

Shattering the Myth: Why Ethiopian Civilization is African not South Arabian ♦

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QUEEN [NUBIA] TO `My AXUM YOUR AXUM`

My fathers built
A heritage of songs and laughter
Your fathers built
Monuments of wars
An historic mass of ruins.
Your sinners came
Crossed our red water fortress
To make our innocents repent.
They insulted our Ra, god
And the memories of Meroe.
Chains of feud rose between our peoples
Till we smoked the incense of peace
Conducted the rites of marriage
And you let our Noble Serpent be.^ψ

♦ *Horn of Africa Journal*, (Rutgers University), Vol. 22, 2004, PP.103-130.

^ψ By Poet Lauriet of Ethiopia: Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, "Your Axum'/ My Axum" [From COLLISION OF ALTARS: A Conflict of the Ancient Red Sea Gods] *Emergences*, Volume 10, Number 1, 2000

Ethiopia as the Cradle of Humankind

The going convention is that each and every one of us is a singular, unmatched and unique human being. But we are all Ethiopians regardless of whether we are of African, European, Asiatic, Oceanian or Amerindian origin.

There is, however, a narrower definition of Ethiopia, for the term stems from the Greek words "aitho", burn, and "ops", face which together mean "burnt face." Thus, in the English dictionary, it is, in fact, interchangeable with "Blacks" or "Africans."¹

Ancient Ethiopia has been known to be located South of Egypt. In traditional political historiography, it was generally referred to as Nubia., or Kush.² At present, Kushites live in large number in Ethiopia, Somalia, Nubia, Morocco, Chad, Rwanda, and Burundi, as well as the Aswan district of Egypt.³

The Axumite kingdom [part of contemporary Ethiopia and Eritrea,] was established thousands of years ago near the confluents of the Blue Nile.⁴ For early European writers, the term "Ethiopia" sometimes included [of course wrongly] even Arabia and India. This lead to much confusion and misinformation, including the whereabouts of the kingdom of a legendary figure known as "Prester John" a Christian priest-king who was believed to rule over a vast kingdom of great wealth in Africa or Asia during the period of the Crusaders.⁵

It was Charles Darwin who said more than a century and a half ago that "from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving – namely... [Humankind] directly follows."⁶ What he meant was that humans are simply the product of evolution. If in the 19th century, that opened a new chapter in human evolutionary theory, then one may rightly ask, where did the European scholars look for the cradle of such a momentous process? Not in Asia, not in the Americas, and definitely not in Africa; it was rather in Europe.

A new development in locating the missing link between modern man and his ancestors was announced with fanfare in 1912. Seemingly, fossilized fragments of a skull-bone, a jawbone, and other relics were said to have been discovered by a British investigator named Charles Dawson in a gravel formation in Sussex, England. Paleoanthropologists christened the creature "Piltdown-man." It was soon heralded as one of the greatest finds of the 20th century – and was used as a proof that man originated in Europe. The myth endured for almost half a century until it was proven in 1954 that the relics were nothing more than disguised fragments of a modern human skull, the jaw of an orang-utan, and the teeth of a chimpanzee, all deceptively doctored and introduced into the shallow gravels on the site.⁷

The established myth that "the dark continent" of Africa has nothing to contribute to human advancement has recently been bolstered with deep-seated stereotypes and negative images shaped by contemporary media. The eastern part of the continent including Ethiopia is depicted as being on the edge of a chasm, struggling in futility and anguish - a colossal basket case that is home to horrific humanitarian disasters and "failed states."⁸

The reality is, however, that "Ethiopia", which is at the centre of this geographical location, is the cradle of mankind. Anthony Browder, in a highly acclaimed scholarly study has recently proven that "the Nile Valley is the primary source of the culture and civilization that in the public mind is always associated with present day Egypt"⁹ As he

points out with tangible proof, the oldest monarchy in the world, that of ancient Ethiopia historically known as *Qustul* [circa 3800 B.C] predates the first Egyptian dynasty of “*Kemet*” by two hundred years. Contemporary Ethiopia being part and parcel of the Nile valley cultural matrix is therefore the cradle of early human civilization.

Fossils of humanlike beings as old as 5.5 millions years old have been unearthed in the Awash river basin located within the wilderness of Afar in Eastern Ethiopia.¹⁰ The latest specimen, found in the same area adjoins another 4 million year old forebear to the human family tree.¹¹ The structure of the fossil was so like human that investigating scientists were astonished; they thus coined the specimen “surprise”¹². The fossil’s theoretical importance as a missing link on the evolution of humankind was also confirmed by scientific studies in genetics, which has become an important tool in investigating man’s past.¹³

Then in 1974, came the remains of “Lucy”, a humanoid female, who is estimated to be 3.5 million years old;¹⁴ and just recently, modern man’s remains estimated to be 160,000 years old, were found in the same area.¹⁵ The discovery was a bombshell and as such rocked the world of contemporary scientists who are investigating the origin of man.

It is important to note that for a long time, scientists believed that modern humans are no older than 100,000 years; but this fossil, which surpasses this estimate by 60,000 years, turned out to be the oldest human remnant ever seen by modern man. Paleoanthropologists now believe that this fossil closes a crucial gap in humans distinctively breaking away from primates. In general, this boosts the theory that modern humans evolved in Ethiopia starting around 200,000 years ago and soon after spread across the rest of the planet. Tracing the most basic female genes in humans and looking at roots of linguistic progression further bolsters the theory.

Rebecca L. Cann, Mark Stoneking & Allan C. Wilson in a highly acclaimed scholarly article published in the journal *Nature* under the title “Mitochondrial DNA and Human Evolution,” have demonstrated a genetic blueprint, which proves that the Horn of Africa is undoubtedly human being’s ancestral homeland. Their study illustrates that the unique patterns of the female borne genetic element [mitochondria] which was passed on from mother to daughter traces our biological roots as well as dispersal patterns across the globe, the logical conclusion being that all of humanity can trace its family roots back to a single woman in Ethiopia.¹⁶

This last point, now known as the “Eve Hypothesis” has become a hot issue among paleoanthropologists.¹⁷ A study by Stephen Jay Gould of Harvard, who analysed the fundamental meanings of the “Eve hypothesis,” suggests – and this corroborates what the human fossils have shown – that the female borne gene of all modern humans has a common origin in Ethiopia some 200,000 years ago. If taken as proof, Gould’s findings have a significant impact on the study of human origins and further propels the theory that Ethiopia is in fact the birthplace of homo sapiens sapiens.

Whence Ethiopian Civilization?

Scientific works have so far traced and established human biological roots to the Horn of Africa and specifically to Ethiopia. Our next task is, therefore, to try to find Ethiopian peoples' cultural development, for the blueprint of a country's civilization is essential in understanding the essence of their history.

We have to recognize from the outset that due to fortuitous historical circumstances, Western civilization has permeated the planet earth more than any other that has appeared since the dawn of history. But what do we mean by "civilization?" Civilization implies peoples' progress in the struggle between humanity and nature.¹⁸ Animals and humans use tools to control nature but whereas animals do what they do by instinct, [e.g. a beaver creating dams or bees producing honey] humans consciously manufactures tools to control nature. And it is due to this reason that humans are called "Homo Faber"¹⁹

Richard Greenfield accurately stated in the early 1960's:

The history of mankind has been punctuated by several major breakthroughs in skill and technology such as the discovery of how to make and improve bone and stone implements; how to control and create fire; how to cook and make pottery; how to domesticate animals (previously only hunted), and how to cultivate plant life (previously only collected). A more recent illustration ...was the discovery of how to write, and modern examples would include the Industrial and the Atomic Revolutions. It is not always remembered, however, that several of the earlier discoveries ... occurred in Africa and were made by Africans.²⁰

Antiquity experts have ascertained that the Egyptians, not the Sumerians invented a writing system. Hence, with the exception of the last two, all of the above were discovered in North-East Africa i.e., in Egypt and its environs. But as Browder relying on

well-documented sources points out: “ Nubia [i.e. ancient Ethiopia] was the lifeline of early Kemet [Egypt] and the source of its language, philosophy and religion.”²¹ Ethiopia therefore becomes the pivotal point in that regard.

Logical assumption leads one to believe that since human life developed in East Africa, many of the most significant progress and critical elements in the maturation of the human species and civilization arose in its core region - Ethiopia and spread along the banks of the Nile river. These developments include the production of tools, nurturing the earliest stages of agriculture and people’s control of fire.

