans represent the relationship to Mpsakali/Gudur that, according to Meek (1931a, vol. 1:252) they all claim.

only heard his voice saying that he would become visible to them when they summoned the blacksmith's daughter. So they sent for the girl, and he became visible and was escorted to the town, where the blacksmith's daughter was given to him in marriage. The priests of the local cult had been dying every year, so the people decided to make the stranger their priest-chief. The stranger thereupon slew the ram at the door of the palace, and stepping over its body entered the palace and ruled for many years, during which the people never lacked an abundance of corn.

A version told us on 25 Sept. 1992 by the 'Dai Kurba (chief of the smith-potter Təwwa clan) Tizhe Jamaare, and Wadawa Kamanda, another elder of the Təwwa clan, runs as follows:

The man from Mpsakali rode up from below the mountain on his cow, and at a waterpoint met girls fetching water. They included the daughter of the 'Dai Kurba. The man was wearing a cowskin and was very dirty. He asked the girls for water. Because he was so filthy, they refused, all except for the daughter of 'Dai Kurba. She went over to him and, politely kneeling, offered him water. The man asked her to fetch her father, and she agreed. When her father came, the man complimented him on his daughter's behaviour and asked him to help him find a place to live. The 'Dai Kurba took him to the Hidi's house and said 'I bring you a stranger.' The Hidi agreed to take him in and expressed his appreciation of the 'Dai Kurba's action.

The man stayed with the Hidi for a while and then told the Hidi that he needed a wife. The Hidi gave him his daughter. Later the man said that he wished to travel and asked the Hidi for the loan of his gown. Hidi agreed and the man gave Hidi his cowskin to wear while he was away. [It should be noted that at that time only the great possessed gowns while others wore skins, thus the exchange of clothing has strong political overtones.] The man went off and stayed away a long time, so long that the Hidi got angry when he did return, telling him to leave his house. The man left the house, but did not return the gown, and built a house for himself in Kuləsəgəi.

In those days the people of the 'Dai Kurba and of the Hidi did not know how to judge, so they began to go to the man from Mpsakali for judgments, which he delivered while wearing his father-in-law's gown. The Hidi complained to the man, 'I thank you for what you have done for me.'; he had given him his daughter and his gown, but he was not behaving as a proper son-in-law. The man offered to return his wife -- but not the gown -- to his father-in-law, but the Hidi refused, saying 'I am not about to go back and forth with my daughter!' The man then told him that he had himself become the Hidi by virtue of the people's reliance on him for justice. He offered his father-in-law the title of Dalatə, and this was accepted.

The two versions, collected some 60 years apart, are remarkably similar. Both emphasize a special connection between the immigrant and the Təwwa smith-potter clan and the replacement of one dynasty (Kuləsəgəi) by another (Dur). There is in fact very general agreement in Sukur on a three phase (Təwwa >Kuləsəgəi > Dur) sequence of chiefly dynasties (David and Sterner in press).

One reason for the similarity between the versions is that the legend contains cliché elements, at least one of which, that of the chief-to-be who arrives on an animal -- cow, sheep or 'antilope-cheval' (Magnant 1993: 3, fn. 11, and pers. comm.) -- extends far beyond the Mandara. The motif of hiding in bushes and contacting women fetching water, like the previous one, is part of a Gudur origin legend (Jouaux 1989:263-64). The political trickery and civilizing skills (in this case delivery of justice) with which the man from Mpsakali gains power from the Kuləsəgəi Hidi in the second version of the legend are paralleled elsewhere in the Mandara, for example among the Mofu-Diamaré (Vincent 1991). It should be noted that while that the Mpsakali origin of the immigrant is significant, no importance is in either version attached to any connection with the chief of Mpsakali, nor does the newcomer arrive bearing great magic or medicines.

Is the Mpsakali/Gudur connection then merely a convenient integrative fiction, as Troy was to Rome in Vergil's *Aeniad*, or does it have some historicity? We shall know more as Cathérine Jouaux's (1989, 1991) research on Gudur develops, and for the moment can only offer a comment and some brief observations [see <http://sukur.info/Lib/Gudur%20NDJS2020.3.pdf>]. First, we should make a distinction between Mpsakali (Mcakiri, etc) and Gudur as names of places and social formations. Aeneas did not migrate to Rome from an obscure Turkish village called Hissarlik, but from fabled Troy which had once, archaeologists claim, stood on the same spot. The identification of Mpsakali with Gudur is questionable, even though, as we shall show, Sukur did maintain a relationship with Gudur.³⁰ For present convenience we will use Gudur to refer to both.

