

Who are the Mysterious Sukkiim?

(IIChron 12:2-3)



Craig M White
Version 2.1



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Bible study articles in this series:

- *Feast of the Nations* by Craig White.
- *The Biblical Origin of Nations. An Introduction to the Table of Nations* by Craig White.
- *The Sanctity of Nationhood in the Bible* by Craig White.

Further Reading:

- *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* by Alan Barnard.
- *In Search of ... the Origin of Nations* by Craig White.
- *Peoples, Nations and Cultures* by John Mackenzie (ed).
- *The Suk. Their Language and Folklore* by Mervyn Beech.

Introduction

In the 1970s and 1980s when I undertook a vast study into the origin of the nations based on the Table of Nations (Genesis 10), I came across the following Scripture which intrigued me:

“In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, because they had been unfaithful to the LORD, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem with 1,200 chariots and 60,000 horsemen. And the people were without number who came with him from Egypt—Libyans, **Sukkiim**, and Ethiopians.” (IIChron 12:2-3) [compare IIChron 14:9; 16:8] [emphasis mine]

Who were the Sukkiim? I wondered.

The *iim* in *Sukkiim* denotes plural for Suk or Suka. In other words, these are the peoples of the Suk.¹

Strong’ *Exhaustive Concordance* demonstrated that this is the only place in the Bible where these people are referred to, adding to the mystery:

“H5525
סֻכְיָי
súkkîy
sook-kee’
Patrial from an unknown name (perhaps H5520); a *Sukkite*, or inhabitant of some place near Egypt (that is, *hut dwellers*): - Sukkiims.”

While the Libyans (Heb = *Lubim* or the *Lub*, descendants of the Lehabim) and Ethiopians (Heb = Cushites, descendants of Cush) are traceable to their current African locations, what of the peoples of Suk?

First of all, given the context of the Scripture it seems obvious to me that the Sukkim came of north-east Africa and thus are obviously descendants of Ham, probably Cushites.

Secondly, given the historical record, traditions and DNA research, the various nations and tribes of Africa have progressively pushed south, forcing other nations and tribes ever southward. This would mean that the Sukkiim must be further south of Egypt and Ethiopia today than they were in the days of King Rehoboam.

In addition, as most African movement has been from west to east and north to south, it is highly unlikely that these people ended up in west Africa or stayed in north-east Africa. Nor can people with a similar name be found in South Africa or Zimbabwe. To me, logically they would therefore probably be found in east Africa and the search was begun.

¹ Cultural information is found in many sources. Interesting and helpful reads include: *Hadza Demography and Sociobiology* by Nicholas Burton-Jones; “Pokot Kalenjin in Uganda”, *Joshua Project* website; “Pokot People”, *Wikipedia*.

Were my assumptions correct? Was the logic a possibility? Let us undertake a quest for the modern location of these people and find out.

Cushite Migrations

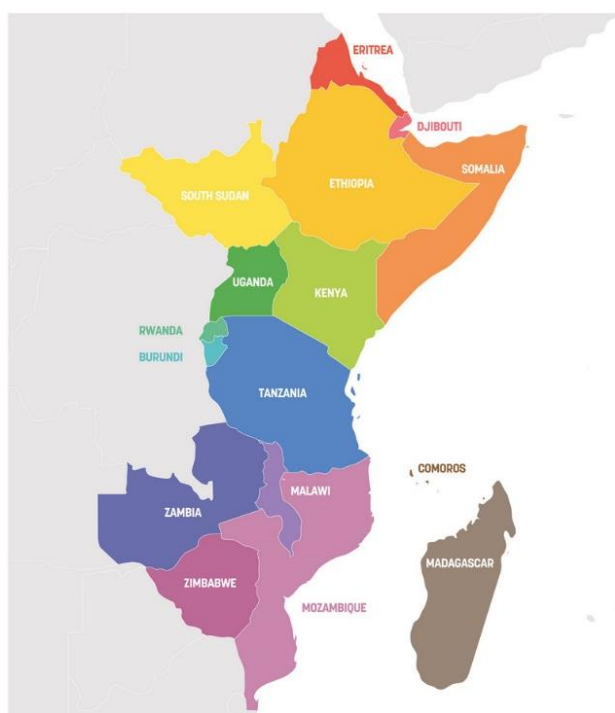
To try and locate the Sukkiim, we should determine where the peoples of Cush are located today.

