

Research Article

The Ethiopian Empire: Its boundaries, antiquities and appellations in the eyes of foreign writers

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Abstract: *According to the ancient division of continents, the Ethiopian Empire was within the continent of Asia and it was bounded, except on the southern part, by water bodies. This Ethiopian Empire was the oldest and precedes all other empires of the ancient world such as Persian, Macedonian and Roman empires, respectively and remained intact for a long period of time even after the above stated empires had collapsed. Moreover, this ancient empire, as described by both sacred and profane histories, is land of origins and it was here where Adam and Eve were created and religious beliefs, alphabets and human civilization in general began. Thus, ancient Ethiopians*

were called autochthones. Regrettably, however, the Ethiopian antiquity was either concealed or falsified by later writers in subtle ways. This paper attempted to examine ancient and medieval sources, and finally it avers to restore the actual history of the Ethiopian Empire.

Keywords: Empire, Ethiopia, India, Geographical Boundaries, Antiquity, Appellations

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1. Introduction

The Ethiopian Empire, as described by classical and medieval writers, extended eastward to the Indian Ocean, westward to the Mediterranean Sea bounded by Egypt along with the Pelusiatic branch of the Nile, northward to the Red Sea and southward its boundary was not fixed clearly. The Ethiopian Empire is the oldest empire on planet earth and it is certainly as old as human history itself. This empire had been identified by diverse appellations and classical sources that ensure that the Ethiopian Empire is the cradle of mankind, the mother of civilization, the originator of religion and alphabets.

Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, knowingly or unknowingly, the ancient history of Ethiopia has been virtually vilified by later writers. There is no other country in the world like Ethiopia whose ancient history is distorted either by malice or ignorance. Consequently, the geographical location of ancient and medieval Ethiopian Empire and its diverse

appellations were utterly mystified and widely exposed to speculative errors. Some writers had attempted to associate the appellation Ethiopia with black people in general, some with the continent of Africa, South of the Sahara, and some others confined it to the present-day Sudan only. What is more, some writers assert that Ethiopians were immigrants from South Arabia.

2. Methodology

The research design of this paper is qualitative. So, it employed a qualitative methodological approach. The data gathering tool of this study was surveying of primary data and reviewing secondary sources and the data analysis method was document analysis. In the process of data gathering, I used both sacred and profane histories written anciently by Homer, Herodotus, Diodorus and others compiled in the late antiquity and during the medieval period. I used also other accounts mainly written by geographers, namely Strabo, Ptolemy and some others so as to show the geographical location of ancient Ethiopia, or India.

3. Analysis and Interpretation

3.1. Ancient Ethiopia and its geographical boundaries

The geographical location of ancient Ethiopia was indicated both by biblical writers and classical geographers. For instance, Moses, who spent half of his life in Egypt and half of it in Ethiopia (see Acts 7: 23 & 30), documents in his first book, “And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compassed the whole land of Ethiopia” (Gen. 2: 13). The biblical Gihon or Nile had served as a common boundary between ancient Ethiopia and Egypt starting from Syene up to the beginning of the delta. Regarding this, Pliny (23-79 CE) usually called Pliny the elder, writes about the border of the two countries as follows:

It (Nile) first comes within the territory of Egypt at the Ethiopian frontier, at Aswan—that is the name of the peninsula a mile in circuit in which, on the Arabian side, the camp is situated and off which lie the four islands of Philae, 600 miles from the place where the Nile splits into two channels – the point at which, as we have said, the island called the Delta begins.¹

According to ancient geographers, the inhabited world was divided into three continents, namely Asia, Africa and Europe and the common boundaries of Asia and Africa were described by Polybius as: “Their respective boundaries are the river Don, the Nile and the

¹ H. Rackham (trans.), *Pliny's Natural History*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, Vol. II, 1961, rpt), p. 265.

straits at the Pillars of Hercules. Asia lies between the Nile and Don and ... Africa lies between the Nile and the Pillars of Hercules.”² Besides, Strabo (63BCE-24CE) states, “Now, in the first place, the Ethiopians that border on Egypt are themselves, also, divided into two groups, for some of them live in Asia, others in Libya, though they differ in no respect from each other.”³ Here the name Libya is another name of Africa and does not indicate the present-day African Ethiopians, rather the present-day Libya and its environs. The location of Africa is described as:

The inhabited country next to Africa is Egypt, which stretches southward into the interior where the Ethiopians border it in the rear. The boundaries of its lower part are formed by the two branches of the Nile embracing it on the right and left, the Canopic mouth separating it from Africa and the Pelusiatic from Asia, with a space of 170 miles between the two mouths.⁴

The Sinai Peninsula was part of the Ethiopian Empire and hence Polybius states that it is the place where Asia and Africa meet in Ethiopia.⁵ Although the Ethiopian Empire was bounded by Egypt and this was unanimously accepted by classical writers such as Strabo, Pliny, Josephus and others, but there is a difference among these writers regarding its direction. As a result, some writers said that Ethiopia was South of Egypt and some others claimed it to be east of it. According to Marcellinus, the Ethiopian Empire was situated east of Egypt and described it as “on the east, by Elephantine, and Meroe, cities of the Ethiopians, the Catadupe, the Red Sea, the Sienite Arabs, whom we now call Saracens.”⁶ On the other hand, Ptolemy (90-168 CE) states that Ethiopia, which is below Egypt, bounded on the north by Libya and Egypt, on the west by interior Libya, on the south by Ethiopia interior, on the east by the Bay of Arabia and the Red Sea.⁷

Towards the north, the Ethiopian Empire was bounded by the Red Sea. The Red Sea as stated by Procopius begins in India and comes to an end at the eastern border of Palestine.⁸ The Red Sea which extends from the Indian Ocean to the Suez Canal was known by different names. The different parts of the sea were known as the Arabian Gulf, Erythraean or

² W.R. Paton(trans.), *The Histories of Polybius*, (London: William Heinemann, Vol. II, 1921), P. 87.

