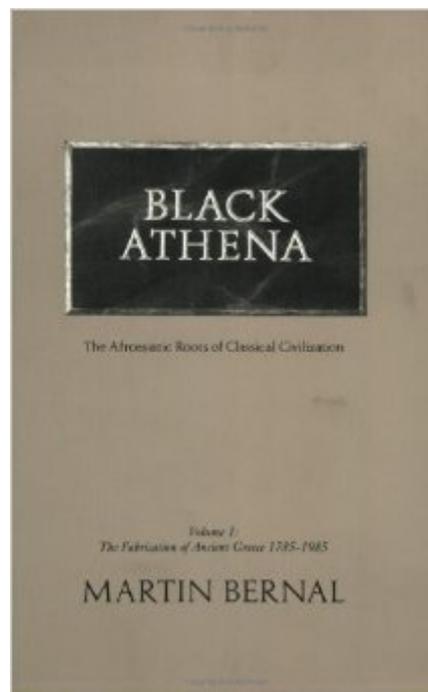


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Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots Of Classical Civilization (The Fabrication Of Ancient Greece 1785-1985, Volume 1)



Synopsis

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*

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

By all reports Martin Bernal is a respected scholar. Although his professional studies have focused on China, he attacks the problems of ancient Mediterranean history, archaeology, linguistics, and modern European intellectual history with enormous verve, great erudition and amazing breadth. It's therefore fascinating to follow the thread of his argumentation and note at every turn just how wrongheaded it all is. Here is a serious scholar who seems to believe that everything written by Europeans in the 19th and 20th centuries is corrupted by their conscious or unconscious racism, but that Greek myths or the self-aggrandizing monument inscriptions of Egyptian pharaohs are to be taken as literal truth. Yes, racism played a role in the development of 19th- and 20th-century historical thinking, but so did increasing knowledge. It was possible to imagine that Greek philosophy, religion and mathematics sprang from an Egyptian source when the Egyptian language was unreadable, but with a real understanding of Egyptian writings it became clear that the content and aims of Egyptian thought and religion were just not compatible with later Greek culture.

Likewise, it was easy to imagine Egyptian military dominance, and perhaps even colonization, of broad swaths of Europe and Asia until decade after decade of careful archaeological excavation failed to reveal any more evidence of Egyptian presence than could be attributed to trade. But just as Bernal claims (not entirely correctly) that conventional scholarship was tainted by racist assumptions, twisting the evidence to favor the position that Greece developed without significant Semitic or African influence, so does Bernal pick and choose his evidence to support the opposite conclusion.

Few books have caused as much scandal and controversy in the cloistered world of the classics as *Black Athena*. In this book, Martin Bernal argues with great clarity and a formidable amount of learning that the roots of classical Greek civilisation depended to a far greater extent than is generally acknowledged in Egypt and Phoenicia and that, from the late eighteenth century onwards, the racism (conscious or otherwise) of European scholars resulted in a kind of academic "cover-up", to the extent that nowadays this Eurocentric tradition has become so firmly entrenched in the canons of classical scholarship that it has contaminated all subsequent research. Therein lies the virtue of this book. Any work which comes along and challenges the basic assumptions of any discipline is of great intrinsic value, as it forces the scholars to sit up and reconsider the foundations of their beliefs, and since *Black Athena* was first published there has been much "soul-searching" done by many classicists and ancient historians. Unfortunately, the book is deeply flawed in numerous respects. Firstly, the quality of the evidence he quotes is, at a generous assessment, flimsy. Bizarre and deeply questionable etymologies from Egyptian and the Semitic languages are no substitute for the complete lack of any archaeological evidence for a significant Egyptian presence in Greece in the period in question. His "unholy trinity" of Christianity, Romanticism and political conservatism which created the Eurocentricism supposedly inherent in the classics does not work - the best example of a historical person who subscribes to these views he could find was the poet Shelley, who was a radical atheist.

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