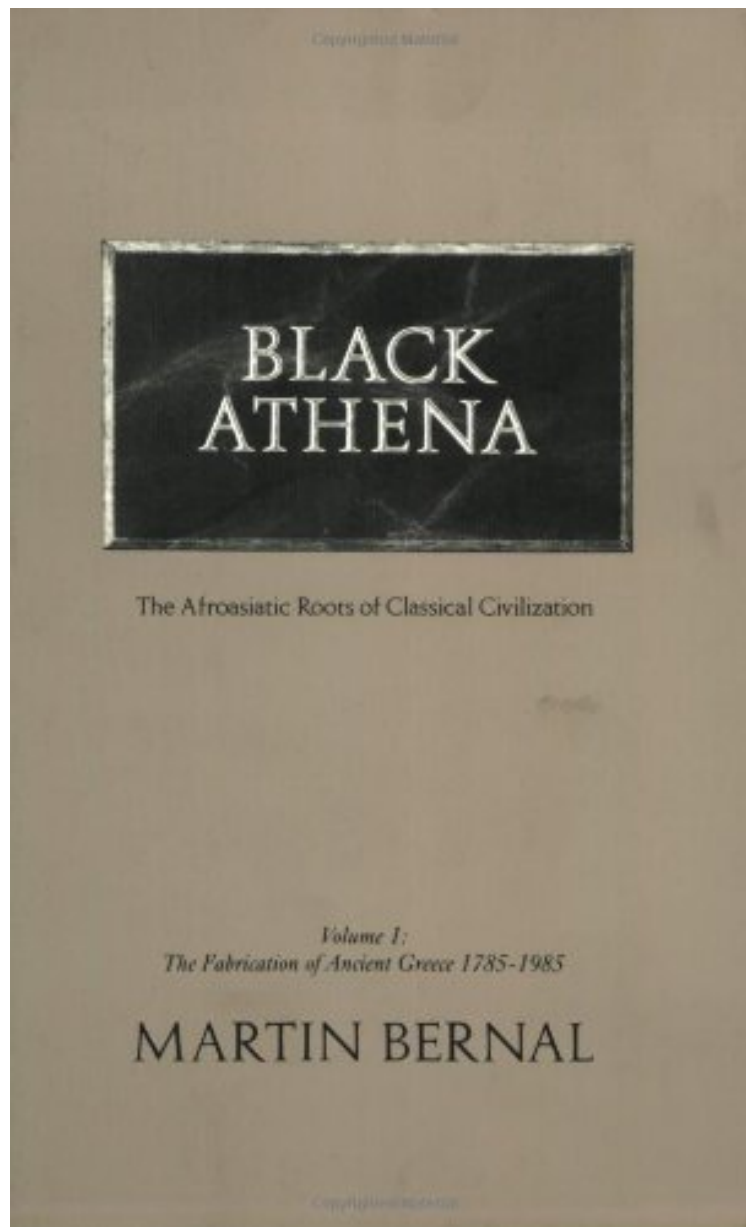


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## **Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization (The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985, Volume 1)**

*Martin Bernal*

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Perfect condition. By Elias Perfect condition. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. **THE FIRST VOLUME OF THE CONTROVERSIAL, THOUGHT-PROVOKING BOOK** By Steven H Propp Martin Gardiner Bernal (1937-2013) was a British scholar who was a Professor of Government and Near Eastern Studies at Cornell University, where he taught until 2001. The other books in this series are *Black Athena: Volume 2: The Archaeological and Documentary Evidence* and *Black Athena: Volume 3: The Linguistic Evidence*; he also wrote an autobiography, *Geography of a Life*. He wrote in the Preface of this 1987 book, The story behind *Black Athena* is long, complicated and, I believe, sufficiently interesting as a study in the sociology of knowledge to deserve extended treatment. In 1975 I came to a mid-life crisis. Politically it was related to the end of the American intervention in Indo-China and the awareness that the Maoist era in China was coming to an end. It now seemed to me that the central focus of danger and interest in the world was no longer east Asia but the Eastern Mediterranean. This shift led me to a concern for Jewish history. The scattered Jewish components of my ancestry would have given nightmares to assessors trying to apply the Nuremberg Laws. It was at this stage that I started looking into ancient Jewish history and into the relationships between the Israelites and the surrounding people (Pg. xii-xiii). He continues, Clearly there were very profound cultural inhibitions against associating Egypt with Greece. I was staggered to discover that what I began to call the Ancient Model had not been overthrown until the early 19th century, and that the version of Greek history I had been taught--far from being as old as the Greeks themselves--had been developed in the 1840s and 50s. [Michael] Astour had taught me that attitudes toward the Phoenicians in historiography were profoundly affected by anti-Semitism; it was therefore easy for me to make a connection between the dismissal of the Egyptians and the explosion of Northern European racism in the 19th century (Pg. xv). He explains, These volumes are concerned with two models of Greek history: one viewing Greece as essential European or Aryan, and the other seeing it as Levantine, on the periphery of the Egyptian and Semitic cultural area. I call them the Aryan and Ancient models. The Ancient Model was the conventional view among Greeks in the Classical and Hellenistic ages. According to it, Greek culture had arisen as the result of colonization, around 1500 BC, by Egyptians and Phoenicians who had civilized the native inhabitants. Furthermore, Greeks had continued to borrow heavily from Near Eastern cultures. Most people are surprised to learn that the Aryan Model developed only during the first half of the 19th century. According to the Aryan Model, there had been an invasion from the north--unreported in ancient tradition--which had overwhelmed the local Aegean or Pre-Hellenistic culture. It is from the construction of this Aryan Model that I call this volume *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985*. (Pg. 1-2) He continues, I believe that we should return to the Ancient Model, but with some revisions; hence I call what I advocate the Revised Ancient Model. This accepts that there is a real basis to the stories of Egyptian and Phoenician colonization of Greece set out in the Ancient Model. However, it sees them as beginning somewhat earlier, in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC. It also agrees with the latter that Greek civilization is the result of the cultural mixtures created by these colonizations and later borrowings from across the East Mediterranean. It tentatively accepts the Aryan Model's hypothesis of invasions from the north. If I am right it will be necessary not only to rethink the fundamental bases of Western Civilization but also to recognize the penetration of racism and continental chauvinism into all our historiography. The Ancient Model had no major internal deficiencies, or weaknesses in explanatory power. It was overthrown for external