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# Problems in African History

The Precolonial Centuries

THIRD UPDATED EDITION

Edited by  
ROBERT O. COLLINS



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## Dedication

*To my former students at the University of California,  
Santa Barbara, in Seminar 201, Problems in African History,  
who have digested, discussed, disagreed, and distilled  
over a quarter of a century the abundance of new learning  
which has made the "dark continent" light.*

Third updated edition, 2005

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## PROBLEM I

# AFRICA AND EGYPT

Although many millennia have elapsed in the evolution of the relationship between dynastic Egypt and African civilizations, scholars have long sought to determine to what extent Africa has borrowed from the culture of Pharaonic Egypt, or more controversially what characteristics Africa has contributed to the growth of Egyptian, Grecian, Roman, and the civilizations of the West. The problem is tantalizing in its geographical, historical, and intellectual sweep, frequently charged with the emotional intensity of identification from those individuals of African descent who seek their claim of cultural affirmation in a disputable Egyptian origin. This is not an academic dissimulation to be argued among the scholastics protected by the ivy-covered walls of academe, but one that strikes at the basic beginnings of cultural orientation, charged with all the emotional rhetoric of racism and the pietistic claims of certitude. The relationship of Africa and Egypt is as old as Herodotus: "Sesostris alone of all Egyptian kings ruled over Ethiopia."<sup>1</sup>

As European explorers, missionaries, and merchants gradually made their way into the interior of the African continent during the nineteenth century, they were astonished and perplexed to encounter states and kingdoms that appeared to contradict the European image of "Darkest Africa." In fact the darkness was the appalling ignorance of Africa and the Africans by supposedly educated and enlightened Europeans. Besides new and exotic cultures, the European incomers were puzzled to discover that the Africans were perfectly capable of organizing their societies within an accepted system of governance. Much of this European skepticism was deeply rooted in the nineteenth-century confirmation by social Darwinists that indeed human evolution had resulted in civilized and primitive, superior and inferior peoples. This dichotomy appeared all the more obvious by the enormous technical disparity between European and African societies that reinforced nineteenth-century ideas of racial inferiority of blacks forged during the centuries of the

<sup>1</sup>*The Histories of Herodotus of Halicarnassus*, vol. 1, translated by Harvey Carter (New York: The Heritage Press, 1958), p. 131.

trans-Atlantic slave trade. During the early decades of the twentieth century, Europeans simply refused to accept the idea that black Africans were capable of creating state systems. Scholars, led by E. G. Seligman, the first professor of Ethnology in the University of London, proposed that the political skills of black Africans were clearly learned or borrowed from wandering bands of white Caucasians. The Hamitic Myth was born.<sup>2</sup>

Seligman and others soon expanded their original idea that many African customs were borrowed from dynastic Egypt into a larger theory of "an older wide-flung Hamitic complex," the belief in a race of tall, lean, light-skinned people who originally came from Egypt or southwest Asia and later migrated throughout Africa spreading the superior political and cultural ideas that were inherent in their blood. This "Hamitic hypothesis" inferred that Africa was a primitive wilderness inhabited by peoples who were civilized by the superior, Caucasian migrating Hamites. Consequently, the degree of political and cultural evolution of the African depended upon the milliliters of Hamitic blood carried in their veins. Writing well before Seligman, Sir Harry Johnston in his linguistic studies of the Bantu (see Problem II) observed, or so he thought, a physical similarity between the ancient Hamitic Egyptians and the ruling caste of every Bantu African, implying what later became explicit, that even the political development of African peoples was the product of intermixture with a superior, presumably Hamitic, race.<sup>3</sup>

The Hamitic hypothesis remains as pervasive as it is discredited. Edith R. Sanders argues that not only were there no white Hamites, but those who might have been in Biblical mythology were not the inferior subservient Africans of Noah, who most certainly does not need to have sons of racial differentiation at the time of the great flood. By the sixth century C.E., the oral traditions of the Hebraic community had determined that the descendants of Ham were black, sinful, and degenerate, which later helped to assuage Christian doubts as to the morality of slavery. This idyllic mythology was rudely disturbed by the French invasion of Egypt in 1798, when scholars accompanying the army confirmed that the roots of Western civilization were deeper than those of Athens or Rome and were African Egyptian, a proposition hardly acceptable to the revolutionaries of France despite the intellectual universality of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

If Sanders cites biblical texts to change the leopard's spots, Merrick Posnansky brings to bear the heavy artillery of archaeology to argue that kingship in Uganda came from Uganda and not dynastic Egypt. In discussing the relationship between Pharaonic Egypt and Uganda, particularly the interlacustrine kingdoms, Professor Posnansky can find little or no evidence from archaeological sites to link any direct

<sup>2</sup>For a summarization of the Hamitic hypothesis, see Professor C. G. Seligman, "Some Aspects of the Hamitic Problem," in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, London, The Institute, vol. XLIII, 1913, pp. 665-7.

<sup>3</sup>See: Presidential Address to the Anthropological Section, *Reports of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* (Manchester, 1915), pp. 11-12.

Egyptian influence in tropical Africa. He asserts that such theories have been based on very inadequate information. Indeed, he argues with his accustomed precision that a great deal of firm evidence exists to indicate the independent development of cultures. While recognizing the similarities between certain dynastic Egyptian and interlacustrine cultures, he argues that:

With large gaps in the evidence available it is premature to accept any single hypothesis to explain either direct links between Uganda and other cultural areas, such as Ethiopia or Meroe, or the role of the Nile Valley civilizations in the diffusion of political ideas and institutions.<sup>4</sup>

The French savants who accompanied Napoleon's military expedition to Egypt founded not only the modern study of Egyptology but also the perplexing relationship between ancient Egypt and Africa. From that time forth the arguments have opened the floodgates of intellectual inquiry and emotional passion as to whether the dynastic Egyptians were blacks who made significant contributions to the Western world, while Napoleon's scholars were converting Hamites into Caucasians whose mission was to bring civilization to Africa. One of the most significant protagonists in this "Great Debate" thought otherwise. The late Cheikh Anta Diop from Senegal argued forcefully that the Egyptians were neither Hamites nor Caucasians dispensing civilization to Africans but in fact were themselves black Africans.

Cheikh Anta Diop asked, "What were the Egyptians?" He insists that the available evidence clearly demonstrates that the Egyptians were black, and as the ancestors of the Africans living throughout the continent today, they were the first to devise the disciplines of mathematics, science, religion (Divine Kingship), agriculture, and medicine, ironically using the very evidence of his most ideological adversary, Professor C. G. Seligman. Diop's hypothesis has been extremely influential in the revival of the African past and in the formation of an African-based school of scholarship that emphasizes the role of Africa in Egypt.

Raymond Mauny has critically examined some of the principal proofs employed by Diop to support his thesis and rejects them. Although more than willing to admit that there were certainly Africans in ancient Egypt, a matter about which there is virtually no dispute, Professor Mauny denies that the Egyptians were the ancestors of the inhabitants of the present population of West Africa. Rather, Egypt to Mauny was a melting pot of many ethnic groups from Asia as well as Africa, and to credit dynastic Egyptian civilization to any one particular group is blatant racism. Mauny cannot accept the degrading practical and intellectual need for Africans to require the diffusion of political, economic, or social ideas from the Hamites or the Egyptians. Nor does he see the necessity for the refugees by the Nile from the desert

<sup>4</sup>Merrick Posnansky, "Kingship, Archaeology, and Historical Myth." Presidential address, 19 January 1966, in *Uganda Journal*, 30, no. 1 (Kampala, Uganda: the Uganda society, 1966), pp. 1-12.

tification of the Sahara to seek civilization from those of the Sahel, the grassland south of the desert. Increasingly, scholars like Mauny are reluctant to accept the direct transfer of ideas and institutions uncritically from one culture to another and today place greater emphasis on the independent development of institutions hitherto assumed to have been borrowed.

