

REVIEW ARTICLE ON THE BOOK

AFRICA AND INDONESIA: THE EVIDENCE OF THE XYLOPHONE AND OTHER MUSICAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS by A. M. JONES (pp. I-VIII, 1-233. Illus. Tables. Index. Pub. E. J. Brill. Leiden, 1964. Price: 36 Guilders).

by

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This book falls into two studies, the one is on the similarities between the music, the tuning and the scales of the xylophones used in Africa and those used in Indonesia; the other is devoted to expounding a solution to explain these similarities.

In the first study Jones holds that African and Indonesian xylophone techniques are so similar as to warrant serious discussion upon the reason for this similarity. As Jones has elsewhere remarked: "(1) The equitonal musical scale is found in Africa and in Indonesia; (2) the pitch of the xylophone notes is approximately the same in Africa and in Indonesia; (3) there is a staggering degree of congruence of V.P.S. notes in a whole octave taken from Indonesia and from Africa; (4) there is also an artificial pentatonic scale not at all like that in the west, found in West Africa and in Indonesia.

These are, at first sight, astonishing similarities, and appear to indicate a borrowing, that is a diffusion of culture traits. Some doubts have, however, been expressed on these similarities. Blacking (1966, XXV, p. 51) remarked: "The measurements and comparison of tunings of musical instruments does not seem to me a very reliable way of guessing the musical intentions of performers, or of proving connections between one culture and another, particularly when few instruments have recently, if ever, been accepted for musical performance." Sachs (1940, p. 239), however, was cautiously inclined to agree: "This similarity [in xylophone playing] is probably not coincidence. Many implements, tools, weapons and instruments in a well-defined area of African Bantu districts are so closely connected with the corresponding objects of South-eastern Asia that an early communication across the Indian Ocean through the Zambesi Valley can be assumed. Certain accordances in the tuning of xylophones in Asia and Africa confirm this statement."

Jones, in his search for a solution, has proposed a borrowing. He rejects the solution that owing to the psychic unity of mankind — advocated a hundred years ago by Bastian in his theory of *Elementargedanken* — similarities in culture arose among peoples independently of each other. The question now arises: did Indonesia in the east borrow from Negro Africa in the west, or did Negro Africa in the west borrow from Indonesia in the east? Jones claims that the xylophone reached Africa from Indonesia. Jones's arguments have been adversely commented upon by Mantle Hood (1965, LXVII, p. 1579) who wrote: "The arguments set forth in connection with the xylophone . . . are founded on an archaic methodology liable to a compounding of errors that in the final result lead us nowhere . . . It is difficult in the limited space available to disentangle, explain and correct the author's frequent mistakes, apparent misunderstandings, biased selectivity, and hosts of non-sequiturs."

Jones's theory is analogous to that of the German Kultur Kreis school of half-a-century ago, a theory which has since been rejected. Jones neither follows, nor indeed mentions, the criteria now demanded by anthropologists in establishing the diffusion of culture traits, although his examination supports Lowie's (1946, p. 362) points that diffusion is convincingly demonstrated when "the resemblances are numerous" and "unusual". Lowie also remarks that: "The weakness of the diffusion doctrine in its extreme form lies in its lack of discrimination." Herein lies one of Jones's faults, lack of discrimination in the evidence brought forward and exclusion, for no good reason,

of other evidence that contradicts his theory, including evidence of origin. Finally, Goldenweiser (1937, p. 474) stipulated: "The geographical factor must be taken into account. In the absence of historical evidence, and all else being equal, proximity, ease of communication or knowledge of its actuality favour diffusion." Or, as Lowie noted, diffusion is convincingly demonstrated when "the course of diffusion is clear." Jones ignores the historical evidence of the Arab Negro slave trade from Africa to Indonesia, a track which establishes a clear course of diffusion.

Jones commits the unpardonable error of arguing from the particular to the general. He finds that Barbot, *circa* 1690, describes in use in the Gambia "the typical Piston Bellows of Indonesia." This type of bellows, also known in Madagascar, has never been seen or heard of in west Africa or for that matter anywhere else in Africa, before or since. Barbot's report is the only known instance and it is reported in the Gambia where ships called to and from the Orient.

