

The Debates on the Perception of the Ancient Egyptian Civilization

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ABSTRACT

There is a tradition according to which the ancient Egyptians were the most civilized people that ever lived. This researcher contests this tradition and argue that the Semitic Peoples and the archaeological findings in Egypt are primary in developing the construct according to which human civilization started from Egypt. The purpose of this research is to firstly shed light on the reasons that led to the development of the tradition of the ancient Egyptian civilization, and secondly, to highlight the implications of the perception of the ancient Egyptian civilization on other Africans.

Keywords: *Archaeological Discoveries, Artefacts, Civilization, Construct, Culture, Theories, Perception*

THE CONCEPT OF CIVILIZATION

Professor Philippe Denis is a senior lecturer in the history of Christianity at the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. Denis believed that the ancient Egyptians were not civilized as it has been speculated. He thought that the conceptualization of the civilization of the ancient Egyptians was a mere construct formed by individuals who are attracted to Egypt or to the Egyptian artefacts and culture.¹ On the other hand, a number of scholars and political heads have argued that human civilization started in Egypt and that the Egyptian civilization is not just a mere construct but a material-reality that is denied simply because the ancient Egyptians were Africans.² The debates which associated the origins of human civilization with Egypt led to the

racialization of the concepts of civilization.³ Botz-Bornstein have presented a theory according to which the French people and the Germans originated the concept of civilization (Botz-Bornstein 2012:10). Another school of thought emphasizes that the beginning of writing is equivalent to the beginning of human civilization. However, this view is disputed by many other European and African scholars (Mizinga 1992:3). Adeoti for example said that writing should not be considered as the major and the only criteria for determining the beginning of human civilization (Adeoti 2014:319).

Adeoti further argued that Africans for example had various way of disseminating and preserving knowledge and that their methods of knowledge preservation which included oral tradition and oral history suggests that Africans were civilized before the emergence of writing (Adeoti 2014:319). Professor Graham Connah of The Australian National University College also pointed out that writing alone did not in any way negates other means or ways of defining civilization. He emphasized that writing is not the main inspiration for human civilization (Connah 1987:8). Connah defined civilization as the creation of a city/state where food-production

¹The author of this article had an interview with Professor Philippe Denis, "Egyptian Civilization," University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Pietermaritzburg, 16th November 2015.

²The unique-technological advancements of the Egyptians which gained global recognition have made a number of scholars to argue that the ancient Egyptians were not Africans or black people hence their civilization is not of African origin. The argument is that the civilization of the ancient Egyptians suggests that they were not Africans simply because it was assumed that Africans do not have any kind of civilization that warranted a global recognition (Adamo 2013:73).

³The concept of civilization have been defined to please a group or an individual's background (Kreis 2014:1). For example, Connah explained that the origin of human civilization had been equated to the origin of European culture by a number of Europeans writers (Connah 1987:6).

and governance exist (Connah 1987:8). Botz-Bornstein regarded civilization as human technical, material and economic advancement aimed at making the human life easy to be managed (Botz-Bornstein 2012:10). Connah further noted that the racialization of the concept of civilization have contributed to making scholars to have less interest in the definition of civilization (Connah 1987:8).

In this research, the concept of civilization has been expanded to include cognitive abilities whose results are expressed in human culture and not just material technologies alone. While culture and civilization are different concepts, the researcher argue that the ancient Egyptian culture is a precursor for their civilization. Generally, culture is today understood as norms propagated by a particular group of society at a specific period of time (Hopkins 2002). While differentiating the words culture from civilization, Botz-Bornstein narrowed the meaning of culture as social practices which are basically intellectual, spiritual and artistic in nature. He thought that civilization unlike culture is material, economic, technical and socially engaging. In other words, Botz-Bornstein thought that civilization is factual while culture is abstract (Botz-Bornstein 2012:10-11). For the ancient Egyptians, the practice of their culture led to different innovations which resulted to the perception that the ancient Egyptians were civilized. This researcher argues that the ancient Egyptians burial culture is preeminent in the construct according to which human civilization originated from ancient Egypt. The researcher cited an example of the implications of the perception of the ancient Egyptian civilization on the Yorubas of Nigeria.

