THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE ETHIOPIAN TRADITIONS

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Until the twentieth century it was generally accepted that the events described in the Biblical Old Testament before the Babylonian captivity (ca. 586 B.C.) occurred in the area of modern Israel, Palestine, Egypt, and Iraq (Babylon). Abraham was supposed to have come from Ur in Mesopotamia, the Hebrews held captive in Egypt, the Exodus to have taken place in the Sinai peninsula and Joshua’s invasion launched across the River Jordan. When professional archaeologists commenced digging in the Holy Land in 1920 they fully expected to uncover evidence of the Exodus, the destruction of Canaanite cities, the establishment of Israelite kingdoms, large public works undertaken by King Solomon and King Omri, the 722-1 B.C. Assyrian destruction of Israel, and the 587-586 B.C. Babylonian conquest of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem. However doubts emerged among archaeologists in the 1960’s [Kenyon] that escalated in the 1970’s [Pritchard] and finally developed in the 1990’s and at the turn of the twenty-first century into outright dismissal of the pre-586 B.C. Biblical account [Finkelstein, Herzog, Lemche, Sand, Silberman, Thompson, Van Seter, Whitelam]. Today leading so called “minimalist” Israeli, American, British, and Danish-based archaeologists believe that Moses, Joshua, David and Solomon never existed and the pre-Babylonian captivity narrative was either fantasy or highly exaggerated. Their opinions are opposed by “maximalist” often faith-based scholars and archaeologists [Bright, Dever, A. Mazar, B. Mazar]. The issue is very controversial because many observers interpret the minimalist hypothesis as undermining the raison d’être of the State of Israel.

In the nineteenth century a number of writers and academics [Dozy et al 1] suggested that Arabia, not Palestine, may have been the true location of the pre-586 B.C. events described in the Old Testament. Other researchers added to this hypothesis in the first half of the twentieth century, postulating that the rise of Islam may have been deeply influenced by close contact with a long established local Judaic community [Margoliouth, Montgomery, Torrey]. In 1985 the debate became extremely heated following the publication of Professor Kamal Salibi’s book The Bible came from Arabia. Salibi based his findings on Arab traditions and place names in Asir, Hijaz and Jizan provinces of present Saudi Arabia and concluded that Ancient Israel and Judah prior to 586 B.C. were in West Arabia spanning territory from north of Medina to Yemen. While incensing the maximalists, Salibi’s work was also condemned by Saudi Arabia, which believed he was suggesting that Israel had a divine right to annex its western provinces of Hijaz, Asir and Jizan. Interestingly Salibi received no support from the minimalists, one of whom (Silberman) privately implied to this writer that it was safer to deny the historical record than suggest it was true but located in West Arabia.

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The solution to the divide in Old Testament archaeology appears to rest in ancient Ethiopian traditions, inscriptions and documents concerning the Ark of the Covenant, the most revered possession of the Hebrew people. The Beta Israel (“Black Jews of Ethiopia”) and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church believe the Ark was brought to Ethiopia in about 950 B.C. by Menelik, son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. This booklet argues that the story is true.

The Hebrew Old Testament is silent on the fate of the Ark of the Covenant but the second century B.C. Second Book of Maccabees states it was hidden at Mt Nebo during the Babylonian invasion and destruction of 587-586 B.C. Traditions from Arabia, where arks were still being carried into battle in the 1920’s A.D. [Grierson and Munro-Hay:176-194, 244a] say the Arabs captured it from the Israelites in battle and it was flung on a dunghill [Parfitt 2008:213]

The most detailed account of what happened to the Ark is contained in the Ge’ez (Ancient Ethiopian) epic Kebra Nagast (Glory of the Kings). The Kebra Nagast was compiled in about A.D. 1314 in Aksum. It consists of two intertwined main documents of roughly equal length and a short conclusion. The earliest part is a totally Israelite (i.e. pre- 586 B.C.) document known as the Sheba-Menelik Cycle and appears to have been originally recorded in Solomon’s reign. The second part, the Caleb Cycle, was probably written in about A.D. 520 on the eve of the Christian invasion of Jewish Yemen [Shahid 1976; Leeman 2005, 2009]. A thorough study of the literary sources of the Kebra Nagast was undertaken in a 1956 doctoral thesis at St Andrew’s University Scotland by the late David Hubbard, who became principal of Fuller Theological College in California. Hubbard agreed with many earlier researchers that the Sheba-Menelik Cycle had been translated into Ge’ez from Arabic not from Coptic as the compilers claimed.

The Cycle begins with the account of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon’s capital of Jerusalem. The queen stays several months and just before she leaves Solomon insidiously tricks her into bearing his child, knowing that this will cause her to lose the right to rule in Yemen. The queen gives birth to her son Menelik on the bank of the Mai Bela stream in what is now Eritrea (“her mother’s country”) and remains queen of her African possessions with a capital at Aksum.

When Menelik comes of age he insists his mother names his father as he is tired of his friends’ taunting. Eventually he receives the queen’s approval to visit Solomon. Solomon is delighted with Menelik and when Menelik declines his offer to stay in Jerusalem Solomon makes arrangements for the establishment of a client Israelite state in Ethiopia administered by the eldest sons of the hierarchy of Solomon’s kingdom.

The eldest sons of the ruling elite led by Azariah, son of Zadok the high priest, are not happy with this arrangement and take steps to steal the Ark of the Covenant to sustain them in their new land. Azariah drugs the celebrants at the farewell dinner and enters the temple through a secret door removing the Ark from under its silk covering and replacing it with a wooden structure.
Menelik is oblivious to the theft and it is only after his party has travelled some way from Jerusalem that Azariah reveals the Ark. Menelik is shocked but then assents to the theft. The party races for Ethiopia.

Meanwhile Solomon is reminiscing with Zadok but his account of a dream in which he saw the Sun move from Judah to Ethiopia alerts Zadok, who rushes to the Temple and finds the Ark gone. Solomon orders an immediate pursuit but by the time his troops reach the coast, Menelik “has crossed to Ethiopia opposite Mt Sinai” (sic).

