

'South Africa is denied its rich cultural history'



Contemporary history textbooks start the recorded history of Southern Africa with the arrival of explorers and settlers from Europe in the seventeenth century, with a few notes on Portuguese explorers a century earlier; in the more remote areas "prehistory" lasted into the nineteenth century. Not so, says Cape Town historian Dr Cyril A Hromník (photo at left), whose vast body of research takes our history back more than 2000 years. Citing pervasive influence from India over the millennia, he also offers compelling explanations for many of the unanswered riddles in the region.

Text by Maré Mouton

Current, politically correct history states that everything on the continent of Africa was the result of the genius of its indigenous peoples. Any later regression from cultural achievements such as the fine gold-plated rhinoceros and other items found at Mapungubwe in Limpopo province, the beautiful "Bushman" rock art and the impressive stone structures at Great Zimbabwe, could only have been caused by natural factors such as environmental changes affecting the people, or by conquering colonists. This Afro-centric approach forms the basis for the eagerly awaited African Renaissance, which must at all cost be attained without help from outside.

But attempts by researchers to find, for instance, a proto-Bantu language to establish the common origin of Bantu peoples in Southern Africa, have met without success. The purpose and identity of the builders of Zimbabwe are anything but clear, and no explanation has been given for the miraculous appearance of the lighter-skinned Quena (Khoi) people somewhere in the northeast of Botswana over 2000 years ago.

Dr Hromník, an American citizen of Slovak birth who obtained his Ph.D. from Syracuse University and who has been working from Cape Town for twenty-five years, offers a hypothesis that brings all the loose ends together. This has brought him into conflict with many established academics and politicians, with the result that publication of his work has been suppressed and an order was even sought to have him deported. Hromník – who speaks or reads more than a dozen languages – bases much of his reasoning on linguistic evidence, quoting from historical texts as far-ranging

as Tamil, Sanskrit, Portuguese and Russian, or from any number of indigenous African languages. He has also identified a wide array of physical evidence dating from 3000 to 200 years ago, from glass beads to Hindu temple art and intricate cosmological temples.

Three thousand years ago, the Kung (or Bushmen, now called San) were the only humans living in southern Africa; there were no dark-skinned Bantu-speakers and no Quena (*Otentottu* or Hottentots, now commonly called Khoikhoi). There also were no cattle or fat-tailed sheep at the Cape. The name Africa did not apply to the continent.



Supreme craftsmanship: the golden rhinoceros of Mapungubwe consists of fine gold plate fixed with tiny nails over a wooden core.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE MAPUNGUBWE MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

When Herodotus visited Egypt in the middle of the 5th century BC, that country was part of Libya, and further south the eastern half of the continent was called Ethiopia. As late as 1500 AD the name Africa applied only to the coastal part of the present Libya. Negroes or *Nigritae* originally were the people who lived in the land of the River Nigris, but this name was later used to denote black-skinned, flat-nosed people. In 1526 the Moorish historian known for short as Leo Africanus explained that the Africans were the white people who had moved from Arabia to the Maghreb in North Africa. He

stressed that "the land of the Negroes... is not to be called any member or portion of Africa". In the same century, however, the Portuguese did incorporate *Nigritia* under the name Africa.

India was in terms of trade the dominant nation in Asia and the Dravidian people of southern India extended their influence east- and westwards across the seas, hence the names Indonesia and Indian Ocean (the only ocean named after a country). Aromata, their trading harbour on the Horn of Africa, became the source of spices and other valuables for the West. Utilizing the monsoon winds, the Indian traders extended their influence further south along the coast (which they called *Ajān-bar* or *Azania*) to the extent that the earliest Portuguese maps show eastern Africa as part of India (the name Mozambique is derived from the Dravidian name for monsoon boats – *mussambi-baza*).

Reaching present-day Mozambique, Hromník contends, the Dravidians encountered alluvial gold along the Zambezi, Pungue and Save Rivers and went further inland to look for the source. Indians were the biggest consumers of gold and other precious metals, and were expert miners and metal craftsmen (Herodotus referred to deep gold mines in India in 500 BC, but the mines may have been established as far back as 6000 BC. Indian Buddhist literature refers to Africa's gold trade in pre-Buddhist times, that is at least 600 BC.)

