

BLACKS' ORIGINS OF MESOPOTAMIAN CIVILIZATION AND EDUCATION

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Abstract

The contribution of black people to the development of world civilization has been a subject of debate during the last two centuries. While there has been a significant breakthrough in crediting the race its rightful position in the world history, the whole question of its contribution to the development of education and world civilization has yet to be delineated and made part of World Civilization history. While there has been a breakthrough in acknowledgement of the African people credit to the rise and development of the civilization of the Nile Valley that of Mesopotamia has yet to be reviewed more critically. The black people deserve rightful credit to the rise and development of early education and civilization of Mesopotamia.

Key Words: Black Origins of civilization and education, Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, Mesopotamia.

Introduction

What significant contributions have black people made to world civilization? While commendable efforts have been made in the reconstruction of a history of black people dating from the pre – colonial era to the present, a great deal of intensive research studies have yet to be carried out in the field of their contributions to world civilization history. In this area of study the Western scholars appear to have done an exhaustive work.

The growth of Western civilization has been accounted for in details. It is portrayed as a cultural development resting on a firm foundation of the classical Greeks and Romans. Their classical city states such as Sparta, Athens, and Rome have been so exalted that they appear to be of greater impact on human civilization than Ur, Nippur, Babylon, Memphis, Thebes, Napata, and Meroe founded by the non Indo – European people.

Unless for their inadequate acknowledgement of the classical Greeks and Romans indebtedness to civilizations of the ancient blacks and Semitic people of the Near East, such scholars need simply high commendations for the thorough job done. As a result of their scholarly activities, the Western people can look back with a deep sense of pride for having been a people of history based on a firm foundation and for remarkable contribution they have made to world civilization.

In this paper, the writer wishes to respond to the challenge offered sometimes ago to black scholars by Dr. Chancellor Williams, distinguished late emeritus professor of African history, Howard University when he remarked:

That the blacks were among the very earliest builders of a great civilization on this planet, including the development of writing, sciences, engineering, medicine, architecture, religion, and the fine arts: (William, 1971. xv.)

With reference to the above statement Prof. Williams went on to say that the story of how such an advance civilization was lost is one of the greatest and most tragic in the history of mankind and should be the main focus of research studies in African history. (William, 1971, xv.) In the light of the above statements, the writer wishes to examine the position of black people at the dawn of world civilization. One of the cradles of world civilization, in fact the earliest cradle of human world civilization has been acknowledged to be the region between Tigris and Euphrates rivers designated by the classical Greeks to be Mesopotamia. Let us cast a new look at the foundation and growth of civilization of this region.

There are certain questions which can guide us in this exploration. First, who were responsible for the plantation of civilization of the Mesopotamia? Second, what evidence is there in asserting that they were members of black ethnic group? Third, what were their attitudes towards education? Fourth, how did their system of education relate to civilization of the human race as a whole?

Pioneers of the Mesopotamian Early Education and Civilization Identified

Who were responsible for the origin of education and civilization of the Mesopotamian Valley? Archaeological and historical discoveries of the last century have shown

that the people named *Sumerians* were responsible for the rise of the Mesopotamian civilization. The major question which remains unresolved is the classification of the *Sumerians* among human ethnic groups. Some scholars have arbitrarily classified them among the Indo – European people. Others have left them as a mysterious race of mankind who were neither Indo – European nor Semitic people. One of the major arguments is that their language bore no affinity with the known languages of the world.

While the writer cannot over-look the difficulties in classification of the people named Sumerians among the major races of the world, there are certain factors that should be noted seriously in an effort to solve the problem. Who named the people Sumerians? When were they called so? What were the reasons for naming them so? In order to answer the above valid questions, it is probably reasonable to make a brief survey of the research done during the last two centuries in an attempt to account for the people in history.

During the third millennium BCE, the land located within the southern portion of the Mesopotamia Valley was known as *Sumer* and *Akkad*. From the second millennium BCE to the Hellenistic age, beginning about the 4th century BCE, the region was known as Babylonia. When the Babylonian civilization fell in Mesopotamia, the actual existence of ancient Sumer seems to have been forgotten. Up to the middle of the 19th Century, Hebraic Old Testament records were probably the only sources which had some information about the region. To the Ancient Hebrews, *Sumer* was known as the land of *Sennaar* or *Shinah*. (Genesis 10:10, Isaiah 11:11, Daniel 1:2).

