

NEGRO INFLUENCES ON INDONESIA

by

M. D. W. JEFFREYS

The Rev. A. M. Jones in a recent article* on the relationship between Indonesian and African music has called attention to a very interesting cultural feature, but his deductions that Negro African music is indebted to Indonesia is open to grave doubt. I propose to show that the boot is on the other foot, and that Indonesia is indebted to Negro Africa for these musical similarities.

The Rev. A. M. Jones's analysis of the music of the two regions is excellent, but he has neglected to consider some facts about the distribution of the Negro under the Arab slave trade. I shall marshal some evidence that will indicate that Negro culture traits were carried to Indonesia, rather than that Indonesian traits were brought to Negro Africa.

The Rev. A. M. Jones shows that:-

- (a) Malayo—Polynesians founded colonies on the eastern shores of Madagascar:
- (b) the equitonal musical scale is found in Africa and in Indonesia:
- (c) the pitch of xylophone notes is approximately the same in Africa and in Indonesia:
- (d) there is a "staggering degree of congruence" of the tunings of notes in a whole octave taken from Indonesia and from Africa:
- (e) there is also an "artificial pentatonic scale not at all like that in the West" found in West Africa and in Indonesia:
- (f) there is an odd metal musical instrument found in the Gold Coast and also in Java:
- (g) similar decorative patterns are found e.g. in Benin and in Indonesia:
- (h) the board games found in Africa and in Indonesia are very similar.

With these facts—there are many other cultural similarities which the Rev. A. M. Jones has not touched on—he concludes: "Thus the consistent evidence of the musical features points to one conclusion: that Indonesian colonists settled on the East Coast of Africa opposite Madagascar, in the southern part of the Congo basin and in Uganda, and in the lower basin of the Niger, including the northern shores of the Gulf of Guinea."

All that this "consistent evidence of the musical features points to" is that these two peoples have, at some time in the past, been in first hand continuous contact and then these similarities would be equally well explained by settlements of Negroes among the Polynesians.

Beyond the Rev. A. M. Jones's deduction there is no corroborating evidence that such settlements other than that on the east coast of Madagascar were ever established. The Rev. A. M. Jones is aware of this lack of evidence and so draws on his imagination thus: "We can imagine the Indonesians to have done what any colonists would be likely to do—to gravitate to such areas as they found most congenial." This type of argument, depending on what "we can imagine" does not explain the habitats of Eskimo or of Bushmen and is as unreliable as it is unsound. As it is, the Rev. A. M. Jones has produced no other evidence such as traditions of such arrivals, or of somatic features of Indonesian colonization outside of Madagascar. He quotes, however, a number of speculative voyages such as trading voyages from Western India to China. What is wanted, on the contrary, is indisputable evidence that Indonesians colonized, for example, the valley of the Niger.

* *African Music*, Vol. II, No. 3, p. 36.

One of the statements, advanced in support of his contention of Indonesian influence on African culture, claims that 'the big canoes far inland on Lake Victoria Nyanza are not African. "The whole method of caulking and other details are completely Indonesian".' The conclusion is that until there was Indonesian influence there were no large canoes on Lake Victoria Nyanza, but it will be shown that both these Victoria Nyanza canoes and the Indonesian ones draw from a common source and that the Lake Victoria Nyanza canoes are in no way indebted to Indonesia for their existence.

As the Egyptian slave trade in Negroes is the earliest of which there is historical evidence, so also the earliest historical evidence of boats and vessels comes from Egypt.

Professor Forde (1927, 8) wrote: "In book after book on the history of ship building it is stated that the main lines of the history of ship building were laid down in Egypt during the early dynastic period, more than five thousand years ago, when the reed float was being gradually elaborated into the ship as we know it."

Now these reed floats are still in use "far inland" on Lake Chad, to give but one example. These reed floats consisted of bundles of reeds lashed together and this early method of ship building continues to this day where, for instance, Arab dhows on the Indian Ocean still consist of planks stitched or sewn together. The Rev. A. M. Jones postulates trans-Indian Ocean influence on Lake Victoria Nyanza but cannot see Egyptian influence from the Nile, where the first boats were built and where boats have been continuously built ever since, proceeding up the Nile to its source in Lake Victoria Nyanza. The large canoes on this lake owe nothing to Indonesian influence but both Negro and Indonesian shipping derive from Egypt.

