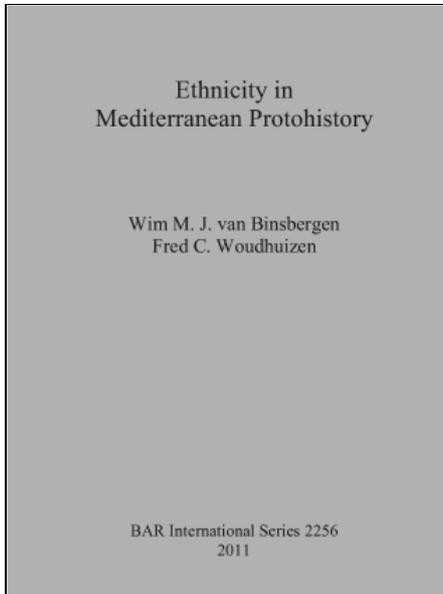


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ETHNICITY IN MEDITERRANEAN PROTOHISTORY



van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., & Woudhuizen, Fred C., 2011, *Ethnicity in Mediterranean protohistory*, British Archaeological Reports (BAR) International Series 2256, Oxford: Archaeopress. ISBN 978-1-4073-0823-4, A4 format, br., 84 figures, 46 tables, Cumulative bibliography, Index of proper names. Index of authors cited, 519 pp, two columns, £70

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ETHNICITY IN ANCIENT HISTORY AND PROTOHISTORY

The use of ethnonyms as representing significant socio-cultural complexes is one of the most conspicuous features of cultural, historical and protohistorical studies of the Ancient Near East, Ancient Egypt, and the Aegean. The ethnic model, variants of which were already utilised by such Ancient writers as Herodotus, Caesar and Tacitus, is so much taken for granted that we scarcely realise that behind this model there is a, *far from self-evident*, theory of how societies and cultures are organised, individually and in mutual contact, what keeps them together and what makes them change. Ethnicity is one of the inveterate blind spots of Ancient Studies. This is all the more remarkable, because the vast majority of authors contributing to these studies, both in Antiquity and in Modern times, have been citizens of complex states and have not identified themselves, primarily, in ethnic terms but in terms of social and professional class, universalist ideals, religion, and citizenship.

In the present project, the two authors have sought to challenge the uncomfortable lack of sophistication surrounding most uses of ethnicity and ethnonyms in Ancient Studies. Fred C. Woudhuizen, as an ancient historian and linguist, has tackled the protohistory of the ethnicity of the Sea Peoples, bringing to bear upon his strongly empirical analysis all relevant documentary, linguistic and archaeological material that more than a century of Sea Peoples studies have considered, and adducing much material that hitherto has not been drawn into the orbit of such studies;

his analyses (which earned him a PhD from Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2006) constitute Part II of the present volume. Van Binsbergen's contribution (besides supervising Part II) has been to concentrate on the theoretical and methodological sides of studies in Ancient ethnicity (Part I) – although, in the process, it was found necessary to combine theoretical and methodological points with extensive and critical discussions of the empirical data, taking sides in major or minor debates concerning specific empirical issues (Part III).

While highly technical, supported in great detail with an abundance of linguistic, archaeological, cultural and mythological data, aspiring to methodological sophistication and linking up with many relevant specialist discussions, this book's argument addresses a period, a region and a topic of the great world-historical significance. It was in the Late Bronze Age, and apparently largely as a result of the Sea Peoples episode, that in Western Eurasia cultural initiative decisively shifted from the Levant and Egypt, to the Central and Western Mediterranean (Greece, Carthage, Rome), leading on to the thought, life world, and forms of socio-political organisation of the Modern world at large.

