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## ***On the Factors of Ethio-Egyptian Origin of Classical Political Thought: A Study in Dialectics***

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the circumstance and factors of Ethio-Egyptian origin of circumspect and classical political thought. In countering the widely held Greek origination thesis, the paper investigates and identifies salient factors that support the Ethio-Egyptian origin of circumspect and classical political thought. While relying on documentary instrument of data generation, description and analysis, the paper probes and identifies ancient Egypt's outstanding specificities, and argues on the salient factors in support of the Ethio-Egyptian origin of circumspect and classical political thought.

**Key Words and Phrases:** Circumspect, Classical, political thought, autochthony, Ethio-Egypt, Greek thesis, Philosopher-priest and Mystery school system

### **1. Introduction**

The notion that circumspect classical political thought and theorization germinated and matured in ancient Greece from circa 500 to about 250 BC; is a widely held thesis especially in Western scholarship. The Greek thesis, which ascribes critical political thinking to the ancient Greek, is often supported by a number of factors, ranging from the claims of the existence of professionals, functional classification of society to ancient Greek being free from foreign subjugation. In contesting this thesis, the paper avers that the factors are much more valid for Ethio-Egypt than for the Greeks.

In countering the Greek thesis, which holds that critical political thinking was an autochthonous product of ancient Greek; we pose two interrelated questions. What is the specific character of Ethio-Egyptian autochthony, cosmology and attainments? Which factors support the Ethio-Egyptian origination of circumspect and classical political thought?

To argue these, we are employing documentary instrument of data generation and interpretative mode of analysis. Accordingly, the paper will dig into existing relevant records on the specificities of Ethio-Egypt's standing so as to generate concrete evidence to support our salient propositions. Accordingly, the paper is divided into five interrelated parts. Following this introduction is a discourse of some conceptual and contextual issues. The third part explores Ethio-Egypt's autochthony, cosmology and attainment, while the next addresses the specific and objective factors that attest to Ethio-Egyptian origination

those interpretations are also found applicable at other times and places.

Although as Thomson (1969) notes, a genius is seldom typical of any collectivity, nor is he or she (the genius) really the best source of information about that collectivity as a whole, it is also important to note that the ideas of a great thinker are not necessarily or even probably 'representative' of the thoughts of his time and age. This is typically the case with St Augustine, Niccolo Machiavelli and Karl Marx and their treatises. This notwithstanding, it is still necessary to appreciate the fact that a thinker is by and large a collectivity's product. Thus, though the genius may not be the best source of information about the collectivity as a whole, his or her ideas must necessarily reflect part of the matrix in the interpretation of social reality within that specific environment. In other words, the content of a thinker's thought need not be an unrelated abstraction or 'a strange event' deserving to be propagated or expunged by force. This is the tradition we observe even within the tenets of post-medieval Western scholarship as attested to in the writings of Martin Luther and the social contract theorists. Simply stated, a salient character of every valid political thought is its interface with the social environment. This is because political thoughts are organically related to their social reality and praxis.

In a very strict sense, cosmology refers to the science or philosophy of the universe. In this work, it connotes more or less a focus on the historical experiences and social realities that shape and inform individual or group thought perspective, orientations and world view. Accordingly, it is possible for a specific political thought to be a product of other-influenced or other-ignited thinking. This explains why most Africans trained in the West or in Western-oriented institutions, most often have sympathy for or are reflective of Western prisms, attitudes and processes. Such alignments and influences are further sustained by the penchant of contemporary Western institutions to donate books and information transmission, via CNN, BBC, VOA, France 24, Aljazeera and so on, to the rest of the world. The difference today, that is, in the contemporary scholarship, is that it has become fashionable, indeed imperative to clearly acknowledge sources.

