

Archaeology and Cultural Lineage in *Of One Blood*

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The racial commentary in Pauline Hopkins' *Of One Blood; or, The Hidden Self* (1903) is initially explicit: as she proclaims in the title, all races are "Of One Blood," the product of a shared history. In reality, however, Hopkins presents a far more nuanced argument about the nature of race and knowledge. Several of Hopkins' characters explore this issue by embarking on an archeological expedition to Ethiopia that mirrors a practice of expedition common among certain Americans at the time of the novel's publication. This expedition is interesting because of its historical and textual contextualization within a transition in the field of archaeology from an atmosphere of amateur antiquarianism to one of scientific professionalism. This positioning allows Hopkins to question the modes of knowledge that both techniques represent. In so doing, she displays what is invisible to Western ways of knowledge by exploring an Africanist approach to thought. The nature and results of the archeological expedition to Africa in *Of One Blood* suggest that the inclusion of African Americans in historically white intellectual spheres was inadequate without the recognition and respect of a unique African American mode of knowledge. Hopkins's claim that humanity is "of one blood" (193) is not an argument for a desegregated western academia but for the inclusion and recognition of African American cultural lineage.

Throughout the nineteenth century, archaeology had been primarily the realm of antiquarians – wealthy amateurs who collected relics for display in their homes and in national museums. As Warren King Moorehead of *Popular Science* wrote in 1889, "[a]n individual may dabble in [archaeology] to the extent of making a collection for his own amusement; he may... become more or less of a scientific archaeologist" (Moorehead 250). Moorehead goes on to describe briefly the characteristic artifacts in the archeology of North America at the time, and his assumptions are clear: the goal of archaeology is to amuse the dabbling antiquarian. The amateur archaeologist can retrieve objects and identify them, a skill easily acquired by a brief education in typology. As European empires

expanded, these casually collected artifacts became the intellectual spoils of imperialism.

Though archaeology had evolved into a more professional discipline by the turn of the twentieth century, its ethos remained that of the imperial antiquarian project. For example, expeditions and research in Egypt, the quintessential site of this style of archeology, provide a similar narrative of exploration to that presented by *Of One Blood*'s expedition to Ethiopia. According to A.L. Frothingham Jr. and Allan Marquand's "Archaeological News" brief in an 1896 issue of *The Journal of Archaeology and History of the Fine Arts*, contemporary projects in Egypt included clearing rubble and flood waters in search of monuments and "relics of antiquity," projects that were funded by organizations such as The Society for the Preservation of the Monuments of Ancient Egypt and other European and American institutions and museums (Frothingham and Marquand 62). Though some cited concern over the fact that "invaluable scientific facts [were] being destroyed through the ignorance and haste of explorers," the exploitation of Egypt's archaeological resources continued for the sake of advancing museum and personal collections (Frothingham and Marquand 63).

The contemporary approach to Ethiopia was similar, though Ethiopia was not the antiquarian's playground that Egypt had become by the turn of the twentieth century. Ethiopia was unique among African nations in its relative ability to resist European imperialism, but still faced significant economic, and eventually political, invasion. Even after the battle of Adwa, in 1896, which marked the historic defeat of the Italian imperial army by Ethiopia, Italy annexed Eritrea, taking part of Ethiopia's land. Long before the battle, however, Italy had viewed Ethiopia as a protectorate, using the nation as a setting for the capitalist development of Italian citizens. This heavy economic imperialism, coupled with the danger of political takeover narrowly avoided in the battle of Adwa, paints Ethiopia as an especially interesting representation of the African experience of European imperialism (Hess).

