

## **Re-thinking the Travel History in and Around Africa: A Case of Ancient Egyptian Explorations**

KIRANPREET KAUR

**To cite this article:** Kaur, K. (2020) Re-thinking the Travel History in and Around Africa: A Case of Ancient Egyptian Explorations; The Saharan Journal, issue 1 (1); National Institute for African Studies (NIAS)

[Link to the article](#)

**Published online:** January 2020

**Submit your article:** 

# Re-thinking the Travel History in and Around Africa: A Case of Ancient Egyptian Explorations

KIRANPREET KAUR\*

## Abstract

*In need for land and trade resources, the ancient Egyptian kingdom explored the interior and coastal Africa leading to the cultural contact between Egyptian and other African cultures. However, the authenticity and evidential validity of these expeditions have been questioned by the scholars leading to the conflict of reality and myth. These assertions dwarfed the position of these explorations in African travel history. Also, their absence and the overwhelming presence of European explorations in and around Africa enabled Europe to claim Western supremacy over the genre as well as the continent. These identity politics has informed and constructed African self-knowledge and African identity for the world. In the postcolonial world, where decolonisation is a central attraction of the academia, the exigency for re-stating the African travel history and literature appears significant. This notion will help in reconsidering the authenticity of ancient relationship between Egypt and Black Africa; also it will restore a sense of pride and satisfaction among Africans in African culture, history and beliefs. This paper tends to test the hypothesis that Africans were the first to explore the interior and coastal Africa based on archaeological evidence. The study, after establishing the relationship between the genre and identity, deals with the role played by the genre in the transition of history to myth. Finally, the paper puts together certain archaeological, documented and practical evidence to validate, or at least move some steps forward towards authentication of the claims of the first circumnavigation of Africa.*

**Keywords:** Travel history, Egyptology, Africa, African identity, ancient Egypt

## Travel Writing and Identity

**T**ravel writing, in conventional terms, can be defined as a literary narration of events and experiences of a journey by the traveller. Debbie Lisle (2012: 1) added to this definition by stating that the genre expresses political commitments and there is a “connection of travel literature to the serious business of world affairs.” From here, I take on further that it is not just a literary genre with certain political implementations. Instead, it is a historical phenomenon for developing, implementing and modifying the ideological and political decisions of the age. These decisions, primarily influenced by the genre, further lead to the construction of the political and social history of the world.

---

\* Kiranpreet Kaur is a PhD student working on African authored African Travel Writings at the Department of African Studies and Anthropology at University of Birmingham.

As William. Y. Adams (1984: 36), an anthropologist, explains that the first stage of ancient Egyptian explorations “served to make the Egyptians aware of the economic resources and opportunities beyond their southern frontiers.” This claim, further according to Adams, was followed by the second stage of expeditions that established trade relations with the powerful chiefdoms of interior Africa; once the relationship was established the need for direct control was seen that led to the first colonial Egyptian empire. This three-layered model of knowing the riches and the possibilities of faraway places; establishing the trade and friendly relationship, and finally eliminating the chiefs and setting up direct control could be seen as a basic fundamental model instrumental in making up of the more recent colonial history.

Travelling, a vital tool at all the three levels brings along with it an essential activity of story-telling. The travellers on their return are excited to share their stories with others, forming an index of travel literature. This travel literature, either oral or written in the form of a rock inscription or a published text, produces significant knowledge about the faraway lands. Thus, the travel literature, a historical and ethnographic document, not only acts as a witness of the past activities, decisions, and ideologies but is also a source of inspiring, making and documenting the history. Travel literature, as discussed by Edward Said (1978), is central to the design of Orientalism. However, it is worth mentioning that it does not only create orient in contrast to occident but also tend to develop elite occident in comparison to the second-rate occident. This pattern can be understood through the history of Grand Tour. The young men of high rank and means, at the age of twenty-one, were expected to undertake a journey across Europe to understand the history, architecture, and geography (Fussell, 1987: 129).

This event, starting in the sixteenth century, gave authenticity and supremacy to these travellers over the others, travellers or travellers. Thus, it initiated an idea of travellers’ accuracy, authenticity and intellectual superiority in Europe. Therefore, when the travellers started travelling out of Europe, to places like Africa, they were regarded as the men of high ranks, intellect and integrity sponsored by the wealthy patrons. Their documents, such as letters, texts, and experiences, were being treated as authentic and original. Also, they facilitated them in the making of the imperial understanding of the faraway places. They observed the peoples through their Western lens of civility and

documented the space of the indigene as different from their own identity. These narratives of famous explorers and travellers did not record the world history as observed by them but as understood by them.

These discourses of observation and representation have allowed travellers to establish and validate their ideologies. For instance, the European colonial masters while travelling to the faraway lands produced Euro-centric narratives speaking about their travels for the sake of civilisation, Christianity and commerce. Their travel narratives tend to propagate the idea of 'white man's burden' where an innocent white traveller could be seen travelling as a saviour of the indigenous. They used travel literature to establish their innocence while implementing their imperialistic ideology through what I would call 'Camouflaged Imperialism'. This camouflaged imperialism helped the colonial powers to 'justify colonialism as the control of wild and savage people by the civilising forces of European culture' (Holloway, 2001: 135). The need for justification of Western imperialism led to the formation of racial stereotypes. Black people were represented as "lazy, ignorant and uncontrollable," whereas the whites were represented as compassionate, kind, and enterprising people (Brantlinger, 1985: 166).

