

**THE SABAEAN INSCRIPTIONS AT ADI KAWEH – EVIDENCE  
SUPPORTING THE NARRATIVE OF THE *SHEBA-MENELIK CYCLE* OF THE  
*KEBRA NAGAST***

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Dr Bernard Leeman**

Inscriptions on two ca. 750 B.C.E incense burners at Adi Kaweh, Ethiopia, appear to be linked to the Hebrew *Old Testament* and, besides confirming ancient Ethiopia traditions concerning King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, may also help solve the present bitter divide in Biblical archaeology.

The *Old Testament* has inspired but severely complicated archaeology in its presumed setting of Palestine. Nineteenth century excavations undertaken elsewhere by enthusiasts with preconceived notions had severely damaged evidence at Great Zimbabwe and the probable site of Troy but a more professional approach was utilized when excavations commenced in Palestine in 1920 even though their main purpose was to uncover evidence to support the Old Testament record. However even meticulous archaeologists such as Kathleen Kenyon, who had worked at Great Zimbabwe and expressed her doubts on the evidence from Biblical Jericho [Kenyon 1960:313-314], were convinced that Palestine was the location for Solomon's and Omri's spectacular public edifices [Kenyon 1978: 67-70]. Nevertheless from the 1970's onwards these preconceptions were challenged to such an extent that today Biblical scholars are split between *minimalists*, including some of Israel's leading archaeologists, who argue the *Old Testament* record is either total fantasy or at best a highly exaggerated account; and *maximalists*, who believe that evidence has already been or will eventually be forthcoming to support the Biblical account. The minimalist stance is particularly contentious as it is interpreted as a threat to the *raison d'être* of the State of Israel.

The *Old Testament* tells of the Hebrew, a landless enslaved people led to freedom and a divinely ordained Promised Land under a leader named Moses, who united them under a

single god and a code of law. Moses' successor Joshua conquered the land of Canaan where the Hebrew intermarried with the defeated population to become Israelites. The Israelites were at first ruled by patriarchs known as judges but then developed two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, which were united by a new royal dynasty led by David of the tribe of Judah and reached a zenith under his son Solomon. The kingdoms then split and were in turn destroyed respectively by the Assyrians (722 B.C.E.) and Babylonians (586 B.C.E.) The deported hierarchy of Judah then conspired with the Persians to overthrow the Babylonians and were rewarded with a land grant centred on Jerusalem. The Old Testament account from ca. 450 onwards has been verified by archaeological and other evidence but fierce controversy remains over the pre-exilic period.

The *maximalist* school of thought, almost unchallenged until the 1970's, has dominated investigation into Ethiopia and Eritrea's ancient inscriptions, documents, vocabulary, and religious observances legends that are linked to the Old Testament. The two imperial dynasties of Zagwe (ca. A.D. 1137 to 1270) and Solomon (ca. 930 B.C.E – A.D. 970, ca. 1270 – 1974) respectively claimed descent from the Hebrew prophet Moses and the Israelite monarch Solomon [Conti Rossini 1928:303-322; Kessler 1985:111]. The culture of both counties is still dominated by the story of the meeting of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon; and also the 6<sup>th</sup> century Aksumite crusade against the Jewish messiah in Himyar (Yemen) and the violent Agaw pagan-Hebraic reaction to Monophysite Christian expansion in the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Until the 1960's, when archaeology in the Holy Land (modern Israel and Palestine) began to undermine confidence in the Old Testament narrative, most outsiders dismissed the Ethiopian/Eritrean traditions as baseless and of recent invention. During the Ethiopian civil war of the 1980's the majority of the Judaic Beta Israel community, many of them part of the huge Ethiopian refugee population in the Sudan, accepted the offer of migration or evacuation to Israel [Rapoport 1986]. The Beta Israel's religious practices and

original texts were First Temple pre-622 B.C.E. Israelite not Second Temple fifth century B.C.E. Jewish and consequently assimilation into “normative” Judaism in Israel has seriously compromised their heritage and identity.

While Old Testament scholarship has gravitated between the parameters of “minimalists” and “maximalists” hardly any Old Testament academics consider the alternative hypothesis of an “Arabian Judah.” This paper provides Ethiopian evidence to support the premise that until the Babylonian destruction of Judah in 586 B.C.E. the events of the Old Testament occurred not in Palestine but in Western Arabia and to a lesser extent on the Ethiopian/Eritrean plateau.

The Hebrew Old Testament was standardised and vocalised ca. A.D. 500 and 950 by two priestly families known as the Masoretic scholars Biblical Hebrew is artificial, a mixture of fifth century B.C.E. Hebrew consonants and tenth century A.D. Aramaic vowels and in over 350 instances the Aramaic and Arabic speaking compilers admitted they were uncertain what the original unvocalised text meant [Encyclopedia Judaica:Masorettes; Tov 2001:8-9]. However the *Septuagint*, the pre Christian Koine Greek language version, probably from a different source than the “standard” Masoretic Hebrew text, provides confirmation that the “standard” Masoretic version adheres to the traditions and beliefs of the post exilic Jerusalem theocracy of ca 450 B.C.E. The editors of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Christian New Testament omitted or suppressed several manuscripts related to their canon. The Gnostic Christian *Nag Hammadi Library*, unearthed in 1945, is a well known suppressed example that has inspired popular literature and films such as *The Da Vinci Code*. In the case of the Old Testament some books seem to have been lost such as the *Book of Jashar* or suppressed like the *Book of Jubilees*. The book which concerns this paper is the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle*, which is a part of the Ge’ez *Kebrā Nagast*.

The Hebrew *Old Testament* and the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* of the Ethiopian *Kebra Nagast* both record events that occurred during the zenith (about seventy five years) of the united kingdoms of Judah and Israel in the reign of King Solomon (ca. 956 – 925 B.C.E.) [Lipinski: 99]. While the Old Testament historical narrative from Moses to Ezra (ca. 450 B.C.E.) has a time frame of between eight hundred and a thousand years, the *Sheba Menelik Cycle* has a span of about thirty years focussing on the political and theological consequences of the Queen of Sheba's visit to King Solomon in the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. The *Kebra Nagast*, which contains the *Sheba Menelik Cycle*, enjoys great prestige in Ethiopia. It served as the country's main constitutional document from the 14<sup>th</sup> century A.D. until the overthrow of the monarchy in 1974 and its theological influence is even deeper. Conversely in Eritrea the *Kebra Nagast* is unpopular because of its association with Haile Selassie. The *Kebra Nagast* was probably compiled in the first part of the fourteenth century A.D by Monophysite Christian clerics in Aksum in the Ge'ez language to bolster the prestige of their benefactors, the restored Solomonid dynasty. It consists of two intertwined documents [Fig.1]: the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle*, which is a Gee'z translation of an Arabic account [Praetorius 1870, Zoltenberg 1877, Bezold 1905, Dillmann 1907, Nöldeke 1924, Guidi 1932, Cerulli 1956] of the meeting three thousand years ago between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba and its political and theological consequences; the *Caleb Cycle* ca. A.D. 520 written in Ge'ez on the eve of the Aksumite crusade against the Himyarite Jewish Messiah Yusuf As'ar Yath'ar (Dhu Nuwas) [Shahid 1976]; and a short colophon ca. 1314 explaining why the *Kebra Nagast* was compiled and by whom. The *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* is the section that concerns Israelite refugees and Shebans in Ethiopia in the tenth century B.C.E.

