
Christianity in Ethiopia: The Quest for When and by Whom It was Introduced?

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Abstract

The introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia was heralded first by an Ethiopian eunuch known by the name Bakos. It happened soon after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and this makes Ethiopia the second country in the world next to Palestine. The evangelical activities of Bakos were subsequently supported by several apostles of Jesus Christ. Among them were St. Matthew, St. Thomas, St. Bartholomew, St. Matthias, and St. Andrew. Matthew preached the new faith to the people of Ethiopia, and henceforth he wrote the Gospel known by his name for Ethiopians in their own tongue. Unfortunately, this historical fact remains concealed, and above all, there is a general misunderstanding that Christianity was introduced by Frumentius in the fourth century after the Council of Nicaea. This paper attempts to examine both ancient and medieval documents, and it avers to reconstruct that Christianity was a first-century phenomenon in Ethiopia.

Keywords: Ethiopia, India, Bakos, Frumentius, Christianity, Apostles

Introduction

There are ample sources that show indeed Christianity was introduced into Ethiopia in the First Century CE. According to these sources, unlike other countries of the world, Christianity in Ethiopia was first heralded by a fellow Ethiopian, and this happened before the apostles left Palestine for their evangelical activities. Subsequently, Ethiopia had been preached to by several apostles of Jesus Christ at different times and in different parts of the empire. For instance, Matthew, Thomas, and Bartholomew had preached the Gospel in Ethiopia, and this is in accordance with the prophecies of David, Isaias, and some other prophets. For instance, David prophesies that “Ambassadors shall come out of Egypt: Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands to God” (Psa. 67:32; in this paper I used the Douay-Rheims Version). David also adds that “Before him the Ethiopians shall fall down, and his enemies shall lick the ground. The king of Tarsis and of the islands shall offer presents; the king of the Arabians and of Saba shall bring gifts.” (Psa. 71:9-10).

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Conversely, there is a widespread assertion by both local and foreign writers that Christianity was introduced into Ethiopia in the Fourth Century CE by Frumentius. Consequently, nowadays, in Ethiopia, there is a general misunderstanding that Christianity was introduced by Frumentius in the fourth century, and what is more, the evangelical activities of apostles in Ethiopia are flatly rejected, and ancient India (Ethiopia) is inaccurately associated with present-day India, and the name Ethiopia with the Sudan only, and the name Seres with China.

Methodology

The research design of this paper is qualitative. The data used in this paper is retrieved from the investigation of primary sources and the review of secondary sources, and the data analysis method is document analysis. In the process of data gathering, the researcher used the Holy Bible, Apocryphal Gospels, and books written anciently by early church fathers and later by archbishops, compiled in the medieval period. The researcher also used other accounts mainly penned by travellers on the geographical location of ancient Ethiopia, India, and Seres.

1. A “Eunuch” under Candace² and his Evangelical Activity in Ethiopia

Two Ethiopians are mentioned in the Holy Bible as eunuchs, the first in the prophecy of Jeremias and the second in the Acts of Apostles. These two Ethiopians were worshippers of God. The eunuch mentioned in the book of Jeremias is known by the name Abdemelech the Ethiopian, who saved Jeremias from the dungeon (see Jer. 38:8-13). While Jerusalem was besieged by Nabuchodonosor in the sixth century BCE, the Lord God delivered Abdemelech from being captured by Chaldeans because of his trust in Him (Jer. 39:15-18). Similarly, the eunuch of Candace was an adherent of the Jewish law, and hence he had come to Jerusalem to worship God, and this is witnessed by Luke as “And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch, of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge over all her treasures, had come to Jerusalem to adore” (Acts 8:27). His baptism is described as:

² The name Candace is spelled differently by different writers as Kandake, Kantake, and, in Vulgate, Candacis. In the Ge'ez and Amharic versions, the name Candace is spelled as ባንዳቃ (Hendäké), to mean India. See the Ge'ez version of the book of Esther (3:13-14, 8:12-14), which spells India with Hendäke. Ancient writers used the names "Ethiopia" and "India" interchangeably, so that the name "Candace" does not indicate that it was the personal name of a queen or a dynastic name, as some writers assume. Rather, it signifies her native land, just like that of the Queen of Saba.

See, here is water: what doth hinder me from being baptized? And Philip said, "If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest." And he answered, saying, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And he commanded the chariot to stand still; and they went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him" (Acts 8:36-38).

As stated above, Abdemelech's life was saved from the hands of Chaldeans because of his trust in God, and the eunuch of Candace was baptized with the initiation of the angel of God and the Holy Ghost because of his faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. These two Ethiopians—Abdemelech and Bakos—are mentioned as eunuchs. When it comes to these two Ethiopians, the word "eunuch" cannot be understood in its literal sense. The researcher believes so because had they been castrated physically, they could not be worshippers of God because the law forbids them as "an eunuch, whose testicles are broken or cut away, or yard cut off, shall not enter into the church of the Lord" (Deu. 23:1). Similarly, Potiphar, who bought Joseph from Ishmaelite merchants and was the chief captain of the army of Pharaoh, is referred to as a eunuch, but he had a wife (see Gen. 39:1&7). This indicates that the word "eunuch" has another meaning. Regarding this, Trimm indicates that in the Aramaic manuscripts, it can mean "eunuch" but can also mean "believer" or a "faithful one".³ Thus, the word "eunuch" which had been associated with the aforementioned Ethiopians, should be understood contextually.

This faithful Ethiopian preached the advent of Christ in Ethiopia after he had been baptized by Philip. Irenaeus (120-202) shows that the 'eunuch' of Candace heralded the advent of Christ in Ethiopia. He adds that "This man was also sent into the regions of Ethiopia, to preach what he had himself believed."⁴ His knowledge of the Old Testament also is described as:

For nothing else [but baptism] was wanting to him who had been already instructed by the prophets: he was not ignorant of God the Father nor of the rules as to the [proper] manner of life but was merely ignorant of the advent of the Son of God, which, when he had become acquainted with, in a short space of time, he went on his way rejoicing to be the herald in Ethiopia of Christ's advent.⁵

³ James Scott Trimm(trans.), *The Hebraic-Roots Version: Scriptures Containing the Tanak and Ketuvim Netzarism*, (North riding, South Africa: Institute for Scripture Research, 2005), p. x

⁴ Alexander Roberts & Donaldson (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, Vol. I, 1903), p. 433

