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69. A Note on the Nilotic Languages, by G. W. Murray

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FIG. 5.

to have served a double purpose, viz., for cutting and scraping (by means of the carina), and as a push-plane. All the specimens to which this note refers are in my own collection.

J. REID MOIR.

Africa: Linguistics.

Thomas.

A Note on The Nilotic Languages, by G. W. Murray. By Northcote W. Thomas, M.A.

69

In the *Journal*, Vol. L, 1920, p. 327 *et seq.*, appears a paper on the Nilotic languages, in which it is argued that Nuba, Bari and Masai, with some others, are Niloto-Hamitic, while Shilluk and Dinka are Niloto-Sudanic. The author does not appear to be quite clear as to their relation to other groups, for (p. 328) he treats them as aberrant Sudanic tongues, while at a later stage (p. 360) they are "nearly allied dialects, possibly akin to the Sudan languages." Mr. Murray ignores the facts that (a) Westermann classed Nuba and Dinka with the Sudanic languages some ten years ago, and subsequently added Shilluk, and that (b) Bari has been regarded as so closely allied to Dinka (*Vienna Or. J.*, XXVI) as to justify classing them together.

Generally speaking, the author's terminology, his data and his method, are vague and sometimes erroneous. He speaks, for example, of Hamitic languages; but we do not learn what they are. He does not accept Westermann's views on Sudanic languages, but gives no definition of his own. He terms "imperfect" the present continuous tense; and in the case of Dinka (p. 335) classes as an Aorist a tense which Mitterrutzner classes and translates as a perfect. He professes to compare roots, but actually gives no more than a series of words in the different languages, of which all that can be said is that they show a general resemblance in form and meaning.

He does not know that tones are found both in Dinka and Nuba; he reduces the accurate transcriptions that we have for Shilluk and Jebel Dair to the level of the older accounts and gives us five vowels only, instead of nine or ten. His section on phonology gives us no account of the sounds, and is in places obscure; *ɲ* (ny) is said to be a "nasalised *y*," though it is apparently a palatalised *n* or a nasal palatal; *y* is said not to occur initially in Nubian, but three lines later we hear of it being prefixed with a "slight *i* sound" when it commences a word (perhaps the semi-vowel is more fully voiced than in English).

For the *s* of the Aorist we are given the equations: **ch* = *sh*, = *s*, or *h*, and the foundation of this is the erroneous statement that *an a chiam* (in reality, *ači* == cease) means "I hoped." As *s*, in Lepsius, appears in the perfect, pluperfect and future perfect, it is probably a mark of past time in the indicative; the term Aorist is usually in Sudanic languages applied to the pronoun + stem; it would perhaps, therefore, be more appropriate to term the Nuba form a preterite.

On p. 337 it is laid down that *-m*, as a negative, is undoubtedly Hamitic, but some ten per cent. of Sudanic languages appear to have it, including Bambara, Dyula, Agni, Edo, Yoruba, Kana and Kede; in Ibo it is a future negative auxiliary.

Mr. Murray is equally mistaken as regards verb suffixes: Temne has much the same system, Diola a more extensive one, while Wolof and Serer have three times the number of forms, besides a combined total of more than thirty tenses in the different moods.

On p. 347 Mr. Murray derives *man*, that from *ma*, not, *in*, this; even if the speculation were phonetically satisfactory, it would surely be desirable to quote a parallel which is more than a mere guess. On p. 348 a prefixed *k*, found also in Kanuri, is explained as an article; it would be interesting to see how Mr. Murray accounts for the Dinka form *akol*, where *a* is perhaps a genderless article, if Bari *k-olon* is to be thus accounted for.

