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Black Apollo?

Martin Bernal's Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, volume iii, and Why Race Still Matters

Patrice D. Rankine

The question of whether the Greek god Apollo has roots in African soil is taken up in Martin Bernal's third and final volume of *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (2006). Akin to the idea of a black Athena, with broader discussions regarding that enquiry now well known,¹ the African Apollo question might seem to many a misguided use of the theoretical tools from archaeology, historical and literary enquiry, and linguistics, all disciplines within classical studies. Certainly the idea of Greece as the proverbial birth-place of civilization, sprung whole like Athena from Zeus's head, is no longer the vogue in classical studies.² Bernal's own argumentation, of late, suggests that such a view was ever only a dominant, not solitary, one.³ Whatever the case, Classicists now commonly discuss Greece as simply a part of a broader Mediterranean basin, albeit a crucial

¹ For a broad discussion of the black Athena controversy, which included scholarly publications as well as videotaped academic debates, see Lefkowitz (1996) and Berlinerblau (1999); for the issue of Afrocentrism, which brought the strongest storms in the backlash, see Lefkowitz (1997), Howe (1998), and Moses (1998). Berlinerblau is also thorough on Afrocentrism.

² The idea is concomitant with 'the Greek Miracle' of the advent of science and philosophy. See Bernal (2001).

³ As early as *Black Athena*, volume i, Bernal offered that scholars like F. A. Wolf had laid out alternative paths of enquiry, such as questions of the Semitic roots of the

one.⁴ At the same time, we are no less concerned with origins now than we were in 1976, when George G. M. James published *Stolen Legacy*, the ostensible shift towards a model of cultural appropriation and influence (over that of a 'stolen legacy') notwithstanding.⁵ Aside from answering the question of whether Apollo is in origin an African god, in the third volume Bernal helps us to consider why such an enquiry might still matter, even as we shift from a paradigm of cultural origins to one of hybridity.⁶

Although 'origins' might belong more to the culture wars of the 1980s (in the United States, at least), the fact that the 'nagging question', as it were, of origins will not go away became clear to me again quite recently. During a conference at Northwestern University in March 2010 concerned with the relationship between Athenian drama and modern African American theatre,⁷ a participant repeatedly came back to an underlying assumption: did not the Greeks take theatre from Africa in the first place? The nagging question is, of course, one of authority: the inventor retains first claims; the conversation goes nowhere without a laying-out of the premisses; and who are we Classicists to speak with any clout about African American theatre in the first place, when theatre began in Africa? The question regarding the origins of theatre, which was never sufficiently answered (and how could it have been?), attests to a number of fundamental principles: concerns about origins, although perhaps 'outdated' within academic circles, have not gone away as cultural capital; there is still a need for sensible, rigorous scholarship that

Greek language, but chose Indo-European instead. Such concessions seem even stronger in *Black Athena*, volume iii. See Bernal (1987, 2006).

⁴ The point can be made simply through an overview of the introduction of Boardman et al. (1986). More recently, Page duBois (2010) has situated Sappho's poems and other ancient phenomena within the context of Asian parallels.

⁵ George G. M. James's 1976 book *Stolen Legacy* certainly gave us a succinct way of referring to the idea that Egypt, and not Greece, is the origin of Western civilization. See James (2010).

⁶ I am well aware that one of the charges against Bernal is that he did not in fact use solid scholarly methods, but I respectfully disagree. It is time to step away from the question 'Does he read Greek?' He does, and he is certainly a better Egyptologist than the majority of Classicists. For a discussion, see Levine and Peradotto (1989), and Marchand and Grafton (1997).

⁷ The conference was part of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation John E. Sawyer Series 2009–10, entitled 'Theater after Athens: Reception and Revision of Ancient Greek Drama'. The instalment 'Greek Drama in African-American Theater' was held on 12–13 March 2010.

addresses these social concerns in clear, systematic ways; Martin Bernal's three-volume *Black Athena*, along with the tomes of responses (thus far primarily to the earlier two volumes), remains the place where such conversations begin. Set in the broader context of our contemporary concern for global history and perspectives, the issue of the origin of theatre, to follow our example, still has relevance. At the same time, such a conversation (about global history and perspectives) might lead us away from any privileging of, or focus on, Africa, and this is a concern for segments of the global society. Just as Europe (or Asia) is a priority to some, Africa and the African diaspora continue to interest others.