THE HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN CIVILIZATION

Egypt had experienced different kinds of leadership and different leaders came with different styles of innovations which affected their civilization. The geographical construction of Egypt had also influenced their civilization. For example, the Nile played a great role in initiating and developing the religious, economic, cultural, political and the social activities of the ancient Egyptians. In other words, the Nile contributed to the perception of the civilization Egypt. The Nile was firstly associated with farming activities before hunting was accepted as a formal activity in Egypt (Murnane 1992:36). The Egyptian land was fertile for crop production but narrowed and elongated and these features hampered the fusion of early

Egyptian settlements (Murnane 1992:36). The results of these early Egyptian settlements led to the isolation of Egypt by the Semitic Peoples. The isolation led the Egyptians to begin to innovate their own means of survival (Johnson 1978:9). Johnson explained how the topographical structuring of the ancient Egyptians motivated them to begin to initiate specific ways of meeting their needs:

The Egyptians, indeed, were self-consciously aware of their national immobility and separateness. They though the Valley had existed since the creation. This is not true, in fact at one time all of Egypt, like most of Africa, was inhabitable. In the later part of the Middle Paleolithic Period, about 10,000 BC, there was an accelerating decline in the local rainfall. The pastures and the savannahs of the Egyptian plains became desert. Even as late as about 2350 BC, average rainfall in Egypt was much higher than today – up to six inches a year – but it was decreasing and continued do so throughout historic times. Much of the country, therefore, became increasing[ly] inhospitable to animals and men. The hippos, the gazelles, the buffaloes and ostriches gradually became fewer. Wild asses, wild cattle, ostriches and lions continued to be hunted well into the time of the pharaohs (Johnson 1978:9).

Furthermore, the ancient Egyptians developed smaller kingdoms and one of the reasons for the development of the smaller kingdoms was due to the kind of isolation they experienced from other parts of the world. Wayne and Simonis said that about 5000 years ago, the smaller kingdoms in Egypt developed into two important states: Lower and Upper Egypt (Wayne & Simonis 1994:12). The unification of Egypt which was initiated by Menes took place around 3000 BCE, and the unification resulted to creating opportunities for further innovations which boosted the civilization of the ancient Egyptians (Grajetzki 2003:7). Wayne & Simonis pointed out that Menes powerful and civilized reign suggests that there was civilization in the Nile Valley which existed for centuries before Menes united the two kingdoms (Wayne & Simonis 1994:12). After Menes rule, more than 30 dynasties, 50 rulers and indigenous Egyptians ruled Egypt for 2700 years before foreigners like the Hyksos began to invade Egypt (Wayne & Simonis 1994:12; Adamo 2010:215).

The immediate successors of Menes are not known but it is known that Menes successors built sophisticated societies, temples, arts, and public works (Wayne & Simonis 1994:13). In the twenty-first century BCE, the Egyptian pyramids were famous. King Zoser (the last king of the Third Dynasty) and his architect Imhotep, built the first Step Pyramid of Saqqara.⁴ The construction of a massive mausoleum for Zoser implies the level of prosperity and innovation or civilization the Egyptians had during Zoser's time. During the Old Kingdom, the powers attributed to the Pharaohs by the Egyptians increased greatly hence the size of the pyramids of the pharaohs increased as well (Schwantes 1986:58). Not long after Zoser's pyramid, the Egyptian began to build more pyramids. Between 2650 BCE and 2500 BCE, Pharaoh Sneferu built the famous pyramid of Meidum in Al-Faiyum and the Red Pyramid of Dahshur near Saqqara. Pharaoh Sneferu encouraged the development of arts and trade and it was during his time that trading vessels of about six meters long plied the waters of the Nile. Sneferu succeeded in bringing thousands of prisoners from successful campaigns against the Nubians in the south ((Wayne & Simonis 1994:13).

Pharaoh Cheops was the last pharaoh of the 4th dynasty and he was responsible for building the three Great Pyramids of Giza (James 1976:157). The mathematical and extraordinary architectural precision involved in the construction of the pyramids of Giza suggests that: "the era of Cheops saw the emergence, for the first time in human history, of an organizational principle. Under his rule, and through the enormous labour and discipline involved in the construction of the pyramid, Egypt became a highly organised state" (Wayne & Simonis 1994:13). During the 5th dynasty (2490-2330 BCE), diversified bureaucracies were introduced by Egyptians pharaohs. The Pharaohs began to share their political authorities with officials and nobles and as a result, their influence and resources were minimized. Pyramids were made smaller

⁴Furthermore, it is appropriate to note that the ancient Egyptian Pyramids were built to the point that the pyramids could accommodate a Pharaoh, his or her relatives and loyalists. The Pyramids were also meant to accommodate other funerary offerings offered to the Pharaoh. For instance, in the Old Kingdom, King Zoser (Djoser), the last king of the Third Dynasty, built a step-mastaba or step-pyramid of about 204 feet using precisely cut stones for himself (Schwantes 1986:58).

for pharaohs. An example of smaller pyramids suggesting how Pharaohs lived during the 5th dynasty can be seen at Abu Sir, just 12 km south from Giza in Egypt (Mark 2009:1; Wayne & Simonis 1994:14).