reasons. (Pg. 2) He acknowledges, I cannot PROVE that the Aryan Model is wrong. All I am trying to do is show that it is less plausible than the Revised Ancient Model and that the latter provides a more fruitful framework for future research. (Pg. 9) He also admits, though I shall discuss many of the linguistic issues in Volume 2, and I have written elsewhere on some other aspects, I cannot provide full evidence here to back up all these contentions. (Pg. 17) He argues, At the end of the 19th century a new image began to emerge. The Egyptians were now seen to conform to the contemporary European vision of Africans: gay, pleasure-loving, childish, boastful and essentially materialistic. Another way of looking at these changes is to assume that after the rise of black slavery and racism, European thinkers were concerned to keep black Africans as far as possible from European civilization. (Pg. 30) He explains, it is also clear that this first great Greek historian [Herodotus] thought the Egyptians and some Libyans were black. On the other hand, the earliest Greek representation of Athena is that from Mycenae, in which her limbs are painted, in line with the Minoan convention--taken from Egypt--of representing men as red/brown and women as yellow/white. Nevertheless, it is Herodotus's awareness of the connection, and his portrayal of the Egyptians as black, that has inspired the title of this series. (Pg. 52-53) Later, he adds, The political purpose of *Black Athena* is, of course, to lessen European cultural arrogance. (Pg. 73) He notes that Herodotus was accused by Plutarch, in the 2nd century AD, of being the father of lies and tends today to be treated with indulgent condescension by scholars working within the Aryan Model, who are especially scornful of his credulity. However, he did not entirely rely on legends when he derived Greek customs from the East in general and Egypt in particular. Herodotus would seem to have been using reason rather than a blind faith in tradition, and the method of comparative plausibility which would seem entirely appropriate for such a subject. We are not here concerned with the rightness or wrongness of his conclusions,

however, but merely with the facts the he himself believed in them and that he was being relatively conventional in doing so. (Pg. 100)He observes, In the earth 4th century, the outstanding spokesman for Panhellenism and Greek cultural pride was the Athenian orator Isokrates Isokrates admired the caste system, the rulership of the philosophers, and the rigor of the Egyptian philosopher/priests .. education. Above all, he insisted that philosophy was, and could only have been, a product of Egypt. (Pg. 103-104)He summarizes, for Plato, if one wanted to return to the ancient Athenian institutions one had to turn to Egypt. In this way he resembled Isokrates The deeper they went towards the true Hellenic roots of Greece, the closer they came to Egypt... Thus, despite their ambivalence if not hostility to the ideas, the two leading intellectual figures of the early 4th century BC were forced to admit the critical importance of foreign colonization, and massive later cultural borrowing from Egypt and the Levant, in the formation of the Hellenic civilization they both loved so passionately. (Pg. 107-108)He points out, the proponents of the Aryan Modal are unable to quote extensively to back their case. (Pg. 120) He adds later, most Renaissance thinkers believed that Egypt was the original and creative source and Greece the later transmitter of some part of the Egyptian and Oriental wisdom, and the veracity of the Ancient Model was not at issue. (Pg. 160)He suggests, In the long run we can see that Egypt was also harmed by the rise of racism and the need to disparage every African culture during the 18th century, however, the ambiguity of Egypts racial position allowed its supporters to claim that it was essentially and originally white. Greece, by contrast, benefited from racism, immediately and in every way; and it was rapidly seen as the childhood of the dynamic European race. (Pg. 189)He summarizes, After the defense of Christianity and the idea of progress, racism was, I believe, the third major force behind the overthrow of the Ancient Model; the fourth was Romanticism. (Pg. 204)He explains, To what race, then, did the Ancient Egyptians belong? I am very dubious of the concept race in general because it is