



102. Prehistoric Graves in the Northern Frontier Province of Kenya Colony

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Arab help, drove the latter from Kanem in the fourteenth century, seem to put the Tuareg origin of the Maghumi of Kanem beyond doubt.

Bula Ferum, Ye Kiyi-ilalla.

O town of Ferum, O noble Kiyi (Bulala).⁸

Am Jihad, Ye Kiyi-ilalla.

O town of Am Jihad, O noble Kiyi (Bulala).

* * *

Ni dugu kime.—You are the red⁹ grandson of a chief.

Fune chilimwa—with the black mouth-veil.

Karan kau—and armlets of black stone (*chilimwa*).

It may be added that these indications of origin are not relevant in respect of the modern Tuareg (the Tuareg of the Northern and Central Sahara) only. The kingdom of Kanem, which came into being about 700-800 A.D. in the region now called Borku, was originally a purely Tuareg polity, in which the name of the old governing class Maghumi is a mere variant of the similar Tamashek term, Imagaran or Imajaran = 'nobles.' These early migrant Maghumi of Kanem were sometimes even called by the name which the modern Kanuri apply to the Tuareg—Kinin or Kindin—as, for instance, in the expression 'Kindin Kel Buram' used of Maghumi invaders of Bornu.

In this expression Kindin is merely descriptive. Kel is a Tamashek word for 'clan' corresponding to Kabyle Ait or Ith—and Buram may, I think, be the same (R for L) as Balau or Balam, Balhemu, or Blemmyes—but it would be interesting, as Mr. Rodd observes, if further light on these questions were forthcoming. H. R. PALMER.

Kenya : Archæology.

Curle.

Prehistoric Graves in the Northern Frontier Province of Kenya Colony. *By A. T. Curle.*

In 1927 I assisted Mr. Pease, who was District Commissioner of the Gurreh District in the Northern Frontier Province of Kenya, to excavate one of the large burial cairns of stones which

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are so common all over the North East corner of Africa from the River Tana in the South to French Somaliland in the North. We also investigated other forms of burial in the area.

The cairn selected was situated about two miles South of Mandera, and three miles from the River Dawa which forms the boundary between Kenya and Abyssinia at that part. It was at the base of a low rocky hill, on slightly rising ground and on a hard gravelly soil. The cairn measured 36 feet in diameter, and the top which was flattish was 6 feet above the ground level on the lower side, and 4½ feet on the higher side. There were four depressions round the centre as if parts had subsided. After the removal of the outer surface at a depth of about a foot the interstices between the stones were filled with hard soil, possibly deposited by termites, while the lower part of the cairn was a solid mass of hard earth and stones (Fig. 1). A section of

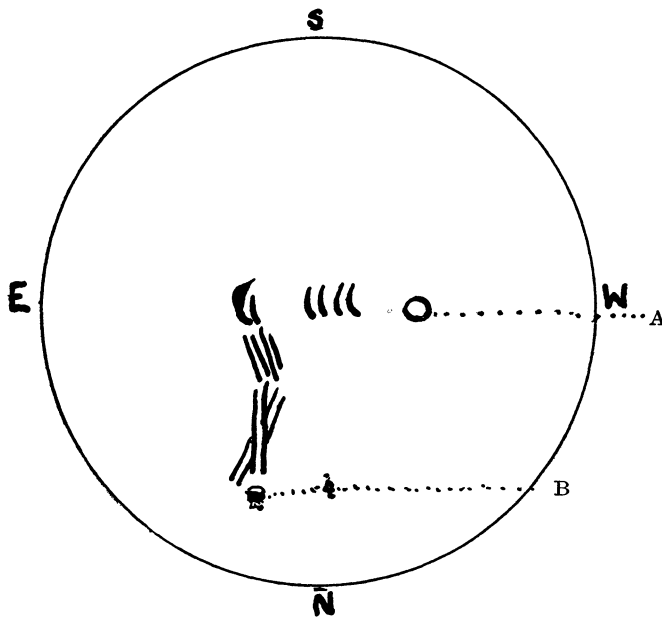


FIG. 1. CAIRN NEAR MANDERA, KENYA COLONY: SKETCH PLAN (NOT TO SCALE), SHOWING POSITION OF THE HUMAN BONES: (A) METAL EARRING: (B) FRAGMENT OF BONE.

⁸ Bulala = Abu or Bu-ilalla.

