

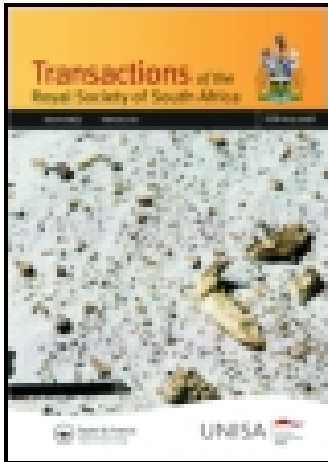
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### THE STAR LORE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIVES

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## THE STAR LORE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIVES.

BY W. HAMMOND TOOKE.

[READ 31ST OCTOBER, 1888.]

It is with much diffidence that the writer places the following few notes upon some of the conceptions held by the barbarous tribes peopling South Africa respecting the heavenly bodies before the members of this Society.

The facts are too few and fragmentary to justify any attempts to formulate a theory on them, nor has any such attempt been made. They are merely recorded here for the sake of comparison.

It may be held that they are not of any practical interest; but such as they are, it is from these almost trivial data that powerful side lights are sometimes thrown upon what would otherwise be completely buried in the mists of obscurity, namely the unwritten history of the races, some prolific, some nearing extermination, which preceded the European occupation of this continent. And they help us to realise a mental condition which has much to teach us, both by its resemblances to our own and by its dissimilarities.

"It is," says Professor Drummond, "a wonderful thing to look at this weird world of human beings, half animal, half children, wholly savage and wholly heathen . . . It is an education to see this sight, an education in the meaning and history of man. It is to have watched the dawn of evolution. It is to have the great moral and social problems of life, of anthropology, of ethnology and even of theology, brought home to the imagination in the most new and startling light."

## BUSHMAN.

Two of the most remarkable characteristics of the South African Bushman, that "*unglückseliges Kind des Augenblicks*," apparently the most degraded type of humanity existing, are (1) his pictorial talent and (2) his acquaintance with the "starry heavens above us." The Homeric Greek has not done more towards distinguishing the Stars of the northern hemisphere than have the half-starved outcasts of the Kalahari Desert or the cave-dwellers of the Drakensberg in respect of those spangling our southern skies.

Miss Clerke has shown in an interesting paper contributed to *Nature*, how Hesperus and Phosphorus, Orion and Arktos, the Pleiads and Hyads nearly complete the list of stars distinguished by name in the Homeric poems from the rest of the "stellar multitude." The Bushman can shew us a longer list than this.

Thus, we learn from Dr. Bleek, that the Pointers of the Southern Cross are called the Male Lions;  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$ , Crucis are the Lionesses. Aldebaran is the Male Hartebeest,  $\alpha$  Orionis the Female Hartebeest; the Male Eland is Procyon, his wives are Castor and Pollux, the Magellanic clouds are Steinboks, the Sword and the Stars in the Belt of Orion are Tortoises, &c., &c.

Both Greek and Bushman dated their seasons by the annual rising of the Stars; but, while the Greek pictured groups in the sky with which he connected legends of god and heroes the Bushman traced no constellations. He named the single Stars which he saw at certain periods from the animals or other objects which at such time come into season or became more abundant. Thus Canopus or the "Ant egg" star by its appearance shows that this article of food might now be sought for.

The Bushmen classify the Stars into night stars and dawn stars. Jupiter is known as the "Dawn's Heart," and Leonis is her child.

The following legends profess to describe the origin of some of the heavenly bodies:

The Milky Way was formed by a girl of the ancient race throwing ashes into the sky.

The Sun was a man formerly living on the earth from whose arm-pits light proceeded. It, however, only illuminated a small space round his house; and while he was asleep some children of the ancient Bushmen were sent to throw him into the sky "since when he shines over the whole earth."

The Moon was caused by the Mantis or chief Bushman deity throwing his shoe into the sky, ordering it to become the Moon and disperse a darkness which was caused by the bursting of the eland's gall bladder. The Moon is red because the shoe of the Mantis was covered with the red dust of Bushmanland.

