

Bantu MIGRATIONS

The **Bantu expansion** or the **Bantu Migration** was a millennia-long series of migrations of speakers of the original Bantu language group. The primary evidence for this great expansion, **one of the largest in human history**, has been primarily linguistic, that is that the languages spoken in sub-Equatorial Africa are remarkably similar to each other, to the degree that it is unlikely that they began diverging from each other more than three thousand years ago. Attempts to trace the exact route of the expansion, to correlate it with archaeological evidence, and more recently, with genetic evidence, have not been conclusive, and so many aspects of the expansion remain in doubt or are highly contested.

The linguistic core of the Bantu family of languages, a branch of the Niger-Congo language family, was located in the region of modern Cameroon and Eastern Nigeria ☆. From this core, expansion began about three thousand years ago, with one stream going more or less east into East Africa, and other streams going south along the African coast of Gabon, Democratic Congo and Angola, or inland along the many south to north flowing rivers of the Congo River system. The expansion eventually reached South Africa probably as recently as 300 A.D.

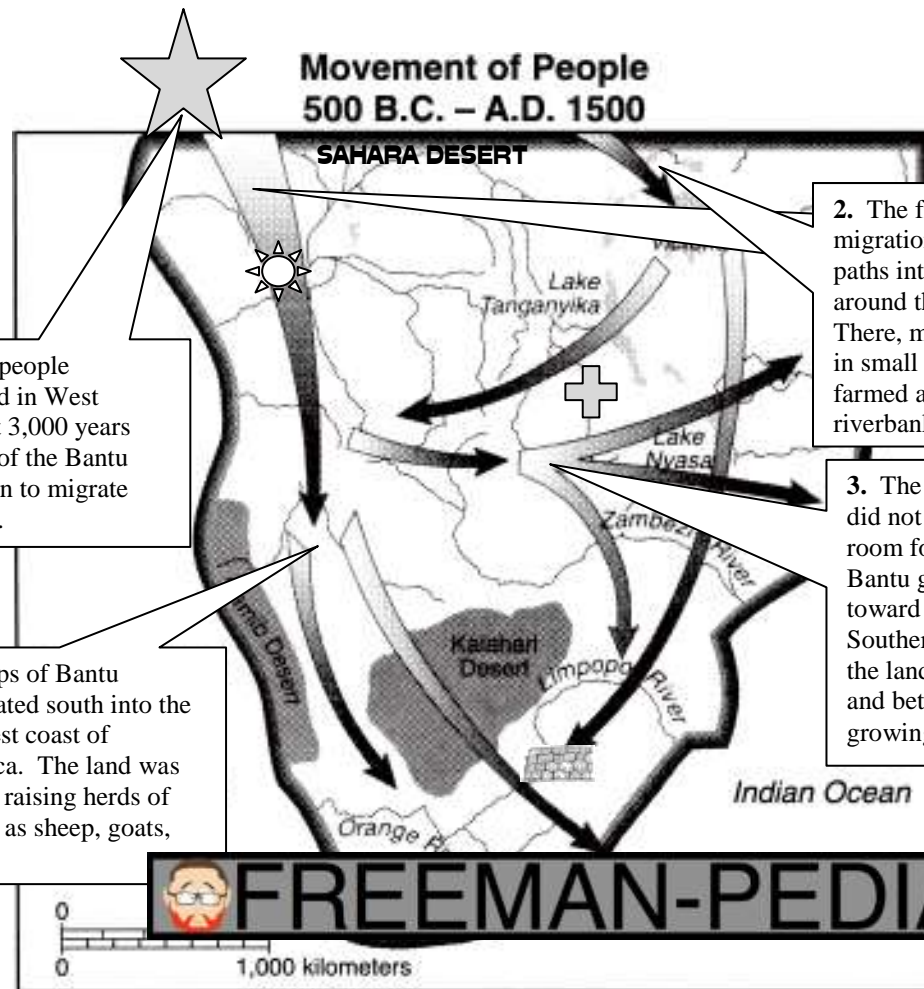
Initially archaeologists believed that they could find archaeological similarities in the ancient cultures of the region that the Bantu were held to have traversed; while linguists, classifying the languages and creating a genetic table of relationships believed they could reconstruct both material culture elements, new crops and the like. They believed that the expansion was caused by the development of agriculture, the making of ceramics and the use of iron, which permitted new ecological zones to be exploited.

