

Kaskara Cross-guards/Quillons: An Essay for Discussion and Comment

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The *Kaskara* sword's cross-guard or quillon is a signature design element of the weapon, yet it has been largely ignored in the literature. The guard is notable for its four-sided "lozenge" cross-section, often flared at the ends. It performs two or three functions:

- as protection for the user's hand from sword strikes;
- as a structural element to "unitize" and secure the blade, guard and grip into a functional whole; and, perhaps debatable,
- as a surface to place a forefinger to help control the user's strike.

Our main interests herein will be the lozenge design element, the Sudanese names of the stylistic variations, and the methods of quillon fabrication. This presentation is based on limited primary on-site research at the sword and knife makers' market in Kassala, Sudan over six days in the spring of 1984 and field notes, as well as:

- direct 'hands-on' inspection of four kaskaras in my collection acquired in Kassala;
- information and images from researchers, enthusiasts and collectors in multiple posts on the Ethnographic Arms and Armour Forum of vikingsword.com; and
- readings of period travelers' accounts and seminal books of arms and armor authors.

Despite these rich resources, no doubt there are serious gaps in our knowledge and understanding of the subject. This preliminary presentation will be greatly enhanced by comments, discussions and corrections from readers of these pages.

The preponderance of travelers' narratives permit us to stipulate that, at least during the 18th and 19th centuries, most of the straight broadsword blades used in the Central and Eastern Sahel Region - the strip from the Hausa states, Karem-Bornu, Wadai, Darfur, Kordofan and Funj Sultanate - were imported from Europe, overwhelmingly in bulk from Solingen, Germany. Many were imported via Bornu, mounted there, and distributed through the region as noted by Denham, et. al. (1822), Barth (1850), and Tonkin (1903). An earlier report from the Funj area by Father Theodoro Krump (1700-1702) reported that a European swordsmith in Sennar at the time couldn't find work and made iron currency pieces. Native blades, of variable quality, were made in Sudan at least from the Mahdiya period (1881-1898) and "factory production" continues even today in Omdurman, Kassala, and Port Sudan.

An excellent essay on trade blades in African swords by Iain Norman may be accessed at <http://iainnorman.com/essays/2014/04/trade-blades-in-african-swords/>.

Iain Norman also has written an excellent essay on the origin of the *Kaskara* name. I can't improve on his work. Access via this link: <http://iainnorman.com/essays/2014/03/kaskara-terminology/>

In some places within this monograph sources are quoted merely by a nickname or with a first name. This reflects that this document began as a thread on the Ethnographic Arms and Armour Forum and those are the user names of contributing members; see the original and add your comments at <http://www.vikingsword.com/vb/showthread.php?t=24210>

These swords, due to their iconic qualities, are known to Western enthusiasts and collectors as the *kaskara*. While the blade is the business end, it is not the focus in this investigation. The gripped end of the sword defines the nominal *kaskara*: it typically consists of a wooden grip wrapped in a leather strip topped with a leather-bound disk and a characteristic range of simple straight cross-guards or quillons. The *kaskara* is always carried in a scabbard with a leaf-like profile at the bottom. [Note: Mandinka swords from West Africa also have a leaf-shaped scabbard, but there are apparently no strong cultural links that would have influenced the design of the *kaskara*'s scabbard.]

Quillons are made by specialized craftsmen, not swordsmiths. Typically, a blacksmith forges the complete unit and other artisans smooth and finish the item before passing it on to the swordsmith who assembles the unified basic sword. There were four cross-guard makers in Kassala in 1984. One was described as producing "excellent" examples, another "good" and two as creating work of "poor" quality. Each worker can make up to 10 units per day. A separate worker finishes them with a file and sand paper.

Five types of quillons may be identified:

- *Sammaniya*:
 - a. Small flare, forged iron
 - b. Large flare, forged iron
 - c. Large flare, gilded forged iron and perhaps cast copper alloy
- *Mutamaan*, forged iron
- *Sennariya*, forged iron
- One-piece, forged angle iron
- Cast copper alloy on *Thuluth* swords

The swordsmiths of the Kassala Suq al Hadad provided me the technical details of types 1-4 above. The cross-guard is called *tomot* in Hadendawa language for "two boys going together" referencing the two langets perpendicular to the horizontal. The Arabic word is *bersham*.

The *Sammaniya*

The *sammaniya* with its flared lozenge ends is perhaps the signature view of the Sudanese *kaskara*. The cross-guard has two side facets on each side with a flat top and bottom, for a total of six forged surfaces. The guard is forged one half at a time. The front and back langets, extending above and below the quillon body halves (four pieces) are then forge welded into a complete unit. This is a common construction technique for the three named forms; see fig. 1 on the following page.

The origin of the name is unknown. It is known that the Sammaniya Sufi order was introduced into Sudan soon after 1775. The Mahdi inherited the leadership of this order, but then condemned Sufi practices as against the values of the Mahdiya movement. After 1899, under British administration, Sufism, always just under the surface, re-emerged to its former popular level.

