

## Revisiting Translation and Interpretation Issues in the Story of the African Royal Official (“Ethiopian Eunuch”) in Acts 8:26–40: The Hebrew Bible (LXX) Background

ANDREW M. MBUVI (UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO, USA)

### ABSTRACT

*This article investigates the OT/Hebrew Bible background of both the designation Ethiopia and the translation and interpretation of εὐνοῦχος, and designation of “Ethiopian” in Acts 8:26-40. The jumping point is Prof Adamo’s own brief chapter that engages the issue. Going further than Adam’s brief article does, the argument seeks to establish the royal background of the Ethiopian official and challenges the use of the term ‘eunuch’ in translation, as it tends to misrepresent the identity of the official.*

**KEYWORDS:** Eunuch, Ethiopia, Meroe, *Kandak’a*, Royal, African Jew

### A REVISITING THE “AFRICAN ROYAL OFFICIAL” IN ACTS 8:26–40

While much of Adamo’s work centres on the Hebrew Bible, he has produced a slim edition titled *Africa and Africans in the New Testament* in which he addresses, oh so briefly, the story of the “Ethiopian Eunuch” in Acts of the Apostles.<sup>1</sup> I would like to interact and expound a little more on that piece here. I expound on the anti-racial reading that Adamo promulgates by going a bit further on some of the key points he addresses and some that he does not. For relevance in an Old Testament journal, I will be arguing the case for understanding the Αἰθίοψ εὐνοῦχος as an African Jew, a royal official rather than a biological eunuch and probing the significance of the Isaianic text in the story.

In the second chapter of the book of Acts, numerous Jewish pilgrims from virtually the whole known world of that time converge in Jerusalem for the

---

\* Submitted: 28/04/2021; peer-reviewed: 06/09/2021; accepted: 07/09/2021. Andrew Mbuvi, “Revisiting Translation and Interpretation Issues in the Story of the African Royal Official (“Ethiopian Eunuch”) in Acts 8:26–40: The Hebrew Bible (LXX) Background,” *Old Testament Essays* 34 no. 2 (2021): 474 – 484. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2021/v34n2a10>.

<sup>1</sup> David T. Adamo, *Africa and Africans in the New Testament* (Washington: University Press of America, 2006), 89–92.

Jewish holiday of Pentecost. However, only a few geographical regions in Acts have elaborate narratives connected with them including Jerusalem, Rome, Corinth, Ephesus and in our case "Ethiopia" in the story of Philip and the encounter with the "Ethiopian Eunuch." As we shall see, both words, "Ethiopia" and "eunuch," have raised interpretive conundrums for interpreters. Besides, we shall also seek to address a few other questions related to this story: What is the significance of this story that the author of Acts felt the need to include it in the book? What could it symbolise in the structure of the book? How does it fit with the mission of the spreading of the gospel to the "uttermost parts of the world" (Acts 1:8)?

## **B ETHIOPIA OR MEROE? DOES IT REALLY MATTER?**

Scholars have made it clear that reference to Ethiopia in this story is not the modern country of Ethiopia. Most have also made the case that the connection of the queen or *Kandak'a* (Candice) to Ethiopia is a misnomer since *Kandak'a* ruled not Ethiopia but Meroe. However, this may not be simply an error of connection since at some point, Meroe ruled over Ethiopia. Importantly also, the name Ethiopia had greater currency in Greco-Roman minds than Meroe and may explain its preference in Acts 8. The Greek historian and geographer, Herodotus (cf. *Histories* 2.22, 28, 29), who claims to have traveled to the region, refers to Meroe as the capital of *Aethiopia* (Ethiopia).<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to the general portrayal of a dominantly patriarchal world in African communities, it is vital also that the Meroe queendom was ruled by a dynasty of queens – *Kandak'a* ("Candace"). In Acts 8, reference to this name is made as though it were that of a singular ruler but external evidence supports the notion that different rulers had the title and some of these queens may have ruled a Nubian queendom that stretched as far as Ethiopia in the East and Egypt in the North. Furthermore, the fame of Nubian *Kandak'a* may have been enhanced greatly by these queens' military prowess that led to a protracted war with the world-conquering Roman army (30–20 BCE).<sup>3</sup>

