

Ninus, the founder of Nineveh, and his greater spouse Semiramis, who was first the wife of his captain, Onnes, but won the king's love by an heroic exploit, the capture of Bactra, which had defied the royal forces. Ninus died, and Semiramis, succeeding to his power, traversed all parts of the empire, erecting great cities (especially Babylon) and stupendous monuments or opening roads through savage mountains. She was unsuccessful only in an attack on India. At length, after a reign of forty-two years, she delivered up the kingdom to her son Ninyas and disappeared, or, according to what seems to be the original form of the story, was turned into a dove and was thenceforth worshipped as a deity. This legend is certainly not Assyrian or Babylonian; Ctesias must have had it from Persians or Medes, and the fulness of detail, the multitude of proper names, favour the conjecture that Ninus and Semiramis were celebrated in some Median epic tale which went on to tell of the fall of Assyria before the Medes (Duncker, *Gesch. d. Alt.*, 5th ed., ii. 18 sq.). In this legend all the conquests of Assyria were crowded together into one lifetime, and King Ninus and his son Ninyas are mere eponyms of Nineveh, personifications of the Assyrian monarchy. But it is round the figure of Semiramis that all the real interest of the legend gathers; nor can she be the arbitrary creation of a poet, for it is certain that her name was popularly connected with many famous places and monuments. "The works of Semiramis," says Strabo (xvi. 1, 2), "are pointed out through almost the whole continent, earthworks bearing her name, walls and strongholds, aqueducts, and stair-like roads over mountains, canals, roads, and bridges." Ultimately every stupendous work of antiquity by the Euphrates or in Iran seems to have been ascribed to her,—even the Behistun inscriptions of Darius (Diod., ii. 13). Of this we already have evidence in Herodotus, who, though he does not know the legend afterwards told by Ctesias, ascribes to her the banks that confined the Euphrates (i. 184) and knows her name as borne by a gate of Babylon (iii. 155). Various places in Media bore the name of Semiramis, but slightly changed, even in the Middle Ages (Hoffmann, *Syrische Akten*, p. 137), and the old name of Van was Shamiramagerd, Armenian tradition regarding her as its founder (St Martin, *Mém. sur l'Arménie*, i. 138). These facts are to be explained by observing that in her birth as well as in her disappearance from earth Semiramis clearly appears not as a mere woman but as a great goddess. In Diodorus's account she is the daughter of the Derceto of Ascalon and miraculously brought up by doves, and again she is finally transformed into a dove, and therefore the Assyrians pay divine honours to this bird. Semiramis, therefore, is a dove-goddess associated with Derceto the fish-goddess. The same association of the fish and dove goddesses appears at Hierapolis (Bambyce, Mabbug), the great temple at which according to one legend was founded by Semiramis (*De Dea Syria*, 14), and where her statue was shown with a golden dove on her head (*ibid.*, 33, comp. 39).¹ But the Semitic dove-goddess is Ishtar or Astarte, the great goddess of Assyria and Babylon, and the irresistible charms of Semiramis, her sexual excesses (see especially Dinon in *Ælian*, *V. H.*, vii. 1), and other features of the legend all bear out the view that she is primarily a form of Astarte, and so fittingly conceived as the great queen of Assyria. The word Semiramis in Semitic form, as the Syrians write it, is Shēmīrām (Hoffmann, *ut supra*), an epithet rather than a proper name, which may be rendered "the highly celebrated," or perhaps rather "name [manifestation] of [the god] Rām."² The historical inference

¹ It is noteworthy in this connexion that Mabbug is the *Ninus petrus* of Ammianus and Philostratus.

² Cp. the Phœnician "Astarte שִׁמְרָם" (*C. I. S.*, i. 1, No. 3, l. 18).

from all this is that Semitic worship was carried by the Assyrians far into Media and Armenia.

On an Assyrian inscription the name Sammuramat appears as borne by the "lady of the palace" of Rammanivar (812-783 B.C.); see Schrader, *K. A. T.*, 2d ed., p. 366. E. Meyer (*Gesch. des Alterth.*, p. 409) combines this with the statement of Herodotus that Semiramis lived five generations before Nitocris, which would make her date 766 B.C. Possibly Herodotus identified the two names, but it is very doubtful whether they are really connected. Shemiramoth (1 Chron. xv. 18) perhaps means "statues of Semiramis," and, if so, was originally a place-name (Ewald, *o. l.*).

