SEMITES IN THE PACIFIC?

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A volume such as this does not demand that every contribution in it should make a fresh addition to the sum of human knowledge within the field that it covers. Primarily such a volume is a tribute by the participants to a friend, and the present article is intended to be just this, from one who was a colleague of the recipient for a considerable period, though within a different area of University life. Our spheres of work did not closely coincide, but a friendship grew up of which this essay is a recognition. It does not bring to light any fresh aspect of Semitic studies; but rather the memory of an effort that failed. If it has any 'moral' at all, it is just to stress the fact that even a well-equipped scholar may sometimes take the wrong track. It has an indirect, rather negative bearing on the wider relationships of the Semites, if only by way of ruling out one possibility which, although real enough geographically, happens not to be right.

The scholar whose work is the subject of this essay was the Rev. Dr. Daniel Macdonald, a trained scholar both in biblical studies and in Semitic languages. He served as a missionary in the New Hebrides for more than thirty years. He was an observant man who contributed to the earlier anthropological knowledge of the Group, and in fact opened up his own area of it to European anthropological knowledge. The theory that he produced regarding the origin of Oceanic languages, which is the subject of this study, had nothing inherently impossible or foolish about it, yet it missed the truth completely. The question of where the Oceanic peoples came from has not yet been answered, but Macdonald's answer at least has been ruled out.

In the early years of the present century this well known missionary made himself still better known by his theory that the Oceanic peoples, especially those known nowadays as Melanesians, represented an independent branch of the Semitic 'race', and that their languages are Semitic. He was not naïve enough to hold that one particular part of the historically known Semitic peoples, such as Arabians, had migrated to the Pacific; he was a little more subtle than that. "The primitive Oceanic", he writes, "must be regarded not as a descendant of, but as a sister to the Arabic, Himyaritic, Ethiopic, Assyrian, Phoenician, Hebrew and Aramaic, and the Efate, Samoan, Malagasy, Malay, etc., as cousins to the Mahri, Amharic, Tigre, Mandaitic, Modern Syriac and

vulgar Arabic dialects, due allowances being made for the fact that these latter have always been more or less under the conserving influence of the surrounding Semitic literature and civilization, from which the Island dialects have for ages been completely shut off, a well as completely isolated from each other" 1907:94).

Such, in brief, was the famous Semitic theory put forward by Daniel Macdonald to account for the Oceanic languages. It appeared in his early work, Oceanic: Linguistic and Anthropological, published in 1889, but was developed on a large scale, with the idea of a definite proof, in his later The Oceanic Languages, their Grammar, Vocabulary and Origin, published by Henry Froude in London in 1907. This is a volume of 352 pages, well printed and bound. Macdonald's missionary sphere was the island of Efate in the central New Hebrides, the island on which the present capital, Vila, is now situated, and the volume sets out to be a comparative grammar of the 'Oceanic' languages, and a dictionary of the particular dialect of Efate in which Macdonald worked for more than thirty years. The Dictionary begins at p. 97 of the work and embraces therefore the great bulk of it, but it is so difficult in its arrangement that one of Macdonald's critics. William Churchill (himself the author of a theory of origins that had no better a fate) indignantly exclaims that he was forced to prepare an index to the dictionary. "An index to a dictionary!" he writes, and one can almost hear the indignation resounding from his study. Actually the work is not quite so bad as that, but the modern student feels almost as indignant when he comes to study the theory that occupies its first 96 pages.

What gave Macdonald his first idea? It would seem—though he has not said so—to have sprung from apparent resemblances in the field of mythology between the Melanesian and the Semitic world, and on this subject he read a paper in 1913 to the Victorian section of the Royal Geographical Society of Australia, which was published in their journal under the title "South Sea Island Mythology". Much of this article reads very strangely now, such as a reference to the Polynesian 'underworld' called Pulotu, of which he says on page 4 of his paper, "It is highly probable that this Burōtu (the Fijian form of the name) is to be traced back to what Europeans call Borhut, in the province of Hadramaut, in South Arabia. The Arabic word is Buruhutu, perhaps by some pronounced Burohotu, as it might be, which the Arabs believed to be the Hades, or Underworld of the dead. The Mohammedan Arabs proclaimed this as the Hades of the infidel, i.e., non-Moslem dead, but it could not have been that in pre-Moslem times." Unfortunately he does not give his 'original', but is content to say "The verb of which this word is a derivative, means, in Arabic, 'to have a white and fair body', 'to be well'." It is true that a ninth century Arabic author does mention barahut as well in the Hadramaut area where the souls of the heathen go—but that this has any connection with Fiji and Polynesia requires more proof than either Macdonald or ourselves could have.*