We see *sammaniyas* in three versions, as noted above. I suggest that the small flare is the parent design. Its origin is unknown. Its genesis is mainly debated to be either the Funj Kingdom in the 1500-1821 period or to the West in the Hausa and Bornu areas or the Mamluk designs up the Nile or via NE Sudan Arab immigrations from Arabia and Red Sea trade routes. Sir Samuel Baker (1861), while in Eastern Sudan, recorded that the Arab tribesmen in the area used similar double-edge straight swords with a plain bar cross-guard. He did not note any details of the guard. Sheiks and other high status individuals carried swords with silver mounted hilts as symbols of their authority.



Fig 1. *Sammaniya* form of *kaskara* guard with a pair of flat surfaces on the front and back faces of the quillons (lateral extensions of the guard) as well as a flat surface on the medial part of the top and bottom. Each quillon end has a flat diamond shaped facet. Only the langet (extension from the guard parallel with the length of the blade) extending towards the tip of the blade is seen in this photograph, but another is present, but lies under the grip wrapping. (Author's photograph).

Less extreme/normal flares represent the ancestor of the form. The typical example seen in fig. 1 above, reported as being made in 1916 in Kassala, has six forged surfaces and a modest flare terminating in a diamond shaped lozenge as a terminal facet. This is quality work. Notice the symmetrical facets, flat top, vertically aligned lozenges and forged-welded langet. A Kassala swordsmith said in 1984 that this type of guard can no longer be made by contemporary smiths.

Sometimes a decorative "X" is cut in the center of the cross-guard. Most are found on *sammaniya* styles, in both the greater and lesser flared examples. It is a stylistic enhancement with no other apparent meaning. My informant in 1984 said some people prefer it, others don't. In my collection, the example shown in fig. 1 does not have an "X" and another one that does is, unfortunately, not a good example to photograph. An illustrative example is shown courtesy of Sotheby's (see fig. 2) with additional images and description at <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2011/arts-of-the-islamic-world/lot.317.html>.

The extreme flares may be the highest form of *kaskara* art. These are most often seen on presentation swords like several from Ali Dinar's arsenal in Darfur in the 1902-1915 period. The forged iron example in fig. 2 from Sotheby's was dated 1902-03. In the enlargement, notice the "X", the filed lines at the ends of the lozenges and the faceted lower langet. This enhanced langet detail is not seen in normally flared examples. Also note, when following the link above, the inscriptions on the ends of the lozenges.

Some extreme flares are seen on gilded, forged iron examples, as with a *kaskara* in the British Museum (Aft. 1932.1014). An example from Christie's has a gilded guard (see fig. 3) while another example of unknown origin has a rough cast copper alloy quillon with flared tips (see fig. 4). I've seen no historical reference to Sudanese copper alloy casting practices although El Tounsy (1854) observed in his travels, conducted from 1803 to 1813, that, along with blacksmiths and weavers, founders were among the trades



Fig 2. A fine *kaskara* sold by Sotheby's in 2011 is an outstanding forged iron example. Note the flared profile and the inscriptions on the lozenge ends. (Photo courtesy of Sotheby's)

in Darfur and Wadai. Additional notes suggest a transition of the import of complete swords to sword blades occurred circa 1800. The necessary materials were available in Darfur; zinc and old copper were imported from Egypt and were highly valued.

An interesting example that came to auction at Hermann Historica in Munich, Germany in 2009 (https://www.hermann-historica.de/en/ali_dinar_ibn_zakariya_sultan_des_sudan_1865_-_1916/l/55561) shows an upside down view of the ends of brass quillons engraved with tughras on a sword given by Ali Dinar to Slatin Pasha in 1910. Note the smoothness of the joint between the guard and the langet would be unlikely if it were forged and gilded.



Fig. 3 *Kaskara* of Sultan Ali Dinar al-Fashir, Sudan dated AH 1333 (1914-15).
<https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/a-sword-of-sultan-ali-dinar-kaskara-6065527-details.aspx>
(Photograph courtesy of Christie's)



Fig. 4. An example of a *kaskara* with a roughly cast copper alloy guard with flared quillons.
(Photograph courtesy of Stephen Wood)

Fig. 5. *Kaskara* presented by Sultan Ali Dinar to his son Mazmal dated 1884 shown. (Photograph courtesy of Bonhams.)



With one exception, the known extreme-flare examples do not predate the Sultan Ali Dinar era (1899-1916) - the exception is a 1884 dated gift from him to his son Mazmal shown on the Bonhams auction site (see fig. 5 above). They seem to appear only in the Ali Dinar regalia and presentation swords and in those shown in Reed's sketches from Darfur (1987 L1 and L2) of examples that were owned by the leader of a tribal section affiliated with Dinar's dynastic base and were handed down from probably the early 20th century. I have not seen any extreme-flared swords attributed to be British war trophies of the 1885 and 1898 battles with the Mahdists or other heirlooms from Mahdist or earlier Sudanese contexts.

Ali Dinar is known to have had a workshop in El Fashir to "produce locally many of the articles of kingly ambience that characterized the life-style of the region's elite;" (see L. Kaptelins and J. Spaulding, *Gifts Worthy of Kings: An Episode in Dar Fur -Taqali Relations*, 1990.) He presented to Makk Jayli of Taqali several "instruments of state" including a native-made (not imported) sword, "silvered, with rivets of silver, decorative beads of silver, mother of pearl, silver rings, a silver pommel and tanned leather" and other weapons wound in silver wire (Kaptelins & Spaulding, 1990, p. 68). No date of the gift or description of the quillons is available. Taqali was a small sultanate in the Nuba Hills of southern Kordofan. It was conquered by Mahdist forces, but again became semi-autonomous at the British Reconquest when the gifts were presented.

