

BLACK ATHENA: AN ETYMOLOGICAL RESPONSE

GARY A. RENDSBURG

Before I proceed to the substantive part of this article, I must begin by setting forth several disclaimers. First, my training is solely within the fields of Semitic and Egyptian. I claim no expertise in the areas of Greek linguistics in particular and Indo-European linguistics in general. Accordingly, when dealing with problems of Greek etymology, I have relied either on the standard secondary literature (Frisk 1954-1972; Chantraine 1968-1975) or on the good counsel of colleagues more qualified than I.¹

Secondly, I was not present at the symposium held by the American Philological Association in Baltimore in January 1989. Nevertheless, from the reports I received, I understand that many in attendance expressed some skepticism over Bernal's etymologies. I have heard similar opinions from other scholars who have read *Black Athena*. It was because of these views that Molly Levine sought an etymologist's approach and thus I was invited to contribute the present essay to this monograph devoted to Bernal's book.

¹ I am especially grateful to Saul Levin of the State University of New York at Binghamton for giving so freely of his time. Virtually every issue treated below was raised in the long discussions we had, so that in many respects this article is as much his as it is mine. Also, my colleague Alan Nussbaum of Cornell University read an earlier draft of the article and caused me to rethink several key points. Although in his view most of the etymologies treated herein either cannot or need not be accepted, his comments have been most helpful and I thank him for his assistance. In the end, I alone remain responsible for the conclusions derived below.

Thirdly, as a student of Cyrus Gordon, I was trained to look for Mediterranean interconnections and I have made some modest contributions along these lines in my own publications (Rendsburg 1982a, 1982b, 1984, 1987). Furthermore, Bernal quotes my work approvingly on several occasions (e.g., p. 457). Moreover, I consider Martin to be a dear friend and a valued colleague in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Cornell University. I mention all of this because from the outset I have to state honestly that I am predisposed to accepting the basic conclusions of *Black Athena* in a most sympathetic manner.

Fourthly, and finally, it is probably premature to judge Bernal's work from an etymological perspective. From his own summary of the planned three volumes of *Black Athena*, it is clear that most of the linguistic evidence will be presented in volume 2. On the other hand, Bernal has presented at least the basic data, so we do have sufficient material with which to proceed.² Moreover, as intimated above, it is obvious that scholarly interest desires at present at least an interim statement on the etymologies put forward by Bernal.

With the preceding statements as background, let us now turn to the substantive treatment of Bernal's etymologies. Here too, however, we need some introductory remarks to establish some ground rules for judging the etymologies proposed in *Black Athena*. It is now generally accepted that Indo-European and Afroasiatic are members of the same language phylum, Nostratic.³ Undoubtedly there are words in the Greek lexicon which are genetically related to Egyptian and/or Semitic. But such contact occurred at an extremely early time, probably no later than c. 10,000 B.C.E. The etymologies discussed by Bernal are due to borrowing at a much later date. Thus, the problem of Nostratic relationships between Greek and Afroasiatic is only tangentially related to our discussion. I mention the issue because Bernal himself does, but in the treatment below we limit ourselves to loanwords. Furthermore, it hardly needs to be added, that for a word to qualify as a loanword in Greek, it must lack a good Indo-European

² While researching this review, I noted that many of the etymologies given by Bernal were proposed by earlier scholars. In the summary of the forthcoming volumes of *Black Athena*, Bernal generally does not cite prior work. I assume full documentation will be given in due course.

³ See most recently Bomhard 1984.

etymology. For most if not all of the words discussed by Bernal, this is the case (more on this below).

The linguist who involves himself with loanwords must also be a historian of sorts. He must have a firm grasp on the historical relationships between two peoples to be able to date when borrowings could have occurred. Bernal states that "*Black Athena* is focused on Greek cultural borrowings from Egypt and the Levant in the second millennium BC" (p. 17) because this is the period of the most fertile contact between the two regions and because "this seems to have been the period in which Greek culture was formed" (p. 18). He is, of course, correct.

But I would also like to add that contacts go back to the third millennium B.C.E. The most direct piece of evidence is the name of a Fifth Dynasty solar temple (*sp-rʿ*) written in hieroglyphic script inscribed on a stone cup found on Cythera (Gordon 1965.43). We can reach even further back into history if we accept the opinion of Sir Arthur Evans, famous excavator of Knossos on Crete: "the indebtedness of Crete to *late pre-dynastic and proto-dynastic* Egypt is now substantiated by a cumulative mass of evidence" (Evans 1921-1936.2.28) (emphasis mine). In other words, although Bernal is certainly right concerning the prime period of contact, i.e., the second millennium B.C.E., we must keep in mind that Egyptian culture was already influencing the Aegean in the third millennium B.C.E. This point is important, because it means that Egyptian words and proper names could have entered the vocabulary of Aegean residents almost two thousand years before we gain our earliest Greek texts, namely, the Linear B documents.