This model of defining the space of British traveller(s) and the colonies as the exact opposite of each other was extensively used by travel literature, specifically Victorian travel literature (Gruesser, 1990). The British travel narratives created a specific definition of the indigenes as barbaric, savage, uncivilised and orthodox people in dire need of Western intervention. The explorers, such as Richard Burton, successfully established the identity of Africa as an unimprovable land in urgent need of civilised masters for coming out of the so-called 'darkness' (Garett, 1997). These educated masters were identified as courageous, brave, committed, cultured and knowledgeable white British travellers (Jeal, 2012). The volume of travel narratives produced in the colonial era ascertained that these civilised white masters were travelling everywhere despite the threats and hitches helping the indigenes break the shackles of slavery, deadly diseases, orthodox beliefs and barbaric eating habits such as cannibalism. The propaganda image of a solitary white man in toxic landscape among mortal inhabitants was a recurring theme in the Victorian travel narratives that highly neglected the role of African guides and associates (Fabian, 2000). This recurring theme was fruitful in constructing and reinforcing

the profoundly disassociated binary identities. It was no longer a man meeting a man but a white saviour meeting a black savage.

Therefore, it can be concluded that travel literature extensively constructed the stereotypes of both races. It helped in dividing the world into two halves: west and rest, orthodox and unorthodox, the helper and the helped, the civilised and the uncivilised. These divisions got embedded in the identity of both, the west and the rest, and formed the stereotypes that pronounced the western character as superior and the status of others as inferior. This idea of superiority intensified with the claims of white travellers and explorers as the first ones to explore and discover the otherwise unknown land.

### **History to Myth**

Ever since the age of discovery, Western society has evolved as an enterprising and inquisitive race. The number of expeditions sent for documenting the geographical and ethnographical knowledge of the world portrayed the Western culture as the pioneers in understanding the world. This Western identity implicitly created the non-western world as an antithesis. This perception further intensified with the facility of the printing press: the Western journeys started reaching the wider audience (Mancall, 2006: 5). Thereby creating an impression that only west was travelling to know the world; non-western were not only passive but were also shown as non-passionate. Travel writing in the Victorian era, according to Clark as quoted by Ghosh, could be seen as a single-sided scenario where Europeans were mapping the world and non-Europeans were nowhere to be seen in this scene of adventure and exploration (2006: 11). This described Western society as enlightened, inquisitive and enthusiastic about solving the mysteries of the world, whereas non-western culture as dark, ignorant and passive. Thereby creating a learned society towards which the entire non-European world was supposed to consult for knowledge of anything and everything.

Though the ancient scholars, such as Herodotus, documented the ancient non-European explorations both into the interior of Africa and on the coasts of Africa, still the Victorian explorers are titled as the explorers of the interior of Africa. The ancient historians recognised the Egyptians as the pioneers of the journey to the interior of Africa. The Egyptians are known to have gone up the Nile until the point of confluence in search of the source of the river Nile, hence

undertaking possibly the first exploration to the interior of Africa, and perhaps beyond, “until the sudd barred their way” (Cary & Warmington, 1963: 158). However, the Western powers negated this authority of Egyptians by “erasing centuries of pre-colonial history, contact, and travel across Africa” (Thompson, 2019). This further facilitated the European, specifically Victorian, travellers to establish the myth of ‘dark continent’ by constructing and exploiting the idea of unknown land.

The rhetoric of Victorian travel writing tends to set up Western hegemony over the African history and ethnography by either discarding or ignoring the ancient explorations. The ancient investigations were discarded by the explorers of the age of discovery and scholarship of the period. The award discarded any possibility of verification of old non-European accounts of travels in the interior of Africa by calling them ‘alleged’ or ‘pretended’, thereby reducing the traditional explorations to ‘myth’ (Webb, 1907). The West claimed that the continent continued to be a secret to the world until 1788, and on this, the Victorians, through their narratives of exceptionalism, constructed a specific identity for themselves and the other (Hibbert, 1982: 13). The Victorian travel discourses notably established the supremacy of the Euro-imperial powers through the establishment and validation of the myth of discovery.

The transition of the ancient explorations from history to mythology was neither spontaneous nor explicit Western conspiracy. It can be suggested that the sparse availability of ancient to medieval written accounts contributed to the rhetorical effect of travel writing in de-historicising Africa and its peoples; facilitating the European authority on the genre to ignore and erase the travels outside the space of Eurocentric narratives (Cary & Warmington, 1963: 8,15). The pre-colonial question of who mapped the world first was phenomenally influential in making the face of the world and deciding the superior race. To become the answer to this question, the Europeans, specifically British, employed various techniques explicitly or implicitly: they erased all the memories and evidence of non-European travels to Africa by either questioning them on a very narrow gauze and testing them according to their own set of belief or by rejecting them on the basis of lack of evidence. Sometimes their urge to declare and validate themselves as the masters of discovery led them to deliberately ignore the archaeological evidence, which would have probably motivated and guided them for specific expeditions. This myth of invention gave

them a hold over exceptionalism through which they were successful in establishing superiority over the genre as well as the world. This 'superior' identity constructed for European powers proclaimed a different identity for the others.

To understand the phenomenon of transition from history to myth and construction of identities through the travel literature, Egypt is a perfect case study. The trajectory, followed by the genre in de-historicising a place, such as Africa, is a significant aspect of studying the practical possibility of decolonisation. The level of affirmation with which a ruling race has declared the entire ancient history of colonies to be a myth defines the indigenous understanding of their present. Before further discussing the effect of politically constructed colonial identities, the hypothesis that Egyptian travellers were an equally enterprising race. Besides, they were exploring the neighbouring places according to the resources, and geographical feasibility needs to be tested based on archaeological and documented evidence. For this purpose, three significant expeditions by ancient Egyptian explorers during the sixth, eleventh and twenty-sixth dynasty will be discussed and verified. Based on the interpretation of the ancient text and radiocarbon dating of excavated material, the sixth dynasty has been placed during the period ranging from 2345-2181 B.C., the eleventh dynasty from 2004-1992 B.C. and the twenty-sixth dynasty from 610 to 595 B.C (Shaw, 2000: 480-482). Though the first two expeditions are not challenged on their authenticity due to the availability of rock inscription as the material evidence, the mention is still needed to validate the third expedition.