The Queen of Sheba agrees to rule jointly with Menelik. Dual monarchies in Aksum were still common in the Christian era. At length the queen abdicates and allows Menelik to rule alone over a mixed population of Sabaeans, Ethiopians and Israelites. The religion is officially Israelite, centred on the Ark of the Covenant (tabot) and the Law of Moses (orit). The state is regarded as the new Zion. The Sheba-Menelik Cycle states that Menelik expanded his territory.

Traditions from Tanzania and the Comoros islands respectively state that Menelik died and was buried in the crater of Mt. Kilimanjaro [Tanganyika Times 10 February 1928] and that Edomites stole the throne of Solomon and placed it in the crater of Mt. Katata [Prosperi 1957:142-3].

The Sheba-Menelik Cycle only describes events before 925 B.C. so it mentions neither Solomon’s death nor the breakup of his kingdom. The Old Testament Book of Kings and Josephus’s History of the Jews have accounts of the Queen of Sheba’s visit to King Solomon both of which appear to be summaries of the Sheba-Menelik narrative except they say nothing of events after the queen’s departure, such as the birth of Menelik, his visit to Jerusalem and the theft of the Ark. The Islamic Qur’an account differs in that it tells the story from Solomon’s perspective [see Appendix B].

The Evidence

The most important inscriptive evidence supporting the Sheba-Menelik Cycle is found on two of three Sabean incense burners [photo, page 37] kept in the Church of Abun Garima at Adi Kaweh, a hilltop village eight kilometers south-west of Wukro, near Mekele in Ethiopia [Schneider 1973; Leeman 2009]. The church is sited on a much older structure, most probably a major Sabean temple, because the two larger incense burners were found a short distance respectively at and below two other hill top Sabean structures to the east and west of Adi Kaweh. The eastern site is the alleged burial place of Queen Yodit, the pagan-Hebraic leader who destroyed Aksum in the 10th century A.D., and also the location of ca.800 B.C. Sabean temple in the process of excavation [Leeman 2009]. The Sabean inscriptions state that the area was part of the realm of D’mt and was ruled by four named high kings and kings of Sheba.

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2 Kilimanjaro’s crater was known to the Ethiopians before it was rediscovered by the Ashira Marangu army scout Kinyala Johannes Lauwo (1871-1996 [sic]) in the 1880’s and “officially” by Hans Meyer and Ludwig Pertscheller in 1889. Lauwo climbed the peak nine times before he realised there was a crater. He served as guide for the Meyer and Pertscheller’s 1889 first successful European ascent. Johannes Notch is named after him. www.ntz.info/gen/n00398.html, Leeman video interview with Kinyala Lauwo, Ashira 1993
and D’mt, three of whom ruled with unnamed high queens and queens of Sheba\(^3\) over a mixed population of red (Semitic) Sabaeans and black (Cushitic) BR (Hebrew) [Schneider 1973, Fattovich 1990].\(^4\) The inscriptions are the work of professional stone masons from Marib (Yemen) and indicate that the Sabaeans were at that time making a major effort to dominate the area while cooperating in conjunction with the local (probably Cushitic) population [Durrani:122]. It is generally assumed that the realm of D’mt with a major centre at Yeha, the site of a huge Sabaean temple, gave way to Aksum around the first century B.C. but this is not absolutely certain and the D’mt realm may have lasted until Queen Yodit’s time (she was queen of “Damot” ca. A.D. 970). The Adi Kaweh inscriptions therefore support the story that a mixed population of Sabaeans and Hebrew (Israelites) was ruled jointly by kings and queens of Sheba in northern Ethiopia one hundred and twenty five years after Solomon’s death and probably much earlier. The inscriptions at Adi Kaweh are the oldest mention of the Hebrew people.

The next piece of information concerns ancient Hebrew-Israelite populations, traditions, religious practices and customs in Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea. Until most were evacuated to Israel in the late 1980’s Ethiopia possessed a large population of Beta Israel (“Black Jews”, “Falasha”). They are the only “Judaic” group to contain Nazarites (like Samson). In addition there are many Ethiopians who claim they are Israelite in origin but converted to Christianity. These are known as “Falasha Mura.” Next are the Qemant, who practise a religion described as “pagan-Hebraic” [Gamst]; and the Yibir/Ibro (“Hebrew”), a landless Agaw serf caste in Somaliland, who are nominally Muslim but traditionally are despised and partly feared as being pagan-Hebraic sorcerers [Kirk 1905:184, Farah 2006:6, Leeman 2005, 2009]. In addition there is a group in Eritrea associated with the traditional landowning aristocracy of Hamasien and the present leadership of the Eritrean government known as “Latos” or “Mai Bela.” Because they are so secretive, no more than a paragraph has been published about them. The Israelis recognise them as Jews but they seem to a mixture of Israelites and Christians, a sort of Judeo-Christian group with a headquarters at Himberti, priests called kes and holy places called kansha [from kanisa meaning a church]. Outsiders call them Latos, from Pilatos (Pontius Pilate = Christ killer). They call themselves Mai Bela, from the river bank where Menelik was born [Leeman 2005, 2009].

Besides the pagan-Hebraic and Israelite groups there are the Ethiopian Orthodox Christians themselves who retain ancient Judaic practices and other elements, some of which are no longer associated with “main stream” Judaism. The chief authority on Hebraic influences in Ethiopia is Professor Edward Ullendorff [1920 - ], who

\(^3\) Despite continuing protests Wikipedia refuses to alter its erroneous statement in its D’MT entry that a work by Nadia Durrani [2005] names the queens

