

## **ABSTRACT**

### **ANCIENT EGYPTIAN IDENTITY**

**by Eva Nthoki Mwanika**

This thesis looks at the approaches Afrocentrists and their critics have used in the investigation of ancient Egyptian identity. These scholars' approach has mainly focused on the Egyptians' racial characteristics. I argue, however, that this emphasis on the ancient Egyptians' physiognomy is not only an imposition of a modern term "race" on a people who had a different world view but also that the ancient Egyptian self-perception has been largely ignored. In contrast, based on an analysis of ancient Egyptian art, literature and inscriptions, I propose an approach to ancient Egyptian self-perception within the context of the characteristic of appearance, manner, mind, familial and other social relations that have been ascertained from the historical context of the person in question. Thus this analysis provides an evidence-based, non-anachronistic understanding of the ancients, and concludes that the ancients had a non-racial self-perception and worldview.

# ANCIENT EGYPTIAN IDENTITY

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by

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The 2004 publication of *Race: The Reality of Human Differences*<sup>1</sup> is not only revolutionary, but further proves that “race” continues to be an important, although controversial, historiographical theme. The book’s main thesis was that throughout history, people have always had the same conception of race. The authors argue that people from ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, India, China and the Islamic world sorted the many diverse groups using features quite similar to those used in the commonsense notion of race and the racial classification of nineteenth-century anthropology, “skin color, hair color and form, body build,[and] facial features.”<sup>2</sup> For Egypt in particular, the authors display Egyptian tomb paintings depicting personalities with various skin hues and physiognomies. Additionally, the book referred to ancient texts like the *Great Hymn of Aten* that speak of differences in human beings ,and inscriptions for example, a stele of the Twelfth Dynasty Pharaoh Sesostris III, containing derogatory attributes of a neighboring people.<sup>3</sup> The authors concluded that “Clearly the Land of the Nile distinguished among broad racial categories, characterized their behavior (however accurately or inaccurately), and even based social policy on those classifications respectively.”<sup>4</sup>

The question that comes to mind is how significant thoughts of for example, nasal indexes were to the ancient Egyptian sculptor as he dutifully worked on the granite, basalt, diorite or quartzite stone. Did the erudite priest, bent over his papyrus rolls, remember to include a clause on skin color and osteological measurements? Was the artistic distinction a matter of observation, bigotry or hierarchical classification? Chapter Two thus will illustrate in-depth how these questions, among others, seem to have eluded Sarich and Miele, and most of the scholars engaged in the debate on ancient Egyptian "identity." An analysis of ancient Egyptian literature, inscriptions

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent Sarich and Frank Miele, *Race: the Reality of Human Differences* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2004) See also Donald B. Redford *From Slave to Pharaoh : The Black Experience of Ancient Egypt* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

and art<sup>5</sup> demonstrates that the approach taken by these various schools is an imposition of a modern terminology of "race" as defined by skin color and select physical attributes as an anachronistic identity marker. The ancient people as will be discussed below had a very different self-perception and worldview.

The objective in this study is thus to be able to address the pertinent questions of what meaning (s) the ancient Egyptians attached to their use of distinctive skin color and physiognomic markers in their statuary. If not skin color then what were the probable markers of identity among the ancient Egyptians? What was at the basis of the ancient Egyptian self-perception in relation to the "other?"

Chapter Three will look at ancient Egyptian identity markers from a broader approach as suggested by Richard Handler in a 1994 article titled, "Is "Identity" a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?"<sup>6</sup> Handler, a cultural anthropologist at the University of Virginia, defined "identity" in the context of the "What" and the "Who." The "What" is a reference to "characteristics of appearance, manner, mind, and situation that have been ascertained from personal experience of the person in question." The "Who" refers to "a web of social relations that places the individual in question with respect to family connections and social rank."<sup>7</sup> It could be argued, that this broad framework is a more applicable approach to the ancient Egyptians' identity for it allows analysis rather than the imposition of anachronistic terms.

For example, using this framework, Handler analyzed the modern link between a personal name and the person's identity and concluded that in some medieval and even modern societies, personal names were "Rarely used and almost forgotten by the end of the person's life."<sup>8</sup> Thus the name was not a significant identity marker for these societies. On the other hand, when the same approach of personal names is applied as a probable identity marker in the ancient Egyptian, the results are different.

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<sup>5</sup> I cite the literature analyzed in this paper mainly from J.H.Breasted's five-volume work *Ancient Records of Egypt: Historical Documents* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1960.) Graphics are mainly based on those depicted in Brian Fagan, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Washington, D.C: National Geographic Society, 2001) and Jean Vercoutter in *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (New York: Morrow, 1976)

<sup>6</sup> Richard Handler, "Is 'Identity' A Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?" in *Commemorations: the Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R.Gillis, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994)

<sup>7</sup>Handler, "Is "Identity" A Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?" Ibid. 35.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

In the ancient royal naming system, the later kings had five names that were remembered down through many generations. The ancient Egyptians emphasized the significance of the name within the context of familial and social relations, the “Who.” These names occurred among other places, as inscriptions on the very same ancient Egyptian statuary that has been most scholars’ point of focus. However, various scholars and the media have obliterated the names’ significance as plausible markers of “identity” by focusing too much on the statuary’s physiognomy.

One could argue that my application of the term "identity," "A mid- twentieth century salient and scholarly cultural construct,"<sup>9</sup> as contradictory to the core argument of this paper which is against the use of the modern concept “race” for the same ancient Egyptian people. An analysis of the ancient Egyptian color use and symbolism, demonstrates that the concept of “race” as contemporarily understood in terms of a hierarchical skin color scheme did not exist among the ancient Egyptians. This is despite the fact that the ancient Egyptians obviously acknowledged color distinction and different physical characteristics.

Thus my use of the modern term “identity,” within the context of the “What” and “Who” will be more of a hypothesis to empirically test if and to what significance the ancients applied characteristics of appearance, manner, intellect and social relations<sup>10</sup> Chapter Four will thus be a summary of my findings with an attempt at a theoretical explanation for modern day anachronistic interpretations. The final section will investigate new developments in the debate of ancient Egyptian identity, followed by ways “race” has been usefully used as an analytical theme in historiography. This first chapter will focus mainly on the definition of terms within a discussion of how “race” has been applied as an identity marker for the ancient Egyptians since the nineteenth century.

The term “identity” is inherently dynamic and environmentally conditioned and thus requires further elaboration from the outset. In evaluating the distinctions in

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<sup>9</sup>Handler, "Is "Identity" A Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?" 2.

<sup>10</sup> The same argument holds for the use of the terms “Negro” and “black” in this paper. The figures depicted in the statuary art bear a close similarity to the people referred to by the same terms in the modern world. The terms here do not bear derogatory connotations. See James E. Harris and Kent R. Weeks, *X-Raying The Pharaohs* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons: New York, 1973) for a further discussion of the examination of mummies and skeletons for ethnic groupings.

ancient and modern world communities, Handler, pointing to the distinction in ancient and world communities approach to cosmology, cautions us on the indiscriminate use of the term “identity.” He argues that “identity” as understood purely in the modern western notions of physical dualities of mind and body, person and world, natural reality and the supernatural “Should not be applied unthinkably to other places and times...or assumed to have been applied universally.”<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the term “identity” portrays changeability in meaning in various contexts and time periods.

Denise McCoskey, a Classicist at Miami University has pointed out that, in the analysis of classical literary texts for example, it is “dangerous to assume that the participants in the documents would necessarily represent themselves the same way in other contexts, i.e. that the identities produced in formal contexts directly correlate to identities claimed in other social domains.”<sup>12</sup> It is for this contextual limitation in defining “identity” coupled with the reality that the presently available ancient Egyptian literature is largely within the official context, that this paper takes a broader approach to the concept of “identity.”

An analysis of the ancient Egyptian literary and statuary material does highlight a recurring pattern in various aspects. Recurring identity markers in particular, could be argued to reflect what the Egyptians considered central to their self-perception in various contexts and chronological periods. Thus the approach of analyzing what the ancient Egyptians repeatedly emphasized in their literature and art as plausible identity markers of both the “self” and the “other,” could then be applied to the existing and forthcoming evidence, whether official or private. As will be shown in the following chapters, we shall see that the modern concept of “race” was not a point of emphasis for the ancients.

Race became a prominent historiographical theme particularly in the last two decades of the twentieth century. The sudden rise was characterized by the advent of a socially defined race, which differed from the previous biological definition. “Race” as a historical theme has continued to underlay, in particular, debates between Afrocentrists and their critics concerning the ancient Egyptian identity. According to

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<sup>11</sup> Handler, Is "Identity" A Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?" ,27.

<sup>12</sup> Denise E. McCoskey, “Race Before “Whiteness”: Studying Identity in Ptolemaic Egypt,” in *Critical Sociology*, 28 (2002): 22.

Edwin Yamauchi, a professor of Ancient History at Miami University, Ohio, the birth of Afrocentrism movement can be especially linked to “the development, since 1965, of black studies programs at universities on the demand of African American students.”<sup>13</sup> Molefi Kete Asante, Professor of African American studies at Temple University is credited with the coinage of the word Afrocentrism.

Afrocentrists involved in this debate have taken the ancient Egyptian physiognomy as their starting premise although their varying interpretations have translated into divergent groupings. “Afrocentrism is not monolithic – there are actually many varieties of Afrocentrism. Some are demagogic and even fascist or racist in their assertions.”<sup>14</sup> Classicist critics of Afrocentrists have in particular opposed extreme assertions that renowned philosophers like Socrates were allegedly “black.” Historians and biblical scholars on the other hand, criticize Afrocentric assertions that “every inhabitant of the continent, including Cyreneans and Egyptians... [and] all biblical figures from Moses to Christ were black.”<sup>15</sup> Some Afrocentrists in contrast, “usefully provide an African perspective on events and themes previously viewed largely from a European angle.”<sup>16</sup>

Stephen Howe in *Afrocentrism: Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes* stated that despite these differences, the Afrocentrists in the post modern era share an “emphasis on shared African Origins among all ‘black’ people, taking pride in those origins and... a belief the Eurocentric bias has blocked or distorted knowledge of Africans and their culture.”<sup>17</sup> Of particular interest in this discussion is the fact that Afrocentrism in its most conventional form maintains that Egypt is an integral part of Africa, and that ancient Egyptians were black Africans.<sup>18</sup>

One of the first writers to claim that Egyptians were black Africans was the African American writer Frederick Douglass in 1854. He argued, “the ancient Egyptians were not white people, but were, undoubtedly, just about as dark in

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<sup>13</sup> Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan : Baker Academic, 2004), 208

<sup>14</sup> Gerald Early, “The Anatomy of Afrocentrism” in *Alternatives to Afrocentrism*, ed. John J. Miller, (Washington, DC: Center for Equal Opportunity, 1996), 11.

<sup>15</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 163 and 211.

<sup>16</sup> John J. Bukowczyk., “‘Who is the Nation? - -or, ‘Did Cleopatra Have Red Hair?’: A Patriotic Discourse on Diversity, Nationality, and Race” *MELUS* 23 no.4 (Winter 98): 8.

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Howe, *Afrocentrism: Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes* ( London: Verso, 1998),1.

<sup>18</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 209.

complexion as many in this country who are considered genuine Negroes; and that is not all, their hair was far from being of that graceful lankness which adorns the fair Anglo-Saxon head.”<sup>19</sup> The same sentiments were echoed by Edward Blyden and Marcus Garvey, both early twentieth century Black Nationalist leaders. The contemporary Afrocentrists have not only demanded the rewriting of “Black African” history but have also put their energies in propagating that this history be included in the curriculum of all levels of American educational institutions. (See graphic # 1.)

Since the 1960’s, these demands to institute African ancient history as a study course have resulted in major public schools , including Washington D.C and Baltimore adopting an Afrocentric Curricular.<sup>20</sup> The *Journal of African Civilizations* was also cited as a publication that has emphasized studies of pharaonic Egypt as a black civilization.<sup>21</sup> Other scholars, however, pointed out the danger of taking this course of action. Some educators in search of reliable information on African and African American history end up utilizing “unreliable books and publications by Afrocentric writers. *The African American Baseline Essays*, developed by the school system in Portland, Oregon, are the most widespread Afrocentric teacher resources.”<sup>22</sup>

Molefi Kete Asante, mentioned above, proposed “Afrocentricity” as an analytical tool for the writing of “black” history.<sup>23</sup> Asante, who is also a propagator of “Black African” history in school curriculum, in a talk at Miami University Hamilton (February 4, 2003) was quick to point out that “Afrocentricity is not a replacement for Eurocentrism “... but a facet that encourages pluralism on a multicultural society.”

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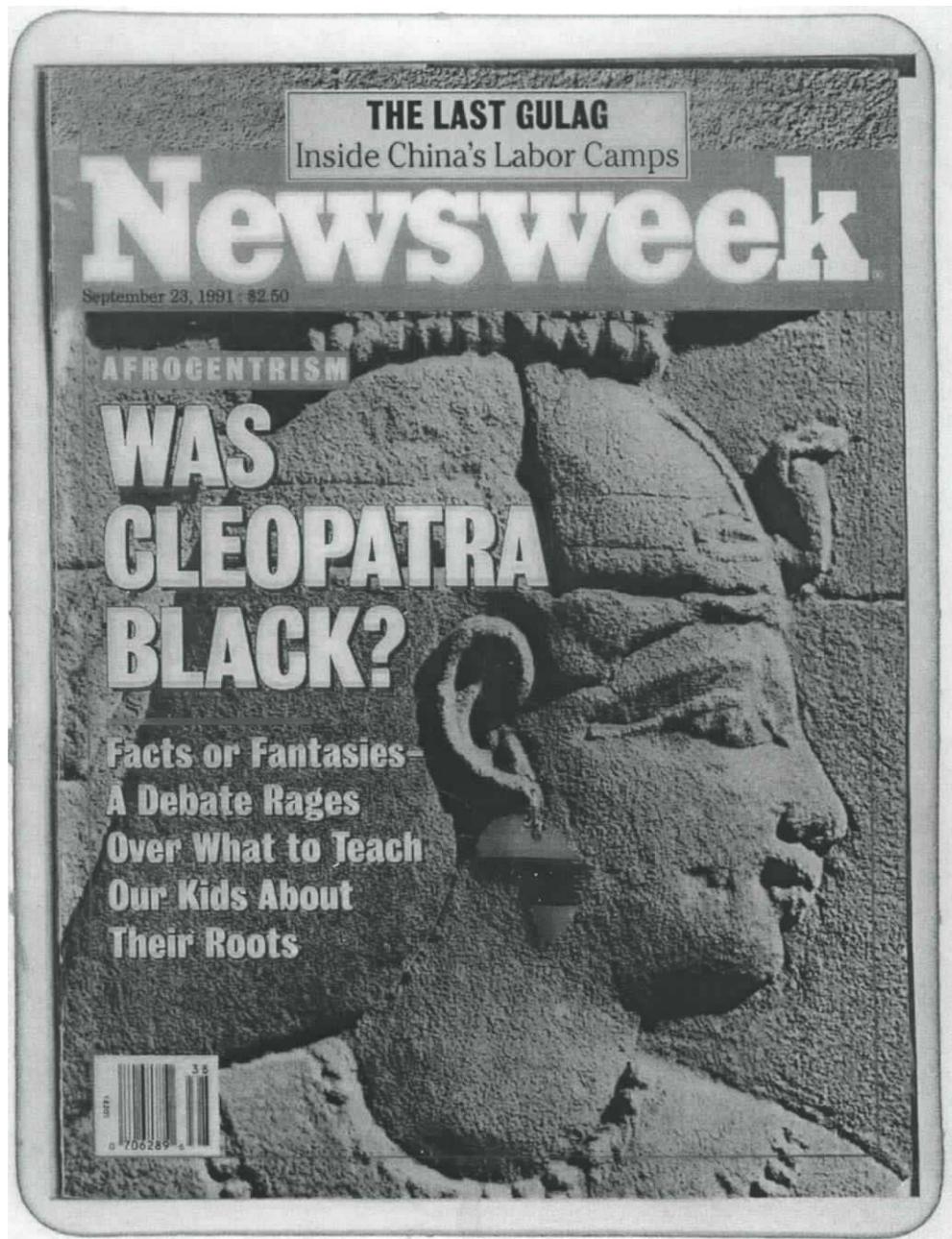
<sup>19</sup> Mary R. Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 126.