Human remains that have so far been found as well as the geological and archaeological records of prehistoric periods clearly exhibit that our forebears followed the flow of the Nile. Indeed, through the millennia, ancient Ethiopia played a forceful and very significant role in the ascent of human civilization.²²

The earliest case of human ancestors using tools has been traced to Ethiopia.²³ Furthermore, it has been proven by scientists that millet, sorghum, cotton, coffee, soft wheat, and camel were domesticated in Ethiopia and were then introduced to south Arabia and from there to the rest of the world around 10,000 years ago.²⁴

Ethiopia has evolved its own writing system starting at about 2000 BC.²⁵ And it may be a great surprise to New Yorkers to learn that it is Ethiopia, the present land of thatched roof tukuls that is the origin of high-rise buildings!²⁶ All these have now been clearly acknowledged by the contemporary academic world.

That Ethiopian civilization goes far back to 8,000 B.C is an accepted fact. By ca. 740 B.C., the king of Ethiopia known as Kashta, ruled from the city of Napata, in Nubia. Kashta conquered Upper Egypt and subsequently established the Twenty-fifth Ethiopian

Dynasty of the Pharaohnic line.²⁷ Soon after ascending his father's throne, Kashta's son, Piankhy, conquered the remainder of Egypt.²⁸ His brother Shabaka, who moved the capital of Egypt to Thebes, then succeeded Piankhy. Shabaka ruled over a huge Northeast African realm known as the "kingdom of Kush and Egypt."²⁹ Ethiopian governance of Egypt lasted over 150 years and it was Assurbanipal, the king of Persia who ended Ethiopian control of Egypt.

Geopolitical exigency, distance and ethnic rivalries lead to the subdivision of the Kushitic empire into nation states such as Nubia, Damot, Axum, Beja, Somalia and many others. The relationship between these nation states was sometimes cordial and sometimes violent, but they never renounced their Kushitic roots.

For a long period of the time after the implosion of the Kushitic empire, one Kushitic state that had an upper hand dominated the political landscape in Northeast Africa. Nubia was invaded by king Ezana of Axum in 350 A.D.³⁰ Even as late as the 10th century AD, Axum ruled over Nubia. The astronomer Al-Battani, for example, who died in 929 AD, retells information from Ptolemy, and names "Ksumi, [Axum]" as the country of "the king of Kush"³¹ Axum also invaded and ruled over South Arabia several times from the 5th Century B.C. to the 6th Century A.D.³²

Ethiopia and Eritrea - Putting the Record Straight

There is no better place to start recounting Ethiopian and Eritrean history than to revert back to their millennia old legends and beliefs, because, history specially ancient history can be sifted only from surviving folklore though such an endeavor

should be undertaken with scrupulous regard for rigor and objectivity. One traditional saga of the region is that present day Ethiopia traces its roots 3,000 years, to the legendary kingdom of the Queen of Sheba, and its monarchs, including Haile Selassie have claimed descent from Makeda [the Queen of Sheba] and king Solomon.

It may be of interest that Ethiopian monarchs claim to this ancestral episode is found in two Ethiopic books, the Kibra Nagast [Honour of the Kings] and the Fiteha Nagast [History of the Kings.] believed by many scholars to have been originally written during the Middle Ages by Arab scholars who had reliable records from the Arab world available to them. Since biblical sources are silent on this issue, scholars have been divided as to whether as recounted in the First book of Kings and Second book of Chronicles, the Queen of Sheba, was really from the region of Axum in northern Ethiopia or from Himyar in South Arabia.

The Egyptian Coptic church and the Orthodox church of Ethiopia are categorical in advancing the first version. Despite the fact that contemporary Western scholars such as Edward Ullendorff consider the claim dubious, the Coptic and Ethiopian historiographical assertion was supported in antiquity as early as the first centuries of the Christian era. Among those who accepted the Egyptian and Ethiopian version that the Queen of Sheba was from the region of Axum in northern Ethiopia are the noted Jewish historian Flavius Josephus as well as famous early theologians of the Christian church Origen, and St. Anselm and St. Augustine. In modern times, noted Orientalists and Biblical scholars such as Ephraim Isaac and Cain Felder have supported this line.³³ The view that the Queen of Sheba's kingdom lay in Himyar, in South Arabia was suggested by others during the early Christian period. These include St. Cyprian, St. Justine the

Martyr, St. Cyril of Alexandria and Epiphanius. And starting from the 19th century Western scholars have almost invariably advanced this second view.³⁴ The dichotomy is what Teshale Tibebu has referred to as “the Orientalist Semiticist paradigm” and the “Axumite paradigm”.³⁵ But no matter which version is advocated, the fact that the Ethiopian Hamites and Semites residing in present day Eritrea and northern Ethiopia from which the Ethiopian royal family originate have ruled South Arabia including Himyar for centuries before and after the Christian era and the situation has never been the other way around only strengthens the first thesis.

The recent independence of Eritrea from Ethiopia has added a new element to the roots of the Queen of Sheba but in all cases, there can be no doubt that ancient Ethiopia and present day Eritrea were one and the same. In actual fact, for almost two thousand years of its existence, Ethiopia was controlled from the area of Seraye in Eritrea and Axum in Tigray, Ethiopia.³⁶

From 2,000 to 1,000 BC, the Kingdom of Damot flourished in Northern Ethiopia, in areas that presently comprises of Eritrea and the Tigray region in Ethiopia. The Blen people who now reside in north Western Eritrea are descendants of the Damot. It is important to note that the Blen of Eritrea are the same people as the Agaws who currently reside in Lasta, in Wallo, Agew Midir in Gojam, Dembia in Gonder, Abergele in Bete Asghde, Bora and Selewa in Tigray, all in northern and central Ethiopia.³⁷

One major settlement in the north was Cabassa, in south central highlands of Eritrea in Hamassen. The people here were mostly Semitic speaking. At around 500 BC, the centre of political power of the Semitic group became Mezbir. The Agaw Hamites and the Semitic speakers were soon assimilated in marriage though the latter

language continued to predominate. Between 400-250 B.C., the centre of political power moved first to Hinzat, then to Yeha.³⁸ The next and most important settlement then became Axum when a great city was established.

Axum became as a fixed capital for all Ethiopia in around 200 B.C. An empire then flourishes from this centre. Thus, between 200 B.C. and 50 A.D., the Aksumite empire originating in Tigray and Eritrea spread on the Red Sea and Indian Ocean littoral and along the valleys of the rivers Anseba, Barca and Mereb.

In A.D. 100, as the 2nd century Greek merchant Cosmas Indicopleutes points out, Aksum was one of the four greatest powers in the world (together with Rome, Persia and China). It was during this time that King Zoscales (Ze-Hakele) of Aksum developed extensive foreign trade through the Red Sea Port of Adulis just a few miles south of the Eritrean port of Massawa.

Axum and the African and South Arabian dichotomy?

Notwithstanding the availability of ample historical corroboration, for hundreds of years, there has been an attempt to dislodge Ethiopian civilization from Africa by tracing everything from its language and culture to its agriculture and architecture to a distant source: South Arabia. The onslaught on the African root of Ethiopian civilization has been advanced in many forms.

One is that Ethiopian history is not only an offshoot of Arabian history but that the Africans were colonized by a more advanced civilization from across the Red Sea. The scholars advancing this view ignore the connection between Egypt and Ethiopia during

the pre-Sabean period. Even after that, Axum was more connected to Nubia - a sister nation state with which it previously constituted ancient Ethiopia.

Axum itself was at first, situated in the western part of the Semitic dominated Ethiopian kingdom much nearer to Nubia than Arabia. Recent investigation in the Kassala region of the North, which was conducted by Italian archaeologists has hinted that some specific aspects of Axumite culture have come from the western lowlands long before the similarities between the Sabean and Ethiopian artefacts could be discerned.³⁹ Archaeologists have also observed characteristics of pre-Axumite pottery, which resembled those of the Nubians. Even the idea of carving and erecting elaborate stelae, ruling class funerary customs have all been found to be characteristics that Axum shared with the nations that established the civilization of the Nile – namely Nubia and Egypt, not with South Arabians. It is important to point out here that Some of these features of civilization date back to the 3rd millennium BC.⁴⁰ And no one can contest the assertion that there is not a single evidence of South Arabian civilization in Ethiopia five thousand years ago. But there was a flourishing Ethiopian civilization in the Horn of Africa then.