When the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* is placed alongside the Old Testament account of events that began with the Exodus and ended with the Babylonian captivity it appears to offer a plausible solution (known as the *Arabian Judah Hypothesis*) to the controversy at present

plaguing Biblical Scholarship. However while the ca. 520 A.D. *Caleb Cycle* is based on undisputed historical events, few non-Ethiopian academics take the contents of the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* seriously yet it appears to pre-date the seventh century B.C.E. It is an account of the Queen of Sheba's visit to King Solomon, her adoption of the Israelite faith, the birth of their son Menelik (Bayna Lekhem/David), his visit to Solomon as a young man, Solomon's plan for an Israelite state in Ethiopia, the theft of the Ark of the Covenant by Azariah, son of the high priest, Solomon's unsuccessful pursuit, the abdication of the Queen of Sheba, and the establishment of the New Zion in Ethiopia under Menelik. Josephus and the Book of Kings summarize the main points apart from the bedding of the queen and its consequences while the Qur'anic account implies that Solomon either annexed Sheba or reduced it to vassal status [Appendix 1].

The Old Testament references in the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* indicate that it was most probably originally composed before the high priest Hilkiah officiated during the reign of King Josiah of Judah (641–609 B.C.E.) because the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* Torah omits the laws listed in the Book of Deuteronomy, which most authorities agree was composed during Josiah's reign albeit utilising some earlier oral traditions concerning Moses [Finkelstein and Silberman 2001:46-47]. The omitted laws concern righteous genocide, racial exclusiveness, justification for killing religious deviants, centralisation and authority of the Temple bureaucracy, and the appointment of judges [Appendix 2] the pre Deuteronomic Torah would therefore have been more palatable to the Queen of Sheba than the final version. The "Sheba Torah" in fact does include some sections of Deuteronomy, namely commandments from chapter 5 (some of which are duplicated in Leviticus and Exodus), and in particular chapter 28. However the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* places the curses first followed by the blessings, which is opposite to the Old Testament version, and adds a passage in chapter 41 that cannot be found anywhere else. [Hubbard: 17] In another section the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* cites the

first part of Deuteronomy 5:14 but finishes the commandment by quoting Exodus 20:10-11. Deuteronomy does not include the reference to the Sabbath mentioned in Exodus 20:11. Hubbard, the leading authority on textual references for the *Kebra Nagast*, suggested that “the authors [of the Sheba-Menelik Cycle] were dependent upon memory rather than text. The fact that the citations are accurate and fairly comprehensive is an indication of the high regard for the Mosaic law among the Ethiopians.” The Sheba Torah also includes what authorities believe is one of the oldest parts of the Hebrew Old Testament, the Holiness Code (Leviticus 18-28) but interprets some parts in an independent authoritative way [Hubbard:20]. The vast majority of Old Testament references in the *Kebra Nagast* are in chapters 106-111 (part of the Caleb Cycle) and drawn from the Christian era Ge’ez Old Testament. Hubbard [1956: 25] regarded them as completely unrelated to the Sheba-Menelik Cycle. The overall conclusion of Old Testament references in the *Sheba Menelik Cycle* is that they most probably belong to an old oral tradition or even a written text pre-dating the seventh century B.C.E. In contrast, the rest of the *Kebra Nagast* was composed with hundreds of references from Christian era written texts. [Hubbard 1956].

There is evidence to suggest that the Sheba Menelik Cycle may even date from before Solomon’s death ca. 925 B.C.E. It does not mention any event that occurred after Solomon’s reign and has detailed descriptions of two issues on which the Hebrew Old Testament is silent. Firstly, it explains how the Ark of the Covenant was stolen and the route it took to reach Ethiopia; and secondly why the high priesthood of Judah disappeared during King Solomon’s reign. In both cases this involved Azariah, named in the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* as the son of Zadok the high priest but in Jewish traditions the high priest himself. In Jewish traditions the high priesthood did not return to power for three hundred years [Mazar 1992: 38] and give no indication of where it had gone. Had the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* been composed even a short time after Solomon’s reign it most probably would have included

examples of some of the disasters recorded in the Old Testament which befell Judah to emphasis the message in the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* that God had abandoned Judah in favour of Menelik's Ethiopian kingdom.

The Sheba Menelik Cycle appears to have some support from archaeological evidence from D'mt, the earliest known state in Ethiopia, which seems to have come into existence before 800 B.C.E. (Durrani 2005:116). D'mt - 𐩃𐩺𐩧𐩪 - was probably more a "collective of people" on South Arabian lines [Beeston 1979: 115] than a centralised political unit and was composed of local and immigrant populations. It is generally believed that its most important centre was Yeha and that it was eclipsed by Aksum but possibly Hebraic D'mt remained independent of Aksum playing a major role in the installation of the Agaw Zagwe dynasty. The religious affiliations of Ethiopia groups are complicated by Old Testament maximalist emphasis on "normative" Judaism, which was developed at a much later date in exile in Babylon and in the "new" Jerusalem ca. 450 B.C.E. by Ezra and Nehemiah [Coogan: 421,-23, 433-35]. Ethiopian Hebraic and Israelite traditions are all pre-Second Temple but commentators use Second Temple Judaism criteria to justify their authenticity when Judaism is arguably irrelevant to Ethiopian Israelite and Hebrew practices and traditions which are conceivably older than those of the area of Palestine. The Solomonic Aksumite/Ethiopian dynasty and its ecclesiastical ally the Orthodox Church regarded its society as Israelite, meaning that it had inherited the political structure and religion of Solomon's united kingdom (along with its syncretic practices) and later blended them with the Monophysite faith of Solomon's descendant, Jesus Christ, creating a Hebraic-Christian faith with an Israelite-Christian dynasty. This explains the ca. A.D. 520 *Caleb Cycle's* vitriolic anti Jewish statements because the Jewish Himyarite messiah Dhu Nuwas not only challenged the Aksumite religion but also the Aksumite Solomonid claim to be the rightful rulers of Ethiopia and Yemen [Shahid 1976: Leeman 2005]. The 14<sup>th</sup> century Colophon in the *Kebra Nagast*