Black Athena remains the place where the type of enquiry with which I am concerned might begin. Despite the continued relevance of his work, Martin Bernal's third volume has not received anything close to the critical attention of his previous offerings.⁸ The state of affairs is quite different from what it was in the 1980s and 1990s.⁹ In America, the culture wars seem to have subsided, although the emergence of a black president has simultaneously led to calls to lay aside race as an existential factor in people's lives, while at the same time (paradoxically) suggesting blackness as a spectre that continues to haunt.¹⁰ In academic circles, as I have suggested, scholarship has widened significantly. Within classical studies, fields of enquiry such as *Classica Africana*, with its focus primarily on black Classicists in the United States and their influence, and Reception Studies in the United Kingdom, which takes up Classics in the postcolonial mind, including analyses of the works of people of African and Asian descent, the picture is quite different from what it was in 1987.¹¹ The spectrum of those who lay claim to the Classics is much wider

⁸ As far as I can tell, the third volume has yet to be reviewed by any of the major classical journals in the United States, nor has it been reviewed in such venues as the *New York Review of Books*.

⁹ The popular American discussion might be charted from Bloom (1987), to Knox (1994), Lefkowitz (1992), and Ray (1997).

¹⁰ Recent political movements in the United States such as the Tea Party movement continue to have strong racial overtones, as *New York Times* columnist Charles Blow, among others, continues to chart. On race and existentialism, one approach to the continued prevalence of race, see Gordon (2000). On race as a continuing factor in the postmodern world, see Gilroy (2006).

¹¹ For an overview of *Classica Africana*, see Rankine (2006). Representative work from the innovators in the field of Reception Studies includes Hardwick (2000), Joshel et al. (2001), Goff and Simpson (2007), and Hall (2008).

than it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in Germany. The diversity of enquirers leads to a plurality of approaches. Edith Hall's recent—and striking—comment that the Classics have no intrinsic ideology could be the mantra for the free play of ideas that is the state of affairs in the early years of the twenty-first century.¹² Without an 'intrinsic ideology', the Classics become phenomena to which anyone, from any culture, at any time, can lay claim. And, yet, the dehistoricizing of events and texts that Hall's observation suggests is one that would trouble any student of the past. What is left of Greece, Rome, or even Africa, in this new world of cultural appropriation?

The interlocutor at the Northwestern conference, with his nagging question—did not Africans invent theatre?—calls us back from our new, presentist obsessions, to the question of origins, or at least to the question of history. The question also, in a way, gives the lie to classicism. If the Classics have no intrinsic ideology, why do we still hold on to spectres of European gods, that the Greeks themselves are the guilty party in first drawing the line between us and them, Europe and Asia, Greeks and barbarians?¹³ Should we not be as much students of ancient Africa and Asia as we are of Greece and Rome? And how are the ideologies and perspectives that *we* are bringing to bear on the past influencing our enquiries? Even if we leave aside the imperial model (the Aryan Model) by which, according to Bernal, some European scholars might have seen the past in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we are certainly still trapped in certain modern approaches. It would seem natural, for example, that a hybridized mind would go back to seek out hybrid origins. Here we are again, reshaping our past to suit our present consciousness. And it certainly gets us nowhere to tell our Northwestern interlocutor that he is asking the wrong question. It would be best to understand why he is asking the question, and then we can decide if it is worth our time suggesting some approaches. Volume iii of *Black Athena* prefers that it is still worth asking questions about origins.

Much of the third volume of *Black Athena* is for linguists to take on, and in it Bernal continues to present his argument from the

¹² The lecture 'Ancient Slavery & Modern Abolition', delivered on 18 February 2010, was the Kreeger-Wolf Lecture at Northwestern University, where Professor Hall was serving as Kreeger-Wolf Distinguished Visiting Professor.

