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THE LOST SCRIPT OF THE BAGAM

KONRAD TUCHSCHERER

ABSTRACT

This article presents new and important information on the Bagam script, an autochthonous writing system from Cameroon which has now fallen into extinction. Details of the script were first reported in the *Journal of the African Society*—the former title of *African Affairs*—almost eighty years ago. The original contribution on the script, however, was not published in its entirety. As a result, scholars interested in the Bagam script over the last seventy-five years have known little about the writing, including details of the script's characters, as these signs—although submitted for publication—were never published. The article relates important information on the history of the Bagam script: the record of its so-called 'discovery' in 1917, the suppression of its characters by the editor of the *JAS*, its subsequent feature in scholarly writing as a 'lost' script, and the author's own account of his investigation to locate information on the script. Most importantly, this article in *African Affairs* will, for the first time, reveal in print the Bagam script characters, adding a final chapter to the story of the Bagam script which commenced in the annals of the *JAS* almost eighty years ago.

Africa and the art and science of writing

AFRICA IS NOT ONLY the 'Cradle of Mankind', it is the 'Cradle of Writing'. Over 5,000 years ago in Egypt, Africans developed their system of hieroglyphic writing, the world's earliest known script. Scholars have traditionally asserted that the earliest writing system emerged at the end of the fourth millennium BC in Mesopotamia and that the 'idea' of writing was borrowed in Egypt around 3100 BC at the onset of the First Egyptian Dynasty. New evidence uncovered by archeologists in Egypt, however, has revealed that Africans employed their advanced hieroglyphic system, which was capable of expressing complex ideas and abstract concepts (and notably place names), at least 150 years earlier than the Sumerians in Mesopotamia, around 3250 BC. The less developed system of notation, employed in Mesopotamia for purposes of accounting, consisted of pictographs for commodities and numerals.

The evidence supporting this important new information was uncovered by Günter Dreyer of the German Archaeological Institute, at Abydos, in a palace tomb known as U-j. Dreyer and his expedition found 150 labels written in hieroglyphs and carved into ivory or bone, possibly at one time

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attached to bolts of linen and containers of grain. These ancient labels written in hieroglyphic signs are at present the world's earliest examples of phonetic writing. The discovery, along with other important finds of royal regalia, also illuminates the existence of a previously unknown Egyptian dynasty—now named Dynasty 0—which preceded the First Dynasty.[1]

The Egyptian system's successive stages of development and usage spanned almost 4,000 years, making it one of the longest continuous literary traditions known to man. The legacy of this ancient African writing system lives on in the modern scripts it inspired such as the Hebrew and Arabic scripts, and indirectly the Greek, Roman and Cyrillic scripts, as well as many others. The Egyptian system was also the source, albeit indirectly, for the development of two of Africa's oldest living scripts, the Tifinagh and Ethiopic scripts.

In modern times Africa has contributed much to the advance of the art and science of writing. A combination of wide-ranging cultural contacts, men of genius, and rich traditions of plastic and graphic symbolism have led to the development of many new and ingenious systems of writing. Such systems include the early nineteenth century Vai script of Liberia and the late nineteenth century Bamum script of Cameroon. Beginning from the early twentieth century, they include scripts of the Mende of Sierra Leone, the Kpelle of Liberia, the Loma of Liberia and Guinea, the Bassa of Liberia, and the Bamana of Mali. From the middle of this century are included scripts of the Bété of Côte d'Ivoire, the Manenka of Guinea, the Wolof of Senegal, and two Fula scripts devised in Mali. Many more documented scripts exist that are not mentioned here, and still others probably exist that have yet to be recorded by scholars. Is it possible that certain traditional African graphic symbols drew their inspiration from Egyptian hieroglyphs? The answer may be 'yes', although it seems more likely that the emergence of ancient hieroglyphs—like many of the modern African scripts—were themselves inspired by earlier traditions of graphic symbolism from Africa.

The story of Africa's impressive contribution to the history of the art and science of writing has gone largely untold in the many volumes on the subject of writing produced by Western scholars. The fact that such achievements have not received the recognition they deserve is not unusual,

1. Günter Dreyer, 'Recent discoveries at Abydos Cemetery U', in E. C. M. van den Brink (ed.), *The Nile Delta in Transition: 4th–3rd Millennium BC* (Israel Exploration Society, Tel Aviv, 1992), pp. 293–9; see Vivian Davies and Renée Friedman, *Egypt* (British Museum Press, London, 1998), pp. 35–8. See also: Günter Dreyer (forthcoming), *Umm el-Qaab I: Das prädynastische Königsgrab U-j und seine frühen Schriftzeugnisse*, Archäologische Veröffentlichungen 86 (Verlag Philipp von Zabern, Mainz, 1998). Davies and Friedman have communicated to me that even earlier examples of Egyptian writing (cylinder seal impressions with hieroglyphs) were recently discovered at Abydos, and the results will be presented by Ulrich Hartung in the forthcoming edition of *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archaeologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo.*

as it is a theme which has general application for the treatment of African cultural history at the hands of outsiders. In the case of the Egyptian system, the 'Africanness' of the achievement is often subverted, despite the fact that many of the earliest examples of the writing appear nearly 500 miles south of the Nile Delta in an area long inhabited by Black Africans. Many of the modern African scripts suffered at the hands of colonial officials who did not support their usage or who took less subtle means to repress them.

This article will present new information on one of Africa's lesser known scripts, the Bagam script of Cameroon.

The lost script of the Bagam

In 1917, a young Royal Artillery officer in the Nigeria Regiment of the West African Frontier Force, Captain L. W. G. Malcolm, made a curious 'discovery' in the grassfield area of Cameroon, the details of which he submitted for publication in the *Journal of the African Society*.[2] While stationed in the town of Bagam, the principal town of the Eghap, Malcolm recorded that the Eghap employed a syllabic script to write their language. These characters, supplied to Malcolm by a retainer of the Bagam chief, were reputed to total several hundred in number. The retainer told Malcolm that the script of the neighbouring Bamum was used as the basis for the script used in Bagam, and when the Bagam script broke down, characters were borrowed from the Bamum script. The Bagam chief pointed out to Malcolm that the two scripts were not the same, and Malcolm added that 'this can easily be seen when comparing them'.[3]

For most of the last century the story has ended here. No characters were ever published. Although Malcolm submitted reproductions of the Bagam script characters to the *Journal of the African Society*, the journal's editor, Sir Harry H. Johnston, chose not to publish them. Adding a prefatory note to Malcolm's article, Johnston cited financial constraints for suppressing the publication of the Bagam characters. It would appear, however, that his reasons were quite different. Johnston called the Bagam characters 'arbitrary', adding that 'It is quite sufficient to say that they are, most of them, imitations or perversions of Roman capitals or else of the trade marks stencilled on the goods of European traders . . . [they are] copied from the white man's symbols'.[4] These were not Johnston's first perverse statements on African invented scripts. In 1906 he had called the Vai script characters 'clumsy adaptations of Roman letters or of

2. L. W. G. Malcolm, 'Short notes on the syllabic writing of the Eγāp—Central Cameroons', *Journal of the African Society*, **XX** (1920–1921), pp. 127–9; note that the Greek *gamma* (*Γ*, *γ*) is rendered in English as *gh*.
3. Malcolm, 'Short notes', p. 128.
4. H. H. Johnston, 'Prefatory note', attached to Malcolm, 'Short notes', p. 127; Johnston had been in the region in the late 1880s, when he was Vice-Consul in Kamerun and Acting Consul in the adjoining regions of Southern Nigeria.

conventional signs employed by Europeans', adding that the Vai syllabary had 'little logic', and he even called on the Liberian government of the period to 'combat this movement'.[5] Later, Johnston would *again* show his contempt for the Bagam script in print: 'The characters are distorted or fantastic adaptations of Roman capital letters'.[6] It is unfortunate that Johnston was unable to recognize the originality of the Bagam script and attach value to the documentation of the characters in the journal. Perhaps the editor assumed that Africans lacked the intelligence and creativity necessary to devise their own systems of writing, with all of the logic and ingenuity that such undertakings entail.

