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The following paper was read, in the absence of the author, by Professor A. H. Keane :—

On the TRIBES of the EASTERN SOUDAN.

By DONALD A. CAMERON, Esq., H.B.M. Consul for the Eastern Soudan.

THE Arabs of Suakin and of its neighbourhood, for about 100 miles in a semi-circle, may, for convenience, be divided into the following tribes :—

1. Natives of Suakin, *i.e.*, Suakinese.
2. Amárrars.
3. Hadéndoas.
4. Ashrafs.
5. Artégas.
6. Bishareen.
7. Beni Amers.

1. The population of *Suakin* is a mixed one, and, exclusive of the Egyptian garrison, numbers about 5,000. Deducting from this a score of English and about 100 Greeks and Levantines, together with Turkish and Egyptian officials, Jeddah merchants and artisans, Somalis, Arabs of Aden, Abyssinians, and natives of India, there remain about 4,000 Suakinese and Soudanese negroes who now represent the fixed population of the town. Owing to the constant intermarriage between the different black peoples here, certain further deductions must be made, and we have left perhaps 3,000 genuine Suakinese whose native language is *Tobedawiet*, and who are identical in race and in language with the friendly or hostile tribes of Arabs outside the town, such as the Amárrars, Artégas, &c.

Later on in treating of each of these tribes it will be seen that they claim by tradition to have different origins. Whatever truth there may be in such traditions, for all practical purposes it may be confidently affirmed at starting that all the natives of the north-eastern Soudan, inside and outside of the town of Suakin, are kindred and speak one common language, *Tobedawiet*, in distinction from Arabic, of which they are more or less ignorant.

The Arabic name for the people of the desert is *Orban* (عربان), by which one means Bedouins, mountaineers, nomads, camel-men, and shepherds, &c. The Suakinese of the town are often called Hadáreb. Now there is a province in the south of Arabia called *Hadramaut* (حضرموت), whose inhabitants are

called *Hadramy*, in the plural *Hadáríma* (حضارمة, حضرمي). These Hadramies abound at Hoveida and other parts of El-Yemen. In fact Hadramy is a generic name at Suakin for people from the south of Arabia, and not from Jeddah and the Hejaz; and it is most natural that from the earliest times adventurers from Hadramaut may have come over and settled at Suakin. Upon this is based the tradition that Suakin is a Hadramy colony, and that Hadáreb is merely another form of Hadáríma—*m* and *b* being interchangeable. Indeed, Othman Sheikh, who claims descent from the aborigines of Suakin, tells me that the Suakinese or Hadáreb are undoubtedly Hadramies from South Arabia.

Mr. G. A. Hoskins, who travelled in Ethiopia in 1833, and soon after published a work on the ruins of Meroe, near Berber, states that when at Dongola, he was told by Sheikh Mukhtar, a most intelligent Kadi, that in the time of the fourth Khaleefa, namely, Ali (in the seventh century A.D.), there was an invasion by the great tribe of the Ababja from the Yemen, who "finding the country inhabited by infidels, drove out some but forced the greater number to turn Moslems, and that thus the former inhabitants became blended with the Arabs and have not been distinguished for ages. This is a curious and highly interesting tradition proving historically almost what might naturally be supposed."

On the whole I think there must be some truth in this Dongolese tradition as narrated by Mr. Hoskins, and I would here draw attention to the similarity of the two words Ababja and Beja.

Ababja can hardly be different from the modern word *Ababdeh*, the name of a powerful tribe which stretches south from Assouan, having the Bishareen to the south and the Amárrars to the east.

Beja is a vague word applied to all Tobedawiet-speaking Arabs, and the origin of the word deserves serious discussion.

In another part of his work Mr. Hoskins says that it is probable that during the period of its magnificence the Empire of Meroe held the Yemen tributary, and that on its decay it was invaded by the Yemenese (Hadramies), who swarmed across into Nubia or Ethiopia. If this view is accepted there can be no doubt that these Yemenese landed at or near Suakin, between Rowaya and Agig, and that most of them hurried inland to the Nile, a certain small portion remaining on the coast. Thus what Othman Sheikh tells me at Suakin, in May, 1886, is confirmed by what I have just read by chance in Mr. Hoskin's book of 1833-4.