During the 6th and 7th dynasties (about 2330-2170 BCE), Memphis was the only capital of Egypt. However, a group of the Egyptians whose names are not known and who wanted political power thought that there should be another place or capital to manage Egyptian affairs (Redford 2006:22-23). The dream of building another capital for the Egyptians became a reality only during the 9th and 10th dynasties. During the 9th and 10th dynasties, the group decided to establish a second capital in Heracleopolis (near Beni Suef) (Wayne & Simonis 1994:14). Smaller dynasties in Egypt continued to have political problems on leadership which resulted to the civil war that took place at the beginning of the 11th dynasty. An unknown person from the Intef family gathered all the unit leaders of the south to unite against the leadership in Heracleopolis and this resulted to the establishment of Thebes as the capital of Egypt (Schwantes 1986:65). Mentuhotep II became a king after the 11th dynasty and he united the north and south of Egypt controlled by a single Pharaoh. It was after this event that led to the ruling of Egypt by a single Pharaoh that opened up opportunities for the princes of Thebes to become rulers of all of Egypt. This political order in Egypt initiated by the princes of Thebes brought about an economic, social and artistic growth in Egypt. Thebes prospered for about 250 years (Wayne & Simonis 1994:14). Tombs and temples were built throughout Egypt and some of these remains can be seen today. The pharaohs Mentuhotep, Amenemhet and Sesostris built monuments at Lisht, Dahshur, Hawara and Lahun-all of which are near Al-Faiyum and Saqqara (Wayne & Simonis 1994:14; James 1976:155).

Another internal conflicts from the nobles of nomes (leaders of provinces) emerged again due to squabble for power around (1780 – 1660 BCE). The power squabble led to the invasion of Egypt by the Hyksos (meaning princes of the foreign land) (Redford 1976: xiii). Around 1550 BCE, the Egyptians defeated the Hyksos and this led the Egyptians into the New Kingdom. The New Kingdom Egypt prospered for over 400 years (18th to the 20th dynasties (1550-1150 BCE) (Wayne & Simonis 1994:14). The pharaohs of the 18th and 19th dynasties added a room, hall or pylon and carved hieroglyphic

inscriptions on every wall and pillar in designing tombs. The reign of Tuthmosis I in 1528 BCE led to the expansion of the Egyptian empire. Tuthmosis I fought and won over Upper Nubia. Tuthmosis I became the first Pharaoh to be entombed in the Valley of the Kings and his daughter Hatshepsut also became a great female Pharaoh. A great pyramid was built for Hatshepsut at Deir al-Bahri on the west bank (Partridge 1994:88-89). Tuthmosis III, Hatshepsut's nephew became the next pharaoh in line. He expanded the Egyptian empire extending through Syria and into western Asia (Tyldesley 2005:23). Tuthmosis III built temples in Thebes, in Buhen and in Amada. The next three Pharaohs after Tuthmosis III: Amenophis II, Tuthmosis IV and Amenophis III continued with the culture of tomb and temple expansion. For example, Amenophis II around 1417 BCE built the Luxor temple and a large mortuary temple which now carries the Colossi of Memnon on the west bank of Luxor (Wayne & Simonis 1994:14; Tyldesley 2005:22).

During the period 1417 BCE, which was the time of Amenophis II, Egypt prospered relatively. Amenophis IV had a misunderstanding with the priesthood of the god Amun, and Amenophis IV decided to use the name Akhenaten in honor of Aten, the disc of the rising sun. Akhenaten and his wife, Nefertiti, were so devoted to the worship of Aten that they established a new capital in Egypt called Akhenaten so that the god Aten would be worshipped (Scheffler 2000:117). Today, the scanty remains of Akhenaten's capital can be seen at Tell al-Amarna, near the town of Al-Minya. After the death of Akhenaten, the priest of Thebes's scattered all signs depicting Akhenaten's rule and he also destroyed all signs which depicts Akhenaten's view on monotheism. The signs included the Temple of the Sun at Karnak. Akhenaten's young son-law, Tutankhamun, ruled for about nine years and died just before reaching manhood (Scheffler 2000:117).

