

10. IS THERE A FUTURE FOR AFROCENTRISM DESPITE STEPHEN HOWE'S DISMISSIVE 1998 STUDY?

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1. Introduction

Stephen Howe's book *Afrocentrism: Mythical pasts and imagined homes*² is in the first place a contribution to intellectual history, and as such it is a fair piece of scholarship. Its breadth of argument, and the depth of reading supporting it, are impressive. *Afrocentrism* is one of the first books to map out in detail, from its remoter origins to its contemporary ramifications and high-profile manifestations, one of the most significant intellectual and political movements of the world today. The book is no longer unique, though. For instance, recent French work has greatly added to our understanding of Cheikh Anta Diop and of Afrocentrist movements in general;³ and where Howe's book spends one substantial chapter on the *Black Athena* debate as initiated by Martin Bernal, there is a fast growing literature of writings⁴ which largely converge, and in part go beyond, the

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¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Colloque sur l'Afrocentrisme, Centre de Recherches Africaines, Université de Paris I (Sorbonne), 2nd May 2000; I am grateful to Richard Banégas, François-Xavier Fauvelle, Claude-Hélène Perrot, and the journal *Politique Africaine* for their invitation; and to Stephen Howe for a generous response. A dramatically shortened version of this paper was published as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2000, 'Le point de vue de Wim van Binsbergen', in: 'Autour d'un livre. *Afrocentrism*, de Stephen Howe, et *Afrocentrismes: L'histoire des Africains entre Égypte et Amérique*, de Jean-Pierre chrétien [sic], François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar et Claude-Hélène Perrot (dir.), par Mohamed Mbodj, Jean Copans et Wim van Binsbergen', *Politique africaine*, no. 79, Octobre 2000, pp. 175-180.

² Howe, Stephen, 1999, *Afrocentrism: Mythical pasts and imagined homes*, London / New York: Verso, first published 1998.

³ Fauvelle, F.-X., 1996, *L'Afrique de Cheikh Anta Diop*, Paris: Karthala; Fauvelle-Aymar, F.-X., Chrétien, J.-P., & Perrot, C.-H., 2000, eds., *Afrocentrismes: L'histoire des Africains entre Égypte et Amérique*, Paris: Karthala.

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

things Howe has to say on this Afrocentrism-related topic. But even so, Howe's book is a standard work and will remain so for years to come.

However, Stephen Howe was a political activist before he became an academic writer, and his book despite its unmistakable academic qualities is less a contribution to detached scholarship than an instance of political polemics. Its aim is not only to depict the Afrocentrist movement and to trace its trajectory through the last two centuries of intellectual and political global history, but also to pass an intellectual, political and moral judgement on that movement. Unmistakably, the author intends his book to constitute Afrocentrism's definitive denunciation. His primary motivation is profound alarm over what he (with many others, foremost Mary Lefkowitz)⁵ sees as the sell-out of intellectual and moral values for the sake of Black, mainly African American, consciousness-raising. These opponents of Afrocentrism are united by a common reasoning which might be summarised as

‘should we allow the standards of scholarship to be abandoned merely for the sake of letting a few African Americans forget such trifles as slavery and the Black ghetto?’

If historical truth, intellectual and pedagogic integrity, the canons of logic and proof are to be violated for the sake of boosting Black identity, then Afrocentrism is among the greatest contemporary threats to mankind, at a par perhaps with environmental destruction and AIDS. Exposing Afrocentrism would be every intellectual's duty, and Howe and Lefkowitz lead

towards Bernal: Berlinerblau, J., 1999, *Heresy in the University: The Black Athena controversy and the responsibilities of American intellectuals*, New Brunswick etc.: Rutgers University Press; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1996, ‘Black Athena and Africa's contribution to global cultural history’, *Quest – Philosophical Discussions: An International African Journal of Philosophy*, 1996, 9, 2 / 10, 1: 100-137; the present volume in its earlier, *TAAANTA* version; also cf. *idem*, 2000, ‘Dans le troisième millénaire avec Black Athena?’, in: Fauvelle-Aymar *et al.*, *Afrocentrismes, o.c.*, pp. 127-150.

⁵ Lefkowitz, M.R., 1996, *Not out of Africa: How Afrocentrism became an excuse to teach myth as history*, New York: Basic Books; and: Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers, *o.c.* In addition to their shared views of Afrocentrism and *Black Athena* (cf. Howe, *Afrocentrism, o.c.*, p. 9f), there is a very striking literal parallel between Lefkowitz and Howe: both present, anecdotically, the picturesque detail of their conversation with an Afrocentrist Black female student, who in Lefkowitz's case claims for a fact that Socrates was Black (Lefkowitz, M.R., 1996, ‘Ancient history, modern myths’, in: Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers, *o.c.*, pp. 3-23; p. 3; cf. Arnaiz-Villena *et al.* (Arnaiz-Villena, A., Dimitroski, K., Pacho, A., Moscoso, J., Gómez-Casado, E., Silvera-Redondo, C., Varela, P., Blagoevska, M., Zdravkovska, V., Martínez-Laso, J., 2001, ‘HLA genes in Macedonians and the sub-Saharan origin of the Greeks’, *Tissue Antigens*, 57, 2: 118-127), and in Howe's case (*Afrocentrism, o.c.*, p. viii) turns out to be ignorant of centuries of West African gold mining and trading. One can only wonder why the combination of Black, female, and ignorant should be so irresistible and infuriating at the same time, to both writers, one of which female and – as far as classics is concerned – a noted feminist.

the way.

Even though completely unsympathetic, if one is familiar with current Afrocentrist writings one cannot help agreeing with their identification of the deficiencies endemic to that genre: the poor scholarship; the amateurish and autodidactic approach to grand historical and comparative themes without systematic use of obvious sources and established methods;⁶ the Afrocentrist authors' manifest and deliberate isolation from current debates and current advances in the fields of scholarship they touch on; and the occasional lapses into Black racism. On all these points Howe has sensible things to say. He presents well-chosen and convincing examples of the ills of Afrocentrism. I find myself in agreement with much of the details of his writing. I particularly admire his uncompromising stance⁷ against any introduction of race-based arguments in academic debate – a weakness by which Afrocentrists, and Bernal, have often embarrassed even their most sympathetic readers.

2. *In vindication of Afrocentrism*

However, where Howe and I fundamentally disagree is with regard to the extent of dismissal that Afrocentrism calls for. Howe's book ends with a note of tragedy: how regrettable that the paradoxes of the modern global history of Black people have ended them up with such a collection of deeply cherished untruths as constitutes Afrocentrism. For him, Afrocentrism is largely what in our Marxist days we used to call *false consciousness*: a view of reality which is systematically distorted and which can be explained from the historical trajectory traversed, in recent centuries, by the collectivity holding these views. Where Howe finds Afrocentrism by and large intolerable it is because, in the context of the politics of identity on which the postmodern world revolves, it is no longer politically correct, yea it is more and more even politically impossible, to publicly ignore or dismiss the Afrocentrist claims; hence their increasing influence in the U.S.A. educational system. For Howe,⁸ as for me, the central issue here is the truth value of Afrocentrism.

Howe asserts himself as one primarily interested in the politics of history writing, but he fails to elaborate on the formidable philosophical

⁶ Yet dismissive statements of this nature need to be made with the greatest care. E.g. when Howe declares that no Afrocentrist has ever done a serious study of an African society (neither has Howe), he contradicts himself when discussing (Howe, *Afrocentrism*, o.c., p. 219) *The Rebirth of African Civilization* by the later Afrocentrist Chancellor Williams (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1961), as precisely such a study.

⁷ E.g. Howe, *Afrocentrism*, o.c., p. 112 n. 9, 226.

⁸ Howe, *Afrocentrism*, o.c., p. 6.

question of what constitutes truth in historical analysis.⁹ If yet he insists on calling the Afrocentric version of history, *mythical* (obviously reserving the claim to non-mythical truth for the non-Afrocentrist history of his own favourite brand), he sadly misses the opportunity of exploring the possibly mythical dimensions of mainstream historiography. In the present argument I shall briefly outline what I see as the mythical, specifically hegemonic, tendency of mainstream North Atlantic history, as confronted by Afrocentrism; but obviously our present context is not the most suitable one to pursue the general epistemological implications of this problem any further.

Howe's special expertise in British anticolonial politics, a modern topic whose historiography hinges on an abundance of written sources, renders him apparently incapable of appreciating the dynamics of the production of African history. In the latter field it is not so much unequivocally documented facts which inform the writing of history, but often¹⁰ the permutation of theoretical models which help to shed light on marginally available shreds of factual evidence, including oblique mythical statements which

⁹ From the very extensive literature on the epistemology of historiography I merely cite: Aron, R., 1961, *Introduction to the philosophy of history: An essay on the limits of historical objectivity*, Boston: Beacon; Atkinson, R.F., 1978, *Knowledge and explanation in history*, London: Macmillan; Collingwood, R.G., 1946, *The idea of history*, Oxford: Clarendon Press; Croce, B., 1923, *History: Its theory and practice*, New York: Harcourt Brace; Dilthey, W., 1927, 'Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften', in: Dilthey, W., *Gesammelte Schriften, VII*, Leipzig: Teubner; Dray, W., 1957, *Laws and explanation in history*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Goldstein, L.J., 1976, *Historical knowledge*, Austin: University of Texas Press; Hempel, C.G., 1942, 'The function of general laws in history', *Journal of Philosophy*, 29: 35-48; Meiland, J.W., 1993, 'Historical knowledge', in: Dancy, J., & E. Sosa, eds., *A companion to epistemology*, Oxford / Cambridge (Mass.): Blackwell's, first published 1992, pp. 176-178; Putman, H., 1981, *Reason, truth and history*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Veyne, P., 1984, *Writing history: Essay in epistemology*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press. Transcontinental historiography has meanwhile been recognised to pose its own specific philosophical problems, cf. Bhabha, H., 1990, ed., *Nation and narration*, London: Routledge; *idem*, 1992, *The location of culture*, London: Routledge; Spivak, G.C., 1987, *In other worlds: Essays in cultural politics*, New York: Methuen; *idem*, 1990, *The post-colonial critic: Interviews, strategies, dialogues*, London: Routledge; Rattansi, A., & Westwood, S., 1994, eds., *Racism, modernity and identity: On the western front*, London: Polity Press; Young, R.O., 1990, *White mythologies: Writing history and the West*, New York: Routledge. For the specific field of African History, cf. Mudimbe, V.Y., 1988, *The invention of Africa: Gnosis, philosophy, and the order of knowledge*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press / London: Currey; MacGaffey, W., 1986, 'Epistemological ethnocentrism in African Studies', in: Jewsiewiecki, B., & Newbury, D., 1986, eds., *African historiographies: What history for which Africa?*, Beverly Hills: Sage, pp. 42-48.