Linguists believe, rightly so, that phonetic law is generally immutable. This means that correspondences will be consistent, whether we are dealing with cognates or borrowings. We have a problem, however, when languages or language families remain in contact for thousands of years, as I believe is the case with Greek and Egypto-Semitic. Let me illustrate this with an example from English. The words *father*, *pater*, and *padre* are all used today in English. Through our knowledge of Indo-European linguistics, we know that the first is the native form derived via Germanic from the reconstructed proto-Indo-European form. The second form is, of course, a borrowing from Latin. The third is also borrowed from Latin, in a sense, but only via its derivative form in Spanish. We know something about the history of contacts, so naturally we conclude that *pater* was borrowed at an early stage of

the English language and that *padre* was borrowed at a later stage of the English language. This is possible because the Romance branch of languages has been in consistent contact with English for two thousand years now.

I raise this point because though in most cases Bernal's etymologies show an internal consistency, occasionally there is an inconsistent phonetic correspondence. But this does not mean that the etymology is therefore not correct. Rather, it indicates that the word may have been borrowed at a different stage in the historical development of Greek or Egyptian or Semitic, or through different channels or via different dialects. To use our above example again, if one were doing a study on the influences of the Italic languages over English, one would not exclude *padre* just because in most cases loanwords reflect the Latin *t* and not the Spanish *d* in such instances.

Some work along these lines has already been carried out by W. A. Ward (1960), with Semitic and Egyptian as his subject matter. Since these language families are integral to Bernal's work, perhaps it is worth summarizing Ward's arguments and results. Ward (1960. 322) acknowledged the "strict set of laws" I alluded to above, but he also added the following: "factors which determine the phonetic structure of a borrowed word are also constantly changing. We may thus conclude that at two given moments of borrowing, separated by a reasonable amount of time, two distinct patterns of phonetic change will be in evidence." In other words, if words X and Y contain the same phoneme, but word X was borrowed in the third millennium B.C.E. and word Y was borrowed in the second millennium B.C.E., the same phoneme may appear differently in the recipient language.

Any number of examples may be given, though one will suffice.⁴ In Old and Middle Egyptian, Semitic *r* and *l* were represented in hieroglyphic script by 3, but in Late Egyptian these two phonemes

⁴ The following information is culled not only from Ward's article, but from W. F. Albright's (1934) important work. For the reader uninitiated in Semitic, let me add the following comment. The West Semitic languages (Ugaritic, Phoenician, Hebrew, Aramaic, etc.) all were written in alphabets which did not render the vowels. Later a system of vocalization was developed for Hebrew. At times I will refer to just the consonants of a word. At other times I will transliterate a word with the vowels. In such cases the vocalization is that of Hebrew, even if I am speaking of another West Semitic language or dialect. Since Hebrew was especially closely related to Phoenician, this leap from the one language to the other is justifiable.

were rendered by *r*. Examples of the former are Semitic *kerem* "orchard, vineyard" = Egyptian *k3mw* and Semitic *'ēl* "god" = Egyptian *ʾ3w*. Examples of the latter are Semitic *brq* "shine" = Egyptian *brq*; Semitic *śr* "hair, wool" = Egyptian *sʿrt*; Semitic *lbš* "clothing" = Egyptian *rbš* "armor" and Semitic *'ēl* "god" = Egyptian *ʾr*.

Another point which needs to be raised is that even during the same general period, the same loanword may appear in more than one form. Examples of this are Semitic *mgdl* "tower" = Late Egyptian *mktr, mkdr, mgdr*; Semitic *tappūah* "apple" = Late Egyptian *dph, dph*; and Semitic *brkt* "pool" = Late Egyptian *brkt, brgt*. All of this illustrates that the process of incorporating loanwords into a recipient language is a complex one.⁵ We expect and often we find consistency. But inconsistency is also known, and such divergencies do not prevent us from concluding that a particular word is not a borrowing.

