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Source: *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 30 (1900), pp. 50-55

Published by: [Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2842617>

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NOTES ON THE GALLA OF WALEGA AND THE BERTAT.

BY REGINALD KOETTLITZ, M.D.

[PRESENTED FEBRUARY 13TH, 1900.]

THE route followed by Mr. Herbert Weld Blundell's expedition, of which I was a member, was briefly this:—We crossed the Gulf of Aden, from Aden to Berbera; thence, starting on December 6, 1898, we crossed Somali Land in a south-westerly direction as far as Jig-jigga on the Abyssinian frontier. This portion of our journey we performed with camels. Thence to Harar we travelled with mules. Avoiding the hot desert route we then proceeded along the ranges in the Arusi and Itu countries, and passed lakes Hanamaya and Chercher to the river Hawash, which we crossed, and thence ascended to Addis Abbeba, the capital of King Menelik. From this place I paid a flying visit to the holy mountain of Zikwala, some forty miles to the south.

Leaving Addis Abbeba we proceeded due west through the countries occupied by the Mecha and other Galla tribes; crossed the river Didesa into Walega, which we traversed in a northerly direction. Crossing the river Dabus we entered the country of the Berta or Nuer, where is Abd er Rahman's village called Beni Shongul by previous visitors. Finally we came to Famaka on the Blue Nile; following that river we reached Khartum and ultimately Cairo.¹

WALEGA.

The Galla of Walega are nearly as dark in complexion as the Itu in the east, and much more so than their kinsmen of Abyssinia. They are much less particular about their dress than are the Gallas in the east. The men often only wear a leather breech-cloth, or are content even with a goat-skin phallocrypt with the hair still upon the skin. The women often only wear the leather breech cloth. The girls, as elsewhere in Galla Land, arrange their hair in the shape of a mop, consisting of a mass of corkscrew ringlets. The married women stiffen this mop with wax and honey until it forms a coherent mass of rigid shape, with an edge like a honeycomb rising above it. Sometimes they dye their hair with red clay.

The tokuls outwardly resemble those of the Abyssinians, except that they are more squat and dome-shaped, with a stick protruding from the apex. The internal arrangement, however, is different. A partition made of sticks cuts off the space

¹ For a map of the route, see *Geographical Journal*, March, 1900.

near the door from the main body of the circular hut, thus forming a sort of vestibule. All household work is done within the inner compartment, and there also, along the wall, are the sleeping places, those of the unmarried men and girls being on opposite sides, and screened off by reed screens suspended from the roof and rising about 7 feet above the floor. The walls of these huts are made of grass thatch.

The hoe is the ordinary agricultural implement, but primitive ploughs, drawn by oxen, are occasionally to be seen.

Gold in small quantities is found in Walega, as also in Leka and Sibü, and is washed out of the sand of rivers and brooks. As the Gallas are required by their Abyssinian masters to pay their taxes in gold dust they are obliged to wash for it. I asked a man who had six dollars' worth of gold how long it had taken him to wash for this, and he told me seventeen days!

In these gold districts it is very common to see men carrying a wooden tray-like pan about 2 feet long and 15 to 18 inches wide. This pan is used for gold washing. A small goat-skin bag contains quills in which the gold is kept, and other apparatus. They carry also a neat native-made balance, with weights of pebbles or seeds, fitted into a small basket, by means of which they are able to ascertain fairly accurately the value of their washings. These quills filled with gold dust, or small packets of it, or gold rings of different weights, have a known value, and pass as currency throughout these districts, and there are some markets, notably that of Nago, which go by the name of "gold markets," and are frequented by merchants desirous of exchanging their commodities for gold dust.

THE BERTAS.¹

The Bertas inhabit the country to the north of the Dabus river² as well as a small tract to the south, within the Abyssinian border. They are true negroes, of a dark complexion, with markedly prognathous crania, thick protruding lips and broad flat noses. Most of them are under the average stature, have long arms and flat and spur-heeled feet. They are far from being a pure race, and there is no doubt a good deal of Arab strain among them.

Their chief, Abd ur Rahman, is an Arab, and resides at a village called Beni Shongul by previous visitors, but not known by this name in the country.

Our visit was ill-timed, for twice recently had the country been raided by the Abyssinians, once by Ras Makunen and again by Dejjä Demisi. The tokuls had been levelled, the crops destroyed by fire, and the live stock killed or driven off. Most of the inhabitants who had escaped death or capture had fled to remote parts of the country. Hence we were unable to obtain food, and obliged to lay in a stock before we entered the country.