¹⁰ With some but not total exaggeration; cf. van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1981, *Religious Change in Zambia: Exploratory studies*, London / Boston: Kegan Paul International; *idem*, 1992, *Tears of Rain: Ethnicity and history in central western Zambia*, London / Boston: Kegan Paul International.

might or might not contain kernels of historical truth. In the context of African history (a discipline obviously relevant to the study of Afrocentrism), the distinction between truth and myth is far less evident than Howe suggests. Let us once more quote¹¹ the following assertion by Jan Vansina, the nestor of African history, in his critique of Luc de Heusch:

‘All history as reconstruction of the past is of course mythical.¹² Myths are held to be “true.” De Heusch is to be faulted for not using *all*¹³ the traditions about the past, however recent that past, and considering them myth. But, conversely, historical accounts reflect the past. The well-known problem is to find exactly how a set of data reflects the past as well as how it expresses the present. The succeeding problem, then, is how to reconstruct the past most objectively, and in doing so create a new myth. Not because the account is not true, but because it will be held to be true.’¹⁴

For Howe the truth value of Afrocentrism is zero, in other words Afrocentrism is entirely mythical. For me, very much to the contrary, Afrocentrism (despite all its endemic defects as summed up above) does contain a kernel of truth, in the form of testable hypotheses about the possible contributions which Africans may have made towards the worldwide development of human culture. Such a position has important political and critical implications. For if there is even the remotest possibility that some of the Afrocentrist tenets (however unscholarly in their present elaboration and substantiation) might yet be confirmed when restated in a scholarly manner and investigated with state-of-the-art scientific methods, then the wholesale dismissal of Afrocentrism cannot simply be the positive, enlightened gesture Howe (and Lefkowitz) claim it to be. Such dismissal risks to be a confirmation of the *status quo*, a continuation of the processes of exclusion and exploitation to which Black people, inside and outside Africa, have been subjected for centuries. Here there is a political role to be played by the odd person out: the scholar and polemicist who for lack of Black or African antecedents cannot be suspected of being on a mere conscious-raising trip, and who yet, for respectable scholarly reasons, defends views similar to or identical with those of the Afrocentrists.¹⁵

¹¹ Cf. above, p. 60.

¹² Original footnote deleted.

¹³ Original emphasis.

¹⁴ Vansina, J., 1983, ‘Is elegance proof? Structuralism and African history’, *History in Africa*, 10: 307-348, p. 342.

¹⁵ This is where Jean-Loup Amselle (Amselle, J.-L., 2001, *Branchements: Anthropologie de l’universalité des cultures*, Paris: Flammarion) goes wrong when chiding Cathérine Coquery-Vidrovitch and myself (p. 98, 104 f) for siding with Afrocentrism. In his opinion we could only have done so in an anti-academic bid to curry favour with the Afrocentrists (to obtain what kind of scarce resources they have to dispense? access to power? to research locations? to rare documents?). For that one could defend Afrocentrism as a scholarly position of integrity is unthinkable to him. In the same move (p. 97), for Amselle, Bernal ‘*apparaît emblématique des rapports qu’entretiennent les juifs améri-*

Martin Bernal's has been such a case, and inevitably there have been numerous attempts (not all of them totally unconvincing) to deny his integrity, to emphasise the differences between himself and the certified, Black Afrocentrists, and to demolish his scholarship and the conclusions to which it has led him; however, there have also been voices vindicating Bernal and urging that his research initiatives be carried on.¹⁶

3. Personal intermezzo: Comprehensive correspondences in space and time

My own case is formally similar to Bernal's although the scope of my scholarship and my public exposure have been so much more limited as to make the comparison an imposition on my part. I am a European born, light-skinned scholar who for decades has conducted research on and around Africa, both localising and comparative, both synchronic-anthropological and historical. For the past ten years¹⁷ I have effectively combined this identity as a North Atlantic empirical social scientist with that of an African-initiated diviner-priest; and for the past three years with that of an academic philosopher, exploring interculturality as a key to the globalising world of today. Socially and ethnically I have no reason to pose as an Afrocentrist, but emotionally, spiritually and scientifically that is what I have become. In my recent academic work, therefore, it has been one of my central concerns to thresh testable scientific hypotheses out of the ideological and otherwise defective writings of the Afrocentrists, and to actually put these hypotheses to the test. I have been struck by the – also for me – unexpectedly great extent to which their empirical truth would appear to be confirmed.

Around 1990, during field-work in Francistown, Botswana, my personal itinerary from ethnographer to intercultural philosopher brought me to an intriguing point, where on the one hand I affirmed the local cultural specificity of Southern African religion, and on the other hand the world-wide ramifications enshrined in that religion were forcefully driven home to me.

cains avec leurs compatriotes noirs' – a remarkably sweeping statement, in which Amselle as a recognised authority on ethnic relations reifies race, ignores the well-documented tense relationship between Jewish and Black ethnicities in the 20th-century U.S.A. (e.g. Berlinerblau, *o.c.*), and, for the sake of his argument, applies (not without a sinister precedent in recent European history) the rubber stamp of fully-fledged Jewish identity to Bernal – a gentile upper-class British American immigrant with a Jewish maternal grandmother, and with mere dreams of his parental ancestry's remote and diffuse Jewish past – as Sephardic Jews by the name of Bernal / 'Spring-born', migrating to Ireland after the 1492 Reconquista, but effectively assimilating there.

¹⁶ See Chapter 1 of the present collection.

¹⁷ The bulk of this text was written in 2000.

In that year I became a Southern African diviner-priest, a *sangoma*. In the process I acquired the mysterious rough wooden tablets of the *sangoma* oracle, consecrated in the blood of my sacrificial goats and periodically revived by immersion in rain water and by the application of the fat of these animals. These tablets seemed to represent the epitome of strictly local cultural particularism. It was as if they had risen from the very soil of rural Southern Africa at some indefinite Primordial Age, and the same seemed to apply to the interpretation scheme which names the sixteen specific combinations that may be formed by the tablets when these are ritually cast. The local oracle of four tablets had been described by missionaries as long ago as four hundred years.¹⁸ ‘The old woman like a stone’, ‘the old male witch like an axe’, ‘itching pubic hair like a young woman’s’, ‘the uvula like a youthful penis’ – this is how the four tablets are (nick-) named, and their various recognised combinations have connotations of witchcraft, ancestors, taboos, sacrificial dances, and all varieties of local animal totems. What could be more authentic and more African? Not for nothing had I, at the time, described my initiation (which, after more than twenty years of work as a religious and medical anthropologist, made me an accomplished and recognized specialist in an African divination and therapy system) as

‘the end point of a quest to the heart of Africa’s symbolic culture’.¹⁹

Yet I soon had to admit that this romantic and implicitly hegemonic suggestion²⁰ of extreme locality was a mere illusion, under which lurked a reality which had enormous consequences for my theoretical and existential stance as an ethnographer and a world citizen. The interpretational scheme, right up to the nomenclature of the sixteen combinations, turned out to be an adaptation of

- (a) tenth-century (C.E.) Arabian magic, notably the divination system known as *‘ilm al-raml* or *ḥaṭṭ al-raml* (see Chapter 9 above) with
- (b) a Chinese iconography (consisting, just like the famous Chinese 易經 *yì jīng* (*I Ching*) oracle,²¹ out of configurations of whole and

¹⁸ Cf. dos Santos, J., 1901, ‘Ethiopia oriental, and Eastern Ethiopia’, in: Theal, G.M., ed., *Records of South Eastern Africa*, Cape Town: Government of the Cape Colony, VII, pp. 1-182 (reprint of the original edition of 1609), 183-383 (English translation).

¹⁹ van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1991, ‘Becoming a sangoma: Religious anthropological field-work in Francistown, Botswana’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 21, 4: 309-344, p. 314.

²⁰ Conrad, J., 1971, *Heart of darkness*, New York: Norton Critical Editions, first published 1899.

²¹ Cf. Shaughnessy, Edward L., 1993, ‘I Ching 易經 (Chou 周朝 I)’, in: Loewe, Michael, ed., *Early Chinese texts: A bibliographical guide*, Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, and the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California,

broken lines), and at the same time

- (c) astrological implications such as had been elaborated another fifteen or twenty centuries earlier, in Ancient Mesopotamia.²²

The local cultural orientation in which the inhabitants of Francistown had entrenched themselves, turned out not to be at all the incarnation of absolute and unbridgeable *otherness*, but – just like my own cultural orientation as a North Atlantic scholar – a distant offshoot of the civilisations of the Ancient Near East, and like my own branch of science it had been effectively fertilised by an earlier offshoot from the same stem: the Arabian civilisation.²³ *I had struggled with the other, as if it were an unassailable,*

Berkeley, pp. 216-228; Legge, J., 1993, ed. & tr., *I Ching / Book of Changes*, Chinese-English bilingual series of Chinese classics, Beijing: Hunan Publishing House; Hook, D. ffarington, 1975, *The I Ching and mankind*, London / Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul (with interesting African parallels); Wilhelm, R., tr., *I Ging: Das Buch der Wandlungen, I-II*, Jena: Diederichs.

²² Thompson, R. Campbell, 1900, *The reports of the magicians and astrologers of Nineveh and Babylon in the British Museum, I*, London: Luzac; Bezold, C., 1919, 'Sze Ma Ts'ien und die babylonische Astrologie', *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift*, 1919, 8: 42-49; Weidner, Ernst, 1923, 'Astrologische Texte aus Boghazköi: Ihre sprachliche und kulturhistorische Bedeutung', *Archiv für Orientforschung*, 1: 1-8, 38-43; Pingree, David, & Brunner, C., 1987, 'Astrology and astronomy in Iran', in: Yarshater, Ehsan, ed., *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, London & New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, II, 858-871; Pingree, D., 1978, *The Yavanajātaka of Sphujidhvaja*, Harvard Oriental Series 48, I-II, Cambridge (Mass.) / London: Harvard University Press (offers, in addition to the monographic argument, a full world history of astrology by the world's greatest specialist); Hunger, H., 1992, *Astrological reports to Assyrian kings, State archives of Assyria, VIII*, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press; Baigent, M., 1994, *From the omens of Babylon: Astrology and Ancient Mesopotamia*, Harmondsworth: Arkana / Penguin Books; Walker, Christopher B.F., 1989, 'A sketch of the development of Mesopotamian astrology and horoscopes', in: Kitson, A., ed., *History and astrology*, London: Mandala, Unwin Paperbacks, pp. 7-14; *idem* [additions by Galter, Hannes, & Scholz, Bernhard], 'Bibliography of Babylonian astronomy and astrology', in: Galter, Hannes, & Scholz, Bernhard, 1993, *Die Rolle der Astronomie in den Kulturen Mesopotamiens: Beiträge zum 3. Grazer Morgenländischen Symposium (23.-27. September 1991)*, Graz: Grazer morgenländische Gesellschaft, pp. 407-449; Reiner, E., 1995, *Astral magic in Babylonia*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 85, 4, Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society; Koch-Westenholz, U., 1995, *Mesopotamian astrology: An introduction to Babylonian and Assyrian celestial divination*, Copenhagen: Carsten Niebuhr Institute of Near Eastern Studies.

