

Northern Sudan ivory market flourishes

Esmond Martin

PO Box 15510 – 00503. Nairobi, Kenya; email: rhino@wananchi.com

Abstract

The ivory market in the Khartoum–Omdurman area of northern Sudan is one of the few in the world that has expanded significantly since the mid-1990s. Today it has become one of the largest in Africa. Government officials and civilians transport the tusks to Khartoum–Omdurman where workshop owners and craftsmen pay USD 105/kg for a 2–5-kg tusk compared with USD 44/kg for a 5–10-kg tusk in 1997. There are 150 or so part-time ivory craftsmen who also carve in wood, compared with about 100 in 1997. They continue to produce mostly jewellery and figurines. In early 2005 there were 50 retail outlets displaying 11,329 ivory items (more than in 1997) made from tusks obtained from elephants poached after 1990. According to Sudanese law, this trade in new ivory is illegal. The items are cheap compared with prices in other countries. Nearly all the buyers are foreigners working in Sudan, especially Chinese, who purchase at least 75%, mostly for personal use, and smuggle them home to China. This growing and unregulated ivory market in northern Sudan is threatening central Africa's elephant populations.

Résumé

Le marché de l'ivoire dans la région de Khartoum–Omdurman au nord du Soudan est un des rares au monde qui s'est significativement étendu depuis le milieu des années 1990. Il est devenu aujourd'hui un des plus grands d'Afrique. Des employés du gouvernement et des civils transportent les défenses vers Karthoum–Omdurman où les propriétaires d'ateliers et les artisans paient 105 dollars le kilo pour une défense de 2 à 5 kilos, comparé à 44 dollars le kilo pour une défense de 5 à 10 kilos en 1997. Il y a environ 150 artisans qui travaillent l'ivoire à temps partiel, mais aussi le bois, comparé à environ 100 en 1997. Ils continuent à produire principalement des bijoux et des figurines. Début 2005, il y avait 50 points de vente qui présentaient 11.329 objets en ivoire (plus qu'en 1997) réalisés à partir de défenses d'éléphants braconnés après 1990. D'après les lois soudanaises, ce commerce de nouvel ivoire est illégal. Les objets sont bon marché par rapport aux prix pratiqués dans d'autres pays. Presque tous les acheteurs sont des étrangers qui travaillent au Soudan, spécialement des Chinois qui en acquièrent près de 75%, surtout pour un usage personnel, et qui les passent clandestinement en Chine. Ce marché d'ivoire croissant et non réglementé du nord du Soudan menace les populations d'éléphants d'Afrique centrale.

Introduction

Since 1999 some of the major ivory markets in the world, such as those in Ethiopia, Egypt and Thailand, have declined in importance. Journalists, however, who visited northern Sudan in 2003/04 reported a very active trade in ivory in the Khartoum–Omdurman area, and conservationists feared that this commerce was actually on the increase. Therefore, I carried out a survey of the ivory markets in Omdurman and Khartoum in January and February 2005 to determine the status of the ivory trade in Sudan.

History

Ivory carving has been practised in southern Sudan for hundreds of years, but in the Khartoum–Omdurman area of northern Sudan, the profession may date from only the late 1890s. Both Khartoum and Omdurman were small villages in the early 19th century, but Khartoum by the 1830s had become a centre for the ivory trade in raw tusks.

Until 1840 there was a monopoly on the tusk trade out of Khartoum, confined to members of the Turkish–Egyptian ruling elite. In 1840 the monopoly ended

and new traders were attracted into the business because it was so profitable. At that time, two shillings of Venetian beads bought one tusk because local people, such as the Bongo and Bari from the White Nile Basin, were unaware of the international value of ivory.

From the 1840s until the time of the Madhi's uprising in the early 1880s, Egyptians, Turks, Europeans and other adventurers went to Khartoum to start expeditions to southern Sudan to obtain tusks. They organized their supplies through outfitters, many of whom were Copts (Christian Egyptians) in Khartoum, and put together parties of up to 200 men, mainly Danagola and Jwaaliyyin tribesmen from northern Sudan. They sailed up the White Nile to Fashoda and Gondokoro. From there, the expeditions usually marched westwards looking for local tribesmen to recruit as their allies. Having succeeded, the adventurers armed these recruited tribesmen and encouraged them to surround a neighbouring village.