From the Table of Nations, we learn that Noah fathered Ham who fathered Cush, Mizraim, Phut, Canaan. Cush in turn fathered:

- Seba
- Havilah
- Sabtah
- Raama (who in turn fathered Sheba and Dedan)
- Sabtechah
- Nimrod

In my book *In Search of... the Origin of Nations* I identified most of the peoples of East Africa as the descendants of Raamah. This would place the Sukkiim in that region today. Given this, we should undertake a short exploration of the peoples of Cush in the first instance.

We should be mindful, of course, that in history, the meaning of a name (in this case tribal names) may change over the centuries. Also, the name of a tribe may transfer to another; or a name which was once used for an entire nation may reduce to only a single tribe. Regardless of all this, a tribal name still provides a trace for the national origin of peoples.



The Cushitic peoples are concentrated in eastern Africa

About 740BC, the Nubians conquered Egypt for almost a century, establishing the 25th dynasty during which time they are pictured as black pharaohs in tombs. They were ousted by the Assyrians about 656BC and during the succeeding centuries ruled from Meroe, near the town of Saba, over their subjects.² Mighty Assyrian emperor Esarhaddon described Egypt/Sudan as "Muzri, Patursu and Kush" (ie Mizraim, Put, Cush) which fits exactly the Biblical origin of these lands and peoples.

This period is known as the Kingdom of Kush which was free from Egyptian influence. In the second century BC powerful queens ruled the nation and, apparently, supplied Hannibal with the elephants which were used against the Romans. By the 6th century AD most of the Kushite Nubians had converted to Christianity and maintained their religion for centuries. It was not until about 1400AD that they turned to Islam and have remained Islamic since.

Their major cities included Kerma, Meroe, *Saba* (also spelt *Soba*), the latter probably derived from Seba, a son of Cush; or Sheba, son of Raama. It is now recognised that Kerma and the surrounding civilization fit the place and the date of the Cushite peoples mentioned in scripture. Once again scripture is found to be so accurate that there can be little doubt that it is indeed an inspired document.

Large pyramids, temples and other structures have been found and further excavations, it is believed, will reveal more exciting finds such as treasures, cult goddesses, kingly sceptres, remains of priests and such like. Their pottery, jewelry, statues, ritual glasses and stele reveal an important culture and people which has only recently been fully recognised. In fact, the region contains more pyramids than Egypt. All historians and archaeologists admit that this area was known in the Bible as *Kush*, to the Romans as *Nubia* and to the Egyptians as *Aethiopia*.

These descendants of Sheba and Dedan are called "Nilo-Hamites" by anthropologists which consist of tribes including the Masai, Nandai³ (comprising the **Suk** or Pokot, Keyo or Elgeyo, Kipsigis or Lumbwa, Nandi, Barabaig and Dorobo), and the Teso (comprising the Teso, Kuman, Karamojong, Turkana and Toposa) (refer to Alan Barnard, *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, p. 15; and Kim de Vries, *Identity Strategies of the Agro-Pastoral Pokot*).

They can be traced all the way to Egypt, which fits the Biblical narrative:

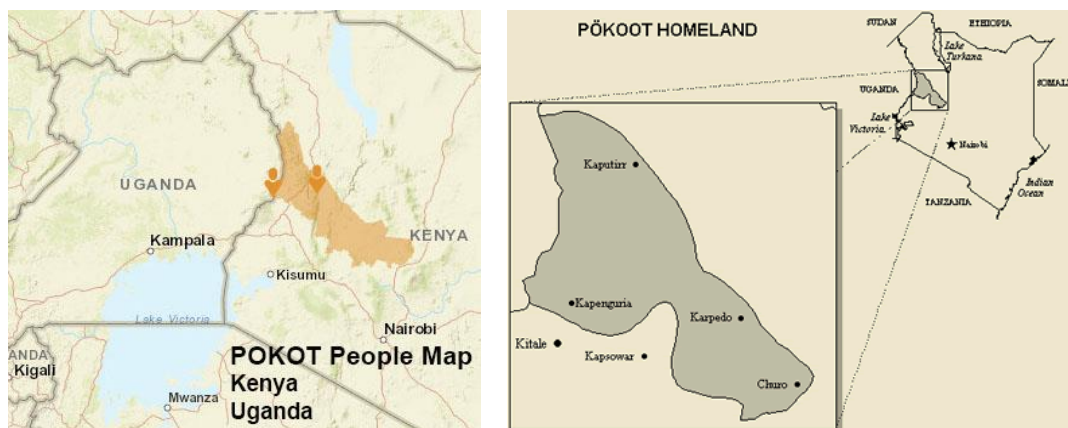
"Most Pokot scholars, including Pat Robbins and Harold Schneider, hypothesize that the Pokot, as part of the larger Kalenjin group, **migrated from various parts of Africa, including but not limited to Egypt**, Lake Turkana, southeastern Sudan, and Ethiopia." (Jennifer Fleischman, *Beads of Empowerment: The Role of Body Art in Challenging Pokot Gender Identities*, p. 6) [emphasis mine]