²³ Van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1994, 'Divinatie met vier tabletten: Medische technologie in Zuidelijk Afrika', in: van der Geest, J.D.M., ten Have, P., Nijhoff, G., & Verbeek-Heida, P., eds., *De macht der dingen: Medische technologie in cultureel perspectief*, Amsterdam: Spinhuis, pp. 61-110; *idem*, 1995, 'Four-tablet divination as trans-regional medical technology in Southern Africa', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 25, 2: 114-140; *idem*, 1996, 'Transregional and historical connections of four-tablet divination in Southern Africa', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 26, 1: 2-29; *idem*, 1996, 'The astrological origin of Islamic geomancy', paper read at The Society for the Study of Islamic Philosophy and Science / Society of Ancient Greek Philosophy 15th Annual Conference: "Global and Multicultural Dimensions of Ancient and Medieval Philosophy and Social

utterly alien totality; but parts of it turned out, on second thoughts, to be familiar and kindred, and accessible.

This amounted to a head-on collision with the central theory of classic cultural anthropology since the 1930s: the historical and cultural specificity of distinct, for instance African, societies; the assumption of their being closed onto themselves and bounded; of their having a unique internal integration and systematics; in general, the idea that something like ‘a culture’ exists;²⁴ and especially, the dogma that the investigating North Atlantic scholar’s culture, and the investigated ‘other’ culture outside the North Atlantic region, share no historical roots whatsoever.

Distancing myself from these paradigmatic dogmas of Non-Western Studies, was for me the trigger to start a comprehensive research project, which has meanwhile resulted, among a host of other publications, in the earlier, *TAAANTA*, version of the present collection (1997), and a book manuscript entitled *Global Bee Flight: Sub-Saharan Africa, Ancient Egypt and the World: Beyond the Black Athena thesis*.²⁵

The latter study was to be based on a similar *Through the Looking-glass*²⁶ experience as I had in connection with the Francistown divination

Thought: Africana, Christian, Greek, Islamic, Jewish, Indigenous and Asian Traditions’’, Binghamton University, New York, Department of Philosophy / Center for Medieval and Renaissance studies, at:

http://shikanda.net/ancient_models/BINGHAMTON%201996.pdf; *idem*, 1996, ‘Time, space and history in African divination and board-games’, in: Tiemersma, D., & Oosterling, H.A.F., ed., *Time and temporality in intercultural perspective: Studies presented to Heinz Kimmerle*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp. 105-125; and Chapter 9 of the present collection.

²⁴ Cf. my inaugural in the chair of intercultural philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1999, ‘*Culturen bestaan niet*’: *Het onderzoek van intercultureelheid als een openbreken van vanzelfsprekendheden*, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam: Rotterdamse Filosofische Studies; English version: *idem*, 1999, ‘“Cultures do not exist”: Exploding self-evidences in the investigation of Interculturality’, *Quest, An African Journal of Philosophy*, 13, 1-2, special issue: Language & culture, pp. 37-114; also in: *idem*, 2003, *Intercultural encounters: African and anthropological lessons towards a philosophy of interculturality*, Berlin / Boston / Muenster: LIT, pp. 459-533.

²⁵ On the abortive MS *Global Bee Flight*, cf. Chapter 12 of the present volume. The draft eventually became a long article: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2010, ‘The continuity of African and Eurasian mythologies: General theoretical models, and detailed comparative discussion of the case of Nkoya mythology from Zambia, South Central Africa’, in: Wim M.J. van Binsbergen & Eric Venbrux, eds., *New Perspectives on Myth: Proceedings of the Second Annual Conference of the International Association for Comparative Mythology, Ravenstein (the Netherlands), 19-21 August, 2008*, Leiden / Haarlem: Papers in Intercultural Philosophy and Transcontinental Comparative Studies, pp. 137-215, preprint at:

http://shikanda.net/topicalities/binsbergen_continuity_african_eurasian_mythologies.pdf.

²⁶ Carroll, L., 1998, ‘Through the looking-glass: And what Alice found there’, in: *idem*, 1998, *The complete illustrated Lewis Carroll*, Ware: Wordsworth, this edition first published 1996, pp. 126-250, text first published 1871.

system. In the mid-1990s, I went through my various articles on western Zambian kingship in order to collect these in a single volume. This was shortly after I had spent a year at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS), Wassenaar,²⁷ in 1994-95, as the only Africanist member of a Working Group on 'Magic and religion in the Ancient Near East'. After this extensive exposure my eye was suddenly and totally unexpectedly caught by the many parallels between the ceremonies and mythologies surrounding Nkoya kingship in South Central Africa, and Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and South Asia. The parallels were so striking, so detailed, that I had to seriously consider the possibility of cultural diffusion from these various regions towards South Central Africa or *vice versa* – once again the suggestion of continuities in space and time across thousands of kilometres and across several millennia.

The Francistown divination system and Nkoya kingship are two concrete examples of the kind of serendipities – paradigmatically unexpected finds – of cultural convergence and diffusion across the entire Old World, which have occupied a central place in my empirical research since 1990. But there has been also a more systematic source of inspiration: the very extensive ethno-historical and anthropological fieldwork which I have undertaken over several decades in various locations on the African continent. In combination with the scholarly literature, and with my involvement in the work of my colleagues and research students, these researches have created a context for comparative hypotheses suggesting considerable correspondences between local cultural orientations, far beyond the strictly local and presentist horizons of classic ethnography.

Against this background I immediately recognised a kindred spirit in Martin Bernal, the author of the multi-volume book *Black Athena*.²⁸

Bernal intends to expose the Eurocentrism which – as he demonstrates – has been at the roots of the study of Graeco-Roman Antiquity over the past two centuries. In Bernal's opinion, the idea of being heirs to the genial Greek civilisation, allegedly without roots in any previous non-European civilisation, has played a major role in the justification of European intercontinental imperialism. His central thesis is that we must recognise the African and Asiatic roots²⁹ of classical Greek civilisation (especially its

²⁷ I gratefully acknowledge the facilities and inspiration offered by NIAS and by my colleagues there within the Ancient Near East work group.

²⁸ Bernal, Martin Gardiner, 1987-2006, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Vol. I* (1987), *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1787-1987; Vol. II* (1991), *The Archaeological and Documentary Evidence; Vol. III* (2006), *The Linguistic Evidence*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press; Bernal, M. Gardiner, (D. Chioni Moore, ed.), 2001, *Black Athena writes back: Martin Bernal responds to his critics*, Durham & London: Duke University Press.

²⁹ Bernal's own formulation is one-sidedly linguistic hence confusing: 'the Afroasiatic roots', see below, p. 329, n.

philosophy and religion) – and in doing so, we would also recognise the non-European roots of major cultural orientations in today’s North Atlantic civilisation, which is increasingly becoming global anyway. Hence the pragmatic title of Bernal’s *magnum opus*, *Black Athena*: this title³⁰ is to indicate that the goddess Athena, although the central symbol of classical Greek civilisation, yet had an origin outside Europe, in Africa.³¹

With the 1997 *TAAANTA* version of the present collection, I helped to reopen the debate on Bernal’s work, which appeared to be effectively closed after the devastatingly critical *Black Athena Revisited*.³² With *Global Bee Flight*, I sought to return to Africa in order to investigate the implications of the *Black Athena* thesis for our Africa research today – and the implication of our Africa research for the *Black Athena* thesis. Because Ancient Egypt occupies a key position in the debates on Africa’s cultural historical relation to Europe and to the rest of the world, a large section of *Global Bee Flight* was occupied by an analysis of the mutual interpenetration of Ancient Egyptian and sub-Sahara-African themes, in the way of concepts and structures of thought, myths, symbolism, the kingship, state formation, and productive practices. My conclusions, however, were sur-

³⁰ Later, Bernal tried to distance himself from all the critical implications of the expression ‘*Black Athena*’, by suggesting that the word ‘Black’ had been imposed by his publisher. The term however already appears in his writings a few years before volume I of *Black Athena, o.c.*, was published in 1987, notably: Bernal, Martin Gardiner, 1985, ‘*Black Athena*: The African and Levantine roots of Greece’, in: ed. Ivan Van Sertima, *African presence in early Europe*, special issue of the *Journal of African Civilizations*, 7, 2: 66-82, New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books); *idem*, 1986, ‘*Black Athena* denied: The tyranny of Germany over Greece and the rejection of the Afroasiatic roots of Europe: 1780-1980’, *Comparative Criticism*, 8, 3: 1-69. Presumably, the ‘tyranny’ attributed to Bernal’s publisher did not quite extend to these learned journals.

³¹ Bernal, *Black Athena, I, o.c.*; Burkert, W., 1992, *The orientaling revolution: Near Eastern influence on Greek culture in the Early Archaic Age*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, originally published as: *Die orientalisierende Epoche in der griechischen Religion und Literatur*, Heidelberg: Winter; Evangelidou, C., 1994, *When Greece met Africa: The genesis of Hellenic philosophy*, Binghamton: Institute of Global Studies. The classic Afrocentrist contribution to the debate on African / Egyptian origins of Greek philosophy has been: James, G.G.M., 1973, *Stolen legacy: The Greeks were not the authors of Greek philosophy, but the people of North Africa, commonly called the Egyptians*, San Francisco: Julian Richardson Associates, first edition New York: Philosophical Library, 1954. It is this line of argument (inherently implausible anyway given the details of Aristotle’s and Alexander the Great’s lives, the enormous differences in format between late Egyptian wisdom texts and the – no doubt in part pseudo-epigraphical – Aristotelian corpus, and finally our almost totally ignorance of what the Ancient Egyptian ‘Houses of Life’ – *i.e.* knowledge centres attached to temples – were all about) which has prompted Lefkowitz to her violently dismissive pamphlet: Lefkowitz, *Not out of Africa, o.c.*; Palter, R., 1996, ‘Black Athena, Afrocentrism, and the history of science’, in: Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers, *o.c.*, pp. 209-266; Preus, A., 1992, *Greek Philosophy: Egyptian origins*, Binghamton: Institute of Global Cultural Studies; West, M.L., 1971, *Early Greek philosophy and the Orient*, Oxford: Clarendon.

³² Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers, *Black Athena revisited, o.c.*

prisingly at variance with the Afrocentric and Bernalian position: I found that, by the end of the fourth millennium before the common era, Ancient Egypt owed its emergence as a civilisation, not to a uniquely African development (which is what Bernal and other Afrocentrists think to be the case) but to the *interaction* between on the one hand Black African cultural orientations, and ‘Pelagian’ Eastern Mediterranean / West Asian cultural orientations on the other.³³ However, as a next step my analyses demonstrated that Ancient Egypt, in its turn, did have a decisive fertilising effect not only (as stressed in the *Black Athena* thesis) on the eastern Mediterranean basin (including the Aegean) and hence on Europe, but also, in a most significant feed-back process, on Black Africa, touching on many aspects of life, including the kingship, law, ritual and mythology.³⁴ In stead of the familiar image of mutually absolutely distinct ‘cultures’, as in the dominant view both among scholars and in the modern world at large, what thus emerges is an image of Africa which displays a very remarkable cultural unity, not for any mystique of Africanity, but as a result of clearly detectable historical processes: sub-Saharan Africa as first an important source and subsequently as a principal recipient of Ancient Egyptian civilisation, and finally as a result of converging Arabian / Islamic inroads as well as - in the most recent centuries – North Atlantic colonial influences.

It is strange that the argument of convergence has met with so little acceptance on the part of African intellectuals today. Instead they virtually unanimously support the argument of cultural diversity and fragmentation. In the words of Kwame Appiah, one of Howe’s intellectual heroes and someone under frequent attack from Afrocentrists:

³³ Meanwhile, my Pelagian hypothesis (see Chapter 9, above) suggests that eventually even the sub-Saharan contribution may not stand on its own, but in itself again combined

- (a) Palaeo-African elements that had evolved, inside the African continent, out of the pre-Out of Africa heritage (Pandora’s Box), with
- (b) ‘African-Pelagian’ elements, diffused South (via the Nile valley and Western Sahara routes) from West Asia / the Mediterranean.

³⁴ With reference to the work of the Senegalese natural scientist and cultural philosopher C.A. Diop, more than with reference to Bernal’s work (which he does not like any more than he does Diop’s; cf. Appiah, K.A., 1993, ‘Europe upside down: Fallacies of the New Afrocentrism’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 february, pp. 24-25, Appiah rejects the idea of such a continuity, on the grounds of two self-evidences which however are untenable in the light of recent historical research: the claim that Ancient Egypt had only a non-specialised philosophy (a point reiterated by Howe), which moreover is unrelated, in substance, with current African cultural orientations; and the claim that we cannot expect to find, in Africa, cultural continuities extending over a period of three or more millennia – a mere restatement of the dominant paradigm (c) as discussed below. Appiah, *In my father’s house, o.c.*, p. 161f.

'If we could have traveled through Africa's many cultures in (...) [precolonial times] from the small groups of Bushman hunter-gatherers, with their stone-age materials, to the Hausa kingdoms, rich in worked metal – we should have felt in every place profoundly different impulses, ideas, and forms of life. To speak of an African identity in the nineteenth century – if an identity is a coalescence of mutually responsive (if sometimes conflicting) modes of conduct, habits of thought, and patterns of evaluation; in short, a coherent kind of human social psychology – would have been “to give to aery nothing a local habitation and a name.”’³⁵

In line with this stress on precolonial fragmentation lies the African philosopher's Kaphagawani's thesis on 'C4', which is a scientific formula meant to express

'the Contemporary Confluence of Cultures on the Continent of Africa. This is a postcolonial phenomenon where different cultures meet and mingle to form new, hybrid forms'.³⁶

In this formulation, extreme multiplicity and fragmentation is still held to be the hallmark of the African past, the point of departure. Such unity between African cultures as is being recognised today is taken to be the result of the postcolonial phenomenon of globalisation, which allows this view to salvage the concept of a pristine distinctness of a great number of precolonial cultures in Africa. The discussion on Afrocentrism (with its Senegalese precursor Cheikh Anta Diop) appears to be lost on the majority of contemporary African philosophers. Afrocentrists are scarcely welcomed or cited in these circles.³⁷

4. Hegemonic paradigms, and the empirically testable hypotheses threshed out of Afrocentrism

As Howe states himself, he came to the study of Afrocentrism not as an Africanist but as one interested in the politics (as distinct, apparently, from the philosophy) of history writing; for him, Afrocentrism is primarily politically distorted history. Underlying the above excursions in space and time is therefore a more fundamental question which takes us right back to the heart of Howe's argument: *By what method and with what validity and*

³⁵ Appiah, *In my father's house, o.c.*, p. 174; cited in approval in: Bell, R.H., 1997, 'Understanding African philosophy from a non-African point of view: An exercise in cross-cultural philosophy', in: Eze, *Postcolonial African philosophy: A critical reader, Oxford: Blackwell*, pp. 197-220, p. 218f, n. 29. The quote (casually unreferenced as a differential sign of the Ghanaian-British author's claim to North Atlantic high culture?) is from Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act V Scene I – not really a household word in most African intellectual circles (nor in Dutch ones, for that matter).

³⁶ Kaphagawani & Malherbe, 'African epistemology', *o.c.*, p. 209.

³⁷ Since this was written in 2000, the situation had changed in the direction of greater accommodation of the Afrocentric perspective.

reliability do we construct images of the past?

Historiographic usage offers a number of ready answers to this question. For Howe, and for many historians like him who situate themselves in the empiricist tradition while being suspicious of an over-reliance on systematic theory, a central methodological approach is that of ‘common sense’, an appeal to the self-validating effect of simple everyday logic and common (i.e. North Atlantic, Western) everyday concepts. Inevitably (since everyday common perspectives are by definition – in addition to being implicitly ethnocentric – intersubjective, shared with others and recognised to be so shared) a common-sense appeal would favour the paradigms as taken for granted in a given discipline at a given moment of time.

It has been Bernal’s merit to make us aware of the immense historical and political significance of one such historiographic paradigm, whose demolition has been the purpose of his *Black Athena* project:

(a) ‘Greek classical culture was essentially *independent* from any inputs from the Ancient Near East (Anatolia, Phoenicia, Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia) and North East Africa (Ancient Egypt)’.

As we have seen, in connection with Afrocentrism, three other such historical paradigms have been dominant throughout the second half of the twentieth century:

(b) ‘Ancient Egypt, although situated on the edge of the African continent, was essentially a non-African civilisation whose major achievements in the fields of religion, social, political and military organisation, architecture and other crafts, the sciences etc., were largely original and whose historical cultural indebtedness lay, if anything, with West Asia rather than with sub-Saharan Africa.’

(In this paradigm we may still detect overtones of the notorious Hamitic thesis³⁸ which was *en vogue* in the early twentieth century and which claimed sub-Saharan Africa to be the passive recipient of cultural innovations derived from a non-African West Asiatic culture carried by people who did not display any of the somatic features of Blackness.)³⁹

(c) ‘Ancient Egypt did *not* have a profound, lasting, and therefore traceable impact on the African continent, particularly not on sub-Saharan Africa.’

(Interestingly, the inverse of this paradigm was a major Africanist paradigm in the first half of the 20th century: diffusionist Egyptocentrism.)

³⁸ Cf. Howe, *Afrocentrism, o.c.*, p. 115f; and Chapter 12, below.

³⁹ However, admittedly, my own Pelasgian hypothesis might appear to differ only in degree from this thesis. I will come back also to this important point in Chapter 12.

(d) 'Contemporary Africa is a patchwork quilt of numerous distinct local cultures, each supported by a distinct language and each giving rise to a distinct ethnic identity, in the light of which broad perspectives on continental cultural continuity going back to the remoter past much be relegated to the realm of ideology and illusion.'

(Again, scholarship before the mid-twentieth century, favouring a diffusionist paradigm, stressed far more African continuity in space and time, e.g. in the work of Frobenius; subsequently, African Studies came under the dominance of structural-functionalism with its reliance on fieldwork in one narrow local setting).

Phrased in this way, these paradigms, although largely taken for granted by the scholars working in their context, are in principle testable hypotheses. Although they are not intrinsically ideological, unmistakably they are well attuned to a hegemonic North Atlantic perspective on the world. They postulate a world which is neatly compartmentalised; incomparably more so than would be suggested not only by the globalising experience of our own time, but also by the demonstrable spread of agricultural techniques, weaponry, musical instruments, languages, belief systems including world religions, formal systems such as scripts, board games, divination methods, myths and symbolism, across the African continent and in considerable (though painfully understudied) continuity with the rest of the Old World, and even the New World. Under the alleged conditions of compartmentalisation, a whole mythical geopolitics comes into being: the mystery and mystique of Europe – more recently: of the North Atlantic in general – can be maintained as a solid ideological power base for colonialism and post-colonial hegemony; Egypt, Africa, African cultures, remain the ultimate *other*, to the North Atlantic, but also to one another; a conceptual and geopolitical 'divide and rule' keeps them in their subordinate place vis-à-vis the North Atlantic; and the basic flow of achievement is defined as going from north to south, while the hegemonically undesirable idea of counter-flows in a northerly direction is ruled out. These four paradigms (a) through (d) may be testable hypotheses, but they are very close to geopolitical myths.

If our four paradigms (a) through (d) can be demonstrated to have considerable hegemonic ideological potential, their inverses are likely to have a similar but opposite counter-hegemonic ideological charge. These inverses would stress historical cultural continuity:

- (a_{inverse}) between Greece and the ancient Near East including Ancient Egypt;
- (b_{inverse}) between prehistoric cultures situated on the Africa continent south of the Tropic of Cancer (23°27' North), and Ancient

Egypt;
 (c_{inverse}) between Ancient Egypt and latter-day African cultures;
 (d_{inverse}) between latter-day African cultures even regardless of the
 influence of Ancient Egypt.

If paradigms (a) through (d) are so ideological as to be probably untrue to a considerable extent, the same might be the case for (a_{inverse}) through (d_{inverse}). Yet it is likely that the latter contain a healthy and serious critique of hegemonic misconceptions, and therefore in themselves are to a considerable extent, demonstrably true. It now so happens that (a_{inverse}) through (d_{inverse}) are among the central tenets of Afrocentrism, which therefore can no longer be relegated to mere false consciousness and Black consciousness-raising, but deserves to be admitted to the central halls of scholarship. To dismiss these inverse views as ‘myths’, as Howe does in the subtitle of his book, is not only doing them injustice, but also means myopia: the potentially mythical nature of the dominant paradigms, which happen to be Howe’s own, is insufficiently brought to the fore.

5. *Howe and Africa*

This myopia of Howe’s book is not readily recognised since the execution of its design is largely impeccable. Not being an Africanist himself, Howe can only be praised for the meticulous way in which he has digested the vast relevant bibliography. He finds little, in the enormous literature he has plodded through, to falsify the paradigms (a) through (d). On the contrary, it is his contention that

‘“Black Athena” is a slogan just as false to history as is “White Egypt”’.⁴⁰

To Howe,

‘the actual evidence of ideas about kingship paralleling Egypt’s either in Sub-Saharan Africa or in the Aegean is extremely thin’.⁴¹

On the basis of what kind of specialist knowledge and authority is such a statement made? My own discovery of very extensive Egyptian parallels in the material on Zambian kingship came only after studying Nkoya kingship and myths for twenty years, and after far more intensive exposure to Ancient Near Eastern and Egyptological studies than British imperial

⁴⁰ Howe, *Afrocentrism*, o.c., p. 4; I would endorse, however, much of Howe’s middle-of-the-road criticism of Bernal’s position, based as usual on extensive reading of the literature on the *Black Athena* debate. I would however shrink from calling Bernal a ‘theorist’, like Howe does (*Afrocentrism*, o.c., p. 8); my reasons for this are presented extensively in Chapter 1 of the present collection.

