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"Where does the Hamite belong?"

Birgitta Farelus

The intention of this paper is to show that the concept of the Hamite belongs to a Euro-centric historiography about Africa. Although the Hamitic terminology in African historical writings was abolished from respectable use over twenty-five years ago, it seems that the image of the Hamite is still lingering on in African scholarship. Unless we make an attempt to liberate ourselves from the projection of European dominant mentality as expressed in the creation of the Hamite, it is difficult to break ground and gain new knowledge and deeper understanding of Interlacustrine sacral kingship from the perspective of the peoples concerned.

In 1861 the British scientists Speke and Grant visited King Rumanyika in Karagwe. They came in search of the source of the Nile. To enter the kingdom of Buganda they had to go via Karagwe, because King Rumanyika served as "gate-keeper" (Speke 1863 and 1906:112) to King Mutesa of Buganda. Speke and his friend Grant became very impressed by Rumanyika, whom they found so civilized that they thought he could not possibly be an African. In line with the racist thinking of his day, Speke declared the Karagwe king to be of Caucasoid, Hamitic stock of Ethiopian origin, a superior race who were believed to have conquered the "Negro" Africans, and to whom the latter were thought to owe every trait of decent civilization. The following well known statement by Seligman most clearly expresses these ideas:

Apart from relatively late Semitic influence...the civilizations of Africa are the civilizations of the Hamites... The incoming Hamites were pastoral "Europeans"—arriving wave after wave—better armed as well as quicker witted than the dark agricultural Negroes (Seligman 1930:96).

Edith Sanders has written a historical overview of the ideology behind the so-called Hamitic hypothesis and has found that there was a previously elaborate Hamitic theory in which the Hamites were believed to be Negroes. She writes:

It becomes clear then that the hypothesis is symptomatic of the nature of race relations, that it has changed its content if not its nomenclature through time, and that it has become a problem of epistemology (Sanders 1969:521).

The early Hamitic hypothesis

In the Old Testament (Genesis 9:18-27) we read about the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham and Japhet (Ham was the father of Canaan). One day Noah had enjoyed a bit too much of the wine he had produced in his wineyard, and Ham found him lying uncovered in his tent and told his brothers about it. Because Ham had put his father to shame in this way, his son Canaan was cursed to be the servant of his father's brothers:

*Cursed be Canaan!
The lowest of slaves
will he be to his brothers.
He also said,
Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem!
May Canaan be the slave of Shem.
May God extend the territory of Japhet;
may Japhet live in the tents of Shem,
and may Canaan be his slave.*

Shem, Ham and Japhet are depicted in the Bible as the ancestors of mankind. Genesis chapter ten gives the table of the nations that were born from their Semitic progenitor. Among those descendants we find the Hamites, and one of Ham's sons is Cush (verse 6).

The Old Testament expresses Jewish culture and beliefs. Naturally, from the point of view of the Jews themselves, their land and people were at the centre of the world. Therefore they wanted to connect the names of the peoples they knew at that time to themselves, to make them part of their own Jewish genealogy. As pointed out by Sanders (1969), however, there is nothing in the Bible that indicates racial differences be-

tween the ancestors of mankind. The ideology of racism would emerge later as a device to justify the slave-trade.

Sanders explains how early Jewish traditions from the sixth century A.D. (*ibid.* 521–522)¹ identified the descendants of Ham with Negroes, who were cursed by being black and depicted as abominable creatures, a notion which persisted in sources from the Middle Ages. In fanciful interpretations of the Genesis stories by mediaeval writers the Negro-Hamite is described as prone to "theft and fornication". These interpretations were readily borrowed by Christians of that time, who had run short of cheap manual labour because of the Plague (*ibid.* 524)². The Negro-Hamite was predestined by the Almighty to be the slave and servant of his brothers, so on that basis nobody saw anything wrong in the reinstatement of slavery. Thus this early version of the Hamitic hypothesis was to provide a suitable justification for the exploitation of the Negro for economic gain during centuries to come.

Edith Sanders goes on to explain how the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century brought new ways of looking at the nature of man and his place in the world. An issue of scientific inquiry that came to engage scholars was the Negro's place in nature. The question at stake in this debate was whether there was unity of mankind, *monogenism*, or whether the races had emerged through separate creation or *polygenism*. Up to then the Negro-Hamite had at least been regarded as a brother in the family of humanity, but now the idea of polygenism degraded him to the state of "a separate creation, subhuman in character" (*ibid.* 524)³.

