

7. *o'* for pronominal Indirect Objects showing the congruency with *O'* and belonging to the verbal complex;
8. *A* (*adverbium*) stands for Adverbial Modifiers:
- A*₁ for Adverbial Modifier being a Noun,
 - A*₂ „ „ „ „ a Noun with a Preposition,
 - A*₃ „ „ „ „ a Noun with the locative suffix,
 - A*₄ „ „ „ „ an Adverb;
 - A*_l „ „ „ „ of place (*l* = *loci*),
 - A*_t „ „ „ „ of time (*t* = *temporis*),
 - A*_m „ „ „ „ of manner (*m* = *modi*),
 - A*_i „ „ „ „ of instrument (*i* = *instrumenti*);
9. *D* (*determinans*) stands for Attributes:
- D*₁ for the Adjective Attribute,
 - D*₂ for the Genitival Attribute:
 - D*_{2q} for the qualitative Genitival Attribute (*q* = *qualitatis*),
 - D*_{2p} for the possessive Genitival Attribute (*p* = *possessoris*),
 - D*₃ for the Nominal Attribute,
 - D*₄ „ „ Pronominal Attribute,
 - D*₅ „ „ Numeral Attribute,
 - D*₆ „ „ Prepositional Attribute.

ANDRZEJ ZABORSKI

NOTES ON THE MEDIEVAL HISTORY OF THE BEJA TRIBES

The period of the Middle Ages is of special importance for the history of the nomadic Beja tribes inhabiting the Red Sea Hinterland of Upper Egypt, Sudan and Erythrea. It is in the Middle Ages and more accurately since the Arab conquest of Egypt that the Beja appear to us in the full light of history — we must insist on the fact that the identification of Beja with Meju¹ as well as with the Blemyes² cannot by yet considered as fairly established since no strictly scientific study of this problem has been done so far. The Aksumitic inscriptions are the oldest historical sources that refer doubtlessly to Beja but in spite of their importance it must be admitted that the information about Beja contained in these inscriptions is rather scanty and dealing with a comparatively short period. A number of valuable and rather exhaustive information about Beja was delivered for the first time by the medieval Arab travellers and writers.

¹ This people is mentioned in the Egyptian records. See T. Säv-Söderbergh, *Ägypten und Nubien*, Lund 1941, p. 18, 233.

² For the best account of the history of the Blemyes see an article by K. Sethe in Paulys *Real-Encyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, V Band, Stuttgart 1897, p. 566, and the first chapters of U. Monneret de Villard's *Storia della Nubia cristiana*, Roma 1938. Cf. an article on Ethiopia by H. Letronne in *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie*, t. V., 1ère partie, Paris 1922. Several scholars identified the Blemyes with al-Biliyyūn mentioned by al-Idrisī in the twelfth century A. D. but this identification cannot be accepted. An interesting etymology of this name has been proposed by L. Reisch, *Wörterbuch der Bedauye-Sprache*, Wien 1895, p. 47, who derived it from the word *bālami* which means „an inhabitant of the desert; a Bedouin“.

It should be stressed as well that there are no historical sources speaking about the immigration of the Arabs on the territories possessed by the Beja nor about any other contacts between these peoples before the conquest of Egypt by the Arabs. The legends referring to such contacts as well as the fictitious genealogies linking various Beja tribes with Arab pre-Islamic immigrants or with the famous Islamic personalities lack any historical evidence being the result of the islamisation of the Beja and of the arabisation of a part of them. Sometimes the folk etymology could be helpful in creating such legends and genealogies which had to higher the prestige of the newly islamized or even arabised Beja as it is the case with some of the Hadārab who consider themselves the descendants of pre-Islamic Arab newcomers from Ḥaḍramawt³.

The first information about the contacts of Arabs with the Beja that came down to us was delivered by Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam and it refers to the expedition led against Nubia by 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ in 31/651—2. The expedition encountered the Beja on its way back to Egypt but 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd left them in peace regarding them as insignificant⁴. It is obvious that the Arabs did not know yet about the gold and emeralds mines situated in the Beja land and they were not interested in the

³ The Hadārab living on Sawākin island asserted that their ancestors had come from Ḥaḍramawt—see J. Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia*, London 1819, p. 433—434. This folk-etymology has been accepted by A. Paul in his *History of the Beja tribes of the Sudan* and in his article *The Hadāreb*, SNR, vol. 40, 1959, p. 75—78. Reinisch, *op. cit.*, p. 112, explains the meaning of the word *Hedāri*, *hedāre*, *hadāre* as follows: 1. 'An-, Einwohner, angesidelter, sesshafter Mann', *anī ō-Sōk-i hedāribu* 'ich bin in Suakin ansässig'. 3. Ein Tribus des Bedauevolkes, in den Reisebeschreibungen als Hadarab (mit der Objectsendung) vorkommend. Cf. the etymology proposed by Monneret de Villard, *op. cit.*, p. 326. A. Pollera, *Le popolazioni indigene dell'Eritrea*, Bologna, 1935, p. 253, describes the tribe of Afar called Hedarem or Hadermò and he says: „Questa tribù, come lo dice il nome, proviene dallo Hadramaut“!

⁴ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Kitāb, Futūḥ al-Miṣr*, ed. by C. C. Torrey, New Haven 1922, p. 189. Cf. al-Maqrizī, *El mawā'iz wa l-i'tibār fī dīkr al-khitat wa l-ā'tār*, éd. par G. Wiet, vol. 3, Le Caire, 1927, p. 272.

subordination of the local tribes. Upon the evidence of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's text we must consider the statement of Ibn Ḥawqal that the majority of Beja was forced by Ibn Sa'd to accept Islam⁵ as a false one.

