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CIRCUMCISION:

Short Review of the Origin and History
of this Custom.

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The rite of circumcision is of great antiquity,¹ and has played an important part in the history of mankind, both in the past and present. The Bible² furnishes the earliest records of this subject, and the Egyptian ruins show, during the reign of Rameses II, 1370 B. C.,³ that this custom was observed. A bas-relief belonging to a temple shows two children being circumcised, and as Rameses was the founder of this small temple, the children being ten or twelve years of age, they are supposed to represent his boys. The upper part of the bas-relief is defaced, but the lower portion is in a perfect state of preservation, and the operator has evidently a stone knife or implement in his hand. From this ruin at

¹ *History of Circumcision*. P. C. Remondino, M. D., pages 21-22.

² Old Testament. Gen. **XVII**; Josh. v: 2-9; Gen. **XXXI**.

³ Ancient History. Part I. The Eastern Nations and Greece. P. V. N. Myers.

Karnack, an accurate description of the Ramesian method can be written dating back to about 1370 B. C.

⁵ "It is related in Gen. xvii that when Abram was ninety-nine years of age, he became a party on behalf of himself and his descendants to a covenant with his God; of this covenant the sign and condition was circumcision, which was directed to be performed (a peculiarity of Judaism) on the eighth day after birth." Abram was circumcised about 1896 B. C. Herbert Spencer says: ⁴ "Still more clearly have we the same implications in the ceremony by which the covenant is established. Abraham, and each of his male descendants and each of his male slaves, is circumcised. The mark of the covenant, observe, is to be borne not only by Abraham and those of his blood, but also by those of other blood whom he has bought. The mark is a strange one, and the extension of it is a strange one, if we assume it to be imposed by the Creator of the Universe, on a favored man and his descendants; and on this assumption it is no less strange that the one transgression for which every "soul shall be cut off," is not any crime, but a neglect of this rite.

Such a ceremony, however, insisted on by a living potentate under penalty of death, is not strange; for, as we shall hereafter see, circumcision is one of various mutilations imposed as marks on subject persons by terrestrial superiors."

⁷ Dr. Ebers ^{8*} says the children ^{9†} on the bas-relief of the temple of Chunsu, at Karnack, ⁸ are between six and ten years of age, "which agrees with the present custom in ⁹ Egypt, ^{9*} where Mr. Lane ^{8*} tells us circumcision is generally per-

⁴ *Synthetic Philosophy. Principles of Sociology.* Vol. I, page 407 of Section 202.

⁵ *Encyclopæd. Britannica.* *Stoddart Co.*, Vol. V, page 690. Circumcision.

⁷ *Encyclopædia Britannica.* 9th ed. *Stoddart Co.*, Vol. V, pages 690-691.

^{8*} "Egypten und die Bücher Mosis Vol. I, pp. 278-284. Ebers."

⁸ "Modern Egyptians." Lane I, page 71.

⁹ *Herodotus.* Transl. by Cary. London, MDCCCLiv, 11. Euterpe, page 108, "37." *Antiquities of Israel*, Eng. Trans., pages 89-97. Ewald, *Old Testament.*

^{9*} "Büdinger, *Egyptische Einwirkungen auf Herbräusche Culte*, in *Berichte of Vienna Academy.*"

¹⁰ "Ancient Egypt, Sir Gardner Wilkinson, Vol. V, page 318."

^{9†} "Chabas, *Revue Archéologique*, N. S., Vol. III, pages 298-300."

formed in the fifth or sixth year," being sometimes by peasants postponed until the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth year.

It has been asserted the priests only were operated upon, and the only early evidence on this point is that of *Origen*. Possibly in that era, the Egyptians, like the later Jews, evaded this custom on account of the contempt and ridicule circumcision exposed them to. The operation as practiced by the Egyptians, was not a rite, but, as Herodotus^{10*} states, a sanitary measure. Both in ancient and modern times different opinions have been held as to the meaning of this ceremony. Wilkinson states positively that there is evidence to show circumcision was performed in Egypt before the immigration of the Hebrews—a myth, common to both Egyptians and Phœnicians,¹¹ "not of a very ancient date in its extant Egyptian form, which seems to bring circumcision into connection with the Sun-God."