In the years following the publication of Malcolm's article, scholars interested in African scripts, notably those engaged in research on the famed Bamum script (devised in its earliest form ca. 1896) in the same grassfield area, lamented the loss of the Bagam characters. Writing in 1922, Delafosse noted the reported existence of the Bagam script in an article on the Bamum script, and mentioned a possible connection between the two scripts, but could not add anything new as he had not seen the actual Bagam characters.[7] In their treatise on the Bamum script published in 1950, Dugast and Jeffreys discussed the Bagam script, suggesting again a possible connection to the Bamum script. In hopes of finding the characters, Jeffreys had corresponded with the Secretary of the Royal African Society,[8] the organization which published the *Journal of the African Society*, but no trace of the characters could be found. By this time, even the idea of contacting the former editor Johnston was futile, as he had died in 1927. Dugast and Jeffreys could only comment that 'the loss of this documentation is great'.[9] In 1963 Alfred Schmitt published his three-volume *magnum opus* on the Bamum script, *Die Bamum-Schrift*, and he too discussed Cameroon's 'other' script. Schmitt made lengthy conjectures on possible connections between the Bamum and Bagam scripts, but admitted that little was known about the Bagam script and its characters were completely unknown. Schmitt wrote that after Malcolm's documentation of the script, later research had failed to find the Bagam script.[10] It is fitting that the foremost scholar of

5. See H. H. Johnston, *Liberia* (Hutchinson & Co., London, 1906), pp. 1114–15.
6. See H. H. Johnston, *A Comparative Study of the Bantu and Semi-Bantu Languages*, Vol. II (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1922), p. 173.
7. Maurice Delafosse, 'Naissance et évolution d'un système d'écriture de création contemporaine', *Revue d'Ethnographie et de Traditions Populaires*, **3** (1922), p. 19.
8. The African Society was renamed Royal African Society in 1935. The title of the society's journal was renamed *African Affairs* in 1944.
9. I. Dugast and M. D. W. Jeffreys, *L'Écriture des Bamum. Sa naissance, son évolution, sa valeur phonétique, son utilisation* (Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire, Cameroun, 1950), p. 9 [my translation]. The authors believed the script contained some 600 signs (p. 9) following the example of Njoya's earliest Bamum system, which contained an inventory of over 500 pictographic signs.
10. Alfred Schmitt, *Die Bamum-Schrift*, Vol. I (Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1963), pp. 186–7.

African scripts in recent times, David Dalby, added a 'final word' on the Bagam script. Writing in 1986, Dalby referred to '*the lost script of the Bagam*'.[11]

It is here that I pick up the interesting story of the Bagam script, in an attempt both to unravel a bit of the mystery surrounding the script and to provide a starting point for future research on the writing.

The Eghap/Bagam

The Eghap (as they refer to themselves) or Bagam (as they are more commonly known, especially in European sources) are a Bamileke people who live in the town of Bagam in the grassfield area of Cameroon. When Malcolm was stationed in the area in 1917–18 at the Bamenda Garrison, the administrative area was known as the Bamenda Division. Today the area of Cameroon from where the Eghap hail is broken down into the following administrative areas: West Province, Bamboutos Division, Southern Galim Subdivision.

The name Bagam—alternatively 'Bagham' or 'Baɣam'—as it is sometimes written on maps—designates the name of the specific town. From the earliest period of German colonial activity through to British occupation in the early 1920s, the area encompassing the towns in the vicinity of Bagam town was *also* known as Bagam.[12] During the British period, the Bagam area included the following towns: Bagam, Bamesso, Bomborroh, Bamendjing, Bamumkumpele, Bamendjinda, Bamendkumbo, Bati, Babete, Bali-Bagam, Gasho, and Baminyam. It is therefore not uncommon to find the name Bagam listed twice on German and British maps dating from their successive colonial occupations of the region, once for Bagam town and a second time for the Bagam region. Today the name Bagam denotes only the town (see map, Figure 1).

The first report of the language spoken by the Eghap in European sources was that made in 1854 by S. W. Koelle in his *Polyglotta Africana*. Koelle referred to the language as Pā̀ṛam, and included a lengthy wordlist of the language which he recorded from Nyámsi, or Andrew Wilhelm, in Freetown.[13] Basing himself in part on Malcolm, Johnston refers to the

11. David Dalby, *Africa and the Written Word* (Fête de la Lettre, Paris, 1986), p. 15 [my italics]. For other comments by Dalby on the Bagam script, see: 'The indigenous scripts of West Africa and Surinam: their inspiration and design', *African Language Studies*, **IX** (1968), pp. 158, 166–7, and 191; also, 'The historical problem of the indigenous scripts of West Africa and Surinam', in David Dalby (ed.), *Language and History in Africa* (Frank Cass, London, 1970), p. 113.

12. Voorhoeve noted that towns, such as Bagam, are also regarded as chiefdoms, and that 'some of the chiefdoms have in the course of history subjected several surrounding villages, but never on a very large scale'. See Jan Voorhoeve, 'The linguistic unit Mbam-Nkam (Bamileke, Bamum and related languages)', *Journal of African Languages*, **10**, 2 (1971), p. 1.

13. S. W. Koelle, *Polyglotta Africana* (Church Missionary Society, London, 1854), p. 13 (with accompanying wordlist); Koelle's orthographic ŗ is the same as ɣ, rendered in English as *gh*.

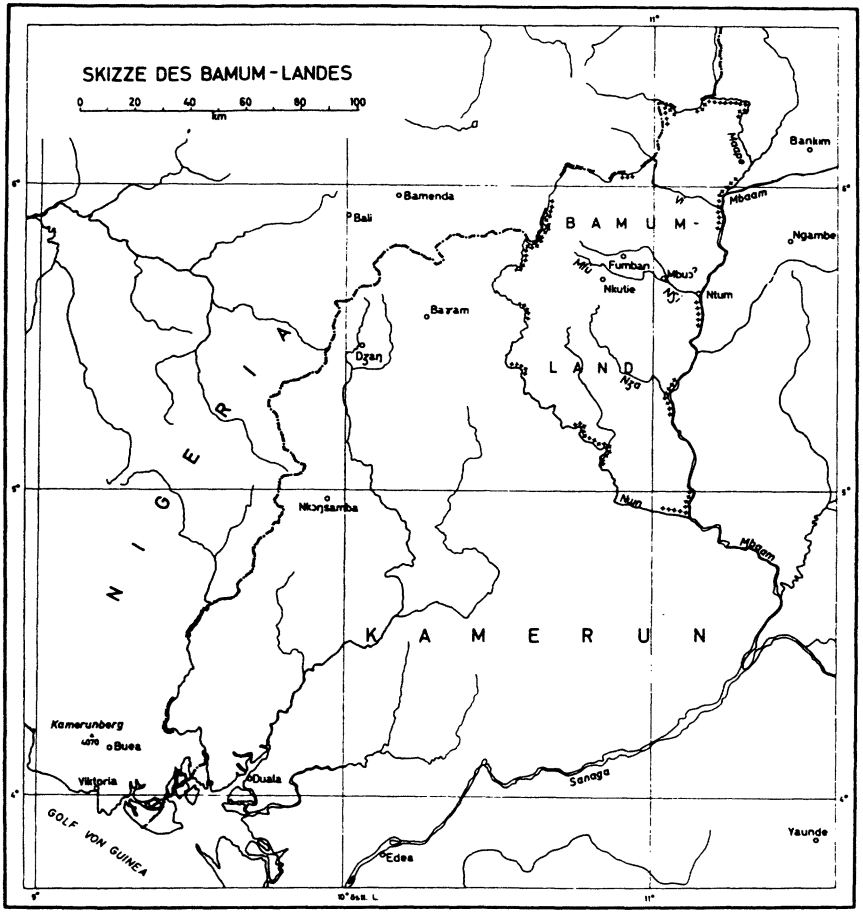


Figure 1. Map of Grassfield Region. Note the close proximity of the town of Bagam (Baγam) to Bamum settlements on the eastern side of the Noun River. Source: Schmitt, *Die Bamum-Schrift*, Volume III, p. 73. Reproduced by permission of Otto Harrassowitz.

language as Eγap, and wrote that Koelle's earlier wordlist for the language, as compared with that which Malcolm collected some sixty years later, proved to be 'very correct'.[14] More recent scholars have also used the name Bagam to denote the language spoken in Bagam town and neighbouring areas, including Westermann and Bryan,[15] Williamson and

14. Johnston, *Comparative Study* (Vol. II), p. 173. Although Johnston reported the name of the language as Eghap, Malcolm never reported that the name was extended to the language in his many publications on the Eghap.
15. Dietrich Westermann and M. A. Bryan, *The Languages of West Africa* (Oxford University Press, London, 1952), p. 129.

