

MESKEREM

The Ancient Future

During the summer of 1968, The Wailers recorded the song ‘*Haile Selassie is the Chapel*’. Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Bunny Wailer and several others put together this track as a clear sign of their growing commitment to Rastafari and its ancient, mystical foundations. This song was a Nyabinghi chant written by Mortimo Planner, one of the leading figures in the Rastafarian movement at the time. Planner had taken a famous country music song, changed the lyrics and made one of the most sought-after recordings of the early Wailers. This particular record catches the Wailer’s entrance into the revelation of Rastafari. With its Binghi drums, raw sound and prophetic words, this musical group had now entered sacred grounds.

The lyrics of this song make a profound statement by claiming that Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, was the messiah and a living God-King. For these young musicians, he was the fulfillment of prophecy and his arrival was an event of global proportions. There is an interesting line in the song that states, “*that man, is the Angel...*” and this is indeed a very profound comment to make about the monarch of Ethiopia. It is clear that in the early stages of their musical career, The Wailers learned about a primeval mystery. They acquired knowledge concerning the monarchy and religious institutions of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewado Church. They became aware of this ancient African culture and its teachings, then presented themselves to the world as Rastafarians. What did they learn that would have such a profound effect on their lives, as well as the lives of many others? What are the roots of Rastafari and the mystical force that carries the movement into the 21st century?

“It was there that I began discovering the pulsating message and truths of Bob Marley, Ras Micheal, Peter Tosh and Jimmy Cliff and the scores of others who were generating similar messages and vibrations. It began dawning on me that I was witnessing and participating in something wonderful: the miracle of triumph through unavoidable suffering, for out of the ghettos of Jamaica was emerging a redemptive philosophy and powerful peace movement in the form of Rastafari.”

The Rastafarians, Leonard Barrett

For many, Bob Marley was and continues to be the doorway into Rastafari. During his career, massive crowds from all over the world came to hear his music and message. He introduced the theology of Rastafari to people from all walks of life, calling

on them to witness the revelation of ancient prophecies. As an individual, Bob Marley was well aware of having been selected to spread this knowledge and he proudly became not only the world's most famous Rastafarian, but also one of the world's most famous musicians, cultural icons and freedom fighters. There is something extraordinary about the rise of Bob Marley, reggae music and the spread of Rastafari to all corners of the globe. For it appears that the Wailers, along with other early Rastafarians, were unto something of great significance, a mystery was unfolding and they became its messengers.

Today, Rastafari can be found in the mainstream popular culture of our global village. It travels around the world through the ever-expanding medium of the internet and other channels of communication; connecting Rasta adherents while sparking some much needed dialogue on the movement. There are millions of Rastafarians around the world, many more who are interested in the movement and a countless number of reggae music fans. Over the years it has developed into a visible cultural movement with distinct characteristics, having come along way even without the physical presence of Haile Selassie I. Rastafari does not have organized congregations, no clergy, no cohesive doctrine and yet a broad range of people are drawn to it.

"They waste their time worshipping God of the dead,
We spend our time worshipping God in the Flesh,
Haile Selassie I, Power of the Trinity, the Most High
Morgan Heritage

Without a doubt, a driving force behind the spread of Rastafari has been reggae music. This form of musical expression has its roots in the global, cross-cultural and worldwide tradition of ritual drumming sessions. Reggae emerged from the hills of Jamaica and the Nyabingi, gradually developing into a distinct sound that appears to resonate deep within the soul of its listeners. Many feel that conscious roots reggae is sacred, with its broad acceptance and public consumption worldwide only adding to its mystic qualities. A common response to reggae and Rastafari is the sensations of going back in time, of being carried into higher realms under the archetypical images of Haile Selassie I, Ethiopia and the Red, Gold and Green. Why has Rastafari continued to grow and spread around the world? Although the coronation of Haile Selassie I was a catalyst for the movement, what are its deeper roots and historical foundations? It is a unique form of expression that has overcome barriers such as geography, culture, ethnicity,

religion and language. Therefore, Rastafari must be drawing upon something deeper, something that belongs to a broader human experience. Its increasingly multi-ethnic and international character suggests the need for a new approach to Rastafarian beliefs and principles. A study, which examines the true source of its energy and mass appeal, as well as the reasons why Rastafari is a leading force in the pressing urge for spiritual revolution.

