

# **ANCIENT EGYPTIAN AND BANTU**

## **THE KISWAHILI-BANTU RESEARCH UNIT**

### **FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF**

### **THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN LANGUAGE**

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### **'THE SOUNDING OF ANCIENT EGYPTIAN WORDS'**

Let this article on the 'sounding' and etymology of Ancient Egyptian words stand as an independent addition to the bank of knowledge already amassed by Cheik Anta Diop, Theophile Obenga and others on the genetic and linguistic relationship between the Ancient Egyptian language and the indigenous languages of Africa. This article forms part of the work on the linguistic sound/meaning correspondences which exist between the Bantu languages and the Ancient Egyptian language.

The methodology I have used is to assess only those words which give an exact or near consonantal match between words. By attempting the findings in this way I hope that a clearer understanding will emerge and participants will be in a position to partake with the investigation in simple meaningful terms thus avoiding vague and unnecessary notions about the complexities of the Ancient Egyptian language.


I have decided to approach the subject in this investigation by examining the pronunciations of three Ancient Egyptian words which give clear convincing correspondences in sound and meaning.

Further words will be addressed in Part 2 of the Rosetta Stones. I have also included a brief account of the Bantu and Kiswahili-Bantu languages and

questioned whether the roots of some words are of Bantu or Semitic origin.

## KOMA

**KM**  **bring to an end**

The four examples labelled A, B, C, and D given below show how it is possible to actually speak the Ancient Egyptian words by inserting the correct Bantu vowels between the consonants to give the correct pronunciation of the word. Thus as a simple example, the Ancient Egyptian word for ‘bring to an end’ given by the consonants **km**  must be pronounced phonetically as ‘**koma**’ in accordance with the Kiswahili-Bantu language and not as **kem** as given in Egyptology books. The missing Bantu vowels here are *o* and *a* not *e*. By using the vowel *e*, the sounding of the Ancient Egyptian word gives a false impression of what the word should be and reinforces the notion that the word could be of Semitic origin thus obscuring the true pronunciation of the word. The word ‘**koma**’ exists in the Kiswahili-Bantu and Bantu languages of Africa and its etymology is purely Bantu in origin. Thus the word **koma**, ‘bring to an end’ is identical to the Ancient Egyptian word given as **km**.

### The Bantu and Kiswahili-Bantu Languages

The Swahili language uses the prefix Ki- attached to nouns to define the language. Swahili being the noun stem from which the term Ki-Swahili is derived. Thus Ki-Swahili is the Swahili language and Wa-Swahili refers to the people who practice Swahili culture. In a similar way the English language is known as Ki-Ingereza.

The vocabulary of the Kiswahili-Bantu language consists of two distinct vocabularies, Bantu and Semitic; although at times it is not always possible to establish whether a particular word is of Bantu or Semitic origin. Examples of this are included in the analysis. The Semitic component in the language was acquired thousands of years ago while trading with the indigenous populations of Africa who spoke Semitic languages. The Semitic languages originated in Africa and disseminated outside Africa through the corridor of the Arabian Peninsula.

In order to differentiate the Kiswahili-Bantu language from its Semitic component I have chosen to attach the term Bantu to Kiswahili to give the term **Kiswahili-Bantu** which focuses on its Proto-Bantu roots. Throughout the article the term Kiswahili-Bantu will be used wherever possible to focus on the Bantu origins of the language. Thus only Proto-Bantu or current

Bantu roots will be considered and a comparison of meaningful vocabulary with the Ancient Egyptian language will be made.

The Kiswahili-Bantu language which is better known internationally as just Swahili, is a Bantu language spoken on the East coast of Africa. It belongs to the Sabaki subgroup of North Eastern Coast Bantu languages. The Kiswahili-Bantu language is widespread throughout the East African regions and spoken in many countries including Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Northern Mozambique, and Northern Zambia and Southern Ethiopia. It is also widely spoken in Somalia and in many parts of the Komoro Islands and Madagascar.

According to the linguist Professor Lodhi, in 1993 the estimated number of speakers of Kiswahili-Bantu can be broken down to the following:

Mother tongue 5-8 million

Second language 28-35 million

Third language 30-40 million

Total amount of speakers 63-85 million.

In order to make an appraisal of the Kiswahili-Bantu language one has to relate its vocabulary wherever possible to its earliest form called Proto-Bantu. The linguist, Professor Assibi Apatewon Amidu asks the question:

'How does one know that the Kiswahili-Bantu language is part of the Bantu languages like Zulu, Shona, Kikuyu and others'?

There is a theory that says, because language is important to the survival of man, people will always carry with them words of their language which will preserve their identity and culture whenever they move from place to place. This means that words which directly affect a person's survival such as those which refer to things like numbers, words referring to body parts or parts of it, those which refer to trades such as fishing, iron working, architecture and so on, do not get readily lost.

