

Correspondence

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THE ANCIENT WISDOM IN AFRICA

Sir,

In the article entitled "The Ancient Wisdom in Africa", which appeared in the Spring number of your journal, we read that "Africa also was once the home of a learning as profound as any in Asia can show". This opinion, although exaggerated when put in this way, is nevertheless basically acceptable, for it is incontestable that profound metaphysical ideas are to be found amongst animistic Negroes; but what is strange in the article in question is that the author damages his own thesis with ethnographic considerations which, to say the least, are paradoxical. His first informant is a Zulu medicine man; he describes him thus: "Mankanyezi was a pure Zulu, of the royal blood... He was a tall, lean man, light chocolate in colour, of a distinctly Jewish cast of countenance, without a trace of the Negroid, with the exception of his snow-white hair which was frizzled". At once the thesis of an authentically African wisdom is destroyed; for the average reader will necessarily think that the Zulus, or the aristocrats of this race, are not true Africans, but immigrant Semites, who have brought with them a white man's wisdom.

Further on the author describes a strange population encountered "in a certain large Native Reserve"; he does not say which because, allegedly, there are circumstances that oblige him "to be vague concerning dates and places"! According to the author, these people whose "features were of a pure European type", "identified themselves in all respects with their Bantu neighbours"; and they assured him that they were "Kabyles" who had come from North Africa.

Three remarks must be made here. Firstly, if these people came to South Africa before Islam, they cannot call themselves "Kabyles", because this name was given to them by the Arabs; *qaba'il* is in fact an Arabic word, the plural of *qabilah*, which means "tribe". Secondly, if these people arrived amongst the Zulus more than a millennium ago and became assimilated into the Negro civilization, as the author affirms, they could not have kept their racial identity; in the absence of any intention to represent either a separate religion or a caste, they would have melted into the mass of the Negro people. Thirdly, if they came following the advent of Islam, it is impossible that they should have ceased to be Moslems, for it is unheard of for any Moslems of the white race to have exchanged their religion for any Negro animism whatsoever.

But let us return to the Zulu medicine man mentioned above, who is said to have had nothing Negroid about him but, on the contrary, resembled a Jew. An ethnologist will see the true state of affairs right away: amongst the Bantu, the Zulus represent a separate group, who are lighter than the Bantu in general and whose prognathism is less marked; but there can be no question of separating them from the Black race, and it needs all the

lack of talent for observation characteristic of so many travellers in exotic countries to enable one to describe a pure Zulu as a pure Semite, or rather as an Armenoid type, for there exists no exclusively Semitic type. Each of the great races repeats within its characteristic framework the general or particular types of the other races, and it is necessarily so, because the human race is one; thus it is always possible to find a Mongol who will remind us of such and such a White or Negro type, and inversely, quite apart from any question of racial mixing. Be that as it may, the contradiction in "The Ancient Wisdom in Africa" is that in order to make us accept the spiritual value of Black Africans, one begins by assuring us that the spiritual men of Africa are in no wise African. Moreover, the reader will suspect that the author of the article in question is insensitive to the beauties that the Negro type can present.

Apart from such ethnographical improbabilities, the Bantu Brotherhood "founded in Egypt in the reign of the Pharaoh Cheops" likewise inspires no confidence; such a thing might just be possible in the case of the Watutsi of Ruanda, but certainly not in the case of the Zulus. And what is especially improbable is that an authentically African spiritual society should have "many disciples, not merely in Africa but in Asia, Europe and America"!

It is not necessary to go on any further.

F.S.

Sept. 1969

ASTROLOGICAL SYMBOLISM

Sir,

Mr. Bolton obviously confuses zodiacal signs with zodiacal constellations. While it is true that signs and constellations do not coincide any more due to the precession of the equinoxes the signs remain unaffected by it. The argument is old and has always been put forward against Astrology. Ptolemy in his *Syntax and Tetrabiblos* (III, 11) had already drawn attention to the gradual divergence between the signs of the zodiac and the constellations; and in the third century Origen made out of this fact an argument against Astrology which he thought to be decisive. Such arguments can be found throughout the centuries: Apomasar, Junctinus and last but not least Boll-Betzold-Gundel in our times, have all put forward arguments based on this discrepancy between zodiacal signs and constellations. The answer is not at all difficult if one returns to the original revealed Astrology. There was indeed a time when both signs and constellations coincided, about 2000 B.C., which might have been the time when Astrology was established in the form or "system" as it is known to us.

In order to understand the metaphysical meaning of the difference between signs and constellations one has to revert to the cosmological order as it was expressed in the well known Ptolemaic world picture wherein the planets and spheres are eternal prototypes (whereby it is the planetary rhythms and not the planets themselves that determine their spheres).

The centre of all is the Sun, the "heart of the world" (*qalb al'alam*) and beyond the spheres of the planets are to be found the heaven of the fixed stars (the constellations),

beyond that the heaven without stars, and beyond that the two highest spheres of the divine Pedestal and the divine Throne. It is the heaven without stars which represents the end of space, the place of discontinuity between the formal and supraformal manifestation. Here the invisible becomes the transcendent. And it is in this heaven that the 12 signs of the zodiac are located. It is therefore here that the entrance to the formal world and the exit from it find their symbolical localization in the two signs Cancer and Capricorn, and it is to this symbolical or principial localization that Guénon's diverse articles dealing with this are related. ("Les Portes solstiales", "Le Symbolisme du Zodiac chez les Pythagoriciens", "L'hiéroglyphe du Cancer" and others).

Let it be clearly understood that this heaven of the zodiacal signs is the place of the heavenly prototypes or archetypes, which remain eternally as they are, unaffected by what is below them (the constellations), while what is below is subject to change. The qualitative differentiation of the heavenly regions as expressed by the division of the zodiac has its origin in the four constant limits of the solar cycle, the solstices and equinoxes. It is wrong to say that the vernal equinox has changed from the sign of Aries to the sign of Pisces because the signs are reckoned from the vernal equinoctial point. One has to say on the contrary that the constellation of Aries has turned towards the sign of Taurus or that the vernal equinox is no longer confronted by the constellation of Aries but by the constellation Pisces. All those changes might have their importance perhaps in changing what might be called the "influences of heaven", but the signs and their principial importance remain unaffected thereby.

That all such considerations are far removed from the arguments or the reasonings of most Astrologers—old and new—does not devalue the eternal truths contained in the metaphysical considerations which are also found in those articles by Guénon just mentioned. It is these considerations which are alone valid and which give to Astrology quite a different perspective from what is commonly understood of this traditional art.

It might be added—because it belongs into the same order—that the fact that technically conditioned beings have set foot on the moon does not in the least devalue the profound symbolism of the moon; the symbol must not however be confused with what it symbolises.

DR. HANS BANDMANN.

Germany, 2.8.69