For a good number of years, visitors in the Mesopotamia took some interest in collecting small relics of the past, for example burned bricks, marked with wedge – shaped impression. It was, however, during the nineteenth century that the clay tablets proved to be the records of some ancient languages. Between 1808 and 1920, C.J. Rich, an Englishman residing at Baghdad while serving the British East India Company, investigated several of the large mounds. He collected some relics covered with cuneiform inscriptions which he sent to the British Museum. His account was published in 1815 and 1818, under the title *Observations on the Ruins of Babylon*. The significance of his findings, however, was not realized immediately when this publication was out.

The decipherment of the Rosetta Stone in 1822 had directed the attention of the world to the Nile Valley. During this time, Mesopotamia seems to be untouched until France sent its consul to Mosul on the Tigris River in 1842. This person was P.E. Botta who having been French consul at Alexandria, Egypt, was stimulated by the discoveries that were taking place in the Nile Valley.

He also started private investigation of some mounds on the traditional site of Nineveh. It was not long before he opened ground on to such unexpected rewards of complete walls of a building. The French Government resolved to sponsor more investigation. Botta realized after that he was in the midst of the valuable remains of a buried culture. Among other discoveries was the great ancient palace of Sargon II (722 – 705 BCE) Botta's findings were forwarded to Paris and deposited in the Louvre. Dr. Iran Maurice Price, formerly professor of Semitic languages and literature, University of Chicago, remarked that the palace was one of the most magnificent the world had ever seen, covered an area of more than twenty five acres. Until then, Sargon's name was known only in the Old Testament book of Isaiah, (Isaiah 20:1). The French Government published his work in five great volumes entitled, *Monuments of Nineveh*, 1849 – 50.

While Botta was working, Austin Henry Layard (1817 – 1894), a young English scholar privately at first and later by the British Museum, began excavating the ancient Sumerian city of Nimrud known as Calah in Genesis. He was successful in bringing to light the palace of the Assyrian King Assurnatsipal (884 – 660 BCE). A few years later he discovered the palace of Sennacherib of Assyria (705 – 681 BCE). He died in 1894, after having left three important written reports on Nineveh.

One of the English outstanding discoveries of the Mesopotamia was accomplished by Sir Henry C. Rawlinson. In 1835, while serving as an English officer in the Persian army, he discovered in the Zagros Mountains the famous Behistun Rock, a limestone hill rising out of the plain to a height of about 1,700 feet. At approximately 350 feet above the base on the perpendicular section, Rawlinson saw a large space which had been carefully cut and polished. On the smooth surface, he saw a relief of a king identified to be of Darius I (552 – 486 BCE) of Persia.

Over him was the Persian god, Ahura Mazda, before whom stood a line of prisoners tied together neck to neck with a rope. One on the left side and below this great group were some columns of cuneiform inscriptions. Rawlinson worked at intervals for four years, sometimes on a ladder resting on a fourteen inch ledge, sometimes from a rope swing, until he had copied the entire cuneiform inscription and its pictures. After closer examination, it was concluded that he had discovered a monument of three languages. With his former knowledge of Persian as a basis, and a slight understanding of Sanskrit and other Eastern languages, he set about the decipherment and translation of the Behistun inscriptions. Not only did his work supply information about Darius I of Persia but proved to be the key to knowing and understanding the Mesopotamian ancient writings, life, peoples, and

governments just as the decipherment of Rosetta Stone by Jean Francois Champollion proved to be the key to the science of Egyptology (Rawlinson, 1878).

The first modern discovery of the people named Sumerians was disclosed in 1850 by Edward Hinks, an Irish Orientalist. He noted that the cuneiform system of writing frequently used by the Semitic Babylonians and Assyrians could not have been invented by them. He concluded that the system of writing must have been developed by some non-Semitic people who preceded them in Mesopotamia.

Further discoveries were done by Sir Henry C. Rawlinson between 1851 and 1855, while serving as the British consul general at Baghdad. Based on the study of the Sumerian – Akadian bilingual texts and unilingual Sumerian inscriptions, Rawlinson stated categorically that there existed a separate non Assyrian language.

The study of the bilingual Sumerian – Akkadian texts, however, continued by Julius Oppert, a French orientalist. In 1852, he started research at the old Babylon site and at Nimrud. In 1869, for the first time, Julius Oppert introduced the name Sumerian as the title for the language of the non Semitic people who introduced civilization in Mesopotamia. He noted that there was frequent use of the royal title “King of Sumer and Akkad.” He remarked that Akkad likely referred to the Semitic people of the valley; whereas Sumer had reference to the non-Semitic race.