Far more to Jones's point would have been a reference to an early description of the xylophone among the Africans at the estuary of the Senegal river in August, 1695. Thus, referring to these Africans, Froger in his account of de Gennes's voyage wrote: "The most part of the negroes divert themselves . . . with playing on a certain musical instrument, which they call *Balafu* (sic) . . . The *Calafu* (sic) is nothing else but several pipes (sic) of very hard wood set in order, which diminish by little and little in length, and are tied together with thongs of very thin leather. These thongs are twisted about small, round wands, which are put between every one of those pipes, to leave a small space: this instrument very much resembles one of ours in that particular; but that of the negroes is composed of many parts, in regard that they fasten underneath ten or twelve gourds, the different sizes of which perform the same effects as our organ pipes: they usually play upon it with sticks, the ends of which are covered with leather to render the sound less harsh."

Before discussing the evidence brought forward, one notes that two important statements on the origin of the xylophone have been overlooked. The first is the claim by Ellis (1883, p. 12) that the Jolloffs of west Africa invented the xylophone, the second is the statement by Sir Harry Johnstone (1902, II, p. 486) that "the totally savage Negro received all his musical instruments higher in development than the single bowstring and the resonated hollow log . . . from Egypt."

On ships and shipping Jones (p. 187) remarked: "The question, 'could the Indonesians have reached the Gulf of Guinea by sea?' and the answer is in the affirmative. Having indicated that the Indonesians could come to Africa ones goes on to ask, 'Did they come?' The maritime evidence is partly documentary and partly circumstantial."

Part of the circumstantial evidence is the twin-masted square sail in West Africa. Jones continues: "Moreover the Arabs themselves have not manifested the Indonesian rigging in their own ships and therefore the Africans could not have got it from them." Yet the Arabs, according to Krumm (1940, p. 165), call a fast sailing vessel with two masts, a *kotia*. Nevertheless Jones does not consider that the Arabs may have introduced it, just as they introduced the Inian ocean cowry shell as currency, reported in use in Timbuktu by Ibn Batuta in 1350, or the chalcedony beads and the dark red beads of Cambay in India, or the orange and the banana or the *Abrus precatorius* as a weight for gold.

Jones (p. 195) writes: "It has been suggested that the great carriers of cultural features were the Arabs and that it is they who may have been responsible for all this. There is, however, no evidence that they came further south on the East coast than Sofala, and Mauny has shown clearly that on the West coast, Arab shipping never got further South than the Dra river (lat. 28° No. i.e. nearly 900 miles north of the Senegal River)". Lady Lugard (1905, p. 54) points out that the Al Moravids who eventually overran Spain, started as a sect at the mouth of the Senegal, *circa* 1050.

Jones steers clear of Arabs. The word does not appear in the index to his book. Yet African canoes are called among the Manganya by the Arab name *ngalawa*, and among the Makua, *ikalawa*, while a similar word is found among the Zulu and the English word galley has the same origin. Tucker (1908, I, p. 85) remarked that Egyptian influences had been at work in Uganda: "is, I think, certain".⁸ Evidence of it may be seen in the make and shape of the musical instruments of the country, in the reed work of the houses, in the form and build of the canoes on the lake. The prow of the latter seems to be very clearly of Egyptian origin." The shape of the west African and Indonesian dug-out canoes can be explained otherwise than by Jones claiming Indonesian influences.

On metal working, Jones similarly attempted to show that metal working was introduced into Africa by Indonesians. However he is faced with the problem that the Nok culture of northern Nigeria which is B.C., influenced the Ife bronze culture. Jones (p. 213) asks: "On the other hand, does not the fact that as far as we know, the bronze casting at Ife seems suddenly to have blossomed in its developed state, suggest the possibility that the *cire perdue* process was brought in from outside?" Of course it does, but Jones appears to be unaware that Frobenius in 1912 established this point but not from Indonesia. Does Jones, posing this question, search whence came the *cire perdue* method? He does not but merely remarks (p. 211) that the *cire-perdue* process occurs in west Africa in the xylophone area, thus leaving one to infer that these two culture traits are linked.