One tribe, the Dinka, dwell in southern Sudan south of the White Nile, numbering about five million. It is their custom to take the leader of a cattle herd (which is called a *majok* which may

² David Rohl, *A Test of Time. The Bible - From Myth to History*, p. 22: "The brutal Assyrian assault crushes all resistance. The Kushites flee south, never to be seen again in the Black Land".

³ The Australian Aboriginals have tribes called Nana, Nanda, Nangatadjara, Nangatara, Nanggikoronga, Nanggumin and Nango. That should come as no surprise as they too are descendants of Cush, but the eastern variety.

derive from *maj* or *mage* = *wise one* and *ok* = *ox*) and train their horns to appear in a circle or into one like a unicorn or even the antlers of a stag. This does not hurt the animal as they have a deep affection for their majoks.



Location of the Suk (Pokot)

The Suk or Pokot dwell mainly in the western districts of Kenya and a small eastern district of Uganda. Being Cushitic, their language group belongs to the southern Nilotic language group and their numbers are around 10 million.



Suk women

“The Suk appear to be unanimous in tracing their origin to two tribes called Chok (or Chuk) and **Seker**, who lived on the Elgeyo escarpment. At present they call themselves Pokwut, and Suk appears to be the name given them by the Masai, and derived from the above-mentioned Chok or Chuk of doubtful meaning.” (Mervyn Beech, *The Suk. Their Language and Folklore*, p. xii) [emphasis mine]

The literature is replete that they call themselves Pokoto or Pokoot, not Suk. However, others have supposedly given them that name and all sorts of theories abound as to its origin and true meaning. It is likely that continued this appellation for many centuries when they resided in northern Africa.

"The people whom we know as the Suk do not recognize this name for their tribe, but style themselves *Pokwut*, the singular number of which word, signifying a single Suk person, is *Pech-on*, the on being one of the ordinary singular suffixes employed to denote a single member of a tribe. *Suk* is said to be the Masai name for the tribe. (Mervyn Beech, *The Suk. Their Language and Folklore*, p. 1)



The Nandi referred to above are basically a cattle herding people and, much like the Indian Dravidian Kurumba, have an adoration for cattle which reflects their ancient pagan worship. To them milk is so sacred that they take precautions to prevent the mixing of meat with milk in the stomach according to Charles Seligman in his *Races of Africa* (p. 105). And to the Suk⁴ tribe, cattle are very important that in their language; if an adjective stands by itself, the noun it qualifies is always understood to be a cow.

Amongst many of these East African tribes,

"Cattle were used in place of money, especially in purchase of wives ... [many] will not kill their cattle, neither do they taste meat unless an animal dies ... [they practice] cattle-worship". (John Baker, *Race*, p. 360)

All anthropologists write how the Cushitic tribes of East Africa, especially the Wahim or Bahima of Uganda, Watussi of Rwanda and Burindi, and the Masai of Tanzania, are very tall, amongst the tallest peoples in the world.⁵ The Sabaeans, comprising Sheba (son of Raama), are said to

⁴ Another tribe called the Suku dwell in the southwestern Congo. They are very centralised with a monarchy. They number just 80,000 but are Negroid, not Nilo-Cushite. They are, however, shorter in stature than other tribes in the region, measuring a mean of 5 feet 2 inches (Igor Kopytoff, "The Suku of Southwestern Congo" in Gibbs, J (ed) *Peoples of Africa*, p. 444)