Assibi Apatewon Amidu quotes Guthrie (1967) who in his study of Bantu languages found for example that the highest percentage of Proto-Bantu roots in a 200 core sample of Bantu languages could be found in Chi-Bemba spoken in Zambia. Chi-Bemba has 54% of the total whilst Ki-Kongo and Kiswahili-Bantu have 44% of Proto-Bantu roots. Compare this with the Ki-Sukuma language spoken in Tanzania which has 41% of Proto-Bantu roots, whilst Chi-Yao spoken in Mozambique has only 35% of Proto-Bantu roots.

Thus by comparing Proto-Bantu roots, the Kiswahili-Bantu language is in percentage terms derived more from an older form of the earlier Bantu language family called Proto-Bantu than say Ki-Sukuma and Chi-Yao.

### **The Ancient Egyptian Language**

The Ancient Egyptian language has always been considered to be a branch of the African-Asiatic family of languages called Afro-Asiatic which spans Africa and Western Asia.

Without going too deeply into the classification of the Afro-Asiatic language, according to Greenberg, the individual branches of the Afro-Asiatic family of languages include the following:

- (1) Semitic, the largest branch of the Afro-Asiatic language which is spoken since ancient times in most of Western Asia, Mesopotamia, Palestine, Syria, Arabia and Africa.

#### **The Semitic language has its origins in Africa.**

- (2) Berber, a group of related languages currently spoken by approximately five million speakers in Northern Africa from the Atlantic coast to the oasis of Siwa in Egypt and from the Mediterranean Sea to Mali and Niger.
- (3) Cushitic, a family of languages spoken by approximately fifteen million people in Eastern Africa from the Egyptian border in North East Sudan to Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya and Northern Tanzania.

Martin Bernal in his book, *Black Athena*, sees the spread of the Afro-Asiatic language as the expansion of a culture which was long established in the East African Rift Valley at the end of the last ice age in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> millennia BC. During the last ice ages water was locked up in the polar icecaps and rainfall was considerably less than it is today. The Sahara and Arabian Deserts were even larger. During the increase of heat and rainfall in the centuries that followed, much of these regions became savannah, into which neighbouring peoples flocked.

The most successful of these were speakers of Proto-Afro-Asiatic language from the African rift valley. Going through the savannah, the Chadic speakers reached Lake Chad while the Berbers, the Maghreb and the Proto-Egyptians arrived in Upper Egypt. However Martin Bernal did not consider speakers of Proto-Bantu in his analysis.

It is the author's contention, from the linguistic contents, that speakers of Proto-Bantu played an active part at the time of the expansion of Proto-Afro-Asiatic speakers in the Rift Valley of East Africa. These Proto-Bantu speakers going through the savannah formed part of the migration to Egypt. The Bantu languages together with other indigenous languages fused together and became embedded to form the Proto-Egyptian language. It is for this reason that the Ancient Egyptian language contains a substantial amount of Proto-Bantu or Bantu roots.


However Guthrie speculated that before the Proto-Bantu expansion from Zaire, there had been several pre-Bantu stages, at which time the Bantu ancestors lived far to the north around Lake Chad. One group from this area made its way to Zaire and became the Proto-Bantu. The Proto-Bantu speakers and Proto-Afro-Asiatic speakers lived along side each other. They traded together, shared and exchanged common vocabularies of words.

### Ascertaining Bantu or Semitic vocabulary


Finding the origins of common words between Proto-Semitic languages and Bantu languages has now become increasingly difficult to ascertain as may be seen by the examples below.

#### Example A

#### SIMBA

Ancient Egyptian: *snb*  *be healthy*

Shona-Bantu: SIMBA, be healthy, be strong, powerful

Consider Sir Alan Gardiner's usage of the Semitic word given on Page 3 in his book on Egyptian Grammar. Sir Gardiner gives the Ancient Egyptian word for 'be healthy' as: *snb* . Sir Alan relates this word to the Arabic word *salima*, which contains the skeletal consonants *slm* and uses this word as the equivalent word for the Ancient Egyptian word.

Had Sir Alan Gardiner referred to Bantu languages he would not have chosen *salima*.

The Shona-Bantu word *simba*, can be used as a verb or noun *Simba* means, 'be strong', 'healthy', 'powerful'. Using *simba* would be a far better choice.

*Simba* also means 'strength', 'force', 'power' 'lion'. Notice the skeletal consonants *smb*. Thus the Shona-Bantu word *simba*, with consonants *smb* gives a closer consonantal match than Gardiner's *slm*.

It is becoming increasingly clear in the scheme of things that the choice for the Ancient Egyptian consonants *snb* are much closer to Shona-Bantu *smb* consonants than to the Arabic consonants (Gardiner's) *slm*.

