

The *`angarêb* in Northern Sudan

More than just a bed

Birgit Jerbi

The Sudanese wooden framed bedstead `angarêb (pl.: `anâgrîb) is an important piece of furniture in nearly all homes in the Sudan. This paper describes the production, variety of forms and especially the multifunctional use of the `angarêb using archaeological finds, written sources as well as field observations. The `angarêb plays an important role in marriage and circumcision ceremonies, at the funeral occasions and within the zâr possession cult. There are diverse options for the use of the `angarêb and different forms of it, as the manufacture of `anâgrîb is an almost 3000 year-old tradition in Sudan. While in towns it is now being used only as a bier for the dead, people in rural regions still use it in many different ways. In the cities the `anâgrîb were often replaced by modern beds and people began to change also their view of the `angarêb as a "traditional" (as opposed to "modern") household commodity.

[bed, `angarêb, household objects, multifunctionality, Shaigiya, gender, Northern Sudan]

The *`angarêb*: good for thinking

I had plenty of time during my research in electricity-scarce northern Sudan to use my bedstead, the *`angarêb*, for thinking as I laid on it and looked into the star-bright night sky. Moreover, I know how it feels to lie on the thin mattress covering the grid made of palm fibres that stretched across the bed frame. My *`angarêb* had an old low wooden frame that I feared scorpions climbed up to crawl into my bed. The palm fibre grid was worn and the mattress did not cover the whole *`angarêb*. I often wished I had a mosquito net instead of having to cover up under thin blankets or a *tôb* (4-6 metre long gown or veil worn by Sudanese women) like the Sudanese do. The blankets would fall off during my restless sleep or were just too heavy during hot summer nights along the banks of the Nile. Sometimes, in the beginning, it was strange or even uncomfortable for me to rest on an *`angarêb*, because I felt it was too short for me. I did not know the right end to put my head and wondered if I was lying in it correctly.

I started to talk to the people about the *`angarêb* as I did about other commodities of everyday life in the course of my research on the change of consumption and needs of

Shaigîya village women in North Sudan, near the town of Merowe.¹ There were many uses for the *`angarêb*, just as there were multiple ways of using many items in Sudan. Each item in that area seemed to have many functions, which is the opposite of my own society, Germany, where hundreds of things are used for only one purpose. In Germany we have so many needs for many things and new needs for new things, which are fulfilled by masses of objects for sale in stores that then fill our already overburdened homes and later end up in the garbage. So it certainly is a part of a general view on 'modernity' to have new things or the newest ones.

There is little known about indigenous furniture or furniture styles in Africa, which is often depicted as a continent with a scarcity of household objects. In this article, I will describe how one piece of furniture, the *`angarêb* (identified by Europeans as a bed), has gone through many changes in appearance, decoration patterns and construction materials and then I will focus on its multifunctionality.

The German folklorist Utz Jeggle (1983: 16) once wrote "Our time chases side-thoughts out of our heads and multiple meanings out of things."² We live in a society of mass consumption, in which there is not much space for diversity in the usage and meaning of things. We are inundated with an enormous amount of objects, each of which has its own special purpose. In Africa, however, there is poverty in quantity of objects, not in quality, as Roy Sieber concludes (1980: 19). There, one tool has a whole set of functions. Is it a worldwide phenomenon that as things become more differentiated, multiple uses for them are less likely? Are "unfolded detailed needs" (*entfaltete Detailbedürfnisse*, Jeggle 1983: 16) likewise a global phenomenon and a consequence of the processes of modernisation? Is the Western world functioning as a model for the so-called 'developing world' concerning changes on wants and usage of things?

Spittler (2001) hints at the discrepancy between universalist claims of ways of thinking and acting and their local realisation, and focuses on the different reception of consumer goods in different societies. Earlier sociological and ethnographic studies, on the other hand, spoke of a worldwide standardisation and homogenisation in the area of consumption, which was thought to lead to a loss of local identities in rural communities (see Jenkins 1969). The interplay of localisation and globalization and the emphasis of local diversity has only in the past decade become the focus of studies, e.g. Miller 1995. I intend to look at one artefact in one particular society to see how people's behaviour has changed, without labelling it 'local' or 'traditional', 'global' or 'modern'.

Let us return to the *`angarêb*, and see what an *`angarêb* is, what it looks like, where it came from and how it changed over the centuries. This discussion will help to distinguish what makes a bed a bed and what turns the *`angarêb* into an *`angarêb*.

