

The continued relevance of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* thesis: Yes and No

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ABSTRACT. This paper situates Martin Bernal's work in context and largely defends it against the sweeping criticism and allegations brought against it (notably in Lefkowitz and MacLean Rogers' 1996 collection *Black Athena revisited*; and in Berlinerblau's *Heresy in the University*, for whom Bernal is 'the academic Elvis' -- i.e. the appropriating White recycling Black ideas). Even so, serious criticism cannot be avoided, notably of Bernal's lack of method; his politicised view of historical and academic truth; his tendency to conflate culture, language and somatic type; his obsession with origins; his literalist approach to myth; his inability to make living socio-cultural history out of reconstructions of provenance; and his dogged insistence on an unconvincing, for non-systematic, Ancient Egyptian etymology of the Greek theonym Athena. Without downright destroying the *Black Athena* thesis, these various defects could be remedied by the concerted, interdisciplinary collaboration of specialists, to which the argument exhorts the international scholarly community. However, towards the end the argument cannot refrain from more fundamental criticism, chiding Bernal for myopic concentration on the Eastern Mediterranean. Here the argument goes beyond the *Black Athena* thesis in the light of state-of-the-art comparative and historical linguistics, and molecular genetics, which have made possible a truly long-range approach to global cultural history. In passing, we highlight the peculiar Bronze Age Mediterranean presence of Niger-Congo / Bantu linguistic elements (usually associated with sub-Saharan Africa). Relying on the recently discovered 'Back-into-Africa' migration from Central and West Asia from the Upper Palaeolithic times onward, and on recent reconstructions of the Upper Palaeolithic *Borean parent language, the present argument offers a powerful alternative for the *Black Athena* thesis: *The Aegean region looks similar to Ancient Egypt, not primarily because of diffusion from Egypt in the Late Bronze Age, but because both were the recipients of a demic, linguistic and cultural movement from West (ultimately Central) Asia; and this movement also extended to sub-Saharan Africa, producing the same similarities there. Ancient Egypt displays many cultural and religious similarities with sub-Saharan Africa, not primarily because of diffusion from sub-Saharan Africa to Egypt in Neolithic times, but the other way around: because the Back-into-Africa movement, carrying a significant share of Asian genes, as well as cultural, religious and linguistic elements (including *Borean-associated elements towards Niger-Congo / Bantu) passed via Egypt on its way from Asia to sub-Saharan Africa.* However, while thus the argument has rather devastating implications for Afrocentrism including the Bernallian variant, it could not have been made without Bernal's visionary and path-breaking contribution.

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¹ This paper is in part a much shortened, but in other respects rather expanded and updated version of: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1997, 'Black Athena Ten Years After: Towards a constructive re-assessment', in: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1997, ed., *Black Athena: Ten Years After*, Hoofddorp: Dutch Archaeological and Historical Society, special issue, *Talanta: Proceedings of the Dutch Archaeological and Historical Society*, vols. 28-29, 1996-97, pp. 11-64; an updated version of this book is now in the press as: Wim M.J. van Binsbergen, ed., *Black Athena Twenty Years After*, Berlin / Boston/ Munster: LIT. A French version of this paper was published as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2000, 'Dans le troisième millénaire avec Black Athena?', in: Fauvelle-Aymar, F.-X., Chrétien, J.-P., & Perrot, C.-H., *Afrocentrismes: L'histoire des Africains entre Égypte et Amérique*, Paris: Karthala, pp. 127-150. An Italian version appeared as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2004, 'Atena Nera: La tesi di Bernal ha provocato reazioni in diverse discipline, dalla storiografia all'antropologia e pone ancora problemi di epistemologia multiculturale', *Prometeo: Rivista trimestrale di scienze e storia*, 22, 85 (March 2004): 102-111. The present English version was supposed to be published in an English edition of the Fauvelle c.s. book, under the aegis of Mary Lefkowitz, with predictable results: it never appeared.

1. Introduction

In November 2008, an international conference at Warwick (U.K.) brought together prominent scholars from all over the world, to make up the balance of 21 years of scholarly debate of the *Black Athena* thesis, initiated by the, then, Sinologist and intellectual historian Martin Bernal in the 1980s.² Their conclusions, currently being processed for publication, made clear that the extreme controversy of the 1980s and 1990s has now given way for accommodation – the *Black Athena* thesis was finally found to be respectable, and was admitted to the canon of ancient history.³ Despite unmistakable hopes to the contrary on the part of the anti-Afrocentric editors of the 1996 collection of hypercritical essays *Black Athena revisited*,⁴ the *Black Athena* debate is clearly still alive and kicking. With understandable delay, Martin Bernal (currently in his early 70s) has now almost completed the projected tetralogy of his *Black Athena* project. After some preliminary statements in article form, this started in 1987 with the publication of Volume I (largely on the alleged fabrication, in European intellectual history, of the image of the absolute originality of Ancient Greece – the region around the Aegean Sea – although already including previews of what Bernal believes is the true, ‘un-fabricated’ history of European dependence on the ancient cultural achievements of Asia and Africa, especially Egypt). Volume II (1991) brought a detailed and highly controversial re-assessment of Egyptian-Aegean relations in the Late Bronze Age, c. 1500-1100 BCE. And since Bernal has largely relied on historical linguistics in his approach to cultural dependencies in the Late Bronze Age Aegean, the series could be concluded in 2006 with a detailed discussion of what Bernal takes to be the linguistic evidence for his historical claims. As a result, from 1987 the *Black Athena* debate was waged in a large variety of settings, especially international conferences and special issues of scholarly journals. One major reason for the delay in the publication of Volume III was that Bernal was extremely active in this debate, countering every major critique with detailed and often ferocious rejoinders, where were finally collected in 2001 under the title *Black Athena writes back*.⁵ The collection I edited in 1997, *Black Athena Ten Years After*, was a major critical defence of Bernal’s position after *Black Athena Revisited*; in much updated and augmented form, that collection is now being reprinted by LIT publishing house as *Black Athena Twenty Years After*. Meanwhile the sociologist of religion Jacques Berliner-

² Cf. Bernal, M., 1987-2006, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Vol. I* (1987), *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1787-1987*; *Vol. II* (1991), *The Archaeological and Documentary Evidence*; *Vol. III* (2006), *The Linguistic Evidence*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

³ I could not attend the Warwick conference myself, but rely on a personal report by one of the participants, Valentin Mudimbe, whom I hereby thank.

⁴ M.R. Lefkowitz & G. MacLean Rogers, eds., *Black Athena revisited*, Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

⁵ Bernal, M. Gardiner, (D. Chioni Moore, ed.), 2001, *Black Athena writes back: Martin Bernal responds to his critics*, Durham & London: Duke University Press. This is largely a collection of Bernal’s earlier rejoinders and defences, as published since 1987.

blau published his *Heresy in the University*,⁶ a reliable exegesis and balanced (and as a result, fairly positive and constructive) critique of the work of Bernal. Enough material, debate and reflection has now been generated for us to try and sort out whatever lasting contribution Bernal may have made, sifting such support and acclaim as he has received – from his obvious errors and one-sidedness which the mass of critical writing on this issue since 1987 has brought to light. In what ways, on what grounds, and under which stringent methodological and epistemological conditions, does Martin Bernal's crusade deserve to have a lasting impact on our perception of the ancient eastern Mediterranean? The question is important, in general for an understanding of the growth of European civilisation and its indebtedness to ancient Asian and African achievements, and therefore particularly for our perception of the place of sub-Saharan Africa in cultural world history. Initially Bernal only intended to bring out the Egyptian ancestry of the Ancient Greek civilisation that was so constitutive of modern Europe; soon however he incorporated his extensive Afrocentric reading (W.E.B. Dubois, Cheikh Anta Diop etc.) into a *Revised Black Athena* thesis, in which Ancient Egypt is no longer the *fons et origo* of Greek civilisation, but mainly the channel through which – what Bernal takes to be – essentially sub-Saharan African prehistoric cultural achievements were siphoned on to the Aegean. Over the years, as an Africanist specialising in religious and cultural (proto-)history, I have become increasingly critical of these sub-Saharan African extensions of the *Black Athena* thesis, which are even more beyond Bernal's original professional competence than his pronouncements on Egypt and the Aegean *per se*; the final section of the present argument will summarise my current position.⁷ However, this does not in the least diminish Bernal's initial merits of having popularised a non-Eurocentric reading of the foundations of European cultural history – and it is to bring out and critically celebrate these merits that the following argument was written.

2. Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* project

British-born Martin Bernal (1937-) is a Cambridge (U.K.)-trained Sinologist. His specialisation on the intellectual history of Chinese/ Western exchanges around 1900 CE,⁸ in combination with his – at the time – rather more topical articles on Vietnam in the *New York Review of Books*, earned him, in 1972, a professorship in the Department of Government at Cornell University, Ithaca (N.Y., U.S.A.). There he was soon to widen the geographical and historical scope of his research, as indicated by the fact that already in 1984 he was to combine this appointment with one as adjunct professor of Near Eastern Studies at the same university. Clearly, in mid-career he had turned⁹ to a set of questions which were rather remote from his original academic field. At the same time they are crucial to the North Atlantic intellectual tradition

⁶ Berlinerblau, J., 1999, *Heresy in the University: The Black Athena controversy and the responsibilities of American intellectuals*, New Brunswick etc.: Rutgers University Press.

⁷ See: van Binsbergen, *Black Athena Twenty Years After*, o.c., for an extensive argument on this point.

⁸ Bernal, Martin., 1975, *Chinese Socialism to 1907*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975.

⁹ Cf. *Black Athena I*, p. xiiff.

since the eighteenth century CE, and to the way in which this tradition has hegemonically claimed for itself a place as the allegedly unique centre, the original historical source, of the increasingly global production of knowledge in the world today. Is – as in the dominant Eurocentric view – modern global civilisation the product of an intellectual adventure that started, as from scratch, with the ancient Greeks – the unique result of the latter’s unprecedented and history-less achievements? Or is the view of the Greek (read European) genius as the sole and oldest source of civilisation, merely a racist, Eurocentric myth? If the latter, its double aim has been to underpin delusions of European cultural superiority in the Age of European Expansion (especially the nineteenth century CE), and to free the history of European civilisation from any indebtedness to the (undoubtedly much older) civilisations of the region of Old World agricultural revolution, extending from the once fertile Sahara and from Ethiopia, through Egypt, Palestine and Phoenicia, to Syria, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Iran – thus encompassing the narrower Fertile Crescent – and the Indus Valley. Here Minoan, subsequently Mycenaean Crete occupies a pivotal position as either ‘the first European civilisation in the Eastern Mediterranean’; or as an ‘Afroasiatic’-speaking island outpost of more ancient West Asian and Egyptian cultures; or as both at the same time. Foreboding the later dependence of medieval European civilisation on Arab and Hebrew sources, Bernal claims a vital ‘Afroasiatic’ (or rather, African and Asian; Afroasiatic is only one of the language families likely to be involved) contribution to the very origins of the Greek, subsequently European, now North Atlantic, and increasingly global, civilisation.

Bernal’s monumental *Black Athena*, projected as a tetralogy of which so far the first three volumes have been published, addresses these issues along two main lines of argument. Volume I, besides presenting an extremely ambitious but deliberately unsubstantiated and scarcely referenced preview of the promised findings of the project as a whole, is mainly a fascinating exercise in the history and sociology of European academic knowledge. It traces the historical awareness, among European cultural producers, of ancient Europe’s intellectual indebtedness to Africa and Asia, as well as the subsequent repression of such awareness with the invention of the ancient Greek miracle since the 18th century CE. The second line of argument, of which Volumes II and III have been nearly conclusive instalments, presents the converging historical, archaeological, linguistic and mythological evidence for this indebtedness. This historical dependence is then symbolised by Bernal’s re-reading (after Herodotus)¹⁰ of Athena, apparently the most ostentatiously Hellenic of ancient Greek deities, as a peripheral Greek emulation of the goddess Neith of Saïs – as *Black Athena*.

Reception of the first two volumes of *Black Athena* was chequered.¹¹ Classicists,

¹⁰ On Egyptian Athena: *Hist.* II 28, 59, 83 etc., and in general on the Greeks’ religious indebtedness to Egypt: *Hist.* II 50ff. The identification of Neith with Athena was not limited to Herodotus but was a generally held view in Graeco-Roman Antiquity.

¹¹ Volume III was published only recently, too late to have a major impact on the *Black Athena* debate. It is my personal impression that its detailed historical linguistics are self-repetitive, often flawed, and fail to reflect state-of-the-art developments in long-range comparative linguistics. Below I will chide ‘Bernal’s obsession with language as the main key to cultural history’. By and large, Volume III did not become the crowning statement it was clearly intended to be. It continues the downward trend in

who read the work not so much as a painstaking critique of North Atlantic Eurocentric intellectual culture as a whole but as a denunciation of their very discipline by an author who continues to insist on his outsidership, have often been viciously dismissive; less so – especially before the publication of Volume II – specialists in archaeology, the cultures and languages of the Ancient Near East, and comparative religion. Virtually every critic has been impressed with the extent and depth of Bernal's scholarship and puzzled by his aloofness from current debates not initiated by himself.¹² And all complain of his lack of methodological, theoretical, and epistemological sophistication.

Where Bernal's central thesis was picked up most enthusiastically, was in the circles of African American intellectuals. Here the great present-day significance of *Black Athena* was rightly recognised: not so much as a purely academic correction of remote, ancient history, but as *a revolutionary contribution to the global politics of knowledge in our own age and time*. The liberating potential of Bernal's thesis has been that it has accorded intellectuals from outside the politically and materially dominant North Atlantic, White tradition an independent, even senior, historical birth-right to full admission and participation under the global intellectual sun. Egypt is claimed to have civilised Greece, and from there it is apparently only one step to the vision that Africa, the South, Black people, have civilised Europe, the North, White people. Admittedly, this ideological triumph is only produced by sleight-of-hand, for it is very far from obvious that ancient Egypt can be equated, by *pars pro toto*, with Africa, let alone sub-Saharan Africa; in fact, as I will argue in the final section of this article, this is not the case at all. Nonetheless, coming from a White upper-class academician who is socially and somatically an outsider to Black issues, *Black Athena's* impact has been considerable. *Black Athena* is built into the ongoing construction of a militant Black identity, offering as an option – not contemptuous rejection, nor parallel self-glorification as in the context of Senghor's and Césaire's *négritude*, in the face of the dominant, White, North Atlantic model, but – the very explosion of that model. And much of the aggression levelled against Bernal is based on alarm over the politicising and erosion of scholarship in the face of militant Afrocentrism.¹³

quality already noticeable in Volume II as compared with the innovative, visionary and excellent Volume I.