A year after the death of Cheikh Anta Diop in 1986 Martin Bernal published *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, in which he argued persuasively that the evolution of western civilization from Greece was a complex interaction between Greece and the Afroasiatic cultures of much greater antiquity, particularly dynastic Egypt. He argued that the ancestors of the classical Greeks were civilized by Egyptian and Phoenician colonization and the later Greeks regularly studied in Egypt. Until the eighteenth century European Enlightenment, Egypt was still regarded as the source of learning that included that of the classical Greek. Thereafter the age of reason opposed Egyptian philosophical thought in favor of Greek artistic perfection and the development of Eurocentric racism. Thus the ancient dark-skinned African Egyptians, *Black Athena*, lost their heritage as the precursors of western civilization to the classical Greeks.<sup>4</sup>

The publication of *Black Athena* in 1987 produced a storm of controversy that was swept up in the popular media, emotionally discussed in the public forum, and fiercely defended by Martin Bernal and his supporters when his arguments were attacked by the legion of classical scholars that resulted in the publication of *Black Athena Revisited* in 1996 in which Guy MacLean Rogers summed up the argument for the Greeks in his *Quo Vadis?*<sup>5</sup>

By the beginning of the twenty-first century the two opposing sides have more or less declared an armistice. On the one hand classical scholars can no longer discount the importance of the influence of Egypt and the Near East on Greek civilization. On the other hand the dynastic Egyptians are most certainly in Africa but not the culmination of the unique development of African societies and states in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Berkenblau, *Heresy in the University: The Black Athena Controversy and the Responsibilities of American Intellectuals* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> See also: Mary Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> See also: Martin Bernal's rebuttal to Lefkowitz and Rogers: Martin Bernal, *Black Athena Writes Back* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001).

# The African Origins of Western Civilization

CHEIKH ANTA DIOP<sup>12</sup>

## What were the Egyptians?

In contemporary descriptions of the ancient Egyptians, this question is never raised. Eyewitnesses of that period formally affirm that the Egyptians were Blacks. On several occasions Herodotus insists on the Negro character of the Egyptians and even uses this for indirect demonstrations. For example, to prove that the flooding of the Nile cannot be caused by melting snow, he cites, among other reasons he deems valid, the following observation: "It is certain that the natives of the country are black with the heat."

To demonstrate that the Greek oracle is of Egyptian origin, Herodotus advances another argument: "Lastly, by calling the dove black, they [the Dodonaeans] indicated that the woman was Egyptian. . . ." The doves in question symbolize two Egyptian women allegedly kidnapped from Thebes to found the oracles of Dodona and Libya.

To show that the inhabitants of Colchis were of Egyptian origin and had to be considered a part of Sesostris' army who had settled in that region, Herodotus says: "The Egyptians said that they believed the Colchians to be descended from the army of Sesostris. My own conjectures were founded, first, on the fact that they are black-skinned and have woolly hair. . . ."

Finally, concerning the population of India, Herodotus distinguishes between the Padaeans and other Indians, describing them as follows: "They all also have the same tint of skin, which approaches that of the Ethiopians."

Diodorus of Sicily writes:

The Ethiopians say that the Egyptians are one of their colonies

<sup>12</sup>Diop, Cheikh Anta, *The African Origins of Western Civilization: Myth or Reality* (New York: Lawrence Hill and Co., 1974). Excerpts taken from pp. 1-9, and 138-139. Cheikh Anta Diop (1923-1986) was born in Senegal and educated in France, where he received a Litt. D. As one of Africa's most recognized historians he is remembered for his efforts to prove that Black people played a much greater role in the formation of civilization than is generally acknowledged. Diop founded the first Carbon 14 dating laboratory in Africa and in 1966 was honored by the World Festival of Negro Arts as the Black intellectual who had exercised the most fruitful influence in the twentieth century. Diop also founded two political parties in Senegal that were later banned.

which was brought into Egypt by Osiris. They even allege that this country was originally under water, but that the Nile, dragging much mud as it flowed from Ethiopia, had finally filled it in and made it a part of the continent. . . . They add that from them, as from their authors and ancestors, the Egyptians get most of their laws. It is from them that the Egyptians have learned to honor kings as gods and bury them with such pomp; sculpture and writing were invented by the Ethiopians. The Ethiopians cite evidence that they are more ancient than the Egyptians, but it is useless to report that here.

If the Egyptians and Ethiopians were not of the same race, Diodorus would have emphasized the impossibility of considering the former as a colony (i.e., a fraction) of the latter and the impossibility of viewing them as forebears of the Egyptians.

In his *Geography*, Strabo mentioned the importance of migrations in history and, believing that this particular migration had proceeded from Egypt to Ethiopia, remarks: "Egyptians settled Ethiopia and Colchis." Once again, it is a Greek, despite his chauvinism, who informs us that the Egyptians, Ethiopians, and Colchians belong to the same race, thereby confirming what Herodotus had said about the Colchians.

The opinion of all the ancient writers on the Egyptian race is more or less summed up by Gaston Maspero (1894-1916): "By the almost unanimous testimony of ancient historians, they belonged to an African race [read: Negro] which first settled in Ethiopia, on the Middle Nile; following the course of the river, they gradually reached the sea. . . . Moreover, the Bible states that Mesraim, son of Ham, brother of Chins (Kush) the Ethiopian, and of Canaan, came from Mesopotamia to settle with his children on the banks of the Nile."

According to the Bible, Egypt was peopled by the offspring of Ham, ancestor of the Blacks:

The descendants of Ham are Chus, Mesraim, Phut and Canaan. The descendants of Chus are Saba, Hevila, Sabatha, Regma and Sabathacha. . . . Chus was the father of Nemrod; he was the first to be conqueror on the earth. . . . Mesraim became the father of Ludim, Ananim, Laabim, Nephthim, Phethrusim, Chassluhim. . . . Canaan became the father of Sid, his first-born, and Heth. . . .

For the peoples of the near East, Mesraim still designates Egypt; Canaan, the entire coast of Palestine and Phoenicia; Sennar, which was probably the site from which Nemrod left for Western Asia, still indicates the kingdom of Nubia.

What is the value of these statements? Coming from eyewitnesses, they could hardly be false. Herodotus may be mistaken when he reports the customs of a people, when he reasons more or less cleverly to explain a phenomenon incomprehensible in his day, but one must grant that he was at least capable of recognizing the skin color of the inhabitants of countries he has visited. Besides, Herodotus was not a credulous historian who recorded everything without checking; he knew how to weigh things. When he relates an opinion that he does not share, he always takes care to note his disagreement. Thus, referring to the mores of the Scythians and Neurians, he writes apropos the latter:

It seems that these people are conjurers; for both the Scythians and the Greeks who dwell in Scythia say that every Neurian once a year becomes a wolf for a few days, at the end of which time he is restored to his proper shape. Not that I believe this, but they constantly affirm it to be true, and are even ready to back up their assertion with an oath.

He always distinguishes carefully between what he has seen and what he has been told. After his visit to the Labyrinth, he writes:

There are two different sorts of chambers throughout—half under ground, half above ground, the latter built upon the former; the whole number of these chambers is three thousand, fifteen hundred of each kind. The upper chambers I myself passed through and saw, and what I say concerning them is from my own observation; of the underground chambers I can only speak from report, for the keepers of the building could not be got to show them, since they contained, as they said, the sepulchers of the kings who built the Labyrinth, and also those of the sacred crocodiles. Thus it is from hearsay only that I can speak of the lower chambers. The upper chambers, however, I saw with my own eyes and found them to excel all other human productions.

Was Herodotus a historian deprived of logic, unable to penetrate complex phenomena? On the contrary, his explanation of the inundations of the Nile reveals a rational mind seeking scientific reasons for natural phenomena:

Perhaps, after censuring all the opinions that have been put forward on this obscure subject, one ought to propose some theory of one's own. I will therefore proceed to explain what I think to be the reason of the Nile's swelling in the summertime. During the winter, the sun is driven out of his usual course by the storms, and removes to the upper parts of Libya. This is the whole secret

in the fewest possible words; for it stands to reason that the country to which the Sun-god approaches the nearest, and which he passes most directly over, will be scantest of water, and that here streams which feed the rivers will shrink the most. To explain, however, more at length, the case is this. The sun, in his passage across the upper parts of Libya, affects them in the following way. As the air in these regions is constantly clear, and the country warm through the absence of cold winds, the sun in his passage across them acts upon them exactly as he is wont to act elsewhere in summer, when his path is in the middle of heaven—that is, he attracts the water. After attracting it, he again repels it into the upper regions, where the winds lay hold of it, scatter it, and reduce it into a vapor, whence it naturally enough comes to pass that the winds which blow from this quarter—the south and southwest—are of all winds the most rainy. And my own opinion is that the sun does not get rid of all the water which he draws year by year from the Nile, but retains some about him.