The *`angarêb*: its history and production

The history of the *`angarêb* can be enriched by the history of the bed in general. Beds are mentioned in a history of lying down and sleeping (Burgess 1985) and in a history of the bedroom (Dibie 1989). In the present European perspective it is self-evident that

beds are for sleeping and lying down on. This specific European view will be extended, however, in the course of this article.

The *`angarêb* is a multifunctional object with a long tradition. It is more than just a bed, because it has various possibilities for use and design. It always consists of a wooden frame, in which a seat or sleeping rest-place is included. On the whole, an *`angarêb* is lower than the beds commonly used in Sudan, and it does not possess a heightened footboard or headboard.³ My informants emphasised that the difference between a 'normal' bed and an *`angarêb* lies in the frame. While the frame of European-type of bed may be made out of iron, that of an *`angarêb* is always made out of wood. European-type beds are heavier and therefore less mobile, while a main characteristic of an *`angarêb* is its low weight. A single adult person can tuck the long side under his arm and carry it from one place to another.

The oldest known *`anâgrîb* in Sudan are from the Bronze Age of the Kerma culture from 1750-1550 BC. Reisner found them in 1917 during his excavations in Kerma, a town close to the third cataract on the eastern bank of the river Nile (1975 [1923]). He concluded from his archaeological findings that in Kerma every person was buried on an *`angarêb* with the exception of the poorest non-enslaved people and those who were to be sacrificed. He assumed that the *`anâgrîb* were used by their owners everyday, before they served as their burial objects. The practice of burial on *`anâgrîb* continued until the Christian period in Nubia. Their everyday use until the 11th century A.D is confirmed by archaeological findings. From the 11th to the 16th century, neither the burial on *`anâgrîb* nor their everyday use as furniture is mentioned in written sources, according to Madani (1980: 46). Only from the beginning of the 17th century do travelers again report on the *`angarêb*.

Gustav Nachtigal (1971) frequently mentions the *`angarêb* in his travel reports from the mid-1800's, and praises it as a lightweight and easy to transport travel bed that he carried with him on his expeditions. According to him, *`anâgrîb* were common in Wadai and Darfur as well as in the Nile countries. "No *jallâbi* or civilised man in Eastern Sudan would ever travel without such an *`angarêb*" (Nachtigal 1971: 403). Nachtigal described the *`angarêb* as a low bench or seat, covered by a network of strips of hide (Nachtigal 1971: 89) or with fibres of the dompalm (*Hyphaene thebaica*). In his glossary from the above mentioned travel report, he explained that the word *angreb* came from the Beja language, in which it meant a low couch with four wooden poles.

In his diary, Slatin Pasha wrote that up to the Mahdiya period (1883-1898) *`anâgrîb* were common in all strata of the Sudanese population and even the regal Khalifa Abdullahi used to sit on an *`angarêb*. For every population stratum there were *`anâgrîb* of different qualities made from different materials (Slatin 1911).

Junker (1891) is the first to stress the multifunctionality of the *`anâgarêb*, that it can be used as couch, sofa or table. He pointed out that it could be found in all of Nubia and Sudan, in every hut and in every tent. In Eastern Sudan, in Kassala, people even used the *`angarêb* as a raft to cross the Gash River during the rainy season. The *`angarêb* could also be tied to a camel as a sort of sled that transported children, women or baggage.

The users differentiate *`anâgrîb* according to form, production and usage, each with names that match their particular features. This division makes it necessary to

briefly survey the most common forms of this object. I will introduce the variations of *`anâgrîb* which are known to me, without laying claim for the listing to be complete.

The *`anâgrîb* have always varied in form and sizes, although the main pattern – wooden frame plus woven lying or sitting surface – has remained unchanged. The frame is neither screwed nor nailed, but is held together only by wooden devices. A simple *`angarêb* is often named *wad al-gaddûm* meaning ‘son of the adze’, which reflects the way it was produced. The wooden frame is coarsely hewn with an adze, a woodworking tool that looks like a cross between a hoe and an axe. *`Anâgrîb* of this kind have been and continue to be the most common. The frames for these *`anâgrîb* can be produced in every local workshop and are affordable for most people.⁴

The legs of the *`anâgrîb* from the Bronze Age that were found in the excavations of Kerma were carved in the shape of the legs of an ox (cf. Reisner 1975: 207f). After the Kerma period, very plain and coarsely hewn legs with square cross-section were the most common type. The repertoire of leg-forms of *`anâgrîb* widened only in the early 19th century by the introduction of turned legs. This development took place as a result of new techniques and new designs that came to Sudan from Indian craftsmen.⁵ The Indian craftsmen produced the *`anâgrîb* with the help of a bow-lathe and not with an adze as had typically been done. Innovations in the production of *`anâgrîb* were not only in style and craft, but also in material, like teakwood that also came from India.