This monumental study (2 million characters, 370,000 words) can scarcely be summarised within the scope of a few pages. The extensive table of contents, lists of tables and diagrams, the cumulative bibliography, and the exhaustive indexes of proper names and of authors cited, afford the reader detailed views of the book's contents, which are rich, complex, wide-ranging (both in a geographical and a disciplinary sense), and often un-

expected and counter-paradigmatic. Meanwhile, the overall structure of the argument is as follows:

PART I

Part I of this book is entitled *Ethnicity in Mediterranean proto-history: explorations in theory and method*. After an introductory chapter defining the interdisciplinary coordinates and the methodological and theoretical orientation of the author (with special emphasis on recent comparative mythology and long-range linguistics as principal analytical tools), Chapter 2 offers an (largely African-orientated) general discussion of ethnicity within the scope of social science research. This will introduce some of the important concepts and theoretical insights to be appealed to for an approach to ethnicity in the Mediterranean Late Bronze Age. It is argued that ethnicity is much more than the classification of human individuals in terms of an ethnic label; *ethnicity is in the first place a way of creating a wide-ranging, supra-local socially (politically, religiously, economically) structured space as a context for social, economic, political, military and ritual interaction over a relatively vast area*. Ethnicity is argued to have at least the following constituent aspects:

- as a system of mental classification into a finite number of specific, named ethnic groups,
- as a socio-political structure, notably a device to turn the overall, neutral geographical space into an ethnically structured space accommodating a number of concrete named groups in interaction, and
- as a process, involving both the interaction of these ethnic groups over time, and the dynamics (emergence, maturation, change, decline, replacement, etc.) of the overall ethnic space they constitute together; of this process we distinguish at least two important movements:
 - ethnogenesis, amounting to the redefinition (through changes in the classification system) of the overall ethnic space so as to accommodate a new ethnic group (often with repercussions for the other groups already recognised within that space)
 - ethnicisation, as the internal process of ‘taking consciousness’ through which members of an essentially non-ethnic category in the socio-economic-political space redefine their identity increasingly in ethnic terms (usually under the influence of a local elite).

The chapter sets out a number of ethnic strategies and mechanisms such as are likely to be reflected in ancient onomastic, including toponymic, material.

Chapter 3 approaches ethnicity in the Eastern Mediterranean in the Late Bronze Age as a specific research problem, entering into a discussion of the empirical, methodological and theoretical problems that arise in this situation of protohistory (characterised by a paucity of empirical

data), and suggesting possible solutions. This chapter especially addresses historians’ well-known and understandable reluctance *vis-à-vis* systematic theorising.

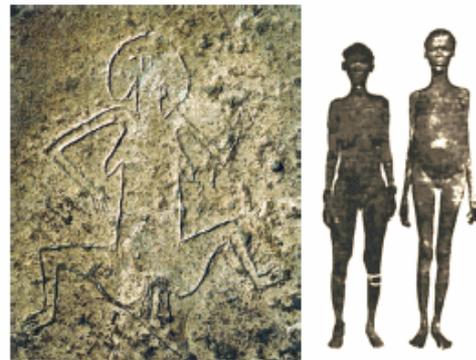


Fig. 4.5. [Uninvited guests in the Bronze Age Mediterranean] (a) Elongated labia minora depicted at Göbekli Tepe. Pre-Pottery Neolithic B. Anatolia (8800-8000 BCE); (b) Khoisan apron.

Before the argument then proceeds to two case studies that will highlight the specific methodological and theoretical difficulties of the study of ethnicity in the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean, Chapter 4 presents, as *prolegomena*, themes in long-range linguistics. Here the reader is introduced to the Fleming / Starostin *Borean Hypothesis which reconstructs hypothetical parent forms of the lexica of most of today’s languages, in the form of an Upper-Palaeolithic hypothetical language. Against this background we will try to identify, in addition to the obvious and recognised languages available on the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean scene, uninvited guests so far largely overlooked by scholarship: mainly Niger-Congo (with Bantu as a major branch), a language macrophylum now exclusively spoken in sub-Saharan Africa; and Sino-Caucasian. Moreover, in the Egyptian context we shall highlight indications of the Uralic phylum (and of the shamanism that is often associated it). Finally we will draw these elements together in the presentation of Karst’s hypothetical five-tiered linguistico-ethnic model for the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean, according to which that region by that time was already subject to conditions of proto-globalisation: linguistically homogeneous populations were not the rule, but every area typically displayed a plurality of language phyla, in an hierarchical socio-political arrangement where the dominant strata predominantly spoke Indo-European and / or Afroasiatic (linguistically relative newcomers), whereas the subaltern strata spoke older scions on the *Borean tree, often relegated to the status of submerged substrate languages.

