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# The land of Ophir

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## The Land of Ophir.

Some able writers have found this interesting and historic spot to be Arabia, others, the continent of India, a few are sure it was the East Indies, while one, Professor Vail, makes out a good case for Alaska.

It would be of value to expound and refute these theories, but our space will permit us to deal with but one, and it in briefest manner.

In I Kings 9 : 28 and 10 : 11, we read of a place that produced enormous quantities of gold, even 55,000 lbs., or \$12,000,000 worth, in one year.

No place has been found that gives indication of such abundance, except a strip of country in East Africa, lying between the Zambesi and Limpopo rivers. Not only has this place been an emporium for gold in mediaeval times, but more ancient mines, ruins, and relics are still there that unmistakably prove a Phoenician occupancy.

Sofala (long. E. 35°, lat. S. 20°) has for centuries been the port of this gold country. When the Portuguese took the town, A.D. 1500, they found two Arab vessels laden with gold; and Arabian history shows that this people had occupied the place and traded in gold since A.D. 35.

Previous to this it was held by the Sabaeans, evidence of which is seen in the name of the River Sabae or Sabi and other historic facts.

We shall proceed to show that this land is the Ophir of old; first, because of the immense quantities of gold that have been procured here, and which correspond to the abundance spoken of in the Biblical accounts, (Zec. 9: 3; I Chron. 9 : 4; I Kings 10 : 14-21). And, second, that the workings of the mines, and the remains of architecture and of religious cult found among the ruins, unmistakably prove Phoenician civilization.

Much of the information here appended is taken from the travels of the Hon. J. Theodore Bent, who recently made a scientific tour through the countries of Matabele, Makalake and Mashonaland for the purpose of examining their ruined cities.

At a place named Zimbabwe", Mr. Bent found pits fifty feet deep, surrounded by walls and towers, as if used by a people in a hostile land, the pits evidently being disused mines.

Inside a large stone enclosure is a temple in ruins, and beneath it a gold-smelting furnace, built of cement, with its chimney still standing. In a chasm near by lay a large number of rejected castings, glazed crucibles, with specks of gold still adhering to them, water-worn stones used for burnishing, and hammers,--all testifying to their previous use by the gold-dust still noticeable on them. There was also found an ingot mould of soapstone, exactly like one of tin discovered in Falmouth Harbour, England, known to be Phoenician by the punch-mark upon it.

These ruined forts, wherever found, have the same appearance--ancient, massive and mysterious.

Those described by Mr. Bent from a chain of strong-holds on the banks of the Sabi River,--the best preserved being at Zimbabwe, lat. S. 20° 16' and long. E. 31° 10'. They are described as elliptical and built after the pattern of a temple at Marib, the capital city of the ancient Sabaean Kingdom". The walls are granite blocks put together without mortar, and very evenly laid; sometimes ornamented near the top by a Shevron pattern in smaller bricks. The length of one of the walls was 680 feet, the height running from 15 to 30 feet and the thickness from 5 to 15 feet.

Mr. E. A. Maund gives a similar description of some ruins at Tabi and on the Impakive, so also does Dr. Emil Holub<sup>#</sup>, seen by him on the Shashi River.

Mr. G. Philips, reading before the Royal Geographical Society, Nov. 24 1890, said the ruins of Zimbabwe were exactly like others he had seen. He saw one fort of immense size, the walls thirty feet thick, and to give some idea of their age tells of a very large iron tree, (hartekol) having grown into and broken down a portion of the wall. These trees being of such slow development suggest an antiquity of many centuries.

Within the outer wall is a sacred enclosure, with remains of towers, temple, altar, platform, monolith and a floor of cement. The towers evidently had a religious significance.

Montfalcon in "L'antiquité, Expliquée" says,--"The Ancients assure us that all the Arabians worshiped a tower, built by their patriarch Ishmael." Maximus of Tyre also says, "The Arabs honored a great cut stone,--resembling Venus." We also read of the tower of Schechem and the Midianite one at Penuel (Jud. 9 : 46; 8 : 7.).

These African towers are no doubt of a phallic nature and bear marked likeness to Phoenician temple-structure. The coins of Byblos depict the sacred cone built within the temple

" Brit. Ency.