One of these *Kandak'a*, Amanishakheto, possibly the mother of the *Kandak'a* referred to in Acts 8, even defeated Augustus Caesar's army in 23 BCE, following the breaking of the peace treaty and Roman attempt to overrun the Meroe queendom.<sup>4</sup> She even had a head of Augustus from one of the ubiquitous statues of Caesar dismembered during the battle and buried in a temple's threshold in Meroe.<sup>5</sup> A stalemate eventually led to a peace treaty with

<sup>2</sup> Herodotus, *Histories: With an English Translation* (ed. By Godley, Alfred; W. London and New York: Heinemann G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1921–24).

<sup>3</sup> László Török, *The Kingdom of Kush: Handbook of the Napatan-Meriotic Civilization* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Török, *The Kingdom*.

<sup>5</sup> Edwin Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004) 159.

the Roman Empire that was very favourable to the queendom of Meroe, possibly because the Romans were aware they could not overrun Meroe and it was beneficial to cede some advantage for the sake of long-term trade and prosperity).<sup>6</sup> This is described by Greek geographer and historian Strabo [c. 63–24 CE] (*Geography* 17.1.53–4) and archaeological evidence supports reports of a vastly wealthy queendom of Meroe in that period that would have accounted for the kind of wealth displayed in the African official's story in Acts – pilgrimage to Jerusalem, chariot travel, book, manager of *Kandak'a's* treasury, etcetera.<sup>7</sup>

However, the possible appellation of *Aethiopia* to her identity in Acts 8 may be partly because *Aethiopia* was a better-known reference for people of African descent among the Greeks and its subsequent Roman influence. For instance, as far back as the eighth century BCE, Homer referenced *Aethiopia* in *Iliad* (I: 423; XXIII: 206) and *Odyssey* (I: 22–23; IV: 84; V: 282–7). *Aethiopia* was also used by Greek historian Herodotus in the fifth century BCE (*The Histories* II: 28–42, 110, 137–67; III: 17–26, 114; 7:90), who described it as:

Where south inclines westwards, the part of the world stretching farthest towards the sunset is Ethiopia (*Aethiopia*); this produces gold in abundance, and huge elephants, and all sorts of wild trees, and ebony, and *the tallest and handsomest and longest-lived people* (*Histories* 3:114).<sup>8</sup>

Compare this statement to Isa 18:1–2:

Ah, land of whirring wings beyond the rivers of Ethiopia (*Kush*), sending ambassadors by the Nile in vessels of papyrus on the waters! Go, you swift messengers, to *a nation tall and smooth*, to a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide.

No doubt there is stereotyping going on in Herodotus' description which might explain its intriguing echo of Isaiah. It is plausible in this generally positive appraisal that the author of Acts prefers to use the *Aethiopia* as a designation for the royal official as a geographical referent to the other "uttermost" part of the world, where the gospel was to reach, according to Luke's outline in Acts 1:8.<sup>9</sup> In this framework, the structure of the book of Acts begins with the birth and ministry of the Church in Jerusalem and develops its outward spread (Samaritans [ch.8], Ethiopians [ch.8] and Greeks [ch.10]), which culminates in Paul's journey toward Rome at the end of the book. However, we have this exponential growth

<sup>6</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa*, 159.

<sup>7</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, 1.1.6.

<sup>8</sup> *The Histories of Herodotus* (Trans and edited by A.D. Godley; 1856).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Ben Witherington III, *Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 290.

that reaches the furthest worlds in the South (Ethiopia) and the East (Parthia) and what better representative of the Southern reach of the gospel to have than a royal official of an intractable African queendom that had gained legendary status in Greco-Roman lore notes above?