Burckhardt, who was at Suakin in 1814, gives a very full and valuable account of this town, and accepts the native statement that Suakin is more or less a colony of Hadramaut.

My own opinions are as follows :—

1. There may have been at least one invasion of the Eastern Soudan from Arabia.

2. That such of the invaders as could not find room on the coast had to hurry inland till they struck the Nile, and that the survivors were easily absorbed by the aborigines, adopting the aborigines' language and having little or no effect on the aboriginal race.

3. That Suakin being on the coast may have retained a large proportion of Hadramies, and so have come to be called Hadramy.

4. That the present Beja or Tobedawiet-speaking people of the Eastern Soudan are the aborigines, who gradually adopted Islam through contact with the coast or with Egypt, or with minor Moslem invasions in the seventh and following centuries.

5. That the Eastern Soudanese are quite unlike the Bedouin Arabs of the north, such as are met with in Arabia, Syria, Mount Sinai, and the Delta; and that they may be fairly assumed to be the aborigines of the country.

The following are extracts from a letter from Mason Bey, of the Egyptian Service, who has travelled a great deal in the Soudan. He says that the aborigines question is very far from settled. For his own part he believes that the Bishareens, Hadéndoas, Halengas, and Beni Amers are an autochthonous race, and that they have held their own in spite of all invasions. As for the theory that the aborigines were killed off by the invaders, that will not stand before recent evidence. Moreover, an invader must have been pressed to reach the Nile, and could do no more than hurry through the country. Occupation by any sedentary race is out of the question. The late Ali Bey, Bakheet of Kassala, assured him that the Beni Amers, Hadéndoas, Bishareen, and Halengas called themselves the "*Rotn*," and that *Rotn* is the name of their country and people. These people have no affinity with the Arabs. Linant gives an account of them in his work on the "*Etbai*." According to Lepsius the Suakin people are Arabs having no affinity with the neighbouring tribes. Mason Bey very properly doubts the affinity between the Hadéndoas and Abyssinians. He adds that most of the ethnological difficulties arise from a preconceived determination to divide the human race into certain hard and fast groups, located within equally hard and fast lines.

Mason Bey sent me the following letter from M. Bonola, the Secretary of the Khedivial Geographical Society of Cairo :—

"My dear Bey,

"This is what I have found about the Beja and Bishareens in the 'Nouvel Dictionnaire de Géographie,' de Vivien de St. Martin, 1884.

"*Beja* or *Bishareen*.—An aboriginal people of Nubia. This name is ancient, and some think they can recognise it in the hieroglyphic inscriptions under the name of *Bouka*, which is like the *Bouga* of the Ethiopian inscriptions, and the Greek inscriptions of Axum.

"Latin authors speak of them as *Blemmyes*.

"On their arrival in Egypt, the Arabs came in contact with the Beja, and good information can be obtained about them from the old Moslem authors. The best notice is that by Makrizi in his 'History of Egypt,' also in the 'Istakiri,' translated into German by Mordtmann ('Das Buch der Länder,' Hamburg, 1845), and in Masoodi.

"Makrizi says that the Beja are of Berber origin. Soon after the arrival of the Arabs in Egypt the Moslems invaded the emerald mines, and intermarried with the Beja, so that a large number of the tribe, called Hadáreb, embraced Islam. This Hadáreb tribe, which is the *élite* of the nation, inhabits the side which is towards Saeed.

"After this *resumé* of Makrizi, M. Vivien goes on to uphold his thesis that the Beja are of Berber origin, and he analyses M. Linant's book on the 'Etbai,' which gives a very detailed description of the manners of this people.

"The language *Bejawi* or *Bedawi* (which must not be confounded with Bedouin) is altogether an original idiom, hitherto very imperfectly known, and it is of very great ethnological importance to determine the relation between the Agão and the other aboriginal dialects of Abyssinia, and the Somali, Galla, Ababdeh, Coptic, and the Berber dialects of the Etbai district.

