

has recast the *theologia tripertita* and so traced again one of the frames by which we conceive of nature and, hence, divinity: *fahrt der Form entlang*.⁹

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CW 87.1 (1993)

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ON *BLACK ATHENA*: ANCIENT CRITIQUES OF THE
“ANCIENT MODEL” OF GREEK HISTORY*

In the first volume of *Black Athena*, Martin Bernal cites Plutarch’s essay “On the Malice of Herodotus” as “the closest to what one might call an attack on the Ancient Model” of Greek history.¹ According to Bernal, such critiques were exceptional because Greeks throughout antiquity generally accepted the Ancient Model, a version of Greek history that traced Hellenic culture back to Egyptian and Phoenician origins. Since the recently published second volume of *Black Athena*² continues the discussion of the Ancient Model but mentions no other ancient assaults on the claim that Greek culture was influenced by “barbarians,” I wish to draw attention to an ancient critique that is both more explicit and more succinct than Plutarch’s. It occurs in the proem to a work that was probably written within a century after Plutarch, the *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* by Diogenes Laertius:³

There are some who say that the study of philosophy had its beginning among the barbarians. They urge that the Persians have had their Magi, the Babylonians or Assyrians their Chaldaeans, and the Indians their Gymnosophists; and among the Celts and Gauls there are the people called Druids or Holy Ones....Also they say that Mochus was a Phoenician, Zalmoxis a Thracian, and Atlas a Libyan.

If we may believe the Egyptians, Hephaestus was the son of the Nile, and with him philosophy began, priests and prophets being its chief exponents....

These authors forget that the achievements which they attribute to the barbarians belong to the Greeks, with whom not merely philosophy but the human race itself began.

In the following chapters, Diogenes Laertius tries to demonstrate that Egyptian and other foreign ideas are not worthy of being called philosophy, “whose very name refuses to be translated into foreign speech” (1.4). He ends his polemical introduction with a hellenocentric outline of the history of philosophy, which began, according to his scheme, with Pythagoras and Anaximander.

⁹ I have omitted the word *nur* (“only”) as I quote again this phrase from Wittgenstein; I do so to downplay any implication that tracing the frame, a ubiquitous and salutary feature of our intellectual endeavors, is a mark of failure or deficiency.

* This investigation was supported by University of Kansas General Research allocation #3086-X0-0038.

¹ *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, vol. 1, *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985* (New Brunswick, 1987) 112.

² *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, vol. 2, *The Archaeological and Documentary Evidence* (New Brunswick, 1991).

³ D. L. 1.1-3, translated by R. D. Hicks (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1925).

Implicit dissent from the Ancient Model is evident in many other ancient sources that, like the work of Diogenes Laertius, wish to assert that civilization itself began with Greece. Attic funeral orations, for example, supply parallels for Thucydides' "nationalism" and "temporal chauvinism," traits that Bernal treats as exceptions to Greek openness.⁴ The funeral orations also demonstrate that the modern "Model of Autochthonous Origin" (traced to the 1820's by Bernal)⁵ has a precedent in the Athenians' own claim that their ancestors simply sprouted from Athenian soil. This claim of autochthony, the Athenian myth *par excellence*,⁶ is surely a radical, albeit tacit, denial of Phoenician or Egyptian influence. Bernal downplays such claims for Greek cultural originality because he wishes to focus upon the clash between his two models: the modern Aryan Model (which stresses invasion from the north) and the Ancient Model (which stresses invasion from the east). Ancient claims of Greek originality and ethnic purity, however, have sometimes fueled modern denials of Eastern or Egyptian influence. Modern historians who have discounted the "philobarbarous" Herodotus have relied instead on texts by classical Athenians, who seem to have been more ethnocentric (or, as Loraux puts it, "narcissistic")⁷ than we sometimes acknowledge. The nineteenth-century German historian Karl Otfried Müller, for example, uses the boast that the Athenians were "born of the earth herself" in Plato's *Menexenos* to support his claim that the Athenians acknowledged no Egyptian or Levantine ancestry.⁸ The Athenian claim of autochthony was also popular in nineteenth-century England, where it was championed by historians George Grote and Sir William Smith. In the latter's work the term "home growth" appears as a rationalized paraphrase of the ancient myth.⁹

Although ancient sources are less unanimous than Bernal implies, the fact that Diogenes Laertius' denial of foreign influence is framed as an attack on previous writers supports Bernal's claim that the Greeks generally believed that they owed cultural debts to Egypt and the East.

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CW 87.1 (1993)

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⁴ Bernal, (above, n.1) vol. 1.102. For a recent discussion of Attic *epitaphioi*, see Nicole Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, Mass., 1986).

⁵ Bernal, (above, n. 1) vol. 1, 407.

⁶ Loraux (above, n. 4) 150.

⁷ Loraux (above, n. 4) 83, 149, and *passim*.

⁸ *Geschichte hellenischer Stämme und Städte*, 2nd ed. (Breslau, 1844) vol. 1, 100.

⁹ "The civilization of the Greeks and the development of their language bear all the marks of home growth, and were probably little affected by foreign influence." *A History of Greece* (New York, 1854), 14-15.