³ Horace L. Jones (trans.), *The Geography of Strabo*, (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1960 rpt), pp. 395&397.

⁴ Pliny, Vol. II, P. 253.

⁵ Polybius, Vol. II, p.89.

⁶ C. D. Yonge (trans.), *The Roman History of Ammianus Marcellinus, During the Reigns of the Emperors Constantius, Julian, Jovianus, Valentinian & Valens*, (London: George Bell & Sons, 1902), p. 307.

⁷ Edward Luther Stevenson (trans. &ed.), *Claudius Ptolemy: The Geography*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1991), p.107.

⁸ H. B. Dewing (trans.), *Procopius with an English Translation*, (London: William Heinemann, Vol. I, 1914), p. 179.

Southern Sea and the Persian Gulf. Strabo categorized the different names of the sea as: “The western side called Arabian Gulf, the eastern side by the Persian Gulf – and the Southern by the greater sea that lies outside both gulfs, which as a whole is called Erythra.”⁹ On the other hand, some writers divided the Red Sea into two parts only. For example, Isidore describes the names of the two gulfs and the reason why it was called as follows: “The Red Sea is divided into two gulfs. Of these, the one part to the east is called the Persian Gulf because the Persians live at its mouth. The other is called the Arabian, because it is next to Arabia.”¹⁰ In addition, Pliny asserts that the Persian Gulf is another name of the Red Sea and justifies that “The Persians have always lived on the shore of the Red Sea, which is the reason why it is called the Persian Gulf.”¹¹ Furthermore, Cosmas tells us that the Persian Gulf forms the boundary between Persia and India [i.e. Ethiopia].¹² From Persia’s perspective the Red Sea was generally called the southern sea. Regarding this, Herodotus documents, “The land where the Persians dwell reaches to the Southern Sea, that sea which is called Red.”¹³ On the other hand, Xenophon states that the Red Sea is situated to the east of Persia. He asserts that the empire of Cyrus bounded on the east by the Red Sea, on the north by Euxine, on the west by Cyprus and Egypt, and on the south by Ethiopia.¹⁴ What is known as Ethiopia by Xenophon is called India by Herodotus. In line with the above, Herodotus reports, “These Indians dwell far away from Persians southwards, and were no subjects of king Darius.”¹⁵ Similarly, a biblical source assures that the empire of Persia under Ahasuerus was bordered by India and Ethiopia (see Ester 1: 1 & 8: 9).

Despite the fact that the Red Sea had been identified by different names, the sea was generally known by the name the Indian Sea which was identical with the Abyssinian Sea, as ascertained by El-Masudi,¹⁶ and hence it was under the rule of Ethiopian emperors. Without the permission of the Ethiopian emperors, ships of other countries could not pass through the Red Sea. Regarding this, Apollonius of Tyana assures that “For there is an ancient law in

⁹ Strabo, Vol. VII, 1930), p.301.

¹⁰ Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, et al(trans.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.278.

¹¹ Pliny, Vol. II, p. 425.

¹² J. W. McCrindle (trans. & ed.), *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, An Egyptian Monk*, (London: Hakluyt Society, 1897), p. 366.

¹³ A. D. Godley (trans.), *Herodotus with an English translation*, (London: William Heinemann, Vol. II, 1921), p. 237.

¹⁴ Ashley Cooper, Shelman, et.al(trans.), *The Whole Works of Xenophon*, (Philadelphia: Thomas Wardley, Book VIII, 1836), p.150.

¹⁵ Herodotus, Vol. II, p. 129.

¹⁶ Aloys Spencer (trans.), *El-Masudi’s Historical Encyclopaedia, entitled “Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems*, (London: Allen &Co., Vol. I, 1841), p.260.

regard to the Red Sea, which the King Erythras laid down, when he held sway over that sea, to the effect that the Egyptians should not enter it with a vessel of war, and indeed should employ only a single merchant ship.”¹⁷ It was on the above justification that Meropius, a Tyrian philosopher, was killed by Ethiopian coastguards. In relation to this, Socrates reports:

It so happened that the treaty between the Romans and Indians had been violated a little before his arrival. The Indians therefore, having seized the philosopher and those who sailed with him, killed them all except his two young kinsmen: but sparing them from compassion for their tender age, they sent them as a gift to the king of the Indians.¹⁸

