

WHAT I HADN'T LEARNED ABOUT EGYPT AND WHY

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Statue of a Cloaked Man, c. 1,850 B.C., Metropolitan Museum, NYC

"Concerning Egypt itself I shall extend my remarks to a great length, because there is no country that possesses so many wonders, nor any that has such a number of works which defy description."

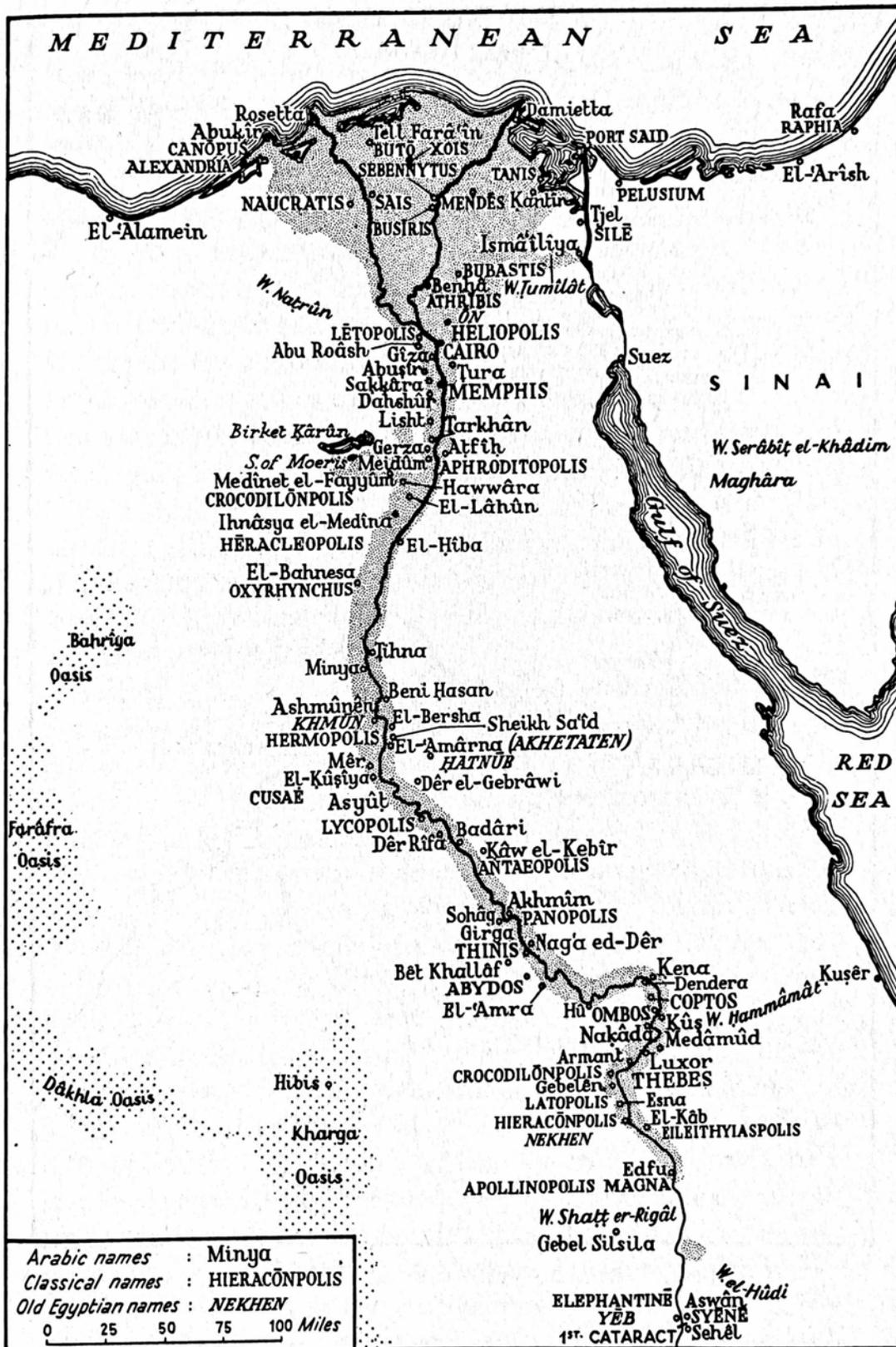
-Herodotus, 450 B.C.

Ancient Egypt has fascinated me ever since my uncle took me to see the Egyptian Collection of the Metropolitan Museum when I was a child. But standing before ancient Egyptian artifacts I always felt I was somehow missing the point; I felt ignorant about what I was seeing. The small dosage of teaching on the subject was vague, and never placed Egypt in any real context, historical or otherwise. I do not remember any comparative studies done with other ancient societies either.

The classical scholar Martin Bernal, who recently wrote an enormous work on the relationship between Egypt and Greece, said that when he realized "that one could find plausible etymologies for a further 20-25% of the ancient Greek vocabulary from Egyptian, as well as the names for most Greek gods and many place names," he felt it had been so obvious that he was surprised he had not thought of it before: "Clearly there were very profound cultural inhibitions against associating Egypt with Greece."

Last year, taking advantage of the opportunity to study in Paris for 1 year, I decided to learn as much as possible about ancient Egypt, at long last. I knew that the Louvre had an even more extensive collection than the Metropolitan, and that the French had been leaders in the oldest of all branches of the science of archaeology called "Egyptology." And indeed, I discovered much more than I ever could have imagined.

In this paper I will consider some of the most important aspects of my research, namely: 1. Who were the ancient Egyptians? 2. What sort of influence did they wield? And, perhaps stretching the domain of "Egyptology" to include "historiography," 3. The rewriting of 1 and 2. These are the elements which jumped off the pages and the monuments as I studied ancient Egypt. In some ways they are relevant to my everyday personal experience in 20th century America (or South America or France for that matter). But now I'm jumping ahead.



MAP I. Egypt.

PART I: Who were the ancient Egyptians?

The ancient Egyptians created one of the most highly advanced civilizations the world has ever seen, and definitely the longest lasting (which is still present, though in a transmuted form). So many of their accomplishments are still awe-inspiring, and we are still ignorant of some of their methods.

They invented paper (using the 'papyrus' plant - which furnishes the name for paper in many languages). They built colossal structures one can witness today, not least of all the famous Pyramids at Giza (which sit almost perfectly on the four cardinal points and demonstrate the knowledge and use of the mathematical concept known as π): The Pyramids, built an incredible 5,000 years ago, are as amazing for their demonstration of mathematical and architectural skills, as they are for proving the existence of an unprecedented social organization.

They invented three forms of writing including the mysteriously beautiful Hieroglyphics (the oldest, before Hieratic and Demotic). Some of the famous mummies are still in such pristine condition that anyone who knew the deceased in life would instantly recognize them today. This mummification was done not out of a fear of death but as part of their view of life. As the Englishman Michael Rice noted in Egypt's making: "Their genius was directed towards the celebration of life and its prolongation to eternity."

They built the first known nation-state and empire. They had a rich and complex religion which motivated men and women as much as (if not more so than) Christianity and Islam. They developed medicine, engineering, astronomy, geometry (which was invented to measure landmarks after the yearly Nile inundations), map-making and agriculture. They dwelt in cities, they sailed in boats, and they developed the arts and crafts to unheard of levels. M. Rice says "Not only did the craftsmen then produce works of an ineffable beauty but they made objects with a truly wonderful technique and an applied skill hardly ever equaled anywhere in the world in later centuries. Indeed, the Egyptian craftsmen of the earliest periods deserve to be recognized as amongst the supreme master craftsmen of all history."

While viewing examples of their strangely modern ancient jewelry, one may be struck with the desire to wear it. And when considering the quality of all these accomplishments, it is almost shocking to take into account the extreme antiquity of the periods

concerned. Almost all Egyptologists place the first dynasty of Kings between 3200 BC -2900 BC, and the most "conventional" chronology places it at 3180 B.C.

These dates are already difficult to conceive of, even without considering the 2000 or so years of "pre-dynastic" development which led to the unification of the 2 kingdoms (lower and upper Egypt, or the north and the south, respectively) by Menes (AKA Narmer), the first king of the first dynasty.

This makes it clear that before 3000 B.C., there were already kingdoms in Egypt, as well as advanced pottery techniques and a calendar (furnishing the first fixed date in the history of humanity, according to Cheikh Anta Diop, at 4,236 B.C.).

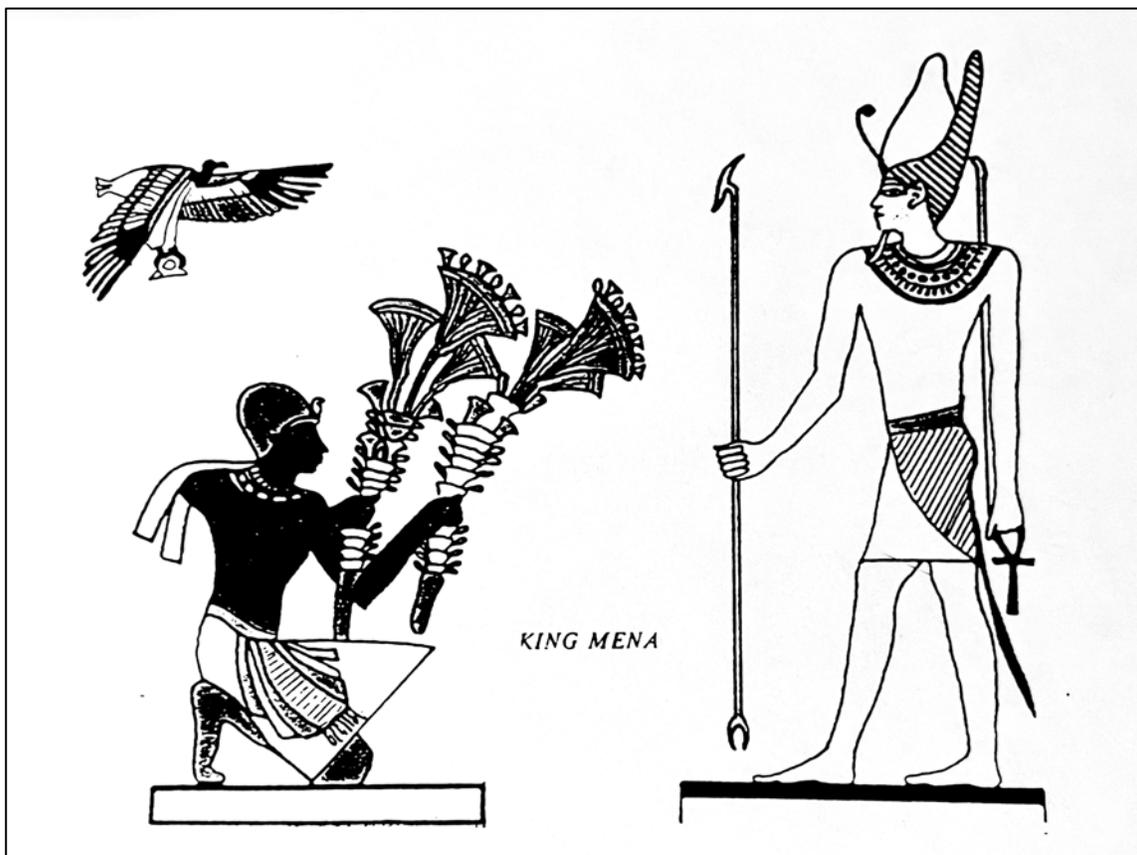
This is a time when most of the world was still living an existence unchanged for thousands of years: nomadically roaming with herds of animals, in small communities. Even the Mesopotamians, the Egyptians' contemporaries, whom we deem the "cradlers of civilization", had no empire - only cities such as Ur, Uruk and Sumer. The French Egyptologist Moret says "apart from some stations of uncertain age in Palestine, no trace of man earlier than 4000 B.C. exists in Syria or Mesopotamia. By that date the Egyptians had their feet on the threshold of their history proper." And the ancient Egyptians have left us an immensely richer body of artifacts and ruins than Mesopotamia.

