

**Were the Achievements of
Ancient Greece
Borrowed from Africa?**

*Proceedings from a Seminar
sponsored by the
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Cover Photo
Bronze Athena found near Piraeus, 1959
Courtesy of the National Archaeological Museum
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Preface

Background

The question which this conference seeks to answer is one that until very recently would not have been asked. No one posed the question because there seemed little evidence to support the notion that the achievements of the ancient Greeks were borrowed or stolen from any other civilization, although it has, of course, long been acknowledged that they were influenced over a period of many centuries by neighboring civilizations in the ancient Mediterranean, and that they brought with them, along with their language, some ideas about poetry and myth. It would have been remarkable had the ancient Greeks not been subject to such influences. The Greeks were always in communication with many different peoples, among them the Phoenicians, Hittites, and Egyptians. Greek culture was improved by contributions from each of these ancient civilizations, and in recent years the connections among them have been studied and explored.

Why then the relatively recent concern with the relation between the culture of ancient Greece and one of these older civilizations, that of ancient Egypt? Has there been a major archaeological discovery that suggests Greece was colonized from Egypt? Has Greek language been shown to be closely akin to Egyptian? Have documents been discovered that reveal close similarities between ancient Egyptian texts and writings that have always been thought to have originated in Greece? Although no scholar in the several fields of ancient Mediterranean studies has made such a suggestion, the question has none the less been asked with increasing insistence. The suggestion that the achievements of ancient Greece were borrowed from Africa comes from outside the field, from two different but closely related sources.

The primary inspiration for the idea comes from a group of writers of African descent, who do not claim to be experts in the field of ancient Mediterranean studies, but rather wish to demonstrate that the achievements of African civilizations, and especially that of ancient Egypt, have been ignored or wrongly characterized by people of European descent. For many years these ideas were not well-known outside of the African-American community, but after 1987 they became the subject of increased interest within the academy as the result of the publication of the first volume of Martin Bernal's multi-volume project *Black Athena: The Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. In his first volume, *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985*, Bernal, a Sinologist, who is a professor of Political Science at Cornell University, sought to show that classical

scholars had downplayed the debt of Greece to Egypt and the Near East out of racism and anti-Semitism¹. In volume II, *The Archaeological and Documentary Evidence*, published in 1991, Bernal attempted to provide the hard data to support his assertions.² Although it is fair to say that few (if any) scholars in the field were persuaded by the arguments in the second volume, his discussions in the first volume of the racism and anti-Semitism in Classical scholarship gave his views much more weight than they might have had in a period of history where issues of race were not at the forefront of public concern.³

In particular, Bernal's ideas have found wide acceptance among those who seek to rewrite ancient history from an "Afrocentric" perspective, and so are eager to assert that *Black Athena* provides the intellectual underpinnings for some earlier African-American theories about the debt of Greece to ancient Egypt. As a result, these theories have made their way into courses in universities and schools throughout this country.⁴ Young people are now being taught that the name Athena was derived from the Egyptian goddess Neith and that Greek philosophers such as Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato, learned about philosophy at universities within an ancient educational structure known as the Egyptian Mystery System. Many also are told that Aristotle stole Egyptian books from the Library at Alexandria and passed them off as his own, impossible because the Library at Alexandria was not built until after his death. These claims continue to be made, even though there is no historical evidence to support any of these assertions. The name Athena does not derive from Neith; the Egyptian Mystery System that some Afrocentrist writers believe to be the precursor of Greek philosophy is, in fact, a purely European creation, invented by an eighteenth-century French priest, who took his ideas from Greek and Roman sources. (He had, of course, no other choice, since no one knew about the real intellectual life of Egypt until the nineteenth century, when hieroglyphics were deciphered, and Egyptian inscriptions and papyri could be read.) Aristotle could not have stolen books from the Library at Alexandria, because the library was not built until after his death.

Nonetheless, these assertions and others like them have had and will continue to have a noticeable effect on education. Although the question of the relation between Greek and Egyptian thought is interesting and well worth pursuing in detail, the way in which it is now being pursued does not advance knowledge or encourage students to become better informed about the ancient world. The proponents of "Stolen Legacy" theories about the "theft" of Egyptian ideas by ancient Greeks do not start from the premise that their students should learn all they can about the languages and histories of the two ancient civilizations. Rather, they encourage their students to ignore the work of most scholars of European descent, on the

grounds that it is “Eurocentric” and thus by definition biased against “Afrocentrism.” They appear to assume that each nation or ethnicity will write history in order to promote its own particular values. Since as a result (or so the argument goes) the history written by one group will automatically be invalid for another, there is no reason to trust the work of scholars in the traditional fields of ancient Mediterranean Studies. Instead, the revisionists feel justified in insisting that their students study a limited set of approved books which convey a considerable amount of misinformation. Anyone who insists that a large quantity of evidence has simply been overlooked by the writers of these books can be contemptuously dismissed as racists, or at the very least, Eurocentric promoters of the “purity” of Greek civilization.⁵

Hence the need for the present conference, and for others like it. These recent claims about the origins of Greek civilization must be discussed, and assessed, and the reasons why they are being made need to be understood in the social context of our times. No one should imagine that the subject of Greek origins is not now a controversial topic. Two representatives from the Nation of Islam attended the morning session of the conference, and another man interrupted a speaker to claim that “we” (the speakers?) had stolen African ideas. Ordinarily a conference about ancient history would not attract this sort of attention. But the fact that the conference was sponsored by the Society for the Preservation of the Greek Heritage should not be misunderstood as an attempt at cultural chauvinism. We are discussing these issues not because we regard ancient Greek civilization as a sacred preserve, or because we consider the ancient Greeks to be less subject to outside influences than other peoples. On the contrary, our purpose is simply to describe what happened in the past as accurately as we can. In addition to showing which of the claims that have recently been made about the ancient world can be substantiated and which cannot, we are asking whether modern European scholars have not sufficiently emphasized the debt of ancient Greece to Egypt. Have they overvalued Egyptian art at the expense of other Egyptian cultural achievements? Have they failed to recognize fully the connections of Egypt to other ancient African civilizations? If they have done so, it is up to us to try to present a more balanced and nuanced account of the relation between the two cultures.

The Conference

In her introduction to the conference **Dr. Deborah D. Boedeker** outlines the major issues involved in discussing the question raised by the conference. She rightly distinguishes between the goals of Afrocentrism and

the content of Afrocentric curricula in the schools. There is no question that schools and universities have ignored or have been unjustly critical of the cultures of African peoples. But in seeking to provide students with a better understanding of African history and geography, why should it be necessary to teach new myths, this time of African (as opposed to European) supremacy, especially when one important goal of education should be understanding and respect for the achievements of all peoples?

In the opening paper of the conference **Dr. Erich Martel** considers the consequences of Afrocentrism for education. He identified Afrocentric teaching about the ancient world as “heritage” rather than “history.” History writing (an invention of the ancient Greeks) encourages the examination of both good and bad past achievements. Writers of *Heritage* select only what are perceived to be the good achievements of any society or culture.⁶ Martel emphasized that Afrocentrism derives support from popular educational theories about child- (as opposed to subject-) centered pedagogy and from postmodern theories of knowledge that suggest that history is merely a form of fiction. Martel points out that none of the prominent educationists who promote Afrocentric curricula have credentials in ancient history, and discusses some of the more significant false claims made in their work. He observes that by using race as a criterion in constructing heritage, Afrocentrists are in fact relying on and preserving discredited Eurocentric theories. Their ideas, he believes, would not harm ancient Greece so much as the very students they were seeking to help. Denying to these students the opportunity to learn how to judge and use evidence will result in their alienation and exclusion from the larger society.

In the next paper “Egypt and Greece: Afrocentrism and Greek History,” **Dr. Stanley Burstein** summarizes the theories put forward by Martin Bernal in *Black Athena*. He explains why Afrocentric literature to date has concentrated on the relation between Egypt and Greece, and deals primarily with particular themes, among them being the race of the ancient Egyptians, the debt of Greece to Egypt, and the suppression of the truth by Eurocentric historians. He also reviews the widely influential theories of the Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop, who saw history as a Manichaean; conflict between a creative South and a harsh North, with the Greeks as preservers and corrupters of the brilliant contributions of ancient Egypt. But even though it is clear that the notion of a “Stolen Legacy” is wrong, Burstein warns us not to dismiss Afrocentric theory as mere myth-making. Black scholars in the nineteenth century were justified in observing that Europeans had created a false dichotomy between African and European civilizations, and that some Europeans had erroneously imagined that the ancient Egyptians were not an African people. But unfortunately the early Afrocentric writers wrote about the ancient world using nineteenth-century

frameworks now discarded by modern scholars of the ancient Mediterranean; and modern Afrocentrism builds on their Eurocentric assumptions.

Burstein goes on to show that contrary to what the Afrocentrists believe, historians of ancient Greece have always been interested in the connections between ancient Greece and ancient Egypt, never more so than in the present. There was active trade in the second millennium B.C., between Aegean nations and Egypt, but little evidence of contact for several centuries after the fall of Mycenae. In the seventh century B.C., Greek mercenaries were active in Egypt, and the Greek city of Naucratis was founded Nile Delta. New information shows that Greeks were in contact with Egyptian priests and officials, and dedicated Greek objects in Egyptian sanctuaries. But the main outlines of history have not been changed by these finds, and it is unlikely that any major areas of Egyptian influence on Greece have been ignored. And even where there is influence, the Greeks put their own stamp on the old ideas: who cannot fail to distinguish a Greek *kouros* from its Egyptian prototypes?

Dr. S. O. Y. Keita in his paper "Is Studying Egypt in Its African Context 'Afrocentric'?" offers a theoretical framework for discussing the origins of the ancient Egyptians. Several factors indicate that the population of ancient Egypt was indigenous: the presence of African flora and fauna in art and literature, and its language, which belongs to a branch of languages that most likely originated in or near the Horn. Pottery remains suggest that Saharans migrated into the Nile valley between 6000 and 5000 B.C., merging with an indigenous population that seems to have come from the Sudan. Foreign ideas were imported, but always on Egyptian terms; for example, emmer wheat and barley were brought from the Near East, and incorporated into patterns of existence that had already been established. Dr. Keita observes that since there are wide variations of physical types among African peoples, there is no reason to assume that the ancient Egyptians did not come from Africa. Recent metric studies suggest that they were coextensive with various groups from the south of Egypt. The morphology of this physical type ("Elongated African"), which includes narrow noses and faces, is most accurately understood as having evolved from indigenous populations, rather than as a product of outside or European influences. Only when traditional theories of race are discarded, and discussions are based on known evidence, can there be a profitable dialogue about ancient Egyptian civilization.

In "Stolen Legacy? The Evidence from Language" **Dr. Jay H. Jasanoff** returns to the question raised by Dr. Keita of the proper use of language as evidence for culture. He comments on the problems of confusing influence with origins and the attempts made by all peoples to establish connections between cultures on the basis of superficial similarities. Ancient Greek is an

Indo-European language, unlike Egyptian, which is Afro-Asiatic. That they spoke different languages, however, does not explain why their civilizations developed in different ways. If the Egyptians had wanted to express the key concepts of Greek philosophy, or the Greeks had wished to describe a more elaborate afterlife, their languages would have allowed them to do so. Nor can language serve as a key to origins, in the absence of other indicators. But because we are well-informed about the vocabulary and structure of Indo-European languages, it is possible for us to determine with some accuracy which words are loan words, and to see which words are translations of foreign words or phrases. A high proportion of loan words usually points to a particular cultural influence, but the few, and mostly late, Egyptian loan words in ancient Greek do not indicate that there ever was a significant Egyptian or African presence on the Greek mainland, as Bernal has postulated. Bernal realizes that strong linguistic ties are crucial to his arguments about the connections between Egypt and Greece, but the etymologies which he has produced so far are based on lax phonetic and semantic criteria, and are often contradicted by the known facts of historical linguistics. Until evidence can be produced to show that there is a substantial Egyptian linguistic presence in ancient Greece, there is no reason to imagine that ancient Greece was a cultural colony of Egypt.

In "Afrocentric Education and the Study of Ancient History" **Dr. James D. Muhly** discusses the conspiracy theories that have fueled the present controversy over Greek origins, and suggests that despite their many fallacies, their existence has inspired a profitable debate. He observes how in the case of the alleged African origins of the Olmec people of ancient Mexico, Afrocentric writers employ the Eurocentric racial theories that (as Dr. Keita has shown) ought to be discarded. In addition, Afrocentric scholars almost always ignore ancient Africa in favor of Egypt, in this case an ancient Egypt of their own creation. But this imaginary view of the ancient world may prove less harmful in the long run than what some nineteenth-century European scholars have written about ancient Nubia. They stated that there must have been an invasion from the North, since in their view no black peoples were capable of great achievement. At least we should give Afrocentrism credit for having encouraged the study of Nubia, and regret that popular interest in that culture came too late to preserve vast quantities of important archaeological evidence which were submerged under Lake Nasser after the construction of the Aswan Dam. Similarly, Bernal's work has challenged classical scholars to explore the connections between ancient Greece and other cultures, and as a result of that challenge, many useful studies have been produced.

Dr. Frank J. Yurco in "The Distortion of History: Bernal, Afrocentrism, and Ancient Egypt," discusses some of the ways in which

ancient Egyptian art and customs have been misinterpreted by Afrocentrists. First he considers the portrayal of "race" in art. Surviving portrait heads show that there were a wide variety of features and skin colors in ancient Egypt. Some of the portraits represent Nubians and other immigrants from neighboring areas, but most simply reflect the nature of the native population, as Dr. Keita has suggested. Using nineteenth-century racist terminology to describe them is both confusing and misleading. Compounding the confusion is the Egyptian convention of using different colors to portray different aspects of the gods' powers. Afrocentrists have also misinterpreted the meaning of the Egyptians' name for their country: *kmt* means "the black land," and the adjective *kemtyw* means "those of the black land." He observes that even though the Egyptians recognized differences in skin color, no one was excluded from advancement because of it.

Dr. Yurco then goes on to discuss other current misinterpretations. The legend of Sesostris (as told by Herodotus) cannot be used as evidence for an Egyptian invasion of Greece; rather, the story best fits invasions by Egypt of Kush in the first millennium B.C. There were contacts between Egypt and Greece in the early New Kingdom (1570-1350 B.C.), and particularly in the XXVIth Saite Dynasty (664-525 B.C.), involving trade and military aid, but nothing like the direct cultural connections posited in some Afrocentric literature. The Greeks had even closer ties with civilizations in the Near East. Alexandria was a Greek city (the Egyptians avoided such coastal settlements), and with different populations that kept themselves separate from one another. The cultural atmosphere attracted Greeks from elsewhere in the Greek world. Great advances were made in the sciences and geography, and Egyptians also contributed to this new knowledge. But it was a Greek, Eudoxus of Cyzicus, who in the first century B.C. enabled an expedition sent by the Ptolemies to reach India and develop the Indian trade route, which helped to enrich Cleopatra and her Roman successors. Through a blending of cultures (there is no question of "stealing") a greater and richer legacy was produced.

Conclusion

The papers explained from several points of view why the approach of much Afrocentric literature is misleading. Many of the claims cannot be supported by the historical evidence, and the notion that ancient historians have ignored or even concealed information about outside influences on ancient Greece is both untrue and unfair. Virtually none of the proposed linguistic connections between Egyptian and Greek stand up to scrutiny. There is no reason to imagine that there was an invasion of Greece from

Egypt in the second millennium B.C. (or at any other time). The outlines of ancient history do not need to be recast. Such contact as there was before the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great was limited mainly to trade and military expeditions. Ancient civilizations in the Near East had a more important influence in the formation of Greek civilization than did any ancient civilization on the continent of Africa. Nonetheless, the Greeks, although often uncomfortable in their communications with foreigners, had a profound respect for the Egyptians, and were proud of their encounters with them, however brief.

The conference papers also demonstrated that perhaps the most serious objection to Afrocentric history is not its historical revisionism, but its tendency to divert attention away from the actual history of ancient Egypt toward an imaginary Egypt reconstructed primarily from European sources. The reality is far more interesting, and more multicultural in nature. Modern categories of race prevent an objective reexamination of the physical characteristics of the ancient Egyptians, and also keep us from seeing that the ancient Egyptians dealt with the question of variations in physical appearance in a humane and unprejudiced manner. But far more significant than the cultural contacts between Egypt and Greece is the connection between Egypt and the rest of Africa, which (although hardly mentioned in the Afrocentric literature) suggests continuing communication with cultures to the South, and influences of immense antiquity from the rest of Africa. We hope that these papers will encourage further study of the connections between ancient Egypt and other African civilization, not only because the research is interesting in itself, but because it will enable us better to understand Africa's contributions to world civilizations.⁷ Such an understanding cannot help but be a benefit to us all.

It is also true that Afrocentrism, along with the theories that support them, have encouraged scholars of ancient history to expand the horizons of their inquiries and to explore all aspects of the ties between ancient civilizations. I believe that every contributor to this conference would agree that it is important and entirely appropriate to study the civilization of ancient Greece in the whole of its cultural context, and that instead of programs in "The Classics" (since after all there are important "classics" in all world literatures) we should offer Ancient Mediterranean studies, where scholars of ancient Greece and Rome would regularly communicate with Egyptologists, Africanists, and Near Eastern Scholars, as we have today. Progress, as several of our contributors emphasized, must begin with such communication and understanding. ■

Mary Lefkowitz

Notes

1. Bernal, Martin. *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. Vol. I: *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece* (Rutgers, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987).
2. M. Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Vol II: *The Archaeological and Documentary Evidence* (Rutgers, N. J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1991).
3. M. Levine, "The Use and Abuse of Black Athena," (*American Historical Review* 97.2 [1992]: 440-60; M. R.Lefkowitz, and G.M. Rogers, eds., *Black Athena Revisited* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), passim, with bibliography.
4. See esp. E. Martel, "What's Wrong With the Portland Baseline Essays?," pp. 30-34 in J. Miller, ed., *Alternatives to Afrocentrism*, Ed. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Center for the New American Community. 1996). B. Ortiz de Montellano, "Afrocentric Pseudoscience: The Miseducation of African Americans," pp. 561-72 in P. R. Gross, N. Levitt, and M. W. Lewis, eds., *The Flight from Science and Reason*, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* vol. 775 (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1996). M. Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History*. Revised Edition (New York: Basic Books, 1997), pp. 239-40.
5. These claims and their origins are discussed in Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa* (above, n.3).
6. For a detailed examination of this topic, see D. Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1996).
7. See esp. A. M. Roth, "Building Bridges to Afrocentrism: A Letter to My Egyptological Colleagues," pp. 313-326 in Gross, Levitt, and Lewis, eds., *The Flight from Science and Reason* (above, no.4).

Introduction

Deborah Boedeker

W elcome, and thanks to all of you for joining us as we consider the fascinating, challenging, and at times emotionally charged issues that this group of scholars will be discussing today.

I'm wearing several hats here, and would like to tip each of them in gratitude before we begin. As a trustee of the SPGH, I want to thank The Classics Department of Georgetown University for co-sponsoring this event, and Professor O'Connor for his gracious welcome to the forum. As a classicist, and one particularly interested in ancient Hellenic culture, I thank Anna Lea and the SPGH for assembling this panel of experts in several scholarly disciplines: multiple perspectives will provide the most effective way to examine a topic that is currently stimulating thought and broadening horizons in this field of study. And as an American, I welcome the occasion to address constructively an issue linked in some ways with the effects of racism and color prejudice in our country.

Needless to say—I hope it is needless to say!—the aim of our seminar, “*Were the Achievements of Ancient Greece Borrowed from Africa?*”, is clearly not to pit Greeks against Africans, ancient or modern. Rather than being polemical, our purpose today is frankly academic (and by that, I do not mean “irrelevant”). It is “academic” in a twofold sense. First, we will try to understand better how history was “made,” both by ancient peoples and by modern historians; and second, we will consider how and for what purpose history should be taught in our schools at this time.

