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978-1-108-06682-2 - The South-Eastern Bantu: Abe-Nguni, Aba-Mbo, Ama-Lala

John Henderson Soga

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The South-Eastern Bantu

Son of Tiyo Soga, the first black South African to be ordained, John Henderson Soga (1860–1941) was a Xhosa minister and scholar. Like his father, he was one of the first of his people to receive an education in Europe and to marry a European woman. His perspective on his people's history is therefore distinctive. Driven by a desire to record Xhosa traditions before they were lost in a changing world, Soga collected oral histories during his work at mission stations in South Africa, producing this historical survey of three branches of the Bantu family. Including genealogies of the main tribes, and tracing their traditions, beliefs and conflicts, the work first appeared in this English version in 1930, having been translated by the author from his native language. His equally authoritative work of social anthropology, *The Ama-Xosa: Life and Customs* (1932), is also reissued in this series.

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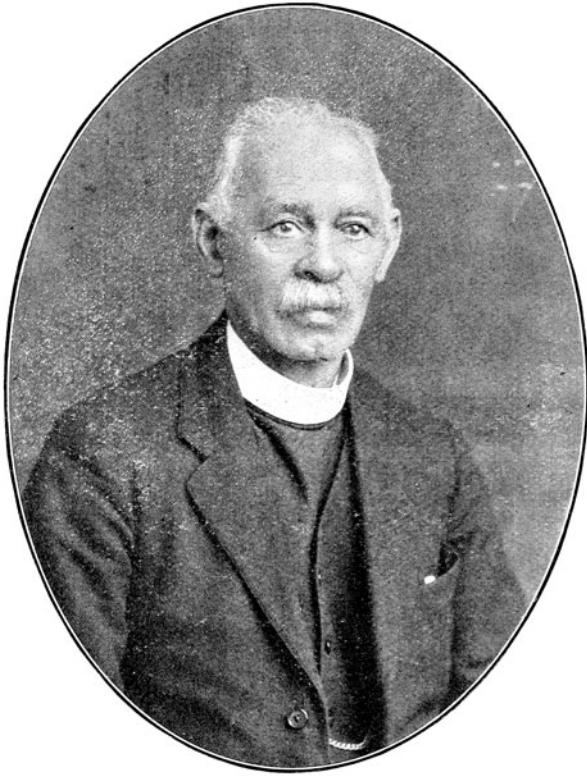
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THE
SOUTH-EASTERN
BANTU

(ABE-NGUNI, ABA-MBO, AMA-LALA)

BY

J. HENDERSON SOGA



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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION.

The present supplement to *Bantu Studies* contains a translation of the Rev. John Henderson Soga's *The South-Eastern Bantu*, made by the author himself at the request of the Editorial Committee of *Bantu Studies*.

The reasons which influenced the Committee in making Soga's *History* accessible in English may be briefly indicated.

1. Up to the present, all instruction in schools for Bantu children has inevitably been based on European text-books translated into the vernacular, or, in the higher classes, studied in the English originals. Such books are naturally written from the European point of view, and educated Natives have not infrequently complained of the "white" bias which, unavoidably, affects more especially the presentation of South African History. This bias appears partly in the accounts of the recurrent wars between Whites and Bantus; and partly also in the comparative neglect of Native tradition and, thereby, of the many happenings which, not having directly affected the Whites, are of purely Native interest. The Rev. J. H. Soga's *The South-Eastern Bantu* is the first considerable attempt made by an educated man of Bantu descent and in touch with Bantu tradition, to present the History of his people in one of the most widely spoken Native languages (isi-Xosa). It will be used in Native schools; it will be widely read by Natives; it will keep alive the memory of their

past ; it will help to form their attitude towards their White fellow-citizens ; it will build up and strengthen their racial self-consciousness as Natives. It is, therefore, a *cultural document* of importance. It is a mile-stone on the road to the creation of an indigenous literature in the vernacular. Whatever its value as a contribution to History may be, it has a value as a factor in the rise of the Bantu peoples in the scale of civilization, and in the strengthening of Bantu self-respect and pride of race. As such, the Committee thought that this book deserved to be made accessible in English to all who are interested in the effort of the Bantu peoples to absorb what is of value in European civilization without cutting off their roots with their own past.

