

LEO FROBENIUS AND CULTURAL RESEARCH IN AFRICA

Some time ago, the journal of the Institute of Foreign Relations in Stuttgart published a short essay by Mr. Leopold Sedar Senghor, President of the Republic of Senegal.<sup>1</sup> It bore the motto: "During the coming era the most important role will fall to that cultural style which combines in itself the highest form of emotional fascination with creative talent".<sup>2</sup> It was not accidentally that he chose this sentence from the book "Schicksalskunde in Sinne des Kulturwerdens" by the German ethnologist Leo Frobenius. In this essay President Senghor tells us how - as a student at the Sorbonne and the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris - he became acquainted with the work and ideas of Frobenius. At that time he read the above mentioned book and another one by the same author - "Kulturgeschichte Afrikas"<sup>3</sup>, and he describes the lasting impact the teaching of this scholar had on himself and on other African students. President Senghor writes: "To the first pioneers of the Negritude he (Frobenius) was much more than a teacher, whose opinions had to be taken seriously; to them he was an effective power, a driving force toward discovering, awakening and consolidating the latent energies within the black people... he talked to us about the one big problem which had become our own cause: the problem of the nature, development and destiny of black African culture"<sup>4</sup>.

We just learned that Frobenius considered emotional fascination an imperative feature of a leading culture. He himself had that ability in an inordinate degree: from early youth on he had been fascinated by African

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1. L.S. Senghor, Schwarzafrika und die Deutschen. In: Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch, Jahrgang 15, Heft 3, Stuttgart 1965, p. 115 ff.
  2. L. Frobenius, Schicksalskunde im Sinne des Kulturwerdens. Leipzig 1932, p. 202. - French edition: Le Destin des Civilisations. Paris s.d. (1936?).
  3. L. Frobenius, Kulturgeschichte Afrikas, Zurich 1933. - French edition: Histoire de la Civilisation Africaine, Paris s.d. (1936?).
  4. L.S. Senghor, loc. cit., p. 115 f.

cultures, and he must have been supremely gifted in transferring his own emotional fascination to his students. The present writer had the personal good fortune of having the late Professor Adolf Friedrich, a former Frobenius student, as teacher and guide during most of his own studies. Friedrich, too, was emotionally fascinated by the cultures of his choice - in his case the cultures of Asia. Leo Frobenius spent practically all his life with studying African cultures. It is worth trying to give an impression of the life and work of this remarkable man, whose name may already be familiar to one or the other of the readers.

Leo Frobenius was born on June 29, 1873, in Berlin, the capital of Germany. His father was an officer in the Prussian Army. Even as a schoolboy Frobenius was interested in foreign cultures. He read every travel report on foreign countries he could lay his hands on, especially those on Africa. His parents were not exactly delighted when he started an ethnographic collection. After finishing school - he never graduated, by the way - the young man became a merchant, but soon he devoted all his time to studying foreign cultures. He was only twenty years old, when he published his first essays in geographical and ethnographical scientific periodicals.<sup>5</sup> In 1894 a short study on the secret societies of Africa<sup>6</sup> and various other essays were published. From then on Frobenius published something every year until he died.

His start was anything but easy. Since he never took a university examination, scholars in his field considered him a dubious outsider and dilettante. Nor did he proceed gently with the older German specialists, and in his youthful ardour his critical observations occasionally overshot the mark. He therefore had to put up with some harsh criticism and even enmity on the part of recognized scholars. As early as 1894 he started to build up a private African archive, which later developed into the Frobenius Institute and today is part of the University of Frankfurt. Over

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5. For a complete bibliography of Frobenius' works see: H. Niggemeyer, Das wissenschaftliche Schrifttum von Leo Frobenius. In: Paideuma (Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde), Band 4, Bamberg 1950, p. 377-418.

6. L. Frobenius, Die Geheimbunde Afrikas. Hamburg 1894.

many years of diligent studies Frobenius gathered together a great deal of data on the most diverse subjects, such as clothing and adornment, foods, handicrafts, habitations, social customs, religion, etc. It is hard to estimate the exact volume of the archive, but there must be well over 100.000 notes. The illustrations of typical and important African tools alone amount to about 25.000 items. At a later date an archive on fairy tales and myths was added.