Red, Gold and Green

“...until the west, and the rest of us know Africa, we can never truly know ourselves.”
Henry Louis Gates, Wonders of the African World

We are currently in the midst of a radical re-interpretation of world history, especially outside of the halls of academic institutions. A new wave of publications has reached the libraries and the bookstores that directly challenge the dominant views of our historical heritage. These writers have re-introduced many neglected areas of study, bringing back to life lost cultures and forgotten traditions. They have also exposed the suppression of evidence about the past and the spread of misinformation that continues to this day. Our understanding of early human societies, ancient civilizations and the spiritual heritage of our ancestors is rapidly changing, reaching a stage of awareness where we have begun to re-examine the structure of our modern world. An exciting theme that is emerging from this new wave of research is the many similarities between all of the world's religions and spiritual traditions. Many ideas concerning humans and their relationship with the sacred are almost identical around the globe, indicating a collective experience for all of humanity. These shared ideas illustrate a spiritual culture that transcends time and change, connecting humans with each other regardless of our personal differences and allowing us to identify with the lives our distant ancestors whom also shared the same experiences with the divine.

“Teach me, teach me, teach me, Teacher,
I and I African culture”

Burning Spear

Over the last few decades, writers have gathered material on the subject of Rastafari and presented an ideology to the world. Those in the fields of comparative religion, history, anthropology and sociology have been especially drawn to Rastafari. Their work has given international exposure to the movement highlighting its central

themes and beliefs. Yet despite these efforts, the subject still remains the source of much debate, widely misunderstood and is in need of going deeper into intellectual landscapes. Although the theological and historical foundations of Rastafari were shaped by the dynamics of the African Diaspora, they are rooted in the same foundations as the collective spiritual heritage of humankind. Born in the context of Caribbean, African, North American and European geo-politics, the quintessence of Rasta culture represents a vital re-manifestation of ancient and global traditions. Some of its most dominant characteristics can be found in religious concepts that were once widespread in previous civilizations from around the world. Rastafari is drawing upon this archaic knowledge, seeing its importance and potential to transform the present world.

"It is true to say that Rasta has become a new world religion, a true new world order.
It is appropriate that Rasta is an African-centered religion, since the world now accepts
the fact that we are all out of Africa.

Rastafari 'Universal Philosophy', Werner Zips

There is an on-going fascination with the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Greece, Rome, the Middle East, Asia and the Americas. An obsession that seems to reflect our innate interests to know about our past and the lives of our ancestors. Of all these classical civilizations, none have drawn as much attention as Egypt. For generations, this part of the African continent has been the subject of intense scholarly debate and the focus of endless amounts of research. No one would disagree that the material and cultural achievements of Egypt are legendary, for its great monuments are still standing to this day and its religion continues to inspire. But despite all of this attention, it is only within the last few decades that Egypt has begun to return to its African roots, as various scholars have recognized that the Egyptian civilization of the lower Nile Delta was actually the extension of a much older African civilization. They have proven that the religious customs, social culture and political institutions of Egypt are distinctively African.

Therefore, this fascination with Egypt is really a fascination with ancient Africa and the spiritual heritage of the Egyptians belongs to the spiritual heritage of the African continent. The period of history that pre-dates the birth of Egyptian civilization had been silenced and ignored by academics for a long time, suppressing the missing link in the study of early societies and the formative stages of civilization. The new African-

centered narrative on ancient history shows the fundamental role that the continent has played in shaping the collective experience of humanity.

In terms of Ethiopia and Eritrea, these countries and their cultures are gradually returning to their African foundations as well. Centuries of misguided scholarship has fostered an image and identity of this region that does not reflect its true nature. This book will completely challenge the standard discourses of Ethiopian and Eritrean history. It will be a radical re-interpretation of the Tewado Church in an attempt to place this indigenous institution back into the greater historical experience of the Nile River Valley and its legacy of advanced civilizations. The cultural, religious and political traditions of Egypt and other Nile River kingdoms are directly related to Ethiopia and Eritrea. As we shall examine throughout this book, the heritage of the Upper Nile dates back to ancient times and the Tewado Church has preserved archaic knowledge and traditions dating back to the primordial periods of human history. These deep African roots are the foundation of Rastafari.