It is easy to believe that Ali Dinar's craftsmen and jewelers had the design inspiration and skills to expand the common slightly flared quillon into the elegant version we see in his regalia and diplomatic creations. One reason for the flared design may have been to create space on the quillon ends to inscribe religious or genealogical texts, (see link to Hermann Historica sale above.) The crack in the Ali Dinar's workshop theory lies in the flared copper alloy quillon sword given by him to his son in 1884 noted above and in the sword shown above in fig. 5. The former Sultanate of Darfur was conquered by the Egypt in 1874 and by

Fig. 6. Nasir Mohammad Funj-era sword in the collections of the Sudanese National Museum in Khartoum; it has been dated to 1762.



the Mahdi's forces in 1883. Those conditions would provide little opportunities for such a sword to be made. It is doubtful that the craftsmen and facilities persisted for some three generations from the reigns of Ali Dinar's ancestors of the Keira dynasty. They may have drawn technical expertise from the Bornu kingdom and other more civilizing influences from the West, but there is no evidence this happened.

Julie Anderson of the British Museum, et al, has written an excellent article *Royal Regalia: a sword of the last Sultan of Darfur, Ali Dinar in Sudan & Nubia*, Sudan Archaeological Research Society Bulletin 20, 2016 p.161. Courtesy of the Dr. Anderson, this may be found online at http://www.vikingsword.com/ethsword/hunley/S&N20_Anderson_et_al.pdf

Another example of the exaggerated flared lozenge is the Nasir Mohammad Funj-era sword, now in the Sudanese National Museum in Khartoum. It has been dated to 1762. It has a forged iron *sammaniya* quillon, like the Ali Dinar examples, but has a star and comet silver grip cover similar to examples brought back to England from the 1899 war. The Nasir blade could well be 18th century, but the grip end appears to be much later (see fig. 6 of the unrestored grip end.)



Fig. 7.
Muthamaan style
hilt cross-guard
form having eight
'facets' that
became
increasingly
common during
the 20th century.
(Author's
collection)

The Muthamaan

This form appears to be a degeneration from the *sammaniya*. It is technically easier to forge than the more sophisticated form and smiths with lesser skills could produce the newer form. The lozenges remain on the ends, but they are only slightly flared and the top and bottom surfaces sort of meld into the two side facets (see fig. 7 above from the author's collection). Beyond the first quarter of the 20th century, as an earlier generation of master forgers apparently became inactive, this type is the more common.

The term *muthamaan* is said to derive from a form of the number eight in Arabic, *thamaaniya*. The *mu-* prefix has an Arabic grammatical function sort of like "to make," hence *muthamaan* means "to make eight". A native speaker may certainly correct me, but the reader will get the idea. I count two facets on each side, front and back for eight surfaces total when both the right and left sides are counted. In contrast the *sammaniya* style has twelve surfaces in total.

Fig. 8. An example of a *kaskara* with a *sennariya* style cross-guard with relatively flattened quillons. (Photograph courtesy of Stephen Wood)



The *Sennariya*

This type is perhaps the most simple yet most elegant of the *kaskara* quillon types. It departs from the lozenge ends of the *sammaniya* and *muthmaan* types and may pre-date them. The ends are spatulate or more like a thick straight screw driver (fig. 8, above) with the flat top and vertical sides and also Chris' oblique bottom view with forge welded langets (fig. 9, below). In both examples the top and bottom surfaces are finished smooth and flat and are of good quality. Note in the grip in fig. 8 the securing pin and open tenon of the upper part of the langet. This illustrates a structural component addressed below.

The origin of this form is unknown. Sennar was the capital of the Funj Empire (1500-1821) and is 250 km south of Khartoum on the Blue Nile River. The form may have originated in Sennar during the Funj times and may be the original *kaskara* cross-guard. Why else would the type be called *sennariya*? A picture of a Funj King dated 1821 indicates vertically flared ends on the guard, although they could be flared and

Fig. 9. Oblique bottom view of *sennariya* style cross-guard with forge welded langets. Note that the lozenge shaped quillon ends of the previous types are no longer present. (Photograph courtesy of Chris)





Fig. 10. Picture of a Funj King dated 1821 indicates vertically flared ends on a guard possibly adorned with precious stones (enlarged insert on right).



Fig. 11. Engraving by Lefebvre from 1845 showing a similar form of cross-guard. (Photograph courtesy of Kubur)

spatulate. Note that the quillon appears to be adorned with perhaps precious stones (see fig. 10). However, an engraving by Lefebvre (1845) (see fig. 11) shows a very similar cross-guard on a presumed Ethiopian outfitted imported sword that is similar to the double-headed snake sword addressed in the Silver Dress article. Note the upper and lower langets are as in the *kaskara* quillon, although the upper one does not appear to fill a structural role. The respective double pommels are similar, but the Funj has a cylindrical top portion while the snake sword sports a biconvex profile. Also, Martin Lubojacky submitted a image of a circa 17th century painting in a museum in Addis Ababa (see fig. 12 on the following page). While the hilt in the old painting reflects the artist's interpretation, it is not totally foreign to the design elements we have been considering. Keep in mind that elite Ethiopian warriors historically used both straight broadswords as well as their iconic curved-blade *shotels*.