Then came Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 that was to lead to new discoveries and the founding of the science of Egyptology, achievements that would "revolutionize history's view of the Egyptian and lay the basis for a new Hamitic myth" (*ibid.* 524–525).

Reports by Napoleon's scientists could not hide the facts that they had found evi-

dence of a great ancient Egyptian civilization which they thought must have been created by a Negroid population. The idea that this civilization accomplished by Black people could be older than that of the Greeks and Romans, the cradle of our Western culture, was contradictory to those who believed in the inferiority of the Negro-Hamite. Theologians of the day asked themselves: "If the Negro was a descendant of Ham, and Ham was cursed, how could he be the creator of a great civilization?" (*ibid.* 526)⁴.

So they reread the Genesis stories and came to the conclusion that it was after all only Canaan who was cursed, while the rest of the progeny of Ham went on to prosper. Sanders' survey of Biblical dictionaries of that period revealed that around the middle of last century theologians had agreed that the curse of Noah was only directed against Canaan and that "all southern nations derive from Ham" (*ibid.* 527)⁵.

At the same time scientists in Europe and America had embarked on the task to prove scientifically that the Egyptian was of Caucasian race, far removed from the inferior Negro. Dr Morton's comparative study of human crania not only led him to believe that the Egyptian osteological formation was Caucasian and that it was a race indigenous to the Nile Valley, but also to "postulate fixity of species, considering it a primordial organic form, permanent through time". (*ibid.* 527–528)⁶

The Hamitic hypothesis as we know it today

It was with such racist ideas in their minds about Africans that Speke and Grant went to "discover" the source of the Nile, as if it had not been seen by any human beings before them! They were received by King Rumanyika of Karagwe with good African hospitality. The king answered well to their expectations of the civilized Hamite:

The first greetings of the king, delivered in good Kiswahili, were warm and affecting, and in an instant we both felt and saw we were in the company of men

who were as unlike as they could be to the common order of the natives of the surrounding districts. They had fine oval faces, large eyes, and high noses, denoting the best blood of Abyssinia. (Speke 1863 and 1906)

These were the kind of reports that were to become seminal to the advance of the Hamitic hypothesis as we know it today. As pointed out by Sutton, a wide range of phenomena pertaining to African peoples have been explained as the result of "migrants and cultural diffusion emanating from the north". The Hamite was made responsible for a diversity of achievements such as the founding of the interlacustrine kingdoms, and "somewhat contradictorily, the acephalous political systems of the so-called "Nilo-Hamites". Not only were the "irrigation, terracing and other intensive agricultural methods practised in several parts of the East African Highlands" attributed to Hamitic influences, but also "the independent pastoralism of the Masai". Other remarkable traits, such as the coming of iron-working, and numerous archeological remains "ranging from ditched encampments and "ancient roads" to stone walls and piles, were also believed to have been accomplished by the Hamites (Sutton 1970).

The popular stereotype of the Hamite, however, was to be that of the proud pastoralist as he "watches his herds and commands the plains with his spear", an image that had "won a romantic admiration from some European observers" (Sutton 1973:96). In short, the Hamite was depicted as the noble pastoralist culture-bearer of Caucasoid origin, who had brought light to the "savage" African (cf. Sutton 1970:128), a theory that fitted well into the framework of justification for the expanding colonial enterprise. It was thought that just as every sign of civilization in Black Africa was to be attributed to influences of "light-skinned" Hamites, no development could take place without the interference of "superior races". Under cover of what were believed to be "civilizing missions", the European scramble for Africa set off. One of the economic gains that would be achieved in the process was

the extraction of cheap raw materials to satisfy industries at home.

Subsequent scholarship dealing with African topics would be shaped more or less consciously within the context of this general current of racist ideas. Colonial administrators and anthropologists like J.H. Driberg in 1929 studied the "savage" to find out how "he really is". On the first page of his book (Driberg 1929) he puts the following question: "Are savages capable of assimilating white culture?" The answer would depend upon "whether their mentality is the same as ours". The concern to find out as much as possible about these so-called "savages" had not arisen out of a genuine interest in them for their own sake, but rather as a means to the end of being able to "govern them to their best advantage and our own" (emphasis mine) (*ibid.* 76).

If indeed the races had been created separately, as postulated in polygenist theories, then the "mentality of the savages" could not have been the same as "ours". In accordance with this kind of logic every race was endowed with its own language (Sanders 1969:526). Meinhof studied "the Hamitic languages" under the following general assumption:

Apparently in the course of history it has repeatedly happened that the Hamitic peoples have subjugated and governed as a ruling people (German original: Herrenvolk) dark pigmented Negroes who spoke languages different from that of the Hamites (Meinhof 1912).

