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1. Nomenclature of the Berta-speaking peoples and their neighbors.

The Ethiopian Berta inhabit the region south of the Blue Nile on both sides of the present Sudan-Ethiopian border. Their territory loosely extends from the region south of Roseires in the north to the Fadasi (/fà-Dāšī/) district in the southeast and the Yabus in the south. It is bounded northeast by the Gumuz who live across the Dabus river, and south by the Leqa Oromo who live beyond the Yabus river.<sup>1</sup> In the west the Berta are bounded by the Uduk, the Ingessana, and the Burun. These last three separate the main (Ethiopian) Berta population from the small Berta-speaking Sudanese communities living on hills Sillok, Malkan, and Yakan (Evans-Pritchard 1932: 9-12). Small settlements of Berta are scattered among other tribes in the south, the Mao and the Oromo of the Beggi region, and the Koma to the west. Scattered Berta speakers are also to be found along the Diddessa valley as far south as the Dabena river, southeast of Gimbi.<sup>2</sup>

Official data on Berta population are not available. Schuver in 1881 estimated their number at 80,000; (Schuver 1883: 3) but subsequent raids and pillaging during the Mahdist period (1881-1898), and the continuous raidings for slaves by their eastern neighbors, greatly reduced the Berta population. Today, the population of Berta speakers (both in Ethiopia and Sudan) has been variously estimated at 50,000 (Hair 1966: 70), the Sudanese Berta at 10,000-20,000 (Tucker and Bryan 1956: 80), while a sample survey conducted by the Ethiopian authorities on the rural population of the Asosa-Beni Shangul Awraja has assessed it at 64,000 (Imperial Ethiopian Government C.S.O. 1967: 5). Since most Ethiopian Berta live within the administrative borders of this district of which they form the bulk (possibly 80-85% of the population, it is possible that the Ethiopian Berta alone number as high as 50,000.

In the literature<sup>3</sup> the Berta have been divided into two distinct groups, a Sudanese one variously called Sillok or Tornasi, and an Ethiopian one, at times identified with the Gamila of Conti Rossini, or more generally referred to as the eastern branch of the Berta.<sup>4</sup> Whether these classifications are linguistically sound is open to question. The Berta themselves do not make such distinctions and claim their language is one.<sup>5</sup> Further research will have to be carried out among the Sudanese Berta if this point is to be clarified. The observations contained in this paper refer to the main (eastern) branch of Berta who live within Ethiopia.

In the literature, the "considerable confusion of nomenclature" lamented by Tucker and Bryan (1956: 80) has given way to several contrasting explanations of ethnic and dialectal names, and Bryan's definition of the border area as "A Linguistic No-Man's Land" has held true for the past thirty years or so (Bryan 1945). The following is an attempt to systematize the existing Berta nomenclature and to correct some of the main discrepancies to be found in the literature.

Berta is the name by which the dialects as a whole, and the people speaking them, are known in the region. The Berta claim today

they came to the region they at present inhabit from a legendary mountain in southern Sennar which they call Gerri, possibly to be identified with Jebel Gerri of the maps, southeast of the Sudanese town of Roseires. They also claim they owe their name to the first ruler in the region, called Berθu, son of Qiθabuwa (or Qibuwa),<sup>6</sup> who is said to have first led the Berta from Gerri and to have settled at Jebel Sude southeast of the present border town of Qessan. Qiθabuwa is better known among the Berta as Berθuwabune ('Berθu's father') because his son became king (/áǵúr/) of all the Berta settlers in the region. Just when this event took place is not known, but the Berta had certainly settled in the region by the early seventeenth century when their name (በርታ, /berta/) first appears in Ethiopian sources as tributary to the Funj kings of Sennar (Esteves Pereira 1900: 154, 158).

Berta traditions acknowledge that the region was then inhabited by scattered groups of "Mao" and Koma who were pushed south and west by the new migrants. Mainly for defence, and as a replica of their former dwelling place at Mt. Gerri, the Berta settled on the region's hills, and in time came to be known by the hills' names.<sup>7</sup> Thus the Fa-Undu were the people of Undu mountain (/fà-, 'people'), the Fa-Fazaqalu were the people living on Fazaqalu mountain (Arabicised as Fázughlī), and so on.