Towards the east, the ancient Ethiopian Empire was bounded by the Indian Ocean also called Eastern Sea or Ethiopic Ocean.¹⁹ In connection with the eastern border of ancient Ethiopia, Cosmas asserts that “the Arabian Gulf called the Erythraean and the Persian, both of which advance from Zingium to the southern and more eastern parts of the earth from the country called Barbaria, which begins where the land of Ethiopians terminates.”²⁰ Similarly, the extent and border of the Ethiopian Empire was indicated by Lobo as “The Empire of Abyssinia hath been one of the largest which history gives us an account of: it extended formerly from the Red Sea to the kingdom of Congo, from Egypt to the Indian Sea.”²¹ Southward, the boundary of ancient Ethiopia was not confined by water body just as that of western, northern and eastern parts of Ethiopia. As a result, we cannot certainly tell the specified border of ancient Ethiopia but there are indicators up to where it extended. As stated above, the kingdom of Congo is one of them. In addition, Emperor Menelik, in his circular letter to Europe in 1891, declares that the empire of his ancestors towards the south extended as far as Lake Nyanza.²² When Homer states that “the Ethiopians who dwell sundered twain, the farthest most of men, some, where Hyperion sets and some where he rises”,²³ he means nothing but the Ethiopian Empire extended from west to east, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean. The eastern frontier of Ethiopia, as stated by Alvarez, was bounded by the two Kingdoms of Ethiopia, Adel and Hadiya, the former extended as far as Zeila and the

¹⁷ F. C. Conybeare (trans.), *Philostratus: The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, (London: William Heinemann, Vol. I, 1912), p. 311.

¹⁸ Samuel Bagster (trans.), *Ecclesiastical History: A History of the Church in Seven Books from the Accession of Constantine, AD. 305 to the 38th Years of Theodosius II, including a period of 140 Years, by Socrates surnamed Scholasticus or Advocate*, (London: Samuel Bagster, 1844), p.51.

¹⁹ Pliny, Vol. II, pp. 381&485.

²⁰ Cosmas, P. 38

²¹ Samuel Johnson (trans.), *A Voyage to Abyssinia*, (London: Elliot and Kay, 1789), p. 65.

²² Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia: A New Political History*, (London: Pall Mall Press, 1965), p. 355.

²³ A. T. Murray (trans.), *Homer's Odyssey with an English Translation*, (London: William Heinemann, Vol. I, 1945, rpt), p.5.

latter as far as Mogadishu.²⁴ Regarding the western Kingdoms of Ethiopia, Emperor Lebna Dengel, in his second letter to Roman Pontiff and written in 1524, stated that “Emperor of the great and High Ethiopia, and vast kingdoms and dominion, king of Xoa,... and Saba, from whence the queen of Saba went, Barnagays [Bahränägash]: Lord of all Nubia, to the confines of Egypt.”²⁵ Furthermore, in the eighteenth century, the chronicler of Emperor Iyasu II (1730-1755) records that the Ethiopian Empire still extended from sea to sea. In his letter to Queen Mentwab, who was crowned with her son, her empire was depicted as ‘ዘትገንን እምባሕር እስከ ባሕር፤ እምነ ምፅዋዕ እስከ ስናር፤ ወእምነ በቅላ እስከ ፈጠጋር እንተ ይዕቲ ይቴጌ ምንተዋብ፤ ዘስመ መንግስታ ብርሃን ሞገሳ እሙ ለንጉሠ ነገሥት ኢደሱ ዘስመ መንግስቱ አድደም ሰገድ።’²⁶ ((This) Queen Mentwab, whose coronation name is Berhan Mogäsa and mother of Emperor Iyasu, whose coronation name is Adyam Sagad, rules from sea to sea: from Massawa up to Sennar and from Bekla up to Fätägar). It was during the era of princes (1769-1855) that the western territories of ancient Ethiopia were occupied by Ottoman Turks. For Emperor Tewodros II, the occupation of these territories was very disappointing and this was reported by Rassam as “the Turks had unjustly taken possession of Sennar and the Soodan, which formerly belonged to Abyssinia.”²⁷

3.2. Ethiopia and its antiquity

The Ethiopian Empire is the oldest and quite different from other ancient empires of the world in the sense that other empires such as Persia, Macedonia and Roman had been created by invading other sovereign states. Conversely, due to the fact that Ethiopia is the origin of Adam and Eve, its empire had been created by extension of kingdoms. There is no valid reason to doubt that as Ethiopia is a cradle of mankind. In connection with this, Moses, tells us that “And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden: and there he put the man whom he had formed” (Gen. 2:8). Here the Garden of Eden in the east is nothing but Ethiopia. For the biblical and ancient writers, the concept of east was synonymous with that of Ethiopia. For instance, when the bible says that they journeyed from the east to the land of Shinar (Gen. 11: 2), this man (Job) was the greatest of all the men of the east (Job 1:3) and there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem (Matthew 2:1) all figuratively indicate

²⁴ Lord Stanley (trans.), *Narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Abyssinia During the Years 1520-1527*, (London: Hakluyt Society, 1881), p.346.

²⁵ Michael Geddes, *The Church History of Ethiopia*, (London: Rich Chiswell, 1696), p.71.

²⁶ Ignatius Guidi (ed.), *Annales Regum Iyasu II Et Iyoas*, (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, Vol. VI, 1909), p. 18.

²⁷ Hormuzd Rassam, *Narrative of the British Mission to Tewodros, King of Abyssinia*, (London: John Murray, Vol. I, 1869), p. 251.

