

Primitive Races Survive in African Desert

Anthropology

By EMILY C. DAVIS

If you were transported to a desert in South Africa—one of the least known corners of the world—and there in the wilderness you met women of a Bushman tribe wearing tall, three-pronged helmets in the famous Viking style, you would probably think you were dreaming and your mental wires had got badly crossed.

If other types of Bushmen were there, with slant eyes and the yellow skins of Orientals and with Chinese tones to their African speech, you would be still more perplexed. And if still different types of Bushmen appeared with reddish skins reminiscent of the American Indian, you would probably sum up the whole baffling situation in the words of Alice in Wonderland—curiouser and curiouser.

These strange, almost unbelievable combinations have been seen and accounted for, however, by an English professor who has had a rare opportunity to journey straight through the Kalahari Desert. The evidence he obtained there appears to upset many prevailing ideas about primitive men in general and about the African Bushmen in particular. His explanation of what he saw links these primitive natives hidden away in South Africa with the distant civilization of Egypt, Crete, Greece, even Scandinavia and China.

The professor, E. H. L. Schwarz, is a geologist and geographer. For more than thirty years he has lived in South Africa, making field surveys of its uncharted country and teaching at the Rhodes University College, at Grahamstown, S. A.

The Kalahari, a great forbidding wilderness in the heart of South Africa, he describes as the last place on earth—outside of the polar regions—where men would want to live. That is why, for many centuries, tribes of primitive men have found the Kalahari a refuge where they could be comparatively safe from their aggressive fellow human beings. And that is why the world has known so little about them.

In the vast tracts of unknown land, Professor Schwarz states, some 10,000 of these people live by the chase, using stone tools as our ancestors did in Europe thousands of years ago, speaking a language invented before the human tongue learned the trick of articulative speech, and showing



VIKING HELMETS in South Africa. This is more than a coincidence, Prof. Schwarz believes

relationship to all the more important stocks of the early human race.

It is as if time and progress had stood still in this enclosed and isolated region, and here we can see in some way what manner of folk we have sprung from.

All through the geologist's journey he saw only these wandering people of the wilderness. Some of the types had never before been described or photographed. The name of Bushman has usually been reserved for the whity-brown pigmies of the bush country. Other types of natives found by the few adventurers into the region have as a rule been thought of as mixed breeds or intruders into the Bushman's home land. But the geologist reports that there are ten or twelve different types of Bushmen. Some have yellow skins, like the Malay; others brighter yellow like the Chinese. Some are red-skins, and others are black. There are pigmy-sized Bushmen, and middle-sized Bushmen, and some that are more than six feet tall. And while there are many mixtures of race, there are enough pronounced pure types so that they can be sorted out into separate peoples and their origins traced.

The different groups got their strange customs and their physical heritage for the most part in the Mediterranean region, 3,000 miles away, according to Prof. Schwarz's theory.

Take the best-known Bushman, for example, the pigmy type, whose body color, when it can be seen through the dirt, is a corpse-like whity-brown. It is reasonably certain that these Bushmen lived originally on the shores of the Mediterranean, Prof. Schwarz points out. One kind of evidence is the pictures of Bushmen shooting ostriches that have been

found on the walls of rock shelters in the Sudan, in North Africa. Similar pictures have also been found in Rhodesia, not far from the Kalahari.

"These Bushmen introduced gaiety into the world," says Professor Schwarz. "Most of the early races were horribly devil-ridden, and life was no joke except to the very few who were rulers. But the Bushmen are always laughing and dancing, and centuries of the bitterest oppression have not taken this saving grace from them.

"These Bushmen were probably the world's first court jesters, for they were brought to the Egyptian court on account of their amusing antics from the time of the first dynasty some 6,000 years ago. When the Pharaoh died his Bushman was killed and buried in the same grave.

"The idea was that when the spirit of the king came into the kingdom of the great god Osiris, the god would think him a great sinner if he had a long face. But if he came accompanied by the shade of the dancing Bushman the god's attention would be diverted and he would pass the party on to the regions of bliss.

"Later the awful thought struck the priests that perhaps Osiris would let the Bushman pass and detain the king, so Pharaoh had to learn to tread the Bushman measures himself. The idea of a king on his throne solemnly studying the steps of a Bushman dance with the object of executing a similar performance before the highest god of the Egyptians is very delightful; more so, as one can still see the dwarfs performing the identical dance."

When the Trek Boers came into South Africa they killed off 2,700 pigmy Bushmen in ten years. But the few that remain still dance and laugh and play the buffoon generally.

An earlier entrant into the Kalahari was the yellow Bushman, known as the Masarwa, the explorer reports. This Bushman is a fairly tall, sturdily built type. People with the same characteristics are found today in such scattered places as Australia and Patagonia, he goes on to explain. There was a prehistoric race around the Mediterranean called the Mousterian race, whose remains occur from Gibraltar to Galilee, which was similar to these yellow Bushmen, if not quite identical. He concludes that there is sufficient evidence (*Turn to next page*)

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DRY STICKS ARE ALL THAT IS LEFT of the South African forest when drought claims it

to found a working theory that these prehistoric people spread all through Africa and Asia and became the races that we now find at the far ends of the continents. If this proves acceptable, these yellow Bushmen would be living specimens showing what the yellow races generally have sprung from.