<sup>20</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*,207.

<sup>21</sup> Mary R. Lefkowitz and Rogers G.M., eds., *Black Athena Revisited* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 117.

<sup>22</sup> Erich Martel, “What’s Wrong With the Portland Baseline Essays?” in *Alternatives to Afrocentrism* ,ed. J.J Miller, (Washington, DC: Center for Equal Opportunity, 1996),30.

<sup>23</sup> Molefi K. Asante defined Afrocentricity as “literally placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior” in *The Afrocentric Idea* ( Philadelphia: Temple University Press,1998),2.



Graphic # 1 Cover of Newsweek, September 23, 1991.

“Afrocentricity” as a philosophy claimed Cheikh Anta Diop, a renowned scholar from Senegal, as one of its earliest pioneers.”<sup>24</sup> Afrocentrists mainly utilize linguistic, artistic and anthropological evidence to argue that all civilization had its roots in “black” Egypt. The Afrocentric biological approach to race could be exemplified by the school’s emphasis on the “broad nostrils and thick lips” of the Sphinx of Pharaoh Chephren (2520-2494 B.C.E. Dynasty IV). The Sphinx adorned the cover of Ivan Van Sertima’s *Egypt Revisited* (1986), not to mention Diop granting this statue, prominent attention in his *African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality?* Diop and his followers also used the same physiognomic approach with the appearance of select Egyptians.

In *African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, Diop approached race as a biological truth. He thus adorned most of his work with ancient Egyptian statuary to demonstrate that the Egyptians were a “black” race based solely on their physiognomic characteristics. In this work, Diop’s main argument, which he repeatedly emphasized in his other works and interviews, was “Egypt was the first to emerge, all ideology put aside. It is not possible –it clashes with chronology- to establish a parallel between Mesopotamia and Egypt, even though the first Mesopotamian civilizations were black.”<sup>25</sup> Additionally, Diop utilized the works of Herodotus, a fifth-century classical writer, as an eyewitness who reported the Egyptians as a “black” people. “It is certain that the natives of the country [Egypt] are black with the heat.... My [Herodotus’] own conjectures were founded, first on the fact that they are black-skinned and have woolly hair.”<sup>26</sup> Diop further interpreted the racial identity of the persons portrayed on the Narmer Palette <sup>27</sup> as black: “The king has thick lips, even everted [sic]. His profile cannot conceal the fact that his nose is fleshy.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore the back of the Palette according to him portrays personalities with the Semitic feature of “long” and “aquiline” noses. This penchant for the

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<sup>24</sup> Molefi K. Asante, *Afrocentricity* (New Jersey: Africa World Press Inc., 1988), ix.

<sup>25</sup> Cheikh A. Diop, interview by Charles S. Finch cited in *Population Biology of the Ancient Egyptians*, ed. D.R. Brothwell and A.B. Chiarelli, (London: Academic Press, 1973), 234.

<sup>26</sup> Cheikh A. Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality?* (Westport: Lawrence Hill, 1974), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Most Egyptologists consider Narmer to be Menes, the first pharaoh of the united two Kingdoms of ancient Egypt. See Graphic #2

<sup>28</sup> Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality?*, 25-27.

biological aspect of race also permeated the non-scholarly world in the last two decades of the twentieth century.

During the last quarter of the twentieth century the modern physiognomic approach to the ancient Egyptians permeated the world of the media. An article featured in the New York *Sunday Times*<sup>29</sup> reported that Louis Farrakhan, a leader of the black radical Nation of Islam declared that Napoleon, while expanding his empire, had ordered his troops to shoot down the nose off Egypt's Sphinx so that its African features would not be recognized. The Sphinx with the "missing nose" referred to in this article can be identified as the one mentioned above of Fourth Dynasty Pharaoh Chephren, the builder of the famous second pyramid at Giza (2520-2494 B.C.E.)

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<sup>29</sup> Tony Allen Mills, "Has black "history" gone over the top?" *Sunday Times*, March 24, 1996, Sunday. New York.



# 2. Narmer Palette,(d.3168 B.C.E.) frontal view # 5. Narmer Palette, rear view.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Ivan Van Sertima, *Egypt Revisited: Journal of African Civilization*, (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1986),136.

The cinema world also has not escaped the scrutiny of this Afrocentric School. Tony Allen Mills also referred to the complaints of a female student at Wellesley College, where the most vocal critic of Afrocentrist Mary Lefkowitz teaches. The student protested when the film *Cleopatra* was shown at the college, on the ground that Elizabeth Taylor's presence in the "starring role simply perpetuated the lie of 'white supremacy.'" Hollywood perhaps tried to escape this form of criticism by employing the highly complex visual effects that make the ancient Egyptians characters in *The Mummy* (1999) and its sequel have racially ambiguous physical characteristics that if evaluated could pass for the three major racial clusters.<sup>31</sup> The citation of these movies in this study is only meant as supporting evidence to show that dwelling too much on the racial aspects of an ancient people contributes to the glossing over of the *historical content* which is overlooked by various scholars in the ancient Egyptian art and literature.

In 1987, the Ancient and Classical history fields were hit by Martin Bernal's much read, much criticized, *Black Athena I: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. This first volume won the Socialist Review Book Award for 1987 and an American Book Award in 1990.<sup>32</sup> Four years later, Martin Bernal, a political scientist by profession and a grandson of the famous Egyptologist, Alan Gardiner, published *Black Athena II: The Archaeological and Documentary Evidence*. These works have "been more widely discussed in both scholarly and general forums than most books."<sup>33</sup> Bernal's above mentioned volumes of a promised four volume series of *Black Athena* led to the publication of Mary Lefkowitz's *Not Out of Africa* and her edited volume, *Black Athena Revisited* within the same year, 1996.

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<sup>31</sup> The sequel is *The Mummy Returns*(2001). The *Scorpion King*, a 2002, movie based on the Nubian Pharaonic dynasty of the Anu race, has an African American as the star. Diop argued that this dynasty preceded the first Egyptian dynasty by 200 years. See graphic # 3.

<sup>32</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 216.

<sup>33</sup> John E. Coleman, "Did Egypt Shape the Glory That Was Greece?" in *Black Athena Revisited*, ed. M.R Lefkowitz, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996),291.



# 3 Figure of Lord Tera Neter of the Anu race.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, 12.

The main goal of Lefkowitz's efforts was to provide evidence to dispute Bernal's claims that Classical Civilization had its roots in the Afroasiatic world, especially Egypt. *Black Athena Revisited* is a collection of articles written by various scholars who addressed specific issues raised by Bernal's two volumes of *Black Athena*. The scholars in this work, some of whom Bernal claimed to have had "a mixture of scholarly and right-wing political agendas"<sup>35</sup> towards his work, included Classicists, Egyptologists, Archaeologists, Linguists, Anthropologists and a Historical Scientist.

Mary Lefkowitz is a classical author and professor specializing in Greek at Wellesley College. Lefkowitz acknowledged in her introduction to *Black Athena Revisited* the fact that Bernal "Can read hieroglyphics and Greek" and "although his field is political science, he [Bernal] seems at home in the chronological and geographical complexities of the ancient Mediterranean."<sup>36</sup> Thus it came as no surprise that due to, as another classicist put it "the extraordinary breadth and wealth of detail in his [Bernal's] work ...cutting across the boundaries of the usual scholarly disciplines," critics during the last decade of the twentieth century not only poured in from almost every field of global history but they were also forced "to expand their horizons far beyond their areas of expertise,"<sup>37</sup> to be able to fully deal with but a section of Bernal's work. In an attempt to challenge and debate the arguments in *Black Athena Revisited*, Bernal in 2001 published *Black Athena Writes Back*.

A historiographical analysis of the above-mentioned publications not only highlights the approaches and emphases used by these various scholars but also serves to further demonstrate that the issue of ancient Egyptian self-perception has been largely sidelined. The above publications act as representatives of, and not substitutes for the multiple scholarly works that have been, and continue to be published addressing the issues of ancient Egyptian history, in particular the ancients' identity and relations with their neighbors. The second chapter of this paper does make reference to some of these other works. Additionally, Bernal and the various scholars in *Black Athena Revisited* touch on a wide range of historically important topics

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<sup>35</sup> Martin Bernal, *Black Athena Writes Back*, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2001),1.

<sup>36</sup> Lefkowitz, *Black Athena Revisited*, 12.

<sup>37</sup> Lefkowitz, *Black Athena Revisited*, 294.

ranging from the linguistic to the archeological. This study focuses only on those arguments that relate directly to the issue of ancient Egyptian identity.

It should be noted that Bernal does not consider himself an Afrocentrist. In an interview with Michael Eric Dyson in 1992, Bernal declared, “I have ...sympathy for Afrocentricity, though I’m not an Afrocentrist myself.”<sup>38</sup> Bernal in a later publication further stressed, “I do not join with those Afrocentrists whose ideal of African purity is a mirror image of European and Euro-American desires from white separation and purity. I also do not accept the many mistakes and exaggerations made by Afrocentrist writers and spokespersons.... I am intellectually convinced that the Afrocentrists are right on two essentials: first, that is useful to see Ancient Egypt as an African civilization, and second, that Egypt played a central role in the formation of Ancient Greece.”<sup>39</sup> A valuable aspect of Bernal’s first volume was his evaluation of how the aspects of race, colonization, and anti-Semitism undergirded the presentation of ancient history especially by German and British scholars of the nineteenth century in the fabrication of what he called the Aryan Model of ancient history. According to Bernal, this model created the image of a pure, northern race who created the Greek civilization, unsullied by contamination from external cultures.

In *Black Athena I*, Bernal’s central argument was that there is verifiable truth of Egyptian and Phoenician influence in Greek civilization. Bernal in an elaborate discussion obviously intended for both a general and scholarly audience, applied archaeological, linguistic and documentary evidence to support his central argument. Bernal’s focus was a comparison between what he termed as “Ancient” and as “Aryan” models with the aim of postulating a “Revised Ancient Model.” The latter contained some elements of both. The Ancient model claimed that the Greek culture had arisen as the result of colonization, around 1500 B.C.E., by the Egyptians and Phoenicians who had civilized the native inhabitants. This, Bernal stated, was the view among Greeks in the classical and Hellenistic ages. This view, according to Bernal, was denied by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and later propagators of the Aryan model, who

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<sup>38</sup> Cited in D.R Brothwell et al., ed. *Population Biology of the Ancient Egyptians* 1973, 234.

<sup>39</sup> Martin Bernal, *Black Athena Writes Back*, 376.

influenced by the anti-Semitism and racism of that period, emphasized held that a pure, northern race created the Greek civilization.

The Broad Aryan Model, established by the 1840s, denied Egyptian influence; the Extreme Aryan Model, which flourished in the 1920s and 1930s, denied even Phoenician influences. The Revised Ancient Model according to Bernal accommodated the validity of this invasion by Indo-European speakers around the fourth or third millennium B.C.E. but also maintained that later, the Hyksos invaded Greece around 1550 after they had been expelled from Egypt, and brought with them elements of Egyptian culture.

Bernal in *Black Athena I* alluded to few sources that referred to the ancient Egyptians as “black” but remained non-committal as to the ancients’ racial identities. In 2001, Bernal in *Black Athena Writes Back* declared that “Readers interested in the physical anthropology of the Ancient Egyptians will not find it in *Black Athena Writes Back*.”<sup>40</sup> However, for this study, the implications of the few references Bernal made as to the identity of various Egyptian personalities, and the theme of race in general, are important in evaluating the twentieth century approach to ancient Egyptian identity.

Bernal referred to a phrase in Aeschylus *The Suppliants*, which described the legendary founder of Greek, Danaids, as “black.” Bernal further posited that Danaids/Danaos who was “either an Egyptian or Syrian,” together with his daughters escaped from Egypt to Argos and brought with them aspects of Egyptian civilization like irrigation to this Greek city state. It was Danaos’ daughters, Bernal argued, who founded the temple at Athens.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, according to Bernal, the “Greek hero Herakles is depicted as a curly-haired African Black! - Something the Aryan model is unable to handle.”<sup>42</sup> Bernal further stated that “I am very dubious of the utility of the concept ‘race’ in general because it is impossible to achieve any anatomical precision on the subject....I believe that the Egyptian civilization was fundamentally African ...Furthermore, I am convinced that many of the most powerful Egyptian dynasties

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<sup>40</sup> Bernal, *Black Athena Writes Back*, 23.

<sup>41</sup> Bernal, *Black Athena I: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 20, 90, and 98.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

which were based in Upper Egypt- the First, Eleventh, Twelfth and Eighteenth were made up of pharaohs whom one can usefully call black.”<sup>43</sup>

The main contentions of the various scholars’ in *Black Athena Revisited* against Bernal were the type of evidence he chose and his deductions from the same. Bernal, in response to Egyptologists John Baines’ and David O’Connor’s argument that the categories “black” and “white” make no sense biologically and were meaningless to the Ancient Egyptians themselves, states that although he is sympathetic to the view that “blackness” was of no concern to the Ancient Egyptians themselves, “I stand by my references to certain rulers as ‘usefully described as black’.”<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, Bernal began his chapter on “A Review of *Not Out of Africa*” by quoting John Stuart Mill, a nineteenth-century abolitionist who asserted that “The original Egyptians are inferred, from the evidence of their sculptures, to have been a negro race: it was from Negroes, therefore, that the Greeks learnt their first lessons in civilization.”<sup>45</sup> Bernal singled out Mill as exceptional for unlike his fellow European nineteenth-century Europeans, Mill emphasized the Egyptian’s “Africanity.”

To demonstrate the “blackness” of these ancient rulers, Bernal used a cult statue of a ruler of the Eleventh Dynasty, Mentuhopte II as evidence. Bernal argued that this statue could have been painted black for many reasons, “It could well have been to represent Osiris and the color of immortality, but that possibility does not rule out other factors...it is interesting to note that some of Mentuhopte’s wives are also represented as having black skin. Thus one cannot assume that the blackness of the pharaoh’s miniature statue was purely the result of religious symbolism.”<sup>46</sup> However, Bernal did not specify what these “other factors” could have been.