These days, the manufacturing centres of *`anâgrîb* wooden frames with their turned legs are Omdurman and other towns along the Blue Nile, mainly Sennar, Wad-Medani and al-Suki. Omdurman is significant for the trade of *`anâgrîb*, while the other towns are situated close to the raw materials. Traders bring the wooden frames of the *`anâgrîb* from the local markets into the villages, where they are sold in marketplaces. In the Shaigîya region, men of Arab groups like the Hassanîya and the Hawâwîr string the grid surface according to the request of the owner of an *`angarêb*. This work is done in the house of the person who bought the *`angarêb*. In former times, it was usual that the men wove their own *`anâgrîb*. But today, the Shaigîya leave this work to men of other ethnic groups.

The *`angarêb*: more than just a bed

The *`angarêb* today is used primarily by peasants and sedentary people.⁶ *`Anâgrîb* are thus spread almost all over Sudan, except in the regions of the pastoralists and nomads in Southern Sudan. I would like to classify *`anâgrîb* not only by form and production, but also by the context of use: the everyday and the festive.

Everyday use of `anâgrîb

The *`anâgrîb* for everyday use are nowadays present in most of the households in rural areas of Sudan. There is usually some type of *`anâgrîb* in every room, because they are meant for members of the household as well as visitors. The number of *`anâgrîb* depends not only on the number of household members; there are always more *`anâgrîb*

than household members in case guests come to stay over night. The investment is not meant to serve the well-being of the family, but is to represent hospitality and satisfaction of guests. It is believed that for guests, no expense is too much. When somebody has a lot of guests and cannot entertain them, it is very shameful.⁷

Poorer families possess mostly only a few *`anâgrîb* and no sort of metal or modern beds. In those homes, the young or female members of the household have to share an *`angarêb* during the night. In the Shaigîya region I saw *`anâgrîb* in most of the houses. They are typically placed in the courtyards and in rooms of the women. For parts of the house that will be visited by males only or is the part of the house where the male members of the family live, people prefer to have the more expensive (though mostly locally produced) metal or wooden beds.⁸

Within one household nobody has a particular *`angarêb* (or bed), on which he or she sleeps every night.⁹ Each member of a household rather has a certain sleeping place in a room, on the porch or in a courtyard. During the daytime the *`anâgrîb* are moved quite a lot. In the summer one has to put them up in shady places. In the cool winter months, people prefer to sit in the sun.

In everyday use, the *`angarêb* serves as a sleeping as well as a sitting place. The women do part of their housework on them, e.g. cleaning vegetables, and they also take a rest from their tiring housework on them. Smaller models of the *`angarêb* serve as a drying device for dishes and deposit for various things (clothing, baskets, pots, sacks of corn, etc.).

Women usually do not sit down next to a man on an *`angarêb*, nor do they lie on an *`angarêb* when a man is in the room. It would show a lack of respect for the man as well as for the woman herself. The differential use reveals the gender-specific treatment of objects and body postures: Women work a lot while sitting and squatting close to the ground or sitting on low stools or an *`angarêb*, while men use chairs and work in upright position.

Occasionally women used the *`angarêb*, to separate their space. Since men can enter the main spaces of women without explanation and at any time, it is the task of the women to hide and cover themselves, even when they are in their own house or in their own part of the courtyard. An *`angarêb* can function as a mobile screen, which can, for example, be put in front of the place where the woman takes her smoke bath (*dukhân*).¹⁰ She places the *`angarêb* with the long side on the floor and throws bed sheets and her clothing over it. The sheets offer additional protection from view, and at the same time absorb the smoky smell of the *dukhân*.

Women and men can both buy and own *`anâgrîb*. The *`anâgrîb* are combined and produced from modern as well as traditional materials. *`Anâgrîb* are mostly used in the places and spaces of women, but men also sit and rest on them. I observed two situations in which men frequently used the *`anâgrîb*. Traders at big markets such as *Sûg Libîya* in Omdurman present their commodities on *`anâgrîb* and men of the *Hassaniya* prepare the dough for sorghum porridge (called *kallakâb*) by drying it in the sun on an *`angarêb*.