"An almost parallel case is afforded by the red Bushman, the Qung," Professor Schwarz finds. "These are mostly small people whose skin is colored a deep, even red. Now these certainly did live around the Mediterranean in very old times, for we find men and women depicted in ancient frescoes on the island of Crete shown with precisely the same body color, and the same thing occurs in Etruscan frescoes in Italy. The same color occurs among the lower coolie classes in China."

Then there are the Hereros, a Bushman tribe whose women wear tall, three-winged helmets made of leather and ornamented with iron beads. The helmet looks decidedly Viking, and in the museum at Christiania there is preserved a Viking helmet with three wings of the same kind.

The explorer explains the distant spreading of this fashion idea by suggesting that it arose in North Africa and was carried by the bargarians to Greece, through Russia and on to the Baltic. Meanwhile, the same custom in its original form was taken southward by the people who migrated that way.

There is additional support for this theory that the Viking helmet styles spread north and south from the African shore of the Mediterranean in the fact that South Africans also

wear another kind of typical Viking headdress. This African tribe takes the skin of the hump of a cow, which makes a convenient cap, and attaches on either side the tusks of a hippopotamus. This is the other form of Viking helmet, and the scientist concludes that "it seems incredible that both kinds of early Norse headgear should be found in Africa unless there had been a direct connection."

The women who wear the warlike helmets admire a feminine adornment—long hair. This cannot be attained naturally, but under the leather head-dress they fasten strands of cow hair to resemble luxuriant plaited locks. Among some neighboring tribes this fashion calls for "hair" hanging down to the heels, and with others thick plaits are the thing. All pretend that the hair is genuine.

Another Bushman tribe is literally a Chinese puzzle. These are brighter yellow in color than the Masarwa, and are a type of Hottentot. Their faces are strikingly Chinese. But what are Chinese doing in South Africa?

Professor Schwarz came into close association with some of these incongruous natives, and after studying their faces he concluded that the typical eye is purely oriental.

"There is a fold of skin dropping vertically on the inner margin," he says, "while the conjunctiva or third eyelid is abnormally developed forming a scarlet clot in the inner angle. This is a Mongolian feature and occurs in no other race, and to my mind indicates admixture with Chinese blood, a view which is strengthened by the guinea-gold color of the skin.

"The tones and pitch in which

these people pronounce words may give them a special meaning. In Chinese there are four tones to the more polished dialect of the north, but in the south these rise to sixteen. It is more than a coincidence that the Hottentot language should possess many of the actual tones of the Chinese language. It is inconceivable that a poor nation such as the Hottentots should have elaborated by themselves such a complicated system of word sounds.

"The whole of this study points to direct Chinese influence, such as might have been brought about by the wreck of Chinese ships along the west coast. Some of the larger ships from China that sailed in the region of Africa, according to old accounts, carried as many as 1,000 people. Ship-wrecked mariners of the middle ages, it would seem, married with the Masarwa or other Bushmen who were unable to impart their language. So the children grew up using the words of their mothers, but keeping the intonation of the fathers."

Only about 40 pure-bred Hottentots of this kind are still left, though many half-breeds occur throughout Southwest Africa, the explorer states. In fact, the various tribes of the Kalahari are on the verge of extinction. Up until 500 years ago their country was a well-watered jungle, stocked with plenty of antelope, rhinoceros and other game which the hunters could depend on for food. Then the great Victoria Falls broke through, and much of the water that had swept down the center of the Kalahari was diverted off to the sea. Gradually the bush began to become desert.

Even 75 years ago the region supported great herds of wild beasts. But since then the desert dryness has spread out in barren, widening circles, claiming more of the tropical growth and shriveling the rivers so that they can no longer be used as water-highways. It is only when a great record-breaking flood comes into South Africa that an adventurous explorer like Professor Schwarz can make his way by boat into the depths of the South African Sahara.

At the time he crossed the Kalahari conditions of 100 years ago were almost miraculously restored. Streams that had been dry sand beds were running swiftly again and the geologist with native guides and a native boat traveled 550 (*Turn to page 97*)