The actual existence of the Sumerians was established further by the later archaeological discoveries. A good number of monuments were excavated from some of the principal cities founded by them. The city of Lagash currently known as Tolloor was excavated by France, under the leadership of Ernest de Sarzec, French vice-consul at Basra in Babylonia between 1877 and 1900. The French expedition during this time succeeded in the discovery of adequate ancient remains to identify the place as Shirpuria or Lagash. They brought to light palaces, temples, statistics, and inscriptions of various kinds. E. de Sarzec carried excavations until his death in 1901. At Louvre, Paris, there is one of the most important collections of Sumerian ancient records and monuments which can be found in any museum.

During the year 1889, the University of Pennsylvania prepared an expedition under the leadership of Dr. John P. Peters for the exploration of Mesopotamia. This group centred its excavation on Nuffar, the ancient Sumerian city of Nippur, dated 1897.

Later campaigns were carried out under the leadership of J.H. Hayness. As a result of the above American archaeological excavations, Nippur emerged as one of the oldest cultural centres in southern Mesopotamia. They discovered many thousands of documents recorded in ancient Sumerian, the language which was used in the

valley before the Semitic Babylonians and Assyrians. From Nippur emerged about 30,000 economic tablets and 20,000 literary tablets, most of them in Sumerian language (Horns 1955, Chiera, 1939).

In both Lagash and Nippur unilingual Sumerian inscriptions were unearthed. There are instances where no Akkadian texts were used. Since the beginning of the 20th century, there has been extensive study of the Sumerian language and literature to the extent that their position as a distinctive group of people has been acknowledged. In 1905, F. Thureau Dang edited and translated the first significant copies of unilingual Sumerian inscriptions, *Les inscriptions de Sumer et Akkad* (the Inscriptions of Sumer and Akkad). In 1923, A. Probel published the first comprehensive description of Sumerian grammar, *Grandzuges der Sumeridschen Grammatik*, which laid the foundation for which the subsequent studies of the subject were built.

The work of editing, translating, and publishing almost a half million Sumerian texts unearthed and deposited at the great museums of the world has been the job of such scholars as Samuel Noah Kramer, A. Falkenstein, T. Jacobsen, and their assistants. Through linguistic studies, therefore, the people named Sumerians were a distinctive group of people responsible for plantation of the Mesopotamian early education and civilization before the takeover by the Semitic Babylonians and Assyrians (Kramer, 1961).

Blacks as the Pioneers of Mesopotamian Early Education and Civilization

Is there any evidence to indicate that the Sumerians were black people? First, in the light of the above passages, it has been observed that the people named Sumerians by Julius Oppert neither spoke an Indo – European nor a Semitic language. In this case, they could be classified either Mongoloids or Negroids, the remaining major races of the world.

Second, the people named themselves “black – headed” or “black – faced people,” which could mean black people as portrayed in the Assyrian and Babylonian inscriptions.

Third, there have been difficulties in the attempt to trace the Sumerians back to their original place before occupying southern Mesopotamia. Prof. George A. Dorsey was convinced that the original Sumerians came from the Elamite Hills to the east of Mesopotamia. In this case, if they lived today, they would be called Arabs; whereas they would be Mongols if they lived originally in Afghanistan (Dorsey, 1931).

If the Sumerians original home was in the Elamite region it is very unlikely that they were Mongoloids. In most cases, they could be classified among Ethiopic or black ethnic group. This was the position of Sir Harry

Johnston. According to him, the Elamites of Mesopotamia appeared to have been a Negroid people with kinky hair who succeeded in transmitting this racial type to some Jews and Syrians. He observed that there was a curliness of hair, together with a Negro eye and full lips in the portraiture of Assyrian which conveys the idea of an evident black element in Babylonia (Johnston, 1910).

Fourth, the above opinion expressed by Johnston has been confirmed by some archaeological discoveries. As per Poole's account, Professor A. C. Huddon remarked that while the Assyrians themselves were depicted to be pure type of Semites among Babylonians, there was a clear sign of Cushite blood. He cited an Elamite king on a vase found in Susa. The statue was painted black, indicating that he was Cushite (Huddon, 1934). It has been observed also that up to the present time, there is a strong Negroid strain in the modern people of Elam. Similarly, Gudea, the most outstanding king of Lagash of the Neo – Sumerian dynasty, is portrayed black. This has been noted to be one of the finest statues of the Sumerians, depicting him as having most of the qualities of a black man. His reign 2100 BCE ushered the dynasty of Ur, during which the first two rulers Ur Nammu and Shulgi who made Ur and Uruk glorious cities of the ancient world (Mallowan, 1965).