¹² J. Berlinerblau, *o.c.*, pp. 93f, esp. p. 105, seeks to demonstrate that the massive reaction which *Black Athena* has produced must be attributed to the fact that its author implicitly touches on the central problems of our times: the struggle of minority identities, multiculturalism, postcolonial theory, the discovery of the hegemonic nature of North Atlantic knowledge systems, in general the rise of an explicit sociology and politics of knowledge, etc. However, this is scarcely convincing because Bernal only very rarely identifies these debates, their authors, and their epistemological and philosophical foundations.

¹³ However, we must not reverse the equation and claim that, by appropriating and broadcasting views that Afrocentrist writers have held for a century or more, Bernal is devoid of originality, is merely, as Berlinerblau puts it (*o.c.*) 'the academic Elvis', i.e., like has been claimed of the pop singer Elvis Presley (1935-1977), a White rising to fame because of his shrewd appropriation and exploitation of an idiom or an idea initiated by Blacks. In my reading of Bernal's itinerary and achievement, his search for an Afroasiatic truth underneath an Indo-European falsehood – in other words, his search for his own distant and nebulous Jewish roots in response to a midlife crisis – came first, and only after the *Black Athena* thesis had properly taken shape, did he discover that Afrocentrists had claimed similar things. It

Given the phenomenal expansion of Ancient Near Eastern and Egyptological studies in the course of the twentieth century, we should not have needed Bernal, in the first place, to broadcast the insight of multi-centred cultural development in the ancient eastern Mediterranean, and as a consequence the fact of classical Greek civilisation's indebtedness to West Asia and to north-eastern Africa including Egypt. *Ex oriente lux* has been the slogan of an increasing number of students of the Ancient Near East since the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁴ *Ex Oriente Lux* of course has also been, for decades, the name of the Dutch society for the study of the Ancient Near East, and of its journal.¹⁵ M. Liverani¹⁶ meanwhile calls our attention to the essential Eurocentrism implied in the slogan, which he therefore refuses to accept as a valid guideline for ancient history today:

'The shift of cultural primacy from the Near East to Greece (the one dealt with in Bernal's book) was interpreted in line with two slogans: *Ex Oriente Lux* (...) mostly used by Orientalists) and 'The Greek miracle' (mostly used by classicists). These slogans appeared to represent opposing ideas but in fact were one and the same notion: the Western appropriation of ancient Near Eastern culture for the sake of its own development' (p. 423).

The message of Europe's cultural indebtedness to the Ancient Near East however was scarcely welcome when it was first formulated, and imaginative Semitist scholars like Gordon and Astour found themselves under siege when they published their significant contributions in the 1960s. Even if Europe's great cultural indebtedness to the Ancient Near East is no longer the secret it was a hundred years ago, given the hostile reception this insight received right up to the 1980s Bernal may be admired for popularising this crucial insight. *Black Athena* has done a lot to make it available to circles thirsting for it while building and rebuilding their own identity. Meanwhile Bernal himself does not claim excessive originality for his views:

'...it should be clear to any reader that my books are based on modern scholarship. The ideas and information I use, do not always come from the champions of conventional wisdom, but very few

is only then that he modified the *Black Athena* thesis in an Afrocentrist direction, allowing sub-Saharan Africa to take the place of Egypt, and treating the latter as a *pars pro toto*.

¹⁴ Scholarly studies outside the context of the *Black Athena* debate yet insisting on the essential continuity between the civilisations of the Ancient Near East, include e.g., Kramer, S.N., 1958, *History begins at Sumer*, London; Neugebauer, O., 1969, *The exact sciences in Antiquity*, New York: Dover, 2nd edition; first published 1957; Gordon, C., 1962, *Before the Bible: The common background of Greek and Hebrew Civilizations*, New York: Harper & Row; Gordon, C.H., 1966, *Evidence for the Minoan language*, Ventnor (NJ): Ventnor Publishers; Saunders, J.B. de C.M., 1963, *The Transitions from ancient Egyptian to Greek medicine*, Lawrence: University of Kansas Press; Astour, M.C., 1967, *Hellenosemitica: An ethnic and cultural study in West Semitic impact on Mycenaean Greece*, 2d ed., Leiden: Brill; Fontenrose, J., 1980, *Python: A study of Delphic myth and its origins*, Berkeley etc.: University of California Press; paperback edition, reprint of the 1959 first edition. These approaches have revived the ancient adage 'Ex oriente lux', which for Bernal contains in truncated form the 'ancient model' of an indebtedness of Greece – and therefore of the whole of Europe – to the Near East; this adage was rejected during the Enlightenment: 'Today it is from the North that the light comes to us' (Voltaire, Letter to Catherina II, 1771).

¹⁵ Also cf. Bernal's rather telling admission of initially overlooking the significance of this rallying cry, *Black Athena II*, p. 66.

¹⁶ M. Liverani, 1996, 'The bathwater and the baby', in: Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers, *o.c.*, pp. 421-427.

of the historical hypotheses put forward in *Black Athena* are original. The series' originality comes from bringing together and making central, information that has previously been scattered and peripheral'.¹⁷

Does Bernal's thesis on the European history of ideas concerning Egypt, and his stress on the role of Egypt in the context of actual cultural exchanges in the eastern Mediterranean in the third and second millennium BCE, stand up to the methodological and factual tests of the various disciplines concerned?

3. Modified diffusionism

The controversial nature of the *Black Athena* thesis, combined with the unmistakable methodological and theoretical oddities of its author, have tempted many critics to resort to caricature when summarising Bernal's position. One such a caricature is that he tries to reduce Greek culture to the flotsam of intercontinental diffusion. However, the problematic of cultural creativity in a context of diffusion is far from lost on Martin Bernal,¹⁸ whose self-identification as a 'modified diffusionist' precisely seeks to capture the difference between the obsolete model of mechanical transmission and wholesale adoption of unaltered cultural elements from distant provenance, and the far more attractive model that insists on a local, creative transformation of the diffused material once it has arrived at the destination area.¹⁹ Despite his occasional Egyptocentric lapses into a view of diffusion as automatic and one-way, Bernal often shows that he is aware of the tensions between diffusion and transformative localisation:²⁰

'While I am convinced that the vast majority of Greek mythological themes came from Egypt or Phoenicia, it is equally clear that their selection and treatment was characteristically Greek, and to that extent they did reflect Greek society.'²¹

Admittedly, part of the production systems, the language, the gods and shrines, the myths, the magic and astrology, the alphabet, the mathematics, the nautical and

¹⁷ Bernal, M., in press, 'Review of "Word games: The linguistic evidence in *Black Athena*"', Jay H. Jasanoff & Alan Nussbaum', forthcoming in Bernal's *Black Athena writes back*, o.c.

¹⁸ Also see the 'third distortion' of his work as identified in: Bernal, 'Responses to *Black Athena*: General and linguistic issues'.

¹⁹ Bernal, 'Phoenician politics and Egyptian justice', 241. Cf. *Black Athena II*, pp. 523f:

'In the early part of this century, scholars like Eduard Meyer, Oscar Montelius, Sir John Myres and Gordon Childe maintained the two principles of modified diffusion and *ex oriente lux*. In the first case, they rejected the beliefs of the extreme diffusionists, who maintained that 'master races' simply transposed their superior civilizations to other places and less developed peoples. They argued instead, that unless there was a rapid genocide, diffusion was a complicated process of interaction between the outside influences and the indigenous culture and that this process itself produced something qualitatively new.'

²⁰ Cf. van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1997, 'Alternative models of intercontinental interaction towards the earliest Cretan script', in: van Binsbergen, *Black Athena: Ten Years After*, o.c., pp. 131-148.

²¹ *Black Athena I*, p. 489, n. 59.

trading skills, of the ancient Greeks were not their own original inventions but had clearly identifiable antecedents among their longer established cultural neighbours. Already the truncated previews of prospective results in *Black Athena I* – previews which should never have been seriously discussed before their full argument in the *Black Athena* volumes yet to be published – created heated debate as to the possible Egyptian antecedents of classical Greek science and philosophy. Here Bernal finds against not only implacable foes like Robert Palter,²² but also the Egyptological archaeologist Trigger who is otherwise very sympathetic to the *Black Athena* project as a whole.²³ The evidence from the Ancient Near East, however, has also been read to support Bernal's view, and polemics concerning the Afroasiatic roots of Greek philosophy and science have gained prominence in the *Black Athena* debate; as a professor of intercultural philosophy the issue is of great interest to me, but a congress on classical archaeology is not the most suitable setting to pursue it any further.²⁴

Meanwhile, over the past decade the themes of diffusion and diffusionism in the social and historical sciences have moved from the periphery towards the centre of international debate. Studies of cultural globalisation emerged in the wake of studies of economic globalisation, and the attention for new forms of consumerism gave rise to a new fascination for man-made objects and their movements in space and time. An author like the leading French anthropologist Amselle notes the rise of a new diffusionism in this connection;²⁵ of which, incidentally, clinging to the anthropological paradigm of preceding decades he is extremely critical. Another stimulus for this field of studies has come from long-range historical linguistics (the study of macro-families such as Nostratic / Eurasiatic and Dene-Sino-Caucasian)²⁶ and from popula-

²² Palter, R., 1996, 'Black Athena, Afrocentrism, and the history of science', in: M.R. Lefkowitz & G. MacLean Rogers, eds., *Black Athena revisited*, Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, pp. 209-266; reprint of: Palter, R., 1993, 'Black Athena, Afrocentrism, and the history of science,' *History of Science*, 31 (1993), pp. 227-87. However, see the short but convincing argument for Egyptian/Greek scientific continuity by the great historian of science and magic W. Hartner (1963, 'W. Hartner' [Discussion of G. de Santillana's 'On forgotten sources in the history of science'], in: Crombie, A.C., ed., *Scientific change*, New York: Basic Books, pp. 868-75): e.g., Hellenist Greek astronomers tell us that Egyptian astronomers (whom we can demonstrate to have been pre-Hellenist) have calculated the lunation to a figure which, as we know now, is within 13 seconds of the correct astronomical value, an incredibly small error of only $5 \cdot 10^{-6}$.

²³ Trigger, B.C., 1995, *Early civilizations: Ancient Egypt in context*, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, first published 1993; p. 93; Trigger, B.G., 1992, 'Brown Athena: A Postprocessual Goddess?', *Current Anthropology*, 33, 1: 121-23.

²⁴ Cf. *Black Athena I*, p. 216, 477, n. 95; Preus, A., 1992, *Greek Philosophy: Egyptian origins*, Binghamton: Institute of Global Cultural Studies, Research Papers on the Humanities and Social Sciences; Lefkowitz, M., 1996, *Not out of Africa: How Afrocentrism became an excuse to teach myth as history*, New York, Basic Books; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., forthcoming, *Flight of the Bee: Sub-Saharan Africa, Ancient Egypt, and the World – Beyond the Black Athena thesis*. The claims affirming Afroasiatic provenance partly go back to the Afrocentric James, *Stolen legacy*. Outside Afrocentrism, cf. West, M.L., 1971, *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

²⁵ Amselle, J.-L., 2001, *Branchements: Anthropologie de l'universalité des cultures*, Paris: Flammarion.

²⁶ Cf. Dolgopolsky, A., 1998, *The Nostratic macrofamily and linguistic palaeontology*, Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research; Ruhlen, M., 1994, *The origin of language: Tracing the evolution of the Mother Tongue*, New York: Wiley; Greenberg, J.H., 1987, *Languages in the*

tion genetics, particularly the controversial but fascinating quantitative work by Cavalli-Sforza and his school, in which Italian researchers are very prominent. For prehistoric processes of change, recent long-range historical linguistics, in conjunction with genetics, on extensive empirical grounds strongly favours, for prehistory and proto-history, the model of *demic diffusion*²⁷ over what for over a century has been anthropology's dominant model of diffusion, that of mere cultural transfer between populations that themselves remain, in principle, fixed to their original geographical position. In other words, when we witness the massive and relatively rapid expansion of a particular cultural trait, such as a particular language or language (macro-)family,²⁸ or religious forms²⁹ the dominant view is now that the bearers of that trait brought it with them in the course of their own extensive geographical displacement, rather than remaining geographically stationary and merely transmitting culturally that trait to others already inhabiting the geographical space where that trait will subsequently end up. Moreover, technological innovation (in food production, communication, warfare etc.) and the ensuing local population increase are generally proposed as the main motors behind demic diffusion.

In the context of the *Black Athena* thesis, Martin Bernal³⁰ has proposed a 'modified diffusionism' to account for processes of cultural indebtedness, e.g. the Aegean's indebtedness to Ancient Egypt. However, the modification involved consisted in taking into account the theory of culture, specifically cultural integration, which

Americas, Stanford: Stanford University Press; Shevoroshkin, V., 1991, *Dene-Sino-Caucasian-Languages: Materials from the First International Interdisciplinary Symposium on Language and Prehistory, Ann Arbor, Michigan, November 1988*, Bochum: Brockmeyer; Bomhard, A., 1984, *Toward Proto-Nostratic: A New Approach to the Comparison of Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Afroasiatic*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins; Bomhard, A.R., & Kerns, J.C., 1994, *The Nostratic Macrofamily: A study in distant linguistic relationship*, Berlin / New York: Mouton de Gruyter. Meanwhile, a major achievement and research tool reflecting these developments in long-range comparative and historical linguistics, is the Starostin's (father† and son) Internet-based database *Tower of Babel*, freely accessible at: <http://starling.rinet.ru/main.html> .

²⁷ Cf.: Barbujani, G., Pilastro, A., de Domenico, S., & Renfrew, C., 1994, 'Genetic variation in North Africa and Eurasia: Neolithic demic diffusion vs Palaeolithic colonisation', *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 95, 137-54; Barbujani, G., & Pilastro, A., 1993, 'Genetic evidence on origin and dispersal of human populations speaking languages of the Nostratic macrofamily', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 90: 4670-4673; Cavalli-Sforza, L.L., 1997, 'Genes, people, and languages', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 94: 7719-7724; Cavalli-Sforza, L.L., 1998, 'The Chinese human genome diversity project', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 95: 11501-11503; Cavalli-Sforza, L.L., Piazza, A., & Menozzi, A., 1994, *The history and geography of the human genes*, Princeton: Princeton University Press; Guglielmino, C.R., Viganotti, C., Hewlett, B., & Cavalli-Sforza, L.L., 1998, 'Cultural variation in Africa: Role of mechanisms of transmission and adaptation', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 92: 7585-7589; Renfrew, C., 1998, 'Introduction: The Nostratic hypothesis, linguistic macrofamilies and prehistoric studies', in: Dolgopolsky, *The Nostratic macrofamily, o.c.*, pp. vii-xxii.