reiterates the view that the restored Solomonid dynasty was *Israelite* while the Zagwe were not.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the most important information about D'mt and maybe also the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Cushitic Agaw Hebrew Queen Yodit comes from Adi Kaweh, a small village on a rocky promontory eight kilometres south-south west of Wukro in Tigray province, Ethiopia. The area is bordered to the north by over 153 rock-hewn Monophysite churches dating from the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. [Buxton 1971]. Adi Kaweh's church, Abun Garima, (sometimes confused by authorities including Munro-Hay [1991: 64] with the large monastery of Abuna Garima near Adwa) contains three incense burners inscribed in boustrophedon Sabaeen ca. 750 B.C.E. [Photos]. The two larger burners were discovered between 1964 and 1972 at the present site of Wukro 1, which is being excavated by German archaeologists; and below Wukro 2 on either side of the church. Wukro 1, about 600 metres below Adi Kaweh across the valley on a hill on the other side of a tributary of the Genfel River, is the site of a Sabaeen temple and the alleged burial place of Queen Yodit, who destroyed Aksum and other Christian centres. Wukro 2 is an unexcavated mound closer to the village and at a similar elevation. The third and smallest incense burner was discovered in the village itself after 1972<sup>2</sup>. The church itself appears to have been constructed on a much older edifice. The village is sparsely inhabited as most villagers have left to work in urban centres but one relatively large building is linked to the 14<sup>th</sup> century Amda Seyon/Gebre Mesqel (1314-1344) of the restored "Solomonid" dynasty [Schneider 1973].

The unvocalised inscriptions on the incense burners were initially translated by Roger Schneider [1973: 385-87]. Other researchers have subsequently improved upon his work. The inscriptions state that D'mt was ruled jointly at first by a king (*mlkn*) W'rn Hywt and his

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<sup>1</sup> The author(s) of the Caleb Cycle ca. A. D. were far less gifted than whoever wrote the Sheba-Menelik Cycle. It mixes Old Testament history with New Testament theology in a mishmash of Biblical quotations, inaccurate historical references, attacks on Jews and the Council of Chalcedon, and an exaggerated self-serving account of the role of Aksum at the Council of Nicaea. It says nothing about Yodit or the rise of the Zagwe.

<sup>2</sup> Interviews by author with Abba Hadera and Adi Kaweh parish officials June to August 2009



queen and then by a series of high kings (*mkrrb*) Rd'm, Rrbh (with high queens), and Lmm [Fattovich 1990: 17]. The last two sets of monarchs were styled rulers of D'mt and Sabaea (Sheba). It is not clear if these rulers were resident in the area or at Yeha, which was either the area's political or chief cultic centre or both<sup>3</sup>. Authorities concur that Rbh and Lmm were linked to South Arabia [Schneider 1965; Von Wissmann 1976; de Conteson 1981; Kitchen 1994; Robin 1995] as are the deities Athtar, Almaqah, Dhat Himyam, and Dhat Badan mentioned on the incense burners [Durrani 2005:117]. Their subjects were listed on both incense burners as two ethnic groups, the *sb'*, who were *reds*, and '*br*,<sup>4</sup> -  $\circ\pi\lambda$  or  $\lambda\pi\circ$  - depending on text direction - who were *blacks*. *Sb'* is accepted by all authorities as meaning *Sabaeans/Shebans*. Conversely '*br* appears to be an unwelcome word for no commentator elaborated on Schneider's dismissive statement: "*La signification du mot est obscure ici. Mis en opposition avec sb'. Il semble designer un groupe de population.*" ("The significance of this word is not clear here. It is contrasted with *sb'*. It seems to denote a population group."

'*Br*, according to the Sabaeen dictionary [Biella: 350], means *those who crossed/ passed over*. This word is identical to the Biblical Hebrew root word for *Hebrew* - '*br* - "avar" ( $\text{עבר}$ ) also meaning "to cross/pass over". Schneider (1917-2002) never responded to this writer's several messages on the issue and his *Adi Kaweh* work was not rated as important in his obituary. Indubitably had the word '*br* been discovered in Palestine or Egypt there would have been considerable interest from Biblical scholars, some of whom have acclaimed the discovery of '*pr*, a word similar to '*br*, as confirming the early history of the Old Testament [Rainey 2008:11, Greenberg 1955, Rowton 1976, Na'aman 1986] and ranking

<sup>3</sup> The Sabaeen temple at Yeha measures ca. 18.5 x 15 metres on a base seven steps high. Its original height was about 13 metres but this was later increased when it became a Christian church. Today it has no roof but there are traces of four internal pillars [Phillipson 1977, Plant 1978; Fattovich 1990]

<sup>4</sup> One inscription actually reads ; '*brhry*  $\circ\pi\lambda\psi$  (and his '*Br*) instead of  $\circ\pi\lambda\psi$  owing to mistake by the engraver [Schneider 1973:387].

the Adi Kaweh “Hebrew” inscriptions in importance alongside the ca. 1209/8 B.C.E. Merenptah Stele and the ninth century B.C.E. Moabite Mesha Stele.

Apart from paganism and Islam, Ethiopia and Eritrea have long established populations with religious practises spanning a continuum from pagan-Hebraic through to First Temple Israelite (but not Second Temple Judaism), Judeo-Christian and Monophysite Christianity. Edward Ullendorf, a leading authority on ancient Hebraic practices in the region, supports the claim of Semitic Tigrinya-speakers that the area of Tigre Province (Aksum, Yeha, Adigrat, Adi Kaweh) was earlier inhabited by pagan-Hebraic Cushitic Agaw speakers [Ullendorf 1960: 53, 61] The presence of three Queens of Sheba jointly ruling a mixed population of Sabaeans and Hebrew with kings in Ethiopia two hundred years at the latest after Solomon supports the text of the Ge’ez epic *Kebra Nagast*, which traces Ethiopia’s political history back to a Sabaean-Israelite state founded by Menelik, the son of King Solomon and Sheba which the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* states he initially ruled jointly with his mother. It is also of interest that the ‘*br* were classified as Cushitic *blacks*, in contrast to Semitic-speaking *reds* because the Samaritans of the northern kingdom of Israel were called *kushi*, which is Hebrew for *black people*; and the Beta Israel of Ethiopia, (whose religion was Israelite) are ethnically and linguistically Cushitic Agaw. Lastly, the serf-caste Cushitic Yibir/Ibro (unvocalised ‘*br*) of neighbouring northern Somalia) are considered by the Somali to be Hebrew in origin [Fisher 2000]. Although there is no archaeological evidence indicating a South Arabian origin for the Beta Israel the word for their house of prayer is taken from the Sabaean word *msd- n* ቆሐዳ [Leslau 1991:363], they themselves are pejoratively called Falasha from the Sabaean word *flś* - ቆገረ or, ቆገረ meaning *people who have been expelled* [Biella:405]. Leslau [1951: xxi] recorded that the Beta Israel retained ancient Hebrew liturgy in their Cushitic Agaw language, although they were unable to understand its meaning.