From ideas such as these the Semitic Origins Theory sprang, and the comparative study of the language began. We find him making comparisons of extra-linguistic facts even in the introduction to the Dictionary volume: he speaks of spirits worshipped by the Efatese, and adding, "all the deities of this kind were represented by stones or rocks—as in early Arabia"—and elsewhere, he might have added!—of the 'holy man', who "was as the prophet or seer or holy man of early Arabia"; of an evil spirit named Maki he makes comparison with 'Arabic nakira, 1, 4, 6 (themes) to be ignorant of, 4, to deny, disavow, Munkar', name of the angel who together with Nakir is said to have the office of examining deceased persons in the grave: see Koran".

When it comes to envisaging the possible course of migration, his imagination really begins to move: "Now in the ancient world, long before the rise of Greece or Rome, it was in the waters of the southern seas alone that ocean-going commerce was begun and carried on for ages by the human race, and that not by the peoples of the Indian or Indo-Chinese, but by those of the Arabian Peninsula. It was here that commercial fleets of Solomon, manned by the Phoenicians, made the first long sea-going voyages recorded by history, whether they went, as some think, to the east coast of Africa, or, as others hold with more probability, to India, or as Josephus than whom there is no weightier historical authority on the subject, says, to the Malay Peninsula. What the Phoenicians of Tyre and Sidon were later on in the Mediterranean, that their ancestors and cousins were then and had been earlier in the southern seas of the Island world. . . . In the Arabian Peninsula. running out into those seas, and contiguous to Africa, there was in ancient times, a great commercial empire. Then and to this day in the existing descendants of that long since fallen empire, which colonised the neighbouring Abyssinia, there is, and we may reasonably infer that there always was from the earliest times, a large negro element of blood." The last statement meets the objection Macdonald knew he would meet on the physical side of the problem—Semites versus Oceanic negroids. Then he goes on to

^{*}I owe this reference to Dr. M. Carter of the Department of Semitic studies, University of Sydney.

imagine the migration of the Oceanic peoples from the Arabian Peninsula along the south coast of Asia, down Africa to Madagascar (the Malagasy also speaks an oceanic language, but it is now fairly sure that it came from Indonesia at a late date) then out towards Malaysia and then to the place where he would have them be.

All this is good, clean, imagination, no doubt, and Macdonald seems to have recognised how vulnerable it is, for he proceeds in the next paragraph to say, "but plausible as all this is, it it not till we take into account the linguistic data that we get upon the solid ground of certainty." Unfortunately, as it now appears, he did not get a footing, nor did he realise that much more than language sharing is needed to establish the historical movements of peoples. At this point, however, it is time to ask, "How did the Semitic Theory work out in practice?"

Any theory involving language must account satisfactorily for vocabulary first of all; then it must show reasonable likeness in grammar as well. The grammatical structure of the Semitic languages is so characteristic that it could not be missed were it present in another group of languages as well. This will be discussed later, for Macdonald made heroic efforts to show that the Oceanic languages do retain the chief marks of Semitic grammar. First let us look at the results of comparing vocabulary between the Semitic and the Austronesian languages (as those of Oceania are now called).