²⁸ E.g. Afroasiatic, to which Ancient Egyptian belongs – claimed by Bernal to have been a massive influence on Classical Greek.

²⁹ Such as the veneration of a spinning/hunting/warrior goddess Neith, or of a solar god Horus – claimed by Bernal to have been the Egyptian prototypes for the Greek divine figures of Athena and Apollo.

³⁰ Bernal, *Black Athena I-III, o.c.*, and *Black Athena writes back, o.c.*

emerged in cultural anthropology in the early twentieth century, after the heyday of classic diffusionism. The latter lacked a theory of culture, and hence only contemplated diffusion of individual, fragmented traits. My concept of 'localising transformation' seeks to articulate how traits, *after geographic dislocation in the context of cultural diffusion*, are subsequently redefined in terms of their new cultural environment in the reception area. What is striking now is that Bernal's reviving of the notion of diffusion has yet concentrated on cultural diffusion, whereas his argument would have greatly benefited from the perspective of demic diffusion especially for the explanation of Egyptian traits in Crete and on the Greek mainland. Although descriptively he did argue for a demographic and not just a cultural presence of Ancient Egypt in the Aegean during the Early Bronze Age, at the theoretical level he insufficiently strengthened the case for the *Black Athena* thesis, because he under-utilised the growing popularity of the model of demic diffusion. The latter model however is far better suited than a model of cultural diffusion to explain the extensive but selective religious and linguistic influence Bernal was claiming, on what now increasingly appears to be very solid empirical grounds.³¹ The increasingly dominant paradigm of demic diffusion would explain presence of these traits simply by the physical presence of Afroasiatic speakers on Aegean soil.

4. The *Black Athena* debate

The publication of Volume II in 1991 meant not only a further increase of the number of disciplines involved in the debate,³² but also a marked change of tone. As long as the *Black Athena* project remained (as in Volume I) essentially a review of the image of Egypt in European intellectual history, the project was by and large welcomed for its solid foundation in scholarship, and critical sense of Eurocentric and racist prejudices informing previous generations of classicists now long dead.³³ Glen Bowersock, the leading American classicist, proved far from blind to the oddities even of *Volume I*, yet he could declare:

'This is an astonishing work, breathtakingly bold in conception and passionately written. It is the first of three projected volumes that are designed to undermine nothing less than the whole consensus of classical scholarship, built up over two hundred years, on the origins of ancient Greek civilization. (...) Bernal shows conclusively that our present perception of the Greeks was artificially pieced together between the late eighteenth century and the present. (...) Bernal's treatment of this theme is both excellent and important.'

³¹ See below, my reference to the work by Lambrou-Phillipson 1990.

³² Various special issues of international journals have been devoted to the *Black Athena* debate: Levine, M. Myerowitz, & Peradotto, J., eds., *The challenge of Black Athena*, special issue of *Arethusa*, 22 (Fall); *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology*, 1990-, 3, 1; *Isis*, 1992, 83, 4; *Journal of Women's History*, 1993, 4, 3; *History of Science*, 1994, 32, 4; *VEST Tidsskrift for Vetenskapsstudier*, 1995, 8, 5; van Binsbergen, *Black Athena: Ten Years After*, o.c. For an extensive bibliographical covering the first decade of the *Black Athena* debate, as well as background literature, see the following website: <http://www.shikanda.net/afrocentrism/index.htm>.

³³ Bowersock, G., 1989, [Review of *Black Athena I*], *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 19: 490-91.

However, when Volume II was published four years later, it addressed the specifics of eastern Mediterranean ancient history – a topic constituting the life’s work of hundreds of living researchers. And it did so in a truly alarming fashion, less well written than Volume I, invoking yet more contentious Egyptian etymologies for ancient Greek proper names and lexical items (yet by and large much sounder than the Ht Nt one), insisting on the cultic penetration not only of Neith but of specific minor Egyptian gods to the Aegean, relying on mythological material as if whatever kernels of historical fact this might contain could readily be identified, claiming physical Egyptian presence in the Aegean by reference to irrigation works, a monumental tumulus, and traditions of a Black pharaoh’s military campaign into South Eastern Europe and adjacent Asia, playing havoc with the established chronologies of the Ancient Near East, attributing the Mycenaean shaft graves to Levantine invaders identified as early Hyksos yet bringing Egyptian culture, and reiterating a sympathy for Afrocentrist ideas which meanwhile had become rather more vocal and politicised in the U.S.A. It was at this stage that many scholars parted company with Bernal and that genuine and justified scholarly critique was combined with right-wing political contestation against the unwelcome, anti-Eurocentric, intercultural and intercontinental message of the *Black Athena* project as a whole – a development formalised and meant to be finalised by the publication of *Black Athena revisited* in 1996 under the editorship of Mary Lefkowitz and Guy MacLean Rogers.

One thing which the editors of *Black Athena revisited* have certainly managed to bring about, is a state of alarm and embarrassment among all scholars and lay people seriously interested in pursuing the perspectives which Martin Bernal has sought to open in the *Black Athena* volumes. And this is a real problem also in the context of my own current work, precisely because it finds itself in sympathy with Bernal’s. How could one honestly and publicly continue to derive inspiration from an author whose work has been characterised in the following terms by a well-informed critic like Robert Palter:

‘...those today who are seriously concerned with formulating a radical political critique of contemporary scholarship (...) might wish to think twice before associating themselves with the methods and claims of Bernal’s work; (...) for his lapses in the most rudimentary requirements of sound historical study – traditional, critical, any kind of historical study – should make one wary of his grandiose historiographical pronouncements. (...) In the absence of adequate controls on evidence and argument, the view of history presented in *Black Athena* is continually on the verge of collapsing into sheer ideology.’³⁴

Sarah Morris praises the critical self-reflection *Black Athena* has brought about among classicists, but finds this too dearly paid for in terms of unwarranted politicising of the scholarship of the Ancient Near East:

‘On the other hand, it has bolstered, in ways not anticipated by the author, an Afrocentrist agenda which returns many debates to ground zero and demolishes decades of scrupulous research by excellent scholars such as Frank Snowden. An ugly cauldron of racism, recrimination, and verbal abuse has boiled up in different departments and disciplines; it has become impossible for professional Egyptologists to address the truth without abuse, and Bernal’s arguments have only contrib-

³⁴ Palter, R., 1996, ‘Eighteenth-century historiography in *Black Athena*’, in: Lefkowitz, & MacLean Rogers, *o.c.*, pp. 349-401, p. 350f.

uted to an avalanche of radical propaganda without basis in fact'.³⁵

Mary Lefkowitz says she does not doubt Bernal's good intentions yet finds him criminally guilty of what must be, especially in her eyes, the greatest crime: providing apparently serious, scholarly fuel to what otherwise might have remained the Afrocentrist straw fire:

'To the extent that Bernal has contributed to the provision of an apparently respectable underpinning for Afrocentric fantasies, he must be held culpable, even if his intentions are honorable and his motives are sincere.'³⁶

Yet all this cannot be the entire story. How else to account, for instance, for the praise which the prominent Egyptologist and archaeologist B.G. Trigger piles on *Black Athena*? He sees Martin Bernal's project certainly not as a mere exercise in consciousness-raising meant for Blacks in search of identity,³⁷ but as a serious contribution to the history of archaeology – one of his own specialities³⁸ – and as a stimulating pointer at the possibilities of innovation in that discipline, which he considers to be bogged down by processual scientism.³⁹ Yet even Trigger stresses Bernal's methodological inadequacies, rejects his contentious chronology particularly with regard to the Hyksos. As an Egyptologist Trigger remains healthily unconvinced by Bernal's argument in favour of the possibility of extensive Asian and European campaigns by Senwosret I or III in the early second millennium BCE. and criticises the way in which he tends to take ancient myth as a statement of fact. Given the large numbers of both Egyptian and Greek myths, Trigger argues, it is easy for any scholar to take his pick and claim historical connections between selections from both sets – again the point of methodology.

In 1997, I adopted the same position as Trigger,⁴⁰ but later I became convinced, on the basis of a more detailed study of Egypto-Aegean mythical parallels, that with a better methodology Bernal's intuitions concerning the Egyptian and Phoenician provenance of the majority of Hellenic myths may yet be salvaged.

However, this proved not to be the last word. In order to approach problems like

³⁵ Morris, S.P., 1996, 'The legacy of Black Athena', in: Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers, *o.c.*, p. 167-175.

³⁶ Lefkowitz, M.R., 1996, 'Ancient history, modern myths', in: Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers, *o.c.*, pp. 3-23, p. 20.

³⁷ Pace Cartledge, P., 1991, 'Out of Africa?', *New Statesman and Society*, 4 (164): 35-36.

³⁸ Cf. Trigger, B.G., 1980, *Gordon Childe: Revolutions in archaeology*, London: Thames & Hudson; Trigger, B.G., 1989, *A history of archaeological thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³⁹ Trigger, 'Brown Athena', *o.c.*

⁴⁰ Specifically in the long footnote towards the end of the article, on the interpretation of the Athenian foundation myths featuring Athena, Hephaistos, Ge and Erichthonios: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1997, 'Alternative models of intercontinental interaction towards the earliest Cretan script', in: *Black Athena: Ten Years After*, *o.c.*, pp. 131-148. Meanwhile, my current long-range research on comparative mythology has brought me to return to these data: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., in preparation, *Black Vulcan' ? A long-range comparative mythological and linguistic analysis of the complex relations between the Greek god Hephaistos and the Egyptian god Pth? – Exploring the Pelasgian realm and its African connections c. 3000 BCE – c. 400 CE*, draft book MS, December 2008.

this, in the last decade I have made comparative mythology one of my special fields of study, seeking to develop a theory and a methodology that would enable me to use mythological data in the pursuit of proto-historical and prehistoric research questions. It then dawned upon me that the parallels which may be perceived between Egyptian and Aegean mythologies, have a much wider distribution in the Mediterranean region, West Asia, Africa, and Europe, and that these parallels should not be explained by a model of Egyptian-Aegean diffusion the Late Bronze Age, but on a much more extensive scale both in space and in time: by reference to a prehistoric common source, situated in West Asia in the proto-Neolithic (c. 10,000 BCE), and from their informing both Northern and sub-Saharan Africa, and Europe.⁴¹

The factual, chronological and methodological chords struck by Trigger as a thoroughly sympathetic reviewer reverberate, with dissonants and fortissimi, throughout *Black Athena revisited* and the other venues of the *Black Athena* debate. Many complain of the defects and even of the absence of methodology in Bernal's writings. Yet such criticism often turns out to be difficult to substantiate, e.g. the utterly unconvincing two methodological case studies by Palter.⁴² However, E. Hall⁴³ convincingly shows the methodological naivety of Bernal's handling of mythical material. Meanwhile, Bernal prides himself, and not entirely without justification, precisely on the explicitly theoretical nature of his approach and his attention for factors relating to the sociology of knowledge, which, he argues⁴⁴ constitutes the main difference between his work and e.g.: Morenz's *Die Begegnung Europas mit Ägypten*.⁴⁵

⁴¹ van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2006, 'Mythological archaeology: Situating sub-Saharan cosmogonic myths within a long-range intercontinental comparative perspective', in: Osada, Toshiki, with the assistance of Hase, Noriko, eds., *Proceedings of the Pre-symposium of RIHN and 7th ESCA Harvard-Kyoto Roundtable*, Kyoto: Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (RIHN), pp. 319-349; also at: http://www.shikanda.net/ancient_models/kyoto%20as%20published%202006%20EDIT2.pdf ; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2006, 'Further steps towards an aggregative diachronic approach to world mythology, starting from the African continent', paper read at the International Conference on Comparative Mythology, organized by Peking University (Research Institute of Sanskrit Manuscripts & Buddhist Literature) and the Mythology Project, Asia Center, Harvard University (Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies), May 10-14, 2006, at Peking University, Beijing, China; in press in: Duan Qing & Gu Zhenkun, eds., *Proceedings of the International Conference on Comparative Mythology*, preprint at: http://www.shikanda.net/ancient_models/Further%20steps%20def.pdf; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2009, 'Transcontinental mythological patterns in prehistory: A multivariate contents analysis of flood myths worldwide challenges Oppenheimer's claim that the core mythologies of the Ancient Near East and the Bible originate from early Holocene South East Asia', *Cosmos: Journal for Traditional Cosmology*, 23 (2007), 29-80; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2008, 'The continuity of African and Eurasian mythologies: As seen from the perspective of the Nkoya people of Zambia, South Central Africa', paper read at the 2nd Annual Conference of the International Association of Comparative Mythology, Ravenstein, the Netherlands, 19-21 August 2008, in press in: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., & Venbrux, Eric, eds., *Studies in comparative mythology*, Amsterdam: Aksant; conference version available at: http://www.iacm.bravehost.com/Binsbergen_Ravenstein_final.pdf . For this departure from the Bernalian model, also see: van Binsbergen, *Black Athena Twenty Years After*, o.c.

⁴² Palter, 'Eighteenth century historiography', o.c., pp. 388f.

⁴³ E. Hall, 1996, 'When is a myth not a myth: Bernal's "Ancient Model"', in: Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers, o.c., pp. 333-348.

⁴⁴ *Black Athena I*, pp. 433f.

⁴⁵ Morenz, S., 1969, *Die Begegnung Europas mit Ägypten*, Zürich & Stuttgart: Artemis.

Many critics are appalled by what they consider to be Bernal's confusion of culture, ethnicity and race.⁴⁶ Staunchly opposed to all forms of diffusionism, they suspect him of a nineteenth-century, lapidary belief in physical displacements of people through migration and conquest as prime explanatory factors in cultural change – neither they, nor their target Bernal, seem to realise that demic diffusion has meanwhile emerged as a respectable model in population genetics and long-range linguistics. They blame him for an unsystematic and linguistically incompetent handling of etymologies.