Until about the last quarter of the last century, the view that Africa has no history and heritage was widely though erroneously canvassed by a broad spectrum of writers. The vogue then, as we see in Adetoro (1976) for instance, was to portray Africa as an arena of lawlessness and largely uncivilized, until the coming of post medieval Eurocentric order. As a matter of fact, particularly during the heydays of European colonialism in Africa, this largely ahistorical and erroneous view was so widespread that Africa and Africans were considered a land and people bereft of any heritage. In his work *Philosophy, History and Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, for example, George W.F. Hegel 1770 to 1831, appeared to be an ideologue in the denial and suppression of the Ethio-Egyptian origin of Greek philosophy and civilization. In one of his theses, Hegel chose to assert that Africans were incapable of any development and culture. Nothing can be further from the truth.

There are also evidences that deliberate and incidental lessons which deny Africa's capacities, achievements and contributions to civilization have been taken. In the hey-days of *Negritude* for instance, Leopold Senghor, was known to have declared

Egyptian language is an African language and has close affinity with the Coptic and Wolaf. Hieroglyphic records show that the Egyptians described and referred to themselves as BLACK. The Greek records also referred to them as BLACK. There are sufficient examples. Scholars have also studied the blood group and skin melanin of the mummies of Pharaohs and reported that they were consistent with the Black African types (Onwuejeogwu et al, 2000:197).

What all these amount to is that to argue, for instance, that ancient Egyptians were not blacks, or that blacks played "peripheral role in the development of Egyptians" (Davidson,1991:2) is to say the least despicable and not in tune with historical evidence on the ground.

However, and amazingly too, in most main stream literature particularly in Western scholarship; the elaborate, well-organized and much higher level of political thought and praxis that had thrived amongst the ancient Egyptians hundreds of years before Plato and Aristotle is either ignored or reduced to feebleness. Also, hardly mentioned in Western literature on classical Greek political thought is the fact that these Greek originators[?] of political thought and theorization - Socrates, Plato and Aristotle - embarked on and in fact had sustained contact with and training in Egyptian Mystery School System - the foremost educational and socio-political institution of the Ethio-Egyptian epoch.

Oddly, in their work, Sabine and Thorson (1973) came close, though grudgingly, to admitting and confirming the high level of holistic - all embracing - systemization and organic scientific-ness attained by Ethio-Egyptians when they alluded to the fact that the astronomers of ancient Egypt

.... observing that all varying activity in the sky take place in a celestial path way  $14^{\circ}$  wide in the behavior of the sun, moon and planets in the various constellations was expressed in the mythic form but it was observed and calculated in an exact and highly imaginative and mathematical way. These circumstances [*instead of saying 'ancient Egyptians'!*] built up an extremely complex occult religio-scientific set of teachings preserved by a priesthood whose numbers were masters of mathematics, astronomy [*which was undifferentiated from what we now call astrology*], a complex style of writing and the interpretation of the myths.

As a matter of fact, Sabine and Thorson (1973:10) also admit, albeit scantily, that the ancient Egyptians were "able to perfect a relatively static [stable?] style of life and thought. The Egyptian style of thought provides an important and illuminating contrast to the Greek invention [sic] of philosophy". Curiously, despite these admissions the highly

sociology of knowledge, Karl Marx (1818 - 1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820 - 1895) argue in *German Ideology*, for instance, that peoples ideologies including their class interest, and more broadly in the social and economic circumstances in which they live. In their words: "it is men, who in developing their material intercourse, change, along with this real existence, their thinking and the product of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but conscious by life". The import of this is that material conditions are also critical elements in the formation of individual and group norms, ideologies and logical thoughts.

Karl Mannheim's (1929, 1936) *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to Sociology of Knowledge* stands out as the most eloquent discourse and impetus to the growth of the theory of knowledge. Mannheim identified two types of knowledge. The first, which he refers to it as true knowledge is based on science, and the other as knowledge based on social class. Corollarily, he identified two types of ideas: 'utopian' and 'ideology'. 'Utopian' ideas support underprivileged groups, while 'ideological' ideas support privileged groups. In his analysis, while arguing that ideologies are used in the stabilization of social order and the wish-dreams that are employed when transformation of that same order is attempted, Mannheim observes a trend towards centralization and the growth of large, powerful and impersonal organizations as well as controlling influence of powerful elites. For him, because centralization trend is inevitable, power should rest in the hands of what he calls 'unbiased intellectuals'. According to Mannheim, the 'unbiased intellectuals' consists of free floating intellectuals who are loosely anchored to the class structure of the society could most perfectly realize this form of truth by creating a 'dynamic synthesis' of the ideals of other groups.