Ethiopia. Furthermore, the apostle Matthew states that queen of Azab came from the uttermost part of the earth to hear the Wisdom of Solomon (Matthew 12:42) and his description depicts the queen as an Ethiopian because the idea of the uttermost part of the earth is the same as that of Homer's farthestmost of men. In line with the above, Marcellinus states the contemporary understanding of the East as "The frontier of the East, stretching straight forward for a great distance, reached from the banks of the river Euphrates to those of the Nile, being bounded on the left by the tribes of the Saracens and on the right by the Sea."²⁸ Besides, there is an assumption; indeed, it is an established belief both among Muslims and Christians that the Garden of Eden is somewhere outside of the earth, then Adam and Eve banished to this world after they had transgressed the law of God. Regarding this tradition, Tabari attests that "God cast Adam down to earth. The place where he fell down was the land of India."²⁹ As stated below, India was another name of Ethiopia, or the three kingdoms of Ethiopia. From the narrative of Moses and ancient traditions, it is possible to deduce that Ethiopia was the home of Adam and Eve. Likewise, Diodorus of Sicily confirms the anteriority of Ethiopians in such a way that "Now the Ethiopians, as historians relate, were the first of all men and the proof of this statement, they say are manifest. For that they did not come into their land as immigrants from abroad but were natives of it so justly bear the name of autochthones."³⁰ Diodorus adds that Egyptians are colonists sent out by Ethiopians and the larger parts of the customs of Egyptians are Ethiopian.³¹ Moreover, Stephanus of Byzantium verified the precedence of Ethiopia's antiquity in a conclusive manner as "Ethiopia was the first established country on earth and the Ethiopians were the first to set up the worship of the gods and to establish laws."³² Accordingly, the glory of ancient Ethiopians was widely disseminated to ancient states of the world and their widespread influence reported by Hereen as follows:

When the Greeks scarcely knew Italy and Sicily by name, the Ethiopians were celebrated in the verses of their poets, 'they are the remotest nation, the most just of men; the favourites of the gods.... And when the faint gleam of tradition and fable gives way to the clear light of history, the lustre of the Ethiopians is not diminished. They still continue the object of curiosity and admiration; and

²⁸ Marcellinus, pp. 27-28.

²⁹ Ehsan Yar-Shater(ed.), *The History of al- Tabari*, (New York: State University of New York Press, Vol. I, 1989), p. 290.

³⁰ C. H. Old father (trans.), *Diodorus of Sicily with an English Translation*, (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1967, rpt), pp. 89 &91.

³¹ *Ibid.* p.93.

³² Drusilla D. Houston, *Wonderful Ethiopians of the Ancient Cushite Empire*, (Oklahoma City: The Universal Publishing Company, 1926), pp.18-19.

the pen of cautious, clear-sighted historians, often places them in the highest rank of knowledge and civilization.³³

As stated above, Ethiopia is not only the origin of mankind but also the beginning of human civilization. In this regard, Alter, a German Jesuit, describes the priority of Ethiopian civilization as “if there was any one place where man first attained to civilization, that place was at or near Sennar in Abyssinia, now called Nubia, but at the beginning of this century, it was all embraced under the designation of Abyssinia.”³⁴ Alter also expressed his regret as follows: “It is unfortunate for us, and most fortunate for those who could conceal the truth about these matters if they could, that so little is known about the history and antiquities of Ethiopia.”³⁵

Civilization can only arise where the art of writing is known and this art of writing fortunately flourished in Ethiopia. Ancient Ethiopia, as land of origins, had introduced its alphabet to human beings in general and to its neighbour Egypt in particular. Regarding this, Diodorus declares that letters used by Egyptians were Ethiopian and the writing system of Ethiopians was called hieroglyphics among Egyptians.³⁶ Hieroglyphics is a Greek word which means sacred or holy. The justification behind the holiness of the Ethiopian language is probably associated with being the language of Adam and Eve. Griffith, who conducted his excavation at Meroe, reports that “The Meroitic alphabet seems no very natural descendant of the old Egyptian.”³⁷

There are ample sources that indicate that Ge’ez was an endoglossic language of Ethiopians, but this ancient Ethiopian language was still considered a Semitic language, as if it originated in the Middle East and derived from an Arabic language. The reason why the origin of Ge’ez is associated with Arabic merely emanates from the similarity of the languages. In this regard, Gibbon asserts that “the olive complexion of Abyssinians, their hair, shape and features distinctly mark them as a colony of Arabs; this descent is confirmed by the

³³ D. A. Talboys (trans.), *Historical Researches in to the Politics, Intercourse and Trade of the Carthaginians, Ethiopians and Egyptians* (Oxford: D. A. Talboys, Vol. I, 1838), pp. 290-291.

³⁴ Jonathan M. Roberts, *Antiquity Unveiled: Ancient Voices from the Spirit Realms Disclose the Most Startling Revelations Proving Christianity to be Heathen Origin*, (Philadelphia: Oriental Publishing Co., 1912), p.298.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.299.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

³⁷ D. Randall Maciver and C. Leonard Wooley, with a Chapter on Meroitic Inscriptions by F. LL. Griffith, *Areika* (Oxford: Letterpress and Plates, Vol. I, 1909), p. 50.

