

## NOTES ON THE TURKANA TRIBE OF BRITISH EAST AFRICA

### PART I.

*Origin.*—Dr. Stuhlmann (*Handwerk und Industrie in Ost-Afrika*) distinguishes five strata in the composition of African natives. First, the dwarf original population, of which scattered remnants are seen in the Pigmies, Bushmen, and perhaps Andorobo; though it is an open question whether small men generally are a special race or degenerates of black races, and the latter is the view taken by Keith in the Hunterian Lectures of 1910. Second, Nigritian peoples, dark-skinned, woolly-haired, with isolating languages formed of monosyllabic roots with no accent, but pitch; their centre of dispersion being South Asia after the end of the tertiary and at the beginning of the pluvial period. Third, Proto-Hamites, probably from the North, speaking an agglutinous language with numerous classes of substantives; who by their admixture with Nigritians gave rise to the Bantu group.

Fourth, light-skinned Hamites coming in near Suez and across the Bab-el-Mandeb, spreading all over North Africa, who by mixture with the preceding elements gave rise to the Bisharin, Hadendoa, Bari, Latuka, Masai, and later to the Galla, Somali, Proto-Abyssinian, Watusi, and Bahima. Fifth, Semites, who, having mixed with Sumerians or Turanians in Arabia, migrated to Egypt circa 5000 B.C., and formed the cultural basis of Ancient Egypt.

Only the fifth and part of the fourth strata can be deemed historical; the first three during a huge period forming the "Negro." Nubia was originally inhabited by the Archaic Egyptians and it was not until the time of the pyramid-builders that the Nigritians came north from their first home in the region about the Great Lakes. Lower Nubia then

became the crucible for the formation of the new races; Sir Samuel Baker states that the Galla (Hamites) once extended far into the Latuka territory. The fusion having taken place, and the zebu-type of cattle having been introduced by the Hamitic element, the next division was doubtless that into agricultural and pastoral peoples; the pastoralists, by reason of their cattle, the forests and swamps, and the tse-tse fly, taking a south-eastern route. The more adventurous of these peoples pushing South met the Andorobo or hill-dwellers, possibly relicts of the first African stratum, and with them formed the Suk, Chebleng, Elgeyo, Kamasia, Nandi, and Lumbwa tribes of to-day.

The Turkana are probably one of the latest formations, and their migration one of the most recent during this lengthy period; they are undoubtedly allied to the Masai, Bari, Latuka, Karamojo, Wami, Dabosa, Dodoso, Jie, and Teso peoples and to a less degree to the Dinka, Shilluk, Acholi, Aluro, Lango, and Kavirondo (Ja-Luo) group; while they are to-day, with the Karomojo, transforming the Suk from an aggregation of hill-dwelling hunters practising a little agriculture into a pastoral tribe. The rapidity with which pastoralists like the Turkana, Somali and Masai absorb, or endeavour to absorb, other tribes and grazing to-day, despite European interference, leads one to think that their migrations have not been so age-long, and in many cases are aided by the people to be absorbed welcoming the oncoming "cattle-culture" and increased wealth.

It is possible that the great Shilluk movement of two hundred years ago hastened the movement of the Turkana, amongst other tribes, and the Turkana think their own migration recent. Native accounts collected by Mr. S. O. V. Hodge are to the effect that the Turkana are an off-shoot of the Jie, a tribe administered from Uganda and living on the escarpment north of Mount Moroto, and that the first settlements of the new tribe were near Lokiriama and Naiyeche, and that in a short time the whole of the Tarash Valley was occupied (*vide* African Society's JOURNAL, Vol. XVIII., p. 183 for map). The Turkana and Jie languages are to all intents one, and the Turkana in all their raids have respected the Jie, while the Jie have reciprocated by providing them

with spears and other iron implements, obtained from the Acholi, at advantageous rates.