At the time when Macdonald was working out his theory, there was no widely accepted "Proto-Semitic", nor was there a Proto-Oceanic of any sort. Semitic studies had made far greater progress than Oceanic, and even today there is no definitively accepted Proto-Austronesian. Macdonald has therefore to work with sets of actual languages, and compare vocabularies not on the level of two Proto-languages but of actual descendant languages. While there is today fair agreement on the essentials of Proto-Semitic, there is less on Proto-Austronesian, and various stages, such as Proto-Eastern-Oceanic (PEO) and Proto-Polynesian, have been set up. The Proto-Austronesian (PAN) set up by Otto Dempwolff, now looks more like being Proto-Indonesian only—but that is aside from the present discussion.

In Table I we shall look at the type of comparison which might be expected nowadays, by setting out a short list exhibiting Proto-Semitic (PS) with PAN and the two presumably subsequent stages of this PAN mentioned above. Then we shall add the same words in the actual dialect of north Efate in which Macdonald was working.

English	Efate	PPN	PEO	PAN	PS
1. blood	ra	toto	dara?	dayah	dãmu
2. breast	susu	susu	susu	t'ut'u	halab (milk)
3. brother		tai-na	ta(n)si	tasik	aḥ
4. die	mate	mate	mate	patav	mawt
5. dog	kori	kuli	kuli	at'u	kalbu
6. earth	tano	kele	tano	taneh	eres-
7. eye	mata	mata	mata	mata	'in-
8. father	tama		tamama	(t)ama	'ab-
9. head	pwau-	² ulu	² ulu	ulu, batu	reš-
10. mother		J 414	tina-	(t)ina	immu
11. name	nisa-	inoa	a(n)sa	ag'an	šum-
12. new	fau	fo ² ou	pa ⁹ oru	behayu	'ešš-
13. nose	nusu	isu	isu	ig'un	appu
14. sand	(n)aran	one?	² one	heni	appu
15. sky	lani	Iani	lani(t)	lanit	šamu
16. spirit	ata-	² ana ² ana	(ate)	sumanat	napešt-
17. star	masoi	fetu?u	pitu ⁹ u	bintan,	kakkab-
17. Stat	1114501	i iciu:u	pitu'u	bituhen	Lakkau-
10 tanana	D	⁷ alelo	man	dilah	lišan-
18. tongue	me-	nifo	mea-		šinn-
19. tooth	bati-	I .	nipon	ipen	
20. water	(no)wai-	vai	wai(r)	wayey	mu-

TABLE I: Vocabulary Comparisons between Efate, Proto-Polynesian (PPN), Proto-Eastern-Oceanic (PEO), Proto-Austronesian (PAN) and Proto-Semitic (PS).

On the surface, the lists certainly do not look inviting. If the art of linguistic comparison consists in establishing regular sound changes between languages, so that given the forms in the one there is a reasonable chance of predicting the equivalents in the other, then Macdonald's task looks quite hopeless. Moreover, his Efatese looks to be very mixed—some answer to Polynesian forms, some to PEO, and relatively few to PAN. Perhaps, then it might be more useful to look at his *Efate Dictionary* and see just what he himself did with the forms given in the Efate column of Table I. When the words of the Efate column of Table I are sought in the *Dictionary*, the result is as set out in Table II.

Efate

Ljuic	
1. blood: ra	A number of quotations from Semitic languages, all possible if d - > r
2. breast: susu	t'idy', plur. t'udiyy'. Possible only if first syllable
3. brother: tai-	normally only younger brother in Oceania. Arr. raşı, t-, t'u-kept and reduplicated, which is not normal prop1collectaneous from raşıca, suck.
4. die: mate	Ar. <i>mata</i> , also general Semitic. But PAN <i>matay</i> is a verbalised form of *patay, so that the comparison is unlikely.
5. dog: kori	Ar. gorw', young dog; gariyy', brave.
6. earth: tano.	Ar. tãna, cover with clay, etc.

head, chief."

s.v. 'father'.

7. eve: mata

8. father: tama-

9. head: pwau-

10. mother: pile-

11. name: nisa-

12. new: fau

As verb, 'look at' Ar. cana, I. emanate (water), be a

spy. 2. Flourish, produce flowers. 3. see, look at . . . Reference to his p. 18 regarding Semitic "quiescents",

This goes back to PAN batu, but Mac, has "Ar,

faraca, ascend, excel in dignity; farcu, summit, top.