⁹ Both in Kanuri and Hausa the word for 'red' is used of skin colour where we should use 'white'; a Tuareg is 'kime,' 'red,' but a much darker Sudanese is called 'bul' (white). Whatever views may be held

about the origin of the present-day Tuareg of the Sahara—the Maghumi and Bulala (Bu-ilalla) Tuareg of Bornu must have come to Borku from regions further East. All their traditions bring them from the Red Sea.

this mass from the southern edge to the centre was systematically cleared. Nearing the ground level a blackish mixture was found in the soil, containing decayed vegetable matter, while immediately below this there were distinct traces of lime, and it was observed that a number of stones proved quite soft as if they had been subjected to fire. Towards the centre of the cairn the stones were noticeably larger and a number were set on edge, but owing to the subsidence of the cairn and the mass of hard earth no definite formation could be traced. At ground level, 15 feet from the southern edge and 3 feet from the centre, fragments of an earthenware vessel were found, which had obviously been fractured by the collapse of the cairn. The fragments were pieced together and formed a bowl of coarse red earthenware 8 inches in diameter and standing on four short legs which rested on a round base, the whole being 6 inches in height. Within the bowl were marks either of fire or of decomposed matter, forming a black coating. The bowl was clearly a stand for food, *see* Note 1, and the shape and design interesting and unlike anything in use in the district to-day; moreover its fragility would render it unsuited to the requirements of a nomadic race. *See* Note 2.

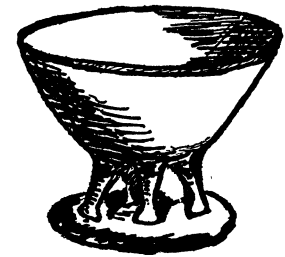


FIG. 2. EARTHENWARE BOWL FOUND IN LARGE CAIRN (FIG. 1).

About 6 inches nearer the centre, the first traces of human bones were found, only fragments remained that crumbled away when touched, but by brushing the earth their outlines could be traced. The lower leg bones lay north and south and were crossed, the right being uppermost, and the thigh bones were roughly in the centre of the cairn, the ribs and the head lay at right angles to the legs, the head lying to the west. A copper or bronze penannular ring measuring 2½ inches in diameter and of the simplest character, which from its position was presumably an ear ring, was found touching the skull. The position of the arms was not traced.

It would seem from the position of the bones that the body had been placed on the ground level in a sitting position and the cairn built around it with a chamber at the feet and each side, roofed over with wood. The collapse of these three chambers and the 'body chamber' would account for the depressions which are a noticeable feature of all the cairns of large type in the Northern Frontier Province of Kenya, and in Somaliland. Whether bowls were placed in the chambers at the sides can only be ascertained by further research.

Later on in 1927 I excavated a very large cairn of the same type measuring 62 feet in diameter, close to Wajir, also in the Northern Frontier Province of Kenya, but owing to the ravages of termites and rats, no relics were recovered except the fragments of a bowl exactly similar to that found in the previous excavation.

The traditions of the Gurreh, a nomadic tribe of Galla extraction at present living in the Dawa Valley, ascribe these cairns to a Hamitic race known by them as 'The Five

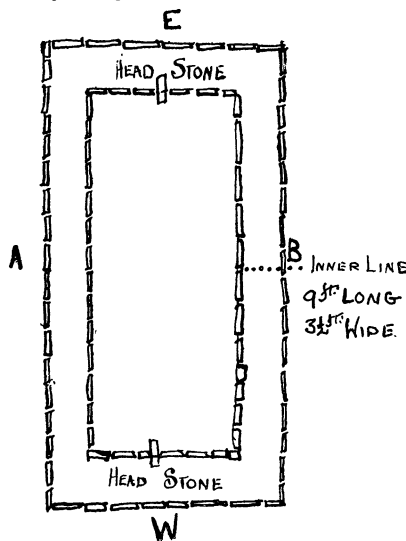


FIG. 3. GRAVE FROM A CEMETERY IN KENYA COLONY: SKETCH PLAN.

