

The Gift of the Nile: Hellenizing Egypt from
Aeschylus to Alexander, and: L'Orient, mirage
grec: L'Orient du mythe et de l'epopee.

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 **The Gift of the Nile: Hellenizing Egypt from Aeschylus to
Alexander, and: L'Orient, mirage grec: L'Orient du mythe et
de l'epopee (review)**

Martin Bernal

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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Phiroze Vasunia. *The Gift of the Nile: Hellenizing Egypt from Aeschylus to Alexander*. Classics and Contemporary Thought 8. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001. xiv + 346 pp. Cloth, \$45.

Alexandre Tourraix. *L'Orient, mirage grec: L'Orient du mythe et de l'épopée*. Edited by Evelyne Geny. Paris: Presses Universitaires Franc-Comtoises, 2000. 165 pp. Paper, fi24.39.

Professor Tourraix is an optimistic reactionary. He sets out his aim with refreshing clarity. He seeks to challenge "l'orthodoxie provisoirement établie," which denies that the Greeks were "tributaires de la représentation du monde véhiculée par leur langue... indo-européenne." Tourraix accuses the "adepts" of this "orthodoxy" of citing Dumézil when he excluded Greece from the regularity of Indo-European patterns of thought, while they reject his basic trifunctional theory. This, Tourraix insists, is not a "doctrine" or an "ideological credo," but the result of a "rational elaboration" (15-16).

Tourraix is not concerned with radical outsiders. He dismisses the whole of Said's *Orientalism* because of the latter's blunder in referring to the chorus of the *Persae* as women. He warns that Bernal should not be taken seriously because his works are not founded on a "scientific hypothesis but on ideological presuppositions" (75). Tourraix's opponents are the professional classicists, notably Martin West, Walter Burkert, and Ruth Edwards. These promote the idea of a substantial Southwest Asian influence on Greek civilization but are unconcerned with Egypt. In the terminology of this reviewer, Tourraix's polemic is not against the "Revised Ancient Model" but as a supporter of the "Extreme" version, he opposes the "Broad Aryan Model."

Tourraix's two centers of concern are Troy and Thebes. Troy interests him as a marginal entity between Greek and Barbarian. He admits that pottery and Hittite texts indicate that there were Mycenaean influences in the Troad. On the other hand, he rightly points out that Homer Hellenized the Trojans more than evidence from other sources can sustain. It has also been impossible to correlate the Homeric version of the city's fall with the date and scale of the destructions of Troy VI, VIIa, and VIIb. Tourraix therefore follows the hypothesis of Paul Wathelet that the destruction described in the epics was not that of an unimportant settlement on the Dardanelles but was really that of the great Greek city of Thebes, which was undoubtedly destroyed in the thirteenth century B.C.E.

This is just one example of Tourraix's general approach, which is not to accept things at face value but to probe more deeply. On the central theme of his **[End Page 629]** book, he agrees that many Greek myths and legends would suggest "Oriental" connections and origins and that much Greek iconography appears to be "Oriental" or Egyptian (75). But he knows that such symbols were devoid of content (23). Unfortunately for his scientific credentials, however, he frequently has to rely on the words *probablement* or *peut-être* to see Indo-European essences behind the Oriental forms (e.g., 22-23).

Clearly Tourraix has always been concerned with Indo-European "cultures." He has published extensively on both Greeks and Persians and the relations between them. When looking at Greek culture, he sees three main indicators of "l'héritage indo-européen." The first is language: He takes a Whorfian view of its determining power and is unconcerned that less than 40 percent of the Greek vocabulary has known Indo-European cognates. The second indicator is trifunctionalism: Tourraix sees the Indo-European base whenever he encounters a triple. Three, however, is an attractive number to speakers of many languages. The Christian Trinity appears to have originated among Aramaic speakers, and Mesopotamian and Phoenician cities had the same tripartite division of the male inhabitants into citizen, resident alien, and slave that later occurred in the Greek *poleis*. Thus, besides its vagueness, trifunctionalism is not an...

BOOK REVIEWS



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