Captain M.S. Welby's account of his non-archaeological journey to and through Ethiopia, which he refers to as Abyssinia, in a 1900 issue of *Harper's Monthly* provides some insight into the conditions, logistics, and goals of travel in Ethiopia during the time. Welby frequently refers to his

experience as a harsh journey with only sporadic material comforts. His treatment of the people whose land he explores is patronizing, as he refers to the home of a gracious host who shelters him from a storm as a “primitive circular wattle hut” (Welby 142). As Welby continues on, his narrative is framed by interaction with various foreign imperial presences. Welby’s attention is directed towards what he sees as vast potential for economic development. Focusing on imperial capitalist progress, he surveys land that could be cultivated, advocates the addition of cattle to the landscape, and scopes out wet areas that could be drained to provide proper roads. Welby and other explorers emphasized material gain, be it obtained by modernizing missions or by treasure hunting.

In *Of One Blood*, Professor Stone’s expedition is tempered by an intellectual goal: to redeem the legacy and history of the Ethiopians who once “manifested great superiority over all the nations among whom they dwelt” (63). Although Stone hopes to wash away prejudice with science, his is an amateur exercise in antiquarianism similar to those undertaken in Egypt in the era. The amateurism of the expedition is clear: Reuel, the biracial doctor turned Ethiopian king whose story propels the text, is only recruited for the mission because it “lacks such a medical man,” (58) and because he is recruited by his wealthy, well connected friend, Aubrey Livingston, as a favor, auspiciously to mend the doctor’s economic woes. Likewise, Reuel discovers his true history and identity not after a careful scholarly study, but rather as the consequence of amateur blundering: he stumbles on an aimless walk, crushing a skull and allowing himself to be kidnapped by his future subjects (111).

In addition to this amateurism, the antiquarian tradition involved a key interest in treasure as a means to financial gain. Accordingly, Aubrey Livingston adequately summarizes the object of Reuel’s expedition: “to unearth buried cities and treasure which the shifting sands of the Sahara have buried for centuries” (58). As we soon learn, “The expedition with which Reuel Briggs found himself connected was made up of artists, savans, and several men – capitalists – who represented the business interests of the venture” (75), a group joined, fittingly, by Charlie Vance. As a wealthy, white, tourist who comes along “for the sake of the advantages of such a trip” (63), Charlie epitomizes the early form of cultural tourism that

antiquarianism encouraged. This characterization of an amateur, imperialist, expedition provides several key modes of inquiry. First, the focus on material treasure and upper-class leisure emphasizes the involvement of the imperial tradition. In addition, the limited success of the white, relatively unqualified participants underlines and refutes the assumption that white men are innately advantaged in expertise. Perhaps most importantly, the amateur nature of the expedition, coupled with its eventual failure, highlights not only Hopkins’ rejection of amateur, imperially founded and funded knowledge, but also her dismissal of the alternative mode of knowledge offered by a new American professionalism.

At the turn of the twentieth century, a new area of focus was emerging in the practice of archaeology, one that sought to discover the origins of both the human species and human societies. Although antiquarian modes of knowledge were downplayed and rejected as limited and exploitative, they were replaced with comparably imperfect alternatives. In *Of One Blood*, Professor Stone is especially significant as a figure of this transition away from antiquarianism. He distinguishes his empirical methodology from those who take a less scientific approach:

You and I, Briggs, know that the theories of prejudice are swept away by the great tide of facts. It is a *fact* that Egypt drew from Ethiopia all the arts, sciences, and knowledge of which she was mistress...I have even thought...that black was the original color of man in prehistoric times. (87-88)

Stone’s faith in the “great tide of facts” identifies him as an exemplary, if idealistic, new “professional” archaeologist. For Stone, Ethiopia is the prehistoric source of civilization to be redeemed with science rather than a vault of valuables to be brought back to the civilized world.

Professor Stone embodies, in many ways, the type of archeologist who would have been engaged in serious debates about new discoveries and theories in the realm of human evolution at the turn of the twentieth century. In an 1893 edition of *The American Naturalist*, E.D. Cope proclaimed, “the ancestry of man is a question to be solved by paleontology” (“The Genealogy of Man” 22). Cope’s scientific tone, as he theorizes a human descent from lemur ancestors, an argument that leans heavily on dentition and other bone

similarities, underscores the scientific goals of this era of archaeology. His conclusion that humans may have evolved either as one species in Europe or as multiple species, or races, divided by geography, moreover, emphasizes empirical archaeology's intense focus on defining human lineage. This focus was not a consensual push forward, however. It was a constant debate, filled with evolving evidence and contradicting professional opinions, as is clear from an article Cope published just two years later. Here, he discusses the heated debate stirred by the discovery of "some bones of an interesting quadrumanous mammal allied to man" ("The Neanderthal Man in Java" 192) in Java with the potential to "[bridge] the gap that has long separated the [man] from the apes" ("The Neanderthal Man in Java" 193). This continuous fascination with human heredity is what characterized the new science of professional archaeology.