\(^4\) Neither of these “maximalist” authorities translated ‘BR (Hebrew) although the discovery of the word near or in modern Israel would have caused enormous interest. See excitement over similar words: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habiru
supervised David Hubbard’s thesis on the Kebra Nagast but unfortunately published his own work with untranslated important quotations from many dead and living languages (e.g. Syriac, Ge’ez, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Portuguese). Despite this, Ullendorff [1956, 1968] concludes that the Hebraic and First Temple Israelite influences in Ethiopia are very ancient while the Lebanese historian Kamal Salibi [1998b:62-63] suggests that a form of Israelite religion (“Nazarene”) associated with exiles who fled to Yemen from the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem was influential at the court of Aksum from about 586 BC to A.D. 332 and this faith was incorporated into Christianity in the fourth century A.D. to accommodate the tradition that Aksum was the True Zion as well as the keeper of the True Faith (Monophysite Christianity). Others argue that Monophysite Christianity around Antioch, Alexandria, and Byzantium/Constantinople had itself incorporated Jewish practices from the “Greeks” (Hellenised Jews) who formed the nucleus of early Christianity. Whatever the reason Ethiopian Christianity has a significant element of First Temple Israelite religion within it and some clerics such as Ewostatewos (ca.1273-1352) at Debra Bizen in Eritrea went into exile rather than accept a ban on “Jewish” practices, which is why both Saturday and Sunday are still respected as holy days [Tamrat 1977, Beylot 1995]. Ullendorff believes that maybe half of Ethiopia’s population was Israelite when Christianity was introduced. In areas such as Agame (where people still endure the insult “Yehud”) in northern Ethiopia and in Hamasien in Eritrea mass acceptance of Christianity has allegedly been fairly recent but the Latos/Mai Bela have chosen western churches instead of the Orthodox [Leeman 2005:185-6] and totally ignore Asmara’s Italian synagogue.

Fourth is the Ge’ez word for the Ark of the Covenant – “tabot.” There are two main authorities on this word. The first, Theodore Nöldeke (1836-1930) was so confused by the word that he termed it an “atrocious monstrosity” [Nöldeke 1860:211] because in his view the word should not exist because it had somehow come to Ethiopia during Solomon’s time. The second scholar, Chaim Rabin (1915-1996), was also deeply perplexed by the word. He concluded that the word was indeed ancient and had come from the Medina area of Arabia during Solomon’s era [Rabin 1951:109].

Fifth, the Hebrew Old Testament and Jewish traditions do not record how the Ark of the Covenant vanished. Nor do they explain why Azariah the high priest of Judah (the Sheba-Menelik Cycle identifies him as the son of the high priest) disappeared and his Zadokite priesthood only reappeared three hundred years later [Benjamin Mazar: 1992:98]. The Sheba-Menelik Cycle is the only document that details the reasons.

Sixth, the Sheba-Menelik Cycle contains the Torah/Orit (Law of Moses) that must have existed during the time of King Solomon [Leeman 2005, 2009]. It is certainly much older than the Torah in the “official” Old Testament because it omits the major part of the Laws of Deuteronomy, the Biblical book that authorities agree was compiled in the reign of Josiah (ca. 640-609 B.C.) during the high priesthood of
Hilkiah [Wright, 1996:6]. Hubbard noted that the Sheba-Menelik Cycle contains variants of the Old Testament whereas the Old Testament quotations in the Caleb Cycle adhere to the Christian era “official” Ge’ez version of the Old Testament. The Sheba-Menelik Cycle contains the Holiness Code [Leviticus 17-26], which Biblical Scholars agree is one of the oldest parts of the Old Testament.

Next, the German missionary Johann Martin Flad [1831-1915], noted that the Beta Israel, the First Temple Israelite Cushitic population of Ethiopia who have now mostly adopted Semitic Tigrinya and Amharic, recited Hebrew prayers in Agaw, although most no longer understood the meaning [Flad 1869; Leslau 1951:xxi]. In summarising the above evidence it seems that at the very least Ethiopia has an ancient association with the Israelite First Temple and a culture obsessed even today with the Ark of the Covenant reflecting the ancient existence of an Israelite state that eventually nearly obliterated the Christian state of Aksum under its pagan-Hebraic Queen Yodit ca. A.D. 970. It appears impossible to accept relatively recent writers’ contentions [Hancock, Kaplan, Quiran, Shelemay] that the Beta Israel adopted a syncretic form of Judaism from ca 500-400 B.C. Aramaic speaking Israelite troops at Elephantine (Aswan in Egypt) on the Nile or affected it in medieval times to distance themselves from their Semitic-speaking Christian overlords and escape imperial taxation.

There is much more. Ironically it is the seemingly ludicrous geographical references in the Sheba-Menelik Cycle that convincingly demonstrate that the Ark was indeed stolen from Jerusalem and brought to Ethiopia three thousand years ago and this leads to far greater issue of immense implications that most Biblical scholars will not even mention.

**Ethiopia is right, Israel is wrong**

Millions of dollars fund Old Testament research in the Holy Land (Palestine and Modern Israel). Although the Beta Israel are Africa’s most studied people, Ethiopian studies receive very little funding. Even the Wukro I site at Adi Kaweh, which may prove to be one of Biblical archaeology’s most important sites, is being excavated by a “maximalist” German team. William Dever, who ridiculed Salibi, has received over a million dollars of archaeological funding but has never once made any investigation of the origins of Arabian Judaism [Leeman 2005:149] which, as Torrey observed, is seemingly illogical because most Arabian Jews were historically located in the Yemen and their numbers diminished towards Palestine, whereas it would be more reasonable to expect the opposite should be true [Torrey 1967:21].

