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*Archæological and  
Ethnological Research*  
*in*  
*South Africa.*

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## Archæological and Ethnological Research in South Africa.

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As a field for research into the problems belonging to ethnology and archæology South Africa has but few rivals. The successive waves of southerly migrations by which the peopling of the southern portion of the continent was effected have all left their traces, more or less indelibly, in those relics of their culture-products which have been able to withstand the action of Time and its army of destructive agents. To a certain extent also the past is reflected in the present, since the various native tribes and races of the present day exhibit in their state of culture survivals from more or less primitive conditions, their progress having been arrested or retarded at different stages in the general advancement towards civilization. Of the earlier populations, the less durable products have long since disappeared, leaving only the imperishable implements of chalcedony, quartzite, dolerite, and other hard rock-materials, as indications of the stages of culture-growth which prevailed during the days of the first migration-drifts, which gave to South Africa its earliest populations.

But, scanty as is the direct evidence of these early cultures, some light may be thrown upon them by a comparative study of the survivals of primitive conditions prevailing amongst the more lowly-cultured of the still living peoples of the world. In elucidating the past history of a population the mutually complementary sciences of archaeology and ethnology must work together, since each may help to throw light upon the other.

#### THE BUSHMEN.

Among the many archæologico-ethnological problems of South African interest is that which is concerned with the question of the origin and original home of the Bushman race. In many respects this primitive, pigmy race of nomad hunters is one of the most interesting of the yet living races of mankind. A Stone Age people of very low general culture, once the undisputed owners of the extensive hunting-grounds of South Africa, but in later times overrun by the Iron Age Bantu immigrants, the Bushmen present one very striking culture-anomaly, in respect of which they stood out conspicuous not only amid the other races of their environment, but also among all the recent primitive races of the world. The phenomenal development of their art (both in painting and in rock-engraving) seems to be out of all proportion to their general culture *status*. Their art is well worthy of careful study for its own intrinsic interest and merit, but it has a further importance as furnishing a possible clue to the racial affinities of the Bushmen. The striking analogy which exists between the rock-paintings of the Bushmen and those of the palæolithic cave-dwellers of Solutréan times in Western Europe, such as have been discovered in caverns at Altamira, in Spain, and Marsoulas, in Southern France, is too marked to be passed over, and this, when coupled with certain resemblances observable between the physical characters of the extinct cave-painters of Europe and the recent Bushmen artists of South Africa, offers a

suggestion as to the possible origin and centre of dispersal of the latter race which is well worth following up. It is at least possible that the ancestors of the Bushmen were an early offshoot from that general migration-drift of a late Stone Age race, which peopled portions of Western Europe in Solutréan times, bringing with it the art of painting and sculpture already well advanced. It is generally admitted that the original home of the Bushmen was far to the north of the region in which they became known, and it does not seem unreasonable to believe that they may boast a common ancestry with the Middle-Cave-period peoples of Western Europe; but, while noting the points of resemblance in physique and culture, we must also take into consideration the points of divergence, and it would appear likely that such separation of the proto-Bushmen from the common stock must have taken place at an early period in the joint migration, before the relatively high Solutréan culture had been reached, but, at any rate, after the art of painting had been considerably developed.

Much careful research will be required before this problem can be even approximately solved, and, if we must agree that much further information is required in regard to the prehistoric cave-dwellers in Europe, we must also admit that our present knowledge of the Bushmen is far too scanty. As a race, the Bushmen may be said to be well-nigh extinct, but there still remain scattered remnants of this once numerous and widespread people, and much may yet be learnt from a careful scientific study of the survivors, degenerate though they be. There are many things which we cannot now hope to learn; it is too late, and we are perilously near being reduced to studying the race after it has become extinct, instead of as a living actuality.

#### AN EARLIER RACE.

There can be little doubt that of those South African races which have survived into modern times the Bushmen were the earliest arrivals