2. But Soga's work has also some claim to attention as a contribution to the *history* of the Eastern Bantu. Not that it brings to light any hitherto unknown events of first rate importance. And for the opening chapters, which deal in the main with matters lying beyond Bantu tradition, Soga relies frankly on the authority of white historians. But, allowing for all this, Soga's work can still claim a distinct value as a historical study. For one thing, it bears evidence, in many parts, of first-hand enquiry into local tribal traditions. The author has made many journeys seeking verification of reports from old Native witnesses. Thus, e.g., we get a fresh clue to the end of Capt. Coxon's party (Ch. xx, 384), or a fresh version of a familiar fact, as in the account of the War of Ngayecibi (1877) given by an old Gcaleka councillor who took part in it himself (Ch. xvi, 254)

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Again the part played by certain customs in tribal history, e.g. the *isi-zi* custom (Ch. iv, *et al.*), is well brought out. Above all, the author's method of tracing (a) tribal migrations by the locations of the graves of tribal chiefs, and (b) tribal affiliations by genealogies of chiefs, with due attention to the distinction between Great Houses, Right-Hand Houses, and Minor Houses, clarifies and supplements in many details previously existing information. The most important result of the application of this genealogical method¹ is the conclusion that the Zulus are a tribe of comparatively recent origin, and belong most probably to the Lala branch of the Eastern Bantu (Chs. xx and xxii, *et al.*) In spite of their importance at the present day and in the history of the last century, the Zulus appear in Soga's pages as an upstart tribe, not equal in distinction and antiquity to other Bantu tribes.

To this statement of the reasons for the publication of this book in an English translation, may usefully be added two comments in anticipation of possible criticisms :—

First, some readers may complain of frequent repetitions in the pages of this book. These repetitions are undeniable, but they are inseparable from Soga's organisation of his material. And for this organisation there is much to be said, remembering that this book is, in the first instance, written for *Native* readers. Soga divides the Eastern Bantu into three main branches : Abe-Nguni, Aba-Mbo, Ama-Lala, and he deals

¹Certain of Soga's genealogies differ, in some particulars, from the genealogies previously published by Tooke (1883 Commission's report). See also Soga's note in *Bantu Studies Vol. III, No. 1.*

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under each branch with the various tribes into which it splits up in the course of history. It is inevitable, on this scheme, that, e.g., wars in which tribes belonging to different branches are involved, should be mentioned twice, once under each tribe. A Native reader, interested in his own tribe first and foremost, would naturally be best satisfied so.

And, secondly, it may be objected that, after all, we do not get here the voice of a pure Bantu, on the ground that Soga is of mixed Bantu-Scotch descent and had a Scotch School and University education. The facts alleged are correct (see *Biographical Note*), but they do not seriously invalidate Soga's testimony. For, whilst fully appreciating what he owes to his white mother and his white wife and his "white" education, John Henderson Soga has that pride of his Bantu blood and that sympathy with the lot and the aspirations of his Bantu fellows which his famous father, Tiyo Soga, wished all his sons to have. Tiyo desired his sons to regard themselves as Natives--indeed, in his own word, as "Kafirs," a term which had in his mouth no depreciatory connotation. Soga's book is written in the spirit of the first of the sixty-two maxims which Tiyo Soga formulated, under the title "The Inheritance of my Children," for the guidance of his sons and daughters through the difficulties of life in general and of racial prejudices in particular. We cannot do better than conclude this *Introduction* with a quotation from that first maxim, in memory of a noble character and a fine Christian, and in illustration of the spirit in which Tiyo's son has written his book:— "Among some white men there

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is a prejudice against black men ; the prejudice is simply and solely on account of colour. For your own sakes never appear ashamed that your father was a Kafir, and that you inherit some African blood. It is every whit as good and as pure as that which flows in the veins of my fairer brethren, I want you, for your own future comfort, to be very careful on this point. You will ever cherish the memory of your mother as that of an upright, conscientious, thrifty, Christian Scotch-woman. You will ever be thankful for your connection by this tie with the white race. But if you wish to gain credit for yourselves—if you do not wish to feel the taunt of men, which you sometimes may be made to feel—*take your place* in the world as *coloured*, not as white ; as *Kafirs*,¹ not as Englishmen. . . . You, my children, belong to a primitive race of men, who, amid many unamiable points, stand second to none as to nobility of character. The Kafirs will stand high when compared in all things with the uncivilized races of the world. They have the elements out of which a noble race might be made !”