Every language in Africa that could demonstrate certain specific traits as proof of higher development like "wealth of vocabulary, sonorous diction, delicate shade of meaning" (Greenberg 1966:24)⁷, or "grammatical gender" (*ibid.* 42) was classified as Hamitic. This was so, especially if the mode of subsistence of the speakers of those tongues pastoral and of light-skinned complexion or among the "more European-looking" or "less African" of Africans (Sutton 1970:128).

The cultural chauvinism inherent in the ideology of the Hamitic hypothesis was to have epistemological repercussions on the treatment of African History of Religion.

Accordingly, every sign of civilisation in Africa was believed to have originated outside its African context.

African sacral kingship was naturally regarded by Seligman as a result of the diffusion of the Hamitic culture-bearers from Egypt (Seligman 1933). In Sweden the comparative religionist Tor Irstam defended his dissertation entitled "Studies in the institutions of sacral kingship in Africa: the king of Ganda." He took great pains to describe and map out every trait of sacral kingship in Africa. Although he found all these examples of kingship rituals in African soil, he could, in the spirit of his time, make the following statement: "...it should be pointed out that a myth upon which a certain rite is founded is as a rule not to be found in Africa" (Irstam 1954:193).

Another Swede, a missionary in the then Rhodesia, Sigward von Sicard, wrote an elaborate study on "Ngoma Lungundu" in 1952. The sacred royal drum of the Lemba people was separated from the less "pure" African drum because it was regarded as having shared Semitic origin and roots with the Ethiopian Arc. To prove his point Sicard cited hundreds of examples from the Bible. The similarities between the concept of the Lemba sacred drum and the Old Testament Arc of the Covenant are demonstrated in detail (von Sicard 1952).

Jerusalem is regarded as the self-evident religious centre of the world in accordance with the paradigm of the Euro-centric world-view.

As a matter of course Europe is the centre of the world for the European. Through centuries Europe had developed the image of the Hamite, first as representing the cursed "Negro" race of Ham. Later, when Napoleon's scientists threatened the superiority of the white race by reports of a possible "Negro" origin of Egyptian civilization, the Hamitic theory had to take a new twist. The thought that the cradle of European culture of Greece and Rome could have been ultimately nourished by a Negroid race in Egypt seemed offending to European self-consciousness. That is why it had to be

proved that the Egyptians were of a Caucasoid stock, capable of creating great civilizations. As the Biblical progenitor of southern nations, Ham became elevated to the same level as the European. Canaan was left alone to carry the burden of Noah's curse.

Such were the preconceived ideas of Speke and Grant, when they met king Rumanyika in Karagwe. In the middle of the unknown land of Africa, considered to be full of frightening "savages", they found a brother, who even shook hands with them "in true English style" (Speke 1963:203), eager to show them his beautiful country. So they discovered their imagined Hamite who proved to be a true human being. As he was "one of us", there was no doubt that he belonged to the same Caucasoid race. Inherent in the ideology of Eurocentricism was the need to dominate the world. Through the creation of the Hamite, Europe could link Africa to itself.

Colonial rule in East Africa had been implemented through kings and local chiefs. In for example Ankole, Uganda, the British had created a ruling power clique, who were basically drawn from the "superior" class of the pastoral Bahima (Muvumba 1982). According to their Hamitic ideology of racist thinking, the Bahima conquerors from outside were the ones who were regarded as "quicker witted" than the "subservient" class of indigenous Bairu agriculturalists. Therefore they became worthy allies and brothers of the colonialists in their "civilising mission" to develop the "natives". The British administration made the kings their equals by equipping them with cars and giving them access to the places where they used to drink their whisky (Carlson 1989). It is a well known fact in Uganda, that the British used agents from the Baganda ethnic group to carry out their orders all over the country, thus enhancing tribal antagonisms. These were manifestations of the British divide and rule policy, which in the final analysis was inspired by the Hamitic theory.

Assertionist reactions

The Euro-centric worldview was to more or less consciously continue to affect the way both African and European scholars wrote about African history and religion for many years to come. It is no exaggeration to say that the shadow of the Hamite is still lingering on in lecture rooms of both European and African universities.