### C “ROYAL OFFICIAL” OR “EUNUCH”? WHO IS TRANSLATING?

In trying to understand the translation issues related to the  $\epsilon\upsilon\nu\chi\omicron\varsigma$  in Acts 8, we shall survey its translation in select biblical texts. The author of a most comprehensive three-set volume commentary on Acts, Craig Keener notes that the official, who is referred to as a “eunuch” ( $\epsilon\upsilon\nu\chi\omicron\varsigma$ ) five times in the narrative could not have been a convert to Judaism since Deut 23:1 and Lev 21:20 prohibit eunuchs to convert to Judaism as proselytes or venture into a place of worship.<sup>10</sup> Instead, Keener categorises him as a “god-fearer” even though the author of Acts does not use that designation for the official.<sup>11</sup>

One could assume that because Jesus prefaces this statement with “not everyone will accept this teaching...” that he is aware he is going against Deut 23:1. In such a case, there would be no contradiction with what Keener proposes here. However, if what Jesus is referencing is a Jewish practice, then, it is unclear what that is. Who are these who “make themselves eunuchs” to serve the kingdom of heaven? If the reference is to singlehood, and not castration, then, the meaning of  $\epsilon\upsilon\nu\chi\omicron\varsigma$  needs to be understood as broader than biological.

In a presidential address for South Eastern Commission for the Study of Religion (SECSOR), Randall Bailey observes that some English translations like KJV and NASB have a tendency of translating the Hebrew word סָרִיס (*saris*), which is usually translated as  $\epsilon\upsilon\nu\chi\omicron\varsigma$  in the LXX, differently for different people groups.<sup>12</sup> He points out that English translations translate *saris* variously as “court officials, chamberlains or eunuchs” when referring to individuals who are Egyptian, Babylonian or Persian (e.g. Gen 37–40; Esth 1:10; NASB 2 Kgs 20:18), while translating the same word as “eunuch” when referring to *Cushites* (Ethiopians/Africans) (e.g. Jer 38:7). This, Randall provocatively terms, “castration by transition.”<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, the LXX (Greek translation of the

<sup>10</sup> Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (2nd ed.; Downers Grove: IVP, 2014), 344.

<sup>11</sup> Such a perspective leaves unclear what Jesus probably meant when he taught that “some men made themselves Eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven” (Matt 19:12).

<sup>12</sup> Randall Bailey, “The Cushite in David’s Army Meets Ebedmelek: The Impact of Supremacist Ideologies on Translation and Interpretations of Text” (Presidential Address at the Annual Meeting of the SECSOR, Atlanta, Georgia, 7 March 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Bailey, “The Cushite,” 10.

Hebrew Bible) omits the word *saris* in this passage. Randall makes the case that this omission reflects ideological prejudice against racial taxonomy that European translators use to categorise Africans in contrast to the so-called advanced civilisations of Egypt, Babylon and Persia.

With this in mind, we return to Acts 8 where we find the Ethiopian royal official reading the same book of Isaiah. In it, the Deuteronomic restrictions (Deut 23:1) to *saris* (eunuchs) is countermanded. Isaiah 56: 4–5 states:

For thus says the LORD:  
 To the (*saris*) eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,  
     who choose the things that please me  
     and hold fast my covenant,  
         I will give, *in my house and within my walls*, a  
         monument and a name  
     better than sons and daughters;  
 I will give them an everlasting name  
 that shall not be cut off (*kārat*).

The context of the above Isaianic passage, especially in relation to the play on the word “cut off” (v. 5) at the end of the passage, lends greater credence to the term “eunuch” as the more accurate translation of *saris* in this case. The vital aspect in this case is that the *saris* would be welcome into the temple (v.4: “...in my house and within my walls”). It is plausible that the author of Acts was aware of this passage, albeit conjectural, even as he includes this story of the Ethiopian royal official as part of the outreach of the Messianic message of the gospel.