Many critics do not so much find fault with his specific points but simply – and clearly for disciplinary, internal, rather than political and external reasons – refuse to recognise his approach as legitimate, up-to-date ancient history.⁴⁷ Thus the eminent ancient historian James Muhly,⁴⁸ who summarises his methodological objections in Bernal's own words:

'it is difficult for the scholar without a discipline "going it alone", to know where to stop'.⁴⁹

According to Baines⁵⁰ the notion of paradigms may be scarcely applicable in the field of ancient history:

'Despite the extended applications of Kuhn's term that have appeared since the publication of his book [Kuhn's, i.e. *The structure of scientific revolutions*⁵¹], ancient Near Eastern studies are not a 'science' or a discipline in the Kuhnian sense. Rather, they are the sum of a range of methods and approaches applied to a great variety of materials from a particular geographical region and period; even definitions of the area and period are open to revision. So far as the ancient Near East relates to 'paradigms', these are, for example, theories of social complexity and change, or in other cases theories of literary form and discourse. *This point is where Bernal's aims depart farthest from those of many specialists in ancient Near Eastern studies.*'

Many critics question whether Bernal's stated intention of trying to understand Greek civilisation is sincere: all they can see is an obsession with provenance, with intercontinental cultural displacement, and with late 20th century CE identity politics, but certainly no coherent and empathic appreciation of the inner structure, the moral and aesthetic orientations, the religious experience and life world of the Ancient Egypt-

⁴⁶ MacLean Rogers, G., 1996, "Quo vadis?" , in: Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers, *o.c.*, pp. 444-454; Snowden, 'Bernal's "Blacks"' ; Brace, C. L., D. P. Tracer, L. A. Yarooh, J. Robb, K. Brandt, and A. R. Nelson, 1996, 'Clines and Clusters versus "Race": A Test in Ancient Egypt and the Case of a Death on the Nile', in: Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers, *o.c.*, pp. 129-164; Baines, J., 1996, 'On the aims and methods of *Black Athena*', in: Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers, *o.c.*, pp. 27-48.

⁴⁷ Baines, *o.c.*, p. 39.

⁴⁸ Muhly, J.D., 1990, 'Black Athena versus traditional scholarship', *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology*, 3, 1: 83-110.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Black Athena I*, p. 381.

⁵⁰ Baines, *o.c.*, p. 42.

⁵¹ Kuhn, T.S., 1962, *The structure of scientific revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; second edition, 1970.

tians, Levantines and Greeks.⁵² In other words, Bernal may be capable of inventing linguistically-inspired historical models, but he is incapable of writing social, intellectual or religious history. This is a fair criticism, to which we shall come back below.

Although Volume I of *Black Athena* contains numerous previews, only sparingly referenced, of the conclusions envisaged for the subsequent volumes dealing with the ancient history of the eastern Mediterranean basin, that volume is first of all an exercise in the European history of ideas. Various critics have deplored what they consider the incompetence with which Bernal treats what he considers a flow of Egyptian knowledge which – often under the name of Hermeticism – allegedly has permeated the European culture of esoterism ever since Late Antiquity. It is difficult to say whether the dismissive views of these critics do not simply derive from their own dismay to see so-called ‘pseudo-sciences’ as astrology, geomancy and alchemy, or invented traditions like freemasonry, elevated to the respectable status of vehicles of the secret transmission of Egyptian knowledge.⁵³ This is, incidentally, how many occultists across the centuries have viewed the situation. Some recent studies of the Hermetic tradition, respectable and without the slightest connection with the Black Athena debate,⁵⁴ would tend to a related view: they see European esoterism as a vehicle, not directly of Ancient Egyptian thought during the dynastic period spanning the three millennia before the Common Era, but certainly as a vehicle of esoteric thought in Late Antiquity, whose detailed relations with the dynastic period remains, admittedly, to be assessed by Egyptologists. Whatever the case may be, from Late Antiquity to the Enlightenment Europe’s intellectual production has been massively (not to say predominantly) in the esoteric field, producing an enormous literature which relatively few researchers can claim to overlook with competence;⁵⁵ if Bernal

⁵² Jenkyns, R., 1996, ‘Bernal and the nineteenth century’, in: Lefkowitz, & MacLean Rogers, *o.c.*, p. 413; Baines, *o.c.*, p. 39.

⁵³ R. Jenkyns (1996), p. 412; J. Baines (1996), p. 44. Also cf. M. Lefkowitz, *Not out of Africa* (1996).

⁵⁴ van den Broek, R., & Vermaseren, M.J., 1981, *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic religion: Presented to Gilles Quispel on the occasion of his 65th birthday*, EPRO [Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l’empire romain], vol. 91, Leiden: Brill; Quispel, G., 1951, *Gnosis als Weltreligion*, Zürich; Quispel, G., ed., 1992, *De Hermetische gnosis in de loop der eeuwen*, Baarn: Tirion; Yates, F.A., 1978, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic tradition*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul/Chicago: University of Chicago Press, first ed. 1964; Yates, F.A., 1972, *The Rosicrucian enlightenment*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. M.A. Murray’s claims of a direct continuity between ancient Egyptian religion and the European esoteric tradition, especially in its popular varieties, have been largely discredited: Murray, M., 1921, *Witch Cult in Western Europe*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921; Ginzburg, C., 1992, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the witches’ sabbath*, tr. R. Rosenthal, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books; repr. of the first Engl. edition, 1991, Pantheon Books, tr. of *Storia notturna*, Torino: Einaudi, 1989. I believe that also in this context the evidence of Egyptian-European parallels need not lead to a model of borrowing from Egypt to Europe – the alternative, much more attractive model would pose that both Egypt and Europe derive from a common source, to be situated in West Asia in proto-Neolithic times or even earlier. This alternative model will guide us through the final section of the present argument.

⁵⁵ Cf. Thorndike, L., 1923-58, *A history of magic and experimental science: During the first thirteen centuries of our era*, 8 vols, New York: Columbia University Press; Thomas, K., 1978, *Religion and the decline of magic*, Harmondsworth: Penguin; Levack, Brian, ed., 1992, *Renaissance Magic*. Vol. II of Brian Levack, ed. *Articles on Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology: A Twelve-Volume Anthology of Scholarly Articles*. 12 vols. New York: Garland, 1992; Jean-François Bergier, 1988, ed., *Zwischen*

is not one of them, his explorations are at least courageous and stimulating.

With the intellectual history of the 18th and 19th century we are on much more familiar terrain. Here the specialists have little difficulty showing that some of Bernal's allegedly racist villains (Kant, Goethe, Lessing, Herder) were in fact – at least at the height of their career – heroes of intercultural learning and modernity's theoreticians of tolerance, recognised as such in the whole world.⁵⁶ Josine Blok offers a penetrating discussion of this dimension of Bernal's work.⁵⁷ Bernal's limited mastery of the German language – already manifest in the considerable number of typographical errors marking the German entries in his bibliographies – is perhaps partly responsible for his errors on this point: he was forced to base his analysis on English translations and on the secondary literature.

5. Critical themes that the *Black Athena* thesis can accommodate without being destroyed by them

We may appreciate, at this point, a number of critical themes which apply to the *Black Athena* debate as a whole.

In the first place, *the search for origins (which are often imperceptible anyway) belongs to the realm of parochial, ethnocentric identity construction more than to the realm of detached scholarship*. Bernal argues – *grosso modo* convincingly despite too many errors in detail – how one particular view of ancient Greek history has served Eurocentric interests, but of course, his alternative inevitably serves other ideological interests, as demonstrated by his rapprochement to the Afrocentrist movement among Black intellectuals. Ironically, the very title and slogan *Black Athena* reveal that Bernal employs the language of race in order to drive home his anti-racist, anti-Eurocentric message; clearly there is some more liberation to be done here.

Secondly, *identification of provenance does not preclude the crucial importance of transformative localisation after the borrowed cultural product has reached – as a process of diffusion – its destination area*. There is plenty of evidence that Greek lexical items, the proper names of Gods, the myths in which they feature, and elements of philosophy and science – as well as many tangible traces of these cultural domains such as enter the field of classical archaeology – do derive from Ancient Near Eastern (including Egyptian) prototypes, but that does not preclude at all that these cultural achievements, once arrived in the Aegean, have gone through a complex and unpredictable local history which truly made them into eminently Greek achievements.

Wahn, Glaube, und Wissenschaft: Magie, Alchemie und Wissenschaftsgeschichte. Zürich: Verlag der Fachvereine.

⁵⁶ Palter, *o.c.*, on Kant, Goethe and Lessing; Jenkyns, R., 1996, 'Bernal and the nineteenth century', in: Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers, *o.c.*, pp. 411-419; and on Herder: Norton, R.E., 1996, 'The tyranny of Germany over Greece? Bernal, Herder, and the German appropriation of Greece', in: Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers, *o.c.*, pp. 403-409.

⁵⁷ Blok, J.H., 1997, 'Proof and persuasion in Black Athena I: The case of K.O. Müller', in: *Black Athena: Ten Years After*, *o.c.*, pp. 173-208; shortened version published as: Blok, J.H., 1996, Proof and persuasion in Black Athena: The case of K.O. Müller, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 57: 705-724.

The same reasoning applies to Bernal's central show-piece, the Greek goddess Athena herself. To the many etymologies of her name which scholarship has produced over the centuries⁵⁸ Bernal has added a new one deriving from the ancient Egyptian *Ht Nt*, 'temple of Neith'. Libyan Neith was a major Egyptian goddess in the Archaic period (3100 BCE) and went through a revival under the seventh century BCE Twenty-sixth Dynasty from Saïs, when Greek mercenaries were prominent. Even though the specific etymology must be considered effectively refuted on grounds of historical linguistics,⁵⁹ the wealth of iconographic and semantic detail which Bernal adduces makes it quite conceivable that the link between the Greek goddess Athena, patron goddess of the major city of Greek civilisation in its heyday, and her Egyptian counterpart Neith, did go rather further than a mere superficial likeness cast in terms of the *interpretatio graeca*. Was the goddess Athena the product of the adoption, into some Northern Mediterranean backwater, of splendid and time-honoured Egyptian cultural models – as a result of colonisation and military campaigns, of Hyksos penetration, of trade? Can such adoption serve as an emblem for far more massive Egyptian civilising action in the Aegean during the Bronze Age?

For a long time it appeared as if Bernal was here arguing on the basis of very scanty evidence, and was largely driven by wishful thinking – by nothing but a personal conviction (perhaps reinforced by his own re-discovery of Jewish roots in his own chequered ancestry) that the Minoan and Classical Greek civilisation must have had Afroasiatic (in fact Ancient Egyptian and West Semitic) cultural roots. Of course, a considerable part of volume II of *Black Athena* is devoted to an argument to the effect that this paucity of archaeological traces is in fact a result of scholarly myopia, exhorting us to consider the available evidence in a new light.⁶⁰ Initially, few specialists have been convinced by this.⁶¹ Meanwhile however, and contrary to my own earlier criticism of Bernal, what for a long time appeared to be a mere trickle of controversial archaeological attestations of Egyptian presence in the Aegean during the Early Bronze Age, has now swollen to a stream. For, completely independent from

⁵⁸ Cf. Fauth, W., 1977, 'Athena', in: K. Ziegler and W. Sontheimer, eds., *Der kleine Pauly: Lexikon der Antike*. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, cols. 681-686.

⁵⁹ Egberts, A., 1997, 'Consonants in collision: Neith and Athena reconsidered', in: *Black Athena: Ten Years After, o.c.*, pp. 149-163

⁶⁰ Bernal, *Black Athena II, o.c.*, ch. XI; Cline, E. 1990, 'An Unpublished Amenhotep Faience Plaque from Mycenae: a key to a new reconstruction', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 110: 200-12; Boufides, N., 1970, 'A scarab from Grave Circle B of Mycenae', *Archaiologika Analekta Athenon*, 3: 273-4; Charles, R. P., 1965, 'Note sur un scarabée égyptien de Perati, Attique', *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, 89: 10-14; Weinstein, J., 1989a, 'The gold scarab of Nefertiti from Ulu Burun: its implications for Egyptian history and Egyptian-Aegean relations', in G. F. Bass, C. Pulak, D. Collon, and J. Weinstein, 'The Bronze Age shipwreck at Ulu Burun: 1986 campaign', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 93: 17-29; Knapp, B., 1981, 'The Thera Frescoes and the Question of Aegean Contact with Libya during the Late Bronze Age', *Journal of Mediterranean Anthropology and Archaeology*, 1: 249-79; Cline, Eric, 1987, 'Amenhotep III and the Aegean: A Reassessment of Egypto-Aegean Relations in the Fourteenth Century B.C.', *Orientalia*, 56: 1-36; Brown, R.B., 1975, 'A provisional catalogue of and commentary on Egyptian and Egyptianizing artifacts found on Greek sites', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota.

⁶¹ Best, J., 1997, 'The ancient toponyms of Mallia: A post-Eurocentric reading of Egyptianising Bronze Age documents', in: *Black Athena: Ten Years After, o.c.*, pp. 99-129; van Binsbergen, 'Alternative models', *o.c.*

Bernal's project (whose first instalment in book form was published in 1987), Lambrou-Phillipson presented, already in 1990, after years of preparation, an impressive, excellently documented catalogue of over 200 objects from the Aegean testifying to an massive Egyptian influence, in not presence, there.⁶²

Whatever model may fit the postulated influence of ancient Egypt upon the Aegean, the important point here is both to acknowledge the Egyptian, or in general Ancient Near Eastern, essential contributions to Greek classical civilisation (the argument of diffusion), *and to recognise at the same time that Athena outgrew her presumable Egyptian origin*, increasingly severing such Egyptian ties as she may once have had, integrating in the emergent local culture, and transforming in the process (the argument of subsequent localisation). She ended up as an important cultic focus and identity symbol of local cultural achievements which were, in the end, distinctively Greek.⁶³

The third observation to be made concerns *methodology*. We have no direct knowledge of the pattern of the past. If our historical pronouncements are scientific, it is because they are based on the processing of all available evidence in the light of explicit and repeatable methods and procedures, before the international forum of academic peers. So much for the outsider going it alone, like Bernal; he even constructs himself to be an outsider to an extent impossible for someone who, ever since 1984, has been a professor of Near Eastern Studies at Cornell. His pride in reviving scholarly views of the early twentieth century, his doggedly sticking to the *Ht Nt-Athena* etymology even while admitting that it can only be sustained by a recourse to contingency, not systematic linguistic law, in general his responsive overkill vis-à-vis his critics, and the ready accusation (by reference to what Bernal monopolises as 'the sociology of knowledge') of ulterior, Eurocentric or racist ideological motives as ultimate argument against his many opponents – all this shows a strange mixture of empiricist realism and political idealism, a shocking lack of method and epistemology, and a tragic denial of the social, collective component as a necessary for scholarship.