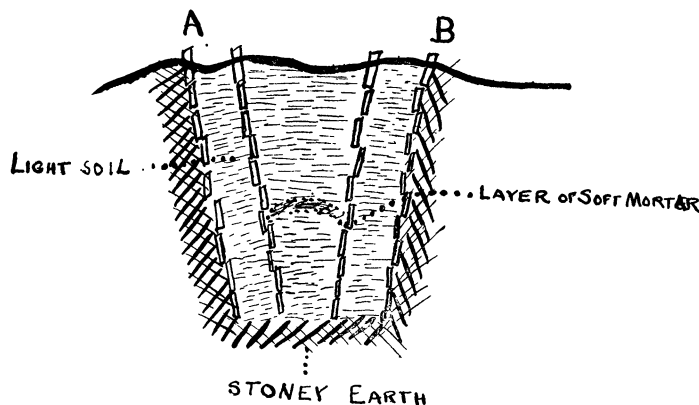


FIG. 4. VERTICAL SECTION OF GRAVE ON LINE A-B IN FIG. 3.

' Tribes,' who eventually drove out the ' Ben Israeli ' mentioned later. Somali tradition in Kenya ascribes them to the ' Madanleh,' who they maintain were super-men of great stature, who dug the wells which are still in use to-day at Wajir, and whose descendants were driven out to the Lake Rudolph area by the Galla.

The other form of burial which was investigated consisted of graves in cemeteries, arranged in rows, the graves usually lying east and west, with headstones. A grave at the end of the row was selected for examination. It was marked off by two lines of stones (Fig. 3), and when a section was cut across (Fig. 4), it was found that both lines of stones were continued below the ground level to a depth of 5 feet, converging inwards as they got lower. At three feet down a layer of mortar composed of lime and sand was discovered, but no remains were found under it. It was noticeable that although the earth outside was stony, inside the stones there was nothing but soft sandy soil.

This form of grave is found within the same geographical limits as the cairns described above and I believe it to be of Muhammadan culture, for the reason that around the mosque at Au Bakadleh in the Hargeisa District of British Somaliland, there are many graves of this type, exact replicas of those on the Dawa some five hundred miles distant. The Gurreh attribute these graves to the ' Ben ' Israeli,' a people of superior culture, and a Semitic race, *see* Note 3, while the Somalis at Au Bakadleh say that this type of grave was that of the earliest people of Arabian descent who crossed to Africa to preach the gospel of Muhammad, and that they were buried with their face looking towards Mecca and lying on their right side.

The other principal form of burial which one finds all over the Somali country is the small cairn, universally ascribed to the Galla or Wardeh, where the dead are placed in a sitting position in a small hole covered with wood or branches with a heap of stones on the top. These are of comparatively recent date and correspond in varying antiquity according to the gradual penetration of the Somalis from the north to the south.

Thus, according to native tradition, which must be regarded as a very unreliable source of information, the cemetery graves of the ' Ben Israeli ' would be the earliest, followed by the cairns of ' The Five Tribes ' or the ' Madanleh,' with the small cairns of the Galla or Wardeh as the most recent.

Unfortunately, it was impossible to preserve the finds made in the excavations, and although the record was preserved in the files of Mandera District Office, I feel that in view of the steadily increasing interest in antiquities, it should be published to make it accessible to a wider circle. I know that several other people have dug into cairns in the Northern Frontier Province of Kenya, and I trust that one day they, too, will place their results on record.

NOTES.

1. I have seen at Guimbo in Italian Somaliland a Muhammadan tomb with a hole in the masonry at one end into which offerings of food and incense were placed at regular intervals, but no special type of dish was utilized.

2. I have looked in many museums at home and abroad to see if I could trace any vessel of similar type and only saw one in a museum at Bologna which was found in an Etruscan burial site.

3. There is a tribe of Indian Jews to-day living on the coast near Bombay called the ' Beni Israel ', who are reputed to have originally migrated from Arabia. They supplied whole regiments for the East India Company's Army prior to the system of mixing the religions in each regiment. They do not indulge in trade and commerce to the same extent as their fellow Jews. A. T. CURLE.

ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE: PROCEEDINGS.

Glimpses of Life under Tibetan Rule in Chinese Turkestan (8th century, A.D.). Summary of a Communication presented by Professor F. W. Thomas, C.I.E., Ph.D., 25 April, 1933.

Chinese Turkestan is the region described by the Greek geographers under the title ' Scythia beyond the Imaos (mountains).' Mountains, rivers, cities and peoples are mentioned by the geographers with longitudes and latitudes rather definite according to the system followed. But practically none of them are identifiable by their names, and this, despite the fact that the information is proved to have been based upon the reports of travelling merchants. The verification of