in the country to the south of the Zambesi and, it is probable that they reached at an early period their magnificent hunting-grounds from which they were ousted by the later and more powerful immigrant peoples. But the question arises—did the Bushmen towards the end of their long southerly migration find the country uninhabited, or did they find it already occupied, to some extent at least, by a still earlier population? This problem of the antiquity of man in South Africa is one full of interest, and one which is attracting the attention of serious students. Here it is necessary for the archaeologist and the geologist to work together, since evidence of considerable antiquity is mainly derived from the geological *data*. A mass of evidence is gradually accumulating which points in the direction of there having existed in South Africa a very early population, whose culture, as far as can be inferred from the stone implements which are its sole surviving representatives, offers a remarkable analogy with that of the Lower Palæolithic, or so-called “River-drift,” period in Western Europe. Most of the well-known “River-drift” types of implements are represented abundantly in South Africa, and these forms extend over a very wide area, which steadily increases in extent as fresh discoveries are made. A large number of these implements of early palæolithic type are found upon or near the surface of the ground, and, except in cases where they are much abraded or heavily patinated, these do not furnish any safe criteria of great antiquity. But others have been discovered deeply buried in undisturbed and ancient alluvial deposits, and of the high antiquity of these there can be no doubt. Further, there is valuable negative evidence to be derived from the fact that very frequently the early types of stone implements are found in abundance in a given district, unassociated with implements which must necessarily be referred to a more advanced phase of culture history. That the implements of “River-drift” type did not belong to the Bush-

man race seems to be clear from the fact that they are not found, unless it be very rarely, amid the relics belonging to this people. They do not occur, as far as I am aware, in the *débris* of the rock-shelters or in the "kitchen-middens" of the Bushmen or the "Strandloopers." Nor can they be associated with Bantu culture, and these facts, combined with the direct evidence of great antiquity, point in no very uncertain manner to their being of pre-Bushman origin. In this connexion it is of interest to recall that there is a Bushman tradition that when the San (Bushman) people arrived in South Africa they found a people already in occupation of the soil, and it is by no means impossible that these earliest inhabitants may have been originally a branch of the Lower Palæolithic peoples, the immense antiquity of whose culture is so well established in Europe.

#### PALÆOLITHIC IMPLEMENTS.

There are numerous "factory sites" in South Africa where implements of early palæolithic type were manufactured in great numbers, in places where a rock suitable as material for implement-making occurs—*e.g.*, chalcedony, jasper, agate, quartzite, dolerite, diabase, &c. Such "factory sites" I have seen near East London, on the Vaal River, near Kimberley, and on the Zambesi, in the neighbourhood of the Victoria Falls, and there are many others. The factory around the Victoria Falls is a very extensive one, reaching certainly from high up on the Maramba tributary to far below the Falls along the left bank of the Zambesi, and from Dale's Kopje to the Masui River along the right bank. The chalcedonic deposits formed at the base of the red (Kalahari) sand on both sides of the Zambesi furnished, it would seem, the bulk of the material from which the implements were made, though implements of a kind of quartzite are abundant along the Maramba more especially. Wherever the chalcedonic outcrop occurs there one can find



the workshop *débris* of the stone-workers. Everywhere along the line of this outcrop unfinished implements (the workshop failures or "wasters") in all stages of manufacture lie upon the surface, and in some places they are in profusion. These "rejects" are interesting as showing the methods whereby the rough stone nodules were gradually trimmed down by flaking and how the finished form was arrived at in the process. Completely finished implements are relatively scarce, since the greater number of these, no doubt, were taken away for use elsewhere or became objects of trade with other tribes having less ready access to the raw materials from which implements could conveniently be made. The methods employed in the manufacture were precisely those adopted by "River-drift" man in Europe and elsewhere, and the results achieved are almost identical with the latter's products, though the very great abundance of discoidal stones, whose use is not very clear, is a conspicuous feature of the Zambesi factories.

The finding of "River-drift" types of implements in abundance, unassociated with types which would have to be referred to a more developed phase of culture-growth, suggests that at some period there lived on the Zambesi a people having a culture comparable with that of Early Palæolithic man. Moreover, the geological evidence afforded by the position in which some of these implements have been found points to a very high antiquity for these. I have myself taken implements and flakes from undisturbed alluvial deposits at depths varying from 18in. to 9ft. in the banks of the Maramba, which has eaten out its channel through the ancient alluvium. Similarly I have excavated river-rolled, abraded, and deeply patinated implements from a depth of 2ft. or so beneath deposits which may be terrace gravels of the Zambesi. Whether the age of such implements is comparable at all with that of the similar culture relics of

the Lower Palæolithic period in Europe it is the province of the geologist to determine, since he must diagnose the deposits; but it is at least certain that a high antiquity attaches to many of the implements of early type in several parts of Africa, and the possibility that the ancestors of the people who made and used them may have been an offshoot from the Lower Palæolithic peoples, of whom a section settled in Western Europe at a very remote period, must be admitted. The evidence in favour of this view is by no means conclusive as yet, but many significant facts have already been brought to light in support of the theory that a section of the Early Palæolithic stock branched off on a southerly migration drift and eventually reached South Africa and spread over what is now Rhodesia, the Orange River Colony, the Transvaal, Cape Colony, and Natal. These may have been followed in later times by an influx of Late Palæolithic people, who under the new environmental conditions became in part the parent stock of the Bushman race. To a branch of these later immigrants may perhaps also be ascribed the implements of "Solutréan" type which have been found abundantly on the Cape Flats and which occur sporadically elsewhere in South Africa.