SEMIYETCHENSK, a province of Russian Turkestan, including the steppes south of Lake Balkash and parts of the Tian-Shan Mountains around Lake Issik-kul. It has an area of 155,300 square miles and is bounded by Semipalatinsk on the N., by China (Jugutchak, Kuldja, Aksu, and Kashgaria) on the E. and S., and by the Russian provinces of Ferganah, Syr-Daria, and Akmolinsk on the W. It owes its name (*Jity-su, Semi-ryetchie, i. e.*, "Seven Rivers") to the rivers which flow from the south-east into Lake Balkash. The Jungarian Ala-tau, which separates it from north-western Kuldja, penetrates into its central portions, extending south-west towards the river Ili, with an average height of 6000 feet above the sea, several isolated snow-clad peaks reaching about 12,000 feet. In the south Semiryetchensk embraces the intricate systems of the Trans-Ili Ala-tau and the Tian-Shan (see TURKESTAN). Two ranges of the former, connected about their middle by a single mountain-mass, extend east-north-eastwards along the northern shore of Lake Issik-kul, both ranging from 10,000 to about 15,000 feet and both partially snow-clad. To the south of the lake two immense ranges of the Tian-Shan, separated by the valley of the Naryn, stretch in the same direction, raising their icy peaks to above 15,000 and 16,000 feet; while westwards from the lake the vast walls of the Alexandrovskiy ridge, 9000 to 10,000 feet high, with peaks rising some 2000 feet higher, extend to the province of Syr-Daria. Another mountain complex of much lower elevation runs north-westwards from the Trans-Ili Ala-tau towards the southern extremity of Lake Balkash. In the north, where the province borders Semipalatinsk, it includes the western parts of the Tarbagatai range, the summits of which (10,000 feet) do not reach the limit of perpetual snow. The remainder of the province consists of a rich steppe in the north-east (Serghiopol), and vast uninhabitable sand-steppes on the south-east of Lake Balkash. Southwards from the last-named, however, at the foot of the mountains and at the entrance to the valleys, there are rich areas of fertile land, which are rapidly being colonized by Russian immigrants, who have also spread into the Tian-Shan, to the east of Lake Issik-kul. The climate is relatively temperate (average yearly temperature 44° Fahr. at Vyernyi, 2500 feet above the sea) and the vegetation rich.

The chief river is the Ili, which enters the province from Kuldja, makes its way through the spurs of the Trans-Ili Ala-tau, flows north-west in a bed varying from 200 to 1000 yards in width, and waters the province for 250 miles before it enters Lake Balkash by several mouths forming a wide delta. Its tributaries from the left are the Naryn, the Tchilik, and the Kurtu; several others become lost in the sands. The Karatal, the Aksu, and the Lepsa likewise fall into Lake Balkash. The Tchu rises in the Tian-Shan Mountains and flows north-westwards to Lake Saumal-kul; and the Naryn flows south-westwards along a longitudinal valley of the Tian-Shan, and enters Ferganah to join the Syr-Daria. The province contains several important lakes. Lake Balkash, or Dengehiz, in the north (8880 square miles), is crescent-shaped, 400 miles long and 55 wide in its broader part; but its area is much less than it formerly was, and it is rapidly drying up,—notably since 1853. Lake Ala-kul, which was connected with Balkash in the Post-Pliocene period, now stands some hundred feet higher, and is connected by a chain of smaller lakes with Sisk-kul. Lake Issik-kul (2260 square miles) is a deep mountain lake, 120 miles long and 37 wide, 5300 feet above the sea. The alpine lakes Son-kul (9400 feet) and Tchatyr-kul (11,100) lie south-west of Issik-kul.

The population, which was estimated at 748,800 by M. Kostenko in 1880 (139,660 being in the Kuldja region), has since increased,

the latest official figures (1882) giving 685,950 for the province, exclusive of the Kuldja region. Of these Russians numbered, according to Kostenko, 41,585, 20,640 being Cossacks, who are very poor as compared with the free Russian emigrants. The majority of the population are Kirghiz (595,237); next come Tarantchis (36,265), Kalmucks (about 25,000), Mongols and Manchurians (22,000), and Dungans (19,657), these last two mostly in Kuldja; while Tatars and Sarts are each represented by some 3000 or 3500 (all the foregoing figures include those for Kuldja). The

province is subdivided into five districts; Vyernyi (18,423 inhabitants in 1879, of whom 3586 were military), the chief town of the province, formerly Almaty, is situated at the foot of the Trans-Ili Ala-tau, and has a mixed population of Russians, Tatars, Sarts, Kirghiz, Kalmucks, and Jews; its trade with Kuldja and Kashgar is increasing rapidly, and it has now two lycæums, for boys and girls, and several other schools. The other towns—Kopal (5450 inhabitants), Serghiopol (1045), Tokmak (1770), and Karakol (2780)—are merely administrative centres.

SEMITIC LANGUAGES

THE name "Semitic languages" is used to designate a group of Asiatic and African languages, some living and some dead, namely, Hebrew and Phœnician, Aramaic, Assyrian, Arabic, Ethiopic (Geez and Amharic). The name, which was introduced by Eichhorn,¹ is derived from the fact that most nations which speak or spoke these languages are descended, according to Genesis, from Shem, son of Noah. But the classification of nations in Genesis x. is founded neither upon linguistic nor upon ethnographical principles: it is determined rather by geographical and political considerations. For this reason Elam and Lud are also included among the children of Shem; but neither the Elamites (in Susiana) nor the Lydians appear to have spoken a language connected with Hebrew. On the other hand, the Phœnicians (Canaanites), whose dialect closely resembled that of Israel, are not counted as children of Shem. Moreover, the compiler of the list in Genesis x. had no clear conceptions about the peoples of south Arabia and Ethiopia. Nevertheless it would be undesirable to give up the universally received terms "Semites" and "Semitic." There exist large groups of languages and peoples which bear no natural collective appellations, because the peoples grew up unconscious of their mutual relationship; so science must needs give them artificial designations, and it would be well if all such terms were as short and precise as "Semitic."

