

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
DECLARATION	viii
SUMMARY	ix
KEY TERMS	xi
ABBREVIATIONS	xii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 A brief overview and statement of the problem	1
1.2 Aims and objectives of the study	10
1.2.1 Importance	10
1.2.2 Challenges.....	15
1.3 Clarification of thesis	16
1.3.1 Selection of material	16
1.3.2 Terminology.....	23
1.4 Methodology	24
1.4.1 Approach.....	24
1.4.2 Organisation and outline of chapters	26

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction	30
2.2 Traditional Western Old Testament Scholarship	32
2.2.1 Introduction.....	32
2.2.2 Introductions to biblical histories, Bible maps, Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias	33

2.2.3 Bible commentaries	37
2.2.4 New trend(s)	40
2.2.4.1 Knut Holter	41
2.2.4.2 Marta Høyland Lavik.....	44
2.2.4.3 Daniel J Hays	46
2.2.4.4 Edwin M Yamauchi	49
2.2.4.5 Some critical remarks	51
2.3 African American Interpretations	52
2.3.1 Introduction.....	52
2.3.2 Robert A Bennett	54
2.3.3 Charles B Copher.....	56
2.3.4 Randall C Bailey	58
2.3.5 Alvin A Jackson.....	60
2.3.6 Rodney S Sadler.....	61
2.3.7 Some critical remarks	63
2.4 African Scholars' Interpretations	65
2.4.1 Introduction.....	65
2.4.2 David T Adamo.....	67
2.4.3 Other voices	71
2.4.3.1 Engelbert Mveng.....	71
2.4.3.2 G A Mikre-Selassie.....	71
2.4.3.3 Sidbé Semporé	72
2.4.4 Some critical remarks	72
2.5 Conclusion	75

**CHAPTER THREE: CUSH TEXTS REFLECTING PROPER NAMES,
PLACES, AND CULTURAL MATTERS**

3.1 Introduction	76
3.2 Proper Names	78
3.2.1 Jeremiah 36:14.....	78

3.2.2 Zephaniah 1:1.....	82
3.2.3 Psalm 7:1.....	88
3.3 Places	91
3.3.1 Genesis 2:13.....	92
3.3.2 Genesis 10:6-8	98
3.3.3 Jeremiah 46:9.....	101
3.3.4 Ezekiel 29:10	105
3.3.5 Esther 1:1; 8:9.....	108
3.4 Cultural Matters	113
3.4.1 Numbers 12:1.....	113
3.4.2 Isaiah 18:2.....	117
3.4.3 Jeremiah 13:23	121
3.5 Conclusion	123

CHAPTER FOUR: CUSH TEXTS CONCERNING ECONOMIC, POLITICAL / MILITARY MATTERS

4.1 Introduction	126
4.2 Economic matters	127
4.2.1 Isaiah 18:7.....	127
4.2.2 Isaiah 45:14.....	132
4.2.3 Job 28:19.....	136
4.3 Political and military matters	139
4.3.1 Introduction.....	139
4.3.2 2 Samuel 18:19-32	141
4.3.3 2 Kings 19:9 (= Isaiah 37:9.....	147
4.3.4 2 Chronicles 12:3	151
4.3.5 2 Chronicles 14:8-14.....	154
4.3.6 2 Chronicles 16:8.....	159
4.3.7 2 Chronicles 21:16	162
4.3.8 Isaiah 18:1-2.....	165

4.3.9	Isaiah 20:3-5.....	168
4.3.10	Jeremiah 38-39.....	172
4.3.11	Ezekiel 30:4.5.9	177
4.3.12	Daniel 11:43.....	184
4.3.13	Nahum 3:9.....	189
4.3.14	Zephaniah 2:12.....	194
4.4	Conclusion	198

CHAPTER FIVE: CUSH, YAHWEH, AND A CONTEXT OF SALVATION

5.1	Introduction	202
5.2	Isaiah 11:11	203
5.3	Isaiah 18:7	209
5.4	Isaiah 43:3	211
5.5	Amos 9:7	218
5.6	Zephaniah 3:10	227
5.7	Psalm 68:32[31	232
5.8	Psalm 87:4	238
5.9	Conclusion	243

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

6.1	Introduction	246
6.2	Analytical Outcomes	247
6.2.1	Importance of finding Africa in the Old Testament.....	247
6.2.1.1	Preliminary remarks.....	247
6.2.1.2	Who are Cushites	252
6.2.1.3	What role does Cush play	259
6.2.2	Challenges of finding Africa in the Old Testament	262
6.3	Implications for the way forward	267
6.3.1	Teaching Old Testament in African Context.....	267

6.3.2 Remaining Uncertainties which call for further research.....	272
6.4 Conclusion	273
BIBLIOGRAPHY	275

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I now dedicate this work to all future African Biblical Scholars.

DECLARATION

I declare that **The Importance and Challenges of Finding Africa in the Old Testament: the case of the Cush Texts** is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

SIGNATURE
(FR P LOKEL)

15th June, 2006

DATE

SUMMARY

The thrust of this study proceeds from the presupposition that first, the Cush texts of the Old Testament which may be used as a conduit for finding 'Africa' in the Bible have generally been 'ignored' or not given the priority they deserve especially by traditional western biblical scholarship. Second, that when, however, they have been accorded a 'token paragraph or two', the interpretations given more often than not tend to portray a negative image of the African Cush. As a result, those of African ancestry who tend to trace their identity (however that term is understood) and historical roots to the biblical Cush tend to take offence at such interpretations. They perceive them as a deliberate attempt to 'de-Africanize' or 'de-emphasize' the African presence in and contribution to the Bible. This thesis argues that there are serious consequences for 'de-Africanizing' the Bible, especially for the African peoples. This constitutes the fundamental argument in chapter one.

To highlight the problem dogging the Cush texts even more, a sample excursion into the works of the major interpreters of the Cush texts is offered. As a result of this, two groups of scholars emerge: the Eurocentric on one hand, and the Afrocentric on the other. It is observed that each of the two groups more or less interprets the texts from its own cultural perspective. This is basically the subject matter of chapter two.

Against this background, the researcher is consequently obligated to return to the sources and, in so doing, attempts another re-reading of all the fifty-six Cush texts from the historical-critical perspective, as well as from other perspectives. This is carried out with the intention of developing an interpretative model which, first of all, does justice to all the Cush texts, thereby offsetting what traditional western biblical scholarship has hitherto done; and which, second, attempts to offer an interpretation of the Cush texts which tries to take into consideration both Eurocentric as well as Afrocentric perspectives and concerns. In this way, a balance of sorts is struck. This is the main focus of chapters three, four and five, which comprise the main *corpus* of this thesis.

The approach employed in the analysis of the Cush references is a 'thematic' one. In other words, texts are grouped according to their presumed 'themes' and are analyzed under the subtitles of 'Preliminary remarks' and 'Analytical remarks'. The former generally focus on literary matters such as those pertaining to the grammar and syntax of the MT, although to a certain extent are also interpretative. The latter attempts an explanation of the given reference as the main focus, but also takes into consideration the views of other scholars. This is how all the references are treated. The MT however is the pivot around which all the analyses hinge. The procedure is 'fluid', however, in that there is much overlapping of the arguments put forward. Finally, a conclusion summarizing the findings related to all the references belonging to one thematic group is provided at the end of each chapter.

The last chapter, which comprises the conclusion to the whole thesis, focuses on the importance and challenges of the Cush texts for Africa. In this connection a way forward is also proposed as to how such texts may be organized and read with some sense in a context of higher learning such as that which obtains in an African University.

KEY TERMS

['Cush' ('Kush'), 'Cushit', 'Cushite', 'Cushim', 'Cushiyyim'; Africa; African; African-American; Afrocentric; Eurocentric; Analysis; Texts; Old Testament; 'De-Africanization'; Interpretations; New Trend(s); 'Thematic' Approach; Traditional Western Biblical Scholarship.]

ABBREVIATIONS

ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
AJBS	<i>African Journal of Biblical Studies</i>
BCE / CE	Before Christian Era / Christian Era
BOTSA	<i>Bulletin for Old Testament Studies in Africa</i>
BGT	<i>Bible Works Greek LXX</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
J / E	Yahwist / Elohist
JB	<i>Jerusalem Bible</i>
JPOS	<i>Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JTSA	<i>Journal of Theology for Southern Africa</i>
KJV	<i>King James' Version (1611 / 1769)</i>
LXX	<i>Septuagint</i>
MGK	<i>Modern Greek Bible</i>
MT	Masoretic Text
NKJ	<i>New King James Version (1982)</i>
NIV	<i>New International Version (1984)</i>
NRSV	<i>New Revised Standard Version (1989)</i>
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays (New Series)</i>
RSV	<i>Revised Standard Version (1952)</i>
TANAK	Hebrew abbreviation for the Old Testament derived from the initial letters of the names of its three divisions: <i>Torah – Nebiim – Ketubim</i>
TEV	<i>Today's English Version</i>
VUL	<i>Vulgate</i>
//	sign for 'parallel to'

=

sign for 'equal to'

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 A general overview and statement of the problem

‘Research on the subject of blacks in the Bible has been sparse. Scholarly silence on the subject is surprising in the light of the fact that the Cushites, who were obviously black, are mentioned fifty-four times [sic] in the Scriptures. Furthermore, a tremendous wealth of historical information dealing with the nation and people of Cush is also available ...’

Using these words J Daniels Hays (1996:270) outlines in a nutshell the problem that has in recent times dogged the study of the so-called ‘African’ texts of the Old Testament: sparse research and a scholarly silence in spite of the conspicuous presence of blacks in the Bible. This presence is normally traced to the interpretation of the Hebrew word ‘ $\text{VW}k$ ’ and its cognates.

It is probably true to say that only now has the interpretation of the so-called African texts in the Old Testament gained a significant momentum. This was not always the case. Throughout the history of biblical exegesis, the interpretation of these texts was not always given the priority it deserved, especially by traditional western biblical scholarship. A brief survey of such scholarship as one peruses the various current introductions to the Old Testament and histories of Israel, especially the sections dealing with geography, as well as Bible maps, reveals this clearly. Such is also the case with Bible dictionaries, and Bible commentaries as well as concordances / lexicons. One example or two from each should suffice to serve as an illustration.

Norman K Gottwald’s introductory work *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (1985) for example enumerates by name Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, South Arabia and Egypt as great civilizations which flourished in ancient times because of their proximity to river valleys (1985:37). However, it makes no explicit reference to Cush as such, save for a meagre reference to ‘Cushi’, the father of Zephaniah who in turn is said to be the great-great-grandson of king Hezekiah (1985:390). Reference to ‘Cush’

as a country is perhaps only implied when the author speaks of these civilizations as extending as far as ‘the upper reaches of the Nile south of Egypt’ (1985:38).

The tendency to ignore Cush is seen also in maps of the so-called Bible Lands, especially those which were drawn in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On the one hand, these maps usually show only Syria-Palestine and the areas to the east. Any depiction of Africa is usually restricted to Egypt. On the other hand, there were also maps which located ‘Cush’ or ancient Ethiopia outside of Africa, especially when depicting the Garden of Eden. For example, Bailey (1991:165-184), cites the engraver W R Annim who depicts ‘Places Recorded in the Five Books of Moses’ and places the insert ‘Cuth’ [Cush] in Persia. Another cartographer, Joseph Erwin Wilson, also cited by Bailey in the same article and whose work is based on ‘Maps of the Rivers of Eden’, actually refuses to depict ‘Cush’, mentioned in Genesis 2:10-14, as the southern part of the border of the Garden of Eden.

One notices a similar tendency with regard to the dictionaries and encyclopaedias of the Bible. As far as the dictionaries are concerned, such is the case for instance with the entry ‘Cush’ in the Supplementary Volume of *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Crim et al. [eds] 1982:200-2001) where the location of Cush may be found either in Africa or in the Arabian Peninsula. Thus, according to this dictionary, the geographical location of Cush is somewhat ambiguous. Similarly, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, edited by Bromiley (1979:839-840), locates ‘Cush’ as a region in Africa identified with Nubia or Ethiopia, or a region in Mesopotamia identified with the Kassites.¹

As for the Bible commentaries, *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, edited by Achtemeier (1996), may serve as an illustration. While Egypt is almost throughout placed with the Near Eastern lands and not with the rest of Africa, Cush is merely mentioned, and the few lines said about it are instead found under the entry ‘Ethiopia’. This is rather intriguing considering that this monumental work is a result of not less than one-hundred and seventy-nine contributors (1996:xix), and boasts of making widely available ‘the results of the best of current biblical scholarship’ (1996:xix). It also claims to put in the

¹ For an extended discussion on this issue see Grayson (1992:714-720) in an article entitled ‘The History of Mesopotamia’ which is published in *ABD*, vol.4.

hands of readers ‘reliable, authoritative, and readable articles on all important names and places in the Bible...’ (1996:xxiii).

In the concordances / lexicons one generally finds no treatment on ‘Cush’ as such, or very little information. One such case is Anderson’s *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, (edited by Jenni & Westermann, 1973-), which apparently does not make any allusion to $\text{VW}\bar{\text{K}}$ either as a geographical location or otherwise. Similarly, some of the not-so-old concordances on the Septuagint do not, as far as I am concerned, contain any references to ‘Cush’, either transliterated from Hebrew, or translated into Septuagint Greek. Such is the case for example with Morrish’s compilation *A Concordance of the Septuagint* (1984), and also the compilation by Lust, Eynikel and Hauspie: *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, revised edition (2003). It would certainly have been very helpful for our purposes if the ‘Cush’ entries had been alluded to by these authoritative sources, but this seems not to be the case, which is somewhat unfortunate considering that the references to ‘Cush’ and its cognates appear some fifty-six times in the Old Testament.

But the tendency to ‘ignore’ or ‘minimize’ Africa is not merely limited to the contributions by western scholars cited above. The trend seems to have infiltrated the works of some church historians as well as theologians. However, perusal of these would unnecessarily overstretch our efforts. Suffice it, though, to point out an example or two as illustrations. Redford, a modern scholar, has for example argued against attributing any pharaonic practices to what he calls ancient ‘Ethiopia’ or ‘Nubia’. According to Redford, these practices may have existed in their ‘bastardized’ and ‘degenerate’ forms in these countries but actually had their origins in Egypt itself (cf Redford 2004:146). One more example to round off the argument I am putting forward: as far as I am concerned, a quick perusal of the issues of the renowned *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (JSOT) over the last thirty years reveals the absence of any essay specifically written with Cush in mind.

Thus, I fully concur with Knut Holter, one of the few western Bible scholars who has shown a keen interest in ‘Cush’ in relation to ‘Africa’, when he observes:

Only a brief glance into the current scholarly literature on the OT is enough to realize that traditional western OT scholarship has not shown much interest in the portrayal of Africa in the OT. On the contrary, western literature on the OT, from Bible atlases and histories of Israel to dictionaries and commentaries, has been accused of reflecting a more or less deliberate de-Africanization (Holter 2000a:94).

And also with Randall C Bailey, an African-American Bible scholar who has pointed out:

For so long the tendency in Old Testament scholarship has been to deny that African nations and individuals either play a role in the text of the Hebrew Canon or had an influence upon it. Sometimes the methods used to deny the presence of Africans within the text have been subtle. Other times they have been not so subtle (1991:165).

Thus, there has generally been a tendency to 'de-Africanize the Bible' (cf. Adamo 1998: passim), or to 'de-emphasize' the African presence (cf. Ukpong 2000:7-8), or to 'ignore' such a presence. In fact, the problem does not seem to apply to biblical texts alone. It extends to other characteristics of the African peoples as well. Perhaps Monges, an African-American scholar, has summarized the problem well when she so graphically writes:

In Western historiography, scholars instinctively disconnect the great civilizations of Africa from African people themselves. There are numerous examples of this, from the building of the pyramids of Egypt to the great walls of Zimbabwe. Western scholars usually attribute the achievements of these great civilizations to people outside of Africa. In this they continue to obey the Hegelian doctrine which says that Africa is on the periphery of world history. This is why Kemet (ancient Egypt) is connected to the Near East or the Orient and disconnected from the African continent. In the case of Nubia, one might reasonably assume that Western scholars would attribute this culture to African people. However, this is not the case even though ancient Greek historians - contemporaries of the Nubians - considered Nubia a land inhabited by black people. They called it Ethiopia (Monges 1997:2-3).

Generally, these ‘biases’ have been perceived by African-American scholars, and in recent times, by African biblical scholars, as reflecting an ‘anti-black’ or ‘anti-African’ feeling. The tendency of traditional western biblical scholarship to ‘ignore’ the ‘African’ texts of the Old Testament is rather amazing, considering that it has now been established beyond reasonable doubt that there is indeed overwhelming evidence in the Bible, and even outside the Bible, to show that black people were not only present in Biblical history but in fact that they actively contributed to it, since they interacted with Old Testament Israelites in many ways.² Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to state that these texts were generally ‘neglected’ or ‘ignored’ and, as a result, that generally no serious attempt was made to relate them to the African context.

But how can one explain this tendency? Perhaps Holter’s remarks again come in handy here for he observes, ‘However, the picture is probably somewhat more complex. Some of the western reluctance might be an understandable reaction to sometimes fanciful attempts in earlier times at drawing lines between Africa and the OT’ (2000a:94-95).

However, not everybody has taken the tendency to ‘ignore’ Africa in the Bible lying down. In fact, the present discussion would remain one-sided if it did not mention another group of scholars who, aware of the issue at stake, have not only attempted to pay attention to all the ‘African texts’, but have also tried to interpret them from another perspective, different from the western one. These are the African-American scholars on the one hand, and the African scholars on the other.³ The former have generally approached the African texts from the point of view of the various American Civil Rights Movements with their emphasis on ‘Black’ liberation and equal rights for all. The latter have on the other hand generally approached the issue in terms of the backdrop of the consequences of slavery and the challenges posed by postcolonial or independent Africa.

² Charles B. Copher has in his more important articles gone to great lengths to prove this point (cf. Copher 1975:9-16).

³ A word of clarification is not out of place here. By ‘African scholars’ we are simply referring to those Old Testament scholars coming mainly from Africa south of the Sahara, an area often referred to also as ‘Black Africa’. However, I realize how problematic it can be to speak of ‘Black Africa’ as distinct from the rest of Africa, which includes Egypt and other parts of North Africa. The exclusion of Egypt and these other parts is not arbitrary but deliberate as they do not constitute the focus of this thesis. Moreover, this thesis also has as one of its aims and objectives the challenge of relating its findings to the existential problems which are especially characteristic of ‘Black Africa’, in other words that part of Africa which is the territory situated approximately south of the Sahara.

In brief, the African-American biblical scholars, notably Randall C Bailey; Charles B Copher; Robert A Bennett; Alvin A Jackson (whose positions on the matter will be discussed in chapter two), like their African counterparts, notably David T Adamo from Nigeria (also to be discussed in some detail in chapter two), have been vociferous in airing their views on the issue. They have gone back to the sources, both biblical and extra-biblical, and have endeavoured to highlight all the instances where black Africans and their contributions feature. In most cases their findings are so overwhelming that one gathers the impression that the whole of the Old Testament concerns Africa and the contribution of Africans to Jewish socio-cultural and religious hegemony. In chapter two of this thesis an attempt will be made to sample views stemming from the various camps of biblical scholarship. This will include a brief discussion of representative voices from traditional western biblical scholarship on one hand, as well as of representative voices from African-American biblical scholars and their African counterparts on the other.

However, when one reads the contributions of the 'Afrocentrists', one gains the feeling that Africans were to be found practically everywhere in the Bible. As a result one is tempted to conclude that these authors have, whether consciously or unconsciously, overstepped their exegetical parameters and as a result have risked falling into the same trap they have been trying to overcome in the first place, namely that of offering a 'fair' and 'balanced' interpretation which takes into consideration the 'Black' and the 'African' hermeneutical concerns. I am of the opinion that these authors, in their eagerness to place Africa and Africans to the fore, have tended not only to exaggerate, but have also allowed little room for further exegetical discussions and, as a result, have made their readers generally suspicious. Do they really treat the texts with all due exegetical respect? Is it true that in the past traditional western biblical scholarship has had some sort of 'hidden agenda' to 'de-Africanize' the Bible? Why have some Afrocentric scholars interpreted this phenomenon as some sort of 'concerted conspiracy' to 'de-Africanize' the Bible? Adamo, one of the renowned African scholars, has for instance argued:

Euro-centric Biblical scholars have made a frantic effort to either 'de-Africanize' or reduce Africa and Africans in the Bible to slavery. While some have denied that Africa and Africans have any influence, others deny their total presence at all in the Bible. The denial of African

presence and influence is so strong because for the past century the thrust of biblical scholarship has been in the hands of western biblical scholars (Adamo 1998:1).

Hence, where an attempt has been made to take into account the African texts, cases of ‘misinterpretation’ have not been uncommon. This leads us to another of those crucial issues connected with the study of the African texts, namely their interpretation or misinterpretation. Generally, African texts have been ‘misinterpreted’, especially by traditional western biblical scholarship. A quick look at some sample texts should furnish enough evidence to prove this point.

In 2 Samuel 18 for instance, we read the story of the Cushite messenger who was sent by Joab, King David’s commander in chief, to report the death of Absalom, the rebellious son of the same King. By all counts, there is no reason to doubt that the Cushite referred to here, in Hebrew yvwk refers to a foreigner, most probably a black man from Africa, serving in King David’s army. That he was a foreigner can be deciphered from his ignorance of the shorter path to the King’s palace, his being unrecognized by the watchman, and his lack of tact when communicating the sad news of Absalom’s death to the King. The fact that he served in King David’s army, under Joab the commander in chief, demonstrates the presence of strangers in that army (possibly as mercenaries) and in the land of Israel in general.

However, biblical scholars have not always been unanimous in their interpretation of the word yvwk . To some, the identity of this messenger has remained elusive. While the majority of scholars would agree, as just pointed out, that he was a stranger, most probably of African origin, others would simply identify him as a ‘negro’ and therefore ‘naturally’ a slave, as for example Smith (1899:359) has pointed out; as if a black person, even in ancient times, could only have been a slave. Similarly, Maclaren (1952:108) has identified him with ‘an Ethiopian slave’. He also adds that the Cushite was someone of no consequence and if King David in his anguish should harm him, ‘nobody will be hurt by a friendless stranger.’ One more example should suffice to hammer the point home, this time from a Francophone author:

Coushite, home du pays de Coush, c'est-à-dire d'Éthiopie [...]. La couleur noire de l'Éthiopien le désigne spécialement pour porter la mauvaise nouvelle (Cf. Dhorme 1959:992).

There are other examples, as we shall point out in chapter two. But one thing is certain. This sort of uncritical labelling can be terribly derogatory to some sectors of our world today. More recent works have, however, tended to be somewhat cautious about the identity of the Cushite in question.

While this tendency seems to have held sway amongst some traditional western biblical scholars, other scholars, especially 'Afrocentric' ones, have tended to identify the Cushite in 2 Samuel differently. Concerned more with presenting Africa and its people in a more positive light, they have tended to identify him as 'one of the royal military officers in the King's court' (Adamo 1998:85). One will come across other examples of such similar views, as we shall point out at a later stage. Yet other western scholars, preferring to remain non-committal, have seen in this text 'a Cushite presence in the land of Israel outside the Cushite heartland' (Holter 2000a:102).

Such in miniature is the spectrum of the problem presented by the interpretation, or rather the 'misinterpretation', not just of 2 Samuel 18, but indeed of many other texts concerning Cush. The example of 2 Samuel may be said to represent only the tip of the iceberg for there are many other instances of misinterpretation, which include the Cushite wife of Moses in Numbers 12:1-10; the identity and ancestry of the prophet Zephaniah in Zephaniah 1:1, and other African texts such as the story of the Queen of Sheba which has traditions linking it to Africa (cf. 1 Ki 10), to mention but a few.

As indeed Copher (1975:9) has pointed out: 'The existence of black peoples in the Biblical world, especially of so-called Negroes, with whom ancient Jews could have interacted, is a matter of great interest, discussion, debate, and of confusing, contradictory opinions.' These texts together with others in the same category, have often not only proved controversial, but have also been frequently misinterpreted.

Thus, by way of summary, the *status questionis* that this study intends to investigate can be crystallized in the following manner: while the 'Cush' texts of the Old Testament have not been given the priority they deserve and have therefore been generally ignored by traditional western biblical scholarship in particular, they have also

often been interpreted in a manner that does not portray people of African descent in a positive light. As a consequence of this tendency, a variety of reactionary interpretations, intent on portraying Africa and Africans positively, has resulted, among Afrocentric scholars especially, and has revived in them the need to go back to the sources and take another look at the 'African texts'. This is done in view of achieving two things mainly: first, that the 'Cush' texts will receive the attention they have not been accorded thus far, especially by traditional western biblical scholars; second, that some interpretative model of sorts which could serve as a tool in future discussions on 'Cush' by both Eurocentric and Afrocentric scholars may be constructed. This is, in a nutshell, the thrust of the present study.

Last but not least, one more comment deserves to be made here. Although for quite some time the above-mentioned situation was the case with regard to the treatment of the Cush texts in traditional western biblical scholarship, and in the camp of African-American scholars, together with their African counterparts, today modest efforts are being essayed in each camp to rectify this anomalous situation.⁴ This is a move in the right direction. Our own venture in this study is therefore an attempt to climb aboard the vessel of the latter, and together with them to travel 'back to the sources' with the aim of doing two things: first, to accord the Cush texts, which are so important for people of African ancestry, their rightful place in the area of Old Testament biblical exegesis. Second, to attempt 'another' interpretation of the Cush texts. Hopefully at the end of this study, some sort of 'equilibrium' of views among scholars will be reached. Such a balanced outcome might serve in future as an important tool in trying to forge ahead with any meaningful dialogue between Eurocentric and Afrocentric scholars. But the task before us is indeed a difficult one, because the topic of this thesis is at once as important as it is challenging.

⁴ Knut Holter, and to a lesser extent Marta Høyland Lavik and perhaps a handful of other scholars who could rightly be considered representative of new trends in western biblical scholarship, has made a commendable effort in this direction. He has not only written books and articles on the topic, but has also encouraged scholars of African extraction to take up the challenge. On the African-American side, we could probably cite Alvin A Jackson (1994) who, although primarily concerned with affirming the black presence in the Bible, cautions about the dangers of making the biblical world 'all black', which would be the same as making it 'all white'.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

If one is aware of the problem surrounding the scholarly debate about the Cush texts, it immediately becomes clear that the aims and objectives of this study pivot on two main lines of argument. First, the need to prioritize these texts and so give them the scholarly treatment that they deserve and, second, to carefully re-read them again and, in so doing, try to address issues pertaining to their interpretations or ‘misinterpretations’. The reason for undertaking this uphill task is driven by the conviction on my part, and certainly on the part of many others, that these texts have tremendous importance for Africa and Africans, despite the challenges that they continue to pose to the exegete. Hence it is now to the question of the importance and the challenges of the Cush texts that I should like to turn my attention in the following paragraphs.

1.2.1 Importance

In terms of the nature of the problem briefly outlined above in 1.1, it has become clearer that the first aim or objective of this study is to investigate further the problem associated with the study of the so-called ‘African texts’ of the Old Testament, specifically the ‘Cush texts’. In the first instance, we would like to investigate whether it is true that these texts have indeed not been given the priority and the attention they deserve, especially by western biblical scholarship. Thus, this study addresses the need to expose the tendency in the past to ignore Africa in the Old Testament by identifying, and offering another interpretation of, all the Cush texts. The need to explore this question further has been given substance by the numerous instances of misinterpretation, as evidenced either by western biblical scholars on one hand, or by African-American scholars together with their African counterparts on the other.

It should be noted that by offering their own ‘counter’-interpretations, the latter group does not necessarily offer an objective interpretation of the contentious references, and they cannot altogether be blamed for this. In their eagerness to be ‘apologetic’ they have oftentimes, either consciously or unconsciously, failed to do justice to all facets of the texts. Certainly, while it is not possible to be completely objective with regard to the interpretation of any text because of the cultural biases which somehow every interpreter

carries, nevertheless the ideal remains that interpreters should strive as much as possible to be objective in their explanations of texts; otherwise we should not be talking of 'exegesis' but rather of 'eisegesis', namely reading 'into the text' rather than 'out of the text'. Therefore, this study addresses the need to provide a balanced alternative to the questionable attempts at interpretation in the past, and hopes to achieve this by a thorough exegesis of all the Cush texts.

But we are embarking on this study because of other reasons as well. By attempting another interpretation of the Cush texts in particular, we would like to explore the possibility of finding answers to some important hermeneutical questions which the study of these texts raises for the African people, such as the question of African identity and history. For instance, what is the relationship between the African reader of the Bible and the Old Testament? Does the Old Testament mean anything special to the African people? Can these texts provide a glimpse into an African history which is pre-western or pre-missionary? In other words, what view of Africa and Africans does the Old Testament exhibit before the advent of western missionaries and colonialists? An answer to this question is particularly important for us, especially if it is accepted that traditional western biblical scholarship has generally marginalized the African presence in the Old Testament. The question of 'identity' however is not as clear cut as it appears. It can be problematic because of the diverse ways of the understanding of this term by various people.

Today, the peoples of Africa, like any other peoples of the world, need to define themselves in the context of the twenty-first century. They are rightly asking themselves who they are, whence they came from and whither they are going. In the context of their history they are also trying to define their relationship with God their Creator. Africans need to come to terms with the fact that, like the rest of humanity, they too are called to salvation. From the Christian point of view, they also are the object of Christ's redemptive work. What then is the place of Africa in the Bible in general, and in the Old Testament in particular? It is therefore necessary now for interested scholars to take up this challenge and try to re-visit and re-interpret these texts from, so to speak, a 'pre-western' perspective. This is the challenge posed by this thesis. Our task, if we may borrow the words of Hays, will consist in demonstrating that, 'Black people are not a

modern-era addition to the story of salvation history. They were there from the beginning.’ (1996:409). Such an insight alone is certainly of tremendous importance to the African people.

The desire to relate Africa and the Old Testament is not new. In fact, as early as the 1950s, a group of African Catholic priests studying in Europe came together to discuss the question of an Africanization of the Christian faith. They reportedly argued that Africans were closer to the biblical world-view than to western theology and philosophy, and that an Africanized theology must of necessity include an interpretation of the Bible from African perspectives (cf. Holter 2002:76). A more explicit focus on biblical scholarship emerged in the 1970s, when no less than three international conferences placed the relationship between Africa and the Bible on the agenda. The first of these was the Jerusalem congress on ‘Black Africa and the Bible’, which was held from 24-30 April 1972 (cf. Holter 2002:77). In the 1980s and 1990s up until 2000 this development took on a more organized nature, resulting as it did in the establishment of biblical associations (to mention but a few) such as PACE, NABIS, ABSEA and GABES⁵ (cf. Holter 2002:77ff).

Thus, the early example during the 1950s was then followed up throughout the latter decades of the 20th century. In other words, the felt need always existed to come up with what some authors have called an ‘*interpretatio Africana*’ of the Bible. If this is the case, then the issue of an African theology is long overdue. Such a venture will not only define what African theology is all about, but will also radically divorce African biblical scholarship from western scholarship. As a result, we shall see a development of African theology that makes use of African resources in its interpretation. African Biblical Theology will then finally become a discipline in its own right.

Finally, by taking upon ourselves the challenge of this topic, we would like to underline our willingness to be part of a new breed of scholars or, in the words of Holter (2000a:12), ‘a second generation’ of African scholars, who are now focusing on the challenge of interpreting the Old Testament from the African point of view. I should like to agree with Holter, an important discussion partner in matters concerning the Old

⁵ PACE: ‘Panafrikan Association of Catholic Exegetes’; NABIS: ‘Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies’; ABSEA: ‘Association for Biblical Scholarship in Eastern Africa’; GABES: ‘Ghana Association of Biblical Exegetes’.

Testament and Africa, about the challenge of approaching these texts from the African point of view:

However, it would be unfortunate, if the second generation of African Old Testament Scholars, would also have to do their research in contexts where the discussion partners for all practical purposes are still western scholars. Not only would the second generation then be prevented from relating their research to the interpretive experiences of the first generation, but it would also continue the more general tendency of marginalizing African Old Testament scholarship (Holter 2002:114).

By bracing up to this challenge, we do not intend to utter the final word on this topic, but rather we hope to be able to make a contribution, however meagre it might be, to the ongoing debate concerning the interpretation of the African texts from the African vantage point. As we enter the 21st century, we see this invitation becoming more and more urgent.

Today, consciously or not, the Christian world is realizing that the ‘South’, and not the North or West or East, is little by little becoming the ‘epicentre’ of Christianity.⁶ Holter (2000a:2) has, I think, rightly observed that:

One reason for this [that is the need to shift the biblical / theological focus] is the fact that the numerical - and probably also spiritual - centre of Christianity is drifting southwards. Africa is a major exponent of this development, as sub-Saharan Africa throughout the 20th century has more or less become a Christian continent. This has important consequences for the global distribution of institutionalized theological and biblical studies.⁷

⁶ By the ‘south’ we do not mean just the continent of Africa, but other countries as well, especially those which lie in the southern hemisphere. However, Africa is slowly but surely becoming a point of interest from the Christian point of view. The factors which have led to this shift or drift are not the concern of this thesis.

⁷ A CNN report (7th April, 2005), commenting on the legacy of Pope John Paul II who had died only a few days earlier and whose body was still lying in state waiting for burial on the 8th of the same month, forecast that by the year 2020 three-quarters of the one billion or so Catholic population then would come from the Developing World. This is to say nothing of other Christian denominations. Furthermore, according to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed (Barrett et al. [eds] 2001), the distribution of Catholics alone world-

If this drift indeed exists, then Africa needs to reflect it not just in the lively and well-attended liturgies which characterize her worship today but also, and *more importantly*, in her theology and indeed in the whole expression of her faith. In brief, Africa needs an *interpretatio Africana* of her faith. This of course means going beyond the beating of drums that is so characteristic of African worship. As Katongole, a Ugandan philosopher and theologian, has rightly pointed out:

We need therefore to be careful in our theology so as not to play up to this spectacularization (say by certain trends of enculturation theologies which may unwittingly tend to promote the picture of a playing, singing and dancing Africa). What we need instead, is a more deeply entrenched theological practice which can in fact challenge different histories and politics which tend to obscure the historical and actual struggles, conflicts and aspirations of the African peoples (2001:259).

By ‘spectacularization’, Katongole (2001: 259ff) refers, more or less, to the tendency among some individuals from the ‘rich countries of the North’ who, in the name of post-modernism, tend to be ‘mesmerized’ by the cultural artifacts of African culture such as the drum. According to Katongole, such individuals end up ‘romanticizing’ the drum as something ‘unique’, ‘neat’, and ‘beautiful’. In his view, this is just ‘another clever way to effectively preclude any serious engagement with the genuinely other.’

Katongole further argues that an even more serious challenge facing Africans is to establish how theology in Africa can ‘help Africa’s voice - its distinctive history and unique challenges – from being reduced to just another merely different, “neat” or “beautiful” chorus in the endless cacophony of inconsequential differences’ (2001:259ff).

wide by mid-2000 was as follows: Europe 27.1%; Latin America 43.6%; Oceania 0.8%; North America 6.7%; Asia 10.4%, and Africa 11.4%. Thus, if the percentage of Catholics in Latin America, Africa, Oceania and the large part of Asia which lies in the southern hemisphere is taken into account, then the Catholic population in the southern hemisphere by mid-2000 would add up to approximately 60% or more. Again this is to say nothing about other Christian denominations.

1.2.2 Challenges

While the re-interpretation of the Cush texts represents a challenge of its own, other challenges exist as well. Firstly, for all practical purposes, a detailed study of all the Cush texts would constitute an enormous task. There are simply too many texts which speak of Cush and / or its cognates. While in itself it may not be a major problem to identify all the Cush texts of the Old Testament, it is a real challenge to establish which of these texts actually refer to the African Cush and which do not. In other words, which geographical entities referred to by the Old Testament can with some relative certainty be said to belong or to refer to the African continent? The spread of the geographical locations of the names in Genesis 10:6-8, for example, confirms the problems associated with the identification of the geographical limits of the term Cush. Thus, the ‘certainty’ with which some sources identify these locations is increasingly coming into question.⁸ A further complication is Genesis 2:13 in which the Gihon, one of the four rivers issuing from the river that flowed out of Eden, is said to ‘flow around the whole land of Cush’. This detail raises the question of the geographical world view of Genesis 2 itself.

Secondly, closely associated with the question of the African Cush are challenges pertaining to terminology. Different names have been given to the area that the Bible calls Cush. Some scholars refer to this area as ‘Nubia’, ‘Wawat’, ‘Kush’, ‘Meroe’ and ‘Ethiopia’.⁹ Moreover, some scholars have pointed out that Cush could also refer to a location in Arabia.¹⁰ There is also a Mesopotamian ‘Cush’ which has been identified with the ‘Kassites’ or ‘Cassites’. Are all these places synonymous with the African Cush? How to make sense of this potentially confusing scenario? I believe it is the task of this thesis to clarify this rather confusing situation as well.

⁸ See commentary on these verses in *La Bible. L’Ancien Testament*, edition Librairie Gallimard 1956, according to which ‘...Misrayim, nom classique de l’Égypte...Pout, region du Pount au sud de la mer Rouge; Le pays de Canaan, la Palestine actuelle; Seba, peut-être le port de Saba, signalé par Strabon au sud-ouest de la mer Rouge; Hawilah, probablement l’Arabie; Sabta, region de l’Hadramouth, dans le sud de l’Arabie; Raamah et Sabtecah probablement en Arabie du sud; Sheba se trouvait dans le nord-ouest de l’Arabie; Dedan, oasis d’*el-Ela*, à proximité de *Médäin-Saleh* dans le nord-ouest de l’Arabie.

⁹ See Daniel J Hays 1996. The Cushites: A black nation in history. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:270.

¹⁰ R C Bailey cites the engraver W R Annim who depicts ‘Places Recorded in the Five Books of Moses’ and places the insert ‘Cuth’ in Persia. Another cartographer, Joseph Erwin Wilson, also cited by Bailey and whose work is based on ‘Maps of the Rivers of Eden’, refuses to depict ‘Cush’ mentioned in Gn 2:10-14 as the southern part of the Garden of Eden but places it somewhere in Arabia.

The methodology we have adopted, namely a ‘thematic approach’, represents a bold attempt to manage at least some of these challenges. By grouping texts according to their presumed categories we hope to define their functions in their respective literary units. Yet, still more challenges face one. Although we have underscored the importance of coming up in this thesis with an *interpretatio Africana* as regards the Cush texts, this in itself represents an enormous challenge because the question arises as to whether one really has to be an African in order to offer an African interpretation of the texts. Must one’s people be present in the Bible in order for one to make sense out of it, or is it possible and even desirable to read the Bible in its ‘strangeness’? By *interpretatio Africana* we simply refer to attempts on our part at ‘contextualizing’ the Bible, which means asking ourselves the basic question: How can an African in his/her life situation read the Bible meaningfully?

1.3 Clarification of aspects of the thesis

1.3.1 Selection of material

The intention of this thesis is to investigate further the problem associated with the interpretation of the Cush texts, in view of exploring the presence of Africa in the Old Testament. But it is also true to state that in fact not only the Cush texts speak of such a presence. Numerous texts in the Old Testament contain references to Africa. The majority of them speak about Egypt, implying that Egypt was more important to the people of God in the Old Testament than any other African nation, or simply that it interacted more significantly with them. The word ‘Egypt’, along with its cognate ‘Egyptian’, and with allowances made for duplications of texts, occurs some 740 times (Habtu 2001:56; see also Even-Soshan 1989:700-703, cited by Habtu), whereas the word ‘Cush’, variably translated ‘Ethiopia’ (LXX, Vulgate, King James Version, English Bible...), ‘Sudan’ (the first editions of the *Good News Bible* and *Today’s English Version*), ‘Nubia’ (Norwegian: 1978, and Danish: 1993), or even ‘Africa’ (Adamo 1998:37)¹¹ occurs some 56 times.

¹¹ See Holter 2000a. *Yahweh in Africa*: 110-112.

This number has been arrived at as a result of sampling all that can be put together from lists of entries by several authors, especially from Even-Shoshan's *New Concordance of the Bible* (1983); Koehler & Baumgartner's *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (1995); Clines & Elwolde's *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, vol. 4 (1998), and Brown, Driver & Briggs' *Hebrew and English Lexicon* (1979), among others. The 'Cush' entries can generally be grouped into the following categories, according to their morphological forms:

- 1) vwk
- 2) yvwk
- 3) tyvk
- 4) $\sim\text{yyvk}$, $\sim\text{yvk}$ and $\sim\text{yvwk}$

References to the term vwk are found in: Genesis 2:13; 10:6 (=1Chr 1:8); 10:7 (=1Chr 1:9); 10:8 (=1Chr 1:10); 2 Kings 19:9; 1 Chronicles 1:8,9,10; Isaiah 11:11; 18:1; 20:3,4,5; 37:9 (=1 Ki 19:9); 43:3; 45:14; Jeremiah 46:9; Ezekiel 29:10; 30:4,5,9; 38:5; Nahum 3:9; Zephaniah 3:10; Job 28:19; Psalm 7:1; 68:32(31); 87:4; Esther 1:1 (=Est 8:9) and 8:9. The references to the term yvwk are made in the following texts: 2 Samuel 18:21 (x2),22,23,31,32(x2); Jeremiah 13:23; 36:14; 38:7,10,12; 39:16; 2 Chronicles 14:8 and Zephaniah 1:1. The references to tyvk are to be found in: Numbers 12:1 (x2); and lastly reference is made to the plural forms $\sim\text{yyvk}$ $\sim\text{yvk}$ and $\sim\text{yvwk}$ in these texts: 2 Chronicles 12:3; 14:11(x2),12; 16:8; 21:16; Amos 9:7; Zephaniah 2:12, and Daniel 11:43. There are also 'Cush'-related terms such as !vwk (Habakkuk 3:7) and $\sim\text{yt} [\text{vr} \text{!vwk}$ (Judges 3:8 [x2].10[x2]), but because of doubts surrounding their linkage to the African Cush, they do not constitute the direct object of investigation in this thesis.

Some general comments ought to be made concerning these texts:

1) Reference count: \mathbf{vwk} (x30); \mathbf{yvwk} (x15); \mathbf{tyvk} (x2); $\sim\mathbf{yyvk}$, $\sim\mathbf{yvk}$, and $\sim\mathbf{yvwk}$ (x9): Total = 56.

2) While almost all the references to ‘Cush’ as a ‘proper noun’ in (1) above appear in isolation from other grammatical elements, nearly all the other cognates of ‘Cush’ appear in combination with other grammatical forms such as prepositions, conjunctions, particles and so forth, and do so according to the syntactical demands and usages of the individual biblical authors.

3) As far as I am concerned, the form \mathbf{tyvk} seems to represent the only two occasions in the whole of the Old Testament where reference is made to the feminine grammatical form of ‘Cush’.

4) As for the references to the plural masculine forms of ‘Cush’ ($\sim\mathbf{yyvk}$ $\sim\mathbf{yvk}$ and $\sim\mathbf{yvwk}$), two features should perhaps be pointed out:

First, morphologically the two words $\sim\mathbf{yyvk}$ and $\sim\mathbf{yvk}$ are clearly two variations of the expected masculine plural form $\sim\mathbf{yvwk}$, but instead of the usual long *šûrreq* as their first vowel, both have a short *qibbus*. This does not, however, change the meaning of the words in any way.

Second, two other forms exist, $\mathbf{!vwk}$ (Ha 3:7) and $\sim\mathbf{yt} [\mathbf{vr} \mathbf{!vwk}$ (Jg 3:8.8.10.10). While the former is usually identified with some nomadic Arab tribe in the neighbourhood of Midian, perhaps because of the reference to the phrase ‘tents of Cushan’, the latter (literally: one of double wickedness) is almost unanimously identified with a certain king of Mesopotamia. However some authors posit a certain emendation which involves splitting the whole phrase into $[\mathbf{vr} \mathbf{vwk}$, plus of course the suffix ‘im’ parsed as a masculine plural form. This would then be translated as ‘Cush, the wicked one’. According to Koehler & Baumgartner (1995:467), the whole phrase would then be understood to be ‘a disfigurement of a proper name.’ But insufficient evidence from authoritative manuscripts exists to substantiate this claim. Thus, considering the doubtful nature of these two entries, $\mathbf{!vwk}$ and $\sim\mathbf{yt} [\mathbf{vr} \mathbf{!vwk}$, I will dissociate them from the ‘Cush’ material although philologically they seem to belong

together. Therefore, they will not be analyzed in this study. More importantly however, in this thesis, the term ‘Cush’ will be used to refer to all the variations cited above, except of course those which display a doubtful linkage to the African Cush as in the case just mentioned.

The references to ‘Cush’ in all its forms are contained in all the three parts of the Hebrew canon (TANAK).¹² According to the ‘thematic’ organization in terms of which references to Cush in this thesis will be analyzed, there are references concerning information on proper names as well as geographical, and cultural matters (Proper names: Gn 10:6-8; Jr 36:14; 46:9; Zph 1:1 and Ps 7:1. Geographical: Gn 2:13; 10:6-10; Ezk 29:10; Est 1:1; 8:9 and Cultural: Nm 12:1; Is 18:2; Jr 13:23). Next, the Hebrew Bible also contains references to Cush concerning economic, political and military matters (Economic: Is 18:7; 45:14 and Job 28:19. Political and military matters: 2 Sm 18:21-32; 2 Ki 19:9; Is 18:1-2; 20:3-5; 37:9; Jr 38-39; Ezk 30:4,5,9; 38:5; Nah 3:9; Zph 2:12 and 2 Chr 14:8-14). And finally one comes across Cush texts which concern the relationship between Cush and Yahweh in the context of salvation (Is 11:11; 18:7; 43:3; Am 9:7; Zph 3:10; Ps 68:32[31] and Ps 87:4).

In fact, the presence of Cush (or ‘Africa’ for that matter) in the Bible is so evident that Copher, one of the most renowned African-American scholars, is prompt to remark: ‘For indeed Africa has a place in the biblical writings from the very beginning, however far back in history one may set those beginnings...In fact, so prominently does Africa figure in some of the biblical content that one might well say, “No Africa, no biblical content”’ (1988:32-33).

In the process of sampling material about Africa and her peoples, it must always be borne in mind that in the Bible information about Africa and its peoples is on the whole given by, and from, the perspective of Hebrew-Israelite-Judahite-Jewish writers, and not by Africans nor from their viewpoint, except where it is established that Africans, whether Hebrew or otherwise, were the authors. Africans, so to speak, are passive providers of the information in most instances. This thesis, however, although it is

¹² For a survey of the ‘Cush’ references according to the arrangement in the TANAK, see Holter (2000a:96), Høyland (2001:46), among others.

concerned with finding Africa in the Old Testament, will focus only on the Cush texts, even to the exclusion of the Egypt texts.

The reasons which have guided this choice include the following: Firstly, extra-biblical sources, while they may be useful as references for our study, are nonetheless outside its scope. Secondly, in the case of Egypt, the other important African country, a number of studies have already been carried out. This is not to say that research on Egypt has been concluded and sealed. On the contrary, it is an admission of the fact that studies on Egypt have progressed so far that in my view they have lost the urgency of the Cush texts, for example.

There is no reason to doubt the fact that Egypt, unlike Cush, boasts such an impressive and better-known history and culture at present. In fact, with reference to Egypt scholars today speak of ‘Egyptology’ as a science in its own right, and they speak of ‘Egyptologists’ in referring to scholars with expertise in matters Egyptian. Thus, we do not perceive any urgent need in this direction. Nonetheless, we still reserve the right in this thesis to appropriate whatever material we deem to be helpful in the advancement of our own topic. After all, as one scholar has well observed, ‘...the history of ancient Africa is as unthinkable without Egypt as the history of Egypt is without Africa’ (Davidson 1964:43). Or as Adamo (2001:66) has expressively put it:

The extra-biblical texts show that the history of Cush is incomplete without Egypt just as the history of Egypt is incomplete without Cush. That is the reason why in most cases they are treated together in extra-biblical (as well as biblical) sources. They belong together as Africans, and they belong to one race. Egypt is the corridor from which other Africans from south of the Sahara traveled outside their known world.¹³

Habtu (2001:56), another researcher into the African presence in the Bible, has argued along similar lines to Adamo: ‘The question of whether Egypt is part of Africa or not, or, for that matter, whether Egypt is significant for biblical studies or not, is a foregone conclusion.’ Thus, Egypt is part of Africa, contrary to the views of those who

¹³ Adamo D T, 2001: Images of Cush in the Old Testament: Reflections on African Hermeneutics, in M N Getui et al. (eds), *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa*, 66.

would rather group it with the Mediterranean Lands, and therefore part of Europe, or as part of the Ancient Near East. If however one goes by the sheer fact of the numbers of references, Egypt would seem to be more important than Cush when it comes to investigating the presence of Africa in the Old Testament. This would make it the natural choice for whoever would be interested in researching on this topic. But we are deliberately foregoing this choice. In this study, where our topic dictates that we appropriate useful material from the Egyptian texts, we shall not hesitate to do so and, in that case, Egypt will receive the same weight and consideration as Cush. After all, as Holter has pointed out, ‘...recently it has been argued that Kush and Egypt instead should be seen as more equal rivals...’ (Holter 2000a:99-100).

Other reasons as well have directed the selection of the material for this thesis. These reasons are not *per se* the primary concern of our investigation, but they are nonetheless worth touching upon. They generally pivot on the question of racialism, a topic that has been a matter of major concern among many African American biblical scholars.

Sadler, one of these scholars, has for instance made it one of his main investigations in a dissertation entitled ‘Can a Cushite Change His Skin? An Examination of Race, Ethnicity, and Othering’ (2001). Cush, he has argued, stands out from the North African ‘sons of Ham’ as a decidedly racial term. Cushites, he further contends, were known through Egyptian and Assyrian epigraphy as a dark-skinned people with features consistent with modern notions of ‘negroes.’ While the racial identity of Egyptians, Libyans and Canaanites has been viewed with less certainty, Sadler (2001:34) has argued that Cushites have generally been accepted as ‘racially black.’

Furthermore, Sadler thinks that Cush is a term often racialized by modern exegetes. In this regard the term ‘Cushi,’ a singular gentilic used to describe people from Cush, has become a translational equivalent for the racial term ‘Negro’ in modern Hebrew. In addition, throughout the history of biblical translation, the term Cush found its way into Greek in the LXX as ‘Ethiopian’, a word which implicitly contains potentially racist implications since it means ‘burnt face’. Thus, the people known to the Hebrew Bible’s authors as Cushites were known by those authors’ Greek-speaking descendants not by their place of origin or ethnicity, but by an essentialist assessment of

their phenotypical presentation: ‘burnt face’. Hence, whereas other ‘Hamitic’ nations generally have not been racialized to the same extent, Cush possesses an extensive history of racial prescription (cf. Sadler 2001:35-36).

The question that Sadler asks is: Did it, namely racialism, occur in the Hebrew Bible? The relevance of his investigation to this thesis may lie in the fact that issues of racialism have not been uncommon on the African continent as well.

Finally, from the geographical point of view, Cush would seem to me to be more representative of ‘black Africa’ than Egypt. The majority of scholars are agreed that the location of ancient Cush should be traced in the region which is situated immediately south of Egypt and extends somewhere from central east Africa to the Red Sea in the East (cf. Holter 2000a:109). This would place the country of Cush approximately in the territory between the first and the sixth cataracts of the river Nile. One should, however, allow for some elasticity and flexibility of territory here.¹⁴

It was pointed out that the relevance of this study consists partly in its seeking to throw light on African existential issues, such as the question of African identity and history. But linked to these aspects is the African experience in the face of the multitude of challenges with which the people of that part of Africa ‘south of the Sahara’ have to reckon. And because the researcher is part of that story, the choice of the Cush texts is still more appropriate! Again, as Holter has rightly observed: ‘...the OT portrayal of Cush echoes aspects of Africa and Africans that go beyond the geographical, cultural, and anthropological borders of Egypt and further into Africa’ (Holter 2000a:96). Moreover, according to the same author, the African-American biblical scholars together with their African counterparts, in their search for Africa in the Old Testament, have very strongly focused on Cush rather than Egypt as representative of Africa (Holter 2000a:96).

¹⁴ The first cataract (there are six if one travels up the Nile, resulting from the unerodable granite basement rock of the Nubian Desert plateau) near Elephantine and Aswan was the natural border of Pharaonic Egypt. Above this point up to the second cataract near Wadi Halfa lay the region of lower Nubia, once called Wawae, and beyond was the region of Upper Nubia, known from about 1970 BCE as ‘Kush’, the same region as the ‘Cush’ of the Old Testament. Centuries later, ‘Kush’ became the general name of the entire region to the south of Egypt, corresponding to the still later designation of the area by the Greeks as Αἰνθιοπί, a. ‘Kush’ simply refers to the land of the ‘Nubians’, namely the peoples south of Egypt proper (cf. Robert A Bennett, 1971:488).

1.3.2 Terminology

In the first instance, I wish to paraphrase M Høyland Lavik, a fellow researcher on the African texts, who has adequately described the terms we intend to clarify here and which will be used in this thesis. By ‘African Texts’ are meant those Old Testament texts that refer to areas and / or individuals from the continent of Africa. Therefore, as mentioned earlier the topic of this thesis precludes discussion of references to the land and people of Africa found in extra-biblical sources. However, it should be noted that these texts are not ‘African’ in the sense that they are necessarily written by Africans or by people of African origin. Neither are they ‘African’ in the sense that they were directed to Africans as such. They simply comprise an integral part of the Hebrew Canon and represent the religious heritage of the Jewish people. The terms used by the Old Testament to refer to the continent of Africa can generally be grouped into three categories, namely Egypt, then Cush and lastly a number of different entities with fewer or more references of uncertain location.¹⁵

By ‘Old Testament’ we strictly refer to the ‘Hebrew Bible Canon’ as consisting of thirty-nine books. Therefore, we are excluding all the other books which are today considered part of the Old Testament Canon by some Christian denominations such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox churches, according to which the following books are recognized as deuterocanonical and authoritative: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (Sirach or Ben Sira), Baruch (including the Letter of Jeremiah), 1 and 2 Maccabees, and additions to the books of Esther and Daniel. The canon of the Greek Orthodox churches also includes 1 Esdras, the Prayer of Manasseh, Psalm 151, 3 Maccabees, plus 4 Maccabees as an appendix (cf. Achtemeier 1996:238). These books are absent from the Hebrew Canon but are found in the Greek Septuagint translation (LXX).

¹⁵ For a comprehensive survey of the Cush terms cf. Holter 2000a: 93-106; see also Høyland, L 2001:43-44.

Since the topic of this thesis is the ‘Cush’, this study will only focus on the references to Cush in the Hebrew Canon. There are 56 Old Testament references to ‘Cush’ spread over the three main divisions of the Hebrew Canon with the term ‘Cush’ occurring 30 times, and its cognates, 26 times.¹⁶ In this thesis the term ‘Cush’ will be understood to refer not to the modern state of Ethiopia, but rather to the territory located immediately south of ancient Egypt, approximately the area between the first and sixth cataracts of the Nile, an African nation known as ‘Kush’ in Ancient Near Eastern sources or ‘Ethiopia’ in Graeco-Roman sources. In this thesis the term ‘Cush’ will be used to cover all these other ancient renderings. Similarly, the term ‘Kassites’ will be used synonymously with the word ‘Cassites’, the other variant of the same term used by some authors to refer to a Cush-related region in eastern Mesopotamia.

It should be noted, however, that the exact demarcation of this portion of land has been a matter of contention among scholars, for it has variably been referred to sometimes as ‘Abyssinia’, ‘Ethiopia’, ‘Nubia’, or even ‘Sudan’. Hence, the term ‘Africa’ when used in this thesis will always refer to the African continent understood in its non-problematized manner.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Approach

The nature of the topic calls for a two-pronged approach. The first concerns reading and becoming acquainted with all the relevant literature. The aim here is to attempt to sample the divergent views which have been expressed to date concerning the African texts in general and the Cush texts in particular, in order to furnish the researcher with background knowledge.

Earlier on in this chapter we have argued that basically two positions exist regarding the interpretation of the ‘African’ texts: the Eurocentric and the Afrocentric. The Afrocentric position encompasses both the African-American scholars and their African counterparts. While the proponents of the first-mentioned approach are alleged to

¹⁶ For a survey of the references, see especially Even-Shoshan (1983:527), among others.

have misinterpreted or even ignored the Cush texts and have therefore not accorded them the priority they deserve, the latter two groups have tended to over-focus on the interpretation of the Cush texts, with the result that their findings have often tended to over-exaggerate their ‘Africanness’. As a result both approaches have led to an unacceptable form of ‘extremism’, which has made their interpretations somewhat suspect from the exegetical point of view.

Thus, by reading the available literature concerning the topic under discussion, the present researcher would like first of all to become informed about the allegations labelled against western biblical scholarship and try to discover to what extent traditional western biblical scholars have ‘deliberately tried to ignore’ and to ‘de-Africanize’ the Bible as D T Adamo, for instance, has claimed. Furthermore, by studying representative authors from the group of African-American and African scholars, this researcher hopes to bring to light the strong and weak points of both and, it is hoped, try to show how far they have tried to rectify the problem they committed themselves to solving in the first place namely that of bringing to the fore the presence of Africa and contribution of Africans to the Bible.¹⁷

We have said that the topic of this thesis asks for a two-pronged approach, the first being a review of the relevant literature by representative authors. The second approach is exegetical in nature. By going back to the Cush texts as found in the Hebrew Bible, the researcher intends to attempt a thorough exegesis of these texts and in so doing ‘give them the priority’ they deserve.

Needless to say, this will entail a multifaceted exegetical approach, as it is not always easy to determine what approach will yield the best results. In brief, the choice of whatever exegetical method is adopted will be dictated by the nature of individual texts, even though it is understood that in the realm of exegesis certain tools and elements remain a constant factor and do not change. For instance, any sound exegesis will of necessity almost always include literary considerations pertaining to issues concerning

¹⁷ It should, however, be noted at this point that new approaches towards the interpretation of the African texts have tended to be more cautious. This is probably because of the awareness of the problem posed by the rather extreme positions we have just attempted to outline. The new approaches have more or less attempted to eliminate, as far as possible, the cultural element which seems to be the key factor responsible for the extreme positions reflected in the interpretations of the African texts in general and the Cush texts in particular. Representative authors from this group too will be studied. For the lack of a better terminology we have dubbed this approach ‘new trend(s)’.

textual criticism, syntax, historical / cultural contexts and so forth. In general, this researcher feels at liberty to use whatever method will be most viable from the exegetical point of view. In order to maximize his exegetical results, he has grouped the Cush texts according to their presumed thematic functions as literary units.

Finally, the basic text that will be used in this thesis is the Masoretic Text (MT) as found in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 1990 edition. The English translations (unless otherwise indicated) will generally follow the text of the RSV (1952) although the researcher feels at liberty to offer his own translation should the need arise. Accordingly, although the RSV invariably translates ‘Cush’ by ‘Ethiopia’, I have preferred to leave it un-translated in its multiple forms. Furthermore, identical and / or parallel texts are treated only once, as they are presumed to refer to the same thing. An example of such a case is the text of Genesis 10:6, which is identical and parallel to 1 Chronicles 1:8; Genesis 10:7 // 1 Chronicles 1:9; Genesis 10:8 // 1 Chronicles 1:10; Esther 1:1 // Esther 8:9; Isaiah 37:9 // 2 Kings 19:9.

Other important versions are the *Bible Works Greek LXX/BNT* (BGT), *BibleWorks 5 Resource, LXX Septuaginta Rahlfs’* (LXT) and the *Latin Vulgate* (VUL). The chronological designations BCE (Before Christian Era) and CE (Christian Era) will be used to refer to the traditional usage of BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini) respectively, out of respect for the diversity of the world’s people. The abbreviations for Bible books follow the system proposed by Kilian (1985).

1.4.2 Organization and outline of the chapters

This thesis will consist of six chapters, the first and the sixth being the introduction and the conclusion respectively. In the introduction the researcher offers an overview and states the problem the thesis is trying to address, outlines the aims and the objectives of the study, clarifies key terms to be used in the thesis and, finally, outlines methodological approaches. The conclusion will largely discuss the outcomes of the thesis, the remaining uncertainties and prospects for further research. Since this study is also meant to be contextual in the sense that, among other matters, it will seek to approach the Cush texts from the African point of view, the conclusion will in addition

include recommendations for the teaching of courses on Africa in the Old Testament and in the Bible in general.

Chapter two comprises a review of relevant literature concerning studies on the African texts in general and the Cush texts in particular. Here, the researcher reads as background information the works of representative authors stemming basically from three groups of biblical scholars: first, traditional western biblical scholarship, which also includes new trends; second, African-American scholars and lastly, African scholars. All this information will, however, only serve as a stepping-stone for chapters three, four and five, which constitute the body of the thesis.

In these chapters, the researcher will attempt a thorough explanation of the various Cush texts from the exegetical point of view. In order to increase his chances of success here, the researcher has grouped the texts according to their presumed themes or categories. A difficulty with this method of organizing the texts is that one still comes across texts which stubbornly refuse to be classified, or which simply do not belong to one or the other of the categories or thematic groupings. These cases will be pointed out when appropriate.

It is of course also possible to carry out the exegesis of these texts according to a scheme which follows the three main divisions of the Old Testament, or a 'canonical approach'. This method of organizing the Cush texts has been successfully employed by Adamo (1998), Holter (2000a), and Høyland Lavik (2001) among others. While this type of approach offers its own advantages, for instance respect for the original setting and contexts of the texts as intended by the biblical author, disadvantages are also evident. For example, it becomes difficult to understand the relationship between the various references as they appear in the three divisions of the Old Testament. This arrangement makes it difficult to determine whether the African presence in the Old Testament was something consistent or merely sporadic. But one thing is certain: that presence permeated all the aspects of Hebrew life.

Furthermore, most of the Cush texts originate in the prophetic literature. Therefore, it would be very tempting to group texts according to a 'prophetic' scheme. While this notion is quite attractive, it does exhibit drawbacks. For example, this arrangement would create a problem of disproportion with regard to the length of the

chapters. Ultimately, one ends up with a thesis in which some chapters are very long while others are very short. This would also be the case if the texts were organized from the ‘morphological’ point of view, whereby one could start off by analyzing the references to the form ‘Cush’, then to ‘Cushi’, *et cetera*.

Similarly, an organization based on chronology, while it is equally attractive, presents us with the real difficulty of establishing the exact dates of the texts. This is for instance the approach adopted by Sadler in his dissertation (2001). But, as a matter of fact, only very few texts in the whole of the Old Testament can today be dated with any relative certainty; the majority cannot.

Other divisions have been experimented with. Copher for example, in an article entitled ‘The Bible and the African Experience: The Biblical Period’ (1988), has studied the African texts according to an eight-period scheme, starting with the period of the Patriarchs and Joseph, and ending with the New Testament period. While this scheme is sound in as far as it offers a broader picture concerning the African experience in the Bible, it looks somewhat pragmatic because it does not group this experience according to clearly-defined categories. Thus, it becomes rather difficult to see the thread that runs through that experience, if any.

The thematic approach, on the other hand, is attractive in that by classifying texts according to their presumed categories they are accorded a certain ‘order’ and congruence, which I consider favours a ‘good’ and ‘fair’ interpretation. Moreover, it makes the texts a little more manageable. Hence the present researcher has preferred this approach. But here again one should also admit of disadvantages. One such disadvantage is to assume *a priori* that a certain text performs a certain function even before this has been proven. This would be tantamount to approaching texts from a biased point of view. One could end up reading into texts meanings they may not contain.

Finally, once the presumed category of a text has been identified, the analysis of the text follows according to the following arrangement. First, the MT text where the reference ‘Cush’ or its cognate occurs is quoted and a translation offered. This section is followed by some ‘Preliminary remarks’ which generally focus on any outstanding literary questions of a grammatical and / or syntactical nature, without necessarily excluding interpretative aspects as well. Subsequently, the ‘Analytical remarks’ focus on

our own explanation or understanding of the Cush reference in a given text. This naturally takes into consideration many other relevant issues which help to illuminate the meaning of the reference, including other scholars' views. This section marks the end of the treatment of the 'Cush' reference in question. Finally, at the end of every chapter except chapter one, a conclusion is offered. However, I should like to point out that the sub-topics of 'Preliminary remarks' and 'Analytical remarks' are not by any means two distinct and discreet processes, but merely represent a provisional and pragmatic arrangement meant to make the explanation of the text manageable. As the reader will probably discover, often their contents tend to overlap.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF INTERPRETATIONS OF CUSH TEXTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

2.1 Introduction

Although quite a number of theses on the topic of Africa and the Old Testament have been written by African scholars ‘north of the Limpopo’ (Holter 2002), only a very small percentage of them explicitly treat the topic of the presence of Africa and Africans in the Old Testament. For example, of the 87 studies cited by Holter, only one bears any direct relation to the topic: the dissertation by Adamo (1986). Fortunately, outside Africa several other scholars, especially in America, and to a lesser extent in Europe, have recently done valuable research in this field.¹⁸ In fact, an interest in the presence and place of Africa in the Bible has been the preserve of African-American biblical scholars. But it is also true that as we enter the 21st century, an ever-increasing number of African biblical scholars are themselves beginning to show interest in biblical references or allusions to the people and places of Africa and the role of Africa in the formation of the Bible. As Africa awakes to the task of recovering its dignity and ‘Africanness’, so too is it recognizing, recovering, and reviving its presence in the past - including its presence in the Bible.