The trek up the rivers led the Indians to what is now called MaShonaland in Zimbabwe, site of the Great Ruins (*sona* is the name for gold in Pāli, the sacred language of the South Indian Buddhists; the *ma-* is a later Bantu prefix indicating foreign people). During a period of well over 2000 years the Indian *sonars* (gold-miners) established more than 1200 mines going as

deep as 38,4 metres and up to 85,3 metres on incline. The site now known as Great Zimbabwe was probably called *Sonakota*, located in *Sonabar* = gold-mining area, now MaShonaland). Mining experts who investigated the deep-stope mines in Zimbabwe, South India, Sumatra and Java at the end of the nineteenth century, were convinced that they had been made by the same people using the same techniques.

The Indian influence permeated Africa from the eastern shores, with trade extending as far as central Sudan, Nigeria and Ghana. From Sofala at the mouth of the Pungue River on the Mozambican coast traders crossed the continent to Angola, and *sonars* established mines as far south as Phalaborwa (the name is derived from an Indian word *phallu*, meaning a bar of iron or other metal, and *borwa*, the Tswana word designating “land to the south”) and the Komati River in Mpumalanga.

The Indians of Sonabar required labour, and evidently brought Bugi workers from their mines in Indonesia – Sumatra, Java and Borneo. Over time the Indian and Indonesian men would naturally have interbred with local Kung women, in Sonabar and along the coast, and thus the first of the Quena race was born, probably in the second half of the first millennium BC. The first Quena born south of the Limpopo most probably date to about the first century AD. At a later stage – probably at about 900 AD – Negroid Limi from the northwest were brought by Indian caravans to the mines of MaShonaland, where they were employed as labourers. This is reflected in their Dravidian name *Limi*, which describes them as “dark-skinned” people and as dependent “followers” of Indian caravans. By about the 12th century AD these people, also known by the Indian name *Bantu*, eventually moved into the northern and eastern parts of southern Africa south of the Limpopo. In 1857, the German linguist W H Bleek adopted the term *baNtu* as a collective name for the entire group of closely related languages spoken by the negroid people whom the Indian caravan trade brought from their homes in the tropical forests of western Africa. This family of African languages was later, for political reasons, renamed the Niger–Congo group, but its speakers continue to be called Bantu, except in South Africa where the name became politically undesirable.

The Indians had a lasting influence on the African continent. They introduced metal-working, including iron tools needed for mining and iron hoes that replaced indigenous wooden digging tools; they brought nourishing plants such as the banana, yams, various millets and vegetables as well as most of the domestic animals; and they introduced trade with shell, stone and glass beads, textiles, iron hoes and other metal tools and ingots, some of which – the more

lasting ones – have been found by archaeologists. They were the first to construct buildings and enclosures of stone, not as fortifications but primarily to serve their cosmological religion. There is no evidence, Hromník says, that the immigrant black people ever became expert miners or metallurgists, or even the primary consumers of the gold, copper and tin mined by the Indians and Indonesians, though they adopted iron and, in time, their mixed Indo-Bantu blacksmiths (such as the Lala and Lemba) produced iron hoes and axes for use in their newly acquired and still rudimentary agriculture.



Mahlatini, a Negro-Asiatic Bantu chief from Mozambique with clearly Indian features (early twentieth century).

The “indigenous” cattle and fat-tailed sheep the first European visitors to the Cape encountered, also had their origins in India. Fat-tailed sheep brought to the Horn of Africa by Indian traders were already mentioned by Herodotus, and the hump-shouldered cattle used by the Quena are anatomically related to the Brahman or Zebu cattle of India. These cattle (*Bos Indicus*) may later have been interbred with a straight-backed, tsetse-resistant Sanga brought overland by the early Ethiopian traders and by the more recent Bantu immigrants.

Apart from anatomical similarities, linguistic evidence also points to the Indian origins of local livestock: the Indian *gomas* is used in the Quena and Kung languages for beef, and the Sanskrit name *gu* and the Hindi *gāy* for harmless creatures such as a cow or sheep, may be recognised in the Quena *gwe* and the Kung *gwee* for a cow. Words for sheep and goats in Bantu languages often have the *gu* as root (this root already appears in central Sudan in pre-Bantu times), or alternatively the Malay *biri*, derived from the Sanskrit *bher*. The

Quena and Kung (where employed as shepherds by the Quena) drew a clear distinction, and always used *gu* for fat-tailed sheep and *biri* for goats.