The history we are talking about, of course, concerns the earliest perceptible beginnings of our civilization, western civilization, in its political, moral, artistic, religious, philosophical, scientific origins. As you are aware (surely this group more than most), pride of place for the beginnings of western civilization has long gone to ancient Greece, known to schoolchildren for generations as the cradle of democracy, birthplace of philosophy, fountainhead of literature, and more. This familiar perspective was eloquently expressed by Percy Bysshe Shelley in the preface to his poem *Hellas* (1821): “We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their root in Greece...”

But ancient Greece, as we also know, did not produce the earliest high culture, even if it is the one most accessible and familiar to us. Nor, of course, did the Greeks ever exist in a vacuum. One reason we are here today, then, is to catch up with some modern scholarly views on

relationships between the ancient Hellenes and their neighbors to the south, the Egyptians, especially in the early stages of their history. We will also consider the relationship between the Egyptians and *their* neighbors to the south, Nubians, Ethiopians, and other Africans. For, as Afrocentrists point out, Egypt is sometimes studied as if it were severed from the rest of its continent.

Our other goal is 'academic' in the sense of 'curricular.' And with this we enter into a major area of Afrocentrist discussion. There are of course many varieties of Afrocentrism, but all versions would probably share the following concerns: First, that schools have taught, and scholars have mostly studied, the origins of our civilization by looking only toward ancient Europe, especially Greece as it happens, to which are attributed many of the most salient aspects of western civilization—including democracy, systematic philosophy, a scientific worldview, and our most revered literary narratives. Second, Afrocentrists are concerned about the effects of this perspective on those who, because of their skin color, may seem to be excluded from this 'European' heritage. And third, they argue that many important cultural achievements in fact originated in ancient Africa, especially North Africa, from which they were then transmitted to Greece and elsewhere; these achievements, they maintain, have not been accorded due attention in scholarship, public consciousness, and the curriculum, in large measure because of racist assumptions.

And so Afrocentrist educators wish to incorporate into school curricula materials that give pride of place to African history, particularly the history of Egypt, and emphasize African contributions to our culture. Our dialogue today will focus in part on the content of these curricula and on how that content has been determined—in other words, on the basis for deciding what we 'know' and will pass on about the distant past.

The Afrocentric project in general long predates the publication of the first volume of Martin Bernal's much-discussed *Black Athena* in 1987. Bernal maintains that the Near East and (most relevant for our purposes today) Africa made enormous contributions to ancient Greek culture, and that those contributions were systematically denied by 19th and 20th century scholars committed to the idea of a 'pure' European civilization, free of Semitic or African elements. Significantly, Bernal's stated aim in publishing his book is not primarily to advance knowledge, although naturally he intends to do that too, but to combat Eurocentrism. Bernal's work, despite the exaggerated conclusions and questionable methodology that have been pointed out by many a reviewer, has unquestionably given Afrocentrist discussion a more prominent place in the national forum, and the debate over *Black Athena* has encouraged many classicists to take more note of the contributions of cultures East and South, as well as North, of the Mediterranean.

Some will find it hard to imagine that simply teaching ancient history differently could change in any significant way the effects of racism. The very intensity of the Afrocentrist/Hellenocentrist debate suggests, however, that we should not underestimate the degree to which we identify with our past, or what we believe our past to be. And as Afrocentrists point out, Black Americans have been told (sometimes in so many words) that, because their heritage is African, they have no history. This problem of providing a valid past raises serious issues. Granted, education should serve the needs of the present, but what does the present really need?

Accordingly, several of our panelists today focus on current curricular issues, and all of them look beyond the present to suggest what a future curriculum might contain. They present fascinating evidence—much of it still too new to have found its way into textbooks—of complex connections among ancient cultures, Greece and Egypt prominent among them. The study of the foundations of our culture, which has provided so many models, may now provide yet another: a model of cultural permeability and openness, of an admirable ability to deal profitably with and learn from others. Let us then prepare to listen to and question each other as we explore these fruitful topics. ■

Heritage or History: The Challenge of Afrocentrism in Our Schools

Erich Martel

One of the most memorable experiences for generations of Georgetown University freshmen was Carroll Quigley's course, "The Development of Civilization", which introduced us to the ancient world and historical analysis. He passionately believed that this study would prepare us for the challenges and difficult judgments we would face as active members of an open society.

One of Quigley's major themes was the effort of humanity to discover the laws that governed the universe and how the ancient Greeks formulated two opposing explanatory outlooks. One view held that these laws could be uncovered through observation and experimentation. This is the birth of the scientific outlook and method, which are based on the assumption that the world we perceive with our senses is real, not illusory, and potentially knowable.

The second was the development of rationalism or the system of logical thinking, first formulated by Pythagoras. He and those who followed him, including Plato and Socrates, held that, "we can say nothing true or know nothing certain about the physical world of appearances. In this world all is flux. But behind this material world there must be some non-material unchanging reality that can be found by rational thought, and alone, without having to confirm it by observation, since the world of sensory perception was illusory." Accordingly, this unchanging, non-material reality, often expressed in the logic of mathematics, contains the ideal "type" or "essence" of every animate or inanimate object. The triumph of this outlook, i.e. the view that ideal, non-material types were real, while the observable world was not, smothered those first steps toward a scientific outlook. The stillbirth of the scientific outlook allowed the forum of thought, discourse, politics and discovery to be dominated by an anti-scientific rationalism as well as a multitude of other irrational cosmologies..

The conflict created by these two competing outlooks has had enormous consequences in the West. They provide a useful framework for examining Afrocentrism as example of the difference between "history" and "heritage".

Well into this century, science accepted the view that the classification and segmentation of the spectrum of humanity into "races" on the basis of a few observable physical traits was grounded in the evidence of biological

research. These arbitrary classifications gave aid and comfort to racial discrimination from the late 18th to the early 20th centuries. Aristotelian logic was employed to reduce these "races" to specific "ideal types", purportedly based on distinctively measurable traits.

By the 20th century, biologists replaced this model with the concept of clines and clusters of specific traits resulting from natural selection, microevolution, and the inevitable mixing of populations. Nonetheless, the "race" concept survives in popular culture and governmental rules and regulations. Ironically, the very concept that was used to justify segregation and the denial of equality has become the bedrock of Afrocentrism. Despite many differences, Afrocentrists hold a static view of "race", employ the discarded yardsticks of 19th century racial theories, and resurrect arguments of racial superiority, based on culture, biology or both.

What then is our legacy from ancient Greece: a scientific outlook that gives us concepts of clines and clusters or the anti-scientific rationalism that justifies "race"? If it is "heritage" we are studying, we can pick the one that feels best; but, if it is "history", then we must acknowledge the influence of both on us. "Heritage" usually means filiopietism, a bipolar focus on the glorious achievements or unfortunate victimization of one's ancestors. The quest for "heritage" prefers to ignore one ancestor's failures or ignoble victimization of others.

"History" requires the examination of the good and the bad in any society. In the past half century historical research and the teaching of history have moved away from ethnocentric and patriotic lore to a more critical examination of the past. Widely accepted canons of historical evidence enable us to distinguish between accurate and flawed accounts of the past. Grounded in the scientific method, historians acknowledge that new evidence requires a reexamination of previous conclusions. By studying and analyzing primary sources, students learn to distinguish fact from opinion and to evaluate the reliability of various types of evidence.

What then is Afrocentrism? Afrocentrism is a current in American educational thought that attributes the lower academic success rates of black students, especially males, to school curricula that are not focused or "centered" around an African "heritage". It derives much of its theory of learning from several popular, but flawed, academic and pedagogical currents: the self-esteem theories, child-centered (as opposed to subject-centered) pedagogy, and the extreme relativism of post-modernism, which holds that any interpretation of the past is legitimate. Many parents and educators mistakenly confused Afrocentrism with the inclusion of African and African-American history in school curricula. Many hoped it would be the key to academic success that its advocates claimed.

Yet, despite such claims, Afrocentrism is not the inclusion of accurate historical information. Afrocentric materials are deeply flawed and, therefore, inappropriate for inclusion in public school curricula for the following reasons:

- assertions about the past, especially ancient history, that are inaccurate or outdated and not supported by currently available evidence;
 - Afrocentric texts and curricular materials are largely written by people who are not specialists in the fields of ancient history they are attempting to revise; some popular authors do not even have college degrees;
 - Many Afrocentric materials are marked by an anti-intellectual populism and appeals to emotion and fear;
 - Advocacy of theories of learning unsupported or contradicted by educational research;
 - Advocacy by some of pseudo-scientific racial and biological theories.
- Frank Snowden Jr., professor emeritus of classics at Howard University, writing in the Georgetown University Alumni magazine (*Georgetown*, Winter 1992), states,

Though Afrocentrists may be competent in their own specialties, many of their statements about blacks in the ancient world demonstrate clearly that they have not approached the ancient evidence with the relevant scholarly apparatus. Many shortcomings have resulted: unfamiliarity with and a failure to use primary sources; a reliance on the undocumented opinions of fellow Afrocentrists on the basis of a few lines from a single author or from a few texts without considering the total picture of blacks in antiquity; the use of language charged with political rhetoric, a tendency to read a "white conspiracy" into scholarly interpretations of the ancient evidence.

The widely circulated Portland, OR, *African American Baseline Essays* (1987, revised 1990) is the most influential Afrocentric curriculum document. It has been adopted by the public school systems in Detroit and Atlanta and used as a model or a source for curricular changes in Newark, NJ, Indianapolis, Ft. Lauderdale, and Prince Georges County, MD. In addition, many other school systems or specially designated individual schools or clusters of schools (Cleveland, Kansas City, Washington, D.C., Oakland, Palo Alto and Los Angeles, inter alia) have adopted or used some of the many Afrocentric books, posters and videotapes available in Afrocentric book stores to revise or update their curricula.

Briefly stated, the inaccurate historical view advanced in the *Portland Baseline Essays*, holds that: "Ancient Egypt was a Black nation...." or "The Land of the Blacks," the famous Ptolemaic queen "Cleopatra VII...was of mixed African and Greek parentage." "She was not fully Greek." "[T]he

original home of the [ancient Egyptian's] ancestors was south in ... the neighborhood of Uganda and Punt," "...invasions by Asians, Europeans and Arabs... pushed Blacks further south," making today's Egyptians different from the ancient Egyptians. Egypt was "the first great civilization," since it was only "[d]uring the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties" of ancient Egypt (i.e., after 2563 BCE) that "[t]he nations (sic) and people in the other river valleys, the Tigris and Euphrates, were laying the foundation of Sumerian civilization." "The African origins of Greek development [were] an unquestioned reality of the Greeks; "Olmec civilization in Meso-America (Van Sertima, 1976) and most other Old World civilizations were largely the products of relatively recent prehistoric (as opposed to Paleolithic) African diaspora.

The more extreme wing of Afrocentrism advocates a fantastic brew of pseudoscience, including a melange of confused claims about the special powers of melanin, the mystical powers of the pyramids, and claims that the ancient Egyptians experimented with gliders, antennas and electricity; and presenting ESP, psychokinesis, remote viewing and astrology as scientifically valid.

A quick survey of the professional background of some of the prominent advocates of Afrocentric history and pedagogy reveals that most do not hold degrees of professional credentials in any of the fields they claim to be revising.

- Molefi Kete Asante, who coined the terms "Afrocentricity" and "Afrocentrism", is chairman of the African-American studies department at Temple University. His Ph.D. is in speech.
- Asa Hilliard III, chief editor for the Portland, OR, *African-American Baseline Essays*, is a professor of urban studies at Georgia State University in Atlanta. His professional credentials are in educational psychology.
- Wade Nobles runs an Afrocentric and "ebonics" high school program in Oakland, CA. He is one of the leading promoters of the notion that a high melanin level confers special physical, mental and spiritual powers on a person. His professional training is in educational psychology.
- Ivan Van Sertima, a professor in African Studies Department at Rutgers University, is best known for his book, *They Came Before Columbus* (1976), which asserts that Egyptians under Nubian rule crossed the Atlantic in the 8th Century BCE and were the major force in the development of the Olmec civilization, which honored them by carving enormous basalt heads in their likeness. He also edits an irregularly appearing Afrocentric journal, *The Journal of African Civilizations*, which contains essays written mostly by amateur historians, not subject to peer review, who seek to prove his argument that most ancient civilizations

from Mesopotamia to China were the direct product of recent diffusion from Egypt or Ethiopia. Ancient historians and anthropologists who specialize in these fields are virtually unanimous in finding these claims not based on evidence. Archaeologist, James Muhly of the University of Pennsylvania evaluated Van Sertima's journal as "well intentioned but quite unconvincing and lacking in the basic techniques of critical scholarship" (Black Athena versus Traditional Scholarship," *Journal of Mediterranean Archeology*, 3/1, 1990).

- Hunter Havelin Adams is the author of the "Science and Technology Essay" in the *Portland Baseline Essays*. Although listed on cover of this widely circulated curriculum document as a research scientist at Argonne National Laboratory, the public information officer, when queried, wrote that Adams is "an industrial hygiene technician [who] does no research on any topic" and whose "highest degree is a high school diploma" (Baurac, 1991).
- John Henrik Clarke authored the "Social Studies Essay" in the *Portland Baseline Essays*, half of which is devoted to ancient Egypt. Among its many errors is his insistence that Cleopatra VII was "of mixed African and Greek parentage," a claim that Mary Lefkowitz analyzes in great detail in *Not Out of Africa* (1996). In an earlier article, "African Warrior Queens" in *Black Women in Antiquity* (1984), edited by Ivan Van Sertima, Clarke offers as proof that Shakespeare calls her "tawny" and that Robert Ripley, who says he has proof for all his facts, calls Cleopatra 'fat and black' (see *Believe it or Not*, p. 82, sixth printing, 1934)." Clarke, professor emeritus of African and Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, is not by training a specialist in ancient history.

The Cleopatra debate offers an example of outright dishonesty. Following the publication of *Not Out of Africa* in early 1996, Molefi Asante rebuked Mary Lefkowitz as follows: "I can say without a doubt that Afrocentrists do not spend time arguing that either Socrates or Cleopatra were Black. I have never seen these ideas written by an Afrocentrist nor have I heard them discussed in any Afrocentric intellectual forums." (*Emerge*, July-August 1996). Yet, Asante's own books list in their bibliographies, books that argue that position. Moreover, he himself wrote a collection of five essays for the Camden, NJ Public Schools (*African-Puerto Rican Centric Curriculum Guide*, n.d., [c. 1988]). There he described Cleopatra as follows:

According to John Henrick Clarke and Joel A. Rogers, although the first Ptolemy was Greek in appearance, as the dynasty intermarried with the native Egyptians they became increasingly African in appearance. In fact, Joel Rogers states, "...Cleopatra herself is

known through tradition as having been of a tawny, or mulatto color, and is so described by Shakespeare.”

John Henrik Clarke says that:

[Cleopatra VII]...was of mixed African and Greek parentage.
(John Henrik Clarke, African Heritage Studies Conference,
Philadelphia, April, 1988)

As Mary Lefkowitz emphasizes in *Not Out of Africa*, Cleopatra’s skin color is irrelevant. It is rather the refusal to critically use the ancient evidence, the willingness to employ hysterical rhetoric and diatribe in place of historical analysis, and the lack of qualms about misrepresenting one’s own writings, that poses a threat to scholarship.

The influence of Afrocentrism in the schools is difficult to accurately assess. Widespread criticism of the historical inaccuracies in Afrocentric books and curricula has led many schools and school systems to camouflage Afrocentric programs under such terms as “multicultural”, “culture sensitive”, *interalia*. Debra Viadero’s experience in writing an article on Afrocentric schools for *Education Week* (October 16, 1996) confirms this. She writes, “Call an Afrocentric school these days, and chances are you won’t get a return phone call.”

Afrocentrism poses the same threat to scholarship as “scientific creationism”, “Lysenkoism” and the many other beliefs that appeal to some sacred or inerrant authority. Appeals to “race” were not invented by the Afrocentrists. Modern racial theories have their roots in Europe, in turn, an outgrowth of ethnocentrism, which all societies, including ancient Greece and ancient Egypt, experienced. By employing “race” as a static and special category, Afrocentrists are unwittingly confirming that they are part of the Western tradition, but not a proud part of it. The proud part of that tradition was the use of scientific data to unmask and disarm the concept of “race”. The great danger is not to ancient Greece, but rather to the students who come under the sway of Afrocentrism. They will be denied the complex and bumpy history of the world that finds heroes and villains in all societies. They will be deceived into thinking “race” is the fundamental reality and that “heritage” is the epitome of good history and that evidence can be selectively included or ignored. The consequence for these students is alienation and further exclusion from the larger society. ■

Egypt And Greece: Afrocentrism And Greek History

Stanley M. Burstein

Debates among ancient historians rarely are “news”. Yet for much of this decade discussion of a relatively esoteric subject, the relationship between the civilizations of ancient Egypt and Greece, has been “news.” The principal American professional organizations concerned with antiquity have devoted special sessions at their annual meetings to the subject. Major scholarly journals have, in effect, organized similar “sessions” in print by devoting whole issues or large sections of issues to consideration of the topic and its ramifications.

Even more remarkable, the topic has engaged the interest of the commercial media and the general public, as, indeed, your presence here today attests. Numerous articles have appeared in newspapers and magazines, many with emotionally charged titles such as: “*Out of Egypt, Greece*”, “*The African Origins of ‘Western Civ’*” and “*Not Out of Africa*” — the title also of an excellent recent book on the subject by one of the other members of our panel, Professor Mary Lefkowitz.¹ It has even been the subject of several television and radio shows. An e-mail bulletin board sponsored by the publisher of *Not Out of Africa* attracted more than 2600 subscribers during its short existence this past spring. Quite unexpectedly, it would seem, Greek history and Greek historians have been drafted into the “culture wars.” How did this happen?

The impetus for this remarkable surge of interest in what might be called the “Ancient Egyptian question” is not in doubt. It was the publication in 1987 by a small English publisher of the first volume of *Black Athena: The Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*.² Two further volumes have since appeared, and the sensation it created in “the Academy” shows no signs of abating.

The work of a respected historian of Communist China and Professor of Government at Cornell University named Martin Bernal: *Black Athena* is not the sort of book that one would expect to become the center of a furious public controversy. As the book’s subtitle—*The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985*—indicates, it is a detailed almost 500-page-long critical analysis of the writing of Greek history during the last two centuries. Hardly the typical best seller! And, indeed, interest in *Black Athena* and the controversy surrounding it outside the United States has been noticeably lacking.

In scholarship like so much else, however, topicality and timing are all important, and *Black Athena* was both topical and timely. *Black Athena* is an exhaustive and, at times, exhausting critique of modern historians of ancient Greece that appeared at a time when multiculturalism and post-modernist criticism of the academic disciplines had become major issues in humanistic scholarship. Professor Bernal's critique was clearly and forcefully presented and the stakes seemed unusually high: nothing less than our entire understanding of the origins of Greek and Western civilization.

The core of Professor Bernal's critique of recent Greek historiography consists of three points. First, ancient Greek writers claimed that important elements of Greek civilization had been borrowed from the ancient civilizations of the Near East and especially Egypt during the second millennium BC when Greece had been colonized by the Egyptians and Phoenicians. Second, evidence of this colonization was preserved in two sources: Greek myths and legend and ancient Greek itself, almost forty percent of whose vocabulary Professor Bernal claims consists of foreign loan words, mostly of Semitic and Egyptian origin. Third, this view of Greek History, which Professor Bernal calls the "Ancient Model" was accepted without question by scholars until the nineteenth century when it was suddenly replaced by the "Aryan Model" which assigned sole credit for the creation of Greek civilization to white invaders from northern Europe and Central Asia.