“Proof that ‘the Rastafarian was a Nile Valley high priest’ is summoned from the ancient Egyptian paintings showing dread-locked priests leading processions.”

Dread Jesus, William Spencer

Roots and Culture

The early Rastafarians were African folk who announced to the world the fulfillment of prophecy. During the early 20th century, some members of the African Diaspora began to see themselves as the messengers of this revelation and those chosen to reveal an ancient mystery. They saw themselves as ‘Ethiopians’ and felt strongly that their lives were directly linked to the unfolding of this divine plan. This connection made to Africa, more specifically the reference of their ‘Ethiopian’ origins, is a fundamental characteristic of the Rastafari movement.

“This new religious development is of great interests to students of Rastafarians for many reasons, one, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is one of the most ancient and historic. It falls not in the rank of the Protestant, but Coptic and Orthodox, the movement of Rasta to one of the most ancient churches in the world is important to this religions history.”

The Rastafarians, Leonard Barrett

When we have a proper understanding of Nile River Valley civilizations and other African empires of the past, the desire of Rastafari to return to the roots makes sense. For the reconstruction of ancient African history brings forth very important information

about the monarchical dynasty of the Ethiopian Tewedo Church. Although it is one of the oldest and longest running political and religious institution on the planet, the coronation of Haile Selassie I as the King of Kings remains a pivotal and prophetic event shrouded in mystery. Only when the true history of the royal throne and the traditions of the Tewedo Church are connected to ancient Egypt and Nubia, can we begin to fully understand the significance of the King of Ethiopia. There is a reason why in 1930, the crowning of Haile Selassie I by the priests of this ancient faith was an international and highly publicized event.

Glory to Jah the prophet has come,
Through all these stages,
Glory to Jah the prophet has come,
Through all these ages,
Rastafari is his name...'

Bob Marley

In late 1970's, Bob Marley made his way to Ethiopia and spent a short time visiting his friends in Shashamane. At the time, he was making future plans to build a studio in this small rural town south of Addis Ababa, eventually looking to repatriate and settle in Ethiopia. Bob had been baptized into the Ethiopian Tewedo Orthodox Church before his passing, and later his funeral rites were performed by priest from this archaic African religion. His interests in the traditions of this faith, along with a growing number of others is a very interesting development. For here we find the source of Rastafari, the connection between this modern movement and a primordial revelation.

For the last three decades, they have been arriving at a steady pace in Ethiopia. Thousands of men and women from around the world, from diverse backgrounds and different cultures, have and continue to make the journey to these African highlands. On any given day, one can find Rastafarians from Europe, Asia, Canada, the United States, the Americas, the West Indies and other parts of Africa, making their way around the Ethiopian landscape. What is drawing all of these people to these highlands, to one of the highest point of the Great Rift Valley? For the local people, the Rastafarians are connected to Bob Marley, Jamaica, reggae music, dreadlocks and ganja, but most importantly, they are connected to the former monarchy of the country. At a time when the attention of the world is elsewhere, Rastafarians have maintained a strong interest in the land, history and culture of this region. Today, more information about this ancient

institution, its rich oral and written traditions, is beginning to surface. Decades of political instability, military conflict and environmental change have had a damaging effect on the local inhabitants. Creating conditions that have overshadowed the glorious heritage of the local people and their culture, leaving many important stories untold. The question remains, what is the mystery of this land and the Tewado faith?

Hidden Dimensions of Rastafari

“Rastas know that Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia, is the Messiah. This knowledge Rastas hold, is accessible to all people, though few arrive at it. Everyone, regardless of Race, is a Rasta deep within and it is up to the person to recognize this. Therefore one does not turn Rasta, Rastafari turns one. One does not become Rasta. One becomes conscious of Rasta. Rastafari is becoming.”