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 495

Bakos, as St.Hierom ascertains, was the apostle of Ethiopians.⁶ After he returned home, first he converted the queen to the Christian faith, and afterwards he propagated it throughout Ethiopia, and in their joint endeavours with St. Matthew, the eunuch preached the Christian religion in the Red Sea areas, namely Arabia, Persia, and India and finally he received martyrdom at the Island of Taprobane.⁷ Wilkinson claims that “Ethiopia is the second foreign country evangelized by the church at Jerusalem.”⁸ Actually, the baptismal of the eunuch does not necessarily mean the evangelization of the country. Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, tells us that a ‘eunuch’ of Candace was the first man to proclaim the advent of Christ for Ethiopians. His witness manifested as:

For as the annunciation of the Saviour’s gospel was daily advancing, by a certain divine providence, a prince of the queen of the Ethiopians, as it is a custom that still prevails there to be governed by a female, was brought thither and was the first of the Gentiles that received of the mysteries of the divine word from Philip. The apostle, led by a vision, thus instructed him; and he, becoming the first fruits of believers throughout the world, is said to have been the first, on returning to his country, to proclaim the knowledge of God and the salutary abode of our Saviour among men. So that, in fact, the prophecy obtained its fulfilment through him: “Ethiopia stretcheth forth her hands unto God.”⁹

As stated in the Acts of Apostles and by early Church Fathers, Bakos is the first apostle for Ethiopians.

2. The Evangelical Activities of Apostles in Ethiopia

Next to Bakos, the apostles of Jesus Christ preached the gospel in different parts of Ethiopia, and this is supported by sources compiled in late antiquity and in the medieval period. Fowler, for example, notwithstanding the first missionary activities of Bakos, states as:

We have statements made by various historians that the Gospel was first preached in Ethiopia by the Apostles themselves—St. Jerome mentions St.

⁶ William Cave, *A Complete History of the Lives, Acts and Martyrdoms of the Holy Apostles*,(Philadelphia: Solomon Wiatt, Vol. II, 1810), p.114

⁷ Ibid. ,p.115

⁸ Benjamin George Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness*,(Rapidan, VA, USA: Hartland Publications ,Nd.),p . 19

⁹ C. F. Cruse(trans.), *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilius ,Bishop of Caesarea, in Palestine*,(New York: Dayton &Saxton , 1842), p.50

Andrew; Rufinus and Socrates speak of St. Matthew; while St. Chrysostom maintained that St. Thomas was the evangelist of those regions.¹⁰

Likewise, Gelasius, who was bishop of Caesarea and died about 395 CE, says that “Matthew had preached the Parthians and Bartholomew to the Ethiopians and Thomas to the Indians of Great India.”¹¹ Rufinus of Aquileia (345-410) and other subsequent writers such as Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret also reported that Christianity was preached by Jesus’ apostles in Ethiopia. Rufinus informs us of the missionary fields of the aforementioned apostles as:

In the division of the earth which the apostles made by lot for the preaching of God’s word, when the different provinces fell to one or the other of them, Parthia, it is said, went by lot to Thomas, to Matthew fell Ethiopia, and Nearer India, which adjoins it[i.e. Ethiopia], went to Bartholomew.¹²

In the following, the missionary activities of each apostle are treated.

A. The Apostolic Acts of Saint Matthew in Ethiopia and His Gospel

Although the aforesaid sources ascertain that Matthew was the Apostle of Ethiopians, they differ in their approaches. Some sources say that Matthew preached in different parts of the world. For instance, the Coptic Synaxarium informs us that “He [Matthew] preached in the land of Palestine and Tyre and Sidon. Then he went to Ethiopia. He entered the city of priests and converted them to the knowledge of God.”¹³ Some other writers claim that the missionary places for Matthew were Ethiopia and Parthia. Regarding this, Metaphratus states that Matthew went to the Parthians and afterwards to Ethiopia.¹⁴ On the other hand, Foxe makes apparent that “He [Matthew] then went into Ethiopia, ordained preachers, settled churches, and made many converts. He afterwards travelled to Parthia, where he met his death, being

¹⁰ Montague Fowler, *Christian Egypt: Past, Present and Future*, (London: Church Newspaper Company Limited, 1901), p.145

¹¹ Nicholas Marinides (trans.), Gelasius of Caesarea: Ecclesiastical History, The Extant Fragments With an Appendix Containing the Fragments from Dogmatic Writings, Edited by Martin Wallraff and et.al,(Berlin: Walter deGruyter,2018), p.131

¹²Philip R. Amidon (trans.), *Rufinus of Aquileia: History of the Church*,(Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press,2016), p.393

¹³ St. George Coptic Orthodox Church, Coptic Synaxarium,(Chicago, Illinois: St. George Orthodox Church, 1995), p.49

¹⁴ W.M. Metcalfe, *Legends of Saints*,(Edinburgh &London: William Blackwood &Sons, Vol. III, 1896), p.141

slain with the sword, about the year 60.”¹⁵ In contrast, Rufinus and Socrates verify that St. Matthew was allotted only to Ethiopia. Accordingly, Socrates states that “When the apostles went forth by lot among the nations, Thomas received the apostleship of Parthians; Matthew allotted Ethiopia; and Bartholomew the part of India contiguous to that country.”¹⁶ Gervase (1150-1211) (of Tilbury) relates us that Greater India was preached by Bartholomew, Lesser India by Thomas and Middle India by Matthew.¹⁷ In addition, a Ge’ez manuscript entitled *Mätsehafä Gädlä Hawaryat* attests that Matthew received by lot the city of priests.¹⁸ After he entered the city of priests, the residents enquired where he came from and Matthew introduced himself as a wise man from Egypt¹⁹. The acts of Matthew describes:

“ገተኛ ወሰንና ሆኖ ንዑስ የሚሸጠው አቶ አቶ ወቅነኛ በተከርከሩ የንግድ ማቋሚነት ወጥቅም አርማካይ አቶ ስምምነት ወሰንና ሆኖ ስመ ለመ ቅዱስ ወቅነት ወቅናት ወመሆመ ወንበለ ወነበረ ተበሆመ እኩ ይወንበ እምነቶ ወመክና እምነበሆመ በሰላም፡፡”²⁰

(Then the king and the people in the city overthrew the temple of Apollo and built a church, and Matthew made a prayer (in it) and appointed to them Armis Episcopate, and he again appointed priests and deacons and gave the Gospel and sojourned with them until their faith got strength and went out from them in peace. *Researcher’s own translation*).