Yet method is not everything in the field of research, and the most precious ideas often derive, beyond prosaic and routine rules, from an intuition which after all, in the words of Spinoza, is the highest form of knowledge. Bernal possesses a mysterious talent for producing profoundly illuminating, sound intuitions which he subsequently seeks to substantiate with unacceptable methods. Of course this is not as it should be, but it is eminently forgivable in view of the alternative: scientific research which is methodologically impeccable and sound, but lacks true intellectual challenge and progress. After several years of intensive participation in the *Black Athena* debate, in the course of which I have familiarised myself with Egyptian mythology and with the ancient Egyptian language, it is Bernal's claims in the mythological and etymological domain which, to my mind, stand out most convincingly.

‘Naturally, I maintain that the reason it is so remarkably easy to find correspondences between

⁶² Lambrou-Phillipson, C. 1990, *Hellenorientalia: The Near Eastern Presence in the Bronze Age Aegean, ca. 3000-1100 B.C.: interconnections based on the material records and the written evidence, plus: Orientalia: A catalogue of Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Mitannian, Syro-Palestinian, Cypriot and Asia Minor objects from the Bronze Age Aegean*, Göteborg: Paul Astroms Forlag.

⁶³ Cf. the final, long footnote in: Wim van Binsbergen, 'Alternative models', *o.c.*

Egyptian and Greek words is that between 20 and 25 percent of the Greek vocabulary does in fact derive from Egyptian!’⁶⁴

This precise statistical statement is often repeated (but with different outcomes!) in Bernal’s work, Yet the numerical procedures underpinning it have so far not been made explicit by him. Meanwhile the sample of proposed Egyptian etymologies of Greek words as included in his ‘Responses to *Black Athena*’⁶⁵ may convince the reader that, at least at the qualitative level, the claim is not without grounds. But here again it is the utter absence of an explicit and approved method – ignorance even of such methods are have been developed in these fields – which produces unsystematic and unconvincing results. Bernal’s proposed etymologies have to be browsed together from all over his published work,⁶⁶ and they usually remain at the level of isolated lexical atoms, – his greatest handicap after all is his lack of sociological and cultural imagination which allows him to conjure up a coherent image of a living culture, rather than a loose bundle of provenances that have virtually died in transit.

By the same token, he handles myth as if its historical contents is self-evident and non-problematic, and is entirely unaware of the great advances in the science of myth analysis since the nineteenth century. One would be justified, from a theoretical and methodological point of view, to reject Bernal’s conclusions on these points. Yet I now find that I have to come back upon my earlier scepticism concerning an alleged Egyptian provenance, in this case of Athenian foundation myths.⁶⁷ In my forthcoming book *Global bee flight* I have meanwhile produced detailed and theoretically informed analyses of the transformations of Egyptian (and Libyan) myths on their way into the Aegean and into Africa.⁶⁸ I am as convinced of the soundness of Bernal’s general intuition on these points, as of the methodological defects of his specific analysis.

6. Towards a re-assessment of Martin Bernal’s work – and beyond

All this leads on to a re-assessment of the *Black Athena* project.

Volume I was an eminently successful explosion of the Eurocentric myth of the autonomous origin of Greek civilisation – a liberating act of deconstruction of previous scholars’ myths worthy of the greatest respect (and, incidentally, one in which

⁶⁴ Cf. *Black Athena I*, 484 n. 141.

⁶⁵ Bernal, M., 1997, ‘Responses to Black Athena: General and linguistic issues’, in: *Black Athena: Ten Years After*, o.c., pp. 65-98

⁶⁶ For an overview, see: Bernal, ‘Responses to Black Athena: General and linguistic issues’, in: *Black Athena Ten Years After*, o.c. (now also reprinted in *Black Athena writes back*, o.c.); and the index to *Black Athena Ten Years After*, where I have listed a considerable number of Greek words for which Bernal proposes an Afroasiatic (ancient Egyptian or West Semitic) etymology.

⁶⁷ van Binsbergen, ‘Alternative models’, o.c.,

⁶⁸ Van Binsbergen, *Flight*, o.c.

specifically Bernal's skill as a trained historian employing an implicit but time-honoured methodology produced an argument largely⁶⁹ away from myth).

Volume II, lacking such methodology and venturing into a domain where the production, recirculation and reproduction of scholarly myth was only too tempting, has not yet produced the science it set out to produce. The great debate it has generated is essentially a struggle to formulate the conditions and the procedures under which Bernal's claims (or the alternative statements that can supersede them) can be allowed to be true; under which their myth content can be kept low. Even if meant to be destructive and dismissive, even the most critical reactions therefore are inherently constructive, and Bernal's later, specific responses (often more precise, clear, subtle and palatable than his original published statements), bring out once more the fact that scientific truth is the – usually ephemeral – product of a social process between peers. In my opinion, these critical remarks apply *a fortiori* to Volume III.

What is needed is that Bernal's sheer superhuman, self-imposed burden is now shared with others, working under an epistemology more readily recognised as suitable to tell myth from truth, but within the spirit of his vision of interculturality and multiculturedness as the central challenge of our age, and of his standards of interdisciplinary breadth and scholarly imagination.

If Martin Bernal produces truth inextricably mixed with myth; if his naïve epistemology is conducive to this; if he has not adopted more widely acceptable methodologies for mythical and etymological analysis; if his reconstruction of the modern history of ideas may be too schematic and partly wrong; if he shows himself more adept at the tracing of the trajectories of isolated cultural and religious items than at the analytical understanding the complexity of localising cultural and religious transformations, or at the properly historical understanding of their actual social, cultural, political and religious *life* once in place; if there are a hundred other things more or less wrong with *Black Athena*, – then *these are merely so many items for a research agenda that ought to keep as many of us as possible occupied for decades into the twenty-first century CE.*

In mid-life and without the required specialist academic training in classical and Ancient Near Eastern languages, archaeology, and ancient history, Martin Bernal has set himself a truly Herculean task. A fundamental dilemma has attended the *Black Athena* project from the beginning: its scope is far too comprehensive for one person, its political, ideological and moral implications are far too complex than that one person could possibly be trusted to thresh them all out. *Whatever error has crept in is more than compensated by his scope of vision, which made him realise that, inside as well as outside scholarship, creating a viable and acceptable alternative to Eurocentrism is the most important intellectual challenge of our time.*

One obvious strategy for reducing the state of alarm which *Black Athena* has brought about among specialists on Ancient Greece and the Ancient Near East, has been to try and refute the details of its scholarship, and to subsequently, smugly, withdraw from the debate. The other way out, and that is the one I have passionately advocated since the mid-1990s, is to continue in the spirit of Martin Bernal's project, with vastly increased personal, disciplinary, financial and temporal resources, and see

⁶⁹ Though far from entirely, cf. the criticism by Blok, *o.c.*; Palter, 'Eighteenth century'; Jenkyns, *o.c.*; Norton, *o.c.*

where this will lead us: far beyond the *Black Athena* thesis, no doubt, but with new inspiring questions towards a new understanding of the ancient world, and more effectively equipped for our global future.

7. From Egyptocentrism to *Borean-associated communalities: Why the *Black Athena* thesis must yet be abandoned for a more comprehensive and essentially different model of transcontinental interaction from the Upper Palaeolithic on

My subtitle runs ‘Yes and No’, and after this essentially positive appraisal, I am afraid we now need to somewhat retrace our steps, and propose such an essential revision of the *Black Athena* thesis as I find necessary, after following, over the past twelve years, the exhortations contained in the previous paragraph, and re-assessing time and again the *Black Athena* thesis and its possible relevance for understanding the place of sub-Saharan Africa in global cultural history, seeking to go beyond its limitations with a better methodology, and with such broadly comparative data as offered by my own specialisation as an Africanist proto-historian, and by the rapidly broadening horizons for systematic comparison opened up by the Internet, JSTOR, Internet Archives, etc.

Linguistic arguments

My revision addresses Bernal’s *mechanical juxtaposition of the Indo-European and the Afroasiatic language families as if this would sum up all there is to be said about cultural interactions in the ancient eastern Mediterranean*. The juxtaposition springs from Bernal’s obsession with language as a key to cultural history, which is also responsible for the misnomer ‘Afroasiatic roots of classical Greek civilization’.⁷⁰ The juxtaposition creates a sense of ‘either/ or’ which eminently befits the political rhetoric underlying the *Black Athena* debate (Black versus White; radical and liberation-orientated versus ethnocentric; the rest of the world versus Europe) but which obscures such continuity as may underlie (in Sumerian, Nostratic etc.) the actual cultural and linguistic dynamics in this region.

If we study the situation in greater detail, the linguistic situation in itself turns

⁷⁰ Let me spell out, probably superfluously, why it is a misnomer. *Afroasiatic* is exclusively a linguistic term, denoting the Afroasiatic phylum as one of the four language phyla found in Africa at the onset of modern globalisation (the others being Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan, and Khoisan). Contrary to the other three phyla, in historical times Afroasiatic (whose African branches include Ancient Egyptian, Berber, Chadic, Cushitic, Omotic, Semitic) is also distributed in West Asia through its Semitic branch, to which languages such as Arabic, Hebrew, Phoenician, Ugaritic and Akkadian belong. When Bernal speaks of ‘Afroasiatic roots’, he does not mean cultural influences coterminous with the extent of Afroasiatic; he means:

- a. in the first place: Egyptian roots (Egyptian being one of the branches of Afroasiatic; but the very obvious influences from Mesopotamia upon the Aegean, especially in religion, myth, science and technology, as systematically underplayed by Bernal; when the Revised *Black Athena* thesis began to focus on sub-Saharan Africa, the other African branches of Afroasiatic were implied, *but hardly studied in detail as far as their cultural and religious contribution to Egypt and the Aegean is concerned*), and
- b. in the second place, more loosely, ‘African and Asiatic roots’, again concentrating on Ancient Egypt and ignoring the rest.

out to be far more complex, but also to reveal a fundamental underlying unity going back as far as Upper Palaeolithic times. State-of-the-art, long-range linguistic reconstructions⁷¹ have brought out that (with the exception perhaps of languages spoken in Australia and New Guinea) most languages spoken today, in both the Old and the New Worlds, may be considered to derive from a hypothetical parent language, named *Borean, thought to be spoken in eastern Central Asia c. 17,000 years ago. High proportions of the reconstructed *Borean vocabulary overlap with the proto-vocabulary of such macro-phyla as Eurasiatic / Nostratic (with such branches as Indo-European, Altaic, Uralic,⁷² Kartvelian, Dravidian, Chukchee-Kamchatkan and Eskimo), Afroasiatic and Dene-Sino-Caucasian (with such phyla as Sino-Tibetan, North Caucasian, Yenisseian, Burushaski and Basque, and at some distance the North American Na-Dene). But also of such macro-phyla as Austric (spoken throughout South East Asia and the Pacific, with the two main phyla Austro-Asiatic and Austronesian), Amerind, and the three African phyla Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan and Khoisan, in their reconstructed proto-vocabularies show up to a few dozen percent overlap with the reconstructed *Borean vocabulary. Although it is virtually impossible to identify prehistoric languages that have left no systematic traces in modern languages, and although therefore our picture of the very remote past of very dim and simplified, molecular genetics has offered a simple explanation for much of this pattern:

1. the Out-of-Africa migration of Anatomically Modern Humans, 80,000-60,000 years ago,⁷³ followed by
2. the Back-into-Africa migration from Central, West and South East Asia back into Africa, from c. 13,000 BCE onward.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Cf. Starostin. *Tower of Babel, o.c.*, which is based on a large number of published etymological reconstructions by authoritative authors, listed in the bibliography section of that database.

⁷² Uralic languages include languages spoken in North Western Asia (Nganasan, Enets, Nenets, Selkup, Khanty, Mansi, Komi) and North Eastern Europe (Saami, Finnish, Karelian, Estonian, Ingrian, Livvi, Votian, Vepsian; Moksha, Erzya, Mari, Udmurt), in addition to Hungarian in Central Europe.

⁷³ Cf. Oppenheimer, S.J., 2004, *The Real Eve: Modern Man's Journey Out of Africa*, New York: Carroll & Graf; Forster Peter, 2004, 'Ice Ages and the mitochondrial DNA chronology of human dispersals: A review', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 359, 1442 / February 29: 255-264. Interestingly, in the context of the *Black Athena* debate the phrase 'Out of Africa' has obtained a very different meaning, against a very much compressed time scale: there it refers, not to the spread of Anatomically Modern Humans beyond the African continent, from c. 80,000 years ago – but classical Greek cultural features' alleged Egyptian origin, in the Late Bronze Age (c. 1100 BCE) and later; cf. Lefkowitz, *Not out of Africa, o.c.*

⁷⁴ Cf. Cruciani, F., Santolamazza, P., Shen, P., Macaulay, V., Moral, P., Olckers, A., Modiano, D., Holmes, S., Destro-Bisol, G., Coia, V., Wallace, D.C., Oefner, P.J., Torroni, A., Cavalli-Sforza, L.L., Scozzari, R., Underhill, P.A., 2002, 'A back migration from Asia to sub-Saharan Africa is supported by high-resolution analysis of human Y-chromosome haplotypes', *American Journal of Human Genetics*, 70: 1197-1214; Coia, Valentina; Giovanni Destro-Bisol; Fabio Verginelli; Cinzia Battaglia; Ilaria Boschi ; Fulvio Cruciani ; Gabriella Spedini ; David Comas; Francesc Calafell, 2005, 'Brief communication: mtDNA variation in North Cameroon: Lack of Asian lineages and implications for back migration from Asia to sub-Saharan Africa', *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 128, 3: 678-681; Hammer M. F.; T. Karafet, A. Rasanayagam, E.T. Wood, T.K. Altheide, T. Jenkins, R.C. Griffiths,

This means a number of things which bear directly on the *Black Athena* thesis, and suggest it should be revised very considerably. In the first place, Greek (as a scion of the Indo-European branch of the Eurasiatic/Nostratic phylum) and Ancient Egyptian (as a branch of the Afroasiatic phylum) have largely a common origin in *Borean; probably the dissociation of the two phyla only took place in Neolithic times.