Fifth, Sir Henry C. Rawlinson, famous English Near Eastern archeologist who deciphered Behistun Rock as noted before, named the Sumerians Cushites (Ethiopians) and traced their original home to be in Ethiopia and Egypt. He observed that the system of writing which they brought to Southern Mesopotamia had the closest affinity with that of Egypt, and that there was an absolute identity between the two alphabets.

As regards to the language issue, Rawlinson remarked that the language of the primitive Babylonians is Ethiopic. He noted that the vocabulary of the Sumerian language was Ethiopic; hence belonging to that stock of tongues which in the sequence were everywhere more or less mixed up with some of the Semitic languages, modern specimens can be found in the Mahra of Southern Arabia and the Gala of Ethiopia.

Sixth, Sir Henry C. Rawlinson's conclusion was supported fully by the Mosaic Old Testament historical accounts. The Genesis records dating from the 15th century BCE clearly portrays how the nations originated and dispersed to the various parts of the world, during the post diluvian era. Genesis genealogy account states that Kush (Ethiopia), and Mizraim (Egypt) were brothers. Kush (Cush) was the father of Nimrod who was the first city and empire builder. Some scholars identify him with Gilgamesh in the Babylonian legend which depicts him two – thirds god, and one third man. He is portrayed as a hero of great strength and daring on seal cylinder, on palace reliefs, and, and in the poetry named Gilgamesh

epic. Genesis credits to Nimrod the establishment of most of the early cities of Mesopotamia such as Babel (Babylon), Erech (Uruk), Accad, Calneh identified by some scholars to be Nippur, Nineveh which later became the Assyrian capital, Calah important city about twenty miles south of Nineveh, near the junction of the Tigris River and the Upper Zab River, excavated by Layard, and Rassam. The above are the same cities founded by the Sumerians. (Genesis 10, Empires of the Bible 1 – 5)

The historicity or authenticity of the *Old Testament* records has been confirmed by the Biblical archeology of the 20th century. To this end, Professor William Foxwell Albright, dean of biblical archeology remarked:

Archaeological research in Palestine and neighbouring lands during the past century had completely transformed our knowledge of the historical and literary background of the Bible... The uniqueness of the Bible, both as a masterpiece of literature and as a religious document, has not been lessened, and nothing tending to disturb the religious document, has not been lessened, and nothing tending to disturb the religious faith of Jew or Christian has been discovered... Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition of the value of the Bible as a source of history (Albright, 1935, pp. 127, 128).

In the light of the above statement, the archaeological research studies of the 20th century have confirmed the Old Testament classification of the people of the world. With reference to the table of nations as displayed in Genesis chapter ten, Professor George Rawlinson once remarked:

That precious document the "Toldoth Beni Noah" or "Book of the Generations of the Sons of Noah." Well deserve to be called the most authentic record that we possess for the affiliation of nations. The Mosaic narrative conveys the exact truth - - a truth alike in accordance with the earliest classical traditions, and with the latest results of modern comparative philology. (Rawlinson, cited from the Empires of the Bible)

The Mosaic Genesis historical records state, therefore, that the people of Cush (Ethiopia) were responsible for the plantation of early education and civilization of both Mesopotamian and Nile Valleys.

Seventh, the authors of the *Horizon of the Lost Worlds* credit also to the black people the origins of civilization of both Mesopotamia and the Nile Valleys. In this volume the writers remarked:

Although there are still many gaps in our knowledge of these ancient worlds, we can trace our Western

traditions back to the earliest of all civilizations in Mesopotamia - - in the land of Sumer and in Egypt. The dark skinned, and dark – haired people who came down from the mountains of Iran to settle the marshy lands of the Tigris – Euphrates Valley were the first people in history to develop the arts and practices that constitute civilized life. During the fourth millennium BCE they had raised great cities with huge temples, devised a system of writing and created a literature and learned to use copper and cast bronze for tools and weapons (Davidson 1962).

In Mesopotamia, the dark skinned, and dark haired people, therefore, were responsible for building the earliest cultural development; the very people Julius Oppert named Sumerians in 1869. In harmony with the above conclusion, Prof. Charles Seignobon, distinguished French historian stated that the first civilized inhabitants of the Nile and Mesopotamian Valleys were a dark skinned people with short hair and prominent lips and were named Kushites (Ethiopians) by some scholars and Hamites by others (Seignobon, 1910).

