

FACTS AND OPINION ABOUT ETHIOPIA

“Cradle of Humankind”

Many wonderful phenomena make Ethiopia **unique**. This uniqueness is primarily due to its' being the cradle of humankind and the source of human civilizations. The references given in the Bible, the finding of the fossilized remains of man's oldest known ancestor, “LUCY” or *Australopithecus afarensis* and the classical notes by the ancient Greeks and Romans provide the basis for considering Ethiopia as a culturally complex and unique entity.

“Lucy” was “a tiny lady 3 feet tall, 60 pounds light and 3.5 million years old” wrote **Donald Johanson** (Cleveland Museum of Natural History) who discovered her in 1974.

Myriad of Fossils

“In Ethiopia, a trove of fossils preserves an entire ecosystem, including pre-humans, ... There's nowhere on the planet that is comparable in having a succession of fossil horizons spanning 6 million years. Several dozen scientists actually might be on site at any time [in Ethiopia], but more than 500 specialists, including many from Ohio, have been drawn into the investigations,” wrote **Tim White** (**Columbus Dispatch, 14 April 2002**).

Hospitality

The hospitality that the peoples of Ethiopia show to foreigners is another unique feature of the country. “*Once you have drunk of the waters of Ethiopia, you will return to imbibe them again*,” wrote **Jim Marshall**, a Professor of Mathematics in Addis Ababa University (1950-1994). **Wilhelm Georg Schimper**, a German traveler, who arrived in Ethiopia in 1837 to collect plants for the “Esslingen Unio Itineraria” stayed there until his death in 1878. **Herbert Francis Mooney**, an Irish botanist, traveled to Ethiopia many times, made good acquaintances with the people and Emperor *Haile Selassie* and ultimately established a National Museum of Plants (Herbarium) in 1959.

Statements like the following also indicate the qualities of the ancient peoples of Ethiopia: “Ethiopians are the most just men” (**Herodotus**, 425-485 B.C., Greek historian); “Ethiopians are the blameless race” (**Homer**, Greek Poet).

Antiquity or Ancient History

By all accounts, Ethiopia is one of the oldest States in the world. (**Martin Bernal**, *Black Athena, The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*). Its' long and almost uninterrupted history of independence is full of valiant

sacrifices against all types of aggression and forces that attempted, one after the other, to dominate it. The climax of this occurred when the peoples of Ethiopia crushed a militarily incomparable and technologically advanced European power, Italy, in 1896 at the battle of Adwa. Ethiopia is a founding member of the League of Nations, the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity.

Addis Ababa is the headquarters of many international and regional organizations, such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the Organization for African Unity, and the Livestock Center for Africa. Africa Hall is one of our most famous buildings, celebrated for the striking artwork designs of the stained glass created by **Afewerk Tekle**.



“Formerly known as Abyssinia, Ethiopia, was founded long before the birth of Christ. Although it had been conquered dozens of times, Ethiopia was the birthplace of African Nationalism. Unlike so many other African states, it had fought colonialism at every turn.

“Ethiopia has always held a special place in my own imagination and the prospect of visiting Ethiopia attracted me more strongly than a trip to France, England and America combined. I felt I would be visiting my own genesis, unearthing the roots of what made man African. Meeting the Emperor himself would be like shaking hands with history” – **Nelson Mandela** (*Long Walk To Freedom*, p. 255)

Faith in God

It is also faith in **God** and the conviction that all human beings are created equal and in the image of God that forms the foundation of the sense of justice, compassion, honor and independence that are so characteristic of traditional Ethiopians.

St. George's Cathedral

Built in 1896 in the traditional octagonal shape by the Emperor Menelik II to commemorate his



victory at Adwa, it is dedicated to the national saint of Ethiopia. The museum houses a

wide collection of important religious paintings, crosses many designs, historic books and parchments, and beautiful handicrafts. There are also fine examples of modern paintings by the famous Ethiopian artist Afewerik Tekle.