resemblance of language and manners the report of an ancient emigration.”³⁸ Similarly, Dillman, dares to say that “In origin and essence Ethiopic is a pure Semitic speech, transplanted by people who migrated from Yemen to Abyssinia.”³⁹ As a matter of fact, the claims of Gibbon and Dillman are inaccurate. I said so because these writers do not have any irrefutable evidence. Firstly, the Arabs, conversely, are emigrants from ancient Ethiopia and even Phoenicians by origin were Ethiopian. Regarding the latter, Herodotus states that “These Phoenicians dwelt in old time, as they themselves say, by the Red Sea; passing over from thence, they now inhabit the sea coast of Syria.”⁴⁰ Besides, Pliny tells us that Ethiopia “having been a famous and powerful country even down to the Trojan wars, when Memnon was king, and the stories about Andromeda show that it dominated Syria and the coasts of the Mediterranean in the times of King Cepheus.”⁴¹ Secondly, the name Arab itself is derived from the Ge’ez word ዐረብ (aräbä) meaning “to be set in” and the derivation Arab denotes “west”, the direction where the sun sets. In Psalms of David, it is stated as “ወበከመ ይረሀቅ ሠረቅ እም ዐረብ አርኅቀ እምኔን ኅጢአተን (As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us (Psalm 103: 12). Thus, the western territory of ancient Ethiopia was known by the name Arab. Classical writers verify that Arabia was lying between Nile and the Red Sea. Strabo, for example, tells us that “The country between the Nile and the Arabian Gulf is Arabia, and at its extremity is situated Pelusium.”⁴² Pelusium was the easternmost major city of Lower Egypt. What was known as Arabia Felix by some, Arabia Happy or Arabia Blest by others was not part of the present-day Yemen as some historians wrongly assume. Regarding this, Strabo testifies that “The first people above Syria who dwell in Arabia Felix are the Nabataeans and the Sabaeans. They often overran Syria before they became subject to the Romans; but at present both they and the Syrians are subject to the Romans.”⁴³ The name Arab is also known by the name Saracen among Greco-Roman writers. In connection with this, Procopius reports that beyond the boundaries of Palestine towards the east it is held by Saracens and their settlement extended from Aelas in the west to India in the east.⁴⁴ The primary origin of the Saracens “... extends from the

³⁸ J. B. Bury (ed.), *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, (New York: Fred De Fall Company Publishers, Vol. VII, 1907), p. 230.

³⁹ James A. Crichton(trans.), *Ethiopic Grammar*, (London: William and Norgate, 1907), p.3.

⁴⁰ Herodotus, Vol. III, p. 395.

⁴¹ Pliny, Vol. II, p. 475.

⁴² Strabo, Vol. VIII, p. 71.

⁴³ Strabo, Vol. I, p. 351.

⁴⁴ Procopius, Vol. I, pp. 179 &181.

Assyrians to the cataracts of the Nile and the frontiers of the Blemmyae.”⁴⁵ Thirdly, Ge’ez, though similar with Semitic languages, varies greatly from other kindred languages. At first, Dilman claimed that Ge’ez was derived from Arabic but when he began to examine the language from a linguistic point of view, he realized that, in contrast to his hypothesis, Ge’ez retained antique characters than Arabic. Dilman’s analysis led him to the conclusion that:

And in various other things, it has kept to a more antique stage than the rest of Semitic tongues. Ethiopic has no article, but it has preserved an originality and a fullness in the department of the pronouns, unmatched by its sister languages. Then it has a host of pronominal particles, of which not a trace is now left in Arabic, while in the perfecting of enclitics it has followed out an original Semitic bent with a thoroughness which is found nowhere else.⁴⁶

The analysis of Dilman signifies that Ge’ez was an independent language from the influence of Hebrew and Arabic languages. Dilman further states the antique stage of Ge’ez as “The Hebrew order of characters is, as we know, very ancient; but we do not know how ancient the Ethiopic order may be ... We are not justified in contending right off that the Hebrew order is the original and the Ethiopic the derived one.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, inscriptions found in South Arabia denote that the Ge’ez writing system precedes that of Arabic. Regarding this, Thomas states, “Thousands of inscriptions have been collected in South-west Arabia, though not all of them have as yet been translated. They are in a character which resembles Ethiopic and is not closely related to the Arabic character which, indeed, it antedates by a thousand years.”⁴⁸ Similarly, Salt, having examined the history of northern Ethiopia, refuted the claim of Murray as:

The chief, and indeed sole argument on which Mr. Murray founded his opinion, was drawn from the similarity between the Geez and the Arabian languages... whereas, on the other side of the question; the general tenor of the history of the Abyssinians, their buildings, written character, dress and the description of them given in the earliest Arabian and Byzantine writers, all tend to prove them a distinct race from the Arabs.⁴⁹

The dawn of civilization had started in Ethiopia and this is well supported by genuine writers. For instance, Hereen states, “In Ethiopia, and consequently in Meroe, the Pyramid-

⁴⁵ Marcellinus, p. 11.

⁴⁶ Crichton, p.6.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ Bertram Thomas, *The Arabs: The Life-Story of a People who have left their deep impress on the World*, (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd, 1937), p.23.

⁴⁹ Henry Salt, *A Voyage to Abyssinia, and Travels in to the Interior of that country, Executed under the Order of the British Government in the Years 1809 and 1810*, (London: W. Bulmer and Co. Cleveland-Row, 1814), p. 458.

architecture was native from earliest ages.”⁵⁰ Hereen adds: “Thus we stand on that remarkable spot which antiquity frequently regarded as the cradle of the arts and sciences; where hieroglyphic writing was discovered; where temples and pyramids had already sprung up, while Egypt was still remained ignorant of their existence.”⁵¹ Similarly, Lepsius informs us that the inhabitants of Meroe were the predecessors and the instructors of ancient Egyptians in civilization.⁵²

3.3. The Ethiopian Empire and its diverse appellations

Besides the appellation “Ethiopia”, foreign writers call it “India” and “Abyssinia”. Here only the appellations Ethiopia and India will be discussed in brief on the origin, meaning and to whom these appellations had been attributed.