The intention of this chapter is to turn to the works of some of the more important contributors from amongst both African-Americans and also Africans. But this chapter is concerned with reviewing what traditional western biblical scholarship says or does not say about the African presence and specifically about Cush in the Old Testament. All this reading is done in order to furnish this thesis with background information about Cush. One could perhaps group the various authors into two main camps, namely Eurocentric

¹⁸ See the works of Bennett (1979), Copher (1974; 1991), Bailey (1991), Jackson (1994), and Sadler (2001), among the African-American authors; Holter (1996; 2000; 2002), Høyland Lavik (2001), Hays (1996), and Yamauchi (2004), among the western ones.

scholars on one hand and Afrocentric ones on the other. By way of a general principle, Eurocentric scholarship would normally reflect European perspectives on interpreting the Bible, whereas Afrocentric works would tend to interpret the Bible from African perspectives. But for the purposes of this study, I have decided to review this literature in terms of three main camps or groups of interpretations, which comprise the following:

1) The interpretations by traditional western Old Testament scholarship. Under this category, I intend to explore representative interpretations of the African presence in the Old Testament as evidenced in introductions to histories of Israel and Bible maps, together with Bible dictionaries and encyclopaedias. I will also peruse major Bible commentaries to which western biblical scholars have contributed articles.¹⁹ Lastly, in this section, I should like to touch on what might be categorized as a 'new trend' among western scholars. This trend clearly purports to depart from the traditional western way of interpreting the so-called African texts, and is particularly evident in scholars such as Knut Holter, Daniel Hays, Edwin M Yamauchi and, to a lesser extent, Marta Høyland Lavik.

2) The interpretations offered by the African-American biblical scholars, who have approached the African texts from a rather reactionary point of view. Again here, as with the first group, I shall attempt to provide only a representative sampling. Here I am particularly interested in the views of Robert A Bennett, Charles B Copher, Randall C Bailey, Jackson A Alvin and Rodney S Sadler.

3) Finally, the interpretations of the African biblical scholars, notably the work of David T Adamo and, to a lesser extent, the contributions to the topic made by scholars such as Engelbert Mveng, G A Mikré-Selassie, and Sidbé Semporé.

The literature review of individual authors will generally follow the chronological order that is reflected in the outline. This order, however, does not necessarily mean that we consider the first writer to be treated as more important than others.

¹⁹ Given the enormous amount of material involved here, only a representative sampling of the views of western scholarship should be sufficient to highlight the argument of the thesis.

2.2 Traditional Western Old Testament Biblical Scholarship

2.2.1 Introduction

Before delving into the treatment of this sub-topic, it is appropriate to point out right from the outset that the Christian church owes much of the understanding of her faith to the dedicated work of centuries of western biblical exegesis. The various contributions of such exegetes undeniably go back many centuries and have greatly shaped the faith and theology of the Christian church through the ages. But despite its mammoth contribution, western biblical scholarship has usually been accused of having disregarded the so-called African texts in general. An example or two to illustrate this point may be in order here. Bailey (1991:166) considers that when talking about Egypt, western biblical scholarship has usually accorded it what he calls a ‘token paragraph or two.’ Copher (1974:7) has proposed what he calls the ‘New Hamite Hypothesis’. According to Copher this hypothesis ‘eliminates the black man, or rather the so-called Negro from the biblical world. Those black peoples whom it retains are given the title Caucasoid. Blacks, who [sic] instead of being regarded as Negroes, are viewed as being white.’

In these white authors one can already discern a pointer in the direction of ‘disregarding’ or ‘ignoring’ the ‘African texts’, specifically the Cush texts of the Old Testament and / or their misinterpretation. And there are other examples as well. The tendency to disregard African texts and ‘misinterpret’ them has been noticed also by some modern western biblical scholars, themselves a product of traditional western biblical scholarship. Such is the case with Knut Holter, today renowned for research on Africa in the Bible, and to a lesser extent Marta H Lavik (cf. Holter 2000a:95; Lavik 2001:45).

Where the African texts have actually been taken into consideration, as has been the case in some instances, western biblical scholarship has been accused of misinterpreting them. Of those who hold this view, Adamo is probably one of the more

significant. According to this African biblical scholar, most of the Cush references have been misinterpreted by western scholarship and he considers this an attempt to try ‘to de-Africanize the Bible’ (cf. Adamo 1998:1).²⁰

Thus, the explanations offered by western biblical scholarship of the ‘African texts’ have recently been viewed with suspicion and caution, especially by the African-American biblical scholars on the one hand, and by African biblical scholars on the other.

As the subsequent subsections will seek to show, the extent of the problem is far wider than meets the eye, for it is evident also in introductions to biblical history and Bible maps, together with Bible dictionaries and encyclopaedias. It becomes even more apparent in Bible commentaries to which western biblical scholars have contributed articles.²¹ Let me now turn to a brief review of the relevant literature in order to emphasize the point we are trying to pursue here.

However, because of the lack on my part of a clear and coherent working structure, I shall offer only a cursory perusal of some works in which the contribution of traditional western biblical scholarship is reflected. This includes introductions to biblical histories, Bible maps, Bible dictionaries, and encyclopaedias on the one hand and Bible commentaries on the other. I shall then follow this up with a brief overview of what we have termed in this thesis as ‘new trends’ in western biblical studies. These trends generally stem from the usual western way of doing biblical studies, but they nevertheless still remain part of traditional western biblical scholarship and may rightly be termed an ‘offshoot’ of it. Finally, I shall offer some critical remarks concerning this kind of scholarship as well as adducing ‘new trends’ by way of conclusion to these subsections.

2.2.2 Introductions to biblical histories, Bible maps, Bible dictionaries and encyclopaedias

²⁰ For more on this see Adamo’s book: *Africa and the Africans in the Old Testament* (1998): Chs 3,4,5 et passim.

²¹ For the purposes of this argument, I intend to highlight mainly the interpretations or misinterpretations given in some major bible commentaries regarding 2 Samuel 18: 19-32 (the Cushite messenger of Joab).

Certainly, when one peruses the various current introductions to the Old Testament and histories of Israel, especially the sections dealing with geography, the tendency to marginalize Cush becomes even more apparent.

For example, Norman K Gottwald (1985), although he enumerates by name Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, South Arabia and Egypt as great civilizations which flourished in ancient times because of their proximity to river valleys, makes no explicit reference to Cush as such.²² Reference to it is perhaps only implied when the author speaks of these civilizations as extending as far as ‘the upper reaches of the Nile south of Egypt’. The same seems to be the case with De Vaux’s *Histoire Ancienne D’Israël* (1971) where no reference at all is made to either ‘Cush’ or ‘Ethiopia’. The closest this author comes to mentioning Cush is in the reference to the ‘Cassites’ (1971:85). In the same vein is John Bright’s famed *A History of Israel* (1972) where no reference is made either to ‘Cush’ or ‘Ethiopia’, the LXX’s rendering for ‘Cush’. In Otto Kaiser’s (1975) impressive work *Introduction to the Old Testament: A Presentation of Its Results and Problems*, Cush is not referred to at all. Similarly, Alberto Soggin’s (1993) beautiful book, *An Introduction to the History of Israel and Judah*, offers no coherent presentation of Cush as such but just happens on it by chance as in the case of his remark or two on the Cushite wife of Moses. As for J M Miller and J H Hayes (1986), any reference to Cush is only implied. In their volume, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, such a reference is merely implied when they speak of the Fertile Crescent, where they maintain that the Persian Empire for example extended to the southwest ‘as far as the Sudan and North Africa’.

In the more recent past, the work by Hoerth, Mattingly and Yamauchi (1994) which is described in the review of the same book appearing on the cover page as ‘the latest word on the people groups who interacted with Israel in the Hebrew Bible...[and provides the reader with] the most comprehensive coverage of what is known about these civilizations, including developments and theories that have emerged since 1973,’ dedicates only a few lines to Cushites, who are also presumed to be a group of people who interacted with Israel in the Hebrew Bible. The meagre information provided is in

²² See Norman K Gottwald. *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (1985).

connection with the twenty-fifth Dynasty of Egypt, the time during which Cushite pharaohs ruled Egypt (cf. 1994:280).

The matter does not stop there. The same attitude is seen when one studies the maps of the so-called 'Bible Lands' especially those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These maps which evidently sought to depict 'all places named in the Bible' often omitted the African nations of Cush, Phut, Lud, Lubim, Cyrene, and others, all of which clearly feature in the Bible. Such is the case for example with Charles Taylor's *Calmet's Dictionary of the Holy Bible* (1837), whose map of 'Asia Minor and Adjacent Countries' includes among the African countries only Egypt, Libya and Cyrenaica, thus leaving out many others, notably Cush whose absence is very conspicuous. The inclusion of only these three countries to the exclusion of Cush would seem to suggest that these countries should not be understood as part of Africa but rather of the ancient Near East. In the same vein are the maps in *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* (1968); *The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible* (1945); *Baker's Bible Atlas* (1961), and the *Bildatlas Zur Bibel* (1957).

Thus, one gathers the impression that apart from Syria-Palestine, the Arabian Peninsula, and Mesopotamia, no other part of the ancient world needs to be considered in relation to the history of ancient Israel. As for the African country of Egypt, there is usually what Bailey (1991:166) has termed 'a token paragraph or two' and Egypt is usually depicted as part of the Near East rather than of Africa.

There were in addition maps that located Cush and ancient Ethiopia outside of Africa. R C Bailey (1991:165-184) for instance cites the engraver W R Annim who depicts 'Places Recorded in the Five Books of Moses' and places the insert 'Cuth' in Persia. Similarly, another cartographer, Joseph Erwin Wilson whose work is based on 'Maps of the Rivers of Eden', and is cited by Bailey, refuses to depict 'Cush', mentioned in Gn 2:10-14, as the southern part of the African border of the Garden of Eden.²³ Most maps usually showed only Syria-Palestine or areas to the east of that region. If there was any mention of Africa, it was usually restricted to Egypt. But the insistence today among some circles on drawing a sharp distinction between 'Egypt' and 'Sub-Saharan Africa'

²³ See R C Bailey. *Beyond Identification: The Use of Africans in Old Testament Poetry and Narratives*, in C H Felder (1991), *Stony the Road we Trod: African American Interpretation*: 165-184.

seems to be really an attempt to dissociate that biblical country from the rest of Africa and place it together with the lands of the Near East or Mediterranean.

With regard to dictionaries of the Bible, together with some important encyclopaedias, one notices a similar tendency to minimize or to altogether exclude any Cushite influence in the Old Testament world. Most of these dictionaries do not contain the entry 'Cush' in their lists, and if they do, such an entry is given only a very modest explanation. Such is the case with *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (1980) and also with *The Interpreter's Bible Dictionary* (1962) which boasts about 'providing the scholarly world and the general public with an up-to-date and comprehensive treatment of all biblical subjects and topics,' but offers only a rather scanty treatment of Cush. It is particularly keen on commenting on Dalgish's negative evaluation of the Cush reference in Psalm 7:1 (cf. 1962:751). Similarly, McKenzie's *Dictionary of the Bible* (1965) refers to the messenger in 2 Samuel 18 simply as a 'Cushite slave' (1965:249). Other dictionaries exhibiting a similar tendency include *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (1974); *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (1973-) and the *Theologisches Handwörterbuch* (1971-1976).

As for the Bible encyclopaedias, the following may be cited for the purpose: *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (1946). Although this encyclopaedia discusses the entry 'Cush', it practically denies any African connection to this term. It flatly claims that the meaning of the term 'Cush' is uncertain, asserting that the descendants of Ham who are always regarded as non-Semites, or the Ethiopians or Ge'ez (as the Ethiopians refer to themselves), 'spoke a sem [itic] language which is of special interest because of its likeness to Himyaritic, and its illustration of certain forms in Assyro-Babylonian. These Cushites were in all probability migrants from another (more northerly) district, and [were] akin to the Canaanites – like them dark, but by no means black, and certainly not Negroes.'

Continuing in the same vein of argument, this encyclopedia contends that 'it cannot be proved whether the Egyptians had quite black neighbours on the South. In earlier times they are represented as brown, and later as brown mingled with black, implying that Negroes only came to their knowledge as a distinct and extensive race in comparatively late times.' Furthermore, according to this source, 'it is doubtful whether

the Hebrews, in ancient times, knew of the Negro race, and that they probably became acquainted with them long after the Egyptians.’ The encyclopaedia also denies that Moses’ wife (Nm 12:1) was a Negress, and states that she was ‘simply a Cushite woman, probably speaking a sem[itic] language.’ J Wellhausen, who is cited in the same encyclopaedia, considers that the detail ‘Cushite wife of Moses’ is an ‘apocryphal addition’ inserted into the narrative, thereby implying that it is consequently of secondary importance. Even the name ‘Phinehas’ which in Egyptian parlance means ‘the black one’ is denied any African connection, because the commentary argues that ‘no Israelite would have borne a name with such a signification.’

The encyclopaedia also maintains that Cushite, the great-grand-father of Jehudi, a contemporary of Jeremiah (Jr 36:14), was not a member of the African people, since the name ‘Jehudi (which means ‘a man of Judah’) is a sufficient refutation to any claims to the African descent.’ Concerning the messenger in 2 Sm 18 it contends that the designation meant nothing more than the fact that the person so designated ‘was of a Cushite people...He was a foreigner as indicated by his ignorance of a shorter path which Ahimaaz took, and by his being unrecognized by the watchman who recognized Ahimaaz, and by his ignorance as compared to Ahimaaz, of the sentiments of David, whom he knows only as a king and not as a man’. And the commentary goes on and on in this line of denial and denigration. Interestingly, the entry does not analyze the text about Cushite the father of Zephaniah the prophet (Zph 1:1).

Other encyclopaedias which similarly deny and minimize ‘Cushite’ influence in the Bible include *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1988), among others.

2.2.3 Bible Commentaries

Perhaps a short introductory word might be helpful here. First of all, we have chosen to peruse only a limited number of commentaries, especially those universally renowned for their academic rigour. It is understood that many more commentaries could have merited our consultation as well. Secondly, we have selected the text of 2 Samuel 18: the passage where the story of the Cushite messenger who reported the death of Absalom to King David is recounted. Some of the reasons for choosing this particular

text comprise the following: 1) In chapter one of this thesis we selected this text as a case text to demonstrate our argument; 2) The Cushite's role in the story of Absalom's death is so conspicuous that it is usually very difficult for commentators to gloss over it and, 3) The divergent interpretations (some of them quite atrocious) to which the identity of this Cushite has been subjected warrant our using it as an illustration text.

A brief excursion into what some Biblical commentaries say about this Cushite messenger in 2 Samuel 18 now follows.

The Anchor Bible Commentary (McCarthy 1984:408), commenting on Joab's messenger, refers to him as 'a certain Cushite'. The commentator continues: 'There is no reason to suppose the fact that this fellow is a Cushite to have special significance. The designation suggests that his ancestry was Ethiopian or Nubian, and a few commentators (Dhorme 1959; de Vaux 1971) conclude that his black skin was a signal to David of the bad news he was carrying.'

The Interpreter's Bible (Buttrick 1953:1142) offers a rather detailed analysis of the messenger: 'The Cushite was an Ethiopian, probably a slave, and so a more suitable person for the unpleasant task', namely of breaking the sad news to King David about Absalom's death. *The Interpreter's Bible* elaborates more fully on the story: 'It remained for Cushai - curiously enough an Ethiopian - to break the news. He was selected by his commanding officer to carry out a dangerous mission which might well cost him his life in the first fury of David's wrath and sorrow; he was selected just because he was a common ordinary soldier who would never be missed if he fell victim to the king's anger.' This comment is in contrast to that on the other messenger, Ahimaaz, who is designated as being 'well born, of high social and political station, a most valued courier', one who should not be risked in the circumstances.

Another commentary, *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* edited by Orchard (1953:323), observes: 'Cushai [Cushi] was probably an Egyptian or Nubian slave who unlike Achimaas [Ahimaaz] had nothing to lose by being the bearer of bad news.' *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture Including Apocrypha*, first published in Great Britain in 1928, comments: 'Cush roughly corresponds to the modern Sudan. The man was nameless because he was a slave.' *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, edited by D Guthrie et al., and published by Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, England, 1970 remarks:

‘Joab preferred to send a slave as a messenger, rather than Ahima-az, in case David reacted violently to the news of Absalom’s death. Moreover, a dark skinned Cushite (=Ethiopian) will have been a messenger of ill omen.’

Maclaren’s *Exposition of Holy Scripture* (1952:108), published by Wm B Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, comments: ‘...it was better for the message to go by some one whose fate was of no consequence. So he [Joab] picks out the Cushite, probably an Ethiopian slave; and if David in his anguish should harm him, no body will be hurt but a friendless stranger. The Cushite gets his orders; and he too is, in another fashion, careless of their contents and effect. Without a word, he bows himself to Joab, and runs, as unconcerned as the paper of a letter that may break a heart.’ *The Biblical Expositor* edited by Carl F H Henry and published by A J Holman Co. Philadelphia, Pa, USA, 1960 does not say much about the messenger; it only observes that he was a ‘Cushite servant’. Similarly, *The International Bible Commentary* edited by F F Bruce (1973:387) refers to him as ‘a Cushite (Ethiopian), probably a slave’. *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible*, edited by M Black and H H Rowley (1962:335) merely contrasts Ahimaaz and the Cushite as bearers of good and evil news respectively.

Another case of offensive interpretation is also to be found among some French and German Bible commentaries. *La Bible* ([1956] 1959:992), commenting on 2 Samuel 18:21, refers to the messenger in the following manner: ‘*Coushite, homme du pays de Coush, c’est-à-dire d’Éthiopie...La couleur noire de l’Éthiopien le désigne spécialement pour porter la mauvaise nouvelle*’ (lit. translated: a Cushite, a man of the country of Cush, that is to say of Ethiopia...The black colour of the Ethiopian particularly marks him to carry the evil news). The *Neue Jerusalemer Bibel* ([1985] 1980:402) observes of the Cushite in the same verse: ‘*Ein äthiopischer Sklave (Kusch ist Äthiopien), also ein Schwarzer, ein Bote schlimmer Vorbedeutung*’ (lit. translated: An Ethiopian slave [Cush is Ethiopia], therefore a black, a messenger of a bad message).

The French and German remarks about the Cushite messenger merit a brief comment. While both may be right in their identification of the country of origin of the Cushite, it is not, however, certain that his ‘black’ colour was symbolic of the sad news he was carrying. As far as the Old Testament is concerned there is no evidence which supports the view that the colour ‘black’ symbolized evil or that being a ‘Cushite’ meant

being a slave. In the absence of such a basis, one can only view these comments as unfortunate, for they are reminiscent of racialist tendencies. Therefore, they can also be taken to represent a case of the misinterpretation of an African text.

Thus, these commentaries which were written and edited by western scholars afford a glimpse into the kinds of interpretations to which at least one 'African' text has been subjected. It cannot of course be presumed that all other African texts have been interpreted or misinterpreted in the same way as 2 Samuel 18. The question certainly arises: How is it that almost all these commentaries written and edited by western scholars invariably construct a rather negative image of the messenger in question? Does being 'Cushite' necessarily imply being 'black' and a 'slave'? Adamo and other Afro-centric scholars have vehemently refused to subscribe to such conclusions and so have other writers from within western scholarship itself, as we shall see below.

2.2.4 New trend(s)

It is true to claim that today new approaches are emanating from the western camp itself which may be said to represent a new trend or trends with regard to the interpretation of the African texts. It is of course difficult to delimit historically when these trends may have begun. However, the book by Sugirtharajah, *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, published in 1991, might be deemed significant in providing such an important historical landmark. Sugirtharajah's contribution to the present thesis is relevant because it broke new ground in making the west aware of the presence of 'other voices from the margin' in the area of scholarly discussion. However, the voices which he identifies and which exhibit a direct linkage to Africa are lamentably very few, actually only four, although the fourth one is a voice from South Africa. What is important for our purposes, though, is Sugirtharajah's effort in itself, which may be interpreted as an attempt at least to try to arouse awareness of such voices in the so-called third world countries. This is significant because it opens avenues for possible discussion partners in biblical scholarship.

The reason I have cited Sugirtharajah here is not to enter into a discussion with him, but rather to offer an instance of the beginning of a departure from traditional

western biblical scholarship. This departure was to become even more evident, especially during more recent times, in the notable contributions by Knut Holter, Marta Høyland Lavik, Daniel J Hays, and Edwin M Yamauchi. One could almost say that these authors have tried to initiate a dialogue with African biblists and theologians. Thus, their efforts could rightly be taken as representative of a ‘new trend’, or an ‘off-shoot’ from traditional western biblical scholarship, although they essentially continue to remain part of the latter. Although these authors still continue to be western, their ideas about the Bible are not necessarily ‘western’. It is now to their contributions that I should like to dedicate the following subsections. The sequence in which the contributions are presented is purely arbitrary.

2.2.4.1 Knut Holter

According to Holter (2000a:4), not to give the African texts the priority they deserve or to ignore them altogether is clearly an attitude that contradicts the views of other Old Testament scholars who think otherwise:

There can be no doubt that African Old Testament scholarship has experienced various examples of marginalization. This experience has occasionally led some African scholars to argue that western marginalization reflects a deliberate ideological de-Africanization of biblical scholarship. Personally, I doubt that this is the case. Rather, I tend to believe that it simply reflects a more general lack of knowledge about African research on the Old Testament.

Thus, according to Holter, the real problem at the core of the problem is *not* neglect of the African texts as such, but rather *ignorance* about African research on the Old Testament. It is *not* therefore a deliberate attempt to de-Africanize the Old Testament as such but rather the lack of adequate information about research on Africa in relation to the Old Testament.²⁴ In Holter’s view, what needs to be done is to combat this ignorance.

²⁴ This conviction may have been one of the driving forces which led Holter to take upon himself the task of trying to collect whatever material has been written about Africa and the Old Testament. His findings have been published in a book by the same author: *Tropical Africa and the Old Testament. A Select and*

Driven by the need to ‘inform’ his readers on issues pertaining to Africa and the Old Testament Holter has, perhaps more than anyone else, devoted much effort to researching the topic.²⁵

But Holter’s initiative does not just stop here. He, so to speak, once again ‘revisits’ the African texts in the Old Testament as if to discover for himself what they say about Africa and its people. Thus, after perusing the whole of the Old Testament, he concludes that Africa is indeed present there. The relevant geographical entities which refer to Africa can be grouped into three categories: those texts which refer to Egypt, those which refer to Cush (or Kush in Ancient Near Eastern sources), and finally a number of different entities with fewer or more references of more uncertain location (Holter 2000a:96). Next, he establishes that Egypt is referred to more often than Cush. These references are spread throughout the whole of the Old Testament, suggesting that probably Egypt was indeed more important to Israel than Cush. References to Cush also pervade the three parts of the Old Testament, with the majority of them being found in the prophetic literature.

Focusing further on Cush, Holter restricts himself to its history especially in the first millennium BCE, a period which corresponds to the so-called twenty-fifth dynasty of the Egyptian kingdom, or also to the period during which Cushite kings ruled Egypt. This period is also known as the ‘Kushite Dynasty’ and it extended more or less from the mid-eighth to mid-seventh centuries BCE.²⁶ It is a period that is generally believed to have marked the climax of the history of Kush and one which is chronologically important to us because it occurs just prior to the time that saw the genesis of most of the Old Testament (cf. Holter 2000a:100).

Annotated Bibliography, University of Oslo, 1996. More recently, another volume by the same author has been published: *Old Testament Research for Africa*, 2002.

²⁵ Among Holter’s more relevant works (books and articles) the following may be cited: *Tropical Africa and the Old Testament. A Select and Annotated Bibliography*, 1996 [just mentioned in f/n 7]; ‘Should Old Testament Cush be Rendered Africa?’ in *The Bible Translator* 48, 1997; ‘The Institutional Context of Old Testament Scholarship in Africa’ in *Old Testament Essays* 11, 1998; ‘Old Testament Proverbs Studies in the 1990s’ in *Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship* 6, 1999; *Yahweh in Africa. Essays on Africa and the Old Testament*, 2000a; Co-editor of *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa*, 2001; *Old Testament Research for Africa*, 2002.

²⁶ The 25th Dynasty (ca 751 – 656 BCE) is often referred to as ‘Ethiopian’. Piankhy, the Nubian king who conquered Egypt, had his capital at Napata, near the Fourth Cataract. His son Tirhakah (Tarhaqa) is mentioned in Is 37:9 (see also 2 Ki 19:9). His intrigues were at least partly responsible for the Assyrian reaction which led to the retreat of the Nubians and the removal of their capital further south to Meroë.

Holter then narrows down the scope of his study, to investigating references to Cush in the Pentateuch, the Prophets and the Writings. His interpretations of the Cush texts are somewhat compact and sketchy, but the trend of his thoughts is already evident.

Commenting on 2 Sm 18 (the Cushite messenger of Joab) he departs radically from the common and popular interpretation of this messenger by western scholars as a 'Negro slave', a view that is evident in many Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias and commentaries, written mostly by western authors (cf. 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 above). But, according to Holter, this is not necessarily the case: 'Interpreters of this narrative have especially focused on how a Cushite could become an officer in Jerusalem. Some older interpreters could, revealing their own prejudices, present the Cushite as '[...] a negro (naturally, a slave)'; however, there is nothing in the OT that supports such a view. A better explanation is that the narrative more generally reflects a Cushite presence in the land of Israel that is outside the Cushite heartland. An interesting aspect of this narrative is that it lets the military skill of the Cushites serve Israel' (Holter 2000a:102).

According to Holter, such is also the case in the narrative of 2 Ki 19. Here the Cushite king Tirhakah is depicted as a central actor in the deliverance of Jerusalem (v.9). Concerning the references to Cush in Isaiah and Zephaniah, Holter points out: 'As a whole, these references to Cush reveal a special awareness of this distant people [...].' (2000:103). It should be noted that seldom has traditional western scholarship viewed this awareness as 'special'. Commenting on the references to Cush in Chronicles, Holter again departs from the traditional negative image of Cush, and points out that instead of focusing on the defeat of Zerah the Cushite by Asa king of Judah (therefore portraying a negative image of Zerah), the narrative, rather, represents the typical pattern of a holy war in the books of Chronicles where the numbers of soldiers involved and the role played by Yahweh are exaggerated (cf. Holter 2000a:103).

Concluding his brief exploration of the Cush texts, Holter concludes that: firstly, Cush is well known; its location in the far south can be used to demarcate political borders; and the colour of the skin of the Cushites is used proverbially. Secondly, the Old Testament reflects a dual concept of Africa, including both positive and negative lines of thought. As a consequence of this, important hermeneutical questions are touched upon, namely the question of African identity and history. Finally, future scholars are

challenged to ‘expose contemporary OT readers to the pre-western concept of Africa reflected in these traditions’ (cf. Holter 2000a:106).

2.2.4.2 Marta Høyland Lavik

In an article entitled ‘The “African” Texts of the Old Testament and Their African Interpretations’ (2001), M Høyland Lavik presents in a nutshell what have become known as the ‘African’ texts of the Old Testament. In brief, these texts speak about Egypt and Cush, wherein the latter is understood as the territory south of Egypt. Høyland Lavik not only enumerates these texts but she also considers how they are interpreted by African scholars. Furthermore, she offers what she calls ‘[...] some general comments which may sensitise readers to the particular hermeneutical understanding that African theologians are currently bringing to Old Testament studies’ (2001:43).

In her presentation, Høyland Lavik begins with the premise that Old Testament texts about the geography and the people of Africa tend not to be regarded as a priority within traditional western scholarship, a situation which in her view has evoked over the last 20-30 years a growing concern among African scholars who have become intent on emphasizing a truly African presence within the Old Testament (2001:43).

After a clarification of what she means by ‘Africa’ and ‘African’ texts, Høyland Lavik subsequently proceeds to conclude that in the Old Testament several terms are used to refer to the African continent. These terms can be arranged into three groups, namely Egypt, Cush and thirdly a number of different entities with fewer references or of more uncertain location said earlier, a number of times, and previously ascribed to Holter. The 56 references to Cush are spread throughout all the three parts of the Hebrew canon, namely the Pentateuch, the Prophets and the Writings.

In the Pentateuch, Cush is reflected in the world map (Gn 2:10), in the Table of nations (Gn 10:6.7.8) and with respect to the Cushite wife of Moses (Nm 12:1).

As regards the references to Cush in the former prophets, mention is made, among other matters, to Cush’s military skills (2 Ki 19:9), and the ‘Cushite officer’ (2 Sm 18:19-33). The references to Cush in the latter prophets, however, reveal different aspects of Cush and Cushites such as their military reputation (cf. Ezk 35:8; Nah 3:9) and the

narrative concerning Ebed-Melech and his rescue of the prophet Jeremiah (Jr 38-39). In Amos 9:7 the Cushites are compared to Israel, whereas Jeremiah 13:23 points to the dark skin of the Cushite. Furthermore, Isaiah warns against trusting Cush (Is 20), and also portrays him as being powerful and wealthy (Is 43:3; 45:14). Yet, the same prophet also envisions Cush as one of the nations coming to Zion with gifts for YHWH (Is 18:1-2.7).

Isaiah 18:1-2.7 'offers the most thorough anthropological description of Cushites' (2001:45). In a doctoral dissertation entitled 'A People Tall and Smooth-skinned: The Rhetoric of Isaiah 18' (2004), Høyland Lavik has offered an in-depth analysis of the full rhetoric behind this description of the Cushites, concluding that Isaiah 18 'refers to relations between nations, and evidently describes a foreign nation' (2004:264). She further argues that the message of Isaiah 18 is that of judgment over Judah, and that '[...] all the activity from the Judean side in order to entering into a coalition with the Cushites is in vain (vv.1-2)' (2004:265). This rhetoric of 'entrapment' is summed up in four head words, namely *cohesion*, *activity*, *confusion* and *concentration* (2004:265). According to Høyland Lavik, 'Verse 7 shows an eschatological restoration for the nations – here represented by Cush – and does not even mention the Judeans' (2004:265).

In the writings, the military ability of the Cushites is again emphasized (2 Chr 12:3; 14:9-15). In the book of Esther 1:1 and 8:9, Cush is referred to as the south-western border of the Persian Empire. Job 28:19 makes allusions to the wealth of Cush and, finally, Psalm 68:32 most probably alludes to the Old Testament motif of the nations bringing gifts to Yahweh in Jerusalem.

Finally, Høyland Lavik turns her attention to another group of texts whose import probably refers to Africa or an uncertain location. These are divided into two groups: firstly, those which most likely have an African location such as Put (Libya or Somalia - referred to in Gn 10:6; Nah 3:9; Jr 46:9; Ezk 30:5), Lubim (Libya - mentioned in 2 Chr 12:3; Nah 3:9), and Pathros (Upper Egypt - mentioned in Gn 10:14; Jr 44:15; Ezk 29:14). Also belonging to this group are those texts which speak of nations that possess ancient traditions in favour of Africa such as Sheba (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* viii 6,5-6) and Seba (cf. Josephus *Ant.* ii 10,2). Sheba and Seba are both connected with riches, the former probably being due to the narrative about the Queen of Sheba (1 Ki 10:2; 2 Chr 9). Common to all these references are their connotations of wealth and military reputation

(cf. Høyland Lavik 2001:46). Secondly, Høyland Lavik mentions texts with an uncertain location such as those concerning Ophir (1 Ki 22:49; Is 13:12; Ps 45:10; Job 22:24; 28:16 and 1 Chr 29:4).

By way of conclusion, Høyland Lavik (1999:47) asserts regarding Cush: ‘The Old Testament portrays Cush as a strong, powerful, exotic nation at the borders of the known world, which is envisioned as one of the nations to come to Zion with gifts to YHWH. The geographical entities with fewer references and / or uncertain location also make up a positive textual image of Africa and Africans. These minor entities are associated with riches and wealth.’

Thus, the reason I consider that Høyland Lavik belongs to the camp of new trends in western biblical scholarship should by now be evident. Firstly, contrary to the tendency in this group to gloss over the so-called African texts of the Old Testament, she, like Holter, and also Hays and Yamauchi whose views are presented below, has accorded these texts the attention they deserve. Actually, she has taken steps to interpret them, even calling the messenger of Joab in 2 Samuel 18 who is usually interpreted rather negatively by traditional western scholarship, a ‘Cushite officer’ (2001:45). Secondly, like the other representatives of this group, she too is of the opinion that these texts which concern the geography and people of Africa ‘[...] deserve to be analyzed thoroughly’ (2001:50).

2.2.4.3 Daniel J Hays

‘As a major power in the ancient world, the Cushites had commercial and political dealings with many nations. Therefore it is no surprise to find them mentioned frequently in the Bible. Indeed, the Old Testament has fifty-four [sic] references to Cush or to Cushites’ (Hays 1996:396).

In these words Daniel J Hays, a white American male, clearly sets himself apart from traditional western biblical scholarship and joins Holter and others to constitute a handful of western biblical scholars who today can be said to represent new trends with regard to their attitude to and interpretation of the Cush texts in the Old Testament. One should notice that he terms Cush a ‘major power’. Rarely has western biblical scholarship

referred to Cush as such. In order to demonstrate his point, Hays then investigates the references to Cush in the Bible. In so doing he not only accords these texts the priority they deserve, but, contrary to traditional western biblical scholarship, he also interprets them with due exegetical respect. A brief perusal of his findings will be sufficient to illustrate his attitude.

Hays is of the view that the controversial Gihon river which among many western biblical scholars has been identified with the Kassites in Mesopotamia, should most probably be traced to the Upper Nile region (1996:396). He also argues convincingly that the Cushite wife of Moses in Numbers 12:1 was most probably from Cush: 'In conclusion the case is strong that Moses married a black woman from the Cushite civilization south of Egypt. This fits not only with the text but also with the historical picture of Cushites in Egypt and with the way the text was translated and understood by the ancient writers' (1996:401). Commenting on 2 Samuel 18:19-33, Hays is of the view that the Cushite in question was a mercenary soldier, given the fact that Cushites were in fact employed as mercenaries in numerous countries of the world, not only in the Egyptian army but in the Persian army as well (1996:401). Hays is furthermore of the opinion that this episode offers additional documentation of the frequent presence of Cushites throughout the ancient world as soldiers, messengers and advisers. Similarly, he also argues that the Zerah in 2 Chronicles, though not reported in 2 Kings, was a Cushite general, either working directly for pharaoh Osorkon or invading Palestine under a treaty provision with him. He concludes: 'The significance of the story to this study is that Zerah is another example of Cushites playing important military / political roles in the ancient Near East in general, and in Israel / Judah in particular' (1996:402-403). As for the king Tirhakah in 2 Kings 19:9 and Isaiah 37:9, the biblical record is clear in its emphasis that Yahweh was responsible for the deliverance of Hezekiah and Jerusalem. Significant, however, is the fact that a black king and a black nation allied themselves with Judah against the Assyrians.

Hays then explores the references to Cush in Jeremiah 13:23 and 38-39 and establishes that while the entire nation of Judah was disobedient to the Lord, it was Ebed-melech, a black Cushite, who confronted the king and delivered Jeremiah. Moreover, at a time when Judah was being judged because of disobedience and covenant violation, a

black Cushite was delivered because of his faith in Yahweh. Hays further explores how Cush is included in prophetic messages concerning the nations, such as those found in passages which warn of judgment in Isaiah 20:3-5 and Jeremiah 46:9 and also in the eschatological future as in Zephaniah 2:12 and other related texts. Even in references to Cush as a proper name, such as those in Jeremiah 36:14; Zephaniah 1:1 and Psalm 7:1, Hays argues convincingly that these names simply reflect the nationality of these individuals. A second possibility is that their skin was dark, a product of interracial marriages. In any case the name most probably did not carry any derogatory connotation, even in the case of Jeremiah 13:23, 'Can a Cushite change his skin?' Hays (1996:407) concludes: 'The ancient Greek writers state that the Cushites were respected in the ancient world for their military prowess and their religious piety. Another possible explanation for using "Cush" as a name, therefore, would be the positive reputation of that nation.'

Thus, to wrap up his arguments, Hays brings the following points to the fore:

- 1) The Cushite civilization was a black civilization on African soil, and the Cushites were well known throughout the ancient world. During Egypt's twenty-fifth dynasty they ruled Egypt herself.
- 2) The Cushites appear in the Bible repeatedly, indicating that black people formed a regular part of the biblical world. The biblical story is told against a multiethnic background. As far back in biblical history as nations go, Cush was there.
- 3) The black heritage in the Bible and in the ancient world is rich and deep. The question that can be asked is: Was this Cushite involvement an accident or was it all part of God's plan, and a demonstration that salvation is open to people of all races?

As Hays (1996:409) has himself so memorably put it: 'Black people are not a modern-era addition to the story of salvation history. They were there from the beginning.'

2.2.4.4 Edwin M Yamauchi

Yamauchi may be characterized as one of those scholars who have given due attention to issues concerning Africa and the Bible. For this reason he can rightly be grouped among the ranks of western scholars whose views about Africa and the Bible, in our view, represent new trends in western biblical scholarship.

In his recent book *Africa and the Bible* (2004), Yamauchi applies his expertise to the history and archaeology of both the Old and New Testaments as they relate to the presence of Africa and Africans in the biblical texts. The main purpose of the book seems to be an examination of biblical texts about Africa in such a way as to provide the Bible reader with a full description of the cultural, geographical, historical, and archaeological background of the 'Africa' of each particular text. By using material from all these sources, as well as a generous use of other scholars' findings, Yamauchi has succeeded in shedding further light on the question of Africa and the Bible, coming up as he does with valuable insights into biblical events and personalities usually associated with Africa. Furthermore, in order to reinforce his arguments, Yamauchi has made ample use of maps, sketches, figurines as well as of reliefs.

Yet, he is quite critical of a kind of 'Afrocentric' exegesis which would assume that all of the Africans in the Bible were necessarily black. On the other hand Yamauchi is also aware of the terrible legacy of racist and 'Eurocentric' interpretation that would read Africa and Africans out of the text. Understandably, as if to sail a middle course, not all material is given equal space and treatment. For example, he dwells at length on the question of the Cushite wife of Moses and the Cushite King Tirhakah and his successors. He has also written a few paragraphs about the twenty-fifth Cushite dynasty. His description of Piankhy (Piye) is, for example, very impressive.

Yamauchi's findings concerning the Cushite wife of Moses support the view that the woman so called was not Zipporah, Moses' first, Midianite, wife, but rather a Cushite woman from the country south of Egypt. The reasons adduced are based partly on the evidence of history and archaeology, both of which strongly support interracial marriages, not only between Egyptians and Cushites but also between Israelites and Cushites. All in all, Yamauchi provides a fascinating and detailed history of Cush and its

relations with Egypt during the Old Testament period. All of this evidence points to his conclusion that 'In light of the ample Egyptian evidence of the presence of many Nubians in Egypt from as early as the Old Kingdom and of intermarriage between Egyptians and Nubians, we should not doubt the possibility of Moses' marriage to a Cushite or Nubian woman' (2004:75). Yamauchi however does not seem to distinguish between the terms 'Cushite' and 'Nubian'. From his analysis it would appear that the two appellations are interchangeable (cf. 2004:73-75).

As for the Cushite King Tirhakah who is mentioned in 2 Kings 19:9 and Isaiah 37:9, there is no doubt that Yamauchi's investigation is a valuable key to understanding and interpreting the former's involvement with Israelite affairs: 'During the period of Assyrian hegemony, for half a century a Kushite dynasty, the 25th, ruled Egypt and attempted to intervene in Palestine. The most important ruler of this dynasty was probably Taharqa (biblical Tirhakah)' (2004:107).

In terms of references to Cush / Cushites such as Cush, the father of the prophet Zephaniah (Zph 1:1), Jehudi (Jr 36:13-14), and also the reference to Ebed-Melech (Jr 38), Yamauchi offers helpful insights although he generally remains brief and non-committal, an attitude which in my view raises more questions than it answers.

Regarding the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, which has been seen by some (especially in Ethiopia) as a story related to Africa, Yamauchi is of the view that Sheba is probably southern Arabia rather than Ethiopia, but again he has included a worthwhile study of the ways in which this story has been read and interpreted in the Ethiopian tradition. But rather than being negative, this too is positive, for it portrays him as a scholar who has attempted to walk a middle road. He rejects a Eurocentric interpretation which either reads Africans out of the text entirely or reads the text with a racist intent. He also rejects one-sided Afrocentric readings which assume that all Africans were black Africans or that everything of value has its origin in Africa. He is balanced as far as his treatment of a particular text is concerned, such as those concerning the Cushite wife of Moses and King Tirhakah, but not balanced in his treatment of all the (56) texts as a whole.

Yamauchi's analysis will probably not end the discussion, but it is certainly a valuable contribution which does not deserve to be ignored by anyone who wishes to take the question of the 'African' texts of the Old Testament seriously.

2.2.4.5 Some critical remarks

2.2.4.5.1 Traditional western biblical scholarship

Critical remarks about traditional western biblical scholarship are naturally meant to be understood as strictly referring to the cases cited above. Therefore, they are by no means exhaustive insofar as they do not pretend to critique the entire unfolding of such scholarship over the centuries.

As far as the present context is concerned, the first comment should probably be directed at the veracity of the allegation that traditional western biblical scholarship generally 'disregarded' or 'ignored' the 'African' texts of the Old Testament. It would seem to me that at this stage of the present study, a comprehensive assessment of this claim may not be possible. The reader might have to wait until a later stage when the analysis of the individual 'African' texts will have been undertaken. This will form the focus of chapters three, four and five. Nevertheless, already it seems to me that a certain amount of disregard for and ignoring of the African texts must be acknowledged. As mentioned earlier, some Afrocentric authors have termed this a case of the 'de-Africanization' of the Bible.

Concerning the 'misinterpretation' of the African texts, things seem to be somewhat straightforward. At least a reading of the text of 2 Samuel 18 (the Cushite messenger), has shown that a certain 'propensity' towards 'misinterpretation' is present, as has been alleged. Thus, from this point of view, those who accuse traditional western biblical scholarship of having 'misinterpreted' the African texts might actually have a case to put forward. But as was remarked with respect to the allegations of 'disregarding' and 'ignoring', a complete assessment of this allegation may have to wait until an analysis of all the African texts has been completed. These comments notwithstanding, it must be remarked, as previously, that traditional western biblical scholarship has without

doubt over the centuries contributed greatly to the understanding of the Christian faith, and for this it deserves credit.

2.2.4.5.2 New trends

Finally, I consider that one or two concluding remarks with regard to the new trends are in order. Positively, these authors have placed the question of Africa vis-à-vis the Old Testament at the forefront. They have not only tried to accord the African texts the priority they deserve but have also interpreted those texts with due exegetical respect. Nevertheless, while the positive approach espoused by these authors towards the African presence in the Old Testament is welcome, one must still pose the basic question: Being still a product of the ‘western’ academia, are they better placed to interpret the ‘African’ texts in such a way that their interpretations truly reflect the concerns of the African church? The answer to this question is not an easy one. Furthermore, none of them can claim that their analyses of the ‘African’ texts are by any means exhaustive. Much work needs still to be done. As Høyland Lavik (2001:50) has pointed out: ‘[...] I share the opinion that texts about the geography and people of Africa found in the Old Testament deserve to be analyzed thoroughly.’

Finally, having undertaken an excursion into the approach of western biblical scholars to the African texts of the Old Testament, it is now time to present another approach, namely that of the African-American scholars. It should perhaps be pointed out at the outset that the interest of these authors is not necessarily an analysis of the ‘Cush’ texts as such, but rather a search for a ‘Black’ or ‘African’ presence in the Old Testament, of which Cush is certainly an important component.

2.3 African-American Scholars’ Interpretations

2.3.1 Introduction

The African-American biblical scholars whose interpretations are to be discussed below also hail from the western hemisphere, but we have decided to treat them

separately because of a number of reasons. The first is that these authors stem from the background of the civil rights movements which characterized the America of the 1950s and the 60s. Understandably their biblical interpretations, by and large, bear the scars of this turbulent phase of American history. In order to better understand them and their contribution to biblical scholarship, a brief presentation of their background is, I think, in order.

The Civil Rights Movement probably started earlier than 1954, but in this year the Supreme Court handed down a historic decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (Kansas), which abolished segregation in public schools, and began a specific movement that ended with the assassination of the Rev Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. Broadly speaking the Civil Rights Movement strove to handle issues pertaining to race and racism, that is to fight racial injustices and animosities. It sought to reconcile the concept of freedom with the idea of equality, which had been formalized in the American Declaration of Independence wherein it was stated that God had created all people equal and that every human being possessed certain inalienable rights, among which were the right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness (source should be given).

The struggle for rights and human dignity, especially by black minority groups, was disseminated through the churches and often expressed through political ideology and public acts such as demonstrations. Continued denials of equality in education systems transformed a hopeless, passive minority of blacks into a self-conscious force; this touched off more than a decade of domestic upheaval that almost led the nation to the brink of racial civil war. Finally, during the administration of President Johnson, the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968 outlawed discrimination in education, housing, employment, voting and public accommodation.

The authors whose views we shall review by and large reflect, in their interpretations of the Bible, the need to give to blacks that dignity and equality that is proclaimed in the Bible itself and that they have in most cases been denied as a result of slavery and other injustices. However, the contribution of the African-American biblical scholars is not limited just to the question of slavery. Such scholarship is also concerned, as Coleman (1993:69) has observed, about its place in a post-Christian, post-modern,

pluralistic and global context. This is what has generally been referred to as the 'Black Awareness Movement'.

One of the results of this movement is the 'Black Religious Experience', whose rationale consisted of at least five elements, at least according to Charles B Copher, one of the outstanding African-American biblical scholars. Thus, 1) The discovery and reclamation of a Black heritage that had been lost, unrecognized, or ignored as an entity of little or no value, 2) The development of a sense of dignity and worth, and of pride in the Black heritage on the part of Black people, 3) The increase of knowledge and the development of skills that would free Black people from oppression and dehumanization, and enable them to survive in an unjust society, 4) The informing of White people about the Black heritage with the purpose of changing attitudes for the better, and of liberating White people from false notions, and finally, 5) The investigation and analysis of the Black religious experience with the goal of discerning its liberating and life-sustaining aspects for the benefit of both Black people and White people.²⁷

These are the issues which constitute the background in terms of which the African-American scholars approach biblical texts and which are clearly reflected in their analyses. We now proceed to discuss the contributions of some of the outstanding scholars, following a chronological pattern starting with the very first one in this venture, namely Robert A Bennett, followed by Charles B Copher, Randall C Bailey, Alvin A Jackson and finally Rodney S Sadler, the most recent arrival on the scene. It should be noted that these authors are by no means the only ones to write about the issues we have just outlined, but they are certainly the most outstanding.

2.3.2 Robert A Bennett, Jr.

The academic rigour with which Bennett (1971) treats the topic clearly sets him apart as a respectable biblical scholar. In an article entitled 'Africa and the Biblical Period' (cf. Bennett 1971:483-500), Bennett ably traces the presence of Africans in the Bible. Starting with a survey of the languages of the ancient Near East and the vocabulary

²⁷ For an explanation of these elements, see C B Copher 1993:9ff (*Black Biblical Studies: An Anthology of Charles B Copher*). *doesn't look quite right even after the deletion*

used to refer to black people, he proceeds to examine Northeast African history in the biblical period (ca. 2000 BCE to 200 CE) and concludes with comments on the African presence in the Bible and the role of Africa in the period of biblical revelation.

His analysis brings him to the conclusion that the Hebrew Bible is first of all a Semitic phenomenon. Linguistically, this means that the language of the Old Testament is related to a larger family of tongues spread geographically around the Fertile Crescent from the Tigris-Euphrates river valley of Mesopotamia to the Nile River valley of Northeast Africa. He also establishes that linguistically, the Semitic phenomenon is related to a large number of the African language groups north-south along the Nile and east-west across the Sahara and to some extent the sub-Saharan Sudanic belt. This analysis is important for him as he tries to establish the link between Africa and the Ancient Near East, of which Israel forms part. Such a link, argues Bennett, cannot be traced solely to recent times but in fact is something which obtained in antiquity as well.

On the basis of this linguistic study, Bennett then proceeds to explore the terms used in the ancient Near East to designate Africa and the Africans, namely as used in the Afro-Asiatic language group: Egyptian, Akkadian, and Hebrew, and points out that there are several of these terms. Cush simply refers to the land of the Nubians, the peoples to the south of Egypt proper. Moreover, Egypt and Cush are called *Magan* and *Meluhha* respectively, with *Meluhha* referring to the land of the black man. In the Hebrew Bible Egypt is called ~YRCM, and Cush, VWK. The dark-skinned Nubian is simply called YVWK, that is, the Nubian or Cushite, and the modern Israeli word for Negro is YVWK. The Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek uses two terms for the Hebrew VWK, which is transliterated as *Chous*, and translated as Aivqiopi, a or Aivqiopj. The Greek Aivqiopi, a perhaps originally meant 'burnt face' or 'brilliant' and was used to refer to Cush and Nubia, and not particularly to the area of modern Ethiopia or Abyssinia.

Having explored all the other texts in the Hebrew Bible which speak of Cush, Bennett concludes that Cush and her people are known; that they indeed constitute part of the ken of Israel throughout her history. Occasionally they participate in that history as did Cushi, Joab's messenger in 2 Sm 18, or in Isaiah's warning against intrigues with

Nubian Pharaohs (Is 18-20), or as with Ebed-Melek, Jeremiah's friend and saviour (Jr 38; 39). Next, he traces the history of the Nile valley in the second and first millennia BCE as it touches upon the Old Testament and demonstrates the interactions between Egypt, Cush and Israel right from the earliest times. He also establishes that the physical characteristics of the ancient Egyptians included their being a brown-skinned people with long hair, whose history is the story of their contact and intercourse with darker, curly-haired peoples up the Nile in Nubia or Wawae (the territory between the first two cataracts) and Cush (the region between the second and fourth cataracts, at first, but later the territory between the sixth cataract near modern Khartoum and the merging of the Blue and White Nile rivers). Cush, which comes to be applied to all the southern region, is both the area of Egypt's contact with black Africa and the base in the second and first millennia BCE from which black Africa moves into the view of oriental and classical antiquity (Bennett 1971: 492). The descent of Israel into Egypt at the end of the Patriarchal Age (1720-1550 BCE; also the period of the rule of the Hyksos in Egypt), without doubt brought the Hebrews into their first real contact with Egypt and Africans. This contact proved crucial in the interactions between these cultures and would take on several forms of cooperation. It is no wonder therefore that Egypt and Cush would later on appear significantly in the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, the main constituent parts of the Hebrew Bible.

Through his analysis Bennett makes it abundantly clear that Africa (Egypt-Cush) and her people are not simply referred to by the Hebrews in terms of their being a distant and mysterious phenomenon, but that they 'intrude upon this Semitic witness to God in its language, its history, and even its theology.' Thus, in so doing he disproves the arguments of those who have interpreted these African texts from a biased and negative perspective.

2.3.3 Charles B Copher

Charles B Copher (1974; 1991) is without doubt one of the most important representatives of the African-American group of biblical scholars. He has, like Bennett, strongly argued for the black presence in the Old Testament against the backdrop of

western biblical scholars who have argued to the contrary. Starting with the problems inherent in the topic he continues by tracing the probable origins of the derogatory understanding of the Negroes or blacks in general by European and / or American biblical scholarship.

Beginning with the teaching of the Rabbis in the Babylonian Talmud, the story of Cain in Gn 4:1-16, and what he designates as the 'pre-Adamite' and 'New-Hamite' hypotheses, he proceeds to expose the misinterpretations that have arisen as a result of such views. In a passionate move to corroborate his arguments he has recourse to the biblical texts themselves and analyzes them under eight periods or headings in order to demonstrate the 'heavy' presence of blacks in the Old Testament. These periods comprise: (1) the pre-patriarchal period; (2) the patriarchal period; (3) the period of the enslavement, the Exodus, and the wilderness wandering; (4) the period of the Judges; (5) the period of the united monarchy; (6) the period of the two kingdoms - Israel and Judah; (7) the period of the one kingdom - Judah; and finally (8) the period of exile and restoration.

In addition, he also explores at least four Hebrew terms which according to him clearly point to the colour black. These are *sahor* (Song of Songs 1:5.6), *hum* or *ham* (Genesis 14 where the word appears as one of Noah's sons, and in Psalms 78:51; 105:23.27; 106:21ff, where it is used poetically to refer to Egypt, which is referred to as the 'tents' or 'land of Ham'. See also Gn 30:32ff); *Qedar* in Genesis 25:13 where the term depicts one of the sons of Ishmael and *Pinehas*, whose Egyptian equivalent is *Pa-Nehsi* which means 'the Negro' or 'Nubian'. As for the term *Cush*, Copher points out that there are 58 references according to the King James Version. Copher also refers to the many cognates of these terms. Furthermore, he proposes that when dealing with a black presence in the Old Testament, Egypt must always be included together with Cush. According to Copher, upon the basis of available evidence, the biblical world is divided into three general regions, as follows: Egyptian-African Cush; Asiatic Cush; and Mediterranean Lands. The evidence is then presented according to categories under each respective region.

For Egyptian-African Cush the categories of evidence include: archaeological data, historical works, critical historical-literary biblical scholars, personal names and

adjectives, modern travellers and anthropologists, ancient Greek and Roman writers, and early Christian commentators. The evidence for Asiatic Cush is subsumed under two categories, namely ancient Greek writers, and modern historical works (cf. Copher 1974:9). Similarly, according to the evidence from the Asiatic Cush, the Elamites referred to in Genesis 10:22 must be included among black peoples. As Copher (1991) argues:

Modern archeologists, historians, and others, upon the basis of archeological discoveries and personal observations, have concluded that the ancient Elamites, as well as other peoples of southern and western Asia, were black, or at least included a large black element in their populations.

Thus, according to Copher, there can be no doubt at all about the black presence in the Old Testament, as deduced from at least the following five considerations, namely: 1) references to the Hamites and Elamites in the Table of Nations; 2) the 'confused' modern Euro-American definitions of black / Negro; 3) ancient Hebrew, Graeco-Roman, and early Christian views with respect to the colour of ancient Egyptians and Ethiopians; 4) some Hebrew words indicative of colour; and 5) some modern scholarly opinions, whereby a black presence in the OT may be established. Such a presence is attested to in many passages and in many ways, from the earliest times to the period of restoration. It appears in literature from many periods of Old Testament history: in historical accounts and in prophetic oracles; in Psalms and in the literature of love - the Song of Songs (cf. Copher 1991:153).

2.3.4 Randall C Bailey

In an article published in 1991, Bailey has in my view successfully presented his case for a black presence in the Old Testament. His point of departure is that there has been a consistent and deliberate de-Africanization of the Old Testament in the works of western biblical scholars, as is evidenced when one peruses various current

introductions to the Old Testament and histories of Israel, especially the sections dealing with geography, maps of Bible Lands, dictionaries of the Bible; this may also be observed in the treatment of Egypt versus the concept of Sub-Saharan Africa, in the works of church historians and theologians. Bailey (1991:168) then concludes his assessment as follows:

Due to the aforementioned tendency within scholarship to deny or dilute African influence on the biblical text (i.e., to de-Africanize), the subject before us is one of immense importance, primarily in terms of the future development of and redirection for the biblical field. It is also important in terms of challenging and correcting previous distortions and omissions in scholarship.

Thus, having offered a critical assessment of the interpretation of the black presence in the Old Testament, Bailey proceeds to identify the African nations and individuals in the Hebrew Canon and carries out the exegesis of some selected texts which speak of the African nations and individuals. By way of conclusion, Bailey (1991:183) is of the opinion that 'Africans not only have a presence in the Israelite poetic and narrative materials - indeed, those materials show that Israel held African nations and individuals in very high regard'. According to Bailey (1991:183), the reasons for the very high esteem accorded to blacks are traceable to the military might, political stability, wealth and wisdom of black nations, all of which resulted in these nations being utilized by Israel as a standard of measurement for Israel herself. This in itself revealed that the authors and redactors of the texts viewed African nations and their leaders as having great value. The latter were also used as foils to reveal how great Yahweh was.

Although Bailey is of the view that African nations and their leaders were utilized as a measurement of valuation and validation, he does caution that nonetheless there was a tendency within the pre-exilic and some of the exilic prophetic traditions to oppose using African nations and individuals as a yardstick for Israel. This was for instance the tendency of the Chronicler (see 2 Chr 12:2-3; // 1 Ki 14:25; 2 Chr 14:9-15. See 1 Ki 15:16-24; // 2 Chr 16:1-6), and the Priestly Source (cf. Ex 7-10) in contrast with the Deuteronomist tendency to value the African contribution, as evidenced in a set of

passages that rely on the association with Africans as a way of establishing the positive status of a biblical character (cf. especially the fourfold reference to Solomon marrying the ‘daughter of Pharaoh’ in 1 Ki 3:1; 1 Ki 9:16; 1Ki 9:24 and 1 Ki 11:1. See also the story of the Queen of Sheba in 1 Ki 10).

2.3.5 Alvin A Jackson

In a monograph which was published in 1994, Jackson traces instances of the foundations of the enslavement of blacks by focusing especially on three texts from the Old Testament, namely Gn 9:18-29 (the curse of Ham or rather of Canaan); Gn 16 and Gn 21 (the story of Hagar the Egyptian, the handmaid of Sarai, Abraham’s wife); and Ex 2:17-21 together with the text of Nm 12 (the Cushite wife of Moses). Jackson rejects the rather negative and biased interpretations applied to these texts by some western biblical authors in favour of an African-‘friendly’ interpretation and application. Jackson has argued that because of the negative interpretations of these texts there have been ‘tragic consequences for millions of Blacks’ (1994:12). Thus, according to Jackson, these texts which are normally associated with Black people do not in fact portray them negatively.

Jackson first of all admits that although there are several works available dealing with Blacks in the bible, these works are weak as regards the exegetical component which is essential for effective preaching (1994:2). He refers to Dunstan’s study, *The Black Man in the Old Testament and its World*, 1974, as an example in this regard. While he accepts some authors as having made good contributions to this field of study, such as Martin Bernal, David T Adamo, and Cain Hope Felder, he rejects others as not useful for his purposes, for example the two volumes by Walter McCray. Together with Cain Hope Felder, Jackson is of the view that making the Biblical world ‘all black’ was no more credible than making it ‘all white’ (1994:2).

He nevertheless questions why the absence of black persons in biblical history as presented to him is so conspicuous. As it is, it seems there is instead an overwhelming preponderance of white individuals that ‘tenaciously usurp the entire stage of historical and interpersonal interactions in the drama of life’ (cf. Jackson 1994:3). This fact, in Jackson’s view, raises certain crucial questions such as: Is the sacred history a record to

exalt and magnify the importance only of those of the Caucasian race? Are blacks being brainwashed either by the mental superiority or spiritual excellence or peculiar divine selection of the transcendent engineer of all things in all life? (cf. Jackson 1994:3). Or is all this the unquestioned design of the awesome yet magnificent creator of the universe? These questions lead to others such as: what are we to understand regarding the words of Scripture: God is no respecter of persons? Are the singular qualities that make a person bold, sincere, fearless, God-conscious, or supernaturally imbued, only intended for the white race? Are we in possession of the entire truth of the present scriptures or have some details of revelatory significance purposely been deleted? Have the scriptures been correctly understood? (Jackson 1994:3).

Jackson (1994:3) concludes by arguing that as a matter of fact, no ethnic division was to be found in the human family until the ‘confusion of tongues’ at the Tower of Babel, and that no racial references can be found in Genesis. The nearest one can arrive at any evidence of black skin colour in the scriptures is in the words ‘Cush’, ‘Ham’ or terms that are derived from the family of Ham. He furnishes an exegetical study of major biblical persons who were part of the black presence in the Bible, the result of sermons he delivered at Saint Baptist Church of Cinnaminson, New Jersey, during 1991-1992 (cf. Jackson 1994:3-4).

2.3.6 Rodney S Sadler

Rodney S Sadler, one of the recent arrivals in the field of African-American biblical scholarship, in 1997 published an article entitled ‘African Presence in the Bible’ in the *African American Devotional Bible*. In that article he explored the presence of Africans in the Bible as a whole. His most outstanding contribution, however, to the field of biblical scholarship is to be seen in his doctoral dissertation (2001) entitled: *Can a Cushite Change His Skin? An Examination of Race, Ethnicity, and Othering in the Hebrew Bible*.

Like other African-American biblical scholars before him, Sadler takes up the question of Cush in the Old Testament, but from the context of race, with the intent of ‘...fill[ing] in the gaps in the larger discourse about race, ethnicity, and othering in the

Hebrew Bible, concentrating primarily on the biblical authors' perspectives of Cushites' (2001:41). Consequently, he peruses the occurrences of Cush in the Old Testament in an effort to establish what the biblical authors perceived regarding this term. All this is undertaken against the backdrop of other studies on the same subject by modern biblical scholars whom Sadler (2001:41) criticizes for '[...] lacking in one or more of the following elements: 1) concern for the change in an understanding of Cush(ites) in Hebrew literature over time; 2) necessary depth to produce a complete portrait of Cush from the perspective of biblical authors / audiences; 3) a systematic analysis of whether constituent elements of racist thought were employed in biblical representations of Cushites.' Furthermore, Sadler (2001:41) says of these authors: 'In fact, as we have seen, many of them refer to Cush as a "black" nation, adding the modern racial description to this ancient ethnic term.'²⁸ In the end he offers valuable conclusions.

The fundamental question that he sets out to investigate is: How did the authors of the Hebrew Bible perceive the Cushites? Thus, his dissertation basically explores the manner in which the authors of the Hebrew Bible represented the Cushites. But this is not all. His thesis also comprises an investigation into how contemporary scholars have understood the terms 'race' and 'ethnicity'. Sadler proposes working definitions of these terms (cf. Chapt.1 passim, but especially pp.9ff).

Noteworthy is Sadler's stringent exegetical approach, which he applies to all the Cush texts and which is evident especially in chapters two, three and four of his dissertation; in these an analysis of texts is performed following three major phases of Israelite history. As he himself says: '[...] by employing historical critical methods, by carefully exegeting the relevant biblical passages, and by examining pertinent extra-biblical texts and archaeological data, I hope to gain insight into the thinking of ancient Israelite / Judahite people' (2001:5). The three major phases of Israelite history to which he applies his approach include the understanding of the term 'Cush' in the tenth to the eighth century (chapter 2); the study of the term 'Cush' in the seventh century to the exilic period (chapter 3) and, finally the understanding of the term 'Cush' in the post-exilic period (chapter 4). In all these chapters, Sadler not only attempts to understand the

²⁸ Sadler's criticism lashes out especially against the following authors: C B Copher, whom he says is often revered as 'the father of Afrocentric biblical scholarship' (cf. Sadler 2001:36). Others include G Rice, S Hidal, R W Anderson, D T Adamo and D Hays (cf. Sadler 2001:36-40).

term ‘Cush’ in specific biblical passages but also investigates whether this term bore any racist connotations.

His study reveals that though on occasion constituent elements of racialist thought were employed in biblical representations of Cushites, there does not appear to have been a coherent system of racial thought in the Hebrew Bible. Instead, often esteemed by biblical authors, Cushites were viewed as an ethnic group, like most of the nations mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. In fact, the study also reveals that considerable contact existed between Cushites and the people of Judah throughout the biblical periods thus far investigated (cf. Sadler 2001:358-359).

In his introductory chapter, Sadler posits the basic questions: Who were the Cushites? To what extent did the people of ancient Israel / Judah know them? He concludes that lurking underneath these questions are a host of ‘murkier issues’ often overlooked by contemporary scholars, such as the questions about why the identity of Cushites has often represented a source of controversy among modern exegetes, or why they as a group have received less sustained attention than others who have displayed a history of political affiliations with Israel / Judah. According to Sadler (2001:4) the thesis will endeavour to 1) ‘[...] ascertain whether racial categories that resemble modern ones were utilized in ancient Israel / Judah; and 2) it will ascertain if such notions of essential difference were used in the Bible, particularly as it regards the Cushites, a group who would be deemed “black” by modern standards.’ The reason Sadler does so is that ‘[...] this study is intended to be a contribution to the continuing dialogue about race, ethnicity and othering [...]’ (cf. 2001:4).

Finally, the study concludes by suggesting that biblical scholars need to critically reassess their understanding of the Cushites and the role this people played in the history of the Levant. Sadler also proposes a number of implications of his study for future discussions about race and speculates on what still remains to be done in this regard.

2.3.7 Some critical remarks

The brief review of the representative African-American biblical scholars above merits some critical remarks and evaluation. To begin with, it is only fair to offer these

against the backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement which is by and large reflected in their interpretations of the African texts. Seen from this point of view, theirs has been a commendable endeavour in their attempt to restore the often neglected or misinterpreted image of the Africans in the Old Testament. They have not only placed the issue of the African presence on the agenda, but more importantly, they have also viewed that presence positively. Furthermore, they have challenged the scholarly world to undertake further research into the presence of Africa in the Bible. Nevertheless, as often happens with positive endeavours, their interpretations of the African presence have not been without flaws. For example, in writing about blacks in the Old Testament, Copher (1991:164) states:

From slaves to rulers, from court officials to authors who wrote parts of the Old Testament itself, from lawgivers to prophets, black peoples and their lands and individual black persons appear numerous times. In the veins of Hebrew-Israelite-Judahite-Jewish peoples flowed black blood.

But do these affirmations reflect the truth about black people? As a matter of fact, these well-intentioned comments have not met with the approval of all. Some of his affirmations still remain a matter of contention, because not everybody will agree that blacks were indeed rulers, or officials or authors, or lawgivers and prophets or even that they had Hebrew blood flowing freely in their veins.

Similarly, other African-American scholars such as Bailey, Jackson and even Sadler have also arrived at conclusions which provoke criticism. For example, is Bailey's assertion that blacks were used as a measure of validation and valuation for Israel correct? In fact, by stressing the black presence in the Bible, the African-American scholars have in my view fallen into the same trap they had committed themselves to dismantling. Fortunately, some of them have been wary about this. For instance Jackson, I think, is right when he sounds a note of caution: 'making the biblical world all black is no more credible than making it all white' (cf. Jackson 1994:2).

Or again, take the example of Sadler. Seen more critically, Sadler's work certainly, like that of the rest of the African-American scholars, tries to grapple with the issue of race and ethnicity. In so doing he not only places the issue of blacks on the

agenda, but also tends to portray them almost always in a positive light. This is understandable, given the cultural background from which Sadler approaches the texts. The difficulty here, however, is that this is often done at the expense of the exegetical rigour and ‘aloofness’ which biblical texts demand if they are to be given any fair interpretation. This is where we find weaknesses in Sadler’s otherwise impressive work.