ABRAHA – Few men have had greater influence on world history than Abraha, Emperor of Ethiopia 1600 years ago. His decision to change the religion of his country from paganism to Christianity probably changed the fate of western civilization. When Islam was sweeping across all of North Africa and southern Asia, Ethiopia held firmly against it for more than 1000 years but also lived peacefully with followers of the Moslem religion peacefully living in the country for over 400 years. It also gave a refuge or sanctuary for the followers of the Prophet Mohammed during the 7th century A.D.

Contributions to Humanity

Coffee – the province known as Keffa in Ethiopia is the origin of arabica coffee (*Coffea arabica*); it was introduced first to Arabia and then to Java by



the British. From there it spread to the rest of the world. Today over 400 million cups of coffee are drunk everyday in the United States (**F. L. Wellman, 1961**, Coffee: Botany, Cultivation and Utilization).

Barley – a disease-resistant variety of barley is now the basis of most of the bread that we have in Asia, Europe and in North America. According to some scholars, farmers in the United States obtain over 150 million dollars per year from the sale of this variety of barley.

“According to the number of its botanical varieties of wheat, Ethiopia occupies first place ... This is also the center of origin of cultivated barley. Nowhere else does it exist in nature such a diversity of forms and genes of barley. A number of genera of cultivated plants are found only in Ethiopia, for example, the grain *Eragrostis abyssinica* [= *Eragrostis teff*] and the oil-bearing *Guizotia abyssinica*” - **N.I. Vavilov** (Russian Scientist)

Hagenia abyssinica (Kosso in Amharic) is a medicinal plant that was initially taken from Ethiopia and introduced into the international world of medicine as an age-old tested medicament. Mesfin Tadesse (1994, Traditional Use of Some Medicinal Plants in Ethiopia), quoting Richard Pankhurst (1975), “wrote at length how crude extracts of this plant began to be utilized in

Europe... the first foreign medical man to interest himself in Kosso” is a French physician called Dr. A. Bryer around 1816.

Drought and Famine

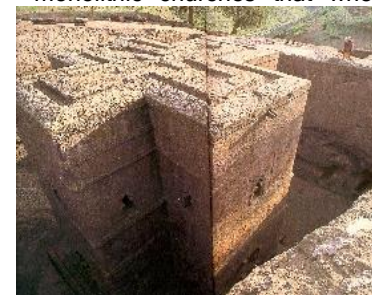
It is ironic that this country that has now come to be associated with drought and famine, has at one time been known as the bread-basket of Africa. The country is known to have had a different philosophy about food. Traditionally, food in Ethiopia has not been considered as a commodity. It used to be extremely disgraceful to sell food. “**Food must be given, not sold**” was the motto in most parts of the country. Feeding travelers is considered as a God-sent opportunity to do good to humanity. It is still common to find oneself in strange situations in some small hotels in rural towns. When one asks for the room and boarding bill, one gets only the bill for the rent of the room and not for the food and the coffee consumed.

It is also ironic to assume that drought is the sole cause of famine as “Ethiopia is the water tower of Eastern Africa, dominating the drainage systems of the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean ...” Drought and famine have their causes in present day greed and negligence in that part of the world as in elsewhere.

Places to Visit

Lalibela - Rock Hewn Churches

Known as the Eight Wonder of the world, Lalibela is a revered spot to Ethiopians and foreigners alike. One is baffled by the immensity and beauty of twelve monolithic churches that where



hewn out of rock over eight centuries ago.

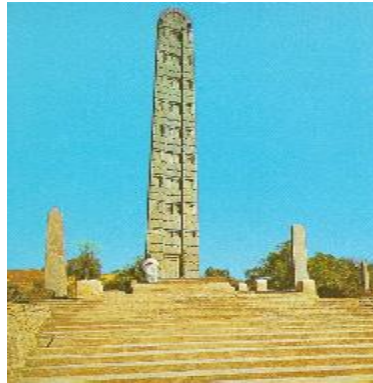
The town is named for King Lalibela, who was born there in the early 12th century, and transformed it into a natural wonder. At the moment of the future king's birth, he was surrounded by a cloud of bees, and believing these to be the soldiers that would one day serve her son, his mother gave him the name Lalibela, which means "the bees recognize his sovereignty."

