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**PART I.**  
**HISTORICAL.**

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**CHAPTER I.**

**HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE  
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## CHAPTER I.

### HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE AMA-XOSA.

#### *Ama-Xosa or Abe-Nguni.*

Bantu tribal names, through the use of several designations for one tribe, prove somewhat mystifying to persons unacquainted with the significance of, and reasons for, them. The writer proposes to endeavour an explanation of the matter in so far as it relates to the Ama-Xosa. The practice itself, however, is not confined to the Ama-Xosa, but is common to all Bantu tribes.

In dealing with this tribe we will frequently use the term Xosa or Xosas, and Gaikas and Gcalekas or Galekas without the plural prefix "Ama," for the Ama-Xosa, Ama-Ngqika and Ama-Gcaleka, for the sake of brevity and convenience.

Polygamy is a universally established institution among the Bantu, the race inhabiting the whole of South and Central Africa from about the sixth degree south of the equator. While there are slight degrees of difference in the internal organization of different tribes, and in customs and law, yet there is a fairly general or common system of sub-divisions within each tribe, that is the clan system, created and regulated by the custom of polygamy.

Each chief, indeed every man, may have as many wives as he is able to give dowry for, each wife being the female head of her own house, and each house has its own distinctive rank. Every individual son of a chief is, de facto, a chief, no matter how inferior the house may be to which he belongs. The heir of each family becomes, naturally, the progenitor of a clan.

Internecine war within the bounds of a tribe, between clan and clan is, therefore, inevitable. The royal house retains its position and authority by means of the assegai when a usurper arises. In a test of strength, should the royal house be over-

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thrown by one of the tribal clans, the latter usually assumes control of the tribe and becomes the reigning house. The tribal designation, which invariably is derived from the name of a prominent chief, under these circumstances is altered, by adopting the name of the conqueror as its tribal title. Important events also, occurring during the reign of a chief, may fix that chief's name as the tribal one, and it becomes stereotyped until a usurper arises and imposes his name on the tribe. One name may supersede another, but nevertheless the first one may continue to live, though in less common use.

As an example of this let us note that the earliest known name of the Xosa tribe was Abe-Nguni. The name was derived from a progenitor in the royal line called Mnguni. We know nothing about Mnguni beyond his name, but through the operation of circumstances, possibly such as those mentioned above, the name, though still in use, has been largely overshadowed by that of a successor, "Xosa." What the tribal name was before Mnguni's day no one can tell. Tradition fails us here as it does so often in matters concerning the distant past.

The Abe-Nguni, coming south from, I believe, the north-east of Central Africa, moved into Northern Natal before Europeans came into the country, and settled close under the Drakensberg Mountain range, at a point now difficult to determine, but supposed to be the sources of the u-Mzimvubu (St. John's River). Later it moved southward towards what is now the Cape Province of the Union, leaving behind it in Natal several of its offshoots.

The first entry of the Abe-Nguni into Natal probably coincides with, and possibly formed part of that great tribal irruption of the Ama-Zimba and Aba-Mbo, in the 16th century, which came into conflict with the Portuguese, destroying their trading stations on the Zambesi and those along the western sea-board of the Indian Ocean from Melinde in the north to Sofala in the south, and inflicting such punishment on the Portuguese that their power was broken and almost destroyed.

The next chief of importance after Mnguni was *Xosa*, from whom the tribe derives its name of Ama-Xosa. While the term Abe-Nguni still lives, as has been said, yet it has fallen into the

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background, and the term Ama-Xosa has for nearly four centuries been the more intimate tribal appellation.

We have no certain knowledge of any great deeds done by this chief to secure his name so prominent a position, but probably he was the chief who ruled the tribe just prior to, or at the time of, its advent into Natal: and the circumstance being a landmark in the history of his people would be sufficient in importance to make his name famous, and impose it as the tribal designation. Shortly after his time various upheavals took place within the tribe, which though they did not disrupt the tribe created within it several large divisions. The first of these took place approximately about the year 1600, when a younger brother, Tshawe, of the reigning chief, Cira, in a great battle overthrew the latter and reigned in his stead. This circumstance created within the tribe the important section called the Ama-Tshawe, which since that day has been the ruling element in the tribe. The Gcalekas and Gaikas are of the Ama-Tshawe. Later again about 1750, through internecine war, the right hand-house, the Ama-Rarabe or Gaikas, became independent of the great house of the Gcalekas.

The original locality of the Xosa tribe is difficult to determine, but the evidences, to my mind, point to an East African home. The fact of their arrival in Northern Natal about the same time as the Aba-Mbo, an East African tribe, seems to indicate their connection in a combined movement. Then again, a fact of still greater significance is that in the religious sphere many of the Xosa customs and sacrifices seem to correspond, however imperfectly, with customs of Jewish origin. The Arabs, who had colonies on the eastern coast of the continent, and intermarried with the Native tribes in their vicinity from ancient times, most probably imposed their religious forms of worship on the neighbouring Bantu. These circumstances strongly point, at least on a *prima facie* view, to an East African origin of the Ama-Xosa.

*General Remarks.*

There are two forces which bind all tribes of the Bantu into a racial unit. The first is spiritual as exemplified in their religion, and in the spirit-world wherein dwell the spirits of their ancestral

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chiefs, and of each family's departed relatives. These spirits are active, concerning themselves with the things which pertain to their unseen world, and, at the same time, keeping in touch with the living, and requiring the living to keep in touch with them through ritual acts and ceremonial rites.