To begin with, his methodological approach, while it is praiseworthy, exhibits its own limitations. By approaching texts from a historical-critical point of view, Sadler has certainly performed commendable work. But apart from a handful of texts, it is generally very difficult (if not impossible) to date the majority of Old Testament texts. This difficulty indubitably has negative repercussions on whatever findings the historical-critical method might yield. Next, there is the problem of one’s cultural bias, against which one must always guard. By approaching the Cush texts from the vantage point of race and ethnicity, Sadler has opened up a space for further criticism.

By way of conclusion, it might perhaps be said that the African-American scholars have not only succeeded in questioning the western approach to the so-called African texts of the Old Testament. They have also placed the question of the interpretation of these texts on the agenda. Africa and Africans are indeed present in the Bible, but the role of their presence there is something that will continue to evoke scholarly interest for a long time to come. This is one of the reasons why our own venture is a valid project. There is still a need for willing scholars to take upon themselves the challenge of re-interpreting these texts. And happily commendable efforts, albeit modest, have been made by Africans themselves to do just this.

2.4 African Scholars’ Interpretations

2.4.1 Introduction

As we enter the twenty-first century and now in retrospect, I tend to agree with those who, such as Holter (2002), believe that the twentieth century made the Old Testament an African book. There is no doubt that during the last century, the search for

an *interpretatio Africana* has comprised the major project of various African interpretative approaches to the Old Testament.

The African biblical scholars whose literature we now seek to review in the following paragraphs have by and large tried to address the question of an *interpretatio Africana* of the Bible, using various interpretative approaches to the Old Testament, especially during the second half of the twentieth century. In their endeavours, they have been rightly asking themselves the following questions which, I consider, Holter (2002:1) has articulated clearly: ‘What does it mean to interpret the Old Testament in Africa? How can we approach the ancient texts of the Old Testament from contemporary African perspectives, using African experiences to express African concerns?’

Yet, they are by no means the only ones to do so. Several others before and after them have also attempted to undertake the same task.²⁹ However, for the purposes of this thesis we have decided to select just a few, namely those who have paid more attention to Cush. These include David T Adamo, probably one of the most outstanding African scholars to date in the field of Old Testament research vis-à-vis Africa. Others are E Mveng, G A Mikré-Selassie and S Semporé. It should be pointed out that in their search for Africa and Africans in the Old Testament, these scholars have consciously or unconsciously come face to face with the Cush texts. This is because any search for Africa in the Old Testament is *de facto* synonymous with the search for Cush, even to the exclusion of Egypt, the other African country which is so frequently referred to in the Hebrew Bible.

Adamo (2001:2) has observed, ‘[...] although African biblical scholars today are beneficiaries of the western biblical interpretation as a result of their access to western education, they are not passive receivers of western biblical interpretation’. The brief discussion below of each of these scholars is therefore an attempt, among other things, to show to what extent they are not, in Adamo’s words, ‘passive receivers.’

Thus, one understands how difficult it can be to concur with statements such as this one by West (1997:114): ‘But just what contribution African scholars will make to the extensive work already done by African Americans remains to be seen, and will depend, in part, on our understanding of “Africa” [...]’. Personally, I have no doubts in

²⁹ For a survey of these African efforts, see the book by K Holter (2002).

my mind that African scholars, despite the endeavours of the African-Americans in the field of biblical scholarship, can still make a contribution that is truly worthwhile and one that reflects their own hermeneutical concerns. This means that African scholars will no longer regard the Bible as the book of the colonizers, but as one which expresses central aspects of African experience and identity, traditional as well as postcolonial. There is a strong need to allow this new understanding of the said book to be reflected in academic biblical studies.

2.4.2 David T Adamo

D T Adamo, who is today considered to be a significant researcher in questions pertaining to Africa and Africans in the Old Testament, has undoubtedly succeeded in putting forward an important case which we now try to present very briefly in the following paragraphs. The most significant contribution by Adamo is to be found in his book entitled: *Africa and Africans in the Old Testament* (1998).³⁰

Right at the beginning of this book, which is a revised version of his thesis of 1986, Adamo (1998:5) spells out its purpose and significance, namely: '[...] the critical and objective investigation of the presence, the role and the contribution of Africa and Africans in the political, religious and economic history of ancient Israel in the period of the Old Testament'.

Basically, Adamo (1998:1) argues that western biblical scholarship has 'made frantic efforts to either 'de-Africanize' or reduce Africa and Africans in the Bible to slavery. While some have denied that Africa and Africans have any influence, others deny their total presence at all in the Bible. This denial of African presence and influence is so strong because for the past century the thrust of biblical scholarship has been in the

³⁰ Other relevant books and articles include the following: *Reading and Interpreting the Bible in African Indigenous Churches* (2001); *Explorations in African Biblical Studies* (2001); 'The Black Prophet in the Old Testament' in *Journal of Arabic and Religious Studies* 4 (1987); 'The African Wife of Moses: An Examination of Numbers 12:1-9' in *Africa Theological Journal* 18 (1989); 'Understanding the Genesis Creation Account in an African Background' in *Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies* 10 (1989); 'The African Queen (1 Kings 10:10-13; 11 Chronicles 9:1-12)' in *Journal of Arabic and Religious Studies* 7 (1990); 'Ancient Africa and Genesis 2:10-14' in *The Journal of Religious Thought* 49 (1992); 'Ethiopia in the Bible' in *African Christian Studies* 8/11 (1992); 'The Table of Nations reconsidered in African Perspective (Genesis 10)' in *Journal of African Religion and Philosophy* 2 (1993).

hands of western scholars.’ To rebut this rather strong accusation he commends what he considers the right approach, something that ‘should have been done at least four hundred years ago’ (1998:4).

This is the approach adopted by some African-American scholars such as Alfred G Dunston, Randall C Bailey, Charles B Copher, Cain Felder Hope, to mention but a few.³¹ Adamo (1998:6) argues that there is now a need for well-prepared scholars, especially of biblical languages, to follow in the footsteps of these authors. He then exhorts his readers ‘to relax whatever is their past and present conception about Africa and Africans, and be ready to listen to a radical [sic] new ideas different from the mainline Eurocentric conception of the black people.’

Having thus provided a rather extended introduction to his book, Adamo then proceeds to investigate terms used in antiquity to refer to Africa and Africans, such as *Wawat* (territory south of Egypt), *Cush* (term used to refer to Africa and Africans and used some fifty-seven times in the Old Testament [1998:14])³², *Punt* (not Libya but rather the territory along the Somali coast), *Nehesi* (Egyptian term used to refer to fellow Africans living south of Egypt), *Magan & Meluha* (terms referring to Egypt and Ethiopia respectively), *Ethiopia* (term originating from the Greeks and most probably connoting ‘burnt face’ in reference to the colour of the skin and therefore used to designate African people in Africa or in the Diaspora), and throughout argues that all of these terms rightly referred to black people, and that it is not accurate for some western scholars to misinterpret them (cf. Adamo 1998:9ff passim). Adamo finally concludes his analysis of Chapter Two (Terms used to refer to Africa and Africa in the Ancient Near East) by throwing down a gauntlet which suggests that whenever any of these terms appears, especially the term ‘Ethiopia’ and ‘Cush’, modern translators should render them ‘Africa’ or ‘Africans’ (1998:37)!

Having ‘settled’ the issue of terminology, he then proceeds to undertake the exegesis of the African texts as they appear in the three divisions of the Old Testament,

³¹ Adamo is for instance captivated by the approach of authors such as: Bishop Alfred G Dunston, *The Black Man in the OT and Its World* (1974); Cain Hope Felder, *Stony the Road we Trod* (1991) & *Troubling Biblical Waters* (1989); and articles by Charles Copher such as ‘The Black Presence in the Biblical World’, in *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 1/11 (1974); and by Randall C. Bailey, ‘Beyond Identification: The Use of Africans in Old Testament Poetry and Narratives’, in *Stony the Road We Trod. African American Biblical Interpretation* (1991).

³² However, I was able to count only fifty-six references to the term ‘Cush’ together with its cognates.

using what he calls 'literary analysis' and 'source' approaches. His exegetical approach generally follows this pattern: historical background / context of individual texts followed by a literary analysis with an explanation and then a conclusion. In his quest he makes generous use of sources, both biblical and extra-biblical, and naturally also of the views of a multitude of biblical scholars, both ancient and modern.

Some of the conclusions arrived at, as one would expect, are the following; only a few examples to underline his point:

- 1) That all the cases in the Old Testament involving Cush refer to Africa or Africans and that the term 'Cush' / 'Cushite' should be translated 'Africa' and 'Africans', respectively.
- 2) That Africa and Africans interacted with the Israelites economically, religiously, and especially politically and militarily.
- 3) That the Israelites never discriminated against Africa and Africans, but instead held them in high esteem and made use of their talents. This is in contraposition (according to Adamo) to many western scholars who have argued that 'Cush' usually occupied a menial position in Israel.

Thus, in Adamo's view, the 'Cushite' in David's army was a military officer not a slave: 'The Kushite in David's army is therefore an African who probably became an Israelite. He became one of the most trusted military man [sic] who was in-charge of protecting David, the King of Israel' (1998:86). Furthermore, the Queen of Sheba originated from Africa (1998:93), not Arabia. The comparison of the prophet Amos of Israel to 'Cushites' is not derogatory but rather merely an indication of Yahweh's universal involvement with all nations, even distant ones such as 'Cush' (1998:100). The proverbial saying of Jer.13,23 is not meant to be a negative remark against 'Cush' but rather an invitation to Israel to be converted from her wickedness (1998:109). Ebed-melek, who rescued Jeremiah from death, was not a slave or a eunuch as some scholars have maintained, but 'one of the highest royal officers' (1998:114), and the prophet Zephaniah most probably had African blood running in his veins. 'I think that the mention of "Cushi" is significant giving such extended genealogy to Zephaniah. The

main purpose therefore may be to show to the readers that the prophet Zephaniah is a full Israelite with a royal status; he is also of African ancestry' (1998:117).

I consider that more than anywhere else in his thesis, Adamo's sentiments are particularly expressed by the remarks he makes in his analysis of the African origin of the prophet Zephaniah. For example, he argues (1998:119):

Prophet[s] in ancient Israel had great contribution to the religious, political and military and social life of ancient Israel [...] Thus to find an African as one of these prophets means that Africans have contributed to the total development of ancient Israel. It could also show that racial discrimination on the basis of color was not in existence in ancient Israel. Since Africans and their nations were highly respected, throughout the ancient Near East, it could have been a great advantage and great esteem to have Africans [an African] as one of the prophets in Israel.

As if to provide a kind of climax to his whole thesis, this outstanding African scholar bluntly asserts (1998:169):

I maintain the fact that they [Africans] would not have been mentioned so frequently had they not held an important place in the Israelite life. It is, therefore, only a lack of proper understanding of the entire life of Israel as recorded by the Old Testament, or bias against Africans, that could have made any scholar maintain that the Israelite only knew the Africans as slaves.

Finally he passionately recommends the need for further archaeological evidence to throw light on the topic, not just of the Near East, but also on excavations in Africa south of Egypt, because as he says, 'Such discoveries may also help to reveal the African cultural [sic] influence on ancient Israel' (1998:169). But Adamo is not alone in this

assessment and interpretation of the Cush (read ‘African’) texts. Other African voices speak as well, to which I should now like to briefly turn my attention.³³

2.4.3 Other voices

2.4.3.1 Engelbert Mveng

E Mveng, a renowned theologian from Cameroon, has investigated the cultural richness of Africa in the Old Testament. By means of textual analysis he has been able to establish that the four geographical places of Cush, Put, Ophir and Sheba referred to in the Old Testament undoubtedly refer to Africa (Mveng 1972:23-39). Furthermore, he points to the geographic, ethnic and symbolic significance of Africa in the Old Testament. According to Mveng, Cush represents one of the great powers of antiquity (Gn 2:13; Is 11:11). Cush, Ophir and Sheba are associated with riches (Job 28:16.19; 1 Kg 9:26-28; 22:49; Ps 72:10; Is 43:3-4; 45:14; 60:6). Also common to Cush, Put, Ophir and Sheba, according to Mveng, is the fact that they all reflect positive aspects of Africa such as wealth, merchandise and military ability.

2.4.3.2 G A Mikré-Selassie

G A Mikré-Selassie, a scholar from Ethiopia, has investigated the connection between Ethiopia and the Old Testament. In an article entitled ‘Ethiopia and the Bible’ published in 1972 he attempts to establish how Jewish and Christian beliefs were introduced into that country. Furthermore, he also argues that among the many references to Ethiopia in the Bible, many of them denote Ethiopia as its boundaries are established today (Mikré-Selassie 1972:193). In Mikré-Selassie’s view, the narrative regarding the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon in 1Kg 10:1-10 marks, according to an ancient Ethiopian tradition, the introduction of Judaism to that country. Finally, Mikré-Selassie

³³ For a survey, cf. M Høyland Lavik 2001. The ‘African’ Texts of the Old Testament and Their African Interpretations, in *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa*. In this article she gives the gist of these other African scholars’ arguments.

concludes that Judaism and Christianity have been rooted in the African continent right from ancient times, and so are not merely additions from the West (Mikré-Selassie 1972:190-191).

2.4.3.3 Sidbé Sempore

Last but not least, S Sempore, a scholar from Ivory Coast, in an article entitled 'Black People and Salvation in the Bible' published in 1993, has argued that from the book of Numbers right through to the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament, African individuals have always played an important role (Sempore 1993:17-29). To corroborate his argument he points out the role played by the Cushite wife of Moses in Numbers 12; the Cushite servant of Joab in 2 Samuel 18:19-33; the role of Ebed-melek who rescued the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 38:7-12 and 39:15-18, and finally the story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40. Sempore concludes that these texts reveal that right from the beginning, the God of Israel had included the Africans in the economy of salvation.

2.4.4 Some critical remarks

Since D T Adamo is practically the only African scholar who has almost single-handedly written extensively on the question of the Cushite (read 'African') presence in the Old Testament, it is no wonder that whatever critical remarks we might express are mainly directed at him.

Important points in Adamo's arguments may be wrapped up in the following manner: Positively, he certainly, among other things, provides a solid overview of the *status questionis*. He employs a commendable and engaging exegetical approach, and he presents a detailed analysis of his topic and arrives at rather predictable conclusions. Negatively, however, on the whole he gives the impression of being biased himself. This is a criticism which, fortunately or unfortunately for him, has not escaped the watchful eye of other scholars. M Høyland Lavik, another scholar working in the same field, has for instance pointed out:

What then are the strong and weak sides in Adamo's approach? The strong side is obviously that he has placed the question for an 'African presence in the OT' on the agenda. [...] However, Adamo's approach has also weak sides. One is that he becomes one-sided [...] I find that he always finishes with the same set of conclusions. It seems as if Adamo approaches the texts predisposed. He finds what he searches for, even though the texts vary with regard to both form and content. In his eagerness to put Africa and Africans in the fore, he exaggerates, giving no room for exegetical discussions, because he concludes before he asks. This approach of Adamo makes his analysis predictable and superficial, and it prevents him from approaching each text with different questions [...]³⁴

I generally tend to concur with Høyland Lavik's assessment of Adamo. Nevertheless, Adamo's work undoubtedly represents a monumental contribution to African biblical studies and will remain so at least for a long time to come. But more importantly, Adamo has presented future biblical scholars with a number of challenges:

- 1) How to translate words like *Cush*, *Cushi*, *Ethiopia*? Adamo's suggestion that 'Cush' and / or 'Cushite' ought to be translated by 'Africa' or 'Africans' respectively (cf. Adamo 1992:59-60; 1998:37) is certainly very interesting and, from the African point of view, also quite attractive. His case is further reinforced when he argues that if, for example, the Hebrew word ~YRCM can be translated by 'Egypt' without much fanfare, why should the same not be done with regard to Cush? But the matter is not as simple as this, for there are real difficulties revolving around the term 'Cush' and its cognates.³⁵
- 2) The need to re-examine some of the 'bold' conclusions he arrives at, especially in chapters three and four of his thesis (1998), where for instance he argues that the Garden of Eden was in Africa.

³⁴ Høyland Lavik: An African Presence in the Old Testament? David Tuesday Adamo's interpretation of the Old Testament Cush passages, in *Old Testament Essays* 11/1 (1998) 50-58.

³⁵ For a discussion on this issue see Holter, 'Should OT Cush be translated Africa?' *The Bible Translator* 48/3 (1997:331-336).

- 3) The need to investigate his allegation that western biblical scholarship has deliberately tried to 'de-Africanize' the Bible and, finally,
- 4) The need to carry out further research, especially in the field of archaeology, not just in the Near East, but in Africa south of Egypt as well.

Høyland Lavik (2001:50) has also posed a couple of other important questions which are a matter of concern with regard to African Old Testament studies. These include the following:

- 1) The danger in considering texts as existential, since this tendency may potentially 'divorce us from the original historical setting of the text', with the result that we risk being led into a '[...] situation of misunderstanding or over-interpretation?'
- 2) Do the texts of the Old Testament necessarily demand to be read as historical facts?
- 3) Does every 'African' text of the Old Testament portray Africa and Africans as playing important roles, or do they just represent one of the several foreign nations mentioned by the biblical authors?
- 4) What about the more negative images of Africa and Africans which are also found in the texts?³⁶

In response to Høyland Lavik's queries, I am of the view that no serious study about the 'African' texts of the Old Testament can afford to ignore these important questions.

As for the other three African scholars, namely Mveng, Mikré-Selassie and Semporé, one cannot but admire the fact that already as early as the 70s these Africans were ahead of their time. Not only did they regard the biblical portrayal of Africans as significant in a variety of ways, they also perceived texts concerning Africa and Africans as containing valuable historical records, which are absolutely crucial in the renewed search into questions concerning African identity and history however we choose to understand those concepts. In this sense, these scholars may be said to have broken new ground in the wider field of 'Africanization of biblical studies'. Nevertheless, their efforts

³⁶ For an expanded version of these questions, see Høyland Lavik's article: 'The "African" Texts and Their African Interpretations', in M Getui et al. (eds) 2001:50-51.

still represent only a modest and isolated venture in the area of African biblical scholarship.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter attempts to survey the main camps which have emerged as regards the interpretations of the Cush texts. As a result it has become more and more clear that not only has western biblical scholarship not given the Cush texts the priority they deserve but that it has also approached them from a rather biased perspective. This tendency has been much emphasized by the African-American biblical scholars on one hand and by their African counterparts on the other. It has also been pointed out by some scholars from the western camp itself. These scholars without doubt represent a new trend with regard to the interpretation of the African texts of the Old Testament.

As a result of the awareness of the problem, the African-American and African scholars, also including authors representing new trends in the western camp, have all expressed the need to study the so-called African texts of the Old Testament further. This is one of the reasons why, for our part, we have resolved in this thesis to ‘go back to the sources’ and, in so doing to attempt, once again, another interpretation of the Cush texts. Hopefully this will clarify or at least shed some light on some of the contentious issues. Chapter three takes up this matter and starts off by analysing textual references whereby Cush is reflected in proper names, places and cultural matters.

CHAPTER THREE

CUSH TEXTS REFLECTING PROPER NAMES, PLACES AND CULTURAL MATTERS

3.1 Introduction

It is now necessary to return to the sources and attempt another interpretation of the Cush texts.³⁷ To facilitate this work we have decided to group texts according to their presumed thematic functions. Thus, this chapter will analyze these texts according to the following themes: References to Cush concerning information on proper names (Jr. 36:14; 46: 9; Zph.1:1; Ps.7:1); references to Cush which concern information about places or geographical locations (Gn 2:13; 10:6-8; Ezk 29:10; Est 1:1; 8:9) and, finally, texts which point in the direction of the cultural and / or anthropological functions of Cush (Nm.12:1; Is.18:2; Jr.13:23).

However, the analysis of these Cush texts is undertaken against the backdrop of two basic assumptions already alluded to in this thesis. The first is that the term 'Cush' refers to a territory south of ancient Egypt, inhabited by the people referred to as Cushites. The second is that the Cushite presence in Egypt and Syria-Palestine was not only a reality but in fact went back many centuries. However, when exactly this presence started to take root is, historically speaking, very difficult to define. Anderson (1995:57) has argued that traditions regarding Cushites in Egyptian history and material-cultural remains from archaeological excavations must constitute the primary basis for understanding the Cushite presence in Syria-Palestine, and not primarily biblical traditions, which he considers are 'often polemical or tendentious regarding non-Judeans.' Citing Säve-Söderbergh (1941:26-27) and Trigger (1976:112-113), Anderson (1995:60) adds that Egyptian literature shows that the Cushites performed a wide variety of tasks, which included positions ranging from '[...] slave to mercenary or military conscript to court official to household servants.'

³⁷ Other and / or similar interpretations of the Cush texts have been offered by the various camps of interpretations which were identified during the literature review and were discussed in Chapter Two.

I am of the view that it would of course be presumptuous to think that the Cushites performed the same roles when they finally interacted with the Jews, which is why it is very important to analyze the texts in order to establish what tasks Cushites did in fact carry out. As for Anderson's view that biblical traditions cannot be used as a primary basis for understanding a Cushite presence in Syria-Palestine, I am inclined to argue the opposite. Personally, I think that biblical traditions can indeed provide us with ample information about Cushite involvement with Syria-Palestine. In addition, information derived from history and archaeology, as Anderson has argued, can serve to corroborate or complement such information.

As would be expected, we are also assuming that the Cushite interactions with the inhabitants of the biblical world such as Egypt, Syria and Palestine must have taken on many forms: religious, cultural, political, economic, military, and so forth.³⁸ Therefore, it is no surprise to find them mentioned frequently in the Bible. Indeed, the Old Testament has 56 references to the term 'Cush' and its cognates. Furthermore, it would seem that the mixing of races seems to have been less of a problem in ancient times than it is today (cf. Anderson 1995:69). Nevertheless, in analyzing the Cush texts, it will be incumbent upon us in the following chapters to try to decipher the form which the mention of the individual Cush texts took. Notice that these assumptions preclude the identification of Cush with the Kassites, whose influence is usually assigned to a period during the Late Bronze Age and whose power most likely did not directly permeate the political life of Syro-Palestinian states. Thus, the identification of the Cushites with a group from Mesopotamia is a most unlikely position which cannot be substantiated.³⁹

In this chapter, we shall try to revisit the references to Cush which point to names of individual persons, names of places or the people associated with a particular geographical locale, and finally those references to Cush which have anthropological and / or cultural connotations. The analysis of these texts is carried out in terms of the problem this thesis is to investigate, namely that firstly, they have not been given the priority they deserve especially in traditional western biblical scholarship, and secondly, that where they have been accorded whatever attention, cases of misinterpretation have

³⁸ Regarding the presence of the Cushites in Egypt and Syria-Palestine much literature is now available. For a survey, see for example the articles by Anderson (1995) and Rice (1975).

³⁹ On this issue see sections 1.1 and 3.3 of this thesis.

not been uncommon. The translations offered generally follow the text of the RSV (1952) and any variations are those of the researcher.

3.2 Proper names

The first of the texts which seem to point in the direction of Cush as providing the names of individual persons are: Jeremiah 36:14, Jeremiah 46:9, Zephaniah 1:1 and Psalm 7:1. The thread that joins these texts together is the designation 'Cush' as an appellation. The question which posits an exegetical challenge here, however, is the need to identify who Cush is and / or the role played by him in these texts. This is the challenge we now take up in the following sub-sections.

3.2.1 Jeremiah 36:14

Masoretic text:

ydwhy-ta \$wrb-la ~yrfh-lk wlvyw
tarq rva hlgmh rmal yvwk-!b whymlv-!b
whyntn-!b
whyrn-!b \$wrb xqyw \$lw \$dyb hnxq ~[h
ynzab hb
~hyla abyw wdyb hlgmh-ta

Translation:

Then all the officials sent Jehudi son of Nethaniah son of Shelemiah son of Cushi to say to Baruch, "Bring the scroll that you read in the hearing of the people, and come." So Baruch son of Neriah took the scroll in his hand and came to them.

3.2.1.1 Preliminary remarks

The mention of Cush in this verse is imbedded in the phrase $\text{yvwk} - \text{!b}$. Out of context this phrase may be translated either as ‘son of Cushi’ or ‘son of a Cushite’. In the former case Cushi would denote a proper name whereas in the latter case it would connote a generic or gentile usage of the phrase; therefore the function of Cush here would point to an ethnic marker. In either case, none of these renderings furnishes a clear identity for Cush or its function.

In order to identify the Cush referred to in this verse it is necessary to narrow down the scope of the verse and situate it in its historical context. Jeremiah 36 pertains to events which take place during the fifth year of the reign of king Jehoiakim of Judah (ca 604 BCE.), and this particular chapter generally marks an important incident in the life of the prophet Jeremiah (Davidson 1985:114). Verse 14 forms part of the so-called ‘Jeremiah’s Scroll’, (Jr 36:1-32). As a literary unit, Jeremiah 36 can be divided into four parts: 1) The recording of Yahweh’s word (Jr 36:1-8); 2) The reading of the scroll or the hearing of Yahweh’s word (Jr 36:9-20); 3) Jehoiakim destroys the scroll or the rejection of Yahweh’s word (Jr 36:21-26) and, 4) The scroll is re-written or the preservation of Yahweh’s word (Jr 36:27-32). Thus, Jeremiah 36:14 belongs to part two which focuses on the reading of the scroll and the hearing of Yahweh’s word, both important aspects in the context of God’s word.

3.2.1.2 Analytical remarks

The reader is informed that the state officials sent a certain Jehudi to bring Baruch in person and have him read the scroll again in their hearing. This is the second time it has been read, the first occasion having been in the temple during a fast. The officials listed here were, to use modern terms, the cabinet ministers in the court of king Jehoiakim. Apart from Elnathan ben Achbor and Gemariah ben Shaphan, we know nothing further

about these men. Jehudi is the *raison d'être* for the Cush reference. It is, however, unusual to find the ancestry of Jehudi, an otherwise unknown person, given in such detail to the third generation; and Cushi happens to be one of his ancestors. According to Carroll (1986:659), lists of this length are usually reserved for significant characters. Thus, there can be no doubt that Jehudi (and by inference his ancestor Cushi) was a significant character. The apparent courtesy with which the state officials treated Baruch indicated their friendly attitude and the possibility that he too was of noble birth. If this is granted, then it is understandable that it required someone with 'sufficient' credentials, in this case Jehudi, to summon him. Jehudi's credentials proceed most probably from the fact that he himself was of noble ancestry. Consequently Cushi, his great-grandfather, must be presumed to be part of that noble ancestry; or else how would one explain his linkage to Jehudi Hence we should enquire: who was this Cushi to whom Jehudi's ancestry is linked?

To decipher his identity it would have been helpful to trace the identity of Jehudi himself, but this does not lead us far. Jehudi is a practically unknown figure as he appears only in this chapter (once in v.14; twice in v.21 and once in v.23). In all these instances, he is mentioned in connection with the incident of the scroll. He is sent to summon Baruch (v.14); he is sent by the king to bring the scroll (v.21); and he reads the scroll before the king (v.23). After this no further mention is made of him. Thus, while this connection between Jehudi and the scroll makes him someone important in the king's court, it is of little use in establishing the identity of Cushi his great-grandfather, who appears in this incident only once in v.14.

Other possibilities may be considered. One is to consider that Cushi is here not in fact a personal name but rather a generic or a gentilic designation. In this sense the phrase would then serve as an ethnic marker to mean that Jehudi simply stemmed from a family of Cushite ancestry and that this fact was apparent to those who knew him.⁴⁰ It would denote that though his ancestry could be traced to indigenous Judeans with characteristically Yahwistic names, his lineage could ultimately be traced to an unnamed Cushite. This is a real possibility, especially given that we are confronted with events

⁴⁰ In Amos 9:7 we notice a similar usage, though there a plural construct is used: the sons of Cushi'. This is clearly intended to denote people from Cush, as is also the case of the genealogical lists in Gn 10:7 and 1 Chr 1:9.

which took place barely half a century from the demise of the twenty-fifth Egyptian dynasty, the ‘Cushite’ dynasty.⁴¹ Rice (1979:27-28) suggests that owing ‘to his political ties with the Cushite dynasty in Egypt, a Cushite may well have served in Hezekiah’s administration to help conduct diplomacy with Judah’s southern allies.’ Another possibility is to investigate other appearances of Cush as a proper name, such as those in Jeremiah 46:9, Zephaniah 1:1 and Psalm 7:1. These will constitute the subject of our investigations below.

Nevertheless, it would be interesting to discover if the Cush referred to in these texts is the same person. Even though some authors have speculated about this possibility,⁴² the chronological separation of the narratives makes it unlikely. It is impossible to believe that someone who had lived in the tenth century (the period of David’s reign) could be the same person who also lived in the late seventh century (the time of Jehoiakim’s reign), a time difference of about three centuries! Thus, even from the chronological point of view, our investigation into the function and the identity of Cush in v.14 does not lead us very far. The most we can say is that whether the designation ‘Cushi’ in v.14 is an individual name or a generic designation, there can be no doubt that the prophet attached importance to that name. This is so for two reasons. First, if this had not been the case, there would be no reason why Cush would have been mentioned in the first place in the genealogy of an otherwise important personage such as Jehudi. Second, it can also be postulated that if Cush had borne any negative connotations, the term would have been deleted altogether from the ancestry of Jehudi.

Thus, in Jeremiah 36:14 we have not only an instance whereby a Cushite presence in Israel is affirmed, but also a situation where that presence was viewed positively. This is the conclusion arrived at also (among others), and expressed more or less in similar words by Rice (1996:407), Adamo (1998:112), and Sadler (2001:220-221). Of these three authors however, the remark by Adamo probably deserves most comment for he writes: ‘[...] Yehudi is not only of African ancestry, he was probably one of the highest and most educated royal state officials’ (cf. 1998:112). But how can this be known for certain? My

⁴¹ This dynasty is usually located in a period which extended from about 751 BCE - 656 BCE.

⁴² So Hutton, “Cush”:123-137. According to him the ‘Cush’ referred to in Ps 7:1 and 2 Samuel 18 is one and the same person. The reason is that both are connected to King David, even though the dating of Psalm 7 is problematic.

view is that there is no way we can know whether this was the case with Yehudi because the text does not tell us so in a manner which excludes any doubt. To say the things Adamo attributes to Jehudi would probably be to read a little too much into the text, rather than out of it.

Another reference to Cush as an individual person is found in the first verse of the book of the prophet Zephaniah.

3.2.2 Zephaniah 1:1

Masoretic text:

yvwk-!b hynpc-la hyh rva hwhy-rbd
hdwhy \$lm !ma-!b whyvay ymyb hyqzx-!b
hyrma-!b hyl dg-!b

Translation:

The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah son of Cushi son of Gedaliah son of Amariah son of Hezekiah, in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah.

3.2.2.1 Preliminary remarks

Zephaniah 1:1 has received some attention in recent literature. The reason is largely twofold: first, the possibility that Zephaniah, one of the Hebrew prophets, was actually of African ancestry, and second, because his pedigree, carried back to the fourth generation and stopping with the name Hezekiah (one of the reformer kings of Israel), suggests that he was a descendant of the king thus called;⁴³ and so was of royal blood and personally acquainted with court circles. That he was also familiar with Jerusalem is indicated by

⁴³ The name, however, occurs in other connections as well, for example in Ezekiel 2:16.

his mention of localities there, which are hinted at in Zephaniah 1:10,11, and also by the use of the expression ‘this place’ (in reference to Jerusalem) in Zephaniah 1:4. But apart from this rather scanty information, the Hebrew Bible provides little other information about the life of this prophet. Consequently, as Sadler (2001:141) has for example pointed out, Zephaniah ‘[...] has inspired an enormous amount of controversy and numerous theories regarding its interpretation.’

Some chronological indications might be of help in putting his ministry into its historical context. The prophecy of Zephaniah was most probably delivered in the reign of Josiah (ca 637-607 BCE), and probably before the religious reformation mentioned in 2 Kings 23:1-24, which is presumed to have taken place in the eighteenth year of Josiah’s reign. The indication that this was the case is to be found in the references to the wickedness which still seems to be prevalent (cf. Zph 1:4,5,8,9,12), a ‘natural consequence’ (we might say) of the long reign of the unprincipled previous king, Manasseh (ca 687-642 BCE), having been born probably around 699 BCE. The book, though placed in the canon after both Nahum and Habakkuk, is chronologically prior to them.

3.2.2.2 Analytical remarks

The author of the biblical text bluntly calls Zephaniah ‘son of Cushi’, who is presented with an extended genealogy. The questions which arise therefrom are: What purpose do these extended genealogies serve, and who was this ‘Cushi’ who was the father of the prophet Zephaniah? Answers to these questions may help unravel the controversy usually associated with this prophet.

As a matter of fact, Zephaniah is the only prophet in the Hebrew bible with such an extended genealogy, naming four of his paternal ancestors. His father Cushi is given the only name in the list which stands out oddly, since all the others are Israelite names. As we have already pointed out in reference to the analysis of Jeremiah 36:14, Carroll (1986) considers that these extended lists of genealogies are usually reserved for significant characters. Another scholar, Wilson (1986:279-280), argues that there would be no other legitimate reason to provide such an extended genealogy except to identify an

important ancestor and that in the case of Zephaniah, only king Hezekiah was significant enough for this long list. Thus, the mere presence of Cushi in this extended genealogy is perhaps meant to tell the reader that we are here dealing with an important pedigree.

Other authors have speculated that the long genealogy serves the purposes of legitimization (cf. Fohrer 1978:456). This theory is based on the presupposition that it is rather problematic to have a prophet who is both a descendant of a Cushite and at the same time a Judean. Thus, a long genealogy such as this one would be necessary to mediate the potential 'damage' Zephaniah's father's name or ethnic origins might cause from the Judean point of view. In this case the genealogy would then serve to prove that the prophet is of good Judean stock (cf. Szeles 1987:62). This seems to be the point of view of Gottwald, according to whom, 'Zephaniah is given an extended genealogy (1:1), which may either intend to show that he was a great-great grand son of king Hezekiah or that his father Cushi ('Egyptian / Ethiopian?') was after all a full Israelite and not a foreigner' (1985:390).

Other authors have even argued that nothing of Zephaniah's origin or position can be gleaned from this long introduction. Such is the view, for example, of Ben Zvi (cf. 1991:42-51) and also of Craigie (1985:106). Others such as Kapelrud (1975:43-45) have argued against any royal descent. Still others, such as Larue (1968:237), have posited that Cushi is just a proper name, not an ethnic designation.

Further objections are based on chronological grounds. It is argued that whereas there are four generations from Zephaniah's ancestor, Hezekiah, there are only three from King Hezekiah through his successors on the throne: Manasseh, Amon and Josiah. But the fact that Zephaniah appears in the fourth generation after Hezekiah, whereas Josiah, with whom he was contemporary, was only in the third, can easily be explained if it is assumed that Amariah was born to Hezekiah many years before Manasseh (who was only twelve when he came to the throne), and that both married and died early. Thus, there is no reason why Zephaniah and Josiah, two contemporaries, cannot both have been descended from King Hezekiah, whose reign is usually placed between 715-687 BCE.

Kapelrud (1975:43-45) is of the opinion that the name Hezekiah was a common name and if the author intended to say that the prophet was related to king Hezekiah, this point would have been made more explicit. But if this were not the case, it would be

difficult to understand why the name Hezekiah would have been included in this genealogy. Most probably, therefore, the Hezekiah referred to is indeed one of the famous Israelite kings. In addition, Smith (1984:125), although he concedes that Cush usually refers to the geographical region south of Egypt, nonetheless decides against considering the identification of Zephaniah's father as a Cushite and instead suggests the possibility of intermarriage.

Furthermore, from the chronological point of view, we are still in the range of the period, well-attested in scripture, when the Cushite presence was not uncommon. This brings us to our investigation into the identity of Cushi. Although from the historical point of view it is possible to understand 'Cushi' here as a generic or a gentile designating a person from Cush, we wish to argue, like Larue (1968:237) and also Copher (1993:40), Adamo (1998:117) and many others including Sadler (2001:157), that all the indications suggest that Cushi was probably the name of an individual and that the person so called was also a Cushite. The fact that it is the only name in the list which does not exhibit a Yahwistic connotation like the rest serves to corroborate this view. The name 'Zephaniah' most probably means 'Yahweh has treasured'.

Thus, the view put forward by Anderson (1995:54) that the identification of this Cushi cannot be known is difficult to maintain. Nor can that of Bentzen (1949:153) who, as a typical exponent of traditional western biblical scholarship, has suggested that he was a temple slave. Bentzen further elaborates that Cushi was a Negro, perhaps from a slave family, although there is nothing in the text to substantiate this. He however does not suggest the same interpretation for other occurrences of 'Cushi'.

Support for a generic or a gentile understanding of 'Cushi' in Zephaniah 1:1 is further corroborated by an appeal to the following arguments: Buzi (Ezk 1:3; Job 32:2), father of the prophet Ezekiel, designates a man of Buz or a Buzite; Gadi (2 Ki 15:14), refers to a Gadite; while the name Hachmoni refers to a Hachmonite (1 Chr 11:11; 27:32). We could also point out that in our own days, we are aware of cases in which the name of a place can also be (come) the name of a person. We know, for example, that certain people bear the name 'Africa'. Therefore, similarly, in the case of Zephaniah 1:1, it can be argued that Cush designates a man from Cush or a Cushite. It is consequently

most probable that the designation ‘Cushi’ must have been the proper name of Zephaniah’s father and that he was also of African ancestry.

Nevertheless, the African ancestry of the prophet has met with objections from a number of authors.⁴⁴ Vlaardingerbroek (1999:12) even writes: ‘Nowadays there is occasional reference to Zephaniah’s “African roots” [...]. Neither [Zephaniah] 1:1 nor 2:12 offer any support for this. It is not necessary in 1:1 to read yvwk to mean “Cushite”. Apparently Cushi existed as a proper name just as in our time there are people with the last name Black, Brown, or De Moor.’

However, the use of the name ‘Cushi’ in Syria and Phoenicia is usually cited as the main reason for the objection. One interpreter thinks he can demonstrate that the name of Zephaniah’s father does not imply African ancestry. He accepts all the names of Zephaniah’s genealogy as genuine, but maintains that Cushi was a common name in the time of Zephaniah and has nothing to do with his national origins. To support his argument he cites a certain Cushi from the Assyrian province of Harran who is known to have had a father and a brother with genuine Aramaic names. In another instance a Cushi from Abu Simbel demonstrates the ability to write Phoenician. From this it is therefore concluded that Zephaniah cannot have been of African origin. But as Rice (1979:23) has argued: ‘For this argument to be valid, all Ethiopians [read Cushites] would have to have been confined to their homeland with none ever becoming resident in other lands.’ Moreover, when one takes into consideration the fact that Judah and the Twenty-fifth Cushite Dynasty of Egypt were allies in revolt against Assyria not long before the birth of Zephaniah’s father, then this objection can no longer hold water. Instead the African origins of the prophet are reinforced.

The basic assumption in this respect is that Cushites were scattered throughout the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean world. This situation came about initially because they were employed as mercenaries by the principal powers of the ancient world: Egypt, Israel, Phoenicia, Greece and Persia (cf. Rice 1979:24). It is known, for example, that Cushite troops were an important factor in expelling the Hyksos from Egypt and in achieving Egypt’s great imperialistic expansion during the Eighteenth Dynasty (cf. Steindorff & Seele 1957:27-28; Du Bois 1965:117,125-130; Copher 1974:7-16). Cushites

⁴⁴ For some of the arguments adduced in terms of this objection, see Rice 1979:23-27.

also continued to form a principal component of the armies of Egypt in their Palestinian campaigns. For example, they participated in Shishak's raid against Judah in the fifth year of Rehoboam (ca 918 BCE), as reported in 2 Chronicles 12:3. They also fought in the army of Pharaoh Necho at Carchemish in 605 BCE, according to Jeremiah 46:9 (cf. also Ezk 30:5). The role Cushite troops played in the armies of Egypt might have led to their being sought as mercenaries elsewhere. It is well-known that David's army comprised men of diverse national origins, such as the Philistines and Hittites. It is not by chance that one Cushite is mentioned in connection with David's army, as is reported in 2 Samuel 18:21-32.

Furthermore, not only did the Cushites fight in the armies of the powers that existed at that time, they were also stationed in various parts of the world as occupation forces or in military colonies. For instance, it is known that Cushite troops were stationed in the vicinity of Jerusalem in the first half of the 14th century BCE, and that they were also to be found among the forces occupying Cyprus under Amasis from 568-525 BCE.⁴⁵ Thus, the efforts to deny the possibility of African ancestry to Zephaniah are not convincing. While the name Cushi of itself does not of necessity require the assumption of African origins, this is certainly its immediate and natural implication.

Adamo (1998:117) has vigorously argued for Zephaniah's royal ancestry (because of his connection to King Hezekiah) and also for the prophet's African ancestry (1998:117). Along the same lines Rice (1979:31) has argued that: 'There is nothing that stands in the way of the identification of the Hezekiah of Zephaniah's ancestry with King Hezekiah, nor with the identification of Cushi with one of Ethiopian descent. These identifications are so intrinsically natural, in fact, that the text requires qualifying notes to prevent them.' This implication is even more powerfully reinforced when one takes into consideration the fact that Judah and the Twenty-fifth (Cushite) Dynasty of Egypt were allies in the revolt against Assyria not long before the birth of Zephaniah's father. [Said earlier] Sadler too has argued for the African connection and contended that such a linkage was even favourable. He is of the opinion that Cushites were well assimilated into the Judean society; that they were esteemed (otherwise a conscientious scribe would have quietly omitted the name had it borne negative or racist connotations), and that

⁴⁵ For a further survey of this matter, see Pritchard (1955:488) and also Snowden (1970:122-123).

‘however we choose to read this pericope, Zephaniah 1:1 demonstrates the extent to which Cushite identity was acceptable, even favourable, in late seventh century BCE Judah’ (cf. Sadler 2001:159).

Finally, in support of the African ancestry of the prophet Zephaniah, I am inclined to agree with Rice who has argued passionately from the point of view of the prophet’s message (cf. Rice 1979:28-31). Considering the small number of Zephaniah’s sermons that have been preserved, it is of importance that his preaching refers twice to Cush, namely in 2:4-15 and in 3:9-10. However, in the final analysis, Zephaniah’s significance depends, of course, not on his roots, but on his message. But the fact that he is an Israelite prophet, probably also of African ancestry, itself conveys a message. The rest of the details in my opinion remain a matter of speculation.

3.2.3 Psalm 7:1

Masoretic text:

vwk-yrbd-l [hwhy l rv-rva dwdl !wygv
ynymy- !b

Translation:

A Lamentation of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning Cush, a Benjaminite.

3.2.3.1 Preliminary remarks

Generally, the literary unity of this Psalm is not undisputed (Anderson 1972:92). However, the phrase that concerns us here is ynymy- !b vwk-yrbd-l [, translated roughly as: ‘against’ or ‘on account’ of the words of Cush of Benjamin.

Again, as was the case with Zephaniah 1.1, the question of the identity of Cush is also the issue here.

To begin with, Psalm 7 exhibits a number of other textual problems but the one which concerns us directly is the one associated with $\text{VW}\bar{\text{K}}$, which according to some Greek versions ($\alpha' \sigma' \theta'$) is rendered Cousi rather than $\text{Cou, j}\bar{\text{A}}$. The rendering Cousi might be due to the influence of 2 Sm 18: 21f, the Cushite messenger of Joab. Although king David is involved in both Ps 7 and 2 Sm 18, there is no reason to think the 'Cush' or 'Cushi' referred to in both cases is the same person. Therefore it is difficult to accommodate the rendering of the Greek versions. Another troubling factor is the word !WYGV , transliterated *šiggāyôn*. The Septuagint and the Vulgate have simply translated it 'psalm'. In fact, this word is a case of a '*hapax legoumenon*', as it is found only in the singular form in Psalm 7.⁴⁶ Mowinckel (1962:209)⁴⁷ has taken it to mean 'a psalm of lamentation' because he thinks the word is related to the Akkadian word *šegu*, which connotes lamentation. Different authors have suggested other possibilities such as its stemming from the root *š-g-h*, therefore being a verb meaning 'to err' or to 'wander'. Hence, Ps 7 would be a song characterized by a variety of feeling, or irregularity of construction (Kissane 1954; Davidson 1998). This is, however, dubious. Still other authors have suggested a possible corruption of this word by the word *higgāyôn* (Oesterley 1939; Snaith and others). Thus, the meaning of word !WYGV is uncertain: no one seems to know exactly what the Hebrew word means (Bratcher & Reyburn 1991:65). However, the suggestion by Mowinckel (1962:209; see also Craigie 1983:97) is probably better, not only because of the reference to Akkadian, a language related to Hebrew, but more importantly because of the context of lamentation which the psalm reflects. We are therefore inclined to read this superscription as 'a Psalm of Lamentation'.

3.2.3.2 Analytical remarks

⁴⁶ However, it is probably the plural form of this word (*šigyōnôt*) which is used in the title of the prophet Habakkuk's prayer in 3:1.

⁴⁷ Mowinckel, S 1962. *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, (2 vols), translated into English by D R Ap-Thomas.

Psalm 7 is generally categorized as an ‘individual Psalm of Lament’ (Anderson 1972:92). The Psalmist begins by asking God to save him from his enemies who threaten him with death (vv.1-2). This is followed by a strong protestation of his innocence (vv.3-5). He calls upon God to judge him and pronounce him innocent (vv.6-9), after which he declares that God is ready to punish evildoers (vv.10-13). Following a description of how the wicked bring disaster on themselves (vv.14-16), the psalmist closes with a prayer of thanks, certain that God will answer him (v.17).

According to the superscription, the Psalm is related to a Davidic origin (Kissane 1954; Cohen 1958; Oesterley 1961), but it may also be of a late date, though not necessarily post-exilic, and therefore not Davidic. Cush the Benjaminite and the event alluded to in the title of the psalm are unknown, as they are not referred to elsewhere explicitly in the Bible, unless of course we presuppose that the redactor had access to a more detailed account of David’s life. However, the fact that David experienced opposition from the Benjaminites, both during Saul’s lifetime and afterward, is well documented (cf. 1 Sm 24-26; 2 Sm 16:5 and 20:1). If the title has historical value and there was an incident involving Cush, the account may have been contained in the ancient and no longer extant historical sources named in 1 Chr 29:29. In fact, the obscurity of the incident tends to support both its antiquity and authenticity.

The Septuagint and the Vulgate have translated ‘Cush’ as ‘Cushite’, which is then subsequently translated ‘Ethiopian’ or even ‘Sudanese’ (TEV)!⁴⁸ As we know, the Cushite appears in 2 Samuel 18:21-23 as the man who conveyed to David the news of Absalom’s death, but we are not told that this Cushite was also a Benjaminite. The association has probably been occasioned by the phrase $\text{vwk} - \text{yrbd} - \text{l} [$ (‘on account of the words of Cush’), but the content of the psalm does not make any reference to the Cushite’s words concerning the death of Absalom.

Other possibilities have been studied, which include the identification of Cush with Saul. In fact, Saul’s father, a Benjaminite, was named Kish (cf. 1 Sm 9:1). Another possibility is Shimei, who is said to be a Benjaminite (2 Sm 16:11-13). Another theory is to identify Cush with Sheba, a Benjaminite who rebelled against David (2 Sm 20:1-11),

⁴⁸ TEV: Today’s English Version.

but nowhere are we informed that another name for Sheba was Cush. Therefore, all these and similar suggestions remain mere guesses.

Those who strongly desire to connect this Cush to Africa have proposed still other possibilities. One such is to emend the phrase to read $\text{!ymy} - \text{!b vw}k$, ‘Cush, son of the South’, in reference to Ethiopia or Africa. The reason given for this suggestion is twofold: firstly, that in other instances ‘Benjamin’ refers to the south (cf. 1 Sm 23:19.24; 2 Ki 23:13; Ps 89:13), and secondly, because of the references to ‘lion’ and ‘arrow and bow’ in verses 3 and 14 respectively. The Cushites were believed to be suppliers of exotic fauna such as lions and were also known by the Egyptians to be ferocious in the use of bow and arrow (cf. Sadler 2001:323).

While Sadler may be right in his observation concerning the military prowess of the Cushites, the emendation ‘Cush, son of the South’, as far as I am concerned, is not supported by any authoritative manuscripts and so is unacceptable. In fact, with regard to this particular text, and contrary to the Psalmist’s negative image of Cush the Benjaminite, Sadler remarks: ‘What is clear is that in the imagination of Israelite / Judahite authors and audiences a man from the tribe of Benjamin could have a name that recalled the glory of the southern Other, Cush’ (2001:328).

But it is difficult to see how this text glorifies Cush. Of significance is the silence of Adamo, one of our major dialogue partners in Cushite matters, on this text. As far as I am concerned, Adamo does not say anything about Psalm 7:1 and it would be interesting to know the reason(s) for this silence. Should it however turn out that he has glossed over this verse, whether intentionally or otherwise, then Adamo may be criticised for falling into the same trap as traditional western biblical scholars, namely that of generally not giving the so-called African texts of the Old Testament the priority they deserve.

By way of conclusion, we are inclined to think that, in as far as the superscription to Psalm 7 is concerned, this is one case where Cush is viewed as an enemy of the Psalmist, which is why he so passionately prays to God to be delivered from him. The identity of this enemy, however, remains elusive since he is ambiguously referred to as both ‘Cush-Benjaminite’.

3.3 Places

In the Hebrew Bible, one finds references to Cush which point to a geographical location. Such is the case in Genesis 2:13; 10:6-8; Ezekiel 29:10; Esther 1:1, and Esther 8:9. It is now to these texts that we turn our attention.

3.3.1 Genesis 2:13

Masoretic text:

vwk #ra-lk ta bbwsh awh !wxyg ynvh
rhnh- ~vw

Translation:

*And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it
that goes around the whole land of Cush.*

3.3.1.1 Preliminary remarks

Some translations, including the KJV, the LXX, and the VUL, have translated ‘Cush’ by ‘Ethiopia’. This rendering is restrictive, though. Most translations have instead opted to transliterate the word ‘Cush’. In my opinion, this word is perhaps better left untranslated.

Genesis 2:13 is one of the four Cushi *loci* in Genesis and Cush is mentioned in connection with the Garden of Eden (Stordalen 2000:270ff). The other three occurrences are to be found in Genesis 10 and are connected with the table of nations. Before any geographical speculations are undertaken regarding the occurrence of Cush in Genesis 2:13, it is perhaps in order to enquire about the origin, the purpose and the context of this text.

It has long been the common opinion that Genesis 2:10-14 constitutes a separate unit in the Yahwistic creation narrative (Westermann 1972:27), and that the aim of this

text is not primarily to provide an item of accurate geographical information but to explain the origin of the created world (cf. also Stordalen 2000:286). Thus, one must be very cautious in identifying the names mentioned in the text. Nevertheless, the names mentioned in verse 13 may be approached in two directions, by either first identifying the river, then the land; or identifying the land first, then the river. We prefer to start with the former.

3.3.1.2 Analytical remarks

Whereas the names of the last two rivers, the Euphrates on the west and the Tigris on the east, are well known from the land of Mesopotamia (Greek: ‘Between the Rivers’) in modern Iraq, the other two rivers are problematic (Stordalen 2000:280ff). Scholars are divided into two schools of thought: those who regard Pison and Gihon as actual rivers, and those who regard them as mythological or symbolic. The former associate the Cush mentioned in verse 13 with Mesopotamia; the latter take Cush in the usual sense of the land south of Egypt.

Although the Gihon can be identified with the Nile, therefore as topographically situated in Africa, it has also been associated with Oxus, Shatt-en-Nil and Khosper in Mesopotamia (cf. Adamo 1998:56), and is also the name of the spring of Jerusalem (1 Ki 1:33.38). If it is accepted that Gihon is to be identified with the river Nile, then the country of Cush which it encircles must be understood to be the African Cush. In fact, Hidal (1977:104) contends that the Cush referred to here has generally been identified with Nubia-Ethiopia. Stordalen (2000:280) holds a similar view: ‘In sum, there is no reason to avoid the regular sense of VW^{K} in Gen 2:13. The region in question is located in the far south-west, which fits the aim of geographical “fullness” in the four rivers.’ Moreover, in the overwhelming majority of other passages, Cush denotes all the land south of the first cataract, although no conclusive evidence exists that it should convey the same meaning here. However, a difficulty with this assumption is that the Nile does not in fact encircle the whole of the African Cush. Thus, from this point of view, it can be argued that there is no certainty that the Gihon refers to the Nile. Westermann (1984:217), citing Holzinger (1898) and Gispén (1966), is of the opinion that ‘nothing

can be concluded from the name of a river.’ He furthermore argues that we cannot in fact know what rivers are meant by the first two names in verse 11. ‘We cannot then identify the first two rivers with any rivers known to us’ (1984:218).

Now since it is not certain that the Gihon denotes the Nile, it must be assumed that the term Cush in this verse is similarly vague. In fact, a number of authors, already as early as the nineteenth and mid twentieth centuries, identified this Cush with the land of Kaššu in Upper or Middle Babylonia (cf. Delitzsch 1881; Speiser 1959), which was usually associated with the Cassites, who were believed to have reigned in Babylonia between 1760-1180 BCE. Mowinkel (1938) even identified the Gihon with the river of *Halys*, now *Kisik Irmak*. Similarly, Speiser (1967) and Weinfeld (1975) have also argued that the land of Cush is the land of the Cassites and that the Gihon is one of the rivers or canals of Mesopotamia. This makes it easier, according to them, to envisage a point where all the rivers met, possibly in the mountains of Armenia or at the head of the Persian Gulf. But since it is only in Genesis 10:8 that Cush may be equated with the Cassites, their view raises difficulties.

Even more explicit in his objection to the African location is Stigers (1976:70), who has written:

Cush (Kuš) is the Cush of the Cosseans and the name of the city of Kish quite likely is a derivation from this name. The identification of the Cush here with Ethiopia was made by Josephus because he did not know any other, and it is to be rejected. Gihon is not found there. Havilah is most likely the Arabian area east of Palestine.

Yamauchi (2004:38), quoting Carol Hill (cf. Yamauchi 2004:38) has suggested:

The most promising attempt to identify real rivers is an essay by geologist Carol Hill, who uses evidence from satellite photographs to identify the Pishon with a now-dry riverbed, Wadi al-Batin, coming from Arabia into the area in lower Mesopotamia where the Tigris and Euphrates flow into a single Shatt al-Arab. She suggests: “The Gihon is most likely the Karun River, or less likely the Karkheh, both of which encircled the land of the Kassites [Cassites] (Cush) in western Iran.”

All these theories would probably be persuasive if the Cush in question were to be located in Mesopotamia. After all, they would garner considerable support in the LXX, which has consistently transcribed the word in Genesis 2:13 with Χους rather than with Αιθιοπια, which everywhere else is used to translate the African Cush.

Nevertheless, serious objections to the Kassite hypothesis must be raised. Adamo (1998), although aware of the difficulties hitherto described, has nevertheless fervently argued for the African location of the river Gihon, thereby implying that the Cush in question must consequently refer to the African Cush. To corroborate his position he cites not only biblical traditions, but also African ones, including evidence from ancient historians and also from modern science (1998:58), such as the findings of *NASA*⁴⁹ and genetic engineering techniques, which he claims have proven that ‘[...] every human being originated from one woman who lived in Africa’ (1998:59). Adamo then concludes: ‘Although this is far from solving the problem of location [of the Garden of Eden] entirely [...] the source of Kush river points to Africa as the most likely location of the Garden of Eden’ (1998:59). The implication here is that if Eden was in Africa, then the river Gihon is also to be located there and that the country of Cush too should refer to an African location.

In my opinion, the enquiry of Adamo unnecessarily overstretches the issue. The purpose of Genesis 2:10-14 is evidently to illustrate how the whole world is watered by the four rivers flowing out of Eden. This is perhaps also how Yamauchi (2004: 38) wishes to interpret it when he refers to scholars who desire to understand the function of the rivers as ‘mythological’ and ‘symbolic’. Stordalen (2000:286) has observed: ‘The impression is that the Eden Garden was not located in the everyday world. This coincides both with a symbolic apprehension of the name !d [and with a temporal reading of the phrase ~dqm ...’

This is the fundamental assertion which the Yahwist tries to connect with the geographical knowledge of that age. If one considers that only parts of the world are mentioned here, it would be most remarkable if Africa had been totally omitted (Hidal

⁴⁹ NASA : Acronym for ‘National Aeronautics and Space Administration’.

1977:105). But if Cush here stands for the then-known part of Africa, Genesis 2:10-14 would contain the following list: Arabia-Africa-Mesopotamia, i.e. all the known parts of the ancient world. This seems much more probable than a mentioning of Mesopotamia in both vv.13 and 14. Therefore, I tend to concur with Hidal (1977:105), who holds that the Cush in Genesis 2:13 probably refers to the African Cush. Sadler too is of the same opinion, for he says: '[...] it would be peculiar if the author of this narrative gave no attention to the great kingdoms of the south, which were known to be riparian nations' (2001:53). Other authors too have lent their support to the African connection. Cassuto (1961) has perhaps offered one of the more interesting views yet in this regard. Basing himself on the philological and etymological analyses of the two rivers, Pishon and Gihon, Cassuto (1961:116) arrives at the following conclusion:

It is clear that these Hebrew names [Pishon and Gihon] are not the names used in the countries through which the rivers run, but are descriptive terms or translations [...] Hiddekel and Euphrates constitute a pair of rivers that are close to each other and conjoin at the end of their course, so it seems probable that Pishon and Gihon which resemble each other even in the formation of their names, and are depicted in similar terms (*it is the one which flows around*, etc), also form a pair of rivers that are in close proximity to each other and are interconnected. Bearing this in mind, and also that the names of the countries around which the rivers flow point to districts south of Egypt, it appears that the most satisfactory explanation is the one that identifies them with two of the streams that jointly form the Nile.

Similarly, Skinner (1994:61), although with some caution, has argued:

In Jewish and Christian tradition it [namely the river Gihon] has persistently been identified with the Nile [...] The great difficulty of that view is that the Nile was well known to the Hebrews as the Euphrates, and no reason appears either for the mysterious designation, or the vague description appended to the name – land of Kûš.

In the same vein Ullendorff (1968:2) also points out that:

The Abbay or Blue Nile plays a profound important part in Ethiopian life and history. To the Ethiopians it is the Gihon of Genesis 2:13 [...] and to this day the Nile springs are called Giyon, i.e Ethiopic for Gihon.

The river going forth from Eden to water the garden and thence dividing into the four rivers of the world may be the ‘flow’ referred to in v.6. In fact, in some Ugaritic and Akkadian texts the high god dwells at the ‘source of the double deep,’ i.e., the source of all the life-giving waters of the earth. The garden therefore is the locale of God. The totality of the world is symbolized by ‘four’, as in the Akkadian phrase ‘the four quarters of the earth’ and this must include Africa (cf. Clifford & Murphy 1990:17). Westermann (1995:19) expresses the same opinion:

It is an attempt to link the “information” about God’s garden with geography. From the river that flows through the garden issue the streams that make the earth fruitful. Two of the streams bear the names Tigris and Euphrates. The other two names are unknown. The number four calls to mind the four quarters of the earth (cf Zech.1:8.11).

The matter of the Gihon river must now be attended to. The word ‘Gihon’ means ‘the turbulent one’, ‘the bursting or bubbling one’. The verb is used in Job 38:8; 40:23 of the sea and of the Jordan. It is the name of a fountain in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Ki 1:33; 38:45; 2 Chr 32:30; 33:14). The notions of ‘turbulence’ and of ‘bursting forth’ or ‘bubbling’ can very easily be associated with the mighty waters of the river Nile.

Although several uncertainties still surround the identification of the Gihon river, many scholars, some cautiously, identify it with the Nile river (cf. Westermann 1984:218) or with the Blue Nile (cf. Ullendorff 1968:2). I am of the view that there are no grounds to discount this African connection, for two reasons: first, the Old Testament for the most part uses ‘Cush’ to designate the area south of Egypt. Therefore, it may be reasonably argued that this might also be the case with the reference in Genesis 2:13. Second, in Jeremiah 2:18 Shihor, the river of Egypt, is rendered as ΓῆϞν by the Septuagint. In Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus) 24:27 Gihon appears in a parallel with the Nile.

Finally, Josephus (cf. *Antiquities* I.1, 3:6) makes the same connection. Moreover, since the time of Alexander the Great (circa 4th century BCE), the secret of the Nile's source has continued to arouse intense curiosity among explorers (cf. also Ullendorff 1968:2).

The implications of this analysis are far-reaching. First of all, it establishes that the Yahwist, the presumed author of this passage, viewed Cush as being one of the regions watered by the rivers flowing out of the Garden of Eden. Second, the author perceived the region of Cush as a land that merited mention in the story of the world's origins. Though there is no mention of people, there is also clearly no attempt to defame the region.⁵⁰ Thus, to 'de-Africanize' the Old Testament as Adamo has forcefully argued, or even to ignore Cush as was pointed out in the introductory chapter of this thesis, would be tantamount to misinterpreting such texts as Genesis 2:13, among others.

3.3.2 Genesis 10:6.7.8 (=1 Chr 1:8.9.10, respectively)

Masoretic text:

! [nkw jwpw ~yrcmw vwk ~x ynbw
 hm[r ynbw aktbsw hm[rw htbsw hlywxw abs
 vwk ynbw
 !ddw abv bg twyhl lxh awl drmn-ta dly
 vwkw

Translation:

*v. 6 And the sons of Ham: Cush, and Mizraim, and Phut,
 and Canaan.*

⁵⁰ Sadler (2001:54) in footnote No. 16 cites an article by Katherine George, 1958. 'The Civilized West Looks at Primitive Africa, 1400-1800', *Isis* 49:56-72. In this article the author notes that the accounts written from the time of Herodotus until 1700 demonstrate a bias against Africa.

v. 7 *And the sons of Cush: Seba, and Havilah, and Sabtah, and Raamah, and Sabtecha. And the sons of Raamah: Sheba, and Dedan.*

v. 8 *Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth.*

3.3.2.1 Preliminary remarks

The text of Genesis 10:6.7.8 in the MT corresponds exactly to that of 1 Chronicles 1:8.9.10. Thus, the analysis of the latter is here foregone since the analysis of Cush in Genesis 10 should be sufficient for our purposes. I should also like to note that I am aware of the sometimes unfavourable interpretations to which the name ‘Ham’ has been subjected. I am deliberately not entering the debate on this issue here since I have already pointed out this tendency in chapters one and two above.⁵¹

The wider context of these verses is that of the populating of the world and the prideful city (Gn 10:1-11:9) and, in a more restrictive context, that of Noah’s descendants becoming landed peoples (Gn 10:1-31). The latter context, which introduces the populating of the earth, is introduced by the fourth instance of the P formula: ‘These are the descendants of Noah’s sons...’ Verses 6-8 speak of the descendants of Ham, among them Cush, the concern of this thesis. In these verses Cush is mentioned three times, once in each verse. Thus, these verses constitute the single concentration of the word Cush in the whole of the book of Genesis. The only other time it occurs in Genesis is to be found in 2:13.

3.3.2.2 Analytical remarks

⁵¹ In this connection I should like to refer the reader to contributions on this topic such as those by, among others: Rice, G (1972). *The Curse that Never Was (Genesis 9:18-27)*. *The Journal of Religious Thought* 29: 5-27; Copher, C B (1989). *Three Thousand Years of Biblical Interpretation with References to Black Peoples*, in Wilmore, G (ed), *African American Religious Studies: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*: 105-128. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

At the creation of humans in Genesis 1:26 God had commanded them to be fertile and increase, fill the earth and subdue it. Up till now the emphasis has been on ‘multiplying’. In this section the accent falls on ‘filling’ the earth. Already Genesis 9:19 speaks of the earth’s being populated from the three sons of Noah. The same statement is repeated in this section (Gn 10:5.18.25.32; 11:8). Thus, the view behind the passage is that each people is assigned a land by God and that it is the task of each people to take possession of its God-given land. This is perhaps the meaning of the word to ‘subdue’ in Genesis 1:28, and is also the idea illustrated by Deuteronomy 32:8-9 where we read: ‘When the most high assigned the nations their homes, when he separated the human race, he fixed the boundaries of peoples according to the numbers of the sons of God, but Yahweh’s portion is his people, Jacob his own allotment’.⁵²

The descendants of Ham are assigned a territory within an arc extending from the mid-Mediterranean through Lebanon-Palestine (both of which had long been under the control of Egypt), and down to the Arabian Peninsula (cf. Stordalen 2000:276-279). In fact the names of Cush’s children in v.6 (Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah and Sabtecha) denote geographical locations rather than names of persons.⁵³ However it must be pointed out that generally no consensus exists among scholars as to the exact location of these places. Havilah for instance is a name that refers to more than one place (Gn 2:11; 10:7.29). Seba has been identified by some with contemporary Yemen but this is not certain. Others have been even less sure. According to Stordalen (2000:276-278): ‘The general idea is that “Cushites” lived in the south; the father in Africa and his sons in Arabia.’ Gunkel, cited by Stordalen (2000:277, footnote 140), had earlier on observed that in fact Ethiopia and South Arabia were associated.

Similarly, Put is usually identified with Libya (cf. Nah 3:9; Ezk 30:5). The identification of Cush, however, is not always clear-cut. In v.6 it is probably the Upper

⁵² Contrary to the paragraph divisions of most translations, Gn 11:1-9 in fact directly continues Gn 10. The picture created is that the nations in Gn 10 sin by refusing to go forth to possess their lands, preferring instead to band together and build a prideful city called Babel at a site of their own choosing.

⁵³ Cf. commentary on these verses in *La Bible. L’Ancien Testament*, edition Librairie Gallimard 1956: ...Misrayim, nom classique de l’Égypte...Pout, région du Pount au sud de la mer Rouge; Le pays de Canaan, la Palestine actuelle; Seba, peut-être le port de Saba, signalé par Strabon au sud-ouest de la mer Rouge; Hawilah, probablement l’Arabie; Sabta, région de l’Hadramouth, dans le sud de l’Arabie; Raamah et Sabtecah probablement en Arabie du sud; Sheba se trouvait dans le nord-ouest de l’Arabie; Dedan, oasis d’*el-Ela*, à proximité de *Médäin-Saleh* dans le nord-ouest de l’Arabie.