The Sumerians of Julius Oppert were, therefore, in this analysis, members of black ethnic group who were the pioneers of education and cultural development of Mesopotamia. They founded a loose confederation of city states that centred at Sumer, Kush, Umma, Lagash, Ur, Babylon, Assur, Uruk (the Biblical Erech), and Eridu. Their organization started probably as early as 3500 BCE. They lost out to the Semitic race, the Old Babylonians during the 19th century BCE.

Ancient Blacks' Early System of Education in Mesopotamia

What was the attitude of the Mesopotamia ancient blacks towards education? What did education mean to them? In brief, it can be rightly said that the priestly class of the Sumerian blacks operated the earliest system of education sound in theory and practice as outlined below.

The Early Mesopotamia Aims of Education

There were two major aims of education among the Sumerian blacks in ancient Mesopotamia. First, their educational system aimed at preparing the young people so as to lead life respectable to both God and fellow man. Second, their educational programme sought to produce qualified manpower for various functions in the states and society as a whole. Qualified manpower needed was for religious, commercial, and political duties. Kramer says the original goal of the Sumerian School was the type known today as “professional”. It was set up for the purpose of training workers meant to meet the economic, social, religious, and administrative demands of the land, and that such continued to be the main goal of education throughout the history of the Sumerian blacks in

Mesopotamia (Kramer, 1959).

The type of Early Educational Institutions in Mesopotamia.

What types of educational institutions were operated by the Sumerian blacks in ancient Mesopotamia? First, the Sumerians seem to have established institutions whereby the youth were taught how to read and write. *The writing schools* were centres for creative writing. In such places literacy of the past were learned, copied, and at the same time the new ones were formulated. While it is true that most of the graduates from the Sumerian schools served as scribes in the temples, palaces, and other private places, some offered to labour as instructors serving as university professors of the day. Through such teaching and research studies, many of such ancient scholars depended for earning their livelihood (Kramer 1959).

Second, there was a strong system of *apprentice schools*. These were institutions which trained at the jobs. From such places many were trained in intricate use of gold, silver and copper. Through the system, skills in making bread, brewing alcoholic beverages were also learned. The young people were taught hydraulics. The irrigation schemes indicate a highly developed science of water conservation.

Third, the most comprehensive centres of education seem to have been *temple schools*. Out of the temple explored there were sections of great halls which were dedicated to the training of young people for priesthood and secretariat services. In them the youth received more advanced studies in religion, occult knowledge, astronomy, and even mathematics so that they might be able to predict seasons for planting and harvesting. The temple schools equipped the Sumerian society with a host of scholars who were versed in various skills and information for all religious, commercial, administrative, and travel duties (Graves, 1925)

In 1914, a Sumerian school building was discovered at Shurupak, one of the Sumerian cities. In it clay tablets were found bearing the exercises of children who lived about 2000 BCE such tablets were found on the floor. The six rooms that surrounded a court looked like modern school rooms. The enclosure marks a huge block of about 55 feet square, the walls surviving up to day are about 8 of 9 feet in height (Kramer, 1959).

The Agents of Instruction

Who were the main instructors of the head of Sumerian school was *Ummia*, a title synonymous to “expert”, or “professor”, or “school father;” whereas a student was known as a “school son.” An assistant professor was named “big brother.” He was responsible for writing the new tablets for the pupils to copy, and at the same time it

was his duty to hear them recite their studies from memory. The other members of the staff included the man in charge of drawing. The monitors had to keep strict account of attendance. Discipline in a school was entrusted to a man in charge of whip (Kramer, 1959; Wilds, 1970).

The Courses of Instruction in Early Education in Mesopotamia

What were the main courses of instruction in early education of ancient Mesopotamia? First, the Sumerian schools taught reading and writing. They were among the pioneers in the development of a system of writing on earth. They developed a system of writing that passed through three main stages. In the first stage, they produced pictogram, meaning stylized picture of an object. *Pictograms* were, however, slow to produce and at the same time were limited in what they could represent. Pictograms were in use probably from 3500 to 3200 BCE. Between 3200 and 3100 BCE, *phonograms* were in use. In this stage, symbols in the form of letters were used to stand for sound and idea. At last they developed syllables impressed by wedge shaped styli on clay tablets which were baked afterwards; hence resulted in *cuneiform* scripts. The students were required to learn not only how to copy but also to produce clay tablets (Mallowan, 1965).