On the other hand, it is important to distinguish between the author of Acts’ assumption of the biological status of the Ethiopian official and the actual reality of his status. The author of Acts may be using a frame of reference from the LXX rather than the Hebrew Bible that serves to find a connection to biblical references to this story of the Ethiopian official permissible. At least one biblical case, the story of Joseph in Gen 37, affirms this broader use in the LXX.

As one commentator on Gen 37: 36 explains, the Hebrew word *saris*, “in other contexts can also mean ‘eunuch,’ but the evidence suggests that the *original use was as the title of a court official* and that the sense of ‘eunuch’ became associated with the terms secondarily...”<sup>14</sup> Thus, while Potiphar is classified in the Hebrew Bible as *saris*, a word often translated in the LXX as εὐνοχός, we however, know that Potiphar had a wife (implying he was not castrated). Therefore, it is peculiar that the LXX translators instead chose the rare word *spadōn* (σπάδων), a rare vocabulary found only in Gen 37 and in Isa 39:7 in the entire LXX and whose meaning is more strictly the “castrated one,” instead of the more ambivalent εὐνοχός – “court official,” “eunuch” in

<sup>14</sup> Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1996), 216 [*emphasis added*].

this passage. Nonetheless, the LXX does translate the same word *saris* when used of the Pharaohs' chief cupbearer and chief baker, two chapters later (Gen 40:2), as  $\epsilon\upsilon\nu\sigma\chi\omicron\varsigma$ .<sup>15</sup>

Thus, if the vocabulary of קָרִים and  $\epsilon\upsilon\nu\sigma\chi\omicron\varsigma$  is broader than just a biological referent, then, it could have been used to designate royal court officials in general, as Keener suggests. It is true that royal households like those of the Pharaohs of Egypt and possibly of the queens of Meroe would have the royal servants castrated to avoid defilement of the royal blood by non-royal court officials or servants. It is also known that African slaves in the Greco-Roman period were often castrated (Juvenal, *Satire* 6.373). However, while such assumptions may have influenced the Ethiopian official's categorisation in Acts 8 as  $\epsilon\upsilon\nu\sigma\chi\omicron\varsigma$ , he was neither a slave nor a household servant but a high-ranking royal official, akin to Potiphar in Gen 37.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, if we need not always apply the biological category to קָרִים /  $\epsilon\upsilon\nu\sigma\chi\omicron\varsigma$ , then, such a restriction of the categorisation of the official in Acts 8 may be unwarranted. In the same regard, the restriction of religious conversion need not be curtailed either.

#### D JEW OR GENTILE? AFRICAN JEW OR NOT?

Craig Keener, who shows greater sensitivity to racial issues than most Eurocentric scholars I have read, posits the argument that Ethiopian official is the first "true gentile" to be converted to Christianity in Acts.<sup>17</sup> Keener distinguishes between the African official's religion as Jewish and his identity as Gentile. While it sounds like great honour bestowed, such a perspective may in turn undermine the African official's Jewish heritage. Adamo leaves the question of the official religious identity (Jew or Gentile) unanswered, preferring instead to emphasise the African identity.<sup>18</sup>

Nonetheless, I think it is important and plausible to make the case for an African Jew in this case. That the royal official would have been representative

<sup>15</sup> See also 1 Chron 28:1 where David gathers all the "*saris* of Israel," in a context where it absolutely makes no sense to translate the word as "eunuchs of Israel." Therefore, majority of the translations rightly render it as "leaders" of Israel.

<sup>16</sup> See Abraham Smith, "A Second Step in African Biblical Interpretation: A Generic Reading Analysis of Acts 8:26–40," in *Reading from This Place, Volume 1: Social Location & Biblical Interpretation in the U.S.* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 213–30 who makes the argument that the notion of royalty in Acts 8 is vital for Luke's structure of Acts in moving the centre of power from the Jewish Jerusalem to what Smith considers a "non-Jewish" convert.

