

Faith is not belief in fact, demonstration, or promise. It is sensibility to the due influence of the fact, something which enables us to act upon it—the susceptibility to all the strength there is in the fact, so that we are controlled by it. Nobody can precisely define it. All we can say about it

is that it comes by the grace of God, and that failure to see the truth is not so lamentable as failure to be moved by it.

The article is signed by the name of MARK RUTHERFORD.

The Traditions of the Masai.¹

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I.

THE statements of the late Captain Merker, which caused such a sensation at the time, about the legends of the Masai, which are so remarkably similar to the early history of the Hebrews, are capable of arousing the most widespread interest even at the present day. The question has not yet been settled whether these legends are really traditions preserved for thousands of years from the original Arabian home of the Masai, or whether Christian (or even Jewish) influence must be admitted. It is well known that Merker himself was firmly convinced of the absolute impossibility of the latter hypothesis; and if such an influence did take place—which is extremely unlikely, for the reasons which I shall point out below—it must have happened at any rate in earlier times, when the Masai still dwelt in the north in the neighbourhood of Abyssinia; but this, again, is open to grave doubts.

In the first place, it is quite out of the question that Merker, whose trustworthiness is beyond all doubt, had been imposed upon. As a matter of fact, it was only after long acquaintance with the Masai of his province that he won the confidence of those old Masai men who at last communicated to him the traditions, as a rule, anxiously guarded from strangers. Our Bavarian fellow-countryman, Deeg, who is a distinguished authority on the Masai, and authorities on Africa like Schillings and Dr. Ludwig Sander, are also perfectly con-

vinced that Christian influence through the missionaries is clearly impossible, since these worked there for only a comparatively short time, and the proud and warlike Masai were still very unresponsive to their exertions. When the English missionary to the Masai, Albert R. Steggall, who was active among them from 1889 to 1905, says (THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, June 1906, xvii. p. 429) that Mr. A. C. Hollis, the eminent authority on the Masai of English East Africa, told him of a Masai boy in his employ, 'that the Masai from whom Captain Merker got much of his information was for some years, during the Masai Famine, connected with a Roman Catholic Mission in the neighbourhood, as indeed were many others, besides those who came under instruction in the Church Missionary Society's station in Taveta,' I can apply that, as Merker himself told me, only to a Masai man from whom he got other information; for naturally he had quite different informants for the many inquiries on which his ethnological work is founded (morals, customs, names, etc.). And Hollis's protest,² that, as he (Hollis) had also associated for years with the Masai of his district, he should also have come on the track of such traditions, is only an *argumentum e silentio*. Either the Southern Masai (in German East Africa), among whom Merker worked, are more faithful

¹ In connexion with the 2nd ed. of Moritz Merker, *Die Masai*, which has just appeared (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1910). The present article is taken from pp. xiii–xxii of the preface (with a few additions made specially for THE EXPOSITORY TIMES).

² In a personal communication from the investigator, for whom I have a great respect, and whose acquaintance I had the pleasure of making at Oxford in 1908 (at the Congress for the History of Religions). In the year 1907, I also had the opportunity of meeting the late Captain Merker personally, after having previously corresponded with him—which was of extremely great value to me in connexion with the much-disputed Masai question.

guardians of these ancient treasures—which is not impossible—or Merker was more fortunate in gaining their confidence on this point also than Hollis, who had not got at the right people just then. In the preface to the first edition, Merker certainly makes special mention of the fact that it was not until during the fifth year after he started his work that he came across those traditions from primitive times, which do not as a rule live in the mouths of the people but are hereditary in certain families, and then are invariably to be found only among a few old men; and Merker took a year and a half to make a thorough examination of what he has given in his fourth chapter. Besides, even according to Hollis (cf. C. Eliot's introduction to A. C. Hollis, *The Masai: Their Language and Folklore*, p. xix), the monotheism of the Masai and their imageless worship of God ('they have definite prayers and they petition the deity more frequently and fervently than the surrounding tribes are known to do') are beyond doubt; and, on the whole, a comparison between the book of Hollis, which appeared shortly after Merker's book, and Merker's *Masai* is the best defence of the trustworthiness of Merker's ethnological as well as his linguistic observations.

Another eminent African investigator, the celebrated linguist, Carl Meinhof of Berlin (now Hamburg), has attacked, in the first place—for linguist reasons—Merker's description of the Masai as a 'Semitic race,' and, in the second place, the hypothesis that their original home was Arabia.¹ But the opinion of the Arabist Schwally of Giessen about the Masai traditions (*Archiv. für Rel.-Gesch.*, 1906, ix. p. 505), that in them 'features of Semitic origin are well grafted on to African' (but 'when and in what circumstances it is difficult to say') is true also of the language, as I was able to ascertain from an exhaustive study of Hollis's book. Unmistakable survivals make it clear that the Masai must at one time have been Semites, and, what is more, Arabian Semites. This will be briefly discussed in the following paragraphs.