"The tribes of the Beja family are numerous, such as the Hadéndoa, Halenga, Shinterab, Merefab, &c."

The above is M. Bonola's letter, and I agree with Mason Bey that it only adds to the general confusion.

In the Bible (Chronicles II, chapter xii, verses 2 and 3) it is said that Shishak, King of Egypt, invaded Jerusalem with an army of Ethiopians, and Lubims, and Sukkiims. Sukkiims may mean the people of Suakin.

Suakin is written *Sawákin* in Arabic (سواكن). The natives call it "*Soke*," in their Tobedawiet language.

The houses at Suakin are all built of coral rag, which is called *Domar*. This is torn up by crowbars from the reefs in summer when the water is low. The natives live in large huts of matting stretched on branches. These huts are called "*Bidaigwab*."

The Suakinese are undoubtedly a handsome race. They are rather below our average height, although their slender figures, covered by the loose white *tōb*, or native toga, and their upstanding hair, make them look taller than they are.

Out on the plains or in the hills they have great powers of endurance in running and climbing, and are as active and lithe as greyhounds. But in the town they are lazy and good for nothing; and even when willing to work make but feeble coolies and coalheavers. Their food is almost entirely vegetable, varied with fish and now and then a little meat.

Within their own narrow waters the Suakinese are very expert fishermen and sailors. Their craft consist of canoes and dhows. The canoe (*Khoori*) is always a "dug-out" of teakwood brought from the East Indies. Their dhows are of the usual type throughout the east, carvel-built and with lateen-sails.

I took great interest in scanning the features of the Suakinese. It was easy to detect the presence of negro blood by the thickness of the nose and lips, &c., but after making all deductions for intermarriage, I made out two rather distinct types, that of the sheikhs and that of the lower classes.

Some of the sheikhs' faces were almost as perfect and refined as that of any Caucasian. The nose was fine and delicate, the brows arched, the lips and chin well cut, and the jaw not too heavy. The hands and feet were small and shapely. The hair was long and wiry, but not crisp like a negro's. It was divided into three parts—a thick pad on the crown, and thick festoons of hair on the side. Some shave their heads, and wear turbans.

The complexion was a dark brown, but not black; on the other hand it was never fair like that of many Arabian Bedouins.

The faces of the lower orders of pure Suakinese are decidedly coarser as a rule. But here again there is a marked difference between tribes. The Amárrars, and especially the Ashrafs, claim superiority of race, and scorn the savage Artégas and Hadéndoas. As these two latter tribes were hostile and absent from Suakin I have had no opportunity of inquiring into this interesting detail.

A great friend of mine, young Sheikh Seyyid Yaseen, an Ashraf or aristocrat of the Northern Amárrars, assures me that it is very easy to distinguish an Amárrar from a Hadéndoa, or both from an Artéga, Bishareen, or Beni Amer; and that every tribe has its peculiar dialect and idioms. A Hadéndoa from near Kassala could never be mistaken for an Amárrar of Suakin or a Bishareen from Berber; the connecting links between these extreme tribes being the minor nomad families who inter-

marry or change their allegiance from time to time. There can be no doubt that the present revolution in the Eastern Soudan will also have a great effect on the tribes. It marks a great epoch in their national history, and every piece of really accurate information which can be gathered now concerning the rebellion will be of value by-and-by from an ethnological point of view. Some of the minor hostile tribes have been annihilated, or are represented only by women and a few infant males. Whole mountain districts have been depopulated. The authority of great sheikhs has been upset, and the future is in the hands of a few less powerful sheikhs and tribes who have kept aloof from the rebellion and fighting, and who are, in consequence, relatively much stronger than before.