### *1. Harkhuf's raids to Nubia*

Pepi II, the last Pharaoh of the sixth dynasty, held Nubia as an important place due to its geographical location. Nubia has been called the corridor of Africa as it lays-between Egypt and the riches of Central Africa (Adams, 1977: 8). Pepi II made several attempts to improve navigation in the first cataract region and enhance the trade with Nubia (Shaw, 2000: 115). Archaeological evidence demonstrates that migrations and expeditions towards the interior of Africa had started much earlier. On the other hand, for this study, it is sufficient to look at this expedition as proof of the Egyptian characteristics of exploration, trade, and invention. This will establish that Africa was being explored, though not for the sole purpose of research, from as early as the sixth dynasty. Biographical

inscriptions in some of the tombs are exceptionally informative about Egyptians relations with Nubia at this time.

A native of Elephantine, Harkhuf, served under King Merenra and Pepy II as a governor of the Aswan. His primary job was to enhance the trade with Nubia and to forge political bonds with local leaders with Egyptian expansion in Nubia as a primary motive. He had left inscriptions in his tomb at Qubbet-el-Hawa on the island of Elephantine about his four overland expeditions to the land of Yam, probably in Upper Nubia (Mieroop, 2011). Through the inscriptions, he is known to have travelled back through foreign lands during his second and third expedition, bringing with him gifts and the knowledge about the routes. During the third expedition, he came down through the south of Irtjet and north of Setju. His tomb is a manifestation of his autobiography and an account of his travels. The monument even bears a letter he received from Pepi II during his fourth expedition, where he expressed his eagerness to see the dwarf, apparently a pygmy, whom Harkhuf was bringing back with him. The tomb details every event that was sought important by the traveller according to the wish of his patron. Since Harkhuf's expedition was sent to establish trade relations and to learn the routes, his travel narrative informs the readers about his returning from different ways with the gifts. He also mentions recruiting Nubian guards, which was the necessity of the time as Lower Nubia had already declared itself free from Egyptian control and local guards were needed to safeguard Upper Nubia (Bard, 2008: 160). The authenticity of this story comes from two examples of material evidence: first the inscription on tomb, and seconds the actual written letter by Pepy II on papyrus.

Notably, the tomb was at first noticed by an Italian scholar, Ernesto Schiaparelli, famous Egyptologist and the Director of the Egyptian Museum in Florence and of the Egyptian Museum of Turin. He published the tomb inscription in the *Memorie dell'Accademia dei Lincei* in 1892 (Angelini, 2016). This was the time when British travel writers, such as Mary Kingsley, were producing voluminous literature about their experiences in Africa and were validating their contemporaries as the pioneers of the explorations. This finding did not find much mention in travel writing of that period, probably, giving them the benefit of the doubt, they were not aware of it.



## *2. The first recorded exploration by Hannu:*

Hannu was an ancient Egyptian explorer, a great steward, and chief treasurer, who under Sankhare Mentuhotep III made the first recorded expedition for the exploration (Bradbury, 1988). During the eleventh dynasty, Hannu is said to have sailed down the Red Sea to explore the south-eastern areas of the Arabian Peninsula, presumably the land of Punt. He sailed to what is now a part of eastern Ethiopia and Somalia. Since control over Nubia lapsed during the first intermediate period and the middle Nile was now controlled by Kerma, to avoid any danger, the sea route was probably taken to circumvent the overland route to Punt (Bard 2008: 173). According to his rock-inscription in the valley of Hammamet, everything for the journey was wisely provided when Pharaoh entrusted the expedition to Hannu. He left with an army of 3000 and passed through the country of cultivation. Hannu is known to have returned to Egypt with treasures, including myrrh (a spice) and precious metals. M. Chabas, who explained the contents of this vital inscription, accompanied his translation by excellent remarks on the subject of the road which was followed across the desert from Coptos to the Red Sea.

Though Hannu is known to have sailed through Red Sea by returning overland, he exhibited that the Egyptians, already in these distant times, had opened a road to transport the products of the land of Punt into Egypt. Some scholars, such as John.H.Breasted (1906: 427-433), believe that Hannu must not have accompanied the ships as he fails to report Egyptians' encounters with Puntites. Here an argument is: these inscriptions if taken as travel accounts, are the documentation of travellers' experiences. These experiences are always subjective and correspond with the reason for the travel, the ideology of the age and the expectations of the traveller. For instance, those who were commissioned as naturalists documented the observations on nature, the anthropologists documented the people and their habits, and the colonial travel writers documented the possibilities in the faraway lands.

Hannu's reason for travelling was to explore the way to Punt through the sea, which he is believed to have done; he was commissioned by the Pharaoh, therefore, he makes a due acknowledgement to the Pharaoh, his arrangements and his bringing back of whatever was asked by the Pharaoh (Callender, 2000: 156). His travel narrative is his observations as finding important by him. He was

neither travelling nor documenting as a historian, a geographer or naturalist. He was going on the command of his patron, so he mentioned that “...And I acted thus for the king on account of the great favour which he entertained for me” (Brodrick, 1891: 54). The inscription of this tomb was known around 1881, even earlier than Harkhuf’s tomb. This period is rather critical in the history of African exploration, as the explorers such as Stanley were establishing and validating their myth of discovery by completely ignoring any possibility of these explorations. Perhaps, they were not aware of these discoveries, but this possibility will also be dealt with in the latter part of this essay.

### 3. *Circumnavigation of Africa:*

The circumnavigation of Africa, according to Herodotus, was commissioned by Nekau II or Necho II of the twenty-sixth Egyptian dynasty. This is the most controversial circumnavigation as Herodotus’ *Histories* is its only source of information. According to Herodotus’ version of the grand event, the Phoenicians sailed from the Erythraian Sea and sailed through the southern ocean, and every autumn put in at some convenient spot, sowed a patch of ground, and waited for the harvest, after reaping the corn re-assumed their journey. Then after two years, in the third year, they rounded the Pillars of Heracles and returned to Egypt (Macaulay, 1904). Herodotus, as a learned historian, documents this history very carefully. He points towards his belief and disbelief equally about the story: based on his knowledge of the authenticity of this event, he found the evidence of a theory that the Indian Ocean and Atlantic waters were one (Cary & Warmington, 1929: 88). He also documents his disbelief, “These men made a statement which I do not myself believe, though others may, to the effect that as they sailed on a westerly course round the southern end of Libya, they had the sun on their right - to northward of them” (Macaulay, 1904: 307).

