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Up the River  
or Down the River?  
An Afrocentrist Dilemma

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The nature of the Nile Valley and the Nile River's function as a unifying factor for Egypt, Sudan, and the rest of Africa are a major subject in the Afrocentric world view and historiography.<sup>1</sup> The writings of the Afrocentric pan-Negroid school, especially those of the prominent Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop and his disciples, reveal, in my view, the inner dilemma of the Afrocentric view and its historical reconstruction.<sup>2</sup> The argument over who has seniority in the Nile Valley—Nubia or Egypt—is a subject in itself, which I will not address here. Our question is why was it necessary to choose at all? If "Africa" is described as a racial and cultural unity, of which Egypt is an indivisible part,<sup>3</sup> why is it important to ask who has seniority—Egypt, Nubia, or equatorial Africa and its many nations?

My aim here is not to touch on the question of Africa's cultural homogeneity. My sole intention is to suppose that the classical view that the river Nile was responsible for the uniqueness of ancient Egypt as a physical and cultural entity, different in nature from the rest of Africa.

THE ADORATION OF THE NILE

Hail to thee, O Nile, that issues from the earth  
and comes to keep Egypt alive! . . .  
He that waters the meadows which He created . . .  
He that makes to drink the desert . . .  
He who makes barley and brings emmer into being . . .  
He who brings grass into being for the cattle . . .

He who makes every beloved tree to grow . . .  
O, Nile, verdant art thou, who makes man and cattle to live.<sup>4</sup>

The ancient Egyptians considered the flow of the Nile River from south to north to be the “normal” natural course of any river. A victory stele was erected for Thutmose I (1504–1492 B.C.) at Tombos, just north of the third cataract, in which the king boasts of his northern frontier at the Euphrates “that inverted (or: circling) water which goes downstream in going upstream (or that circling water which flows north [= downstream] in flowing south). This curious designation reflects Egyptian amazement at a river which, unlike the Nile, flows towards the south.”<sup>5</sup>

But what was most important to the ancient Egyptians were the functions of the Nile as the cultivator of Egypt, primarily its northern region (Lower Egypt). The ancient Egyptian name for this land, Kmt, “the black one,” emphasized the singular nature of Lower Egypt compared to other regions and the major contribution of the Nile in creating and preserving this singularity.<sup>6</sup> The myth of the resurrection of the god Osiris is deeply rooted in the Nile, the natural force that fertilized the land of Egypt. It is Osiris who built canals with floodgates and regulators to prevent the Nile from overflowing the neighboring countryside and turning it into a marsh.<sup>7</sup> “Osiris was regarded as the power of the moon, which produced the Nile-flood and therefore all the fertility in Egypt.”<sup>8</sup> *The Book of Making the Spirit of Osiris (or The Spirit Burial)*, for example, says: “Hail, Osiris. . . . Hap[y] (the Nile) appeareth by the command of thy mouth. Making men and women to live on the fluxes which come from thy members, making every field to flourish.”<sup>9</sup>

The significance of the river is manifested in the cosmogony of Pharaoh Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV) of Amarna (1353–1335 B.C.), in “The Great Hymn to the Aten”:

You made Hapy (h’py) (the Nile God) in dat (the Netherworld).  
You bring him [as flood waters] when you will,  
To nourish the people.  
You made a heavenly Hapy [i.e. rain] descend for them.<sup>10</sup>

According to this cosmogonical picture, there is one Nile in heaven that brings rain to strange nations, and another Nile on earth that issues from the underworld for Egypt alone.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, all the various cosmogonical systems in ancient Egypt shared the perception of overwhelming importance ascribed to the Nile and its annual flooding.<sup>12</sup> The Nile occupied an important position in Egyptian culture; it influenced the development of mathematics, geography, and the calendar; Egyptian geometry advanced

due to the practice of land measurement “because the overflow of the Nile caused the boundary of each person’s land to disappear.”<sup>13</sup> “The most important event in Egyptian life was the annual flooding of the Nile, the inundation period, which coincided closely with the helical rising of Sirius the Dog, the brightest star in the earth’s hemisphere just before dawn.”<sup>14</sup> Many wall paintings reveal the different functions of the Nile in religion, fishing, and trade.<sup>15</sup> In no other African religion had a river such status and function in its myths of creation.<sup>16</sup>

Classical writers from Herodotus to Diodorus Siculus and Strabo, as well as Jewish writers from Philo of Alexandria to the sages, carried on this tradition, recognizing and praising the Nile’s contribution to Egypt’s unique nature. When Herodotus wrote the famous words “Egypt is the gift of the Nile,” he was referring to the thick mud and black soil of the Delta brought by the river from Ethiopia, stressing the uniqueness of Lower Egypt. “What is Egypt but a river valley, which the water floods?” Strabo asks rhetorically (1.2.25). “Egypt is a land rich in plains, with deep soil,”<sup>17</sup> wrote Philo of Alexandria, “very productive of all that human nature needs, and particularly of corn. For the river of this country, in the height of summer, when other streams, whether winter torrents or spring-fed, are said to dwindle, rises and overflows, and its flood makes a lake of the fields which need no rain but every year bear a plenty of crop of good produce of every kind” (Philo, *De vita Mosis*, 1.5–6 and see also 114–118).<sup>18</sup>

According to Karl Butzer, the roots of Egypt’s agricultural system “must be sought in both Africa and Asia, from among a wide array of economic traditions.”<sup>19</sup> Domesticated animals, for example, gradually expanded into Egypt from Asia. However, Egypt’s agriculture and system of food production, which finally appeared in northern Egypt shortly before 5000 B.C., were indigenous in character.

Thus we find that all of the ancient and classical sources shared the view that the Nile was the major factor in the creation and flourishing of ancient Egyptian civilization and the main force behind its distinct and unique character—a view shared by modern historians. I too am focusing on the river, following the classical sources and emphasizing its dominant role in shaping Egyptian culture (and, in part, the Kushite culture as well), very different from the inner-African cultures that supposedly had contacts other than trading various kinds of goods such as gold, slaves, and ivory.

Yet none of all these sources, be they of ancient Egypt, classical antiquity, or the Hellenistic-Roman period, mentions anything about the Nile as a water route between the Nile Valley (Nubia and Egypt) and inner Africa, nor do any Egyptian records in our possession describe the Nile as Egypt’s route to sub-Saharan equatorial Africa. Egyptian records and ship logs reveal the importance of the Nile in unifying Egypt; the Egyptian kings

(and their Ptolemaic successors) made regular river trips from temple to temple, but nothing is said about frequent trips up the river from Upper Egypt to Sudan—the gateway to inner Africa. The main function of the river was the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt: “It was the Nile, and traffic upon it, that was in time to permit the creation of a great Egyptian kingdom.”<sup>20</sup>

The Nile could hardly replace the desert caravan routes through the Sahara because the southern part of the Nile provides neither good water nor land routes. Not only were travelers forced to bypass the six cataracts between central Sudan and southern Egypt,<sup>21</sup> they also had to bypass the river valley. As a result the Middle Nile was actually a backwater, even though light boats (made of papyrus), used for fishing and transporting goods, could be easily carried from one place to another over land, thus bypassing the cataracts. Stronger and larger boats and ships, carrying heavy commodities, sailed primarily to and from the sea on the northern part of the river.<sup>22</sup> Early in the sixth dynasty (2291–2323 B.C.) the governor of Upper Egypt, Weni, excavated five canals to overcome part of the natural obstacles,<sup>23</sup> and in the eighth year of Sesostri III (1870 B.C.), the period in which Lower Nubia was subjugated, a canal 150 cubits long, 20 cubits wide, and 15 cubits deep had been constructed at the cataract at Aswan.<sup>24</sup>

If this is so, then the Nile, as a means of communication, barely served as a connecting link between Egypt and the Sudan, while the Lower Nile permitted contact and interaction between Lower and Upper Egypt and Lower and Upper Nubia, serving as a major factor in the unification and centralization of the land and its kingdom.<sup>25</sup> One had to leave the water route and later return to the river several times, and afterward continue over land farther south through Sudan to the interior of Africa. There was no easy way into the heart of Africa from the Nile Valley. The Egyptians used donkeys on caravan routes to carry on the long-distance trade with the south. But there is no mention of donkeys making their way into the heart of Africa, and the journey there and back, off the track of desert roads, must have been based entirely on porters.<sup>26</sup>