The first fruits of this archive which had been layed out with such immense care, were two books published in 1898 on masks and secret societies of Africa<sup>7</sup>, and the basic work on the origin of African cultures.<sup>8</sup> In this latter book he programmatically developed the doctrine of cultural cycles as a scientific method. But he did so in an overbearing, almost arrogant manner, which at a later time he considered unacceptable himself. Everywhere this work was sharply rejected, even by those who had promoted his research and acknowledged certain achievements and ideas. After its publication Frobenius was nearly completely ignored by the scholars. In this book he had gone way beyond his time in his scientific projections, as well as in his general attitude towards foreign peoples. It was quite natural that at the end of the 19th century, at the climax of European colonialism, Frobenius should arouse opposition. He not only accused the Europeans of egocentric historical thinking, but directly and indirectly attacked colonial imperialism.<sup>9</sup> His first exposition on his ideas of the philosophy of culture appeared in the book on African cultures. Frobenius compared culture to man and a living being as such: "Cultures live, give birth and die, they are living beings.... A culture is a large body and all acquisitions of culture - whether of a spiritual... or material nature... - are parts of it. Just... as one recognizes the nose of the father in the

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7. L. Frobenius, *Die Masken und Geheimbunde Afrikas.* (= *Nova Acta. Abhandlungen der Kais. Leop.-Carol. Deutschen Akademie der Naturforscher* 74, Nr. 1). Leipzig 1898.

8. L. Frobenius, *Der Ursprung der afrikanischen Kulturen.* Berlin 1898.

9. Frobenius, *Der Ursprung der afr. Kulturen*, p.VIII.

nose of the child, so we have to recognize the inheritability of weapons, tools, huts, etc. The entire method (of the sciences of culture) rests on the definition of the forms of development and inheritance in a given culture; I do not mean of an individual part or section of it, but rather of the prototype which determines the essential character of all its parts. Our concern must be to establish as exactly as possible the outer (morphological) and inner (anatomical) structure of a culture and its forms of living (physiological structure), and then the answer to the question of relatedness will appear."<sup>10</sup> At another point he makes the daring statement: "Culture grows by itself, without man, without a people... Culture is a living being." Men, of course, are the vessels of culture. Since man must die, but culture continues in essentially the same way and "changes much more slowly than man, cultural forms are the documents by which we can study the history of mankind..."<sup>11</sup> Speaking about this early hypothesis in his later book "The Destiny of Cultures", Frobenius says in 1932 that, if he had originally claimed culture to be self-sufficient and independent of man in its growth, it was only a few years afterwards that he tempered this concept by including man in his examinations as the spiritual supporter of culture. It was his desire to go beyond the object and reach man that led to his first voyage<sup>12</sup>. It was also in this book that he formulated in a concise form the central ideas of his teachings which he called the doctrine of the morphology of culture: "The course of life of an individual is determined by his position as an object in the face of culture, just like a whole culture, a cultural period, or culture as such is determined by its relations to the larger development of biological phenomena of the organic world"<sup>13</sup>.

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10. Frobenius, op. cit., p. XI f.

11. Frobenius, op. cit., p. XIII.

12. Frobenius, Schicksalskunde..., p. 69f.

13. Frobenius, op. cit., p. 71.

Let us once more return to the book on the origin of African cultures, which was to have such a lasting effect on ethnological research in Germany and Austria. The starting point of the examinations on the origins of African cultures was the question, how it was possible that a cultural manifestation (an object, a house, a religious concept) could occur in two separate parts of the earth in exactly the same form. The ethnologists of the late 19th century were extremely interested in this question. It was answered in two different ways: one group held that from its inception the spiritual development of man had been laid out according to the same laws: on a certain level of culture man inevitably comes to invent certain tools and form certain habits. Utility was considered the primary motive of invention. Phenomena of the spiritual-religious sphere, which one could not or would not put into the category of utility, were explained by a difference in mental attitude. This evolutionary theory (or, according to Adolf Bastian, this theory of elementary thoughts) was countered by the doctrine of diffusion, which claimed that there had been human contact between the various tribes even in man's earliest beginnings, and that in this manner the transmission of cultural goods was accomplished. In 1898 Frobenius proved that not only isolated cultural items in areas separated by distance were of a similar shape, but that in certain regions numerous elements were alike.<sup>14</sup> Frobenius examined the similarities and dissimilarities of individual cultural elements, as for instance shields, bows, knives, throwing-clubs, throwing-knives, musical instruments, forms of housing, etc. He studied all available data on these objects from all over Africa. He entered the range of distribution of the various types on maps. By comparing the ranges of distribution of the various cultural elements Frobenius came to the first result of his new method: the culture cycles to which he assigned the African cultures. Later he revised this idea of cultural cycles in some parts.