While the Kung remained hunters, the Quena became livestock herders and dispersed southwards – archaeological finds on the West Coast and at Klipgat Cave on the Southwestern Cape coast indicate that sheep were kept in the area as long as 2000 years ago. The Quena retained many aspects of their Indian roots, including the triple-curved hunting bow, the habit of smoking *bhang* (Indian hemp or the local *dagga*), and articles of clothing and decoration much more sophisticated than those worn by the Kung. Because they were nomadic and moved seasonally after pastures for their sheep and cattle, they lived in portable huts made of reed-mats and constructed temporary *kraals* (corals) of branches for livestock. However, they left behind thousands of stone structures all over South Africa, designed as time-keeping devices to support the calendar used in these cosmological temples.

Dr Hromník has published a detailed diagram of one such stone structure (*litaku*), the Dying Sun Chariot Temple near Carolina in Komatiland (the *Komati*, called *MaKomati* in Africa, were the traders and money-lenders of Dravidian South India). This celestial two-wheel chariot consists of a precisely orientated main body designed to accommodate the Sun and its driver and it rides towards a conical hill where the sun of the Winter Solstice sets annually. In one of the inner wheels there is a seat for the priest which aligns exactly with the point where the sun rises on 22 June, the New Year in the southern hemisphere. Outside the main body of the temple and further afield, the chariot is flanked by two “lunar wheels”. From the North Wheel (Summer), situated 525 metres from the main Chariot temple, the full moon of the Summer Solstice and the new moon of the Winter Solstice can be observed. The South Wheel, placed 325 metres from the main Chariot temple, has no obvious observation seat but is aligned precisely with the other wheel and the main body of the chariot and must have served another, as yet unascertained purpose(s) in the Chariot temple.

The temple in Komatiland may have been constructed by immigrants from India, but that is unlikely in the case of the Summer and Winter Solstice Temples which Dr Hromník has identified in the Moordenaarskaroo near Laingsburg and which he ascribes to the Quena. (The Karoo, one of the most quintessentially South African landscapes, also bears a Quena/Dravidian name: *karu* = arid country.) The various structures comprising this temple complex were disregarded by locals as remnants of *kraals* or game traps. They stretch over a distance of 51 km and the largest among

them consists of two parallel and 530 m long solid walls. Dr Hromník has shown that this temple is precisely aligned with the rise of the sun on the two Equinoxes and with the lowest orbit of the Winter Solstice, 22 December. (*Readers can visit this site with Dr Hromník in December – see below.*)

The Quena spread their Indian heritage even further south. At Montagu on the edge of the Little Karoo Dr Hromník discovered a rock engraving depicting an ancient two-wheeled war chariot from India. The engraving is located at the mouth of a cave that had been extensively studied by archaeologists, but was never noticed until 1985, when it caught the eye of Hromník's eight-year-old son Tristan. The chariot depicted is of a type used in India until 1000 AD and many similar images are to be found along old trade routes in the Sahara. However, no evidence has so far been found that such a vehicle was ever used or even seen in South Africa!

The cave contained several thousand stone artefacts shaped like spearheads, which led an American archaeologist to classify the cave as a "factory site". The blades were all sharp and unused, however, and none were found outside the cave – why would the product of a factory be buried under the factory floor? Hromník has another explanation: The chariot is a known symbol of the supreme Hindu god Śiva, who was carried across the sky in a chariot. The spearhead is a key symbol of Śaivism, and the artefacts in the cave were placed there in layers of hot ash as offerings to Śiva. The cave was therefore clearly a temple, not a factory.

Even this discovery did not bring Hromník into the fold of established academia. His opponents label him as a crackpot, a racist, a poor scholar, etcetera; he says they are ignoring the available facts to protect their own academic and political positions, thereby robbing the indigenous peoples of their rich and varied cultural heritage.

One of many issues addressed by Dr Hromník is the current naming of the various indigenous groups first encountered in South Africa by the European colonists. He points out that no group ever referred to themselves as Khoikhoi or San or Khoisan. The people encountered at Table Bay and in its hinterland by Jan van Riebeeck and his men in 1652, in the first instance referred to themselves in terms of their own clan, of which about sixteen have been noted: Chainoqua, Hessequa, Gouriqua, Attaqua, etc. In broader terms, these people called

themselves the Quena (the term used for instance in van Riebeeck's diaries) or Oten-tottu, meaning "Mixed" or "Related". The latter name was corrupted by the Europeans, who had trouble transcribing the click language, into "Hottentotte" and Hottentot, which over time became a derogatory name and is now politically unacceptable.