It is interesting to study Jones's method in establishing the Indonesian introduction of metallurgy to west Africa. He (p. 224) wrote: "It was somewhere about the second century B.C. that the bronze age appeared in S.E. Asia and spread to Indonesia, followed shortly after by iron working so that by about 100 A.D. the iron age had spread over Indonesia though still on a restricted scale." Jones does not suggest why metallurgy could not as effectively have spread into Africa as it did into Indonesia, instead he continues in the following vein: "If we are right in thinking that in Africa, the presence of the bronze-iron culture in the xylophone areas is due at least, in part to the Indonesians, then these people were presumably already in the bronze-iron age when they arrived: this gives us a *terminus a quo* round about the end of the first century A.D."

One is astonished at Jones's neglect of vital evidence. Research on the iron age in Africa has been done, for instance in Rhodesia by Summers who wrote: "Unlike the sequence in Europe and the Near East, those of South Central Africa shows no copper or bronze using stage between the stone and iron-using phases . . . the sudden appearance of iron in the archaeological record has therefore been attributed to the arrival of metal-working people from the north . . ." Note from the north, not from the east as would be the case if iron and bronze working were due to Indonesian colonists.

The accepted date of the appearance of iron workers in Africa is important. Summers, referring to Rhodesia, remarked: "It is now realised that the local Iron Age can be divided into two distinct complexes. S. Rhodesia Iron Age A which runs from the earliest metal using (possibly 100 B.C.) up to the beginning of the 19th century."

Lowie (p. 142) remarked: "All Negroes had blacksmiths at the time of their discovery, and any collection from native Africa at once contrasts with similar assemblages . . . from Oceania by the enormous wealth of iron articles." This same observation applies to Indonesia, for, concerning Indonesia Lowie (p. 140) wrote: "They learned to work iron tools and even perfected a distinct form of bellows; but they imported iron material, thus remaining dependent on outside smelters."

Yet these are the people that Jones claims who taught the Negro of Africa metallurgy; namely smelting and foundry work as well as smithying. Iron foundry work in the Zambesi valley is dated *circa* 100 B.C. and is attributed to Bantu from the north, not to Indonesians from the east. Professor Daryll Forde reported that the earliest evidence of iron working in Africa occurs in Nubia where mounds of iron slag are found in the Egyptian provincial town of Meroe. This slag is dated about 700 B.C. Ford remarked

that the craft of the African iron worker has undoubtedly spread slowly southwards from people to people in the period that has elapsed.

These early Egyptian iron workers used stone anvils, stone hammers and pottery-bellied bellows. Lowie, describing the Negro iron workers of the Upper Nile area, stated that they used pottery-bellied bellows, an unshafed rock for a hammer and a stone anvil. As these Negro iron-workers are in the valley of the Nile one concludes continuity of the craft.

My own researches in the Cameroons showed that the iron-workers there used the same implements as were used by the ancient Egyptians: stone anvils, and, though there is plenty of timber, these Cameroon iron-workers used pottery-made bellows. Jones's claim that iron-working was introduced by Indonesians falls away.

For bronze and the *cire perdue* method of casting Jean-Paul Leboeuf has stated that excavations around Lake Chad have yielded numerous bronze pieces produced by the *cire perdue* process. These pieces are the work of the Sao, a people who came from the east and that the zenith of this industry was pre-Islamic, hence earlier than the bronzes of Ife or Benin but certainly not of Indonesian origin. The skeletons connected with the Chad industry are mostly Negro, with some non-nigrific skeletons. One recalls the Songhai kingdoms in the buckle of the Niger as of Persian, not Indonesian, origin. These kindoms are possibly linked with the Kiswa migration from the valley of the Nile about 600 A.D.

Jones draws attention to shaft and tunnel burials in both Africa and Indonesia and quotes Meek as his authority for such burials in Nigeria but Jones discreetly omits to mention that Meek ascribes such burials to Egyptian influence.

Jones also refers to skull burials in both Africa and Indonesia but Jones appears to be unaware that this practice is also Egyptian. Budge (1909, I, p. 16) wrote: "The words 'thou received thy head' refer to the primitive Egyptian custom of dismembering the bodies of the dead. In the graves of the late neolithic period in Egypt the head is found cut off from the body . . ." Erman (1907, p. 155) another Egyptologist, remarked that the head of Osiris was said to be present in a box at Abydos.