The second force is relationship which works through the kinship of a progenitor, and through a common blood stream reacting to the furthest off descendant ; thus binding the progenitor to the family, clan and tribe which have their being in him, and likewise binding family, clan and tribe to him. So powerful has this bond been that Xosa loyalty was ever found to be utterly impervious to attempts, on the part of Governors, to secure the betrayal of a proscribed chief. Loyalty is the very breath of life to the Xosa : loyalty to the head of the family, and in an ascending ratio to the head of the clan, and loyalty with an added religious veneration to the chief of the tribe. To this virtue a parallel may be found among other races, but nowhere can one be found to surpass that of the Xosa tribesman.

*Origin of the Ama-Xosa.*

Any answer to the question of the origin of the Xosa tribe must, of necessity, be a purely speculative one. Nothing definite can be asserted thereon, since there is no historical data, or indeed traditional, on which an authoritative statement might be based. There are, however, one or two things, the consideration of which incline to the belief that the tribe is of East African origin. The first, and most important of these, is a certain similarity between some religious observances of the Xosas and those of the Jews, which cannot be set aside as mere coincidences. In this connection compare the article on Religion, dealt with later on in this work.

The question then arises, " Through what source could these Jewish ceremonies have come to the Xosas ? " The answer is, through a source which, if not actually Jewish, was at least responsible to the Jews for its form of worship. It does not seem that any such source was available on the western side of the African continent, unless far north and beyond the territorial limits of the



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Bantu race. On the eastern side of the continent, on the other hand, the Bantu were in contact with two Asiatic peoples,—the Hamites who inhabited the western sea-board of the Red Sea, throughout the greater part of its length, and extended as far southwards as Gallaland, and even to the country of the Hamitic Massai (Masayi), whose southern limit reached, at least, one degree below the Victoria Nyanza. Not being familiar with Hamitic forms of religion, I merely quote these tribes as a possible source from which the Bantu received, in remote times, their religious forms, assuming that this took place before Mohammedan influence had changed their original form of worship. A much more probable source is the Arab colonist of East Africa.

From an indefinite period before the Christian era Arabs carried on trade along the eastern shores of Africa, at a time when the Bantu race was still in its infancy. This trade in merchandise and slaves was carried on from remote times uninterruptedly until the Portuguese, in the 15th century, came into conflict with them, and wrested from them most of their main stations. Nevertheless the Arabs were too deeply rooted in Eastern Africa to be entirely suppressed by the Portuguese, so that, even to the present day, they are still carrying on their trade in commerce and slaves, in spite also of British efforts to stamp out the latter.

Throughout many centuries the life of the Arabs of the east coast of Africa has touched the life of the Bantu tribes of that region, and it can scarcely have done so without leaving a permanent impression in some form or other. Unless, therefore, the similarity between some of the religious ceremonies of the Jews and those of the Xosas can be dismissed as merely accidental and a coincidence, and in no way dependent upon Arab intrusion into East Africa; and unless it can be disproved that the Arabs intermarried with, and took concubines from, the Eastern Bantu tribes, their inter-relationship by blood and otherwise with the Bantu in those parts must be admitted.

If again the religious observances of the Xosas are granted as being in some cases even similar to those of the Jews; and if intermarriage with East African Bantu be admitted, it seems, by implication, to justify the theory of an east coastal origin for the Xosas.

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The latter fact may also account for the somewhat lighter colour of the Xosas as compared with the general run of other Bantu tribes.

As to the religion of the Arabs—"the collateral relatives of the Jews," Professor Dods, in his book *Mohammed, Buddha and Christ*, p. 29, tells us that "Judaism and Christianity were also largely, if not very purely, represented in Arabia before the time of Mohammed." Hence while the early Arabic worship was that of the stone, which, at first white, became black through the sins of the people, there is no doubt that Judaism was the religion of a large part of the Arab race.

While there were also colonies of Phoenicians in East-Central Africa, there are few, if any, evidences of phallic worship among the Bantu, and certainly none among the Xosas.

Judaism is, therefore, the only source from which Bantu religious ceremonies, imperfect though they be, could be derived, and as has been said, the probable medium of their introduction to the Bantu were the Arab colonists. Though not widely spread, the Arab custom of a son inheriting his father's wives has been adopted by some few Bantu tribes. This also must have been a custom adopted through contact with Arabs. The Xosas, however, do not "indulge" in it.

*Unity of the Xosa Tribe.*

Unlike the great majority of Bantu tribes, whose unity has invariably been broken up by internicine wars and the jealousy of minor chiefs born under polygamy, whose natural effect is always disintegrative, the Xosa tribe has suffered comparatively little from this cause, and has maintained its integrity as a tribe for over five hundred years at least; that is, if we assume, as I believe we are justified in doing, that Xosa, from whom the tribe takes its name, lived not later than 1535.

Notwithstanding the virtual independence of such sections of the tribe as the Ama-Ngqika (Gaikas), Ama-Ndlambe (Ndlambes), Ama-Mbalu (Mbalus) and others, yet all without exception claim a bond of unity between them through the person of Xosa, whom all alike venerate. This has been sufficient to bind the