As to the reason for the replacement of the "Ancient Model" by the "Aryan Model" Professor Bernal is clear and forthright. It was not the result of the progress of "objective" scholarship but of racist and nationalist prejudice. Nineteenth century European historians—predominantly British and German—could not accept that the Greeks, whom they idealized, owed anything to the ancestors of the dark skinned peoples their countries were busy conquering. For this reason Professor Bernal argues that future progress in the understanding of Greek history is possible only if modern Greek historians follow the lead of the ancient Greeks and again put the "Ancient Model" with its emphasis on Egypt and the Near East at the center of Greek historical studies.

Black Athena understandably created a sensation among Classicists and Greek historians. No critique of Classics and Greek historiography on this scale had ever appeared before. *Black Athena* is also a remarkably fascinating work to read. It combines the titillation of a tabloid expose of the sins of the founding fathers of contemporary Greek historiography with an uncompromising denunciation of everything we teach our students about Greek history and how it should be studied. The passage of time, however, has brought perspective. Professor Bernal's goals for *Black Athena* were ambitious: to lessen European cultural arrogance and to provide a new

framework for the study of Greek history. Although his project is only half-complete—volumes on the linguistic and mythical evidence for his thesis are promised—it is increasingly clear that neither goal is likely to be completely achieved.

The publication of the first two volumes of *Black Athena* sparked an unprecedented outpouring of articles and reviews that still continues unabated. The most important of these studies are now conveniently collected in the volume *Black Athena Revisited* edited by Professor Lefkowitz and her Wellesley colleague, Professor Guy Rogers.³ Even a cursory reading of these studies leaves no doubt that, while Professor Bernal's critique of eighteenth and especially nineteenth century Greek historiography has considerable merit, the flaws in *Black Athena* are too numerous and significant for it to serve either as a secure guide to the history of Greek historiography or as a framework for the future study of Greek history. Books, however, have their own fates. The intended audience for *Black Athena* was classicists and scholars of Greek history, and it clearly reached that audience. But it also found an enthusiastic reception from some African American intellectuals. The reasons for this development, which Professor Bernal does not seem to have anticipated, are to be found in events of the late 1980's.

The late 1980's were marked by efforts to introduce Afrocentric curricula into the public schools of cities with large African-American populations. The controversies provoked by these reforms could be fierce; in my home state of California, the Oakland school district even rejected the state approved Social Studies Textbooks and tried to write its own.⁴ Not surprisingly, supporters of Afrocentric curricula welcomed the support that *Black Athena* and its sensational exposé of the "racist and nationalist" roots of academic Greek history could provide their cause. The almost simultaneous controversies over the adoption of Afrocentric curricula in the public schools and *Black Athena* had an unexpected result. Greek historians and the mainstream media both became aware of the existence among African-American intellectuals of an alternative Afrocentric version of Greek history that, like *Black Athena*, emphasized the central importance of Egypt in the history of Greece and, through Greece, that of Western Civilization as a whole.

Extended discussions of Greek history by Afrocentrists are comparatively rare. Indeed, George G. M. James' famous *Stolen Legacy: Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy*⁵ is, to my knowledge, the only full length Afrocentrist study of an aspect of Greek history. Five main themes do tend, however, to recur in Afrocentrist references to Greek history: first, ancient Egyptians were Blacks; second, Egypt was the first and most influential ancient civilization; third, Greeks became civilized by

appropriating Egyptian learning; fourth, many important figures in Greek history including the mathematician Euclid, and, of course, the Ptolemaic queen Cleopatra VII were Blacks; and fifth, evidence supporting these claims exists in classical literature but has been suppressed by Eurocentric white historians. Because Egypt and not Greece is at the heart of Afrocentric discourse, the context for discussions of Greek history in Afrocentric discourse is largely limited to one topic: contact between Greece and Egypt and its effects, and in recent years the most influential force shaping Afrocentrist views of the nature and significance of that relationship has been the work of the Senegalese scholar Cheik Anta Diop.⁶

Cheik Anta Diop is best known outside Afrocentrist circles for his insistence that Egypt was a “Black civilization” and his melodramatic suggestion that Egyptologists conspired to suppress this fact by hiding or destroying black mummies.⁷ In actuality, however, he was a philosopher of history in the tradition of Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee, who articulated a view of world history of remarkable comprehensiveness in which the relationship between Egypt and Greece plays a critical role. Educated at the Sorbonne under the distinguished Greek historian Andre Aymard at the time of dissolution of France’s African empire in the 1950’s, Diop devoted his considerable scholarly ability to developing an interpretation of African history that would simultaneously affirm the greatness of African culture and its significance in world history. In that interpretation the history of civilization in the Old World took the form of a Manichaean conflict between the peoples of what Diop called the two “cradles”: a harsh northern cradle located in the steppes of Central Asia and led by the Greeks and a benign and the creative southern cradle in Egypt whence civilization originated and spread throughout the Mediterranean basin and the Near East. The histories of the two cradles first intersected in the second millennium BC when Greek invaders overwhelmed the “African” Minoans, thereby, beginning a process of “White” aggression against the southern cradle that has continued up to the present. Before their ultimate defeat, however, the representatives of the southern cradle succeeded in civilizing their Greek conquerors, and thereafter at critical junctures in Greek history Greek culture was reinvigorated by renewed contact with the Egyptian sources of its culture, first by Greek intellectuals who came to study in Egypt and then by the wholesale appropriation of Egyptian culture by Greeks following the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC.

Diop’s vision is a tragic one, a nightmare history from which he urged Africans to awake and renew their culture by returning to their Egyptian roots and making Egypt play the same role in African education and culture that Athens and Greece does in Western culture. Unlike George James,

however, Diop and his followers do recognize the originality of Greek culture and its world historical significance, but they deny it positive value, claiming that the savage central Asian environment in which the Greeks originated rendered them incapable of understanding the spiritual dimension of the Egyptian roots of their civilization. In Diop's works, "the Greeks merely continued and developed, sometimes partially, what the Egyptians had invented. By virtue of their materialistic tendencies, the Greeks stripped those inventions of the religious, idealistic shell in which the Egyptians had enveloped them."⁸ In other words, what is positive in the Greek achievement is traceable to its Egyptian roots, what is negative to its Greek roots; and that contradiction is the ultimate cause of the recurrent crises that have wracked Western Civilization up to the present.⁹

The initial encounter with the Afrocentric version of Greek history is a disconcerting experience for a Greek historian. Part of the problem is style. The tone of much Afrocentric Greek history is polemical and provocative; the use of the word "stolen" to characterize the relationship of Greek philosophy to Egyptian thought is a good example. More disturbing, however, are three characteristic features of this literature: its pervasive concern for race as a determinant of ethnicity and culture, its constant citation of obsolete theories and outdated scholarship, and its uncritical use of sources that accords the status of facts to poorly supported hypotheses such as the supposed existence of an "Egyptian mystery system" which is claimed to have been the source of most of Greek philosophy. Equally unsettling is the tendency of Afrocentrists to dismiss all criticism by non-Afrocentrist scholars, such as that by Professor Lefkowitz, as simply the result of the critic writing within a Eurocentric and racist framework.

It is not surprising that the first response of most Greek historians upon reading these works is to want to dismiss them as "bad history" and to get on with doing real "Greek History". Yielding to that temptation would, however, be a mistake. Whatever we may think of them as professional historians, our students, as the Egyptologist Ann Macy Roth¹⁰ recently reminded her fellow Egyptologists, to read these works, and it behooves us to be able to respond intelligently to their questions, especially since many of them will become teachers and will have to confront these issues in the communities and schools where they teach. Equally misguided, I believe, are attempts to dismiss Afrocentric ancient history as simply a "myth" or the creation of intellectual charlatans perpetrating a fraud on the African-American community and its students. In actuality, the Afrocentric approach to ancient history is almost two hundred years old and has deep roots in African-American intellectual history.

The origins of Afrocentric Greek history lie in the now almost forgotten but bitter nineteenth century debate over the capacity of the

Negro for civilization.¹¹ At issue in this debate was a simple question: could Blacks survive and function as freemen in civilized society? Not surprisingly, its participants stated their cases in the starkest possible terms. At the heart of the negative case were the twin claims that Blacks had never created a civilization and that Africa had no history. So, a certain Commander Foote, the author of an article entitled, "*Africa and the American Flag*," asserted that "if all that negroes of all generations have ever done were to be obliterated from recollection forever, the world would lose no great truth, no profitable art, no exemplary form of life. The loss of all that is African would offer no memorable deduction from anything but the earth's black catalogue of crimes."¹² Some of the participants in this debate such as George Glidden, the man who introduced modern Egyptology to American and, according to his admirers, the person who "was the first to announce that Egyptians were caucasians and not blacks,"¹³ went further and ascribed separate origins to Blacks and Whites. Greece and Greek culture, unfortunately, played an important and invidious role in this debate. As Thomas Jefferson's and John C. Calhoun's rhetorical willingness to reconsider their views on Negro inferiority if Blacks could shown to be "capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid"¹⁴ and conjugating a Greek verb" indicated, Greek culture was held up as the absolute standard by which the extent and quality of Black achievement or failure was to be judged.¹⁵

Blacks in the early United States and elsewhere responded to these challenges in two ways. Some tried to meet them "head-on" and, like Benjamin Banneker in the eighteenth century and Alexander Crummell in the nineteenth century, actually took up the challenger and mastered the intricacies of Euclidean geometry and the Greek verb. More numerous and influential, however, were those who sought to vindicate "the Moral, Intellectual, and Religious Capabilities of the Coloured Portion of Mankind"¹⁶ by turning the tables on their opponents and claiming a major role for Africans in the origins of civilization in general and of Greek civilization in particular.

The earliest examples of this theme date from the 1820's and the 1830's, and they became a characteristic feature of nineteenth century Black historical writing in the United States and elsewhere. Examples are numerous,¹⁷ and include pamphlets, public speeches, scholarly articles, school textbooks, and even a novel published in 1903 by the African-American woman novelist Pauline E. Hopkins.¹⁸ The clearest and most elegant statement of this theme, however, was provided not by an American but by the distinguished Anglo-African scientist and scholar, James Africanus Beale Horton, who wrote his 1868 book, *West African Countries and Peoples and a Vindication of the African Race*, that:¹⁹

"Africa, in ages past, was the nursery of science and literature; from

thence they were taught in Greece and Rome, so that it was said that the ancient Greeks represented their favourite goddess of Wisdom—Minerva—as an African princess. Pilgrimages were made to Africa in search of knowledge by such men as Solon, Plato, Pythagoras; and several came to listen to the instruction of the African Euclid, who was at the head of the most celebrated mathematical school in the world, and who flourished 300 years before the birth of Christ....Many eminent writers and historians agree that these ancient Ethiopians were Negroes, but many deny that this was the case. The accounts given by Herodotus, who traveled in Egypt, and other writers settle the question that they were....Say not, then...that Africa is without her heraldry of science and fame. Its inhabitants are the offshoots...of a stem which was once proudly luxuriant in the fruits of learning and taste; whilst that from the Goths, their calumniators have sprung, remained hard, and knotted and barren.”

Bridge players call this trumping your opponent, and anyone who has ever played bridge can understand the attraction of this argument, especially since it could be extremely effective. Thus, while testifying before the U.S. Senate in 1883, Richard Wright, the future founder of Savannah State College, responded to a question about the “comparative inferiority and superiority of races” by observing that “the majority of the sciences...have come from the coloured races..., that the Egyptians were actually woolly-haired negroes...,” and that “the same thing is stated in Herodotus, and in a number of others with whom you gentlemen (sc. the Senators) are doubtless familiar.”²⁰

The problem is not the truth or falsity of the arguments presented in these passages and many others like them, but the fact that they could easily appear without significant change in almost any contemporary Afrocentric study of the relationship between Egypt and Greece. Put simply, Afrocentric ancient history with its trust in the literal meaning of “authoritative” texts is not so much bad history as old fashioned history. As the distinguished African philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah perceptively noted, what is most striking about Afrocentric history is “how thoroughly at home it is in the frameworks of nineteenth century European thought”.²¹ The irony is that Afrocentrists continue to fight with nineteenth century weapons—their arguments clearly reflect Bernal’s “Ancient Model”—a nineteenth century battle, whose principal objectives were achieved long ago. So, no reputable historian today doubts that Africa has a long and important history or that Egypt was essentially an African civilization or, most important, that Egypt exercised significant influence on the development of Greek civilization. So much for the past; what about the

present and future?

As I already mentioned, one of the main contentions of Afrocentrist scholars is that Greek historians have attempted to suppress all evidence of relations between Egypt and Greece and the significant influence Egypt exercised on the formation of Greek civilization. The truth is just the opposite. Relations between Greece and Egypt have always interested Greek historians, and in recent years their study has become one of the most active and dynamic areas of Greek historical studies as new discoveries have transformed our understanding of the extent and significance of contact with Egypt in Greek history.²²

Most dramatically affected have been our ideas concerning relations between the Aegean and Egypt during the second millennium BC. The fact of Aegean contact with and influence from Egypt during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages—roughly the seventeenth through the fourteenth centuries—has been known since the beginning of Minoan and Mycenaean studies in the late nineteenth century. By the beginning of the twentieth century scholars could cite a wealth of iconographic, artifactual, textual, and linguistic evidence including: the use of Egyptian conventions, themes, and techniques in Minoan art; the adoption of Egyptian deities by the Minoans; Egyptian objects discovered in the Aegean and Aegean goods in Egypt; and the depiction of Minoan and Mycenaean tribute bearers in a number of tombs of high ranking eighteenth dynasty officials at Thebes.

Initial assessments of the historical significance of these phenomena were expansive. So, the great American Egyptologist James Henry Breasted conjured up the “vision of a vanished [sc. Egyptian] empire” that extended from Iraq to Crete on the basis of two Egyptian objects, one found at Knossos on the island of Crete and the other purchased from an antiquities dealer in Baghdad.²³ Such views were widely publicized and even found their way into popular school textbooks. It is not surprising, therefore, that early twentieth century forerunners of contemporary Afrocentrism welcomed the support such interpretations gave to their theories. Thus, in a 1917 article entitled “The African Origin of the Grecian Civilization” George Wells Parker argued that Sir Arthur Evans’ spectacular discoveries at Knossos on Crete proved that “the ferment creating the wonderful Grecian civilization was preeminently the ferment of African blood.”²⁴ It is equally unsurprising that some later historians, reacting against such exaggerated assessments of Egypt’s role in the Aegean, erred in the opposite direction and suggested that relations between Greece and Egypt in the second millennium BC amounted to little more than a limited trade in luxuries that floated like a “froth”²⁵ on the surface of Greek history.

The passage of time and new evidence have made clear, however, that while there can be no question of an Egyptian empire in the Aegean, ties

between Egypt and Greece were far more extensive and important in the mid-second millennium BC than a mere “froth”. The evidence supporting these new interpretations is varied and includes: Egyptian scenes in Late Minoan I frescoes from Thera, frescoes executed in a Minoanizing style at the Hyksos capital of Avaris in an early eighteenth dynasty context, the Aegean itinerary inscription from the mortuary temple of Amenhotep III at the Kom el-Hetan, faience objects with the cartouches of Amenhotep II, Amenhotep III and the latter’s chief wife Tiy from Mycenae and Tiryns, an illustrated papyrus from Amarna apparently containing representations of Aegean soldiers in Egyptian contexts, and the Ulu Burun shipwreck which contained in its extraordinary cargo Egyptian and Nubian goods a remarkable gold scarab of the famous Egyptian queen Nefertiti.

Disparate though they are, the items in the above list share two characteristics with the tribute bearer reliefs and the Egyptian objects previously discovered in the Aegean: they mostly involve high status luxury goods and they were found predominantly in governmental centers. In other words, relations between the Aegean and Egypt in the mid-second millennium BC were relatively close, but they were primarily at the state level and involved relatively few people. As a result, when Mycenaean civilization collapsed at the end of the second millennium BC, direct contact between Greece and Egypt ceased, leaving little evidence of long term impact on the development of Greek culture.

The situation is different with regard to the second period of intensive Greek contact with Egypt, that which began in the first half of the seventh century BC and ended in the late sixth century BC with the Persian conquest of Egypt. Our general understanding of the history of relations between Greece and Egypt in this period has not changed materially, and that was to be expected. The principal features of that history—the decisive contribution made by Greek and Carian mercenaries to the liberation of Egypt from Assyrian rule in the 650’s BC, the establishment of a Greek diaspora in Egypt in the seventh and sixth centuries BC, the role of the city of Naucratis as the center of Greek life in Egypt, and the development of a virtual Egyptomania in late Archaic Greece—were all well known from Greek literature. Nevertheless, while the main outlines of the story have remained largely unchanged, it has received some unexpected nuances.

Until recently, historians have assumed that the Greeks who settled in Egypt during this period lived in virtual ghettos with little contact with Egyptian society or culture. So one scholar could say without fear of contradiction that “we have no Egyptian evidence that a pre-Ptolemaic priest of any description ever met a Greek.”²⁶ Two recently published documents suggest a very different picture of the possibilities open to ambitious Greeks in seventh and sixth century BC Egypt. The first is a

Demotic papyrus from Hermopolis dated to the year 575 BC²⁷ and containing a petition from a priest of Thoth to an Egyptian district official named Ariston, that is, a Greek in Egyptian service, requesting that the latter assist a group of priests who were bringing a dead sacred ibis to the Fayum for burial. The second is an Egyptian block statue discovered at Priene in western Turkey and published by Olivier Masson and Jean Yoyotte, and containing the following inscription:²⁸

Pedon, the son Amphinoos, dedicated me, having brought me from Egypt. The Egyptian king Psammetichus gave him a gold arm-band as a reward for bravery and a city because of his excellence.

Ariston and Pedon clearly were not marginalized individuals but government officials, who were fully integrated into Egyptian society and culture. Moreover, Ariston, at least, was presumably literate in Egyptian while Pedon was sufficiently Egyptianized to choose for his monument in his home town a block statue, the sculptural form traditionally used in Egypt to commemorate the achievements of a successful government official. Equally important, the many fine Egyptian objects discovered in the precinct of Hera on Samos and other east Greek sanctuaries strongly suggest that Pedon was not an isolated figure but typical of many east Greeks who made their fortunes in Egypt and then returned home "to retire". The implications of these and other recent discoveries for our understanding of the significance of Egypt for the development of Greek civilization are still unclear. It is likely, however, that that significance will ultimately be found to extend beyond the limited areas of the arts and religion where it now generally recognized to include, for example, significant aspects of early Greek medicine.²⁹

This paper has ranged widely, and that is understandable. Afrocentric history is not a passing fad but heir to a long tradition of African American interest in ancient history. Studying it opens the door to a little known but significant aspect of the history of the classics in the United States, their role in Black education and culture.³⁰ The questions it raises concerning the significance of Egyptian and Egyptian culture in the formation of Greek civilization are also important, but the tools of Afrocentric are too blunt to provide them with satisfactory answers. In studies of the relationships between cultures, it is not enough simply to catalogue borrowed traits and their source; one must also explain if possible why those traits were borrowed and how they were transformed to fit the needs of their new cultural setting. In concrete terms we must, for example, not only candidly and fully identify the Egyptian roots of early Greek sculpture, but we must also explain why the early Greek male statue type known as a *Kouros* is not an Egyptian statue type despite its obvious Egyptian ancestry. That is the task for the future. ■

Notes

- 1 Mary Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History* (New York, 1996).
- 2 Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, 2 vols. (London, 1987-1991).
- 3 Mary Lefkowitz and Guy MacLean Rogers, ed., *Black Athena Revisited* (Chapel Hill, 1996).
- 4 The Oakland textbook controversy is described in Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dream: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York, 1995) 7-32/
- 5 George G. M. James, *Stolen Legacy: Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy* (New York, 1954)
- 6 For Diop's views on Greek history see especially, Cheik Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* (Westport, 1974); *Precolonial Black Africa: A Comparative Study of the Political and Social Systems of Europe and Black Africa, From Antiquity to the Formation of Modern States* (Westport, 1987); *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa* (London, 1989); and *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology* (Westport, 1991). A sympathetic study of Diop and his school is Chris Gray, *Conceptions of History: Cheikh Anta Diop & Theophile Obenga* (London, 1989).
- 7 Diop, *African Origin*, 54.
- 8 Diop, *African Origin*, 230.
- 9 The implications of this thesis are most fully worked out in Jacob H. Carruthers, *Mdw Ntr Divine Speech: A Historiographical Reflection of African Deep Thought from the Time of Pharaohs to the Present* (London, 1995).
- 10 Ann Macy Roth, "Building Bridges to Afrocentrism: A Letter to My Egyptological Colleagues," *American Research Center in Egypt Newsletter*, 167 (September, 1995) 1, 14-17; 168 (December, 1995) 1, 12-15.
- 11 For this debate see William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America 1815-59* (Chicago, 1960); and David S. Wiesen, "Herodotus and the Modern Debate Over Race and Slavery," *The Ancient World*, 3 (1980) 3-16.