These parallels are important to keep in mind as we turn now to Bernal's material.⁶ I begin with the question of how Afroasiatic *ḥ* is rendered in Greek borrowings. A most interesting proposal of Bernal is Greek *haima* "blood" as a loanword from Phoenician *ḥayyīm* "life," based on the well-known connection in Semitic religion between the two (pp. 59-60). This is an especially attractive suggestion because the two forms reflect the same diphthong *ai/ay*. But to substantiate it, one would have to show that in other cases Semitic *ḥ* was borrowed into Greek as *h*. Fortunately, there is another example: Greek *harpē* "sickle" = Semitic *ḥrb* "sword" (Brown 1968.178).

On the flip side, however, a similar proposal is problematic. I refer to Bernal's attempt to derive Greek *harma* "chariot" from what he considers Semitic *ḥrm* "net" (p. 60). But the root is probably *ḥrm*, presuming that the Arabic verb *ḥarama* "perforate" and noun *tahrīma* "lace, openwork, mesh" are the etyma of Hebrew and Aramaic *ḥrm* "net." Semitic *ḥ* appears in Greek loanwords as *ch* (see below), not *h*. Phonetically, Bernal's etymology is not totally impossible. He would just have to assume that the Greek form came from a Semitic language in which *ḥ* had already merged with *h*. Certainly, Phoenician is such a language, for the alphabet indicates that such a merger had occurred. On the other hand, there are semantic difficulties. The Mycenaean

⁵ For detailed linguistic discussion see Sapir 1921.192-206.

⁶ In several instances below, I have altered Bernal's transliterations. For example, whereas he does not indicate gemination (see p. xxi), I have done so.

⁷ Actually "dagger" is probably more accurate. See briefly King 1988.80, 82.

evidence points to the original meaning of *harma* (= *a-mo*) to be “wheel” (Ventris and Chadwick 1973.530). Furthermore, I fail to see the connection between either “wheel” and “net” or “chariot” and “net.”

Whereas Semitic *h* appears in Greek words as *h*, the representation of Egyptian *ḥ* in Greek words is a zero value. Bernal proposes to derive the river names *Kephisos/Kaphisos* from Egyptian *ḳbh* “cold water, the First Cataract, fountain, libation, etc.” (p. 49); *Athēnai* from Egyptian *ḥwt nt* “temple of Neit” (p. 51) and *Io* from either *ḥ* “moon” or *ḥt* “cow” (p. 95). In addition, Bernal accepts Barthelemy’s (1763. 226) derivation of *ophis* “snake” from Egyptian *ḥf3w*, Demotic *ḥf* “snake” (p. 171). There is a remarkable consistency here. Moreover, the reflex of Egyptian *ḥ* by a zero value in Greek is consistent with the universally accepted etymology of *Aigyptos* from Egyptian *ḥwt k3 pth* “house of the soul of Ptah” = Memphis. In short, one is impressed with this array of evidence.

The equation of *ophis* = *ḥf3w* requires additional comment. The Greek form is generally seen as cognate with Sanskrit *áhi-* “snake” (Frisk 1954-1972.2.453; Chantraine 1968-1975.842), but the picture is actually more complicated, since Greek *echis* also meaning “snake” appears to be cognate with Sanskrit *áhi-*. And perhaps the rare Hebrew word *ʿep̄eh* “viper” should also enter the discussion. I am content merely to present the data, and to leave it to others to ascertain the ultimate relationship among these various words.

A special word is needed concerning the derivations of *Athēnai* from Egyptian *ḥwt nt*; *Aigyptos* from Egyptian *ḥwt k3 pth* and *Io* from Egyptian *ḥt* “cow” (one of two options). A basic development in the history of the Egyptian language is the loss of final *-t*, a process which occurred in Late Egyptian for certain, but which may have been underway already in Middle Egyptian or even Old Egyptian (Černý and Groll 1978.6; Gardiner 1957.34 n. 1a). Consequently, the lack of a *t* in the beginning of *Aigyptos* is to be explained by its having been dropped in the Egyptian word *ḥwt*; the lack of a *t* at the end of *Athēnai* is to be explained by its having been dropped in the Egyptian word *nt*; and the lack of a *t* at the end of *Io* is to be explained by its having dropped from *ḥt*.

However, if the derivation of *Athēnai* from *ḥwt nt* is to be defended, then the *th* in *Athēnai* must be the reflex of the final *-t* in *ḥwt*,

which in this case remained.⁸ That is to say, if *hwt nt* is the source of *Athēnai*, one final *-t* remained while the other was lost. I would explain this case by postulating the borrowing during a period in the history of the Egyptian language when final *-t* was lost in absolute forms (*nt*), but was still retained in construct forms (*hwt*) (Gardiner 1957.34 n. 1a).