Herodotus’ doubt has now been solved by geographers, who have validated the accuracy of the statement of his sources. Moreover, a complete reconstruction of his story is given by Rennell, Wheeler and Muller corroborate much of Herodotus’ work. (Cary & Warmington, 1929: 93). Still, the scholars, such as Allan B Lloyd and E.J. Webb have rejected the first circumnavigation of Africa by calling it a myth. They have raised numerous questions on the practicality of the voyage, absence of written evidence, unauthentic sources,

impossible distances, and discontinuity in narratives. Now to argue this, we must agree with M.Cary (1929) that the history of ancient explorations must be written on somewhat different lines from that of ancient and modern discoveries. Somehow we cannot fit every time period and race to our set patterns. Every time period is guided by a specific dominant ideology, and every race migrates for its particular reasons.

Before dealing with the issues mentioned above, it is essential to establish: one, the people of Ancient Egypt were widely travelled and well-versed with shipbuilding techniques; second the reasons for this circumnavigation. Though the two expeditions discussed above, one set towards the interior of Africa and the other on the coast of Africa, prove that Egyptians were travelling both inland and coastal areas of Africa, still more archaeological evidence for the sea-faring aptitude of the Ancient Egyptians is needed to make the case believable.

The evidence of imported exotics and other materials from interior Africa and lands overseas is a significant point to state highlight that Ancient Egyptians were in thorough contact with others. They are known to be importing 'turquoise from Sinai; silver from Anatolia via the Levant; copper from Nubia[,] Sinai and [the] eastern desert; gold from [the] eastern desert and Nubia; fine wood [such] as cedar and products [such] as incense and myrrh from [W]estern Asia and tropical Africa" (Shaw, 2000: 320). However, the most crucial evidence of their travels to as far as North-eastern Afghanistan is lapis lazuli, a grave bluestone, known to Egyptians as Khesbed (Shaw, 2000: 313). This stone was used for jewellery, amulets, and figurines from the Nagada II Period that dates 3000 BC. This stone seems to have been located at Badakhshan in northeastern Afghanistan (4000km from Egypt) (Shaw, 2000: 320). This evidence proves that the Egyptians of 3000 B.C. were already aware of land routes and were travelling to these faraway lands. This erases any doubts about their inquisitive and inventive character.

Now to understand their shipbuilding skills, the discovery of two massive sealed pits in 1954 must be discussed. These two massive sealed pits, carved into the limestone bedrock of the Giza plateau, were excavated underneath a pile of debris just south of the Great Pyramid of Giza. These pits seemed to form a part of the funerary complex of the pyramid of King Cheops, the second ruler of the Fourth Dynasty of the Egyptian Old Kingdom, even before the expedition of Harkhuf. One of the pits preserved the timbers of a 43.m (143.97') funerary

vessel (Jenkin, 1980: 3). The forests of the boat were dismantled into 651 separate parts and were arranged in thirteen layers. This boat seems to have been buried some four and a half millennia earlier, apparently at the same time that King Cheops was buried in his tomb in the heart of the adjacent pyramid (Jenkin, 1980: 4).

In yet another excavation at Wadi Gawasis, the archaeologists have discovered the remains of the oldest seafaring ship. This established that the “ancient Egyptians were capable of navigating as far as the southern Red Sea region” using ships built with refined technology (Bard and Fattovich, 2015). The investigations at Wadi Gawasis reveal that in the Middle Kingdom the destination of the seafaring expeditions from this harbour was the land of Punt, as several stelae mention the toponyms Bia-Punt, God’s Land, or Punt, with dedications to Min of Coptos. This site of Wadi Gawasis was also established as the Pharaonic harbour used for sea-faring expeditions during the twelfth dynasty based on textual evidence (Veildmeijer.Et.al, 2008). These archaeological evidences demonstrate and confirm two points: firstly, Egyptians were travelling to faraway lands, and had already established trade relations with an area 4000 Km away from Egypt; secondly, they had refined technology to make ships enabling them to commission seafaring expeditions. Thus it can be said that they were aware of routes faraway and were capable of navigating. This leads to an assumption that they may have wanted to explore those faraway lands through sea waters due to safety and ease. However, the question now arises, even if they wanted to explore the sea routes to these distant lands, how far they could have travelled with these ancient ships?

Although, the ‘mythical tale’ of Scota, the daughter of an Egyptian Pharaoh who married Geytholos, the founder of Scots, after being exiled from Egypt, assist in establishing that the Egyptians might be well trained and technically sound to navigate the waters of North Atlantic sea after passing through the pillars of Hercules, a distance greater than they were travelling overland (Matthews, 1970: 289). This calls for mentioning another element of archaeological evidence. In 1939 the hulls of two ancient ships were found in Ferriby in the Humber Estuary, these were radiocarbon dated to be of a period around 1400 to 1350BC, much earlier than the period of circumnavigation (Rogers, 2017). These were thought to be the remains of Viking ship at first, but continued excavation produced additional remains of boats, presumably

wrecked in some storm. These ships were found to be 'much older than Viking Ships' and very much similar to the vessels found in the Mediterranean (Bhaktivejanyan, 2013: 330). It was established that 'these boats originated from 2000 years before the Viking age' but were 'radiocarbon dated to 4000 years ago' (Bhaktivejanyan, 2013: 330). Also, Lorraine Evans, an Archaeologist, in her book *Kingdom of Ark* made a compelling case, based on these shipwrecks found in Europe and attributing them to Egyptians based on document review, of close contact between ancient Egyptians and Europe.