#### THE LACK OF CONTINUITY.

So far there is a lack of evidence to show that the Lower Palæolithic culture progressed in South Africa and developed into a more advanced state. At present there seems to be a break between the older and the later palæolithic cultures, if such they be; but this gap may in the course of time be bridged over when the succession of early culture phases in the region has been rendered clear through a study of the stratification of relics of successive periods. Careful examination of old alluvial deposits and the *breccia* in caves and under rock shelters, layer by layer, may furnish evidence of continuity in advance-

ment, but at present one is left wondering what became of the people whose handiwork seems to be analogous, if not homologous, with that of man in the "River-drift" period. If they did not advance, were they absorbed and their culture modified by later immigrants? Or perhaps, even, were they exterminated by the latter? There is but little evidence of a grafting of one culture upon the other, as far as I am aware, and it does not appear very likely that the succeeding wave of immigrants, if these were the ancestors of the Bushmen, would have been powerful enough to wipe out the earlier population. It is, of course, possible that some devastating disease may have exterminated the race or reduced it to a mere negligible remnant, for we know from recent experience how liable Africa is to be ravaged by diseases of a virulent and rapidly spreading type. Such speculations may stimulate scientific research into the true *status* of these early-culture conditions in South Africa, and lead to careful investigation of the geological horizons to which they belong. The problem involved is of interest to all South Africans, since it is concerned with the elucidation of the earliest chapters in the culture-history of the region and with the antiquity of man in this part of the world. But the whole of Africa is involved in the problem, since the successive migrations southward must have left their traces along the routes followed; and, indeed, those traces, the racial spoor, so to speak, are here and there observable. The chain of evidence cannot yet be completed, owing to the many links which still remain undiscovered; but interest has been aroused, and there are already many enthusiastic workers in the field.

#### SHELL HEAPS.

Another valuable field for combined archaeological and ethnological research is afforded by the shell heaps, or "kitchen-middens," of the so-called "Strandloopers." The range

of distribution of these middens extends along the coast certainly from Durban to the Cape Peninsula, and the deposits of shells and other remains are often of considerable thickness. It is probable that the "Strandlooper" population on any given part of the coast was at no time a dense or strictly sedentary one; the precarious nature of the food supply would have militated against such conditions. We are driven to conclude that the great depth of some of the middens and the enormous area covered by them indicate a very prolonged period for their deposition. Further evidence of their antiquity is seen in the position of some of the middens, which are situated far from the present sea border and at a considerable height above sea level, while in very many instances they are buried under several feet of sand or other later deposits. From an extended and organized examination of these shell deposits, layer by layer, we may hope not only to increase our knowledge of the physical characters of the "Strandloopers" themselves, and their true racial affinities, but also to form a more or less complete picture of their habits and mode of life. We may expect, moreover, to ascertain whether during the prolonged period which was required for the accumulation of these refuse-heaps, there was any change, be it advancement or retrogression, in the *culture-status* of the "Strandloopers." To this end it is desirable that sites should be selected in several districts where the deeper shell-heaps occur, and that an area of, say, 20 feet square, should be excavated completely through the middens, in horizontal layers of six inches or a foot at a time, the shells, bones, implements, &c., in each layer being kept separate and carefully tabulated. The proportion in which the various shells and other objects occur in the different layers should be noted, so that the results obtained from the successive layers may be compared. The results thus acquired from the various districts should then be collated. Such organized and

combined research applied to the "Strand-looper" shell-heaps would involve but a trifling cost, and would prove of far greater scientific value than all the unorganized and desultory collecting which has hitherto been done. From the combined results another chapter in the early history of South Africa could be written, or, possibly, even another *series* of chapters.