Villagers in those days kept their own supply of tusks for carving and selling, and for fence posts. Rather than killing elephants, it was easier to obtain this ivory. The tribesmen tortured the elders to find out where their ivory was hidden, captured cattle and killed the older people, while the women, children and surviving men were immediately enslaved. The cattle were given to the tribesmen who initiated the raids, and the captured young men and women were forced to carry the tusks back to the boats waiting on the White Nile (Asher 2005; M. Asher, pers. comm. 2005).

On their return to Khartoum, the adventurers used the slaves to pay off members of the expedition and to make any final payments to the outfitters. The adventurers organized most of their tusks to be sent down the Nile to Berber by boat. Here regular caravans carried the tusks eastwards to Suakin on the Red Sea to be shipped to Europe and India. The journey from Khartoum to Suakin took about two weeks. About 10% of the tusks were carried across the Nubian desert by camel to Egypt for export, but as this was a longer route than the Suakin route, much less went out this way (Asher, pers. comm. 2005). By the mid-1850s Sudan was exporting on average 130 tonnes of tusks a year, one of the biggest exporting countries in the world (Parker 1979).

Ivory became the backbone of Khartoum's economy, and slavery was a by-product of the ivory trade. By the late 1870s Khartoum had grown to

50,000 inhabitants (about half were slaves), but there is no evidence that craftsmen worked ivory in any noticeable amount in Khartoum or Omdurman during that time.

This commerce in tusks, nearly all passing through Khartoum, continued until the early 1880s when the Madhi's aggressive expansions disrupted these traditional trade routes. In 1885 the Madhi finally took Khartoum from the Anglo-Egyptian forces under General Charles Gordon. The Madhi then ordered that most of the city's inhabitants be killed and the capital be moved across the Nile to Omdurman. Khartoum became abandoned for several years. In 1898 Anglo-Egyptian forces under the leadership of General Herbert Kitchener defeated the Madhists and re-established Khartoum in that year.

According to the reminiscences of a prominent ivory businessman in Khartoum, in 1898 or 1899 his grandfather moved from Asyut in Egypt, a town noted for the carving of ivory and camel bones, to Omdurman to establish an ivory-carving business and shop. This Egyptian family, called Iskander, were Copts. Other members of the family followed into the business (George Saber Iskander, pers. comm. 1997).

In the early 20th century four Copt families were crafting ivory, with the head of each family employing two or three young assistants. Three of the families lived in Omdurman and one in Khartoum, all having come originally from Asyut. They had trained in Asyut to carve and engrave wood, bone and ivory, but in Sudan specialized mostly in ivory. These craftsmen produced mostly ivory items that appealed to the British and other European residents of Khartoum: necklaces, walking sticks, animal figurines and candle holders. The British even drew samples of the items they wished the carvers to make (Murad Iskander, cousin of George Iskander, pers. comm. Khartoum 1997).

In the 1920s the number of ivory enterprises expanded to at least six with three in Omdurman and three in Khartoum. During the 1930s the ivory business prospered. By 1940 there were 10 such workshops with sales shops in Omdurman and three in Khartoum. Each workshop had from five to eight ivory craftsmen. Besides these approximately 85 craftsmen, about an equal number were working at home. Thus, at the beginning of World War II there may have been as many as 200 ivory craftsmen in Omdurman and Khartoum, many having been trained

by the Iskander family. Most craftsmen were Muslim Sudanese who lived and worked in Omdurman (M. Iskander, pers. comm. Khartoum 1997).

During World War II many foreign troops were stationed in Khartoum. The ivory craftsmen, using only hand tools in those days, produced animal figurines, badges for military uniforms and candle holders for the British and American armed forces, and handles for ostrich feather fans for the Egyptians. The quality of these items was quite high, as craftsmen specialized in individual objects.