¹³ For the argument, see Hall (1991).

standpoint of 'competitive plausibility' (on which see Berlinerblau 1999). After spending over 200 pages just on Indo-European, Indo-Hittite, and the structure of classical Greek, Bernal turns to applying these to conceptual, theoretical, and cultural links between ancient Greece and its Mediterranean neighbours. Bernal (2006: 269–71) links concepts such as *moira*, the Greek idea of 'fate', to Semitic counterparts. He finds Egyptian and Semitic words and ideas in Greek conceptions of nature and agriculture, medicine, and hunting. Here again, Bernal's process is noteworthy because it steers us away from ahistoricism; he draws us to the question of historical contact and influence, and this causes us to examine the phenomena we have appropriated. The end of this enquiry notwithstanding (can we ever truly return to the beginning, the origin?), the importance of the process becomes increasingly clear.

From the standpoint of social history and cultural phenomena, African Apollo, like black Athena, is, to my mind, the easiest entry into *Black Athena*, volume iii. Apollo is, for many European thinkers (and I am thinking of Nietzsche), the most Greek of the Olympian gods (Bernal 2006: 455), leaving aside Athena and her patronage of Athens, the most Greek of cities. Apollo, god of reason, enlightened *loxias*, antithesis to Nietzsche's Dionysus. Wrestling Apollo from the grips of European scholars, a grip held since Winckelmann's famous paean to the Apollo Belvedere, Bernal makes the idea of a non-European Apollo plausible. By doing so, Bernal accomplishes a feat that eluded a number of non-specialists, Afrocentrists, and others who held similar hypotheses (as I show more clearly momentarily).

My aim here is not to come to a definite conclusion about Apollo's origins. I hope that I have made it clear how messy an ordeal such a conclusion would be. I am more interested here in the cultural context in which the question is raised, and for this reason I do think that the question is worthy of our time. The enquiry into the origin of Apollo, within the context of free-flowing cultural appropriations (the Classics without an intrinsic ideology), might lead to the question: 'So what?' The specific idea of an African Apollo might bring us to an understanding of how such an investigation might be conducted, but certainly historical enquiry necessitates a laying-out of methods. Understanding Greece's and Africa's positions in the ancient Mediterranean is not the only context for learning the methods of a historian. Why does this particular question, these particular geographical areas and time periods, matter?

More than learning the methods of an historian, the question of an African Apollo returns us to the cultural divide that still exists, at least in North America, and is played out in academic debates. As Jacques Berlinerblau (1999) offered with respect to Bernal's previous volumes, one of *Black Athena's* legacies was an integration of knowledge between specialists in classical studies and, for lack of a better term, Afrocentric scholars. That is, Bernal stood in the divide between the Classics and Afrocentrism. I take Afrocentrism not as the fringe ideology that Mary Lefkowitz attacked during the high points—or perhaps they were the low points—of the *Black Athena* debate. Rather, I follow Wilson Jeremiah Moses's assessment (1998) of Afrocentrism as a long-standing component of black thought in North America, linked to broader Western ideas, such as the interplay between anti-modernism and the idea of progress. As Moses offers, scholars as central to American life as W. E. B. DuBois deployed the term 'Afrocentric' with all its attendant associations. Moses sees Afrocentrism as concomitant with an African American idea of decline (that blacks in America lost a great tradition), which an ecumenical Ethiopianism (where Ethiopia 'stretches forth her hands', as Marcus Garvey put it, and receives the lost Diaspora) counters.¹⁴ Put succinctly, Afrocentrism, more than a fringe ideology, is a broad-based effort to counter what is effectively the writing of Africa *out* of history. This effort is at times conscious, and at times inadvertent. As I have been intimating, and as will become clearer in the example of African Apollo, the model within the United States has been that of a conscious (perhaps self-conscious and self-defeating) Afrocentrism. The example of Brazil, however, as the other locale to which the majority of African bodies were transported during the slave trade, is one of a more organic Africa-centred life. Whereas African retentions (from the hundreds of years of slave traffic to the New World) have to be uncovered and shown within the United States, they are ubiquitous in Brazil.¹⁵ There is perhaps nothing exceptional about Africa, and yet the priority of Africa to tens of millions of people in North America and Brazil, as a focal point of

¹⁴ The contours of Ethiopianism are perhaps most clearly defined in the Rastafari movement. See Chevannes (1995) and Shilliam, Chapter 6, this volume.

¹⁵ Any number of examples from religious and social practices might suffice, but Floyd Merrell's study (2005) of capoeira and candomblé takes a comprehensive look at the phenomena of history, African retentions, and resistance among people of African descent in Brazil.

ideology and social practice, as well as a field of historical and scholarly enquiry, is undeniable.