*A cluster analysis of the world's *Borean-associated linguistic macro-phyla*

In this connection it is relevant to summarise the outcomes of a linguistic analysis I have recently undertaken.⁷⁵ Here I attempt a statistical cluster analysis of today's linguistic macro-phyla, based on a large 7*1153 cells matrix in which these 7 macro-phyla are scored against whether a particular reconstructed *Borean root (of the 1153 that have been proposed by Starostin) is or is not attested for that particular macro-phylum. For the non-African macro-phyla and for Afroasiatic I could safely rely on *Tower of Babel*. The three African phyla however are very unsystematically and patchily represented in that global etymological database. I have therefore only taken its data on Khoisan, ignoring its data for Nilo-Saharan and Niger-Congo. I resigned myself to the fact that I could not get adequate quantifiable data for Nilo-Saharan. For Niger-Congo, I had to concentrate on the major sub-phylum of Bantu. Here the lexical reconstructions of Guthrie (although subject to much controversy) with Meeussen's additions⁷⁶ do provide quantifiable data. Having found that *Tower of Babel* fails to acknowledge a considerable number of plausible *Borean derivatives in Bantu, I reassessed the proto-Bantu corpus, by reference to an explicit methodology. Performing an hierarchical cluster analysis, using the Single Linkage (= Nearest Neighbour) linkage method, and employing Russell & Rao's distance measure as is systematically indicated for cases like this, this resulted in the dendrogram of Fig. 1.

The percentages next to the names of the macro-phyla indicate which proportion of the *Borean lexicon is represented in the reconstructed proto-lexicon of the respective macro-phyla; for Khoisan I rely on the Tower of Babel treatment, but I suspect that closer and more systematic scrutiny would yield a much higher percentage – like I found for Bantu. Note the closeness of Bantu and Khoisan, their joint clustering with Amerind (which helps to explain a great many surprising parallels between North American and sub-Saharan African cultures, in such fields as puberty rites, divination, mythology, astronomy, games, basketry / weaving, hunting and fishing technology),

A.R. Templeton and S.L. Zegura, 1998, 'Out of Africa and back again: nested cladistic analysis of human Y chromosome variation', *Molecular Biology and Evolution*, vol. 15, n° 4, pp. 427-441.

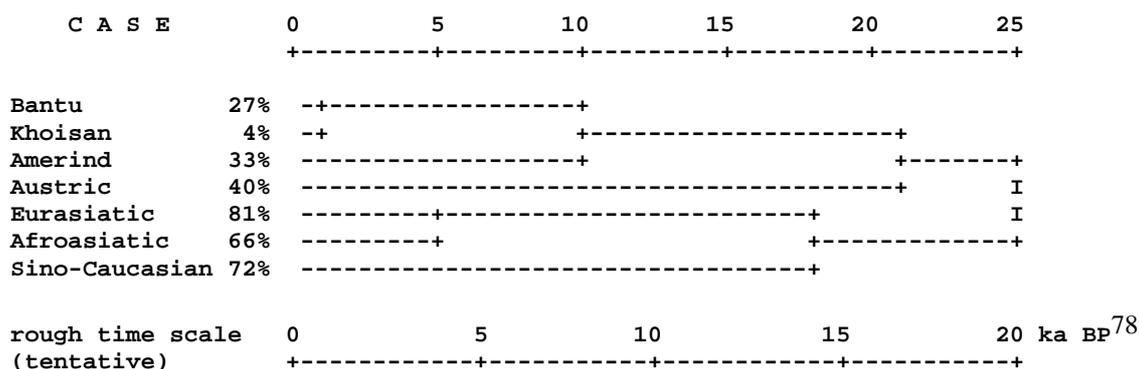
⁷⁵ Cf. van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2008, 'Cluster analysis assessing the relation between the Eurasian, American, African and Oceanian linguistic macro-phyla: On the basis of the distribution of the proposed *Borean derivatives in their respective lexicons: With a lemma exploring *Borean reflexes in Guthrie's Proto-Bantu', MS, October 2008, 340 pp.

⁷⁶ Guthrie, M., 1967-1971, *Comparative Bantu: An introduction to the comparative linguistics and prehistory of the Bantu languages*, Westmead/ Farnborough/ Hants: Gregg Press, vol. 1-4; Guthrie, M., n.d., 'Guthrie's Proto-Bantu forms', at: <http://www.cbold.ddl.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/Docs/Guthrie.html>; Meeussen, A.E., 1980, *Bantu lexical reconstructions*, *Archief voor Antropologie*, 27, Tervuren: Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika; Meeussen, A.E., n.d., 'Proto-Bantu Reconstructions', at: <http://www.cbold.ddl.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/Docs/Meeussen.html>.

while these three macro-phyla together with Austric constitute one main branch of *Borean, the other main branch being composed of the dominant languages of Eurasia (with Eurasiatic and Afroasiatic constituting one rather close cluster, and with Sino-Caucasian at a considerable distance). In the light of this analysis, recent suggestions by Manansala and Pedersen as to the closeness of Indo-European and Austric cannot be systematically sustained.⁷⁷ My merely statistical outcomes yet suggests an initial bifurcation of the hypothetical *Borean-speaking linguistic, cultural and demographic stock, with

1. one, ultimately peripheral branch vacating the Central Asian homeland and moving on (being chased?) to South East Asia, Oceania, the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa, and
2. the other, ultimately central, branch remaining in the Eurasian homeland, gradually expanding westward to finally occupy most of Eurasia, and the Northern half of Africa.

Fig. 1. Dendrogram setting out the relative positions of the *Borean-associated linguistic macro-phyla in relation to Bantu and Khoisan (after van Binsbergen, Cluster analysis, o.c.)



Even supposed that this audacious analysis can stand statistical and linguistic criticism, much further reflection is needed before we can try to explain such an early bifurcation – perhaps at the level of differential innovation in modes of production; of world-view and ideology; and of socio-political technology. Thus shamanism appears as a secondarily and perhaps rather recently acquired institution among peoples speaking languages of the ‘peripheral branch’; by contrast, the ‘central’ branch retained and developed, perhaps even originated, shamanism as a dominant institution, from which gradually the more highly organised political and religious status, and statal, systems

⁷⁷ Cf. Manansala, P., n.d., ‘Austrics in India’, at: <http://www.geocities.com/Tokyo/Temple/9845/austric.htm>, n.d.; Manansala, Paul Kekai ., 2006, *Quests of the Dragon and Bird Clan*, no place: Lulu; Pedersen, Torsten, n.d., ‘Austric words in IndoEuropean and AfroAsiatic?’ at: <http://www.angelfire.com/rant/tgpedersen/austric.html>).

⁷⁸ ka = kilo-annum, millennium; BP = Before Present.

may be derived that seem to be characteristic of Eurasia). As indicated, one might take the horizontal axis of this dendrogram for a very rough time scale, under the following assumptions which however require much further substantiation:

- (a) The Mal'ta archaeological culture, of Lake Baikal c. 22 ka BP can be plausibly identified as one of the possible contexts for the reconstructed *Borean parent language.
- (b) For modelling purposes, language change, like genetic change, can be tentatively assumed to take place at a constant pace.⁷⁹

Uninvited guests and disconcerting interactions in the Bronze Age Mediterranean

This means that in all likelihood many of the cultural, religious and mythological correspondences between Egypt and the Aegean, to the (probably high) extent to which they were enshrined in the shared *Borean-associated vocabulary, go back to much earlier than the Bronze Age, and that the parallels are to be explained, not in the first place by Late Bronze Age north-bound diffusion across the Mediterranean, but by a common Asian proto-Neolithic origin. In the second place, the field of Neolithic communalities which thus becomes discernable for West Asia and the Mediterranean, with extensions deep into Europe and Africa, displays a very high linguistic diversity, ranging from

- Afroasiatic (Eastern and Southern Mediterranean, probably in west- and south-bound expansion into North and West Africa); to
- North Caucasian / Basque involved (like most other population and language groups in that region and period) in a westbound expansion;
- to the emerging Indo-European initially probably concentrated around the Black Sea;
- to westbound, shamanism-associated Uralic elements which chariot technology – invented in Central Asia c. 2000 BCE – allow to spread deeply into Central and Northern Europe but also to leave traces in Mesopotamia (where chariots and shamanism appears in the middle of the second millennium BCE), Egypt (the etymology of the theonym Neith as Mistress of the Waters is probably Uralic; shamanic elements in the tomb of Tut-^cAnkh-Amon in the form of chariots and a royal diadem indistinguishable from a shamanic one), and the Aegean (where Pythagoras, Empedocles, Abaris the Hyperborean, are

⁷⁹ Assumption (b) has informed glottochronological research for over half a century now. However, the time scale in Fig. 1 is clearly compressed towards more recent ka, suggestive of exponential rather than linear pace. That language change may have increased in the more recent millennia especially under conditions of greater population density and statehood, is suggested by the case of Chinese, whose oldest forms as authoritatively reconstructed by Karlgren are much closer to Eurasiatic and Afroasiatic, only to be eroded beyond recognition, and into an abundance of homophony, characteristic of modern Chinese. (Karlgren, B., 1957, *Grammata Serica Recensa*, The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities Bulletin, 29, Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities.)

essentially shamanic figures revealing ancient Asia-derived continuities).⁸⁰

- to African languages, of which Niger-Congo (of which Bantu is a well-known sub-branch) has left traces in West Asian toponymy (notably the Palestinian hydronym *jabbok*, which means ‘fordable place’ in proto-Bantu, cf. Genesis 32: 22f; and *kana’an*, *Canaan*, proto-Bantu ‘to refuse’ – notably the overlordship of the states in the Nile Valley and Mesopotamia, with several parallels in South Central Africa)⁸¹ and in the various linguistic elements listed in Table 1. By the same token, profound lexical communalities may be spotted between reconstructed branches of proto-Khoisan, and proto North-Caucasian – in line with the very convincing finding by the leading geneticist Cavalli-Sforza, that modern Khoisan speakers in Southern Africa derive from a hybrid Asian / African population, with ancestors living in West Asia as recently as 10,000 years ago.

Table 1. Proposed connections between on the one hand Bantu, on the other hand Mediterranean divine names, religious concepts and ethnonyms⁸²

	I. Connections proposed by Karst		II. Proto-Bantu		III. remarks
	I.a. Mediterranean	I.b. Bantu	II.a. Guthrie, with Guthrie number	II.b. Meeussen, with noun classes	
1	Phoenician/Punic Moloḥ	muluku / m-luko, mlungu,	-dÓk-, to rain, 650, > ? mulungu,	-dók-, rain, drip, 5.4., [> S.C. & S.	Proto-Bantu *d often changes into -l- in historic attestations. To relegate the West Semitic form to Bantu is certainly possible, but this is a case where

⁸⁰ Cf. van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., in press (2009), ‘Before the Pre-Socratics: The evidence of a common elemental transformational cycle underlying Asian, African and European cosmologies since Neolithic times’, *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, XXIII, 1-2.

⁸¹ Cf. Lancaster, C.S., 1974, ‘Ethnic identity, history, and “tribe” in the Middle Zambezi Valley’, *American Ethnologist*, 1: 707-730. This adds an interesting note to our discussion of the two main branches of Borean, two footnotes up. If avoidance of expanding proto-state systems is to be a factor of major demographic, linguistic and cultural processes in global cultural history since the Upper Palaeolithic, proto-state formation would have to be much older than the handful of millennia now usually granted it in connection with the Ancient Near East / Egypt – whereas such major population movements as that of Bantu expansion, the Sea Peoples at the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean (with some Bantu element), Uralic and Celtic expansion, Frygians (an ethnonym similarly associated with ‘freedom’), Huns and other Central Asian invaders, might have more in common than their overall west-bound direction. But it is far too early to try and identify an overall, systematic pattern here.

⁸² The selection of cases in columns I.a and I.b was suggested by: Karst, J., 1931, *Origines Mediterraneae: Die vorgeschichtlichen Mittelmeervölker nach Ursprung, Schichtung und Verwandtschaft: Ethnologisch-linguistische Forschungen über Euskaldenak (Urbasken), Alarodier und Proto-Phrygen, Pyrenaeo-Kaukasier und Atlanto-Ligurer, West- und Ostiberer, Liguro-Leleger, Etrusker und Pelasger, Tyrrhener, Lyder und Hetiter*, Heidelberg: Winters, pp. 245f. Karst however, although a pioneer of modern long-range comparative and historical linguistics, is often obsolete or wrong in his interpretation of these long-range connection. Therefore I base the identifications in columns II.a and II.b, in terms of proto-Bantu, on more recent authoritative sources: Guthrie, *Comparative Bantu*, o.c.; Guthrie, ‘Guthrie’s Proto-Bantu forms’, o.c.; Meeussen, *Bantu lexical reconstructions*, o.c.; Meeussen, ‘Proto-Bantu Reconstructions’, o.c.; and (for column III) Starostin, *Tower of Babel*, o.c.

		mu-lungu, 'God, Heaven	God?	Bantu mulungu, God]	there is an overriding *Borean etymology with near-global; application: cf. *Borean (approx.): *TVKV 'to pour, drop' (> Eurasianic : *tUKV ; Sino-Caucasian : *[t]Hänkó; Austric : Proto-Austronesian *itik, Proto-AustroAsiatic *tVk 'drop'; Amerind (misc.): *tokw 'saliva; spit' ⁸³ .
2	Canaanitic El / Bel, cf. Sardinian / Aegean Julius, Jolos, Jolaos	Bantu y-ulu, e-ulu, wilu 'God, Heaven'	-*gòdò 5-, top; sky, 880, [>-ilu- in S.C. & S. Bantu]	-*gudu 5 L LH, sky, above, 6.3.,	Cf. Germanic <i>god</i> , whose etymology is unclear – both semantically and phonologically the Bantu connection is more convincing that Old Indian <i>huta</i> , 'the one who is invoked'. No obvious long-range etymology available
3	Aegean Abantes	<i>Abantu</i> , 'people'	-*ntò 1/2, person, 1798	-*ntu L 1, person, some (or other), any, 6.4.	Cf. Austronesian <i>-taw</i> , 'human'. ⁸⁴ No consensual long-range etymology available, however, cf. Indo-European : *-nt-, 'under', 'underling', proposed ⁸⁵ as etymology of Ancient Greek <i>anthrō pos</i> ('human being') and <i>Athē na</i> (as underworld goddess); Afro-Asiatic : t3, 'land, ground' (Ancient Egyptian); Sino-Tibetan : *dōlH, Chinese: 底 *tǎj? 'bottom', 根 *tǎj? 'root, base'; Tibetan: <i>mithil</i> bottom, floor; the connection with 'human', and with this entire complex, is hypothetical; Khoisan : 'person' in the following reconstructed <i>Proto</i> -languages; Central Khoi-San: *khóé; Khoikhoi: *khoe; West Central Khoi-San: *khóé; East Central Khoisan: *khóé; South Khoi-San (Taa): *ta^, *tu^; North Khoi-San: *ž ù
4	Lohios (Apollo), Meilihios (Zeus), molo, magical herb in Homer	Bantu m-logi, m-lozi, moloki, m-rogi, 'magician, sorcerer',	-*dÒg-, to bewitch, 644, [> -roθ - in S.C. & S. Bantu] / *dÒgi 14, witchcraft, 646, [> S.C. & S. Bantu -roθ i-]	-*dog- L, bewitch, 5.4., / - *dog-L 1, witch, 5.4.,	No consensual long-range etymology available, so Karst's Bantu proposal has a point
5	Chaldaeian Ōwan, Cappado-cian Omanes, Aegean	Bantu ô-wāngi, uwingo, uwingu, 'God,	-*gàNgà 9/10, medicine man, 786, / - *gàNgà 14,	-ganga L 1, 9, doctor, medicine man, 4.3. /	Dolgopolski, one of the pioneers of the Nostratic hypothesis, identifies <i>nganga</i> as a proto-Nostratic root which therefore cannot merely be counted as originally Bantu. ⁸⁶

⁸³ Cf. Ruhlen, Merritt, n.d., 'Amerind Dictionar', no. 590, unpublished, available in Globet data base and incorporated in Tower of Babel, o.c.; Peiros I., 1989, 'The Austric Macrofamily: Some Considerations' [Proto-Languages and Proto-Cultures] In: Shevoroshkin, Vitaly, (ed.), *Reconstructing Languages and Cultures. Abstracts and Materials from the First International Interdisciplinary Symposium on Language and Prehistory in Ann Arbor, 8.-12. Nov. 1988*, Bochum: Englisch Seminar, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Vol. 20, pp. 66-69: 128.

