

NAITERU-KOP: Maasai Heritage Revealed



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Chapter One: Unraveling the Maasai Identity

The Maasai (also written Masai) are an East African Nilotic ethnic group who live mostly in Kenya and Tanzania (Beidelman, 2016; Hoskins, 2001). The Maasai people are semi-nomadic pastoralists who rely mostly on cattle herding for a living. They are known for their distinct cultural customs, traditional way of life, and distinctive dress style.

The term "Maasai" is thought to derive from the Maa language, which is spoken by the Maasai people. The singular form "Maa" refers to the language itself, whereas the plural form "Maasai" refers to those who speak it. The term "Maasai" was coined by foreigners and has since been extensively embraced by a variety of organizations, including researchers, explorers, and adjacent villages.

It is critical to recognize that many ethnic groups in East Africa have their own names for the Maasai people, resulting in pronunciation and spelling differences. In Swahili, another widely spoken language in the region, the Maasai are known as "Wamaasai."

Maasai warriors are famous for their exceptional height, endurance, and startling red hair, which helped them dominate the Rift Valley grasslands. The Maasai Mara wildlife reserve in southern Kenya is named after the tribe because it is still their ancestral home.

Throughout their history, the Maasai have maintained an oral tradition that promotes their idea that they are East Africa's sole pure pastoralists. These myths reinforce the Maasai's supremacy over other tribes, particularly hunters (Dorobo) and agriculturalists, whose jobs were viewed as less dignified, such as soil cultivation.

Chapter Two: Tracing Ancestral Roots

The Maasai origins have been examined in numerous accounts and understandings, both in oral tradition and scholarly studies performed by scholars. Maasai folklore and oral tradition are important in preserving their cultural history, passing down stories about their ancestors from generation to generation. Simultaneously, scholars have performed investigations, linguistic analyses, and anthropological research to acquire insight into the Maasai people's historical beginnings.

A. The Origins of Maasai: Folklore

The Maasai are derived from a mythological character known as "Naiteru-kop" or "Naiteruak," who, according to their beliefs, fell from the sky and emerged from the sacred fig tree with all the livestock. According to legend, the tree released its roots to let Naiteru-kop and the cattle to emerge, establishing the Maasai people's close affinity with their livestock.

As Naiteru-kop's descendants multiplied, they wandered across the region, and the Maasai began their nomadic way of life, herding cattle and living in harmony with nature. The fig tree remains a symbol of their forefathers as well as their cultural identity. It is important to note that Maasai folklore and oral tradition vary between Maasai sub-sections, and these stories are passed down through generations, assisting in the preservation of their cultural past and identity.

According to another oral tradition, the Maasai were born to herd cattle, and the tribe's first male progenitor was given a herding stick for this purpose. Furthermore, it was considered that engaging in other occupations, like as hunting and farming, would undermine this specialty.

Another myth holds that the Maasai believe they are the chosen people because they have been given livestock. According to the Maasai creation story, God gave his three sons three sticks as gifts. God chose the third son, the Maasai's progenitor, and gave him a long herder's stick and a rope with which livestock dropped from heaven to earth. Others claim they descended from heaven on a gigantic cow hide carrying all the cattle on the planet, and they thought they were the original owners of all cattle for a long time.

Another Maasai tale claims that they came from the lower Nile Valley to the Lake Turkana region. On their route to the Kerio Valley escarpment in Kalenjin nation, they conquered, displaced, and absorbed other ethnic groups in the Great Rift Valley. Given that the Maasai were originally pastoralists, Ole Sankan (1971) ascribed the Maasai's southward expansion to a need for additional grazing pasture. As a result of this southerly migration, they reached northern Tanzania and, finally, central Tanzania. The Maasai are predominantly found in the counties of Kajiado and Narok in Kenya's former Rift Valley province.