In the *Book of the Dead*, chapter xvii, we read of "the blood which proceeded from the limb of the god Ra, when he wished to cut himself," which the late Vicomte de Rougè interpreted, with much plausibility, circumcision (*Revue Archéologique, nouv. série*, 1,244). And in a fragment of the Philonian Sanchoniathon (*Fragmenta Historicum Græcorum*, ed. Müller III, 568, 569), "we find El circumcised his father, Uranos, or, according to a different version, himself."¹² Donnelly says it was "resorted to in Atlantean days, imposed as a religious duty." One of the Atlantean kings, "Ouranos, circumcised his whole army," and those of his allies, during a plague which the author of Atlantis^{12 13 14 15 16 17} thinks was syphilis, which rite the colonies of this sunken continent carried into Europe, and not the disease. Donnelly states

^{10*} *Herodotus Transl.* Cary., (Eng. ed.), page 108.

¹¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica.* 9th ed., Vol. V. Circumcision, pages 690-691.

¹² *Atlantis.* Donnelly, pages 1, 2, 3, 6, 18. ~~1472~~

¹³ *Pre-Adamites.* Alexander Winchell, LL. D., pages 379-382.

¹⁴ *Ancient America.* Baldwin. Chap. vii, page 174.

¹⁵ *North Americans of Antiquity.* John T. Short. Pages 143, 498-505.

¹⁶ *Brasseur*, in Landa's *Relacion*, page xxi, and *Popol Vuh*, chap. iii.

¹⁷ *Prehistoric Races of the United States.* Foster. Pages 394-399.

Atlantis was the birthplace of civilization, both the new and old world being populated by these people, their oldest colony being Egypt, who, like the Athenians, repulsed their large armies which had conquered a greater part of Europe. He believes the Greek gods were Atlantean kings.

Winchell refers to these people as "Mongoloids," and, according to the advocates of this theory of Atlantis, they populated America, and the natives of Central America practiced circumcision. Therefore, from this standpoint we are indebted to them for spreading syphilis, circumcision, making gunpowder, and as being the earliest printers, as claimed for the Chinese. ¹⁸ Plato's ancestor, Solon, ¹⁹ lived 600 B. C., obtained information from the wise men of Sais, according to Plutarch, in regard to Atlantis, which was destroyed 9,000 B. C.—* the Guanches of the Canaries, being a remnant of the Mongoloid race of the lost continent. The Maya and other American nations had a tradition in regard to Atlantis and its destruction. Herodotus wrote in regard to circumcision ²⁰ fourteen centuries after the Old Testament had been written, while Strabo and Diodorus wrote some centuries later in regard to this custom. ²¹ Herodotus says the rite is of Egyptian origin, and "to have been admitted in Palestine, but he is probably only right, so far as the Phœnicians or Canaanites are concerned," but Pythagoras and Herodotus may have written concerning this subject nine hundred years "after Moses had recorded his laws."

²² Voltaire and certain Jews had a controversy, during which the Hebrews denied they borrowed circumcision from the Egyptians. The Jews claim the Phœnicians borrowed this rite from the Israelites. In the early history of Christianity there was a great dispute among the followers of Christ in regard to this custom. ²⁴ There were two parties,

¹⁸ "Plato, *Timæus* and *Critias*, ed. Stallbaum, 1838, t. vii, pages 99, 389. Jewett's translation of the *Dialogues of Plato*, Vol. II, pages 462, 519-521, 588, 599, 607." *Winchell's *Pre-Adamites*, page 380.

¹⁹ *Atlantis*. Donnelly, page 5.

²⁰ *History of Circumcision*. Remondino, pages 21, 23, 22.

²¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 9th ed. Stoddart Co., Vol. V. page 690.

²² "Letters of Certain Jews to Monsieur Voltaire, Containing an Apology for their own People." Pages 451-476. Translated Lefauv, Philadelphia, 1848.

the disciples of St. Paul,^{23 24 25} or "Pauline party," of Antioch, who represented the uncircumcised or Gentiles, who did not believe in the necessity of circumcision. St. Peter^{23 24 25} and his followers observed the Mosaic rite; they represented the "Jewish party" of Jerusalem.

