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Egypt.

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Some Egyptian and Nubian Notes. *By Aylward M. Blackman, B.A.*

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On the day of the great 'id in January 1907 I witnessed the appearance of the Sheykh Dakrûri in his tomb at Behnasa. The cemetery at Behnasa is famous all over Egypt, and is notable for containing the tombs of several of the so-called Şaḥâba such as Fattah-el-Bâb. On entering this well-known tomb of Dakrûri with several of our workmen, I found it crowded with enthusiastic men and women, the latter uttering their shrill cries of joy (zagharit) and all clapping their hands. Among them there were also one or two dervishes, with long tangled hair and beards, clothed in rags and waving green flags. In the midst of all this clamour one of my companions nudged my arm and said, "Look up there," and upon the whitewashed dome where he pointed I saw the shadow of a man standing by a horse. On this being observed the cries and clapping grew louder and the crowd became almost frenzied with excitement. Presently the man mounted the horse and disappeared. It is supposed to be very lucky to see this miracle. I inquired if this was the Sheykh himself who appeared, and the reply was, "Not the Sheykh himself but his good spirit" (mush esh-Sheykh nafsuh lâkin bârakatuh).

On mentioning this to the Omda's son, a youth who had been educated in a European school in Cairo, he told me that he and a friend had made an experiment in connection with this supposed miracle. Not far from the tomb is a mound, and if a man and horse stand on this when the sun is in a certain position they are reflected as in a camera obscura through a small window on to the dome.

During the 'id there are many Bedawy horsemen about, in the neighbourhood of this and other tombs. So the miracle is explained, and is probably produced by unconscious agents.

Another famous tomb at Behnasa is that of the seven maidens (es-saba'a banât). Visitors to this shrine of both sexes roll over and over in the sand close by. This preserves one's good health and is a cure for sickness of any kind. Strings hung from the walls and from these were fastened hundreds of rags, buttons, or ornaments, which were left by pilgrims who had been cured. It was customary for a pilgrim to erect a small pile of stones or bricks outside the tomb as a memento of his visit. Similar small piles I found in Nubia around the rough circles of stones, said by the local inhabitants to mark the graves of Şaḥâba.

Another well-known Sheykh at Behnasa is Abu Samraq. So famous is he that people come to him from Alexandria. Sick folk pass the night in his tomb, often several nights, and if recovered offer him a victim.

Another Sheykh whose name I cannot recall had a somewhat sinister reputation. No one could ever pass the night in his tomb; whoever attempted to do so was ejected by some invisible agency.

Passing through a cemetery late one night at Marwaw in Nubia I asked if the people of the village were afraid of being in a cemetery in the dark. The answer was, "Why should one fear the dead who are resting in the security of God '(elli yekûnu bi aman Allah)'. My Nubian guard who was with me said one need only fear a place where there had been a murder. The spilled blood produced an afrit who disappeared if one said, "Bismillah er-raḥman er-raḥim." This afrit was not the spirit of the murdered man, which was in the "bir el-arwâḥ" but only an emanation from the blood, "nafs min ed-dam." I am indebted to Dr. Seligmann for the following information in connection with this same idea. An Egyptian told him that if a man were attacked and did not die on the spot, but after he had been removed, there was no ghost, even if blood were shed. Also if he died there and then, blood must be spilled and soaked up by the earth. Murder by a bloodless blow on the head did not produce an afrit.

An idea about twins, common to Lower Nubia and Egypt, is that they have the power of becoming cats at night. They can enter houses, steal milk and food, and eat chickens. A man from Quft in Egypt told me that he was in a friend's house one evening, and while they were conversing a cat entered and tried to drink from a bowl of milk. The owner of the house picked up a knife to throw at the cat, while the other tried to prevent him, saying, "That is the son of so and so, the butcher." But in spite of this the knife was thrown, and the cat wounded in one of its hind legs. In the morning the boy was found to be wounded in the same leg as the cat. Grown men who are twins will tell one that they can remember as children becoming cats, though as they grow up they lose this power. To break the spell, and prevent the children from becoming cats, immediately after birth the father must place the twins in an oven (cold, of course), and then after a short time remove them (Fig. 1). Apparently they are just put in and quickly removed. This latter idea is Nubian; the Egyptians that I have questioned do not know it.

FIG. 1.—OVEN.

In Nubia hair from the back of the neck of a hyena is worn for an amulet as a cure for barrenness in women. For the same reason the head of the horned cerastes is worn. A childless Nubian woman on hearing that a woman in the neighbourhood is in labour will put on a gold nose ring and gash her ankle with a razor. She then enters the room where the child is being born. The evil magic in her system passes out through the spilled blood and the gold nose ring into the fertile woman. This makes the woman and her child ill, the latter is said nearly always to die. The barren woman next year will bear a child. This was told me by my boatman from Shellal.