Hornell (1946, 253) wrote: "To any one having acquaintance with the types of river craft used in ancient days, the fundamental identity of these characteristics with those possessed by the boats of dynastic Egypt is too striking and comprehensive to be accepted as the result of coincidence or parallel development. Indeed the Ganges to-day, in respect of the craft crowding her waters, presents a scene much more like that common to the Nile in the days of the Pharaohs than is its present day aspect . . . The Egyptian square sail is conserved and, most remarkable of all, many of the great river cargo boats of the Ganges retain the primitive quarter steering paddle favoured in ancient Egypt . . . The presence of an *oculus* is another great link with Egypt . . . Few customs are so widely prevalent among fishermen as that of painting or affixing 'eyes' (*oculi*) upon the bows of their vessels. It is found throughout the entire width of the Old World, from the Mediterranean to the China Sea."

Hence so far as navigation is concerned the influence is from Africa to Asia, i.e. from west to east as far as the China Sea. The Rev. A. M. Jones would have that this influence so far as Negro Africa is affected is in the reverse direction, but until he can produce evidence of comparable significance with that quoted above the verdict must be "not proven".

With navigation went trade and all the evidence is that early trade from Africa was again west to east. A straw shows which way the wind blows and I shall employ the culture trait centred round the use of the bezoar stone. This "stone" is described in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as: "A calculus or concretion found in the stomach or intestines of some animals . . ." The word *bezoar* is of either Arabic or Persian origin. Hazen (1949, I, 138) writes: "Bezoars were first mentioned as a medicine by the Arabs and Persians, . . . They are universally considered as an antidote for poison whether used internally, placed on the wound, or merely worn as an amulet."

As a sequence to the Arab trade in bezoar stones one finds them, according to Kruijt, similarly esteemed by the Indonesians. He (1914, VII, 239) writes: "The Indonesians consider them (bezoars) as the concentrated soul substance of the animal or plant. They are used for various purposes: they are worn on the naked body; they are supposed to ensure long life, to staunch blood, to procure invulnerability." This use of the bezoar

to protect and ensure life against poisons, for example, is not the result of pragmatic knowledge, but provides a clear case of learned behaviour, of culture trait borrowing. These concretions, partly mineral, partly organic in origin and found in the alimentary tract of herbivorous animals, are quite innocuous and as utterly useless from a medical or any other aspect of life preserving as are gall stones. Yet they are valued for these very reasons by Indonesians merely because Arab traders have declared bezoars to possess these protective qualities. Such an example is a useful instance of the diffusion of a culture trait again from west to east.

Anthropologists were well aware at the turn of the century of similarities in culture traits between Indonesia and Negro Africa. The German anthropologist, Ankermann, for instance, listed a number of these similarities. Thus there was a discussion between another German anthropologist Frobenius and Ankermann. This discussion was published in 1905 in *Zeitschrift fuer Ethnologie*. The following translation therefrom is relevant. "If, for instance, there are found in two different parts of the world dances where masks are used, one must refrain from maintaining a genetic relationship of both cultures. Yet if further investigation should reveal that next to these dances and masks other rows of cultural elements pertaining to both countries are found, then there is no doubt that a relationship between the two can be established. I do not want to state that the west African culture has immigrated direct from Melanesia, or that the east Papuan culture has come from Africa. It is much more probable that there is a mutual place or origin of both cultures, the exact position of which we shall be able to find after the cultural history of southern Asia has been examined in the same way as that of Africa and Oceania."

The above attitude to these similarities of culture in such widely separated areas is sound. Dr. G. Graebner of Cologne under the stimulus of Ankermann took up this study of similarities in culture, and laid down criteria by which one could deduce the direction of culture borrowings and culture diffusion. While these criteria have value the examples selected to demonstrate them were so unsuitable as to render the criteria ultimately unacceptable. They were, however, the basis of the *kulturkreis* school of diffusion. In the absence of any definite evidence to show which way diffusion actually occurred recourse was had to these criteria to decide the point. Thus, on these criteria much of Negro culture is, by Graebner and also by Ankermann, derived from Melanesia.