⁴¹ Howe, *Afrocentrism*, o.c., p. 130.

historians, anthropologists and Africanists normally get. This suggests some of the methodological and paradigmatic problems involved: usually the more one specialises in one spatio-temporally specific domain of human culture, the less likely one is to gain similarly detailed information on another domain, and the more likely one is to retreat into myopic paradigmatic self-evidences.

Howe cites approvingly (p. 173) the opinion of the anthropologist Benjamin Ray – not to be confused with the Egyptologist John Ray – according to whose non-specialist opinion not a single Egyptian artifact has ever been found in sub-Saharan East Africa.⁴² Alas, by the rules of falsificatory logic one counter-example is enough to disprove this claim.⁴³

However, the distribution of specific artefacts is not the only way to gauge cultural continuity between regions. The extensive continuity

⁴² Ray, B.C., 1991, *Myth, ritual and kingship in Buganda*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 196.

⁴³ Breuil, H., 1951, 'Further details of rock-paintings and other discoveries. 1. The painted rock "Chez Tae", Leribe, Basutoland, 2. A new type of rock-painting from the region of Aroab, South-West Africa, 3. Egyptian bronze found in Central Congo', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 4: 46-50. Further on this find, cf. Leclant, J., 1956, 'Fouilles et travaux en Égypte, 1954-1955', *Orientalia*, 25: 251-252. Shinnie however dismisses, cursorily, this intriguing find as an accidental intrusion (Shinnie, P.L., 1971, 'The legacy to Africa', in: J.R. Harris, ed., *The legacy of Egypt*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 434-455). Admittedly, the trajectories of artefacts may be capricious and difficult to interpret. Thus, a Roman coin from the time of Constantine the Great (c. 272-337 CE) was found near Buea, Western Cameroon, in the 1930s (Bovill, E.W., 1958, *The golden trade of the Moors*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 41, n.). Since, contrary to the disputed reports of the Phoenician Hanno sailing down the West African coast and probably sighting Mt Cameroon ('the Chariot of the Gods') in the end (Falconer, Thomas, ed. and tr., 1797, *The Voyage of Hanno: Translated, and accompanied with the Greek text: Explained from the accounts of modern travellers, defended against the objections of Mr Dodwell, and other writers, and illustrated by maps from Ptolemy, d'Anville, and Bougainville*, London: Cadell; Lacroix, W.F.G., 1993, *Afrika in de oudheid: Een linguïstisch-toponymische analyse van Ptolemaeus' kaart van Afrika: Aangevuld met een bespreking van Ofir, Punt en Hanno's reis*, Delft: Eburon; and Herodotus' claim of a circumnavigation of Africa under Pharaoh Necho II, 600 BCE, *Historiae*, IV, 42), there is no record of Roman Atlantic trade all the way to Mt Cameroon. Therefore a specialist like Robert Dick-Read (2005, *The phantom voyagers: Evidence of Indonesian settlement in Africa in ancient times*, Winchester: Thurlton) surmises that this coin is one of the large number that found their way to the Indian Ocean, where Roman trade was going through a revival under Constantine, and where Roman coins were much in demand. In that case the Buea coin suggests a trajectory that brought probably quite a few other items of culture to West Africa via Madagascar and Southern Africa (e.g. cowries – of monetary value both in China and in Africa –, divination bowls – South and West African ones have much in common with Chinese ones displaying 36 zodiacal signs –, Ifa geomantic divination (cf. Chapter 9 above), Indonesian food crops e.g. banana, perhaps even trans-Pacific American food crops); and all this far away from the usual Arab trade routes connecting West Africa with West Asia and the Mediterranean. The Egyptian bronze might have travelled a similar way before ending up in Congo, but there is – as we shall see shortly – sufficient Ancient Egyptian documentary and iconographic evidence of inroads South of the Sahara to make an overland trajectory at least thinkable.

between Ancient Egypt and the rest of Africa cannot be doubted.⁴⁴ Already a century ago, the great Egyptologist Petrie⁴⁵ gave an impressive list of such continuities, here rendered as Table 1. When Shinnie revisited the evidence in 1971⁴⁶ he was predictably critical of Petrie’s argument, which inevitably was based on methodologically obsolete and incomplete data. Yet is worthwhile to summarise Petrie’s now obscure article because, even after almost a century, its author’s phenomenal knowledge of Egyptian material culture, plus the obvious quality, already, of the available ethnographic literature on Africa,⁴⁷ allowed him to identify many details of continuity which still cannot fail to impress us.

Table 1. Petrie on African-Egyptian continuities

nature of the evidence	Egyptian-African parallels	
treatment of the body	1. mummifying 2. contracted burial 3. beheading the dead 4. passage for the spirit 5. vehicle for the spirit 6. restoration of ability to the corpse	7. recess graves 8. pole over grave 9. round-domed graves 10. domed pit tomb 11. sloping passage tomb
offerings for the dead	12. beer and flour offerings 13. cloth offering. 14. offerings at the grave 15. killing the offerings.	18. men sacrificed at royal funeral 19. eldest son the family priest 20. the funeral image 21. tall hats of officiants

⁴⁴ Cf. many important contributions in: O’Connor, David, & Andrew Reid, 2003, eds., *Ancient Egypt in Africa*, London: UCL Press, including the one by Wengrow and (on West Africa and Egypt) Fohinso.

⁴⁵ Petrie, W.M.F., 1914, ‘Egypt in Africa, I-II’, *Ancient Egypt*, 3: 115-127 and 4: 159-170.

⁴⁶ Shinnie, ‘The legacy’, *o.c.*

⁴⁷ Petrie however lists only a handful of sources: Werner, A., 1906, *The native races of British Central Africa: With thirty-two full-page illustrations*, London: A. Constable & Co., Part II of *The Native Races of the British Empire*; Leonard, Arthur Glyn, 1906, *The lower Niger and its tribes*, London: Macmillan; Frobenius, Leo, 1913, *The voice of Africa: Being an account of the travels of the German Inner African Expedition in the years 1910-1912, I-II*, London: Hutchinson; Seligman, C.G., 1911, ‘Cult of Nyakang and the divine kings of the Shilluk’, *Wellcome Tropical Research Laboratories*, Report 4, vol. B: 216-238; *idem*, 1911, ‘Dinka’, in: Hastings, J., with Selbie, J.A., & Gray, L.H., eds., *Encyclopaedia of religion and ethics*, Edinburgh: Clark / New York: Scribner, pp. IV: 704-713; *idem*, 1913, ‘Some aspects of the Hamitic problem in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 43: 593-705; Johnston, H.H., E. Torday, T. Athol Joyce & C.G. Seligman, 1913, ‘A survey of the ethnography of Africa: And the former racial and tribal migrations in that continent’, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 43: 375-421; Dennett, R.E., 1906, *At the back of the black man’s mind: Or, Notes on the kingly office in West Africa*, London: Macmillan.

	16. offering chamber above grave 17. drain to the east	22. offering chamber for the image 23. the soul house
royal functions	24. the chief as priest 25. the king killed before old age 26. indirect mention of king's death 27. sister marriage	28. honour of the royal placenta 29. importance of leopard's skin 30. potency of the ox tail 31. ensign of the saw fish
beliefs	32. the mundane spirit world 33. every object has its spirit 34. the ancestral spirit 35. the roads of the future 36. twins human and animal 37. ram-headed gods	38. the bull god 39. totemism and animal clans 40. the sacred sycamore fig tree 41. red cattle sacrificed 42. animal skulls hung up 43. divination by objects thrown
material products	44. red and white pottery 45. red and black pottery 46. mud toys 47. wooden head-rests 48. wooden hoes 49. double process spinning 50. flat ground-loom	51. mosquito nets 52. harpoon 53. drag net 54. hand net 55. basket traps 56. ring snares 57. cone on the head
late influence from Egypt	58. terracotta Nigerian heads 59. the classical patterns	60. interwoven patterns 61. architectural style

The question however has always been whether such parallels are due

1. to the influence of Ancient Egyptian culture on the rest of Africa,
2. or reversely, to the fact that Ancient Egypt simply, as another African society, was a product of sub-Saharan Africa,
3. to a third factor which, as a shared substrate, both sub-Saharan Africa and Ancient Egypt had in common, or whether
4. the parallels are insignificant and simply spring from accidents of cultural history ('parallel invention') against the background of the converging properties of the minds Anatomically Modern Humans.

The information contained in Table 1 is too extensive and too detailed to make (4) a plausible option. My personal preference is for (3), for the extensive reasons presented in Chapter 12, below. However, throughout the 20th century reflection concentrated on the dilemma between points (1) and (2). Since this choice was most cogently put by the Egyptologist Fairman (1965),⁴⁸ I propose to call it '*Fairman's dilemma*'; Keita has posed the same question in slightly different terms.⁴⁹ Comparative professional thinking among Egyptologists and archaeologists in the last few decades

⁴⁸ Fairman, H.W., 1965, 'Ancient Egypt and Africa', *African Affairs*, 64, special issue: African Studies Association of the United Kingdom, Proceedings of the 1964 Conference (1965), pp. 69-75.

⁴⁹ Keita, Shomarka O.Y., 1981, 'Critical commentary: Royal incest and diffusion in Africa', *American Ethnologist*, 8, 2: 392-393.

has tended towards view (b)⁵⁰ and has thus converged with Diopian and other forms of Afrocentrist thought.⁵¹ A new phase has entered in this debate, now that the Afrocentrist point of view is taken more and more seriously in Egyptological circles (e.g. Ndigi 1997, and in general the scholarly journal *Cahiers Caribéens d'Égyptologie*).⁵²

Given the fact that Ancient Egypt was a major cosmopolitan power for three millennia, and that its trading and military contacts extended far

⁵⁰ Hoffman, M.A., 1979, *Egypt before the Pharaohs*, New York: Knopf; Celenko, T., 1996, ed., *Egypt in Africa*, Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art in cooperation with Indiana University Press; O'Connor, D., 1994, *Ancient Nubia: Egypt's rival in Africa*, Philadelphia: University Museum of Archeology and Anthropology; Davies, W. Vivian, ed., 1991, *Egypt and Africa: Nubia from prehistory to Islam*, London: British Museum Press; Hassan, F.A., 1995, 'Egypt in the prehistory of northeast Africa', in Sasson, J.M., with J. Baines, G. Beckman & K.S. Rubinson, eds., *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, I-III*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, pp. II, 665-678.