⁵ See also Charles Seligman, *Races of Africa*, p. 104; Francis Huxley, *Peoples of the World in Colour*, p. 152.

be “men of stature” in Isaiah 45:14⁶ which is interesting because Herodotus wrote (c. 484-420BC) how the Ethiopians of his day were said to be the tallest people in the world (Herodotus, *The Histories*, 3.20, 114).⁷

The Sukkiim in East Africa

As we have seen, the only direct mention of the Sukkiim in the Bible is recorded in II Chronicles (c. 923 BC):

“In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, because they had been unfaithful to the LORD, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem with 1,200 chariots and 60,000 horsemen. And the people were without number who came with him from Egypt—Libyans, **Sukkiim**, and Ethiopians.” (II Chron. 12:2-3)⁸

The Sukkiim originally dwelt on the east coast of Africa (Ethelbert Bullinger, *The Companion Bible*, p. 581. Note on II Chron 12:3). Josephus’ rendition of I Kings 10:22 as “ivory, Ethiopians, and apes” suggests that the Hebrew was *Sukkiyyim* or black people (rather than *Tukkiyyim* or peacocks which some think) (Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 8. 10. 2). Even if Josephus is wrong, at least his statement shows that the Sukkiim were understood to be black peoples.

There might therefore be something to the reference to the “Lubim and Put” in Nah 3:9 and the “Lubim and Sukkim” in IIChron 12:3 given that both are similar in fashion and that this indicates that there were a people descended from Put amongst the Sukkim, and not Cushites alone.

Speaking of Shishak, King of Egypt, Josephus writes:

“concerning whom Herodotus was mistaken, and applied his actions to Sesostris; [who came] with many ten thousand men ... they were the greatest part of them Libyans and Ethiopians”. (ibid, 8. 10. 2)

“Herodotus of Halicarnassus mentions this expedition having only mistaken the King’s name; ... He says withal that the Ethiopians learned to circumcise ... from the Egyptians; with this addition, that the Phoenicians and Syrians that live in Palestine confess that they learned it of the Egyptians.” (ibid, 8. 10. 3).

⁶ Strong’s *Exhaustive Concordance* explains the word stature:

“H4060

מִדָּה

middâh

mid-daw’

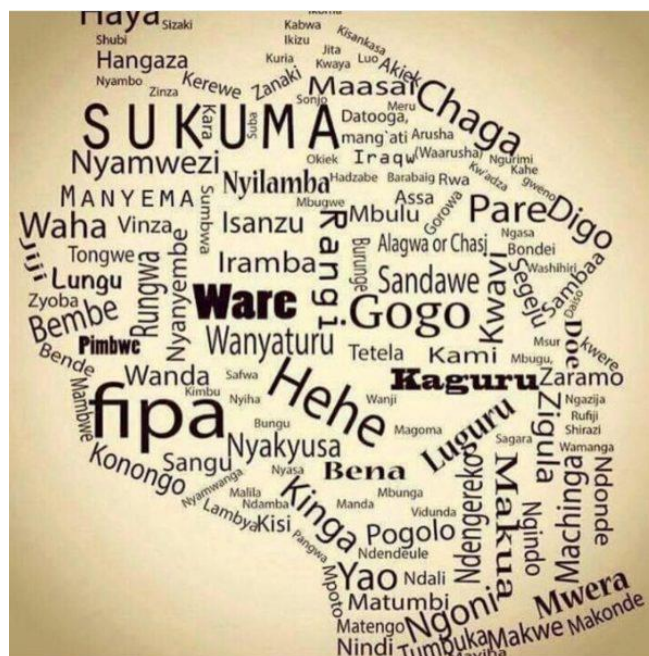
Feminine of H4055; properly *extension*, that is, height or breadth; also a *measure* (including its standard); hence a *portion* (as measured) or a *vestment*; specifically *tribute* (as measured): - garment, measure (-ing, meteyard, piece, size, (great) stature, tribute, wide.

Total KJV occurrences: 55”

⁷ One wonders if there is a connection between the **Anak** peoples of Genesis 23:2 and Joshua 15:13) with the **Anuak** or Anyuak Nilotic tribe of south-west Ethiopia and south-east Sudan, relatives to the other tall peoples of eastern Africa?

