

Asclepiades' Didyme

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THE EPIGRAMMATIST ASCLEPIADES writes of a certain Didyme, "Gazing at her beauty I melt like wax before the fire. If she is black, what is that to me? So are coals, but when we burn them, they shine like rosebuds" (*Anth. Pal.* 5.210):

τήκομαι ὡς κηρὸς πὰρ πυρί, κάλλος ὄρων.
εἰ δὲ μέλαινα, τί τοῦτο; καὶ ἄνθρακες· ἀλλ' ὅτε κείνους
θάλασσωμεν, λάμπουσ' ὡς ῥόδευι κάλυκες.

Alan Cameron has recently argued that Didyme is one of the mistresses of Ptolemy Philadelphus, and in support of this identification makes *inter alia* these points:¹

(1) "In the ordinary way skin black as coal might be thought to suggest a negro: a Nubian, say, or Ethiopian. But (as our own use of the word illustrates) when applied to skin coloring, black is a very relative term, normally implying no more than skin significantly darker than the speaker's" (287).

(2) The name Didyme may be useful in the interpretation of the epigram. A not uncommon name, Didyme is "above all an *Egyptian* name." The mention of a dark-skinned Didyme in a Hellenistic epigram leads one to expect an Egyptian, also suggested by a notice that Ptolemy Philadelphus had a mistress named Didyme, "one of the native women" (287, 289).

(3) It is not necessary to read the poem describing Didyme's beauty and defending her dark skin as implying that Didyme was Asclepiades' mistress, but the poem could be interpreted as a "perfectly acceptable compliment to the mistress of another man—even a king" (291).

I shall focus primarily on the first of these points: the Greek and Roman usage of "black" as applied to dark- and black-skinned peoples and the relevance of this usage to Didyme's ethnic identification. First, however, Cameron's other two

¹ A. CAMERON, "The Mistresses of Ptolemy Philadelphus," *GRBS* 31 (1990: hereafter 'Cameron') 287-92.

points should be addressed briefly. It should be emphasized at the outset that it makes no difference whether Didyme was the beloved of Asclepiades or a mistress of Ptolemy Philadelphus. The evidence in classical texts strongly suggests, if it does not prove, that in associating Didyme's blackness with coal Asclepiades was following a common Greco-Roman practice in descriptions of Ethiopians.² Further, there is no reason to discount the possibility, as Cameron suggests, that Didyme may have been the object of Asclepiades' affections. Most of the poet's erotic epigrams had heterosexual love as their themes and reflected his personal affairs.³ Why should he have not written a few lines expressing his feelings about a beautiful woman—a common enough theme in classical poetry? And the beautiful woman in this case was obviously one whose skin-color differed from a preferred Mediterranean hue. It is not unlikely that Asclepiades, like others before and after him, was, in this poem, articulating a view about women who did not meet the Greco-Roman standard of beauty—a not unfamiliar *topos* in classical authors.⁴

As to Cameron's observation that Didyme was "above all an Egyptian name," Nubians had been 'natives' of Egypt as early as the Fourth Dynasty of the Old Kingdom, as attested by the "reserve heads" from Giza (*ca* 2600 B.C.) of a Negro woman and her husband, an Egyptian prince, a noble of the court of Memphis.⁵ Further, Nubians had been employed as soldiers in Egypt at various times, as early as the Sixth Dynasty. Troops, for example, which had been sent to Asia by Pepy I under the

² Cf. 246–48 *infra*, with nn.18f. The African Ethiopians mentioned most often in classical texts refer to the dark- and black-skinned inhabitants of the Nile Valley south of Egypt (called Kushites by the Egyptians and often designated as Nubians by modern specialists). Greeks and Romans also located other Ethiopians along the southern fringes of northwest Africa and at times closer to the Mediterranean littoral. In this paper in general I use "Ethiopians," the word appearing most often in the classical and early Christian sources relevant to the focus of this paper, but in some cases I use "Nubians" when this designation appears in the specialists cited.

³ P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford 1972) I 563.

⁴ Cf. 248f *infra*., with nn.23f.