For nearly 200 following years the contacts between the Arabs and the Beja were limited to the frontier disputes caused by the Beja raids organised against the settled population of Egypt but the usual exchange of produces between the Beja nomads and Egyptian agriculturalists was peacefully conducted as well. The content of the two treaties imposed by Arab punitive expeditions sent in the reign of caliph al-Ḥiṣām (724—743)⁶ and in 831 in the reign of al-Ma'mūn⁷ throws some light on the history of this period. The mines were still unknown or completely inaccessible to the Arabs as they were not mentioned at all in both treaties. The excellent camels bred by the Beja were the only thing possessed by them that had some value for the Arabs⁸. The religion and culture of Islam gradually exercised some influence upon the Beja and probably at the beginning of ninth century a part of them, i. e. the groups living in the neighbourhood of the Muslims, accepted Islam as it results from the treaty concluded in 831 which had to render access to the Beja possible for the collectors of *zakāt* tax. At the same time this treaty had to guarantee that the mosques built in Ṣ.n.ja (صنجة)⁹ and in H.j.r (هجر)¹⁰ in the

⁵ Ibn Ḥawqal, *Opus geographicum*, ed. J. H. Kramers, t. I, Lugduni Batavorum 1938, p. 50—51.

⁶ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *oh. cit.*, p. 189.

⁷ Al-Maqrizī, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 273—275.

⁸ Accordingly with the first treaty the Beja had to supply the Arabs with 300 young camels every year and accordingly with the second treaty the yearly tribute consisted of 100 camels or 300 dinars payed in golden dust.

⁹ Cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Annales*, cum aliis ed. M. J. de Goeje, III series, Lugduni Batavorum 1901, p. 1432. Monneret de Villard, *op. cit.*, p. 102, tries to identify it with modern Sinkat.

¹⁰ Cf. al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'riḥ*, ed. T. Houtsma, t. I, Lugduni Batavorum 1883, p. 218; the same author's *Kitāb al-buldān*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, Lugduni Batavorum 1892, p. 336; J. Marquart, *Die Benin-Sammlung*, Leiden 1913, p. CCCXIII; C. Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia*, t. I, Bergamo 1928, p. 271; O. G. S. Crawford, *The Fung Kingdom of Sennar*, Gloucester, 1951, p. 104—106. The identification of this

Beja land were not destroyed — it proves that only some of the Beja accepted the new religion. At the end of eighth century and at the beginning of ninth the territories east of the Nile gained some importance due to the trade- and pilgrims-routes which crossed them — the treaty of 831 protected the merchants and pilgrims ¹¹.

In 846 a new punitive expedition was sent which had serious consequences for the development of relations between the Beja and the Arabs in the future. According to Ibn Hawqal ¹², the Arabs saw the gold mines in Wādī al-'Allāqī ¹³ and found the traces of their exploitation by the Byzantines ¹⁴. The rediscovery of the old gold mines was the direct reason for the immigration of the Arab tribes which were flowing into Upper Egypt in search of pasturages and trying to make themselves independent of the official administration. The Arabs from Hījāz appeared in Wādī al-'Allāqī first but up to 852 the Arabs from al-Yamāma, mainly Rabi'a and Muḍar established their control ¹⁵. The expansion of the Arabs was stopped by the Beja for a short time but the expedition sent by caliph al-Mutawakkil in 855 — the biggest and the best organised one, opened the way for the Arabs ¹⁶. Rabi'a, Muḍar and the Arabs from Yemen who had been driven by the Beja from the mines took part in this expedition ¹⁷ and immediately after the victory they renewed their efforts to establish their control over the gold mines and their hegemony over the newly

very common place-name seems to be impossible. As it has been suggested by Marquart, this name is probably connected with the Ethiopian word „hagar“ which means „a town“ and it is not to be identified with the Arabic word for a stone (hajar — حجر) as it has been done by Crawford.

¹¹ Cf. Ibn Hawqal, *op. cit.*, t. I, p. 51—52.

¹² Ibn Hawqal, *op. cit.*, t. I, p. 53.

¹³ See an article by G. Wiet in EI, new edition, t. I, and cf. also Sāve-Söderbergh, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

¹⁴ In the text of Ibn-Hawqal — *al-Rūm* which may also signify the Romans. Cf. al-Maqrizī, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 271.

¹⁵ Ibn Hawqal, *op. cit.*, t. I, p. 53.

¹⁶ The best narrative of this expedition was recorded by al-Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, 3 series, p. 1428—1433.

¹⁷ Ibn Hawqal, *op. cit.*, t. I, p. 53. Cf. al-Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, 3 series, p. 1431.

penetrated territories. Since 859 when al-Qummī — the leader of the expedition of 855 who had been nominated a supervisor of the Beja was killed in result of a conflict with Rabi'a chief, Wādī al-'Allāqī and its surroundings became virtually independent territory whose control was a matter of dispute between the rival Arab tribes and clans ¹⁸. Al-Ya'qūbī's description of the mines ¹⁹ refers evidently to these times — accordingly to him, except Rabi'a and Muḍar who constituted the majority of the Arabs there were also Balī ²⁰, Juhayna and Banū Sulaym. Rabi'a gained and kept their hegemony not only because of their numeral superiority over the other Arab groups but the support given to them by Beja cannot be overlooked. Several writers speak about the intermarriage of Rabi'a with the Beja ²¹ and consequently we must consider the second half of ninth century as the beginning of arabisation of some of them. The direct and frequent contacts with the Arabs stimulated only the process of islamisation of Beja. Nevertheless up to the middle of tenth century only the tribal group of Hadārab accepted Islam as it is made clear by al-Mas'ūdī ²² and confirmed by al-Uswānī ²³ who adds that Hadārab

¹⁸ Ibn Hawqal, *op. cit.*, t. I, p. 54.