The mention of *'br* at Adi Kaweh and the Sabaeen origin for *falasha* and the Beta Israel's *msd-n* indicates that perhaps the Beta Israel's traditions recorded in the *Kebra Nagast* and the contentious issue of Ethiopian "Judaism" (strictly speaking it is *Israelite*) should be reassessed. The Beta Israel are the most studied people in Africa. Today very few remain as a result of massive airlifts to Israel during the Ethiopian civil war [Rapoport 1986]. Although the Beta Israel claim to have arrived in several waves from the time of King Solomon onwards and maybe even earlier, recent researchers have rejected their claim and suggests that their form of Judaism is an affection to distance themselves from Monophysite Christian imperial rule after A.D. 1314. [Quirin 1992, Kaplan: 1992]

The Beta Israel are Agaw in origin but had overwhelmingly abandoned their Cushitic language for Semitic Amharic or Tigrinya before their exodus to modern Israel [Rapoport 1981:95]. Their sacred book, the Ge'ez Old Testament, is identical to that used by Christian Ethiopians. Their knowledge of Judaism was confined to events before the Babylonian captivity. One tradition claims they are descendants of Agaw who had lived in Arabia [Ullendorf 1960:132, Rapoport 1981:17]. Archaeological evidence shows that a common culture did exist on the opposite shores of the Red Sea, ca. 1500-1000 B.C.E., but no inscriptions exist to indicate their language [Durrani 2005:112] The Beta Israel believe they are descendants of Menelik's followers. The Beta Israel worshipped in buildings called the *House of God*, yet they venerated pagan rituals and practiced spirit possession. They faced *east* when praying, believing it to be the direction of Jerusalem, and probably never had any historical link with Palestine. They built special ritually "unclean" huts for menstruation and childbirth and practiced circumcision and clitoridectomy. Sharing Christian traditions, the Beta Israel hierarchy included monks and nuns, high priests, low priests and lay personnel. The Beta Israel alone have Nazarite practices (Samson of Old Testament fame, was a Nazarite). Nevertheless the Beta Israel, along with the Qemant, who have a weaker Hebraic

tradition, were culturally almost identical to their Christian neighbors. All observed Mosaic dietary laws and had similar beliefs in a heaven for the good, a hell for the damned, angels, Satan, a first and second coming of a messiah, resurrection, and a day of judgment [Ullendorff 1956 and 1968]. The chief authority on the Qemant, Frederick Gamst [1969] best summarized the three groups – the Qemant, the Beta Israel, and the Amhara-Tigrinya - as follows:

The...Qemant...have a largely pagan but somewhat Hebraic religion, with Christian elements. The Beta Israel [have] a largely Hebraic but somewhat pagan religion, with Christian elements. The Amhara and Tigray practice a Christianity markedly ba-orit (following the Old Testament).  
[Leeman 2005:177]

The Ethiopian church is also heavily Israelite. It is Monophysite and was under an Egyptian *abun* (archbishop) from the fourth century until 1952. In medieval times, when European contacts became more common, European observers were immediately struck by the Orthodox Church's Israelite practices, for example circumcision. Some accepted that the Ethiopians had inherited them from Solomon's kingdom through Menelik's companions; a claim seemingly supported by the book of Isaiah and the book of Zephaniah, which mention Israelites in *Kws*. The Aksumite priesthood believes it is the *inheritor* of the Hebrew Aaronite priesthood (the Beta Israel priests believe they themselves are Aaron's *descendants*). No data exist for the Beta Israel priesthood but DNA testing on the Buba priestly clan of the Lemba in southern Africa, who claim Hebraic descent, has revealed a much higher percentage of the Y chromosome kohenin priestly gene than among any other Judiac population [Thomas et al:2000: 674-686]. Ethiopian churches are traditionally built on small hills in the manner of synagogues and follow the three divisions found in Israelite religious architecture rather than the basilica model used by early Christians elsewhere. The

Orthodox Church has also adopted many terms from Syriac Aramaic for items specifically associated with Judaism such as *kahen* (priest), *menorah* (seven-stemmed candle holder), and words for skull cap, a priest's ritual belt, and probably a priestly breastplate modelled on that worn by the Jewish high priest. The Orthodox Church denied Jesuit accusations that its adherents were forbidden to eat pork, but in practice Ethiopian Christians abhor it. The custom of rearing only white chickens may have some Hebraic ritual symbolism. Ethiopian Christians generally follow Mosaic dietary laws but have no sanction against consuming milk and meat in the same meal. Circumcision is performed on the eighth day after birth, a custom shared only with Jews. Two important Christian festivals and fasts are of Hebraic origin. The first is the New Year feast, which corresponds with the Jewish New Year. The second festival is Mäsk'äl, sixteen days after the New Year, which echoes the Jewish period of atonement [Ullendorf 1968: 117; 1956: 216-256]. Mäsk'äl supposedly commemorates the granting of a piece of the true cross to King David of Ethiopia (1380-1409), the method of celebration, i.e. interpreting the smoke patterns of bonfires, indicates a Hebraic origin based on the pillars of fire and smoke of the Exodus. The basis of the Ethiopian legal code from ca. A.D. 1450 until 1930 was the *Fetha Nagast* (the Law of the Kings). Although it was originally a twelfth-century A.D. Arabic document compiled in Egypt by a Coptic scholar, who based the code on the Torah, the New Testament, decisions and canons of early church councils, Roman civil law, and tenets of Qur'anic law, the *Fetha Nagast* reminds Orthodox Christians concerning sexual relations:

“...tazakar za'azazaka 'egzi'abher ba'afa musi.... “(...remember what God has commanded you through the mouth of Moses....) [Leeman 2005: 177-178; Zoltenberg 1877].

In accordance with Mosaic Law, sexual relations are forbidden during times of fasting and when a woman is menstruating. The Fetha Nagast utilizes Leviticus 20:18, which is that part of the Torah dealing with sexual relations that is included in the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle*.

Orthodox churches have large oval baptisteries for total immersion. These appear to be inherited from a pre-Christian tradition linked to southern Arabia. The temple at Yeha, the probable capital of pre-Aksumite D'mt, contains a typical example that is duplicated in Ethiopian Christian churches. There is however a Jewish ritual whereby the high priest conducts total immersions. On New Year's Day Ethiopian Christians take a purification bath in their local river to cancel the sins of the previous year; then they sacrifice an animal, a custom similar to the Israelite practice where the priest sacrificed an animal to wipe away sins. Another festival linked to Judaism includes one whereby angels inform God about the conduct of the Faithful and divine decisions are taken on their future. A noteworthy event occurred in the fourteenth century when the Orthodox Church, reacting to Catholic criticism, changed its fasting days from Monday and Thursday to Wednesday and Friday to combat Catholic accusations of Judaism. However resistance to the edict to celebrate *only* Sunday instead of Saturday and Sunday as holy days was so powerful in the Tigrinya areas, where the Judaic practices were strongest and Christians refused to bow before the cross and images of the Virgin, that the Ethiopian ruler Zar'a Ya'eqob had it rescinded a hundred years later in A.D. 1450. [Cambridge History of Africa 1050-c.1600: 163]

Archaeological evidence in northern Tigre and Eritrea supports the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* account to the extent that it is clear that there was a definite surge of Sabaeen political and economic interest to northern Ethiopia and Eritrea in the period 1000-500 B.C.E. particularly between the Sabaeen A and C style epigraphic period ca.800- 500 B.C.E. which probably reflected changing trade patterns and political considerations in the Arabian peninsular. Jacqueline Pirenne [Munro-Hay: 65] suggests that the Israelite element in

Ethiopia was introduced by Israelite refugees from the eighth century B.C.E. Assyrian conquest of the Kingdom of Israel. The use of the title *mukkrb* (high monarch) at D'mt could either be a propaganda statement or a genuine statement by powerful Ethiopian based rulers with influence in Arabia. After the sudden decline in Sabaeen influence after 500 B.C.E. there was a three hundred hiatus in monumental and epigraphic development before the rise of Aksum [Durrani: 116].

