

RACISM IN CLASSICAL ARCHAEOLOGY*

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From c. 2300 BC onwards the proto-Minyan culture appears in Greece. Its closely related successor, the Minyan culture, has covered in the Peloponnesus the period between c. 2000 and 1600 BC.¹ As in other regions of Greece in this peninsula another culture, characterized by Matt-Painted Pottery, existed alongside the Minyan one during the same period.² In the last decades of the 17th century BC both cultures are replaced by a new culture from overseas. This last conclusion is based upon the destruction of exclusively coastal settlements of the two former cultures in both the Peloponnesus and elsewhere in Greece.³

A next generation of non-racist archaeologists will undoubtedly confirm that the original homeland of the proto-Minyan culture lies in inland Thrace and that its Minyan successor comprises the Thracian coast between Molyvopurgo in the Chalcidian peninsula and Troy, many Cycladic islands, Boeotia and the rest of southern Greece respectively.⁴ This new generation will also sustain the earlier expressed view that the Matt-Painted Pottery culture, present in both the Greek Mainland and the Cyclades, also comprises the coastal areas of southern Anatolia up to Tarsus in the East, where it probably stemmed from.⁵

The second generation of non-racist archaeologists will discover that in a much later period, for which written sources are extant, a Thracian tribe lived in the island of Thasos still using the material culture once named Minyan by their predecessors.⁶ Then they will also discover that the Matt-Painted Pottery tradition had continued far into historic times along the southern Anatolian coast among Luwian population groups. Thus they will be far less shocked than classical archaeologists are nowadays when reading in the literary works of ancient Greek writers that Greece once had been inhabited by Thracian and Luwian population

*A response to Martin Bernal 1991.

¹ Caskey 1960: 301 ff.

² Buck 1964: 231-313.

³ Van Royen & Isaac 1979: *passim*.

⁴ Best & Yadin 1973: *passim*.

⁵ Goldman 1956: 165.

⁶ Best 1976: 164-167.

groups. So in the next century maps will be composed on which concentrations of "Minyan" and "Matt-Painted Pottery" sites happen to coincide with Thracian and Luwian areas of habitation as mentioned by ancient Greek authors.

Fortunately for future, non-racist hellenists there are a time and a space left for the arrival of the Greeks in the southern Balkan area named Greece after them. For the bringers of war-chariots and swords of a Syrian type on their landing on the coasts of *exclusively* southern Greece in the last decades of the 17th century BC are considered to have been "the creators of Mycenaean civilization". And it is true that even the five Linear B tablets or so, found in the Mycenaean "Old Palace" with *Cretan ground-plan* (1400-1300 BC) at Pylos contain an archaic form of the Greek language.

So far so good. However, the consequences of the above reconstruction based upon a combination of archaeological, historical and linguistic data are unacceptable in racist thinking. For from an archaeological point of view there is no denial that the presence of "Mycenaean" war-chariots is already attested in Syria from the 18th century BC onwards, if it is allowed to use "Mycenaean" Syrian sword types as pointers towards this region.⁷ That the "Mycenaean" tholos tombs in Mycenae, Peristeria and Volimidia were largely filled with Egyptian and Syrian grave goods is clear to any prehistorian who has studied their contents.

Now the ancient Greek historical tradition itself wants to have it that Danaos should have arrived in the Argolis from Egypt and Kadmos in Boeotia from Phoenicia.⁸ Although the ancient Greeks had named themselves Danaoi after precisely this Danaos, in racist conceptual thinking he must have been an Egyptian, like Kadmos must have been a Phoenician. Therefore hellenists prefer to discard this complete ancient Greek literary tradition as fictitious legends. The possibility that both immigrants might have been Greeks is, of course, not even considered.

As for the clearly recognizable, rather large Egyptian and Semitic vocabulary in ancient Greek—not surprisingly already present in its earliest, "Mycenaean" dialect—this is simply explained away by hellenists as a set of loanwords derived during commercial contacts.

In short, the alternative explanation, namely that Greek war-chariot-eers just had formed one of the so-called "Hyksos" components in the coastal areas of the Near East during the 18th and 17th centuries BC before they embarked with destination Crete and Greece is unbearable

⁷ Crowel 1981: *passim*.

⁸ Stubbings 1963: 11-14.

to racist minds. Not because this would explain the undeniably Afroasiatic luggage they brought with them on their arrival in Greece. Not because this would confirm at last the ancient Greek historical tradition on their coming to Greece from lands dominated by "Hyksos" groups at the time. Not because of the huge mass of Afroasiatic terms in their vocabulary, which only then would become understandable. No, because of the implication that "the purest race in the world, the ancient Greeks" would have ethnically intermingled not only with other Indo-European peoples like Thracians and Luwians in Greece itself, but also with Phoenicians, Jews, Egyptians and Nubians, in short Semites and Blacks in the Levant and all that during no less than two full centuries!

And yet, which *prehistorian* is seriously going to deny the identity of the "Mycenaean" tholos tombs in Messenia and in Cyprus and Ugarit?⁹ Which *specialist in Semitic linguistics* is going to ridicule the equation of the royal Ugaritic name Niqmadu with the Greek one of Nikomedes?

Therefore it is rather saddening to even find the author of *Black Athena - The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* fiercely fighting the possibility that Greeks might have formed part of the Hyksos conglomerate as a separate *linguistic* group.¹⁰ This is something quite different than to state "that the Dutch ancient historian Jan Best hit upon the desperate [sic] expedient of claiming that the Hyksos were the original Greeks". For contrary to Martin Bernal not the least specialists in Indo-European linguistics subsume Armenian, Greek and Indo-Iranian under one and the same subgroup within the family of Indo-European languages.¹¹ And as an originally linguistic continuum does suggest as well an originally geographic one, the Transcaucasian area becomes a very attractive candidate for the homeland of the war-chariot indeed, from which both Indo-Iranians and Greeks would have spread over the Near East.¹² The two other objections of Bernal against the arrival of the Greeks from coastal areas in the Near East are that any putative Indo-Aryan speakers among the Hyksos were certainly outnumbered by Hurrians and that the vast majority of the Hyksos in Lower Egypt were Semitic in both material culture and language. My own conclusion from these observations would be that at least the admixture of Hurrian and Semitic blood in the veins of the Greek war-charioteers must have been considerable and in any case comparable to the large number of Semitic words in the Greek language. However, as my American opponent prefers to put it: "Any one of these objections would

⁹ Baurain 1984: 93.

¹⁰ Bernal 1991: 400-402.

¹¹ Crossland 1971: 853; 867.

¹² Drews 1988: *passim*.

be enough to sink Best's scenario. The three together make it a complete non-starter."¹³ In classical studies it still seems to be a long way to go to non-racism.

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¹³Bernal 1991: 402; *Antiquity* 64 (1990) 168-169.