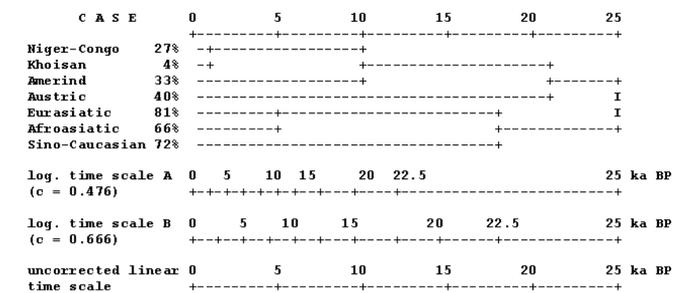


Fig. 4.3. Dendrogram setting out the relative positions of *Borean-associated linguistic macro-phyla in relation to Niger-Congo and Khoisan; percentages indicate the minimum proportion of the corpus of 1153 reconstructed *Borean roots to be traceable in each macrophylum.

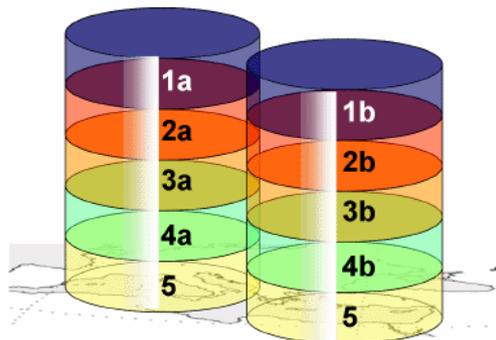


Fig. 4.8. Layered linguistic complexity of the Bronze Age Mediterranean according to Kant 1931a

In Chapters 5 and 6 the theoretical and analytical principles outlined in the preceding chapters are applied to two well-known texts from the Early to Middle Iron Age which scholars have since long recognised as important pointers to ethnic structures in the Late Bronze Age: the Homeric Achaean Catalogue of Ships, and the Biblical Table of Nations in *Genesis* 10. A close reading of these texts specifically with the aim of identifying aspects of ethnic classification, structure and process reveals some hitherto unnoticed ethnic traits: tripartite regional clustering in the Catalogue; a dualist binary structure – extensively argued to be archaic – underlying the Table of Nations’ tripartite surface structure, while that latter text’s numerous ethnic labels, defying scholarly consensual identifications, yet clearly define an ethnic space encompassing the entire known world. Such a reading moreover helps us to test out some of the methodological and theoretical notions developed in the earlier chapters. It reminds us of the fact that often the protohistorical social arrangements we seek to interpret in ethnic terms, are in great measure merely mythical; and it finally prepares the reader for what the two authors have chosen as their *pièce de resistance*: the question of the ethnicity of the Sea Peoples.