To supplement their incomes at the time of World War II, some ivory craftsmen also carved rhino horn. One was the father of Murad Iskander. He made only cups which were used for detecting poisonous drinks. He sold them to Arab dignitaries and to some Europeans. The British officials in Omdurman at the time, however, asked Mr Iskander to stop making these cups as it was against the law—rhinos were already endangered. Other craftsmen in Omdurman made rhino horn rings, which still can be seen in Sudan today (M. Iskander, pers. comm. Khartoum 1997).

After the war, the ivory business slumped due to the exodus of the British and foreign troops. But from the 1950s to the early 1980s the ivory business revived and flourished with about 200 carvers catering mostly to British, French, German, Greek and Italian customers (M. Iskander, pers. comm. Khartoum 1997). In 1983 the Nimeiri government introduced *sharia* law, which closed all the bars and many restaurants in Khartoum. At the same time the economy in Sudan was in poor shape. Consequently, most of the 10,000-strong Greek community and other Europeans left Sudan. Sales of ivory items thus dwindled. The ivory traders tried to export ivory carvings wholesale during the 1980s (it was then still legal) to make up for their losses, but this generally failed. These Sudanese businessmen could not compete in price and quality with items made in India and Hong Kong.

With the CITES ban on the international trade in ivory that came into effect in 1990, the Sudan ivory business declined further. European and American visitors, the traditional buyers, stopped purchasing ivory. Politics worsened in northern Sudan with the military coup of June 1989, with Sudan government support of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1990, and with Sudan government aid towards terrorism (Economist Intelligence Unit 1998). Due to all these political problems, and with few visas being issued to Westerners, their numbers fell further.

Ivory trade survey of Khartoum and Omdurman, 1997

With growing concern among conservationists from the mid-1990s that the ivory trade in Sudan might be increasing once again, I carried out the first survey of the domestic ivory trade of Khartoum and Omdurman in November 1997 (Martin 1998a,b). According to the ivory traders there, tusks came mostly from southern Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the Central African Republic (CAR) with smaller quantities from Kenya and Tanzania. Members of the Sudanese army and merchants moved tusks northwards by lorries. Craftsmen and workshop owners, mostly in Omdurman, bought these tusks. Small tusks of 1–2 kg sold for USD 15.50/kg while larger ones of 5–10 kg sold for USD 43.60/kg at the market rate of 1750 Sudanese pounds to the dollar (Martin 1998b).



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An ivory craftsman uses a lathe to cut an elephant tusk in Omdurman.

The hundred or so ivory craftsmen at that time worked from home or in the Omdurman workshops. Some craftsmen made the distinction between tusks from the forest elephant, which are straight and more translucent and which they called Arab ivory, with those from the savanna elephant, which are more curved and creamy in colour and which they called African ivory. Most preferred the softer savanna tusks.

The artisans were paid for what they produced. Skilled craftsmen earned about USD 100–200 a month.

One traditional Sudanese doctor bought some of the waste powder for USD 3.42/kg for some of his patients in order to reduce fluid in the legs or to help with childbirth, and one Greek paid USD 20 for some of the waste, but bought in very small quantities.

The most popular items made in 1997 were animal figurines, jewellery (especially beaded necklaces, rings and bangles), name seals, chopsticks and walking sticks. The supply of chopsticks and name seals was in response to a new demand for these items by the Chinese. Chinese expatriates started to come to Sudan in large numbers in the 1990s to work on construction sites, build an oil pipeline, work in the oil fields, and run two textile factories. The Chinese probably were buying at least half the ivory items, according to the shopkeepers, at this time.

Khartoum had little night life, so when these Chinese passed through the Khartoum area, they spent their evenings visiting the souvenir shops. Sometimes they made a list of items to buy and some had drawings of the actual size and shape of an item they were looking for. They often bought in bulk after extensive bargaining. The Chinese preferred beaded necklaces, chopsticks, animal figurines, name seals and cigarette holders. All these were cheaper in Khartoum than in China.

South Koreans may have been the next largest buyers of ivory objects. They chose name seals, beaded necklaces and animal figurines. I interviewed a South Korean in a hotel shop who had just bought four ivory seals for USD 5.71 each. He said he bought them as they were considerably cheaper than in South



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Photographed in 1997, rhino horn and carved ivory tusks were still available in Khartoum in 2005.