As with many things, the *`angarêb* has good and bad sides. The *karrâb*, the unwoven part of the grid surface, is considered the foot end of the bed. But it is common

knowledge that one should put his head on the opposite end, because lying on the 'wrong side' causes a headache. In the last phase of a delivery of a child the *karrâb* is important: The midwife beds the birth-giving woman with her abdomen on a pile of cushions and mattresses, which were beforehand heaped up on the *karrâb*. This way, blood and other bodily fluids can immediately flow to the ground.

On the unwoven part of an *`angarêb* the members of a household can tighten the fabric. The tightening does not require special skills, and can be done whenever necessary, most of the time before feasts (for example, at the end of the Ramadan). Sometimes the lying and sitting fabric will be completely replaced, or a new *`angarêb* will be purchased. The maintenance of the *`anâgrîb* and their sheets and covers is the task of women. In the Shaigîya society, the condition of the *`anâgrîb* can tell a lot about their owners. In poorer houses, one would often find very worn down *`anâgrîb* with a broken lying surface. Often these families do not even have the simplest kind of mattress, let alone bed sheets to cover them. In Northern Sudan, the lack of furniture is mostly a sign of poverty (except among nomadic people). Lack of furniture, however, will not be used to criticise behaviour or to express disapproval of a household. What *is* criticized is lack of cleanliness and order in a house. I overheard a comment made by women about the state of a house they had visited: "We didn't dare to sit on the *`anâgrîb*, because they were so dirty, but we immediately sat on the floor in the dust of the courtyard."

There are not only differences in the form and function of *`anâgrîb*, but also in the type of cushions put on them. In the daytime, women only put mattresses on the *`anâgrîb* when guests are coming or when someone plans to rest for a longer time. For example, during Ramadan when people sleep a lot in the daytime, or when somebody returns from a journey, women roll out the mattresses on the *`anâgrîb* and put on sheets appropriate for the occasion.

The mattresses that match the *`anâgrîb* are also locally produced. They consist of a coarse cotton sack that is filled with raw, cleaned cotton wadding. When the *`anâgrîb* are being used as a chair, a work surface, or a screen, no mattress is used. Also, in the summertime, one sleeps or lies on an *`angarêb* without using a mattress. One reason for this may be that it is cooler if air can circulate through the loose fabric.

During the often long-lasting use *`anâgrîb* are allocated to various tasks. A typical 'biography'¹¹ of an *`angarêb* could be as followed: An *`angarêb* that was bought originally for a wedding, served first as a nuptial bed until it was put on the porch or in a room of the male-inhabited part of the house, after the owners had bought double beds. In the end the *`anâgrîb* was removed to the *hôsh harîm* (part of the house inhabited by the women). Very badly worn out *`anâgrîb* are often only fit for the dark of the smoke-filled kitchen, the usual destination of any very worn and old objects that were once suitable for a more public place.

Ritual and festive use of `anâgrîb

In contrast to former times, today the *`angarêb* does not play a role in burials, but is only used as a bier. An *`angarêb* that has served as bier for carrying the dead body to

the grave is not immediately put inside the house or in the interior of a *hôsh*, but left leaning against the wall outside the house for three days. Then the bier-`angarêb will be used again in its everyday function. While in rural areas no special `angarêb is used as a bier (every `angarêb in the house can be used in that function), in the cities another practice prevails. There, often one single `angarêb will be stored in a small room. It is only taken out of that room for funerals.

For weddings the *abû rakûba* (`angarêb with canopy) and the *sâj-`angarêb* (teakwood-`angarêb) were very common. Until the 1950's, elaborate `anâgrîb were connected with the wedding ceremonies. The bridegroom sat on this kind of `angarêb during the Henna night and for the *jirtig*-ceremony.¹² After the 1950s, beds with carved head- or footboards were very fashionable. Nowadays wedding ceremonies often take place on modern metal beds or chairs which stand on a platform. Before the existence of these modern beds and double beds the `anâgrîb that were used in the wedding ceremonies were used as the everyday bed for husband and wife. In the towns or in the countryside, modern beds are now mostly seen in bedrooms instead of the wedding-`anâgrîb.