¹⁹ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Kitāb al-buldān*, p. 334—335.

²⁰ Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 110—112, identified Ballī with Balaw who, accordingly with him, „were a ruling caste of Arabian origin who entered the Sudan probably in the 14th century and imposed their rule on the indigenous people, presumably of mixed Beja and Tigre tribes“. His ideas are based on the vague resemblance of the names whose identity seems to be absolutely improbable both from the historical and the philological point of view. Cf. Reinisch, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

²¹ Ibn Sulaym al-Uswānī quoted by al-Maqrizī, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 277 and 272. This author speaks about the intermarriage already before the expedition of al-Qummī but this is obviously an inconsequence of the composition only. See also Ibn Hawqal, *op. cit.*, t. I, p. 55 and the map opposite p. 38. Al-Maqrizī, *Kitāb al-Muqaffā* (the fragment translated by E. Quatremère, *Mémoires géographiques et historiques sur l'Égypte*, vol. 2, Paris 1811, p. 78. F. Wüstenfeld, *El-Maqrizis Abhandlung über die in Aegypten eingewanderten arabischen Stämme*, Abgedruckt von Göttinger Studien 1847, p. 27, 68.

²² Al-Mas'ūdī, *Les prairies d'or*, texte et trad. par C. Barbier de Meynard et Pavet de Courteille, t. 3, Paris 1861, p. 34.

²³ Quoted by al-Maqrizī, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 272, 277, 278.

still retained some pagan beliefs. Ibn Hawqal — a contemporary of the former writers, calls the Beja „Muslims by name only“ as they accepted merely confession of faith and substituted some pagan beliefs by Islamic ones ²⁴.

The information about Beja and their country in 11th—16th c. period is rather scarce and limited mainly to the history of 'Aydāb ²⁵, Sawākin ²⁶ and gold mines ²⁷ i. e. to the places which played a rather important part in the life of Islam in North Eastern Africa. The arabisation of a part of Ḥadārab ²⁸ and most probably of the other Beja tribes was going on constantly during that period. The infiltration of Arab tribes and their partial assimilation to Beja was not tantamount to the domination of the Arabs in the Red Sea Hinterland — the Beja kept their control

²⁴ Ibn Hawqal, *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 50—51, 56.

²⁵ See an article on the history of 'Aydāb by H. A. R. Gibb in *EL*, new edition, t. 1. The development of this port in the middle of ninth century was due to the reopening of the gold mines by the Arabs.

²⁶ Ibn Hawqal, *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 42 says that Sawākin is inhabited by the Persian merchants and by the Arabs of Rabi'a tribe — this information refers to the middle of tenth century most probably. Cf. Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, hrsg. von F. Wüstenfeld, Leipzig 1866—1873, t. 3, p. 182. In the thirteenth century Ibn Sa'īd (see quotations by Abū'l-Fidā', *Géographie*, éd. par Reinaud et Mac Guckin de Slane, Paris 1840, t. 1, p. 189) says that Sawākin is in the hands of the chief of the Beja who are Muslims — this chief imposes taxes on merchants. See also Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *The Travels*, transl. by H. Gibb, vol. 2, Cambridge 1961, p. 363. J. F. E. Bloss, *The Story of Suakin*, Part I, SNR, Vol. 19, 1936, p. 282, made efforts to prove that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa did not visit Sawākin really but there is no reason for any doubts about the veracity of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa in this case.

²⁷ The gold mines were abandoned at the beginning of fourteenth century — see 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Fayyūmī, *Natr al-jumān* (quoted by G. Wiet in his commentary to *Hitat of al-Maqrizī*, vol. 2, p. 278, n. 2). The emeralds mines were abandoned in 1358 — see al-Maqrizī, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 111.

²⁸ Al-Qalqaṣandī, *Subḥ al-A'sā*, Cairo, 1913—1919, t. 4, p. 493, who lived since 1355 to 1418, had an anonymous informant on Sawākin. Accordingly to him, the island was inhabited by merchants and was governed by a sultan of the Arabs called al-Ḥadāriba — this sultan had his agency in Cairo. It is obvious that about the beginning of fifteenth century the Ḥadārab living on Sawākin were arabised.

over 'Aydāb ²⁹ at the same time when Arab nomads were active on the routes linking 'Aydāb with the towns of Upper Egypt ³⁰.

The tribal and social organisation of Beja as well as some of their customs are described comparatively well by the medieval Arab writers. The identification of a number of tribal names which are quoted in Arabic sources remains one of the most interesting tasks for the historian. It seems however, that trying to identify different tribal names we cannot limit our inquiry to the Beja only — the history and the present situation of other peoples of Eastern Sudan and Erythrea must be taken into consideration.

The oldest Arabic texts relating to these peoples and territories — *Ta'rīḥ* and *Kitāb al-buldān* of al-Ya'qūbī were studied and commented by such eminent scholars like Marquart, Conti Rossini, Monneret de Villard and Crawford. Thanks to their efforts some tribal and place names were identified but the text of *Ta'rīḥ* relating to the peoples of North Eastern Africa was not explained as a whole. Of course the identification of all the names

²⁹ Nāsir-i Ḥusraw, *Sefer Nāmek*, éd. par. C. Schefer, Paris 1881, p. 177, says that 'Aydāb was dependent on Egypt in the middle of eleventh century. His contemporary — al-Bakrī says that 'Aydāb was inhabited by Banū Yūnus (in the fragment published by F. Wüstenfeld, *Die Statthalter von Ägypten zur Zeit der Chalifen*, „Abhandl. der Königl. Gesellschaft der Wiss. zu Göttingen“, 20 Band, 1875, p. 5, note, بنو يونس and in Kemal Youssouf, *Monumenta Cartographica Africae et Aegypti*, t. 3, fasc. 3, p. 730, verso, بنو يونس which I amend to بنو يونس) — some people considered them to the Arabs and other regarded them as the Beja. This proves that this Arab sub-tribe of Rabi'a was intermingled with Beja then. The later writers speak about the control of 'Aydāb by the Beja — see al-Idrīsī, *Description de l'Afrique et de l'Espagne*, éd. par R. Dozy et M. J. de Goeje, Leyde 1866, p. 27; Quatremère, *op. cit.*, t. 2, p. 169; Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 2d. ed. revised by M. J. de Goeje, Leyde 1907, p. 64; Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 69.