These three examples reveal that Herodotus was not a passive reporter of incredible tales and rubbish, "a liar." On the contrary, he was quite scrupulous, objective, scientific for his time. Why should one seek to discredit such a historian, to make him seem naive? Why "refabricate" history despite his explicit evidence?

Undoubtedly the basic reason for this is that Herodotus, after relating his eyewitness account informing us that the Egyptians were Blacks, then demonstrated, with rare honesty (for a Greek), that Greece borrowed from Egypt all the elements of her civilization, even the cult of the gods, and that Egypt was the cradle of civilization. Moreover, archaeological discoveries continually justify Herodotus against his detractors. Thus, Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt writes about recent excavations in Tanis: "Herodotus had seen the outer buildings of these sepulchers and had described them. [This was the Labyrinth discussed above.] Pierre Montet has just proved once again that 'The Father of History did not lie.'"<sup>13</sup> It could be objected that, in the fifth century BC when Herodotus visited Egypt, its civilization was already more than 10,000 years old and that the race which had created it was not necessarily the Negro race that Herodotus found there. But the whole history of Egypt, as we shall see, shows that the mixture of the early population with white nomadic elements, conquerors or merchants, became increasingly important as the end of Egyptian history approached. According to Cornelius de Pauw, in the low epoch Egypt was almost saturated with foreign white colonies: Arabs in Coptos, Libyans on the future site of Alexandria, Jews around the city of Hercules (Avaris?), Babylonians (or

<sup>13</sup>Tanis, the Biblical Zoan, at the mouth of the eastern branch of the Nile Delta.

Persians) below Memphis, "fugitive Trojans" in the area of the great stone quarries east of the Nile, Carians and Ionians over by the Pelusiac branch. Psammetichus (end of seventh century) capped this peaceful invasion by entrusting the defense of Egypt to Greek mercenaries. "An enormous mistake of Pharaoh Psammetichus was to commit the defense of Egypt to foreign troops and to introduce various colonies made up of the dregs of the nations." Under the last Saite dynasty, the Greeks were officially established at Naucratis, the only port where foreigners were authorized to engage in trading.

After the conquest of Egypt by Alexander, under the Ptolemies, cross-breeding between white Greeks and black Egyptians flourished, thanks to a policy of assimilation:

Nowhere was Dionysus more favored, nowhere was he worshiped more adoringly and more elaborately than by the Ptolemies, who recognized his cult as an especially effective means of promoting the assimilation of the conquering Greeks and their fusion with the native Egyptians.

These facts prove that if the Egyptian people had originally been white, it might well have remained so. If Herodotus found it still black after so much crossbreeding, it must have been basic black at the start.

Insofar as biblical evidence is concerned, a few details are in order. To determine the worth of biblical evidence, we must examine the genesis of the Jewish people. What, then, was the Jewish people? How was it born? How did it create the Bible, in which descendants of Ham, ancestors of Negroes and Egyptians would thus be accursed; what might be the historical reason for that curse? Those who would become the Jews entered Egypt numbering seventy rough, fearful shepherds, chased from Palestine by famine and attracted by that earthly paradise, the Nile Valley.

Although the Egyptians had a peculiar horror of nomad life and shepherds, these newcomers were first warmly welcomed, thanks to Joseph. According to the Bible, they settled in the land of Goshen and became shepherds of the Pharaoh's flocks. After the death of Joseph and the Pharaoh "Protector," and facing the proliferation of the Jews, the Egyptians grew hostile, in circumstances still ill-defined. The condition of the Jews became more and more difficult. If we are to believe the Bible, they were employed on construction work, serving as laborers in building the city of Ramses. The Egyptians took steps to limit the number of births and eliminate male babies, lest the ethnic minority develop into a national danger which, in time of war, might increase enemy ranks.

So began the initial persecutions by which the Jewish people was to remain marked throughout its history. Henceforth the Jewish minority, with-

drawn within itself, would become Messianic by suffering and humiliation. Such a moral terrain of wretchedness and hope favored the birth and development of religious sentiment. The circumstances were the more favorable because this race of shepherds, without industry or social organization (the only social cell was the patriarchal family), armed with nothing but sticks, could envisage no positive reaction to the technical superiority of the Egyptian people.

It was to meet this crisis that Moses appeared, the first of the Jewish prophets, who, after minutely working out the history of the Jewish people from its origins, presented it in retrospect under a religious perspective. Thus he caused Abraham to say many things that the latter could not possibly have foreseen: for example, the 400 years in Egypt. Moses lived at the time of Tell el Amarna,<sup>14</sup> when Amenophis IV (Akhnaton, circa 1400) was trying to revive the early monotheism which had by then been discredited by sacerdotal ostentation and the corruptness of the priests. Akhnaton seems to have attempted to bolster political centralism in his recently conquered immense empire through religious centralism; the empire needed a universal religion.

Moses was probably influenced by this reform. From that time on, he championed monotheism among the Jews. Monotheism, with all its abstraction, already existed in Egypt, which had borrowed it from the Meroitic Sudan, the Ethiopia of the Ancients:

Although the Supreme Deity, viewed in the purest of monotheistic visions as the "only generator in the sky and on earth who was not engendered . . . the only living god in truth . . ." Amon, whose name signifies mystery, adoration, one day finds himself rejected, overtaken by Ra, the Sun, or converted into Osiris or Horins.

Given the insecure atmosphere in which the Jewish people found itself in Egypt, a God promising sure tomorrows was an irreplaceable moral support. After some reticence at the outset, this people which apparently had not known monotheism previously—contrary to the opinion of those who would credit it as the inventor [of monotheism]—would nonetheless carry it to a rather remarkable degree of development. Aided by faith, Moses led the Hebrew people out of Egypt. However, the Israelites quickly tired of this religion (the Golden Calf of Aaron at the foot of Mount Sinai) and only gradually returned to monotheism.

Having entered Egypt as seventy shepherds grouped in twelve patriarchal

<sup>14</sup>Tell el Amarano, a city built 190 miles above Cairo in 1396 BC, as the new capital of Akhnaton's empire.

families, nomads without industry or culture, the Jewish people left there 400 years later, 500,000 strong, after acquiring from it all the elements of its future tradition, including monotheism.

If the Egyptians persecuted the Israelites as the Bible says, and if the Egyptians were Negroes, sons of Ham, as the same Bible says, we can no longer ignore the historical causes of the curse upon Ham—despite the legend of Noah's drunkenness. The curse entered Jewish literature considerably later than the period of persecution. Accordingly, Moses, in the Book of Genesis, attributed the following words to the Eternal God, addressed to Abraham in a dream: "Know for certain that your posterity will be strangers in a land not their own; they shall be subjected to slavery and shall be oppressed four hundred years."

Here we have reached the historical background of the curse upon Ham. It is not by chance that this curse on the father of Mesraim, Phut, Kush, and Canaan, fell only on Canaan, who dwelt in a land that the Jews have coveted throughout their history.

Whence came this name Ham (Cham, Kam)? Where could Moses have found it? Right in Egypt where Moses was born, grew up, and lived until the Exodus. In fact, we know that the Egyptians called their country *Kermit*, which means "black" in their language. The interpretation according to which *Kermit* designates the black soil of Egypt, rather than the black man and, by extension, the black race of the country of the Blacks, stems from a gratuitous distortion by minds aware of what an exact interpretation of this word would imply. Hence, it is natural to find *Kam* in Hebrew, meaning heat, black, burned.

That being so, all apparent contradictions disappear and the logic of facts appears in all its nudity. The inhabitants of Egypt, symbolized by their black color, *Kem* or Ham of the Bible, would be accursed in the literature of the people they had oppressed. We can see that this biblical curse on Ham's offspring had an origin quite different from that generally given it today without the slightest historical foundation. What we cannot understand however, is how it has been possible to make a white race of *Kermit*: Hamite, black, ebony, etc. (even in Egyptian). Obviously, according to the needs of the cause, Ham is cursed, blackened, and made into the ancestor of the Negroes. This is what happens whenever one refers to contemporary social relations.

On the other hand, he is whitened whenever one seeks the origin of civilization, because there he is inhabiting the first civilized country in the world. So, the idea of Eastern and Western Hamites is conceived—nothing more than a convenient invention to deprive Blacks of the moral advantage of Egyptian civilization and of other African civilizations, as we shall see.

