



THE ANCIENT KINGDOM OF PUNT AND ITS FACTOR IN EGYPTIAN HISTORY

The Genetic Factor

Part VIII

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One of the factors that have led the former Egyptologists to believe that the Puntites were Somali, and even the ancient Egyptians were partly Puntites, was the physical anthropology. Although there are no big differences in physical appearances among the Cushitic populations in Northeast Africa, the Puntites are particularly identified with the Somalis while the ancient Egyptians depicted themselves as similar to the Puntites.



Moreover, the Egyptians persisted on describing Punt as the land of god, gods or ancestors. This readily means that an important section of Egyptians believed that they were originated from that land. In fact, the Egyptians had artistically displayed the racial types that were known to them such as Temehow (Libic or Mediterranean), Nemow (Asian or Semitic), and Nehesow (Nubian or African).

Interestingly, Puntites were the only people that had carefully been illustrated as the affinities of the Egyptians racially and culturally. Although it is not so far challenged

scientifically, the physical features can still be regarded as a questionable criterion. However, the previously-addressed findings including linguistics, and new archaeological discoveries, suggest that the indication may not be questionable anymore.¹

Similarly, genetic evidence supports the old assumption and the new findings. A new investigation on Y chromosome markers shed more light on the prehistoric linkage between the two peoples. Genotyping markers on Y chromosome in the Somalis, scientists have recently found that a special type of gene marker, E3b1 cluster y, define the Somalis. Findings from other investigations on Y chromosome markers in diverse populations that are relevant for the Somali case were compared to the findings in 201 male Somalis.

The frequency of the genotype (E3b1) in the Somalis is 77.6% (96.8% of it cluster y). Its frequency in other populations is as follows: the Oromos in the neighborhood of the Somalis 35.9%, Amharas 22.9%, mixed Ethiopians 22.4%, Egyptians 20.0%, Sudanese 17.5%, Iraqis 6.3%, Northern Africans 6.1%, Omanis 1.7%, Southern Europeans 0.5% - 5.1%, Turks 1.7%, and various Sub-Saharan Africans 0.7% and lower.²

Thus, these populations share E3b1 with the Somalis in Y chromosome clusters mostly different from the Somali one (cluster y). After the Somalis, the highest frequency in cluster y is found in the Oromos, particularly those geographically related to the Somalis. In addition to the fact that the Oromos are generally the closest affinities of the Somalis, those in question have assimilated a large Somali population during the last four centuries.³

On the bases of the available information, Somalia is the primary home of the E3b1, Ethiopia is the second, Egypt is the third while Sudan is the fourth. This means that outside the Afro-Asiatic populations in the Horn of Africa, the highest frequency of E3b1 is found in the living Egyptians which make them the closest group to the Somalis in this respect.

In general, before the study on the Somalis in 2004, it has been known that the modern Egyptians closely related to the populations in the Middle East, Horn of Africa, North Africa, with presence of South European and Nilo-Saharan genetic elements.

The E3b1 is the predominant gene marker in the Somali population but there are other types of gene determinants that contribute to the characterization of the Somali racial affiliation and go along with the direction of the predominant marker.

Although more work on E3b1 lineages in the Horn of Africa was in progress at the time of publishing the data we use here, the y chromosomes so far observed in the Somali population consist of E3b1 77.6%, sharing it with other Afro-Asiatics in lower frequency; 15% of K2, J and M17 which is characteristic in Eurasia; and less than 5% of A3, B, E3a, and E3b2 in the sub-Saharan (non-Afro-Asiatic) Africans.⁴

The predominant gene component was introduced into the Somali population 5000-4000 years ago. The researchers base this date on estimation of the 'Time back to the Most Recent Common Ancestor (TMRCA)' assuming a generation time of 25 years. It is also estimated that the cluster began to expand sizably in the Somali population 1200 years ago.⁵ This is understandable because over 80% of the living Somalis claim that they are descendants of biologically-related (patriarchal or matriarchal) families that lived around that time.

It appears that, like anthropologists on the Somali studies assume a generation time of 25 years for the ancestral lineages, the genotype scientists here also accept that number of years for the Y chromosome lineages. This is generally an acceptable standard.

But, most of the traditional ancestral lineages in Somalia show a generation time of 30 years or more. The difference between the traditional ancestral lineages and the standard one warrants a further investigation. If the generation time would be based on the later number, the TMRCA approximation would be 5000-6000 years for E3b1 cluster y. And even according to other estimation, cluster y originated in the Horn of Africa approximately 9600 years ago.⁶

Another temporary problem is that, our information here does not include age estimates of E3b1 in the Egyptian population. However the position of Egypt in E3b1 geographic distribution and its frequency in the populations indicates that there were pre-historic Somalo-Egyptian connections.

Moreover, the Puntite factor was introduced into Egypt in the same general era that the Somali nationhood was evolved. Accordingly, the data suggest that a gene flow took place between the two people which survives in the ethnically-dynamic population of

present-day Egypt. The data also suggest that, if the ancient Egyptians were about to share the E3b1 with a group or to receive it from them that are essentially the Somali since the marker is characteristic in the Somali and it is suggested that cluster y, at least, originated in the Horn.⁷

How did the gene flow take place?

Two kinds of pre-historic Somali immigrations into Egypt have hitherto been suggested: a pre-dynastic immigration; and some occasional immigrations by individuals or small groups that accompanied with the Egyptians who visited and returned from Punt during the New Kingdom era, for example with Hatshepsut's expedition. Some Somalis including prominent scholars also migrated to Egypt during the Islamic era, particularly the last seven centuries. But since cluster y had largely expanded at the beginning of the Islamic era in the Somalis and it is not significantly found in the Egyptians, the gene flow should have occurred in the Puntite era.