Even if at first Frobenius' method was severely attacked, as explained before, he was brilliantly justified six years later. A meeting of the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory was held

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14. A.E. Jensen, Leo Frobenius - Leben und Werk. In: Paideuma (Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde), Band I, Leipzig 1938/40, p. 51f.

on November 19, 1904, which was to become historical. On this occasion Fritz Graebner read a paper on "Cultural cycles and cultural strata in Oceania", and Bernhard Ankermann lectured on "Cultural cycles and cultural strata in Africa".<sup>15</sup> Even today these lectures by two assistants of the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin are frequently considered the beginning of research on cultural history, although in fact Frobenius' book "Der Ursprung der afrikanischen Kulturen" could claim this honour for itself. Graebner confirmed the proper approach of Frobenius' research method, but he accused him of not having supported it by sufficient evidence. Graebner felt that Frobenius had been too schematic in his method, with the result that elements belonging together had been torn apart. It was mainly Bernhard Ankermann, the specialist for African studies at the Berlin Museum of Ethnology, who did justice to Frobenius. He said in his lecture: "Frobenius must be given credit for having created in his book the first unified picture of this enormous material. After examining the material one must acknowledge the picture as being generally correct...."<sup>16</sup> Frobenius was present at this memorable meeting. He himself pointed towards the dangers inherent in his method: it was not enough to look merely at the outer forms of certain cultural elements, one had to determine their content. He drew attention to the fact that he himself had in the meantime changed some of his views expressed in his book, but that at the time of its publication it had been its genuine errors that his critics had completely overlooked.<sup>17</sup>

After the first phase of theoretical work, a period of intense travelling followed for Frobenius. There are only occasional theoretical speculations in his books which he presented to the public as the result of his travels. One theoretical problem, however, seems to run through practically all his writings: his endeavour to reconstruct the history of African cultures. From the start his journeys had been planned with this in mind, and his book on the history of African cultures, first published

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16. Ankermann, op. cit., p.54.

17. Zeitschrift für Ethnologie, Band 37, 1905, p.88 f.

in 1933, is simply the logical outcome of his travel program.

The proud pleasure he felt at finally being recognized by some representatives of science coincided with a period of travel preparations. Ever since 1893 Frobenius had tried in vain to raise sufficient funds for a research-voyage. He succeeded in these efforts in 1904. It is understandable that, after his book on the origin of African cultures had appeared, Frobenius had the urgent desire to actually see and study African cultures in their whole context. At Christmas time 1904 he travelled to what then was the Congo State, accompanied by a painter. There he went into the Kassai-Sankuru region and studied the cultures of various peoples; among others he visited the Bakuba, the Bapende, the Bena Lulua, and the Bachokwe. In 1906 he returned home with a wealth of scientific data, and in 1907 he published his book "In the Shadow of the Congo State".<sup>18</sup> In this first travel report, as well as in all those that were to follow, Frobenius wrote unreservedly about the obstacles put in his way by bureaucracy and by individual administrators in the colonies he visited. But aside from this frank criticism he mentions appreciatively the help and promotion extended to him by certain administrative officers and personalities. A large number of fairy tales and legends he had recorded while in the Congo, was not published until twenty years later.<sup>19</sup> Even on this first trip Frobenius established ethnographic collections which were sold to various German Museums.

In 1907 Frobenius started on his second voyage which led him from the Senegal, through the Western Sudan, to Northern Liberia and through Upper Volta to Togo. His travel route first took him from Dakar to St. Louis. After a short stay there he journeyed up the Senegal river to Kayes, and - by train - to Bamako. There he set up his base of operations, and

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18. L. Frobenius, *Im Schatten des Kongostaates*. Berlin 1907. Most of Frobenius' notes from the Congo are unfortunately still unpublished.