Has ben missed out of the dictionary entirely, but

seems to be included in the paragraph referred to

Does not seem to fit the word tama at all.

Ar. 'ism and sim'; Heb. s'em, 'name'.

Ar. mahdut', part, of hadata', be new, Heb. badas, 13. nose: nusu-Heb. nhīraim, nostrils; Syr. nhīro', nose; Ar. noh'rat, aperture of the nose, referred to Efate nor-14. sand: (n)aran Ar. horr' or horron, sand, from harra, be hot. 15. sky: lani Heb. rum, ram, be high. He distinguishes lani, 'wind' as linking with Ar. namama 'blow gently'! 16. spirit: ata Is a PN loanword in Efate, and = 'shade', not a PAN form. An especially tangled entry in Macdonald. 17. star: masoi Not a PAN word. Subject to a tangled phonetic discussion in his volume, p. 21 ff. In dictionary as mena-, Ar. manmul', 'tongue', from 18. tongue: menamalae 'be a detractor'. Strange word in Ef., shared with Fijian, not normal PAN in this sense. "Ar. 'asin". Discussion on p. 31 based on broken plurals quite unintelligible. Note: "As such 'broken plurals have almost entirely re-19. tooth: batiplaced in Arabic the old or 'sound' plurals, so the latter have almost disappeared from the Oceanic dialects'. 20. water: (no)wai no is prefixed article, root wai. Heb. (ma'), maim, me'. TABLE II: The Efate word list as discussed by Macdonald, See Table I. At first sight, Table II looks no more promising than Table I, as far as cognation is concerned. It does, however, show a few possible resemblances that might or might not be real cognates. The question of chance resemblance always rises in situations such as these. A certain percentage of chance resemblances may be expected: some set it as high as 4 or even 5 percent. Nowadays the matter would be investigated statistically by the application of the Chi-squared test from probability theory. In Macdonald's day this mathematical checking method had not been used. If it is true that English 'bad' and Persian baed although identical in meaning are not related in spite of being also identical in sound, might not this be the case with Semitic verbs 'to die' and Oceanic mate? The Chi-squared test has been used in modern time by

Isidore Dyen and other Oceanic scholars, but it would be too

much to expect it of Macdonald.

Macdonald, however, was well awake to the establishment of cognation by means of regular phonetic changes. Indo-European comparative philology had taught him the importance of phonetic laws, and indeed it had been applied to Semitic studies. long before his time. The trouble was the fact of presumption: when it is presupposed (for whatever reason) that two groups of languages are related, it is easy to handle laws of phonetic change. not necessarily dishonestly, but at least unwisely. It is equally easy, of course, in the working out of subgroups within a family as evidenced by the uncertain placing of Ugaritic within the Semitic family. Each student has tended to bring in preconceived ideas resting on non-linguistic bases. When one looks at Macdonald's comparisons, one often feels that he is engaging in special pleading. Take, for instance, word 19 in the list: 'tooth'. First of all, Efate bati resembles only Fijian, and could actually be a loanword. It is not generally Oceanic. Demowolff traced it to a form *pantik, 'pointed'. This is difficult; teeth are not particularly 'pointed' unless they have been sharpened and this does not generally occur in Oceania, though it is not unknown in Indonesia. As for any resemblance that needs serious consideration, between bati and Ar. 'asnān—that has surely nothing to commend it.

It may therefore be good to look at Macdonald's methods of applying phonetic laws (or establishing them). He gives this part of his work pride of place in his volume just because he knew linguistic science had to be satisfied about it before his theory could be accepted. Yet the results are unrealistic, especially when he passes beyond the obvious types of change, such as *b > *v, that could naturally be demonstrated. There is room to consider here only more difficult instances, including those he invokes in dealing with bati. He was fully aware of the principles of comparative philology, yet his Tables of correspondences often look quite chaotic. He gives, for instance, within Efate itself between dialects—such changes as s to n: isuma and inuma for 'plantation clearing'; mesau and muri for 'desire'. But it is far from clear that these pairs of words are just variations of one root. Possibly the first two are, but the second two are almost certainly different roots. Such attempts to deal with variations within Efate itself vastly complicate his problem, of which there is room only for one or two aspects here.