Many other points invite criticism, but I pass to the comparison of words in the appendix. There are 157 "roots," of which Nuba has 138, Bari 134, Masai 77, Shilluk 81, and Dinka 73; but these figures are subject to some deduction, for where a word with a strictly cognate meaning could not be found, Mr. Murray has substituted one less nearly akin; thus he refers to the same root such words as: look for—touch lightly; pot—ground; scourge—prick; bird—nest; and so on; with these deductions the above figures become: 119, 125, 68, 73, 68; they are, of course, only approximate, and the differences may be due as much to imperfections in the record as to real differences in the languages.

Some ten per cent. of the "roots" are contained in Westermann's *Sudan-sprachen*, mentioned in Mr. Murray's bibliography but not otherwise alluded to in the article; it is interesting to compare the figures for these roots, supplemented by words omitted by Mr. Murray, with those already given; they are 16 roots: Nuba, 14 + 1 doubtful; Bari, 14; Masai, 7; Shilluk, 8 + 2 doubtful; Dinka, 9.

* *Ch* is said to be a primitive sound!

They show virtually the same proportions as Mr. Murray's; Nuba and Bari have seven-eighths of the roots, the remainder about one-half. It must not, of course, be assumed that these figures are a measure of the relations of the five languages with each other; probably no correct index can be found from an analysis of word roots. One obvious difficulty is that, if we take Shilluk and Dinka, out of the 100 odd words or "roots," only 47 are common to both, while about 30 are found in Shilluk and another 30 in Dinka; even if we knew how much of the balance does or does not form part of the vocabulary of the languages, it would probably prove impossible to express the relation in terms of numbers. I therefore merely point out that Mr. Murray's association of Dinka with Shilluk hardly seems to be borne out by his lists.

Until we have some more exact method of determining and expressing linguistic relationships, and of sorting our primitive material, both as regards roots and other linguistic material, from borrowed, and until we are clear whether our groups are to express primitive or present-day facts, it seems premature to attempt much more than the roughest ordering of language groups. N. W. THOMAS.

Mesopotamia : Ethnography.

Burnett..

A Note on a Little-known Type in the Mosul Area. *Communicated by Major R. Burnett. (Extract from a letter from Telafar dated 4th April 1921.)*

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"Went for a hack with Crawford this evening and we met some very queer-looking people, some of the tribe called 'Slaveys.' They are most extraordinarily interesting. Their clothes are made almost entirely of gazelles' hides. They have a cross marked on their backs. They are a desert tribe who are supposed to be direct descendants of the Crusaders. They are supposed to have the gift of being able to find water in the desert. They have no religion and no marriage laws; very poor and peaceable. It is considered unlucky to kill one of them, and they help the wounded. I am awfully pleased to have seen some of them, as they are rarely met with, as they live in the deserts. Crawford (Political Officer) had never met any before. He bucked with them for a bit and made them do a sort of dance, a most strange spectacle which terrified my ponies. They were all small and thin, with nice features on the whole. They were very much smaller than the Arab or Turkoman one meets here. The latter are extraordinarily numerous; there is quite a large settlement of them round here."

Ponafidine, the Russian, in his book, *Life in the Moslem East*, mentions an unknown tribe of Bedouin called Solibah, of similar characteristics. He says that the name comes from *saleb*, cross. They are supposed to be the remains of some Christian race. They are looked down upon and are called by the Mohamedan Arabs. *Kelabn l' Kala* (wild dogs). They are known for the shortness of their stature and the great length of their spears. They are the carpenters, blacksmiths and doctors for man and beast amongst the Bedouin. Their tents are made of skins instead of hair.

Mr. Rose tells me that in Beckford's *Vathek* dwarfs are mentioned as inhabiting the mountainous parts near Samara or in the realms of the Caliph, who is the hero of that extravaganza. Beckford does not give his authority for his statement.

Telafar is some 50 miles west of Mosul in the foothills that border the desert on the Mosul-Aleppo caravan route, and about 150 miles N.W. of Samara.

The story of having no religion and no marriage laws is the usual one told by the Arabs and Turks about any tribe from whom they differ in religion.

R. BURNETT.