It is impossible to link the notion of Hamite, as we labor to understand it in official textbooks, with the slightest historical, geographical, linguistic,

or ethnic reality. No specialist is able to pinpoint the birthplace of the Hamites (scientifically speaking), the language they spoke, the migratory route they followed, the countries they settled, or the form of civilization they may have left. On the contrary, all the experts agree that this term has no serious content, and yet not one of them fails to use it as a kind of master-key to explain the slightest evidence of civilization in Black Africa.

### Arguments for a Negro Origin

The concept of Kingship is one of the most impressive indications of the similarity in thinking between Egypt and the rest of Black Africa. Leaving aside such general principles as the sacrosanct nature of Kingship and stressing one typical trait because of its strangeness, we shall single out the ritual killing of the monarch. In Egypt, the king was not supposed to reign unless he was in good health. Originally, when his strength declined, he was really put to death. But royalty soon resorted to various expedients. The king was understandably eager to preserve the prerogatives of his position, while undergoing the least possible inconvenience. So he was able to transform the fatal judgement into a symbolic one: from then on, when he grew old, he was merely put to death ritually. After the symbolic test, known as the "Sed Festival," the monarch was supposedly rejuvenated in the opinion of his people and was once again deemed fit to assume his functions. Henceforth, the "Sed Festival" was the ceremony of the king's rejuvenation: ritualistic death and revivification of the ruler became synonymous and took place during the same ceremony. (Cf. Charles Seligman's *Egypt and Negro Africa: A Study in Divine Kingship* [London: Routledge, 1934].)

The monarch, the revered being par excellence, was also supposed to be the man with the greatest life force or energy. When the level of his life force fell below a certain minimum, it could only be a risk to his people if he continued to rule. This vitalistic conception is the foundation of all traditional African kingdoms, I mean, of all kingdoms not usurped.

Sometimes it operated differently, for example, in Senegal, the king could not rule if he had received wounds in battle; he had to be replaced until cured. It was during such a replacement that a paternal brother, who was the son of a woman of the people, seized the throne. As Lat-Soukabe, he initiated the Guedj dynasty, circa 1697.

The practice of replacing the king whenever his vital strength declines obviously stems from the same vitalistic tenets throughout the Black world. According to those beliefs, the fertility of the soil, the abundant harvests, the health of people and cattle, the normal flow of events and of all the phenomena of life, are intimately linked to the potential of the ruler's vital force.

In other regions of Black Africa, the events occur exactly as in Egypt

with regard to the actual killing of the monarch. Certain peoples even set a time limit, after which he is assumed to be incapable of ruling and is then really put to death. Among the Mbum of Central Africa, this time limit is ten years and the ceremony takes place before the millet season. The following peoples still practice the ritualistic death of the king: the Yoruba, Dagomba, Shamba, Igara, Songhay, the Hausa of Gobir, Katsena, and Daura, and the Shilluk. This practice also existed in ancient Meroë, i.e. Nubia, Uganda-Rwanda.

## A Review of Diop

### RAYMOND MAUNY<sup>15</sup>

... One would have thought after reading his doctoral thesis that Diop would have "put water in his wine" and that the advice of his professors . . . would have taken root. This is not the case, as I realized when listening to the lecture given by C. A. Diop on April 19, 1960 at Dakar. . .

Now, what may be permissible to a student or a young secondary school teacher is not permissible to the *Doctor es lettres* who can, by virtue of his title, begin teaching in a university. And so, despite the understanding that I feel toward the author, whom I know, I feel it's my duty, whatever pain it may cause both of us, to say openly what others do not, out of politeness or for other reasons.

According to Diop, the Pharaonic Egyptians, the Phoenicians, the Carthaginians, the Elam, and the ancient Arabians were all Negroes. Negroes were at the origin of civilization:

[T]hey were the first to invent mathematics, astronomy, the calendar, science, the arts, religion, agriculture, social organization, medicine, writing, technology, architecture. . . . In saying all this one simply asserts that which is, in all modesty, strictly true and which no one, at this time, can refute by arguments worthy of the name. . . . Moses was Egyptian and therefore Negro.

Thus, according to Diop, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are basically Negro.

I am all the more confident about rejecting the author's interpretations because I have no intention of attributing to Indo-Europeans what I attribute to races more or less brown (I am aware of the author's objection on page twenty to the use of the word brown instead of black, an objection I do not accept) and to the yellow people between the Nile and the Pacific: Egyptians,

<sup>15</sup>This review appeared in *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire* XXII, Series B (1960), pp. 544-51. Translated by Nell Painter and Dr. Robert Collins. This review is actually directed at Diop's original work *Nations noires et culture*, first published in 1955 by *Présence Africaine*, Paris. *Nations noires et culture* was translated and published in English in 1974 as *The African Origin of Western Civilization*.

Raymond Mauny has been a prolific writer and commentator on the African past while professor of African history at Dakar.

Syrians, Mesopotamians, Hindus, and Chinese. I recognize without any prejudice that "my ancestors the Gauls"<sup>16</sup> were, before the arrival of the Romans, barbarians, when, at the same time, brown and yellow people already had a civilization for several millennia and when great monuments had already been built in Nubia, a Negro land.

On what does C. A. Diop base his opinion? The whole of modern Egyptology, according to him, has been a vast European racist plot to destroy the evidence that the people of the Pharaohs belonged to the Negro world. This veritable "falsification of history"—it is even the title of one of his chapters—has led to the willful disappearance of thousands of mummies so as to preserve only those with long hair.

It is well known that a number of "archaeologists" working before 1900 and before the legislation concerning ruins in Egypt did neglect to preserve skeletons in order to have only those on the side of "artistic and epigraphic treasure. . . ."

According to C. A. Diop the examination of bone remains and of mummies of pre-Roman Egyptians demonstrates that they were Negroes:

I assert that the skulls found for the most ancient periods and the mummies of the dynastic period are in no way distinct in anthropological characteristics from the two Negro races existing on earth: the Dravidian with straight hair and the Negro with kinky hair."

add further on . . .

When we scientifically clean the skin of mummies, the epidermis appears pigmented in the same way as that of all other African Negroes. . . . I add that today *infallible scientific techniques* exist (ultraviolet rays, for example) to determine the melanin content of a pigmentation. Now the difference between a white person and a black, from this point of view, comes from the fact that the white person's organism does not secrete enzymes. It is the same for that of the ancient Egyptians. That is why, from prehistory to the Ptolemaic period, the Egyptian mummy stayed black. In other words, during all of the known history of Egypt, the skin of all the Egyptians of all social classes (from Pharaoh to peasant) has stayed that of the authentic Negro, as well as their osteology. See: the canon of Lepsius.

We need answers to these statements which only anthropologists and

<sup>16</sup>"Nos ancêtres les Gaulois" ("Our ancestors the Gauls") is an allusion to the opening sentence in an elementary school textbook widely used in French West Africa. The phrase has since become synonymous with the assimilationist colonial policy of France. (Editor)

Egyptologists can give us. *That there were Negroes among the Egyptians and that a prolonged mixing has left profound Negroid imprints among the people of the country has not been denied by anyone for a long time. But this is far from making the whole or even the majority of the Egyptians of the Pharaonic period Negroes.*

I am not an anthropologist no more than an author for that matter, but I suggest to the reader one of the best works concerning the question of the ancient Egyptians: C. S. Coon, *The Races of Europe*, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1939, pp. 91-98 and 458-62). The racial composition of ancient Egypt is analyzed (pre-Neolithic Mediterraneans, whites; Tasians, whites; Fayum-Merimdians, whites; Badarians, seemingly from the Abyssinian plateau, brown with Negroid features; Nagada, related but less Negroid; Mediterraneans of lower Egypt, whites; and from 3,000 BC up to the Ptolemaic period, the history of Egypt shows "the gradual replacement of the Upper Egyptian type by that of lower Egypt." The later invaders (Hyksos, people of the sea, Semites, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks) all belonged to white races, with the exception of the Ethiopians of the twenty-fifth dynasty who were of Nubian origin.

According to Coon, the conventional impressions show a svelte body, with narrow hips and small hands and feet. The head and face "are those of smoothly contoured fine Mediterranean form"; numerous types of the upper classes represented by the portraits "looked strikingly like modern Europeans." The type of certain Pharaohs, like Ramses III, seems on the contrary to be related to the Abyssinian type.

The pigmentation of the Egyptians "was usually a *brunet white*; in the conventional figures the men are represented as red, the women often as lighter, and even white" and the daughter of Cheops, the builder of the great pyramid, as "a definite blonde." Southward, as one approaches Aswan, the population was evidently darker (brown-red, brown).