The origin of the word Turkana is stated to have been *Ny'turkwan*, caves in rocks, in which the Turkana first lived. The Turkana do not exhibit any physical resemblance to cave-dwellers. While not being "giants," as reported, they are as a race extremely tall. The word may mean "dwellers in stony places" when the nature of this country is considered, but it should be noted that the rocks and crannies abounding in Turkana do often offer shelter, and further, that the reputed parent-stock, the Jie, live on the table-land at the edge of a precipitous escarpment, in which there are natural caves. Possibly a comparison of the Latuka language with the Turkana will support a suggestion that Latuka (more correctly *Eltuken*), the spelling of Sir Samuel Baker and Emin Pasha, and Turkana are the same, or variants of the same, word.

*Tribal History*.—Shortly after the formation of the tribe it came into conflict with its neighbours, first with the Dabosa, who were occupying Lojom, on the Lower Tarash (the fighting has continued and the Turkana have a respect for the Dabosa); next with the Donyiro, a tribe partly in the Sudan, Uganda and East Africa Protectorates, akin to the Dabosa with a language approximating Turkana, and with the Marle,<sup>1</sup> the majority of whom live in Abyssinian territory between Lakes Rudolf and Stephanie, whom Count Teleki characterises as a "remarkable people held in great esteem by surrounding tribes." The fighting took place in the neighbourhood of Mounts Pelegech and Labur; relations are now friendly in the North of Turkana. At the same time the Turkana were spreading in a south-eastern direction and met the Samburu,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Marle, there is a Suk legend that they are descendants of Suk from Maerich whom famine drove North. Natives state their language approximates to Masai and Nandi. Count Teleki (1883) notes that they do not circumcise; they cicatrise the body as the Turkana, Karamojo and Suk, and use the wrist knife as those tribes.

<sup>2</sup> The Samburu, presumably the Burkeneji noted by Teleki in 1888; in May that year he states the *second* heavy Turkana raid took place. Mr. Beech, *The Suk*, relates that some of the Samburu fled South of Lake Baringo, where they became the Njemps or Njamusi. They are of Masai origin. Probably the Turkana obtained camels, which they prize, from the Samburu and the markedly Hamitic Rendile.

a relic of the Masai migration, who possessed the country between the Turkwel and the Kerio Rivers as far north as Lake Rudolf and as far south as Laterok Mount. The Samburu were defeated and fled in the direction of the El Barta plains, Mount Marsabit, and the Guaso Nyiro River, where they are still to be found. Having defeated the Samburu the next tribe met were the recently formed Suk.\* Relations were at first friendly, later inter-tribal raiding began, which continues to this day. The Suk were driven from the Muruasagar Hills to the Chemerongi Range, which they hold with difficulty. Another tribe with whom the Turkana came into conflict are the Karamojo, with whom they seem to have been ever inveterate enemies, and to have contended equally. They did not come in contact with the Masai until both tribes were administered.

*Distribution.*—The boundaries of the area occupied by the Turkana have not been defined for the purposes of administration. A natural and tribal boundary would be from Sillali along the foot-hills westward to Kolosia, to the Turkwel Gorge, thence along the foothills of the Chemerongi Range, thence along the northern slopes of Mount Moroto, thence along the escarpment to Mount Zulia, thence to the present Sudan boundary, thence in a north-eastern direction to encircle the Lorusia Mountains, to the Abyssinian frontier; this boundary does not provide an eastern limit to the tribe and the Turkana are encroaching upon the Samburu in this direction.

The population of Turkana is probably about 45,000; roughly 25 per cent. are thought to inhabit Sudan territory, 50 per cent. Uganda territory west of the boundary with Kenya Colony, 25 per cent. between the Turkwel and Kerio Rivers.

*Comparison with Other Tribes.*—The group or groups with which the Turkana are affiliated have been noted in speaking of their origin. The tribes having a special relationship with the Turkana are the Jie, Dodoso, Karamojo, and Suk.

\* Suk, said to be a Masai word *ckok*, a short bill-hook used in agriculture by this and other Escarpment Tribes. In the same fashion the Masai nicknamed the Kipsikis, *Lumbwa*. The Suk call themselves Pokwot, plural Pochon.

