



The Sacred City of the Ethiopians by J. Theodore Bent

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his interesting work on the Wild Hill Races of India (which I have since read) mentions a similar usage among the Tipperalis of that country. Among the Woolwa words terminating in "*was*" would appear to indicate a stream of water, since the tributary streams are known as the *Rusewass*, *Cooringwas*, *Billwas*, &c.

The Woolwa do not appear to be at war with any of the other tribes, not even with the wild Cookra to the north, nor the Rama to the southward.

They have the pleasant custom, common to riverine tribes, of leaving their permanent houses during the dry season and camping out amongst the rocks and boulders or sand-banks in the bed of the fallen streams. At the time I knew them the names of their largest villages on the Blewfields River, were Kaka on the upper river, Woukee, and Moroding, situate on the high banks below the falls of the same names, and on the lower river, Kissalala and a settlement beyond a hill called Assan-uka.

"The Sacred City of the Ethiopians." By J. Theodore Bent, F.S.A., F.R.G.S. Mr. Bent's explorations in Mashonaland made him desirous to investigate the traces of early civilisation in countries which had undoubtedly been under Sabæan or Arabian influence, hoping to find buildings or inscriptions which would help to elucidate the mystery surrounding the builders of Zimbabwe.

His first investigations were devoted to Abyssinia (Ethiopia), where many ancient inscriptions and important ruins were known to exist. The unsettled state of the country considerably interfered with Mr. Bent's explorations and subjected him and his brave wife to great peril; nevertheless they succeeded in making many important archæological discoveries.

Chief among these are the Sabæan inscriptions, which, says Dr. Heinrich Müller, "are of the highest historic interest, because they testify by their presence there, to the connection between the peoples of South Arabia and of Abyssinia which is set forth in the list of peoples in the tenth chapter of Genesis; and they also testify to the migration into Ethiopia of the Sabæans, a fact which Greek authors allude to."

Professor Müller gives the date of the earliest of these inscriptions as about the seventh or eighth century B.C., whilst the latest appears to belong to the sixth century of our era.

The older inscriptions were found at Yeha, which Mr. Bent identifies with Ava, a city built by Sabæan colonists, and which apparently fell into decay after the building of Aksum the "Sacred City of the Ethiopians."

These inscriptions are unfortunately very fragmentary, having been found built into the walls of more modern buildings; but Yeha contains also ruins of great importance, the principal being a fine building called by Mr. Bent a Sabæan temple. It is a square of masonry, built of large stones without cement and without

windows. It was probably about 50 feet in height originally; the entrance was on the west side, and before the gateway stand two tall monoliths with altars at the base, one of which has a circular disk engraved upon it, Mr. Bent thinks, for receiving the blood of slaughtered victims, but for this it does not seem well fitted.

This ancient temple stands within what is now a sacred enclosure, whilst a Christian church, built out of the ruins, in the walls of which are inserted several fragments of Sabæan inscriptions, occupies the centre of the older buildings. About 300 yards from this temple are remains of what appears to have been a cyclopean building, and further explorations will perhaps yield very important results for this city, if *Ava* would appear to have been the capital of the Troglodytes, and it is at least curious that even to the present day, the inhabitants resort to caves in the mountains, driving their cattle thither to prevent their falling into the hands of an enemy. An exploration of these caves also would doubtless yield very interesting results.

The Christian legends of Yeha make it the home of Queen Candace, and it seems to be remarkable not only for its architectural remains but for the fertility of the soil, and traces of ancient terraced agriculture and irrigation works.

"When *Ava* (Yeha) was destroyed," says Mr. Bent, "the *arcana* of the religion of the Ethiopians and the capital of the kingdom was transferred to Aksum."

This city, which has been the "Sacred City of the Ethiopians" since the very earliest days of Abyssinian Christianity, was "the greatest city and the capital of all Ethiopia," at least two centuries before Christ, and Mr. Bent finds beneath the Christian church traces of an ancient sun-temple architecturally similar to that at Yeha; but the most remarkable of the archæological remains at Aksum are undoubtedly the immense monoliths, which Mr. Bent estimates at fifty in number, some rough and unhewn, others finely shaped and elaborately ornamented.

Some of the decorations on the obelisks Mr. Bent compares with those on tombs in Cilicia and Lycia, and believes that the ornamentation, which seems to simulate doors and windows, beams and pillars, represents Bethel's "terminating in the firmament in which the Sabæan sun-god is supposed to reside." At the foot of many of these obelisks are altars with cups or ring marks, meant as Mr. Bent supposes, to receive the blood of victims sacrificed to the sun-god, for he says such altars were common in Mithraic worship, and he thinks that those of Aksum belong to the period of the colossal architecture of Baalbec, tracing in them a Greco-Egyptian origin; whilst high up a steep hill, carved on a granite boulder, is a fine representation of a lioness with a sun symbol, pointing perhaps to Persia.

It seems a thousand pities that Mr. Bent was prevented from continuing his researches at Aksum, where besides these most interesting obelisks, he saw miles of ruined buildings of considerable size with stone foundations, temples, palaces, and

probably tombs, doubtless hiding relics of immense archæological interest.

Of the curious Christian legends and antiquities we have not room to write, but they are tolerably well known, and the chief interest for archæologists and anthropologists lies in the traces apparent of long continued intercourse in early prehistoric times between this country and Arabia on the one hand, and Egypt and Greece on the other. There seems every reason to believe that an extensive commerce was carried on for ages by sea with Arabia, that an Arabian colony established itself at a very early date in Ethiopia, and at a later period would appear from the inscriptions to have conquered a portion of Arabia. This which is related by early historians, is confirmed by Mr. Bent's researches, which bring monumental records to the aid of history. The Græco-Egyptian intercourse is seen in bilingual inscriptions, Hinngaritic and Greek as well as in various pillars found in ruins which can be traced from Adulis on the coast to Aksum, and Mr. Bent was fortunate in tracing the old trade route which was apparently carried over the plateau of Kohaild, where he found the extensive and very interesting ruins of Koloe, the chief feature of which is a great dam, the wall 219 feet in length, containing large sluice gates. The masonry of this dam is described as resembling the Hellenic of the best period, and from it and the columns before referred to, with other architectural peculiarities, it seems probable that an influence from Asia Minor was at work here. This Mr. Bent refers to the time of Ptolemy III, but the Abyssinian jewellery, bearing as it does, so strong a resemblance to that discovered by Schliemann at Hissarlik, one head-dress in silver particularly (in the British Museum) being almost identical with that in gold from Troy, seems to point to an earlier date for the asserted influence. Doubtless excavations at Adulis and at Koloe would yield most important relics, and it is to be hoped they may soon be undertaken.

Although Mr. Bent found no buildings resembling Zimbabwe he saw much to remind him of Mashonaland in the flora, in the legends of the Queen of Sheba, and in the manners and customs of the people, particularly in their mode of working iron, and in a curious game played with pebbles in holes on a board, and which he says is found wherever Arabian influence has extended, but as it is played on the West coast of Africa and in India, as well as in Abyssinia and Mashonaland, this may require further investigation.

The Abyssinians appear, according to Dr. Garson, who has added a chapter on their physical characteristics, to be more nearly allied to the Semites than the negroes, although there are great variations among the tribes, some exhibiting marked negro affinities, whilst the northern tribes are termed Hinngaritic, and seem to bear out the historic account of their Arabian origin.

A. W. B.