With all the temples, tombs, stelae, statues, records, myths and stories on papyrus and walls, jewelry, furniture, mummies, clothes, and paintings, that the ancient Egyptians left behind, one might think that the question, "who were they?" would not be a controversial one - and yet it is - controversial and confusing.

Consider Ian Portman writing in Luxor (ancient Thebes): "from the outset, the people of Egypt were a mixture of several African races." What exactly is meant by that we do not know; he says no more on the subject. One of the most distinguished Egyptologists, Sir Alan H. Gardiner speaks of an "Egyptian race," though he concedes that "it is generally agreed that the oldest population of Egypt was of African race." Cyril Aldred, the Scottish Egyptologist whose books one may read if taking a course on "Egyptology," says "the prehistoric Egyptian belonged to the Mediterranean race." He goes on about the physical characteristics of this "race" and says, "this basic stock was modified at an early period by broad-headed migrants from Palestine of mixed Anatolian [Turkish] and semitic descent." He never even considers an African possibility.



Menes (AKA Narmer or King Mena), according to the Egyptians



Menes according to the 1995 souvenir industry in Egypt: this postcard reflects a "modern" view where the darker-skinned of the two must be subservient. In color, this Menes is depicted as pink.

Perhaps this ambiguity exists because we live in a very "race" conscious society (indeed world). But I agree with Bernal: "I am very dubious of the utility of the concept of 'race' in general because it is impossible to achieve any anatomical precision on the subject." I hold with most serious scientists who consider that there is only one: The "human race" among Homo-sapiens-sapiens. But I cannot ignore the "race" consciousness (and downright racism) permeating almost all institutions of American (or "Western") life; and not least of all in education - which largely ignores African history (which we can take the liberty of defining as "Black"), and certainly does not place ancient Egypt in an "African" much less "Black" context. I will explore whether there would seem to be reason to do so, despite statements such as Charles Aling's in Egypt and the Bible, "The Egyptians must first be considered part of the Near East rather than part of Africa."

Modern Egypt has been part of the Arab/Muslim world, and practically at the heart of it, for over 1,000 years; so there is a tendency to think of the ancient Egyptians looking as they do today. But from a historical perspective, the Muslim domination is only the latest and longest lasting of a series of colonizations beginning in antiquity (Hyksos, Persians, Assyrians, Greeks, Romans, Christians, Turks and Europeans). We can safely assume that this has changed the face of Egypt.

Everyone agrees that the two ancient Egyptian Kingdoms were unified c.3,200 B.C. From the south (upper Egypt) by the first pharaoh Menes (Narmer), said to have come from Abydos. Everyone also agrees that the further south one goes in Egypt, the darker skinned the Egyptians become (even today, 5,000 years of mixing later). Gardiner calls it, "the first nome of Upper Egypt, and where the population was no doubt partly of Nubian race." This is due to a disarmingly simple and yet largely ignored fact: that Egypt is on the African continent.

In most contexts, there exists a deep separation between Africa and Egypt. Museums, books, travel agencies and brochures all share in this geographical confusion, ultimately taking its toll in one's mind. Throughout my search for ancient Egypt, this separation of Egypt and Africa was confirmed again and again. Some people actually told me, as if to clear up my confusion, "Egypt is not in Africa!"

Egypt is usually grouped with countries we call the Middle or Near East. I can make this assertion without fear of contradiction. Although everywhere I hear that Egypt is a part of the East,

hardly anywhere am I told it is part of Africa, a fact easily verified by a quick glance at any map.

Admittedly, Egypt is The African country closest to the Middle East, and it shares most of its modern culture with its eastern neighbors; but it is in Africa still. Morocco shares as much as Egypt with the East, but no one would pretend to place it there. Furthermore, the Nile originates deep in Ethiopia and Uganda which provides a connection to "Black Africa" that Morocco does not have. Logically, it should come as no surprise to anyone that the inhabitants of Egypt are (and were) Black. I shall now examine the evidence.

The well know French Egyptologist and writer Gaston Maspero admitted that "By the almost unanimous testimony of ancient historians, they [The Egyptians] belonged to an African race that first settled in Ethiopia, on the Middle Nile." We still possess whole, ancient, eye-witness testimonies about who the Egyptians were, which are now mostly ignored or written-off when the question arises.

The famous Greek world-traveler Herodotus of Halicarnassus (484-430 B.C.), hailed as the "father of history", who visited Egypt in the 5th century (already the decline of Egypt) had something to say which may enlighten us today. In his *Histories*, he says of the Egyptians, "they are black skinned and have woolly hair"...and later, "it is certain that the natives of the country are black with the heat." Sir A.H. Gardiner, though he does not mention these particular quotes, says of Herodotus: "In truth there is no reason to impugn his good faith."

The ancient geographer Diodorus of Sicily (1st century B.C.) wrote that he believed the ancient Egyptians to be descended from the Ethiopians. It must be remembered that what the ancients called Ethiopia included modern day Sudan. This posed no contradiction to his mind, as it may have, had the Egyptians been a distinct group. Similarly, Strabo (late 1st century B.C.) had no dilemma asserting that "Egyptians settled Ethiopia and Colchis (below Nubia)." The impact of these testimonies magnifies when one takes into account the fact that Egypt was unified from the south. Rice says "it was from the south that the most enduring influences in Egyptian society came and without doubt most of its greatest leaders were southerners too."

Furthermore, it seems that the very question, "who were the ancient Egyptians?" was not only not controversial in antiquity, but it was accepted as a self-evident truth that Egyptians were

"Black Africans." This fact was not then incompatible with later racist ideas that Africans are savages, incapable of creating and maintaining "civilization." These racist ideas fueled colonialism and slavery in the 16-20th centuries, and they were themselves, as the poet Aime Cesaire said, a "European invention".

The turn of the century French archaeologist and professor of history of Religions Amelineau (and one of the first excavators in Egypt) wrote: "Egyptian civilization is not of Asiatic, but of African origin, of negroid origin, however paradoxical this may seem. We are not accustomed, in fact, to endow the black or related races with too much intelligence, or even with enough intelligence to make the first discoveries necessary for civilization." This was a rare acknowledgement by an archaeologist with a not so rare attitude.

Furthermore, ancient Egyptians actually called their land "Kemi(t)," meaning "black." This has usually been accepted to mean "the black land." For example, Rice: "Blackness was so much a part of the image of Egypt that it was called Kemi, the black land."

To my mind, Egypt is either beige (desert) or green (crops); it was only black following the yearly flood (mud). Cheikh Anta Diop, to my knowledge the only African Egyptologist outside Egypt asserted: "The interpretation according to which Kemit designates the black soil of Egypt, rather than the Black man and the country of the Blacks, stems from a gratuitous distortion by minds aware of what an exact interpretation of this word would imply."

There are still other factors which bear on the question of who the designers of the society born along the Nile were. Let us therefore consider archaeology, because much of what has been uncovered in Egypt speaks of Africa.

The mummies, which are rarely shown to the public (except for one room in the Cairo Museum with ten mummies in it), show many clear examples of Black African people. We must bear in mind that to be mummified signified importance - from noble to pharaoh. Even the concepts giving impetus to the practice of mummification (like life after death), speak to us of Africa. Ian Portman says, "these themes were elaborated by the Egyptians with subtlety and passion from ancestral ideas about fertility and death common throughout black Africa."



The mummy of Tutankhamen. 18th Dynasty, c. 1,339 B.C.

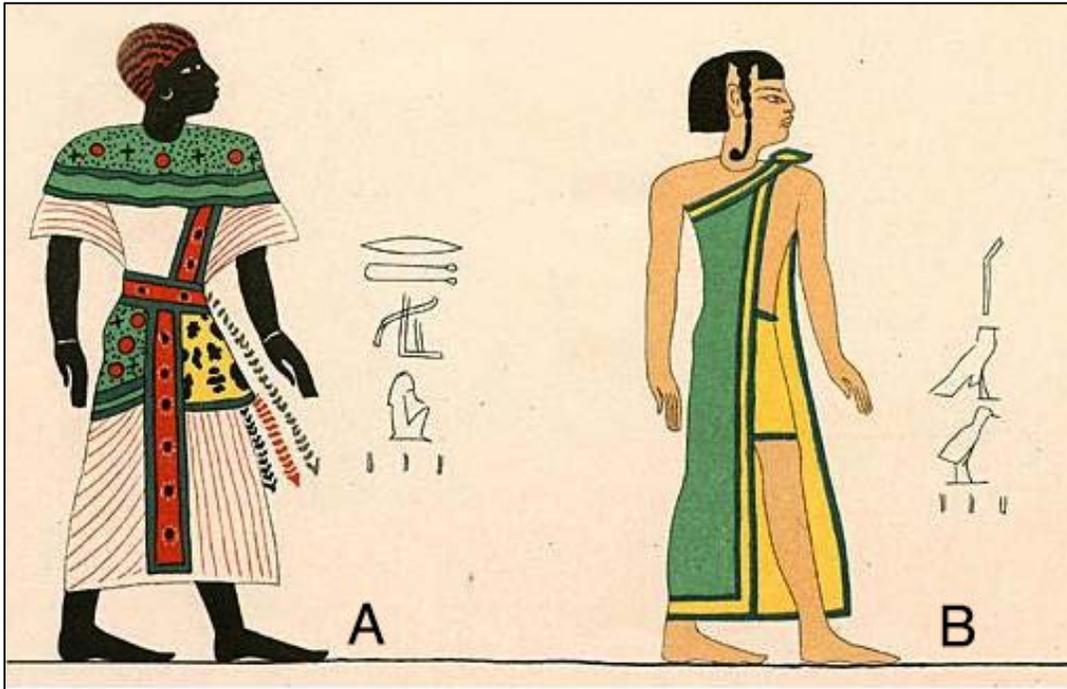
The first archaeologically attested foreign group to enter Egypt was the "Hyksos" (which means "foreign chieftains"). They are widely acknowledged to have been "Asiatics," meaning simply, originating in the East. This incursion did not take place until the "Second Intermediate Period" (between the Middle + New Kingdoms, c. 1700-1550 B.C.), that is to say relatively late in Egyptian history. Mummification stretches back to the very beginnings of historical Egypt.