As Vincent (1991) has shown in great detail for the 'princes' of the Mofu-Diamaré, some Mandara chiefs, and certainly the Bay of Gudur though not Hidi Sukur, are both forces of nature in themselves and magically control natural forces, manipulating stones or other equipment to control the rain, leopards, and, especially in the case of Gudur, locusts (Jouaux 1989:265). Within their small territories these personages are indeed priest-kings, but it was primarily as *chief magician* [or better *diviner*] that the chief of Gudur was consulted by outsiders, who came not to worship but to obtain 'medecines' for rain, the ending of a plague of locusts, fertility, and health (ibid. 283-84). And while Bay Gudur was prepared to service their requests and accept their payments, it would seem that he neither knew nor cared very much about the social formations that claimed a Gudur connection. (Similarly Sukur preserves no chronicles of the chieftom of Gulak subsequent to its legendary founding either from Sukur or by a brother of the first Hidi. There is for example no possibility of cross-dating the chiefly genealogies on the basis of evidence internal to them.)

There is a Sukur title holder, the Makarma bin huḏ, one of whose former responsibilities was to go to Gudur to seek magical help against various natural disasters. The title descends in a Dur patriline. The present incumbent's father was the latest to do so in the 1930s at the time of the last locust plagues, and was provided by Hidi Nzaani with gifts: a horse, a gown and six slabs of iron with four legs each, called *nas-duk* (literally leg + horse). He travelled with another envoy from Damay, a politically independent but *sakun*-speaking settlement on the Sukur plateau, and one from Wula where they spent the night.³¹ It is surely misleading to describe this expedition in

³⁰ The name Mpsakali may perhaps refer to Masakal, a massif on the edge of the Diamaré plain some 10 km east of the Gudur massif.

³¹ Interview with Sinnə Dlamata, Makarama bin huḏ, Dur clan, ca 70 years, on 2 Jan., 1993. According to him the party travelled from Wula to Mokolo and then on to 'Dumsi,' arriving on the fourth day. The chief of Gudur was

terms of hereditary ambassadors (MacBride 1937) engaged in pilgrimage (Jouaux 1989:283; Seignobos 1991:231) to a 'pagan Mecca' (Kirk-Greene 1960:70), during which they would stay in special lodgings along a prescribed route. Several colonial and later sources phrase the relations of those societies that claimed links to Gudur and Gudur itself in terms of inter-state diplomacy, world religions, and divine kingship. But this is once again to clothe a simpler reality in inappropriate trappings.

There are in Sukur and Damay other indications of Gudur connections. Whether or not the clan name 'Dur,' said to mean 'firmly established,' has anything to do with 'Gudur' is unclear, but it is surely significant that four of the Damay clans share with Gudur and its so-called brother clans the praise name pair Biya, for men, and Mbalda, for women (Jouaux 1989:271; Seignobos 1991:228). Biya is the name of the founder of the Gudur chieftaincy (Jouaux 1989:263). Bægəda, the name of the chiefly Damay clan, was spontaneously interpreted as 'bi Gudol', child of Gudur, by a former assistant visiting us from Sirak,³² while Mangu, another Damay clan, has the praisename Gudul.³³ In marked contrast to expectations, Damay's connections to Gudur appear stronger than those of Sukur itself!

The dressing of the hairlocks

Some colonial sources attribute to Sukur a kingdom founded in whole or in part on military dominance; the alternative view of Hidi Sukur as a spiritual power, in MacBride's words the 'sole accredited agent for the Priest of Gudur' sits uneasily with the first, but may appear to be supported by the role played by the Hidi in the installation of neighbour chiefs. Kulp listed the following settlements that 'have their chiefs "coronated" by priests of Sukur': Gulak, Duhu, Maiva-Palam, Dzu, Kamale, Wula Mango and Wula Hangko, Muduvu, Mabas, Vemgo, and Vizik. Shaw (1935) states that 'it is only during more recent years that the Chiefs of Kilba have ceased journeying to Sukur for formal installation by the Hlidi (and even in the present it is stated the royal spear of Kilba is still sent for formal blessing)....'. He notes that