- 12 I know Commander Foote's article only as quoted in Edward W. Blyden, "The Negro in Ancient History," *The People of Africa*, ed. by Henry M. Schieffelin (New York, 1871) 1-2.
- 13 Editor, "A Sketch of the Progress of Archeological Science in America," *The Southern Literary Messenger*, 1 (1845) 427.
- 14 Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia*, Query XIV.
- 15 For this theme, see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Authority, (White) Power, and the (Black) Critic; or, it's all Greek to me," *The Future of Literary Theory*, ed. by Ralph Cohen (London, 1989) 324-346.
- 16 Part of the title of a book by Wilson Armistead, *A Tribute for the Negro: Being a Vindication of the Moral, Intellectual, and Religious Capabilities of the Coloured Portion of Mankind: with Particular Reference to the African Race* (1848).
- 17 An excellent anthology of such texts is *Classical Black Nationalism: From the American Revolution to Marcus Garvey*, edited by Wilson Jeremiah Moses (New York, 1996).
- 18 Cf. Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., "Ancient Africa and the Early Black American Historians, 1883-1915," *American Quarterly*, 36 (1984) 685-699; and Clarence Walker, *Deromanticizing Black History: Critical Essays and Reappraisals* (Knoxville, 1991) 87-94. Pauline E. Hopkins' novel, *Of One Blood, Or the Hidden Self*, is reprinted in *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins*, edited by Hazel Canby (New York, 1988) 441-621.
- 19 Quoted in Molefi Kete Asante and Abu S. Abarry, ed., *African Intellectual Heritage: A Book of Sources* (Philadelphia, 1996) 255. I have omitted Horton's references to Roman and early Christian history.
- 20 Quoted in James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill, 1988) 29-30.
- 21 Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Europe Upside Down: Fallacies of the New Afrocentrism," (*London*) *Times Literary Supplement* (February 12, 1993) 24.
- 22 The following sections are based on my article "Greek Contact with Egypt and the Levant: Ca. 1600-500 BC. An overview," *The Ancient World*, 27 (1996) 20-28.
- 23 James Henry Breasted, *A History of Egypt* (New York, 1905; rpt. 1964) 182.

- 24 George Wells Parker, "The African Origin of the Grecian Civilization," *The Journal of Negro History*, 2 (1917) 343.
- 25 The phrase is that of Emily Vermeule, *Greece in the Bronze Age* (Chicago, 1964) 151.
- 26 O. K. Armayor, "Did Herodotus Ever Go to Egypt," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 15 (1978) 65.
- 27 El Hussein Omar M. Zaghoul, *Fruhdemotische Urkunden aus Hermupolis*, *Bulletin of the Center of Papyrological Studies*, 2 (Cairo, 1985) 23-31.
- 28 Olivier Masson and Jean Yoyotte, "Une Inscription ionienne mentionnant Psammetique Ier," *Epigraphica Anatolica*, 11 (1988) 171-179.
- 29 The most recent general survey of Egyptian influence on various aspects of Greek culture including medicine is Erik Iversen, "Egypt in Classical Antiquity: A Resume," *Hommages a Jean Leclant*, edited by Catherine Berger et al., *Bibliothèque d'Etude*, 106, 3 (Cairo, 1994) 295-305.
- 30 Cf. Shelley P. Haley, "Classics pedagogy begs race questions," *The American Classical League Newsletter*, 16, 1 (1993) 8-14.

Is Studying Egypt in Its African Context “Afrocentric”?

S.O.Y. Keita

The current discussion in the public and scholarly areas about “Afrocentrism”, a term with various meanings and usages, have frequently included discourse on the ancient Egyptians.

Afrocentrists and Eurocentrists alike frequently have ideological positions which influence, and indeed hamper their understanding of complex social, biological, and historical phenomena. This essay seeks to open a dialogue with all who have a serious interest in the subject of ancient Egyptian origins. The theoretical position take here is largely rooted in a broad realism. It is acknowledged that observations or facts are only interpretable in terms of theories or, at least broader contexts of information. It is important to recognize that since various biases or orientations have influenced, and continue to influence how data or the world are understood, theories and perspectives taught to students influence them likewise. The great physicist Max Planck was once asked about his role in the creation and acceptance of modern physics; how had he convinced his older colleagues to accept the new thinking physics? Planck replied that he had not convinced them, but that they “had died.” Sometimes change in scientific or other academic thinking occurs after the death of scholars who created the status quo. Some fields have been greatly marred by various theoretical or sociopolitical biases. Anyone who does not acknowledge the existence of theoretical or social bias is not likely to advance knowledge or understanding.

It is possible to address the issue of Egyptian origins by asking questions about the geography, language, archaeology, and biology of the ancient Egyptians. This is the most objective approach. Only a multifaceted inquiry can help us understand the origin of these and other ancient peoples, including the ancient Greeks.

Without taking either the side of “Eurocentrists” or “Afrocentrists” one can ask the following questions in order to explore ancient Egypt’s origins (see Rousse 1986).

1. Where is Egypt geographically, in a physical sense? And what is its cultural geography? Is Egypt in Africa, Asia, or Europe? Do its art, symbols, writing, and beliefs more likely reflect a culture which grew up in a regional African environment?
2. According to modern linguistic studies, is the ancient Egyptian

language a member of a family of African origin? Or is it a member of a family from Europe or Asia?

3. Do archaeological data indicate a culture which developed primarily on African soil? If anything was borrowed, did this occur on the terms of the indigenous people? Or was the culture imported fully developed from Asia or Europe, brought by settler colonists?
4. Do data from human biology suggest that the ancient Egyptians are primarily coextensive with any of the various groups the Greeks called Ethiopians? Or do the data suggest that the northern Nile Valley was peopled by settler colonists from Norway, England, Greece, Arabia, Iraq of the Levantine region (Lebanon-Israel-Palestine)?

Did the majority of the ancestors of the early Egyptians evolve in northeast Africa from African ancestors? Or did the ancestors evolve in Europe or Asia and then migrate to Africa?

These questions facilitate an objective inquiry and exploration of early ancient Egyptian origins. Answering them will also help respond to the question "Is studying ancient Egypt in its African context 'Afrocentric'", with 'Afrocentric' being understood as a pejorative, ideologically tainted term, like "Eurocentric", although it need not be so.

Although it should be easy to answer these questions, this will not necessarily be so because of the preconceptions which many of us carry. One example will suffice. There is a stereotyped non-scientific idea about what physical traits a "real" African has. This is no doubt due to recent social history, not science: the "Africans" brought into slavery in the Americas, although not physically uniform have been characterized that way. They primarily came from West and Central Africa. This experience has "given" "African" a definition which is not scientific. This misconception has been frequently reinforced by scientists, who after all are also products of society. Curiously, the concept of African and even "Negro", a derogatory term, have not been consistent in meaning (see Brace 1863, Prichard 1848, Vercoutter 1978). Indigenous Africans have a range of physical traits.

Geography: Physical And Cultural Aspects

Ancient Egypt emerged on the banks of the Nile River, which courses from inner Africa. The river splits the eastern Sahara in its journey to the Mediterranean. In essence the river is a linear oasis which never goes outside of Africa. Egypt's southern and western "borders" are confluent with

the African land mass. The Sinai peninsula separates Egypt from Asia, although it is not a real barrier. The Mediterranean Sea separates Europe and Asia Minor from Egypt.

Nilotic (African flora and fauna were a fundamental part of the symbol systems and iconography of early Egyptian culture. The hieroglyphs were all taken from Nilotic fauna and flora (Mokhtar 1981). The god Thoth is associated in iconography with the baboon, not a common animal in dynastic Egypt, and also an indigenous African fauna; panther skins are frequently shown as a ritual garment associated with the worship of Osiris by his son Horus (see statements by Leclant, Unesco Cairo Symposium 1974). Burials of local African animals (e. g. baboons) have been found in Hierakonpolis, and early important town in southern Egypt (Hoffman 1988). Hippopotami and cattle, the latter of African origin, figure prominently in the imagery of Egyptian texts.

In summary it can be stated that Egypt is in Africa and Nilotic flora and fauna are well integrated into the culture of the early Egyptians; this suggests that the people were indigenous, or at least that the culture developed locally and was not an import.

Historical Linguistics

Historical linguistics has as one of its aims the understanding of the development and diversification of language families. In the major school of approach the assumption is made that truly related languages descend from a common parent called a proto-language, which has diversified primarily due to time and the geographical separation of its speakers. This model is borrowed from evolutionary biology. Scholars attempt to reconstruct and identify the location and time of existence of the proto-language. This approach gives a history of the language family and may suggest the culture and environment of early speakers. Of course people unrelated to the original speakers of a language of proto-language may adopt them as their own voluntarily or under duress.

The ancient Egyptian language is classified as a member of the Afro-Asiatic family (Greenberg 1966, Blench 1993, Loprieno 1995, Ehret 1979, 1984, 1995). (Nubian is classified as Nilo-Saharan.) The members of this family are primarily found in Africa. There are currently six recognized branches, although a few scholars would prefer to reserve judgment on one of these. The branches (or members) are viewed as having equal status by some scholars (Loprieno 1995), but not by others (Ehret 1995), whose analyses suggest that some of the branches are more closely related to each other. The vocabulary of reconstructed parental Afro-Asiatic suggests that

its speakers used plants extensively and had metaphysical beliefs which are recognizable in much later Egyptian and Near Eastern religion, and in Ethiopia today (Ehret 1996).

The members of Afro-Asiatic, other than ancient Egyptian, are Berber, Chadic, Cushitic, Omotic and Semitic. Ancient Egyptian, as far as is known at present, is the only member of the branch carrying its name. Its late form is preserved today in the liturgy of the Egyptian Coptic Church. Berber is spoken in northwest Africa and parts of the Sahara, including some Egyptian oases. Chadic languages are found in northern Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon. The distribution of Cushitic is largely restricted to the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan), but extends to Kenya and Tanzania. Omotic languages are only spoken in Ethiopia. The speakers of Semitic languages are distributed throughout the Near East, as well as Africa (the Horn). Ancient Semitic languages include Babylon, Hebrew and Phoenician. The best known of modern Semitic languages is Arabic, which was introduced to northern Africa during the Islamic period.

Specialists in Afro-Asiatic historical linguistics have deduced that the geographical origins of the family lay in Africa, south of Egypt, somewhere in or near the Horn of Africa (Bender 1975, Ehret 1979, Blench 1993). The parent or proto-language is estimated to have existed between 14,000-11,000 years ago. Curiously this time period coincides with the appearance of the Mushabi culture in the Near East; this culture appears to have origins in the Nile Valley (Bar Yosef 1987). Angel (1973) also suggested, based on skeletal evidence, that there was a migration from Africa at about this time. Perhaps the Mushabians were early Afro-Asiatic speakers. The origin of Afro-Asiatic, and specifically the Horn, is most probable because of the principles of "greatest diversity" and "least moves". The principle of greatest diversity expresses the idea that the location of the greatest variety of a "reproducing" entity is likely to be its place of origin. This location signifies where the language family, plant or animal species has existed the longest; diversity is said to be directly proportional to length of residence. The principle of "least moves" expresses a concept about simplicity in explanation in a problem having a geographical dimension. For example, given the general location of diversity how can one pinpoint the more specific locale of origin? The principle of least moves postulates that the smallest number of movements (e. g. migrations) from the central place of origin most likely explains the observed distribution. The principle of greatest diversity indicates that Africa is the source of Afro-Asiatic; and the concept of least moves suggests the region in or near the Horn to be the most probable locale of "origin".

Another reason which suggests the Horn of Africa as the origin is the presence of Omotic, which has characteristics which would seem to make it

most similar to proto-Afro-Asiatic (Bender 1975). Omotic is notably different from other members of Afro-Asiatic, but similar enough that it is generally included in the family. However, some scholars see it as a sibling family; this view would not alter the position of the Horn as the locale of Afro-Asiatic's genesis.

The ancient Egyptian family, as noted, seems to only have had itself as a member. This probably was not always the case. There may have been several closely related languages which could have been classified as Egyptian in the Saharan oases and Nile Valley. Evidence suggests that the Nile Valley was colonized by Saharans from several locales (see Hassan 1988). It can be postulated that the ancient Egyptian language seen in the later written texts emerged as a lingua franca, which perhaps started as a language to facilitate trade and communication between communities along the Nile. It can easily be seen why, if such a language did exist, that it would have been chosen to be codified into writing.

How did ancient Egyptian "sound", or how was it pronounced? Ancient Egyptian was not written with vowels, so the question cannot be answered with certainty. However, some linguists give evidence that many of its words may have been vocalized like those in Beja, a Cushitic language (see Loprieno 1995).

In summary, ancient Egyptian is a member of the Afro-Asiatic family which originated in Africa. The language was not imported from Asia or Europe. The plants and animals in the early hieroglyphs come from the local environment. The ancient Egyptian language clearly emerged in a northeast African context.

Archaeology

Archeological data suggest that early Egyptian culture, long before the first kings, arose most directly from a Saharo-Nilotic (indigenous African) base (El-Yahky 1985, Hassan 1988, Kobusiewicz 1992). This is true of northern and southern Egypt. A Near Eastern influence is also observed.

Between 6000 and 5000 BCE cattle-herding Saharans seemed to have migrated into the valley, merging with indigenous hunters and gatherers, producing the foundation for the way of life to come. Aspects of Saharan culture, specifically pottery, seem to belong to a tradition which may have had Sudanese origins. The oldest pottery in Africa comes from the Sudan and Sahara. The stone tools and other artifacts found in the earliest southern predynastic culture, called Badarian (~4400 BCE) seem to suggest a clear merger of the indigenous valley people with Saharans. Saharan rock art and southern predynastic mobilier art have scenes showing similar

activity. The fauna depicted in both are the same: antelopes, giraffes, elephants, ostriches, crocodiles and hippopotami; and are represented in a similar manner. Human representations are also similar in many instances in the two regions (El-Yahky 1985). Examples are men with false tails hanging from the waist (seen also as a part of pharaoh's attire), similar tools and weapons, such as mace heads, bows and shields; men with feathers on their heads, zoomorphic and masked people, and "women with their arms on their heads."

In northern Egypt the situation was more complex. Archaeologists have observed two sequences of culture in several sites; earlier cultures are somewhat different in that they conceivably demonstrate more Near Eastern influence, without, however, being settler colonies. The later cultures in the same sites, which clearly lead to later northern Egyptian developments show relationships to Saharan cultures (see Kobusiewicz 1992).

Near Eastern elements in early Egyptian (and European) culture include barley and emmer wheat, which were domesticated in the Near East 2,000 years before being used in the Nile Valley. Their presence does not mean mass migration. In fact the names for these plants in Egyptian are not Semitic, Sumerian, or Indo-European. This suggests that indigenous Nile Valley inhabitants had a history of plant manipulation, and merely transferred Egyptian names to these plants. Recent research indicates that these domesticates were initially adopted as a part of the existing foraging subsistence strategy, and not as a replacement for it (Wetterstrom 1993). In other words, these crops were merely integrated into the lifeways of the indigenous Egyptians, on their own terms. An interesting recent finding is the discovery of possibly domesticated sorghum, an African staple, at Nabta Playa, a site in the Western Desert of Egypt near the Sudanese border (Wendorf et al. 1992). The date given for the site is approximately 6,000 BCE.

The sequence of cultures which clearly leads to dynastic Egypt is found in southern Egypt. These cultures which can be conceived as phases in an unbroken sequence, are named the Badarian, Naqada I (or Amratian), Naqada II (or Gerzean) and Naqada III (or the protodynastic). Dynasty I followed Naqada III, which politically has been called Dynasty 0. Some earlier scholars believed that Naqada II was heavily influenced by the Near East (Petrie 1939). Some suggested that at the end of this period or in Naqada III an invasion occurred bringing new culture and people. This idea has been termed the "dynastic race" theory and is no longer accepted. Excavations clearly indicate the internal development of Egyptian culture (Hoffman 1988). There was some culture borrowing, but this took place on Egyptian terms.

Human Biology

The geographical, linguistic and archaeological data indicate that Nile Valley culture is an African affair. But what about the people, what is their "ultimate origin", are they immigrant Asians or immigrant Europeans? Was northern Africa originally colonized by non-Africans who then had Afro-Asiatic and Nilo-Saharan languages *imposed* on them by migrating eastern Africans from the Horn? Or are the Nile Valley people biological African variants, the extension of an African matrix, the product of an African evolution?

In the past and recently, discussions about the biology of the ancient Egyptians have generally been uninformative because they failed to integrate palaeontology, evolutionary theory, and genetic data and paradigms into the discourse. Instead ancient Egyptians have been described in terms of the race concept and categories which date to the pre-genetic era. Built into the current race construct are notions about what traits a "real" African has, and concepts like the so-called "true Negro" (whether stated or not), although no one ever discusses who the true White or Caucasian is, in this kind of approach. The phrase "Black African" is not a scientific term, but rather has its origin in the political discourse of the colonial era. This and other similar terms should be consigned, like phlogiston, to the dustbin of history. The phrase is used in numerous ways, with numerous levels of inclusivity. Scientifically speaking, skin color and physical variations grade into one another, so creating categories is quite arbitrary. Perceptions will most certainly differ and be shaped by various sociohistorical experiences. Most certainly many of the characteristics seen in ancient Egyptian art (and in modern southern Egyptians) are associated with people who are called "black" or "colored" in the social experience of the United States. The fact is that indigenous Africans vary immensely in physical traits. Even "sub-Saharan", a geographical term, is not applied consistently; for example, sometimes the Horn of Africa is excluded although it is largely at the latitude of Nigeria, a "sub-Saharan" country. There is without doubt an arbitrariness about the use of these terms, which reflects the ideological positions or cultural biases of various academic traditions. The question about early Nile Valley peoples should be oriented to biogeography. Did they evolve in Africa, and if "admixed" with non-Africans, did this admixture occur in Africa?

The race concept and categories in reality cannot be separated from a sociohistorical context which interpreted and interprets human geographical differences as divisions indicating deep fundamental differences. The race concept starts with the implied premise that humankind is divisible into

units which are uniformly distinct for all measurable characteristics. In other words the units are conceptualized as types, which emerged in the distant past, in different "homelands". All individuals or populations which don't conform to one of the "types", i.e. who are "intermediate", are presumed to be mixtures of two or more of the pre-defined static units. This approach is called typological thinking and is non-evolutionary when mixture is seen as the only source of variation. A relevant example is Coon's (1965) view that the ancient and modern Egyptians were and are ancient ["African", "European"] hybrids. Natural selection, in this view, and other evolutionary processes, are not given a role in shaping the Egyptian biology. Other African populations with narrow noses or faces have been stated to have non-African ancestry, an interpretation which is typological. Without modern evolutionary perspectives there can be no real understanding. It is also important to say that the racial categories/labels cannot be divorced from their original conceptual contexts which included specific geographical homelands.