B. The Missionaries' Account.

According to Harry Johnson, the Maasai are a cross between Nilotic-Negro and Hamite (Galla Somali). Others say they interacted with or were inspired by Egyptian tribes. Ruth T. Shaffer wrote the following observation, which was recalled by Sironka ole Masharen (2009), one of the first missionaries in Maasai land, in her book, *Road to Kilimanjaro*:

We spotted a mummy in a coffin that we were certain was a Maasai warrior when touring the national museum in Cairo, Egypt, on our way back from furlough in 1948. But when we spotted the label, it said "King Tut Ankhamin." Because there were so many displays, we assumed the Maasai had migrated from that location.

Their origin is unknown. Their complexion is a dark brown-black color, and pure Maasai have aquiline noses and small lips. They are known as "Nilo-Hamitic". Many believe their origins were closely tied to the Hebrews, or Semitic race, because they have stories comparable to Biblical accounts, told from mouth to mouth. They still resemble Jacob when he went to see Esau, despite their vast herd.

According to J. T. Hoskins, J. T. (2001) as cited by Sironka ole Masharen (2009), a tribe from the north, such as the Masai, may have once been in

contact with races influenced by ancient Egypt, and may represent a degeneration of another race rather than an increase of the primaeval African stock.

C. The Potential Link: Maasai-Oromo

The data in Father Martial de Salvic's book "The Oromo," published in 1901, presents interesting concerns about the potential link between the Maasai and Oromo tribes. Salvic states that the Maasai just like their counter parts, Tutsi of Rwanda and Lang'o of Uganda, are the lost tribes of Oromo. Some authors group the Maasai with the Oromo emigrants, implying a similar heritage or historical connection.

Chromosomal similarities have been discovered between the Maasai and the Oromo, lending credence to the theory of a historical link. Tishkoff et al. (2009) investigated the Maasai autosomal DNA and discovered evidence of different cluster assignments from Nilo-Saharan and Cushitic ancestors. This is consistent with genetic evidence of Cushitic absorption by Nilotic over the last 3000 years.

Wood et al. (2005) performed Y chromosome analysis in various Sub-Saharan tribes, including the Maasai, and discovered the presence of haplogroup E1b1b-M35 in a large proportion of the Maasai tested. This genetic marker is also seen in northern Cushitic men, implying a common ancestor extending back over 13,000 years.

These genetic researches add to our understanding of the Maasai and surrounding ethnic groups' historical links and exchanges, offering insight on their intriguing origins.

D. The Biblical Connection.

J. T. Hoskins Jr. (2001) emphasizes Merker's fascinating research "Die Masai" (Berlin, 1904), which gives a distinct perspective on the Maasai's historical roots. Merker speculates that the Maasai may have shared ancestral origins with the ancient Hebrews, and he cites various stories about creation, the deluge, the Ten Commandments, and other components of primordial history that are comparable to Biblical and Babylonian accounts.

Hoskins, on the other hand, issues a cautious note and argues for critical examination of these stories. He believes that some elements were acquired or adapted from Christian or Islamic sources, potentially affecting the Maasai story.

The origins of East African races are complicated and ambiguous in the absence of concrete historical evidence extending back thousands of years. Hoskins highlights that, in contrast to more civilized nations with well-documented history, identifying the origins of East African races is based on present evidence like as physical characteristics, language, and religious practices.

It's worth noting that modern Christian Maasai have seen parallels between the biblical name "Amasai" and their own ancestors. Amasa, son of Yathar, Chief of thirty, is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 12:1-2 of the Aramaic Bible in Plain English, declaring his support for David. Hebrew Names Version for 1 Chronicles 9:12 and `Adayah the son of Yerocham, the son of Pashchur, the son of Malkiyah, and Ma`asai the son of `Adi'el, the son of Yachzerah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Meshillemi, the son of Immer. Such links represent Maasai views and understandings of their historical identity today.

In conclusion, the Maasai past is a complex tapestry of interpretations that merge cultural, genetic and religious elements, making it a subject of constant research and investigation.