³⁰ Ibn Jubayr, *op. cit.*, p. 63. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 68. Quatremère, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 170—172. Al-Nuwayrī (see the fragment published by Muṣṭafā Muḥammad Muṣ'ad, *al-Islām wa al-Nūba fī al-'uṣūr al-wuṣṭā*, 1960, p. 274—278) describes an expedition against the Bedouins of the desert of 'Aydāb in 1322 and he mentions also the Beja tribe Halenga هالكة for the first time.

mentioned there is extremely difficult, if possible at all because we lack almost completely the analogical information by other writers and our knowledge of this territory and of the peoples living there is far from being satisfactory. Although I cannot identify the other names, nevertheless it seems that we must reconsider our approach to the passage of *Ta'riḥ* which contains the description of „five Beja kingdoms“³¹. Let us reexamine it once again. Immediately after the chapter „Kingdoms of al-Habaša and al-Sūdān“ the chapter „Kingdoms of Beja“ follows where al-Ya'qūbī gives some details about the six „kingdoms“. In his opinion five of these „kingdoms“ belonged to the Beja. The first was „the kingdom“ of a people called N.q.y.s (نقيس)³² which stretched itself from Aswān to Baraka³³ — its „capital“ was called H.j.r³⁴. The inhabitants of this „kingdom“ were organised into following tribes (*butūn*): Ḥadārab (الحدارب)³⁵, *ḥab*³⁶, al-'mā'r (العمار)³⁷, *ḥab*³⁸, M.nāsa (مناسه)³⁹, *ḥab*⁴⁰, *ḥab*⁴¹, *ḥab*⁴².

³¹ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'riḥ*, t. 1, p. 217.

³² Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 103—104, identified Naqīs with Umm Nagi who constitute one of the groups of Bišarin. He based his identification on the very remote resemblance of the names and this makes it valueless from the scientific point of view.

³³ Identified by Marquart, *op. cit.*, p. CCCXI. Cf. W. Munzinger, *Ostafrikanische Studien*, Basel, 1883, p. 277, 399.

³⁴ Cf. note 10.

³⁵ In the text of al-Ya'qūbī — الحدارات which is to be amended to الحدارب.

³⁶ The letters lack diacritical signs.

³⁷ J. S. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, London 1952, p. 49, has proposed to identify this name with modern Amar'ar.

³⁸ The letters lack diacritical signs.

³⁹ Trimingham, *op. cit.*, p. 49, has proposed an identification with Mānsa'. Manāsa (?) of al-Ya'qūbī may be intended for a plural form but this does not solve the problem of identification. Cf. E. Littmann, M. Höfner, *Wörterbuch der Tigre Sprache*, Wiesbaden, 1956—1962, p. 688.

⁴⁰ The letters lack diacritical signs.

⁴¹ The letters lack diacritical signs. The first two letters may be read, perhaps, as 'Az or 'Ad which means „a tribe, family, people“ in Tigre (Cf. Littmann, Höfner, *op. cit.*, p. 482, 380). This word is a common element in the names of some southern Beja and Tigre Tribes.

al-Zanāfij (الزنانج)⁴². The gold mines exploited by the Muslims were situated in this „kingdom“. There is no doubt that this description refers to Beja. There are, however, grave doubts about the identity of the other „kingdoms“ with the Beja. Already Marquart identified the third „kingdom“ — Bazīn with the peoples known today also as Baria and Kunama⁴³. Also Ibn Sulaym al-Uswānī⁴⁴ and Ibn Hawqal⁴⁵ wrote about Baria and Kunama and it is to be noted that both of them inserted the information about these peoples into the description of the Beja who are of quite different origine and culture. Crawford, following Marquart, added: „Yacubi's inclusion of them (Baria, Kunama) amongst the Beja shows that for him the word „Beja“ had no precise connotation, and was used indiscriminately of all the „infidels“ in this part of the world“⁴⁶. Crawford did not realise the fact that his observation could be applied as well to the other „kingdoms“. Their identification with the Beja seems to be based, in fact, on misunderstanding. Ibn Hawqal describes T.f.l.y.n⁴⁷ which is beyond any doubt to be identified with B.q.l.y.n — the second „kingdom“ of al-Ya'qūbī, without any reference to Beja and we may consider it, therefore, as different from them. Moreover al-Ya'qūbī says that the peoples of B.q.l.y.n/T.f.l.y.n as well as the inhabitants of the fourth „kingdom“ — J.r.y.n⁴⁸ had a habit of plucking out the front teeth — this habit which is common mainly among the Nilotic peoples seems to be completely unknown

⁴² Perhaps we should read Az Zanāfij — cf. note 41, which could be misinterpreted by the Arabs who considered the first part of this name as the definite article.

⁴³ Marquart, *op. cit.*, p. CCCXV. Cf. Littmann, Höfner, *op. cit.*, p. 702.

⁴⁴ Al-Maqrizī, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 271.