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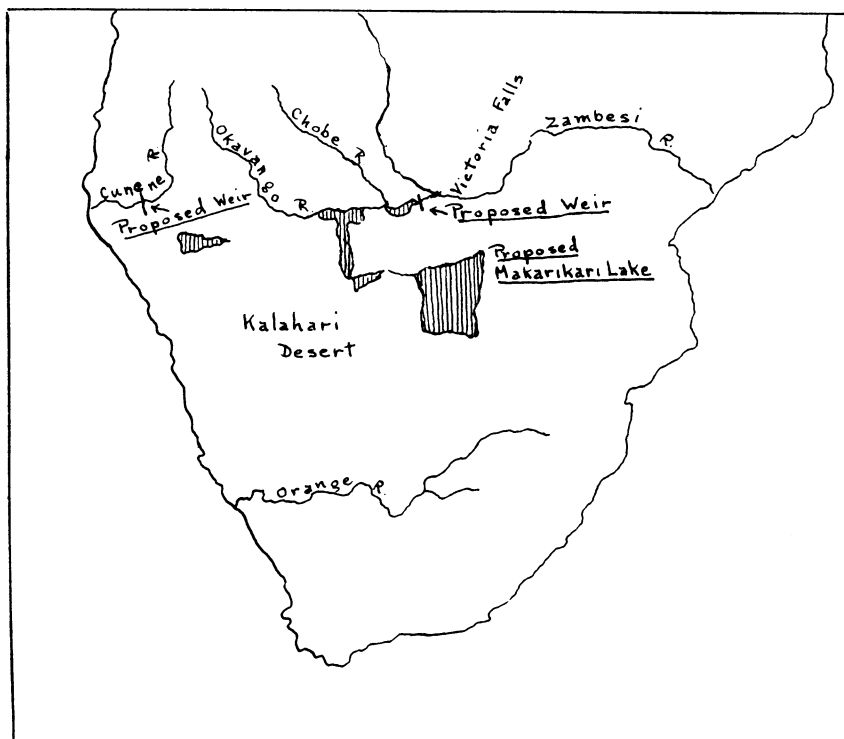
miles down these highways. When the boat trip ended unexpectedly in a dry field, the geologist and the natives managed to engage a wagon and set out through 250 miles of deep sand, the worst of the desert, the region known as the Great Thrust.

This remarkable desert exploration trip took place in 1925, the year of the great flood, but until now Professor Schwarz has been more absorbed in the scientific significance of what he saw than in telling the world about his adventures and discoveries. Ever since he began traveling through South Africa he has been troubled by the terrible results of drought, which is becoming more and more of a problem. Plan after plan to make the Kalahari region fertile again was worked out by him and rejected for one reason or another. The desert journey gave him many important facts to work with because it revealed to him the exact condition of the river courses in the old days and showed how the rivers would take their old channels if given a chance. Now, however, he has taken time off to tell the story of his explorations and his theories, explaining the relation of the Bushmen to the races of the world. These theories and discoveries will appear shortly in book form, he states.

The growing aridity of the Kalahari is starving out the Bushmen rapidly. A single thunder storm is enough to make dry sticks of trees bloom again and to send the grass shooting up luxuriantly, for the dryness of the Kalahari is not old enough to be entirely barren. But rains are becoming rare. Drought is the rule. In 1918, when Professor Schwarz went through the western edge of the Kalahari, the capital of Ovamboland was strewn with human skeletons, the remains of Ovambo natives who were seeking food and water and had fallen by the way. Fifteen thousand perished in this way.

The drying process of the rainless region is ruining 300,000 square miles of country for any useful purpose, but Professor Schwarz points out that comparatively inexpensive engineering works will restore the rivers to their former routes and save the water now carried off uselessly to the sea.

The chief rivers in question are the Zambesi, the Chobe and the Okavango. The Zambesi is an international waterway, and its use would involve international negotiations. But in



MAP OF SOUTHERN AFRICA, showing the rivers that would restore the Kalahari Desert to fertility and the areas which would become reservoirs

time of a great flood all of the water cannot flow over the Victoria Falls, but some is pushed into its old channels leading down through the Kalahari. Part of this excess flood water can be controlled during flood time by a sill on the Kalembezi River which flows into the Zambesi, and the water thus diverted would be turned into the great depression in the southern Kalahari known as the Makaririkari. To send the water of the other rivers, the Chobe and the Ovango, into the Kalahari, the geologist proposes a weir at Ngoma, near Victoria Falls, for this obstruction would divert enough water to recreate the old desert streams. In the west of the Kalahari he proposes building a forty foot wall across the Cunene to turn the water into a stream heading for the Kalahari.

The scheme would make economical use of the materials of the region for the barrages. The Ngoma weir, for instance, would be made of Mopane wood, which is resistant to rot and which is available in quantities from nearby forests. The Mopane piles would be filled in with rubble from adjoining basalt hills. The wall would have to be as high as 20 feet for a short distance, the geologist estimates, and it would have to continue over the flats to the margin of forest never covered by any record floods. If the flood waters were stemmed at

Ngoma, an accumulation of sand would form behind the wall, and reeds would grow in dense masses, thus adding ten more feet to the effective height of the wall.

The result of the engineering project would make the Kalahari a well-watered luxuriant region, as it formerly was, and would re-vitalize one-tenth of the whole arid region of South Africa.

"At present," the geologist says, "the Kalahari acts as a reverberatory furnace, whence blow the hot winds that devastate the land, producing the dreadful droughts in South Africa. If this area is converted into a verdant region, rain-laden clouds will blow off it, with corresponding beneficial effects to the surrounding country."

The project would save the remnant of the starved-out natives, it is argued. It would rid the white farmers of the surrounding country of the terrors of drought. And it would create land for settlement and farming.

The British government sent an official expedition into the Kalahari last summer to determine the value of such an undertaking, for it is realized that while there are many plans for making over Africa to suit its modern inhabitants, this project is one that involves very large economic consequences.