A defensive alliance united the different mountain settlers, who once a year descended from their refuge to participate in common ritual ceremonies which were aimed at strengthening the Berta sense of belonging to one group. The alliance was symbolized by putting together the sacred stone (/šàngúl/) which the Berta had taken along from Gerri as a symbol of their unity. The place, Jebel Sinje, a burial ground for all Berta kings and a shrine for ritual ceremonies (the shangul is also known as /bèl-áǵúrù/, 'the rock of the kings'), was called /bèl: šàngúl/, meaning the rock /bèlè/ of Shangul, from which the northern region took its name.<sup>8</sup>

The name found in the literature is the Sudanese Arabic version of the name /berθa/. Because of its association with slave raids in the past, the term "Berta" is today used by Sudanese Arabs and their descendants in the region as a synonym of ʿabid (Ar. 'slave'). The region was known to nineteenth century travellers as "Dār-Bertat" (Ar. for dār al-Berta);<sup>9</sup> later it came to be known as Beni Shangul, and the Ethiopian Berta were said to call themselves Xojalee or Hoyalee (Cerulli 1947: 157 n.) All these terms are of Arabic derivation and reflect different historical periods in the region's history.

Dar al Berta was the term used by the Arabic-speaking Egyptian administration in Sennar (1821-1881). Beni Shangul - construed to be a derivation from the Arabic Banī (sons of) and the Ethiopian /šank'illa/ (a loose term meaning 'Negro', used mostly in a pejorative sense; Trimmingham 1952: 218) was used only after the ascendancy in the region of ʿabd-ar-Raḥman Khojalī, the ruler of the northernmost Berta district bordering with the Sudan, in about 1880.<sup>10</sup> The northern Berta region is still known today as Beni Shangul (or Banī Shangul) by both the Ethiopian authorities and Sudanese Arabs. Yet the Berta call it /bèl: šàngúl/, and this appears to be the original name of this Berta district.

Similarly, the term 'Xojalee' - a contracted form of Sheh Hojale (Ar. Shaykh Khōjalī) - is the name of the Asosa ruler Khōjalī al-Ḥasan

of the Rikābiyya family who was given the overrule of the whole Berta region by the Ethiopians after they annexed the province in 1898 (Arkell 1928: 5). As a term, it includes only the Rikābiyya members of the ruling family of Asosa who claim Arab descent, and cannot be used as a general term for the Berta, being a family name and referring only to the southern (Asosa) district of the Berta. Yet, because many Berta subjects of Khojalī al-Ḥasan were taken to Shewa after 1898 as slaves or soldiers in the Ethiopian army, the name Hojale has been employed by Ethiopians for anybody coming from this border region. The term Shogale<sup>11</sup> is also used by the Oromo living in the surrounding regions (Leqa, Qellem, Sibū...), and the term is widely used today in preference to Hojale.

Other terms such as Gebelawin, Watawit, Gamila, Fadon or Agaro are to be found in the literature in connection with other unspecified groups of Berta speakers in the region.<sup>12</sup> Since they are a major source of confusion, these terms require a few words of clarification. The term Jabalawīn<sup>13</sup> (Ar. for 'mountain dwellers') is used by Sudanese, Arabs, and Sennar migrants' descendants in the region to denote those Berta groups who claim to be descendants of the old Funj rulers of Sennar who migrated to the Ethiopian escarpment before the fall of the Funj kingdom (1821), intermarried with the Berta, and set up 'Funj' dynasties who were tributary to the rulers of Sennar. Their alleged descendants, scattered throughout Berta country, take great pride in ascribing their 'pure' origin to the Funj, and call themselves by this name.

Since the Berta lived mainly on hills, the 'Funj' settled among them and ruled over these hills. The term Jabalawin, "people of the hills", was given to these Funj-Berta descendants by the Arabs who came to the region in the early nineteenth century to distinguish them from the rest of the Berta. Yet the distinction seems to be an arbitrary one, since claims to Funj descent are widespread in the whole border region and indicate more a status symbol than an ethnic marker (James 1971: 203-206). It would rather seem that the term Jabalawin was used by the Arabs mainly in a geographical sense, to denote all people who lived on hills, which is the equivalent of the Berta /fá-šū're/ ('people-up'), a term used in the region to refer to people living in high places.

The term Jabalawīn is rarely used by the Berta themselves, who call this group /máyu/, a contraction of the Arabic Banī Ummaya, from the alleged descent line claimed by the Funj to prove their Arab origin.<sup>14</sup> For the Berta, Mayu is a synonym of 'freemen', and they seem to include in this term any foreigner of Arab descent who has come to their region. In fact, under this term the Berta include also the better known group of the Watawit (watawīt, Trimmingham 1952: 219), the ruling group which took the power away from the Jabalawin in the first part of the nineteenth century. This was a group of Arab migrant traders (jallaba) and teachers (fugara) who came to the region towards the end of the Funj rule mainly for trade and sporadic missionary activities.<sup>15</sup>