impossible to achieve any anatomical precision on the subject Research on the question usually reveals far more about the predisposition of the researcher than about the question itself. Nevertheless I am convinced that the further south, or up the Nile, one goes, the blacker and more Negroid the population becomes, and that this has been the case for the same length of time I believe that the Egyptian civilization was fundamentally African and that the African element was stronger in the Old and Middle Kingdoms, before the Hyksos invasion, than it later became. Furthermore, I am convinced that many of the most powerful Egyptian dynasties were made up of pharaohs whom one can usefully call black. (Pg. 241-242)He states, by the outbreak of the Second World War a paradigm had been established. It was no longer tolerable for a scholar to suggest that there had been any significant Egyptian or Phoenician influences on the formation of Greece. Anyone who now did so was---if possible---expelled from the academic community, or at least labelled cranky. (Pg. 398-399)He recalls, The only likely champions of Ancient Egypt are Copts and small groups of African and American Blacks. The latter are much more concerned with proving that Egypt is truly African and black than with its influence on Greece An even more powerful inhibitory factor to the restoration of the Egyptian aspect of the Ancient Model has been the fact that these black scholars have been outside academia. Thus most of the writing has been circulated among friends or published in very small editions; rapidly sold out to a passionately concerned public, but not considered as scholarship by academics, and not even stocked by libraries I had been studying these issues for eight years before I became aware of this literature I found that my intellectual position was far closer to the black literature than it was to orthodox ancient history I know that the ideological objections to the Ancient Model can no longer be stated in public. In private they may still be believed in, but I am convinced that even this attitude is not very frequently found in liberal academia. It seems, then, that the Aryan Modal is being maintained very largely by its own tradition and academic inertia I am convinced that the Ancient Model will be restored at some point in the early 21st century. (Pg. 401-402)He summarizes, Thus, as the end of the 1980s, I see continued struggle among black scholars on the question of the racial nature of the Ancient Egyptians Furthermore, there is a general hostility among them to Semitic culture, especially when it is supposed to have affected Egypt. Meanwhile, where white scholars are increasingly prepared to admit that the West Semites played a substantial part in the creation of Greek culture, there is still a far greater reluctance to admit fundamental Egyptian influence upon it. One aspect of my work is an attempt to reconcile these two hostile approaches. (Pg. 436-437)He concludes, With the intensification of racism in the 19th century there was increasing dislike of the Egyptians, who were no longer seen as the cultural ancestors of Greece but fundamentally alien. A whole new discipline of Egyptology could thus grow up, to study this exotic culture and at the same time maintain and reinforce Egypts distance from the real civilizations of Greece and Rome. The status of Egypt fell with the rise of racism in the 1820s; that of the Phoenicians declined with the rise of racial anti-Semitism in the 1880s and collapsed with its peak between 1917 and 1939. Thus, by the Second World War, it had been firmly established that Greece had not significantly borrowed culturally or linguistically from Egypt and Phoenicia and that the legends of civilizations were charming absurdities, as were the stories of the Greek wise men having studied in Egypt (Pg. 442)The main point I have been trying to make throughout this book is that the Ancient Model was destroyed and replaced by the Aryan Model not because of any internal deficiencies, not because the Aryan Model explained anything better or more plausibly; what it did do, however, was make the history of Greece and its relations to Egypt and the Levant conform to the world-view of the 19th century and, specifically, to its systematic racism. Since then the concepts of race and categorical European superiority which formed the core of this [world view] have been discredited both morally and heuristically, and it