The people of Tafeh, a village near Bab-el-Kalabshah, in Lower Nubia, eat the fox, and I was informed by my boatman that the people of the village hold the fox in high esteem. They say that he who eats of him imbibes his cunning. For other ideas about the fox in that village see my article in *MAN*, January 1909, on the fox as a birth amulet. Perhaps it is the last lingering trace of a fox divinity in that region (??).

FIG. 2.—CIRCLE OF STONES.

A man from Qus in the Muderiyeh of Qena, Upper Egypt, told me that a man who desires to be a clever scribe should catch a hoopoe bird, and tear the heart from it while yet alive and eat it raw. This he said was commonly believed in his part of the country, and his own uncle had done so with success.

A man from Quft in Upper Egypt told me that while the bridegroom is on his way to and from the mosque in his wedding procession, a man, holding a bar

with lighted lamps suspended from it, walks before him and behind. A near relation or close friend walks on either side of him; this is done to prevent anyone touching him, for should he be touched ill-luck results and the marriage produces no children.

A Coptic wedding custom is to slaughter a sheep on the threshold of the house door before the bride enters. The threshold is smeared with blood, and the bride must cross it without getting any blood on her feet or clothing. Should she do so, the marriage is unlucky.

On the high desert above Dabôd Temple in Nubia is a circle composed of rough stones (Fig. 2). In the midst of this is set up a large stone with a hole in it, from which is suspended a large ring made of iron wire. To the ring are fastened rags, buttons, and small personal ornaments. Close to the upright stone are placed offerings of pots. Sick people sleep inside this circle, and if the Sheykh, who is supposed to be buried there, heals them they fasten to the iron ring a rag torn from their clothes or something similar.

Dr. Seligmann found that at Qurna, near Luxor, circumcision rags are hung up in a Sheykh's tomb there. They were evidently early dressings, as they were considerably

FIG. 3.—TOMBS OF SHEYKHS.

FIG. 4.—POT.

stained with blood. Perhaps they were hung there to ensure a speedy healing? Dr. Seligmann also found, at the same place, that hard by the Sheykh's tomb grows a tree. A sick man plucks leaves from it and sleeps with them under his head. In a dream the Sheykh appears and prescribes a treatment. With respect to circumcision rags, I find a somewhat similar custom prevailed among the Fijians. "The blood was caught on a " strip of bark cloth called kulo (red), " which in some cases was suspended " from the roof of the temple or the " house of the chief."*

At Gerf Hussein in Nubia is the domed tomb of the Sheykh Abd er-Rahîm, among a group of Sheykhhs (Fig. 3), he, however, being the most popular. People who desire some temporal blessing, such as recovery from illness, a child, or success in a dispute, make a vow that if their wish is gratified they will offer the Sheykh a victim (*dabiha*). Outside the tomb is a block of stone, coated thick with dried blood of countless sacrifices, on which the victim is offered. To enter the domed tomb one must pass through a rectangular ante-chamber roofed with "bûs" (*dura*-straw) laid on rafters of palm trees. In this ante-chamber is a small hearth, the usual kind consisting of two or three stones to stand the cooking

FIG. 5.—CIRCLE OF STONES.

* See *The Fijians*, by Basil Thomson. In a Sheykh's tomb on the opposite side of the river to Qurna Dr. Seligmann also saw pieces of the dress of a bridegroom, worn on his wedding-day, hung up.

pot on. Near this primitive hearth stood two large pots (Fig. 4) for cooking the flesh of the sacrificed animal. The victim after being slain and duly prepared is, I understood, and as I have seen in Sheykhs' tombs in Egypt, hung up just inside the tomb for a while. It is then taken down and cooked, and half belongs to the servant of the Sheykh and half forms a feast for the poor. The feast, which is shared together

by the offerer and the poor, is an essential part of the sacrifice.

At Gerf Hussein also was a circle of stones (Fig. 5) supposed to mark the burial place of a Sheykh. To this an old woman would often bring an offering of dough in a red pottery dish. First she would smooth the sand within the circle, speaking all the while in Nubian interspersed with Arabic interjections such as "yâ sheykh, yâ rabbi." Then she scattered part of the dough on the grave, and the rest she offered to those who stood by, myself included. She told me it was good to eat because it belonged to the Sheykh.