If the earlier investigators had the advantage in time, Soga has the advantage of closer contact with his people and more prolonged research into its tribal traditions. The truth is at least as likely to lie on his side as on that of his predecessors in this field. We must look to future research to clear up the few points of difference, if that is still possible.

R. F. A. H.

¹Tiyo Soga's own italics.

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A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE ON THE AUTHOR.

The author of this book, the Rev. John Henderson Soga, is the second son of the late Rev. Tiyo Soga and his wife, Janet Burnside, daughter of a Glasgow burghess.

Tiyo Soga was the first, and still is the most famous, of the small, but steadily growing, band of men of pure Bantu descent who have received a European School and University education, and then returned to practise their professions in their native land.

Readers of this book who wish to understand something of the background of the author's descent on the paternal side, cannot do better than read the Rev. John A. Chalmers's *Tiyo Soga: A Page of South African Mission Work* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1877). Suffice it here to say that Tiyo was a descendant of Gaika chiefs, being a son of Soga, who like his father, Jotello, was greatly respected, both as warrior and as councillor, in the Gaika tribe. Jotello is reported to have been killed at the battle of Amalinde, so frequently referred to in the pages of this book (see p. 157). Soga, though opposed to the war of 1877-8 (see p. 254) and a non-combatant in it, refused to desert the Great Chief, Sandile, and seek a safe retreat. He was killed by Fingo Auxiliaries of the Colonial Army in 1878, whilst his grandson, the author, was at school in Scotland. Tiyo, after receiving the beginning of his education at Lovedale, was taken to Scotland where, after

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completing his school education, he took the Arts course at Glasgow University, followed by training for the Ministry in the Theological Hall of the United Presbyterian Church. In 1857, he was licensed and ordained by the Glasgow Presbytery of the U. P. C., and returned, with his Scotch wife, to South Africa, where he founded Mission stations, first at Emgwali, in the Stutterheim district, among his own people, the Gaikas, and later at Tutura, among the Gcalekas. There he died in 1871.

Before giving further details of the author, it may be interesting to complete the picture of the Bantu-Scotch family of which Tiyo Soga was the founder, by a brief account of Tiyo's other sons and daughters.

Including John Henderson, there were four sons and three daughters.

The eldest son, William A. Soga, after taking the M.B.C.M. and the M.D. degrees at Glasgow University, entered in Edinburgh upon the Divinity course of the U. P. Church, completed it in 1887, was ordained by the Glasgow Presbytery, and sent out to S. Africa to found the Miller Mission, Elliotdale, Transkei. He was the first Medical Missionary in that field. But finding the demands of two professions, Missionary work and Medical practice, too heavy, he resigned in 1900 from the former and confined himself to the latter, practising at Elliotdale until his death there in 1916. His son, it may be added, has followed his father's profession and is a much respected doctor at Idutywa.

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The third of the brothers, A. K. Soga, received his education at the Glasgow High School and the Dollar Academy, Clackmannanshire. After taking Law classes at Glasgow University, he returned to the Cape and is stationed, as an officer of the Public Works Department, in the Kentani district, Transkei.

The youngest brother, J. F. Soga, was a pupil of the same schools as A. K. Soga, and then took the degree of M.R.C.V.S. at Dick College, Edinburgh. As Government Veterinary Surgeon, he took a prominent part in the fight against the Rinderpest epidemic in 1897. He died in 1903.

Of Tiyo's three daughters, the eldest died in 1880; the second is engaged in Mission Work in the Transkei; the third, who went to Scotland at an early age, never returned : she is now a teacher of singing in Glasgow.

John Henderson Soga, the author, crossed the sea to Scotland for the first time at the age of three, for medical treatment of a lameness which was never wholly eradicated. Five other voyages to Scotland followed, for School and University education and for furlough from his Mission work.

