

7. The Development of the *PROTO-BANTU* 3500-1000 B.C.

While Egypt was unifying and becoming a great world power, another people group was developing far away who were ultimately to dominate all of sub-Saharan Africa. These people had originally lived in the Sahara region, but as the Sahara dried out and became desert, they began to migrate out. As some peoples migrated north and east to the Nile valley, so others migrated south and west to the *Niger-Benoue* valley. Today we call these people the Proto-Bantu. At this date they were largely cut off from contact with Egyptian and even Sudanese civilization by desert and distance. As the desert became more and more formidable a barrier, the peoples of the outside world lost the knowledge that these sub-Saharan blacks existed. Yet they thrived and multiplied so that a millenium later they were virtually bursting the seams of their homeland.

Part of the vocabulary of the hypothetical Proto-Bantu language has been reconstructed on the basis of lexical correspondence between related known languages. For instance, if a word exists in all the languages of the Bantu language group, it is assumed to have existed in the parent language, that is, in Proto-Bantu. On this basis scientists have deduced that the speakers of Proto-Bantu who flourished at the edge of the desert between the expanding Sahara and the inhospitable rain forest to the south were familiar with elephants and giraffes, raised melons, made beer and porridge, domesticated dogs and chickens, hunted with spears and arrows, carved drums, smelted iron, and prized cowrie shells. The whole area between the Niger and Senegal rivers is known to have been a major center of domestication of sorghums and millets. The people there were concurrently fishers, hunters of large and small game, and cultivators of domestic agricultural crops like yams and palms. They wove raffia, bred goats, and kept some cattle but did not take them on migrations.

The Proto-Bantu language is thought to be the basis of all the languages in the *Congo Kordofanian group*, and its ancestor is thought by African *language classification* specialist Joseph H. *Greenberg* to have been spoken about 2700 B.C. 68

The Proto-Bantu like the people of Egypt, maintained a belief in a distant God, a "first cause" of sorts who made everything there is. They did not continue to walk in all His ways or to honor Him in everything, so they began to fear evil spirits as well as the diviners, priests and mediums who claimed to control them. In fact, they blamed witches for most of their problems. They honored their ancestors to the point of worship, prayed to their likenesses, and offered them sacrifices. Because of their turning from the God their first ancestors had known, they lived and died in fear, yet they never totally forgot that there was a God who made them.

The Khoisan

Another ancient group to develop were the Khoisan. No one knows exactly when they arrived in central and southern Africa, but we do know that they were well established when the earliest of other groups arrived. They seem to have been the first human inhabitants of large parts of these areas. They may have migrated directly to their ancient homelands soon after the dispersion at Babel. The Khoisan were the ancestors of the present-day Bushmen and Hottentots. They are genetically related to the Negroes, having kinky hair, broad noses and other negroid features, but

their skin and hair is yellowish and becomes wrinkled at an early age. Like the pygmies, they tend to be short in stature, from 4'7" to 4'9", with small hands and feet and relatively short legs, bulbous foreheads, pointed chins and large buttocks.

It is thought that the Khoisan once lived extensively all over the temperate southern areas of Africa, as far north as the mouth of the Congo River and central Tanzania. One Bushman site in has been excavated in Zambia that has been dated 2300 B.C. and shows a thriving Khoisan culture at that time.

Modern descendants of the Khoisan are divided by lifestyle. The Bushmen are stone-“age” hunter-gatherers even today and call themselves, “Khoi-Khoi.” The fact already mentioned that modern bushmen easily recognize and explain stone-“age” tools of long ago shows that Bushman Culture has changed very little over time and is in fact essentially like what archaeologists call the Wilton Stone Culture of long ago. They make many intricate tools of bone, tan hides, use natural pigments, make baskets, and erect wind screens for houses. They paint and carve on rock. They hunt big animals like zebra, buffalo, antelope, and even rhino. They do not hunt grown elephant or small animals and eat few fish. They are loosely organized, having no clear leaders. Because they are hunters, they are nomadic and must remain in small bands of less than a thousand in order to exist.

All groups of Bushmen believe in a supreme, good God, the Creator of all things, the sender of rain. He is known as Xu or Khi or Xuwa, who is prayed to and sometimes offered the firstfruits of the Hunt. He is believed to be omnipresent and holy, yet he is seen to be distant and having no connection to the daily moral life of the people. They believe in a life after death in a land with abundant food. They also believe in ghosts, and some hold concepts of ghosts that are similar to reincarnation. They also worship the sun, moon, and stars. They believe that an evil being also exists, and people dying a “bad death” are said to go to him. The Hottentots worship “heroes”, one of whom was their original chief and a great warrior. They believe that the spirits of the dead go with them to the grave but can emerge from the tomb as ghosts, people sometimes pray to them and offer sacrifices to them. They have many magicians endowed with supernatural powers.

The Hottentots are cattle herders who do some hunting as well. They call themselves “San.” The name Khoisan is a blend of both names. They live in larger groups than the Bushmen, probably because the milk provided by their cattle provided a better diet than the uncertainties of the hunt. Hottentot groups might reach several thousand in population, so they felt the need for more organization and selected chiefs. Today these groups live primarily in the Kalahari desert, having lost most of their former territory to the Bantu tribes migrating from the north.

Both Bushmen and Hottentots have little sense of personal property, but a clear sense of territory. Individuals “own” nothing, but the tribe or group owns its land. Today only about 50,000 of the Bushmen survive. Trouble developed long ago between the Bushmen and the Hottentots, for the game on which the hunter Bushmen depended tended to move out quickly as the cattle of their Hottentot cousins moved in.

The Pygmies

The pygmies, a short, dark people, have long lived in the rain forests of the Congo River basin and its tributaries. Their way of life is totally adapted to the forest and seems to have changed little from the time it first began to be observed.

The languages of both the Khoisan and the Pygmies are distinct from the Bantu and are characterized by extensive use of clicks formed in the mouth and throat.

Other Ancient African Peoples

Capsians

Archaeologists name other ancient peoples, who may be a part of other groups. Archaeologists identify them by the artifacts they left behind. One such group is called the “Capsians,” and they lived in many isolated places in Africa. Their artifacts have been dated by some scientists at 10,000 B.C., although this writer would not accept such an ancient date. Whenever they lived, these people were stone-“age” hunters who made microlithic tools. That is, they flaked off narrow flakes of stone and used these in making compound tools. They were also skilled in pottery making, producing what may be some of the earliest pottery, sculpture and stone engraving. One settlement of these people has been identified in Kenya by the lakes of the Kenya Rift valley. Another has been identified in southern Tunisia by the salt water lakes there. In Tunisia, artificial mounds composed of debris of snail shells show that they stayed there for several generations and thus were likely not a nomadic people.ⁱ

Acheulians

Groups which archaeologists call “Acheulian” have been identified in Morocco and Kenya, by the tools they made. Other groups manufacturing identical tools have been found in England and in India. These tools have been dated anywhere from 50,000 to 5,000 B.C. Because they show close similarity in peoples so widely scattered, it is possible that these tools come from cultures just after the dispersion from Babel, before individual cultures developed their unique qualities.ⁱⁱ

ⁱ Hallett, Robin, *Africa to 1875*, (University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, MI, 1970), p. 41.

ⁱⁱ Hallett, p. 38-39.