Jones, in his search for similarities, draws attention to the practice of attaching value to the human lower jaw-bone. This practice is common to Africa and Indonesia. Jones, however, omits to say that. Budge (1911, II, p. 91) wrote: ". . . it is becoming clearer, the more the subject is investigated, that the beliefs which underlie the funeral ceremonies of Ancient Egypt and the Sudan are identical." Budge illustrates his contention by reference to jaw-bones in ancient Egypt. Thus in the VIth dynasty one finds a pyramid text which reads: "O Unas, thy two jaw-bones which were separated have been established." In Cap. 126 of the Book of the Dead one finds: "I have come! I have brought to him the jaw-bones in Re-stou . . ."

Thus far Jones's case is that African and Indonesian music are so alike that the only explanation is that African music derives from Indonesian colonies in the basin of the Niger, Congo and east-Africa. Except for east Africa, namely Madagascar, there is no evidence for Indonesian colonies elsewhere. In support of his case Jones selects other similarities and attempts to show their Indonesian origin where they occur in Africa. However, so far as Africa is concerned, these similarities are also found in ancient Egypt and much earlier there than they occur in Indonesia. Hence the probability is that these African-Indonesian similarities, other than music, derive from Egypt and not from Indonesia.

Jones draws attention to the fact that "plangi" dyeing, better known as "tie-dyeing" exists in both regions. This type of dyeing is, however, found preserved in its pure form in west Africa.

The culture traits listed by Jones may be shown to have origins other than Indonesia. These similarities are found in Egypt, and at a much earlier date than the date at which

they occur in Indonesia. Hence the probabilities are that these traits derive from Egypt and not from Indonesia.

It remains to examine Jones (pp. 179, 180) claim of "an impinging of Indonesian culture on the Niger basin, the Congo basin and on South East Africa . . . a considerable impingement, in short a colonization of such vast areas is given as occurring before 400 A.D." No further evidence is offered for this Indonesian colonization, but Jones proceeds to assert that "on balance the musical and linguistic evidence suggests the possibility that the colonization was a series of waves, originating from at least two areas in Indonesia, and spread in time, over several centuries around the beginning of the Christian era" Jones makes no reference to the fact that on the east coast of Africa, that side of Africa nearest to Indonesia, Indonesian words are hard to find. Krumm (1940) in his book, *Words of Oriental Origin in Swahili* has a glossary of fifty pages. In it there is only one word of doubtful Malaysian origin and none of Indonesian. Elsewhere, where Jones cannot give any evidence of Indonesian colonies, he finds similarities between Negro and Indonesian words. To account for these similarities Jones ignores both Torrend's and Johnston's comments on linguistic similarities between Negro African languages and those of Melanesia. Torrend (1891, pp. XLV, LXVI) remarked that traces of Bantu languages are found in Fiji, a fact which indicates a movement out of Africa to the east. Nor has Jones noted Torrend's hint: "If South Africa has long been frequented by these eastern traders, who can tell how many slaves have been exported by them from Sofala at various times, and in what proportion their blood flows in the veins of the occupants of the islands to the east of South Africa?" Johnston (1919, I, p. 22) wrote: "Bantu phonology may be matched in some of the Sudanic tongues and even (to a remarkable degree) among the Papuan and Melanesian languages." Sacks (p. 239) had much the same idea when he wrote of xylophones: "The same method of playing is current among African Negro tribes, for instance the Azandah in East Africa; and here, as elsewhere in Africa, two or more xylophones are played at once."