He attended Glasgow High School, 1870-3 ; Dollar Academy, 1873-7 ; Edinburgh University (Arts course), 1886-1890 ; U P. Divinity Hall, Edinburgh, 1890-3. He was licensed and ordained in 1893 by the Edinburgh Presbytery, and sent out as Missionary to Bacaland, Mount Frere District, Griqualand East. There he founded the Mbonda Mission, where he worked, 1893-1904, until

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transferred to the Miller Mission, Elliotdale, in succession to his brother, Dr. W. A. Soga. There he is still working at the present day.

John Henderson Soga's work at School and University was solid but not brilliant. He won no outstanding academic distinction, but in spite of the handicap of his lameness, gained the first medal of his University in Gymnastics. In his proficiency with single stick and boxing gloves, his fellow students thought they could recognise something of the war-like spirit of his ancestors—fortunately well under control.

He married a Scotch lady, Isabella Brown, as did, with one exception, all other sons of Tiyo Soga.

Of his own children, the eldest son has recently taken the B.Sc. degree in Engineering at Glasgow University, while a younger son has completed his school studies at Dollar Academy. The eldest daughter is on the Staff of the Blythswood Institute.

Along with his missionary labours, John Henderson Soga has carried on a literary activity which, especially since 1910, has been very extensive. In that year, he began a series of translations from English into the vernacular, isi-Xosa. He began with *Aesop's Fables*, but this translation has never been published. Of his subsequent translations there have been published :—

1. *The Travellers' Guide from Death to Life*, 1924.
2. *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, by Mrs. Penn-Lewis, 1925.
3. *Our Bodies and How They Work*, by Dr. E. Chubb, 1927.

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4. *The Pilgrim's Progress, Part II.* which was brought out by the S. P. C. K. in 1927. The First Part had been translated and published by the author's father, Tiyo Soga, in 1867 (see Chalmers, *Tiyo Soga*, ch. xviii).

In 1924, the author was appointed a member of the Committee for the further revision of the Xosa Bible. The version endorsed by this Committee is now being issued and has been adopted by the various churches engaged in Mission work among the Xosa-speaking tribes.

John Henderson Soga, like his father, Tiyo, has always been interested in the traditions, customs, and tribal life of his people, on which he has been collecting data since 1880. These he is now engaged in working up into a book on "Ama-Xosa Life and Customs." His interest in History was first stimulated by a lecture given to the U. P. Divinity students at Edinburgh, by Mr. Thomas Shaw, later Lord Shaw of Dunfermshire. The present *South - Eastern Bantu* is the outcome of this interest.

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PREFACE.

The original language in which the Manuscript of this book was written is Isi-Xosa. The present translation into English has been prepared by the Author at the request of the Department of Bantu Studies of the University of the Witwatersrand.

While the subject matter of the original has been produced in its entirety, a strictly literal translation has been avoided in order to make the English translation as clear as possible.

The primary object of the book was to place in the hands of the rising generation of the Bantu something of the history of their people, in the hope that it might help them to a clearer perception of who and what they are, and to encourage in them a desire for reading and for studying their language.

It is very noticeable that the Bantu people are losing touch with their own past. Few of the older men are now able to give a reasonable account of the history of the tribes to which they belong, and still less are they able to trace the genealogy of their tribal chiefs with anything like accuracy. The younger men, educated and uneducated, know practically nothing of the history of the Bantu. "Old things are passed away" with them, and "all things are become new." Their present environment, their outlook on the future, has, under the influence of new laws and customs, focussed their attention on matters of life and conduct unknown to their fathers.

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The book deals mainly with tribal constitution and movements, leaving the wider field of customs, laws, religion, folklore, etc., to others to explore. The first six chapters are devoted to an effort to indicate the probable origin of the Bantu race. In this the writer has had to rely mainly on historical and ethnological sources of information. He has also attempted to bring some kind of order out of what appears to many to be a chaotic welter of tribes, without any clear national cohesion. For this purpose the Eastern Bantu, i.e., those between the southern border of Natal and the Cape Province, with whom this book particularly deals, have been divided into three main branches :—

(a) *Abe-Nguni*, (b) *Aba-Mbo*, (c) *Ama-Lala*.