Naturally, the African reaction against Euro-centric cultural chauvinism was strong and the pendulum struck in the other extreme. African scholars did not hesitate to defend "Mother Africa". The Afro-American intellectual and clergyman E.W. Blyden was the pioneer of "the modern Negro and African renaissance" (Diagne 1979:143). As early as the nineteenth century he developed the theory that a Negro Egypt was the birthplace of civilisation (*ibid.*135). This theme is treated scientifically in a multidisciplinary manner by Cheikh Anta Diop from Senegal, who sees pharaonic Egypt as a mouthpiece of the ancient African cultural heritage (Diop 1955). The theory he wanted to establish in the fifties has been formulated like this by Wamba-dia-Wamba:

Ancient Black Africans are asserted in the dissertation to be the ultimate inaugural foundation of the World civilisation in which the Greek contribution is only one among the successive links of the civilisational chain (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1989:18).

Diop's scholarly achievement can be seen as a protracted struggle because he had to write another two dissertations until the jury in Paris finally granted him his Ph.D. The work of this "great African savant" to enhance African culture was part of the emerging African nationalist movements in their aspirations to reconquer "African man's optimum space". In the 1920s and 1930s French-speaking African intellectuals engaged themselves in the debate to defend their culture and ethnicity under labels of "Cri Nègre" and "Negritude". In America there emerged the pan-Negro movement at that time. The Germanic and Scandinavian *Kulturkreise* trends were contemporary movements for the enhancement of national cultures, but they did not have

such a pronounced connotation of skin-colour. The ethnic theme naturally became important within the framework of struggle against racist colonial hegemony (Diagne 1979).

In what seems to be an obsession with colour and race, Diop initiated the study of the degree of melanine in the skin of Egyptian mummies, to prove that they were Black Africans (Diop, n.d.:35). Meinhof had earlier pictorially represented the human types in Africa who were supposed to have been of Hamitic, Caucasoid race, and compared them to their believed counterparts in Egypt. Among the former were pictures of pastoral Bahima (Batutsi) from Mpororo and Rwanda compared to Ramses II and Nefertite (Meinhof 1912, table I-XI). Now Diop similarly chose iconographic evidence to prove his point that they were all of Negro-African extraction. Ramses II is in Diop's Plate I.17 compared to a modern Mututsi and they both have identical African hairstyles (Diop 1981). This is to say that the debate was dependent on the general theoretical framework and methodology that was coined by European racist prejudices.

Besides the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiongo, there is only one nationalist in East Africa, namely the Ugandan poet and scholar, Okot p'Bitek. In his work *African religions in Western scholarship* he analyzed how this dependency syndrome lingered on in the work of, for example John Mbiti, whom he accused of "smuggling" Christian characteristics into African religions. This was to make them look more respectable in the eyes of the Western audience, as if approval from the "Big Brother" was necessary (p'Bitek 1970).

With this contradiction of Euro-centric dependency in the back of their minds, scholars of the independent nations of the sixties defended their African identity. Consequently, as a reaction against the previous tendency to stress external influences, there was a tendency to emphasize only internal factors. The African peoples south of the Sahara defended their own civi-

lisation as having evolved independently and in proud isolation.

It is in the light of this general historiographical framework that we should approach current literature about the role of the Bachwezi, which is essential to an understanding of interlacustrine history of religion. The court-centred oral traditional histories in present day western Uganda are dominated by the short-lived Bachwezi dynasty, accredited to be the founders of the Bunyoro-Kitara empire. Oral traditions connect this dynasty to the most famous archaeological remains in Uganda, the earthworks of *Bigo bya Mugenyi* ("the cattle enclosure of the Stranger") (Oliver 1953), recently dated to around 1100 A.D (Reid 1991). When the Bachwezi dynasty succumbed to internal and external problems the last of their rulers, Wamara, later change to dominate the spirit possession cult in large areas of the Great Lakes' region (cf. Farelius 1978; 1989). Bachwezi traditions, especially remembered by their pastoral Bahima followers, fitted well into the stereotype of the Hamitic light-skinned, conquering empire-builder from the north.

In reaction to the Hamitic myth there came a tendency to "indigenize" the Bachwezi and their Bahima followers. The pastoralist "Hamitic" culture-bearers were, in the case of the Bahima in Nkore, declared to be of indigenous Bantu origin (Karugire 1971).

The American archeologist Peter Schmidt uses structuralist theories developed in the context of the Buhaya kingdoms to show that the Bachwezi were purely spiritual beings connected to Early Iron Ages sites over 2000 years ago. In Bachwezi or Embandwa spirit possession cults these spirits voiced the opposition of the oppressed against the ruling dynasties (Schmidt 1978).

