
Annex to Chapter 1: Report of the symposium on 'The Peopling of Ancient Egypt and the Deciphering of the Meroitic Script'¹

Cairo, 28 January–3 February 1974

Summary report²

The symposium was held in two stages: the first took place from 28 to 31 January 1974 and concerned 'The peopling of ancient Egypt', the second dealt with 'The deciphering of the Meroitic script' and took place from 1 to 3 February 1974.

The participants were as follows:

Professor Abdelgadir M. Abdalla (Sudan)
Professor Abu Bakr (Arab Republic of Egypt)
Mrs N. Blanc (France)
Professor F. Debono (Malta)
Professor J. Devisse (France)
Professor Cheikh Anta Diop (Senegal)
Professor Ghallab (Arab Republic of Egypt)
Professor L. Habachi (Arab Republic of Egypt)
Professor R. Holthoer (Finland)
Mrs J. Gordon-Jaquet (United States of America)
Professor S. Husein (Arab Republic of Egypt)
Professor Kaiser (Federal Republic of Germany)
Professor J. Leclant (France)
Professor G. Mokhtar (Arab Republic of Egypt)
Professor R. El Nadury (Arab Republic of Egypt)
Professor Th. Obenga (People's Republic of the Congo)
Professor S. Sauneron (France)
Professor T. Sæve-Söderbergh (Sweden)
Professor P. L. Shinnie (Canada)
Professor J. Vercoutter (France)

Professor Hintze (German Democratic Republic), Professor Knorossov, Professor Piotrovski (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) and Professor Ki-Zerbo (Upper Volta) were invited to the symposium but were unable to attend and sent their apologies.

In accordance with the decisions of the International Scientific Committee, Professor J. Devisse, the Committee's Rapporteur, was present and prepared the final report of the symposium.

Unesco was represented by Mr Maurice Glélé, programme specialist, Division of Cultural Studies, representing the Director-General, and Mrs Monique Melcer, Division of Cultural Studies.

1. This annex should have been inserted as an Annex to the whole volume and placed after the Conclusion.

2. The present report is an abridged version of the final report of the symposium. It was prepared by the International Scientific Committee's Rapporteur at the request of the Committee, for insertion in this volume. The Proceedings of the Symposium have been published in the series *The General History of Africa – Studies and Documents* No. 1, Unesco, Paris, 1978.

I Symposium on the peopling of ancient Egypt

Two papers previously commissioned by Unesco from Professor J. Vercoutter and Mrs N. Blanc² provided a basis for discussion.

Three important stages may be distinguished in the discussion.

- A Summary of the introductory papers.
- B Preliminary statements made by most of the participants.
- C General discussion.

A Summary of the introductory papers

(1) Professor Vercoutter drew attention to a number of points dealt with in greater detail in his written report, and made a number of further observations.

- (a) In spite of recent progress, physical anthropology had so far provided relatively little reliable data except in Nubia. The information available was insufficient to enable provisional conclusions to be drawn with regard to the peopling of ancient Egypt and the successive phases through which it may have passed. Furthermore, this information was not homogeneous as regarded either time or space and historians often disagreed as to how it should be interpreted. The methods themselves were being called in question; but it was now generally agreed that craniometry did not meet the requirements of such research.

A number of regions had still not been studied in any depth. This applied to the entire Delta during the predynastic and protodynastic periods, and to Upper Egypt prior to Neolithic times. Little was known of the area between the Second and Sixth Cataracts in Neolithic and protodynastic times. Similarly, the links existing in ancient times between the Sahara, Darfur and the Nile had as yet been very little studied.

In that respect, the work that had been done lagged behind what had been achieved in North Africa and in the Syria-Palestine zone.

Evidence at present available did not warrant the assertion that the populations of northern Egypt had been different from those in the south. Similarly, the gap between Palaeolithic and Neolithic was probably due to the fact that insufficient research had yet been done in that field.

- (b) *Insufficient and unsatisfactory use had been made of iconography; the studies which had been carried out were based mainly on cultural criteria. The iconographic material available, however, has extremely significant characteristics from the the eighteenth dynasty onwards.*
- (c) Outline of the two opposing theories in their most extreme form:
 - (i) The people who lived in ancient Egypt were 'white', even though their pigmentation was dark, or even black, as early as the predynastic period. Negroes made their appearance only from the eighteenth dynasty onwards.
From the protodynastic period onwards, according to some, the population remained the same; others believed that foreign penetration into Africa profoundly altered the conditions of cultural life.
 - (ii) Ancient Egypt was peopled, 'from its Neolithic infancy to the end of the native dynasties', by black Africans.

(2) Mrs Blanc reported on her research findings.

- (a) Mindful of the fact that, for reasons which were themselves historical, the historiography of the valleys of the Nile had been based on the assumption

2. These documents are attached to the Final Report, 1974.

that there was a civilized Egyptian valley providing a wealth of historical evidence, and another valley farther south, which was black and primitive, and of interest only to anthropologists, Mrs Blanc hoped that historical research in the valley as a whole would in future be more balanced. This would mean abandoning traditional historical methods and broadening the field of inquiry to embrace a new methodology. Mrs Blanc saw the work which had been going on in Nubia for the last twenty years or so as a first step towards the re-examination of the question which faced the symposium.

- (b) In order to escape from the traditional view of the Nile valley which traced its historical development in a north-south direction, from the 'more civilized' to the 'less civilized', Mrs Blanc drew attention to the Nile regions situated between the twenty-third parallel and the sources of the river in Uganda. Her analysis took into account the dividing line, which she regarded as being of fundamental ecological importance, along the tenth parallel, where the advance of Islam stopped.

Between the twenty-third and the tenth parallels, the Nile, being a navigable waterway, could apparently have played a role comparable to that which it played farther north, in Egypt. This did not occur, and the ecological conditions in this reach of the river no doubt provided the principal explanation.

Mrs Blanc went on to make an overall examination, in the light of this fact, of the respective contributions of settled and nomadic populations throughout the area considered.

But after tracing the history of the population changes since the coming of the Muslim Arabs, she concentrated particularly on reviewing hypotheses concerning the peopling of this zone prior to their arrival. She emphasized that the Nile valley facilitated communication with West Africa and sub-Saharan Africa and that it was reasonable to put forward the hypothesis that the civilizations which emerged there might be authentically African rather than civilizations intermediate between the Mediterranean world and black Africa.

Darfur, to the west, about the social and political organization of which, prior to the seventeenth century, little is known, nevertheless played an important part as a regional centre of economic development.

To the east, the region of Sennar, inhabited by the Funj, was the centre of a 'black sultanate' which was originally neither Arab nor Muslim.

The zone between the Nile and the Red Sea occupied by the Beja was barely able to support settled populations, on account of the harsh ecological conditions.

South of the tenth parallel, the ecological conditions were totally different. In this area, there were isolated populations about which little was known either from archaeological research or from oral traditions. Hypotheses on the peopling and history of this zone today have little evidence to support them, and it is only in more southerly regions, in the interlacustrine zone in East Africa, that fairly thorough historical studies have been carried out.

B Preliminary statements by participants

(1) Professor Sève-Söderbergh gave information about the Scandinavian excavations in the Sudan between 1960 and 1964. These excavations established that there were contacts between the Nile valley and North Africa and the Sahara. The subjects covered by the publications³ included 7000 rock drawings and the analysis of the remains of 1546 human

3. See Scandinavian Joint Expedition to Sudanese Nubia, publications (especially Vol. 1, *Rock Pictures*; Vol. 2, *Pre-Ceramic Sites*; Vol. 3, *Neolithic and A-Group Sites*; and Vol. 9, *Human Remains*).

individuals. Van Nielson (Vol. 9) had defined the relations between the A Group, C Group, New Kingdom Group, etc. Comparative studies yielded different results, depending on whether craniometry only was used or anthropological and technological factors as a whole. Inconographical and physical anthropology studies lent support to the idea that there had been a migration of Saharan peoples and of groups coming from the south, and that they also had had considerable contacts with the ancient Egyptians. For the Mesolithic period, comparisons had to be made on the basis of fewer than 100 skeletons. Valid conclusions were impossible in the case of Nubia, but more accurate data could be obtained on the Neolithic period.

In any event, Professor Säve-Söderbergh thought that it was impossible to base a study of the peopling of Egypt in ancient times, or any other similar study, on racial distinctions. In future, other lines of inquiry should be followed. Different cultures, contemporary with one another but isolated, might nevertheless belong to the same techno-complex. This new method confirmed that Egypt was African. But, if one looked beyond this finding, it was apparent that there were many other problems. Nagada I and II did not belong to the same techno-complex as Nubia or the contemporary Sudan. In the Sudan, the zone extending from Kassala to Chad and from Wadi Halfa to Khartoum was a single, large techno-complex unit. The A Group constituted another and more recent techno-complex between the First and Third Cataracts and possibly beyond.

(2) Professor Cheikh Anta Diop gave an extensive account of his ideas. He summarized a written paper, picking out the main points.

- (a) From the anthropological point of view, research carried out since the discoveries of Professor Leakey led to the conclusion that the human race first came into existence in Africa in the region of the sources of the Nile. Gloger's law, which presumably applied just as much to the human race as the other species, stated that warm-blooded animals which evolved in a warm, humid climate had a dark (eumelanin) pigmentation. The earliest human beings on earth were therefore ethnically homogeneous and negroid. The population spread out from this original area, reaching other regions of the earth by only two routes: the Nile valley and the Sahara.