Between the first and the third centuries AD, the Axumite monarchs played a pivotal role in inter-state clashes in South Arabia. But by the fourth century, evidence abounds that Axum had extended political suzerainty over areas ranging between Kasu and Noba in the Sudan to the Kushitic Bejas in the North. At that time, Axum had appropriated to itself the imperial role of its sister ancient Ethiopian states – Meroe and Napata. The Central Kushitic people of Agaw also became subjects to the rising Axumites. Through its port at Adulis [just south of Massawa in Eritrea,] the Axumites sent goods obtained from their vast East African empire to the world market. This

enabled the rulers of the new Ethiopia to take control of the rich trade centred in the Arabian Peninsula. To bolster their position, Axumite leaders employed skilful diplomacy and befriended the Romans who had a huge empire just outside Ethiopia itself and became their trading partner.

A careful study of the artefacts in Northern Ethiopia and present Eritrea – now numbering 90 in total have been conducted in the area of Hawelti-Melazo. These are located not far from Axum. They include a well-known sanctuary and other structures and burial places of Yeha.⁴¹ The works at Hawelti-Melazo, at Matara and the historical sites of Seglamien Kaskase, Feqya, Addi Grameten, Hawelti, Melazo, Gobochela, Enda Cherqos, Medoge and Addi Galamo – all exhibit some distinct characteristics of the Nile Valley even though in the analysis of Western oriented Ethiopianists, they are completely associated with South Arabia.⁴² Furthermore, some of the writings found in Eastern Eritrean sites bear names which have no resemblance to South Arabian or Ethiopian designations. It is safe to conclude from this therefore that there were in fact diverse East African ethnic groups in Ethiopia of the pre-Christian period.

One archaeologist writing about the finds of an expedition he conducted in northern Ethiopia particularly in Yeha stated that the shape of the jars there has a very close affinity to an Egyptian artefact.⁴³ Quite possibly, Egypt copied Ethiopian art form or Ethiopia copies its neighbour's but it makes perfect sense since there is close affinity in the civilization of the Nile Valley. It is important to add here that local tradition has it that Yeha, where these artefacts were found, was reputed to be the Queen of Sheba's capital

Richard Greenfield who is an astute observer and a meticulous scholar of Ethiopian history states:

It has until recent years been a characteristic of research workers in Africa to attribute almost every African achievement to one or other 'foreign influence' and Ethiopia has been no exception to this. However, discoveries at Yeha and elsewhere are now seen to demonstrate an extremely inventive and local craftwork. Several fragments of inscriptions exist... At the time of its discovery one was seen to be older than any other then known, including those found in Arabia. Others show distinct features of local Ethiopian origin.⁴⁴

There is no civilization that is totally immune to foreign cultural tow. But no one can deny that the artwork of Yeha, as well as the stelae of Axum, the monolithic churches of Lalibela and even the castles of Gondar which show some Portuguese influence were the work of local Ethiopian craftsmen.

When Graham Hancock wrote his book "the Sign and the Seal" which became a best seller and has since been made into a documentary film, the world was taken by storm about the suggestion that the Ark of the Covenant is secretly preserved in the church of Zion in Axum. What went unchallenged was his assertion that the 11 monolithic churches of Lalibala, which the Portuguese visitors to Ethiopia in the 15th century called the "8th Wonder of the World", were built by the Nights Templars. Note that if a group of Nights Templars disappeared from the Middle East at the same time as the Churches were being constructed, then the logical conclusion should be that they went to Ethiopia and built these elaborate churches - feats which Africans had no capacity to accomplish!. Why Ethiopians who created the civilization of Northern Ethiopia and built huge stelae of granite and high-rise palaces during the beginning of the

Christian era could not construct churches dug out of mountains 1000 years later begs the question. This is indeed, a typical case of Western oriented Ethiopianist paternalism that is blind to documented facts.

The similarity between the artworks of the Ethiopians and the South Arabians starts to emerge only after 800 BC but Queen Hatshepsut's expedition to the Horn of Africa was more than a thousand years earlier. It was from this Kushitic territory now populated by the Somali ethnic group that Egypt was able to acquire supplies of precious stones, minerals, myrrh, incense, and other exotic materials. In this regard, Egyptian hieroglyphic records refer to the territory believed to be within present day Somaliland and Ethiopia as "the Land of God. or "the Land of Punt."

The sources from Hatshepsut's records do give us a general scheme of the location of Punt, what it was like and the period of its existence [which is about. 2500 BC.]

⁴⁵Greenfield mentions "the existence of paved roads and tessellated pavements with stone sculptures and graffiti in the unexplored Mama plains in south-East Ethiopia." These ruins, found in the Somali populated region of the Horn, he speculates, is the territory of Punt.⁴⁶ In brief, Ethiopian civilization which was uniquely African was thriving long before South Arabia had anything tangible in the form of civilization and definitely long before the Greco-Roman influence engulfed the planet with Macedonian and Roman invasions.

Despite all these, the British scholar, Margery Perham who many claim has written a classic book on the Ethiopian state system starts her book as follows:

The history of Ethiopia may be said to begin in South Arabia. The people who at some time during the

first millennium before Christ, crossed the Red Sea to colonize the highlands of the African horn were an offshoot of the Semitic Sabea civilization which flourished in the south-west of Arabia...The immigrant Semites landed in a continent of which the north-eastern group of Hamites, often called Kushites, who also include the Gallas, [Oromos] Somalis, Danakil and Kaffas [live.] ...Authorities differ as to whether this race , grandparents to the Ethiopians, originated in Africa or Asia...”⁴⁷

Professor C.G. Seligman of Britain is categorical that they originated from “Asia”.⁴⁸ Perham goes even further in tracing the Kushites and the Semites of Ethiopia and binding them to the Europeans. She had even Christened them “Eurafricans.” She claims: “Both groups are Caucasians and belong to the same branch of the Human race as the great majority of the Europeans. For this reason, the Hamites are sometimes called Eurafricans.” If mankind’s origin is East Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular why the Hamites of East Africa should not be simply Africans instead of being tied to a European racial strain which is an upshot of a relatively recent human migration is not clear from Perham’s and other Europeans’ works.

Some 19th century European authors have tried to tie to Oromos of Ethiopia to European roots. One French visitor to the Oromo areas even wrote a book entitled: “Les Gallois d’Ethiopie” in which he collected similar words in both languages and suggested that the name Galla comes from the French tribal name “Gaul.”

It is interesting to note that even in the third millennium, the assertion has continued unabated. Arnaiz-Villena et al have recently published a genetic study entitled “HLA genes in Macedonians” in which they claim:

HLA alleles have been determined that Greeks .. have a substantial relatedness to the...Ethiopian...people, which separate them from other Mediterranean groups. Both Greeks and Ethiopians share quasi-specific DRB1 alleles, ...Genetic distances are closer between Greeks and Ethiopian...groups than to any other Mediterranean group. ...Finally Greeks cluster with Ethiopians...in both neighbour joining dendrograms and correspondence analyses. The time period when these relationships might have occurred was ancient but uncertain...⁴⁹

The far fetched European connection aside, Ethiopian cultural and material progress is, for contemporary Western historians, simply a subsidiary of South Arabian civilization. Even Ethiopian engineering achievements have been treated as relics from South Arabia that elevated a “savage land” to civilization. Perham asserts:

The connection [of South Arabia] with Ethiopia can be traced by the relics of Sabeen settlements with their inscriptions and architectural and decorative forms, which, crossing the Sea, mark a route which can be clearly traced from Adulis on the coast to Axum...on the mountains.⁵⁰

As a contemporary revisionist Ethiopian historian, Messay Kebede points out, in modern Horn of Africa historiography which has been shaped by Western oriented Ethiopianist scholars, it is Europeans not Africans, not even Ethiopians who are hailed as custodians of Ethiopian academic enquiry. In all their scholarly studies, Ethiopian scholars are totally ignored. Instead, the Western oriented Ethiopianist s congratulate one another in this endeavour.