Within a sociopolitical context that acknowledges the political play of academic ideas, an African Apollo—like a black Athena—stands in as a symbol for something much greater than the scholarly enquiry itself. In their search for African origins, black American writers in the Afrocentric vein were doing no more than their European and white American counterparts, who legitimated their own position through Greek origins. To the extent that Wilson posits Afrocentrism in the end as a Western phenomenon, he concurs with Paul Gilroy (1993) with respect to the blackness of modernity. That is, the modern world is one of cultural appropriation; modernity is achieved through particular approaches to and elisions of the past.

In contrast to the previous volumes of *Black Athena*, which found themselves at the centre of the racial divide, *Black Athena*, volume iii, arrives in the context of a more strident, postcolonial environment. In the context of the early twenty-first century, an African Apollo serves in a similar way to Frank Snowden's 'blacks' in antiquity, which sought, not for an Afrocentric home in Africa, but for an acceptable, non-confrontational integration in Greece. African Apollo is a post-colonial, hybrid entity.

It is worth spending some time on Bernal's arguments for an African Apollo. Bernal's approach to an African Apollo (he is less insistent on the 'blackness' of Egypt in volume iii than he was in volume i) will be familiar to anyone versed in the debates around *Black Athena*, volumes i and ii. Bernal begins with Herodotus. Quoting Egyptians on the subject of a floating island, Herodotus tells us that Apollo is Egyptian Horus (2.156). Apollo and Artemis are the offspring of Dionysus and Isis. As we know from *Black Athena*, volume i, Herodotus is a lynchpin to Bernal's Ancient Model, a prism through which Bernal claims that Greeks saw their own past. In *Black Athena*, volume i, Bernal claims that Herodotus knew the Egyptians to be black, and, as in the case of Apollo, Herodotus gives us many clues to the connection between Africa and Greece. Egypt, which still held a high place in the Renaissance imagination, was transformed and held a lower status in eighteenth-century ideas of progress, and was still further diminished during nineteenth-century Romanticism. This is Bernal's Aryan Model. For Bernal, none of these moves, in and of themselves, would have led to the rewriting of the Ancient Model. They culminate, however, in German classicism,

Altertumswissenschaft (Bernal 1987). Bernal cites Nietzsche, Hegel, and Marx among the writers whose intense ‘Hellenomania’ led to the emergence of an Aryan Model (Bernal 1987). Part and parcel of this model was the elevation of Apollo as a European god of reason (in opposition to his foreign, irrational counterpart, Dionysus), the downplaying of foreign (Asian, Syrian, or Egyptian) origin, and the idea of Greek material realities being more advanced than those of Egypt. Bernal summarizes the case against the moderns in *Black Athena*, volume i:

And he [Marx] was living in an age when everybody felt in their bones that Greece was categorically apart from, and above, Egypt. Thus the destruction of the Ancient Model gave his generation a freedom on this question that was not available to Hegel. Marx was able to deny Egyptian influence on Greece outright. (Bernal 1987: 296)

The rejection of Herodotus as a trustworthy source would follow from this logic, and indeed indictment of Bernal’s trust of Herodotus was an ongoing feature of the *Black Athena* debate of the 1990s.¹⁶

Bernal’s resuscitation of the Ancient Model, therefore, begins with the critique of the biases of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars, and the case of an African Apollo is no exception. If Bernal raises charges against European scholars in *Black Athena*, volume i, he lays out the counter-evidence in volumes ii and iii. Bernal hints at the Apollo/Horus connection throughout *Black Athena*, volume ii, and he sets up the linguistic analysis that would come in volume iii: ‘I believe that many of the Greek divine names, such as Apollo, Athena and so on, were in fact Egyptian and that when Herodotus said “names” he usually meant just that, *names*’ (Bernal 1991: 109–10). By volume iii, Bernal returns to the analysis of European scholars that underscored the first volume:

From at least the fifth century BCE until the early nineteenth CE Apollo was universally assumed to be the young god of the sun. Karl Ottfried Müller challenged this image with his view that Apollo was the dynamic ‘golden-haired’ tribal god of the northern Dorians. He claimed that the earliest Greek texts did not refer to the god’s solar aspects. (Bernal 2006: 454)

¹⁶ Scholarship since the publication of *Black Athena*, volume i, attests to the countless areas upon which Bernal’s thesis touches. Beginning with the critique of Bernal’s reading of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European thinkers, the range of responses has been as wide as the maestro’s charges. See Lefkowitz (1996).