The connexion of the Semitic languages with one another is somewhat close, in any case closer than that of the Indo-European languages. The more ancient Semitic tongues differ from one another scarcely more than do the various Teutonic dialects. Hence even in the 17th century such learned Orientalists as Hottinger, Bochart, Castell, and Ludolf had a tolerably clear notion of the relationship between the different Semitic languages with which they were acquainted; indeed the same may be said of some Jewish scholars who lived many centuries earlier, as, for instance, Jehuda ben Koraisch. It is not difficult to point out a series of characteristic marks common to these languages,—the predominance of triconsouantal roots, or of roots formed after the analogy of such, similarity in the formation of nominal and verbal stems, a great resemblance in the forms of the personal pronouns and in their use for the purpose of verbal inflexion, the two principal tenses, the importance attached to the change of vowels in the interior of words, and lastly considerable agreement with regard to order and the construction of sentences. Yet even so ancient a Semitic language as the Assyrian appears to lack some of these features, and in certain modern dialects, such as New Syriac, Mahri, and more particularly Amharic, many of the characteristics of older Semitic speech have disappeared. But the resemblance in vocabulary generally diminishes in proportion to the modernness of the dialects. Still we can trace the connexion between the modern and the ancient dialects, and show, at least approximately, how the former were developed out of the latter. Where a development of this kind can be proved to have taken place, there a relationship must

exist, however much the individual features may have been effaced. The question here is not of logical categories but of organic groups.

All these languages are descendants of a primitive Semitic stock which has long been extinct. Many of its most important features may be reconstructed with at least tolerable certainty, but we must beware of attempting too much in this respect. When the various cognate languages of a group diverge in essential points, it is by no means always possible to determine which of them has retained the more primitive form. The history of the development of these tongues during the period anterior to the documents which we possess is often extremely obscure in its details. Even when several Semitic languages agree in important points of grammar we cannot always be sure that in these particulars we have what is primitive, since in many cases analogous changes have taken place independently. To one who should assert the complete reconstruction of the primitive Semitic language to be possible, we might put the question, Would the man who is best acquainted with all the Romance languages be in a position to reconstruct their common mother, Latin, if the knowledge of it were lost? And yet there are but few Semitic languages which we can know as accurately as the Romance languages are known. As far as the vocabulary is concerned, we may indeed maintain with certainty that a considerable number of words which have in various Semitic languages the form proper to each were a part of primitive Semitic speech. Nevertheless even then we are apt to be misled by independent but analogous formations and by words borrowed at a very remote period.² Each Semitic language or group of languages has, however, many words which we cannot point out in the others. Of such words a great number no doubt belonged to primitive Semitic speech, and either disappeared in some of these languages or else remained in use, but not so as to be recognizable by us. Yet many isolated words and roots may in very early times have been borrowed by the Hebrew, the Aramaic, the Ethiopic, &c., perhaps from wholly different languages, of which no trace is left.

The question which of the known Semitic dialects most resembles the primitive Semitic language is less important than one might at first suppose, since the question is one not of absolute but only of relative priority. After scholars had given up the notion (which, however, was not the fruit of scientific research) that all Semitic languages, and indeed all the languages in the world, were descendants of Hebrew or of Aramaic, it was long the fashion to maintain that Arabic bore a close resemblance to the primitive Semitic language.³ But, just as it is now recognized with ever-increasing clearness that Sanskrit is far from having retained in such a degree as was even lately supposed the characteristics of primitive Indo-European

² The more alike two languages are the more difficult it usually is to detect, as borrowed elements, those words which have passed from one language into the other.

³ This theory is carried to its extreme limit in Olshausen's very valuable *Hebrew Grammar* (Brunswick, 1861).

¹ *Einführung in das A. T.*, 2d ed., i. 45 (Leipzig, 1787).

speech, so in the domain of the Semitic tongues we can assign to Arabic only a relative antiquity. It is true that in Arabic very many features are preserved more faithfully than in the cognate languages,—for instance, nearly all the original abundance of consonants, the short vowels in open syllables, particularly in the interior of words, and many grammatical distinctions which in the other languages are more or less obscured. But, on the other hand, Arabic has coined, simply from analogy, a great number of forms which, owing to their extreme simplicity, seem at the first glance to be primitive, but which nevertheless are only modifications of the primitive forms; whilst perhaps the other Semitic languages exhibit modifications of a different kind. In spite of its great wealth, Arabic is characterized by a certain monotony, which can scarcely have existed from the beginning. Both Hebrew and Aramaic are in many respects more ancient than Arabic. This would no doubt be far more apparent if we knew Hebrew more completely and according to the original pronunciation of its vowels, and if we could discover how Aramaic was pronounced about the 13th century before our era. It must always be borne in mind that we are far more fully and accurately acquainted with Arabic than with the other Semitic languages of antiquity. The opinion sometimes maintained by certain over-zealous Assyriologists, that Assyrian is the "Sanskrit of the Semitic world," has not met with the approval even of the Assyriologists themselves, and is unworthy of a serious refutation.