⁵ J. Vercoutter, J. Leclant, F. M. Snowden, Jr, and J. Desanges, *The Image of the Black in Western Art, I: From the Pharaohs to the Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York 1976: hereafter 'Image') 38, 41, and fig. 7; F. M. SNOWDEN, Jr, *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1983: hereafter 'Snowden, Prejudice') 11 with figs. 1f.

command of a general Uni, included Nubian contingents.⁶ Stelae (ca 2180–2040 B.C.) portraying black archers with broad noses, thick lips, and hair edged with dots show that Nubians and their wives, sometimes Egyptian, were established at Gebelein, near Thebes, late in the third millennium B.C.⁷ And the presence of a sizable Nubian element in the population of Gebelein is attested by the boast of a resident soldier that he “surpassed the whole town in swiftness—its Nubians and Upper Egyptians” (*AEL* 90). The forty wooden models of black-skinned soldiers found in a tomb of a prince (Mesehty) point to the presence of Nubian soldiers further north at Assiut about 2000 B.C. (*Image* 43 with figs. 10f). Many Nubian recruits upon retirement remained in Egypt, settled on farms, married Egyptian women, and apparently enjoyed the status of free citizens; a few attained positions of wealth and influence, among them Maiherpri, Tuthmosis III’s fan-bearer, who received the high honor of burial in the Valley of the Kings.⁸ And the occupation of Egypt by the Twenty-fifth Ethiopian Dynasty was one of the periods that would have witnessed an increase in the Nubian element in the population of Egypt. In short, as a result of long residence in Egypt and the New Kingdom’s policy of acculturation, many Nubians had frequently adopted Egyptian religion, customs, and names.⁹

⁶ *CAH*² I.2 (1971) 360f; M. LICHTHEIM, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings in the Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley 1975: hereafter ‘*AEL*’) 19f.

⁷ H. G. FISCHER, “The Nubian Mercenaries of Gebelein during the First Intermediate Period,” *Kush* 9 (1961) 56–80; *Image* fig. 12.

⁸ W. C. HAYES, *The Scepter of Egypt: A Background for the Study of the Egyptian Antiquities in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, I–II (Cambridge [Mass.] 1953–59: hereafter ‘Hayes’) at II 116; *CAH*² II.1 (1973) 352.

⁹ Fischer (*supra* n.7: 77), in commenting on the Egyptianization of the Nubian mercenaries from Gebelein, observed that they “equipped themselves with funerary stelae made by local craftsmen and ... frequently adopted Egyptian names”; cf. J. H. Taylor for Nubian adoption of Egyptian names: *Egypt and Nubia* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1991) 33. Maiherpri, for example, the Nubian fan-bearer of Tuthmosis III, was an Egyptian name (*CAH*² II.1 352, 361; Hayes II 116), as was Harsiotef, an early fourth-century B.C. Napatan ruler of Nubia (W. Helck and E. Otto, edd., *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* II [Wiesbaden 1977] 1021; W. Y. Adams, *Nubia: Corridor to Africa* [London 1977] 251, 270). Amenemhet I, the pharaoh of the Twelfth Dynasty, was thought to be of partly Nubian descent, the son of a Nubian mother and an Upper Egyptian father: *AEL* 143; Hayes I 171, 143 with fig. 107; J. Leclant, “Egypt in Nubia during the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms,” in S. Hoch-

Even if Asclepiades' Didyme refers, as Cameron argues, to a mistress of Ptolemy Philadelphus, the poet may very well have selected the name to serve a dual purpose—first as a poetic pseudonym for the object of his own affections and in addition, indirectly, as a reference to Ptolemy's Didyme, the second a possibility mentioned by Cameron in his statement (291) that the poem would have been a “perfectly acceptable compliment to the mistress of another man—even a king.” Further, the names of innamoratas in Greek, as in Roman poetry, may well be fictive. The name Bombyca, for example, which appears only in Theocritus as the name of the darling of a love-sick swain, may have been selected, as Gow has suggested, because Theocritus considered it appropriate for a girl piper (Βομβύκα, evidently derived from a type of flute, the βόμβυξ).¹⁰

Turning now to the major thrust of this paper—the classical usage of “black” as applied to dark-skinned peoples and its relevance to the identity of Asclepiades' Didyme, I should emphasize that Greeks and Romans frequently noted the respects in which peoples darker than themselves differed from one another; and the blackest of these—Africans from the south of Egypt and the southern fringes of northwest Africa—they designated as Ethiopians and accurately portrayed in detailed descriptions and strikingly realistic portraits. As early as the second millennium B.C. artists on the islands of Crete and Cyprus, in mainland Greece from the sixth century B.C. onward, and later in many parts of the Greco-Roman world depicted many individuals with various combinations of dark or black skin, woolly or tightly coiled hair¹¹—traits used by anthropologists today in classifications of Negroid peoples. The Ethiopian's blackness became proverbial and gave rise to the expression Αἰθίοπα σμήχειν. That Ethiopians were considered as blacker than other dark-skinned peoples is clearly illustrated by Manilius' color scheme (4.722–30), in which Ethiopians were described as the blackest; Indians, less sunburned; Egyptians mildly dark; and finally the Moors: a gradation frequently noted elsewhere in classical texts.

field and E. Riefstahl, edd., *Africa in Antiquity I: The Essays* (Brooklyn 1978) 64.