The alleged denigration of Egypt in nineteenth-century European scholarship is again evident in Bernal's analysis of Müller. The centrality of the sun to Egyptian practices goes without saying. Bernal is suspicious of the severing of Apollo from his solar connections. The nineteenth-century trend was to make Apollo Dorian, a 'hyperborean' god who resides 'beyond the north wind' (Bernal 2006: 455).

The idea of Apollo as an exclusively European god would certainly hold through the middle of the twentieth century, Bernal (2006: 455) claims, despite his concession that scholars were more open to 'eastern connections' by the late twentieth century. Here we might discern a softening of what Berlinerblau called Bernal's 'big picturism', his tendency to think in terms of 'models', thereby establishing structures into which evidence might be forced to fit. Concessions were already evident in Bernal's *Black Athena Writes Back: Martin Bernal Responds to his Critics* (2001), in which Bernal suggests that scholars were already turning towards a more open disposition. What Bernal was getting at all along, however, was the extent to which social and political environment to some extent determines how 'scientists' see the world and conduct their research. Bernal made this point again during his keynote at the 'African Athena' conference in 2008, at the University of Warwick, when he discussed the political environment of his own Cornell University in the decade or so leading up to *Black Athena*, volume i (see Bernal, 'Afterword', this volume). In the case of Apollo, Berkeley University scholar Joseph Fontenrose to some extent renders Bernal's reading of a hyperborean Apollo as too literalist. Published in 1959, Fontenrose's *Python* gives a different take on Apollo's hyperborean home: the remoteness of the place 'beyond the north wind' makes it mysterious, just as Ethiopia is the paradise where Zeus goes to party in Homer's *Iliad* 1 and elsewhere. Snowden's cautionary remarks against imposing modern biases onto classical Greek minds fit here (in Lefkowitz 1996); our North and South, Europe, Asia, and Africa, do not map neatly onto the classical world. For the ancients, 'beyond the north wind' is as exotic—non-Greek—as Ethiopia (Hartog 2009). We already have trouble fitting all the evidence into Bernal's Ancient Model, even if some of his charges of the social and political prisms through which later scholars saw the Greek world are verifiable.

The crux of Bernal's argument for an African origin of Apollo—perhaps the Africa we imagine, not the one in the Greek imagination—is the linguistic evidence. He first rejects the etymology of Apollo in the

Dorian for ‘sacred assembly’ (ἀπέλλαι, *apellai*): ‘Unimpressed, the lexicographers Frisk and Chantraine declare that the etymology of Apollo is “unknown”’ (Bernal 2006: 455). Bernal expands on an etymology he had already suggested in *Black Athena*, volume ii, which is a linguistic tie that gives legs, as it were, to Herodotus’ assertion that Apollo is called Horus in Egypt. Although the name Apollo is absent from the Linear B, Bernal turns to *Paiēōn*, who is a healer in Homer and has strong ties to Egypt. (In Homer’s *Iliad*, e.g. 4.232, he was said to have brought medicine to Egypt.) *Paiēōn* as an epithet for Apollo is attested in inscriptions, and the ‘paean’ is of course the song of victory, often addressed to Apollo (attested in Liddell and Scott). For Bernal (2006: 456), *Paiēōn* is ‘a byword of Horus’ through Egyptian *Hr*. Since Bernal’s arguments are primarily linguistic, it would take someone with interdisciplinary training in Egyptology and Greek to challenge them. As if aware of this, Bernal continues to ground his argument in broader, ideological issues. He claimed, for example, that one way that European scholars dislodged Apollo from his Egyptian connection was to deny his early (pre-fifth century) connection to the worship of the sun. Apollo’s Homeric epithet *lykēgenēs*, which has a ‘wonderful ambiguity’, could be taken as binding the god to Lycia, rendering him a wolf (from *lukos*), or as meaning ‘light born’ or ‘light begetting’ (Bernal 2006). It should be clear by now that Bernal prefers *lykēgenēs*, ‘born of light’, because this etymology ties Apollo to sun worship. Walter Burkert’s earlier analysis and citations give Bernal room to roam: ‘modern scholars dispute whether the name Apollo *Lykeios* has to do with Lycia, “light” or the “wolf”—most Greeks, in any case, took it to mean “wolf”’ (Burkert 1983: 121).

