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THE AFROASIATIC ORIGIN OF EGYPTIAN *rm* "FISH"

This most common term for "fish" in Eg. has so far been lacking a reliable etymological explanation in the AA lexical stock. M. Cohen's (1947, no. 466) equation of Eg. *rm* to Sem. **nūn*- "fish" (Hebr., Ar.) is evidently incorrect for the phonology, while the most recent comparison (as areal parallel) to PDrav. (!) **irāma* "sp. fish" by V. Blažek (1992, 159) is highly dubious for geographical and chronological reasons. The Eg. popular etymology (as early as the Vth Dyn.) derived *rm* "fish" from *rmj* "weinen" (Gamer-Wallert 1970, 16). Note that the latter form is a solid cognate of ECu. **ilm*- "tears" (Sasse 1982, 105; Lamberti 1987, 534, no. 15) > PSam **ilm* "tear" (Heine 1978, 65) ~ CCu. **ʕrəḡ*["]- "tears" (Appleyard 1991, 23; CCu., ECu.) ~ SCu. **ilima* "tears" (Ehret 1980, 291) ~ SOM. Ari *erma* "tear" (see Dolgopolsky 1987a, 199, no. 33; Blažek 1994, 27). It is excluded that Eg.-CCu.-SOM. isogloss represents a variant root with **r*-, to which perhaps also Ar. *rama'a* "to flow (tears), weep" (Ember 1911, 93; Eg., Ar.) belongs.

In the Egyptian culture, fish played a double role. In everyday life it was one of the most common and popular kinds of food, on the other hand, from the NK onwards, fish had become the object of religious prohibition and abstinence. In the calendar lists of the late NK, eating of fish is forbidden on certain days of religious importance. One cannot find fishes in the offering lists either. In a postscriptum to the 64th Utt. of the BD, abstinence from eating fish is one of the conditions of religious purity as cleaned feet, no intercourse with women (Gamer-Wallert 1970, 77). As is well known, king Pianhi (747-716 B.C.) has considered fish as impure from a religious viewpoint, and a similar view of Egyptians was recorded by Clemens Alexandrinus (Stromata VII, 33, 8) and Herodotos (II, 37), cf. also Schlichting 1984, 1126; Kákosy 1993, 248.

Gamer-Wallert (1977a, 227; 1977b, 229), however, emphasises that the taboo of fish eating was characteristic of the late NK and Late Period (and even then, it was not generally accepted) with no earlier trace before the late NK. Nevertheless, I think, the evidence of comparative linguistic data speaks for that the view among the Egyptians about fish as a disgusting, impure worm-like creature may have had earlier roots than the NK. This postulation can be supported by the following inner Eg. innovations for "fish" (some of which are attested much before the NK):

- a) *wbbw* "Art Fische" (MK, Wb I 172, 10) ~ *bw* "Ausdruck für Schmutz" (CT, Wb I 174, 19; FD 40: "impurity"), *b* "Unheil, Sündhaftes, (Gr.) Schmutz, Unreines" (NK, Wb I 174, 15-17) ~ Sem. **y**b* "vice, to shame" and/or Geez *ʕbā*, Tigrinya *ʕba*, Amhara *ʕbāt* "dung" ~ LECu. **eeb*- "to be ashamed" > Somali *ʕeb-ay*- "to put to shame" (Dolgopolsky 1987b, no. 22; Sem., LECu.) ~ WCh. Bade *áaban* "feces" (Blažek 1994, 3; Ethio-Sem., Bade) ~ CCh. **ub*- "excrements" (Orel-Stolbova 1992b, 185).
- b) *bw.t* "art Fisch (dessen Genuss als religios unrein gilt)" (OK, Wb I 453, 4) ~ *bwj* "verabscheuen" (OK, Wb I 453, 6), *bw.t* "Abscheu, das Widerliche" (Pyr., Wb I 453-454), cf. also the "fish" determinative (Barbus bynni, Gardiner 1927, 467: K2) attached to the root **bw*, cp. still *b* "Böses" (LP, Wb I 410, 8) ~ Berb. Tuareg *buyy-āt* "verabscheut werden, verachtet sein" (Zyhlarz 1932-1933, 90; 1934, 121) ~ (?) HECu. **bob*- "to smell bad, stink"