I offer a thought experiment as to how the *sammaniya* style may have evolved from the *sennariya* style. It involves a bit of blacksmith empathy. We see that the *sennariya* style essentially begins with a rectangular iron bar with parallel horizontal surfaces at 90 degrees to the vertical. Suppose a smith turns the bar 45 degrees to present a rhombic/diamond cross section, with facets on all four planes. Now hammer the top and bottom facets flat to form horizontal surfaces at the blade end of the half-guard and taper to the ends while preserving the diamond cross section. Now dress to create the lozenge ends. The piece now has six surfaces. Split the blade end of the quillon to accept the blade and wooden handle and the piece looks like half of a *sammaniya* quillon. Have I explained this the way I envision it? Will the process actually work as a forging exercise?

Fig. 12. Ethiopian warrior depicted in a circa 17th century painting in a museum in Addis Ababa.
(Photograph courtesy of Martin Lubojacky)



One-Piece Cross-guard

Mohammad Tomaniye was the first person to forge the entire guard from a single piece using flattened angle iron in 1943. He devised a template with the center of a rectangular piece pierced by a Z type cut as shown (in fig. 14) and the long sides are forged to the cross shape. The short stubs form the langets and the other pieces which parallel the blade. The one-piece aspect of the guard doesn't permit even a slight flare at the ends. Mr. Tomaniye's innovation allowed a serviceable unit to be produced that doesn't require the high skills of the *sammaniya* yet resulted in a product similar to the *muthamaan* or *sennariya* faster and more efficiently. A one-piece unit replaced the method that previously required aligning and forge welding four separate pieces together. Apparently by 1984 all quillions produced in Kassaka were of this simplified type.

Fig. 13 below shows the flat template while fig. 14 on the following page shows two completed forged guards. The right unit is of *sennariya* style and the left side is a *muthanaan*, almost a *sammaniya*. Either style can be forged from the same templated sheet.

It's possible to determine by inspection the difference between the one-piece and the *muthamaan*. Note the

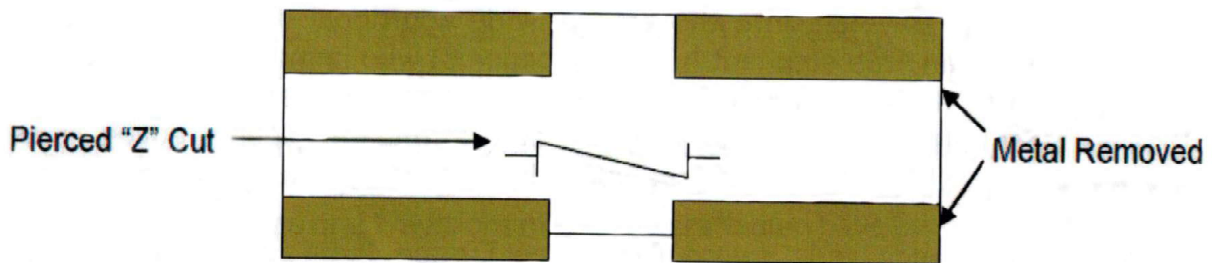
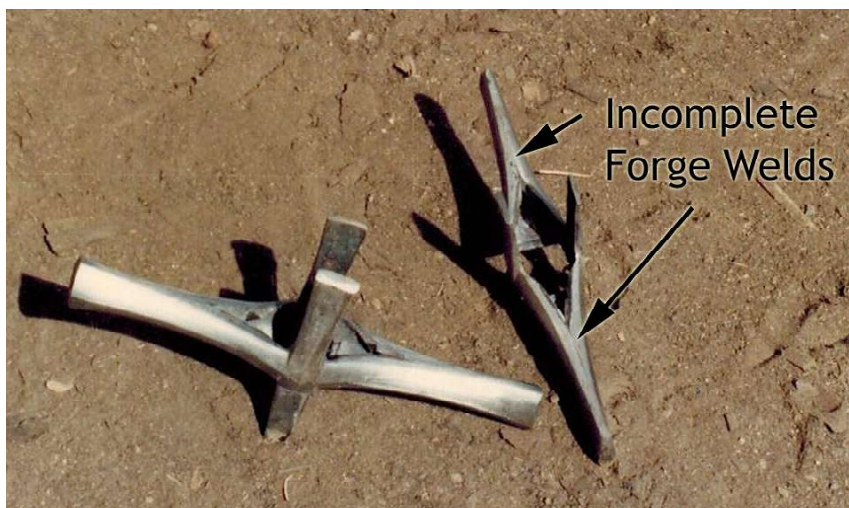


Fig. 13. Template for fabrication of a *kaskara* crossguard.
(Author's diagram)

Fig. 14. Two completed forged guards. The right unit is of *sennariya* style and the left side is a *muthanaan*, almost a *sammaniya*. (Author's photograph)



gap line on the bottom of the right unit in fig. 14. This is where the forge weld line was not completely fused. The photo of the bottom of one of my sword's quillons (see fig. 17) suggests the beginning of a similar gap; note the small lozenge end, as well.