3.3.1 The appellation “Ethiopia”

The appellation Ethiopia spelt in Ge’ez as ኢትዮጵያ (Ityopia), in Greek as Αἰθιοπία, in Latin as Aethiops or Aethiopica. The name Ethiopia is an extant name of a country mentioned by Moses in the Old Testament before any other country in the world. Regarding its origin and meaning, there are different hypotheses. Among others, Ethiopian clerics assert that the appellation Ethiopia is derived from Ethiopis, another name of Kush and I think this is taken from the assertion of Josephus. Josephus asserts, “Of the four sons of Ham, time has not at all hurt the name of Chus; for the Ethiopians, over whom he reigned, are even at this day, both by themselves, and by all men in Asia, called Chusites.”⁵³ The assertion of Josephus contradicts the narrative of Moses about the Flood and if the narrative is literarily true, Kush cannot be king of Ethiopians because at that time only eight souls survived from the Deluge. Likewise, Isidore reports that “Ethiopians are so called after a son of Ham named Cush, from whom they have their origin. In Hebrew Cush means Ethiopian.”⁵⁴ As opposed to the above, Isidore claims that “Ethiopia is so called after the colour of its inhabitants, who are scorched by the proximity of the sun.”⁵⁵ The claim of Isidore is very misleading. Firstly, the appellation Kush had already existed before Abraham, patriarch of the Jewish people and hence the name Kush cannot be Hebrew by its origin. Secondly, if Kush really meant

⁵⁰ Talboys, Vol. I, p. 388.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 396.

⁵² Leonora and Joanna B.Horner(trans.), *Letters from Egypt, Ethiopia and the Peninsula of Sinai*, (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853), p.152.

⁵³ William Whiston(trans.), *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, (Oxford: D. A. Talboys, Vol. I, 1839), p.74.

⁵⁴ Isidore, p.199.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.293.

“Ethiopian” in Hebrew, when the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek by the Septuagint in third century BCE; the two names would not be found in it but only either Kush or Ethiopia. Williams inaccurately adduces, “The Hebrew term ‘Cush’ is translated Ethiopia by the Septuagint, Vulgate and almost all other versions, ancient and modern, as well as by the English version.”⁵⁶ Had it been true what Williams and others asserted, we might read in the Bible that Ham begat Ethiopia instead of Ham begat Cush. It is evident that the association of the name Ethiopia with Kush came into existence after the Jewish Talmud was introduced in the sixth century CE. Classical writers were unfamiliar with what the later writers assert. For instance, Pliny states where the name Ethiopia was derived as “But the whole race was called Aetheria, and then Atlantia, and finally it took its name from Aethiops the son of Vulcan.”⁵⁷ Budge rejected the claim of Pliny as “But it is clear that the natives of that part of the Nile Valley which Pliny calls ‘Ethiopia’ had a name for their country and it is equally clear that it was not derived from the name of the son of Vulcan.”⁵⁸ Budge, however, did not dare to tell what the actual name of Ethiopia was. Vis-à-vis Talmudic sources, Philo, a Jewish writer, interpreted Ethiopia as “And it [Gihon] encircles and surrounds Ethiopia, making demonstrations of war against it; and the name of Ethiopia, being interpreted, means humiliation.”⁵⁹

Nowadays, several writers, especially African Americans, erroneously claim that the appellation “Ethiopia” is Greek by its origin. For example, Jackson argues, “When the Greeks came in contact with the dusky inhabitants of Africa and Asia, they called them the ‘burnt-faces’. The Greek word for burnt was Ethios and the word for face was ops. So “ethios” plus “ops” became Ethiopian.”⁶⁰ Likewise Williams asserts that the name Ethiopia is derived from the roots $\omega\theta\omega$, ‘to burn’, and $\omega\psi$ ‘face’.⁶¹ Similarly, Budge argues that “it is clear that both $\text{A}\iota\theta\iota\omicron\psi$ ‘an Ethiopian’, and $\text{A}\iota\theta\iota\omicron\pi\iota\alpha$, the name of his country, are of Greek origin, the former name meaning ‘burnt face’ and the latter the country of burnt faced men.”⁶² Misguided by the above and similar other narratives, many writers, both foreign and local, believed that the

⁵⁶George W. Williams, *History of the Negro Race in America, 1619 to 1800*, (New York & London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, Vol. I, 1885), p.12.

⁵⁷ Pliny, Vol. II, p.477.

⁵⁸ S.A. Wallis Budge, *A History of Ethiopia, Nubia and Abyssinia*, (London: Methven & Co. Ltd, Vol. I, 1928), p.2.

⁵⁹ Charles Duke Yonge(trans.), *The Works of Philo Judaeus: The Contemporary of Josephus*, (London: H.G. Bohn, 1854-1890), p.49.

⁶⁰ John G. Jackson, *Introduction to African Civilizations*, (New York: Citadel Press, 1994), p.65.

⁶¹ Williams, p.22.