### THE IRON AGE.

Special interest has been aroused in the problem of the origin and history of iron-working in Africa. As is well known, Africa south of the Sahara came into its Iron Age without having passed through a Copper or Bronze Age, and thus the development of the iron industry was not reached through the normal sequence of successive stages which characterized the culture-history of Europe, North Africa, and elsewhere. "Savage" Africa passed directly from stone to iron. The question arises—Did the native negro peoples acquire the art of iron working from peoples who had already acquired and developed it, or is the art indigenous amongst them and a product of native inventiveness? Recent researches and deductions by Dr. von Luschan and others have tended to support the latter hypothesis, and speculations have arisen as to the possibility of the art of extracting iron from the ore and of forging it into useful appliances having not only been developed at an early period amongst the negro peoples of Africa, but, further, of its having been transmitted thence through Egypt into Europe. If further archæological investigations support this view, and if it can finally be proved that the relatively highly cultured Bronze Age peoples of Europe owe to the African native the suggestion that iron could be substituted for the inferior metals copper and bronze, it will be recognized that the world at large owes a deep debt of gratitude to the primitive indigenous population of the Dark Continent.

In Egypt, the natural link between "Savage" Africa and the Mediterranean, the early history of iron working is obscure. Iron has been found in deposits reputed to belong to the sixth dynasty (c. 4000 B.C.), and even to the fourth dynasty (c. 4600 B.C.). In the Egyptian paintings of early Mycenaean times, iron is represented in blue to distinguish it from copper and bronze (red and yellow). Still, the evidence of the commencement of the iron-using period in Egypt is very incomplete, and fresh investigations will be required ere this point will be cleared up.

In Europe, as Dr. von Luschan urges, the Iron Age began at a comparatively late date, probably not earlier than 900 B.C. Hence it is improbable that Egypt received the idea of iron working from Europe. For the same reason it is unlikely that inspiration was derived from Assyria and Babylonia, whose Iron Age does not appear to have commenced prior to 1000 B.C. In India, too, it was a development of comparatively late date. If we exclude the north and the east, there remains only the south (for the west may be disregarded) as a possible source whence Egypt, and through her Europe, acquired the art of manufacturing iron, unless we assume that in Egypt itself is to be found the fountain-head of the industry.

#### MODERN CLUES.

A study of the present conditions obtaining amongst the native African ironworkers tells us several things of interest which bear upon this problem. First, we find that many of the native iron ores are procured with little trouble and are easily reducible at a relatively low temperature. From hematite, for example, malleable iron which can be forged into bars can be extracted by heating in a charcoal fire for a few hours with the help of bellows. The ease with which native ores are reduced renders it possible, if not probable, that the process of extraction of iron from the ore may have been accidentally hit upon by a primitive people through pieces

of the ore becoming repeatedly, though unintentionally, mixed up with the ordinary domestic fires. Some suggestive evidence is, moreover, acquired from a comparative study of the primitive methods employed by the natives in reducing the ore, more especially in Equatorial Africa. In some districts a very rudimentary process still prevails, the broken ore and charcoal being merely heaped up upon the ground. After the requisite heat has been raised with the help of bellows, the extracted iron falls to the bottom of the mass and is collected. As a slight improvement, in some districts the fire is built over a shallow pit or depression in which the iron collects. Elsewhere, again, the mass of charcoal and ore is bounded with lumps of clay, which form an incomplete confining wall. From this stage may have been evolved the idea of confining the fire within a complete encircling clay wall, whose height was increased as it was found that a more effective draught was obtained thereby. This probably led to the development of the tall, circular furnaces of clay employed by the famous iron-working tribes of the Bahr-el-Gazal region and elsewhere. If these several graduated methods applied to the reduction of iron ore may be regarded as survivals from various stages in the developmental history of the process, the probability of this industry having been arrived at by the native African negro independently of outside influence is greatly increased. The wide range of dispersal of these methods over Africa south of the Sahara also favours this view.

The structure of the most characteristic and most widespread form of native African bellows, in which the flexible membranes are worked with a pair of sticks held in the hand, links the modern negro blacksmith with the ancient Egyptian metal workers of the 18th dynasty, who employed the same type of bellows very slightly modified, a type which does not occur outside the confines of the African continent. The famous 18th dynasty painting at Luxor, representing the casting of the bronze temple

doors, shows clearly the form of the ancient Egyptian bellows, and establishes their identity with the prevailing Central African form of to-day, incidentally, moreover, proving an affinity between the metallurgical methods of the two peoples. Future researches may prove that the earliest experiments in iron working took place in Egypt, and that the early history of the industry had its home there ; but so far, convincing evidence of this is not forthcoming, and in the meantime a fairly strong case can be made out for the origin and early development of iron working amongst primitive peoples of negro stock, probably in or near the equatorial region. It may appear revolutionary to suggest with Dr. von Luschan that the African negro may have been the real discoverer of the potentialities of iron and the inaugurator of the Iron Age, the introduction of which revolutionized culture in Europe, and hastened to a phenomenal extent the advance towards civilization ; but the supporting evidence is strong enough to call for a following up of the clues.