As regards the Jie, the relationship is fiduciary, there is a physical likeness, the languages present only dialectical differences, the nature of their country makes the Jie somewhat agricultural and the Turkana almost entirely pastoral.

The Dodoso, the same remarks apply, save that there is enmity between them and the Turkana. The Karamojo are not good friends with the Turkana, the language is alike but not so much as with the preceding two tribes, the physical resemblance is not so great. It will probably be found that the Karamojo are of two types; the first the Niloto-Hamitic type, tall, long-legged, often with Hamitic features preponderating in influence, customs, and numbers over the second type of a Bantu strain, found more especially north and east of Mounts Elgon and Debasien. The Bantu type in the Karamojo has been noted by anthropometric measurements by Dr. Shrubshall (*vide* Sir H. Johnston, *The Uganda Protectorate*, Vol. II., p. 762).

The birth, marriage, inheritance, and death customs of the Jie, Dodoso, Karamojo and Turkana are very much the same, and even the clans, cattle brands, and names. The weapons, head-dress, stools, dress,<sup>4</sup> and ornaments present a like similarity, as also the food and its preparation; the first three tribes, however, while obviously preferring a cattle-food existence and inhabiting a country more favourable than the Turkana, do a little agriculture. Probably the original nucleus was that known as the Jie, Dodoso, and Turkana tribes to-day, then living above the escarpment north of Mount Moroto, the first party breaking off and going directly south to form the Karamojo with indigenous natives and a Bantu people, the second party to form the Turkana and remaining pure.

There are differences in the form of hut-building,<sup>5</sup> the more sedentary Jie, Dodoso and Karamojo following one type; the

<sup>4</sup> Dress, Sir H. Johnston, *The Uganda Protectorate*, Vol. II., shows several photographs of adult female Karamojo naked. They are well clothed to-day not in trade goods but in skins, and never seem to have been otherwise. His book is dated 1902.

<sup>5</sup> Hut building, the same writer, p. 772, states the Karamojo are perhaps an exception to the rule of the "flounced" Nilotic thatching of huts. No exceptions amongst them have been seen in their permanent villages, and such Turkana as have permanent dwellings follow the same pattern.

extremely nomadic Turkana naturally another, nomadic only from the nature of their country.

A comparison with the Suk presents other features, and possibly a key to the formation of the Nandi, *i.e.*, the confluence of Niloto—Hamitic natives with Andorobo or Hillmen, an amalgamation dictated not only by conquest, but by admiration for the virile qualities of the immigrant and for his cattle, offering by their possession wealth, food, drink, clothing and a "culture."

In early days the Suk, if then possessing any cattle, were debarred by the Samburu from grazing the plains in the Kerio Valley area, and their first impetus towards a nomadic life was on the first successful raid upon the Samburu; having obtained stock they naturally came in contact with the oncoming Niloto—Hamitic, Turkana, and it seems that they amalgamated with them to some extent about 1860, afterwards quarrels set in.

The fact remains that an increasing number of Suk are adopting a pastoral life modelled on the Turkana, marrying Turkana women in the East and Karamojo women in the West, following the Turkana dress, weapons, customs, nomenclature, organisation, and even amongst the pastoral sections abandoning circumcision, particularly in the West, and endeavouring as much as possible to speak Turkana or Karamojo, a language very different from the Suk tongue, which is roughly an archaic form of Nandi, and which they now affect to despise.

*Physical.*—The Turkana have been described as "giants," and their average height estimated as 7 ft. They are certainly a tall race, but not giants, and a man of 7 ft. in height would be exceptional. They are a well-made race, and capable of great exertion. The colour of their skin varies between chocolate-brown and black. The hair of the head is negro-like. In their physiognomy they do not present so prognathous a type as the Karamojo, some faces are Hamitic, as with the Somali. Turkana women are prolific and well-made, but while a tall race of women they do not reach the height of their men.

The Turkana, as the Jie, Dodoso, and Karamojo do not circumcise or practise clitoridectomy as the Suk.