¹⁰ A. S. F. Gow, ed., *Theocritus* (Cambridge 1950) II 199.

¹¹ *Image passim*; for Negroes in the art of Cyprus 1900–1300 B.C. see V. Karageorghis, *Blacks in Ancient Cypriot Art* (Houston 1988) 8–13, figs. 1–4.

Written records leave no doubt about the physical characteristics of the Ethiopians with whom Greeks and Romans were familiar, and often call attention to the intensely black skin and woolly hair of Ethiopians—characteristics regarded as their most typical physical traits. Ethiopians are black and flat-nosed in Xenophanes B16 Diels-Kranz; black, with the woolliest hair of all mankind in Herodotus (7.70); black, flat-nosed, and woolly-haired in Diodorus (3.8.2); and in the *Moretum* (31–35) they are described with the detail and accuracy of modern anthropological classifications of the so-called Negroid type. Classical writers took considerable pains to call attention to the proverbial blackness of Ethiopians and the fact that their pigmentation differed in intensity from that of other dark-skinned peoples. Though Egyptians were often described as dark or black, the fact that they were lighter than Ethiopians and also not as woolly-haired was frequently noted. Some Egyptian pirates in the region of the Nile Delta were described as black-skinned, not absolutely black but resembling a half-breed Ethiopian (Ach. Tat. 3.9.2). The inhabitants of the area near the Egyptian-Nubian boundary were said by Flavius Philostratus (VA 6.2) to be not fully black, not as black as Ethiopians, but blacker than Egyptians. The people who lived in the regions around Meroe were deeply black in color and were pure Ethiopian (κατακόρως ... μέλανες τὰ χρώματα καὶ πρώτως Αἰθίοπες ἄκρατοι: Ptol. *Geog.* 1.9.7). That the pigmentation of Egyptians was seen as lighter than that of Ethiopians is also attested by the adjective *subfuscili*, which Ammianus Marcellinus (22.16.23) chose to describe Egyptians. The emphasis on the intensity of the Ethiopian's blackness, as compared with the Egyptian's lighter hue, appears in the Acts of Peter in a description of a female demon as “most Ethiopian, not Egyptian, but altogether black” (*in aspectu Ethiopissimam, neque Aegyptiam sed totam nigram*).¹²

The Greco-Roman practice of using Ethiopians as a yardstick for measuring not only the color but also the hair of colored peoples is illustrated by an emphasis on the contrast between the woolly hair of Ethiopians and the ‘non-woolly hair’ of dark-

¹² *Actus Petri cum Simone* in R. A. Lipsius and M. Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha* I (Leipzig 1891) 70; cf. B. G. Trigger, “Nubian, Negro, Black, Nilotic?” in Hochfield and Riefstahl (*supra* n.9) 27: “On the average, between the Delta ... and the Sudd of the Upper Nile, skin color tends to darken from light brown to what appears to the eye as bluish black.”

skinned Egyptians and Indians. Some Indians were said to be blacker than all other peoples except Ethiopians (Arr. *Anab.* 5.4.4); those south of the Ganges were described as burned by the sun but not so black as Ethiopians (Plin. *HN* 6.70). Southern Indians resembled Ethiopians in color; northern Indians, the Egyptians—but, Strabo adds (15.1.13), though southern Indians resembled Ethiopians in color, they were similar to other Indians in countenance and hair because hair does not curl or become woolly in Indian climates. Similarly, Arrian's observations (*Ind.* 6.9) emphasized the differences between Ethiopians, Indians, and Egyptians: southern Indians resemble Ethiopians in that they are black (μέλανες) but they are not so flat-nosed (σιμοί) or woolly-haired (ούλόκρανοι) as Ethiopians, whereas northern Indians are physically more like the Egyptians. The Ps.-Aristotelian *Physiognomonica* (812af) describes both Egyptians and Ethiopians as ἄγαν μέλανες, but mentions only Ethiopians, *not* Egyptians. In other words, μέλας and *niger* commonly referred to the deep black of the Ethiopian's skin; but, as the evidence demonstrates, these color-words also evoked in the Greek and Roman mind other physical characteristics of Ethiopians, especially the hair, and hence were in themselves frequently a kind of shorthand equivalent of 'Ethiopian'—a practice not unlike that of later generations of whites who have used 'blacks' as the equivalent of Negroid types.