(Hudson 1989, 406) ~ CCh. *bu- "excrements" (Orel-Stolbova 1992b, 185: CCh., Eg.) and Buduma bōbi "ton, Lehm" (Lukas 1939, 92).

c) *hm.t* "Art Fisch" (LP, Wb III 80, 13) ~ *hm.t* "Unglück, Übel" (Gr., Wb III 80, 12), which is evidently more archaic, cf. ECU. **ha/um*- "bad" (Sasse 1979, 38) > Psam **hum*, pl. *hūmūm* "bad" (Heine 1978, 64).

d) *ftt.w* "Bez. der Fische" (BD, Wb I 581, 15; FD 99: "fish", not connected to *ftft* "springen" as Erman and Grapow think) ~ *ft* "sich ekeln, überdrüssig sein" (Med., Wb I 580, 8-13; FD 99) ~ HECu. **fuut*- "to fart" (Hudson 1989, 409) ~ WCh. Angas *fut*, Ankwe, Sura *fūt* "to vomit" (Greenberg 1958, 300; Illič-Svityč 1966, 23; SISAJa I, no. 133: WCh. + Eg.).

e) *hw.w* "die Fische" (Gr., Wb III 247, 9) ~ *hw.w* "böse Handlungen, Sünde, (Gr.) Unreines" (MK, Wb III 247, 7-8).

Fish was associated also with the offensive smell:

f) *hns* "to stink" (Med., Wb III 301, 1-3; FD 193) is written with a "fish" determinative.

g) *šnj* "Gestank von Fischen" (Med., Wb IV 503, 7) ~ *šn* "als Bez. für Schlechtes" (Gr., Wb IV 503, 8) - both words are with "fish" determinative.

h) *b'ḥ* "in üblen Geruch gebracht (bildlich vom Namen)" (MK, Wb I 450, 6; FD 81: "to be detested") written with a "fish" determinative ~ SCU. **baa*- "to defecate" > Iraqw *ba'a* "mud", Dahalo *baa*- "to defecate" (Ehret 1980, 135) ~ CCh. **ba*- "dirt" (Orel-Stolbova 1992b, 187; Orel 1994, 2: CCh., SCU.).

In some further cases "fish" seems to be etymologically related to designations for snake, worm or sim., what is probably connected with the despised, disgusting character of fishes in the eyes of the ancient dwellers of the Nile valley, cf.:

i) *gdb* (probably < **gudVb*) "ein Fisch" (Med., Wb V 633, 2) ~ *gdbj* "eine Schlange im Jenseits" (NK, Wb V 633, 5), *gdf.t* "Wurm, Gewürm, auch Schlange" (BD, Wb V 633-634) possibly (if we treat -b/-f as suffixes) related to ECU. Somali *god/galol* "worm" and/or Sidamo *goḥan-čō* "termite" ~ NOM. Ometo *guḥune* "worm", Gofa *guḥṇe* "worm", Wolamo *gutunia* "worm" (Dolgopol'skij 1973, 249; Boisson 1990, 20).

j) AA **[a]š*- "fish" is probably reflected in Eg. *š(3)* "lizard" (Pap. Ram. V, 21; Gardiner 1927, 465: II; FD 49) ~ Bed. *aša*, *aše* "fish" ~ CCu. **as*- "fish" (Appleyard 1984, 44, 57, add Qwadza *azō* "fish", Reinisch 1885, 33; 1887, 654) > Ethio-Sem. Ge'ez *āšā*, Tigre, Tigrinya *āsa*, Amhara *asa* "fish" (Leslau 1988, 85) ~ ECU. Saho *āsa* "fish" ~ NOM. Kafa *āšō*, *hāšō* (coll.) "Fische" vs. *eš* "pescare", Gofa *āso* "Fisch(e)" (Reinisch 1888, 265) ~ ECh. **a[s]*- "fish" (Orel-Stolbova). Cf. Cohen 1947, no. 48 (Geez, Bed.); Hintze 1951, 76 (Geez < Bed., Bilin); Orel-Stolbova 1992a, 167 (Bed., Saho, ECh.); Orel 1994, 3 (ECh., CCu with erroneous reconstructions).

