19. Die Flexion des ägyptischen Verbums

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some improvements in practical working which facilitated the use of cursive writing. Phonograms derived from word-signs. The end of the native system was brought about by the gradual adoption of the Greek character—beginning, perhaps, in the second century A.D. If any radical improvement was ever made in the Egyptian form of writing, that improvement must have taken place at or after adoption by another people: e.g., some have supposed that our alphabet was derived by the Phœnicians from Egypt; but any such derivations are at present entirely hypothetical.

Although the Egyptian system of writing may not be actually a stage in the history of our alphabet, it throws a strong light on the development of the alphabetic system: and the survival of its pictorial form (for decorative purposes) enables us to recognise the highly ramified connections between the forms and meanings of characters to an extent which is impossible at present in any other system, whether in Mesopotamia, China, or elsewhere.

The results of recent Egyptian philology indicate therefore that Egyptian was originally a Semitic language, though its character changed early. The main lines of the grammar being at length established, the materials for a complete dictionary are now being collected and classified.

Egypt: Language.

Erman.

Die Flexion des ägyptischen Verbums. Von Adolf Erman. (*Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.* XIX. pp. 317ff.)

19

At a recent meeting of the Berlin Academy of Sciences, whilst dealing with some technicalities of Egyptian grammar, Professor Erman gave expression to some new philological results which are of importance both to the historian and to the anthropologist. His own studies had already in 1892 rendered a close connection between Egyptian and the Semitic tongues hardly dubious. But at the same time the most striking characteristic of the Semitic languages, namely, the derivation of the vocabulary from roots of three radicals, seemed to be absent from Egyptian, which appeared, on the contrary, to have a preference for biliteral roots. This difficulty has now been removed by the researches of Dr. Sethe upon the Egyptian verb (see Kurt Sethe, *Das ägyptische Verbum*, of which two volumes have already appeared, and a third, containing indices, is in preparation). It has become clear that most Egyptian biliteral verbs have become such through the decay of a weak consonant, and were accordingly, in their origin, triliteral. As a further consequence of this discovery, fresh similarities in the vocabulary have been brought to light, greatly adding to the evidence hitherto available. Professor Erman has now no hesitation in classing Egyptian among the Semitic languages. It is noteworthy that this conclusion has been reached without any investigations into the field of comparative syntax, which would, as any one acquainted with the languages in question must know, indubitably lead to valuable results pointing in the same direction.

Professor Erman then turns to the historical aspect of his conclusion. He compares the movement which carried the Semitic idiom from Arabia to Egypt and East Africa with the Mohammedan invasion which overran the same countries in the seventh century of our era. The parallel is complete, except that whereas the later stream of conquest gave birth to one extensive, yet united nation, the more ancient failed to do so. This difference he attributes with great show of reason to the fact that the Mohammedan invasion imposed a religion, while the earlier invasion did not. The greater decay of the Semitic idiom in Egypt he assigns to an original difference of race. As to this race, he surmises that they resembled those Nubians who live in the barren stretches between Assuan and Dongola. These have preserved their one language intact in this region which no invader has taken the trouble to conquer;

and it is a language unrelated to any known idiom, and doubtless—like the Basque—the relic of a tongue which once covered a far wider area. Here we probably have the original tongue of the indigenous Egyptian. Thus Professor Erman arrives at the supposition that the Egyptians were “semitised Nubians,” a conclusion which has been advanced on other grounds, and which will probably be corroborated as soon as the archæological evidence has been properly sifted.

A. H. G.

Egypt: Physical Anthropology.

Macalister.

20 *On Perforate Humeri in Ancient Egyptian Skeletons.* Communicated by Professor A. Macalister, M.D., F.R.S., to the Anthropological Section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Bradford, September 11th, 1900.

In sorting out our Cambridge collection of Egyptian bones, I have noticed the frequency of supra-articular perforation of the humerus, especially in the bones from Libyan graves. I did not begin to count the number of examples until more than three-fourths of the series had been put away in store-cases, but out of the last twenty boxes opened, I found that out of 682 humeri, 390 were perforate and 292 imperforate. The percentage of perforation is therefore 57·2.

This exceeds anything hitherto published. Of ancient North Americans the percentage of perforate bones out of 300 specimens is 40 per cent. In one collection from the Gila Valley, in Arizona, 48 perforate bones were found out of 89, a percentage of 53·9; but this is exceptionally high, and the number of bones is not large. In our Cambridge collection, when I began to count, I found out of the first 115 bones that 65 were perforated; so, had I none but this series, the percentage would have come out 56·5.

The Libyans may therefore, I think, claim to hold the record. In our dissecting room there were three instances out of the last hundred bodies examined. (Other statistics will be found in Messrs. Matthews and Lamb's article on the subject. *Mem. Amer. National Acad. Sci.*, vi, 217.)

The authors just quoted are most probably correct in considering this as an acquired character. The youngest specimen obtained was in a humerus of a child probably 7 years old. I have not seen any genuine approach to this condition among 100 foetal humeri examined for the purpose. As far as I know, it has never been found in a foetal bone.

It is a perforation of the shaft well above the epiphysal junction line. The distal extremity of the diaphysis thickens below the hole down to the place where the epiphysis is set upon it.

It is always in the intra-articular part of the olecranon fossa, below the line of reflexion of the synovial membrane that crosses the middle of the fossa. It is, therefore, quite distinct from the vascular holes with which Topinard associates it, as these are always extra-articular (the vessels are chiefly derived from the inferior profunda).

Of these perforate humeri, 172 were right, and 218 were left. As far as could be determined from size, shape, and from the accompanying pelvic bones, 192 were male, and 198 were female. There is thus the same preponderance of left and female over right and male bones, which was noticed by the describers of the Hemenway collection, leading one to speculate as to the nature of the work which predisposed to the perforation—the mill, the shadoof, or the mattock.

As to the sizes of the holes, they were mostly oval or elliptical, with the long axis transverse or nearly so, and the distribution of these sizes are shown in the accompanying table:—