

Quelles sont les origines du *nišan*? La source profonde du besoin esthétique de décorer les animaux d'élevage se trouve dans la nécessité d'extériorisation du sentiment de beauté chez les éleveurs. Le niveau de perfection de la technique et la valeur décorative de l'oeuvre dépendent du talent artistique individuel du tondeur.

Il est évident que les recherches et études sur l'intéressant problème de la décoration des animaux par le découpage ornemental de leur toison, devraient être poursuivies.

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# SOME ERITREAN PLACE-NAMES IN ARABIC MEDIEVAL SOURCES

A number of the place and tribal names of the northern part of modern Eritrea and of the adjacent territory of the Sudan have been preserved in medieval Arabic sources and especially in *Ta'riḥ* by al-Ya'qūbī<sup>1</sup> and in *Kitāb šurat al-arḍ* by Ibn Ḥawqal<sup>2</sup>. I hope that sometime in the future it will be possible to draw a historical map of this area in the 9th and 10th century but this can be done only after a thorough investigation on the spot and after a considerable study of Tigre and especially of the Beja language is achieved. Old maps were studied by many scholars but they were not yet checked in an exhaustive and systematic way. Up to the present moment only two or three place-names and the same number of tribal names have been identified so that they may serve as points of reference to locate the rest of them. This is by no means enough. A general sketch of a map which has been mentioned above has been already made by O. G. S. Crawford<sup>3</sup> but though some of his locations and interpretations are based on a good knowledge of the territory and of the maps, many of them are rather hasardous. Moreover he relied on the uncritical and abridged edition of Ibn Ḥawqal's

<sup>1</sup> al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'riḥ*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma, t. I, Lugduni Batavorum, 1883, pp. 218—19.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb šurat al-arḍ*, ed. J. H. Kramers, fasc. 1, Lugduni Batavorum, 1938, pp. 54—58.

<sup>3</sup> O. G. S. Crawford, *The Fung Kingdom of Sennar*, Gloucester 1951, p. 103.

text by Youssouf Kamal<sup>4</sup> and he did not introduce any conjectures. In the present paper I am going to present the results of my efforts to interpret and to explain some of the place-names with the help of the dictionaries of Ge'ez and Tigre languages. I wish to underline that what I intended was not etymology properly speaking but rather finding a root from which a given place-name could be possibly derived. Any attempt to find a real etymology would be premature since we do not know whether our readings of these names are correct (Arabic alphabet facilitates mistakes and allows for different conjectures), our knowledge of the respective languages is very limited and there are no studies in toponymics which could help us providing some analogical and well established data. Unfortunately some important maps are not at my disposal.

My efforts to find some help in the existing dictionaries of the Beja language<sup>5</sup> have failed. This must not, of course, prevent other scholars from trying to do it once again and we know that these dictionaries are of quite limited scope. Other languages spoken on the examined area are also little known and I think that recourse to the Ethiopian Semitic languages is a justified procedure. In my opinion the situation did not change through the past millenium in any radical way<sup>6</sup> and the territory under the consideration was inhabited mainly by the Beja and Tigrē as well as Tigrinya peoples and Baria and Kunama did not change their abode. It is possible also that other minor peoples like Bilin were erroneously classified by medieval Arab writers as the „Beja“, „Nūba“ or „Habaša“ so that they remain hidden under one of these or of some other tribal names. Already Ibn Hawqal and later Leo Africanus supply some references most probably to the Tigrē language<sup>7</sup>. Moreover a big number of the contemporary

<sup>4</sup> Youssouf Kamal, *Monumenta Cartographica Africae et Aegypti*, vol. III, fasc. 2, Leyde 1932.