'The sacred hairlock of the majority of the Priest-Chiefs, or (at Mildu) the priests, is fixed by an envoy of Sukur, a smith popularly known as the Taguma [Tlagama]. But many also proceed to Sukur for what may be regarded as the 'civil' installation where they receive from the Hlidi the royal cap and gown. This is a present practice which has not been discontinued as a result of Fulani overlordship. And in consequence it makes me somewhat hesitant at accepting Mr. MacBride's statement to the effect that Sukur dominion was founded on loot and rapine.'

We agree entirely with Shaw's logic.

While we did not obtain details on the Kilba connection in 1992-93, we enquired as to this practice from Kwada, Tlagama of Sukur, from Hidi Gəzik, and in as many other settlements as we were able. Before certain of the neighbouring chiefs are installed, they send gifts that include a ram and salt. The Hidi may reciprocate the gift-giving, for example offering an iron staff to the chief of Kamale, and he sends a party to the installation that includes the Tlagama, a smith-

named Ngumda. Sinnə remembered nothing of Nzaani telling people to kill cocks and women to squeeze eggs between their bellies and thighs (see below).

³² Kodje Dadai, himself of a clan that claims Gudur origins and with praise name "Biya." 2:75

³³ Interviews with Njidda Zirakwanay, clan Beguda, Bulama of Damay Kasa, ca 45 yrs, on 10 Nov. 1992 (JS 3: 30), Bulus Vayta, Mangu clan, Tlufu of Damay, 50-60 years, on 11 Dec. 1992, and Usmaana Ndaysu, Mariya clan, 90+ years, on 27 Sept. 92.

potter of Rəvai clan whose duties include playing the squeeze drum (*ruwidang*) on ceremonial occasions, and shaving the Hidi's head and dressing his hairlock, which, because at installation it has plaited into it the hairlock of his predecessor, has a sacred quality and may not be seen by others. The Tlagama performs or performed this shaving and hairlock dressing as part of the installation ceremonies for the neighbour chiefs listed below.

Gulak (Margi Medugu). Confirmed as past practice by Aji B. Medugu of Gulak, an amateur historian, though the present Ptil (chief) is a Muslim who did not have his head shaved at installation. Formerly it was Ptil Gulak who sent his representative to dress the hairlock of the chief of its daughter settlement, Duhu.

Wula. Confirmed by Lepəda, Mazə (chief of) Wula, though the custom has now lapsed.

Mabas. Confirmed to our assistants by Yakuda Hausa, Mbagham (chief) of Mabas.

Kamale = Ghunkulu, Mughkulu (Higi). Confirmed by Vandī Slatu, Mazə Kamale.

Maiva-Palam (Margi). Confirmed by Ptil Abadiya Abarri.³⁴

Dzu (an offshoot of Maiva-Palam with many settlers of Sukur origin). Although not mentioned by either Tlagama or Hidi Gəzik, the Ptil Dzu, Cinda Buba, claimed that although Hidi Sukur is sent no presents, he sends a representative to shave the head and dress the hairlock of the Ptil at his installation.

Vamay (Mavoumay). This was claimed by Tlagama and later denied by Hidi. However, this may be a matter of different names for the same settlement as, interviewed on another occasion, Hidi said that Hidis did send Tlagama to dress the hairlock of a chief at Wanday mountain ('beyond Wuro Wanday of the Fulbe'). Vamay is 7 kms ESE of Wanday, thus 'beyond' from a Sukur viewpoint. This is the first time that any such association of Sukur with a settlement in Mafa territory has been suggested and it requires to be followed up by further fieldwork.