Egypt could also use the sea route to Punt (Somali) and from there reach the inner continent. Several autobiographical accounts exist of organized expeditions to the south: the Weny expedition to Nubia and farther south during the sixth dynasty; and the sixth-dynasty Harkhuf expedition, which traveled to Punt through Hammamat and the Red Sea.<sup>27</sup>

It was not the Nile, provider of water and alluvial soil, creator of the natural environment for the genesis and evolution of a unique civilization, that served as a route and corridor between equatorial Africa, the Nile Valley, and the Mediterranean. It was not the river as a water route that created a long and intensive movement of migration, cultural diffusion,

and cultural transmission between the Nile Valley and Africa. It was not the the movement up and down the river that was responsible for Africa's place under the sun as the cradle of Egyptian civilization, or Egypt's place as the birthplace of African (and world) civilization. The river's role was performed inside the Nile Valley alone, up to the cataracts and not beyond. The traffic on the Nile permitted the creation of the Egyptian kingdom and offered the only natural and convenient route from village to village; as we saw, the very concept of travel was expressed by sailing upstream and downstream.<sup>28</sup>

Because the matter concerning us is Egypt's connection with Africa, contact did not have to be based on the Nile as a transit route. Hence the question of “up the river or down the river” need not focus on the role of the river as a route of transportation but on the very nature of the contacts between the Nile Valley and equatorial Africa. This issue can also be discussed without entering into the role played by the Nile in creating these contacts. The question of up or down is therefore metaphorical; the real question is “from north to south” or “from south to north”; whether it took place through the Nile or through other possible routes, what concerns us are two different phenomena of migration and diffusion between Africa and Egypt: first, the gradual and very long prehistorical (predynastical) phenomenon; and second, the diffusion between tribes and organized nations with a defined identity, which were able to control both migration and diffusion during the historical (dynastical) period.

### *Between Migration and Transmission*

If there were ongoing contacts between Egypt and Africa, what were they like and what influence did they wield? My discussion will focus on clarifying the underlying ideology usually given to this question and its implications. Who was the benefactor (donor) and who was the beneficiary (receiver) in the relationship between the Nile Valley and tropical Africa south of the Sahara?

The Afrocentric view is that the Nile, in John Henrik Clarke's words, “played a major role in the relationship of Egypt with the nations in southeast Africa. During the early history of Africa, the Nile was a great cultural highway on which elements of civilization came into and out of inner Africa.”<sup>29</sup> Or, as Molefi Kete Asante, the leading African scholar, wrote: “Cataracts aside, the ancient Nubian and Egyptians never considered the rocks in the river impregnable boundaries that prevented social, political, and military interrelation and interventions.”<sup>30</sup>

At this point it is important, first, to distinguish between relationships during the prehistorical period and the historical period, and between

Egypt and Nubia's relationship and that of Egypt and equatorial Africa. Second, in dealing with contacts between Egypt and sub-Saharan (equatorial) Africa, we should distinguish between two different periods: the long period before 3000 B.C., and the period after. We should also distinguish between human migration and the diffusion of cultural traits in general, and within these two long spans of time in particular during these two time periods. The differences between various forms of immigration or cultural diffusion should be examined because there is a fundamental difference between the movement of populations in the prehistorical period and migratory movements between settled and politically organized regions. There is also a difference between the diffusion of cultural elements in the prehistorical period and diffusion involving developed cultures. There is a difference between a large-scale nomadic movement, takeover, and settlement on one hand, and cultural changes resulting from the slow infiltration of small groups, trade relations, and the like on the other.

This is an important fact in our case because the chances of influential contacts between the Egyptian Nile Valley, the Sahara, and "Africa" south of the Sahara and along the upper reaches of the Nile were better between 5000 and 3000 B.C. than in later periods.<sup>31</sup> East Africa was the cradle of humanity, and the peopling of the Nile Valley was a result of waves of migration from the south. As mentioned earlier, the Nile Valley provided a unique environment for the development of an agricultural society, dependent upon domesticated crops and animals, basically different from the African societies in the equatorial rain forest.<sup>32</sup>

These waves of migration suggest that there may have been a transmission of cultural elements and goods between the north and south. Perhaps a common cultural substratum existed during the prehistorical period as well. If this is true, the question is whether discrete cultures developed from that substratum and then fragmented, or whether it was sufficiently vigorous and strong to remain active even after the various cultures split off and went their own ways.

Nevertheless, following the prehistorical period, almost all significant contact between Egypt and most of sub-Saharan Africa via the Sahara came to an end,<sup>33</sup> mainly as a result of climatic changes in the Sahara region, which had become arid, and as a result of Egypt's rapid development. Some scholars believe that the Sahara region could not continue to serve as a route between Egypt and Africa, whereas others believe that even after 3000 B.C., a "rich trade was carried on for all the coveted commodities of Africa, for ivory and ebony, for ostrich feathers and eggs, for leopard skins and cattle and slaves, and gold."<sup>34</sup> On the basis of his findings in Knossos, Sir Arthur Evans even reached the conclusion that some African products may have found their way into Crete by way of the Nile Valley and Egypt, or by overland routes across the Sahara from the interior

via Nubia.<sup>35</sup> Some of these commodities were brought to Egypt and the Mediterranean.<sup>36</sup> According to this view, prior to the introduction of the camel to Africa,<sup>37</sup> "donkey-drawn and possibly horse-drawn carts and even chariots crossed the western and central Sahara between North Africa and the regions of the Niger River, throughout a long period before the middle of the first millennium B.C. Another useful route lay between the Middle Nile and the western region around Lake Chad, passing across Africa by way of Kordofon, Darfur and Zangawa."<sup>38</sup> The Nile never replaced the desert routes; even if we accept the view that favored continuous trade contacts, it is quite clear that only limited Egyptian commodities reached Africa, and that only a very few Egyptian commodities reached the interior of Africa through the Nile Valley.

As mentioned earlier, the question of the nature of the Nile Valley civilization—the nature of the relationship between its two parts, Egypt and Nubia, and the nature of the relationship between them and the African interior—has gained a new ideological dimension in recent years. Those African and African American scholars who invested so much effort into establishing the theory that Egypt and the Nile Valley were an integral part of Africa must inevitably claim that it was the river and the river valley that played an important part in creating this unity and uniformity.<sup>39</sup>

From an Afrocentric point of view, however, it is not nearly enough to find the traces of intensive trade contacts between the interior of Africa, Nubia, and Egypt, or even a limited cultural exchange. Its aim is to claim far greater, more intensive, continuous, and influential biological and cultural contacts during the prehistorical periods. Thus, Afrocentrist writers argue that these contacts occurred during the predynastic period (before the third millennium) and continued during the historical dynastic periods; that they were based on deep cultural affinities and resemblances based on common racial backgrounds. In other words, they were based on a substratum of racial and cultural unity and uniformity, thus creating another cultural unity and uniformity.