Here are the comparisons:

Ancient Egyptian: 'be healthy' = *snb*

Shona-Bantu 'be healthy': *smb* = *simba*

Semitic: 'be healthy': *slm* = *salima*


### Example B

#### HATUA

Ancient Egyptian: *hat*  *moment, time*

Kiswahili-Bantu, **HATUA**, step, pace in walking, a time, period of time, moment, point of time, space

The next Kiswahili-Bantu word I would like to examine is the word *hatua*, a noun and is said to be derived from the Semitic Arabic word *khtwa(t)*. It is listed by **I Bosha** in his trilingual dictionary, but he does not give its Arabic usage.

The Kiswahili-Bantu noun *hatua* means, step, pace in walking and by implication it is a measure of space, distance and time. It therefore also means opportunity or time. Thus *hatua* must be derived from the Southern-Soto-Bantu language word, *hata*, to take a step, to tread on the ground. This in turn gives a measure or pace in walking. Thus the noun *hatua* means, time, moment or a period of time. It is interesting to observe that the Kiswahili-Bantu word *hatua* matches the Ancient Egyptian word in sound and meaning, Ancient Egyptian: *hat*  *moment, time*.

The Semitic Arabic word *khtwa(t)* fails to match the Ancient Egyptian word in sound. This is yet another example which proves that it is difficult to establish the etymology of words, in particular when dealing with Bantu and Semitic words. Researchers have taken the easy option of classifying certain Bantu words as Semitic without looking for their Bantu roots.

## Example C

### Semitic or Bantu root?

Consider next the Afro-Asiatic word for 'head'. The root of this word is supposedly derived from Semitic-Arabic, Semitic-Hebrew, Semitic-Akkadian and Semitic-Aramaic. According to Mudupe Oduyoye, *ras* means 'head' in Semitic-Arabic, *ro'sh* in Semitic-Hebrew, *re'sh* in Semitic-Aramaic, *ras* in Ethiopic and *rishu* in Semitic-Akkadian, *rasi* in Kiswahili-Bantu. I would now like to analyse the Bantu word for '*the father of*', which in turn means the possessor of, or one who dwells in a place. The word for father in the Southern-Soto-Bantu language is given as *re*, *rarae* and even *rara*. Thus *Re kglo* means the great father or the great chief.

The word *Ra-* is derived from the contracted form *Re wa* which means '*the father of*'

Thus *Ra-* '*the father of*' is used as a prefix for nouns denoting function, ownership or position. In other words, the word '*father*' is used as '*head*' or '*leader*'. Here are some examples in which the prefix *Ra-* is used:

*Ra-dinku* means the father or possessor of sheep, *Ra-motse* means the father or possessor of the village, a headman or chief of the village. Clearly the Semitic word for 'head' is derived from the Bantu contracted form of *Re wa*, 'the father of' and shortened to just *Ra-*.

## Example D

### Semitic or Bantu Roots?

I would now like to examine the etymology of the Kiswahili-Bantu word *damu*, which is the word used for blood. *Damu* is classified as a Semitic-Arabic word in the Kiswahili-Bantu dictionary and is said to be derived from the Arabic word *dam*, blood. According to the research, it is clear that the word *damu* is in fact not a Semitic word and should be re-classified as belonging to the Niger-Congo group of languages. The Bantu languages form part of this group. Joseph H Greenberg's work on the languages of Africa makes a good contribution when analysing the word for blood in the Niger-Congo group of languages. He also mentions the resemblance of the word for blood between the Niger-Congo and Niger-Kordofanian-languages. Joseph H Greenberg has shown that the Bantu prefix *ma-* is a formative and associated with substances which are uncountable, usually fluids or liquids. Within the Niger-Congo group of languages variations of the prefix *ma-* exists and these may also become suffixes of words, *-ma*.

As an example the word for water in Longuda, a Niger-Congo language is given as *ma-m* and the word for blood is *tu-ma*. Contrast this with another language from the Niger-Congo group. In the Chamba language the word for blood is given as *ie-ma*. The *-ma* suffix also occurs in the Bua language, *hu-ma*, blood, whilst in the Koke language *li-m* means water.

The word for blood in the Kumba language gives a close approximation to the Kiswahili-Bantu word *damu* and uses the Proto-Bantu prefix *de-* or *ma-* to arrive at the word given as *dei-ma*, the word for blood. In the Nimbari language *de-m* means blood. The word for blood in the Southern-Soto language is *ma-di*. In the Zulu-Bantu language the word for water is *ama-da*. The suffix *da* is obviously taken from Proto-Bantu *de/ma*.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the etymology of the Kiswahili-Bantu word *damu*, blood gives a close approximation in sound and meaning with *dei-m* the word for blood in Nimbari. Hence *damu* does not have its origin in the Semitic-Arabic language as has been previously assumed.

The next article will deal with The Bantu Rosetta Stones Part 2

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