*Clothing, Ornaments and Weapons.*—The body is disfigured by Turkana men by cicatrization on the chest and shoulders; on the left breast when a woman has been killed by him, on the right or the whole chest when a man, and—*moi* (from Turkana *emoit*, an enemy) is added to his name, the cicatrization is done by cutting. The septum of the nose is pierced by men and a white metal plaque hung, a custom probably causing the Masai name *El-Gume* for the tribe; the middle incisors of the lower jaw are usually extracted; the lower lip is pierced and a piece of polished quartz or metal inserted. The dressing of the hair is varied, it may consist of a few ostrich plumes; a black ostrich feather busby; a carefully mudded skull cap in which are inserted in gut sockets, "antennæ" of wire or oryx horn, bound with giraffe hair, with a chain hanging down the back and tufted with marabout-down; or a striking oval chignon stretching far down the back made of the hair of the wearer, his relations and friends, and mudded, with ostrich feather and "antennæ" decoration. There is nothing to show that the hair used is of a man's ancestors; the feathers are often dyed delicate shades of blue and pink. The chignon is more associated with middle age. The ears are pierced for rings. All these physical decorations are found amongst the Jie, Dodoso, Karamojo and Suk.

The ordinary dress of a Turkana man is an oval goat-skin pad down the back, a string of beads or else a belt of hard seeds around the waist, a pennon-shaped apron over the buttocks, a number of iron rings or beads around the neck and wrists, skin garters at the knee and ankles, thumb and finger rings. Giraffe or other tails worn in a band around the biceps are favoured by young men, an oryx horn snuff-box is carried, and one of the three distinct types of pillow-stools. Sandals of thick hide are worn, a piece of fat is hung to the neck ornaments to be used for oiling the body and cleansing the weapons. The same are found amongst the Jie, Dodoso, Karamojo and Suk.

The Turkana weapons are two spears of about 10 ft. in length, with laurel-shaped heads, wooden hafts, and iron shod; these are used for stabbing and throwing; they can be

thrown 70 yards, and in times of peace are sheathed with strips of leather around the blade; a curious circular wrist knife used at close quarters, also sheathed; a curved stick with a sharpened end used on the head of an opponent and as a shield; and a finger-ring knife, used, it is said, as a knuckle-duster, but more generally for eating purposes. The shield is a narrow strip of elephant or like hide, sometimes of wicker, with a stick hand-guard, which protrudes at the ends, decorated with a black pompom of ostrich feathers. They do not use the bow as the Suk, but otherwise resemble them, the Jie, Dodoso, and Karamojo, in their weapons.

The face is often mudded, grey, white (ash), and yellow, as the legs below the knee; a pattern of white and red ash and mud sometimes decorates the fore-locks; the temples are shaved and the hair of the body removed; this ornamentation is found amongst the other tribes mentioned.

Turkana women generally shave the sides of the head, twining the hair of the pate in thin plaits; the ears are pierced for rings; the neck is adorned with a mass of cowries and beads, necklaces of ostrich eggshell are prized; the waist is girdled with a thick belt of beads; a V-shaped skin apron decorated with beads is worn over the pudenda, and a skirt of skins with jagged ornamented edges, longer in the married woman; the wrists and fingers are decorated with iron rings. They oil the body with rancid butter.

*Houses and Villages.*—These are of a mean description; the hut consists of two parts, and is a small framework of sticks about 4 ft. high, over which skins or grass are spread.

This is the sleeping place. There is often another shelter of roughly interwoven branches which is used as a sitting place and kitchen. Each woman has a separate hut. The youths sleep in the open on ox-hides. This rough hut is dictated by the extremely nomadic nature of the Turkana, in its turn dictated by the nature of their country and the numbers of their stock; where they have settled for any time they build their huts in the "flounced" Nilotic fashion.

Stock is kept in the open, save the newly-born. Thorn zaribas surround the villages. The villages are often large, for safety in the case of raids, and division of labour in the

herding of stock, each kind and age of which has its particular grass for grazing. The work entailed by large herds of stock is little realised by Europeans. There is no particular system in the congregation of villages, save the reasons noted above; they are generally inhabited by members of the same section, and are a law to themselves.

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*(To be continued.)*