Although Old Testament scholars ignored or vilified Salibi, his hypothesis, as Mazrui noted, appears to support the Sheba-Menelik Cycle’s narrative as well as solving issues concerning Arabian Judaism. In his 1951 publication *Ancient West Arabian*, Chaim Rabin noted that there was a large amount of Hebrew vocabulary and grammar in the dialects of West Arabia. He could offer no explanation for the “surprising similarities and parallelisms of West Arabian with Canaanite” [Rabin:2-
and concluded, “This is not the place to work out the historical implications of this, especially as it affects the darkest part of Arab history” [Rabin:199]. Fascinatingly, these dialects were in exactly the same area that Salibi had found the place names of the Hebrew Old Testament although he himself only realised it in 2010 [email to Leeman 2 March]. Secondly there are very obvious reasons why an ancient Arabian Judah could have prospered and reached a zenith in the period 1000-925 B.C. and then lost power to Israel in Omri’s reign. Salibi placed Israel in the northern Hijaz near Medina and Judah in the south in Asir next to Yemen. Following the ca. 1200 B.C. domestication of the camel, which Arab traditions ascribe to the Hebrew, the western Arabian escarpment became an important trade route for Sabaean/Sheban gold, gemstones and incense caravans and attracted Egyptian and Assyrian imperial control. However, between about 1000-925 B.C. the Egyptians withdrew to deal with invasions by the Sea Peoples [Kitchen 2003: 99-100] while Assyria pulled back to counter the threat of Aramaean population movements near the border of what is now modern Turkey [Lipiński 2000]. These withdrawals opened the way for an opportunistic local population (e.g. the Hebrew) to seize control of the lucrative Sabaean trade and grow rich from taxing the caravans. Despite the 460 year captivity Hebrew has no Egyptian words but Rabin noted in another work that it contains trade words such as “sapphires” from India, which appears to indicate it was on a major trade route from India to Egypt [Rabin 1968].

Salibi’s work has been of vital assistance in deciphering the geography of the Sheba-Menelik Cycle and had he taken much earlier notice of the large number of emails and letters urging him to consider Rabin’s work and the Ethiopian evidence his arguments, too reliant on place names, would have probably gained much wider acceptance.

Much confusion has been caused in Old Testament studies because of place names. Edward Robinson was chiefly responsible for the haphazard unscientific wildly speculative methods used to identify locations in Palestine in 1837-8 and 1852 [Leeman 2005:22]. European Jewish traditions and scholarship have also been very unreliable, being over-influenced by the drive to prove that Palestine is the Promised Land and therefore the Jewish homeland through divine will. The definitive Hebrew Old Testament was published in about A.D. 950, six hundred years after the New Testament, by the Masoretic scholars, two priestly families based in Galilee and Babylon. These scribes laboured for four hundred and fifty years to complete their task. The original Old Testament had been written only with Hebrew consonants since vowels were considered divine sounds. Languages change over time, sometimes rapidly. For example modern English speakers would find it impossible to understand the English of King Harold of Hastings let alone the Anglo-Saxon of A.D.500. The Arabic and Aramaic speaking Masoretic scholars put the vowels into the Hebrew Old Testament while admitting that in three hundred and fifty places they had no idea

3 The Hebrew adopted Canaanite as their language.
of the original meaning [Encyclopaedia Judaica]. Words such as MSR and MSRM were taken to mean Egypt, while KWS and KSM were equated with Ethiopia or Sudan. Salibi suggested that in some places these words refer to cities not countries. He also argued that the Jordan (H-YRDN) was not a river but the escarpment in Arabia that rises from the coastal plain to the mountain range known as the Tihama or Sarawat. Many Arab traditions support Salibi’s suggestions. For example Mecca is associated with Abraham and there is an ancient tradition the Red Sea was once blocked by a volcanic lava flow at the strait of Bab-el-Mandeb between Yemen and Eritrea which then broke causing massive death and destruction in the subsequent flood. Interestingly the word for Hebrew in Hebrew and Sabaean is not only identical (‘BR) but has a second meaning in both languages of “those who crossed over” [Biella:350]. Since the Beta Israel and the Zagwe royal house have strong traditions about Moses, there is speculation that Moses’ Red Sea crossing may have been at its southern end. Support for this comes from Moses’ marriage to Zipporah, the Cushite daughter of the Prophet Jethro. Salibi places Zipporah’s home as Kush (Kshm) next to the volcanic mountain in northern Yemen named Jebel al-Nabi Shu’ayb - the mountain of the prophet Shu’ayb. Shu’ayb is Arabic for Jethro. In 1997 a team of Canadian archaeologists [Keall 1997] discovered a ring of large monoliths on the coastal plain below Jebel al-Nabi Shu’ayb dating from about 1800 B.C. (Moses’ era) and therefore, if Salibi’s Arabian location for the Exodus is true, the pillars may be the same mentioned in Exodus 24:4. Perhaps the Hebrew captivity occurred near or in Ethiopia.

Whoever wrote the Sheba-Menelik Cycle was obviously not referring to a Jerusalem in Palestine. On page 11 is a map of Menelik’s journey from Jerusalem to Ethiopia with Jerusalem sited in Palestine. The account makes no sense.

When Salibi’s book was published in 1985 this writer wrote to him about the strange geography of the Sheba-Menelik Cycle and asked him to send his hypothetical map of an Arabian Judah marking place names mentioned in the Ethiopian document in case the Cycle’s contents matched his hypothesis of an ancient Judah in West Arabia. Salibi replied [Letter 15 February 1987] that he was not conversant with the Sheba-Menelik Cycle but kindly sent his map. The result was sensational for it showed that the author of the Sheba-Menelik Cycle was referring to a Judah opposite Ethiopia in West Arabia not to one in Palestine.

A map of Menelik’s journey from Jerusalem to Ethiopia with Jerusalem and other locations sited by Salibi in West Arabia is on page 12. Since Salibi drew his map blind to the Sheba-Menelik Cycle narrative of the journey of the Ark from Jerusalem to Ethiopia, the result is quite astonishing. It explains why the Beta Israel traditionally prayed to a Jerusalem in the east (in Arabia), not one to the north (in Palestine). It would also explain why the word “Falasha” and the word for the Beta Israel’s house of prayer are both Sabaean in origin [Biella;405; Leslau 1991:363] but most of all why Ethiopian culture is so heavily Judaic, obsessed with the Ark and drew its political legitimacy from Moses (Zagwe dynasty ca A.D. 1137-1270) and Solomon (Haile
Selaisse). The short period of imperial Sabean occupation and high culture ca.800 – 500 B.C. could probably be attributed to Sabean attempts to find other trade routes to escape the instability in West Arabia as the united kingdoms of Israel and Judah vied for supremacy and were then respectively destroyed by Assyria and Babylon. Jacqueline Pirenne [1918-1990] suggested that the Beta Israel, First Temple Israelites, were refugees from the Assyrian (772 B.C.) and Babylonian (587 B.C.) conquests [Munro-Hay 1991:65]. Two Sabean monarchs gave tribute to the Assyrians in 456 and 487 B.C., indicating the Assyrians were far closer than Palestine. [Schippmann 2001:39].