The jewelry with which the ancient Egyptians adorned their bodies bears an unmistakably African stamp. The most obvious example is their use of the "cowrie" shells, still used in African and African-American jewelry. And what is known as "Totemism" was clearly a part of the ancient Egyptian religion. There were various animal deities, a common practice among African religions; for example, the Falcon Horus, the jackal Anubis, the cat Bastet, the Apis Bull, the crocodile Sobek, the Scarab and the fantastic Seth.

For a more recent and direct approach, however, let us consider the renowned Frenchman Jean Francois Champollion. He has been called "the founder of Egyptology" for his excellent visual and linguistic capabilities which enabled him to decipher the ancient hieroglyphics once and for all in 1822, and is one of the most widely respected figures in the field. In a letter to his brother about some curious figures in the tomb of Sesostris I (the conquering 12th dynasty pharaoh, c. 1970 B.C.), he wrote:

"They had tried to represent here the inhabitants of the four corners of the earth, according to the Egyptian System, namely: 1. (the one closest to the God Horus) the inhabitants of Egypt; 2. The inhabitants of Africa proper; 3. Asians; 4. Finally (and I am ashamed to say so, since our race is the last and most savage in the series), Europeans who, in those remote epochs, frankly did not cut too fine a figure in the world... on the other tombs, the same generic names reappear, always in the same order. We find there Egyptians and Africans represented in the same way, which could not be otherwise."

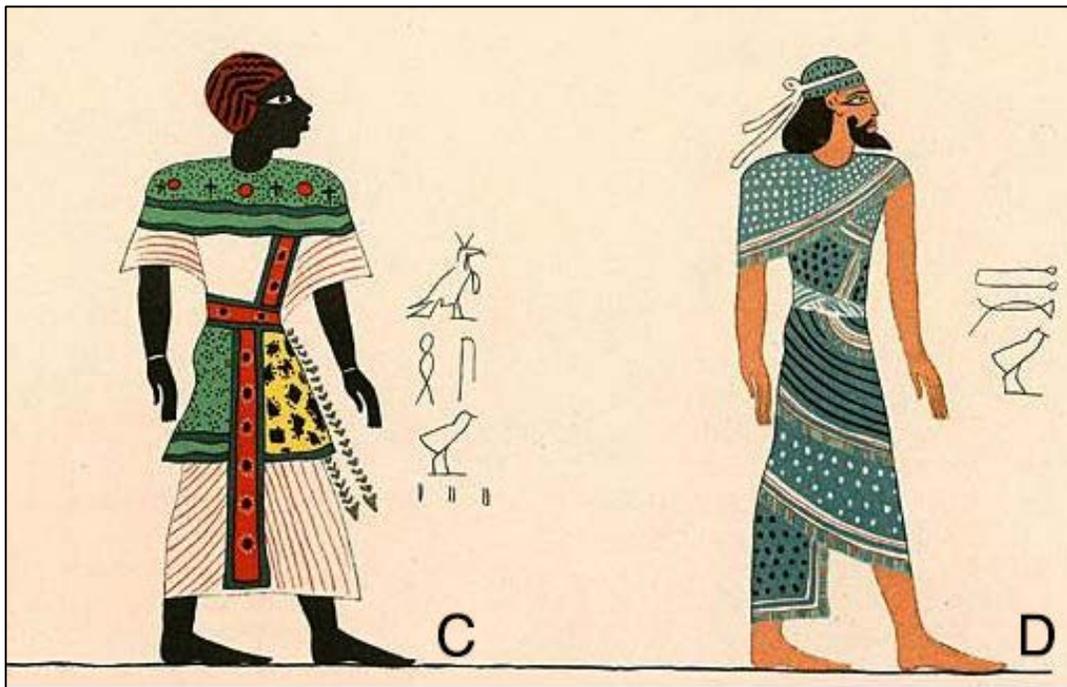
Needless to say, these particular images (or the reproductions Champollion had made) are not available on posters or postcards in Egypt, and the tomb of Sesostris I is closed to the public.



From the tomb of Ramses III, c. 1,200 B.C.; Luxor

- A: "Remetou": Egyptians
- B: "Temehou": Libyens (Indo-Europeans?)
- C: "Nehesiu": Nubians (Africans)
- D: "Amou": Semites

Egyptians and Nubians are depicted almost identically (A and C)



Finally, in regards to the identity of the ancient Egyptians, I will now consider language. It is only very recently that linguistics has begun to take a role comparable to that of archaeology, but it seems logical and inevitable because the study of the relationships between languages and where they are found in the world offers important clues about the history of the peoples who spoke those languages. Linguistics provides evidence of migrations (through the cultural spread of a language), contacts and influence between peoples (through "borrowed" words and concepts), as well as of origins (through genetic relationships between languages). For example, the relationship between French and Spanish is not the result of "borrowing," but of a genetic relationship which can easily be traced back to Latin.

It is often heard that the ancient Egyptian language is a mystery to us - that we have no idea about how it sounded. This idea was dispelled when I read "Nouvelles Recherches sur L'Egyptien Ancien et les Langues Negro-Africaines Modernes," a book relating ancient Egyptian to modern West African languages by Cheikh Anta Diop. Here I saw for myself an amazing wealth of similarities - and even perfect correspondences - between grammatical structures, which are rarely "borrowed", in ancient Egyptian and Wolof, Peul, Tuglor (Senegal), and other West African languages. For example, Wolof and ancient Egyptian share the expression of the past tense, the same suffixal conjugation, most identical pronouns, the same demonstrative, passive voice, and more; the list goes on and on including much identical vocabulary.

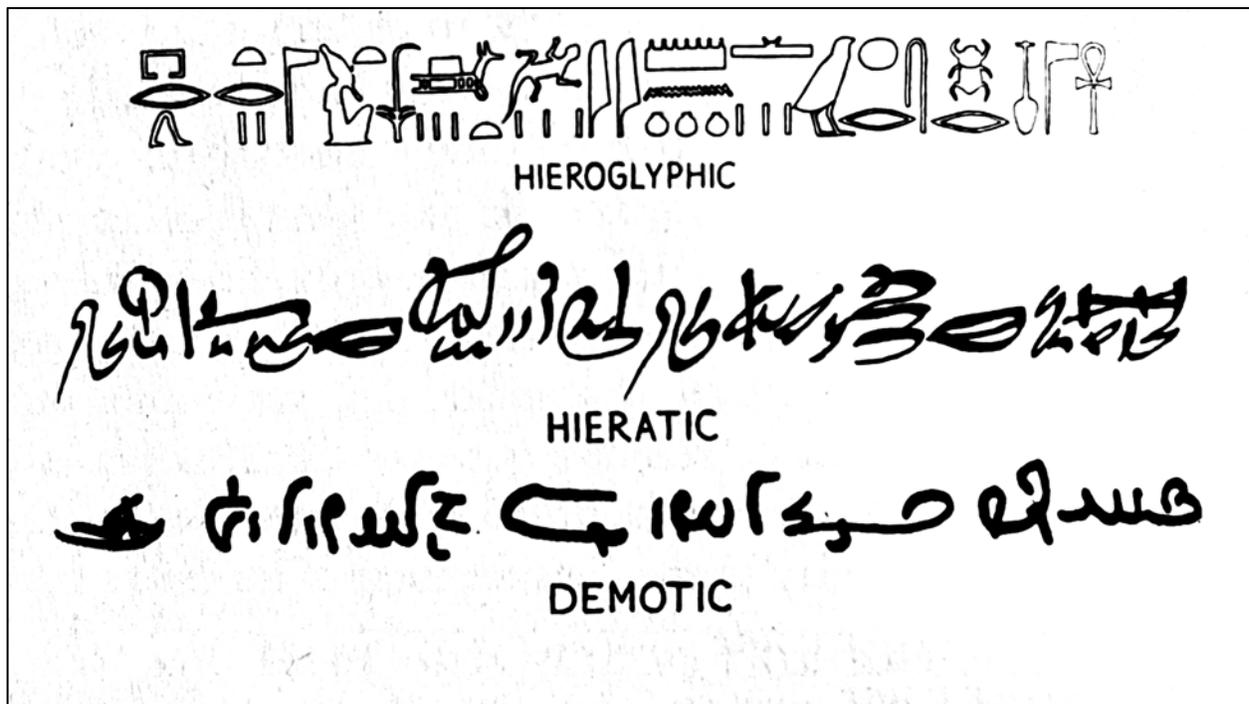
It is utterly impossible to ascribe such similarities to coincidence. This is a strong suggestion of a genetic relationship between ancient Egypt and Black Africa; just as French and Spanish have a common ancestor, ancient Egyptian and Wolof must as well. Furthermore, I know of no studies of the Nubian language in the south of Egypt, but it presumably shares much with the old Egyptian language as well.

Furthermore, the ancient language spoken and written by the Egyptians has enjoyed a far-ranging influence. Though hieroglyphics are often presented as being a muddled and hopelessly complex representation of language, they are actually a learnable language capable of expressing anything. It is actually easier to learn than Chinese (which has no alphabet).

The ancient Egyptian language was alive and evolving for an incredible stretch of time. There were three forms of the hieroglyphic script (corresponding to the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms), which eventually were used exclusively for religious

and ritual purposes. Most Egyptians who wrote did so using a language derived from hieroglyphics (Hieratic). Then came the move simplified Demotic, and finally Coptic (which is written using Greek and a few Demotic characters and is still alive in the Egyptian Coptic church). Consider the changes in the English language from the time of Shakespeare to modern times (300 years) for a useful comparison about how much a language can evolve over thousands of years.

