MON AND MUNDA IN INDIA AND BEYOND.

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In the present state of our knowledge any definite conclusions about the physical type which is to be associated with the original introduction of the Austroasiatic languages is clearly impossible, and it is merely intended here to attempt some examination of the existing information which may serve as a starting point for further investigations. All we have to go on at present is the evidence of language and culture, and both of these have to be used with extreme caution, as it is commonly found that languages and cultural traits are handed down from one people to another like secondhand clothes in the bazar. Mountains, forests and other inaccessible parts of the earth have always formed a refuge for the weaker races, and each in turn will take its language with it when driven to such fastnesses, while that part of the race which remains in the open country has generally adopted the language and customs of invading and conquering inhabitants. When the process repeats itself, the former refugees will be acquiring the language of the earlier invaders while these themselves are already exchanging it for that of their successors ; as a more useful language, like a more useful implement, will inevitably modify if not supplant a clumsier and less perfect. This at any rate is what seems to have happened in Britain, where the mountainy men who still use Celtic languages the most exclusively are not by any means to be taken as the best representatives of those who brought those languages in, but appear often to belong to still more ancient stock who have in their time undergone the same process as the Celtic speakers did later at the hands of speakers of Teutonic tongues. We cannot therefore take the present speakers of Mon and Munda languages as necessarily representing at all the race which originally imported these languages into India.

The present distribution of Austroasiatic languages in India shows very small patches of survival in the Punjab and Himalayas, a fairly solid block in Chota Nagpur and Orissa, and patches again, but stronger and larger than those in the north-west, in the Central Provinces and in Assam.[1] The same family appears again in the Nicobar Islands and in the east of Burma and becomes, of course, increasingly predominant in the south-east of the Asiatic Continent, in Indonesia and in the Pacific. The breaks in the distribution of the Indian branches of the family are marked by the fact that the Munda group of languages has retained certain ancient characteristics lost by the

[1] Indian Census Report, 1931. Section 155.

Mon-Khmer group, and that Nicobarese, though generally approximating to the latter group, has likewise retained some of those ancient characteristics which are seen in the former.[1] The Mon-Khmer languages in Assam appear to have arrived there from the east. This view seems to be confirmed by cultural evidence to which I refer below. The recognized Austroasiatic family of languages, extending as it does from the Punjab to New Zealand and from Madagascar to Easter Island, has been in the past the most widely distributed group in the world, as far as geographical distribution goes. According to Baer's law (which may fairly be applied from zoology to linguistics) this wide distribution alone would make them an older family than any other in India. Now during the last two or three years Hevesy has argued that no such linguistic family as the Austroasiatic exists at all. He apparently repudiates the connection between Munda and Mon-Khmer and seeks to establish in its place a connection between the Munda and the Finno-ugrian family.[2] Now this view seems entirely contradictory to the cultural evidence with regard to the Munda- and Mon-Khmer-speaking groups, and the only conclusion left is that if Hevesy is right about the relation of the Munda to the Finno-ugrian group the older philologists were also right about its relation to the Mon-Khmer group. This would make the Finno-ugrian-Austroasiatic family a still wider group geographically and still more ancient in point of time. Hevesy also concludes that the Dravidian precedes the Munda in India, but to my mind the displacement of Munda, as the earlier, by Dravidian, as the later, is indicated not only by the present geographical distribution in India of the two languages but also by the influence which Dravidian languages have apparently exercised directly on Aryan languages in northern and western India. The fact that patches of Munda languages still survive in remote corners of north-west India would perhaps be enough to account for a certain number of direct loan words from Munda to Indo-Aryan languages.

A further question is raised by Hevesy's identification of the Easter Island script with that of the Mohenjodaro seals.[3] If this identification be correct it supports the association of India with the Pacific, and suggests, *prima facie*, that there might be more than Hevesy is willing to admit in the relationship which others have found between the Austroasiatic family and India. Rivet's association of the Sumerian language with the Austroasiatic family may also bear on this point. If so we have to consider whether the people of Mohenjodaro may not at one time have spoken an Austroasiatic language, belonging perhaps to the stock which survives to-day in the Munda family. I have already pointed out that such an hypothesis would not involve any necessary racial identification of the tribes now using Munda languages with those

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[1] Meillet and Cohen.—*Les Langues de Monde.*

[2] Hevesy.—*Journal Asiatique.* Paris, 1934.

[3] Hevesy.—*Osterinselschrift und Indusschrift* in the *Orientalistiche Literatur Zeitung*, Leipzic. November, 1934.

who inhabited Mohenjodaro. On the other hand, while Hevesy's association of Munda with the Finno-ugrian languages has not yet found general acceptance, there seems to be at least one serious difficulty about his identification of the Easter Island and Mohenjodaro scripts. It is true that the parallel series of ideographs shown by him indicates a very remarkable similarity, and that so great an authority as Prof. Langdon accepts his case as proved. The difficulty seems to be that the Easter Island script, being recorded on wood, must apparently be very much more recent than the Mohenjodaro seals, some 5,000 years old perhaps. If there is this distance between the two in point of time one would expect to find a very much greater divergence between the symbols than Hevesy's parallel columns indicate, as it seems hardly credible that the symbols should have remained in use but so little changed during the passage of millenia.