A comparative grammar of the Semitic languages must of course be based upon Arabic, but must in every matter of detail take into consideration all the cognate languages, as far as they are known to us. In the reconstruction of the primitive Semitic tongue Hebrew might perhaps afford more assistance than Ethiopic; but Aramaic, Assyrian, and even the less known and the more-modern dialects might furnish valuable materials.

It is not a formidable undertaking to describe in general terms the character of the Semitic mind, as has been done, for example, by Lassen (*Indische Alterthumskunde*, i. 414 sq.) and by Renan in the introduction to his *Histoire des Langues Sémitiques*. But still there is a danger of assuming that the most important characteristics of particular Semitic peoples, especially of the Israelites and of the Arabs, are common to all Semites, and of ascribing to the influence of race certain striking features which are the result of the external conditions of life, and which, under similar circumstances, are also developed among non-Semitic races. And, though it is said, not without reason, that the Semites possess but little talent for political and military organization on a large scale, yet we have in the Phœnicians, especially the Carthaginians, in Hamilcar and in Hannibal, a proof that under altered conditions the Semites are not incapable of distinguishing themselves in these domains. It is a poor evasion to deny that the Phœnicians are genuine Semites, since even our scanty sources of information suffice to show that in the matter of religion, which among Semites is of such supreme importance, they bore a close resemblance to the ancient Hebrews and Aramaeans. In general descriptions of this kind it is easy to go too far. But to give in general terms a correct idea of the Semitic languages is a task of very much greater difficulty. Renan's brilliant and most interesting sketch is in many respects open to serious criticism. He cites, for example, as characteristic of the Semitic tongues, that they still retain the practice of expressing psychological processes by means of distinct imagery. In saying this he is taking scarcely any language but Hebrew into account. But the feature to which he here alludes is owing to the particular stage of intellectual development that had been reached by the Israelites, is in part peculiar to the poetical

Character of Semitic mind.

style, and is to be found in like manner among wholly different races. That the Semitic languages are far from possessing the fixity which Renan attributes to them we shall see below. But, however this may be, certain grammatical peculiarities of the Semitic languages—above all, the predominance of trilateral roots—are so marked that it is scarcely possible to doubt whether any language with which we are tolerably well acquainted is or is not Semitic. Only when a Semitic language has been strongly influenced not only in vocabulary but also in grammar by some non-Semitic speech, as is the case with Amharic, can such a doubt be for a moment entertained.

Many attempts have been made, sometimes in a very superficial fashion and sometimes by the use of scientific methods, to establish a relationship between the Semitic languages and the Indo-European. It was very natural to suppose that the tongues of the two races which, with the single exceptions of the Egyptians and the Chinese, have formed and moulded human civilization, who have been near neighbours from the earliest times, and who, moreover, seem to bear a great physical resemblance to one another can be nothing else than two descendants of the same parent speech. But all these endeavours have wholly failed. It is indeed probable that the languages, not only of the Semites and of the Indo-Europeans, but also those of other races, are derived from the same stock, but the separation must have taken place at so remote a period that the changes which these languages underwent in prehistoric times have completely effaced what features they possessed in common; if such features have sometimes been preserved, they are no longer recognizable. It must be remembered that it is only in exceptionally favourable circumstances that cognate languages are so preserved during long periods as to render it possible for scientific analysis to prove their relationship with one another.¹

On the other hand, the Semitic languages bear so striking a resemblance in some respects to certain languages of northern Africa that we are forced to assume the existence of a tolerably close relationship between the two groups. We allude to the family of languages known in modern times as the "Hamitic," and composed of the Egyptian, Berber, Beja (Bishari, &c.), and a number of tongues spoken in Abyssinia and the neighbouring countries (Agaw, Galla, Dankali, &c.). It is remarkable that some of the most indispensable words in the Semitic vocabulary (as, for instance, "water," "mouth," and certain numerals) are found in Hamitic also, and that these words happen to be such as cannot well be derived from trilateral Semitic roots, and are more or less independent of the ordinary grammatical rules. We notice, too, important resemblances in grammar,—for example, the formation of the feminine by means of a *t* prefixed or affixed, that of the causative by means of *s*, similarity in the suffixes and prefixes of the verbal tenses, and, generally, similarity in the personal pronouns, &c. It must be admitted that there is also much disagreement,—for instance, the widest divergence in the mass of the vocabulary; and this applies to the Semitic languages as compared not only with these Hamitic languages that are gradually becoming known to us at the present day but with the Egyptian, of which we possess documents dating from the fourth millennium before the Christian era. The question is here involved in great difficulties. Some isolated resemblances may, improbable as it appears, have been produced by the her-