⁴⁵ Ibn Hawqal, *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 55, 57.

⁴⁶ Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

⁴⁷ Ibn Hawqal, *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 57. Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 106, tried to identify it with Baqla but this identification cannot be accepted. Kramers, *L'Erythrée au Xe siècle*. „Analecta Orientalia“, vol. 1, Leiden 1954, p. 162—163, proposed an identification with Bilin but this does not seem to be very probable.

⁴⁸ Cf. Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 107; Conti Rossini, *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 275.

among the Beja⁴⁹. It is possible that the fifth „kingdom“ — Q. ṭ.ʿa is to be placed south of Bādī i. e. beyond the territory inhabited by the Beja. We must not forget that the sixth „kingdom“ described by al-Yaʿqūbī is to be identified with the Ethiopian state⁵⁰ and this fact must have been quite clear to this historian. Our interpretation of the list of „six kingdoms“ must be, therefore, completely changed — we must consider these „kingdoms“ not as the tribes of Beja nor as the geographical regions⁵¹ but as different peoples described in order of succession of the geographical position of their territories.

The mistake committed by al-Yaʿqūbī or by his informants may be explained in the following way: originally he knew from the old and very popular Biblical tradition the peoples who were considered to be descendants of the Biblical Ham — the progenitor of black peoples, the eastern branch of which comprised the Nubians, Beja, al-Habaša and al-Zanj⁵². Thus the other peoples of North Eastern Africa known to al-Yaʿqūbī from some travellers or from some written records had to be classified within one of the groups mentioned above. Since the first of these peoples were the Beja, our historian considered the other four unknown neighbouring peoples as Beja too, thus using the word „Beja“ in the same way as the names of Nubians, al-Habaša and al-Zinj were applied to indicate different peoples and groups which seemed to be uniform for many not very well informed medieval writers. Perhaps it is of some significance that the composition of the chapter „Kingdoms of Beja“ is illogical as this chapter contains also a description of the peoples of East Africa and of West Sudan. It is not impossible that the mistake was made by the copyist of *Taʿrīḥ*.

The description of Beja contained in *Kitāb al-buldān*⁵³ is not as detailed as the former one and it refers to the true Beja only.

⁴⁹ Cf. Conti Rossini, *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 269; A. Butt, *The Nilotes of the Sudan and Uganda*, London 1964, p. 28; V. Grottanelli, C. Massari, *I Baria, I Cunama e i Beni Amer*, Roma 1943. Al-Yaʿqūbī says nothing about this habit among Bazīn although it is popular among this people now.

⁵⁰ Cf. an article by A. J. Wensinck in EI (first edition) t. 3.

⁵¹ Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁵² Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʿrīḥ*, t. 1, p. 216—217.

⁵³ Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Kitāb al-buldān*, p. 271—129.

This would confirm our hypothesis concerning the list of „kingdoms“ of *Taʿrīḥ* but *Kitāb al-buldān* is somewhat contradictory in comparison with *Taʿrīḥ* in this respect. Al-Yaʿqūbī mentioned two groups of Beja there — the Ḥadārab with الكدسي⁵⁴ and al-Zanāfij. The residence of the chief of Ḥadārab was in H. j. r which was also a trade centre visited by Muslim merchants. Their territory was situated 25 marḥalas from al-ʿAllāqī. So far the text of *Kitāb al-buldān* confirms *Taʿrīḥ* only. There is one serious difference — the territory of al-Zanāfij is said to be also 25 marḥalas distant from al-ʿAllāqī but B.q.l.y.n⁵⁵ is intended for the town of their chief. We cannot decide if it is but a mistake or if the situation really changed since the time when *Taʿrīḥ* had been composed.

The best description of North Eastern Africa in medieval literature is certainly the one written by Ibn Hawqal who gives also a rather lengthy list of the southern Beja tribes⁵⁶. It cannot be excluded, however, that this author also considered some other, different but sometimes intermingled peoples to be Beja.

Accordingly to Ibn Hawqal, in the region of Baraka the tribes (*buṭūn*) of K.d.b.m (كدبم)⁵⁷ known as ʿjāt (عجات)⁵⁸ lived — they were classified by this author as Beja. In the direction of the sea they adjoined the Ḥāsa (الخاسا)⁵⁹ who were composed of numerous tribes (*buṭūn*) living in the plains as well as in the mountains. In the northern part of Baraka valley there was another numerous tribe (*qabīla*) called B.y.wātika (بيواتيكة)⁶⁰. Near

⁵⁴ De Goeje considered this name which lacks diacritical signs to be identical with كور mentioned in *Taʿrīḥ*, t. 1, p. 218. This seems to be quite possible.

⁵⁵ Cf. note 47.

⁵⁶ Ibn Hawqal, *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 55—56.

⁵⁷ Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 104, has proposed to identify it with الكدسي.

⁵⁸ Kramers, *op. cit.*, p. 160, has identified it with Agau but his identification is based on the vague resemblance of the names only. Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 104, identified it with حجاب mentioned by al-Yaʿqūbī.

⁵⁹ In the text of Ibn Hawqal — الجاسا.