Fig. 5.4. Contiguity and discontinuity in the listing of regions in *Iliad* II

The two case studies have a parallel composition. They first situate the document under study in its specific historical context, seek to understand its place in the longer work (the *Iliad*, the Bible) in which the document is incorporated, and try to understand the document as a text, against a necessarily brief overview of the abundant scholarly literature. Both documents turn out to have, indeed, a strongly mythical and cosmological orientation which we first need to appreciate: especially through the application of comparative mythology – highlighting the long-range

mythical antecedents, across several continents and across many millennia, of Noah (typologically demonstrated to be a ‘White God’ of creation or second creation) and his sons –, and distributional comparative ethnography. Only against the background of this mythological insight can the document at all be used as a historical source on Late Bronze Age ethnicity. The familiar question is addressed of how to use Early to Middle Iron Age data in a bid to reconstruct ethnicity in the, immediately preceding, Late Bronze Age. The treatment of both documents concentrates on the question of the identification of the onomastic material (ethnonyms and toponyms) they contain. For the Achaean Catalogue of Ships we arrive at a coherent view, which adds a few new minor points to the study of ethnicity and political organisation in the Homeric Age. Also discussed is the relevance, for Sea Peoples Studies, of the Homeric images of the Greeks before Troy. For the Table of Nations however, the problems of onomastic identification turn out to be truly dramatic and, to judge by the extensive literature reviewed, insurmountable, even if an anthropological discussion of the genealogical format of the Table of Nations equips us with additional analytical tools. Yet, beyond the deconstruction of some biblical scholars’ cherished views, Chapter 6 yields a very important positive result that is to guide us through the next Parts of this book: extensive evidence of an ethnic space encompassing the entire known world from West Asia to the Central Mediterranean and Northeastern Africa.

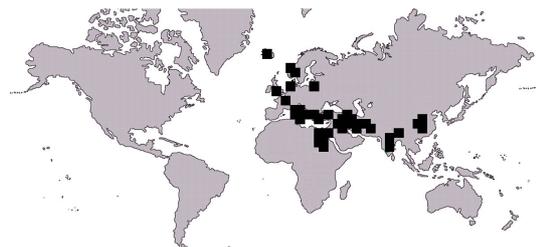
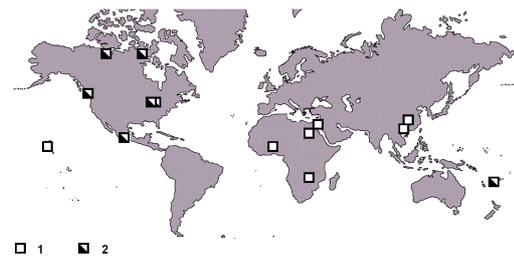


Fig. 6.5. [Triads as a relatively recent and regional phenomenon:] Triads seem to be restricted to literate Eurasian mythologies: Global distribution



1 attestation; 2 uncertain

Fig. 6.7. Distribution of the theonym Noah and proposed cognates in various continents

PART II

After the more general discussions in Part I, Fred Woudhuizen takes the floor in Part II with his detailed, state-of-the-art specific discussion of the ethnicity of the Sea Peoples, on the basis of all the available primary documents and of the vast secondary literature. This Part II, entitled *The Ethnicity of the Sea Peoples: An Historical, Archaeological and Linguistic Study*, entails the revised and updated commercial edition of Fred C. Woudhuizen’s PhD dissertation.

Against the background of a short review of ethnicity and of exposés of the historical setting, Part II's approach is interdisciplinary in nature in that it combines data from archaeological, epigraphical, historical and linguistic sources, and tries to work them into an historical synthesis. It also transgresses the borders as set by traditional scholarly disciplines in that it uses data ranging from European and central Mediterranean archaeology, Mycenaean studies and later Greek epic and literary sources, Anatolian archaeology and Hittite textual sources, supplemented by the relevant Luwian ones, Ugaritic studies, Levantine archaeology and Hebrew Biblical reminiscences, and, last but not least, the relevant Egyptian texts. No single scholar in his right mind could claim to be a specialist in all these different disciplines, and so the support is gratefully acknowledged of – to name the most important contributors – the Egyptologist J.F. Borghouts and the Assyriologist Frans Wiggermann in transliterating Egyptian and Ugaritic texts, respectively.