In the Nile valley, this spread took place from the south in a northerly direction, in a progressive movement, between the Upper Palaeolithic and the protohistoric periods.

Even Professor Massoulard had reached the conclusion that the population of ancient Egypt perhaps comprised at least three different racial elements: negroids, amounting to over one-third of the total, 'Mediterranean' people and people of the Cro-Magnon type. Professor Diop inferred from this that the population of Egypt was basically negro during the predynastic period, a conclusion contradicting the theory that the negro element spread to Egypt in later times.

Skeletons with fragments of skin attached, dating from very ancient times, before the practice of mummification was introduced, had been discovered by Elliot Smith. These fragments, stated Professor Diop, contain melanin in sufficient quantity to establish them as negro skin.

In the quest for positive proof, Professor Diop had studied a number of preparations being subjected to laboratory examination in Dakar. These consisted of samples of skin taken from mummies found in Mariette's excavations. They all revealed – and Professor Diop invited the specialists present to examine the samples – the presence of a considerable quantity of melanin between the epidermis and the dermis. Melanin, which was not present in white skin, persisted for millions of years (notwithstanding frequent affirmations to the contrary) as could be seen from an examination of the skins of fossil animals. Professor Diop hoped to be given the opportunity of carrying out similar research on the skins of the Pharaohs whose mummies were in the Cairo Museum collection.

He went on to state that a conclusive anthropological study would also include

osteological measurements and the study of blood-groups. It was remarkable, for example, that present-day Egyptians, particularly in Upper Egypt, belonged to the same blood-group, B, as the population of West Africa, and not to Group A2, which was characteristic of the white race.

- (b) *Iconography*: On the basis of an important iconographical drawing and the definitions given in this work, Professor Diop contended that it was unnecessary to dwell on details which, for example, distinguished negroes from other personages – the latter being aristocratic – in the same tomb: this difference of representation was of social origin. The common people were iconographically distinguished from members of the ruling class.
- (c) Professor Diop went on to speak of the evidence provided by *ancient written sources*, pointing out that Greek and Latin authors described the Egyptians as negroes. He referred to the testimony of Herodotus, Aristotle, Lucian, Apollodorus, Aeschylus, Achilles Tatius, Strabo, Diodorus Siculus, Diogenes Laertius and Ammianus Marcellinus. Modern scholars, he said, refused to take account of those texts. By contrast, an eighteenth-century author, Volney, did speak of the inhabitants of ancient Egypt as negroes. Furthermore, the biblical tradition also considered Egypt as belonging to the descendants of Ham. Professor Diop considered that the science of Egyptology, a product of imperialism, had much to answer for in denying all the facts to which he had just referred.
- (d) Professor Diop then turned his attention to the way in which the Egyptians described themselves. They used only one word for this purpose: KMT,⁴ 'the strongest term existing in the language of the Pharaohs to indicate blackness', which was translated by Professor Diop as 'the negroes'. Consequently, this hieroglyph was not written with crocodile scales but with a piece of charcoal.

(3) Professor Debono contributed an extensive review of the information given in Volume 1.

(4) Professor Leclant began by stressing the African character of Egyptian civilization. But it was necessary to distinguish clearly, as Professor Vercoutter had done, between 'race' and culture.

Physical anthropology in Egypt was in its infancy. Nevertheless, there was no justification for relying on the totally outmoded studies of Chantre, Elliot Smith, Sergi, or Dr Derry. Furthermore, there had already been important restatements of current knowledge such as that by Wierczinski.⁵ Groups working in Nubia had also shown considerable interest in physical anthropology, with the result that Nubia, reputedly 'poor' in archaeological remains, paradoxically seemed likely to become far better known than Egypt in this respect.⁶ Archaeological expeditions now gave great prominence to osteological studies, an innovation which was greatly to be welcomed.⁷

In cultural studies, rock engravings, which showed an enormous degree of uniformity from the Red Sea to the Atlantic, were worthy of careful study. These traces had been left by successive cultural groups, hunters, herdsman, or others.

The peopling of ancient Egypt was a considerable problem and it would be very premature, at this stage, to adopt a synoptic approach as a means of solving it. The problem should be approached through separate, precise studies. For this purpose, the

4. This word gave rise to the term 'Hamite' which has been much used subsequently. It is also found in the Bible in the form 'Ham'.

5. *Bulletin of the Egyptian Geographical Society*, 31, 1958, pp. 73–83.

6. Professor Leclant referred to the work of Nielsen, Strouhal, Armelagos, Rogalsky, Prominska, Chemla and Billy.

7. cf. An important recent article, D. P. van Gerven, D. S. Carlson and G. J. Armelagos, (Racial History and Bio-cultural Adaptation of Nubian Archaeological Populations), *JAH*, vol. XIV, no. 4, 1973, pp. 555–64.

collaboration of specialists in disciplines not represented at this symposium was indispensable. All the participants were 'general historians', qualified to compile and synthesize data supplied by specialists; such data were, for the moment, very inadequate.

In any case, it was retrograde to have recourse to authorities who were today completely outdated, such as Lepsius or Petrie. They might be recognized as having 'historical' importance but Egyptology had made great progress since their day.

As for iconographical evidence, the only problem was to know how the Egyptians considered themselves in relation to other men. They called themselves RMT (Rame), that is to say 'men'; other people they regarded as an amorphous mass extending in all directions, designated by the cardinal points. For example, the statues of prisoners at Sakkara (Sixth dynasty, 2300 before our era) were partly northerners (Asians, Libyans) and partly southerners (Nubians, negroes). Stereotypes of northerners (whites) and southerners (negroes) under the sandals of Pharaoh confirmed that representation.

(5) Professor Ghallab spoke of the successive elements which could be identified in the peopling of Africa between the Palaeolithic period and the third millennium before our era.

In north-east Africa, a large quantity of stone objects dating from the second pluvial period had been found in the Nile valley and the oases. Professor Ghallab distinguished at least six ethnic groups in Egyptian population during the Mesolithic period, which, however, were united by a homogeneous culture. He considered that the human race during the Palaeolithic period was more or less homogeneous and 'Caucasian'; the first negro types in Africa were Asselar man and Omdurman man. In the late Palaeolithic period, the black race appeared from the Atlantic to the Red Sea. Among the earliest Egyptians, however, traces had been found of 'Bushmen', some of whose characteristics were modified as a result of their becoming acclimatized to Mediterranean ecological conditions. Even today, there were vestiges of this 'Bushman' type in the population of Egypt. A negro culture did not really appear prior to the Neolithic period.

(6) Professor Abdelgadir M. Abdalla did not think it important to establish whether the ancient Egyptians were black or negroid: what was most remarkable was the degree of civilization they had achieved.

Iconographic evidence made it clear that the creators of the Napata culture had nothing in common with the Egyptians: their anatomical characteristics were completely different. If the Egyptians were black, what colour were the men of the Napata culture?

Turning to the subject of linguistics, Professor Abdalla stated that KM (Kem) did not mean 'black' and its derivatives did not refer to the colour of individuals. He gave a linguistic demonstration in his turn to illustrate his theory, which differed from that of Professor Diop. He concluded that the Egyptian language was not a purely African language; it belonged to a proto-Semitic group, as could be abundantly demonstrated by supporting examples. Professor Abdalla considered that the linguistic examples given by Professor Diop were neither convincing nor conclusive and that it was hazardous to make too uncompromising a correlation between a language and an ethnic structure or an individual. A comparison drawn between a dead language and living languages was bound to be inconclusive; the similarities which had been pointed out were fortuitous and nothing was so far known of the evolution of ancient African languages. The evidence which had been given to support the theory of kinship was in fact far more consistent with the theory of the spread of ancient Egyptian throughout Africa than of its kinship with present-day African languages. Why should it be assumed that ancient Egyptian and Wolof were related, but not ancient Egyptian and Meroitic, for example? The language of Napata and Meroitic were at opposite poles from one another.

Professor Abdalla hoped that the inquiry would be pursued in the strictest fashion.

- (a) He considered it impossible to establish any automatic correlation between an ethnic group, a socioeconomic system and a language.

- (b) It was impossible to reach scientifically valid conclusions by working 'on a large scale'. There were almost no unambiguous examples in history of major migrations accompanying major cultural transformations.
- (c) 'Negro' was not a clearly defined concept today as far as physical anthropologists were concerned. A skeleton did not provide evidence of skin colour. Only the tissues and the skin itself were important in that respect.
- (d) It was imperative to broach the study of palaeopathology and of funerary practices without delay.

(7) Professor Sauneron intervened in the course of a lively exchange of views on linguistic matters between Professors Abdalla and Diop. Professor Sauneron stated that in Egyptian *KM* (feminine *KMT*) meant 'black'; the masculine plural was *KMU* (Kemou), and the feminine plural *KMNT*.

The form *KMTYW* could mean only two things: 'those of Kmt', 'the inhabitants of Kmt' ('the black country'). It was a derived adjective (*nisba*) formed from a geographical term which had become a proper name; it was not necessarily 'felt' with its original meaning (cf. Frank, France, French).