It seems that Afrocentrists emphasize this point—the continuity of interdependence during the historical (dynastic) period, based on the common substratum—because they are fully aware that the phenomena of human migration and cultural diffusion in prehistorical periods are fundamentally different in nature from cultural diffusion in historical periods, just as they are fully aware that this fundamental difference is much more evident when one party in the relationship, the Egyptians, was a highly advanced civilization, while the peoples of interior Africa were far less culturally advanced. In other words, I believe the Afrocentrists fully realize that even if Egypt and Africa shared the same material culture during the Neolithic period, Egypt developed so rapidly that it became very different from the interior cultures, as well as from Nubia and Sudan.<sup>40</sup> In contrast

to the Nile Valley, agriculture in Western and Central Africa spread very slowly, while the use of iron dates from 700 B.C. to 400 B.C.<sup>41</sup>

This Afrocentric view can be regarded as an inverted intellectual response to Western diffusionist theories that claimed that African culture developed through the outside influences of the white or Hamitic race and that so-called African backwardness resulted from Africa's long isolation from the Near East and the Mediterranean basin. In one famous example, Gordon Childe claimed that Egypt advanced as a result of a migration of large numbers of people into the river valley oasis during the last Ice Age who settled in the Nile Valley and did not migrate to the south, resulting in Africa's isolation.<sup>42</sup> The early Egyptians came as conquerors from outside Africa (Asia) and advanced through Lower Egypt southward.<sup>43</sup> Until the beginning of the twentieth century, European literature rarely considered the possibility of ties and contacts between Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa. From this point of view, the only acceptable theory is that there were mutual influences between Kush and Egypt.<sup>44</sup>

Their urgent need to respond in kind led the Afrocentrists to adopt a hyperprehistorical and historical diffusionist paradigm and to stress the importance of the racial factor. This factor, some of them assume, was responsible for the common human traits that, according to this view, were (and are) long-lasting and stronger than any other cultural development, evolution, and context. In their view, African cultural evolution was free of any outside African influences. Instead, Africa is perceived as the source and origin of human evolution. The goal of the Afrocentric theory and worldview was to turn the picture of African isolation and backwardness upside down. African American scholars replaced the European diffusionist paradigm with a hyper-African or Egyptian paradigm, in which Africa and Egypt became the cradle of a homogeneous black race that spread its culture and knowledge throughout the world, from China to the pre-Columbian civilization.<sup>45</sup> They were preceded by a few European scholars, such as G. Elliot Smith and Charles G. Seligman, who drew parallels between ancient Egyptian and African cultures and believed they discerned a basic resemblance between Egyptian and African customs that, in their view, arose from a common African substratum.<sup>46</sup> Smith's Egyptocentric (heliocentric) diffusionism claimed that Egypt—black Egypt—was the single source of human culture,<sup>47</sup> and that an ebb and flow of migrants from the south came to Nubia and Egypt, bringing with them the concepts and patterns of divine kingship, cosmology, language, and more. Africans and African traits were transmitted to Nubia and Egypt from the south, whereas the predynastic age was characterized by the migration of blacks into Egypt, not only from Nubia but from the inner regions of Africa as well. This flow continued during the dynastic period. However, these

Western scholars stopped at this particular point: an African substratum existed, expressed mainly in popular religion, but Africa was never able to attain the high achievements of Egypt.

It is no wonder that only part of this theory has been adopted by African and African American scholars, convinced as they are that Egypt, Nubia, and Africa sprang from a common racial stock or substratum, shared the same philosophical concepts and customs, and that the Egyptian language belongs to the family of African languages. For the Afrocentrists, this view or theory became a scientific truth, an ideological faith, a political stand, a historical revelation and redemption.<sup>48</sup>

#### EGYPT, THE NILE, AND AFRICA

I do not wish to enter the debate about the racial origins or racial traits of the ancient Egyptian population.<sup>49</sup> Even some Afrocentrists agree that in the course of hundreds of years, the population of the Nile Valley must have undergone physiogenetic changes as a result of living in a physical environment that differed from the one in equatorial Africa. Diop himself wrote that the man born in Africa was "necessarily dark-skinned due to the considerable force of ultraviolet radiation to the equatorial belt. As he moved toward the more temperate climes, this man gradually lost his pigmentation by process of selection and adaptation."<sup>50</sup> A more reasonable argument is that the Egyptian population underwent changes as a result of non-African migration. A geographically defined population, as was the Egyptian population, "can undergo significant genetic change with a small percentage of steady assimilation of 'foreign' genes."<sup>51</sup> As a result "the people of the Nile Valley present a continuum, from the lighter northern Egyptians to the browner Upper Egyptians, to the still browner Nubians and Kushites and to the ultra-dark brown Nilotic peoples."<sup>52</sup>

But let us assume, for the sake of argument, that Africa and the Nile Valley indeed shared a common biological and cultural substratum: Does this mean, as Afrocentric writings claim, that Egypt was African in its way of writing, in its culture, and in its way of thinking? Is there any connection between a common "racial" origin, and culture and civilization? Even if we are able to point to some biological and cultural similarities, the question still remains: Was this a result of the common biological substratum, of common cultural roots, resulting from similar responses to the natural environment, or a result of continuous cultural contacts between the Nile Valley and the sub-Saharan savanna? Here we may argue that if one stresses the racial substratum, there is no need to claim continuous contacts and influences, since those who belong to the same race will respond

in similar patterns and create a similar human culture. And if, indeed, we accept the theory of both a common biological substratum and continuous contact between Egypt and Africa, one may wonder how the vast differences separating the civilization and culture of ancient Egypt from that of Nubia, and even more so, from that of Africa, may be explained.

Afrocentrists often refer to Africa as a homogeneous entity, whereas, as Wyatt MacGraftey observes, "the influence of Egypt on Africa, and vice versa, must be studied in terms of plurality of discrete, autonomous groups instead of the undifferentiated Negroes and Hamites of the traditional approach."<sup>53</sup> From a historical point of view we should try to trace the influence of Egypt not on the whole of Africa but on specific African nations and regions. However, if we find a similarity between Egyptian culture and one of the cultures south of the Sahara, we must ask why this similarity is found in that particular culture and not in other African cultures. Moreover, even if we assume that there is a common linguistic stratum, the claim that modern research (of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) in oral traditions of the Western African peoples reveals that they contain living, active sediments of an ancient Egyptian tradition that vanished more than 2,000 years ago (!) actually asserts that the said African societies have remained static, without undergoing any cultural real change for thousands of years. In this manner, a hyperdiffusionist hypothesis becomes the theory that a certain society functioned as a receiver during a particular period, and then remained in a frozen state.

Thus, from a geographical-regional perspective, we are dealing with two separate issues: one refers to the nature of the ties between Egypt and Nubia within the Nile Valley; the other to the nature of the links between Egypt (and Nubia) and the interior. Because space is limited, I shall deal only with the second issue: the relationship between Egypt and Africa. All Afrocentrists believe that humankind originated around the region of the Great Lakes and that the peopling of the Nile Valley (and other parts of the world) must have taken place in a succession of waves.<sup>54</sup> W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, for example, wrote: "The Negroid came as hunters and fishermen. Probably they came up from Nubia. They began to settle down and till the soil. . . . They had copper and varied tools of flint capable of working timber."<sup>55</sup> In his view, the origin of the indigenous Egyptian is African, and as a result the African people who moved or pushed northward along the Nile brought the basic elements of their culture with them until Egypt "passed from the wings to the center stage in the unfolding human drama of northeastern Africa."<sup>56</sup> If, however, this is so, what happened after the end of the prehistorical and predynastic period?

On this point, Afrocentrists take two different tracks that bear historical as well as ideological significance.

#### THE "UP THE RIVER THEORY": FROM NORTH TO SOUTH

According to Diop and his disciples, black Egyptian civilization originated in Upper Egypt from the Paleolithic period onward,<sup>57</sup> and the different inhabitants of the African interior originated from this southern Egyptian stock and derived their culture from Egypt, namely, up the river.<sup>58</sup>

I believe that Diop adopted this paradigm because it was evident to him that even if a common Stone Age African substratum existed, the Nile Valley civilization advanced more rapidly than other African civilizations. Since Diop could not be satisfied with the basic Stone Age traits, and since ancient Egypt was a literate culture while African cultures were oral cultures, he was inclined to assume that it was Egypt that influenced Africa (an influence which became possible because Egypt and Africa shared the same racial and mental equipment!). For us, wrote Diop, "The turn to Egypt in all domains is a necessary condition for reconciling African civilization with history . . . in order to renovate African culture. . . . In a reconceived and renewed African culture, Egypt will play the same role that Greco-Latin antiquity plays in Western culture."<sup>59</sup> According to this view, Egyptian cultural influences spread for thousands of kilometers in the direction of sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>60</sup>

In his many publications, including his contribution to the UNESCO International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa, Diop claimed that Africa was inhabited by people from the Nile Valley. He also said that "in all likelihood, after the drying of the Sahara (7000 B.C.), Black mankind first lived in bunches in the Nile basin before swarming out in successive spurts toward the interior of the continent,"<sup>61</sup> and that the Yoruba are of Egyptian origin. According to Diop, the nations of the Kara from southern Sudan and Upper Oubangui, the Kare-kare from northeastern Nigeria, the Yoruba of southeastern Nigeria, the Fulani, the Poular, the Serer, the Zulu, and others, all originated in the Nile Valley. These Negro people left the Nile Valley because of overpopulation and a series of odd crises.