Sadly, many contemporary Ethiopian historians have failed to challenge their European mentors in the annals they describe. The result is that several generations of Ethiopians and Africans who have read post Renaissance European scholars of Ethiopian

studies and their disciples have been brainwashed into believing unsubstantiated assumptions despite the fact that Ethiopian history told it otherwise and the ancient Greeks from Homer to Herodotus, [6th to 3rd century BC] early Rabbinical thinkers such as Flavius Josephus, the first generation of Christian thinkers such as Origen [first century AD,] St. Anselm and St. Augustine and in the Middle Ages, Portuguese ambassadors and missionaries [15th to 16th centuries AD] had made their own investigations and in the case of the latter visited in person and written on the country. It is ironic that as Messay points out, some of the Europeanist scholars have never even “set foot on Ethiopian soil.”⁵¹

It is interesting to point out that whatever Ludolf who was known as “Father of Ethiopian Studies in Europe wrote in the 17th century was, as he himself admits, an inference from the tales of an Ethiopian church scholar – Abba Gorgorewos whom he met after the latter went to visit Rome. And even though Edward Ullendorff of Oxford is fluent in both Ge’ez and Amharic and could clearly witness the works of numerous Ethiopian scholars who have written massive texts from Bahrey’s Zenahu Zagalla [Oromo history, 1599] to Zara Yaco’s Hatata – or philosophical treatise, [16,00th] to Alaqa Astme’s Yegalla Hizb Tarik, to Afe Work Gabra Yasus’ Yate Menelik Tarik, [19th century] he does not mention a single Ethiopian historian whether modern or contemporary, in his long bibliography.

One aspect which has been either downplayed or distorted in Western oriented analysis is Ethiopia’s writing system. The striking similarity between the Ethiopic syllabary and the Armenian writing system has led to several speculations few of them suggesting that the Armenian scholars used the Ethiopic syllabary as their model when

they developed theirs in the 5th century AD. But some have dared to suggest that the Ethiopian system was influenced by the Armenian one even though the Ethiopian writing system has been observed on temples as long ago as 800 years BC and the Armenian writing system was invented by Merop between 404 and 406 AD.⁵²

In a recent study, Ayele Bekerie argues that Ethiopic is a major constituent of the African knowledge systems and one of the foremost contributions of Africans to world cultures and history. He presents tangible proofs that the Ethiopic writing system did not originate in South Arabia around 800 BC but is much older than it has been previously portrayed, tracing back its origins to 2,000 B.C. His study clearly illustrates the dynamic linkages between the Ethiopian Syllabary and Egyptian writing systems, showing the intrinsic relationship between all African writing systems of the Nile Valley.

Ayele's landmark tome that fathoms the history and principles of Ethiopic (Ge'ez), portrays it as an innovative African Writing System. He clearly advances a telling and striking demonstration of a wide range of Ethiopic erudition, as well as its linguistic phenomena. For him, the Ge'ez script which is a foundation to a great literary tradition in Ethiopia .is not just a writing system or syllabary but a knowledge system; it encompasses philosophical tenets dealing with ideography, numerology, syllography, astronomy, and grammar. The author also argues successfully that Ethiopic is systematic, rational, logical and critical. For him, the suggestion that South Arabia was the origin of the Ethiopic script is simply the distorted hegemonic and Western oriented Ethiopianist scholarship of the 19th century for the Ethiopic syllabary has its origin not in South Arabia but rather in Africa itself.⁵³

The Judaic Connection and Origins of Beta Israel

Because of its millennia old writing system and its class of church scholars called Dabtaras, there are massive amounts of primary sources for Ethiopian history. However, in the works of European Ethiopianists, Ethiopian sources are totally ignored and in the rare cases when they are employed, they are treated as anthologies of legendary tales. The Kibra Nagast and the Fitha Nagast, two of the most important documents of Ethiopian history are brushed aside as collection of legends that were written to legitimise the Solomonian royal line which arose after the fall of the Zagwe dynasty. Though the Kibra Nagast was said to have been translated from Arabic in the 14th century, recent studies have shown that the the Queen of Sheba being from northern Ethiopia was not concocted in the 14th century to legitimise the Solomonians. In this regard, it is interesting to note that one of the heirs to the Axumite throne, the son of Kaleb or Elasban who came to the throne of the Ethiopian empire in 531 AD was named Za-Israel [meaning “born of Israel”] and an eleventh century biography of Egyptian Patriarchs, refers to Axum as "the kingdom of Saba, from which the queen of the South came to Solomon, the son of David the king."⁵⁴ It is important to note that the first one is almost seven hundred years and the second three hundred years before the Solomnian dynasty’s establishment.

Western oriented Ethiopianist scholars want to deny the existence of Judaism in Ethiopia before the time of Ezana in the 4th century AD. However, ancient Ethiopian church traditions maintain that Judaic worship and culture existed as long ago as the 8th century BC. Western oriented Ethiopianist scholars have brushed this aside without presenting tangible evidence to the contrary.

If at least some biblical stories can be taken at face value, the Jewish Pre-settlement theory is actually bolstered by the account of the Eunuch of Queen [Candace] of Ethiopia who went to Jerusalem to worship in the synagogue around 50 AD and was reading the book of Isaiah when he encountered the apostle Phillip. This, it should be stressed, is almost 300 years before the official conversion of Ezana. There are also many other religious tales with similar indirect references in the pre-Christian period suggesting that Ethiopia had indeed adopted Judaism early during her history. The Jewish Pre-settlement theory indicates that beginning around the 8th century BC until the middle of the 1st millennium BC, there was an influx of Jewish settlers who came from Nubia and Egypt. Some might have also come from Southern Arabia itself long before Kaleb's famous occupation of Yemen. There can be no doubt that the Jewish settlers called the Falashas [immigrants] now referred to as "Beta Israel" came to Ethiopia before the arrival of Christianity. Proofs for their presence are narrated in detail in Ethiopian historical books.

There are also material artefacts that clearly depict ancient Jewish ceremony. For example, the Temple at Yeha in Tigray province, which was constructed in the 6th century BC, is an architectural reproduction of other Jewish shrines found in Israel and Egypt during the pre-Babylonian era (i.e. before 606 BC). Furthermore, in the monastery islands of Lake Tana northern Gojjam, many archaic stone altars, produced in the style of Jewish sacrificial alters of pre-8th century BC Israel, have been traced. Some of these vessels actually carry residues of blood from the Jewish style sacrifices of thousands of years ago. The method in which the blood was smeared on the stone altars is said by specialists to be typical to a tradition that totally adhered to Mosaic religious principles.

No matter the circumstances, it may be legitimate to ask if Israeli history can be culled from the Old Testament tales and Greek history from Homer's Iliad and the Odyssey, why authentic Ethiopian historical books should be briskly brushed aside. The only logical reason is one of double standard.

Rescuing Queen Yodit from History's Back Burner

Just like they have refused to accept Zara Yacob's rationalistic Ethiopian philosophy, western historians have also disputed the well documented existence of the Judaic Queen Yodit [Judith] in 10th century Ethiopia. A 9th century Jewish traveller Eldad had-Dani refers to a Jewish kingdom "beyond the rivers of Kush." He narrates that the Jewish tribe of Dan, in order to avoid the internecine wars between Judah and Israel migrated to Kush, and finally, with the help of Naphthali, Asher and Gad, founded an independent Jewish kingdom in the Gold Land found in the vicinity of present day Ethiopia.⁵⁵

Many Arab historians of the late 900 AD also confirm Ethiopian church records about Queen Judith [also known as Yodit-Gudit, or Esato.] In Arab accounts, she is referred to as "the queen of the Bani al-Hamwiyya." One contemporary Arab historian of the period, known by the name Ibn Hawqal⁵⁶ cites in account he wrote between 970 and 980 that Ethiopia was ruled for thirty years by a woman who had slain the Axumite king, took over the kingdom of Ethiopia and incorporated it into her own territories in the south.⁵⁷ In another written report, a record still preserved in South Arabia states that in 969-70, the king of Yemen sent to the sovereign of Iraq a zebra, which he received as a gift from the "Queen of al-Habasha [Ethiopia]."⁵⁸ Considering the time and the

circumstances that Judith was believed to have carried out her destructive expeditions in the mid 900's and continued to rule Ethiopia until 1003 AD there can be no doubt that the report is referring to the Judaic Queen.

Notwithstanding, all this, however, Western intellectuals from the nineteenth century Orientalist, Wallis Budge to the 20th century historian from Oxford university, Edward Ullendorff, have simply brushed aside data culled from Ethiopian historical records which deal with the Judaic Queen from the area south of Axum, who usurped power, persecuted the legitimate emperors and destroyed the city itself. Ullendorff is so categorical about his stand that he quotes one of his colleagues, the Italian Ethiopianist scholar, Conti Rossini and states that the stories relating to Judith's conquest of Axum "possess no basis in historical fact."⁵⁹

Zara Yacob and Ethiopian philosophy

It should be clear by now that western oriented Ethiopianists persistently dispute Ethiopian records and spurn anything that does not conform to their theoretical constructs. This is true of history as of ideas. For this, let us look at the monumental works of a 17th century Ethiopian scholar's work and how the Western oriented Ethiopianist intellectuals have treated it. This concerns Zara Yacob and his treatise, *Hatata*.

