



A Grammar of the Somali Language: With Examples in Prose and Verse, and an Account of the Yibir and Midgan Dialects (Classic Reprint)

J. W. C. Kirk

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Excerpt from A Grammar of the Somali Language: With Examples in Prose and Verse, and an Account of the Yibir and Midgan Dialects

There are but few people who have any serious study of the many and interesting tongues of that part of the African Continent in which the Somali race has grown up. Our knowledge of the Somali language is due to the labours of Rigby, Hunter, and Larajasse and Sampont. As this is not a written language, great praise is due to those who first grappled with the difficulty of reducing the speech to writing. This has now been done so satisfactorily that I myself have lately carried on a successful correspondence with an educated Somali in his native tongue, using the spelling and orthography of the present book. Schleicher's work is rather a philological treatise on the language, gathered largely from isolated individuals of the people, and not from practical acquaintance with the race in their own country; but he is to be congratulated on having collected a number of stories which are a useful and important foundation to a Somali literature. Paulitachke's work is a purely comparative treatise on the three dialects, Somali, Gala, and Danakil, written from an ethnological point of view.

While serving with Somali troops during the campaigns of 1902-1904 against the Mullah, Mohammed Abdallah, I had the most favourable opportunities for a practical and wholesale study of the colloquial dialect of this people; and it seemed only right that results obtained from so intimate an acquaintance should not be left unrecorded, in spite of the many imperfections which must still exist in the record. The work done by others hitherto has been largely confined to the coast and to the mixed population which assembles at the sea-port towns; and it is but recently that any strangers except a few sportsmen have been able to dwell in the interior, and so to know and converse with the natives in their own homes and natural surroundings.

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