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In 1997 Chinese customers were buying about half the ivory items for sale in the souvenir shops of Khartoum and Omdurman.

Korea and he was going to give them as presents to friends on his return.

Gulf Arabs were next in importance as buyers of Sudanese ivory items. They preferred jewellery, walking sticks and prayer beads. The few Japanese who came to Sudan occasionally bought name seals and animal figurines. Europeans bought less—just the odd piece of jewellery or animal figurine. Sudanese bought extremely little and only jewellery, except for those who purchased a few objects as presents for foreign delegates or for friends in the Gulf.

My 1997 survey found new ivory items in 18 shops in Khartoum, 15 in Omdurman, and 1 in Khartoum North. There were several thousand items on display, mostly made in Omdurman. In the Omdurman open-air jewellery market where the traders displayed their tourist trinkets on the ground (not in stalls or shops), there were only a few new ivory items, but unlike the shops, many old ivory objects were for sale that had been made in the south and west of Sudan. A pair of bracelets from western Sudan was selling for USD 20, and there was jewellery from southern Sudan. A few other wildlife products were displayed for sale, both in the jewellery market and in the shops, such as men's leopard skin shoes for USD 80, cheetah skin shoes for USD 29, plain rhino horn finger rings for USD 17, monkey skins for USD 57, gazelle horns for USD 29–80 a pair, painted ostrich eggs for USD 29, and handbags or belts made from snake, crocodile and lizard skin.

The prices for most ivory items offered for retail sale in 1997 were low (table 1) because the raw product was inexpensive and the cost of labour was low. Ivory craftsmen no longer specialize, and having become generalists in the last few decades, the quality of carvings is much lower, which also explains the cheap prices.

Results of an ivory trade survey in Khartoum and Omdurman in 2005

I carried out a second survey of the ivory markets of Khartoum and Omdurman in January and February

Table 1. Retail prices for recently made ivory items seen in Khartoum, Omdurman and Khartoum North in November 1997

| Item | Size (cm) | Average price (US dollars) |
|--|-----------|----------------------------|
| <i>JEWELLERY</i> | | |
| Bangle | 1 | 3 |
| Earrings, pair | medium | 9 |
| Necklace, beaded | medium | 17 |
| Ring | 1 | 2 |
| <i>FIGURINES</i> | | |
| Animal, thin | 10 | 30 |
| thick | 12 | 86 |
| thick | 18 | 114 |
| Human | 25 | 100 |
| Bust | 16 | 34 |
| <i>TUSKS</i> | | |
| Carved bridge, 4 elephants | 25 | 46 |
| Carved bridge, 6 elephants | 35 | 91 |
| Polished | 75 | 543 |
| <i>MISCELLANEOUS</i> | | |
| Candle holder | 15 | 34 |
| Cigarette holder | 8 | 3 |
| Chess set with wood board, wood black pieces, ivory white pieces | 40 x 40 | 429 |
| Name seal | 7 | 6 |
| Prayer beads for Muslims | medium | 14 |
| Walking stick (all ivory) | 100 | 200 |

Exchange rate: 1 US dollar = 1750 Sudanese pounds

2005 (Martin 2005). According to the Omdurman craftsmen and traders, tusks were still mainly from elephants recently killed in DRC and southern Sudan. This dovetails well with reports of poaching in DRC (Mubalama 2005). As before, a few tusks came from CAR, Kenya and Chad. The hunters were, as in 1997, Baggara Arabs, policemen, Sudanese army personnel and local civilians. Some of the military personnel were still transporting the tusks northwards (England 2004) while a few officers were also implicated in carrying tusks to the traders' houses in Khartoum and Omdurman. Indeed, these soldiers and other government officials were the main suppliers of tusks, but Sudanese businessmen were also involved. This information came from extensive interviews with ivory traders.

The craftsmen and owners of the ivory workshops paid USD 26–105/kg or an average of USD 57/kg for tusks (at the market rate of 2530 Sudanese pounds to a dollar) for small, poor-quality tusks and scrap, and USD 44–148/kg or an average of USD 105/kg

for good-quality tusks of 2–5 kg. Most tusks sold wholesale were less than 6 kg.