<sup>5</sup> L. Reinisch, *Wörterbuch der Bedauye-Sprache*, Wien 1895; E. M. Roper, *Tu Bedawie*, London 1929; H. Almkvist, *Die Bischari-Sprache in Nord-Ost Afrika*, Uppsala 1881.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. A. Zaborski, *Beja and Tigrē in 9th—10th c. Period*, in the press.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. A. Zaborski, *Notes on the Medieval History of the Beja Tribes*, „Folia Orientalia“, t. VII, 1965, p. 302—303. The information deli-

place names have the endings -ib or -it which are recorded in some place-names in both al-Ya'qūbī and Ibn Hawqal. Since they are recorded in the Arabic script these endings can be mutually altered in their spelling (i.e. -ib can be easily changed to -it and *vice versa*) and, what seems less probable, they can represent original -in. Both -ib and -it suffixes exist in the Tigre language<sup>8</sup> — the latter is genuinely Tigrē but the former seems to be borrowed<sup>9</sup>. Indeed there is such a suffix (actually this is the ending of accusative used also with proper names in quotations)<sup>10</sup> in the Beja language and I think that most probably it was borrowed by the Tigrē from the Beja. As far as -it suffix is concerned, we must remember, however, that being a Hamito-semitic morpheme it occurs also in Beja and on the basis of its occurrence it is impossible to predict whether the name is of Beja or Tigre origin.

It must be very strongly emphasized that some of the hypotheses presented here are very risky but since the place-names discussed here are real *hapax legomena*, looking for their probable roots is the only way on which we may find some partial explanation, and thus it cannot be neglected.

Most of the place-names seem to be triconsonantal and this speaks in favour of the hypothesis that they are rather of Tigrē origin since in the Beja language the biconsonantal roots are prevailing. This cannot be considered, however, as a rule in every case.

Ibn Hawqal mentions three times the mountains close to Wādī Barka and called M. lāhīb<sup>11</sup>. Crawford was inclined to connect

vered by Ibn Hawqal may refer, perhaps, only to the dialectal division of the Beja language. We know from Yāqūt that the Ethiopian language was spoken in Bādi'.

<sup>8</sup> F. R. Palmer, *The Morphology of the Tigre Noun*, London 1962, p. 40; W. Leslau, *Grammatical Sketches in Tigrē*, JAOS, vol. 65, 1945, pp. 176, § 20.

<sup>9</sup> W. Leslau, *op. cit.*, p. 176, says: „This suffix is a problem. It is difficult to explain by any phenomenon of Tigré; it is possible that it is due to some Cushitic influence“. I think that only the influence of the Beja language can be accounted for it.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. my review of Yusūf Faḍl Ḥasan, *The Arabs and the Sudan*, „Folia Orientalia“, vol. 10, 1969, p. 263.

<sup>11</sup> Ibn Hawqal, *op. cit.*, p. 54—55.

this name with that of Beit Male<sup>12</sup> but this is obviously a very hazardous association. Kramers opinion was as follows: „Le région montagneuse appelée ملاحيب doit être le massif qui se groupe autour du plateau du Hamasen, où le Barka prend son origine; ceci ressort surtout de la notice que cette montagne s'étend jusqu'aux contrées qui appartiennent au système fluvial du Nil. Nous aurons occasion d'y revenir plus tard. Pourtant le nom ملاحيب reste inexpliqué. Ce nom a une apparence, peut-etre fausse, d'être du bon arabe; il y a en effet en Arabie une montagne du nom de ملحوب ou ملحيب. Le mot signifierait alors quelque chose comme „les régions accessibles“ et ce devaient être des commerçants ou des nomades arabes qui ont donné ce nom à la montagne. Il paraît plus probable, cependant, que ملاحيب est un mot non-arabe et que la désinence -īb appartient au parler des Budja desquels les voyageurs islamiques tiraient leurs informations“<sup>13</sup>. Indeed some place-names could be already Arabic since Ibn Hawqal knew them from some Arab informants who might have used their own place-names and not the local ones. Taking, however, into consideration, the near relationship and similarity of Tigre and Arabic, it is likely that this is a Tigre name. There is, indeed, in Tigre a group of place-names which have both the prefix ma- and the suffix -īt<sup>14</sup>. What is most important, there is in Barka a place called Malhit and a subtribe of Hadendowa called Malhitkena<sup>15</sup> after this place. There is also a tribal name Malhit recorded in Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache<sup>16</sup>. A very serious obstacle consists, however, in the fact that in Arabic script we have pharyngeal (ḥ) and not (h). Reinisch says that this name is derived from the name of the tree *Ximenia americana* which is called, according to him, in Tigre malhata.