Iris Berger also brings up the relevant theme of resistance to political oppression in her research about the Bachwezi, but comes to the conclusion that the Bachwezi may have been identical to the "deep-black Wichwezi paria of wandering gypsies" that early European travellers like Emin Pasha

had observed as remnants of an indigenous population. Berger reviews the opinion of Wrigley, who was the first to suggest that the Bachwezi should be interpreted as spirits not connected to a human dynasty:

...he may be correct in denying the existence of a historical human dynasty called Abacwezi, since their reputation as historical figures developed as a result of European misinterpretations of African statements that happened to reinforce erroneous colonial theories of the African.

She continues to explain how these misconceptions arose, when the Africans who first saw the Europeans arriving thought that they were the Abachwezi who came back. The Europeans misunderstood these statements and took them as "evidence that the Abacwezi had been an ancient dynasty of light-skinned kings", when "the Africans undoubtedly were referring to the association of the colour white with the world of spirits" (Berger 1980:66-67).

It is the contention of the present researcher that these interpretations of the Bachwezi are not only symptomatic for the trend of reaction against the Hamitic myth, but also explanations that draw mainly on the historiography itself, from outside of the context of the people themselves. The matter for concern seems to be the assertion that the Bachwezi were not connected to any "light-skinned" conquering dynasty from the north that could be reminiscent of Hamitic racist theories. Therefore it seems that current scholarship is still fixed in an attitude of defence against the racist interpretations of the African past.

The abolition of Hamitic terminology

Already in 1966, however, the linguist Joseph Greenberg had succeeded in demonstrating that Hamitic terminology was inappropriate, because it had arisen out of an unfounded assumption that linguistic, physical and cultural traits go together when classifying languages.

Greenberg convincingly demonstrated the arbitrary shallowness of Meinhof's

method of using just sound or meaning for the comparison of resemblances, and showed that it is necessary to "involve both sound and meaning in specific forms". For example, you cannot concentrate only upon forms of meaning indicating sexgender and conclude that the language must therefore be Hamitic, without identifying corresponding phonetic similarities. By means of mass comparison Greenberg could show that the alleged Hamitic languages had more in common with the languages of peoples living in their geographical neighbourhood than with the other so-called Hamites that Meinhof had found scattered over Africa. Greenberg's third fundamental of method was the seemingly self-evident principle that "only linguistic evidence is relevant in drawing conclusions of classifications" (Greenberg 1966:1). Greenberg argues:

In the instance of the use of Hamite in Africa, we have an extension of a term, whose original application in a linguistic sense was never made precise, to a great physical variety of populations....As a matter of fact, even the linguistic use of the term Hamite should be abandoned. The Semitic languages do not occupy any special place in the total Hamito-Semitic complex. Their cultural importance and connection with our own historic past has led to a separate treatment which is not justifiable linguistically (ibid.50).

Greenberg suggests that the name Afroasiatic should be applied to the language family found both in Africa and Asia with the effect that "Hamitic could be entirely eliminated from use even as a linguistic term", (*ibid.*). He places four subgroups in the Afroasiatic language family, namely Semitic, Berber, Ancient Egyptian and Cushitic. It should be noted that all of these subgroups except the Semitic are found rooted only in African soil.

As for the correlation of pastoralism with so-called Hamites he was able to demonstrate that those peoples who had been believed to speak Hamitic languages in Africa were highly heterogenous and not only confined to pastoral activities. Therefore "the stereotype of the pastoral conquering Hamite must be abandoned" (*ibid.*51).

The importance of the southern Cushites in the interlacustrine region

Thus having cleared the Hamite from serious scholarly writings about Africa, historians ventured into new ways and methods to deal with the early history of the continent.

The problem of contacts between Ethiopians and East Africans was dealt with by Christopher Ehret, UCLA, who introduced methods of historical linguistics and loanword analysis to show direct interaction between oral societies in the past (Ehret 1974). His student, David Schoenbrun, went further and compared pollen analysis (palynology), historical linguistic methods and archaeological findings (Schoenbrun 1990).

In the works of the afore mentioned scholars the Southern Cushites figure prominently in the early history of the region. They were stone-tool using pastoralists connected to early farming and herding. They are estimated to have spread over Africa from the southern fringes of Ethiopia between 5000 and 3000 years ago (Ambrose 1982:113). According to Schoenbrun their system of production was more predominantly pastoral and "centered on the breeding, herding, milking and bleeding of cattle" (Schoenbrun 1990:173-174). A branch of Southern Cushitic-speakers, the *Tale* Southern Cushites, are assumed to have populated parts of north-western Tanzania and the southern fringes of Lake Victoria before at least 500 B.C., that is *before* the Bantu-speakers arrived (*ibid.* see Map 3, p. 185). Schoenbrun dates the latter to the period just after 500 B.C.

