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The Black Man in the Biblical World

During the course of centuries, upon the basis of the Bible the black man has been viewed in several and various ways. He has been regarded as the veritable father of Near Eastern civilizations; as cursed of God, or by a prophetic man of God, forever destined to serve “his more favored brethren,” incapable of any civilization. At the same time, but still upon the basis of the Bible, he has been excluded from the family of man, and declared to be a beast. Moreover, he has been declared a non-inhabitant of the biblical world, yet at the same time the cause behind the disintegration and decay of ancient civilizations.

Upon the basis of non-biblical sources of knowledge he has been removed from the ancient biblical world, and excluded from those peoples which had a role in the development of civilization, modern as well as ancient.

The more or less biblically based view that regarded the black man as an inhabitant of the biblical world may be titled the Old Hamite Hypothesis. Supported at points by the writings of ancient Greeks such as Homer and Herodotus, this hypothesis, like a stream, flowed in the area of Western thought for roughly four centuries, from 1400 to 1800. Then, around 1800, a new stream came to the surface. This latter, which may be called the New Hamite Hypothesis, eliminates the black man, or rather the so-called Negro, from the biblical world. Those black peoples whom it retains are given the title Caucasoid Blacks who instead of being regarded as Negroes are viewed as being white.

Since 1800 the two streams have flowed side by side with the older becoming increasingly reduced in volume while the newer, especially in scholarly circles, has increased in size and significance to the extent that for many it is the only stream that exists. But more must be said about the streams in their concurrent flows. Each has been fed by numerous tributaries, sometimes by one and the same tributary. At times streamlets have flowed from one to the other, and so led the waters that it is difficult if not impossible to distinguish them. Most especially is this true in regard to the Negro: the older stream fed by the tributary mistakenly called the curse upon Ham joins the waters of the newer that not only removes him from the biblical world but also views him as incapable of civilization.

Changing the figure of speech from streams to schools of thought, the two have given rise to interest, discussion, and debate. These have varied in intensity across the years since 1800, waxing and waning.

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according to the social climate with respect to Negroes. Thus in the period leading up to the American Civil War, debate was at fever pitch. Again around the turn of the century interest, discussion and debate was renewed; and so still again after the United States Supreme Court’s 1954 decision with respect to the segregation of Negroes.

Presently interest, if not discussion and debate, continues. With respect to biblical studies, on one side are critical historical-literary biblical scholars and their associates in the several related fields of science. They adhere to the newer school of thought; and the vast majority exclude the Negro from their writings, particularly as these have to do with the biblical world. Thus Heinisch-Heidt in discussing the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 excludes Negroes along with several other peoples; and Martin Noth allows a role for them “only on the border of the Near East as neighbors of Egypt...” Further, Noth criticizes the ancient Egyptians for having incorrectly portrayed and classified the Nubians as Negroes. Albright is a bit more generous in his inclusion of the Negro, writing as he does:

“...All known ancient races in the region which concerns us here belonged to the so-called “white” or “Caucasian” race, with the exception of the Cushites (“Ethiopians”) who were strongly Negroid in type, as we know from many Egyptian paintings.”

On the other side are those who still adhere to the older view upon the basis of their interpretation of the Bible, yet also upon the basis of evidence provided by archaeology, historical writings, and other sources. Some maintain that there was a very pronounced presence of blacks, even Negroes, in the biblical world, including the ancient Hebrews-Israelites-Jews.

The present writer essays to investigate the validity of and to judge between the two opposing views. He does so, however, aware at the outset of several well nigh insoluble problems. In the main, these have to do with definitions and the usage of words, such as race, black, Negro, as they are employed by Afro-Americans on one hand and Euro-Americans on the other.

It is to be noted that Afro-Americans define black in several ways, both literal and figurative. Thus one may be literally black in color and be a black person, or Negro. Or the person may be of any shade of color and still be defined as Black, Negro. Additionally, one may be defined as black regardless of color or race; all who suffer oppression, especially oppression at the hands of white Westerners, are classified as black.


In addition to works by Conservative and Traditionalist biblical scholars and other writers, there are numerous writings by Afro-Americans and Black Africans. Among these latter are The Black Messiah and Black Christian Nationalism, by Albert C. Cleage; and From Babylon To Timbuktu, by Rudolph R. Windsor.
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Over against the Afro-American definitions are the definitions of the white man. These may be social, political, biological, and so on. In America black means Afro-American, Negro, but the precise definition may vary from state to state; or the definition may be one set by the Federal Government. Nationally, anyone with a discernible trace of African Negro blood is a black.