2. Outside Suakin we meet with two great tribes, the *Amàrrars* and the *Hadéndoas*. The Suakin-Berber road forms a pretty correct boundary between them. The *Amàrrars* stretch along a base line from Suakin, Handoub, and Ariab, northwards past Rowaya and Elba towards Kosair. They are Arabs of the mountains and of the coast. They are not Nile Arabs, for between them and the Nile are the Ababdehs and Bishareen. Their country is called the "*Etbai*." The headquarters of the tribe is in the Ariab district, and their sheikh of sheikhs, who has been recently murdered by Osman Digna, was Hamed Mahmoud, son of Hamed Hasai, of the Ajim or noblest stock. The *Amàrrars* may be classified into four great families—

- i. Weled Gwilei,
- ii. Weled Aliab,
- iii. Weled Kurbab-Wagadab,
- iv. *Amàrrars* proper of the Ariab district,

making in all a total of about 50,000 fighting men.

The *Amàrrars* claim to be of Koreish descent. They assert that Seif Ullah Khàlid ibn Weleed invaded and conquered the Eastern Soudan in the reign of the Khaleefa Osman, and that they and their kindred tribes of the Comeelab, Bishareen, Belaweab of Suakin, and Mergomab of the Atbara, are the descendants of the invading Arab army. The grain of truth in this tradition is that small bands of Koreish Arabs may have come and won over certain sheikhs and tribes to Islam, and that as the new faith spread over the country during the last 1,000 years the people have been at pains to make themselves out to be of Arabian descent.

3. The *Hadéndoas* have their headquarters at Filik, near Kassala, and extend from the Abyssinian frontier northward through the Gash, Wadi Langab, Wadi Oseer, and Khor Baraka, past Erkowit and Tokar to Kokreb, and Sinkat close to Suakin.

The Shukuriehs are to the south and west of them; the Beni Amers to the east; the Bishareens and Amárrars to the north; and their only access to the sea is in the neighbourhood of Suakin. The majority of them are much nearer Kassala than Suakin, and it is incorrect to speak of the Suakin Arabs in a general sort of way as being Hadéndoas.

Digna himself is a Hadéndoa, and for the last three years he has succeeded in collecting at Tamai a large number of the Northern Hadéndoas, Artégas, and some Amárrars. Thus the word Hadéndoa is now almost synonymous for the rebels. The natives whom I have consulted all insist that the Hadéndoas are not of Arabian origin, and that they are an early emigration from the centre of Africa, west of the Nile. The Amárrars look upon them as a wild inferior race, who somehow have learnt the Tobedawiet language, but who are quite distinct from the Amárrars, Ashrafs, Beni Amers, and Bishareen. They say that the Hadéndoas freely intermarry with other tribes, that their sheikhs have not much influence over them, and that they easily shift their allegiance and follow any leader of their fancy like bands of brigands rather than tribes under a sheikhdом or patriarchal government.

The head sheikh of sheikhs of all the Hadéndoas is Musa, who lives at Filik, in the Kassala or Taka province.

The Hadéndoas outside Suakin may for convenience be divided into two great tribes, (1) *Hamdabs* and the (2) *Erkowaits*.

In addition to these, there are of course all the numerous tribes and sub-tribes under the great Sheikh Musa, at Filik, to the south.

But at Suakin I am unable to obtain any accurate information about them, and I now speak only of the Northern Hadéndoas immediately under Digna's influence. This confederation in 1884-5 must have numbered at least 15,000 desperate fighting men.

The Comeelabs are sometimes spoken of as Amárrars and sometimes as Hadéndoas. The Amárrars claim them as kindred but many of their sub-tribes joined the Hadéndoas under Digna.

4. The *Ashraf*, *Shurefa*, or *Shereefs* (أشرف, شرفاء, شريف) are a small tribe who live for the most part near Tokar, in the Gash and in Khor Baraka. A certain portion have also settled among the Amárrars to the north. The number of grown males among all the Ashraf probably does not exceed 2,000. They call themselves Beni Háshim, and claim descent from the Prophet. Throughout the Mahdi-Digna revolution they have remained loyal to the Egyptian Government and their sheikhs are now taking an active part with the Amárrars in dispersing the rebels.

Seyyid Yaseen, an Ashraf-Amárrar Sheikh, tells me that centuries ago their ancestors were rulers of Medina, but that in the sixteenth century they were overthrown by the family of Abdul-Mutalleb. The Mecca Sheikhs then invited them to come and settle in that town, but Mohammed el Wali, the head of the family, refused, and crossed over to Suakin about the year 1550 A.D. He died and was buried at Suakin, leaving three sons, whose posterity are now to be found near Tokar, in Suakin, and among the Northern Amárrars.