<sup>17</sup> Keener, *The IVP Bible Background*.

<sup>18</sup> Adamo, *Africans in NT*, 90–91.

of the group of African Jewish converts is not farfetched.<sup>19</sup> He was coming from Jerusalem, presumably on Jewish pilgrimage to Jerusalem: he was reading (in Hebrew or Greek) and understanding the Isaianic text (though struggling to interpret the meaning of the text), hence, a possible prior convert aware of the import the Isaianic passage. The possession of a Jewish biblical scroll would suggest not only sufficient wealth to afford its purchase but also the assumed concession from Jewish scribes or religious Jewish merchants to purchase it. All these elements suggest a Jewish convert already established in religious practice.

The Hebrew Bible, in numerous passages such as Zeph 3:10, “From beyond the rivers of *Cush* my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings,” attests to Jewish presence in this region. Zephaniah (Zeph 1:1) himself was a Cushite (lit. “son of *Cush*” – an African Jewish prophet).<sup>20</sup> Why then was the African royal official in Acts 8 reading the Hebrew Bible and why did he travel to Jerusalem for Pentecost? As Acts 2 mentions Jews from all parts of the Roman Empire and beyond, why could not this Ethiopian royal official be a Jewish convert, who subsequently converted to Christianity? He could afford and was trusted enough to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Pentecost because Jewish converts in Meroe either were in good standing in the royal household or were part of the royal household. This of course is a conjecture but one that is not improbable.<sup>21</sup>

It is also prescient that the book of Isaiah was the one that the African official was reading. Not only have we shown the background of *saris* in Isaiah and Genesis in providing an alternative understanding of the notion of *ἐύνοῦχος*, it is also the book in which the ingathering of scattered Israel is promised—an idea embraced in Acts 2:5 with the world’s Jewish peoples gathered in Jerusalem (“Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation

<sup>19</sup> The descriptive elements of the Ethiopian official in Acts 8 imply a religious commitment to Judaism – Jerusalem trip, biblical manuscript, familiarity with Isaiah, etcetera.

<sup>20</sup> Biblical “Cush,” according to David T. Adamo, *Africa and Africans in the Old Testament* (Eugene: Christian Universities Press) should be more accurately translated as either “Nubia” or “Africa,” which would place Jewish presence in the Meroe region.

<sup>21</sup> The Meroe dynasty, no doubt, had links to the more famous Axum kingdom to the East, which had a historical tradition of link to Judaism in what was embedded in its legend of Menelik, a supposed son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba credited with bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Axum. Alternatively, the very connection to Queen of Sheba itself may be the source of such a Jewish heritage in Meroe. Some scholars have sought to link the Queen of Sheba with the kingdom of Meroe too, partially based on the first-century Jewish historian Josephus’ construction of such a connection (*Antiquities* 2.5–2.10). However, and perhaps even more simply, with Meroe ruling over the region that included Ethiopian, it may not have been unthinkable that indeed this officer was himself Ethiopian with Jewish background, as opposed to Meroite, serving in the royal court of the queen of Meroe.

under heaven”), who became vehicles of transmission of the gospel of Jesus following the encounter with the Holy Spirit. Isaiah 11:11 lists the nations from which the ingathering would be drawn: “On that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from [*Cush* – Ethiopia/Meroe], from Elam, from Shimar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.” This Isaianic testimony confirms a certain tradition of Jewish presence in the African region.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, the official had come to Jerusalem or a religious pilgrimage during the Jewish Pentecost festival that attracted Jews “from every corner of the world” (Acts 2:1) He was also reading the Hebrew Bible (according to Keener, most likely in Greek language called the *Septuagint*, also abbreviated as LXX).<sup>23</sup> The Romans retained Greek as the *lingua franca* of the Empire and thus the trade language. This high-ranking royal official, responsible for the Nubian queen’s treasury, was most likely well versed in Greek as he had to negotiate in trade with his neighbouring Egyptian cities under Roman rule. As a literate person, this royal official was part of a privileged minuscule percentage of people in the ancient world population who could read. This is because it is assumed that Philip conversed with the official in Greek. Meroe also had its own written language that scholars have only recently begun to decipher.<sup>24</sup> While the Rosetta stone discovered in Egypt may have helped decipher the Egyptian hieroglyphs, the Meroitic language remains an enigma to be fully resolved.