To designate 'black people', the Egyptians would have said *Kmt* or *Kmu*, not *Kmtyw*. In any case, they never used this adjective to indicate the black people of the African hinterland whom they knew about from the time of the New Kingdom onwards; nor, in general, did they use names of colours to distinguish different peoples.

(8) Professor Obenga in his turn reverted to the linguistic demonstration which had been begun by Professor Diop.⁸

- (a) After criticizing Professor Greenberg's method, on the basis of the recent work by Professor Istvan Fodor⁹ and remarking that, since the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, it was an accepted fact that linguistic evidence was the most obvious means of establishing whether two or more than two peoples were culturally related, Professor Obenga endeavoured to prove that there was a genetic linguistic relationship between Egyptian (ancient Egyptian and Coptic) and modern negro-African languages.

Before making any comparison, one must be on one's guard against confusing typological linguistic relationship, which gave no clue as to the predialectal ancestor common to the languages being compared, and genetic relationship. For example, modern English, considered from the typological point of view, had affinities with Chinese; but, from the genetic point of view, the two languages belonged to distinct language families. Similarly, Professor Obenga rejected the notion of a mixed language as linguistic nonsense.

Genetic relationship depended on establishing phonetic laws discovered by comparison between morphemes and phonemes of similar languages. On the basis of such morphological, lexicological and phonetic correspondences, one could arrive at common earlier forms. In this way, a theoretical 'Indo-European' language had been reconstructed in the abstract and had been used as an operational model. It was indicative of a common cultural macrostructure shared by languages which subsequently evolved along separate lines.

- (b) Professor Obenga drew attention to important typological similarities in grammar: the feminine gender formed by the use of the suffix *-t*, the plural of nouns by the suffix *-w* (*ou, u*). He next analysed complete word-forms and noted similarities between those of ancient Egyptian and a considerable number of African languages; between Egyptian and Wolof the correspondence was total. This series of demonstrations led Professor Obenga to the conclusion that morphological,

8. The full text, as transmitted to the Rapporteur by Professor Obenga, is attached as Annex II in the Final Report of the symposium.

9. I. Fodor, *The Problems in the Classification of the African Languages* (Centre for Afro-Asian Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, 1966), p. 158.

lexicological and syntactic similarities amounted to convincing proof of the close relationship between ancient Egyptian and negro-African languages of today. This kind of parallelism was impossible between Semitic, Berber and Egyptian.

He then dealt with comparisons of ways of expressing 'to be' in verb – noun combinations: the common archaic form in the Bantu language was the same in this respect as that of the most archaic form of ancient Egyptian. The analysis of negative morphemes, of the emphatic future and of linking particles led to the same conclusions as the previous examples. Professor Obenga considered, therefore, that it would prove possible to discover a common genetic structure.

- (c) Lastly, Professor Obenga spoke of what he considered to be the most interesting aspect of the comparison.

He drew parallels between the forms taken in different languages by certain words: palm, spirit, tree, place; and also between certain small phonemes: for example, *KM (Kem)*, black in ancient Egyptian, becomes *Kame, kemi, kem* in Coptic; *ikama* in Bantu (with the meaning of charred by exposure to excessive heat), *kame* in Azer (cinder). *Romé*, 'man' in ancient Egyptian, becomes *lomi* in Bantu. The same phonemes have the same functions in the different languages compared.

Professor Obenga inferred from these comparisons that it would be possible in the future to identify a 'negro-Egyptian' language, analogous to 'Indo-European'. In this context, and in view of the undeniable common cultural background of all these languages, there was a sound basis for the development of future studies.

(9) Professor Gordon-Jaquet stated that the study of Egyptian toponymy could perhaps be brought to bear in support of the assertion that no massive immigrations or invasions of foreign populations had arrived in Egypt at least since Neolithic times. It was a well known phenomenon that topographical names were extremely long-lived and that each successive language group inhabiting the same area would leave its mark on that area in the form of place names, more or less numerous, depending on the size of the population and the length of time of its predominance in that area. Any important permanent addition to the Egyptian population from the exterior would certainly have left its mark on the toponymy of the country. This was not the case. The toponymy of Egypt was very homogeneous, displaying names whose etymology could almost without exception be explained by the Egyptian language itself. It was only at the Ptolemaic period and still later, after the Arab conquest, that names of respectively Greek and Arabic origin were added to the basic fund of Egyptian names. It was only in the peripheral regions, Nubia, the Western Oases and the Eastern Delta – regions in immediate contact with neighbouring peoples speaking other languages – where names whose etymology could be traced to these foreign languages were to be found.

(10) Professor Devisse briefly abandoned his role as Rapporteur to inform the symposium of the unexpected results of an iconographic study.¹⁰

Three manuscripts¹¹ included representations of black Egyptians which merited consideration. After eliminating what could be attributed to biblical tradition (the descendants of Ham), and allegorical representations in a consciously archaic manner (Hades, Night), there remained a variable proportion of Egyptians represented with negro features and colouring. Admittedly, some of these were servants, but – and on this point the scenes

10. This very wide-ranging international study will be the subject of a publication in three volumes two of which have already been published. The study has been carried out by the Menil Foundation (Houston, United States of America), a unit of which in Paris has co-ordinated the collection of a vast quantity of iconographic material.

11. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, New Acquisitions: latin 2334 (VI–VIIe?), Vatican grec 747 (XIe), Vatican grec 746 (XIIe).

selected were extremely interesting – others were free Egyptians. Some of them – about a third of the participants – were around the table of Joseph, who was giving a banquet for his Israelite brothers seated at another table; others were taking part in the sale of Joseph to Potiphar, who was himself represented as white. Probably the most remarkable aspect of these representations, which were consistently realistic in their details, lay in the characteristic costume worn by these black Egyptians (particularly in the eleventh-century octateuch). The negroes, who were clearly differentiated from Egyptians wearing beards and turbans, were in many cases carrying spears and wore a 'panther skin' leaving the right shoulder bare. Professor Devisse considered these observations all the more interesting because there were considerable contacts between Byzantium and Egypt during the Fatimid period, and because the representations which dated from this period were far more realistic than in the older manuscript.

It was very difficult to interpret these documents: they pointed both to the Byzantine cultural background and to the biblical tradition. Nevertheless, they reflected a 'northerner's view' of the Egyptians which was not consistent with the standard 'white-skinned' theory.

C General discussion

The general discussion made it clear that a number of participants, in varying degrees, thought it desirable, in the present state of knowledge, to undertake macro-analyses embracing the history of ancient Egypt as a whole, or, in some cases, the entire continent of Africa; certain other participants, on the other hand, thought that it would be wiser to take geographical micro-analyses very much further on a disciplinary or interdisciplinary basis.

(1) Chronological analysis of the results achieved

The discussion on this point was opened by Professor Cheikh Anta Diop. Since the Upper Palaeolithic period, the initial homogeneity of the human race had gradually declined; the population of Egypt was neither more nor less homogeneous than the population of other parts of the world. The first appearance of the human race was currently believed to have occurred in Africa 5 300 000 years ago B.P. The origins were African.

Homo sapiens appeared about — 150 000 and progressively spread to all the then habitable parts of the Nile basin. Men living in Egypt at that time were black.

Rejecting the opposing theory, referred to by Professor Vercoutter in his report concerning the peopling of Egypt during the predynastic period, Professor Diop stated that the 33 per cent of 'white' Egyptians with a fairly dark, or even black, pigmentation were in fact, black, as were the 33 per cent of half-castes; adding the last 33 per cent of the population mentioned by Dr Massoulard and admitted to be black, Professor Diop expressed the opinion that the population of Egypt as a whole was black throughout the protodynastic period.

He went on to reassert the general theory which he had previously outlined concerning the black population of Egypt which gradually became hybridized.

At another point in the discussion, Professor Diop explicitly stated that the black population of Upper Egypt began to retreat only at the time of the Persian occupation.

He ended by making two general observations: one concerned the use of the word *negroid*, a term which he considered unnecessary and pejorative; the other concerned the arguments which were being put forward to contest his ideas, and which he considered to be negative, lacking in critical rigour and not based on the facts.

Professor Diop's theory was rejected in its entirety by one participant.

None of the participants explicitly voiced support for the earlier theory concerning a population which was 'white' with a dark, even black, pigmentation. There was no more than tacit agreement to abandon this old theory.

Numerous objections were made to the ideas propounded by Professor Diop. These objections revealed the extent of a disagreement which remained profound even though it was not voiced explicitly. In respect of certain sequences, the criticisms arose out of the line of argument put forward.

In so far as very ancient times were concerned – those earlier than what the French still called the 'Neolithic' period – participants agreed that it was very difficult to find satisfactory answers.

Professor Debono noted the considerable similarity between pebble cultures in the different regions where they had been discovered (Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Egypt). The same was true of the Acheulean period, during which biface core tools were similar in a number of regions of Africa.

On the other hand, the homogeneity of the Sangoan industry, found in East Africa, progressively diminished as one moved farther north. At Khor Abu Anga (Sai Island in the Sudan), there was a more or less complete range of tools. From Wadi Halfa onwards, a number of elements were apparently lost. In Egypt, only one of the industry's typological characteristics was retained, between Thebes and Dahshur near Cairo.

In the Middle Palaeolithic period, the striking of Levallois flakes with Mousterian variants differed greatly between Egypt and areas situated farther south or west.