Comparison of Four Similar Swords' Quillons of the *Sammaniya* Style

I compared my four midling kaskara swords and attempted to place each into its correct type. They are shown together in fig. 15 of all four top views and fig. 16 of two bottom views.

#1 is reported as being of circa 1916 vintage and is definitely a *sammaniya* type. Note its flat top and bottom, horizontal facets, total of six surfaces per half, vertically aligned end lozenges, and obviously forge welded langets.

#2 is of unknown age. It has a rough finish with considerable surface scratches but no patina. It almost looks like neglected "new, old stock," but after all it is at least 35 years old. The top is flat, but somewhat abbreviated. The facets are rather rounded, but in the ends form lozenges that are slightly askew so that it's hard to tell if the langets were attached separately or were part of a one-piece forging. The "X" cut into the metal at the junction may be disguising the weld, but a look inside the mount doesn't confirm it either way. I would reluctantly classify it as a "gentleman's C" *sammaniya*. Then again, the suggestion of the hairline joint could make it a close cousin to the one-piece *sammaniya*-style forged from the flat angle iron shown in fig. 16.

#3 is also of unknown age. The front facets roll over to form lozenge ends several degrees from the vertical. No flat top or bottom. The langet weld joint may be obscured by the "X" marks both front and back. This meets the criteria for a *muthmaan*.

#4 also is of unknown age. The surfaces are rolled like #3 and the lozenges are askew and much smaller than expected. There are no joints between the body and the langets, these being folded parts of the same metal template. This is obviously a one-piece and made after 1943 at the earliest. Further evidence is found in the bottom views. Note the hairline at the end of one 'V' section. That suggests an incomplete forge weld joint as shown in fig. 16.

In assessing the age and type of a kaskara, it is important to look at the bottoms as well as the tops of the guard, and for forge weld joints between the body and the langets.

Fig. 15. Four *kaskara* from the author's collection, showing hilt details as viewed from above and described in greater detail on the previous page.

#1 is a *sammaniya* type

#2 is a *sammaniya* variant, with a suggestion of the hairline joint suggesting a close cousin to the one-piece *sammaniya*-style.

#3 is a *muthmaan* type.

#4 represents the one piece cross-guard, all components being folded parts of the same metal template.

(Author's photograph)



Fig. 16. Two of the above *kaskara* showing hilt details as viewed from below. Evidence of incomplete forge welds testifies as to the manner of construction.

(Author's photograph)

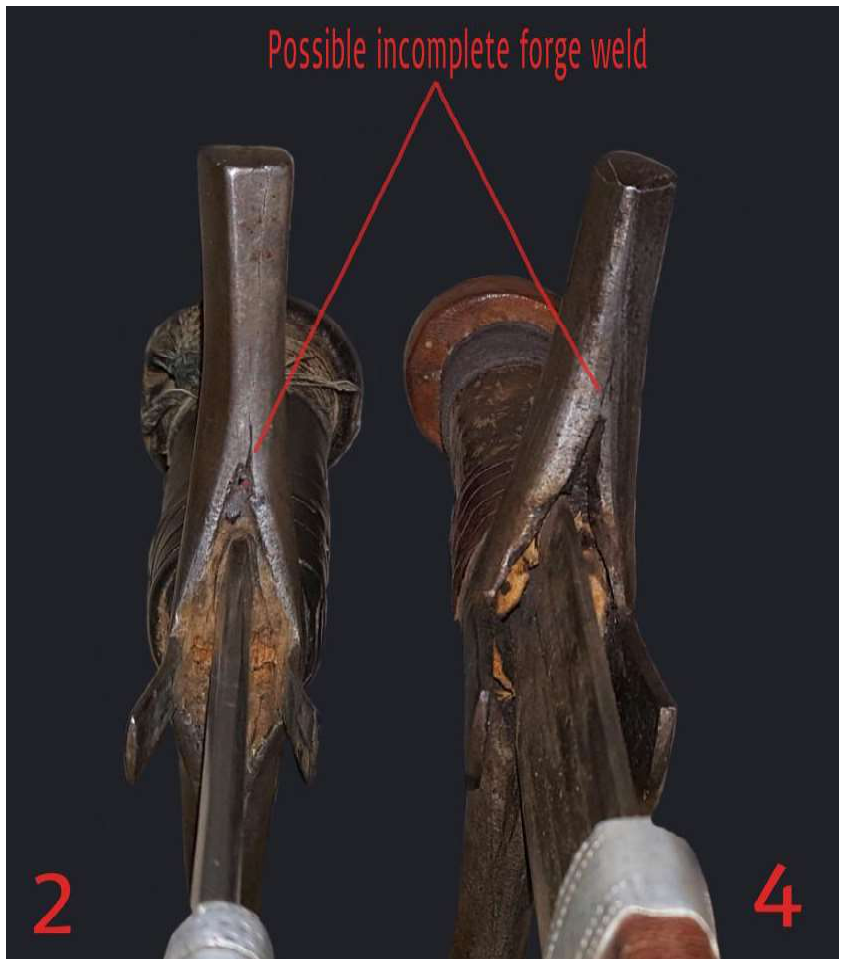




Fig. 17. Thuluth style sword with acid resist etched repetitive prayer inscriptions on the blade, overall and detail image of hilt with a silvered brass cross-guard with expanded quillon tips. The robust 36¼ inch blade has a well defined fuller and the sword weighs 1113 grams. (Photograph courtesy of Lee Jones)

