

In the present volume Yamauchi aims to study the relationships between ancient Africa and the Bible, from far antiquity down to Roman times. His objectives are: “to explore the historical and archaeological background of biblical texts that deal with Africa and the Bible, ... to examine the exegesis of these texts and ... to trace the ramifications of later interpretations and misinterpretations of these texts” (16), no less, but also no more.

Yamauchi begins the first part of this study with the curse of Ham (19–33), claiming that “No other verse in the Bible has been so distorted and so disastrously used down through the centuries for the exploitation of Africans and African Americans as Genesis 9.25” (19). Yamauchi summarises the events that led to the curse and writes on its significance (a mere three pages):

A little reflection shows the fitness of Noah’s response. Measure for measure, Noah “unfathers” Ham by driving a wedge between him and his (youngest) son Canaan. . . . Ham, who seeks to free himself from parental authority and law, will be held responsible by his son — as a parental authority — for all the evils that befall that son. In any case, a simple reading of the text reveals that though the sin was Ham’s, Ham was not the object of Noah’s curse. As The Original African Heritage Study Bible [C. H. Felder, ed., Nashville: Winston, 1993] points out, none of Ham’s three other sons, Mizraim (Egypt), Put (Libya), or Cush (Nubia = Sudan), was cursed (22).

Then Yamauchi exposes the abuse of this figure in Jewish traditions (starting with the Midrash on Genesis from the fifth century; Yamauchi mentions 4Q252 (Genesis Pesher II.6f) in the treatment of the OT, from Early Judaism cf. also Jub. 7.10,13; 9.1) and Muslim tradition and its understanding among Europeans, Americans, South Africans, and among the Mormons (22–33). For the Wirkungsgeschichte of this text in South Africa Yamauchi refers to the studies of G. M. Fredrickson, A. du Toit, W. A. de Klerk and J. W. de Gruchy. From a South African perspective the treatment is too short and perhaps simplistic. While the authors quoted by Yamauchi might be technically correct in claiming that this verse played no role in the development of the policy of Apartheid (31), the issue whether and to what extent the idea of the curse of Ham circulated in (certain) Afrikaner circles at the time is not addressed fully (its significance in the 19th century South Africa is sketched in ten lines). It is necessary to distinguish between

what is expressed in official policy statements and the popular sentiments in society, even in religious communities. Very few, if any, official policy documents referred to the cursing of Ham as an argument in favour of Apartheid or other racial issues, yet the idea has been circulating in some Afrikaner communities. And, when such ideas float around in a community — even without the endorsement of official documents — it is possible or at least easier to apply a policy like the policy of Apartheid without too many questions being asked. Yamauchi focuses too much on the official statements or academic assessments, and not sufficiently on ideas that have been circulating, in addition to what those documents say or do not say. Despite these criticisms it is otherwise a welcome feature of this study that Yamauchi often sketches the Wirkungsgeschichte of passages in various traditions. For the significance of Gen 9 in other African contexts cf. T. A. Adeyemo’s Is Africa Cursed? (Nairobi: Christian Learning Materials, 1997).

The chapter on “Moses’ Cushite Wife” of Numbers 12.1 (35–75) focuses on the question of her exact origins: “Was she an African from Cush (closely linked with Egypt) or from Cush(an), an ancient term for Levantine Midian?” (13f). In addition, Yamauchi examines the reference to one of the four rivers associated with the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2.13, the Gihon of which it is said that it “flows around the whole land of Cush”. After a long survey of various ancient designations and sources (including Cush and its rendering Ethiopia in the MT, LXX and Latin texts), a description of this “Land of Deserts and Cataracts” (46–50), the gold of Cush, a survey of the relationship between Egypt and Nubia and of various archaeological discoveries in the area and various evidence for “Egyptianized Nubians”, Yamauchi concludes: “In light of the ample Egyptian evidence of the presence of many Nubians in Egypt from as early as the Old Kingdom and of the intermarriage between Egyptians and Nubians, we should not doubt the possibility of Moses’ marriage to a Cushite or Nubian woman” (75).

The following section, “Solomon and Africa” (77–105) covers all references to Africa that appear in the various Biblical accounts of Solomon, including the five references to Solomon’s marriage to a Pharaoh’s daughter. Through his trading activities, “Solomon . . . served as the middleman between Egypt and the Neo-Hittite and Aramean states (1 Kgs 10.29)” (81). Yamauchi discusses the location of Solomon’s copper mines, the significance of his Red Sea port at Ezion-Geber and the identification of the land of Ophir (discussion of the suggestions that Ophir refers to what the Egyptians called the land of Punt which was their source of incense and which has been identified with various countries along the East coast of Africa). Next Yamauchi takes up the location of Sheba (“. . . the biblical and archaeological evidence that Sheba was in southwest Arabia”, 105), its kingdom and prominent queen. This includes the role of camels (mentioned in 1 Kgs 10.2), evidence of early contacts between Palestine and South Arabia and a fine survey of the report of the visit of the queen of Sheba in various Jewish, Islamic and Ethiopian traditions.

The last chapter devoted to OT evidence covers “Tirhakah and Other Cushites” (107–48; 2 Kgs 19.9; Isa 37.9). Treatment first focuses on Joab’s Cushite messenger of 2 Sam 18.19–33, Asa’s opponent Zerah the Cushite (2 Chr 14.9–15)