Zara Yacob was the Son of a peasant farmer born in Axum in 1592 A.D. who attended the religious school of the day and graduated after 16 years of intense university level education. Zara Yacob studied Grammar and Poetry as well as the sacred texts. Then he became a debtera [scholar] and a teacher. But after the conversion of Emperor

Susneyos to Catholicism, the Catholic bishop from Portugal, Mendes orders the forced conversion of all Ethiopian Orthodox members of the church to Catholicism, there was an inquisition. Zara Yacob found himself to be a target because he had refused to renounce his Ethiopian Tewahdo faith. To save his life, he fled from Axum and lived the life of a hermit in a cave for two years where he meditated and developed some theological and philosophical ideas different both from those of the Catholic missionaries of the time and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo clerics he grew up with. His treatise named Hatata [Discourse] was a critique of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For European intellectuals, Zara Yacob's ideas were found to be so modern that some including Edward Ullendorff and the Italian born Ethiopianist scholar, Conti Rossini, dismiss it as the deceptive work of an Italian missionary by the name of Padre Giusto d' Urbino who spent only a few years in Gondar in the late 19th century.

Here is his philosophical construct. Man is autonomous. He states:

"God created man to be the master of his own actions, so that he will be what he wills to be - good or bad." Everything, says Zara Yacob, should be subject to scrutiny and severe test of Rationality. He strongly argues that intelligent human beings have the innate power with which to interpret the messages of the sacred texts, and that nothing is to be spared from critical examinations by the inherent authority of human reasoning. For its proper exercise, neither the sovereign nor a religious authority should have the power of manipulation and authoritarianism to intimidate people from acting their conscience and exercising their power of reasoning.

It is generally belied that the French thinker, Descartes, was a key figure in the development of the Enlightenment or the Age of Reason, a decisive outcome of the Western world's Scientific Revolution. However, Zara Yacob's rationalistic philosophy of religion and the world of man started in Ethiopia not in Europe as is taught in Western schools and that was why they cast doubt on its authorship. How could they imagine that Zara Yacob could be an ardent believer in the power of Reason and as the arbiter of human and theological understanding? How could he ever condemn the dogmatism of both the Jesuit missionaries who came from Europe to Ethiopia as well as the Dabtaras of his own Orthodox Tewahdo Church? Was he ever capable to argue as the treatise does: "the light of reason should illuminate the dark regimes of human thought?" For scholars like Conti Rossini and Edward Ullendorff that was unthinkable.

It suffices to say that contemporary philosophers have now done careful studies of Zara Yacob's discourse. Noted philologists have also produced several scholarly articles on this work. Books have been written on it. Most have proven beyond any reasonable doubt that the treatise was from the 16th century not the work of an Italian Jesuit. The missionary in question who found the book in Gondar and introduced it into Europe did enjoy the notoriety it brought him and left some Ge'ez writings of his own which were found to be so full of grammatical mistakes that he could definitely not have written such a flawless Ge'ez text after staying in Gondar for only six years. Here he had to study not only Amharic because the Ethiopian Dabtaras he consulted did not speak Italian or any other European language but also Ge'ez with which even the most brilliant Dabtaras have to spend a minimum of ten years to perfect before embarking on any

serious composition. Eurocentrism has therefore tried to distort and even deny the rightful place of Ethiopian philosophy as it did with Ethiopian history.

The Queen of Sheba, the Glory of Axum

One other point of contention in Ethiopian historiography is the origin of the Queen of Sheba. Local sources among which are the *kibra Nagast* and the *Fitha Nagast* show that before the appearance of the Queen of Sheba, there was already an established Ethiopian kingdom based on worship of the serpent in the tradition of Egypt. This particular dynasty was said to have ruled for some 350 years before the advent of the Queen of Sheba. The kings were definitely Kushitic not South Arabians. Evidence abounds that the Kushitic state of Damot, [written as Tiamo or Tsiyamo in the still surviving stone slabs of Axum] had already been established by the second millennium BC. And as additional inscriptions in Northern Ethiopia show, they had extended their dominion over South Arabia and were referring to their ruler as “mukarrib of Damot and Saba’”⁶⁰ They also conquered the sister ancient Ethiopian state of Meroe in Nubia in the reigns of kings Harsiotef and Nastasen who ruled during the fourth century BC. Not surprisingly, this fact is totally dismissed and is rarely mentioned in contemporary Ethiopian historiography since it contradicts the established Western convention.⁶¹

All of Ethiopia’s ancient books point out that the Queen of Sheba was from Africa and do not make any reference to her being from South Arabia. The Egyptian Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox churches are categorical in advancing this historical fact.

Their assertions are not isolated. As long ago as the early Christian period spanning 1,800 years, noted Talmudic and church scholars have contended that the

Queen of Sheba was from the region of Axum in northeast Africa. Among these is the noted Jewish historian Flavius Josephus as well as famous early theologians of the Christian church Origen. The same is true of St. Anselm and St. Augustine. Despite all this, contemporary European Ethiopianist historians totally dismiss the fact and claim that the Queen of Sheba was from South Arabia.

The idea that Ethiopia was a land of savages or barbarians⁶² that was civilized by the South Arabian immigrants does not hold water. Yet, major Western historians have advanced this thesis so strongly that the scholarly community all over the world has accepted it as being scientific. The thesis is faulty for a variety of reasons. Ethiopian scripts which were originally written in boustrophedon style were used in Ethiopia for more than a thousand years before the Christian era. These are still seen in Matara, Qohaito and Yeha near Axum. But they were also transported to South Arabia and one still sees such records in Marib and Sa'ana, capital of Yemen.

Furthermore, Axum's control of South Arabia was momentous and prevailed for a long time. By 200 AD, as inscriptions in Yemen which were carved at the 'Mahram Bilqis', [wrongly named the temple of the Queen of Sheba,] the Axumite kings Gadarat and Adhebah had established garrisons in South Arabia. In fact whenever there was conflict among the Arab states of the period, they called on Axum for support against a rival. This was particularly true of Hadramawt and Saba. For example, an early third century inscription found in South Arabia depicting a treaty between several kings, the king of Hadramawt as well as Yada'ub, Gaylan, and the king of Axum named Gadarat states:

They agreed together that their war and their peace should be in unison, against anyone [who] might rise up against them, and that in safety and in security there should be allied together, Salhen and Zararan and `Alhan and Gadarat.⁶³

According to South Arabian inscriptions, between 200 and 230 AD, Zafar the capital of Himyar was occupied and garrisoned under the authority of Baygat, the son of the Nagashi, [Negus or king] of Axum. Also inscriptions in al-Mis'al in Yemen clearly mention two kings of Axum named Datawnas and Zaqarnas who extended their rule over Arabia between 260 and 270 AD. Other inscriptions in the same area also clearly show that between 100 and 400 AD, through political alliance, naval power and military muscle, Axum exerted control on Arabia from Hadramawt in South Arabia to Najran in modern Saudi Arabia.

Axum's fame was almost unparalleled in the region. Just a few years before the birth of Islam, Ethiopian power was so important in the Middle East that emissaries came to pay their respects to the kings. An interesting sixth century Islamic history which was translated by a Chinese historian named T'ien-fang Chih-sheng shih-lu between 1721 and 1724 and published in 1779 recounts Mohammed's biography entitled 'True Annals of the Prophet of Arabia,' According to the book, in 577, when Muhammad was just seven years of age, the Axumite Najashi [king] Saifu came to the throne of Ethiopia. Upon being informed of this important event, one of the Querish leaders of Mecca, Abd al-Muttalib went to Axum to celebrate Saifu's accession to the throne. At the celebration, the Querish leader made the following speech:

The great king, your grandfather, was a benevolent king,
and his grandson is a holy sovereign, who breaks off with

flatterers and follows what is right, avenges the oppressed and, acting upon right principles, administers the law equitably. Your servant is the superintendent of the sacrifices in the sacred precincts of the True God, a son of the [Querish], who, hearing that your Majesty has newly received the great precious throne, has come to present congratulations.⁶⁴

Whereas the king's of Axum used the royal title which included South Arabian kingdoms, none of the South Arabian monarchs ever mentioned political suzerainty over Axum or Ethiopia. Furthermore, starting from the reign of Emperor Endubis, Axumite kings minted coins in gold, silver, and bronze, for use both in East Africa and in Arabia.⁶⁵ There is no South Arabian coin which had currency in Ethiopia and North-East Africa. Nor are there South Arabian writing records that have been left in Ethiopia or anywhere else in the Horn of Africa to claim suzerainty over Ethiopia.