The fundamental changes resulted from the different ecological conditions they met when they penetrated deeper into the continent and their adaptation to the different ecological conditions. Thus, they abandoned the technical equipment and scientific knowledge they had brought with them, assets that were not needed in their new environment. Diop claims that with economic resources assured by nature, without the need for perpetual inventions, the Negro became progressively indifferent to material progress.<sup>62</sup> Although the Negro was the first to discover iron, he found no use for it. Asa G. Hilliard III is one of many African American writers who adopted this theory, claiming that "indigenous Africans were driven from

Egypt by various invasions occurring after the 12th dynastic period circa 1783 B.C., settling in other parts of Africa including West Africa."<sup>63</sup>

Diop was neither the first nor the only scholar to develop this theory. Archdeacon Lucas, T. E. Bowdric,<sup>64</sup> E. L. R. Meyerowitz,<sup>65</sup> and others asserted that there were strong cultural and linguistic ties between the Yoruba, the Ashantees, and the Egyptians as a result of diffusion processes from Egypt south to the lands of the Yoruba and Ashantee, as well as to other West African peoples. These statements, writes Peter L. Shinnie in his contribution to Harris's *The Legacy of Egypt*, "have been repeated time and time again without any further authority. Apart from the inherent improbability of cultural and artistic traits surviving in recognizable form over such a period of time, it is difficult to see how any objective study could find anything distinctively Egyptian in the cultures of the people described."<sup>66</sup> Following this line of thought, Dana M. Clark suggests similarities between the Egyptians' and the Dagoes' (Mali) perception of "Man, God and Nature,"<sup>67</sup> whereas according to Yoruba traditions, "enthusiastically propounded by some Yoruba historians,"<sup>68</sup> they were influenced by ideas from the Nile Valley, perhaps transmitting via Meroë. Even if we accept the possibility that certain techniques and forms of government were influenced by the Sudanic state, writes Robert S. Smith, "these possibilities far from justify the acceptance of the Egyptian theory, while other parts of the argument, especially the supposed resemblance in language, between ancient Egyptian and Yoruba, can be dismissed."<sup>69</sup>

One may wonder why these Egyptian immigrants never thought of using their technological heritage to shape their environment; to use, for example, iron tools (which were transmitted to the main body of Africa primarily through North Africa),<sup>70</sup> irrigation systems, and the like. Indeed, iron-pointed spears were a great social and political innovation in Africa, but the use of iron was limited and very backward compared to the Nile Valley civilization. And how do we explain the theory that while they maintained their basic social organizations and cosmology in the savanna and the rain forest, all their other cultural, social, and political achievements were so unlike the Egyptian origin?

As mentioned earlier, scholars do not exclude the possibility of mutual contacts. Shinnie, for example, does not rule out the possibility of Egyptian influence on Africa, or vice versa, and agrees that there exist "here and there faint traces of common culture or of influence of the one on the other. Through the haze of centuries of separation there is the suggestion that there were exchanges, some in the realm of ideas and institutions, some in the realm of material objects." But, he sums up, it is very hard to tell which way these ideas or objects traveled,<sup>71</sup> or when. Even if we assume that the idea of the divine pharaonic monarchy, rule by a god, is founded on a broad African *soubassement* (base) as claimed by E. L. R.

Meyerowitz,<sup>72</sup> this idea underwent fundamental changes in Egypt, not to mention changes in its functions; the Egyptian king was "closely tied from the outset to the fertility of the Nile and the soil of Egypt. He personally guaranteed this fertility."<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, the crucial question is the degree of importance of the components transmitted from Egypt to Africa, in shaping the nature of the various cultures in Africa, or in affecting the dynamics of their changes. The cultural elements that moved from north to south during the period in question, according to the "up the river" theory, were not the sort that could shape the nature of African society or influence its dynamics.

Diop and his school conclude that Upper Egypt (Nubia and Sudan) was the birthplace and cradle of humanity. From there, people and culture migrated to the south (inner Africa) and the north (Lower Egypt and beyond). But during the historical period it was Egypt (Upper and Lower), a far more advanced civilization, that transmitted its high culture to Africa.

#### THE "DOWN THE RIVER" THEORY: FROM SOUTH TO NORTH

The second theory claims that ever since the prehistoric period, the movement of human migration, cultural diffusion, and transmission went from the south (the Great Lakes and inner Africa) to the north—down the river—and that the movement of Negroes from the south to the north along the Nile Valley and the Sahara Desert brought with it the African language, myths, cosmogony, and skill. This view was held by quite a few European scholars. For example, English Egyptologist E. A. Wallis Budge, in *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, asserted that Africans and African traits arrived in Nubia and Egypt from the south, and that the predynastic age was characterized by migration to Egypt by black people from sub-Saharan Africa in a stream that continued during the dynastic period. The indigenous Egyptian beliefs in a god creator of the world and in his resurrection and immortality are African in origin.<sup>74</sup>

Thus, according to this view, Africa was the first and genuine source of migration and cultural diffusion; it was from Africa that Nubia and Egypt received almost everything that enabled them to rise. This school of thought holds that Egyptian civilization is millennia older than is usually believed, and that the Sphinx represents "prima facie evidence of the existence of a full-fledged, flourishing Nile Valley civilization no later than 7,000 years ago, quite possibly as old as 9,000 years!" The conclusion is that high Egyptian culture evolved from a confluence of migration and influences coming down the Nile from the Great Lakes, merging with those moving eastward out of the Sahara.<sup>75</sup> This cultural influence was a

result not only of Stone Age diffusion, but also of Bronze Age and Iron Age diffusion and transmission.<sup>76</sup>

The ideological implications are quite clear. If we accept the first view that cultural diffusion during the historical period went down, not up, the river, this gives cultural priority to black Egypt, and, thus, in the opinion of many Afrocentric writers, seems to undermine the originality and greatness of the African culture. Even if Afrocentrists regard Egypt as a land of black people, from the ideological point of view they still prefer to give priority to pure Africans and genuine Africa. If Africa was the fountain of Egyptian cultural achievements, and these great achievements grew out of a genuine African culture, then it is Africa that gains the status of the primordial civilization.

The other point of view states that if Egypt is considered the source of African culture, then Africa gains from having been inspired by this great civilization. If Africa was influenced by Egypt, it could not have been a backward continent. Thus, black Africans can and must lay exclusive claim to the cultural heritage of the Egyptian civilization.<sup>77</sup> Basil Davidson, I believe, is aware of the difficulties inherent in this theory. Thus, even though he refers to classical authors who wrote that pharaonic culture had derived from inner Africa, and he writes that inner Africa was the cultural begetter of the ancient Egyptians, his African source is not equatorial Africa but the cultures of the then green Sahara of the fifth millennium B.C. and earlier.<sup>78</sup>

This idea was recently repeated by Miriam Ma'at-Ka-Re Monges, in her book *Kush—The Jewel of Nubia: Reconsidering the Root System of African Civilization*.<sup>79</sup> This book, like most others, is not based on an original study, but rather on a summary of existing literature, collected in such a way that it reflects her premeditated decision to reject books that do not concur with her opinion and to praise those books that support it (Diop in particular<sup>80</sup>). For the most part, her book focuses on the connection between Nubia and Egypt. Both, according to the authors, are closely connected to eastern Africa and tropical Africa. She ignores Diop's views on Egypt's influences during the historic period and prefers to focus on Africa's alleged influence on Egypt (and Nubia). Monges rejects the findings and conclusions of scholars such as Graham Connah,<sup>81</sup> William Y. Adams,<sup>82</sup> and others who admit that Africa south of the Sahara supplied Nubia and Egypt with gold, ivory, and slaves, while various concepts such as that of divine kingship were diffused from north to south. Her view is that residents of the Nile Valley were of indigenous African ancestry, who brought with them important elements of their culture from south to north, or down the river—elements that became the foundation of Egyptian culture. She also feels it necessary to argue that despite Egypt's progress, its culture was not necessarily superior to other African civilizations.<sup>83</sup>

In addition to these two extreme views, there is another moderate, and more accepted, view, according to which “correlations of linguistic and archaeological data suggest a westward migration of Nilo-Saharan speakers at approximately 3000 B.C.”<sup>84</sup> Here Africa is not considered a homogeneous racial-cultural entity, and diffusion and acculturation are regarded as complex and dynamic phenomena.

