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A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF EVLIYA ÇELEBI ON A VIOLENT DEATH PRACTISED IN THE SOUTHERN SUDAN (1672)

The Turkish traveller, Evliya Çelebi gives a description of Egypt, the Sudan¹ and Abyssinia² in the tenth volume of his *Travel-Book*³ (*Seyahatname*). Various data supplied by the traveller prove his multilateral interests, it refers, among other things, to history, geography, ethnography and even African languages⁴. The work of Evliya Çelebi is one of the earliest and rather rare documents among the non-Arabic external sources serving to enlarge our knowledge of this part of the African continent. As it is known, the works of classical Arab authors of the 17th century concerning Africa south of the Sahara are scarce⁵, or extinct if we consider the area covering the contem-

¹ Cf. M. T. Petti Suma, *Il viaggio in Sudan di Evliyâ Çelebi* (1671—1672), „Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli“, Nuova Serie, vol. XIV, (Scritti in onore di Laura Vecchia Vaglieri), Napoli 1964, pp. 432—452.

² Cf. A. Bombaci, *Il viaggio in Abissinia di Evliyâ Çelebi* (1673), „Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale“, Nuova Serie, vol. II, Roma 1943, pp. 259—275.

³ Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatnamesi, Mısır, Sudan, Habeş* (1672—1680), (Onuncu cilt), İstanbul 1938.

⁴ Cf. T. Habraszewski, *Kanuri — Language and People — in the 'Travel-Book' (Siyahatname) of Evliya Çelebi*, „Africana Bulletin“, N° 6, 1967, pp. 59—66.

⁵ T. Lewicki, *Źródła arabskie do dziejów Afryki na południe od Sahary* (Arabic Sources on the History of Africa south of Sahara), „Etnografia Polska“, IX, 1965, p. 288.

porary Republic of the Sudan; the European sources⁶, on the other hand, appear only in the later period.

From the abundant ethnographic material comprised in the *Travel-Book*, one particular information has been selected concerning the custom of hastening the death of the ill, as well as the mourners' behaviour during the burial. This, unfortunately, rather general mention is found in the description of „Foncistan“ that is the Funj Kingdom of Sennar.

According to Evliya Çelebi, „when someone suffers from a painful sort of disease, as soon as the apparent death approaches, the weak, who had earlier not eaten, or drank for a few days, is told (by his compatriots) to be „a troublesome guest“ (?) and is buried. They (the natives) do not abandon their ill and their dead as Tartars and Albanians (?) do. After a man's death they do not weep, or mourn or lament — they perhaps laugh“. When questioned by Evliya Çelebi why they do not mourn the dead, his informants answered: „We have to die, too. So why weep? It is no shame, such is the law. We shall all die“⁷.

The aim of this note is to state how far this mention of the traveller could be verified and an attempt is made to show that the custom of a violent death was, and still is, known on the territory of the former Funj domain.

The moribund seem to have been buried alive, though the Turkish text is not quite clear on this matter. The death has been quickened in order to get rid of the disabled from the community. In this respect, one can not exclude the possibility, that the ill might have been refused the food and drink when showing features of a mortal disease. Evliya Çelebi tells us only about the ill

⁶ For local Sudanese and early European sources see: O. G. S. Crawford, *The Fung Kingdom of Sennar*, Gloucester 1951, pp. 340—343.

⁷ Evliya Çelebi, *op. cit.*, p. 897—8. The Turkish text is quoted as printed in the Latin edition. It runs as follows: „Hemen eeli müsemmaları geldükde ağır hasteliği misal bir maraza mübtelâ olub evvelden dahi zaif bir kaç gün ekl(ü) şürb etmedüğü bigi âlâ müsafiri deyüb defn iderler. Tatar ve Anabud kavmi gibi hasta ve mevtadan kaçmazlar. Ve bir âdemin öldüğüne âhü figan ve giryeü nalân etmezler. Belki hande iderler. Hakir süal idüb Niçün bügâ eylemezsiz didim. Biz dahi ölseker gerek. Niçün aklar(ız). Bir ayıb şey degildir. Kanundur. Cümlemiz ölür deyu cevap etdiler“.

people, nevertheless one should believe, according to later accounts, that in those times a similar custom has been practised in respect to the seniles.