The *Tale* Southern Cushites have left remnants or loan-words in the language of their successors on the interlacustrine scene, the Western Lacustrine Bantu-speakers. The most important loanword is *-tale* or *-tala* = "lion", but *-tama* = "sheep" and *-sagama* = "blood" (Ehret 1974:83), also disclose religious and cultural interactions from the past.

When writing about the Bachwezi in 1978 (Farelius 1978), I studied the mythology

about the fall of the last Muchwezi king Wamara, who lost his beloved white cow, *kitare*, and therefore committed suicide (see Césard). In another myth, the one about the *Nyamushagi* woman, that I had recorded myself in Karagwe 1975, the white cow of *kitare* with its bull-calf *rutare* figure as the ultimate symbols of kingship⁸. I had been told that after death the spirits of the kings in Karagwe were believed to be incarnated in the shape of a lion, *entare*⁹, and one dynastic name was *ntare* = "the Lion". In short, there emerged a pattern around the concepts of the white cow, the white bull-calf and the lion, all of them emanating from the root *-tare* = "lion", which we have seen is a Southern Cushitic loanword in Western Lacustrine Bantu. This *-tare* pattern appeared to be connected to sacral kingship myths, beliefs and rituals in Karagwe and the adjacent interlacustrine kingdoms, according to the oral and written sources available to me at that time.

In 1991/92 I got the opportunity to follow up these findings when doing fieldwork in the Kagera region of north-western Tanzania and in western Uganda for a Ph.D. project entitled *Karagwe kingship mythology and symbolism in Nile Valley perspective*¹⁰. The material gathered from knowledgeable elders in parts of north-western Tanzania and south-western Uganda tends to confirm the hypothesis about the *-tare* pattern of pastoral kingship symbolism related to the white cow, the white bull-calf and the lion.

Furthermore, through the name of *Nyamushagi* from the myth I recorded in Karagwe, Tanzania, eighteen years ago, I managed to trace the agricultural, originally Bantu-speaking clan of the Bayangwe in Igara, Bushenyi district, Uganda, who had been in charge of all the ancient kingship rituals connected to the *-tare* pattern of symbolism in the old kingdom of Nkore. They bear the same symbolic representations of totems as the Bahinda kings in Karagwe and Nkore.¹¹

The bulk of the evidence accounted for in the paper *Interlacustrine dynasties in religious-historical perspective* (Farelius 1992) shows

that the agriculturalist, iron-working of the monkey totem clan of the Bayangwe could have developed their pastoral kingship rituals through contact with the Southern Cushites, who were gradually absorbed by Bantu-speakers. We surmise a complex structure of early interactions, whereby the technically superior iron-working Bantu-speakers created a powerbase, underpinned by the prestigious pastoral kingship ideology (*ibid.*45).

This is likely to have happened about two thousand years ago, which means that if the Bachwezi empire-builders arrived around 1100 A.D., they would have found an advanced institution of pastoral sacral kingship in operation. Later traditions naturally depict the Bachwezi as the founders, not only of the Bunyoro-Kitara empire, but also of the very institution of kingship. Such was the nature of their dominance on all levels, in the secular as well as spiritual domains. The succeeding dynasty of the Bahinda are accepted by most scholars as having belonged to migrating Bahima groups of intensive pastoralists. According to the conclusion of the present researcher the Bahinda managed to get adopted into the indigenous clan of the Bayangwe agriculturalists (cf. Mushanga 1970), who probably welcomed them as worthy successors in order to maintain the ancient pastoral kingship ideology they probably have practised since time immemorial (*ibid.*57).

Now it appears that African historians who have "spent years trying to slay the dragon of the Hamitic myth" find it "mildly embarrassing" to note the emerging recognition of Cushitic importance. However, the same scholars conclude:

Within East Africa, the "Hamites" had been described as bringing the civilized arts to a preexisting substratum of cultivators. In reality, the Cushites were among the prior populations who were absorbed and pushed aside, although they contributed institutions, words, ideas, and knowledge of the local environment that survived in the languages and cultures of those who supplanted them (Curtin *et al.* 1981:121).

Sanders, however, thought that Hamitic terminology was being replaced by a southern Cushitic one which was just another

...ion, albeit a subverted one, of the Hamitic myth (Sanders 1969:531). Similar notions are still expressed by some African historians, who do not like to hear about dominant pastoralist kingship ideologies. This is probably because it reminds them of the Hamitic hypothesis, created from racist European prejudices.