The next few centuries saw the rule of Egypt by Ramses I, II, III, and Seti I. These kings also built massive monuments and temples at Abydos and Abu Simbel. They also waged wars against the Hittites and the Libyans. As the second king of the 20th dynasty, Ramses III influence went low and Alexander the Great took the advantage and invaded Egypt in the 4th century BCE (Brier 2013:20). The invasion of Egypt by Alexander the Great led to the emergence of Greek rule (332-30BCE) in Egypt

(Redford 2006: xiii). The power of Egypt decline before Alexander the Great captured the territory in 332 BCE and this was so because for centuries, the Ethiopians, the Libyans, the Persians and the Assyrians had invaded Egypt at several times. Alexander the Great established the capital of Egypt in Alexandria, a place named after himself (Shinnie 1965:23-24). After the death of Alexander the Great, a Macedonian general Ptolemaic I ruled Egypt and he established the Ptolemaic dynasty which lasted for 300 years. The popularity of Egypt increased because the Ptolemaists built a famous library, temples of Dendara, Philae and Edfu (Brier 2013:17-18).

The Romans had a good relationship with the Ptolemaists until about 51 through 48 BCE when Cleopatra VII and her younger brother Ptolemy XIII ruled Egypt under Roman protection. Octavian became the first ruler of Egypt as Emperor Augustus and he made Egypt the granary of the Roman Empire. Apart from a brief invasion from the Ethiopians in 24 BCE, Egypt prospered for 30 years under Roman rule (Wayne & Simonis 1994:17-18). The Pharoanic, the Greek and Roman rules of Egypt were unique because it was during these periods that special monuments, tombs, pyramids and other inscriptions were made in Egypt while a few monuments destroyed. The initiation or the development of the ancient Egyptian pyramids, mummies, hieroglyphics, inscriptions, and objects found in their tombs are indications of the development of their civilization. Archaeological discoveries in Egypt in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries have contributed to making Europeans and Africans to have interest and debate the civilizations of the ancient Egyptians. Wayne and Simonis said that the earliest advancements made by the ancient Egyptians through their funerary practices, agriculture, architecture and arts have made scholars to think that civilization started from Egypt (Wayne & D. Simonis 1994:12).

THE CONTRIBUTION OF BURIAL CULTURE TO THE PERCEPTION OF THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN CIVILIZATION

The historical background of ancient Egypt especially with regard to the importance of the Nile and for their burial culture have contributed to the perception of their civilization (Murnane 1992:36). During the Predynastic period, the Egyptians mummified by exposing corpses to the warm natural weather of Egypt. The warm weather removed moistures from corpses

naturally (Jordan 1976:144-145; Davies 1999:27; Partridge 1994:10; Murnane 1992:37). Agai said that the practice of mummification became complicated over a period time for the ancient Egyptians because the Egyptians developed various techniques that enabled them to mummify and that the development of the techniques for mummification could have enhanced their technological creativity or their civilization (Agai 2013b:55-60).

Egypt as a country is attracting hundreds and thousands of tourists, academics, anthropologists, religious scholars and archaeologists almost on a daily basis. More so, Egypt is known for its abundance of evidence depicting the ancient Egyptian burial culture (Turner 1993:12). An example can be cited with the mummy of Ramses II which was found marred and is at present in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. The mummy was discovered in Egypt by Gaston Maspero on 5 July 1881 (Scheffler 2000:121). According to Scheffler, the information obtained on the stele of Merneptah (1236-1223 BCE) suggest that Ramses II was a Pharaoh at the time of the Exodus (Exodus 1:11) and that he was the father of Merneptah (Scheffler 2000:121). Ramses II, who reigned around 1304-1237 BCE was known to be a great builder who built for himself more temples and other monuments than any other Pharaoh (Scheffler 2000:121). Also, an excavation conducted by an Australian team of researchers in 2005 in a place fifteen miles south of Cairo at a hillside which had a lot of ancient graves revealed a tomb dating back to 4200 BCE. Inside the tomb were three coffins, one of which was thought to have been the coffin of the tutor of the sixth Dynasty King Pepi II called Meri (Scheffler 2000:126-128).⁵

Meri's chest was covered with beads and he was standing over another mummy that was swathed in turquoise blue beads bound in strips of black linen. The name of the mummy bound in strips of black linen is not known, but the team who conducted the research thought that the mummy could have been Meri's wife. The third wooden coffin also contained a mummy and it had an inscription dating back to the 26th Dynasty. Attached to the coffin was a deity called Petah Sakar. Petah was a deity of the artisans and Sakar was the god of the cemetery (James 1976:157). A number of heart scarabs with amulets have also been found in Egypt. One of the amulets is said to have belonged to King

Sobkemsaf of the early Seventeenth Dynasty (James 1976:159).⁶

Archaeological evidence for mummification during the first three Dynasties are rare unlike the Fourth Dynasty. Archaeologists in 1925 have uncovered the tomb of Hetepheres, the mother of King Cheops (James 1976:157). The tomb contained a calcite chest with some bandaged packages of visceral matter soaked in a diluted solution of natron (a chemical used for mummification). The body of Hetepheres found is a typical example of the Fourth Dynasty Period mummification method (James 1976:157). Furthermore, the tomb of the last king of the First Dynasty, Kea, gave evidence that people who were loyal to the king were buried in lateral chambers together with the king (Spronk 1986:57-58).