But according to another legend our satellite was a man who had incurred the wrath of the Sun. The Sun attacked him with his knife, *i.e.*, his rays, until the Moon was by degrees cut away, all but a little piece, which the Moon implored him to spare for his children. He then began to increase again until he reached his original size, when the process was repeated.

## KHOI-KHOI.

From the evidence that remains to us of Hottentot life, we gather that the Hessequa, Cachoqua or Namaqua resembled their pygmy neighbours and foes in taking a lively interest in matters astronomical. Nay more, they regarded some of the heavenly bodies with a veneration approaching worship.

Thus Dapper tells us of the tribes within the vicinity of the Dutch Settlement that they had some superstition regarding the New Moon, at the appearance of which they crowded together making merry the whole night dancing and singing. Nieuhof says that they specially honoured the Moon and probably did not hold the Sun in less esteem. Leguat believed that they paid the Moon some kind of worship. Kolb states that both at New and Full Moon they continued dancing and singing throughout the night; and Captain Cowley calls them "worshippers of Dame Luna."

With regard to the tribes further north we learn from the commander of an expedition sent into Great Namaqualand in 1761 by Governor Tulbagh that the Namaqua religion then consisted in worshipping and praising the New Moon.

The Nama term for "moon" is *Khab*, in *Kora Kham* "the returner." The present antiquated and obliterated nature of this name (so Dr. Theophilus Hahn concludes) points to its early application to our satellite, before the separation of the Hottentot or Khoi-Khoi clans.

Kolb speaks of it as being the "Sichtbar Gott" whereas *Ticquoa* was the "unsichtbar Gott." Nama legends appear to connect the moon *Khab* with another being *Heitsi-eibib*. And according to Dr. Hahn *Ticquoa* or *Tsui* ||*Goab*, a word now always applied to the Supreme Being, originally signified Red morning or Dawn, and is also synonymous with *Heitsi-Eibib*, "the Dawn Tree." Therefore, says Dr. Hahn, it can no longer be doubtful that "the Moon is identical with *Tsui* ||*Goab* as the 'Lord of Light and Life.'"

It at all events seems made out that the Hottentot conceptions of the Supreme Being can be identified with the Light or Sky in its different manifestations of the oft-recurring moonlight or victorious dawn.

To turn to the Stars:  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  Centauri are called *mura* "the two eyes,"  $\mu$  1 and 2 in the Scorpion are the "eyes of the lion." One of the names for Venus is "the man with the fingers cut off."

The Pleiads are called *Khunuseti*, which means offshoots or the stars of the offshoots, namely the "Stars of the budding season or

spring," another meaning given to them is "those who spring or shoot off from one stem, a cluster." Both these meanings will be found in various Bantu dialects as will be seen below.

The *Khunuseti* were daughters of *Tsui* || *Goab*, the Dawn or Sky God. It is related of them that they once said to their husband, "Go and shoot those three Zebras for us, but if you fail to shoot, do not return!" The husband went with one arrow, and shot with his bow. He did not hit and sat because his arrow had missed the Zebras. On the other side sat the Lion, and watched the Zebras and prevented the man from picking up his arrow, and because his wives had cursed him he could not return, and then he sat in the cold night shivering and suffering from thirst and hunger.

And the *Khunuseti* said to the other men: "Ye men, do you think that you can compare yourselves to us and to our equals? There now! We defy our husband to come home because he has not killed game."

This legend has been pictured in the Sky by the Namaqua. The husband of the *Khunuseti* or Pleiads is Aldebaran; his bow is  $\pi$ ,  $\pi^2$ ,  $\pi^3$  Orionis; his arrow three other stars in the same constellation, probably the sword; his sandals are  $\epsilon$  and  $\delta$  of the Hyades, his kaross is  $\eta$  and  $\gamma$  Hyadum; the Zebras are  $\delta^2$  and  $\zeta$  Orionis, or the three Stars in the Belt and the Lion is  $\alpha$  Orionis (Betelgeuse) or in another version Sirius.