⁶⁰ „Tika“ (singular „tak“) means „men“. See Reinisch, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

by Bādī' the tribes (*buṭūn*) of Q.ʿ.ṣa (قصة) ⁶¹ were living — they were the biggest, the richest and the most powerful of the Beja tribes in the interior. Further there were al-Māt.y.n (الماتين) who adjoined Duh.rā (دُهرَا), next Sabderat (سبدرات) ⁶², G.r.k.y (غرکای) ⁶³ and Duḥ.n.t (دُحنت) whose territory stretched as far as the mountains called M.s.mār (مسار). In the vicinity of Sawākin there were tribes (*buṭūn*) of Rigbat (رقات) ⁶⁴ and H.n.d.y.ba (حنديا) ⁶⁵ which were subject to Hadārab. To the latter belonged the following tribes (*buṭūn*): Arteiga (المرتكة) ⁶⁶, al-S.w.t.bādāwa (السوتبادوا) ⁶⁷, al-H.w.t.ma (الحومة), Hadandīwa (الهندويا) ⁶⁸, al-N.j.rendāwa (النجرندوا) ⁶⁹ and al-J.n.y.tika (الجنيتكة) ⁷⁰. Al-Wāh.tika (الوختكة) ⁷¹ and Ger'ib

⁶¹ Cf. p. 285—286.

⁶² In the text of Ibn Hawqal — ستراب. Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 107, says: „The Sitrab are the inhabitants of the neighbourhood of the jebel and khor called Sitarab on the modern maps, between 20 and 30 miles WNW of Tokar“. From the point of view of paleography both variants of this name are possible.

⁶³ The reading Gurhābā or Gurhābab is possible (غرحابي i غرحاب) and this would be the name of one of the Beja tribes which belong to the Hadendowa tribal group (see A. Paul, *History*, p. 138). It could be also read — عركاي (cf. note 41).

⁶⁴ In the text of Ibn Hawqal — رقات.

⁶⁵ Cf. Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

⁶⁶ This name has been already identified by Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 108. Burckhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 434, says that during his visit to Sawākin this island was ruled by five Arteiga clans. Unfortunately he does not give the names of these clans but it is interesting that Ibn Hawqal also mentions 5 tribes except Arteiga which is mentioned as the first one. This coincidence may be, however, quite accidental. Cf. note 60.

⁶⁷ In the text of Ibn Hawqal — السوتباروا. „Dāwa“ means „a tribe“ — see Reinisch, *op. cit.*, p. 21—74.

⁶⁸ In the text of Ibn Hawqal — العكنير. Cf. Reinisch, *op. cit.*, p. 21, *Handbook of African Languages*, Part III, London 1956, p. 121.

⁶⁹ Cf. note 67. In the text of Ibn Hawqal — النجيريوا. „Enda“ means „men, people“. „Endāwa = end-dāwa“ which means „a tribe of people“.

⁷⁰ Cf. note 60.

⁷¹ In the text of Ibn Hawqal — الواخكة. Cf. note 60.

(الجرييب) ⁷² formed together one tribe (*batn*). Each *batn* was divided into nearly 100 sub-divisions (*fahd*) ^{73a}.

Arteiga which have been already mentioned by Ibn Hawqal are at present arabised to some degree ⁷³ but we know that Hadārab intermarried with the Arabs already in the second half of ninth century. We do not know, however, how old is exactly the process of mutual racial and language influence of Beja and of the Semitic peoples of Ethiopia. As to the other Beja tribes that we have identified, Rigbat speak Tigre today, Sabderat speak Tigre and Arabic and Hāsa which belong to Beni Amer group are bilingual as well speaking Tigre and Bedaue ⁷⁴. But what language did they speak and what people they were in the times of Ibn Hawqal? Were they Beja or Tigre or some other people? Were they already intermingled? Hāsa are already mentioned in the Aksumitic inscriptions among the other neighbouring peoples which were defeated by ʿĒzānā ⁷⁵. Scholars are of different opinions as to the origin of Hāsa. Marquart affirmed that they were a semitized people which was originally different from the Beja as well as from the Semites. He assumed also that the „tigreisation“ of Hāsa took place after thirteenth century ⁷⁶. Unfortunately despite his assertions no Arabic nor any other sources tell us anything reliable about the origin of Hāsa. Conti Rossini considered Hāsa to be Beja ⁷⁷. Accordingly to Kramers, Hāsa were a non-Semitic people in ninth century but his presumption is based on the unproved and rather improbable hypothesis

⁷² In the text of Ibn Hawqal — الحريب. This tribe belongs to Hadendowa — see A. Paul, *History*, p. 138.

^{73a} Pollera, *op. cit.*, p. 229, says that Beni Amer were divided into more than 138 fractions not speaking about the very numerous smaller sub-divisions and families.

⁷³ A. Paul, *History*, p. 140—142 considers Arteiga to be the Arabs. The other writers who described Beja in nineteenth and in twentieth century considered them to be the Beja and this is confirmed by Ibn Hawqal.

⁷⁴ *Handbook of African Languages*, Part III, p. 119, 133—134.

⁷⁵ E. Littmann, *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition*, Band IV, Berlin 1913, p. 33.

⁷⁶ Marquart, *op. cit.*, p. CCCXX, CCCXVIII.

⁷⁷ Conti Rossini, *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 271.

that Ḥāsa could not be Semites because the latter were designated as Q.ʿ.ša (قصة) which were identical with Q.t.ʿa of al-Yaʿqūbī⁷⁸. The last conjecture may be true but is still to be proved. It seems, however, that Kramers has overlooked that the Semites of Ethiopia are grouped in *Taʿrīḥ* in „the kingdom of al-Najašī“ although we cannot claim that all the Semites had to be designated by this single name. The identification of Q.ʿ.ša/Q.t.ʿa with Geʿez is rather improbable and the vague resemblance of the names is not enough by itself to establish an identification. The ethnical situation in Erythrea was extremely complicated from ancient times and the mutual contacts of Beja with the Semites of Ethiopia and also probably with some other peoples are much older than the Arab infiltration. It must be borne in mind that the Aksumitic inscriptions speak not only about the victories of ʿĒzānā over the Beja but there is also a reference to the enforced resettlement of some defeated Beja group on the territory of the Ethiopian state⁷⁹. It seems, therefore, almost evident that in the tenth century the southern Beja were partially intermingled with the Tigre. Perhaps the following information delivered by Ibn Ḥawqal is to be interpreted as a proof of it: „They (Beja) speak a language which is common for the (all) Beja... but some of them have a language by which they differ from the others“⁸⁰. Unfortunately it cannot be excluded that Ibn Ḥawqal or his informants considered some other people to be Beja. The most interesting information is delivered also by Leo Africanus who wrote nearly 600 years later: „Ceux-ci (Beja) parle une certaine langue que je crois être mélangée de chaldéen et qui se rapproche beaucoup de celle parlée à Suachin et dans la Haut-Ethiopie, ou se trouve la résidence de Prete Jean“⁸¹. As it is known that the classical Ethiopic language was called Chaldean in the first part of sixteenth century in Europe⁸², perhaps we might assume that the author referred to