To the English version has been added a chapter on Tribal and Clan names (ch. vii) and one on the correlation of Bantu tribes (ch. viii), indicating its methods and its limitations, together with the royal salutations of various tribes, and the interdict on the marriage of blood relations, which are factors of importance in correlation.

Special attention has been given to the compilation of genealogical tables of the more important tribes, which are of as much interest to the members of the various tribes mentioned, and possibly to European students, as the more general matter.

Tradition has been largely relied upon in following out individual and tribal history. Naturally however, the contact between white and black in South Africa, made it necessary to include incidents dealt with in extant history books, but this has been done as sparingly as possible.

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The book will probably exhibit the defects inseparable from a translation from one language into another, where two very distinct idioms have to be reconciled, but apart from these and other shortcomings, the author's hope is that the book may provide at least some interest both for the general reader, and for students engaged in the study of Bantu history.

Much encouragement and help which have been accorded the author by Mr. K. A. H. Houghton, Inspector of Schools, are gratefully acknowledged. Thanks are also due to Prof. D. D. Jabavu, B.A., and Rev. M. S. H. Williamson, B.A., B.D., for assistance in the compilation of the Ntlangwini genealogical table and in other ways, and to Mr. Edwin Mpinda for assistance with the Ama-Bele table.

J. Henderson Soga.

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| W. C. Scully, | <i>History of South Africa.</i> |
| C. Brownlee, | <i>Kafir Life and History.</i> |
| D. Fraser, | <i>The Future of Africa.</i> |
| Rubusana, | <i>Zemk'inkomo magwalandini.</i> |
| G. Mason, | <i>Life with the Zulus of Natal.</i> |
| Eveleigh, | <i>Story of a Century, 1820-</i> |
| | <i>1920.</i> |
| Dower, | <i>Annals of Kokstad.</i> |
| Bokwe, | <i>Ntsikana.</i> |
| Clark Russel, | <i>Dampier's Voyages.</i> |
| Baden Powell, | <i>Matabele Campaign.</i> |
| Wissman, | <i>Equatorial Africa.</i> |
| Sir Godfrey Lagden, | <i>The Basutos.</i> |
| G. E. Cory, | <i>Rev. Francis Owen's Diary.</i> |
| | <i>Etc. Etc.</i> |

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John Henderson Soga

Frontmatter

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ERRATA.

PAGE.	LINE.	
35	14	for <i>or</i> read <i>of</i> .
39	29	delete <i>were</i> .
56	17 and 19	for <i>Tana</i> read <i>Sena</i> .
164	14	add after <i>Ndlambe</i> , “ was reported ”
174	18	for <i>adventures</i> read <i>adventurers</i> .
185	6	for <i>o</i> substitute <i>a</i> .
185	16	for <i>l</i> substitute <i>d</i> = <i>ding</i> for <i>ling</i> .
185	6	for <i>object</i> read <i>abject</i> .
214	11	for <i>to him</i> read <i>him to</i> .
273	10	for <i>Zombo</i> read <i>Zumbo</i> .
294	3	for <i>Mbanqo</i> read <i>Banqo</i> .
302	19	for <i>whose</i> read <i>who</i> .
302	27	for <i>young</i> read <i>younger</i> .
303	19	for <i>head</i> read <i>name</i> .
303	19	for <i>was</i> read <i>is</i> .
342	6	for <i>vain</i> read <i>main</i> .
401	33	for <i>Wusho</i> read <i>Wushe</i> .
465	10	for <i>Mdungunya</i> read <i>Ndungunya</i> .
428	14	for <i>no by</i> read <i>by no</i> .
461	19	for <i>returned</i> read <i>retired</i> .
476	7	for <i>Mnyambuuvu</i> read <i>Mnyamvubu</i> .
476	25	for <i>Ntsikoni</i> read <i>Ntsikeni</i> .
477	18	for <i>were</i> read <i>was</i> .
482	4	for <i>Qiya</i> read <i>Qeya</i> .
487	28	for <i>latter</i> read <i>former</i> .