Further, in 1955, archaeologist Dr Sean O'Riordan, during an excavation of the Mound of Hostages at Tara, a site of the ancient kingship of Ireland, found Bronze Age skeletal remains that were argued to be of a young prince. The skeletal, still wearing a rare necklace of faience beads, made from a paste of minerals and plant extracts, was carbon-dated to around 1350 BC. In 1956, J. F. Stone and L. C. Thomas reported that the faience beads were Egyptian. Based on this evidence and referring to Newgrange Barrow, a burial site in Ireland, the historian Malcolm Hutton claimed in 2017 that the Egyptian presence in the British Isles during the Bronze Age is not a doubtful event (Rogers, 2017). The archaeological evidence discovered from Navan Fort, Armagh further strengthen the case. The Barbary ape skull found at this location was radiocarbon dated to 390-20BC. Since at this time, the Barbary ape was only confined to North Africa, therefore its presence in Ireland suggests that it would have travelled with its master as a pet, as the Egyptian masters are known to carry their pets along (Lynn, 2003: 50; Uhm, 2016: 36). Based on all the above-discussed evidence, a case can now be forwarded that the Egyptians were travelling long distances (about 4000km distance by land and more than that by the sea).

Still, to understand if Egyptians were interested in navigating to the south of Africa, another significant textual evidence needs a mention. In 1827, George Thompson, a successful merchant, travelling across Africa from Cape Colony to promote his company, wrote his travelogue: *Travels and Adventures in South Africa*. In a footnote, he records a discovery of the timber of a vessel embedded in the sea some years ago, which he was unable to identify but he writes:

"..A nautical gentleman, who examined it with more care than I had an opportunity of bestowing, thinks that the wood (which has apparently been buried for ages in the sand) greatly resembles cedar, and conceives it

possible that this may be the remains of some ancient Phoenician vessel, wrecked here when our present Cape Flats were under water, forming, perhaps, a shallow strait between Wynberg and the Koeber... Whatever may be in this, Captain Owen seems to have obtained strong evidence of the commerce of the Phoenicians having extended from the Red Sea, much farther down the eastern coasts of Africa than is generally imagine..." (Thompson, 1827: 319)

The most noticeable here is the year; this travelogue published in 1827, and according to Thompson, this discovery was made a few years previously. This means that the British were very much aware of the possibility of the Phoenicians travelling to Cape Flats, perhaps for commerce. This is nowhere mentioned or taken into account by the scholars while disagreeing on the circumnavigation. This may be and may not be a justification to the ancient endeavours; however, this discovery is worth mentioning, specifically when its period is earlier than the Victorian era, the period of enlightening discoveries. Furthermore, it is crucial to mention that this discovery was re-initiated in 1852, a fund for twenty pounds was asked by Charles Bell (Surveyor-General) through a letter to C.H. Darling (Lieut. Governor), and the same was sanctioned as well. Some of the excerpts from that letter, as quoted by H.F. Sampson are as follows:

".. However extraordinary it may seem, I am compelled to believe that this wood is part of a large vessel upward of some seventy feet in length, wrecked when the sea washed up to some of the ancient beaches on the Lion's Head and now raised some hundreds of feet in height above the present high-water mark and left at a distance of at least 14 miles from the shore... It would be idle to indulge at present in any archaeological speculations. I would merely allude to the accounts which have reached our times of the early circumnavigation of Africa while the pyramids were yet new. The Block cannot be taken as evidence of recent construction, for Blocks are pictured and carved by the ancient Egyptians and Assyrians, and if, solely from position, I advert to the possibility of this being a relic perhaps of the age of Pharaoh Necho, and to the care with which of late years the Archaeologists of Europe have collected and classed all that relates to the prehistoric annals of their country, particularly in Norway and Scotland. I do so, only that the chance of some interesting discovery may not be lost." (Sampson 1948: 37-38)

The result of this archaeological survey and that sum of twenty pounds is not known; at least this is what appears from Sampson's paper. However, the only point worth mentioning here is that discoveries were going on about the wrecks. It is quite possible that Charles Bell would have mistakenly linked the wrecks with the age of Necho. Still, if a report of the investigation were available, a better understanding of the debris would have erased the speculation. The most interesting question to be contemplated here is: why the scholarship missed this account, and even if it missed the results, why did it not act as a clue towards authenticating or questioning the first circumnavigation of Africa more rationally? However, this shipwreck, either from Necho's period or not, of an ancient period establishes one fact: that ancients were navigating as far as Cape Flats in South Africa.

Now to further discuss the probability of the circumnavigation, the reason for the travel is essential to be mentioned. For that a brief political background of the time of the circumnavigation is needed to be understood. When Necho II started his reign, there were severe military problems on Egypt's north-eastern border. The twenty-fifth dynasty ended with Egypt suffering severely from the Assyrian invasions of 671-631 B.C. The twenty-sixth dynasty began with specific threats, such as a deunified Egypt, economic weakness and threat from Asiatic and Nubian kings to regain control over Egypt (Lloyd, 2007). Psamtek I was strengthening his military as well as an economic base by 'developing trade links with Greek and Phoenicia' (Bard, 2008: 270). Therefore, developing the military and economic relations with neighbours was the need of the time. To promote trade and consider the possibility to attack southern Babylonia by sea, Nekau II began construction of a canal running from the delta's Pelusiac branch through the Wadi Tumilat to the Gulf of Suez (Bard, 2008: 270). This must have been seen as a revival of the economic activity in the red sea area; however, Necho declined the project after the death of 1,20,000 Egyptians and after an oracle informed him that only a foreigner would benefit from this canal; the canal was later completed by Darius (Redmount, 1995: 128). The circumnavigation of Africa must somehow be related to Necho's defence projects (Lloyd, 2000: 376). The involvement of Phoenicians in this circumnavigation is another logical point that can be evident in the actuality of the project. Phoenicians were excellent sailors and shared the Babylonian enemy; therefore, Necho II's asking for Phoenician help and Phoenicians consenting to this project makes sense.