⁸ In IIChron 16:8 we are told that the “huge host” poured into the Middle East.

Before continuing our tracing the movements of the Sukkiim into the Sinai and Palestine and into Asia Minor, let us notice how the name is recalled in Africa.



Location of the Sukuma in Tanzania

Firstly, there was a city called *Sakkara*⁹ in lower Egypt (Michael Grant, *Ancient History Atlas. 1700 BC To AD 565*, p. 3). The modern *Suwakim*, a town on the Red Sea in the Sudan was originally known as *Suakim*. Again, one cannot positively identify that with *Sukkiim*, but it is a possibility. Also, I might mention that the African goddess, Hathor, was anciently known as *Seket* or *Sakti* which may be connected to the *Sukkim* (Ayyaswami Kalyanaraman, *Aryatarangini. The Saga of the Indo-Aryans* (Vol. 1), p. 21).

In south-west Zaire dwell a tribe called the *Suku*, numbering only about 100,000. The area of *Sakania*, in Zaire, bordering on Zambia is probably named after them.

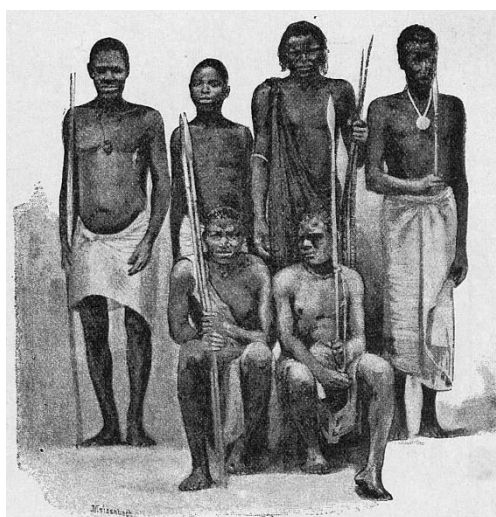
In Tanzania dwell the *Sukuma*, a different tribe to the *Suku*, which carries a meaning of northerners.¹⁰ They refer to themselves as *Wasukuma* (plural) and *Msukuma* (singular). They, together with related tribes, are classified as southern Nilotes (formerly known as Nilo-Hamites) and number about ten million and represent the largest ethnic group in Tanzania (John Mackenzie, (ed) *Peoples, Nations and Cultures*, p. 260). Their threshing and growing of Sorghum is almost identical to that of the central highlands of Ethiopia, observers inform us (see Hugh Doggett, "A suggested history of the crops common to Ethiopia and India" in *Late prehistory of the Nile Basin and the Sahara*, pp. 27-47). Did the Sukuma migrate south via Ethiopia?

⁹ Whether it was one and the same as *Sakha* (Xoiss) in the Nile Delta, we do not know. Nor can one say for certain that the names are connected to *Sukkiim*.

¹⁰ For further background information about them, refer to Carl Gahnström, *Ethnicity, Religion and Politics in Tanzania*, pp. 51-4. Related people are the *Nyamwezi* (also called *Dakama*, or *people of the South*).

Tribes in proximity to them are of the same stock, though are not called Sukuma (Anthony Makwaia (et al), "ABC of the Sukuma Calendar", *International Journal of Theoretical and Applied Mathematics*, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 127.)

Yet another tribe, the *Suk*, are found in Kenya, north of Lake Baring. They are noted for farming cattle, sheep, goats, and they also keep camels (Thayer Willis, *A History of Discovery and Exploration*, p. 151). They are not Negroid but Nilo-Hamite (Cushitic) and like so many Cushites, they have an adoration of cattle having established a cattle cult. To them milk is sacred (Charles Seligman, *Races of Africa*, p. 105) and in this connection some anthropologists have pointed out the similarities between the cattle cults of East Africa and southern India. They cannot fathom out how this could be. Taylor puzzles over the many similarities, for example, between the Kurumba Dravidians and the Ethiopians (Thomas Taylor, *Environment, Race and Migration*, p. 210; See also Carlton Coon, *Living Races of Mankind*, p. 403).¹¹