Ethnologically, upon the basis of criteria established by white men, the color black may have nothing to do with race. A Negro is one who exhibits a certain group of traits which include black color, a particular type of hair, and skeletal structure, especially cranial.

In the essay several categories of evidences are set forth. And toward the end of making the most accurate judgment, two types of at times overlapping evidence are employed. One type consists of evidence supplied by scholars who are adherents to the newer view; the other, of evidence employed by holders of the older view that the writer regards as tenable.

Upon the basis of available evidence, the biblical world is divided into three general regions as follows: Egypt-African Cush; Asiatic Cush; and Mediterranean Lands. The evidence is then presented according to categories under each respective region. For Egypt-African Cush the categories of evidence are: archaeological data; historical works; critical historical-literary biblical scholars; personal names and adjectives; modern travelers and anthropologists; ancient Greek and Roman writers; and early Christian commentators. The evidence for Asiatic Cush is subsumed under two categories: ancient Greek writers, and modern historical works. And for the Mediterranean Lands the evidence is presented under the one category of historical works. Finally, the evidences from the three regions are viewed from the vantage point of Hebrew-Israelite-Jewish accounts, traditions and legends: the biblical Table of Nations, the Babylonian Talmud, and Midrashim.

The present article is limited to a presentation of evidence for Egypt-African Cush, under the categories of archaeological data and historical works.

EGYPT-AFRICAN CUSH

Archaeological Data. The phrase archaeological data as here used applies to all those archaeological finds of antiquity that throw light on the subject and give content to the evidence. They may be observed and gathered from the surface or unearthed. Further, they may be of several kinds: written records of whatever description, paintings, statuary, skeletal remains.

With respect to Egypt-African Cush, antiquities have been better preserved than in any other place. Additionally the finds have been most numerous there; and the investigator might well begin in this region because of the sheer volume of evidence respecting the absence or presence of the black man. Moreover this region is part of the
continent where in historical times the Blacks have constituted the bulk of the overall population. But there is still another reason for beginning with Egypt-African Cush. From the very beginning of modern Egyptology the black man, more particularly the Negro, has figured largely in the endeavor, albeit as an object rather than a participant. The New Hamite Hypothesis and Egyptology went and continue to go arm in arm. Up to roughly 1800 the ancient Egyptians as well as the ancient Cushites had been taken to be black and Negroes. Traditionally biblical interpretation, supported by observations of Herodotus, the so-called Father of History, served as the basis of the view. Illustrative of the Herodotus element are the words of Count Volney, after travels in Egypt and the Near East during the 1780’s:

I was at first tempted to attribute this (color of the Egyptians) to the climate (d) but when I visited the sphynx, I could not help thinking the figure of that monster furnished the true solution of the enigma: when I saw its features precisely those of a negro, I recollected the remarkable passage of Herodotus, in which he says, “For my part, I believe the Colchi to be “a colony of Egyptians, because, like them, “they have black skins and frizzled hair (e)” that is, that the ancient Egyptians were real negroes, of the same species with all the natives of Africa...”

A few years after Count Volney’s trip came Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt, 1798, and the consequent opening up of Egypt for archaeological discovery. The New Hamite Hypothesis, from its beginnings based upon theories about race which placed the Negro at the very bottom, could not permit a possibility that Negroes had developed the civilization of the Nile Valley. And by 1810 Blumenbach, pioneer in racial classification, was in Egypt studying human remains. From those days until the present Egyptology has continued with one underlying motive being still to prove that the ancient Egyptians-African Cushites were not Negroes.

But modern Egyptology has been related to the Negro in still another way. It got under way at the very time that justifications for the enslavement of Negroes were feverishly being sought; and it became the handmaiden of both the Old Hamitic Hypothesis coupled with the curse upon Canaan (Ham), and the New Hamite Hypothesis. It was in such an arrangement as this that the two streams flowed as one. In America there arose what has been called a “school of anthropologists” bent on debasing the Negro, and using Egyptology in such a way that one member of the school referred to his work as “niggerology.” And so on into the present, with Egyptologists either ignoring altogether a Negro presence or, at best, admitting of only a slight Negro element in the Cushite population. But now to a consideration of the archaeological evidence.