Furthermore, as it was the first circumnavigation, consequently, it can be said that neither Phoenicians nor Egyptians were aware of the actual African coastal area. This would have allowed them to optimistically think of finding a way around Africa for attacking Babylonia.

Till now this has been established through the document and archaeological evidence that Egyptians were seafaring people travelling to faraway lands as early as 3000 B.C., they had technically sound ships to materialise their projects, they have been going to South Africa, and they had a reason to circumnavigate Africa. After setting up this case, now the primary questions raised about the circumnavigation by the scholars need to be dealt with the following.

#### *Written evidence*

It can be argued that this circumnavigation was not commissioned with the aim of documenting the journey but had a different and more materialistic reason. Therefore, it may quite be suggested that they completed their task of exploration and then left for their place without inscribing anything, or they may have stayed at Carthage, or maybe they were not able to inform Necho about their achievement. The exact date of the expedition is not available, possibly Necho might have died till the time they came back and Necho's successors were weak as well as indulged in saving their frontiers from the enemy so quite possible that they were not interested in the outcomes. However, their experiences remained with the Egyptians through oral evidence that they gave to Herodotus. There are several examples of certain heroes, such as Dullah Bhatti of Punjabi tradition, Hari Singh Nalwa of Sikh Empire and Tyoshtyuk of China, who live through oral traditions; this may be one of those examples.

#### *Impossible distances*

Rennel's reconstruction of Herodotus' circumnavigation story is an essential argument in proving something like that must have happened. According to Rennel, they may have started their journey in July and reached the Horn of Africa and continued their journey with gaps during the crop seasons. If the course of Southeast winds is taken into account, the time of entering third years is just appropriate. This is quite possible that they may not have had any distance measuring equipment; still, the story of completing this circumnavigation in the



third year holds relevance. One convenient piece of evidence of this needs to be stated here: To prove the reality of this circumnavigation, Philip Beale, a 52-year-old former City fund manager from Lulworth, Dorset decided to re-do the circumnavigation in a craft similar to the 2,600 years old Phoenician sailing boat. He hired archaeologists and traditional shipwrights to construct the boat based on the design of an ancient galley found wrecked in the western Mediterranean: almost 65ft in length, with a single sail and emergency oar holes for when the wind dropped. His expedition set off from Arwad Island, off the coast of Syria, where local craftsmen had built it. The trip took the crew – which varied in size, “from six at one point up to 15” – through the Suez Canal into the Red Sea, down and around the southernmost tip of Africa. Once past the Cape of Good Hope, they worked along the coasts of West Africa and back to Syria through the Straits of Gibraltar (Kendall, 2012). During their expedition, which lasted two years two months, they covered more than 20,000 miles. This is a bit illogical to say that the ancient circumnavigators concocted the story with almost the same time that is required to complete the circumnavigation. This physical and practical evidence, along with archaeological and textual evidence, validates the capability of Phoenician ships and people to circumnavigate Africa 2,000 years before the first European, Bartolomeu Dias, rounded the Cape in 1488.

If, as argued by Webb, it is to be thought that this circumnavigation never happened or partially happened, then their clear descriptions of the sun to their right, the presence of gold at the coast of Guinea, which another Carthaginian navigator Hanno took along with him after them, could not have been correct. It may be doubted that they may have known about the gold in present-day Djibouti, Mozambique, Swaziland or Somalia, but this doubt holds no relevance on a practical basis. As, if they were navigating through the waters, then there is no reason to move back without completing their journey, correctly when they were not running out of food supplies. Furthermore, when they would have arrived as far as South African cape, then why they would decide to go back rather than go around the African coast?

Furthermore, the story comes through Herodotus, a Greek Historian, therefore there seems no valid reason for a Greek giving credit for such event to Egyptians. Herodotus himself was a traveller, and if he wanted to concoct a story, he might have tried to do it under his name or at least he would have given its credit to Greek travellers but not others.

The scholars sometimes can be seen questioning the authenticity of the circumnavigation based on their presumptions and expectations of the race. For instance, Allan B Lloyd doubts the circumnavigation based on Egyptian characteristics: he says 'Here we have Egyptian king presented to us, like some philosopher-king, forming the notion of circumnavigating Africa...This would surely have been a psychological impossibility for any Pharaoh' (Lloyd, 1977: 150). Is it appropriate to doubt some event just because it never happened earlier? 'It is doubtful that an Egyptian King would, or could, have acted as Necho is depicted as doing'(Lloyd, 1977: 150). This raises the brows towards a highly biased understanding of a particular race. Necho had a reason for the circumnavigation, his ancestors had already had expertise in shipbuilding; he had resources to do this. Therefore, it is inappropriate to doubt an event based on the biased understanding of a race.

The narratives are further questioned about their authenticity, the truthfulness. Now here a literary counter-question needs to be posed, what is authenticity? What can be considered the truth? Can any accounts, oral or texts, except geographical facts be considered truth in travel writing? The observations, assumptions, analysis can never be free from subjectivity. The genre is highly self-describing, and self-constructing, the perspectives and prejudices of the writer take the front seat in style, and in such cases, can we describe anything as authentic and true? Is it not that every representation, every story of every traveller are equally doubtful? As Michel Foucault (2000) established that there is no connection between truth and subjectivity, therefore, to consider the question of authenticity cannot be seen in isolation. Specific facts, reasons, logics, possibilities will ever need consideration.

It appears that the possibilities in the light of age have never been analysed sympathetically. This has led to a situation where all the ancient endeavours of exploring Africa by Africans were doubted and questioned; whereas the events narrated by Europeans were believed with little or no doubt at all. The colonial scholars and travellers have, therefore, allowed the ancient African history of travel to slip into the realm of myth. They have been negated to such an extent that travel literature scholarship has stopped even mentioning them. Though the genre attracted scholars to regard the travel literature as a separate discipline and give it due attention after the 1970s, still these travels remained ignored. The inscriptions, although small as compared to complete travel

narrative, hold historical facts and the experience of the pioneers of travelling. If studied carefully, they hold the potential to reconstruct the African identity, however, the absence of these texts from African travel narratives somehow points towards a present scenario: colonised minds.