From an ethnological point, the ceremony was not specially a Semitic rite, being only used by the southern and western Semites, who no doubt borrowed it from the Egyptians, says one writer.²⁶ The Koran does not mention it, but a few authorities state it was a primitive custom to circumcise Arabian youths between the ages of ten and fifteen.²⁷ Pococke quotes "from the express statement of Ibn-al-Athir" that the facts already stated in regard to Arabia are true.

It is recorded the "preachers of Islam" carried this custom into Persia, India, and Turkey. History even mentions the Israelites obtained the rite of circumcision from the Arabians. The uncircumcised is a term of contempt used in the Old Testament, and is applied to the Philistines.

The circumcision of the Phœnicians, or Canaanites, has been disputed, but is attested by the writings of Herodotus, and biblical references. The mythology of the ancient Egyptians, in speaking of the death of Osiris,^{28 30} says²⁹ Typhon carried off the phallus of the deceased, and the subsequent action taken by his wife, Isis, which led to phallic worship. Thus Isis started the adoration of the white bull Apis. There has been a custom among many ancient and modern races or tribes to secure a³¹ trophy from the body of a dead enemy. The American Indians, (a) Scythians,^{32 33} scalped their foe. Herodotus states, in regard to the

²³ Synthetic Philosophy. Principles of Sociology. Herbert Spencer. Vol. I, Sec. 202; page 407. Appleton & Co., N. Y. 1892.

²⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica. 9th ed. Vol. XVIII, page 429.

²⁵ New Testament Col., ii chap., 12, 13 verses; Gal. ii chap. 1-10 verse.

²⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica. 9th ed., Vol. V, 690.

²⁷ "Pococke. Specimen Hist. Arabum. Page 319." Gen. xxxiv.

²⁸ Atlantis. Donnelly, pages 309, 466. ³¹, p. 209.

²⁹ History of Circumcision. Remondino, p. 28, 29. ³⁴ p. 30.

³⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica. 9th ed., Vol. XVII; Mythology, p. 158.

³² Old Testament. Psa. lxxviii, 21.

³³ Catlin, Schoolcraft, Baneroff, and others, (a) "Jaime's Hist. Eng. Lit.," p. 35.

Scythian, "he makes a cut round the head near the ears, and shakes the skull out." Dr. Remondino³⁴ gives a different version of this affair—the Scythian soldiers returning from battle with heads of their dead enemies. Abyssinians and a few negro tribes on the Guinea Coast carry away with them the phallus of the slain of the defeated in battle.³⁵ Spencer's version is as follows: "It was shown that among the Abyssinians the trophy taken by circumcision from an enemy's dead body, etc."³⁶ Among the modern Berbers it is still a practice for a young man, on proposing marriage, to exhibit to his prospective father-in-law the "virile members" of his dead foes.³⁷ Bergmann says the Israelites practiced these mutilations as David brought two hundred prepuces of the Philistines killed in battle to Saul, and he says it ought to read "two hundred virile members."

Remondino makes the following statement: "The Israelitish circumcision could have originated from either phallic worship or any hero; warrior usages is untenable as a proposition, as regards the living prisoners, and is contrary to the monotheistic idea which ruled Israel, or to the benign nature of their God."

³⁸ Professor Worman, of Brooklyn, does not believe phallic worship had anything to do with circumcision. According to some writers, the phallus was removed from prisoners, and in the course of time circumcision was resorted to instead, as a mark of slavery. Spencer conveys this idea also, in his "Sociology," and also Bergmann in his writings. Authors in their works in speaking of this rite, lay stress on the days selected by the Egyptians and Jews as to when to circumcise. *This proves nothing, and the point is not as to some particular day, but how did the custom originate, what race first performed circumcision? Are they necessarily the direct, or indirect, means of spreading the operation all over the world? Could not the rite of circumcision originate independently of the*

³⁵ *Synthetic Philosophy*. Principles of Sociology. Vol. II, Sect. 362, p. 67.

³⁶ *History of Circumcision*. Remondino, pp. 30, 37, 31, 38, 26.

³⁷ *History of Circumcision*. Remondino, p. 31. ³⁹ p. 28.

³⁸ *History of Circumcision*.. Remondino, p. 26, ³⁹ p. 28.