Second, the Sumerian institutions taught *languages*. In the first instance students were expected to know the Sumerian language well. In addition, they were required to learn a foreign language, especially a Semitic language so as to have the citizens communicate easily with the foreigners in the course of business transactions.

Third, *mathematics* occupied an important position in their educational programme. In particular, they did well in arithmetic and geometry. The numbering system was based on five and twelve. In this case, they developed a system of mathematics based on 60 as basic unit instead of the current numbering based on 10 and 100.

Fourth, instructions in *astronomy* or *astrology* were given. The people observed heavenly bodies with great accuracy. Consequently, they developed a calendar of 12 lunar months, while at the same time made provision for correcting discrepancies at certain intervals. Their system of mathematics based on 60 as basic unit produced 24 hour day, sixty minute hour, and 360 degrees in the circle. Through astronomical studies, they invented water clocks and sundials, for time measuring (Mallowan, 1965).

Fifth, they discovered how to cure many diseases. They performed surgery. In this case instruction in *pharmacy* and *surgery* were given.

Sixth, the Sumerian blacks demonstrated their ingenuity in the development of *architecture, art, and engineering*. They discovered how to make bricks out of clay. They demonstrated their architectural and

engineering skills in the construction of *ziggurats*, artificial mountainous buildings tapering in the form with setbacks and ascending staircases used as temples. The best preserved is at the site of Ur, whereas the largest one is within the vicinity of ancient Babylon. Architecture and hydraulics were developed and taught, (Woolley, 1929)

Seventh, the Sumerian blacks were outstanding for instructions in *law*. Three outstanding codes of law discovered by the archeologists originated from them. These laws dated from the time of Urukagina, and Ur – Namu as monarchs. The Hammurabi's code of law of the 17th century BCE was simply a translation into Babylonian language, the Sumerian blacks' codes of law.

Eighth, the Sumerian taught *theology* and *practical religion*. They were highly religious people. Apart from their belief in numerous gods, they had the *supreme triad*, three principal deities. First, there was *Anu*, the supreme god who reigned in the heavens. In the earliest time he was honoured at Uruk. He was the sky god. Second, was *Enlil* who was the lord of the atmosphere and the earth. Like Christ in the Christian theology, he was the maker of the universe, in other words, the lord of the earth. Third, there was *Enkior Ea* who was god of water. The Ziggurats as steps towards heaven were constructed for gods, especially *Enlil*, the deity of the air. The priests developed sound theology. They knew that people inhabited a highly designed cosmos, created by the supernatural beings. This orderly universe could be explained in mathematical language (Pritchard, 1950).

Ninth, the Sumerians left thousands of pieces of *literature*, dating from the earliest known time in Mesopotamia. The cuneiform tablets discovered portray a rich and varied literature of the people. There were of all types of discipline. In particular, there were religious, historical, and epic poems. The most outstanding found by the archeologists include *Enumaesh*, telling the story about how the universe was created; *Gilgamesh epic*, telling the story about deluge – (flood); *Adapa epic*, relating the story about the fall of man. All of the above epic writings run parallel with Genesis account of creation, flood and the fall of man (Thomas, 1961).

Tenth, *music* was taught. It was the art which meant a great deal to everyday life of men and women of all classes. Singing was done and various kinds of instruments were played.

Historical Impact of Sumerian Blacks on the Origins of Mesopotamian Civilization and Education

What were the major historical impacts of Sumerian blacks?

First, the ancient blacks named Sumerians were the pioneers in the development of the earliest civilization that centred within the Mesopotamian region of the Near

East. In this Endeavour, they were the first to set up city states and a form of federal system of government that incorporated Eridu, Ur, Lagash, Uruk (Biblical Erech), Shurupak, and Umna located on the southern section of the valley; and Nippur, Kish, Babylon, Kucha, and Eshnunna on the northern portion of the valley.

In the light of the Hebrews Old Testament records, the first or earliest empire builder was a Cushite named Nimrod. He led not only in the establishment of the most of the cities mentioned above, but also in building Nineveh which later became a magnificent capital city of the Assyrian Empire. Except for the intervening short periods of the Akkadians (Old Babylonians), and Gutians, the Sumerian blacks proved to be the dominant people in political, social, economic, religious, and intellectual spheres in Mesopotamia between 3500 and 1800 BCE.