How well does the "scientific" race construct, which is based on morphology (external anatomy) hold up? Recall that the well known racial classifications are based largely on skin color, and hair and facial conformation, and were developed before the genetic era. All subsequent genetic and biological data have been collected in terms of these anatomically defined categories. For the categories to remain valid the additional data should conform to the discrete boundaries implied by the morphologically based categories. Studies using serum protein and blood group variations indicate that differences between individuals of the "racial" groups are greater than the differences between the averages of the groups (Latter 1980). This means that when a large amount of data are used that individuals may be more similar to others in a group other than that to which they have been assigned. Thus the boundaries are not sharp. This violates the technical requirements of classification. Studies using mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) which is only maternally inherited, indicate that individuals from the so-called racial groups are not uniform in their mitochondrial DNA types (D'Andrade and Yorbin 1996), nor are Africans uniform. Individuals from the different groups may be more like each other than those in their own so-called race. Furthermore all of the major mtDNA variations are found in "sub-Saharan" Africa. The mitochondrial DNA studies are very significant because mtDNA is believed to be minimally affected by natural selection. Based on general ideas of classification individuals in "racial" groups should be uniform in their lines of descent for the race concept to be meaningful.

Nuclear DNA reflects both maternal and paternal contributions. Some studies of the internal patterning of living humans grouped by "races"

suggest that Europeans are a hybrid between early Africans and Asians who met and mingled in the Near East or Europe (Bowcock et al. 1991). The implication of this for the racial construct is that one of the units ("races") is not a fundamental unit, since it is the product of the mixing of others.

Both mitochondrial and nuclear DNA studies whose purpose is to generate a historical structure of modern human microevolution, indicate that the likely time of the deepest division is between 150,000 to 100,000 years ago. There were no modern humans outside of Africa at this time. Hence this microevolution is actually genetic differentiation taking place within Africa, not riation. Furthermore, there is no evidence for the emergence of the skeletal and more obviously, soft tissue differences at this time which were used to define so-called races. It is not known when the skeletal and genetic variants now conceived as "racial" by some became associated. It is conceptually wrong to say that "Africans" split *from* "Caucasians", "Mongoloids", "Australoids", etc. *ad nauseum*, as sometimes been done, or even the reverse, because these terms carry certain stereotyped physical trait associations.

The massive genetic variation found in Africa today from Cairo to the Cape of Good Hope is largely African in origin. African climates/ecosystems also selected for variation in skin color, hair form and skeletal characteristics. The sheer length of time of modern human existence in Africa would predict the great accumulation in random biological variation. This would be facilitated further by the size of the continent which promoted the fissioning and migration of populations thereby enhancing variation. The so-called "Negro" morphology has no privileged place in the definition of biological Africanity, when a scientific model which integrates time, geography, palaeontology, and the genetic structuring of modern *Homo Sapiens* grounds the discussion. Northern Africa was inhabited by modern people long before Europe (Clark 1989). There is no evidence that the region was empty and primarily colonized by non-African outsiders, who had *differentiated outside* and then returned to Africa.

Having considered some basic issues we can return to the ancient Egyptians. What was their biogeographical origin, and to what groups do their remains show the greatest relationship? Many scholars work from the perspective of assessing population relationships using various mathematical techniques. The unit of analysis, ideally, is a breeding population. The goal is to ascertain biological affinity. The techniques assess similarity. It is assumed (not always correctly) that greater similarity equals greater relationship. This problem underscores the necessity for good research design, and use of a wide range of information.

Studies on skeletal remains either use measurements or anatomical

features. Measurements, also called metric variables have become common. Usually the skull is used. Dental characteristics may also be used. Neither cranial or dental traits can be simply equated with DNA. Upper Egyptian material from 30,000 years ago overlaps more recent so-called sub-Saharan and northern African material (Brauer and Rimbach 1990). Predynastic Egyptian morphology has been stated to be that of black-white hybrids (Strouhal 1971); this of course is from a racial paradigm, and does not consider the natural range of variation of bonafide biohistorical Africans, even those that the Greeks called "Ethiopians". Recent metric studies of the predynastic southern Egyptians (or studies which included them) indicate greater similarity (or biological affinity) to ancient Sudanese or modern populations of the Horn of Africa (see Mukherjee et al. 1955, Gaballah 1970, Brauer 1976, Hillson 1978, Keita 1990). There is also overlap with neolithic Saharans (Dutour and Petit Maire 1987), and in some cases with West Central Africans (Keita 1990). Non-metric studies of southern predynastic and Dynasty I remains suggest them to have greater overall affinity to Sudanese than to material from the Aegean or the Near East (Berry and Berry 1972). These are all likely areas of greater connections. By divisive cluster analysis even northern late dynastic Egyptian (26th-30th dynasty) crania grouped with tropical Africans not from the Horn of Sudanese regions (see Howells 1973); but in other approaches these remains grouped with northern Europeans.

Were the early Egyptians more similar to the Greeks, or to any of the groups whom the Greeks called Ethiopians? An analysis was carried out which included recent Greeks, ancient Italians, ancient Sudanese (Kushites), and modern Somali. The predynastic and Dynasty I Egyptians group with those whom the Greeks would call Ethiopians (i.e. the Kushites and Somali). In fact all the metric studies suggest that the early Egyptians were more coextensive with various groups from south of Egypt than from Europe. These groups tend to have a morphology which can be understood as part of the pattern called Elongated African (see Hiernaux 1975). This pattern includes narrow noses and faces; it evolved in Africa.

Another aspect of human biology which can assist in assessing the origins of a population from an evolutionary point of view is limb proportions. Early ancient Egyptian populations have limb proportions which have been described as "super-Negroid" (Robins and Shute 1986). The term "tropical" would be better from an adaptive evolutionary perspective. Such limb proportions suggest that the early Egyptians were not cold-adapted immigrants to the Nile Valley. On average, European limb proportions are different and consistent with cold adaptation.

The hair of early predynastic Egyptians from Badari has been analyzed (Strouhal 1971). It was concluded that it was like that of a stereotyped

African-European hybrid. However, grossly the hair is no different than the hair of many Fulani, Somali or Beja. Hence admixture is not needed to explain the nature of this hair.

Analyses using DNA from ancient Egyptian remains are still in the infancy. One study of twelfth dynasty remains indicates the presence of "sub-Saharan" lineages (Pääbo and Di Rienzo 1993). However, "sub-Saharan" was not defined and it is well to note that the other lineages may also be "sub-Saharan," given the great variety in the region. Furthermore, the emphasis on sub-Saharan suggests that somehow this is the mark of a bonafide Africanity. This is not true. Biological traits which evolved in Africa are all equally African.

Studies of the living Egyptian population or including them indicate genetic overlap with all of the populations from surrounding regions (Di Rienzo et al. 1994, Pääbo and Di Rienzo 1993, Hammer and Horai 1995). The genetic "profile" is intermediate to that of stereotypical Africans and Europeans. A racial model would require interpreting these findings as indicative of an "admixed" population. Indeed the modern Egyptians are described as a "Caucasoid"- "Negroid" mixture by some. Other writers have state that the modern Egyptian population is admixed with "Africans" (!), clearly indicating a definition of "African" which is socially constructed, not one based on biogeography or the locale of biohistory. Egypt *has* been colonized and/or settled by various nations. Historical records on balance indicate that most of the foreigners were non-African. However, as some Egyptian geneticists have stated, "during this long history and besides these Asiatic influences, Egypt maintained its African identity..." (Mahmoud et al. 1987: 493). If these migrants had little genetic impact then the bulk of the genetic variation would be indigenous African, due to genetic differentiation within Africa. This is an evolutionary explanation. However, it is well to note that small but constant amounts of migration can have a large genetic effect over time. It is possible that modern Egyptians are statistically significantly different in genetic terms from their ancient forebears; but ancient nor modern Egypt is defined by a particular genetic profile. Until the complete range of indigenous genetic variation for numerous systems is known for all of early Africa, it will not be possible to assess how much admixture has really taken place. Theoretically the most appropriate genetic markers to assess admixture from non-African sources would be unique variants which can be shown to have emerged outside of Africa and which date to after the occurrence of adaptations to non-African environments. Until this information is obtained and new analyses performed, it is best to take the conservative Darwinistic position that the baseline variation of all northern Africa was a part of an African reticulum or gradient of differentiation, and not a product of hybridization.

Summary

Linguistic, archaeological, and biological data, considered with geography, contextualize the emergence of early Egypt. Its African locale is indispensable to a scientific and common-sense understanding of Egypt. It is not a question of “African” “influence”; ancient Egypt was organically African. Studying early Egypt in its African context is not “Afrocentric,” but simply correct.

Afternotes

It is curious that although scholars like Henri Frankfort, Jean Leclant, Jean Vercoutter and a host of others, on careful reading, have said that ancient Egyptian culture was African, that some still contest or resist this. Even some of these scholars contradict themselves by sometimes saying that ancient Egypt was African, and on other occasions, that it was “Western”. This kind of contradiction is difficult to resolve. Incidentally, the “Africa” of their comparisons is not Berber-speaking northwest Africa.

This effort has been premised on the idea that an honest well-structured inquiry will help reconcile the information retrieved by those working from different points of view. If I have succeeded to any degree, then “Eurocentrists” and “Afrocentrists” should see that non-ideological (but critical) approaches are possible. Obviously all is not knowable, but the vitriolic attacks heard recently do not advance knowledge or the understanding of how things like racism shape discourse. Nor does it help to say that some writers are only trading in conspiracy theories, or that others are simply intractably racist. There must be dialogue. ■

Afrocentric Education And The Study Of Ancient History

J.D. Muhly

The outrageous excesses of popular Afrocentric scholarship have been fairly well publicized and received the ridicule they justly deserve. As is now well known, Afrocentric scholars are said to believe that Socrates was black, that Cleopatra was black, that Hannibal, Jezebel, Bathsheba, and Amenophis III were black, that Aristotle stole his philosophy from the Egyptian books he found in the Alexandrian library at a time when there was no Alexandria, let alone a library, and that black Egyptians had achieved manned flight in space by ca. 4000 BC. The latter idea was based upon the misinterpretation of a small clay bird in the Cairo Museum.

The question is, who would believe such nonsense? The answer is, a great number of people spread all over the United States. I am interested here not in the how or the what associated with such beliefs, but rather the why. Why is it that so many Americans, especially African-Americans, appear to be so willing to embrace beliefs that to any ancient historian seem uncomfortably close to sheer lunacy?

One must first understand that we are not dealing here with simple matters of scholarly disagreement. The world of Afrocentric scholarship has become prominent only in recent times, because it is only recently that Afrocentric scholars were able to unmask, as they would have it, the grand conspiracy theory that has kept the truth hidden for hundreds of years. Afrocentric theory is very much a part of conspiracy theory and as such central to American intellectual traditions. This is the land of conspiracy theory. Americans seem willing to believe that some underlying conspiracy is behind almost every major national event. From the movies of Oliver Stone to magazines such as *Paranoia* and *Perceptions*, conspiracies are everywhere. Just mention conspiracy and you have the automatic support of much of your potential audience. A recent article in the *The New York Times* makes all too clear the degree to which the Clinton presidency has become entangled in a web of conspiracy theories; a web spun out on the World Wide Web, for the Internet has become the lifeblood of most American conspiracy theories (Weiss 1997).

The degree to which conspiracy theory has taken hold amongst the African-American community in this country is made all too clear by Jeffrey Rosen in a recent essay published in *The New Republic* (Rosen 1996).

Rosen quotes from a recent article by Regina Austin, a lawyer specializing in Critical Race Theory. Austin says of conspiracy theory that:

“Even though conspiracy theorizing is far from an ideal form of discourse and leaves much to be desired as a manifestation of black critical judgment, it has its usefulness. Because I respected the speakers, I felt compelled to investigate the speech. What I found leads me to believe that anti-black conspiracy theorizing is not all bad. Whether the theories are true or not, I would argue that the theories themselves reveal much about the concerns of contemporary blacks regarding law, medicine, economics, politics, and the media, and warrant serious consideration on that account. The theories represent critiques of major institutions and social systems by a people who are and have been foreclosed from full participation in them. Anti-black conspiracy theorizing generates a counter-response to exclusion and discrimination by mobilizing collective black interest in a way that contributes to the growth and the strength of the black public sphere.” (as quoted by Rosen 1996:32).

In other words, whatever the facts might be, there is still merit in believing that Socrates was black. Such a statement from a prominent black intellectual [It was the refusal of the Harvard Law Faculty to hire Regina Austin in 1990 that prompted Professor Derrick Bell to resign from that faculty] helps to explain why Afrocentric scholars are willing to accept statements that, in other contexts, would be rejected without comment.

The intellectual background also explains in large part why Afrocentric scholarship has taken such a hold in the United States, much more than anywhere else in the world. Europeans, for example, are still rather baffled by the whole concept. But why should African Americans today be so concerned about what happened in ancient Greece and ancient Egypt? Before I attempt to answer that, I want to point out that Afrocentric scholarship embraces much more than the Greek theft of Egyptian civilization. There is also the idea that all Meso-American civilizations of the New World have their roots in Black Africa. This idea is based upon the remarkably African features found in a series of massive stone heads produced by the Olmec culture of Mexico during the latter part of the second millennium BC. As these over-lifesize heads obviously depict people of African origin, or so it is claimed, they are to be seen as evidence for an African colonization of the New World in the eighth century BC. Not that the entire Olmec population was African. Van Sertima imagines that “a small but significant number of men and a few women, in a fleet protected by a military force, moved west down the Mediterranean toward North Africa in the period 948-680 BC” and somehow ended up in the New

World (Van Sertima 1985: 237).

"Nothing of the sort" is the reply of all Meso-American archaeologists. The similarities are purely accidental and there is no other evidence that the Olmecs of ancient Mexico were anything other than the descendants of people who came across the Bering Straits from Asia during the last Ice Age. In fact this is an example of the racist typography that Dr. Keita spoke about at this conference, the idea that we know what all Africans have always looked like and that they all looked alike. Writing in the catalogue of the recent Princeton exhibition on *The Olmec World: Ritual and Rulership* (1996), Richard Diehl and Michael Coe refer to theories regarding the Phoenician or African origin of Olmec civilization as "outlandish fairy tales" (Diehl and Coe 1996:11-12). And the monumental stone heads themselves date some three to four hundred years earlier than the crossing from Africa imagined by Van Sertima.

Will such a curt dismissal of their beliefs have any impact upon Afrocentric scholarship? None whatsoever. There it will be simply seen as another example of the conspiracy to conceal the truth. I have a special interest in the Olmec hypothesis because of Ivan van Sertima, one of this country's leading Afrocentric scholars, spoke on this very subject on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania on February 6, 1996, a lecture sponsored by our Greenfield Intercultural Center. Dr. Van Sertima spoke on "The African Presence in Ancient America: They Came Before Columbus."

This is also the title of his book on the subject, published in 1977 and reprinted many times. It was also the theme of his lecture at the conference on Nile Valley Civilizations, held in the Martin Luther King, Jr. International Chapel on the campus of Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia (26-30 September 1984), the proceedings of which were published as a special issue of the *Journal of African Civilizations* in 1985. It is to this Morehouse conference that I would like to turn now, for I feel that it captures better than anything else I have read the true essence of Afrocentric scholarship and the reasons for the success that Afrocentric scholars have achieved in the United States.

Van Sertima realizes that Olmec civilization is regarded by many Meso-American scholars as constituting the origins and foundations for all subsequent Meso-American civilizations (sc M. Coe 1994: 62), so that, by inserting African elements among the Olmecs, "a whole vision of American history is at stake" (Van Sertima 1985:244) The result is indeed a very different image of the black presence in the New World. As Van Sertima puts it, "Everywhere, from one corner of the ancient American world to the other, blacks were found. Not only were they here long before Columbus, but they were here, not as slaves, but as free men, even as priest-kings

among the Olmecs" (Van Sertima 1985: 246). Such ideas prevailed at Morehouse in 1984, so that Charles Finch could say that as a result of the conference "the light of a new dawn cast its glow over some of the forgotten realities of history" (Finch 1985: 7).

He went on to say of the impact of the conference that "It is as if African peoples have been mentally adrift in a Sargasso Sea of ignorance and confusion, without moorings, without direction, without a helm to steer by. In the aftermath of the Nile Valley conference, we can now perceive that the "Dark Ages" of African history may finally be drawing to a close" (Finch 1985: 7). Hugh M. Gloster, the President of Morehouse College, concluded that "A light has been struck in the darkness surrounding the history of African peoples, and neither we nor the world can ever be the same again. Now that the torch has been lit, we must all labor to keep it burning" (Gloster 1985: 12). It is this almost messianic belief in the importance of what they are doing that has persuaded some scholars to support these ideas, even though they know that they are wrong. Such reasoning takes one down a very slippery path, and as Frank Snowden (one of the best critics of this approach) has put it, "It is neither racist nor traitorous...to insist upon truth, scholarly rigor, and objectivity in the treatment of the history of blacks" (as quoted by John Ray in his excellent review of the *Black Athena* controversy: Ray 1997: 3).

A bit more reading might have made Dr. Van Sertima more wary of associating black history with Olmec civilization for we are told that the Olmecs ate domestic dogs, made a hallucinogen from the marine toad and practiced cannibalism (M. Coe 1994: 69). However his rhetoric, and that of the other scholars at the Morehouse conference, deserves careful study. It describes what Afrocentric scholars feel they have accomplished.

The references to Africa, by Van Sertima and other Afrocentric scholars are, in reality, all references to Egypt. No Afrocentric scholar that I have read has any interest in the rest of Africa. Nothing is said about the achievements of the Ibo, the Yoruba, or about the bronzes from Ife and Benin City. This is, for me, one of the most astounding features of Afrocentric scholarship: it ignores all of Africa save for Egypt. Afrocentric scholars accuse white European scholars of ignoring Africa. That is, in many respects, a just charge. But Afrocentric scholars do an even better job of ignoring Africa, due to their obsession with creating a black civilization in Egypt. They ignore a rich cultural heritage in order to create a bogus one.

Afrocentric scholars assume a unity of African civilization, a concept that no scholar who actually works in Africa would ever endorse, and that this unity can somehow be understood solely within the parameters of pharaonic Egypt. But, as May Lefkowitz has so nicely shown (in *Not Out of*

Africa, 1996, chap. 3), Afrocentric Egypt really has nothing to do with pharaonic Egypt. It is an Egypt created by Late Hellenistic and Roman Neoplatonists who came to Egypt through their work on Pythagoras and the Pythagorean life, (for which see G. Clark (trans.), *Iamblichus: on the Pythagorean Life*, Liverpool, 1989). Above all it is based upon the Hermetic tradition and the collections of writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus. As Garth Fowden has shown in his brilliant book on *The Egyptian Hermes* (2nd ed., Princeton 1993) none of this has anything to do with Pharaonic Egypt. In a very real sense Afrocentric scholarship has nothing to do with Africa or with Egypt.

Greece and Egypt take on their proper roles once you understand that, in the words of Kwame Anthony Appiah, the Afrocentric world is but the Eurocentric one "turned upside down" (*Times Literary Supplement* 4689-12 February 1993), (p. 24). Just as Greece was the prime mover for 19th century Eurocentric scholarship, so must it be for Afrocentric scholarship. But it is an African Greece, not European Greece, a Greece that really got all its good ideas from Egypt. And Egypt, once it is recognized that ancient Egyptians were all black, can stand for all Africa, because Egypt was the only African civilization to have a highly sophisticated, literate culture. Afrocentric scholars worship the written word as do all Eurocentric scholars and the Greeks obviously could borrow their philosophy, science and mathematics only from a literate culture. That meant Egypt.