The question that Philip posed to the Ethiopian official indicates that the official clearly understood what he was reading, at least in terms of content. The interrogative verb that Philip used in 8:30 (*γινώσκῶ*) can reference comprehension (e.g. Acts 21:37) or revelation (e.g. John 1:48). Philip presumed literary knowledge on the part of the official, and so asks, “About whom, may I ask you, does *the prophet* say this, about himself or about someone else?” (Acts 8:34). This is not a question of linguistic comprehension, but rather of meaning or interpretation. Therefore, Philip’s explanation begins with the Isaiah passage and draws an interpretive line all the way to Jesus’ death and its theological implications. The theological application is what confounded the official and what Philip offered to unravel. This kind of conversation is no different from those that Jesus had with other Jews when he presented interpretations of biblical teachings that were confounding or prophetically anticipated to his Jewish interlocutors (cf. to Nicodemus in John 3:10 or to the teachers of the Law in Matt 16:3). It was not necessarily a lack of understanding of the content but the interpretive substance of the material by the seeker that needed an explanation.

<sup>22</sup> Clark M. Williamson, “The Ethiopian Eunuch: Dealing with a Gender-Bender,” *Encounter* 73/3 (2013): 52.

<sup>23</sup> Keener, *IVP Background*, 344.

<sup>24</sup> Claude Rilly and Alex De Voogt, *The Meroitic Language and Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).



Possession of a Jewish religious text by the official, not be a common occurrence even among Jewish individuals outside of scholars and religious leaders in the first century would also indicate the religious commitment of the official rather than mere curiosity. It would also be hard to envision a non-Jewish person being granted possession of such a text, especially if also considered castrated.<sup>25</sup> The subsequent baptism also does not indicate a lack of prior Jewish conversion as Keener may imply. John's baptismal candidates in the Gospels were only Jews. Instead, Christian baptism is to be understood strictly in connection to Jesus Christ. Only by Philip connecting the message of Isa 53, which the official was reading, to the story of Jesus, did the official conclude that he needed to be baptised. This baptism has everything to do with connection to Jesus and not to the official lacking Jewish conversion, *contra* Keener.

The legendary aspects of *Aethiopia* have led some scholars to question the historical veracity of the story of the African royal official. However, if this story is legendary and not historical, why would it be included in Acts—as an *apologia* for the early growth of the Christian church in this part of Africa? However, there is no historical evidence of such besides the book of Acts. If it is not an *apologia*, then, what purpose would it serve in the account of Acts? A simple statement like the one in Acts 2 indicating Christian converts returning to their homes would have sufficed. Why invent a whole narrative about the conversion of a royal official? It does not seem to make sense. Thus, the question of veracity is misleading as it sidesteps the more important question of why the author of Acts chose to include this story in his narrative. Questions of historical veracity cannot downplay the structural and symbolic significance this encounter exemplifies in Acts.

It is intriguing to note that, of the group of Gentile Christians selected as part of the solution regarding the neglect of Greek Christians in food distribution in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6), it is the stories of Stephen (Acts 7) and Philip (Acts 8) that stand out. Stephen's message was given in Jerusalem to the Jewish community who rejected his message and stoned him to death. Philip was sent to Samaritans and to the African royal official. In this scenario, the message started in Jerusalem with Stephen and began to reach the uttermost parts of the world in Philip's preaching. The Samaritans were essentially denied Jewish status in Second Temple Judaism but Jesus made outreach to them in his public ministry (John 4). Philip led a conversion of Samaritans (Acts 8:5–13) before being sent by the Spirit to the edges of Israel to minister to an African from even further away—the edges of the known world.