It appears that the Rev. A. M. Jones is a follower of the *kulturkreis* school. I shall show that his conclusions are unacceptable. The enigma of 'the black belt', that region on the earth that comprises the dark skinned peoples, is the position of the Negro in it. This belt stretches from Negro Africa via India to Melanesia and Australia. At either end are Negroes, but in the centre none. The centre of the belt is occupied by a dark skinned people, the Hindu. They offer no difficulty. They belong to the same race as that of the European, namely the Caucasian. This race is subdivided into the light skinned Caucasians of Europe, North Africa and Asia Minor and the dark-skinned Caucasians of Egypt, Arabia and India.

How comes it then that east and west, India is flanked by Negroes? That distribution is the puzzle. There are thus Oceanic and African negroes separated from each other by Arabia, India and Malaya. The estimated population of Negro Africa is in the region of two hundred and twenty million, while the Oceanic Negroes who extend from New Guinea to Fiji number less than four million.

The first point to determine is whether the peoples in these two negro groups are of one and the same stock, because if they are different no special problem arises. If, on the other hand, it is found that they are of one stock then it is necessary to decide whether the Negro arose in Africa and spread eastwards to Melanesia or whether he arose in Melanesia and spread westwards, or whether there are other possible origins for him such as arising twice independently. Certain anthropologists with no training in anatomy, physiology or genetics to control their speculations derive the Negroes of Africa and of

Melanesia from Asia. Professor Goodwin (1951, I, i. 18) postulates post-agricultural migrations. For him the Negro entered Africa from Asia between 7,000 and 5,000 B.C. and in two main linguistic groups, one the Sudanic and the other the Bantu. This linguistic distinction is unfortunate as evidence of the Asiatic migrations because it has now been shown by Greenberg that the semi-Bantu and Bantu languages evolved in Africa from the Sudanic. There are other theories of the origin of the Negro from Asia such as that of Delafosse but as Howells has pointed out, all these ex-Asiatic theories to account for the African Negro suffer from the following defect: Howells (1948, 299) writes: "The great stumbling block is of course the lack of Negroes not only in Asia but also in the approaches to Africa or Melanesia, where one would certainly expect to find traces of them had they migrated out of Asia by land. Not much can be said in the face of this."

In other words Africa is the home of the Negro and if found elsewhere it follows that he has been transported there and of course he would carry many of his culture traits with him into his new environment.

On turning to the anatomists, the physiologists and the geneticists for guidance in ascertaining the direction of human migrations one finds that their speculations are scientifically controlled. Thus Professor Hoebel (1949, 70) writes: "Among biologists a fundamental principle is that 'general anatomical resemblances imply relationship and that detailed similarities of face and form mean that the individuals possessing them have in common all or nearly all of their ancestors'. It is assumed in physical anthropology, therefore, that groups of persons who bear distinctive anatomical resemblances are more closely related to each other (inbred) than to others."

With this test at hand one can now proceed to evaluate the speculations of various writers to account for these Oceanic Negroes. Professor Elliot Smith, one of Britain's great anatomists, subscribed to Hoebel's criterion. He wrote (1929, 140): "These Melanesian Negroes present the general characteristics of the African Negro, but in a form suggesting more or less admixture with other races. We thus have the race divided into two great groups—African and Oceanic . . . The question naturally arises as to the geographical situation of the original home of the Negro." It is quite clear that Professor Elliot Smith regarded the two branches of the Negro to be branches of one and the same people.

Professor Howells (1948, 286) writing of Melanesia says: "The one racial type which seems proper to the area is Negro . . . of a sort which seems indistinguishable from the African. The difficulty lies in the presence of so many other racial elements. To say that this Negro type is the characteristic one is to say that it is what would probably be left if all the other distinguishable types could be extracted from this conglomerate . . . The Negro proper seems to be more characteristic of the main coastal routes, being found on the shores of New Guinea (especially the north coast) and of the islands to the east."