Like the Funj before them, the new migrants settled among the Berta, intermarried with the region's ruling families, and by the mid-nineteenth century had taken power in their hands. The mixed

descendants of these Arab settlers and Berta inhabitants came to speak the region's language as their own, and ruled over it. Some say they were called "Wetawit" because their language (Berta) sounded like a bat in flight (sg. wəṭwəṭi from wəṭwəṭ, Ar. "bat"). The term has a pejorative meaning in the region, and is rarely used by the Berta-speaking Arab descendants, who refer to themselves as Arab to emphasize their 'pure' origin, and who adamantly claim the name "Wetawit" comes from the Arabic wāṭan (homeland) to mean true people of the land where they have settled. 16

Berta speakers living along the low valley of the Dabus towards the junction of this river with the Blue Nile are known in the literature as Gamila.<sup>17</sup> Although they have been referred to as a 'tribe' (Tucker and Bryan 1956: 80) or a 'section' (Er. Cerulli 1956: 11) of the main Berta cluster, there do not appear to be sufficient grounds to consider them a separate group. Their very name Gamila - possibly to be identified with the Qamāmyl of Cailliaud (1826: 421-5) - is a derivation of the Berta word /gá-mì:lí/, 'son-black', a widely used Berta expression meaning 'children of blackmen', which the Berta proudly apply to themselves, and to which they oppose the non-blacks with the term /gá-bè:ñi/, 'son-red' or children of the red (i.e., "white"). The term "Gamili" has no pejorative connotation among the Berta, and does not refer to any particular group. The Berta living around Jebel Sude, the descendants of the first settlers, are at times referred to as the purest among the Gamili, and it is possible that the term "Gamila", wrongly applied to one particular group, came from this collective name.

Finally, the Fadon 'group' of the literature<sup>18</sup> are the people who once lived on the Dongo (/dòŋò/) mountain in the Belfodio (i.e., búl-fù:dí-yù, "river-white-belly") area north of the present district capital of Asosa. After the destruction of the Dongo village by the 1898 Ethiopian expedition in this region, the Fa-Dongo moved to the close-by Menge area, where they founded a new settlement. Similarly, the Agaro group mentioned in the literature<sup>19</sup> and reported by Ernesta Cerulli (1956:11) as a small Berta group in the Fazughli area, are the Fa-Haru, living on mount Haru, about midway between Fazughli and Qessan on the Sudanese side of the border.

Although dialectal differences are reported in the literature, these do not appear to alter the basic unity of the Berta, who claim their language is one. They refer to it as /ndú-bèrəú/ or /ndù-əyù/, "home language"<sup>20</sup> (/ndù/, 'mouth', /əyù/, 'place-belly' and ad extensum 'home'), as opposed to /ndú-əù:əó/, the language of the foreigners (/əù:əó/, 'outside'). They refer to both "Mao" and Koma as Homa, who are not recognized as Gamili but are disparagingly called /umma dùdù (/umm/, 'slave', /dùdù/ 'leaves') or 'slaves of the leaves' since, when the Berta first met them, they are said to have fed themselves with leaves and to have had tree bark and grass as their only garment.

The Oromo (Galla) and the highland Ethiopians are both called /ga:la/, although the Ethiopians are at times known by the term /makada/, as they are also by the Ulu hillsmen of Burun (Evans-Pritchard 1932: 16). Both the Jebalawin and the Wetawit are referred to as "Mayu", although the latter are often called /gè:dí mùrəó/ or

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"children" (/gè:dí/, sing. /gà/) "of the horse" (/mùrθá/, pl. /mùrθé/), since horses in the region were first brought in by the Arabs. Similarly, the Berta spoken by these two foreign groups is called /ndù-màyù/ by the region's inhabitants, who are quick to add that it is not 'pure' and is spoken by people 'whose tongues are tied'.

The Burun are called by the Berta /bruŋ/. The arabized Wetawit call both "Mao" and Koma "Amam", highland Ethiopians "Makada", Europeans "Ennasara" (from the Ansar, or followers of the Mahdi of Sudan), the Berθa "Berta", and the Funj "Jebalawin". They call themselves "Arab" or, according to their respective alleged descent line, Rikabi, Bidari, etc. The Jabalawin also call themselves "Arab" and at times "Sudan", but follow Berta nomenclature otherwise. The term "Hamej" or "Hamaj"<sup>21</sup> often connected with the Funj in the border region, is seldom used by them; they prefer the more prestigious term "Funj." Simoons 1960: 21 ff. refers to "Hametsh" in the Kumfel (Kunfel) country of Ethiopia, west of Lake Tana. They were said to speak a non-Afroasiatic language, but it was not made clear as to whether it might be Gumuz. Field work by Bender in February 1974 established that the Kunfel-area Hamej speak Gumuz. Reidhead (1946: 11) says the Hamej speak the language of the local group, e.g. Tabi (Ingessana), Jumjum, Berta. There is no "Hamej" language. The term is a pejorative (see Bender 1975c: 70).

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