Given the linguistic link that Bernal creates between *Hr* and *Paiēōn*, which he buttresses with the epithet *lykēgenēs*, he is able to draw his conclusions in the most emphatic possible terms: ‘In any event, the *luk stem clearly indicates that from Homeric or pre-Homeric times, Apollo was associated with the calendar and heavenly lights, the sun and the moon’ (2006: 458). Bernal makes his case piece by piece, block by block, word by word. The Homeric epithet for Apollo *hekēbolos*, the ‘far-shooter’, is ‘interesting’ for Bernal because Horus, *Hrw*, is from *hr*, which means ‘distant’ (2006: 460). Bernal likens the Homeric image of Apollo, who swoops down like a falcon (*Iliad* 15.236–8), to the iconography of Horus: ‘In Egyptian theology Horus was the falcon high in the sky swooping down on his victims’ (2006: 460). With the preponderance of evidence now stacked in favour of his argument, Bernal is able to offer Apollo’s African origin

through competitive plausibility. That is, viewed from the perspective of the facts, Bernal proposes African Apollo as a stronger hypothesis than the others.

If we leave aside for the moment the question of the blackness, as it were, or the Africanness, of Egypt, one that gets us into Snowden's objections to *Black Athena*, volume i, Bernal, at the very least, shows us how we might begin to approach such an enquiry. Early objections to his methodology notwithstanding, Bernal presents for us the set of skills that would be required to conduct the type of interdisciplinary scholarship that would approach issues of Greece's early contact with North Africa and the Near East. These skills include textual analysis (an understanding of authors, their tendencies, and their context), along with a cultural, literary, and methodological analysis of authors, such as Herodotus; linguistic analysis, such as is evident in Bernal's treatment of the *luk root, *Hr*, and *hekēbolos*; and an understanding of religious practices, migration trends, and scholarship on these subjects, as well as the polemics stemming from the various positions a scholar might take.

But why make the effort? We come again to the nagging question: So what? What if Apollo is a god whose worship in Greece had some precursor in Africa? Even if the idea of origins has fallen out of vogue in academic circles, it is probably unavoidable—or at least still irresistible. If questions of origin are to be asked, it is certainly worth considering why they are being asked, how we might go about answering them, and where our answers might lead. And, independent of origins, sites of cultural appropriation remain: Europe, Africa, and Asia. As it pertains to a 'black' Athena, or an African Apollo, I have already touched upon the context of North American intellectual life within which Bernal's corpus primarily fell. Howe, Berlinerblau, and others give the genealogy of the Afrocentric idea at one end of the American intellectual divide, and Moses offered that even the search for origins among black Americans is tantamount to that of broader Western classicism. In the twentieth century in America, Moses sees the quest for African origins even in W. E. B. DuBois, himself a classicist by training, who would be well aware of the counterpoint he was creating to European origins. Once we understand the historical context of the question of origin, sites of appropriation remain.

Bernal's broader relationship to Afrocentrism is well documented. From the publication of the first volume in 1987, *Black Athena* was swept up in well-established discussions of the African as opposed to

the Greek origins of Western civilization. By African, North American Negro writers meant 'black'. With its publication in 2006, *Black Athena*, volume iii, returns to the milieu, and race might well remain a factor in the reception of the book. It is worth noting that, as it pertains to an African Apollo, Bernal again enters a discussion he might not have directly anticipated. The Afrocentric strain of scholarship has already appropriated Apollo. In 1982, for example, *The Journal of Negro History* published an article, written by Eloise McKinney Johnson, titled 'Delphos of Delphi'. Johnson had already gone a step further than Bernal does by tracing Egypt's own origins to Ethiopia. The position that, to cite Berlinerblau (1999: 153), 'Egyptians are descendants of an indigenous African cohort' is an old one in Afrocentric thought, one that extends back at least into the nineteenth century, as other chapters in this volume interrogate. Johnson (1982: 279) intertwines the discussion of Apollo into her view of Ethiopia: 'Mythology books in the English language tell us that *Delphi* means *dolphin* and that the area's first settlers arrived from Crete astride a dolphin's back. These books, however, ignore Delphos and his Ethiopian origins.'