# Seven Years in South Africa.

enclosure" exactly as those observed in Mashonaland. Truncated cones, monoliths and phalli are found in Sardinia and Malta<sup>#</sup>, answering well to these of Africa. Lucian in "De Syria Dea" describes a temple at Hieropolis in which "there stood two very large phalli, thirty cubits high"--those measured by Mr. Bent were twenty cubits. M. M. Perrot and Chipiez say, "We find the worship of betylae in every country reached by Phoenecian influence"<sup>†</sup>. Mr. Bent could find no burial grounds, and knowing of an immense cemetery on the Bahrein Islands, in the Persian Gulf, concluded that the Phoenecians transported their dead, especially as they were in an alien country, as the Mohammedian Persians do to-day. He adds, "One cannot fail to recognize the vastness and power of this ancient race, their great constructive ingenuity and strategic skill".

From the position of the altars, doorways and monoliths it is certain they made astronomical measurements, such as the equinoxes and solstices. Some of the monoliths were covered with geometrical figures and probably served as gnomons. By other architectural constructions the meridian transit of stars could be studied, but although the observers were south of the equator, it was only the northern heavens that attracted their attention, suggesting their acquaintance with only that part of the sphere.

Our traveller made interesting finds of soapstone pillars with birds carved on the top of them, much resembling the Assyrian astarte and the obelisks of Phoenecian worship<sup>‡</sup>. Lucian describes such a pedestal and bird discovered in the temple of Hieropolis<sup>\*</sup>. On a Phoenecian coin taken from Cyprus there is depicted an exact representation of these figures found in Mashonaland<sup>§</sup>.

The numerous phalli found were all anatomically accurate. One of them had a winged sun cut upon it closely resembling a carving on a marble column of known Phoenecian origin, now in the Louvre.

M. M. Perrot and Chipiez say that this symbol is often found and is a kind of Phoenecian trade-mark. Some of the phalli had another Phoenecian sign, that of a rosette.

Other finds consisted of bowls, which were decorated with hunting scenes after the Phoenecian type of art, with every detail pictured, even to the breath of the animals. Some of the written characters resemble Proto-Arabian and early Sabaeen inscriptions.

A round soap-stone cylinder, two feet two inches in cir-

<sup>#</sup> Ruined Cities of Mashonaland, p.100. History of Art in Sardinia

<sup>#</sup> History of Art in Sardinia. M.M.Perrot and Chipiez. vol.1,

<sup>†</sup> Mashonaland. p.153. <sup>\*</sup> De Syria Dea. p. 477.

<sup>§</sup> Phoenecia, Perrot and Chipiez. p. 285. p. 58.

cumference decorated with knobs, corresponds exactly with one of white marble, taken from Cyprus and known to be of Phoenecian origin, -now deposited in the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge.

Horodrianus described a sacred cone adorned with protuberances in the Phoenecian temple at Emesa, Syria".

Mr. Bent also found Celadon pottery from China, Persian ware, Arabian glass and Egyptian beads, the latter of the Ptolemaic period. Beads of the same character as those found by Mr. Bent have been taken from ancient tombs in Thebes, Boroha. The pottery was no doubt of early Arabian times, and not so old as some of the other curios mentioned, it was enriched with designs that suggest an advanced stage of ceramic art.

DeBarros says that "The chief monuments, both at Zimbabwe and elsewhere, date from an epoch anterior both to Portuguese and Arab times". Mr. F. Mandy asserts that "the northern slopes of Mashonaland will eventually prove to be the alluvial gold fields of the world: over an area of several hundred square miles, gold is to be found in every stream. Here is what will prove the largest and richest gold field that the world has ever seen: extending from the granite back-bone in the south to within sixty miles of the Zambesi, and from the Sabia in the east to the Nata river in the west. The immense waves of promising quartz which seam the country, the numberless old workings to be found everywhere, and the inability of some of the reefs to hide their gold, all tend to prove the wonderful mineral wealth here locked up".#

Other travellers make similar statements and all record large numbers of old and disused mines, showing not only present but ancient wealth of enormous extent.

Rawlinson says "The Phoenecian used conical stones (bacllyli) dedicated to various deities, and that their religious festivals were held at the equinoxes".<sup>o</sup> Lenomant<sup>o</sup> speaks of the Phoenecians and Cushites as having traded with Equatorial Africa. While he and others refer to the bas-relief of the Deir-el-Bahari Temple as depicting the yearly tribute, brought from Pun (Punt) which, by these ancient witnesses was of African origin, --ebony, ostrich feathers, leopard, giraffe and lion skins, tusks and gold.