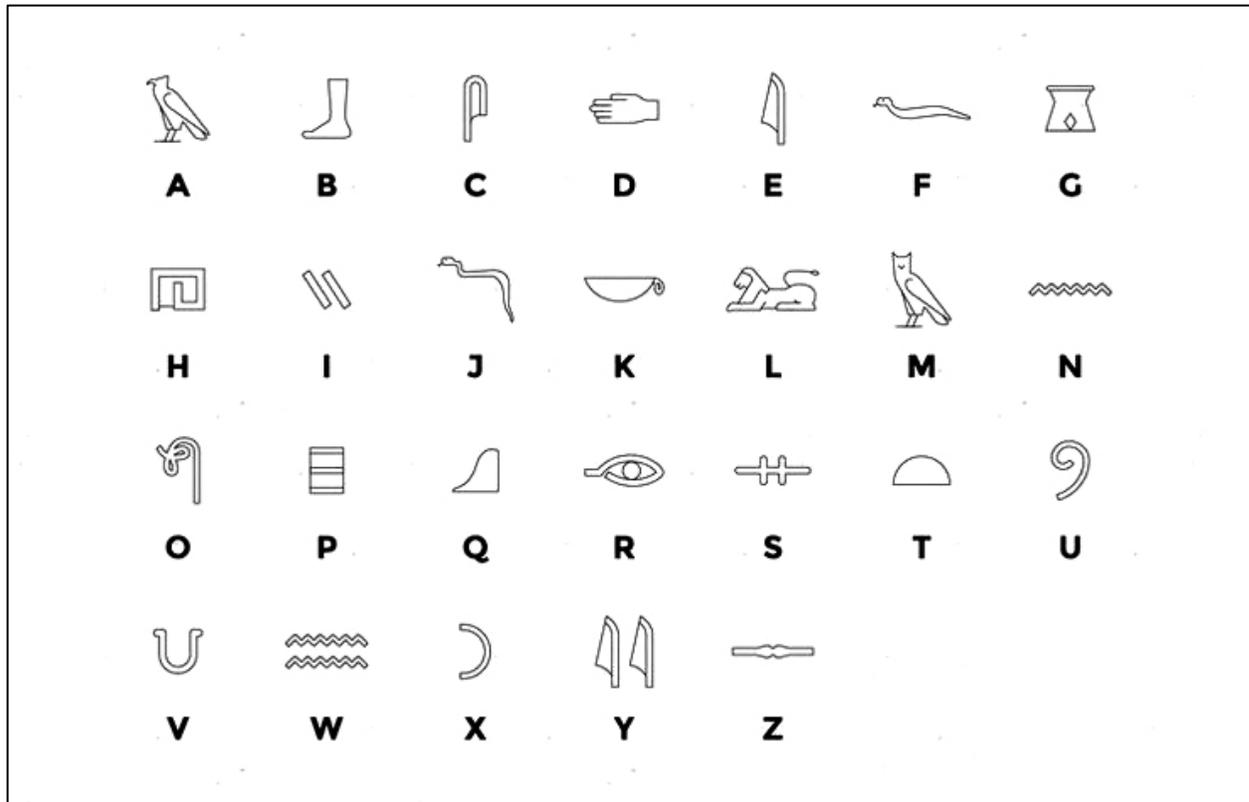
Ancient Egyptian and the languages derived from it were all written from right to left, generally omitting the spoken vowels; hieratic and Demotic look similar to modern Arabic. And it is no coincidence that Arabic and Hebrew are both written from right to left, omitting vowels; not to mention Amharic (spoken in Ethiopia), Tigrinya (in Eritrea) and the now extinct Akkadian and Phoenician. These languages were all born in areas under Egyptian domination in antiquity.



The evolution of the three ancient Egyptian scripts

I mentioned above that Bernal found 20-25% plausible etymologies of ancient Greek from ancient Egyptian; there are also many accepted Egyptian loan words into Greek which have no Indo-European roots. Although we generally learn that the alphabet began in the "Fertile Crescent" (present day Iraq), it is clear to me that the alphabet was also "invented" in Egypt. In "Histoire Des Nos Ecritures," Louis Chabot correctly states, with a little

lack of respect that, "in total, the hieroglyphics contain 24 alphabetic signs, corresponding to 22 spoken articulations: the Egyptians therefore, without knowing it, invented a complete alphabet of their consonants."



The hieroglyphic alphabet

No one can claim to have proof of priority between the Egyptian and Mesopotamian alphabet because they developed simultaneously, or practically so, at a time when we cannot have exact dates. Yet the priority is always attributed to Mesopotamia.

Mr. Rice, writing in 1990: "The culture which grew and flourished in the Nile Valley was wholly autochthonous. It grew out of the lives and preoccupations of the cattle rearing African peoples (black Africans, it must certainly be acknowledged) who were the true ancestors of the pharaohs in all their majesty and power." Rice's book, *Egypt's Making* is a double study of Egypt and the Middle East from 5,000-2,000 B.C. He uses all of the latest information available, and can hardly be accused of Afro-centrism (as has been done to scholars such as Cheikh Anta Diop).



The lasting power of Egyptian symbols as exemplified by the U.S. dollar bill

PART II: What sort of influence did they wield?

Egypt was the center of the world for thousands of years - the center of knowledge and culture. Even the Bible speaks of the "Wisdom of Egypt." The ancient world had boundless respect for Egypt. Flooded with mystery, many aspects of the society were exclusive and secret even to the Egyptians themselves. Hegel said, "Egypt at that time was regarded as a highly cultured country, and it was so when compared with Greece."

Many modern practices have their beginnings documented in Egypt; for example, medicine (and especially herbal medicine). The first bakery was in ancient Egypt. And although one may learn otherwise, even in books with titles such as "History of Philosophy," which often ignore Egypt, philosophy has its roots in Egypt. This fact was no mystery to the ancient Greeks, whom we tend to credit with the innovation. Writing in Busiris c.390 B.C., Isokrates says "on a visit to Egypt he [Pythagoras] became a student of the religion of the people, and was the first to bring to the Greeks all philosophy." Because of its reputation, many philosophers and

mathematicians wanted to spend time in Egypt. In fact, according to the ancients themselves, many Greeks studied in Egypt.

Diop says that "Pythagoras, Thales, Solon, Archimedes and Eratosthenes, among others, were trained in Egypt. Egypt was indeed the classic land where two thirds of the Greek scholars went to study." Even lawmakers like Lykourgos were said to have studied in Egypt. This should not surprise us any more than an American art student going to study in Paris in 1995. Pythagoras spent from 16 to 22 years among the monks in Egypt thousands of years after the pyramids were built, yet we acknowledge his "Pythagorean Theorem" of the angles of a triangle ($A^5 = B^5 + C^5$) without acknowledging its Egyptian roots.

According to A. Slosman, in *The Extraordinary Life of Pythagoras*, his very name comes from Egyptian: PTAH-GO-RA = who knows God (PTAH) and the sun (RA). Pythagoras returned to Greece to form the "Pythagorean brotherhood," famous for its mysticism (based on the Egyptian priesthood). Hegel, in the same lecture above, said, "From Egypt Pythagoras thus without doubt brought the idea of his order..." This fits with what Bernal calls "the consistent ancient tradition of a superior mathematics" in Egypt.

Even Plato studied in Egypt in the late 4th century B.C. In *Phaidros*, Plato has Socrates declare that "Thoth (The Egyptian god of wisdom) it was who invented numbers and arithmetic and geometry....and most important of all letters."

Many of Plato's contemporaries considered his Republic to be simply a rehashing of Egyptian society, and Krantor, a few generations later said they mocked Plato about it. Karl Marx said, "Plato's Republic, in so far as division of labor is treated in it, as the formative principle of the state, is merely an Athenian idealization of the Egyptian system of castes."

Mathematics as well was largely developed by the ancient Egyptians. Aristotle said "in Egypt mathematical sciences first commenced, for there the nation of priests had leisure." Of course, the most direct and indisputable testament of the Egyptian mathematical prowess are the pyramids. Even aesthetically, being derived from the earlier step-pyramids, they are beautiful symbolic "stairways to heaven."

The lesser-known enormous columns, imitating wrapped papyrus and lotus plants, are the ancestors of the Greek Doric and Ionic columns. Proto-Doric columns are found in the cliff tombs of Beni-Hasan, Egypt, and elsewhere as well.

This is no secret to serious architecture students at distinguished institutions such as The Cooper Union, but many tourists come to Egypt and are surprised, ironically, that the columns "look Greek." These architectural inventions are as impressive for their use of mathematics and engineering as for their originality and power.

Not surprisingly, other elements of ancient Egyptian aesthetics are still present today. Egyptian symbols are everywhere, used both directly and indirectly. Anyone familiar with these symbols can corroborate. The Ankh, for example, a "T" with an oval on top, symbolizes the breath of life and life everlasting - it is still seen around many a neck. Rice says "the early Egyptians had a genius, never remotely approached by any other ancient society, for devising symbols which instantly encapsulate complex and diverse concepts."

A major and often neglected way in which the ancient Egyptians have influenced the modern world is through religion. Though we tend to hold their ancient pantheon of gods as a pagan cult, long extinct, some basic concepts and components of the Greek pantheon, Judaism, and Christianity came directly from Egypt.

The Greeks themselves, with Herodotus at the forefront, believed that their religion was derived from the Egyptian one, which seemed to them to have existed since the beginning of time. When Gardiner describes the first Greek travelers in Egypt, he says, "the queerest fancy of the Ionian visitors was that the gods and goddesses worshipped by the Egyptians were none other than their own deities." Gardiner also points out that Herodotus was "obsessed by the idea that the Hellenes derived from Egypt, not only many of their religious observances, but also the gods themselves."

Many modern scholars attribute this "obsession" to some flaw in the usually-respected writers mind, as opposed to assuming truth in it. One often comes upon lists showing the names of the Greek gods and their Roman equivalents, but I could not, try as I might, find a single list which included Egyptian gods. I had no recourse but to compile the following list myself from various sources:

EGYPT - GREECE - ROME

AMEN-RA - ZEUS - JUPITER
NEITH - ATHENA - MINERVA
PTAH - HEPHAISTOS - VULCAN
OSIRIS - DIONYSOS/HADES - DIONYSOS/SATURN
HORUS - APOLLO - APOLLO/PHOEBUS
THOTH - HERMES - MERCURY
BASTET - ARTEMIS - DIANE
ISIS/HATHOR - APHRODITE - VENUS

Isis, according to the *Lonely Planet Guide to Egypt*, "was worshipped so passionately that she became identified with all the goddesses of the Mediterranean, finally absorbing them to become the universal mother of nature and protector of humans."