How serious a threat is all this to traditional Classical scholarship and what one might call normative ancient history? I am reasonably confident that Classical scholarship and Egyptology will both survive the challenge of Afrocentrism. What Martin Bernal did in *Black Athena* was not to create Afrocentric scholarship, but to make it academically respectable. This was made clear to both of us when we took part in the fascinating conference on "Challenging Tradition: Cultural Interaction in Antiquity and Bernal's *Black Athena*," held at Temple University (19-20 October 1990) and jointly sponsored by the Departments of Classics and Afro-American Studies. While Bernal certainly exaggerated on occasion, he did do an excellent job (in *Black Athena* Vol. I) in exposing the racism and anti-Semitism all too common in 19th century European scholarship. What has been written about ancient Nubia is in fact far worse than anything said about Greece or the Near East by 19th century scholars. Nubian prehistory was seen in terms of successive waves of white or Hamitic incursions, which produced cultural progress, and black or Negroid incursions, which produced cultural regression and Dark Ages. Here is Sir Grafton Elliot Smith, Professor of Anatomy at Manchester University, writing in 1909 in connection with the First Archaeological Survey of Nubia:

"the smallest infusion of Negro blood immediately manifests

itself in a dulling of initiative and a 'drag' on the further development of the arts of civilization" (quoted by Trigger 1978: 28). Or consider Randall-MacIver and Woolley writing about their work at the Roman Nubian cemetery of Karanog:

"But soon the unfailing dynamics of race reasserted their force. If a short-lived and unstable black empire has occasionally extended its limits to within view of the Mediterranean, it has ultimately been repelled all along the line" (quoted by Trigger 1978: 28).

We have managed to survive the excesses of Elliot Smith, Randall-MacIver, and Woolley and we are the better for it. We will survive the excesses of Afrocentric scholarship, and the contentious atmosphere that sometimes accompanies it. In a way we have already responded to the Afrocentric challenge, with a new understanding of ancient Egypt as a civilization located in Africa, and with a renewed emphasis upon Nubia. The pioneering work of George Reisner in Nubia was never published. Now every major archaeological museum in Europe and America has a new Nubian gallery.

This sudden flurry of interest in Nubia is hardly a chance affair. There can be no doubt that interest in Afrocentric scholarship, and in black contributions to western civilization, is directly responsible for the new Nubian Gallery that is now a feature of almost every major museum in Europe and the United States. Objects that languished in storage for decades were suddenly seen as worthy of prominent display. The catalogue written to accompany the new Nubian Gallery at the Fine Arts Museum in Boston simply states that "Thanks to worldwide interest in the fascinating cultures that make up Nubia's history, our knowledge of Nubia has increase greatly in the last decade. For the first time at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, this material is showcased in its own gallery" (Haynes 1992: 7). But the Fine Arts Museum began work in Nubia in 1906; the Nubian Gallery opened in 1992.

The increase in knowledge mentioned in the above quotation came about as a result of the salvage archaeology carried out in Nubia prior to the building of the Sadd-el-Aali, the Aswan High Dam. Whereas the potential destruction of the great monument of Rameses II at Abu Simbil attracted the greatest international concern, resulting in an elaborate rescue effort organized by UNESCO (Gerster 1963), the destruction of countless archaeological sites in Lower Nubia, now totally inundated by the waters of the artificial lake created by the dam, received little attention.

Some effort was made to survey and even excavate a number of the prehistoric sites destined to be covered by the waters of Lake Nasser (now more commonly called the Nubian Sea), especially by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, under the direction of Keith C. Seele. This

work only served to give some slight inkling of the magnitude of the destruction caused by the dam (Roberts 1993). It is very doubtful that international opinion would permit the Egyptian government to carry out such a project in the 1990's. In the 1960's there was little public interest in Nubia. The exhibition at the Institut du Monde Arabe (Paris) on "Soudan, Royaumes sur le Nil" (5 February to 31 August 1997).

Classical Studies has also changed, with more emphasis now being given to contacts with and influences from the Near East and the interaction between Greek and Oriental cultures in the Geometric and Archaic periods. Walter Burkert's *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influences on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (Harvard UP, 1992) is an excellent example of this. Excellent surveys of the archaeological evidence for such contacts have been published, including those by E. Guralnick (1989) and G. Markoe (1996). Very far-reaching claims for Near Eastern influence upon the development of Archaic Greek art have been made in a much discussed recent book by Sarah Morris (1992). There can be no doubt that much of the impetus for such scholarship has come from the challenge presented to Classical scholarship by Bernal's *Black Athena* volumes. As scholars we usually end up doing the right thing, but only after we are given a good push in the right direction. ■

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Stolen Legacy? The Evidence from Language

Jay Jasanoff

Neighboring peoples and cultures can influence each other in many ways. In today's world, "neighboring" can mean pretty much anywhere: we can have a taste for Mexican food, Japanese pottery and Indian music, or Indian food, Japanese music and Mexican pottery. In my home town of Ithaca, New York, a small upstate city of about 30,000 people, there are no fewer than eight Chinese restaurants. By no means all of these depend on the relatively cosmopolitan university population. The largest and most successful of them serves a five-dollar all-you-can-eat lunch buffet to a local clientele of truck drivers, small tradespeople and senior citizens, who happily combine their Hot and Sour Soup and General Tso's Chicken with heaps of American-style chicken wings, crinkle-cut french fries and ketchup. Even before the advent of the "global village," however, long-range cultural borrowing of this kind could and did take place on a smaller scale. Gunpowder was introduced into Europe from China, and into America from Europe. The potato came from Peru. The silkworm was an early example of commercial theft; it is said to have been smuggled into Constantinople by two Persian monks who concealed the insects in the hollows of their bamboo staffs. Still earlier, the Greeks obtained amber from the Baltic, the Phoenicians are supposed to have gotten tin from Cornwall, and the Egyptians imported ivory from inner Africa. Starting around 6000 BC or even before, the form of social and economic organization that we call "Neolithic", marked by settled agriculture and the domestication of animals like sheep and cattle—quietly diffused over much of Eurasia and Africa.

These examples of cross-cultural contact, of course, involve material things, like foods and articles of trade; and technologies, like agriculture and the manufacture of gunpowder. But ideas—and, indeed, whole systems of ideas—can travel as well. The most spectacular instances are afforded by the great world religions—Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Buddhism began in a small area of northern India, but eventually expanded to cover Tibet, China, Japan and most of Southeast Asia. Christianity, starting as a minor Jewish sect in Palestine, gradually spread to the Roman world as a whole, and then far beyond. Islam was the religion of a small corner of the Arabian peninsula before it was carried within the space of a century to the Pyrenees and the borders of India. In the realm of secular thought, the geometry of the Greeks was eagerly assimilated by the Arabs and passed on

to the Hindus, while the Indian system of arithmetic, incorporating the all-important invention of the zero, was transmitted by the Arabs to Europe. "Stolen" or not, Aristotle's ideas were of great interest to the medieval Arab philosophers, who helped reintroduce Greek philosophy to the backward intellectual culture of the West. The Arabs also gave Europe their astronomical and astrological lore, some of which went back to ancient Mesopotamia and some to Hellenistic Egypt.

But sometimes, especially when we are dealing with the remote past, our evidence is fragmentary. I decided to begin with Chinese restaurants and Babylonian astrology because these cases are all pretty secure; we have lots of evidence bearing on the history of Hot and Sour Soup in America, and we can reconstruct a convincing argument to explain how it got from China to upstate New York.

The history of writing abounds in cases of possible but unproved cultural diffusion. Was the development of the Egyptian hieroglyphic writing system completely independent of the invention of the Mesopotamian cuneiform script at around the same time? Was the Semitic alphabet, of which the Greek alphabet is an improved offshoot, wholly a Levantine invention, or was it somehow inspired by Egyptian hieroglyphic writing? These are questions to which a diffusionist answer—an explanation in terms of contact—has seemed attractive to many scholars, but which cannot now be answered with finality. We just don't have enough evidence.

There are other cases where we can show that a diffusionist explanation is wrong, or at least wildly improbable. Consider the pyramids. At Meroe, on the upper Nile in what is now Sudan, are the ruins of an ancient city that was once the capital of the kingdom of Cush—a country mentioned both in hieroglyphic records and in the Bible. Here we find, dating from a period corresponding to the last thousand years or so of pre-Christian Egypt, the material remains of an Egyptianized state that has been called "Egypt's only colony." Included amidst the debris are the enclosure of a temple to the Egyptian sun god Amon and a number of small but very Egyptian-looking pyramids. Were these structures inspired by the pyramids of Egypt proper? The answer is obviously yes: in a region that was the subject to Egyptian influence for millennia, and in the immediate vicinity of an Egyptian temple, the appearance of a characteristic Egyptian architectural form is hardly likely to be accidental. But there are also pyramids in Mexico and Guatemala, built by the Mayan Indians in pre-Columbian times. What about these? Here the circumstances are completely different. The Egyptian pyramids are tombs; the Mayan pyramids are temples. Mayan civilization was about as different from Egyptian civilization as two archaic urban cultures can be; the recent decipherment of Mayan writing has only confirmed this. But towering above every other objection to a connection

between the Egyptian and Mayan pyramids is the problem of geography. It is impossible to imagine a plausible route by which a taste for pyramid-building could have migrated from Egypt to Mexico or, for that matter, from Mexico to Egypt. Note that I say a *plausible* route. People who believe in a link between the Egyptian and Central American pyramids are usually remarkably willing to assume unrecorded voyages by intrepid stone-age seafarers, or a Lost Continent of Atlantis, or—better yet—a Lost Continent of Mu. In *Chariots of the Gods*, a book that enjoyed a certain vogue twenty years ago, Erich von Däniken showed how everything fell into place once we were prepared to admit the role of spacemen from the planet Venus. Make enough special assumptions and you can argue for anything.

Although von Däniken's flying saucers were a distinctly eccentric touch, undocumented historical encounters of various kinds have often been invoked by writers whose real interest is to establish a link, sometimes transparently unscholarly reasons, between their own culture and a supposedly more prestigious older one. This practice is not new. One of the reasons why Virgil wrote the *Aeneid* was to provide the Romans with an illustrious Trojan war history like the Greeks had. In the sixteenth century the French poet Ronsard composed the *Franciade*, an epic poem tracing the founding of the French nation to an invented Trojan prince named Francus. Mary Lefkowitz reminds us that Hellenized Jewish writers like Philo, Josephus and others routinely asserted that Plato and other Greek philosophers based their ideas on the doctrines of Moses. Closer to home, inscriptions allegedly proving a medieval Norse presence in Minnesota, a Celtic presence in Maine, or a Phoenician presence in Kentucky are "discovered" with suprising regularity.

The perspective on Greek and Egyptian history that has been called "Afrocentric" is thus nothing unusual. When George G. M. James in *Stolen Legacy*, Cheikh Anta Diop in *Civilization or Barbarism*, or Martin Bernal in *Black Athena* claim that Black African pharaohs established the first organized governments on the Greek mainland, they are writing a kind of history that may be tendentious and self-serving, but is no different—at least not in principle—from the kind of tendentious and self-serving history that representatives of other interest groups have sometimes written. This is also true of their cultural claims—that Greek science and mathematics were anticipated by the Egyptians, that Plato was trained by Egyptian priests, that Aristotle acquired his doctrines by ransacking the library of Alexandria, and so on. Since no history is completely free of bias, it is not enough to dismiss these assertions as politically motivated; political motives, as Bernal likes to point out, are found among orthodox classicists, historians and linguists as well. The only way to contest the extreme Afrocentric version of history, if we want to contest it, is to engage with it. Reasonable people may never

agree on whether the Parthenon is a more impressive building than the temple of Karnak, or whether Pythagoras was a more admirable mathematician than the Egyptian author of the Rhind Papyrus. But reasonable people *can* be expected to deal objectively with such yes-no questions as whether there was an Egyptian state in Boeotia or whether there is a detectable Egyptian substrate in Aristotle's *Poetics*. To investigate questions like these, the most reliable method is one that was not infrequently favored by the Greeks themselves. I refer, of course, to the method of looking at the facts.

Other scholars, speaking from their own areas of expertise, have discussed the nature of the Egyptian presence in the archeology of Bronze Age Greece, the similarities and differences between Greek religion and Egyptian religion, the similarities and differences between Greek religion and Egyptian religion, the pros and cons of the proposition that Socrates was black, and so forth. I have nothing of my own to add to these debates. What I would like to comment on is an aspect of the controversy that everyone is happy to pay lip service to, but that relatively few of the participants on either side have actually discussed in any detail. This is the linguistic dimension. The Greeks and the Egyptians, as we know, spoke different languages. Greek was, and is, an Indo-European language—which is a shorthand way of saying that it is the descendant, via an orderly process of generational transmission over a period of millennia, of an earlier language which was at the same time also the ancestor of Latin, Sanskrit, Hittite, and most of the modern languages of Europe and northern India. We call this common parent of Greek, Latin and Sanskrit *Proto-Indo-European*; its descendants constitute the Indo-European family of languages. The structure of the family can be displayed in a tree diagram like the following:

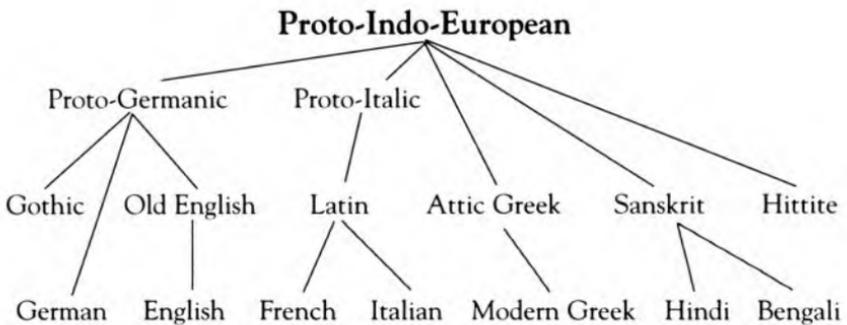


Figure 1. The Indo-European Languages (schematic)

Scholars still wonder where and when Proto-Indo-European was spoken; the best guess puts it around 4000 BC in the area to the north and west of the Caspian Sea. Since this was a time well before the earliest writing that we know of, we have no documents in Proto-Indo-European, and it is unlikely that we ever will. But—and this is an extremely important point—the fact that we have no direct records of Proto-Indo-European does not mean that we know nothing about it. On the contrary, the methods of historical linguistics allow us to infer a great deal about Proto-Indo-European by comparing the forms taken by individual words in the Indo-European daughter languages.

Let us consider two simple examples. The Greek word for the number ‘five’ is *pénte*; its counterparts elsewhere in the family include Latin *quinque*, Sanskrit *páñca*, Gothic *fimf* and Lithuanian *penki*. The resemblances among these forms are too great to be accidental; they must therefore all go back to a common ancestor form in Proto-Indo-European. The methods that we use to reconstruct such preforms are quite sophisticated; in the present case, it can be shown that the Proto-Indo-European word for ‘five’ was **pénk^e*, with a *k^e*-sound where Greek has a *-t*-. (The asterisk means that the form **pénk^e* is a reconstruction.) Now consider the inflected verbal form meaning ‘they carry’. In Attic this is *phérousi*, but in the Doric dialects the word is *phéronti*, with an “aspirated,” or breathy, *p*-sound that became an *f*- in Modern Greek. Outside Greek, Latin has *ferunt*, Sanskrit has *bháranti*, and Gothic has *bairand*. Here too there must have been a Proto-Indo-European preform; it can be reconstructed as **bhéronti*, with a so-called “voiced-aspirate” **bh-* as the initial consonant sound. Our purpose in positing Proto-Indo-European words in this way, it should be noted, is not to bring a long-vanished language back to life, which would be impossible even under the most favorable circumstances. The object of comparative reconstruction is rather to summarize our historical knowledge of the Indo-European languages that have actually come down to us. Thus, even the minuscule body of data we have looked at so far tells us that the Proto-Indo-European sounds **kw* and **bh*, neither of which any longer occurs in Greek, developed into other sounds—specifically, **t* and **ph*—over the course of the three thousand years or so that separate Proto-Indo-European from Homer. A glance into a good Greek etymological dictionary, such as Frisk’s *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* or Chantraine’s *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, will satisfy even the most perfunctory browser that we know a very great deal more.

The Egyptian language, on the other hand, was not Indo-European. It

belongs to another language family—a family that was once called Hamito-Semitic, but which is nowadays usually known as Afroasiatic. Afroasiatic too can be represented by a tree diagram:

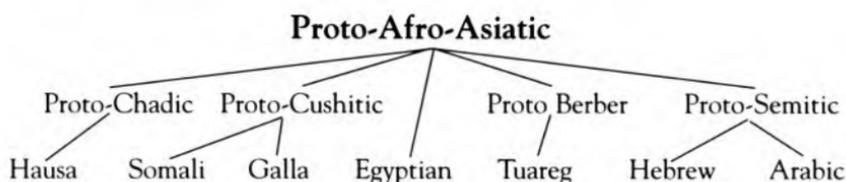


Figure 2. The Afroasiatic Languages (schematic)

Proto-Afroasiatic was spoken even longer ago than Proto-Indo-European. It had a number of primary branches, one of which gave Egyptian, another of which gave the important sub-Saharan language Hausa and its congeners, and still another of which—the only non-African branch—led to the Semitic languages, including Hebrew and Arabic. In principle, the same techniques that we use to reconstruct Proto-Indo-European can be used to reconstruct Proto-Afroasiatic. In fact, however, the reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European has not advanced nearly so far as the reconstruction of Proto-Afroasiatic—partly because much less scholarly effort has gone into the investigation of Afroasiatic than Indo-European—partly because much less scholarly effort has gone into the investigation of Afroasiatic than Indo-European, and partly because the material is, for a variety of reasons, significantly more difficult to work with. In a sense, then, Egyptian is a language with a prehistory that is still largely waiting to be written.

It should be said at the outset that the fact that Greek and Egyptian belong to different families has *absolutely no bearing* on the key issues in the Afrocentrism controversy. No languages are “better” than others, or more capable of expressing abstract concepts. If the Egyptians had seen fit to invent Greek philosophy, they would have found ways to express its key concepts, just as the Greeks, if they had believed the same things about the afterlife that the Egyptians believed, would have talked about them as freely and easily as the Egyptians did. Nor does the fact that Egyptians spoke an Afroasiatic language shed any light on whether the Egyptians were white, black, or something in between. Speakers of Afroasiatic languages come in all colors nowadays, just as speakers of Indo-European languages do, and there is no reason to think that the situation was different in antiquity. As a matter of fact, there is only one reason why the Indo-European character of Greek is important in the present connection, and that reason is simply this:

because of the fact that Greek is a thoroughly investigated Indo-European language, we happen to be extraordinarily well informed about the prehistory of much of its vocabulary. We are thus in a good position to evaluate claims—frequent in the literature of Afrocentrism—that this or that Greek word was originally borrowed into Greek from Egyptian or some other African or Near Eastern source. As we shall see, this observation is no mere philological nicety; the tool thus placed in our hands is a very powerful one.