E. Migration and Linguistic: A Comparative Study

The Maasai are a Nilotic ethnic group who have traditionally lived in northern, middle, and southern Kenya, as well as northern Tanzania. Their dominion expanded to span the Great Rift Valley and nearby territories from Mount Marsabit in the north to Dodoma, Tanzania in the south by the mid-nineteenth century.

The Maasai migrated to Kenya from what is now Sudan around 1,000 years ago, according to historical chronicles. They make up roughly 2% of the region's overall population and have thrived

thanks to their expertise in animal husbandry, notably cow herding.

Linguistic evidence suggests that the Maasai are connected to other Nilo-Saharan groups such as the Bari, Lotuko of southern Sudan, Teso, and Karamoja of eastern Uganda. According to Sommer and Vossen (1993), the Maasai traveled through southern Sudan before arriving in the Great Rift Valley and sections of eastern and central Kenya.

Bureng (n.d.) connects the Maasai and other Nilotic peoples in his book on parts of Bari history, implying that they moved from a location other than present-day Khartoum, Sudan. He claims that migration was primarily from the north to the south. This migration explains the linguistic, cultural, and ethnic similarities noted among these peoples, which range from the Nubians in the far north to the Bari in the middle Sudan and the Maasai in the far south.

According to Bureng (n.d.) Nubian, Bari, and Maasai (also known as Nilo-Hamites) borrowed substantially from a second language known as 'Hemitic,' which later perished without a trace. He proposed dividing the race into two large linguistic and racial groups: 'Nilotic' proper and 'Nilo-Hamites.' According to this classification, only the Nilotic proper are of pure Negroid origin, whereas the Nilo-Hamites, including Bari, Nubian, and Maasai, are people of mixed race, having both Nilotic and Hamitic elements.

The term "Hamite" historically referred to a racial classification that was part of a now outdated and discredited theory known as "Hamitic hypothesis." In the Bible, the concept of the "Hamitic origin" is derived from the genealogical account of Noah and his three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. This account is found in the Book of Genesis, specifically in chapters 9 and 10.

According to Genesis 9:18-19 (ESV): "18 The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) 19 These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed."

Genesis 10:1-6 (ESV), states the following: "1 These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood. 2 The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. 3 The sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. 4 The sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. 5 From these the coastland peoples spread in their lands, each with his own language, by their clans, in their nations. 6 The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan."

The ancestral homeland of the Nilotes, including the Maasai, has been contested and is still unknown. Bureng (n.d.) idea of Nilotic peoples migrating from the north to the south, on the other hand, provides a credible explanation for the

region's significant linguistic, cultural, and ethnic similarities.

Chapter Three: Migration, Settlement and Emergence.

Research by by A.C. Hollis, A.H. Fosbrooke, Allan H. Jacobs, and S.S. Ole Sankan gives light on the Maasai's migration and settlement patterns. Irratanya, the oldest age-set remember by the community, is considered to have held power between 1761 and 1781, during which time the Maasai are thought to have reached the southern half of modern-day Kenya and the north-central areas of Tanzania.

According to Sironka ole Masharen's (2009) narration, the Maasai first dwelt between Lake Turkana and Mount Kenya before gradually migrating to southern Kenya and north-central Tanganyika (Tanzania) in the mid-18th century. It is thought that they moved from their legendary homeland, Endikir e Kerio, located in the Rift Valley. The Kerio Valley, with its steep walls and steep slope, provided as a crucial signpost for their ascent.

According to legend, the Maasai were forced to ascend out of the Kerio valley due to a severe famine. They built a gigantic ladder, but it collapsed after half the crowd had ascended. Those who remained were branded "ilmeek," or "ilmeekure," indicating that they were no longer Maasai. The name "ilmeek" was initially used inside

the Maasai community, but it is now used to refer to non-Maasai, similarly to how Jews used the term "Gentile" to denote non-Jews.