One such aspect is the matter of 'weak' or 'quiescent' sounds which play a morphological rôle in Semitic languages. Macdonald sought, of course, to find parallels to them in Efate and general Oceanic. About the word bati 'tooth', he says: "For example, ismun, 'name' (Ar.), Ef. nisa, Malo isa, Santo kişa . . . looking

back to an earlier explanation, "dropping of initial syllables of words first radical weak, or quiescent, and on the other hand, (b) adding an initial syllable to words with '(Aleph prosthetic), to lighten the pronunciation . . . in Efate, the first syllable of, for example, bati, 'teeth' is of a different kind. Thus 'teeth' is in Santo uşu and peti, Sulu isi, Madura waja, Celebes nisi, Savu nutu, Gilolo nedi, &c.(*) . . .

As the Index shows, the additional initial syllable in these words for 'teeth' (and 'head') is that of the Semitic 'broken plural', or rather collective singular. Again, the theory has dictated the analysis.

Assimilation is another matter of some interest on the phonetic level. Bergsträsser in Einführung in die Semitischen Sprachen, p. 7 states that "the particular relationship between consonant and vowel results in keeping the articulation of the consonant sharp and exact, the inclination to assimilation of neighbouring consonants rare, while on the other hand the articulation of vowels is less definite, and playing space for articulation for the short vowels is very great. . . "This is certainly not a characteristic of Austronesian languages, though it is in many Australian languages, and assimilation as Macdonald treats it overlooks this non-Semitic trait in the AN languages.

However, lexical comparisons alone—even if these are real will never establish basic linguistic relationships. Many theories, some quite promising, have suffered shipwreck on this rock. Structural agreements must be established. It is these that provided the firm foundation for Indo-European and also for a Semitic family. Grammatical foundations must be provided for even the most promising lists of vocabulary agreements if membership of a set of langauges in a common family is to be established. This could, of course, suggest that Ancient Egyptian is basically a Semitic language profoundly influenced by a non-Semitic language— Hamitic, if we really knew what a Hamitic language is—as English is a Germanic language profoundly influenced Romance languages. For Egyptian grammar resembles Semitic in a more than chance degree, while its vocabulary very often departs from the Semitic pattern, even in the twenty words used as examples in Table I. In point of fact, however, there is no real agreement as to the interrelationships of Semitic, Hamitic and Cushitic, so that it is even possible that these represent three subdivisions of one original language family. This note is really

^{*}It is now known that the Gilolo (i.e. Northern Halmahera) languages are not Austronesian at all, so that this example would be ruled out!

marginal to the main discussion, but by no means wholly irrelevant to it. It must also be remembered that Macdonald was not out to show that there was such a thing as an Austronesian language family related to a Semitic family at some remove from it; he was out to show that modern Oceanic peoples had actually originated in Arabia.

When the grammatical structure of the languages is considered, it might be expected that any theory involving Semitic languages would at least take into account an observed structural characteristic of the Semitic languages. In this instance, the most basic characteristic of the languages is that of "triliteralism". Another characteristic that would be sought if the first was established is the occurrence of the 'themes' that also mark the Semitic languages. Indeed it would need to be shown that the verb was, so to speak, the dominating feature of the languages, while the noun depended for its morphology, to a large extent, on the verb.

In beginning to study Macdonald's Semitic theory of the Oceanic languages, as far as structure is concerned, it is necessary to study first his treatment of these two features of the verbal systems. Moreover, if the comparison is to be fruitful, it should be shown that the Oceanic verbal system is comparable to the earliest demonstrable Semitic systems, rather than to the later type which is evident in Hebrew and general West Semitic. East Semitic comparisons ought to be more fruitful. Now, when Macdonald's theory is examined in these two aspects, what is the finding?