All but the last of the chiefs listed above either share links with Mpsakali that are expressed in oral traditions in terms of kinship between chiefly dynasties (Gulak, Wula, Mabas, and, according to van Beek (1981:115-16) also Kamale), or rule substantial territories that are of economic importance to Sukur as sources of charcoal and ore for its iron industry (Maiva-Palam, Dzu, and the same is true of Kamale). In the case of the former group, the Hidi is in most accounts regarded as genealogically senior, while regarding the latter, Hidi Sukur is, as the chief of Palam put it, 'senior in traditional matters.' This is likely to reflect Sukur's long establishment in the region. The Margi of Maiva-Palam and their Dzu offshoot are, according to traditions collected by Kulp (1935:5-8), relatively recent immigrants from Mukava near Michika, whence they may have been driven out by Higi. In none of these cases is there any indication that the Hidi's role in the installation of chiefs testifies either to a former political dominion over their territories or to a religious supremacy as 'vicar of Gudur,' or far less, that Hidi Sukur was, as Bana traditions recorded by Mohammadou (1988:294-95) state, the king of a great religious centre who was sacrificed together with his principal dignitary every fifth *month*!³⁵ Rather we are dealing with a simple case of seniority that, whether in the family or in terms of first settlement, has politico-religious overtones in this culture area.

³⁴ Hidi Gəzik also said that the chief of Kojiti (Kwadjite) received the hairlock from Tlagama. This may be the case but he may have confused Kojiti with nearby Maiva-Palam. We failed to check this in the field.

³⁵ To the best of our knowledge Sukur is as ignorant of Bana's claimed descent from Sukur as is Gudur indifferent to the fate of its putative children, Soulede, Verdeke and Sukur (Jouaux 1989).

It is however worth considering in which of the neighbour chiefs' installations the Hidi plays no role, and why. In the case of Damay we were informed that it is because their chief 'is not a real Hidi'. Sukur-Damay relations are too complex to be treated here in any detail, but the traditions indicate that, despite the political independence of Damay (expressed in warfare and a separate ceremonial cycle), Sukur played an important role in the installation of immigrant clans at Damay. It is not unreasonable therefore that Sukur political theory should conceptualize the chief of Damay more as a Balam, or ward head, than as a chief of the same rank as the Hidi.

The chief of Kurang, the other independent settlement on the Sukur plateau, is a Kapsiki although the population includes a Sukur element and seems to have done so for many generations. Sukur's relations with Kurang and with the Kapsiki generally have been ambivalent. They were neither suppliers of raw materials for the Sukur iron industry nor important clients for its products. Fighting seems to have been fairly common but partook more of the nature of rustling and counter-rustling livestock than serious warfare. When Hamman Yaji forced a large part of the Sukur population to flee, they took refuge with Kapsiki at Rhoumzou and Mogode (despite the fact that Kapsiki are said not to have been above looting in Sukur in the aftermath of Hamman Yaji's attacks). In short, the relations between Sukur and Kapsiki, including Kurang, were not such as would appropriately have been expressed by Hidi Sukur's symbolic participation in their ceremonials.

As to Sukur's neighbours to the north, the Margi of Mildo and Hyambula (Shambula) who claim 'Babur' (Pabir) and Glavda origins respectively, the existing historical and ethnographic materials are scrappy and confusing. Suffice it to say that the long association of the Margi and the Fulani, and their involvement in the turbulent history of a region fought over by Wandala, Borno and Adamawa resulted in some secularization of their chiefs. Although the Hidi arranged for Sukur men and women to obtain charcoal and ore in their territories, this remained a commercial transaction without ritual expression.³⁶

To the best of our knowledge Meek is mistaken in his claim that Hidi Sukur assists in the installation of the minor chiefs of Vemgo and Vizik. Waga, now descended to the plains, Vemgo and Vizik are small and more or less heterogeneous entities (see Kirk-Greene 1956) that speak languages or dialects closely related to those of Mabas and the Hide of Tourou (Meek 1931a, vol. 1:320). The western expansion of Mafa in recent centuries appears to have contributed to the fragmentation of a once coherent ethno-linguistic cluster comprising the predecessors of these social formations. According to Lawan Idirisa of Waga, Sukur people used to come to make charcoal and collect ore on Waga lands on an individual rather than institutional basis. Hidi Sukur played no part in his installation.³⁷

In summary, the contribution of Hidi Sukur to the installation rituals of neighbour chiefs reflects on the one hand the respect accorded by the peoples of the region to seniority, interpreted in terms both of age and of priority of settlement, and, on the other, Sukur's exploitation of this situation to maintain its access to critical factors of iron production and thus its preeminent position in the iron trade. While the idioms of kinship and common Mpsakali/Gudur origins may be employed in the expression of these relationships, there is no reason to see in them the

³⁶ Although we failed to enquire into this, it is by no means impossible that Hidi Sukur does participate, as Shaw states, in the installation of the most important Mildo 'priest,' the '*zuli*' of the Amaraku shrine (Kulp 1935:33).