The point to notice here is that the African Negro type is prominent on the sea coasts.

Sir Arthur Keith (1937) until his death one of Britain's leading anatomists, wrote: "At each extremity of the Belt in Africa, as in Melanesia, we find peoples with black skins, woolly hair, more or less beardless, prognathous and long headed. We cannot suppose these Negroes to have been evolved independently of each other." This view is also held by the geneticist, Ruggles-Gates who (1948, 352) wrote: "There is no evidence of autochthonous Negroid peoples in the great region between Africa and Melanesia . . . A modern exception to this would be the Negro slaves (of African origin) in Arabia, and perhaps the Pulayas of southern India who might have been derived from a few stray Africans in relatively recent times . . ."

I shall now marshal evidence to show that the Arab slave trade in African Negroes was not a matter of a few stray Africans in modern times but that this trade encompassed

hundreds of thousands of human beings transported eastwards over more than one and a half millenia.

The earliest sources whence the Arabs obtained Negro slaves were in the 'Sudan'. Now in Arabic, Sudan means the land of the blacks and included all of West Africa south of the Sahara to the Atlantic.

The Arabs were responsible for the founding of the early empires in the Sudan. Thus Lady Lugard traces the rise of the kingdoms of Ghana, Melle and Songhay to early Arab infiltration and stresses continually the close contact between the Arabs and these Negro kingdoms. For instance, a report of a visit by Arabs to the city of Ghana, the source of later Negro migrations, as early as the eighth century is noted by Lady Lugard (1905, 81). Idrisi, the Arab geographer, stated *circa* 1154, according to Mauny (1954, XXIV, 204) that Ghana was: "The greatest town in the land of the Negroes." Notwithstanding that Ghana was the greatest town in the land of the Negroes, he pointed out that it was then Muslim in religion and "the kings are said to be descended from Salih ben Abdullah, a descendant of the Prophet."

Another great kingdom among the Negroes was that of Songhay. It was also deeply under Arab influence. The conversion in 1009 A.D. of the king, Za-Kosoi, to Mohammedanism is noted by Lady Lugard (1905, 120, 189) while "Ghana in 1350, though ruled by a king of Berber descent, owed allegiance to the Abbasside Sultan of Egypt, and . . . the king of Ghana and his subjects were all Mohammedan . . ."

Alberuni, a native of Khiva, in Turkestan, was born in 973 A.D. He spent much of his days in India and wrote a treatise on the history of India, which was published in 1030 A.D. According to Sachau's (1910, I, 197) translation, Alberuni, describing Africa, wrote: "The continent protrudes far into the sea in the western half of the earth, and extends its shores far into the south. On the plains of the continent live the western negroes, whence the slaves are brought; and there are the Mountains of the Moon, and on them are the sources of the Nile. On its coast, and the islands before the coast, live the various tribes of Zanje." Now note that Alberuni refers to the western negroes, i.e. the Guinea negroes, as in his time being the source of the Negro slave trade. He mentions the Zanj whose coast was opposite the island of Zanzibar.

Pilgrimages to Mecca were then, as now, part of Muslim religious life, while Muslim merchants with caravans of slaves travelled from Senegal to Mecca and back. This great caravan route, from the river Senegal to Mecca, passing through the kingdoms of Ghana and of Songhay, had been established before 1154 when it was described by Idrisi. Ibn Kaldun stated that caravans from Egypt, consisting of 12,000 laden camels, passed every year through Tekadda on their way to Melle.

Sir Richmond Palmer (1936, 15) in his translation of the Mahram of Omme Jilmi of Bornu, written *circa* 1086—1097 A.D. writes: "Tura Tuzan was the pillar of my kingdom . . ." To this remark Palmer adds the following footnote: "Tura Tuzan means the Caucasian Tura . . . people of Syrian and Asiatic provenance who, in the ninth century, conducted the 'slave trade' with Bornu . . ."