Scholars with rigorous research are already inclined to accept the premise that the civilization's movement is from Ethiopia to South Arabia, not the other way around. Among these bold scholars is Jacqueline Pirenne who concludes that in her view, the expansion of civilization did not take place from Yemen towards Ethiopia, but very much likely the other way around: "from Ethiopia towards Yemen."⁶⁶

Western scholars such as Michels however continue to claim that the trace of South Arabian influence in Ethiopian artefact proves one thing: the South Arabians mustered a highly advanced colonial occupation force with which they subjugated Kushitic Ethiopians, and with political supremacy, forced them to adapt their culture.⁶⁷

Nothing can be further from the truth. Most of the materials had in fact no resemblance to those from South Arabia. The Ethiopians themselves ingeniously crafted them. And instead of South Arabian rulers or kings leaving their imprint in Ethiopia, it is

Ethiopian rulers who left their imprint in Arabia. In fact, all written records, facts and circumstances clearly prove this.

When Cosmas Indicopleustes, who wrote *Christian Topography* went to Axum in the first century A.D. he saw many things that were uniquely Ethiopian. He observed, a multi-storied palace and four elaborately carved figures of unicorns, none of them related to contemporary relics in South Arabia. Then the governor of Adulis on the specific orders of Emperor Kaleb of Axum asked him to transcribe a marble chair at the Axumite port of Adulis which was erected several centuries before by an unknown king of Ethiopia. This pre-Christian Ethiopian king claims to rule northeast Africa as well as South Arabia. The inscription states in part:

I sent a fleet and land forces against the Arabitae and Cinaedocolpita who dwelt on the other side of the Red Sea and having reduced the sovereigns of both, I imposed on them a land tribute and charged them to make travelling safe both by sea and land...⁶⁸

One would presume that a superior civilization is reinforced by political power. But it is important to note that no parallel records showing this have ever been found in South Arabia.

Ezana, the first Christian Emperor of Ethiopia who reigned in the 4th century A.D. writes on one of his inscriptions; “Ezana, king of Axum and of Himyar and of Raydan and of Ethiopia and of Saba ... king of kings.”⁶⁹ In another one, he inscribes: “Ezana, the son of Ella Amida, of the family of Halen, king of Axum and of Himyar and of Raydan and of Saba and of Sahlen....”⁷⁰ In a third inscription which dated to the period after his conversion to Christianity Ezana writes: “By the power of the Lord of Heaven who is

mightier than everything which exists in heaven and or on Earth, Ezana, the son of Ella Amida,, of the descent of Halen, king of Axum and of Himyar, Raydan, Saba, Salhen...”⁷¹ In all statues Ezana erected, the imperial claim is that the monarch was the king of Himyar and Raydan both of which were in South Arabia. No South Arabian king has ever claimed to have ruled Ethiopia.

Abraha of Axum and Arabia

More important among the Ethiopian rulers of Arabia was Abraha [6th century] . A description of his exploits needs elaboration to comprehend how much influence Axum [Ethiopia,] and by implication Africa had on South Arabia. Abraha also known as Abraha al-Asram or Abraha b. as-Saba'h, was an Axumite Christian governor of Yemen in the 6th century AD. Preposius, the Christian historian of the period, states that he was a member of the Axumite royal family.⁷²

When the Judaized ruler of Himyar, Yusuf Asar Yathar [also known as Dhu Nuwas,] persecuted the Christian converts in Yemen, a problem arose. According to a historian of the Middle East named Pseudo-Zacharias of Mitylene,⁷³ Yusuf had usurped power in Himyar when an Axumite viceroy died and immediately started to persecute Christians. After hearing the report, Kaleb was incensed and resolved to intervene. Reasons for Kaleb’s intervention however do not only seem to have been motivated by religious zeal. Yusuf, it is generally believed, acted against Axumite maritime and trade interests in the region, and those of her Roman imperial partners. It is important to note that the Roman emperor, Justinian I had himself written a letter to Kaleb to impel him to intervene on behalf of the Christians of Najran who were victimized by Yusuf.

Initially, because the period of the coup d'état was a rainy season, the Ethiopian ruler could not send a viceroy across the Red Sea to install another titular king. When summer came, however, Kaleb dispatched a military expedition under an Axumite military commander called Ariat with the purpose of overthrowing the usurper. On the first attempt, Ariat's army was entrapped by Dhu Nuwas' ruse and the mission failed to dislodge the anti-Christian king. This provoked Kaleb's anger and he sent a second expedition in 520 – with scores of ships manned by 100,000 soldiers under the able command of Abraha who quickly smashed Yusuf's [Dhu Nuwas'] fighting force, killed him and put Himyar and South Arabia which used to be a vassal of Axum for centuries under the control of Kaleb's chosen Viceroy - Sumyafa` Ashwa [also known as Esimiphaeus.] All the Christian churches in Arabia also came under the direct control of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo church. In the inscriptions he left behind, Sumyafa refers to himself both as “king” and “Viceroy of the Kings of Axum.”⁷⁴

Sumyafa's power lasted for about five years, and ended in circa 525. This heralded the rise to power of Abraha, the Axumite military commander who with the support of rebel elements in the Ethiopian occupation force eager to settle in South Arabia, then endowed with myrrh and rich in spices, seized control of Yemen. He went further and refused to pay royal tribute to Kaleb. By this action, he incensed the Axumite emperor so much that he decided to remove him from the leadership of the South Arabian vassalage by force. But an army sent out from Axum across the Red Sea to overpower Abraha and transfer political rule to Kaleb's chosen viceroy mutinied.⁷⁵ It defected and joined the rebel general's ranks. A contemporary historian, Tabari records that 'Abraha rid himself of Kaleb's army commander by challenging him to a duel in which the loyal

Axumite officer 'Ariat was slain.⁷⁶ In the duel, 'Abraha received an injury which earned him the moniker "al-Asram," meaning, "scar-face." Abraha used the title of “king of Saba, Himyar, Hadhramawt, Yamanat, and all their Arabs of the Coastal Plain and the Highlands:” Soon Kaleb accorded him de facto recognition upon yearly disbursement of a nominal royal tribute. After reconciling with the emperor, Abraha’s inscriptions in Marib referred to him as `viceroys of the king” Ellazan [Ellasban].”

Kaleb [later to be canonized as a saint both by the Coptic and the Catholic churches] abdicated the throne and became a hermit. His sons, Emperors Za-Israel and Gabra Maskal, who succeeded him as rulers of Axum and South Arabia followed their father’s footsteps in dealing with the Axumite general.

Abraha was for all practical purposes, an extraordinary figure in South Arabian history, ruling his realm efficiently and promoting the cause of Christianity which had been hitherto challenged by the rapid growth of Judaism in the area and the prevalent paganism of Arabia north of Yemen. As a religious zealot, Abraha first built a magnificent church at Sana'a to serve as a counter-attraction to the surrounding pagan peoples’ thus arousing the hostility of the Querish, the Meccan ruling clan who were filled with trepidation that the pilgrim traffic with its money-spinning offerings would be sidetracked and flow to Sana'a away from Mecca which was then the centre of the Pagan worship of the Kaaba.

In 570 A.D. just around the birth of Mohammed, Abraha's occupation army with an elephant corps arrived in Central Arabia and surrounded Mecca. Due to the spectacular display of the Ethiopian general’s elephant corps, the date is celebrated in the Muslim calendar as “am al fil” [the Year of the Elephant,] ⁷⁷Abraha's expeditionary force

was however called back because a smallpox epidemic spread among the Axumite army and ravaged them mercilessly.

The Axumite general and the South Arabian local king, Abraha did not pass without leaving an important imprint across the Red Sea. Irrefutable epigraphic sources in the form of inscriptions on the Marib dam in Yemen have recorded that Abraha crushed an uprising lead by the son of the deposed ruler Esimiphaeus. Another inscription which was found at Murayghan, South Arabia, records a defeat inflicted by 'Abraha on the Pagan North Arabian tribe of Ma'add. This was in the year 540-550 A.D. The inscriptions also tell that Abraha made vital repairs to the Marib dam that he received envoys from his ruler, the Axumite Emperor as well as from Byzantium, from Persia and from Harith B. Djabalat, the phylarch of Arabia.