On the island of Bigeh, close to Shellal, there is a domed Sheykh's tomb (Fig. 6), with a small offertory chamber

attached, containing pots. Around it are the graves of the community. Noticeable is the flag on the door. Such flags are the regular emblems of Sheykhs and tokens of sanctity. Wherever they are put they denote some sort of religious prohibition. Such a flag stuck in a heap of vegetables lying by the roadside will prevent any being taken. The thief would be invariably stricken with sickness. Date palms are also thus protected from robbery. A newly-built house often has a similar flag at each corner. I was informed that afrits were jealous of a new house and desired possession, but that the flapping of these flags frightened them off. Practically every Sheykh's tomb has one or more of these flags inside or outside it. Is it possible that the flag is the same as the Egyptian hieroglyph , the sign of a god? Griffith (*A Collection of Hieroglyphs*, p. 46) suggests that the sign represents a roll of cloth, the lower part bound or laced over the upper end appearing as a flap at the top, probably for unwinding. From the early examples of the sign depicted in Petrie's *Medûm* the sign might well represent a flag.

The example shown in *Hieroglyphs*, Plate III, is possibly a flag whose stick is covered with different coloured bands of cloth. Similar are the sticks of the flag-shaped fly-flaps made at Esneh in Upper Egypt. The central pole, from which radiate to smaller poles strings of flags and lamps, set up in every Muslim village to celebrate the prophet's birthday, is also decorated with alternating bands of coloured cloth, usually blue and red.

FIG. 6.—SHEYKH'S TOMB.

FIG. 7.—PLATES OVER HOUSE DOOR.

Charms and amulets are in common use among both Egyptians and Nubians. In a village not far from Fant, in Middle Egypt, the leading people were four wealthy brothers. One of them was widely known for his writing of potent amulets; he gave one to a servant of mine, a piece of written paper folded. On my wanting to open the paper and see what was written on it, my servant, greatly alarmed, prevented me. He told me that should I open the paper I should die, for so he had been told by the Sheykh. At Gerf Hussim, Lower Nubia, there is a Sheykh who can make amulets for a religious war. If a Muslim wearing one of these is struck by a bullet, it will either glance aside or pass through him without doing harm.

In 1906, at Behnasa, our head reis fell ill with some sort of fever. He was dissatisfied with European medicine, and went to the Sheykh (a living man in this case). The Sheykh wrote "excellent writing" on paper, and threw it into the fire. As the paper was consumed the fever left the sick man's body. The rite was several times repeated, apparently at one sitting.

An interesting case of how a new custom springing up is, after a time, given some magical signification comes from Lower Nubia. Over nearly every house door china plates are fastened up (Fig. 7). In some places the people said they were merely an ornament, in others—a village called Meris and at Dehmit—the people said they were put over the door to ensure there always being plenty of bread in the house. The Omda of Dehmit said that it was only in the last ten to fifteen years that Nubian servants in hotels and European houses had brought such plates home with them. Till then plates had never been used for bread, if anything had been used for bread it was, and indeed still is, the flat basket (*ṭabaqa*). I never saw a single instance of a *ṭabaqa* fastened over a door.

The people of Quft believe that brothers never meet after death in Paradise. This makes the grief of surviving brothers all the more poignant, and the outward display of mourning at such a funeral is even more noteworthy than at other funerals. While one brother is holding intercourse with his other relations in Paradise, should another brother come up, the first (they say) immediately disappears. This is not only believed of *twins*, but of *all* brothers, and the Quftis say it is taught them by the 'Ulema.

The people of the same place and neighbourhood never speak to or of their wife by her name. A husband addresses her always as *yâ bint*, or *yâ mârati*, O girl, O my wife, respectively. Their reason for this is that such an appellation would be too familiar, and would make the wife conceited. A man said to me, "Iza kunt ukallîm-ha keda nafs-ha yetla' kebîr." (If I speak to her so, her mind will become big.) A man will call his sister-in-law by her name, and she him by his name.

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England : Archæology.

King : Polkinghorne.

Holed Stone at Kerrow, St. Just-in-Penwith, Cornwall. *By H. King and the late B. C. Polkinghorne, B.Sc., F.C.S.*

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While making enquiries at Kerrow Farm on other matters, we were informed by Mr. Humphrey Hoskins, the farmer, of a large stone with a hole in the centre which his son had laid bare some months previously in cutting furze in a croft at the western foot of Chapel Carn Brea.

On August 14, 1907, we had the ground cleared around it and found it to be a circular slab of granite 48 inches in diameter and 12 to 14 inches in thickness. In the centre was a cylindrical hole, of diameter 8 inches, and depth 8 inches; very truly worked, *not* ground, but apparently formed by use of iron tools. The interior surface was, however, quite smooth and no tool marks could be detected. Our helpers raised