There is every reason to believe that this slave trade in Guinea negroes continued unbroken till the end of the nineteenth century and in support of this contention I may mention that Ledyard who was in Egypt in 1788 reported, according to Murray (1817, I, 292), that the Muslims of Africa "trade to Darfu for slaves, gum and elephants teeth. The slaves of this nation are of a good form and size, quite black, with the true Guinea face, and curled short hair. The importation of negro slaves into Egypt, in a year, was estimated by M. Rosetti at 20,000."

The point I am demonstrating is that the Negro in the early Arab slave trade across the Indian ocean eastwards came from two sources, namely from the Sudanic Negroes of west Africa and from the Bantu Negroes of east Africa.

The American naturalist, Dr. Pickering, who was in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean

circa 1840 noticed that the Negroes he met came then from two different sources, for he wrote (1850, 192, 209, 185, 265): "At Mocha Negroes were numerous, and they had been derived from two distinct portions of Africa. Some had come, like those of Egypt, from the white river of the Nile and were called *Nuba*. These were highly esteemed as soldiers and as such, were kept in numbers by some of the more powerful chiefs of Southern Arabia. The majority, however, of the Negroes I saw at Mocha had been brought from Zanzibar . . . In the streets of Bombay I frequently fell in with Soahili, who belonged, as before to the Arab shipping . . . At Singapore I saw two Negroes in the ship of the Abyssinian Arab, . . . on enquiry I was informed that 'the black' Arabs came chiefly from Sennaar . . . Individuals who called themselves *Arabs* were numerous at Singapore, but their claim was not in all instances free from suspicion, on account of an obvious motive—Arab influence being paramount with the Malays, 'who plume themselves according to the proportion of Arab blood they may have in their veins'; while, on the other hand, they look down upon the Indian Muslims. These self styled Arabs were mostly persons of mixed descent, but I was not prepared at the time to distinguish the Ethiopian from the Telingan (Indian) admixture, and indeed, the task may not prove easy of accomplishment. One of these persons had his beard striped longitudinally grey and black (it is presumed by artificial means); and the same was observed in an Abyssinian Arab from Mukdusha, who likewise was residing at Singapore . . .

Puzzled by the evident traces of Semitic features among the Melanesians Professor Hoebel, (1949, 71) writes: "The fact that certain Melanesians possess 'Semitic' noses cannot be used as evidence of Semitic ancestry for these Oceanic Negroes. On the other hand, neither can it be said that the fact of this nose is not an important element in the cluster of distinctive traits that characterizes each of these groups."

What is quite clear from the inevitable bastardization that went on between Arab masters and slave negresses is that this Semitic nose is found among the Oceanic Negroes and not among African Negroes, except e.g. among Soahili and other east coastal Negroes exposed to Arab miscegenation. Hence the Semitic nose is, *pace* Professor Hoebel, a clear indication of some Semitic ancestry in the Melanesian make up.

The maritime trade in Negro slaves across the Indian ocean or Erythraean sea as it was formerly called, before A.D. was in the hands of Arabs. Hirth and Rockhill (1911, 4) write: "It seems evident that, during ancient and mediaeval times, the sea-trade between Egypt and Persia on the one side, and India and the Far East on the other, remained exclusively in the hands of the enterprising Arabs of the southern Arabian coasts, who, in very early days, established stations at all the principal ports-of-call along the coast to the south of the Indus and thence ultimately to Canton where . . . they appear to have had a settlement or colony as early as A.D. 300."

Arab trade with China and the east increased so that by the latter part of the seventh century Hirth and Rockhill (1911, 15, 23) report that: "the sea-trade of the Hindus and Arabs with the Malay Archipelago and China had assumed very considerable importance and this accounts partly for the fuller and more accurate accounts of the countries of Southern Asia and the Archipelago given in the Chinese Annals of the sixth and seventh centuries . . . By the middle of the eighth century the Mohammedans at Canton . . . had become so numerous that in 758 A.D. they were able . . . to sack and burn the city and make off to sea with the loot . . . Somewhere about the ninth century . . . a portion of the southern sea trade of China was diverted to Ts'uan Chan, near Amoy . . . Two centuries later this port became of nearly equal importance with Canton; the Arab settlement became much larger at the latter place . . . Troubles which broke out in China in the latter part of the ninth century . . . caused the foreigners at Canton and Ts'uan Chan to seek refuge at Kalah on the west coast of the Malay peninsula, presumably Palembang, and at the former place the ships from Sirof and Oman met those which came from China. Trade was carried on in this way down to at least the

beginning of the tenth century for Masudi says it was so at the time he visited that place . . . Chan K'afei, writing in 1178 says: 'Of all the wealthy foreign lands which have great store of precious and varied goods, none surpass the realm of the Arabs . . .'