¹ The following is an instance of the manner in which we may be deceived by isolated cases. "Six" is in Hebrew *shesh*, almost exactly like the Sanskrit and modern Persian *shash*, the Latin *sex*, &c. But the Indo-European root is *sweks*, or perhaps even *ksweks*, whereas the Semitic root is *shidh*, so that the resemblance is a purely accidental one, produced by phonetic change.

rowing of words. Uncivilized races, as has been proved with certainty, sometimes borrow from others elements of speech in cases where we should deem such a thing impossible,—for example, numerals and even personal suffixes. But the great resemblances in grammatical formation cannot be reasonably explained as due to borrowing on the part of the Hamites, more especially as these points of agreement are also found in the language of the Berbers, who are scattered over an enormous territory, and whose speech must have acquired its character long before they came into contact with the Semites. We are even now but imperfectly acquainted with the Hamitic languages; it is not yet certain into what groups they fall; and the relation in which Egyptian stands to Berber on the one hand and to the south Hamitic languages on the other requires further elucidation. The attempt to write a comparative grammar of the Semitic and Hamitic languages would be, to say the least, very premature.¹

The connexion between the Semitic languages and the Hamitic appears to indicate that the primitive seat of the Semites is to be sought in Africa; for it can scarcely be supposed that the Hamites, amongst whom there are gradual transitions from an almost purely European type to that of the Negroes, are the children of any other land than "the dark continent." There seems, moreover, to be a considerable physical resemblance between the Hamites and the Semites, especially in the case of the southern Arabs; we need mention only the slight development of the calf of the leg, and the sporadic appearance amongst Semites of woolly hair and prominent jaws.² But both Semites and Hamites have been mingled to a large extent with foreign races, which process must have diminished their mutual similarity. All this, however, is offered not as a definite theory but as a modest hypothesis.

It was once the custom to maintain that the Semites came originally from certain districts in Armenia. This supposition was founded on the book of Genesis, according to which several of the Semitic nations are descended from Arphachsad, i.e. the eponym of the district of Arrapachitis, now called Albak, on the borders of Armenia and Kurdistan. It was also thought that this region was inhabited by the primitive race from which both the Semites and the Indo-Europeans derived their origin. But, as we saw above, this ancient relationship is a matter of some doubt; in any case, the separation does not date from a period so recent that the Semites can be supposed to have possessed any historical tradition concerning it. There cannot be a greater mistake than to imagine that nations have been able to preserve during long ages their recollection of the country whence their supposed ancestors are said to have emigrated. The fantastic notion once in vogue as to the permanence of historical memories among uncivilized races must be wholly abandoned. The period in which the Hebrews, the Arabs, and the other Semitic nations together formed a single people is so distant that none of them can possibly have retained any tradition of it. The opinion that the Hebrews and the tribes most closely related to them were descendants of Arphachsad is apparently due to the legend that Noah's ark landed near this district. The notion has therefore a purely mythical origin. Moreover, in Genesis itself we find a totally different account of the matter, derived from another source, which represents all nations, and therefore the Semites among them, as having come from Babylon.

¹ This of course applies yet more strongly to Benfey's work, *Ueber das Verhältniss der ägyptischen Sprache zum semitischen Sprachstamm* (Leipzig, 1844); but his book has the permanent merit of having for the first time examined this relationship in a scientific manner.

² Comp. G. Gerland, *Atlas der Ethnographie* (Leipzig, 1876), p. 40 of the text.

Scarcely any man of science now believes in the northern origin of the Semites.

Others, as Sprenger and Schrader,³ consider the birth-place of the Semitic race to have been in Arabia. There is much that appears to support this theory. History proves that from a very early period tribes from the deserts of Arabia settled on the cultivable lands which border them and adopted a purely agricultural mode of life. Various traces in the language seem to indicate that the Hebrews and the Aramaeans were originally nomads, and Arabia with its northern prolongation (the Syrian desert) is the true home of nomadic peoples. The Arabs are also supposed to display the Semitic character in its purest form, and their language is, on the whole, nearer the original Semitic than are the languages of the cognate races. To this last circumstance we should, however, attach little importance. It is by no means always the case that a language is most faithfully preserved in the country where it originated. The Lithuanians speak the most ancient of all living Indo-European languages, and they are certainly not autochthones of Lithuania; the Romance dialect spoken in the south of Sardinia is far more primitive than that spoken at Rome; and of all living Teutonic languages the most ancient is the Icelandic. It is even doubtful whether the ordinary assumption be correct, that the most primitive of modern Arabic dialects are those spoken in Arabia. Besides, we cannot unreservedly admit that the Arabs display the Semitic character in its purest form; it would be more correct to say that, under the influence of a country indescribably monotonous and of a life ever changing yet ever the same, the inhabitants of the Arabian deserts have developed most exclusively certain of the principal traits of the Semitic race. All these considerations are indecisive; but we will ingly admit that the theory which regards Arabia as the primitive seat of all Semites is by no means untenable.