Their own tradition is not the only evidence that they came from the north; that fact is confirmed by a comparison between some of their numerals and those of the Cushite languages (especially Somali and Galla) and of Nuba. Cf. the following list, to which I have added, from Hollis's

¹ Cf. his review in *Zeitschr. f. Ethnol.*, 1904, xxxvi. pp. 735-744.

new book,² the numerals of the Nandi—a race closely akin to the Masai:

	Nuba	Galla	Somali	Masai	Nandi	
1	<i>wēr</i>	toko	kau	obo	...	1
2	owu, <i>ora</i>	lama	laba	are	aeng	2
4	kemso	afur	afar	angwan	angwan	4
6	gorjo	dya	leh	ille	lo	6
7	kolloda	torb	tadoba	...	tessab	7
8	iduwō	zadet	sidet	isyet	sisi	8
9	oskoda	zagal	sagal	anderoit, sal	sokol	9
10	<i>dimenu</i>	...	toban	tomon	taman	10
20	aro	<i>digetam</i>	lubatun	tigitam	tiptem	20
30	...	<i>zodoma</i>	sudun	osom	sosom	30
40	...	<i>afurtam</i>	afartam	artam	artam	40
50	kuntun	onom	konom	50
100	<i>imil</i>	...	bog'hol	ip	pokol	60 100

In its purely Semitic syntax, too, the Masai language is closely related to Galla and Somali, while in this respect the rest of the Cushite languages (cf. on this point my *Grundriss der Geogr. und Gesch. des alien Orients*, p. 154 f.) show far more Nuba influence. And the purely Semitic basis of the so-called 'imperfect scheme' may still be plainly shown to underlie the whole Masai conjugation; cf. the following:

1. sing. *a-suj*, I follow. pl. *ki-suj*, we follow.
2. sing. *i-suj*, thou followest. pl. *i-suju-suju*, you follow.
3. sing. *e-suj*, he follows. pl. *e-suj*, they follow.

Here, corresponding to a letter-change to be observed also in Masai, *i* is the weakened form of *ti*, and *ki* has arisen from *ni*,³ so that we must assume as the earliest forms:

1. sing. *a-suj*; cf. Somali *aqan*, I know.
2. sing. *ti-suj*; ,, ,, *ta-qan*, thou knowest.
3. sing. *ye-suj*; ,, ,, *ya-qan*, he knows.
1. pl. *ni-suj*; ,, ,, *na-qan*, we know.
2. pl. *ti-sujū*; ,, ,, *ta-qanen*, you know.
3. pl. *ye-sujū*; ,, ,, *ya-qanen*, they know.

This is exactly the Semitic conjugation scheme (e.g. Arab. *a-kun, ta-kun, ya-kun*; pl. *nakun, takūnū*,

² A. C. Hollis, *The Nandi: Their Language and Folklore*, with Introduction by C. Eliot. (Oxford: Clarendon Press.) 1909, xl. 328 pp.

³ Cf. *ki-suj*, 'thou followest me,' from *ni-suj*, or (Hollis, *Masai*, p. 73) the change of the affixes *-ki* and *-ni*, or (p. 61) *tu-suja-ki*, 'follow me' (from *tu-suja-ni*), or (p. 56) *amelok*, but perf. *ata-melono*, or (p. 36) *oti klein*, fem. *kiti* (in contrast with *ado*, 'high,' fem. *nado*); and also *i* from *ti* (Hollis, p. 15), *naito*, 'the girl,' or *na-tito*, or (p. 58) *a-ikena*, 'I counted it,' for *a-t-ikena*, or (p. 61) *i-suja*, 'wash him,' for *ti-isuja*.