Their greatest sheikh is Shereef Mohammed Abu Fatima, who lives at Dagga, in Khor Baraka.

I consider that the future of the Eastern Soudan is in the hands of the Amárrar-Ashraf tribes, and that with patience, conciliation, and firmness there is every hope of establishing a sound native government under the headship of their sheikhs.

5. The *Artégas* are said to be the descendants of a sheikh of that name, who came from Hadramaut in pre-Islamic times, and married one of the daughters of Iblis, and settled near Tokar. The *Artégas* now assert that their name means "patrician" (õmed. عميد), and indeed they may be looked upon as the most ancient stock of this district. I have met with no *Artégas*, as they are all rebels, but I am assured that they are an inferior race like the lowest types in Suakin. At present the tribe numbers about 5,000 men near Tokar. Before the revolt, large numbers were to be found in this town. One family still remains, the Divan Bekabs, but they are few and quite insignificant. Similarly, Mahmood Resheed ibn et Taha, of Suakin, claims to be of the original stock of *Artéga* and the daughter of Iblis.

It is worth while going to Tokar, and making a thorough inquiry into the traditions of this tribe; and I believe that much valuable information from an ethnological point of view can be obtained from a stay in that district.

Tokar, indeed, and not Suakin, is the key to the north-east Soudan. Suakin is a chance settlement, and has a score of rival inlets north and south; but Tokar, from its position, is unique. It is at Tokar, therefore, that the questions of the races and languages of the Tobedawiet Arabs can be best studied. One could learn more in a month there, than in a year at Suakin.

6. The *Bishareen* occupy the western half of the Berber road, and lie beyond the Suakin province. The Amárrars claim them as kindred of Arabian, Koreish, or Kwahili origin. Certain tribes like the Bishara and Bishariabs are indeed classed as Amárrars. They speak Arabic and Tobedawiet.

7. The *Beni Amers* (بنى عامر) occupy a triangle of territory

of which Agig is the apex; the sea coast to Massowa the eastern side, the Khor Baraka to Kassala the western side, and the Abyssinian frontier the base.

Their language is Tigré and not Tobedawiet, and like the Bishareen, they lie beyond the Suakin province.

Of the foregoing tribes of Suakinese,

Amárrars,
Hadéndoas,
Ashrafs,
Artégas, and
Bishareens,

it will be seen that the first thing that connects them more or less is their common speech—Tobedawiet.

Almkvist has published a very full grammar of this language under the title of "*Bischari Sprache*." Munzinger, in his "East African Studies," gives an excellent vocabulary of Tobedawiet as spoken in the south among the Hadéndoas and some of the Beni Amers.

In the next place (although most of the Beni Amer speak Tigré, which is an Abyssinian dialect, and very few speak Tobedawiet), yet the Amárrars claim kindred with them. On the other hand they scout any idea of kinship with the Tobedawiet-speaking Hadéndoas. I do not understand this.

The course of study which I have laid down for myself in my leisure this winter and spring at Suakin is first of all to try and master the Suakin language as a basis for ethnological research. I may then be able gradually to collect fresh materials in the shape of oral traditions, folk-lore, &c., which may be of use to this Institute. The present essay is merely a preliminary sketch.

EXHIBITION of WEST AFRICAN SYMBOLIC MESSAGES.

By G. W. BLOXAM, M.A., F.L.S., Assistant Secretary.

[WITH PLATE IV.]

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY said that Mr. R. N. Cust had kindly presented to the Institute eight specimens of Aroko, sent to him by Mr. J. A. Otonba Payne, Registrar of the Supreme Court at Lagos. These Aroko, or symbolic letters, were such as are used by the tribe of Jèbu in West Africa, to which tribe Mr. Payne himself belongs.

No. 1 (Fig. 1, Plate IV) is a message from a native prince of Jèbu Ode to his brother residing abroad. It consists of six