This fact would seem to show that the Hottentot differs from the Bushman in his method of naming the Stars; not the period of their appearance and its connection with the seasons seem to have suggested the names given to the stars above mentioned, but their relative position towards each other by which they illustrate the legend.

This tradition, we may remark in passing, appears to show that in early times the Hottentot women had enlightened views as to the position of their sex.

#### BANTU.

Far different to the conceptions entertained by the yellow races of South Africa of the heavenly bodies are the notions held respecting them by the dark skinned Bantu.

The Kaffir knows and names Sun, Moon and Star, but he has no legends as to their creation. "These things," to adopt Tiyo Soga's words, "seem to have baffled his imagination." With few exceptions, such as the Morning and Evening Star and the Pleiads, he has no distinctive epithet for the more conspicuous stars. He never lifts

his eyes to trace the patterns on "this majestic roof, fretted with golden fire," nor to note the rising or setting of planet or asteroid, except as it may serve to mark the advent of the planting season, &c.

The ama Zulu and ama Xosa call the Sun *Ilanga*, but they seem to regard it with no veneration and look on it neither as an ancestor nor as a deity.

The Xosas have indeed a tradition that the creator or first ancestor, *Uhlanga*, came out of a cave situated *eastward* "from whence the Sun issues every morning," and this legend together with the verbal similarity of *Uhlanga* to *Ilanga* might lead to the conjecture that there is a common origin on the two words. And doubtless both words bear within them the original conception of rising "originating from." *Uhlanga* is however more closely connected with *Umhlanga*, a reed, and the most common form of the myth is that *Uhlanga* the first man sprang from a reed or bed of reeds. Thus it would rather seem to indicate that the Kaffir at some early period migrated from some marshy locality like the shores of Lake Bangweolo or the ambatchchoked head waters of the Nile than that he ever considered himself a Child of the Sun.

The use of the word *Ilanga* for Sun seems confined to the Zulu and Xosa tribes. The ama Mbalu or ama Langa have disused it on account of a noted chief of their clan bearing the name and they have substituted *isota* instead.

The word most universally used among the Bantu is some form of *Zuwa*. Thus :

Tribe.		Locality.		
Ama Tonga	...	Sofala	...	... Zuba
Ba Nyai	...	Near Tette	...	... Zuwa
Ma Ravi	...	South of Lake Nyassá	...	... Dsua
Wa Sambara	...	...	...	... Zua
Wa Swaheli	...	Zanzibar and Mombasa	...	... Jua
Wa Taveita	}	Kilimanjaro	...	{ Zuwa
Wa Chaga				
Wa Ganda	...	L. Victoria Nyanza	...	... Nguba
Eshi Kongo	...	Sao Salvador	...	... Ntuva
Ora Herero	...	Damaraland	...	... Eyuva.

Only among the Wa Chaga does this word connote the meaning of God or deity as well as Sun, and this may perhaps be explained by their proximity to the Masai or other Sudan tribes amongst which heaven worship exists.

As with *ilanga* (Sun) so it may be said of *inyanga*, the Kafir and Zulu word for Moon, that it is rarely found in any other Bantu language.\*

*Inyanga* appeared to Dr. Bleek to be of Hottentot origin, and if so this would show perhaps that the veneration paid by the Khoi-Khoi to the Moon had had the effect on the neighbouring Kafir of inducing him to adopt the Hottentot word. No sign of Moon worship, however, has been observed in the Kaffir, who selects a full moon for his festivities for the same reason that we choose it for a moonlight walk round the Kloof.

Two words are most commonly applied by the Bantu to the Moon of which it may be said, speaking roughly, that one is in use on the West and one on the East Coast.