The `angarêb with canopy and the teakwood-`angarêb fell out of use by the 1960s. In the past the teakwood-`angarêb was used mainly by rich people for their weddings. Nowadays, old *sâj-`anâgrîb* are seldom found in the households of the well-to-do, and if they are, they are usually not in use anymore. They will be kept together with other artefacts of the family heritage. Madanî (1980: 121) states that before their general disappearance, wedding-`anâgrîb were used like the urban bier-`anâgrîb are at present: Elderly women used to keep them in a chamber and only took them out for a marriage within their family or neighbourhood.

Further festivities or ritual contexts for the use of `anâgrîb are circumcision and the *zâr* ceremonies. In both cases the `angarêb serves as a couch for the people being treated. In the *zâr* cult,¹³ often described as possession cult in the literature, the `angarêb functions mainly as a resting place for the patient. In the course of a several days long *zâr* ceremony I observed that the afflicted woman, who was lying on a simple house-`angarêb, was massaged by her female relatives and oiled with *dilka* ointment.¹⁴ During the actual *zâr* rituals, none of the women present sat on an `angarêb, stool or chair.

During *zâr* and *bikâ* rituals¹⁵ the participating women sit on straw or plastic mats, with which the floor of a room or porch is covered. The *shuyûkh* ('holy men', who mostly belong to a Sufi order) are present at various points during these and *zâr* events. They will sit in a higher position, not on `anâgrîb, but on chairs.

In rural areas of northern Sudan, the circumcision (*tahûr*) of boys and girls¹⁶ is carried out on the `angarêb. Afterwards the children will lie for approximately one week on `anâgrîb covered by red mats.¹⁷ For this event one also uses the ordinary house-`anâgrîb that will return to everyday use.

Changes in forms and continuity in usage

A glance in a current Sudanese textbook for class one reveals that the *`angarêb* is both a part of Sudanese folklore as well as part of the repertoire of everyday objects.¹⁸ People in the rural areas of northern Sudan in particular still use the *`angarêb* in multiple ways. But the situation is changing. Madanî (1980: 119) observed a growing standardisation of the measures of *`anâgrîb*. Remarkably, the size of the *`anâgrîb* has generally diminished over time. One explanation for these changes in the *`anâgrîb* and possibly also for their displacement could be the fact that modern beds made of iron or wood are becoming more fashionable.¹⁹ This development could first be seen in the urban centres of Sudan, where the decorated *`angarêb* from the wedding ceremonies and the simple *`angarêb* as part of the furniture disappeared gradually. Older specimens of the *`anâgrîb*, with decorated or elaborately well-turned or carved legs, are now being kept by their owners as objects of reminiscence. It is mostly older people that still use the *`angarêb* in the rural context. Generally it is seen as rather old-fashioned, to furnish one's house with *`anâgrîb*. Instead, beds are valued as modern.

The two pieces of furniture have a lot of similarities. Elaborately forged iron beds that can be bought in the markets in Omdurman or Khartoum have grids made out of iron bands as their lying place, which are reminiscent of the weaving of the *`anâgrîb*. But the head- and footboards often have modern attributes, like Mercedes' stars. The iron beds are preferably painted in white and turquoise – colours that are more associated with men's realm (women's objects are red or purple).²⁰ Another similarity is that the frames of these beds are used by the women for drying homemade noodles or clothes when they are not used for sitting or sleeping. So, like *`anâgrîb*, they function in multiple capacities to dry and store objects.

In rural areas of Sudan it is increasingly rare to find elaborate *`anâgrîb*. On the whole, the *`anâgrîb* there were not ousted by the modern bed. Simple forms of *`anâgrîb* are still very widespread and are used in the house right next to more modern wooden beds. *Anâgrîb* or beds with a lying or sitting space made out of plastic ropes have a substantially longer duration of life because one does not have to string the woven fabric as often. But one cannot use those kind of *`anâgrîb* without a mattress, because they are considered too "hot". The plastic rope grid does not let air circulate, since the ropes are woven more densely than with the palm fibre type of weaving is. Furthermore, palm fibre is considered to be a "cool" or "cooling" material.

For the more public areas of the house, people in northern Sudan mostly prefer beds with an iron frame. Beds can be put in the *sâlûn* or on the verandas in the male sections of the house, because they do not have to be moved a lot.