Abraha died leaving the throne to his sons Y-Axum [meaning “Of Axum] and Masruq, born to him by Raihana, a Yemenite woman of aristocratic extraction. The heirs to the throne continued to pay nominal tribute to Axum until the Persians who had an empire in the region invaded the whole of Arabia. Soon, the Christian houses of worship that were under the control of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo church were swept under the rapid expansion of Islam.

Axum at the Twilight

Even after all these momentous events, when the Persians took over South Arabia and Islam spread in the region pushing the Christian empire further west onto the

mountains, Ethiopia's importance in the region continued unabated. A well-known essay titled "Hudud al-Alam" - written by an unknown person of Persian origin for example states in 983AD:

This country [Ethiopia] has a very mild climate. The inhabitants are of black complexion. They are very lethargic [but] possess many resources. They obey their own king. Merchants from Oman, Hejaz and Bahrain often go to that country for trade purposes.⁷⁸

A contemporary historian, Al-Ya`qubi describes Axum of his period during the last decade of the first millennium as follows:

[Axum is] a vast and powerful country. Its royal city is Ku`bar ["Ankobar?"]. The Arabs go thither to trade. They have big cities and their seacoast is called Dahlak. All the kings of the Habasha nation are subject to al-malik al-a`zam [the Great King;] [they] ...are careful to obey him and pay tribute.⁷⁹

In an essay entitled "Akhbar al-Zaman;" the Arab historian Al-Mas`udi, who lived in the late 900's states:

... the Habasha are the descendants of Habash B. Kush. B. Ham. The largest of their kingdoms is the kingdom of the Najashi, who is a Christian. Their capital is called Kafar ...[Ankobar?]. The Arabs have been coming to this kingdom for trade since earliest times.⁸⁰

Yet in another work, Al-Mas`udi provides another interesting information about the reach of the Axumite empire on the Red Sea coast. In his geographical text “Muruj al-Dhahab,” [the `Meadows of Gold' he comments:

The principal city of the Habasha [people] is called Ku`bar, [Ankobar?] which is a large township and the residence of the Najashi, [king] whose empire extends to the coasts opposite the Yemen, ... possesses such towns as Zayla`, Dahlak and Nasi.⁸¹

After the Persians replaced the Axumites in Arabia, one notable development was documented in Islamic history. It is recorded that Axum gave shelter to the followers of Mohammed in what is known in the Koran as the “First Hegira”⁸² as a result of which the Muslim prophet gave directives to his followers never to make a jihad against Ethiopia. This is one factor for the success of Ethiopian Christianity to survive for over 1600 years. Needless to say that the South Arabians had no similar influence on Ethiopia, even though the Western Ethiopianist scholars have treated Ethiopian civilization as being simply part and parcel of South Arabian cultural refinement.

The study of the history of Kush centered on Nubia and Axum have remained obscure mainly because of the fact that Western scholars have tended to treat the two sister nations that were the offspring of ancient Ethiopia as being far apart in acquiring their civilization – one from Egypt the other from South Arabia. That both of these premises are clearly wrong has not diminished their impact.

Linguistic Roots of Semitic Ethiopia

Whether one likes it or not, Axum is the child of Kush. But traditional Ethiopianist historians insist that the Axumite civilization has its origins in South Arabia because the Ethiopic language – Ge'ez and its derivatives such as Tigrigna and Amharic happen to be Semitic. They insist that South Arabian influence including the Semitic language came to Ethiopia around 800 B.C. However, this is not tenable.

The theory that a group of languages spoken over a wide expanse of Africa and West Asia have the same root has been accepted by linguists for over a hundred years. These languages are considered part of the dialect geography of linguistic terminology referred to as Afroasiatic or Hamito-Semitic. Today, Afroasiatic or Hamito-Semitic languages are spoken by 300 million people in North Africa; in the greater part of the Sahara; in major segments of East, central, and West Africa and West Asia, particularly the Arabian peninsula, including Israel, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.

The Hamitic tongues include ancient Egyptian, Coptic, Tameshek, [the Tuareg language in Mali] Kaby'e, [Spoken in Togo] Agaw, Beja, Oromo, Somali, Saho, Blen, Chamir, Afar [spoken in Ethiopia and Eritrea] with many other smaller branches, whereas the Semitic languages are spoken by the North-Arabians, the South-Arabians, major segments of the Ethiopians, the ancient Babylonians and Assyrians, the diverse Aramean tribes, the Hebrews and their family members such as the Edomites and Moabites, the Canaanites, as well as the Phenicians and their branches.

Contemporary Semitic languages consist of Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic, South Arabian, and the Semitic languages of Ethiopia. Of these, Arabic is the most prevalent since it is spoken from Mauretania across North Africa, down through Chad and Sudan stretching to south-western Iran and covering some areas of East Africa, South Central

Asia, Malaya, Malta, and South-west Pacific countries. Modern Hebrew spoken in Israel is another branch. So is Aramaic spoken in some villages near Damascus, Syria. The Mandaean and the 'Assyrians' of Iraq and north-western Iran's Assyrians are also a branch. South Semitic consists of the Ethiopic branch. This in turn has a north-south division, with classical Ethiopic (Ge'ez) in the northern group, along with modern Tigrinya and Tigre. Modern Amharic belongs in a branch of the southern group. Contemporary South Arabian languages are spoken across the far end of the Arabian peninsula and on the islands in their environs. After a thorough study, a known linguistic scholar, Chaim Rabin has concluded that the early Semites were a single speech-area, differentiated dialectically.⁸³ Written records in Semitic languages are known for some 2,500 years.

Kushitic languages are spoken in North Africa. The Berber languages which are Kushitic were formerly spoken all through North Africa -- from the frontiers of Egypt to the Canary Islands but are now confined into enclaves scattered over the continental divide of this locale. Fragments have been preserved from the past. Ancient Libyan personal names etched in inscriptions have been found to be Kushitic.

Kushitic languages are also spoken in Northern Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea and the Somali Republic [Horn of Africa,] reaching into Tanzania, and Kenya. The Kushitic classification includes "Beja, Central Kushitic, Highland East Kushitic, Lowland East Kushitic, and Southern Kushitic" As shown from the hieroglyphics, many proper names used in ancient Egyptian have been identified as being Kushitic. This fact has further been corroborated by Arabic sources which exhibit similar data from medieval times. A further source of earlier Kushitic is found in the Semitic languages of the area. Kushitic is

substratal to these, and Semitic has loan words from Kushitic. According to Carleton T. Hodge, “the Agew group [based in Ethiopia] is ...the main substratum” of this classification.

Today, four-fifth of all Kushitic and Semitic peoples live in Africa. The original population diffusion for Semites and Kushites took place over 4,000 years ago and this was centred on an Africa heartland, which was within the boundaries of Ethiopia.

According to Crawford Howell Toy and George A. Barton :

[Many] scholars [agree] that ... Africa was [the cradle-land of] of the united Hamito-Semitic race, and that the Semites in prehistoric times separated from their kinsmen and migrated to Arabia, where their special racial characteristics and the distinguishing features of their languages were developed, and whence they were distributed over other Semitic countries.⁸⁴

Other scholars believe, that the languages of the Afroasiatic family were first spoken alongside the shores of the Red Sea. Although the Hamitic languages are almost exclusively spoken in Africa, the widespread existence of the Semitic languages in West Asia is explained by the logical assumption that African Semitic speakers migrated from East Africa to West Asia in very earliest times. Scholarly opinion about the African origin of the Afroasiatic language family is bolstered by the fact that only in Africa are all its constituent ethnic groups located.

Within the recent past, many scholars are in the process of unravelling the civilization of the Nile within their African context. Western Africanist scholars’ spin notwithstanding, a scientific study by Grover Hudson and Stuart Munro Hay has shown

that older forms of Semitic languages were spoken in North-East Africa 2,000 years before the Christian era. This is supportive evidence for the paradigm that the movement in people, in culture, in civilization, in governance was from the Horn of Africa to Arabia not the other way around. The result is that taboos such as not challenging the concept that Axum has less affinity with Nubia than with South Arabia are being shattered. Furthermore, paleoanthropology and modern archaeology are also taking uncharted venues and in the process continuously uncovering numerous facts that were hidden from those who tended to move with inertia blindly.