19. L. Frobenius, *Dichtkunst der Kassaiden (= Atlantis, Band XII)*. Jena 1928.

then travelled northward into the Beledougou and from there southward through Guinee to Northern Liberia. After that he returned to Bamako, and his next trip took him via Mopti to Timbuktu, and through the Hombori Mountains to Bandiagara and onward to Ouagadougou, the capital of the Mossi Empire and of the present-day Republic of Haute-Volta. Via Northern Togo he reached the terminus of this trip: Lome. Frobenius left a deep impression among the native population by his interest in their culture and his helpfulness. Twelve years ago the present writer met a former clerk of the French Colonial Administration in Leo, a small administrative center in the South of Haute-Volta. He was an old man by that time, but he remembered the German Frobenius who had visited Ouagadougou while he had been stationed there as a young French civil servant. He said - a little bit exaggerating - Frobenius' interest in culture was so intense that nothing could be hidden from him. Furthermore he said that Frobenius had treated sick people in that region. Frobenius' own travel report of that period mentions that shortly after he had arrived in Ouagadougou the only doctor for miles around had died.

Frobenius did not go alone on this trip either: his travel companions were an engineer and a painter. After his return to Germany doctors advised him to spend the winter 1909/10 at the Mediterranean, but Frobenius could not bear staying at any one of the mundane spots on the Riviera: together with his wife and his brother - a painter by profession - he travelled to Algeria where in the spring of 1910 he was busy with cultural studies. Thus, for better or for worse, his third trip to Africa was accomplished, the results of which we shall discuss at a later point.

In the same year - that is, in 1910 - Frobenius sailed for Nigeria and Northern Cameroon, accompanied as usual by a painter. There he devoted himself to the study of the cultures of the Yoruba, the Jukun, Nupe, Tiv, and various tribes of Adamawa. With the Yoruba in particular he attempted to achieve historical depth: he came across the famous terracottas and stone figures and got to know bronze sculptures in the classical Yoruba style. Frobenius immediately recognized the high artistic value of these objects. He made them known in Germany through publications, and brought a number of terracottas back with him. In 1912 he returned from this tour. In the same year he went on his fifth journey - this time to Kordofan - while the sixth - from 1912 to 1914 - took him to



Algeria and Morocco where he studied rock paintings. His seventh trip finally was made to Eritrea in 1915, on behalf of the German General Staff.

I shall mention only the most important publications on the results of these journeys: in 1911 a report on his travel to the Western Sudan and the Volta region appeared under the title "Auf dem Wege nach Atlantis" (= On the Road to Atlantis)<sup>20</sup> The most significant results of all his African explorations South of the Sahara he presented in his three volume work "Und Afrika sprach...", published in 1912/13.<sup>21</sup> A somewhat abridged version of it appeared in English translation that same year, entitled "The Voice of Africa" (2 vols., London). In this expansive work we can clearly recognize Frobenius' conviction that African cultures must have been in contact with the classical high cultures in the Mediterranean and Near East areas. This supposition found expression in the sub-titles of the first two volumes of "Und Afrika sprach": Frobenius supplied the first volume with the subtitle "On the Ruins of Classical Atlantis"<sup>22</sup>, while the second volume was entitled "On the Threshold of Venerable Byzantium"<sup>23</sup>. Frobenius believed that cultural elements of the classical high cultures reached Western Africa by sea along the Atlantic coast of Africa. Although cultural relations between the Mediterranean region and Western Africa had been fundamentally accepted by the scholars, Frobenius was criticized for suggesting the sea as the route of transferral instead of the Transsaharan route. Frobenius had not excluded this second possibility as a travel route for cultural goods, but in a certain sense this criticism induced him to study the cultures of North-West Africa. In this area and its profusion of cultural documents, he did not only concentrate

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20. L. Frobenius, *Auf dem Wege nach Atlantis*. Berlin-Charlottenburg 1911.

21. L. Frobenius, *Und Afrika sprach...*, 3 Bände, Berlin-Charlottenburg, 1912/13.

22. *Auf den Trummern des klassischen Atlantis*.

23. *An der Schwelle des verehrungswürdigen Byzanz*.

on the contemporary cultures, but also tried to evoke the voice of the past: he studied rock-paintings and had copies made of them by the four painters accompanying him. The first fruit of these studies put before the public was an essay on the manner of grave construction Frobenius had examined archaeologically in North-West Africa.<sup>24</sup> This very study of the layout of graves represented an organic supplement to his research in the Niger river-bend where he had also investigated the structure of graves.