<sup>12</sup> O. G. S. Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>13</sup> J. H. Kramers, *L'Erythrée au Xe siècle*, „Analecta Orientalia“, Leiden, 1954, p. 159.

<sup>14</sup> W. Leslau, *op. cit.*, p. 174, § 16, d. Cf. Tigre sāḥel „lowlands, a plain at the coast“, Maṣḥal is a geographical name and Maṣḥalit a name of a tribe.

<sup>15</sup> L. Reinisch, *op. cit.*, p. 169, and cf. p. 168 melah.

<sup>16</sup> E. Littmann, M. Höfner, *Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache*, Wiesbaden 1962, p. 685.

Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache quotes the form mēlhætta<sup>17</sup>. The etymology proposed by Reinisch is not quite sure but at any rate the name recorded by Ibn Hawqal could be amended to \*Malāḥīt. There is, however, a complication in the fact that there is also in the territory of Bēt Šaḥaqan a place called Mēlhib<sup>18</sup>. As far as Malāḥīt is concerned, I should like to point out the root l-ḥ-t from which perhaps *malḥatay* „beginning of the rain season, latter part of summer, early rain“<sup>19</sup> is derived. This territory might have been used by the nomads in this very season. This may be, however, only a folk-etymology.

Between Wādī Barka and M. lāḥīb Ibn Hawqal locates Anbūrīt<sup>20</sup>. I agree with Matveyev and Kubbel that its meaning is obscure and that it may refer most probably to a region in Wādī Barka<sup>21</sup>. Looking for a root from which this name could be derived, we find the root n-b-r which occurs both in Ge'ez and in Tigrē with almost the same meaning. In Ge'ez<sup>22</sup> *nabara* means 1. sidere, considerare, sedere, situm, positum esse, 2. manere, permanere, remanere, esse. 3. habitare, incolere etc., causative sedere facere, ponere, collocare, statuere, manere facere. In Tigre<sup>23</sup> *nabra* means „to abide, to stay, to dwell, to inhabit, to live, to grant sustenance“. A nominal form with the meaning „settlement“ or „inhabited territory“ could be derived probably from this root. We have, indeed, in Ge'ez<sup>24</sup> a similar form *nəbrat* which means 1. sessio, situs, 2. positio, 3. stabilitas, status, conditio, 4. habitatio, commoratio. If my assumption is true, the exact explanation of the grammatical form of Anbūrīt remains still to

<sup>17</sup> Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache, p. 108.

<sup>18</sup> Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache, p. 685.

<sup>19</sup> Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache, p. 32. Cf. also A. Dillman, *Lexicon Linguae Aethiopicæ*, Lipsiae 1865, 147.

<sup>20</sup> Ibn Hawqal, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>21</sup> V. V. Matveyev, L. E. Kubbel, *Arabskiye istočniki X—XII vekov po etnografii i istorii narodov Afriki yuzhnoye Sahary*, Moskva 1965, p. 377.

<sup>22</sup> A. Dillmann, *op. cit.*, 650—652.

<sup>23</sup> Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache, pp. 329—330.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. also S. Grébaut, *Supplément au Lexicon Linguae Aethiopice*, Paris 1952, p. 218.

be done by somebody who is better acquainted with the Gə'əz and Tigre languages.

