ISIS AND ASIIS

EASTERN AFRICA'S KALENJIIN PEOPLE AND THEIR PHARAONIC ORIGIN LEGEND: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

by

KIPKOEECH ARAAP SAMBU

Submitted in accordance with the requirements For the degree of

DOCTOR OF LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY

In the subject

SEMITIC LANGUAGES

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

PROMOTER: PROFESSOR PS VERMAAK

NOVEMBER 2000
SUMMARY

The Kalenjiin-speaking people of Eastern Africa have maintained a popular tradition that their ancestors came from farther north, from a place that they variously call Tto and Misiri (Egypt). So much part of the oral tradition has this claim been that the first informants to talk to the incoming colonial officers and their compatriot anthropologists at the close of the 19th century, inevitably repeated it to them. Those visitors duly entered the traditions into their political and anthropological records.

However little was done by way of an attempt to either validate or dismiss this claim of origin except for brief debates in the early 20th century colonial press. The author decided to investigate this claim in the interest of his own community and posterity. It was a pioneering work, naturally, and the result was a string of discoveries. Consequently a disciplined scholarly approach to further research became an imperative, hence this doctoral project.

This project is based on the following premises:

(1) That if the Kalenjiin claim were to be seen to be valid, then their chief cultural expression, their language, had to have a verifiable relationship, at the genetic level, with the language spoken by the Egyptian population that they claim to have branched away from in greater antiquity. This necessitated the extensive comparative linguistic work, chiefly: (a) lexicostatistical analysis that is based on hard-to-drop basic words of language, and (b) syntactical analysis that is based on equally hard-to-change aspects of grammar.

(2) Similarly, the traditional religion of the Kalenjiin had to feature an appreciable amount of parallelism with the religion(s) of ancient Egypt as well as with its likely offshoots, Judaism and Christianity being the most visible of them. Are the respective ancient Egyptian and Kalenjiin names for Deity: “Isis” and “Asiis”, sheer coincidences, or are they mere mispronunciations of each other? Comparative work based on the aspect of religion and the related narratives that are either the pith or the sheath of religion constitute the bulk of this thesis. The oft-unrecognised need to separate ancient Egyptian polytheistic mythology from true ancient Egyptian monotheistic religion is addressed.

Key Terms

Alternative spellings are given where applicable:
Asis; Asisian; Asis; Isis; Puh; Maat; Ma’at; Kalenjiin language; Kalenjin; Kalenjiin religion; Oorgoiyoot; Orkoiyot; Oral tradition; Comparative religion; Divine kingship; African traditional religion.