Jones claims that Indonesia colonists impinged on the Niger basin, the Congo basin and on South East Africa. Abyssinia does not come into Jones's reckoning but Abyssinia provides some interesting data for the migration of the xylophone from Africa to Indonesia. Father Alvares was in Abyssinia in 1520 and, according to Beckingham and Huntingford's (1958, I, p. 76) translation, he, describing the church of the monastery of St. Anthony, wrote: "One can go all round the altar. The bells are of stone, and like this: long thin stones, suspended by cords passed through them, and they strike them with sticks made for the purpose, and they make a sound as of cracked bells heard at a distance." Obviously one is dealing with a type of stone xylophone. The authors point out the word "stone" in the above context is in Arabic called "*dawal*, more correctly phonoliths, since the normal church bell in Ethiopia is as Alvares describes." Now it is known that China and Japan were trading with Axum in Abyssinia in the first century A.D., as there is no evidence that the Indonesians ever did, the discovery of phonoliths in Indonesia can be ascribed to their introduction from Abyssinia. Schaeffner in *La Revue de Musicologie* (Paris, Juillet 1951) has an article, "Le Lithotone de Ndut Lieng Krak", where the name of a Vietnam village occurs. There, ten slabs of stone, man made artefacts, were discovered in 1949. From the manner and place where found, no great antiquity can be ascribed to them. Kirby (1954, LI, p. 68) wrote of them that not only were they "tuned so that altogether they form a definite musical scale, but four of the ten yield the interval of a fifth, that is to say both the second and third partials of the harmonic series, so prominently that it is impossible to conclude otherwise than that they were deliberately constructed so as to produce that result." It is lamentable that no musical analysis has been done of the Abyssinian phonoliths but seeing that the Vietnam phonoliths are found on the Abyssinian-China run, one can conclude that the Vietnam ones owe their origin to those of Abyssinia.

Jones (p. 181) holds: "The whole musical argument of his first eight chapters does point to an Indonesian colonization in Africa." but he makes no attempt to ask whether these similarities may not be due to *actual* Negro colonies in Indonesia rather than to *hypothetical* Indonesian colonies in Africa. Except for Madagascar, there is no evidence for Indonesian colonies elsewhere in Africa. Here Jones is open to the serious charge of *suppresio veri*. Africa is today recognised as the cradle of the Negro race, consequently when the Negro is found outside of Africa it is known that his appearance outside his cradle land is due to migration. Jones does not mention that in Oceania, of which Indonesia is only a part, there are today colonies of African Negroes to the tune of over four million.

The derivation of the Oceanic Negroes from Negro Africa is attested by a long list of distinctive, similar culture traits.

Radin (1948, II, p. 54) wrote: "Ancestor worship today has a very specific distribution. It is found in marked development among primitive peoples only in certain regions. It characterizes the religion of the Bantu Negroes and many of the Melanesian tribes . . ." The Melanesians are basically Negroes. Mason (1895, p. 376) wrote: "The falcate edges of the Manbutto and other African swords were designed to meet an emergency. This way of dealing hacking rather than slashing strokes was manifestly intended to wound the head, which is protected, as with a helmet, by a high coiffure, while the blow of a sabre or a sword, in our fashion, would fall ineffectually on the elastic bolster. Hence the term 'pick' applied to such weapons by Pitt-Rivers is eminently appropriate. This style of weapon reappears in the negroid area of the Indo-Pacific, and for the same reason, to pierce through the massive woolly coiffure."

The Basenji or non-barking dog, is the dog of Negro Africa. Bryant (1949, p. 328) the historian of the Zulu wrote: "It is remarkable too, that the Negro's most distant relatives across the ocean in Papua is also possessed of a dog that never barks." Harrer (1964, p. 177) in New Guinea reports on the Negroes of the island that they wear a penis-sheath. The Zulus used to wear a penis-sheath which is also found, not only in central Africa, but also in ancient Egypt. Of the Negro dogs of New Guinea, Harrer (p. 22) wrote: "Like the dogs of the Pygmies in Africa, they seem to be Pharaonic, or Basenji dogs. At all events they don't bark." Harrer (p. 30) also mentions that these New Guinea Negroes pierce their ear-lobes and keep on dilating them till they almost reach the shoulder. But many Negro tribes in Africa, e.g. the Zulu, do the same. Harrer also mentions that the New Guinea Negroes indulge in finger amputations but certain of the Zulu clans do the same as well as other Negroes. Liana suspension bridges are found in New Guinea. I have used such bridges myself when in the Czmeroons.

These New Guinea Negroes pay a "bride-price" just as the Zulu and other Negro tribes do. Woven sleeping bags to protect the sleeper against mosquitoes are found on the lower Shire river and also in New Guinea.

The New Guinea Negroes still make polished stone implements similar to those found in west Africa. There are other cultural similarities between the Negroes of Africa and the Indonesians such as huts with gable roofs, reed and wooden shields, bark cloth, secret societies, face masks, also the similarity of the bow in the two regions. These similarities are in addition to those set down by Jones.