Legend has it that King Lalibela enlisted the help of angels to produce the miraculous rock-hewn churches. Standing in two groups, on either side of the Jordan River, the churches are still houses of worship today. One of the churches is believed to contain the tomb of the king himself.

The best time to visit the churches is during one of the religious holidays, when the priests who live there perform ancient rituals according to the religious tradition. At Timkat (Ethiopian Epiphany) on January 19, an intricate ritual unfolds before the spectator-here the traditional dances of the priests take places after the annual baptismal mass o the River Jordan. During Ethiopian Easter, Christian from near and far makes a pilgrimage to beloved Lalibela to celebrate on holy ground.

Axum

It is generally believed that Axum was first established by immigrants from southern Arabia a few centuries before Christ, and by first century AD, Axum was the capital of the vast and powerful Axumite kingdom, which dominated the crossroads of Africa and Asia for almost a millennium.



The Axumites introduced Ethiopia's first written language, Ge'ez, and gave Ethiopia its first organized religion-Christianity-in the fourth century AD.

The people of Axum also built seven monolithic obelisks, each made out of a single piece of granite, and three of which still remain today. (One of the obelisks is now standing in Rome, Italy, where it was brought from Axum by the fascist dictator Mussolini, in 1937. The Ethiopian people are still patiently awaiting the return of this obelisks to Axum.) The largest of the stelae-measuring over 33 meters and the largest in the world-has fallen and now lies in broken segments next to the only obelisks that remains standing (in Axum). Ironically, what was made by hand many centuries ago is beyond the capabilities of modern technology to repair today.

Perhaps the greatest mystery of this ancient city is the legend that here is the resting place of the Ark of the Covenant-a claim connected in Ethiopian tradition to legends of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, whose son Menelik is said to have brought the Ark to Axum some 3000 years ago and established the Solomonic dynasty of which Haile Selassie was the last reigning emperor. The Ark is housed in a well-guarded sanctuary chapel, which one may approach, but never hope to enter. On Epiphany the people of Axum carry a replica of the Ark in a procession.

Axum also has the ruins of the Queen of Sheba's palace (*Taakha Maryam*), and a huge water reservoir hewn out of solid rock, known as the Queen of Sheba's bath. Finally, outside of the city stands an obelisk, much older than in the Park of the Stelae, which is thought to mark the grave of the Queen of Sheba.

North-West Ethiopia

Northwest Ethiopia is one of the Country's richest regions for culture, history and natural beauty. The medieval city of Gondar, with more castles than in any other city in Africa, the special enchantment of Lake Tana, the breathtaking Simien Mountains (Ras Dasheen at 4543 m is Ethiopia's highest peak), and

the glory of Tis-isat...Blue Nile Falls; this is Ethiopia at its most sensational.

Lake Tana the largest lake in Ethiopia (3,000 square km) is the source of the famed Blue Nile, which starts its long journey to Khartoum, and on the Mediterranean. The 37 islands that are scattered about the surface of the lake shelter fascinating churches and monasteries, some of which have histories dating back to the 13th century. However, it should be noted that most of the religious houses are not open to women. The most interesting islands are: *Birgida Maryam*, *Dega Estefanos*, *Dek*, *Narga*, *tana Cherkos*, *Mitsele Fasilidas*, *Kebran*, *Debre Maryam*

Kebran Gabriel is the principal monastery visited by male tourist from *Bahar Dar*, with its impressive, cathedral like building first built at the end of the 17th century. *Dega Estefhanos*, which is also closed to women, is on an island in the lake, and a very steep and winding path reaches the monastery. Although the church is relatively new (only a hundred years old), it houses a Madonna painted in the 15th century. However, the treasury of the monastery is a prime attraction, with the remains of

several Emperors, their robes and jewels.