It was well over ten years that Frobenius had to forego further travelling, because of the First World War and its aftermath. Now he had the time to edit his many notes and assess the result of his journeys. He writes that an harmonious atmosphere among his travel companions was of great importance to him, and that he always felt personally responsible for the morale and wellbeing of the members of his travelling team. Doubtless-ly this was not an easy task at a time when all luggage had to be transported by carriers which considerably increased the number of participants. In 1925 he proudly states that during the years 1904 to 1915 he employed several thousand people, and despite a number of epidemics he never had to mourn the death of a single one.<sup>25</sup>

In this period of contemplation which political and economic circumstances enforced upon this restless wanderer and explorer, Frobenius returned with new vigour to theoretical problems. In his considerations he always adhered to his method published in 1898, although he had improved it since then. In the book "Paideuma", published in 1921, Frobenius writes, that he had departed from the mechanistic world-view which, in 1898, had influenced his writings on the origin of African cultures, and that now he is convinced that culture can only be grasped intuitively. "The mechanistic (world-view) tries to understand single processes and phenomena

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24. L. Frobenius, *Der kleinafrikanische Grabbau*. In: *Prahistorische Zeitschrift* 1916, p. 1-84.

25. L. Frobenius, *Vom Schreibtisch zum Aquator (= Erlebte Erdteile, Band III)*. Frankfurt 1925, p. 38.

of actual and psychological life by ascertaining laws. Its strength lies exactly in the finding and establishing of these laws - its weakness in that inevitably the elements that conform to such laws confront those that do not. In this manner... the abnormal and the exception are set apart as second class material, as it were, and thereby the method loses its reliability for all-inclusive and equal judgement... The intuitive world-view, on the other hand, based on the conception of a plan, is satisfied with finding the most significant phenomena and perceptively establishing their proper place within the whole structure of existence"<sup>26</sup> By declaring himself in favour of the intuitive world-view, Frobenius handed a weapon to his opponents, which they occasionally used against him rather unfairly. Disdainfully they would assert that Frobenius was working with intuition instead of with facts. But his early works and the "Atlas Africanus"<sup>27</sup> which appeared in the twenties, argue against this opinion. His travel activities had brought Frobenius into close contact with African peoples. In "Paideuma" he draws the following conclusion: "I have seen great and strong manifestations of culture among hardly known dark races, and small and poor cultural remnants among high-ranking people in Europe - and vice versa; I have met with broad-minded and free views, deep inner religiosity, great and true poetry in dark corners of human communities, and paltry insignificance, envy and the like, right next to significance, in my own country. Men are the same everywhere." His practical experience had convinced him that culture was even more of a "self-sufficient organism" than he had claimed in his earlier work: "Culture, in its large organic nature, now appears to me even more independent of man than it did earlier." The book "Paideuma" is meant to introduce the reader to the "soul-like qualities" of culture. It is not an attempt to present a single culture, but rather an attempt to acquaint the reader with

26. L. Frobenius, *Paideuma - Umriss einer Kultur - und Seelenlehre*. Munchen 1921.

27. L. Frobenius u. Ritter von Wilm, *Atlas Africanus*. 8 Hefte, Munchen und Berlin 1922-1930. - English edition of nos. 4-7: *Morphology of the African Bow-weapon*, Berlin and Leipzig 1932.

the essence of all culture. Exemplary questions for such investigations are: 1. what forms of poetry are characteristic of a people? 2. From which level does the creative power of culture draw its life? 3. what is the meaning of knowledge in a given culture? Almost all examples quoted in this book are the outcome of Frobenius' African travels. In a number of other books on Africa, written between 1921 and 1925, these ideas have been further elaborated.

It was during these years that the first volume were published as part of the seven volume work "Erlebte Erdteile"<sup>28</sup> (Continents Experienced), which in a sense represents a complete view of Frobenius' ideas and endeavours. This series also contains a second revised edition of "Paideuma"<sup>29</sup> In the same period the first of altogether twelve volumes of fairy tales, legends and myths was printed, material Frobenius had collected during his travels.<sup>30</sup> The tenth volume of this series - the title

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28. L. Frobenius, Erlebte Erdteile. 7 Bände. Frankfurt a.M. 1925-1930.