On the semantic side, it may seem odd to derive the name of a deity from a form which means “temple of Neit.” But there are well-known parallels to this, namely, the goddess Hathor = *hwt hr* “temple of Horus,” and the deity Bethel, literally “house/temple of El/God,” attested to in the Bible in Gen 31:13 (see also 35:7); Jer 48:13; in the Elephantine papyri and elsewhere (Hyatt 1939; Davidson 1979.146).

Next I would like to address the related issue of Semitic *h* and Egyptian *ḥ* and *ḥ* in Greek words. As noted above, the expected correspondence is Semitic *h* = Greek *ch*. The paradigm example is Semitic *hrš* “gold” = Greek *chrysos* (mentioned by Bernal on p. 41; see also Brown 1969.159). Accordingly, Bernal’s proposal to derive Greek *mechri(s)* “up to, as far as” from Semitic *mḥr* (cf. Akkadian *māḥri* “in front of”) is perfectly justified. Similarly, Greek *chēra* “widow” = Egyptian *ḥ3rt* “widow” (p. 62) is an impressive proposal.

In these two instances Indo-European etymologies have been proposed. For the former there is Armenian *merj* “near” (Frisk 1954-1972.2.222; Chantraine 1968-1975.692), and for the latter Latin *heres* “heir” is commonly cited (Frisk 1954-1972.2.1095-96; Chantraine 1968-1975.1257). In evaluating whether *mechri(s)* should be related to Akkadian *māḥri* or to Armenian *merj*, the following should be kept in mind. While it would be atypical for prepositions to be borrowed from one language family to another, note that Akkadian *ana* “to, for” and *in(a)* “in, on” resemble their Indo-European counterparts and are not cognate with other Semitic prepositions (although the latter now appears in Eblaite as well). As far as Latin *heres* is concerned, it is not only semantically more distant than Egyptian *ḥ3rt*, but the presence of *-ed-* in all the oblique cases marks the form as morphologically anomalous. I merely present the evidence and leave it to the reader to decide whether Bernal’s Egypto-Semitic vocables or the traditional

⁸ The use of Greek *th* and not *t* to represent an Egyptian *t* is not altogether surprising. Greek transliterations of Hebrew proper names also commonly use *th* for Hebrew *t*. Thus Hebrew *terah* “Terah” = Greek *Tharra*; Hebrew *tāmār* “Tamar” = Greek *Thamar*, etc.

Indo-European etyma are to be correlated with the Greek words under discussion. Phonetically, there is no problem in either direction.

More troublesome is Bernal's attempt to explain Greek (*w*)*anax* "king" from Egyptian *ḥt dt* "may he live forever" (pp. 61-62, 94). First, it is hard to imagine how the Egyptian *ḥ* was borrowed into Greek as a *w*. Secondly, we would have to assume that the final *ḥ* of *ḥt* and the initial *d* of *dt* merged to form the *x* of (*w*)*anax*, a most unlikely phonetic development.⁹ (The lack of a *t* in the Greek form would not be a difficulty, given what has been said about final *-t* in Egyptian.) Thirdly, the passage of an expression meaning "may he live forever" to a noun "king" would be quite extraordinary.

Another subject which requires extended discussion is the treatment of the labials in loanwords. Apparently there are two standard correspondences of Semitic *b*, one with Greek *p* and one with Greek *b*. For the former, I have in mind the aforementioned *ḥrb* "sword" = *harpē* "sickle," and the generally accepted derivations of *Europa* from Semitic *ʿrb* "west, evening, enter" (noted by Bernal on p. 69) and of *gryps* "griffin" from Semitic *kērûb* "cherub" (Brown 1968.184-88).

There are also sufficient examples of Semitic *b* = Greek *b*. The clearest cases are *ʿērābôn* "pledge" = *arrabôn* "pledge" (Brown 1968.174-78) and *bōšem* "balsam" = *balsamon* "balsam" (Steiner 1977.123-29). Accordingly, there is nothing inherently wrong in Bernal's attempt to revive the derivations of Greek *bōmos* "platform, altar" from Semitic *bāmāh* "high place" (p. 59); *Belos* from Semitic *bʿl* "Baal, lord" (p. 95) and *Kabeiroi* from Semitic *kabbîr* "great" (p. 312). In presenting this evidence, we must bear in mind that even within Semitic there is a well-attested interchange of the voiced and unvoiced labials *b* and *p*, e.g., *pʿl/bʿl* "work, make, do"; *npš/nbš* "soul," etc. Thus it is not surprising to find Semitic loanwords in Greek with orig-