would be fair to say that the Aryan Model was conceived in what we should not call sin and error All I claim for this volume is that it has provided a case to be answered the dubious origin of the Aryan Model does call into question its superiority over the Ancient model. (Pg. 442-443) Obviously a provocative and controversial book, this book remains (even after thirty years) must reading for anyone interested in the debate about the origin of Greek ideas and culture. 5 of 8 people found the following review helpful. A searing look at the sociology of knowledge for our century By Earl Hazell "Americans have lost touch with their history, and in this thought-provoking book, Professor James Loewen shows why. After surveying twelve leading high school American history texts, he has concluded that not one does a decent job of making history interesting or memorable. Marred by an embarrassing combination of blind patriotism, mindless optimism, sheer misinformation, and outright lies, these books omit almost all the ambiguity, passion, conflict, and drama from our past. In ten powerful chapters, Loewen reveals that:="The United States dropped three times as many tons of explosives in Vietnam as it dropped in all theaters of World War II, including Hiroshima and Nagasaki="Ponce de Leon went to Florida mainly to capture Native Americans as slaves for Hispaniola, not to find the mythical fountain of youth="Woodrow Wilson, known as a progressive leader, was in fact a white supremacist who personally vetoed a clause on racial equality in the Covenant of the League of Nations="The first colony to legalize slavery was not Virginia but Massachusetts From the truth about Columbus's historic voyages to an honest evaluation of our national leaders, Loewen revives our history, restoring to it the vitality and relevance it truly possesses." Book Description of LIES MY TEACHER TOLD ME: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong by James Loewen Our lack of understanding of our own history as Americans would be laughable if it weren't so sad...yet we dare not question the history of ancient cultures as we have been told of the past two to five thousand years?" ...Some modern scholars trace the name of the star [Sirius] in the hieroglyphic of the dog, evoking the god Anubis...The ancient Greeks, who took over so much of the Egyptian Wisdom, called 'Spdt' by the name Sothis, yet it remained the dog star in their calendars, and it was used by both Greeks and Egyptians in the orientation of important temples." ...It was this promise of stellar immutability which had led the ancient Egyptian priests, AND THEIR PUPILS THE GREEK ARCHITECTS, to orientate their temples to the stars. It was this same promise which led the designers of Washington, D.C. to ensure that their own new city was also laid out in accordance with a geometry which reflected the wisdom of the stellar lore." David Ovason THE SECRET ARCHITECTURE OF OUR NATION'S CAPITAL Chapter One (emphasis mine) I often wonder if people have actually read this book cover to cover and sat with it for a moment or two, before formulating their opinions of it and challenging the credentials and motivations of its author. What makes this book one of the most important of this now ending century has only indirectly anything to do with the majesty of Ancient Egypt--a culture we truly have yet to be introduced to, even in enjoying to the present day its legacy on the mind and culture of the modern world. Bernal challenges us all to look at the historians responsible for the mental architecture of our perspective on both the ancient and, subsequently, the modern world, and the socio-political/cultural milieu in which they found themselves with the same skepticism with which his detractors demand he submit to. With a great deal of modern scholarship proven to be mythically based, he has earned the raking over the coals he has received--but for mostly the right reasons. BLACK ATHENA, ranks among the most important and far reaching books of this closing century for the debate it provokes, the questions they demand be re-asked regardless of the answers, and the flood gates of heretofore excommunicated literature it legitimizes and acknowledges; literature and careful historical study in a world where, up until the writers responsible, anyone to disagree with the accepted