The Maasai had arrived in their current position in southern Kenya by 1750, most likely from Endikirr e Kerio. As reported by Sir Charles Eliot, the Maasai gradually developed as a regional superpower between 1850 and 1880, engaging in internal civil wars and foreign battles with other non-Maasai communities. They were effective in resisting Arab slave traders, collecting tribute from people passing through their region, and treating other African and non-African races with supremacy.

The Berlin Conference of 1886 resulted in the division of East Africa into influence regions. The British built the first railway stations in Machakos in 1889 and Dagoretti in 1890. On June 15, 1895, the British established the British East Africa Protectorate, which was first ruled from Mombasa. During this period, the Africa Inland Mission was also established, with John Stauffacher becoming the first missionary to pioneer Christianity in Maasai land, Kijabe.

Taki Ole Kindi Oloiposioki and Molonket Olokorinya Ole Sempole, from the sub-section/Olosho lo Ilkeekonyokie and the age-set Olporor known as Itareto, were important Maasai missionaries. Taki was the first to translate the New Testament into Maasai in 1922, after earlier translating it into Swahili and Kikuyu. Taki also pushed Maasai youngsters to attend school outside of their

traditional cattle grazing obligations, and graduated from a mission school in 1923.

Chapter Four: Language and Linguistic Connections

The Maasai people speak Ol Maa, also known as Maa, an Eastern Nilotic language with a verb-subject-object (VSO) word order. Linguistic evidence suggests that Maa is connected to southern Sudanese languages like Bari and Lotuko, as well as eastern Ugandan languages like Karamojong and Teso. This linguistic link supports Sommer and Vossen's (1993) theory that the Maasai migrated through southern Sudan and settled in the Great Rift Valley.

Despite extensive contact with other groups during their travels, the Maasai managed to keep their language. Linguistic investigations have indicated tight relationships between the Maasai and the Kalenjin, who live in northern Lake Turkana's cradle land. Furthermore, Nandi, Turkana, Suk, Dinka, Karamoja, Bari, and Latuka are regarded to be in the same linguistic group as the Maasai.

To demonstrate the linguistic similarities, the following words from the Maasai and Kalenjin languages are compared:

<u>English</u>	<u>Kalenjin</u>	<u>Maasai</u>
Grandmother	Koko (Gogo)	Kokoo
Grandfather	Agui	Nkakuyia
Lord	Laitorian	Olaitorian
Donkey	Sikiriet	Osikiria
Father	Papa	Papa
Arrow quiver	Motian	Emotian
Warrior	Muren	Olmurani
Husband	Poyiot	Olpayian
Friend	Choruet	Enchoruet

Similarly, the Latuka language of South Sudan, spoken east of the Nile and north of Nemule, shares grammatical similarities with the Maasai language.

During a February 2019 journey to Torit, South Sudan, I had the unusual opportunity to interact with the Latuka community. I couldn't help but notice some remarkable similarities between the Latuka language and the Maasai language during my time with the Latuka community. My first-hand encounter with the Latuka village

offered light on the Maasai's historical migration and settlement in East Africa.

<u>English</u>	<u>Maasai</u>	<u>Latuka</u>
House	Enkaji	Aji
Shoe	Enamuke	Amuke
Hand	Enkaina	Aina
Leg	Enkeju	Eju
Teeth	Ilala	Ala
Water	Enkare	Are
Goat	Enkine	Ine
Sheep	Enker	Eer
Eye	Enkong'u	Ong'u
Nose	Enkume	Ume
Mouth	Enkutuk	Utuk

The Bari, who live northwest of Latuka on the Nile's banks, are said to be the originators of the plain Nilotic language spoken by the Maasai, Turkana, Samburu, and Teso.