If we leave aside for the moment the supposed connection between Ethiopia and Egypt, Bernal's etymologies would suggest that Johnson's claims of a non-European origin of Apollo are worthy of further study:

A cluster of words central to the cult of Apollo derives from Afroasiatic, probably Semitic but possibly also Egyptian. It is the series listed by Chantraine under one heading: δέλφαξ [delphax] (5) 'sow'; δελφίς, δελφίνος [delphis, delphinos] (5) 'dolphin'; Δελφοί [Delphoi] (H) 'Delphi,' city of Apollo and the oracle; and δελφύς [delphus] (4) 'womb'. Linked to the last is ἀδελφός [adelphos] (H) 'brother'. (Bernal 2006: 472)

Bernal gives further clues to an obscurity that Johnson (1982: 279) claims has been 'a carefully shrouded secret'. Bernal (2006: 473) argues that the word group for Delphi have Semitic, and likely Egyptian, origins, as 'no Indo-European etymology has been proposed for *delphus* itself'.

How did Johnson come to a similar idea as Bernal's? Johnson opens her article with a quotation from Peter Tompkins's *Secrets of the Great Pyramid*, which is also her main source. (Bernal mentions Tompkins twice in his first volume; Johnson is not cited at all.) Tompkins (as quoted at the opening of Johnson's article) proffered

that Egyptian Pharaohs established the oracle at Delphi during the Ethiopian dynasty. Together, the clues and independent claims—even from those closer to the ‘lunatic fringe’ than orthodox scholars—do read like a mystery novel (Bernal 1987: 276). Surprisingly, it is Snowden who offers the most compelling link between Egypt, Ethiopia, and Apollo, despite his insistence on the waywardness of Bernal’s—and the Afrocentric—approach. As early as 1948, Snowden makes reference to ‘Negroes’ on the coinage at Delphi and suggests that the image of the black person might have been Delphos, the eponymous hero at Delphi (Snowden 1948: 44). Insisting on the ‘Negroid’ features of the bust, Snowden returns to the argument for Delphos, Apollo’s offspring in mythology with a black mother, in *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient Views of Blacks* (1983). Throughout his decades of work, Snowden applied the same anachronous terminology—Negro, Negroid, black—for which he criticizes Bernal. Yet textual, linguistic, and physical evidence, along with speculation, do all amount to something quite black at Delphi, and the deracinated, North African Egypt of nineteenth-century scholarship is not enough to remove the trace of race that informs such scholarship.

Whatever the case, Bernal does show the patience and meticulous attention to sources that might inform the non-specialist claims of investigators like Johnson. We have already discussed the links between Apollo and Horus; the connections between the paean, the god of healing, and the sun; and the traces of a black eponymous hero at Delphi. It is worth mentioning Johnson’s understanding of Delphi as the navel of the earth, or the *omphalos*, because here the arguments are stunningly weak, although Bernal provides some help. Johnson (1982: 280) digresses in the meaning of *omphalos* as ‘stone’ by making the observation that ‘it may be more than a coincidence that the name *Peter*, so important to Christian worshippers, also means “stone” or “rock”’. Johnson makes an entirely irrelevant point, but the speculative play on words and meaning is, in the end, shown to be all there is to work with at times, even when done well. Bernal reveals how tenuous even certain well-established etymologies are. Bernal’s similar and perhaps more apropos play, when it is based on linguistic rules, perhaps salvages Johnson’s point about the *omphalos*: ‘Nevertheless, *omphalos* also means “navel” and it is interesting to note that at Delphi the stone was sometimes decorated with what was supposed to be the skin of the Python Apollo had killed’ (Bernal 2006: 473). Bernal goes on to tie the *delphus* or ‘womb’ to the *hystera*, the floating

womb that causes hysteria and therefore needs to be weighted down. We might speculate further about hysteria, the madness of the Pythia, and oracular practices at Delphi, with its possible connections to Egyptian or Ethiopian—African—social and religious practices. (Again, we would be speculating about linguistic play in the hands of a misogynistic, pre-scientific culture.)