Although this new identity for the discipline of archaeology was progressive in that it moved away from the imperialist project and towards a less prejudiced conception of human history, it was not the source of ultimate truth for Hopkins any more than antiquarianism was. In Ancient Meroe, Professor Stone hopes to find a dead source of knowledge to be dusted off and pored over, a dead reality whose rich history lies solely in the past. In reality, however, Reuel's discovery uncovers a preserved but very much living world, one fortified against the invasion of western research and treasure hunting. For Hopkins, then, Stone's progressive attitude over-professionalizes the question of racial origins and misses the eventual truth that emphasizes Tellessar's living heritage over any notion of a carefully packaged past. The eventual truth that Hopkins' narrative uncovers is one of lineage, a concern that is central to this text. Just as they were to scientific archaeologists like Professor Stone, the closely connected ideas of lineage, inheritance, and nativity are crucial to Hopkins's argument. This preoccupation with human, cultural, and individual origins establishes archaeologically discoverable human lineage as key to understanding reality, history and destiny. This heightened interest in origins and lineage reflects, as it did in the academic climate of the time, a shift towards an understanding of the world in which racism was decreasingly justifiable. The science of human lineage denies the separation of racial origins, but to Hopkins, it does not go far enough in respecting the cultural lineage of people of African

descent. *Of One Blood* thus seeks to illuminate the worth of Ethiopian traditions, primarily those of mystical knowledge.

By virtue of his mixed biological race and his mixed cultural experience, Reuel Briggs is the product of two distinct lineages of power and knowledge. The first is the tradition of white academia in which he attempts to pass for a successful white doctor by concealing his "hidden self," both his racial identity and his proclivity for mysticism. This is also the lineage in which Professor Stone participates, a discipline of understanding consistently reworked to bring in new information without incorporating any new forms of knowledge. Reuel's inclusion in this lineage, be it by his passing as white or by eventual desegregation, is not enough to repair racial injustices, and the modes of knowledge that it presents are not sufficient in the discovery and understanding of the novel's eventual "truth." The second lineage, by contrast, is the one that Reuel must undertake his journey to Ethiopia in order to discover, is his inherited right to a mystical and deeply physical tradition of hidden power. This lineage produces his "hidden self" and holds the key to the novel's understanding of race, origins, and history.

Upon entrance into Telassar, Reuel's position as a returning king in this somewhat mysterious lineage comes into view almost immediately. He is greeted by his Prime Minister, Ai, who asks, "[b]ut why, my son, did you wander at night about the dangerous passages of the pyramids? Are you too, one of those who seek for hidden treasure?" (113) Reuel's identity, which is vague within the white American tradition, becomes clear within this one. He is both Ai's prophesied leader and his metaphoric son, the unknowing heir to a vast truth that quickly becomes real to him as he transforms from an amateur treasure-seeker into King Ergamenes. As such, Reuel literally takes on the mantle of his true tradition by discovering the truth about his own identity and about the fate of ancient Ethiopia that his archaeological expedition could only have hoped to uncover.