At this point we can turn back to Eg. *rm* "fish" (OK, Wb II 416, 12), probably **rāmā(w/j)* > (S) *ra(a)me*, (B) *rami* (m/f) "Nilbarsch" (Osing 1976, 429: **rēmj* [j/w]; Vycichl 1983, 172: original is **rīmey*, pl. **rimy-ū* > sg. **rēm*, pl. **rame*), which W. Vycichl has proposed to derive from a not attested root **rmj* "pouler". This theory, however, would be very hard to prove in the lack of convincing concrete evidence.

Nevertheless, in the light of the above mentioned parallels (esp. points i, j), it seems fair probable that Eg. *rm* is of common origin with Sem. **rm* "to rot" vs. Hebr. *rimmā*, Aram. *rēm-et*- "worms (in rotten meat, corpse, etc.)", Ar. *rimm-at*- "ant with two wings" ~ ECU. Saho *rimme*, *rimmi* "termite, worm, maggot in rotten meat/corpse", Galla *rāmno* "worm, parasite", *rimma* "ant, termite" (Gragg 1982, 457), Galla Borana *rāmno* "worm, maggot", Sidamo *rāmō* "termite", Gollango *irmätte* "termite" (AMS 1980, 273), Burji

hirim-a, Rendille *ririm*, Bayso *iririm*, Dasenech *armōtti*, Galla *rir(i)m-a*, Konso *irmatt-a*, Gidole *irrimašš*, Hadiyya *irm-aččo* "termite" (Sasse 1982, 97). See also Dolgopol'skij 1973, 172 (PCu. **rām*- "worm, maggot"), Majzel' and Militarev 1983, 168.

The connection of "to rot" vs. "worm" in Sem. is not necessarily a contamination as Dolgopol'skij and Militarev suppose, cf. the parallel case in PKartv. **ma-t*- "worm" (Klimov 1964, 129) traced back to the root **t*- "to rot, decay, putrefy" by Gamkrelidze & Ivanov (1984, 87, note 2) and also by Penrihi-Sarjvelaže (1990, 298). (For a different etymological analysis of Kartv. **ma-t*- cf. Illič-Svityč 1965, 372; 1976, no. 312.)

Our reconstruction of the vocalized Eg. form as **rām*- can be confirmed by not only the Coptic reflexes and the ECU. Galla-Sidamo isogloss, but also by that an original **ri/u*- would have very probably resulted in Eg. *j*- and not *r*- in the Anlaut (see Diakonoff 1984, 6; 1988, 40; D'jakonov et al. 1987, 28), cp. e.g. Eg. *jm* (< **rim*) "Ton, Lehm" (MK, Wb I 78, 2), *jmj.t* "aus Ton hergestelltes (?)", (MK, Wb I 78, 4) ~ Sem. Ar. *rimm*- "(wet) earth" (Majzel'-Militarev 1983, 210; Orel 1994, 5); or Eg. *jwj* "bewässern, (Flüssigkeit) ausgießen" (MK, Wb I 49, 1-2) ~ Sem. **riway*- "abundance of water" and **rwj* "to drink" ~ WCh. Hausa *rūwōō*, pl. *rūwōyē* "water", Galambu *rwō* "river" (Majzel'-Militarev 1983, 203; Militarev 1984, 159, no. 15; Orel-Stolbova 1988, 81, no. 91; Blažek 1991, 364).

Abbreviations

AA: Afroasiatic (Hamito-Semitic), (B): Bohairic dialect of Coptic, BD: Book of the Dead, Bed.: Bed'awye, Berb.: Berber-Guanche, C: Central, Ch.: Chadic, CT: Coffin Texts, Cu.: Cushitic, Drav.: Dravidian, E: East, Eg.: Egyptian, Gr.: Greek and Roman Period, H: Highland, Hebr.: Hebrew, Kartv.: Kartvelian, L: Lowland, LP: Late Period, Med.: Medical Texts, MK: Middle Kingdom, N: North, NK: New Kingdom, OK: Old Kingdom, Om.: Omotic, P: Proto-, S: South, (S): Sahidic dialect of Coptic, Sem.: Semitic, W: West.

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