Almost all the ivory workshops are still in Omdurman, and both Christians from various parts of Sudan and Muslims originating from northern Sudan still craft ivory. The number of ivory craftsmen has risen since 1997 and there may be as many as 150 today. They work in ivory and wood and occasionally silver or amber, but almost never camel bone. There are camel bone carvings in the shops, but these are almost all imported from Egypt. Ivory items are four or five times more expensive than camel bone (tables 2 and 3).

The craftsmen said they used from 45 to 225 kg a year of tusks each, but the latter number is probably too high. The craftsmen and workshop owners sell their finished products to souvenir shops. Skilled craftsmen working six days a week from 1000 to 1800 hours earn the equivalent of USD 8–12 a day while polishers earn about USD 3 a day. The earnings of an ivory carver (about USD 10 a day or USD 260 a month) compare favourably with government salaries, while a polisher receives more than the minimum salary in Khartoum of about USD 50 a month.

My 2005 survey revealed 24 souvenir shops in Khartoum, 25 in Omdurman and 1 in Khartoum North that were offering ivory products for sale. Only two shops in two hotels displayed ivory. The owners of the souvenir shops are Muslims (56%) and Christians (44%). The Christians are mostly Copts while the Muslims were originally from Egypt, northern Sudan and Turkey.

The number of ivory objects displayed per shop varied from 2 to 1021. The total number seen in the 50 shops was 11,329 or an average of 227 per shop. The most numerous items were animal figurines (30%), pendants (19%), rings (15%) and bangles (8%) (table 4). No shop specialized in ivory only; all carried a mixture of items, such as wood, ivory, camel bone and leather. All the objects, including ivory, were

Table 2. Retail prices for camel bone objects seen in souvenir shops in Khartoum, Omdurman and Khartoum North in January–February 2005

| Item | Size (cm) | Average price US dollars |
|------------------|-----------|--------------------------|
| Animal figurine | 4 | 6 |
| Animal figurine | 8 | 15 |
| Human figurine | 5 | 4 |
| Necklace, beaded | medium | 5 |
| Paperknife | 13 | 3 |
| Paperknife | 15 | 4 |
| Paperknife | 18 | 4 |

Exchange rate: 1 US dollar = 2530 Sudanese pounds

Table 3. Retail prices for recently made ivory items seen in Khartoum, Omdurman and Khartoum North in January–February 2005

| Item | Size (cm) | Price range (US dollars) | Average price (US dollars) |
|---------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Jewellery</i> | | | |
| Bangle | 1 | 12–29 | 20 |
| Earrings, pair | 3.5 | 3–4 | 3 |
| Necklace, beaded | medium | 14–45 | 30 |
| Pendant | 4–5 | 2–34 | 14 |
| Ring | 2.5 | 2–6 | 3 |
| <i>Figurines</i> | | | |
| Animal, thin | 10 | 12–63 | 23 |
| thick | 10 | 47–119 | 86 |
| Human | 15 | 59–99 | 72 |
| <i>Tusks</i> | | | |
| Carved | 21 | 100–140 | 120 |
| | 30 | 198–257 | 218 |
| Polished | 6.8 kg | — | 800 |
| | 8.0 kg | — | 2000 |
| | 15.4 kg | — | 1200 |
| <i>Miscellaneous</i> | | | |
| Box | 8 x 8 | 59 | 59 |
| Chopsticks, pair | 20 | 10–14 | 13 |
| Cigarette holder | 12 | 5–8 | 6 |
| Comb | 15 | 18 | 18 |
| Crucifix | 15 | 59–90 | 75 |
| Key ring | 6 | 12 | 12 |
| Letter of alphabet | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Name seal | 10 | 20–30 | 27 |
| Napkin ring | 1 | 6–20 | 13 |
| Paperknife | 19 | 6–20 | 14 |
| Pen holder | 10 | 5 | 5 |
| Prayer beads for Muslims | medium | 20–36 | 28 |
| Vase | 20 | 180–656 | 331 |
| Walking stick (all ivory) | 300 | 260–320 | 299 |

Exchange rate: 1 US dollar = 2530 Sudanese pounds

— not applicable



An artisan in Omdurman shows ivory items he has just carved.

of medium to poor quality. As in 1997, there were no old ivory items seen on display in the shops. In the Omdurman jewellery market there were far fewer old southern Sudanese ivory items than in 1997. Old bangles were the most common in 2005, at about USD 37 for ones of 4 cm width. No items of new ivory were for sale there, although there had been a few in 1997.