Furthermore, Bernal’s argument that his application of “blackness” on these pharaohs was “to counterbalance early twentieth-century Egyptologists emphasis on the image of Ancient Egyptians and their rulers as real or imagined northerners or

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<sup>43</sup> Bernal, *Black Athena I*, 241-242.

<sup>44</sup> Bernal, *Black Athena Writes Back*, 23, and 28.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 373

<sup>46</sup> Bernal, *Black Athena Writes Back*, 29.

'whites.'<sup>47</sup> was not exhaustive. His argument did not consider whether these pharaohs perceived themselves, or were perceived by other ancients as "black." Although Bernal raised important points especially on the changing meanings of race as a social phenomenon, his emphasis on the "blackness" of these pharaohs served as a substitution of the modern term "white" with another modern term, "black" for an ancient people. Bernal further pointed out that in the United States and Western Europe, one drop of black blood is enough to label someone a "black." "However, when Ancient Egypt is viewed, no one is considered "black" unless he or she conforms to the European stereotype of a West African. Very few Ancient Egyptians would have been labeled "white" in nineteenth- or twentieth-century Britain or America."<sup>48</sup>

What is evident is that scholars including Bernal, Diop and his adherents to win the argument of "black" Egyptians, "define black not in terms inclusive of the great variety of African populations, but in stereotypes that choose Africans geographically distant from Egypt, such as those in Nigeria or Togo, as their model. In this way both sides reveal their continued entanglement in the misapprehension of the past."<sup>49</sup> The fact that "race" is an important social theme in evaluating twenty-first century societies does not, however, warrant an imposition of the concept on an ancient society.

Although on the surface the *Black Athena* series may seem as highly inaccurate, as one Egyptologist put it, "I cannot bring myself to mince words or appear to recommend any part of this bad book....,"<sup>50</sup> the questions and proposals Bernal raised do serve a positive purpose. O'Connor stated that "serious challenges such as this, to accepted orthodoxy always stimulate productive rethinking of the evidence and the issues and can indeed lead to a changed understanding of important processes in the past."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Bernal, *Black Athena Writes Back*, 29.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Christopher Ehret, "The African Sources of Egyptian Culture and Language," in *Africa Antiqua*, ed. Josep Cervello Autuori, (Barcelona: Aula Aegyptiaca Fundacion, 2001),122.

<sup>50</sup> Leonard H. Lesko, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 24 no. 3 ( Winter 1994) :518-521 .

<sup>51</sup> Lefkowitz, *Black Athena Revisited*, 61.

The danger of actually using valid historical evidence to deduce inaccurate, anachronistic conclusions, and the possibility of the continuation of this trend, seems to be the issue that has preoccupied most of the various critics. However, as far as the issue of the ancient Egyptian identity was concerned, scholars including Bernal and others as will be discussed in the following chapter, have approached the available historical evidence in a very limited way. These scholars have analyzed the issue of “identity” exclusively within the framework of “race” as it is understood in the modern sense. This perspective, it could be argued, ignored the probability that the ancient Egyptians may have perceived themselves by using other forms of identity markers.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE MODERN PERCEPTION OF THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS

Lefkowitz emphatically stated “the question of race matters only insofar as it is necessary to show that no classicists or ancient historians have tried to conceal the truth about the origins of the Greek people or the ancestry of certain famous ancient figures.”<sup>52</sup> In addition, according to the critics of Bernal, the ancient Greek civilization although influenced to some degree by the Egyptians arose independently. Lefkowitz argued “influence is not to show origin. Greek culture was separate and different from Egyptian or African culture. It was divided from them by language and by genealogy.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, to the critics, the “ancient Egyptians were Mediterranean peoples, neither Sub-Saharan blacks nor Caucasian whites but peoples whose skin was adapted for life in a subtropical desert environment.”<sup>54</sup>

Frank Snowden Jr., a classicist at Howard University, applied the evidence of a first century Roman politician, Manilius, to underscore the fact that the ancient Egyptians were not “black.” According to Manilius’ biological classification, “Ethiopians were the blackest; Indians, less sunburned; Egyptians, mildly dark; and the Moors, the lightest.”<sup>55</sup> Consequently, this form of argument not only overlooked the ancient Egyptians self-perception but also anachronistically, applied a modern binary construct of race on an ancient people. It could be argued that the main oversight was the melded characteristic of the ancient Egyptians and their neighbors. The ancient Egyptian society consisted of a mixed Mediterranean and sub-Saharan people regularly on the move. It follows then that the labeling of the ancient Egyptian interactively mixed society, based on the modern fixation of ‘black’ and ‘white’ is historically anachronistic.

Various Afrocentrists in pursuit of the ancient Egyptian identity based on a racial approach, cite from works of controversial classical writers including Diodorus Siculus, Aeschylus and Herodotus. It, however, remains unproven according to critics of Afrocentrism, how far these ancient authors should be trusted as historical

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<sup>52</sup> Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa*, 16.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>54</sup> Kathryn A. Bard, “Ancient Egyptians and the Issue of Race” in *Black Athena Revisited*, 104.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

authorities. Diop, for example, quoted Herodotus, a fifth-century classical writer, as an eyewitness who reported in *Herodotus 2:104*, “It is certain that the natives of the country [Egypt] are black with the heat.” Diop further argued that according to Herodotus the inhabitants of Colchis, in the northeast of the Black Sea, were of Egyptian origin and a part of the army of an Egyptian King of the Twelfth Dynasty, Sesostris --“My [Herodotus’] own conjectures were founded, first on the fact that they are black-skinned and have woolly hair.”<sup>56</sup> Diop went on to argue that this fact of “black” ancient Egyptians was later supported in the first century B.C.E. by Diodorus of Sicily and Strabo.<sup>57</sup>

Diop drew heavily on Count Constantin de Volney (1757-1820), as an exemplar of a European who rose above “black discrimination” when slavery flourished in the nineteenth century. Volney, a French philosopher and historian described the ancient Egyptians as having “a bloated face, puffed up eyes, flat nose, thick lips.... I was tempted to attribute it to the climate, but when I visited the Sphinx its appearance gave me the key to the riddle. On seeing that head, typically Negro in all its features.... we can see how their blood, mixed for several centuries with that of the Romans and Greeks must have lost the intensity of its original, while retaining nonetheless the imprint of its original mold.”<sup>58</sup> Lefkowitz on the other hand, dismisses the testimony of these early writers based on the fact that they relied on the patriotic and thus biased Egyptian priests as their informants. Furthermore, according to Lefkowitz, the Greek writers “were eager to establish direct links between their civilization and that of Egypt because Egypt was a vastly older culture.”<sup>59</sup> Lefkowitz further emphasizes that the first book of Herodotus was suspect but the second book of Herodotus “still serves as an important source of information about ancient Egypt.”<sup>60</sup>

However, later when Lefkowitz discusses the legendary lawmaker Solon (640-560 B.C.E.) states, “The idea that early Greek law was inspired by Egyptian law is a historical fiction... our earliest authority, Herodotus says Solon went to visit the sixth-

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<sup>56</sup> Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality?*, 1.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>58</sup> Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality?*, 27.

<sup>59</sup> Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa*, 54.

<sup>60</sup> Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa*, 61-62.

century pharaoh Amasis in Egypt after he established his laws in Athens.<sup>61</sup> The debate as to what extent these early classical writers can be used as textual evidence of ancient Egyptian racial identity, if at all, has arguably become circular. In addition, limited primary sources for ancient Egypt further complicate this venture.

On art, scholars take dissimilar positions on the reliability of the statues left behind by the ancient Egyptians as evidence of real physical characteristics. Afrocentrists gave and continue to give these statues a primary position in their argument of the racial identity of the ancient Egyptians. Depictions of these “broad nosed-thick lipped” figures are found among others, in Diop’s above mentioned works, Ivan Van Sertima’s edition of *Egypt Revisited* (1986) and Jean Vercoutter’s series *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (1976-). Frank Snowden, a critic of the Afrocentrism also argued “our earliest evidence comes from Egyptian craftsmen- in countless paintings, sculptures, mosaics and other pieces from their workshops realistically portrayed the physical features of the southerners.”<sup>62</sup>

On the other hand, a documentary aired on the History channel<sup>63</sup> suggested that the Egyptian statues were idealized beings and not real portraits of the people represented. Kathryn Bard, an archaeologist at Boston University, also stated that “the conventions of Egyptian art, as established by the beginning of the First Dynasty (ca 3050 B.C.E) do not represent humans as seen in perspective by the eye, but represent them in an analytical manner that transforms reality.”<sup>64</sup> She further argued that the art was also not at all representative because it focused on the Egyptian crown and the elite.

From an anthropological perspective, Diop, as earlier mentioned, stereotypically adorned a considerable portion of his work - *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality?* (1974) with ancient Egyptian statuary compared to the modern African tribes of West Africa to support his stand that the ancient Egyptians

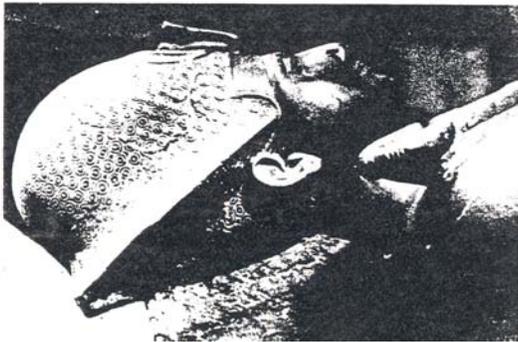
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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>62</sup> Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa*, 112.

<sup>63</sup> “The Sphinx of Egypt” aired on 05/11/2003. A video cassette on the same title is also available on [www.historychannel.com](http://www.historychannel.com)

<sup>64</sup> Lefkowitz, *Black Athena Revisited*, 106.



# 4 Modern Watusi (top), Pharaoh Ramses II Egyptian Princess (top left) and 3 Senegalese girls.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, 19 and 39.

were “black or Negro.”<sup>66</sup> To refute this, Bard, cited studies that have analyzed the metrical variations in skulls. Bard concluded that due to geographical proximity, it was not surprising that the Egyptian skulls were not very distinct from the skulls found at Jebel Moya in northern Sudan, but were much more distinct from all others, including those from West Africa.<sup>67</sup> However, she also pointed out that the ancient Egyptian skulls also differed from skull samples from Europe and Asia.

Furthermore, a study of dendrograms by Brace C. Loring, an anthropologist at the University of Michigan, showed that in consideration of the number of shared characteristics especially in biological taxonomy, the Egyptians “clearly had biological ties both to the north and to the south, but that it was intermediate between populations to the east and the west and that Egypt was basically Egyptian from the Neolithic right on up to historic times.”<sup>68</sup> Unfortunately despite the fact that anthropologists at least by 1969 had “459 mummified Egyptians and 10,000 objects (skeletons and skulls) covering a period of at least 2500 years”<sup>69</sup> at their disposal, external features which are the ones most frequently used to distinguish race today have long since disappeared in the physical remains of burials-- even when they have been mummified as in pharaonic Egypt.

Nancy C. Lovell, a professor of anthropology at the University of Alberta is a biological anthropologist interested in the skeletal biology of ancient peoples, particularly in how their skeletons reveal aspects of the interrelationships between culture, environment, and health. In an article titled “The Physical Anthropology of Egyptians,”<sup>70</sup> Lovell argued that for over a century, the debate over the origins of the Dynastic Egyptians—whether the ancient Egyptians were Negroid Black Africans originating biologically and culturally in Saharo-tropical Africa, or whether they originated as a White “Dynastic Race” in the Mediterranean or western Asian regions

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<sup>66</sup> See graphic # 4.

<sup>67</sup> Lefkowitz, *Black Athena Revisited*, 105.

<sup>68</sup> Lefkowitz, *Black Athena Revisited*, 158.

<sup>69</sup> D. R. Brothwell et al., *Population Biology of the Ancient Egyptians* (London: Academic Press, 1973), 159.

<sup>70</sup> Nancy C. Lovell, “Egyptians, physical anthropology of,” in *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Kathryn A. Bard and Steven Blake Shubert, ( London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

had assumed that the racial origins of the ancient Egyptians could be found in their skeletal record. According to Lovell, “contemporary physical anthropologists recognize, however, that race is not a useful biological concept when applied to humans.”<sup>71</sup>

In addition the great and complex physical variations observable and unobservable to the eye, more of the variation in human genetic make-up can be attributed to differences within these so-called “races” than between them. Lovell interestingly notes that “While genetic mixing as a result of migration makes populations more alike, genetic differences among populations can become amplified if they are separated by geographic or cultural barriers- a phenomenon known as “genetic drift.”<sup>72</sup> Ancient Egypt, as noted above, had highly mixed population and thus application of “race” on this society becomes not only anachronistic, but more complicated. Thus “the extent to which the antagonists- the Classicists, as we might call them-, on the one hand, and the Diop-influence variety of Afrocentrists on the other –seem unaware of advances in genetic theory and in our understandings of historical causation is dismaying. Both seem trapped in a time warp, the dimensions of which were laid down in the nineteenth-century and set out in accord with the racialist orthodoxy of the times.”<sup>73</sup>

A recent article in the *Time Magazine*<sup>74</sup> reported that the long lost mummy of Queen Nefertiti may have been identified by a British Egyptologist, Joann Fletcher in tomb KV 35 near modern day Luxor, Egypt. The racial identity of Queen Nefertiti wife of Pharaoh Akhenaten (reigned 1350 B.C.E-1334 B.C.E) had raised a lot of controversy in the last quarter of the twentieth century when “an advertisement for a doll of the Queen Nefertiti portrayed her as white-skinned.”<sup>75</sup> Thus although skeletal material continues to be available, given the approach taken by various scholars in the examination of ancient material in pursuit of the identity of the ancient Egyptians

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<sup>71</sup> Nancy C. Lovell, “Egyptians, physical anthropology of,” 277.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>73</sup> Christopher Ehret, “The African Sources of Egyptian Culture and Language,” in *Africa Antiqua*, ed. Josep Cervello Autuori, (Barcelona, 2001), 121.

<sup>74</sup> Jeffrey Kluger and Adrea Dorfman, “Nefertiti Found?” in *Time*, June 16, 2003, 54-56. See also Tim Friend “Nefertiti unwrapped? Looks like it” in *USA TODAY* June 10, 2003, 11D.

<sup>75</sup> Frank J. Yurco, “Were the Ancient Egyptians Black or White?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 15.5 (1989):24.

based on physiognomy, this particular mummy may not be of much help to them. “Unfortunately” the Negroid features of curly hair and thick lips may not be recoverable- the mummy’s head was found clean-shaven and the mouth badly damaged!