Similarly, the Ethiopian Synaxarium relates that Saint Matthew had appointed a bishop and priests and built a church for the city dwellers, and it also reports that Saint Thomas had been at the city of the blessed before Matthew.²¹ Unlike documents of late antiquity, the book compiled by Jacobus de

¹⁵ John Foxe, *Book of Martyrs: Being a History of the Persecution of Christians in All Ages*, (Philadelphia: Charles Foster Publishing Co., 1895), p. 28

¹⁶ Samuel Bagster(trans.), *Ecclesiastical History: A History of the Church in Seven Books from the Accession of Constantine, AD. 305 to the 38th Years of Theodosius II, including a Period of 140 Years, by Socrates Surnamed Scholasticus or Advocate*, (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1844), p.69

¹⁷ Richard Raiswell, *Before the Company: English perceptions of India in Sixteenth Century*, (Unpublished Phd. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2002), p.17

¹⁸ E. A. Wallis Budge (ed.), *The Contendings of the Apostles-The Ethiopic Text, Being the Histories of the Lives and Martyrdoms and Deaths of the Twelve Apostles*, (London: Henry Prowde, 1899), pp.95&101.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* ,p.103

²⁰ *Ibid.* , p. 113

²¹ E.A. Wallis Budge(trans.), *Synaxarium: The Books of the Saints of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church*, (Garland, TX, USA: The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Debre Meheret St. Michael Church, Nd), P.81

Voragine (1228-1298), archbishop of Genoa, is very informative and tells us the detailed evangelical activities of Matthew in Ethiopia. He informs us that “Matthew the apostle, preaching in Ethiopia, in the city that is said Nadaber.”²² Jacobus adds:

Then Matthew the apostle entered into that city and was lodged with the eunuch of Candace, the queen, whom Philip baptized. ...Then this eunuch demanded of St. Matthew how he spake and understood so many tongues. And then Matthew told him how the Holy Ghost descended and had given to the apostles all science of tongues.²³

The act of Matthew was facilitated by divine intervention. God heard the prayer of the apostle and raised the king’s son from death. As a result, many people came to the apostle with crowns of gold and diverse manners of sacrifices, but Matthew told them that in fact he was not God. His act describes:

And by the commandment of him they made a great church of the gold and silver that they had brought which in thirty days space was edified and achieved. In which church the apostle sat three and thirty years, and converted all Ethiopia to the faith of Christ. And then the king Egippus, with his wife and his daughter, and all the people, were baptized.²⁴

Due to the change of toponyms, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact location of Nadaber, or the city of priests, but from the expression of *Gädlä Hawaryat*, it is possible to deduce that Nadaber was the city of Raguel, father-in-law of Moses, in present-day Sudan. The geographical location of ancient Ethiopia extended from Syene, or Aswan, to the Ethiopian, or Indian Ocean. Anciently, Sudan was known by the name Lower Ethiopia.

Finally, Matthew was murdered by Hirtacus, and the reason is that “He was slain by king Hirtacus, because he was not willing that Iphigenia, the daughter of the king of Ethiopia, who had consecrated her virginity to God, should be given him to wife.”²⁵ According to Jacobus Matthew sojourned in Ethiopia for about thirty-three years.

²² F.S. Ellis (ed.), *The Golden Legend, or Lives of Saints Translated by William Caxton*, in Seven Volumes, (London: J.M. Dent and Co. , Vol. V, 1931 rpt), p. 150

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.* ,p. 152

²⁵ Thomas W. Mossman,(trans.), *The Great Commentary of Cornelius à Lapide*,(London: John Hedges,1887), p. xi

Contrary to the above-stated sources, some writers, both local and foreign, allegedly asserted that Matthew was not the apostle of Ethiopia. For example, the late Tekletsadiq Mekouria dismissed testimonies as “part of the population mistakenly believes that Saint Matthew was the first to bring Christianity to Ethiopia. This view, however, is supported by no document worthy of belief.”²⁶ Likewise, Binns disregarded that “the apostle Matthew is said in several traditions to have preached and been martyred in Ethiopia, but these are late accounts.”²⁷ The criticism given by Binns is unfounded, because, the evangelical activities of Matthew in Ethiopia and Frumentius in India, were offered by the same monk-Rufinus. On the vice versa, Jesuit missionaries admitted that Matthew was the apostle of Lower Ethiopia, which is present-day Sudan, but denied his evangelical activities in present day Ethiopia. For instance, Almeida presupposes that “The glorious apostle St. Matthew did not reach this country, high Ethiopia, but only what lies between Suaquem and Egypt, and so there is in this country no memory of this holy apostle, nor has any record of him ever been found in a book.”²⁸ Similarly, a Lapide, another Jesuit, contends that “It is said that S. Mattew preached in hinter Ethiopia, now called Sennar, where there are Black Ethiopians.”²⁹ The refutation of Jesuit writers is not surprising due to the fact that they were anti-Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

The Gospel of Matthew is additional evidence, as he was an apostle of the Ethiopians. Unfortunately, later writers are reluctant to admit as it was written for the people he had preached to. Some writers think that the Gospel of Matthew was written originally in Hebrew by citing the works of Papias (70-155), Eusebius (265-340) and Jerome (347-419). In a fragment of Papias, it is stated that ‘Matthew wrote in the Hebrew dialect the sayings, and everyone interpreted them as best he was able.’³⁰ The statement of Papias does not justify us to suppose that Matthew wrote the Gospel in Hebrew, but only a collection of logia, the sayings of Jesus. Eusebius, on his part, paraphrased the

²⁶ Tekletsadiq Mekouria , “Christian Aksum” in G. Mokhtar (ed.), General History of Africa. II: Ancient Civilizations of Africa,(California: University of California Press, 1981), p.403

²⁷ John Binns, *The Orthodox Church of Ethiopia: A History*, (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2017), p.40

²⁸ C. F. Beckingham & G. B. Huntingford(trans. & ed.), *Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593-1646: Being Extracts from the History of High Ethiopia or Abassia*, (London: Hakluyt Society, 1954), p.12

²⁹ Mossman, p.xxx

³⁰ S. Baring-Gould, *The Lost and Hostile Gospels: An Essay on the Toledo Jeschu, and the Petrine and Pauline Gospels of the First Three Centuries which Fragments Remain*,(London & Edinburgh: Williams & Norgate, 1874), pp. 171-172

work of Papias as “For Matthew, who had at first preached to the Hebrews, when he was about to go to other peoples, committed his Gospel to writing in his native tongue, and thus compensated those whom he was obliged to leave for the loss of presence.”³¹ Similarly, Jerome contends that “Matthew, also called Levi, apostle and aforesmtes publican, composed a Gospel of Christ at first published in Judea in Hebrew for the sake of those of the circumcision who believed, but this was afterwards translated into Greek, though by what author is uncertain.”³² The assertions given by Eusebius and Jerome are implausible because Palestine had already been preached by Jesus, and his apostles were ordered to stay at Jerusalem until they received the Holy Ghost, and then after they shared countries of the world by lot. and hence Matthew set out to go to Ethiopia. Moreover, both of them misinterpreted the expression of Papias, *logia*, or the sayings of Jesus, in the Gospel of Matthew.