conventional wisdom was considered a crank or a communist/demagogue by definition. Never did I gather from his work that he infer ancient Greek Culture did not exist independently from its African/Egyptian/Semetic influences. His work is even nearly devoid of the rhetoric (regardless of the sources provided) of the litany of his Afro-centric Egyptological antecedents--the writers of which go back more than a century. The mere possibility of the particulars of his work being historically accurate, proving by default the validity of his hypothesis--BASED PURELY ON HIS WELL DOCUMENTED HISTORY OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE IN 19TH CENTURY EUROPE--is the real source of any anxiety, or excitement. Again, as we enter the twenty-first century, I invite anyone coming upon this title to read one of the most important works of the twentieth. The generations yet to come will wonder why the book even needed to be written, much less argued about.

Winner of the American Book Award, 1990. Could Greek philosophy be rooted in Egyptian thought? Is it possible that the Pythagorean theory was conceived on the shores of the Nile and the Euphrates rather than in ancient Greece? Could it be that Western civilization was born on the so-called Dark Continent? For almost two centuries, Western scholars have given little credence to the possibility of such scenarios. In Black Athena, an audacious three-volume series that strikes at the heart of today's most heated culture wars, Martin Bernal challenges Eurocentric attitudes by calling into question two of the longest-established explanations for the origins of classical civilization. The Aryan Model, which is current today, claims that Greek culture arose as the result of the conquest from the north by Indo-European speakers, or "Aryans," of the native "pre-Hellenes." The Ancient Model, which was maintained in Classical Greece, held that the native population of Greece had initially been civilized by Egyptian and Phoenician colonists and that additional Near Eastern culture had been introduced to Greece by Greeks studying in Egypt and Southwest Asia.

Moving beyond these prevailing models, Bernal proposes a Revised Ancient Model, which suggests that classical civilization in fact had deep roots in Afroasiatic cultures. This long-awaited third and final volume of the series is concerned with the linguistic evidence that contradicts the Aryan Model of ancient Greece. Bernal shows how nearly 40 percent of the Greek vocabulary has been plausibly derived from two Afroasiatic languages—Ancient Egyptian and West Semitic. He also reveals how these derivations are not limited to matters of trade, but extended to the sophisticated language of politics, religion, and philosophy. This evidence, according to Bernal, confirms the fact that in Greece an Indo-European people was culturally dominated by speakers of Ancient Egyptian and West Semitic. Provocative, passionate, and colossal in scope, this volume caps a thoughtful rewriting of history that has been stirring academic and political controversy since the publication of the first volume. "A work which has much to offer the lay reader, and its multi-disciplinary sweep is refreshing: it is an important contribution to his to historiography and the sociology of knowledge, written with elegance, wit, and self-awareness... a thrilling journey... his account is as gripping a tale of scholarly detection and discovery as one could hope to find." -- Margaret Drabble, *The Observer* "An astonishing work, breathtaking bold in conception and passionately written... salutary, exciting, and in its historiographical aspects, convincing." -- G. W. Bowersock, *Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton* "The next far in book.... A formidable work of intellectual history." -- *Christian Science Monitor*

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About the Author  
Martin Gardiner Bernal (1937 - 2013) was Professor of Government and Near Eastern Studies at Cornell University. The first two volumes of *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* ("I: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785-1985"; and "II: The Archaeological and Documentary Evidence") have been translated into German, Italian, Spanish, French, Swedish, Greek and Japanese. *Black Athena* won the American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation in 1990.