⁹ The only possible parallel I can think of, and it is an extremely remote parallel at best, is the representation of the name of the Persian king *Khshayarsha* in Greek and Hebrew, to wit, *Xerxes* and *ḏḥašwērōš*. Note that the first Greek *x* equates with Hebrew *ḥ* + *š*. This comes close to the equation of Greek *x* and Egyptian *ḥ* + *d*. The latter consonant is often the equivalent of sibilants (though admittedly never *š*) in both common Egypto-Semitic roots and in loanwords between Egyptian and Semitic (Ward 1962.403-06, 411-12; Ward 1963.425-26, 435-36). I repeat, however, that this is only a very remote analogy. Obviously, it has no direct bearing on Bernal's attempt to relate (*w*)*anax* and *ḥt dt*.

inal *b* represented by both *b* and *p*. The first of the aforementioned words, Greek *bōmos*, is often derived from an Indo-European root *g^weh₂* “go, walk, step” (Chantraine 1968-1975.204), but this is a slightly different meaning. A *bōmos* was not something tread upon, rather it was a platform or altar upon which people presumably did not walk.

On the Egyptian side, the phoneme *b* is either preserved as *b* in Greek, or it appears as *ph*. A virtually sure example of the former is Late Egyptian *br* “small boat” which appears in Greek as *baris* (pp. 61, 263). This in turn lends some support to Bernal’s suggestion that the etymology of *Thēbai* is *ḏb3t* “palace, shrine” (p. 51), although I am less sure about the match of the initial consonants here.¹⁰ Bernal also tries to relate *basileus* “king” to Egyptian *p3 sr* “the official” (pp. 61-62). But in light of the fact that the former appears in Linear B as *qa-si-re-u* (Ventris and Chadwick 1973.576), one must assume an earlier form *g^wasileu-* which only later shifted to *basileu-*. Therefore, this proposal is greatly weakened.

In two instances Egyptian *b* appears in Greek as *ph*. One has already been mentioned, namely, *ḳbh* = *Kephisos/Kaphisos*. The other is the very convincing etymology of *sophia* “wisdom,” which Bernal wishes to relate to the Egyptian verb *sb3* “teach” and the noun *sb3yt* “teaching, instruction” (p. 62).¹¹ As was the case with the Semitic labials discussed above, also in Egyptian there is an interchange between voiced *b* and voiceless *p* (Ward 1975.63-67). Accordingly, it is to be expected that Egyptian *b* appears in Greek sometimes as *b* and sometimes as *ph*.

As far as Egyptian *p* is concerned, Bernal’s etymologies are consistent in that they all show Greek *p* as the correspondence. The most realistic proposal is *p3 mr* “the tomb, the pyramid” = *pyramis* “pyramid” (p. 47). Also possible is *sp3t* “nome, district” = *Sparta* (p. 53). In the latter equation, however, one must assume retention of the final *-t* in the Egyptian form, which generally has not been the case in the examples presented thus far.

¹⁰ There is no other instance of Egyptian *ḏ* in Greek to serve as a control for the initial consonant in the *Thēbai* = *ḏb3t* equation. (I omit the *(w)anax* = *ḳnh ḏt* equation.) However, in as much as the closely related Egyptian word *ḏb3* “box” was borrowed into Hebrew as *tēbāh* “ark, basket,” and since Hebrew *t* often equates with Greek *th* (see above note 8), the law of transitivity may permit the identification of *Thēbai* and *ḏb3t*. Again we must posit a loss of final *-t* in the Egyptian etymon.

¹¹ As an aside, note that Greek *sophia* was then borrowed into Hebrew, in a sense, since it appears in the bilingual pun in Prov 31:27 (Wolters 1985; Rendsburg 1988).

On the other hand, the case of *p3 šidôn* “he of Sidon” or *pr šidôn* “house of Sidon” = *Poseidon* (p. 67) presents all sorts of difficulties. First of all, neither of the posited etyma is actually attested in Egyptian. There are parallels to these phrases, but generally they are with Egyptian toponyms or divine names, e.g., *pr ḫmn* “house of Amun.” The construction with a Phoenician city name or divine name would, I believe, be unique. Secondly, on the Greek side, Bernal must contend with the fact that *Poseidôn* is only one of several forms the name takes, and, indeed, it may be a secondary development. In Cretan and Boeotian the name appears as *Poteidaôn*. It is true that a Phoenician *š* can appear in Greek as *t*; Sidon’s neighboring city of Tyre (*šôr* = *Tyros*) is a well-known example (Steiner 1982.66-67). But this information has to be taken into account. In the end, this is a weak proposal.