From the issues raised in the foregoing theoretical discourse, it is obvious that there is glaring interface between human logical thought and objective conditions. The linkage offers us a veritable theoretical framework for examining not only the factors of Ethio-Egyptian origination of circumspect and classical political thought but also the social environment and objective conditions that engendered the germination thought-content and processes. At this point, it is necessary that we also state the hypotheses we deem tangent to this paper.

Our central hypothetical propositions are twofold. The first is that the specificities of ancient Egyptian autochthony, cosmology and attainments constitute authentic crucible for the origination and maturation of circumspect political thought and theorization. Secondly, Ethio-Egyptian origination of circumspect classical political thought is supported by a wide range of factors. At this point, it is necessary that we explore the salient issues in Ethio-Egyptian autochthony, cosmology and attainments.

### **3. Issues in Ethio-Egyptian Autochthony, Cosmology and Attainments**

Our major concern in this section is to investigate and identify the specificities of ancient Egyptian autochthony, cosmology and attainments that provide authentic crucible for the origination and maturation of formidable political thought and praxis. In this regard, we note that the historical accounts of human activities in various parts of Africa

generally held that the sacrifices practiced among the Ethiopians are those which are the most pleasing to heaven.

Thus, in Diodorus's account, the founding of religious practices and the cult of the dead, the invention of hieroglyphic writing and political institutions are all traceable to the ancient Ethiopians who founded ancient Egypt. This is why for instance "the belief [by ancient Egyptians] that their kings were gods, the very special attention which they paid to their burials, and many other matters of a similar nature were Ethiopian practices" (Diodorus in Cregert: 36). In tandem, ancient Egypt attests to their Ethiopian roots. In the words of Dubios (1965:17) "Egyptians looked upon themselves, as the source of Egypt and declared according to Diodorus Siculus that Egyptian laws and customs were of Ethiopian origin." The import of all these is that the larger part of Egyptian custom was Ethiopian, and therefore rooted in African experience.

The organization of the political structures and processes of ancient Egypt attest not only to her primacy or cradle status but also the sophistication of her political thought and praxis. Whereas Nupata in Nubia is acknowledged by many as the first embryonic state, archaeologists and political historians attest that Kemet or ancient Egypt was the first full fledged national state in history. In her article, titled "Ancient Egyptian Government and Bureaucracy" Marie Parsons (2004) a notable Egyptologist [particularly Egyptian archaeology, political history and religion], underlined the fact that:

About five 5200 years ago, King Menes laid down the oldest legislative system in human history when he issued the law of 'Tehut', god of wisdom as the only law applicable all over Egypt. He also made Memphis the first unified and centralized state in history, with an organized system of government, administration, judiciary, education, police, army, and so on. Ancient Egyptian antiquities speak much of how advanced their government and administrative system were, the king (Pharaoh) was the head of state who appointed the great Treasurer or Tax Collector. Local government was successfully applied in Egypt since the time of old kingdom (in Ogunmodede, 2006:72-73).

While some scholars such as Meyer and Brested in Ogunmodede (2006) traced Ethio-Egypt rise to 3400BC and 3200BC, for many others there are enough grounds to contend that this occurred much earlier. For John Jackson (1980) and Dubois (1965), Egypt started from 8000BC / 10000BC and 4211BC respectively. Based on Manetho's (in Ogunmodede 2006) and Carruther (1994) separate account however, it makes sense to trace Egypt's rise to between fifth to seventh century BC. Before this emergence, Ogunmodede (2006) notes that human societies constituted of diverse and belligerent kingdoms ruled by selfish Princes who were often at war with one another in a manner reminiscent of the Hobbesian state of nature.