Howard Carter, a British Egyptologist made an astonishing finds of Egyptian artifacts in ancient Thebes, on the west bank of the Nile River between 1922 and 1923. At the Valley of the Kings, Carter found over 2000 items including boxes of funerary figures, three golden funerary couches and the remains of Pharaoh Tutankhamen who ruled Egypt for a period of nine years (between 1361 & 1352) (Wayne & Simonis 17). Tutankhamen died when he was nine years old (Scheffler 2000:117). Brier said that the discovery of the remains of Tutankhamun contributed greatly to adding interest to Egypt and to Egyptology (Brier 2013: xii). The ancient Egyptian burial culture have contributed to the preservation of their artifacts and the archaeological researches in Egypt have also contributed to the perception of the Egyptian civilization.

THE THEORIES OF THE PERCEPTION OF THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN CIVILIZATION

The Pro-Egyptian Theory of the Origins of Human Civilization

The debate on the perception of the ancient Egyptians civilization is centered on two theories: the pro-Egyptian theory of the origins of human civilization and the anti-Egyptian theory of the origins of human civilization. The pro-Egyptian theory of human civilization is a construct according to which human civilization originated from Egypt and from Egypt, it spread to other parts of the world. Proponent of this theory believe that the ancient Egyptian

⁵cf. "archaeological discoveries in Egypt," from <http://www.crystalinks.com/cd.html>, [2005], 1-3.

⁶The amulets or charms were meant to guide and direct the deceased on the stormy, dry and hard routes as he or she journeyed to the world of the dead.

civilization is preeminent to any other civilization in the world including that of the Babylonians, Chinese, Indians, Aztecs and Incas (Mills 2013:1; Adamo 2013:73). Nelson Mandela, a former president of South Africa after his visit to Egypt in 1994 described Egypt as “the cradle of African civilization” (Reynold 2012:1). Mandela believed that the ancient Egyptians whom he regarded as Africans were long ago civilized before the west were civilized:

This was not amateur archaeological interest; it is important for African nationalist to be armed with evidence to dispute the fictitious claims of white that Africans are without a civilized past that compares with that of the West. In a single morning, I discovered that Egyptians were created great works of art and architecture when whites were still living in caves (Reynold 2012:1).

Professor Edward Reynolds of the University of California San Diego added that the civilization and other developmental strides made by the ancient Egyptians is one of the reasons that motivated Nelson Mandela to continue to fight for the liberation of the majority of South Africans. Reynolds together with Magubane believed that the Malians, the Ethiopians and the Zimbabweans were also civilized in the ancient times just like the ancient Egyptians even though their own type of civilization varied from those of the ancient Egyptians (Reynold 2012:1-2; Magubane 1999:11). Nascimento presented an argument stating that the ancient Egyptians were black people and that their civilizations was prominent in the ancient times. Nascimento quoted Cheikh Anta Diop in the argument that the ancient Egyptians were black people and that their civilization is also of black origin:⁷

The ancient Egyptians were Negroes. The moral fruits of their civilization is to be counted among the assets of the Black world. Instead of presenting itself in history to an insolvent debtor, the Black world is the very initiator of the “Western” flaunted before our eyes today. Pythagorean mathematics, the theory of four elements of Thales of Miletus, Epicurean materialism, Platonic idealism,

⁷According to Nascimento, Diop compared the ancient Egyptian civilization to those of other black Africans. He particularly noted that the Egyptians were related to the Yorubas in terms of their religions (Nascimento 1999:164).

Judaism, Islam and modern science are rooted in Egyptian cosmogony and science. One needs only to meditate on Osiris, the redeemer-god, who sacrifices himself, died and is resurrected to save mankind, a figure essentially identifiable with Christ (Nascimento 1999:144).⁸

Furthermore, S.M. Umoh known to be a writer on Nigerian history and development together with Professor C.A. Folorunso a former lecturer at the University of Ibadan Nigeria have argued that human civilization originated from Egypt (Umoh 1971: 116; Folorunso 2003:83). Fitzgerald also believed that the ancient Egyptians were responsible for the civilization other Africans. In other words, he thought that there was no civilization in Africa until the Egyptian originated civilization and civilized all other parts of Africa (Fitzgerald 1968:418).⁹

The Anti-Egyptian Theory of the Origins of Human Civilization

The anti-Egyptian theory of the origins of human civilization is another construct according to which human civilization did not start from Egypt. A historian by the name Paul Johnson is among those who do not accept that human civilization in general started from Egypt:

At one time scholars believed that the civilization of ancient Egypt was the first in the history of the world and the progenitor of all others. We know this to be untrue, but the ancient Egyptians retain one unique distinction: they were the first people on earth to create a nation-state (Johnson 1978:9).