The afrocentric perspective

It is now high time that we sought to respect and understand African oral culture with its rich traditions and histories from within the linguistic and socio-economic contexts of the peoples concerned, rather than through theories shaped outside that context. It takes a conscious effort to banish once and for all the lingering shadow of the Hamite from the minds of the historians and social scientists who deal with African problems, as they are confined by the methods and terminology of Western scholarship.

Cheikh Anta Diop is the scholar who has paved the way to a deeper understanding of Africa in its totality. He insists "that the reality of Black Africa be seen through a scientific Afrocentric lens without mystification and naivety" (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1989:19). There is no need to defend anything just because it is African. What matters now is to try and find out what really happened without any bias.¹²

To Diop the division of Africa into areas north and south of the Sahara is elusive, because it cuts the sub-Saharan region off from its larger continental connection, seen in a deeper time perspective.

From 6000 years ago the rock-paintings in the Libyan desert of the Sahara bear witness of a flourishing pastoral culture (Mori 1965). The final wet phase of the Neolithic age ended about 4400 years ago (Mokthar 1981:3). When the Sahara dried up, people had to move in search of water and the Nile became a natural refuge in times of famine and drought.

...after 2400, the very drying up of the part of Africa between the 30th and 15th parallels north made the

Nile Valley the major route of communication between the continent's Mediterranean coast and what is now called Africa south of the Sahara. It was via the Nile Valley that raw materials, manufactured objects and, no doubt, ideas, moved from north to south and vice versa (*ibid.*:5).

Seen from within the African context, the Southern Cushites played the role of early mediators of pastoral culture from north to south. Inherent in the pastoral mode of subsistence is the tendency for domination, enhanced by the prestige and leisure afforded through the movable property of cattle. The dominant ideology of pastoral kingship, however, drew on images and symbols that are ultimately modelled after prototypes from a shared African environment.¹³

Notes

¹ She quotes here T. F. Grosset 1963, *Race, the history of an idea in America*, p.5.

² She gets here information from R. Graves & R. Patai 1964, *Hebrew myths*, p. 121.

³ She draws here from Voltaire, *The works of Voltaire: a contemporary version* modernized by W. J. Fleming 1901, New York; and Lord Kames 1780, *Sketches of the history of man*, Edinburgh, as examples of this group.

⁴ Sanders draws on the example of this trend of ideas written by Rev. M. Russel 1831, *View of Ancient and Modern Egypt*, New York.