Prices for ivory items varied depending on size, amount of carving and quality. The cheapest were letters of the alphabet for USD 2 and rings and earrings for USD 3. Polished tusks of various weights were the most expensive, followed by vases (USD 331) and full-ivory walking sticks (USD 299) (table 3).

According to the shopkeepers, the main customers for ivory items were still Chinese, who were buying more than before—at least 75% of the sales. There are now 3000–5000 Chinese in Sudan, the number varying according to the amount of construction workers needed at any one time. South Koreans are still

Table 4. Ivory items seen for retail sale in Khartoum, Omdurman and Khartoum North in January–February 2005

| Item | Percentage of total |
|--|---------------------|
| Animal figurine | 30 |
| Pendant | 19 |
| Ring | 15 |
| Bangle | 8 |
| Human figurine | 5 |
| Chopsticks, pair | 4 |
| Earrings, pair | 4 |
| Cigarette holder | 2 |
| Napkin ring | 2 |
| Necklace | 2 |
| Prayer beads for Muslims | 2 |
| Walking stick | 2 |
| Jewellery, other | 1 |
| Name seal | 1 |
| Tusk, carved | 1 |
| Vase | 1 |
| Misc.: hair clip, key ring, paperknife, etc. | 1 |
| Total | 100 |



In the Omdurman jewellery market, traders display some of their wares for sale, including ivory bangles from southern Sudan.



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The Chinese in Sudan were buying 75% of the country's ivory items in 2005, such as this man who was negotiating a good price for several sets of ivory chopsticks in Omdurman. They retailed on average at only USD 13 a pair compared with around USD 90 in Beijing.

the second main buyers; there are several hundred now in Sudan, running businesses such as Daewoo Corporation, Korean International Arab Motors Company, a construction company and a tyre factory. Gulf Arabs and occasionally a European diplomat will buy ivory items. Shopkeepers named the items preferred by the different nationalities and this remained the same as in 1997. Sales are flourishing in the Khartoum area compared with the early 1990s, but Sudanese traders still do not attempt to export their ivory carvings wholesale.

Discussion

Several large changes have taken place in the ivory trade in Sudan between 1997 and 2005. More shops displayed ivory items in early 2005 and many more

ivory objects were for retail sale. The main reason is that there are more foreigners now in the country, especially Chinese. This is because the Sudan government has been encouraging more foreign investment in both public and private sectors. At the same time it has been easy for the Chinese to take ivory items out of Sudan. One Sudanese ivory trader admitted that the Chinese were also buying new tusks from traders directly from their homes for export to China. The amount of raw tusks being exported from Sudan to China is not known.

Between 1997 and 2005 the price of tusks in northern Sudan increased. Prices for tusks have almost tripled as more are now coming from the DRC, requiring greater transport costs than from southern Sudan. Also as elephant populations have declined, the animals are harder to find, especially those with tusks of reasonable size. Retail prices for ivory items have also gone up due to the escalation of the price of the raw material, but not as much as tusks. Jewellery, name seals and walking sticks have perhaps doubled in price in US dollars, while animal figurines have stayed about the same. This is because labour charges have not increased so much in dollar terms due to the devaluation of the Sudanese pound. Despite these retail price increases, items still cost much more in Egypt in 2005. For example, in Egypt a 10-cm ivory figurine cost more than triple the equivalent in Sudan; a paperknife was also triple, and a full-ivory walking stick was four times the price (Martin and Milliken 2005). The relative cheapness of ivory items in Sudan remains the main reason for their popularity.