Conclusion

Ethiopia has been proven to be the cradle of the human species. But the suggestion that its civilization originated in South Arabia is totally wrong. Similarities in cultures do not necessarily imply cause and effect. And if one is assumed due to some striking parallels the conjecture has to be proven with tangible evidence which does not exist in the Ethiopian-South Arabian paradigm..

On the other hand, that a strong relationship existed between Axum and Nubia from time immemorial though the relationship was not always peaceful is very clear. In the case of the sister nations, there was time for war and time for peace. There was time when they were one kingdom and time when they were separate sovereign entities. The liaison between the two known in ancient times simply as “Ethiopia” was dialectical – it was continuously shifting and adjusting. What the one needs to do is therefore to look for African history where it is supposed to be: in Africa itself, to get a precise idea of the crucial unity in space and millenary reciprocity of cultural exchange between the sister

nations comprising of ancient Nubia and ancient Ethiopia: in short to get a grounding in the quintessential Kushitic civilization that has so far been overshadowed by global fascination with Mesr's [Egypt's] remarkable achievements.

¹ A. Lang, et al., *The complete works of Homer; the Iliad and the Odyssey*. New York, The Modern library, 1935.

² Kush, in ancient times, was a Northeast African entity south of Egypt also known as Ethiopia or Nubia. The word Kush also denotes a generic name for the language families of an Afro-Asiatic group most of whom presently live in North-East Africa. Whereas the ancient Egyptians, the Berbers, the Nubians, the Bejas and the Agaw represent the old Kushitic stock, the Oromos, the Somalis and the Afars represent the most modern stock of Kushitic language group.

³ M. A Bryan, *The distribution of the Semitic and Cushitic languages of Africa, an outline of available information*. London, New York, Publication for the International African Institute, London: Oxford University Press, 1947.

⁴ I. U.. M. Kobishchanov, and J. W. Michels. *Axum*. University Park ; London, Pennsylvania State University Press. 1979

⁵ C.F.Beckingham, *The Prester John of the Indies*, 2 Vols. London: Hakluyt Society, 1961

⁶ Charles Darwin, *the Origin of Species*, London, 1859

⁷ A Maitland. Adey and Editors of Time Life Books, *The Emergence of Man: the Missing Link*, New York: Time-Life Books, 1972 , P. 14

⁸ United States. Congress. House. Committee on Foreign Affairs. Subcommittee on Africa. and United States. Congress. House. Select Committee on Hunger International Task Force. (1992). "Conflict and famine in the Horn of Africa : hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, and the International Task Force of the Select Committee on Hunger, One Hundred Second Congress, first session,." Washington, U.S. G.P.O. May 30, 1991; International Crisis Group. *Somalia : countering terrorism in a failed state*. Nairobi, International Crisis Group, 2002; Coakley, J.. *The territorial management of ethnic conflict*. London ; Portland, Or., F. Cass. 2003

⁹ Anthony Browder, *Exploding the Myths, The Nile Valley Contributions to Civilization*, New York: Institute of Karmic Guidance, 1992

¹⁰ The scientific examination of fossils has proven this fact. Ramidus remains found in Afar, Ethiopia are estimated to be 5.5 millions years old. A four-million-and-a-half year-old Australopithecus has also been unearthed at Aramis, (Afar,) Ethiopia, between 1992 and 1994. Scientists have again found remnants of Ardipithecus, the earliest-known hominid while working in the Awash river basin located within the wilderness of Afar in Eastern Ethiopia. For details, see H.S. SA.M., *Archaeology*; Mar/Apr95, Vol. 48 Issue 2, p13; John Noble Wilford, *New York Times*; 2/21/95, Vol. 144 Issue 49979, p C1, 2 bw; Constance Holden, *Science*; 2/3/95, Vol. 267 Issue 5198, p 618; Henry Gee, *Nature*; 1/26/95, Vol. 373 Issue 6512, p. 272; *Nature*; 11/3/94, Vol. 372 Issue; 6501, p31; Sarah Bunney, *New Scientist*; 10/1/94, Vol. 143 Issue 1945, p. 16.

¹¹ This is the specimen, named Australopithecus Garhi.

¹² **(Same as #10)** Its scientific name is “Gharhi” which in the Afar language means “Surprise” Berhane Asfaw, White, Tim Lovejoy, Owen, Latimer, Bruce Simpson, Scott, Suwa, Gen, Haeusler, Martin, McHenry, M. Henry. *Journal of Human Evolution*; April 2004, Vol. 46 Issue 4,

¹³ *Science*, May 26, 1996

¹⁴ “Lucy” is of the Australopithecus *Afarensis*, type. See Henry Gee, “Why we still love Lucy.” *Nature*; 11/18/93, Vol. 366 Issue 6452, p207, 1/2p, 1c

¹⁵ This refers to Homo sapiens idaltu. *New Scientist*; 6/14/2003, Vol. 178 Issue, 2399, p4, 2p, Chris, Stringer, *Nature*; 6/12/2003, Vol. 423 Issue 6941, p692, 4p Luis Quintana-Murci, Omella Semino, Hans J. Bandelt, Giuseppe Passarino, , Ken McElreavey, A. Silvana Santachiara-Benerecetti, , *Nature Genetics*, Dec 99, Vol. 23 Issue 4, p437, 5p

¹⁶ Rebecca L. Cann, Mark Stoneking & Allan C. Wilson., “Mitochondrial DNA and Human Evolution”, *Nature*, 325 ,1987, p. 31-36

¹⁷ Wilford, “Believers in African Eve think they have found Adam(s)” *New York Times*, (Late Edition (East Coast)). New York, N.Y.: May 26, 1995; Mark Stoneking, , In Defense of "Eve"- A Response to Templeton's Critique, *American Anthropologist* 96 (1), 1994:131-141.

¹⁸ Peter Farb, *Man's Rise to Civilization*: Ny: E. P. Dutton, 1968; Nettler, Gwynn. A Measure of Alienation, .*American Sociological Review*, Dec57, Vol. 22 Issue 6, p670, 8p; (AN 12782012)

¹⁹ In scientific terms “homo faber” means “Man the Maker.”

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²¹ Browder, op. cit.

²² Goldman, Phaon. “The Nubian Renaissance.” *Egypt Revisited*, 2nd. ed., Revised & Expanded - African Civilizations, 1989, p261, 10p, 1bw; (AN 11641523)

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Brigitte Scheffer,” Dark as hell, strong as death, sweet as love--how coffee conquered the world”, .*New Internationalist*, Sep95 Issue 271, p22, 2p, 1 cartoon; (AN 9510114707

²⁵ Ayele Bekerie, *Ethiopic, An African Writing System: Its History and Principles*. Lawrenceville, N.J., and Asmara, Eritrea: Red Sea Press, Inc., 1997

²⁶ Peter James and Nick Thorpe, *Ancient Inventions*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1994, pp. 203-4

²⁷ Joseph E. Harris, [ed.] *Pillars in Ethiopian History*, William Leo Hansbury African History Handbook, Washington DC: Howard University Press, 1974

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles*, London: Oxford University Press, 1965 pp.:1-7

³¹ *Nallino 1907: II, 47.*

³² Edward Ullendorff, *Ethiopia and the Bible*, London: Oxford University Press, 1968, P. 21

³³ Ephraim Isaac and Cain Felder, “Reflections on the Origins of the Ethiopian Civilization,” *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed. Taddese Beyene, Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1988, vol. I, p. 79

³⁴ See for example, Sir E. Wallis Budge, *The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek*, London: Kegan Pall, 2001, p. xlii and Edward Ullendorff, Op.Cit.

³⁵ Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia 1896-1974*, Lawrenceville N.J. The Red Sea Press, 199?, P. xvii

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- Ethiopia: the other that Eritrea was wholly part of Ethiopia until it was seized by force during the colonial era.
- ³⁷ Zawde Gabra-Selassie, Eritrea and Ethiopia, Op. Cit.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ R. Fattovich, (1988). Remarks on the late prehistory and early history of northern Ethiopia. Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Ethiopian Studies, Volume 1. Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, pp. 85-104
- ⁴⁰ Ibid
- ⁴¹ R. Fattovich, (1990). Remarks on the Pre-Aksumite period in northern Ethiopia. *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 23, 1-33.
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- ⁴³ Quoted in Greenfield, Op.Cit. pp. 7-22
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- ⁴⁸ C.G. Seligman, *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*, 1932, PP. 3-4
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- ⁶¹ Hay, Op. Cit
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