Although the Ethiopian evidence supporting the Salibi hypothesis has been widely distributed since 1985 it has been completely ignored in almost every publication. The Saudi reaction was extreme, bulldozing sites named by Salibi as probable locations of Old Testament cities such as An Nimas (Jerusalem), south of Taif. Salibi’s book was banned in Saudi Arabia and Syria for implying that Modern Israel should annex Asir and Hijaz provinces. All references to this writer’s work that argued that evidence from the life of the Queen of Sheba supports Salibi’s hypothesis have systematically been removed from Wikipedia from early 2010 onwards and a Saudi student arrested and briefly jailed when a copy was found on his return home. While the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Beta Israel, the Yemeni Jews, the Rastafarians, Ethiopian and Eritrean university students and tour guides, and David Hubbard were intrigued by the idea of an Arabian Judah, it was not considered of any merit by Israel Finkelstein, Roderick Grierson, Graham Hancock, Stuart Munro Hay, Richard Pankhurst, Roger Schneider, Kay Kaufmann Shelemay, Thomas Thompson, and two thousand (sic) other Biblical and Ethiopian scholars and writers contacted between 1990 and 2010. If Ancient Israel and Judah were indeed located in West Arabia it would make the research of thousands of academics appear extremely careless and trivial and completely undermine the raison d’être of the State of Israel. One important consequence however would be to make early Ethiopian history, Beta Israel and Ethiopian Orthodox Church traditions, and the Ge’ez language major biblical and historical academic disciplines. However the Arabian Judah hypothesis appears too much of a threat to academic funding, academic reputations, Holy Land tourism, and political agenda to warrant consideration let alone open debate.

Conclusion

The Ark of the Covenant, according to the few reliable accounts that exist, is a wooden box containing a milky stone tablet that in the past exuded a mysterious light. It is almost certainly housed in Aksum and came to Ethiopia during Solomon’s reign from Arabia. Most people who have written about the Ark never carefully read the Sheba-Menelik Cycle in Ge’ez. The best translation is by Carl Bezold in German in 1909 (republished 2009). A very inferior version was accomplished by Ernest Wallis Budge, who appears merely to have translated Bezold’s German translation into English. Bezold was influenced by the assumption that Jerusalem was in Palestine and
therefore translated “City of Msrn” as “Country of Egypt” although he was astute enough to translate one section as the “water flow” whereas Budge put “the Takezze River” [Leeman 2005:162]. Bezold and Budge were not the first to insert their own interpretation. The original compilers of the Kebra Nagast, puzzled by the geography of the Sheba-Menelik Cycle, interpolated a section that told of Solomon’s pursuit party being informed by Egyptian officials that Menelik’s entourage had passed through Alexandria and Cairo, cities built centuries after Solomon’s era [Leeman 2005:161,166]. Graham Hancock, the most famous “maximalist” writer on the Ark of the Covenant, completely missed this point [Hancock: 213, 219, 222].

Several reasons explain why the Ethiopian evidence has been ridiculed ever since James Bruce’s epic account of ancient ties with the Old Testament was published in the 18th century. Firstly there is enormous racial and paternalistic prejudice towards Ethiopia and those who identify with it, especially the Rastafarians; and anything that can construed as a malevolent Arab agenda against Israel (Salibi is in fact a Protestant Christian). Biblical Scholarship hardly ever needs to exert itself against criticism because it is defended in depth by millions of supporters whose ignorance is matched by fanaticism, and also by newspapers, academic journals, publishing houses and other media too timid to challenge accepted wisdom. Secondly there are theological implications. The Sheba-Menelik Cycle states that Solomon’s behaviour towards the Queen of Sheba cost Judah and Israel its status as the kingdom of God’s Chosen People. Thereafter Ethiopia became the True Zion. The Sheba-Menelik Cycle was almost certainly written in Solomon’s time because it does not mention the catastrophes that befell the united kingdoms after his death, which could be construed as confirming that Judah and Israel had lost divine grace. If the Sheba-Menelik Cycle account is true, serious question arise about the standards and objectivity of Western Jewish and Christian scholarship.

Early Ethiopian history has so far been written by Biblical maximalists who interpret Ethiopian traditions and customs through the flawed comparison with an Old Testament located in Palestine. Although Biblical maximalists continue to interpret any find in Palestine and Israel as proof that the Old Testament occurred entirely in that area, inevitably the lack of findings combined with human curiosity must eventually lead to a reassessment of the Ethiopian and Arabian evidence. Until serious archaeological investigations commence in Asir and Hijaz the Ethiopian records concerning the Ark of the Covenant are the most important evidence along with the work of Rabin on West Arabian and Schneider at Adi Kaweh proving that Moses, Joshua, David, and Solomon existed. The records strongly indicate that indeed there once was a powerful united kingdom of Judah and Israel that for seventy five years under David and Solomon played an important historical role in the Middle East and made an indelible imprint on the history and culture of Ethiopia.

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Map 1: The geography of Menelik's route according to the *Kebra Nagast* with Jerusalem in Palestine and *Msr/Mzrm* translated to mean *Egypt*. Jerusalem – Gaza – border – arrival in Ethiopia opposite Mt Sinai.
Map 2: The geography of the movements of the Ark of the Covenant according to the Salibi hypothesis

**Biblical account of the Ark's movements:** Shiloh – Eben – Ashdod – Gath – Beth Shemesh – Gibeah – Goren – City of David – Jerusalem

**Sheba-Menelik Cycle account of Menelik's route:** Jerusalem – Gaza – border of Egypt – Waters of Ethiopia – Brook of Egypt – Sea of Eritrea – arrival in Ethiopia opposite Mt Sinai
APPENDIX A

1. The Jewish Torah and the Israelite Torah of the Queen of Sheba

The Torah in the Sheba-Menelik Cycle is listed in Chapters 41, 42, 89, 90, and 91 of the Kebra Nagast. This Torah seems to be that which existed when the Queen of Sheba accepted the Israelite faith. Certainly scholars are in agreement that the laws governing sexual relations are from the Holiness Code [Leviticus 17-26], one of the oldest parts of the Hebrew Bible.