Macdonald himself was wide awake to these requirements, and sought to meet them. In regard to triliteralism, his book contains a whole chapter headed "Triliteralism and Internal Vowel Change" (pp. 34-51). He begins this chapter by saying: "It is now to be shown that the Oceanic primitive language had like each of its sister dialects, Arabic, Assyrian, etc., its share of the common stock of purely and exclusively Semitic triliteral words (nouns and verbs) with the purely Semitic common method of formation or inflexion by internal vowel change, and external additions (prefixed, infixed, suffixed), and its share also of the common Semitic particles. This, if it can be shown, will be admitted to be conclusive." Unfortunately for the theory, it is not shown.

From this beginning, he discusses, not the eastern—Akkadian—but the western—Arabic and Hebrew—verbal systems, and finally admits that the system does not occur in the Oceanic languages: "The ancient finite verb with its perfect and imperfect so formed is no longer found in the existing broken down Oceanic languages, though as analytic substitutes for it we have as the

finite verb for instance in Efatese the 'verbal pronoun' joined with the verbal nouns after the fashion of the imperfect, as a bano, 'I (am or was) going' = 'I go or went', and in Malagasy the 'pronominal adjunctive' joined with these verbal nouns, after that of the perfect, as tiaku, 'my loving' = 'I loved or love'. Even this concession he makes to the theory is a complete twisting of the facts of Oceanic languages, whether of the western Indonesian type (Malagasy—and this belongs to a rather exceptional group, anyhow) or to the eastern Island type which Efate represents quite well.

Next, he proceeds to list thirty Arabic 'themes' (finishing with '&c' as being still an incomplete list). From this beginning he takes forms which occur in various Oceanic languages (no one language such as Efate by itself) and treats them as thematic variations of one root. Most people would regard them as dialectal variations of an original root. Based on Efate *lifai* 'bend round', he gives six 'themes':

1. lave

4. lampit, lavasi

2. lifa

lipat
loveoa

3. lofe, love, lufe

But these are not 'thematic' variations in Efate, each having a particular meaning and producible for any and (at least in theory) every verb. They are stem forms for different Oceanic languages! The last is a Fijian transitive form: *love* would be the Fijian intransitive, and *loveoa* the transitive stem to which pronoun objects would be added. *Lipat*, *lampit*, *lapit*, etc., are found only in Indonesian languages, are are not interchangeable with others.

Strangely enough there is something much more like what he is looking for in Efate itself, and he seems to have missed noticing it. In Efate there are the forms: lifai, 'bend round'; malibai, 'bent'; lofa, 'a thing bent'; lofai, 'to bend' (transitive); malofa, 'bent'; kalofa or kolofe, 'bent'; lufe (Samoan lavalava), 'wrapper bent round the loins'. Actually Semitic methods would not explain these forms—the appearance is misleading. It is true that they do look suspiciously like 'themes' but in spirit they are quite different—and no doubt different in origin. In other words, the Semitic pattern must be forced on the Oceanic languages; it is not really there. The vision has again triumphed over the facts. In the rest of the chapter Macdonald proceeds to account for all the known variations of the themes in Semitic languages, one by one, and find representatives of each in Oceanic: "triliterals with the second radical doubled"—although many of the Oceanic languages do not tolerate double consonants—"Triliterals with the first radical v(w), y(i), h, h (and h), h and all the rest of them.

In the following chapter he goes on to deal with verbal inflexion, and seeks to find Semitic elements present again, listing as models "safal, tafal, afal, mafal, etc." True, there are prefixes in Oceanic languages, which seem to function rather like these. but they are historically explicable in other ways, e.g., ma- is a stative prefix in nearly all the languages, but limited to certain roots; others are part of the verbal stem, e.g. Malagasy tahuta. Malay takut, 'fear' and not ta+ that root itself. In Eastern Oceanic it prefixes the stative ma- and becomes ma-takut- with a transitive suffix added: in Efate itself, without a suffix but with normal loss of final consonant it becomes mataku. Macdonald quotes Malagasy tahuta 'in past and future tenses' without seeing that ta- is part of the stem and that there is no such root as *kut. And its Semitic original? "Ar. taka" v.t. to fear (derived from waka', 8), takiyyat, 'fear, caution'; takwa, 'fear of God'. . . . " There is no root *waka' in the Oceanic languages, as there should be if the latter left the Semitic area early in history. Still ta- must be reconstructed as a profix in Oceanic. There is such a ta-, but it is a prefix of spontaneity, limited in range and use.