It is also important to note that in his book, *the Mediterranean World in Ancient Times*, Sanford (1951:70) provides some useful details on the extent of centralized administration of the Ethio-Egyptian government. In particular, he points out that

priests devoted all their energy to philosophic and interdisciplinary inquiry at the various learning centres attached to various temples. Their disciplined life style encouraged circumspective inquiry into the nature of the cosmos and the social reality.

It is surprising that despite these admissions, albeit grudgingly, Sabine and Thorson (1973) choose to opine that professionalism in ancient Egypt were of no consequence. This opinion notwithstanding, the fact still remains that as a cluster of varied but composite professionals, philosopher-priests were a driving force in the emergence and maturation of political thought and theorization in ancient Egypt. The priestly caste in Ethio-Egypt has all the time necessary to deepen critical and theoretical thoughts. Theirs, were essentially exercises in speculation, complex reality, organic analysis and synthesis of ideas. They were able to attain high grounds in the regard because theirs was a life of state-backed leisure as a result of which they were cushioned from material want. This is very much unlike Greek situation where Socrates, Plato and Aristotle had to continually contend with striving to eke out a living to sustain their intellectual pursuit. As a matter of fact, in his *Metaphysics* Aristotle, generally known as the father of political science, validates this as he clearly explains that "sciences which do not aim at giving (physical) pleasure or the necessities of life were discovered, and first, in the places where men began to have leisure" (in Mckeon in Onyewuenyi: 46). Perhaps that was why, according to Aristotle, (Onyewuenyi, 1994) the mathematical science and (sciences of precise knowledge or philosophy) were founded in Egypt. For there, in ancient Egypt, the priestly castes were state maintained. In this way, the existence of the professionalism of philosopher-priest was a big boost to the germination and maturation of circumspect and classical political thought in Ethio-Egypt.

### ***Factor II: Functional Classification of Society***

As argued in Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2011), much of what Plato - an alumnus and outstanding graduate of Ethio-Egyptian Mystery School System - busied himself with in his advocacy of an ideal state, was based or inferred from what he gathered from political thought and praxis in ancient Egypt. This of course, arose from his observation that the ancient Egyptian society was, by and large, made up of the guardians or rulers, the soldiers and the workers. In line with Plato's concept of justice, the ancient Egyptian society worked well because none of these groups or classes meddled in the affairs of the other classes. The guardians or philosophers made up of the Pharaoh and the philosopher-priests had enough time to engage in disciplined political inquiry.

The implication is that the two non-rational segments of the society, soldiers and workers, were ruled by the guardians, the rational part of the trio. It is only philosophers who can and do use their reasoning to acquire knowledge, and therefore rule the other two lower classes. The point being made therefore is that the functional classification of Ethio-Egyptian society into (a) guardians - rulers and philosopher-priests (b) soldiers and (c) the workers played a major role in the germination and maturation of circumspect

as well as their impact on the Greco-Roman civilization later on, Onyewuenyi (1994: 63) observes with regret, that "these administrative ideas were to be copied by Greece and Rome centuries later, and yet the historians teach that the Western world through Greece and Rome did not borrow from Egypt (Africa)". During its last millennium, Egypt started showing signs of weakness as it was conquered in turns by her neighbours. Until the looting of her libraries and the deliberate appropriation of her institutions of learning, which attended Alexander the Great's pillage, Egypt continued to serve as world's centre of learning. The implication of all these, is that most of what has long been ascribed to 'classical Greek' were actually not products of autochthonous Greek's social and physical environments.

#### ***Factor V: Robust System of Laws***

The Ethio-Egyptian society was guided by an intricate set of laws which evolved to ensure that the different institutions and processes of state functioned within the confines of the duties assigned them. The laws relied on and reinforced their understanding of nature. The Egyptian legal system and law school were also famous. For example, one of its many students, Moses, of biblical reckoning, has been acknowledged as a foremost law-giver.