Fortunately, DNA studies have been successfully exploited in the molecular study of human evolution in recent times. As far as the ancient Egyptian population is concerned the studies are laudable in that in their analysis, they contextually consider historical events like migration, geographic and cultural barriers. Using the technique known as the polymerase chain reaction (PCR), archeologists have been able to retrieve mitochondrial DNA sequences from archeological remains of soft tissues that are several thousands of years old.<sup>76</sup>

For example, short mitochondrial DNA sequences have been recovered from the remains of a liver found in a canopic jar belonging to Nekht-Ankh, a priest of the Middle Kingdom.<sup>77</sup> These sequences when compared to the sequences recovered from the Delta population (Lower Egypt), it were found to be identical to four of the modern Egyptian mitochondrial lineages. Preliminary results from PCR on the Nile Delta population in the late 1980s found that “small subsets of modern Egyptian mitochondrial DNA lineages are closely related to Sub-Saharan African lineages.”<sup>78</sup>

Thus PCR, although dogged by problems of contamination from human handling of material during and after excavation as well as from fungi, bacteria and other agents, is primarily aimed at studying ancient populations and their interactions within their historical context and not necessarily to label them “black” or “white.”

It could be argued that the core of this debate on the racial identity of the ancient Egyptians is the regrettable amount of flexibility in the use of the terms “Africa,” “Egypt,” and “Black.” The word “Africa and thus “African” “is not even indigenous to Africa. It’s an external term with an external definition.”<sup>79</sup> Lefkowitz

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<sup>76</sup> Svante Pääbo and Anna Di Rienzo, “A Molecular Approach to the Study of Egyptian History,” in *Biological Anthropology and the Study of Ancient Egypt*, ed. W. Vivian Davies and Roxie Walker, (London: British Museum Press, 1993), 87.

<sup>77</sup> Svante Pääbo and Anna Di Rienzo, “A Molecular Approach to the Study of Egyptian History,” 88.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Miller, *Alternatives to Afrocentrism*, 19.

argued, “What the Roman called ‘Africa’ was only the north coast of that continent.”<sup>80</sup> Additionally, only in the late third century did the Roman “diocese” of Africa cover all the north-west African provinces except the area around Tangiers. Later, northwest Africa was called *Ifriqiya* by the Arabs.<sup>81</sup> Yamauchi further notes that the original *Afri* were probably one tribal group in one small part of Tunisia.

John Baines , an Egyptologist, states that in addition to emphasizing the futility of the search for the color of the ancient Egyptians, “ The Egyptians would not have known the meaning of the term Africa (as discussed above)...*and it is best to leave the matter there.*”<sup>82</sup> Snowden further points out that Bernal, Cheikh Anta Diop, G.G. James among others who loosely apply the terms “black,” “Egyptian,” “Africoid,” and “Negro” to several ancient populations and use them interchangeably, “Are mistaken in assuming that the term *Afri* (Africans) and various color adjectives for dark pigmentation as used by Greeks and Romans are always the classical equivalents of Negroes or blacks in modern usage.”<sup>83</sup>

Ali A. Mazrui, an author and professor at SUNY-Binghamton in a lecture delivered in 1993 discussed this pertinent question, “What is the Africa we talk about in Afrocentricity?”<sup>84</sup> Mazrui’s conclusion does shed light on Afrocentrics seemingly unconscious use of the terms “Africa,” “Egypt” and “black.” He referred to a “Global Africa” perspective which firstly encompasses the “continental Africa, secondly the diaspora of enslavement... [and] thirdly, the diaspora of colonialism.”<sup>85</sup> Most Afrocentric scholars based on their experiences, may have used the terms may consciously or unconsciously for scholarly or political reasons. However, this explanation is not reason enough to ignore the fact the ancient Egyptians were virtually unaware of these modern geographical and political terms.

In retrospect, neither should the scholars’ efforts be wholly dismissed. Furthermore its unscholarly to see “an author’s interpretation as being determined by

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<sup>80</sup> Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa*, 31.

<sup>81</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 40.

<sup>82</sup> John Baines, “ Was Civilization Made in Africa?” in New York Times Book Reviews August 11, 1991,13.

<sup>83</sup> Snowden, *Black Athena Revisited*, 113.

<sup>84</sup> Falola, Toyin., ed. *Africanity Redefined: Collected Essays of Ali A. Mazrui Vol. 1* ( New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc.2002) , 21.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

social and intellectual context to a degree that almost excludes both the specific subject matter of the work and any personal independence of mind the author may possess.”<sup>86</sup> Yamauchi, pointed out that, “The recently spawned Afrocentric interpretations have focused on some legitimate concerns.”<sup>87</sup> By emphasizing the investigation of what color the ancient Egyptians were and the Africans’ contribution to civilization, the school has yielded laudable historical evidence that may have remained ignored without the Afrocentric effort.<sup>88</sup> Of more importance here are those evidences that provide an insight of the ancients through their “own eyes.”

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<sup>86</sup> Lefkowitz, *Black Athena Revisited*, 35.

<sup>87</sup> Edwin M. Yamauchi, “Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (1996): 406.

<sup>88</sup> Richard Leakey’s group archeological findings of the first hominoid *Kenyapithecus* has led to the acceptance of Africa as the cradle of mankind. The Hamitic theory was short-lived and Dr. Yamauchi pointed to the Egyptian language formerly classified as Hamito-Semitic, has now been recognized by Joseph H. Greenberg as part of the Afrosiatic languages that include Berber, Chadic and Omotic. Carleton Hodge in numerous articles has pointed out links between Egypt and Hausa of northern Nigeria.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### EARLY PERCEPTIONS OF THE ANCIENT EGYTIANS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS.

The Hebrews did perceive the Africans as a people different in various aspects from them. The Septuagint and the Vulgate translate the Hebrew word *Cush* with “Ethiopian,” which is derived from the Greek word *Aithiops*, literally meaning “sunburned face.” *Aithiops* was a general word used by the Greeks to describe dark-skinned people, chiefly from the area south of Egypt. Snowden further points out that while for this same area, the Greeks, Romans and early Christian authors used *Aethiopia/Aithiopia*, various modern scholars employed the term Nubia.<sup>89</sup> Donald Redford, a renowned Professor of Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies at Pennsylvania State University, proposes that Nubia is derived from Egyptian *nbw*, “gold” and thus Nubia may mean “gold-land.”<sup>90</sup>

A key verse in the Hebrew Bible that points to the ancients’ recognition of distinct bodily color is Jeremiah 13:23 “*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.*” Charles B. Copher interpreted this verse as pointing to the Cushites [Ethiopians] being used by God as a yardstick for having accepted who they were-militarily powerful and thus “unthinkable [for the Cushites] to want to change who they are.”<sup>91</sup> The Afrocentric influence in this interpretation need not be overemphasized. Furthermore, Copher seemed to imply that the Hebrews perceived the Cushites as a people deriving pride in their skin color as a distinctive identity marker. When the verse is analyzed in context, it can be argued that God posed this rhetorical question to the Israelites, at a time when they were participating in pagan worship. Thus, the Israelites are “firmly entrenched in their evil, they can no more change their evil ways than an Ethiopian can change the

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<sup>89</sup> Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice*, 3.

<sup>90</sup> Donald B. Redford, “Egypt and the World Beyond” in *Ancient Egypt*, ed. David P. Silverman, (London: Judy Piatkus Publishers Limited, 1997), 40.

<sup>91</sup> Charles B. Copher, “The Black Presence in the Old Testament,” in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, ed., Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 177.

color of his skin or a leopard change his spots.”<sup>92</sup> The verse implies nothing more than immutability and has a parallel in an ancient Egyptian wisdom saying in the Instructions of Ankhsheshonqy, “There is no Nubian who leaves his skin.”<sup>93</sup> Thus it becomes erroneous to interpret the verse as either glorifying the Africans or speaking negatively about or the African’s inability to change.

An analysis of such biblical verses and others, which bear directly or indirectly on the issue of skin color is important in shedding some light in the Hebrew and other ancients’ perception of the Egyptians and their neighbors. George G. M. James, author of the controversial book, *Stolen Legacy* (1954), and teacher of Greek and mathematics at several colleges in Arkansas emphasized the notion that the biblical Simeon in Acts 13:1, was not only black but an Egyptian and a professor attached to the Church of Rome. However, Lefkowitz argued that Simeon’s Latin nickname, *niger* meaning “black” may suggest that he was of Ethiopian and not of Egyptian descent.<sup>94</sup> Also, a comment on Acts 13:1 in *The Original African Heritage Study Bible* states, “Two persons of Africa are included, namely Simeon who was called “Niger” (a Latinism for “the black man”) and Lucius of Cyrene, which is in northern Libya. Only two others are mentioned. This would suggest that 50 percent of the prophets and teachers in the first ‘Christian’ church were Africans and thus by modern legal racial standards, Blacks.”<sup>95</sup>

Yamauchi argues that such an interpretation “betrays a common misperception among Afrocentric scholars: the assumption that all Africans were blacks.”<sup>96</sup> Some scholars argue that the term “Niger,” which referred no doubt to his complexion, was added precisely to distinguish this Simeon, from Simon the Cyrenean who bore the cross of Christ (Mark 15:21, Luke 23:26, Matt.27:32).<sup>97</sup> In considering that Cyrene was a Greek colony in Libya, and that Ptolemy I had sent a considerable number of

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<sup>92</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Jeremiah in World Biblical Commentary* Vol.26 (Dallas, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1991), 193.

<sup>93</sup> Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 37.

<sup>94</sup> Lefkowitz, *Not Out Of Africa*, 149.

<sup>95</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 186.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 185.

Jews from Palestine to Cyrene as prisoners of war, Simon of Cyrene “was no doubt a member of the prominent Cyrenean Jews who are mentioned in Acts.”<sup>98</sup>

Various scholars have proposed various arguments supporting the view that Moses’ Cushite wife in Numbers 12 is to be identified with the Midianite Zipporah, from northwest Arabia, and thus deny that Moses had a black wife. However, evidence pointing to “ the long-lasting interrelationships between Egypt and Kush, the country to the south [modern Sudan] [demonstrates] that Moses could very well have married a black woman from Nubia.”<sup>99</sup>

Early writings including those of Augustine, Talmud, the Targum, Onkelos, Ezekiel the Tragedian, Ibn Ezra, and some recent scholars suggest a Midianite wife for Moses on the basis of the parallelism between Cushan and Midian in Habakkuk 3:7: “ *I saw the tents of Cushan in distress,/ the dwellings of Midian in anguish.*” David Adamo commendably analyzed the various arguments proposed by various scholars that Zipporah, Moses’ wife was a Midianite , but concluded with valid evidence that she was an African wife -- “Midian and Kush ...were never used interchangeably in the biblical, the Egyptian, or the Assyrian records... [where] the word Kush is used with a clear geographical or personal identification, it always refers to Africa.”<sup>100</sup>

Some scholars on the other hand, although accurately rendering Moses’ wife as Cushite, took the interpretation too far. Randall C. Bailey interpreted God’s punishment of leprosy upon Moses’ sister Miriam in Numbers 12: 1 for having “ *spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married*” as hardly “accidental that Miriam is described as leprous, as white as snow.”<sup>101</sup> “The black identity of Zipporah” he argued, “indeed may be pertinent- not only did those in the ancient world regard black Africans favorably, but at times they became the standard by which they judged themselves...racial values of the Bible are progressive

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<sup>98</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 17.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>100</sup> David T. Adamo, *Africa and the Africans in the Old Testament* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1998),70. Other scholars however, point out that in several instances in the Bible, “Kush” seems to refer to a location not in Africa. See David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 27-28.

<sup>101</sup> C.Bailey, “Beyond Identification: The Use of Africans in Old Testament Poetry and Narratives,” in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* , ed., Cain Hope Felder, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 135.

in comparison to later hostile racial attitudes in the medieval and modern periods.”<sup>102</sup> According to him, Moses' black wife is contrasted with Miriam who suddenly becomes white as snow in her punishment. On the other hand he claimed that Miriam's reference to the Cushite wife “is not a racist claim against this woman; rather it is a disclaimer that association with the Cushites is not a prime way to gain status. The prime way is to be addressed by Yahweh.”<sup>103</sup>

It can be argued that Bailey took the analysis of a literal style of color metaphors to the extreme. One scholar argued that it is doubtful that leprosy even existed in the ancient Near East at the time of the Hebrew Bible and more so, “The biblical description of the disease (Ex. 4:6, Num. 12:10, 2 Kings 5:27) as “like snow” description in various translations is *not* in the original Hebrew text.”<sup>104</sup> Additionally the disease is found in the Hebrew Bible as God's punishment for different sorts of sins, none of which have anything to do with Blacks. Joab and his descendants are cursed with it for the crime of murder (2 Sam. 3:29); Gehazi is afflicted with it for acting deceitfully (2 Kgs 5), and King Uzziah for improperly offering incense in the temple (2 Chr. 26:16-21).<sup>105</sup>

Thus Numbers 12 put in historical context, reflects the extensive economical, cultural and political contacts in the Mediterranean and Red Sea region, in particular between Egypt and Kush during Moses' time, the New Kingdom. Most scholars who interpret the Cushite Moses' wife as Zipporah seem unaware of this fact, which to the ancient Hebrews was obvious. As early as the Old Kingdom, there is evidence of intermarriage between Egyptians and Kushite women. Nubian captives appear as titled servants of Old Kingdom nobles in the Fifth Dynasty. A possible descendant of these Nubians is a woman, “with non-Egyptian, distinctly Kushite features, buried in Giza mastaba no.4440, in the reign of Khufu, with her Egyptian husband and prince.”<sup>106</sup> Snowden pointed out that the “features and color of Queen Tiy, the influential consort of Amenophis III point to a Nubian extraction.”<sup>107</sup> This could be explained by tracing

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<sup>102</sup> Bailey, “Beyond Identification: The Use of Africans in Old Testament Poetry and Narratives,” 135.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>104</sup> Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 27.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>106</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 74.

<sup>107</sup> Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice*, 40.

her family tree where her grandparents were a mixture of Egyptian and *Nehesi* ethnicity.<sup>108</sup> Among the non-royals, there is evidence of a grave stela from Gebelein in Upper Egypt now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (03.1848), showing a man called Nehesy, holding a typical Nubian bow, with an Egyptian wife.<sup>109</sup>

It can thus be inferred that the Hebrews acknowledged, and referred to the Africans, both the Egyptians and the Ethiopians, as a people associated with a particular geographical zone, militarily strong (Isaiah 31:1), and wealthy ( Daniel 11:43). According to the *Revised Standard Version Bible*, Isaiah 18: 2 refers to the Kushites as a “tall and smooth nation.” Isaiah by using the Hebrew term *Morat* meaning “smooth” or “burnished or “polished,” may have been “referring to the appearance of the Kushites’ skin after it has been rubbed with oil.”<sup>110</sup> This interpretation may perhaps be supported by observations made later. For example, Herodotus 3.23 noted that the Ethiopians have shining skin. Thus though the Hebrews recognized the distinctive African skin color, and other physiognomic features, an analysis of their writings above does not indicate that race underlay their perceptions.