One of the first attempts to write down the Maa language was made by Johann Ludwig Krapf, a German Lutheran missionary employed by the

English Church Society. In 1854, he released Enkutuk Eloikob's lexicon, which used Roman vowels and consonants to record Maasai words and phrases.

Chapter Five: Maasai Sub-Sections/Loshon

The Maasai were previously a single tribe known as Olosho in the Kerio Valley. It is crucial to remember, however, that the Maasai are not a homogeneous group. They are divided into several internal sub-divisions, each defined by subtle variances in speech, dress, beadwork, armament, habitation, sub-tribal governance, rites, military arrangements, and socio-political and economic factors.

According to Sironka Ole Masharen's 2009 research, the Maasai community is divided into 13/14 sub-groups known as iloshon (plural) and olosho (single). Ilkisonko, Ilpurko, Iloitai, Ilkeek-Oonyokie, Ildamat, Iloodo-Kilani, Ilwuasin Nkishu, Isiria, Ilmatapato, Ildalat-Lekutuk/Ilkankere, Ilkaputiei, Isampur, Ilmoitanik and Ilchamus are the sub-groups.

These sub-groups maintain their distinct cultural practices, customs, and social structures, adding to the Maasai community's vast diversity. The differences across the sub-groups illustrate the complicated fabric of Maasai identity and the necessity of acknowledging the diversity and variations within this well-known East African

ethnic group. These are the sub-tribes or sub-sections:

1. Ilkisonko: The most common and ubiquitous, found in regions such as Nchukini, Loitokitok, and Olgulului near Namanaga in Kenya and Tanzania. They are further subdivided into Ilembambal, Isirinketi, Ilaitayiok, Ilaiser, Osupuko Looltatua, Isikirari, Ilketumbeine, Ilgilai, Lekipirash, Ilkiito, Isalei, Iliiyaya, Ilmolelian and Ilkule sub-clans. During the Oling'eshar ceremony, Ilkisonko play an important part in naming new age-sets.

2. Isampur: Also known as Ilaibor kineji or ilpusi Kineji, they live in Samburu County, Laisamis in Marsabit County's, and parts of Turkana, Baring'o, and Laikipia Counties.

3. Iloodokilani: They live in the area between Mile 46 (Elang'ata Uas) and Olkiramatian and interact with the Sonjo community in Tanzania. They maintain a traditional land tenure system and have embraced education, thanks to Magadi Soda company support.

4. Ilchamus: They lived around the eastern banks of Lake Baring'o after breaking away from the Laikipiak i.e. Ilkumpa and Ilkaleya clans. Because of historical marginalization and a lack of political representation, the Ilchamus indigenous community is considered endangered.

5. Ilkankere/Ildalalekutuk: Ilkankere is thought to be a conglomeration of breakaway Ilkisonko sub-groups who banded together during the Maasai

tribe's tribulations in 1890. Their territories include Kajiado, Oloyiankalani, Oltangi-Enkorika, and Mashuuru and stretch from Mashuuru to Ilbibil.

6. Iloitai: They live in the southern section of Narok, between the Inkuruman escarpment and the Maasai Mara Game Reserve. Since colonial times, they have continually safeguarded their land tenure system and natural resources through innovative conservation techniques.

7. Ilkeekonyokie: They perform a traditional role in the inter-sectional age-setting ceremony by supplying olkiteng' lemouo (the horned bull). Their territory stretches from Kisaju before Isinya to Suswa and Nairagie Enkare, bordering Ildamat in Narok County at Ntulele.

8. Ilmatapato: Their territories extend along the Great North Road from Olgululi to Eselenkei to Ilbibil, Ng'atataek, and Namanga. They've established group ranches like Meto, Osilalei, and Oldonyio Orok.

9. Isiria: Currently residing in Transmara - Olorukoti lo Siria/Osupuko lo Siria, they were formerly a sub-clan inside Olosho lo Ilkisonko among the Ilaitayiok. During succession wars, they migrated to Southern Luo land for numerous years before returning to Transmara.