When it finally comes to person, number, tense and mood, the Semitic and Oceanic language just do not meet at all. Not only do the latter vary greatly among themselves, but the basic pattern of person marker + tense marker + stem \pm transitive suffix and object is quite different from that of Semitic. The elaborate systems of transitive markers is especially without parallel in Semitic. So Macdonald's scheme breaks down again.

When, therefore, the author comes to his Chapter VI: "Summary. Arabia the Motherland of the Oceanic Languages", there seems to be very little to say—only he sees it differently. Why was this?

There are several reasons. Firstly, the presuppositions that he had made, based on extra-linguistic factors and themselves firmly based. It is helpful to quote a statement by a different author, a physical scientist and not a linguist, made within the framework of Gifford Lectures, and not in a linguistic study. In The Living Stream, Gifford Lectures published in 1965, Sir Alister Hardy remarked that though it might be possible to be completely impersonal in scientific writing, "even here, however, if we have invented a pet hypothesis, which by intuition we feel must be true, we are in danger of falsely imagining ourselves to be getting the results we expect."*

^{*}P. 239. Quoted in Arnold Lunn and Garth Lean, Christian Counter-attack, London, 1969, p. 99.

It is true that other attempts have been made to link the Semitic languages to other groups, such as the Indo-European, but the theories, for example, of the Danish scholar Hermann Moller, and the French scholar Albert Cuny, have not stood the test of closer analysis. In passing it should also be recalled that Macmillan Brown made an attempt to link the Oceanic languages with Indo-European (working mainly from the Polynesian side) in his Riddle of the Pacific (1924). This is particularly interesting in connection with the Semitic-Oceanic theory of Macdonald. These theories perhaps fare a little better than Macdonald's, but that is all that can be said of them. At the same time there is no impropriety in the idea of comparing one or more language families. The difficulty is that so very rarely is our knowledge of both of them sufficiently deep and as well historically based.

Some remarks of Moscati may be to the point in this connection. After pointing out that 'Proto-Semitic' is "merely a linguistic convention or postulate", but that "such a convention is a necessary pre-requisite for an understanding and reconstruction of linguistic history", he goes on: "The conception of Proto-Semitic would seem comparable to that of Proto-Indo-European. The problems of the former do, however, appear more manageable owing to the lesser degree of geographical dispersion of the Semitic languages and the greater measure of affinity between them. It would therefore be more appropriate to compare Hamito-Semitic with the Indo-European on the one hand, and Semitic with the Romance, Slavonic or Germanic languages, on the other."*

Two pages later, Moscati has more to say about the Hamito-Semitic and Indo-European question: "Such conjectures are, however, very highly speculative, especially on account of deep-seated morphological divergence between those groups, although the inflexional structure appears to be common to both."

So far there is at least theoretical justification for Macdonald's attempt to look in his chosen direction, and certainly there is no a priori reason why early Semites should not have voyaged eastwards, as the ancient Norsemen voyaged westwards until they discovered America. Nor is Macdonald ignorant of the basic laws of linguistic comparison in attempting to prove kinship.

What chiefly led him—and others, including Macmillan Brown—into disaster was the lack of knowledge about Oceanic languages as a whole, and how to apply the theory of comparativism. In his time the necessary information just was not there,

^{*}S. Moscati et al., An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages, edited by S. Moscati, Wiesbaden, 1964, p. 15.

and even at the present time we still do not know where the Oceanic languages came from, or even whether ultimately they are a unity or not. The physical question of race obtrudes itself every time an attempt is made to bring together the languages of Melanesian Negroids and the lighter-skinned, quite differently built, Polynesians. We know now that the whole problem is immensely more complicated than Macdonald realised. There seems to be no one "Oceanic" language, and linguistic research in this field is being directed into a number of different channels. It is frequently held that the ancestors of the modern Oceanic Negroids moved out from southern China under pressure of advancing Mongoloid peoples—but, then, why should Polynesians. who are not Negroids, share a basic common vocabulary and some grammar with these peoples? It is suggested that Polynesian languages may have developed somewhere in the New Hebrides -right in the centre, just where Macdonald worked-but again, the physical anthropological question comes in. Macdonald has tried to do too much too early.