Unfortunately, from as early as the period of the church fathers to the modern times, some of the Hebrew writings have been misread as justifying racism based on skin color. One of the most popular examples is the “Curse of Ham” theory. Genesis 9: 24-25 are verses of great historical significance--“And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son [Ham] had done unto him. And he [Noah] said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.” (*King James Version*.) Several aspects are obvious from a surface reading of the biblical text, it was Canaan who was cursed and not Ham. Secondly, there is no mention of “blackness” as a punishment for Ham’s transgressions. However, these verses were “reinterpreted in subsequent centuries by various groups in both the Old and New World to explain the blackness of Africans and to justify enslaving them or in the case of the Mormons, excluding them from their priesthood.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> F.J. Yurco “Were the Ancient Egyptians Black or White?” in *Biblical Archaeological Review* 15.5 (1989): 25-26.

<sup>109</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 75.

<sup>110</sup> Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 32.

<sup>111</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 16. See also 26 and 31.

According to the Bible, Noah had three sons: Ham, Shem and Japheth. Genesis 10:6 lists the sons of Ham as Cush, Mizraim, Put and Canaan. Since Ham was assumed to be the progenitor of Africans, when African slavery became widespread, first among the Arabs and then among the Europeans and Americans, Genesis 9:25 was reinterpreted. This verse was understood as God having cursed the descendants of Ham with a black skin and destined them to slavery and thus justifying African enslavement.

Based on some remarks made by Jewish rabbis in the Midrash, “it has been alleged that the so-called curse of Ham, originated first in Jewish circles.”<sup>112</sup> Jewish works emphasizing Ham’s punishment as smitten in the skin and bequeathed with other Negro characteristics include the sixth-century *Babylonian Talmud*, and the medieval collection of legends and rabbinic exegesis known as the *Tanhuma* among others. For example, from *Tanhuma* 13.15, R. Patai and R. Graves (1964) offer this paraphrase:

“Moreover because you [Ham] twisted your head around to see my nakedness, your grandchildren’s hair shall be twisted into kinks, and their eyes red; again, because your lips jested at my misfortune, theirs shall swell; and because you neglected my nakedness, they shall go naked, and their male members shall be shamefully elongated. Men of this race are called Negroes.”<sup>113</sup>

Yamauchi observed that the last sentence, “Men of this race are called Negroes,” is not in the Hebrew text but was an explanation inserted by Graves and Patai.<sup>114</sup> Additionally, a closer contextual examination of the texts renders the theory of a Jewish origin of the curse of Noah implausible. Both the Biblical story and early rabbinic thought held that Canaan and not Ham was cursed. Furthermore, it was Cush and not Canaan who inhabited Africa south of Egypt, where Ham’s black descendants were claimed to be. Some Septuagint manuscripts even went as far as replacing Canaan with Ham. A Dead Sea Scrolls fragment (4Q252), translated by García Martínez, reads,

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>113</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 23.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 25.

“And he said, ‘Cursed be Canaan; he will be, for his br[others], the last of slaves!’ [But he did not] curse Ham, but only his son, for God had blessed the sons of Noah”<sup>115</sup>

David M. Goldenberg, a visiting scholar in early Jewish history at the University of Pennsylvania, published a phenomenal work, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. In this work, Goldenberg attempted to explain how and when this strange interpretation of the biblical Genesis 9 took place. Goldenberg analyzed various literary images found in the Hebrew Bible, the Jewish writings in Greek, apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works, the Dead Sea (Qumran), literature in the Hellenistic- Roman periods, and the Talmud and Midrash composed during the first seven or eight centuries C.E. Goldenberg argued that “the negative value of blackness whether due to a psychological association of darkness with fear of the unknown or due to some other cause-underlies the negative sentiment toward dark-skinned people that resulted in Black Slavery. Indeed, according to many anthropology reports, the phenomenon is common even in black Africa. It appears that the symbolism of black-negative and white-positive is widespread among peoples of all colors.”<sup>116</sup>

According to Goldenberg, the negative color symbolism of black was found in rabbinic, biblical and ancient Near Eastern literature. Patristic exegesis, especially by Origen applied this negative color symbolism to the Ethiopian, where black was synonymous with sin. Early Christian fathers in addition to perceiving Kush as the remotest, also defined Kush as “darkness” or “blackness.”<sup>117</sup> This negative aspect was also found in classical and rabbinic sources. Goldenberg further argues that Greco-Roman writers like Philo, the Rabbis, and the church fathers drew on this universal symbol and independently applied it to the Ethiopian.<sup>118</sup> Goldenberg thus concluded that the ancient Israelites, the early church fathers and the Rabbis did not harbor anti-black sentiment. “In allegorizing the biblical text the early Fathers drew on the common metaphor of darkness or blackness as evil, and, unless there is evidence to

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>116</sup> Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 2-3.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 74. See also 67.

the contrary, we cannot assume that such exegesis reflects an antipathy toward black Africans.”<sup>119</sup>

The New Hamitic Hypothesis arose early in the nineteenth century. Earlier in the tenth century, the curse of Ham had been modified to exempt Egyptians and Berbers. However, “with the recognition that Mizraim (Egypt) was descended from Ham, a counterhypothesis also arose early in the nineteenth century, which held that the Hamites were actually Caucasian or Europeans who were the inventors of the great civilizations in Africa.”<sup>120</sup> Various scholars, clergyman and travelers like John Hanning Speke, who discovered the source of the White Nile in central Africa, were among the supporters of this hypothesis. The Hamitic thesis even influenced “the Belgians to favor the fairer and taller Tutsi over the darker Hutu, which contributes to the deadly enmity between these two tribes even today.”<sup>121</sup>

Thus it is evident from the above discussion that various personalities, covering a wide chronological period read the ancient Hebrew biblical text from the perspective of their own time and place. Consequently, the racial perception of black as slave was not rooted in ancient Israel but was birthed as a justification of slavery in the seventh century.

The Egyptian use of terminology for reference to their neighboring people, is an indication that the Egyptians perceived themselves as distinct from their neighbors and that *kmt*, “black lands,” had more of a geographical than a skin color connotation. In addition, the Egyptians “named their country from the color of the soil, “the black country” (*Qêmet*), and thus distinguished it from the *red country of the barbarians*.<sup>122</sup> Thus the “red” desert country was a foreign land, and was contrasted with the “black” fertile soil, which gave Egypt its name-*Kemet*.<sup>123</sup> The same application of the stem *km* is further emphasized by the accounts of Sinuhe,<sup>124</sup> an Egyptian courtier who fled his

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<sup>119</sup> Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 51.

<sup>120</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 29.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>122</sup> Adolf Erman, *Life in Egypt* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1971), 32.

<sup>123</sup> Herman Kees, *Ancient Egypt: A Cultural Topography* (Illinois: Chicago University Press, 1961), 36.

<sup>124</sup> A leading Egyptologist, Cyril Aldred in *The Egyptians*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 57 refers to this ancient tale as “a real tomb autobiography rather than a work of imagination”, 139. William Kelly Simpson in *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (London: Yale University Press, 1973) further seconds this by pointing to the inscriptions’ accuracy in dating the death of this king.

homeland after the death of the reigning king of the Twelfth Dynasty, Ammenemes. Part of the account reads, “ *When I reached the lake of Kemwer (Km-wr) ....* ” *Km-wr* here refers to the “‘great black’-the earlier extension of the Gulf of the Suez.”<sup>125</sup> Consequently, an analysis of other terms that the Egyptians uniquely used to refer to the various African geographical locations and the people inhabiting these lands is important in evaluating ancient Egyptian perception of the “other.”

Diop’s linguistic efforts at analyzing the similarity between the cognates of the West African language ,Wolof with the ancient Egyptian although off the mark are to be applauded as first steps for a further linguistic study of the African languages.<sup>126</sup> Diop, linguistically analyzed the term *kmt* as derived from the adjective *km*=black to designate “... strictly Negroes or at the very least, black men.”<sup>127</sup> Later, various scholars including Molefi Kete Asante emphasize *kmt* as the word the ancient Egyptians used to refer firstly to their people and then their land. However, linguistically the Hebrew term for black *kam* was never used as a pejorative adjective proceeding either the term *Aithiopia* or *Kush*. Diop raised a crucial question as to why the ancient Egyptians never applied the various morphological derivatives of the term *kmt*, meaning “black,” to “the Nubians and other populations of Africa to distinguish them from themselves.”<sup>128</sup> Diop’s conclusion was that the ancient Egyptians did not refer to their neighbors as “black,” the Egyptians must have been “black” too. It could be argued however, that the ancient Egyptians did not conceptualize skin color as an important distinctive element for identification.

An analysis of Egyptians’ self perception vis a vis “the other” further illustrates that the ancient Egyptians utilized various non-racial terms to distinguish themselves from their neighbors. Controversy among various scholars still persists concerning the meaning of the various terms employed by the ancient Egyptians to designate their immediate neighbors. The names *Nehesi*, *Wawat* and *Punt* were

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<sup>125</sup> J.H Breasted *Ancient Records of Egypt: Historical Documents* Vol. 1 ( New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1960), 237.

<sup>126</sup> Yamauchi, “Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of The Evangelical Theological Society*, 39(1996): 406. Yamauchi points to the fact that Carleton T. Hodge showed that Egyptian “...has links not so much with Wolof but with Hausa, a dialect spoken in Nigeria.”

<sup>127</sup> Ivan Sertima, *Egypt Revisited: Journal of African Civilization*, (New Brunswick : Transaction Publishers, 1986),20.

<sup>128</sup> Sertima ,*Egypt Revisited*, 21.

uniquely employed by the Egyptians while *Kush*, discussed above, was used by the Egyptians and other non-Africans including the Assyrians and Hebrews<sup>129</sup> to refer to a particular area and/or people in Africa. It is important to note here that the above mentioned reference terms were never used interchangeably or as cover terms for both the Egyptians and their southern neighbors. Each was used as a distinct name for a particular reference point. Consequently, the liberty taken by various scholars like Adamo -- “Kush shall be translated “Africa” and “Kushite” [f]or “African”<sup>130</sup> not only perpetuates the confusion already existing in the meaning of the terms but also proves too general.

Both the Afrocentrists and their critics agree that the ancient Egyptians referred to the inhabitants of Kush as *Nehesi*.<sup>131</sup> The difference lies in the point of emphasis the various scholars attach to the term’s meaning. *Nhsjw*, which is variously rendered *Nehasyu*, *Nehesy*, and *Nehesyou* was an older term preceding Kush and was used by the Egyptians as early as 2600 B.C.E to designate those who lived to the south of them. “It is translated “Nubian” and seems to denote primarily those who lived in the Nile Valley as opposed to those who lived in the eastern desert.”<sup>132</sup> Snowden, criticizing the Afrocentrists argued that *Nehesi* “did not like the classical term *Aethiopia* emphasize color.”<sup>133</sup> Afrocentric scholars including Copher, Adamo among others seem to stress the “blackness” or “Negro” connotations of *Nehesi*. Adamo in particular, pointed to the translation provided by E. A Budge in *An Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary* (1978) where “Nehesi = a black man or Negro [particularly] the southern blacks.”<sup>134</sup>

The use of “Negro” translation for *Nehesi* in ancient Egyptian literature publications further emphasizes the anachronistic understanding of this term. For example, an account of, Uni, a notable in the service of King Pepi I of the Sixth Dynasty VI describing the conquests of the Old Kingdom is rendered as, “ [The Old Kingdom led conquests] among the “ irthet (*yrtt*) Negroes, the Mazoi (*md*) Negroes,

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<sup>129</sup> Genesis 10:6, Isaiah 11:11

<sup>130</sup> Adamo, *Africa and the Africans in the Old Testament*, 37.

<sup>131</sup> J.H Breasted in *Ancient Records of Egypt*, translated *Nehesi* as “Negro”.

<sup>132</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 43. Sir Alan Gardiner also translated *Nhsy* as “Nubian” in *Egyptian Grammar* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 575.

<sup>133</sup> Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice*, 5.

<sup>134</sup> Adamo, *Africa and the Africans in the Old Testament*, 17.

the Yam (*Ym>m*) Negroes, among the wawat (*w'w'.t*) Negroes, among the Kau (*K'w*) Negroes and in the land of Temeh (*Tmh*).”<sup>135</sup> Adamo thus concluded that *Nehesi* carried both ethnic and geographical meaning. However, Budge’s definition of *Nehesi* can be considered outdated in comparison too Raymond Faulkner’s dictionary entry which defines the term as “Nubian.”<sup>136</sup>

The ancient Egyptians, it could be argued, perceived themselves as distinct either physically or culturally from their neighbors to the south, and thus the need for a distinct referential term, *Nehesi*. To infer the possibility that *Nehesi* was used to “distinguish the southern Negroes from themselves [Egyptians] who may also be Negroes but living in the North,”<sup>137</sup> without concrete evidence proves erroneous and contradictory. Furthermore, there is no evidence in the ancient records that refer to the Egyptians as “northern *Nehesi*.” On the other hand, *Aithiops*, which the classical Greeks used to refer to the *Nehesi* had more emphasis on skin color.<sup>138</sup> In addition, the Hebrew name *Pînēhās* (Phinehas) “originally meant “the Nubian,” as Egyptian *p3* before *Nḥsj* in *pi-neḥase* is the definite article. As this [Phinehas] was the name of Aaron’s grandson (Exodus 6:25), it is an independent confirmation of intermarriage with Cushites in Moses’ family.”<sup>139</sup>

Interestingly, the Egyptians reserved the word for “man” for themselves, and often used pejorative epithets to the Nubians to the south of them, the Asiatics, i.e Semites to the east, and also the Libyans to the West. “It is well known the Egyptians considered themselves an indigenous people, free from any foreign taint....Therefore the Egyptians alone were termed “*men*” (romesh); other nations were negroes, Asiatics, or Libyans, but not men.”<sup>140</sup>

According to Redford, the Egyptians often called the natives to the south “bow people,” “kilt wearers,” “blacks”-names “that had-for the Egyptians –slightly pejorative overtones.”<sup>141</sup> These uncomplimentary terms can be analyzed as defensive

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<sup>135</sup> Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, Vol. I.,142.

<sup>136</sup> Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 137.

<sup>137</sup> Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*,21.

<sup>138</sup> Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice*, 5.

<sup>139</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 44.

<sup>140</sup> Erman, *Life in Egypt* ,32.

<sup>141</sup> Redford, “Egypt and the World Beyond”, 41.

reflexes on the part of the Egyptians especially after the rise of the first Nubian state, south of the Second Cataract called Yam at the close of the Old Kingdom. *Ta Sety* “The Land of the Bow” was the oldest term used for the area to the south of Egypt. A model of forty archers was found in the tomb of Mesehty at Asyut.<sup>142</sup> In addition, a well-preserved tomb of an archer was uncovered at the Kerma cemetery by C. Bonnet. Two bows were found, with the strings [in the deceased] right hand and a supply of arrows nearby.<sup>143</sup> Such a designation “The Land of the Bow” illustrates Egyptian external attitudes and beliefs about the southerners. Egyptians had a long history of recruiting Kushites as mercenaries as early as the First Intermediate period (ca. 2258-2040B.C.E.) down to the Hellenistic period. “We find Kushites as mercenaries in the service of the Egyptian army in Canaan in the fourteenth and the tenth centuries B.C.E. There were [also] Kushite contingents also in the Persian army of Xerxes.”<sup>144</sup> Emphasis was placed not so much on their “race,” but on their skill and prowess as archers.