Herodotus stated: "Almost all the names of the gods came into Greece from Egypt... my inquiries prove that they were all derived from a foreign source, and my opinion is that Egypt furnished the greater number."

I stress that it was the Greeks themselves who acknowledged the Egyptian influences on their culture. Even if Egyptologists, anthropologists, sociologists, theologians dispute the identity and influence of ancient Egypt, one must acknowledge that the ancient Greeks never disputed it. The fact that numerous Greeks overlooked their antipathies towards ancient Egyptians and other non-Greeks, and kept these traditions of their origins alive in the face of their own national prejudice, prompted the 18th century historian W. Mitford to state: "for their essential circumstances they seem unquestionable."

Furthermore, there is always more evidence of the ancient traditions coming to light. To illustrate this point, I will again use my *Lonely Planet Guidebook*, whose only agenda is to facilitate one's travels, "until 1851, the existence of the sacred Apis tombs was known only from classical references. Having found a half-buried sphinx at Saqqara and following the description given by the Greek historian Strabo in 24 B.C., the French archaeologist Auguste Mariette began digging, and uncovered the avenue of sphinxes leading to the Serapeum [which also existed]."

Despite the fact that so much of what the ancient Greeks asserted has been proven true, modern scholars hold in contempt Greek ideas which contradict their own.

I will now offer some examples of strong links binding Greek "mythology" to Egyptian history. Herodotus wrote of a great labyrinth in Egypt which greatly impressed him. Having visited some, I know one could no doubt describe the elaborate plans inside tombs or pyramids as labyrinths. Also, in Greek myth there was a labyrinth which contained a "minotaur" - a bull-like animal - on the island of Crete, while in Egypt there was a much older cult of sacred bulls, known as the Apis bulls, which included their mummification and entombment.

In another example of these linkages, the King of Crete was known as King Minos, while the first king of united Egypt was named Menes. Even Gardiner states that "there must have been some contact with Crete, because the Minoan culture betrays unmistakable signs of Egyptian influence."

More concretely, in the Greek myths themselves there are cities which were actually founded by Egyptians (such as Danaos) and by Phoenicians (like King Kadmos). In fact, in part of the Oedipus cycle we learn that "Kadmos was one of the three sons of Agenor, King of Tyr, city on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean."

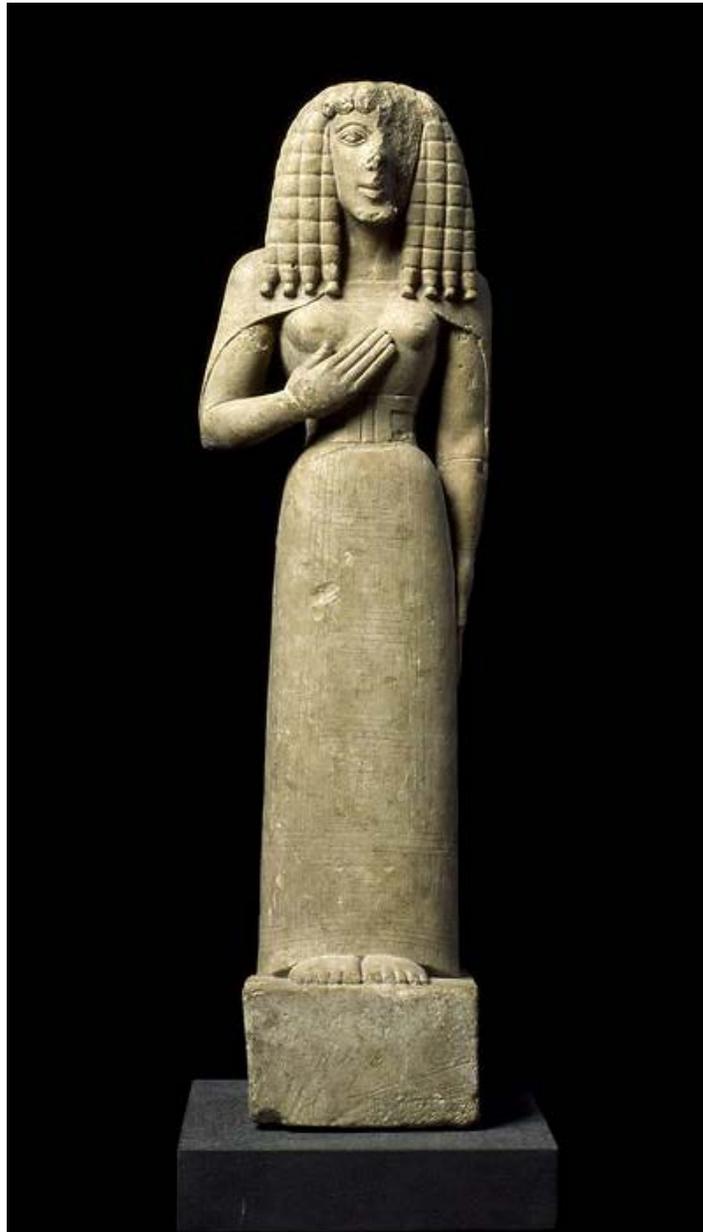
Thucydides, the 5th century B.C. Greek historian, referred to 'Phoenician' Settlements on the Greek islands and all around Sicily. Now it should be borne in mind whenever one speaks of Phoenicians, the expert navigators and peaceful merchants who dominated the coasts of the Mediterranean in antiquity, that they were colonized by Egypt from the 16th to the 13th centuries B.C. When the Greeks spoke of the Egyptians and Phoenicians frequenting their island and founding cities, they did so as history, not as myth.

Archaeology, which, for instance, finds Egyptian objects at every level on Crete, confirms this. The further back in time one goes in Greece, the closer one gets to Egypt. On the west bank of ancient Thebes (Luxor), in the Tomb of Rekhmire, an 18th dynasty governor under Thutmosis III (who is known as "the Napoleon of Antiquity" for his imperialistic activities), one finds (according to my guide) "in the first chamber, to the extreme left, are scenes of Rekhmire receiving gifts from foreign lands. The panther and giraffe are gifts from Nubia; the elephant, horses and chariot came from Syria; and the expensive vases come from Crete and the Aegean islands."

What one learns of ancient Greeks usually begins c. 500 B.C., or at most c. 700 B.C. with the first Olympic games; but what was happening there during the thousands of years before, while Egypt

was busy creating culture and colonizing the countries around them? Diodorus Siculus gave a "record of Egyptian colonies in Babylonia, Colchis and Greece."

Jill Kamil, writing in *Upper Egypt* says "Egyptian influence spread to Libya, Crete, Palestine, Syria, and southward to Nubia." Many scholars accept Egyptian colonization on Crete but reject the idea on mainland Greece. This does not seem logical considering the distances involved; if they reached Crete, the Egyptian boats would have likely also reached the mainland.

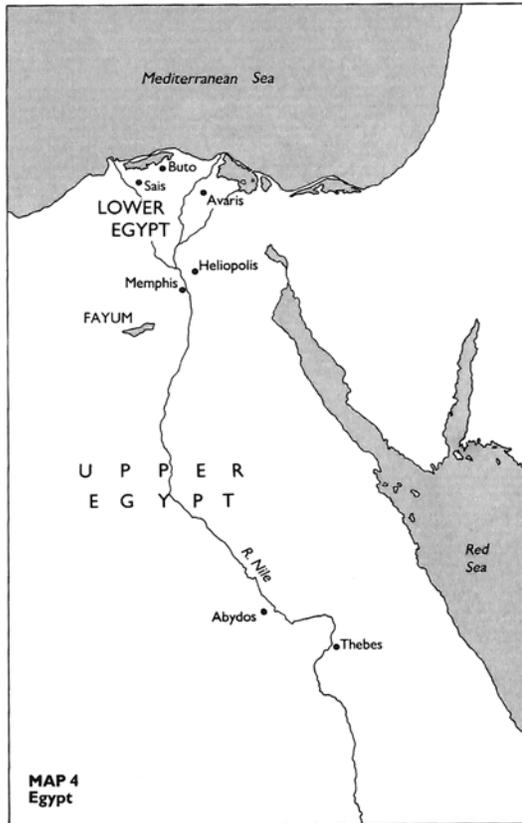


Cretan art with Egyptian influence: *Femme Debout*, 640-630 B.C.; Louvre



Cretan art with Egyptian influence: *Dionysermos*, 530-520 B.C.; Louvre

Sextus Julius Africanus, the early Christian writer (early 3rd century A.D.) who transmitted important information about the chronology of ancient Egypt said of the 12th dynasty ruler (c. 2000 B.C.): "Sesostris, for 48 years: in 9 years he subdued the whole of Asia and Europe as far as Thrace." Unsurprisingly Enough, later scholarship has characterized this finding as "unhistorical."



The Hebrews were a small group when they began their sojourn in Egypt, which lasted 400 years, but were quite a numerous group when they left. The exact dates of their entry and exodus are disputed, but according to the most probable and accepted chronology, they entered at about the same time as the Hyksos, c. 1700 B.C. The Hyksos, 'foreign chieftains', installed themselves at the delta and ruled lower Egypt as pharaohs. Kamil says "when divided, the delta, lower Egypt, was open to diverse foreign influences, while it was in upper Egypt, and in neighboring Nubia, that the traditional spirit of ancient Egypt survived.

Simply from the length of their sojourn, one can deduce that the Hebrews were influenced by their mighty host nation. However, there are examples of how this influenced the Hebrew language as

well as the rite of circumcision. Circumcision was practiced by many African civilizations including Egypt, and the Egyptians had more mercy for circumcised enemies.

At this point, some detailed Egyptian history is essential. During the famous and well-documented period known as the 18th dynasty, Pharaoh Amenophis IV and his wife Nefertiti, the most famous couple in Egyptian history save for Anthony and Cleopatra, challenged the religious status quo - the politically powerful priests of Amen in Thebes - and attempted to revolutionize the ancient religion (c. 1360 B.C.). For this he is known as the "heretic pharaoh." Anenophis was trying to achieve a basic shift away from the Egyptian pantheon and towards a monotheistic view of the sun god "RA," manifested in the visible sun-disc "Aten". He changed his own name to Akhenaten to symbolize his mission, and he stretched the accepted aesthetic canon by the way in which he had himself and his family represented.