Why did the Somalis immigrate into Egypt?

From an economic point of view, migration from a less-favored area to a favored one is one of the options that the livelihood of a poor rural household or community can be improved.⁸ The human societies were largely doing that throughout the history of mankind. The natural motive of pursuing better life was usually driving many of these societies to long-planned or unplanned immigrations. The Egyptian Nile valley was one of the most migration-attracting regions in the world.

According to linguistic and archaeological suggestions, Cushites had been expanding since the Mesolithic era from the Northern parts of the greater Horn of Africa to the lower Nile valley in the North and the Great Lakes region of East Africa in the South.⁹

Over or nearly 5000 years ago, a Cushitic nomadic people from the Eastern Horn of Africa apparently immigrated from Punt to Upper Egypt during the last stage of Naqadan Culture in Egypt. This warrior people eventually contributed to the formation of the dynastic Egypt¹⁰ in a process reminiscent of the migration of Nomadic Semites from the Arabian Desert to the lower waters of Iraq, who later produced Hammurabi and built Babylon.

Naturally enough, most of the remarkable ancient civilizations were instigated from a fusion of at least two peoples or experiences: sedentary community in a favored area and invaders, mostly nomadic, from less-favored area. A new civilization was then to be crafted from the combination of two backgrounds: the traditional establishment with tolerance attitude of the indigenous people, and the survival and adaptation requirements with military organization of the invaders.

That is apparently what took place in Egypt around 3000 BCE. However, it is generally known that besides the native farmers and Puntite Cushitics, a presence of Libic and Semitic roles in the dynastic Egypt. But of the invaders, the Puntite role was unparalleled. At the advent, these Puntites met stiff resistance from the locals. But after a series of wars¹¹ they turned to be victorious, or they managed by another way to be part of Naqadan society and its leadership system.¹²

The Puntite-led new upper Egyptians with the mixed culture had subsequently immigrated to Lower Egypt. The upper Egyptians had eventually led the unification of the country and establishment of its dynastic state approximately 5000 years ago. Similarly, they introduced to the country the cultural and commercial connections with Punt.¹³

Was Egypt too far for Somali immigration?

Absolutely not. According to traditions backed by some records, during the last seven centuries, at least, some Somalis were reaching out to Egypt not only via the sea but by overland also.¹⁴

And even other Somali hordes ended up beyond Egypt four to five centuries ago. On the bases of another tradition that exists both in Chad and Somalia, there is a large clan that emigrated from southern Somalia who now live in northern Chad. The clan still recognizes its origin through a lineage and stories of the immigration as being part of Garre in the west of Jubba River. Generally, Afro-Asiatics, and particularly pastoralists like the Somali, trace their ancestors of over a millennium old by the lineage and tomb preservations.

Regardless of these local examples, the fact that human societies were conducting long immigrations over thousands of miles even long before the dynastic Egypt, makes

overland travel from Somalia to Egypt at that time a snap finger journey. This might explain the existence of the Somali factor in Egypt that was drawing its origin from Punt.

In conclusion, like the linguistic and archaeological findings, the results of this genetic investigation highlight the direction of studying the foundations of the Somali history because they indicate the substantial historical occupants of the Eastern Horn of Africa and the significant era of the evolution of the Somali nationhood, and they provide more explanation for the nature of Punt-Egyptian connections.

Our forthcoming discussion will underline important archaeological contributions, and their ethno-cultural implications, to more understanding of such foundations and connections.

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References and Notes

¹See Sections II, III, VII & X (forthcoming) of this study, online.

²Juan J Sanchez, Charlotte Hallenberg and others, "High frequencies of Y chromosome lineages characterized by E3b1, DYS19-11, DYS392- 12 in Somali males", in European Journal of Human Genetics, 2005, 13, 856-866, Nature Publishing Group.

³Said M-Shidad Hussein, Soomaaliya Dad Iyo Dal, 2009, a revised edition forthcoming.

⁴Juan J Sanchez et al, 2005.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid. 862.

⁷It is noteworthy to mention here that the results of this study are partly consistent and partly contrast with the views expressed in Dr. Cavalli-Sforza's et al, a comprehensive work on the history of human genes whose genetic suggestions on the Horn of Africa population are almost inconclusive or even arbitrary due to lack of sufficient data, (see The History and Geography of Human Genes, chap. 3, by L. Luca Cavalli-Sforza, Paolo Menozzi, and Alberto Piazza, 1994, Princeton University Press).

⁸World Development Report, Agriculture for Development, The World Bank, (2007), Washington, DC.

⁹See Section I of this study.

¹⁰Author Weigall, A History of Pharaohs, 1925, V. 1, 88, 91-3; Elliot Smith, The Ancient Egyptians and the Origin of Civilization, 1923, 81-2; James Breasted, A History of Egypt, 1924, 25-6; George Steindorff & Keith Seele, When Egypt Ruled the East, 1959, 101; Muxammad Cizah Duruuzah, Taariikhul Jinsil Carabiyy, V. 11, 37-8.

¹¹John Romer argues that the upper Egyptians did not unite the country by force but a normal expansion to Lower Egypt. However, the intermittent conflict in Upper Egypt is obvious in Egyptian records.

¹²Ibid (note 10).

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Said M.Shidad Hussein, The Somali Scholars in Medieval Records, not published.