

CENTRAL AFRICAN BROADCASTING STATION

(Lusaka)

BROADCAST SERIES ON BANTU TRIBESNo 1Introductory Talk By

A.M. Kittermaster

Broadcast: English Programme for Africans: 7. 2. 50. 1700 - 1715 Hrs.

Every week, on Tuesdays, at this time, we are going to talk to you about the Bantu peoples of Africa, of which you yourselves are a part. Each week we shall take one tribe and tell you something about that particular tribe. On Sunday evenings at a quarter to five you can hear these talks given in Chinyanja.

Now before we begin talking about individual tribes we should ask "Who are the Bantu?" "Where do they live?" "Where do they come from?" In other words, "Who are you?" and "Where do you come from?" Because you Africans of Northern Rhodesia are all members of the Bantu race of people.

We need not tell you that the word "Bantu" means people. This word, like many other words, is to be found in nearly all Bantu languages. It varies of course, but the word NTU means people, or a person, in most of your languages. The Anyanja may talk about ANTU and the Amazulu about ABANTU, but the word still looks very much the same. Now in the same way all Bantu languages still have something in common which is one of the reasons why one African of the Bantu race will very easily pick up the language of another African of the Bantu race. The languages do differ, of course. For instance a Nyanja speaking person would hardly understand a Sotho speaking person. But basically the two languages would have a lot in common. The nouns of all Bantu languages are divided into classes and most of the words are made up of what we call "roots" - that is a single word or syllable which can be built up into

longer words by adding bits and pieces on to them. And it is not only in their languages that the Bantu resemble each other. In appearance, too, there are certain similarities between one tribe and another. The Swazi, for example, are very black and have longish hair, the Cwana are lighter in colour and have short hair, the Chopi are slender and lightly built while the BaGanda are outstanding and upright. But in general they have common characteristics by which they can be recognized, as have the Nilotic tribes of the North or the Negroid tribes of the West. In their way of life, too, the Bantu have much in common. Most tribes, (I say most, not all), live by combining agriculture with the keeping of cattle. There are exceptions of course, particularly with regard to some of our tribes here in Northern Rhodesia. Again, among those tribes who have cattle, their cattle are often regarded as money and are often surrounded by magical beliefs and practices. Cattle play an important part when it comes to paying for a bride. The political and social life of most Bantu tribes is also similar. Though these aspects may vary from tribe to tribe, the basis of their politics and way of life is much the same. Some tribes may owe allegiance to small chiefs, while others have been knit together into larger tribes which might almost be called a nation (like the Basotho under Moshesh, or the Amandebele under Mzilikazi) - but life in the village is very much the same throughout Bantu Africa.

Where, then, did all these Bantu come from? Their arrival in Central and Southern Africa is comparatively recent. Recent, that is, from a historical point of view. Less than two thousand years ago, (and that is not so very long when you look at man's history) there were probably no Bantu races in Central or Southern Africa. Originally the Bantu probably came from Northern Africa round about the country which we now call Abyssinia. We do know that in biblical days and Roman days the African people were used as slaves. These slaves were probably captured in the very far North or North East of Africa, in the land that lies between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean sea. It is probable that a series of

invasions took place by the African tribes who are known as "Hamitic" people. These Hamitic tribes lived in the coastal areas and were probably more advanced than the Bantu tribes, otherwise they would not have driven them out. Even to day, in Abyssinia and Somaliland, the Africans there are Hamitic and not Bantu. Whatever the exact cause was, the Bantu began their long trek across Africa, a trek that continued in some form or another until the end of the last century. It took the Bantu a few hundred years to cross Africa, and, as they travelled, they settled in various parts of the continent, sometimes fighting amongst themselves and splitting up into smaller tribes and sometimes defeating people weaker than themselves. This was how the tribal groups came about. But whatever the Bantu did, wherever they fought or lived, they were always on the move from place to place. They moved either because they were driven out or because they worked out the land and moved on to new land. (You are suffering from this now - because there is not always new land to move to - and it is now time that you learnt to settle and farm your land properly so that you don't have to move to new land). Now as the Bantu moved across Africa they often absorbed the habits and ways of living of the people they conquered or of the people they were conquered by. For example the Xhosa,, Zulu and Amandebele people (the people whom we call Nguni) have clicks in their language. These clicks were almost certainly introduced into their language through living alongside the Bushmen and Hottentot peoples who were already in the South when the Nguni arrived there. The Bushmen people still talk with clicks.

As the Bantu moved, so did they fight and quarrell amongst themselves and with neighbouring tribes. Some tribes became more advanced than others and formed quite an elaborate system of Government. In the Belgian Congo, for example, the Bushongo and Luunda peoples ruled over many hundreds of tribes, exacting tribute from them and incorporating them into their own system of government.