Johnson said that it is pertinent to note that western Asia developed before Egypt but that Egypt had its own uniqueness with regard to their civilization particularly in their creation of a city-state (Johnson 1978:9). Meaning, the Egyptians could be given credit for the creation of the city-state and Mesopotamia for the creation of other forms of human civilization. With regard to the formation of city-state, Falola

⁸Originally from Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization* (1944; version in English of selections from *Nation Negre et Culture and Anteriorite des civilisations Negres*, originally published in French).

⁹Mark said that Egypt influenced the civilizations of Greece and Rome: “the great monuments which is still celebrated for reflect the depth and grandeur of Egyptian culture which influenced so many ancient civilizations, among them Greece and Rome” (Mark 2009:1).

and Heaton sided with Johnson's African or the Egyptian origin thesis of the creation of city-state. Falola and Heaton reiterated that Africa and not Mesopotamia started the city state "... all social state formations in the Nigerian region had essentially indigenous African origins, although they were certainly willing to incorporate outside influences over time" (Falola & Heaton 2010). Furthermore, archaeological investigations in the 1950s conducted at Jericho, and at Hacilar and Catal Huyuk in Turkey shows that the much acclaimed "Neolithic Revolution" – which is referring to the cultivation of crops, the domestication of animals and the settlements of communities took place in Mesopotamia as early as 8000 BCE (Johnson 1978:11-15). Johnson said that there is no evidence of such development like the Neolithic Revolution in ancient Egypt around 8000 BCE. Johnson noted that the creation of city-state in Egypt was a later development compared with western Asia and that around the fourth millennium (3500 BCE), the Sumerians were living in more developed houses than those of the ancient Egyptians most of whom lived in the villages around the fourth millennium: "the Sumerians seem to have been several hundred years ahead of the Nile Valley in developing an essential urban pattern of trading and manufacturing, with large city temples and a civic government" (Johnson 1978:11-15).

Johnson's suggestion that civilization may not have started from Egypt but western Asia is supported by other authors like Pate, Hays and Oates. Babylon, a part of Mesopotamia in western Asia was known as one of the greatest and most popular regions of the Ancient Near East. This region had victories over many wars and they prospered in knowledge. Sumerians occupied Babylon as early as 3000 BCE and the Akkadians around 2000 BCE (Pate & Hays 2003:21-22; Oates 1979:11). Pate & Hays (Pate & Hays 2003:21-22) together with Oates (Oates 1979:11) believed that it was in Mesopotamia that ancient civilization started and spread to other parts of the world. These scholars called Mesopotamia the "cradle of civilization" (Oates 1979:11; Pate & Hays 2003: 21-22). Pate and Hays added:

The Sumerians developed writing, and they used it extensively for recording government activities and even mundane business transactions. The clay tablets they used for writing have been preserved through-out the ages and during the last one hundred years, archaeologists have

recovered more than a quarter million clay tablets inscribed in the Sumerian language. Besides writing and government documentation, many other developments that were critical to the rise of civilization have been attributed to the Sumerians: the city-state, the accumulation of capital, the wheel, the potter's wheel, monumental architecture, the number system based on the number 60 (we still use this for time as well as for geometry, i.e., 60 minutes in an hour, 360 degrees in a circle, etc.), Schools and the cylinder seal (Pate & Hays 2003:21-22).

Babylon prospered and became a very popular nation during the time of the Akkadians and the Sumerians. To modern scholars and interpreters, Babylon depicts pride, great corruption, injustice, suffering and oppression. But it also suggest fame, luxury, wealth and a land of attraction and the center of human civilization (Garriot 2002:2; Hall 2006:43). Other scholars like Leo Frobenius believed that African civilization originated from Etruscan sources and not from Africa (Frobenius 1913:345). Massa, like Frobenius also sided with the construct that Etruscan civilization is among the earliest of the human race.¹⁰

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PERCEPTION OF ANCIENT EGYPTIAN CIVILIZATION ON THE YORUBAS OF NIGERIA

A renowned Nigerian writer in the nineteenth century by the name Samuel Johnson linked the Yoruba origins to the ancient Egyptians and to the Coptic Christians in particular (Johnson 1921:6-7). His views regarding the Yoruba origin, their culture and civilization is the most adorable and seemingly the most uncontested among the Yorubas (Falola 1999:32; Akintoye 2004:3). Samuel Johnson himself attempted "...to create a link between the Yoruba and the great civilizations of Egypt and Greece" (Falola 1999:33-37, 40). Johnson said that the Yoruba

