



Royal Incest and Diffusion in Africa

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reply to Rubel and Rosman

While every critique attempts to raise central issues in anthropology, the primary intent of my review was directed toward illustrating the complexities in the data themselves. Therefore, in light of Rubel and Rosman's ill-tempered and inconsequent reply, I suggest that interested readers return to the original sources and formulate their own conclusions.

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Van den Berghe and Mesher's (AE 7:300-317, 1980) evaluation of royal incest in Africa outside of Egypt as being "residual and symbolic" rests on the fundamental belief that a structured complex of ideas diffused in toto through space and time to other African societies, was accepted by such societies, and subsequently degenerated (i.e., "gradually evolved away from the fully reproductive Egyptian model" [AE 7:311, 1980]). Since their explanation of the existence of royal incest in non-Egyptian Africa is that it is of Egyptian origin, their evaluation of these other royal incest traditions would be invalidated if it were shown that they did not come from Egypt. It is my contention that they did not. The agents of diffusion were not named, but it can be assumed that they would be called Hamites—those high culture bearers of the "Hamitic hypothesis," which is a Euro-ethnocentric construct supposedly demonstrating the ultimate non-African origin of African (which includes Egyptian) culture. This idea, which is not always named, has been exposed and rejected (MacGaffey 1966:4, 6-9; Sanders 1969; Harris 1972:21-24; Curtin, Feierman, Thompson, and Vansina 1978:121, 168-169).

The most parsimonious explanation for cultural similarities between various African societies, through time and space, is that they shared common-root cultural elements and were "preadapted" and predisposed to similar ethos and institutions that were evolving in parallel fashion. Egypt's neolithic womb was African.

The evidence for the basis of a root commonality is substantial. Specific prehistoric central African tool designs manifest themselves in Naqada, Badari, and Fayum sites (de Heinzelin 1962:109; Arkell and Ucko 1965:146, 150). Shaw (1976:156) states that "the early cultures of Merimde, the Fayum, Badari, Naqada I and II are essentially African and early African social customs and religious beliefs were the root and

foundation of the ancient Egyptian way of life." Pottery usage probably spread from the central Saharan Highlands to the Nile Valley, as it seems to have been made there first (Flight 1973:554). The motifs of Saharan rock paintings show similarities to those in pharaonic art. This is probably due to the former influencing or being the progenitor of the latter (Mori 1964:230, 243, 244; Blanc 1964:183-184) via Saharans leaving a desiccating land to, in part, people the Nile Valley and other parts of Africa. The oldest mummy in Africa is of a black Saharan child (Donadoni 1964:185-188; Blanc 1964:184). Frankfort (1956:39-40) points out the possibility of understanding the pharaonic world view by reference to beliefs extant in various African populations. Childe (1969:6-7) derives Egyptian society from an African totemic clan base. He and Aldred (1978 [1965]:50) note a divine king and rainmaker figure as the core of the Egyptian kingship, and it is plausible that the peopling of the valley was at least in part by people from more rainy regions (Strouhal 1971:7) whose fortunes had been influenced by climatic change. Thomson and Randall-McIver (1905), Falkenburger (1947), Strouhal (1971), and others affirm the tropical African affinities of the early Nile Valley populations, and the distance diagram of Mukherjee, Rao, and Trevor (1955:85) places the Badarians genetically near the Ashanti and Taita. Paoli (1972) found a significant resemblance between the ABO frequencies of dynastic Egyptians and the black northern Haratin—the probable descendants of the original Saharans. The pharaonic language had approximately several hundred semitic roots, with the rest ascribable to an African genesis (see UNESCO 1974); Obenga has demonstrated Bantu-Egyptian linguistic relationships (UNESCO 1974). The land of the gods and ancestors for the ancient Egyptians was to the south and west (Davidson 1959:63).

Finally and significantly, it must be noted that Bruce Williams (1980) has demonstrated that Nubia was a unified polity—with writing, state apparatus, and insignia in 3500 BC, 300 years before dynastic Egypt. Moreover, the Nubian insignia was used later in Egypt. Perhaps Nubia inspired Egypt politically, as it clearly did culturally. Any contention that incest spread from dynastic Egypt to the rest of Africa (even to Nubia!) is forcing the (nonexistent) evidence. Therefore, any evaluations and hypotheses which hinge on this assumption must be reworked. The non-Egyptian African forms of royal incest probably represent the basic pattern from which an Egyptian specialized model arose because of unique conditions in Egypt.

note

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