Finally, one of the most eminent of contemporary Orientalists, Ignazio Guidi,⁴ has attempted to prove that the home of the Semites is on the lower Euphrates. He contends that the geographical, botanical, and zoological conceptions which are expressed in the various Semitic languages by the same words, preserved from the time of the dispersion, correspond to the natural characteristics of no country but the above-mentioned. Great as are the ingenuity and the caution which he displays, it is difficult to accept his conclusions. Several terms might be mentioned which are part of the common heritage of the northern and the southern Semites, but which can scarcely have been formed in the region of the Euphrates. Moreover, the vocabulary of most Semitic languages is but very imperfectly known, and each dialect has lost many primitive words in the course of time. It is therefore very unsafe to draw conclusions from the fact that the various Semitic tongues have no one common designation for many important local conceptions, such as "mountain." The ordinary words for "man," "old man," "boy," "tent," are quite different in the various Semitic languages, and yet all these are ideas for which the primitive Semites must have had names.

We must therefore for the present confess our inability to make any positive statement with regard to the primitive seat of the original Semitic race.

It is not very easy to settle what is the precise connexion between the various Semitic languages, considered individually. In this matter one may easily be led to hasty conclusions by isolated peculiarities in vocabulary or

³ The former has maintained this view in several of his works, the latter in *Z. D. M. G.*, xxvii. 417 sq.

⁴ "Della Sede Primitiva dei Popoli Semitici," in the *Proceedings of the Accademia dei Lincei*, 1878-79.

grammar. Each of the older Semitic languages occasionally agrees in grammatical points with some other to which in most respects it bears no very close resemblance, while dialects much more nearly related to it are found to exhibit different formations. Each Semitic tongue also possesses features peculiar to itself. For instance, the Hebrew-Phœnician group and the Arabic have a prefixed definite article (the etymological identity of which is, however, not quite certain); the dialect nearest to Arabic, the Sabæan, expresses the article by means of a suffixed *n*; the Aramaic, which in general more closely resembles Hebrew than does the Arabic group, expresses it by means of a suffixed *ā*; whereas the Assyrian in the north and the Ethiopic in the south have no article at all. Of this termination *n* for the definite article there is no trace in either Arabic or Hebrew; the Sabæan, the Ethiopic, and the Aramaic employ it to give emphasis to demonstrative pronouns; and the very same usage has been detected in a single Phœnician inscription.¹ In this case, therefore, Hebrew and Arabic have, independently of one another, lost something which the languages most nearly related to them have preserved. In like manner, the strengthening of the pronoun of the third person by means of *t* (or *tā*) is only found in Ethiopic, Sabæan, and Phœnician. Aramaic alone has no certain trace of the reflexive conjugation formed with prefixed *n*; Hebrew alone has no certain trace of the causative with *sha*.² In several of the Semitic languages we can see how the formation of the passive by means of internal vocal change (as *kullima*, "he was addressed," as distinguished from *kallama*, "he addressed") gradually dropped out of use; in Ethiopic this process was already complete when the language first became literary; but in Aramaic it was not wholly so. In a few cases phonetic resemblances have been the result of later growth. For example, the termination of the plural masculine of nouns is in Hebrew *īm*, in Aramaic *īn*, as in Arabic. But we know that Aramaic also originally had *m*, whereas the ancient Arabic forms have after the *n* an *a*, which appears to have been originally a long *ā* (*āna*, *īna*); in this latter position (that is, between two vowels) the change of *m* into *n* is very improbable. These two similar terminations were therefore originally distinct. We must indeed be very cautious in drawing conclusions from points of agreement between the vocabularies of the various Semitic tongues. The Ethiopians and the Hebrews have the same word for many objects which the other Semites call by other names,—for instance, "stone," "tree," "enemy," "enter," "go out"; and the same may be said of Hebrew as compared with Sabæan. But to build theories upon such facts would be unsafe, since the words cited are either found, though with some change of meaning, in at least one of the cognate languages, or actually occur, perhaps quite exceptionally and in archaic writings, with the same signification. The sedentary habits of the Ethiopians and the Sabæans may possibly have rendered it easier for them to retain in their vocabulary certain words which were used by the civilized Semites of the north, but which became obsolete amongst the Arabian nomads. To the same cause we may attribute the fact that in religion the Sabæans resemble the northern Semites more closely than do the tribes of central Arabia; but these considerations prove nothing in favour of a nearer linguistic affinity.

One thing at least is certain, that Arabic (with Sabæan) and Ethiopic stand in a comparatively close relationship to one another, and compose a group by themselves, as contrasted with the other Semitic languages, Hebrew-Phœnician, Aramaic, and Assyrian, which constitute the

¹ Viz., the great inscription of Byblus, *C.I.S.*, fasc. i. No. 1.