Macdonald does not stand alone in his theory of Semito-Hamitic influence in the Pacific. There is another whose name is much more famous and who was much more highly placed than Macdonald. This was Sir Grafton Elliott Smith who put forward a little later (and apparently without knowing anything at all about Daniel Macdonald) a theory still more daring and wide embracing than Macdonald's. Elliott Smith was impressed by the great complication of the process of mummification, and of pyramid building and was overpowered by the idea that such processes could have been developed only once in human history. This idea led him on to claim that all civilisation had developed from Egypt and been carried by Egyptian sailors all over the world. His ideas were taken up and developed even more elaborately by his pupil, W. J. Perry, whose books The Children of the Sun and the Growth of Civilisation (the latter in 1924 and made into a Penguin volume in 1937) popularised the thought of a group of Egyptian 'Children of the sun' going around the world, introducing civilisation everywhere, as they sought for certain substances believed capable of producing life and guaranteeing eternal life. Those of us who were reading anthropology in the thirties felt the thrill of the adventure proposed to us, but now we have seen how little historical basis there was for such an all-embracing theory. Perhaps Macdonald's theory could have been woven into this pattern had he still been there to do it! His claims, however, were much humbler. There is a difference between Elliott Smith and Perry's claims and those of Macdonald. Even on a diffusionist theory of civilisation, it is not required

that all civilisation should come complete and ready made from one source, although items and even whole complexes of items may do so. A language does have to move, if it does so at all, in time and space with a body of speakers.

Yet this is precisely what Macdonald tried to do. In the aforementioned paper on mythology he attempted to find the whole Babylonian system of gods in Oceania, in the usual confusion—Polynesians of Hawaii and Samoa along with Melanesians of Efate and Fiji, as if they were all really one-any of them whose names or characters he thought he could identify or reconstruct. He had evidently read widely in mythology, but he had not learned discrimination, any more than had Elliott Smith and Perry. One case is particularly interesting. In the mythology paper he discusses Wota, the Efate word primarily for a chief, lord or husband, and refers his reader to the Dictionary, p. 314. Looking there one finds wota derived from ba'al, 'lord' and hence Bel. 'chief idol or god of the Babylonians'! Whatever phonetic authority is there for such an identification? Then he goes on to a dissertation on Wota as an object of Efate worship, in the course of which he says: "Another form of this word in Efatese is fatu, thus Mare Wota, proper name is also in one dialect Mare fatu." The whole entry is too long to retail. But fatu is probably not related to wota at all. It is the Polynesian form of PAN batu, 'stone' and has nothing to do with Ba'al or Bel, even though there is—as he says—"the great conical rock in the sea 14 miles north of Efate, called Wota. It has the shape of the ancient Semitic Baal pillars" and received a degree of worship, as did Wota. Yet all this is valid only for north Efate, not for Oceania as a whole, and not for Polynesia. Macdonald writes, 'I am now able to show that the worship of both of these gods (Bel and Manu) has been continued from remote antiquity downwards until found in the islands of the present day, and so that their names have been in one case (Manu) not at all changed, and in the other very lightly (Balu or Valu to Fatu or Vatu by the slight and common Island change of l to t).' This sounds exactly like Perry, but it is Macdonald. He ends his mythology paper with the hope that "I feel sure that a search by competent people living in the Island groups for such proper names, before the knowledge of them passes away forever, would yield results of great value to the Science of Comparative Mythology".

Here surely is the apotheosis of domination by an idea, the more tragic because "Semites in the Pacific" could well have been a fact. Indeed through Islam they have had a tremendous influence in the western area of the Austronesian peoples, but how much later and in what a different way from what Macdonald thought!