As we have already argued, there is a basic difference between a common substratum of two different civilizations and a similarity between two different civilizations. To speak of a racial substratum of equatorial Africa and Egypt that created a common culture (or even common collective personality) is to accept a black version of the myth of an Aryan (Indo-European) race and to presume that Indians, Persians, and Germans are a homogeneous cultural-human entity. Common racial origin does not inevitably produce a common culture. Thus, even if we accept the view that Egypt was an integral part of Africa, this partnership could have been a result of prehistorical background or of common racial features, but not based on intensive and prolonged contacts (as was the case with Egypt and the Nubian riverland, and desert dwellers in Upper and Lower Nubia). Nevertheless, the fact remains that different human entities emerged and developed from the real or alleged common substratum.

Let us accept, for argument's sake, the theory that common racial origins create a common worldview, symbols, and social organization in the early stages of the evolution of human society. This does not mean, however, that different cultures cannot, in later periods, emerge from the same racial source and substratum. If this is so, the population that sprang from the assumed common African stock underwent physiogenetic and more important cultural changes. The claim of constant migration and diffusion from Africa to Egypt or vice versa is baseless, but if indeed this constant and continuous migration and diffusion took place, one may wonder what caused the fundamental differences between the cultures of interior Africa and the Egyptian-Nubian civilization.

The historical fact remains that if Africans were descendants of the Egyptians, or vice versa, they underwent cultural separation from their original culture; even if we accept the radical view that “the ancient Egyptians retained for more than 3000 years their essential African outlook in terms of myths, symbolism, and ethos throughout the history of the country” until the arrival of the Greeks,<sup>85</sup> we still cannot deny that their culture diverted from its origins. Moreover, popular and high Egyptian culture was transmitted to Hindu-European Greeks or to Semitic people, and not to their racial partners, the black Africans.

Was this a result of cultural isolation or of the unique genius of the Egyptians? According to Davidson, “Much of the greatest numbers of tropical Africans lived in former times, as many live today, in villages or



scattered homesteads, having few material possessions, knowing nothing or little of the written word, enjoying the present as a gift from the golden age of their ancestors, and not much caring for a different future. Yet their technological simplicity was no guide to their social and cultural achievement. In truth they had tamed a continent."<sup>86</sup> Davidson also rejects the notion of diffusion from one "common fund" and what one may define as "parallelomania." Here, then, a processual approach is taken.<sup>87</sup> The internal progress of African societies is seen not as a mere result of outside influences but as a result of internal dynamics.

It is quite clear that Diop and his disciples are fully aware of the problem and attempt to overcome it. We have already noted that in Diop's view, it was Egypt that played the role of the cradle of black Africans. He based his theory on etymological data, including a discussion on totemism, circumcision, kinship, cosmology, social organization, and matriarchy. Yet, like all African American writers, he cannot deny the notion that the Nile Valley constitutes an independent cultural record. He also must accept that a deep and wide cultural chasm separates Africa and Egypt. Egypt "brought the African genius to its highest and finest expression. Inner Africa was the mother, the great Nile the father, and Egypt the brilliant son and fulfiller."<sup>88</sup> If this is so, then it is necessary to explain what gave the son the driving force and ability to ascend higher than his mother.

In his efforts to explain the fundamental cultural differences between Egypt and Africa, Diop offers a solution: the assertion that there was no need for Egyptian material civilization in the African environment and that the tropical climate caused them to lose interest in technological innovations. "With economic resources assured by means that did not require perpetual inventions, the Negro became progressively indifferent to material progress," he writes.<sup>89</sup> Cut off from the Nile Valley and the Mediterranean, the people of Africa settled in a geographical environment requiring a minimum effort of adjustment, and became oriented toward the development of their social, political, and moral organization, rather than toward speculative scientific research. Can we really accept the view that in this tropical setting, humans were freed from the need to adjust to nature, or had no incentive to change it according to their own needs? The Afrocentric view tends to describe this human condition as an ideal and harmonious co-existence with nature. The fact is that the different peoples of equatorial Africa adapted themselves to the limitations or the possibilities of the land in different ways, which resulted in pronounced regional differences.

Afrocentrists also portray Africa as the home of an ideal civilization that emerged as a harmonious balance of nature and environment—the same ideal environment as in Egypt. Kete Asante, for example, compares Africa to the Nile Valley, claiming:

The central physical phenomenon of Egypt is the great river, the Nile. It played a vital role in the creation of Kemetic philosophy, agriculture, technology, and religion. . . . Much like other Africans in riverine areas of the continent the Egyptians viewed the world with security, stability and optimism. The world did not seem harsh and ferocious, cruel and menacing to the Egyptians. To a large extent the geography of Egypt provided the people with a pleasant isolation except to the south. There were no harbors in the Delta, deserts east and west, and so openness to the south through the cataracts allowed Ethiopians and Nubians to interact with the Egyptians. . . . The Egyptians retained their essential African outlook in terms of myths, symbolisms, and ethos throughout the history of the country.<sup>90</sup>

Needless to say, this is an unhistorical and imaginary description of ancient Egyptian society, which ignores its close interrelations with the Near East, the Aegean, and even inner Asia. It is misleading to compare the economic resources of the Nile Valley with those of tropical Africa, or to argue that Egypt was not indifferent to material progress. Yet, can we accept his statement that Egypt's social and moral order in Egypt had attained a level of perfection?

While Kete Asante unifies Africa and the Nile Valley, Diop accepts the notion that the obviously deep cultural changes between Africa and Egypt were the result of the different ways by which different people, even those belonging to the same racial stock, responded to their environment or developed their collective genius.

Thus, we may conclude that from an ideological, Afrocentrist point of view, hyperdiffusionism may be perceived as the right response to European racial hyperdiffusionism; at the same time, however, it presents a very grave challenge to Afrocentrism itself: If all the Negroes share the same mental qualities, why, according to Afrocentric theory itself, did all the black peoples need Egypt to serve as their source of high culture, and were unable to invent and develop their own cultures along the same lines of progress without the help of diffused traits from the Nile Valley? This hyperdiffusionism frees ancient Africa from its image of a dependent culture—dependent on Europe—but instead portrays it as dependent on ancient Egyptian culture. This dependence is not considered an expression of inferiority because the ancient Egyptians are perceived as belonging to the Negro race.

Nevertheless, this awareness of the profound gap separating Egyptian and African cultures gave rise to three speculative paradigms: (1) the claim that the Africans' uniqueness is manifested in their distinct phenomenology, philosophy, ethics, and collective psychology, and not in their creative skills in science, technology, and so on;<sup>91</sup> (2) the claim that Africans in tropical Africa were able to develop their own science and technology; and

(3) the claim that Egyptian achievements in these fields belong to the entire Negro race.

Therefore, in their geographical lore, East Africa—the Great Lakes, Sudan, and Upper Egypt—are considered the heart and cradle of Africa, and as a result, their historical lore was forced to spin a web of migrations and cultural contacts between this heart, inner Africa, and Egypt in order to describe Africa as a cultural unity based not only on race but also on mutual cultural transmissions first from south to north and later from north to south.

#### THE WONDER THAT WAS EGYPT

At this point we must return to the Nile and the Nile Valley and to the common perceptions about them.

Some Afrocentrists often accept the climatic theory and the influence of environment on creative genius and social and political order. According to Diop, the black skin color of the first human beings was a result of the warm and humid climate that secreted a black pigment. Thus, even if the racial origin of the Egyptian population in predynastic Egypt was Negro, their color underwent changes throughout the years. The color of the Egyptians has become lighter down through the years, like that of the West Indian Negroes, but, he argues, the Egyptians never stopped being Negroes.<sup>92</sup> Not only was the climate of the Nile Valley different from the climate of the African hinterland, but, according to Herodotus, the Nile Valley and the river had different features and functions compared to the other great African rivers. The Nile necessitated the creation of an organized social and political order able to produce large surpluses of food, consequently resulting in a stratified society, a segment of which was urban and highly developed. Crops had been grown in the Nile Valley since 7000 B.C.: barley unknown to Africa, emmer wheat and flax, and later, palm trees, dates, papyrus, and others. The Nile also played a key role in religion and ritual. The horse and chariot, which could not reach Africa, also influenced the shaping of the state and political society. The plow and the pump, as well as other irrigation techniques, were not used in Africa's fields. There were no temples or libraries in Africa, no scribes and books, no science like that in Egypt. All the elements of culture that Afrocentrists claim are common to Africa and Egypt only serve to underscore the number of disparate elements, as well as a number of elements in Egyptian culture that are absent in African cultures.