Shimizu (who included a further wordlist for the language),[16] Voorhoeve (also with wordlist),[17] and Mann and Dalby.[18]

The grassfield region has been characterized as an 'area of extreme linguistic fragmentation', where 'language changes from village to village, or even within a single village'.[19] It is not surprising, therefore, for names of languages to be toponyms, as languages were/are often identified by the towns where they are spoken. Voorhoeve illustrates the linguistic situation in the following way:

> Each chiefdom considers its own language as the only possible linguistic norm. Dialect differences are often exaggerated by the speakers, and the use of a specific dialect seems to constitute a man's very identity as belonging to a certain chiefdom (or tribe). It does not seem conceivable for the inhabitants of a certain village to regard their mother-tongue as a dialect of the language of some other village. Remarks of this nature would certainly be interpreted as a kind of improper cultural imperialism from the side of the competing village. As a result of this linguistic situation, language names are seldom used . . . one speaks about one's mother-tongue as the language of village X, ignoring the almost identical languages in the neighbouring villages.[20]

While at times Malcolm referred to the language as Bagam, he noted that *the Bagam referred to the language they spoke as Mengaka* (which he wrote as Munghāka), and a number of writers have corroborated that this is an alternative name for the Bagam language.[21] This is not to be confused with the more widely spoken and well known language of Mungaka (or Bali), a related language spoken in the surrounding areas, which was ardently promoted by the Basel Mission during the period of German administration. Both of these languages—as well as the Bamum language—are classified as part of the 'Mbam-Nkam' group, belonging to the Benue-Congo subdivision.[22]

In this article I shall refer to the Eghap people, the Mengaka language, the town (and at times the area) of Bagam, and the Bagam script.

16. Kay Williamson and Kiyoshi Shimizu (eds), *Benue-Congo Comparative Wordlist*, Vol. I (West African Linguistic Society, Ibadan, 1968), p. xiv (with accompanying wordlist); the wordlist for Bagam continues in Kay Williamson (ed.), *Benue-Congo Comparative Wordlist*, Vol. II (West African Linguistic Society, Ibadan, 1973). The source for the wordlist was Gw' Thomas of Bagam town.
17. Voorhoeve, 'The linguistic unit Mbam-Nkam', pp. 1–12.
18. Michael Mann and David Dalby, *A Thesaurus of African Languages* (Hans Zell, London, 1987), p. 118.
19. Mann and Dalby, *A Thesaurus of African Languages*, p. 115.
20. Voorhoeve, 'The linguistic unit Mbam-Nkam', pp. 1–2.
21. Mann and Dalby, *A Thesaurus of African Languages*, p. 118; also, Barbara F. Grimes (ed.), *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (Summer Institute of Linguistics, Dallas, 1996), pp. 206 and 188–9 (map).
22. See Voorhoeve, 'The linguistic unit Mbam-Nkam', for a detailed study of the linguistic classification of Mengaka/Bagam, as well as the history of that classification.

Finding the 'lost' Bagam script

My interest in the Bagam script began when I was a doctoral student at the School of Oriental and African Studies in 1992.[23] While examining the scholarly literature on the Bamum script, I came across periodic references to the reported, yet virtually unknown, script of the Bagam, the neighbours of the Bamum in the grassfield area. It was at this point that I began an ongoing search for information on the Bagam script, the Eghap people, the Mengaka language, and anything that I could find on the life and career of L. W. G. Malcolm. My first move was to re-trace Jeffreys' steps by bringing the story of the lost Bagam script to the attention of the Secretary of the Royal African Society. This search produced no results, as it was pointed out to me that editors of the journal had in the past largely conducted their work away from the confines of the society's offices, and that editors—such as Johnston—had kept their own records of journal activities. On the advice of Professor Roland Oliver, I examined Johnston's personal papers at the Royal Commonwealth Society as well as archival documents of the Royal African Society held there, but found nothing. During this time I had been steadily tracking down Malcolm's many journal publications, and was beginning to learn a bit more about his life and career.

I traced Malcolm's life and career backward in time through archival sources, first through records at the Wellcome Institute in London, where Malcolm had worked as Conservator of the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum from 1925 to 1934.[24] I then turned to archival documents at the Bristol Museum, where Malcolm had worked as assistant curator of anthropology and antiquities from 1921 to 1925. My final stop was Cambridge University, where Malcolm had been a research student in anthropology at Christ's College from 1919 to 1921. During his time at Cambridge, Malcolm was deputy curator of the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology and lectured in both anthropology and Hausa. While at Cambridge, Malcolm worked under the supervision of pioneer anthropologist A. C. Haddon, and it was in the library that bears this man's name today—the Haddon Library of Archaeology and Anthropology—that I located Malcolm's unpublished 1922 M.Sc. thesis,

23. My earlier points on the Bagam script are in my thesis: Konrad Tuchscherer, 'The *Kikakui* (Mende) syllabary and number writing system: descriptive, historical and ethnographic accounts of a West African tradition of writing', Ph.D thesis, University of London, 1996, pp. 164–5.

24. Malcolm died in 1946, at the age of 59 (Wills Registry, London, File G29/97-01-0063). As noted above, Jeffreys wrote to the Secretary of the Royal African Society in an unsuccessful attempt to trace the characters which Malcolm submitted for publication. What Jeffreys should have done was trace Malcolm himself. Jeffreys had been interested in the Bamum script since 1936 and commenced work on his treatise on the writing (publ. 1950) in 1942, three years prior to Malcolm's death. See M. D. W. Jeffreys, 'The alphabet of Njoya', *West African Review*, **23**, 296 (1952), p. 430.

The Eghap: An ethnographical and somatological study.[25] It was in this thesis, appended to the back of volume three, that the 'lost script of the Bagam' would be found.

The Bagam script

I reproduce on the following pages, from Malcolm's Cambridge master's thesis, the Bagam characters which he collected in 1917.[26] Included with the characters are Malcolm's phonetic identifications for the characters in Mengaka, along with a translation of those values—i.e. their 'meanings'—in English. It is highly likely that the characters, phonetic identifications, and English translations presented here are the same or similar in form and content to those which Malcolm originally submitted to Johnston for publication in the *Journal of the African Society*. That the material from Malcolm's thesis and his submission to the journal were the same is attested to by the fact that in Johnston's second volume of *Bantu and Semi-Bantu Languages*, published only one year after Malcolm's article on the Bagam script appeared, Johnston offered thirty-six examples of words in Mengaka,[27] all of which were contained in Malcolm's same list reproduced on the following pages.

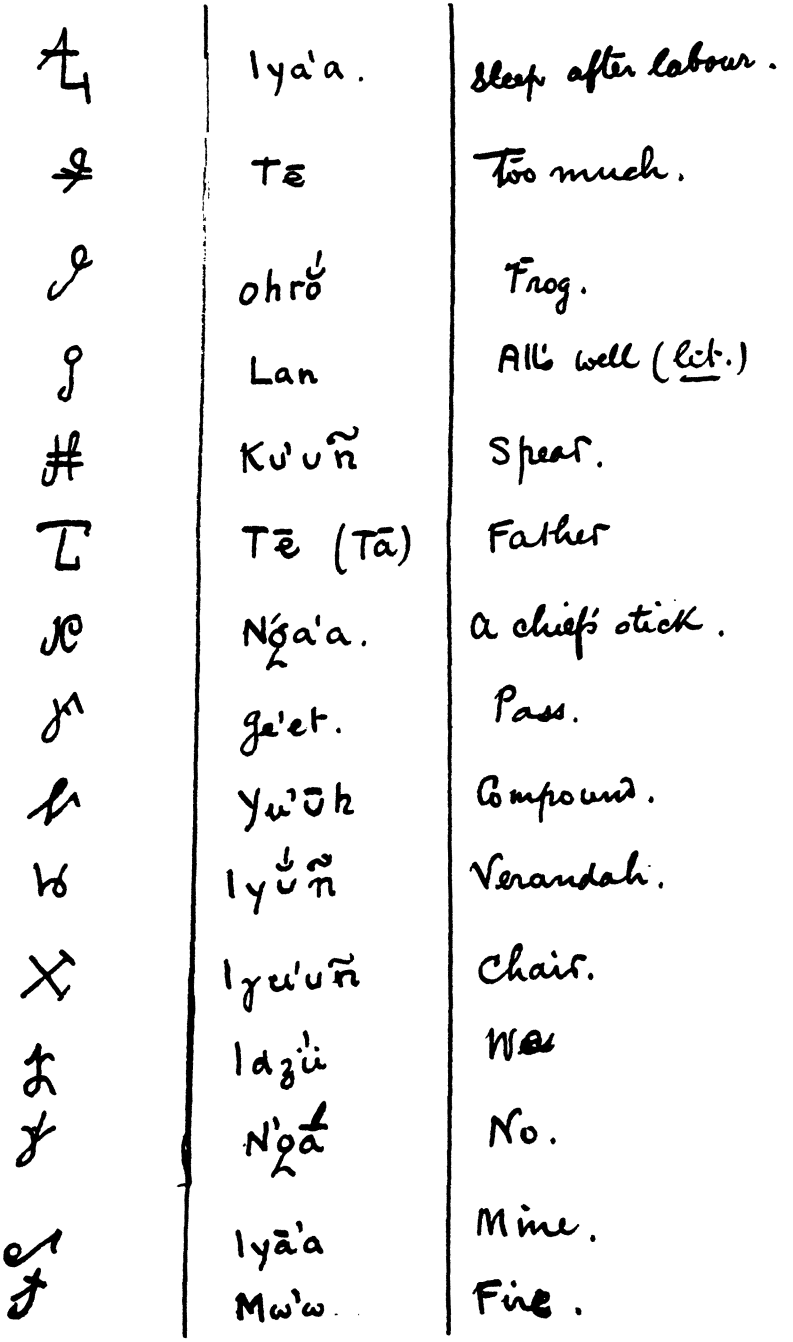
Only some general points on the script will be made here. A detailed linguistic study of the script will be published in the near future by the present writer along with Eghap scholar, Moses Tesi.