Second, they were among the earliest in the invention of a system of writing. They formulated Cuneiform scripts which were adopted by many different groups of people including the Semitic Babylonians, Assyrians, Aryan Hurrians, and Hittites, with only minor modifications.

Third, the ancient blacks of Mesopotamia succeeded in organizing a system of religion, mythology, architecture, literature, and economic enterprise which they were able to pass over to the succeeding Semitic people, the Babylonians and Assyrians. These succeeding nations of Mesopotamia also succeeded in passing over the Sumerian blacks cultural traits to the neighbouring people including the Greeks and Romans.

Fourth, as observed earlier in this study, the Sumerian blacks divided the circles into 360 degrees. Their mathematical system of symbols based on the number 60 was the forerunner of modern decimal system based on the number 10.

Fifth, that apart from the Hebrews, modern world has received the most ancient documents on cosmology. The universe to them was so orderly that it could not be a product of chance as the naturalists are trying to tell the modern world. It was to them a design that could be explained in a mathematical language.

Sixth, since astrology necessitated observation of the stars, this science led to astronomy, in which the later Mesopotamian people reached the high degree of excellence. The pyramidal structure known as the *Ziggurat*, the temple of the Sumerians and other Mesopotamian people, proved useful for obtaining correct astronomical observations.

Seventh, from the ancient blacks of Mesopotamia came some of the earliest law codes. The existence of such indicates that there was a high degree of political and social organization in the city states. As already stated the famous Hammurabi law codes were simply the Babylonian or

Semitic rendering of the Sumerian black system of laws.

Eighth, from the Sumerian blacks emerged the idea and practice of establishing institutions of learning. Education to them was part and parcel of life in the community or society. It aimed at preparing youth so as to lead life respectable to God (divine being) and fellow mankind. Second, their system of education aimed at preparing of qualified manpower for meeting religious, social, economic, political, and intellectual services to the state and society as a whole.

Conclusion

As long as the documents and monuments of history are preserved, the significant contribution of black people to world civilization and education cannot be forever wiped out. As modern African historians and educators, we cannot afford focusing only in the reconstruction of black history dating from the pre-colonial era to the present, significant as that may be. The history of black people must begin at the dawn of human civilization; the very period in which the race was at the forefront nearly in every field of human cultural development.

As a people, it is imperative that the truth about significant contribution of black people to education and civilization of the human race be reconstructed and incorporated as part of educational programme of the African people all over the world as form of truth that was realized by Dr. Gabriel Kingsley Osei, distinguished Ghanaian historian and educator, who remarked:

In the early history of mankind, the Africans stood high in the ladder of civilization, but through dark ages fell into ignorance and superstition; but now, in the dawning of a new day arising, never again to be submerged beneath the darkness that covers the earth, the gross darkness that covers the people (Osei, 1968, p. 22).

The above statements carry the same thought of Prof. Chancellor Williams cited at the beginning of this paper. Not only were the black people in the forefront in Africa, but also in the origins of Mesopotamian civilization and education. On that note of understanding, the African historians and educators should explore the reconstruction of the entire history of black contributions to world civilization and education. In this noble task, nothing should be permitted to stand on the way.