And is it not a historical irony that, according to the Afrocentrist view, it was Greece that inherited the wisdom of Egypt, spawning literature, philosophy, and science, while Africa was left behind? That would mean that

the Sinai desert and the Mediterranean Sea have played a far more important role as routes of cultural transmission than the river Nile.

The paradox here, in my view, lies in the fact that while the Afrocentrist (or pan-Negroid) theory believes that by claiming Africans and Egyptians belong to the same race, they are providing the black African people with a new historical and cultural past and future and are, in fact, replacing an old white racial theory with a new black racial theory, in response to white racism. Furthermore, since many of them accept the historical fact that a deep gap separated Egyptian cultural achievements from African cultural achievements during the dynastic periods, they themselves undermine the basic foundation of their racial theory and its racial-cultural message of redemption.

We may conclude that if the ecology of the valley shaped the nature of Egyptian culture, it was stronger than the primordial common substratum. In other words, even when we accept the influence of a real or alleged common substratum and the existence of several similarities, we, as well as most of the Afrocentrists, cannot avoid accepting the ancient view, echoed by Du Bois, that “to the Nile Egypt owes all the special peculiarities which distinguish it from Africa.” Even though he tries to stress the unity of Negro history and culture from the Mountains of the Moon to the Mediterranean, he is forced to admit that this culture blossomed along the lower Nile (“but was never severed from the Great Lakes and Inner Africa”). Even though he argues that Egyptian religion “came naturally from the primitive animism of the African forest,” he admits that “gradually. . . . The Egyptians became a separate inbred people with characteristics quite different from their neighbors,” and that the “primitive animism” progressed to a more “advanced” religion.<sup>93</sup>

Civilization is an assemblage of styles and patterns of life consisting of a form of government, laws, literature, social organization, a mode of production and economy, religious beliefs, and organization.<sup>94</sup> All of these create and formulate a complete pattern of life. I believe this to be the primary reason why Afrocentrists with a modern orientation cannot accept the Western notion that they lack any cultural heritage (except for popular religion, etc.), but at the same time are not ready to reject a Western cultural heritage, as some radical Afrocentrists do, and find refuge in the notion of unique spiritual traits (i.e., a unique phenomenology). Their solution is to make Egypt part of African culture and thus appropriate it, without any need to claim that this culture originated in Africa or that Africa was part of it. From this point of departure, there is no need at all to deny the uniqueness of the Nile Valley, nor is there any need to propose a hyperdiffusionist paradigm—be it a diffusion that moves up the river or down the river. Herodotus himself asserts that not only is the Egyptian climate peculiar to that country, and that the Nile is different in its behavior

from other rivers elsewhere, but the Egyptians themselves in their manners and customs seem to have reversed the ordinary practices of humankind,<sup>95</sup> thus stressing the unique nature of Egyptian civilization that separates it from the rest of the world, including Africa.

The debate I have surveyed here is an important expression of the search for an ancient past as a part of the endeavor to forge a new identity. It is doubtful, however, whether a reconstruction—even one that is historically reliable—can serve this goal. In truth, this leads to the conclusion that cultural diffusion (i.e., the dissemination and borrowing of culture) is an integral and essential part of the history of culture, and that racial commonality does not create cultural communality, not to mention political commonality.

In his poem, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” (1921), the African American poet Langston Hughes wrote:

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.  
I looked upon the Nile and raised the Pyramids above it.

Hughes, I presume, was unaware that with these lines he was clearly pointing not to a common basis but to fundamental differences—the differences symbolized by a hut on one hand, and a pyramid on the other.

We may conclude that the main function of the Nile and the Nile Valley was not a route or corridor—up- or downstream—between Egypt and inner Africa, creating and preserving racial and cultural interrelations and even unity—but a river that provided Egypt with a distinct environmental setting for the emergence and development of an integrated, advanced, and unique civilization; a civilization that developed and flourished on both sides of the river and that was, from its inception, fully aware of its uniqueness. This was a civilization that may have been accessible to the south, to Africa, but maintained a deep and fruitful cultural relationship with neighboring cultures in the Mediterranean basin and in the ancient Near East instead.

#### NOTES

1. See Levine, “Bernal and the Athenians in the Multicultural World of the Ancient Mediterranean,” p. 20. On Afrocentrism, pan-Negroism, and Egyptocentrism see Howe, *Afrocentrism: Mythical Past and Imagined Homes*; Moses, *Afrotropia: The Roots of African American Popular History*; and Shavit, *History in Black* (forthcoming).

2. See van Sertima, *Great African Thinkers*; and Fauvelle, *L’Afrique de Cheikh Anta Diop*.

3. See, for one example, the statement by Kete Asante: “The Egyptians retained their essential African outlook in terms of myths, symbolism, and ethos

throughout the history of the country” (Kete Asante, *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*, p. 52).

4. Pritchard, *Ancient Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, p. 372. See the translation in Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, pp. 205–210: “Hail to you, Hapy: / Sprung from earth, / Come to nourish Egypt!” See also the “Hymn to the Nile” (“Nilhymanus”) in Helck, *Kleine Ägyptische Texte: Der Text des “Nilhymnus,”* p. 11. On the Nile in Egyptian theology, see in Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, p. 150. He writes: “What the author of the Hymn to the Nile apparently had in mind was the fact that the Nile did not have a cult image or receive daily service, but that sacrifice was made to it as a festival on the occasion of the flood (h’py). Heitsch, p. 126. A love poem dedicated to the Nile that floods its banks, from the Roman era, says, among other things: “My betrothed, do not tarry, yours . . . / Embrace your bride, / bearer of sheaves of corn, / With wave-enveloping flowers, / Take pleasure in your wedding songs. / Path that shakes earth to Egypt . . . / Flows exuberantly [ . . . ].” See Heitsch, *Die Dichterfragmente der Römischen Kaiserzeit*, p. 126. In Aeschylus’s play, *Suppliants*, the Danaids praise the Nile (lines 516, 854–857), and in W. Kranz’s view, Aeschylus was familiar with ancient Egyptian hymns to Hapy Walther Kranz, *Stasimon: Untersuchungen zu Form und Gehalt der griechischen Tragödie*, p. 101.

5. Hallo and Simpson, *The Ancient Near East: A History*, p. 261. In ancient Egyptian, many words concerned with movements were determined by the idea of sailing: to travel south is to get upstream, and to travel north is to go downstream, even when referring to traveling outside Egypt (Kees, *Ancient Egypt*, p. 96).

6. Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, p. 46. On the environmental changes in the Nile basin and their influence, see Krzyzaniak, Robusiewicz, and Alexander, *Environmental Change and Human Culture in the Nile Basin and Northern Africa Until the Second Millennium B.C.*

7. Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, vol. 1, pp. 11, 19.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 385. Budge suggested that the conception of Osiris was of purely African origin (p. 17).

9. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 51. Borghonst notes that from the New Kingdom onward, “those who were drowned in the Nile were thought to become ‘saint’ by coming into immediate contact with the primeval waters (Nun), represented on earth by the River Nile” (see Borghonst, “Magical Practices Among the Villagers,” p. 122).

10. Clagett, *Ancient Egyptian Science/A Source Book*, vol. 1, tome 2, p. 579.

11. Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, p. 46.

12. Clagett, *Ancient Egyptian Science*, vol. 1, tome 1, pp. 265–266. Statues of the River god were painted green and red; the first was supposed to represent the color of the river in June, when it is a bright green, before the inundation.