In the Palaeolithic period, for reasons which remain obscure but which were probably due to changed climatic and ecological conditions, Egypt became isolated from the rest of Africa with regard to the stone tool-making industry, and original industries were created (Sebilian, Epi-Levalloisian or Hawarian, Khargian).

Furthermore, at the same period there was an attempt at foreign penetration by the Aterians from north-east Africa. Traces of them were found as far as the southern Sahara. Having reached the Siwah oasis and also, in large numbers, the Khargah oasis, they spread out in the Nile valley and their traces had been found at Thebes. Other evidence dating from the same period had been noted at Wadi Hamamat (Eastern Desert), at Esna (mingled with Khargian remains), at Dara, at Jebel Ahmar near Cairo, and as far as Wadi Tumilat in the Eastern Delta (mingled with Epi-Levalloisian remains). It was probable that at the same time there was a small-scale admixture of other races, rapidly absorbed by the native population.

An equally interesting intrusion of foreign peoples into Egypt was that of the Natoufians of Palestine, whose presence at Halwan near Cairo had long been an established fact. Recent excavations had shown that these people inhabited a larger area. Stone implements, attributable to these Natoufians, had been found at Fayum and in the Eastern Desert along a belt extending in an east-west direction across the Nile valley at this point.

Professor Sauneron considered that, in view of the existence of chipped pebbles in the old Pleistocene strata of the Theban hills, it could be inferred that human beings had inhabited the Nile valley since very ancient times.

Professor Ghallab stated that the inhabitants of Egypt in Palaeolithic times were Caucasoids. He went on to say the recent excavations had provided evidence of the existence of men of the 'San' type in the population during the predynastic period.

Professor Shinnie was in agreement regarding the settlement of *Homo sapiens*, but without mentioning the colour of his skin, and dated the first settled population of the Nile valley at about 20 000 years ago. Subsequently, various human groups came from different regions, increasing this population and altering its composition.

The discussion was no less lively concerning the Neolithic and predynastic periods. Professor Abu Bakr emphasized that the Egyptians had never been isolated from other peoples. They had never constituted a pure race and it was impossible to accept the

idea that in the Neolithic period the population of Egypt was entirely black. The population of Egypt in Neolithic times was a mingling of men from the west and east, who had been incorrectly called Hamitic.

This was also the theory of Professor El Nadury. In Neolithic times migrants from all parts of the Sahara had infiltrated the sedentary population settled in the north-western part of the Delta, resulting in an intermingling of many ethnic groups. From that period onwards there was no break in continuity as regards the population until dynastic times. The site of Merimé with its wealth of clearly stratified archaeological material showed that the peopling of this area had been a gradual process.

Professor Vercoutter firmly stated his conviction, with regard to the peopling of Egypt in ancient times, that the inhabitants of the Nile valley had always been mixed; outside elements coming from west and east had been numerous, particularly in predynastic times.

During the predynastic period and the beginning of the dynastic period, a further element, coming from the north-east and described as Semitic, was added to the population. Like Professor Abu Bakr, Professor El Nadury thought it a striking fact that, during the first dynasty, fortifications had been built at Abydos, in all probability for the purpose of preventing immigration from the south towards the north.

Professor Abu Bakr referred to the case of the yellow-haired, blue-eyed wife of Cheops as an example of the existence of 'non-black' people in Egypt. Professor Diop regarded this isolated instance as an exception which proved the rule.

In the course of the discussion, Professor Obenga added some important points and emphasized the interest of ancient written sources concerning the population of Egypt. Herodotus, in a passage concerning the Colchians which was neither disputed by modern scholarship nor invalidated by the comparative critical study of manuscripts, endeavoured to show, through a series of critical arguments, that the Colchians were similar to the Egyptians: 'They speak in the same way as they do, they and the Egyptians are the only peoples to practise circumcision, they weave linen like the Egyptians'; these similarities were in addition to two other features which they had in common, their black pigmentation and their crinkly hair.

Professor Leclant maintained that ancient writers used the expression 'burnt face' (Ethiopians) to refer to Nubians and negroes but not to Egyptians. Professor Obenga replied that the Greeks applied the word 'black' (*melas*) to the Egyptians. Professor Vercoutter, in particular, asked in what precise context Herodotus had defined the Egyptians as negroes. Professor Diop replied that Herodotus referred to them on three occasions: in speaking of the origin of the Colchians, in speaking of the origin of the Nile floods, and in discussing the oracle of Zeus-Amon.

In Professor Leclant's opinion, the unity of the Egyptian people was not racial but cultural. Egyptian civilization had remained stable for three millennia; the Egyptians described themselves as REMET (*Romé* in Coptic) and, particularly in their iconographic representations, drew a distinction between themselves and the peoples of the north and those of the south who differed from them. Professor Obenga denied that Egyptians, in using the word REMET, drew a racial distinction between themselves and their neighbours; he considered the distinction made to be similar to that which led the Greeks to differentiate between themselves and other peoples, whom they termed Barbarians.

Professor Leclant noted that important palaeo-African features in the cultural life of Egypt were worthy of study. As an example, he mentioned the baboon, which was an attribute of the God Thoth, and the frequent appearance in iconography of 'panther' skins as a ritual garment during the worship of Osiris by Horus. In his opinion, however, the Egyptians, whose civilization was culturally stable for three millennia, were neither white nor negro.

Professor Sauneron then questioned the very idea of a homogeneous population, particularly if it was alleged to have existed from the earliest appearance of man in Egypt

up to the predynastic period. He considered that none of the evidence currently available gave grounds for doubting that the population of Egypt was mixed.

The conclusion of the experts who did not accept the theory, put forward by Professors Cheikh Anta Diop and Obenga, that the Nile valley population had been homogeneous from the earliest times until the Persian invasion, was that the basic population of Egypt settled there in neolithic times, that it originated largely in the Sahara and that it comprised people from the north and from the south of the Sahara who were differentiated by their colour. In opposition to this theory, Professors Diop and Obenga submitted their own theory to the effect that the valley was peopled uniformly by black people and that the movement had been from south to north.

(2) Existence or non-existence of migrations of consequence towards the Nile valley

As regards this item, the proceedings of the symposium remained very confused. More than one discussion was inconclusive.

Generally speaking, participants considered that the 'large-scale migrations' theory was no longer tenable as an explanation of the peopling of the Nile valley, at least up to the Hyksos period, when linguistic exchanges with the Near East began to take place (Holthoer). On the other hand, several experts thought that population exchanges had evidently occurred with immediately adjacent regions in the valley, although very divergent opinions were expressed concerning the role played by geographical or ecological factors in creating natural or artificial obstacles to such population movements.

At all events, it was generally agreed that Egypt had absorbed these migrants of various ethnic origins. It followed that the participants in the symposium implicitly recognized that the substratum of the Nile valley population remained generally stable and was affected only to a limited extent by migrations during three millennia.

When the later periods came to be examined, however, it proved impossible to reach this very broad measure of theoretical agreement.

As regards the Palaeolithic period, Professor Cheikh Anta Diop put forward the hypothesis that *Homo sapiens* settled progressively in the valley as far as the latitude of Memphis. Professor Abu Bakr said that too little information was available concerning this period and that the northern part of the Nile valley might not have been inhabited at all. Professor Obenga, on the other hand, considered that between the Upper Palaeolithic and the Neolithic periods there had been continuous settlement by a uniform population; the Egyptians themselves had laid emphasis on this in their oral traditions, mentioning the Great Lakes as their original homeland and Nubia as a country identical with theirs.

Where the Mesolithic merged with the Neolithic (Professor Vercoutter) or during the Neolithic period (Professors Habachi and Ghallab), it seemed likely that fairly large movements of population took place from the Sahara towards the Nile valley. Professor Vercoutter hoped that these movements, about which very little was at present known, would be dated accurately and that the relevant archaeological material would be collected and studied.

Professor Cheikh Anta Diop submitted certain details by way of reply: Radio-carbon dating for the Western Sahara showed that a period of damp climate had extended from about 30 000 B.P. to 8 000 B.P., with intermittent periods of drought; similarly, the dating of the ensuing dry period was becoming clearer. Similar datings should be obtained for the Eastern Sahara; by combining the results obtained with palaeo-climatic research and with studies of tombs and carvings, the information which Professor Vercoutter wanted would be obtained.

Professor Habachi unreservedly supported the theory of migrations from the Sahara on the basis of known studies. Professor Säve-Söderbergh considered that the majority of

Neolithic cultures in the Nile valley belonged to a techno-complex of Saharan and Sudanese cultures; nevertheless, migratory movements were probably intense, especially prior to and at the end of the neolithic subpluvial period.

As an alternative to the hypothesis postulating a migration from the Sahara largely during Neolithic times, Professor Diop put forward the hypothesis that the population had spread northwards from the south. He restated the idea, to which reference had been made several times during the discussion, that, during the Capsian period, this culture covered a vast area extending from Kenya to Palestine.

On the subject of the protodynastic and predynastic periods, Professors Diop and Vercoutter agreed that the population of the Egyptian reaches of the Nile valley was homogeneous as far as the southern extremity of the Delta. These two experts were in partial agreement on the hypothesis of migration southwards from the north, Professor Vercoutter finding this theory difficult to accept and Professor Diop rejecting it. Disagreement emerged on the subject of defining the nature of these people more precisely. Professor Diop regarded them as being the Anu and identified them in the picture noted by Petrie in the temple of Abydos.