The most noticeable aspect of Old Testament culture in Ethiopia the *tabot*, the Ark of the Covenant. Until the 1920's it was also very much a part of tribal culture among certain Bedouin groups in Arabia [Munro Hay and Grierson: 1999]. Hebrew, Arabic, and Ge'ez names for the Ark of the Covenant are respectively *tebhah*, *tabut*, and *tabot*. Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930), a German Semitic scholar, termed the Ethiopian word “an atrocious monstrosity” because its form indicated it had been adopted from a Hebrew source in the Medina area in Arabia before 400 B.C.E. [Rabin 1951: 109] declared “Ethiopic (Ge'ez), then, must have received the word (tabut/tabot) somehow via West Arabian, through channels as yet unknown to us” [Rabin 1951: 110].

Less controversially, Arabia is known to have had a substantial Jewish population in the first centuries of the Common Era and the Prophet Mohammed's dealings with prominent Jews are well recorded [Stillman: 1979]. Patricia Crone [1987] postulated that the Jewish involvement in the rise of Islam was far more significant than previously assessed. Since the establishment of the State of Israel Arabian Judaism has become far more highly charged and in 1985 the Lebanese historian Kamal Salibi exacerbated the issue by challenging both the minimalist and maximalist camps when he suggested that the *Old Testament* account was an accurate description of events prior to 596 B.C.E. that had occurred in south-west Arabia not Palestine. His book *The Bible Came from Arabia* located the original Hebrew homeland in the volcanic area of Northern Yemen. Possibly displaced by an eruption the Hebrew were

enslaved in an Egyptian military colony, escaped and crossed the Jordan, which was a reference to the Tihama escarpment not a river, to establish states astride the Sabaeen highland trade routes in the present regions of Asir and Hijaz that were eventually destroyed by the Assyrians and Babylonians. Salibi relied heavily for his hypothesis on the similarity between the unvocalised place names of the *Old Testament* and the locations listed in the Saudi government's *Gazette of Place Names*. Adding to earlier theories of Beke, [1834], Cheyne [1899], Winckler [1904], Hommel [1896], Taylor [1896], Glaser [1890], Schmidt [1908], and Montgomery [1934], he argued that several references in the Old Testament may indeed have referred to Egypt and Ethiopia but in other cases were more probably cities in Arabia more than one named Msrn, Msr and Kws, which would explain Josephus's statement that the Queen of Sheba was queen of two cities in Asir not Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia, and that Moses (who married Zipporah, a Kushite woman near "Mt Sinai") led a Msrn city army against a highland city named Kush, not the kingdom of Egypt against Ethiopia. Salibi has since published three major works elaborating on his ideas but none has had any significant impact. While his views are understandably unpopular in Israel, his books are banned in Syria and Saudi Arabia as an incitement to Zionist expansion. The Saudi government has destroyed sites identified by Salibi as probable Old Testament locations.

There is some evidence to support Salibi. While fully aware of Reinhart Dozy's 1864 work that placed Israelites in Mecca in David's time (ca 1000 B.C.E) Salibi was unaware that Chaim Rabin's *Ancient West Arabian* (1951) had recorded a seemingly inexplicable high percentage of Hebrew grammar and vocabulary in the area Salibi had identified as the Promised Land. Rabin [1968] also wrote a separate work concerning Indian luxury goods trade words in Ancient Hebrew perhaps indicating that Solomon's realm was closer to India than generally accepted. Secondly while archaeology reveals that the site of Solomon's supposed Jerusalem in modern Israel/Palestine was at that time a collection of mud brick



villages [Thompson 1991], his capital would far more likely to have prospered in a tenth century B.C.E. Arabian setting when there was an opportunity for a local West Arabian Iron Age people to fill the power vacuum caused by the Egyptians and Assyrians during their temporary withdrawal ca 1000-920 B.C.E. (David's and Solomon's reign) and tax the lucrative Sabaeen trade routes. An Arabian location for Judah would explain why Omri's 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. northern kingdom of Israel controlling the Taima trade route junction prospered while the southern kingdom of Judah declined as the Sabaeans avoided their control by re-routing their trade through Ethiopia. It would also explain (a) why Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722/721 B.C.E.; (b) why the Sabaeans intensified their Ethiopian involvement between 800-500 B.C.E. and (c) why the Babylonians attacked Judah after it had taken over the remnants of Israel since it would have become a potential threat to Taima. Next, although there was some Jewish dispersal southwards into Arabia after A.D.70, the historical demographic pattern of Jewish settlement in Arabia was always densest in the Yemen and tapered towards Palestine. Torrey [1967: 21] summarised the paradox: "The investigator is disappointed by the scarcity of Israelites in the one place [near Palestine], and scandalized by their apparent multitude in the other [Yemen]." In addition Old Testament references indicate a volcanic location for the Exodus. Arab traditions not only record that the Hebrew hailed from a volcanic region that devastated their land [al Fakhr al-Razi commenting on the Qur'an 68: 17-33 in Salibi 1985: 209] but allude to a blockage of the Red Sea (possibly the result of a massive lava flow) where it meets the Indian Ocean that was breached by an earthquake that drowned large numbers of peoples [Columbia Encyclopedia: Bab el Mandeb]. Lastly Salibi was ignorant of the contents of the *Kebra Nagast* yet his proposed map of the correct location of the Promised Land explains the seemingly bizarre geographical references and other elements in the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle*.