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7 Samuel George Morton, George Robins Gliddon, Josiah Clark Nott, and others. For recent works on these men, see especially William Stanton, *The Leopard’s Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race In America 1815-59* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1960).
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Recent archaeological discoveries establish in the Sahara a Negro civilization which goes back as far as 8000 B.C. It is believed by some that with the increasing desiccation of the Sahara some of the inhabitants moved eastwards into the Nile Valley as well as southwards into so-called Negro Africa. But some New Hamite Hypothesis scholars concede that predynastic Egyptians were Negroid in whole or in part. Having made that concession, however, they progressively remove the Negro from the Egyptian population between the beginning of the dynastic period up to the Eighteenth Dynasty. Afterwards they admit of a presence to a very limited degree.

About a Negro presence across the centuries of the dynastic periods archaeology has much to say. After making allowance for explicit and implicit counter claims and for differences of opinion in regard to identification of lands and definitions of words, the following stand out.

**Ancient Egyptian Historical Records.** First there are among the archaeological data such records as were compiled by Breasted and Pritchard. Breasted’s five volume work, *Ancient Records of Egypt,* from beginning to end is a documentary of references to Negroes, beginning with the Third Dynasty. From the period of the Third Dynasty there is the Palermo Stone with a statement about “hacking up the land of the Negro.” From the Sixth Dynasty, during the reign of Pepi I, there is the Inscription of Uni with its list of Bedwin Negro tribes against whom the Egyptians waged war; and from the reign of Mernefer there are the Inscriptions of Harkhuf which include an account of a journey into the lands of the Negroes. The Twelfth Dynasty yields the “First Semneh Stela” with its prohibition against the crossing of a boundary at the second cataract of the Nile by any Negro except a tradesman or commissioned person. Between the Twelfth and Eighteenth Dynasties no inscriptions are presented, but from the Eighteenth Dynasty onwards they are numerous. In substance they have to do with references to Negro lands and peoples, with individual Negroes such as one or more who bear the name “Nehesi,” with Negro captives of war, and with Negroes in the armed forces on through inscriptions of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, the Ethiopian.

Pritchard’s volume on *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* supplements Breasted’s volumes with an inscription attributed to Kamose who reigned just prior to the establishment of the Eighteenth Dynasty. A portion of the inscription is significant not only for what it adds to knowledge of Egyptian history but also for Pritchard’s identification of Ethiopia.

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(ancient Cush) with Negro. The relevant portion reads:

"... (One) prince is in Avaris, another is in Ethiopia, and (here) I sit associated with an Asiatic and a Negro! Each man has his slice of this Egypt, dividing up the land with me ..."11

Beyond this contribution to the subject at hand, Pritchard's volume provides additional content by including a list of temple serfs from the reign of Ramses III, an Egyptian letter that deals with a mixed Egyptian military force of 5000 bowmen including 880 Negroes, and a letter from the Amarna period that bemoans the behavior of Cushite, Negro, troops in Canaan.

Additional inscriptions include that of Antef V, Eleventh Dynasty, which boasts of conquests over Asians and Negroes; that of Ameny, Twelfth Dynasty, which records campaigns against Ethiopians; and an inscription of Usertesen I, Twelfth Dynasty, reporting victory over several Negro tribes. And from the Thirteenth Dynasty comes a cartouche upon which is engraved the name Ra-Nehsi, the Negro of Ra, identified as a king.12

Statuary and Paintings. Second among archaeological data are statuary and paintings of several kinds. Regarded by some as representing Negroes, they go back as early as 3000 B.C. and continue through dynastic and later times. Two limestone portraits which Reisner dated around 3000 B.C., and designated by him "the earliest known portraits of Negroes," were obtained by the Boston Museum.13 From the Fourth Dynasty (2550 B.C.), comes the head of a princess whom William Stevenson Smith identifies as a member of the Cheops family. Writes Smith, "The wife of the other unknown Prince (G4440) is of negroid type with thick lips, wide nostrils, and full cheeks (Fig. 11) ..."14 Montet refers to the head as being that of a Negro woman, and states that, being from Giza, it was probably made in the royal workshops for a member of the Cheop's family.15

And, commenting on the innumerable statues and statuettes that date from the period of the Old Kingdom, Montet writes that the men were on the whole rather tall, had broad, strong shoulders, a firm flat belly, and well developed limbs. "They had clearly defined features, prominent eyes, usually large, almost flat noses, thickish lips and somewhat low foreheads. Such were without exception the kings of Egypt at the time of the Old Kingdom."16