Aeschylus' use of a multiple comparison to describe the appearance of the Danaids provides an example of the pains sometimes taken to identify precisely the physical features of darker peoples, in this instance apparently a mixed black-white type. The Danaids describe themselves as a black sun-smitten race (*Supp.* 154f: μελανθῆς ἡλιόκτυπον).¹³ Aeschylus mentions also differences in form (496: μορφῆς ... φύσις) and, hence, apparently conceived of the Danaids as physically different from their cousins, who are described simply as black (719f: ἄνδρες ... μελαγχίμοις γυίουσι; 745: μελαγχίμῳ σὺν στρατῶ). To Pelasgus (279–85) the Danaids seemed to have the appearance of Libyans, or inhabitants of the Nile, or the images of women carved by Cypriot craftsmen, or nomad camel-riding neighbors

¹³ The nomenclature of certain northwest African peoples illustrates another example of classical efforts to describe a mixed black-white people: Melanogaetuli (black Gaetuli), Leukaethiopes (white Ethiopians), and Libyoaethiopes (Libyan Ethiopians).

of the Ethiopians, or flesh-devouring Amazons. The precise physiognomical intent of this multiple comparison is not certain, although the image is illuminated somewhat by a tradition of African Amazons who lived near the western Ethiopians (Diod. 3.53.4) and especially by evidence of an Ethiopian element in the population of Cyprus. Aeschylus' inclusion of images by Cypriot craftsmen suggests that he may have been aware of the presence of Ethiopians in Cyprus noted by Herodotus and attested by statues of Negroes, dated about 560 B.C., found at Ayia Irini.¹⁴ And it is tempting to imagine that Aeschylus may have known of similar statues of mulatto women, descendants of Ethiopians and Cypriot women in the employ of Amasis during his occupation of Cyprus.

Cameron is correct in his observation concerning 'black' as a relative term, but when he states that the adjective implies "no more than skin significantly darker than the speaker's," he overlooks substantial evidence extremely important for the interpretation of Didyme's blackness. In the first place, it is often possible to determine from a specific context when people described simply by color-terms, even without any other ethnic identification, are intended as Ethiopians. And, secondly, Asclepiades' juxtaposition of μέλαινα and ἄνθρακες calls attention to the Greco-Roman practice of particularizing the intensity of an Ethiopian's blackness by comparisons or associations of his color with the blackness of coal, pitch, night, or crows.

I turn, first, to the use of μέλας, *niger*, and similar words as equivalents of Αἰθίοψ. Several references to the descendants of black-white racial mixture, for example, either indicate or imply that color words served as the equivalents of 'Ethiopian'.¹⁵ Descriptions of and references to Memnon also point to a similar equivalency. In describing the death of Memnon, Philostratus states (*Imag.* 2.7) that Memnon, coming from Ethiopia,

¹⁴ For an Ethiopian element in the population of Cyprus see Hdt. 7.90 and 2.182, which reports that Amasis (569–525 B.C.) was the first conqueror of Cyprus, where stone sculptures of Negroes have been found (dated ca 560 B.C.), probably representing blacks in the employ of Amasis during his occupation of the island. For the stone figures from Ayia Irini see *SwCyprusExp* II (Stockholm 1935) ccxxxix, figs. 2–6, nos. 1095, 1228.

¹⁵ Arist. *Gen. An.* 1.18.722a, *HA* 7.6.586a; Antig. Car. *Mirabilia* 112 (122), in O. Keller, *Rerum Naturalium Scriptores Graeci Minores* (Leipzig 1877) 27; Ar. Byz. *Historia animalium epitome* 2.272, in S. Lambros, ed., *Supplementum Aristotelicum* I.1 (Berlin 1855); Plut. *Mor.* 563A.

seems to inspire terror among the Achaeans, for blackness had hitherto been only a myth (πρὸ γὰρ τοῦ Μέμνονος μῦθος οἱ Αἰθίοπες). Memnon is in some cases described as *Memnon Aethiops* (Catull. 66.52), at other times as *Memnon niger*.¹⁶ Claudian (*Cons. Stil.* 1.265) apparently had Ethiopians in mind in referring to Memnon's troops as *nigra agmina*, as does Lucan (10.303) in describing the inhabitants of Meroe, situated between the Fifth and Sixth Cataracts, as *nigris Meroe fecunda colonis*. Paralleling an antithesis of the white and Negroid heads of Janiform plastic vases, frequent racial contrasts between white northerners and black southerners (often Scythians and Ethiopians) in the widely-accepted environment theory also point in the direction of an "Ethiopian-black" equivalence, attested as well by the notes of scholiasts and lexicographers.¹⁷