In their paintings and sculptures the Egyptians represented foreigners with their racial characteristics: "Besides the Libyans, who have Nordic features as well as coloring, Asiatics, with prominent noses and curly hair, sea peoples from Mediterranean, with lighter skins and more pronounced facial relief than the Egyptians, are also shown, as well as Negroes" and farther "The Mediterranean pigmentation of the Egyptians has probably not greatly changed during the last 5000 years."

Such is the opinion of an anthropologist. I leave each individual to draw his own conclusions. But this does not prevent me from thinking that it would be difficult to support the position that a people composed principally of Mediterranean groups could be Negro, especially after all the precise arguments given by Coon, who, it may be noticed in passing, recognized a Negroid contribution.

According to C. A. Diop the ancient authors definitely affirmed that the

Egyptians were Negroes. Herodotus, the "father of history," who wrote about 450 BC, is very correctly included, for he visited Egypt. But are C. A. Diop's examples the proof that he thought they were?

Herodotus does not mean to speak of Egypt when he says "the heat makes the people black," but rather of the inhabitants of the countries of the South, that of the Ethiopians, from where the Nile comes.

"And when he adds that the pigeon was black, he means us to understand that the woman was Egyptian." Did not the Greeks (the Hebrews had the same reaction) have a tendency, as is well known, to regard the Egyptians as "blacks" only because they were darker than the Greeks? Do we not use the same expression in France (from which the family names Morel, Moreau, Lenoir, Negre, etc.) to designate people with a darker than average complexion? A Nordic is clearly conscious of having a lighter complexion than the ordinary Spaniard or southern Italian. He will speak of dark skin, brown skin, even of black skin, just as one, for that matter, speaks of bathers tanning on the beach in summer. Yet neither the one nor the other is any more Negroid for it.

Is the example of the Colchidians any better? The author cites a passage from Herodotus: "The Egyptians think these people are the descendants of part of the troops of Sesostris. I would suppose the same for two reasons: the first is that they are *black* and that they have kinky hair." But why does Mr. Diop not add the rest of Herodotus' passage . . . "To tell the truth this proves nothing because other peoples are in the same situation." And the adjective *melanochroes* which Herodotus uses does not necessarily mean "black." Legrand, in 1948, translated it as "having a brown skin." Also on this subject I refer the reader to F. M. Snowden's, *The Negro in Ancient Greece*.

In the following example concerning the southern Indians, I see nowhere any mention of the fact that the Egyptians were black. It is a question only of the Ethiopians.

The passage of Diodorus of Sicily concerning Ethiopia's civilization being older than that of Egypt, according to the Ethiopians, is interesting from more than one point of view, because it reports for the first time in history, to my knowledge, the interpretation that the Egyptians were descended from the Ethiopians, and thus raises the question of the part that the Negro had in the formation of ancient Egypt. In addition I consider this text more important than those of Herodotus, of Genesis, and of Strabo, for the problem before us. But I insist on immediately saying that archeology has convincingly shown that it was Egypt that was the civilizing element in Ethiopia, and not the reverse. I do not think that anyone can prove that the architectural triumphs of Nubia, to cite only one example, are earlier than those of Upper and Lower Egypt of the period of the pyramids. This does not mean that the Ethiopians did not have a part in the constitution of Egyptian civili-

zation. I am even convinced of the contrary. It is up to the ethnologists, sociologists, and others to determine the precise magnitude of that contribution.

In the following example from Strabo: "Egyptians established themselves in Ethiopia and Colchida." I do not see anything which would prove that the Egyptians were black; they colonized these two countries and that is all.

The same comment may be applied to the passage from Genesis (9:18 to 10:20) where the Egyptians (Mistaim) are, in effect, regarded as descendants of Cham. Cham was only a legendary person, however, just as Noah, Sem, and Japhet, and the Bible's division only indicates the diverse races known at the time by the editors of Genesis: Indo-Europeans (Japhet), Semites (i.e. Hebrews, Arabs, some Mesopotamians, etc.), and Chamites (i.e., the ensemble of people who to their knowledge were darker than Semites: Kush, Ethiopians, Punt, Canaan).

Genesis, which is not a treatise of anthropology, by any means, but a collection of Hebrew, Mesopotamian, and Egyptian legends concerned, among other things, with the origins of the human races as the Hebrews of the second millennium BC might see it, and nowhere does Genesis speak of the *color* of the descendants of Cham or Canaan: the Israelites were only conscious of being lighter than they, that is all.

Thus not a great deal is left after an examination of the ancient texts cited by the author which might lead us to believe that the ancient Egyptians were Negroes. Archaeology leads us to just the opposite conclusion, supported, of course, by the text of Herodotus. It was only from the time when "Egyptian fugitives" were settled in Ethiopia that "the Ethiopians, adopting manners of the Egyptians, became more civilized."

To be sure, there is no lack of hypotheses regarding the origins of the Egyptians; and C. A. Diop is not an innovator in this matter. Here is a passage where G. Hanotaux (*Histoire de la nation égyptienne*) speaks of it:

What were the earliest people (of the Nile Valley)? Celtes, replies Poinsinet de Sivry—Negroes, said Voley—Chinese, was the opinion of Winckelmann—Indo-Polynesians, pretended Moreau de Jonnes—Africans from Ethiopia or Libya, declared Petrie, supported by the naturalists, Hott, Morton, Perrier, Hamy—Asiatics coming from Babylonia with an advanced civilization, affirm the archaeologists and orientalists, Brugsch, Ebers, Hommel, de Rouge, de Morgan. There is without doubt reason for this variety of opinions: It is that there was such a mixture of diverse races in Egypt.

Egypt is thus a melting pot of races and civilizations, at the crossroads of three continents. This is the real contribution of this country. To want to monopolize the whole to the profit of only one of the composite elements is

to contradict the truth. And it is up to us, historians of Black Africa, to unravel what was the part of the *Negro* and of the *Brown* people (the "Africans of Ethiopia and Libya" of Petrie), a fact already widely admitted, as we have seen, in the makeup of ancient Egypt.

As for the rest of Black Africa, the results of archaeology, as we know, are very meager at present. How can C. A. Diop explain that the Egyptians, who he pretends were Negroes, and the Nubians, spiritual sons of Egypt, were the only ones before the first millennium BC to be civilized in all of Africa? For one cannot understand why the inhabitants of the Nile valley would have been the *avant-garde* of humanity when the other Negroes stayed at a "primitive" state just like the Europeans who were their contemporaries. And if West African Negroes descended from the Egyptians, why did they become "decivilized" *en route* between about 500 BC, the date of their departure from Egypt according to C. A. Diop, and 900 AD, the period from which we have texts describing them as rather "backwards"? Which way did they go? How is it that no ancient author speaks of this migration, although, according to the author, it was made during the historical period? And how is it that they have left no trace of their passage along the way?

Let us be very clear that it is *mounds* in the interior region of the Niger Delta and not *pyramids*, as the author thinks, not that one wants to "disparage African achievements," but because a pyramid is a volume with a well-defined form and mounds have a round or oval plan and are roughly hemispheric in form. The first are found particularly in Egypt, Nubia, and in Central America, the second in Black Africa and Europe.

As for thinking that the signs carved on the Baobabs of Diourbel are hieroglyphics, the author is now at home and knows the question well enough, I suppose, to judge for himself whether it is really writing (the old people of the area would give him the information in this case) or simply graffiti carved in the soft bark, which seems more likely.

Another problem rightly preoccupies Mr. Diop: the skin color of the Egyptians as it is represented in tomb paintings and on other documents. According to him . . . "the color called dark red of the Egyptians is none other than the natural color of the Negro," and he gives a text of Champollion-le-Jeune as evidence. Now Champollion-le-Jeune clearly distinguishes between Egyptians (dark red), Negroes "Nahasi," Semites "Namou" skin color tending toward yellow, Medes and Assyrians with a swarthy complexion, Indo-Europeans "Tamhou," with white skin.

Two works with numerous illustrations in color, which I have before me . . . to my mind support the opinions of Champollion-le-Jeune, and many others, concerning the great variety of races represented [in Egypt]. Nevertheless, one thing is clear: when the artist wanted to depict Negroes, he distinctly gave them a black or gray color. And the dark red people are not, with few exceptions, Negroes, but tawny people, brown people. It is, of

course, true that the color black is found throughout the paintings, *but to represent the hair and not the skin*. The Egyptians were absolutely conscious of the difference in skin color between themselves, the Negroes, and Asiatics.