As suggested by Frantz Fanon (1963), the colonised people maintain their condition by willing and working towards imitating the culture and ideas of the coloniser. This willingness has led African people to not only believe but also repeat the ideas, doubts and agreements of the white scholars. The years of colonial rule have left an impression on the minds of the colonies, the impression of complete surrender to the superiority of the ruling class. Fanon (2008), talks about the internalisation of colonial prejudice. He suggests that the colonial regime pressurised the minds of the colonised to an extent that at a point they started alienating from their culture and beliefs.

In the absence of written ancient travelogues, along with the power of the ruling class, the genre of travel writing paved the path for Victorian lies, ignorance or truths to become the universal truths. Tabish Khair, in an introduction to *Other Routes: 1500 years of African and Asian Travel Writing*, demonstrates, through the example of Angkor Wat, a regularly visited Buddhist temple, the way western propaganda of discovering a place is nothing more than mythology.

This propaganda, however, established Europeans as the masters of exploration and travel. This superiority, once established, was further to decide the connotations of 'authenticity' and 'truth'. They are thus giving rise to the conflict of 'belief' and 'disbelief', 'myth' and 'reality'. Anything that was known or relevant to the power was believed, and all other was rejected by declaring it as a 'myth'. This further went on forming, narrating and deciding the identity of both the races through the discourses of explorations. The colonies understood their historic character through the colonial rulers; the world understood colonies through the meaning attached to their ethnic and racial identities by colonial powers. Being the ruling class, they were and still are at the highest position in the intellectual hierarchy, thus whatever they created or constructed was never counter questioned by others. Even if it was counteracted, the impact was not significant. Therefore, nothing changed on the practical level instead, it went on creating 'mimic man'.

A cultural, historical and racial hegemony was created, that was to decide the history and present of many societies. The stereotypes created by the colonial era, are to date being validated and reinforced by the tags like 'area of darkness' and 'heart of darkness'. A phrase 'Dark Continent' coined by a Victorian explorer, H.M. Stanley nearly a century and a half ago has gone to define the place and its people. As suggested by Adams (1984), that though the darkness was in the minds of the explorers (European), still most of the people have understood that phrase in terms of darkness in the minds of Africans. The darkness became 'a metaphor for their moral backwardness and their ignorance of the higher arts of civilisation' (Adams, 1984: 36). This African darkness was seen in contrast with European enlightenment (Adams, 1984).

With European imperialism, the power went into the hands of Western society, and the culture of the West stand at the highest position in the colonial hierarchy dictated the norms of civility. They, through the discourses of difference, established superiority over societies society their knowledge.

Travel literature has played a vital role in constructing and carrying forward the identities built by colonial powers. The genre has credited the colonial masters with the title of discoverers and the knowledge precursors of the geography; on the contrary, has deprived African people of any claim to knowledge and power. The commemorating sites in Africa on the names of the European discoveries speak a lot about colocalisation of experience, the lost African history and its heroes.

To challenge this power structure, the knowledge produced by it needs to be challenged. This can be reversed through re-visiting the entire set of indigenous beliefs, myths and cultural materials. The evidence of Egyptian explorations in and around the other parts of Africa will provide an initial step in reviewing the travel history. Since Egyptians, due to their geographical position can be and should be called Africans. Therefore it can be said that the first endeavour to know the continent, its hidden mysteries, such as the source of Nile, was made by the Africans themselves. The continent was unknown to other invaders and explorers as outsiders, whereas Egyptians have been in contact with the interior and coastal Africa since the era of antiquity. The inquiry into this aspect of ancient African history will not only kindle the need for re-writing the history and reconstructing the African identity without the colonial shadows but also promote the idea of pan-Africanism. Re-writing the history of travel and

exploration on the lines of ancient investigation will enforce thinking from a different angle. It is essential to think re-writing indigenous histories by re-thinking the 'myths' as some source of historical facts. This will also allow establishing the authority of the indigenous culture and its historical narrative, further leading to self-confidence, cultural autonomy, and reliance on the people of Africa. This will be the first significant step towards the decolonisation of minds as well as academic thought.

## **Conclusion**

The de-historicising of the African identity has left Africans with only one option of understanding their history through the European voices. The European perceptions and ideas of the Pan-African identity have got embedded for them as well as the rest of the world. The need for developing confidence in its own culture is vital to decolonise the mind which can be done by shifting African travel history away from colonial influences. The present paper has established, through the study of archaeological and textual evidence, that Africans were the pioneers in African exploration, both in the interior of Africa and on the coasts, and the Europeans were very much aware of the ancient endeavours; they might have used this ancient knowledge to plan their expeditions. However, the absence of any acknowledgement to these ancient sources in the Victorian travel narratives or the expedition and exploration societies confirms the political use of the knowledge and discovery to set up the logic of empire and authority over the indigenous culture.

The paper also discussed that the conflict of belief and disbelief, myth and reality led to the degeneration of African confidence to a level that, despite the revolutionary figures and times, the African consciousness has mostly surrendered to Western supremacy, with this be seen through Victorian and African travel narratives. Therefore, to break the colonial shackles at the psychological level, Africa needs to be seen and discussed from its period of known glory and (then furthering to the reasons and failures) I am unsure what this means. The need to motivate African people towards complete decolonisation can only be fulfilled by re-writing and re-narrating their history.