As discussed above, in former times elaborately worked *`anâgrîb* were found in the areas of the house that were meant for visitors. They had mattresses made out of cotton, covered by white, hand-embroidered sheets or coloured industrially produced fabrics, just as iron beds are covered today. The *`anâgrîb* are increasingly regarded as outmoded. They were once put in the guest rooms for male visitors, the most prestigious place of the house, but have since been demoted to the space of the women. Yet, they stand up to modern pressures, at least in rural region, and fulfil their various functions.

They are useful in everyday life and in outside spaces; they have been rigorously tested and their presence is welcome.

Beds with a 'hybrid' form are very popular. They resemble *`anâgrîb* as well as modern beds. The head- and footboards on this kind of bed are made out of wood, whereas the long ends are made of metal tubes. The sitting or lying place is created from weaving colourful plastic ropes together. Beds of this hybrid type are very easy to take apart and to transport. The individual parts of such beds come from different places. The carved wooden parts and the iron tubes come from specialised workshops in Omdurman or Khartoum. The smith who lives in the village cuts them to the desired length. The stringing of the grid is done in a traditional way in the village with plastic ropes that can be bought at local markets.

Beds in the European sense have similarities to *`anâgrîb* in both their terminology and form; they are also equally multifunctional. Beds as well as *`anâgrîb* are available in prosperous households in a sufficient number for everyone and are not only there for sleeping. They will also be offered for the guests to sit on.²¹ At weddings in the region of Merowe I could often observe that pedestals were made of beds, on which stood two heavy iron chairs for the couple. The bed was covered with a carpet or a blanket of red colour and resembles the red decorative mats that people used in former times for weddings and later, for everyday.

For the Shaigîya it is worth mentioning that whereas simply shaped *`anâgrîb* are mostly owned by women, luxuriantly decorated bed and chairs as well as all heavy pieces of furniture (outside of the kitchen) are owned by men. The 'modern' bedroom is supposed to be purchased by the bridegroom or his family, while the kitchen inventory and utensils are supposed to be acquired by the bride's family.

Epilogue and outlook

Two tendencies can be observed, which on one side hint to change but on the other side to continuity. The *`angarêb* has changed steadily in its form and was to some extent pushed aside by the bed. There is no doubt in the preference for the bed to an *`angarêb* in the urban milieu and in public areas of the house. But people transferred their many uses of the *`angarêb* to an artefact similar to it: the bed. Where *`anâgrîb* are not in use anymore, beds have taken over their functions. But the *`angarêb* fits well with Sudanese habits and, its various appealing qualities help it to persist. It requires little wood, it is cheap, easy to transport and to move around inside the house. Furthermore, repair work is cheap and can often be done by the owner. *`Anâgrîb* changed clearly in their measurements and use of materials.

Adoption of foreign artefacts in another society does not always include the imitation of ways of using them. Thus, a bed in the Sudanese context has other meaning than it does, for example, in the United States or Germany. The new thing was integrated into an existing field of usage and meaning. People in Sudan did not allocate the bed merely the purpose of lying down and sleeping, and they did not ban the beds to bedrooms that were separated from other rooms. The artefacts that people in the so-called

developing countries choose for themselves and value as signs of 'modernity', depend on local aesthetics and habits, advertising campaigns and marketing strategies on a global scale, national subsidy programs and policies, purchasing power of the consumers, past and present, and local discourses that take place about artefacts. These choices would surely be a fruitful topic for further study.

The *`angarêb* stands in the cities and towns for an old rural style of life. It has been pushed aside, out of its high status, and out of the public parts of the houses, because it does not fit in a modern house interior anymore. Nevertheless, the 'time of rest' has not yet begun for the *`angarêb*.