Thuluth Cast Copper Alloy Quillons

Thuluth style swords have prayers etched on the blade. Some blades are battle quality, but others are relatively thin and meant for symbolic purposes or even as souvenirs. They were popular during the Mahdiya period (1881-1898), while others may have been produced during the early post-reconquest period. The quillons are variously described as cast brass or cast bronze and have langets like the other types described herein. Most have rounded button-like tips (see fig. 17 above). Also, note the sharpened blade edge noting a more serious purpose. Others may exhibit a tip profile suggestive of the *sennariya* style (see fig. 18 on the following page).

It is unclear where these swords were made. During the Khalifa's administration the import of copper from Egypt was restricted and available supplies were likely used to make rifle ammunition in Omdurman's arsenal. Informants in Kassala in 1984 said that they had done brass casting there in the undefined past, but offered no further explanation. In 1871 Frederic-Benoit Garnier wrote about imports through Suakin from Egypt. Andreas, in a 2014 EAA post, translates from the French that "among the goods were blades and

Fig. 18. Cross-guard tip profile suggestive of the *sennariya* style on a Thuluth blade.



cross guards of German manufacture.” The type and material of these cross-guards are not further identified nor was their ultimate disposition. If of copper alloy, they could have sat in a warehouse in Khartoum until found and used on Thuluth swords during the Mahdiya.

The Thuluth style sword, with distinctive blade and quillon, is more or less a dead end. Its popularity was apparently short lived and associated mainly with the Mahdiya. It likely would never be seen in the field as a symbol of authority or weapon for self defense or conflict. Yet the type is interesting historically and stylistically. Jim McDougall and Iain Norman have discussed the form extensively and their inputs are well worth absorbing. More information and discussion of this type of sword can be found in the links below, among others.

<http://www.vikingsword.com/vb/showthread.php?t=14711&highlight=Thuluth>

<http://www.vikingsword.com/vb/showthread.php?t=16477>

<http://www.vikingsword.com/vb/showthread.php?p=220571>

Additionally, a report (http://cool.conservation-us.org/anagpic/2007pdf/2007ANAGPIC_Grady.pdf) of a technical appraisal and protective treatment of a Thuluth sword and monitor lizard skin scabbard is informative. It’s interesting not because it’s Thuluth, but due to the assessment and treatment processes. The cross-guard, similar in appearance to the example in fig. 17, was thought likely to have been made of recycled brass and copper materials (Grady, p.14).

Structural Role of Cross-guards

In addition to its protective and decorative roles, the cross-guard performs a structural role. The wooden grip is cut and relieved to wedge between the blade and the guard to hold it securely in place. (See the wooden handle driven into the quillon in fig. 16.) Also, the vertical langets fit into slots in the wood grip (see also fig. 8).

Many, perhaps most, blades have a flat tang 2-3 inches long with an approximately ¼ inch hole in them. They seem to be typical in both imported and native blades, but I am open to correction. It is of a width much less than the blade. (See the tang with such a hole in fig. 19 on the following page.) This tang seems



Fig. 19. *Kaskara* tang with a hole for placement of a pin to secure the hilt.
(Photograph courtesy of Mefidk)

to have a more defined outline than those on the few native blades I have seen and I wonder if tang shape could be diagnostic for native versus imported blades. The soft wooden grip has a hole cut in it to accept the tang. Additionally, the grip is inlet/open mortised to accept the vertical upward langets of the quillon to wedge the blade firmly in place. The bottom of the grip is believed to be tapped into the opening in the quillon to firmly wedge in the blade. A pin is then inserted through the grip and through the tang hole and

Fig. 20. *Kaskara* hilt (second from left) that has lost the covering of the grip, revealing the pin securing the hilt.
(Photograph courtesy of Colin Henshaw)



peened to hold the parts securely together. The second hilt from the left in fig. 20 below has such a pin. The other three are indeterminate.

A 2018 video made by the AP in the Kassala sword suq shows a different way to attach the blade and wooden grip. (See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiwvGpbYhms>). Here the smith inserts a “rat tail” type sword tang into a previously drilled wooden grip and into the cross-guard (see video at 47 seconds). This seems less secure than the pinned tang method, but this construction may have been made to facilitate easier assembly now that the sword is intended mainly for ceremonial use and not subject to the rigors of combat. The video also shows craftsmen smoothing a newly made cross-guard. It’s interesting to see that swords are still being made in essentially the same manner as observed by the author in 1984, and basically forever.

It appears that all of the swords brought back to Britain as war trophies in the late 19th century were of a homogenous design within the scope of the *samanniya*, *sennariya* and so called Thuluth styles, whether plain, silver or reptile leather dressed. The *samanniya* with its slightly flared ends appears by far to be dominant.

