

GENIUS OF THE BANTU
A STUDY OF THE BANTU TRIBES OF AFRICA, WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO THE AGENCIES WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR
CIVILIZATION

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6. The Semitic Hypothesis, Israelitish Origin.

Although the Semitic elements in the Bantu racial composition might come from the Arabs, as closely allied, in view of the fact that Arab influence was occasional, apparently, and not extended through a large impetus as of a migration, I may come to the consideration of the claims of still another and final hypothesis which has much to support it as accounting for the relation of the Bantu to other and extraneous peoples.

It is allowed that groups of Israelitish peoples have, from time to time, journeyed into the upper Nile country. But this does not seem to sufficiently account for the large access of influence of which the Bantu are the concrete result. In the absence of direct proof of an extensive migration, this hypothesis brings us two considerations, viz., those of customs, -religious and otherwise, and also those of language relations. The contention has been made that the extraneous element of the Bantu was derived from tribes of Israel

which were first carried away to Babylon, as related in the Scriptures, and afterward in whole or in part migrated through Egypt into equatorial Africa, and, through mingling with native tribes, upon whom they imposed much of their own religion and customs, gave rise to the peoples now known as Bantu.

Various considerations are supposed to have bearing on the probability of this being the origin of the Bantu.

1. Recorded history is not supposed to sufficiently account for the subsequent career of the Israelites left in Mesopotamia by those who took part in the Return from Captivity. Some hold, without historic proof so far as we are aware, that we are to look to the British Isles as their present abode, and to the English people as their descendants.¹ Apart from historic considerations, this view lacks the essential of language connection.

2. The Israelites were familiar with the country of Egypt, and the route thither. From previous residence in and relations with Egypt after the Exodus, they would regard that country as inviting them to depart from the more unfriendly scene of recent bondage. This is seen, in the career of the remnant, in Palestine, who left, migrating to Egypt and taking the prophet Jeremiah with them. ²

3. They were also measurably acquainted with the country beyond Egypt, Ethiopia. The expedition of Moses, their great law-giver, into that country, his success there in the subjugation of the Ethiopians, as well as something of later relations, must have been known to them, and may have encouraged

¹Vid. British-Israel literature, chiefly in Great Britain.

²Vid. Jeremiah, Chapter XLIII.

to do that which was not unusual in those times, move out, a nation in its entirety, and seek more congenial environment, in the direction best known to them.

4. That they should pass through, and beyond Egypt would be expected. Such migratory movements into Egypt and on to further lands had already occurred.¹ The upper reaches of the Nile with its tributaries, rather than the sandy deserts of the West, would invite their journey. Increase of population and a further knowledge of regions fertile and balmy where all Nature conspires to provide creature comfort without serious physical exertion would lure them, as earlier and later comers, into the easily occupied territories of equatorial Africa.

5. As for the processes of amalgamation with native tribes, through which even so strong a type as the Israelitish would largely become indistinct, --we can easily think of the wholesale slaughter of the male population in defense of their homes, as in later slave-raiding times. As in Europe and Asia, these invasions often resulted in the extermination of the male

It is not an unknown thing that the Hebrew type should be scattered to regions far remote, and become commingled with native stock. Captain Webster finds today in the Papuans of the Admiralty Islands "strong Hebraic features, very prominent."¹

6. Time coincidence; -the approximate date of the Bantu immigration has been placed as far back as 2000 years ago, with a likelihood of some centuries earlier.² This authority bases his conclusions on linguistic data.³ The Israelitish exodus from Mesopotamian regions must have occurred about the time suggested, as far as we have any means of judging.

7. Coincidence in religion and customs. We mention only a few points, those most noteworthy.

(1) Recognition of the existence and authority of one God, the Creator. Originally, the Bantu as the Hebrews were monotheists.

(2) The exercise of the priestly office, by the headman of

(2) The exercise of the priestly office, by the headman of the kraal (family establishment).

(3) The rite of circumcision (q. v. in chapter on "Circumcision," under "Heathen Education," this thesis) practiced universally by the Bantu, on male children, as the Hebrews.

(4) Original attitude of the Bantu toward the use of swine's flesh for food.

(5) Custom of taking the wife of the deceased brother, according to law given in Deut. XXV: 5.

(6) Peculiarities in the practice of sorcery, similar to

1 Vid. A. T. Bryant's Zulu-English Dict., Preface, page 17.

2 Sir H. H. Johnston, Article Bantu Languages, Encyc. Britan.

3 In particular, the consideration of the root "nkuku".

The Bantu peoples had so far degenerated when found by modern Europeans that they had no written speech, and but very little is to be found in the way of picture writing.¹ Yet the Zulu-Kafir language, to which we may refer as a representative Bantu tongue, is in both form and content just such a type of speech as we would expect to be developed from the ancient Hebrew, by

¹The Zimbabwe carvings (Vid. page 6) and wall-paintings in caves in Natal include all that remains of ancient graphic inscription.