Schaff erroneously declares that “Matthew’s Gospel was evidently written for Hebrews and Hebrew Christians with the aim to prove that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah.”³³ In contrast, linguists verified that the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel according to Hebrew are not the same. Even Schaff admits that “The Greek Matthew, as we have it now, is not a close translation from the Hebrew and bears the marks of an original composition.”³⁴ Vis-à-vis to others, Paulus contends that “In view of the unanimous testimony that the Gospel of Matthew was not originally written in Greek and was written in a Syro-Chaldaic tongue.”³⁵ Actually, the association of the Gospel of Matthew with a Syrian tongue is a wild guess due to the fact that Matthew was not the apostle of Syria. The Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of the Hebrews were quite different, and their difference is stated as follows:

The Gospel of St. Matthew and the Gospel of the Hebrews were not identical. It is impossible to doubt this when we examine the passages of the latter quoted by ecclesiastical writers, the majority of which are not to be found in the former, and the rest differ from the canonical Gospel either in details or in the construction of the passages which correspond.³⁶

³¹ Schaff, Eusebius, p.216

³² Philip Schaff(ed.), *Theodoret, Jerome, Gennadius, Ruffinus: Historical Writings, etc.*,(New York: Christian Literature Company,1892), p. 733

³³ Schaff, *History of* , p.378

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 384

³⁵ Jonathan M. Roberts, *Antiquity Unveiled: Ancient Voices from the spirit Realms Disclose the most Startling Revelations Proving Christianity to be Heathen Origin*,(Philadelphia: Oriental Publishing Co.1912), p.228

³⁶ Baring-Gould, p.139

The discrepancies between the two versions signify that the Gospel of Matthew was written originally neither in Hebrew nor in Greek. The Gospel of Matthew, as stated above in the Ge'ez version of *Gädlä Hawaryat*, was written in Ethiopia for Ethiopians and this is witnessed by diverse ancient sources. For instance, Dorotheus attested that "Bartholomew preached to men of India, and delivered to them the Gospel after Matthew in their proper tongue."³⁷ Likewise, Hippolitus (170-236) tells us that "Bartholomew, again, preached to the Indians, to whom he also gave the Gospel according to Matthew."³⁸ Moreover, the Gospel of Matthew written for Ethiopians is found at the library of Vatican. In line with this, a Lapide (1567-1637), a Belgian Jesuit, verifies:

I have also found in the Vatican Library at Rome the Coptic, or Egyptian version of the Gospels, the Ethiopian, and the Persian, all very ancient. For the Gospel was brought into Egypt soon after Christ by S. Mark, into Ethiopia by S. Matthew, into Persia by S. Simon and S. Jude. And so the faith of the Gospel flourished in those regions.³⁹

The Gospel of Matthew mentioned above is probably the Gospel taken from India or Ethiopia by Pantaenus. Pantaenus was a philosopher of the Stoic school and the teacher of Clement of Alexandria. He was sent to Ethiopia in 189 and narrated by Jerome as:

On the request of the Legates of that nation, he was sent to India by Demetrius [189-231] bishop of Alexandria, where he found that Bartholomew, one of the twelve apostles, had preached the advent of the Lord Jesus according to the Gospel of Matthew, and on his return to Alexandria he brought this with him written in Hebrew characters.⁴⁰

The assertion that the Gospel of Matthew which brought from India into Alexandria, was written in Hebrew, is unconvincing and this most probably an interpolation by later writers. Butler is reluctant as Matthew's Ethiopia was not part of Africa. His reluctance is reported as "Rufinus and Socrates tell us

³⁷ Ellis, p. 37

³⁸ Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson (eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Hippolitus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Company, Vol. V, Nd), p.654

³⁹ Mossman(trans.), p. xxiv

⁴⁰ Philip Schaff(ed.), *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, (New York: Christian Literature Company, Vol. III, 1892), p. 752

that he [Matthew] carried the Gospel into Ethiopia, meaning probably the southern and eastern part of Asia.”⁴¹

There is also confusion whether Matthew or Matthias was the apostle of Ethiopia. The confusion is reported as:

There is a considerable doubt as to whether it is Matthias or Matthew that is spoken of. Pseudo-Abdias, followed by all the Latin writers on the subject, calls him Matthew. The Greek texts hesitate between the two. Tischendorf edits Matthias, on the authority of his oldest MS. There is also some discrepancy as to the name of the town. Some MSS. Say Sinope, others Myrmene or Myrna; they generally, however, coincide in calling it a town of *Æthiopia*.⁴²

This confusion emanates partly from the similarity of names of the apostles and partly from the ignorance of these writers due to the fact that both of them were the apostles of Ethiopia. As stated above, Matthew suffered martyrdom at Nadaber and Matthias at Myrmene or Myrna. When the apostles shared countries of the world by lot, Matthias received part of Ethiopia. Regarding this, it is stated that “ወዢኑ ማኅልል አዋጅት አህንኑ ዓለም ወተኞዥ አዥኑ ወወልኩ ወቃወል ወቃ ለማትኩስ ከዚ ይተኞ ስዕስ ለማትኩስ ለማትኩስ”⁴³ (Literally, at that time when the apostles divided countries of the world by lot, the lot fell upon Matthias to set out to the country of human-eaters).

In the book of Walker, there is a subtitle “Acts of Andrew and Matthias in the City of Man-Eaters”. In this subtitle, it is stated that “By lot, then, it fell to Matthias to set out to the country of the man-eaters.”⁴⁴ While he was preaching the Gospel of Christ, Matthias was captured and sent to prison. Concerning this, Walker states that “the Lord appeared in the country where Andrew was teaching, and said to him: Rise up and set out with thy disciples to the country of the man-eaters, and bring forth Matthias out of that place.”⁴⁵ On the other hand, under the subtitle, “Acts and Martyrdom of St. Matthew the Apostle”, it is stated that “O Matthew, take this rod of mine, and go down from the mountain, and go into Myrna, the city of the man-eaters, and plant it

⁴¹ Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and other Principal Saints*, (Dublin: James Duffy, Vol. IX, 1866), p.259

⁴² Alexander Walker(trans.), *Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, and Revelations*, (Edinburg: T&T. Clark, 1870), p.xvii

⁴³ Budge(ed.), *The Contendings* , p.225

⁴⁴ Walker(trans.), p.348

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 349

by the gate of the church which thou and Andrew founded.”⁴⁶ Walker adds that “And Saint Matthew finished his course in the country of the man-eaters, in the city of Myrna.”⁴⁷ The association of Myrna with Matthew is inaccurate. As described above, Andrew was sent to help Matthias and the church was founded by them. There are sufficient sources, as Matthias was the apostle of Ethiopia. For example, Metcalfe reports that “According to some authorities he suffered martyrdom in Colchis, which they call Ethiopia.”⁴⁸ Similarly, Jerome testifies that both Andrew and Matthias preached the Gospel in the towns on the two Colchis Rivers, namely Asparus and Phasis, and calls the people Ethiopians.⁴⁹ Smith similarly assures that Matthias preached the Gospel and suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia.⁵⁰ The above-stated sources assure that both Matthew and Matthias were the apostles of Ethiopia.