Notes

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- 1 See Jerbi (n.d.). The fieldwork for one year from 1997 until 1998 was part of my Ph.D. research as a member of the Graduates Seminar "Intercultural Relations in Africa" at the University of Bayreuth, Germany. The research was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, to which I am very grateful for the means provided to me.
- 2 "Unsere Zeit treibt die Nebengedanken aus den Köpfen und die Mehrdeutigkeit aus den Sachen" (Jeggle 1983: 16).
- 3 The following measurements for the height, length, width and cross-section measures of the frame and legs (in cm) of different *`anâgrîb*: marriage-*`angarêb* (1820-1950) 80-75 x 200-190 x 125-110; 9 x 7; 10 x 10; house-*`angarêb* (1820-1950): 70-50 x 190-185 x 110-90; 8 x 6; 8 x 8; standard size of a present day used *`angarêb* (1950-1980): 45 x 180-170 x 100-80; 7 x 5; 7 x 7 (Madani 1980: 119).
- 4 In spring 1998 a coarsely hewn *`angarêb*-frame at local markets like Tangassi cost 8.000 to 12.000 LS (approximately 4-6 USD).
- 5 According to one oral tradition, the Indians settled at the banks of the Blue Nile, other sources say that they were living in Jeddah, in Saudi-Arabia (Madani 1980: 55).
- 6 I agree with Madani (1980) that the nomadic population prefers the easier transportable, folding beds, e.g. the Hassaniya (neighbours of the sedentary Shaigiya) use a low bed made out of palm ribs, called *sêdâb*.
- 7 I was often told the story of a European diplomat who lived for a long time in Sudan, but in spite of his obvious wealth and taste in interior design, he did not have enough chairs and glasses to offer his guests.
- 8 In the Merowe district in 1997 and 1998, a metal bed was not even available for double the price of an *`angarêb*. The prices for wooden beds of local production were also a lot higher than that for *`anâgrîb*.
- 9 An exception are the nuptial beds (mostly double beds after the European model).
- 10 The smoke bath has various cosmetic, aesthetic and sexual connotations. To take a smoke bath, a (married) woman sits over a pit, in which there is an earthen vessel let in and which is

filled with glowing acacia wood logs (*talih*). The woman undresses herself totally to wrap up to the neck in a thick woollen blanket, as soon as she sits over the fire pit.

- 11 Kopytoff (1988) coined the term of a 'biography of things'.
- 12 To give a brief idea of the use of *'anâgrîb* during these ceremonies, I only want to mention that during the Henna-night female relatives of the bridegroom put Henna on his feet and palms. In the *jirtig*-ceremony, which is performed as good omen for the marriage by most of the Northern Sudanese ethnic groups, the bridegroom gets a perfumed paste made of sheep tallow and sandalwood (called *darîra* or *fâl*) applied on the crown of his head. A wooden chain and a red silk bracelet will be put on the bridegroom. The bride and the bridegroom will receive good wishes from relatives and the couple will spray each other with milk. Henna and *Jirtig* ceremonies are complex and varied; a full description is beyond the scope of this article. For the various wedding ceremonies see el-Tayib 1955 and Crowfoot 1922.
- 13 For more on the *Zâr* cult, cf. Boddy 1989 and Boehringer-Abdalla 1987.
- 14 *Dilka* is a perfumed ointment produced by the women in a complex and time consuming procedure. Its content are various spices (as cloves, sandalwood etc.) and grounded *dhurra*-millet. It is used as a massage-ointment.
- 15 *Bikâ* is the Sudanese Arabic term for ceremonies that follow bereavement, especially the ritualised crying and mourning of the women. In former times, this also included actions such as the tearing apart of clothing and pouring ashes on one's head, cf. Boehringer-Abdalla 1987.
- 16 The circumcision of the prepuce belongs to the Islamic prescriptions for cleanliness of the men. In Northern Sudan, girls are genitally mutilated. Pharaonic circumcision (emic denomination) is still very widely spread. For this kind of circumcision, the clitoris and the labia minora and majora are cut off and the opening of the vagina is narrowed by sewing it together. This cruel custom is not an Islamic precept, only circumcision of boys is. For more on female genital mutilation in the Sudan cf. Gruenbaum 2001 and El-Dareer 1982; Toubia 1988 for an emic perspective.
- 17 The circumcised boys and girls are decorated like bridegrooms and brides. They will have their eyes lined with *kohl* (kajal), and will be decorated with henna and *darîra*-perfume. They will also both get silk threads wrapped around their hands and (only the boys) a half-moon shape made out of gold foil bound at their forehead.
- 18 The *'angarêb* can be seen together with farming devices (like hoes or sickles) as well as other typically Sudanese items like coffeepots (*jabbana*) and *tabag* (woven lids for food trays).
- 19 These wooden beds are made from plywood as well as massive wood.
- 20 For a thorough description and interpretation of the dichotomy of women's and men's culture in northern Sudan, see Boddy 1989. I noticed certain dichotomies described by Boddy also being true for the Shaigiya. One could depict the *'anâgrîb* as women's objects and chairs as part of the men's sphere.
- 21 Only certain members of a household sleep in beds, for instance, when people sleep inside in the colder season of the year. Also recently wed couples or couples that would like to be by themselves sleep in beds.

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