Further, the degree or intensity of blackness is most important in determining the precise meaning of 'black' in a particular context and whether a color-term is the equivalent of Αἰθίωψ—a point especially relevant in the case of Didyme. The characteristic or special blackness of Ethiopians is frequently suggested by the objects appearing in various images and comparisons used to particularize the color of the skin and to suggest its intensity. Some of the objects so employed appear in Martial's description of a super-black woman (1.115.4f): *quandam ... nocte nigriorem formica, pice, graculo, cicada*. Although the word 'Ethiopian' does not appear in the epigram, the intensity of the blackness expressed by the objects Martial chooses for his comparison makes clear that he is describing an Ethiopian; the woman is *nigerrima*. Parenthetically, Martial's reason for including a cicada in this context is strikingly explained by Meleager's reference (*Anth. Pal.* 7.196.4) to a cicada's "Ethiopian color" (Αἰθίοπα ... χρωτί). Variations of Martial's imagery for blackness, without using the word Ethiopian, appear in other contexts with undoubted reference

¹⁶ Sen. *Ag.* 212; Verg. *Aen.* 1.489; Ov. *Am.* 1.8.3f; cf. Manilius 1.767: *Auroraeque nigrum partum*.

¹⁷ Σ in *Callimachi hymnos* 6.11a (ed. R. Pfeiffer [Oxford 1953] II 77): τὼς μέλανας] τοὺς Αἰθίοπας; Σ in *Luciani Dialogos marinos* 15.4 (ed. H. Rabe [Leipzig 1906] 268): μέλανας ἀνθρώπους ἐώρων] ὁ γὰρ Νότος ἀπὸ Λιβύης πνέει, ἐνθα οἰκοῦσι Αἰθίοπες; Zonaras *Lexicon* I (ed. J. A. H. Tittmann [Leipzig 1808] 68): Αἰθίωψ] ὁ μέλας; Σ in *Juvenalem Vetustiora* 15.49.1d (ed. P. Wessner [Leipzig 1941] 229): *nigro tibicine: Aethiope*.

to Ethiopians. *νυκτίχρως* and *nocticolor*,¹⁸ in one instance applied to Memnon, were at times the equivalents of Ethiopian. "Blacker than darkness and pitch" was another expression used of those who were extremely black.¹⁹

Several descriptions of North African Ethiopians provide further parallels to Martial's comparison. A black slave from Hadrumetum is described as pitch-black (*Anth. Lat. I 183.2, piceo ... corpore ... niger*). In praising a famous black charioteer, Luxorius of Carthage recalls not only Martial's use of night, but also the largely Roman tradition of a black Memnon. Describing the charioteer as having the swiftness of Aeolus and Zephyrus, and the color of night, his mother, the tribute continues: "Memnon, though a son of Dawn, fell at the hands of the son of Peleus.... Never will there be born an Achilles who will surpass you. Memnon you are in appearance, but in fate you are not."²⁰ In his account of the victory of Justinian's general John Troglita over rebellious Moors, Corippus states (*Johan. 6.92ff*) that all the captives were not of the same color, but that some were black as crows.²¹

Didyme was not simply black or dark as an Egyptian: Asclepiades associates her color with coal (*ἄνθρακες*). That coal was one of the objects regularly employed in classical imagery in descriptions of Ethiopians is dramatically illustrated by the following lines from a Romano-African epigram (*Anth. Lat. I 182*): *corvus carbo cinis concordant cuncta colori. quod legeris nomen, convenit: Aethiopsis*. In light of the black-Ethiopian equivalencies outlined above and of the context of the Didyme

¹⁸ Ps.-Callisthenes 83.6, in W. Kroll, *Historia Alexandri Magni I* (Berlin 1926); Gell. *NA* 19.7.6.

¹⁹ *Appendix Proverbiorum* 3.84 (=CPG I 432): *Μελάντερος ζόφου καὶ Μελάντερον πίσης· τῶν καθ' ὑπερβολὴν μεμελασμένων*.

²⁰ *Anth. Lat. I 293* (=M. Rosenblum, *Luxorius: A Latin Poet among the Vandals* [New York 1961] 114f no. 7). Rosenblum (181f) points out that the details provided about the charioteer show that he is "clearly a Negro." It is worth noting that one of the horsemen in the Carthaginian Mosaic of the Horsemen from the imperial period is a Negro easily identifiable from his hair and nose: J. W. Salomonson, *La Mosaique aux chevaux de l'antiquarium de Carthage* (=EtArchInstNéerlRome 1 [The Hague 1965]) 95f with Tabl. 4 (LVIII, 2, fig. 8). For the traditions of an Asian and African provenance of Memnon, and for Memnon as black in the Roman period, see my *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1970: hereafter 'Snowden, Blacks') 151ff.