It is a commonplace of historical linguistics, and of everyday experience, that cultural borrowing is very often accompanied by linguistic borrowing. When the potato came to England, the name of the potato came into English; *mutatis mutandis*, the same thing happened with the pumpkin, the rutabaga and the zucchini. The spread of Christianity from the Greek-speaking eastern half of the Roman Empire to the Latin-speaking western half brought a spate of Greek loanwords into Latin—words like ‘priest’ (Latin *presbyter*), ‘bishop’ (Latin *episcopus*) and ‘church’ itself (Latin *ecclesia*), the first two of which eventually found their way into English. Similarly, the expansion of Islam introduced thousands of Arabic loanwords into Persian; in Egypt, it eventually led to the complete replacement of Coptic, the Egyptian spoken language, by Arabic. I spoke earlier of the invention of the zero in India and its transmission to Europe via the Arabs; it should come as no surprise to learn that the English word *zero* is of Arabic origin. Many old chemical and astronomical terms, such as *alcohol*, *alkali*, *zenith*, *nadir*, and star names like *Vega*, *Rigel* and *Betelgeuse*, are likewise Arabic. Nowadays, of course, we get our scientific and technical vocabulary from Latin and Greek, partly through productive processes that allow us to form words like *psychedelic*, *hologram*, *teleportation* and *laparoscopy* without limit. Even apart from such “learned borrowings,” however, English is usually rich in loanwords. After the Norman conquest in 1066, the entire English aristocracy became French-speaking, and French replaced English as the ordinary language of cultivated discourse and secular literature. When English reasserted itself in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it was a changed language, full of borrowed French words that reflected the changed life and culture of late medieval England. We still have thousands of French words in English that go back to this period. They are completely nativized: scholars can spot them with ease, but no lay person would think there was anything foreign or learned about *table*, *chair*, *train*, *army*, *cross*, *toast*, *blue*, *brown* or *very*. And English is not unique: Japanese and other East Asian languages have borrowed heavily from Chinese, Armenian has borrowed heavily from Middle Persian, the modern Mayan languages of Mexico have borrowed heavily from Spanish. Interestingly, our inscriptions from Meroe on the upper Nile, though still largely undeciphered, contain clear examples

of Egyptian loanwords. Facts like these, which are perfectly well known, make good intuitive sense. When languages have been in close contact, and especially when one of them has been in a position of dominance relative to the other, you would expect to be able to tell—and you usually can.

Before moving on to Egypt and Greece, I should add that there is one other kind of borrowing of potential interest to us. This is *loan translation*. A good example is furnished by our old friend Hot and Sour Soup. What was the origin of this term? The adjectives *hot* and *sour* are of course perfectly good English words, but their use together to provide the name of a specific restaurant item seems a little odd; English gastronomical terminology just doesn't usually work this way. In fact, the feeling of strangeness is well justified, for *hot* and *sour*, like *sweet* and *sour* and *stir-fry*, are literal translations of Chinese cooking terms. Such borrowing by translation is very well attested in more "serious" areas of activity as well, especially in languages where polysyllabic foreign words are difficult to accommodate in the native lexicon. Thus, when Buddhism was introduced into Tibet from India, the whole enormous technical vocabulary of Mahayana Buddhism, in Sanskrit, was laboriously rendered, root by root and suffix by suffix, into Classical Tibetan. The Tibetan Buddhist vocabulary consists entirely of Tibetan elements, but combined in ways that make it clear that they were translated from the corresponding elements in Sanskrit.

The import of all this for the Afrocentrism controversy should be clear. If it is really true that Egyptian kings held sway over the Greek mainland in the middle of the second millennium B.C., and if it is really true that Greek science, mathematics and philosophy were invented in Egypt and merely borrowed or "stolen" by the semi-barbarous Greeks, then we ought to find linguistic evidence of this in the form of a large body of Egyptian loanwords, or at least loan translations, in Greek. Indeed, we ought to find a particularly dense clustering of such words in the fields where the Greek debt to Egypt was allegedly the greatest. But this is not at all the case. The number of certifiable Egyptian loanwords in Greek is very small, and virtually confined to terms denoting specifically Egyptian plants, animals, and products that the Greeks would naturally have had no names of their own for. A few representative items are the following:

baris 'boat' <Eg. *br* (Coptic *bari*)

ebenos, *ebene* 'ebony' <Eg. *hbn(y)*

ibis 'ibis' <Eg. *hby*

kommi 'gum' <Eg. *kmy(.t)* (Coptic *komi*)

kullestis 'kind of Egyptian bread' <Eg. *krst*

papuros 'papyrus' <Eg. *p3-pr* (with the definite article *p3-*)

psagdan, *psagdas*, *sagdas* 'unguent' <Eg. *p(3)-sgnn*, *sgnn*

Words of this kind, few in number and mostly very late, could have been acquired by Greeks travelling to Egypt or, likelier still, by Greeks residing in Egypt. They lend no support to any of the major Afrocentric claims.

When we turn to the vocabulary of Greek science, mathematics and philosophy, the silence of the Egyptian evidence is deafening. The word 'pyramid' is possibly of Egyptian origin; but again, pyramids are quintessentially Egyptian objects. Philosophical terms like *arete* 'virtue', *episteme* 'knowledge', *eidos* 'form', *húle* 'matter', *anamnēsis* 'recollection', *ousia* 'essence' *dike* 'justice', *nous* 'mind' and *phusis* 'nature', have, so far as I know, no interestingly similar Egyptian counterparts; all are perfectly good Indo-European words. It is interesting to note, however, that "Afrocentric" etymologies have been proposed for *nous* and *phusis*. *nous* is derived by James and Diop from Egyptian *Nun*, which is said to mean 'primordial matter'. I do not know whether or not this gloss is accurate, but it hardly matters; the Greek word is demonstrably a contraction of older **noos*, with two syllables, and this in turn can only go back to earlier **noyos* or (as is usually assumed) **nosos*. In the last analysis, the only thing that *nous* and *Nun* have in common is an initial *n*—hardly a argument for anything. As for *phusis*, Diop says that "the very origin of this root may be Negro-African or Egyptian." Looking up the accompanying footnote, however, the reader finds that Diop is comparing it, not with an Egyptian word, but with *fes*, a word in his native Wolof that is said to mean 'become'. Quite apart from the fact that there no linguistic connection between Egyptian and Wolof—a language that does not belong to the Afroasiatic family, by the way—Diop's etymology ignores some of the most basic facts of Greek. *phusis* is a perfectly well-formed derivative of the verb *phuo* 'produce', the middle forms of which mean 'grow'. The suffix *-*sis*, which productively makes abstract nouns from verbal roots, is reconstructible as *-*tis*; for the change of **t* to **s* before **i* compare the development of *bheronti* to *pherousi*, as discussed about. The word as a whole goes back to a preform *bhutis*, and has an exact cognate in Sanskrit *bhutis* 'becoming'. The resemblance between the Greek and Wolof forms, such as it is, is wholly fortuitous.

There is one other technical term of Greek philosophy that has been memorably alleged to have an Egyptian etymology. This is Democritus' word *atomos* 'atom', which has, of course, come down into English and other modern languages as a loanword with a rather specialized scientific meaning. *atomos* in Greek is not, on the face of it, a difficult form; it means 'uncut' 'uncuttable' or 'not to be cut', and consists of the negative prefix *a-* followed by a verbal adjective containing the root of the verb *temno* 'to cut'. There are many other Greek words of this structure such as *agraphos* 'unwritten', *atrophos* 'not nourished', *adutos* 'not to be entered', and so on. Nevertheless,

James professes to believe that *atomos* is the same word, or rather name, as *Atum* (actually *itm*), an Egyptian sun god whom he identifies, inter alia, as 'the creator of the eight gods' and 'the unmoved mover'. Another writer calls *Atum* the god who 'in the beginning was everything'. These glosses, I am afraid, have a very tendentious ring to them. But whoever or whatever *Atum* was, the fact remains that *atomos* is an ordinary Greek word with a technical meaning ('indivisible particle') that accords perfectly with its literal meaning of 'uncut(table)'. To convey what James' proposal amounts to, it may be instructive to perform a brief thought experiment. Consider for a moment the source of the English word *uncut*. We all think we know that *uncut* consists of *un-*, the negative prefix, plus *cut*. But how would we react if someone told us that we were wrong, and that *uncut* actually came into English from Greek? The argument would run like this. The Greek noun *onkos* means, among other things, 'mass' or 'bulk'. From *onkos* can be formed a denominative verb *onkoo*, meaning 'to endow with mass or bulk'; this in turn, would have had a verbal adjective *onkotos* 'endowed with bulk, bulky, not divided into smaller pieces'. Now suppose our would-be etymologist told us that *onkotos* in this last sense was the actual source of English *uncut*; would we believe him? I, for one, would call the proposal imaginative but wildly improbable. That is also how I would describe the proposed derivation of *atomos* from *Atum*.

James and Diop make occasional linguistic arguments like these, and they are without exception unconvincing. But neither of these writers treats the evidence from language with the seriousness it deserves. Neither James nor Diop seems to appreciate the fact that if the influence of the Egyptians on the Greeks was as profound as they say it was, then Egyptian loanwords in Greek ought to be like Greek loanwords in Latin, Chinese loanwords in Japanese, or French loanwords in English—transparent and ubiquitous. (It is interesting to note that Diop's 152-page discussion of "*Africa's Contribution to Humanity in Sciences and in Philosophy*" devotes 78 pages to the sciences, 68 pages to philosophy, and only four pages to language.) The only Afrocentric writer who has fully grasped the crucial significance of language to the Afrocentric project is Martin Bernal. The two volumes of Bernal's *Black Athena* contain close to two hundred "Afroasiatic" etymologies, most of them Egyptian. These, moreover, are said to be only a small fraction of the total; many more are promised for a projected third installment of *Black Athena*, which will be devoted wholly to Greek-Egyptian and Greek-Semitic etymologies. Needless to say, those of us who have a professional interest in the history of the Greek language look forward to the publication of Bernal's next volume. Meanwhile, however, the material he has published already gives us plenty to discuss.

My colleague Alan Nussbaum and I have already presented our

evaluation of Bernal's etymological method and the quality of his Egyptian-Greek comparisons in the book *Black Athena Revisited*, edited by Mary Lefkowitz and Guy Rogers. I can therefore confine myself here to summarizing our main conclusions.

First, Bernal's phonetic and semantic criteria for deciding that a given Egyptian word and a Greek word should be considered "the same" are unacceptably lax. There are no recurrent patterns in his data; depending on Bernal's requirements, a single Egyptian sound may correspond to three, four, or even five different sounds in Greek. The Egyptian glottal stop or "aleph"—the sound rendered in our transcriptions by a small '3'—is sometimes said to correspond to the vowel *a* in Greek, sometimes to the consonant *r*, sometimes to the consonant *l*, and sometimes to nothing at all. A further huge element of uncertainty is added by the fact that we do not usually know the vowels of Egyptian words; Bernal fills them in in such a way as to make his comparisons more attractive than they would otherwise be.

Second, a disproportionately high percentage of Bernal's supposed Egyptian loanwords in Greek are not ordinary words but names—names of people, names of gods, or names of places. This is significant because the literal meaning of a name need not correspond to any actual attribute of the person or object named. My name, Jay, goes back to the name of a bird in Latin; Bernal's name, Martin, associates him with the god Mars. Similarly, John literally means 'God is gracious', James (i.e. Jacob) means 'he will supplant', the York of New York means 'boar's town', Paris takes its name from the Gaulish tribe of the Parisii, and so on. Bernal exploits this semantic open-endedness of names to the limit. His derivation of the Greek city name *Methone* from an Egyptian word meaning 'bull ring', for example, is completely arbitrary, as is his derivation of the spring *Telphousa* from a rare Egyptian name for Libya. Equally arbitrary is his much-publicized but absurd derivation of *Athenai* 'Athens' from the Egyptian *Ht Nt* 'Temple of [the Goddess] *Neit*:' there is not the slightest reason to believe that the meaning was this and not any of a thousand other things.

Finally, Bernal's derivations of ordinary *non*-onomastic Greek words from Egyptian preforms are often contradicted by known historical linguistic facts. So, for example, *basileus* 'king' cannot come from Egyptian *p3 sr* 'the official', as Bernal says it does; the Mycenaean spelling *qa-si-re-u* shows that the initial *b-* of this word goes back to an earlier **gw*. Similarly, *khiloi* (dialectally also *kheloi*, *khellioi*) 'thousand(s)' cannot be the same word as Egyptian *h3* 'id'; even if we could accept Bernal's claim that Egyptian *h-* and *-3-* would have given Greek *kh-* and *-l-*, respectively, the Greek dialect forms show that the preform of this word must have had a cluster **-sl-*, which appears in Sanskrit *sa-hasriya-* 'thousand-fold', with *-r-* from **-l-*. Or again,

Greek *ophis* 'snake', with its variant *ekhis*, points unmistakably to an Indo-European vowel-changing noun **higwhis* (nominative), **hégwhis* (genitive), rather than to a borrowing from Egyptian *hf*.

On the basis of observations like these, Nussbaum and I came to the conclusion that "Bernal's claim to have uncovered 'hundreds' of viable Greek-Egyptian and Greek-Semitic etymologies is simply false. We doubt that he has discovered even one such etymology that is wholly new. Certainly there are Semitic and Egyptian borrowings in Greek, but they are, as standardly believed, relatively few in number and—with some conspicuous exceptions on the Semitic side—late in date. Indeed, if there is any positive linguistic result that can be said to follow from *Black Athena*, it is that most of the identifiable Semitic and Egyptian loanwords in Greek have already been found, since Bernal's unremitting search for further examples has been so notably unproductive." That is still my conclusion today. And unless and until someone can produce evidence to show that, appearances notwithstanding, there is a substantial Egyptian linguistic presence in Greek, the Afrocentrist view of Greece as a cultural colony of Egypt will be a dead letter. ■

The Distortion of History: Bernal, Afrocentrism, and Ancient Egypt

Frank J. Yurco

I wish to thank Anna Lea and the S.P.G.H. for hosting this seminar, and inviting me to speak at it. To preface this paper, I want first, to note that not all Afrocentrists are involved in the distortions I am presenting, and that others are involved in this issue as well, notably Dr. Martin Bernal, in his *Black Athena*, vol. I-II¹, and a promised vol. III. This has been noted also by my colleague and fellow Egyptologist, Dr. Ann Macy Roth, of Howard University who in a two-part article titled "Building Bridges to Afrocentrism," published in the *American Research Center in Egypt Newsletter*², offered a possibility for dialogue between Egyptologists and Afrocentrists. As she noted, both groups are involved in championing ancient Egypt as an African Civilization of great antiquity. Nor do I refrain from criticizing some of my Egyptologist colleagues for failing to consider these issues at all.

Some Afrocentrists, however, have gone well beyond such consensus. There are among them those who have claimed that ancient Egyptians were uniformly black, like sub-Saharan Africans.³ In taking such positions, they are turning American racism on its head, for it was Americans of the 19th century slavery era who developed the varied notions such as that one great grandparent of African ancestry made a mixed-race person "black". On the face of it, this notion was nonsense in genetic terms.⁴ Rather than being uniformly black as some Afrocentrists would propose, the biological reality is that Africans show as much diversity as do Europeans, or Asians. Africans range from the light complexioned North Africans to the dark brown central Africans, to the jet-black Shilluk, Dinka, and Nuer peoples of the southern Sudan.⁵ Shomarqa Keita has espoused this view of African population diversity that has developed largely driven by natural selection over the millennia, and in this view, he is absolutely correct.⁶ This diversity is also well exemplified by ancient and modern Egypt. Just as today, the population ranges from light-brown-complexioned in the Delta and northern Egypt, to slightly darker complexions in Middle Egypt, and darker brown Upper Egyptians, from Coptos southwards. Close to Aswan the population resembles Nubians, and the still darker Sudanese, until one reaches the ultra dark Shilluk, Dinka, and Nuer, in the southern Sudan. The same sort of diversity may be seen in ancient Egypt, when its people are viewed without selectivity. Some Afrocentrists claim that ancient Egyptians were uniformly black, and they begin to distort history when they

pronounce other, valid, excavated representations of ancient Egyptians as fakes and frauds. Such claims have been published about the statues of Rahotep and Nofret, about Ka-Aper, also called Sheikh el-Beled, and so also the head of Nefertiti, now in the Berlin Museum.⁷ Ironically, all three of these examples are excavated pieces, that have excellent documentation!⁸ Statues of the Archaic Period-Old Kingdom often are painted in a color convention that represents males as red-brown, while females are depicted yellow-white. Rahotep and Nofret exemplify this practice. Still, they are both portrait-quality representations, and depict two distinct individuals. Such portrait quality is also found in the best royal and noble work of Dynasty IV-V. The notable reserve heads from Giza are among the most realistic examples. Among them are two excavated from Giza mastaba G4440, that represent a husband and wife.⁹ Yet these two individuals are as distinct and different as can be. The man was a typical Memphite type, as represented in Sneferu-Khufu's extended families. His wife's head by contrast has strongly Nubian-Kushite features.¹⁰ How did she appear at Giza? Perhaps she was one among the Nubians captured by Sneferu who raided Nubia according to the Royal Annals.¹¹ Royalty in ancient Egypt often are attested to have married captured enemy royal females to their own progeny. These statues were among the earliest known examples of this practice. Descendants of Sneferu's captured Nubians became known in the Old Kingdom as "pacified Nubians", and some of these rose to high rank in the later Old Kingdom.¹² Another statue of a nomarch, or local governor, in the Cairo Museum, depicts an individual named Ny ankh Pepy Kem, that is, Ny-ankh-Pepy the black. His statue depicts a dark brown elongated Upper Nilotic type individual.¹³ He was nomarch of the nome of a Middle Egyptian name, Meir, where the average population is, and was anciently, lighter brown in complexion. It is distinctly possible that he was nicknamed, "the black" km in ancient Egyptian. Interestingly, other members of his family are known and certain ones were nicknamed desher "red", based probably on their lighter, redder complexions. So, we have in this family, perhaps a mixed Egyptian-Nubian group. Another feature of Ny-ankh-Pepykem's statue, is that he has a multi-colored, perhaps beaded, sash hanging down the front of his white linen kilt. This sash may be further evidence of his Nubian origin.

In Dynasty V-VI Egyptians began recruiting Kushites from a locality called Yam, now known to be identical to Kerma, a site around the Third Nile Cataract in the Sudan, an area called Kush by the ancient Egyptians. These Kushite recruits were called nehsy, in examples of stelae dedicated by them and their families who took residence in Egypt, as Fischer noted.¹⁴ Eventually, large numbers of these Kushites settled in Egypt because of their high demand as mercenaries specializing in archery. Their presence

and representation in monuments, led to a change in the Old Kingdom color convention used to depict males and females. The Kushites, both males and females, were much darker than average Egyptians, and came to be depicted exactly so in their representations, though some Kushites married Egyptian women. In the First Intermediate Period, these Nubian archers became highly in demand in all the provincial armies of Middle Egypt. Still later in Dynasty XI, some of these Kushites began to appear in the royal family itself. Mentuhotep II, who reunified Egypt, buried several of such darked complexioned Kushite women behind his complex at Deir el-Bahri.¹⁵ In the tomb reliefs and paintings, these ladies were depicted as dark brown to black. One among them was named Kemsit, that may be translated, "the lady is black". Others were named Sadhe, Kawit, Henhenit, and Ashayet. Mummies of several were found, including Kemsit's and the original excavator of the complex, Naville, called her mummy "negroid".¹⁶ Though unfortunately Kemsit's mummy has been lost, another of these women's mummies was excavated by the Metropolitan Museum Expedition later, and she too was dark complexioned, and also exhibited tattooing and perhaps scarification as well, both attested as southern Sudanese customs; her image is reproduced in a Metropolitan Museum of Art photograph.¹⁷ In the Middle Kingdom, female statuettes were placed in the tombs of males, and are known as "brides of the deceased". Many of them show tattooing, and again, some among them were black complexioned and depicted with brightly patterned Nubian style skirts.¹⁸ The Nehsy males who served as mercenaries sometimes display scarification, and they are always shown wearing a brightly patterned sash hanging in front of their kilts; its is very like the sash that Ny-ankh-Pepy-kem's statue also wears.¹⁹ So, from this documentation it is clear that Kushites and Egyptians freely intermingled in southern and Middle Egypt, and Egyptologists such as Winlock and Hayes in the forties and fifties acknowledged that the brown complexions of southern Upper Egypt owed much to these Kushites and their settlement in Egypt.²⁰

Similar migrations influenced northern Egypt, where Libyans from the west, or western Asian Semitic peoples likewise migrated in small numbers over the three millennia of ancient Egyptian history. Migrations from Nubia-Kush and from the Levant and Libya also echo in the royal houses of Egypt. Dynasty XII, whose founder's mother is called "a woman of Ta-Seti" (a name for Nubia), in the Prophecy of Neferti,²¹ indeed had pharaohs who were dark complexioned, with Nubian features. This echoes in their statuary, and is reflected in the works of scholars from Aldred, to Winlock and Hayes, Egyptologists active from the 1920s to 1960s.²² Also, Winifred Brunton, wife of another English Egyptologist, painted Senwosret III and Amenemhat III, pharaohs of Dynasty XII, as dark brown Nilotic types, in the 1920s!²³ From northern Egypt, the XIXth Dynasty Ramessides were

light-complexioned, Semitic type pharaohs. Their actual mummies survive, and Ramesses II who named his eldest daughter, Bint-Anath, reflect the Semitic influence on this royal family.²⁴ So, it is little wonder that Sinuhe, an Egyptian courtier who fled Egypt and took residence in the Levant, used a term to describe a confusing situation such as he experienced, as “when a Delta man finds himself in Abu” (Elephantine), and again, “can the papyrus cleave to the rock.”²⁵ What did Sinuhe mean? Papyrus was typical of the Delta, rock typical of Aswan.²⁶ The Delta was so different ethnically and culturally, from the Aswan area, that a Delta dweller felt like a foreigner in Aswan. Clearly, just as today, ancient Egypt exhibited a great population diversity. The ancient Egyptians were not monolithically black, except in the outdated racist terminology of the 19th century! Likewise, 19th century scholars, unable to comprehend the diversity of African populations, developed the Hamitic hypothesis to explain the lighter complexioned Africans of Egypt partly and of other places along the Nile and in Ethiopia. So skewed is United States policy that to this day, it classifies Egyptians migrating to the United States as “white” regardless of whether they are dark complexioned as in Edfu, or light complexioned as in Cairo. Scholars have long rejected this Hamitic hypothesis, though it unfortunately still circulates as in the Hutu-Tutsi conflict in Rwanda-Burundi.