We have seen above that an anthropologist, C. S. Coon, called the usual color of the Pharaonic Egyptians "brunet white." This color resembles that of the average modern Egyptian of the Delta, those of the south being darker (reddish brown to a medium brown hue).

I am happy to find myself in accord with C. A. Diop when he speaks of the Ife civilization in Nigeria. It was a brilliant civilization, incontestably Negro, which, with its brass heads in naturalistic style, attained the summits of, not only African, but world art.

I am not competent, on the contrary, to judge the linguistic portion of this work, in particular the relationships between ancient Egyptian and modern Wolof; and I leave this problem to linguists. But I must admit my skepticism when I see a toponym in Songhai country, Tondidarou [Tundi-Daro], a site which I know well, with its megaliths (of which the obvious etymology is Songhai: *tondi daro* = big stone) explained by the Serer *tundi daro* = the hills of the union.

Nor do I think that the Lebu of Cape Verde have any relation whatsoever with the people, of the same name inhabiting the western approaches of the Nile Delta before our era. And to say that several Pharaohs of the first dynasties were of the Serer race "because their name included *Sen*" seems, to my mind, at the least very questionable. Such play on words is possible among all the languages of the world. Would Sun-Yat-Sen, Ibsen, Eisenhower, and Amundsen all be Serer as well?

Logic does not seem to lead to a closer possible relationship between ancient Egyptian and other African languages than to Indo-European languages. *But it is evident that comparisons should be made by competent and specialized linguists.*<sup>17</sup> It will be impossible to speak knowingly about all this until dictionaries and grammars of African languages are published. In order to form an opinion on a similar work of D. P. de Pedrals, *Archeologie de l'Afrique noire*, (Paris: Payot, 1950), a work which unfortunately seems to have had a good deal of influence on the author, I suggest the reader consult the reports in *Man*, September 1951, pp. 122-23, and the *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire*, 1951, pp. 1331-33.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup>The student would do well to consult the work of Joseph H. Greenberg, *The Languages of Africa* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1963), particularly pp. 42-65. (Editor)

<sup>18</sup>Unfortunately, the work of D. P. de Pedrals, *L'Archeologie de l'Afrique Noire*, (Paris: Payot, 1950), from which C. A. Diop derives so much of his information, has been described by one authority as "would-be scientific discussions of names and words that add not one jot to our knowledge of African archaeology." (G. W. B. Huntingford in his review of *L'Archeologie de l'Afrique Noire*, appearing in *Man* (London: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain

Despite these questionable hypotheses given as accepted and irrefutable truths, and the failure to include information from recent works concerning West Africa, the book of Mr. Diop is a landmark. It is the first general historical work written by a French-speaking black African, and, besides being an important source of documentation, it includes some excellent parts and it has the great merit of not following the traditional interpretations and of forcing the Egyptologists and others to take a stand and define their positions more precisely. Nevertheless, written before 1955 in Paris, it is inescapably a belligerent book, completely impregnated with the spirit of those years of struggle during which Africans, in particular students exiled in Paris amid the colonizing people and, in addition, frustrated by their national history, prepared the way for independence by exalting Negritude, sometimes even, and this is normal, at the price of taking liberty, perhaps unconsciously, with impartial and scientific truths: only that which could agree with his thesis was included. All this is "quite fair," and to me the attitudes formed during the general struggle of all the different African peoples are to be found therein.

Today, in 1960, times have changed. This is the year of independence for a number of countries in Black Africa, Mali among others. The African historian, without abandoning in the least his political opinions formed during the years of struggle against colonialism, owes it to himself, to science, and to his country to place himself, if he has not already done so, on the level of *strict objectivity*, which does not exclude interpretation or the use of hypotheses to be proven, but without which it is impossible to speak of history, of research, of scientific knowledge of history. *Otherwise the whole of the new school of African history risks being discredited and the sum of errors and exaggerations would be disastrous for the Africans themselves.* For now, and with reason, the African history taught to black children is being reformed so that children no longer learn just the history of the colonizers, but of their own people. It is no longer a question of convincing Parisian audiences or African students in Paris; the former were almost in general incompetent to judge and the latter were obviously already decided by anticolonial reaction, before the rapid acquisition of independence, to applaud this veritable Negro Gobinism. *It is now a question of the author's submitting his ideas to the examination of specialists, who are the only ones qualified to say what is worth retaining.* Or else the author himself must go back to the hard task of historical research to verify a number of his hypotheses.

When modern Egyptologists accept C. A. Diop's thesis that ancient

and Ireland, LI 1951), p. 123. Other leading archaeologists agree, seeming to make this work a very questionable source for evidence on Egyptian origins and migrations of the African. (Editor)

Egypt was "Negro," then and only then must school manuals be reformed. Would the cultural unity of Africa, from the Egyptians to the Bushman, include the Moroccans, the Tauregs, the Teda, the Pygmies, the Zulu, the Somalis, and the Abyssinians? Why not? On the condition that the ethnologists and sociologists tell us it is so.

A linguistic connection between ancient Egyptian and Wolof? Specialists of African languages could, one day, tell us if this hypothesis is valid. But again, they must be experts and their works confirmed by other specialists.

As for West African prehistory and history to the end of the middle ages, I hope that the author will permit me to think that I may give a relatively authoritative opinion in this matter.

There is, in effect, one urgent problem: *the part of the Negro in the development of the universal civilization during the course of past centuries.* In the meantime, however, what must come immediately is the development of the Negroes' active and original contribution to the elaboration of modern humanity. That the Negro had a part is incontestable, undeniable, but, up to now, the question has only just been touched by specialists. Just like all the other races, the Negro has contributed his stone in the construction [of the edifice of human history], but it is now a question of making this addition more precise, and no longer dismissing the problem by saying that Egypt was Negro and thus solving the problem before it can be properly stated and studied.

This study will no doubt necessitate long years of work before it can lead to any real conclusions: careful scrutiny and commentaries on texts, examination of Egyptian and other collections, innumerable detailed studies will all advance us, step by step, towards the truth. This task should be begun as early as possible, and principally in the three West African universities, Ibadan, Accra, and Dakar, and in Negro universities in America. I am ready to collaborate in this task.

The great merit of C. A. Diop will be to have contributed, after Dr. K. O. Dike, Fr. M. Snowden, J. C. de Graft-Johnson, and others, to the opening of this record to which no African, no Africanist and I would even say that no one should be indifferent at the hour when Africa vigorously affirms her personality.

# Black Athena

MARTIN BERNAL<sup>19</sup>

## Proposed Historical Outline

*Black Athena* is focused on Greek cultural borrowings from Egypt and the Levant in the 2nd millennium BC or, to be more precise, in the thousand years from 2100 to 1100 BC. Some of these may be earlier and a few later exchanges will also be considered. The reasons for choosing this particular time-span are first that this seems to have been the period in which Greek culture was formed, and secondly that I have found it impossible to discover indications of any earlier borrowings either from the Near East or from legendary, cultic or etymological Greek evidence.

The scheme I propose is that while there seems to have been more or less continuous Near Eastern influence on the Aegean over this millennium, its intensity varied considerably at different periods. The first "peak" of which we have any trace was the 21st century. It was then that Egypt recovered from the breakdown of the First Intermediate Period, and the so-called Middle Kingdom was established by the new 11th Dynasty. This not only reunited Egypt but attacked the Levant and is known from archaeological evidence to have had wide-ranging contacts further afield, certainly including Crete and possibly the Mainland. The succession of Upper Egyptian black pharaohs sharing the name Menthotpe had as their divine patron the hawk and bull god Mn̄w or Mont. It is during the same century that the Cretan palaces were established and one finds the beginnings there of the bull-cult which appears on the walls of the palaces and was central to Greek mythology about King Minos and Crete. It would therefore seem plausible to suppose that the Cretan developments directly or indirectly reflected the rise of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom. . . .

<sup>19</sup>Bernal, Martin, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (London: Free Association Books, 1987). Excerpts taken from volume 1, pp. 17–18, 440–442.