The characters are, as Malcolm called them, *syllabic*, i.e. they are *syllabograms*. The basic unit for the syllabograms appears to be the CV syllable, and signs also exist for independent syllabic vowels. Malcolm shows that the characters not only represent syllables, but when characters are in isolated form, they can represent words. That some Bagam characters may be *logo-syllabic* should not seem strange, as many African syllabaries have logo-syllabic characters. For these African scripts, it is sometimes the case that logograms representing monosyllabic words were adapted, over a period of time, to the writing of words, or constituents of words, which shared their same structure (i.e. homophones). It was in this way—employing what is known as the *principle of the rebus*—that the greatest advance in the history of writing was made: phonographic writing was born. In modern cases of scripts evolving in Africa utilizing the rebus principle, the process did not occur organically as in the case of ancient Egypt, but rather under the ingenuity of inventors already familiar with phonographic writing (usually Arabic or the Roman script), who made conscious efforts to transform characters, often traditional graphic symbols, into phonographic characters. Likewise, inventors of African scripts

25. Louis William Gordon Malcolm, 'The Eghap: An ethnographical and somatological study', 4 Volumes, M.Sc. thesis, Cambridge University, 1922.
26. Malcolm, 'The Eghap' (Vol. III), pp. 204–14.
27. Johnston, *Comparative Study* (Vol. II), p. 173.

Syllabic character	Muñyāka.	English
	Ti'i	a name.
	M̂ve	Outside
	Ū'ú	You.
	a'a !	An exclamation
	Gyie	To sleep.
	Hō'ŏh	An exclamation.
	i'i	It is so.
	Tuzgo	Burn.
	Pa'ap	A grass bag.
	muco	To shew
	uñ	Now
	N'de	Prefixed to an attendant's name.
	Uwál	Cut.
	Shē	Ground.

Figure 2.



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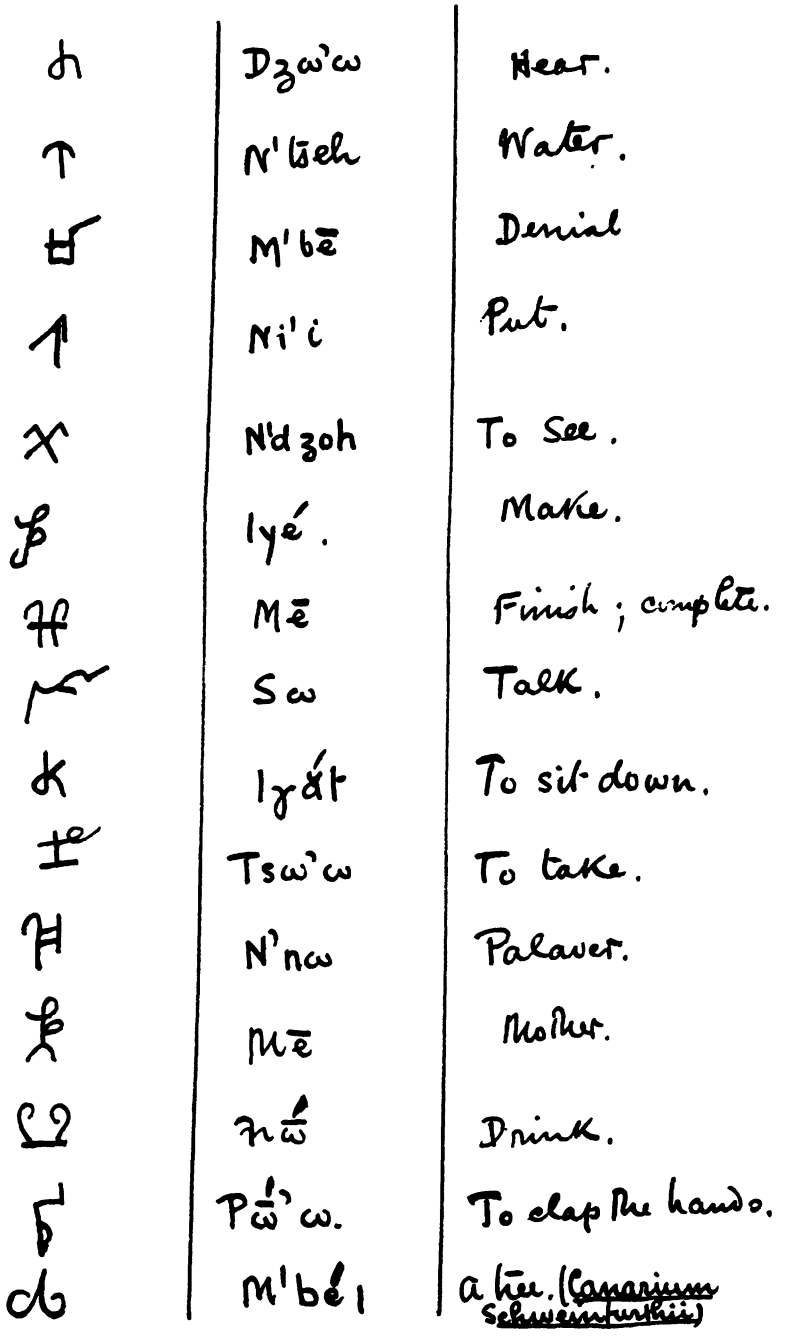