## **E ACTS 8 AND NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF ACTS**

The Samaritans, considered impure half-breeds by other Jews, were Philips' first converts to Jesus' followers (Acts 8:5–18). Second, was the African royal official

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Adamo, *Africans in New Testament*, 89.

whose Jewish background is plausible but unclear (Acts 8:14–25). In Acts 9, the conversion of Paul, a thoroughbred Jew, is recounted, followed by the story of Cornelius, a Greek God-fearer (Acts 10). If there is a pattern here, it seems to be less about who the individuals were, and more about conversions that have to do with journeys – Philip *journeyed* to Samaria and to the Southern Gaza road to meet an African royal in his *journey* back home; Paul encountered the risen Christ in his *journey* to Damascus; and, Peter *journeyed* to Cornelius under duress to minister to and baptise him.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the pattern may indicate Christianity's breaking of barriers that Judaism had imposed on outsiders. If order matters, the conversions of Samaritans and the African official, before that of Paul, the ultra-conservative Jew and the most important figure in the rest of Acts, give significance to the integration of outsiders into the Jesus Movement. *Outsiders*, not in terms of religion since we have argued for the Jewishness of the African official, but rather, geographical interpretations of outsider—from the utmost parts of the world.

## F CONCLUSION

I have attempted briefly to interact and engage with Prof Adamo's interpretive work on Acts 8 by both highlighting his contributions to African biblical scholarship and pointing at some of the interpretive challenges that we all have to contend with in this process. I have pointed out what I consider to be interpretive shortcomings while proposing a way forward. However, this is done not in the spirit of denouncing his contributions but of showing us where Adamo has challenged us to dare go, while being aware that collective voices do not always have to agree on the details, as long as they do so concerning the importance of the need for interpretive voices beyond Eurocentric interpretation of the Bible.

## H BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adamo, David T. *African and Africans in the Old Testament*. Christian Universities Press, 1997.
- . *Africa and Africans in the New Testament*. Washington. University Press of America, 2006.
- Alter, Robert. *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*. New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1996.
- Bailey, Randall. "The Cushite in David's Army Meets Ebedmelek: The Impact of Supremacist Ideologies on Translation and Interpretations of Text," Presidential Address at the Annual Meeting of the SECSOR, Atlanta, Georgia, 7 March 2014.
- Herodotus, *Histories: With an English Translation*. Edited by Godley, Alfred W. London and New York: Heinemann G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1921–24.
- Histories of Herodotus*. Trans and edited by A. D. Godley, 1856.
- Juvenal. *Satire*. Translated by Charles Badham. New York: Harper Brothers, 1855.

- Keener, Craig. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. 2nd Ed. Downers Grove: IVP, 2014.
- Rilly, Claude and Alex de Voogt. *The Meriotic Language and Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Smith, Abraham. "A Second Step in African Biblical Interpretation: A Generic Reading Analysis of Acts 8:26–40." Pages 213–30 in *Reading from This Place, Volume 1: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the U.S.* Edited by Fernando F. Segovia, Mary Ann Tolbert. Minneapolis.; Augsburg Fortress, 1998.
- Herodotus. *Histories: With an English Translation*. Edited by Alfred Godley; W. London and New York: Heinemann G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1921-24.
- Török, László. *The Kingdom of Kush: Handbook of the Napatan-Meriotic Civilization*. Leiden: Brill, 1997.
- Williamson, Clark M. "The Ethiopian Eunuch: Dealing with a Gender-Bender." *Encounter* 73/3 (2013): 47–56.
- Witherington III, Ben. *Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998.
- Yamauchi, Edwin. *Africa and the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004.

Dr Andrew Mbuvi. Lecturer African American Religions and Biblical Studies, University of North Carolina Greensboro, USA. Email: [ammbuvi@gmail.com](mailto:ammbuvi@gmail.com). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9289-3034>