Gondar

Gondar has been called the Camelot of Africa. The Capital of Ethiopia in the time of the 17th century Emperor *Fasilides*, the city is celebrated for its castle palaces built by the emperor and many of his successors until the middle of the 19th century. The 'imperial quarter' is one of the most impressive vestiges of Ethiopia's great past. Other treasures of Gondar include the 18th century Palace of *Ras Beit*, the Bath of *Fasiladas*, the ruined Palace of *Kusquam*, and the church of *Debre Berhan Selassie* with its unique murals.

South-West Ethiopia

The southwest of Ethiopia is a region rich in wildlife resources, with three major national parks. Distinctly different from other parts of Ethiopia, from broad vistas the visitor can look out over a mixture of fertile grasslands, terraced hillsides, broad rivers and forests. This is a region famous for its coffee, and the fertile Kaffa region is said to be the original home of the wild plant.

Jimma

The town of Jimma is a great trading center, and was once the heart of the famous Jimma Kingdom. The palace of Abba Jaffar and the new museum is well worth a visit. The road from Jimma to Gambella climbs up the escarpment in dramatic curves, providing even more spectacular views.

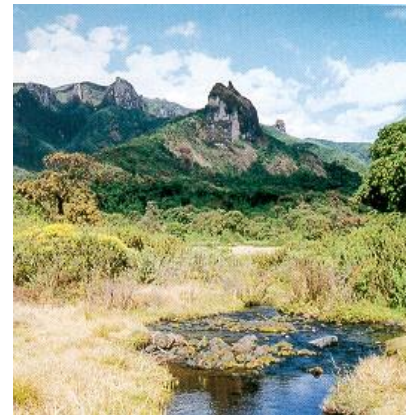
For ornithologists the forests around Metu are famed for their prolific bird life, while the sight of the waterfalls of the Sor River is well worth the hours trek from *Bechu* village. Closer to Addis Ababa (320 km), on the *Shashemene-Sodo* road, the *Senkele* Swayne's Hartbeest Sanctuary protects endemic sub-species that have experienced reducing numbers in past years. Also, to be seen are Oribi, Bohor reedbuck, and Greater Kudu, as well as 92 species of birds.

The *Omo* River, with its awe-inspiring impressive gorge and heart-stopping rapids, has become a popular river for white-water rafting. Some of the rapids have been given names that relate to people or are evocative of their challenge...Henderson's Hydraulic, Double Trouble, Tewodros, and Haystack. Most trips start at Gibe Bridge 185km from Addis Ababa and follow down to the confluence with the River *Gojeb*.

Places to see

Omo National Park; *Gambella* National Park; Mago National Park

Southern Ethiopia



The Bale Mountains

The Magnificent Bale Mountains dominate the southeast corner of Ethiopia. A high-altitude plateau broken by dramatic volcanic plugs and peaks, the Bale Mountains National Park is 2,400 square km of Rocky Mountains interspersed with cascading mountain streams, the spectacular *Harenn* Escarpment, and grassy plains.

The region is the home of the Oromo people, traditional herdsman with distinctive mana or homesteads. Although several Oromo 'monarchies' were established in the 19th century, the traditional *gada* or age group system of community government is still common.

In the west of this region the rift Valley, with its lakes and national parks, makes a pleasant gateway to the mountain. The resorts of the Rift Valley, especially *Sodere*, have become very popular excursion from Addis Ababa.

The Main border post for Kenya is situated at Moyale, and while the road on the Kenyan side of the border is not as good as that in Ethiopia, this is a popular land crossing for trade and tourist.

The town of Sheik Hussein is one of the most important pilgrimage sites for Ethiopia's Muslims, and has many fascination mosques, shrines and tombs.