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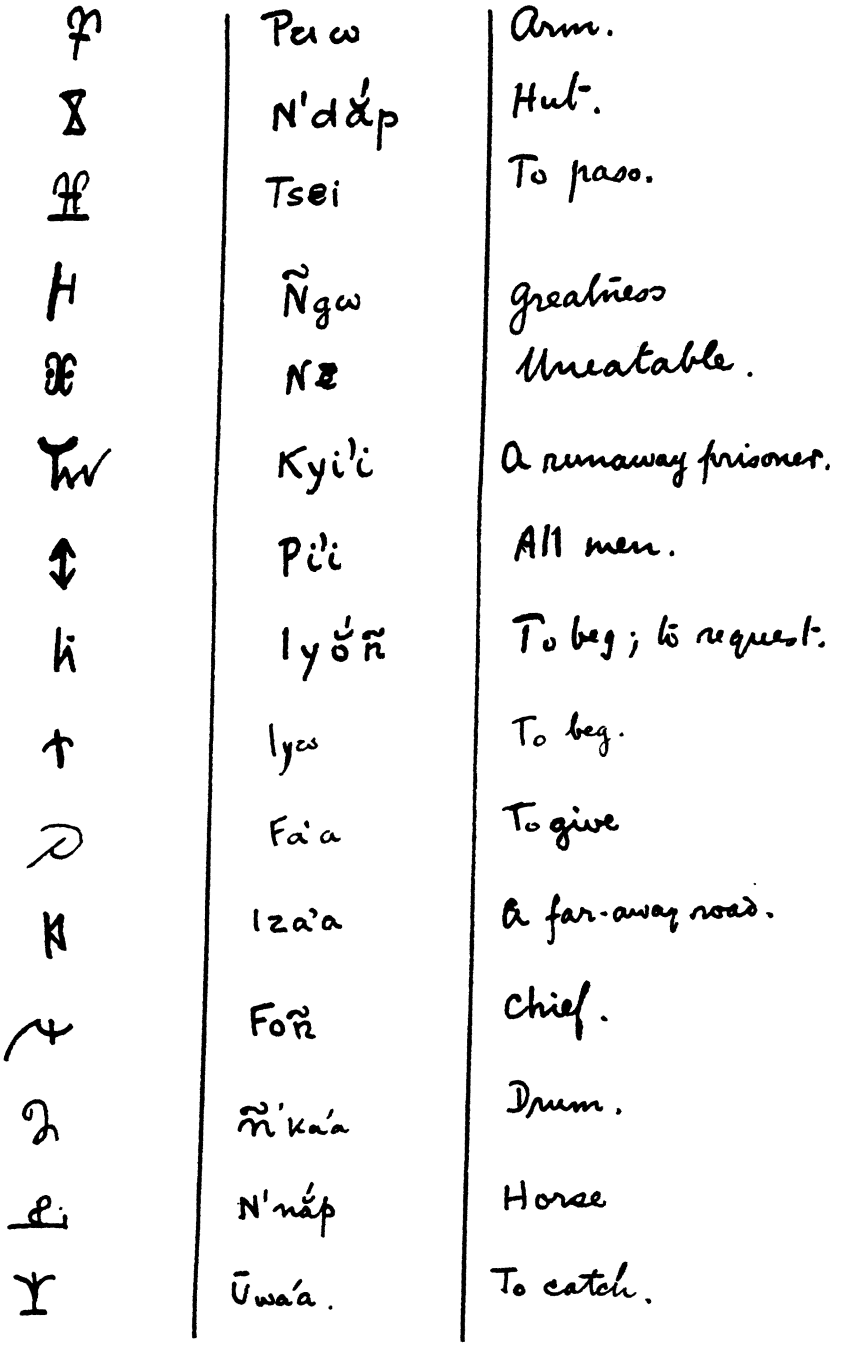

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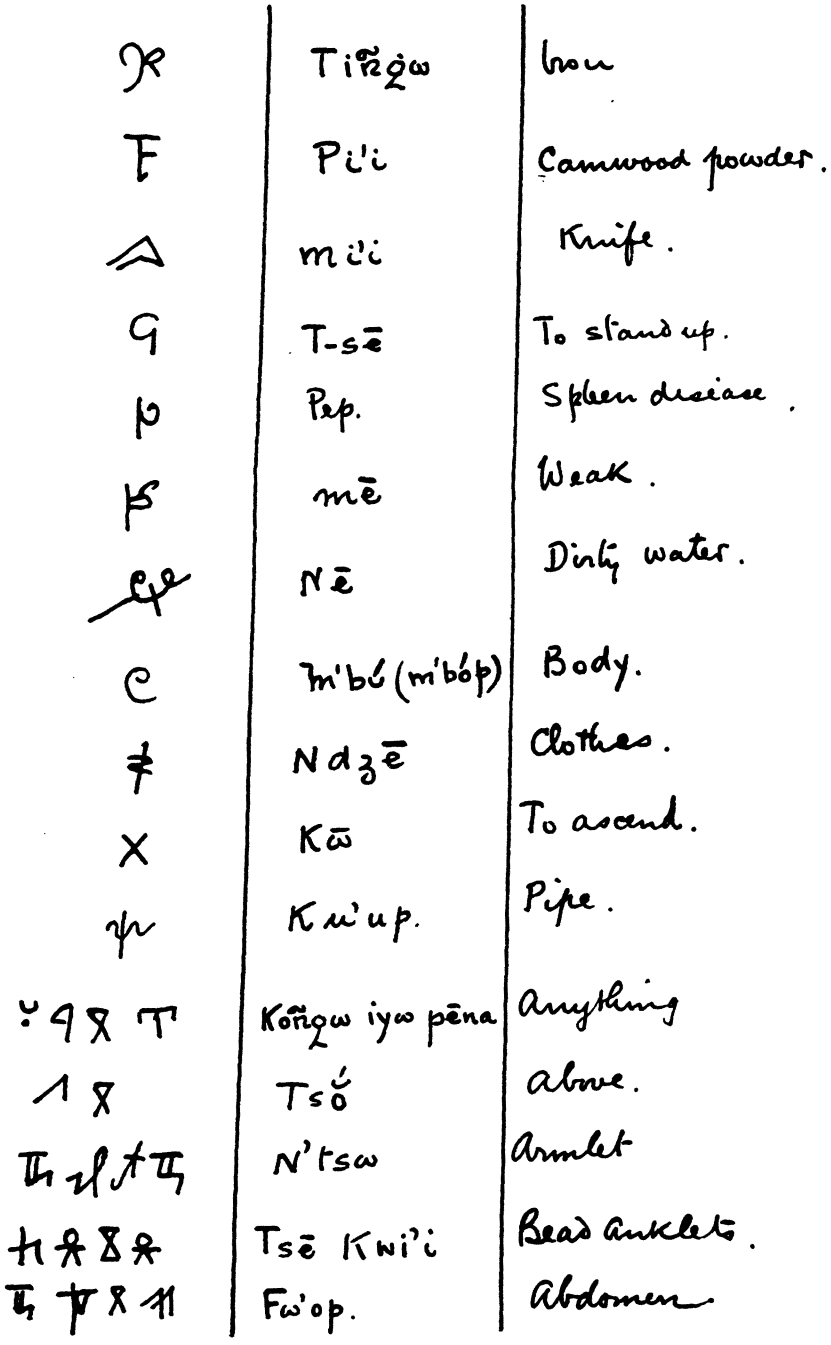

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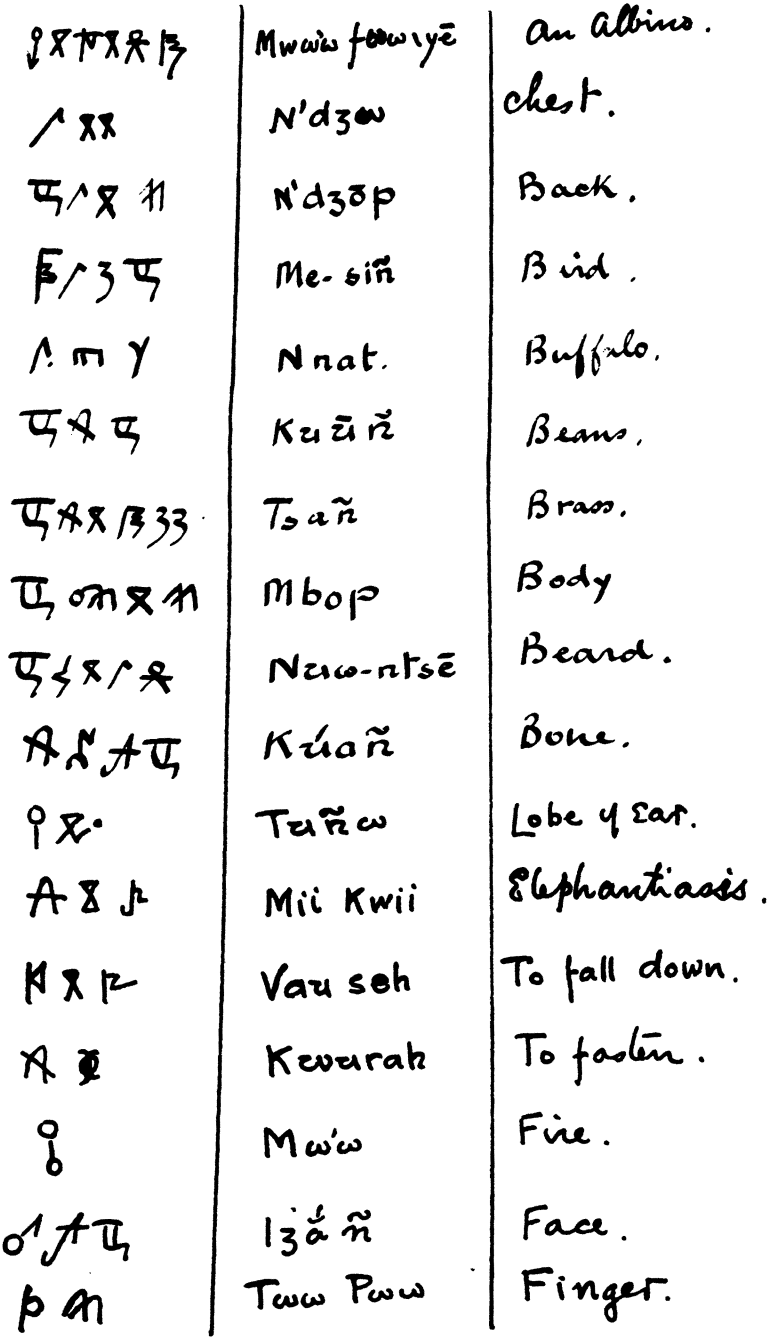