It is illuminating to compare the Sheba-Menelik Torah with the 613 commandments of the Jewish Torah [available at several sites on the Internet and about 7500 words in length]. The Jewish Torah emphasizes racial purity. It accepts slavery. It has highly detailed rituals and has laws relating to personal matters, urban bureaucratic centralized government, and the priesthood. It calls for respect for prophets but death for those who dissent. It gives a privileged role to hereditary priest clans, the Levites and Kohenin, and sanctions taxation to maintain them. It outlines regulations concerning kingship. The laws from Deuteronomy that enhance the priesthood, establish central control, demand racial exclusiveness and theological conformity, are listed below, followed by brief comments and the Torah of the Sheba-Menelik Cycle itself:

Bring all offerings to Jerusalem. Deuteronomy xii. 5, 6
Offer all sacrifices in the Temple. xii. 14
Bring to the Temple also the offerings from beyond the land of Israel. xii. 26
Obey the prophet of each generation if he neither adds nor takes away from the statutes. xviii. 15
Appoint a king. xviii. 1
Obey the authority of the Sanhedrin. xvii. 11
Appoint judges in every town. xvi. 18
Destroy idolaters and burn their city. xii. 2, xiii. 16
Destroy the seven Canaanite nations. xx. 17
Blot out the remembrance of Amalek. xxv. 17
Neither fear a false prophet nor hinder any one from killing him. xviii
Never show mercy to or intermarrry with idolaters or allow them to live in your land.
[Also in Exodus xxiii. 33; and vii. 2, 3]

Never permit the marriage of a daughter of Israel with an Ammonite or Moabite. xxiii. 3
Never offer peace to the Ammonites and Moabites in time of war. xxiii. 6
Never forget the evil done by Amalek. xxv. 19
Never leave any Levite without support. xii. 19
None of these issues are mentioned in the Sheba-Menelik Torah. On the other hand, the Jewish Torah has a section on laws relating to Nazarites, who only exist among Ethiopia’s Beta Israel.

Hilkiah’s success in using the book of Deuteronomy to massacre and defile the Samaritan priesthood was followed later by Ezekiel’s “vision” and Ezra’s draconian measures that distanced the Jewish colony of New Jerusalem from the tolerance of the earlier Torah.

The provisions of the Israelite Torah in the Sheba-Menelik Cycle are listed on the next page. The Torah of the Queen of Sheba is obviously much older than the “official” Torah in the Hebrew Old Testament. It indubitably was written before 600 BC and most probably during Solomon’s reign. It is quite extraordinary and indicative of the narrow focus of Old Testament researchers that it was not until 2005 that any scholar pointed out its antiquity.
2. The Israelite Torah According to the Sheba-Menelik Cycle

Chapter 41 [Kebra Nagast]

Do God’s work
Have no other God
Don’t get angry
Treat good people well
Criticize sinners
Deal harshly in court with violence against people
Treat poor people and orphans well and defend them
Protect and restore abandoned and unhappy people
Judge impartially irrespective of background
Never accept bribes

Chapter 42

Respect only the one true god
Don’t worship material objects
Don’t make a false oath invoking God’s name
Respect as holy the seventh day of the week and do no work that day
Treat your parents well
Don’t have sex with someone else’s wife
Don’t kill anyone
Don’t have sex outside marriage
Don’t steal
Don’t give false testament
Don’t desire anything belonging to another person

A man must not have sex with the following:

Sister, half sister, step sister, adopted sister
Son’s daughter
Daughter’s daughter
Father’s sister
Mother’s sister
Father’s brother’s sister
Son’s wife
Daughter
Brother’s son’s daughter
Brother’s wife
Woman and her daughter
Woman and her son’s daughter
Woman and her daughter’s daughter
A menstruous woman
Your neighbour’s wife
Another man
An animal

Don’t marry sisters while both live
Don’t offer your children to Moloch

A woman must not have sex with an animal

“Sanctify ye your souls and your bodies to God”
Chapter 89
Love what is right
Hate deceit
Don’t be fraudulent
Don’t oppress
Don’t make auguries from birds or signs
Don’t use charms
Don’t use incantations
Don’t use portents
Don’t use magic

Chapter 90
Don’t eat the meat of an animal that died of natural causes or was killed by other animals
Keep sex within marriage
Don’t use force to settle disputes
Don’t rob your neighbour
Don’t abuse each other
Don’t oppress anyone
Don’t quarrel
Return stray livestock
Report livestock in difficulties and assist in their retrieval
If you dig a well, cover it
If you build a shelter, put a roof over it
Help people carrying heavy loads

Don’t cook the meat of animal in the milk of its mother
Respect and defend the rights of the poor and orphans
Don’t take bribes
Refuse to be corrupted
Neither harm birds with young nor remove the young birds
Don’t harvest the entire crop
Keep surplus food for strangers
Don’t engage in dishonest and immoral activities
Judge fairly
Don’t bully people
Don’t mistreat the infirm
Don’t have sex with your father’s partners
Don’t cheat your neighbours
Don’t cause death by perverting justice for aliens
Respect your parents and don’t treat them lightly
Don’t worship material objects
Don’t have sex with animals
Men must not have sex with other men
Don’t kill innocent people
Don’t worship other gods
Chapter 91

Acceptable food

Ox
Sheep
Goat
Ram
Stag
Gazelle
Buffalo
Antelope
Oryx
Any animal with cleft foot and nails
Fish with scales and fins
Birds with clean habits

Forbidden food

Pig Sea gull
Camel Heron
Wolf Swan
Hare Ibis
Coney [rabbit or hyrax] Pelican
Water creatures without fins and scales Hoopoe
Birds with unclean habits Night raven
Vulture Hornbill
Eagle Water piper
Osprey Water hen
Raven Bat
Owl Locust
Hawk Grasshopper
Flying or springing creatures with two to six legs [nor touch their dead bodies]
## APPENDIX B