13. Cohen and Drabkin, *A Source Book in Greek Science*, p. 34. James Breasted writes: “Thus a genial and generous, but exacting soil, demanded for its cultivation the development of a high degree of skill in the manipulation of the life-giving waters, and at a very early day the men of the Nile valley had attained a surprising command of the complicated problems involved in the proper utilization of the river” (Breasted, *A History of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 9).

14. Gillings, *Mathematics in the Time of the Pharaohs*, p. 235. On the three Egyptian calendars, see pp. 265–266.

15. See one example of many, the painting of a state ship of Viceroy Huy who gets ready to sail for Nubia, *From the Tomb of Huy*, about 1360 B.C., in Wilkinson and Hill, *Egyptian Wall Paintings*, p. 51. See the biblical perception of the Nile and its different functions in Isaiah 19:4–10.

16. One should, of course, distinguish between the role and perceptions of a river that flows through a rain forest and a river (such as the Upper Niger) that flows through desert land. In the Edo cosmogony, for example, water is considered "the primordial substance that once covered the world and from the center of which land first emerged" (Ben-Amos, "The Promise of Greatness," p. 119). See "Flute Poem in Praise of River Deities" from Ghana: "River Adutwum, in you we bathe, and from you we quench / Our thirst. / From you we take the water to wash our clothes. / Asante Kotoko, our children and our grandchildren, / But for you what we have done?" (in Curlander, *A Treasure of African Folklore*, pp. 1–7).

17. Indeed, as one moves to the north, the climate becomes progressively more arid, and the importance of the river is enhanced until it is the only life-sustaining feature. As to the role of the Nile in the history and kingdoms of Kush, it should be noted that Kush extended into a number of diverse climatic zones which offered vastly different potentials for agricultural activities. Some degree of homogeneity in the lifestyle of the peoples inhabiting its banks, however, was provided by the river Nile which traversed these zones. See Welsby, *The Kingdom of Kush*, p. 153. In his *Geography* (1.2.23), the geographer Strabo comments that "even if this is not true of the whole of Egypt, it is certainly true of the part embraced by the Delta, which is called Lower Egypt" (p. 153). Diodorus Siculus wrote that, according to Egyptian accounts: "When in the beginning the universe came into being, men first came into existence in Egypt, both because of the favourable climate of the land and because of the nature of the Nile. For this stream, since it produced much life and provided a spontaneous supply of food, easily supported whatever living things have been engendered" (1.10.1) (trans. C. H. Oldfather, *The Loeb Classical Library*, vol. 1 [1981 edition], pp. 34–35). In Plato's *Timaeus* the Egyptian priests tell Solon that the Nile is the savior of Egypt in various ways because whereas other dry places suffer destruction as a result of dry weather, the Nile "saves us also at such times from this calamity by rising high" (D.11–12). Egypt has no floods that bring destruction: "Neither then nor at any other time does the water pour down over our fields from above, on the contrary it all tends naturally to well up from below" / (E.18–21) (trans. R. G. Bury, *The Loeb Classical Library*, vol. 2 [revised and reprinted, 1952], pp. 34–35). In *Ethiopica* (An Ethiopian Romance), written in the second or third century A.D., Helodorus refers to sacred books about the Nile, "which only priests may read and understand, telling how the Nile spreads over its banks like a sea and fertilizes the filth it floods. That is why its water is sweet to the taste: it is supplied by clouds in the sky" (trans. Moses Hadas, *Ethiopica*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957, p. 58). In *De Rerum Natura* (On the Nature of Things), the Roman poet Lucretius describes the flow of the Nile: "The Nile towards summer-time swells and overflows on the fields, the only river in the whole land of Egypt. This river is wont to irrigate Egypt through the middle heats" (6.712) (trans. W. H. Rouse, *The Loeb Classical Library* [1959 edition], pp. 494–495).

In *Metamorphoses* the Roman poet Ovid repeats this theme (1.422–424). These are primarily descriptions that mainly fit the situation in Lower Egypt, as life in the southern rain belt of Egypt has never relied exclusively on the Nile. The truth is that the flooding of the Nile was not regular but rather prone to long- and short-term trends. Egypt, both the delta plain and the river valley, experienced floods on one hand and drought on the other. This is also the reason for the importance of the irrigation system of the flood plain (see Butzer, *Early Hydraulic Civilization in Egypt*). Nevertheless, the phrase coined by Herodotus was expanded and became a common topos of both parts of Egypt, both Upper and Lower, as one

physical unit; see Volney, *Voyage en Syrie et en Egypte*, pp. 18–34. This view became the conventional wisdom. Hegel, for example, wrote that the Nile Valley was adapted to become a mighty center of independent civilization and has a singular and unique nature as a geographical region in Africa (Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, pp. 207–210). At the same time, however, he accepted Diodorus's view that the Egyptians received their culture from Nubia (Meroë).

18. Trans. F. H. Colson, *The Loeb Classical Library*, Vol. 6 (1994 edition), pp. 279, 333–335. This description follows Genesis 13:10, which described Egypt as the garden of the Lord, and Herodotus ("now, indeed, there are no men, neither in the rest of Egypt, nor in the whole world, who gain from the soil with so little labour") (Herodotus, 2.14, trans. A. D. Godley, *The Loeb Classical Library* [1960 printing, p. 291]), but undermines the biblical story about the seven years of drought!

Jewish exegeses repeat this topos to explain how this basic difference between Egypt and Palestine makes a decisive impact on the worldview of each people: "The land of Egypt—only if you work over it with mattock and spade and give up sleep for it [will yield], if you do not, it will yield nothing. The land of Israel is not like that—its inhabitants sleep on their beds while God sends down rain for them" (Finkelstein, 77). This is the explanation offered by the Jewish sages for the sublimity of the Land of Israel—a country blessed by God—compared to the land of Egypt. Yet this saying obviously implies, intentionally or not, that Egypt's prosperity and its surplus of food were not only the result of a "gift" granted by nature but were based on the social and political organization required, and created, to control the use of the water and the soil.

19. Butzer, *Early Hydraulic Civilization in Egypt*, p. 11.

20. Redford, *Pharaonic King-Lists*, pp. 115–118, 204. See also Janseen, *The Ancient Egyptian Ships Logs*.

21. "The six cataracts upstream Aswan prevented navigation, and the Nile seemed to lose itself inextricably in the marches of the Sudanese lowland at a latitude of some 8-N, making it impossible to track the river to its sources" (Hugon, *The Exploration of Africa*, p. 42).

22. Wilkinson, *The Ancient Egyptians, Their Life and Customs*, vol. 2, pp. 119–132. "The Nile itself was characterized by more vigorous summer flood with the competence to carry massive loads of gravel from Nubia to Cairo" (Butzer, *Early Hydraulic Civilization in Egypt*, p. 13).

23. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, p. 21.

24. Kees, *Ancient Egypt*, pp. 100–101. Herodotus wrote that at some point the travelers had to leave the river "for forty days, because sharp rocks . . . make the river impracticable for boats" (2.29); according to Diodorus, it took ten days to sail the Nile from Alexandria to Ethiopia (3.34.7). According to Ibn Khaldun: "Boats cannot get through. Cargoes from the Sudanese boats are taken off and carried on pack animals to Assuan at the entrance to Upper Egypt. In the same way, the cargoes of the boats from the cataracts to Assuan is a twelve day's journey" (Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 121). Welsby writes: "In the reach from Abu Hamed to el Debba, where the direction of the current and the prevailing winds coincide, movement upstream is virtually impossible for vessels under sail. Elsewhere boats were able to float downstream with the current or sail upstream before the north wind which blows virtually all the year round" (Welsby, *The Kingdom of Kush*, p. 171). The Nile served a water route for 750 miles, from the red granite outcropping at Aswan northward to the Mediterranean and back. See Budge, *The Nile*, pp. 45–49, and Kees, *Ancient Egypt*, pp. 96–141. The Nile continued to serve as the

highway of Egypt beyond Cairo until the railway was laid and steam power introduced ("Cook's Nile Service," from 1869). Travelers during this period could sail on private *dhahabiyya* up the river from Cairo to Aswan and back, a voyage of 590 miles. See the selection from travelers' books in Pick, *Egypt: A Traveler's Anthology*, pp. 116–145.