During the dynastic period, the stability of the population of the Egyptian reaches of the Nile valley was attested by the stability of its culture; Professor Diop showed that the Egyptian calendar had been in use as early as -4236 and, from the beginning, had a cyclic pattern of 1461 years. He considered that, until the Persian invasion, that stability had been threatened only by a very powerful earthquake which occurred in about -1450. This had given rise to a series of migrations which affected the equilibrium of all countries bordering the eastern Mediterranean basin. Seafaring peoples then attacked the Egyptian Delta at a period contemporaneous with the disappearance of the Hittites and the appearance of the proto-Berbers in North Africa. Apart from this major upheaval, the only important episode in the life of the Egyptian people, even if it were not associated with a migration, was the conquest of Egypt in a south-north direction by the unifying Pharaoh Narmer in about -3300.

There was no discussion of this analysis, but other analyses were put forward: Professor Sève-Söderbergh sought to establish, on the basis of the Nubian excavations, at what periods and in what conditions the Egypt of the Pharaohs had become cut off from the south. In Nubia, the most ancient culture gradually disappeared at the end of the first dynasty or perhaps at the beginning of the second. The C Group which succeeded it did not appear before the sixth dynasty. This meant that there was a 'chronological gap' of about 500 years, between -2800 and -2300, on which no information was available today. It was clear that, as a result of this situation, active contacts between Pharaonic Egypt and the south were destroyed or discontinued.

There was another instance of the same situation: no archaeological remains dating from the period between -1000 and the beginning of the Christian era were to be found in Lower Nubia. The earliest Meroitic remains which had been discovered there dated from the first century of our era; exchanges between Egypt and the south had therefore varied considerably between -2800 and the Meroitic period.

Professors Vercoutter and Leclant noted the appearance, from the eighteenth dynasty onwards, of a type of negro representation which was totally different from anything that had existed earlier (the tomb of *Houy* or the tomb of *Rekhmire*, for example). How did these new populations make their appearance in Egyptian iconography? Was it the result of contacts between Egyptians and the south or because of migrations northwards into Nubia of populations living farther south? Professor Shinnie objected that this information gave no grounds for inferring that there had been a northward migration from the south which had affected the population of Egypt.

Professor Leclant considered that, with the exception of the eighteenth-dynasty example already mentioned, no important change had occurred prior to the twenty-fifth dynasty,

when the Kushites from the Dongola region appeared in Egypt. He was inclined, incidentally, to regard this as attributable rather to the transitory increase of a particular influence in the life of the Egyptian population than to migrations of peoples.

Two main facts became very plain during the discussion and were not seriously contested:

- (a) There is a twofold problem in connection with the Nile Delta¹² in prehistoric times.

Firstly, as Professor Debono pointed out, this region, unlike Upper Egypt, is very little known, as the excavations being carried out at Merimde, El Omari and Meadi-Heliopolis have not yet been completed.

The human remains so far discovered dating from prehistoric times and from the archaic period are different from those found in Upper Egypt.

Secondly, it appears certain that human factors which affected life in Lower Egypt or the Delta, in so far as they can be discerned prior to the dynastic period, differ from those which were operative in the valley south of this region.

- (b) The study of the ancient substratum of the population has been made possible in northern Nubia by the intensive archaeological research organized under Unesco's auspices. For a great variety of reasons, this has not been the case in the remainder of the Egyptian part of the Nile valley, where research concerning predynastic times and ancient material cultures had produced far fewer results than in northern Nubia. The reservations and the unwillingness of some of the experts to draw final conclusions are probably due in part to this fact.

There is no doubt that one other factor at least added to the complexity of a discussion which often took the form of successive and mutually contradictory monologues. This factor emerged clearly from a phrase uttered by Professor Obenga, although it was not commented upon. Professor Obenga considers it self-evident that a homogeneous cultural substratum necessarily implies a homogeneous ethnic substratum.

Whether or not these two ideas lend themselves to simultaneous consideration, it seems likely that they were not kept sufficiently apart during the discussions and that, as a result, the conclusions reached were less clear-cut than they might otherwise have been. The possibility of finding points of agreement was probably affected by this fact.

Nevertheless, if they are considered without reference to racial issues, two major themes did ultimately meet with almost unanimous agreement, at least as working hypotheses.

It was probably in Neolithic times that the population of the Egyptian Nile valley was most affected by large-scale migrations. Two theories are current in this connection: according to one, the migrants came, in the main, in a north-south direction from the entire area of the Eastern Sahara; according to the other, these movements of population came along the Nile from the south; from protodynastic times onwards, the population of Egypt was very stable. The nature of the peopling was not radically altered by the various population movements which affected the political life and the military situation of Egypt, by the consequences of Egypt's commercial relations, by the internal efforts towards agricultural settlement or by infiltrations from nearby regions. This ethnic stability was accompanied by a high degree of cultural stability.

However, during the discussion of the hypothesis of a homogeneous population, which was favoured by Professor Diop, and the hypothesis of a mixed population, which was supported by several other experts, it became clear that there was total disagreement.

12. Professor Holthoer drew attention to the following work: D. G. Réder, 'The Economic Development of Lower Egypt (Delta) during the Archaic Period (V-IV [centuries] before our era)', a collection of articles which appeared in the *Journal of Ancient Egypt*, 1960 (translation of the Russian title).

(3) Results of the physical anthropology inquiry

At various points in the discussion, it became apparent that the terms used hitherto for the purposes of racial description required to be more clearly defined.

Mr Glélé, the representative of the Director-General of Unesco, intervened to reassure those experts who advocated outlawing the terms 'negro', 'black' and 'negroid' on the grounds that the concept of race was outmoded and efforts should be made to bring men closer together by repudiating any reference to race. Mr Glélé reminded the participants that Unesco was committed to the cause of promoting international understanding and co-operation in the cultural sphere and that it had not been the intention of the Organization, when deciding to hold the symposium, to give rise to tensions between peoples or races but rather, as far as the present state of knowledge permitted, to elucidate and clarify one of several subjects which were matters of doubt, namely, the question of the peopling of ancient Egypt from the point of view of its ethnic origin and of its anthropological relationships. What was needed, therefore, was to compare the alternative theories, to assess the scientific arguments on which they were based, and to take stock of the situation, drawing attention, where appropriate, to any gaps. He emphasized that the terms negro, negroid, black, had, in any case, been used hitherto; that they appeared in all scientific studies, as also did the word 'Hamitic' or 'Chamitic', even though doubts had been expressed on their validity in the course of the current symposium; he also stated that the authors of the *General History of Africa* would make use of those words, to which readers were already accustomed. Whatever general opinion one might have, it remained true that these words, as used in both scholarly and popular works, were not devoid of meaning and were inseparable from value judgements, whether implicit or otherwise. He corroborated a statement made by one expert with reference to Unesco's publications on racial problems. Unesco had not repudiated the idea of race; the Organization had drawn up a special programme to study race relations and had stepped up its efforts to combat racial discrimination. There had been several publications on this important problem. It was therefore out of the question for the symposium, in studying problems bearing on the peopling of ancient Egypt, to reject out of hand, and without proposing any new system, the generally accepted classification of peoples as white, yellow and black – a typology which had traditionally been used by Egyptologists to classify the people of Egypt. Furthermore, if the traditional vocabulary currently used by historians needed revision, it should not be revised merely for the history of Africa but for the entire world; if the symposium considered the matter important, it could be submitted for consideration at the international level to the historians' association. Pending the introduction of new terms, the terms black, negro, negroid and Hamitic, which were currently used, should be more clearly defined.

The debate on this point was opened by Professor Vercoutter. He recalled that the problem had been raised by the work of Junker, when he used the word 'negro' to denote the type of representations which appeared under the eighteenth dynasty, and was subsequently caricatured by the Egyptians. Junker used the word negro primarily in reference to West Africa, emphasizing both the pigmentation and certain facial characteristics.

Professor Vercoutter was inclined to think that, in place of this old point of view, more specific criteria were essential in order to provide a scientific definition of the black race; in particular, he mentioned a blood criterion, the question of the precise significance of the degree of skin pigmentation and whether, for example, the Nubians should be considered as negroes.

Various attitudes emerged with regard to these questions. Several participants hoped that the word 'race', which on a number of recent occasions had aroused strong feelings,

would be used with circumspection. Professor Obenga replied that the notion of race was recognized as valid by scientific research and that the study of races did not necessarily involve racialism.

The discussion brought out the difficulty of giving a scientific content to the terms under review. Even more, perhaps, it brought out the fact that more than one expert was reluctant, for highly respectable reasons, to use those terms, which could rightly be regarded as having dangerous or pejorative implications. Some experts pointed out, moreover, that the basic answers on this issue could not be expected to come from historians and archaeologists, but only from specialists in physical anthropology.

Professor Sève-Söderbergh was supported by a considerable number of the participants when he expressed the hope that racial terminology would be studied by specialists on modern physical anthropology. A strict scientific definition would be of use with regard not only to Africa but also, and perhaps more so, to Asia; similarly, the concepts of mixed population, composite population and groups of populations needed sharper definition. Unesco already had before it a request to this effect in connection with research being carried out in Nubia.

