

What If Your Blond Hair Has Black Roots?:

Herodotus, Black Athena, and the Idea of a Mediterranean Melting Pot

Pancho Savery, September 30, 2009

1

As to human matters, they all agreed in saying that the Egyptians by their study of astronomy discovered the solar year and were the first to divide it into twelve parts – and in my opinion their method of calculation is better than the Greek... They also told me that the Egyptians first brought into use the names of the twelve gods, which the Greeks took over from them, and were the first to assign altars and images and temples to the gods, and to carve figures in stone. (The Histories II: 4)

2

I will never admit that the similar ceremonies performed in Greece and Egypt are the result of mere coincidence – had that been so, Greek rites would have been more Greek in character and less recent in origin. Nor will I allow that the Egyptians ever took over from Greece either this custom or any other (II: 49)... The names of nearly all the gods came to Greece from Egypt. (II: 50)...It was the Egyptians too who originated, and taught the Greeks to use, ceremonial meetings, processions, and processional offerings. (The Histories II: 58)

3

Egyptians are unwilling to adopt Greek customs, or, to speak generally, those of any other country. (The Histories II: 91)

4

“For Zeus went to the blameless Aithiopians at the Ocean yesterday to feast, and the rest of the gods went with him. On the twelfth day he will be coming back to Olympos, and then I will go for your sake to the house of Zeus, bronze-founded, and take him by the knees and I think I can persuade him.” (Iliad I:423-427)

5

“I hate his gifts. I hold him light as the strip of a splinter. Not if he gave me ten times as much, and twenty times over as he possesses now, not if more should come to him from elsewhere, Or gave all that is brought in to Orchomenos, all that is brought in to Thebes of Egypt, where the greatest possessions lie up in the houses, Thebes of the hundred gates, where through each of the gates two hundred fighting men come forth to war with horses and chariots; Not if he gave me gifts as many as the sand or dust is, Not even so would Agamemnon have his way with my spirit until he had made good to me all this heartrending insolence.” (Iliad IX:378-387)

6

We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts all have their root in Greece. But for Greece...we might still have been savages and idolators. (Shelley 332)

7

It's the foundation of everything we do. We use the language. Its politics, ethics, science. We can't help but be partly Greek. To write it off as dead white male patriarchy is just a piece of suicide. (Yoffe 49)

8

If the apparent mutability of the physical world and of the human condition was a source of pain and bewilderment to the Greeks, the discovery of a permanent pattern or an unchanging substratum by which apparently chaotic experience could be measured and explained was a source of satisfaction, even joy, which had something of a religious nature. (Pollitt 4)

9

the birth of rational thought (Vernant10)

10

vision, planning and organizational skill of an exceptional order were required (Saggs 48)

11

Let not your heart be puffed-up because of thy knowledge; be not confident because thou art a wise man. Take counsel with the ignorant as well as the wise. The full limits of skill cannot be attained, and there is no skilled man equipped to his full advantage. Good speech is more hidden than the emerald, but it may be found with maidservants as the grindstones. (Asante and Abarry 306)

12

A comprehensive discussion of ethical behavior and moral philosophy. (Asante, The Egyptian Philosophers 39)

13

I am not the only man or the first to have observed [the piety of the Egyptians]: many, both now and in the past, have done so, including Pythagoras of Samos, who went to Egypt and studied with the Egyptians. He was the first to bring philosophy to Greece. (Barnes 84)

14

Egypt had by far the greatest civilization in the East Mediterranean during the millennia in which Greece was formed [and that] Greek writers had written at length about their debts to Egyptian religion, and other aspects of culture. (Bernal xiv)

15

If Europeans were treating Blacks as badly as they did throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Blacks had to be turned into animals, or at best, subhumans; the noble Caucasian was incapable of treating other full humans in such ways. This inversion sets the scene for the racial and main aspect of the 'Egyptian problem':

*If it had been scientifically 'proved' that Blacks were biologically incapable of civilization, how could one explain Ancient Egypt – which was inconveniently placed on the African continent? There were two, or rather three solutions. The first was to deny that the Ancient Egyptians were black; the second was to deny that the Ancient Egyptians had created a 'true' civilization; the third was to make doubly sure by denying both. The last has been preferred by most 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century historians. (Bernal 241)*

16

the Ancient Model had to be overthrown and replaced by something more acceptable. (Bernal 2)