⁶² Budge, Vol. I, p.2.

name Ethiopia was coined by the Greeks. However, the assertion of the aforementioned writers does not have any irrefutable source to be cited but it was merely fabricated. That is why the root words they claimed are quite different and hence neither the root words nor its meaning is plausible. Among Greek writers, it was Homer who wrote about Ethiopia and Ethiopians for the first time in eighth century BCE. Homer says nothing about the skin colour of Ethiopians. He only told us that the people were blameless and divided geographically into east and west. Above all, the Greek word for black is **ΜΕΛΑΣ/μελάς** (melas), and its adjective form is **μελάγχροες** (melanchrous), to mean dark-skinned.⁶³ The appellation Ethiopia has nothing to do with the physical characteristics of the people; that is why classical writers classified some of them as swarthy Ethiopians,⁶⁴ and some others as the tallest and the handsomest of all men.⁶⁵ Accordingly, Pliny states that the category of Ethiopians as “the people called in Greek the white Ethiopians: Beyond these are the Ethiopian clans of Nigritae.”⁶⁶ Unlike other western writers, Baldwin, argues that the appellation Ethiopia had a religious significance but no colour complexion and in line with this, he reports as “Eustatius (Schol in Homerum) says, ‘Aethiops is the title of Zeus.’⁶⁷

Conversely, archaeologists argue that ancient Ethiopians belonged to the Caucasian race. For example, Garstang and others report, “The monuments found this winter at Meroe prove definitely that the Ethiopians had no Negro blood in their veins.”⁶⁸ Similarly, Lepsius states, “The ancient population of the whole Nile Valley as far as Chartum, and perhaps, also, along the Blue River, and the Abyssinian nations, were in former times probably distinctly separated from the negroes than now, and belonged to the Caucasian race.”⁶⁹ As to the skin colour of Ethiopians, Poncet reports his eyewitness account as: “We have been a long time in an error in Europe as the looks and complexion of Æthiopians; which proceeds from confounding them with the blacks of Nubia, their neighbours. The Æthiopians are naturally a dun or olive colour.”⁷⁰ Similarly, Waldmeier, who was in Ethiopia for about ten years, verified his witness as:

⁶³ Herodotus, Vol. I, p.391.

⁶⁴ Arthur S. Way(trans.), *QUINTUS SMYRNAEUS: The Fall of Troy*, with an English Translation, (London: William Heinemann, 1913), p.77.

⁶⁵ Herodotus, Vol. II, p.27.

⁶⁶ Pliny Vol. II, p.249.

⁶⁷ John D. Baldwin, *Pre-Historic Nations*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publications, 1875), p.58.

⁶⁸ John Garstang, A. H. Sayce, & F.L.L. Griffith, *Meroe: The City of the Ethiopians*, (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1911), p.4.

⁶⁹ Leonora & Horner, Letters, p.208.

⁷⁰ William Foster (ed.), *The Red Sea and Adjacent Countries at the Close of the Seventeenth Century as Described by Joseph Pitts, William Daniel and Charles Jacques Poncet*, (London: Hakluyt Society, 1949), p.130.

Many people in Europe and America are of opinion that the Abyssinians belong to the slave race of Africa, but it is not so. They are of thorough Caucasian type, and generally tall, nice-looking people; their colour is not black, but chestnut brown; ladies who are always in the house are not so dark, and some of them are white.⁷¹

Just like its origin and meaning, to which part of Africa the name Ethiopia belonged was also distorted by falsified narratives. In this connection, Williams asserts, “Land of the Blacks” meant all ‘Ethiopia’, all ‘Ethiopia’ meant all Africa.”⁷² Budge also claims the following:

And there is no doubt that the earliest classical writers considered to be ‘Ethiopians’ all the peoples who were swarthy or brown-skinned or black-skinned (including the Negroes), and the country in which they lived, whether the Sudan or Western Asia or India, to be ‘Ethiopia.’ This being so we need not be surprised that the earliest classical writers do not assign geographical limits to ‘Ethiopia.’⁷³

Contrary to the above, Budge states, “The works of Strabo, Diodorus and Pliny tell us about the people of Ethiopia or Kush, but it is clear that all their statements refer to the Kingdom of the Island of Meroe and Napata.”⁷⁴ The assertions of Williams and Budge are misleading. Firstly, the geographical situation of ancient Ethiopia was in Asia and also known by the name India. Secondly, all the black states of the ancient world were not called Ethiopia or Ethiopians by classical writers. Ancient Egyptians, for example, as Herodotus told us, were dark-skinned but he never called them Ethiopians. Thirdly, the name Ethiopia was not limited to the present-day Sudan. Regarding this, Strabo states, “The Nile was filled by summer rains when Upper Æthiopia was flooded.”⁷⁵ It is certain that Upper Ethiopia is the present-day Ethiopia. Moreover, the colour complexion of Ethiopians, as stated above, were not uniform but mosaic and hence the prophet utters, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jeremiah 13:23). Jeremiah compares the skin colour of Ethiopians with the spots of the leopard, which is mosaic and unchangeable.

⁷¹ Theophilus Waldmeier, *The Autobiography of Theophilus Waldmeier, Missionary: Being an Account of Ten Years' Life in Abyssinia; and Sixteen Years in Syria*, (London: The Orphans' printing Press, 1886), p.15.

