

Berber, the philologists mean the Hamitic languages of N. Africa,<sup>1</sup> known to us at the present day from the Tamashek, Kabyli, and kindred dialects. The spread of Islam along N. Africa brought the Arabs into contact with these Berber tribes,<sup>2</sup> whose influence on Islam in that area was as profound as that of the Turks in Mesopotamia, but it is ridiculous to think that any elements of Berber vocabulary entered Arabic in the pre-Islamic or Qur'ānic period. One may doubt whether any of the Muslim philologists had any acquaintance with the Berber dialects,<sup>3</sup> and certainly the words quoted as Berber by as-Suyūṭī's authorities have no connection with any Hamitic tongue. Again all we can say is that these words were puzzles to the scholars of the day, and **بلسان**

**اهل المغرب** or **بلغة البربر** at least sounded well as a cloak for their ignorance.

From the discussion thus far it has become obvious that we cannot rate very highly the work of the Muslim authorities who have dealt with this difficult and important subject.<sup>4</sup> Goldziher has well said that "to attempt to explain all that has been set forth (by these authorities) as Hebrew, Syriac, Nabataean, etc., from one's knowledge of these tongues would be undertaking a fruitless task. These, languages, like the people who spoke them, belong to a grey antiquity, and are merely general terms for anything mysterious, esoteric, and ununderstandable, and to which belongs everything of whose origin there is no certainty, but whose great age is obvious."<sup>5</sup> Occasionally one gets flashes of what looks like philological learning, as e.g. when we find at-Ṭabarī in the Introduction to his *Tafsīr* (i, 6), quoting Ḥammād

b. Salama on **قورت من قسورة**,<sup>6</sup> to the effect that the word for *lion* in

<sup>1</sup> See al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, iii, 242, for the home of the Berbers.

<sup>2</sup> Once, in dealing with **قنطار** as-Suyūṭī (*Itq*, 323) refers to **لسان اهل الافريقية**, by which he probably means Berber.

<sup>3</sup> Their theories as to the origin of the Berbers are interesting. al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, iii, 241, makes a curious confusion between the Philistines and the Phoenicians, for he tells us that the Berbers came from Palestine and settled in N. Africa, and that their kings were known as **جالوت** a dynastic name, the last bearer of which was the Jālūt who was killed by David.

<sup>4</sup> The philologists did much better in dealing with such foreign words outside the Qur'ān, i.e. with later borrowings of Islamic times. Some account of them and their methods will be found in Siddiqi, *Studien*, 14-64.

<sup>5</sup> *ZDMG*, xxvi, 766.

<sup>6</sup> lxxiv, 51. Ḥammād's line of Tradition as usual goes back to Ibn 'Abbās.