The Zulu for moonlight is *unyezi*, probably from an Archaic form *inkwezi* (see Bleek), and we find this word applied to the Moon among the following tribes on the East Coast :

Wa Swaheli	...	...	}	Mwezi
Wa Nyamwezi†	...	...		
Ma Kwa	...	...		
Tetté and Sena Tribes	...	...		
Wa Ganda	...	...		
Wajiji ...	...	...	...	Ukwezi
Wa Chaga	...	...	...	Mwere
Wa Sambala	...	...	...	Muezi
Wa Pokomo	...	...	...	Muezi
Nyassa Tribes	...	...	...	Mwezi.

And on the South-west :

Ora Herero	...	...	}	Omueze
Ora Ambo	...	...		
Ba Rotse	...	...	...	Moezi
Angola ...	...	...	..	Mbeshé
Lubalo, Kisama, &c.	...	...	...	Mbeshi.

But among the greater number of West Coast tribes it is replaced by another word as follows :

Isubu ...	...	...	}	Ngonde
Diwala ...	...	...		

\* I have only come across it in the two following Lake Tribes: Watuta, *inyanga*; Ma Nyuema, *mwango*.

† Wa Nyamwezi, people of Moon land or of the Moon badge. They wear an ivory crescent moon attached to the neck.

Ngoten ...	...	..	}	Ngon
Melon ...	...	...		
Dikele ...	...	...	...	Ngondie
Babenda...	...	...	}	Ngonda
Basunda...	...	...		
Eshi Kongo	...	...	...	Ngondi.

The forms *mwezi*, *unyezi*, &c., are according to Döhue connected with a root *izi*, meaning shining particles.

The various words in use in Kaffir for Star seem to bear the same origin.

Thus star in Xosa is *inkwenkwezi*; in Zulu it is *inkwezi*; while the Xosa for morning star is *ikwezi*, all apparently connected with the Zulu and Xosa *ikwezikwezi*, a glittering substance.

Again we have the Zulu and Xosa *in-Kanyezi*, a fire-fly or star, which seems compounded of *izi* above-mentioned and *nku-kanya*, to "shine or emit light."

A similar word, similarly derived, is the Zulu *ucwazibe*, evening star, which may be compared with *ubu-Cwazicwazi*, brightness.

Another form of *ucwazibe* seems to be the Zulu *icazibe*, evening star, represented in Xosa by *icanziwe*.\* Here *zibe* or *ziwe* seems to be akin to *umsebe*, a ray of light or spreading ray; compare *uku-ziba*, to separate.

Another word of different origin applied by the ama Zulu to the evening star is *isi-celankobe*, from *cela*, meaning beggar, and *inkobe*, corn. But why this star should be called "a beggar for corn" is not apparent.

The root *izi* glitter is seen in *nyenyezi* of the Tette and Sena tribes, *inyeleti* at Lourenço Marques, *nyuladi* at Inhambane, and *menneri* at Quillimane, all with the meaning of star.

In Setshuana stars are called *linaleri*, diminutive *linaletsane*.

Among the ma-Koa they are called *itotwa*, among the wa Swahili, *nyota*.

In otyi-Herero the word for star is *omyose*, and seems to be connected with *nyosa*, "to burn." It is probably the same word as *nyota* of the Swahili just mentioned. A fixed star is *o'nyose ondikame*; *zikama* meaning "to be fixed"; and a planet is *onyose ondiange*, the latter word from *rianga*, "to rove about." The Morning Star is called *o'hingoutuku*, or "chaser of night," or

\* Used to signify Orion by the translators of the Kaffir bible.



*okanumaihi*, "little drinker of sweet milk," on account of its appearance at milking time.

In Kongo a star is called *ntetembwa*, a term possibly connected, as in Zulu and Xosa, with a word meaning [to sparkle or glitter, viz.: *tentena*; and a planet is called *nkazi a ngonde*, the wife of the moon. In Bunda (Angola) a planet is *chi-tetembuka*.