² *Shalhebeth*, "flame," is borrowed from Aramaic.

northern group. Only in these southern dialects do we find, and that under forms substantially identical, the important innovation known as the "broken plurals." They agree, moreover, in employing a peculiar development of the verbal root, formed by inserting an *ā* between the first and second radicals (*kātala*, *kaātala*), in using the vowel *a* before the third radical in all active perfects—for example, (*h*)*kātala*, *kaātala*, instead of the *haktil*, *kaatil* of the northern dialects—and in many other grammatical phenomena. This is not at all contradicted by the fact that certain aspirated dentals of Arabic (*th*, *dh*, *ṭh*) are replaced in Ethiopic, as in Hebrew and Assyrian, by pure sibilants—that is, *s* (Hebrew and Assyrian *sh*), *z*, *ṣ*—whereas in Aramaic they are replaced by simple dentals (*t*, *d*, *ṭ*), which seem to come closer to the Arabic sounds. After the separation of the northern and the southern groups, the Semitic languages possessed all these sounds, as the Arabic does, but afterwards simplified them, for the most part, in one direction or the other. Hence there resulted, as it were by chance, occasional similarities. Even in modern Arabic dialects *th*, *dh* have become sometimes *t*, *d*, and sometimes *s*, *z*. Ethiopic, moreover, has kept *ḏ*, the most peculiar of Arabic sounds, distinct from *ḥ*, whereas Aramaic has confounded it with the guttural *ain*, and Hebrew and Assyrian with *ṣ*. It is therefore evident that all these languages once possessed the consonant in question as a distinct one. One sound, *šin*, appears only in Hebrew, in Phœnician, and in the older Aramaic. It must originally have been pronounced very like *sh*, since it is represented in writing by the same character; in later times it was changed into an ordinary *s*. Assyrian does not distinguish it from *sh*.³ The division of the Semitic languages into the northern group and the southern is therefore justified by facts. Even if we were to discover really important grammatical phenomena in which one of the southern dialects agreed with the northern, or *vice versa*, and that in cases where such phenomena could not be regarded either as remnants of primitive Semitic usage or as instances of parallel but independent development, we ought to remember that the division of the two groups was not necessarily a sudden and instantaneous occurrence, that even after the separation intercourse may have been carried on between the various tribes who spoke kindred dialects and were therefore still able to understand one another, and that intermediate dialects may once have existed, perhaps such as were in use amongst tribes who came into contact sometimes with the agricultural population of the north and sometimes with the nomads of the south (see below). All this is purely hypothetical, whereas the division between the northern and the southern Semitic languages is a recognized fact.

Although we cannot deny that there may formerly have existed Semitic languages quite distinct from those with which we are acquainted, yet that such was actually the case cannot be proved. Nor is there any reason to think that the domain of the Semitic languages ever extended very far beyond its present limits. Some time ago many scholars believed that they were once spoken in Asia Minor and even in Europe, but, except in the Phœnician colonies, this notion rested upon no solid proof. It cannot be argued with any great degree of plausibility that even the Cilicians, who from a very early period held constant intercourse with the Syrians and the Phœnicians, spoke a Semitic language.

³ It is not quite certain whether all the Semitic languages originally had the hardest of the gutturals *gh* and *kh* in exactly the same places that they occupy in Arabic. In the case of *kh*—where Ethiopic agrees with Arabic—this is at least probable, since there seem to be traces of it in Assyrian. But it would appear that in Hebrew and Aramaic the distinction between *gh* and *ayin*, between *kh* and *ḫ*, was often different from what it is in Arabic.

Hebrew.—Hebrew and Phœnician are but dialects of one and the same language. It is only as the language of the people of Israel that Hebrew can be known with any precision. Since in the Old Testament a few of the neighbouring peoples are represented as being descended from Eber, the eponym of the Hebrews, that is, are regarded as nearly related to the latter, it was natural to suppose that they likewise spoke Hebrew,—a supposition which, at least in the case of the Moabites, has been fully confirmed by the discovery of the Mesha inscription (date, soon after 900 B.C.). The language of this inscription scarcely differs from that of the Old Testament; the only important distinction is the occurrence of a reflexive form (with *t* after the first radical), which appears nowhere else but in Arabic. We may remark in passing that the style of this inscription is quite that of the Old Testament, and enables us to maintain with certainty that a similar historical literature existed amongst the Moabites. But it must be remembered that ancient Semitic inscriptions exhibit, in a sense, nothing but the skeleton of the language, since they do not express the vowels at all, or do so only in certain cases; still less do they indicate other phonetic modifications, such as the doubling of consonants, &c. It is therefore very possible that to the ear the language of Moab seemed to differ considerably from that of the Judeans.