Mr Glélé said that if the criteria for classifying a person as black, white or yellow were so debatable, and if the concepts which had been discussed were so ill-defined and perhaps so subjective or inseparable from habitual patterns of thought, this should be frankly stated and a revision should be made of the entire terminology of world history in the light of new scientific criteria, so that the vocabulary should be the same for every one and that words should have the same connotations, thus avoiding misconceptions and being conducive to understanding and agreement.

Professors Diop and Obenga were ill-advised, however, to refer to the series of criteria established by anthropologists to characterize the negro: black skin, facial prognathism, crinkly hair, flat nose (the facial and nasal indicators being very arbitrarily selected by different anthropologists) negritic bone structure (ratio between upper and lower limbs). According to Montel, the negro had a flat and 'horizontal' face. Professor Abu Bakr observed that, if that were the case, the Egyptians could certainly not be considered as negroes.

Professor Diop went on to specify that cranial measurements had never provided any statistical basis for specifying that a particular brain size was characteristic of one race or another.

He considered that there were two black races, one with smooth hair and the other with crinkly hair and, if the skin colour was black, it was unlikely that the other fundamental characteristics which he had previously enumerated would not be found. Lastly, whereas the blood-group A2 was characteristic of white people, black people tended to have Group B, or, in a more limited number of cases, Group C.

Professor Shinnie replied that the American specialists whom he had consulted while preparing for the symposium had told him that skeletal studies had some importance but that they did not in themselves provide a basis for determining race, and that the criteria regarded as adequate by Professor Diop were, rightly or wrongly, no longer considered to be so by American specialists.

Professor Obenga considered that there were two groups within a single black race, one with smooth hair and the other crinkly hair. Professor Obenga reverted to the general question which was before the symposium: if the notion of race was accepted as valid and if the notion of a black race was not rejected, what was to be said of the relationship between this race and the ancient Egyptians?

Professor Diop considered that the findings of the anthropological inquiry already provided an adequate basis on which to draw conclusions. Negroid Grimaldian man appeared about -32 000, Crô-Magnon man, the prototype of the white race, about -20 000, Chancelade man, the prototype of the yellow race, in the Magdalenian period,

about —15 000. The Semitic races were a social phenomenon characteristic of an urban environment and were a cross between black and white races.

He was, therefore, in no doubt: the first inhabitants of the Nile valley belonged to the black race, as defined by the research findings currently accepted by specialists in anthropology and prehistory. Professor Diop considered that only psychological and educational factors prevented the truth of this from being accepted.

As the assumption behind the research being carried out in Nubia was favourable to a universalistic view, the research findings were of little use in the current discussion. Professor Diop was not in favour of setting up commissions to verify patent facts which, at the present time, simply needed formal recognition: in his view, all the information currently available, even that which derived from the superficial studies made in the nineteenth century, supported the theory that, in the most ancient times, the Egyptians were black-skinned and that they remained so until Egypt ultimately lost its independence. In response to the various questions put to him, Professor Diop stated that the samples already provided by archaeology were adequate to support his argument. He was unable to accept Professor Vercoutter's proposal that anthropological documentation antedating about 1939 should be regarded as of dubious reliability owing to its lack of scientific rigour.

Professor Diop's forceful affirmation was criticized by many participants.

The main criticism was voiced by Professor Sauneron, who observed that the total number of people who had occupied the Nile valley between the beginning of historical times and the present day could reasonably be estimated at several hundred million individuals. A few hundred sites had been excavated and some 2000 bodies studied; in view of the sparseness of the data thus obtained, it was totally unrealistic to infer from them such ambitious general conclusions. As the available samples gave nothing like a complete picture, it was advisable to wait until a rigorous and sufficiently comprehensive inquiry into general features had provided universally acceptable evidence.

(4) The validity of the iconographic inquiry

In this field also there were two opposing theories. Professor Diop considered that, as the Egyptians were black, their painted iconography, which, incidentally, he had not cited in support of his argument, could represent only black people. Professor Vercoutter, who was supported by Professors Ghallab and Leclant, considered that Egyptian iconography, from the eighteenth dynasty onwards, showed characteristic representations of black people who had not previously been depicted; these representations meant, therefore, that at least from that dynasty onwards the Egyptians had been in contact with peoples who were considered ethnically distinct from them.

Professor Diop remarked that, in the course of his introductory statement, he had submitted a series of representations drawn exclusively from sculpture. He regarded all these as representing black people or as showing features characteristic of black societies. He asked for specific criticisms of these records and invited participants to produce comparable representations of whites in dignified or commanding postures dating from early Pharaonic times. Various participants replied that there had never been any question of discovering in Egypt representations comparable to those of Greek statuary, for example. Professor Vercoutter said that numerous representations could be produced in which human beings were painted red rather than black, but that Professor Diop would refuse to recognize these as non-black. Professor El Nadury did not deny that there were black elements in the population of Egypt during the Old Kingdom but said that it seemed hardly likely that the entire population was black.

Professor Vercoutter stated that the photographic reproduction of Pharaoh Narmer was

considerably enlarged, that the features were probably distorted, and that to regard the person represented as black involved a subjective assessment. This was also the opinion of Professor Säve-Söderbergh, who said that the photograph could just as well be interpreted as a picture of a Laplander.

Professor Vercoutter did not dispute that there might have been black elements in Egypt throughout history, and he himself adduced a number of further examples of their being represented graphically. He took issue with the facts as presented, however, on two counts: they had been drawn indiscriminately from the whole Pharaonic period, without clear references; and the selection had been made to support a theory. On this score, Professor Diop replied that he had made a point of submitting only carved objects or scenes in order to avoid the likelihood of discussion on the significance of colours, but that he had been obliged to use the material available to him at Dakar. The list was comprehensive; it extended from the Old Kingdom to the end of the Pharaonic period. The evidence did, indeed, support a theory and any contrary theory must of necessity be supported by iconographic representations of 'non-black' Egyptians.

During the lengthy discussion on colours, Professors Vercoutter, Sauneron and Säve-Söderbergh, on the one hand, and Professor Diop on the other, were again in disagreement. During the discussion, nothing was conceded by either side. The only apparent point of agreement was that the matter warranted further study, in particular with the help of specialized laboratories.

Professor Vercoutter conceded that there were representations of black people in Egyptian sculpture during the Old Kingdom, and he gave supporting examples. But he did not consider that they were representative of the Egyptian population as a whole, which was, in any case, also represented by contemporary sculptures showing quite different features.

Professor Vercoutter wondered why the Egyptians, if they did regard themselves as black, rarely, if ever, used carbon black in their representations of themselves but used a red colour instead. Professor Diop considered that this red colour was indicative of the black Egyptian race and that the yellow colouring of the womenfolk illustrated the fact, to which attention had been drawn by American anthropologists, that women, in a number of racial groups studied, were, as a rule, of a paler hue than the men.

(5) Linguistic analyses

This item, in contrast to those previously discussed, revealed a large measure of agreement among the participants. The outline report by Professor Diop and the report by Professor Obenga were regarded as being very constructive.

Discussion took place on two levels.

In response to Professor Diop's statement that Egyptian was not a Semitic language, Professor Abdalla observed that the opposite opinion had often been expressed.

A grammatical and semantic debate took place between Professor Diop on the radical which he reads *KMT*, derives from *KM* 'black' and considers to be a collective noun meaning 'blacks, i.e. negroes' and Professor Abdelgadir M. Abdallah who adopts the accepted reading of it as *KMTYW* and translation as 'Egyptians', the plural of *KMTY* 'Egyptian', the *nisha*-form from *KMT* 'black land, i.e. Egypt'. The latter reading and translation were affirmed by Professor Sauneron.

Turning to wider issues, Professor Sauneron drew attention to the interest of the method suggested by Professor Obenga following Professor Diop. Egyptian remained a stable language for a period of at least 4500 years. Egypt was situated at the point of convergence of outside influence and it was to be expected that borrowings had been made from foreign languages; but the Semitic roots numbered only a few hundred as compared with a total of several thousand words. The Egyptian language could not be isolated from its

African context and its origin could not be fully explained in terms of Semitic; it was thus quite normal to expect to find related languages in Africa.

However, a rigorous methodical approach required the difficult problem of the 5000-year gap to be faced: this was the period separating ancient Egyptian from present-day African languages.

Professor Obenga drew attention to the fact that a language which was not fixed by a written form and which developed normally might retain certain ancient forms; he had cited examples of this in the communication he had given on the first day of the symposium.

Professor Sauneron noted that the method which had been used was of considerable interest, since it could not be purely fortuitous that there was a similarity between the third person singular suffixed pronouns in ancient Egyptian and in Wolof; he hoped that an attempt would be made to reconstitute a palaeo-African language, using present-day languages as a starting point. This would facilitate comparison with ancient Egyptian. Professor Obenga considered this method to be acceptable. Professor Diop thought it essential to derive a research method from linguistic comparisons, and he provided a specific example of what he had in mind. He regarded the Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk groups and their respective languages, on the one hand, and Wolof, on the other, as being ethnically and, to a lesser extent, linguistically related. Senegalese proper names occurred in the groups in question at clan level. More specifically, Professor Diop believed that he had found among the Kaw-Kaw, in the Nubian hills, the clearest link between ancient Egyptian and Wolof.