Egyptian *f* appears in Greek as *ph*, which is naturally to be expected. The two examples advanced by Bernal are the aforementioned *ophis* = *ḫf3w* and the derivation of Greek *xiphos* “sword” from Egyptian *sft* “sword” (p. 61). The latter seems perfectly reasonable, even though we have no parallel to the initial consonant correspondence. Again the final *-t* of the Egyptian form must have dropped.

Next we turn to the velar consonants. The Semitic phoneme *k* appears in a variety of ways, but in no case would we want to disqualify a particular etymology. Thus, as already mentioned, *kērûb* “cherub” = *gryps* “griffin”; again as noted above, *kabbîr* “great” = *Kabeiroi*; and *kuttōnet* “tunic” = *chiton* “dress” (p. 41). Once more, however, such interchanges are already seen within Semitic. Note the two roots *msk* and *mzg*, both meaning “mix,” which incidentally equate with Greek *misgō* (Brown 1969.153-55).¹² Also, note that in Eblaite the divine name or epithet *ka-ba-du* is also written *ḫa-a-pa-tu* (Pomponio 1983.145 n. 18), and that the name of an Eblaite prince is written both *ik-su-up-da-mu* and *iḫ-su-up-da-mu* (Pettinato 1981.61).

More consistent is the treatment of Semitic *q* in loanwords in Greek. In each case it is *k*. Moreover, the words proposed by Bernal are all convincing. The city names based on the stem *Kary(at)* are derived from Semitic *qrt* (p. 50); *kudos* “divine glory” is derived from Semitic *qdš* “holy” (p. 60) and *nektar* “nectar” is equated with Semitic *niqtār* “incense” (p. 60, with credit to S. Levin¹³). Furthermore,

¹² In this instance, it is likely that the Semitic forms are borrowed from Indo-European.

¹³ See Levin 1971.

there is the well established etymology of *Kadmos* from Semitic *qdm* “east” (p. 69), and here it is worth mentioning *kōthōn* “cup” identified with the relatively rare Semitic usage *qṯn* “vessel” (Brown 1969. 157). What is especially striking about all these equations is that not only do the consonants match perfectly, but the vowels do too. For example, Hebrew *qōdeš* “holy” is a *u*-class segolate whose proto-form can be reconstructed as **qudš*. Greek *kudos* shows the same first vowel.

Similarly, Egyptian *ḳ* (thought to be the same sound as Semitic *q*) is also represented in Greek by *k*. Bernal’s sole example is the aforementioned Greek *Kephisos/Kaphisos* derived from Egyptian *ḳbh*. This accords with another well-known example, not discussed by Bernal, Greek *kommi* “gum” borrowed from Egyptian *ḳmyt* “gum, resin” (Sturtevant 1947.144-45). Note once more that the Egyptian final *-t* is not represented in the Greek form.

Afroasiatic *g* appears in Greek only as *g*, although there are very few examples. The clearest is the Greek particle *gar* which is to be related to Egyptian *grt* (p. 62).¹⁴ This makes Bernal’s proposal to derive Greek *gaia/gē* “earth” from Semitic *gayʾ/gēʾ* “valley” (p. 58) quite attractive. Once more one is struck by the correspondence of the vowels in this pair.

Other proposed etymologies have no difficulty whatsoever. A convincing suggestion is the etymology of the city name *Megara* which Pausanias claimed meant “cave, subterranean chamber” (p. 50). The Hebrew word *mēʿārāh* not only means “cave,” but the vowels are exactly those of *Megara*. From Ugaritic *mḡrt*, we learn that the second consonant in the Semitic form is *ḡ*. This phoneme was consistently rendered by Greek *g* in the Septuagint, the most famous instances being *Gaza* and *Gomorra* (Blau 1982.33-5).

One is equally impressed by such suggestions as *martyr* “witness” = Egyptian *mtrw* “witness” (pp. 47, 61); *naiō* “dwell” and *naos* “dwelling, temple, shrine” = Semitic *nāweh* “place, abode” (p. 60); and *Rhea* = Egyptian *rʿt* “sun-goddess” (p. 63) (with loss of final *-t* once more). In none of these do I perceive any difficulties on the etymological level. A special point should be made concerning *naiō/naos* = *nāweh*. The latter form actually occurs in Hebrew with the meaning

¹⁴ Perhaps also here we should invoke the loss of final *-t* to explain the relationship between two words.

“temple, shrine” in Exod 15:13, and it is used as a verb in Exod 15:2. A weaker suggestion is *deilos* “wretched” = Semitic *dāl* “poor, low” (p. 60). The Homeric metrical evidence points to an earlier Greek form with **dw-*, which would be difficult to dovetail with Semitic *dal*.