Martin Bernal was born in London 1937. He attended King's College Cambridge as an undergraduate, graduate student and research fellow. He also studied at Peking University, Berkeley and Harvard. In 1973 he was appointed to the faculty at Cornell University where he remains today as a Professor Emeritus. After 20 years he changed his field from the history of China in the 19th and 20th centuries to the origins of Ancient Greece. In the series of books with the general title *Black Athena* he argues that we should take Ancient Greek historians seriously when they maintained that Egyptians and Phoenicians played central roles in the formation of their culture. Conversely we should take into account the political and ideological pressures on 19th and 20th century scholars who wished to deny the ancient interpretation. The books have stimulated widespread discussion and controversy.

## Conclusion

. . . . The main body of the book began with a description of the ways in which Classical, Hellenistic and later pagan Greeks from the 5th century BC to the 5th century AD saw their distant past. I attempted to trace their own vision of their ancestors' having been civilized by Egyptian and Phoenician colonization and the later influence of Greek study in Egypt. I tried to show the ambivalent relationship between Christianity and the Jewish biblical tradition on the one hand and Egyptian religion and philosophy on the other: despite all the centuries of potential and actual rivalry, there was no doubt on either side that up to the 18th century, Egypt was seen as the fount of all "Gentile" philosophy and learning, including that of the Greeks; and that the Greeks had managed to preserve only some part of these. The sense of loss that this created, and the quest to recover the lost wisdom, were major motives in the development of science in the 17th century.

I went on to show how at the beginning of the 18th century the threat of Egyptian philosophy to Christianity became acute. The Freemasons, who made much use of the image of Egyptian wisdom, were at the centre of the Enlightenment in its attack on Christian order. And it was in opposition to this 18th-century notion of "reason" on the part of the Egyptophils that the Greek ideal of sentiment and artistic perfection was developed. Further, the development of Europocentrism and racism, with the colonial expansion over the same period, led to the fallacy that only people who lived in temperate climates—that is, Europeans—could really think. Thus the Ancient Egyptians, who—though their colour was uncertain—lived in Africa, lost their position as philosophers. They also suffered through the establishment of the new "progressive" paradigm because they had lived so far in the past.

In this way, by the turn of the 18th century the Greeks were not only considered to have been more sensitive and artistic than the Egyptians but they were now seen as the better philosophers, and indeed as the founders of philosophy. I suggested that as the Greeks were now viewed as such paragons of wisdom and sensitivity, intelligent counterrevolutionary intellectuals saw the study of them as a way of re-integrating people alienated by modern life; and even of re-establishing social harmony in the face of the French Revolution. Classics as we know it today was created between 1815 and 1830—an intensely conservative period. The same period also saw the Greek War of Independence, which united all Europeans against the traditional Islamic enemies from Asia and Africa.

This War—and the philhellenic movement, which supported the struggle for independence—completed the already powerful image of Greece as the epitome of Europe. The Ancient Greeks were now seen as perfect, and as having transcended the laws of history and language. Thus it was now thought profane to study any aspect of their culture as one would the culture of other peoples. Moreover, with the rise of a passionate and systematic racism in the early 19th century, the ancient notion that Greece was a mixed culture that had been civilized by Africans and Semites became not only abominable but unscientific. Just as one had to discount

the "credulous" Greeks' stories about sirens and centaurs, so one had to reject legends of their having been colonized by inferior races. Paradoxically, the more the 19th century admired the Greeks, the less it respected their writing of their own history.

I see this destruction of the Ancient Model as entirely the result of social forces such as these, and the requirements put upon the Ancient Greeks by 19th-century Northern Europeans. My belief is that no internalist force—or advance in the knowledge of Ancient Greece—can explain the change. Having said this, I accept that the establishment of the Aryan Model was greatly helped by the working out of the Indo-European language family, which—though inspired by Romanticism—was an internalist achievement; and by the undoubted fact that Greek is fundamentally an Indo-European language. But here, too, the same social and intellectual forces that had brought down the Ancient Model in the 1820s were even more intense in the 1840s and 50s, and they clearly played a role in the increasingly "northern" picture of Ancient Greece that developed in the late 19th century. At the same time, the sense that only 19th-century men knew how to think "scientifically" gave the—mainly German—scholars the confidence both to dismiss ancient descriptions of early Greek history and to invent new ones of their own without any regard to the Ancients.

With the intensification of racism in the 19th century there was increasing dislike of the Egyptians, who were no longer seen as the cultural ancestors of Greece but as fundamentally alien. A whole new discipline of Egyptology could thus grow up, to study this exotic culture and at the same time maintain and reinforce Egypt's distance from the "real" civilizations of Greece and Rome.

The status of Egypt fell with the rise of racism in the 1820s; that of the Phoenicians declined with the rise of racial anti-Semitism in the 1880s and collapsed with its peak between 1917 and 1939. Thus, by the Second World War, it had been firmly established that Greece had not significantly borrowed culturally or linguistically from Egypt and Phoenicia and that the legends of colonization were charming absurdities, as were the stories of the Greek wise men having studied in Egypt. Indeed, these beliefs survived the years between 1945 and 1960, even though their ideological underpinnings of racism and anti-Semitism were generally being discredited in the academic community.

Since the late 1960s, however, the Extreme Aryan Model has been under heavy attack, largely by Jews and Semitists. The important role of Canaanites and Phoenicians in the formation of Ancient Greece is now being increasingly acknowledged. However, the traditional attribution of much of Greek civilization to Egypt is still denied; and in Greek language studies—the last bunker of Romanticism and the Extreme Aryan Model—any talk of significant Afroasiatic influence on Greek is ruled absurd.

The main point I have been trying to make throughout this book is that the Ancient Model was destroyed and replaced by the Aryan Model not because of any internal deficiencies, nor because the Aryan Model explained anything better or

more plausibly; what it did do, however, was make the history of Greece and its relations to Egypt and the Levant conform to the world-view of the 19th century and, specifically, to its systematic racism. Since then the concepts of "race" and categorical European superiority which formed the core of this *Weltanschauung* have been discredited both morally and heuristically, and it would be fair to say that the Aryan Model was conceived in what we should now call sin and error. . . .

# Black Athena Revisited

GUY ROGERS<sup>20</sup>

The editors of this volume present here some preliminary answers to [the] questions [raised in Bernal's work]. These preliminary answers are based upon summaries of the articles edited for this volume (although there obviously are some differences among the contributors about details). In setting out these preliminary answers, we hope to provide scholars and the general public with a handy reference to the state of expert judgment on some difficult scholarly questions.

We recognize that Bernal (and other scholars) may well disagree with our answers to these questions. We welcome his response. At the end of this conclusion, we make some suggestions about how the debate about the roots of classical civilization might be framed most productively in the future. We look forward to the next round in the debate.

*Who were the ancient Egyptians?* Although the population of ancient Egypt had ties to the north and to the south, and was also intermediate between populations to the east and west, the population of ancient Egypt was distinct and basically Egyptian from the Neolithic period right up to historic times.

*Were the ancient Egyptians "black"?* Many of the scholars who contributed to this volume found this question to be disturbing, at least as it was formulated in *Black Athena*. Several contributors specifically have been concerned that ancient evidence and archaeological remains have been identified with concepts of race and racial issues which belong to the modern world. Such issues appear to have been absent in the conceptual world of ancient Egyptians and Greeks. Indeed, in the ancient Mediterranean world in general, color terms did not carry the stigma of inferiority similar to that associated with color terms in postclassical societies, which have sub-

<sup>20</sup> Lefkowitz, Mary R., and Guy MacLean Rogers, ed., *Black Athena Revisited* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996). Excerpts taken from pp. 448–451, *Quo Vadis?* by Guy MacLean Rogers.

Guy MacLean Rogers (b. 1954) holds a Ph.D. in Classics from Princeton University. He has received numerous grants and fellowships, including ones from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Philosophical Society, and All Souls College, Oxford. His first book, *The Sacred Identity of Ephesos: Foundation Myths of a Roman City*, won the Routledge Ancient History Prize. Chairman of the Department of History of Wellesley College from 1997–2001, he grew up and still lives in Litchfield County, Connecticut.

jected darker skinned peoples to terrible forms of discrimination on the basis of the color of their skin.

But since Bernal himself has raised this question, both in *Black Athena* and in subsequent public comments, scholars have felt obliged to set the record straight for the sake of their peers as well as the general public.

We believe that the attempt to assign the people of the Nile valley to "Caucasoid" or "Negroid" categories is an arbitrary act and wholly devoid of historical or biological significance. It would be inaccurate to describe the ancient Egyptians as either black or white; the population of ancient Egypt was one of mixed pigmentation. Essentially, the Egyptians were the Egyptians. To describe them otherwise promotes a misconception about the ancient Egyptians, with racist undertones, that reveals much more about those who wish to make such attempts than about the ancient Egyptians themselves.