The seemingly endless possibilities at play in these etymologies might begin to appear all too postmodern, with pastiche and cleverness as currency in competitive plausibility. At the same time, Bernal does make the point that classicists do not ask certain questions, questions that Afrocentrists do ask, as the *Black Athena* debate revealed. Lack of interest, then, limits possibilities, even though too much of a stake in the outcome certainly skews the information we find. In the end, it turns out that Snowden, who quickly took sides against Bernal in the classicist camp, was one of Bernal's few peers in asking questions about colour and ethnic diversity in antiquity.¹⁷ Although Snowden avoided the Bernalian tendency to see things in terms of conspiracy or cover up, the reality that certain questions are not asked regarding the evidences we do have is a reflection on who is conducting the investigations. The many wonderful images of 'blacks' in antiquity that grace the pages of Snowden's books tend not to find their way into textbooks on Greek art, so that Delphos, as an example, is not often discussed outside Afrocentric essays, Snowden's books, or the *Black Athena* debate. The idea of a—black, Negro, African—eponymous hero at Delphi from outside Greece does in the end change the narrative. There is certainly no cover up, but the fact that many of these images have remained in the back rooms of museums is a reflection on the lack of interest in them. In such a context, the proposal of an African Apollo, as a subset to Bernal's larger Black Athena project, takes on heretical tones, rather than being one of many, perhaps equally plausible, ideas at play in the study of antiquity.

So we return, for the third and final time, to the 'so what?' question. Since it is a philosophical reality that we do search for ourselves—and our differences—in the face of the other, the types of enquiries that Bernal undertakes will continue to matter, as long as race is in play in the modern mind. As it pertains to our views of the past, an

¹⁷ Today, we might add Thompson (1989) and Isaac (2004), to name only two of the ever-increasing editions on the topic.

increasing number of scholarly publications are opening up the perspective on the ancient world to include more on India and Persia, as we have discussed. This is no doubt a result of the degree to which the constitution of the modern world is evolving to include a populous China, India, and the Middle East. Certainly those places were always on the map, so to speak, but their interaction with the Western world, for a number of reasons, matters more to *Western* scholars and laypersons in Europe and the Americas. Indeed, colonized peoples have always had to gauge their assimilation of Western values and mores; European scholars, politicians, and economists now see their interaction with groups outside Europe and North America as critical to their economic and cultural survival.

Within this context of a hybrid and global perspective, Africa is also perceived to be more in play than in the past.¹⁸ The Afrocentric idea is a case in point of how Western notions of progress, or even anti-modernism, might continue to play a significant role for certain parts of the whole. Snowden (1983: 67) cited Brazil as a counter-model to classical Athens and America vis-à-vis the treatment of black bodies. As the location to which a predominance of Africans was transported through the 1800s to serve as slaves, Brazil remains today the largest African diaspora (Page 1996). The fact that the slave trade there lasted furtively through much of the nineteenth century makes Brazil a hotspot, so to speak, for the study of African retentions in the New World. One wonders what clues to ancient practices we might find in the worship of hybridized, African deities in Brazil, like Exu, the god of crossroads who so resembles Hermes, or Iemarijá, the Aphroditic goddess of the sea.¹⁹ I am by no means here proposing a 'stolen legacy' or any direct influence, whereby we might chart analogies between the deities. Rather, I am pointing to syncretic cultural processes—not the manufactured heroism of certain strands of Afrocentrism—where contact is inevitable and worth investigating. The research approach that Bernal attempts—the evaluation of certain types of evidence, archaeological, documentary, and linguistic; a certain attention to

¹⁸ See Ferguson (2006) on the point that very little contemporary global history really engages with Africa, beyond the tokenistic. Nevertheless, Africa as a global and economic force cannot be denied.

¹⁹ Exu, or Esu, Elegba is the trope of Henry Louis Gates, Jr, for the signifying monkey, the Yoruba god of the crossroads that he sees as a figure for black American poetics. See Gates (1988); on African mythology in the New World more broadly, see Prandi (2001).

detail; and the interest to dedicate oneself to the task for a sustained period of time—is certainly a way forward. We might not definitively answer the question of an African origin of Apollo, but the question might lead to other astounding finds, such as a black eponymous hero at Delphi. For the black bodies in Brazil, and dark bodies elsewhere, this line of questioning is as worthy of our attention as the possibility of Indian or Persian interaction with Western religious, social, or cultural institutions, ancient and modern.