Above I noted that the words which Bernal treats generally lack good Indo-European etymologies. I will not present all the data, but the following comments culled from the two standard etymological dictionaries of Greek bear this out. I present the information in chart form.

Greek word	Frisk 1954-1972 (with volume and page)	Chantraine 1968-1975 (with page reference)
<i>Athēnai</i>	Wie die Göttin ist auch ihr Name vorgriechisch und unerklärt (1.28)	théonyme inexpliqué (28)
<i>gaia/gē</i>	unklar (1.282); ohne etymologie (1.303)	Ni <i>gē</i> , ni <i>gaia</i> n'ont d'étymologie établie (219)
<i>haima</i>	sichere aussergriechische Verwandte fehlen (1.39)	il n'y a pas de nom du sang common à tout l'indo-européen (34)
<i>naiō</i>	das Verbalstamm <i>nas-</i> . . . steht isoliert (2.287)	ignorée (733)
<i>nektar</i>	ohne sichere Etymologie (2.301)	l'étymologie est obscure (741)
<i>Rhea</i>	ohne Etymologie (2.647)	[no entry]
<i>sophia</i>	unerklärt (2.755)	pas d'étymologie (1030-31)
<i>xiphos</i>	Etymologie unbekannt (2.337)	obscure (767)

In some cases, Frisk and Chantraine present conceivable etymologies, but I find Bernal's derivations more convincing. A good example is *kudos* “divine glory” which both Frisk (1954-1972.2.40-41)

and Chantraine (1968-1975.595-96) relate to a Slavic word meaning “wonder, miracle,” e.g., Russian *čúdo*. The Semitic root *qdš* “holy” is closer in meaning, however. This is made especially clear in the famous passage in Isa 6:3 *qādōš qādōš qādōš yhw̄h šēbā’ôt mēlō’ kol hā’āreš kēbōdō* “Holy, holy, holy, the LORD of Hosts, his glory fills all the earth,” where “holy” and “glory” appear in poetic parallelism.¹⁵

In the end, there are very few of Bernal’s etymologies which are not borne out. I have not discussed every one of his proposals, but I think the above survey demonstrates that his approach is sound. In the main, they are internally consistent. When they are inconsistent, they can often be explained by inner Egypto-Semitic developments. Or, we may always rely on our historical overview presented at the outset. An anomaly here or there can always be explained on the analogy of our *pater/padre* example. An Egyptian or Semitic word which was borrowed very early in the period under discussion may not show the same phonetic correspondences as a word which was borrowed later on. I have also alluded to the different dialects of both Greek and Egyptian. The channels of transmission can also effect the manner in which a word is borrowed. Thus, divergencies from established norms do not render posited etymologies any less likely.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to present an etymology of my own, namely that of *makar* “blessed.” The comments of Frisk (1954-1972.2.162) “ohne Etymologie” and Chantraine (1968-1975.659) “pas d’étymologie” allow us to look to Afroasiatic for a suitable etymology. Bernal proposes Egyptian *m3^chrw* “true of voice,” a common idiom in Egyptian literature (p. 61), but there are difficulties

¹⁵ For additional evidence consult the following passages: Lev 10:3, Isa 10:16-17, 11:9-10, Ezek 28:22, Ps 29:2, 63:3, 96:8-9, 1 Chr 16:29. In these verses either the roots *qdš* and *kbd* are parallel or they are collocated in a way which reflects their close semantic relationship. The Ezekiel passage may be especially important, since the word-pair occurs in a prophecy against Sidon, obviously one of the Canaanite cities with close ties to Greece. If we assume, as I do, that the prophets’ words to the foreign nations often reflect the language of the intended audience, then the use of *qdš* and *kbd* in Ezek 28:22 may indicate a close tie between these two vocables in Phoenician. Support for this hypothesis is forthcoming from the fact that Ps 29:2 also includes *qdš* and *kbd* as parallel terms. Psalm 29, as virtually all biblicists agree, is a northern composition. I am grateful to Richard C. Goerwitz, a graduate student at the University of Chicago, for his quick response to my request to produce via his computer database a list of verses wherein both *qdš* and *kbd* appear.

with the phonetics. Egyptian *ḥ* = Greek *k* is unexpected, notwithstanding my above comments on the interchange of *k* and *ḥ* in Eblaite and the example of Semitic *k* = Greek *ch*.