The geography of the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* is incomprehensible if applied to a Judah and Israel located in Palestine but makes sense if applied to the Salibi hypothesis [Map One]. Arab and Ethiopian scribes would have a basic knowledge of Middle East geography. If they did not, later editors would correct their work. This appears to have happened. It appears that the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle*, written some time between 925 and 641 B.C.E. had a completely different geographical viewpoint than its Ge'ez speaking Aksumite Christian redactors ca. A.D. 520 – 1314. The redactors of the *Kebra Nagast* took the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* text and believing its geography ridiculous inserted what they thought were helpful points that unfortunately only further complicated the issue. They introduced the Archangel Michael (associated in the *Old Testament* with post 586 BCE events) into the text and said when Menelik departed Jerusalem, his entire party flew. In chapter 52 Menelik's party left Jerusalem for Gaza and then proceeded the border of Mesrin (Egypt), where they reached "the river of Ethiopia," a journey of a single day instead of the usual thirteen. There Menelik was informed that his companions had stolen of the Ark of the Covenant. Next the party came to the Sea of Eritrea (the Red Sea), crossed and arrived opposite Mt. Sinai from where they travelled on to the Ethiopian highlands [Map Two]. This makes no sense and neither does the account of Solomon's pursuit. On discovering the theft of the Ark, Solomon's troops rode out for Mesr ("Egypt"), where they learnt that Menelik's party had left nine days earlier. Some of the troops, returning to Solomon, reported that Menelik had taken three days to travel from Jerusalem to the Takezze River. The remaining force continued the pursuit to the Red Sea. Solomon himself then joined the chase and reached Gaza. Thwarted, he returned to Jerusalem. Chapter 59 of the *Kebra Nagast* is an interpolation. It states that Solomon met a messenger sent from Alexandria by the Egyptian pharaoh, who reported he had seen Menelik's party pass through Cairo, which they had reached after three days from "the river of Egypt." This section can be disregarded because Alexandria and Cairo were

respectively founded six hundred and nine hundred years after Solomon. Martin Gilbert's *Atlas of Jewish History* places "the river of Egypt" at Wadi al-Arish just south of modern Gaza.

Salibi provided his hypothetical map of an Arabian Judah and Israel to this writer oblivious of the route outlined in the text concerning Menelik's escape to Ethiopia. *Map Three* reveals the Sheba-Menelik Cycle text as applied to Salibi's map, which named *Jebel al-Nabi Shu'ayb* (Mountain of the Prophet Jethro – Moses' father in law) as the true Mount Sinai. The Ge'ez translation of the original Arabic original mentions *Mesrin*, *Msr*, and *Gebes* and most scholars have usually translated all these as *Egypt*. However Bleke [1834a, 1871, 1873] Winckler [1893], Taylor [1896], Cheyne [1899], Schmidt [1908], Montgomery [1934] argued that many of these names mentioned in ancient texts referred to locations in northern Arabia not to Egypt of the Nile. The remark "Gebes (Egypt), the name of which is Mesrin" seems to have been a later elaboration by the Ge'ez scribes. Wallis-Budge and Bezold both translated *hagara msr* as if Msr (Egypt) were a country (Ge'ez = *beher* or *medr*; the word can also mean region, province, or district) but *hagar* is the Ge'ez word for *city*. Since Menelik's party crossed the Red Sea *after* passing through Mesrin, Msr, and Gebes, the three locations should be on the *east* side of the Red Sea, in Arabia, and the text is speaking of a city named Msr not a country, which supports Bleke et al. It therefore appears that the text of the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* is applicable to a 10th century Judah and Israel located in western Arabia not Palestine [Map Three].

The dilemma facing Ethiopian historical research is that it is dominated by the issue of Palestinian archaeology, the majority of which has been directed to proving the existence there of pre-586 B.C.E. Israel and Judah. Although the minimalist-maximalist controversy has bitterly divided Old Testament archaeology since the 1970's, historians writing about Yeha, Aksum, the *Kebra Nagast*, the Ark of the Covenant, the Beta Israel, Queen

Yoidt/Gudit, and the Zagwe have either been uncompromising maximalists or surprisingly ignorant of the controversy. In addition the tragic removal of the Beta Israel to Israel and the consequent destruction of their ancient culture has usually been hailed a triumph and in a recent maximalist study of African Judaism neither the *Kebra Nagast* nor *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* received a mention [Bruder 2008]. Munro-Hay (1947-2004), a respected authority on Aksum, was criticised for superficiality in his final book [2005] because he paid only a cursory interest to the *Kebra Nagast* [Belcher 2006]. Nevertheless the extremely questionable conclusions about Old Testament archaeology seem not to have made any impact at all outside a small academic circle; and the Saudis, who might have been expected to be supportive, have destroyed locations named by Salibi as possible Old Testament locations, and along with Syria has banned books concerning the Arabian Judah hypothesis. The true location of Ancient Judah and Israel is extremely important for the history of D'mt, the nature of Aksumite society and Ethiopian religion, the origins of the Beta Israel, the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. destruction of Aksum and the installation of the Zagwe dynasty. If the maximalist belief that pre-586 B.C.E. Judah and Israel were indeed in Palestine then it is extremely difficult, because of the distances between the two areas, to explain the depth of Hebraic-Israelite influence in Ethiopia and Eritrea. If the extreme minimalist stance of Thompson [1999] is correct then the Hebraic evidence from Ethiopia and Eritrea is completely inexplicable. If however the Hebrew origins, captivity, Exodus and their Israelite kingdoms were on the opposite side of the Red Sea the Ethiopian traditions and practices have a logical explanation.

In conclusion historical research in Ethiopia has to a significant extent been contorted by as yet unsubstantiated maximalist beliefs that the Biblical Promised Land and the united Israelite kingdoms of David and Solomon were located in modern day Israel and Palestine. Since Ethiopia has historically been so remote and isolated from Palestine there has been an

understandable reluctance to link Ethiopia's Hebraic culture with what was believed to be Palestinian based Old Testament events. The problem has inevitably been exacerbated by the Israeli claim that Modern Israel is the location of David's kingdom, which seems to explain the timidity and obduracy of Old Testament "minimalist" scholars refusing, despite the lack of findings in Palestine, to consider an alternative location, in particular West Arabia, and undertake a survey of the Ethiopian evidence. Extreme minimalist stances that the entire pre-586 B.C.E. Old Testament record is fantasy appear as uncompromising as Biblical literalists. Ethiopian historical research has always been under "maximalist" control which has resulted in denigration of those such as James Bruce [Ullendorf 1953: 276-281] emphasising close links between Ethiopia and the Old Testament. All recent works on the Beta Israel and the Ark of the Covenant are maximalist in orientation [Shelemay, Quiran, Kessler, Kaplan, Rapoport, Munro-Hay and Grierson, Hancock, Munro-Hay].

The area around Adi Kaweh area contains at least twenty similar unexcavated Sabaeen sites situated on hilltops overlooking rivers. Wukro 1 and 2 on either side of Adi Kaweh have produced incense burners mentioning Hebrew ruled by kings and queens of Sheba and D'mt. Powerful local traditions insist that Queen Yodit, allegedly a 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. pagan-Hebraic queen who killed the Aksumite king and destroyed his city, is buried at Wukro 1. <sup>1</sup>Her realm was said to be Damot and speculation has it located far to the south in Sidamo. However the similarity between unvocalised *D'mt* and *Damot* may not be coincidental and is probably one and the same place given the location of her death and the proximity of Christian Monophysite structures, indicative of the expansionary Semitic Christian expansion into her pagan-Hebraic Cushitic realm inspired by the religious fervour earlier initiated in the sixth century by the arrival ca. A. D. 502 of the Nine Saints [Frend: 305-308] and the destruction of Jewish Himyar [Moberg 1924]. With Old Testament archaeology in

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<sup>1</sup> The present Ethiopian-German excavation of Wukro 1 (where one of the "Hebrew" incense burners was unearthed in the 1960's) was a consequence of protests by local villagers at Adi Kaweh when suggestions were made to use the rubble covering Yodit's alleged tomb for road repairs.

turmoil and the Saudis irredeemably obdurate all that can be done at present, given minuscule funding for non-Biblical archaeology, is to be more flexible in the interpretation of pre 500 B.C.E. Sabaean excavations in Tigre given that a Palestinian location for ancient Israel and Judah in that period has not been substantiated.