Sof Omar Caves

120 km east from Goba is one of the most spectacular and extensive cave system in the world. Created by the Web River in the limestone rock, the caves are an extraordinary natural phenomenon and a place of

breathtaking beauty. Great caverns have been carved out of the rock creating soaring underground chambers. The caves, now an important Islamic shrine, can be visited with local guides. (Source: Embassy of Ethiopia, Washington DC)

Eastern Ethiopia, Harar & The Ogaden

Eastern Ethiopia provides a diversity of both landscape and people. The vast Ogaden plateau and the broad savannah can be arid territory traveled by occasional herds of camel goats and cattle, as the nomadic people follow the sparse rains. The hot dusty landscapes, enlivened by termite hills, are a harsh environment, but the Somali and Afar people of this region are strong, hardy, and expert in achieving the most out of their demanding lands. The more fertile northern reaches are mountainous, and home to some of the best coffee in Ethiopia. Here traditional farming methods are still employed side by side with more modern land management.

Harar

The city of Harar is an ancient (1520 AD) and holy city. Always an important trading center, the city is famous for its ancient buildings



, its great city walls, and as a center of learning and Muslim scholarship (the town has 99 Mosques). The city is well known for its superb handicrafts that include woven textiles, basket ware, silverware and handsomely bound books, and Harar has been a place of pilgrimage from all over the world for many years.

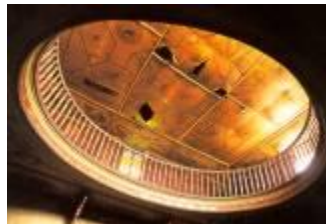
Places to visit in Harar

The City Walls

The City Walls and the narrow streets lined with traditional Harai gegar houses.

Rimbaud House

A fine traditional house dating



from the period when the French poet Rimbaud lived in Harar.

The Hyena Men



As evening falls local men attract wild hyenas to the city in a bizarre spectacle as they bravely feed these scavengers

Babille Elephant Sanctuary

East from Harar is the Babille Elephant Sanctuary, close to a small town of the same name famous for its hot springs and the Babille 'Valley of Marvels'. The 6982 km reserve is a sanctuary for rare endemic sub-species of elephant, but is also home to black-maned lions, kudu and wild ass.

Dire Dawa

The main, but more modern town of Dire Dawa, was the creation of the Djibouti /Addis railway. This important engineering achievement, developed at the end of the 19th century, has played a major part in Ethiopia's development. Born as a terminal for the railway. The town has expanded as a major trading and commercial center. 54km from Harar, its' airport is served by daily flights from Addis Ababa, and the town is a good center from which to explore the region. The best way to explore Dire Dawa is to hire a horse drawn

Ghari (Carriage), which provide a



fun taxi service.

The traditional Kefira Market

A colorful area with local people still in traditional costumes, camel trains from the north and the Ogaden, and a wide variety of local produce and handicrafts.

Kuni-Muktar Mountain Nyala Sanctuary

Established to provide a small sanctuary for the stately Mountain Nyala, its scenic beauty and natural forest afford a tranquil setting, 18km west of Atsbe Teferi. It also contains an estimated 19 other species of mammal (including Menelik's Bushbuck)



and 24 species of birds.

Cave Paintings

Close to Dire Dawa, local people will point out ancient cave paintings dating back thousands of years.

Awash National Park

Lying in the lowlands east of Addis Ababa, and astride the Awash River, is one of the finest reserves in Ethiopia. The Awash River, one of the major rivers of the Horn of Africa, waters important agricultural lands in the north of Ethiopia and eventually flows into the wilderness of the Danakil Depression. The dramatic *Awash* Falls, as the river tumbles into its gorge, is a sight not to be missed in the national park.

Awash National Park, surrounding the dormant volcano of *Fantale*, is a reserve of arid and semi-arid woodland and savannah, with riverine forests along the Awash River. Forty-six species of animals have been identified here, including Beisa Oryx and Swayne's Hartebeest. The bird life is prolific, especially along the river and in the nearby Lake *Basaka*, and there are 5

endemics amongst the 392 species recorded.

Hot Springs

A special attraction of the Awash Park is the



beautiful clear pools of the *Filwoha* hot springs. Access to the park is best from the main Addis /Assab highway, and there is a caravan lodge at Kereyu Lodge at the edge of the gorge.

Compiled by Dr. Mesfin Tadesse,

Chairperson: The Ethiopian Community Organization, Inc., Columbus, Ohio, 2003-2006.