¹ Berta is the singular, Bertat the plural. Shangalla is an Abyssinian designation applied to the Bertat and all other negro tribes.—ED.

² Dabus seems to be the Galla name of this river. The Bertat call it *Yabus*, the Gamila *Dale*, and others *Dadhesa*, etc.—ED.

We saw, however, enough of the people to convince us that the Bertas are lazy, careless, ignorant, stupid, impudent, fierce and vicious. By the Arab rulers we were treated well.

The dress of these negroes is of the simplest, consisting for the most part, and in the case of females as well as males, of a piece of leather or skin attached to a hip-belt and passed between the legs. Many, however, may be seen to wear the loose trousers, shirt and tope common in the Sudan.

Both sexes wear their hair short or shave the head, and they are much given to gashing their faces and arms, and also the trunk and occasionally even the legs. These gashes are made with a knife, when young, and the scars resulting from this operation stand out above the surface, salt and ashes having been rubbed into the wounds. Usually there are three long gashes in the face, running obliquely downwards and outwards across the cheeks, as also a number of smaller gashes, vertical and slightly curved, on a level with the eyes, towards the ears.

The marks on the arms consist of numerous small wedge-shaped gashes, arranged in rows, or broad arrow-heads, with transverse lines separating the rows, or zigzags, diagonal crosses and other fanciful designs. Gashes of the same kind cover the trunk and the lower extremities, and sometimes they cover nearly the whole body. Women even decorate their breasts with these fanciful designs. Occasionally a patch of small round spots, resembling vaccination or small-pox marks, covers the shoulders and other parts of the body.

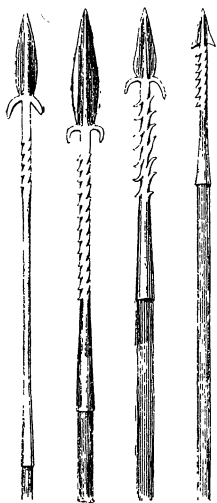


FIG. 1.—BERTA SPEARS.

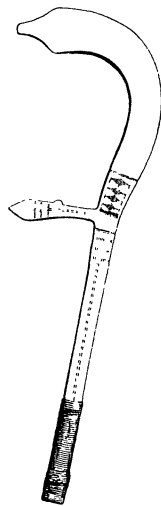


FIG. 2.—KULBEDAH.

The weapons of these people consist of a spear, sword, throwing stick and dagger. The spear has a long slender iron head, which ends in a comparatively small barbed arrow-headed point, the iron below which is jagged in a regular

pattern all round and as far as the socket by which it is attached to a bamboo shaft. This shaft ends in a ferrule with a chisel-shaped iron point. A spiral iron ring is attached one-third up the shaft, probably with the object of balancing the spear.

Many are also armed with the kulbedah, which resembles a curved double-edged sword with a spur on the inner side of the curve not far from the handle. This is an ugly and dangerous weapon, which is used as a sword and is also said to be thrown. A variety of this weapon, S-shaped, with a second spur, is met with occasionally. The straight iron handle of these swords is padded with leather, and often covered with crocodile or lizard skin.

The throwing stick or club is the weapon seen most frequently. It is curved and flat, and resembles a boomerang. It is made out of wood (sometimes of the root-end of a bamboo), and the patterns vary considerably. The men are very expert in its use and are able to knock down a bird in the water, fifty yards away or more. It does not, however, return to the thrower like the boomerang.

The tokuls are circular and resemble those of the Abyssinians and Gallas, except that the upper ends of the rafter sticks protrude about a foot through the thatch all round the centre pole. The floor is generally formed of a platform supported upon short poles and covered by the projecting roof. The walls are plastered with hard mud resembling mortar. In cases where the tokul does not



FIG. 3.—TOKUL.

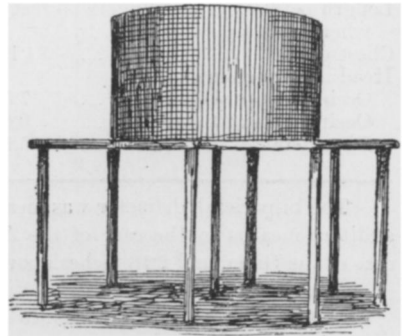


FIG. 4.—GRANARY.

stand upon a platform, the threshold of the door is raised a foot or 18 inches to prevent the hut being flooded during the rains.