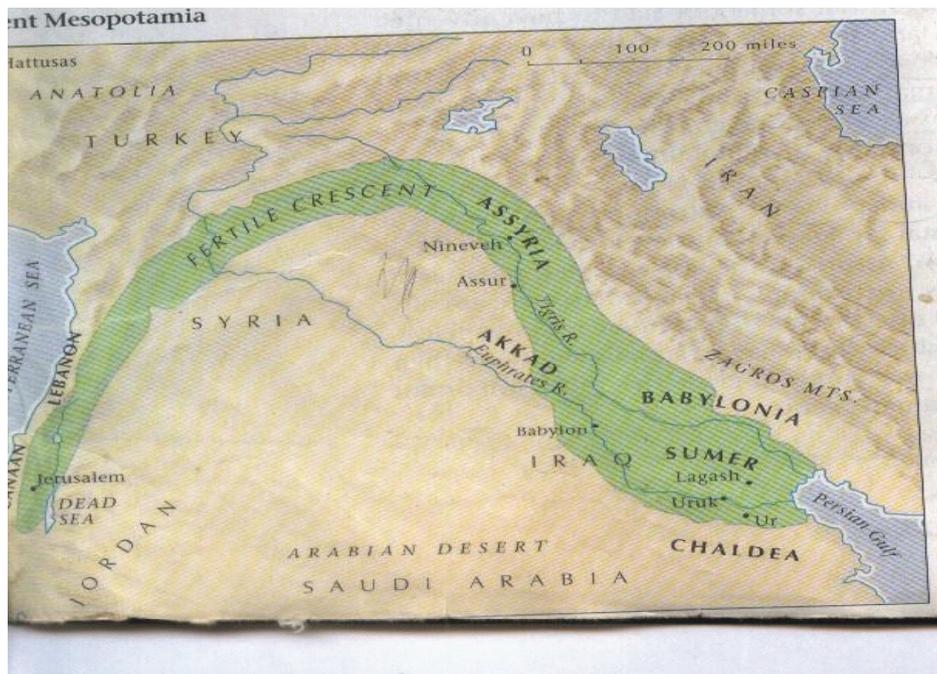


Figure 1

Ancient Mesopotamia Civilization: From Burns, 1988. W.W. Norton & Company.

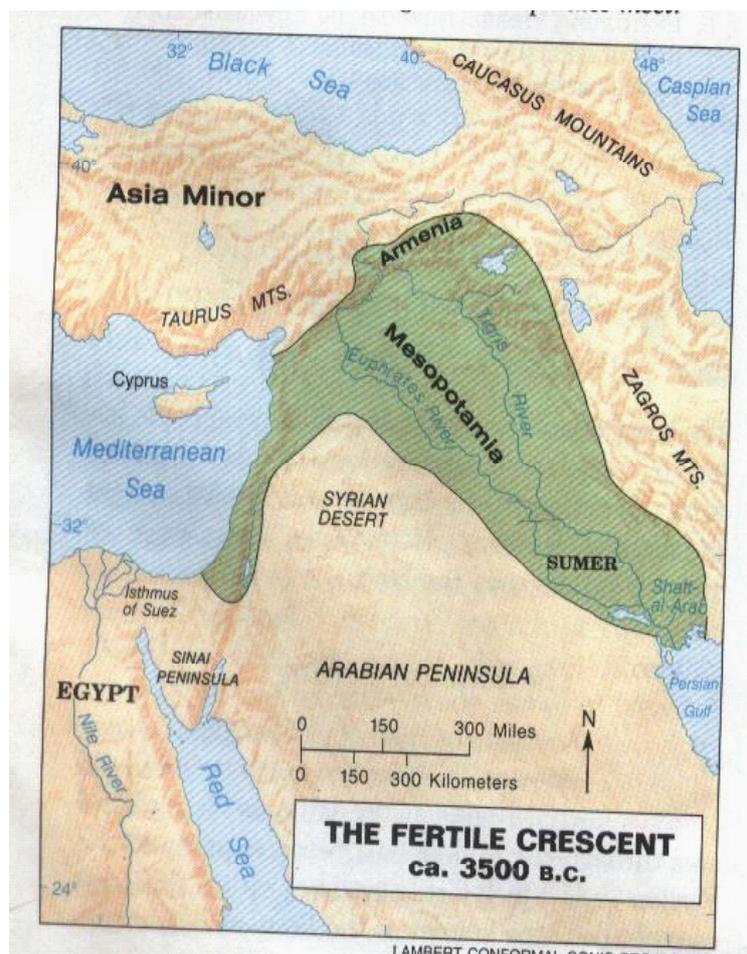


Figure 2

The Fertile Crescent Historical Map from: Mazour, A., Mazour, G. & Peoples, J. M... (1990)

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NASAL CONSONANT PROCESSES IN STANDARD KISWAHILI

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Abstract

This paper discusses four phonological processes that are evident in Standard Kiswahili nasal consonants. The natural generative phonological theory (NGP) has been used in the analysis of the various processes. Both formal and general rules have been posited for each of the processes in order to show the environments under which they occur.

Key words: Phonological processes, homorganic nasal assimilation, nasal deletion, Ganda law, Kiswahili.

Introduction

Standard Kiswahili has five underlying nasal consonants. These nasals are /n/, /ɲ/, /ŋ/, /m/ and /ɱ/. All these phonemes are involved in various phonological processes that lead to the realization of different variants at the phonetic level. Some of the processes are fairly natural and are motivated by the anatomy of the articulatory organs while others are not so natural. At the same time,

some processes are still quite productive while others seem to have been blocked. In this paper, all these angles concerning Standard Kiswahili nasal consonants are explored.

Nasal Palatalization

One process evident in Standard Kiswahili nasal consonants is the palatalization of the alveolar nasal. According to both Meinhof (1968) and Guthrie (1970/71),