

A Sudanese Fighter, 1886

Artist: Arthur von Ferraris (1856-1936)

Medium: Oil

Status: Permanent Collection

Accession No.: GUEMG : 2007.1.7

Until recent research, little information was known about this striking portrait. The inscription reads, '*A Monsieur Carrey, Le Caire, 1886, A. Ferrari*'. It was left to the States of Guernsey by William Wilfred Carey of St Peter Port's Castle Carey in 1929.



Why would Carey commission this portrait and who does it show? From 1881, Carey was stationed in Cairo, Egypt, where he received several military honours. Most notably the Khedive star, a medal awarded to participants who acted on behalf of the Khedive, the viceroy to Egypt, in the Anglo-Egyptian and Mahdist wars.

The Anglo-Egyptian war resulted from the Khedive's efforts to westernise Egypt and Britain and France's economic interest in the Suez Canal. These western interventions were rejected by the Egyptian nationalist Ahmed Urabi who organised an uprising against the Khedive. These conflicts resulted in the Bombardment of Alexandria in July 1882 at which William Carey was present.

During the British occupation of Egypt, Muhammad Ahmad, a Muslim religious leader declared himself the 'Mahdi' and launched a holy war against the Ottoman-Egyptian authorities in Sudan. The Mahdiyya period would last for nearly 14 years until its defeat by Anglo-Egyptian forces under General Kitchener in 1898. At the time, European efforts to colonise Africa were vigorous, so it was a remarkable though short-lived example of African independence.

The Mahdists fought the British in many battles and earned an enviable reputation for their bravery. These fighters were from the Hadendoa, a nomadic group of the Beja people from Sudan and Eritrea. Other Beja groups including the Bisharin and Amara tribes from Sudan and Egypt sided with the Egyptian colonial government and their British allies. This painting shows a Bisharin fighter from the Red Sea Hills.

The painting was credited to Arturo Ferrari, however, an Art UK website enquiry suggested that the artist is Hungarian born Arthur von Ferraris (1856-1936). It is known that von Ferraris travelled to Cairo in the winter of 1884-85. He later returned to Paris with a collection of studies and photographs to commission portraits for wealthy clients. Research showed that a contemporary photograph titled *A Bicharin Soldier*, taken by the Zangaki brothers from Greece, was used as reference for the portrait.

By commissioning the painting, it suggests that William Wilfred Carey held the Bisharin fighters in high regard and wanted to immortalise them in portrait form.



(Above) Zangaki, C, G. (N.d) A *Bicharin* soldier [Online]. Available at <https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/egypt-zangaki-brothers-1870-1890/> (Accessed 26 October 2020)