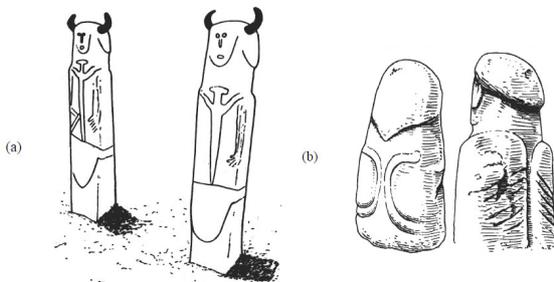


Fig. 21.2. Statue-menhirs from Corsica: (a) Cauda (with horns reconstructed on the helmets), (b) Scalsa Murta (from Grosjean 1966b. Fig. 5; Sandars 1980: 99. arb. 60)

Thus, in Part II, the whereabouts and vicissitudes of the various groups which made up the Sea Peoples are meticulously described as far as the sources allow this, from the period before the upheavals which mark the end of the Bronze Age up to its aftermath. It is argued that we are not dealing with an amorphous bunch of pirates, but with distinct ethnic identities, which, in working together, even developed a sense of inter-group relationships – so to say a common goal and destiny. An overall eastbound movement is posited, starting in the Central Mediterranean, and gradually building up with the addition of more and more ethnic groups, until Sea Peoples were ready to discharge their accumulated powers onto Hatti and Egypt, with varying success.

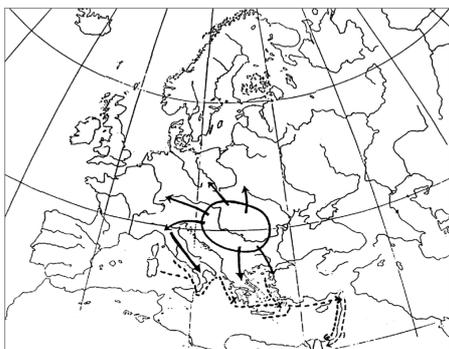
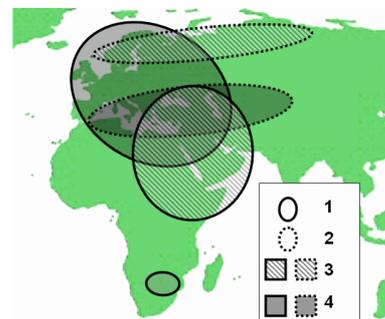


Fig. 21.3. Distribution of Urnfield culture and (dotted arrowed lines) the route of the Sea Peoples; (a) c. 1180 BC

PART III

How was it possible that the Sea Peoples, coming from such geographically dispersed origins, could identify sufficiently with one another to form a formidable force capable of dealing a lethal blow to the Hittite empire and of permanently weakening the Egyptian state? Woudhuizen's answer is in terms of a shared Indo-European identity and of Urnfield expansion pressure (cf. Kimmig 1964), engendering a somewhat adventurous motivation to go and plunder the wealth of *distant* kingdoms. Part III, offering van Binsbergen's second opinion, adduces an additional interpretation of the Sea Peoples data, in terms of *relatively peripheral and archaic segmentary groups seeking to counter, by a combined eastbound and westbound movement, encroachment by the nearby states of Hatti and Egypt*. From this alternative perspective the Urnfield and Indo-European factors appear less than exhaustive and conclusive as an explanation for ethnic identification among the Sea Peoples (also in view of the non-Indo-European linguistic elements identified in Chapter 4). Part III proposes to attribute such ethnic identification in the first place to the Sea Peoples' conscious affirmation of an extended circum-Mediterranean identity that is suggested to have existed since at least the Early Bronze Age – an ethnic awareness for which 'Pelasgian' is proposed as a suitable analytical term, even though the polysemy of this term throughout the nearly three millennia of its use inevitably invites confusion and misunderstanding. From what few scraps of factual information we have concerning the Sea Peoples' culture and worldview, Part III argues (against a comparative-mythological background, and a very extensive list of Pelasgian traits and their geographical and ethnic distribution) a Pelasgian orientation for the Sea Peoples as the basis for their effective ethnic mobilisation across vast geographical spaces. The Extended Pelasgian Hypothesis sees the Pelasgian cultural substrate developing in the Neolithic and Early Bronze Ages in a region focussing on West Asia but extending from the fertile Sahara to Central Asia; subsequently, 'Pelasgian' traits expanded in all four directions – Central and Western Europe; Northern Europe; the Eurasian steppe and beyond; and sub-Saharan Africa, using the technologies of chariot and seafaring as main vehicles of spread; of this proposed expansion the Sea Peoples episode may have been just one aspect.