Other statuary indicative of a Negroid element in the general Egyptian population is that of individual rulers. Meriting special mention, accord-

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11 Pritchard, p. 232. Attention should be given to Pritchard's footnote on the rendering Negro instead of Nubian.
16 Ibid., p. 25.
ing to descriptions of some historians,\textsuperscript{17} were Nefert-ari Ahmose, wife of Ahmose I, founder of the Eighteenth Dynasty, Thothmes I, Thothmes II, Seti I, Queen Tiy, wife of Amenophis III and Osorkon II. Taharqa of the Ethiopian Dynasty requires an additional word, for even most recent writers deem statues of him to be Negroid. There are those who see in the apparent Negro kneeling in submission to Esarhaddon on the Sinjirli stela none other than this pharaoh. And I. Woldering in discussing the art of the Ethiopian dynastic period writes, “King Taharka is shown with negroid features, which indicate the racial origin of the Nubian rulers.\textsuperscript{18} And in discussing statuettes from the same period he goes on to say:

“In the case of female statuettes slender maidenly delicacy gives way to the stumpsiness and corpulence typical of Nubian women.

An ivory statuette of a lady of the royal family, now in Edinburgh, depicts her as thickset and plump. The face, with full lips and heavy eyelids, betrays her negroid racial origin.”\textsuperscript{19}

Painted limestone reliefs dating from the Middle Kingdom, Twelfth Dynasty (1991-1785), show Negroes of various ranks in society. Other well known paintings depicting Negroes, by way of example, date from the reigns of Queen Hatshepsut, Tutankamun (Huy’s tomb), Seti I, Ramses II and III. Some from the reigns of Seti I and Ramses II portray four races of men according to the Egyptians, in which are included the Egyptians themselves as reddish-brown and Negroes as black. The paintings in Huy’s tomb are revelatory in regard to the Negroid features of Nubians. Describing one of them, Mariette-Bey wrote:

“... People of every shade of complexion and of every race present themselves before him. Some are Negroes with distinctive features strongly marked; others are of the Negro type but brown in color . . ."\textsuperscript{20}

\textit{Skeletal Remains.} Skeletal remains, especially skulls, have been studied and restudied in efforts to determine the percentage of Negroes in the population of Egypt across the centuries. During the first decades of the twentieth century, G. Elliot Smith, upon the basis of his anatomical studies, admitted of possibly 5\% of Negroes in the predynastic period.\textsuperscript{21} More recently, upon the basis of a restudy of some crania and a study of some new ones, Eugen Strouhal allows of 1/3 Negroid and 1/3 Negroid-


\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20} Auguste Mariette-Bey, \textit{The Monuments of Upper Egypt}, translated by Alphonse Mariette (London: Tribner & Co., 1877) pp. 225f. One should note later editions of this work for their reduction in references to Negroes.

mixed for the population of one pre-dynastic time. In 1905 Arthur Thompson and David Randall-MacIver in their book Ancient Races in the Thebaid reported that of Egyptians belonging to the period between the Early Predynastic and Fifth Dynasty 24% of the males and 19.5% of the females were to be classified as Negroes. Further, that for the periods of the Sixth to the Eighteenth Dynasty about 20% of the males and 15% of the females studied are grouped with Negroes. Prior to these, Auguste Mariette-Bey reported on skeletal remains at Thebes dating from the Eleventh Dynasty. Says he, “The inhabitants of Thebes interred at Drah-abou’l-neggah, the necropolis of that early period, were frequently Negroes.”

Modern Historical Works. To be sure, modern historians and other writers draw upon archaeology and related pursuits for the production of their works. Consequently, to use the finds of archaeology and the works of historical writers as sister categories is to make for a great deal of repetition. Nevertheless it seems profitable to use the two categories despite the obvious duplication.

In addition to the observations of several historians on the Negroid appearance of various pharaohs and other noble persons is the historical content of their books relating to Blacks-Negroes. This content is of two kinds: general descriptions of the ancient Egyptians as a whole and treatments of affairs in which Negroes figure.