Hirth and Rockhill (1911, 32-) state: "The slaves who were natives of the islands beyond the sea (of China) may have been African negroes, in which the Arabs of those times carried on a large traffic . . . The practice of keeping black slaves continued in China down to the latter part of the fourteenth century, perhaps even to much more modern times . . . many families (in China) buy black people to make gate keepers of; they are called ' . . . devil slaves, or . . . black slaves or servants . . .'

Mayers (1870, IV, 182) mentions the fact that in 1381 the King of Java sent 300 black slaves as a present to the Chinese Emperor. Now the King of Java would not denude himself of his black slaves in sending a gift of 300 to the Emperor of China. Here then is an indication of the number of black slaves that must have been in these regions in 1381.

This Arab slave trade in African Negroes continued well into the nineteenth century.

Enough historical evidence has now been marshalled—there is much more of it—to establish that the Arab slave trade lasted well over a millenium and a half and is sufficient to account for the present existence of the Oceanic Negroes.

In the face of this evidence it would indeed be strange if culture traits characteristic of the Negroes of the western Sudan and of Bantu east Africa were not found in Melanesia. The evidence marshalled renders it unlikely that original Indonesian culture traits will be found in Negro Africa.

It is thus quite clear that it is not surprising—nay, that it must be expected—to find that many of the Indonesian culture traits are similar to those found in Negro Africa. To regard these numerous similarities as due to Negro Africa borrowing from Indonesia is to ignore the testimony of recorded history.

What is astonishing is that the Rev. A. M. Jones appears to have overlooked the Arab slave trade in African Negroes and to have omitted to consider it as possibly accounting for the musical similarities found in Indonesia and in Negro Africa.

No, Sir, the boot is on the other toot. The similarities in music between Indonesia and Africa are due to the impress that African Negroes, imported into Melanesia by the Arab slave trade, exerted on the culture traits of Indonesia.

REFERENCES

- Forde, D. *Ancient Mariners*, London 1927.
- Goodwin, A. J. H. . . . 'Know Yourselves' *The African Drum* Vol. 1. No. 1. Cape Town 1951.
- Greenberg, J. H. . . . 'Studies in African Linguistic Classification' *South West Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1949.
- Hance, H. F. and Mayers, W. F. . . . 'Introduction of Maize into China', *The Pharmaceutical Journal and Transactions*, December 31, 1870.
- Hazen, J. H. 'Bezoar' *Standard Dictionary of Folk Lore Mythology and Legend*. Ed. by M. Leach, New York, 1949.
- Hobbel, E. A. *Man in the Primitive World*, New York 1949.
- Hornell, J. *Water Transport*, Cambridge, 1946.
- Howells, W. *Mankind so Far*, London 1948.
- Keith, Sir A. Introduction to *Arabia Felix*, London, 1937.
- Kruijt, A. C. 'Indonesians'. *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Ed. by Hastings, London, 1914.
- Iugard, Lady *A Tropical Dependency*, London, 1905.
- Mauny, R. A. 'The Question of Ghana' *Africa*, Vol. XXIV, No. 3, July, 1954.
- Murray, H. *Historical account of the Discoveries and Travels in Africa by the late John Geyden*. London, 1817.
- Palmer, Sir R. *The Bornu Sabara and Sudan*, London 1936.
- Pickering, C. *The Races of Man*, London 1850.
- Ruggles-Gates, R. . . *Human Ancestry*, Cambridge, Mass., 1948.
- Sachau, E. C. *Alberuni's India*, London 1910.