¹⁰(Massa 1973:8). Although there is no definite conclusion regarding the origin of the Etruscans, the connection between the Tyrrhenians and the Etruscans is because the Etruscans are regarded by many scholars as seafaring peoples who came from Asia Minor and resided in Italy as early as 1000BCE (Guiseppi 2001:1). This seafaring characteristic of the Etruscans is similar to those found among the larger group of the Phoenicians or the Tyrrhenians. The origin of the Etruscan is still not known but their civilization is suggested to have influenced Europe (Massa 1973:7-8).

sculptures are similar to that of the ancient Egyptians:

Again, that they emigrated from Upper Egypt to Ile Ife may also be proved by those sculptures commonly known as the "Ife Marbles," several of which may be seen at Ile Ife to this day, said to be the handiwork of the early ancestors of the race. They are all together Egyptian in form. The most notable of them is what is known as the "Opa Oranya," (Oranyan's staff) an obelisk standing on the site of the Oranyan's supposed grave, having characters cut in it which suggest a Phoenician origin. Three or four of these sculptures may now be seen in the Egyptian Court of the British Museum, showing at a glance that they are among kindred works of art (Johnson 1921:6).

More so, the famous Ife Bronze Head have been compared by authors like Clark to the arts in Egypt (Clark 1970:214-216). After Samuel Johnson, Olumide Lucas and many contemporaries Yorubas have continued to believe that they and their ancestors originated from Egypt (Fani-Kayode 2013) mainly due to the connection of the Yoruba culture and arts to those of the ancient Egyptians.

The Yorubas have an ambiguous view regarding their origin and the origin of their civilization. Firstly, the Yorubas generally believe that Oduduwa is their original ancestor who emigrated from the East or Arabia or Egypt to Ile Ife in Yorubaland (Oyebade 2004:57; Johnson 1921:5).¹¹ The tradition of the Eastern or the Arabic or the Egyptian origins of the Yoruba suggests that their civilization originated from these regions. Secondly, the Oduduwa creation myth is a tradition according to which Oduduwa was thrown from Heaven to Ile Ife by God (Olodumare) (Ojo 1999:5). The Oduduwa creation emphasizes a tradition according to which Ile Ife is the centre of creation where human civilization originated (Godesberg 1973:160). A renowned Yoruba leader, Prince L. A. Adetunji encouraged that the Oduduwa myth ought to be read literally and not metaphorically. Adetunji noted that according to the Oduduwa myth, Ile Ife should be regarded as the origin of human civilization. He wrote that civilization started from Ile Ife to Egypt, and from Egypt to Babylon, and from Babylon to the

Chaldeans. He said that after the death of Nebuchadnezzar in 561 BCE whose reign saw the peak of Chaldean civilization, the trend of civilization moved to Persia and from Persia to Greece – Greece to Rome and from Rome to Britain. Adetunji explained that the reason why Yorubaland or Africa is in the bottom of civilization at present is because empires rises and fall hence civilization is a cycle (Adetunji 1999:16-17).

Frobenius excavations in the northern site of Ile Ife in 1910 made him to find naturalistic Bronze, many broken artifacts and terracotta heads. Frobenius finds added to the popularity of the Yoruba people (Frobenius 1913:345). In the 70s, Peter Garlake and Frank Willet (at Ita Yemoo) independently excavated various sites around the town of Ile Ife where they found a number of terracotta figures and bronze. More excavations in Ile Ife have been conducted and glass beads, more terracotta objects, glass making-crucibles, slag and a burial chamber of about four to seven meters high and what was regarded as the "drum of Oduduwa" were all found. The crucibles, the slag and beads shows that Ile Ife was the "...center of productive glass industry," and also the center of ironworking and of craft specialization. Pavements dating to about 11th to 12th centuries were found at Ita Yemoo (northeast of Ile Ife) and charcoal from human-dug pits were found at Orun Oba Ado (Shaw 2004:47). Lange thought that the dating of objects found in Yorubaland had not been accurate and that the people of Ile Ife might have lived longer than generally estimated (Lange 1995:44-46). A number of archaeological researches conducted in Yorubaland have contributed to the knowledge of comparing Yoruba civilization to the civilization of the ancient Egyptians. The perception of the ancient Egyptian civilization is primary in associating the origins of the Yorubas and the origins of their civilization with Egypt.