10. Ilpurko: Kenya's largest Maasai sub-section, primarily found in Narok County, with pockets in Kajiado county. In Narok County they settled at

Melili, Mao, Enkare Narok, Mosiro, Osupuko, and Lemek, as well as Olgos Orok in Tanzania.

11. Ildamat: Originally found between Entapipi (Ndabibi) between Naivasha and Ng'atet, they now live in Melili, Enaramatishoreki, Ntulele, and Kajiado.

12. Ilmoitanik: The name was derived from Moita Mumias, where a fleeing Iluasin Nkishu clan sought safety during an inter-clan feud. They settled in Transmara's Shartuka and Inchipiship areas.

13. Iluasin Nkishu: Located along the Maasai-Kisii border from Keyian to Nyangusu, with some also residing along the Mara River at Emarti and as far south as Enkirende. Some took the name Ilkirasha and now live among the Ilkaputiei in Kajiado.

14. Ilkaputiei: The sub-section inhabits the expansive areas south of the Uganda railway line, stretching from Kinyawa to Kiserian in Ngong sub-county. They share borders with ilkisonko at Merueshi, Ilkankere, and Ilkeekonyokie on the western and northern parts. Their group ranches, which were among the first to be individualized during colonial times, include Merueshi, Mbuko, Kiboko, Mashuuru, Imbilin, Poka, Nkama, Arroi, Mamen, Emarti, Ololoitikoshi, Kisaju-Isinya, Inkiwanjani-Konza, Orkarkar, Erankau-Kiu, and Embolioi.

These many sub-groups contribute to the Maasai community's vibrant cultural tapestry, each with its own set of rituals, traditions, and identities.

Chapter Six: The Maasai's Lost Sub-Sections.

Internal conflicts and fights in the Maasai community have resulted in the destruction and loss of certain major sub-tribes or sub-sections. These wars, known as the Maasai civil war, saw some sub-tribes/sub-sections gang together against certain sub-sections, resulting in strategic holocausts and genocides.

As a result, certain sub-sections suffered extinction, and only remnants or twisted breeds resembling their former selves survive today. Among the sub-sections that were destroyed as described by Sironka ole Masharen (2009), are in the following order:

1. Iltaarramodooni: Considered the strongest, they could not be vanquished by one sub-section/ Olosho Obo, causing other Loshon/sub-sections to band together and destroy them. This group's remnants were assimilated by adjacent villages, making it impossible to locate them now.

2. Loolokirisiai / Lokirisiai: A fortunate group, the bulk of whom survived the holocaust. The survivors

formed an Ildamat clan in IPurko. Their identification might be discovered among others.

3. IIng'uesi: Known for their wild and indomitable nature, the mere presence of the IIng'uesi sent chills down the spines of other Loshon/sub-sections. Some members of this group remained as Iltorobo, while others merged with Ilaikipiak.

4. Idikirri: This group's remains were taken in by Iltorobo, an Ogiek village that accepted vanquished Maa groups.

5. Ilkoki: This group was also exterminated, and the survivors were incorporated into the Iloosekelai. The Iloosekelai tribe was subsequently apprehended but permitted to stay with their cattle.

6. Iloogolala: A mythological group noted for their power who lived throughout Kajiado and Loitokitok. They engaged in unusual actions of digging dams, they were slain and their graves were brutally strewn. The remnants of this tribe are thought to have integrated among Chaggas, Taita, and Ameru.

7. Ilaikipiak: The remaining powerful Ilkisonko and IPurko groups planned and carried out a genocide against this sub-section. The Maasai integrated the survivors, with some families settling in Purko, Keekonyokie, and IImatapato. The Agikuyu and Ameru communities assimilated others.

It is critical to research and document the history and identity of these vanquished groups in order to restore their voice and cultural heritage, as well as to ensure that their contributions to the Maasai community are recognized and protected.

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