The next point is to determine how these colonies of African negroes came to be established in Indonesia. Budge (1907, II, p. 329) wrote: "The whole policy of the kings of Egypt towards the Sudan was dictated and directed by their need for slaves and gold, and the example set by them was closely followed by Persians, Macedonians, Romans, Arabs and Turks."

The maritime trade in Negro slaves across the Indian ocean before A.D. was in the hands of the Arabs. Hirth and Rockhill (1911, p. 4) in their translation of two Chinese geographies published before 1138 A.D. wrote: "It seems evident that, during ancient and mediaeval times, the sea-trade between Egypt and Persia on the one side and India

and the Far East on the other, remained exclusively in the hands of the enterprising Arabs of the southern Arabian coasts, who, in very early days, established stations at all the principal ports-of-call along the coast to the south of the Indus and then ultimately to Canton . . . where they appear to have had a colony as early as A.D. 300."

The trade in Negro slaves across the Indian ocean and into Indonesia continued uninterruptedly till well into the 19th century. This trade in Negro slaves readily accounts for four million odd Negroes settled throughout Indonesia and beyond and hence for the cultural similarities in these two regions.

Finally, there is the anomaly that, as Kirby (1965, VIII, p. 106) has pointed out, the xylophone is not known in China. This anomaly poses a problem for Jones. If the xylophone were invented in Indonesia and could spread from there across the Indian Ocean, across the whole breadth of Africa to be found in the Gambia in 1883 and there considered indigenous, what is the explanation that it could not migrate the much shorter distance into China? If on the other hand the xylophone were invented in Africa, its wide distribution throughout Africa is explicable and its non-entering into China is also explicable on the grounds (a) that there has been insufficient time for this migration to have occurred, or (b) that as it was a Negro slave instrument the Chinese would lose face playing it. The rules, as laid down by American anthropologists, are met by the migrations of African Negroes to Indonesia. Consequently one would expect to find much the same xylophone terminology in both areas. Jones (p. 145) draws attention to these phonetic similarities, *Mbe* in Java and *Hombe* in Chopi for the "great" note.

Further observations on African musical terminology are disconcerting for Jones theory of the Indonesian origin of the xylophone. D. T. Niane in his book *Sudiata* (trans. by G. D. Picket, London, 1965, p. 14) refers to *balafons* (xylophones) being played circa 1225 A.D. in the Mali kingdom. Reade (1864, p. 148) wrote among the Fons of the Ncombo falls "there were two musicians, one of whom beat an instrument called *bandja*, constructed on the principle of a harmonicon; a piece of hard wood being beaten with sticks, and the notes issuing from calabashes of different size fastened below*.

There is a word to be said on Jones's (p. 119) statement: "One must be on one's guard against the error of credulity. This can work both ways: either in a too eager readiness to accept insufficient evidence, or on the other hand, in so determined an effort to be scrupulously 'scientific' as to shut one's eyes to the available facts because they constitute a probability and not a water-tight proof." He then somewhat curiously asks: "Is it more credulous to believe that Indonesian influence has been at work in Africa or is it more credulous to believe that it has not?" It is the task of the cultural historian to present evidence and possibly to offer hypotheses to explain the evidence. It is not his task to warn readers against the error of "credulity", or to ask them to "believe." The academic disciplines do not proceed on these lines, and the passage is regrettable.

The question of the xylophone distribution must include the possibility that it is the African who influenced Indonesia, and that the African was transported by the slave trade to the east to form there the numerous Negro colonies which, incidentally are not mentioned by Jones. The weight of evidence and the application of the rules that govern the diffusion of culture traits militate against the acceptance of Jones' theory that the xylophone in Africa is due to Indonesian influence.

*FOOTNOTE:

This instrument is found everywhere in West Africa. It is called *Balonda* in Senegambia; *Marimbu* in Angola. It is described by Froebel as being used by the Indians of Central America, where, which is still more curious, it is known by the name of *marimba*.

Does one conclude that Indonesians introduced the *marimba* to the central American Indians or that they picked it up from imported African Negro slaves, just as the Indonesians did?

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