The eshi-Kongo generally call a constellation *ebunda dia ntetembwa*, or "gathering of stars." They have a curious name for the three Stars in the Belt of Orion, namely *mbwe yo nshiji yo nkongwambwa*, or "the dog, the palm rat and the chief huntsman."

In Kafir, Orion's belt is simply *amaroza*, "a line of stars," primarily "a row of beads."

It will be noticed that on the West Coast among the ova-Herero, the eshi-Kongo and the Angolese a distinction is made between fixed stars and planets.

Although generally viewing the heavens with indifference, many Bantu tribes make an exception in favour of the beautiful star cluster around which so many northern legends have gathered.

Miss Clerke tells us that in Arabic the Pleiads are called *Eth Thuraiyâ*, from *therwa*, copious, abundant, because many are gathered in a small space; and that the idea of family or groups is also contained in the Biblical *Kimah*. "Analogy," she says, "then almost irresistibly points to the interpretation of the Greek Pleiads by *pleiônis*, many, or *pleiós*, full, giving to the term in either case the obvious signification of cluster."

We have seen that "cluster" is one of the meanings attributed to the Nama *Khunuseti*; among the Bantu we find this meaning unmistakably evident in the Herero *oty'ose*. This word is a form of *o'nyose*, star, plural *ova nyose*, and means strictly no more than "starry," "appertaining to stars," "the place of stars." Hence its application among the ova-Herero to the Pleiad Star cluster.

In Kongo the word is *udundalunda*, a swarm, applied also to a swarm of bees. This closely resembles the Australian word *worru*, a bee's nest applied to the same asterism, and reminds us of the poet's "fire flies tangled in a silver braid."

The eshi-Kongo have, however, another word for the Pleiads *zu lunda emvula*, which seems to mean the "storehouse or gathering place of rain." (Cf Inhambane "rainy season" = *nange-nvula*.) This would appear to connect the Pleiads in the Kongo mind with the advent of the rainy season just as the "pluviæ Hyades" were so con-

nected in classic lore ; and it may be here mentioned that while rain is prevalent all the year around San Salvador, the heavy rains commence about the middle of October.

However this may be, we have evidence that the Eshi-Kongo regarded the movements of the Pleiads as betokening the succession of the seasons ; and this gives weight to that view which would associate the term *Khunuseti*, among the Namaqua, with the arrival of spring.

Stronger proof on this point may, however, be obtained from consulting the vocabularies of the Bantu languages of the South and East Branches.

In Xosa and Zulu the word for the Pleiads is *isilimela*, a term in Zulu bearing the additional signification of "the breaking-up time," i.e., "the ploughing time," and the beginning of spring. Closely connected with this word is the Zulu and Xosa *uku-limela* "to hoe, plough, or break up the land."

The Kafirs would seem therefore, at one time, to have marked the first appearance of the Pleiads as the signal for commencing ploughing operations and as the harbinger of spring.

It is not probable that they applied the term *isilimela* to the Pleiads recently, for their first spring rains and therefore their ploughing season usually commences on the frontier about the beginning of October, while Dr. Gill and Mr. Finlay have very kindly told me that at 32° S. Lat. the Pleiads would be seen rising just after sunset about November the 15th.

Probably therefore the name was first given some centuries ago, when our frontier tribes were in more northern latitudes, before they drove the Hottentots from the banks of the Bashee and Kei.

Perhaps also this word was formed before the South-east Bantu split up into the tribes as we now know them. For the Betshuana use almost exactly the same term for Pleiads, *selemela* and possibly their word for summer, *selemo*, is connected therewith. At Sena, Mozambique, and among the Makoa, *pa-ku-lima*, *ilimue*, *ulima* all have the sense of ploughing or cultivation, but the writer is not aware whether any form of this word is applied by these tribes to the Pleiads.

Among the Wa Swaheli this is the case ; the Pleiads being in Ki Swaheli *Kilimia* ; *Kilimo* meaning cultivation or planted crops and *Kulimo*, to hoe or cultivate.