29. L. Frobenius, Erlebte Erdteile, Band 4: Vom Volkerstudium zur Philosophie. Der neue Blick. 1925.

30. L. Frobenius, Atlantis. Volksmärchen und Volksdichtungen Afrikas. Jena 1921-1928:

- I. Volksmärchen der Kabylen 1. Band. Weisheit. (1921).
- II. Volksmärchen der Kabylen. 2. Band. Das Unegheuerliche(1922)
- III. Volksmärchen der Kabylen. 3. Band. Das Fabelhafte. (1921)
- VI. Märchen aus Kordofan. (1923)
- V. Dichten und Denken im Sudan (1925)
- VI. Spielmannsgeschichten der Sahel. (1921).
- VII. Dämonen des Sudan. (1924).
- VIII. Erzählungen aus dem Westsudan. (1922)
- XI. Volkserzählungen und Volksdichtungen aus dem Zentral-Sudan (1924)
- X. Die atlantische Gotterlehre. (1926).
- XI. Volksdichtungen aus Oberguinea. (1924).
- XIII. Dichtkunst der Kassiden (1928).

of which could be translated "The Mythology of Atlantis" - deals with the religion of the Yoruba and appeared in a French translation under the title of "La Mythologie de l'Atlantide". In Germany this collection of fairy tales, legends and myths aroused repeated criticism, right up to the present: Frobenius had derived his texts exclusively from interpreters and so their authenticity could not be corroborated. Furthermore, Frobenius had been rather free in his translations of them into German. When at a later date other authors were able to procure the actual texts, it was found that Frobenius had been absolutely correct as far as the motives and essential plots of the stories were concerned. Cultural research is primarily interested in motives.

In one of the volumes of "Erlebte Erdteile" Frobenius writes that when he started out, he considered it an absolute necessity to learn the language of the people with which he wanted to concern himself. In the Congo, therefore, he had learned the basic traits of the languages of the Bayaka and Baluba. But because his visits were relatively brief, he did not learn to master the subtleties of the languages.<sup>31</sup> It is understandable that during his tours in West Africa, between 1907 and 1912, Frobenius did not manage to learn the languages of all the tribes with which he came into contact.

In 1922 Frobenius founded the "Research Institute for the Morphology of Culture" in Munich, which was moved to Frankfurt on Main in 1925. This research institute became part of the University of Frankfurt, and is called the Frobenius-Institute today. Together with his collaborators at the research institute, Frobenius started yet another great work in the early twenties, the "Atlas Africanus". In it he tried to comprise cartographically all important elements of African cultures, so that with the aid of such maps a more comprehensive view of the African cultures might emerge.<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately the "Atlas Africanus" was never completed, and there is little chance of its being finished by someone today.

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31. Frobenius, *Erlebte Erdteile*, Band III: *Vom Schreibtisch zum Äquator*. Frankfurt 1925, p. 29.

32. See foot-note 27.

In 1925 the major results of his North African trips - from 1910 to 1914 - were published in the book "Hadschra Maktuba", in which Frobenius put before the public his extensive material on rock-paintings.<sup>33</sup> Hugo Obermaier, one of the leading pre-historians of his time, wrote the introduction to this book.

In 1926 Frobenius was able to take up his travelling again: he went into the Nubian desert. Only two years later his ninth tour followed which took him to South Africa. A variety of things attracted him there: the rock pictures of South Africa, the ruins of Zimbabwe, and the traces of the divine kingship of the Zimbabwe Empire in the contemporary cultures of those peoples living in the region of the ruins. This was Frobenius' last extensive trip to Africa South of the Sahara. Between 1932 and 1935 Frobenius went on three more journeys, to Lybia and other parts of North Africa, primarily to study rock-paintings and engravings.

While for his previous tours he used to take outsiders, mainly painters, as travel companions, he now felt it his obligation to train young oncoming scholars whom he took along on his journeys. In this way he introduced a change of generations. For reasons of health, Frobenius had to entrust his collaborator Adolf E. Jensen, who later became his successor, with leading a research voyage to Ethiopia.

The ethnographic report on the South African journey had appeared in 1930. In 1931 it was followed by two volumes entitled "Madsimu Dsangara"<sup>34</sup>, which contained the most significant rock-pictures found in South Africa. In the next year his book on the destiny of cultures<sup>35</sup> was published and in 1933 the history of African cultures<sup>36</sup>. The last great work to come from Frobenius' pen was printed in 1937, and deals with the

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33. L. Frobenius und H. Obermaier, Hadschra Maktuba. Urzeitliche Felsbilder Kleinafrikas. Munchen 1925.