Nile Valley and Ethiopia, but in v.8 it seems to be Cossaea, the country of the Kassites in North-East Babylonia, the proper area of the Mesopotamian Nineveh (cf. Speiser 1959:236). Thus, the descendants of Ham did not settle only in Africa but also in other parts of Arabia and Mesopotamia, along with North Africa and East Africa. Therefore, it is not inaccurate to associate Cush with Mesopotamia. In fact, the assertion by Sadler (2001:68) seems to be correct, for he says: ‘There appear to be several instances of admixture suggested by the appearance of the names of the same eponymous ancestors of several groups in distinct patronymics.’

Similarly, the argument concerning Nimrod, the progenitor of the Babylonians, falls into place. This is also corroborated by the Hebrew text which remarks that Nimrod was a hunter (דַּיָּוָד, cf. Gn 10:9). Hunters, especially in ancient times, were generally mobile since they moved from place to place in pursuit of game.⁵⁴ Scholars have usually found it difficult to reconcile Nimrod’s presence in Mesopotamia with his presumed African ancestry. His presence in that country, namely Mesopotamia, has remained enigmatic (Hays 1996:397). This is also Adamo’s view, for he writes: ‘The exact identification of Nimrod admits no satisfactory solutions, and will probably remain a strange puzzle...’ (cf. Adamo 1998:63).

Thus, as Sadler (2001:69) has pointed out: ‘...the Table of nations should not be viewed as an ontologically distinct division of the “human race” into three sub-set “races”...What the Table does represent is a collection of the nations known to the Yahwistic and Priestly authors, and which a subsequent redactor arranged primarily by geography; this view accounts for the complex web of relationships between and among nations.’ And I am inclined to subscribe to such a view. Clearly, the Table of nations encompasses the whole of the known world, which includes Cush. A further implication is that the nations of the world are controlled by Yahweh.

⁵⁴ Flavius Josephus makes Nimrod the progenitor of the Babylonians, as the biblical Table does, but then he lists him as a brother of Cush, not as his son (cf. *Antiq.* I.4,1-3). Because of the ‘migrations’ involving Nimrod as well, some apologists have tended to explain why most of the ancient descendants of Cush were African and Negro, while others had the appearance of Arabs or ancient Sumerians. Similarly, generations of rabbinic scholars combined facets of this story to account for differences in skin colour as well as ethnic temperament, although the biblical narrative of Noah and his sons says nothing about the colour of Noah or his children and grandchildren.

3.3.3 Jeremiah 46:9

Masoretic text:

wacyw bkrh wllhthw ~yswsh wl [
tvq ykrd yfpt ~ydwlw !gm yfpt jwpw vwk
~yrwbgh

Translation:

Advance, O horses, and dash madly, O chariots! Let the mighty warriors go forth: Cush and Put who carry the shield, the Ludim, who draw the bow.

3.3.3.1 Preliminary remarks

First of all, a word or two to comment on what some translations have offered with regard to this verse. The *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) renders ‘Cush’ by ‘Ethiopia’, as do the *King James Version* (KJV) and other important translations. The *Jerusalem Bible* (JB), however, has not translated the word ‘Cush’. The Greek versions have also rendered it by Αἰϋϋι, οὔια. All this points to the difficulties of translation involved in this verse. Furthermore, the MT reads tvq ykrd yfpt which literally means ‘handlers of, benders of, a bow’. The word yfpt has already occurred two words previously and so its repetition here may be simply redundant. Since the first of these words occurs in the preceding colon, it is probably safe to delete it as an erroneous repetition (cf. Bright 1965:302; Thomson & Harrison 1980:686).

The syntax of v.9b suggests that the words ‘warriors’ and ‘Cush’ are to be juxtaposed. This usually denotes ‘possession’ of the former by the latter, although the point is normally highlighted by the use of a ‘Maqqeph’ between the two juxtaposed nouns. Thus, the rendering of the LXX which has ‘evxe, lqate oi` machtai. Αἰϋϋιο, πων ...’ (...go forth you warriors of the Cushites...) might be more

acceptable, or better still the translations which nuance ~yrwbgh by means of an element of strength.⁵⁵ Thus, another possible translation might be: “Charge, you horses! Roll on, you chariots! Forward, you mighty warriors of Cush and of Put carrying shields, [men of] Ludim grasping their bows.’

But translation is not our most important task here. It is, rather, to examine the use of the word ‘Cush’ which, whether translated or not, seems to denote a place of provenance and therefore a geographical location.

3.3.3.2 Analytical remarks

According to Thomson (1980:689) Cush is Ethiopia, a region of the Nile south of Egypt. Bright (1965:306) adds ‘roughly Nubia’. Whatever rendering we adopt, it is clear that the region south of Egypt is meant.

The identification of Put is, however, disputed. But according to Thomson (1980:689), it is probably Punt of the Egyptian literature, a territory which lay along the east coast of Africa in the region of modern Somaliland. Such is also the interpretation of Bright (1965:306). Alternatively, it was part of Libya (cf. Lambdin 1962:971).

Lud, which we have rendered simply as ‘Ludim’, is variously understood. Some regard it as Lydia in Asia Minor, referred to in Is 66:19, along with Javan (Greece) and the coastal islands. In the passage of Isaiah the Lydians are associated with the Egyptian army (cf. Thomson 1980:689). Alternatively Lud refers to a land in North Africa (cf. Gn 10:13). Another proposal is to read ‘Libyans’ as in Nahum 3:9, where Put and the Libyans are allied with Cush and Egypt in a losing cause, if the emendation of ‘Ludim’ for ‘Lubim’ is permitted. We are inclined to side with Bright who wishes to identify it with an African people, referred to in Genesis 10:13 as well (cf. Bright 1965:306).

The larger historical context of the events which this verse describes relates to the defeat of the armies of Pharaoh Necho in 605 BCE by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar at the battle of Carchemish on the river Euphrates (v.1). As Sadler (2001:232) points out, prior to this time, actually since 609 BCE, Judah had been Egypt’s

⁵⁵ So the *New King James Version* (NKJ) which translates it as: ‘mighty men’; the Latin Vulgate: ‘fortes’; *Modern Greek Bible* (MGK): oi` ivscuroi,.

vassal. But this defeat shifted the balance of power significantly, so that Judah came under the vassalage of Babylon. The wider context of v.9, however, places it with the oracles directed against foreign nations (Jr 46-51), the superscription of which is to be found in Jeremiah 46:1. The immediate context of this verse therefore suggests a prophetic situation by means of which Yahweh passes judgment over Egypt (Jr 46:1-28). Egypt, described using overtones of arrogance in vv. 7-8, goes to battle against the Babylonians who are allied with Judah, although Yahweh has predestined the latter to lose.

Similarly, Cush, who has allied itself with Put and the Ludim, is destined to lose, just like the Egyptians. Ezekiel 30 contains a similar description of the destruction of the composite Egyptian forces. One should recall that prophecies against the nations constituted one aspect of the prophetic ministry. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Nahum, and Obadiah all contain substantial sections devoted to the theme, while other prophets generally at least mention the nations.

The battle apart, the Cushite presence in the Egyptian army should be noted. This presence can be traced from the tenth century until the late seventh century. In this particular case we perceive a Cushite presence in Pharaoh Necho's army in the late seventh century, even after the demise of the twenty-fifth dynasty. This suggests that the Cushites continued to participate in the Egyptian military even after they were no longer the rulers of Egypt. Whether they did this with the official sanction of Cush or as mercenary troops in the service of the pharaoh is not made clear from the text.

More important, though, is the fact that the Cushites are presented as 'mighty warriors'. This is the subtle nuance attached to the Hebrew $\sim yrwbg h$ which I think has not always been captured by most translations. In fact, the Cushite prowess in battle is something legendary.⁵⁶ Sadler too has pointed out this fine distinction, when in reference to this episode he asserts that this is yet another instance in which the Cushites are known for their might in bolstering the armies of Egypt (cf. Sadler 2001:234-235). So does Adamo (1998:115-116) who writes: 'The above passage [...] is also another evidence of the degree of Israelite military and political dependence on African nations. [...] Ancient Israelites recognized that these African nations (Ethiopia, Put, Egypt and

⁵⁶ See 2 Ki 19:9; Nah 3:9; Zph 2:12; Is 18:1-2; 37:9; 2 Chr 14:8-14

Lud) are great warriors and were exceptionally good in handling shield and bow.' Undoubtedly, the Cushite confederation with Put and Ludim mentioned in v.9 makes them an even more formidable force. But the biblical text seems to be intent on underscoring the role played by Yahweh. No wonder, therefore, that the present pericope predicts the Cushite defeat by Yahweh, even in the company of their allies.

In chapter four, Cush will be discussed in connection with its military and political functions. Suffice it to mention here that apart from being allies of the Egyptians, who are Yahweh's adversaries by reason of being Judah's enemies, the Cushites are portrayed positively. It is precisely because they are allies of the Egyptians that the Cushites are potentially Yahweh's enemies as well.

3.3.4 Ezekiel 29:9-10

Masoretic text:

hwhy yna-yk w[dyw hbrxw hmv ~yrcm-#ra
htyh
ytyf[ynaw yl ray rma ![y
~yrcm #ra-ta yttnw \$yray-law \$yla ynnh
!kl
vwk lwb-g-d[w hnws ldgmm hmv brx twbrxl

Translation:

v.9 *And the land of Egypt shall be a desolation and a waste. Then they shall know that I am the LORD. Because you said, "The Nile is mine, and I made it,"*

v.10 *Indeed, therefore, I am against you and against your rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt utterly waste and*

desolate, from Migdol to Syene, as far as the border of Cush.

3.3.4.1 Preliminary remarks

Verse 9 has been included in order to provide a smooth transition to verse 10, which would otherwise start with a hanging conjunctive phrase: 'indeed, therefore'. The immediate context concerns the oracle against Pharaoh and Egypt his land. The expression 'from Migdol to Syene' implies that the oracle will affect Egypt right from its northern border to its southern extremity. The term 'Migdol' is Semitic and means 'tower'. According to Zimmerli (1983:113) 'This is probably the Migdol in the Delta rather than the watch towers which were erected by the Egyptians on their eastern frontier as defensive forts [...] it may be equated instead with the Delta Migdol which was known as the location of a community of Jewish refugees and mentioned in the book of Jeremiah (44:1 cf.[?] 46:14) and thus known of in the time of Ezekiel. It must lie right at the northernmost point of the eastern frontier [...]'. 'Syene' has generally been identified with the modern Assuan (Aswan) which again, according to Zimmerli (1983:113), 'is the traditional southern frontier point a little north of the first cataract, modern Aswan.' Thus, the oracle will extend also as far as the frontier of Cush. Cush is here clearly located in the vicinity of Egypt and is the southernmost frontier of the land of Pharaoh, bordering on Assuan, which is south of Egypt. Now, whether the whole land of Cush is intended is another matter. Zimmerli doubts it (1983:113).

3.3.4.2 Analytical remarks

Sadler (2001:239) has argued that the oracle is reminiscent of Jeremiah 46 and its prophecy of the destruction of Egypt at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Although this is the earliest interpretation and is one supported by the majority of biblical commentators (Blenkinsopp 1990:130; Eichrodt 1970:405; Zimmerli 1983:103-104), who emphasize Egypt's destruction at the hands of Babylon from its northern frontier to its southern,

others envisage a more comprehensive one that would include both Egypt and its partner Cush. They argue that this is implied in the understanding of the phrase ‘as far as the border of Cush’, which is said to refer to Cush’s southern border. In this case, the oracle would therefore include the whole land of Cush. A similar usage in the understanding of this phrase is to be found in the expression ‘from Dan to Beersheba’, employed to designate the whole of Israel. Sadler (2001:241) has argued that the phrase ‘as far as Cush’ is only plausible if the reference was intended to include, not exclude, Cush. This assessment is also corroborated by the subsequent narrative in Ezekiel 30, which pertains to the same historical events. There the destruction extends from Egypt into Cush. This situation is also supported by Jeremiah 46. Thus, Sadler (2001:241) concludes that the sacred author most probably intended the tragic demise depicted in Ezekiel 29 to extend from Egypt into Cush, because after all Cushite soldiers featured prominently in Pharaoh Necho’s armies, as they had done in the armies of his predecessors.

Furthermore, Cush is often used to represent the extent of the known world (cf. Est 1:1; 8:9). Hence, in this general reference to the destruction of Egypt, the use of Cush as a geographic point may mean that the destruction would extend from Egypt to the southern extent of the known world, possibly encompassing Put and Lud if these are understood to be other nations south of Egypt. The resulting destruction would consequently extend from Egypt to the lands of its allies,⁵⁷ resembling that found in Ezekiel 30 (cf. Sadler 2001:241). In fact, the inclusion of Cush in the prophesied crisis in Ezekiel 29 forms the content of Ezekiel 30. Adamo’s remarks on Ezekiel 29 presuppose the destruction oracle to include Africa south of Egypt as well (1998:122-123). These views are difficult to reconcile with the expression ‘Migdol to Syene’: the North and South boundaries of Egypt standing as a merismus for ‘the whole country’ (cf. Boadt 1990:323). In fact Zimmerli (1983:113) has argued that the expression ‘from Migdol to Syene’, as ‘an analogy to which one may cite the phrase for the full extent of Israel “from Dan to Beersheba” (Ju 20:1; 1 Sam 3:20; and elsewhere), makes it clear that the devastation covers the whole of Egypt’. Zimmerli furthermore argues that ‘the expression recurs in Ezekiel 30:6. “Syene” (ḥnws) is the traditional southern frontier-point a little

⁵⁷ A veiled reference to these allies is probably to be found in the phrase ‘the clinging fish’ in verse 4 (cf. Boadt 1990:323).

north of the first cataract, modern Aswan. After the expulsion of the Ethiopian rulers by the Saites, Egypt once again reached as far as this southern frontier. Whether behind the insertion “and as far as the frontier of Cush” there lies the memory of the fact that from time to time the territory as far as the second cataract at Wadi Halfa [...], belonged to Egypt, one may very well doubt.’ Hence Zimmerli is dubious concerning the inclusion of Cush here.

Therefore, why would Cush be condemned? According to Sadler (2001:242), not because of any perceived Cushite defect or Judean malice towards the southern people, but rather owing to the former’s failure to defend Judah. Because the southern alliance forces had failed to support and deliver the people of Judah from their northern aggressors, Babylon would come forth and decimate their land. According to Adamo (1998:122) it is ‘because of the sin of hybris and arrogance.’ Hays has suggested that this sin of arrogance refers to Pharaoh’s boasting, his claiming to be the ‘creator’ and the possessor of the Nile (cf. Hays 1996:263).

However one understands the phrase ‘as far as the frontier of Cush’, it seems to me that the writer of Ezekiel 29:10 intends the reader to understand that the oracle was meant to be comprehensive in scope. Thus, the comprehensive destruction of Egypt and the regions to the south, summarily dubbed ‘Cush’, clearly represents another instance whereby ‘Cush’ is viewed as an enemy of Yahweh and therefore of Israel, Yahweh’s people.

3.3.5 Esther 1:1 (8:9)

Masoretic text:

vwk-d [w wdhm \$lmh vwrwvxa awh vwrwvxa
ymyb yhyw
hnydm hamw ~yrf [w [bv

Translation:

Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus; this was the Ahasuerus who ruled from India to Cush, over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces.

3.3.5.1 Preliminary remarks

Although Esther follows Nehemiah in the Bible, its events occur about thirty years prior to those recorded in Nehemiah. The story is set in the Persian Empire, and most of the action takes place in the king's palace in Susa, the Persian capital. The phrase 'from India to Cush' appears here and again in chapter 8:9, which is why we are discussing these verses together. But first, some brief preliminary remarks about the text, the canonicity of the book of Esther, the literary form and questions pertaining to author, place and date of composition are in order.

The work has been preserved in a shorter Hebrew version which is assumed by most scholars to be the original text. But it exists also in a substantially longer Greek version which freely translates the Hebrew text and then intersperses six sizeable additions.

The book is unusual in that in the original version no name, title, or pronoun for God appears in it. This caused some church fathers to question its inclusion in the canon. Only the Hebrew version has been accepted by Judaism and that only after considerable hesitation, probably because of the lack of religious elements in the story.⁵⁸ The Greek additions were declared canonical by the Council of Trent (1545-1565 CE) but are listed among the Apocrypha in Protestant Bibles. Nevertheless, God's presence is evident throughout the book. More than just an entertaining historical novel, Esther is a story of

⁵⁸ Note that all the Old Testament books except Esther are found at Qumran.

the profound interplay of God's sovereignty and human will. God prepared the place and the opportunity, and Esther and Mordecai chose to act.

The nucleus of the Hebrew story may go back to the fifth century, approximately 470 BCE, with subsequent editing in the Greek period.⁵⁹ Esther became queen in 479 BCE. The additions were probably composed in the second century BCE in Egypt or Palestine. The author is unknown, although there is a possibility that it may have been written by Mordecai himself. Some authors have suggested Ezra or Nehemiah because of the similarity of the writing style.

The book of Esther in its canonical form 'demonstrates how the story's motifs, themes, structure and rhetoric carefully interact and mutually contribute to a carefully structured, unified composition' (Sandra 1979:185). Among other motifs, those of kingship and obedience / disobedience are equally central to the narrative. When taken together they present the locus of Esther's message. Although scarcely any scholar would now argue for the historicity of Esther, the book has nonetheless been described as a 'historical novel'. It seems to reflect remembrances of a real or threatened pogrom against the Jews in the Persian Empire or even a historical Mordecai and Esther who had influence at the Persian court. In fact, the description of Persian customs is generally faithful to what is known about that culture.

The book begins with Queen Vashti refusing to obey an order from her husband, King Ahasuerus, believed to be Xerxes I of the Persians (ca 485-465 BCE). He was identified with Xerxes the Great, who was Persia's fifth king.⁶⁰ She was subsequently banished, and the search began for a new queen. The king sent out a decree to gather together all the beautiful women in the empire and bring them into the royal harem. Esther, a young Jewish woman, was one of those chosen to be in the royal harem. King Xerxes was so pleased that he made her his queen.

Nevertheless, its 'historicity' notwithstanding, the story as it now exists seems to bear the characteristics of a fictional narrative, told more or less for religious purposes and expressing well-known themes of Old Testament wisdom literature. Mordecai and

⁵⁹ Many authors place Esther in the Maccabean period. But the story possibly had its origin in the eastern Diaspora in the late Persian period, and became known in Judah in the second century.

⁶⁰ The name 'Ahasuerus' is of Persian origin and means 'I will be silent and poor'. The name appears also in Ezra 4:6 and Daniel 9:1.

Esther are classic examples of the righteous wise personages who seem naïve and helpless but who eventually turn the tables on clever schemers such as Haman. The story of the patriarch Joseph (Gn 37ff) appears to have exercised considerable influence on the author. Like Joseph, Mordecai and Esther acquire high positions in a foreign land and use that power to save their people. There was, understandably, a strong feeling that Jews would have to stick together as Jews if they hoped to win out over the machinations of their foes. The overriding purpose of the book seems to be to demonstrate God's sovereignty and his loving care for his people.

3.3.5.2 Analytical remarks

The phrase 'from India to Cush' appears in Esther 1:1 and 8:9. As indicated in the Table of nations (Gn 10:6-8), Cush was associated with the southernmost parts of the known world. Esther 1:1 and 8:9 clearly comprise other indications of this extremity. Høyland Lavik (2004:85) has even perceived this function of Cush in Isaiah 18:1-2. In Esther, Cush marks the south-western extent of the Persian Empire. It was Cambyses, Cyrus' son (ca 525 BCE) who added Egypt to the Persian Empire (cf. Scheffler 2001:140) and pushed up the Nile 'into the Dark continent until his expedition against the Ethiopian Kingdom of Napata and Meroe came to grief but not before he established the span of the Achaemenian realm "from India to Ethiopia"' (Gordon 1965:281). He expanded the empire to include not only Egypt and parts of the Upper Nile, but also the Elephantine Island which was a colony of Jews in the Diaspora. Gordon has furthermore argued that while Darius 1 and, to a lesser extent, Xerxes 1 made minor extensions to the imperial borders, the limits of the empire were basically established by Cyrus and Cambyses (1965:281). Gordon asserts that during his military campaigns in Africa, Cambyses not only overran Egypt but indeed reached Ethiopia (1965:272). He eventually became Pharaoh and is so depicted on Egyptian monuments (1965:273). Yet no reference to Cambyses exists in the Bible or in Jewish tradition. The reason is probably that he did not affect Judean welfare. Thus, the reference 'from India to Ethiopia' most probably reflects a historical reality.

In Esther 1:1 and 8:9 the audience is introduced to the Persian King Ahasuerus as the monarch who rules over the 127 provinces of the empire, from India to Cush. By character, he was proud and impulsive as can be noticed from the events of Esther 1. The reader's initial encounter with the king suggests an immediate association with the provinces. It is also clear that the book of Esther is concerned with the concept of kingship, and the story itself is presented as a court tale. The importance of this motif is indicated by the frequency of the root $\$ \text{Lm}$ which occurs over 250 times in the 167 verses of Esther (cf. Sandra 1979:59). Therefore, not surprisingly, royal titles appear frequently in Esther Chapters 1-2. This frequency may be the desire to portray the great wealth and the power of the king, which extends as far as Cush.

The extent of the empire embedded in the phrase 'from India to Cush' in 1:1 and 8:9, and the reference to 'a hundred and twenty seven provinces', besides indicating the power of the king, is perhaps also meant '[...] to stress how widespread the Jewish dispersion was and how numerous therefore the Jewish population of the empire' (Clines 1984:96). We have already pointed out that at Elephantine in Upper Egypt, there was a Jewish colony. This understanding of the extent of the Jewish dispersion is supported by the terms of the decree itself. In Esther 8:9 we read that the decree is addressed 'also to the Jews in their script and in their language'. This is an addition that is, strictly speaking, superfluous since the Jews must surely be included in the previous phrase from the same verse earlier on: 'to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language'. According to Clines (1984:96), this qualification might indicate that the Jews were indeed the principal subject of the decree and were therefore conceived of as being specifically addressed. But of course as Esther 8:13 again specifies, the second decree was speedily issued throughout the empire 'to all peoples' and not just to the Jews alone. Furthermore, according to Clines (1984:96), the reason for this was so that 'there will be no surprise for anyone on [the month of] Adar 13 and all the citizens of the empire will have plenty of opportunity to decide where their loyalties lie [...]

What important conclusions for this thesis might then be drawn from the phrase 'from India to Cush' in Esther 1:1 and 8:9? The first is perhaps the awareness of the existence of the country of Cush as the frontier marking one of the extremities of the Persian Empire under king Ahasuerus. It is also clear that Cush as a country was well

known to the author of Esther. Secondly, the implied inclusion of citizens of Cush in the king's decree might be a pointer to the fact that Cush was subject to the Persian king. It is not, however, clear to what extent this was the case. It might also be simply that the author of Esther wants to underscore the point that Ahasuerus was of proud and impulsive character, as seen in Esther 1. It is perhaps in this connection that his name or title means 'I will be silent and poor', as Yahweh is *the* King! But more importantly, to the Israelites who in their pride saw themselves as located at the centre of God's favour according to Amos 9:7, Yahweh asserted that the distant people of Cush were just as much his children. Finally, Esther 1:1 and 8:9 also reflect the context of the promise that the exiles would return from beyond Cush, a motif that is referred to, not only in Isaiah 18:1 (cf. Høyland Lavik 2004:82-83), but also in Isaiah 11:1 and Zephaniah 3:10.

3.4 Cultural matters

The references to Cush in the following set of texts by and large clearly point to anthropological and / or cultural functions of the term, as we shall, it is hoped, demonstrate in the subsequent analyses. These texts are Numbers 12:1, the Cushite wife of Moses; Isaiah 18:2, a comprehensive description of Cush in an ethnographic portrayal; and Jeremiah 13:23, an almost proverbial description of Cush. Let us now turn to these texts and analyze them one by one to discover their full import.

3.4.1 Numbers 12:1

Masoretic text:

tyvkh hvah twda-l[hvmb !rhaw ~yrm
 rbdwtw
 xql tyvk hva-yk xql rva

Translation:

Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married; for he had married a Cushite woman.

3.4.1.1 Preliminary remarks

This text represents ‘one of the more controversial references to the Cushites [...]’ (Hays 2001:397). Some textual problems should first be pointed out. This text is problematic both from the literary as well as the interpretative points of view. First, there is a disparity between verses 1 and 2. This disunity is enhanced by two more factors: i) The occurrence of the feminine singular in Hebrew in the first sentence: ‘and Miriam spoke against Moses’ instead of ‘they spoke’, namely Miriam and Aaron. Moreover, Miriam’s name is mentioned first in this verse, while in the other verses the text reads ‘Aaron and Miriam’. ii) The restriction of the punishment to Miriam.

As a result of this disparity some commentators argue that this text is not a literary unit. They argue that the base narrative of J/E has been supplemented by the ‘Aaron’ material. No agreement exists, however, as to the precise extent of the supplementation, but generally commentators find additions in verses 2-8, 10b and 11 (cf. Budd 1984:133). Another problem has to do with the central focus of the text: Is the issue at stake the marriage of Moses to the Cushite woman or is it the issue of his authority and spiritual privileges with regard to the reception of the divine word? And again the actual objection to this Cushite marriage is not stated. It can also be noted that no objection is made to the non-Israelite origin of the wife in Zipporah’s case.

3.4.1.2 Analytical remarks

Several commentators argue that the central focus of the text is not Moses’ marriage, but his authority and spiritual privileges. However we are inclined to argue that the clue to the central reproach is to be found in the punishment of Miriam. Why was she afflicted with *white* leprosy? Is this not an indication that this was the case because she was criticizing Moses for having married a *black* woman?

Many commentators, including Noth, have argued that this woman was not a black Cushite from the country south of Egypt. As far as Noth is concerned, the country on the southern boundary of Egypt would be far too removed from Moses' sphere of activity (Noth 1968:94). He has argued that the Cushite woman is probably to be identified with the 'Cushan' of Habakkuk 3:7, where the reference is to a tribe or confederacy of tribes mentioned as parallel to Midian (1968:94). At the same time Noth is of the view that this woman must be distinguished from the Midianite Zipporah, as the justificatory clause in v.1b is also obviously intended to assert. Other authors have identified the woman in question with Zipporah herself, Moses' erstwhile wife (cf. Owens 1970:118). But there are indications that in fact this was *not* Zipporah but a second wife of Moses, and that she was a Cushite and therefore a black woman from the territory south of Egypt. Several reasons support this view.

First of all, historically during the eighteenth, nineteenth and even twentieth dynasties of Egypt, relations between Egypt and Cush were close (cf. Yamauchi 2004:73). This means that there were hundreds if not thousands of Cushites active in all levels of Egyptian society. Thus, Noth's argument that the African Cushites were far removed from Egyptian interaction overlooks the extent to which Cushites had permeated the Egyptian society (Hays 2001:398).

Secondly, Exodus 12:38 states that there were other people who travelled out of Egypt with the Israelites during the Exodus event, whereas Numbers 11:4 speaks of 'foreign elements' among them. The implication here is, of course, that these were people of other nationalities, most probably including the Cushites (cf. Yamauchi 2004:37). Thirdly, the argument from Habakkuk 3:7 does not seem to hold water at all. It is very difficult to argue as Noth (1968:94) has done: that the Cushite in question is an Arab-looking Midianite just because the term Cushan is used in parallel with Midian. Moreover, the Habakkuk text reads 'Cushan' rather than 'Cushite'. Thus, there is no indication that the same area is referred to here. Instead, Cush occurs a dozen times in the Old Testament, clearly as a reference to the civilization south of Egypt. But 'Cushan' occurs once, only in Habakkuk 3:7, and the reference is somewhat enigmatic. Overwhelming evidence should be adduced before a common, normal usage of the word Cush is rejected in favour of a poorly attested one such as Cushan.

One should mention other reasons as well. Almost throughout the Old Testament, Cush is associated closely with Egypt. Even the Septuagint and the Vulgate render ‘Cushite’ in Numbers 12:1 as ‘Ethiopian’, the word used by the Greeks and Romans to refer to the region south of Egypt inhabited by people with black skin.

Difficulties are also created by identifying this woman with Zipporah, Moses’ first wife. If this woman was indeed Zipporah or some other Midianite, why did Miriam and Aaron object at this particular time, when Moses’ marriage to this woman had occurred some forty years earlier? Whether Zipporah at this juncture had died or not is irrelevant, but it was not uncommon for men in Old Testament times to be married to more than one woman. The context of Numbers 12:1 implies that this was a recent marriage and that the marriage was the occasion of Miriam and Aaron’s hostility.

Throughout the ancient world the term ‘Cush’ carried strong connotations of black ethnicity. No wonder even the prophet Jeremiah referred to the Cushites’ skin without offering any explanation, implying that his readers associated ‘Cushite’ with black skin (cf. Jr 13:23). The word ‘Cushite’ is used twice in Numbers 12:1, probably for emphasis. The ethnicity of Moses’ new wife was stressed and then opposition arose within his family. As a result of the conflict over Moses’ marriage, Miriam is judged and Moses is reaffirmed. Apparently, the family objected to this interracial marriage, but God approved it. God struck Miriam with leprosy and she became (white) like snow or like a ‘corpse’ (Sadler 2001:85) having ‘forfeited whatever natural skin-coloration she had...’ Cross (1973:204) suggests that the punishment of white, leprous skin was an intentional, appropriate response to Miriam’s prejudice against her black sister-in-law.

So what may one conclude regarding the matter of the Cushite wife? Adamo (1998) and also Sadler (2001) have all offered a fairly lengthy discussion in an attempt to interpret the text concerning the ‘Cushite’ wife of Moses. This perhaps indicates that the solution to this issue is not easy to come by. In fact Sadler (2001:87) has affirmed: ‘We are far from any permanent solution to the issues raised by this chapter.’ I also consider that the ‘imaginative reconstruction’ of the text which Adamo (1998:68-69) proposes seems to be unnecessary as it would be further complicating the matter. Yamauchi’s findings regarding the Cushite wife of Moses support the view that the woman so called was not Zipporah, Moses’ Midianite and first wife, but rather a Cushite woman from the

country south of Egypt. The reasons given are partly based on the evidence of history and archaeology both of which strongly support interracial marriages, not only between Egyptians and Cushites but also between Israelites and Cushites (cf. Yamauchi 2004:75). The data from archaeology and history, in addition to the analysis we have offered above, give us every reason to argue that Numbers 12:1 has most probably in mind Moses' marriage to an African woman.

3.4.2 Isaiah 18:1-2

Masoretic text:

vwk-yrhnl rb[m rva ~ypnk lcclc #ra ywh
 ~ym-ynp-l[amg-yllkbw ~yryc ~yb xlvh
 arwn ~[-la jrwmw \$vmm ywg-la ~ylq
 ~ykalm wkl
 wcra ~yrhn wazb-rva hswbmw wq-wq ywg
 halhw awh-!m

Translation:

v.1 *Ah, land of whirring wings beyond the rivers of Cush,*
 v.2 *sending ambassadors by the Nile in vessels of papyrus*
on the waters. Go, you swift messengers, to a nation tall
and smooth, to a people feared near and far (here and

there), a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide.

3.4.2.1 Preliminary remarks

Isaiah 18 is a problematic text because its author employs a number of rarely-used Hebrew words (the *hapax legomena*); hence the meaning of the text is somewhat ambiguous and translators depend largely on contextual clues to interpret the passage. Thus the precise purpose of the prophecy is unclear (cf. Sadler 2001:110).

The term Cush occurs once in this chapter in verse one, and Cush is the subject of this oracle, although not all commentators agree on this.⁶¹ Other difficulties concern the dating of the oracle, although it is quite possible that it might have been inspired by the events of the late eighth century (714-704 BCE) when Cush, the Philistines and several other powers including Judah were planning a revolt against Assyria. All these problems notwithstanding, Isaiah 18:1-2 '[...] is perhaps the best ethnography of the Cushites in the Hebrew Bible' (Sadler 2001:110). Høyland Lavik (2004:75), too, expresses the opinion that 'the primary motif of Isa 18:1-2 is Cush [...] all of Isa 18:1-2 describes either the geography or the inhabitants of the land of Cush.' She notes, however, that this is the case except for verse 2a_g: $\sim y l q \quad \sim y k a l m \quad w k l$ ('Go, you swift messengers [...]'). But we wish to read this verse as a unity, and also as referring to Cush as its immediate context. Furthermore, according to Høyland Lavik (2004:82), in Isaiah 18, 'the geography of the region of Cush is described in the beginning of the v.1, and at the end of v.2: [However] no exact information is given of elevation, location, distance to the sea, numbers of rivers etc.' But we query the relevance of such information. To seek exact information about elevation, location, distance to the sea, numbers of rivers et cetera would be in my view to try to demand much more from the text than it is prepared to grant.

3.4.2.2 Analytical remarks

⁶¹ Young (1965:478) for example has suggested that the text is not an oracle against Cush, but a message meant to inspire relief among anxious Judean citizens in their confrontation with the Assyrian menace.

This passage provides a considerable amount of information about the land and people of Cush, as understood by Isaiah. Høyland Lavik has also remarked on this. In addition, Isaiah perceived Cush as a distant land. According to Høyland Lavik (2004:83), this is the meaning of the phrase ‘land of buzzing wings’. To support her view she cites Zephaniah 3:10 as one of the texts which is perceived as describing one of the corners of the world: ‘Zeph 3:10 has the same wording as is found in Isa 18:1: $\text{vwk} - \text{yrhnl}$ rb [m [beyond the rivers of Cush]]. This phrase speaks about Cush as the most remote nation in the world (cf. Esth 1:1; 8:9).’ To further corroborate her arguments she quotes Oswald (1986:360), according to whom the term Cush in Isaiah 18:1 is metaphorical since it was used as a metaphor for the ends of the earth (cf. Høyland Lavik 2004:83).

The phrase ‘land of buzzing / whirring wings’ may also refer to ‘flies or [a land] swarming with swift and devastating armies’ (cf. Sadler 2001:114), or might even refer to boats with sails (cf. Driver 1968:45; Clemens 1987:164; Oswald 1986:359-360). Thus, the phrase in my view still remains enigmatic as it is a *hapax leguomenon*, but its connection to ‘vessels of papyrus’ causes me to think that the latter view, which speaks of boats and sails, should probably be preferred. In fact, as Sadler (2001:114) has pointed out: ‘[...] it provides insight into the mode of transport for vigorous Cushite trade [...]. These statements indicate that Cush was known to be a riparian nation aflutter with sailing craft traversing its rivers’. Moreover, it can also be deduced from the text of Isaiah that Cush was thought to be a fertile land since its land was ‘divided by rivers’, a nuance which I think Høyland Lavik has captured when she writes that ‘[...] the connection between rivers and Cush has a positive function of associating Cush with abundance’ (cf. 2004:83).

Isaiah also comments on the people of Cush. The first statement is embedded in the phrase ‘swift messengers’ ($\sim \text{ylq}$ $\sim \text{ykalm}$). This phrase reminds one of the Cushite messenger in 2 Samuel 18, and also in our own times of the athletic prowess of the Ethiopians as long-distance runners to say nothing of the athletic talents of the Africans in general. But Høyland Lavik omits this phrase for she considers that it does not form part of the rhetoric about the motif Cush, and instead argues that the land of

Cush has the habit of ‘sending envoys by sea in vessels of paper reeds over waters’ (2004:84). The second phrase is ‘tall and smooth’ ($\text{ }^{\text{j}}\text{rwmw } \text{\$vmm}$), translated by Høyland Lavik as ‘tall and smooth-skinned’. This phrase also refers to the physiological characteristics of the Cushites. According to Høyland Lavik (2004:84), ‘It is likely that Isa 18:2 has in mind a polished look of the skin.’ I see no difficulty with such a description. The feature of the smooth skin is, however, associated with that of height, on which I should like to comment; Høyland Lavik is silent in this connection.

It is true that the Old Testament contains other references to height as in the case of the inhabitants of Canaan when Moses sent spies there to reconnoitre the country (Nm 13:32-33). Saul, the first king of the Jews, is said to have stood shoulder-high over all other men (1 Sm 9:1-2). Yet the prophet Isaiah was able to recognize this somatic feature also in other peoples such as the Cushites. And even today the people of certain tribal groups in the Sudan are indeed very tall, measuring as they do over six feet and above. Herodotus, the father of history, once wrote that Ethiopians (read Cushites) were $\alpha\upsilon\delta\rho\alpha\varsigma\ \mu\epsilon\gamma\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\upsilon\varsigma\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \kappa\alpha\lambda\lambda\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$, which roughly may be translated as ‘men tall and handsome / beautiful / honourable’ (For this observation taken from Herodotus 111.114, see Wade 1929:122.)

The other element has to do with the skin, which Isaiah asserts is ‘smooth’, probably devoid of excessive facial and / or thoracic hair. Contrast this with primitive man who is usually depicted with a great deal of bodily hair! Do we therefore have before us the case of a fully-evolved human being?⁶²

Finally, Isaiah describes Cush as a land of ‘people feared near and far (here and there), a nation mighty and conquering’. Høyland Lavik suggests the translation: a people ‘feared from that day and onwards [...] line upon line and down-treading’ (2004:85). Using these words, Isaiah in my view sums up the military power of the Cushites. That the Cushites demonstrated military prowess is evidenced by their conquest of mighty

⁶² Many books on evolution which purport to depict the appearance of the primitive man usually portray him as a hairy, heavy-jawed human being (cf., among others, the book by Gregor (1966) with illustrations by John Martinez, *The Adventure of Man (His Evolution from Prehistory to Civilization)*, New York: The Macmillan Company. Of interest also is the remark by Waliggo (1988) who reports that some white missionaries to Uganda used to baptize their African converts on condition that they were human! After more than three thousand years since the book of Isaiah was written, how could anyone possibly still doubt the fully-developed form of any people?

Egypt, even to the extent of establishing a dynasty there, the so-called twenty-fifth Dynasty of Egypt. This fact is also supported by the Old Testament reports of the adventurous excursions into Palestine itself by the Cushites, such as are to be observed in the exploits of king Tirhakah of Cush (2 Ki 19:9; cf also Is 37:9) and Zerah the Cushite (2 Chr 14:9ff).

Thus, the overall picture that Isaiah paints of Cush is a comprehensive one: a nation of swift messengers, of tall and beautiful people, and at the same time of great military abilities. Even their land is portrayed as fertile. These are a people that the prophet presents as prone to fall but who will also regain their stature and come before Yahweh with a reverent attitude; and who, as with Zephaniah 3:10 and Psalm 68:31, will in the eschaton be devout worshippers of Yahweh. As Sadler (2001:118) has rightly put it: ‘This chapter contains the best Judean ethnography of this distant Other and we [sic] also the most comprehensive collage of ways that Judean authors used the images of Cush in Hebrew literature’.

This text from Isaiah sends very strong signals to those who have over the centuries viewed the Cushites of the Old Testament times differently.

3.4.3 Jeremiah 13:23

Masoretic text:

wlkwt ~ta-~g wytrbrbx rmnw wrw[yvwk
 \$phyh
 [rh ydml byjyh]

Translation:

*Can the Cushite change his skin, or the leopard his spots?
 Then may you also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.*

3.4.3.1 Preliminary remarks

To understand this reference to Cush it may be helpful to put it into the general context of the prophet Jeremiah's ministry. It was probably during the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah (from ca 609-597 BCE) that Jeremiah was most active.⁶³ His ministry comprises material found in Jeremiah 7:1-20:18. Thus, the reference to Cush is found in this context. This section can furthermore be broken down into four subdivisions: i) The Mistaken Covenant (7:1-10:25), ii) The Broken Covenant (11:1-13:27), iii) Crime and Punishment (14:1-17:27) and iv) the Symbolic Meaning of the Prophet's Life (18:1-20:18). The verse which concerns us is therefore located within the sub-section of the Broken Covenant and has to do with the threatening words pronounced by the prophet against Judah (13:15-27). To be precise, v. 23 speaks about the incurable sickness of Judah.

3.4.3.2 Analytical remarks

'Jerusalem is doomed once again!' The Babylonian victory at Carchemish in 605 BCE could have offered an excellent occasion for the prophet to pronounce this last warning. To this well-known interrogation, a negative answer must be given. The sinful state of Judah has now taken on a 'natural' character, so to speak. Owing to her repeated downfalls into idolatry, she has set herself in a permanent state of rupture from Yahweh. Therefore, Judah will be punished since her wickedness has become an enduring part of her nature. However, this extremely pessimistic view will be mildly corrected at the end of v. 27, where a slight hope of conversion is still expressed.

Therefore, the main purpose of this verse is not to despise the skin of the Cushite as such but, as Adamo (1998:109) has well said, it is '...to express very vividly that there

⁶³ Jehoiakim, under whom Jeremiah carried out his ministry, is reputed to have been a ruthless tyrant, who was despised by Jeremiah. Nebuchadnezzar, who defeated Egypt at Carchemish in Syria (605 BCE), takes Jerusalem in 603 BCE and confirms Jehoiakim in office. In 601 BCE, Jehoiakim revolts. He dies when the Babylonian army arrives (597 BCE), and is succeeded by his son Jehoiachin, who is immediately taken as a captive to Babylon; Zedekiah is installed as king in his place (cf. 2 Chr 36:9f).

is a deep-seated wickedness in Judah which has been ingrained into the blood of the people by several years in the school of wickedness'. Sadler holds the same view: '...the people of Judah were unable to change their ways and were consequently destined to suffer a horrendous fate' (Sadler 2001:210). The purpose of the rhetorical questions here is to present a scenario where change would be impossible (Sadler 2001:210). Put bluntly, the prophet Jeremiah wishes to impress on his audience the implausibility of Judah's repentance. The sinful behaviour of Judah was so habitual and so entrenched that it had become as unchangeable as skin colour.

Of interest however, is the observation that the reference to the Cushites' skin was apparently proverbial, which implies that the Cushites were known in Jeremiah's Jerusalem, and furthermore that they were known for their dark skin colour. The residents of Jerusalem knew them sufficiently well for Jeremiah to refer to them for the purposes of illustrating a sermon, without providing any further explanation. Of course, similar proverbs also appeared in Greek literature.⁶⁴ They provide strong evidence that Cushites - black people - were part of the ancient world. This finding renders the theory of the 'de-Africanization' of the Old Testament (if it is true), which has been put forward by such Afrocentrists such as Adamo and others, rather difficult to uphold. As Hays (1996:409) has rightly pointed out: 'Black people are not a modern-era addition to the story of salvation history. They were there from the beginning.'

Furthermore, to perceive racist overtures in this text as some authors have done, would really be to miss its main point. Blackwood's (1977:129) view that the Cushite's 'skin pigment is under discussion [here]', should be rejected. The reference to the skin of the Cushite in this text has nothing to do with any prejudice towards or denigration of the people thus referred to hitherto. Instead, Jeremiah's rhetorical question emphasizes Israel's stubborn refusal to repent of her deviant disposition (cf. Hs 5:3-4). This is also the conclusion reached by, among others, Holladay (1986:415), Jones (1992:203) and Leslie (1954:75).

⁶⁴ See, for example, plates 43, 54, 55, 71, 73, 93 and 95 in Snowden F M (1970). *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience*.

Thus, although it is true that in the Old Testament one finds a number of references to 'black' in relation to skin colour, there is no evidence that these are associated with the Cushites' skin colouration.⁶⁵

3.5 Conclusion

Let me say a word or two, by way of conclusion, about the texts we have thus far tried to analyze. From a more general point of view the foregoing analysis has been discussing Old Testament references in which Cush bears connotations that may be linked to proper names, geographical locations and cultural matters. It has also become clear that, by and large, these texts still offer a real challenge since no unifying thread seems to link them, apart perhaps from the fact that they all point to a Cushite presence in the different sectors of the Israelite community. The complete picture regarding the import of these texts, as well as the rest of the Cush texts, will however only be presented in chapter six where the researcher presents more informed conclusions and findings.

Nevertheless, already at this stage one can see some initial pointers to the importance of these texts to the African cause. The following texts are the basis upon which these pointers rest: references to Cush as a proper name (Jr 36:14; Zph 1:1; Ps 7:1); references to places (Gn 2:13; Ezk 29:10; Est 1:1; 8:9) and references to cultural matters (Nm 12:1; Is 18:1-2; Jr 13:23). There may be other implications as well.

Insofar as references to proper names are concerned, it is becoming increasingly clear that first of all a Cushite presence in Israel is affirmed. Furthermore, this presence was viewed positively. If this had not been the case, it would be difficult to explain the extended genealogies, save those from Psalm 7, which are associated with the text of Jeremiah 36 and Zephaniah 1. Secondly, if the appellation 'Cush' had borne any negative connotations, most probably it could have been deleted altogether by the redactors of these texts. It is therefore reasonable to assume that Cushites were well assimilated into Judean society. It can also be postulated that they were well esteemed and that their

⁶⁵ See, for example, Job 30:30 which contains the phrase 'my skin is black'; Song of Songs 1:5 where there is the phrase 'I am black'; and also verse 6 of the same book which contains the phrase 'because I am black'. Similarly, Lamentations 5:10 has the phrase 'our skin as an oven has been blackened'. In Jeremiah 8:21, the prophet proclaims 'I am black', where blackness denotes 'mourning'.

identity was not only acceptable but also favoured. The text from Isaiah 18 which belongs to the other cluster of texts pointing to the cultural connotations of Cush perhaps represents one of the most elaborate examples yet in this respect.

According to our analysis, the references to Cush in these texts tend to portray this African country in a very positive manner. This is particularly so, regardless of the allusions to colour which have caused some interpreters, such as Blackwood (cf. 3.4.3 above), to read into these texts a tinge of racism. Personally, I do not believe this to be the case because, contrary to this view, the Cushites were in fact well accepted into Israelite society, as our analysis has demonstrated. The references to colour, in my view, rather reflect the fact that, being 'black', the Cushites as a result bore the burden of being too conspicuous a minority among a 'white' majority. The issue of colour therefore may be explained in the same way that a white individual would be viewed or perceived among a majority of black individuals.

Finally, as for texts which point in the direction of geographical locations, the country of Cush is not only linked to the Garden of Eden and therefore to the symbol of cosmic harmony, peace and well-being, but also to the origins of the world and its people, as the pericope of Genesis 10:6-8 seems to signify. Furthermore, the geographical references are perceived as depicting the boundaries of the known world, although they are also conceived of as the subject of God's judgment; the text of Ezekiel 29:10, for example, seems to indicate this.

Hence, the general picture of Cush is that at the time when the individual texts were written, Cush was understood as a geographical entity with its own history and distinct identity. It was also known to interact with the Israelites, and this interaction took diverse forms. These interactions also led to religious, judicial and inimical ramifications, as Zephaniah 1:1, Jeremiah 36:14 and Psalm 7:1 respectively seem to indicate. These numerous and varied implications allow one to argue that the Cush references in this chapter are of importance in the search for Africa in the Old Testament.

CHAPTER FOUR

CUSH TEXTS CONCERNING ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL / MILITARY MATTERS

4.1 Introduction

The presence of Cush in the Old Testament also took other forms such as an involvement in economic, political and military affairs, which forms the topic of this chapter. Whereas the economy or wealth of Cush is referred to in Isaiah 18:7, 45:14 and Job 28:19, allusions to its political and military dimensions are clearly evident in the

following texts: 2 Samuel 18:21-32; 2 Kings 19:9; 2 Chronicles 12:3; 14:8-14; 16:8; 21:16; Isaiah 18:1-2; 20:3-5; and 37:9; Jeremiah 38-39; Ezekiel 30:4.5.9; Ezekiel 38:5; Daniel 11:43; Nahum 3:9; and Zephaniah 2:12.

Sometimes some of these references overlap, as is the case with the references from 2 Chronicles which allude to events in the books of Kings. This is also the case with Isaiah 18, already discussed above (cf. 3.4.2) in connection with cultural references to Cush (vv.1-2). Here, we are returning to the same text again but this time in connection with its economic (v.7), as well as its political and / or military connotations (vv.1-2). Ezekiel 30:4.5.9 mentions Cush in conjunction with its allies in the context of war, but in Ezekiel 38:5 Persia and Lud are also mentioned alongside Cush again, in reference to a context of war since they carry shield and helmet. The texts from 2 Chronicles speak of a complex of military adventures.

The following analyses therefore are carried out with the intention of defining these involvements of Cush in some detail so as to decipher their import in the Old Testament. However, not all the texts receive the same detailed analysis. In certain cases, such as Ezekiel 38:5, the analysis of Ezekiel 30:4,5,9 is deemed sufficient to illustrate the function of Cush in this book.

4.2 Economic matters

4.2.1 Isaiah 18:7

Masoretic text:

\$vxm ~ [... twabc hwhy] yv-lbwy ayhh t [b
 rva hswbmw wq-wq Ÿywg halhw awh-!m
 arwn ~ [mw jrwmw

!wyc-rh twabc hwhy-~v ~wqm-la wcra
~yrhn wazb

Translation:

At that time gifts will be brought to the LORD of hosts from a people tall and smooth, from a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide, to Mount Zion, the place of the name of the LORD of hosts.

4.2.1.1 Preliminary remarks

Isaiah 13–23, which brackets the verse we are investigating, is usually accepted by scholars as constituting one section that may partly be entitled ‘God, the Master of the Nations’ (cf. Oswald 1986:61ff). This section may further be broken down into subsections, such as 17:12 – 18:7, namely ‘God’s judgment over all the nations’. Therefore, Isaiah 18:1-7 represents God’s message of judgment to the nations.

Although the text of Isaiah 18:7 does not explicitly mention Cush by name, this verse, like verse 2, is generally believed on the basis of verse 1 to refer to the African nation of Cush (Gray 1962:310-311; Kaiser 1972:93-94; Bright 1972:281). According to Wildberger (1997:209): ‘There is no doubt that its message [that of Is 18:1-7] is about Cush. There is no discernible reason why a superscription verdict concerning Cush has not been placed at the beginning [...]’

Several authors, however, dissociate this verse from verses 1-6. It is said to be an addition and is generally believed to stem from a post-exilic commentary composed by the Isaiah community (cf. Clements 1980:163; see also Adamo 1998:103). One of the reasons adduced is the phrase *twabc hwhy-~v ~wqm-la* (‘to the place of the name of the Lord of Hosts’), which is considered to be Deuteronomistic vocabulary and is therefore of a later date than Isaiah. A further reason given for its

redactional nature and therefore late date is the temporal clause *ayhh t [b* ('at that time'), rather than the usual *awhh ~wyb* ('on that day') which is characteristic of the poetic oracles. It is interesting to note that the *New Interpreter's Bible* does not comment on this verse at all and one is tempted to ask why. Is it because it is considered an addition, or because it speaks about Cush, in which case it betrays the commentator's prejudice against such references? However, it is only fair to note that despite this 'oversight' the commentary nevertheless admits Cush as the initial subject matter of Isaiah 18, but not before acknowledging other themes as well! In addition, only a token reference is made to the Cush ambassadors (v.2) but nothing at all to the cultural or anthropological nuances of Cush which are alluded to in this chapter.

Despite the literary problems which may be associated with verse 7, generally modern scholarship attributes the present oracle of Isaiah 18:1-7 to the prophet Isaiah himself. The oracle is usually placed either in the period of the Philistine revolt in the year 713-711 BCE or in the year after the death of Sargon in 705 BCE, during which King Hezekiah played the decisive role in southern Palestine in the revolt against Assyria. Bright (1981:281) dates the oracle at 714 BCE, a date some twelve or thirteen years prior to Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem. This is most probably correct because the messengers, or ambassadors, appearing in this passage came from Cush, apparently for the purpose of enlisting Israel, under Hezekiah, in an alliance against Assyria. Thus, whatever encouragement Isaiah extended to those Cush ambassadors most certainly occurred before the event of Sennacherib's siege and the predicted slaughter of Sennacherib's army (vv. 5 and 6).

This setting implies that the ambassadors mentioned in verse 2 are in Jerusalem at the behest of the Ethiopian Pharaoh Shabako in order to discuss a common action against the Assyrians with Hezekiah. But, according to Coffman (1990:168), the Ethiopian King at that time was Piankhy, sometimes referred to also as Piye (cf. Yamauchi 2004:113). Coffman argues that it was he who in about the year 725 sent ambassadors to Hezekiah, King of Judah, for the purposes of involving that country in a coalition against the Assyrians. Isaiah warned against such folly, though, by providing God's answer to the messengers (cf. Coffman 1990:68). Scholars are sometimes not very clear about the Cushite Kings who ruled Egypt during the so-called Twenty-fifth Dynasty. But,

Yamauchi's book (2004) has, I consider, shed much light on this. Yamauchi for example asserts that the founder of this Dynasty was Piankhy, whose standard dates are 747-716 BCE. Shabako, who ruled between 716-702, was his brother (cf. Yamauchi 2004:113-119). Thus, the biblical events involving the Cush ambassadors rightly fall into the reign of Shabako.

The Cush dynasty which Sabako established over Egypt had its capital at Napata, and from Napata, any Cushite embassy would presumably have come. But from Elephantine to Napata, and indeed for some distance further south, the country is a country not of rivers, but of a single River, the Nile. Some way south of Napata, the Nile is joined by important tributaries from the South East. The 'rivers of Cush' referred to in the text may be the Nile and one or both of these other rivers.

Accordingly, many commentators see verses 5ff as a prophecy that Yahweh himself will destroy the Assyrians, so that the political measures against them will be unnecessary. The prophet was addressing the African messengers sent by King Shabako and who were in Jerusalem, sending them back home empty-handed because Judah did not need their support (cf. Adamo 1998:104). The background to this interpretation is the conviction that Isaiah, according to 29:1ff; 30:27ff and 31:4ff, shared such an expectation towards the end of his active life.

4.2.1.2 Analytical remarks

For several reasons, among which is especially the inclusion of verses 1-2 and 7, I will read Isaiah 18:1-7 as a unified pericope. The nation referred to is Cush, a territory south of Egypt. The people described are the Cushites. Not only are they swift, tall and smooth-skinned, but they are also fierce since they are feared far and near, literally 'of vigour and of treading down'. Their land too is surrounded by rivers and consequently perceived by the prophet as very fertile or exhibiting 'abundance' (Høyland Lavik 2004:81; cf. also Sadler 2001:114 and Adamo 1998:104).

Thus, in general, a positive image of Cush is presented. But in addition to this affirmative picture which purports to portray Cush in its anthropological / cultural and economic aspects, in the eschaton Cush too will recognize the superiority of Yahweh and will pay him homage by bringing him gifts (v. 7). During that time of eschatological drama, Mount Zion will become not only the spiritual but also the political middle point of the entire inhabited region of the earth. It is the place where Yahweh resides, either directly or represented by his earthly regent, the Davidic king (cf. Is 11:10), and all peoples will come there, and will declare their loyalty to the ruler of the world and pay him homage. To this group of peoples the Cushites also belong, inhabitants of a nation far away, on the edge of inhabited lands (Est 1:1; 8:9), whose appearance in Jerusalem had naturally made a deep impression (cf. Wildberger 1997:223). Belief in Yahweh will be universal in the eschaton. At the end of time, even so distant a people as the Cushites will acknowledge the lordship of Yahweh and will perform an act of homage before him in the city that is the centre of everything connected with faith in Yahweh, in the ‘navel of the earth’ (cf. Ezk 38:12; see also Is 45:23ff; Phil 2:10).

The motif of peoples coming to pay homage was not only familiar in Israel during ancient times, but also among Israel’s neighbours (cf. Wildberger 1997:223ff).⁶⁶ No matter how spectacularly Cush had made its appearance on the stage of world history, Isaiah does not trust the Cushites: their days are numbered. Yahweh could take his time but one day the moment would arrive when he would also settle accounts with this people ‘feared near and far; a nation mighty and conquering’ (Is 18:7; see also Is 18:1-2).

Therefore, whereas in verse 2 the focus is on the anthropological and / or cultural connotations of the African nation of Cush (cf. 3.4.2 above), verse 7 depicts that nation ultimately being subdued by Yahweh, and the sign of this subjugation will consist in its bringing gifts (יָבֹא – לְבָוֵי) to the Lord of Hosts in Zion, which will be a symbol of their acknowledgement of his power. According to Gray (1975:316) the tribute or ‘gifts’

⁶⁶ For references to this motif see, among others, Ezekiel 17:22ff; Deutero-Isaiah 45:14; 49:7; 55:3b-5, and also Zechariah 2:15; 6:15; 8:20-22. In Isaiah 60, it is used in a greatly expanded form. The passage in the book of Zephaniah 3:8-10, to be dated to a postexilic era, is remarkably similar to what is said in Isaiah 18:7. Psalm 68:32 is also not all that different from Isaiah 18:7. Although the wording of the Psalm is undoubtedly very old, verses 31-33 are dated as postexilic and it is at least within the bounds of possibility that they are dependent on Isaiah 18:7. For the evidence of this motif in extra-biblical sources, see Grelot 1957:319-321, among other authors.

referred to perhaps consists of people themselves rather than of material possessions. Notice that the solemn expression ‘gifts will be brought’ goes back to Psalm 68:30 (cf. also Ps 76:12).

From the African point of view, what are we to understand by this message? I consider that the main point, among other things, is the fact that the Cushites, like the rest of the known world, will recognize in Yahweh a god who is calling all peoples, regardless of their provenance, to himself. The reason for this is that they too are his children. Perhaps this is the meaning of the ‘gifts’ referred to here, as Gray (1975:316) has argued. If this interpretation is correct, then it is the gift of themselves rather than material possessions that Cush will bring to Yahweh. Hence this is a very lofty way of portraying a people. If they are a gift, they are precious. Thus, in the final analysis this prophecy is in favour of Cush rather than against them. As Coffman (1990:167) has said: ‘We have avoided the use of the word “burden” in this title, because this prophecy is not a prophecy *against* Ethiopia, but *about* Ethiopia [...] God is not here speaking against Ethiopians, but *to* them, appealing to them to hear his prophecy against Assyria, pertaining especially to Sennacherib’ (italics mine).

Thus, this text very firmly affirms the Cushites, and for that matter the people south of Egypt, for what they are, because they are regarded as ‘gifts’ in the eyes of Isaiah. This perception consequently crowns the positive image of Cush described in verses 1-2.

Another text which portrays Cush in terms of its economic characteristics is to be found in a section of Deutero-Isaiah, namely Isaiah 45:14. It is now to this verse that I should like to turn my attention.

4.2.2 Isaiah 45:14

Masoretic text:

vwk-rxsw ~yr̄cm [ygy hwhy rma Ȳhk

wkly \$yrxa wyhy \$lw wrb[y \$yl[hdm
yvna ~yabsw
la \$b \$a wllpty \$yla wwxtvy \$ylaw
wrb[y ~yqZb
~yhla spa dw[!yaw

Translation:

Thus says the LORD: 'The labour of Egypt and merchandise of Cush and of the Sabaeans, men of stature, shall come over to you, and they shall be yours. They shall walk behind you; they shall come over in chains and they shall bow down to you. They will make supplication to you, saying: "Surely God is in you, and there is no other. There is no other God."'

4.2.2.1 Preliminary remarks

The term 'Cush' appears once in this chapter, and only in this verse. Cush is mentioned together with its presumed allies, Egypt and Saba.⁶⁷ The material of this verse resembles that of Isaiah 43:3 where the trio are again mentioned. There they are 'ransomed for the sake of Israel', although here this is not the case. Hence, in this verse a new development is discernible.

Other, literary, issues are evident as well. Who is the 'you' referred to as a recipient of the labour and merchandise of these nations? Is it Cyrus, who is understood to be Yahweh's 'shepherd' and 'anointed' according to Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1, respectively? However, the use of the feminine form used in these references seems to

⁶⁷ The mention of the trio does not seem to evoke any concrete historical allusion. The identification of Egypt and Cush should also represent no major problem. Saba, however, mentioned here and in three other passages of the Old Testament, is probably to be located in or near northeast Africa and is probably chosen because it represents the most remote regions known to the Israelites.

exclude the Persian king. Could the 'you' perhaps be Israel or Judah itself? Be it as it may, to understand the 'you' references as referring to Israel or Judah does not significantly alter the understanding of Isaiah 45:14 (cf. also Is 43:43) because, after all, Yahweh may have offered these nations to Cyrus as a ransom and he may be the one delivering them to Israel or Judah, where they can submit to and worship Yahweh (cf. Sadler 2001:200. See also Whybray 1981:109). Another possibility is to understand verse 14 as a unit distinct from verse 13. In this case the beneficiary of the labour and merchandise of the trio will then be someone else, not Cyrus.

4.2.2.2 Analytical remarks

The text as we have translated it runs as follows: 'The labour of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush and the Sabaeans, men of stature [...]'.⁶⁸ Sadler (2001:201) has posited that in the case of Sabaeans, the assortment consists of human beings, not commodities! To corroborate his argument he cites the wording in the same verse, which reads, 'to you they will pass over and they will be yours [...]', thus implying human beings themselves. While Sadler's argument might be valid, the syntax of the verse nevertheless suggests that the merchandise of Cush also applies to Seba. Although we have permitted an ellipsis in the translation, the literal rendering should perhaps have been '[...] the merchandise of Cush and the merchandise of Sabaeans [...]' but this would sound awkward in English. Thus, the subject of the verse is the 'labour of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush and Seba'.

The implication for Sadler's rendering would be that the text justifies the subjugation of the Sabaeans, the Egyptians and Cushites, an interpretation contrary to Zechariah 8:20-23 where the prophet describes the assembled nations as willing worshippers of Judah's God, not conscripts. But again, rather metaphorically, in Isaiah 45:14, the Cushites and their allies are led away in chains and forced to bow before Israel/Judah, not to Yahweh! Thus, this verse would seem to authorize the enslavement of the African peoples, if we understand Egypt and Cush here to represent parts of the

⁶⁸ Cf. also Isaiah 18, where the Cushites are described as 'tall' in stature.

known African world. This reading would make it a palatable text for those who today indulge in acts of human slavery, especially that of the African people!⁶⁹

But again in Deutero-Isaiah, in fact all nations will eventually bow to Yahweh. This point might therefore represent an indication that the nations mentioned here are referred to as ‘representatives’ of the entire world serving Yahweh, and not as those singled out for this fate. In this sense, as Sadler (2001:204) has argued, ‘[...] contemporary biases should not dictate the interpretation of this prophecy’. Wilson (1986:244) has argued that there is no enslavement involved here but merely a change of status to vassals of Yahweh, and that the notion of subjugated people in ‘chains’ in verse 14 represents the fate of the formerly idolatrous nations, who will be released and promised a prosperous future should they willingly choose to bow before Yahweh.

Thus, the image of the Cushites, Egyptians and Sabeans genuflecting before Judah is a metaphor for their eventual submission to Yahweh at the eschaton. We are left with a portrait of an inclusive Yahwism at that point. However, this will not be based on consanguinity or choice as appears to be the case in Zechariah 8:20-23, but is predicated by force (cf. Sadler 2001:204). The ultimate fate of the Cushites is that of being vassals, not of Cyrus, but of Yahweh, represented in this text by Judah. These people will explicitly profess monotheism. In my opinion, this is the first time in the Old Testament that such a vision has appeared if one excludes the confession of Naaman (2 Ki 5), which in any case is made by an individual, and not by a people.

⁶⁹ Black Africa has a long history of slavery going back many centuries. Because it is beyond the scope of this thesis to enter into a lengthy discussion of this topic, suffice it to point out a fact or two in order to demonstrate the point. McEvedy (1995:80ff) for instance reports a lucrative trade in Black Africans, both men and women, as far back as the sixteenth century. This brisk traffic in Black slaves, conducted especially by the Portuguese among the Europeans, but also by Arabs, grew up mainly between the West Coast of Africa and its offshore islands, but also in East Africa. It also flourished thanks to the complicity of some African Chiefs. The traffic was soon extended to include the settlements and plantations being established in the New World (cf. McEvedy 1995:80). Many factors have been cited as reasons for this, including the need for manpower to work in the plantations in the New World, but also to help in household chores as was the case among the Arabs, who put their female slaves to work in their homes (McEvedy 1995:80). The business was also enhanced by the greed of African chiefs who provided slaves and gold in exchange for horses, glassware and metalware, clothes, and for as little as salt, alcohol and tobacco! (Cf. McEvedy 1995:80.) Furthermore, the interpretation (or misinterpretation) of certain biblical texts by a number of extreme far-right groups, notably in Apartheid South Africa, also favoured the practice. McEvedy (1995:98) reports of the Boers or Farmers of South Africa that: ‘At a time when public opinion in Europe had swung decisively against slavery the Boers remained wedded to their view of the native African as an inferior being created by God to toil for the white man’. It was the anti-slavery campaign initiated mainly by the British at the opening of the nineteenth century that would halt (at least in principle) this inhuman practice (cf. McEvedy 1995:96-97).

But there is also another perspective on the matter. Isaiah 45:14 can furthermore be understood to form part of Deutero-Isaiah's effort to boost the self-esteem of his people by predicting a time of future glory. At that time the wealthy, powerful, and influential nations of the world will come to a once-debased but, in the future, a glorious Judah in order to bow before Yahweh. Notice should be taken of the mention of wealth and merchandise here. Although this is probably not the main aim of the biblical author, it is implied that these nations were indeed wealthy. The mention of wealth enhances their image, and the point the author is making is that it is not merely simple, depraved people who will submit to Yahweh but people who indeed 'mattered' to the world of the time.

Probably Deutero-Isaiah could not have imagined that his words of hope for his people could someday have been employed to serve the purposes of those who perceived the world through the lenses of slavery. That they 'come over in chains' does not necessarily mean that they arrive as slaves, but the author has in mind the experience of captivity in war which was well known in the ancient Near East. It is in terms of this captivity that the prophet describes the submission of other nations to Yahweh and to Judah, the people of Yahweh. The submission to Israel Israel / Judah is to be understood as submission to Yahweh. The prophet foresees not a military conquest but a religious one, as is clear in the following lines. It is Israel Israel / Judah which reveals Yahweh to the nations, and it is through Israel / Judah that Yahweh receives the surrender of the nations.