²¹ For Ethiopian military activity in northwest Africa see Snowden, *Prejudice* 31-34.

epigram, I agree with Sarah Pomeroy's view that the woman whose beauty is the subject of Asclepiades' tribute was Ethiopian.²² Didyme was clearly *Aethiopissima, neque Aegyptia sed tota nigra*, to adapt the phraseology of the Acts of Peter (*supra* n.12). Although Asclepiades mentions only Didyme's color, clearly particularized by the poet's association of black with coal, a point that I have made above should be emphasized: color-terms alone were often used as the equivalents of 'Ethiopians' and evoked in the Greek and Roman mind other Ethiopian physical characteristics, especially hair. Hence, Didyme's hair may also have been as tightly curled as that of Philaenion, another Ethiopian, whose beauty was admired by Philodemus (*Anth. Pal.* 5.121): "May I love such a Philaenion, golden Cypris, until I find another more perfect." Philaenion is described as black and with hair more curled than parsley, two of the physical traits considered by Greeks and Romans as the most characteristic features of Ethiopians.

Furthermore, it appears that by paying his tribute to the beauty of an Ethiopian woman Asclepiades associated himself with a Greco-Roman tradition that rejected color as a standard for judging beauty (and, in a broader context, as a criterion for evaluating individual worth). Greeks and Romans, like many other peoples, had narcissistic canons of physical beauty (what H. Hoetink describes as a somatic norm image).²³ Lovers in classical literature in general stated a preference for a middle point between their own Mediterranean complexion and that of the extremely fair Germans and dark-skinned Africans.²⁴ As

²² S. Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt: From Alexander to Cleopatra* (New York 1984) 55.

²³ H. Hoetink, *The Two Variants in Caribbean Race Relations: A Contribution to the Sociology of Segmented Societies*, tr. E. M. Hookyaas (New York 1967) 120: "the complex of physical (somatic) characteristics which are accepted by a group as the norm and ideal."

²⁴ By failing to consider all the relevant evidence, some scholars (e.g. D. S. Wiesen, "Juvenal and the Blacks," *CI Med* 31 [1970] 132–50) have read a non-existent anti-black bias into Greek and Roman statements of preference for a Mediterranean complexion. But there is no need to import pejorative elements into such preferences, which represent an ethnocentrism characteristic of many peoples (see *supra* n.23). Some twentieth-century commentators (influenced perhaps by some modern attitudes toward black-white marriages, which in the United States were illegal in many states until the Supreme Court ruled in *Loving vs Virginia* [1967] that the state's miscegenation law was unconstitutional) find it surprising that interracial unions were not uncommon in the ancient Mediterranean world and that statements of preferences

early as the fifth century B.C., however, Herodotus, the first European to express an opinion about the physical appearance of Ethiopians, described them (3.20) as the most handsome men on earth. Dio Chrysostom's discourse on beauty emphasized (21.16f) the subjectivity of classical narcissistic criteria and raised the question whether there was not a foreign type of beauty just as there was a Hellenic type. Sextus Empiricus (*Math.* 11.43) noted that men differed in definitions of beauty: Ethiopians preferred the blackest and most flat-nosed; Persians, the whitest and most hooked-nosed; and others considered those intermediate in features the most beautiful. Others, like Philodemus (*Anth. Pal.* 5.121) and Martial (1.115.4f), rejecting the prevailing norm image, did not hesitate to extol the beauty of blackness.

And there were still others who rejected prevailing Mediterranean criteria of beauty, although it is not possible to determine from the context the precise shades of 'dark' or 'black' preferred. It is important and relevant, however, to note that the preferences expressed show clearly that the Mediterranean somatic norm image was by no means universally accepted. The lovesick swain in Theocritus (*Id.* 10.16–29), for example, reminds those who call his Bombyca sunburned that to him she is honey-brown and charming; he adds that a violet is dark (μέλαν) but among the first flowers chosen for nosegays. Vergil (*Ecl.* 2.16ff, 10.37ff) explains a preference for dark (*fuscus*) Amyntas by pointing out that violets and hyacinths are dark (*nigra*) and warns the fair (*candidus*) Alexis not to have too much faith in his color, because white privets fall but dark (*nigra*) hyacinths are picked. Ovid's Sappho tells Phaon that Andromeda, dark (*fusca*) with the hue of her native Ethiopia, captured Perseus by her beauty (*Her.* 15.35–38).

Another aspect of the classical tradition relating to the inconsequence of color was the view that excellence is found among all peoples, regardless of color. Although the Didyme epigram, in the spirit of those before and after him who rejected the prevailing norm image, is limited to a judgment of beauty, Asclepiades may have also had in mind a broader aspect of the Greco-Roman tradition—the inconsequence of color as a criterion for evaluating individual worth. Menander (fr. 612 Koerte²

for dark- or black-skinned women were not unusual in classical literature. See Snowden, *Prejudice* 73–82, 94–97, 134ff with n.57.