I turn now from linguistic to cultural considerations. As is well known, the neolithic shouldered hoe, or adze, has been associated with the Mon-Khmer-speaking Khasis in Assam and with Indo-China, the Irrawady valley and the Malay peninsular. It is also the old Polynesian form and occurs in obsidian in Easter Island. Westwards of Assam it occurs in the Sawara country in the Madras Agency Tracts, occasionally in the Santal Pargannas, and has been found in a copper form in part of Chota Nagpur.[1] Otherwise I know of no occurrence of it nearer than the paleolithic shouldered adzes found at Kish, where pottery adzes of similar type were also found by Mackay. Nor are any shouldered celts reported, as far as I know, from anywhere south of the Godavari river, though I have seen a somewhat similar iron type in Mysore, suggesting the long narrow rectangular shouldered iron hoe of the Sawaras. Bodding, it is true, argues against any association of the shouldered hoe with the Austroasiatic languages,[2] but does not seem to have been aware that both in Assam and in the Madras Agency Tracts the association still continues, as there are tribes speaking languages of that family and using iron hoes manifestly derived from the shouldered stone prototype, and in areas which still yield specimens in polished stone.

Another important cultural item is the use of megaliths for burials. Like the Munda-speaking tribes of Chota Nagpur the Khasis burn their dead and collect the bones in a pot which is placed in a stone ossuary of dolmen type, while menhirs are also erected.[3] An important feature of the funeral rites is the collection of the bones of the dead from individual dolmens to the clan ossuary. A feature of this ceremony is the construction of a pair of shallow tanks, and this feature has made it possible to link the Khasi burials, with their rough dolmens and menhirs of intractable gneiss, with the elaborately shaped sandstone burial urns of the North Cachar Hills, which, like the Khasi

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[1] Indian Census Report, 1931. Section 155.

[2] *J.A.S.B.* LXXIII, No. 2. 1904.

[3] Gurdon.—*The Khasis.*

and Munda clan burial places, form great groups of stone ossuaries.[1] Now recent discoveries in Tonkin [2] have revealed stone burial urns which can clearly be associated with those of the North Cachar Hills. This is of very great importance, since although we already have the direct linguistic link and cultural link of the shouldered hoe, this fresh association through stone mortuary urns brings them in to very much closer touch, particularly in point of time, as the use of these stone urns does not seem to have extended over a great period of time. Further the Tonkin discoveries may make it possible to give an approximate date to the corresponding remains in Assam. Dr. Coedès regards the menhirs and slabs, which are found to the south of the stone urns area, as having belonged to the bronze age, whereas the stone urns are clearly of the iron age. He would date them about the beginning of the Christian Era and associate them with the first Chinese expansion into Tonkin. Mdlle. Colani, however, regards the menhirs and slabs as later than the stone urns. The burials under these slabs are in clay pots like those of the Mundas, or of the modern Khasis. A similar sequence is given by Kruyt in regard to the stone urns and the pot burials of the Célèbes. In order to justify this sequence however, Mdlle. Colani is forced to the unwilling conclusion that iron has preceded bronze in parts of Tonkin. At the same time she seems to me to hit on the true solution when she says that the presence of sandstone in Tran-ninh province has determined the funerary handiwork of past inhabitants. At the present time Konyak Naga villages possessing sandstone make stone cists for the skulls of their dead, but those with no sandstone readily available use pots.[3] Moreover these pots are used in identically the same manner in the Konyak country for the skulls of the dead, as they were in Tonkin for cremated remains, the pot being covered with a flat stone or with a second pot inverted. If sandstone and pottery can be used, as it is to-day, contemporaneously for the same purpose, this might equally have been the case in ancient Tonkin. It would appear that if the Syntengs or Khasis of Assam first erected stone urns in the North Cachar Hills, where there was sandstone, and then cists and dolmens containing pots in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, these two cultures must at least have followed one upon the top of the other, and were in all probability in existence contemporaneously. It seems possible therefore that burials in pots might have preceded as well as followed the use of stone urns.

Another point noted by Mdlle. Colani is the progressive decrease in the size of the cavities in the stone urns. A similar process seems to be apparent

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1 Mills and Hutton.—*Ancient Monoliths of North Cachar, J.A.S.B.* XXV, No. 1. 1929.

2 Colani.—(1) *Communications au premier congrès de préhistorie d'Extreme Orient.* Hanoi, 1933.

(2) *Note sur das Mégalithes du Haut-Laos. Bulletin de la Société Préhistorique Française,* No. 7-8, 1934.