The granaries, likewise, are raised upon a platform some 5 or 6 feet above the ground. They resemble cylindrical baskets.

We came past many fields enclosed within thorn hedges, but the only crops we noticed were dhurra and cabbages, all the rest having been destroyed.

They grind their corn on a disc-shaped stone (granite) about 18 inches or 2 feet in diameter, and slightly hollowed out upon the surface. The corn is ground or crushed with a smaller stone which is rubbed up and down, or round and round like a pestle in a mortar.

Large heaps of the empty shells of a big land mollusc were seen outside the tokuls. These had evidently been made use of as food, perhaps in consequence of the scarcity of more palatable food caused by the war.

Gold is washed in the Bertat country. The wooden trays used for the purpose are the same as those used by the Gallas, as are also the balances and quills.

The salt-blocks imported from Abyssinia constitute the favourite currency, more so than Maria Theresa dollars and Egyptian coins.

Donkeys are the only beasts used as pack animals and for riding, for owing to the Serut fly, ponies cannot be kept. The caravans of the merchants, however, are for the most part made up of human beasts of burden, male and female slaves being more numerous here, and cheaper than animals.

The following is the mean of a number of anthropological measurements which I was able to take :—

	Abyssinians.	Gallas.		Bertat.
	Males.	Males.	Females.	Males.
Age	26·7 years	27 years.	41·2 years.	27 years.
Stature	5 feet 5·4 ins.	5 feet 6·6 ins.	5 feet 3·3 ins.	5 feet 5·8 ins.
Length of upper extremity	22·3 ins.	22·33 ins.	21·3 ins.	23·08 ins.
Length between tips of fingers when arms are extended.	5 feet 8·65 ins.	—	—	5 feet 10·7 ins.
Chest girth	34·125 ins.	—	—	33·93 ins.
Head measurements :—				
Occipito-frontal	7·5 ins.	7·49 ins.	—	7·42 ins.
Occipito-mental	9·6 „	9·60 „	—	9·57 „
Bi-parietal	5·9 „	5·70 „	—	5·54 „

The bi-parietal diameter was measured 2 inches above and 0·77 inch behind the external auditory meatus in the case of the Abyssinians ; 1·9 inches above and 0·39 inch behind in the case of the Galla, and 2·18 inches above and 0·77 inch behind in the case of the Bertat.

As a result, I found that the Galla are the tallest; the Bertas exceed in length of arm and fathom stretch; the Abyssinians in girth of chest; the occipito-frontal diameter is greatest among the Abyssinians; the occipito-mental among the Galla; and the bi-parietal among the Abyssinians.

DISCUSSION.

MR. RAVENSTEIN said the expedition of which the author was a member had performed a most interesting journey, the results of which were most acceptable to geographers and anthropologists. Starting from Zeila, it had successfully traversed the countries of Mohammedan Somal and Gallas, of Christian Abyssinians and heathen Galla and Berta, and had ultimately come down the Blue Nile to Khartum. All these, however, were more or less border-districts, where neighbouring tribes had influenced each other, and primitive or primæval conditions could hardly be studied with advantage. He had long thought

that a well-formed expedition despatched into the heart of Galla-Land, might yield results of the very highest interest. We had learnt no doubt a great deal about the Gallas, but nearly all that information had come to us through missionaries, such as Leon des Avanchers, Massaja or Krapf, who had obtained their information in frontier lands, and whose preconceived notions hardly fitted them to present unbiassed reports on a heathen people. The information to be found in Tutschek's grammar showed these Galla to be simple atheists, whilst the curious bits of information collected by his friend, the Rev. Thomas Wakefield, made me anxious to obtain a fuller and a more precise knowledge of their circumstances. If this Institute were richer, or if one of its wealthy Fellows could be induced to come forward, he thought the money could not be spent better than by despatching an expedition into the country of the Bworani Galls, who seemed, as yet, not to have been contaminated by contact with Christians or Mohammedans. Such an expedition might now safely start from Kismayu, the tribes around which had been won over since the occupation of the coast by England. It would, of course, have to include several members, all of them well prepared for the task they undertook, and some of its members would have to be prepared to stay two or more years in the country, so that they might thoroughly learn the language and win the confidence of the people. An expedition like this, he thought, would furnish scientific results of the highest value, and in every department of science.