B. Acts of Saint Thomas and Saint Bartholomew in ‘India’

There are different narratives about where St. Thomas was assigned for his missionary activities. Some writers assert that St. Thomas was assigned only to Parthia, and some others claim that he was the apostle of both Parthia and India. Concerning the former, Socrates tells us that “When the apostles went forth by lot among the nations, Thomas received the apostleship of Parthians.”⁵¹ Regarding the latter Michael Rabo states that “The apostle Thomas preached in India exterior and in Parthia.”⁵² Anciently, Parthia and India were contiguous. Concerning this, Isidore assures that “The region from the border of India to Mesopotamia is generally called Parthia.”⁵³ Some other writers assert that the missionary field of Thomas is more than two nations. Regarding this, Hippolitus reports that “And Thomas preached to the Parthians, Medes, Persians, Hyrcanians, Bactrians and Margians and was thrust through in four members of his body with a pipe spear at Calamene, the

⁴⁶ ibid. p. 374

⁴⁷ ibid. p. 387

⁴⁸ Metcalfe, p. 160

⁴⁹ John D. Baldwin, *Pre-Historic Nations; or Inquiries Concerning Some of the Great Peoples and Civilizations of Antiquity, and Their Probable Relation to a Still older Civilization of the Ethiopians or Cushites of Arabia*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1874), p.134

⁵⁰ William Smith, *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, (Grand Rapid, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1884), p.432

⁵¹ Socrates, p. 57

⁵² Moosa(trans.), p. 161

⁵³ Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, et.al(trans.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.286

city of India, and was buried there.”⁵⁴ More missionary fields of Saint Thomas listed by Purchas as:

Saint Thomas called Didymus, preached to the Parthians, as Origen, and after him Eusebius have written: Gregorie Nazianzene addeth the Indians: Chrysostome saith, he whitens the black Ethiopians: Thodoret reciteth the Parthians, Persians, Medes, Brachmans, Indians and the adjoining nations.⁵⁵

The missionary field of Thomas in India is verified as “Thomas was first described as apostle to the Indians in 378 by Ephrem the Syrian, then in 389 by Gregory of Nazianz, and again in 410 by Gaudentius, in 420 by Jerome, and in 431 by Paulinus of Nola.”⁵⁶ The association of Saint Thomas with India is expressed as “It is the constant tradition of the Eastern Church that the apostle Thomas evangelized India, and there is no historian, no poet, no breviary, no liturgy and no writer of any kind who, having the opportunity of speaking of Thomas, does not associate his name with India.”⁵⁷

Besides Thomas, Saint Bartholomew was another apostle of India. There are ample sources that signify that Bartholomew was in India to preach the Gospel of Christ. For instance, Purchas informs us that “Saint Bartholomew (saith Chrysostome) passed into Armenia major and instructed the Lycaones; Sophronius addes the Albanians, and the Indians termed fortunate: Origen saith the hither India; Socrates India next to Ethiopia.”⁵⁸ Similarly, Dorotheous, as cited by Jacobus, states that “Bartholomew preached to men of India, and delivered to them the Gospel after Matthew in their proper tongue”⁵⁹. As stated by Walker, Saint Bartholomew healed the daughter of King Polymius of India, who was suffering from an evil spirit and as a result the king and his family was baptized by Bartholomew.⁶⁰ Walker adds that “And the king laid aside his diadem, and followed Bartholomew the apostle.”⁶¹ King Polymius replaced his earthly crown by celestial and became

⁵⁴ Roberts and Donaldson (eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. V, p. 654

⁵⁵ Purchas , p.151

⁵⁶ Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar W. Winkler(trans.), *The Church of the East :A Concise History*,(London &New York : Rout ledge Curzon, 2003), pp.51-52

⁵⁷ Wilkinson, p.294

⁵⁸ Purchas, p.152

⁵⁹ Ellis(ed.), Vol. V, p. 37

⁶⁰ Walker(trans.), p.437

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

bishop of India in accordance with the commandment of Bartholomew the apostle.⁶²

It is evident that both Thomas and Bartholomew were the apostles of India, but the question is whether the India of classical writers is the same as present-day India. Classical writers, namely Herodotus, Diodorus, Pliny the Elder, Strabo, Apollonius of Tyana, Claudius Ptolemy, Cosmas, and even Marco Polo and Friar Jordanus, were unfamiliar with present-day India. These writers and some others use the name "India" either for the empire of ancient Ethiopia in general or for the three kingdoms of Ethiopia in particular. For instance, Virgil, an Italian poet (70-19 BCE) tells us that the Nile that makes Egypt green flows down from swarthy Indians.⁶³ Similarly, Procopius of Caesarea, a historian of the Justinian period (527-565), recounts that "The Nile River, flowing out of India into Egypt, divides that land into two parts as far as the Sea."⁶⁴ In the hagiography of Barlaam and Ioasaph, St. John Damascene of Syria informs us that India is another name for Ethiopia. He reports that "the edifying story that hath come to me, the devout men from the inner land of the Ethiopians, whom our tale calleth Indians, delivered unto me, translated from trustworthy records."⁶⁵ Moreover, the geographical situation of India was bounded by the Red Sea. Regarding this, Diodorus states that "Now India is four-sided in shape, and the side which faces east and that which faces south are embraced by the Great Sea."⁶⁶

Strabo similarly described India as "India, which is the greatest of all nations and the happiest in lot, a nation whose confines reach both to the Eastern Sea and to the Southern Sea of the Atlantic."⁶⁷ The India of the ancients was bounded on the north by the Red Sea and on the east by the Eastern Sea, also known as the Indian or Ethiopian Ocean. From Persian's perspective the Red Sea was called the Southern Sea. Regarding this, Herodotus says that "The land where the Persians dwell reaches to the Southern Sea, that sea which is

⁶² *Ibid.* , p. 439

⁶³ H.Rushton Fairclough(trans.), *Virgil With an English Translation*,(London: William Heinemann, Vol. I,1916), p.217

⁶⁴ H.B. Dewing(trans.), *Procopius With An English Translation*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, Vol. VII, 1971), p. 363