The custom itself of inflicting a violent death has been known in nearly all communities from the very remote past, for example in the European and Asiatic territory, as the Middle Ages and earlier sources point out⁸. At the present stage of knowledge of the African peoples it is generally accepted that the reasons of death based on magic and/or religion outweigh the natural causes of death⁹. In contrast with the existing works devoted to a ritual killing of the old or ill, the so-called divine — priest-kings, chiefs and rain-makers — mainly in the Nilotic tribes¹⁰, the problem of relating this custom to the ordinary people in Africa, as a whole, has been given rather little attention¹¹.

Evliya Çelebi does not name any particular tribe among whom this custom might have been practised. All what could be guessed from the other data is that the said people were non-Moslem Negroes who presumably lived within the frontiers of the Funj realm, approximately somewhere between the White and the Blue Nile area. The Funj Sultanate was a mixture of various tribes and it consisted, among others, of peoples sometimes called the Pre-Nilotes¹². In the descriptions left by the European travellers of

⁸ Cf. K. Müller, *Zur Frage der Altentötung im West eurasiatischen Raum*, Paideuma, „Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde“, Bd XIV, 1968, pp. 17—44.

⁹ L. V. Thomas, *The Study of Death in Negro Africa*. In: *The Proceedings of the First International Congress of Africanists*, Accra 11th—18th December 1962 [...], (London) 1964, p. 158.

¹⁰ Cf. J. G. Frazer, *The Dying God*. In: *The Golden Bough, A Study in Magic and Religion*, III, London 1963; G. W. T(itherington), *Burial alive among the Dinka of the Bahr-el-Ghazal Province*, „Sudan Notes and Records“, VIII, 1925, p. 196—197; S. Lagercrantz, *Contribution to the Ethnography of Africa*, „Studia Ethnographica Upsaliensia“, I, Lund 1950, pp. 347—360, 427—428; S. Santandrea e L. De Giorgi, *Morte violenta per i „Re divini“ Scilluk e Dinka — Sudan*, „Africa“, (Roma), Anno XX, N. 1, 1965, pp. 15—32; N. 2, pp. 163—187.

¹¹ Cf. J. Koty, *Die Behandlung der Alten und Kranken bei den Naturvölkern*, Stuttgart 1934, pp. 91—132.

¹² The term Pre-Nilotes was used for the first time by V. L. Grotanelli in: *I Pre Niloti: un'arcaica provincia culturale in Africa*, „Annali

several Pre-Nilotic tribes, one finds a confirmation of the custom mentioned by Evliya Çelebi. These ethnographic accounts in the European sources belong mainly to the 19th century.

The traveller, J. Russegger, while staying in the southern fringes of the Sudan, was informed by the natives that in the region of „Kassan“ (south of Fazoghli) as well as in the „Dar el Pert“ (Berta) there is a custom of burying the senile, the weak, and crippled alive. Such a man, tired of life, would go with his family and relations to a place where he wished to rest. A grave would be dug there, and for three days a feast would go on. Finally the old man would lie in a pit and earth would be thrown over him¹³. The same tribe of Berta and the Gebelawin is mentioned by von Barnim who noticed that they bury alive the old and fatally ill men¹⁴. A similar custom is reported by R. Lepsius¹⁵ near „Fazoql“ (Fazoghli). The seniles, when they feel weak, are buried alive. The old men of the Negro tribes living south of Kordofan are treated in the same way. They were similarly said to exterminate the ill and the crippled and first of all those who suffered from infectious diseases. The dead were buried with loud lamentations¹⁶. Another traveller, G. Lejean was told by a Dinka man that in the Burun tribe the seniles are buried alive¹⁷.

