

The Sultan, Rabah Zobeir, Africa's Greatest Champion

He was a Genius at Strategy and Diplomacy

His Daring and Brutality Knew No Bounds



By J. A. ROGERS, Paris, France

The career of the Sultan Rabah Zobeir is concrete proof that given the man and anything near a favorable environment, race or birth counts for naught.

Born among a primitive and entirely untamed people in the heart of the Sudan, captured and held as a slave, he fought his way to liberty and carved for himself an immense empire in the richest region of Central Africa, east of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

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Old kingdoms crumbled under the tread of his well-trained cavalry. These lands he later ruled with such statesmanship that European administrators in Africa used him as their model. He built fine cities, had an army over which he exercised Roman discipline, and forced the head of the mightiest secret organization in Africa and the East to obey him.

The most uncompromising foe of European expansion in Africa, Rabah made colonial interests in England, France, Germany, and Belgium very uneasy. For thirty years he ruled, defeating able white commanders, and exacting a heavy toll in lives from France.

And all of this happened in our time for Rabah was born about 1848.

Taken by French Women

Captured at Bahr-el-Ghazal on the Upper Nile, Rabah was brought to Egypt and sold to a trader named Zobeir. A Frenchwoman, coming to Egypt with an expedition for the interior, hired Zobeir as guide. The latter took Rabah with him.

On the return of the expedition, the Frenchwoman gave her guns and the remainder of the ammunition to Zobeir, and Zobeir, gathering a number of adventurers, went off with Rabah up the Nile to Bahr-el-Ghazal, Rabah's former home.

Here Zobeir established himself as a slave-trader and prospered so well that he built a kingdom of his own. At that time (1872) Egypt was engaged in conquering the Sudan, and made war on Zobeir. The latter, however, defeated the Egyptians and a peace was concluded by which Zobeir was made a viceroy. Much of Zobeir's success was due to Rabah, who, by this time, had risen to be second in command.

Escapes Pursuers

As Zobeir had been made a viceroy, he was invited to Cairo for a celebration of the honor. But there

he was made prisoner by the English general, "Chinese" Gordon. Zobeir's son, Suleyman, thereupon once more attacked the Egyptians but Suleyman, beaten in battle, was promised his life if he surrendered. He did and was executed.

A similar invitation had been extended to Rabah, but too cautious to be caught by promises, he rallied 700 of his countrymen around him as soon as Suleyman had surrendered, and dashed off into the desert. Their fleet Arab horses soon bore them out of the reach of their pursuers.

For the fugitives there was but one way of making a living: plunder. At that time (1879) there were several Negro kingdoms in Central Africa, just south of the Sahara, which did considerable trade with Europe, as the Wadai, the Baghirmi, and Bornu.

Bornu, lying in the rich and fertile region around Lake Tchad, was the richest, oldest, and most important. Several times the size of the State of New York, it had been established in the 8th Century, and was highly civilized when some of the now leading European powers, like England, was almost in a savage state. During the reign of Henry VIII while the English were still using bows and arrows, the Bornuans were using gunpowder.

Rabah Becomes Immensely Wealthy

From these Central African kingdoms went out gold, ivory, skins, leather, ostrich feathers, and slaves. Into them came silks, watches, and all the usual products of European manufacture. Caravans took and brought these articles through Tripoli by way of the Sahara desert. Lying across this route, Rabah and his band became the terror of the merchants. So much booty fell into his hands that he became immensely wealthy.

Almost every nation from the most ancient time has been founded on plunder. When enough wealth has been acquired by this means, the leader usually thinks of settling down, so to speak. Rabah, running true to form, cast his eyes on the Negro kingdoms, above-mentioned, and decided

that it was time he had an empire of his own.

By the use of strategy, he decided, he could considerably expedite matters. At that time there were two powerful rulers near him: one on the east, and the other to the west. He decided to use the latter to further his ends.

Hated Christians

This ruler was Mohammed Senussi II. While Senussi's domain was not a regular organized empire, it was perhaps even more powerful. He was the head of a secret organization which extended over the length and breadth of Africa, from the Mediterranean on the north to Senegal, Nigeria, and Abyssinia on the south, and into Turkey and Arabia. The society had been founded by his father

Rabah had the reputation of being very hard and austere. It is said that one day, seeing an amulet around the neck of one of his wives, who was asleep, he cut the thread, and, opening the amulet, found an undecipherable inscription inside. Taking it to one of his learned men, he bade him read it. . . . He ordered both the learned man and his wife to be put to death.

er and had been greatly extended by himself.

The object of the Senussi was to keep Christianity and the Europeans out of Africa. Its power was immense, and extended even into Europe whither Senussi sent his youths to be educated. At the period of which we are writing, Senussi II was so powerful that he issued an edict against Adbul Nejd, Sultan of Turkey because of the closeness of his relations with the European powers. The Senussi played an important part in Near East politics in the last war, and is today one of the agencies most feared by the European powers in Africa.

Senussi II was white, or what passes for white in North Africa. His father was a white Berber and his mother a quadroon.

Demands Wholesale Massacre

Rabah, whose daring knew no bounds, decided to bend Senussi to

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