Hebrews, or Egyptians? Why not? ⁴⁰ Cæsarian section is performed in Uganda, Central Africa, successfully, *in order to save both mother and child.* ⁴¹ Prehistoric Man of Europe trephined the skulls of the living for diseases of the brain, and of the dead, as a religious ⁴² ceremony. ⁴³ The Incas operated upon the living for diseases of the calvarium and fractures of the same. I have seen a fractured skull, where the incision through the scalp (of the mummy) had been made during life, and the patient died evidently during the operation. This is a good example of ancient surgery. The natives of the South Sea Islands ⁴⁴ operated upon the heads of the living for diseases. The Australians operate upon the cervix, and perineum, cutting the latter down to the rectum. ⁴⁵ They also, in order to prevent conception, perform an operation upon the male urethra, producing an artificial hypospadias.

Who taught them surgery? These operations all started independently, and for many different reasons. Their causes were in the case of circumcision due to *religion, sanitary measures, slavery following war*, etc. As the savage is not so sensitive to pain, and the intense sufferings following injuries, as in the case of a highly civilized man, yet, no doubt, as Donnelly suggests, circumcision may date from the ⁴⁶ "stone age of Europe." "Paleolithic Man's" child, having suffered from diseases due to his long leathery prepucis and filthy habits and surroundings, conceived the operation through some accidental injury to the infant, or boy. He operated for reflex neuroses, no doubt, in many cases. The savage has a reason for everything he does, be it good,

⁴⁰ *Histoire des Accouchements*, etc. G. J. Witkowski, p. 621.

⁴¹ *Man Before Metals*. N. Joly, pp. 88, 87, 336, 338.

⁴² Smithsonian Report, 1875. Art. by Henry Gilliman, pp. 234-245.

⁴³ Atlantis. Donnelly, p. 273.

⁴⁴ *Annual of the Universal Med. Sciences*, Sajous, 1890. Art. by Gihon, Ep. 21. *Vol V*

⁴⁵ *Med. Press.*, Feb. 21, 1894. Deformation of the Genital Organs. J. G. Garson.

⁴⁶ Primitive Man. Louis Figuier, p. 25-121.

⁴⁶ The World Before the Deluge. Louis Figuier, p. 409.

⁴⁶ Antiquity of Man. Lyell, pp. 75-92.

⁴⁶ The Recent Origin of Man. James Southall, p. 86.

⁴⁶ Pre-Historic Times. Sir John Lubbock, pp. 2, 78, 423.

bad, or very foolish; and he is an observer and experimenter in medicine and surgery with success in many cases, as the operations described in my paper show a history of the surgery in the past and present.

Why could not circumcision for diseases, independently of the Jews, have been performed? We have seen that the Arabians circumcised before the advent of Mohammed, and they also perform a similar rite upon females. ⁴⁷ In Egypt and Arabia a society of Mussulmen circumcise young girls at the age of seven years, and this consists in excising the clitoris by means of scissors, or pincers, as is the case at "Mossoul." A grown woman who has been educated abroad, on the birth of her child is operated upon. ⁴⁷ In Morocco, says Correl, they go to school and get five children, who run through the streets holding a cloth to which is attached four eggs, chanting prayers as they hastily pass along the thoroughfares; great personages break and throw bottles of water upon this cloth. And on arriving at the Mosque, they join the procession. The child is usually from two to five years of age; is placed upon a richly saddled, bridled and caparisoned horse or mule. The members of the family surround the boy, carrying banners, etc., and an Arabian band (regardless of numbers) is composed of an alto clarinet and tamborines, playing outlandish tunes. The marching child's horse is preceded by a band of armed men, carrying guns, who from time to time execute a kind of war dance, and then discharge their arms. This ceremony takes place when a male child is circumcised. The Arabians, it is seen, perform this rite upon women, and also the Abyssinians operate upon females, as do the Egyptians in like manner. ⁴⁸ The Arabians circumcise large numbers of boys, "regardless of the trifling differences in their ages." They have many other interesting ceremonies pertaining to this religious custom, which differ in details, as also is the case in Turkey. In Madagascar, it is claimed, the Arabs in early ages lived in this place, and they obtained

⁴⁷ Histoire des Accouchments, etc. G. J. Witkowski, p. 574.