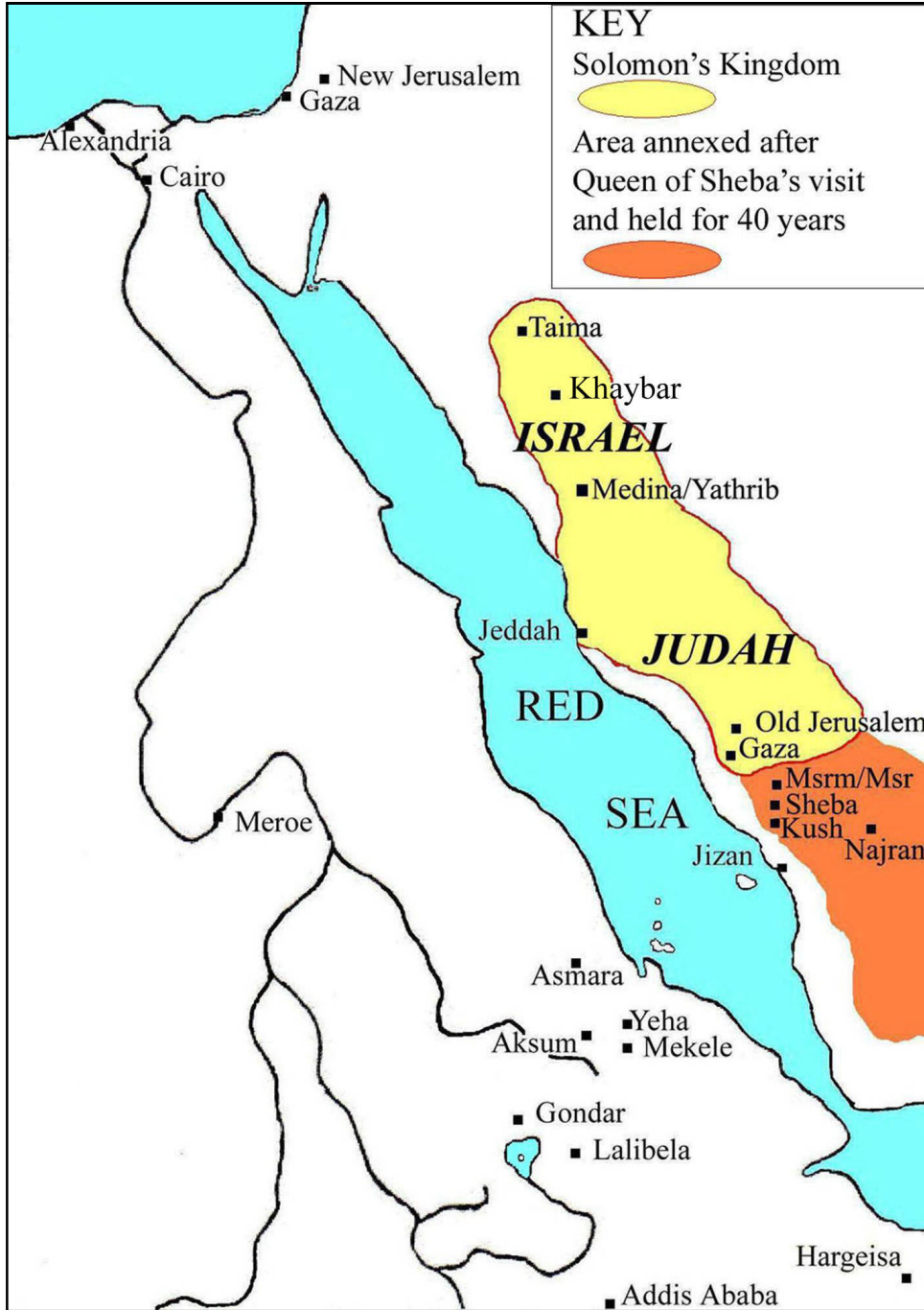
**FIG. 1: CHAPTERS OF THE KEBRA NAGAST**

1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36
37	38	39	40	41	42
43	44	45	46	47	48
49	50	51	52	53	54
55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66
67	68	69	70	71	72
73	74	75	76	77	78
79	80	81	82	83	84
85	86	87	88	89	90
91	92	93	94	95	96
97	98	99	100	101	102
103	104	105	106	107	108
109	110	111	112	113	114
115	116	117	Colophon		

**KEY**

Sheba-Menelik Cycle	ca. 920 B.C.E.	
Caleb Cycle	ca. 520 C.E.	
Solomonid Restoration	ca. 1314 C.E.	