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<sup>142</sup> See graphic # 5

<sup>143</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 44

<sup>144</sup> Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 34.



# 5. Marching Army, from the tomb of the 11<sup>th</sup> dynasty official Mesehti, at Asyut.<sup>145</sup>

The Frontier Stelae erected by Senwosret III<sup>146</sup> proclaimed, “*The Southern boundary made in the year under the majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt* ,

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<sup>145</sup> Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, 33. Diop referred to the soldiers as “armed Sudanese.”

*Khekure (Sesostris III) who is given life forever and ever; in order to prevent that any Negro should cross it by water or by land, with a ship, (or) any herds of the Negroes; except a Negro who shall come to do trading in Iken (Ykn) or with a commission.*”<sup>147</sup>

The prohibition here, could be argued, does not apply to the Negroes based on their skin color. It was more of the Egyptian way of controlling the “wretches, craven-hearted” *Nehesi* viceroys, “whose power was becoming disruptive and hence a threat to Sesostris III.”<sup>148</sup> Thus the ancient Egyptians highlighted the physiognomy of the “other” with the aim of making a distinction that would reflect back to their political hegemony and not racial hegemony. Also, by the New Kingdom, “successful military and quasi-military commercial activities in neighboring regions had established an Egyptian self-image as a culturally superior group whose foreign activities were encouraged by their gods.”<sup>149</sup>

Redford further illustrates the Egyptian attitude to Asiatics by referring to a twenty-first century B.C.E text that states “Speak now of the bowman! Lo, the vile Asiatic! ....He has been fighting since the time of Horus, never conquering not yet being conquered.”<sup>150</sup> Most of these West Semitic immigrants had continued to flow into the northeast of Lower Egypt since the Old Kingdom as workers or traders. A scene from the tomb of a nomarch Khnumhotep II (1870 B.C.E.) shows a group of thirty-seven Asiatic Bedu who had come to trade for eye paint. Redford argued that the Bedu were unwanted guests, especially by farmers whose fields were laid waste by the Bedu’s passing flocks.

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<sup>146</sup> See graphic # 6

<sup>147</sup> Breasted, *Ancient Record of Egypt* Vol. I, 293.

<sup>148</sup> Aldred, *The Egyptians*, 140.

<sup>149</sup> David O’Connor, “New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period, 1552-664 BC” in B.G. Trigger et al., ed. *Ancient Egypt: A Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 194.

<sup>150</sup> Redford, “Egypt and the World Beyond”, 42.



# 6. Pharaoh Sesostri I (Twelfth Dynasty.)<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, 18.

However, once settled inside the country the Asiatics or Semites could marry Egyptians, acquire important jobs and rise in society. “Yanammu became a high state official under Akhenaten, ‘Aper-el became Prime Minister (ca. 1400 B.C.E.) under Amenhotep III, and Bay became chancellor under Siptah and virtual king-maker (ca. 1210 B.C.E.).”<sup>152</sup> The rank of prime minister/ vizier was second only to the pharaoh in responsibility and power. Thus although the Egyptian’s commonly added the epithet “wretched” or miserable” whenever they mentioned Kush, and Asiatics this did not prevent those who were assimilated into Egyptian culture from rising to positions of prominence. Indeed, as much as the ancient Egyptians conceived “the other,” the distinction had nothing to do with “race” as understood in modern terms.

It is evident that the ancient Egyptians used various skin colors to designate the “other.” Thus it would be an inaccuracy to claim that the ancients including the Egyptians were totally blind to the existence of dissimilar skin colors and physiognomic features in various human populations. According to Snowden, even the classical Greeks “had the ability to see and comment on the obvious different physical characteristics of blacks without developing an elaborate and rigid system of discrimination against blacks based only on the color of the skin.”<sup>153</sup> The Egyptians made the awareness of this distinction explicit in their art<sup>154</sup> and literature.

The *Great Hymn of Aten* is remarkable in “the almost anthropological view of the races of mankind differentiated in color and language.”<sup>155</sup> The text is inscribed on Ay’s Tomb at el Amarna dated during the reign of Akhenaten of the Eighteenth Dynasty. Akhenaten is known for elevating the sun disk, the Aten to the neglect of the older state and local gods. The text reads, “*The lands of Khor [Syro-Palestine] and Kush, the land of Egypt: you [god Aten] set every man in his place, you supply their need; everyone has his food, his lifetime is counted. Their tongues differ in speech, their characters likewise; their skins are distinct, for you distinguished the*

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>153</sup> F.M Snowden, “Attitudes toward Blacks in the Greek and Roman World” in *Africa and Africans in Antiquity*, ed. Edwin M. Yamauchi (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001) , 268.

<sup>154</sup> See graphic # 7. The distinctive Negro features portrayed are broad noses, thick lips and coiled or woolly hair.

<sup>155</sup> William K. Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, and Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), 289.



Libyan

Nubian

Syrian

Shasu

Hittite

Graphic # 7

peoples.”<sup>156</sup> During the same Dynasty, the *Hymn of Victory* dated during the reign of Thutmose I, further gives a glimpse of this physiognomic consciousness. “*He [Thutmose I] has overthrown the chief of the Nubians, the Negro is helpless and defenseless in his grasp. He hath united the boundaries of his two sides there is not a remnant among the Curly-Haired who came to attack him.*”<sup>157</sup>

There is no indication however, that the ancients’ recognition and the classical emphasis on skin color were ever translated into racial relations. The ancient Egyptians easily integrated the *Nehesi* into their socio-political system particularly as discussed above, by marriage or having them serve as part of their military. (See Graphic # 5 above)

The ancient Egyptian religious beliefs and practices offer a further indication of this incorporation of foreign elements. The Egyptian pantheon included some deities for example *Dedwen* and *Ash*, which had foreign names and southern origins.<sup>158</sup> Once these gods were introduced into the Egyptian pantheon, they remained there retaining their original names. Furthermore, a title containing the name of a foreign location is not definitive evidence of a foreign origin. “Hathor clearly an Egyptian goddess, could be referred to as the Lady of Byblos.”<sup>159</sup> Silverman further argued that such titles indicating foreign sovereignty for deities seemed to demonstrate nothing more than the Egyptian’s chauvinism and imperialism. It can thus be argued that the geographical terms applied by the ancient Egyptians in the same way stressed more a national identity than racial distinction.

Herodotus further gives a clear indication of the Egyptian’s emphasis of national identity during the Late Period, 664-323 B.C.E. David O’Connor, mentioned above, refers to Herodotus’ (II, 18; 158) analysis of the oracle of Amen-Ra at Siwa. The oracle had declared that Egypt included everything which was covered by the waters of the inundation, and that everyone was an Egyptian who lived north of Elephantine and drank waters of the Nile; later we are told that the Egyptians

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<sup>156</sup>Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature I* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975),98.

<sup>157</sup>Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* Vol.2, 30. Breasted highlighted the fact that the term “curly haired” was employed also during the reign of Seti I.

<sup>158</sup>David P. Silverman, “Divinity and Deities in Ancient Egypt” in *Religion in Ancient Egypt*, ed. Byron E. Schafer, (London: Cornell University Press,1991), 57.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid.

considered everyone a foreigner who did not speak Egyptian. Thus “nowhere does Herodotus give any indication that racial considerations were an issue of any importance; domicile and culture, not physical characteristics, were the key criteria.”<sup>160</sup>

Interestingly, when the ancient Egyptian scribe in the employ of the New Kingdom Queen Hatshepsut was recording the royal expeditions to Punt, he thought it prudent to note not the dark skin of the chief’s wife, but her obesity! “A long line of Puntites bearing similar products [spices and animal products]. At their head, as before the chief and his enormous wife.”<sup>161</sup>

K. A. Kitchen, in describing the splendor of the ancient civilization of Punt cited the exploits of a local baron Harkhuf serving during the Old Kingdom Sixth Dynasty ruler, Pepi II. Harkhuf referred to a Bawerdjed’s expedition to Punt which brought a “pygmy (for) the dances of the god, from the land of the horizon dwellers.”<sup>162</sup> There were no epithets describing the pygmy’s skin color in any of these texts. The emphasis was more on the dwarf’s dancing ability in honor of the gods. It is thus evident that although reference to various physical attributes did feature in ancient Egyptian literature and art, emphasis on it was secondary if not rare.

An era that needs critical investigation to further emphasize “race” as a non-factor in this ancient setting is the Kushite Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, which was certainly black, but regarded themselves as Egyptians and were regarded as such by the Egyptians themselves. Kushite kings ruled Egypt for about half a century beginning at approximately 760 B.C.E. Yamauchi, concurring with E. R. Russmann argues that “the pharaohs of the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, who hailed from Napata near the Fourth Cataract, can be rightly called “black pharaohs,” – “The newcomers did not look like Egyptians. Their skin was darker, their physiognomy that of the Sudan. In fact, they looked like the Nubians whom the Egyptians had pictured since time immemorial, but always as vile conquered enemies, as servile tributaries or as mercenaries.”<sup>163</sup> As evidence, Yamauchi points to depictions of Kushite rulers with a darker “chocolate brown” color

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<sup>160</sup> David O’Connor, “New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period, 1552-664 BC,” 316.

<sup>161</sup> Breasted, *Ancient Record of Egypt* Vol. 2, 108.

<sup>162</sup> K.A. Kitchen, “The Land of Punt,” in *Archaeology of Africa*, ed. T. Shaw, (London: Routledge, 1993), 589.

<sup>163</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 108.

than the reddish-brown Egyptians in the wall paintings of the temple of Taharqa at Qasr Ibrim and also on a papyrus fragment (Brooklyn 47.218.3).

Russman in another work<sup>164</sup> focusing on portraiture and how it evolved in different historical eras in ancient Egypt argues that the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty portraiture had little to do with an individual's appearance, but rather "expressed his ethnic relationships, whether real or fictive to his predecessors."<sup>165</sup> Both scholars agree that the distinctive Negroid features of Kushite rulers were, "broad-shoulders," "short, thick neck," "fleshy lips," and "broad flat noses." For example, the images of an important ruler of this Dynasty, Taharqa, depict both Negroid features and distinctive Kushite details-- the double uraei, that is, the two serpents on the forehead, representing their rule over both Egypt and Kush.<sup>166</sup> In extra-biblical sources Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal call Taharqa, who ruled Egypt between 690 and 633 B.C.E., the king of Kûsu.<sup>167</sup>

For an insight into ancient the Egyptians' evolving perception of important identity markers, it is important to analyze ancient Egyptian art within the context of historical era and function. For example, Old Kingdom private portraits differed from the royal examples in function and meaning. In terms of appearance, age can be considered an important identity marker. "The kings' faces are youthful, while portrait representations of their subjects always show men of at least middle age."<sup>168</sup> During the late Old Kingdom up until the Twelfth Dynasty, there occurred a new style that exaggerated facial and anatomical features, which Russmann analyzes as aimed to express other aspects of the individual than his or her physical being. Not until the Twelfth Dynasty, was the idea of portraiture revived for royal representations. In addition to age, the aim was to express character and personality.

For example, "We know from Middle Kingdom literary texts that their [royal] expressions are meant to reflect the mood of the period, which was one of pessimism

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<sup>164</sup> Edna R. Russman, *Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from the British Musuem* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2001)

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>166</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 132.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>168</sup> Russman, *Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from the British Museum*, 35.

and distrust.”<sup>169</sup> The Twenty-fifth dynasty versions are middle-aged or elderly faces, with frowning and scowling expressions. Thus the representations of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty Kushite kings were essentially ethnic images, carefully modified to suit their role in Egypt.

In addition, a king by representing himself incorporated into the god’s or goddess’ form was more pertinent as an identity marker than his or her skin color. This was especially prominent in the New kingdom where there was “a conscious effort, both in texts and in scenes, to equate the king with the powers of the divine world.”<sup>170</sup> This was a practice which was quite understandable considering that the diminution of the stature of the king was one of the factors that led to the anarchy of the First Intermediate Period that preceded the Middle Kingdom.<sup>171</sup> The King by incorporating the form of the deity and hence its power into his being hoped that this identity would reflect back on their political power.

Having ascertained that “race” with its emphasis on skin color and select physiognomy did not feature in the ancient Egyptian world, it is then important to analyze how the ancient Egyptians identified themselves ,and the “other,” beginning with the framework of “What.” “What” here refers to the characteristics of mind, manner and appearance. Aspects particularly in the realms of intelligence and clarity of speech featured prominently in ancient Egyptian literature. The *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*<sup>172</sup> told of a peasant who was made to appeal nine times to the royal court so that the latter could marvel at the eloquence of his speech. Sinuhe (cited above) did not hesitate to point out that the Chief of Upper Retenu (Palestine) “knew my [Sinuhe’s] character, he had heard of my wisdom; the Egyptians who were with him, bare witness of me.”<sup>173</sup>

The ancient Egyptian ascertained this distinction among themselves and the “other” from the experience of relating to their neighbors politically through conquest or military incorporation, economically through trade and socially through

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<sup>169</sup> Russman, *Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from the British Museum*, 36.

<sup>170</sup> Byron E. Shafer, *Religion in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 66.

<sup>171</sup> Aldred, *The Egyptians*, 120.

<sup>172</sup> William K. Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, and Poetry* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1973), 31-49.

<sup>173</sup> Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* Vol. I , 238.

intermarriage and religion. Furthermore, it is evident that the ancient Egyptians' explicit use of distinctive color in their statuary art to reflect on characteristics of appearance was not inspired by negative racial connotations. Stating that the ancient Egyptians "were not black" without providing an analysis of who the Egyptians themselves thought they were thus does not fully address the contentions about race.

Also, it is important to distinguish between color symbolism and color prejudice. An analysis of ancient Egyptian art and statuary shows that color symbolism does not always lead to color prejudice, or for that matter ethnic prejudice. The ancient Egyptians had religious color symbolism, which calls for a cautionary note in "utilizing Egyptian reliefs and paintings to assess ethnicity and racial characteristics."<sup>174</sup> For example, one scholar argues that the ancient Egyptians "believed themselves to be superior to foreigners by the color of their skin. The Syrians were light brown, the Libyans white, the negroes black, but the Egyptians had received from the gods their beautiful color, a deep dark brown for the men, a light yellow for the women."<sup>175</sup> This may be argued to be an anachronistic reading.