The Mesha inscription is the only non-Israelite source from which any knowledge of ancient Hebrew can be obtained. (See HEBREW LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE.) Some fragments in the Old Testament belong to the second millennium before our era,—particularly the song of Deborah (Judges v.), a document which, in spite of its many obscurities in matters of detail, throws much light on the condition of the Israelites at the time when the Canaanites were still contending with them for the possession of the country. The first rise of an historical literature may very probably date from before the establishment of the monarchy. Various portions of the Old Testament belong to the time of the earlier kings; but it was under the later kings that a great part of extant Hebrew literature came into shape. To this age also belong the Siloam inscription and a few seals and gems bearing the names of Israelites. The Hebrew language is thus known to us from a very ancient period. But we are far from being acquainted with its real phonetic condition in the time of David or Isaiah. For, much as we owe to the labours of the later Jewish schools, which with infinite care fixed the pronunciation of the sacred text by adding vowels and other signs, it is evident that even at the best they could only represent the pronunciation of the language in its latest stage, not that of very early ages. Besides, their object was not to exhibit Hebrew simply as it was, but to show how it should be read in the solemn chant of the synagogue. Accordingly, the pronunciation of the older period may have differed considerably from that represented by the punctuation. Such differences are now and then indicated by the customary spelling of the ancient texts,¹ and sometimes the orthography is directly at variance with the punctuation.² In a few rare cases we may derive help from the somewhat older tradition contained in the representation of Hebrew words and proper names by Greek letters, especially in the ancient Alexandrine translation of the Bible (the so-called Septuagint). It is of particular importance to remark that this older tradition still retains an original *a* in many cases where the

¹ For example, we may conclude with tolerable certainty, from the presence and absence of the vowel-letters *y* and *v*, that in older times the accented *e* and *o* were not pronounced long, and that, on the other hand, the diphthongs *au* and *ai* were used for the later *o* and *é*.

² The very first word of the Bible contains an Aleph (*spiritus lenis*), which is required by etymology and was once audible, but which the pronunciation represented by the point-system ignores.

punctuation has the later *i* or *e*. We have examined this point somewhat in detail, in order to contradict the false but ever-recurring notion that the ordinary text of the Bible represents without any essential modification the pronunciation of ancient Hebrew, whereas in reality it expresses (in a very instructive and careful manner, it is true) only its latest development, and that for the purpose of solemn public recitation. A clear trace of dialectal differences within Israel is found in Judges xii. 6, which shows that the ancient Ephraimites pronounced *s* instead of *sh*.

The destruction of the Judæan kingdom dealt a heavy blow to the Hebrew language. But it is going too far to suppose that it was altogether banished from ordinary life at the time of the exile, and that Aramaic came into use among all the Jews. In the East even small communities, especially if they form a religious body, often cling persistently to their mother-tongue, though they may be surrounded by a population of alien speech; and such was probably the case with the Jews in Babylonia. See HEBREW LANGUAGE, vol. xi. p. 597. Even so late as the time of Ezra Hebrew was in all probability the ordinary language of the new community. In Neh. xiii. 24 we find a complaint that the children of Jews by wives from Ashdod and other places spoke half in the "Jewish" language and half in the language of Ashdod, or whatever else may have been the tongue of their mothers. No one can suppose that Nehemiah would have been particularly zealous that the children of Jews should speak an Aramaic dialect with correctness. He no doubt refers to Hebrew as it was then spoken,—a stage in its development of which Nehemiah's own work gives a very fair idea. And, moreover, the inhabitants of Ashdod spoke Hebrew. G. Hoffmann³ has deciphered inscriptions (written in Greek letters, but, after the Hebrew fashion, from right to left) on two coins struck about 150 years after Nehemiah, which are in pure Hebrew⁴; nor does the language seem to diverge at all from that of the Old Testament. It is therefore probable that Nehemiah alludes only to a slightly different local dialect. If the Philistines of Ashdod still continued to speak Hebrew about the year 300 B.C., it cannot be supposed that the Jews had given up this their own language nearly three centuries earlier. We may also conclude that the Philistines from the earliest period spoke the same language as their eastern neighbours, with whom they had so often been at war, but had also lived in close pacific intercourse.

After the time of Alexander large bodies of the Jewish population were settled in Alexandria and other western cities, and were very rapidly Hellenized. Meanwhile the principal language of Syria and the neighbouring countries, Aramaic, the influence of which may be perceived even in some pre-exilic writings, began to spread more and more among the Jews. Hebrew gradually ceased to be the language of the people and became that of religion and the schools. The book of Daniel, written in 167 or 166 B.C., begins in Hebrew, then suddenly passes into Aramaic, and ends again in Hebrew. Similarly the redactor of Ezra (or more correctly of the Chronicles, of which Ezra and Nehemiah form the conclusion) borrows large portions from an Aramaic work, in most cases without translating them into Hebrew. No reason can be assigned for the use of Aramaic in Jewish works intended primarily for Jerusalem, unless it were already the dominant speech, whilst, on the other hand, it was very natural for a pious Jew to write in the

³ See Sallet's *Zeitschrift für Numismatik*, 1882 (Berlin).

⁴ The inscriptions, short as they are, exhibit the exclusively Hebrew word *ir* ("town," and the feminine *asina* (*hasinah*), "the strong," with the termination *ah* (not *at*, as in Phœnician). Had the Ashdodites been accustomed to use a dead language on their coins they would certainly have employed the native Semitic writing.