The next place mentioned by Ibn Hawqal immediately after Anbūrīt is D.rūrīt and there is no doubt that these mountains (Ibn Hawqal says explicitly that this was a name for mountains) were comprised in the same area. Highlands are called in Tigrē *rorā*, p. *rawarrat*<sup>25</sup> and it would be quite tempting to associate this name with the plural form but the first consonant would remain unexplained and this association must be abandoned. There is, however, also a verb *təror'a* „to be elevated, to be eminent“<sup>26</sup> and the initial /t/ could be assimilated or misinterpreted by the foreigners as voiced /d/. The trouble is, however, that nothing can be said about this rare, as it seems, and not well attested form. There are some other possibilities. Dərar is the name of a subtribe of Ad Taklēs<sup>27</sup>. Less probable is the connection with the root d-r-r recorded both in Ge'ez and in Tigrē which has various meanings. There is, for example, a passive participle *dərer* „he who has food, the rich man“<sup>28</sup>, *dariro* „a kind of grain“, *darar* „a wild leguminous fruit“ etc. It would be easy to invent an explanation for taking any of these as a folk-etymology (e.g. one could argue that D.rūrīt was named so because there were good pasturages there) but the scientific value of such hypotheses would be very restricted.

The last place-name of the same region is Q.l'ib. Water was abundant there and this was a kind of border line which was not crossed by the tradesmen and on which they could conduct their business. It was situated in the valley close to M.lāhīb mountains<sup>29</sup>. Kramers tried to identify this name with the name of Kelau<sup>30</sup>, i.e. with an unknown people who, according to a tradition preserved among the Bilin; were the ancient inhabitants of the area. Kramers hypothesis is not very safe and it can be challenged on both philological (the similarity between the two

names is far too remote and the ending is most probably -ib or -it) and historical ground. If we take into consideration the fact that the region of Q.l'ib was a border line for foreign merchants, (we do not know whether because of the geographical inaccessibility or because of some political reasons), then perhaps it would be possible to connect this name with the root k-l'. *Kal'a* means in Tigrē „to hinder, to refuse, to keep aloof, to take away“ and there is a feminine active participle *kal'it*<sup>31</sup> — we remember that it is easy to amend Q.l'ib to \*Q.l'it. In Gə'əz<sup>32</sup> *kal'a* means arcere, cohibere, retinere, prohibere, impedire, *kəl'at* means prohibitio, impedimentum. Perhaps the place could be called so because the tradesmen were not allowed to go beyond it. Nevertheless this etymology is almost annihilated by the fact that in Arabic script we have (q) and ('). Q.l'ib can be also amended to \*Falgit or \*Falgib and there is in Gə'əz<sup>32a</sup> a word *falag* which means valley; river bed“ (1. vallis, rivus, torrens, canalis, 3. flumen, fluvius, amnis).

The unidentified tribal territory of Jārīn (here we find once again the ending discussed above) stretched „from the town called Bādi' to the line of Barka in T.f.līn“ and to „the place called H.l. Ad-D.jāj“<sup>33</sup>. The latter place remains unidentified though Conti Rossini's hypothesis merits attention. He considered it as the Arabic translation of Amba Derho and explained it as „a place where the hens gather“<sup>34</sup>. Amba Derho is a name of a village to the north of Asmara and *amba* means „table-mountain“ and *derho* has the meaning of „chicken“<sup>35</sup>. It is true that H.l. Ad-D.jāj really looks like Arabic status constructus. I should like to point out some other possibilities without claiming the supremacy of my own hypothesis over i's one. Conti

<sup>31</sup> *Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache*, p. 391.

<sup>32</sup> A. Dillmann, *op. cit.*, 819; S. Grébaut, *op. cit.*, p. 256. Cf. L. Reinisch, *Wörterbuch der Bilin-Sprache* p. 225.

<sup>32a</sup> A. Dillmann, *op. cit.*, 1344, S. Grébaut, *op. cit.*, 380.

<sup>33</sup> al-Ya'qūbī, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

<sup>34</sup> C. Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia*, Bergamo 1928, p. 275.

<sup>35</sup> *Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache*, p. 517 and 354. Cf. J. Marquart, *Die Benin-Sammlung*, Leiden 1913, p. CCCXII; O. G. S. Crawford, *op. cit.*, 107.

<sup>25</sup> *Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache*, p. 158; W. Leslau, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

<sup>26</sup> *Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache*, p. 158.