On a final note: although this verse does not primarily speak of the wealth of the three nations as such (whatever form that wealth takes), nonetheless one cannot but allude to this aspect as well. We have translated the verse as the '[...] labour of Egypt, the merchandise of the Cushites and Sabians [...].' Although Sadler's focus in this particular verse does not fall on property as such, it is nevertheless significant to note that he has translated 'wealth' instead of 'labour' (cf. Sadler 2001:200). This in my view implies that the three nations were meant to be understood as possessors of property; consequently we have included this particular verse in a discussion of the economic significance of Cush. Mention of labour, or wealth or merchandise, tempts one to bring into the equation issues pertaining to world trade and all its ramifications, some of which

are negative as they entail long tales of exploitation and other similar matters. Isaiah 45:14, just as Isaiah 43:3, does not seem to portray a message of exploitation as much as one of subjugation. In fact, the Cushites in Deutero-Isaiah do not fare well in this regard. They are described as a subjugated people: they will form part of the forced pilgrimages to Jerusalem to bow as vassals before Yahweh, the universal sovereign and the God of Israel / Judah.

Another text which seems to portray Cush in terms of economics is found in the Writings, namely Job 28:19. We now turn our attention to this text.

4.2.3 Job 28:19

Masoretic text:

hlst al rwhj ~tkb vwk-tdjp hnkr[y-al

Translation:

*The topaz of Cush is worthless in comparison, and even
pure gold, is valueless.*

4.2.3.1 Preliminary remarks

This verse should be put into context. Verses 15-19 comprise one section concerning wisdom teaching, akin to the same theme in Proverbs 4:5,7: an admonition to acquire wisdom. The value of wisdom is compared to that of silver, gold, and jewels in Proverbs 3:13-15, and the two themes are combined in the advice that one should ‘buy’ wisdom rather than gold (Pr 16:16). Here, however, the poet reverses the traditional imagery. One cannot purchase wisdom, not even with all the precious metals and jewels in the world.

In Job 28:15-19, the same point is made in a subtle way, in varying sentences. One notes this in the long list of precious gems and metals named. In addition to silver, five different expressions for ‘gold’ are employed, which are impossible to render in

English. Generally they suggest a connoisseur's familiarity with rarities among rarities. Seven different gemstones are named in order to suggest all the fabled riches coming from widely differing places in the world.

As the products of mining, they represent not only wealth but also evidence of the technological power of mining, celebrated in Job 28:1-11. There is also a list-like quality [not quite clear] in the synonymous verbs for exchange or value: 'given,' 'weighed out' (v.15); 'be paid for' (v.16); 'valued' (v.17). The sequence is interrupted in verse 18 by the stylistic phrase 'don't even mention...' and is completed in verse 19 by a repetition of the verbs 'valued' and 'paid for' or 'compared'. The governing repetition, however, is the negative particle 'not': unlike the others it is not varied and begins each verse of the section comprising verses 15-19, except for verse 18. Such is the literary context of Job 28:19.

4.2.3.2 Analytical remarks

Verse 19 comprises part of the wisdom poem in Job 28, or more precisely the 'hymn about the inaccessibility of wisdom'. The *Catholic Study Bible* (1990) however omits it completely in its re-arrangement of the verses, giving no reason for doing so! In this poem several aspects of mining are described, and some of its products are mentioned. In verse 16 we even hear of the legendary 'gold from Ophir', which is rated as nothing by comparison to wisdom. The expression 'Gold from Ophir' would seem to be a stereotyped phrase in the Old Testament (cf. 1 Ki 10:11; 1 Chr 29:4; Is 13:12; Ps 45:10; Jb 22:24), connoting 'abundant' and 'genuine' (North 1967:202). This is why perhaps its exact locality has generally eluded scholars.

The topaz, or chrysolite as some other translations render it, occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament apart from Job 28: in Exodus 28:17, 39:10, and Ezekiel 28:13. In all these instances the word denotes a precious stone in the dress of the high priest's *hošen*, which is understood to be the dress of the king of Tyre. The LXX simply renders it by *τοπαζιον*. In the ancient world no sharp distinction was made between topaz and chrysolite, the latter being regarded as a less-hard variant of topaz (cf. Zimmerli 1969:673). This alone places the 'topaz' of Cush in the context of a precious metal.

Yamauchi (2004) dedicates a few paragraphs to the ‘Gold of Kush [Cush]’, which according to the *Amarna Letters* cited by Moran (1992:44), was ‘as plentiful as dirt’ and made Egypt ‘the richest nation in antiquity’ (Yamauchi 2004:51). Yamauchi (2004:53-54) attests that: ‘Between 1901 and 1903 British geologists identified eighty-five ancient gold mining sites in what was then the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Between 1989 and 1994 German investigators identified more than a hundred additional sites.’

But gold was not the only mineral for which Cush was famed. It was also a source of important materials such as pink granite, which was used for the great monoliths known as obelisks; diorite, used for royal statues especially during the Old and Middle Kingdoms; copper, which was worked at Buhen near the Second Cataract, and bronze, an alloy of copper and tin, as attested to by furnaces discovered during the excavations at Kerma (cf. Yamauchi 2004:51). Furthermore, Yamauchi (2004:132), speaking about the Cushite King Taharqa (the biblical Tirhakah), reports that in his tomb at Nuri, the king had deposited more than 1,070 *ushabti* (*shawabti*) or figurines of various sizes, and that these were made of varied stones: serpentine, granite, limestone, calcite, alabaster, syenite, and ankerite. In addition when Thebes, then under the control of the Cushites, was sacked by the Assyrians in 663 BCE, a massive booty was gathered, including ‘silver, gold, gems, costumes, chattels, and even obelisks!’ (Yamauchi 2004:140). Taharqa himself was so rich that one modern author writes: ‘Representations of Taharqa confront us with almost an embarrassment of riches. In stone, in bronze, and in relief, far more remains of this king than of any other in his dynasty.’ (cf. Yamauchi 2004:131). Thus, there can be no question at all about the riches of Cush.

Although Cush was wealthy in minerals and other precious stones, its gold was obtained at great human cost and labour and was used for ‘international diplomacy’ (cf. Yamauchi 2004:53), implying that it was highly valued. The ‘topaz of Cush’ in Job 28:19 is difficult to identify with any certainty, of course. But assuming that the Cush referred to is the African Cush, one can postulate that the topaz in this verse may very well be one of the precious minerals by another name. In fact, Plinius in his *Historia Naturalis* (cf. Strabo 16,4,6) states that the topaz of Job 28:19 acquired its name from *Topa, zioj* (an island in the Red Sea), implying that the ‘topaz of Cush’ should be looked for in the vicinity of the Red Sea. Hidal (1977:100) is inclined towards such a conclusion: ‘If it is

exactly the island mentioned above—which is possible but not proved—we have come to the border between Egypt (Pathros) and Cush.’

This view brings the ‘topaz of Cush’ to the vicinity mentioned in Yamauchi’s discussion of the ‘Gold of Cush’ (2004:51). Hence, there is every reason to think that the Cush in this verse indeed refers to the territory south of Egypt and to a location which was very much famed for its gold and other precious metals. Topaz may have been one such mineral. Therefore, Job 28:19 qualifies as one of the texts which alludes to the economic understanding of Cush, as Høyland Lavik (2004:81) has also postulated. Furthermore, not only has Yamauchi dedicated several paragraphs to discussing the ‘Gold of Cush’, but he has also provided much information about how it was mined, especially citing the use of slave labour. The allusion to such labour in the process of mineral extraction seems to fit well with the mining techniques cited in Job 28:1-11. But of course, as the context of Job 28 implies, the main point of this chapter is wisdom rather than the wealth of Cush, which is only referred to by implication.

4.3 Political / Military Matters

4.3.1 Introduction

During the period of the united monarchy (Saul, David, Solomon), and also the divided kingdoms that followed, a few Cushites actually appear in the biblical narratives, especially in connection with the political and military affairs of the Israelites. Such involvements are found in 2 Samuel 18:19-32; 2 Kings 19:9 (=Isaiah 37:9); 2 Chronicles 12:3; 14:8-14; 16:8; 21:16; Isaiah 18:1-2; Isaiah 20:3-5; Jeremiah 38-39; Ezekiel 30:4,5,9; Daniel 11:43; Nahum 3:9; and Zephaniah 2:12. It may be noted that all the references from 2 Chronicles cited here point to events occurring at the time of the divided monarchy after Solomon (2 Chr 10 – 36).

But according to Anderson, whose point of view we simply attempt to paraphrase here, these contacts were, rather, the result of prior Egyptian involvement with Syria-Palestine. In other words, when the Cushites took over Egypt and established the Twenty-

fifth Dynasty, they also ‘inherited’ so to speak, Egyptian involvement with Syria and Palestine. As Anderson (1995:62) has argued:

The period of direct political domination of Egypt proper by Cushites is limited to a few short decades during the 25th Dynasty. During this period the Cushites tried to control areas of the former Egyptian empire, often with little success. However, in spite of Assyrian hegemony in Syria-Palestine during this period, many previous economic and trade contacts, some border military districts and garrisons, and some diplomatic missions were apparently maintained. More direct encounters than had previously taken place between Cushites as a group and those groups who lived in Syria-Palestine would seem likely.

In addition, Anderson (1995:58) has furthermore argued: ‘If diplomatic relations were established between Egypt and Israel, then it is likely that Cushites were present in Samaria and possibly in other parts of the Northern Kingdom.’

But it seems to me that attaching any Cushite involvement with Syria-Palestine to Egypt would be tantamount to denying them any initiative of their own. It could be argued, for instance, that if the Cushites were able on their own initiative to defeat the presumably unwilling Egyptians and establish a dynasty, why would they not have done likewise in their dealings with Syria-Palestine?

Be this as it may, I consider that it is not farfetched to believe that Cushites used their initiative in whatever they did and that the references to Cush in regard to political and military matters probably represent the greatest number of times yet that this African nation was involved with Syria-Palestine. It is now to these references that our attention is turned, beginning with the Cushite presence in 2 Samuel 18:19-32. But first, some general historical indicators might be useful in understanding the analyses we are about to undertake. These concern certain important historical figures who will feature in these analyses. Thus, among the Assyrian Kings the following individuals feature prominently: Sargon II (721-705 BCE; cf. Scheffler 2001: 90 et passim) and Sennacherib (704-681). On the Judean side I should like to point out king Hezekiah ben Ahaz (727-698 BCE; cf. Scheffler 2001:121 et passim); and finally, of the Cushite kings, the following are worth

noting: Piankhy (ca 747-716 BCE; cf. Yamauchi 2004:113), Shabako (716-702 BCE; cf. Yamauchi 2004:117) and Tirhakah (690-664 BCE; cf. Yamauchi 2004:128). Between Shabako and Tirhakah there was another king by the name of Shebitku (702-690 BCE; cf. Yamauchi 2004:119), but his influence in Palestine is not attested to.

4.3.2 2 Samuel 18:21-32

Masoretic text:

rva \$lml dgh \$l yvwkl bawy rmayw
#ryw bayyl yvwk wxtvyw htyar

rmayw qwdc-!b #[myxa dw[@syw
rmayw yvwkh yrxa yna-~g an-hcra hm
yhyw bawy-la
tacm hrwfb-!ya hklw ynb #r hta hz-hml
bawy

#ryw #wr wl rmayw #wra hm-yhyw
yvwkh-ta rb[yw rkkh \$rd #[myxa

rfbty yvwkh rmayw ab yvwkh hnhw
\$yl[~ymqh-lk dym ~wyh hwhy \$jpv-yk
\$lmh ynda

r[nl ~wlvh yvwkh-la \$lmh rmayw
lkw \$lmh ynda ybya r[nk wyhy yvwkh
rmayw ~wlvbal
h[r1 \$yl[wmq-rva

Translation:

v. 21 Then Joab said to a Cushite, 'Go, tell the king what you have seen.' The Cushite bowed before Joab, and ran.

v. 22 Then Ahimaaz son of Zadok said again to Joab, 'Come what may, let me also run after the Cushite.' And Joab said, 'Why will you run, my son, seeing that you have no reward for the tidings?'

v.23 'Come what may,' he said, 'I will run.' So he said to him, 'Run.' Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the Plain, and outran the Cushite.

v.31 Then the Cushite came; and the Cushite said, 'Good tidings for my lord the king! For the LORD has vindicated you this day, delivering you from the power of all who rose up against you.'

v.32 The king said to the Cushite, 'Is it well with the young man Absalom?' The Cushite answered, 'May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up to do you harm, be like that young man.'

4.3.2.1 Preliminary remarks

In this section, the appellation ‘Cushi’ appears twice in verse 21, once in verse 22, once in verse 23, twice in verse 31, and twice in verse 32. In fact the pericope under consideration forms part of the subsection which comprises 2 Samuel 17:24–19:9 and is one which could appropriately be entitled: ‘The Decisive Battle and Absalom’s Death’.⁷⁰ The text is in fairly good condition in this section, but the MT yvwk in 18:21b is better read with the article, thus yvwkh (Conroy 1978:43).

It has already been pointed out how almost invariably the ‘Cushite’ messenger has been subjected to all sorts of interpretations, especially by certain members of the traditional western Old Testament school, some of which are quite negative. One of the most atrocious interpretations is perhaps the one offered by the *New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* edited by Fuller (1969:325) which refers to the messenger as ‘[...] an expendable African slave whose colour would be a ready indication of bad news [...].’ But interestingly, another commentary by W G Blaikie, first published in 1893 and then again in 1978, refers to the same messenger as ‘a simple official, not like Ahimaaz a personal friend of David’ (Blaikie 1978:278). The latter interpretation is the one that has been more acceptable to both the African-American and African biblical scholars respectively. Thus, although treating this text anew would seem to be repeating a foregone conclusion, we are taking it up again for the purposes of substantiating the diverse claims thus far expressed.

Furthermore, although the Septuagint treats ‘Cushi’ as a personal name throughout (Hatch & Redpath 1954; see also Conroy 1978:154), I should like to regard it as a gentilic.⁷¹ Therefore, rather than indicating a proper name, ‘Cushi’ should be understood to designate the country of provenance. In fact, all the other occurrences of the word in verses 21-32 use the definite article save 21b (cf. also Conroy 1978:154). Thus, the lack of an article in verse 21b of the MT might be taken as a scribal error.

⁷⁰ I should like to acknowledge the in-depth study of this section by Conroy, 1978.

⁷¹ Not just the LXX; the Greek versions of *Aquila*, *Symmachus*, *Theodotion* have also all taken ‘Cushi’ in 2 Samuel 18 as a proper name.

4.3.2.2 Analytical remarks

The historical context of 2 Samuel 18:19-32 is familiar. The revolt of Absalom results in David's momentary escape to Mahanaim. Meanwhile Joab, David's general, pursues Absalom. He and his skilled and experienced men overtake him in the forest of Ephraim (2 Sm 18:1-8). This was probably a trackless forest from which there could be no escape. During the battle that ensued Absalom's soldiers ended in disarray and Absalom himself, who was riding on a mule, had his head caught in the branches of an oak tree. Some interpreters say that it was his hair which became entangled in the thicket. This is probably due to the influence of 14:26, where it is said that Absalom had an enormous amount of hair on his head. As a result of this Absalom is said to have been 'suspended between heaven and earth' (18:9) and was therefore unable to proceed and make his escape. That is when Joab found him and thrust his 'lance' (actually three pieces of sharpened weapons; cf. v.14) into his heart. Apparently, Absalom did not die immediately but was only mortally wounded. It was Joab's men who finished the grisly task of striking and killing him.

What Joab did was disobedient to David's instructions: 'Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom' (18:5). Absalom's death marked the end of the campaign. All that was left was to report the matter to David.

The next stage in the story which is so graphically reported brings Ahimaaz into the scene again and then, for the first time, the Cushite. The ramifications of the actions of these two men have given rise to all sorts of interpretations. For one thing, Joab wanted the Cushite to report the news (good or bad) to David, but Ahimaaz insisted on going as well and Joab gave him leave. Ahimaaz was too excited to remain behind, yet when he faced the King he lacked the courage to tell the whole story, as Joab had foreseen. It was finally the Cushite who broke the news to David, thus resulting in his grief for Absalom his son.

Some of the questions often asked in connection with the details of this story, not all of which we shall discuss here, are for example the following: Why did Joab not obey David's orders with regard to 'dealing gently with Absalom'? Why did he choose the Cushite to report about Absalom's death? Why did Ahimaaz insist on reporting the news?

Who was the Cushite, and how did he come to be a member of David's army? Many more questions could be posed, but the answers to them will largely remain a matter of speculation. Our concern focuses mainly on the Cushite and his role.

As to the identity of the Cushite, we have already pointed out that many commentaries written by western scholars have almost invariably understood him to be of Cushite origin, therefore a foreigner. They are also unanimous in saying that he was a 'Nubian', or 'Ethiopian', or a 'Black slave' whose colour served as an appropriate symbol of the bad news he was carrying. For this generally negative portrayal of the 'Cushite', I refer the reader to all the arguments advanced in sections 2.2.2 and especially 2.2.3 of this thesis. I also refer the reader to Caspari (1909), Dhorme (1923), De Vaux (1965), and Blenkinsopp (1966), all of whom are cited by Conroy (1978:69).

Given this overwhelming evidence concerning the identity of 'Cushi', one is inclined to question where the idea of his being a 'slave' came from in the first place. In my view, one cannot completely discount the view that it might be reminiscent of the prejudices which were associated with the enslavement of Africans, a phenomenon which can be traced as far back as the fifteenth century (cf. McEvedy 1995:80ff). During that epoch African slaves were shipped to Western Europe and the Americas to do all sorts of menial work, ranging from tending sugar-cane plantations to undertaking household chores such as running errands. Thus, in the present case, if Joab merely needed someone to run errands, a western interpreter of the text of 2 Samuel would see the Cushite in David's army as a natural choice.

However, as if in a concerted effort to refute the interpretation of this text by western biblical scholarship, the African-American scholars, as well as their African counterparts, agree that while the Cushite in question was a foreigner and probably of African descent, they refute any attempts to identify him as a slave. Instead, they argue that most probably he was a 'military officer' (cf. sections 2.3 and 2.4 passim). In fact, even some scholars from the camp of western scholarship, those representative of what may be termed 'new trends' in different approaches to Cush texts, also now view the Cushite in 2 Samuel 18 and other Cush texts more favourably (cf. 2.2.4). Høyland Lavik (2004:79; cf. also 2.2.4.2 above) even calls the Cushite in question a 'Cushite Officer',

although it is difficult to conclude from the text that he was a military officer in the sense we understand that term today.

The reasons behind this positive new understanding of the identity of Joab's messenger are as diverse as the number of interpreters involved. Still, it is not clear why Joab was so unwilling to let Ahimaaz carry the news. Personally, I consider that the overriding reason is the one connected with the fact that the Cushite was a stranger and also a mercenary in David's army.⁷² This is also the view of Conroy (1978:69, especially note 102) who has suggested that Joab chose the Cushite, not necessarily because he was black, but simply because he was a foreigner: '...it is preferable to think that Joab chose the Cushite simply because he was an alien and hence, if the worst came to the worst, more expendable.' To substantiate his argument, Conroy cites the example of Obed-Edom the Gittite in 2 Samuel 6, who was chosen to host the Ark (cf. Conroy 1978:69, note 102).

Verse 22 suggests that the task might have been merely a matter of reward, but Gordon (1986:286) has pointed out David's unpredictability towards messengers of bad tidings (cf. 1:15-16; 4:8-12), although in the cases cited the messengers themselves were implicated in the unfortunate events. If indeed the messengers of good news often received rewards, then as Anderson (1989:226) has suggested 'there might be the tendency to use the less important members of one's staff for evil tidings.' It is my contention that in this regard, the Cushite was less important by reason of being a stranger and a mercenary. Owing to the same reason he was therefore also more expendable in the eyes of Joab. After all, who does not know that usually 'blood is thicker than water' when it comes to difficult situations?

Another text which speaks about the function of Cush in relation to political and military matters is to be found in the so-called Former Prophets. This is the text of 2 Kings 19:9, which is the object of our next analysis. This verse is rehearsed almost verbatim by Isaiah 37:9.

⁷² For the role of Cushites as mercenaries much information has been provided by authors such as, among others, Rice (1979), Hays (1996). See also section 3.2.2 of this thesis.

4.3.3 2 Kings 19:9 (= Isaiah 37:9)

Masoretic text:

acy hnh rmal vwk-šlm hqhrt-la [mvyw
rma1 whyqzx-la ~ykalm xlvyw bvyw \$ta
~xlhl

Translation:

*When the king heard concerning King Tirhakah of Cush,
'See, he has set out to fight against you,' he sent
messengers again to Hezekiah, saying, [Thus shall you
speak to Hezekiah, King of Judah:]*

4.3.3.1 Preliminary remarks

The first remark to be made is that both the texts of 2 Kings 19:9 and Isaiah 37:9 mention King Tirhakah of Cush. In addition, the historical events surrounding these two texts are identical. Thus, in as far as their historical context is concerned, they will be presumed to belong together in this analysis, although of course it will be assumed that Isaiah 37 rehearses a narrative already known from 2 Kings 19.

Another remark that merits pointing out concerns the translation. The Hebrew text ends with a word which may be translated by the English gerund 'saying' but which makes the sentence incomplete. Thus, in order to offset this rather awkward ending we have provided in square brackets the English translation of the first part of verse 10, which does not form part of our discussion. This notwithstanding, verse 9 in fact forms part of the larger pericope of the section of 2 Kings 19 which comprises verses 1-37 and whose content may be termed 'Hezekiah consults Isaiah'. The historical events

surrounding this pericope generally speak about the continued siege of Jerusalem (vv.1-13), and the eventual deliverance of the city (vv.14-37). It is in the context of the continued siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians that ‘Tirhakah of Cush’ (2 Ki 19:9; Is 37:9) is alluded to. This allusion is the *raison d’etre* of our investigation here.

4.3.3.2 Analytical remarks

The continued siege of Jerusalem (2 Ki 19:1-13) clearly represents for King Hezekiah a moment of national crisis. Desiring to do all that was within his power to know God’s will concerning the matter, Hezekiah sends Eliakim, Shebna, and the leading priests, all dressed in sackcloth (a symbol of mourning), to meet with Isaiah so that he might hear God’s word through his prophet (vv.1-3). To the repentant Hezekiah who interpreted the events looming over Jerusalem as portending not only physical but also spiritual consequences, Isaiah uttered his message: not to fear the blasphemous words of the Assyrian King Sennacherib who will eventually suffer death. Thus, through Isaiah, Hezekiah is assured that God is in control of the entire situation. God himself will deal with the Assyrian threat.

During this unfolding of events Tirhakah of Cush was advancing through the Philistine coast to aid the Philistine city of Ekron. Apparently having bypassed Ekron, the Assyrian King was able to bring his forces safely to Eltekeh where he met and defeated the Egyptian / Cushite troops whom Tirhakah had brought to the aid of Hezekiah. After this victory, Sennacherib turned back inland to capture Timnah and then Ekron itself. While he was thus engaged in fighting, he despatched a siege contingent to Jerusalem to prevent Hezekiah from attacking from the rear. But for all his military planning, the Assyrian king was not successful in his assault on Jerusalem. As the Assyrian annals report, all Sennacherib succeeded in doing was to render Hezekiah ‘a prisoner in Jerusalem, like a bird in a cage’ (cf. Scheffler 2001:124). Such is the general reconstruction of the events as far as we can gather it from the biblical narrative.

But from the historical point of view, things are not as crystal clear as they appear. For example, it is difficult to fit into the time frame suggested by 2 Kings 19:9, and also by Isaiah 37:9, the reference to Tirhakah to whom the biblical text refers as

‘king’, when it is certain that he began his reign only in 690 BCE (cf. Hays 1996:403; Anderson 1995:58; Yamauchi 2004:125). This allusion to Tirhakah as king has caused some scholars to dismiss the biblical reference in 2 Kings 19:9 as unhistorical. Yamauchi (2004:125) for instance cites Redford, who holds the view that the author of 2 Kings 19 was simply mistaken. Again, Yamauchi (2004:125) cites another author, Spalinger, who is said to consider the reference in 2 Kings 19:9 as an ‘anachronism’. This is another way of saying that it is not historical.

Thus, in an attempt to solve the problem of historical dating, some scholars, again cited by Yamauchi, have suggested that the Assyrian king Sennacherib did in fact conduct two military campaigns against Judah (cf. Yamauchi 2004:125ff). According to this scenario, the first invasion by Sennacherib resulted in a battle with an Egyptian / Cushite army at Eltekeh, followed by a siege of Jerusalem and Hezekiah’s agreement to pay tribute. The second campaign around 689 BCE resulted in the capture of Lachish, a second siege of Jerusalem and the intervention of the Egyptian / Cushite army led by Tirhakah after he had become king in 690 BCE (cf. Yamauchi 2004:125-126).

But Kitchen (1999), who is cited by Yamauchi as being ‘convincing’, has argued for only one Assyrian military campaign under Sennacherib, and two battles at Eltekeh. According to Yamauchi, Kitchen has shown that Tirhakah was about twenty years old in 701 BCE and was therefore old enough to lead an army. According to this view, the reference to Tirhakah as king is then to be taken as a proleptic designation, inasmuch as the account was certainly written after he had become king (cf. Yamauchi 2004:126-127). This view is also more or less supported by Honor (1966:34), who has suggested that perhaps Tirhakah was a military commander before he became king (cf. Hays 1996:403). At any rate, the Assyrian and the Hebrew accounts agree that Sennacherib did not actually capture Jerusalem, but only ‘shut up Hezekiah like a bird.’ Hays (1996:403) claims that the annals of Sennacherib say nothing about the disaster described in 2 Kings 19:35-36 and Isaiah 37:36-37 and that in any case, the Assyrian king would hardly have recorded such a disastrous defeat. Furthermore, Sennacherib’s annals do not mention Tirhakah by name, as later Assyrian annals do, but they do mention this event (cf. Hays 1996:403). According to Sennacherib’s account, Hezekiah appealed to Egypt and Cush (both under Cushite rule) for help against the Assyrians, and the Cushite king responded

with an army. Sennacherib apparently turned from Jerusalem to defeat this Egyptian / Cushite army and then turned his attention to Jerusalem, but without success (cf. Hays 1996:403-404).

In this connection it will be remembered that during the Twenty-fifth Egyptian Dynasty, Cushites ruled Egypt and attempted to intervene in Palestine. According to Yamauchi (2004:107), the most important ruler of this dynasty was Taharqa (the biblical Tirhakah). While strictly speaking this dynasty was founded by Piankhy (Piye) in 747-716 (cf. Yamauchi 2004:114), it was Taharqa, who reigned for twenty-six years from 690 to 664, who was without question ‘the most important pharaoh of the 25th Dynasty’ (Yamauchi 2004:128).

We must admit that the historical events surrounding this verse and also Isaiah 37:9 are very complex. But, these historical difficulties apart, the biblical record is clear in stressing that God was responsible for the deliverance of Hezekiah and Jerusalem. We should therefore be very careful in providing too much detail about Tirhakah’s role, or else we may diminish Yahweh’s role in defeating Sennacherib. What is significant for us, of course, is the fact that Tirhakah, presumably a black king, allied himself with Judah against the Assyrians. The reference to Tirhakah suggests that there was a Cushite presence in Judah, or at least that some form of diplomatic relations existed between Egypt and Judah, or that the redactor of 2 Kings 19:9, and for that matter of Isaiah 37:9, remembered this king from the Cushite era. This is nevertheless significant even though his intervention is described as a failure, and thus a confirmation of Isaiah’s frequent warnings about the folly of relying upon Egypt (cf. Is 18:1-4; 30:1-8; 31:1-3; see also Is 36:6 and Ezk 30:14-16), because it demonstrates that Isaiah’s prophecies concerning the events so far described were fulfilled.

Two other texts which portray Cushites in their involvement with Palestine and which make reference to the same historical events are the now familiar passages of Isaiah 18:1-2 and Isaiah 20:1-6. As with the preceding two texts the common denominator which permits these texts to be grouped together is Assyria. Our attention is now directed to these texts.

The Cush references in the latter former prophets [?doesn’t make sense] are not confined to the books of Samuel and Kings only. They are also to be found in the books

of Chronicles, an understandable fact given the relationship between these books. In fact, McKenzie has written, ‘The books of Samuel and Kings are the Chronicler’s main source and the basis for his “rewritten Bible”’ (2004:35). It is now to the Cush references in Chronicles that the following four main sections are dedicated.

4.3.4 2 Chronicles 12:3

Masoretic text:

~yyks ~ybwł ~yrcmm wm[wab-rva ~[l rpsm
!yaw
~yvkw

Translation:

*And the people were without number who came with him
from Egypt -- Libyans, Sukkiim, and Cushites.*

4.3.4.1 Preliminary remarks

The text of 2 Chronicles 12:3 is bracketed by the narrative section of 2 Chronicles 10:1 – 12:16. This section describes the events surrounding the accession to the throne by Rehoboam of Judah after the death of Solomon his father. The account of Shishak’s invasion in 2 Chronicles 12:1-12, which includes the verse mentioning Libyans, Sukkim, and Cushites, borrows from 1 Kings 14:25-31, although with significant recasting and supplementation (McKenzie 2004:267). 2 Chronicles 12:2 finds a rough parallel in 1 Kings 14:25, and 2 Chronicles 12:9-11 is very similar to 1 Kings 14:26-28. But the rest of the verses, thus including verse 3 which speaks of Cushites and its allies, are unique. The text too is quite straightforward.

4.3.4.2 Analytical remarks

The term ‘Cush’ occurs once in this chapter, in verse 3. The account involving Cush begins in the fifth year of the reign of Rehoboam, king of Judah, circa 930-913 (cf. Sadler 2001:298), when Shishak (Sheshonq I), the Libyan founder of the Twenty-second Egyptian Dynasty, invaded Judah. However, exactly when this occurred remains a matter of contention, as is the case regarding a number of other factors related to Shishak’s relationship with his neighbours to the north (cf. Sadler 2001:299).

According to Kitchen (1973:72-76), also cited by Sadler (2001:299), by the time of the invasion, Shishak was already a firmly-entrenched ruler, twenty or so years into his reign (Sadler 2001:299). And before this invasion, Shishak had been successful in a previous campaign to pacify the Cushites on Egypt’s southern border (Kitchen 1973:72-76). He subsequently turned his attention to Palestine, which was then in disarray following the split of the United Kingdom of ‘Israel’. One should note that the term ‘Israel’ in this context may refer either to the entire nation, Judah included, or to the northern tribes or nation alone (cf. McKenzie 2004 261). It may also be remarked that Shishak had initially given asylum to the exiled king Jeroboam (1 Ki 11:40). This might indicate that he was in alliance with the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Kitchen, however, does not explain why Shishak invaded Israel and why he seemed more concerned with devastating Israel (Kitchen 1973:296-300).

However, Redford (1973:3-17), contrary to Kitchen, considers that the invasion of Judah occurred fairly soon after Shishak began to rule Egypt, and is of the opinion that the Bible may not have accurately portrayed the reason for the invasion. He furthermore suggests that the Egyptian king may have entered Palestine at the behest of Rehoboam, son of the Egyptian ally, Solomon, to eliminate the threat which the rebellious northern kingdom under Jeroboam posed to the stability of the region (Redford 1973:3-11). In fact, this seems to reflect the message of 2 Chronicles 12:8 by means of which Judah’s enduring service to Egypt is implied. In the Chronicler’s view, Jeroboam and the north

are in sinful rebellion, not just against the Davidic line and Judah, as in verse 19 (= 1 Ki 12:19), but against God (cf. McKenzie 2004:263).

Yamauchi (2004:109), following O'Connor (1993:67), is of the view that it was in 925 BCE that Shoshenq I (Shishak), then pharaoh of Egypt, invaded Judah and Israel and employed Nubians (Cushites) in his army. And that later, his son Osorkon I despatched against Judah another army headed by a general called Zerah, the Cushite (cf. Yamauchi 2004:109).

Thus, the reference to Cushites and their allies is linked to the invasion of Israel by Shishak. The reason seems to have been general instability in the region (cf. Sadler 2001:301). Shishak's Egyptian army is, however, notable for its ethnic composition: it is made up of Libyans, Sukkites and Cushites. The inclusion of both Libyans and Sukkites is understandable given that Shishak was the chief of the Meshwesh, a powerful tribe of Libyan warriors (cf. Sadler 2001:301). He was the founder of the twenty-second Egyptian dynasty (945-715 BCE), ruling over that dynasty for a period of twenty-one years (945-924 BCE, cf. Yamauchi 2004:188). The Sukkites are thought to have been another Libyan group and constitute obvious allies of their compatriot Shishak in his present powerful position (cf. Kitchen 1973:295, note 291).

The Cushites, though, seem to have been included as a result of Shishak's campaign in Cush, but little is known of it. Kitchen (1973:293-300) opines that Shishak's foray into Cush was intended to secure resources from the rich region or perhaps to resolve a border dispute. After the campaign he then enlists the Cushites into his army along with Libyans and Sukkites. Cushites may have remained in the general region as a military occupying force and as emissaries of the twenty-second Egyptian dynasty, since they continue to be mentioned in 2 Chronicles 14; 16; 21.

Thus, there can be no doubting the military prowess of the Cushites since they are portrayed as being amongst the agents enforcing Egyptian supremacy. Their involvement also accords weight to the assumption that they were not dominated by the Judahite community that was responsible for recording the narrative. If this had not been the case, the writer of 2 Chronicles 12:3 would have glossed over the matter without any qualms. The same situation appears to exist regarding the subsequent narratives of 2 Chronicles below. The Cushites are portrayed as part of a group having superior power

and influence, although in most cases they tend to be overshadowed by their Egyptian allies.

4.3.5 2 Chronicles 14:8-14

The verses which refer to Cush in the pericope of 2 Chronicles 14:9-15 include the following: verses 8, 11, and 12.

Masoretic text:

@la lyxb yvwkh xrz ~hyla acyw
hvrn-d[abyw twam vlv twbkrmw ~ypla

ynplw asa ynpl ~yvwkh-ta hwhy @gyw
~yvwkh wsnyw hdwhy

rrgl-d[wm[-rva ~[hw asa ~pdryw
ynplw hwhy-ynpl wrbvn-yk hyxm ~hl !yal
~yvwkm lpyw
dam hbrh llv wafyw whnxm

Translation:

*v.8 Zerah the Cushite came out against them with an army
of a million men and three hundred chariots, and came as
far as Mareshah.*

v.11 So the LORD defeated the Cushites before Asa and before Judah, and the Cushites fled.

v.12 Asa and the army with him pursued them as far as Gerar, and the Cushites fell until no one remained alive; for they were broken before the LORD and his army. The people of Judah carried away a great quantity of booty.

4.3.5.1 Preliminary remarks

The section which encompasses the verses referring to Cush, namely 2 Chronicles 14:8-15, may be termed as ‘The beginning of the reign of King Asa and his victory over Zerah the Cushite’. I should like to note, though, that not all the versions and commentators concur with regard to the division of the verses in this pericope. But I follow the division of the Hebrew text.

The books of Chronicles are usually assumed to recount the parallel events in the books of Kings. As regards the incident with reference to Zerah, it is not mentioned at all in the books of Kings. However, only a brief account exists there concerning King Asa (cf. 1 Ki 15:9-24), whereas in 2 Chronicles the narrative about him is embellished and expanded to three whole chapters, namely 14, 15, and 16. Verses 1-5 roughly correspond with 1 Kings 15:8-14, whereas verses 6-8 comprise an addition from another source. Verses 9-15, which recount the piety of Asa and the power of the Lord, are not reported anywhere else in the Bible. So the inevitable question which arises is that of the historicity of the military campaign waged by Zerah the Cushite, as narrated in 2 Chronicles. We shall come to this question shortly.

Asa is presented by the Chronicler as a man like David, great on the battlefield and diligent in religious reform, although in the end his religious loyalty flags and he is suitably punished. Although the story of Zerah the Cushite is not reported anywhere else in the Bible, we are nevertheless taking it up on the grounds that it appears in one of the canonical books of the Hebrew Bible.

4.3.5.2 Analytical remarks

The passage recounts the expedition by Zerah the Cushite who confronted Asa (913-873 BCE, cf. Hays 1996:401)⁷³ of Judah with an army of a million men, literally ‘a thousand of thousands men’, an expression we have rendered simply as a ‘million men’. Selman (1994:388-389) suggests that Zerah’s army is best understood as comprising ‘1000 units’ (cf. also Yamauchi 2004:108). However, according to Noth (1958:107), the men of the clan, who were liable to serve in the militia unit of that clan, constituted what is referred to in the Bible as ‘thousand (s)’, as a way of measuring the clan’s military strength. Thus, according to him the number in itself is of ‘no significance’ (Noth 1958:107). Consequently, I am inclined to think that this seems to have been the case also in the present context, although the Chronicler’s use of the ‘Holy War’ tradition as a factor influencing the exaggerated numbers cannot be discounted altogether.⁷⁴

As if to underscore the military strength of Zerah, the author of the Hebrew text also reports that he could deploy three hundred chariots (v.8). No doubt such a show of military might must have produced in the unfortunate Asa feelings of awe and shock. Asa then called to the Lord for help and the Lord awarded him victory over Zerah.

The main difficulty with this episode, as we pointed out earlier, is the question of its historicity. This question arises because the military campaign by Zerah the Cushite is not recorded in the Books of Kings or even anywhere else in the Bible. It is also doubtful that even a military general could marshal so many soldiers in one single expedition at a moment’s notice! Unless, of course, we are confronted with the usual case of the biblical tendency to exaggerate numbers. Consequently, some authors, for example Knauf, have

⁷³ Scheffler (2001:111) dates the reign of King Asa of Judah as extending from 905-874. Thus, Asa reigned, according to Scheffler’s dating, for 31 years, whereas according to Hays, he did so for 40 years. Whatever the case, the point that Asa ruled for ‘a long time’ is made.

⁷⁴ For a resumé of the concept of the ‘Holy War’ tradition, see for example Bauer, 1970:958-961; see also Noth, 1958:107ff.

questioned its historical value, whereas others, for example Myers and Bright, have argued for the historicity of the event (cf. Hays 1996:401-402; Yamauchi 2004:108).

According to Knauf, cited by Hays (1996:401), the event as recorded is not historical. Zerah could not have been a ruler from Cush, but then no evidence is cited for this claim. Hays also cites Knauf who contends that Zerah could not also have been an Egyptian because according to Knauf, again cited by Hays (1996:401), no Egyptians are given names starting with 'z'. Knauf is reported (cf. Hays 1996:401) as arguing that the story of 2 Chronicles may refer to a later skirmish with Bedouins, especially because the passage mentions camels.

But according to Myers and Bright, also cited by Hays (1996:402), the event of Zerah the Cushite is historical. These writers also argue, according to Hays, that Zerah was either a Cushite mercenary in the Egyptian army or an Arab. The evidence they present regarding the 'Arab' possibility is the text of Habakkuk 3:7 and Numbers 12:1, both of which are in any case dubious texts for establishing any Arab connection to the term 'Cush'. Hays has, in my opinion, argued convincingly against any Arab or Bedouin connection (1996:402).⁷⁵ Another author, also cited by Hays (1996:402), contends that Zerah is not called a king, but that he was a Cushite general sent by Pharaoh Osorkon. But Hidal (1977:100) disagrees: 'To identify him with Pharaoh [sic] Osorkon I of the 22nd dynasty is impossible already from a linguistic point of view.' According to Hidal (1977:101), 'Zerah was in all probability the chief of [...] an Arab guerilla band of a rather small size, which, in the disturbed period after Shishak's campaign, got a considerably expanded field of action. Cush might then be the name of an ethnic group, living in the vicinity of Judaea.' But, according to Hays (1996:402), Zerah the Cushite should be viewed as 'a Cushite general, either working directly for Pharaoh Osorkon or invading under a treaty provision with him.' Thus, we meet seemingly rather conflicting views from these two authors, although both agree as to the connection of Zerah with Egypt.

Yamauchi (2004:108-109) has cited Albright who connects the event to 1 Chronicles 4:40, according to which Zerah's army was derived from Hamites; these may

⁷⁵ For additional reasons to discount the Arab and/or Bedouin connection to the texts of Habakkuk 3:7 and Numbers 12:1, the reader is referred to section 3.4.1 of this thesis.

have been a colony of mercenaries established by Pharaoh Shoshenq I (Shishak I) after he invaded Judah in the fifth year of Rehoboam (2 Chr 12:3). Yamauchi (2004:109) also cites another author, Kitchen, according to whom Zerah was probably a commander on behalf of the Libyan pharaoh Osorkon I (924-889 BCE), the son of Shoshenq I. Following O'Connor (1993:67), Yamauchi points out that Dynasties 21-24 consisted of pharaohs who arose from Libyans who had settled in Lower Egypt (cf. Yamauchi 2004:109). According to O'Connor, cited by Yamauchi (2004:109), in 925 BCE, Shoshenq, then pharaoh of Egypt, invaded Judah and Israel, and employed Cushites in his army. Later his son Osorkon I despatched against Judah another army headed by a general called Zerah the Cushite. In both cases, Nubians who had been settled in Egypt for generations might have been involved, but it is equally possible that the Nubians in question were recruited in Upper Nubia or 'even dispatched from there thence by some Nubian [Cushite] "ally" of the Egyptians.'

Thus, it seems to me that the argument which links the event to Egypt and its pharaohs and which even mentions Zerah by name appears to be accurate. It fits well with the earlier invasion by the Egyptian Pharaoh Shishak, recorded in 2 Chronicles 12, where Cushites are listed as part of the Egyptian army. If this is granted, then it can be deduced that not only is Zerah's event historical, but also that, given the Cushite prowess in military matters, there is a distinct probability that this African general nurtured real ambitions against Asa. It also renders unacceptable Hidal's view that Zerah was just the leader of an Arab guerilla band, because guerillas do not normally wage battles in a conventional manner, as did Zerah.

But more importantly, whatever the scholarly agreements or disagreements concerning the event might be, the significance to this study of the story in 2 Chronicles 14 is that Zerah offers another example of Cushites playing important political/military roles within the ancient Near East in general, and within Israel/Judah in particular. The Cushites are also portrayed as seasoned in the art of war, and had it not been for Yahweh's omnipotent intervention, King Asa of Judah would have stood no chance of winning this particular battle against Zerah.

4.3.6 2 Chronicles 16:8

Masoretic text:

brl lyxl wyh ~ybwllhw ~yvwkh alh
~ntn hwhy-l[\$n[vhbw dam hbrhl ~yvrplw
bkrl
\$dyb

Translation:

*Were not the Cushites and the Libyans a huge army with
exceedingly many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you
relied on the LORD, he gave them into your hand.*

4.3.6.1 Preliminary remarks

As with the previous section (4.3.5), the text from 2 Chronicles 16:8 is bracketed by the narrative concerning the reign of king Asa in 2 Chronicles 14:1 – 16:14. Judging from the number of verses (16 versus 48), Chronicles' account of Asa's reign is three times longer than that of Kings (1 Ki 15:9-24). The reason is perhaps that it illustrates at length some of the Chronicler's theological concepts (cf. McKenzie 2004:275).

In essence, there are two parts to the Chronicler's account, each focusing on a military threat. Asa responds differently to the two threats, and herein lies the lesson which the Chronicler derives from Asa (cf. McKenzie 2004:275). Each of these episodes is accompanied by an oracle, purportedly delivered by a prophet for the occasion and expressing the Chronicler's perspective.

The first military threat is offered by Zerah the Cushite whom Yahweh defeats because of Asa's piety (14:8-15). The second threat which evokes a less pious reaction from Asa is 16:1-14, the focus of this section. The conclusion to the record of Asa's reign recounts his death and his burial (16:11-14).

It can also be noted that most of this material is unique to Chronicles, and that those sections which are paralleled in 1 Kings (15:16-18; 16:1-6.11-14) attest significant elaboration (cf. McKenzie 2004:276).

4.3.6.2 Analytical remarks

The conflict between king Asa of Judah and Baasha king of Israel in 2 Chronicles is set during Asa's thirty-sixth year (16:1). Although the origin of the figures thirty-fifth (15:19), thirty-six (16:1), and thirty-ninth (16:12) years remains uncertain, the artificiality of the chronological scheme in Chronicles is relatively clear (cf. McKenzie 2004:283). According to McKenzie, 'The Chronicler placed Asa's misdeeds at the end of his reign in order to account for his disease as punishment' (2004:283). McKenzie also notes that continual warfare was waged between Baasha and Asa. This allows the Chronicler to depict Asa's reign as a time of peace, as a reward for his faithful response to the threat of Zerah (cf. McKenzie 2004:283).

The takeover of Ramah by Baasha constituted a real threat for Asa, but instead of concentrating on the attack, the Chronicler chooses to focus on Asa's reaction instead. In the face of this threat, Asa literally 'bribes' the Aramean, Ben-hadad, into attacking Israel (cf. v.4). Asa uses Temple funds for this purpose (16:3). As a result of this impending threat, Baasha in his turn is forced to withdraw his offensive against Judah (16:1-5). Thus, what Asa did seemed a shrewd but effective solution to his problem, at least in the short term. But the Chronicler's assessment is religious rather than political. He perceives it as an act of faithlessness on the part of Asa, a failure to rely on God, as he did in 14:9-11, when he was confronted by Zerah the Cushite. This failure is the core of the criticism levelled by Hanani's prophecy in 16:7-10, especially verse 8, the focus of this section: *'Were not the Cushites and the Libyans a huge army with exceedingly many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the LORD, he gave them into your hand.'*

According to Japhet (1993:736), the language of the prophecy is late, but according to McKenzie (2004:283), the ideology is the Chronicler's, and so is the composition. Two consequences result from Asa's unfaithfulness. First, whereas he could have conquered the Arameans led by Baasha, as David had once done (1 Chr 19), they have now escaped (16:7). Second, Asa, whose reign has been peaceful for the most part, will now face wars (16:9). To confound matters for himself, Asa responds angrily to Hanani's oracle and has him thrown into prison (16:10; cf. also 2 Chr 18:26 // 1 Ki 22:27; Jr 20:2-3; 29:26). He is also accused of oppressing some of his own people. Whereas in chapters 14 – 15, he united with them and led them in reliance upon God, he now turns against them and thus compounds his failure to trust in Yahweh's deliverance.

Finally, in 16:11, the Chronicler turns to the concluding verdict on Asa. He is struck by a disease of the 'feet'. According to McKenzie (2004:284-285), the term 'feet' here might be used as a euphemism for the genitals. If this is the case, then Asa's affliction may have been some form of venereal disease. The Chronicler however seems less concerned with Asa's disease than he is with the theological implications associated with it. Even suffering from the disease, Asa has the opportunity to trust in God, but he relies instead on human healers or 'physicians' (16:12).

The understanding of Cushites and their allies in this text therefore seems to be imbedded in the understanding of the Chronicler's message in Asa's reign. The primary theological lesson of Asa's reign is succinctly expressed in 2 Chronicles 15:2. Those who seek Yahweh will be found by him, while those who forsake him will be forsaken by him. Asa's career vividly illustrates both of these principles. For the most part he sought Yahweh, and he was rewarded with peace, but when he forsakes him he is rewarded with warfare and disease. As McKenzie has observed: 'The main point of the account about Asa in Chronicles, then, seems to be to provide a paradigm for the principle of immediate retribution or reward' (2004:285; so also Yamauchi 2004:108). Thus, the defeat of the Cushites and their allies which is envisaged in 16:8 is intrinsically linked to the fate of Asa.

Not much is said about the Cushites here, though. No Cushite characters are mentioned either. The only detail is perhaps the reference to the victory Yahweh won for Asa over the armies of Zerah the Cushite. As Sadler has pointed out, it can also be

inferred that the inclusion of the Libyans is not inconsequential, for it confirms the Chronicler's viewpoint that Zerah's attack was part of an Egyptian expedition (2001:310). He furthermore argues that the Chronicler's account here leaves little doubt that the expedition of Zerah the Cushite in 2 Chronicles 14 does not refer to raiders from an Arabic Cushan (cf. Sadler 2004:310-311). 2 Chronicles 16:8 also indicates that Libyans were quite active in the Egyptian army during the twenty-second dynasty. Like Libyans, Cushites too may be presumed to have been active especially as soldiers in the Egyptian army. They are mentioned here to demonstrate Yahweh's fidelity by recalling Asa's victory over a mighty army.

4.3.7 2 Chronicles 21:16

Masoretic text:

xwr ta ~rwhy-l [hwhy r[yw
~yvwk dy-l [rva ~ybr[hw ~ytlvlph

Translation:

*And the LORD stirred up against Jehoram the anger of the
Philistines and of the Arabs who are near the Cushites.*

4.3.7.1 Preliminary remarks

The text of 2 Chronicles 21:16 is bracketed by 2 Chronicles 21:1 – 23: 21 which deals with the reigns of two kings and one queen: Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Athaliah respectively. As usual, the narratives in Kings provide the basis for the Chronicler's accounts, who however supplements and alters his source from Kings in typical fashion, except for the story of Jehu's revolt (2 Ki 9 – 10), which the Chronicler radically

abbreviates in a somewhat unusual and creative way (cf. McKenzie 2004:300). The reign of Jehoram comprises the narrative of 2 Chronicles 21:1-20. It is in connection with his reign therefore that reference is made to Cush. The present analysis will consequently be limited to Jehoram's reign only. Ahaziah's and Athaliah's reigns are reported in 2 Chronicles 22:1-9, and 22:10 – 23:21, respectively.

4.3.7.2 Analytical remarks

Jehoram's reign in chapter 21 may be divided into the following segments: i) Jehoram's accession and evaluation (vv.1-7); ii) the rebellion of Edom and Libnah (vv.8-10); iii) Jehoram's other sins (v.11); iv) Elijah's letter (vv.12-15); v) the invasion of the Philistines and Arabs 'who are near the Cushites' (vv.16-17); and vi) Jehoram's disease, death, and burial (vv.18-20). What role then does segment (v), where 'Cush' appears, play in this scheme?

It may be immediately noted that the order of these segments illustrates the Chronicler's most basic theological scheme: sin-punishment-sin-warning-punishment (cf. McKenzie 2004:301). It should also be pointed out that the temporal clause $\text{d}y - \text{l}$ [qualifying the Cushites needs comment.

Although we have translated it 'near', following, among others, RSV (1952), Myers (1965:123), Japhet (1993:814) *et cetera*, other scholars have translated it differently. Such is the case with *The New World Translation of Holy Scripture* (1984), according to which the temporal clause is translated 'under the control of' the Cushites, thus 'the Philistines and Arabs who were *under the control* of the Cushites' (1984:576). A similar view has been expressed by Sadler, although he uses 'authority' instead of 'control' (2001:313). In the same vein also is the rendering by Johnstone (1997:113), who is cited by Sadler (2001:313, note 34).

The latter view which suggests 'control' or 'authority' merits comment. Left as it is, the Cushites would certainly be portrayed in a positive light since they would appear as wielding power over the others in the group. Sadler has argued strongly for this view, citing among other reasons first, the similarity between 2 Chronicles 21:16 and 2 Chronicles 14, where Zerah the Cushite is identified as the leader of the Egyptian forces.

Sadler argues that a similar power hierarchy is evident here. Furthermore, Sadler draws parallels between 2 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles 12, where the Egyptian army served as agents of Yahweh's wrath against the unfaithful Judean king. Sadler therefore concludes that in chapter 12, Yahweh punishes Rehoboam for his infidelity and that in 2 Chronicles 21 Jehoram is likewise chastised by an Egyptian coalition. Therefore, Sadler concludes, 'The Chronicler employs the powerful Cushites as the conduit of YHWH's wrath' (2001:313). Thus, in Sadler's view, the Chronicler uses the Cushites and their allies as tropes not just of military might but also of the metaphoric sword, wielded to remind Yahweh's people of their responsibility to be faithful to the covenant of their God (cf. Sadler 2001:314). In conclusion, Sadler argues that there is no disparagement of the Cushites in 2 Chronicles 21, for they appear instead as leaders, not just members, of a force mightier than Judah, although the Chronicler does not provide them with a voice or with any depth as characters (cf. Sadler 2001:314).

However attractive this position might be, I am still inclined to follow the rendering of the RSV (1952), Myers (1965), and Japhet (1993). I contend that the temporal clause is probably better understood as 'near' or 'besides' rather than in the sense of 'control' or 'authority'. First of all, it would not make any difference to the fate of Jehoram whether or not the Cushites were the leaders of their allies. Secondly and more importantly, the Chronicler's point is that because Jehoram had sinned, his punishment as announced in Elijah's letter was expected to occur. Elijah had predicted a 'great plague' (v.14) that resulted in the loss of Jehoram's family and property. To be sure, what agent in the given circumstances was powerful enough to deliver this 'great plague', if not an alliance already known for doing so before? The prophecy of Elijah came to be realized in a swift manner, almost without resistance, through the agency of the Philistines and the Arabs (vv.16-17).

It is important also to note that the defeat of Jehoram did not stem from Edom and Libnah (vv.8-10), the enemy to the south / south-west, but rather from the Philistines and Arabs (vv.16-17) a vicious enemy to the west / south-west, and one nearby the Cushites to the south. According to Japhet (1993:814), 'The Arabs who are near the Cushites probably defines their geographical situation: in Asa's time the "Cushites" were affiliated to the vicinity of Gerar (14:13), that is south-west of Judah.' Finally, in verse 18, the

Chronicler turns to the punishment inflicted on Jehoram's body, just as prophesied in verse 16 and exactly as foretold by Elijah.

These invasions provide yet another contrast between Jehoram and his immediate predecessors. The Philistines and Arabs brought their tribute to Jehoshapat, Jehoram's father (17:11), and the mention of the Cushites recalls Asa's success against them in 14:13. Therefore mention of them here seems to be made in order to complete the strength of the forces against Jehoram, although this does not necessarily preclude their involvement in the actual military campaign.

4.3.8 Isaiah 18:1-2

Masoretic text:

vwk-yrhnl rb[m rva ~ypnk lclc #ra ywh
~ym-ynp-l[amg-ylkbw ~yryc ~yb xlvh
arwn ~[-la jrwmw \$vmm ywg-la ~ylq
~ykalm wkl
wcra ~yrhn wazb-rva hswbmw wq-wq ywg
halhw awh-!m

Translation:

v.1 *Ah, land of whirring wings beyond the rivers of Cush,
v.2 sending ambassadors by the Nile in vessels of papyrus
on the waters! Go, you swift messengers, to a nation tall
and smooth, to a people feared near and far, a nation
mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide.*

4.3.8.1 Preliminary remarks

Isaiah 18:1-2 may be said to be linked with 2 Kings 19:9 owing to the allusion of both texts to the Assyrian menace. However, this is the third time that Isaiah 18 has been brought into the picture in connection with its reference to Cush. The first had to do with the cultural aspect (cf. section 3.4.2 of this thesis), the second was with regard to economic affairs (cf. section 4.2.1 above), and the third now concerns the military and political functions of Cush. Thus, Sadler (2001:110) might very well be right in saying that Isaiah 18 '[...] is perhaps the best ethnography of the Cushites in the Hebrew Bible', even though his focus in relation to this statement is related to the cultural function of Cush. Although some overlapping in our analysis may result, it can nevertheless be said that there is no doubt that Isaiah 18 is one of the texts which offer one of the most comprehensive descriptions of Cush yet in the Old Testament. Its focus is not only cultural or anthropological, but also economic, as well as military and political. Nonetheless, it should be noted that Isaiah 18 is not just about Cush; there are other themes as well. Høyland Lavik (2004:12) admits of a number of 'unresolved textual, translational, methodological and interpretative problems [...].' But the details of these problems are beyond the scope of this thesis.

It was earlier pointed out that the initial ywh in verse one should be translated as 'Ah' rather than the doom exclamation 'Woe', since this prophecy is really an oracle *about* Cush rather than an oracle *against* it (cf. 4.2.1). As far as Proto-Isaiah is concerned, it is only in chapter 20 that we begin to see Cush becoming an object of doom, but even then it shares the burden with Egypt. Most likely, part of Isaiah 18:1-7 originates from a time when Egypt was under the control of the Cushites, who wanted to form alliances to oppose Assyria. But the early tradition of these verses has been expanded in later centuries. Certainly verse 7, as was previously pointed out, represents an example of such expansion, and quite likely also verses 3 and 6. But, more than anything else, it is the

reference to ambassadors in verses 1-2 which has called for our further investigation of this text.

4.3.8.2 Analytical remarks

Isaiah 18 stands out as a key chapter in the Hebrew Bible, for the ample details it gives about both the land and the people of Cush (cf. Sadler 2001:126). Verses 1-2 among other things concern ambassadors sent from Cush, presumably to the royal court in Jerusalem. However, although addressed to swift messengers the prophet's words are meant to be heard by the court and the citizens of Jerusalem. First, the land is described and the journey by the ambassadors is reported (vv.1-2b). The Prophet instructs 'messengers' to go to the same land, the one 'the rivers divide'. Stordalen (2000:280) suggests that Isaiah 18:1 and also Zephaniah 3:10 indicate that Cush was perceived as a 'river land'. A question may be raised, though, as to whether these messengers are the same as the ambassadors sent from Cush. It is apparently somewhat confusing that before the messengers arrive, they are despatched. Consequently some interpreters conclude that they are different, the ones sent being the Judean emissaries to Egypt (cf. Sweeney 1996:257; see also Tucker 2001:175). But more likely, it is the Cushite ambassadors who are instructed to return home with a message (cf. also 2 Ki 17:4).

Ambassadors in Old Testament days were not permanent officials placed by nations in the capital cities of other states but were emissaries sent out on special commissions. In the case of the present text the purpose was to foment rebellion against Assyria, which was very much in the interests of the rival power that straddled the Nile valley. The lightness of their papyrus vessels made it possible for them to be carried past rapids and other unnavigable stretches of rivers. It is common knowledge that its many cataracts and rapids render navigation on the Nile particularly treacherous.

The point of Isaiah 18:1-2, however, is the action of God. Even though the text is obscure, it seems the Cushites had sent ambassadors to Jerusalem with proposals which were not accepted. Almost certainly their mission was an attempted diplomatic venture against Assyria (cf. 30:1; 31:1). But Yahweh does not desire such a political move. He

himself will devastate the Assyrian army. This might be one of the reasons why Sweeney (1996:262) considers that the entire section of Isaiah 17-18 functions as counsel to the royal court against making an alliance with Egypt. The defeat of the Assyrian army will be followed by homage being paid to Yahweh from a people who are strong, and who dwell in a land of flowing rivers (v.7).

One should also recall that at this time and prior to 701 BCE, Egypt was governed by a Cushite dynasty which was inaugurated by Piankhy. This explains the contact between Jerusalem and the people of Cush. Thus, in Isaiah 18, we come across a case where Cush is concerned about the welfare of Jerusalem; and the sign of this concern is the emissary sent there for the purposes of determining how Cush might be of help against the Assyrians. As it happened this friendly gesture from Cush was turned down through the words of Isaiah.

But Isaiah 18 is by no means the only text which brings Cush into the political and military picture in its dealings with Syria-Palestine. Another important text upon which we now focus our attention is Isaiah 20:3-5.

4.3.9 Isaiah 20:3-5

Masoretic text:

~wr[why[vy ydb[\$lh rvak hwhy rmayw
 vwk-l[w ~yrcm-l[tpwmw twa ~ynv vlv
 @xyw

twlg-taw ~yrcm ybv-ta rwva-\$lm ghny !k
 ~yrcm twr[tv ypwfxw @xyw ~wr[~ynqzw
 ~yr[n vwk

~trapt ~yrcm-!mw ~jbm vwkm wvbw wtxw

Translation:

v.3 Then the LORD said, 'Just as my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Cush,

v.4 so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as captives and the Cushites as exiles, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.

v.5 And they shall be dismayed and confounded because of Cush their hope and of Egypt their boast.'

4.3.9.1 Preliminary remarks

Cush appears in these verses three times, once in each verse. Isaiah 20 is one of the shortest chapters of Proto-Isaiah, as it consists of just six verses (cf. Is 18 which has seven verses). Of course, the content of the oracle rather than its length is more important. The whole chapter may be termed 'An Oracle against Egypt and Cush' because these two allies had failed to defend a co-conspirator, Ashdod, against Sargon's devastating attack in 711 BCE. The pericope not only utters an oracle but indicates the circumstances in which it was delivered. The oracle is delivered in the form of a 'symbolic act', a genre which is quite common in the Old Testament (cf. for example 1 Ki 11:29-32; Is 7:10-14; 8:1-4; Jr 13:1-11; 19; 32; Ezk 4-5; Hs 1; 3).

Furthermore, the five Philistine cities of Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, Gath and Eglon were united in a federation, and this union was dominated first by one and then by another of them. The rebellion against Assyria at this time was centred at Ashdod. The revolt occurred in 713-711 BCE and probably developed in response to events further south. In the meantime Egypt had been taken over by the Cushite dynasty circa 715 BCE. This development most probably marked the high point of the said dynasty. Accordingly, the small states in Palestine felt there might be more hope of securing assistance from this African power against Assyria. The devastation of Ashdod is mentioned in the Assyrian

inscriptions and can be accurately dated to 711 BCE. Such is therefore the historical context of the verses where Cush is mentioned and which we are now to investigate.

4.3.9.2 Analytical remarks

The style of the chapter is remarkably matter of fact, given the shock and embarrassment one would have expected from the prophet's behaviour. Verses 3-6 interpret this odd behaviour. The chapter begins with an Introduction (v.1) that establishes the date in terms of a specific event: the year that Sargon's 'Commander-in-Chief' put down a revolt in Philistia (Ashdod) was most likely 711 BCE. The importance of this chronological information is both that it sets the scene and indicates, from the beginning, the outcome of the events. Encouraged, if not instigated, by Egypt, Ashdod and other Philistine city-states revolted against Assyrian rule. The three years Isaiah is said to have walked around naked and barefoot possibly correspond to the three years of the Philistine revolt (cf. Clements 1980:173). Trust in Egyptian power proved to be vain since Sargon sent his troops to put down the rebellion.

The prophetic act explicitly concerns Egypt and Cush, whose people will be carried off as prisoners 'naked and barefoot with exposed buttocks'. The agent of this shameful defeat is the king of Assyria (v.6). But the sign also concerns the city of Ashdod and the Philistine revolt ('the inhabitants of this coastland'). The insurrection against Assyria will fail because of the rebels' reliance upon Egypt. Finally, the message of the prophet is addressed to the people of Judah and Jerusalem who would have observed the symbolic action. The direct message to them is that the rebellion fomented by Egypt will lead to disaster. Indirectly, the message conveys that those in Jerusalem should avoid entangling themselves in foreign alliances. The sign serves as a warning against joining such coalitions, specifically against trusting Egypt and Cush. Although there is no explicit call to trust Yahweh, this sense is consistent with the core of Isaiah's message (cf. Is 7:1-9).

It is interesting to note that this short prophecy against Egypt and Cush is delivered in a symbolic act by Isaiah, who for three long years goes naked and barefooted. It is pointless discussing the sometimes weird ways and bizarre behaviour of the prophets in the exercise of their ministry. But their actions leave no doubt about the messages they want to convey, for which these acts are audio-visual aids. Actions are messages that can speak louder than words. Isaiah's act reminds me of various ways of cursing in the African context, some of which involve going naked or pointing the male organ at the person being cursed. The idea is to send a strong message to the intended subject of the curse. However, unlike 'symbolic acts' performed by diverse individuals even in today's world, prophetic symbolic acts are not meant to draw attention to the prophet himself but to the message.

The symbolic act of Isaiah represented a signal to those in Judah who were inclined to put their trust in Egypt (cf. 30:1-5; 31:1-3), especially in its revived strength under its new Cushite rulers. In fact the Egyptian army despatched to the help of Judah in 701 BCE was defeated at Eltekeh. This was the first of a series of disastrous defeats by Assyria in the next few decades, just as Isaiah had foreseen. But for Egypt and Cush it was not just a simple defeat, but one accompanied by severe humiliation. This might be the nuance that is intended by the mention of buttocks (cf. v.4).

It will be remembered that during the prophetic ministry of Isaiah, which lasted several years, the Cushites were at the height of their historical prominence. They exercised their sway over a region that stretched from the headwaters of the Nile all the way to the Syria-Palestine region. Isaiah presents a mixed portrait of the Cushites. While Isaiah 18 stands out for its description of the land and the people of Cush, Isaiah 20 stands in marked contrast because it portrays a Cush that is humiliated and debased, a Cush Isaiah's audience is normally not used to, but one completely unfamiliar; that is if one excludes the less dramatic defeat at Eltekeh (cf. Is 37:9). I should like to note that in this text, whereas Egypt is said to be the 'boast' of Judah, Cush is said to be the 'hope' (v.5). This appellation portrays these African nations in a very positive manner. It can be inferred that the relationship that exists between Cush and Judah is not that of master-slave, but rather of equals. Cush and Israel appear to be operating on the same level, facing the same enemies and interrelating in other areas as well.

Another text which refers to Cush is again located in the prophetic literature: that concerning Ebed-melech the Cushite in Jeremiah 38-39. This individual appears three times in Jeremiah 38 (vv.7,10,12), and once in Jeremiah 39 (v.16). I now discuss these verses.

4.3.10 Jeremiah 38-39

The relevant verses are Jeremiah 38:7.10.12 and Jeremiah 39:16.

Masoretic text for Jeremiah 38: 7.10.12:

awhw syrs vya yvwkh \$lm-db[[mvyw
bvAy \$lmhw rwbh-la whymry-ta wntn-yk
\$lmh tybb
!mynb r[vb

rma1 yvwkh \$lm-db[ta \$lmh hwcyw
aybnh whymry-ta tyl[hw ~yvna ~yvlv hzm
\$dyb xq
twmy ~rjb rwbh-!m

~yf whymry-la yvwkh \$lm-db[rmayw
txtm \$ydy twlca txt ~yxlmhw twbxsh
yawlb an
!k whymry f[yw ~y1b1

Masoretic text for Jeremiah 39:16:

rma l yvwkh \$lm-db[l trmaw \$wlh
ÎaybmÐ ybm ynnh larfy yhla twabc hwhy
rma-hk
\$ynpl wyhw hbwj l alw h[r l tazh ry[h-la
yrbd-ta
awhh ~wyb

Translation:

38:7 Ebed-melech the Cushite, an official in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern.