⁵¹ Cf. Diop, Cheikh Anta, 1962, *Bulletin de l'IFAN [Institut Française de l'Afrique Noire]* 24, B, 2-3; *idem*, 1979, *Nations nègres et culture: De l'antiquité nègre égyptienne aux problèmes culturels de l'Afrique noire d'aujourd'hui*, Paris: Présence africaine (1st ed. 1955); *idem*, 1981, 'Origin of the Ancient Egyptians', in: G. Mokhtar, ed., *General history of Africa, II, Ancient civilizations of Africa*, Berkeley & Los Angeles: UNESCO & University of California Press, pp. 27-51; Fauvelle, F.-X., 1996, *L'Afrique de Cheikh Anta Diop*, Paris: Karthala; Fauvelle-Aymar, F.-X., Chrétien, J.-P., & Perrot, C.-H., 2000, eds., *Afrocentrismes: L'histoire des Africains entre Égypte et Amérique*, Paris: Karthala; Lam, Aboubacry Moussa, 1989, 'Égypte ancienne et Afrique noire chez Cheikh Anta Diop', *Présence Africaine*, 149-150: 203-213; Noguera, A., 1976, *How African was Egypt: A comparative study of Egyptian and Black African cultures*, New York: Vantage Press; Bernal, *Black Athena I-III, o.c.*; Obenga, T., 1992, *Ancient Egypt and Black Africa*, London: Karnak House; Van Sertima, Ivan, ed., 1995, *Egypt: Child of Africa*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction. In fact, however, the well-known Victorian Egyptologist E.A. Wallis Budge (cheap reprints of whose obsolete books have earned him lasting – although in the eyes of specialists disreputable – authority among amateurs dabbling in Egyptology to this very day) already championed the Afrocentrist view of Egypt a century ago in great detail (e.g. Budge, E.A. Wallis, 1911, *Osiris and the Egyptian resurrection*, London: Warner / New York: Putnam), alternating accounts of African religious beliefs and violent practices such as Budge had painstakingly gleaned from the then available literature, with the insistent and elaborate argument that the venerated Ancient Egyptians should in the first place be understood as Africans. However, on the basis of other references to Africans in Budge's work (e.g. Budge, E.A. Wallis, 1904, *The gods of the Egyptians: Or studies in Egyptian mythology, I-II*, Chicago: Open Court & London: Methuen & Co., I, 297 f, 304 f, on the central Egyptian mytheme of creation through masturbation) I suspect that his apparently generous and apparently counter-hegemonic instance of Afrocentrism *avant la lettre* was in the first place inspired by the fact that, scandalised, he needed a remote, 'othering', in the terminology of his times even 'savage', origin to which he could attribute such imagery of physical violence and variegated sexuality as he found in Egyptian texts.

⁵² Ndigi cites a number of prominent early Egyptologists supporting the same idea, e.g. J. Capart, R. Cottevaille-Giraudet, K. Meinhof (in fact a Bantuist), H.P. Blok (who from Egyptologist developed into a Bantuist), and F. Daumas; Ndigi, Oum, 1997, *Les Basa du Cameroun et l'antiquité pharaonique égypto-nubienne: Recherche historique et linguistique comparative sur leurs rapports culturels à la lumière de l'égyptologie, I-II*, thèse de doctorat, Université Lumières, Lyon 2; éditions Sentrion_Lille.

South into the Sudan and beyond, it is simply inevitable that Ancient Egypt, once established as such, exerted a strong cultural influence all over the Northern half of the African continent,⁵³ where its representatives travelled widely for local products, ranging from skins and gold, to dwarves.⁵⁴

Why then are there admittedly *few* concrete attestations of Egyptian objects on sub-Saharan? Table 1 implies one ready explanation. Whatever cultural forms came down the Nile valley and spread across sub-Saharan Africa, were appropriated in a process of transformative localisation, and absorbed, as well as eclipsed, the imported Egyptian forms by very similar local African forms. Moreover, whereas the soils of Egypt (with the exception of the Delta) are exceptionally suitable for the long-term preservation of artefacts, the opposite is the case for most of sub-Saharan Africa. Of

⁵³ A few glimpses: Wainwright, an Egyptologist, sees an extensive Egyptian influence in West African cultures (Wainwright, G.A., 1949, 'Pharaonic survivals, Lake Chad to the west coast', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 35: 167 -175), and proposes that Meroe was the station through which Egyptian metallurgy passed to Bunyoro (whereas in neighbouring East African groups such technology had rather Swahili connotations (Wainwright, G.A., 1954, 'The diffusion of *-uma* as a name for iron', *Uganda Journal*, 18: 113-136). Incidentally, Wainwright (1949, 'The founders of the Zimbabwe civilization', *Man*, 49: 62-66) sees an Ethiopian, specifically Galla, hand in the founding of Great Zimbabwe, but that is not the point here. Moreover: Meyerowitz, E.L.R., 1960, *The divine kingship in Ghana and in Ancient Egypt*, London: Faber and Faber, on Ghana; Seligman, C.G., 1934, *Egypt and Negro Africa: A study in divine kingship*, London: Routledge, especially with reference to the Nilotic societies of the Sudan; Lam traces the widespread Peul / Fulani pastoralists to Egypt, as if the wholesale paradigmatic rejection of the Hamitic thesis (see Chapter 12, below) never took place; Lam Aboubacry Moussa, 1993, *De l'origine égyptienne des Peuls*, Paris, Presence africaine / Gif-sur-Yvette, Khepera.

⁵⁴ Egyptian penetration into sub-Saharan Africa is well documented: e.g. O'Connor, D., 1971, 'Ancient Egypt and Black Africa: Early contacts', *Expedition: The Magazine of Archaeology / Anthropology*, 14, 1: 2-9; Strouhal, E. 1971, 'Evidence of the early penetration of Negroes into prehistoric Egypt', *Journal of African History*, 12: 1-9; Celenko, T., 1996, ed., *Egypt in Africa*, Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art in cooperation with Indiana University Press; Cf. Williams, Bruce, 1997, 'Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa: Their interaction', in: Joseph O. Vogel, with Jean Vogel, eds., *Encyclopedia of Pre-colonial Africa*, Walnut Creek CA etc.: AltaMira Press / Sage, pp. 465-472 – with interesting bibliography; Adam, S., with the collaboration of J. Vercouter, 1981, 'The importance of Nubia: A link between Central Africa and the Mediterranean', in: G. Mokhtar, ed., *UNESCO general history of Africa, II, Ancient civilizations of Africa*, Berkeley: UNESCO & University of California Press, pp. 226-244; Mauny, R., 1978, 'Trans-Saharan contacts and the Iron Age in West Africa', in: J.D. Page, ed., *The Cambridge history of Africa, II*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 272-341; Zayed, A.H., with the collaboration of J. Devisse, 1981, 'Egypt's relations with the rest of Africa', in: G. Mokhtar, ed., *UNESCO general history of Africa, II, Ancient civilizations of Africa*, Berkeley: UNESCO & University of California Press, pp. 136-154; Herkhuf, 1914, 'The autobiography of Herkhuf', in: Budge, E.A.W., *Literature of the Ancient Egyptians*, London: Dent, pp. 131-135; Pierrotti, Nelson, 2007, 'La explotación de África en los textos egipcios: De Sahure a Neco II', *Antigua: Historia y Arqueología de las civilizaciones*, at: cervantesvirtual.com.


course, the abundance of Ancient Egyptian artefacts in Nubia cannot be counted in this connection, in the first place because Nubia is not sub-Saharan, in the second place because throughout three millennia Nubia and Egypt, even when politically separate, have been culturally so continuous that one cannot really speak here of a dissemination of culture from one region to the other.

Thus we arrive at the assessment by the Meroe specialist Shinnie, by no means an Afrocentrist, and one healthily suspicious of Egyptocentrism:

‘...it can be seen that, here and there, there are strong resemblances to Egyptian objects and to Egyptian culture scattered throughout Africa. In the realm of material culture a small number of objects have been found which might reasonably be supposed to have originated from Egypt. Amongst these are musical instruments such as the small harp used by the Azande and other peoples of the southern Sudan and Uganda, wooden headrests in various parts of the continent, certain types of sandals, and many other similar objects. In West Africa attention has been drawn to the use of ostrich-feather fans, very similar to pharaonic ones, in Wadai and Bagirmi and other places in the neighbourhood of Lake Chad. (...) In other parts of West Africa, particularly Nigeria, there are resemblances in the regalia of chiefs to the pharaonic regalia - whips, crooks, and flails have all been reported and some have seen them as direct borrowings from Egypt. The god Shango, of the Yoruba, whose sacred animal is the ram, has been derived by some from the god Amun, and Wainwright⁵⁵ has cited a ram-headed breastplate from Lagos which certainly very strongly suggests an Egyptian influence.’⁵⁶

Shinnie is sceptical of Seligman’s stress on Egyptian parallels in African kingships, yet he has to admit that the case for such parallels for the Bunyoro in Uganda

‘...does suggest, however remotely, Egyptian influences. Yet the Bunyoro royal line cannot have reached its present home more than a few hundred years ago and, as Seligman himself observed, this makes Egyptian influence unlikely, it being just as probable that these traditions are due to old and widespread African beliefs which affected Egypt as they have affected other parts of Africa.’⁵⁷

Nor can one help suspecting that the two queens of Mpororo, also in Uganda, who were carried around in baskets scarcely a century ago,⁵⁸ were a sub-Saharan African enactment, across several millennia, of the Ancient Egyptian title  *nbty*, ‘The Two Ladies’, which was represented in

⁵⁵ Wainwright, G.A., 1949, ‘Pharaonic survivals, Lake Chad to the west coast’, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 35: 167 -75; Wainwright had been a major Egyptologist for decades when he began to explore, towards the end of his career, Egyptian influences in sub-Saharan Africa.

⁵⁶ Shinnie, ‘The legacy’, *o.c.*, pp. 447f.

⁵⁷ Shinnie, *ibid.*

⁵⁸ Delme-Radcliffe, C., 1905, ‘Surveys and studies in Uganda’, *The Geographical Journal*, 26, 5: 481-497 and 6: 616-632; van der Sluijs, Marinus Anthony, n.d., ‘Mythopedia database on African myth’, at: <http://www.mythopedia.info>, retrieved 15 May 2005.

hieroglyphic sign Gardiner G16⁵⁹ as the vulture goddess Mwt and the cobra goddess Wdyt – the two principal divine protectors of the Egyptian king.

Nubia (northern Sudan) has often been identified as the likely scene for the interactions, if any, between Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa.⁶⁰ To Howe however, Nubia appears not as the corridor it is for most specialists, but as a forbidding boundary, in line with the dominant paradigm (c) cited above but at deviance with some available specialist readings of the archaeological evidence.