Gardiner says, "Atenism was a genuine monotheism." Akhenaten founded a new capital, Atkhetaten, now known as Tell-el-Amarna, where the new monotheism was officialized. This of course infuriated the old order, as the priests had much to lose under the new heresy; so they resisted and eventually crushed the revolution and the new city with it.

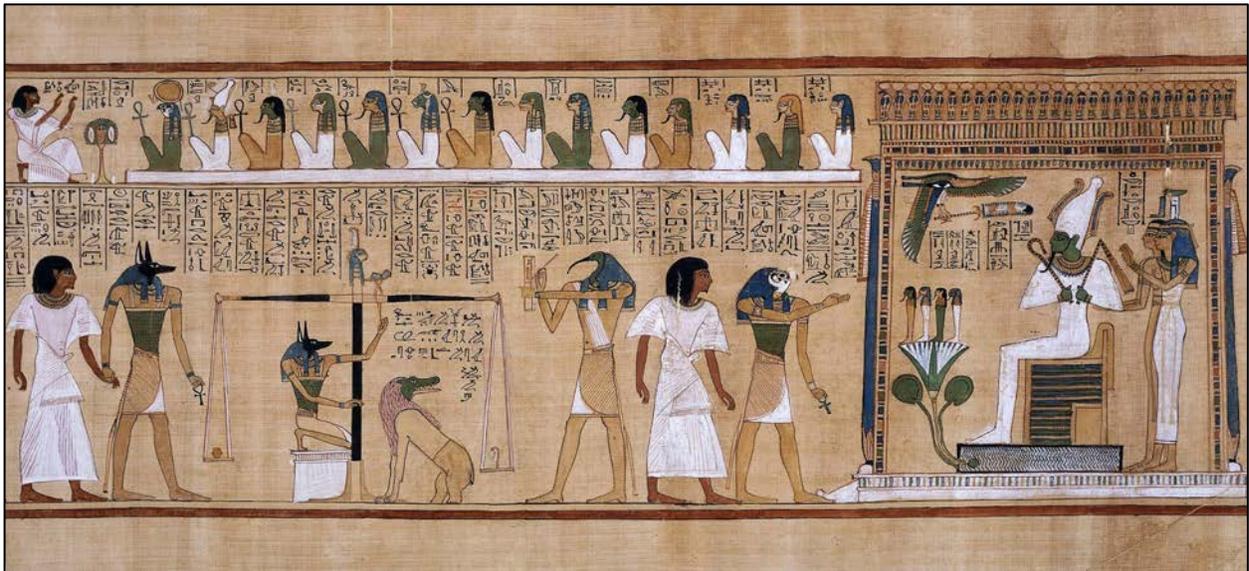
As part of this stamping out of the heresy and reinstallation of the old order, the young Pharaoh Tutankhaten was forced to change his name to Tutankhamen ("King Tut," famous for being the only pharaoh whose tomb had not been looted before archaeologists arrived). This story is relevant to the question of influence on the Hebrews because Moses probably lived in Egypt at the time of this religious revolution and counter-revolution. What impact did Akhenaten's ideas have on Moses and the Hebrews? This is, of course, a matter of speculation, but it is clear that Atenism is the historical beginning of documented monotheism in the world.

Not only was Moses born and raised in Egypt, but according to the Bible, Jesus himself grew up in Egypt. Therefore, the infancy of the Jewish nation as well as Moses' and Jesus' childhoods took place in ancient Egypt. To illustrate the importance of Egypt to the ancient Hebrews, the name "Egypt" appears 680 times in The Bible. Yet, in all ancient Egyptian documents the name "Israel" appears but once, on a stela erected c. 1218 B.C. by Merneptah (the 19th dynasty successor of Ramses II), in a list of his conquests. It says: "Israel is laid waste, his seed is not."

Not only was the earliest monotheism in ancient Egypt, but also the first holy trinity: Osiris, Isis and their son Horus (the father, the mother, and the son). This paradigm was extended to other gods as well; for example, Amen, Mut and Khons, or Chnum, Anukis, and Satis. This component was transmitted to early Christians who turned it into "the father, the son and the holy spirit."

The influence of Egypt on early Christianity is a subject where much work remains to be done but the very beginnings of Christianity took place in Egypt and many of the first people to embrace the new faith were Egyptians.

Furthermore, Osiris, the god who is murdered and then resurrected to peacefully spread civilization, is a figure irresistibly identifiable with Christ. In the ancient Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, as well as in numerous tales and depictions throughout ancient Egypt, the deceased tell of their acts before the tribunal and the god Osiris, in "the moment which the evildoer feared but the good man welcomed with joy." There are judges who watch as the soul is weighed on a balance against truth, which is represented by the feather, "Maat", either to grant that to the good man "the eternal bread of Osiris be given to him, and a place in the fields of peace with the followers of Horus," or to send the evildoer "into the thick darkness of the Duat to dwell with Apophis the terrible in the Pits of Fire."



The Osiris judgment scene: from the left, Anubis leads the deceased; the weighing of the soul against the feather of truth; Ibis-headed god of wisdom Thoth takes note of the outcome for Osiris who sits enthroned.

Diop sums it up nicely: "Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, later religions, have taken the dogma of the last judgment from this text." To conclude from this set of circumstances that Egypt was an important factor in the development of the ideas and mythology of these later religions would not be an exaggeration. Kamil says, "Apart from the religious belief in the concept of the soul, an afterlife, resurrection and judgement, religious ritual provides the most clear examples of continuity: sacrificing animals, use of incense, purification with water and pilgrimages."

Religion aside, I will offer one more example of the far-ranging ancient Egyptian influence. In 1982, off the Uluburun peninsula of southern Turkey, 50 meters below the Mediterranean's surface, a Canaanite (Phoenician) vessel was found. It was subsequently excavated for 11 years due to the difficulty of an "underwater dig". It was determined that the vessel was lost 3,313 years ago. Stacey Perman, in "Underwater Treasure" says: "one of the smallest items was also the most intriguing: a button-size gold scarab inscribed with the name of the Egyptian Queen Nefertiti in a form that suggests she may have had greater power than was previously thought." Amen.

Even saying "Amen" after prayers in both Christianity and Judaism evidently comes directly from the Egyptian "King of the Gods." In the Webster's New World Dictionary, the Etymology of "Amen" is "Latin, from the Greek, from the Hebrew." Although the dictionary stops there, it is clear to me that the Hebrew "Amen" comes from the Egyptian.



Queen Tiye, 18th Dynasty, c. 1,370 B.C. (wife of Amenhotep III, mother of Akhenaten, grandmother of Tutankhamen); Egyptian Museum, Berlin, Germany

PART III: The rewriting of I and II.

Now that we have considered who exactly the ancient Egyptians were, and gotten a taste of their immense influence to this day, I would like to explore the reason why the learning on the subject (especially in school) is vague and wanting, why there is a reluctance to credit their accomplishments, and why we are taught to separate Egyptians from the rest of Africa.

One of the only things I remember learning about the ancient Egyptians as a child was that "they had no sense of perspective." This clearly shows a sad state of affairs.

Theodore Mommsen, the great 19th century historian of Rome is reported to have written: "History must first make a clean sweep of all these fables which, though purporting to be history, are little more than improvisations."

It is obvious that accepted history in antiquity was very different from today's since Herodotus wrote: "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 touched upon."

It is very difficult to ignore, dismiss or revise ancient testimony such as this, and yet this is exactly what modern historians writing about Egypt have done. One such scholar, Karl Otfried Muller, a professor at the famous Gottingen Institution which produced so many racist intellectuals (some of whose theories later influenced the Nazis), consistently discredited ancient works. The most basic reason for this new trend arising in historiography in the 19th century was the so-called "scientific" racism.

This may have been the most intensely racist century in world history: European countries competed with each other to dominate the dark-skinned world, with its riches; there were millions of Black slaves working for white profit-driven capitalists who thought them inferior; Colonialism was at its peak - practically the whole world was actually owned by Europe; The "Indians" of the Americas were being systematically eliminated, and there were "scientific" theories about the supposed inferiority and corrupt nature of the "Black and related races."

These racist theories were presumably invented to justify the inhuman policies and practices institutionalized by supposedly

"good Christians" (Europeans). Bernal sees a "connection between the dismissal of the Egyptians and the explosion of northern European racism in the 19th century."

All this came from the same Europe that was inventing "Egyptology" and writing history books to be used in schools all over the world; books which taught West African children about "our ancestors the Gauls", for instance.

It must be remembered that modern Egyptology is barely 200 years old, since Napoleon's "scientific" expedition to Egypt was in 1798, and the hieroglyphic script was finally deciphered in 1822. And Egyptology is dominated by Europeans and Americans to this day.

It would be ludicrous to suppose even for a moment that this general and respectable racist atmosphere did not permeate the educational sphere.

Yet, there is ample evidence to show that the previously accepted history of the relationship between Egypt and Greece was subsequently revised to fit "modern" assumptions. Bernal writes: the paradigm of 'races' that were intrinsically unequal in physical and mental endowment was applied to all human studies, but especially to history."

After all, colonial Europe could not speak of the inability of Blacks to create and practice "civilization" on the one hand, while teaching about the first great African civilization on the other.

Bernal makes the point emphatically, "Imperialism being what it is, it became increasingly 'inadmissible' to continue to accept the theory - evident until then - of a negro Egypt." He adds: "In the first place, the perception of the early Egyptians in the late 18th century and early 19th century was as negro - see, for instance, the famous representations of the sphinx being measured by French scientists of the expedition (1798)."

He continues, "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?"

European scholars dealt with the logical inconsistency of their position in two ways. The first was to imply that the ancient Egyptians in fact did not possess such a great civilization at

all, down-playing the greatness attributed to it in antiquity (and apparent to this day). The second was to deny that ancient Egypt was actually an African civilization. Eventually, both tactics were used.

An example of the first solution is found in Sir E. Alfred Wallis Budge, one of the most famous and still widely-read English Egyptologists who wrote in 1904: "The Egyptians being fundamentally an African people, possessed all the virtues and vices which characterized the North African races generally, and it is not to be held for a moment that any African people could become metaphysicians in the modern sense of the word... to say nothing of the ideas of the great Greek philosopher, which belong to a domain of thought and culture wholly foreign to the Egyptian."

An example of the second solution is found in the writing of Champollion's brother, Champollion-Figeac, in 1839:

"The opinion that the ancient population of Egypt belonged to the negro African race is an error long accepted as truth...Herodotus recalls that the Egyptians had black skin and woolly hair. Yet these two physical qualities do not suffice to characterize the negro race."