The king happened to be sitting at the Benjamin Gate,

38:10 Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Cushite, 'Take three men with you from here, and pull the prophet Jeremiah up from the cistern before he dies.'

38:12 Then Ebed-melech the Cushite said to Jeremiah:

'Just put the rags and clothes between your armpits and the ropes.' Jeremiah did so.

39:16 'Go and say to Ebed-melech the Cushite: "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to fulfill my words against this city for evil and not for good, and they shall be accomplished in your presence on that day."'

4.3.10.1 Preliminary remarks

Cush is alluded to in connection with events involving Jeremiah in chapters 38-39; these may be said to form part of the wider context of the prophet's woes comprising the wider section which begins in 37:1-44:30. In this larger section, Jeremiah's sufferings are described before, during, and after the fall of Jerusalem. The events in Jeremiah 38-39, however, took place near the end of the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

As tensions mounted in Judah, the anti-Babylonian group at the court of King Zedekiah (597-586 BCE, cf. Scheffler 2001:134), wanted to do away with Jeremiah because he predicted doom for Judah. He preached that it was futile to resist Nebuchadnezzar because the Lord had raised him up to judge Judah. This message was extremely unpopular with the court officials who were engaged in defending Jerusalem. Jeremiah clearly distinguishes himself as a true prophet of Yahweh. He interpreted the actual significance of the events of the time, over against the so-called prophets who were part and parcel of the *status quo* and who proclaimed peace when there was no peace (cf. Jr 23:9-40). Consequently, he was officially charged with working against the war effort and with weakening the will of the people to resist the invading Babylonians (38:4). His message was deemed dangerous as it weakened the morale of the soldiers. The officials on whom the burden of the defence of the city rested therefore perceived him as a traitor and called for his death.

Zedekiah was too weak to withstand his officials (38:5-6). While he did not actually sign Jeremiah's death warrant, neither did he do anything to prevent any punishment. Thus, Jeremiah ended up being thrown into a muddy cistern, but one which was dangerous enough to ensure a slow and painful death. This was his third and probably harshest imprisonment yet. The point of throwing him into a pit of sorts was perhaps meant to soothe the conscience of his enemies lest it accuse them of actually slaying him. It was then that Ebed-melech the Cushite entered the scene in order to rescue Jeremiah. He sees the harm ([[ר v. 4) not in Jeremiah's words but in the conduct of the officials who acted wickedly (w [רh) and informs the king about what had happened to Jeremiah (v.9).

It is interesting to note that every time Ebed-melech is mentioned it is specified that he is a Cushite. This is clearly the narrator's way of underscoring the role this

individual performed in connection with the rescue of Jeremiah. The remarks below are therefore meant to point out how far this was the case.

4.3.10.2 Analytical remarks

Ebed-melech is called **SYRS VYA**, a word we have translated as an ‘official’ in the royal palace, although some other authors have translated it ‘eunuch’. The designation ‘eunuch’ has not gone down well, especially among some African Americans and their African counterparts, because they have seen this appellation as an attempt to denigrate this person. However, the rendering ‘eunuch’ seems to be supported also by the literary meaning of the name Ebed-melech, which in Hebrew means ‘servant of the king’.⁷⁶

While the word **SYRS** can indeed be translated as ‘eunuch’, there are strong reasons in my view to suggest that in the present context the word should most probably be rendered as ‘official’ or even simply ‘courtier’ (Gene 1975:98). First of all, the term is understood in this sense in 2 Kings 18:17 and also in Jeremiah 39:3.13 where it is understood to refer to ‘high-ranking officials’. This is perhaps the reason why Hays (1996:405) has gone further in suggesting that this individual might have been an ‘Egyptian military attaché in Jerusalem’. But there is no need, I consider, to overstretch this issue as Hays has done. I believe there is compelling evidence from Scripture itself to argue that this individual was indeed an official. In the Old Testament, the word **SYRS** is found some 45 times (cf. Rice 1975:98ff), and it is cited throughout the three divisions of the Old Testament. In about half of these cases the proper meaning is that of ‘officer, courtier’, although one should allow some flexibility in meaning, as the term would sometimes resemble the use of the English word ‘lieutenant’ (cf. Rice 1975:99). The clearest instance where **SYRS** means eunuch is Isaiah 56:3.4, and probably also in many references in Esther and Daniel. But as Rice (1975:99) has pointed out in the latter cases, the references belong to a time much later than that of Jeremiah. Also, in the case

⁷⁶ I should like to acknowledge the thorough analysis of these verses by Rice (1975:95-101), which has greatly assisted my understanding of Ebed-melech the Cushite.

of Esther and Daniel the setting in which these officials function is a non-Israelite one. But it is perhaps only fair to point out that the reference in 2 Kings 20:18, which is parallel to that in Isaiah 39:7, should be included with these passages, for they anticipate the fate of Hezekiah's son in the Babylonian court.

There are also a few passages earlier than and contemporary with Jeremiah where the word may mean 'eunuch'. Such is the case with the reference in 2 Kings 9:32 where the ~YSYRS who threw Jezebel out of the palace window were actually with her when Jehu came in. And because they are mentioned in connection with women and children, the ~YSYRS in Jeremiah 41:16 may be eunuchs. But as Rice (1975:100) has argued, 'not enough detail is given in these two passages to make a definitive judgment.' Actually, no firm evidence exists which would prove that Israelite monarchs ever employed eunuchs to oversee their harems. Such persons would automatically have been excluded from the Israelite congregation according to Deuteronomy 23:1 and Leviticus 21:17-21 (cf. Rice 1975:100).

Thus, because of this ambiguity, the meaning of the word SYRS in Jeremiah 38:7 cannot be determined with any certainty. But an argument based on Jeremiah's promise to Ebed-melech as an individual practising Yahwism strongly suggests that he could not have been a eunuch since Israelite law prohibited such people from the congregation. The only strong case that remains is therefore to understand this word, which after all is of Assyrian origin, as denoting 'official, courtier'. The Assyrian term from which this Hebrew word is derived is *sha rēshi* and means 'he at the head', that is he 'who goes before the king, one of his confidential advisors' (cf. Rice 1975:98). This is more or less what every official or courtier does before his master.

In addition to the texts already cited above, it is also interesting to note that when he learnt of what had happened to Jeremiah, Ebed-melech sought out Zedekiah who was at the Benjamin Gate of the city. The king may have been overseeing preparations in anticipation of a resumption of the siege by the Babylonians. Or he may have been acting in his role as judge, hearing complaints from and adjudicating cases for his people. At any rate, it was in a public setting that Ebed-melech confronted the king. He informs him of Jeremiah's fate, and charges the men responsible for it with committing a crime (38:8-

9). A simple commoner such as a eunuch cannot just walk up to the king when he is busy with matters of state 'in his office' and request the release of an important prisoner of the calibre of Jeremiah! Only people in good standing with the king would normally have the courage to accost him in public, interrupting what he was doing.

As it turned out, the king put Ebed-melech in charge of the rescue operation. Ebed-melech's courage, dispatch, compassion and his ability to organize the operation certainly bring out the best in him. Moved to save the life of another and acting without calculation or counting the cost, this foreigner, in the words of one commentator, 'emerges from obscurity to immortality' (cf. Calkins 1930:298). He also demonstrated that he was a man of great faith. As it turned out, some time after his rescue, Jeremiah sent word to Ebed-melech assuring him that he would be saved from those who sought his life and would even survive the fall of the city (39:15-18). Good deeds more often than not are rewarded. The basis of Jeremiah's assurance to Ebed-melech is that he trusted in God. This means that first of all, Ebed-melech was one of those who believed that Jeremiah was God's authentic prophet.

Jeremiah's promise to Ebed-melech (39:15-18) should logically have been placed soon after the account of the prophet's rescue, but as Gene (1975:96) has argued, it is probably placed in the context, which tells of the fall of Jerusalem, the capture of Zedekiah near Jericho, his being made to witness the slaughter of his sons, being blinded, and taken captive to Babylon, to 'let us see how the king who acted without faith, lost his life and the life of his nation, whereas one who did act in faith was saved.'

The preservation of the prophet's life may be the result of the divine intention, but it is carried out by the humane and risky pleading of a court official by the name of Ebed-melech the Cushite. He does so in a carefully worked-out strategy. This is of course significant for us since it shows how this foreigner saved the prophet of the Lord. His Cushite nationality is alluded to four times (Jr 38:7.10.12; 39:16). This was the author's way of indicating that while the entire nation of Judah including its king was disobedient to the Lord, it was a black official who confronted the king and delivered Jeremiah from a slow but certain death.

Another reference to Cushite involvement in political and military matters also stems from the prophetic literature, this time from one of Israel's exilic prophets: Ezekiel. It is on him that our attention is now focused.

4.3.11 Ezekiel 30:4,5,9

Masoretic text:

vwkb hlxlx htyhw ~yrcmb brx habw
hytdwsy wsrhnw hnwmh wxqlw ~yrcmb llx
lpnb

#ra ynbw bwkw br[h-lkw dwlw jwpw vwk
wlpw brxb ~ta tyrbh

~ycb ynplm ~ykalm wacy awhh ~wyb
~yrcm ~wyb ~hb hlxlx htyhw xjb vwk-ta
dyrxhl
hab hnh yk

Translation:

*v.4 A sword shall come upon Egypt, and anguish shall be in
Cush, when the slain fall in Egypt, and its wealth is carried
away, and its foundations are torn down.*

*v.5 Cush, Libya, Lydia, all the mixed people, Chub, and the
people of the covenant, shall fall with them by the sword.*

v.9 On that day, messengers shall go out from me in ships to terrify the unsuspecting Cushites; and anguish shall come upon them on the day of Egypt's doom; for it is coming!

4.3.11.1 Preliminary remarks

The general literary and structural context which brackets the verses containing the references to Cush is that of Ezekiel 25:1–32:32 and encompasses Ezekiel's oracles against foreign nations and rulers. This wider section may be broken down into still smaller, more manageable ones, one of which is 29:1–32:32, which may be titled 'Seven Oracles against (the Pharaoh of) Egypt'. Within this unit, the section relevant to this thesis is the one that comprises 30:1-19. This may be termed 'The Day of Egypt' and can be further broken down to the manageable size of 30:1-9, namely 'Yahweh's Day against Egypt and its Allies'.

Other literary questions also merit attention. Ezekiel 30:1-19, which brackets the section that concerns this thesis, in fact constitutes the third of the prophet's seven units of utterances against Pharaoh and Egypt. The first of these units is Ezekiel 29:1-16 (ruin and restoration); the second consists of Ezekiel 29:17-21 (the conquest of Nebuchadnezzar); the third is Ezekiel 30:1-19 (the Day of the Lord); the fourth comprises Ezekiel 30:20-26 (the breaking of Pharaoh's arm); the fifth is found in Ezekiel 31:1-18 (the cedar is felled); the sixth is Ezekiel 32:1-16 (lament of Pharaoh), and the seventh comprises Ezekiel 32:17-32 (Egypt in the underworld).

One may add comments on other literary features as well. In verse 5 the origins of the allies in Egypt's army who will also fall are specified as: Cush, Put (Somalia or Libya), Lud (Lydia), all Arabia and the enigmatic Hebrew word **bwk**. It will be recalled that the trio Cush, Put and Lud is also mentioned in Jeremiah 46:9 where they appear as mercenaries or allies in Pharaoh Necho's army at the battle of Charchemish (605 BCE). But the Hebrew word **bwk** is unknown. On the basis of the Septuagint (so also the Syriac and Vulgate versions), some scholars emend it to **bwl**, that is,

‘Libyans’ (cf. Nah 3:9). Thus, the Hebrew letter כ could be understood to be a slip of the letter ל, which is not an uncommon error in the history of the transmission of biblical texts. But we are not certain this was the case, so we have left the Hebrew word untranslated. Moreover, if it was translated by ‘Libya’, then it would be difficult to understand why the author would refer to Libya by another name in the same verse.

Next, the phrase בר [ח-ל]קו which we have rendered as ‘and all the mixed people’ in verse 5. We simply want to note here that some versions such as NRSV and NIV have translated this phrase by ‘and all Arabia’. But there is no convincing rationale for such a rendering. Moreover, it would remove the focus of the oracle away from Africa. In fact Taylor (1969:202) has suggested that the word is used in Jeremiah 25:20 to denote not Arabs, but all the ‘foreign folk’ or the ‘mixed multitude’, understood here to refer to ‘mercenaries’ or ‘resident aliens’.

The phrase תירבח #רא ינבו, literally ‘the children of the land of the covenant’, and which we have literally rendered as ‘people of the covenant’, most probably refers to the Judeans. Jeremiah 24:8 notes their presence in Egypt at the time of the first deportation to Babylon in 597 BCE. In fact, following Jerusalem’s destruction and the assassination of the Babylonian-appointed governor, Gedaliah, Jeremiah urged his fellow survivors not to migrate to Egypt, but they, fearing Babylonian reprisals, forced him and Baruch to flee with them to Tahpanhes (Jr 41:1–43:7). Jeremiah 44:1 addresses Jews living in Migdol, Tahpanhes, Memphis, and the land of Pathros. In fact, Psammetichus II (594-588 BCE), who was a contemporary of Ezekiel and who conducted a victorious campaign against the Cushites, made use of Jewish soldiers in his army (cf. *Letter of Aristeas*, 13). Another word that merits comment is !wmח in verse 4, which has been translated by NRSV and also NIV (including our rendering), among others, as ‘wealth’. One should note that other translators have rendered it as ‘horde, wealth, uproar, pomp, pride’. But of the 66 times that this word appears in the Hebrew Bible (45 times in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel), 26 of these are in Ezekiel and 16 are to be found in Ezekiel chapters 29–32, implying that it is a word close to this prophet’s heart. And every time he uses it, it is almost always in connection with wealth.

Finally, another important word worthy of comment is the Hebrew word $h\bar{l}x\bar{l}x$ in verse 4, which we have translated as ‘anguish’. But this word could as well be rendered as ‘writhing’ (said of someone in severe physical pain such as that associated with women in childbirth). It derives from the Hebrew root $\bar{l}w\bar{x}$ and means to ‘whirl’, or ‘dance’ or to ‘writhe’. It can also refer to the psychological anguish and the physiological reactions of persons facing impending doom or anticipating the destruction of others (cf. Darr 1999:102).

Other important clarifications which appear in the general pericope of Ezekiel 30:1-19, from where the references to Cush have been gleaned, are the following: The expression ‘from Migdol to Syene’ in verse 6 is a merismus employed to refer to the whole territory of Egypt (cf. also Ezk 29:10 and section 3.3.4 of this thesis); Pathros (Thebes) in verse 14 refers to upper south Egypt, and Pelusium and Memphis in verses 13 and 16 refer to the north-east boundary and a city south of Cairo respectively.

4.3.11.2 Analytical remarks

Ezekiel 30:1-19, which constitutes the third of the prophet’s seven utterances against Pharaoh, may be split further into three interrelated units, thus: verses 2-9; 10-12, and 13-19. These units contain no explicit references to historical events. Taylor (1969:202) has suggested that the oracle should probably be dated shortly after January 587 BCE, the date given in Ezekiel 29:1. According to him the oracle that follows, namely Ezekiel 30:20-26, is only uttered three months later. The reader might be likely, however, to associate it with the date (the latest in the scroll) prefixed to the immediately preceding oracle (cf. 29:17), that is the first day of the first month of the twenty-seventh year of Jehoiakin’s exile, put at April 26, 571 BCE. Thus, according to this dating, it can be postulated that Ezekiel, knowing Yahweh’s decision to give Egypt and its wealth to Nebuchadnezzar and his soldiers as wages for their disappointing thirteen-year blockade of Tyre (cf. Ez 29:18-20), further describes Egypt’s demise.

Zimmerli (1983:128) is of the view that this oracle, namely Ezekiel 30:1-19, stems from a later date and probably from the school of the prophet, as it uses the

prophet's language and motifs of divine judgment against Egypt. Apart from its being a later exposition, other indicators as well point to another hand than the prophet's. The confused enumeration of the Egyptian cities and districts in verses 13-19 illustrates, in Zimmerli's opinion, how far removed the actual conditions in Egypt were from the Babylonian exiles. As Zimmerli concludes: 'In the very full list of names, one can discern more of a show of learning than of actual knowledge' (1983:129). In order to argue his case even further, Zimmerli (1983:128) quotes Jahn (1905:213), according to whom: 'It [namely the unit 30:1-19] reveals repetitions and imitations of other passages and is of such little value that it appears unworthy of Ezekiel. It seems to be of the concoction of a later hand, for whom the description of Egypt's fall in chapter 29 was not good enough.'

But we are inclined to think that, nevertheless, the references to language and motifs cited by Zimmerli, as well as those to Nebuchadnezzar in verses 10-12, enable us to situate the unit in the historical context of Ezekiel's ministry. On this basis at least, if for no other reason, we wish to take this unit as originating from the prophet himself and to regard references to Cush too as exhibiting this origin. These references are of course the main focus of our investigation.

The oracle of Ezekiel 30 opens with a revelation formula (v.1). The oracle proper falls into three units, namely verses 2-9; 10-12, and 13-19 [said in first para of this section]. The first unit (vv.2-9) announces Egypt's doom. After the address to the prophet and the message formula (v.2), the day is heralded when Egypt and her supporters will fall (vv.2-6). Then, devastated, Egypt will recognize Yahweh (vv.7-8). Finally, the far-off Cush, receiving the report, will writhe with fear (v.9). The subjects of this section are mostly Egypt and her allies. The verbs used are largely intransitive and passive, but the causes and agents of doom are scarcely mentioned.

Furthermore, unit one (vv.2-9) takes up the motif of the 'Day of Yahweh'. Originally, this motif expressed Israel's expectation of a time when Yahweh, their mighty warrior God, would destroy their adversaries. But Amos, a Judean prophet during the reign of Jeroboam II (786-746BCE), would turn these traditional hopes for the day of Yahweh on their heads, on account of Israel's immorality and unjust practices (cf. Am 5:18-20; 8:9-10). The Israelites, and no one else, would be God's enemies on the day of the Lord. Amos' twist to this motif was adopted by succeeding prophets (cf. Is 2:12-17;

Jr 30:7; Jl 1:15; 2:1-12; Zph 1:14-18). Ezekiel employs it in chapter 7 to describe the destruction of Israel's soil and its inhabitants. Here, however, he reverts the motif to its original function, applying it to a foreign nation and its allies. Egypt is Yahweh's enemy and so should be Israel's as well. Yet rather ironically, many of God's people have placed faith in that enemy. In fact Judean soldiers are also serving in Egypt's army!

The oracle enlarges on the fate of Egypt's allies and satellites: 'all her helpers are broken' (v.8). Throughout the length and breadth of the land they will fall by the sword, from 'Migdol to Syene' (cf. Ez 29:10), and nearby Cushites will be terrified as messengers go forth to them in ships up the Nile to tell them of Egypt's downfall. It may also be noted here that the author, with exegetical skill, reverses the scenario of Isaiah 18:1-2. There, the ambassadors are sent *down* the Nile in vessels of papyrus towards Judah to encourage its support of Ashdod's rebellion against Assyria in 714 BCE (cf. sections 4.3.4 and 4.3.5 above. See also Is 14:32; 20:1-6). Here, by contrast, God despatches ambassadors to go *up* the Nile toward the distant Cush in order to crush its self-confidence.

The second unit (vv.10-12) concerns God's commissioning of Nebuchadnezzar to carry out Egypt's doom. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, will act as Yahweh's agent of Egypt's destruction (cf. 20:19). The swords of his soldiers will fill the land with corpses, and Yahweh will dry up the Nile canals and streams, thus desolating the land and everything in it (cf. v 12). But the real agent of destruction is of course Yahweh himself. Finally, the third unit (vv.13-19) speaks of the destruction of the power and the centres of population in Egypt. It is to be observed, however, that contrary to Isaiah, Ezekiel in this text does not contemplate the fall of Cush to Nebuchadnezzar. Rather, as Greenberg (1997:630) has observed, Cush's despair would reflect the enormity of Egypt's destruction. This anguish is expressed by the word $h\bar{l}x\bar{l}x$. (For this nuance see also Is 21:3; Nah 2:11). In this connection, it will be remembered that Cush was home to the twenty-fifth dynasty of Pharaohs (710-663 BCE). The twenty-sixth or 'Saitic' dynasty was Egyptian, though, and Psammetichus II (594-588 BCE), Ezekiel's contemporary, campaigned successfully to bring its southern neighbour back under Egypt's control.

What makes this oracle extraordinary is the faith that prompted it. This is evident from the prophet's temerity in declaring that the great civilisation of Egypt with its

pyramids, its cities, rulers and peoples was vulnerable to the judgment of Judah's God. The fall of Egypt will be so severe that it will overwhelm its neighbours (including Cush), some of whom were Egypt's political, economic and military allies (cf. 30:5). The prophet believes that just as judgment fell upon Israel and Judah, it is now falling on Egypt and its allies. He specifies the instruments that God will use to bring this doom about (vv.10-12), namely Nebuchadnezzar, but even more severely 'the drying of the Nile,' Egypt's lifeline without which it cannot exist. This fate will encompass Cush as well. At the fall of Egypt, the Cushites would realise their own impending visitation.

There is no doubt that Ezekiel here conceives of God as a mighty warrior God, who is on the side of the oppressed and the exiled, such as Ezekiel and his compatriots. It is therefore comforting to know that no oppressor, physical or spiritual, is so powerful as not to succumb, sooner or later, to God's sovereign rule. The powerful nations face the warning that they are never invincible.

Now that we have completed an excursion into the political and military references to Cush in the major Israelite prophets, the next section continues our investigation, this time reading one of the minor prophets of Israel, namely prophet Daniel, whose name in Hebrew means 'comfort' or 'compassion'. After the severe judgment meted out against Egypt and its allies in the foregoing section, it is perhaps a good idea to turn to something more 'comforting', although I have my doubts that this is the case with verse 9.

4.3.12 Daniel 11:43

Masoretic text:

twdmx lkbw @skhw bhzh ynmkmb lvmw
wyd[cmb ~yvkw ~yblw ~yrqm

Translation:

*He shall become ruler of the treasures of gold and of silver,
and all the precious things of Egypt; and the Libyans and
the Cushites shall follow in his train.*

4.3.12.1 Preliminary remarks

The term ‘Cush’ occurs once in this book and only in this chapter at verse 43. However, as Sadler (2001:343) has pointed out, Daniel 11:43 is ‘one of the most difficult and problematic [verses] in this study [that is of the Cush texts].’ The immediate context of this verse is the pericope which brackets the unit of Daniel 11:40-45, which has been described by some scholars as ‘an imaginative prediction of Antiochus’ death’ (Hartman & Di Lella 1978:303; Wiseman 1978:201). The fictional prophecy begun in 11:2 concludes in 11:39. Verse 40 speaks of the ‘time of the final phase’, alluded to in 11:27 and specifically mentioned in 11:35. But as has happened previously (11:28), Antiochus will receive alarming ‘news from the east and north’ (11:44a) and will be compelled to abandon his newly-acquired territory. ‘He will set out with great fury to completely exterminate many’ (11:44b).

All in all, ‘Daniel 11 contains one of the many complex narratives in the book that combine historical accounts with material that is inconsistent with historical records’ (Sadler 2001:338). Nevertheless, the appellation ‘Cush’ appears here as it does in many other difficult narratives and so merits analysis in its own right.

4.3.12.2 Analytical remarks

Towner (1984:164), also cited by Sadler (2001:338), asserts that the ‘scenario described in 11:40-45 simply never transpired.’ For this reason some modern scholars are inclined to take the whole of Daniel as ‘a legendary retrojection, composed between the exile and the early Hasmonean period’ (Sadler 2001:338). According to Hartman and Di Lella (1978:303), ‘[a]lthough the apparent literary form of this passage is prediction, it is best to view these verses as the sacred author’s imaginative expectation of what would

happen in the final days of Antiochus' career.' However, the authors also concede that many of the narratives are dependent on earlier traditions and sources.

Lacocque (1979:232) has found in Daniel an assortment of themes borrowed from Isaiah 10:5ff; 31:8-9, and Ezekiel 38-39, basing his argument on the imagery used (cf. also Sadler 2001:338-339). The discussion on the Cushites is linked with the end of time, when a certain powerful king will come and wreak havoc among the southern nations. Scholars generally agree, based upon an apparent correlation of events in the prophecy with the historical record, that the king in question is none other than Antiochus IV, also known as Antiochus Epiphanes (cf. Hartman & Di Lella 1978:303; Lacocque 1979:232; Bright 1981:417-427; Wiseman 1978:201-202, among others). This Seleucid king (175-164 BCE) attacked Jerusalem in about 169 and 167 BCE, exterminating much of the male population, and destroying all the vestiges of the Jewish cult. Adamo (1998:158-159) among others has provided a useful resumé of Antiochus' exploits in Jerusalem.

Antiochus IV, 'the king of the north', will again be provoked by Ptolemy Philometor (cf. Hartman & Di Lella 1978:303), 'the king of the south', into waging another war, but this time the Syrian tyrant will overwhelm Egypt 'like a flood' or 'whirlwind' (RSV). He will attack by land and sea, presumably because only in this way will he be able to subdue Alexandria, which had eluded his grasp before. But there is no mention whatsoever, in the extant ancient sources, of the war predicted in 11:40. Hence according to Hartman and Di Lella (1978:303): 'The present section contains no historical information at all, but purports rather to be a genuine prediction of events to happen after the apocalypse was composed and presumably circulating among the faithful...it is worthless as a historical source.' The trouble is that nothing in these verses matches the actual course of history as it is known from other sources (Hartman & Di Lella 1978:303).

According to Wiseman (1978:201), 'At this point the commentators are persuaded that the author ceases to write history and looks ahead to describe how the tyrant will meet his end.' As a matter of fact, there is no mention of such events in the history recorded in 1 Maccabees 3-4, which took place in the later part of 166 BCE, and the events that are mentioned, such as the conquest of Egypt and the battle between the sea

and the glorious holy mountain (v.45), never took place (Lacocque 1979:232). Antiochus died of some mental disease, not in Palestine but in Syria? (Wiseman 1978:201).

As Antiochus moves south, no country will be able to resist him; not ‘even the land of Egypt will escape’ (v.42). Antiochus had plundered Egypt on his first campaign there (11:28). This time, however, he will carry away ‘the treasures of gold and silver and all other precious things in Egypt, and the Libyans and Cushites shall follow in his train’ (11:43). According to Hartman and Di Lella (1978:304), the ‘Libyans’ whose land was west of Egypt, and the ‘Cushites’ whose land lay to the south of Egypt, all of which are referred to in verse 43b, represent the traditional limits of the Egyptian empire, just as Dan and Beersheba represent the limits of biblical Israel in Judges 20:1 and elsewhere. What is meant here, therefore, is that Antiochus will subdue Egypt completely (Hartman & Di Lella 1978:304). In the envisaged victory, the tribes of Edom, Moab and the larger part of the Ammonites will escape as they will throw in their lot behind the conqueror Antiochus, but he will eventually take their land and riches, including those of Egypt. Libya and Cush will be in his train (Wiseman 1978:201). Antiochus is therefore described as one who will have Libyans and Cushites ‘follow in his train’. The understanding of this verse holds the key to unlocking the role of the Cushites here.

The RSV translates the passage ‘he shall become ruler of the treasures of gold and of silver, and all the riches of Egypt; and the Libyans and the Ethiopians shall follow in his train.’ According to Sadler, this means that ‘he will conquer Egypt, take possession of the wealth of the land, and then the Libyans and the Cushites will follow in his steps.’

Although no evidence exists that Antiochus ever conquered Egypt and Cush (cf. Lacocque 1979:232; see also Sadler 2001:340), we ask why Cush and Libya are incorporated in this prophecy. Certain authors consider that the two appear together because they represented all of the allies of the Egyptians, as may be the case also in Ezekiel 30:5 and Nahum 3:9 (cf. section 4.3.7 and 4.3.8 above). Heaton has argued that this combination is intended to describe the farthest limits of Egypt on the south and west (1956:239; see also Sadler 2001:340-341). So also Delcor (1971:249) according to whom, ‘*Situés à l’Ouest et au Sud de l’Égypte, il désignent ici les confins de l’empire des Ptolémées.*’

As for Lacocque (1979:233; see also Sadler 2001:341), Libya and Cush were mentioned as they were under Egypt's yoke and therefore Antiochus would liberate them, although there is no evidence to show that Cushites were ever subject to Egypt during the second century BCE (cf. Sadler 2001:341). Thus, the suggestion by Lacocque is historically not correct, although it is true that in other oracles Cush appears with Libya, both being allies against Egypt (Is 43:3; 45:14; Jr 46:9; Ezk 29:10; 30:4.5.9). Sadler observes that their continued presence in the armies of the Egyptians predates the twenty-second Egyptian Dynasty and most likely indicates the composition of the Egyptian armies known by Judean authors. If Egypt were to be attacked, they would be expected to participate in its defence (Sadler 2001:341).

Concerning the function of Cushites in this text, Sadler has argued that Daniel 11:43 speaks of Antiochus' subjugation of the Cushites and Libyans (2001:341). Furthermore, they are included in this text because of their close association with the Egyptians. But, Sadler argues, 'In this text, they appear to function less as conquered soldiers do, inasmuch as they are associated with the Egyptians' gold, silver, and desirable goods. I suggest that they are in verse 43 listed among Egypt's assets' (2001:341-342). Sadler (2001:342) calls this a 'commodification of Cush and Libya which effaces their humanity, making them akin to other items of great worth.'⁷⁷ Lacocque (1979:233) seems to sound a similar note when he speaks of Cush and Libya looking to Antiochus Epiphanes as their liberator from Egyptian hegemony (Lacocque 1979:233; see also Sadler 2001:342, especially footnote 92), and so does Adamo who in effect connects these African nations with wealth (1998:159).

Personally, while I respect the view of Sadler and others with regard to understanding the function of Cush and Libya in verse 43 in terms of 'wealth' or a 'material commodity' or perhaps war 'booty', I would nevertheless argue for a military connection. Although the commodification pointed out by Sadler is certainly present in this verse, it seems to me that Cush and Libya here stand mainly for defeated allies, such as would result from an unfortunate military encounter. Delcor (1971:249) is of the same opinion: *'Les Lybiens et les Koushites mentionnés dans la Bible, soit comme des*

⁷⁷ By 'commodification' Sadler seems to me to suggest that these African nations are treated as property to be acquired as spoils of war and therefore as on a par with other items, commerce and trade such as gold and silver.

mercenaries, soit comme des auxiliaries des Egyptiens (cf. Na 3,9; Jr 46,9), *se soumettront au roi du Nord.*' And there are good reasons for this argument. First of all, the general context suggested is that of war, similar to that in Isaiah 43 and 45. In Isaiah 43:1-7, Cushites are led away in chains, while in Isaiah 45:14, Cush together with its allies is consigned to a shared fate. For an extended discussion of these issues, the reader is referred to sections 4.2.2 and 5.2.3 above, respectively. Although these sections deal with economic matters and with Cush and Yahweh in the context of salvation, there is nonetheless an element of war imbedded, lurking underneath, which seems to characterize the main function of Cush here.

If this is granted, then the passage refers to the fate of Cushite and Libyan mercenaries serving in the Egyptian army. Thus, the idea of 'commodification' as suggested by Sadler might need to be approached with caution. Here, as elsewhere previously, the Cushites, the Libyans and the Egyptians, though a powerful trio of nations, are once again portrayed as enduring defeat together, a fate after all recognized by Sadler himself (2001:344).

A final word concerning the apocalyptic motif of Daniel may at this point be in order. The book of Daniel can without doubt be grouped among those books constituting apocalyptic biblical literature. But as Heaton has cautioned, 'It is even more important, however, that we should not be misled into associating the book with the speculative and pseudo-scientific curiosity of some of the later apocalyptic writers' (1957:36). The characteristic of these writers is to pose many 'futuristic' and oftentimes mysterious questions in an effort to interpret the future.⁷⁸ But, again as Heaton (1957:37) has pointed out, Daniel was not interested in the mysterious future as such, but in the unveiling of the *present* (italics Heaton's) sovereignty of God. His concern with 'the time of the end' (11:40a) is an essentially theological and religious interest, the outcome, in a period of intense spiritual agony, of his longing for the full manifestation of his conviction that 'the Most High rules the kingdom of men' (4:17.25). It is in this sense that the defeat of Cush and its allies in Daniel 11:43 may be understood.

4.3.13 Nahum 3:9

⁷⁸ For an excellent list of some of these questions, see Heaton, *The Book of Daniel* (1957:36).

Masoretic text:

wyh ~ybwlw jwp hcq !yaw ~yrcmw hmc [vwk
\$trz [b

Translation:

*Cush was her strength, Egypt too, and that without limit;
Put and the Libyans were her helpers.*

4.3.13.1 Preliminary remarks

Historically, the proud Assyrian empire, whose power had for centuries been felt and feared from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean, crumbled quickly after the death of Assurbanipal (ca 630 BCE). He was the last great leader of the Assyrian Empire, famed for his great library at his capital, Nineveh (cf. Yamauchi 2004:138). When the Egyptians rebelled, upon the death of his father Esarhaddon, Assurbanipal captured Memphis in 669 BCE. When he later learned of plots involving rulers from the Delta and Taharqa (biblical Tirhakah), he pursued the latter all the way upriver to Thebes in 664. It is said that when Taharqa heard of the news of his approach, the former fled into Thebes to save his life (cf. Yamauchi 2004:140). Afterward, Taharqa is said to have retreated to his homeland, where he eventually died in 664 BCE.

Under the combined assaults of the vigorous Medes from the north of Persia and the Chaldeans from southern Babylonia, the ancient city of Asshur fell in 614 BCE. When the renowned Nineveh was destroyed in 612 BCE, Assyrian domination of the Near East was ended.

The reaction to the overthrow of Assyria, expressed by the people long subjected to its yoke, is nowhere more clearly seen than in the book of Nahum. The core of the book is a superb, vivid poem extolling Nineveh's destruction, which Nahum felt to be inevitable. The prophet spells out the reason for the Assyrian downfall in unequivocal terms: it is the Lord's judgment upon an unscrupulous, defiant nation. This basic theme makes it clear that Nahum's thought is passionately partisan. It asserts boldly that the Lord is the avenger of cruelty and immorality. The date of Nahum's prophecy most likely lies close to the events it predicts, probably between 626 and 612 BCE.

The verse under investigation forms part of the literary context which comprises Nahum 3:8-11, and contains the third description of Nineveh's four destruction accounts. The first and second destruction are described in Nahum 2:3-3:1 and 3:2-7, respectively, whereas the fourth description is to be found in 3:12-19. The Egyptian capital Thebes (Hebrew, No-Amon) had been captured by the Assyrians in 663 BCE, although Cush was her strength with the rest of Egypt (vv.8-9). The city of 'Thebes' is 'No-Amon' in Egyptian language, namely the 'city of Amon' (cf. Jr 46:25; Ezk 30:14-16. See also 4.3.7.1 above), and this name has been adopted as such by the Israelites.

Amon was the chief god of the Theban pantheon and had been one of the principal deities of Egypt since the New Kingdom (ca 1580-1090 BCE). Thebes, which lay some four hundred miles south of the modern city of Cairo, constituted the chief city of Upper or southern Egypt. It was also a leading centre of Egyptian civilization, for it was a place of temples, obelisks, sphinxes, and palaces and was dominated by the mighty temples of Amon at Luxor and Karnak on the east bank of the Nile. Its temples and palaces are said to have found no equal in antiquity, and they are still regarded by some as the mightiest ruins of an ancient civilization to be found anywhere in the world. The strategic location of Thebes made the river Nile its natural wall of defence. Thus, it is equated with Nineveh, similarly defended by a wall of water because of its location on a great river (cf. Nah 2:5.6.8).

The phrase $\text{h}c\text{q} \text{ !}y\text{a}$ ('without limit') is probably meant to underscore the unreserved support given to Thebes by the rest of Egypt and Cush. Put and the Libyans were 'her helpers' (v.9). The limitless power of Thebes is also alluded to in Nahum 2:10;

3:3 and Isaiah 2:7. Egypt and Cush were allies and are also mentioned as enemies of Assyria in Isaiah 20:4ff.

4.3.13.2 Analytical remarks

The key to interpreting the reference to Cush in this verse is closely linked to the understanding of the Egyptian city of Thebes. Thebes enjoyed intermittent periods of glory as the capital of Egypt from Middle Kingdom times (ca 2160-1580 BCE) onwards. After some indifferent periods, the establishment of a Cushite dynasty in the seventh century assured a continuing peace for Thebes, since it had access to the strength of both Egypt and Cush. This may be the strength ‘without limit’ referred to in our verse, which might be understood to mean that Thebes, Egypt and Cush shared vast resources among themselves.

However, the sacking of Thebes by the Assyrians in 663 was a memorable event. As Yamauchi (2004:140), citing Redford, points out, massive booty was stolen from Thebes, including ‘silver, gold, gems, costumes, chattels, and even obelisks!’ Actually, again as pointed out by Yamauchi (2004:140), before the fall of Nineveh in 612 BCE, ‘the prophet Nahum used the sack of Thebes by the Assyrians as a warning to the Assyrians themselves.’

Nahum refers to Cush, a comprehensive name for the territory and kingdom south of Syene (Assuan), embracing parts of the Sudan, Nubia, and Ethiopia proper, which was for many years known as Abyssinia. Cush had enjoyed independence since about 1000 BCE. The twenty-fifth dynasty under Pharaoh Sabako (ca 712 BCE) subdued all the Nile territory and he established his capital at Napata in Upper Egypt. Thebes as the centre of the Cushite Empire and its chief city could depend on the strength of the armies mustered by the entire domain. Not only was the power of Cush available, but in addition the resources of North Egypt, subjugated by Cush, could be drafted for battle against No-Amon’s enemies. The military supplies, the manpower, the native strength of the Nile country, north and south, were so vast that Nahum asserts: ‘There was no limit to it’ (cf. also Is 2:7).

Besides, Cush and Egypt, plus two other countries, namely Put and Libya, are listed in the formidable array of allies who served No-Amon. The exact location of Put (Gn 10:6; 1 Chr 1:8; Jr 46:9; Ezk 27:10; 30:5; 38:5) still remains problematic, however. It has been identified with Libya, firstly on the basis that the Septuagint translated this term by 'Libya'; secondly on the grounds that the Coptic name for western territory in Lower Egypt was consonantly related to *Phaiat*, and thirdly, because Josephus and some Greek writers knew a river called 'Phut' in Mauritania (cf. Maier 1980:322). None of these arguments is decisive, though. Firstly, the Septuagint often varies its translation, offering 'Libyana' only in the poetic books. Secondly, the Coptic name is of a later date and thirdly, Josephus' river need not specify the territory. Besides, Nahum's mention of 'Put and Libyans' involves a differentiation which appears to rule out every identification.

Thus, most probably Put represents the Red Sea coast country as far south as Somaliland. In favour of this identification we note the resemblance in the biblical 'Put' and the 'Punt', the present Egyptian designation for the contemporary East African country. In fact, not only the Egyptians, but even today some inhabitants of the region described above, distinguish between Somaliland and Puntland, although for various political reasons which are beyond the scope of this thesis. Locating Put along the Red Sea coast as far as Somaliland seems to me to harmonize in a general way with other scriptural references. In the Table of Nations (Gn 10:6), Put is one of the Hamitic countries grouped, as here, with Cush and Egypt. Put is likewise connected with Cush in other Old Testament passages (cf. Jr 46:9; Ezk 30:5; 38:5). Thus, the identification with the North-East African coast might be very probable.

The last of No-Amon's allies were the 'Lubhim' (cf. Dn 11:43; 2 Chr 12:3; 16:8); or the Libyans (perhaps the same as *Lehabim* in Genesis 10:13; 1 Chr 1:11), generally the inhabitants of the territory west of Egypt. The extent of their domain, as well as the early history of these people who gave their name to this territory, is uncertain.

All these mighty peoples in Upper and Lower Egypt, and to the East and West of Egypt, Nahum declares, 'were among your help' (referring to the Cushite capital of Thebes). In other words, the impregnable capital could count them as allies ready to come to its aid. Owing to this coalition, not so much of the 'willing' as of the 'unwilling',

Thebes indeed felt itself secure. Even the geographical location of Thebes gave the impression of invincibility: its location in the Nile valley, where the steep cliffs come close to the river on either bank, together with its distance from the Egyptian border with Western Asia, created this impression.

Alas, this was not to be the case historically speaking, because Thebes was eventually destroyed by Ashurbanipal in 663 BCE. Ashurbanipal left a record of his conquest of Thebes on the so-called *Rassam Cylinder*, discovered in the ruins of Nineveh in 1878. On the cylinder he describes the dismal destruction of Thebes and the plentiful booty which he took away (cf. Pritchard 1969:295).⁷⁹ In Nahum 3:8-9, the prophet compares the coming fate of Nineveh with the accomplished fate of Thebes. Just as Thebes had fallen so too would Nineveh, for it was no better than the great Egyptian / Cushite city. This meant that the great Thebes, despite its numerous allies which included Cush, could have prevented its collapse, and implies that the similarly mighty Nineveh would be brought to its knees. Thus, in predicting the collapse of Nineveh, there was no better example for Nahum to adduce (3:8-10) than the fate which had overtaken Thebes, which fell as spoil to the conquering Assyrians in 663 BCE amid scenes of fire and slaughter. The prophecy concluded with an ironic comment upon the decadence that had led to its fall, and the rejoicing that this event would produce among the neighbouring peoples. Thus, Cush is portrayed as vulnerable and as succumbing to the powers that be.

A final note on the message of Nahum is appropriate. The prophet presents not so much a doctrine of justice as an affirmation of divine justice. He speaks as one who believes that God will act, not as one who is God's self-appointed lieutenant, thirsting for the battle field so that he can engage in the slaughter of which he speaks. If we have understood Nahum's message we will not volunteer to join the ranks of Nineveh's attackers; rather we shall seek to transform the evil within the nations to which we belong.

⁷⁹ On the *Rassam Cylinder*, Ashurbanipal boasts about his exploits at Thebes: '[...] I myself conquered this town completely. From Thebes I carried away booty, heavy and beyond counting: silver, gold, precious stones, his entire personal possessions, linen garments with multicolored trimmings, fine horses, inhabitants male and female. I pulled two high obelisks, cast of shining zahalu bronze, the weight of which was 2,500 talents, standing at the door of the temple, out of their bases and took them to Assyria.' (cf. Pritchard 1969:295.)

Another reference to Cush suggesting political and military ramifications is to be found in the book of another of the twelve minor prophets, namely Zephaniah. We now turn to this prophet.

4.3.14 Zephaniah 2:12

Masoretic text:

hnh ybrx yllx ~yvwk ~ta-~g

Translation:

'You Cushites also; you shall be slain by my sword.'

4.3.14.1 Preliminary remarks

This is not the first time Zephaniah has been the object of our investigation. We earlier discussed him at some length in connection with his identity in Zephaniah 1:1 (cf. section 3.2.2 of this thesis). Here however, we revisit Zephaniah in connection with his reference to the nation of Cush concerning the latter's involvement in the political and military affairs of Syria-Palestine.

The opening statement of the book indicates that Zephaniah prophesied 'during the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah' (640-609 BCE). The verse under investigation is generally assumed to fit well into this period. Zephaniah predicted the destruction of Nineveh (2:13-15), which took place in 612 BCE. The question is whether his prophecy belonged to the earlier or later part of Josiah's reign. Scholars have argued for both options. Even then, there are no strong reasons for denying verse 12 to Zephaniah from the time of King Josiah himself. As Haak (1995:238) has asserted: 'None

of the “solutions” proposed seems to be strictly necessary and none is entirely convincing. It seems best in this case to follow the MT tradition as it stands.’

The section which encompasses this short verse, namely 2:4-15, in fact contains four prophecies against other peoples: the Philistines (vv.4-7); the Moabites and the Ammonites (vv.8-11); the Cushites (v.12); Assyria and Nineveh (vv.13-15). However, we know of no threat directed against Judah by the Moabites and Ammonites. But the prophecy supports Josiah’s politics of expansion which involved neighbouring peoples such as the Philistines, Moabites and Ammonites. His politics also ran counter to the conduct of Egypt, which was still trying to assist the Assyrian empire in its final struggle.

The division of section 2:4-15 simply follows the series of peoples against which the prophecy is successively directed. Opinions may differ with regard to the precise scope of the individual parts, however. For instance, is 2:12 an independent utterance or does it belong to the prophecy against Assyria, as some authors have suggested? But when one considers that at least from the formal point of view, the name of the party threatened is immediately mentioned at the outset of the prophecy, it seems unlikely that anyone else is meant when Cush is mentioned. However, it can be postulated that given the involvement of Cush with Egypt in the twenty-fifth dynasty (ca 712-663 BCE), it is possible that the mention of Cushites here might also include the Egyptians. As Vlaardingerbroek (1999:130) has pointed out: ‘This strikingly brief prophecy, without description and without specification of grounds, prompts the suspicion that we are dealing here with the elimination of Egypt as a political power, and nothing else.’

Furthermore, it may be noted that prophecies against other nations are not *per se* a new phenomenon since they appear in the work of most prophets, although in the pre-exilic prophets this type of genre is lacking only in Hosea and Micah. It is also lacking in the post-exilic prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, but is continually recurrent in the rest of the prophets.

4.3.14.2 Analytical remarks

This prophecy is located amongst the oracles against the nations in the prophecy of Zephaniah, as we have already pointed out. The first of these oracles is directed

against the Philistines (vv.4-7), the second against Moab and Ammon (vv.8-11), the third against Cush (v.12), and the fourth and final one against Assyria (vv.13-15). The major difficulty with the verse we are investigating is the understanding of the historical context in which it was composed. We have suggested above that it must be dated to the time of King Josiah himself, whose reign is alluded to in verse 1. But not all writers would agree with this.⁸⁰

It has been questioned whether ‘Cush’ in this verse does indeed refer to the ‘traditional’ southern entity as reflected in most of the Old Testament texts and also in extra-biblical material. The problem has arisen because the motive of the oracle against Cush is not evident, and the oracle itself is presented in such a brusque and rather offhand manner. As Roberts (1991:202) has pointed out: ‘The historical background for this oracle is not self-evident [...] We simply do not know what provoked this oracle.’ Therefore, some authors have suggested that in order to interpret this oracle it is important to understand the proper identification of Cush in this text (cf. Haak 1993:240). While the concerns raised are genuine, one can still afford to ask: why problematize the appellation ‘Cush’ at this particular moment when all along it has generally been understood to refer to the territory south of Egypt? Moreover, if it is granted that the twenty-fifth dynasty, which was Cushite, ruled Egypt in the eighth and seventh centuries, then one must assume a greater involvement of this African nation with Syria-Palestine. In fact, we have already indicated that such was the case at the time of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Nahum. Even after the defeat of the said dynasty by Ashurbanipal (ca 663 BCE), it is still reasonable to assume that, at least, memories of the Cushite presence still lingered on in the minds of the people, possibly including Zephaniah. This may have been the case especially when the twenty-sixth Saite dynasty (664-525 BCE) of Necho I and Psammetichus I replaced the Cushite dynasty. The ‘Saite’ or ‘Saitic’ dynasty is so-called because it refers to the Egyptian dynasty which ruled from Sais, a city in the western delta.

Thus, it is difficult to concur with approaches which suggest that events referring to Zephaniah 2:12 refer to events of a relatively ‘distant past’ (cf. Ben Zvi, cited by Haak

⁸⁰ I should like to acknowledge the detailed research by Haak (1995) which not only provides very valuable insights but also much bibliographical material concerning the reference to ‘Cush’ in Zephaniah.

1995:240) or even ‘a distant past even further’ (cf. Ball, cited by Haak 1995:241). While on historical grounds Ben Zvi denies any likelihood that ‘Cush’ in this verse refers to the African country, Ball associates it with the Kassites (cf. Haak 1995:240-241). Instead, I am inclined to agree with Haak (1995:241), who has argued that the events surrounding Zephaniah 2:12 are ‘historically specific and exhibit a detailed understanding of the circumstances early in the reign of Josiah. [...] I expect that this oracle exhibits the same historical specificity as others in the series.’ The others in the series referred to by Haak consist of Philistine, Moab, Ammon, and Assyria.

Since all other peoples included in the oracles against the nations in Zephaniah were active participants in the political events in the late seventh century, ‘Cush’ should be located within this context. There is no reason therefore to think that there was any significant change in the political atmosphere, even after Cush lost its dominance over Egypt to Assyria in the twenty-sixth dynasty. There are many examples of this in modern times as well. Often, previous political tendencies do not easily die out, but continue to live on, even many years after they have been officially pronounced dead. In fact, all of Zephaniah’s oracles against the nations are directed against former Assyrian allies, whether that alliance was political or economic. The oracle in 2:12 therefore fits this historical context well, on the understanding that ‘Cush’ refers to an Assyrian ally on the southern border of Egypt (cf. Haak 1995:244).

But of course, the most important thing about Zephaniah is his message, which is intertwined with these events. Its focus is the ‘day of the Lord’: Zephaniah uses the expression more often than any other prophet. The day of the Lord would be a day of doom, because the people ‘have sinned against the Lord’ (1:17). In Zephaniah 2 he predicts and pronounces judgment on the neighbours of Judah. These included Cush. Having foretold God’s judgment on the nations east and west of Judah, Zephaniah next directs attention to nations south and north: Cush and Syria. The Hebrew word $\sim\text{ג}$ (‘also’) indicates that the Lord would also bring Cush to an end, just as he would Moab and Ammon. But Zephaniah also held out a promise of ‘shelter’ for those who sought the Lord (2:3). This might be the meaning of his name.

More detail regarding the meaning of the name ‘Zephaniah’ might further explicate Zephaniah’s message. As far back as the early church fathers, the etymology of

Zephaniah's name was disputed. One explanation understood the name to contain the root '*saphan*' (GK 7621: 'to hide, shelter'). This etymology plus the common suffix *yah* for Yahweh provides the meaning: 'Yahweh has hidden'. Another suggestion derives the name 'Zephaniah' from the root '*sapah*' (GK 7595: 'to watch'). Thus, combined with the suffix *yah*, the name in this case would mean something like 'Watchman of Yahweh'. In chapter 3, after an utterance concerning the judgment on Jerusalem, Zephaniah promises future glory for Israel's remnant.

As should have become clear by now, the search for the presence of Cush is not restricted just to the prophetic literature. Cush also appears in the historical books, including the books of Chronicles. One such important reference to Cush is to be found in 2 Chronicles 14:9-15. It is now to this text that our investigation in the following chapter is turned.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the involvements of Cush with Syria-Palestine. Generally speaking, it can be said that there is no doubt that these took on several forms, including not only economic (cf. section 4.2), but also political and military (cf. 4.3) affairs. Thus, there can be no doubt that these involvements constitute the clearest indication yet of the presence of Cush in the Old Testament. The Cushites appear in the Bible repeatedly, demonstrating that African people were a regular part of the biblical world. As far back in biblical history as nations go, Cush was there. These involvements also bear witness to the fact that Cush, an African nation south of Egypt, was well known and contributed enormously to the general history of the Levant in general and to that of Israel in particular.

More specifically, the investigations in this chapter have revealed that Cush was associated with wealth. The reference to 'gifts that will be brought to the Lord of Hosts from a people tall and smooth-skinned' (Is 18:7), regardless of whether these gifts consisted of material things or of people themselves, points clearly to this wealth. If, as some authors have suggested, the 'gifts' in question referred to people themselves, then this would be one of the most elevated ways of portraying a people. Similarly, the

‘merchandise’ or ‘labour’ of Cush (Is 45:14), and the ‘topaz’ of Cush (Jb 28:19), represent other important references to Cush’s wealth. We have argued that the enigmatic word ‘topaz’ most probably referred to the many precious metals for which Cush was famed.

The references to the wealth of Cush bring to mind the modern perceptions of Africa as a destitute continent, although it is in fact rich in resources. While many of these resources still remain to be used, it is sad to note that those that have been mined have often been misappropriated.

In as far as the political and military involvements of Cush were concerned it is probably true to say that these were as complex as they could be. But certainly, the references to Cush in this regard bear testimony to the political and military realities to which Cush was no stranger. The Cushite messenger of Joab (2 Sm 18), who was most probably an officer in David’s army, is proof that Cushites had so infiltrated Israelite society as to be part of sensitive institutions such as the military. The same may be said of Ebed-melech (Jr 38-39) who functioned at the court of King Zedekiah. The urgent and well-executed moves of Ebed-melech to save the life of one of Israelite’s greatest prophets demonstrate that human sensitivities are not the monopoly of any one ethnic group. The references to Cush in Jeremiah offer evidence of the fact that the prophet’s audience was familiar with the Cushites, who were still participating in the history of Judah in the late seventh century although they were no longer the rulers of Egypt. Other references to Cush in Jeremiah have been discussed in previous sections (cf. 3.2.1; 3.3.3; 3.4.3), and generally speaking Cushites fare well, as our investigations of Jeremiah 36:14 (Yehudi, grandson of Cush), Jeremiah 46:9 (Cush and Put), and Jeremiah 13:23 (the reference to Cushite skin), have shown.

The reference to ambassadors despatched to Jerusalem in Isaiah 18:1-2 comprises another example of the sensitivities of the Cushites towards other people. It can be inferred here that Cushites were probably, by the time of Isaiah, already seasoned in the art of diplomacy. Although Isaiah goes ahead to express his disapproval of the ambassadors’ mission, he shows how willing they were to be of help to Judah in its time of need. The text also shows that the two groups of people shared a common destiny in their opposition to Assyria, then perceived to be a mutual adversary. It suggests that there

were deep, abiding friendships between the two as well as mutual respect, or else it would be difficult to explain their mission. Isaiah should be credited with producing the most complete picture of the Cushites in the whole of the Old Testament, probably because of the prominence of this African nation on the geo-political stage during the prophet's time. Yet, Isaiah 18 stands in marked contrast to Isaiah 20 where Cushites are portrayed as humiliated and debased.

The prophet Ezekiel too records his own impressions of Cush. In chapter 30, he employs the familiar image of the mighty Cush because the latter was known to be a source of mercenary strength in other nations' armies. In this particular chapter, Cushites are members of the armies of the Egyptians and are arrayed alongside their traditional allies: Put, Libya and Lud. But the fate of the Cushites in Ezekiel is always the same: destruction, which is, however, ordained by Yahweh himself. Thus, in this sense, Cushites may be said to be portrayed negatively and as vulnerable. Cushite involvements in political and military matters made them vulnerable in other respects as well. The references in Nahum (3:9) and Zephaniah (2:12) indicate how they were the object of these prophets' oracles of doom.

Finally, the military campaigns alluded to in the accounts of Tirhakah and Zerah (2 Ki 19:9; Is 37:9; 2 Chr 14:8-14), and also of Shishak with his army comprising Libyans, Sukkites, Arabs and Cushites (2 Chr 12:3; 16:8; 21:16), leave no doubt in anyone's mind of the military prowess of this African nation. The reference to chariots in Zerah's army offers evidence of the extent to which the mechanized warfare of the Cushites had developed. Presumably, these chariots were pulled by horses. Although we did not discuss the issue of horses in our investigation, authors are generally agreed that Cushites were breeders of these animals, which possessed a good pedigree (cf. Yamauchi 2004:115). It will be remembered that Cush was also often referred to as the 'Land of the Bow', implying how skilled in archery these African people were. The reference to Zerah in Chronicles indicates how such skill in military matters, developed over the years, could be used to challenge other peoples as well.

The references to Cush in the political and military affairs of the Old Testament world are, I think, a reminder also to the modern reader of the complexity of the dynamics involved in these two realities. It is precisely because they are complex that

there is need continually to exercise caution in studying them. They offer a reminder that every nation has its own place in history and has a contribution to make to that history. Finally, they are a pointer to the fact that ultimately, it is God who directs the course of world events and that he does so according to his will and in his own time.

CHAPTER FIVE

CUSH, YAHWEH, AND THE CONTEXT OF SALVATION / RESTORATION

5.1 Introduction

The involvements of Cush with the people of Judah and / or Israel in the Old Testament period were not merely limited to its connections with cultural and / or anthropological, political and military matters as the foregoing analyses have revealed. They also extended to the religious sphere, more specifically to dealings between Yahweh and Israel on one hand, and Yahweh and other nations - notably Cush - on the other. The Old Testament portrayal of Cush and of Yahweh's relationship with Cush is consequently the focus of this chapter, and the texts to be discussed are: Isaiah 11:11; 18:7; 43:3; Amos 9:7; Zephaniah 3:10; Psalm 68:32 [31]; and 87:4. Again a word of caution here is not out of place.

These involvements are not clear-cut in the sense that one can identify Yahweh's involvement with Cush precisely. As was the case with previous analyses, the involvements or functions of Cush at times overlap. Thus, one may meet with a case where for example a reference to military involvement is also an allusion to political relationships. What we have attempted to do in this investigation is to focus more on an apparently *predominant* aspect in each of our references, which has comprised one of the guiding principles governing our thematic approach in other sections of this thesis and is also the case here.

Our intention in this chapter to argue that the following texts contain certain key concepts which serve as a common denominator that pervades all of them. These concepts revolve around the following key words which are reflected in the title of this chapter, namely Yahweh, Israel, Cush and the context of restoration or salvation. These denominators need not necessarily appear for every reference in this order. Furthermore, the discussion of the concept of restoration or salvation is in a way restricted since the focus of this thesis falls on Cush. Thus, allusions to the restoration and salvation of Israel feature only in as far as they advance the case for Cush. But one must admit that the two are so intertwined that the distinction becomes somewhat arbitrary and treating them simultaneously seems to be the natural thing to do.

5.2 Isaiah 11:11

Masoretic text:

wdy tynv ynda @yswy awhh ~wyb hyhw
 ~yrcmmw rwvam ravy rva wm[rav-ta
 twngl
 ~yh yyamw tmxmw r[nvmw ~ly[mw vwkmw
 swrtpmw

Translation:

On that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastland of the sea.

5.2.1 Preliminary remarks

The verse under investigation stems from the general context of Proto-Isaiah which comprises chapters 1-39 and represents a collection of oracles from the eighth to the sixth centuries. The term Cush occurs once in Isaiah 11, verse 11. The poem of which this verse forms part dates from the end of the Babylonian exile and refers to the post-exilic Diaspora of the Jews spread among the nations mentioned in verse 11. The immediate literary context forms part of what has been referred to by some authors as the ‘Book of Emmanuel’ and comprises the section which extends from Isaiah 6:1–12:6 (cf. Testa 1982:376). The section that is directly relevant to our investigation forms a subsection of the ‘Book of Emmanuel’, viz. Isaiah 11:1-16.⁸¹ This may further be broken down into two parts, namely Isaiah 11:1-9, and Isaiah 11:10-16. Isaiah 11:1-9 foresees a time when the Messiah, descendant of David, will establish a kingdom of justice, peace and perfect harmony in the whole of creation. This is well-exemplified by the imagery used. Isaiah 11:10-16, which brackets the verse which is the object of our investigation, falls in the context of what may be titled as ‘the glory of Zion’ section (cf. Testa 1982:376). It is, however, considered by some authors to be a later addition (cf. Jensen 1990:238). Nevertheless, the section is important for its reference to Cush.

Verse 11 mentions the nations of the Jewish Diaspora which will eventually feature in the whole process of the restoration and the glory of Zion: Assyria, Egypt,

⁸¹ The designation ‘Book of Emmanuel’ has arisen from the understanding that the central focus of Isaiah 6:1–12:6 is really the ‘Sign of Emmanuel’ in Isaiah 7:10-17, a text which has come to be understood as symbolizing the future messiah (cf. Testa 1982:381). Understood in this sense, this interpretation would then link up well with what the prophet Nathan said of the house of David in 2 Samuel 7:11-17, that the Lord will in some future time raise an heir for David. It is he who will build the Lord a ‘house’, a euphemism for a kingdom. That kingdom or Davidic dynasty would then last forever.

Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath and the coastlands of the sea. Roughly speaking, these nations represent archaic and commonly-cited near and far geographical names of Israelite exiles.

Assyria and Egypt represent classic enemies of Israel (7:18); Pathros is Upper Egypt (Dan 10:14); Cush consists of the country south of Egypt (18:1; 20:3-5). Elam is located east of Babylonia, today Iran (21:2); Shinar is Babylonia (Gn 10:10; Dan 1:1-2); Hamath represents Syria (10:9; 2 Ki 17:24); the isles are either those near the coastlands or those in the Mediterranean where many Jews had been sold and used as slaves (Jl 4:6).

But upon initial examination, chapter 11 of Isaiah presents numerous problems to the exegete. Some of these follow: first, the text seems to reflect evidences of multiple editorial layers that have been redacted into a single chapter, united by the metaphor of the root or shoot of Jesse, an image found both in Isaiah 11:1 and 11:10 (cf. Sadler 2001:103. See also Kaiser 1983:262). Secondly, one may note an ambiguity concerning the period addressed in this prophecy since it seems unlikely that Isaiah would have known of exiles in regions as far afield as Cush in his day. Thirdly, the mixed assortment of names used to identify the regions where the 'remnant' will be assembled is problematic as well. We will take these issues into account below.

5.2.2 Analytical remarks

The reference to Cush in this chapter occurs amid a larger list of nations among whom the people of Israel (here identified as Ephraim) and Judah have been dispersed. However, the reference to a significant Diaspora has been thought by many to hint at a late date for verses 11-16. Wade (1929:32) proposes that the use of the term 'stump' (remnant) of Jesse implies that the independent Judean monarchy was no longer in existence. Childs (2001:104) suggests the prophecy is late post-exilic, owing to the perception of a worldwide Diaspora and hints of Deutero-Isaiah's hope regarding Israelite and Judahite reconciliation. Some authors argue that if any portion of the prophecy does belong to Isaiah ben Aamoz, then it is the portion that suggests a return from Assyria and Egypt, resulting from the deportations of 733-31 and 722-20 BCE. Kissane (1960:138) for instance considers that this is an authentic Isaianic reference.

Verses 11-16 speak of Yahweh and what he will do for the remnant of Israel, dispersed through many lands (v.12). The reference is to the postexilic Diaspora rather than the Babylonian Exile (cf. Wade 1929:86; Young 1965). The allusion to the jealousy between Ephraim and Judah thus has as its background Jewish-Samaritan hostilities (cf. Ezr 4:1-3). The redemption envisioned is depicted as a new exodus, since Yahweh dries up the waters and leads forth his people (vv.15-16). The concept of a highway (*messilla*) derives from Deutero-Isaiah (cf. 40:3), and not from the old exodus tradition. Assyria was no longer in existence when this text was written, but Egypt and Assyria represent powers that oppress and enslave.

The nations enumerated in Isaiah 11:11 represent the lands of the Jewish dispersion. One such nation is Cush. However, the names used to identify these nations are rather unusual for they are an interesting mix of nation and city names that are further complicated by a redundancy (cf. Sadler 2001:105). Egypt and Pathros would both suggest that the prophet intended the larger region of Egypt. As Wildberger (1991:492) has pointed out: 'Perhaps the redundancy is due to the fact that the author meant by Egypt the northern or Lower region and by Pathros, the southern or Upper region'. Also, the reference 'Hamath' is puzzling since 'Hamath' is not a capital city, but an unremarkable city in the region of Syria. Nevertheless, the reference may point to a large Diasporic community in that city (cf. Kaiser 1983:265). The author may have had in mind the intention of using the expression as a *pars pro toto* to designate the whole land of Syria. Thus, because of this unusual situation, many scholars think that the most plausible scenario is that the passage initially limited the return, describing it as only from Egypt and Syria. But subsequent redactors may have employed 'Cush' alongside 'Elam', 'Shinar' and the 'Coastlands' to represent the great scope of Yahweh's efforts to bring the people of Israel and Judah back home (cf. Wildberger 1991:488-490). Hence, a vast portion of the world known to Hebrew authors is represented by these different states. The resulting picture is therefore one of an 'ecumenical return' (Sadler 2001:107), demonstrating the authority of Yahweh over the nations of the world. In this regard, the in-gathering from Cush reflects Yahweh's reach to the southernmost portions of the then-known world.

However, again as Sadler (2001:107) has cautioned, we should be careful not to be hasty in precluding references to an Israelite / Judahite presence in Cush in the time of Isaiah, since this is not the only theoretically pre-exilic text to imply a return of Diasporic Israel / Judah from Cush. A veiled reference to this return is also present in Isaiah 18:7 and Zephaniah 3:10. According to these texts a future day of in-gathering is prophesied where adherents to Yahwism will make their trek north to their home in the Promised Land. This concept varies only slightly from the nuance given to the phrase ‘gifts from Cush’ that was the focus in Isaiah 18 and which will be the point of our investigation in Psalm 68 below.

The historical circumstances which led to the presence of Jews in these nations vary greatly. However, for this thesis it is significant to observe that whatever the causes of such dispersion, Isaiah refers to the people of God in lands as remote as Cush. In fact, historically, we know that Jews were once to be found also in Egypt and on the island of Elephantine (called *Yeb* by the Egyptians), right up the Nile. This is where a Jewish mercenary force was garrisoned during the Persian period (cf. Yamauchi 2004:47). According to some authors the Jewish presence there may have come about as a result of conscription by the Assyrians (cf. Soggin 1989:565-566; Miller & Hayes 1986:435-436). There is no doubt that this may also have constituted one of the major reasons of their presence elsewhere.