As a non-specialist, Howe admirably compiles most of the available specialist literature, offering a middle-of-the-road synthesis in line with the dominant paradigms (a) through (d). But he has simply not spent enough time in the various disciplines his argument touched upon, nor looked closely enough once he was there. He misses the feel of the disciplines involved,⁶¹ their internal counter-currents, and some of their more recent developments.

Thus the African origin of humankind is dismissively glossed over by

⁵⁹ Gardiner, A.H., 1994, *Egyptian Grammar: Being an introduction to the study of hieroglyphs*, rev. 3rd ed., Oxford: Griffith Institute / Ashmolean Museum, this edition first published 1957, first edition published 1927.

⁶⁰ Cf. Adams, W.Y., 1984, *Nubia: Corridor to Africa*, Princeton: Princeton University Press / London: Lane, first published 1977. For the crucial extent of interior African influences upon the formation and symbolism of first-dynasty Egyptian kingship, cf. Williams, B.B., 1986, *The A-group Royal Cemetery at Qustul. Cemetery L: Excavations between Abu Simbel and the Sudan frontier*, in: Keith C. Seele, Director, Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition volume III, Part 1, Chicago: Oriental Institute; Williams, B.B., 1996, 'The Qustul incense burner and the case for a Nubian origin of Ancient Egyptian kingship', in: Celenko, T., ed., *Egypt in Africa*, Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art in cooperation with Indiana University Press, pp. 95-97. Howe (*Afrocentrism, o.c.*, p. 140) discusses these findings in a way biased by the dominant, Northern-centred and anti-continuity paradigms. When John Iliffe, an excellent modern historian of East Africa but without authority on ancient Egypt-African relations, writes

'Egypt was remarkably unsuccessful in transmitting its culture to the rest of the continent' (Iliffe, J., 1995, *Africans: The history of a continent*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 26; cf. Howe, *Afrocentrism, o.c.*, p. 146)

this should have been appreciated by Howe as another mere restatement of the dominant paradigm, and not as an independent empirical conclusion in its own right. In the face of the enormous evidence to the contrary, from Petrie onwards, Iliffe's statement can only be considered as naïvely hegemonic.

⁶¹ For instance, with the sheer difficulty of mastering the relevant scripts and languages, the century-old backlog in publishing primary materials, the small number of Egyptologists and Assyriologists in the world, and their disciplines' rather too successful insulation from the rapid turnover of theoretical paradigms (functionalism, structuralism, marxism, postmodernism, etc.) which since the early twentieth century have affected most other provinces of academia, the rate of obsolescence of intellectual products in Egyptology and Assyriology is far slower than Howe takes for granted (e.g. Howe, *Afrocentrism, o.c.*, p. 225) on the basis of his personal experience with such fields as political and intellectual history, African Studies, etc.

Howe in his chapter III, but hardly a word here on recent discoveries which have added, to the meanwhile generally accepted view that humanisation took place in Africa some four million years ago, the fact that it was also the African continent which saw the emergence of Anatomically Modern Humans (c. 200 ka BP),⁶² capable of language, art, symbolism, social organisation etc. It is from Africa that now hail our oldest finds of animal representations, paint, and sophisticated weaponry like barbed harpoons.⁶³ Such a probable African background of modern humans (who, for the additional survival value as ultraviolet-ray protection, may well have been black-skinned, to boot) provides Afrocentrism with a *prima facie* case too good to be ignored or dismissed.

Howe's good intentions have not prevented him from implicitly endorsing a view of world history that is potentially hegemonic, Eurocentric, and mythical, and that therefore is not to be preferred over the Afrocentrist alternative he fights.

6. Polemical overkill

That Howe is ideologically far from neutral is suggested by his style of writing. Frequently his good intentions are overtaken by his polemic stance.

When he refers to the collectivity of Afrocentrists as a 'posse'⁶⁴ (a mindless group of henchmen relentlessly pursuing their adversaries at the orders of an authoritarian leader) or a 'pack' (a noun usually reserved for a collectivity of non-humans, specifically canines), the boundaries of good taste and decency appear to be crossed. This is also the case when, out of sheer philosophical ignorance, the idea of possible African alternatives to binary logic has to be caustically dismissed.⁶⁵ Likewise the nostalgic or

⁶² ka = kiloyear, millennium; BP = Before Present.

⁶³ Shreeve, J., 1996, *The Neandertal enigma? Solving the mystery of modern human origins*, New York: Morrow / Viking, pp. 216f, 257f; Deacon, H. J., 1992, 'Southern Africa and Modern Human origins', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, B 337 (1992): 177-183; Deacon, H., & J. Deacon, 1999, *Human beginnings in South Africa: Uncovering the secrets of the Stone Age*, Altamira Press: Walnut Creek CA; Anati, E., 1999, *La religion des origines*, Paris: Bayard, French translation of *La religione delle origini*, n.p.: Edizione delle origini, 1995, pp. 88f; *idem*, 1986, 'The rock art of Tanzania and the East African sequence', *Bolletino des Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici*, 23: 15-68, Fig. 5-51; Wendt, W.E., 1976, '“Art mobilier” from Apollo 11 Cave, South West Africa: Africa's oldest dated works of art', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 31: 5-11.

⁶⁴ Howe, *Afrocentrism, o.c.*, p. 282.

⁶⁵ Howe, *Afrocentrism, o.c.*, p. 249; cf. Cooper, D.E., 1975, 'Alternative logic in "primitive thought"', *Man*, n.s., 10: 238-256; Durkheim, E., & M. Mauss, 1973, 'The social genesis of logical operations', in: Douglas, M., ed., *Rules & meanings*, Harmond-

proud adoption of African and Egyptian names by Afrocentric writers has to be ridiculed by Stephen Howe, as if it is incomparably more rational that twentieth-century parents, like his own, under conditions of massive secularisation, should call their children after the earliest Christian martyr.⁶⁶ Perhaps Howe could explain to the benighted Blacks the superior rationality of Christian martyrdom?

Scholarly reputations are also readily sacrificed on the altar of Howe's indignation vis-à-vis Afrocentrism, and the more readily so, the less Howe knows of their specialist field. The synthetic, programmatic overview of Afrocentrism by Clyde Ahmad Winters is sarcastically dismissed,⁶⁷ but no attention is paid to that same writer's intriguing linguistic work, published in authoritative international journals, tracing linguistic parallels between West African languages, Asian, and native American contexts, and suggesting an unexpected Asian dimension to African presence, thus challenging all accepted geopolitical wisdom.^{68 69} Inevitably, Herodotus is paraded

worth: Penguin, p. 32, the original article first published 1903; Salmon, M.H., 1978, 'Do Azande and Nuer use a non-standard logic?', *Man*, n.s., 13: 444-454. On the strategic place of non-binary logics in intercultural philosophy, cf. my *Intercultural Encounters, o.c.*, and *idem*, 2009, *Expressions of traditional wisdom from Africa and beyond: An exploration in intercultural epistemology*, Brussels: Royal Academy of Overseas Sciences / Academie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-mer, Classes des Sciences morales et politiques, Mémoire in-8°, Nouvelle Série, Tome 53, fasc. 4.

⁶⁶ Howe, *Afrocentrism, o.c.*, pp. 247f.

⁶⁷ Interestingly, Winters himself takes exception at the identification of Bernal's work as Afrocentrist:

'This book [i.e. *Black Athena*] has nothing to do with Afrocentrism. In the two volumes published thus far [this was obviously written before *Black Athena III* was published in 2006 – WvB], Bernal maintains that Semites from Phoenicia and the Semitic Hyksos speaking rulers of Egypt, took civilization to Greece, not Black Africans.' (Winters, Clyde, n.d., 'The Black Greeks', at:

<http://clyde.winters.tripod.com/chapter6.html> retrieved 11 November 2008.

Winters' position is puzzling in its ethnico-linguistic classification: apparently, what for him, here, is the qualifying criterium for Afrocentrism, is not the claim of African provenance (which, after all, could very well have been mediated via West Semitic speakers from Phoenicia and via 'Semitic Hyksos' (?) speakers, drawing on Egyptian sources that, in Afrocentric fashion, could be ultimately considered as African), but the fact of cultural transmission by certified Africans / Blacks.

⁶⁸ Winters, C.A., 1977, 'The influence of the Mandé scripts on ancient American writing systems', *Bulletin de l'IFAN [Institut Fondamental de l'Afrique Noire]*, T39, serie b, no. 2, (1977): 941-967; Winters, C.A., 1983, 'Possible relationship between the Manding and Japanese', *Papers in Japanese Linguistics*, 9: 151-158; Winters, C.A., 1984, 'A note on Tokharian and Meroitic', *Meroitic Newsletter / Bulletin d'Information Meroitiques*, 13 (June 1984): 18-21; Winters, C.A., 1984, 'The genetic unity between the Dravidian, Elamite, Manding and Sumerian languages', *P[roceedings] Sixth ISAS [International Symposium of Asian Studies]*, 1984, (Hong Kong: Asian Research Service, 1985), pp. 1413-1425; Winters, C.A., 1986, 'Dravidian and Magyar / Hungarian', *International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics*, 15, no 2.

by Howe⁷⁰ in the all too familiar, clichéd manner as the ‘Father of Lies’, whereas claims as to the amazing extent of objective historical fact in Herodotus are ignored.⁷¹ Henry Frankfort, who was one of the greatest Egyptologists⁷² and Assyriologists of his generation (scarcely half a century ago), and whose books still rate as lasting standard works among the specialists, is denounced as ‘outdated’. Frobenius, one of the greatest Africanists of his generation (early twentieth century CE) and the main single intellectual influence upon Afrocentrism,⁷³ is anachronistically depicted as of negligible intellectual capabilities, of damaging influence even on European African Studies, hardly taken seriously anymore by the specialists, and an art thief to boot.⁷⁴ Sergi, a highly original physical anthropologist of the early twentieth century, is filed by Howe as merely ‘long-forgotten and academically discredited’.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Whilst providing grist for the mill of my Pelasgian hypothesis, at the same time; see Chapter 12, below.

⁷⁰ Howe, *Afrocentrism*, o.c., pp. 152f.

⁷¹ Spiegelberg, W., 1927, *The Credibility of Herodotus’ account of Egypt in the light of the Egyptian monuments*, Oxford: Blackwell; Pritchett, K. 1993, *The liar school of Herodotos*, Amsterdam: Gieben; Bernal, *Black Athena*, I, o.c.