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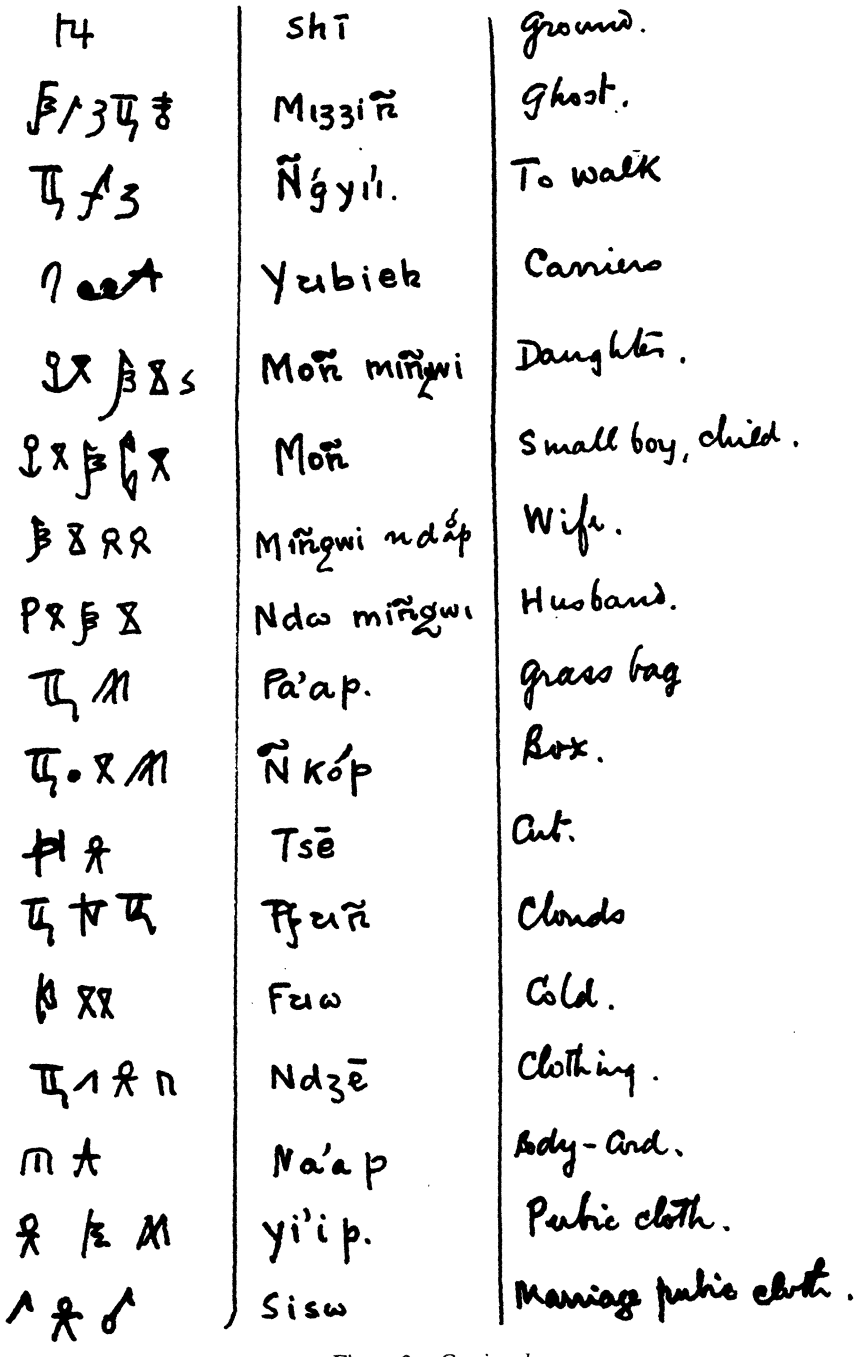

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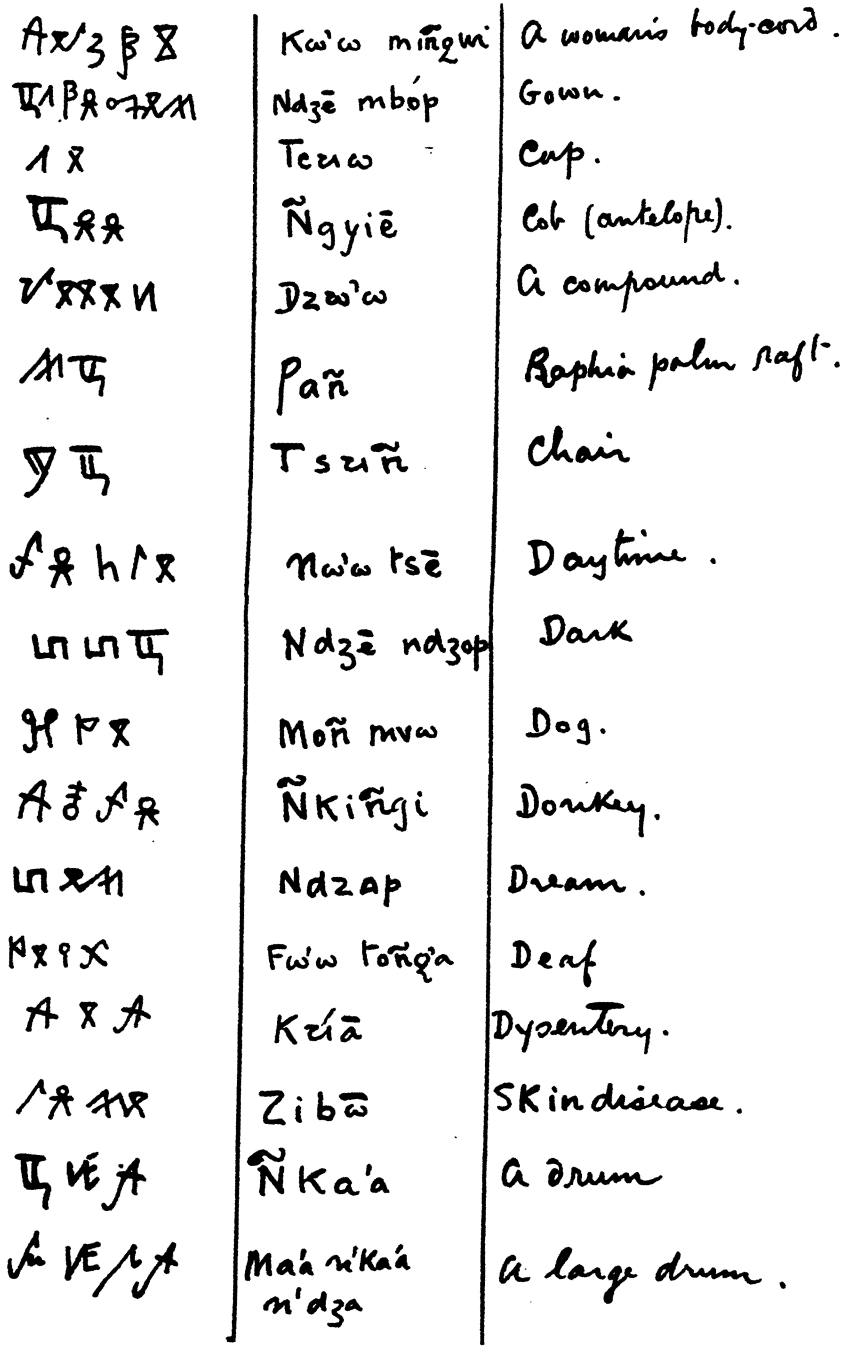