yākānū), transferred from Arabia to the Cushite languages. Besides, in spite of the fact that the Masai vocabulary and much of its grammar is so very Africanized, it shows many traces which clearly point to an original Arabian home. Among these I count the conjunctions *o*, 'and' (from *wa*), and the consecutive *pe*, 'and,' 'so that' (Hollis, p. 100), which is exactly the difference so characteristic of Arabic between *wa* and *fa*; the remains of the formation of individual names by the ending *-a* (*il-akir*, 'stars,' *ol-akira*, 'a particular star' [Hollis, p. xxi]); the double function of the particle *ma* ('not' as well as 'that,' as in Somali; cf. Arab. *ma*, 'not' and 'that which'); and separate characteristic words which can hardly be later loan-words, but must be looked upon as ancient remains, such as *ramesa*, 'night' (Arab. *rāmīs*, 'night-bird,' *rams*, 'grave'), *sararua*, 'navel' (Arab. *surra*), *sero*, 'forest' (Arab. *sarw*, 'wood-mountain,' originally 'cypress-forest'), *kunoni*, 'smith' (Arab. *kain*), *remet*, 'spear' (Arab. *rumh*), *moruo*, 'older man,' 'husband' (Arab. *maru*), *ure*, 'to fear' (Arab. *wara'a*); 'sun' and 'day' fem. ('night' and 'moon,' on the contrary, masc.); cf. also Arab. *šams*, 'sun' fem., and the phrase *al-lail wa 'n-nahār*,¹ 'night and day,' alongside of *al-yaum wa 'l-laila*. Some plural forms in Masai point distinctly to the South Arabian Mahra language (therefore the dialect of the incense-country), from which the so-called Ethiopian language originates, e.g. *ing-aitin* from *eng-ai*, *il-apaitin* from *ol-apa*, etc. (Hollis, p. 25); cf. in Mahra *ebelūten* (from *aybel*, 'flint'), *haidenten* (from *haidēn*, 'ear'); similarly Ethiopic *enta* (fem.), 'which,' and Masai *enna*, fem. of *elle*, and also the feminine article *en* (in contrast with masc. *ol*). According to Hollis (p. 275), the Pleiades (*gokwa*; cf. S. Arab. *kōkabān*) with the Masai consist of six stars only,² as in the

¹ *Nahār* is an old feminine form (afterwards no longer recognized as such) of the word *fa'āl* from *nūr*, 'light'; *lail* is the masc. of *laila* (older form *lailat*) with the same meaning, 'night.'

² It should also be observed that, as with the Babylonians, besides *kakkabu*, 'star' (Arab. *kaukab*), there was an older *kakkabu* (P.N. *Bel-kapkapī*, var. *Igur-kakkabu*, locating Enlil or Ekur=Bel in the north pole, certainly referred to the polar star, so also the Masai possessed, besides *gokwa*=kau-

pictorial representations of South Arabian epitaphs * * * (different from the seven circles of the Babylonian Nergal-symbol $\bigcirc \bigcirc \bigcirc \bigcirc$; cf. Zec 3⁹ and 4¹⁰, the seven eyes of Jahweh); the name of the holder of the religious tradition of the Masai, *el-kiboron*, coincides in a remarkable way with the word for 'priest,' *kabir*, in the old Minæan inscriptions of Yemen.³ The peculiarly 'European word *dengel*, 'maiden' (originally, of course, 'young wife'), is the same as the Masai *en-dangile*, 'young wife' (after circumcision); 'tongs,' *el-garamet*, is the Arab. *el-kullābat*, 'cow-bell,' *eng-gurugur*, the Arab. *al-gulgul*, and *en-abere*, 'spear,' perhaps Arab. *el-ibra*, 'needle.' The name of the species of climbing-plant, *mogongora*, from which the Masai get a fragrant wood for sacred purposes (Merker, p. 20, and cf. p. 150, *ol-magirigirieni*, a vanilla-smelling perfume), very forcibly recalls the S. Arab. name for 'incense,' *mugr*; for, as a rule, the repetition of the second half of a word, of which the Masai are so fond (e.g. *gadardar*, name of a tree, *airašaraš*, 'a shrub'), is just as much a peculiarity of Ethiopic, where it is used especially for the formation of names of colours (*warakrik*, 'gold-green'=Heb. *yeraḳrak*, *hamalmil*, 'green,' but also *dabarbir*, 'ridge-like'=hill, and the Tigr. plant-names *gondefdāfe*, *endufduf*, *amferfaro*, and *handugdug*). These are all sure traces which completely justify Merker's designation of the Masai as originally a Semitic, and more specifically an Arabic, race.

kabū(n)=Pleiades, another word *kopekob* meaning 'north.' It is known for certain that *kaukab*, 'star,' goes back to the older *kakkab*, and it is proved directly by the Mahra form *kibekib*, *kibkob* (D. H. Müller, *Die Mehri- und Sogotri-sprache*, iii. 46). These two Masai words (for 'Pleiades' and 'north pole star') point to very ancient Babylonian-East-Arabian influence.

³ There is also a Masai custom, according to which, when a Masai is inside a hut with a woman, he sticks his spear in front of it, so that no other man may enter (Merker, pp. 84 and 120), which agrees remarkably with the similar custom related by Strabo (bk. xvi.) of the Southern Arabs (only 'staff' here instead of 'spear'). And the fact that the 'speaker' is at the head of the warriors recalls South Arabia (cf. *kail*, 'chief,' properly 'speaker,' and *sayid*, 'lord,' probably possesses the same etymology; cf. Syriac *sewād*, 'speech').