Responding, Diop says, "Lo and behold! It is no longer enough to be black from head to foot and to have woolly hair to be a negro!... It is at the price of such alterations in basic definitions that it has been possible to whiten the Egyptian."

In another example of the second solution, but in our day, the Berlin Egyptian Museum justifies their black mummy thus: "The black color of the flesh is indicative of the use of bitumen in the mummification process." In fact, most Egyptian mummies on display are Black, but the occasional non-Black mummy, such as that of Ramses II, usually becomes a widely available image through reproductions in books, magazines, posters, postcards, etc.; Are we, therefore, to assume that there was no bitumen used for these mummies, and that there is a preference for mummies that were not prepared with bitumen?

During my recent visit to Egypt, this year, I saw time after time dark-skinned mummies on display, many paintings of dark-skinned Egyptians, and many statues with African features throughout Egypt. This, incidentally, in blatant contrast to the massive souvenir representations, which I also saw, where many Egyptians look pinker than most Europeans.

This shameless distortion of what one can plainly see for oneself was reconfirmed over and over again. Indeed, Egyptian children's books are among the guiltiest of this phenomenon.

Not coincidentally, at the same time that ancient Egypt was being dragged through the mud, the relatively obscure Mesopotamian cultures were being polished and began to be emphasized, and ancient Greece was given a saintly dimension.

Wilhelm Von Humbolt, the creator of the new University at Berlin wrote, "for us the Greeks step out of the circle of history. We fail entirely to recognize our relationship to them if we dare to apply the standards to them which we apply to the rest of world history... from the Greeks we take something more than earthly, almost godlike."

Such prominent figures as Johann J. Winckelmann, regarded by many as the founder of the discipline of art history, and Solomon Reinach, a central figure in French scholarship, were passionately involved with the uplifting of Greek art and philosophy. They participated in creating what Bernal calls a "condescending and contemptuous attitude towards Egypt... the accurate alignments of the pyramids and temples, and the use of π are all explained as the results of practical knacks rather than of profound thought."

It was much easier to associate the Middle Eastern "cradle of civilization" (as opposed to Egypt) to the Indo-European; and the discovery of the Indo-European language family, including languages as far afield as Sanskrit, helped this rapprochement.



A travel agency's brochure (1995) places Egypt in the "Moyen Orient," the Middle East (1995).

"Asiatic" connections were considered to be preferable to African connections. Gardiner and many others even refer to ancient Egypt as an "Eastern civilization."

Classical scholars like Julius Beloch, a German who taught in Italy, suspended criticism, comparison, and judgement when approaching Greece; Bernal says "Karl Otfried Muller urged scholars to study Greek mythology in relation to human culture as a whole, but was adamantly opposed to recognizing any specific borrowings from the East."

Greece was now perceived as the "pure" childhood of Europe in a romantic way, coinciding with the movement known as Romanticism, with its concern for "local formation" of "races," notions of "blood," and common heritage.

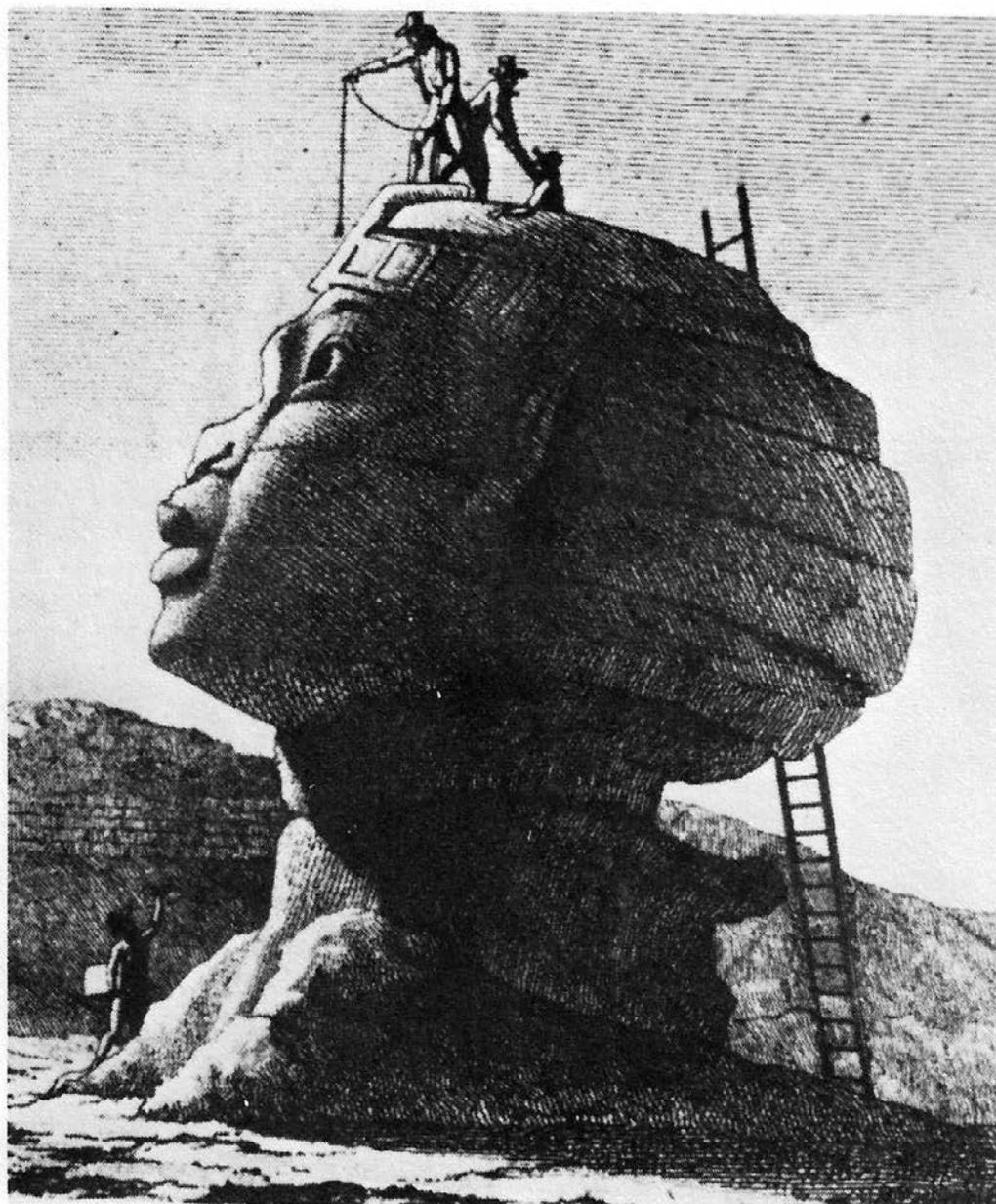
Bernal states, "for 18th and 19th century romantics and racists it was simply intolerable for Greece to have been the result of the mixture of native Europeans and colonizing Africans and Semites... with the intensification of racism in the 19th century there was increasing dislike of the Egyptians, who were no longer seen as the cultural ancestors of Greece but as fundamentally alien."

The modern Belgian scholar Guy Bunnens said, "The end of the 19th century saw a great current of antisemitism in Europe, particularly in Germany and France... this hostility against the Jews extended in history against those other semites, the Phoenicians."

No classical scholar would want to or indeed be able to associate ancient Greece with Egypt in this atmosphere, even though the Greeks had consistently done it themselves.

Bernal says, "Paradoxically, the more the 19th century admired the Greeks, the less it respected their writing of their own history."

In this atmosphere of Romanticism and racism, Bernal says "history - now seen as the biographies of races - consisted of the triumphs of strong vital peoples over weak and feeble ones... for these scholars, in addition, it was self-evident that the greatest 'race' in world history was the European or Aryan one. It alone had and always would have the capacity to conquer all other peoples and to create advanced dynamic civilizations."



The Sphinx as the first French scientific mission found it in the 18th century (from *La Description d'Egypte*, Bibliothèque numérique mondiale). Its model was said to have been Pharaoh Chephren, often spelled Khafre, who built the second Giza pyramid, c. 2,600 B.C., 4th Dynasty

Another major reason for the new views of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Mesopotamia was the emerging European concept of "progress" - the idea that "new is better" accompanying the industrial revolution. With this concept, scholars could argue that ancient Greece, being much "newer," was actually superior to ancient Egypt, and that the Greeks had perfected clumsy Egyptian ideas.

Consider Hegel's statement: "They [The Greeks] certainly received the substantial beginnings of their religion, culture... from Asia, Syria and Egypt; but they have so obliterated the foreign nature of this origin, and it is so much changed, worked on, turned around and altogether made so different that what they as we prize, know, and love in it is essentially their own."

This year, while speaking with people about the ideas in this paper, I often heard that kind of statement, and I believe such 19th century ideology is still very widespread and underlies our views about ancient Greece and ancient Egypt, among other things.

If what this paper states contains truth, then, as Bernal says, "It will be necessary not only to rethink the fundamental bases of 'western civilization' but also to recognize the penetration of racism and 'continental chauvinism' into all our historiography, or philosophy of writing history."

Yet, it is quite recent that some scholars have been rethinking ancient history. Edward Said, for example, has stated: "as recently as thirty years ago, few European or American Universities devoted curricular attention to African literature."

Even to write this paper, it was difficult to find material. It was especially hard to find documentation of the historiography of the 19th century. For this reason, I relied heavily on Martin Bernal's monumental work *Black Athena*, where he traces how the perceptions of ancient Egypt changed from the time of Herodotus to the present. It is a unique book clearly showing the massive revision of ancient Egyptian history that has taken place. Although such writers as Diop and Bernal have been called "revisionists," obviously the greatest revision already happened.

Edward Said neatly summarizes the issue when he states, "... it is no longer possible to ignore the work of Anta Diop, Paulin Hountondjii, V.Y. Mudimbe, Ali Mazrui, in even the most cursory survey of African history, politics, and philosophy." The fact that Bernal has come up against substantial criticism and resistance only shows the enduring power of the 19th century status quo.

One can argue over details, but the basic premise of this paper, the plausibility of the existence of a great civilization on the African continent which influenced - if not outright conquered the entire Mediterranean coast - and the subsequent 19th century rewriting of history, rests on solid ground. Yet it is disputed, on weak grounds.

A sample of the criticism aimed at Bernal will illustrate this point. R. Pounder, in the April, 1992 "American Historical Review" says, "Bernal makes a major contribution to confusion and divisiveness by giving credence to Afro-centrist theories that cannot be supported by historical, anthropological, or archaeological criteria." J.M. Weinstein finds that "Bernal's insistence on depicting the inhabitants of Upper Egypt and the major pharaonic dynasties that arose in that region - the 1st, 11th, 12th and 18th - as blacks is especially unfortunate."