⁸⁴ Adelaar, S., 1994, 'Asian roots of the Malagasy: A linguistic perspective', paper presented at the congress on Malagasy cultural identity from the Asian perspective, Leiden, 28-29 March 1994.

⁸⁵ Ode, A.W.M., 1927, 'Reflexe von "Tabu" und "Noa" in den Indogermanischen Sprachen', *Mededelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, afd. Letterkunde*, 63, A, 3: 73-100.

⁸⁶ Dolgopolsky, A., 1998, *The Nostratic macrofamily and linguistic palaeontology*, Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research

	primal god Okeanos.	Heaven',	medicine, 787	-*gang- L, wrap up, bandage, heal, 4.3.	
6	Minos, Menuas [Urartean king]	Bantu m-ngu, mu-ungu, mu-ingu, 'God',	? -*nÉnÈ DP, big, 1350; ? -*dÓk-, to rain, 650, [> S.C. & S. Bantu mulungu, God]	-*néne, big, 3.3.; -dók-, rain, drip, 5.4., [> S.C. & S. Bantu mulungu, God]	Cf. my above attempt to propose an Austric etymology for Minos; for the 'rain' element, see above, line 1
7	Basque. yinko 'God' ⁸⁷	Bantu-Zulu Nkulu, God; Massai ngai, en-gai.'	-*yíNk-, to give, 2085, ? ; -*kódò DP, old, 1197, /- *kódò 1/2/14, old person/old age, 1197, [> -kulu, in S.C. & S. Bantu]	-*nink-, give, 2.3.; - *kúdú 1, big, senior, adult, 6.3. [> -kulu, in S.C. & S. Bantu]	Not necessarily Bantu-related, cf.: *Borean (approx.) : *KVRV 'old' (> Eurasianic : *gwVrV 'old'; Afroasiatic : *gVr - 'old' (Cushitic, Chadic and Berber *gVr- 'be bigger, older'); Sino-Caucasian : *xq(w)VrV 'old'; African (misc.) : Bantu *-kúdù 'old'; Ijo kUrai 'year'. (?); San. ɕarē 'full grown person'. ⁸⁸

Thus involved in an overall westbound (and, for the African languages, also southbound) movement from the *Borean epicentre, and in ways that modern molecular genetics can reconstruct in detail (Fig. 2), the scope and direction of the main elements in the *Black Athena* thesis take on a very different shape than that claimed by Bernal. The Aegean region looks similar to Ancient Egypt, not primarily because of diffusion from Egypt in the Late Bronze Age, but because both were the recipients of a demic, linguistic and cultural movement from West (ultimately Central) Asia; and this movement also extended to sub-Saharan Africa, producing the same similarities there. Ancient Egypt displays many cultural and religious similarities with sub-Saharan Africa, not primarily because of diffusion from sub-Saharan Africa to Egypt in Neolithic times, but the other way around: because the Back-into-Africa movement, carrying a significant share of Asian genes, as well as cultural, religious and linguistic elements (including *Borean-associated elements towards Niger-Congo / Bantu) passed via Egypt on its way from Asia to sub-Saharan Africa.

⁸⁷ Cf. *Tower of Babel*, o.c., Basque etymology: Proto-Basque: *iainko 'God'; Bizkaian: Jainko; Gipuzkoan: Jainko; High Navarrese: Jainko, (Baztan) Jinko; Low Navarrese: Jinko; Lapurdian: Jainko, Jinko; Zuberoan: Jinko. To this *Tower of Babel* adds the following comments:

'Azkue also cites Jaungoiko (BZK, GIP, ANV), but possibly this longer word ('lord who is on high') is a "folk-etymology which attempts to rationalize the old name [Jainko] into something more obviously Christian" (Trask, R. L. 1997, *The History of Basque*, London: Routledge, p. 323). The etymology remains mysterious.'

⁸⁸ Illich-Svitych, V.M., 1971-84, *Opyt sravnenija nostraticheskix jazykov*, I-III, Moscow: Nauka; Dolgopolski, n.d., 'Nostratic dictionary', unpublished but incorporated in data bases Globet, Nostret and in *Tower of Babel*, 2005: 664 (SH - Turkic), 670 (SH - Kartvelian).

Not a revamped Hamitic thesis

I realise that this comes close to the now discarded Hamitic thesis.⁸⁹ This theory was popular in the early decades of the 20th century because it seemed to offer an explanation for the ideological dilemma which was posed by African cultures at the height of colonialism: *how is it possible that Africans, whom European colonialism and racialism have denied all capability of cultural and technological achievements, yet display such achievements so undeniably?* The answer was sought in a model posing an influx of ‘culturally superior’ pastoral ‘Hamites’ (i.e. Afroasiatic speakers, of intermediate somatic traits between Africans and Caucasians) from West Asia, civilising Africa in proto-historical times, allegedly in much the same way as they were allegedly being ‘civilised’ by Europeans in the early twentieth century CE. I have no need for such a model, because I – Editor of *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, consistent defender of Africa’s contribution to global cultural history, speaker of four African languages, the adopted son of an African king, and a certified and practising diviner-healer in the Southern African *sangoma* tradition – consider myself to be reasonably free from the delusions of colonialism and racialism. However, the very same freedom allows me to ignore the pressures of political correctness. If the Hamitic thesis had an unmistakable colonial and racist origin, and implies to deny the cultural creativity of modern Africans, *that does not mean that no major transfer could ever have taken place*, since the Upper Palaeolithic, of genetic, linguistic and cultural material from West Asia to sub-Saharan Africa. Sometimes scholars are right for the wrong reasons – as is often the case, for instance, with Bernal, and with the scholars from around 1900 whose ideas he often seeks to revive. The inroads south, along the Nile valley and the Sahara routes (marked by abundant rock art depicting chariots – a technology invented 2000 BCE in Central Asia) have been recognised as such for a very long time. What is more, state-of-the-art genetics and linguistics – as all too briefly reviewed in the present paper – prove beyond reasonable doubt that there was, from 15 ka BP on and especially in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages, a sizeable demographic, linguistic and cultural influx from West Asia into sub-Saharan Africa. It is my impression that this influx was not imposed, in sub-Saharan Africa, as an alien package, onto ‘Africans’ as we know them today. The Paleo-Africans of 15 ka BP probably displayed high levels of continuity with the Palaeo-African groups (characterised by mt-DNA types L1, L2 and L3) that constituted the whole of Anatomically Modern Humans, and their ancestral culture, before the Out-of-Africa

⁸⁹ Cf. Meinhof, Carl. 1910. ‘Ergebnisse der afrikanischen Sprachforschung’, *Archiv für Anthropologie*, neue Folge, 9, pp 179-201; Meinhof, Carl. 1912. *Die Sprachen der Hamiten. Nebst einer Beigabe über die hamitische Typen von Felix von Luschan*, Abhandlungen der hamburgischen Kolonial-Instituts, Bd 9. Berlin: Friederichsen; Seligman, C.G., 1913, ‘Some aspects of the Hamitic problem in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 43: 593-705; and, as later, critical reflections on the Hamitic hypothesis: Greenberg, J.H. , 1966, *The languages of Africa*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2nd ed. , first published 1963; Sanders E. R., 1969, ‘The hamitic hypothesis. Its origin and functions in time perspective’, *Journal of African History*, 10, 4: 521 -532; Zachernuk, Philip S., 1994, ‘Of Origins and Colonial Order: Southern Nigerian Historians and the ‘Hamitic Hypothesis’, c.1870-1970’, *Journal of African History*, 35, 3: 427-455; Sharp, Travis, 2004, ‘The Hamitic Hypothesis: A Pseudo-Historical Justification for White Superiority’, in: Anonymous, ed., *Writing for a Real World: A Multidisciplinary Anthology by University of San Francisco Students*, pp. 52-72, at: <http://www.usfca.edu/rhetcomp/journal/sharp2004.pdf>.)

exodus from 80 ka BP onward. But today's Africans are substantially different, both culturally, linguistically and even genetically: they are largely a product of the Back-into-Africa movement, and as such fairly continuous with the populations and cultures of West Asia and Europe. The considerable affinities between Bantu and *Borean suggest that after all the early twentieth-century linguist Trombetti had a point and that *major elements towards* Bantu came into being, not on African soil, but in Asia;⁹⁰ in that case these contributive elements (a 27% *Borean lexicon) were transferred to sub-Saharan Africa in the very process of the 'Back-to-Africa' migration. Major cultural themes besides language came under the same dynamics, and this explains the continuity (in mythology, kingship, kinship, patterns of reconciliation and adjudication, religion, etc.) between West Asia, Europe, and sub-Saharan Africa.⁹¹ The same may also apply to metallurgy, whose invention is still being contested between West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa⁹² – but we can settle that argument by invoking a model where it was proto-Bantu speaking groups in West Asia, carrying a proto-African culture on their way to sub-Saharan Africa, that invented and transmitted metallurgy – like the specialist blacksmiths, the Sinties, on the fire-god Hephaistos' special island Lemnos,⁹³ or like the iron-working, music-oriented Gypsies (a major subgroup of which is also called Sinti) of which we find traces as far inside Africa as Sudan and Zambia. The Hamitic thesis is predicated on an obsession with difference, with absolute and discrete distinctions between Africans, Europeans and West or Central Asians. The reality of cultural history is much more fluid, transitional, interconnected, and simply makes sub-Saharan Africa, like Europe and on very similar terms, part of the world at large. Once more, we have to admit that the notion of 'African' as a distinct identity is (like the concept of Africa itself) mainly an invention, first of colonialism and racialism, but subsequently internalised by the latter's Black victims.

Going far beyond the Black Athena thesis

In the newly emerging picture, Ancient Egypt can no longer be regarded as the child of sub-Saharan Africa and nothing more (as current Afrocentrist writing, including Bernal, would have it – and as emphasised in Egyptological and archaeological circles since Hoffman's influential book Egypt before the Pharaohs (1979);⁹⁴ nor can

⁹⁰ Cf. Trombetti, Alfredo, 1923, *Elementi di glottologia*, Bologna (Italia): Zanichelli.

⁹¹ Cf. van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2008, 'The continuity of African and Eurasian mythologies: As seen from the perspective of the Nkoya people of Zambia, South Central Africa', paper read at the 2nd Annual Conference of the International Association of Comparative Mythology, Ravenstein, the Netherlands, 19-21 August 2008, in press in: van Binsbergen, Wim M. J. and Venbrux, E., eds., *Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Conference of the International Association of Comparative Mythology*, original conference paper at: http://www.iacm.bravehost.com/Binsbergen_Ravenstein_final.pdf.

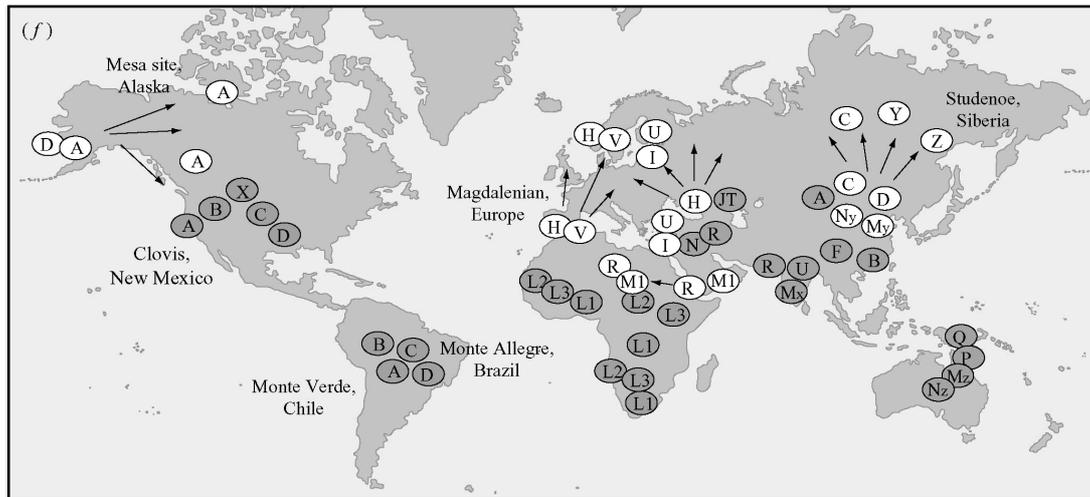
⁹² Cf. Alpern, S.B., 2005, 'Did they or didn't they invent it? Iron in sub-Saharan Africa', *History in Africa*, 2005 32: 41-94.

⁹³ Homer, *Iliad*, I. 594; *Odyss.* VIII. 294.

⁹⁴ Hoffman, M.A., 1979, *Egypt Before the Pharaohs*, New York: Knopf, rev. ed. 1991.

Ancient Greece be regarded any more as simply the grandchild of sub-Saharan Africa and nothing more.⁹⁵

Fig. 2. Reconstruction of the history and spread of mitochondrial-DNA types from the Upper Palaeolithic onwards (15 – 2 ka BP), showing the overall east-west movement from West Asia, and the attending 'Back-into-Africa' movement (Figure © 2004 Forster).⁹⁶



When the period summarised in this figure began, Anatomically Modern Humans had already been in existence for nearly 200 ka, and after their emergence in Africa had already started their spread out of Africa 65 ka earlier.

