

The ancient history of the continent known today as Africa

The modern study of Africa has uncovered knowledge about its peoples that was lost since the distant times of antiquity. It has proved what the Greek historians Herodotus (c. 484 - 425 BCE) and Diodorus of Sicily (c. 90 BCE - c. 30 BCE) of the classical age had stated about the black people as being “different but equal”.¹ Long before slavery distorted European perceptions about Africans, the ancient Greeks had approached them on eye- level. In 1984 in his book “The story of Africa”, the journalist Basil Davidson led us to the monuments of ancient African history:

For example, the walls of Great Zimbabwe give witness to one of the most significant civilizations in the world during the medieval period. It was first discovered in 1871 by the German geologist Carl Mauch (1837- 1875) who was wandering around in search for gold. Unfortunately, he and all Europeans of his time were so prejudiced that they could not believe the evidence of their own eyes. Rather than facing the possibility that Africans might have a history of their own, they fabricated exotic explanations of longtime gone and faraway monarchs like King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba to have built it.

Another example of such history forgery is the neglected Nswatugi Cave in the Metabo hills of modern Zimbabwe. The 3.000 years old rock frieze shows large numbers of giraffes, antelopes and kudu cows; the last together with humans. It is not very clear why and how these were created, but similar as in other cave paintings in the world, they might have served as psychological and spiritual reassurance before or after group hunting. The same animals are still living in that area.

In the 1950ies, a team of French scientists, led by Henri Lhote (1903- 1991), discovered another rock paintings in the Algerian Tesla Mountains of today’s Sahara.² They, too, show people hunting animals, which proves that the region once carried wildlife. The paintings have been estimated to be around seven- or eight thousand years old. As the land turned into desert, its peoples migrated to the South, the West, and in the East into the valley of the Nile. This means that the great civilization of the Egypt Pharaohs had its origins in the heart of Black Africa. The evidence suggests that the earliest kingdom of the Nile was in Nubia. Later, the Kingdom of Kush had its own distinctive culture and achievements amongst which, perhaps, was the taming of the great

¹ Basil Davidson, *The story of Africa* (London: Mitchell Beazley Publ., 1984), 19.

² *Ibid*, 22-25.

African elephant. These discoveries of diverse forms of civilization in Africa brought into light various concepts of divinity, creation and moral order, which gave social life to communities.³

Before these newer acknowledgements during the centuries of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and even later, because of the above mentioned neglecting of African civilizations and achievements, beliefs about a “natural black inferiority” had arose. The famous German philosopher Friedrich Hegel (1770- 1831), though never been to Africa and hardly knowing anything about its peoples, published this unbelievable statement: "This is the land where men are children. A land lying beyond the daylight of self-conscious history, and enveloped in the black (...) At this point, let us forget Africa. Not to mention it again. For Africa is no historical part of the world."⁴ The Pan Africanist and statesman of Liberia Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832- 1912) hold against this: “Africa is no vast island (...), cut off through the ages from the men who have made and influenced the destinies of mankind. She has been closely connected, both as source and nourisher, with some of the most potent influences which have affected for good the history of the world.”⁵

Throughout this our human history, we have attempted to satisfy our intellectual curiosity by searching for answers to life's never-ending questions. This has given rise to theories and systems of thought, which first appeared in the form of ancient religions. In Africa besides our old traditional beliefs, we can find early connections with all three Abrahamic religions: The Jews celebrate up to date the Passover, which reminds them of the Exodus, when Moses led their ancestors out of Egypt to the Land of Canaan. The Christians celebrate Christmas and remember the flight of Mary and Joseph with Little Jesus to Egypt, when Herod had ordered the killing of all baby boys and toddlers in and out Bethlehem. The history of Muslim relations and encounters in Africa goes back to the first years of the Islamic era. For example, when a group of the first adherents were persecuted in Mecca, the prophet Muhammad sent them to the Christian Kingdom of Aksum to seek refuge, and they were granted asylum.⁶

³ Diop A. Cheikh, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, trans. M. Cook (Westport/ CT: Lawrence Hill Publ., 1974), 101-102.

⁴ Ronald Kuykendall, “Hegel and Africa: An Evaluation of the Treatment of Africa in the Philosophy of History”, *Journal of Black Studies* vol. 23, no. 4, (1993): 572.

⁵ Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1994), 131.

⁶ E. A. Wallis Budge, *A History of Ethiopia, Vol. I: Nubia and Abyssinia* (London: Routledge Publ., 2014),