Moreover, evidence also exists to substantiate the claims that some groups from Israel may have ventured into the regions south of Egypt many years ago. These have today come to be known as the ‘Lost Tribes of Israel’. It is claimed that one such example is that of the Lemba of South Africa; another is that of the so-called ‘Falasha Jews’ found in Ethiopia. During a devastating famine which struck the latter country in the early 1990s, many of the Falasha Jews were actually airlifted to Israel in an attempt to rescue them and the present author indeed met some of them at the shores of the Dead Sea and in their camps near Mount Tabor, when he was on a study tour in Israel / Palestine.⁸²

⁸² M Le Roux, who is one of the promoters in the ‘Africanization of Biblical Studies Project’ and who has also co-promoted this thesis, has undertaken extensive research on the Lemba of Southern Africa. This author was privileged to be present when her book on the Lemba was launched in Pretoria, South Africa, in November 2004.

Though their ambiguous origins obscure the time of migration, both the Lemba and the Falasha Jews, also referred to as the 'Beta Israelites', demonstrate that Jewish groups had penetrated into the heart of the African continent perhaps even as early as before the advent of the Christian Era. In the light of the existence of these two groups and the Jewish outpost of Elephantine on Egypt's southern border in the mid-seventh century BCE, it is not implausible that Israelites settled in Cush during the late eighth century or early seventh century (cf. Sadler 2001:108-109, footnote 118). Though we cannot definitively place this community in Egypt prior to the mid-seventh century, at best the characteristics of their community would satisfy the requisite criteria for the remnant in the prophecy of Isaiah 11:11. They were displaced Israelites dwelling on the borders of Cush near the time when Isaiah of Jerusalem composed his oracles. Perhaps it was from this community that settlements of Israelites migrated south into Cush. But nevertheless, however plausible this explanation might be, it still remains largely speculation.

The conditions of the life these Israelites led in the Diaspora are also not altogether clear. The prophecy does not seem to offer any clues. But the references to 'pots of meat, fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic' during their sojourn in Egypt (cf. Nm 11:4-5) offer indications that, at least in some of the lands of dispersion, the Jews led fairly good lives. Nevertheless, this is also only speculative. All that can be said with some relative certainty is that just as other nations housed Israel in pre-exilic times or served as places of refuge for displaced Jewish people during and after the Exile, so did Cush. Cush was simply another nation that 'welcomed' either exiled Israelite settlers or an exiled community.

Thus, the focus of Isaiah 11:11 falls primarily on the Jews and not on the Cushites, whose country is only mentioned as one of the places of the Jewish dispersion. But such a mention of Cush is in itself significant. It points to the fact that Cush existed in antiquity as a country with other, known, locations. It can also be postulated that the Jewish presence indicates the importance of such a location to history; or else why would they end up in a place of little significance? This seems to be the case to me, unless of course they were forced to move to a desolate place as often happens when people are oppressed.

We have mentioned that Isaiah 11:10-16 represents a section of the ‘Book of Emmanuel’ which may be termed the ‘glory of Zion’, a ‘place of rest’ for Yahweh. Once on this mountain of rest, all his subjects from the four corners of the earth will no longer behave as wild animals, but will instead put aside any instinctual greed and injustice, because ultimately the ‘knowledge of the Lord’ will fill all the country like abundant waters (cf. Is 2:3; 30:21; 32:15-17). In fact, the root of Isaiah (starting with Hezekiah and followed by the Messiah) will serve as a standard for calling back the dispersed flock, namely the ‘remnant’ of Israel taken into exile by the Assyrians (cf. 2 Ki 17:23) and the Egyptians (Hs 11:5). Ultimately, all the exiles will converge on his place of glory, namely Mount Zion, to look for a place of rest. Thus, one may speak of a kind of ‘second Exodus’ executed once more by the omnipotent hand of God (Ezk 6:6) who will again dry up the ‘mouth’ of the Sea of Egypt and the River Euphrates. Then the exiles will as in the first Exodus pass through with dry sandals.

Consequently, the exiles of Israel and Judah, summoned from all the four corners of the earth, will exterminate their oppressors (Philistines, Edomites, Moabites and Ammonites) and will gather at the holy mountain of Zion without jealousy and greed, thereby forming a united future kingdom similar to the glorious times of King David (cf. Hs 2:2; 3:5; Jr 3:18; Ezk 34:23; 37:16-28).

This ‘second Exodus’, which took place after the tragedy of 586 BCE, and which is also alluded to in 2 Chronicles 30:10-12, is implied in Isaiah 11:11-16. Hence, if the reading of this text is stretched further, one can plausibly argue that it *de facto* envisages a broader context of peace, salvation and / or restoration and implies that Cush would be no stranger to such a context.

5.3 Isaiah 18:7

Masoretic text:

švmm ~ [twabc hwhy l yv-lbwy ayhh t [b

rva hswbmw wq-wq ywg halhw awh-!m arwn
 ~ [mw jrwmw
 !wyc-rh twabc hwhy-~v ~wqm-la wcra
 ~yrhn wazb

Translation:

At that time gifts will be brought to the LORD of hosts from a people tall and smooth, from a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide, to Mount Zion, the place of the name of the LORD Sebaoth.

5.3.1 Preliminary remarks

It is important to note that the present writer again refers to Isaiah 18 in connection with Cush, underscoring his belief that Isaiah 18 is significant in this respect. Although the verse does not mention Cush by name, the general context suggests that it is the object of discussion (cf. vv.1-2). The people referred to in verses 1-2 as ‘tall’ and ‘smooth-skinned’ are in verse 7 also portrayed as ‘bringing gifts to the Lord of Hosts’. But first, some remarks on literary features must be made.⁸³

The verse is very similar in literary formation to verses 1-2, except for minor alterations. Even the subject is the same. Høyland Lavik (2004:238, especially footnote 8) cites a long list of scholars according to whom this verse is a late addition and therefore cannot be taken generally as originating from the prophet Isaiah who lived in the 8th century. One of the reasons adduced is for example the use of the terminology ‘Zion’ and ‘Yahweh Sebaoth’ which is not found in verses 1-2 (cf. Høyland Lavik 2004:239). But, as she (2004:239) has argued ‘[...] this thesis seeks to show how Isa 18 *as a whole* is designed in a way that shapes the entire message of judgement towards

⁸³ I should like to acknowledge an in-depth analysis of this verse by Høyland Lavik (2004:237ff).

Judah.’ Thus, in agreement with her assessment, this researcher too is of the view that this verse should be read as a unit. In this thesis, verse 7 will be understood as forming an integral part of Isaiah 18 as a whole. This seems to be the appropriate approach, especially considering that this is how the verse has been transmitted to us in the final form of the text.

5.2.2.2 Analytical remarks

The similarities of Isaiah 18:7 with Isaiah 18:1-2 have been alluded to already. But Isaiah 18:7 chiefly contains, among others, the two motifs of ‘gift’ and ‘Zion’, which are not mentioned in Isaiah 18:1-2. However, both motifs are attested to in the Old Testament, the former much less frequently, some three times (Is 18:7; Ps 68:30 [68:29]; Ps 76:12 [76:11]), whereas the latter appears a much greater number of times, exhibiting a wide range of connotations.⁸⁴ In Isaiah 18:7 the motif ‘gift’ is applied in a context where it is associated with the nations’ pilgrimage towards Zion, here represented by Cush. Of importance to the present investigation is, of course, the choice of Cush as representative of the nations who will travel in pilgrimage to Zion.

The motif ‘Zion’ in Isaiah 18:7 on the other hand can be referred to as the place where the nations will arrive in eschatological times. Again Cush is mentioned here, by implication, as one of those nations. This is of significance to our investigation. Furthermore, by repeating the motif of ‘rivers’ already occurring in Isaiah 18:2, and in connection with Zion which in turn is connected to Cush as just outlined, Isaiah 18:7 links up with and rehearses, as it were, the narrative portraying the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2:10-14. In so doing Cush becomes linked to the origins of the world and to a time understood to be one of abundance and harmony.

The whole of verse 7 refers to future events during which ‘in that time’ gifts will be brought to Yahweh Sebaoth on Zion by a people ‘tall and smooth-skinned’. It has already been pointed out that the people referred to are ‘Cushites’, whose features as well as their land are described graphically by the author.

⁸⁴ For the distribution of these occurrences, see Otto (1989:1007) under the entry **!wyc**. Cf. also Stolz (1976:544), who counts 154 occurrences of Zion in the Old Testament.

Thus, while reference is made to the wealth of Cush (whatever the nature of such wealth (cf. chapter three of this thesis) in verse 7, the prophet Isaiah foresees a time in the future when this African nation south of Egypt will come to Mount Zion, ‘the place of the name of Yahweh Sebaoth’. It is this ‘coming to Zion, to the place of Yahweh Sebaoth’ which has come to be interpreted as signifying the conversion of the Cushites. Thus, at the eschaton this African nation will be converted to Yahweh. This conversion will be concretized in the bringing of gifts to the Lord of Hosts. In fact, Isaiah sends the Cush ambassadors to Jerusalem to pay homage to the Lord in his temple (cf. Is 2:2-4.60.62; 45:14; Ps 87:4; Zec 14:16; Ps 68: 31-33). In the eschaton, Cush will be saved and is therefore placed in the context of salvation and relationship with Yahweh.

Hence, it is significant to note that already as early as the time of Isaiah the conversion of the Cushites was being envisaged. Over the centuries, this conversion was to be realized in various ways, most importantly through missionary work.

5.4 Isaiah 43:3

Masoretic text:

\$[yvwm larfy vwdq \$yhla hwhy yna yk
 \$ytxt absw vwk ~yrcm \$rpk yttn

Translation:

For, I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you.

5.4.1 Preliminary remarks

The term ‘Cush’ appears once in Isaiah 43, in verse 3, where it is associated with Seba and Egypt. The trio recalls a set of associations whose nature is not so easy to

determine with any certainty. These associations (or are they perhaps political alliances?) are reflected not only in the present text, but also in Isaiah 45:14 and Genesis 10:6-8, as well as in the books of Chronicles (1 Chr 1:8-10,22; 2 Chr 12:3; 14:7-14; 16:8). It should however be pointed out that the texts from the books of Chronicles more or less repeat the lists of peoples enumerated, especially in Genesis 10.

Isaiah 43, which contains the verse with the designation ‘Cush’, is generally perceived by various scholars as forming part of a wider oracle which comprises the whole section of Isaiah 43:1-7. Westermann (1969:114ff) divides the pericope into verses 1-4 and 5-7 respectively. So do Wade (1929:276), Sadler (2001:190ff) and Adamo (1998:125), to name only a few examples. It is also clear that if the text is accepted as it has come down to us, verses 3 and 4 consist of parallel explanatory clauses (cf. Sadler 2001:191). Verse 3 identifies whom Yahweh is to redeem, namely Israel, whereas verse 4 identifies the value of Israel to Yahweh. Also in verses 3 and 4, Yahweh offers parallel promises to the nations in place of Israel. Thus, it would seem that the author intended this pericope to be read as a unit, and therefore there is no need to rearrange it. This seems to be the view of the majority of scholars, which I shall therefore adopt in my reading of Isaiah 43:1-7.

Furthermore, the oracle is constructed in two parts which are parallel to each other: verses 1-4 and verses 5-7. Verse 1 begins with the assurance of salvation, ‘Fear not’, which is substantiated in the perfect tense ‘I have set you free’, and by means of a noun clause ‘you are mine’ (cf. also v.3a: ‘I am’), and is continued in the proclamation of imminent salvation expressed in the future tense (cf. vv.2ff). The oracle is rounded off in verse 4a by the repetition of the substantiation in the perfect tense.

The second part of the oracle (vv.5-7), while briefer than the first (vv.1-4), is parallel to it in structure and content. Verse 7, which rounds off the two parts and serves as the conclusion of the pericope, shows the end which the work of redemption has in view, namely the ‘glory’ of Yahweh. Thus, there is no need to fragment this oracle as some authors have done.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Whybray (1981:81-82); Smart (1965:96), and Wilson (1986:243), to cite just a few examples, have all postulated a re-arrangement of the verses of the MT text. The present author is inclined to concur with Westermann (1969:114ff), according to whom the pericope of Isaiah 43:1-7 may be divided into two parts, namely verses 1-4 and 5-7.

Our attention is now directed to the function of Cush in Isaiah 43:3.

5.4.2 Analytical remarks

The context of Isaiah 43:3 is to be found in verses 1-7. Westermann (1969:115) has argued that the words of Isaiah 43:1-7 refer to an oracle of salvation, the core message of Deutero-Isaiah's proclamation. To my mind one of the indications that this is indeed the case is the use of a *waw* disjunctive in the temporal clause $\text{חַת} [\text{w}]$ ('but now'), which appears in verse one. Thus, the oracle in Isaiah 43:3 contrasts sharply with the miserable state of Judah described in Isaiah 42:18-25. As Westermann (1969:115) has pointed out, Isaiah 43:3, like Isaiah 40:2 which cancels Judah's old guilt, proclaims the dawn of the day of liberation and salvation.

Furthermore, the Hebrew verbs used in verse one of this chapter are highly allusive as they bring to mind God's acts of 'creating, fashioning', all of which are reminiscent of the creation accounts of Genesis. The significance of this reference is its showing that the same creative act which brought into being the heavens and the earth in Genesis is now creating Israel. He who fashioned or formed human beings in Genesis 2:7 is now fashioning Israel. Yahweh now acts as the next of kin to Israel in paying ransom for it. He has called Israel 'by name', in other words addressing it as Yahweh's 'covenant people'.

Holter (2000:122) considers Isaiah 43:3 to be one of the texts within the Old Testament portrayal of Cush that can throw light on the triangular relationship of Cush with Israel and Yahweh. In this text, Cush, together with two other nations, namely Egypt and Seba, is depicted as the ransom which Yahweh is willing to give to the Persian king Cyrus in exchange for the release of the exiled Israel. According to Holter (2000:124), Cush here 'definitively plays a positive role'.

This role hinges on the word 'ransom' (v.3) and the action of 'redeeming' (v.1), both of which are applied to Yahweh, who will eventually 'give' people 'instead' of Israel. The verb לָאָג , 'to redeem', signifies the act of liberating, by means of a payment, a relative who has been imprisoned for debt, and was originally, according to Westermann (1969:116), 'a technical term of a family law.' Although Westermann is of

the view that this oracle may initially have been applied to an individual, it is now applied to Israel as a nation: 'This element in Deutero-Isaiah marks the appearance of something new in the relationship between God and his people. The subject to which Deutero-Isaiah's entire proclamation is addressed is the nation as a unit' (cf. Westermann 1969:116).

Thus, one nation's redemption comes at a high price. In order to ransom Israel, Yahweh will offer Cush, Seba and Egypt in its stead. For the purposes of this thesis, it is the surrendering of this trio for the sake of Israel that is most significant. Our understanding of these acts depends upon what we infer about them. What is then the author's valuation of Cush and its partners?

First of all, from the point of view of Israel, the reference to the trio leaves no doubt that Africa is being referred to. While it may have been Persian policy to conquer Africa (and Egypt was conquered by Cyrus' son Cambyses II), it is probable that the prophet was simply saying 'the farthest parts of the world' (cf. vv 5-6). Westermann (1969) has argued that: 'Israel's saviour is the lord of all the nations [...]. While v.4 uses general terms, lands and peoples, v.3b is specific as to those of them which God is to give in Israel's stead or as her ransom – Egypt, Ethiopia [Cush] and Seba.'

Sadler (2001:192-193) has proposed at least four possibilities which in my view are not at all far-fetched. The first one places great value on the trio (2001:192), the reason being that these nations were situated in regions rich in natural resources, although Sadler does not specify the nature of such resources. He furthermore argues that these nations had represented, at various times, significant military and political forces in the Levant (2001:192). The second suggestion exonerates Israel itself at the expense of the dignity of its southern neighbours (2001:192). The reason given for this position is that the restoration of Israel is predicted on the subjugation of not just one, but *three* prominent nations. The third possibility is to think of these nations as representing the southern farthest extent of the known world (2001:193), which implies that Yahweh would give the whole known world in order to ransom the favoured Israel from its Babylonian captivity. Finally, the fourth possibility, based on actual historical events, is to think that Deutero-Isaiah in Isaiah 43:3 perceived a period when the Persian king Cyrus would have entertained political ambitions which might have led him to seek the

unconquered territories in Egypt and farther south (cf. Sadler 2001:193). Sadler argues that in fact, the relationship between this prophecy and Cyrus is implied by Isaiah 45:14 where the trio appears again (cf. Sadler 2001:193, footnote 118), although the identification of Cyrus as the recipient of the gifts from these nations is problematic. Nevertheless, Sadler is of the view that in Isaiah 43:3, the image of Yahweh delivering Egyptians, Cushites and Sabeans to king Cyrus is implied (2001:193).

But as history demonstrates, Cyrus (539-530 BCE) never actually acquired Egyptian territory. That ambition was to be realised by Cambyses II (530-522 BCE), Cyrus' son and successor, in about the year 525 BCE (cf. Bright 1959:365; Boshoff, Scheffler & Spangenberg 2000:168; Scheffler 2001:139-140). But one thing is clear, namely that the relationship between Yahweh and Cyrus is interpreted as some form of contract.⁸⁶ It would seem in the present context that the presumed contract consisted in Yahweh permitting Cyrus' plan of world domination, provided that he in his turn repatriated the exiled people of Israel. The presupposition here would be that the most important lands remaining for Cyrus to conquer would have been Cush, Egypt and Seba; hence the validation of the metaphor of the nations being given 'instead of' Israel.⁸⁷ Finally, Sadler (2001:194) concludes:

However we choose to interpret this passage, several points are clear: Israel is deemed more important to YHWH than this [sic] these other three nations; the freedom and autonomy of these other nations can be compromised for the sake of Judah's redemption; Judah is given hierarchical priority over other nations, including Cush.

According to Soggin (1993:26), Isaiah 43:1ff, like other texts in Second Isaiah (cf. Is 41:18ff; 43:16ff; 48:20ff), speaks of a 'second exodus' and a 'restoration' of the exiles who returned home from Babylon. Hence, there can be no doubt that the concern of Isaiah 43:3 is the exiled people of Israel. Therefore, Sadler as just cited above, has in my view unnecessarily speculated with regard to the reason (s) for this concern. The

⁸⁶ Isaiah 45:1 unequivocally calls Cyrus Yahweh's 'anointed one'! It should also be noted that Israel itself is called Yahweh's 'chosen one' or 'anointed one'.

⁸⁷ However, Wilson (1986:243), cited by Sadler (2001:194, footnote 121) cautions that 'no geopolitical import should be read into [this] prophecy.'

actual reason for this restoration is clearly stated in verse 4 where we read that Yahweh says of Israel ‘you are precious...honoured, and I love you’. This unreserved concern for Israel hinges on Yahweh’s love for it, because of which Yahweh is willing to go to any lengths, even surrendering other equally important nations in compensation for Israel.⁸⁸ A number of authors have captured this nuance in their analyses of this chapter. Adamo (1998:125) echoes them when he writes:

Deutero-Isaiah seems to be saying, using every symbol and great extravagant language at his disposal, that Israel is loved by Yahweh; Israel has a saviour who will go to any lengths, even giving the entire world for Israel’s deliverance. Here the love of Yahweh serves as a motif throughout the poems.

There is nothing Yahweh will not give up, including the rich African nations of Egypt, Seba and Cush, in order to secure the deliverance of Israel. Felder (1989:24) has articulated this position equally well when he writes: ‘God stands prepared to offer the richest and furthest countries, among which are Ethiopia [Cush], Egypt, and Seba [...]’

The question then arises as to the social status of these African nations in the eyes of Yahweh. Do they mean less to him than Israel? Apparently, the ramifications of Isaiah 43:3 suggest that a positive answer might be given to this question. If so, Cush, together with Egypt and Seba, at least in this text, appears to be relegated by Deutero-Isaiah to an inferior position. What is even more troubling is that Yahweh seems to be sanctioning this position, as Yahweh is explicitly pro-Israel. The question begs for further scrutiny of the implications of this oracle vis-a-vis the trio.

It would be unfair to conclude that Deutero-Isaiah and therefore Yahweh in fact harboured any racist feelings towards Cush and its companions. First of all, Cush is placed on the same pedestal as Egypt and Seba. Thus, its fate is a shared one. Had it been the intention of the author to denigrate Cush, one would expect him to have isolated the

⁸⁸ In the text of Amos 9:7, it is apparent that Yahweh cares for other nations as well and not just Israel alone and that Israel like other nations is responsible for its iniquities, hence outlining Yahweh’s universalism. Thus, seen from this perspective Isaiah 43:3 would seem to present the reader with a theological tension as regards Amos 9:7.

latter for racist treatment, but this seems not to be the case for Cush is merely mentioned together with Egypt and Seba.

Second, it may also be remarked that Isaiah 43:3 as well as other texts of the Old Testament were, after all, first written for an Israelite audience. In fact, the point of Isaiah 43:3 seems to be rather to reassure a people whose future has been threatened by the Babylonian exile. Isaiah 43:3 is first and foremost Judeo-centric in the sense that its primary purpose is to tell the people of Israel that Yahweh still had their welfare at heart despite the trauma they had undergone. Sadler (2001:197) has brought to the fore another important and relevant point in my view: the need on the part of Yahweh to ‘reinforce their [Israelite] covenantal relationship with their God’.⁸⁹ Thus, if these considerations are accepted, such an interpretation would almost certainly preclude the subjugation of Cush or indeed the other two members of the trio.

The matter of Isaiah 43:3 can now be finalised. The trio represent the countries which God permitted the Persians under Cyrus to conquer, in return for having granted Israel its freedom. Now in the context of restoration, they will be given to Persia ‘instead’ of Israel as a ransom. The acts of ‘ransoming’ (v.3) and ‘redeeming’ (v.1) represent key terms which are crucial, in our view, for the understanding of the reference to Cush in Isaiah 43. Isaiah 43:4 underscores the reason for this venture on the part of Yahweh: his love for Israel. Because of this almost selfish love, Yahweh is willing to go to any length to restore Israel. Yahweh addresses his people with exceptional tenderness, promising to save them and gather them from all the places (the nuance deriving from the reference to the four corners of the world, vv.5-6) where they have been scattered and once again to reunite them. Soggin (1993:26) has rightly referred to this venture as a ‘second exodus’ and it is not for nothing that this text is rightly termed an ‘oracle of salvation’. The significance of the reference to Cush lies precisely in the importance placed by Yahweh on Israel. The text from Amos which is the object of the next investigation shows that in fact this understanding was not the case only with Isaiah, but also with Amos.

5.5 Amos 9:7

⁸⁹ It may be remarked that the idea of a covenant relationship is not such a frequent concept in Deutero-Isaiah as in other texts. Nevertheless, this seems to be the function of texts such as Isaiah 42:6; 49:8, and 54:10.

Masoretic text:

larfy ynb yl ~ta ~yyvk ynbk awlh
~yrcm #ram ytyl[h larfy-ta awlh hwhy-
~an
ryqm ~raw rwtpkm ~yytvlpw

Translation:

*Are you not like the Cushites to me, O people of Israel?
says the LORD. Did I not bring Israel up from the land of
Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans
from Kir?*

5.1 Preliminary remarks

The nine chapters of the book of Amos consist of a striking combination of announcements of doom, warnings, laments, visions, hymnic praises, one short narrative and an unexpected proclamation of salvation at the end (cf. Martin-Achard 1984:49; Heyns 1992:63). The contents can be subdivided into two fairly distinct main sections, namely, a collection of prophecies (words) by Amos (chs.1-6) and a report of his visions (chs.7-9). However, the only literary question usually posed by scholars is the authenticity of Amos 1:3 – 2:16 (Auld 1986:41; Martin-Achard 1984:57), which in any case does not affect the verse under investigation here. The prophecies of Amos are introduced by ‘he said’ in 1:2, while the visions are presented in autobiographical style

using the introduction ‘The Lord showed me’.⁹⁰ The verse which mentions ‘Cush’ therefore forms part of the section containing the visions.

From the literary point of view, verse 7 consists of two rhetorical questions which may be designated ‘a’ and ‘b’ respectively (Holter 2000b:115).⁹¹ These questions, requiring an affirmative answer, which Yahweh, through Amos, posed to his northern audience, are meant to arouse tension prior to the delivery of the prophetic announcement of judgment on Israel. A similar example is to be found in Jeremiah 13:23 where the prophet asks: ‘Can a Cushite change his skin?’ In the case of Amos the two rhetorical questions form a thematic parallel. They somehow relate Israel to one or two foreign nations (cf. Holter 2000b:118). Israel occurs in both lines, and it is related to the geographically distant Cushites in line ‘a’ and to the geographically closer Philistines and Arameans in line ‘b’. However as Holter (2000b:119) has pointed out:

[...] the actual function of the relationship between the Cushites of line a and the Philistines and the Arameans of line b, is not easy to grasp, as the structure of the text reflects a rather sophisticated composition. It should, however, be emphasised that the Masoretic text is clearly understandable, so there is no need for emendations.

Taken together, these two sets of parallels serve to strengthen the paralleling of lines ‘a’ and ‘b’ (cf. Holter 2000b:120). Thus, these structural features need not be understood to necessarily contrast with each other, namely to contrast the relation of Israel to Cush on one hand and that of Israel to the Philistines and Arameans on the other. As it is, a reading of line ‘a’ serves only to compare Israel to Cush, a comparison linked to their mutual relationship with Yahweh (cf. Holter 2000b:120ff).

Furthermore, whatever the meaning of this simile, it is clear that Amos utilized the Cushites to reassess Yahweh’s relationship with Israel. The text demonstrates that at the point of the fall of Israel, in the latter part of the eighth century, Yahweh compared the Cushites, for whatever reason, to Israel. As Sadler (2001:89) has pointed out:

⁹⁰ Cf Heyns (1992:63). ‘Choose Life! An Overview of the Book of Amos’, in Swanepoel F, *Thus Said the Lord*.

⁹¹ I am greatly indebted to Holter (2000b:115-125), whose article ‘Is Israel Worth More to God than Cush?’ offers very valuable insights into the text of Amos 9:7.

‘Because this rhetorical question occurs amid an oracle of destruction, we can reasonably conclude that Yahweh intended Israel to perceive a negative aspect of Cushite identity as the crux of the simile.’

Another aspect which perhaps merits comment is the phrase $\sim yv\dot{v}k \ ynb$. Sadler (2001) has in my view unnecessarily problematized the rendering $\sim yv\dot{v}k \ ynb$, arguing that it is ‘an anomaly’ (2001:96) since it does not appear anywhere else in the Bible, and has translated it as ‘offspring of Cushites’ (cf. also 2001:98). The closest parallels are in Deuteronomy 1:28 and 9:2 where we find the phrase $\sim yqn \ [\ ynb$ (offspring of the Anakim). The present phrase is also similar to the rendering $larfy-y\dot{v}k$ (sons / children of Israel). Sadler concludes that it can therefore be inferred from this rendering that ‘the Hebrew authors would have noted this redundancy of this construction to describe an ethnic group [...] Such an unusual construction may signal an unusual meaning’ (Sadler 2001:98). But I do not notice anything unusual in this construction as it is clear that the simile is meant to refer to the Cushites.

Amos is generally accepted as the first of the four biblical prophets of the eighth century, a group that made a special contribution to the faith of Israel. Consequently, in the works of the other members of the group, namely Hosea, Isaiah and Micah, we find themes which resonate in Amos’ book (cf. Heyns 1992:62). Similar themes are also reflected in the books of Joel and Obadiah. The book of Amos is placed between the books of Hosea and Micah. In order to understand Amos better, it would have been desirable to possess ample biographical information about him, but sadly there is little, apart from some meagre indications in the book itself that he was a sheep-farmer and cultivated sycamore trees, and did not belong to any company of prophets (7:10-17).

Although Amos was from the south, his prophetic ministry was exercised in the northern Kingdom during the reign of Jeroboam II (785-745 BCE). This is the information we garner from Amos 1:11, but the text of 2 Kings 14:23-28, which describes the reign of Jeroboam II, makes no mention of Amos’ name. According to 2 Kings 14:25-56, Jonah the son of Amittai is mentioned as prophesying a prosperous reign for Jeroboam II. It is also explicitly said that during this time, *no* judgment was uttered against Israel, which is difficult to reconcile with the fact that Amos, who in all

probability exercised his ministry at the time of the King in question, proclaimed days of doom, for which utterances he is particularly known (cf. Heyns 1992:63). So, how are we to understand this lack of allusion to his message? Was he simply ignored or criticized by certain circles as seems apparent in Amos 7:10-17? It is difficult to tell with any certainty.

But the fact of the matter is that Jeroboam II initiated an aggressive and expansionist policy which extended the borders of his kingdom as far as Damascus and Hamath in the north and as far as the Dead Sea in the south. His military and political power paid off and resulted in increased commerce and wealth, but the wealth was not equally shared among the people (cf. Am 4:1; 6:1). Insofar as religious affairs were concerned there was much hypocrisy (Am 4:4; 5:5, 21-24). The Israelites, however, interpreted their prosperity as a sign of God's approval and blessing, assuming that they were in a special relationship to Yahweh and therefore quite secure. It is within this context of social and religious decadence that Amos exercised his ministry and that the comparison in question should be understood.

5.5.2 Analytical remarks

Although source-critical studies of the book of Amos maintain that the book has been reworked by many editors, much of its content, including the verse under investigation, is considered as stemming from the prophet himself (cf. Martin-Achard 1984:52ff). From the contextual point of view, Amos 9:7 may be said to belong to chapters 7-9 which comprise a collection of symbolic visions regarding the destiny and fate of Israel. Within these visions, Amos 9:7 parallels the exodus of Israel with the historical experiences of other nations. Yahweh is depicted as showing care for other nations, and among these nations Cush is mentioned explicitly. But scholarly opinion is largely divided with regard to the interpretation of this reference. Hence, what precisely is the message of Amos here?

There are those who have in the words of Sadler (2001:102) 'attempt[ed] to eisegete' obscure and racist thought using this verse, although there have been moderate voices as well. Mays (1969) is one of those who has attempted to 'eisegete'

racist material into the understanding of Cush in this verse. According to Mays (1969:157), the comparison was intended to 'humiliate Israel completely with respect to Yahweh, to reduce them to the role in Yahweh's order of things which the Cushites played in their own society'. In the same vein, another author, Horton (1904:172), has argued that this verse should be understood in the context of the 'Curse of Ham' in Genesis 9 in terms of which he deems the Cushites to be 'the descendants of Ham, the despised and accursed branch of Noah's family'. But the actual subject of that curse was of course Canaan and not Ham, the presumed predecessor of the Cushites.

Another scholar imbued with racialist prejudice is Edghill, according to whom the Cushites of the time of Amos were 'uncivilized' and 'despised blacks' (1926:90). But nowhere in the Old Testament do we find this said or even implied of the Cushites. Instead all the indications suggest that the Cushites were in fact held in high esteem, as evidenced by their presence in various sectors of Israelite life. Feelings similar to those of Edghill have been expressed by Harper (1905:192). In order to illustrate how a text can be subjected to completely opposing views, Holter (2000b:115-116) has used as examples the stand-point of Harper vis-à-vis that of Adamo. But Harper and Edghill are not alone in their interpretation of Amos 9:7. In a similar vein, Ullendorff (1968:9) is of the view that this verse could only be 'fully appreciated if the [Cushites] serve, in the present context, as the epitome of a far-distant, uncivilized, and despised black race'.

All in all, as Sadler (2001:92) has pointed out, the perception that this passage contains racial overtones and that it assumes a demeaning connotation of the term Cushites, has been maintained by many modern exegetes over the course of the entire twentieth century. Thus, according to these exegetes, verse 7 would suggest that Yahweh has rejected Israel, allowing it to descend to the level of the vilified people of Cush. But again as Sadler (2001:93) has observed: 'Were we to accept Edghill, Ullendorff, Mays, Horton, and Neher's analyses, we would have interesting fodder for our discussion of racialist traits.'⁹²

⁹² I should like to note, however, that the quotation from Martin-Achard cited by Sadler and presumed to express the views of A Neher in fact seems to express a contrary view to that which Sadler attributes to him here. Going by the quotation from Martin-Achard, it is rather difficult to see how Neher can be taken to be 'racist'.

Nevertheless, as the various analyses of the Cush texts in this thesis have shown, it is difficult to contend that the Cushites were in any way debased, at least not explicitly. This seems to be the case here too. There are no hints of racialist traits or of attempts by the biblical author to draw attention to the colour of the Cushites. Adamo (1998:99) is of the same opinion: ‘A close examination of this passage (Amos 9:7-8) will convince any honest and well-informed biblical scholar that those explanations given above have no basis in the context.’

Yet it must be stated that the assumptions of Edghill and others concerning the Cushites during the period when Amos prophesied are historically inaccurate, because the Cushites in Amos’ time were clearly neither uncivilized nor isolated in their own territory. By that time Cushites were already active in the Levant (cf. 2 Sm 18 and 2 Chr). Moreover, the news of the hegemony of the Cushites during the twenty-fifth dynasty would have by then reached Judah as well. One author by the name of Smith has dated Amos’ prophecy between 760-740 BCE, and according to her:

[There is] no evidence that the Kushites were despised, heathen, backward, strange, or any of the other frequent disparaging and pejorative metaphors and adjectives that some contemporary biblical scholars utilize to describe Kush [...] the historical information does not substantiate it (Smith 1994:44).

According to Rice (1978:42): ‘There are no grounds whatsoever to [sic] Amos’ audience to take the comparison with the [Cushites] as demeaning’. Similarly, Martin-Achard (1984:124), citing Neher, has argued:

A. Neher fait remaquer que jamais le mot kush n’est utilise dans la Bible hebraique comme synonyme d’esclave ou d’etre inferieur; les Kushites seraient l’exemple d’un peuple reste au niveau naturel, n’etant pas entre dans l’histoire a l’inverse d’Israel, d’Aram et des Philistins (Martin-Achard 1984:124; cf. also Sadler 2001:92).

Thus, according to Neher, cited by Martin-Achard (1984:124), the word ‘Cush’ is never used in the Hebrew Bible as a synonym for a ‘slave’ or an ‘inferior’ being. Rather,

the Cushites serve as an example of a people who have remained on a natural level and who possess the same history as Israel, Aram, and Philistia.

The matter does not stop here, though. Certain authors have expressed moderate views on the reference to Cushites in Amos 9:7. One such author is Wolff, according to whom it was rather the *remoteness* of Cush which motivated the prophet to compare Israel to it (cf. Wolff 1977:347). In similar fashion Rice (1978:43) has contended that Amos used the Cushites in this simile because they ‘were remote and different’. This is also the view of Andersen and Freedman (1989:903), according to whom the image of Cush is used as representative of a distant nation. Similarly, Adamo (1998:99-100) has argued: ‘The reason they were used as a means of comparison with Israel is that they were seen as “representative” of foreign people living in the remotest or far-distant part of the world, yet with whom the Israelites were well-acquainted.’

Hence, according to these authors the text of Amos would imply that the basis of the comparison between Cush and Israel was that Israel was not more important to Yahweh than the most distant nation of Cush, which was known to be located at the end of the known world. A Lods, cited by Martin-Achard (1984:123), expresses the same view:

Amos nie purement et simplement le privilège des fis d’Israël; ils ne sont pas plus devant YHWH que les nègres du pays de Kush (Jr 13:23).
Le Dieu d’Amos n’est plus le Dieu particulier d’une nation; il est l’arbitre souverainement juste et le protecteur de tous les peuples.
(Martin-Achard 1984:123)

The text presents the relationship between Yahweh and other nations in expressions that parallel Israel and these nations. Accordingly, the election of Israel does not prevent Yahweh from having a similar relationship with other nations. Just as Yahweh led Israel out of bondage and gave them a home, Yahweh also led the Philistines, the Arameans and the Cushites and gave them their homes, possibly in the land of Israel itself.

That the reference is to Cushites living in the Levant finds ample support from the Old Testament itself. As it is, one finds groups such as those of Cushan (Jdg 3) and those

referred to in Habakkuk 3. Cushites also journeyed out with the Israelites during the Exodus, as mentioned in Numbers 12. There is also a mention of the hosts of the Cushites who were stationed by the Egyptians in southern Palestine according to 2 Chronicles chapters 12, 14, 16 and 21. Cushites are also referred to in the monarchic period, as we read in 2 Samuel 18 and at the time of the prophet Jeremiah (chs 38-39). Therefore, given this overwhelming evidence, it can be deduced that Amos 9:7 most probably refers to a group or even groups of the ‘offspring of the Cushites’ (Sadler 2001:99), who settled in the immediate environs of Judah. As with Israel, Philistia, and Aram, they were known to have originated in another region, namely Cush. But their vicinity to Judah evidenced Yahweh’s hand in their own exodus narrative.

Amos may have used the reference to convey the message that the ‘offspring of Cushites’ who had found a home in the environs of Judah were of no less concern to Yahweh than Israel. Hence, there is no reason for Israel to feel that it would not suffer the brunt of Yahweh’s wrath because of its misdeeds. Yahweh will judge those who have perpetuated injustice with ‘equal ferocity’ (Sadler 2001:100), whether Israel or one of the gentile nations. As Adamo (1998:100) has pointed out: ‘This passage should be regarded as a refutation of “an implied objection” from the listeners who boasted that Yahweh’s election automatically secured them from punishment.’ Such is also the view of Martin-Achard, according to whom what matters in this verse is the present context of Israel, which indicates that Yahweh is the God also of the Kushites, as well as of the Arameans, and of the Philistines (cf. Martin-Achard 1984:126).

But, in spite of the threat of the finality of the nation’s collapse, Amos 9:9-11 shows the assurance that is never lacking in the prophet’s words, namely that God will not completely destroy Israel, but will leave a remnant to fulfil his promises.⁹³ Yahweh does not desire the death of a wicked person but wishes a person to change and live.

On a final note, it can also be pointed out that biblical authors employed the appellation ‘Cush’ to different ends and that the appellation ‘Cush’ was a malleable trope in biblical literature. In the case of Amos, when the prophet confronts Israel’s arrogant

⁹³ In the Book of Acts 15:15ff, James the Apostle interprets this passage in a messianic sense. The ‘fallen hut of David’ in Amos 9:11 probably refers to the messianic kingdom. The nations bearing Yahweh’s name might refer to the gentile peoples who shall be converted to him, that are conquered by him, and therefore shall bear his name.

posture, the Cushites are employed as a people for whom Yahweh also cares in order to demonstrate that Israel is like other nations. In Amos 9:7, Cush is placed on a common footing with Israel to exemplify the notion of Yahweh's justice. The fact that Amos 9:7 portrays Yahweh as an all-embracing God is in itself good news for everyone else who is not Israelite. Thus, Amos' message is that of reassurance to non-Israelites, signifying that regardless of their origin they are nonetheless children of God. Nobody enjoys a monopoly of God. All humanity belongs to him and is treated by him as such. The ideas about 'predilection' and 'election' are therefore challenged by Amos in the reference to Cushites in 9:7. The act of 'bringing out' did not raise Israel's status before Yahweh. Both Israel and Cushites are seen by Amos as equal in the eyes of Yahweh. There is a veiled message as regards Yahweh's expression of universalism here, as Holter (2000b:121-122) has clearly pointed out:

The idea of comparing Israel to foreign nations both opens (cf. 1:3–2:16) and closes (cf. 9:7) the book of Amos, and in between one finds a theology where aspects of universalism (cf. especially the doxologies, 4:13, 5:8–9, 9:5–6) and particularism (cf. especially 3:2) exist side by side. In other words, although Yahweh has a special relationship with Israel, he has indeed also a relationship with other nations. This provides a reasonable context for the triangular relationship between Cush, Israel and Yahweh in 9:7, as Cush then can be understood as an exemplification of Yahweh's relationship with other nations.

In 1978, Gene Rice wrote an article in which he surveyed the function of 'Cush' and searched for the possibility of traces of racist thought in the text of Amos 9:7. He concluded that Amos referred to the Cushites in this simile because they 'were remote and different' (cf. Rice 1978:43). He also established that there were 'no grounds whatsoever for Amos' audience to take the comparison with the [Cushites] as demeaning' (Rice 1978:42).

Thus, like Rice, our own investigation of this verse points in the same direction. Therefore, when Rice in his article enquires: 'Was Amos a Racist?', the obvious answer should be a resounding 'No!' The comparison of Israelites with Cushites demonstrates that the latter are as precious in Yahweh's eyes as the former. The text from Zephaniah

which is the object of our focus in the following paragraphs demonstrates that this was in fact the case.

5.6 Zephaniah 3:10

Masoretic text:

!wlbwy ycwꝑ-tb yrt [vwꝑ-yrhnl rb [m
ytxnm

Translation:

*From beyond the rivers of Cush my suppliants, the
daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering.*

5.6.1 Preliminary remarks

I should like to note that ‘Cush’ is alluded to three times in this brief book (1:1; 2:12; 3:10), an indication of the prophet’s concern with the entity ‘Cush’, whatever those concerns might be. Secondly, I also want to draw the attention of the reader to the parallels between Zephaniah 3:10 and Isaiah 18:1.2.7, specifically regarding the reference by Isaiah to the land ‘beyond the rivers of Cush’. This might indicate a correlation between the two, a correlation that Sadler (2001:168) has also pointed out: ‘Several of the themes in Zephaniah’s prophecy appear to be echoes from Isaiah 18’. It would seem that one cannot expose oneself to the prophecy of Zephaniah without becoming aware of the fact that theologically he bears the imprint of his immediate predecessor, namely Isaiah of Jerusalem (circa 740-700 BCE). This imprint is clear in the emphasis on the Day of the LORD, the remnant, and faith, although Zephaniah differs from Isaiah with regard to the latter’s emphasis on judgment.

It is also important to observe that while in Zephaniah 3:9, *all* the people have been gathered, purged and united in the worship of Yahweh, the prophet singles out Cush in particular despite this inclusive reference in 3:10. ‘Why?’ we are induced to ask. As it is, verse 10 would seem to be unnecessary in its present context, and its inclusion is a little puzzling unless it stems from someone who has a special interest in Cush. It has been argued elsewhere that this interest may arise because of the possible African ancestry of this prophet (cf. Zph 1:1; see also 3.2.2 above).

Finally, I should like to draw the attention of the reader to questions of the translation of this verse, which by all counts is rather awkward. These problems arise from the word yrt [(my suppliants) and the phrase $\text{ycwp} - \text{tb}$ (daughter of my dispersed). The difficulty with these phrases is not so much in their meaning, however, as in their juxtaposition with one another. The MT has suggested a couple of other variants which we shall not consider in this thesis as they are not central to the discussion, and which in any case might serve only to complicate matters rather than clarify them.⁹⁴ Of interest, however, is the variant which translates the phrase $\text{ycwp} - \text{tb}$ ‘of Arabia’ and ‘the northernmost parts’. However, I have preferred to translate this problematic phrase simply as ‘daughter of my dispersed ones’, and have therefore preferred *lectio difficilior* to other suggestions. Nevertheless, if the rendering ‘northernmost parts’ is preferred, then the reference to ‘beyond the rivers of Cush’ would denote the other, opposite side, namely ‘the southernmost parts’ and Cush is usually understood as located on the southernmost part of the known Israelite world (cf. Est 1:1; 8:9; Is 11:11; 18:7 and perhaps even Gn 2:13).

If this rendering is accepted, then the views of Copher (1993:161) and Ben Zvi (1991:227-230), who have suggested that this phrase signify ‘all humanity’ might be correct. It would suggest *all* Yahweh’s people dispersed in every corner of the earth, an interpretation already alluded to in the discussion of Zephaniah 3:9. The difficulty with this interpretation, however, is that it does not seem to take seriously the phrase ‘from beyond the rivers of Cush’, which clearly narrows the scope to Cush itself.

⁹⁴ These problems have been discussed at some length by Ben Zvi (1991).

Regardless of whatever modifications and interpretations are accorded to these phrases, the syntax of Zephaniah 3:10, like that of Zephaniah 2:12, will remain problematic. As Haak (1995:238 footnote 1) has pointed out, none of the ‘solutions’ proposed by some scholars, notably Ben Zvi, seems to be strictly necessary and none is entirely convincing. Thus, it seems best in the case of Zephaniah 3:10, as in Zephaniah 2:12, to follow the MT tradition as it stands.⁹⁵

Concerning the identification of ‘Cush’ in Zephaniah 3:10, it would seem rather difficult to accept the views of, among others, Haak and Ball. While the former has argued vigorously for the identification of ‘Cush’ with Egypt because of the reference to the ‘rivers of Cush’, the latter has argued for an even more remote possibility: that of identifying Cush with the Kassites in Mesopotamia. Haak (1995:248) for instance contends: ‘The suggestion here is that the area designated “beyond the rivers of Cush” refers, in fact, to Egypt’. And again: ‘It does not seem necessary to look to the geographically and temporally distant Kassite kingdom for an identification’ (cf. Haak 1995:249). He further argues that the reference to the land ‘beyond the rivers of Cush’ found in Isaiah 18:1-7 ‘seems quite well suited to the understanding of the subject as Egypt [...]’ (1995:248).

For Ball (1988:244-254), ‘Cush’ in Zephaniah 3:10 as well as in Isaiah 18:1 refers to the Kassite kingdom, as it also connects with the mention of ‘Cush’ in the story of the garden in Genesis 2:10-14.

But we have all along argued that in most cases, except perhaps for the problematic text of Genesis 2:10-14 to which Ball alludes and which seems to locate ‘Cush’ among the Kassites in east Mesopotamia, ‘Cush’ refers to the territory south of Egypt. Therefore there is no reason to think otherwise in the case of Zephaniah 3:10.⁹⁶ In fact the reference ‘rivers of Cush’ seems to blend better with the White and Blue Niles rather than with any ‘canals’ or ‘waterways’ which provided irrigation and also linked the Mediterranean with the Gulf of Suez, as Haak (1995:245ff) has further argued. Thus, I

⁹⁵ I should like to note that Haak (1995) has provided much valuable bibliographical information concerning Zephaniah 3:10.

⁹⁶ Another text which does not seem to locate the land of Cush south of Egypt, as is the case in most references, is Genesis 10:8. Like Genesis 2:10-14, this text most probably refers not to an African location but rather to a region of the Kassites east of Mesopotamia.

should like to understand the reference to ‘rivers of Cush’ as pointing to the environs of this African country south of Egypt.

5.6.2 Analytical remarks

If the oracle in Zephaniah 2:12 fits the historical context in terms of which the term ‘Cush’ refers to an Assyrian ally on the southern border, then the phrase ‘rivers of Cush’ in Zephaniah 3:10 may be taken to refer to the Blue and White Niles. This reference nevertheless recalls the difficulty in relating the spread of Judahite exiles to what historically transpired, a fact which has led some commentators to assume a late date for this verse. If however, ‘Cush’ in Zephaniah does not refer to the upper reaches of the Nile, as has been pointed out, then an alternative understanding may be available.

The appearance of Judahites in Egypt and beyond is indicated in the later prophecies of Jeremiah. According to Jeremiah 44:1, an oracle is apparently delivered after the fall of Jerusalem; the audience is specified simply as ‘the Judahites dwelling in the land of Egypt, that is, in Migdol, in Tahpanhes and in Noph and in the land of Pathros (cf. also Jr 46:14). These Judahites need not be defined as refugees from the destruction of Judah by the Babylonians in 587 BCE. Haak (1995:245) has pointed out that there is archaeological evidence which points to the fact that as early as the second millennium, the northern branches of the Nile delta were supplemented and extended by canals which provided irrigation and also linked the Mediterranean with the Gulf of Suez. These waterways, according to him, formed the eastern boundary of Egypt. Furthermore, the dominance of the Saite Egyptians in the late seventh century and their connections with Judah make it likely that Judahites were among those who populated ‘Egyptian’ garrisons from the reign of Psammetichus I onward (cf. Haak 1995:246).

Hays (1996:278) reports that in 663 BCE, an Egyptian family from Lower Egypt regained control of Egypt with the aid of Greek and other mercenaries. Subsequently, Egypt began to strengthen its southern frontier against the Cushites. Under Psammetichus, however, a large contingent of Egyptian troops defending the southern border defected to Cush, settling among the Cushites and intermarrying with them. ‘Egypt then settled Jewish mercenary soldiers at the isle of Elephantine on the Nile, as a

frontier garrison against the Cushites. This settlement no doubt provided a point of contact between Jews and Cushites’.

But Judahite refugees were not merely confined to Egypt and its immediate environs. There is evidence to suggest that they were even to be found in Upper Egypt and almost certainly in the country of the Cushites. This is all the more likely considering that during the twenty-fifth Cushite dynasty, an alliance existed between King Hezekiah of Judah (727-698 BCE; cf. Scheffler 2001:106) and the Cushites.⁹⁷ It is not improbable to speculate that because of this ‘contact’ a number of Cushites must have become ‘suppliants’ or for lack of a better word ‘worshippers’ of Yahweh. Similarly, it is not unlikely that some Israelites sought refuge in Cushite territory following the defeat by Assyria in 701 BCE (cf. Is 11:11). If so, this would account for the otherwise awkward and difficult reference to the pilgrims from Cush as ‘suppliants’, namely native Cushites, and to the ‘daughter of my dispersed ones’, meaning Judahite refugees.

The text of Zephaniah 3:10 therefore becomes more intelligible when the prophet proclaims that Yahweh’s offering will be brought by his ‘suppliants’, namely Cushites, and by the ‘dispersed ones’, namely Judahites. If the reference is not to native Cushites and refugee Judahites, as we believe it is, then at least the rendering ‘daughter of my dispersed one’ should be understood as an addition from the time of the Diaspora (after 587 BCE) inserted to call attention to the Judahite presence in Cush territory (cf. Is 11:11) or to accord the passage the meaning that converted Cushites will bring the dispersed Judahites home.

The message of Zephaniah is of paramount importance here. His prophecy has largely to do with judgment, but Zephaniah possesses the capacity to go beyond the judgment he predicts and instead to envision a future of the restoration of Judah and

⁹⁷ Hezekiah ben Ahaz reigned for twenty-nine years (727-698 BCE). He is rated by the Deuteronomist, the Chronicler and the book of Isaiah as one of Judah’s most successful kings (cf. 2 Ki 18-20; 2 Chr 29-32; Is 1; 20; 36-39). His success was not simply limited to political matters but also extended to the religious sphere. Politically, he continued to pursue a policy of submission to Assyria as his father Ahaz had done, most probably a stratagem employed in order to spare Jerusalem and Judah an Assyrian invasion. When the Assyrian King Sennacherib (704-681 BCE) succeeded Sargon II (721-705 BCE), Hezekiah saw an opportunity to throw off the Assyrian yoke. To do so, he sought alliance with Egypt (which was then ruled by the Cushites), and probably also the help of the Babylonians (cf. 2 Ki 20:12-13). From the religious point of view, he was considered by the Chronicler as the pious king *par excellence* since he is said to have initiated great religious reforms such as the removal of local sanctuaries and the centralization of the cult in Jerusalem (cf. Scheffler 2001:121-124).

Jerusalem (cf. 2:1-2; 3:11-13). In the concluding and climactic oracle of his prophecy, he appropriates that future in a vision of great power and beauty (3:14-18). Those addressed have already suffered disaster and borne reproach (v.18), they have been oppressed and put to shame (v.19), and they have been scattered abroad so that they must be brought home and their fortune restored (v.20). Thus, as it is, the prophet envisions a future of restoration for the people of Israel. This will consist in the exiles returning to Mount Zion, a prophecy also proclaimed by other prophets, notably Isaiah.

Ultimately, this represents a message of hope for the people of Israel as they will, in the eschaton, find themselves returning to the LORD. In this sense, although there is a mention of Cush in 3:10, this message does not seem to primarily concern it, but rather ‘dispersed’ Judahites. In the second instance, however, the Cushites too are included in the final restoration as the analysis of the following reference in Psalm 68 will show.

5.7 Psalm 68:32[31]

Masoretic text:

wydy #yrt vwkw ~yrcm ynm ~ynmvx wytay
~yhlal

Translation:

Let bronze be brought from Egypt; let Cush hasten to stretch out its hands to God.

5.7.1 Preliminary remarks

The Catholic Study Bible (1970:688) in an explanatory note on Psalm 68 remarks that it is ‘one of the most magnificent but, at the same time, one of the most difficult hymns of the Psalter. In several places the Hebrew text is poorly preserved.’ *The New*

Jerome Biblical Commentary (Jensen 1990:537) adds: ‘Probably the most obscure and difficult of the pss. The difficulties include not only many individual words and lines but the nature of the whole poem itself. Is it a coherent whole or an ancient catalogue of lyric poems [...]?’⁹⁸ Anderson (1972:481) offers a similar assessment: ‘The interpretation of this Psalm is a difficult task because its structure is very complex, and the text is clearly corrupt in more than one place.’ According to Dahood (1968:133): ‘[Psalm] lxxviii [68] is widely admitted as textually and exegetically the most difficult and obscure of all the psalms...’

Sabourin, renowned for his study of the psalms, considers that the poorly preserved sections of the text of this psalm have rendered it more difficult to interpret because of brief allusions to an excessive number of scattered events (cf. Sabourin 1974:327-328). Weiser (1962:481) has expressed similar views:

In no other psalm are the various attempts at interpretation so diverse as in Psalm 68. It is not only that the severely corrupted text and [...] often disconnected style offer great difficulties to the exposition of the psalm. The style in particular moves to and fro, alternating between the forms of speech and those of narration, between description, prayer and hymnic portions, and between the various verbal tenses.

He furthermore points out that ‘[...] the [MT] text is poorly preserved in some sections’, notably of verses 12-15 (cf. Sabourin 1974:327). In addition, the ‘unpleasant’ allusions to Egypt, which is mentioned alongside Cush in verses 31-32, are according to Sabourin (1974:328) ‘more recent than the original psalm’.

In an attempt to suggest a plausible literary composition encompassing the whole psalm, Sabourin (1974:328ff) has given attention only to selected verses, which we can presume are in his opinion more problematic (cf. Sabourin 1974:329-331). These verses include the following: 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 23, and 33. It is interesting to note that verse 32 [31], which contains the reference to Cush, is not one of these. Thus, it may be inferred that, in the understanding of Sabourin at least, this verse poses no

⁹⁸ *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (1990:537) has for example observed of verses 13-15 that they constitute ‘one of the most obscure passages in the Psalter; [of which] no proposed transl. has won assent.’

particular literary problem to the exegete. This is somewhat surprising considering the complexity surrounding the translation of the word ~ $\Upsilon\eta\mu\nu\chi$ with which the exegete must contend.

For example, not all versions would translate ~ $\Upsilon\eta\mu\nu\chi$ by 'bronze', the rendering of *RSV* which we have preferred here to all others. Our choice has been influenced by the context which seems to suggest a material object, as well as by references to Cush elsewhere as 'bringing gifts' to Jerusalem.⁹⁹ But it must be pointed out that some versions of the Bible have 'nobles' instead (*The Catholic Study Bible* [1970]) while yet other versions use 'rich tribute' or even 'gold and silver' (*The African Bible* [1999]), some of which can be disputed. Many others also understand this word to refer to persons rather than to material objects such as 'bronze'. Such is the rendering of KJV ('princes'), NJB ('nobles'), NKJ ('envoys' or 'ambassadors'), BGT (pre,sbeij which is the prose form of presbuthj: 'old man' or 'elder'). The MGK has megista/nej ('the great'), the rendering which is perhaps behind the translations of the KJV and NJB above. The insistence of BDB (1979:365) that the meaning of the word which appears only in the plural is 'unknown' does not seem to be helpful. But ~ $\Upsilon\eta\mu\nu\chi$ is not the only word in this psalm which presents the exegete with translation problems; several other words do so as well.

Similar difficulties apply to the placement of the verses. While the verse which refers to Cush is in the MT numbered as 31, this is not reflected in all translations. Many translations instead have numbered this verse 32, and the BGT (Bible Works Greek) as Psalm 67:32 rather than 68:32. Therefore, we are confronted with an enormous gamut of textual problems in Psalm 68.

As to its date, which is important in searching for clues as to the interpretation of this psalm, Sabourin is of the view that it falls into a Pre-Exilic collection of hymns which may be classified as a hymn of 'God's Triumphal Procession' (1974:327). Weiser thinks it 'dates from a very early period' (1962:483). According to Weiser (1962:483), this date offers 'an explanation for the strange allusions, like sketches from pre-existing models, to various incidents and traditions which form the background of the psalm and

⁹⁹ Cf. Isaiah 45:14; 60:6-7,11-14. See also section 4.2.2.2 above.

are taken for granted, but are frequently quite obscure to us.’ Kraus (1988:68) suggests that in fact one comes across pre-exilic elements in the psalms in general although there was considerable post-exilic redaction of individual psalms before the Psalter was canonized, circa 300 BCE. Weiser (1962:482) has further argued that the continually recurring prayer style and the call upon the gathered cultic community to sing praises to Yahweh (v.26), leaves no doubt that the psalm presupposes a communal act of worship in the course of which it was recited.

This is also the assessment in the *The Catholic Study Bible*, according to which Psalm 68 ‘[...] was written to be sung as the Ark of the Covenant was carried in solemn procession into the Temple.’ Thus, it is probable that the psalm accompanied the early autumn feast of Tabernacles (Succoth), which included a procession of the tribes as alluded to in verses 25-28. But even then the ceremony described cannot be identified with any certainty.

5.7.2 Analytical remarks

That this Psalm is difficult to interpret has already been pointed out above (cf. Anderson 1972:481). Nevertheless, a tentative explanation is not out of place. The psalm does not fit into any other major Psalm types, although it comes nearer to the hymns than to any other *Gattungen* (Anderson 1972:481).

The general outline of the psalm develops in nine stanzas, each of three to five poetic lines, viz.: verses 2-4; verses 5-7; verses 8-11; verses 12-15; verses 16-19; verses 20-24; verses 25-28; verses 29-32; and verses 33-36 (cf. Tate 1990:172). Thus, beginning with the ancient war cry of Israel, which most probably was used when the Ark was carried into battle (v.2, cf. also Nm 10:35), the opening strophe proclaims the defeat of the wicked and the triumph of the just (vv.3ff). After general praise of Yahweh’s goodness (vv.5-7), the Lord’s victorious march from Egypt to Sinai (vv.8-11) and the conquest of the Promised Land (vv.12-15) are briefly and poetically recounted. Reference is then made to God’s choice of Zion for his dwelling (vv.16-19), as well as to his victories (vv.20-24). Finally, with the description of the present procession serving as an

interlude (vv.25-28), God is implored to spread his rule (vv.29-32) until all the earth sings his glory (vv.33-36).

Hence, according to this literary scheme of things, the reference to Cush would be placed in the context of God spreading his mighty rule (vv.29-32) or ‘universal kingship’ (cf. Tate 1990:173) until all the earth sings his glory (vv.33-36). It is now to the import of verses 29-32, which describe Cush, that our attention is directed.

The message of this unit is communicated with great poetic skill. In verse 29 God is petitioned to show forth his power. Verse 30 introduces a command to the kings, expressed in a jussive form of the Hebrew verb, to bring gifts for the temple in Jerusalem: ‘Let bronze be brought from Egypt’. The word $\sim\Upsilon\Omega\mu\nu\chi$ is in fact a *hapax legomenon* in the Old Testament (cf. Tate 1990:169), and because of its relation to the Akkadian *hasmanum* (Dahood 1968:150) or the Egyptian word *hsmn* (Anderson 1972:497; Albright 1950) it may rightly be translated as ‘bronze’ (Anderson 1972:497) or ‘natron’, which is the more common meaning of the Egyptian usage rather than a kind of ‘bronze’ or copper (Albright 1950:33-34). However, the plural form of the noun as we have it here may suggest items made of bronze rather than the raw material itself. Dahood (1968:150) has therefore suggested ‘blue cloth.’ Tate, following the LXX (pre, sbeij) and Syriac, has suggested instead that the word should be translated ‘ambassadors / nobles / magnates / envoys’ (1990:169). But he concedes that this idea is related to the brightly coloured (red and blue) clothing worn by nobles, diplomatic agents, and others of wealth and high social status (cf. Tate 1990:169).

The reference to kings, already mentioned in verse 30, is again continued in verse 31 where they are commanded to prostrate themselves while bearing ‘bars of silver’. Thus, the nature of the gifts referred to in verse 30 is identified. Yet the connection of this with the ‘beast of the reeds’, probably a veiled reference to Egypt or even to the Nile crocodile, a symbol for Egypt (cf. Ezk 29:2ff), is difficult to fathom. This time, however, the subjugation of the kings is also hinted at. They will prostrate themselves while carrying ‘bars of silver’. The ‘bars of silver’ might refer to tribute from foreign nations which will be brought to Zion. Verse 32 furnishes the identity of the peoples referred to in the poem, namely Egypt and Cush, who will ‘extend their hands to God’. The act of extending hands probably implies subjugation and their homage (cf. Weiser 1962:490).

According to Anderson (1972:498), who is in agreement with Dahood (1968:229), the use of 'hands' here connotes 'possessions' or 'resources'. Hence, Cush will stretch out his hands to bring to Yahweh 'tribute' rather than 'exports' (Anderson 1972:497).

The main point of this poem must now be determined. The psalm may have been composed from segments of ancient poems, which would explain why the transitions are implied rather than explicitly stated. At any rate verse 2 is based on Numbers 10:35-36, and verses 8-9 are derived from Judges 5:4-5.

Although the Hebrew text of this psalm is not well preserved and even the ceremony described cannot be identified with any certainty, it can nevertheless be deduced from the evidence available to us so far that this psalm was most probably used during a procession accompanying the early autumn feast of Tabernacles (vv.9, 24). The feast included a procession of the tribes (vv.25-28). At the heart of that festival was the revelation of God who, according to ancient thought, comes to his sanctuary from Mount Sinai and by his presence 'actualizes' his redemptive work, that is to say, he causes all the saving deeds to which the covenant people owe their existence to become a present reality (cf. Weiser 1962:482). But that is not all. The psalm also relives the fact that once upon a time, Israel was oppressed by a foreign power, perhaps by Egypt (vv.31-32), unless of course Egypt stands for any oppressor.

In the feast at Mount Zion, the community of Israel acknowledged the kingship and power of Yahweh over the covenant community, whose history extended from the exodus days to the present. They also expected that in the days to come Yahweh would be King over the whole universe; that his empire would be established on earth. When this occurs, all nations will be represented and will acknowledge Yahweh since they will do him homage (v.31). Thus, Egypt and Cush, as representatives of the southernmost parts of the world, would travel to Jerusalem, acknowledging Yahweh with their gifts. As Weiser (1962: 490) has pointed out: 'Not till its conclusion does the psalm display universal scope by bidding the "kingdoms of the earth" to pay homage to God and sing his praise.'

It may be of significance to point out in the context of this psalm that Ullendorff (1968:9) has referred to verse 32 as an important one in the tradition of the Ethiopian *Kebra Nagast* (n. 50). According to that tradition, the 'stretching out of hands to God' has

become interpreted, in the words of Ullendorff (1968:9), as ‘[...] a proof-text and a symbol of the country’s passionate adherence to the orthodox faith.’ Ullendorff does not specify the kind of faith he refers to, though, and by his own admission, the text has undergone some editing: ‘The text of the substantive part differs from the Ethiopic Old Testament and, indeed, from *Kebrä Nagast*, chapter 13’ (cf. Ullendorff 1968:9, especially footnote 5). It should also be pointed out that the Masoretic Text’s reference to ‘Cush’ does not necessarily refer to the modern state of Ethiopia. Nevertheless, it is important to note how a text is perceived as having a direct reference to an African nation.

Textual problems are by no means the monopoly of Psalm 68. They are also to be found in Psalm 87, which is the object of our next investigation. It is necessary, however, to note that despite these difficulties, these texts make important references to Cush.

5.8 Psalm 87:4

Masoretic text:

rwcw tvlp hnh y[dyl lbbw bhr rykza
~v-dly hz vwk-~[

Translation:

*Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon;
Philistia too, and Tyre, with Cush: ‘This one was born
there,’ [they say].*

5.8.1 Preliminary remarks

The assertion by Sabourin that ‘textual problems abound in this psalm’ probably best describes the difficulties involved in its analysis (cf. Sabourin 1974:212). The text of this psalm is disordered, and several verses have been re-arranged. Weiser (1962:579)

suggests that verse 6 should be placed before verse 4. He also proposes that verse 6 serves as a general narrative introduction to the divine utterance, without which the whole psalm is not intelligible; its proper place therefore is after the introduction in verse 3 (Weiser 1962:582). He further argues that the text of the psalm seems to have become disarranged in the course of copying, and that in order to understand the psalm, it is not possible to dispense altogether with transpositions of one sort or another, and the same mistake which some expositors have made, thereby transforming this psalm into a 'jigsaw puzzle', should be avoided (cf. Weiser 1962:579). He is also of the opinion that this psalm exhibits a certain affinity to the Zion Psalms, namely Psalms 48, 76, and 84 (cf. Weiser 1962:581).

The NEB version has for example re-arranged the verses thus: 2, 1, 5b, 4, 5a, 6, 7, 3, but other similar re-arrangements have been suggested by Gunkel (1967), and Oesterley (1939), although it is clear that such suggestions are no more than intelligent guesses, as they are done on the basis of what seems to be logical to various translations or commentators. The reason for the re-arrangement is most probably twofold: First, the psalm begins with the Hebrew phrase 'his foundations are laid upon holy hills' although there is no antecedent for the pronoun 'his'. Second, it is not easy to trace a clear line of thought through the psalm, although Weiser (1962:580) holds the view that this is only the case at first glance, for he maintains that the reader is in fact tasked with finding out how the thoughts are related to each other. However, other scholars, notably Dahood (1968:398-399), Rogerson & McKay (1977:182), Eaton (1967:214-215) and Anderson (1972) do not subscribe to such a re-arrangement; they prefer the Masoretic order of the verses.

Our view is that, while the beginning of the psalm may be difficult, it should be remembered that what is logical to the modern reader may not necessarily be so for the ancient biblical authors. Thus, the hypothetical explanation offered by Oesterley (1939:390) that a scribe copied the lines of this psalm in the wrong order needs to be approached with caution. Indeed, biblical texts always need to be approached with caution, and it is this attitude that the present researcher is adopting in trying to make sense of this difficult psalm.