Afrocentrists who claim that the ancient Egyptians were uniformly black have simply flopped the Hamitic hypothesis, and produced an equally flawed concept. Did the fact that Kemet, the ancient name of Egypt, meant “black land” also connote that Egypt’s people called themselves “black”? Hardly, for kemtyw, the adjectival form of kemet, meant “those of the Black Land” no more, no less.²⁷ It certainly does not mean the Egyptians called themselves “black”. Still, Egyptians were and still are, Africans, of a basically Nilotic type. Nilotic peoples from Egypt through the Sudan, and Ethiopia, are a basic population type, regardless of complexion, that differs from other Africans.²⁸ They include Africa’s darkest to lightest complexioned peoples.

Yet the ancient Egyptians viewed their solar deity as the creator of all humankind, made in his image and likeness, as two Middle Kingdom texts tell it.²⁹ Further, Akhenaten declared Kushites and Levantine peoples and Libyans all as creatures of Aten.³⁰ For Kush and Egypt, Aten created the Nile and its flood, so that the great would be equal to the poor. That was Egypt’s ancient belief, social justice and equality of all peoples, as expressed in their religious teachings. Again, in the royal tombs of Sety I and Ramesses III, these verities of humans were all depicted in one part of the Book of Gates. The Kushites, still called Nehsy, also still wear their frontal sashes. Egyptians were shown lighter, their conventional red-brown. Libyans are depicted light complexioned and tattooed. Western Asians are depicted

with swarthy complexions. All also are in their distinct costumes, and all are shepherded by Hor-akhty, an aspect of the solar deity.³¹

More confusion is produced by the ancient Egyptian practice of depicting certain deities in varied colors. The Egyptian rationale for this practice is diverse.³² Some deities were painted black because of chthonic associations. Thus Min, clearly a fertility deity connected with the harvest and agricultural cycle was painted black.³³ Osiris had a fertility aspect as well, but also afterlife aspect, and might be shown green, blue, or black. Amon was painted blue at times, as his name meant "the hidden one" and thus he was sky-colored. Because the deceased obtained their resurrection through Osiris, they often were depicted as black or green on their coffins, or in specific statues made for the afterlife.³⁴ Thus individuals painted black cannot automatically be assessed as of that complexion in real life, especially if the depiction is funerary. Such depictions must be carefully assessed. As noted previously, when Kerma Kushites began to serve as mercenaries and were so depicted, in the later Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period and later Middle Kingdom, they were depicted as much darker brown than Egyptians. In this case, it is a realistic depiction of how they indeed looked. When they are labeled "nehsy", one can be certain they are Kushites.³⁵ The women buried behind Montuhotep II's complex likewise may be assessed as very dark complexioned. In their chapels, when shown with the king, they were painted very dark brown. In this case, discovery of mummies of several of them concurs in assessing that they were Kushites from deep in the Sudan. Another example is Mai-her-pa-re, depicted as very dark brown with frizzy hair in his Book of the Dead, and again confirmed as a Kushite by his mummy.³⁶ As he was granted burial in the Valley of the Kings, he and the women buried behind Montuhotep II's complex, all can be considered examples of Kushites who rose to the highest circles societally. Another instance, where one can be fairly certain that a person was dark in complexion is when as in Ny-ankh-Pepy's case, he is labeled kem, "black". Examples where one has to exercise more caution are Osiride statues of kings, like those of Montuhotep II, or Tutankhamun, where the black color reflects association with Osiris. Again, in the case of the Dynasty XII pharaohs, since a text states that the mother of the founder of the line was from Ta Seti, a name for Nubia, we can be certain that this pharaoh and his successors in direct lineage, would be dark brown in complexion. Their portrait statues do confirm that they had Nubian features. In all this evidence, it also becomes clear that the Egyptians had no color line barring advancement. Ranging themselves, from light brown to dark brown, they considered foreigners who settled in Egypt by their skills and talents, and not their complexions. Their religion ended up underscoring this tolerance, for as Akhenaten's solar hymn states, Egypt's creator deity made humans not

only in his own image and likeness, but also distinguished them by varying complexions, and by diverse speech. In the Ramesside tombs this was confirmed by the verities of humankind shown under the care of the solar deity.

Of course, when foreigners came as enemies, they were depicted in humiliating postures. Yet, no one single population was singled out for such treatment, but all who came as enemies, whether Kushites, or western Asians, or Libyans, or Sea Peoples, were depicted in humiliating postures. Yet, as is clear from New Kingdom policy, if the captives had good military skills, they were sent into the Egyptian army, and there they obtained the same benefits that accrued to Egyptians in the army, and some thereby became citizens, and even rose high in social rank.

Egypt And Greece: Facts And Fallacies

Bernal in his volumes, *Black Athena*, claimed that during the Middle Kingdom and the Hyksos Era (1991-1570 B.C.), Egyptians and the Hyksos planted colonies in Mycenaean Greece, and developed ruling dynasties there. To back this, he cited a recently discovered Middle Kingdom inscription, and the Legend of Sesostriis, a late First Millennium B.C. Egyptian creation. This Sesostriis Legend was created to assuage Egyptian nationalist feelings when they became subject to Neo-Assyrian, Persian, and Greek world conquerers.¹⁷ Herodotus cites an example of the use of this legend, which an Egyptian priest related to him. The priest stated that when the Persian ruler, Darius, desired to raise a statue of himself in front of one of Sesostriis, the priest upbraided him, that only when he had matched the conquests of Sesostriis could he raise a statue in front of his. To match the conquests of these later rulers, the legend had to be constantly updated, with multi-year campaigns, and references to the Kushites and the Scythians. Neither had really been conquered by the Persians, so this suited the legend fine. In the Middle Kingdom, no Egyptians went on multi-year campaigns, and no Scythians were even around then.¹⁸ As for the Mit-Rahina inscription, it mentions campaigns and some conquests in Stt, "Asia" in a very generic sense, but has no mention of Thrace or Greece.¹⁹ So, clearly, it has no evidence for multi-year campaigns of conquest, or of a vast empire. Rather, such multi-year campaigns and vast empires are the stuff of First Millennium B.C., as also are references to the Scythians and Thracians. Why did this legend fix on Sesostriis? Perhaps this is because the name Sesostriis is Greek for Senwosret, and Senwosret I and III both became legendary in their own time for their campaigns against Kush.⁴⁰ The Kushites fit the legend, because neither the Persians nor the Greeks were

unable to master the Kushite-Meroitic Kingdom of the First Millennium B.C. So, by crediting this Sesostris, who at least comprises the two Senwosrets of the Middle Kingdom, and for good measure, adding the conquests of Ramesses II, and perhaps Ramesses III and his victory over the Sea peoples, the Egyptians of the First Millennium B.C. under Persian and Greek rule, vicariously soothed their nationalist senses. Kush was not a place these empires conquered, and the Sea Peoples included Mycenaean Greeks! Clearly, this legend is the creation of the First Millennium B.C., and especially was concocted to deal with Egyptian nationalists' feelings of that era.⁴¹

There is also the charge of the *Stolen Legacy*, to cite the title of G. G. M. James' volume, that the Greeks took most of their cultural legacy from ancient Egypt, and a black ancient Egypt at that. It claims also that all the significant philosophers, mathematicians, surgeons, and scientists of antiquity either studied in Egypt, or were Egyptians themselves. What are the facts? The ancient Greeks did revere Egypt as an older, deeper civilization than their own, as Herodotus duly noted. First certain contacts were made with the Mycenaean and Minoan cultures in the early New Kingdom (1570-1350 B.C.)⁴² Yet, most real contacts were made in the XXVIth Saite Dynasty 664-525 B.C., when Egypt indeed was an ancient and hoary civilization. In that era there were political and cultural contacts with Greeks, and the first Greek merchants also set themselves up in Egypt, where Amasis gave them Naucratis as a settlement where they could create Greek temples and other traditions. After the Persian conquest of Egypt, when in 405 B.C., the Egyptians were able to regain their independence, they did appeal to the Greeks for help against the Persians, their common foe. Egypt supplied Greece with papyrus and linen, while Greece provided timber and wines, and military aid.⁴³ There was cooperation and mutual sharing of resources, but no stealing of anyone's legacy. To be sure, some Greeks, like Solon, did consult with Amasis of Dynasty XXVI, and Egyptians even made donations to Delphi. Yet Greece also borrowed heavily from the Levant and Mesopotamia. Their Classical Greek alphabet was derived from Phoenicia, and algebraic equations and the sexigesimal system of counting originated in Mesopotamia.⁴⁴ Likewise, some Greek cults, like that of Dionysus had closer associations with the Levant. In short, Greece owed a debt not only to Egypt, but also to Levantine cultures and to Mesopotamia, and furthermore certain Greek traditions trace back to their Mycenaean ancestors. Nor have Egyptologists made a secret of Egypt's legacies to her neighbors and to the modern world. *The Legacy of Egypt* has now been through two editions.⁴⁵

Lastly, there is the issue of Alexandria and its contribution to world civilization. Alexander the Great laid the plans and the vision of

Alexandria in Egypt.⁴⁶ Earlier, the Egyptians were wary of coastal settlements, their capital, Memphis being well inland. When they were involved in trade with the Mediterranean, it was with the Levantine cultures, as for instance, with the city of Tanis that flourished from Dynasty XXI-XXII, ca 1100-712 B.C. Thereafter, the experience of foreign conquest taught them to defend stoutly the northeastern Delta approaches.⁴⁷ The XXVIth Saite Dynasty promoted relations with Greece and Lydia, mainly seeing them as a counterweight to Assyria and the Neo-Babylonians. From this arose also the presence of Greek traders in Egypt, and the eventual decision of Amasis to grant them Naukratis as a base.⁴⁸ Thus the outward-looking Alexandria was a Greek idea, of Alexander the Great. After his death, the Macedonian Greek general Ptolemy, son of Lagus chose Egypt as his kingdom, and he and his descendants developed Alexandria, also ruling Egypt from it.⁴⁹ As it developed, its population was multicultural, Greek, Jewish, and Egyptian, each group having its own quarter. In the central Greek quarter, the Ptolemaic rulers built their palace and the Greek institutions, and also the famed Library, Museum, and the Temple of Sarapis. Sarapis was the city's deity, molded from Osiris and Apis, and given an image created in Ionian Greece. The Egyptians never really took to this deity, he was mainly a deity of the Ptolemaic rulers and their Greek population and the overseas territories. A branch of the library was planted in the Serapaeum, as his temple was called. These scholarly institutions drew many scholars and literary people from the Greek world at large. From this arose much of Alexandria's sophisticated development, as the best and brightest minds settled in Alexandria. Of course, the Egyptians also contributed to this knowledge. Great advances were made in astronomy, geography, mathematics, mechanics, and in knowledge in general. The Ptolemies also authorized the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, the famed Septuagint. Another vision of Alexander the Great, the mixing of the eastern and western worlds came about partly in Alexandria.

This came when in 118 B.C., when a South Indian ship was wrecked in the Red Sea. The ship's South Indian navigator was rescued, and he revealed to the Ptolemaic naval authorities how to use the westerly monsoon winds, to sail directly to India from the southern Red Sea.⁵⁰ Eudoxus of Cyzicus, a city on the Sea of Marmora, a superb navigator, was just then in Alexandria, and Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II selected him to lead the first Ptolemaic direct voyage to India. Outwitting the southern Arabs who for long had dominated the India trade, the Ptolemies now sailed directly, and brought back a wealth of luxury goods, spices, silks, gem-stones, precious wood, and other commodities, that they then transhipped through Alexandria after a hefty markup, to the increasingly Roman world, hungry for these commodities. This helped revive the legendary wealth of the

Ptolemies that Octavian so eagerly sought from Cleopatra VII, in 30 B.C., when Egypt became a Roman Province. The Indian trade route continued developing, as the Romans extended it, and later the Arabs inherited it, and from it they also developed the Swahili trade route with east Africa. So, the combination of Greek and Egyptian culture in Alexandria produced a rich flowering of development. Again, no one stole anyone's legacy. Rather through the blending of cultures a greater and richer legacy was produced. ■

Footnotes:

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3. For instance, Asante, Molefi K. *Kemet. Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World press, 1990; Ben Jochanan, Y.A. *Black Man of the Nile and his Family* (New York: Alkebu Ian Books, 1989; idem. *Africa: Mother of Western Civilization* (New York: Alkebu Ian Books, 1988); Asante, Molefi K., ed. *Black Women in Antiquity* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1984); and Van Sertima, Ivan, ed. *Egypt: Child of Africa* (Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1995).
4. See, for instance, Keita, Shomarqa, "Studies and Comments on Ancient Egyptian Biological Relationships," *History in Africa*, 20 (1993), 129-154.
5. Trigger, Bruce G., "Nubian, Negro, Black, Nilotic?" in *Africa in Antiquity: The Arts of Nubia and the Sudan*, vol. I, Essays, eds. S. Hochfield and E. Riefstahl (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1978), pp. 27-35.
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8. Rahotep and Nofret: Excavated by Mariette's assistant, Daninos, see Corteggiani, Jean-Pierre. *The Egypt of the Pharaohs at the Cairo Museum*, transl. by Anthony Roberts (London: Scala Books, 1987), no. 12, pp. 38-41. Ka-Aper, also known as Sheikh el Beled, excavated by Mariette at *Saqqara*, see Lauer, Jean-Philippe. *Sahara: The Royal Cemetery of Memphis, excavations and discoveries since 1850* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), p. 31, and pi. 15. Nerfetiti's head and bust, excavated at El-Amarna, see Aldred, Cyril. *Akhenaten: King of Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), p. 59, pi. 17.
9. *Ancient Egypt* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1942), pp. 30-31, figs. 8-9.
10. Snowden, Frank M, jr. *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient Views of Blacks* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 11, and fig. 1-2.
11. Breasted, James Henry. *Ancient Records of Egypt*. vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906, pp. 142-143, sec. 311-312.
12. Trigger, Bruce G. *Nubia Under the Pharaohs* (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, 1976), p. 47.
13. Corteggiani, *The Egypt of the Pharaohs at the Cairo Museum*, No. 27, p. 60.
14. Fischer, Henry G., "The Nubian Mercenaries of Gebelein during the First Intermediate Period," *Kush* 9 (1961), 45-80.
15. Winlock, Herbert E. *Excavations at Deir el-Bahri. 1911-1931* (New York: MacMillan & Co., 1942, pp. 129-130, pi. 10 (bottom), and pi. 34.
16. Naville, Edouard. *Deir el-Bahri, Part 1, Egypt Exploration Fund Memoir no. 28* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1907), pp. 31, 49-50, pi. 23, 17c, d. *Deir el-Bahri, Part 2, Egypt Exploration Fund Memoir, no. 30* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1910), pi. 20. Winlock, *Excavations at Deir el-Bahri, 1911-1931*, pp. 129-130.
17. Hayes, William C. *Scepter of Egypt*, vol. I (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1953), pp. 158-162.
18. Winlock, *Excavations at Deir el-Bahri, 1911-1931*, pi. 34 (top), 35 (top).
19. Corteggiani, *The Egypt of the Pharaohs at the Cairo Museum*, no. 27, p. 60. Saleh, Mohammed, and Hourig Sourouzian. *Official Catalogue. The Egyptian Museum Cairo* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp van Zabern, 1987, no. 72.
20. Winlock, *Excavations at Deir el-Bahri, 1911-1931*, pp. 129-130; Hayes,

- Scepter of Egypt, vol. 1, pp. 171, 176.
21. Lichtheim, Miriam. *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. I (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 139-145.
 22. Aldred, Cyril. *Art in Ancient Egypt: Middle Kingdom* (London: Alec Tiranti, 1969), p. 38, text and fig. 19. Also see Winlock and Hayes, notes 15-20.
 23. Brunton, Winifred. *Great Ones of Ancient Egypt* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1929), pl. p. 104; idem. *Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), pl. p. 32.
 24. Kitchen, Kenneth. *Pharaoh Triumphant* (Mississauga ONT: Benben, 1982), p. 100.
 25. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. I, p. 225.
 26. Diop, Cheikh Anta, "Origin of the Ancient Egyptians," in *General History of Africa*, vol. II, ed. G. Mokhtar (Paris: UNESCO and Heineman Educational Books, 1981), pp. 4142. See response of Sauneron, pp. 64-65. Sauneron was correct. While km means "black" and kmt "Black Land", a name for Egypt, the nisbe adjectival form, kmtyw, means only "those of the Black Land," so, Gardiner, Alan H. *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 61-62, sections 79-81. If a noun, kmtyw must be translated "blacklanders", not "negroes" as Diop claimed. The adjectival process developed from Kmt, "Black Land", not from km itself, already an adjective.
 27. Trigger, "Nubia, Negro, Black, Nilotic?," pp. 27-35; also Yurco, Frank J. "Were the Ancient Egyptians 'Black' or 'White'?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 15, no. 5 (September-October, 1989), 24-29, 58.
 28. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 1, p. 106.
 29. Lichtheim, Miriam. *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2 (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), p. 98.
 30. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 1, pp. 131-132.
 31. Hornung, Erik. *The Valley of the Kings*, transl. by David Warburton (New York: Timken Publishers, 1990), p. 139, pi. 105, 107-109. Hornung, Erik. *The Tomb of Pharaoh Seti I* (Zurich-Munich: Artemis Publishers, 1991), pp. 44-45, pis. 58-59.
 32. Wilkinson, Richard H. *Symbol and Magic in Egyptian Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), pp. 106-125.

33. Ibid, pp. 112-125, especially, pp. 116-121.
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44. Neugebauer, Otto. *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity*, 2nd ed. (Providence: Brown University Press, 1957), pp. 29-52. Gutherie, W.K.C. *The Greeks and their Gods* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954), pp. 145, especially pp. 151-152.
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