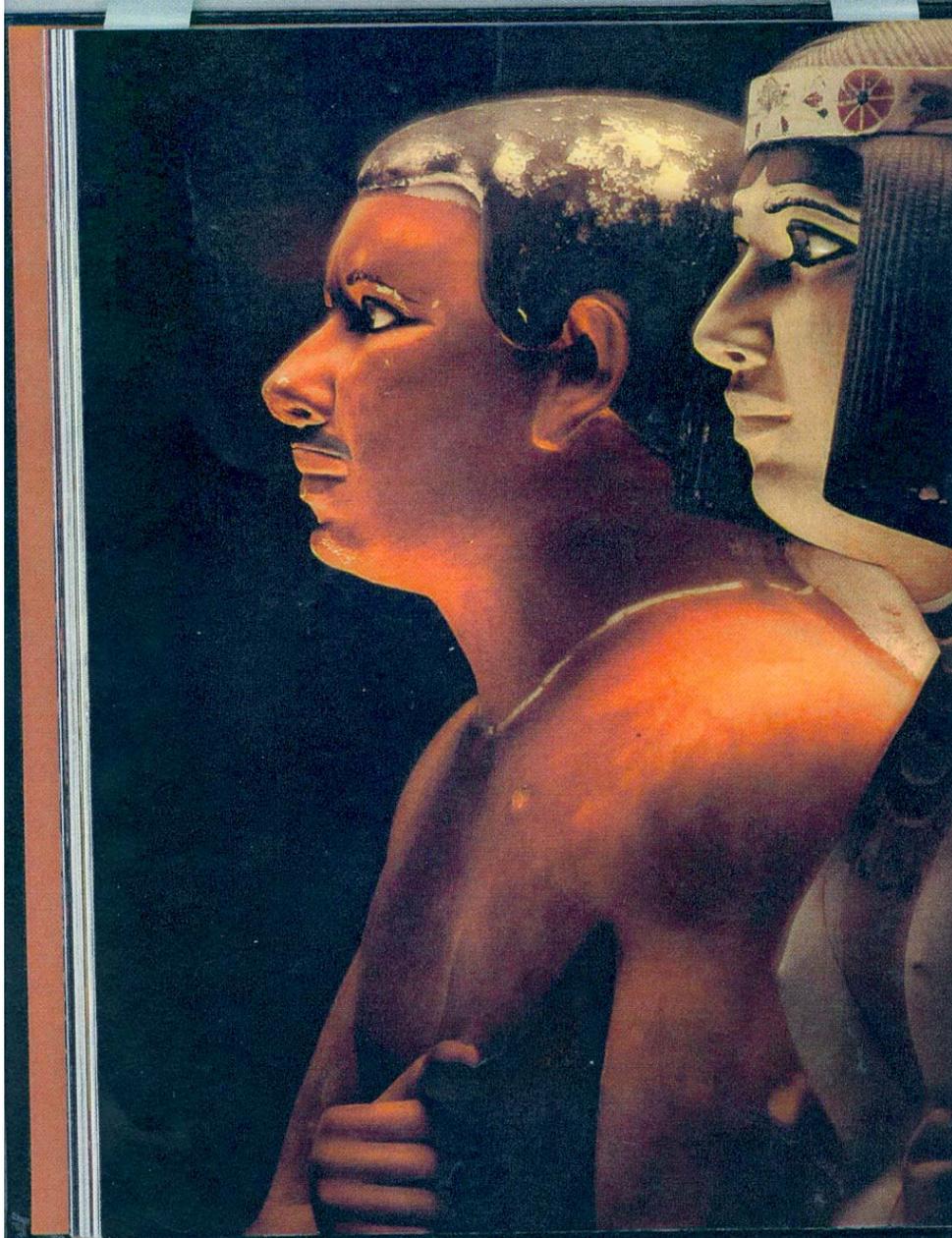
Based on artistic depictions, it is true that in the Old Kingdom, "Egyptian men were depicted as reddish brown, women yellow and people living in the south black."<sup>176</sup> Some Afrocentrists by relating this to other African practices, convincingly propose that the color symbolism was related to the ancient Egyptian religious conceptualization of the cycle of life and death. The paint consisted of red ochre, an oxide of iron and a vegetable gum binder. The paint probably signified the "blood of life" encompassed in the male and the yellow represented "fertility" encompassed in the female. The ancient Egyptian society was patriarchal and the economy was based primarily on agricultural fertility.

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<sup>174</sup> F.J. Yurco "Were the Ancient Egyptians Black or White?" in *Biblical Archaeological Review* 15.5 (1989): 29.

<sup>175</sup> Erman, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, 32.

<sup>176</sup> John Baines, "Was Civilization Made in Africa?" in *New York Times Book Reviews* (August 11, 1991), 13. See graphic # 8.



# 8. High priest Rahotep and wife, Nofret. Statue from early 4<sup>th</sup> Dynasty ( 2680-2544 B.C.E)<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Brian Fagan, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Washington, D.C: National Geographic Society, 2001), 70.

These implications of color symbolism may then hold ground. Furthermore, the goddess Hathor, who was believed to give birth to the yellow sun everyday, was considered the “patroness of women.”<sup>178</sup>

Some of the Afrocentrists, however, have used deductions based on religious color symbolism to further argue that the ancient Egyptians were black. For example, James Brunson, an art historian at Northern Illinois University pointed out that the graphics did not portray a dark-red race.<sup>179</sup> He argued that the red and yellow symbolic use applied exclusively to the Egyptians who were actually black. He further supported the assertion, “In their paintings, the Egyptians cared little for whether non-Egyptians would maintain their spirit, thus portrayed them in their natural hues.”<sup>180</sup> To explain the presence of purely black Egyptian statuary in the Old Kingdom, Brunson extended the symbolism to the color black.

According to Brunson, black “held a significant position in ancient Nile Valley spirituality-inextricably bound to the conceptual cycle of life, death and rebirth.”<sup>181</sup> This argument holds ground as far as explaining why the ancient Egyptian portrayed some of their gods black. However, by arguing, “After unification [Old Kingdom], black was used solely for gods and the pharaoh. By Middle Kingdom however, this right was extended to other members,”<sup>182</sup> Brunson contradicts his basic argument. If the right to symbolically use black was extended to other non-royal members, and if the ancient Egyptians were black, how would the depictions of ancient Egyptians in non-black hues after the Middle Kingdom be explained?

Goldenberg referring to Frank Snowden’s *Blacks In Antiquity* (1970) and Lloyd Thompson’s *Romans and Blacks* (1989) pointed out that the main critique that has been leveled against Snowden was that “he closed his eyes to obvious expressions of anti-Black sentiment in a world in which he believed there was none. Where Snowden refused to see anti-Black sentiment, Thompson saw it but explained it not as racism but as “ethnocentric reactions to a strange and unfamiliar appearance,” and

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<sup>178</sup> John Baines “Society, Morality, and Religious Practice” in *Religion in Ancient Egypt*, Shafer, 180.

<sup>179</sup> James Brunson “The Dark Red Race Myth” in Ivan Van Sertima’s *Egypt Revisited: Journal of African Civilizations* (New Brunswick : Transaction Publishers,1993),54-55

<sup>180</sup> Sir Wallis E. Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection* Vol. I, (New York: Dover Publications,1973), 277

<sup>181</sup> Brunson, “The Dark Red Race Myth,” 56.

<sup>182</sup> Brunson, “The Dark Red Race Myth”, 75.

“expressions of conformism to the dominant aesthetic values.”<sup>183</sup> However, Snowden clearly while referring to the classical Greeks stated, “Parenthetically it is questionable whether individuals should be called “racist” because they accept aesthetic canons prevailing in their country.”<sup>184</sup> The same argument can be applied to the ancient Egyptians keeping in mind that their habitat had a wide variety of people, not to mention a wide variety of stones at their disposal. Cyril Aldred discussions in *The Egyptians* (1998) offered glimpses of this reality by describing the statuary stones ranging from pink, red to black granite and gray to green diorite.

Yurco’s explanations of the practice of this color symbolism hold more historical truth and further allows for the possibility of a heterogeneous society. He states, “By Middle Kingdom and more certainly in the New Kingdom, the color strictures of this artistic canon partly gave way. Often in these periods, people were depicted with their actual skin color.”<sup>185</sup> Despite the criticism Bernal’s various arguments in *Black Athena* have experienced, he addressed the whole issue of “race” as applied to the ancient Egyptians in its historical context. Bernal attributed his skepticism about race to the heterogeneous population of Egypt, which from the ancients had contained African, South-West Asian and Mediterranean types. This would offer an explanation to Brunson who pointed out that Hekanefer, a royal prince of *Wawat* during the New Kingdom Dynasty XVIII had “glistening skin of the ebony with a long, arched and pinched nose,”<sup>186</sup> –a biological reality in a heterogeneous society. It can thus be concluded that the ancient Egyptians *did* distinguish various skin colors and physiognomic attributes. Furthermore, they did base their identity as discussed within the framework of the “What.”

In ancient Egypt, the naming system distinguished who was who in the web of family connections, political and social relations. Based on the ancient records the ancient Egyptians have left us, the power of the name as an identity marker underlain by religious connotations stands out above all else. “In ancient Egyptian beliefs, the name was an integral part of the personality. It had to be preserved even into the

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<sup>183</sup> Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 8-9.

<sup>184</sup> Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice*, 63.

<sup>185</sup> Yurco, “Were the Ancient Egyptians Black or White?”, 29.

<sup>186</sup> Brunson in Sertima, *Egypt Revisited: Journal of African Civilizations*, 78.

afterlife,”<sup>187</sup> In retrospect it can thus be argued, if the name was not preserved the missing kings were considered not only illegitimate but also non-existent. For example, various kings were omitted in the King lists inscribed in the Temples at Abydos, Memphis, and Thebes.<sup>188</sup> The significance of the name is further exemplified by the risk taken by various individuals in overriding the severe warnings in some of the monumental inscriptions directed to anyone who would obliterate the name of the owner.<sup>189</sup> An example of this was Thutmose III’s hacking out Queen Hatshepsut’s name from her statuary. He considered her to have usurped his right to the throne. Shafer further added that among the ancient Egyptians, to know the name of an individual was to have some control over him or her. With the name, one could either perpetuate or destroy the very being of the bearer.

The centrality of the name could lay in the fact that it was not only a term for reference but was also descriptive of the bearer. The royal names were inscribed in cartouches or royal rings. A pharaoh would bear a minimum of five names including the religious name / Prenomen and the secular name / Nomen. A commemorative stela from the reign of Thutmose III reads, *Life to the Horus* ‘Strong bull arisen in Thebes’, *the Two Ladies* ‘Enduring of kingship like Re < in heaven’, *the Horus of Gold*, ‘Powerful of strength, Holy of appearances’, *the King of Upper and Lower Egypt* ‘Menkheperre’, *the Son of Re*, ‘Thutmose [personal name] ruler of truth’ [beautiful of forms], beloved of Amen- Re who presides I Ipet-eswe (Karnak), may he live eternally.” Queen Hatshepsut bore the names Horus “*mighty of doubles*” Favorite of the Two Goddesses “*Fresh in Years*,” Golden Horus “*Divine of diadems*” King of Upper and Lower Egypt: “*Makere who lives forever*” Hatshepsut [personal name missing in Stele].<sup>190</sup> The five elements in italics preceding the individual names above were “titles or epithets common to every pharaoh and express, except in the fourth case his relation to some deity or deities.”<sup>191</sup>

The intricate relation of the name with religion was also explicit during the

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<sup>187</sup> Shafer, *Religion in Ancient Egypt*, 28.

<sup>188</sup> Alan H. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs; An Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 48-50.

<sup>189</sup> Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs; An Introduction*, 48-50

<sup>190</sup> Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt Vol.2.*, 99.

<sup>191</sup> Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 51.

reign of Akhenaten, discussed earlier as the king who gave prominence to the sun disk god. Akhenaten emphasized his relation as a son to the sun-disk. Considering the political turbulence of his reign, it was a matter of political urgency to establish familial connection to a god considered central and powerful in ancient Egyptian history. Tutankhamon marked the transition from the religion of the sun disk god Aten introduced by his predecessor, Akhenaten. Tutankhamon after doing away with the Aten faith under which he was known as Tutenkh-*aton*, changed his name to Tutankhamon. The name reflected his faith in the god Amon who was now considered supreme. The titles indicated that the king was immediately and physically the offspring of the god.

Breasted argued that this stress on relations to gods was “pressed at first only to kings whose claims to the throne through their mortal parents were questionable.”<sup>192</sup> Archaeologists also recognized the centrality of the ancient Egyptian name in their customs. O.V Nielsen describing the Scandinavian excavations in relation to the C-Group in Nubia and the Egyptian New Kingdom, observed that although all the graves were of a pure Egyptian type, “there were no graves where the name of the deceased was mentioned and that this is against orthodox Egyptian burial customs.”<sup>193</sup>

In addition, it was no coincidence that the ancient Egyptians conceptualized their divinities as belonging to family groupings consisting of a nuclear family of father, mother and child. At Thebes there was the sacred triad of Amun, Mut and Khonsu. In Memphis-Ptah, Sekhmet and Nefertem and at Abydos-Osiris, Isis and Horus.<sup>194</sup> The significance of familial relations extended down to the secular groupings. Sesotris III after setting up the boundary to prevent the *Nehesi* from crossing over to Egypt threatened, “The true son is he who champions his father, who guards the border of his begetter. But he who abandons it, who fails to fight for it, *he is not my son, he was not born to me.*”<sup>195</sup> (emphasis mine) What was at stake here was the threat of the significant familial tie being severed.

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<sup>192</sup> Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* Vol.2, 76.

<sup>193</sup> Brothwell, et al., *Population Biology of the Ancient Egyptians*, 33.

<sup>194</sup> Shafer, *Religion in Ancient Egypt*, 41.

<sup>195</sup> Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature I*, 119-120.

Furthermore the ancient Egyptian was always careful to include the familial lineage of an individual if considered of honor together with his rank when referring to him or her. The man behind the eloquent peasant's arrest was referred to as "Djehutinakhte; he was the son of a man named Isry, and he was a tenant of the High Steward Rensi, son of Meru."<sup>196</sup> The non-royal persons whose chances of familial relations to the gods were slim opted for the emphasis on social connections to royalty. Sinuhe, courtier who ran away referred to himself as "Hereditary prince, count wearer of the royal seal, sole companion, Judge, local governor, King [among] the Bedwin, Real confidant of the King, his beloved, the attendant Sinuhe."<sup>197</sup> When the Egyptian Sinuhe was away from home and was attacked by a giant champion of Palestine, his only thoughts were on calling his Egyptian god of battle prowess Montu—"every Asiatic yelped. I gave praise to Montu."<sup>198</sup>

The ancient Egyptians also considered some non-administrative professions and skills almost divine and took pride in exhibiting prowess in them. The correspondence of a royal official Hori with a scribe best illustrated the primacy the ancients placed in their professions. "The scribe, choice of heart, persevering of counsel, for whose utterances there is rejoicing when they are heard, skilled in the Word of God."<sup>199</sup> These professions had particular deities as patrons; Thoth of scribes, Ptah of craftsmen and Imhotep, "the architecture of King Djoser's funerary complex at Saqqara was first considered a great sage, then the son of Ptah and eventually a god associated with medicine. Tomb paintings of specific officials contained "distinct scenes from their owner's careers as generals, treasures or astronomers."<sup>200</sup>

Frequency in references to various forms of athletics in ancient Egypt indicated that it was one source of identity marker at least for men. "The king [Taharqa] performed on the thirtieth year of his reign and every three years thereafter a ritual called the Heb Sed festival. He demonstrated his physical vigor by running

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<sup>196</sup> "The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant" in Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 32.

<sup>197</sup> Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* Vol. I, 235.

<sup>198</sup> Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* Vol. I, 64.

<sup>199</sup> "An Egyptian Letter" J. B Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1950), 475.