⁶⁵ G. R. Woodward Mattingly(trans.), *St. John Damascene: Barlaam and Ioasaph with an English Translation*, (London: William Heinemann Ltd,1937), p.5

⁶⁶ C. H. Old father (trans.), *Diodorus of Sicily with an English Translation*,(London: William Heinemann Ltd, Vol. II,1967), p.3

⁶⁷ Horace L. Jones (trans.), *The Geography of Strabo with an English Translation*, (London: William Heinemann Ltd, Vol. I, 1960), p. 497

called Red.”⁶⁸ Herodotus also adds that “These Indians dwell far away from Persians southwards, and were not subjects of king Darius.”⁶⁹ The appellation India is derived from the river Indus. Concerning this; Isidore states that “India is so called from the river Indus, by which it is bounded on the west. It stretches from the South Sea to the place where the sun rises, and reaches in the north up to the Caucasus range.”⁷⁰ River Indus is another name of Phison of the Old Testament. Concerning this, Cosmas states that “Phison is the river of India, which some call Indus or Ganges.”⁷¹ Josephus similarly reports that “Phison (a name meaning “multitude”) runs towards India and falls into the sea, being called by Greeks Ganges.”⁷² St. Jerome describes the same river as “Ganges-called in Holy Scripture Pison-which compasseth the whole land of Havilah.”⁷³ Havilah or Euilat is the biblical name of ancient India and its location described in the Old Testament in association with the original abode of Ishmaelite. “And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur, which is before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria” (Gen.25:18). In connection with Euilat, Cosmas states that “The sons of Ham, Cush and Misraim ... Saba and Euilat; that is the Homerites and Indians, for Saba is situated in the Homerite country, and Euilat is in India.”⁷⁴ The relationship of Indians and Homerites also is described as “these Indians are now called Homeritae instead of their old name of Sabaeans, which they received from the city of Saba, the chief city of the whole nation.”⁷⁵ Malalas (491-578) reports about the India of the ancients as “Andas, who became a Christian, reigned over the Axoumite Indians.”⁷⁶ Since the India of the ancients was extended from the Eastern Sea to the Sinai Peninsula, Ophir, the place where King Solomon fetches gold, was part of the Indian Territory. Regarding this, Josephus tells us that “anciently called

⁶⁸ A. D. Godley(trans.), *Herodotus with an English Translation*,(London: Heinemann Ltd, Vol. II, 1921), p. 237

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* , p. 129

⁷⁰ Bamey, Lewis, et al(trans.), p. 286

⁷¹ J. W. McCrindle (trans. & ed.), *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, An Egyptian Monk*,(London: Hakluyt Society, 1897), p.75

⁷² H. St. J. Thackeray(trans.), *Josephus with an English Translation*,(London: Heinemann Ltd, Vol. IV, 1961), p.19

⁷³ Philip Schaff(ed.), *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*,(New York: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1892), p.421

⁷⁴ McCrindle(trans.&ed.), *The Christian* , p. 373

⁷⁵ Edward Walford(trans.), *The Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen, Comprising History of the Church from A. D.324 to A. D. 440 and the Ecclesiastical History of Philostorgius, as Epitomized by Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople*,(London: Henry G. Bohn, 1885), p.437

⁷⁶ Elizabeth Jeffreys, et.al.(trans.), *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, (Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1986), p.248

Sopheir [Ophir], but now the Land of Gold; it belongs to India.”⁷⁷ As Ophir was in India or Ethiopia the testimony in the Old Testament presented as “And King Solomon made a navy of ships in Eziongaber, which is beside Eloth, on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom. And Hiram sent in the navy his servants shipmen that had knowledge of the sea ... And they came to Ophir, and fetched thence gold.”(1K 9: 26-28).

The India of ecclesiastical writers, where the apostles Thomas and Bartholomew have been assigned, was divided into three kingdoms. The division is reported as “Historians declare that India is divided into three parts; and the first is said to end at Ethiopia, and the second at Media, and the third completes the country: and the one portion of it ends in the dark, and the other in the ocean.”⁷⁸

The three kingdoms of India without specific names and locations mentioned by Malalas in association with the four kingdoms of Ethiopians as follows:

The emperor of the Axoumitai is further into the interior than the Homeritai, while the emperor of the Homeritai is near Egypt. It is through the country of the Homeritai that the Roman traders reach Axoum and the Indian empires further in to the interior. For there are seven empires of Indians and Ethiopians; three of the Indians and four of the Ethiopians.⁷⁹

In the chronicle of John of Nikiu, the aforementioned kingdoms stated as “Now the country of the Ethiopians was not far distant from Egypt: it comprised three Indian states and four Abyssinian states.”⁸⁰ Marco Polo designated the three kingdoms of India, as Greater India, Lesser India and Second or Middle India, which is called Abascia.⁸¹ Polo adds that “Abascia is an extensive country, termed the Middle or Second India.”⁸² Moreover, Polo manifested the missionary activity of St. Thomas in Ethiopia as follows:

The conversion of these people to the Christian faith was the work of the glorious apostle, St. Thomas, who, having preached the gospel in the kingdom of Nubia, and converted its inhabitants, afterwards visited Abascia,

⁷⁷ Thackeray(trans.),, Vol. V, p.661

⁷⁸ Walker(trans.), P.429

⁷⁹ Jeffreys, et.al(trans.), p. 251

⁸⁰ R. H. Charles (trans.), *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu, Translated from Zotenberg's Ethiopic Text*, (London: Williams & Norgate, 1916), p. 141

⁸¹ Ernest Rhys(ed.), *The Travel of Marco Polo, the Venetian*,(London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1914), p. 398

⁸² *Ibid.*

and there, by the influence of his discourses and the performance of miracles, produced the same effect. He subsequently went to abide in the province of Maabar; where, after converting an infinite number of persons, he received, as we have already mentioned, the crown of martyrdom, and was buried on the spot.⁸³

Chrysostom makes clear that Thomas was the apostle of the Wise Men who brought gifts for the infant Jesus. He states that “when Thomas came into the parts of the three kings which came to worship Our Lord he baptized them, and they were helpers and aiders of Our Lord and of the Christian faith.”⁸⁴ Above all, Chrysostom indisputably states that “Thomas whitens the Ethiopians through baptism.”⁸⁵ Several church historians acknowledge that the India of Rufinus is Ethiopia but only when it is associated with Frumentius. For instance, Butler in his narrative about Frumentius, acknowledges that “Farther India, which name the ancients gave to Ethiopia.”⁸⁶ But in relation to Bartholomew who has preached the Gospel in nearer India or in Ethiopia, he entirely denies that “By the name of Indies, the ancients sometimes mean only Arabia and Persia; but here they speak of proper India; for they make mention of the Brachmans of that country, famous over the whole world for their pretended skill in philosophy.”⁸⁷ This is a double standard. Regarding the India of the ancients, Rae assures that “and it was Abyssinia that Rufinus and his followers, Socrates, Sozomen, and other historians, called by the name of India.”⁸⁸ Furthermore, Rae dismissed the claim that the present day India received Christianity from apostles as:

The fact is that Southern India received Christianity, not from any of the ancient seats of the church, not from Jerusalem or Antioch, not from Alexandria or Rome or Constantinople, but from the Nestorian Patriarchate on the banks of the Tigris; not by way of the Red Sea, but by way of the Persian Gulf; not in the fourth century, nor until the beginning of the sixth.⁸⁹

In the Chaldean Breviary found at the church of St. Thomas of Malabar, we read that “Through St. Thomas the Chinese [Seres] and Ethiopians were

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 399

⁸⁴ Ellis.(ed.), Vol. II, p.148

⁸⁵ Purchas, p. 151

⁸⁶ Butler, Vol. X. , pp.292-293

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* ,Dublin, Vol. VIII, 1866, p. 314

⁸⁸ George Milne Rae, *The Syrian Church in India*,(Edinburgh &London: William Blackwood &Sons, 1892), p.96

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 102

converted to the truth.”⁹⁰ Here the appellation Seres altered fancifully into Chinese by Jesuit missionaries. Accordingly, today the ancient history of Seres is distorted to be the history of China. In reality, classical sources signify that the people of Seres were situated within the ancient Empire of Ethiopia. In relation to this, Lucan tells us that “The first nation to behold him [Nile] are the Seres.”⁹¹ Ptolemy similarly reports that “The country of the Seres and their metropolis was situated to the north of the Sinai.”⁹² Besides, Arrian says that “The Seres, situated between the rivers Hydaspes and Indus.”⁹³ Moreover, Ambrose of Milan states that the Abyssinian bishop, Museus, had ‘travelled almost everywhere in the country of the Seres.’⁹⁴ The geographical location of Seres laid south of the Red Sea and their race were Ethiopian.⁹⁵

Heliodorus indisputably ascertained that the Seres were the people of Ethiopia. He tells us that in the battle between Emperor Hydaspes of Ethiopia and Oroondates of Persia, the soldiers of the former were recruited from Meroe, Troglodites, Blemmies and Seres.⁹⁶ He also adds that envoys from Seres brought a gift to Hydaspes two garments, one purple and another white that was spun from the spiders yarn and in return Hydaspes released prisoners of Seres.⁹⁷ The Seres were the inventors of silk, wool and paper. Some of their activity mentioned by Marcellinus as “They have numbers of shining groves, the trees of through continued watering produce a crop like the fleece of a sheep, which the natives make into a delicate wool, and spin into a kind of fine cloth.”⁹⁸ Concerning the commerce between Seres and Roman merchants, Pliny reports that “And by the lowest reckoning, India, Seres and the Arabian

⁹⁰ Charles D. Van Tuyl(trans.), *China Illustrata by Athanasius Kircher*,(Mukogee, Oklahoma: 1986), pp. 51-52

⁹¹ J. D. Duff(trans.), *Lucan with an English Translation*,(London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1962), p. 613

⁹² J. W. McCrindle (trans.&ed.), *Ancient India as Described by Ptolemy*, (London: Trubner & Co. 1885), p. 29

⁹³ John Rooke(trans.), *Arrian's History of Alexander's Expedition*,(London: T. Warrall, et al. Vol. II, 1792), p.290

⁹⁴ Wilkinson, p.52

⁹⁵ Jacob Bryant, *A New System, or An Analysis of Ancient Mythology*,(London: T. Payne, Mews-Gate, et al.,Vol. III, 1776), p. 554

⁹⁶ W. E. Henley (ed.), *An Æthiopian History Written in Greek by Heliodorus Englished by Thomas Underdowne Anno 1587 with an Introduction by Charles Whibley*,(London: David Nutt, 1895), pp. 244-246

⁹⁷ Ibid. , p.278

⁹⁸ C. D. Yonge (trans.), *The Roman History of Ammianus Marcellius, During the Reigns of the Emperors Constantius, Julian, Jovian, Valentinian & Valens*,(London: George Bell & Sons, 1894), p. 342

Peninsula take from our empire 100 million sesterces every year—that is the sum which our luxuries and our women cost us.”⁹⁹ It was from Seres that silkworm and then the production of silk was introduced to the Roman Empire of Byzantine during Justinian II (527-565) with the help of Indian or Ethiopian monks.¹⁰⁰

3. “The Conversion of Aksumites or Indians by Frumentius”

As stated above, Rufinus tells us that Matthew was the apostle of Ethiopia and Bartholomew to Indians adjoining to Ethiopia but in his narrative about Frumentius, neither the name Ethiopia nor Axum is mentioned but merely farther India. Besides, Rufinus says nothing about the specific year when Meropius was killed and Frumentius was consecrated by Athanasius. At the end of the story, Rufinus asserts that “These events we came to know of not from popular rumour, but from the report of Aedesius himself, who had been Frumentius’s companion, and who later became a presbyter in Tyre.”¹⁰¹ But, when we examine the whole story, it appears, not an eye-witness report, rather hearsay. Had it been a direct report from Aedesius himself, the story would be supported at least how they were grown up and learn the language of Indians, because according to Rufinus they were small boys. As to the coming of the two boys Rufinus states that “One Meropius as well, a philosopher of Tyre, decided to go to India for the same reason; he had with him two small boys whom as his relatives he was instructing letters. The younger was called Aedesius and the older Frumentius.”¹⁰² The reason why Meropius was killed by coastguards and spared the life of boys is justified by Socrates as:

It so happened that the treaty between the Romans and Indians had been violated a little before his arrival. The Indians therefore having seized the philosopher and those who sailed with him, killed them all except his two young kinsmen; but sparing them from compassion for their tender age, they sent them as a gift to the king of the Indians.¹⁰³

Rufinus failed to consider how the two boys grew up at the court of Aksum but simply jumped to narrate about their promotion as a cupbearer and secretary. What is more, Rufinus rushes that Frumentius became bishop of

⁹⁹ H. Rackham (trans.), *Pliny’s Natural History*, (London: William Heinemann Ltd, Vol. IV, 1960), p.63

¹⁰⁰ Dewing (trans.), *Procopius*, Vol. V,), pp.227-231

¹⁰¹ Amidon Rufinus , p. 396

¹⁰² *Ibid.* , p.394

¹⁰³ Bagster, Ecclesiastical, p.70

farther India, without informing us how he attended his church education. The journey of Frumentius to Alexandria and his consecration is stated:

