

### 3. Prehistoric language contact in Berber

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In Nichols' (1992) terminology, North Africa and the Sahara constitute a classic spread zone, dominated throughout most of recorded history by a single indigenous language family: Berber. Any analysis of prehistoric language contact around the Mediterranean accordingly needs to take Berber into account. The surprising homogeneity of this family seems to reflect a history of repeated levelling events, facilitated by interregional trade and by high mobility in pastoralist regions (Souag 2017). The contact history of Berber is likewise overshadowed by the influence of major expansions into the region, with successive layers of Punic, Latin, Arabic, and Romance loanwords predominating even in regions neither Carthage nor Rome ever dreamed of ruling (Vycichl 1952; Múrcia Sánchez 2011; Kossmann 2013; Blažek 2014). Berber languages have nevertheless preserved a certain number of clues to what preceded these eras of centralisation.

A number of candidate prehistoric borrowings are pan-Berber. A couple of Egyptian borrowings are prominent in date palm terminology, reflecting the westward expansion of this agriculturally vital species (Kossmann 2002; Vycichl 1991); some localised words shared with Nubian, such as 'onion', may reflect a similar contact scenario (Vycichl 1961; Kossmann & Jakobi *fc*). The numerals 5-9 are evidently Semitic in origin, but equally evidently reflect contact with a stage of Semitic more conservative than Punic or even Arabic. The names of several metals, such as iron and silver (Boutkan & Kossmann 1999), are well-known *Wanderwörter* whose precise source presents difficulties but must be rather early; a comparable situation is found for equine terminology. Efforts to identify Berber roots for "proto-Mediterranean" substrate terms in languages of the northern Mediterranean (Chaker 2013; Argiolas 2020) largely appear unconvincing, but suggest some promising directions for further research.

Aside from prehistoric contact between Berber and other families, the increasing attention paid towards intra-Berber variation opens up the difficult but interesting possibility of exploring prehistoric substrata within North Africa itself. The most promising case so far involves the Tuareg of the central and southern Sahara, where a number of phonologically anomalous terms with no good Berber source are concentrated in the domains of hunting and farming (Kossmann 2005). Analysis of kinship terminology suggests that this reflects a substratum with similarities to modern Songhay, whose speakers would have a substantial influence on Tuareg social structure. Much less can be said for the present about other areas, but in the Fezzan a few words seem like potential candidates for remnants of a Saharan substratum, while the sharply divergent vocabulary of Zenaga is unlikely to be explicable solely in terms of an early split.

The time is ripe for reexamining prehistoric loans in Berber: more comparative data is available on Berber languages than ever before, and our understanding of the historical phonology of Berber has advanced significantly in recent decades (Prasse 2003; van Putten 2019; Kossmann 2020). This talk will therefore seek to present a new synthesis, sifting better candidates from proposals that need to be abandoned and suggesting new possibilities.

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