What Weinstein calls "insistence" are exactly six pages out of 575 (Vol.I), dedicated to the "race" of the Egyptians. After stating "I am very dubious of the utility of the concept of 'race' in general because it is impossible to achieve any anatomical precision on the subject," Bernal says "I believe that the Egyptian civilization was fundamentally African and that the African element was stronger in the old and middle kingdoms, before the Hyksos invasions, than it later became. Furthermore, I am convinced that many of the most powerful Egyptian dynasties which were based in Upper Egypt - the 1st, 11th, 12th and 18th - were made up of pharaohs whom one can usefully call black."

These are not the words of an Afro-centric maniac obsessed with race. In the winter, 1989 "Journal of Interdisciplinary History," G. W. Bowersock, in a generally positive review writes, "what inevitably clouds the issue is Bernal's insistence on the general truth of the ancient tradition of Egyptian and Phoenician origins."

In the same '92 review quoted above, Molly M. Levine says Bernal has a "focus on origins and race," and that the book is "dangerous, because in reopening the 19th century discourse on race and origins, the work sadly, inevitably, has become part of the problem of racism rather than the solution that its author envisioned." What is extraordinary is that all this criticism addresses only six pages in a book of 575.

Levine also asserts that the book "adds to an ever-growing body of popular and scholarly literature that attempts to reconnect black

Americans with their African origins," though Bernal does not once mention Black Americans in his book.

What is clear is the pre-occupation on the part of the critics with "race and origins." As Bernal proves, new visions of history are inevitable, and I am confident that the ideas in this paper will become more and more accepted. This is because, although racism is ever-present, it has lost its respectability. It is no longer possible for a serious scholar to assert that ancient Egyptians could not have been Black because Blacks would be incapable of creating such an advanced society.

My intention when I began my research was simply to learn as much as possible about ancient Egypt, but I was brought to the shores of Greece many times. Once a clearer picture of Egypt emerged, I was inspired to re-read Greek myths from a new perspective.

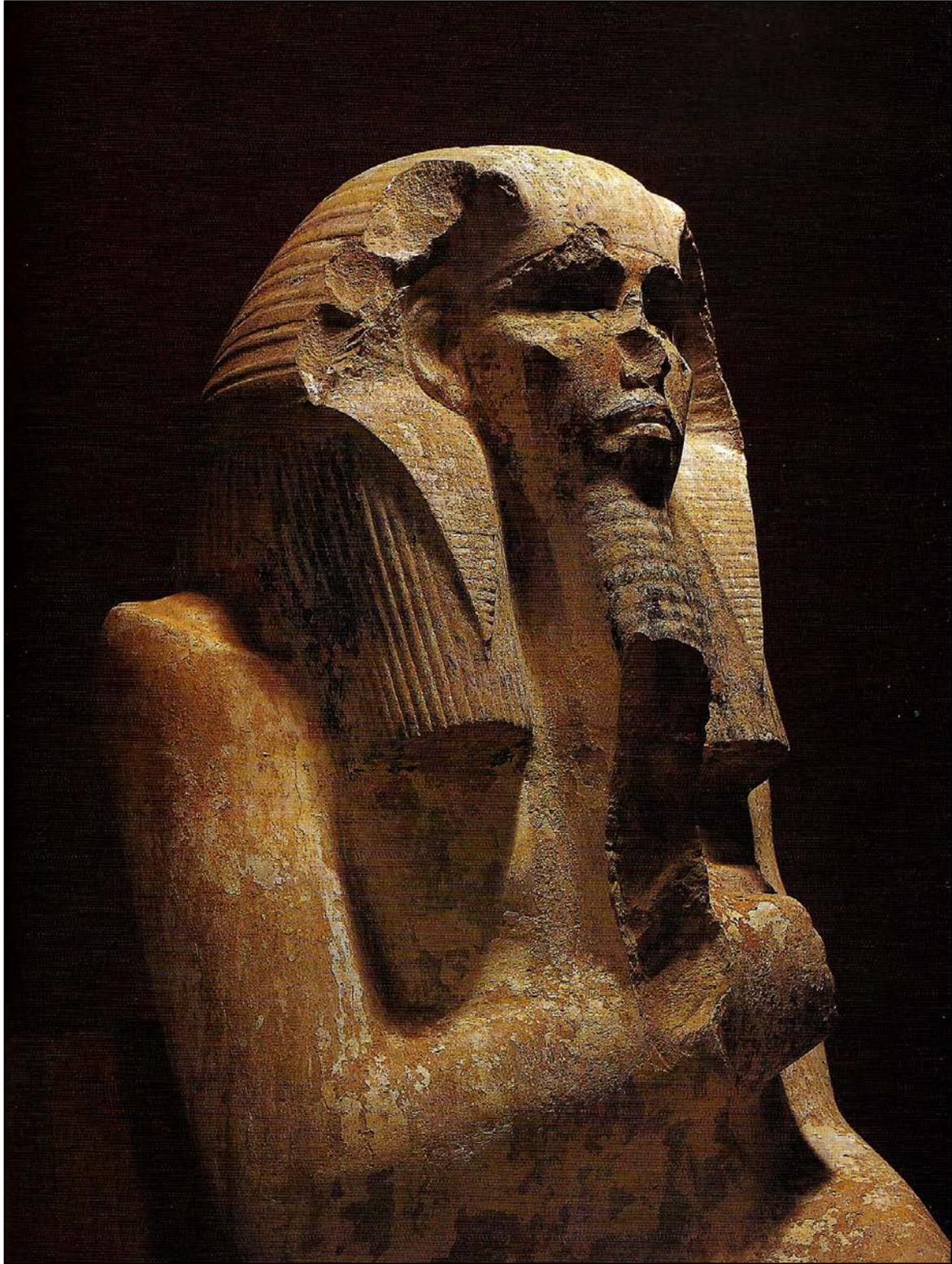
Typically, a more accurate view of ancient history inspires one to know more. In contrast, a trademark of inaccurate history is its vagueness, which leads to frustration and a feeling of being overwhelmed by a seemingly unlearnable history.

One cannot in fact learn about ancient Greeks and Phoenicians without learning about ancient Egypt. The reverse is true as well. World culture has inherited much from ancient Egypt as well as from Greece; approaching history with this in mind offers greater possibilities and more rewarding results.

I was fascinated by ancient Egypt partly because I learned much about my own modern world. To go so far back in time, to imagine a life so removed from our own, and then to look back at ourselves is a remarkable experience.

A true understanding of our history and our present requires knowledge of ancient Egypt. Enhancing classical Greece's role at the expense of its Egyptian roots distorts this understanding. Rice sums it up: "The line which connects our world with theirs [the Egyptians] is direct and unbroken; they are a profoundly important element in our cultural ancestry. To understand them a little is to add greatly to an understanding of ourselves."

Amen.



The near-lifesize painted limestone statue of King Djoser Neterikhet, 3rd Dynasty, c. 2,650 B.C., which was found in its original setting, a small chapel on the north face of pyramid at Saqqara known as *the Step Pyramid of Djoser*; Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Egypt



Pyramids of Giza, Egypt, c. 2,550-2,490 B.C.

AFTERWORD

There are many thought-provoking and fascinating bits of information I came across while researching ancient Egypt that did not bear directly on the subjects of my paper. I could not bear to eliminate them all, so I will discuss two: the origins of Christmas and the origins of Paris (my host city while doing my research) and how they relate to ancient Egypt.

The Bible informs us that Jesus was born "while shepherds watched their flocks by night." We can assume from this that it was not in December since, as J. John says in *What's The Point of Christmas?* "The shepherds and the sheep would have frozen in the Palestinian winter!"

In any event, the early Christians "did not know the exact date of Jesus' birth, neither was there any annual celebration of the event... The first evidence for the celebration of Jesus Christ's birth on 25 December is found in a Roman document dated A.D. 336. The date was chosen as a Christian takeover of the Roman festival [*Saturnalia*], celebrating the unconquerable sun. The apparently dying sun began to increase its sunlight on 25 December."

The reference to the sun brings Egypt and the sun god Ra to mind, and of course the roots of the Roman festival go back farther in time. It is possibly based on an ancient Egyptian celebration: Osiris, the Egyptian judge of the dead, god of the underworld and patron of agriculture was said to have been born on the 26th of December. Osiris was usually painted green or black and was occasionally represented as a tree. Egyptians celebrated the return of the sun and longer days by decorating their homes with plants, palm leaves, and branches.

These links are clues as to why one sees trees and wreathes inside people's homes for Christmas. The "unconquerable" Osiris was also killed and resurrected, like Jesus (and even much like the above reference to the sun). Thus, we have links between Christmas and ancient Egypt on three counts: trees/branches, a calendar date, and a symbolic equivalence (the rebirths of the sun, Osiris, and Jesus).

At some point while living in France, I asked myself, "why is Paris called 'Paris'?" The most distant history I found was a Celtic group that had settled in the Parisian basin c. 3rd century BC, calling themselves "Parisii." I knew from my Egyptian studies. that the Celts had sustained some influence from Egypt, at the very least indirectly, through the Phoenicians.

Then I came upon the hieroglyph for "house," or "temple," which is transcribed "pr" or "per". For example, the temple of Amen at Karnak may have been known to the ancient Egyptians as "Per-Amen" - temple or house of Amen. Needless to say, there were many sites along the banks of the Nile known as Per-(God) or Per-(Pharaoh). For example, the city the Hebrews toiled in was known as "Per-Ramses." There was at least one site called "Per-Isis," the home of the feminine goddess of healing, sexuality, and motherhood; the wife of Osiris and mother of Horus.

Her veneration, as well as the cult of many other Egyptian gods and goddesses, spread north into Europe as far as Germany, and lasted many centuries. When I learned that the cult of Isis was especially widespread in the Parisian basin, I was compelled to see a connection.

The worship of Isis lasted in France in such prestigious places as the church of Saint Germain-des-Pres until the 16th century when the destruction of the monastery put an end to the cult.

Significantly, the famous cathedral of Chartres, only 60 kilometers from Paris, is famous for still having two "Black Madonnas." The church presumably could not crush the powerful cult in Chartres, so it incorporated it.

It is therefore plausible that "Parisii" was one of the numerous places of worship of Isis in Europe, and the etymological origin of Paris: "Per-Isis" with the final "s" dropped somewhere in history. The more I learn about ancient Egypt, the more I see its influence everywhere.

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