=CAF III 157) maintained that natural bent, not race, determines nobility, and it makes no difference whether one is Scythian or Ethiopian. Agatharchides (*GGM* I 118) notes that success in battle depends not upon color but upon courage and a knowledge of military science. An epitaph of the third century, found at Antinoöpolis in Egypt, contrasts the black skin of a slave darkened by the rays of the sun with his soul blooming with white flowers.²⁵ The sixth-century poet Luxorius, in a tribute to the famous black animal-fighter Olympius, uses an ancient symbolism—'black', in a society with a somatic norm image of Mediterranean 'white'—to emphasize the inconsequence of color in evaluating men (*Anth. Lat.* I 353). It is Olympius' strength and skill in the amphitheater, not his color, that matters. In rejecting the prevailing Carthaginian somatic norm image, Luxorius claims that Olympius is not handicapped by his blackness and is as beautiful in the great love the people have for him as another, handsome without strength, is ugly. Luxorius' epitaph for Olympius concludes, "the fame of your glory will live ever after you and Carthage will always remember your name."²⁶

An adaptation of the classical rejection of the somatic norm image and the recognition of Ethiopian beauty appears in Origen's exegesis of the "black and beautiful maiden" of the Song of Songs 1.5.²⁷ The mystery of the church arising from the Gentiles and calling itself black and beautiful, Origen wrote, is adumbrated in a symbolic union of the spiritual law (Moses) and the church (the Ethiopian woman)—a foreshadowing of the universal church.²⁸ The superficial meaning of the bride's words, "I am black and beautiful" in the Song of Songs, according to Origen (2.360), is that the bride is black in complexion but, having both natural beauty and beauty acquired by practice, she should not be reprimanded. Origen explains further how the bride can at the same time be black and fair without whiteness. She has repented of her sins and conversion has bestowed beauty upon her, and he adds, showing the applicability of the passage to all men, "If you repent, your soul

²⁵ E. Bernard, *Inscriptions métriques de l'Égypte gréco-romaine* (=Annales littéraires de l'Université de Besançon 98 [Paris 1969]) 143–47.

²⁶ *Anth. Lat.* I 354.13f: *vivet fama tui post te longaeva decoris atque tuum nomen semper Karthago loquetur.*

²⁷ Septuagint: μέλαινά εἰμι καὶ καλή; Vulgate: *nigra sum, sed formosa.*

²⁸ *Comm. in Canticum Canticorum* 2.362, 366f (GCS VIII 115, 117f).

will be 'black' because of your former sins but because of your penitence your soul will have something of what I may call an Ethiopian beauty."²⁹ And when Origen declares that all whom God created He created equal and alike, whether they were born among Hebrews, Greeks, Ethiopians, Scythians, or Taurians, he is adapting a formula and familiar pattern of classical thought that leaves no doubt as to its meaning and comprehensiveness.³⁰

²⁹ *Hom. in Canticum Canticorum* 1.6 (GCS VIII 35–38).

³⁰ Origen *Princ.* 2.9.5f, tr. Rufinus (GCS V 169f). The misinterpretation of the Greco-Roman somatic norm image has been noted (*supra* n.23). Similarly, some scholars have also seen an anti-black bias in classical and early Christian black-white symbolism and have read into ancient texts a non-existent color prejudice (e.g. P. Mayerson, "Anti-Black Sentiment in the *Vitae Patrum*," *HTR* 71 [1978] 304–11; cf. Snowden, *Prejudice* 150f n.243). In the first place, the classical association of Ethiopians with death and the Underworld seems to have been due primarily to a basic tendency of peoples, African Negroes included, to equate blackness and evil, especially in the areas of human experience concerned with religion and the supernatural. Further, research in the social sciences has raised the question whether individuals who react negatively to the color black develop an antipathy to dark-skinned people and suggests that, though such a reaction is in theory possible, the evidence is far from conclusive. Cf. K. J. Gergen, "The Significance of Skin Color in Human Relations," in J. H. Franklin, ed., *Color and Race* (Boston 1968) 112–25, esp. 120f. Greeks in fact considered a fear of the Ethiopians' color a childish superstition. Agatharchides (*De Mari Erythraeo* 16, *GGM* I 118), for example, points out that Ethiopians do not astonish Greeks because of their blackness and their different physical appearance: such fears cease at childhood. As to the misinterpretation of early Christian black-white symbolism, some scholars have taken into consideration only the demonological contexts and have overlooked exegetical interpretations that were much broader in scope than the limited demonological references, and set forth a coherent body of doctrine in which Ethiopians became an important symbol of Christianity's ecumenical mission. By choosing the classical black-white imagery and by adapting familiar patterns of thought, Origen and others after him believed that they could interpret scriptural references more meaningfully, and could explicate their messages more convincingly, if they recalled the classical associations of blackness with death, evil, ill-omens, and the Underworld. In spite of these and similar associations of blackness in demonological texts, the emphasis was on skin coloration and no other racial characteristics, and there was no stereotypical image of Ethiopians as the personification of demons or the devil. Nor was there a fixed concept of black as evil or unworthy of conversion, but, on the contrary, the Ethiopian imagery was used by early Christian writers to emphasize dramatically that blacks were summoned to salvation and were welcomed in the Christian brotherhood on the same terms as other converts. Nor is there any evidence that blacks of the first centuries after Christ suffered in their day-to-day contacts with whites as a result of the metaphorical associations of black-white