1. The Bantu people originally lived in West Africa. About 3,000 years ago, speakers of the Bantu language began to migrate south and east.

4. Other groups of Bantu speakers migrated south into the dry, grassy west coast of Southern Africa. The land was best suited for raising herds of livestock such as sheep, goats, and cattle.

2. The first wave of Bantu migration followed two paths into the rainforest around the Congo River. There, many of them lived in small villages and farmed along the riverbanks.

3. The dense rainforest did not provide much room for farming. Some Bantu groups moved toward the East coast of Southern Africa, where the land was more open and better suited to growing crops.



In 1966 Roland Oliver published an influential article presenting these correlations as a reasonable hypothesis. They pushed out or absorbed the hunter-forager Khoisan, who formerly inhabited these areas. Meanwhile in Eastern and Southern Africa, Bantu-speakers adopted livestock husbandry from other peoples they encountered, and in turn passed it to hunter-foragers. Herding practices reached the far south several centuries before Bantu-speaking migrants did. **Archaeological, linguistic, genetic and environmental evidence all support the conclusion that the Bantu expansion was one of the most significant human migrations and cultural transformations within the past few thousand years.**


THE EARLY MIGRATION/EXPANSION (1000 BCE-500 CE)

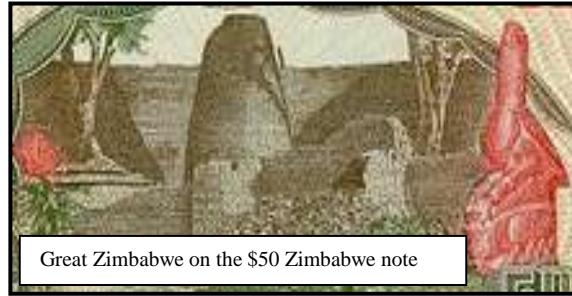
It seems likely that the expansion of the Bantu-speaking people from their core region in Cameroon began around 1000 BC. Although early models posited that the early speakers were both iron using and agricultural, archaeology has shown that they did not use iron until as late as 400 BC, though they were agricultural. The western branch ☀, followed the coast and the major rivers of the Congo system southward, reaching central Angola by around 500 BCE. Further west, Bantu-speaking communities had reached the great Central African rainforest, and by 2500 years ago (500 BCE) pioneering groups had emerged into the savannas to the south.

Another stream of migration, moving east by 3000 years ago (1000 B.C.E.), was creating a major new population center near the Great Lakes of East Africa \oplus , where a rich environment supported a dense population. Movements by small groups to the southeast from the Great Lakes region were more rapid, with initial settlements widely dispersed near the coast and near rivers, due to comparatively harsh farming conditions in areas further from water. Pioneering groups had reached modern South Africa by 300 C.E. along the coast.