Bob Marley ‘Reggae King of the World’, M.Whitney & D.Hussey

There is an elusive, hidden element of Rastafari that has perplexed many of those interested in the subject. Although a series of historical events involving Ethiopia acted as the catalysts for the movement, something else is also responsible for the rapidly growing appeal of this movement. This is the element of Rastafari that cannot be fully explained, its mystical power that cannot be seen or heard but rather only be experienced. Just like the ‘Mystery Schools’ of the ancient world, it is a spiritual movement based on a personal experience with the divine, rather than one defined by institutions, culture or language. It is a journey to the inner space of the psyche that reveals the mysteries and Rastafari is the revelation that begins this meta-physical adventure.

One of the strongest traits of Rastafari is that it has embraced the idea that all humans are divine beings, ‘*we know and we understand, Almighty God is the living-man*’. Not only is there a belief in the divinity of Haile Selassie I and Empress Menen, but there is also a belief in the higher Self, the God-within. This is expressed throughout all aspects of Rastafarian philosophy and has been around since its conception. With these characteristics, Rastafari is fused with powers for self-transformation, acting like a window into the sacred and a spiritual initiation into the great mysteries. This process of self-transformation that continues to take place for many adherents is the mystical phenomenon of Rastafari, with the life of Bob Marley being a prime example. Over his career we can observe his own personal transformation, mental and physical changes that reflected the alchemical nature of Rastafari.

Bob Marley and the many others who became Rastafarians in the 1960's and 1970's, entered into a relationship with their own divine Self. Their introduction to the House of Solomon, the faith and the monarchial dynasty of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewado Church, changed them all by initiating this internal experience. The roots and culture aspect of Rastafari through a reconnection to ancient Africa, plays a major role in the discovery of this new self-identity. Bob Marley's physical appearance changed during his journey into Rastafari, a lion emerged as he took on the appearance of an ancient shaman. His musical message also changed, for many of his songs became clear expressions of his passionate interests in African history, the occult, Biblical mysteries and Haile Selassie I. His life has become the prototypical example of the mystical initiation into the mysticism of Rastafari.

"That so many around the world would adore Marley's records and revere him as a revolutionary firebrand while never entirely comprehending the complexity of his message made his people love and cherish him all the more. They understood the magnitude of his accomplishments and they regarded his artifice as being mystical in origin. He was a shaman, a duly appointed apostle of Jah, scolding the sinful, threatening the pernicious and reaching out to the righteous with arcane language the untrained ear could not completely decipher."

Catch a Fire, Timothy White

Self-transformation requires an inward, psychological journey into a dimension called the subconscious. It is a mental adventure 'down' to the deep realms of the soul, to the core of our own 'being' and into a sacred space. Within these depths can be found layers and layers of memories, which have become hardwired into our bodies and passed on from generation to generation. For most of us, many of these memories will remain dormant and unknown during our lives, lying deep below the surface of consciousness having patiently waited to be discovered. Only by focusing our attention inwards and plunging into the subconscious, can we hope to communicate with this psychic realm and recollect our memories. Once this journey has begun, a process of self-transformation takes place as the trans-dimensional forces of the subconsciousness are awakened.

There is a direct relationship between enlightenment and remembrance, for spirituality is the act of going back to the roots and becoming the being that you used to be. The belief that within the subconscious can be found this original, divine nature is a constant theme in religious traditions from around the world. Since ancient times, there has been a commonly held view that the human mind is capable of 'traveling' to other

dimensions. True spirituality was nondenominational, nonsectarian and more of a personal, psychological journey of remembrance and self-discovery. A deeper understanding of the Mysteries, required knowledge from the sub-conscious and this could not be taught, but only experienced. Only through a conscious and determined effort could one expect to discover this inner Self and unlock its secrets. With the memories that are stored in the subconscious playing such a vital role in this process, it is no wonder that knowledge of ancient history is essential for transformation. With the foundations of Rastafari grounded in archaic African history, the movement has become the manifestation of deep memories from our collective subconscious.

"If in the spirit of the medieval alchemists, every human alive today were to undergo a 'genetic' melanosis or nigredo, they would resolve their genetic heritage to a common primeval source from Africa."