The emerging picture is complex, and suggests intensive and creative South-North interaction and feedback. Since the synthetic work of Hoffman on the Saharan antecedents of Ancient Egypt, and Williams' impressive identification of Egyptian central royal symbols (royal bark, white crown and palace façade) on a Nubian incense

⁹⁵ Even though recent genetic research concurs with, for instance, iconographic analysis of the Thera / Santorini frescoes from Minoan times, in suggesting an unexpectedly great African element. Cf. Marinatos, S., 1969, 'An African in Thera', *Analekta Archaiologika Athenon*, 2: 374-375; Knapp, B., 1981. The Thera Frescoes and the Question of Aegean Contact with Libya during the Late Bronze Age, *Journal of Mediterranean Anthropology and Archaeology*, 1: 249-279; de Graft Hanson, J.O., 1976, 'Africans in heroic Greek royal families?', *Legon Journal for the Humanities*, 2: 51-59; Arnaiz-Villena A., Dimitroski K., Pachó A., Moscoso J., Gómez-Casado E., Silvera-Redondo C., Varela P, Blagoevska M., Zdravkovska V., Martínez-Laso J., 2001, 'HLA genes in Macedonians and the sub-Saharan origin of the Greeks', *Tissue Antigens*, 57, 2:118-127.

⁹⁶ From: Forster, 'Ice Ages', *o.c.*, Fig. 2f, relating to the period from 15 to 2 ka BP. As Forster's other maps document, the H-type emerged in the Black Sea area and migrated to the Iberian peninsula before 20 ka BP, where it was then came to be associated with Basque, and subsequently spread to the North Sea area. Also cf. Oppenheimer, S.J., 2006a, *The Origins of the British - A Genetic Detective Story*. London: Constable and Robinson.

burner from pre-dynastic times,⁹⁷ there is no possibility of denying the constitutive contribution made to Ancient Egypt from the Saharan region south and west of the pharaonic territory. However, the Africa involved in such feedback is not in the least the primordial Africa of the pre-Out of Africa Exodus; on the contrary, it is an Africa that is already deeply involved in the Neolithic revolution, that makes its own contributions to that revolution by the local domestication of specific food crops and animal species. It is an Africa that has already massively absorbed the demic, linguistic and cultural material brought from West Asia by the Back-into-Africa migration. As a result, on essential points of cosmology (dominated by the separation of Heaven and Earth), kingship (as the principal re-connection of Heaven and Earth), mythology around these themes of cosmology and kingship, it would be tempting to speak of an Extended Fertile Crescent, far exceeding the narrow West Asian confines that gave its name to this presumed cradle of the Neolithic, and in fact extending from the fertile Sahara and the Ethiopian highlands, via Egypt, West and Central Asia, to China, with extensions to North Africa and Europe. This, incidentally, is also the core region⁹⁸ in which I believe I can identify a cosmology based on an elemental transformation cycle.

A new, long-range reading of Athena and Neith

In this surprising, new context of the Extended Fertile Crescent and its Upper Palaeolithic prehistory, also Bernal's central icon, that of the theonym Athena as a barely disguised Athenian import from Egypt, takes on a very different shape. Athena and Neith together belong to a vast belt, extending from the Sahara to West Asia (with extensions into South and East Asia, thus encompassing the entire 'Extended Fertile Crescent) and dating back to the Neolithic, displaying goddesses associated with young womanhood/virginity, military prowess, and feminine arts (especially weaving) and with spiders; other goddesses in this belt are Anahita,⁹⁹ Anat,¹⁰⁰ Anatu (perhaps also Inana), the West African spider-god Nzambi/Nyambi, cf. the West African spider trickster hero Anansi.

⁹⁷ Williams, B.B., 1986, *The A-group Royal Cemetery at Qustul. Cemetery L: Excavations between Abu Simbel and the Sudan frontier*, Keith C. Seele, Director, Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition volume III, Part 1, Chicago: Oriental Institute; Williams, B.B., 1996, 'The Qustul Incense Burner and the Case for a Nubian origin of Ancient Egyptian Kingship, in: Celenko, T., ed., *Egypt in Africa*, Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art in cooperation with Indiana University Press, pp. 95-97.

⁹⁸ Ultimately, however, this cultural region of the Neolithic elemental transformation cycle extends into North America, as flood myths recorded there indicate; cf. van Binsbergen, 'Before the Pre-Socratics', *o.c.*

⁹⁹ Cf. Cumont, F., 1911, 'Anahita', in: *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Hastings, J., with Selbie, J.A., & Gray, L.H., eds., Edinburgh: Clark / New York: Scribner, pp. I: 414-415; Frederic Giacobazzi, F., n.d. (2003), 'Anat, Anath, Anit (Syria), Anatu (Mesopotamia), Anahita (Persia, Armenia), Neith (Egypt), Athene (Crete), Athena (Greece)', at: <http://www.kirtland.cc.mi.us/honors/goddess/anat.htm> .

¹⁰⁰ Fontenrose, J., 1980, *Python: A study of Delphic myth and its origins*, Berkeley etc.: University of California Press; paperback edition, reprint of the 1959 first edition, pp. 139, 244, 253 n. 48. Of course, the goddess Anat was an established member of the Egyptian pantheon in the Ramesside times, cf. Bonnet, H., 1971, *Reallexikon der Ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, Berlin: de Gruyter, reprint of the first edition of 1952, pp. 37ff.

Ultimately, I would be inclined to interpret these goddesses as transformations of the Upper Palaeolithic creator goddess, the parthenogenetic Mother of the Waters, under a cosmology based on the separation of Water and Land. Still in the Upper Palaeolithic, as part of the verticalisation of the world image associated with the rise of shamanism, this cosmology was supplanted by one based on the separation of Heaven and Earth – which then became the dominant cosmology throughout the Old World, Oceania, and part of the New World, from the proto-Neolithic on. Verticalisation brought institutionalised social and symbolic sources of power leading to a male-dominated world-view, in which the ancient creator goddess was dethroned by a male creator and her creative powers reduced to domesticity, although she was allowed to retain her connotations of virginity and her implicit association with water.¹⁰¹ Neith is still in many respects the Mother of the Waters (a point well appreciated by Bernal, cf. *Black Athena II*, pp. 87f), whereas the aquatic epithets of Athena, although understudied, are eloquent:

- Athena Hippiia ‘of the horses’ – in the Aegean context, horses are in the first place sacred to Poseidon, the god of the sea, however, Poseidon in itself is a masculinising transformation of the Upper Paleolithic Mother of the Waters
- Athena Halea ‘of the sea’
- Athena Aithuia, ‘the sea bird’ (stormy petrel, sea-gull)
- Athena Glaukopsis, which at school we learned to translate as ‘Owl-Eyed’, but which may simply render the colour of the sea – Glaukos is the name of various mythological figures all of which have a relation with the sea
- Athena Nauta – ‘mariner’ or ‘shipwright’ – she is credited with essential help in the construction of the legendary ship Argo

All these maritime dimensions make her stand out as what to my mind, despite all the much later accretions of prowess and fine arts, she is more than anything else: a transformation of the Virgin Mother of the Primal Waters. This was keenly seen by Fauth when he wrote:

‘Auf die weitverbreitete Lallwurzel *at- greift auch van Windekens zurück, wenn er der göttlichen Jungfrau (Pallas) in Athene den sakr[alen] Titel der ‘Mutter’ zugesellt findet.’ (Fauth, W., 1979a, ‘Athena’, in: K. Ziegler and W. Sontheimer, eds., *Der kleine Pauly: Lexikon der Antike*. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, cols. 681-686.)

Viewed thus, there is no question any more of Neith engendering Athena, or the other way around: both are closely related specimens of a cosmologico-religious system which, throughout the belt thus identified, has produced Great Goddesses with connotations of underworld, death, violence, and ultimately of Primal Waters – connotations which were often (although not in Athena’s case) emblematised in bee symbolism. In this way one must also view the etymology of the names of Athena and Neith: the two female deities, and their names, are not derivations from one another, but both are probably derivations from a deity which is not so much Egyptian or

¹⁰¹ For an initial brief discussion of these themes, see: van Binsbergen, ‘Transcontinental mythological patterns’, *o.c.*

Libyan but West Asiatic.¹⁰²

Conclusion: Lessons for Afrocentrists

The emerging argument – although it could only have been conceived thanks to Bernal – yet more or less explodes the *Black Athena* thesis, since it dissolves Bernal's very contradiction between Indo-European and Afroasiatic as the possible sources of Aegean civilisation, and instead draws on continuities that could hardly be relegated to a primal and exclusive African origin.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Cf. Karst, *Origines*, o.c., p. 95:

‘Bei Diodor, Sic., Kap. 56—68, wird von einer Goettin Tritonis Athena berichtet, deren Kult in der Gegend des libyschen Tritonissees heimisch war. Diese tritonische Gottin Athena ist sicher identisch mit der arisch-iranischen und pontisch-kappadokisch-armenischen Anahit. Tritonis oder Triton ist als Goettesattribut, als Theophorname derselben Gottheit zu fassen und direkt zu identifizieren mit der eranischen Gottheit Thritha oder Thraetaona (Thraetana), bzw. dem indischen Trita, dem wassergeborenen Gotte Aptya, der iranisch als Athwya erscheint. Dies ware ein weiteres Argument fur eine einstige ostarische Besiedelung Kleinafrikas, vorausgesetzt, daß, nicht schon in der Diodorquelle eine Verwechslung des hesperisch-libyschen Tritonseees mit einem homonymen irano-turanischen und der afrikanischen Libya mit dem innerasiatisch-turanischen Libyerlande vorliege. Hierfuer sprache die bei Diodor, Kap. 68, erwahnte ‘libysche’ Dionysosinsel mit Stadt Nysa in der Tritonissee, wo es sich vermutlich ursprunglich entweder um die ‘indische’ Nysa (Nyssa) handelte, die Heimat des jungen Dionysos, bzw. um das medisch-hyrkanische Nisaea oder um die Nisaeischen Gefilde in Medien Kaspien, also um Lokalitaten des innerasiatischen Libyen.’ (Karst 1931b: 95)

¹⁰³ In earlier versions of this argument, published in French and Italian, I was not yet alive to the *Borean-associated and genetically substantiated continuity between West Asia, Ancient Egypt sub-Saharan Africa, as stressed in the present section. Instead I relied on

‘an ancient Mediterranean linguistic and cultural substratum, wedging in between Indo-European and Afroasiatic, which specialists have invoked time and again for etymological and religious reconstructions of the ancient Mediterranean’,

arguing that Ancient Egypt was the product of the interaction between two essentially independent demic, linguistic and cultural inputs: (a) a (sub-)Saharan one coming in from the South and the West, and (b) a hypothetical Mediterranean substratum. My test case was to be provided by the first-dynasty royal tombs of Abydos in Upper Egypt, where southern male nobles associated with Horus lie interred with female nobles – the latter often with explicit Neith connotations in their names and associated iconography, and thought to hail from the Delta and to be adepts of the Neith cult situated there (cf. Petrie, W.F., 1902-1903, *Abydos, I-II*, London: Egypt Exploration Fund; Emery, W.B., 1961, *Archaic Egypt: Culture and Civilization in Egypt Five Thousand Years Ago*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.) On this iconic image I based the following argument:

‘It was the interaction between an African and an eastern Mediterranean cultural tradition which produced, in the first place, the political system, the culture and the society of ancient Egypt. Once in place, this ancient Egyptian culture has, in its turn, in the course of three millennia exerted a decisive influence (with predictable feed-back phenomena, considering the original cultural indebtedness of ancient Egypt to these region) on the eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa. Once in place, this ancient Egyptian culture has, in its turn, in the course of three millennia exerted a decisive influence (with predictable feed-back phenomena, considering the original cultural indebtedness of ancient Egypt to these region) on the eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa.’

The lessons for Africa and for Afrocentrists are clear, and although disappointing at first glance, are ultimately illuminating and empowering. Contrary to the essentialising and the othering which has been the standard modern approach to Africa worldwide¹⁰⁴ (and which has also been Bernal's approach, incidentally, as well as that of most Afrocentrists), Africa turns out to have always been an integral, and important, part of the world at large, and thus of global cultural history. It is true that the essential cultural repertoire of Anatomically Modern Humans came from Africa, but that was over 50,000 years ago, and makes all of us humans today, or none of us, Africans in the primordial (and meaningless) sense. The Afrocentrist claims however refer to a much more recent past, from the Bronze Age or Neolithic Age at the very remotest. If for these relatively recent periods they claim an exclusively African origin of global cultural initiatives, they are mistaken, and they risk ripping Africa loose from the texture of transcontinental continuities in which it has thrived during the past few millennia (despite the setbacks of the last few centuries), in which it has made its own global contribution, and in which it can be recognised and affirm itself as a major player, instead of (as is the global reality of the last few decades) a disqualified outsider.

I now see that such a Mediterranean substratum (reminding us of the visionary but obsolete work of Sergi and Karst in the early 20th century; cf. Sergi, G., 1901, *The Mediterranean race: A study of the origin of European peoples*, London: Scott; earlier version published as *La stirpe mediterranea*, Roma 1895; Karst, *Origines Mediterraneae, o.c.*) is an artificial construct, creating an opposition between the Mediterranean North (supposed to be continuous with Syro-Palestine, Libya and even Anatolia) and the Nubian South (supposed to be continuous with the Sahara and with sub-Saharan Africa). Such continuities do attend the early dynastic Delta (as acknowledged by Hoffmann, o.c.; and on the linguistic side, by Kammerzell (Kammerzell F., 1994, *Panther Loewe und Sprachentwicklung im Neolithikum*, Goettingen, *Lingua Aegyptia Studia Monographica* 1) and Ray (Ray J.D., 1992, 'Are Egyptian and Hittite related?', in Alan B. Lloyd, ed., *Studies in pharaonic religion and society in honour of J. Gwyn Griffiths*, London: Egypt Exploration Society, pp. 124-136). But this is only to be expected on the basis of the more comprehensive model now advanced in the present section – and a similar kind of continuity extends to early dynastic Abydos, where e.g. Sumerian continuities have been claimed to abound (cf. Rice, M. 1990, *Egypt's Making: The Origins of Ancient Egypt, 5000-2000 B.C.*, London / New York: Routledge).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Mudimbe, V.Y., 1988, *The invention of Africa: Gnosis, philosophy, and the order of knowledge*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press / London: Currey; specifically on the Black Athena debate, this leading African philosopher has made the following enthusiastic contribution: Mudimbe, V.Y. 1992, 'African Athena?', *Transition*, 58: 114-123.