

Towards the Extended Pelasgian Hypothesis

An integrative perspective on ethnic, cultural, linguistic and genetic affinities encompassing Africa, Europe, and Asia from the Neolithic onwards

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Outline of this book's argument

Towards the Extended Pelasgian Hypothesis seeks to offer, as the subtitle indicates, an integrative perspective on ethnic, cultural, linguistic and genetic affinities encompassing Africa, Europe, and Asia from the Neolithic onwards. In Chapter 1, I set the scene by discussing the methodological and interdisciplinary points of departure of my argument against the background of my various interlocking research projects of the last two decades. In Chapter 2, I indicate the long-range linguistics (focusing on the Borean Hypothesis) that offer a major interpretative framework. Chapter 3 seeks to identify and demonstrate the book's overall approach by the example of a distributional diachronic analysis of the spiked wheel trap, a simple hunting device which however may serve as an 'index fossil' for the prehistoric relationships we are after. In the course of the next few chapters I will demonstrate in detail, how problematic, inconsistent and contradictory the notion of 'Pelasgian' is that we may derive from Ancient Graeco-Roman writers (Chapter 4), and that is reflected in modern scholarship on Pelasgian culture and language (Chapter 5). Yet I insist on using the term 'Pelasgian' for the succession of widely extended and internally heterogeneous cultural complexes in the Neolithic (Primary Pelasgian realm) and the Bronze Age (Secondary Pelasgian realm), because I cannot think of a better term to convey the specific connotations of these complexes – in other words because I feel that, despite or even precisely *because* of their contradictions and inconsistencies, the Ancient use of the term captures much that is essential. The solution lies not in the mere imposition of an analytical framework in which 'Pelasgian' is being defined in nominalist terms regardless of the conscious meanings employed by the historical actors themselves in Antiquity, because such imposition makes insufficient use of the richly textured information that lies contained in the very inconsistencies and non-sequiturs implied in these actors' utterances. So my solution to the obvious dilemmas of Pelasgian studies, and my justification for continuing to use the term nonetheless, lies in an attempt at a detailed hermeneutical

historical analysis of the various dimensions, both in subject matter and over time, of 'Pelasgian' – not so much an exercise in historical ethnography, but an explicitation of the many (in principle irresolvable) contradictions shaping the complex field of tension in which the notion of 'Pelasgian' situates itself (Chapter 6). This yields (Chapter 7) a long list of 'Pelasgian' traits percolating through a Neolithic Primary Pelasgian realm and/or through a Bronze Age Secondary Pelasgian realm. It also yields an awareness that these traits, ever since the end of the Bronze Age, have become so widespread throughout the Old World, that a detailed examination of their distribution brings out what I have called the 'cross-model'. After

- the original, Primary Pelasgian realm (which in principle was a greatly modified, *Extended* Fertile Crescent stretching from the fertile Sahara to China in the Neolithic)
- had become greatly complexified, innovated and transformed by the end of the Bronze Age,
- and in that process had been furnished with revolutionary new technologies of locomotion (horse and chariot),
- both (transformed) Primary, and Secondary, Pelasgian traits were spread westward (further into the Mediterranean, to end up in the Western Celtic world), northward (the Germanic and Uralic realm of Central and Northern Europe and of Northernmost Eurasia), southward (the Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan speaking worlds of sub-Saharan Africa), and eastward, across the Eurasian steppe, to Scythians, Indo-Scythians and Indo-Iranians, to end up (across the Himalayas and its western extensions) in the Indo-European world of South Asia, and in the Altaic world of Mongolia, Korea and Japan.

While the argument so far has been conducted against the inspiring and corroborative background of long-range comparative historical linguistics especially the Borean Hypothesis, in Chapter 8 other corroborative evidence is adduced: the postulated Pelasgian realm, and to some extent even the proposed cross-model, turn out to correspond to identifiable patterns of geographic distribution of genetic traits, especially concerning such classic genetic markers as Rhesus factors and thalassaemias. Finally (Chapter 8.4 and Appendix), the Extended Pelasgian Hypothesis is compared with a similarly comprehensive vision on Old World cultural dynamics during the Holocene (from 10 ka BP onward), Stephen Oppenheimer's Sunda Hypothesis, and their competitive plausibility are indicated, also on the basis of specific detailed data and analysis in the Appendix.

In the conclusion (Chapter 9) we look back at the trajectory covered. In particular we will address the following point: with all its concern to provide a systematic, empirical argument according to which modern Africans and their cultural history – subject to extreme marginalisation and othering in the scientific and socio-political global life of the last few centuries – are yet affirmed as simply part and parcel of global cultural history, the Extended Pelasgian Hypothesis may yet, myopically, be considered a revamped version of the condescending and essentially racist Hamitic thesis that captivated North Atlantic Africanist research in the early decades of the 20th century. As a counter-paradigmatic trans-disciplinary and transcontinental attempt at synthesis, the present argument – however carefully embedded in numerous tabulated empirical examples and painstaking library research – is likely to generate strong irritation and attract aggression from many sides, just as happened with Martin

Bernal's *Black Athena* thesis which in a way has been a major inspiration even though the present argument seeks to go far beyond Bernal's regional, Egyptocentric and ultimately Afrocentrist limitations. I have of course invited such criticism by the boldly unconventional nature of my argument, and I will genuinely welcome it, however severe, as an essential step beyond my own very obvious limitations – but I hope to be spared ironic references to the Hamitic paradigm of a century ago.

On the basis of this argument, I will make four claims:

1. *The Extended Pelasgian Hypothesis significantly contributes to our understanding – in a time frame stressing, not so much the Palaeolithic (as in the Out of Africa model and the Borean Hypothesis), but the last few millennia – of the historical relation between the cultures and languages of sub-Saharan Africa and those of the rest of the Old World*
2. *The Extended Pelasgian Hypothesis significantly contributes to our understanding the identity, motivation and organisational resources of the Sea Peoples in the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean*
3. *The Extended Pelasgian Hypothesis casts an original new light on the Black Athena question, relegating the unmistakable affinities between Ancient Egypt and the Aegean not in the first place (as does Bernal) to unilateral Egyptian influence upon the Aegean in the Early to Middle Bronze Age, but by stressing how both Ancient Egypt, and the successive cultures of the Aegean (which have suggested the designation 'Pelasgian' in the first place) can be seen as local developments springing from the common fond of the Primary Pelasgian Realm, in which many of the cultural and linguistic traits already circulated that Egypt and the Aegean have in common, and of which Bernal has pointed out to his great and inspiring merit*
4. *The Extended Pelasgian Hypothesis casts an original new light on the alleged origin of philosophy in the Pre-Socratic Ionian attempts to define the primal matter of the universe: the Pre-Socratic philosophers' first steps in philosophy were in fact a decontextualised and largely misunderstood restatement of an ancient cosmology hinging on a transformative cycle of elements, that had circulated in the Pelasgian realm at least since the Bronze Age and probably since the Neolithic, and therefore can be found all over the three continents of the Old World.*

These claims are formidable and, if only very partially sustained (and more can hardly be expected), justify the excessive investments in time and intellectual efforts that have gone in the present argument. This is, for better or worse, the crowning piece of many years of feverish research, writing and debate.