³⁷ Interview with Lawan Idirisa Ndurwa, ca 50 years, on 5 January, 1993.

relicts either of an ancient Sukur state or of a Gudur-centred theocracy of which Hidi Sukur was legate.³⁸

We should not pass on to the matter of Sukur's dubious statehood without a formal statement that the Hidi is and was never a divine king in the Frazerian sense (Feeley Harnick 1985:273-74). It was not the Hidi's ritual function to control any natural forces (see de Heusch 1985:36), nor, unlike Mofu-Diamaré princes, is he identified with them. Nor were Hidis ever sacrificed.³⁹ Even were we to accept Vaughan's (1980) sophisticated, but in our view less than convincing, argument that a form of divine kingship involving a form of sacrifice existed in Sukur's daughter polity, Gulak, there is no justification for extending it to Sukur. In the past Hidis were certainly hedged about with ritual restrictions to a far greater extent than obtains today, but their persons were not sacred. This is indeed suggested by the numerous coups perpetrated against those Hidis who are dated historical personages (Table 2). On the other hand the manipulation of sacred knowledge constituted one of several techniques in the continuing negotiation of social, political and economic relations that maintained their privileged position (Smith and David in press).

Sukur -- state or chiefdom?

The last myth that we confront in this paper is that Sukur was a state. If by a state we mean a form of political organization in which residence transcends kinship as a principle of affiliation, in which force is monopolized by the central power, and which is managed by a professional bureaucracy, then Sukur certainly does not qualify. Curiously, although affiliation is conceptualized in terms of kinship, residence appears in practice to have been more important, as Sukur sought to attract immigrants, and perhaps especially smith-potters, to develop its iron smelting and processing industry. The ideology of common Mpsakali origins was promoted to support societal integration.

Table 2. Hidis of the Dur dynasty, their reigns and reasons for departure from office.

Name	Approx. reign	Why ceased to rule (Ref.)¹
Watsə	? 19th century	Died in office (Strümpell 1922)
Ngaaka	? 19th century	

Mbakə	late 19th century	Killed by Hammado's supporters
Hammado	late 19th century	Killed by Kuratə
Kuratə	ca 1900- ca 1915	Died in office? (Kirk-Greene 1960)
Ndushəkən	ca 1915- ca 22	Killed by Hamman Yaji (MacBride 1937)
Tlagəma	ca 1922	Deposed by Nzaani after nine day rule
Nzaani	ca 1922 - 34	Abdicated under threat of deposition by the British colonial power (MacBride 1937)
Matlay	1934- ca 59	Deposed in old age ² (Kirk-Greene 1960)

³⁸ Hidi Nzaani's role in organizing a fund to pay for the magical intervention of Bay Gudur against the locust plague of 1930, and, if true, of Hidi Matlay in popularizing a form of sacrifice of thanksgiving at the end of the plagues in 1936, can be seen in the same light. See MacBride 1937:3-4.

³⁹The Bana tradition reported by Mohammadou (1988:294-95) we regard as incredible. It has no echoes in Sukur.

Usaani	ca 1959- ca 67	Deposed in old age ² (Pongri 1988)
Zirangkwadə	1967-83, 84-91	Deposed, reinstated, died in office
Gəzik	1983-84, 1992-	Deposed, reappointed

¹ References to dates and/or to reasons for replacements..

² Said to have been deposed by the then government at the instigation of his successor.

As to the control of force, although the Hidi could call on close agnates, on his affinal relatives, in particular sons-in-law, on title holders whom he had appointed, and under certain circumstances on members of his clan for armed support, there was no police force or corps of soldiers at his command. When disputes within Sukur over land or women or other issues erupted into fighting, elders would attempt to stop it but, according to Midala Bizha,⁴⁰ the Hidi would not intervene though he might later judge. Very few raids were undertaken against other settlements, at least in living memory, and, although the attack of October 1920 on Mildo Vapura would seem to have been planned and coordinated by Hidi Ndushəkən, this was clearly exceptional, as, if it ever existed, was the brief Watsə episode of more intensive raiding. Sukur's reliance on peaceable relations with other communities was dictated by its industrial strategy.

