

A 19th CENTURY PERCEPTION OF CHAMIC RELATIONSHIPS

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As late as 1963 an internationally respected linguist could write that Jarai and Rade are to be considered Mon-Khmer languages (Trager 1963). It was not until Richard Pittman (1957) and Dorothy Thomas (1963, written 1957), followed by Ernest Lee (1966) and others, conclusively demonstrated the Austronesian source of Chamic that linguists unanimously took the Chamic languages out of the Mon-Khmer family.

The Mon-Khmer type of phonology found in the Chamic languages, plus the heavy borrowing between Bahnar and Jarai, had confused the picture, so that Przyluski, writing in the 1952 edition of Les Langues du Monde called the Chamic languages Mon-Khmer.

In the journals of Henri Mouhot written from 1858 to 1861 he mentions his visits to eastern Cambodia and the borders of southern Vietnam, recording all the information that he could glean from his own observation and from conversations with others. He includes the following comment (Vol.2, pp.29-30):

On my return from my excursion amongst the Stiens [Stiengs], M. Fontaine, whom I met at Pinhalu, ... favoured me with the following remarks on the dialects of several of these tribes:-

The language of the Giarai [Jarai] and that of the [Redais] Rade bear a strong resemblance to each other: the two tribes are only separated from each other by the river Bong, which flows between them in a westerly direction, after running for some distance from south to north and watering the lands of the Candians or Bihcandians [Rade Bih], whose language also resembles in some degree that of the tribes just mentioned. The dialect of the Bonnava [Bahnar] or Menons [Mnong?] does not appear to me to have any similitude to the others, nor even to those of the tribes farther north [Katuic?].

After a sojourn of several years among these tribes, I was forced, on account of my health, to go to Singapore. I was astonished, after a little study of Malayan, to find in that language a number of Giarai [Jarai] words, and many more bearing a strong resemblance to words in that dialect; and I doubt not this similarity would be found

still more remarkable by any one who thoroughly studied both languages. The resemblance also of the language of the Thiamés [Chams], the ancient inhabitants of Isiampa [Champa], now in the province of Annam, to that of these tribes, leads me to believe that they must all have sprung from the same root.

M. Fontaine thus recognized the common root of the Rade, Jarai, and Cham languages with the Malay language, and he distinguished them from the Mon-Khmer languages Bahnar and Mnong (?). So perhaps to M. Fontaine should go the credit of first recognizing the true genetic relationships of the minority languages of southern Vietnam a full century before the full linguistic community acknowledged them. Kuhn 25 years later (1889) clearly called Cham Malayo-Polynesian.

Mouhot also gives a little information about the languages and customs of the Stieng [Stieng], Bannavs [Bahnar], Cedans [Sedang], Italhans [Halang], Reungáo [Rengao], Giaraié [Jarai], Redais [Rade], Candians / Bihcandians [Bih], Tiamés [Cham], Braon [Brao?], Ieboune [?], Nedai [Rade?], Bonou [Mnong Bunong?], Bih, and Somrai [Samre]. He lived for three months among the Stieng at Brelum, where Azemar later lived and wrote about the Stieng. (See Mouhot Vol.1, pp.221-225, 237-264, Vol.2, pp.23-37.)

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20 February 1989

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