3 Hutton.—*Two Tours of the Naga Hills, M.A.S.B.* XI, 1929.

in the North Cachar Hills, and if I am right in suspecting that the monoliths at Dimapur and Kasomari have sprung from the same tradition as those in the North Cachar Hills, the shrinking of the cavities is very marked indeed at Dimapur and has almost disappeared at Kasomari.[1]

It is necessary at this point to mention that stone funerary urns, some of very large size, are reported from Minahassa and from the Célèbes, while Sumatra and Nias yield stone troughs almost certainly used for the same purpose and in some respects very similar to the stone urns of Tonkin.[2] It is likely therefore that the area of megalithic urn burials of one sort or another has been widespread in Indonesia. That it reached Assam overland from the east seems almost certain, as not only is an eastern origin indicated by Khasi tradition, but there are clear traces of Mon-Khmer to be found in the Naga Hills both in occasional scraps of folklore, in river names in part of the unadministered area to the north-east, and in the iron Yimtsung hoe which is identical with the smaller Khasi shouldered hoe and quite unlike other Naga hoes. Dixon has associated the Khasis in physique with the Manipuri ; much similarity is to be found between Khasi and Kachha Naga custom, including the use of the upright and the flat stone as memorials to the dead ; and the Naga tribes to the east of the Khasi and North Cachar Hills mostly claim an origin from the east or south-east. The Khasi lime appears to be identical with *Citrus ichanguensis*,[3] a native of southern China or northern Indo-China ; while the villages in the southern Sangtam country on the Burma border of the Naga Hills claim to have brought with them the seeds of their lime trees when migrating from further east.

The position reached is this :—that the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austro-asiatic linguistic family has reached India from the far east or from Indonesia, and both in the place of its origin and in its present location is associated with certain cultural items which include the shouldered hoe and the disposal of the ashes of the dead in clay pots under dolmens. Munda, a more archaic language of the same family has the same cultural associations. We are forced to consider whether the Munda languages may not have been brought to India from the east and have immigrated across the Bay of Bengal at an earlier date than the movement of the stone urn makers into Assam, and developed the copper hoe from the neolithic type. There are certain considerations which at first sight seem to support this view. The Sawara in the Madras Agency Tracts cultivate rice on irrigated terraces. This method of cultivation is certainly practised in the Himalayas, but is typical also of Indonesia. It is not practised however by the more westerly branches of the Sawara tribe in Central India. Hodson regarded the language of the Hayas of Nepal as connected with the Kolarian (Munda) family and Campbell records

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1 Hutton, *J.R.A.I.* LII, LIII (1922-1923) and *J.A.S.B.* XX, No. 5. 1924.

2 Van der Hoop.—*Megalithic Remains in S. Sumatra.* Zutphen, 1933 (?).

3 Personal information given by Mr. P. C. Kanjilal of the Indian Forest Service, U.P.

their tradition of migration from the Deccan.[1] There are certain folktales of the Santals and Mundas which find very close parallels in Indonesia. Such an hypothesis however fails to account for the presence of languages of the Munda family in the Punjab and elsewhere west of Chota Nagpur without the shouldered hoe, and it seems definitely negatived by the fact that Nicobarese, linguistically mid-way between the Munda and the Mon-Khmer groups of the Austroasiatic family, is also unassociated with either the stone burial urn or the shouldered hoe. The only satisfactory hypothesis appears to me that the copper hoe (or adze) of prehistoric Chota Nagpur is the prototype of the polished stone shouldered adze (or hoe) of the further east, and having been evolved in copper was copied in polished stone in India and more prolifically further east, and that the type was retained in iron, after the introduction of that metal, by Assam tribes and by the Sawaras independently. This incidentally would account for the marked divergence of the iron forms in Assam and in Madras though the stone forms found there are more proximate. If the distribution of the shouldered hoe be later than that of the language there is nothing remarkable in its having missed the Nicobars. This is not of course to say that there has been no immigration of culture from the east across the Bay of Bengal, as it is certain that there has been a flow of migration in that direction to Ceylon and up the west coast to Malabar, and it is most improbable that it left the east coast untouched. Hornell ascribes certain canoe forms to this source, and it seems likely that the coconut also came thence to Orissa. This however is not necessarily relevant to other matter considered in this paper. The conclusion as to the diffusion of the shouldered hoe culture sheds no light on the alleged identity of the Mohenjodaro and Easter Island scripts nor on Hevesy's association of Munda with the Finno-ugrian family; the paleolithic shouldered hoes at Kish are still left out in the cold. It is possible that the Munda languages may have penetrated India down the Ganges valley from the north-west; they may have originated north of the Himalayas and spread simultaneously south-west and south-east.

These are questions which can only await further investigation and discovery.

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[1] Dalton.—*Ethnography of Bengal*, 1872.