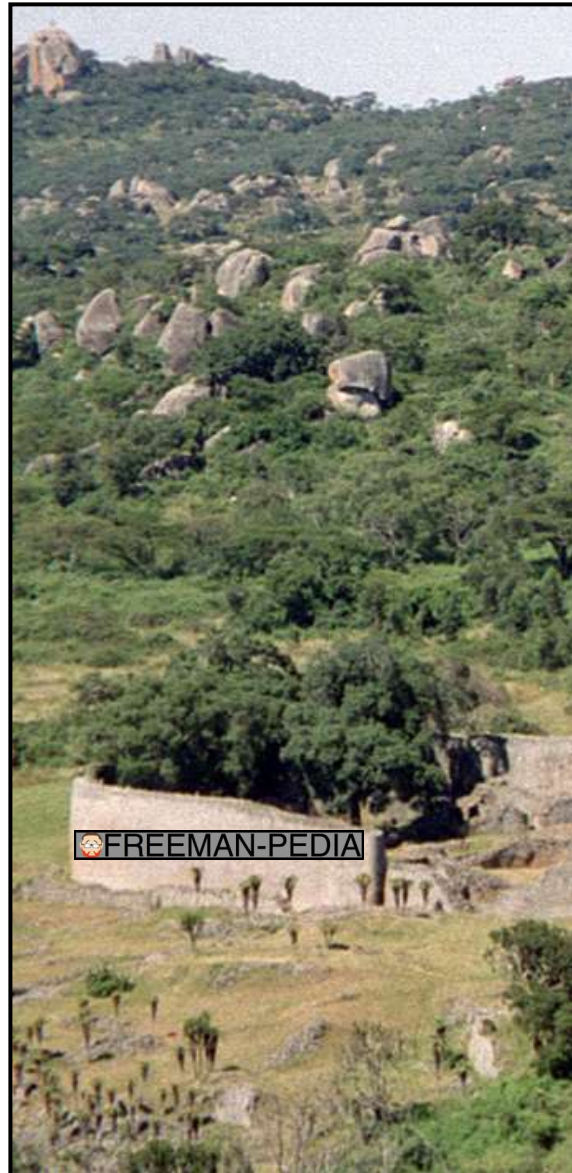
THE POST CLASSICAL MIGRATION/EXPANSION

(1200CE-1600 CE)

Between the 13th and 15th centuries, the relatively powerful Bantu-speaking states on a scale larger than local chiefdoms began to emerge, in the Great Lakes region, in the savanna south of the Central African rainforest, and on the Zambezi river where the Monomatapa kings built the famous **Great Zimbabwe** complex . Such processes of state-formation occurred with increasing frequency from the 16th century onward. They were probably due to denser population, which led to more specialized divisions of labor, including military power, while making outmigration more difficult. Other factors were increased trade among African communities and with European, Swahili and Arab traders on the coasts; technological developments in economic activity, and new techniques in the political-spiritual ritualization of royalty as the source of national strength and health.



Great Zimbabwe on the \$50 Zimbabwe note



 FREEMAN-PEDIA

GREAT ZIMBABWE

Great Zimbabwe is a ruined city that was once the capital of the Kingdom of Zimbabwe, which existed from 1100 to 1450 CE. The monument, which first began to be constructed in the 11th century and which continued to be built until the 14th century, spanned an area of 1,784 acres and at its peak could have housed up to 18,000 people. Great Zimbabwe acted as a royal palace for the Zimbabwean monarch and would have been used as the seat of their political power. One of its most prominent features was its walls, some of which were over five meters high and which were constructed without mortar. Eventually the city was largely abandoned and fell into ruin.

Late 19th and early 20th century historians had trouble attributing Great Zimbabwe to black Africans due to Colonial/Racist ideologies. Below is the account of archaeologist Paul Sinclair:

"I was the archaeologist stationed at Great Zimbabwe. I was told by the then-director of the Museums and Monuments organisation to be extremely careful about talking to the press about the origins of the [Great] Zimbabwe state. I was told that the museum service was in a difficult situation, that the government was pressurising them to withhold the correct information. Censorship of guidebooks, museum displays, school textbooks, radio programmes, newspapers and films was a daily occurrence. Once a member of the Museum Board of Trustees threatened me with losing my job if I said publicly that blacks had built Zimbabwe. He said it was okay to say the yellow people had built it, but I wasn't allowed to mention radio carbon dates... It was the first time since Germany in the thirties that archaeology has been so directly censored."