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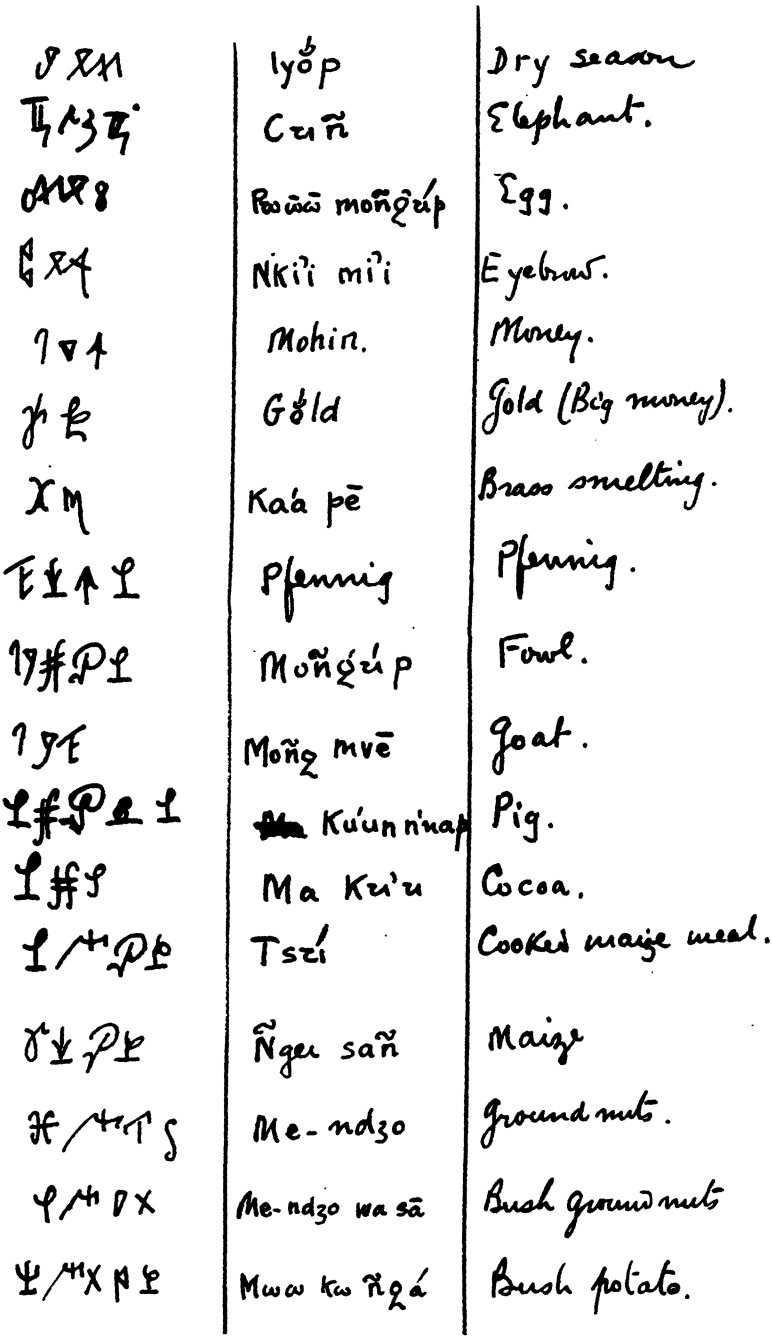

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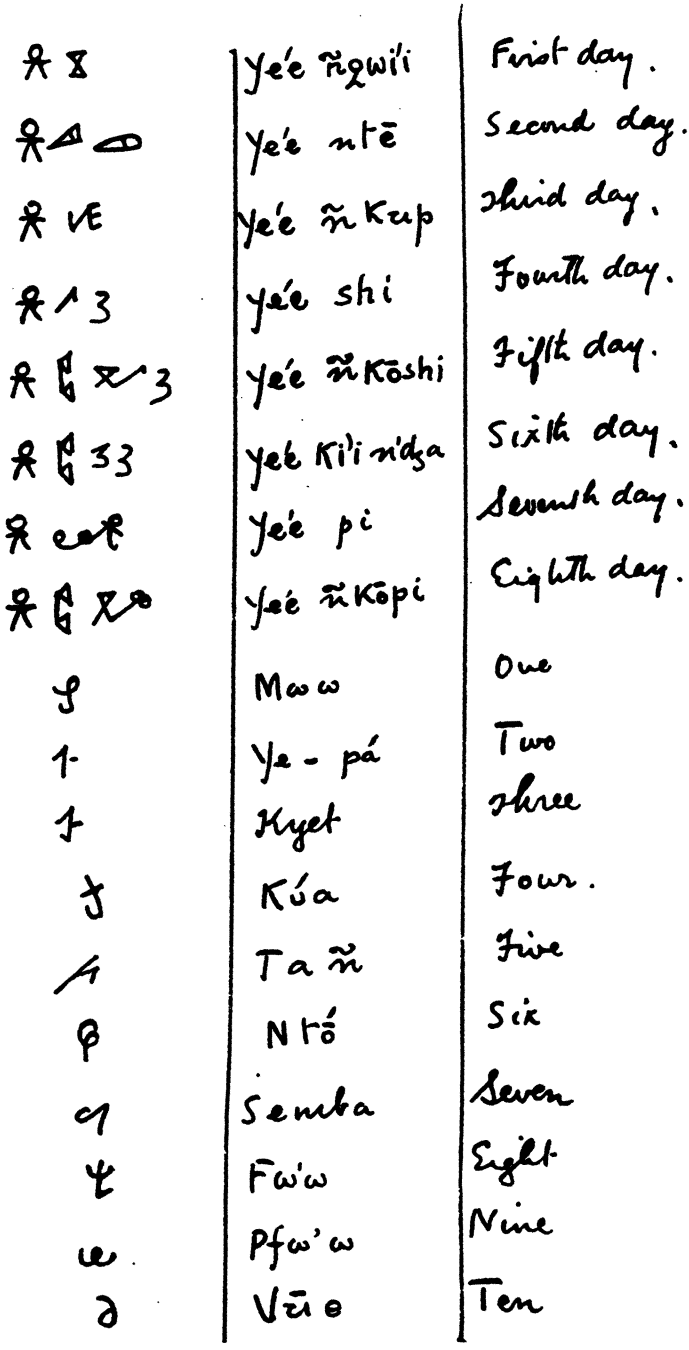

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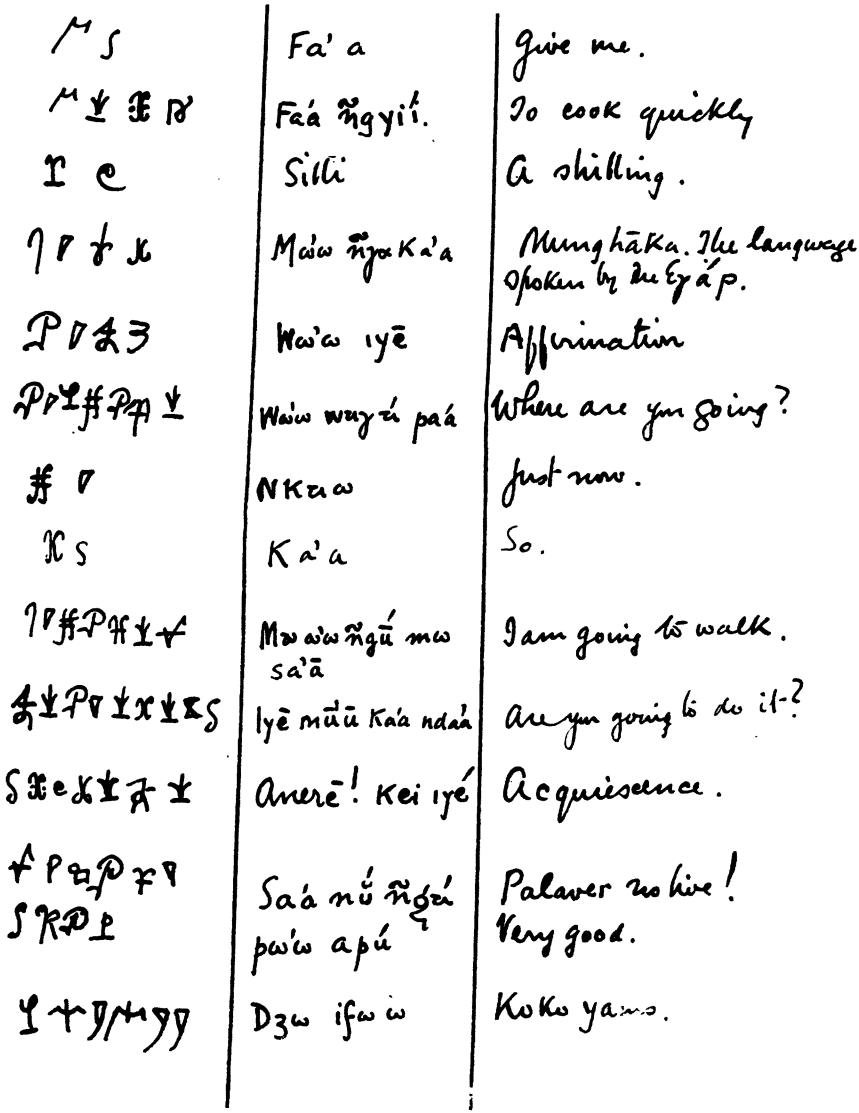