### COMPARISON OF EVENTS DURING THE QUEEN OF SHEBA’S VISIT TO KING SOLOMON

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Came with gifts</td>
<td>Came with large retinue and gifts</td>
<td>Came with large retinue and gifts</td>
<td>Solomon learns the queen worships the sun and orders her to submit to him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took up residence in the palace</td>
<td>Amazed at the palace</td>
<td>Questioned Solomon</td>
<td>Solomon rejects her gift of gold and threatens invasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the wonderful food</td>
<td>Amazed at sumptuous apartments</td>
<td>Solomon answered all her questions</td>
<td>Solomon obtains the queen’s throne and alters it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was given beautiful clothes</td>
<td>Was shown the house known as the Forest of Lebanon</td>
<td>Was impressed by Solomon’s wisdom, palace, food, seating arrangements, attendants’ clothes, wine, and burnt offerings</td>
<td>The queen visits and is tested by a glass floor and the altered throne. She submits to Solomon and adopts his religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Solomon’s wisdom</td>
<td>Description of the daily food and its preparation</td>
<td>Declared she was deeply impressed</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Had her questions answered</td>
<td>Saw beautiful clothes of the servants</td>
<td>Gave gifts of gold and spices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily given food and clothes</td>
<td>Witnessed Solomon’s administration</td>
<td>Acknowledged benign influence of Solomon’s God</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saw how table was prepared</td>
<td>Witnessed daily sacrifices</td>
<td>Solomon reciprocated in official and other ways</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Amazed at the palace</td>
<td>Believed things were better than expected</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazed at sumptuous apartments</td>
<td>Believed that the Hebrew were a blessed people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Witnessed daily burning of incense</td>
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<tr>
<td>Converted to Solomon’s religion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tricked by Solomon into bearing his child</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

Ge’ez transcript of sections of the Sheba-Menelik Cycle of the Kebra Nagast concerning the route of the Ark of the Covenant from Jerusalem to Ethiopia

CHAPTER 53 20
CHAPTER 55 23
CHAPTER 58 26
CHAPTER 59 28
CHAPTERS 53-59 30-33
Transliterated and translated
Chapter 53 of the Kebra Nagast

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Chapter 58 of the Kebra Nagast

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Chapter 53 [first section]

Xeba tawhba saragala la’ityopya

Wabaxeba xedarusa gāzā hagara ’emu laneguš zāwahaba soba tmaqü’e xecēlu neguš salomon lanegušta ’ityopyā. Wa’emliya bashu ba’ahati ’elat westa dawala gebes ’enta smā megrin wasoba r’euq xedālu xeyalāna ’esrā’ ēl kama ba’ahati ’elat bashu mēhwāra 13 ’elat wa’idakmu wa’ixbu wa’iṣab’e wa’i’enssā wakwilomu kama zasobē šagbu wastyu ’a’imaru wa’amnu ’emuntu daqiqa xeyl kama ’emxeba ’egzi’abhēr konat zati waybēlwe lanegušmu nāwrd saragālāte ’esma baṣāhna māyya ’ityopyā zāti y’eti takazi ’enta tward ’em’ityopyā watsaqi falaga gebes wa’awradu saragalātihomu ĥiya watkalu dabīt rihomu. Wahoru xbura daqiqa xeyl wasadedu kwilo ’ahzaba. Waybēlwe lanegušmu ngrkanu nagara la’ema tkl ta’aqṣo waybēlomu ’ewa ’ekl wala’ema tbēluni ’eska ’elata motya ’iyawad’e wa’iẏāś’e.

The translation reads:

How the transport of the Ark reached Ethiopia

They halted at Gaza, the city of the king’s mother, which King Solomon had given to the Queen of Ethiopia when she visited him. From there they took a single day to travel to Gebes [Egypt], the name of which is Mesrin. When the children of the leaders of Israel saw that they and their animals had taken one day to travel a distance that usually took thirteen without getting tired or hungry or thirsty and indeed felt that they had eaten and drunk their fill, they believed it was God’s work. They spoke to their king [Menelik “Let us put our loads down for we have arrived at the waters of Ethiopia. This is the flow that comes from Ethiopia and waters the Brook of Gebes [Egypt].” And so they let down their transports [made their camels kneel?] and pitched their tents.

Chapter 55 [extracts]

Ba’nta zatafasu sab’a ityopya

Watanš’u saragalātini kamu qadimu wagēšu baṣbāh yhēlyu lāti watalā’lu kwilomu maṭana ’emät ’enza yastaفاعwwomu sab’a bhera Gebes xelafu baqdmēhomo kama slalot wasagadu lomu sab’ā bhera Gebes ’esma r’eywā ’enza trawṣ kama dhay bawesta samāy wakwilomu yrawsu basaragalā ’enza yrawsu baqdmēhā wabedxrēnā. Wabashu Bahra ’al ’Ahmar ’enta y ’eti Bahra ’Ireterā…….labāhra ’Ireterā wawasab’a ’tyopya wawad’u bāhra
The translation reads:

**How the people of Ethiopia rejoiced**

Then the transports [camels?] rose up early in the morning and left and the people sung praises to Zion and they were all raised up to the height of a cubit. They passed by like shadows and the people of Egypt called out their farewells and the people of Egypt paid homage to Zion as she flew above them by accompanying her transport before and behind. Then they came to the Sea of Al-Ahmar, which is the Sea of Eritrea [the Red Sea] … And the Sea of Eritrea was joyful as too were the people of Ethiopia, who went to the sea and celebrated mightily with a greater pleasure than did Israel after the escape from Egypt. They arrived opposite Mount Sinai and stayed some time in Qades and then they loaded their transports, rose up and departed, passing to the land of Mdyam and then the city of Belontos, a city of Ethiopia …

Chapter 58 contains the account of Solomon’s pursuit.