Hero with an African Face, John Ford

The Eternal Return

Under the banner of the Red, Gold and Green, Rastafari is taking us back to the roots. It is reclaiming the memories of our distant past and the heritage of early humanity. With Ethiopia as the cornerstone, Rastafari has become a global movement back to the beginning, to the moment of our 'sacred origins' and as the result of this collective remembrance, buried memories have resurfaced. They can be found in the art, music, culture and theology of Rastafari and deeply engrained in the self-identity of its members. It is this sub-conscious aspect, coupled alongside its historical roots that explains the faith's growing appeal around the world. For the inner dimension of Rastafari is where the movement transcends geography, nationality and culture. From this psychic realm, Rastafari has begun to symbolize the contents our ancient memories, drawing inspiration from the magical and mythological depths of the collective sub-conscious. It has emerged from the eternal human condition and this gives Rastafari the mystical powers to transcend and transform. This is the meaning of 'revelation', a personal and collective experience whereby the contents of the sub-conscious come to life and the invisible is made manifest.

"The more the modern world unravels the beliefs of the ancient peoples and explores the frontiers of man's being, the more it appears that we are coming full circle into an area of extraordinary synthesis in which the intellectual divisions separating the past and the present suddenly shattered by the shock of recognition."

Star Maps, W.M Fix

Many religious movements over the ages were centered on the re-establishment of a condition that was lost and forgotten. Their message was the call to return to an original, primordial perfection that once existed at the beginning and many of the great prophets of history were preaching a remembrance of our past, especially our origins. A constant theme in their teachings is the idea of a mythical paradise that once existed long ago, a period of time when the archetypal divine human being existed. It seems that a profound event took place during the early stages of human history that made the path of enlightenment not a forward journey, but rather a journey back to this moment of time. There is a collection of mythology, legends, tales and occult lore that supports this idea of a primordial transformation, for the emphasis on our ancient roots and sacred origins is a global phenomenon.

At the root of this great mystery, is the belief that during this period something quite extraordinary took place. It was a stage marked by a fundamental change in the development of humanity, a paradigm shift that altered the course of our history. There is a substantial amount of evidence that points towards this transformation for anthropological and archeological research along with information from textual and oral sources, backs up this claim. They all point towards a series of events in a primordial epoch that were responsible for altering human culture and behavior. For our distant ancestors appear to have been involved in some kind of 'mystical revelation', one that established a new relationship between humanity and the divine. It was a golden age, the above was reflected in the below, heaven and earth were united. It is a moment firmly implanted in the genetic memory banks of us all and it forms the foundation of our collective, spiritual heritage. The primordial legend has survived throughout the ages and continues to have a profound effect on the world today.

Since modern society attaches very little importance to early human history, many people overlook the heritage of our distant ancestors. They are unaware of the primordial experience and do not remember the long presence of humans on earth. This is unfortunate because it keeps them distant from a body of knowledge and a sense of self that has positive and uplifting qualities. The ancient teachings associated with our earliest ancestors have the capacity to transform the individual as well as the collective. They are

a true source of wisdom, a legacy that began with the primordial revelation and survives to this day. What exactly occurred in early human history that is so vital to our spirituality? Why is a period often referred to as the 'First Time' so important to religions from around the world'?

In its remembrance of our ancient roots, Rastafari has become the symbol of this forgotten heritage. The movement is expressing of these memories, artistically, musically and ideologically it is a manifestation of them into consciousness. These are the signs that the mythical age of First Time and the events that transformed our earliest ancestors have begun to repeat themselves. With the King of Zion as its figurehead, Rastafari is the leading voice for a prophetic revelation that is in the midst of taking place. It appears that humanity goes through phases of remembering and then forgotten their sacred origins, all part of a greater cycle that always culminates with the re-establishment of the primordial reality. Negative forces can only distract humans from their true identity for so long, the divine Self exists within the psyche and it is only a matter of time before what has been hidden is revealed. Throughout this book, we shall explore our primordial history and its connection to the movement of Rastafari, a link that is crucial in our attempt to understand its source, global appeal and relevance to the modern world.

"Ancient memories are running through my veins..."
Sizzla

The coming of First Time will have a profound and even cataclysmic impact on humanity. It marks the arrival of the sacred into the profane, the moment when eternity descends into historical, earthly time, when spirit overwhelms matter. As this occurs, there will be a dissolution of our present construction of reality, once well-established ideas will be replaced by new ones and once all-powerful institutions will crumble at the foundation. The revelation has already begun and a series of events have already taken place to indicate that we are on the threshold of a new age. A collective remembrance of ancient memories and the mystical self-transformation of millions is only the beginning, for the great mystery of our sacred origins will soon be revealed to all.