The concept of the self as something that can be divided, pretended, hidden, and discovered is prevalent, though criticized, throughout *Of One Blood*. Like Reuel, who discovers his true identity over the course of the expedition, his relatives and companions experience comparable mystical epiphanies. For example, Dianthe, Reuel's half

sister and periodic fiancée, travels through the novel in an epic search for the real self that she loses and can only find once Reuel uncovers their family history. Additionally, Hopkins brings immediate attention to the issue with her subtitle: *The Hidden Self*, which plays homage to William James' mystical psychology of hysterical women. *The Hidden Self* (1890) is James' explication of what he describes to be "a sort of dust cloud of exceptional observations, of occurrences minute and irregular, and seldom met with, which it always proves less easy to attend to than to ignore" (James 361). This line of thought validates both a mystical way of knowledge and the importance of the self, or "selves" as a metaphor for and representation of knowledge. If knowledge of the whole self is the ultimate knowledge, that which is hidden injures both the self and society at large.

In Hopkins' text, the type of mystical knowledge that provides answers about history and identity is reserved for characters of African descent. Reuel's premonitions of his sister Dianthe, both before he meets, saves, and marries her and once he has been separated from her by the expedition to Ethiopia are experiences, like his faith in mysticism, that are unique to him. Additionally, Mira's shadowy appearances are reserved for Reuel's family. While his white acquaintances scoff at Aubrey Livingston's ghost stories, Reuel's reality includes both otherworldly beings and the possible reversality of death. Dianthe, too, has mystical experiences - she envisions Reuel as her savior and discovers her full identity only after receiving a written message from the shadow of her mother, Mira, and receiving her family's full, twisted, history from her grandmother, Aunt Hannah. The fact that white characters, though made of the same blood as their counterparts, cannot access the spiritual realm or their corresponding hidden selves is key to Hopkins argument. The white tradition of knowledge has so thoroughly ignored alternative modes of knowledge that it is missing the greater truth of the issue. Thus, Hopkins argues that African Americans do not need simply to be included in the white mode of knowledge, but rather that they need to have their alternative tradition of knowledge, built on specific cultural experiences, recognized, respected, and revered. By this inclusion, Hopkins explains her homage to William James: mystical knowledge need not remain closed to people of European descent but can be integrated with science in order to explain what is otherwise inexplicable.

Hopkins' argument depends on her providing several potential modes of knowledge and truth, all of which she carefully discredits in order to present an alternative form of knowledge. That form of knowledge, which seems to provide the ultimate truth in the text, is the highly mystical one that she limits to her characters of African descent. Not only is the narrative one in which the ultimate archaeological discovery is one of a living rather than dead culture, but Reuel is also a medical doctor who can literally produce life out of death. Truth and knowledge are thus living, changing, and deeply spiritual entities.

The knowledge that Reuel/Ergamenes recovers alongside his sovereignty is distinct from both the knowledge acquired by amateur fortune-hunting, and by empirical or professional knowledge; instead, it is a mystical tradition that exceeds both commercial and scientific desires. Reuel suddenly discovers that he can speak Ai's Arabic with ease as he absorbs his Prime Minister's narrative history of Telassar. His identity within this history is delineated similarly in that:

[i]t was a tradition among those who had known him in childhood that he was descended from a race of African kings... The nature of the mystic within him was, then, but a dreamlike devotion to the spirit that had swayed his ancestors; it was the shadow of Ethiopia's power. (125-6)

Additionally, Reuel's true identity as King Ergamenes is one that cannot change with time: though individuals and academic fads come and go, Telassar will always have a King Ergamenes and a Queen Candace. This inherited knowledge of self is a tradition ascribed solely to characters of African descent in this text. It is the source of Aunt Hannah's wisdom and Mira's shadowy appearances. This is the knowledge that provides the ultimate truth about race, identity, history, and lineage in *Of One Blood* above and beyond any white scientific advancement.

The initially bizarre mystical happenings of *Of One Blood* become far more comprehensible when understood as the answer to the question that Hopkins poses when she rejects both antiquarian and scientific archaeology as modes of discovering the truth about the past and about identity. Both of the types of knowledge that she dismisses are artifacts of white inquiry, and as such cannot fully comprehend a reality shaped and experienced by anyone outside of the white race. Rather than

simply desegregating entry into the public and academic spheres, Hopkins advocates for a radical reconsideration of what and who can create and inform knowledge in the first place.

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