The Rev. John MacKenzie writes of the ruins of ancient smelting furnaces, pits and mines on the banks of the Tatie river, an affluent of the Limpopo River, and he describes the

\*.Stanford's Compendium of Geography - Africe, vol. II, p. 392.

#Stanford's Compendium of Geography - Africa, vol. II, p. 392.

<sup>o</sup>Religion of the Ancient World, pp.156-158.

<sup>o</sup>Ancient History of the East, vol. I, pp.300-308.

physical appearance of the tribes near the coast, as resembling Arabs." Another traveller, W. M. Kerr, tells of the Mashona and Makalaka races as being tall, strong and of a light complexion; their hair, he says, is done up like the ancient Hebrews, they bury in caves, have great respect for women, are remarkable for domestic virtue and are skilled in industrial arts, making implements, forging weapons, weaving and embroidering.

Numerous other testimonies might be given from Bishop Bruce<sup>†</sup>, H. W. Walmsley, Mauch and F. C. Selous. Walmsley<sup>φ</sup> speaks of seeing women grinding maize Egyptian fashion, and the Arab-like appearance of the men; also agricultural implements like those seen on Egyptian sculpture, temples with carvings of Egyptian-like birds, beasts and characters. Mauch found ruins resembling Solomon's Temple. Selous<sup>†</sup> describes an immense excavation, a circular hole 100 feet in depth and sixty feet in diameter, at the bottom a vast cavern, 180 feet long, cut out of the rock, and a slanting shaft three hundred feet long running from the cavern to the surface. The rock is covered by innumerable scorings, as if done by an iron instrument. He adds, "A truly extraordinary amount of labor must have been expended in this place."

Passing these remains of art and cult, we would draw attention to some customs and rites. A line drawn from Algoa Bay to Lake Ngami would divide the Bantu race from the Hottentot and Bushman, and it is among the Bantu, living east of that line, that the following practices are prevalent.

Some influence, very much like the Mosaic Law, has been at work among them. Travellers find them applying ceremonial cleansing to their weapons of war, to their soldiers after a fight, and to cattle or goods taken as spoil. Those who have touched a dead body are "unclean" until a purification has been accomplished. Their women are placed in seclusion for from one to three months after child-birth, they are then purified and admitted to society. One of these ceremonies is to shave the head,—"yet not causing baldness." They have antipathy to swine and a man is expected "to raise up seed" to his departed brother.

In a public covenant the stomach of a slaughtered animal is laid over the clasped hands of the covenanting parties.\*

But another rite, that is almost, if not exclusively of Hebrew origin, is found among these people, viz:-circumcision. The few nations who have practiced it seem to have taken it

† Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society. March 1888, p.

\* North of the Orange River. John MacKerzie, p. 498.

φ North of the Orange River, p. 485-498.

⊙ The Far Interior - W.M. Kerr, vol. II, p. 42.

† Memories of Mashonaland, p. 17. Travels 'Round Africa.

φ Ruined Cities of Zulu Land, p. 135.

from the "stock of Abraham." The Arabians have it from Ishmael (Gen. 17 : 25), and the Egyptians probably took it from the dwellers of Goshen, altho' Movers\* thinks that they borrowed it from the Phoenecians; however the latter evidently knew of it and introduced it into East Africa, for there it is to-day. The Bechuanas circumcise both boys and girls, but it is discouraged by Christian missionaries and therefore it being abandoned.\* Their belief is that if the children are not circumcised they cannot inherit any of the paternal estate; this is closely allied to the Levitical Law,—"That soul that is not circumcised shall be cut off from his people" (G. 17 : 10-14).

The fact that this ancient usage is confined to the Bantu race,—the most advanced of the African peoples,—is strong evidence, when added to the other facts mentioned in this paper, that the subjects of Hiram once occupied this portion of Africa.

We could continue to prove that this land meets all the conditions demanded for Ophir. On the other hand, no other place, purporting to be the site, can in any degree, show such lateral evidence much less produce a country that can ever approach this land for the abundance of its auriferous metal, either in modern or ancient times.

All the other 'lands of Ophir' have one or more difficulties that make their claims impossible, but Mashonaland satisfies all requirements and may justly be considered the "Land of Ophir."

May, 1899.

\*Die Phonizier. Vol. I, p. 362.  
 \*Ten Years North of the Orange River. 1859-69 John MacKenzie  
 South and East Africa. p. 158. p. 378.