34. L. Frobenius, Madsimu Dsangara. Sudafrikanische Felsbilderchronik. 2 Bande. Berlin und Zurich 1931.

35. L. Frobenius, Schicksalskunde im Sinne des Kulturwerdens. Leipzig 1932.

36. L. Frobenius, Kulturgeschichte Afrikas. Zurich 1933.

rock-paintings of Fezzan. Its title is "Ekade Ektab"<sup>37</sup>. The ideas expressed in "Schicksalskunde..." and "Kulturgeschichte Afrikas" represent Frobenius' scientific legacy. The later book in particular is significant in the context of this paper for, as said before, it was this book which even in the thirties made a great impact upon African students. Without a doubt, some of its details need correction now, to accord with the results of further research during the past thirty years; but some of its basic tenets are still supportable, and constitute the groundwork for many new investigations.

In the year 1912 Frobenius had reported on his work to the German Kaiser - for the first time. Wilhelm II gave considerable sums from his private funds to finance Frobenius' North African journeys between 1912 and 1914. In the twenties this relationship between Wilhelm II and Frobenius became more intimate. Frobenius was a frequent guest in Doorn, the Dutch exile of the Kaiser. Wilhelm II founded the "Doorn Study Group" in co-operation with Frobenius: Frobenius, his collaborators and various befriended scholars of other disciplines used to travel to Doorn for lectures and scholarly discussions.

The preferment of the German Kaiser was not the only recognition Frobenius received during the late years of his scientific work. After he moved to Frankfurt, he received a teaching appointment from the University. Shortly thereafter he was generally recognized by the scholars and enjoyed a considerable reputation among specialists. In 1932 he became honorary professor at the University Frankfurt. When he died, on the 9th of August 1938 in his house at Biganzolo on Lago Maggiore, the life of a scholar, filled with achievement, came to an end - no doubt a restless existence, but nevertheless an existence which in gratefulness Frobenius had abundantly enjoyed.

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37. L. Frobenius, Ekade Ektab. Die Felsbilder Fezzans. Leipzig 1937.

Overlooking his scientific activity we can divide it into four phases: The storm and stress period of the young man, lasting about a decade, during which his bold ideas were first brought to public attention; next, the travelling period at the height of his life, when Frobenius critically examined his own theories by checking them against actual facts; in the third phase of his life - during the years following the First World War - he revised his earlier theories, while his last phase is marked by new research travels, and by his mature assessment of all the practical experience he had gained in Africa.

Frobenius' scientific postulations have fallen on fertile ground - at least in Germany. Graebner's and Ankermann's work is based upon them, and Hermann Baumann, who at present is "the grand old man" of German ethnology, further developed and revised the scientific ideas of Frobenius and Ankermann - a little more than 25 years ago he wrote the first detailed synthesis of African cultures<sup>38</sup>, which is to be followed up in the near future by a basic revised synthesis. Baumann's new work on African peoples and cultures will be published in two or three volumes. It has been written by a team of ethnologists under the direction of H. Baumann who will present his new view of the synthesis. The book of George Peter Murdock<sup>39</sup> has proved that it is impossible for a single scholar to write a really valuable synthesis of the African cultures without the collaboration of other specialists.

At the end of this paper, it will be useful to give a short summary of the ideas expressed by Frobenius on the culture cycles of Africa.

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38. H. Baumann, *Volker und Kulturen Afrikas*. In: H. Baumann, R. Thurnwald, D. Westermann, *Volkerkunde von Afrika*. Essen 1940.
39. G.P. Murdock, *Africa - Its Peoples and Their Culture History*. New York 1959.



The Ethiopian culture covers nearly all parts of Africa where farming exists. This culture is associated with cultivated plants. Frobenius distinguished Eastern Ethiopians between Ethiopia and Darfur, Central Ethiopians between Wadai and the Bauchi plateau of Nigeria, Western Ethiopians in the Western Sudan, Southeastern Ethiopians in East Africa, and Southwestern Ethiopians in the Congo. Eastern, Central, and Western Ethiopians are characterized by patrilineal descent, patriarchal organization of the family, a considerable participation of men in farm-work, age-set systems, segmentary social organization, cult of the ancestors, cult of the earth under the direction of special priests, combination of cattle-breeding and farming (especially sorgho), etc. The Ethiopian culture has a tendency to incorporate foreign elements. This explains, why it is often difficult to distinguish between e.g. the Ethiopian and Old Erythrean Cultures.