The custom of a violent death has survived among the Pre-*Lateranensi*, XII, 1948, pp. 280—326. The name pertains the tribes living between the middle basin of the Blue Nile and the valley of the Baro, part in western Ethiopia and part in the southeastern Sudan. They include the Ingessana, Berta, Gumus, Burun, Maban, Uduk, Mao and Koma, as well as minor groups somewhat vaguely known as Fung, Hameg, Watawit, Gebelawin, and a few more. V. L. Grotanelli, *The Vanishing Pre-Nilotes Revisited*, „Bulletin of the International Committee on Urgent Anthropological and Ethnological Research“, N° 8, 1966, p. 23.

¹³ J. Russegger, *Reisen in Europa, Asien und Afrika (...) unternommen in den Jahren 1835 bis 1841 (...)*, Bd 2, *Reisen in Egypten, Nubien und Ost-Sudan*, Stuttgart 1843, s. 603.

¹⁴ A. von Barnim, *Reise des Freiherrn A. von Barnim durch Nord-Ost-Afrika*, Berlin 1863, p. 624—625.

¹⁵ R. Lepsius, *Briefe aus Aegypten, Aethiopien und der Halbinsel des Sinai geschrieben in den Jahren 1842—1845 (...)*, Berlin 1852, p. 212.

¹⁶ R. Lipsius, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

¹⁷ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Ethnological Observations in Dar Fung*, „Sudan Notes and Records“, XV, 1932, Part I, p. 47, n. 1.

Nilotes until modern times, but it was severely forbidden by the government in 1922. Now, when a medical cure is futile, the dying man is surrounded by his relations who wait for his last breath. In fact, they fear the coming of this moment. To shorten the time of expectance, they try to deprive the dying man from the remains of his vital energy. A grave is being dug and people behave very loudly intending to quicken his death. After death the women violently express their grievance, crying and beating their breasts. Lately, the Pre-Nilotes usually postpone the burial until ten days after death. They act in this way in order to enable the relations of the dead living far away, to arrive in time, and to make sure whether the man did not die a violent death¹⁸.

A further evidence of a violent death is found among the Shilluk who are traditionally known as the Nilotic tribe, but sometimes also classified to the Pre-Nilotes¹⁹. In contrast with the Shilluk, the neighbouring Nilotes, with whom the Pre-Nilotes have little or no affinity²⁰, as for instance, the Dinka, have a firm belief that an involuntary, that is a normal death, is the lot of ordinary men and beasts²¹. Among the Shilluk, the manner of putting to death is different and the custom was applied mainly to the divine kings, though there are a few accounts relating it to the ordinary men, too.

According to W. Hofmayr²², death may be hastened when there is much suffering or if the agony is long drawn out. A prolonged period of immobility of the body is taken for death; the people immediately begin to wail, the dying man is declared dead, his face is covered with cloth, and the grave is dug.

A more recent account on the Shilluk reports, that on old man would be smothered as also would be one suffering from

¹⁸ H. Hilke u. D. Plester, *Forschungsreise in das Land der Prä-Niloten im Südost-Sudan 1954—1955*, „Zeitschrift für Ethnologie“, 80, H. 2, 1955, pp. 185—186.

¹⁹ Cf. G. P. Murdock, *Africa, Its Peoples and Their Culture History*, New York, Toronto, London 1959, s. 172.

²⁰ V. L. Grotanelli, *Vanishing Pre-Nilotes...*, p. 25.

²¹ G. Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience. The Religion of the Dinka*, Oxford 1961, p. 314.