Summary with Historical Notes

The question remains unanswered: When did the *samanniya* style originate, become homogenous and the signature style of the Mahdist Era? I think that presently the answer to all elements is “We don’t know.” There is scant and scattered physical evidence. I’ll summarize what I am aware of. Others, please add to what is known.

The accounts of 18th and 19th century European travelers to the Central and Eastern Sahel may be our best available sources of information on the swords and their quillons. Historians of the period are also in the mix. Many observers noted the availability of imported Solingen sword blades, and only a few even suggest the grip portions of the swords observed.

- In 1700-02 Father Theodoro Krump (translated by Jay Spaulding) in the Funj lands reports that swords were a symbol of authority among the Funj hierarchy, and separately, that a sword brandished by a local Arab prince was “like that of Emperor Charles.” Other swords of the period had loop guards as well. Krump also observes that slave infantry carry lances and shields while horse and camel cavalry use lances or sabres.
- The 1762 dated, but unrestored, Funj sword of Nasir Mohammad. (See fig. 6.) While the blade may be 18th century, I doubt the period date because the quillon is heavily flared like the Ali Dinar examples of the 1899 period. Also, the silver grip cover has the star & comet design like much later examples.
- James Bruce in *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, 1768-73*, book IV, p. 481 reports from Sennar that the king has 1,800 horse with coats of mail and armed with only a broad Slavonian [Slavonian]sword. This suggests that complete swords, rather than or in addition to unmounted blades, had been imported from Europe.
- W. G. Browne in his *Travels in Africa, Egypt and Syria, from the year 1792 to 1798*, London, 1806, p. 347, reports that “sword blades, straight, (German) from Kahira” (Cairo) as well copper face-pieces, or defensive armour for the horses’ heads and firearms are imported into Darfur. If they were coming into Darfur from Cairo, they certainly were available to be imported up the Nile Valley. This may be one of the earliest references to the mass import of German blades into the Sudanic region.
- John Lewis Burckhardt in his *Travels in Nubia* (during 1811-12) observes, while in Nubia, that swords of German manufacture are sold by Egyptian merchants and that “the scabbard, for fashion

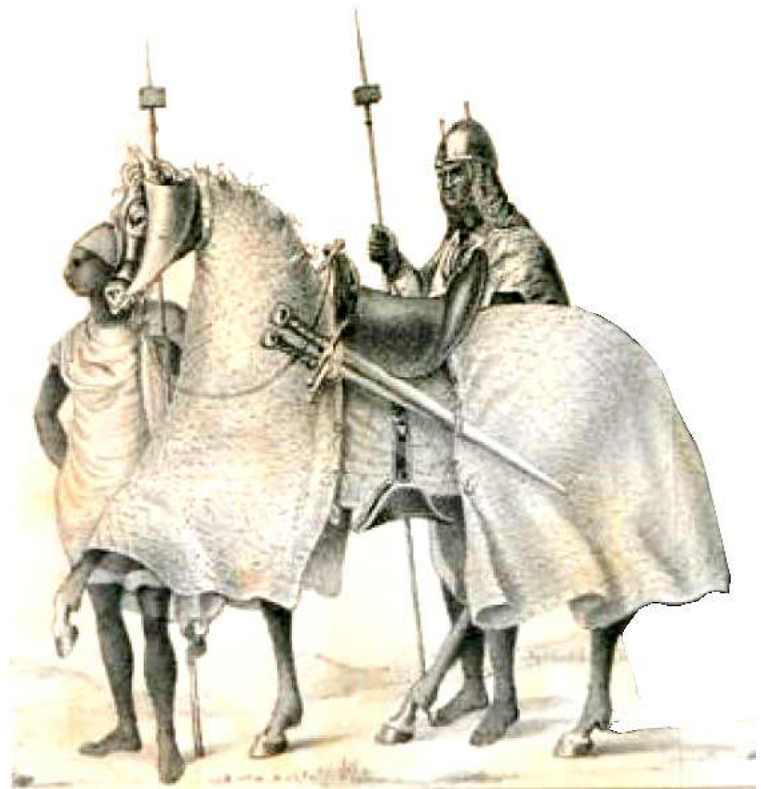
sake, is broader near the point, than at the top” on p. 142. (This observation supports the leaf shaped scabbard bottom in the “1821” Funj print shown as fig. 10 herein and also noted below.) Later he reports that at the Shendy market on the Nile there were German sword blades from Solingen and goes on to say that about 3,000 of them are annually sold at Cairo to southern traders (p. 303.)