17

How it happened that Egyptians came to the Peloponnese, and what they did to make themselves kings in that part of Greece, has been chronicled by other writers; I will add nothing, therefore, but proceed to mention some points which no one else has yet touched upon. (The Histories VI: 55)

18

a demanding, phony, unreliable male of insatiable sexual appetite and was obviously intended to be sung by a woman. (McNeil 74)

19

If you tried to give Rock n' Roll another name, you might call it 'Chuck Berry.'  
(Major 387)

20

arguing that Afrocentric writers offer a valid interpretation of ancient history is like being comfortable with the notion that the earth is flat (Lefkowitz, Not Out of Africa 8)

21

a whirling confusion of half-digested reading, bold linguistic supposition...preconceived dogma [and] just plain bad scholarship. (Lefkowitz, Black Athena Revisited 167)

22

the resurgence of virulent nationalism and interethnic violence on an international scale. (Lefkowitz, Black Athena Revisited 172)

23

Afrocentrism not only teaches what is untrue; it encourages students to ignore known chronology, to forget about looking for material evidence, to select only those facts that are convenient, and to invent facts whenever useful or necessary. (Lefkowitz, Not Out of Africa 158)

24

Afrocentricity is primarily an orientation to data...a perspective which allows Africans to be subjects of historical experiences rather than objects on the fringes of Europe. (Asante, Malcolm X 2)

25

placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior. (Asante, Afrocentric 6)

26

One of the legitimate criticisms of my work is seeing me as an academic Elvis, that is, a white person who comes out with something Black people have been saying for years and getting lots of credit and attention for it. The reception of my work is at two levels, one is that established white scholars listen to me because I am white. The other is because I am white and have a good position in an Ivy League University, I have the time and the facilities to produce much more standard-looking materials. (Phillip 17)

27

The Ancient Egyptians were negroes. The moral fruit of their civilization is to be counted among the assets of the Black world. Instead of presenting itself to history as an insolvent debtor, that Black world is the very initiator of the 'western' civilization flaunted before our eyes today. Pythagorean mathematics, the theory of the four elements of Thales of Miletus, Epicurean Materialism, Platonic idealism, Judaism, Islam, and modern science are rooted in Egyptian cosmogony and science. One needs only to meditate on Osiris, the redeemer-god, who sacrifices himself, dies, and is resurrected to save mankind, a figure essentially identifiable with Christ. (Diop xiv)

28

The Greeks traded throughout the Mediterranean, borrowing freely from other cultures. From the Phoenicians they acquired an alphabet, some technology, and bold new religious ideas. From Egypt they obtained the ideas that defined what we call Greek architecture, the basics of geometry, and much else besides...Greece was not a miracle...it was a lucky accident of history and the product of many unattributed lessons from neighbors and predecessors (Solomon & Higgins 7)

Many of the leading ideas of Greek philosophy, including the all-important interest in geometry and the concept of the soul, were imported from Egypt. Indeed, it might be more enlightening to view the 'miracle' in Greece not as a remarkable beginning, but as a culmination, the climax of a long story the beginnings and middle of which we no longer recognize. (Solomon & Higgins 9)

29

political purpose of Black Athena is, of course, to lessen European cultural arrogance. (Bernal 73)

30

THE VOICE of the goose sounds forth  
as he's caught by the bait. Your love  
ensnares me. I can't let it go.

I shall take home my nets,  
but what shall I tell my mother,  
to whom I return every day  
laden with lovely birds?

I set no traps today,  
ensnared as I was by love. (Fowler 17)

WOULD that I were  
her delicate signet ring,  
her finger's sentinel!  
I'd see then her love  
each and every day

.....

And it would be I  
who'd stolen her heart. (Fowler 41)

31

As a general  
advance against my position  
and I shall withdraw to  
the bedroom

As a soldier  
march against my lines  
and I shall retreat to bed. (Bertman 181)

32

We say, hold on to the real facts of history as they are, but complete such knowledge by studying also the history of races and nations which have been purposely ignored. We should not underrate the achievements of Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome; but we should give equally as much attention to the internal African kingdoms, the Songhay Empire, and Ethiopia, which through Egypt decidedly influenced the civilization of the Mediterranean world. (Woodson 154)

33

Precisely where the battle over territory and identity is the most intense, intellectuals have a moral obligation to offer alternative modes of thinking. (Said 19)

34

Herodotus took seriously the possibility that Egypt and Persia might have something to teach Athens about social values. (Nussbaum 53)

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