⁷² The measure of Howe’s expertise in the field of Egyptology is indicated by the fact that (albeit on what he claims to be the authority of the non-Egyptologist Michael Mann) he indiscriminately writes (Howe, *Afrocentrism*, o.c., p. 126) *Ma’at* and *Macat* for the well-known goddess of order and good measure, mistaking in the latter version of the word the glottal stop for a ‘c’. More importantly, Howe (*Afrocentrism*, o.c., p. 127) sees Ancient Egypt’s achievements mainly in the spiritual and moral field, ignoring what Egypt gave the world in terms of unrivaled architectural feats (the pyramids, Karnak), hydraulic engineering, political organisation, agriculture, myth, culture, law and science... Obviously, Howe’s is not the kind of expertise that should sit in judgement over the specifics of Bernal’s work on Graeco-Egyptian cultural and linguistic interrelations.

⁷³ Abiola Irele, F., 1997, ‘Negritude’, in: Middleton, J.M., 1997, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Africa south of the Sahara*, I-IV, New York: Scribners, pp. III, 278-286, p. 281. The founding father of French prehistory, the abbé Breuil, a formidable scholar in his time but of course by now considered as obsolescent, would scarcely have collaborated with Frobenius if he had not been convinced of the latter’s stature: Frobenius, L., & Breuil, H., 1931, *Afrique*, Paris: Cahiers de l’Art. For the decisive impact (admittedly, not always for the best) of Frobenius on German African Studies, cf. Haberland, E., ed., 1973, *Leo Frobenius 1873-1973*, Wiesbaden: Steiner; Jensen, A.E., 1938-40, ‘Leo Frobenius – Leben und Werk’, *Paideuma*, 1: 45-58; Luig, U., 1982, ed., *Leo Frobenius: Vom Schreibtisch zum Äquator: Afrikanische Reisen*, Frankfurt a.M.; Streck, B., 1995, ‘Leo Frobenius (1873-1938)’, in: Frobenius L., *Masques*, Paris: Editions Dapper; Streck, B., 1996, ‘Frobenius’, *Deutsche Biographische Enzyklopädie* 3. München (1996): 499f; Vajda, L., 1973, ‘Leo Frobenius heute’, *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 98: 19-29. One of the weaknesses of Howe’s approach is that his academic frame of reference is almost exclusively Anglo-Saxon / English.

⁷⁴ Howe, *Afrocentrism*, o.c., pp. 167f.

⁷⁵ Howe, *Afrocentrism*, o.c., p. 34 n. 9, cf. p. 46; Howe leaves the reader to guess at the details of Sergi’s downfall although there is the suggestion that it related to Sergi’s controversial – but not generally discredited – reading (like C.A. Diop’s, *Civilization or Barbarism*, Brooklyn (N.Y.): Lawrence Hill!) of the Grimaldi skeletal remains as negroid.

What Howe does not realise is that all these ancient and modern scholars have one thing in common, which makes them unwelcome in the common-sense, main-stream paradigmatic world to whose authority Howe appeals. They all had the ability to think across established cultural and geopolitical boundaries, whether this meant explaining the origin of the Persian wars in a complex context encompassing the entire Ancient World (Herodotus), or lumping Egypt and Mesopotamia in one grand argument (Frankfort's *Kingship and the gods*),⁷⁶ or stressing the essential continuity between West Africa, North Africa, and Europe, when it comes to kinship patterns and symbolism (Frobenius)⁷⁷ and somatic traits (Sergi).⁷⁸

7. Transcontinental influences or 'Africa for the Africans'?

The case of Frobenius is particularly instructive. In addition to other allegations (some of which may be only too true but none of which should be treated anachronistically), Howe – suddenly adopting an Afrocentrist perspective! – reproaches Frobenius⁷⁹ for stressing outside influences on

⁷⁶ Frankfort, H., 1948, *Kingship and the gods: A study of Ancient Near Eastern religion as the integration of society and nature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁷⁷ Frobenius, L., 1923, *Vom Kulturreich des Festlandes*, Berlin: Volksverband der Bücherfreunde, Wegweiser-Verlag; *idem*, 1929, *Monumenta terrarum*, Frankfurt a. Main: Forschungsinstitut für Kulturmorphologie; *idem*, 1931, *Erythräa: Länder und Zeiten des heiligen Königsmordes*, Berlin / Zürich: Atlantis-Verlag; *idem*, 1954, *Kulturgeschichte Afrikas*, Zürich: Phaidon; first published Vienna, 1933.

⁷⁸ Sergi, G., 1901, *The mediterranean race: A study of the origin of European peoples*, London: Scott; first published as *La stirpe mediterranea*, 1895.

⁷⁹ Howe, *Afrocentrism, o.c.*, p. 116. In fact, Frobenius far from depicting Africa (as under the Hamitic thesis) as the passive recipient of outside influences, instead stressed continuities straddling Western and Southern Europe, and North and West Africa, for instance in the fields of kinship and symbolism. The distribution of megalithic monuments throughout these regions, with all the notorious definitional and methodological problems attaching to this topic, yet confirms such continuity, and so do the transcontinental distribution patterns now becoming apparent in the field of territorial cults (Werbner, R.P., 1977, ed., *Regional cults*, New York / London Academic Press; Schoffeleers, J.M., 1979, ed., *Guardians of the Land: Essays on African territorial cults*, Gwelo: Mambo Press; de Polignac, F., 1995, *Cults, territory and the origins of the Greek city-state*, Chicago / London: Chicago University Press; Flynn, Edwin, 2002, 'Clash of cults: Royal and territorial cults in central Africa', *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere*, 69: 63-101; Alcock, S.E., & R. Osborn, 1994, eds., *Placing the gods: Sanctuaries and sacred space in ancient Greece*, London: Oxford University Press; Farnell, L.R., 1907, *The cults of the Greek states, I-IV*, Oxford: Clarendon), and in the fields of trance and possession (cf. Arbman, E., 1963-1970, *Ecstasy or religious trance, I-III*, Uppsala: Svenska Bokförlaget; Bourignon, E.M., 1968, 'Divination, transe et possession en Afrique transsaharienne', in: Caquot, A., & M. Leibovici, eds., *La divination, II*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, pp. 331-358; Burkert, W., 1962, 'ΓΟΗΣ: Zum griechischen Schamanismus', *Rheinisches Museum*, 105: 36-55; Eliade, M., 1968, *Le chamanisme: Et les techniques archaïques de l'extase*, Paris: Payot, 1st ed 1951; Ginzburg, C., 1989, *Storia notturna*, Torino: Einaudi, 1989; Halifax, J., 1980, *Shamanic voices: The shaman as seer, poet and healer*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books; Janzen, J.M., 1992, *Ngoma: Discourses of*

African cultures. Such emphasis on Frobenius's part certainly does not fit in the Afrocentrist orientation, yet it is the inescapable implication of global cultural exchanges percolating since at least the Upper Palaeolithic. In fact, we encounter here a fifth main-stream paradigm:

(e) There have been no substantial non-African influences on African cultures.

This paradigm happens to be shared by late twentieth century Africanists, and Afrocentrists alike. In my opinion, the hegemonic background of the contention enshrined in this paradigm lies in a combination of two ideological stances. In the first place, the North Atlantic tendency to an absolute *othering* of things African, which does not tolerate them to be polluted by transcontinental connections and thus to be recognised, after all, as part of the wider world. In the second place, I see here an attempt at compensation for a guilty feeling about the violation of African dignity in the context of the transatlantic slave-trade and colonialism; something like:

'now that we have admittedly robbed Africa of everything, let us at least grant it its independent cultural integrity'.

Yet Africa has unmistakably been part of the global world of humankind since the latter's African origin, both giving to the wider world, and taking from it; and transcontinental exchanges in human culture have been the hallmark of history, also as far as Africa is concerned.

8. Conclusion

I chose a question as the title of this paper: *Is there a future for*

healing in Central and Southern Africa, Los Angeles / Berkeley / London: University of California Press; Ritter, E.F., 1965, 'Magical-expert (-*asipu*) and physician (-*asû*): Notes on two complementary professions in Babylonian medicine', in: H.G. Güterbock & T. Jacobsen, eds., *Studies in honour of Benno Landsberger on his seventy-fifth birthday, April 21, 1965*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press for Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, pp. 299-322; Lewis-Williams, J.D., with T.A. Dowson, Paul G. Bahn, H.-G. Bandi, Robert G. Bednarik, John Clegg, Mario Consens, Whitney Davis, Brigitte Delluc, Gilles Delluc, Paul Faulstich, John Halverson, Robert Layton, Colin Martindale, Vil Mirimanov, Christy G. Turner II, Joan M. Vastokas, Michael Winkelman, Alison Wylie, 'The signs of all times: Entoptic phenomena in Upper Palaeolithic art [and Comments and Reply]', *Current Anthropology*, 29, 2: 201-245; van Binsbergen, *Religious change, o.c.*; Vandenbroeck, P., 1997, *De kleuren van de geest: Dans en trance in Afro-Europese tradities*, Gendt: Snoeck-Ducaju & Son); Winkelman, M., 2000, *Shamanism: The neural ecology of consciousness and healing*, Westport & London: Bergin & Garvey). These several traits, of whose vast literature I can only show glimpses here, may be recognised as 'Pelagian', circulating throughout the Old World since the Late Bronze Age, whatever their even remoter antecedents.

Afrocentrism despite Stephen Howe's dismissive 1998 study? It is time for an answer.

Let us be grateful to Howe for giving us a serious scholarly study of the background and contents of Afrocentrism as a case of intellectual history. His devastating political and ideological critique of Afrocentrism has been inspired by the best of intentions, by concern not only for the future of scholarship and education but also by abhorrence at the thought of Black intellectuals retreating into an intellectual ghetto. Contrary to Bernal, who – by a surprisingly desperate conception of scholarly knowledge construction – prides himself for being right for the wrong reasons,⁸⁰ Howe can be said to be wrong for the right reasons. His book does not put paid to Afrocentrism; and I am pleased to report that, as a sign of commitment and intellectual integrity on Howe's part, he was obviously pleased when, at the colloquium where the present argument was first delivered, I stated the case for the possible empirical truth of some of the most cherished Afrocentrist theses; all the antagonism marked the preceding pages, did not prevent us from the most amicable exchanges during that colloquium.

It is not in the Black ghetto or in its academic counterparts (such as the *Journal of African Civilizations* and Karnak Publishers, and Transaction Press, all bastions of Afrocentrism), but in the open, transparent, universally accessible environment of academia itself, that Afrocentrism will assert itself. It has to be coaxed into open debate, in order to be cleansed from poor methodology, restrictive selection of data, entrenched refusal to take cognisance of existing detached scientific inquiry, and above all, racism. Beyond the unmistakable defects of current Afrocentrism glows the promise of a bright future, where thanks to Afrocentrism's inspiring reversal of accepted hegemonic paradigms, we may hope to come much closer to the empirical, demonstrable truth concerning such contributions to mankind's world-wide culture as Africa has exchanged, over the millennia, with the other continents.

⁸⁰ This is the assessment by an anonymous reviewer in the authoritative journal *Antiquity*, 12 (1991): 981; and quoted, with perhaps too little self-criticism, by Bernal himself (this collection, p. 218).