It is significant to point out that the reference ‘Cush’ has not been deleted even in texts with such difficult textual problems as those in psalm 68 above and the present psalm, 87. This might indicate the ancient nature of these texts, and also constitute a proof that however far back we go into biblical textual history, Cush was there.

5.8.2 Analytical remarks

The brief commentary on this psalm in the *African Bible* (1999:948) categorizes it as ‘one of the songs of Zion, which was probably used by Jewish pilgrims coming from many parts of the world.’ Zion is therefore called upon to become the religious capital of all the nations. Egypt (Rahab), Cush, Syro-Palestine (Philistia and Tyre), Mesopotamia (Babylon), all the pagan neighbours of Israel are destined to know the true God and to furnish proselytes (cf. Zc 2:15; 8:23; Ps 45:15).

The Hiphil form of רָכַז could be ‘I cause to remember’ but it is usually read in the sense of ‘I will mention’ or ‘I tell of.’ Dahood (II:300; 251-52) mounts an argument for the Hiphil as a ‘record / inscription.’ Thus, ‘I shall inscribe Rahab and Babylon’, which seems to relate well to verse 6. Tate (1990:386) however considers that the verse should be read in the sense of ‘set forth the case (as in Is 43:26) or ‘proclaim’ (as in Jeremiah 4:16 and Isaiah 12:4). Hence verse 4 would have at least a ‘semi-forensic sense, being a proclamation by the divine king’ (1990:386). As for the preposition ל the appropriate rendering might be read as a dative, thus ‘to those who know me’, as again in Jeremiah 4:16. Consequently, Rahab, Babylon and Cush are declared to be among those who know Yahweh. As for the rest of the nations mentioned in this verse, the LXX has the ‘Philistines’ (lit. ‘foreigners’) for Philistia and ‘the people of the Cushites’ for Cush. The LXX retains the singular for ‘Tyre’, though. The Hebrew text signifies ‘the people of’ each of the nations named, rather than the nations as political and geographic entities (as in Isaiah 19:24-25). ‘Cush’ can refer to either land or people or both (cf. Tate 1990:386).

This is by no means an exhaustive reference to the known world. Nevertheless, such is the will of Yahweh expressed in this psalm in oracular form (vv.4-5). The

implication is that after the Babylonian exile many Jews still lived outside Palestine in the Diaspora, but all of them still considered Zion as their true mother.

It can be assumed that during the great pilgrimage-festival, Jerusalem offered shelter within her walls to guests of very varied origin who had arrived to attend the feast. In fact, proselytes already existed in pre-exilic times (cf. 2 Ki 5). This is to counter the argument that this psalm might be attributed to a later period in the post-exilic era. The poet visualizes the heavenly Lord as he draws up the roll of the nations, classifying them according to their native countries. It is an imposing number of people from all over the world. Those who were once the enemies of Israel, and so also of Yahweh, now belong among the worshippers! These include Egypt, called by her prophetic-mythological name Rahab, and Babylon, the ancient foe. There are also Philistines as well as Phoenicians from the coast town of Tyre, as well as people from as distant a country as Cush. So far does the divine power extend. As one author has remarked, 'This is the brotherhood of man [kind] in the highest order' (Oesterley 1939:390; cf. also Adamo 1998:154).

Weiser (1962:580) concurs with this interpretation of the psalm. He has argued that the lack of visible connections of thought and the peculiar stylistic character of this piece of poetry have to be explained in the light of the special situation to which the psalm presumably owes its origin, namely the Temple of Jerusalem, specifically on the occasion of a great pilgrimage-festival. On that occasion, the festal throng of people moves along in solemn procession, in step with the rhythm of the hymns. People from all over the world, including 'black figures' (Weiser 1962:580) from the distant country of Cush, are not absent from this gathering of nations in the house of God on Mount Zion. All these peoples (from the Nile and Euphrates, from the lands of the Philistines and of the Phoenicians, and Cush) are 'united in *one* faith, believing in the *one* God whom they jointly profess' (Weiser 1962:580).

As a result, what the prophet Isaiah had uttered as an eschatological hope (cf. Is 2:2ff; 11:10; chapters 18; 19; 20; 23) has become a living reality in the cultic scene which is here portrayed. The significance of all this is of course, the coming into being of the universal kingdom of God and the dawn of the age of salvation which is evident in psalm 87. The poet graphically expresses the thoughts of God which his vision crystallizes, particularly the majesty of God, who is worshipped by the whole world; and coupled with

this vision is Jerusalem's importance as the spiritual centre of the world. According to Weiser (1962:580), 'it must have been an experience of this kind that led to the composition of the psalm.'

I should like to add my voice to Weiser's and to that of several other authors, including Adamo (1998:154), according to whom this psalm portrays 'a remarkable concept of the unity of God's people which transcends nations, languages and color [sic]. The Psalmist, like Deutero-Isaiah, brings out the universalistic doctrine.' Tate (1990:392) is of the view that this psalm is 'a declaration of God's intention to make Zion the spiritual metropolis of the world.'

The reference to Zion as 'mother' (used by Paul in Gal 4:26) is of course a designation which is very appealing to many people, especially of an African background where family ties, and especially attachment to the 'mother', are still quite strong.¹⁰⁰ Zion is perceived as the mother of all these peoples. Therefore, by introducing this concept, the psalmist seems to me to be promoting the idea that all these peoples are in fact 'brothers' and 'sisters'. The Gentiles are 'fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers in the promise of Christ Jesus throughout the Gospel...the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God' (Eph 3:3-9, RSV). The speaker in Hebrews 12 declares: 'You have come to Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first born who are enrolled in heaven' (vv.22-23, RSV). Revelation seems to confirm the same idea when it says that 'the redeemed of the earth' will stand with the triumphant Lamb on Mount Zion (Rev 14:1-5; 7:9).

It will be remembered that Isaiah too has described the maternal role of Zion, the fruitful bride of Yahweh (cf. Is 54:1; 62:4ff). As the psalmist recognizes the brotherhood of all these peoples he begins to count: 'This one was born there.' It is essential to realize

¹⁰⁰ It is for example common knowledge among many African peoples that if someone is contemplating insulting another, the insult is thought to be more effective and enhanced if it is uttered simultaneously with some reference to the adversary's mother! The same is true if some compliment is offered, because of the importance attached to this concept. The idea of 'mother' is of course intrinsically linked to the idea of family. The importance which Africans attach to family is so great that not so long ago, the so-called 'African Synod' of the Catholic Church, which was held in Rome in 1994, chose the theme 'Church as Family of God' as one of its guiding principles in the work of the evangelization of the continent in the 21st century.

that Yahweh's great plan of universal salvation was already at work in Old Testament times.

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the function of 'Cush' vis-à-vis Yahweh and the context of salvation and / or restoration. While the textual intricacies involved are by no means easy to decipher, nevertheless, it seems clear that the reference to 'Cush' is linked to a context of salvation. The text of Isaiah 11:11 has shown that in the time of the second exodus, perceived by Isaiah as a time of the restoration of the Israelite people, one of the countries from which these peoples will gather is the distant Cush. The Israelites had sought refuge there for one reason or another. As usually happens, it is more probably to a friendly country that people will normally flee. The concept of the Israelites being refugees in the land of Cush has parallels even today, given the many refugees especially on the African continent. Linked to refugee status is of course the idea of 'hospitality', which we can presume in the present circumstances. Thus, the mention of Cush in this context places it in a positive light, contrary to the attempts at denigration of which we have hinted elsewhere in this thesis. But more importantly, the restoration of Israel is in fact the restoration and salvation of Cush as well.

Isaiah 18:7, a verse which forms part of the most comprehensive anthropological description of Cush in the whole of the prophetic literature, expresses another element of this distant and exotic country. In verse 7, the prophet Isaiah foresees a time in the future when this African nation south of Egypt will come to Mount Zion, 'the place of the name of Yahweh Sebaoth'. It is this 'coming to Zion to the place of Yahweh Sebaoth' which has come to be interpreted as signifying the conversion of the Cushites. Hence, at the eschaton this African nation will be converted to Yahweh. This conversion will be concretized in the bringing of gifts to the Lord of Hosts. In the eschaton, Cush will be saved and is therefore placed in a context of relationship with Yahweh. It is undoubtedly significant that already as far back as the time of Isaiah the conversion of the Cushites was envisaged. As it is, this conversion was to be realized in various ways, most

importantly through missionary work, and it is gratifying to note that today this momentum is continuing vigorously.

However precious Cush was in the eyes of Yahweh, Isaiah 43:3 leaves no doubt in anyone's mind that Israel was even more important to Yahweh, which is why Yahweh was more than willing to surrender Cush together with Egypt and Seba in exchange for Israel. But no-one should understand this act by Yahweh as demeaning in any way the importance of Cush. On the contrary, it in fact enhances the importance of Cush. Or else how should we understand the fact that Cush was chosen together with the rest of the trio as a valuable item of exchange? The choice of these peoples *ipso facto* demonstrates their importance. Hence, it can be concluded that there was never a time when Cush was viewed insignificantly by the authors of the Old Testament. Even today this of course constitutes a challenge: that all peoples matter in the eyes of God and as such deserve all the respect they can garner. And Isaiah is not alone in this view of Cush. The text from Amos supports his view and so also does the reference from Zephaniah.

The fact that Amos 9:7 portrays Yahweh as an all-embracing God is in itself good news for everyone who is not an Israelite. Thus, Amos' message is that of reassurance to non-Israelites. It means that regardless of their provenance they are nonetheless children of God. Nobody enjoys a monopoly of God. All humanity belongs to him and is treated by him as such: Yahweh's universal sway is evident here. Consequently Zephaniah 3:10 includes Cush among those nations who will recognize Yahweh in the eschaton as their Lord and as a sign of this recognition bring him gifts, whatever the nature of those gifts.

The message of Zephaniah is of paramount importance. His prophecy has largely to do with judgment, but Zephaniah evidences the capacity to go beyond the judgment he predicts and instead envisions a future of the restoration of Judah and Jerusalem (cf. 2:1-2; 3:11-13). Although the message of Zephaniah in this verse first of all concerns dispersed Judahites, the mention of Cushites places them in a context of restoration and salvation as well, as does our understanding of the Cush references in Psalms 68 and 87, difficult though they are. Cush-related terms occur some three times in the Psalter, viz. in Psalms 7:1, 68:32[31], and 87:4. While in Psalm 7 the term 'Cush' is used as a personal name for a Benjaminite adversary of King David, in Psalm 68 Cush performs a symbolic gesture of submission to Yahweh. Biblical scholars agree that Psalm 68 is a difficult

psalm to interpret. However, this psalm envisions all nations acknowledging the sovereignty of God. In this context Cush, or the known lands south of Egypt, would be understood as specifically referring to the country of Cush and by extension to the rest of the sub-Saharan countries. Africans have always stretched out their hands in worship to God in many and diverse ways.¹⁰¹ Similarly, Psalm 87, though likewise a corrupt text, speaks about Yahweh's involvement in the origins of several nations. Having embraced Christ, Africans stretch out their hands, which are full of praises, thanksgiving and petitions to the Lord who draws all humanity to himself (Jn 12:32; cf. Lukwata 2003:191).

Throughout the world the ancient peoples intermingled in a manner that decreased racial differences. Regardless of their differences, all peoples are very close as human beings and have been from the beginning of time. All peoples of the world possess the same basic nature. In the same kingdom, serving the same God, peoples have lived in peace and harmony, and this way of living can be the way of living in our modern world.

The messages that are revealed through the Cush references certainly have much to teach us. God is God of all peoples. The eight references we have attempted to analyse in this chapter affirm that Yahweh is not only the God of Israel but is definitely also the God of the Cushites or, for that matter, of the African people. The Bible writers challenge all God-fearing people to live as brothers and sisters to all peoples. The God who is in us should not be limited by us. He is universal, as some of the major writers of the Old Testament already understood, and greatly values African peoples amongst others.

CHAPTER SIX

¹⁰¹ Lukwata, an academician from Uganda, has dedicated a whole chapter to these various ways in his book *Integrated African Liturgy* (2003). He has for example detected the presence of this tendency when he analyzed African concepts such as the belief in the unity between the visible and the invisible, a holistic mentality, prayers, naming ceremonies, sacrifices, human intermediaries, communion with the ancestors, venues of prayer, magic and witchcraft, communitarian living, commensality, the African covenant or 'Blood Pact', African asceticism, the human body, fasting and other bodily restrictions, seclusion, exorcism, social changes et cetera (cf. Lukwata 2003:3-26).

CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Introduction

It is indubitably the case that at present the drive exists in some biblical scholarly circles to address questions concerning the identity and history of the African people because it is believed that providing answers to these questions will to some extent have existential consequences for the African peoples, especially those south of the Sahara. Therefore, enquiries have often been made as to whether or not the ‘Cush’ texts of the Old Testament can be used as a conduit for resolving this issue. In other words: ‘Can the Cush texts of the Old Testament be used to find Africa in the Bible?’

Opinions vary among scholars. Among those who consider that this is indeed the case, one of the challenges usually faced is the geographical location of Cush. While some, probably the majority, would locate it in Africa, others would identify it with some province usually associated with the Kassites of ancient eastern Mesopotamia.

Other opinions arise from the different ways of understanding of the term ‘identity’. The term ‘identity’ is in fact a fluid one as it can be understood differently in different contexts. In this sense ‘identity’ becomes a constantly changing phenomenon. This is an aspect which is kept in mind all the time in this thesis when Cush is related to Africa. This is done in order to avoid uncalled for generalizations. Modern Africa is in fact a multicultural continent with a complex diverse history. Nevertheless, this cautionary note notwithstanding, I should like to understand the Africa referred to in this thesis as ‘black Africa’, the one whose identity is intrinsically linked to the connotation of the Hebrew term ‘Cush’ or the Greek term ‘Ethiopia’. Thus, the term ‘identity’ from this perspective refers to the Africa which has been the focus of both African American biblical scholars, as well as their African counterparts, among others (cf. Holter 2000a:96). Mugambi (2001) has I think articulated well the idea intended here when he speaks of ‘reconstruction’ of history and culture to express the importance of identity formation, a process which he says ‘[...] cannot be delegated across cultures and across generations’ (2001:10; see also Mugambi 1995:40).

A cursory perusal of the diverse opinions and interpretations, including also my own analysis of the fifty-six Cush texts, has revealed certain emerging patterns concerning this type of Africa. These opinions concern not only these texts' importance for the identity and history of the these African people, but also bring to light a number of challenges related to any study focusing on finding 'Africa' in the Bible through the conduit of these texts.

In this chapter, it is therefore my intention to put together my impressions concerning why this endeavour is important, not just for me, but also for other interpreters as well. I shall also try to identify some of the challenges with which researchers may have to contend in the process of finding Africa in the Old Testament by means of the exegetical analysis of the Cush references.

6.2 Analytical Outcomes

6.2.1 Importance of finding Africa in the Old Testament

6.2.1.1 Preliminary remarks

In chapter one, two important issues which lie at the heart of this thesis were raised. The first one concerns the tendency, at least in the past, by traditional western biblical scholarship to *ignore* the presence of Africa in the Bible in general and in the Old Testament in particular. This tendency has been referred to by Afrocentric scholars, using various expressions. Adamo (1998:1 *passim*), among others, has labelled it 'de-Africanization', whereas Ukpong (2000:7-8) would rather speak of a 'de-emphasis and exclusion of the African presence and contribution in the biblical story.'

The second issue concerns the *interpretation* or rather '*misinterpretation*' of certain Cush texts. The Afrocentric scholars contend that where Cush texts have been accorded, in the words of one scholar, a 'token paragraph or two' (Bailey 1991:166), cases of 'misinterpretation' often are not lacking. The blame for this has been placed almost entirely on western biblical scholars.

Personally, I do not greatly mind if people choose to ignore or misinterpret certain texts. They are certainly free to do so. However, important for me as an African, an identity I can claim to share with many other Africans who trace their biblical roots to the Old Testament Cush, are rather the implications associated with the tendencies to ignore or misinterpret Cush texts. For a variety of reasons, these texts are essential for African peoples.

One of the implications is that when these texts are ignored, the life-history of the African peoples is compromised. Their story is not recounted. Consequently, the African people are not, so to speak, given a face or a voice. Their identity and their contribution to the biblical world are also brought into question. The wording of the old adage, ‘without the past, there can be no present and future’, seems to apply fully. The loss of the past somehow affects the present and influences how the future is shaped. Thus, there is a need for Cush to be revisited and brought to light. Its story needs to be told to the world.

One may identify other implications as well. On the spiritual level, ignoring Cush texts would, obviously, be tantamount to depriving a people of a source of spiritual nourishment. Spiritual insights from texts such as Isaiah 18, which portray Cush positively, could prove to be extremely energizing.

Furthermore, therapists recommend that in order to accelerate the healing process in a patient, it is necessary to encourage them to recount their past. By re-telling their past, people often come to terms with their present situation and are thus impelled on the right track towards recovery.

Today, Africa as a continent is sick in very many ways. It suffers the ravages of war, violence, destruction, and death. The continent is almost perennially in the grip of disease, notably HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and many other serious ailments which affect all sectors of society, notably women and children, often the most vulnerable in African societies. Now and then recurrent famines occur which threaten the very existence of Africa itself. Therefore, Africa needs healing, and part of that therapy has to do with aiding her to come to terms with her past – of which Cush is a vital part. After all, as Brueggemann (1991:130), cited by Punt (1999a:9) has argued: ‘...the marginalization of pain and poverty is not intrinsic to the canonical literature but is

imposed on the text by the political process of canonical interpretation by the dominant community.’¹⁰²

Regarding the question of negative interpretations or misinterpretations, the implications are similar to those associated with the tendency to gloss over the Cush texts. According to Copher (1989:106), who is also cited by Punt (1999a:8): ‘[...] the Bible and interpretations of it led to such murder: physical, psychological, social, and spiritual as in the case of Black people.’

Needless to say, Africans, like any other people, tend to take offence when negative interpretations are applied to biblical texts which they hold very dear. The matter is still further exacerbated if such negative interpretations touch on issues pertaining to the identity of a people however we choose to understand the word identity. Let me illustrate this with an example.

It is common knowledge that in many African cultures people normally tend to dissociate themselves from individuals who practise witchcraft or similar repugnant practices. Young people are advised never to marry into families known to practise witchcraft, and to be labelled a ‘witch’ or an offspring of a witch is a very terrible experience.

Similarly, the same kind of negative feeling sets in when texts with which Africans identify themselves are interpreted in a way that tends to denigrate them. When Joab’s messenger in 2 Samuel 18 is identified with someone who was of ‘no consequence’ (Maclaren 1952:108), or ‘[...] an expendable African slave whose colour would be a ready indication of bad news he was carrying’ (Fuller 1969:325), African folk naturally feel slighted. Similarly, when the curse on Canaan in Genesis 10 is linked to the people of African ancestry and is used to justify their enslavement, Africans again take offence. And there are many other examples of interpretations of the Cush texts which are offensive. I should like to note, however, that attempts to correct the legacy of the

¹⁰² I should like to note, however, that this view is in contraposition with Mofokeng’s, according to which, ‘[Biblical documents believed to contain] stories and texts which are basically oppressive and whose interpretation (not misinterpretation) only serves [to promote] the cause of oppression’ (Mofokeng 1988:37, cited by Punt 1999a:9). It should however be noted that Mofokeng is speaking in a context where Liberation Theology was taken as a central theological theme, especially in Southern Africa.

abuse of the Bible for the purpose of opposing African peoples and values have been addressed within the broader debate on 'Eurocentrism' and 'Afrocentrism'.

Thus, it is important for me to show that Cush texts can be read differently without necessarily offending anybody. My analysis of the fifty-six such texts has demonstrated that many of the negative interpretations about Cush possess no scriptural basis. They seem rather to be the product of certain preconceived racial ideologies.

Finally, this study has also been carried out with another objective in mind. In 1991, Sugirtharajah, a scholar of Indian origin, published a work entitled *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*. His contribution to the present thesis is relevant because it broke new ground in making the West aware of the presence of 'other voices from the margin' in the area of scholarly discussion. Although the voices cited from Africa are lamentably very few (actually only four, the fourth being from South Africa, therefore a voice most probably not unknown to the West), Sugirtharajah nevertheless pioneered a departure from the traditional western way of doing scholarly work. In retrospect, Sugirtharajah's efforts may now be viewed as modest attempts to try to arouse an awareness of such voices speaking in the so-called third world countries. This is significant since it opens avenues for possible discussion partners as regards biblical scholarship.

Not so many years ago, another scholar, Holter, wrote an article entitled 'It's not only a Question of Money! African Old Testament Scholarship between the Myths and Meanings of the South and the Money and Methods of the North'. In that article, Holter basically argued for the need for the West to enter dialogue with the South: '[...] there is still a number of OT colleagues of ours...whose scholarly publications should be of interest also to OT scholars outside Africa' (Holter 1998:241). He elaborated:

My point is rather that OT scholarship should be open to all kinds of approaches to the OT, hence being careful of defining only certain traditional approaches as 'scientific'. Such a methodological openness and plurality, I think, is of basic importance to any encounter between Western and African OT scholarship (Holter 1998: 248).

Holter then proceeds to suggest some tangible areas where this contact between the West and Africa might be possible (cf. Holter 1998: 248-250). He becomes more direct when he remarks: ‘On this background I should like to emphasise how important it is that Western OT scholars who include African comparative material in their studies, also include African scholars’ (1998:249). What Holter and other scholars are proposing will ultimately be helpful in overcoming a certain form of ‘academic inferiority complex’ among African biblical scholars.

In section 2.2.4 above, I have argued that Holter, together with Høyland Lavik, Daniel J Hays, and Edwin M Yamauchi, might rightly be regarded as voices representative of new trends of biblical interpretation. Although these authors still remain part of western biblical scholarship, they have made commendable efforts towards dialoguing with Africa. They are by no means the only ones, since there are probably many others who have not made their voices heard. I am confident that in the not-too-distant future we will be noticing similar trends stemming from the Afrocentric camp itself, if this is not in fact the case already. My own efforts too may be taken as a modest contribution in the venture to continue this dialogue. We have attempted to offer a comprehensive study of the Cush texts, aiming to provide interested persons with something with which to start as they further the dialogue on Cush. Thus, research of this type seeks to articulate the role and contribution of Africa to world history.

Spurred on by these convictions, I try to recount the story of the Cushites and in the process hope to bring to light important aspects of their identity and history, as well as to emphasize the roles they played when they interacted with Israel. Thus, the focus of the following sections falls first of all on wrapping up, although only briefly, all the major findings resulting from the analytical (exegetical) treatment of the fifty-six Cush texts. These findings result from the material gleaned especially from chapters three, four and five of this thesis. Some of the important questions here include the following: Who are the Cushites? What role do they play, and how do they relate to Yahweh, the God of Israel?

6.2.1.2 Who are the Cushites?

As far as I am concerned, the very first thing that (so to speak) ‘gives away’ the identity of the Cushites is to be found in the appellation ‘Cush’ itself. What do the biblical authors mean whenever they use this term? What’s in a name?

Our analysis of the Cush texts has demonstrated that whenever the biblical authors use the term ‘Cush’ they almost always intend to refer to the black race whose country of origin is located somewhere in Africa, specifically to the south of Egypt. In the Old Testament times, however, just as is the case in the movement of peoples today, and for various reasons, Cushites were to be found in many places of the Levant, including Israel. Since this presence was somewhat conspicuous, at least at the time when the biblical authors wrote, they chose to give it the term ‘Cush’, a Hebrew word for black people and one inspired by the black colouration of these people.

Thus, it is no surprise that Jeremiah uses their colour in a proverbial manner to proclaim God’s oracle (Jr 13:23). Isaiah, a contemporary of Jeremiah and the writer who in the whole of the Old Testament perhaps gives the most elaborate description of Cushites yet, alludes to their stature and skin texture as well. He refers to somatic features when he refers to them as ‘tall’ and ‘smooth-skinned’ (cf. Is 18; see also Is 45:14). Centuries earlier, Herodotus, often referred to as the ‘Father of History’, had expressed a similar evaluation when he described them as ‘men tall and handsome’ (cf. Herodotus II & III. See also section 3.4.2.2 above).

Because of their dark complexion, the Greeks used to refer to them as ‘Ethiopians’, a term which connotes a ‘burnt face’. In Book II.22, Herodotus remarks that Ethiopians are ‘black by reason of the heat.’ This is also roughly the understanding in more recent times of the term ‘Sudan’, a country often associated with Cush. The word ‘Sudan’ probably derives from the Arabic *bilad-al Sudan* and simply means ‘land of black people’.

It may be noted that certain somatic characteristics, such as height and deep dark skin, even in our own times are usually associated with the people from that part of Africa. Needless to say, this is something to be proud of and not something to be ashamed of, regardless of what different kinds of people say. The colour black is just as

beautiful as the colour white! Thus, everyone should avoid trying to portray certain colour traits as negative, therefore as less preferable than others.¹⁰³ This is the kind of attitude which can sometimes drive certain people whose skin colour is portrayed negatively to take up reactionary positions. Our analysis has shown that cases of these reactionary positions abound.

It is necessary to correct the negative images about Africa and African peoples embedded in certain traditional readings of a number of biblical texts. Ukpong (2000:8; see also Rice 1972:17-25) cites the example of how the curse of Canaan pins Ham down. He cites a fifth-century CE Midrash which not only assigns the curse of Noah, meant for Canaan, to Ham but is also alleged to state: 'Your seed will be ugly and dark-skinned'. Ukpong furthermore cites a six-century CE Babylonian Talmud which states: 'The descendants of Ham are cursed by being black and are sinful with degenerate progeny' (2000:8; see also Isaac 1980:4-5).

Well, these interpretations sharply contrast with what we have just said about the biblical views (and also Greek perceptions) of Cushites or black people. Consequently, they have no biblical basis and should consequently be discarded as they could prove to be potentially offensive to the present descendants of Ham.

The biblical authors also make references to the dark pigmentation of the Cushites (cf. Nm 12; Jr 13). This has led to speculations that the latter were discriminated against. Although these references to colour are somewhat suspect insofar as racial prejudice is concerned, these instances are few. Rather than being discriminated against, Cushites were instead regarded like any of the other groups with whom the Israelites / Judahites interacted. When they were ostracized, the context usually included Egypt and / or its other allies. Thus, there appear to have been no consistent and deliberate attempts at discrimination against them.

As far as our findings are concerned, the Old Testament seems to offer no serious evidence to buttress the claims that biblical authors were racist. What is perhaps more

¹⁰³ A case in point is for example the symbolism of 'smoke' which is used in the election of a new Pope. According to it, 'white' smoke signifies success in the election process. It signifies that the Catholic Church may now rest, as indicated by the expression 'Habemus Papam', Latin for 'We have a Pope'! However, 'black' smoke is taken to mean an unsuccessful outcome in the election process and entails further anxious waiting! I have observed several members of the Catholic African Clergy struggling with feelings of uneasiness every time reference was made to 'black' smoke.

plausible is that the Cushites were conspicuous by reason of their colour, just as in the same way a white individual would stand out from among a majority of black individuals. I should like to cite an example from the Swahili-speaking peoples of East Africa to illustrate the point here.

In Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, the Swahili word for white person is *muzungu*, a word which resonates with *mlungu* (sing.) and *abelungu* (pl.) among the Zulu people of South Africa. Whenever a white individual is passing by, one frequently hears especially children calling them *muzungu*, the singular of *bazungu*, meaning white people. But in my view, this does not mean that the children in question are being racist.¹⁰⁴ It is rather that the white colouration strikes them in a manner which provokes them to a comment which apparently seems racist. When Jeremiah uttered his proverbial dictum about the skin of the Cushite, he was not being racist but intended to make a point about the impossibility of change in reference to Israel. Similarly, when Miriam criticized her brother Moses for marrying a Cushite woman (Nm 12), she was not exhibiting a consistent and deliberate racist trend, although her utterances could be construed to be suspect and imprudent. Thus, if today people wish to discriminate against others on account of their colour, they are not prohibited from doing so, but surely they cannot claim any biblical basis for such an action, at least not as far as the Old Testament is concerned.

Closely related to the issue of colour is the issue of the slavery of black people, which has found biblical justification among certain extremist groups in some sectors of human society. This issue was more pronounced in the past five or so centuries, although one can still hear of glaring cases of this inhuman practice, but today most manifestations of enslavement have taken on very subtle forms.

¹⁰⁴ Adamo, one of the most outspoken African biblical scholars and one of our predecessors in this endeavour, reports a similar experience while he was on a study tour in Israel not many years ago. Because of his black colour the Hebrew children were calling out to him as ‘Cush’! (Cf. Adamo 2004). One of Uganda’s leading newspapers recently ran a story about a certain Ugandan student who had just graduated in Australia and taken a job teaching the English language in Taiwan. The writer reports that the visitor attracted a lot of attention as she happened to be the only black person in a town where many people had never seen a black person in real life before. Children came up and touched the visitor to see if the black ‘paint’ would rub off and to feel the texture of the hair. Moreover, there were several traffic accidents as motorists slowed down to stare at the stranger. Even dogs reportedly barked at the new spectacle. The article concludes by saying: ‘The same thing still happens in remote parts of Africa when a *mzungu* [white person] shows up.’ (Cf. Obbo, C 2005. ‘Mkapa leaving power because he is short.’ *The Daily Monitor*, 31st August.)

Isaiah 20:3-5 is a major text which seems to point in the direction of portraying Cush rather negatively. The reference to 'slavery' however seems to become more explicit in Isaiah 45:14. But he is by no means the only prophet in this regard. Ezekiel 30:4.5.9 is another text which testifies to the more adverse perception of Cush, and Psalm 7:1 portrays Cush as an adversary of none other than King David himself.

Although these texts tend to portray Cush negatively, it would be inconclusive to argue that they therefore sanctioned slavery as well. As it is, the intricacies involved supersede the theme of slavery as such. When Isaiah dramatizes in a very symbolic manner the conquest of Egypt and Cush (Is 20:3-5), he clearly presents Cush in a debased and humiliated manner, as he walked for three whole years naked and barefooted. However, the context of this passage suggests something else than the debasement of Cush. Isaiah uses the analogy in order to hammer home the pressing issue of trying to thwart Judean complicity in any anti-Assyrian plot. The aim of this oracle is, among other things, to warn the people against joining the anti-Assyrian plot which had been inspired by the king of Ashdod. Such complicity could only spell ruin for Judah. Therefore, Isaiah did not have in mind the denigration of Cush as such. In fact, in chapter 37, Isaiah presents the reader with a powerful Cushite military figure in the person of king Tirhakah of Cush whose military power is deployed in connection with the liberation of Jerusalem (v.9). Similarly, Zerah, another powerful Cushite general, uses his military machine to challenge other peoples, although he eventually ends up being defeated by king Asa of Judah (2 Chr 14:13).¹⁰⁵ But his defeat was decreed by Yahweh himself. One could almost say that had it not been for Yahweh, things would have been very different for Asa!

As for the text of Isaiah 45:14, we indeed find reference to 'chained' Cushites, in addition to the act of 'bowing' low, thereby suggesting some form of subjugation of them. It is therefore easy to see how such a text could provide real fodder for those who are bent on entertaining notions of enslavement. But the context of this verse suggests

¹⁰⁵ It is interesting to note the sort of mechanized military gear that Zerah marshalled. His military machine comprised large numbers of infantry and a large assortment of cart-drawing horses. It is in fact said that Cush was greatly famed for breeding a good pedigree of these animals. To corroborate the claims concerning its prowess in battle, its land is often associated with 'bow' and 'arrow' (See Service 1998:10 where the author not only describes the 'People of the Bow' but also depicts a painted jug from 'Kush' showing one of the country's famed archers in action.) 'Land of the Bow' is a translation of the Egyptian *Ta Sety*, and is believed to be the oldest expression used by the Egyptians in ancient times to refer to the territory south of Egypt (cf. Yamauchi 2004:44).

that this fate will not befall Cush alone but will also include its allies, the Egyptians and the Sabeans. Further scrutiny reveals that this text is not really meant to be understood historically in the sense that what is described did indeed transpire. It would seem, rather, that the text is meant to encourage and elevate the faltering self-esteem of a nation recovering from the historical trauma of the Exile.

Finally, while the text of Psalm 7 clearly depicts Cush as an adversary from whom David prays to his God for protection, Ezekiel 30:4.5.9 furnishes a graphic description of the anguish and the eventual downfall of Cush. But again, as in Isaiah 45:14, this fate will be shared with Egypt, Put, Lud, Arabia, Libya and all the people of the 'allied lands', all of whom shall fall by the sword. For Ezekiel, the fate of Cush and all its allies is always the same: destruction. But this is ordained by Yahweh himself (v.12). In this sense, the portrayal of Cush parallels that of the oracles of doom in Nahum 3:9 and Zephaniah 2:12.

To conclude the point concerning the apparently detrimental depictions of Cush, it may be safely argued that like many other peoples, Cush experienced its difficult moments as it interacted with other inhabitants of the Levant. Any negative portrayals of Cushites can often be linked to particular historical events, and not necessarily to a persistent ideology of behavioural defects or character flaws indicative of racist thought. The point of these negative references seems to be rather to reveal more details of the historical contingencies of the prophets, and less of how Cushites were perceived, never mind the fact that the images sometimes used may be quite disturbing in today's world. But one may mention still other aspects which illuminate the question of the identity and history of Cush.

The reference 'Nubia', another variant translation of the term Cush, probably derives from the Egyptian *nub* meaning 'gold'. It will be recalled that Cush, which probably existed as early as 2000 BCE, and lasted till around 350 CE according to, among others, Sylvester (1997:38), used to supply Egypt with exotic items such as elephant tusks, 'ebony', a hard black tree that grows in the Nubian Desert, and panther skins.¹⁰⁶ It also exported slaves and cattle and was a major supplier of gold. Sylvester has

¹⁰⁶ The back cover of Service's book (1998) and Yamauchi's *Africa and the Bible* (2004:65) both display a picture of a painting supposedly taken from an Egyptian tomb dating from 1400 BCE. The portrait clearly

provided us with an overall expanded chronology of the Kingdom of Cush (1998:73). The fact that some form of trade between Cush and its powerful neighbour, Egypt, existed cannot be doubted, although one can only speculate as to what materials Cush received in return for its exports. Isaiah makes references to Cushite messengers sailing in vessels of papyrus on the Nile (Is 18:2), suggesting that the Cushites had already acquired navigational skills. It is probable that these skills could have been put to some good use such as trade. Thus, the concept of trade is not a new one, even for Cushites.

It is therefore most unfortunate when in today's world Africa often loses out in trade. It is often exploited and does not receive its fair share of the world's resources. Africa badly needs to develop from being a mere provider of raw materials to a formidable trade partner, able also to export finished products of a high value. There is need to rethink unfair trading systems which have tended to keep Africa lagging behind in development.

Should 'Cush' / 'Cushites' be translated 'Africa' and 'Africans', respectively? Adamo has strongly supported such a view (1992:59-60; 1998:37). His suggestion in this respect is certainly very interesting and, from the African point of view, also quite attractive. His case is further reinforced when he argues that if, for example, the Hebrew word *mitzra'ayim* can be translated by 'Egypt' without much fanfare, why should the same not be done with regard to Cush? Hence, the problem connected with the location of Cush would be resolved once and for all.

I wish that Adamo's suggestion would be easy to implement! Unfortunately, things are not always as straightforward as we would love them to be. Translators need first of all to contend with many difficulties before they can arrive at a translation of sorts.¹⁰⁷ It is true that over the years an evolution in the translation of the word 'Cush' has become evident, thus giving rise to names such as 'Ethiopia', 'Sudan', 'Nubia' and, in the case of Adamo, even 'Africa'. Some of these terms are certainly more preferable than others, depending on the individual Cush texts. Nevertheless, the differences afford a clear sign of the struggles and challenges faced by translators in their work. Cush is one

depicts Cushites bringing the Egyptian king tribute of gold, ebony logs, incense, leopard skin(s) and monkeys.

¹⁰⁷ For an extended discussion on this issue see Holter (1997:331-336); Unseth (1999:143-159).

such case. But I will touch on the question of challenges at a later stage. As far as I am concerned, Adamo's point has been made: the need constantly to explore new avenues in the venture in order to make the biblical message more meaningful to people. This entails a critical approach to translation issues, though.

Waliggo, a renowned Ugandan academician, has for example pointed out the many translation intricacies which the first Christian missionaries to Uganda faced in the second half of the nineteenth century. For instance, in order to translate 'venial' or 'non-grievous sin', the *Luganda* expression *ekibi eky'omukisa*, which literally translates as 'a sin of blessing' was initially suggested, to the chagrin of many! (Waliggo 1997:191, footnote 4).

Finally, to sum up issues pertaining to the identity of Cush, a word needs to be said about its geographical location. The country of Cush was located in the remote and southernmost part of the Persian Empire (Ezk 29:10; Est 1:1; 8:9). The African country of Cush was centred in what is now northern Sudan, with part of southern Egypt. But these borders have fluctuated throughout the hundreds of years of its existence (Unseth 1999:145). Today, this area would consist of a territory that comprises roughly the whole area between the first and sixth cataracts of the river Nile.

The country of Cush was one well watered by rivers, an indication that the land of Cush was not only fertile, rich and arable, but also that its rivers were navigable enough to favour water transportation and consequently even trade (cf. Gn 2; Is 18; Jb 28).

When the biblical authors speak of the origins of the world and its peoples, Cush is alluded to as well. Cush was there as far back as the beginnings of biblical history. Therefore, in the words of one author Cush 'is not a modern addition [to history]'.¹⁰⁸ It can be inferred that when God created the universe, Cush was included in that creation act. By way of analogy, in the beginning of the universe, God said: 'Let there be Africa.' And there was Africa! Furthermore, the mention of Cush in connection with the Garden of Eden (Gn 2) places it in the context of primordial abundance, harmony and well-being usually evoked by the imagery of this garden.

As a result, the identity of the Cushites, as far as the Old Testament references are concerned, is indisputable. Their place too in history is undeniable. To try (so to speak) to

¹⁰⁸ Hays (1996:409).

‘de-Cushitize’¹⁰⁹ the Bible, as some commentators are alleged to have done, would be tantamount to trying to distort the reality of the historical presence of a people. The multiple roles which Cush played during those times accord much weight to the kind of presence this African nation wielded.

6.2.1.3 What role does Cush play?

To begin with, Cush’s presence in the Levant was not passive, but active, and one which was viewed positively. Cushites were well-assimilated into Israelite society, as evidenced by their participation in various sectors of that society. Cushites exerted an influence on the social (Nm 12:1; Is 18:2; Jr 36:14), economic (Is 18:7; 45:14; Jb 28:19), political and military (2 Sm 18:19-32; 2 Ki 19:9 [=Is 37:9]; Is 18:1-2; 20:3-5; Jr 38-39; Ez 30:4-5.9; Dn 11:43; Nah 3:9; Zph 2:12; 2 Chr 14:8-14), as well as religious aspects of Israelite society (Is 11:11; 18:7; 43:3; Am 9:7; Zph 3:10; Pss 68:32[31]; 87:4).

Some of these references overlap, as is the case for instance with the Cush references in Isaiah. For Isaiah, the Cushite presence is manifest in most aspects of society. This is perhaps very revealing of the sometimes complex modes of human interaction. But more importantly, Cushites constituted a regular part of the biblical world. One of the major reasons for this presence is the fact that Cush enjoyed its greatest political influence in the epoch close to the period when most of the Old Testament literature originated, during the time when Cushite Kings ruled Egypt, a period often referred to as the Twenty-Fifth Egyptian Dynasty. This is usually placed chronologically somewhere between 750 BCE – 655 BCE, before these kings were driven out by the Assyrians.

But, while Cushites interacted visibly with Israelites owing to their different forms of involvement in the various sectors of Israelite / Judahite society, another form of interaction was also taking place behind the scenes, almost concomitantly, something invisible but nevertheless very real. This is the *indirect* interaction of Cush with Yahweh which is made possible through Cush’s *direct* involvement with the various aspects of

¹⁰⁹ Given the wider implications of the understanding of the term ‘de-Africanization’ of the Bible which some authors have used, I instead hold the view that a phrase such as ‘de-Cushitization’ of the Bible would instead be a more appropriate coinage in the present context.

Israelite society. This brings to the fore the question of how Cush interacted with Yahweh. The following paragraphs offer a brief consideration of this aspect of Cushite life.

Traditionally, Cushites believed in a host of deities (cf. Service 1998:35-41), including adopted Egyptian gods (Yamauchi 2004:156; Service 1998:36-40). Thus, the claim by some in the past that Africans south of the Sahara never possessed any gods of their own is unfounded. Those who believe in African Traditional Religions should be accorded due respect, even though these religions are by no means exempted from the criticisms usually levelled against other religions, including Christianity. The missionary epoch during which African religious practices were deemed ‘pagan’ is long past.

However, in the Old Testament, Cush is somehow drawn into interaction with the God of Israel as well because of its association with Israel. This is the information that can be gleaned from such texts as Isaiah 11:11; 18:7; 43:3; Amos 9:7; Zephaniah 3:10; and Psalms 68:32 and 87:14.

In Isaiah 11, we read about the restoration of Israel but also that of Cush, whereas in Isaiah 18, a future is envisaged for Cush as well as for Israel. In the *eschaton*, Cush will come to Mount Zion, to the place of the ‘name of Yahweh Sebaoth’. This ‘coming’ to Zion has been interpreted by many as being indicative of the conversion of the Cushites to Yahweh. This conversion will be symbolized by the ‘bringing of gifts’, whatever the nature of those gifts.

But the text of Isaiah 43 shows that Israel is more important to Yahweh than Cush is. The imagery used is powerful. The author uses two Hebrew words: **!טן** which means ‘to give, to put, to set before’, and **רpk** which connotes the idea of ‘price of a life, a ransom’. Their nuances here suggest the meaning of an ‘exchange’, similar to what transpires during commercial transactions. Therefore Yahweh will ‘hand over’ Cush and its allies in exchange for Israel.¹¹⁰ A preference for Israel is clearly indicated here, but one should be careful not to minimize the importance of Cush and its allies who are

¹¹⁰ This attitude of Yahweh’s seems to me to connect well with one of the central motifs of the New Testament, namely the redemption wrought through the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul in 1 Cor 7:23 would later on say: ‘You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters.’ Similarly, the Letter to the Hebrews too speaks at length about the expiatory role of the priesthood of Christ.

regarded as valuable items in the divine transaction. The implication here is that the more precious the item on the table, the higher the price. Thus, ultimately, not only Israel, but also Cush and its allies are important to Yahweh.

This is also the message of Amos and Zephaniah in the texts just cited above. Zephaniah for instance goes beyond his usual message of judgment and in 3:10 focuses on the restoration of Israel. But since Cush is mentioned in this context as well, it may be deduced that it too is connected by Zephaniah to the context of restoration and salvation. Likewise, this is also in a nutshell the significance of the references to Cush in Psalms 68 and 87, which although difficult to decipher from the literary point of view, are nevertheless quite straightforward with regard to the restoration of Cush as well.

Thus all in all, the relationship of Cush to Yahweh is made possible via Israel. If this point is further stretched, the promise made to Abraham (Ex 12:3), that the peoples of the world would bless themselves by him (Ex 12:3) and by his descendants (Ac 3:25), literally seems to find fulfilment in these Cush texts. In this sense, it is not difficult to perceive the place of Africans in the divine plan of salvation.

In section 1.2.1 above, especially footnote 7, I hinted at the rapid spread of Christianity in the southern Hemisphere, at least judging externally from the number of new converts and from the mode of worship which is vibrant because it makes generous use of song, drum, dance et cetera. The spirituality of the worshippers is of course difficult to quantify. It is possible that in the southern hemisphere the situation exists where faith is, so to speak, 'one mile long but one inch deep' whereas it is equally possible that in the northern (or is it western?) hemisphere, where faith is apparently receding judging from the diminishing numbers of churchgoers, the situation is one in which the faith is 'one inch long but one mile deep'! In any case, my contention, which I share with several others, is that the apparent growth of Christianity in the southern hemisphere, especially in Africa, needs to be matched by an equally strong and vibrant Theology. One way of realizing this is by making the Bible the centre of African Christian belief and expression.

6.2.2 Challenges of finding Africa in the Old Testament

Such a tremendous task as finding Africa in the Bible by means of studying the Cush texts offers its own challenges. As far as I am concerned, the search for Africa in the Bible has been a rather tedious and haphazard experience on my part because of the multiple issues that this venture entailed. In the following paragraphs, I intend to point out some of these hurdles. For the purposes of this presentation, I should like first to list these challenges and then proceed to expand on each of them.

As far as I am concerned, the challenges involved in using Cush Old Testament texts as a conduit for finding Africa in the Bible may generally be grouped into four main categories of issues: 1) methodological; 2) hermeneutical; 3) literary; 4) geographical and historical.

Because of the nature and the number of the Cush texts, these problems tend to overlap in certain cases.

1) Methodology

While the task of identifying the Cush texts in the Old Testament already constitutes a problem of its own, actually getting down to analyse the texts is another. How does one undertake an analysis of the fifty-six Cush texts without compromising their exegetical import and depth? Is this perhaps one of the reasons why many scholars, both Eurocentric and Afrocentric, sometimes gloss over a number of them? Therefore, understandably, I too was faced with the problem of how to organize these texts so that they could somehow be beaten into some manageable shape. As a result I considered several possibilities, including 'canonical', chronological, morphological and 'thematic' arrangements, among others.

The first option was to settle for a 'canonical' organization. This means analyzing texts according to the order in which they appear in the Hebrew Bible, the TANAK approach, which would imply beginning with Cush references in the Law, then in the Prophets (Former and Latter), and finally in the Writings. This type of organizational scheme would respect the arrangement of the Bible authors and has been adopted by,

among others, Adamo (1998), Holter (2000a), Høyland Lavik (2001) and possibly Copher (1988). Moreover, it also takes into account the literary setting and context of the individual texts.

The difficulty with this type of arrangement, though, is that the references are not evenly distributed amongst the three sections of the Hebrew Bible. The majority of the texts are found in the Prophets, especially the latter ones. This large presence of Cush in the prophetic literature poses more questions than it answers. The fewest allusions are in the Writings. Again one may ask why. Furthermore, analysing texts in terms of this arrangement will result in a disproportion whereby too much emphasis would be placed on prophetic impressions of Cush and too little elsewhere. Thus it becomes difficult to gain a clear view of the Cush presence in the Old Testament.

Similarly, other possible arrangements offer their own advantages and disadvantages. If one chooses a chronological approach, as for instance Sadler (2001), Yamauchi (2004), and to a certain extent also Adamo (1998) seem to have done, then one should be prepared to contend with the challenge of dating texts. This has oftentimes proved very difficult as only a few texts can be dated with any relative certainty. Nevertheless, fruits are to be plucked here and there. For instance, we now know that Cush's involvement with Israel / Judah was more pronounced at the time the Cushites were rulers in Egypt during the Twenty-fifth Egyptian Dynasty, a period placed roughly between 750 BCE – 655 BCE.

In terms of the morphological approach, the intention would be to analyze the Cush texts according to the morphological forms in which the references occur, which means identifying the forms, about five of them (Cush, Cushi, Cushit, Cushim / Cushiyim). But as was the case with the 'canonical' arrangement, the problem of disproportionality is a real possibility here too. There would be too much material on the form 'Cush', since the majority of references feature it (x 30), and less on the other forms. The form 'Cushit' is only referred to twice. It is revealing that the term 'Cush' was more often employed than other forms. Our analysis in the various chapters and sections where this form is explained has shown that it was used in different ways to refer to proper names, as a gentilic, *et cetera*.

Because of these difficulties, I finally decided to settle for the ‘thematic’ approach insofar as the analysis of the texts is concerned. But I have listed these texts according to the MT arrangement, which has basically to do with grouping texts according to their presumed topics or themes, hence the coinage ‘thematic’. I should like to remark that in the present case, this method seemed to me to be more promising than the other arrangements for a number of reasons.

First of all, the texts were categorized into various topics. Happily the topics to which we assigned them ultimately seemed to vindicate us, for they seemed after all to fit the themes we thought *a priori* they would! Secondly, the texts appeared a little more manageable to me and also took on a satisfactory order. This has favoured a sensible interpretation of Cush which has yielded valuable information about Cush, enabling me to recount the story above (6.2.1.2 & 6.2.1.3).

But this method has its disadvantages as well. First, there are texts which defy any classification. This is the case with the Cush references in Isaiah, which seem to spread all over the place in the writings of that prophet (cf. 6.2.1.3). Another ‘stubborn’ text is Daniel 11:43. It could fit anywhere, into the political, military, cultural or even the Cush-Yahweh relationship context. Does it have to do with political / military matters, or with Cush and Yahweh and a context of salvation, or both or neither? A definite stance had to be taken to place these texts somewhere, in order to analyze them! Sometimes, however, the correlation between certain texts is so strong that they simply ask to be treated together. Such is the case with the texts from Isaiah which are not only related but also seem to overlap where the portrayal of Cush is concerned.

Second, this arrangement seems to decide *a priori* what role the Cush texts play before it is even proven. This is of course tantamount to reading into them meanings they may not necessarily possess, a clear case of eisegesis.

In addition, closely related to the challenges pertaining to the methodological arrangement of texts are issues of hermeneutics.

2) Hermeneutical

This matter deals basically with the various interpretations of Cush. But it seems to me that the overriding principle in all these interpretations has been the idea of context. To my mind it appears that most interpretations of Cush, especially negative ones, strongly reflect the context of the interpreters behind them, in other words that people usually tend to interpret texts from their cultural perspectives. Thus, if a text is not interpreted, or is altogether ignored as we pointed out in the case of much traditional western biblical scholarship, this has probably implied that those authors did not consider those texts important to them or to their contexts. Yet one should be careful about making sweeping statements which would suggest that just because one's favourite text is not reflected anywhere in the gamut of biblical interpretations, the silence results from some malice or something of the kind. It might sometimes be a purely unconscious and innocent act, unless of course the author concerned explicitly states the reasons for treating certain texts the way he or she chooses to. But from this too something positive may be learnt: perhaps that one needs to be very careful in the way certain texts are interpreted because those texts might have a different meaning for other people. If toes are stepped upon, their owners will naturally tend to counter-react. One could cite by way of example the 'populist' erudition evidenced in authors such as Cain H Felder (*Troubling Biblical Waters* [1989]; *Stony the Road We Trod* [1991]); Walter A McCray (*The Black Presence in the Bible*, 2 volumes [1990]); Mensa Otabil (*Beyond the Rivers of Ethiopia* [1993]) or even Monges (*Kush, the Jewel of Nubia* [1997]). These and other Afrocentric interpretations of the Cush texts clearly seem to me to reflect this counter-reaction.

This is not the end of the matter, though. It is quite possible that the 'offending' party is further provoked to re-act in turn, with the result that both sides become entangled in a kind of academic 'chain-reaction', or 'clash' of perspectives. In this context, I am of the view that the so-called 'responses' to discordant opinions among scholars are clear illustrations of this phenomenon. Why do people tend to 'respond' to some article? Is it not perhaps because they do not agree with the views expressed therein?

As closely connected with the hermeneutical challenge is the literary one.

3) Literary

The essential focus here is the written form of the transmitted text. The final text reaches the reader with all its baggage of scribal editing or redaction, and it is up to the reader to make sense of the written word, as is the case with the Cush texts too. They have been handed down with difficulties of transmission evident, which is why the text of some references is not easy to manage exegetically. Such is the case for instance with the texts from the Writings (Psalms 68; 87), to mention just two examples. Ultimately, a good interpretation will depend on how well the exegete has resolved any outstanding literary or textual problems involved in the text. This will of course depend on the individual exegete's ability to handle such texts.

Finally, something should be said about the challenge which Cush poses from the geographical / historical point of view.

4) Geographical / Historical

These challenges centre on the location of Cush. Not everybody would agree with Adamo that the biblical Cush should be located in Africa and that Cushites are Africans. The main objection here is that Cush has also been associated with other locations outside Africa, such as the Kassites in eastern Mesopotamia. One could of course advance an argument grounded on the possibility of free movement among the ancients, especially given the trade links that existed between Africa (especially Egypt) and the Middle East. The presumption here would be to argue that Cushites travelled far afield. If they were to be found in Israel, why would they not be found in Mesopotamia? Fortunately, for those of us who hold to the African connection of Cush, most of the Cush references usually point to an African location.

Another related problem is the geographical location of the Garden of Eden and its rivers, with which Cush is associated. Here no consensus appears to exist among

scholars either. Personally, I have argued for an African location, although Eden might just constitute a figure of speech used by the biblical author to mean something else.

All these challenges will probably still face us for a long time to come, but I should like to explore some directions that could be taken.

6.3 Implications for the way forward

6.3.1 Teaching the Old Testament in an African Context

Several years ago, I was a student of the Bible at the prestigious Pontifical Biblical Institute (Biblicum) in Rome, pursuing a Licentiate degree in Scripture together with several other African students as well. I am very grateful to all my professors at the Pontifical Biblical Institute for the thorough introduction to biblical languages and other biblical disciplines. Nevertheless, I should like to remark that my stay there would have been even more profitable had the courses I followed also trained me how to read the Bible meaningfully in my context as an African. If my memory serves me well, I do not remember seeing anywhere in the congested syllabus any course specifically addressing African approaches to the Bible or something similar. Perhaps the only study with any direct reference to Africa which was undertaken during the period of the late 1960s through the 1990s is the dissertation by Laurent Naré from Burkina Faso, which was published in Rome in 1983 under the title *Proverbes salomoniens et proverbes mossi: Étude comparative à partir d'une nouvelle analyse de Pr 25-29*.

My four long and gruelling years came and went, leaving me no better prepared for the work which awaited me once I was back home. The comparative study by Naré was certainly a step in the right direction, had it been continued.

The reason I am citing this experience is by no means to malign the biblical Institute and my former professors but rather to highlight the need, in my view, to constantly adapt even biblical studies to situations. Some people would call this 'contextualization' or 'inculturation' or employ other similar terms. In 1971, Mbiti wrote:

We have to Africanize Christianity, that is give it an indelible African character. It is not enough to transplant pre-fabricated Christianity from Rome or Geneva to Kampala or Lagos... We have to produce a type of Christianity here which bears the imprint MADE IN AFRICA (Mbiti (1971:3).

In the same vein, West (1993:62) remarked:

The presence of *the Bible in Africa* is ambiguous, but the importance of its presence cannot be disputed. The presence of *Africa in the Bible* may be unfamiliar to most readers, but that is because most of us read the Bible from a European perspective. But we can and we should read the Bible from an African perspective.

These quotations from Mbiti and West say it all: in Africa, the Bible ought to be African. But it cannot be so if an attitude of *laissez faire* is adopted. African biblical scholars and theologians need to be proactive in bringing about an *interpretatio Africana* of the Bible. This demands that a deliberate option ought to be taken in African theological institutions and departments of Religious Studies in African universities to design programmes wherein the question of Africa and the Bible are addressed, and the issues of contextualization become a real concern. I should like to understand ‘contextualization’ from the point of view of Africa as encompassing a situation in which the Bible is no longer the book of the colonizers, but one which expresses central aspects of African experience and identity, traditional as well as post-colonial. There is a strong need to reflect this new understanding of the book in academic biblical studies.

About the same time as Mbiti wrote, Newing (1970) and Idowu (1972) were already very much aware of this need. Newing for example carried out research on the ‘Study of the Old Testament Curricula in Eastern and Central Africa’ and even proposed valuable suggestions, many of which are still quite valid even today. For instance he wrote, ‘It seems to me that we have to rethink our whole approach to theological education in Africa. We need to escape, if possible, from our inherited structures which shackle us to irrelevant [sic] curricula patterns and education methods. Fundamentally, this means a reappraisal of the whole static concept of institutional training’ (1970:92).

Similarly, Idowu wrote a very insightful article entitled ‘The Teaching of the Bible to African Students’.

In the more recent past, Professor Abogunrin, till 2000 editor of NABIS, published an article in the *African Journal of Biblical Studies* in which he raised his concerns about the state of biblical studies in Africa. The title of his article: ‘Biblical Research in Africa: The Task Ahead.’ Similarly, Professor Holter (2001) undertook a review of the book by Hess & Wenham (1998), ‘Make the Old Testament Live: From Curriculum to Classroom’, implying that some of the suggestions by Hess and Wenham are quite relevant. Professor Masenya from the University of South Africa articulated the same need when she argued for the necessity of contextualizing the Bible in an article entitled ‘Teaching Western-oriented Old Testament Studies to African Students: An Exercise in Wisdom or in Folly?’ (cf. Masenya 2004:455-469; see also Masenya 2002:3-8).

Not so long ago Professor Adamo vigorously argued for the need to ‘decolonize’ biblical studies in general (cf. Adamo 2004; see also BOTSA 2005 [no.19] pp. 3-10). He has asserted that this is so because, ‘I felt dissatisfied with the colonization of my thought and the thought of my people and the methods of biblical interpretation imposed on us’ (2004:6). Consequently, he proceeds to suggest that some of the ways of ‘decolonizing’ the Bible should include the following: i) planning a curriculum that reflects African perspectives; ii) teaching the Old Testament from African culture and religion; iii) writing textbooks that reflect African perspectives; and iv) comparative study of African and Old Testament culture and religions (cf. BOTSA 2005, no.19, pp.6-8). The list of scholars who have advocated contextualization is continually growing.

Encouraged by these academic exhortations, my humble proposal regarding the present theme of Africa and the Bible is as follows:

- 1) Bible syllabus: Given the importance that Africans attach to the Cush texts of the Old Testament, a Bible course which includes topics about Africa / Africans and the Bible would be appropriate in the context of an African University or institute of higher learning. Such a course would have to be designed to reflect the needs of the students themselves and also of their society. There are benefits to including such a course in the

syllabus; whereas not to do so would represent a serious ellipsis in the teaching of the Bible and in conveying its relevance to the students concerned. Students too could be involved in the process of designing such a course. The key principle here is that programmes, especially university ones, should constantly evolve and adapt.

2) Biblical languages, especially Hebrew and Greek: It might at first seem strange to insist on such a requirement, especially if the need to contextualize the Bible is agreed upon. Might these rather 'obsolete' and seemingly archaic languages not distract attention from the more practical matters? Is it not demanding too much from students?

Several scholars consider that such is not the case. They argue that the teaching of biblical languages is an essential component in the quest to contextualize the Bible and theology in Africa. Nel (2005:2-10) has strongly argued for the necessity of biblical languages in the task of the interpretation and translation of biblical texts, suggesting that the study of Hebrew and Greek 'assists a closer entry to the text' (2005:2) and adding that 'The God-talk' of the Old Testament is highly metaphorical and consequently requires the background of the Hebrew language in order to make sense of it (cf. Nel 2005:8). For him the language and thought patterns of the Old Testament are intrinsically connected: 'The Hebrew language does not only transport ideas as a medium, but the language itself is an expression of the thought patterns of Israel without which full appreciation is impossible' (2005:9-10).

Similarly, Holter (2005:1) holds that African Old Testament studies in fact proceeds from the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament for 'practical' and 'principal' reasons because 'the Hebrew language is the door into the world of the living and relevant texts of the Old Testament.' Echoing similar concerns, Du Toit (2005:14-15) has argued that the Bible and its languages are an integral part of the indigenous knowledge systems of the African continent. She also points out that there are students who want to study Hebrew for personal enrichment or for reasons of faith.

Zinkuratire (2001:217-226) has on the other hand unearthed what I would refer to as an interesting discovery concerning the similarities and correspondences between Hebrew and Bantu languages. He has argued that many peculiar features in Hebrew seem difficult only because they are compared with English grammar and syntax, but

interestingly do not seem so difficult in Bantu languages. Comparison with Bantu languages, he suggests, will quite often facilitate the explanation and understanding of certain features of biblical Hebrew (cf. Zinkuratire 2001:224-225). Furthermore, he has pointed out that a comparison between Hebrew and Bantu languages has very important implications for Bible translation and for African Old Testament scholars (cf. Zinkuratire 2001:225-226). In a related article, Zinkuratire has argued, 'Western biblical scholarship has been making use of the languages, cultures and religions of the Ancient Near East, particularly Canaan and Mesopotamia, to comment on and explain many biblical texts. In the same way traditional African religions and cultures can profitably be used for the same purpose' (cf. Zinkuratire 1998:8).

Personally, I wish to add my voice to those above and strongly endorse the need for biblical languages, for two reasons in particular. One, it is my ardent conviction that genuine translation and interpretation of biblical texts can only be possible if these crucial tools, namely biblical languages, are made part and parcel of the process. However, in this connection, I should note that while there are good translations in modern languages as well, which can be used and have been used successfully to translate the Bible into other languages, the former are nevertheless limited in many ways and do not always convey sufficiently clearly the complex nuances of Hebrew and Greek. As a certain dictum in Italian, possibly originating from another source, says, '*un traduttore é un traditore*' (literally, 'a translator is a traitor'); this often seems to be the case when it comes to translating the Bible.

Two, if the biblical languages are brushed aside, how can African scholars claim to be on the same academic level with their counterparts in Europe and America who are well versed in these languages? Consequently, it will become increasingly difficult to engage in any meaningful scholarly dialogue between Africa and the West in the manner we have been advocating all along.

3) Research and seminars: I should like to suggest that in institutions of higher learning such as universities, the method of teaching should be one that tends to encourage research. Therefore conducting seminars should take precedence over even the lecturing method of imparting knowledge, though not to the exclusion of it. Probably

Newing, cited above, was right when he wrote, ‘Seminars therefore should be the rule rather than the exception’ (1970:93). It seems to me that lecturing, while it has its own advantages, also exhibits many disadvantages. There is a joke which defines a lecture as being the transmission of the professor’s notes to the students’ notebooks without passing through the mind of either! There seems to be some truth in this statement. In my view, lecturing does not seem to challenge students enough and it encourages, among other things, cramming, which is good only for exam purposes. The research and seminar approach on the other hand tends to make learning more personalized. As a result students tend to internalize matters better and they are also not lacking in commitment.

4) Finally, since students are studying the Bible for various reasons, ranging from the spiritual to the material, they should therefore be helped to learn various ways of reading the Bible profitably. These include skills such as how to pray the Bible, conduct Bible services, how to deliver sermons, et cetera, especially if they choose to go into church work. I should like also to stress the need to help students to make efforts to link the Bible to their lives so that the Bible is not just studied in a detached manner. We do not study the Bible for its own sake, but rather to make it touch our lives and that of other people.

6.3.2 Remaining uncertainties which call for further research

This study does not in any way pretend to have exhaustively handled all the issues connected with the study of the Cush texts of the Old Testament. Neither does it pretend to be an in-depth analysis of all the details of these texts. Many issues still remain unresolved; future studies would do well to keep these in mind as they continue the quest for Africa in the Bible. This problem has been further exacerbated by the limited number of sources written specifically with Cush in mind. I should like now to point out some of the problems which still seem to me to represent a challenge in the study of the Cush texts.

When Adamo (1998) concluded his excursion into Cush, he identified several challenges associated with the venture of finding Africa in the Bible. Among the many he

cited, one concerns the need to undertake archaeological work not only in the Middle East but also in Africa. This challenge has not yet been taken up.

Connected with this is the need for future scholars to look into the problem of locating the exact geographical extent of the African Cush. Up to now we have argued that the boundaries of Cush as a country seem to have been fluid. As if to confound matters even more, I recently came across a modern map of the Republic of Sudan and very close to the Ugandan border is a place which was marked 'New Cush'! So how far did Cush extend? Or is the delimitation of its territory going to remain forever a tantalising mirage?

Future scholars might want also to look into the question of the proper approach to the study of the Cush texts. In this study, the Cush texts were organized according to a thematic scheme. Although I am satisfied with having used this scheme, one may still enquire whether there are better schemes which could produce improved results.

I should also like to challenge future scholars to investigate the issue of the terminology used and suggest how to streamline it. What do we mean by 'Africa', 'African', 'Eurocentricity', 'Afrocentricity' *et cetera*? Furthermore, future scholars are challenged to take up the study of 'Cush' in the New Testament.

Finally, given the enormous number of challenges posed by the study of the Cush texts, perhaps there is still a need in the future to conduct further hermeneutical studies, purposely focussing on the studies of Cush which have hitherto been carried out. Such studies would not necessarily explore the Cush texts as such, but could rather focus on the existing studies of the Cush texts as their main objective. Unless these challenges are met, we will probably have to content ourselves with only a partial portrayal of Cush in the Bible.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has been focusing on the importance and challenges of finding Africa in the Bible by means of studying the Cush texts. It has also spelt out some practical suggestions by way of looking into the future, and is not oblivious to the remaining uncertainties. If the overall message of this chapter were to be condensed, it

would probably be this: to place the Bible at the centre of African Christianity by using the African context to draw inspiration.

Several years ago Idowu (1972:199) wrote: ‘I believe that we have reached a stage in Africa where we have to adopt the slogan first coined by the World Council of Churches some time ago, that “the world provides our agenda.”’ What Idowu meant was that it is the ‘situation’ or ‘context’, as we have used it here, which should determine how the Bible in Africa should be approached and taught. A contextualized Theology is one which has as its main characteristics a reflection of the ‘language, context and content’ of the African reality (cf. Masenya 2004:456).

Not many years ago, Punt (1999a:8) wrote: ‘The central role claimed for the Bible in African Theology is not balanced with an equally central role for biblical studies in Africa.’ In a similar vein, Parratt (1983:88-94) cited by Punt (1999a:8) also observed that biblical studies are lagging far behind other aspects of theological study in Africa, and that in some instances they have become a mere ‘appendage’ (Wambudta 1980:36).

While I would tend to agree with Punt that biblical studies in Africa do not play the central role claimed for the Bible in African Theology, and also with Parratt’s view that biblical studies in Africa are lagging behind, I am not so sure that these studies can still be considered an ‘appendage’ as Wambudta has claimed. This may have been the case in the remote past, but in the more recent past, I think we have witnessed an awakening which intends to place biblical studies at the centre of *Theologia Africana*. Scholars from Europe, America and Africa itself have measured up to the challenge and today one can access a great deal of material on the subject. The meta-scope of this thesis has been to make a contribution in this area. I am confident that other studies will follow suit. What is important now is to maintain the momentum.

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