25. O'Connor, *Ancient Nubia*, p. 12.

26. There is no evidence of trans-Saharan trade from Egypt to southwest Africa.

27. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, p. 21. Harkuf sent a great altar of alabaster downstream in a barge that he built for it. On Harkuf see Lichtheim, pp. 23–27. Punt was described as a land full of treasures, and the lands east of it were perceived as marvelous land and fabulous realm in Egyptian travelers' tales. See Maspero, *History of Egypt*, pp. 224–226, 365–368. However, it is hard to accept his view that "the Nile afforded an easy means of access to those who wished to penetrate into the heart of Africa" (p. 221).

28. Landstrom, *Ships of the Pharaohs*, p. 11.

29. Clarke, "Cheikh Anta Diop and the New Concept of African History," pp. 115–116.

30. Kete Asante, *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*, p. 33.

31. Egypt was part of the Sahara Desert before it began to get humid (since 7000 B.C.) and then dried up (around 2000 B.C.), and it was its link with the rest of the continent. See Nougera, *How African Was Egypt?*

32. Many scholars believe that this development was due to diffusion from the East. See Newman, *The Peopling of Africa*, p. 42.

33. O'Connor, "Ancient Egypt and Black Africa—Early Contacts," p. 2.

34. Steindorff and Seele, *When Egypt Ruled the East*, p. 97.

35. Hanseberry, *African History Notebook*, Vol. 2, p. 39.

36. O'Connor, "Ancient Egypt and Black Africa—Early Contacts," p. 2.

37. First in the eastern horn of Africa. The camel arrived in Egypt in Roman times. See Bulliet, *The Camel and the Wheel*.

38. Davidson, *African Civilization Revisited*, p. 13.

39. Many scholars, however, emphasize the impact of internal factors on the developments of African societies in Central Africa. And see the different and contradicting views expressed in the essays in Celenko, *Egypt in Africa*.

40. According to George Murdock, Egypt, Nubia, and Sudan shared a common culture during the Stone Age up until c. 3000 B.C. The agricultural advances in the Lower Nile Valley brought about a cultural spurt that separated it and formed the basis for the early dynastic age (Murdock, *Africa: Its Peoples and Their Cultural History*).

41. Newman, *The Peopling of Africa*, pp. 104–157; van der Merwe, "The Advent of Iron in Africa," pp. 453–506. Afrocentrists often claim that metallurgy was discovered first in Africa, basing this idea on "scientific news" such as an article from February 6, 1970, in the *New York Times*, announcing that South African archaeologists had discovered an iron mine in Swaziland that revealed that iron smelting dates back at least 43,000 years in Africa (Clark, "Similarities Between Egyptian and Dagon Perception of Man, God and Nature," pp. 121–122).

42. Trigger, "Egypt and Early Civilizations," p. 26. This was the conventional wisdom among many scholars. The logical conclusion from the identification of the ancient Egyptians as "non-Africans" in origin was that every cultural evolution southward to Egypt was a result of diffusion or transmission from the Nile Valley. See Holl, "West Africa: Colonialism and Nationalism," pp. 229–301.

43. See Wilkinson, *The Ancient Egyptians, Their Life and Customs*, vol. 1, pp. 302–303.

44. Adams, "The Kingdom and Civilization of Kush in Northeast Africa," pp. 775–789.

45. De Barros, "Changing Paradigms," pp. 150–172. For a hyperdiffusionist approach, see Kraus, *Human Development from an African Ancestry*.

46. Seligman, *The Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*.

47. Smith, *Migration of Early Culture*.

48. Diop, "Origin of the Ancient Egyptians," pp. 27–57. See also van Sertima, *Egypt Revisited*, pp. 9–37.

49. See Berry and Berry, "Origins and Relationship of the Ancient Egyptians," pp. 199–208. They write that "Egyptian skull samples are not very distinct from the Nubian samples . . . (however they are more distinct from the Ashanti series . . . and the Near Eastern series)"; Yorca, "Black Athena," pp. 62–100; O'Connor, "Ancient Egypt and Black Africa—Early Contacts"; Macgraffey, "Concept of Race in the Historiography of Northeast Africa," pp. 1–17. For an Afrocentric view, see Crawford, "The Racial Identity of Ancient Egyptian Populations," pp. 35–44.

50. Diop, "Africa: Cradle of Humanity," p. 21.

51. Keita, "The Geographical Origins and Population Relationship of Early Ancient Egyptians," p. 24.

52. Yorca, "Were the Ancient Egyptians Black or White?" p. 58. See also Trigger, "Nubian, Negro, Nilotic?" pp. 27–35.

53. Macgraffey, "Concept of Race in the Historiography of Northwest Africa," p. 17.

54. See the summary in Finch, "Nile Genesis," pp. 35–54.

55. Du Bois, "Egypt," p. 100.

56. See Ehret, "Ancient Egyptian as an African Language," pp. 25–27.

57. Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization*, pp. 85–98.

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 179–201.

59. Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism*, p. 3.

60. Diop, *The African Origins of Civilization*, p. 254.

61. Diop, *Precolonial Black Africa*, p. 213; Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization*, pp. 134–178.

62. See Holl, "African History," pp. 200–204; Diop, *Precolonial Black Africa*, pp. 212–234.

63. Hilliard, "The Meaning of KMT History," p. 13.

64. Bowdich, *An Essay on the Superstitions, Customs, and Arts Common to the Ancient Egyptians, Abyssinians, and Ashantees*. See also Massey, *Book of the Beginning*, pp. 598–674.

65. Meyrowitz, *The Divine Kingship in Ghana and Ancient Egypt*.

66. Shinnie, "The Legacy to Africa," pp. 436–437.

67. Clark, "Similarities Between Egyptian and Dagon Perceptions of Man, God and Nature," pp. 119–130. And see Baines, "Origins of Egyptian Kingship," pp. 95–156. He stresses the unique nature of the dual kingship of ancient Egypt, which is a result of the physical contrast of the Nile Valley and the delta.

68. Lucas, *The Religion of the Yoruba*.

69. Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, p. 10.

70. Davidson, *African Civilization Revisited*, p. 13.

71. Shinnie, *The Legacy to Africa*, p. 438.

72. See Meyrowitz, *Divine Kingship in Ghana and Ancient Egypt*, and Nougera, *How African Was Egypt?* pp. 123–201.

73. Redford, *Pharaonic King-Lists*, p. 24.
74. Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, pp. 348–349. See also the entire chapter, pp. 348–383. Also see the articles in van Sertima, *Egypt Child of Africa*. According to this view, African nations in various part of the continent knew the secret of iron-toll production and astronomical mathematics, and even possessed proto-script. This view was adopted by the modern Egyptian scholar Salama Musa in his book *Hadanat Misr fi Ifriqiya*, under the influence of Elliot Smith.
75. Finch, “Nile Genesis,” pp. 35–54.
76. See, for example, Ben-Jochannan, *Africa—Mother of Western Civilization*, pp. 292–303. However, he stresses primarily the deep links of the Nile Valley (down to Zimbabwe) and the Great Lakes.
77. Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization*, p. 249.
78. Davidson, “The Ancient World and Africa,” pp. 324–325.
79. Monges, *Kush—The Jewel of Nubia*.
80. See Monges, “Homage to the Elders,” in *Kush—The Jewel of Nubia*, pp. 52–60.
81. Connah, *African Civilizations—Pre-colonial Cities and States in Tropical Africa*.
82. Adams, *Nubia—Corridor to Africa*.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
84. Macgaffey, “Concept of Race in the Historiography of Northeast Africa,” p. 17.
85. Kete Asante, *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*, pp. 50–53.
86. Davidson, *The African Genius*, pp. 27–28.
87. See Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language*, pp. 120–144.
88. Finch, “The Works of Gevval Massey,” p. 401.
89. Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization*, p. 23. And see Holl, “West Africa: Colonialism and Nationalism,” p. 203.
90. Kete Asante, *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*, pp. 50–53.
91. African and African American writers try to prove that some branches of technological skills and scientific innovations originated in Africa or were known in it prior to their development in Egypt or independent of it. See van Sertima, *Blacks in Science*.
92. Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization*, p. 249.
93. Du Bois, “Egypt,” pp. 98–114.
94. Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes*, p. 252.
95. Herodotus, *The Histories*, p. 142.