⁷⁸ Kramers, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

⁷⁹ Littmann, *op. cit.*, Band IV, p. 10.

⁸⁰ Ibn Ḥawqal, *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 56.

⁸¹ Jean-Léon l'Africain, *Description de l'Afrique*, éd. par A. Epaulard, Paris 1956, vol. II, p. 484.

⁸² I. Kračkovskij, *Vvedeniye v efiopskuyu filologiyu*, Leningrad 1955, p. 49.

Tigre. This would be another proof that in the Middle Ages a part of Beja spoke this Semitic language.

It was generally accepted that Ḥadārab formed one of the northern tribes of Beja living in the neighbourhood of Muslim possessions in Egypt. We know, indeed, that Ḥadārab lived in the vicinity of the Arabs and that they intermarried with them and also that they controlled the gold mines and ʿAydāb. There are also some traces in the toponimics indicating their northern habitation — e. g. Ras al-Hadārab (Ras Elba) in the borderland between Egypt and Sudan⁸³. The Arabic sources give no precise indications that would enable us to reconstruct the limits of the tribal territories of the Beja in the Middle Ages but some writers say that the Ḥadārab were active in the south as well. As it has already been said, Ibn Ḥawqal locates the tribes of Rigbat and Ḥ.n.d.y.ba which acknowledged the sovereignty of Ḥadārab on the territory opposite Sawākin. Al-Qalqašandī speaks about the Ḥadārab on this island as well in fifteenth century. Today Ḥadārab constitute one of the big divisions of Beni Amer⁸⁴ and it is to be noted that among the inhabitants of Erythrea and North Eastern Ethiopia the name „Ḥadārab“ is used to denote Beja in general as well as their language⁸⁵.

Al-Yaʿqūbī mentions Ḥadārab and al-Zanāfij in *Taʿrīḥ* with the other tribes of Beja without saying anything about the relations between them. It would be possible to conclude *ex silentio* that in the middle of ninth century al-Zanāfij were independent of Ḥadārab⁸⁶. In *Kitāb al-buldān* the same author draws distinct division between the two Beja groups — Ḥadārab with الكدسي and al-Zanāfij. This may have, perhaps, something in common with the fact that in *Taʿrīḥ* the Ḥadārab were mentioned at the very beginning and al-Zanāfij as the last of the tribes.

⁸³ Gazetteer No. 69, Sudan. Official Standard Names approved by the United States Board on Geographic Names, Washington 1962, p. 146.

⁸⁴ A. Paul, *History*, p. 138.

⁸⁵ Conti Rossini, *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 272; E. Littmann, *Publications of the Princeton Expedition to Abyssinia*, Leiden 1910—1915, vol. 2, p. 344.

⁸⁶ See L. E. Kubbel, V. V. Matveyev, *Arabskiye Istočniki VII—X vekov*, Moskva—Leningrad 1960, p. 361.

Ibn Sulaym al-Uswānī is the first and the only author to speak about the dependance of al-Zanāfij upon Ḥadārab. He says: „Al-Zanāfij constitute another part of this people. Although they surpass the Ḥadārab in number and although they had the ascendancy over them in the past, nevertheless they obey them to-day, they defend them and they herd their cattle. Every chief of Ḥadārab has some amount of al-Zanāfij who are like the slaves because Ḥadārab inherit them“⁸⁷. This type of social organisation is common in the recent times among Beni Amer, Tigre and some other peoples and the serfs are usually of different origin⁸⁸. It would be an exaggeration if we tried to conclude from the text of al-Uswānī, as Conti Rossini did, that the majority or the all of the Beja stayed first under the sovereignty of al-Zanāfij⁸⁹. Ibn Ḥawqal does not mention al-Zanāfij at all but he says that Rigbat and Ḥ.n.d.y.ba were subject to Ḥadārab. It was suggested that Ḥadārab gained their supremacy thanks to the support given to them by their Arab allies and relatives⁹⁰. It is to be emphasised, however, that the beginning and the origin of this model of social organisation is still controversial — we cannot claim with much probability that it did not exist earlier than the ninth century or even before the Arab infiltration. We know already that Rabī'a came to control Wādī al-'Allāqī to a large extent thanks to the Beja and it seems probable that Rabī'a intermarried with Ḥadārab because this Beja tribe was one of the strongest. Of course it must be admitted that the islamisation and the intermarriage with the Arabs helped the Ḥadārab to keep their social and political position but the part played by the Arabs in the subordination of al-Zanāfij must not be overestimated.

The relations of Beja with the Nubians have not been adequately described by the medieval writers. Al-Mas'ūdī speaks

⁸⁷ Al-Maqrizī, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 272.

