

AETHIOPIAN MEMNON: AFRICAN OR ASIATIC?

Prof. F. Heichelheim has recently attempted to fix the composition date of either the Aethiopsis or the Little Iliad to 663–656 B. C.¹⁾ Ctesias' story of the Assyrian king Teutamus sending the Aethiopian Memnon to assist Priam, an Assyrian vassal²⁾, could have originated, his argument runs, only at a time when Assyria actually did control Aethiopia and the Troad. And such a time was 663–656 B. C.; for in 663 the Aethiopians of Upper Egypt recognized nominal Assyrian overlordship, and after Psammetichus' revolt in 656 these Aethiopians would no longer have considered themselves subject to Assyria.

But there is every reason to believe that the Memnon of the Aethiopsis was an Asiatic Aethiopian, not an African³⁾. Son of Dawn, Memnon was the Easterner incarnate. The Aethiopians of the epic poets lived on the eastern shore of Ocean⁴⁾. Renewed contact with Egypt disclosed the southern Aethiopians, and the Greeks who fought in the service of Psammetichus II against the Africans of the Upper Nile perhaps enjoyed thinking that they had fought against Aethiopians. But Memnon was not immediately transferred to the African branch of the Aethiopians. Aeschylus gave him a Cissian lineage⁵⁾. Herodotus knew nothing about an African Memnon, but several times mentions Memnon in connection with Susa⁶⁾. In fact, Memnon did not become an African Aethiopian until Hellenistic times. Agatharchides of Cnidus had heard claims that Memnon was an African⁷⁾, and the first explicit reference to an African Memnon at Troy is the parenthesis in Diodorus 2, 22, 4⁸⁾. Q. Curtius Rufus, however, mentions the African Memnon in 4, 8, 3, and if Curtius got his anecdote from Cleitarchus this identification could have been current as early as 300 B. C. Perhaps the clearer picture of eastern geography, together with the Ptolemaic emphasis on Egyptian involvement in Greek mythology, supplied the impetus for locating Memnon in Upper Egypt⁹⁾.

That Ctesias' story concerned an Asiatic Memnon is entirely clear: Memnon led Aethiopians and men of Susiana, Tithonus is the general of Persis, and Memnon himself built a royal residence in Susa. Ctesias' story is prosaic demythologizing: Memnon is a subject of Assyria, Tithonus is an official, and Memnon dies in a Thessalian ambush. All of this bears little resemblance to the Memnon of the Aethiopsis, who comes as the son of Dawn, wearing a panoply made by Hephaestus, and is slain by Achilles. Ctesias, who delighted in correcting Greek tales by comparing them with Oriental tales, must have himself introduced the Assyrians into the Memnon myth.

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1) "The Historical Date for the Final Memnon Myth", Rh. Mus. 100 (1957), pp. 259–263.

2) Proclus' summary of the Aethiopsis says nothing about any of this:

Μέμνων δὲ ὁ Ἡοῦς υἱὸς ἔχων ἡφαιστότευκτον πανοπλίαν παραγίνεται τοῖς Τρωσὶ

βοηθήσων· καὶ Θέτις τῷ παιδί τὰ κατὰ τὸν Μήμενον προλέγει. καὶ συμβολῆς γενομένης Ἀντίλοχος ὑπὸ Μήμενον ἀναιρεῖται, ἔπειτα Ἀχιλλεὺς Μήμενον κτείνει. The Ctesian version (Jacoby, F. Gr. Hist 688 F 1; derived directly or indirectly from Ctesias' Persica) is found in Diodorus 2. 22, 1-3 and 5.

3) Heichelheim does not deal with the question of the location of the Aethiopians. R. Holland, „Memnon“, in *Myth. Lex.* II, cols. 2653-2687, presented what is still the most comprehensive analysis of the growth and variations of the Memnon myth. Cf. also G. Goossens, „Memnon était-il Ethiopien ou Susien?“ *Chronique d'Égypte* 14 (1939), pp. 336-339. J. Forsdyke, *Greece before Homer* (London, 1956), pp. 101 ff, identifies Tithonus with the Nubian god Didun. T. B. L. Webster, *From Mycenae to Homer* (London, 1958), p. 65, suggests that the name „Aethiops“ on a tablet from Pylos implies Egyptian influence. But even if the Greeks of the Mycenaean period knew of Nubian Aethiopians, this had been forgotten by Homer's time.

4) A. Lesky, „Aithiopika“, *Hermes* 87 (1959), pp. 27-38, very carefully distinguishes between the mythical Aethiopians of the East and the geographical extension of the Aethiopians in Africa. „Daß der Sohn der Eos aus dem Osten kommen mußte, stand in jedem Falle fest...“ (p. 31); the Aethiopians of the Iliad „sind die mythischen Götterfreunde im fernen Osten am Ufer des Okeanos“. (p. 34). *Odyssey* 1, 22 and 5, 282 place the Aethiopians in the East, but the geographical excursus in 4, 83 would place them somewhere between Syria and Africa.

5) F. 405, Wecklein. Herodotus 3, 91 identifies the Cissians as dwellers around Susa.

6) *Hdt.* 5, 53-4 and 7, 151.

7) Photius' summary of Agatharchides' *On the Red Sea*, 728-9, Hoeschel.

8) Diodorus himself may have heard the version of the African Aethiopians. In 3, 11, 3 he says that while in Egypt he talked „with many ambassadors from Aethiopia“.

9) *Curtius* 4, 8, 3: *Cupido haud iniusta quidem, ceterum intempestiva incesserat non interiora modo Aegypti, sed etiam Aethiopiam invisere; Memnonis Tithonice celebrata regia cognoscendae vetustatis avidum traherat paene extra terminos solis.*