Instead, I would look to Semitic *brk* “bless” for the origin of Greek *makar*. Two phonological developments must be posited. First we have to assume a labial interchange, with the Semitic *b* becoming *m* in Greek. As a parallel within Egypto-Semitic, note that the toponym *lēbānôn* “Lebanon” appears in hieroglyphic script as *rmnn*. Or, in the other direction, note that Egyptian *snb* “healthy” equals Semitic *šlm* “whole, healthy.” Furthermore, we have to assume a metathesis between the final two consonants in *makar/brk*, but as Bernal himself notes, this is quite common when the liquids *l* and *r* occur, especially “between 2nd and 3rd position” (p. 47). Consequently, there should be no major objection to my etymology for *makar*.

In closing, let me reiterate my above conclusion that most of the etymologies proposed in *Black Athena* stand up to the tests of linguistic analysis. As with all pioneering studies, mistakes are to be expected. But I am more impressed with the gains made than I am troubled by the errors committed. The skepticism mentioned at the beginning of this article is unfounded.

Cornell University

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Albright, W. F. 1934. *The Vocalization of the Egyptian Syllabic Orthography*. New Haven.
- Barthelemy, J.-J. 1763. "Réflexions générales sur les rapports des langues égyptienne phénicienne et grecque," *Recueils des Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions* 32.212-33.
- Blau, J. 1982. *On Polyphony in Biblical Hebrew*. Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, VI/2. Jerusalem.
- Bomhard, A. 1984. *Toward Proto-Nostratic: A New Approach to the Comparison of Indo-European and Afroasiatic*. Amsterdam.
- Brown, J. P. 1968. "Literary Contexts of the Common Hebrew-Greek Vocabulary," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 13.163-91.
- 1969. "The Mediterranean Vocabulary of the Vine," *Vetus Testamentum* 19.146-70.
- Černý, J. and Groll, S. I. 1978. *A Late Egyptian Grammar*. Rome.
- Chantraine, P. 1968-1975. *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, 4 vols. Paris.
- Davidson, R. 1979. *Genesis 12-50*. Cambridge.
- Evans, A. 1921-1936. *The Palace of Minos at Knossos*, 4 vols. London.
- Frisk, H. 1954-1972. *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 3 vols. Heidelberg.
- Gardiner, A. 1957. *Egyptian Grammar*. Oxford.
- Gordon, C. H. 1965. *The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilizations*. New York.
- Hyatt, J. P. 1939. "The Deity Bethel and the Old Testament," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 59.81-98.
- King, P. J. 1988. *Amos, Hosea, Micah — An Archaeological Commentary*. Philadelphia.

- Levin, S. 1971. "The Etymology of *nektar*, Exotic Scents in Early Greece," *Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici* 13.31-50.
- Pettinato, G. 1981. *The Archives of Ebla*. Garden City, NY.
- Pomponio, F. 1983. "I nomi divini nei testi di Ebla," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 15.141-56.
- Rendsburg, G. A. 1982a. "Semitic PRZL / BRZL / BRDL 'Iron,'" *Scripta Mediterranea* 3.54-71.
- 1982b. "On Jan Best's 'Decipherment' of Minoan Linear A," *Journal of the Ancient Near East Society* 14.79-87.
- 1984. "Notes on Genesis XXXV," *Vetus Testamentum* 34.361-65.
- 1987. "Gen 10:13-14: An Authentic Hebrew Tradition Concerning the Origin of the Philistines," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 13.89-96.
- 1988. "Bilingual Wordplay in the Bible," *Vetus Testamentum* 28.354-57.
- Sapir, E. 1921. *Language*. New York.
- Steiner, R. C. 1977. *The Case for Fricative-Laterals in Proto-Semitic*. New Haven.
- 1982. *Affricated Šade in the Semitic Languages*. New York.
- Sturtevant, E. H. 1947. *An Introduction to Linguistic Science*. New Haven.
- Ventris, M., and Chadwick, J. 1973. *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*. Cambridge.
- Ward, W. A. 1960. "Some Effects of Varying Phonetic Conditions on Semitic Loan Words in Egyptian," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 80.322-27.
- 1962. "Some Egypto-Semitic Roots," *Orientalia* 31.397-412.
- 1963. "Notes on Some Semitic Loan-Words and Personal Names in Late Egyptian," *Orientalia* 32.413-36.
- 1975. "The Biconsonantal Root *b3 and Remarks on Bilabial Interchange in Egyptian," *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache* 102.60-67.
- Wolters, A. 1985. "Šôpiyyâ (Prov 31:27) as Hymnic Participle and Play on *Sophia*," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104.57-87.