⁸⁸ Cf. Munzinger, *op. cit.*, p. 311—317; S. Nadel, *Notes on Beni Amer Society*, SNR, vol. 26, 1945; A. Paul, *Notes on the Beni Amer*, SNR, vol. 31, 1950; K. G. Roden, *Le tribù dei Mensa*, Stockholm 1913, p. 117 ff.

⁸⁹ Conti Rossini, *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 271; *Enciclopedia Italiana*, t. 5, p. 468.

⁹⁰ Kubbel, Matveyev, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

about the Beja raids against the Nubians⁹¹. Al-Uswānī gives us the most interesting information in this respect⁹². Accordingly to him, a group of al-Zanāfij which were classified as a group of Beja too, settled on the territory of the Nubian state of Maqurra but they preserved their language as well as their pastoral way of life not mixing themselves with the Nubians — they had a governor appointed by the king of Nubia. Ibn Ḥawqal also speaks about some Beja who settled among the Nubians in the region of Duk.n (دكن)⁹³. Here we cannot be quite sure that the real Nubians were meant because, as it has already been pointed, the word „Nubian“ could be applied sometimes to denote other „black“ peoples living south of Egypt.

The origin of Islam among the Beja has already been discussed. Besides a few sources which speak about the pagan beliefs of Beja there are also some references to the Christianity among this people⁹⁴. Yāqūt says that the inhabitants of Sawākin were Christian Beja⁹⁵ but this information cannot be dated precisely. The other sources referring to the Christianity among the Beja are also comparatively late. Al-Idrīsī says that the majority of Beja are Christians⁹⁶. Ibn Sa'īd and some other writers who merely quote him say that a part of Beja is Muslim and that some of them are Christians⁹⁷. It seems that Christianity had some influence upon the Beja living in the neighbourhood of the Christian states of Nubia and Ethiopia but we must remember also in this case what a wide meaning the word „Beja“ could have. The information about Christianity among the Beja is too

⁹¹ Al-Mas'ūdī, *op. cit.*, t. 3, p. 32—33.

⁹² Al-Maqrizī, vol. 3, p. 257—258.

⁹³ Ibn Ḥawqal, *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 55. Cf. Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 107. Kramers, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

⁹⁴ The information delivered by al-Maqrizī, *Le livre de la Création et de l'Histoire*, éd. par C. Huart, Paris 1907, t. 4, p. 65, most probably does not refer to the Christianity among the Beja but among some other people.

⁹⁵ Yāqūt, *op. cit.*, t. 3, p. 182.

⁹⁶ Al-Idrīsī, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁹⁷ Abū'l-Fidā, *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 124.

⁹⁸ Cf. J. S. Trimingham, *Islam in the Sudan*, Oxford 1949, p. 58, n. 5.

scanty to permit us say anything more about its real spread and influence exerted by it upon them in the Middle Ages.

Much has been written by different scholars about the matrilineal succession among the Beja in the Middle Ages. Ibn Sulaym al-Uswānī is not the only author that speaks about this custom. It is described already by al-Balāḍurī who says, giving an account of the expedition led by al-Qummī, that after the death of the Beja chief the son of his sister and of another chief became his successor⁹⁹. Al-Uswānī gives a more detailed description. He says: „Their relationships follow the female line. They pass the inheritance to the son of a daughter or of a sister to the exclusion of the true son“¹⁰⁰. We find a reference to this custom in Ibn Ḥawqal's *Geography* too — he says that two main chiefs of Ḥadārab were related to the Arab chiefs — they were their maternal uncles¹⁰¹. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa says that the sultan of the Sawākin island at the time of his coming was the Šarīf Zayd b. Abī Numayy who came into his possession through Beja, because they were his maternal relatives¹⁰². Conti Rossini and Baumann interpreted the passage of al-Uswānī describing this custom as an evidence of a matriarchate among the medieval Beja¹⁰³ but this is not right — it is obvious that this information refers to matrilineal succession only. Murdock thinks that in view of the lack of any evidence of matrilineal descent, or of elements commonly associated therewith, it seems preferable to ascribe these Beja customs to prolonged contact with, and borrowing from, the Nubian peoples to the west¹⁰⁴. It can hardly be a historian's task to decide such problems but it is to be pointed that we have almost no information about the other peoples speaking Cushitic

⁹⁹ Al-Balāḍurī, *Liber expugnationis regionum*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, Lugduni Batavorum 1886, p. 238. The other sources describing the expedition of al Qummī do not say that „the king“ of the Beja was killed but this is irrelevant here.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Maqrizī, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 267—268.

¹⁰¹ Ibn Ḥawqal, *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 55.

¹⁰² Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 363, cf. t. 1, p. 69.

¹⁰³ Conti Rossini, *op. cit.*, p. 268, H. Baumann, D. Westermann, *Les peuples et les civilisations de l'Afrique*, Paris 1957, p. 277.

¹⁰⁴ P. Murdock, *Africa — its Peoples and their Cultures*, New York 1959, p. 317.

languages in the Middle Ages and therefore we cannot exclude the possibility that such customs were common to them at that time. On the other hand the common origin of these peoples is still but a hypothesis. W. Hirschberg in his review of A. Paul's *History of the Beja Tribes* speaks about the influence of Napata and Meroe in this respect¹⁰⁵ but this also cannot be easily accepted because we lack historical information about it. His supposition that this custom is due to the influence of Himyarite Pre-Islamic immigrants cannot be right because we have no historical evidence of an immigration of that kind among Beja too. Beja retained some traces of matrilineal succession up to the present time as it has been described by different travellers and anthropologists.

Finally it is to be hoped that the publication of further Arabic manuscript sources will bring some new material on Beja and it will make possible to solve some of the problems which had to remain unexplained also in this contribution to the history of the Beja.

¹⁰⁵ „Anthropos“, vol. 50, 1955, p. 474.