There was another change from 1997 to 2005. There were fewer southern Sudanese-made old ivory items and no new items offered for sale in the Omdurman jewellery market in 2005. This is despite the fact that new ivory items, especially jewellery, are still being made in the south, and old ivory is for sale there. For example, in early 2005 a foreign diplomat visited an ivory craftsman's house in Yei near the DRC–Uganda border. He saw a worktable covered with ivory chips and dust and several newly made beaded necklaces and crosses, presumably for local sale. The artist took the diplomat to a near-by hut and showed him two raw tusks that were available for carving. Old ivory items were recently for sale in southern Sudan in Rumbek. A Kenyan businessman who went to Rumbek in May 2005 was offered several old ivory bangles for USD 4–5 each. One possibility for the lack of southern Sudan ivory in the north

is that the war increasingly severed retail connections between the south and Muslim Khartoum, leaving the Khartoum military and the Khartoum carvers and shops as the main retail link.

Sudanese government officials claim that they have cracked down on the illegal ivory trade. Officials from Khartoum reported through the Sudanese Embassy in Nairobi that 46 pieces of raw ivory had been intercepted in a lorry on its way to Egypt in 2004. They also reported that 'considerable amounts' of ivory have been impounded by Customs authorities in Khartoum and in Port Sudan, and raids have been carried out from November 2004 in various markets in Khartoum State to control the trade in ivory (Sudan 2005). But this would all seem to be merely tackling the tip of the iceberg. Owners of workshops and souvenir shops in Khartoum and Omdurman stated that it was still easy to move worked ivory within and out of Sudan, and ivory businessmen in Egypt confirmed in March and April 2005 that tusks were still coming into southern Egypt from Sudan (Martin and Milliken 2005).

Furthermore, although there has been some improvement in law enforcement, there has been no significant change in the Sudanese laws concerning ivory. For example, many governments have banned all domestic trade in ivory items, except for certified antiques, but in Sudan any item from ivory obtained prior to 1990 is legal, which creates a very easy loophole for carvers and retailers. Internal trade in pre-1990 ivory is still thus legal (Sudan 2005). But in practice over 98% of the ivory items on offer for sale in 2005 were carved from ivory obtained after 1990—and are thus illegal. The government does not recognize this and claims a lot of it is camel bone (Sudan 2005).

Conclusion

Sudan is one of the few countries in the world where the number of ivory craftsmen and the number of ivory items offered for retail sale have increased since the mid-1990s. The Khartoum–Omdurman area has become one of the largest retail markets for ivory objects in Africa and has recently surpassed Egypt, a country with a huge tourism industry (Martin and Milliken 2005).

Although the government has recently tried to seize raw ivory, more needs to be done. It is unrealistic to expect the government to stop the flow of ivory across its borders because many parts of the country are po-

litically unstable and, being the biggest country in Africa, its borders are too long to patrol adequately. Given the Chinese link, it would be worthwhile for greater vigilance at the Khartoum airport of people leaving the country, especially to check the luggage of Asians, the main buyers of ivory items.

To stop the trade in new ivory, the most effective procedure would be to inspect the workshops to prevent craftsmen from using fresh tusks. The retail shops should be checked for ivory items made from post-1990 elephant tusks also. It should be up to the shop owners to prove to the government the age of their ivory products. Those items made from recently killed elephants should be cleared from the shops immediately and prevented from re-entering the trade. As the tusks nearly all end up in this one region of Sudan—Omdurman—this is the place for the government to concentrate its efforts. Such enforcement procedures would be easy to implement and the exercise would not be expensive. There are not many large workshops in Omdurman and only 50 tourist retail ivory outlets heavily concentrated in two small areas of Omdurman and Khartoum. Success would be easy to secure and in a very short time. There would be little economic hardship to the craftsmen and retailers as the craftsmen already work in other materials and the shops sell a wide variety of products.

It also should be made compulsory for the shop owners to put up signs in their outlets saying that it is illegal to purchase ivory for export. Of equal importance, the Chinese Embassy in Khartoum should advise their Chinese contract workers that it is against the law of both countries to take ivory out of Sudan and import it into China. These simple and inexpensive regulations would be effective if the Sudanese and Chinese governments were committed to implementing them.

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