1890 Illustration of the Wasukuma (by Den tyske Emin Pascha)

But let us return now to the story flow. Two quotes may help to further illuminate a complex study. *A Gazetteer of the Old and New Testaments* states:

"Sukkim ... were ancient tribes who dwelt in caves in various part of Palestine, Arabia, the coast of the Red Sea, Egypt." (p. 455)

The *Bible Dictionary* has this to add of the Sukkiim:

"the Greek and Latin versions call them 'troglodytes', or dwellers in caves; but if the word is Hebrew, it rather means 'dwellers in tents', or Scenites... Fürst thinks the Sukkim were dwellers in **Sok**, a mountain region near the Red Sea, where Pliny fixes the troglodyte city of **Suche**; and he thinks the modern

¹¹ A people called the *Sokorro* or *Sorko* live on the banks of Lake Chad (south-west of the country). Perhaps the town of *Sokoto* in north-west Nigeria and a river of the same name which extends into central Niger, is named after them; also in southern Mali stands a town called *Sikassa*.

Nubian name *Suakim* may be connected with the same district" (*The Bible Dictionary*, p. 1051).¹² [emphasis mine]

The *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* states that the Sukkiim were probably from Libya (refer to Thomas Taylor, *Environment, Race and Migration*, p. 206).¹³

When Egypt was defeated by the Assyrians, many of the Cushites were taken by them and resettled near the Colchis¹⁴ where remnants of Nimrod's empire were already located (Herman Hoeh, "Truth about the Race Question", *Plain Truth*, July, p. 21). Isaiah foretold this in prophecy:

"And the Lord said, 'like as My servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and a wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia;

"So shall the King of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered to the shame of Egypt.

"And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory.

"And the inhabitant of this isle [Heb. "coastland"] shall say in that day, 'Behold, such is our expectation, whither we flee for help to be delivered from the King of Assyria; and how shall we escape?'" (Isaiah 20:3-6)^{15 16}

The cruel Assyrians (Isaiah 19:4) enslaved these peoples from the Red Sea coast who were in the Egyptian army, and then sent many of them on to the Colchis.

¹² Troglodytes were also known to have dwelt in parts of Palestine which may have been related to those of eastern Egypt (Henry Hall, *The Ancient History of the Near East*, p. 183).

¹³ As an aside, we find to this day an Australoid element in the Ushtetta peoples of Algeria. These are probably represented by the Tedas who dwell today in both Algeria and Chad.

¹⁴ "For it is plain to see that the Colchians are Egyptians; and what I say, I myself noted before I heard it from others. When it occurred to me, I inquired of both peoples; and the Colchians remembered the Egyptians better than the Egyptians remembered the Colchians; the Egyptians said that they considered the Colchians part of Sesostris' army. I myself guessed it, partly because they are dark-skinned and woolly-haired; though that indeed counts for nothing, since other peoples are, too; but my better proof was that the Colchians and Egyptians and Ethiopians are the only nations that have from the first practised circumcision." (Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 2, Ch. 104)

While Pliny the Elder (c23-79AD) informs us:

"The Colchians were governed by their own kings in the earliest ages, that Sesostris king of Egypt was overcome in Scythia, and put to flight, by the king of Colchis, which if true, that the Colchians not only had kings in those times, but were a very powerful people." (*The Natural History*, Book 23, Ch. 3)

¹⁵ The prophet Amos 9:7 wrote: "Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto Me, O children of Israel? Saith the Lord. Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt [like the Ethiopians]?"

¹⁶ Interestingly enough, a small state called *Sikkuri*, lay in the mountains south-east of ancient Assyria in ancient times (Henry Williams, *Historians History of The World* (Vol. 1), p. 378). The steppe district on the western bank of the Euphrates River was known as *Shuki* or *Sukhi* (Iorwerth Edwards (ed), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, (Vol. 1, Pt. 2), p. 287). Tiglath-pileser I of Assyria spoke of the "land of Sukhi" (Sabatino Moscati, *The Semites in Ancient History*, p. 65) which is also the name of a tribe of people (ibid.) And an area called *Sukhu* (Shuah) lay north-west of Babylon (Ibid: 532). Here is where Nimrod's descendants and Cushitic allies dwelt. Their language bears a remarkable resemblance to that of the original natives of Ethiopia (George Rawlinson, *Origin of Nations*, p. 209). Buxton even mentions that the black peoples of Madagascar may, in part, be derived from the black peoples of South-East Asia (Dudley Buxton, *The Peoples of Asia*, p. 68).