We have already quoted Barkindo's (1985:55) reference to Sukur's 'four components of government: the Llidi, the councillors, the executives and the functionaries.' In our Table 3 . Sukur title holders by clans and main functions as of 1992-93.

K indicates that the title is of Bornoan origin .

W indicates that the title is of Bornoan origin via Wandala.

Ha indicates that the title is of recent Hausa origin.

l indicates that the title is inherited within a patriline (potentially reverting to the clan).

TITLE	CLAN	FUNCTION

<i>Group I. Title-holders with duties that are closely tied to the chieftdom.</i>		
Tlidi (Hidi)	Dur	Chief
Makarma	Dur	Senior advisor and supporter
Mak. bin huɗ	Dur ^l	Installation of chief (formerly envoy to Gudur)
Rwa Tlidi	Dur	Heir apparent (unused at present)
Wakili Ha	Dur	Chief's deputy
Fatə Tlidi	Shagwam	Privileged advisor
Midala ^K	Karandu ^l	War leader (role ritualized) ¹
Dzarma ^K	Zwahəi ^l	Herald
Tlyam mbərəm Jira	Kiggi ^l	Chief's 'ear' in upper Sukur
Tlyam mbərəm Təka	Yanna* ^l	Chief's 'ear' in lower Sukur
Tləməzui	Kəməvud ^l	Role in Yawal ceremony

Group II Title holders who are members of the chief's 'household'.

⁴⁰ Interview 10 Oct., 1992 (1:99).

Tl̩əsəku	Mədləŋ * ¹	Chief's 'chaplain'
Tl̩əfu	Kwabala* ¹	Judge and supporter of Hidi
Tl̩əfu	Gadə* ¹	'Chamberlain' to the chief
Tlagama ^W	Rəvai ¹	Chief's barber and drummer (a smith)
Tl̩əgəm	Kwazhuwa ¹	Chief's drummer (a smith)
Birima ^K	Zwahəi	Junior 'chamberlain'

Group III Title holders with primarily ritual duties.

Dalatə ^{K/Ha}	Kuləsəgəi ¹	Chief of the sacrificers
Mbəzəfwai	Gadə* ¹	Sacrificer
Mbəzəfwai	Habəga 'wai * ¹	Sacrificer
Mbəzəfwai	H. humtəva * ¹	Sacrificer
Mbəzəfwai	Hwatlə ¹	Sacrificer
Mbəzəfwai	Rəvai ¹	Sacrificer (not a smith)
Mbəzəfwai	Ka-Ozha ¹	Sacrificer, liaison with rain-maker ²
Barkuma	Kiggi ¹	Ritual duties (Zoku and at time of sowing)
Ḍai kurbā	Təwwa ¹	Smith who buries the chief
Tlidi ɗai	Təwwa ¹	Senior funerary smith. Title now extinct ³
Tl̩əduv	Dumsa ¹	Sacrificer, assistant to Ḍai kurbā

Notes:

- ¹ The Midala title was vested in Bakyaŋ before that clan's emigration.
- ² The Ka-Ozha Mbəzəfwai is of the same clan as the Wula rainmaker, and is primarily responsible for liaison with him.
- ³ The Ḍai kurbā's section of Təwwa appears never to have been charged with burials other than that of the chief. The last Tlidi ɗai died ca 1985. His Təwwa section no longer carries out burials for others.

opinion no such fourfold division ever existed. In Table 3 we list the title holders, their clans and main functions as of 1992. (The division into three categories is our imposition on the data. Differences between our list and that of Kirk-Greene (1960:83-86) are minor except as regards the functions of the title holders and the aura of royal statehood that his language confers. Where he enumerated 16 titles we were able to find 21, and his 17 title holders are expanded to 28, largely because there are several Mbəzəfwai sacrificers. His 'Lli-Suku,' from MacBride, and 'Disku,' from Shaw, are variant renderings of one title, that of Tlisuku.⁴¹ Wakili, a title of Hausa origin, has recently replaced Row-Hidi in the sense of chief's deputy, though not as heir apparent. The Bulama or ward head title is a colonial introduction of ultimate Bornoan origin. Bulamas are appointed by the Hidi at his pleasure.