If Didyme, as Cameron suggests, was a mistress of Ptolemy Philadelphus, Asclepiades may have thought that by the choice of the name of a royal mistress for the tribute in his epigram, he was adding special point to his view, shared by others, that black beauties were among those who inspired the rejection of the prevailing norm image. One final point: how to account for the presence of an Ethiopian mistress in the royal court? Our sources report that Ptolemy Philadelphus led an army into Ethiopia, seized a portion of the country of the black Ethiopians, and included in his Great Procession in Alexandria Ethiopians carrying objects prized by Egyptians and the Ptolemies—tusks of ivory, ebony logs, and vessels of gold and silver.³¹ In light of the reports of Philadelphus' many mistresses and his more than ordinary penchant for amorous affairs (Ath. 576Ef), it is not unlikely that in the course of his Ethiopian ventures he arranged for the presence of some Ethiopian women in his court.

Black-white interracial unions were nothing new in Egypt. As early as the Fourth Dynasty, we have seen, a noble of the court of Memphis had a Negro wife, whose position in the court was equal to that of Egyptian women (*supra* n.5). In commenting on the women in the household of Mentuhotpe II (*ca* 2060–2010 B.C.), H. E. Winlock has called attention to the rich brown complexion of Ashayet, a queen in the pharaoh's harem, and to the ebony black color of her companion Kemsit. The fondness of this pharaoh and his nobles for southern women, in Winlock's opinion, accounts for more than a "trace of the brunette com-

symbolism. In sum, in the early church blacks found equality in both Christian theory and practice. See Snowden, *Prejudice* 82–87, 99–108 with references, to which should now be added J. Winkler, "Lollianus and the Desperadoes." *JHS* 100 (1980) 160–65, who makes the important point (162f) that black is not the only color appearing in supernatural contexts but that there is a "second category of frightening appearance ... pure white skin" and "Just as everything in the underworld can be called black, so it can just as well be called pallid, bloodless, white."

³¹ Diod. 1.37.5; Theoc. *Id.* 17.87; Ath. 201; E. E. Rice, *The Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus* (Oxford 1983) 1 and 138–50, for the accuracy of the accounts of the Grand Procession by Athenaeus and Callixenus. For the activity of Ptolemy Philadelphus in Ethiopia see Snowden, *Blacks* 126ff; Fraser (*supra* n.3) I 176ff.

plexion in the Theban aristocracy of 4,000 years ago."³² The mother of Amenemhet I, the first pharaoh of the Twelfth Dynasty, was reported to be the son of a Nubian mother and a father from Upper Egypt.³³ The rebellious soldiers of Psammetichus I (according to Herodotus 2.30) had no hesitancy about seeking Ethiopian wives. Josephus' account of Moses' marriage to Tharbis, the daughter of an Ethiopian king (as Josephus described the Cushite woman of the Old Testament) shows no disapproval or condemnation of the union.³⁴ King Juba II of Mauretania, whose features in some of his busts have been considered Negroid,³⁵ was first married to Cleopatra, the daughter of Antony and Cleopatra. Classical writers who had occasion to mention black-white racial mixture—as illustrations of the transmission of physical characteristics, as evidence of adultery, or for any other reason—included nothing resembling later strictures on black-white unions.³⁶ In such a milieu and in a country with a long history of black-white racial mixture, the presence of Ethiopian mistresses in a royal court would not be singular.

We have no knowledge of the family histories of the dark and black women whose beauty is sung in classical poetry or of the many mixed black-white types portrayed by Greek and Roman artists. Nor are we informed about Didyme's genealogy; but, like Verdi's Aida, the daughter of an Ethiopian king, Didyme may have also been of royal ancestry, a hostage or captive taken in one of Philadelphus' commercial and military Ethiopian ventures.

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³² H. E. Winlock, *Excavations at Deir al Bahri, 1911-1931* (New York 1942) 130; cf. Hayes I 129f.

³³ See *AEL* and Hayes, *supra* n.9.

³⁴ Jos. *AJ* 2.252f; cf. Numbers 12:1-16.

³⁵ J. Desanges, in *Image* 265 and figs. 363f.

³⁶ See Snowden, *Prejudice* 94-97.