Others may have been brought to the area later. The black peoples in that area were written about in an article in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*:

“Near Sukhumi in Abkhazia, in almost the same district where Herodotus talked to the black-skinned and woolly-haired Colchians some twenty-two centuries ago, John Gunther noted the existence of a small Negro community; he was told that its members were descended from slaves imported from Africa many centuries ago by Georgian princes”. (Patrick English, “Cushites, Colchians and Khazars” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Jan 1959, p. 49)

Although the article is rather short (just 5 pages) it contains vital information for our research. For example:

“Long after Herodotus' time, the inhabitants of Colchis seem to have been still of the same physical type as he found there. P. H. Larcher states that "St. Jerome and Sophronius, cited by Bochart, **call Colchis the second Ethiopia**; and Sophronius, in his Life of St. Andrew, informs us that towards the mouth of the Apsarus, and on the banks of the Phasis, there were Ethiopians.” (ibid, p. 53) [emphasis mine]

Another fascinating article on these people appeared in 1973:

“... ancient Greek scholars [such] as Herodotus, Callimachus, Diodorus of Sicily, Strabo, Dionysius and Eustapius who maintained that the Colchi had come from Egypt. [researcher Dimitri Gulia] draws a parallel between Abkhazian and Abyssio-Egyptian geographical names, names of deities, proper names, as well as manners, customs and beliefs.” (Slava Tynes, “When did Africans get to Soviet Union?” *The Afro-American*, 3 February 1973)

This article was the first of three in a series which contain a plethora of information worth reading given all the fascinating detail contained therein. The articles refer to what the author believes in the more ‘recent’ transplanting of Africans to the Colchis area which would mean that they were settled near or with the more ancient black settlement in the area.

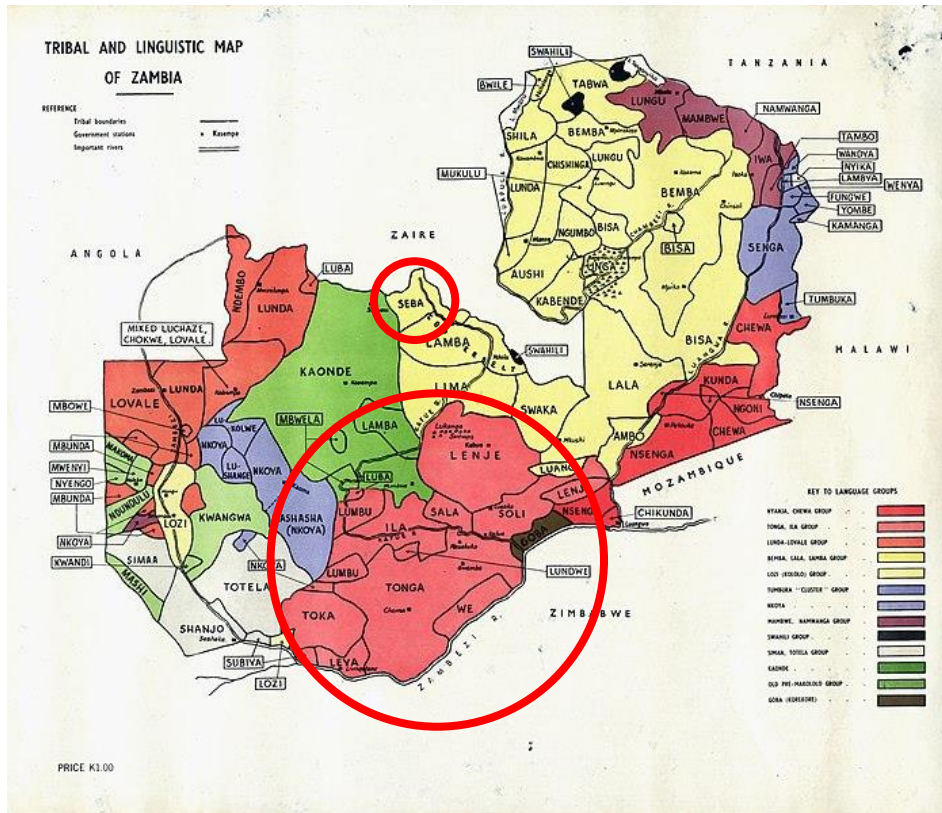
Others, of course, may have migrated there at a later date, joining up with these people (Allison Blakely, “The Negro in Imperial Russia” *The Journal of Negro History*, Oct 1976, p. 354).