⁷² Chancellor Williams, *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.*, (Illinois: Third World Press, 1974), p.111.

⁷³ Budge, Vol. I, p.2.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* P.4

⁷⁵ Strabo, Vol. VII, P.17

3.3.2 The appellation India

The appellation India was first introduced by Herodotus, and then after by many who wrote about its marvels and wisdom of Indians. The name India is derived from the river Indus, Phison of the Old Testament. Regarding this, Cosmas states, “Phison is the river of India, which some call Indus or Ganges.”⁷⁶ Indians were one of the tribes of ancient Ethiopia. In line with this, Isidore states, “There are three tribes of Ethiopians. Hesperian’s, Garamantes, and Indians. Hesperian’s are of the west, Garamantes of Tripolis, and the Indians of the East.”⁷⁷ The territory of ancient India was described by Orosius(385-420 CE) as: “In this territory is India, with the Indus River on the west which empties into the Red Sea, and the Caucasian Range on the north; the rest of India, as I have said, is bounded by the Eastern and the Indian Oceans.”⁷⁸ Similarly, the geographical situation of India was also indicated manifested by Strabo as: “India, which is the greatest of all nations and the happiest in lot, a nation whose confines reach both to the Eastern Sea and to the Southern sea of the Atlantic”.⁷⁹ Likewise, Cosmas states, “The sons of Ham, Cush and Misraim, ... Saba and Euilat; that is the Homerites and Indians, for Saba is situated in the Homerite country, and Euilat is in India.”⁸⁰ The evidence in the Old Testament where Euilat was stated as “And they dwelt from Havilah [Euilat] unto Shur, that is before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria” (Gen.25:18). Ancient India, as described by Herodotus and other subsequent writers, it was either another name of Ethiopia or the name of the three Kingdoms of the Ethiopian Empire. Accordingly, some of the classical writers used the name India as another name of Ethiopia and some others used it as part of Ethiopia. For instance, Virgil tells us that a river that makes Egypt green flows down from swarthy Indians.⁸¹ Similarly, Procopius of Caesarea states, “The Nile River, flowing out of India into Egypt, divides that land into two parts as far as the sea.”⁸² In a similar manner, St. John of Damascus in his description of Ethiopia, states, “From the inner land of the Ethiopians, whom our tale calleth Indians.”⁸³ Likewise, Abu Salih informs us that India is the land of Abyssinia, which is also called al-

⁷⁶ Cosmas, P.75

⁷⁷ Isidore, P.199

⁷⁸ Roy J. Deferrari(trans.), *The Seven Books of History Against Pagans by Paulus Orosius*,(Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1981), p.9.

⁷⁹ Strabo, Vol. I, p. 497.

⁸⁰ Cosmas, p.373.

⁸¹ H. Rushton Fairclough(trans.), *Virgil with an English Translation*, (London: William Heinemann, Vol. I, 1916), p.217.

⁸² Dewing, Vol. VII, p.363.

⁸³ G.R. Woodward & H. Mattingly(trans.), *St. John Damascene: Barlaam and Ioasaph with an English Translation*, (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1937), p. 5.

Hindah.⁸⁴ On the other hand, some writers clearly indicate that the name India refers only to the three kingdoms of Ethiopia. Concerning this, John, Bishop of Nikkiu, documents, “Now the country of the Ethiopians was not far distant from Egypt: it comprised three Indian states and four Abyssinian states.”⁸⁵ John Malalas further elaborates the relationship of India with Ethiopia as:

The emperor of the Axoumitai is further into the interior than the Homeritai, while the emperor of the Homeritai is near Egypt. It is through the country of the Homeritai that the Roman traders reach Axoum and the Indian empires further into the interior. For there are seven empires of Indians and Ethiopians; three of the Indians and four of the Ethiopians.⁸⁶

4. Conclusion

The Ethiopian Empire extended from the Indian Ocean in the east, to the Mediterranean Sea to the west, and bounded, except on the southern part, by water bodies. By ancient division of continents, the Ethiopian Empire was within the continent of Asia and its northern and eastern territories were called India by classical writers. The Ethiopian Empire was the first empire of the ancient world and its people are autochthones. As described in the first book of Moses, it was here in Ethiopia where human beings came into existence and civilizations originated. Accordingly, the appellation Ethiopia is neither Hebrew nor Greek by its origin but rather, just like other states of the ancient world, is associated with the name of one its emperors. The attempts made by some modern writers either to limit the ancient territory of Ethiopia to the present-day Sudan, or to enlarge its extent to black people as a whole, is very misleading. The presumption that Ethiopians are immigrants from south Arabia and its language is derived from Arabic is also implausible and above all, the claim that the appellation Ethiopia is Greek by its origin is entirely fabricated. The assertions of these writers are not supported by authoritative sources. Thus, I think, their assertions are most probably associated either with a systematic distortion of the ancient Ethiopian history, or else merely speculative errors of these writers.

⁸⁴ B. T. A. Evetts(ed.&trans.), *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and Some Neighbouring Countries-attributed to Abu Salih, the Armenian*, (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1895), p..296.

⁸⁵ R. H. Charles(trans.), *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu, Translated from Zotenberg's Ethiopic Text*, (London: Williams & Norgate, 1916), p.141.

⁸⁶Elizabeth Jeffreys, Michael Jefreys, et.al(trans.), *The Chronicle of John Malalas*,(Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1986), p. 251.

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