Professor Vercoutter pointed out, as a matter of interest, that in the tomb of Sebek-Hotep there were representations of three Nilotes who were indubitably ancestors of the Dinka or the Nuer.

(6) Development of an interdisciplinary and pluridisciplinary methodology

There was complete agreement on this point as to the necessity of studying in as much detail as possible all the zones bordering on the Nile valley which were likely to provide fresh information on the question submitted to the symposium.

Professor Vercoutter considered it necessary to give due weight to the palaeo-ecology of the Delta and to the vast region which Professor Balout had termed the African Fertile Crescent.

Professor Cheikh Anta Diop advocated tracing the paths taken by peoples who migrated westwards from Darfur, reaching the Atlantic seaboard by separate routes, to the south along the Zaïre valley and to the north towards Senegal, on either side of the Yoruba. He also pointed out how worthwhile it might be to study Egypt's relations with the rest of Africa in greater detail than hitherto, and he mentioned the discovery, in the province of Shaba, of a statuette of Osiris dating from the seventh century before our era.

Similarly, a general study might be made of the working hypothesis that the major events which affected the Nile valley, such as the sacking of Thebes by the Syrians; or the Persian invasion of -525, had far-reaching repercussions on the African continent as a whole.

D General conclusion

It is to be expected that the overall results of the symposium will be very differently assessed by the various participants.

Although the preparatory working paper sent out by Unesco gave particulars of what was desired, not all participants had prepared communications comparable with the pain-

stakingly researched contributions of Professors Cheikh Anta Diop and Obenga. There was consequently a real lack of balance in the discussions.

Nevertheless, for a number of reasons, the discussions were very constructive.

- 1 In many cases, they clearly showed the importance of exchanging new scientific information.
- 2 They brought home to almost all the participants the shortcomings of the methodological criteria which had hitherto been used in research.
- 3 They drew attention to examples of new methodological approaches on the basis of which the question before the symposium could be studied in a more scientific manner.
- 4 This first meeting should, in any case, be regarded as providing a basis for further international and interdisciplinary discussions, and as a starting point for further researches which were clearly shown to be necessary. The large number of recommendations is a reflection of the desire of the symposium to suggest a future programme of research.
- 5 Lastly, the symposium enabled specialists who had never previously had the opportunity of comparing and contrasting their points of view to discover other approaches to problems, other sources of information and other lines of research than those to which they were accustomed. From this point of view also, the symposium undeniably proved constructive.

E Recommendations

The symposium draws the attention of Unesco and of other competent bodies to the following recommendations.

(1) Physical anthropology

It is desirable:

- (i) that an international inquiry be organized by Unesco, either by consulting universities in a sufficient number of countries, or by consulting individual experts of international repute, or alternatively by convening a symposium, with a view to establishing very precise standards on the strictest possible scientific principles for defining races and for identifying the racial type of exhumed skeletons;
- (ii) that the collaboration of the medical services of several Unesco member states be sought for the purpose of carrying out statistical observations during post-mortem examinations on the osteological characteristics of skeletons;
- (iii) that a re-examination be made of human remains which are already in the possession of museums throughout the world, and that a rapid study be made of remains discovered during recent excavations in Egypt, in particular in the Delta, with a view to adding to the available information;
- (iv) that the Egyptian authorities do everything in their power to facilitate the necessary study of examinable vestiges of skin, and that these authorities agree to set up a department specializing in physical anthropology.

(2) Study of migrations

It is desirable that the following studies be undertaken:

- (i) a systematic archaeological study of the earliest periods during which the Delta was inhabited. This operation might be preceded by the analysis of a core sample taken from the soil of the Delta. The study and the dating of this geological core sample could be carried out simultaneously in Cairo and in Dakar;
- (ii) a comparable inquiry in the regions of the Sahara near to Egypt and in the oases. This inquiry should comprise the simultaneous study of rock drawings and

- paintings and of all available archaeological material. Here again, geological samples might be analysed and dated at the same time;
- (iii) a survey in the valley itself, comparable to that which has been carried out in northern Nubia, which would be concerned with non-Pharaonic tombs, with the study of ancient material cultures and, in general, with the prehistory of the valley as a whole;
 - (iv) an inquiry on palaeo-African vestiges in Egyptian iconography and their historical significance. The cases of the baboon and of the leopard ('panther') skin have already been cited by the symposium. It would undoubtedly be possible to discover others.

(3) Linguistics

The symposium recommends that a linguistic study be made without delay on the African languages which are in imminent danger of disappearing: Kaw-Kaw has been suggested as a very significant case in point.

At the same time, the co-operation of specialists in comparative linguistics should be enlisted at international level in order to establish all possible correlations between African languages and ancient Egyptian.

(4) Interdisciplinary and pluridisciplinary methodology

The symposium earnestly hopes that:

- (i) interdisciplinary regional studies may be undertaken in several regions, with the following priorities:
 - Darfur
 - the region between the Nile and the Red Sea
 - the eastern fringe of the Sahara
 - the Nile region south of the tenth parallel
 - the Nile valley between the Second and Sixth Cataracts.
- (ii) an interdisciplinary inquiry be made as a matter of urgency on the Kaw-Kaw who are in imminent danger of extinction.

II Deciphering of the Meroitic script

(1) A preliminary report had been prepared by Professor J. Leclant at the request of Unesco.¹³

(a) The Meroitic language, which was used by the cultures of Napata and Meroe, was still not understood, although the script had already been deciphered.

The historical account of the studies made on Meroitic showed how systematic research on the inscriptions, which had gradually been collected in a haphazard way in the course of excavations, had been started only in recent years. Archaeological research was likely to bring to light more inscriptions in the future; none had so far been discovered in the region between the Second and Fourth Cataracts: the same was true of the travel routes in the direction of the Red Sea, the great valleys of the West, Kordofan and Darfur.

It was particularly important to persevere with archaeological work as it could reasonably be hoped that a bilingual inscription might one day be discovered.

(b) The results were published in full in the *Meroitic Newsletters*, thirteen issues of which had so far appeared, which made it possible rapidly to publicize findings when they were sometimes still only tentative. Regular meetings of specialists had taken place – at Khartoum in December 1970, in East Berlin in September 1971, and in Paris in June

13. See this preliminary report in Annex IV of the Final Report of the symposium (1974).

1972 and again in July 1973; the results of the last-mentioned meeting were set out in Information Note No. 34 issued by the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, Unesco.

Computer processes had also been used for analysing the Meroitic language for a number of years. As a result, there had been considerable and rapid progress in this field.

By compiling lists of *stichs*, it had been possible to make a start on analysing the structure of the language. The index of words recorded now comprised 13 405 units and a means had been found of putting questions to the machine.

On this basis, an effort had been made, by using words of which the meaning was known or could be inferred, to compare the language with Egyptian or Nubian.

(c) Professor Leclant ended his presentation with an account of the lines of research now being followed:

Professor Hintze was working on structures;

Professor Schenkel was working on improving the data to be recorded by the computer;

Professor Abdelgadir M. Abdalla was going forward with an inquiry about which he was to speak briefly; it had achieved results which corroborated the findings of the international team.

Future efforts would include making a comparison between Meroitic and other African languages and discovering its place among a group of African languages, in particular in relation to Nubian; other comparisons would be made with the languages spoken in areas bordering on the Ethiopian region. Lastly, it would be desirable to compare Meroitic with African languages as a whole.

Discussion

(2) Professor Abdalla confirmed that he endorsed the system adopted for transcribing Meroitic and the method which had been devised for recording the texts. He drew attention to the gaps in our knowledge: almost complete ignorance of the system of pronouns, of the use of demonstrative pronouns, of the nature of prefixes and suffixes. It was essential to know with what other languages Meroitic was linked.

Professor Abdalla was in favour of carrying out a kind of dissection of the language, so as to study its components. He drew attention to the mobility of the elements forming personal names in which these elements had social implications: the same mobile elements recurred in the names of several members of a given family; the names of certain children comprised elements taken from the names of their mother and father; certain names were titles; others contained place-names.

(3) Professor Shinnie said that there were three possible methods of approach: the discovery of a bilingual text; the internal analysis of the structure of the language; and comparison with other African languages.

Direct comparison between the two principal non-Arabic languages of northern Sudan and of the M Group had proved fruitless: Meroitic might prove to be a help in making this comparison.

(4) Professor Kakosy, who was present as an observer, laid stress on the necessity of studying documentary sources. He stated that there were in Budapest fragments of offering tables which came from a site close to Abu Simbel; he proposed to include these fragments forthwith in the Repertory of Meroitic Epigraphy.

(5) Professor Cheikh Anta Diop was very pleased with the progress achieved. Pending the possible future discovery of a bilingual text, he suggested that use should be made of the computer-based methods which had made possible the partial deciphering of the Maya

hieroglyphs by the Leningrad team headed by Professor Knorossov. Most scripts had been deciphered with the help of bilingual or multilingual texts. The correct procedure in the case of Meroitic would be to combine multilingualism and the potentialities of the computer in the following manner:

- (a) Purely as a methodological procedure, a relationship should be postulated between Meroitic and negro-African languages, thus creating a multilingual situation.
- (b) As, at the present time, 22 000 Meroitic words could be read with some degree of certainty, a 500-word basic vocabulary should be drawn up on punched cards for each of 100 African languages carefully selected by a suitable group of linguists. The words selected might be those indicating, for example, the parts of the body, terms of kingship, religious terminology, terms relating to material culture, and so on.
- (c) The computer should be programmed to recognize, for example, three identical consonants, two identical consonants, etc.
- (d) On the basis of the results obtained, a comparison should be made of the structures of the languages thus juxtaposed.