²² W. Hofmayr, *Die Shilluk. Geschichte, Religion und Leben eines Niloten-Stammes*, Wien 1925, p. 299.

a long and painful illness, and the smothering is done, in some cases at least, shortly before death would take place naturally. When questioned about the reasons for this „mercy“ killing the Shilluk were vague and evasive. They said, for instance, that it was a humiliation for anyone to die naturally²³. A death among the Shilluk is the signal for an outburst of wailing on the part of the women²⁴.

All of the quoted accounts are rather fragmentary and by no means exhaust the problem. According to them, it appears, that burial alive was the most frequent form of putting to death ordinary men — the old and the ill. The custom of burying alive seems to have been widely spread over a large area in the Southern Sudan. It can be traced first of all, in the Dar Funj region, populated mainly by the Pre-Nilotic peoples. It seems that the informants of Evliya Çelebi belonged to one of these peoples. He could converse with them on his route through the Sudan, for example in Sennar, which he pretends to visit, or elsewhere, maybe in a quite remote place from their nomeland, where they might have been transported as slaves.

As regards the mourners' behaviour, in every tribe mentioned above, a wailing accompanies the burial. In this context, the detail of Evliya Çelebi's account concerning the mourners' attitude is contradictory to other sources and is probably a guess of his own. A similar attitude, however, is known among the Nilotic tribe of Western Dinka. One feature of their reaction to the death of „a master of the fishing spear“, who dies most frequently by strangulation or suffocation, was that people should not mourn, but rather should be joyful²⁵.

The account of Evliya Çelebi on a violent death is the earliest mention of the custom practised in the Southern Sudan and it allows to observe its continuity among the Pre-Nilotés within a period of at least three centuries, though it certainly has been in usage a long time ago.

²³ J. Dempsey, *Mission on the Nile*, New York 1956, p. 94.

²⁴ J. Dempsey, *op. cit.*, p. 24. Also in other description of the Shilluk's funeral the people weep (mourn). Cf. D. Westermann, *The Shilluk people*, Philadelphia 1912, pp. 112—113, 136.

²⁵ G. Lienhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 300, 316.

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AN UNPUBLISHED DESCRIPTION OF JERUSALEM, IN THE MIDDLE AGES, AS FOUND IN THE AR-RAWḌ AL-MIṬĀR, BY 'ABD AL-MUN'IM AL-HIMYARĪ

Kitāb ar-Rawḍ al-Miṭār fī Ḥaber al-Aqtār by Ibn 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Himyari was one of the last great Arabic historico-geographical lexicons written in the Middle Ages. This important work was till now published only in parts: E. Lèvi-Provençal published in the year 1938 the part relating to the Iberian Peninsula, with a French translation. In the introduction E. Lèvi-Provençal presented an interesting study about the manuscripts of the book, and some notes on the life of the al-Himyari¹. Then in the year 1956 professor A. Rizzitano from Sicily published selected passages relating to the Italian islands and territories². Beside that in „Folia Orientalia“ were published other small parts: T. Lewicki³ wrote about Brāga and Miška, A. Małecka about the eastern Coasts of Africa, finally S. Hamarneh gave a description of Damascus⁴.

¹ E. Lèvi-Provençal, *La Péninsule Iberique au Moyen Âge d'après le Kitāb ar-Rawḍ al-Miṭār al-Himyari*, Leide 1938.

² Umerto Rizzitano, *Kitāb al-Rawḍ al-Miṭār l-ibn 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Himyari, Khāṣṣa bi-l-djuzur wa-l-bika' al-Itāliyya*, in „Mad-jallat Kulliyyat al-Adāb“, XVIII, May, 1956.

³ The al-Himyari was already familiar to him. Cf. *Encyclopédie de L'Islam* (Nouvelle Édition).

⁴ T. Lewicki, *Brāga et Miška d'après une source arabe inédite*, „Folia Orientalia“, tome I, fasc. 2 (1959), Cracovie 1960, p. 322; A. Małecka, *La côte Orientale de l'Afrique au Moyen Âge après le Kitāb*