Hamites, more especially as these points of agreement are also found in the language of the Berbers, who are scattered over an enormous territory, and whose speech must have acquired its character long before they came into contact with the Semites. We are even now but imperfectly acquainted with the Hamitic languages; and the relation in which Egyptian stands to Berber on the one hand and to the south Hamitic languages on the other requires further elucidation. The attempt to write a com­parative grammar of the Semitic and Hamitic languages would be, to say the least, very premature.@@1

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

as a modest hypothesis.

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

Some prominent scholars consider the birthplace of the Semitic race to have been in Arabia. There is much that appears to support this theory. History proves that from a very early period tribes from the deserts of Arabia settled on the cultivable lands which border them and adopted a purely agricultural mode of life. Various traces in the language seem to indicate that the Hebrews and the Aramaeans were originally nomads, and Arabia with its northern prolongation (the Syrian desert) is the true home of nomadic peoples. The Arabs are also supposed to display the Semitic character in its purest form, and their language is, on the whole, nearer the original Semitic than are the languages of the cognate races. To this last circumstance we should, however, attach little importance. It is by no means always the case that a language is most faithfully preserved in the country where it originated. The Romance dialect spoken in the south of Sardinia is far more primitive than that spoken at Rome; and of all living Teutonic languages the most ancient is the Icelandic. Besides, we cannot unreservedly admit that the Arabs display the Semitic character in its purest form; it would be more correct to say that, under the influence of a country indescribably monotonous and of a life ever changing yet ever the same, the inhabitants of the Arabian deserts have developed most exclusively certain of the principal traits of the Semitic race. All

these considerations are indecisive; but we willingly admit that the theory which regards Arabia as the primitive seat of all Semites is by no means untenable.

Finally, one of the most eminent of contemporary Orientalists, Ignazio Guidi,@@3 has attempted to prove that the home of the Semites is on the lower Euphrates. He contends that the geographical, botanical and zoological conceptions which are expressed in the various Semitic languages by the same words, preserved from the time of the dispersion, correspond to the natural characteristics of no country but the above-mentioned. Great as are the ingenuity and the caution which he displays, it is difficult to accept his con­clusions. Several terms might be mentioned which are part of the common heritage of the northern and the southern Semites, but which can scarcely have been formed in the region of the Euphrates. Moreover, the vocabulary of most Semitic languages is but very imperfectly known, and each dialect has lost many primitive words in the course of time. It is therefore very unsafe to draw conclusions from the fact that the various Semitic tongues have no one common designation for many important local conceptions, such as "moun­tain.” The ordinary words for “ man,” “ old man,” “ boy,” "tent,” “ block,” “to beat,” &c., are quite different in the various Semitic languages, and yet all these are ideas for which the primitive Semites must have had names.

It is not very easy to settle what is the precise connexion between the various Semitic languages, considered individually. In this matter one may easily be led to hasty con­clusions by isolated peculiarities in vocabulary or grammar. Each of the older Semitic languages occasionally agrees in grammatical points with some other to which in most respects it bears no very close resemblance, while dialects much more nearly related to it are found to exhibit different formations. Each Semitic tongue also possesses features peculiar to itself. For instance, the Hebrew-Phoenician group and the Arabic have a prefixed definite article (the etymological identity of which is, however, not very probable) ; the dialect nearest to Arabic, the Sabaean, expresses the article by means of a suffixed *n*; the Aramaic, which in general more closely resembles Hebrew than does the Arahic group, expresses it by means of a suffixed *ä*; whereas the Assyrian in the north and the Ethiopie in the south have no article at all. Of the termination *n* for the definite article there is no certain trace in either Arabic or Hebrew; the Sabaean, the Ethiopie, and the Aramaic employ it to give emphasis to demonstrative pronouns; and the very same usage has been detected in a single Phoenician inscription.@@4 In this case, therefore, Hebrew and Arabic have, independently of one another, lost something which the languages most nearly related to them have preserved. In like manner, the strengthening of the pronoun of the third person by means of *t* (or *tū)* is only found in Ethiopie, Sabaean and Phoenician and perhaps in some Arabic particles too. Aramaic alone has no certain trace of the reflexive conjugation formed with prefixed *n*; Hebrew alone has no certain trace of the causative with *sha.@@*5 In several of the Semitic languages we can see how the formation of the passive by means of internal vocal change (as *kullima,* “ he was addressed,” as distinguished from *kallama,* “ he addressed ”) gradually dropped out of use; in Ethiopie this process was already complete when the language first became literary; in Aramaic it was not wholly so and in most modern Arabic dialects the old passive forms have nearly or totally disappeared. In a few cases phonetic resemblances have been the result of later growth. For example, the termina­tion of the plural masculine of nouns is in Hebrew *īm,* in Aramaic *īn,* as in Arabic. But we know that Aramaic also originally had *m,* whereas the ancient Arabic forms have after the *n* an *a,* which appears to have been originally a long *a (ūna, īna);* in this latter position (that is, between two vowels) the change of *m* into *η* is very improbable.@@6 These two similar terminations were therefore originally distinct. We must indeed be very cautious in drawing conclusions from points of agreement between the vocabularies of the various Semitic tongues. The

@@@1 This of course applies yet more strongly to Benfey’s work, *Über das Verhältnis der ägyptischen Sprache zum semitischen Sprachstamm* (Leipzig, 1844); but his book has the permanent merit of having for the first time examined the relationship in a scientific manner. The investigation of the relationship between Egyptian and Semitic has been greatly advanced by the distinguished Egyptologist Ad. Erman: cf. especially his treatise, “ Die Flexion des ägyptischen Verbums,” in the *Sitzungsberichte der Berliner Akademie der Wissenschaften* (1900), xix., especially p. 34 sq. See also Hamitic Languages.

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

@@@5 “ Della sede primitiva dei popoli semitici,” in the *Proceedings* of the Accademia dei Lincei (1878—1879).

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

*@@@5 Shalhebeth,* “ flame,” is borrowed from Aramaic.

@@@8 Arabic seems to have transplanted the termination from the

verb to the noun, or to have at least modified the substantival termination in accordance with the verbal.