⁴⁸ History of Circumcision. Remondino, pp. 37, 38, 39, ⁴⁹ p. 40-41.

the operation from them. This is hardly true, so far as circumcision is concerned. ⁵⁰ Another Arabian ceremony is, the father of the boy to be circumcised kills a sheep in his tent, and while the men are feasting, the women singing, surround an ornamented camel's saddle, placed in front of the entrance to the tent. The men ⁵¹ finally come out, mount their horses, lance in hand, riding three times around the saddle, and then engage in warlike games. ⁵¹ Most all of the Australians, except the tribes in Victoria and New South Wales, practice circumcision; the age of the boy to be circumcised is eight years. The circumcised ⁵² will not eat with the uncircumcised, and is performed as an act of cleanliness, and is one of importance when this operation is usually performed, as a mark of manhood.

The ceremony, ⁵¹ "Euriltha," is a long, complicated piece of surgery, lasting weeks, that is used in cases of females. In ⁵⁴ Madagascar since 1861, and probably some years previous, no general circumcision has been practiced. After and before the appointed time of performing this ancient custom, ⁵⁴ there was great rejoicing, profligacy and crime. The prominent ceremonies were "the fetching of water," called "holy water," "strong water." There were amusements, dressing up in all their finery and jewels. At the time of operation, "benedictions and prayers are pronounced for the prosperity of the children." An address is made to them in public, exhorting them to be brave and faithful to their sovereign. Sheep and oxen are killed in a semi-sacrificial way; the blood of the animals is regarded as "possessing some degree of sanctity." An offering is made of bananas to avert evil, which are first placed on the children, and are supposed to carry away calamities to be feared, and are thrown away outside of the village as "devoted or accursed."

⁵⁰ Social History of the Races of Mankind. A. Featherman, Fifth Division Arameans, pp. 380, 17, 98, 155, 224, 254, 510, 633, 650.

⁵¹ Medical Press, G. J. Garson, Feb. 21, 1894, p. 189. ("Notes on Deformations of the Genital Organs Practiced by the Natives of Australia.")

⁵² Pre-Historic Times. Sir John Lubbock, p. 460.

⁵³ Social History of the Races of Mankind. A. Featherman, Fifth Division, Arameans, p. 380.

⁵⁴ "Madagascar and Its People." James Sibree, Jun, pp. 238-239.

Feasting, dancing, and singing occupy their time, and a great many hours are thus wasted, and large sums of money are expended on these occasions. ⁵⁵ The nobles have a more elaborate ceremony, especially a prince. The gourds, or water bottles, used are ornamented. A prince among the "Tanla, or forest people," has an expert spearman selected, to carry him to the appointed place to be circumcised. A ⁵⁶ second spearman conceals himself, and as the child and its guardian leave the house, he hurls his spear at them; should he hit the man or child, he loses caste and is not a prince; and should both custodian and boy be killed, nothing is thought of it; but should they escape, he is known to be a prince. As before stated, the Madagascans are supposed to have learned circumcision from the early Arabian settlers. In ⁵⁷ Senegambia the rite is performed upon both sexes with superstitious observances. All ⁵⁸ Bechuana and Caffre or Kaffir tribes south of the Zambesi practice circumcision or *boguera*. Just at early dawn of day long rows of boys, fourteen years of age, armed with sandals on their hands as shields, being faced by men with long, tough, and flexible wands; these naked individuals dance, and the men ask questions of the boys, then rush forward and shower savage blows upon them. The sandals serve only to bend the wands, which make deep gashes into the children's backs, and they dance as the blood spurts from their wounds, singing all the time. The second part of the ceremony is concealed from the public, and circumcision takes place in private.

This operation among these natives "is civil rather than a religious rite." One ⁵⁹ authority says, in the Congo country boys are circumcised at eight and ten years of age, living apart one month in a separate hut and undergoing a preparatory discipline. The Turks have interesting ceremonies

⁵⁵ *Madagascar*. The Great African Island. Rev. James Sibree, Jun., F. R. G. S., p. 217-223, 273-274.

⁵⁶ "Encyclopædia Britannica." 9th ed., Stoddart Co., Vol. XXI, p. 695.

⁵⁷ Livingston's Travels and Researches in South Africa. Harper Bro., N. Y., 1858., pp. 164, 165.