<sup>27</sup> *Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache*, p. 726.

<sup>28</sup> *Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache*, p. 518.

<sup>29</sup> Ibn Hawqal, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> J. H. Kramers, *op. cit.*, p. 159—160.



Rossini. I do not want to supplant the latter with something which may not be better at all but to contribute some other interpretation in order to provide a chance to check the validity of all the existing hypotheses. The second part of this name is similar to Tigrē *dagge* pl. *dagaggi* „village, somewhat large settlement, lasting settlement“<sup>35a</sup>. It is true, however, that al-Ya'qūbī describes it only as a „place“ and not as a village or settlement. Nevertheless he did not know the region from his own experience and this argument is not a very strong one. There is also a place called Dagadga in the Bogos land<sup>36</sup> which could be corrupted to Dajāj (then we should expect, however, something like \*Dajaja). there is also a Tigrē word *dagdagat*, pl. *dagaddag* which means „sandy soil, desert“<sup>37</sup>. Then there is in Gə'əz<sup>38</sup> a word *dəngag* with the meaning 1. ora, crepido, ripa, litus and, what is perhaps even more interesting, 2. terminus, limes. /N/ could assimilate to the following /g/. The second meaning would be, perhaps, the best for constructing a hypothesis (H.1 Ad-D.jāj was a limit or a frontier indeed) while the first meaning is perhaps somewhat less probable since we do not know whether this place was situated on the coast or in the interior. The first part of this name (i.e. H.1) remains, however, unexplained, and this makes all these assumptions rather doubtful.

The fifth territory mentioned by al-Ya'qūbī<sup>39</sup> stretched also from Bādi' to the place called Faykūn (there are vowel signs in the first syllable and there is waw in the second syllable which can be a mater lectionis indicating the vowel /u/). Faykūn can be amended to \*Qandūt and there is in Tigrē the word *gend* which means also „limit; border“ while the verb *gannada* means „to draw a limit, to define, to estimate“, *gānada* „to draw a limit“<sup>40</sup>. The ending -ūt would remain unexplained and this invalidates such a connection. Faykūn can be also conjecturally amended to

<sup>35a</sup> *Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache*, p. 541, L. Reinisch, *Wörterbuch der Bilin-Sprache*, p. 98, 35.

<sup>36</sup> *Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache*, p. 728.

<sup>37</sup> *Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache*, p. 543.

<sup>38</sup> A. Dillmann, *op. cit.*, 1118; S. Grébaut, p. 322.

<sup>39</sup> al-Ya'qūbī, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

<sup>40</sup> *Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache*, p. 589.

\*Fankūn and this would be similar to Fenqen in the country of Māriā<sup>41</sup>.

Finally I should like to discuss the problem of Bādi'. At first traditionally identified with Massawa, it was identified by Crowfoot<sup>42</sup> with Airi on the basis of a fragment of a qaṣīda recorded in Yāqūt's *Geographical Dictionary*<sup>43</sup>. In the respective fragment there is a mention of Bādi', Dasa and M.šātīrī. The name Bādi' is quite unknown on the spot but the last name is still used for a mound. This would be not necessarily enough for the identification but Crowfoot's assumption finds support in *Kitāb šurat al-arḍ* by Ibn Hawqal. As it was rightly suggested by Crawford<sup>44</sup>, Ibn Hawqal's description of the Red Sea and of the adjacent islands is clearly in favour of the identification of Bādi' with Airi — namely the distances given there<sup>45</sup> (these are stated in terms of days of sailing and thus are not absolutely sure since sailing depends too much on the weather) seem to exclude the identification with Massawa. There is only one fact which can contradict Crowfoot's hypothesis — Ibn Hawqal says that Barka falls into the sea between Bādi' and Sawākin whereas it disappears today in the sands to the south of Airi<sup>46</sup>. The geographical conditions might, however, have changed in the course of time. Nevertheless, it is still a fact that Bāse is the Tigrē name for Massawa and it is pronounced Baḍe by the Beja. The name could

<sup>41</sup> *Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache*, p. 737 and p. 738 the same place-name in the country of 'Ad Takles.