*Was Egypt African?* Although Egypt lies geographically on the continent of Africa, in anthropological terms the categorical labeling of the civilization of ancient Egypt as "fundamentally African" is misleadingly simplistic. In fact the archaeological evidence of African kingdoms south of Egypt suggests distinctly different cultures that were often in conflict with ancient Egypt. *Black Athena* hardly treats these relations—and still less so the widespread evidence in other parts of the continent for the independent evolution of civilizations. In tracing the alleged Afro-Asiatic roots of classical civilization, Bernal has almost nothing to say about the entire continent of Africa and its many and diverse ancient civilizations. In short, *Black Athena* is not about ancient Africa at all.

*Did the ancient Egyptians or Hyksos colonize Greece?* In *Black Athena* Bernal claims that Greece was colonized from Egypt not once, but twice: first during the third millennium B.C.E., when Egyptian colonists arrived in Greece, bringing advanced building skills, their cults and religion; and second, during the eighteenth/seventeenth centuries B.C.E., when the Hyksos, having been driven out of Egypt, invaded the Argolid and ruled there.

Unambiguous archaeological evidence in support of an Egyptian colonization of Greece is absent from the Aegean area, despite decades of field research. Nor do the historical records of Egypt or any other Near Eastern culture support the idea of a Hyksos invasion and colonization of the Argolid.

*Did the ancient Egyptians and/or the Phoenicians massively influence the early Greeks in the areas of language, religion, science, and/or philosophy?* No expert in the field doubts that there was a Greek cultural debt to the ancient Near East. The real questions are: How large was the debt? Was it massive, as Bernal claims? Was it limited to the Egyptians and the Phoenicians?

The consensus of the contributors to this volume is that the debt cannot be described as massive; nor was the debt limited to Egypt and Phoenicia.

Certainly the evidence shows that the Eighteenth Dynasty and the Aegean world were in close contact at certain levels; but such contacts are not equivalent to "suzerainty" and do not imply the substantial cultural impact upon the Aegean that is required by Bernal's claims.

All of the contributors agree that the early Greeks got their alphabet from the Phoenicians; but little else. Indeed, in terms of language, the evidence that Bernal has presented thus far for the influence of Egyptian or Phoenician on ancient Greek has failed to meet any of the standard tests which are required for the proof of extensive influence, including a large percentage of undisputed vocabulary borrowings, phonetic similarity, and parallelisms in grammar. Overall, the fact remains that Egyptian and Canaanite scripts were never used widely in historical Greece.

Similarly, in the area of religion, Egyptian and Canaanite deities were never worshiped on Greek soil in their indigenous forms. Nor does the abundant archaeological evidence support claims of deep and pervasive influence in the area of cult.

The case for Egyptian influence on Greek mathematical astronomy, mathematics, and medicine is only somewhat stronger. In these areas the Egyptians definitely influenced the Greeks; but Greek achievements, especially in the fields of mathematics and medicine, became quite distinct and original.

Several contributors, while convinced of the influence of the Mediterranean cultures of the ancient Near East on early Greek civilization, especially through the medium of trade, nevertheless could not agree that Egypt or Phoenicia was the principal axis of that influence. Instead they point to relations that were probably more critical to long-term developments in Greece, including (especially) relations with the northern Levant, Anatolia, and, ultimately, Babylonia, which was much more influential culturally than Egypt generally in the Near East. Furthermore, there were more geographical routes available by which that Babylonian influence could travel.

Finally, several contributors have drawn attention to a different model of interaction between the ancient Near East and early Greece. Instead of Bernal's model of colonization and/or massive influence moving from Egypt and Phoenicia to Greece, Near Eastern specialists suggest a model of regular, widespread, and mutually profitable contacts between many different Near Eastern cultures and the early Greeks over a much greater time span. Several scholars emphasized that there is, in fact, increasing evidence of Minoan and early Greek influence on the culture not only of Egypt, but of Palestine as well. The cultural road to early Greece apparently was not a one-way street; rather there were many two-lane highways of cultural exchange, connecting many different Near Eastern cultures not only with the early Greeks but also with each other.

*Did the Greeks believe that they were descended from the Egyptians and the Phoenicians?* There were rival traditions propounded about the origins of the Greeks, at different times and for different reasons. We might call such rival traditions competitive subjective ethnicities. The Cadmus and Danaus myths, for instance, upon which Bernal places such weight, were created or revised (in the forms which we now

have them) by Athenian poets and historians who wished to emphasize the autochthony of Athens by contrast with the alleged foreign origins of rival city states. Greek myths of ethnic origins, in other words, do not bear unmediated, literal truths about the origins of the Greeks.

*Did eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars obscure the Afro-Asiatic roots of classical civilization for reasons of racism and anti-Semitism?* Some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars who wrote about the question of Greece's cultural debt to Egypt or Phoenicia did so from a point of view that today would be considered racist or anti-Semitic. Some of those scholars denied or underemphasized that debt for the sake of maintaining the uniqueness and originality of European culture in their own day.

But not all or even the majority of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century classical scholars who downplayed Greece's debt to Egypt or Phoenicia were racists or anti-Semites. Rather, the majority of those scholars downplayed that debt because they saw little evidence for the kind of massive influence that Bernal has argued for. Nor has he been able to produce new evidence or a new interpretation of old evidence which might convince the majority of scholars today that the majority of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars were essentially wrong.

Furthermore, as the essays collected in this volume have shown, Professor Bernal's attempt to portray figures such as Herder and Grote as racists or romantics is not supported by a careful, contextualized study of all of the evidence. Too often in *Black Athena* he has selected only a few sentences from the works of earlier scholars and has decontextualized those sentences in order to build up a picture of undifferentiated racism and anti-Semitism—but only on the part of those previous scholars who have questioned the depth of Greece's debt to Egypt or Phoenicia.

The scholarly record is, in fact, far more complex and contradictory than Bernal allows. The picture of attitudes toward blacks in Britain and America, for instance, is far more complicated than he makes it out to be. There certainly were many prominent and outspoken intellectual antiracists in Britain and America, a fact readers would never discover from reading *Black Athena*.

More to the point, many scholars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries questioned the depth of Greece's debt to Egypt and Phoenicia, not for reasons of racism and anti-Semitism, as Bernal would insist, but because evidence leading to that conclusion was lacking; or, more importantly, because the discovery of new evidence led in the opposite direction. In particular, the discovery of the Indo-European language group, of which Greek was proved to be a member, encouraged nineteenth-century scholars especially to think of Greek civilization as being fundamentally different from the civilizations of Egypt and Phoenicia.

In sum, Bernal's presentation of European classical historiography of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as pervaded by racism and anti-Semitism that prevented scholars from accurately assessing the Afro-Asiatic roots of classical civilization, is oversimplified and unconvincing.

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## PROBLEM II

# BANTU ORIGINS AND MIGRATIONS

The term "Bantu" was first defined by Dr. Wilhelm Bleek in his book published in 1862 entitled *A Comparative Grammar of South African Languages*. Bleek observed that nearly every language spoken on the southern third of the African continent used prefixes that could be attributed to a set of what he called "Proto-Prefixes," presupposing a generic relationship and implying an aboriginal source. Many scholars of Africa have since studied the Bantu languages, and all have come to the general conclusion that these languages definitely form an organic unity suggestive of just such common origin. This hypothesis, however, has created in the past a number of linguistic, geographical, historical and even national problems in identifying the relationship of the Bantu languages, which presently occupy such a vast area of the African continent. Today the problem has been fundamentally resolved in the work of many scholars in many disciplines, but primarily through the linguistic work of Prof. Joseph H. Greenberg. The disputes that have divided scholars of virtually every nationality over the past generation have now been largely laid to rest as a consensus has been formed as to the relationship of the overwhelming millions of Bantu speaking peoples of the continent of Africa. Moreover there is increasing agreement as to the homeland of the Bantu speaking people, and what is more important, their relationship with the speakers of West African languages forming a larger speaking group known as Niger-Kordofanian.

The present problem, however, is concerned principally with those Africans who speak a Bantu language, their origins and their diffusion throughout much of the African continent. Although there is widespread consensus that indeed the Bantu-speaking Africans originated in the area of the Camer-