## References

- Adams, W. (1977). *Nubia: Corridor to Africa*. NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Adams, W. (1984). The First Colonial Empire: Egypt in Nubia, 3200–1200 B.C. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 26(1), pp.36-71.
- Angelini, A., Capriotti, G. and Baldi, M. (2016). The high official Harkhuf and the inscriptions of his tomb in Aswan (Egypt). An integrated methodological approach. *ACTA IMEKO*, 5(2), pp.71-79.
- Bard, K. (2008). *An introduction to the archaeology of ancient Egypt*. Malden, Mass, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bard, K. and Fattovich, R. (2015). Mersa/Wadi Gawasis and Ancient Egyptian Maritime Trade in the Red Sea. *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 78(1), pp.4-11.
- Bhaktivejanyana, S. (2013). *Ithihaasa: The Mystery of His Story Is My Story of History*. Author House.
- Bradbury, L. (1988). Reflections on Traveling to "God's Land" and Punt in the Middle Kingdom. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 25, pp.127-156.
- Brantlinger, P. (1985). Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent. *Critical Inquiry*, 12(1), pp.166-203.
- Breasted, John. H. (1906). *Ancient Records of Egypt: Historical Documents from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest, collected, edited, and translated, with Commentary, Vol 1*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Brodrick, M. (1891). *Egypt under the Pharaohs: A history derived entirely from the monuments by Heinrich Brugsch-Bey*. London: John Murray.
- Callender, G. (2000). The Middle Kingdom Renaissance (c. 2055-1650 BC). In: I. Shaw, ed., *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.137-170.
- Cary, M. and Warmington, E. ed., (1963). *The Ancient Explorers*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Fabian, J. (2000). *Out of our minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fanon, Frantz. (2008) *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann. France: Pluto Press
- Fanon, Frantz. (1963) *The Wretched of Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington. London: Penguin Books

- Foucault, M., Rabinow, P., Hurley, R. and Faubion, J. (2000). *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. London: Penguin.
- Fussell, P. (1987). The Eighteenth Century and the Grand Tour. In: P. Fussell, ed., *The Norton Book of Travel*. NY: W.W. Norton & Inc.
- Garett, G. (1997). Relocating Burton: Public and Private Writings on Africa. *The Journal of African Travel Writing*, 2, pp.70-79.
- Ghosh, Amit and Tabish Khair. (2006). *Other Routes: 1500 Years of African and Asian Travel Writing*. Oxford: Signal.
- Gruesser, J. (1990). Afro-American Travel Literature and Africanist Discourse. *Black American Literature Forum*, 24(1), pp.5-20.
- Hibbert, C. (1982). *Africa explored: Europeans in the Dark Continent, 1769-1889*. London: Allen Lane.
- Holloway, L. and Hubbard, P. (2001). *People and place: The Extraordinary Geographies of Everyday Life*. NY: Pearson Education Limited.
- Jeal, T. (2012). *Explorers of the Nile: The Triumph and Tragedy of a Great Victorian Adventure*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Jenkins, N. (1980). *The Boat beneath the Pyramid*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Kendall, P. (2012). A British adventurer plans to sail a replica of a Phoenician sailing boat across Atlantic. *The Telegraph*.
- Lisle, D. (2012). *The Global Politics of Contemporary travel writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lloyd, A. (1977). Necho and the Red Sea: Some Considerations. *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 63, pp.142-155.
- Lloyd, A. (1988). The Old Period (664-332 B.C). In: I. Shaw, ed., *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.364-387.
- Lloyd, A. (1994). *Herodotus, book II*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Lynn, C. (2003). *Navan Fort: Archaeology and Myth*. Bray, Co. Wicklow: Wordwell.
- Macaulay, G.C. (1904). *The History of Herodotus Vol I*. Translated by G.C.Macaulay. Macmillan and Co: London.
- Mancall, P. (2006). *Travel Narratives from the Age of Discovery: An Anthology*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Matthews, W. (1971). The Egyptians in Scotland: The Political History of a Myth. *Viator*, 1, pp.289-306.

- Mertz, B. (1964). *Temples, Tombs and Hieroglyph*. Harper Collins.
- Redmount, C. (1995). The Wadi Tumilat and the "Canal of the Pharaohs." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 54(2), pp.127-135.
- Rogers, J. (2017). *Britons descended from Ancient Egypt? How links were set up here Thousands of years ago*. [online] Express.co.uk. Available at: <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/884070/Ancient-Egypt-Britons-Irish-ancestry> [Accessed 26 Mar. 2018].
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books.
- Sampson, H. (1948). Phoenician Shipwreck on the Cape Flats. *The South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 3(10), pp.34-40.
- Shaw, I. ed., (2000). *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stanley, H. (1880). *Through the dark Continent or the sources of the Nile around the great lakes of Equatorial Africa and down the Livingstone River to the Atlantic Ocean by Henry M. Stanley ...* London: S. Low, Marston Searle & Livingston.
- Thompson, A. (2019). *Why was Africa called the Dark Continent?*. [online] ThoughtCo. Available at: <https://www.thoughtco.com/why-africa-called-the-dark-continent-43310> [Accessed 30 Oct. 2019].
- Thompson, G. (1827). *Travels and adventures in Southern Africa; -*. London: Henry Colburn, New Burlington Street.
- Uhm, D. (2016). The monkey Business: the illegal trade in Barbary macaques. *Journal of Trafficking, Organized crime and Security*, 2(1), pp.36-49.
- Van De Mierop, M. (2011). *A History of Ancient Egypt*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Veldmeijer, A., Zazzaro, C., Clapham, A., Cartwright, C. and Hagen, F. (2008). The "Rope Cave" at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, [online] 44, pp.9-39. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27801620> [Accessed 30 Oct. 2019].
- Webb, E. (1906). On the Pretended Phoenician Circumnavigation of Africa. *The Geographical Journal*, 28(3), pp.297-298.
- WEBB, E. (1907). The Alleged Phoenician Circumnavigation of Africa. *The English Historical Review*, XXII(LXXXV), pp.1-14.
- Welsby, D. (2004). Egyptian invasions of Nubia: the last 5,000 years. *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa*, 39(1), pp.283-304.