The terms Khoikhoi (Nama for "man, men") and Khoisan (a blanket term for the click-language group comprised of the Khoikhoi and the San) which are in common use today, have no historical roots and were coined by academics as linguistic labels only in 1881 and 1928 respectively, but were soon also applied as ethnographic terms.

Even greater confusion surrounds the names of the Bushmen, now called San. These people called themselves Kung, or alternatively Bushmen. The name San is a derogatory Quena name for these smaller people without livestock which means "naked". Hromník main-

tains that there is no record of Bushmen living in the southern parts of the country in colonial times. Historical documents by colonists and early travellers refer only to "Bosjesman Hottentotten", translated as "Bushmen", but these were not true Kung hunter-gatherers, but either Quena who had lost their cattle and had to revert to living off the veld, or Soaqua, a mixture of Quena/Kung who were of smaller stature than the Quena, but bigger than Kung, and often followed Quena groups as servants.

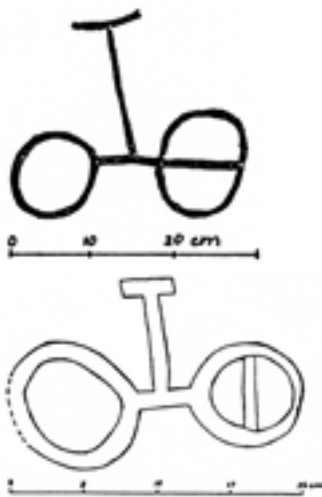
But if there were no Bushmen in the Cape, who created the many thousands of rock paintings? Hromník is convinced that the paintings were by-and-large done by the Quena, and cites various Indian images and symbols from the paintings as proof. This has brought him into conflict with especially Dr David Lewis-Williams of the University of the Witwatersrand, who has built an international reputation on explaining the meaning of "Bushman" rock art by referring to interviews with "Bushman" convicts in Cape Town in the 1870s and recent interviews with the Kung of the Kalahari. (*The authorship of South African rock art is a complex issue, and outside the scope of this*

article. A current introduction to the subject may be found in the work of Dr John Parkington of the University of Cape Town, who has done extensive research in especially the Cederberg area.)

Another axe Dr Hromník has to grind with conventional assumptions, is the weighted digging stick supposedly used by Kung women in their daily search for edible bulbs and roots. Hromník says the weighted digging stick was simply invented by academics to explain the use of the peculiar, round stones with a hole through the centre that were found in so many locations. There is no record of anybody ever actually seeing a woman using such a stick weighted with a stone (William Burchell made his oft-reproduced though dysfunctional drawing from other people's writings long after his visit to the Cape, and the only extant photograph was compiled by collectors and posed at Salt River in 1884). It was also highly unlikely that a woman would carry a stone that weighed more than the food that she could collect in a day; her tasks could easily be performed without the stone. Hromník says the stones (called *!kwe* stones by the Quena and the Soaqua) are common in Hindu temples, where they are called *yoni* stones and represent Śiva's female energy. This position brought Hromník in very direct conflict with the South African Archaeological Society, whose newsletter is called *The Digging Stick*, and which has a drawing of this implement – complete with stone – in its masthead!

Could it be coincidence that so many Southern African words and place-names are from India? Is there another explanation for the origins of the Quena people or the many stone structures scattered throughout the region? Is it coincidence that "Bushman" art so often shows tall, "elongated" figures, or were at least some of them painted by people taller than the Kung? Could local sheep and cattle have arrived in the region through tsetse-infested tropical Africa? Dr Hromník, with his Indo-African hypothesis, offers a new insight into the history of the region, but it seems his ideas will only get into mainstream textbooks once archaeologists and other academics bury their current political battle-axes! ■

Dr Hromník will conduct three one-day visits to the Quena temple near Laingsburg on 16–18 December. Contact him on 021 689 4463 or Dina on 083 324 0096, or e-mail hromnik@eject.co.za.



Two chariots (to the same scale), the top one from the Sahara, the lower one from Montagu.



A typical !kwe stone. This one measured 14,5 cm across and weighed a hefty 3,1 kilograms.