Figure 2. The Bagam Script. Louis William Gordon Malcolm, 'The Eghap: An ethnographical and somatological study', Volume III (M.Sc. thesis, Cambridge University, 1922), pp. 204–14. Reproduced from originals by permission of the Haddon Library at Cambridge University.

employed the *acrophonic principle* to reach the same ends, borrowing the initial syllables of poly-syllabic words associated with particular symbols, and then attaching the values of the initial syllables to the symbols. Sultan Njoya (1876–1933) employed both the rebus principle and the acrophonic

principle in arriving at his widely employed sixth script for the Bamum, *A-ka-u-ku* (named from the values of the first four signs). In examining the forms of the Bagam characters as Malcolm recorded them, I find no obvious connections between the outward forms of characters and their corresponding phonetic equivalencies—which might point to ideographic or pictographic origins for the characters—and therefore it might have been the case that characters were formulated in a single stage as syllabograms. One must remember, however, that the antiquity of the Bagam script has yet to be established.[28] Presented with a snapshot of the Bamum script towards the end of its development, one might make a similar judgment, concluding that the script was invented from the beginning as a syllabary, with no previous stages of ideographic or pictographic inspiration, since little if any connection is observable between the stylized graphic forms of characters and their corresponding phonetic equivalencies. Diachronic assessment of the Bamum script shows, however, that the script evolved under the direction of Sultan Njoya from ideographic/pictographic beginnings into a syllabic script.

Some points can also be made on the organization of the Bagam script. The direction in which the characters are written is from left to right, in a linear fashion. Psychological units such as set phrases or 'word boundaries' are not apparently separated by spaces in text. No tonal indicators or forms of punctuation appear to be used. It is not possible to determine from Malcolm's data if the characters of the syllabary were organized in a fixed order of recitation—a *signary* or *syllabary key* (referred to as an *abecedary* for an alphabet)—a feature so commonly found among other West African syllabaries, including the Bamum script.

In his thesis, Malcolm noted that he had had little linguistic training.[29] This fact is borne out by his often haphazard application of the orthography which Johnston promoted[30] (in including Malcolm's Mengaka wordlist in his *Bantu and Semi-Bantu Languages*, Johnston was forced to correct Malcolm's use of his own orthography.[31]) Malcolm's deficiency as a linguist is also evident in the system he used to document the Bagam characters. Malcolm recorded some of the characters in their isolated

28. Malcolm did not record how long the Bagam script had been in use. Writing in 1922, Johnston (*Comparative Study*, Vol. II, p. 173) says the Bagam script was 'introduced about twenty years ago', suggesting a date of ca.1902 (Johnston must have acquired this information through personal communication with Malcolm, and Malcolm referred to such communication with Johnston in his thesis: Malcolm, 'The Eghap', (Vol. I), p. 32. Dalby ('The indigenous scripts of West Africa and Surinam', p. 168) put the date at c.1910, presumably because he thought that the script must have been in use at least that long for it to have been known by a number of people in 1917, as recorded by Malcolm.
29. Malcolm, 'The Eghap' (Vol. III), p. 10.
30. Malcolm ('The Eghap', Vol. III, p. 203) noted that he based his orthographic conventions on Johnston, *A Comparative Study of the Bantu and Semi-Bantu Languages*, Vol. I (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1919); for details, see pp. 39–43.
31. Johnston, *A Comparative Study* (Vol. II), p. 173.

forms (apparently those that had meaning as words) and introduced others as they were written out in polysyllabic words and phrases. It would have been better if he had first recorded *all* of the characters in their isolated forms with corresponding transliterations noted, and then subsequently recorded their usage in longer text.

Malcolm's identifications are problematic in a number of respects. Some characters appear to have repeating values (e.g., the characters with the English translation 'fire'). In cross-checking characters which Malcolm recorded first in their isolated forms and then as they are found in the transcription of polysyllabic words and phrases, one finds that there are often huge discrepancies between the characters and their phonetic identifications. It is here that Malcolm's English translations provide hope. In cross-checking Malcolm's English translations with Mengaka/ English wordlists recorded by Koelle, and later by Williamson and Shimizu, one sees that Malcolm often failed to include prefixes and suffixes in his phonetic identifications *which had been encoded by the corresponding entries in the Bagam script*—in some situations, this explains the existence of additional, seemingly irrelevant, Bagam characters. In other cases, Malcolm appears to have done the opposite, adding lengthy phonetic values for only two or three syllabograms. In yet other entries, he simply mistakes consonants or vowels for similar sounds (to the ear of a non-Mengaka speaker).

Unravelling the phonetic equivalencies of the Bagam characters will be explored in a subsequent paper which will also compare the Bagam and Bamum scripts (with discussion also of the *Nsibidi* graphic system).[32] There is little question that the Bamum influenced the Eghap, and there exists a great deal of historical literature which shows the close historical ties of the people.[33] As Malcolm himself noted: 'by far the greatest influence [on the Eghap] has come from the north-east, that is, from Bamum'.[34] This influence from the neighbouring Bamum (who spoke a related language) probably extended to the script as well, and Malcolm pointed out that the earlier devised Bamum script was well known in Bagam and that Bamum characters were used when the Bagam script broke down. In his thesis, Malcolm wrote: 'My informant said that the art

32. A non-phonographic system used by a number of peoples in the Cross River area; see J. K. Macgregor, 'Some notes on Nsibidi', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, **39** (1909), pp. 209–19.

33. Two important sources which illustrate the strong ties between the Bamum and Eghap are: Paul Nchoji Nkwi, *The German Presence in the Western Grassfields 1891–1913: A German colonial account* (African Studies Centre, Leiden, 1989) and Paul Nchoji Nkwi and Jean-Pierre Warnier, *Elements for a History of the Western Grassfields* (University of Yaoundé, Yaoundé, 1982). Professor Claude Tardits has kindly pointed out to me that the Bagam had reputedly learned the 'lost wax technique' from the Bamum. See B. Ankermann, 'Bericht über eine ethnografische forschungsreise ins Grasland von Kamerun', *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* (1910), pp. 288–310.

34. Malcolm, 'The Eghap' (Vol. II), p. 424.

originated in Bamum, but that of the Eghap was "we own country fashion" '.[35] It is of interest to determine a more exact connection between the two scripts, such as the identification of the stage or stages in the development of the Bamum script (and such data are available)[36] which may have influenced the design of the Bagam character forms, the organization of the Bagam script as a linguistic system, and even the formulation of the Bagam numerals (as the Bamum tradition also has an associated number writing system). Also, as the seven stages of the Bamum script's development have been chronologically identified, we might also be able to gain a better idea of a time-frame for the Bagam script's own formulation or adaptation. Two other areas of inquiry are worth mentioning. Dugast and Jeffreys claimed that around 1912 King Njoya asked neighbouring Bamileke chiefs to send students to his schools in the hope that his writing would spread.[37] Do records exist showing that Eghap students attended such schools? Also, it is important to explore traditions of graphic imagery employed by the Eghap—from their elaborate scarification symbols and pottery designs to royal regalia—which may have contributed to the development of the signs for the script.

This paper acts only as a beginning. Almost eighty years after the Bagam script was first documented in the *Journal of the African Society*, the suppressed characters of the script have at last found their way into publication in the *JAS*'s descendant, *African Affairs*. Linguists will now have in their possession reproductions of the Bagam characters for examination, providing a point of departure for investigations into the inspirations for the design of characters and overall organization of the writing system, as well as comparisons with the Bamum script. The urgent need for fieldwork on the history of the script cannot be overstated, as oral traditions may hold an important key to understanding the history of the Bagam script's development and usage. Many questions remain to be asked, and far more questions remain to be answered. One thing, however, is certain. The 'lost script of the Bagam' has been found.

35. Malcolm, 'The Eghap' (Vol. III), p. 203.
36. See Dugast and Jeffreys, *L'Écriture des Bamum*, and Schmitt, *Die Bamum-Schrift*.
37. Dugast and Jeffreys, *L'Écriture des Bamum*, p.9.