1. Mute swan (*Cygnus olor*);
2. Whooper (*Cygnus cygnus*) and Bewick's swan (*Cygnus bewickii*);
3. Brooding area;
4. Wintering area;
data: Houlihan 1986: 50 f. and Fleece & Hoskieu 2007.

Fig. 28.9. [Identifying the geographical origin of Sea Peoples by the bird ornaments on their boats] Schematic representation of Eurasian brooding and wintering areas of the three indigenous species of *Cygnus*

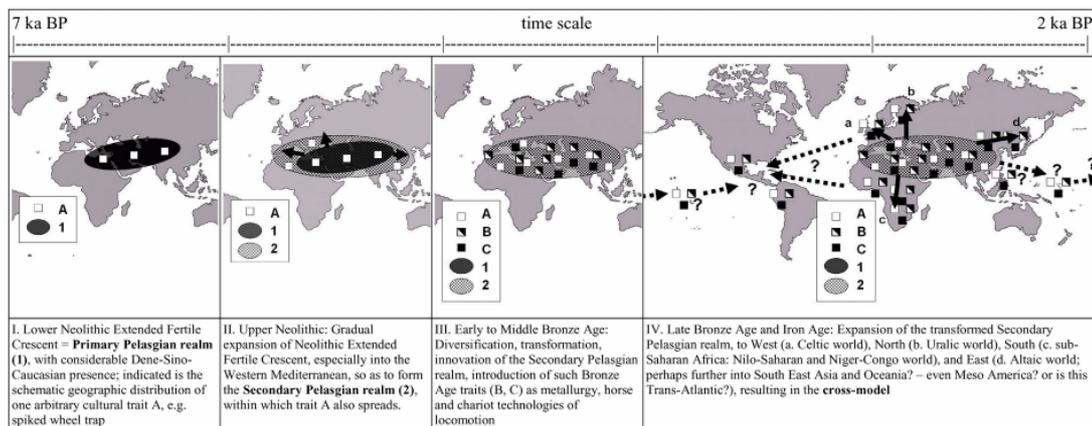
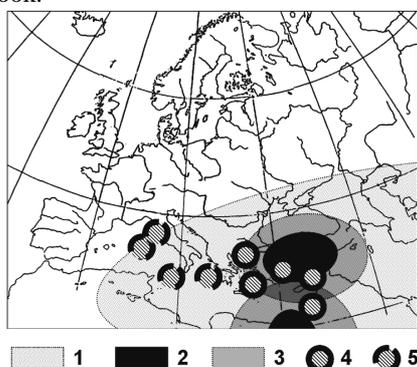


Fig. 28.16. Diagrammatic representation of the Extended Pelasgian Hypothesis

PART IV

Thus the two authors differ considerably, largely as a result of their different background and disciplinary allegiance. Van Binsbergen (Parts I and III), apart from providing an elaborate theoretical framework, as a historicising anthropologist is focusing on long-term processes and cultural features; Woudhuizen (Part II) as of origin a historian is more occupied with the reconstruction (however difficult, in the protohistorical context) of the petty historical incidents. Yet in the end the two authors offer the reader a balanced synthesis (Part IV), in which their respective views turn out to be complementary rather than diametrically opposed, and in which also an elaborate further methodological and linguistic vindication is offered for some of the more controversial points contained in the present book.