CONCLUSION

There are a number of reasons that made Egypt to be perceived as a popular nation from ancient time's up-to the twenty-first century. The recognition of ancient Egypt by the Semitic peoples as an economic herb is a contributing factor to the popularity of Egypt in the ancient times (Lange 2004:277). The Phoenicians and the Greeks traded in gold and for slaves in Egypt since the sixth century BCE (Clark 1970:219; Lange 2004:279). Nebuzaradan's invasion of Israel and the Israelites search for refuge have made a number of the Israelites to

¹¹Ile Ife is an important Yoruba city where more Yoruba annual festivals are celebrated (Olupona 2011:1-17, 21-50)

migrate and settle in Egypt in 589 BCE (Le Roux 2008:15; 2 Ki 25:8-21; Jr 52:12-14). In the eighteenth and in the nineteenth centuries, the Europeans continued to develop keen interest on the concepts of the Egyptian civilization (Tyldesley 2005:7-8). This interest has been motivated by Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. Napoleon encouraged various archaeological excavations in Egypt and he contributed immensely to the scientific study of the Egyptian artifacts (Adamo 2013:73). His findings of the Rosetta Stone in July 1799 in the Nile Delta have enabled scholars for the first time in the nineteenth century to be able to decipher hieroglyphics (Brier 2013:56-57).¹² These points mentioned above have contributed to the development of the construct according to which civilization started from ancient Egypt.

The ancient Egyptian burial culture and their beliefs in the afterlife is another reason that made scholars to regard the Egyptians as the originators of the afterlife beliefs and the Cult of Osiris practiced in Babylon (Spronk 1986:57). Partridge mentioned that Herodotus was among the scholars that believed that the Egyptians originated the afterlife beliefs (Partridge 1994:10-11).¹³ The association of the origins of certain African ethnic groups like the Yorubas with Egyptian could be associated with the perception of the civilization of the ancient Egyptians. The civilization of the ancient Egyptians worth recognition and at this stage, it cannot be categorically stated that they originated the human civilization for many reasons:

- the 1950s archaeological finds at Jericho, Hacilar and Catal Huyuk in Turkey suggests that the Mesopotamians were civilized before the Egyptians (Johnson 1978:11-15).
- the study of early humans have contributed to the study of the origins of human civilization (Agai 2014:4-5). More fossils of early humans have been found in Eastern, Southern, Central and Northern Africa and in other parts of the world than they were found specifically in Egypt (Stringer and Mckie 1996:174-175; Caldwell and Gyles 1966:5; Clark 1970:18; Gunther 1955:10). Neanderthals are regarded by many scholars as the first early humans to initiate the afterlife beliefs (MacGregor 1992:55-56;

Hultkrantz 1982:24; Leakey 1982:52-53). Redford noted that the fossils of Neanderthals and other early human ancestors like *Homo erectus* and *Homo sapiens* have not been found in Egypt (Redford 2006:11). This finds raises questions on the perception that human civilization might have started from Egypt and spread to other parts of the world.

- inadequate archaeological research in many parts of Africa apart from Egypt, the lack of expertise in the excavation and in the study of artifacts including the lack of public support and poor funding (Wesler 2002:25) have rather contributed to the popularity of the perception that civilization might have started from Egypt and not from other parts of Africa. The outcome of a recent study of Nok sculptures found in North-Central Nigeria is beginning to make archaeologists to suggest that high-level scientific use of iron might have started from West Africa: "...archaeologists are looking at the possibility that West Africans developed iron-working technology autonomously, possibly starting with the Nok" (Atwood 2013:14).¹⁴ In other words, if more archaeological research is thoroughly and professional conducted in other parts of Africa apart from Egypt and in other parts of the world, more artifacts that would amaze the world would have been found. This may not displace the interest of the uniqueness of the Egyptian artifacts but it can create a formidable platform that will contest the perception of the ancient Egyptian civilization.

The tradition according to which the ancient Egyptians might have been civilized earlier or at the same time or after other ancient peoples were already civilized can be contested. The practice of their burial culture which is the primary precursor for their civilization is the main reason that allowed the eye-capturing evidence for the perception of their civilization. The archaeological finds in Egypt contributed to the perception of their civilization without which the Egyptians might not have been regarded as the most or one of the most civilized people that ever lived. More so, without the perception of the ancient Egyptian civilization which gained global recognition, certain ethnic groups in Africa and around the world may not have confidently associated their origins with Egypt.

¹²J. Jones, "Egypt and Europe in the 19th century" courses.wcupa.edu/jones/his312/lectures/Egypt.htm. (2014), 1.

¹³ Originally in Herodotus, Edition Bohn, II, 123.

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The Debates on the Perception of the Ancient Egyptian Civilization

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Citation: Jock Matthew Agai "The Debates on the Perception of the Ancient Egyptian Civilization" *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies*, vol 4, no. 12, 2017, pp.11-21.

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