- Frederic Cailliaud in his *Voyages to Meroe*, vol. 2 (1819-1822) reports that sword blades and iron were imported to Sennar from abroad and iron from Kordofan (p. 292.)
- A print of the Funj King with sword dated 1821 (see fig. 10). While the source of the print is unknown to me, it is assumed that the artist was faithful to the physical item. The scabbard already has the leaf-shaped lower part characteristic of the *kaskara*. An enlargement of hilt area shows what looks like a jeweled quillon considerably wider than the *samanniya* type, more like a Takouba. The pommel is not visible, but one could imagine the upper and lower langets of a *kaskara*.
- During 1837-39 Ignatius Pallme traveling in Darfur and Kordofan observed that “that people use swords without guards, hilts covered with leather. Sheikhs’ swords have massive silver hilts, terminating in a knob as large as a hen’s egg of the metal.” The Mandinka of West Africa don’t have guards on their swords and use a leaf-style end on their scabbards (see fig. 21, below). The scabbard style carried by Haj pilgrims passing through Sennar may have influenced the *kaskara* scabbard appearance.
- Theophile Lefebvre’s *Voyage en Abyssinie*, 1845 is an old French traveller’s book, where the author draws collected objects from Ethiopia and objects used by Ethiopians. He displays an engraving of a sword (fig. 11) with an apparently imported blade with a quillon much like that shown in the 1821 Funj print (fig. 10) noted above and a double pommel that is a close cousin to that of the snake sword

Fig. 21. The Mandinka of West Africa don’t have guards on their swords and use a leaf-style end on their scabbards.



Fig. 22. Lithograph of a Wadai knight from El Tounsy in his 1851 *Voyage to Wadai*.



addressed in the *Kaskara in Silver Dress* section.

- 1851. Following Pallme’s observation, El Tounsy in his 1851 *Voyage to Wadai* (Darfur’s neighbor to the west) has a lithograph of a Wadai knight with a sword with a similar knob (see fig. 22 above). These two observations suggest that the *kaskara*’s home is not in the West. As a footnote, he observed that the silver pommels were hollow, containing pebbles that produce a jingling sound and were called garlic-heads.
- 1861-62 Samuel Baker explored up the Atbara River east from the Nile and observed that rank and file Arabs’ swords had a plain bar cross-guard while the sheiks, etc. wear silver hilted swords. While he did measure the swords, he apparently wasn’t interested in the fine points of sword accessory design. Also, the Hamran sword hunters he met were equipped with straight, double-edged swords, but he did not comment on guards.
- In 1874-75 Arthur Myers and a others had a big game hunting experience with the same tribe of sword hunters. There are photos taken by Roland Ward, but they are unlikely to include other than portraits of their dead animals.
- 1871. Frederic-Benoit Garnier wrote about imports through Suakin from Egypt. Andreas, in a 2014 EAA post, translates from the French that “among the goods were blades and cross guards of German manufacture.” This is the first and only reference to imported German cross-guards. We don’t know the material or design on the cross-guards, nor have any known examples emerged.
- 1879 lithograph by Robert Hartmann in the *Zeitschrift fur Ethnologie* (Journal of Ethnology), vol 11, 1879, in German shows a horseman with a *kaskara* having a leaf shaped scabbard. The hilt and quillons appear to be like the classic *kaskara* style, but since it’s from a sketch, the details are not definitive. Google Translate produced “Sukuri Rider in Full Armor.” I assume he was a Shukriyya Arabic tribal knight in the Northern Butana Plain area of Eastern Sudan, (see fig. 23 on the following page).
- 1885-1899. The overwhelming majority of the war trophies brought back to England display the

Fig. 23. Lithograph by Robert Hartmann published in 1879 showing a horseman with a *kaskara* having a leaf shaped scabbard.



classic characteristic of *kaskara* quillons named herein and are with the characteristic leaf shaped scabbard terminus. Exceptions are virtually almost always limited to reptile skins on hilts and scabbards which may be associated with various reptile cults especially in the southern range of the Mahdiya controlled lands. Many of these are associated with Thuluth blades. (I read somewhere that the exotic reptile dress was made to appeal to visitors or British Condominium staff.) This suggests that the *kaskara*, as we know it, had been homogenized and made universal before or near the beginning of the Mahdiya in 1881-85 or certainly after 1885 when the Khalifa consolidated his power after the Mahdi's death.

- 1899-1916. With the exception of the 1884 outlier, in my understanding virtually all the extreme flared *samanniya* quillons were made during Ali Dinar's restoration of the Darfur Sultanate. The swords depicted in Reed's 1987 monograph (LI & LII), as well as others, were likely made during this period as well. I have no information on the fate of Dinar's workshop after his reign ended.

Thus, we have scant evidence from remote and static sources to support our deductive speculation. In order to progress, we need on-site primary research by Sudanese investigators. Local people have memories, provenanced swords and perhaps documents that could elucidate our inquiry, but as time goes by fewer exist. No doubt dated heirloom swords still exist in context. But then again, "who will bell the cat?"

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 - Vikingsword.com Ethnographic Arms & Armour Forum member’s threads and posts for discussions and images referenced and used herein.
 - Various museum collections, auction sites and personal collections for images and sword descriptions referenced and used herein.
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The author wishes to express his gratitude to Ian Greaves for his assistance in reviewing, editing and presenting the original version of this work on the Ethnographic Arms & Armour Forum at <http://vikingsword.com/vb/showthread.php?t=24210> where additional comments may be found and made.

This revised version, formatted for printing, was prepared with the assistance of Lee Jones and may be accessed at http://vikingsword.com/ethsword/hunley/kaskara_guardes.pdf

The companion monographs may be accessed at the following locations:

http://vikingsword.com/ethsword/hunley/kaskara_fullers.pdf

http://vikingsword.com/ethsword/hunley/kaskara_silver_dress.pdf