In Tanganyika the Bena and Hehe peoples became unified under the leadership of various powerful chiefs. The Zulus under Shaka built up a powerful military organization - in fact so powerful that millions of Bantu began trekking north again to get away from his rule - the Amandebele to Rhodesia, the Shangaan to Portuguese East Africa and the Ngoni to Nyasaland and Tanganyika. As they trekked, so again they fought with tribes weaker than themselves. The Amandebele, who had learnt much from Shaka, in turn drove weaker tribes like the Mashona away. And so it went on. Sometimes, as in the case of Mzilikazi or Shaka, the power was held by one man, or chief, (though he did have councillors of whom he did not take much notice). In other cases (for instance the Barotse under Lewanika) the chief's power was not absolute or despotic (as under Shaka or Lobengula) because in affairs of state the chief was assisted by a Prime Minister (Ngambela) and a group of councillors picked from among the high born Barotse. Witchcraft and sorcery also played a very important part, in some cases the most important part in the affairs of the tribe, and chiefs who wanted more power were quick to take advantage of witchcraft in obtaining their power. This again varied from tribe to tribe, but it is true to say that among the Bantu there was not one tribe which did not believe in witchcraft in some form or another. Some chiefs, (like Khama of the Bamangwato) tried to wipe out sorcery altogether, but found it difficult. Others (like Mzilikazi) encouraged it and made great use of the Inyanga or Isangoma in ruling their people.

Now where is all this leading us to? Just this. When we tell you each week on the wireless about the various Bantu tribes, you should remember that though they all have different customs, different beliefs, different ways of ruling and so on, yet there is something in which they all resemble each other. There are certain things which seem to be common to all the Bantu, whether they live in Barotseland, Zululand, Uganda or elsewhere. For example they are all great movers and even to

day the migratory spirit is still strong among the Bantu. Again, the Bantu all practised some form of "shifting cultivation." Usually this consisted merely of abandoning land when it was no further use for growing or grazing. Another similarity is to be found in the way the Bantu built and do build their villages. This was usually a small group of huts or houses, fairly close together, fenced in for protection against wild animals. Further North, the huts would be grouped round a central open space, with small plots nearby and the main fields further away, to where their families would go at harvest time. The shape of the village varied, but in general appearance the huts were of the same design and thatched in very much the same way. Their religious beliefs, too, were very similar, with a strong emphasis on witchcraft. Tradition, too, played an important part, legends and tales being handed down from generation to generation in each tribe. In character there are many similarities between all the Bantu. They are fond of romancing and are well known for their cheerfulness and sense of humour, particularly in times of stress and hardship. Generally speaking, too, they are strong and have powers of great endurance. Musically, too, there are similarities. The most important thing in Bantu music is the tone of Bantu speech - it is by reflecting this tone (in the rise and fall of the voice) on drums that the Bantu can make drums talk - the drum beat being a copy of the way the voice falls and rises. The Kaffir piano (kalimba, kankwele, Mbira or whatever you call it) is common to nearly all tribes - although in many cases it is tuned differently. These are only a few things common to all Bantu peoples, and we would ask you to remember them when we are talking about individual tribes. As we talk about these tribes it will seem that they are all very different, but you will notice that there are certain basic things in which they are all alike.

Now you can hear these talks every Tuesday at 5.00'clock in English, or every Sunday at a quarter to five in Chinyanja. We advise you to listen because we think that it is a good thing to

know about other people, particularly one's neighbouring people. By knowing about them and their lives and history we can understand them better. And if, and when, you meet Bantu people of different races from yourselves, you will perhaps know something about where they live, what they do, and what their lives are like. Next week's talk will be on the Yao, and after that you can hear talks on these tribes, Lengge, Nyasaland Ngoni. Nsenga, Kunda, Tanganyika Ngoni, Cewa, Lovale tribes, Ganda, Transvaal Ndebele, Zezuru, Kamba, Lenje, Chagga, Lala, Ushi, Lamba, Ngonde, Venda, Lemba, Kgatla, Xhosa, Ila, Pedi, Bemba, Bena, Makua, Hehe, N.R. Tonga, Ndaui, Chopi, Sotho, Nyakussa, Pondo, Sukuma, Kavirondo, S.R. Ndebele and Zulu. So if you are interested in these tribes, listen to these talks.

---

AMK/

Broadcast House  
P.O. Box 209  
Lusaka

**Collection Number: AD1715**

**SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS (SAIRR), 1892-1974**

**PUBLISHER:**

*Collection Funder:- Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation*

*Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive*

*Location:- Johannesburg*

©2013

**LEGAL NOTICES:**

**Copyright Notice:** All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

**Disclaimer and Terms of Use:** Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document forms part of the archive of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), held at the Historical Papers Research Archive at The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.