⁵⁸ "Encyclopædia Britannica." 9th ed., Stoddart Co., Vol. VI, p. 237.

nies connected with their rite of circumcision. ⁵⁹ There has been a ⁶⁰ dispute among writers as to whether the ancient Mexicans ⁶¹ removed the prepuce; as they had a blood covenant, some claim the blood was taken from the prepuce. ⁶¹ Las Casas and Mendieta state circumcision was practiced by the Aztecs and Totonacs. ⁶¹ Brasseur de Bourbourg found evidences of it among the Mijes. According to Las Casas, on the twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth day, the child was circumcised in the temple by the priest; and in the case of females, he deflowered them with his finger, and the priest repeated the operation at the sixth year. ⁶¹ Mallet informs us the Mexicans cut off the ears and prepuces of the new-born. ⁶¹ Herrera and Acosta confirms the statement of Clavigero, that the Mexicans drew blood from the prepuce. ⁶¹ "Pierre d'Angleria and other contemporary writers" state in the island of Cosmel, in Yucatan, seaboard along the Gulf of Mexico, and on the coast of Florida, they have seen the whole prepuce removed with a stone knife. ⁶¹ Gumilla, a Spanish monk, states the Saliva Indians of the Oronoco operate on the child on the eighth day. ⁶² Lord Kingsborough maintains ⁶¹ circumcision was performed on the eighth day, declaring it to have "prevailed thousands of leagues along the Atlantic, amongst nations very remote from one another, and who spoke very different languages." ⁶¹ Kingsborough believed the Mexicans were descendants of the ⁶³ Jews. Teamas and the Manaos, on the Amazon circumcised ⁶⁵ boys. ⁶⁶ Practically three distinct ⁶⁷ races, the Australians, Papuans, New Caledonians, and people of the

⁵⁹ The North Americans of Antiquity. John T. Short, p. 463.

⁶⁰ Mexican Antiquities. Lord Kingsborough, vol. vi, pp. 121-122; vol. vi, pp. 272, 333-335; vol. viii, pp. 143, 391, 20; vol. vi, p. 393; vol. viii, p. 155.

⁶¹ "History of Circumcision." Remondino, pp. 46-48.

⁶² The North Americans of Antiquity. Short, p. 463.

⁶³ The North Americans of Antiquity. Short, pp. 460-463.

⁶⁴ Bancroft's *Native Races*. Vol. iii, p. 429.

⁶⁵ Brinton's *Mythology*, p. 147. (Represented a renunciation of the lusts of the flesh).

⁶⁶ "Encyclopædia Britannica." Vol. v, p. 690.

⁶⁷ *Social History of the Races of Mankind*. Featherman. Second Division: Melaneans' Papu and Malay Melanesians.

nesians/

New Hebrides. This rite was performed by the Chippe-ways of North America, and also, as shown, in Central America among the Maya people. The Jews, in spite of all persecutions, for thousands of years circumcised their children, and in some cases even operated upon their dead, in order that the law of their forefathers might be kept. Phallic worship could not account for all cases of circumcision; neither war, slavery, nor sanitary measures, for filthy races circumcise their children. Many causes led each and every nation independently to adopt this remarkable custom. The old Alexandrian library possibly contained amongst its priceless jewels of ancient literature some very old records antedating the account in the Old Testament.

It does not follow, as a fact, because circumcision is mentioned in the Old Testament that the Jews were the first to perform this rite and *operation of other races*.

It has not been my intention to speak of the methods of operating, and the dangers and benefits to be derived therefrom.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES.

Social History of the Races of Mankind. Second Division: Papuo and Malayo Malanesians. A. Featherman, pp. 147, 150, 151, 204, 207, 307, 320, 335, 354, 387, 418, 435, 453, 478.

Social History of the Races of Mankind. First Division: Nigritians, pp. 56, 154, 198, 224, 253, 305, 623, 644, 656, 713, 724, 334, 374, 315, 566, 580, 600, 724, 736 (p. 713, Mandingos circumcise girls. Specific operation within vagina).

* Races of Mankind. Oscar Peschel, p. 22.

* "Von Martius, Ethnographie i," 582.

* "Herrera, Historia general, Dec. iv, lib. ix, cap. 181."

Cook's Voyages in the Australian Hemisphere, vol. iii, p. 156.

Physical History of Mankind. Prichard, vol. ii, p. 287.

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