Several historians join the archaeologists in either recognizing the pre-dynastic Egyptians as Negroid or as having been strongly mixed with Negroes. Others essay to give a description of the overall appearance of the population. Such a description, in addition to that of Montet given above, is that of George Rawlinson:

“... The fundamental character of the Egyptian in respect of physical type, language, and tone of thought, is Nigritic. The Egyptians were not negroes, but they bore a resemblance to the negro which is indisputable. Their type differs from the Caucasian in exactly those respects which when exaggerated produce the negro. They were darker, had thicker lips, lower foreheads, larger heads, more advancing jaws, a flatter foot, and a more attenuated frame ...”

Various historians include Negroes in their detailing of Egyptian history from the Fourth Dynasty onward. During the Fourth-Sixth Dynasties the Egyptians had dealings with the Negroes of Central Africa and recruited Negro tribes into their armies, as is shown by Una’s inscription. Budge, Petrie and others make use of this inscription.

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24 Mariette-Bey, Opus. Cit p. 147.
28 Petrie, op. cit., p. 94.

http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/itcj/vol1/iss2/3
and note that the Egyptians levied tens of thousands of troops including Negroes from several tribes. Fairervis records that among the wives of the Theban King Mentuhotep II (Eleventh Dynasty) were several with Negro blood and some with body tattooing, indicative of the closeness of Africa to the southern Nomess.\textsuperscript{30} The period of the Twelfth Dynasty is noted as one during which Egyptians had numerous relations with Cush; and several historians call special attention to the stela of Sesostris III at Semneh on which Negroes, with a few exceptions, are forbidden to cross the boundary. Dynasty Thirteen is marked as one during which a Negro king, Ra-Nehsi, ruled even in the Delta region,\textsuperscript{31} and around the same time Kamose complains of being situated between the Asiatic and Negro kings, sharing rule with them.

The Eighteenth Dynasty is presented as one during which the Egyptians had increasingly numerous contacts with Negroes, and as one during which the rulers were largely of Negro extraction. To begin with, Nefertari, black queen of Ahmore I, is by some historians declared to be a "negress." The treasurer of Queen Hatshepsut is stated to be a Negro on the basis of his name, Nehsi. Thutmosi I wars against Negroes, while Amenhotep III employs Negro auxiliaries in his armies. At the same time, in one instance during his reign, 740 Negroes are brought back as captives of war.\textsuperscript{32} Negroes are seen as constituting part of the Egyptian army during the reign of Amenhotep IV, as indicated by the behavior of Negro troops in Canaan during the Tel-el-Amarna period. And during the same period Negroes are integrated into the life of the Underworld.\textsuperscript{33} Additionally, Negroes are included in the historical works on the basis of the paintings in the tombs of Eighteenth Dynasty personalities.

References in the historical works to Negroes in Egyptian life during the Nineteenth Dynasty are numerous. Seti I's tomb paintings as depicting Negroes among the four races are included by some; and attention is called to the large number of Negroes, especially in the armies, yet also elsewhere. In this regard Rawlinson states that whole tribes of Negroes were moved into Asia;\textsuperscript{34} and Breasted notes that during the reign of Ramses II there were nearly 1000 Negro soldiers in a mixed army of some 5000.\textsuperscript{35} Ramses III is represented as warring against Asiatics and Negroes; and as having among the slaves in the Temple estates approximately 5000 Syrians and Negroes.\textsuperscript{36} Later, during the reign of Ramses XI, note is taken of a certain Pa-Nehsi who was Viceroy of Cush and Commander of the Army.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{31} Good statements about Ra-Nehsi are made by Petrie, op. cit., pp. 202 and 221, and by Budge, \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 103ff.
\textsuperscript{33} Montet, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 191f.
\textsuperscript{34} Rawlinson, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. II, p. 323.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 282.
During the periods between the Nineteenth and Twenty-fifth Dynasties, various historians make mention of Negroes in the army of Shishak, identify Osorkon I with Zerah the Ethiopian, refer to Osorkon II as Negroid, and place a Nubian king in Thebes during the reign of Osorkon III.\textsuperscript{38}

To end with the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, Albright and Steindorff-Seele admit of a strong mixture of Negro blood in the veins of the Nubians-Ethiopians-Cushites; and it is generally admitted that Taharqa and his successors were of Negro extraction. Steindorff-Seele even go so far as to call special attention that under Taharqa "the throne of Egypt was occupied by a Negro king from Ethiopia!"\textsuperscript{40} Arthur Weigall goes still further in his treatment of Piankhi, predecessor of Taharqa: he refers to him as the most famous of the "nigger kings."\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Op. cit.}, p. 271.