Several other titles originate from outside Sukur, whether from Borno or Wandala, and whether directly or indirectly, for example via Fulani (*Fulfulde*) or Pabir, we cannot at present determine (see Forkl 1985 and cf Meek 1931a). The 'tl + vowel' prefix to several titles may also be of Wandala origin though the root may perhaps be shared between *wandala* and *sakun*. Given the

⁴¹ MacBride (1937) adds one further title that even by that time was extinct. The 'Batari' was said to have been 'Lidi's bailiff in all home affairs. Not properly a member of Council, but by his office considered as "owning" the village.' We heard of no such title, and the office does not concord with our view of the organization of precolonial Sukur.

lack of correlation of titles and associated offices both between social formations and within them through time (Cohen 1987: 28-29), any interpretation of the culture historical significance of the foreign titles would be hazardous without much further research. We may however note that while Bornu has clearly been the main donor of titles in this region, followed, perhaps, by Wandala, Sukur (and closely related Damay) have neither received titles from Gudur (with the possible exception of Tlagama) nor passed them on to other groups (with the probable exceptions of Makarma and Tlæfu to Gulak, and Tlæfu to certain Higi settlements). This is strong evidence that Sukur was never a dominant power in the region.

With regard to Barkindo's (1985: 55) categories of councillors, executives and functionaries, in our view these are misleading because they imply a degree of political and occupational differentiation that never existed. All physically active Sukur, including title holders, were heavily involved in agriculture and in iron production. Hidi Matlay, for example, was a noted furnace master accustomed to directing two smelts simultaneously. And although some offices of some title holders might be characterized as executive or administrative, no offices, with the possible exception of those of the Hidi himself, required anything approaching full time involvement of any title holder.

Nor were there *councillors* because there is no *council*, no formal body composed of all or some of the title holders that met on any kind of regular basis. In 1992-93 there was only one meeting that could be categorized as formal. This occurred during Zoku, a ceremony of cleansing and renewal, and dealt with matters of traditional practice. The concept of a 'council' does not exist in *sakun*, the closest approximation being *ndahay pokum mburum*, 'people of importance in the land,' elders whose counsel will be listened to by the Hidi, but this indefinite category includes respected elders who are not title holders. There are, in other words, no councillors, and not all counselors are title holders. At present, all title holders are counselors.⁴²

There is a similar problem with 'executives and functionaries' in that these categories are inappropriate. Several offices serviced by title holders may be considered either executive and/or functionary; others are rather priestly, yet there are no full time priests. In the case of the Hidi, a considerable portion of his time is now spent as a civil servant, including (in 1992-93) frequent attendance on the Local Government Authority officials in Gulak. Tlæmazui's duties, on the other hand, now appear to be limited to clearing the paved way down to Ndilloey before the Yawal ceremony, and to providing eight bowls of millet porage and one large one of bean stew to the Hidi's musicians and others on that occasion!

There was and is in Sukur nothing of the bureaucracy characteristic of states. Each and every clan, saving only Kwasha, today represented in the mountain settlement by only two households, possesses one or more titles. While this is reflective of historical development it also constitutes another integrative device comparable to the linkage of clans through the ideology of their common Mpsakali origins. Sukur was and remains a chiefdom of renown; as we shall show in Part II of this paper (ND & JS 1996) it had an unique industrial character. But it was never a state.

Conclusion

⁴² Though this was perhaps not always the case for the Birima.

This paper has corrected by no means all the misconceptions regarding Sukur that are apparent in the limited literature on this extraordinary montagnard chiefdom, nor has it exploited by any means all the data of historical value contained in that literature. A detailed comparison of the information on title holders' offices obtained by Shaw in 1935 and by us in 1992-93 can, for example, provide much information on socio-political change, but must be deferred to a later publication. We have been concerned here rather to demonstrate that Sukur was never either a state nor a significant military power, and that its Hidi was neither a divine king nor the 'vicar of Gudur'. We have been engaged not in destruction of the work of some remarkable men but in its deconstruction as an essential preliminary to constructing Sukur as an industrial force in the Mandara highlands whose inputs were essential to the exploitation of a large part of lowland northeastern Nigeria. That less fabulous but equally fascinating role will be explored in Part II.

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FIGURE CAPTION

Figure 1. Sukur and its region, showing neighbouring peoples and settlements.