

Ingessana Throwing Knives (Sudan)*

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This note is concerned with a weapon, often referred to in English as a throwing knife and in Sudanese Arabic as *kolbeda*, to be found among the inhabitants of the Ingessana Hills of the Blue Nile Province in the Sudan. The aim is primarily empirical in that an attempt is made to understand the form and features of the weapon which, as will be apparent, cannot be accounted for in simple functional terms as the most expeditious design with a view to inflicting grievous bodily harm.

However the topic is not perhaps without relevance to areas of study outside the narrow confines of Ingessana culture. A considerable amount of interest has been shown in such weapons, of which the Ingessana varieties are a particular instance, in a distribution involving a number of cultures and a large area of central Africa. We may distinguish morphologically two types, the so called 'winged trombash' and the 'F form', the Ingessana knives being instances of the latter¹. The former type seem to be largely confined to peoples speaking languages of what GREENBERG has named the Adamawa-Eastern sub-family and known previously as semi-Bantu. The 'F form', however occurs among peoples of diverse cultures, and alongside the winged knife in parts of the Adamawa uplands, in a distribution which, from the Shari-Chad basin to the Blue Nile, corresponds to the historic states of Bornu, Bagirmi, Wadai, Darfur and Funj and their respective spheres of influence at one time or another. It is not unlikely that the prolonged martial rivalry between these adjacent states would be conducive to a rapid diffusion of weaponry. For various reasons it seems likely that the weapon reached the Ingessana by this route. This article is directly relevant to the question of

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¹ The last attempt to tackle the ethnology of the African throwing knife is, to my knowledge, THOMAS (1925). He distinguishes twenty morphological types. An earlier attempt is that of SCHUTZ (1889).