**MAP ONE**  
**ANCIENT JUDAH AND ISRAEL**  
**ACCORDING TO THE SALIBI HYPOTHESIS**

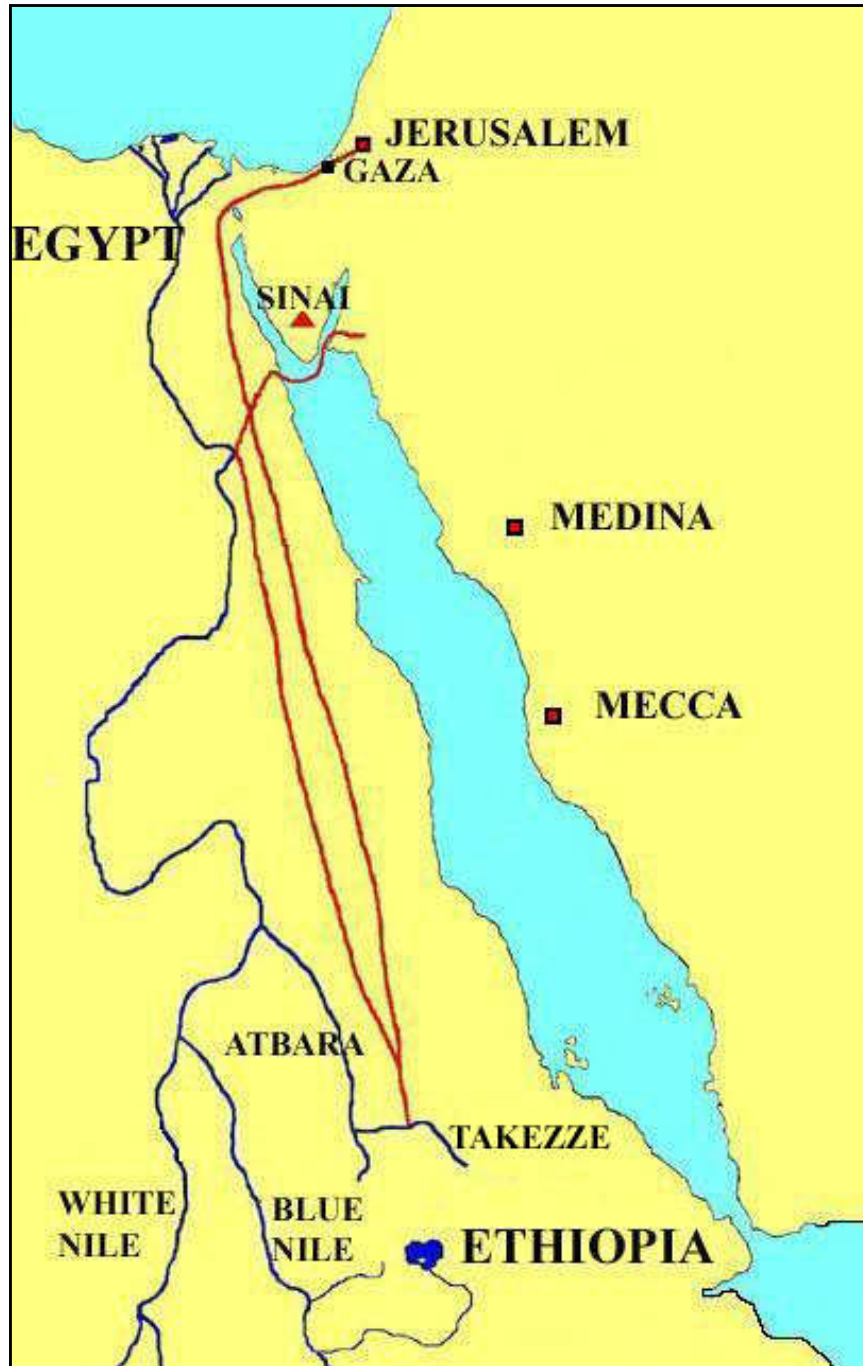


The shaded area is the region that contains the “Hebrew-isms” recorded by Chaim Rabin in “Ancient West Arabian”, the Old Testament place names noted by Kamal Salibi, iron deposits, and an ancient ark culture. It also straddles the lucrative incense, gold, precious stones, and luxury goods trade routes from Sabaea (Sheba). This area was temporarily abandoned by Egyptian and Assyrian imperial control ca. 1000-920 B.C.E., the same years as the zenith of the Israelite states under David and Solomon.



## MAP TWO

THE GEOGRAPHY OF MENELIK'S ROUTE ACCORDING TO THE *KEBRA NAGAST* WITH JERUSALEM IN PALESTINE AND *MSR/MSRM* TRANSLATED TO MEAN *EGYPT*



Jerusalem – Gaza – border of Egypt – Waters of Ethiopia – Brook of Egypt – Sea of Eritrea – arrival in Ethiopia opposite Mt Sinai

### MAP THREE

#### 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

*Kebrā Nagast account of Menelik's route:* Jerusalem – Gaza – border of Egypt – Waters of Ethiopia (Kush) – Brook of Egypt – Sea of Eritrea – arrival in Ethiopia opposite Mt Sinai

## APPENDIX 1

### THE LAWS OF DUETERONOMY *NOT* INCLUDED IN THE SHEBA-MENELIK CYCLE OF THE KEBRA NAGAST

- 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 intermarry 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  
    Never rebel against the Sanhedrin. xvii. 11  
Never elect a stranger as king over Israel. xvii. 15

## APPENDIX TWO

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

<b>Sheba-Menelik Cycle</b>	<b>Josephus 1</b>	<b>Kings 10: 1-13</b>	<b>Qur'an 27:28, 17:29, 27:37, 27:38, 27:44</b>
Came with gifts	Came with large retinue and gifts	Came with large retinue and gifts	Solomon learns the queen worships the sun and orders her to submit to him
Took up residence in the palace	Amazed at the palace	Questioned Solomon	Solomon rejects her gift of gold and threatens invasion
Description of the wonderful food	Amazed at sumptuous apartments	Solomon answered all her questions	Solomon obtains the queen's throne and alters it
Was given beautiful clothes	Was shown the house known as the Forest of Lebanon	Was impressed by Solomon's wisdom, palace, food, seating arrangements, attendants' clothes, wine, and burnt offerings	The queen visits and is tested by a glass floor and the altered throne. She submits to Solomon and adopts his religion
Experienced Solomon's wisdom	Description of the daily food and its preparation	Declared she was deeply Impressed	
Had her questions answered	Saw beautiful clothes of the servants	Gave gifts of gold and spices	
Daily given food and clothes	Witnessed Solomon's administration	Acknowledged benign nfluence of Solomon's God	
Saw how table was prepared	Witnessed daily sacrifices	Solomon reciprocated in official and other ways	
Amazed at the palace	Believed things were better than expected		
Amazed at sumptuous apartments	Believed that the Hebrew were a blessed people		
Witnessed daily burning of incense			
Converted to Solomon's religion			
Tricked by Solomon into bearing his child			

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**PHOTOGRAPHS**



Incense Burners at Adi Kaweh being cleaned of recent decorative white paint 2009



View east from Adi Kaweh of Yodit's alleged tomb at Wukro 1 Sabaeen Temple site 2009



Adi Kaweh Church from the west 2009



Unexcavated Wukro 2 site west of Adi Kaweh Church 2009



Sabaeen altar at Wukro 1 site, Adi Kaweh below Yodit's alleged grave with channel on right for blood from sacrifices (University of Mekele History Department 2009)



Collection for blood from Sabaeen altar sacrifices at Wukro 1 site, Adi Kaweh University of Mekele History Department 2009)





Excavated wall at Wukro 1 Adi Kaweh  
(University of Mekele History Department 2009)



Remains of statue at Wukro 1 Adi Kaweh  
(University of Mekele History Department 2009)



Incense burner 1 with "Hebrew" inscription Adi Kaweh 2009



Incense burner 2 with "Hebrew" inscription Adi Kaweh 2009

"The Temple at Yeha (in Tigray province), which is said to have been erected in the 6th century BCE, is believed to be an architectural copy of other Jewish temples found in Israel and Egypt during the pre-Babylonian era (before 606 BCE (sic)). Another example is found on the monastery islands of Lake Tana (northern Gojjam), where several archaic stone altars, fashioned in the manner of Jewish sacrificial altars of pre-8th century BCE Israel, have been found not only preserved in good condition but also containing blood residue. The manner of the blood placed on the stone altars was found to be typical to a culture that strongly adhered to Mosaic Law."

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