<sup>200</sup> Shafer, *Religion in Ancient Egypt*, 54-57.

around a courtyard.”<sup>201</sup> Apparently, Taharqa, the king of the Twenty-fifth dynasty (690- 664 B.C.E) whom Diop exhibited his statue to emphasize his “Negroid” features had other sources of personal pride in mind.

A stone monument of Taharqa, “related the king’s running prowess as he encouraged his soldiers on their daily run from Memphis to Faiyum and back. His Majesty commanded that a stela be erected at the back of the western desert to the west of the palace and that its title be “Running Practice of the Army of the Son of the Sun Taharqa, may he live forever....He [Taharqa] distinguished the first among them to arrive and arranged for him to eat and drink with his bodyguard”<sup>202</sup> Various pharaohs of the New kingdom such as Tuthmosis III and his son Amenophis II, boasted about their skill in archery. An inscription from Medamud related how the latter challenged nobles to match his superb.”<sup>203</sup> However, wrestling took precedence in the athletics of the ancient Egyptians. The great “Wrestling Ground” from the tomb of Baqti III depicts a staggering number of 219 pairs of wrestlers!

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<sup>201</sup> Edwin M. Yamauchi. “Athletics in the Ancient Near East “ in *Life and Culture in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Richard E. Averbeck et al, ( Bethesda, Md. : CDL Press, 2003), 497. For further discussions on the intriguing representation of athletics in the Ancient Near East see the full article above.

<sup>202</sup> Yamauchi, “Athletics in the Ancient Near East,” 497. (Also in *Africa and the Bible*, 129.)

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 498.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is evident that “race” as understood today in terms of skin color was not a key identity marker for the ancient Egyptian. Furthermore, “the first to call special attention to the Nubian’s [*Nehesi*] blackness were people [the Greeks] living outside Africa.”<sup>204</sup> In addition, the division of mankind into races as understood in the modern sense began with F. Bernier in the seventeenth century of our era.<sup>205</sup> Thus the Afrocentric insistence on the ancient Egyptians as a black race proves anachronistic and limited because the ancient Egyptian did not conceptualize himself or herself in this way.

This assimilative and hence heterogeneous ancient society consisted of individuals who based their identity more on a web of social relations with the family as the focal point and one’s intellectual aptitude and social rank. All these facets grounded on a firm religious base are what formed the ancient Egyptian identity. Thus the fact that the ancient Egyptian society was heterogeneous inherently points to the futility of trying to find the pure racial identity of the ancient Egyptians as either “black” or “white.” Secondly, the degree of intercultural and spatial relations that existed serves as evidence that the ancients lay little or no emphasis on race as a distinguishing factor. Why then, one may ask, has ancient Egyptian identity been subjected to such anachronistic interpretations?

E. H. Carr defined historical writers as “products of their own times, bringing particular ideas and ideologies to bear on the past.”<sup>206</sup> African history has for a long time been subjected to Eurocentric perspectives. Bruce G. Trigger, a professor of anthropology at McGill University, Canada, in a remarkable discussion related how the archaeology of the Sudan and Egyptian Nubia has been subjected to a series of Western European and North American interpretive paradigms since the nineteenth century.<sup>207</sup> Trigger argued that the paradigm of evolutionary archaeology was in the

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<sup>204</sup> Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice*, 74.

<sup>205</sup> Adamo, *Africa and the Africans in the Old Testament*, 37.

<sup>206</sup> Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1999), 2.

<sup>207</sup> Bruce G. Trigger “Paradigms in Sudan Archaeology” in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 27, No.2 (1994) 323-345.

ascendant in the early nineteenth century. This theory “In keeping with the enlightenment philosophy widely believed that all human groups [including the Egyptians] were equally capable of participating in human progress.”<sup>208</sup> Consequently such an approach led the first generation of Egyptologists to take seriously the reports of classical writers such as Diodorus of Sicily.

As early as the 1860s more as a means for the justification for colonialism, the enlightenment philosophy was challenged by intelligentsia of Western European middle class. This group propagated racist beliefs which emphasized differing and unequal talents and potentialities for cultural development. Blacks were considered among the least intelligent and progressive branches of humanity. Traits like “highly productive agriculture, large scale metal-working, monumental architecture, centralized kingdoms and sophisticated art styles” were put forth as originating outside of Africa.<sup>209</sup> The traits had been brought there “by prehistoric fair-skinned colonists, whose creative abilities had ultimately been sapped as result of miscegenation with indigenous Blacks.”<sup>210</sup>

Trigger argued that the Hamitic Hypothesis, which argued for “fair-skinned” Egyptians was the “The most popular and insidious speculation that attempted to establish a prehistoric counterpart for the modern Western European colonization of Africa.”<sup>211</sup> The Hamitic prehistoric colonists in Africa ranging from Phoenicians, Greeks to Egyptians, were portrayed as tall, light skinned pastoralists who had originated in northeastern Africa. “Sometimes the mere presence of cattle among any group in sub-Saharan Africa was arbitrarily interpreted as evidence of Hamitic influence.”<sup>212</sup> The Hamites hence “were able to conquer and exploit agricultural societies the same way that knights were assumed to have ruled over the peasantry in medieval Europe.”<sup>213</sup> To exemplify this, Trigger refers to C.G. Seligman’s description of Hamites in *Races of Africa* (London, 1957) as “better armed as well as quicker

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<sup>208</sup> Bruce G. Trigger “Paradigms in Sudan Archaeology,” 325.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 326-327.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

witted than the dark agricultural Negroes [who lived to the south and west of them.]”<sup>214</sup>

Ancient Egypt, which had long been recognized as one of the great civilizations of the ancient world, posed a special problem, for it was also located on the African continent. Thus “while some Egyptologists were willing to ascribe many of the distinctive features of Egyptian civilization to an African or Hamitic substratum, they were not prepared to attribute the development of Egyptian civilization to either the Brown or The Black race.” Scholars like D.E.Derry, and Walter Emery attributed the development to a “master race” or for W.M. F. Petrie, to the “Falcon Tribe” or “Dynastic Race” which had originated in Elam (in Persia) and come to Egypt by way of Ethiopia and the Red Sea.<sup>215</sup> Physical anthropological evidence was produced to support these ideas. An anatomist, Grafton Elliot Smith, in *The Ancient Egyptians and Their Influence upon the Civilization of Europe* (London, 1911) argued that in the Old Kingdom “there had been an influx of broad-skulled, non-Semitic Asiatics who had built the Egyptian pyramids and introduced the megalithic culture into Western Europe.”<sup>216</sup> This assertion is also underlain with the misconstrued reification of the concept of “civilization” where, most scholars “turned that diffuse concept into a thing likely to be invented just once or, at most, two or three times. Wherever that quality deemed to be civilization appeared, it must have been spread from one of those very few centers of invention.”<sup>217</sup>

These ideas, of a pre-historic “master race” continued to intrigue Egyptologists into the 1960s. Perhaps, such Eurocentric historiography was what stimulated counter-arguments by scholars like Diop and his adherents, who emphasized that the ancient Egyptians were not northern “master races” but indigenous African blacks. The above evaluation may be considered an explanation, but is still not a justification for applying anachronistic terms to an ancient society.

After most Africa countries attained independence, Trigger described a shift to post- colonial Archeology. African archeologists, who had been trained abroad

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<sup>214</sup> Trigger, “Paradigms in Sudan Archaeology,” 328.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 329. See also H.W. Fairman, an Egyptologist at the University of Liverpool, who argued for a Semite Dynastic influence in H.W. Fairman, “Ancient Egypt and Africa,” in *African Affairs* 64 (1965): 70.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>217</sup> Christopher Ehret, “The African Sources of Egyptian Culture and Language,” 122.

assumed responsibility for administering the research carried out in their country.<sup>218</sup> Some of this archeology proved useful as it did away with most of the Eurocentric assumptions. However, other scholars took the archeological interpretations to the extreme. The results of which are the Afrocentric deductions discussed above.

On the other extreme, too much focus was paid to Egypt at the expense of the other areas south of Egypt. Fortunately, archeological knowledge of areas south of Egypt is slowly experiencing considerable growth. For example, conclusions formulated by George Reisner of Harvard University from excavations at the town site and the cemetery of Kerma, the capital of Kush have been revised based on recent excavations. Reisner “because of the discovery of the statues of an Egyptian official and his wife, he [Reisner] misinterpreted Kerma as an Egyptian outpost and the structure known as the Western Deffufa as a fortress.”<sup>219</sup>

However, after nearly a century of neglect, excavations at Kerma by Charles Bonnet on behalf of the University of Geneva showed that it was in fact a temple, surrounded by other religious structures. In 1996-1997 excavations at Doukki Gel , a site near Kerma, Charles Bonnet and his colleagues uncovered remains of a first-century A.D. palace and temple. Below this temple, there was still an earlier sanctuary from the Napatan period. “In the most recent season (2000-2001) excavators found a further surprise: a temple from the time of Akhenaten (ca. 1350 B.C.), which replaced a still-earlier temple from the time of Amenhotep II or Thutmose IV, thus indicating a remarkable continuity of religious sanctity at the site, which lasted a millennium and a half!”<sup>220</sup>

Other evidence of early complex African societies include Nubia, “perhaps the largest state ever to appear along the Lower Nile in antiquity,”<sup>221</sup> which ruled Egypt for over half a century (728 B.C.E or 732 B.C.E. to 663 B.C.E.) This established a foundation of the empire of Kush whose Meroitic texts exhibit “the world’s first written punctuation marks.”<sup>222</sup> Kitchen, in a discussion of Punt, the area around the

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<sup>218</sup> Trigger, “Paradigms in Sudan Archaeology,”335.

<sup>219</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 67.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>221</sup> T. Shaw et al. ed., *Archaeology of Africa* (London: Routledge, 1993), 145.

<sup>222</sup> C. Ehret et al., *The Archaeological and Linguistic Reconstruction of African History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 16.

modern coast of Somali, referred to its early customs and people and labeled it as the “sole African land with so ancient a history, traceable into the third millennium B.C.E.”<sup>223</sup>

Various scholars also pointed to the stonewalled enclosures, including walls and towers of the “Great Zimbabwe Ruins” dated from the eleventh century to the sixteenth century C.E. Karl Mauch , a German geologist, discovered the ruins in 1871, and incorrectly ascribed them to Solomon. “This belief inspired Rider Haggard, an Englishman who served in South Africa, to pen his famous novel *King Solomon’s Mines* in 1885. Still others attributed them to settlers from India.”<sup>224</sup> Under the influence of the Hamitic hypothesis, mentioned above, some scholars credited newcomers from the north rather than the indigenous Bantu peoples. However, these spectacular ruins in Zimbabwe have gone a long way in annihilating “earlier assumptions that manifestations of cultural ingenuity of necessity derived from outside the continent, the only permitted exception being ancient Egypt.”<sup>225</sup> The stonewalled enclosures are an exemplar of an indigenous complex form of governmental structure in Africa south of Egypt.

Both the Afrocentrists and their critics by focusing too much on Egypt fell into the trap of the earlier Eurocentric approach. As Christopher Ehret, a professor of African History at the University of California put it; this is simply turning the European view on its head.<sup>226</sup> The nineteenth century and early twentieth century Europeans had also uplifted the Egyptian civilization above the rest. If a given belief or custom, for example, the ancient Egyptian harvest and funerary rites, “can be attested in Ancient Egypt and in some modern African tribe [then] it is necessarily or automatically proof of borrowing from Egypt; the situation is far too delicate and complex for such assumptions to be made without careful research.”<sup>227</sup> It would be interesting, if not informative to investigate color symbolism, and naming system mentioned above in other non-Egyptian cultures. This would go a long way in drawing

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<sup>223</sup> K.A Kitchen “The Land of Punt,” in *Archaeology of Africa*, ed. T. Shaw, (London: Routledge , 1993),587-608.

<sup>224</sup> Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 87.

<sup>225</sup> Shaw, *Archaeology of Africa*, 9, and 705-711.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Fairman, “Ancient Egypt and Africa,” 72.

parallels of other ancient identity markers, among ancient Egyptian and other African societies, in contrast to the modern emphasis on skin color.

## Race as a Useful Analytical Tool in History

The penchant for the biological factor of skin color and consequent tenuous conclusions did not overthrow race as a useful analytical tool in history. The recent past has witnessed the renewal of Afrocentrism particularly in black studies but with different overtones. The move is from focus on the “black” African race to one of multiculturalism. Race however, still remains the fundamental theme. Multiculturalism it could thus be argued, anticipates a wider cosmopolitanism which is allows for a diversity of viewpoints. Multiculturalism according to this new school, approaches black history through a Triple Heritage: African traditions, Islam and Christianity. The objective is to investigate how African history has been formed by the interplay of these three concepts and not particularly by race.<sup>228</sup>

In the Classical field, scholars of the twenty-first century are beginning to contextually apply “race” fundamentals within ancient history. Denise McCoskey, Professor of Classics at Miami University, Ohio in an article “Race Before “Whiteness”: Studying Identity in Ptolemaic Egypt,”<sup>229</sup> argued that the concept of race should be added in approaches to Ptolemaic Egypt “to allow historians of this period to situate certain performances within a larger colonial structure that continued to treat the categories of “Greek” and “Egyptian” as conceptually distinct.”<sup>230</sup> McCoskey defined race as “an ideological structure within which identities are formed. I [McCoskey] therefore join scholars in other fields who pointedly prefer the concept of “race,” not because it corresponds to any biological or cultural absolutes, but because it connotes, and refers investigation to, issues of power.”<sup>231</sup> Here, “race” is defined within the structural power relations, which do not necessarily include skin color connotations.

McCoskey’s conclusions were based on an analysis of various documents that attested to the increasing ability of certain “native Egyptians” to act as “Greek” especially in administrative and legal functions. According to McCoskey, the colonial power structure controlled when and by whom one could perform as either Greek or

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<sup>228</sup> See Darlene Hine and Jacqueline McLeod *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999) for articles dealing with the African Diaspora model.

<sup>229</sup> McCoskey, “Race Before “Whiteness” Studying Identity in Ptolemaic Egypt,” 13-39

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 13

<sup>231</sup> McCoskey, “Race Before “Whiteness” Studying Identity in Ptolemaic Egypt,” 33.

Egyptian. Thus despite the Ptolemaic Greek interrelation with the Egyptians, there was that fundamental thought that governed individual self-perception. McCoskey pointed to a continuing debate, which centers on a Ptolemaic woman who used both Greek and Egyptian names, Apollonia and Senmouthis . “Not content to consider her both Greek and Egyptian, scholars have instead persistently sought to answer definitively the question “Was she a Greek or an Egyptian?”<sup>232</sup> Thus race as a historiographical theme has provided new and important ways of looking at history in a world submerged in the assumption of a “black” and “white” dichotomy of race. This dichotomy although a social reality in the western world, is not a meaningful category of ancient history.

What is important then is not to ask whether the ancients were racist but instead to ask how the ancients perceived themselves and the “other.” Thus although science may in the future prove whether the ancient Egyptians were “black,” “white,” or “African,” at the end of the day, the Egyptian was “What” and “Who” he or she *essentially thought* himself or herself to be.

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid.,28

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