This method was more rational than the haphazard comparison of linguistic structures, because too little was as yet known about the grammar of Meroitic. The method was more efficient than awaiting the result of a non-comparative study of the internal structure of Meroitic.

Professor Leclant endorsed this investigatory and operational procedure as being likely to provide very valuable information. He thought that it would be useful not only to make a concordance of features actually present but also of features not present (the absence of certain structures or certain sequences).

Mr Glélé asked to what extent the methods used for deciphering other languages could also serve to clear up the mystery surrounding the Meroitic language. He stated that Professor Knorossov and Professor Piotrovski had been invited to the meeting on the same basis as Professor Holthoer and Professor Hintze in order to provide the required information.

Professor Leclant said that a very wide-ranging study of this matter had been made at meetings held in Paris and London during the summer of 1973. The work both on the Mohenjodaro script and on Maya had not yet got beyond the stage of working hypotheses.

Professor Diop hoped, however, that the idea of using comparative methods side by side with the study of structures would not be abandoned. His proposal was approved by Professor Sauneron, who took the opportunity of emphasizing the importance of the work which had already been done by the Meroitic Studies Group.

Subsequent discussion bore more especially on the languages of the Sudan; Professor Sæve-Söderbergh emphasized that, in any case, it was important that they be studied, since quite apart from the comparison with Meroitic, a knowledge of these languages would assist in advancing African linguistics. Professor Sæve-Söderbergh at this stage submitted the outline of a recommendation to this effect. He also emphasized that it was possible, even with quite small funds, to set up an efficient secretariat and to accelerate the collection of material, its processing by computer and the redistribution of information.

Lastly, there was discussion of the content of the recommendation. Professor Diop hoped that the excellent work done by the Meroitic Studies Group would be continued with full international collaboration, that a systematic compilation of the vocabulary would be made in the Sudan and that an identical compilation would be carried out in other regions of Africa with the collaboration of Professor Obenga. Professor Sauneron accepted these proposals in their entirety. As it was uncertain what bearing this work would ultimately prove to have on the deciphering of Meroitic, he hoped that the study of African languages would be developed independently, for its own sake, even if it were partly incorporated

in the overall project. It was likely to be very protracted and it was essential that a thoroughly sound method should be established from the outset, after strict critical appraisal. Professor Obenga endorsed this idea and suggested that an inventory should be made of the grammatical features of Meroitic which were currently known. Professor Leclant considered that this proposal could be put into effect immediately. Professor Habachi hoped that the need for an archaeological inquiry would not be neglected.

In response to a methodological proposal made by Professor Obenga, Mr Glélé stated that the methods to be adopted would be decided when the membership of the international team responsible was finalized. He explained that Unesco was supporting the studies being carried out in Khartoum with regard to Sudanese languages and was in a position to provide study grants in accordance with its normal procedures. Unesco was financing and directing a programme on African linguistics and had just adopted a ten-year plan for this purpose.

Recommendations

- (1) (a) The meeting expresses its satisfaction for the work accomplished by the Meroitic Study Group in Paris in collaboration with scholars of many other countries, and wishes to express its opinion that the work is well grounded and promises good results.
- (b) The meeting has unanimously decided to suggest the following measures to further the project:
 - (i) the speeding up of the computer processes by making available additional funds, and circulating the information, in revised and improved form, to the main centres of Meroitic studies;
 - (ii) to produce lists and where possible, of Meroitic personal names, place names and titles, and to classify linguistic structures, and to pursue collaboration with specialists in African linguistics;
 - (iii) to establish and publish a complete corpus of all Meroitic texts with bibliography, photographs, facsimiles and transcriptions on the basis of the existing files (*Répertoire d'Épigraphie Méroïtique*);
 - (iv) to produce a complete Meroitic vocabulary.
- (c) Since the results of the project so far obtained are scientifically sound and promise a successful development, and since the greater expense of the project as a whole has already been met with funds from various sources, this meeting now considers it to be imperative to assure the continuation and completion of the project by providing funds for the following purposes:
 - (i) costs of secretariat and personnel for the documentation and scientific publication of the material;
 - (ii) costs of inquiries in collections and museums;
 - (iii) travel expenses of specialists;
 - (iv) costs of card punching and computer time.
- (2) The next step of research would be comparative structural and lexicographical studies of African languages, in the first place the languages of the Sudan and the border regions of Ethiopia, some of which are now dying out. This would best be done by giving Sudanese students at the University of Khartoum a linguistic training, preferably such students who have these languages as their mother tongue.

Such training would also be of value for many other purposes. Such a project, which would complement the valuable work already under way in the Sudan, would require to

be negotiated with the University of Khartoum, and funds would be required for the necessary scholarships.

(3) In addition a wider linguistic survey of all African languages with the purpose of collecting key words was desirable. Such a survey should be made in collaboration with the Meroitic Study Group and be directed by specialists chosen by Unesco in collaboration with the International Scientific Committee for the General History of Africa. The choice should be limited to about 500 words of selected categories from some 100 languages.

This collection, when computerized, would be a valuable tool not only for the deciphering of the Meroitic language but for many other linguistic problems of modern Africa.

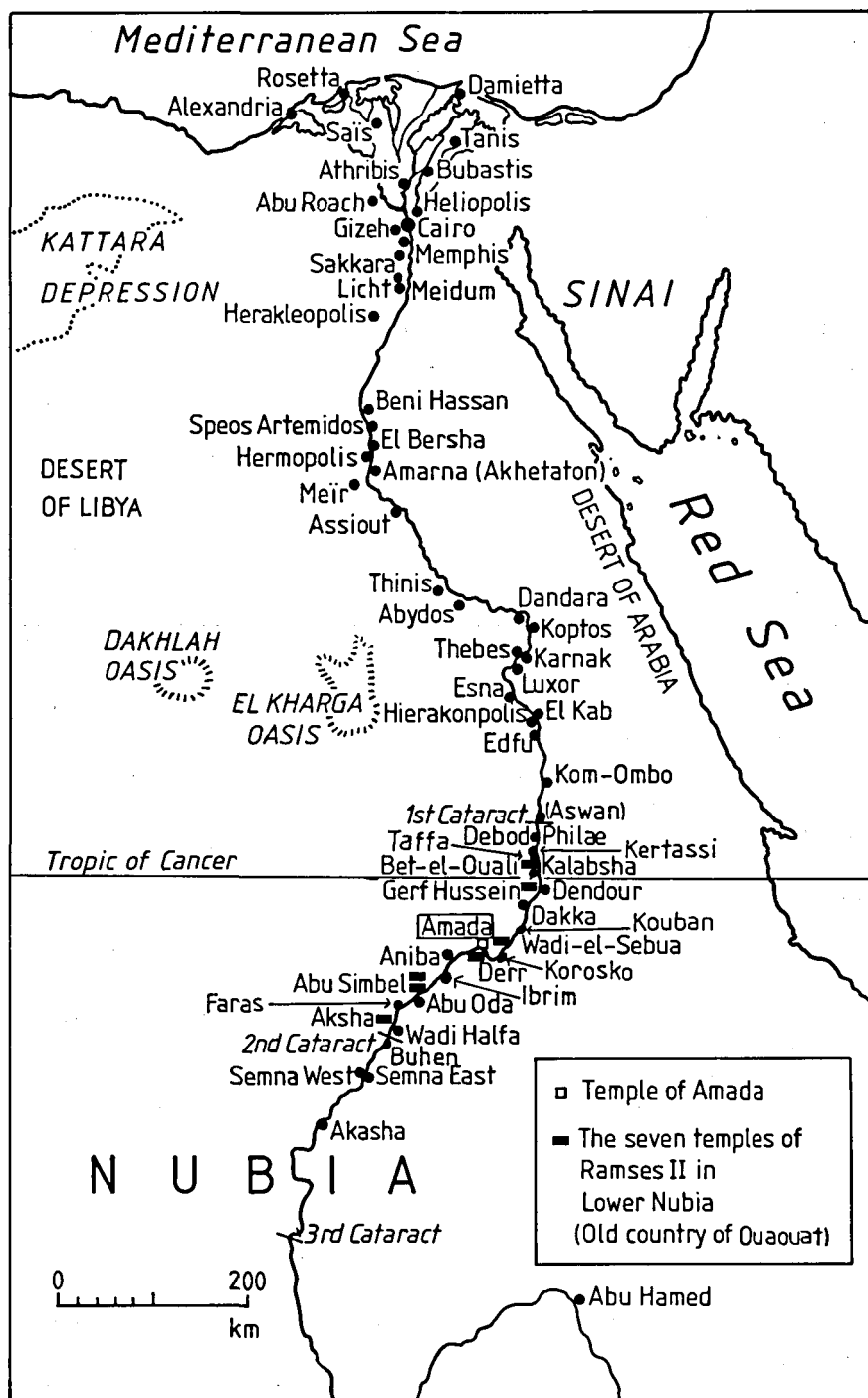


FIG. 2.1 The Nile from the Third Cataract to the Mediterranean