**Chapter 58** [sentence four onwards]

_Xaba tans’a salomon yotlomu_

Wahoru wabashu hagara msr xaba ta’yanu hya sab’a ityopya msla negušomu waxabahi tasalamwa lasyon watafašhu wahatatu kiyahomu ḥara neguš waybêlwmomu sab’a bhēru _gebeq_ ’emrhq maw ā’el bazya xalafu sab’a ’ityopyā ’emna yrawsu basaragalā kama malāʾekt wayqallu ’emna ’ansrt bawesta samāy waybêlwomu mā’azē ’elat xalafu ’emmēkmu waybêlwomu yom tasarım’e mawa’el bazu xalafu ’emnēna. Wabo ’emmēhomu ’ela gab’u wanagarwo languš salomon kama xalafu tasarım’u mawā’el ’emza xalafu ’emsr _wa’abyăšinasa_ horu kama xyešu ’eska _bahṛ _’irtrā_ wānhnasa gabā’ena kama nngrka zanta ’esku xali lalika neguš ba’elata sanuy ’emkama wadj’u emxabeka bašhu bašalus xaba _falaga takazi_ hagara msr walananí soba fanawkana _em’ilyarusālem_ basāhna ba’elata rāb’ē xalikē bašbab maṭana ybashu ’emuntu sab’e.

Watan’a neguš waybē ’axezwomu xamsṭihomu ’aska nnrak ṣdqa qašomu. Wa’aftanu ḥawira neguš wasarawitu wabasu _gaza_ wattas’elomu waybêlomu ma’azē xalafa waldya ’emanēkmu. ’Awṣu waybelu xalafā y’eti šalus ‘elat wasoba sa’anu saragālatihomu ’albo zayahawr mal’elta mdr ’alā basaragalā sqūłān
mal’alta nafus wayqallu ‘emna ‘ansrt zawesta samay wakwilu nwayomu yaḥawr/mslēhomu mal’elta nafās basaragalā walanasā masalana zaʼānta rasayka lomu baṭbabka kama yhoru basaragalā mal’elta nafās. Waybēlomu bonu zahalawat syon tabota hgu la’egziʼabheır mslēhomu weybēlwo ālbo zar’ine.

The translation is:

**How Solomon rose up to kill them**

And Solomon’s cavalry sped on and reached the city of Msr where the men of Ethiopia had camped with their king and where they had made peace with Zion and rejoiced. And Solomon’s troopers questioned the people and the men of the region of Gebes told them “Some days ago some Ethiopians passed through here and they traveled swiftly in wagons like angels and faster than eagles.” And the king’s men asked, “How many days ago did they leave?” And the men of Gebes told them nine days had passed since they left. Then some of the troopers returned to Solomon and told him, “It’s been nine days since the Abyssinians left Msr. Some of our detachment have gone to look for them at the Sea of Eritrea hut we came hack to report the situation. Consider the matter, my lord. On the second day they left your territory and on the third they reached the river at the city of Mesr. And after being sent out by you from Jerusalem we arrived on the day of the Sabbath. And we returned today, the fourth day of the week. You can estimate just how far those men have traveled.” At this the king became extremely angry and ordered the five cavalrymen to be seized and held until their story was checked. Then the king set out with troops for Gaza where he asked the people when his son had left. They replied that he had departed three days earlier, adding “and having loaded their wagons, none of them traveled on the ground but in wagons suspended in the air. And they were swifter than the eagles in the sky, and all their loads traveled with them in wagons above the winds. As for us, we thought you had in your wisdom, enabled them to travel in this way.” But when the king asked them if the fugitives were carrying Zion, the Tabernacle of the Law of God, they replied they had seen nothing.
Chapter 59 appears mostly to be an interpolation but the reference to a three day journey to the Brook of Egypt is probably genuine.

Chapter 59 [first section]

Xaba hatato lagbsawi gabra far‘on

The translation reads:

**How the king questioned an Egyptian, the servant of Pharaoh**
And Solomon left that place, and he met an emissary from the courtiers of the Pharaoh of Egypt, whom the Pharaoh had dispatched with a gift to present Solomon along with much treasure. He arrived and paid his respects to the king. King Solomon was so anxious to discover what had happened that he began asking questions even before the emissary had presented his gift and his compliments, saying, “Have you seen a band of Ethiopian fugitives pass this way?” Pharaoh’s ambassador responded to the king, stating, “Oh king, live forever! My lord, King Pharaoh, dispatched me from Alexandria to see you. And so, I will tell you how I have come. Having left Alexandria I arrived in Cairo, the city of the king, and there encountered those Ethiopians of whom you speak for they had arrived there too. They reached there after a passage of three days to the watercourse, the brook of Egypt…. 
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The oldest known inscription mentioning the Hebrew people - שִׁמְיָן - [line 3 reading right to left. Sabaean inscriptions are boustrophedonic = bi-directional] discovered on two ca.750 B.C. Sabaean/Sheban incense burners at Adi Kaweh, Leeman 2009
The marked area is the region that contains the Hebrew/Canaanite vocabulary and syntax recorded by Chaim Rabin in Ancient West Arabian, the Old Testament place names noted by Kamal Salibi, iron deposits (David and Solomon were famous armourers), and an ancient Ark culture. It also straddles the lucrative incense, gold, precious stones and luxury goods trade routes from Sabaea (Sheba). This area was temporarily abandoned by Egyptian and Assyrian imperial control ca. 1000-925 B.C., the same years as the zenith of the Israelite states under David and Solomon.
Xi Wang Mu, the Daoist Queen of the West (her location was the Kunlun mountains of western China), is believed by some authorities to be one and the same as the Queen Sheba (the Queen of the South). They lived in the same era, had relations with powerful monarchs, and cultivated plants associated with immortality (incense, myrrh, and a magical peach). Both were religious leaders and queens of the jinn (genies). Sheba’s Torah has similarities to the Daoist emphasis on respecting nature and gender equality.

A Persian tradition states the Queen of Sheba was the daughter of a Chinese ruler and a peri (jinn). Arab traditions say her mother was queen of the jinn.
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