#### THE RHODESIAN RUINS.

A great amount of attention has been paid to the famous ruins of Rhodesia, but as yet no final diagnosis of these interesting structures has been made. No completely convincing interpretation has been offered of their origin, as to which there remain even to-day two antagonistic views. The most important and best known of the stone-built ruins, that known as the Temple of Great Zimbabwe, has probably been too much disturbed by previous excavations to yield much fresh evidence of scientific value, but there still remain several important kindred buildings which are relatively untouched. These should be examined by unbiassed and fully qualified experts specially selected for the purpose, and including both archæologists and ethnologists of high repute. The excavations should be thorough, carried through in accordance with the most approved archæological methods, and extended down to



the very foundations. Many interesting and suggestive investigations have already been made, and are still being conducted, with a view to determining who were the people who erected these in some cases imposing buildings, but so far absolutely convincing proof is lacking, and it is essential that exhaustive and perfectly methodical researches should be undertaken without delay under the sanction and, it is to be hoped, with the support of the governing authorities. The settling of this vexed question will be welcomed by all, and would increase the scientific value of and the public interest in a group of relics of whose possession Rhodesia is justly proud.

#### THE NEED FOR RESEARCH.

There are very many other lines of inquiry which promise rich scientific results. The matter is an urgent one, since the material for study is rapidly disappearing. Insensate vandalism is working havoc among the Bushman paintings and sculptures, irresponsible and unauthorized collecting is ruining many a valuable site, and is spoiling the field for scientific exploration. The opening up of the country with roads, railways, and townships is tending to reduce culture conditions to one general dead level of uniformity. Native arts, industries, customs, and beliefs are rapidly dying out, before they have been properly studied and recorded, or are being contaminated through outside influence, and the individual characteristics of native tribes are becoming obscured.

Under the new Constitution, with a Union Government, and with increasing stability and prosperity in South Africa, we may confidently look to the sustained encouragement of scientific research becoming a recognized item in the Government programme. It seems inevitable that an annual grant of money assigned to the purpose should form one of the tangible signs of Government sympathy and support, but it is to be hoped that a fund may be established out of contributions from private sources, in order

that a substantial sum may be available annually for research of a highly scientific character. In many respects the financing of special pieces of research work by wealthy individuals is greatly to be encouraged, but there are many advantages in private subscriptions going to swell a common fund of which a Government grant forms the nucleus. The administration of such a general fund might conveniently be assigned to a board composed of men competent to decide as to the merits of the various applications made by qualified researchers for financial support. In England the Government grant in aid of scientific research is administered and allocated by a number of boards representing the various sciences, and appointed by the Royal Society, so that the administration is under the highest scientific authority, and the Government not only is saved the responsibility of administration, but has a guarantee that the best possible use will be made of its funds. Adequate financial support for and encouragement of museums is also a great desideratum.

#### LEGISLATION.

Stringent laws should be passed to put an end to vandalism and the unauthorized tampering with ancient remains. This matter is, I believe, receiving the attention of the Government. In the case of the Bushman paintings much valuable material has been permanently lost through the wanton obliteration and defacing of these unique art relics. Under any circumstances accurate copies should be made of all these paintings, since they cannot last indefinitely, and Bushman art can never be revived. An excellent lead has been given by the Clarendon Press in publishing recently a collection of copies of Bushman paintings made by Miss Helen Tongue.

It is eminently desirable that there should be established some kind of central bureau which might advise and assist those who are undertaking research or are desirous of information.

In the course of a lecturing tour which I undertook this year at the invitation of the South African Association, I became convinced that there is no lack of interest in the problems of South African culture history, but that active co-operation in the study of local phenomena is checked through a lack of such a central authority. There is no recognized person or committee to whom appeals for information and guidance can be made, and no organization for the collecting together and collating of the vast amount of floating knowledge which is stored in the minds of hundreds of people who have travelled through the country and have been in intimate contact with the natives. The establishment of professorships would help materially to train a younger generation of local researchers, and to teach them how to observe and collect information of a reliable kind. Through organized and systematized work, material for a more or less complete history of culture in South Africa will be brought together, and a better understanding of native ideas and of the potentialities and limitations of the native population will be arrived at, rendering less difficult the task of a just and enlightened administration of the affairs of the various races and tribes for whose welfare the Government is responsible.

HENRY BALFOUR,  
OXFORD, 1910.







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