1. Pelasgian realm; 2. core statal area of Egypt and of Hatti; 3. sphere of influence of Egypt and Hatti, hence proposed provenances of the Sea Peoples according to van Binsbergen; 4. for these areas the approaches of Woudhuizen and van Binsbergen yield the same positive result; 5. for these Central Mediterranean areas as Sea Peoples provenances proposed by Woudhuizen, no support is offered by (a) van Binsbergen's stress on peripheral revolt against encroaching statehood, however (b) they may be vindicated by invoking the Pelasgian hypothesis.
Fig. 29.3. Synthesis of the approaches of Woudhuizen and van Binsbergen

What has sustained the two authors' close and enthusiastic co-operation over the years, is their uncompromising effort to turn data from the margins of prehistory, which effectively means from protohistory, into history. In this manner they flatter themselves to have retrieved knowledge of otherwise long forgotten yet crucial episodes of human civilization, notably, the eastern and central Mediterranean in the Bronze Age.

THE AUTHORS

Wim van Binsbergen (1947, Amsterdam; picture bottom left), read anthropology, sociology and general linguistics at Amsterdam University, and took a PhD at the Free University, Amsterdam (1979). He conducted ethnohistorical and ethnographic fieldwork on North African popular Islam, religious change in South Central African protohistory, kingship and ethnicity in Zambia, ecstatic cults in Southern Africa, and healing cults in West Africa. In the last two decades his empirical research has extended – also through short-term explorations in South, South East and East Asia – into long-range, transcontinental comparative research in the fields of formal systems (divination, animal symbolism, games, early Cretan writing, languages, mythology, Ancient Mesopotamian magic, ecstatic religion), kingship, and (proto-) globalisation. Meanwhile his philosophical research has explored the epistemology and methodology of intercultural knowledge formation. He was lecturer in sociology, and a long-standing research affiliate, at the University of Zambia in the 1970s-80s. A member of the African Studies Centre, Leiden since 1977, he founded there the department of political and historical studies, and directed Africanist social and historical research through the 1980s-90s. He taught anthropology and ethnic studies in professorial positions at the universities of Leiden, Manchester, Berlin (Freie Universität), Durban-Westville, and Amsterdam (Free University). Since 1998 he has been Professor of the Foundations of Intercultural Philosophy, Erasmus University, Rotterdam. By the mid-1990s, a critical re-assessment of Bernal's *Black Athena* thesis made him turn his research again, in part, to Mediterranean protohistory, finally resulting in the present book. His latest works are *New Perspectives on Myth* (Papers in Intercultural Philosophy and Transcontinental Studies, 2010; with Eric Venbrux), and *Black Athena Comes of Age* (LIT, 2011). His two-volume monograph on *Religion and Social Organization in Northwestern Tunisia* is to go to the press shortly, while another book project *Africa's transcontinental continuities in pre- and protohistory* is on its way.



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Fred C. Woudhuizen (1959, Zutphen; picture top right) studied Mediterranean Pre- and Protohistory at Amsterdam University, and received a PhD from Erasmus University Rotterdam (2006, incorporated in the present book as Part II). He has specialized in Luwian linguistics, seeking to demonstrate the relevance of this particular language for our understanding of fragmentarily preserved languages like that of Cretan hieroglyphic, Etruscan, Eteo-Cyprian, and Sidetic (various publications in the form of articles, conference papers, and monographs). The present study has served as a spring-board for his archaeo-linguistic reconstruction of Indo-Europeanization in the Mediterranean as published in *The Journal of Indo-European Studies* 38 (2010) 41-131; the resulting familiarity with Semitic linguistics allowed him to present comprehensive treatments on the Byblos script (*Ugarit-Forschungen* 39 [2007] 689-756) and Cretan Linear A – in so far as this notates a Semitic idiom (see his books *The Earliest Cretan Scripts* [1] of 2006: 35-57 and *The Earliest Cretan Scripts* 2 of 2009: 124-149).