The Sukulumbe and Sakalava tribes

There are at least two other tribes with names similar to Suk.

First of all, there is the Sukulumbe (or Suku Lumba or Shukulumbé or Baile) – tribes that broke away from the Sukuma and others, finding their way into Zambia and Malawi. When the Bemba (now the majority tribe) from the Congo region moved into Zambia centuries ago, they found Sukuma pockets had already settled in the region.

Of interest to us is that the Sukulumbe language includes some north African loan words, providing a link to their origins in the north.

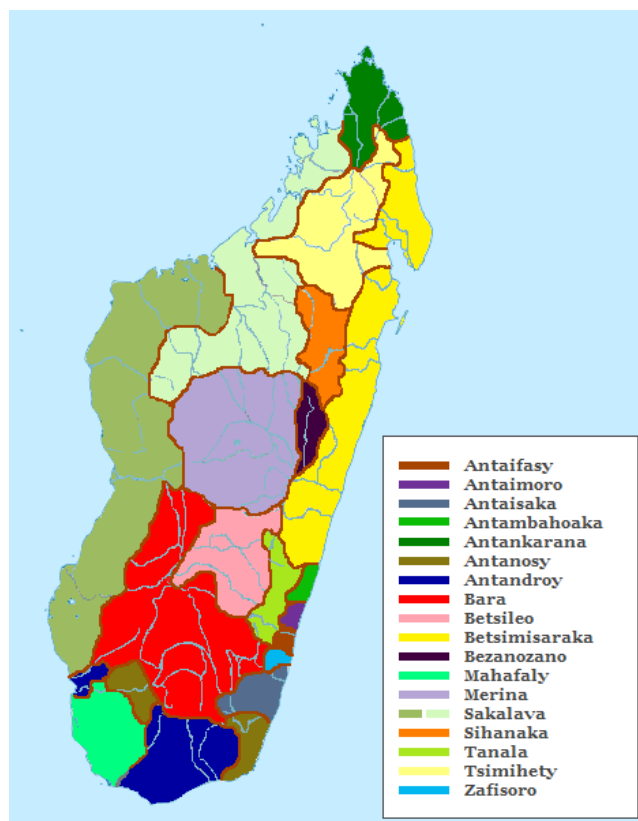


This means that they could well have formed a part of the army mentioned in IIChron 12:2-3.

These people are the

“most prominent of a cluster of Bantu-speaking peoples inhabiting the Southern Province west of Lusaka, capital of Zambia.” (John Mackenzie, (ed) *Peoples, Nations and Cultures*, p. 207)

Another tribe, originating from the African coast, were brought into Madagascar. They live today on the west coast of the island and are known as the *Sakalava* (*A History of Discovery and Exploration*: 1973, p. 151) and speak a language of that name (Harold Fullard, *Philips College Atlas*, p. 9). They have mixed considerably with the Arab, Indian and Indonesian elements there (James Sibree, *The Great African Island. Chapters on Madagascar*, pp. 109-110). But the African element now dominates (Mervyn Brown, *Madagascar Rediscovered*, p. 20).



The Sakalava dwell along the west coast



Source: <https://voyage-madagascar.org/a-propos-tribus-sakalava/>

Further information available here: "Sakalava People",
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sakalava_people

Final Comments

It seems clear that the Sukkiim mentioned in ancient Scripture are resident today in east Africa among the peoples descended from Cush.

The number of tribes resident in east Africa with name of *Suk* or similar cannot be a coincidence, viz the Suk, Suku, Sukulumbe, Sukuma, Sakalava. There is even a tribe called *Seba* (either a descendant of Cush's son Seba or of Sheba, son of Raama) in Zambia to this day.

The coincidences are too much to ignore, but further work needs to be undertaken on the likely identity of these people.

I hope that the reader has found this bit of detective work of interest.

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