The coronation of Tafari Makonnen as Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, was the catalysts for a revolutionary movement that has been going strong ever since. Rastafari has become a spiritual force, leading to the meta-morphosis for many of those

who study its historical roots and occult mysteries. A series of events over the last century involving the life of Haile Selassie I, the Ethiopian Tewado Church and its monarchy have become a doorway into the sacred. Drawing many people into mystical and mythical realms, towards the source of their own being and true identity. This is the kind of psychological experience that changed Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Bunny Wailer and all the other early Rastafarians. There was something about this ancient African priesthood and the king and queens who sat upon its royal throne, that had captured their attention. What is the mystery of the Tewado Church?

Haile Selassie I was a member of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewado faith, his language, education and cultural identity came from this Church. He rose to power through its social infrastructure and earned the position as King of Kings in continuation of a political process that is thousands of years old. To fully understand the prophecy surrounding the Emperor and the prominent role that Ethiopia played on the world stage during the last century, an examination of the Tewado faith is necessary. When we recognize the archaic presence of humans in the Ethiopian and Eritrean highlands, the monarchy and monastic traditions of this ancient Church can be viewed through a new prism. Once we have connected the Horn of Africa to early human history and the development of civilization, then the events leading up to the revelation of Rastafari can be understood in a different context. By making an association with the Tewado faith and ancient Africa, Rastafari has arrived at the beginning and unlocked the transformative powers of the primordial experience.

What is unique about the Tewado Church is the role that ascetics play in its core teachings and philosophy. These are individuals who have withdrawn from society for extended periods of time to live a solitary life of prayer and contemplation. They spend their time in caves, deep in jungles and high up in the mountains, focusing their thoughts on the natural mystic of creation. Asceticism is well-established pathway towards transformation and spiritual illumination, it has been around since ancient times and has been practiced all over the world. It is a discipline that has proven to bring about a drastic change in the mental and physical condition of those who engage in this practice. It is also a fundamental trait of the Tewado faith and is deeply interwoven into the long history of the Ethiopian and Eritrean highlands.

To understand the source of Rastafari we must look to the monastic communities of this region, here we will discover a hidden tradition and a missing link in the narrative on primordial humanity. We will uncover the ideologies behind the royal throne of Ethiopia and the deep roots that support the prophecy of this land and its people. It is a natural development that the contemporary movement of Rastafari is connected to the Tewado Church, for they are a fusion of the distant past with the future. It is also a natural development that in the quest to re-establish an identity through the dynamics of the African Diaspora, the founding figures of the movement directed the people's attention towards Ethiopia and the Great Rift Valley of Africa. They had become aware of a great mystery that was speaking through the traditions of the Tewado Faith, and they wanted the world to know.

Throughout this book, we shall be taking a different approach to the history and philosophy of the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Tewado Church. As the debate continues over the relationship between Rastafari and the teachings of this 'Christian' religion, we will try to form a synthesis between the two. Today, the highlands are still home to one of the oldest and longest running spiritual traditions on earth, one that has been largely ignored by scholars and writers. This work will look at the ancient Tewado faith as a window into primordial humanity and as the keepers of great mystery.

Back in the 1960's, this legacy of Ethiopia caught the attention of a young reggae band from Jamaica called the *The Wailers* and transformed them into Rastafarians. They saw Haile Selassie I as the messiah and a sign that the coming judgment and redemption was at hand. They believed in this very strongly and felt the pressing need to spread the prophetic message that His Majesty was 'the angel'. Since then, many others have drawn the same conclusion and today Rastafari has become a powerful, unifying force as we head into the 21st century. It continues to draw members from diverse backgrounds, it continues to express itself through art and it is building the resource materials needed to support its theological foundations. In the next chapter, we explore in more detail the monastic heritage of the Tewado Church, unlocking the secrets of the ascetic in our attempt to reconnect the primordial tradition with Rastafari.

"Marley's performances were legendary. He danced as if possessed by a higher calling and his artistry evokes the magic and the mysteries of the ancients...the dreadlocked rasta."

Soul Rebel, David Burnett