The counterpart to the Ethiopian culture is the Hamitic culture which can be found in North and Northeast Africa, as well as along the so-called Hamitic migratory route in East, South, and Southwest Africa. To this culture belong hunting and cattle-breeding with respective customs (the cattle-complex!); dominating position of leather in material culture, thinking is rational; dead and dying persons are as far as possible avoided; the evil eye is considered to be the cause of illness and accident; amulets; sorcery, and magic are most important. This culture - according to Frobenius - was responsible for the production of rock-pictures.

The relicts of an old hunting culture were discovered by Frobenius among small groups of hunters in Northwest Africa, in the hinterland of the Western Guinea Coast, between Niger and Chad, sporadic, too, in East and Southwest Africa. This culture, called Mahalbi culture (from Hausa mahalbi or maharbi = hunter) by Frobenius, is characterized by certain customs in initiation-rites and in hunting. It is said to be a variant of the Hamitic culture.

The Old Erythrean culture is spread especially in West Africa and it is represented only in a few places of East Africa. Use of vegetable materials and artistic ornamentation of tools and household utensils are typical for the Old Erythrean culture. Shields from wickerwork, objects, made from bamboo, slit-drums, xylophone, and the house on piles are some important elements belonging to that culture.

Apart from the Old Erythrean culture Frobenius worked out a Middle Erythrean culture, having entered the African continent at two places: in the North in Ethiopia and in the South at the coast of Mocambique. Accordingly, Frobenius distinguished a North and a South Erythrean culture. The latter one is spread among the Central and South-eastern Bantu, i.e. in the Southern Congo and in Southeast Africa. The spheres of influence of the North Erythrean culture Frobenius discovered in Northeast Africa, in the Eastern and Central Sudan. Leit-motif of these cultures is the divine kinship, to be found - we must admit - in the Western Sudan and on the coast of Upper Guinea as well. Frobenius e.g. cartographically fixed up the following motives: ritual murder of the king; the custom of the king's eating in secret; the king marries his sister sexual licence of the royal princesses; respected position of the queen-mother; anarchy during interregnum, etc. Frobenius considered e.g. the hare as the hero of tales and the house with conical roof as other characteristics of these cultures.

The Syrtic culture is responsible for many of the Old Mediterranean influences on West Africa. Frobenius thought that this culture came to West Africa by Transsaharan routes. Ruins of lost towns, sanctuaries and grave-chambers were said by him to be leit-motives from the Mediterranean in the North to the Sahel in the South. Fortress-like clay compounds, tower-like granaries, granary-urns, funerary urns, containers made from skin, tanning und dyeing of leather, metal casting in the cire-perdue process, the town-plan with four gates oriented according to the four cardinal points, and certain ornaments used in pottery and in scarification are further elements of this culture.

Like the Erythrean and Syrtic cultures, Frobenius considered the Atlantic culture as an inheritance from Western Asia. This culture comprises the coastal parts of the countries of the Gulf of Guinea as far as the Congo. It was considered by Frobenius to be an offshoot of the Atlantic culture of the classical era. Frobenius believed that Benin and the Yoruba kingdoms were its main contemporary representatives. Characteristic traits are certain types of boats; certain rowing techniques gods or couples of gods thought to reside in the four directions of the world; stone-beads; production of glass-beads; burnt-sacrifice or -offering; toga-like costume of men; in sculpture the motive of women

holding their breasts with the hands; burial by fumigation; use of coffins.

Frobenius devoted his life's work to Africa. Africa in its turn rewarded him richly by his contact with its cultures. What was it that Frobenius gave to Africa though? It was more than merely his ideas on the philosophy of culture which were gladly and gratefully received and attested by African students of the thirties, who were stimulated by them to regard their own cultures in a new and, fortunately, positive light. It was more than his recognition of African cultures which Leo Frobenius wrote about in his "Kulturgeschichte Afrikas". It was a wealth of documents, parts of which already belong to history, while others will become historical material within a few years or decades. When that time comes, African historians will profit greatly by consulting the extensive documentations Frobenius compiled. This will not only comprise the study of his books, but equally so the utilization of the archives of the Frobenius-Institute in Frankfurt.

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