Frumentius journeyed to Alexandria, saying that it was not right to conceal what the Lord had done. He therefore explained to the bishop everything that had been done and urged him to provide for some worthy man to send as bishop to the already numerous Christians and churches built on barbarian soil. Then Athanasius, for he had recently received priesthood ... ‘What other man can we find like you, in whom is God’s spirit as in you, and who could achieve such things as these? And having conferred on him the priesthood, he ordered him to return with the Lord’s grace to the place from he had come.¹⁰⁴

Some of the narratives of Rufinus are untrustworthy. Firstly, the assertion that Frumentius went to Alexandria without the consent of the king of India and became bishop of Indians is implausible. The researcher believes that Egypt at that time was a colony of the Roman Empire but India or Ethiopia was one of the great empires of the world. Secondly, to be a bishop Frumentius had to attend church education because while he was with Meropius, Frumentius was learning only letters. As to his church education, Asres tells us that Enbäräm, chief of the priests of Axum, was the teacher of Frumentius.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, Rufinus himself acknowledged that there had been numerous Christians and churches built in India or Aksum before Frumentius was consecrated as a bishop. Above all, Rufinus, and other subsequent writers namely, Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret never say that Frumentius converted the king of India or Aksum.

Contrary to sources, virtually all later writers claim that Frumentius was the first bishop of Ethiopia and even some writers dare to say as he was the first to introduce Christianity into Ethiopia. Among Ethiopian writers the late professor Sergew Hable Sellassie was one of them who acknowledges the introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia by Frumentius. He asserts that “there is no doubt that Christianity was introduced into Ethiopia at that time. For this, we have literary and archaeological evidence.”¹⁰⁶ Ullendorff likewise asserts that “The circumstances attendant upon the introduction of Christianity into

¹⁰⁴ Amidon , pp. 395-396

¹⁰⁵ Asres Yenesew, *YäKam Mätasäbiya: Yä Ityopia Fidäl Mäsärätnät Mätawäqiya*, (Asmara: Kokebe tsebah Printing Press, 1951.), p.56

¹⁰⁶ Sergew Hable Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*, (Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1972), p.100

Ethiopia are sufficiently well known. It occurred about the middle of the fourth century and is attested in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* by Rufinus.¹⁰⁷

Butcher even dares to assert that Christianity came from Egypt and declares that “the Church of Abyssinia was found as an offshoot of the Egyptian Church, ... Before this, Christianity had never taken root in that country, though the people claimed a far-off connection with the Jewish and practiced many Jewish rites.”¹⁰⁸ It is very disappointing that nearly all church historians who acknowledged Frumentius was bishop of Ethiopia refrain to accept that Matthew was the apostle of Ethiopia. As stated above, Ethiopia was a missionary field of apostles and this attested is also by Theodoret as:

They have induced not only the Romans, and those who live under their empire, but also the Scythians, Samaritans, Indians, Ethiopians, Persians, Seres, Hyrcanians, Britons, Cimmerians, and Germans, to receive the law of the crucified saviour; and in short have preached it to all nations, and to every class of men.¹⁰⁹

Besides, before the Council of Nicaea, in a religious council held at Alexandria called a Golden Circle, Ethiopians were participants and their participation is reported as:

Just as Christianity began to take its present shape, there was a grand assembling of all the learned men of the world, who came from India under the name of Gymnosopists, who came from Abyssinia as Geezaleze; ... But it was overthrown by the consummate scoundrel Constantine; and ever since then you have been made to carry a weight that almost crushes you to the earth.¹¹⁰

Furthermore, the Coptic Synaxarium tells us that Maximus, 15th Patriarch of Alexandria (264- 282), wrote a letter to Ethiopia so as to inform the decision of Antioch:

Shortly after his enthronement, he received a letter from the council of Antioch, which included the grounds for excommunicating Paul of Samosata and his followers. He read it to the priests of Alexandria and issued a letter

¹⁰⁷ Edward Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians: An Introduction to Country and People*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961, rpt), p.100

¹⁰⁸ E. L. Butcher, *The Story of the Church of Egypt*, (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., Vol. I, 1897), p. 151

¹⁰⁹ M. L' Abbe Huc, *Christianity in China, Tartar, and Thibet*, (London: Longman, Vol. I, 1857), p.20

¹¹⁰ Roberts, p. 301

and sent it along with the letter of the council to all the cities of Egypt, Ethiopia and Nubia.¹¹¹

All the aforementioned sources signify that Christianity had already been introduced into Ethiopia before Frumentius. So, the claim that Frumentius is the first to introduce Christianity into Ethiopia is really unconvincing. Let alone to be the first person to introduce Christianity in Ethiopia, even in the consecration as bishop of Ethiopia, Frumentius was preceded by several bishops including John, who attended the Council of Nicaea in 325 and put his signature to his acts.¹¹²

Conclusion

The people of Ethiopia have been preached by several apostles. As stated above, Matthew, Thomas, Bartholomew, Andrew and Matthias have been assigned to preach the Gospel of Christ in different part of Ethiopia. However, the church history of Ethiopia is misrepresented by later writers of both local and foreign. Consequently, the history of Christianity in Ethiopia is perceived as if it was introduced in the fourth century CE by Frumentius. This misrepresentation can be expressed in two ways. Firstly, though Rufinus himself attested that Matthew was the apostle of Ethiopians, many church historians refrain to acknowledge this. In contrast, these writers invariably use the work of Rufinus as the main source to support their argument of Frumentius being the first to introduce Christianity into Ethiopia. Secondly, farther India or Interior India, where Frumentius was consecrated is acknowledged by these writers as it was the territory of Ethiopia. Conversely, Nearer India and Greater India where St. Bartholomew and St. Thomas were assigned respectively are associated with the so called proper India. To this researcher, this approach entails a double standard.

For genuine writers, it is evident that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is an apostolic church. Christianity in Ethiopia was a phenomenon of the first century CE. It was first introduced by Bakos, Eunuch of Queen Candace, and subsequently expanded by the apostles of Jesus Christ. Besides, the Gospel of Matthew found in Ethiopia by Pantaenus, the letter of Maximus, and the participation of Ethiopians at the annual council of Alexandria are all living testimonies to the fact that Christianity had been introduced before Frumentius. For the ancients the appellation "India" was connected either

¹¹¹ The Coptic Synaxarium, p.301

¹¹² Huc, P.37

with the three kingdoms of Ethiopia in particular or the entire Empire of Ethiopia in general. Likewise, to associate the name Ethiopia with the Sudan only and the appellation Seres with China is really inaccurate.

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