It is a known fact that Moses, generally known in the history of the Jews as the lawgiver, was a graduate of the Egyptian Mystery System law schools. Having been adopted as a child by Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus, 2: 1-10), Moses was naturally initiated into the school's secrets, mysteries and wisdom. It is accordingly important to note that he duly imbibed ancient Egypt's legal ethos and scholarly traditions, and utilized same in later life challenges which would include the Decalogue and authorship of the first five books of the bible. Thus, in a significant sense the practices and doctrines propagated by Moses were also fired by his training in the law school of the Egyptian Mystery System School, as affirmed in the bible.

The fact that the Ethio-Egyptian Mystery System schools originated and perfected a formidable legal system is further confirmed by no less a personality than Isocrates. A pan-Hellenist, Isocrates could not in his *Bousiris* hide his admiration for Egypt, and its people, for the perfection of their constitution. Accordingly, he praised those responsible for the Egyptian legal system, which he considered an important factor in the cultural progress of ancient Egypt. He also wished that his own native Sparta in its own government had adhered more to the Egyptian model (Bernal in Onyewuenyi: 54). There is thus no doubt that the factor of robust system of laws constitutes a logical fillip to the germination and growth of circumspect political thought in Ethio-Egypt.

#### ***Factor VI: Scientific Approach***

Science has been variously defined. While to Idike (2002: 1), it is "the discovery of the secrets of nature by man through rigorous thinking" to Nagel (in Abel 1976: 107), the essence of science hinges on the fact that it "seeks to discover and formulate in general terms the conditions under which events occur". Following the same trajectory,

grow food, as well as extract minerals from the subsoil. Thus, ancient Egypt, otherwise known as the Ethio-Egyptian state, was not only the first to institute authoritative or overwhelming political organization and law but also the originators or first in several other fields of human endeavour, including medicine, mathematics, astronomy and so on!

The greatness of ancient Egypt and the seminal status of her civilization has been documented by a number of Africanist writers. For example, in his work, *The African Origin of Greek Philosophy: An Exercise in Afrocentism*, Onyewuenyi (1994:64) points out that at

The height of Egyptian civilization and scholarship, with its temples, pyramids, architecture, writing, philosophy, science and art of government, had been achieved centuries before the existence of Greece as a people or as an empire. In fact, Greece and parts of Europe had been provinces of the Egyptian empire and had sent early tributes and taxes to the Egyptian pharaohs.

Arguing along the same line, Chiekh Anta Diop (1991:46) points out that it is necessary to state that

Fourteen hundred years before Roman power, Egypt created centralized empire in the world. It might be believed that a vague bond united the Egyptian emperor and his vassals. This was not the case. One can hardly imagine today, the degree of centralization in the Egyptian empire and the efficacy of its administration. 'Royal messengers' a kind of *missi dominici* went through the different regions of the empire delivering messages from the pharaoh. The generals were in charge of regularly making inspecting tours in the conquered territory. A royal postal service circulated over roads created by the Egyptian administration, stalked out with military stations and water tanks for re-supply.

In the light of the foregoing it makes to posit that ancient Egypt is the first to institute overwhelming political institution. The import of all these is that it helps to come to terms with the fact that Ancient Egypt was not only free from foreign subjugation, but that it was also a primary imperial power.

## 5. Concluding Analysis

In this paper, we have explored the circumstance and factors of Ethio-Egyptian origin of circumspect and classical political thought. We have argued that unlike the widely held Greek origination thesis, that circumspect classical political thought in ancient Egypt was interwoven with practice and activism. In doing this the paper probed and identified ancient Egypt's outstanding specificities, and argued on the salient factors in support of the Ethio-Egyptian origin of circumspect and classical political thought. Our main thrust has been that given the level attained by ancient Egypt before its gradual decline, political thought and praxis attained a very high level that greatly affected the



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