<sup>42</sup> J. W. Crowfoot, *Some Red Sea Ports in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, „The Geographical Journal“, vol. 37, 1911, p. 542.

<sup>43</sup> Yāqūt, *Geographisches Wörterbuch*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, t. I, Leipzig 1866, p. 00.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Gə'əz daset „island“ but Crowfoot, *op. cit.*, p. 542, says that „the name Dasa is still applied, I have been told, to a part of the mainland opposite to Mashatiri“.

<sup>45</sup> O. G. S. Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Hawqal, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Hawqal, *op. cit.*, p. 57. Cf. J. H. Kramers, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

<sup>46</sup> C. Conti Rossini, *op. cit.*, p. 212; *Enciclopedia Italiana*, t. 12, p. 514; cf. J. H. Kramers, *L'Erythrée décrite dans une source arabe du Xe siècle*, Atti del XIX Congresso Internazionale degli Orientalisti, Roma 1938, p. 574, note.

be, indeed, transferred from Bādi' on Airi after its fall to Massawa. Littmann suggested that this name could be, perhaps, related with the Arabic word for goods or merchandise<sup>47</sup>. This is not quite improbable since the name M.šātīrī may be in a similar way connected hypothetically with Arabic *muštārī*<sup>n</sup> „tradesman“ or *muštara*<sup>n</sup> „purchase, buying“. The Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache records a word beda „market“ which is, most probably a loan-word from Arabic. In Gə'əz<sup>48</sup> *baš'a* means „praefinire alqd Deo sacrum“, causative „to make blessed“, *beṣu'* felix, fortunatus, beatus, *beṣe* „blessing“ and in Tigrē<sup>49</sup> we have also *baš'a* „to be blessed“, *beṣu'* „blessed“. As far as I know, the etymology of the name Massawa remains unexplained, but perhaps it is to be connected, with the root *saw'a* which means „to sacrifice, to make sacrifice“<sup>50</sup> and there are derivatives *maswa'et* „sacrificium, altare“ and *meswa'* „altare, sacrarium, adytum, locus altaris“<sup>51</sup>. The two meanings, i.e. that of *baš'a* and that of *saw'a* may refer to the same place so that the former could be a local (Tigrē) epithet or perhaps even a synonym of the latter. The town could be named a „Blessed Sanctuary“ because there was perhaps an altar or a temple there or, if only the first etymology is true, it could be named „Blessed“ or „Fortunate“ because of its good navigational or some other qualities. These hypotheses can not be valid since the name we write Massawa is always written in Ethiopic documents with ṣ, i. e. with „emphatic“. I am indebted for this information to Prof. G. W. B. Huntingford (personal letter of 2d April 1971) who also considers Munzinger's etymologu (Ostafrikanische Studien, Basel 1864, p. 114) as not impossible. Cf. L. Reinisch, Wörterbuch der Beḍaue-Sprache, p. 174, Wörterbuch der Bilin-Sprache 90; Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache, p. 690 (twice!) and p. 644.

The results presented here may be rejected in principle and

<sup>47</sup> O. G. S. Crowfoot, *op. cit.*, p. 547, note.

<sup>48</sup> A. Dillmann, *op. cit.*, 548.

<sup>49</sup> Wörterbuch der Tigrē-Sprache, p. 301.

<sup>50</sup> A. Dillmann, *op. cit.*, 256; S. Grébaut, p. 133.

<sup>51</sup> A. Dillmann, *op. cit.*, 257.

considered as folk-etymologies. I do not publish them in order to gain general approval since I am fully aware that inventing etymologies under these circumstances is the very last step before falling into the precipice of fancy and wishful thinking. The pitfalls are very numerous, the mistakes are inevitable and I am the first to doubt in the value of these etymologies. What I have done should be considered merely as a proposal in a discussion — my voice does not close but opens it.