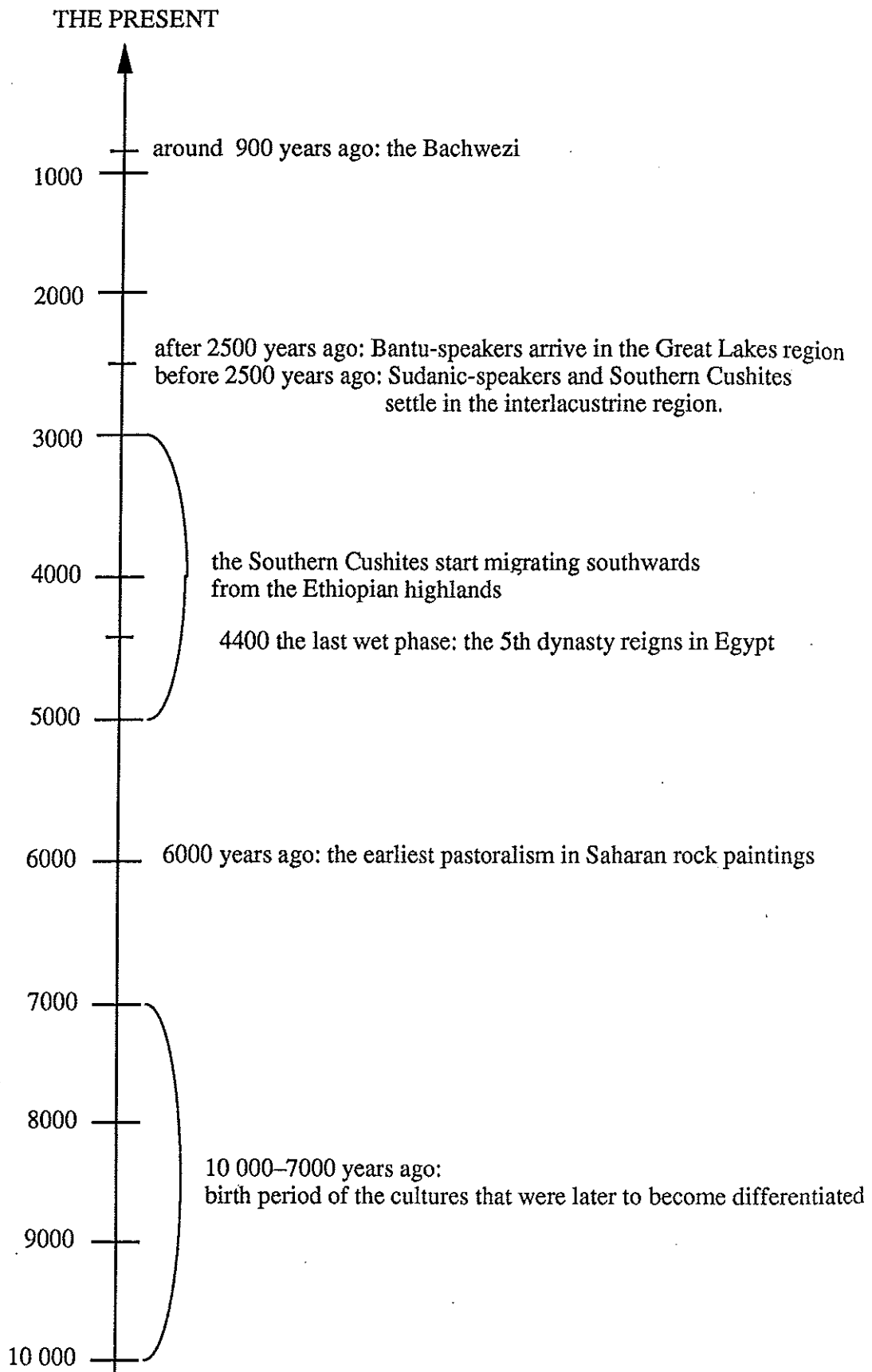
⁵ She mentions a long article under the name *Ham*, written by John Kitto, D. D., F. S. A., in *Encyclopedia of Biblical literature*, 1846.

⁶ Here she makes reference to the work of Samuel George Morton, American physician and professor in anatomy, author of several books on human crania, such as *Crania Americana* and *Crania Egyptica*, 1844. In this connection she also mentions the Swedish Dr. Retsius as one of the world reknown scientists in craniology.

⁷ He quotes here F. W. Taylor 1921, *A first grammar of the Adamawa dialect of the Fulani language*. Oxford.

⁸ Cf. Farelius 1989, where I made an attempt to compare the two versions of the *Nyamushagi* myth I recorded in Karagwe in 1975 with the myth about the fall of Wamara taken down by Father Césard from the Buhaya kingdom of Ihangiro in the twenties. The more authentic version of the myth was told twice by Mzee Matayo Rwemburara, about 70, Ahakishaka village, Karagwe. A migrant from Kigezi, Uganda, he had been an *enanga*-player at the court of the Karagwe king Rumanyika. (*Enanga* is a 6 to 8-string trough zither. A wide range of oral literature genres are performed to or associated with the *enanga* zither.)

Figure 1. *The time periods mentioned in the text*



It was Mzee Matayo's version that made reference to the white cow of *kitare* giving suck to its bull-calf *rutare*. (*Leeba ente ya Kitare, neyonkya enumi yayo ni Rutare*)

9 Information from Mzee Matayo in 1975.

10 Research proposal written within the context of Interlacustrine Regional Research Centre, IRREC, submitted to SAREC in January 1991. I am most grateful to SAREC and my IRREC colleagues for their invaluable help in writing the proposal and to for having funded this project.

11 Interview with the clan elder of the Abagoboka branch of the *bayangwe* clan of the *enkende* (monkey) totem, Mzee Bwirizayo, 30/3 1992 in his home in Kibaare, Igara, Bushenyi district, south-western Uganda. All interviews were carried out in the local language of *luhaya/runyambo* (Bukoba and Karagwe respectively). The Western Lacustrine Bantu languages are to a certain extent mutually understandable.

12 This is in accordance with the objectives of IRREC, The Interlacustrine Regional Research Centre, as expressed in their report of the first workshop held in Kampala, May 1990.

13 I am indebted to my IRREC colleague, the historian Mr G. T. Mishambi, who helped me both to understand these points and implement the contextualisation of my material into an overall afrocentric perspective.

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